withdraws defeated, the angels hail the triumph of Christ, and bid him now begin his work of reconciling and redeeming mankind.

Some critics think the poem an inferior sequel to *Paradise Lost.* Others think that it is even better than its predecessor. It is a different kind of poem, and thus perhaps neither better nor worse.

*Samson Agonistes: Milton's Tragedy*

While *Paradise Lost* is written in the manner of Virgil's epic poem, the Aeneid, the story of the events leading up to the founding of the city of Rome, *Samson Agonistes* is written in the manner of the Greek tragedies. The story of Samson is found in the Book of Judges, 13-16. Milton's drama covers only the last few hours of Samson's life, when, after a lifetime of being undefeatable in battle and irresistible in strength, and a lifetime of misusing and wasting the powers that God had given him for the deliverance of his people from the Philistines, he has lost everything, and is a blinded captive and slave. In his captivity, he is visited by his father Manoah, by spokesmen for his tribe, by his wife Dalila (Delilah), and by a Philistine warrior Harapha. By his dialogue with each in turn he moves slowly from self-pity and despair to renewed trust that God has accepted his repentance and has work for him to do. Finally, acting in accordance with what he takes to be the will of God, he sacrifices his own life in destroying the chief oppressors of his people, and so achieves in death more than he had in life.

Some critics think this Milton's best work. Almost all are agreed that it is by far the best English tragedy ever written on the Greek model. No other work comes close.

## 1.3 Lycidas

*In this Monody the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637; and by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy, then in their height*

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.

Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear

Compels me to disturb your season due;

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.
Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring;
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
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!

For we were nurs'd upon the self-same hill,
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill;
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.
Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,
Temper'd to th'oaten flute;
Rough Satyrs danc'd, and Fauns with clov'n heel,
From the glad sound would not be absent long;
And old Damætas lov'd to hear our song.

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.

Where were ye, Nymphs, when the remorseless deep
Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
For neither were ye playing on the steep
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream.
Ay me! I fondly dream
'Had ye bin there'—for what could that have done?
What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,
The Muse herself, for her enchanting son,
Whom universal nature did lament,
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?

Alas! what boots it with incessant care
To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade,
And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
Were it not better done, as others use,
To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair?
Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
(That last infirmity of noble mind)

To scorn delights and live laborious days;
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life. "But not the praise,"
Phoebus replied, and touch'd my trembling ears;
"Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
Nor in the glistering 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."

O fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'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.

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.
"Ah! who hath reft," quoth he, "my dearest pledge?"
Last came, and last did go,
The Pilot of the Galilean lake;
Two massy keys he bore of metals twain
(The golden opes, the iron shuts amain).
He shook his mitred locks, and stern bespake:
"How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,
Enow 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.
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!
What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
And when they list their lean and flashy songs
Grate on their scrannel pipes of wretched straw,
The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed,
But, swoll'n with wind and the rank mist they draw,
Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread;
Besides what the grim wolf with privy paw
Daily devours apace, and nothing said,
But that two-handed engine at the door
Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more".

Return, Alpheus: the dread voice is past
That shrunk thy streams; return, Sicilian Muse,
And call the vales and bid them hither cast
Their bells and flow'rets of a thousand hues.
Ye valleys low, where the mild whispers use
Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
On whose fresh lap the swart star sparely looks,
Throw hither all your quaint enamel'd eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied showers
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted crow-toe, and pale jessamine,
The white pink, and the pansy freak'd with jet,
The glowing violet,
The musk-rose, and the well attir'd woodbine,
With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,
And every flower that sad embroidery wears;
Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,
And daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.
For so to interpose a little ease,
Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
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,

## 1.4 Glossary

The name "Lycidas" is fairly common in pastoral poetry (e.g., in Theocritus, *Idyl* I, Virgil, *Eclogues* VII and IX). The note under the title was added in *Poems*, 1645.

By plucking laurel, myrtle, and ivy, constituents of the poet's crowning, is symbolized Milton's return to the writing of verse (after the interval of four years since *Comus*); the reference to this enforced and premature action indicates Milton's unwillingness to write poetry at this time while still preparing himself for his *magnum opus*.

