

Peter and the Wolf: A Reading of Milton's *Lycidas*

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Wolves howl to the moon and feed on corpse-flesh, their eyes shine in the dark, and they haunt wooded mountains.

—Robert Graves, *The White Goddess* (NY, 1948), 235.

Wolves are known for their rapacity, and for this reason we call prostitutes wolves, because they devastate the possessions of their lovers. Moreover, a wolf is a rapacious beast, and hankering for gore.

—*The Bestiary; a Book of Beasts, being a translation from a Latin bestiary of the twelfth century, made and ed. by T. H. White* (NY, 1960), 56.

Good morrow, masters, put your Torches out,
The wolves have preied, and looke, the gentle day
Before the wheels of Phoebus, round about
Dapples the drowsie East with spots of grey.

—Shakespeare, *Much Ado About Nothing* V. iii. 25-28.

Immortality. Milton desired it, knew that he deserved it, and believed that he could guarantee it for himself. In a letter written to his friend Charles Deodati, dated 23 September 1637, he said:

Agitatedly you search for many [things], even what I think. Hear, Theodotus, the true [thing] into [your] ear so that I may not turn-red [from saying it out loud]; & go-on-setting-down[-as-acceptable] [that] for-a-very-little-while I may speak great [things] at you; do you search-for what I think? [Let] the good God so [love] me—[I bethink] immortality. What, by-the-true, will I act? *I grow wings*, & I meditate flying: but our Pegasus conveys himself out hitherto by-means-of somehow tenderish feathers; let us taste wisdom groundedly.¹

The wings that Milton was growing were the stanzas of *Lycidas*, and the tenderish feathers were its words and sentences.

¹ *Familiar Letters* 7, in John Milton, *The Works of John Milton* (NY, Columbia U., 1931-1938), vol. 12, 26: "Multa solícite quaeris, etiam quid cogitem. Audi, Theodote, verum in aurem ut ne rubeam, & sinito paulisper apud te grandia loquar; quid cogitem quaeris? ita me bonus Deus, immortalitem. Quid agam vero? πτεροφυῶ, & volare meditor: sed tenellis admodum adhuc pennis evehit se noster Pegasus, humile sapiamus." The translation here, and elsewhere (unless otherwise specified), is mine.

I

The cure was a success, but the doctor died

Milton's *Lycidas* is a poem *par excellence*, a thorough and arrogantly produced ποίημα, so much so indeed that it initially chases the reader away, yet it does so only later to enfold and devour the reader, transforming interpretive obmutescence (i. e., a blind mouth) into keen-sighted commentary (i. e., an eye that sucks), transforming blame into praise.² For *Lycidas*, the locus classicus of interpretive obmutescence is Dr. Samuel Johnson's account of the poem,³ an account that is so correctly wrong that no reading of the poem that purports to be sufficient, should fail to face the difficulties that it raises. *Lycidas* is a great writing,⁴ and Johnson is a great reader.⁵ One even could formulate the rule of thumb that when a reader who is great seems to misread a writing that is great, such a reader's remarks may be more useful as guides to an ultimately correct reading⁶ than the remarks of a lesser reader who articulates an incipiently

² Cf. *The Bestiary*, 58: "A Wolf's eyes shine at night like lamps, and its nature is that, if it sees a man first, it strikes him dumb and triumphs over him like a victor over the voiceless. But, also, if it feels itself to have been seen first, it loses its own ferocity and cannot run."

³ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Most Eminent English Poets* (London, 187-), 65-66. It is also reprinted in the following works, among others: *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, vol. 2, pt. 2, ed. A. S. P. Woodhouse and Douglas Bush (London, 1972), 566-567 (this will hereafter be cited as "Variorum"); John Milton, *Milton's Lycidas: the tradition and the poem*, ed. C. A. Patrides (NY, 1961), 56-57 (this will hereafter be cited as "Patrides"); John Milton, *Milton's "Lycidas," edited to serve as an introduction to criticism*, ed. Scott Elledge (NY, 1966), 229-230 (this will hereafter be cited as "Elledge").

⁴ Ruskin called it "a true book" [*Sesame and Lilies* I. 20, in John Ruskin, *The Works of John Ruskin*, ed. E. T. Cook and Alexander Wedderburn (London, 1903-1910), vol. 18, 69; also in Elledge, 238]. It has been called "perfect art" (Hazlitt, in Elledge, 232), "the high-water mark of English Poesy and of Milton's own production" (Mark Pattison, in Elledge, 244, Variorum, 568; cf. Patrides, vi), "the most perfect piece of pure literature in existence" (Arthur Machen, in Elledge, 244), supremely and purely beautiful (cf. James Holly Hanford, in Patrides, 55), "one of the greatest poems in English" (E. M. W. Tillyard, in Patrides, 63), "a work of great art" (John Crowe Ransom, in Patrides, 81), "an intimate marriage of form and matter, expression and substance" (Paul Elmer More, in Patrides, 94), "one of the chief glories of English lyrical verse" (F. T. Prince, in Patrides, 153). Also, consider George Coffin Taylor, "Milton's English," *Notes and Queries*, 178, 27 January 1940, 56: "I imagine most critics would agree that it is impossible to find in English literature a work more representative of the most rarefied of all the rarefied sublimations of the stuff of poetry—the last word in the perfection of the art form of poetry." Finally, cf. Rex Warner, *John Milton* (London, 1949), 25: "There can be...no poem more perfect than *Lycidas*."

⁵ Cf. Warren Fleischauer, "Johnson, *Lycidas*, and the Norms of Criticism," in Magdi Wahba, *Johnsonian Studies* (Cairo, 1962), 235.

⁶ For example, on Aristotle's reading of Plato, see St. Thomas Aquinas, *In Aristotelis librum De anima commentarium*, Liber I, lectio VIII, section 107: "Ubi notandum est, quod plerumque quando reprobatur opiniones Platonis, non reprobatur eas quantum ad intentionem Platonis, sed quantum ad sonum verborum ejus. Quod ideo facit, quia Plato habuit malum modum docendi. Omnia enim figurate dicit, et per symbola docet: intendens aliud per verba, quam sonent ipsa verba; sicut quod dixit animam esse circulum. Et ideo ne aliquis propter ipsa verba incidat in errorem, Aristoteles disputat contra eum quantum ad id quod verba ejus sonant." ("Where[as] it is going-to-be noted [= it must be noted], in-that more when [Aristotle] reproves the opinions of Plato, he does not reprove them as-much toward the intention of Plato, but as-much toward the sound of his words [i. e., with respect to the surface meaning of his words]. In-that he does thereto, wherefore Plato has had a bad manner of teaching. For he says all-things figurally, and he teaches through symbols: intending through the words [something] other than [what] the words themselves sound [i. e., than what the words mean on the surface]; thus-as in-that he has said the soul to be a circle. And thereto, lest someone fall into error on account of the words themselves, Aristotle disputes against him [i.e., against Plato] [only] as-much [as] toward that which his words sound [i. e., that which his words mean on the surface].")

correct reading. Johnson's reading is especially privileged for reading *Lycidas* because it "is the first critique of that poem by a major English literary critic, and the evidence points toward the fact that the critique satisfied the moiety of [his contemporary] readers" (Fleischauer, 240). In addition, Johnson's overall respect for Milton precludes accusing him of some bizarre, idiosyncratic, and irrational bias against Milton.⁷

Here is a portion of Johnson's celebrated and often cited remarks:

One of the poems on which much praise has been bestowed is *Lycidas*; of which the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain, and the numbers unpleasing. What beauty there is we must therefore seek in the sentiments and images. It is not to be considered as the effusion of real passion; for passion runs not after remote allusions and obscure opinions.... Where there is leisure for fiction, there is little grief.

In this poem there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral; easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are long ago exhausted; and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind....

Among the flocks, and copses, and flowers, appear the Heathen deities...with a long train of mythological imagery, such as a college easily supplies....

