A CONSIDERATION OF THE MANNERIST CHARACTERISTICS OF LYCIDAS
AS A MEANS OF SOLVING SOME OF THE POEM'S "PROBLEMS"

by

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Abstract

The wide spectrum of scholarly opinion on various facets of Lycidas suggests the need for a different critical approach. Mannerism offers a possible new approach.

Mannerism originated in Italy during the early sixteenth century. Two sets of criteria exist for distinguishing mannerist characteristics; one emphasizes maniera or style in the absolute sense; the other inner tension. The two aspects are not necessarily antagonistic but can exist in the same work as instanced in Bronzino's London Allegory. All critics agree that mannerist art is subjective. The style resulted in part from impact on sensitive personalities of unstable local conditions and uncertainties arising out of world developments. Milton's vulnerability was doubtless influenced by his personal life.

Lycidas expresses not only conventional grief but Milton's deep-rooted uncertainties. Deaths significant to Milton marked 1637. He was under serious prolonged strain when he wrote Lycidas. The invitation to contribute to a memorial volume provided an opportunity to express his thoughts.

Milton created a uniquely personal poem while incorporating motifs from earlier pastorals spanning the whole history of form. Three poets played major influential roles: Theocritus, Virgil, Spenser. Milton based his choice of pastoral on current popularity of form and implicit promise therein of resurrection. Deceased fitted perfectly the shepherd-poet-pastor role traditionally assigned to the subject of a pastoral elegy.
The question of Lycidas' subject evokes various, sometimes conflicting answers, indicating central ambiguity characteristic of mannerist works. Rejection of Lycidas as subject rests partly in matter of perspective and scale. Lycidas is always seen as small-scale, far-off figure. Diminution of central figure is literary manifestation of recurring practice in mannerist painting. Lycidas is relegated to the background, while the foreground is peopled with figures more interesting to Milton. Milton allows his own concerns to take precedence over the poem's nominal subject, demonstrating a practice common to mannerist artists.

Familiarity with pastoral tradition makes the reader aware of Milton's unfamiliar usage. He demonstrates principle of disegno interno, making abundant references to his predecessors but presenting them in a form totally different from that sanctioned by tradition. He makes his own rules for Lycidas' versification out of his knowledge and enjoyment of the strictest Italian practice. His juxtaposition of six- and ten-syllable lines creates a psychological effect comparable to that generated by Michelangelo's treatment of classical architectural elements in the Laurentian Library anteroom. The strength of Milton's emotion is unescapable, unalleviated by soothing effect of rhythm and rhyme.

The question of unity in Lycidas is troubling. Scholarly discussion divides the poem into parts but does not explain discrepancies in mood, scale and subject matter within divisions. Such shifts encourage the notion of Lycidas as mannerist. Mannerism depends in part on "violent yoking together of apparently unrelated elements." The few
scholarly discussions of Lycidas which address themselves directly to the question of the poem's unity suggest a kind of unity which accords with mannerist criteria.

Lycidas fulfils criteria of virtuoso performance. Milton invests old poetic form with new vitality, making it memorable with passages of pathos and beauty. He joins sound and sense to achieve powerful, expressive effects. Presence of inner tension in poem is significant mannerist element.

Concluding eight lines of Lycidas differ in form, mood and point-of-view from lament proper. Mood of cheerful confidence is attributed to poet's natural sense of satisfaction at successful conclusion of task undertaken reluctantly. Milton has transcended the problems that King's death forced him to confront. His self-preoccupation in the final stanza reflects self-conscious concern of mannerist artist with the practical side of his own techniques.

Mannerist criteria can reconcile disparate points of view on various facets of the poem.
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All quotations from the poetry and prose of John Milton are taken from *John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose*, ed. by Merritt Y. Hughes with notes and introductions by the Editor (New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957).
A CONSIDERATION OF THE MANNERIST CHARACTERISTICS OF **LYCIDAS**

AS A MEANS OF SOLVING SOME OF THE POEM'S "PROBLEMS"
the form, structure, and mood of an artistic statement cannot be separated from its meaning, its conceptual content; simply because the work of art as a whole is its meaning, what is said in it is indissolubly linked with the manner in which it is said, and cannot be said in any other way. Libraries have been filled with attempts to reduce the meaning of a play like Hamlet to a few short and simple lines, yet the play itself remains the clearest and most concise statement of its meaning and message, precisely because its uncertainties and irreducible ambiguities are an essential element of its total impact.

These considerations apply, in varying degrees, to all works of creative literature, but they apply with particular force to works that are essentially concerned with conveying their author's sense of mystery, bewilderment, and anxiety when confronted with the human condition.

Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

During the three centuries that have elapsed since Milton's death, *Lycidas* has been, and continues to be, the subject of much scholarly criticism. Over the years, the tenor of this criticism has changed markedly. Today, no serious student of English literature would agree with Dr. Johnson's scathing dictum of two centuries ago, that "no man could have fancied that he read *Lycidas* with pleasure had he not known its author." Most would support a more sympathetic point of view, perhaps that which sees the poem as "the most poignant and controlled statement in English poetry of the acceptance of that in the human condition which seems to man unacceptable,"¹ or perhaps that which, more simply, praises *Lycidas* as "one of the greatest poems in English."²

However, this general accord does not extend beyond agreement on the excellence of the poem itself, but subsumes a wide spectrum of opinion on the various facets of the poem. The true, as opposed to the ostensible subject of *Lycidas*; the pastoral form and Milton's deviations from it; the question of the poem's unity; the varying tones in which the verse speaks, from the virulence of the poet's attack on the clergy to the delicacy of the flower catalogue--these are aspects of the poem that continue to invite consideration. Of course, complete unanimity of opinion on every element of *Lycidas*, as of any poem, is as undesirable as it is unlikely. Differences in interpretation of, for instance, various images serve most often to enhance and illuminate one another, and testify
to a richness of poetic texture. But differences of opinion embracing such basic elements as subject, theme and structure suggest a work of a quality somehow outside the range of hitherto accepted poetic criteria, a work which demands a different approach—one which does not attempt to explicate *Lycidas* according to conventional standards, or to force it into the pattern of a conventional genre (after making due allowance for whimsical deviations by its author). Such a new approach has been suggested, and tentatively explored, during the past two decades, notably by Wylie Sypher in *Four Stages of Renaissance Style*, and by Roy Daniells in *Milton, Mannerism and Baroque*. Both Sypher and Daniells see *Lycidas* as an example in English literature of that stylistic category hitherto acknowledged chiefly in Italian visual arts of the Cinquecento and known as Mannerism.

This relatively new way of looking at *Lycidas* is as yet only a lightly trodden path, and the efforts of many students are needed to smooth it into an easier road to understanding. This paper, then proposes to open up the way a little to an increased understanding of both the general—mannerism as a possible approach to literature, and the particular—*Lycidas* as perhaps the most significant example of mannerist literature.
Footnotes


Chapter Two

A CONSIDERATION OF THE MANNERIST STYLE.

Mannerism is a term that has only recently entered the vocabulary of literary criticism, and criteria for its application to literature are at present still in a state of emergence, far from fully, or even adequately, defined. Although now recognized as offering a significant and helpful approach to early and middle seventeenth century English literature hitherto regarded as difficult, strange or in some fashion deviant from what is thought of as "normal," or as a pathway to levels of meaning not yet explored, mannerism has received little serious attention by recognized English scholars, and the student who attempts to examine seventeenth-century poetry for evidence of mannerism must therefore turn first to the field of visual and plastic art and to scholarly investigation thereof, for it was in this field that the movement now acknowledged as mannerist was first recognized, and its origins, probable causes and distinguishing characteristics were defined. Even here, however, disagreement on many aspects of the style confuses the scene. Some of these disagreements, relating to the time and place of mannerism's beginnings, are of minor importance in the context of this study, but those differences of opinion surrounding a definition of the style and its probably causes are of major significance and must be looked at in some detail. But let us consider first the question of mannerism's beginnings.

Students of the style agree that it originated in Italy during the early sixteenth century, although a difference of opinion exists as
to whether Rome or Florence was the actual birthplace of mannerism. Dr. Walter Friedlaender, who in 1914 pioneered the twentieth century's study of mannerism, considers its creation as an "essentially Tuscan accomplishment,"¹ a view endorsed by Arnold Hauser as recently as 1965. Hauser explains its emergence there as resulting from the removal to Rome of Michelangelo and Raphael, and the consequent establishment of that city as ... the real home of classical art, while Florence was now able to move more freely of the hitherto prevailing tradition. But, to understand subsequent developments, it is necessary also to recall that after the sack of Rome Florence regained something of its former importance as an artistic centre, and the seeds of the new style that took root at the time of Guiliano's seizure of power were able to come to full blossom there. In any case, the lavish patronage practised by the usurper and its accompanying ambiguity were not entirely inappropriate to the complex and contradictory nature of the style.²

On the other hand, John Shearman, whose study, Mannerism, is one of the latest in the field, points to Rome as the place where mannerism "first reared its beautiful head,"³ spreading out from there as its practitioners travelled to other parts of Italy. He cites the plague of 1522 and the sack of Rome in 1527 as two major events that drove artists, among other citizens, from Rome and consequently brought about the dissemination of the style. But it is not necessary to pursue this disagreement here, since both cities are prominently associated with Italian artistic achievement and each was the scene of subsequent significant mannerist development.

Most students of the trend agree that mannerism as a definite style began in 1520, the year that was marked by the death of Raphael and the end of the High Renaissance, but since changes of style seldom
occur abruptly without giving some hint of their imminence, an unequivocal
dating of the beginnings of this style as 1520 seems too arbitrary, and
common sense supports those critics who point to foreshadowings as early
as the first decade of the sixteenth century. Mannerist tendencies can
be detected in work of Michelangelo as early as 1504, and in several
Raphael madonnas executed prior to 1510. As to the duration of the style,
critics do not agree on an exact terminal date, but generally concede
that sometime after 1600 and not later than 1610 marks the end of the
mannerist period in the Italian visual arts.

More important for this study, however, than disagreement as to
exactly where mannerism originated and its chronological limits are the
differing opinions as to its distinguishing characteristics. Among art
critics of the twentieth century two main areas of discrimination exist.
One emphasizes the derivation of the term from the Italian word maniera,
meaning style in its absolute sense, style characterized by grace, elo­
quence, refinement of finish and implied ease of execution and other
attributes of the highly cultured, sophisticated courtly society which
sponsored and supported mannerism's development. A second point of view
maintains that the essence of mannerism rests in an inner tension which
expresses itself in a variety of ways. Mannerist art reveals the pre­
sence of this tension by a discordance between the ostensible subject and
its formal realization, by a lack of focus in the sense that all parts
are not apparently directed towards the organic development of one
central conception and by a seeming lack of unity arising out of this
failure to focus on a central theme. Mannerist art disregards or opposes
the Renaissance ideals of balance, proportion and scale, and exhibits a wilful refusal by the artist to subordinate his own personal expressiveness to the expectations of his audience.

The notion of tension as the single most important distinguishing feature of mannerist art wins support from scholars who approach its study from a variety of viewpoints. Erwin Panofsky, who discusses the philosophical tenets underlying mannerism in the visual arts; Arnold Hauser, who examines the trend from the point of view of the art historian; and Wylie Sypher, who discusses the style from the perspective of English literature, all point to the presence of tension as an inalienable characteristic of mannerism.

In opposition to their views, however, is the opinion of art critic John Shearman, who explicitly rejects this notion and states unequivocably that "there is as little necessity as excuse for an explanation of Mannerism in terms of tension . . . ." He insists instead on "refinement, elegance and grace . . . ," on mannerism as "an extreme manifestation of civilized living," the product of an Epicurean society who desired and cultivated beauty in every aspect of its existence.

Shearman's position stems from a refusal to acknowledge the influence on artistic expression of events in the world at large, and from an insistence on recognizing mannerism as the manifestation of a culture centered in the sophisticated, insulated life of the Italian ducal courts. But his argument is weakened by the nature of the examples he chooses to support it. He pays only limited attention to painting (probably the most expressive and certainly the most influential art
form), virtually ignores some painters (Pontormo, Beccafumi, El Greco among others) recognized elsewhere as the most significant figures of the period, and, with relatively few exceptions, concentrates on the minor works of the most important artists or on examples taken from the repertoire of those individuals who can best be described as craftsmen—distinguished, gifted, capable of the most exquisite refinement both in conception and execution, but nevertheless not worthy to be numbered among the truly great artists of the period.

The courtly aspect of mannerism has not gone unrecognized by other critics. Hauser describes mannerism as "the courtly style par excellence, in the sense of exclusivity and fastidiousness," the style which held the foremost position in all the leading European courts of the sixteenth century, and more inclusively, "the artistic language of the intellectual, international elite."

In fact, the two aspects of mannerism are not necessarily antagonistic. The criteria of grace, elegance, fineness of finish, can be subsumed in the more essential quality of tension. Even among Shearman's examples, chosen to illustrate the beauty of form and refinement of execution which for him above all else typify mannerist achievement, are to be found many which exhibit the element of tension—in material strained to its utmost potential (the Bologna Mercury, p. 89); in decoration so overwhelming that it threatens the stability of the form (doorway, Dietterlin, p. 123) and in delicacy of line rendering a subject in itself gross (Flagellation—Michelangelo, p. 55).

Similarly, in the more imposing works of the Mannerist period,
the overpowering presence of tension does not preclude grace, elegance and refinement as integral elements making an essential contribution to the total impact. For an instance of this, let us look briefly at the so-called London Allegory of Bronzino, painted around 1546, mid-point in the mannerist era, and typically mannerist in its lack of focus or centrality and its overabundance of apparently unrelated forms. Its lineage is decidedly courtly—painted for Duke Cosimo de Medici as a gift to Francis I of France. Intimate in scale, it fulfills Shearman's criteria of elegance, grace and refinement of finish. The body contours of the principal figures are gracefully rendered. The colours are cool and clear. The flesh of Venus, Cupid and the putto has a porcelain-like texture, and the painting as a whole is rich in finely depicted detail. Venus' delicate tiara, the jewelled clasp that fastens Cupid's quiver and the hands of the various figures provide a series of exquisite studies. Yet the painting is full of tensions, of which the unstable postures of the Venus-Cupid configuration, the contrast between the coarsely muscled arm and shoulder of the figure at top right and the delicately rendered bodies of Venus, Cupid and the putto, and the ambiguous relationship of Venus and Cupid suggested by Cupid's unfilial embrace of his mother, are three examples.

Another source of tension in Bronzino's Allegory, as in mannerist art generally, arises out of its disregard for or opposition to the Renaissance ideals of balance, harmony and symmetry. Renaissance compositional rules would have placed the embracing Venus and Cupid, as "subject," in the centre of the canvas, and arranged the remaining subordinate
figures in a balanced and harmonious relationship to them. In Bronzino's painting, however, the "central" figures are not "central" at all, but dominate the lower left of the picture, filling the front of the picture plane and forcing an uncomfortably close relationship between themselves and the viewer, whose attention is at the same time diverted by the strongly articulated arm and head of Time, extending across the top right, and the gesticulating putto beneath him. No one compositional element serves as a focal point.

These unco-ordinated spatial relationships suggest a lack of unity. Both the meaning of and the connection between the various motifs are obscure, and, in the absence of any single spatially ordering arrangement, they tend to stand as individual elements rather than coalesce into a unified whole.

This tendency of mannerist artists to reject renaissance rules of composition is discussed by Panofsky in *Idea*, a study of the changing definition of the relationship between the artist and his material over a period extending from Roman antiquity to the late seventeenth century. Panofsky notes that the mannerist era is marked by a "general and almost passionate rebellion against all rigid rules." The artist chose instead to depend on his own divinely inspired "inner idea" or *disegno interno*. This insistence on the "inner idea" and the assumption by the artist of the right to use his material in whatever way best expressed it, regardless of established precedent, was not stated formally until nearly a century after mannerism had become the dominant style, when in 1607 Federico Zuccaro published his *L'Idea de Pittori*. Nevertheless, practice
long anticipated his premise that artistic creation was not a science, subject to mechanical rules, but an external realization of the design directly engendered in the artist's mind. Zuccaro does not limit the operation of disegno interno to the art of painting alone, but sees it as operating in "all worthwhile accomplishments of the human intellect ..."  

This subjectivity of mannerist art is a characteristic that all critics, whatever their special field of interest, point to. Walter Friedlaender, who begins the twentieth century's study of mannerism with a discussion of painting, says of mannerist art that it "is basically subjective, since it would construct and individually reconstruct from the inside out, from the subject outward, freely, according to the rhythmic feeling present in the artist. ..."  

E. K. J. Reznicek, also concerned with painting but writing fifty years after Friedlaender, defines the mannerist artist as "one who consciously opposes the tenets of the Renaissance, who rejects its teaching concerning proportion and perspective, and who chooses unlimited imaginative creation rather than a strict dependence on what he sees. This [is an] art of the inner vision, not concerned with descriptive objectivity, but with evocative suggestion by the mind's eye . . . ." 

Nikolaus Pevsner, in An Outline of European Architecture, implies a subjective art when he discusses the new awareness in the artist of the virtues of eclecticism, and substituting for a merely imitative pattern "the capricious, the demonstrative or the daring, . . . ." 

Wylie Sypher, concerned with analogies between mannerist art and literature, confirms this subjective quality of the
style when he writes: "Mannerist painters and poets alike defy rules of proportion and perspective to satisfy the needs of their subjective view of reality. . . . each painting, statue, façade, each poem and play, is a special case, a personal manipulation of design, material, situation, language, response."¹⁴

The question now arises as to the reasons underlying this new artistic approach. Why should this reliance on self, this eclecticism, this determination to proceed according to a personal vision, manifest itself at this particular time?

It seems probable that this change was one of the many which occurred in the early years of the Cinquecento, resulting from the acceptance of painters and sculptors as practitioners of liberal rather than mechanical arts. This new status, for which artists had fought all during the previous century, differentiated them from mere craftsmen, mechanically carrying on a trade. Along with this change came an emancipation from the guilds, under whose direction artists, as long as they were regarded as craftsmen, had worked like any other craftsmen. But by the end of the fifteenth century artists had become accepted as freely educated individuals working in harmony with other men of learning. Not surprisingly, along with this rejection of the guilds went a rebellion against the technical tradition that they had established; rules which maintained that art was a science based on mathematical and geometric principles, dependant on observation and measurement, were discarded, and the internal spiritual image rather than the external perceivable reality became increasingly the subject for artistic representation. As
the century progressed the artist's status was further enhanced and his right to proceed subjectively confirmed by the belief that his ability to conceive this inner spiritual image, or *disegno interno*, was a direct gift of God endowing him with powers similar to God's, and evidence of the Godlike nature of man. We might note here that this concept of *disegno interno* is formulated, although not named, in the earliest English literary criticism extant. Sir Philip Sidney, in his *Apology for Poetry*, notes that the poet is not bound by what he observes in nature, but "lifted up with the vigour of his own invention," searches freely for inspiration "within the zodiac of his own wit."\textsuperscript{15}

The question now arises as to why many (although not all) artists chose to exercise their new found freedom of expression in distorted, ambiguous, unstable works rife with tension; works which are in direct contradiction to the art of the preceding generation which pictured a world characterized by clarity and order, balance and symmetry, an all-pervading harmonious unity of design and purpose. The answer is to be found in part at least in the conditions prevailing in the world of which they were part. The mannerist style is one result of the impact on sensitive personalities of both unstable (in some cases chaotic) local conditions, and, more importantly, uncertainties (not confined by national boundaries) which had invaded many aspects of man's existence. The sensitivity of the artistic temperament is not a matter of mere conjecture. The records show that many of mannerism's early practitioners, those whose work is most strongly marked by anti-classicism, were strange, neurotic creatures. Pontormo, shy and introverted, withdrew for long
periods from all social contact. His favorite pupil and adopted son, Bronzino, recorded in his diary and his poetry an intense loneliness and sadness of spirit. Parmigianino, haunted in his youth by religious problems, spent his last years a lonely recluse, careless alike of his personal appearance and his contractual obligations. Michelangelo, although his art cannot be summed up as exclusively or even mainly mannerist, left a heritage of undeniably mannerist works expressing the agonies of spirit of a personality subject to violent changes of mood and seemingly at war both with himself and with the world. For these artists and their contemporaries coming to maturity in the early decades of the Cinquecento, living and working mainly in Rome and Florence, violent change was a fact of life, involving both invasion from without and political upheaval from within:

The overthrow of the Florentine republic and the sack of Rome in 1527 are only the most obvious of many political disorientations. (A local mob led by the Colonna had sacked the Vatican in 1526.) Such remote figures as Columbus, Vasco da Gama and Luther were undermining Italian supremacy, and more immediately, both France and Spain intruded with military and diplomatic force into the Italian scene.16

But more significant and far-reaching in its consequences than the political and economic upheavals in Italy was a series of developments during the sixteenth century which affected every field of human interest and endeavor, developments which conspired to undermine the individual's faith in himself and in the stability of his world.