Lycidas. The name Lycidas is common in ancient Greek pastorals, establishing the style Milton imitates for this poem. William Collins Watterson notes that in Theocritus' pastoral, Lycdas loses a singing competition. Watterson asserts that Milton is aligning King with Lycidas in an attempt to portray himself as victorious over King. Virgil's ninth Eclogue is spoken in part by the shepherd Lycidas, a scene that includes, as Balachandra Rajan points out, a reference to social injustice. Lucan's Civil Wars 3.657-58 also tells he story of a Lycidas pulled to pieces during a sea battle by a grappling hook.

Height. The headnote – "In this Monody … height." – dis not appear in 1638 (Justa Edouardo King). This addition might be due to the less strict laws regarding published texts. The trinity MS has the headnote but without the final sentence. "And by occasion height." The clergy Milton refers to is the clergy of the English Church as ruled by William laud. Archbishop of Canterbury. A champion of traditional liturgy and the bane of reformist Puritans. Bishops fell out of power in 1642, between the two editions.

Friend. Edward King, a schoolmate of Melton's at Cambridge who drowned when his ship sank off the coast of Wales in August, 1637. King entered Christ's College in 1626 when he was 14 years old. Upon finishing his studies. King was made a Fellow of Christ's thanks to his patron King Charles I. The Trinity MS of Lycidas is dated Nov. 1637, three months after King's death.

Never-sear. Never withered. 1638 has "never-sere". Laurel was considered the emblem of Apollo, myrtle of Venus, and ivy of Bacchus.

crude : unripe.

shatter : scatter.

dear : grievous, but with overtones from other meanings of the word.

Milton treats Edward King as at once priest and poet. Like others with a humanistic education, King could, and on occasion did, write Latin verses.

welter: roll about.

meed: token of honour; tear: commonly used as a poetic synonym for elegy (as in Spenser's *Teares of the Muses*).

One of the haunts sacred to the Muses was the spring Aganippe on Mount Helicon, near which was a temple to Zeus.

my destin'd urn. The urn, used by the ancients for burial (cf. Sir Thomas Brown, *Urn Burial*), here stands for the poet's death.

Say, *Requiescat in pace*; shroud (burial cloth) here stands for the dead.

lawns: grass lands.

gray-fly: so called from its colour, and also the trumpet-cry from the noise it makes.

battening: making fat.

Though some inexactness in the description has been noticed, Milton probably intends the Evening Star (Hesperus).

Satyrs in Greek myth were human figures, but with pointed ears and clad in skins' beasts. By the Romans they were identified with their fauns and represented with goat's horn, tail, and cloven hoof (hence cloven heel). Here they stand for Milton and King's fellow students.

Damœtas: presumably standing for some fellow of the college.

gadding: wandering, that is, growing naturally, not subjected to control.

canker: canker-worm, which by feeding on it produces canker in the blossom.

taint-worm: a worm thought to taint or infect cattle.

white thorn: the common hawthorn.

An appeal to the nymphs was one of the conventions of pastoral elegy. The places named in Greek and Latin pastoral belonged to the ancient world and were selected with some reference to the subject. As is appropriate in *Eclogue* X, the lament for Gallus, a poet, Virgil appeals to the Naiads in association with places sacred to the Muses, and may suggest that by Naiads he really means the Muses. Milton appropriately substitutes British places in the vicinity of King's fatal journey; and by Nymphs he probably means the Muses, since he associates them with bards, and the Bards formed a division of the Druids, the priests of the Britons, while traditions accessible to Milton traced a connection between ancient Greek and ancient British religion and culture. His first allusion refers vaguely to some burial place of the Druids in the Welsh mountains (the steep); the second, and more specific, is to the island of Anglesey, which the Romans called Mona; the third is to the river Dee, marking the border of England and Wales and supposed to possess magic powers by which it predicted the fortunes of the hostile nations; over the Dee stood Chester, whence travellers took ship for Ireland.