This poem has yet a grosser fault. With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as ought never to be polluted with such irreverent combinations Such equivocations are always unskilful; but here they are indecent, and at least approach to impiety, of which, however, I believe the writer not to have been conscious.

(*Lives*, 65-66)

Johnson's indictment is severe. Nevertheless, by reviewing its counts, one may be able at least partly to establish the framework within which *Lycidas* is to be read, to define the labyrinth that must be threaded to penetrate to the poem's core.

The first count is the harshness of the diction, by which Johnson broadly means the harshness of the style (cf. Fleischauer, 243-247, esp. 243 bottom). Here there is no difficulty in the designation alone, because within the poem the monodist, "the uncouth Swain" (¶11, 186),⁸ indicts himself on the selfsame grounds as a "rude" (¶1, 4) maker of "harsh and crude" (¶1, 3) poetry or song (cf. ¶1, 10-11; Fleischauer, 245). What is at issue here, then, is not the harshness of the monody, but rather—as we will see—its function in the poem as a whole.

Second, Johnson censures the uncertainty of the rhymes and the irregularity of the meter (cf. Fleischauer, 241-243), to which might be added our own contemporary complaint of the lack of order in stanzaic lineation (Cf. John Crowe Ransom, in *Patrides*,

⁷ For example, Johnson regarded *Paradise Lost* as "a poem, which, considered with respect to design, may claim the first place, and with respect to performance, the second, among the productions of the human mind." (*Lives*, 68)

⁸ I shall cite *Lycidas* by verse paragraph number and line number(s). The only exception to this will be the prose prologue, which will be cited as such.

69; F. T. Prince, in Patrides, 154-155). Taken together, these things are tantamount to an accusation of structural deficiency, perhaps exacerbated by the consideration that such structural unconventionality is found in a poem that, in other respects, seems to be as convention-bound as possible. Therefore, however one may be able to resolve it, there is a structural tension in *Lycidas* between its ostensibly conventional aspects and its ostensibly un- or anti-conventional aspects. Yet, one should be prepared at least to consider the possibility that the structural tension is an adumbration of a deliberate thematic concern with the tension between the conventional and the extra-conventional as a whole.

Third, Johnson focuses on the insincerity of the monody, by which he seems to mean the monodist's assumption of a grief-strickenness that is belied by the very means employed for its expression. That is, the monody is a *ὑπερβολή* that is a mask for an *ἔλλειψις*.⁹ Indeed, Milton's acquaintance with the occasional subject of the poem, Edward King, was no more than casual (cf. *Variorum*, 544-547; Elledge, 149), and he even had reason to dislike him and inwardly to be gratified by his death.¹⁰ In any case, our information about King is so sparse as to make it foolhardy for us to use this as the basis for understanding *Lycidas*. Moreover, the prose prologue¹¹ to the internal monody, which is the major intratextual reference—and a somewhat oblique one at that—to the death of King was omitted from the text of the poem by Milton when he gave it for inclusion in the memorial volume *Iusta Edovardo King* (Cambridge, 1638)¹² and was restored to it (with the addition of the second sentence) only when it was republished in 1645 as part of Milton's collected poems.¹³ One could argue that there was no need for it in the memorial volume, and that only when it was republished in isolation did its occasional character require explicit acknowledgment. However, one could respond that for this purpose the second sentence was superfluous and the first not nearly explicit enough. In addition, since "Milton intended his effects" (Ransom, in Patrides, 74; cf. 80, 69),¹⁴ the obliqueness of the reference must have been deliberate. In the

⁹ Cf. John Crowe Ransom, in Patrides, 67: "For *Lycidas* he mourns with a very technical piety." Also, Cleanth Brooks and John Edward Hardy, in Patrides, 139: "The expression of grief is thus, we are inclined to say, conventional." Northrop Frye formulates it brutally (Patrides, 206): "Milton was deeply interested in the structure and symbolism of funeral elegies, and had been practising since adolescence on every fresh corpse in sight, from the university beadle to the fair infant dying of a cough." Consider also the following list of Milton's early *in obitum* poems: (1) "In obitum Procancellarii medici," (2) "Elegia secunda: in obitum Praesulis Wintoniensis," (4) "In obitum Praesulis Eliensis," (5) "On the death of a fair infant dying of a cough," (6) "On the University Carrier, who sicken'd in the time of his vacancy, being forbid to go to London, by reason of the Plague" (a diptych), (7) "An epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester," (8) "Epitaphium Damonis," (9) "Sonnet XIV: on the religious memory of Mrs. Catharine Thomason, my Christian friend, deceased 16 December, 1646."

¹⁰ Cf. *Variorum*, 544. The testimony of Milton's nephew that they were intimate friends seems to be his own *ex post facto* reconstruction based merely on his uncle's having composed *Lycidas*. Cf. Elledge, 147, n. 1. Also, cf. *Iusta Edovardo King, reproduced from the original edition, 1638*, intro. Ernest C. Mossner (NY, 1939), intro., v-vi. Furthermore, cf. Johnson's comment about Milton's attitude when Salmasius died in 1653: "Milton was flattered with the credit of destroying him." (*Lives*, 48)

¹¹ More precisely, the first sentence of it, as we now have it. Only this sentence is in Milton's manuscript.

¹² *Lycidas* is the last poem in the volume: *Iusta*, English obsequies, 20-25.

¹³ On the text of *Lycidas*, see Patrides, 233; Elledge, 10; *Variorum*, 545-549, esp. 548-549; *Iusta*, intro., ix-x.

¹⁴ Cf. Johnson, *Lives*, 70: "To the completeness or *integrity* of the design [of *Paradise Lost*] nothing can be objected.... There is perhaps no poem, of the same length, from which so little can be taken without apparent mutilation." Also, cf. Warner: "*Lycidas*...is, to my mind, with the possible exception of Vergil's *Orpheus and Eurydice*, the most perfect poem of its length that has ever been written." (54) "To some minds indeed the most forbidding thing about this great poet is his perfection. What he intends to do he does, according to his own standards, exactly." (12)

monody itself, there is no direct reference to King such as one finds in many of the other obsequies in the memorial volume.¹⁵ Hence, Milton has chosen a peculiar middle ground for his poem, resting somewhere between the complete knownness of the person memorialized and that person's total anonymity. What could be the reason for this? I would suggest that it is a strategy that Milton employs as an important clue to the defiant attitude that the poem ultimately is meant to express. Without *Lycidas*, both Edward King and the *Iusta* in his honor would be virtually unknown today,¹⁶ and Milton must have been aware that this was the likely future possibility. However, if so, why does Milton stop so temptingly short of making the kind of explicit identification of Lycidas and King in the prose prologue of *Lycidas* which he does not hesitate to make of Damon and Charles Diodati in the argumentum of the *Epitaphium Damonis*? Because only in this way could he ensure that the search for the "historical" Lycidas would be a tribute to himself, that the search for the enfeared would spotlight the enfeared less than it would the guarantor of the fame, namely Milton himself. Milton, then, must have been so certain of his own poetic immortality that by making it the impetus for a local historical inquiry, he could foreknow that the research unleashed would always return to its source, i. e., that it would begin and end with Milton. At the same time, he could foreknow that this would set the tone for an attempt to localize historically all the personae of the poem, an inquiry that would prevent a premature inquiry into the poem's inner translocal meaning. As such, it is an audacious and successful feint.

