Throughout his life Milton suffered from problems with his eyes. Eventually he completely lost his sight in the winter of 1651 – 1652. It should be mentioned that during the previous decade he suffered from a severe eye disease. As he wrote in the letter of 28th September, 1654 to an unknown person\(^1\), at first when he looked at his table lamp, he saw a corona around it, then the left part of the left eye failed. Should he close the right eye, everything he saw suddenly diminished. When he rested, all objects before him seemed to swing either to the right, or to the left. He wrote: “Certain permanent vapours seem to have settled upon my entire forehead and temples which press and oppress my temples with a sort of sleepy heaviness, especially from mealtime to evening”. When trying to fall asleep during this period he saw a bright light from which “colours proportionately darker burst forth with violence and a sort of crash from within”. And then these colours condensed in impenetrable blackness marked with ashy light, as though bound with it. For a long time scholars held different opinions that had caused the loss of sight. Now the majority of them agree that it was glaucoma.

With regard to his blindness Milton's contemporaries broke up in two camps: the poet’s relatives thought that this was the consequence of his painstaking service to God, and his enemies considered his blindness the divine punishment for his speeches against the King. When Anne Saidler, Cyriack Skinner’s aunt was asked to read Milton's treatise “Eikonoklastes” (1652), she replied: «You should have taken notice to God’s judgment upon him, who struck him with blindness, and, as I have heard, he was fain to have the help of Andrew Marvell or else he could not have finished that most accursed libel»\(^2\). The first thing Milton experienced was a mixture of shock and depression. Though he knew that his eyesight was worsening gradually, he could not put up with the fact that he would spend the rest of his life

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\(^1\) Only the name of the correspondent, Philaras, is known.

in darkness. This very fact of losing his sight completely tortured him. He feared he would not succeed in completing his poem *Paradise Lost*. Thus, he would not be able to serve God. Furthermore he was hurt by statements of those who used his blindness against him claiming this was the Divine punishment for his sins.

Milton understood that he would regain sight only after ascending the Heavens. At the end of the letter to one of his friends Milton compared physical sight to bread, thus alluding to Christ’s answer to Satan: «It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God» (Matthew 4:4).

However Milton got used to living blind and eventually found the justification of God’s action. Having deprived him of sight, God withdrew him from the vanity of everyday life and allowed him to concentrate on internal, heavenly light. Milton does not cease reading and writing: only now he employs men to read the Hebrew Bible to him. In addition he dictates his works. He usually composed at night, and at dawn dictated from 20 to 30 verses to his third (and last) wife. When asked, how often Milton reads Homer and Virgil, and so guessing, that thus they want to accuse him of borrowings from these poets, she replied: “He does not steal from anybody, and obeys the Muse, inspiring him”. “Who is this Muse?” - somebody asked her. “It is the grace of God and the Holy Spirit, attending him at night”, - she answered.

As Milton learned to live in darkness, his friends and relatives insisted that he should continue to write. Being aware of his relatives’ support, Milton resumes composition of his masterpiece. For him the composition of “Paradise Lost” is both wish and necessity. He was eager to tell about the circumstances of the Fall so that people could learn a lesson from this and have a new outlook on their place in the world. For Milton blindness became a symbol of talent and spiritual vocation. It took him away from people, but connected him with God. His blindness didn’t prevent Milton from finishing «Paradise Lost», and this is what the heroism of the poet consists in. The blind narrator glorified light.
The poem begins in the realm of “darkness visible” in Hell which the author corresponds with lines, “What in me is dark / Illumine, what is low raise”.

The prologue of Book III of "Paradise Lost” is not infrequently called “The Prologue of Light”. Here Milton speaks about his blindness not for the sake of the reader's sympathy, but for the sake of a metaphor when he compares God to light. Further Milton compares himself to great blind poets of the past, in particular with Thamyris, the Greek poet, the author of a poem about the war of the Titans and the gods. For Milton his poem is a Christian parallel to Thamyris’ pagan one. At the end of the prologue he says:

So much the rather thou celestial light  
Shine inward, and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate, there plant eyes, all mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight.  

(III, 51-55)

Though he does not see divine light, he sees heavenly light which is not seen by others. He knows that it is a more significant light and speaks about it to those who do not see it. What he writes in the poem, is dictated to him by the inspiration, granted to him by God. « The prologue of Light » is not the only place of «Paradise Lost» where Milton speaks about light. He also speaks about the divine light in the prologue to Book VII where he mentions the Muse visiting him nightly and granting inspiration to him. This inspiration is mentioned again at the beginning of Book IX where the poet says:

If answerable style I can obtain  
Of my celestial Patroness who deigns  
Her nightly visitation unimplor'd  
And dictates to me slumb'ring.
Here Milton compares blindness to night. He uses this comparison once before passing to the story about Adam and Eve’s sin. He reminds the reader that his imagination is not that of a fallen man, a descendant of Adam and Eve, but it is based on the inspiration he received from the Lord. In Book XII Milton continues this comparison, saying: “I find / Mine eyes true op'ning, and my heart much eased”.