Orpheus, the mythical originator of poetry and song, was reputed to be the son of the Muse Calliope, and gifted with the power of charming by his music all animate and inanimate things, which subsequently united in lamenting his death. After his final loss of his wife, Eurydice, he wandered through Thrace mourning for her, where he was encountered by the wild female worshippers of Bacchus. Enraged by his repelling of their advances, they hurled their spears at him, but these, charmed by his music, fell harmless to the ground, whereupon the women set up a loud cry, drowning the music, and the spears took effect. They cast the head of Orpheus and his lyre into the river Hebrus which bore them out to sea and cast them up on the island of Lesbos.

Amaryllis and Neaera are names which occur in erotic pastoral poetry. Milton is perhaps thinking of the amatory court poets of his own day.

clear: noble (Lat. *clarus*).

Alluding to the saying of Tacitus, *Histories*, IV, VI, that "for even the wise man the desire of glory is the last to be put aside."

Milton alludes to Atropos, the one of the three Fates who cut the thread of life. Thinking of her inexorable character and the fear she inspires, Milton deliberately calls her not a Fate, but a Fury.

Phoebus, god of poetry, intervenes with the counterstatement that praise is not ended by death. It can be shown from the Latin poets that touching the ear was a way of reminding one of something forgotten (Virgil, *Eclogue*, VI, 3 ); trembling here is a transferred epithet, signifying: "touch'd my ears, I trembling the while."

foil: a thin leaf of metal placed behind a gem to enhance its brightness.

True fame depends on merit in the sight of God and will be enjoyed in heaven. (Jove here stands for God, as often in Christian humanist poetry.)

Arethusa, the spring Arethusa, in the island of Ortygia, off the coast of Sicily, here symbolizes Greek pastoral poetry, and especially the Idyls of Theocritus, born in nearby Syracuse. Mincius, the river flowing roumd Mantua, claimed by Virgil as his birth, symbolizes Latin pastoral poetry, and especially the *Eclogues* of Virgil. The vocal reeds are the stems used for making the shepherd's pipes. The words of the preceding paragraph were of a higher order and transcended the pastoral mood, to which the poet returns, as suggested in *Now my oat* [another synonym for the shepherd's pipes] *proceeds*.

herald of the sea: Triton.

in Neptune's plea: that is, to exonerate Neptune (the sea) from blame for the death of Lycidas, by calling witnesses to the calm weather.

Hippotades: Aeolus, son of Hippotes and guardian of the winds.

Panope: one of the Nereids or sea-nymphs, who was associated with calm weather and invoked by Roman sailors.

An eclipse was proverbially of evil omen.

Camus, thought of as the genius of the Cam, and the representative here of Cambridge University, built on its banks. His appearance suggests the slow-flowing, weed-grown river. The *sanguine flower inscribed with woe* is the hyacinth as it is accounted for in the myth of Hyacinthus (Ovid, *Metamorphoses*, X, 174-217) accidentally slain while at play with Apollo: his blood fell on a lily, staining it purple, and on the petals the god wrote ai, ai (ahs, ahs). The implication is that the sedge of the Cam bears a like sign of woe.

pledge: child (Lat. *pignus*).

As a fisherman on the Sea of Galilee, and leader of the Disciples, St. Peter is here called the Pilot of the Galilean lake.

The starting point of these lines is Christ's words to St. Peter, "And I will give thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 16:19), read perhaps in the light of, ''he shall open, and none shall shut; and he shall shut, and none shall open" (Isaiah 22:22).

mitred, referring to the crown of the bishop, St. Peter being presented in the role of ideal bishop.

Commencing with an indictment of the clergy as entering the ministry from worldly motives and excluding those with a true vocation, Milton describes their neglect of their duties and the consequences to the flock. Lines 123-25 are usually explained as an allusion to their infrequent and valueless sermons

which do nothing to nourish the flock; but quite possibly it is a reference (couched in the language of shepherd life) to their neglect of their duty while they give themselves to song and other secular recreations.

sped: provided for.

flashy: destitute of meaning, trifling.

scrannel pipes. Virgil has the phrase *stridenti stipula* (*Eclogues*, III, 27). Milton's scrannel appears to be his invention, though possibly based on some dialect word meaning thin; its sound suits well with his verb *Grate*.

allude to the corrupting effect of the false doctrines taught them.

allude to conversions to the Roman Catholic Church (here symbolized by the wolf), at which, as the Puritans erroneously believed, Archbishop Laud connived.