Although it is difficult and perhaps ill-founded to assess any one of these developments as more or less important in its effects, certainly one of the more far-reaching was the displacement of the Ptolemaic...
system of astronomy, which had upheld the motion of the earth as the centre of the universe, around which revolved the sun, the stars and the other planets, by that of Copernicus, which propounded the theory that the sun was the centre around which moved the other heavenly bodies, of which the earth was now but one planet among many. The shock of this new concept was extended in the second half of the century when Bruno first questioned the notion of the universe as finite. Man now stood poised on the brink of an infinite universe, the point at which he stood no longer absolute, the centre and summit of God's creative purpose on an earth central to a bounded universe, but occupying a position that could be determined only relative to the other elements in the cosmic system.

The sixteenth century also saw the religious world shaken as Luther sought to establish man in a new, direct relationship to God, divorced from the Catholic position in which the church stood as intermediary between God and man. Coincident with this changing relationship the theory of predestination developed, which postulated a God not bound by the humanistic considerations hitherto thought to govern the divine will, but arbitrarily dispensing damnation or grace without regard to human standards of morality or reason. Man was free to interpret the word of God according to his own understanding, but at the same time he was bereft of the intercessory powers of the Church and its sacraments.

The idea of a fixed moral standard to which man strove to adhere, and from which he deviated at his peril, was undermined and the notion of right and wrong as relative to the requirements of particular
circumstances was put forth by Machiavelli in *The Prince*, and the uncertainties which arose out of Machiavelli's thesis were compounded late in the century in the *Essays* of Montaigne, with their questioning of all absolute values, general truths and moral commandments.

These new and radically different concepts in science, religion and morality were the more shattering in that they came into being at a time when corruption in the church was widespread and had not yielded to attempts at reform during the previous century, and at a time also when the disintegration of the feudal social and economic system (marked by the increasing mechanization of labour as capitalism developed beyond its primitive beginnings) had exposed man to forces which negated his worth and importance as an individual. The artist's newly won freedom from the confinements of tradition was not without its price. The breakdown of the feudal guilds and their replacement by the right to work according to the demands of his own individual personality meant surviving in an increasingly competitive society, meeting the demands of a market-place that saw art less as a source of spiritual satisfaction and of educational value and more as a commodity, a commodity beautiful and aesthetically satisfying, to be enjoyed for its own sake, but nevertheless sold in the market-place in competition with others.

The cumulative effect of these changes was to induce in society a state of alienation, with its corresponding state in the individual of narcissism, a condition compounded of disorientation, spiritual crisis and a sense of helplessness in the individual who felt himself at the mercy of impersonal forces outside his comprehension or control, existing
in a precarious relationship to society, to the world and to God.

The value of these two concepts—alienation and narcissism—to the student of mannerism lies in their providing an underlying cause to which can be related all manifestations of the style. They are the source of a spiritual malaise of which mannerism is symptomatic. The fact that the actual formulation of theories of science, politics, religion and morality postdated the first creative era of mannerist art does not lessen their responsibility, for, as Hauser points out, "... chronology ... is not always conclusive in the history of ideas. Artistic developments often anticipate ideas that have not yet been formulated, but are 'in the air.' Thus, in tracing the history of ideas we are confronted just as often with correlations as with causal connections, ...".

There is certainly no problem reconciling these developments with the manifestation of mannerism in English literature. This was a seventeenth-century phenomenon, by which time the new ideas in science, religion, politics and morality put forward during the Cinquecento had become well established. Luther's doctrines, to cite one instance, which were hardly known and little understood in Italy at the beginning of the mannerist period, had crystallized in England with the rapid growth of Puritanism during the early seventeenth century. As Roy Daniells notes in discussing the lateness of English mannerism, "The religious problems arising in Italy in Michelangelo's day were being fought out in England by the friends and enemies of Milton." And although The Prince was not translated into English until 1640, it was well known in England from
about the beginning of the century, thanks to the translation of selected
parts into French and repeated reference to it in Elizabethan drama.

The effect of new and revolutionary ideas on any one individual
is difficult, if not impossible, to judge. Any attempt at a distance of
three hundred years to assign to them even partial responsibility for an
individual's state of mind perhaps provides an insubstantial basis for
argument. Yet it seems unlikely that Milton, the student, with his per-
ceptive mind and wide-ranging intellectual curiosity, was unaware of
these new currents of thought; or that Milton, the poet, with his demon-
strated artistic sensitivity, was unaffected by them. The uncertainties
that they raised in the general intellectual climate might hover like
phantoms on the fringes of his awareness, but the probability exists
that these uncertainties played at least some part in shaping the poet's
consciousness.

The degree of his vulnerability would doubtless be influenced by
the tenor of his personal life. Let us then turn to the next chapter,
and a consideration of the events and circumstances of Milton's life and
the strain which they may well have imposed on the poet, in the years
preceding the writing of Lycidas.
Footnotes


4 Shearman, p. 171.

5 Ibid., p. 177.

6 Ibid., p. 188.


8 Ibid., p. 152.


10 Panofsky, p. 88.

11 Mannerism and Anti-Mannerism in Italian Painting, p. 10.


14 Four Stages of Renaissance Style (New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1955), p. 120.


17 Hauser, p. 74.

18 "The Mannerist Element in English Literature," p. 10.
Chapter Three

MILTON: THE YEARS PRECEDING LYCIDAS

. . . mannerism has two modes, technical and psychological. Behind the technical ingenuities of mannerist style there usually is a personal unrest, a complex psychology that agitates the form and the phrase.


Roy Daniells, discussing *Lycidas* in *Milton, Mannerism and Baroque*, notes that "There is no difficulty in conceding that Milton, . . . as in *Lycidas* he recorded a confronting of the disordered world of action, was in fact recording true experience of a piercing and personal kind. This experience included a sense of deep uncertainty and helplessness,. . . ." Certainly the poem is more than the conventional expression of grief for a lost friend. Milton could, and did, write a conventional elegy only a few years later to mark the death of a friend of his school days, Charles Diodati, who died in 1638 while Milton was in Italy. Diodati was much more beloved by Milton than Edward King, and his death a loss far more grievous to Milton than that of King. But whereas Milton's lament for Diodati, *Damon's Epitaph*, is marked by a tone of quiet sorrow that recognizes but accepts his loss, and of assurance in his friend's immortality, Milton's elegy for King is imbued with emotion, rebellion and doubt.

What prompted Milton to choose the occasion of the memorial volume to Edward King to write a poem expressing not just sorrow at an untimely and irrational death, but his own deep-rooted uncertainties concerning death and the threat that it poses, and, more significantly, his
uncertainties concerning life? Events of the year 1637, the year in which *Lycidas* was written, had no doubt played their part in fostering Milton's doubts. For while the death of King in August of that year was the specific event that prompted the poem, the death a few months earlier of Milton's mother; the death of the poet-laureate, Ben Jonson; the death-dealing presence at Horton of the plague, may well in their total effect have impressed on the young poet's mind the unpredictability and finality of death and the uncertainty of life. But the poem expresses more than abstract concern. *Lycidas* raises questions that cast doubts on the value of the way of life that Milton himself has chosen, on the goals to which he aspires and on the wisdom of the course that he has been following since his graduation from Cambridge more than five years previously. Now, suddenly, at the prompting of an event that one might expect to have little more than a casual claim on his interest, all this comes under his serious and disturbed scrutiny. Perhaps a consideration of the circumstances of the five years preceding the writing of *Lycidas* will throw a significant light on the poet's state of mind as he set about writing his contribution to the King memorial volume.

There can be little doubt that Milton was under serious, prolonged strain at the time *Lycidas* was written. He had been for over five years pursuing a course of solitary study, undertaken to supplement the inadequacies of his Cambridge education, and to prepare himself for the ministerial role for which he had been destined since childhood. His conception of his calling was a high one, demanding both intellectual and spiritual maturity:
... at twenty-four he considered himself still a "youth" and only arrived "near" manhood. He felt that he was lacking in the "inward ripeness," the intellectual and spiritual maturity, necessary to an effective ministry. So he confessed in his seventh sonnet.\(^2\)

Initially his interest and enthusiasm had been directed toward fulfilling his desire to serve God in a formal capacity as a member of the Protestant clergy, but, as the years of study went by, he became more and more aware of his poetic abilities. His pleasure in his development as a poet must have been augmented by his very real ambition for fame,\(^3\) for the realization of this ambition could now be seen as a probable outcome of his poetic endeavours.

He had already tasted the pleasure of having his work accepted outside his own circle of family and friends. He had seen his work in print in company with that of Ben Jonson when his sonnet, On Shakespeare, was included in the commendatory verses in the second folio edition of Shakespeare's plays published in 1632. This was a significant mark of recognition for his verse, even though it was printed anonymously. And he had been offered, and had accepted, an invitation to write a masque for the Earl of Bridgewater on the occasion of his appointment as new Lord President of Wales, an invitation which Jonson himself might well have been pleased to accept. The assignment was a difficult one, but Milton had acquitted himself well, and in a way that augured well for his future as a poet. Comus, as the masque Milton wrote for this occasion has come to be known, was not an elaborate production with skilled actors and dancers performing in a costly setting, but relied instead on the beauty of the poetry to make the entertainment a success.
The necessities of the situation placed a heavy burden upon the poetry of Comus, as poetry. Lacking masquers, and eye-filling spectacle, and trained actors, and choral singing, Milton had to delight his auditors chiefly with the magic of words. Apart from the children, a few songs set to music by Lawes, and a simple plot, the success of Comus as entertainment depended upon language charged with power and beauty, depended upon eloquence and fervour and lyric flights.4

That Comus is still read with pleasure for the charm and beauty of its poetry is a testimonial to Milton's achievement. His satisfaction in this venture must have been warm in his mind in November of 1637, for plans were even then under way for the publication of the text, plans of which Milton was aware.

Yet despite the success which had attended the writing and production of Comus, three years had elapsed since the occasion of its presentation, and there had been no further poetry since. Was there a significant reason for this long silence? Had something happened to make Milton suppress his creative powers and instead direct all his energies towards the single goal of preparing for the ministry? W. R. Parker, in his biography of the poet, suggests as the explanation for this failure of the poet to use his creative gifts for so long the possibility that a conflict had occurred between Milton and his father over the writing of Comus. Parker postulates that this commission from an aristocratic family to write, and to be involved in the presentation of, so worldly an entertainment could well have seemed to the elder Milton a dangerous distraction from his son's goal, as well as one at odds with his own non-conformist principles. The expensive schooling, the program of continued study which the father had supported, had been directed towards one end--
preparation for the ministry. The writing of a masque was irrelevant to such an objective; indeed, possibly a threat to its achievement.

For evidence to support his hypothesis (and he quite frankly admits that it is an hypothesis) Parker turns to Ad Patrem, the poem which Milton wrote to honor his father. Parker conjectures that this tribute was written in the first part of 1634, about the time that Milton accepted the invitation to write Comus, and records a serious disagreement between father and son.

A conflict is explicitly stated in Ad Patrem; it is not implied or suggested; no reading between lines is necessary. Milton did not write Ad Patrem simply because he felt like praising his father. He did not write it because he was finally bursting with gratitude for favours past. The poem is an argument, carefully developed, tactfully phrased, shrewdly climaxed with a flattering promise. It is a smiling, urbane attempt to persuade an old man to change his mind. The retired scrivener had expressed himself as "despising" poetry (line 17). He held it in "contempt" counting it "futile and useless" (56-57). He "hated" it (67). Milton records his father's attitude bluntly.

We do not know the father's response to his son's persuasion; Parker suggests that the matter ended in compromise—Milton proceeded with Comus, and thenceforth concentrated all his efforts on his studies. The implication is that the conflict was resolved by an agreement on the part of the younger man to write no more such poetry.

If the language of Ad Patrem is blunt in its references to the senior Milton's attitude to poetry, the poem's tone is conciliatory. The poet early indicates his uncertainty as to the reception his verse will receive: "The song that she [my Muse] is meditating is a poor attempt, dearest father, and not at all certain to please you." He
closes with a compliment to his father as benefactor and a reference to his awareness of his father's generous support: "But to you, dear father, since no requital equal to your desert and no deeds equal to your gifts are within my power, let it suffice that with a grateful mind I remember and tell over your constant kindesses, and lay them up in a loyal heart."  

Parker's conjecture seems to be supported by the verse, and if true, offers a reasonable explanation for Milton's failure to exercise his creative gifts particularly in view of the fact that this long poetic drought came at a time in his life when we might justifiably have expected to see his poetic powers developing actively towards their full potential.

It was also a time in the poet's life when another strong, and more commonly felt urge than that to write poetry, had needed to be checked as incompatible with his program of self-education. In a "Letter to an Unknown Friend," written sometime in 1633, he confessed his awareness of the "potent inclination, and inbred, which about this time of a man's life solicits most, the desire of house and family of his own." The notion of this "desire of house and family of his own," as an important and legitimate one was doubtless fostered by the "dedication of the Puritan clerical caste to the conjugal life . . . ." The popularity of the merits of matrimony as a topic for the Puritan preachers, who "set forth an ideal pattern of love and marriage based on traditional Christian morality . . . ." could only have increased Milton's natural yearnings. In the course of the careful religious training which marked
his early years he must have listened to many sermons developing this theme. Such teachings could not fail to stimulate the young man's natural interest in sex and sexual satisfaction, and, at the same time, to foster his awareness that spiritual as well as physical solace was denied him. It is revealing that when in *Lycidas* he questions the wisdom of having given over so many years to study, the only specific deprivation that he mentions is phrased in erotic imagery:

Were it not better done as others use,
To sport with *Amaryllis* in the shade,
Or with the tangles of *Neaera's* hair?

(11. 67-69)

His early writings reveal a young man more rather than less responsive to feminine charms. At seventeen, he writes from London to tell a friend of the lovely young girls who pass him in the street:

Here, like stars that breathe out soft flames, you may see groups of maidens go dancing past. Ah, how many times have I been struck dumb by the miraculous grace of a form which might make decrepit Jove young again!

"Eyes which outshine jewels and all the stars that wheel about either pole," "waving tresses which were golden nets flung by Cupid," "seductive cheeks beside which the purple of the hyacinth . . . turn[s] pale," these rapturous descriptions testify to the responsiveness of the impressionable young poet.

When, two years later, Milton celebrates in "Elegy V" the coming of spring, he expresses in richly erotic imagery his passionate awareness of the loveliness of the physical world once again renewed in the annual cycle of rebirth:
... for what is lovelier than she [the reviving earth] as she voluptuously bares her fertile breast and breathes the perfume of Arabian harvests and pours sweet spices and the scent of Paphian roses from her lovely lips? ... Look Phoebus, facile loves are calling to you and the winds of spring carry honied appeals. Perfume-bearing Zephyr gently fans his cinnamon-scented wings and the birds seem to carry their blandishments to you.14

The poet sees himself in a kind of ecstasy. "My breast is aflame with the excitement of its mysterious impulse and I am driven on by the madness and the divine sounds within me."15 This language reveals an imaginative life in startling contrast to the real world of the young student, and gives an indication of his capacity for deep and ardent responses to sensuous stimulations. The warmth of the returning sun, the perfumes of flowers and spices, the sweet song of the birds, the invitation to sleep in the cool grass—all elements of sensual pleasure are exploited in this little song to love.

His poetry is rich in sexual imagery, as in this passage from L'Allegro:

Zephyr with Aurora playing,  
As he met her once a-Maying,  
There on Beds of Violets blue,  
And fresh-blown Roses washt in dew,  
Fill'd her with thee a daughter fair,  
So buxom, blithe, and debonair.

(11. 19-24)

The sentiment that prompts this kind of literary expression is not, of course, unusual or remarkable. What is unusual is the sensitivity and passionate intensity of some of these early passages.

That his self-imposed continence, however willingly undertaken,
was a matter of serious and thoughtful consideration by him can be inferred from the depth of feeling that informs his praise of chastity in *Comus*.

So dear to Heav'n is Saintly chastity,  
That when a soul is found sincerely so,  
A thousand liveried Angels lackey her,  
Driving far off each thing of sin and guilt,  
And in clear dream and solemn vision  
Tell her of things that no gross ear can hear,  
Till oft converse with heav'nly habitants  
Begin to cast a beam on th'outward shape,  
The unpolluted temple of the mind,  
And turns it by degrees to the soul's essence,  
Till all be made immortal: . . .

(11. 453-63)

Parker points out that Milton, and his collaborator and probable adviser in the writing of *Comus*, Henry Lawes, could have chosen no more appropriate virtue to celebrate, nor one better calculated to please the parents and friends of *Comus'* fifteen-year-old heroine, Lady Alice Egerton. His argument is persuasive and very probably true. But that does not preclude the probability that, by virtue of Milton's situation, his pride in later writings in his chaste youth and young manhood, and the unmistakable sincerity of his argument, he is here expressing his own deeply felt convictions.

But, as Comus points out, "If you let slip time, like a neglected rose / It withers on the stalk with languish't head" (11. 743-44). This argument is as true in the real world of Milton as in the make-believe world of *Comus*. The Lady, to whom it is addressed, offers little to oppose it, retreating instead behind a disparagement of Comus. This
failure to counter Comus' argument with an effective reply may well indicate Milton's inability to devise one, thus reflecting some doubt in his own position.

Other doubts arose to plague him during these years of study. He had left Cambridge "grievously (and permanently) disappointed in his Cambridge education." One of the most important deficiencies in the Cambridge curriculum was its neglect of the study of history, a neglect which Milton had realized and regretted ("... how great an additional pleasure of the mind it is to take our flight over all the history and regions of the world, to view the conditions and changes of kingdoms, nations, cities, and people. ..."). To remedy this deficiency he made the independent reading of history an important part of his program of self-education. From 1635 onward "his chief reading was in history, particularly the history of the Christian church from its very beginnings." As part of his program he undertook to read the writings of the early Christian fathers, a difficult assignment demanding intense concentration, and willingness to contend with the "hard, crabbed abstruse style of so many of the books." He had also to contend with his own increasing disillusionment, for as he read, while he found some things to praise, he found more to criticize and condemn; as he read "he 'found many things both nobly done and worthily spoken'; but he did not fail to 'mark how corruption and apostasy crept in by degrees.'"