Fourth, Johnson censures the pastoral form of the poem on two counts: on the one hand, it is stale and unartful ("easy, vulgar...disgusting; [using] images...long ago exhausted"); on the other hand, it is false and unnatural (i. e., it possesses "inherent improbability").¹⁷ This is a paradoxical accusation, as one can see if one boils it down to its core. In effect, Johnson is asserting that *Lycidas* is a product neither of art nor of nature.¹⁸ In other words, there is a betweenness about *Lycidas* that is very puzzling.¹⁹

Finally, according to Johnson, the poem's grossest fault is its impiety (cf. Fleischauer, 253 ff.), an impiety that he claims Milton not to have intended. This too is puzzling, because if Milton is a master of design, then if the poem is impious, Milton must have

¹⁵ Consider in the obsequies, for example: (L) no. 1, probably by the editor, 1, 45, 105; (L) no. 2, by N. Felton, title; (L) no. 12, by Stephen Austie, 15; (L) no. 16, by Thomas Farnsby, title (cf. last line); (L) no. 17, by Henry King, title; (L) no. 18, by John Hayward, 2; (L) no. 19, by Michael Honeywood, 11, 12; (L) no. 20, by the same author, 1, 6, 20; (L) no. 23, by Ralph Widdrington, title; (E) no. 1, by Henry King, title; (E) no. 3, by John Cleveland?, last line; (E) no. 7, by Sampson Briggs, 11, 43; (E) no. 9, by John Hayward, 33; (E) no. 11, by R. Brown, last line. For a list of authorial identifications, see *Iusta*, intro., xii-xiii. Cf. (G) no. 9, by John Potts, 22; (L) no. 18, by John Hayward, 2.

¹⁶ Cf. *Iusta*, intro.: "Edward King lives through *Lycidas*." (v) "Certainly it is the presence of *Lycidas* that makes the Memorial Volume the extremely valuable collector's item it is today." (viii)

¹⁷ Cf. Fleischauer, 247 ff., whose attempt to defend Dr. Johnson on this point blinds him to the real force of the accusation.

¹⁸ Could *Lycidas* be analogous to "that first [one] out of whose image/ skillful Nature has fashioned the human kind, / [and that first one is] eternal, uncorrupted, coeval to the pole,/ And one and universal, the example of God" (ille primus cuius ex imagine/ Natura solers finxit humanum genus,/ Aeternus, incorruptus, aequaevus polo,/ Unusque et universus, exemplar Dei)? [Milton, *De idea Platonica quemadmodum Aristoteles intellexit*, 7-10, in *Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. Merritt Y. Hughes (NY, 1957), 57, hereafter cited as "Hughes."] That is, could not *Lycidas* be the cleverly constructed image of a primal ideal poetic entity, constructed so equally out of both art and nature that it appears to be constructed out of neither?

¹⁹ When Dr. Johnson accuses Milton of parading his erudition for no reason other than the parading of it, he is embroidering his attack against the pastoral form. However, he does so (especially through the phrases "Heathen deities" and "mythological imagery") in a way that prepares his final accusation.

been conscious of it. On the other hand, based on the same premise, if Milton were not conscious of impiety in the poem, then it must not have been (and must not be) impious. Johnson is certainly correct in pointing to the tension in *Lycidas* between paganism and Christianity, in particular to the problem of where Milton stands, a problem that must be resolved if the poem is a unified whole. Johnson seems implicitly to suggest that *Lycidas* demands of us that we sacrifice either Milton's deliberateness or Milton's piety. If this were a genuine choice, then one would have to sacrifice Milton's piety. However, whether or not it is a genuine choice can only be decided by a reading of the poem as a whole, although it may well turn out that its "true meaning is so uncertain and remote, that . . . it cannot be known when it is found."²⁰

II

- You can talk all you want to, but it's different than it was.*
 —*No, it ain't, but you gotta know the territory.*²¹

Let us begin by examining the formal structural organization of *Lycidas*.

First, there is the pattern of stanzaic lineation, which for all its apparent irregularity actually is ordered carefully to reflect the thematic movement of the poem. Its order is built around multiples of two and three:

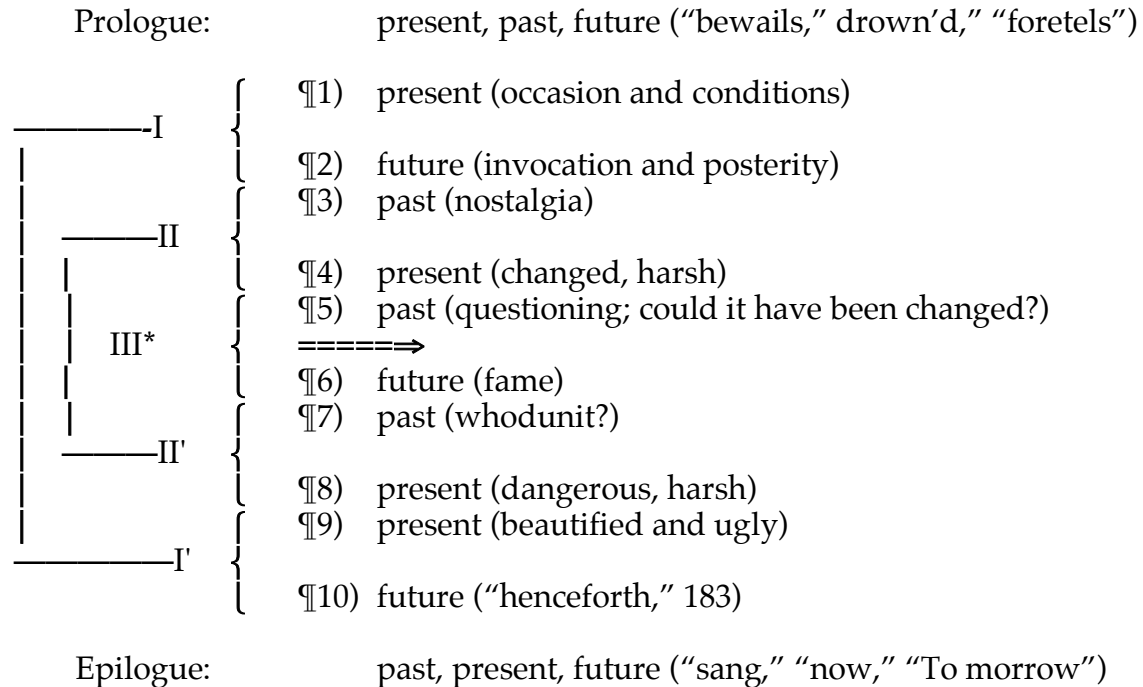
Prologue	2 prose sentences (2 x 1)		
Part I	[	¶1) 14 (2 x 7)	|
	[	¶2) 10 (2 x 5)	|
	[	¶3) 12 (2 x 6)	|
	[	¶4) 13 (<i>prime</i>)	↓
	[	¶5) 14 (2 x 7)	|
Part II	[	¶6) 21 (3 x 7)	|
	[	¶7) 18 (3 x 6)	|
	[	¶8) 29 (<i>prime</i>)	|
	[	¶9) 33 (3 x 11)	↓
	[	¶10) 21 (3 x 7)	|
Epilogue	¶11)	8 (2 ³ = 2 x 2 x 2)	

Part I, then, is bounded by two fourteen-line paragraphs (¶1 and ¶5), while Part II is bounded by two twenty-one-line paragraphs (¶6 and ¶10). The three central paragraphs of each section show an ascending numerical order, two members of which are multiples of the base number of that section and one member of which is a prime number (the prime number paragraphs both deal with present harshness). Finally, the epilogue represents an integration of the numerical bases of the poem by being a cubing (threeing) of the prologically introduced dyad (two).

²⁰ Johnson, *Lives*, 65. This remark may be equally applicable to Dr. Johnson himself.

²¹ Meredith Willson, "Rock Island," *The Music Man*.

The second structural pattern is the pattern of stanzaic temporal shifts, which indicates that the poem presents itself as an attempt to rectify a breach in the triplex structure of temporality, a breach which has been caused by a present trauma,²² and the failure to come to terms with that breach seems to reduce the time continuum to an unintelligible duplex entity lacking a principle of unity or integration. This can be preliminarily indicated by a schema listing the dominant tense of each part of the poem:



The prologue, then, introduces all three temporal phases, but out of their proper sequential order, and the body of the poem restores that order. In simple summary, the choreography of the body of the poem is the following. Step I (¶1 and ¶2) moves from present to future without a prior consideration of the past. Hence, step II (¶3 and ¶4) begins with the past and moves to the present, but now the infection of the present by the past makes a move to the future impossible. Consequently, step III (¶5 and ¶6) begins again with the past, but this time the past vaults the present and lands directly in the future; and the lack of the present in this central step suggests that the genuine problem involves coming to terms with the present. This is why the center of the ostensible reorientation of temporality which steps II' and I' accomplish is a doubling of the present as part of the presentation of the three phases of temporality in their proper sequential order, a presentation that is briefly summarized in the verse epilogue (¶11).²³

These, then, are the two major structural skeletons of the poem, but they need to be animated by putting flesh and blood on them.