This is the most disputed passage in Milton's poetry. It seems evident from the context that the two-handed engine is some heavy weapon, ready at the door of the sheepfold, to be used against the wolf. This must be the starting point for any interpretation of meaning.

Alpheus, a river god in Arcadia, pursued the nymph Arethusa (see above, lines 85-87 n.) and when she, to escape his pursuit, was transformed to a spring by Diana and passed beneath the sea to Ortygia, the river Alpheus followed her and reached the same island. Here the association with Arethusa makes Alpheus likewise a symbol for Sicily and pastoral poetry. To ensure that the meaning is not missed, Milton adds an invocation to the muse of pastoral verse, "Return Sicilian Muse."

use: are accustomed (to dwell ).

swart star: Sirius, the star whose rising in August was said to burn the fields swart or dark.

rathe: early.

freakt: spotted or streaked.

amaranthus: an imaginary everlasting flower.

laureate hearse. The hearse, or frame supporting the bier, here stands for the bier itself; laureate (by its association with the laurel of the poet's crown) signifies that the bier is a poet's.

stormy Hebrides: islands off the northwest coast of Scotland subject to Atlantic storms.

Reference is to the monsters of the deep.

moist vows: tearful prayers.

Bellerus old. Milton appears to have invented the person from *Bellerium*, the Roman name for Cornwall.

Milton appears to refer to a tradition that on St. Michael's Mount, a rock off the south coast of Cornwall, the archangel Michael, one of England's two patron saints, had been seen standing on guard against the traditional enemy Spain, here represented by the district of Namancos and the castle of Bayona.

Angel: i.e., St. Michael.

A reference either to the rescue of the poet Arion by a dolphin, which bore him safely ashore, or to Melicertes, whose body was brought to shore by a dolphin, and who was deified as the god of harbours (as Lycidas was to become "the Genius of the shore'" below line 183 ).

day-star: probably the sun.

ore: i.e., gold.

"And ... Jesus went unto them walking on the sea" (Matthew 14:25).

nectar: in classical mythology, the drink of the gods.

The saints may refer either to the blessed dead in heaven, and *entertain* mean receive into their company, or to the angelic host, and *entertain* mean receive as a guest. The unexpressive (i.e., inexpressible) nuptial song may refer either to the song of rejoicing of the former group (Revelation 14:1-4) or to that of the latter group (Revelation 19:6 7).

Genius of the shore. Among its various meanings in Latin, genius betokened a local deity or guardian spirit.

The song proper ends at 185, and is followed by this brief narrative passage. The uncouth swain is Milton in his guise of shepherd poet. The quills are the shepherd's pipe. Doric, the dialect used by Theocritus, hence denotes the simple language of pastoral poetry.

## 1.5 Notes

**Background and Text**. Lycidas first appeared in a 1638 collection of elegies entitled Justa Edouardo King Naufrago. This collection commemorated the death of Edward King, a collegemate of Milton's at Cambridge who drowned when his ship sank off the coast of Wales in August, 1637. Milton volunteered or was asked to make a contribution to the collection. The present edition follows the copy of Poems of Mr. Jhon Milton (1645) in the Rauner Collection at Dartmouth College Known as Hickmott 172. Milton made a few significant revision to Lycidas after 1638. These revisions are noted as they occur.

**Form and Structure** – The Structure of Lycidas remains somewhat mysterious. *J. Martin Evans* argues that there are two movements with six sections each that seem to mirror each other. Arthur Barker believes that the body of Lycidas is composed of three movements that run parallel in pattern. That is ,each movement begins with an invocation, then explores the conventions of the pastoral, and ends with a conclusion to Milton's "emotional problem" (quoted in Womack).