As he read on, through worse rather than better, Milton's disillusionment grew.

He knew now that "those 'purer times' were no such as they are cried up, and not to be followed without suspicion, doubt, and danger."
no longer felt "that over-awful esteem of those more ancient than trusty Fathers" and he was ready to answer any votary who held them in "blind reverence." Having ploughed through "that indigested heap and fry of authors which they call Antiquity," he was almost prepared to summarize Church history as "the foul and sudden corruption, and then, after many a tedious age, the long-deferred but much more wonderful and happy reformation . . . in these latter days." A Christian should reverence the martyrs, but should "rely only upon the Scriptures." . . . The Gospel was sufficient rule and oracle for any intelligent person.22 (my italics)

This was not a profitable train of thought in the 1630's for one destined for the ministry. The advent of Laud to the archbishopric in August of 1633 had markedly increased the pressures on dissenters to conform. Laud had the power to see that those who did not conform were punished, and he did not hesitate to use it. And what might have been a solution for Milton, in that it offered an alternative to ordination, a "lectureship" which in a liberal parish would have permitted him the role of religious teacher without requiring him to perform any church rites, was under Laud no longer available.

Milton's growing contempt for those who had preceded him into the ministry may have fostered in him a reluctance to become one of their number. His studies had shown him how ill-prepared the typical university graduate was to fulfill a Christian ministry. Yet such graduates undertook to do so, and turned what Milton conceived as an opportunity for service into one of self-profit. The prospect of being numbered among such "blind mouths" could have provoked in him only distaste.

No one, not even Milton, could withstand indefinitely the pressures of those years of unremitting study, pressures that the passing of time could only intensify. He was approaching his twenty-ninth birthday,
denied an outlet to his strong creative urges, lacking the affection and companionship normal for his age and committed to a future perhaps ever less inviting that seemed to demand that either he compromise his conscience or find himself in an increasingly hazardous situation. It seems not unlikely that Milton welcomed an opportunity to give expression to the thoughts that his various experiences may well have stimulated within him.

Such an opportunity came when he was invited to contribute to a volume of memorial verse designed to mark the untimely death of a friend from his university years. Here was the chance to express not only sorrow at an untimely death, but his doubts and frustrations, his disillusionment and uncertainties. He wrote *Lycidas*. 
Footnotes

1 Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963, p. 47.
3 Prolusion VII, Complete Poems, ed. Hughes, p. 625.
4 Parker, I, 132.
5 Ibid., II, 789.
6 Ibid., I, 125.
7 Ad Patrem, Complete Poems, ed. Hughes, p. 82.
8 Ad Patrem, p. 85.
9 Quoted by Parker, p. 227.
11 Haller, p. 242.
12 Apology for Smectymnuus, Complete Poems, ed. Hughes, p. 694.
16 Parker, I, 132.
17 Ibid., I, 121.
18 Prolusion VII, Complete Poems, ed. Hughes, p. 625.
19 Parker, I, 145.
20 Ibid., p. 147.
21 Parker, I, 146.
22 Ibid., p. 150.
Mannerist practice is dependent upon the existence of an anterior body of work in which the conventions of classical and Christian humanism are simply obeyed. It must be against the known pattern of convention that the revealing strangeness is permitted to develop.

Roy Daniells, Milton, Mannerism and Baroque, p. 33

Critics have not infrequently commented on the debt that Lycidas owes to the long tradition of the pastoral. Occasionally such comments have been disparaging, and of these none is better known than that of Dr. Johnson:

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. When Cowley tells of Hervey, that they studied together, it is easy to suppose how much he must miss the companion of his labours, and the partner of his discoveries; but what image of tenderness can be excited by these lines?

We drove a field [sic], and both together heard
What time the grey fly [sic] winds her sultry horn,
Battening [sic] our flocks with the fresh dews of night.

We know that they never drove a field, and that they had no flocks to batten; and though it be allowed that the representation may be allegorical, the true meaning is so uncertain and remote that it is never sought because it cannot be known when it is found.

But where Johnson condemns, later criticism most often praises, and, while noting that Lycidas belongs to the most conventional of genres, commends Milton for creating a poem so uniquely personal while
incorporating motifs drawn from earlier pastorals spanning the whole history of the form. For as Daniells remarks, "Milton's employment of pastoral elegy reveals a dependence upon tradition probably unequalled in any other English poem."²

That this should be so is not a matter for surprise, given Milton's love of the classics, his extensive reading and his assimilative powers. And he had a long tradition to draw on, for the pastoral elegy as an artistic form extended back nearly two thousand years at the time Lycidas was written.

Although for various reasons not important here interest in the pastoral had lapsed from time to time, enthusiasm for the form had periodically been revived, and with each successive revival its possibilities had been enriched, its scope extended. The original distinguishing characteristics of the pastoral were retained over centuries of usage, although emphasis tended to change as succeeding practitioners introduced new material or highlighted hitherto unstressed elements.

During the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, coincident with the Renaissance revival of interest in all things classical, there had been a strong surge of interest in the pastoral lament in Italy. This was sparked by the publication in Milan in 1481 of an edition of the poetry of Theocritus, the early Greek originator of the pastoral, followed a few years later by the publication of a further edition containing the pastoral elegies of his successors, Bion and Moschus. These three Greek poets, spanning approximately the years 300 to 100 B.C., between them laid the foundations for the poetic form in which Milton chose to mark the death of Edward King.
But early Greek poetry was not the only source from which Milton drew inspiration for his elegy. The American critic, J. H. Hanford, in his essay "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's Lycidas" surveying pastoral poetry from its Greek beginnings until the time that Milton wrote Lycidas, concedes to three poets a major role in influencing Milton:

In all the long history of the pastoral before Lycidas there are three or four great names. For later writers their work sums up the pastoral tradition. It is to them that the poet will look for direct inspiration. Theocritus, Virgil, and his own Spenser—with these Milton felt a kinship of genius; from them, when he chose to write at all in the most conventional of literary forms, he drew both the conventions themselves and the secret of finding his way beyond them into the realm of lofty and original poetry.3

It is, therefore, the way in which these three poets--Theocritus, Virgil and Spenser--originated or used the distinguishing characteristics of the pastoral elegy that I propose to discuss, although not without a nod in the direction of those others who, during the long history of its development, contributed significantly to the form.

Theocritus, born in Syracuse around 300 B.C., is the first known poet in the tradition. His first idyl, "Daphnis" laments the death of the young shepherd, Daphnis, who, after his marriage to the fairest of the nymphs, dies rather than yield to a new love. Most of what we recognize in Lycidas as the conventions of the pastoral elegy have their beginnings in the circumstances of this poem. Its subject--Daphnis the shepherd, the manner of his life and of his death--establishes a pattern to which all later practitioners adhere in greater or lesser degree.

But before looking at the poem itself, and at the subsequent developments of the pastoral, it is interesting to note that the legend
of Daphnis originated in the quasi-religious practices of earlier primitive people who mourned the death of the tender growth of spring under the heat of the summer sun. With the passing of time, and the "tendency of the Greek imagination to give a human meaning to all that interested it"4 this mourning for the passing of the beauties of the early part of the year becomes a lament for the death of a young shepherd-poet, dear to the various elements of the natural world that surrounds him. As in earlier legend the natural growth of spring was blighted by the heat of summer, so in Theocritus' first idyl the life of the young shepherd Daphnis is blighted by the human passion of love.

Daphnis' unhappy story is narrated within a dramatic framework. The idyl opens directly on an encounter between an unnamed goatherd and Thyrsis, a shepherd renowned for the sweetness of his voice. Their dialogue unobtrusively discloses the rural setting and the background of musical endeavor that each brings to this occasion. With persuasive flattery and the promise to reward his efforts with the gift of a beautifully carved wooden bowl, the goatherd induces Thyrsis to sing a song for which he has won renown, the "Woes of Daphnis." Thyrsis sings his song, and claims his prize from his grateful auditor. The idyl ends as the everyday life of the two principals is effectively recalled in the concluding line of their dialogue.

The lament proper, "The Song of Thyrsis," comprises only a little more than half of the idyl. It opens with a short refrain, "Begin, dear Muses, begin the pastoral song," which is repeated between each stanza, changing only slightly to mark the progress of the narrative. This
refrain, which becomes a constant in the pastoral elegy, underlines the
musical quality of the poem, and is as well an important structural
element unifying the song and defining it within the idyl. Thyrsis' song
proceeds according to a pattern which later pastoral laments will adopt
in whole or in part, turning into artificial conventions elements which
occur naturally in Thyrsis' story. It opens with the singer reproaching
the nymphs for their absence from the scene of Daphnis' death, a natural
enough reproof here since Daphnis was the son of a nymph and had spent
his childhood among them. Daphnis' father, Hermes, together with other
shepherds and their protective divinity Priapus, comes to his side as he
lies dying, to discover the source of his trouble and to offer consola-
tion. Such visits by those who loved the dying shepherd are a natural
reflection of their concern for his well-being. The beasts of the flock
which Daphnis has tended, and the mountains and trees among which he has
lived, mourn at his passing: "... the sorrow of nature for the death of
humanity looks back to an earlier time when the death was that of nature,
not humanity. Thus what was once the source of sorrow--the withering
vegetation--becomes the mourner." Daphnis, rebelling against his fate,
calls on nature to reverse her normal course:

Now you may bear violets, you bramble bushes; bear them, you thistles,
and let the lovely narcissus spread its foliage over the juniper.
Let all things be changed, and let the pine tree bear pears, since
Daphnis dies, and let the stag drag down the dogs and let the screech
owl from the mountains contend with nightingales.

But the bitterness of the sentiment is masked, if not altogether
dispelled, by the beauty of the images the poet calls to mind. By
invoking the flowers of spring and the fruits of autumn, by seeking victory for that most regal of forest creatures--the stag, and by recalling to us the nightingale, renowned for the sweetness of his song, the poet mitigates the threat of a world gone awry.

The song proper ends with an image of the dying Daphnis, sinking into the "eddying flood" of the stream of death.

Here, then, in Theocritus' first idyl are to be found a number of features which become firmly associated with the pastoral elegy. The recurring refrain, the address to the nymphs, the visits of various deities and other concerned or interested parties, the mourning of nature and the prayer that Nature reverse her course, together with innumerable turns of phrase and ideas sometimes little more than hinted at, will be found repeatedly in the work of subsequent poets writing in the pastoral elegiac tradition. They are basic to Lycidas, although by the time Milton writes his poem that part of the traditional material arising out of the particular circumstances of Daphnis' life--the appeal to the nymphs, the procession of mourners, the mourning of nature and most especially, the presentation of the deceased as a shepherd--have become not matters of fact or likelihood but merely artificial conventions to which practitioners of the genre conform.

Theocritus' contribution to the pastoral tradition does not rest solely on "Daphnis." His seventh idyl, "The Harvest Festival" marks a significant development, for in this poem the two principals, in reality poets, masquerade as shepherds, and thus disguised exchange songs. The importance of this idyl within the pastoral tradition lies
in the fact that the poet, even though disguised, is himself a part of the narrative, thus opening the way for the autobiographical element that is to become an important feature of later elegies. "As Idyl 1 established for later centuries the conventions to be associated with elegy, so Idyl 7 gave precedent for the personal, allegorical element in all pastoral." 7

This marks the beginning of a trend we shall see fully exploited in Lycidas, the opportunity for the poet to present not only details of his personal story, but his own ideas on life. The fact that one of the characters in this seventh idyl of Theocritus is called "Lycidas" suggests a particularly intimate connection between the two poems.

Although Hanford limits to Theocritus Milton's indebtedness to the early Greeks, it is worthwhile to consider briefly two slightly later Greek elegies, the "Lament for Adonis" and the "Lament for Bion." Both make important contributions to the development of the form, and adumbrate elements to be found in Lycidas, even though Milton may have come to them indirectly through the work of later poets. The "Lament for Adonis" was written by Bion, who lived during the second century B.C. "Strictly speaking," says Hanford of this poem, "[it] is not a pastoral at all; Adonis was a hunter, not a shepherd. The poem is associated with the pastoral, however, because of its form and because it is the work of a pastoral poet." 8 But in "Daphnis" Theocritus described Adonis as shepherd as well as hunter, "Charming, too, is Adonis, since he also pastures flocks . . ." 9 and the relationship of the "Adonis" to the earlier poem is clearly evidenced not only by the form with its recurring
refrain between each stanza, but by the mourning of nature for the dead Adonis.

Bion's poem hints at two developments which will become increasingly important in the elegiac tradition, particularly in relation to *Lycidas*: a command to deck the bier of the deceased, here expressed without elaboration: "Cast on him wreaths and flowers"\(^{10}\) (1. 75); a faint, but perceptible, allusion to some sort of rebirth: "Cease thy lamentations, this day, Cytherea; refrain from beating thy breast. Thou must weep for him again; thou must bewail him again in another year"\(^{11}\) (11. 97-99). Taking into account that the impulse for the pastoral lament originated in the renewal and subsequent death of the earth's vegetation, Adonis here is linked with the annual cycle of nature. He dies, and is mourned, and will die and again be mourned in another year, but his rebirth is implicit in these expectations.

Third and last among Greek poems contributing to the development of the pastoral elegiac tradition is the "Lament for Bion," attributed to Bion's pupil, Moschus. The relationship between this lament and those which we have already considered is readily apparent. Similar in form to Bion's own "Lament for Adonis," in that it forgoes the dramatic introduction of Theocritus' "Daphnis" and instead opens directly on the mourning song, it nevertheless uses the pastoral setting of the latter poem and the recurring refrain in which the Muses are summoned, and depicts, in a passage much more elaborate than its original, the sorrowing world of nature. But the "Lament for Bion" differs from its predecessors in that its pastoral setting is a matter of choice rather than of necessity,
for the subject is not a shepherd but a poet, depicted as a shepherd and presented in pastoral scenery.

In thus extending the scope of the pastoral lament to embrace not merely shepherds but persons conceived as shepherds, Moschus insured the continuing vitality of a form that must otherwise have been the victim of its own limitations.

Other important innovations occur in the "Lament for Bion." It honors a real person, rather than a mythological or symbolic figure; the singer is an element of the song in his own person; and he presumes that he will inherit the dead poet's heritage of song.

The "Lament for Bion" offers no hint of rebirth, reflecting rather on the finality of man's death, as opposed to the annual renewal which characterizes the world of nature.

For the next important developments in the pastoral elegiac tradition we must move forward in time to the first century B.C. and turn from Greece to Rome and the next great influence on the form. Virgil (70-19 B.C.) altered the pastoral elegy in both style and spirit. He was the first poet "to begin the disassociation of pastoral from the conditions of actual life . . . ." The pastoral setting, an integral part of Theocritus' "Daphnis" out of which grew, or to which related, all other elements of the form, became in Virgil's usage an artificial convention, a background against which persons whom the poet wished to honor masquerade as shepherds. And not surprisingly in view of this development, other elements which occur naturally in the poetry of the Greek originators, arising as they do out of the circumstances of the-
subjects' lives, appear in the work of Virgil only as conventions, carried forward in adherence to the original patterns, but unrelated in meaning to the new application of the form. The nymphs might justifiably be reproached for their absence from the deathbed of one who had been their charge and companion since childhood; various elements of the natural world might conceivably mourn the death of one who had passed his life among them. But a reproach to nymphs for their failure to attend the death of a poet, or the mourning of nature for a general, even when both poet and general are presented as shepherds, become merely conventional elements in the laments, unrelated to the real circumstances of the subjects' lives.

Of Virgil's ten eclogues, two are of particular interest here: the fifth, "Daphnis," which honors Julius Caesar in the guise of Daphnis, and the tenth, "Gallus," which celebrates the poet's friend Gallus, himself a poet but here presented as a shepherd. Virgil's "Daphnis" is the vehicle for a significant development in the scope of the pastoral elegy, for here, for the first time, the form is used to lament the death of a great man, neither poet nor shepherd, but disguised under a pastoral name. In "Gallus" Virgil varies the form, forsaking dialogue. Instead he frames the lament for Gallus between an introductory passage, declaring his theme and summoning the assistance of the muse, and a closing stanza announcing the conclusion of his task and the resumption of his daily duties. This, of course, provides a precedent for Lycidas, which proceeds according to a similar pattern.

Virgil's fifth eclogue contains elements found in both the first
and seventh idyls of Theocritus. Like the Greek "Daphnis," the Roman "Daphnis" is in dramatic form, opening directly on an exchange between two goatherds, one of whom is skilled in piping, the other in singing. The dialogue serves to indicate both the rural background and the identity of the participants, who, unlike their Greek counterparts, proceed to demonstrate their skills without the inducement of a reward. As in Theocritus' seventh idyl, each sings in turn and each praises the performance of his companion. The eclogue ends with an exchange of gifts, one goatherd receiving from the other his pipe, and giving in return his prized crook. Notably absent is the recurring refrain with which Thyrsis begins his song in Theocritus' "Daphnis" and which, repeated between each stanza, sharply delineates within the elegy the song proper and emphasizes its song-like nature.

In content the fifth eclogue echoes many of the motifs found in Theocritus, although Virgil's development of these differs somewhat from the Greek model. The nymphs, whose absence was questioned in Theocritus' "Daphnis," are here present as mourners. The mourning of nature at Daphnis' death is suggested briefly rather than detailed at length. Daphnis' call to nature to reverse her usual order becomes in Virgil a lovely passage describing how fields previously fertile now bear noxious weeds:

Often in the furrows to which we entrusted the large grains of barley, unfruitful darnel and sterile oats spring up. In place of the soft violet, in place of the crimson narcissus, there now rise the thistle and the bramble bush with sharp thorns.13 (11. 35-38)

A suggestion of the flower motif appears in the command to the
shepherds to "Strew leaves on the ground, raise shade over the springs, . . . for Daphnis bids us pay him such honor and build a tomb . . . ."\(^\text{14}\) (11. 39-41).

But considered as part of the whole pastoral elegiac tradition, Virgil's fifth eclogue has as its most significant element the deification of the dead Daphnis. The prospect of some sort of renewal or rebirth, previously barely hinted at by the Greek poets, becomes here a joyful affirmation of Daphnis' entry into a heavenly abode: "Radiant Daphnis marvels at the unfamiliar threshold of Olympus, and beneath his feet beholds the clouds and stars"\(^\text{15}\) (11. 56-57). The subsequent rejoicing of Daphnis' world and all its elements is developed with the detail Virgil's predecessors used to describe the mourning of nature. As Harrison points out, "In this joyful motif lies the poem's most important contribution to elegy; for later pastoralists it remained only to substitute the joys of a Christian heaven."\(^\text{16}\)

In Virgil's tenth eclogue, "Gallus," he again honors a real person, a poet, continuing the tradition that links poet and shepherd in the pastoral scene. This poem, in form and content and in style, to the extent that the style can be judged from a translation, reveals itself as an important model in the long tradition that culminates in *Lycidas*. As previously noted, a single voice is heard throughout and the lament proper is enclosed, not within a dramatic framework, but within an introductory and a closing stanza. In the first, the identity and the world of the singer are revealed. In the latter, he serves notice that his song is finished and his everyday activities resumed. This is the pattern that Milton adopts for his elegy.
Virgil does not use the recurring refrain, nor does he summon the muses to his assistance. But he does use other motifs familiar from his Greek predecessors, adapting them somewhat to accord with the subject of his lament. He reproaches the nymphs for their absence from the scene of Gallus' trouble, a parade of sympathetic mourners express their concern, and nature joins in the universal sorrow.