²² In order to appreciate the complete force of Milton’s achievement, one would have to say strictly “an ever-present trauma.”

²³ Cf. Lowry Nelson Jr., *Baroque Lyric Poetry* (New Haven, 1961), 64-76, for another argument that also stresses the problem of temporality in *Lycidas*.

III

*Something old, something new, something borrowed, something blue;
Or, who's afraid of the big bad wolf?*

Let us now begin again, this time in simple sequential reading order. In this order, the first thing that one encounters is the title, "Lycidas," a name which "is fairly common in pastoral verse," from which the Variorum editors conclude that "there seems to be no special significance in the choice,"²⁴ a conclusion which seems to have been widely accepted by commentators on the poem. This is strange because, with regard to Milton's poetry as a whole, it is always dangerous to decide that any given item has no special significance.²⁵ In this instance, it is especially dangerous, because the name is Greek, and Milton was a consummate Hellenist. It would seem compulsory, then, to inquire into the meaning of the name "Lycidas," i. e., Λυκίδας. Λυκίδας would be the Greek patronymic of λύκος, "wolf," and hence it would mean "wolf-sired," "the descendant of the wolf," or (more figuratively) "having the characteristics of a wolf."²⁶ Therefore, someone bearing the name "Lycidas" (if it is appropriate) would be at least wolfish if not a wolf in the full sense, since patriarchal descent is not simply equivalence to the patriarch. I will return to the significance of the name later, but already one can see that in a poem which contains (§8) a striking so-called digression, which is especially announced in the prose prologue and in which a wolf figures prominently, the name cannot be dismissed as non-significant without careful reflection.

The work proper begins with a prose prologue that provides a distancing effect. An external narrator tells us about the internal monodist, which is not to say that these two are not the same person, the one the singer having sung presenting himself as an other, the singer singing.²⁷ The distancing effect will be renewed in the verse epilogue (§11). One of the themes of the prologue is that the temporal flow has become upset or breached or disoriented. This is indicated by the explicit tenses or implicit directedness of the three verbs: present ("bewails"), past ("drown'd"), and future ("foretels"), instead of the proper order of past, present, and future. The work, then, will take the form of an attempt to rectify the breach in the structure of temporality.²⁸ Such a rectificatory act requires daring, boldness.

²⁴ Variorum, note ad loc., 636-637. At the same time, however, they assert that there is significance in the choice of the name "Damon" for the *Epitaphium Damonis*, a name that seems no less common in pastoral verse than the name "Lycidas."

²⁵ One may, of course, and quite legitimately, decide that one cannot discern its significance, or even that its significance may—for lack of historical information, for example—be permanently irretrievable.

²⁶ See the discussion in Carl Darling Buck, *A Reverse Index of Greek Nouns and Adjectives* (Chicago, 1945), 416-443, esp. 441-443, for words in -δας. Also, cf. Herbert Weir Smyth, *Greek Grammar* (Cambridge, MA, 1956), section 845, 233-234. Cf. ὁ λυκιδεύς, "wolf-cub." Also, cf. ὁ ἀλιιάδης, "the salt-sea-sired," i. e., "the fisher."

²⁷ The impersonal and usually self-referential "the Author" in the first sentence strongly suggests their sameness. I leave open the question of whether and how either or both of these are to be identified with Milton himself.

²⁸ In addition, the following motifs are introduced in the prologue: lamentation ("Monody," "bewails"); writing/art ("Monody," "Author"); learning ("learned"); the vicissitudes of fortune ("unfortunately"); death ("drown'd"); friendship ("friend"); psychic/somatic growth ("Passage"); piety/ecclesiastical practice ("foretels," "Clergy"); the extremes of human experience ("ruine...height").

It is appropriate, then, that the monody (the internal poem) begin boldly with three stressed monosyllables.²⁹ This boldness echoes the boldness of another well-known English poem, a poem that Milton undoubtedly knew, namely John Donne's "Holy Sonnet X," which begins with four stressed monosyllables (a double spondee), "Death be not proud."³⁰ The Holy Sonnet is a conventional Shakespearean sonnet in form, yet its teaching is decidedly and decisively unconventional in many ways. The monodist, then, seems to be announcing even metrically that however convention-bound (i. e., bound by the convention of the pastoral elegy) his monody may be in its form, one should at least be open to the possibility that it will be un- or anti-conventional in its teaching.³¹ For example, the first verse paragraph is of sonnet length (fourteen lines), yet its first line is unrhymed (as also is its thirteenth line),³² i. e., it is written to subvert the very formal expectations that it evokes. As we will see, the poem is subversive in more than formal ways.

The triad of plants apostrophized by the poet in the first two lines seems straightforward enough, initially. Yet, if one tries to sort out the relationships between them, certain peculiarities become manifest. From one point of view, the laurel, an emblem of poetic distinction, is allied with the ivy, an evergreen, in that neither of them is described by its color, whereas the myrtle, a tree of mourning, is so described. Thus, a contrast is implicitly articulated between the evergreen immortality of art and the brutal transience of human mortality. However, from another point of view, an alliance can also be formed between the myrtle and the ivy, both said to be evergreens, the former a tree associated with Venus and hence suggestive of sex as well as of death, the latter a shrub associated with Bacchus and hence suggestive of drunken revelry. This alliance leaves the laurel standing alone, as indeed it does in the monody's first line, and it stands in the precise place where we would expect an apostrophization of the muses, an expectation whose fulfillment is delayed until the beginning of the second paragraph. If the laurel is, in some sense, a substitute for the muses, what does that suggest about the poet's attitude toward the muses as ordinarily understood? Perhaps it would help to recall that laurel leaves (bay leaves) were used in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries as a laxative. If the poet had this in mind, then invoking the laurel would constitute a daring and irreverent denigration of so-called poetic inspiration, a denigration such as one would expect only in a most highly deliberate poetic artificer. Even if one regards the laurel as symbolic of victory in poetic agonistics, this would only emphasize the hybris of a poet so sure of poetic victory and praise³³ that he invokes it at the very beginning of his work as though it were assured already. This is reminiscent of Milton's remarks in *Ad patrem* (101-104):

Therefore I, already—as-much-as-you-like—the lowest part of the taught troop,
Will sit among the conqueror ivies and laurels,

²⁹ Cf. David Daiches, in *Patrides*, 104. The first line of the monody also ends with three stressed monosyllables.

³⁰ For an account that recognizes Donne's influence at least on the *Iusta* as a whole, see Ruth Wallerstein, *Studies in Seventeenth Century Poetic* (U. Wisconsin, 1961), 96 ff.

³¹ Cf. Ransom, in *Patrides*, 67-68; Brooks and Hardy, in *Patrides*, 136 ff.

³² There are altogether ten unrhymed lines in *Lycidas*: ¶1, 1 and 13; ¶2, 15 and 22; ¶4, 39; ¶5, 51; ¶6, 82; ¶7, 91 and 92; ¶9, 161. Cf. Ransom, in *Patrides*, 69-71; Prince, in *Patrides*, 154-155. J. A. Wittreich [*PMLA*, 84 (1969), 60-70] argues from the madrigal tradition that only three are unrhymed, but his argument depends upon dissolving the integrity of the verse paragraph units of which the poem is composed.

³³ The name "laurel" derives from the Latin *laus*, "praise."

And already obscured, neither will I be mixed with the artless people,
And [yet] our tracks will avoid profane eyes.³⁴

Not only, then, do the first two lines of the monody refer to the pastoral tradition in its pure form and its degenerate erotic form simultaneously,³⁵ but also they express a boast.