**Voice** Milton's epigram labels Lycidas a "monody": a lyrical lament for one voice. But the poem has several voices or personae. Including the "uncouth swain" (the main narrator who is "interrupted" first by Phoebus (Apollo), then Camus (the river Cam. And thus Cambridge University personified), and the "Pilot of the Galilean lake" (St. Peter). Finally, a second narrator appears for only the last eight lines to bring a conclusion in ottava rima ( see F.T. Prince). Before the second narrator enters, the poem contains the irregular rhyme and meter characteristic of the Italian canzone from. Canzone is essentially a polyphonic lyrical form, hence creating a serious conflict with the "monody." Milton may have meant "monody" in the sense that the poem should be regarded more as a story told completely by one person as opposed to a chorus. This person would presumably be the final narrator, who seemingly masks himself as the "uncouth swain." This concept of story-telling ties Lycidas closer to the genre of pastoral

elegy.

**Genre**. Lycidas is a pastoral elegy, a genre initiated by Theocritus, also put famous use by Virgil and Spenser. Christopher Kendrick asserts that one's reading of Lycidas would be improved by treating the poem anachronistically, that is, as if it was one of the most original pastoral elegies. Also, as already stated, it employees the irregular rhyme and meter of an Italian canzone. Stella Revard suggests arrangement in verse paragraphs and its introduction of various voices and personae are also features that anticipate epic structures. Like the form, structure, and voice of Lycidas, its genre is deeply complex. James Sitar.

**Monody**. A lyrical lament for one voice.

**Lycidas?** An echo of Vrigil; "Who would not sing for gallus? (Eclogue 10.5)

## 1.6 Critical Essays

### 1.6.1 'Lycidas' as a Pastoral Elgy

Lycidas is a pastoral elegy and, as John Bailey stresses, it out distances all previous English elegies almost as easily as Comus out instances all previous English masques. The word 'pastrol' is derived from the Greek word 'pastor' which means to "gaze". Hence pastoral poetry is a poetry which deals with the life and doings, loves, joys and sorrows of shepherds and shepherdesses and other humble dwellers of the country side. In a pastoral elegy the poet mourns the death of some friend or relative in the guise of a shepherd mourning the death of another shepherd. Theodritus, Bions, Moschus and virgil were the great writers of pastoral elegies among the ancients. Their pastorals are characterized by a rare freshness and first hand observation of Nature. They capture the real beauty and charm of rural life. With the Renaissance, the pastoral was widely practiced in Italy and other European countries, and from Europe the vogue of the pastoral reached England. Spenser and Sidney were the pioneers of this tradition in England. In their hands, the pastoral has much of the freshness of the early Greek masters, but in the hands of the imitators of Spenser and Sidney, pastoralism became a mere convention, something merely bookish and artificial.

In Lycidas, Milton has followed the pastoral tradition. It is a pastoral elegy. The very name 'Lycidas' is the conventional name for a shepherd and it frequently occurs in the pastoral elegies of Theocritus and Bions. The pastoral machinery has been made full use of by the poet. He speaks of himself as a shepherd and of Edward King as another shepherd both of whom were nursed together and who fed their flocks together :

For we were nursed upon the self-same hill,

Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade and rill :

Together both, ere the high lawns appeared

Under the opening eyelids of the Morn,

We drove a-field, and both together heard

What time the gray-fly winds her sultry horn,

Batterning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,

Oft till the star that rose at evening bright

Toward Heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel

Meanwhile the rural ditties were not mute,

Tempered to the oaten flute;

Rough Satyrs danced, and Fauns with cloven heel

From the glad sound would not be absent long;

And old Damoetas loved to hear our song.

Further, in the pastoral tradition there are charming descriptions of the idyllic beauty of the countryside. A thousand flowers bloom and beautify the landscape:

Bring the rathe primrose that forsaken dies,

The tufted crow-toe, and pale Jessamine,

The white pink, and the pansy freaked with jet,

The glowing violent,

The musk rose, and the well-attired woodbine,

With cowslips wan that hang the pensive head,

And every flower that sad embroidery wears;

Bid amaranthus all his beauty shed,

And daffodillies full their cups with tears,

To strew the laureate hearse where Lycid lies.

The passage is characterized by first hand observation and its freshness and charm are beyond question.