The over-all effect which Virgil achieves in "Gallus," as in his other eclogues, is, however, very different from that of the Greek poets on whom he drew. The artless simplicity of Theocritus, his loose construction and richly evocative images, give way in Virgil to a carefully designed, finely polished, work of art. Whether the poem takes the dramatic form, as in "Daphnis," or the lyric, as in "Gallus," the reader is conscious of a design in which all parts contribute to the whole. Using the motifs which tradition has associated with the pastoral, elegiac form, Virgil assembles them in a pattern that reflects the poet's shaping consciousness. This characteristic of his verse allies him closely with Milton and Lycidas, where the element of conscious craftsmanship plays a decisive role in the total effect.

If we accept Hanford's appraisal of Theocritus, Virgil and Spenser as the three most significant influences on Milton when he came to write Lycidas, we must now span sixteen centuries, and consider the contribution that Spenser made to the tradition. The pastoral elegy did not, of course, remain entirely static during the intervening years. Even during prolonged periods of poetic near-drought changes were occurring. The Middle Ages saw one particularly important development, as
the influence of Christianity worked to fuse the image of the pastoral shepherd and his flock with the image of the Christian pastor and his flock, an inevitable development as the pastoral came to be treated by religious writers.

The connection thus established between the classical pastoral and the Christian religion served greatly to extend the utility and scope of the pastoral form. It opened the way, in the eclogue, for the treatment of matters ecclesiastical, and rendered the pastoral elegy as appropriate to the death of a member of the clergy as it was to that of a poet. The significance of these remarks will be clear when we recall the ecclesiastical satire in *Lycidas* and remember that Edward King had intended to enter the church.17

In Italy, during the Renaissance resurgence of interest in the pastoral, its subject matter broadened impressively, as it became a vehicle for ecclesiastical satire, for didacticism and personal allegory, and for the expression of the poet's personal views on matters of love, religion and morality. But although Milton was familiar with the writings of Petrarch and Boccaccio, and probably later Italian poets writing during the Cinquecento, it is likely that their influence came not directly but through the medium of Spenser. Through Spenser, who set out deliberately to write eclogues in accordance with established types and who used as his models not only Theocritus and Virgil, but later poets in the tradition--Mantuan, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Marot and Sannazaro--Milton was in touch indirectly if not directly with the whole pastoral tradition.

In terms of its influence on subsequent pastoral poetry, Spenser's *Shepherd's Calender* is of unique importance in the history of English pastoral literature, for in it he combines two distinct and apparently
contrary tendencies. He was influenced by the tradition, but was more than merely an imitator. He took the established pastoral motifs, used some elements of the traditional forms, but combined them according to the dictates of his own individuality.

Drawing on what Greg has described as the "native pastoral impulse" in English verse, Spenser places his eclogues in a uniquely English setting, and peoples them with rustic characters at home in the English countryside. In their dialect, drawn from the language of Chaucer, he attempts to reproduce the rustic speech of his own day, giving an aura of authenticity to his characters and disguising "the time-honoured platitudes that they repeat from their learned predecessors." Spenser's chief contribution to the formal side of pastoral composition is his attempt in the Shepherd's Calender to unite a series of poems into an artistic whole. His major unifying device is his characters, whose story, appearing or referred to intermittently throughout the series, loosely binds the twelve eclogues together. And, as the title indicates, a further attempt at unification is based on Spenser's intention to relate the annual cycle of the year to the life of man, an attempt that is only partially successful, for in some eclogues "not only does the subject in no way reflect the mood of the season . . . but the time of the year is not so much as mentioned." A prevailing mood of gloom which characterizes the twelve poems (although "single eclogues are light-hearted or even humorous"), gives a unity of tone to the series.

Of the twelve eclogues that comprise the Shepherd's Calender,
only one, "November," is an elegy. In this poem Spenser mourns the death of a real person, fictitiously named and never satisfactorily identified. The consistent stanzaic form and rhyme scheme mark Spenser's lament with a mold different from its forbears. But the opening dialogue in which two rustic characters engage, followed by the mourning song, recalls the familiar classical pattern, and the archaic language Spenser affects gives his work the flavour of poetry whose roots extend back to primitive times. Likewise, Spenser's content recalls his classical antecedents. The opening dialogue tells us that we are in pastoral country, that the principals are shepherds, and the season winter, as one shepherd persuades his fellow to sing, and promises to reward him with a pet lamb.

The opening stanza of Colin's mourning song begins with an appeal to his muse: "Up, then, Melpomene, thou mournfulst Muse of nyne!" (1. 53) and closes with a refrain that, with appropriate variations, marks the end of each stanza:

O heavie herse!  
Let streaming teares be poured out in store:  
O carefull verse!  

(11. 60-62)

This refrain is part of each stanza, not interposed between stanzas as in Spenser's Greek precedents, and has a more powerful influence on the poetic effect, not only defining the song proper within the poem, and emphasizing its song-like qualities, but appealing to man's innate response to repetition and the reassurance that such repetition provides.

The familiar conventional motifs appear. Nature mourns:
The feeble flocks in field refuse their former foode,
And hang theyr heads, as they would learne to weepe:
The beastes in forest wayle as they were woode,
Except the wolves, that chase the wandring sheepe,
Now she is gon that safely did hem keepe.
The turtle, on the bared braunch,
Laments the wound that Death did launch.
0 heavie herse!
And Philomele her song with teares doth steepe.
0 carefull verse!24

(11. 133-42)

The contrast between the annual rebirth of Nature and the final-
ity of man's death is drawn:

Whence is it that the flouret of the field doth fade,
And lyeth buryed long in winters bale:
Yet soone as spring his mantle doth displaye,
It floureth fresh, as it should never fayle?
But thing on earth that is of most availe,
As vertues braunch and beauties budde,
Reliven not for any good.
0 heavie herse!
The braunch once dead, the budde eke needes must quaile:
0 carefull verse!25

(11. 83-92)

Dido's tomb is decked with flowers: "The gaudie girlonds deck
her grave, / The faded flowres her corse embrave."26 (11. 108-09).

Consolation is offered:

She raignes a goddess now emong the saintes
That whilome was the saynt of shepheards light:
And is enstalled nowe in heavens hight.27

(11. 175-77)

Two conventions originating in Theocritus' first idyl do not
appear in "November" but Spenser shows his familiarity with them in *Astrophel*, his elegy on the death of Sir Philip Sydney. Thyris' reproach to the nymphs for their absence from Daphnis when he needed them becomes in *Astrophel*:

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Ah, where were ye this while, his shepheard peares,
To whom alive was nought so deare as hee?
And ye, faire mayds, the matches of his yeares,
Which in his grace did boast you most to bee?
Ah! where were ye, when he of you had need,
To stop his wound, that wondrously did bleed. 28
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(11. 127-32)

The parade of mourners is perhaps echoed in this later elegy by the pilgrimage of the shepherds to the scene of Astrophel's death, to view the unique flower which the gods have caused to grow there.

Eleven other poems make up the *Shepherd's Calender*, and to some of these Milton is probably indebted for material which forms part of *Lycidas*. As Hanford indicates, the "May," "June," and "September" poems contain ecclesiastical satire, the passage in the "May" eclogue being markedly similar in sentiment and expression to Milton's bitter attack on the corrupt clergy in *Lycidas*. In Spenser's "October" eclogue there is a protest regarding the lack of recognition accorded poets, which may foreshadow those lines in *Lycidas* which question the sacrifices entailed by a poetic career and point out that only Heaven can accord true recognition of the poet's efforts. Milton's inspiration to develop the exquisite flower passage in *Lycidas* out of the Greek poets' simple command to deck the grave may have come from a somewhat similar catalogue of flowers in Spenser's "April" eclogue. 29
But such details, while worthy of note, do not suggest Spenser's real significance to Milton. This must surely lie in the example he presented of an English poet who looked to tradition for a pattern but adapted it as his own genius demanded. The elements of the pastoral elegiac form, the time-honored motifs which Spenser uses, were—or could easily have become—familiar to Milton from his own studies. The inspiration—or the courage—to use them in unfamiliar ways must surely have been strengthened by the precedent Spenser had set.

The effect produced by Milton's departure from tradition is nowhere similar to that achieved in "November." Spenser's is an unsophisticated, untroubled genius; his poem is marked by the Renaissance attributes of balance, harmony and regular rhythmic expression, culminating in an ordered and logically anticipated conclusion. No one part of "November" impinges unduly on our consciousness. Each motif takes its proper place, its effect subordinate and contributing to that achieved by the total poem. Milton, marching to the music of a different drummer, in a world less stable than that which Spenser knew, used the traditional pattern to express different urgings.

Milton's choice of the pastoral elegiac form is not difficult to understand. It was currently popular. Its origin in the fertility rites of ancient folk made implicit in the pastoral the promise of resurrection, of the rebirth that is a natural part of the annual cycle of birth and death and birth again. The person he was to honor fitted perfectly the shepherd-poet-pastor role traditionally assigned to the subject of the pastoral elegy. The precedent for introducing extraneous but related
matter had been established. His predecessors had taken liberties with form and content—the way was open for him to do likewise.
Footnotes


3 From P.M.L.A., XXV (1910), 403-47. This article was revised by C. A. Patrides, and reprinted in Milton's Lycidas, The Tradition and the Poem, ed. Patrides, p. 54.


5 Pastoral Elegy, p. 2.

6 Ibid., p. 28.

7 Ibid., p. 259.

8 Hanford, in Milton's Lycidas, ed. Patrides, p. 33.

9 Pastoral Elegy, p. 28.

10 Ibid., p. 35.

11 Ibid., p. 36.


13 Pastoral Elegy, p. 43.

14 Ibid., p. 43.

15 Ibid., p. 43.

16 Ibid., p. 263.

17 Hanford, in Milton's Lycidas, ed. Patrides, p. 43.

18 Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama, p. 74.
19 Ibid., p. 94.
20 Ibid., p. 92.
21 Hanford, in Milton's Lycidas, ed. Patrides, p. 50.
22 Pastoral Elegy, p. 175.
23 Ibid., p. 176.
24 Ibid., p. 178.
25 Ibid., p. 176.
26 Ibid., p. 177.
27 Ibid., p. 179.
28 Ibid., p. 187.
Chapter Five

THE SUBJECT OF Lycidas

The structure of the mannerist universe is not wholly determinate; it is open and shifting, and the equivocations in casuistry are a special tactic of mannerist conscience, just as an extremely elastic logic is the special tactic of mannerist art, or as the double meaning, the ambiguity, is the tactic of mannerist verse.

Wylie Sypher, *Four States of Renaissance Style*, p. 137

The study of Lycidas as an example of mannerist literature might well begin with a consideration of its subject. What is the subject of Lycidas? The various, and sometimes directly conflicting, answers that this question evokes are in themselves indicative of the mannerist nature of the poem, for such diversity points to the presence in the work of a central ambiguity that, while different in different forms and again in individual instances within each form, is frequently characteristic of mannerist works.

Some well-known examples can be cited. In drama, we might think of *Hamlet* and the uncertainties inherent in the characterization of the Prince. Is Hamlet really mad, or is he using the pretext of madness as a protective screen for hiding his attempts to discover the truth of his father's death? Amongst paintings, we might recall Parmigianino's masterpiece, the *Madonna del collo lungo*, and therein, amongst many enigmas, the impossibility of determining the spatial relationship between the Madonna and her companions who fill the foreground of the picture plane.
and the row of mysterious columns in the background. And what is the thematic relationship to the Madonna of the tiny figure who stands in front of these columns, holding in both hands a scroll which he unwinds while gazing fixedly at something or someone beyond the picture plane? In sculpture, the brooding figures that dominate the Medici tomb come perhaps most readily to mind, as, resting in unstable equilibrium on top of the sarcophagi, they confront the spectator with sombre, inscrutable expressions. What meaning is intended by these weary figures, maintaining their positions in seeming defiance of gravity, as their swelling body contours and heavy musculature overwhelm the delicate sarcophagi with their graceful moldings and volutes? In these three examples, as in numerous others, some element or elements central to the work remain unsolved and unsolvable. In the case of the visual arts, their enigmatic quality is accepted as an integral part of the work. In the case of literature, the very nature of language encourages different interpretations, but no one interpretation disposes for all time of the many possibilities that exist, and the enigma continues to exert its own fascination.

In the case of Lycidas and its subject, one might expect the author to provide a helpful key to the puzzle. In 1645, when the passage of time had dissipated the emotions attendant on the original composition of the elegy and thus enabled the poet to look objectively at his work, Milton wrote a short preface for Lycidas, in which he indicated two subjects for his poem: "In this Monody the Author bewails a learned Friend, . . . . And by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted Clergy then in their height." But the poem centres on too many other matters to make
this an acceptable definition of its subject and scholarly criticism offers a number of alternatives.

Reading Milton's simple statement of his intent, one wonders what he would have made of the assertion that "it is his own youth, his own guerdon, his own possible death that so moves him, rather than poor King's,"¹ or of a second opinion that rejects both the "learned Friend" and the poet himself as subject, and submits that Lycidas is "about poetry and the poet, generally conceived, and of the conditions impelled by existence upon the poet and his works."² Milton's biographer, W. R. Parker, sees the subject of Lycidas as "premature death, and the questions this raises about dedication and preparation, for the ministry and poetry,"³ a conception not too different from that of E. M. W. Tillyard who asserts that "The real subject of Lycidas is the resolving by Milton of his fears of premature death and of his bitter scorn of the clergy into an exalted state of mental calm."⁴ David Daiches, on the other hand, considers the subject of the poem to be "man in his creative capacity, as Christian humanist poet-priest,"⁵ a point-of-view directly contradicted by Richard P. Adams, who states that "Milton was expressing his own feelings in Lycidas, and not any abstract or general or public sorrow. The personal note established in the first five lines is maintained throughout."⁶ Both these conceptions--the intensely personal and the highly abstract--are reflected in the answer of D. C. Allen, who sees Lycidas moving "as a pendulum between the universal and the particular, between the special lesson of the inner Milton and the cosmic principle drawn therefrom that each man is part of the human estate."⁷
Although some of these answers are obviously more limited than others, none can be dismissed as incorrect, nor, on the other hand, can any one be singled out as providing a definitive answer to the question. However, this diversity of opinion should be counted a gain, for it contributes to our awareness of the poem's complexity and, in its failure to provide a single answer, encourages us to look at the poem more closely in an attempt to determine why such diversity should be.

A suitable starting point for such an examination is the recognition that critics tend to agree implicitly if not explicitly that, despite the author's expressed intent, the real subject of the poem is not the "learned Friend," Edward King. Why is this so, when King, in his guise as Lycidas, is a constant presence throughout the lament? Lycidas is one member of the "we" whom the reader meets early in the poem when, as shepherds,

Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
We drove afield, . . . .

(11. 25-37)

His death is the occasion for Nature's mourning; the nymphs are reproached because they were not present when he needed them, and the mourners are questioned on their role in the sad event of his death. Camus inquires after Lycidas, St. Peter notes his superiority to those who survive him, and the poet asks for a floral tribute to him. The dolphins, the shepherds and the solemn troops of heavenly saints each in their turn and according to their fashion do him honor. The closing lines of the lament
proper picture him as a beneficent deity extending aid to all who come within his scope. Why then is it so generally conceded that Lycidas is not the subject, but a peripheral figure only to the poet's main concerns?

The answer rests in part at least in the matter of perspective and its corollary, scale. For in contrast to his presentation of himself and those other figures with whom he is intermittently preoccupied, the poet presents Lycidas always as a small-scale figure seen far off on some distant horizon, and consequently impressed only slightly on our awareness. We see him first in the opening stanza of the poem, afloat on his "wat'ry bier," but are allowed only a glimpse of the dead youth before the poet quickly diverts our attention to the action of the wind and water that rock him helplessly back and forth and to the need for some one to grieve for him:

He must not float upon his wat'ry bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
Without the meed of some melodious tear.

(11. 12-14)

Our sense of remoteness from Lycidas and the consequent lessening of his claim on our attention are intensified by our recent close proximity to the poet himself in the passage immediately preceding:

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
And with forc'd fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.

(11. 1-5)
In these introductory lines of *Lycidas* the speaker confronts us directly. "I come," he tells us, forcing on us an awareness that we are involved in intimate communication with him. The elements of the scene that he describes are by their very nature minute—fingers, berries and leaves; the actions that he describes are small in scope—he "plucks" the unripe berries of laurel, myrtle and ivy, and "shatters" their leaves as he does so. By focussing our attention on these selected details and letting them fill the screen of our imagination, he implies a large scale presence close at hand. *Lycidas*, adrift on some distant and undiscriminated expanse of ocean, seems by contrast a remote figure, his fate a matter of diminished urgency.

A similar contrast in scale marks the stanza that follows St. Peter's threat of vengeance on a corrupt clergy. The first part of this verse paragraph is taken up with the floral tribute, which depicts a sequence of flowers, each seen closely enough to distinguish its individual characteristics. We see the "tufted Crowtoe," the "Cowslips wan that hang the pensive head," and the other flowers the poet summons. Each tiny entity dominates the scene in turn; each is endued with some distinctive quality that sets it apart from its fellows. But when, following this exquisite tribute to *Lycidas*, we turn to consider his fate, we find him almost beyond our reach:

Ay me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding Seas Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd, Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides, Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world; Or whether thou to our moist vows denied, Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old, . . . . .

(11. 154-60)
Lycidas has become totally depersonalized, no longer a human being, but "bones" at the mercy of the indifferent elements of the natural world.

Throughout the poem Lycidas remains a remote figure, whether he is one among shepherds tending their flock in some distant field or sinking slowly into the uncaring ocean. At the moment of his apotheosis other figures loom between him and the reader:

There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,

(11. 178-80)

Even in his moment of ultimate glory our attention is diverted from him.

We can explain this failure of the poem to focus on its ostensible subject in part by acknowledging that Milton knew King only slightly and would have but few details on which to base a full-scale portrait of him, had he wished to present one. But, in the context of this paper, we can consider another possibility--that this diminution of the central figure, this pushing it away into the background, is a literary manifestation of a recurring practice in mannerist painting, a practice which involved the rejection of the classical concept of a composition built around one principal motif, to which all other elements were related but subordinate.

Leonardo's Last Supper illustrates the classical mode well. In Leonardo's mural, the figure of Christ, seated at a long table that extends horizontally across the picture plane, occupies the central position in the tableau. His head is at the exact centre of the vertical axis, and very slightly to the right of centre of the horizontal axis.
All elements of the composition are symmetrically disposed around Him. His twelve disciples, divided into four groups of three, are posed with two such groups on either side of Christ. The picture's source of light, a doorway flanked by a window on each side of the rear wall of the room in which the supper is held, echoes the symmetrical arrangement of Christ and His disciples, and dramatizes the central position of Christ by outlining Him in light.