Surely, then, when the poet presents himself in the next two lines as immature (“rude”), one can infer that this is a pose. Why should he adopt such a pose? Perhaps to conceal his tracks from *oculos profanos*, to express with immunity and impunity what could not be expressed openly in his own voice, to be able simultaneously to speak to those who can and should hear and to be silent to those who cannot and should not hear. Just as the “Berries harsh and crude” will be distilled by the poet into verse sweet and ripe, so too will the pastor rude emerge as the poet polished. Indeed, the very assertion of his pastoral identity culminates (¶1, 5) in an inaccuracy that undermines that assertion (cf. Warton, cited in Elledge, note ad loc.), an inaccuracy to which the rhyme of “mellowing year” and “never-sear” alerts us. I mean that since evergreen (“never-sear”) leaves stand outside the natural cycle (“mellowing year”) that eventuates in harvesting, the expressed concern is unfounded. Perhaps, then, when the poet says that he will shatter the leaves before a harvest, he does not mean that he will destroy them or disseminate them before they reach their prime, but rather that he will spread them out before his own harvest, i. e., before his own death, as some sort of antidote to it. That is, in doing for Lycidas what Lycidas’s untimely death prevented Lycidas from doing for Lycidas, the poet is doing the same for himself, namely erecting a bulwark against death, the bulwark of art. So, in singing for Lycidas, the poet is singing for himself. This is the ultimate source of the constraint and compulsion under which he sings, a constraint and compulsion that Lycidas’s premature death adumbrates.

However, if the poet himself has assumed the requisite rectificatory task, why does he now invoke the Muses (¶2, 15-17)? Is this too a pose?

In an ostensibly traditional way—however tardily—the poet invites the muses to begin, and then he repeats the invitation. The repetition of the word “begin,” I believe, is a clue to the dramatic dynamics of the implicit dialogue here. The poet’s first invitation to the muses is answered by their silence. Therefore, he repeats it and asks for a somewhat loud response the second time (cf. Variorum, note ad 17), a response that is audible. The continued silence of the muses reveals their indifference and/or their inadequacy, reveals the insufficiency of the notion of external poetic inspiration, a notion that is merely a “denial vain, and coy excuse” (¶2, 18), a fable to be banished, to be sent “hence.” The muses, then, are actually the muse (¶2, 19), namely the poet himself: he is his own inspiration. Just as the pretense of immaturity was raised only to be razed immediately, so too the muses are invoked only to be denigrated. This is a pattern that will be repeated throughout the poem, namely the conjuring up of a traditional figure or figures only ultimately to denigrate and/or qualify and/or reject their ordinarily understood functions.

Therefore, if we ask again by whom truly the rectification is required, the implied answer—as the ambiguous “we” (¶2, 23), which could refer just as well to the monodist

³⁴ Ergo ego iam doctae pars quamlibet ima catervae / Victrices hederas inter, laurosque sedebo, / Iamque nec obscurus populo miscebor inertī, / Vitabuntque oculos vestigia nostra profanos. (Hughes, 85) Also, cf. *Mansus*, 5-6 (Hughes, 127).

³⁵ Cf. Hanford, in Patrides, 38; Prince, in Patrides, 155. Also cf. Thomas Perrin Harrison Jr., *The Pastoral Elegy: an anthology* (Austin TX, 1939). Further, see Milton, *Elegia Sexta*, 13-36, esp. 13-18 (Hughes, 50-51).

and his eulogizer as to Lycidas and the monodist—is the poet himself, the shepherd of souls. Thus, the poet turns for a moment to the metaphor of poetry as shepherding, to young poets in the guise of young shepherds (¶3). At first glance, this look backward appears to evoke a sense of nostalgia, of pastoral beauty, and of idyllic communion, a sense which is supported by the rhyme scheme: the third verse paragraph has a regular rhyme scheme, and it is the only verse paragraph in the first part of the monody that has no unrhymed lines. Nevertheless, appearances can be deceptive. One must ask, for instance, if one reflects upon their youthful duets, by what kind of song rough satyrs and cloven-heeled fauns would be moved. One must answer that they would be moved by erotic and orgiastic song.³⁶ What, then, can one say of Damoetas? The only adjective used to describe him is “old” (¶3, 36). He is called neither sage (cf. ¶7, 96) nor reverend (cf. ¶8, 103), neither wise nor virtuous, but only old. Damoetas, then, is the kind of old man who would be attracted to the erotic singing of young men, i. e., he is an aging homosexual.³⁷ Hence, there is a tension between the apparent consolatory beauty and friendship of the pastoral scene (the daylight of ¶3, 25-31) and its hidden undertones of eroticism and homosexuality (the nighttime of ¶3, 32-36), between the promise of youth and the degeneracy of age. If a poet may turn into Damoetas, perhaps death in youth is more desirable than it seems. Perhaps, but only if one’s fame be guaranteed. In other words, there is embodied here an implied Achilleusian choice between a brief but glorious life and a long but obscure life. If there were no other alternative, the poet would presumably lean toward the former. But there is another alternative, namely a long and glorious life, the reasonable expectation of which would depend upon insuring the glory at each stage of life, in now after now after now, in the present.

The fourth verse paragraph begins by making explicit the tension which was expressed implicitly in the third verse paragraph, i. e., it begins with a shock when the monodist faces the present³⁸ in the light of the tension between the beautified past and its possibly ugly underbelly. The tension now resurfaces on a large scale, the scale of nature as a whole: the beauty appears as the rose, the recently weaned herds, and the blooming flowers; the ugliness appears as the canker, the taint-worm, and the frost. However, now the emphasis is explicitly on the ugliness, on loss, on harshness, on change, on decay, and on death. These pose a grave threat to any attempt to ensure glory for oneself or for another, unless somehow they can be nullified either in speech or in deed.

Accordingly, the fifth verse paragraph divides into two sections: the one (¶5, 50-57) examines the vain dream, the utopian possibility, that death may be nullified by nature, by deeds; the other (¶5, 58-63) examines the possibility that death may be nullified by art, by speech. Nature is represented through its divinities, the nymphs—and the poet’s

³⁶ This, then, is a covert allusion to the pastoral tradition in its debased erotic form. Cf. Milton, *Elegia Quinta*, 127: “Atque aliquam cupidus praedatur Oreada Faunus” (“But-also the desirous Faun plunders some Oread”) (Hughes, 41).

³⁷ It is no accident that the gray-fly (¶3, 28) is mentioned here. For the gray-fly or dor-beetle was also known as a cockchafer (cf. *NED*; also, see Thyer-Newton, cited in Elledge, note ad loc.). For “cock” as equivalent to “penis,” see Eric Partridge, *Shakespeare’s Bawdy* (NY, 1960), 88. It should be added that for Milton’s contemporaries, the name “Damoetas” would constitute a clear and immediate reference to Sir Philip Sidney’s *Countess of Pembroke’s Arcadia*, in which a Dametas who is the embodiment of rustic loutishness figures prominently. Furthermore, if Milton’s own remarks about *Arcadia* are in any way typical, the connection between it and eroticism would have been immediate. Milton himself calls it a “vain amatorious poem...nor to be read at any time without good caution” (*Eikonoklastes*, ch. 1, Hughes, 793, cf. 794-795).