Again true to the convention of the pastoral elegy, Milton introduces a procession of mourners mourning the death of their beloved Lycidas. All Nature-the woods, the caves, the echoes-mourns the death of Lycidas. Triton, "the herald of the sea", Camus, 'reverend Sire', St. Peter, 'the Pilot of the Galilean Lake', are other mourners introduced by the poet. The introduction of St. Peter, also provides the poet with an occasion for a fierce invective against the corruption and degeneration of contemporary Church. Such denunciation is also a part of the usual machinery of the pastoral elegy. We find such denunciations in Spenser's Shepherd's Calender and in the elegies of a number of Italian poets.

The elegy ends according to accepted tradition on a note of hope and consolation. For Lycidas is not really dead, and "the woeful shepherds" should weep no more. Like the sun, he would rise out of the sea in which he has been drowned, and having reached in the blessed kingdom of Heaven would be entertained by all the saints. Or he would become the, "Genius of the shore", near which he was drowned:

Now, Lycidas, the shepherds weep no more;

Hence forth thou art the Genius of the shore,

In thy large recompense, and shalt be good

To all that wander in that perilous flood.

In short, Milton in Lycidas has followed the pastoral tradition in its entirety. It is a pastoral dedicated to the purposes of elegy and lament. Milton might have owed much to the pastorals of Spenser and other writers, but by his lament he revived and enriched the pastoral tradition. A number of modern works have bee inspired by Milton's elegy. The authors of Adonais and Thyrsis "fed on the self-same hill" as the author of Lycidas; they too revive echoes of the Sicilian shepherd-music; and apart from such general similarities as we should expect where writers have chosen the same vehicle of expression, each has at least one point of contact with Milton. Thysis, like Lycidas, presents an idealized picture of university-life, and perhaps of sincerity and true feeling begotten of love for the scenes described, the advantage rests with Arnold. In Adonais, Shelley's invective against the enemies of Keats recalls Milton's onslaught on the church; a subsidiary theme has kindled the fire of personal feeling in each poem, and neither can be regarded as the consecration of perfect friendship. – (Verity).

### 1.6.2 Nature of Grief in 'Lycidas' – Edward King as the Nominal Subject

As regards the charge of artificiality, it is mistake to suppose that Lycidas in an expression of intense personal grief on the death of a close friend. Milton and Edward king were never very intimate friends, and Milton was not deeply grieved at King's death. Says John Bailey in this connection, "Milton had liked and respected him, no doubt, but had certainly not been so intimate with him as with young Charles Diodati who died almost exactly a year later, and was lamented by his great friend in the Epitaphium Damonis which is the finest of the Latin poems. Those who read Latin will enjoy its close parallelism with Lycidas and its touches of a still closer bond of affection and its expression of intense personal sorrow. But if the death of Diodate aroused the deeper sorrow in Milton, that of King produced unquestionably the greater poem. It is a common mistake to think that to write a great elegy, a man must have suffered a great sorrow. That is not the case. The poet's real subject is not the death of king; it is the death of all who have been or will be loved in all the world, and the sorrow of all the survivors, the tragic destiny of youth and hope and fame, the doom of frailly and transience which has been eternally pronounced on so many of the fairest gifts of nature and all the noblest works of man. The death of Lycidas is not merely a personal loss, it is a loss to the university and to religion.

As both Dr. Tillyard and Cazamian agree, Edward King is not the real, but merely the nominal subject of Lycidas. "Fundamentally "Lycidas" concerns Milton himself. King is but the excuse for one of Milton's most personal poems." It does contain deep feeling, but the deep feeling is not about king, but about his own possible fate. A brief critical review of the poem would fully bring out the truth of the assertion that Milton and not king is the real subject of the Elegy.

### 1.6.3 The Autobiographical Element

Lycidas can fittingly be divided into six parts – the introduction, the Epilogue and four main sections. The introduction, lines 1-25, does not concern Lycidas at all, but is concerned with Milton's own reluctance to write a poem before his powers have matured. But he must write, for Lycidas died prematurely and for a premature death he must be willing to risk premature poetry. Moreover, if he writers an elegy for Lycidas, some other poet may honour him, when he dies, with an elegy :

So may soon gentle Muse

With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn,

And as he passes turn,

And bid fair peace be to my sable shrowd,

For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,

Fed the some flock, by fountain, shade, and vill.