The decorations on the side walls and ceiling and the disposition of the utensils and food on the supper table are likewise symmetrically arranged and likewise emphasize Christ's central position. Yet the scene is not static—the beautifully modulated facial expressions and gestures of the disciples give it animation—but rather pervaded by an all-enveloping aura of harmony that flows out in every direction from the calm figure of Christ at its centre.

But in mannerist art the convention of endowing the picture's subject with pictorial (and psychological) emphasis by giving it the central position of the composition is frequently disregarded. The subject may be placed off-centre, brought forward on the picture plane into an uncomfortably close relationship with the viewer, or pushed far to the back.

The conventional distribution of emphasis between more and less important elements is abandoned, as material is introduced whose apparent relationship to the subject is obscure, but is given prominence in response to arbitrary considerations of the artist. It is a practice that manifests itself in mannerist art as early as Raphael, as late as Tintoretto.
A late Raphael, the *Fire in the Borgo*, painted between 1514 and 1517, and described as the first large painting that can be called mannerist (of which it should be noted that the design is Raphael's although the actual painting is attributed to his assistants) affords a striking example of the tendency to relegate the central figure to the background. The subject of the fresco is a fire in the Borgo quarter of Rome, which was extinguished by the blessing of Pope Leo IV. But the Pope, nominally the most important character in the narrative, is seen as a tiny figure placed slightly off centre at the extreme rear of the scene. He stands in the Loggia of the Vatican, extending his hand in benediction, but his gesture is dwarfed by the distance that separates the spectator from it. The foreground is crowded with figures of disproportionate size, whose large scale and emphatic gestures distract the viewer's attention from the event which the picture purports to celebrate.

A similarly mannerist treatment of subject is found in Tintoretto's *Presentation of the Virgin*, painted in the early 1550's, nearly forty years later than the Raphael. Here again, we find the central event pushed well to the back of the picture plane and rendered in a scale disproportionate to that of the figures that dominate the foreground and central areas of the canvas. The slender Pope stands outlined against a stormy sky, waiting to receive the tiny Virgin, who is dwarfed both by the massive staircase she ascends and the large volumes and expansive gestures of the auxiliary figures.

One other similarity between *Lycidas* and this latter painting is its treatment of the relationship between the reader, or, in the case of...
the painting, the viewer, and aesthetic space. In the poem, the speaker's terse "I come" seems to project him into the reader's space, shortening the distance between art and reality. In the painting, the heel of the foot that bears the weight of the woman who occupies the middle foreground is pressed right against the edge of the picture plane, so that her free foot, extended slightly behind her, must project into the viewer's space. Aesthetic space and real space are confused, aesthetic distance is compressed, and a figure nominally subsidiary to the picture's subject commands a disproportionate share of our attention.

The handling of space in both these paintings has been described as typically mannerist--perverse and irrational. In each instance, the central figure is pushed to the back of the picture plane, and figures of secondary importance, and in the case of the Tintoretto, of obscure thematic relevance, are allowed to dominate the viewer's attention.

While the analogy between paintings and poem cannot be pushed too far, it is provocative to consider the similarities in the treatment of their nominal subjects. Like Raphael's Pope and Tintoretto's Virgin, Lycidas is relegated to the background while the foreground is peopled with figures of more compelling interest to Milton. His own persona, Orpheus, Phoebus, Camus, St. Peter, St. Michael and the solemn saints above--the intensity of the poet's interest in them differs, but it is at the very least sufficient to render remote and indistinct the figure of Lycidas. On two, or perhaps three, of them Milton focuses with special intensity, further defying the classical principal of subordination to a central theme as he gives them positions of prominence that reflect his own psychological involvements.
One of these, of course, is Phoebus, come to reassure the poet that a just reward in Heaven awaits those who have rightly earned it:

"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistening foil
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed."

(11. 78-84)

This is Phoebus' answer to Milton's despairing realization that he might not be spared to enjoy the fame he so earnestly seeks. His desire for fame, which he anticipated as a just reward for the intense effort he was prepared to put forth, had been a long standing one, frankly acknowledged while he was still at Cambridge:

And shall I ignore a satisfaction to which no parallel can be found?
To be the oracle of many peoples, to have one's home become a shrine,
to be the object of invitations from kings and commonwealths and of visits from neighbors and distant foreigners, and of pride for still others who will boast it an honorable distinction merely to have had a single glimpse of one. These are the rewards of study and the profits that learning can and often does bring to those who cultivate her in private life.10

The death of a young man whose life had been in so many ways similar to Milton's own raises with poignant intensity the spectre of untimely death as a possibility for himself, and, in the face of such a threat, the value of his own past efforts and of the recognition he strove for becomes a matter that must be given voice. The death of Lycidas has provoked it, but the fact of that death is less important to the poet than the train of thought which it inspires.
A second, and more compelling, figure that demands our attention as it reflects with consuming intensity another of Milton's preoccupations is St. Peter, the Pilot of the Galilean Lake. In the context of the poem, St. Peter as founder of the Christian Church symbolizes Milton's personal dilemma. For despite his growing misgivings, Milton is not yet released from his solemn, even though informal, commitment, to the ministry. But his years of study have made him increasingly aware of the inadequate training and selfish motivation of the clergy, and perhaps more important, of the corruption in the church they purport to serve. The senseless death of a young man of blameless character and high purpose becomes even more incomprehensible to the poet in the face of his awareness of how needed, and how rare, such men are. Some notion of retribution for those who abuse the trust reposed in them (however obscurely defined the form that retribution may take) is of vital importance to him. Who better than Christ's leading apostle to give the reassurance the poet needs? What better place for him to speak from than the centre of the canvas, reflecting not only his importance in the Christian hierarchy, but the strength of the poet's own need for reassurance that some sort of justice will prevail?

Appearing in the poem earlier than either St. Peter or Phoebus as the focus of Milton's attention is the figure of Orpheus. More closely integrated into the elegy's development, inasmuch as he comes on the scene in a thematically logical extension of the conventional reproach to the nymphs for their absence from the scene of Lycidas' death, Orpheus' appearance, though brief, is a powerful one, shattering momentarily the reflective mood of the pastoral.
That Milton should at some point in *Lycidas* make reference to the legendary poet-singer is not of itself a surprise, for not only was the story of Orpheus a commonplace during the Renaissance, but his association with the pastoral elegy was long established. Like the Greek elegy itself, the legend surrounding his death and destruction is thought to have originated in the seasonal fertility rites of primitive Mediterranean peoples, and in addition, there were analogies that could be drawn between the legendary figure and Edward King.

Orpheus was renowned for his gifts of song, which had endowed him with the ability to charm the trees and the wild beasts of the forest, and from this beneficent power grew the notion of him as a harmonizing and ordering force, an influence for good such as Edward King might have become within the ranks of the Christian ministry. But, like Orpheus, King had died suddenly in the prime of his young manhood, the victim of forces as cruel and senseless in their way as those which had destroyed the Greek poet-singer. It is on this cruel and senseless death that Milton focuses in *Lycidas*, picturing it with a savage force that introduces an element of violence foreign to the pastoral scene:

> When by the rout that made the hideous roar,<br> His gory visage down the stream was sent,<br> Down the swift *Hebrus* to the *Lesbian* shore.<br>

(11. 61-63)

The intrusion is short-lived, but the vision of Orpheus' head, for the brief instant it flashes before us, dispels all thought of Lycidas and the conventional associations of the pastoral lament.
Just as the appearance of Phoebus in the poem embodies Milton's intense ambition for earthly recognition, and that of St. Peter his disillusionment with a corrupt, self-seeking clergy, so does the shocking apparition of Orpheus' "gory visage" point to the special significance that the Orpheus legend holds for him. "Milton," Caroline Mayerson tells us in "The Orpheus Image in 'Lycidas,'" "revered Orpheus as one of the models on whose traditional careers he was shaping his own . . . ."

Orpheus meant a revered musician-poet-prophet-teacher who had sung of God and creation, whose songs had affected man and beast, stock and stone, even the inhabitants of Hades. His music and his teachings had contributed to the establishment of a harmonious and civilized society. His musical skill, his power over nature, and his premature death kept alive his historical association with the pastoral elegy. To the Christian world, his personality and his accomplishments invited comparison with those of other venerated prophets, both heathen (the Druids, among others) and sacred (Christ). Finally, for a society traditionally inclined to allegorical interpretation, Orpheus became a symbol of human wisdom directed to social ends, the civilizing force which renews itself, despite periodic annihilation.

Milton's treatment in *Lycidas* of the Orpheus story suggests how closely interwoven in his imagination was the fate of the legendary poet-teacher and that of the real-life Edward King. If Orpheus symbolized Milton's own aspirations, he seemed likewise to stand for King's achievements and prospects. In one aspect of his role as poet-prophet-teacher he provided a model for Milton; in another, only slightly different, for King. The death of King, paralleling at so many points that of Orpheus, was a real-life enactment of the myth, that would make terrifyingly obvious to Milton the possibility of extending to the ultimate degree—death—the analogy between the three. The intense emotional build-up of this short passage, and the speed and finality with which Milton diverts
his and our attention from Orpheus are understandable, for no one, least of all an individual who felt himself destined for great achievement, and who had spent laborious years preparing to meet that challenge, could bear to contemplate at length so horrifying a possibility.

In allowing his own concerns to take precedence in his poem over its nominal subject, Milton demonstrates a practice common to mannerist artists. He has developed in literature a pattern more readily apparent in painting. He has placed his emphasis, spent his emotions, unexpectedly in relation to the death of King, and by forcefully diverting our attention from his nominal subject, has left the true subject of his poem open to question.
Footnotes


10 Prolusion VII, Complete Poems, ed. Hughes, p. 625.

Chapter Six

RHYME AND RHYTHM IN LYCIDAS

In Florence the formal rhetoric of classical art was sub­jected earlier than in Rome to experiments that transformed it. No less than their Roman contemporaries, Pontormo and Rosso worked from their inheritance of classical accomplish­ment, but they worked on it in a different temper and with more radical effects. They subjected the classical vocabu­lary to pressures of expression that often were not to be deduced from classicism, and indeed were contrary to it. They inverted the accepted sense of classical form or warped it to their new ends, and made new inventions of aesthetic devices or borrowed them from sources that were geograph­ically or chronologically outside the sphere of reference of classicism.

S. F. Freedberg, Painting in Italy, 1500-1600, The Pelican History of Art, Penguin Books Ltd., p. 115

James H. Hanford, in his very informative essay, "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's Lycidas," ventures the opinion that the modern reader, approaching Lycidas for the first time, experiences a feeling of strange­ness due to his unfamiliarity with the pastoral tradition. It is inter­esting to conjecture that the seventeenth-century reader to whom Milton addressed his poem, who was familiar with the tradition, might, because of that very familiarity, have experienced an even greater feeling of strangeness. The conventions, classical and biblical allusions, even single words and phrases and their sources would alike be known to him, for Milton, even at this early stage in his career, is writing for a "fit audience . . . though few" and in exploiting its learning, as well as his own, follows accepted practice. But this very familiarity on the part of his audience with the material out of which he crafts his poem could
serve to make only more evident the unfamiliar way in which he uses it.

While making apparent his debt to Theocritus, Virgil and Spenser, Milton rejects the qualities which distinguish their efforts and refashions the elements of their poetry according to his own highly individualistic pattern. The sweet artlessness that marks Theocritus' "Daphnis"; the sense of symmetry and proportion, of a unified work of art, that distinguishes Virgil's "Gallus"; the regular, easily identified rhythmic pattern of Spenser's "November" and _Astrophel_, are not characteristic of Milton's elegy, for in _Lycidas_ he presents the familiar elements of the pastoral tradition in a new and radically different combination.

In his memorial poem to the death of Edward King, Milton demonstrates dramatically the principle of _disegno interno_—the external realization of the artist's inner vision executed without regard for objective reality or established rules. First formulated by Zuccaro in 1607,² this concept "is the distinguishing motivation of Mannerist practice."³ In the plastic arts, the artist may reject those Renaissance precepts which dictated an observance of the classical attributes of harmony, symmetry and balance, of adherence to mathematical rules of proportion, perspective and scale. In the literary arts, or at any rate in poetry, our main concern in this essay, the practitioner may abandon the smooth rhythmic line, the flowing cadences, the regular stanzaic form. In either case, he is asserting a personal response to his vision, which evokes from him an expression more personal and more powerful than would be possible if he conformed to the rules hitherto prescribed for his art.
This is not to deny that all practitioners of the arts, whatever their medium of expression, draw on the heritage bequeathed to them by their predecessors, and put their own stamp on whatever of this vast bequest they elect to use. The unique handling of material, the continuing expansion of its possibilities, are significant indicators of genius, and the Renaissance had seen a growing relaxation of the absolute authority of tradition which had restrained the medieval artist. But the principle of disegno interno introduced a greater freedom from traditional usage than had previously been known; embodying a revolt against general rules which had hitherto governed the manner of usage; and involving a handling of the artist's material dictated by purely subjective considerations.

This need in the artist to thus stamp his efforts as the product of his personal vision may have arisen from sources internal or external to him; from some dislocation in his own psyche or from the impinging on his consciousness of radical and incomprehensible changes in the external world. These need not have affected all artists of a given period. Some, less sensitive, could be unaware of threatening forces in the world around them, or aware, but sufficiently secure to shrug them off. Others, vulnerable by virtue of their natural disposition or external circumstances or both, reacted in varying degrees to the stress imposed on them.

I have stated earlier in this essay my conviction that Milton, at the time he wrote Lycidas, was suffering from the cumulative effects of strain resulting from years of intensive study long protracted and the normal satisfactions of young manhood long deferred, from an awareness of
death which the bereavements of the year had fostered, and perhaps from the suppression of his poetic talents as a concession to his father, strain which might well have been intensified by the peculiar uncertainties of the age in which he lived. His reading of church history and the stories of the early Christian fathers had left him disillusioned when he had expected to be inspired. As he studied, his convictions that the educational system was turning out men ill-equipped to discharge the duties of the ministry they undertook were confirmed. Such strain and disillusionment sought expression, but expression more personal and intense than anything to be found in earlier pastoral laments.

Yet the pastoral elegiac form was a peculiarly appropriate one in which to mourn Edward King—a suitable testament to his youth, the personal esteem in which he was held, his ventures as a poet and his destined role as priest. Practice sanctioned reference in it to the poet's own concerns, and precedent existed for the incorporation of satiric reference to the church.

Traditionally, the function of the elegy was to give expression to the mourner's grief; of the pastoral, to relieve the theme of sadness by investing it with images of grace and beauty. Milton lets these functions assert themselves, appealing to his readers' erudition by abundant references to his predecessors, but, needing to give expression to emotions more compelling than grief at King's death, he presents these references in a form totally different from that sanctioned by the tradition, a form more vigorous, more personal and more expressive.

Let us then look at Lycidas and the ways in which Milton has
employed the various elements of his inheritance and consider them in order of their power to impress the reader, whether he is of Milton's generation or our own.

The first "strangeness" (to use Hanford's term) that confronts the reader of *Lycidas* is the absence of any readily accessible rhythmic pattern, a lack that must have been far more noteworthy in the seventeenth century than it is in the twentieth. Bearing in mind that Spenser was one important source to which Milton looked for inspiration, and close to him historically, we might consider briefly a stanza from *Astrophel*, Spenser's lament for the death of Sir Philip Sidney in 1586. The style of this pastoral elegy offers an instructive contrast to *Lycidas*. Putting aside as irrelevant in the present context the fact that "Astrophel" contains a lament within a lament, both prefaced by an introduction, we will consider only one stanza, emphasizing this poem's place in the tradition by choosing as an example one that incorporates a familiar motif—the mourning of nature for the deceased:

> Woods, hills and rivers now are desolate,
> Sith he is gone the which them all did grace:
> And all the fields do waile their widow state;
> Sith death their fairest flowre did late deface.
> The fairest flowre in field that ever grew
> Was Astrophel; that was, we all may rew.4

(11. 25-30)

In this stanza, as almost without exception throughout the poem, Spenser's meter is iambic, his line, decasyllabic. While on the one hand he avoids the monotony that attends the unrelieved use of this rhythm by the occasional introduction into his line of an extra syllable with a
consequent weak ending, he exploits the soothing effect of the consistent rhythm by establishing it as the norm for his poem. The persistent iambic beat exercises its own palliative on the mourner's grief. Nor is the reader distracted from this soothing effect by an unfamiliar pattern of rhyme. Throughout the poem, the rhyming pattern of the stanzas is ababcc, the last two lines in each instance comprising a couplet which, in a style reminiscent of the sonnet, sums up, or makes a comment on, the preceding four lines. All the stanzas are identical; their pattern is obvious—the reader is not required to search for it nor disturbed by its absence. It manifests itself as a consistent element contributing to the total effect of the elegy. As for the individual lines, with few exceptions the pause at the end of each echoes the natural pause in the poet's thought. Run-on lines, as in the concluding couplet of the quoted stanza, are infrequent, and, like the occasional extra syllable, break the monotony of the metre without seriously disturbing the general pattern.

When we turn to Lycidas we find a different picture, and I use the term "picture" consciously, for the very appearance of the printed poem on the page foreshadows a different kind of poetic experience. For Lycidas does not progress in neat stanzas with lines of uniform metre and easily identifiable rhythm. Milton has taken the pastoral motifs and combined them in a totally new and highly subjective fashion. His elegy is comprised of one hundred and ninety-three lines, divided into eleven verse paragraphs that vary in length from eight to thirty-three lines, and although these lines, iambic in metre, are predominantly of ten syllables, disposed among them, apparently at random, are one seven-syllable,
three eleven-syllable and thirteen six-syllable lines. Of these irregular lines, only those of six syllables deviate sufficiently from the norm, and occur frequently enough, to impinge heavily on our consciousness. Nevertheless, the rhythm is broken, however slightly, by these deviations. The lines are for the most part closely rhymed, but the rhyme pattern varies from verse paragraph to verse paragraph, the irregularity emphasized by the presence of eleven lines, again disposed apparently at random, which do not rhyme at all.

If we compare the previously quoted stanza from Astrophel with the passage from Lycidas that embodies the same motif, we are immediately aware of the totally different effect that Milton achieves:

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!
Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
With wild Thyme and the gadding Vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn.
The Willows and the Hazel Copses green
Shall now no more be seen,
Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the Canker to the Rose,
Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,
Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the White-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherd's ear.

(11. 37-49)

The smooth flow of Spenser's verse gives way in Lycidas to a rhythm that emphasizes the latter poem's dramatic quality. We are acutely conscious of the speaker and of this passage as his speech, speech more carefully modulated than that of everyday usage, but nevertheless embodying a strong feeling of direct communication that
dramatizes the mourner's grief rather than seeks to allay it.

The stanza contains thirteen lines, ten of ten syllables and three of six. There is no obvious principle governing the way the six-syllable lines are disposed. The metre is strongly iambic, but this pattern is broken by three heavily accented syllables opening the third line: "Thee, shepherd, thee the woods and desert caves . . . " and a spondee at the beginning of the eighth line, "Fanning their joyous leaves to thy soft lays."

Some lines rhyme, but no discernible pattern of rhyme is evident. The rhyme does not correspond to the development of the poet's thought, but makes its effect independently. Unlike Spenser's stanza, Milton's verse paragraph does not stand as a completely self-contained unit of thought, but looks back in its opening lines to the concluding lines of the preceding stanza before developing its own theme of Nature's sorrow.