³⁸ The repetition of the “now” clause (¶4, 37-38) emphasizes this.

list is comprehensive, including Oreads, Dryads and Naiads—and their human apostles, the Druidic poet-priests and Lycidas. Art, on the other hand, is represented through Calliope, who is twice called “the Muse her self” (¶5, 58, 59), and through her progeny, the poet Orpheus.³⁹ In the presentation, nature is plural⁴⁰ and its effect is pacific, while art is singular⁴¹ and its effect is violent. In natural terms, Lycidas’s death is little more than a watery embrace, and the death of the Druids is a comfortable repose. Death is simply in the course of things, a datum to be accepted calmly. In the face of death, the only proper stance is to sustain one’s business (or rather, one’s “playing”) as usual. The natural divinities are indifferent to the wonted death of natural beings. However, even if they were not, they would be helpless to avert it. The fame of the Druids seems to rest on their acknowledgment of that and on their service to nature in its variety. However, the fame of the Druids is not an individual fame but a class fame, as the name “oaks” is a class name.⁴² Nature does not memorialize and individualize nature. It is speech that does this, artful and thoughtful speech, poetry. Hence, only in the context of poetry does the word “nature” (¶5, 60) occur. Poetry individualizes the apparently multifarious (makes “Universal nature...lament”), and in so doing, it enchants and provokes. Although poetry cannot nullify death *de facto*, it can nullify it *de jure*, and consequently it can guarantee fame, individual fame. Orpheus’s fame far surpasses the fame of the Druids, but the price that he paid was dismemberment. He paid that price because he allowed himself to feel the loss of Eurydice so personally that his sphere of enchantment diminished, his power narrowed, and hence he became vulnerable to an enraged and crazed multitude. Of his work virtually nothing survives. Although Orpheus’s fate was brought on by himself, his fame depends on others. It seems, then, as though the poet alone cannot guarantee his or her own fame. The realization that deeds are inefficacious and that the efficacy of speech is precarious leads the poet to the brink of despair, i. e., the poet’s meditation on Orpheus has led to an identification with Orpheus. He has looked back at the past, and he has seen it fade into irretrievability.

Despair grounded in the past, then, leads to despair for the future (¶6). However, the desire for fame, for glory, for immortality, is ineradicable: it is the last illness of even the noble mind. Not only is it the last illness—the poet seems to suggest—but also it is an illness for which there is no cure. This is why it may be better to play erotically than to write philosophically. In other words, perhaps the guarantee of immortality through human progeny—however limited it may be—is more certain than the guarantee of immortality through poetic progeny. Perhaps, then, the precariousness of poetic fame is so great that to the poet the fate is a fury blindly cutting off whom it will. Despair for fame has led to despair for poetry itself. The poet has now reached rock bottom, and hence a severe self-corrective is required in the externalized form of Phoebus Apollo, the ancient voice of self-knowledge. Phoebus’s appearance seems sudden until we realize the significance of the assertion “Phoebus repli’ed (¶6, 77). This means that Phoebus has been silently present since the beginning of the paragraph and that it is he as implicit auditor to whom the poet’s remarks (¶6, 64-76) have been addressed.

³⁹ For Orpheus, see Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1-105; Pindar, *Pythians* 4. 176-177; Lucian, *πρὸς τὸν ἀπαιδευτον* (*Adversus indoctum*), 11-12; Vergil, *Georgics*, 4. 453-566; *Paradise Lost* 7. 32-38.

⁴⁰ Cf. “Nymphs” (¶5, 50), “Bards...Druids” (¶5, 53).

⁴¹ Cf. “Muse” (¶5, 58, 59), “Orpheus” (¶5, 58), “Universal nature” (¶5, 60), “rout” (¶5, 61).

⁴² The names “druid” and “dryad” derive from the Greek δρῦς, “oak.” Cf. “Gens Druides antiqua” (“The ancient clan, the Druids”) (*Mansus*, 42, Hughes, 128).

Phoebus's appearance here is strongly reminiscent of the second sentence of Vergil's sixth eclogue:

When I sang kings and battles, the Cynthian has pinched [my] ear and has admonished [me thus]: "It is obligatory, Tityrus, for a pasturer to pasture [his] fat sheep, [and] to say a led-down [i.e., distracted] song."⁴³

According to Apollo, then, a pasturer (a shepherd) should proffer ample food to the flock of sheep in order to make them fat and/or to maintain their fatness, but a poet should proffer meager food to the flock of readers in order to make them lean and/or to maintain their leanness. The poet's flock, then, should be lean and perhaps hungry, as should the poet himself or herself. Such poets with such flocks are dangerous indeed. Both poets and grim wolves, therefore, stalk a hungry flock.

According to Phoebus, poetic fame transcends corporeal duration and the duration of immediate reputation. Poetic fame rests on Jove, namely on one divine perfect reader to whom the poetry must be addressed. There is, and need be, only one "perfect witness" (¶6, 82).

However, perfect witnesses demand perfect evidence, and so when the "higher mood" (¶7, 87) of the ancient past recedes, the recent past, i. e., the past at the time of Lycidas's death, emerges as the purpose of an interrogation. This, then, is the "whodunit?" paragraph (¶7). Instead of total despair, there is now a sober investigation of the alleged parties to the alleged crime. In other words, the despair in which the first part of the poem culminated is replaced initially by a quest for the truth of the matter, i.e., by a quest for truth.

Who, then, was responsible for Lycidas's death? The first suspects interrogated are the forces of nature, and they are exonerated. That is, art—in this instance, the art of forensic rhetoric—brings nature to the bar, and nature is absolved of guilt, at least for this crime.⁴⁴ As "sage Hippotades" (¶7, 96), the wise windbag, affirms, nature's criminals were in jail, and its innocents were playing (cf. ¶5, 52). Who, then, was guilty? It was the boat, a humanly made object, a work of art. This seems to imply that in some "fatall and perfidious" (¶7, 100) way, art is responsible for Lycidas's death: Lycidas died because he was a poet. Even his piety, his "sacred head" (¶7, 102), did not counterbalance his poetry.

However, if poetry was the cause, was it the cause in the sense of executioner? Only poetry can answer that charge, and hence the next witness is poetry itself in the figure of Camus, Lycidas's poetic progenitor, the wise⁴⁵ maker of art out of nature. Indeed, his mantle is woven—weaving is an art—from hair—a natural growth; his bonnet is both woven from marsh vegetation and "inwrought with figures dim" (¶8, 105), as the hyacinth⁴⁶ is inwrought with a cry of grief. Thus, his mantle and bonnet as examples of artificed nature are the perfect attire for him. Moreover, the dim figures in the bonnet,

⁴³ Vergil, *Eclogues* VI. 3-5: "cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthius aurem/ vellit et admonuit: 'pastorem, Tityre, pinguis / pascere oportet ovis, deductum dicere carmen.'"

⁴⁴ Cf. "Fellon winds" (¶7, 91) and *Variorum*, note ad loc.

⁴⁵ The word "sedge" (¶8, 104) seems to be a pun on, and hence an echo of, "sage" (¶7, 96).

⁴⁶ The reference to Hyacinthus recalls the implicit homosexuality of the third verse paragraph. Apparently, then, physical homosexuality adumbrates the psychic homoeroticism that teaching and poetic communication require. Cf. Plato, *Symposium*, where the connection is fully articulated between immortality and homosexuality as the phenomenon that indicates most graphically that eros does not exhaust itself in procreation.

like the Jamesian figure in the carpet, are representations—if one summarizes the various significations of “figure”—of animate beings, metaphors, numbers, and geometrical shapes. In addition, Camus’s physical action, namely “footing” (¶8, 103), is an incarnation of poetic versification, which is measured by feet.⁴⁷ Camus, then, represents art, and his bearing acquits him of the possible charge of having executed Lycidas, although he still feels called upon to assert his innocence explicitly by asking who has kidnapped and murdered his most valuable devotee. Although his question is a serious attempt to set the proceedings back on the right track, its comic hyperbole should not be overlooked. The only other occurrence of the word “quoth”—as far as I know—in Milton’s verse occurs in the second elegy on the death of the university coach driver, a poetic burlesque, where it is used as a laughable poeticism (cf. “On the University Carrier” 2. 17, Hughes, 65). Therefore, although Camus may be innocent of murder, he is certainly not innocent *simpliciter*. No poet is.