Before Eve’s fall Satan peeps at her lasciviously. A lascivious look is a first step to sin and is almost a sin in itself. When Satan tempts Eve to eat the forbidden fruit, she looks at it with lust. The overall objective of Satan consists in forcing Eve to approach the tree, and the rest she will do herself once she sees the fruit. Voyeurism (peeping) transforms the examined object into a victim, the voyeur wishes to see without being seen. Thus, voyeurism is one of the dangers relating to eyesight in the poem. But Satan’s voyeurism is obvious already in Book III. Taking the shape of a beautiful fine cherub, Satan meets archangel Uriel and tells him about his desire to see the newly created world:

To visit oft this new Creation round -
Unspeakable desire to see and know
All these wondrous works, but chiefly Man.

(III, 661-63)

In contrast to the author's intention "to see and tell", Satan has the voyeuristic wish "to see and know". His purpose completely reveals the difference between the concealed lust and real reverence. Even when he speaks, he remains "imperceptible", and only the narrator is able to see Satan’s secret presence.

Uriel allows Satan to see the newly created world, but only for glorifying it. Otherwise the look of the angel is that of Satan, lascivious, envious and destructive. Eyesight is represented in this fragment as vulnerable and insufficient.
Guarding against the approach of Satan, Uriel turns and sees an innocent and a fine cherub. So the archangel alludes to the central epistemological problem of the episode: what is seen is not the same as what is cognized. One should not judge by appearance. Even Uriel, “the sharpest sighted the Spirit of all in Heav’n” cannot make out Satan in the guise of a beautiful fine cherub. Only God Himself and the narrator inspired by Him can distinguish hypocrisy, « evil under an invisible appearance ». For Milton God is not an indifferent observer, and the force of His sight is greater that can be described in words. But God is invisible. Is it possible to call Him « the transcendental voyeur»? From His throne God sees Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden, and then surveys Hell, Chaos and Satan going to the newly created world. Only the narrator can see God, but after God has seen him and granted him divine light. The narrator definitely asserts that we do not see God. The chorus of angels eulogizes the Heavenly Father, naming Him "the fountain of Light ":

Fountain of Light, thy self invisible
   Amidst the glorious brightness, where Thou sit'st
   Thron'd Inaccessible.

   (III, 375-377)

For the attempt to see God one may be deprived of eyesight, for even the brightest angels dare not come up to Him, but close their eyes with wings. God the Father sees the past, the present and the future. However, the presence of the Son does not give the opportunity to name God the Father « the transcendental voyeur». The Son provides visual access to the Father so that heavenly beings could observe His divine substance, seeing streaming light. The light of Christ is ideally combined with God’s internal clemency and the vision of true appearance indefinitely enriches the poet, whose purpose is «to see and tell". Otherwise stated,
to see God and to comprehend Him is the same thing. The vision gives the poet confidence that what he sees is true\(^3\).

Milton's blindness drew to itself the attention of writers and scholars for a long time. Oscar Wilde wrote about it: “I have sometimes thought that the story of Homer’s blindness might be really an artistic myth created in critical days, and serving to remind us not merely that the great poet is always a seer, seeing less with the eyes of the body than he does with the eyes of the soul, but he is a true singer also, building his song out of music, repeating each line over and over again till he has caught the secret of its melody, chaunting in darkness the words that are winged with light. Certainly, whether this be so or not, it was to his blindness, as an occasion if not as a cause, that England’s great poet owed much of majestic movement and sonorous splendour of his later verse. When Milton could no longer write, he began to sing. <…>. When Milton became blind he composed, as everyone should compose, with the voice purely and so the pipe, or reed of earliest days became that mighty many-stopped organ, whose rich reverberant music has all the stateliness of Homeric verse if it seeks not to have its swiftness, and is the one imperishable inheritance of English literature sweeping through all the ages, because above them, and abiding with us ever, being immortal in its form.”\(^4\).

On the contrary, T.S.Eliot asserted: “The most important fact about Milton, for my purpose, is his blindness. I don’t 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 connection 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

\(^3\) Sensenig, Victor. Always the Seer is a Sayer. //http://www.publications.villanova.edu/Concept/2003/Sensenig%20Formatted%20Paper.htm

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”⁶. And further: “It is at least more nearly possible to distinguish the pleasure which arises from the noise, from 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, rhetoric⁷. Despite the polemic acuteness of the statement, T. S. Eliot is right when he says that Milton was the man most experienced in music and devoid of “visual imagination”: as Eleanor Gertrude Brown calculated, the poet mentions only 29 colours 181 times in his poetry. She thinks it is not enough for the greatest English epic poet. Therefore Milton can be rightly named the poet - musician. His concept of voice is thoroughly poetic. In his opinion, the voice opens what is hidden in the depth of human soul, this is the display of the divine element in Man. Poetry is the same as singing for him. Written poetry is secondary; it appeared much later than oral poetry. Therefore the essence of poetry is melody. It follows, that as poetry is song, and song is expression of the divine element, the poet is someone who finds out the divine element in nature and in man.