In poetry of the twentieth century, such irregularities of form and metre and the absence of a pattern of rhyme are commonplace, regarded neither as whimsical novelties nor as wilful transgressions by the poet against established custom, but as factors contributing significantly to the expressiveness of his verse. Milton, in disregarding the accepted poetical practices of his day, was seeking a greater expressiveness than conventional patterns afforded. It is noteworthy that the lines of irregular syllabic length and the lines which do not rhyme (never identical) are concentrated in the early part of the poem, where the poet raises the questions that disturb him. Only one irregular line (162) occurs after the flower passage, suggesting that he has won the "little
ease" that he sought from his floral tribute to Lycidas. In the final movement of the lament, in which the poet in some measure resolves his uncertainties, the lines are uniformly of ten syllables, with a discernible, if erratic, rhyming pattern. The rhymed couplet, with which Milton frequently, but not always, ends his stanza, is likewise disposed in a way that seems to reflect the poet's lessening agitation. Of the seven occurrences of this regularizing element, three conclude the last three stanzas of the poem.

Two stanzas stand out particularly for their apparent lack of pattern, and in each the poet develops a concern vital to him—Death, as an unforeseen, irrational agent. In the first of these—the stanza already quoted—the beautiful, the young and the fragile are grossly victimized by dangers they cannot anticipate and cannot defend themselves against. This is one of the shorter stanzas in Lycidas, containing only thirteen lines, but numbered among these thirteen are three lines of six syllables and one line that does not rhyme.

In the second passage that includes a more than usual number of irregularities, the poet attributes Lycidas' death to evil and mysterious forces, perhaps set in motion by man rather than by Nature, but nonetheless unsuspected by and beyond the control of their victim:

O Fountain Arethuse, and thou honor'd flood,
  Smooth-sliding Mincius; crown'd with vocal reeds,
That strain I heard was of a higher mood:
  But now my Oat proceeds,
And listens to the Herald of the Sea
  That came in Neptune's plea.
He ask'd the Waves, and ask'd the Felon winds,
What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?
And question'd every gust of rugged wings
That blows from off each beaked Promontory.
They knew not of his story,
And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd,
The Air was calm, and on the level brine,
Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.
It was that fatal and perfidious Bark
Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

(11. 85-102)

Of the eighteen lines that comprise this stanza, four are irregular: two of six syllables, one of seven and one of eleven; one line is unrhymed.

Clearly, the irregularities of form are most frequently found in those parts of the poem which express the poet's doubts attendant on death and life. The irregular pattern of rhyme, however, persists throughout the poem up to the concluding stanza, where the point of view changes, marking this stanza as a framing device for the lament proper. Its separateness from the main body of the poem's thought is confirmed by the strict regularity of the ottava rima form.

"Art," says Hauser, "may be . . . the expression of an un governable urge to master reality, or the feeling of being hopelessly and helplessly at its mercy." The irregularities in the two stanzas quoted might well reflect the turbulence in the mind of a determined and dedicated man, facing the reality that he too, like flowers and weanling herds, or more significantly, like his drowned contemporary Edward King, is vulnerable and defenceless against an unpredictable and irrational enemy.

F. T. Prince, in his essay, "The Italian Element in Lycidas,"
traces Milton's sources for these unfamiliar patterns of rhythm and rhyme to the works of Italian poets of the Cinquecento. But, as Prince makes clear, Milton has not achieved his effects through a casual application of Italian principles of versification, but rather has made his own rules for the poem out of his knowledge and enjoyment of the strictest Italian practice. In structuring *Lycidas* he has demonstrated the principle of *disegno interno*, freely adapting the rules of Italian versification to imbue the pastoral elegy with an uncharacteristic degree of power and energy.

Prince points out that Italian literature provides no exact parallel with *Lycidas*, no one poem that can be singled out as Milton's model. The form that *Lycidas* takes is the result of Milton's familiarity with and appreciation of several different kinds of Italian verse. In the poetic pastoral dramas of the sixteenth century he found the models for his irregular stanzaic form and rhyme pattern, notably in Tasso's *Aminta*, which "established the use, for certain purposes, of such irregularly rhymed passages," and in Guarino's *Il Pastor Fido* which further developed this feature of his compatriot's pastoral drama. It is worth noting that Milton's models were dramatic works, and the modifications of the *canzone* form affected therein occurred in passages of dialogue. It seems likely that Milton's decision to write his elegy in dramatic monologue form was influenced by his awareness of the possibilities for dramatic and lyrical verse opened up by this liberation of the *canzone*.

For it was on the *canzone* that Milton based his versification of *Lycidas*. The authority for his combination of six-syllable and
ten-syllable lines and the relationship of their rhymes came to Milton from the Italian tradition, as did the principles governing the structure of Lycidas. In its original form, the canzone consisted "of a complex, fully rhymed stanza of some length, repeated several times and followed by a shorter concluding stanza, the commiato." We are not concerned at this point with the commiato, to which, as Prince notes, the concluding stanza of Lycidas corresponds, but rather with the structure of the stanzas which make up the body of the canzone. A typical stanza is made up of two sections, linked by a key line, or chiave. These two sections (but in practice usually one rather than both) might be similarly divided and their divisions similarly linked, by a key line. This key line, contained in each instance within the second section, performs its linking function by rhyming with the last line of the first section.

As the verse form was originally used, the expression of the poet's thought was shaped by, and restrained within, the divisions of the poem. Divergencies of form and content occurred only for some special purpose. But during the seventeenth century, poetic practice changed and as Prince points out, "the divisions of the canzone were often deliberately overridden . . . , but only because, even when the diction did not follow them, they remained in mind, and the effect was one of counterpoint between the rhyme-pattern and the diction . . . ." This counterpoint appears throughout Lycidas, where the rhyme pattern consistently extends beyond the statement in which it originates.

An example can be seen in a section of the stanza previously quoted:
The Willows and the Hazel Copses green
Shall now no more be seen,
Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the Canker to the Rose,
Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,
Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the White-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherds ear.

(11. 42-49)

These eight lines divide into two separate units of thought; the first three expressing the visible signs of Nature's mourning, the following five lines comparing the death of Lycidas to deaths in Nature equally unpredictable and unjustifiable. But the rhyme scheme overrides the boundaries between them. The fifth line, or second line of the second section, finds its rhyme in the concluding line of the first section, thus serving as a linking line, or chiave, between the two parts of the stanza. At the same time it sets up reverberations between the thoughts expressed in the two sections, recalling the cessation of carefree activity in the natural world brought about by Lycidas' death, and making that death one with others equally cruel and senseless.

Milton is using the principle of the chiave, to create a rhyme which looks both backward and forward, and further enhances this effect by his use of the six-syllable lines,

which are also placed so as to give a sense of expectation: they not only always rhyme with a previous longer line (thus looking back), but they give the impression of a contracted movement which must be compensated by a full movement in the next line (which is always of full length), and they thus look forward. This effect is most marked when, as in most cases, these short lines rhyme with the line immediately preceding them.11

The uneven rhythm of this backward and forward movement, with its
accompanying sense of contraction and expansion, generates a vitality of its own, giving to the verse form a power at odds with the soothing function generally associated with the pastoral elegy, but a power necessary to contain the urgent questions that the poet raises therein. When Samuel Johnson said of Lycidas that "the diction is harsh, the rhymes uncertain and the numbers unpleasing," he failed to allow for the unfamiliar burden that Milton placed on his pastoral elegy. Consolation for the death of Edward King is only part, and a lesser part, of the task Lycidas performs. Milton is more concerned with questions that have to do with death, and more importantly, with life—the value of a life dedicated to achievement, to service; the suddenly realized threat that death may come before that achievement is realized, that service rendered. By his repeated references to the pastoral tradition he reminds us that Lycidas is an elegiac lament and its occasion is the death of Edward King. But in the irregular pattern of his rhyme, and the unpredictable recurrences of his six-syllable line, he gives his poem a form that underlines his concern therein with the unpredictability of death and the uncertainty of life. Spenser's smooth rhythms and graceful flowing style preclude content of such urgency.

In Milton, Mannerism and Baroque, Prof. Daniells, discussing mannerist elements in Lycidas, draws an analogy between the psychological effect created by Milton's juxtaposition of six-syllable and ten-syllable lines and Michelangelo's treatment of the frames and mouldings in the Laurentian Library Anteroom, pointing out that both exhibit the mannerist capacity to generate expectations which they fail to satisfy.12 The
analogy between the poem and the library anteroom can be farther extended. Like Lycidas, the Ricetto is a complex of classical motifs, handled in an arbitrary, highly individual fashion. The room serves no function other than to contain the staircase which provides access to the Library proper, whose floor is some three metres above the floor of the anteroom. The staircase itself is of massive proportions, its overwhelming presence emphasized by its division into three contiguous sections, each of which, separated by a balustrade from its neighbour, retains its own identity. The two side flights, with their rectangular treads, seem to climb upwards, while the central section, its steps rounded in the centre and again where they meet the balustrade, flows downward with relentless force.

The anteroom which contains this compelling structure opposes it with a dynamism of its own. The wall surfaces are heavily burdened with structural and decorative members, their dark grey color contrasting strongly and sombrely with the dead white of the walls. They are dominated by heavy columns, standing in pairs, whose weight and unrelieved severity of design are stressed by the slender, fluted corbels suspended beneath them. The blank windows are overburdened with heavy, rounded pediments, contrasting oddly with the delicate articulation of the niches above them. A similar contrast distinguishes the narrow doorway standing outlined in an angular pattern of slender molding, which plays against the massive columns flanking each side of the opening proper, and against the weight of the pediments pressing down from above. But disparate as they are, and incongruous as they might seem, these elements in
juxtaposition give to the walls of the anteroom a necessary monumentality which permits the small volume of the room to accommodate the powerful force of the tripartite staircase. Similarly, the verse form which Milton achieves for *Lycidas* by his very personal manipulation of Italian rhythms is able to sustain the questions which he raises.

The lay reader, unfamiliar with Italian poetry of the Renaissance and the rules governing its composition, is unlikely to recognize the ways in which Milton has conformed to these. Even those first readers of the memorial volume for Edward King, comprising as they did a select and educated audience, might have had difficulty in tracing Milton's pattern of versification to its sources, for even within the principles that he followed he arbitrarily introduced variations and deviations for the sake of greater expressiveness. Today's reader, while sensing some governing principle underlying the apparently random disposition of short and unrhymed lines, accepts the irregularities of its application and responds to the energy that this application generates. The impulse for Milton's emotion may catch us unaware, but its strength is inescapable. The poet demands that we share his mental turmoil, unalleviated by the soothing effect of rhythm and the psychological security offered by a repeated, identifiable pattern of rhyme.
Footnotes


8 Ibid., p. 155.

9 Ibid., p. 154.

10 Ibid., p. 163.

11 Ibid., p. 165.

Chapter Seven

UNITY IN LYCIDAS

In Mannerist painting, drama, and poetry conflicting or unrelated modes of feeling and conduct are brought together side by side and left unreconciled, as if one phase of activity had nothing to do whatever with another phase of activity in which the same persons take part. (p. 146)

The mannerist composition has a psychological focus, perhaps, rather than any stated structural focus, .... (p. 145)

Wylie Sypher, Four Stages of Renaissance Style.

To the modern reader of Lycidas, as perhaps to Milton's contemporaries, the question of the poem's unity is a troubling one. For even as we recognize that each part is indispensable and that none could be eliminated without doing irreparable violence to the poem, we miss the sense of inevitability, of a sequence of parts flowing smoothly to a natural conclusion, that distinguishes the poetry of Milton's predecessors. We do not find sustained in Lycidas the consolatory mood of earlier pastorals, and we are startled by the interjection of images hostile to the Arcadian world. The symmetry of parts and the organic thematic development that marks Astrophel, the harmoniously balanced organization of "Gallus"--those characteristics inherited from the classical world that the Renaissance admired and established as standards of artistic excellence--give way in Lycidas to a different mode of structure.

Scholarly discussion of Lycidas acknowledges this, if only implicitly, in that it tends to see the poem made up of several parts.

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Although there is no unanimity of opinion on the exact delineation of these parts, in general critics agree that the poem consists of an introduction, a lament proper divided into three sections, and a conclusion. Opinions differ as to the point at which the introduction ends and the lament begins, but on the divisions within the lament, and the points at which they occur, critics in general agree. The first section ends at line 84, after Phoebus' declaration on heavenly, as opposed to earthly fame:

As he pronounces lastly on each deed
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed.

(11. 83-84)

The second section ends at line 131, after St. Peter's terrible and enigmatic threat of vengeance:

But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.

(11. 130-31)

The final section (and the lament proper) ends at line 185, with the vision of Lycidas as "the Genius of the shore":

In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
To all that wander in that perilous flood.

(11. 184-85)

The last eight lines, the ottava rima, make up the poem's conclusion. These divisions are a matter of general agreement, but, as
indicated earlier, an interesting and apparently hitherto unacknowledged disagreement exists between English scholars over one other important division in the poem, namely, that point in Lycidas at which the introduction ends and the lament begins. This disagreement is worth a moment's consideration, not because it is of particular importance in relationship to the poem's unity, but because it offers in literary form an example of a mannerist characteristic more commonly associated with architecture.

David Daiches, noting Milton's close recall of the opening refrain in Thyrsis' song from Theocritus' "Daphnis," would establish line 15 as the beginning of the lament proper:

It is with deliberate awareness of the classical pastoral tradition that Milton begins the actual elegy in the second verse paragraph:

Begin, then, Sisters of the sacred well . . .

Not so, says Woodhouse. "The first movement (23-24) begins with a reminiscence of the life at Cambridge presented under pastoral images, . . . ." Woodhouse is referring to the lines which read:

For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.

(11. 23-24)

E. W. M. Tillyard, however, is of the opinion that these two lines should be included in the introduction, and that the elegy proper begins at line 25, with Milton's recollection in pastoral terms of the two youths' shared experiences:

Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
Under the opening eyelids of the morn
We drove afield, . . .

(11. 25-28)

A case can be made for any one of these choices. As Daiches points out, in summoning the Muses Milton is recalling a convention that goes back to Theocritus and the earliest pastoral dirge. The similarity is unmistakable between this line from *Lycidas* and the refrain with which Thyrsis begins his lament for Daphnis: "Begin, dear Muses, begin the pastoral song." But can we say with certainty that this call to the Muses marks the actual beginning of Milton's lament? For the poet turns away momentarily from his task to note that he too will die, and to hope that his death will call forth a song from some other poet:

Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,
So may some gentle Muse
With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn,
And as he passes turn,
And bid fair peace be to my sable shroud.

(11. 18-22)

Woodhouse's choice of lines to mark the starting point for the elegy proper is likewise open to question. Do they, as this critic suggests, mark the beginning of the poet's reminiscences, and therefore the beginning of his lament, or is he, as Tillyard states, still at this point concerned chiefly with his own fate, and developing the analogy between his life and that of Edward King?

This blurring of the relationship between contiguous parts is a common characteristic of mannerist art. It can be seen most easily in
mannerist architecture, where one member is made to serve two units, and cannot be specifically identified with either to the exclusion of the other. Michelangelo's Medici Chapel offers a clear example. Here the doors at the corner of the chapel and the blind tabernacles above them "share the main horizontal member between them; the brackets at the ends of this horizontal may be read as supporting a lintel in the context of the door or hanging from a base in the context of the tabernacle." Similarly, we may read the two debated lines from Lycidas as either the poet's summing up of the reasons why he should undertake the unwelcome task of thus acknowledging his friend's death, or as the beginning of his account of the life they shared.

Leaving aside this question, to which no final resolution is possible, let us consider the divisions that have been identified, and the search for the organizing principle that unifies them. That search is complicated by the presence, in each of the first two divisions, of passages devoted to questions thematically allowable within the pastoral context, but in Lycidas charged with an emotion that severely strains, if it does not altogether vanquish temporarily, the pastoral mood. The questions of Fame as a just reward for a life dedicated to achievement and of punishment for a life of corruption are given an emphasis that exaggerates the separateness of the poem's parts, setting them in contest with another and threatening the unity of the poem as a whole.

Some critics recognize these questions as "digressions," not from the poem's thought, but from its mood. Others, disliking perhaps the implications of such nomenclature, see them not as "digressions" but
as passages distinguished by a greater emotional power. Another view, while recognizing the intensified emotion that pervades these passages, sees it as the natural climax of a gradually rising emotional crescendo, perfectly controlled and paralleled in each section of the poem. Still another view, holding that in *Lycidas* Milton has a more profound purpose than the merely elegiac one—that of resolving his fears of premature death and his bitter scorn of the clergy "into an exalted state of mental calm"—sees this purpose as bringing the varying elements and differing emotional levels into harmonious relationship. The above do not exhaust the differences which are to be found in critical discussions of the structure of *Lycidas*. They do suggest, however the resistance that the poem offers to any attempts to impose a pattern on it.

Even the acknowledgement that the poem does indeed divide into three or possibly four sections does not take into account the discrepancies in mood, scale and subject matter which exist within each division. Within the first division, for instance, we encounter a bewildering sequence of changes. This section opens with the poet's description, in pastoral terms, of the activities which he and Lycidas shared:

Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
We drove afield, and both together heard
What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning, bright
Toward Heav'n's descent had slop'd his westering wheel.

(11. 25-31)

The scene is a pleasant landscape, containing no special
distinguishing features. Normal expectation is fulfilled by the shepherds, their flocks, and the grassy fields in which the sheep feed. The cycle of the day is rendered in delicate imagery that creates for us the tender beauty typical of the peaceful pastoral scene. From the "opening eyelids of the morn" to the end of the day, signalled by the "Star that rose, at Ev'ning," the scene is suffused by an aura of peaceful charm quite in keeping with the pastoral landscape. The tone is objective, matter of fact. No hint of impending sorrow clouds this short vignette. The only touch of melancholy is in the verb tense, suggesting as it does that these activities belong to the irretrievable past. But since all past is irretrievable, and to yearn after it a commonplace, no special sorrow necessarily attaches to these lines. And even their subdued melancholy is tempered by the poet's recollection of rustic songs and dancing that formed part of their day.

The mood changes abruptly, becoming infinitely more sombre, as we move into the passage describing the mourning of nature:

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!

(11. 37-38)

The heavy monosyllables, emphasized by repetition, echo the weight of the poet's oppression, and the finality of Lycidas' death is underlined by the closing phrase, "and never must return," the accented "never" impinging on our consciousness with emphatic force.

The mood of sadness persists as the poet recounts his and Nature's mourning, expressing the bitterness of loss in images that reflect his
new awareness that youth and beauty are forever menaced by hidden threats from within and unpredictable forces from without:

As killing as the Canker to the Rose,
Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,
Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the White-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherd's ear.

(11. 45-49)

Bitter as these images are, they do not prepare us for the next passage, with its abrupt change of mood, as the head of the dismembered Orpheus flashes suddenly upon the peaceful pastoral scene and as suddenly disappears:

When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
His gory visage down the stream was sent,
Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore?

(11. 61-63)

The violence of the crowd, the ugly noise that accompanies their hideous activity, and the "gory visage" in which this activity culminates are of an emotional intensity altogether different from anything we have hitherto encountered in this section.

Unexpected shifts in scale and perspective accompany these changes in mood. The opening pastoral scene reproduces briefly in pictorial language the prospect or vista beloved by seventeenth-century landscape painters. In this distant view no details loom up with special clarity. The shepherds' activities are clouded by a soft haze that changes but persists from pre-dawn through noon-day heat to evening's waning light.
The bloody head of Orpheus, on the other hand, is thrust before us in dramatic closeup, shocking us into renewed awareness of the poet's task and the death that occasioned it. Lycidas' death is a real death, merciless and irrational, its wanton cruelty not to be obscured by the pretty conventions of the pastoral.