Camus, then, has restated the issue that is at stake here, and the timing of his question is wonderfully precise: as if in answer to it, St. Peter appears as the embodiment of the clergy at its height. The “Pilot of the *Galilean Lake*” (¶8, 109)⁴⁸ immediately launches an invective against certain shepherds and warns of the dangers of the rapacious wolf, whoever they and it may be. The assumption, supported by Ruskin’s ingenious explanation of the phrase “Blind Mouthes!” (¶8, 119),⁴⁹ has been made too easily that the primary object of the attack is the clergy. Although one should not deny that aspect of the invective, one should not blindly assert it either. After all, the poem’s dominant figure has been the equation of poets and shepherds. Yet the attack seems to fuse poets and priests, i. e., the shepherds seem to be what one could call pious poets,⁵⁰ both the genuinely pious (such as Lycidas seems to have been) and the sham pious majority, who are neither genuinely pious nor genuine poets. In other words, four categories are implicitly established here (for three of which I have adduced examples):

- | | |
|----------------------|---------------------|
| (1) pious non-poet | (St. Peter) |
| (2) pious poet | (Lycidas) |
| (3) impious non-poet | (sham poet-priests) |
| (4) impious poet. | |

Peter attacks “the grim Woolf” (¶8, 128), that is different from both Lycidas and the corrupt shepherds. What, then, does the wolf represent? I would suggest that the wolf represents the impious poet, namely the monodist, in contradistinction to the pious poet, Lycidas. This is the reason for the name “Lycidas.” Insofar as he is a poet, he is wolf-sired, but insofar as he is pious, he is not a wolf. Therefore, Lycidas is not a poet in the full sense.

What is a poet in the full sense? A poet in the full sense is a wolf in the full sense. What is a wolf in the full sense? It is (see epigraph from Graves, above) a beast that howls (or sings) and feeds on corpses (as one must do in writing an elegy) in wooded mountains (in a pastoral setting). In addition, the wolf, like the writer, is rapacious:

⁴⁷ Cf. Milton, *Elegia Sexta*, 8 (Hughes, 50): “Nec venit [noster amor] ad claudos integer ipse pedes” (“Nor does [our love], itself [being] integral, come to lame feet”).

⁴⁸ Whether the reference is to *Luke* 5: 1-11 or to *Matthew* 14: 22-34 is a fascinating question. Cf. ¶10, 172-173.

⁴⁹ *Sesame and Lilies* I. 21, in *Works*, vol. 18, 72.

⁵⁰ Cf. R. I. Brett, *Reason and Imagination* (NY, 1960), 45-46.

The writer's only responsibility is to his art. He will be completely ruthless if he is a good one. He has a dream. It anguishes him so much he must get rid of it. He has no peace until then. Everything goes by the board: honor, pride, decency, security, happiness, all, to get the book written. If a writer has to rob his mother, he will not hesitate; the "Ode on a Grecian Urn" is worth any number of old ladies.⁵¹

It is precisely this rapacious and subversive impiety that may put the poet at the mercy of the institutional machinery that is dedicated to the inculcation and preservation of piety. This may explain the threat of punishment by the "two-handed engine" (¶8, 130). Perhaps it is a machine possessing one hand for smiting the impious and one hand for smiting poets. Where the poet is impious, both hands stand "ready to smite once, and smite no more" (¶8, 131). St. Peter, then, refers back to the first line of the monody in order to threaten the monodist that if he continues to embrace heterodoxy, there will be no more once mores. This is why Peter's voice is called "dread" (¶9, 132): the monodist responds to the voice with dread because it is meant as a reprimand to him. This is in sharp contrast to the "higher mood" (¶7, 87) of the Apollonian voice. Where institutional Christianity preaches fearful obedience, paganism teaches rational inquiry.

Hence, the beginning of the ninth verse paragraph is a liberating return to pagan antiquity. It opens with a dual invocation, on the one hand to "*Alpheus*" (¶9, 132; cf. Ovid, *Met.* 5. 572-641), the major river of the Peloponnese, and on the other hand, to the "*Sicilian Muse*" (¶9, 133), the muse of the pagan pastoralists (cf. Vergil, *Eclogues* 4. 1). One of the effects of the power of Christian dogma—or of any orthodoxy—is to shrink the power of pagan reason. The diminution of freedom of thought is a danger to be averted at all costs.⁵² Yet, there is another danger to be averted, and that is the danger of persecution at the hands of the prevailing orthodoxy. In short, how is one to preserve the life of thought without incurring the death of the thinker, i. e., how is one to present one's thoughts to the "fit audience...though few" (*Paradise Lost* 7. 31; cf. *Eikonoklastes*, preface, Hughes, 782-783) without alienating the unlearned audience though many. This is the problem adumbrated by the life of Orpheus, and the solution of the Orphics to this problem was simply to abjure public communication. This is not the solution of either Milton or the monodist.

What, then, is their solution? Presumably, it is to adopt a form of overt utterance that allows for covert utterance, i. e., presumably it is to write, as it were, between the lines:

Persecution, then, gives rise to a peculiar technique of writing, and therewith to a peculiar type of literature, in which the truth about

⁵¹ William Faulkner, in *Writers at Work: the Paris Review interviews*, ed. Malcolm Cowley (NY, 1959), 124.

⁵² Cf. Walter Berns, "John Milton," in *History of Political Philosophy*, ed. Leo Strauss and Joseph Cropsey, third ed. (Chicago, 1987), 454 [= 2nd ed. (1972), 429; 1st ed. (1963), 411]: "Not many pagan thinkers held the life of the intellect in higher esteem" than Milton did. Cf. Milton, *Christian Doctrine*, preface (Hughes, 902): "It has been my object to make it appear...of how much consequence...is the liberty not only of winnowing and sifting every doctrine, but also of thinking and even writing respecting it, according to our individual faith and persuasion.... Without this liberty we are still enslaved, not indeed, as formerly, under the divine law, but, what is worst of all, under the law of men, or to speak more truly, under a barbarous tyranny."

all crucial things is presented exclusively between the lines. That literature is addressed, not to all readers, but to trustworthy and intelligent readers only. It has all the advantages of private communication without having its greatest disadvantage—that it reaches only the writer’s acquaintances. It has all the advantages of public communication without having its greatest disadvantage—capital punishment for the author. But how can a man perform the miracle of speaking in a publication to a minority, while being silent to the majority of his readers? The fact which makes this literature possible can be expressed in the axiom that thoughtless men are careless readers, and only thoughtful men are careful readers. Therefore an author who wishes to address only thoughtful men has but to write in such a way that only a very careful reader can detect the meaning of his book.⁵³

Hence, the hidden lesson of the monodist’s encounter with St. Peter is that one must write and read between the lines. However, the external power of orthodoxy is greater, at least in an immediate sense, than that of heterodoxy,⁵⁴ because thoughts are frail (cf. ¶9, 153), and the monodist is so shaken by his encounter that he has difficulty speaking.

Therefore, he calls on the Sicilian Muse to invite the vales to look homeward and to deck Lycidas’s bier. Because of the monodist’s encounter with St. Peter, we should expect the speech of the muse and the monodist’s own speeches following it to be, to all appearances, models of orthodoxy. This expectation is fulfilled, as is the expectation that there is also a hidden undercurrent of heterodoxy. The muse’s speech (¶9, 136-153)⁵⁵ lists altogether eleven flowers.⁵⁶ To what do the eleven flowers correspond if not to the eleven verse paragraphs of the poem? This floreate enameling of the monody is meant to give the monodist respite to compose himself, although indubitably the muse who speaks here is an externalization of the poet, a protective mask, so to speak, as the possessive adjective “our” (¶9, 153) indicates. The speech, then, which is a response to a

⁵³ Leo Strauss, *Persecution and the Art of Writing* (Glencoe, IL, 1952), ch. 2, 25. Cf. 25-26: “Another axiom, but one which is meaningful only so long as persecution remains within the bounds of legal procedure, is that a careful writer of normal intelligence is more intelligent than the most intelligent censor. It is he, or the public-prosecutor, who must prove that the author holds or has uttered heterodox views. In order to do so he must show that certain literary deficiencies of the work are not due to chance, but that the author used a given ambiguous expression deliberately, or that he constructed a certain sentence badly on purpose. That is to say, the censor must prove not only that the author is intelligent and a good writer in general, for a man who intentionally blunders in writing must possess the art of writing, but above all that he was on the usual level of his abilities when writing the incriminating words. But how can that be proved, if even Homer nods from time to time?”