He borrows from the Greek philosophy of music the theory of music of spheres in his poetry. According to this theory, certain sounds correspond to each part of nature.

Thus, in his article “Paradise Lost and the Acoustics of Hell” M. Steggle writes that traditionally Hell was considered in European culture a place where intolerable, chaotic and incessant noise, “weeping and gnashing of teeth” reigns. In «The Aeneid” of Virgil, Aeneas, descending into the underground kingdom of the dead, hears unceasing groans. And this is how Hell is described in Dante Alighieri’s “The Divine Comedy”:

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⁷ Ibid. – P. 262.
Here sighs and cries and shrieks of lamentation
Echoed through the starless air of Hell;
At first these sounds resounding made me weep:
Tongues confused, a language strained in anguish
With cadences of anger, shrill outcries,
And raucous groans that joined with sounds of hands
Raising a whirling storm that turns itself
For ever through that air of endless black,
Like grains of sand swirling when a whirlwind blows.

(Inferno, III, 22-30)

Such is Hell which is depicted in J.Bunyan's works. Milton treats this theme differently: when Satan addresses the demons with the speech, his courageous words interrupt «horrid silence» (an oxymoron). Milton's demons utter a wide variety of noises and even play music. (Paradoxically enough, Milton considered music « the synecdoche of the divine in all its forms »). Hell perceives noise as a threat, "frightens", "trembles" и « runs in horror » from intolerable noise. Milton transfers those acoustic properties which were traditionally attributed to Hell to Chaos. In comparison with the roar of Chaos, the shouts uttered by demons are simply silence. (In an early ode « On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity » (1629) music correlates with harmonious order, and Chaos, on the contrary, correlates with rough noise). From the psychological point of view such an image of Hell is justified and convincing. For an ordinary viewer evil is the absence of light, and it is the absence of sounding for a blind person.

In Eden we hear background noise of weak intensity. Acoustically Eden is richer than Hell: diverse sounds of terrestrial life and night singing of guardian angels merge here. Silence in heavens appears only once, i.e. after the death of the

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Son on the cross. Sounds are harmonious and divine, and silence is similar to damnation. Before the Fall there was no difference between speech and music.

The condition of hopelessness inherent to inhabitants of hell is expressed by absence of sound harmony or, what is even worse, full silence.

After Satan returns to Hell, he is met by hissing, significantly stressing the “horrid silence” of Hell. The image of silence has an allegorical sense: it expresses in the language of poetic images the theological concept of « punishment by deprivation », the removal of a creature from God. Raphael’s prophecy on demons was carried out not only in the fate of demons, but also literally, in that acoustic world where they are doomed to live.

Sound images for Milton became the replacement of visual ones, and in that case, the motive of “horrid silence”, reigning in Hell, is possible to understand as an expressive analogue of “visible darkness” in which the hell is immersed in precisely the same way as in silence.

Thus, we draw a conclusion that Milton believed blindness a gift from Heavens and used it to complete the epic poem and to serve God in this way. Milton's fate is in a way similar to that of Beethoven’s. God granted the grace of internal hearing to Beethoven for the creation of his immortal works. The composer heard not everyday fuss and rustle; he heard the highest sound of symphonies, such sound as genius can only hear. Light breath of Heavens and the rustle of angels’ wings are heard in the music of the composer. This music, this hurricane of sounds, this delight of soul in greatest creations, e.g. the Ninth symphony and the Solemn Mass, and also masterpieces of chamber music (the sonata №№ 28-32 and quartets №№ 12-16) were created already with full loss of hearing. It gives us some hints how suffering was understood in classical culture. Not going into details, it is necessary to say here that for centuries suffering was not perceived as something self-sufficient. It was perceived only as an aesthetic emotion. To melt the suffering into a perfect artistic creation is the purpose of the artist, which was shown on the example of "Paradise Lost". Suffering, as well as thinking, was considered as an integral part of a human being. The Werther of Goethe is human just because he
suffers. The acme of the idea of suffering as an aesthetic emotion comes to the fore in European decadence: a classical example here is O. Wilde’s “De Profundis”

However at the beginning of the 20th century there is a turning point in understanding of suffering: now suffering is perceived as something self-valuable and antiaesthetic, and the proof of that is German Expressionism with its aesthetics of disgraceful things. In Expressionism contents prevail over the form, and we incur boldness to assert that Expressionism is the art of degrading form. Expressionists represent suffering as evil, and they represent evil for its sake without seeking for ways of overcoming it.

The Expressionist poetry appeared suitable to the forthcoming 20th century and the approaching era of totalitarianism when, using W.H.Auden's words, «conscience believed in the necessity of murder». Only in the 20th century one can say that «After Auschwitz it is impossible to write verse». (Th. Adorno). Otherwise stated, suffering is now perceived as something self-sufficient, as the contents which no longer require form and are simultaneously antiaesthetic.