The impact of this violent scene is reinforced by an abrupt recall of the pastoral world as the poet ponders the value of the dedicated life:

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
To tend the homely slighted Shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?

(11. 64-66)

These unexpected shifts in tone are not confined to this first division of the poem. The passionate indictment of the "fatal and perfidious Bark / Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark," (11. 100-1), as the agent of Lycidas' death, contrasts strangely with the peaceful seascape that immediately precedes it:

The air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.

(11. 98-99)

A similar contrast marks the portraits of Camus and St. Peter, who follow one another in the procession of mourners. In Camus, Milton portrays a vaguely melancholic figure, weighed down by his heavy garments embroidered to recall the sad legend of Hyacinthus:
Next Camus, reverend Sire, went footing slow,
His Mantle hairy, and his Bonnet sedge,
Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.

(11. 103-06)

The aura of gentle melancholy that surrounds Camus extends to his inquiry after the dead Lycidas: "Ah! Who hath reft" (quoth he) "my dearest pledge?" (1. 107). Camus' air of slow deliberation is echoed by the phrasing of his question. Its division into two parts robs it of any urgency; the interpolated "quoth he" slows down the line to match his measured tread.

Juxtaposed against Camus' blurry outline, but seen from a totally different perspective, is the forbidding figure of St. Peter, whose dramatic appearance on the peaceful pastoral scene is reported with stark simplicity:

Last came and last did go
The Pilot of the Galilean lake.

(11. 108-09)

The harsh "k" of "came" and the gutteral "g" of "go" in the opening line of the stanza set the tone for the passage to follow, throughout which these are the predominant consonantal sounds. The alliterated "k" reverberates throughout the line announcing that St. Peter is about to speak: "He shook his Mitred locks and stern bespake:" (1. 112). This line anticipates the tonal quality of the speech itself:

"How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,
Enough of such as for their bellies' sake,
Creep and intrude and climb into the fold?  
Of other care they little reck'ning make,  
Then how to scramble at the shearers' feast,  
And shove away the worthy bidden guest;  
Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold  
A Sheep-hook, or have learn'd aught else the least  
That to the faithful Herdman's art belongs!  

..."

(11. 113-21)

The harshness of these repeated "k's" and "g's" is intensified by the repetition of that least lovely of sounds that the English language affords--the ugly "ow" of "how," "anow," and "mouths" that echoes through the early lines of St. Peter's speech. While the vowels soften as the speech proceeds, the harsh consonants continue until the final threat of vengeance.

Any consideration of this passage must take into account its relative paucity of adjectives and heavy concentration of verbs. The poet is concerned with the corruption within the church and he expresses the urgency of this concern by picturing as process the activities that disturb him.

"What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;  
And when they list, their lean and flashy songs  
Grate on their scannel Pipes of wretched straw.  
The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,  
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,  
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:  
..."

(11. 122-27)

More than a difference in emotional intensity separates this passage from the rest of Lycidas. At this point in his poem Milton's
attention is fully engaged by the corrupt clergy, and he portrays them and their behaviour in language that employs not only meaning but quality of sound to express his anger and contempt.

In Bronzino's *Allegory* we can see a similar contrast between the dominant figures. The face of Time, thrusting out from the top right of the painting, is distorted with emotion, whereas Venus and Cupid appear frozen in their awkward pose and embrace without passion. Time's coarsely muscled arm and dark skin tones set him apart from Venus and Cupid, rendered with porcelain-like delicacy and finely wrought body contours. Like St. Peter in *Lycidas*, Time is an intrusive element in this painting, related to its subject by some subjective consideration of the artist, but given a distinct and separate existence within the total painting by the technical resources of the painter.

The third division of *Lycidas* contains similarly disconcerting contrasts, as we move directly from the intimate scale of the flower passage, with its close-up of the delicate markings on the sad Pansy faces and the tears that fill the cups of mourning "Daffadillies" to the boundless immensity of the watery world that is Lycidas' unmarked grave. The sheltering prospect of "valleys low" and "gushing brooks" is cut off and in its place we are confronted by a restless and menacing ocean, not in some fictitious landscape drawn from the poet's imagination or the classical world as hitherto, but in the real world of which Milton is, and Edward King was, part. Once again the poet reminds us of the reality of King's death, and of that body that welters to the parching wind blowing from the stormy Hebrides to the distant Spanish shore.
Such sudden shifts in tone and mood, in time and place, the fact that the poem does not present an "ordered landscape in which everything is made to achieve congruity" encourage us to look at *Lycidas* as the work of a mannerist sensibility. For it is upon this "violent yoking together of apparently unrelated elements" that mannerism depends in part for its effects. Hauser, in his discussion of mannerism as it appears in English literature, describes such a compositional method as "totally unclassical." His specific reference is to Shakespeare's *Antony and Cleopatra*, but allowing for the difference in genre, his comments on the structure of the play warrant consideration in relationship to *Lycidas*. Such structure he sees as following neither the principle of unity nor that of proportion or balance of constituent elements; nor is it in harmony with the principle of necessity or finality. It is instead "cinematic" and "atomized," free from all regard for temporal and spatial unity. It does not present a logical sequence of events moving towards a dramatic climax, but, like the motion picture technique, "montage," seeks to create a mood or express an idea by showing in swift sequence a series of short and not necessarily sequentially related scenes. "A film-like freedom with space and time, discontinuity in both mediums, dissolves and interpolations, are characteristic of the whole." He continues by pointing out that "in mannerism, unity of structure is either a matter of indifference, or, . . . obtained by different, less striking and often more complicated means than in classical art."

Few scholarly discussions of *Lycidas* address themselves directly to the question of its unity. Those which do, however, suggest a kind
of unity in the poem which accords with mannerist criteria, although such discussions, it need hardly be pointed out, do not acknowledge mannerist criteria as their basis. Their suggestions, however, are on this account more rather than less interesting to the student of mannerism, since they unwittingly point to an unconventional (i.e., anti-classical) determinant of the poem's unity. The most explicit occurs in an essay by Northrop Frye, wherein Fry states that the provisional hypothesis from which the study of every poem must begin is that that poem is a unity. He points out that if undue emphasis is placed on the "peripheral facts" about Lycidas—what we know of Milton, his relationship to King, his ambitions as a poet, his bitter feelings towards the clergy—facts in themselves only tenuously related and incorporated into the poem in compliance with different creative principles, "... the poem will break down into pieces corresponding to those fragments of knowledge."\(^\text{17}\) Lycidas, he implies, must be regarded as an "imaginative unity." "By appearing himself at the beginning and end of the poem, Milton presents the poem as, in a sense, contained within the mind of the poet."\(^\text{18}\) Such an opinion is not far removed from that of Tillyard, mentioned earlier, that the basis of the poem's unity lies in the resolving of the poet's fears of premature death and of his bitter scorn of the clergy; in bringing, as it does, a state of mental calm to a mind keyed up by struggle.\(^\text{19}\) M. H. Abrams finds a similar unifying element in the movement of the poem from despair through a series of insights to triumphant joy.\(^\text{20}\)

If we concede the poetic imagination and the poet's purpose—so
closely related as to be almost the same force—as unifying elements, 
then shifts in time and place, mood and tone, become legitimate means of 
intensifying the poem's expressive capacity. Their presence helps to 
identify Lycidas as a mannerist work. "Homogeneity of constituent 
elements is never and nowhere a characteristic of mannerism; if it had 
ever achieved such a thing it would have ceased to be what it was." 21
Footnotes


6 Where a preference must be indicated, as is necessary for the discussion to follow, I prefer Tillyard's opinion that the elegy proper begins at line 25.

7 Woodhouse, p. 273.


9 Arthur Barker, "The Pattern of Milton's Nativity Ode," The University of Toronto Quarterly, X (1940-41), 172.


13 Even Shearman, whose approach to mannerism ostensibly rejects the more dramatic criteria which his colleagues in the field suggest, agrees that unity in the classical sense is not a necessary feature of
mannerist works of art (see pp. 137-51, Mannerism). He speaks of the
element of surprise in a mannerist staircase, which did not "allow the
visitor to grasp visually the whole unit, but only its successive parts;"
(p. 116), and of a mannerist garden, as "not usually to be grasped as a
unity, nothing predominates and there is no dramatic focus . . . . The
successive, cumulative impression is more important . . . ." (p. 125).
Shearman's text is concerned for the most part with minor art forms which
exhibit the style, and it is therefore from them that he draws specific
eamples to illustrate his point.


15 Ibid., p. 344.

16 Ibid., p. 345.

17 "Literature as Context: Milton's Lycidas," from The Proceedings
of the Second Congress of the International Comparative Literature Assos－
ciation, ed. W. P. Friederick, University of North Carolina Studies in
Comparative Literature, XXIII (1959), 44-55, and rpt. in Milton's Lycidas,
The Tradition and the Poem, ed. C. A. Patrides (New York: Holt, Rinehart

18 Ibid., p. 203.

Patrides, p. 61.

20 "Five Types of Lycidas," in Milton's Lycidas, The Tradition
and the Poem, ed. C. A. Patrides (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston,

21 Hauser, p. 348.
Chapter Eight

GRACE AND ELEGANCE vs. TENSION IN LYCIDAS

Mannerist works of art are conceived in the spirit of virtuoso-performances (John Shearman, Mannerism, p. 81).

The most characteristic quality of "mannerist" art... is an internal dualism, an inner tension (Erwin Panofsky, Idea, p. 79).

The opening pages of this essay take note of two important critical approaches to mannerism: one which considers that any truly mannerist work is marked by the presence of unresolved tension, and a second which sees a mannerist work of art as distinguished by its beauty of execution, fineness of finish, grace and elegance of style—all those qualities which unite to produce a work of consummate artistry. How does Lycidas fare when measured against these standards? Leaving aside temporarily the question of tension, we find in Milton's poem ample evidence that it fulfils Shearman's criteria of virtuoso performance. For Lycidas is an enduring testimonial to Milton's poetic genius. He employs his artistic medium, language, to create an eloquent lament, investing an old poetic form with new vitality and making it memorable with passages of pathos and beauty. The beauty, however, rests as often in Milton's handling of the language as in the images that language evokes, for the poet joins sound and sense within his chosen form to achieve effects of uncommon power and expressiveness.

This is nowhere better exemplified in the poem than in the passage following the catalogue of flowers, where the poet sadly acknowledges
the uncertainty of Lycidas' fate:

Ay me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding Seas
Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd,
Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
Or whether thou to our moist vows denied,
Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
Where the great vision of the guarded Mount
Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold; . . .

(11. 154-62)

The language makes plain that, beyond the certainty of his death, little is known of Lycidas' fate. Robbed of his identity as an individual, without power to resist the relentless force of the water, he is at the mercy of a sea whose limits are undefined and whose depths are unplumbed. In this context the notion that he might "visit" the underwater world or "sleep" by "the fable of Bellerus old" can only be ironic, for the sea has robbed Lycidas of all power to determine his actions and of the capacity to engage in such homely activities. He floats perhaps beyond the named boundaries of the ocean, and, even when possible boundaries are set, the likelihood of their confining him is questioned. "Where'er," "whether," "where," "perhaps"--this is a vocabulary of uncertainty, uncertainty caught up and echoed by the alliterated "wh" and "w" sounds that pervade the lines: "whilst thee the shores . . . ," "wash far away," "where thou perhaps under the whelming tide," "the monstrous world."

The insistent iambic rhythm, with the stress falling for the most part on heavy vowels, reproduces the steady pounding of the waves--the pounding that has reduced Lycidas to "bones" as he is tossed back and
forth. This is particularly effective in the first two lines, where con-
sonants are juxtaposed and vowel sounds repeated to reinforce the rhythm
of the verse.

Throughout this passage, as indeed throughout the poem, sound and
rhythm are subtly manipulated to heighten the meaning of the language.

Ay me! Whilst thee the shores and sounding Seas
Wash far away, where'er thy bones are hurl'd.

(11. 154-55)

Here the poet indicates his own despair (me), his friend's plight (thee)
and the source of both (the seas) letting them chime together in a rhythm
that echoes the monotonous regularity of the waves. The consonantal
pattern of this sequence of predominantly one-syllable words ensures that
this rhythm is maintained. At the same time, the action of the water is
described in language carrying little emotional or connotative force
(wash far away), until we reach "hurl'd" in which the full violence of
the sea is suddenly released. The implications of "bones" washed far
away are revealed in a grimmer light, and the menace latent in the lines
becomes appallingly clear.

In another passage noteworthy for the way in which sense, sound,
rhythm are combined to create a desired effect, Milton takes a convention
that is a commonplace in the pastoral elegy, the mourning of nature for
the deceased, and presents it with freshness and originality:

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!
Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
With wild Thyme and the gadding Vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn.
The Willows and the Hazel Copses green
Shall now no more be seen,
Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft lays.
As killing as the Canker to the Rose,
Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,
Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the White-thorn blows;
Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherd's ear.

(11. 37-49)

Our attention is immediately engaged by the opening couplet, in which the stark fact of Lycidas' death is twice stated in language of compelling simplicity: "now thou art gone,/ Now thou art gone." The despairing wail of the "ow" reverberates in our consciousness, and the poignancy of the second cry is underlined by the finality of the accented "never" which follows: "Now thou art gone, and never must return" (1. 38). At the same time the rhythm of the lines is subtly checked by the harsh, rough texture of this elemental vocabulary, while an unobtrusive change in metre from the iambic of the first line to the opening spondee of the second, together with the caesura after "gone" ensures that each significant word, "now," "thou," "gone," is given full emphasis.

The mourning "Woods and desert Caves" are presented in intimate association with the dead shepherd; "Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,/ . . . / And all their echoes mourn" (11. 39-41). This movement from the large generalities of woods and caves to the intimate detail of Thyme and Vine, Willow and Hazel gives the convention of mourning Nature a certain credibility, for it places the dead Lycidas in a setting from which he may well be missed--as shepherd he was one more specific in the pastoral landscape.
Milton follows this movement with three images which demonstrate his use of imagery as a unifying element in the total structure of the poem. Each image is within the context of the stanza—Nature mourning for the loss of Lycidas—but its meaning extends into the poem beyond the boundaries of one stanza. The first two, the Canker in the Rose and the Taint-worm that infects the weanling Herds, present a picture of surface beauty undermined from within, and look forward to the poet's later indictment of a corrupt clergy that fattens itself on the church while those in its charge, "the hungry Sheep," "rot inwardly" (11. 125-27). The third, in delicately beautiful language, presents an image of flowers blighted by frost in the full glory of their springtime loveliness, reminding us of the central event of the poem—the unexpected and unpredictable cutting off of a young life.

Throughout the stanza the sound of the language reinforces the meaning. A heavy sense of loss pervades the opening lines, and the abrasive quality of the repeated "k's"—"as killing as the Canker to the Rose," and the "f's" and "r's" of "frost," "flowers," and "first" grate on our sensibilities like the hard fact of bereavement.

Johnson complained of Milton's diction that it was harsh; much of the diction in this passage can be so described. But Milton's choice of language shocks us into a new awareness of the poignancy of death. It lifts his sentiments above the trite and perfunctory, and breathes new life into the familiar pastoral convention.

Wylie Sypher has called attention to "the power of the isolated phrase" in mannerist literature, pointing out that phrases of a mannerist
poem can enjoy an independent existence, gaining in poetic force and vitality when they are thus deprived of context. No student of *Lycidas*, whether or not he sees in the poem evidence of a mannerist sensibility, would disagree that this is true of Milton's elegy. Each may have his own special favorites, although I suspect that the appeal of at least some of the following is general:

He must not float upon his wat'ry bier
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
   (11. 12-13)

Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
   (1. 26)

... Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear,
When first the White-thorn blows;
   (11. 47-48)

The Air was calm, and on the level brine
Sleek *Panope* with all her sisters play'd.
   (11. 98-99)

And Daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
   (1. 150)

Look homeward. Angel now, and melt with ruth:
   (1. 163)

... sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
   (11. 179-81)

The above are not intended to constitute a full list of lines which, isolated from their context, linger on to haunt the reader long after the poem has been read and the book laid aside. They merely suggest the power of Milton's language and the sentiment it conveys to impress themselves on the mind.
In some instances their appeal can in part be analysed and explained, the result of a happy synthesis of meaning with elements of the poetic art. We can see this at work in the first example quoted. The poet explains the unhappy circumstances of Lycidas' death, circumstances that are driving him to the task of writing a lament, despite his feeling that he is not yet prepared to do so. Lycidas' need to be remembered and mourned is greater than the poet's reluctance to write, and he conveys the sense of that need by picturing the drowned youth at the mercy of both wind and water; the wind will toss his unresisting body helplessly about and the water will carry him to oblivion. The position of "must," the first accented beat in the line, gives it a special urgency, and even though grammatically the need it expresses relates to Lycidas, thematically it reminds us of the obligation placed on the poet. The alliterated "w's" coincide with the stresses of the rhythm, linking "wat'ry" with "unwept," "welter" and "wind," so that the words most heavily charged with meaning are joined both by sound and accent.

Milton is so often thought of as a poet whose vocabulary and structures are dominated by Latinisms that it is worth noting the simplicity of both in these two lines. He uses language derived exclusively from the limited vocabulary of his Anglo-Saxon and Middle English heritage, disposing it with artful simplicity to achieve richly sonorous poetry.

Not every memorable line in Lycidas submits as readily to even a partial explanation of its power. "And Daffadillies fill their cups with tears," (1. 150)--this line contains no obvious poetic devices to
explain its pull on the feelings of the reader. Neither language nor rhythm are in any way unusual or remarkable. Does its secret lie in the diminutive, endowing these sturdy flowers with an unaccustomed air of fragility, or is it the pathos inherent in the thought of their tear-filled cups? Or is it some other element that defies explanation?

With some lines it is beyond the power of language to offer even a tentative explanation of their appeal. "Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth" is such an instance. What gives these simple words their aura of haunting poignancy? Any attempt to assign it to the emotional connotations of "homeward" or "ruth" can be quickly dispelled, for without denying their power to engage our sympathies, we have only to change their order slightly, or to move one word, to appreciate that their sequence is as important as the words themselves, and that both have been determined by a unique sensitivity.

There are other memorable lines in Lycidas, the secret of whose power is similarly elusive. "With Nectar pure his oozy Locks he laves" (1. 175) conjures up an incongruous vision. Nectar, thought of as a drink, and a sweet drink at that, seems inappropriate as a cleansing agent. Its firm association with the gods and goddesses of Greek mythology makes questionable its presence in a Christian heaven. The mention of "oozy locks" recalls all too vividly the closing of the "remorseless deep" over Lycidas' head, and his exposure to the action of wind and water. Yet the line has an irresistible melody, and impresses with its soothing quality that rests in the soft sounds of the words rather than in their meaning.
The poem as a whole owes something of its unique appeal to Milton's special vocabulary. It has been pointed out that the poet introduced into his elegy a number of words not hitherto an accepted part of the language of English poetry, words that "refer primarily to the natural world, in more specific and sensory terms than were usual before Milton's time." Of these new words, an unusually large proportion are adjectives, and indeed, throughout Lycidas, adjectives, whether familiar or part of this new vocabulary, occur more frequently than is generally characteristic of English poetry, which for the most part employs more verbs than adjectives. Lycidas, however, reverses this practice and uses more adjectives than verbs. The actual numbers have been found to average twelve adjectives and nine verbs to each ten lines of poetry. An excerpt from the catalogue of flowers suggests how effectively this concentration on adjectives contributes to the power of Milton's verse:

Throw hither all your quaint enamell'd eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.