⁵⁴ Cf. Milton, *Philosophus ad regem (A Philosophical [Person] to the King)* (Hughes, 115-116).

⁵⁵ The dramatic situation definitely establishes these lines to be spoken not by the monodist, but by the muse. The monodist makes his request in lines 134-135. The muse’s compliance begins with the phrase “ye valleys” (136), i. e., ‘ye vales,’ and ends with the phrase “false surmise” (153). As if to emphasize that the monodist is not the speaker here, of the nine occurrences of the drowned poet’s name (¶1, 8, 9, 10; ¶4, 49; ¶5, 51; ¶9, 151; ¶10, 166, 172, 182), eight have the form “Lycidas” and only one—the one here (¶9, 151)—has the form “Lycid.” The alteration cannot be justified on metrical grounds alone, especially since the poet does not hesitate to vary the poem metrically when he believes it to be necessary, as in line 145 in the same speech.

⁵⁶ “Primrose” (142), “Crow-toe” (143), “Gessamine” (143), “Pink” (144), “Pansie” (144), “Violet” (145), “Musk-rose” (146), “Woodbine” (146), “Cowslips” (147), “Amaranthus” (149), “Daffadillies” (150).

false accusation,⁵⁷ masks itself as a playful false image. The falseness of the accusation is the falseness, the opinion-boundness, of all orthodoxy as such; the falseness of the image is the pretense that Lycidas's body is present and intact. The poet explicitly responds only to the latter falseness. The "Ay me!" here (¶9, 154), just as the earlier "Ay me" (¶5, 56), is an expression of an incapacity in one sense and of a determination to face reality in another sense. Where before it introduced Orpheus's "goary visage" (¶5, 62), here it introduces Lycidas's fleshless and bloodless bones (¶9, 155).⁵⁸ However, Lycidas is no Orpheus. Although Orpheus was *damnatus capitis*, his *caput* (his rationality and life principle) remained afloat and more or less intact. However, of Lycidas virtually nothing remains. Although Orpheus's world is a grief-stricken "Universal nature" (¶5, 60), Lycidas's world—to whose bottom he has sunk—is "monstrous" (¶9, 158).⁵⁹ One might object that at least for Lycidas there is the protective Christian guardian angel Michael. However, while Lycidas rots, Michael indifferently gazes away at Spain, and the poet endeavors to rouse him to concern. In other words, the Christian vision needs a lesson from pagan poetry. Since Christianity looks far away, it fails to see what is underfoot, i. e., by focusing on the hereafter and nowafter, it loses the here and now. This is in sharp contrast to the pagan poet Arion, with whom the monodist identifies himself when he sings out to the dolphins for help (¶9, 164). Arion is superior as a poet to both Orpheus and Lycidas because Arion used his music to preserve himself from death and to punish those who would have killed him.⁶⁰ When the monodist identifies himself with Arion, then, he suggests that he too is superior to Orpheus and Lycidas.

The monodist demonstrates his superiority in his next speech (¶10), a concluding assertion of Christian orthodoxy that is meant to charm even St. Peter. The structure of the first line (¶10, 165) indicates that it is a conclusion. It is exactly parallel to the first line of the poem: it too begins and ends with three stressed monosyllables, and it repeats the word "more." In addition, its "no more" echoes the end of St. Peter's speech (¶8, 131). It is as if the poet is demonstrating that he has assimilated not only Peter's lesson, but his language too. The stage is set, then, for the annunciation of Lycidas's resurrection. Just as the day-star sinks only to rise again, and just as Peter sank into the Galilean lake only to be resurfaced by Christ (cf. *Matthew* 14: 22-34), so too has Lycidas sunk only to become risen again through Christ's power. In Lycidas's case, the result is that he is made into a divinity: he becomes the guardian or "Genius of the shore" (¶10, 183), the protector of future maritime wayfarers. Now, with Lycidas at his post, we can say that God's in Heaven and all's right with the world.

However, is God, and is it? If one looks closely, the answer is, "No." Take, say, the triad 'day-star/Peter/Lycidas.' Both Peter and Lycidas need external help to rise after sinking, but the day-star—whether it be the morning star (in accordance with its primary signification) or the sun (cf. *Variorum*, note ad 168)—has its principle of rising and sinking in itself.

Hence, although Peter and Lycidas are an appropriate pair in this context, the day-star seems to be a superfluous third. However, if one considers the relevant passages

⁵⁷ The primary meaning of "surmise" is "accusation" or "allegation" (cf. *NED*).

⁵⁸ Also, cf. "Hebrus" (¶5, 63) to "Hebrides" (¶9, 156).

⁵⁹ Why editors of the poem routinely treat the adjective "monstrous" as though it were a genitive of material is baffling. Cf. *Variorum*, note ad loc.

⁶⁰ Herodotus I. 23-24. Also cf. Milton, *Elegia Quinta*, 113-116 (Hughes, 41); *Ad patrem*, 60 (Hughes, 84).

from Vergil and Spenser,⁶¹ the day-star must be the morning star, the star that sinks under the name “Hesperus” but rises under the name “Lucifer.” This would seem to fit the writing tactics of the monodist.

In addition, in contrast to the earlier focusing on Orpheus’s and Lycidas’s heads (cf. ¶5, 62; ¶7, 102), now the focus is on Lycidas’s hair (¶10, 175; cf. St. Peter’s “Miter’d locks,” ¶8, 112). Is it possible that this or the suchlike hair is the material out of which Camus’s “Mantle hairy” (¶8, 104) and even the monody now before us are woven?

Finally, with regard to Lycidas’s deification, looking back over the poem as a whole, one must ask what effect the deities had on the fate of Lycidas. The answer is that they had none: they were inefficacious. This would suggest that the elevation of Lycidas is a sham elevation. The poet cannot depend for salvation upon any external force or being. Rather the poet must effect his or her own salvation, must guarantee his or her own glory. Thus ends the monody.

In the eleventh and final verse paragraph, the poet, as the shift to the third person indicates, is described arising to face his future tasks. Temporality has been restored to its proper sequence: past (“sang”: ¶11, 186), present (“now”: ¶11, 190, 191), future (“To morrow”: ¶11, 193). It seems as though the monodist is Camus’s true pupil because in imitation of his teacher, he too wears a “Mantle” (¶11, 192; cf. ¶8, 104)

What are the “fresh Woods, and Pastures new” (¶11, 193) toward which he goes? If we think primarily of *Lycidas*, they are new deaths, new corpses, new fodder for the poet’s *os sacrum*. The poet’s twitch is less an attempt to protect himself from the chill of the encroaching darkness (cf. Elledge, note ad 192) than it is the wryly expressive gesture of the samurai between tasks.⁶² It is presumably just as much the gesture of Milton himself.

Let me conclude by adopting the voice of the devil from Blake’s *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and asking if Milton was “of the Devil’s party without knowing it.”⁶³ The only judicious answer to this question is that Milton would not have been of any party without knowing it.

⁶¹ Cf. Vergil, *Aeneid* 8. 589-591: “qualis ubi Oceani perfusus Lucifer unda,/ quem Venus ante alios astrorum diligit ignis,/ extulit os sacrum caelo tenebrasque resolvit” (“of-which-sort as where Lucifer, having been drenched by the wave of Ocean,/ [Lucifer] whom Venus cherishes before [i.e., in preference to] the other fires of the stars,/ has raised [his] sacred mouth out of heaven and has re-loosened the darkneses”). Also, cf. Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, I. xii. 21: “As bright as doth the morning starre appeare/ Out of the East, with flaming locks bedight,/ To tell that dawning day is drawing neare,/ And to the world does bring long-wished light.”

⁶² Cf. Akira Kurosawa, *Yojimbo* passim.

⁶³ William Blake, *The Complete Writings*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (NY, 1957), 150. Also, cf. Brett, 47.