(11. 139-41)

In these lines the predominance of adjectives is slightly greater than throughout the poem as a whole, particularly when we allow that the function of "purple" is more adjectival than verbal, its force being derived from its descriptive capacity rather than from its power to suggest an action. The ambiguity inherent in the command is obscured by the richly detailed descriptions that it contains--descriptions that endow each substantive with "specific and sensory" properties. The "eyes"
are "quaint, enamelled"—skilfully wrought in the gay, bright colors associated with enamel and endowed with its light-reflecting capacities. Supporting them and providing a fittingly contrasted background is the "green turf." These two images are predominantly visual, although both "enamel" and "turf" make submerged appeals to our sense of touch—"enamel" through its inherent hardness, "turf" in the softness of the grassy sward it implies. This tactile quality extends to "honied showres," together with the long train of associations that follows "honied," reminding us of bees, of the flowers with which the passage is intimately concerned, of the fresh and life-supporting rain that brings the "vernal flowers" in its wake. Whatever "little ease" the poet finds in the flower passage must surely reside in large part in these three lines, whose "vernal flowers" recall the spring and the rebirth of all things in Nature.

As in other forms of Mannerist art, beauty and subtlety of expression sometimes veil a sinister meaning inherent in the work. The delicate imagery of "Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear" (1. 47) obscures the fact that this frost is for the flowers as cruel an agent of death as the sea is for Lycidas. We respond to the pounding rhythm of "where'er thy bones are hurl'd," (1. 155) and momentarily forget that these "bones" were once a man, destroyed by the action this same pounding rhythm describes. Similarly, we look at Michelangelo's preparatory drawings for the Flagellation, and, beguiled by the refinement and grace of the design, forget the essential brutality of his subject.

No piecemeal examination of Lycidas can do justice to its
melancholy beauty. It is the totality of the poem that moves us. Milton's skilful choice of language to convey his changing moods; the images, now serene, now brutal, now consolatory, now disturbing, that language presents; the subtle harmonies and discordances of sound that unobtrusively support the sense of what he is saying; all are woven together in an intricate rhythm that echoes the rise and fall of the poet's emotions.

Lycidas is indeed a virtuoso performance, but it is doubtful if any student of mannerism (other than Shearman) would consider that fact alone sufficient evidence to support the notion of the poem as the expression of a mannerist sensibility. For most critics, a more significant mannerist element is the presence within the poem of an inner tension which is never totally resolved, a tension born of Milton's frustrations, uncertainty and disillusionment.

Lycidas gives eloquent expression to this inner tension. It is manifest in the opening verse-paragraph, arising out of the conflict generated within the poet between his resistance to the task which he has undertaken and his awareness of the need to mourn the dead Lycidas. The first lines of the stanza make it abundantly clear that he comes to his task unwillingly:

Yet once more, 0 ye Laurels, and once more
Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never sere,
I come to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
And with forc'd fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
Compels me to disturb your season due:

(11. 1-7)
He tells us first that he is forced, and later that he is compelled, to act. Cruel and unrelenting pressure has driven him to write his elegy for King, but the death of King is not the sole source of this pressure. "Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear" are both responsible. The prominence given to "bitter constraint" by its position at the beginning of the line; the intensity of feeling which charges the diction as compared to the relatively passive "sad occasion dear" suggest that in Milton's mind the former was the more compelling reason to write his poem. The pause after "bitter constraint," together with the use of the conjunction "and," dispels any notion that it was caused by the "sad occasion dear." Two forces have exerted their unique pressure upon him, and although both are linked with Lycidas' untimely death ("For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime," ) they remain separate.

At this point the poet turns to Lycidas' death, concentrating on it as the occasion for his elegy:

For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:  
Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew  
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
He must not float upon his wat'ry bier  
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
Without the meed of some melodious tear.

(11. 8-14)

The contrast in style that marks these two sections of the opening stanza provides a clue to the relative impact of their subject on the poet's inner feelings. For whereas the movement of the opening seven lines is slow and heavy, the diction terse and the use of poetic devices sparing,
the later passage moves with lyrical grace. Repetition and alliteration bring a song-like quality to the lines that alleviates the sombre message they carry. This opening verse paragraph demonstrates that Milton's deepest emotions are not engaged by the death of King, but by some other not yet identified consideration.

Tension develops along two channels, separate but interwoven, as the poet voices the questions that trouble him, questions that King's death have raised and that have to do with that specific event, and questions of a broader scope that are more intimately related to Milton's own situation. Milton's friendship with King, but more importantly, the many similarities in their respective positions--their ages, their backgrounds and their ambitions to lead useful lives in God's service--provide the connecting thread.

Most heavily charged are those sections of the poem that reflect Milton's preoccupation with his own life and future. The first of these presents the brief and bloody vision of Orpheus. That Milton saw in the legendary figure of Orpheus a model for his own development has been suggested earlier in this paper. Now, as he mourns Lycidas, reflecting on the sudden and insidious destruction of other beings young and fragile, he is reminded of Orpheus' death, marked by special violence and cruelty and by the helplessness to prevent it of those who loved the victim. But Milton identifies himself far more strongly with Orpheus than he does with Lycidas, and the vision is too painful to dwell on. The scene closes abruptly, too abruptly to allow for release of the tension that the scene engendered.
In a quieter mood, the poet turns to ponder another dilemma that the death of Lycidas has raised:

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care  
To tend the homely slighted Shepherd's trade,  
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?  
Were it not better done as other use,  
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,  
Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?  

(11. 64-69)

What, the poet asks, is the value of stern dedication to study, of the effort to prepare to fulfil worthily his role as God's shepherd and as poet? It is significant that he refers only to one kind of self-denial that his years of study have entailed--the pleasures of feminine company. The reference is a light-hearted one, but its playful imagery masks a long submerged discontent. Four years earlier he had expressed to a friend his awareness of "that need which about this time of a man's life solicits most, the desire of house and family of his own."4

The goal toward which he strives, and which could make his course worthwhile, is "fame."

Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise  
(That last infirmity of Noble mind)  
To scorn delights, and live laborious days;  

(11. 70-72)

But the image he uses, "spur," is an ugly one, with connotations of pain and force, used to goad to further exertion an animal unwilling or overstrained. It is scarcely compatible with the "clear spirit" and "Noble mind," images that the poet uses to refer to himself. And what is the
point of it all—the careful self-discipline, the necessary suffering—if one's life is to be cut off by a whimsical fate, blindly without reference to merit and without the attainment of one's cherished goal? The answer is unconvincing:

"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering foil
Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumor lies,
But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes
And perfect witness of all-judging Jove;
As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed."

(11. 78-84)

The reader feels, and shares, the poet's inability to find in Phoebus' promise a satisfactory answer. The prospect of "fame in Heav'n" is too far removed from the young Milton's earlier vision of his home as a shrine and himself as a revered and sought-after companion of the great and the famous. Despite Phoebus' answer, the poet's question hangs in the air and the role of blind Fate as the arbiter of man's destiny remains still unchallenged.

The poet turns away momentarily from his own preoccupations to Lycidas' death. "What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?" (1. 92). The answer is ambiguous, and again, unsatisfying:

It was that fatal and pernicious bark
Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.

(11. 100-103)

Once again man's destiny is shown to be at the mercy of irrational forces.
Some ill-understood natural event (th'eclipse) has combined with evil forces generated by man (curses dark) to doom the ship and thus Lycidas. This answer, introducing an alien note of superstition which the mood of the poem cannot assimilate, lacks conviction. Milton's questions and the manner of their asking, reveal the man of reason. He seeks rational answers. Mere superstition cannot satisfy him, even when phrased with all the force of a positive statement. The stanza ends on the same note of frustration as that which preceded it.

The following stanza gives us St. Peter's famous indictment of the Anglican clergy, in which a question is implied that links Milton's self-concern with his concern for the dead Lycidas:

"How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,  
Enough of such as for their bellies' sake  
Creep and intrude and climb into the fold?  
Of other care they little reck'ning make,  
Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,  
And shove away the worthy bidden guest;  

..."

(11. 113-18)

What principle of selection governs who shall die and who shall live? The good are taken and the evil are spared. Milton's memories of Cambridge and his recent studies form the basis for St. Peter's bitter charges. Lycidas, the poet knows, embodied all those qualities so vital to those who would do God's work; yet Lycidas is dead, the victim of some wilful force the poet cannot comprehend. Others, motivated by greed and self-interest, are left to pursue their unworthy goals, indifferent to the sufferings of those whose care should be their first concern.
The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:

(11. 125-27)

Or perhaps even worse, they are left to fall into the clutches of Roman Catholicism: "Besides what the grim Wolf with privy paw / Daily devours apace, and nothing said; . . ." (11. 128-29). Once again the poet is frustrated. The accumulated tensions built up during St. Peter's outburst do not find adequate release in his threat of retribution: "But that two-handed engine at the door / Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more." (11. 130-31). The ambiguity of St. Peter's threat renders it unsatisfactory as a solution for the poet's explicit charges. Of course, no satisfactory answer is possible. The assurance of some prevailing justice, of a divine order that ultimately punishes or rewards according to true worth, can only come from inner faith, and nowhere in the poem does the poet's faith shine forth with absolute conviction.

The promise of future life that he envisions for Lycidas is strangely limited:

Where other groves, and other streams along,
With Nectar pure his oozy Locks he laves,
And hears the unexpressive nuptial Song,
In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.
There entertain him all the Saints above,
In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
That sing, and singing in their glory move,
And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.

(11. 175-81)

Just how limited this vision of Heaven is can be better realized if we
compare it with a later description by Milton of the heavenly scene, as it appears in Paradise Lost:

... all
The multitude of Angels with a shout
Loud as from numbers without number, sweet
As from blest voices, uttering joy, Heav'n rung
With Jubilee, and loud Hosannas fill'd
Th' eternal Regions: lowly reverent
Towards either Throne they bow, and to the ground
With solemn adoration down they cast
Thir Crowns inwove with Amarant and Gold,
Immortal Amarant, a Flow'r which once
In Paradise, fast by the Tree of Life
Began to bloom, but soon for man's offense
To Heav'n remov'd where first it grew, there grows,
And flow'rs aloft shading the Fount of Life,
And where the river of Bliss through midst of Heav'n
Rolls o'er Elysian Flow'rs her Amber stream;
With these that never fade the Spirits elect
Bind their resplendent locks inwreath'd with beams,
Now in loose Garlands thick thrown off, the bright
Pavement that like a Sea of Jasper shone
Impurpl'd with Celestial Roses smil'd.
Then Crown'd again thir gold'n Harps they took,
Harps ever tun'd, that glittering by thir side
Like Quivers hung, and with Preamble sweet
Of charming symphony they introduce
Thir sacred Song, and waken raptures high;
No voice exempt, no voice but well could join
Melodious part, such concord is in Heav'n.

(III:344-71)

This is a richly expansive picture of Heaven, invoked in images of gold and precious stones, calling up the fragrance of flowers and the vital force of flowing, falling, water. Music swells out without restraint, enveloping all in its sweet harmonies, as all sing, united in an act of adoration towards God and the Son. The scene is filled with an energy which is in itself an affirmation of the joy of the angels in Heaven. It expresses itself in the expansiveness of their movements, the radiance of
their emotions and the vigour of their song. This vital, joyous affirmation of delight in celestial existence is missing from the Heaven promised Lycidas. The scene is exquisitely painted, but emotionally barren. Lycidas remains a spectator, a passive recipient of the angels' ministrations but not absorbed into their company. He hears the "unexpressive nuptial song" but he does not join in the singing. The Heaven depicted is too confining, too limited, to offer an adequate compensation for the abrupt termination of an able and promising earthly existence. We admire the beauty of the poetry, but we do not accept it as a convincing answer to the poet's doubts. Our dissatisfaction is confirmed by the poet, who, as if in response to the inadequacy of the Christian reward, supports it with a pagan one:

Henceforth thou art the Genius of the shore, 
In thy large recompense, and shalt be good 
To all that wander in that perilous flood.

(11. 183-85)

But Lycidas' role as a pagan deity throws into question the heavenly fulfilment that the poet has earlier promised. As "Genius of the shore," Lycidas is to be "good" to all who venture within his charge. But what form is that goodness to take, if not to protect them against a fate such as that which befell Lycidas himself? Our faith in the "blest kingdom" wavers when we are promised protection against it. In thus postulating an alternative or perhaps a supplementary role for Lycidas, the poet disperses, but he does not resolve, the tensions which his uncertainties and anger have generated.
This marks the end of the elegy proper. When the poet moves beyond the lament to resume his everyday role, turning his back on the problems of death to look forward to the promises of tomorrow, his mood and that of the poem change. His tribute to Lycidas is finished, and, no longer concerned with the expression of his (and all men's) most troubling and persistent uncertainties, he can look back on it without emotion as a task undertaken and discharged.

Milton has written a song of uncommon grace and beauty, charged with an emotion born of his empathy with a dead friend. Those students of mannerism who seek a "virtuoso performance" will find it in Lycidas. Those who seek unresolved tension as the identifying mannerist element will do likewise.
Footnotes


3 Ibid., p. 98.

The concluding eight lines of *Lycidas* catch the reader by surprise, so markedly do they differ in form and mood from the lament proper. Prince, in his discussion of Milton's adaptations in *Lycidas* of Italian verse forms, notes that this final verse paragraph, rhymed like an *ottava rima*, "undoubtedly corresponds in its own way to a *commiato*," the *commiato* being the short concluding stanza which marks the end of an Italian canzone. Other critics have seen this final stanza as part of a framework for the elegy proper, one more instance of Milton's adaptation of a traditional form. This brief Epilogue, says Woodhouse, balances a Prelude which is part of the monody, "so that together they give something of the effect of the traditional framework setting." Harrison echoes this opinion, but is more explicit, pointing to the structure of Virgil's "Gallus" with its eight introductory lines balanced by eight concluding lines as a precedent for *Lycidas*. Greg offers a similar opinion, except that he suggests Spenser as Milton's model.

But such comments take note only of the form and structural purpose of the concluding lines, and do not explain other differences between this stanza and the lament itself. The reader is immediately aware of a change in point-of-view, as the poet, who has hitherto spoken directly in his own person, now refers to himself as the "uncouth swain" and comments objectively on his song:
Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th'Oaks and rills,
While the still morn went out with Sandals gray;
He touch't the tender stops of various Quills,
With eager thought warbling his Doric lay.

(11. 186-89)

And, as we can detect in these lines, even more striking is the change in the poet's mood. His initial unwillingness to undertake his task is now forgotten, as he tells us that "eager thought" has marked his singing.

We can attribute this mood of cheerful confidence, uncoloured by the emotional tension of the song proper, to a natural sense of satisfaction and relief at having finished successfully a task undertaken with reluctance. That such an emotional shift is peculiarly characteristic of Milton can be deduced from a discussion of the poet's pastoral monodies by Woodhouse, who notes that Lycidas, like all Milton's poems, is an exercise in aesthetic patterning, and, in common with most, although not all, of his early poetry, embodies elements from his extra-aesthetic experience. Woodhouse numbers Lycidas among Milton's poems that start from "an experience which poses a problem, demanding to be either resolved or transcended, and which generates an emotional tension requiring to be resolved." In the imposition of an aesthetic pattern on this experience, and its working out, the emotional tension is released. The fact that the poem offers only limited, or in some way unsatisfactory solutions to the problems it raises is not significant in terms of the effect of such patterning, for the act of creation--of defining, ordering and expressing his experience--brings its own release. As Woodhouse points out, the pastoral monody "becomes a vehicle for Milton's profoundest emotions and
an instrument, not indeed for solving, but for transcending his problems, and thus for achieving such a resolution of emotional tension as only poetry could effect (my italics).

Woodhouse's inference that Milton has transcended, rather than resolved, the problems that King's death forced him to confront, accords with my earlier argument that the lament proper in Lycidas is marked by elements of unresolved tension which indicate its mannerist character, and at the same time explains the mood of the closing stanza. It does not, however, give any indication as to why we are justified in considering the poem's conclusion mannerist.

This is determined by the self-preoccupation of the poet. In these final eight lines he is concerned only with himself and his creative act. He tells us that he has occupied the day from morning to evening with his writing. He acknowledges a debt to his Greek predecessor, and, by paraphrasing a line from Virgil's "Gallus," implies one to his Roman. He points to his future and the promise of new ventures that it holds: "Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new" (l. 193). This self-preoccupation of the concluding stanza gives the final mannerist stamp to Lycidas, reflecting as it does the self-conscious concern of the mannerist artist with the practical side of his own techniques and his strongly-felt need to justify his practices.
Footnotes


5 Woodhouse, p. 262.

6 Ibid., p. 263.


Chapter Ten

CONCLUSION

The student of Lycidas cannot fail to mark the differences in opinion which characterize scholarly discussion of Milton's elegy. That this is in some way attributable to the nature of the poem has been indicated by Roy Daniells, who describes as the "crowning achievement" of Lycidas "the enormously ramified complex of reactions, conscious and unconscious, which it provokes." Daniells notes that "These are not in the nature of sequences of ideas merely or numbers of identifiable references or rows of problems solved," but are rather "in the nature of innumerable conflicting forces."¹

One solution to the problems which such conflicting opinions create is to consider Lycidas as a mannerist work of art, for the criteria which define the work of a mannerist sensibility afford us a way of reconciling the many disparities in critical reaction. Mannerist criteria can reconcile two such disparate points of view as that of John Crowe Ransom, who describes Lycidas as "A Poem Nearly Anonymous" and that of E. M. W. Tillyard who describes the lament as "one of Milton's most personal poems."² It can accommodate Daniell's description of Lycidas as "the most effective lyric utterance in the English language"³ and Hanford's opinion that Lycidas "... is hardly lyric at all."⁴ G. Wilson Knight's statement that Lycidas is "an accumulation of magnificent fragments"⁵ need no longer be dismissed as the conclusion of an unsympathetic reader⁶ but can be acknowledged as an honest critical opinion.
founded in the poem's mannerist mode, and not incompatible with the opinion of Northrop Frye that the poem's unity exists within the mind of the poet, or that of Tillyard who sees the poem's unity resting in its unity of purpose. Hanford's insistence on Milton's indebtedness to the whole pastoral tradition can be seen as supporting, rather than undermining Don Cameron Allen's assertion that *Lycidas* is "so totally different from other elegies of the Renaissance and antiquity that were it not for the sheer externalities of the mode, such as the mourning of nature, the summoning of the deities and the accidental literary recollections . . . it would hardly seem to belong to the same artistic gender." To consider *Lycidas* as a mannerist poem does not explain away its many mysteries nor does it diminish the challenge that these mysteries offer the reader. But many of the poem's anomalies that conventional critical approaches either ignore or strain to elucidate can be reconciled if *Lycidas* is accepted as a mannerist work of art.
Footnotes

1 Roy Daniells, Milton, Mannerism and Baroque (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1963), p. 49.


3 Daniells, p. 49.


6 See Headnote 3, Introductory notes to Lycidas, in Complete Poems, ed. Hughes, p. 117.


**Sources Consulted**