Why should Milton think of the possibility of his own death, even though at the time he was young and in the fullness of health? As **Dr. Tillyard** points out for one thing during the years 1636-37, plague was bad in England and many people had died of it in Horton itself. Naturally, Milton's thoughts turn to the possibility of his own death. Secondly, when Milton wrote *Lycidas* in 1637 he was twenty-nine years of age, and early in the next year he set out for Italy with perhaps the intention of going on to Greece. The last line of the poem,

*To morrow to fresh Wood, and pasture new,*

might well refers to this intended journey. "Anyhow at the time of writing Lycidas Milton must have had the Italian and possibly the Greek journey in is mind. When he heard of King's death, and still more when by consenting to write the elegy he had to make his mind dwell on it, he could not but have felt the analogy between King and himself. Milton and King had been at the same college in the same University. Their careers and interests had been similar there. Milton was a poet, King had written verse too. King had made a voyage on the sea, Milton was about to make voyages. How could Milton have missed the idea that he might make the analogy complete by getting drowned, like King, also ? At a time when, through plagues and what no, life was fless secure than in modern times of peace, Milton, having sacrificed so much to his great ambition, must anyhow, at the time of preparation drew to an end, have dwelt on the thought that it might be all for nothing. Not that he was a coward : but the fear that his ambitions might be ruined at the last moment must have been at times difficult to endure."

*The first main section*, beginning 'Together both, ere the high Lawns appear 'd', consists of line 25 to 84. It contains a lament for the death of Lycidas, regret that the muse could not protect her son, and leads up to the first great cause of pain in Milton's own mind : the risk of dealth before his great work is completed. What has been the use of all his laborious preparation,his careful chastity (for doubtless he means this by his reference to Amaryllis and Neaera), if fame, for whose sake he has denied himself, is to escape him, anticipated by death ? Earthly fame, he replies to himself in the person of Phoebus, has nothing to do with heavenly fame : it depends on deeds, not on what those deeds effect. "So he argues, but one does not get the impression of emotional conviction yet: the final impression of the first section is that it would be a cruel shame and a wicked waste, if he were to die. It should be noted with what consummate skill Milton in this section works the subject from King to its climax in himself."- **(Tillyard)**

In the second main section, lines 85 to 131, beginning. '*O Fountain Arethuse'*, he does the same thing. In the elegiac tradition various mourners come to visit the dead body of Edward King. It is perfectly natural that St. Peter should come to visit a priest, and equally natural that he should proceed from lamenting the death of a good priest to denouncing the bad. "but this denunciation reveals

the second great cause of mental pain in Milton : his quarrel with contemporary England, typified the rottenness of the clergy. *Thus St. Peter's outburst is not an irrelevant digression but strictly parallet with Milton earlier outburst about the blind Fury.* One can even see a close connection of ideas between the two grievances. One grievance is that 'the hungry sheep look up and are not fed'; England has bad or useless teachers: the other is that he, Milton, whose ambition was to teach by writing a great epic, to feed the hungry sheep of England, may easily be cut off before it can be realized. It skould be noted, too, that the second grievance, like the first, is answered at the end of the second movement. Punishment is waiting; the two-handed engine stands ready to smite. But even less than at the end of the first section has mental calm been attained. The end of the second section marks the climax of the poem. Milton has stated his quarrel with Life: we await the conclusion." – **(Tillyard**).

*The third section*, lines 132 to 164, beginning *Return 'Alpheus'* forms a kind of transition to the final note of hope and consolation. "Some quieter interlude is cearly necessary between St. Peter's bitter outburst and the heavenly triumph of the final movement. The sudden change from the terror of the two-handed engine to the incredible beauty of the description of the flowers contains and implication that somehow the 'dorique delicay', of which the description of the flowers is the highest example in Milton, is not irreconcilable with the sterner mood, and hence is able to insinuate some comfort. So too from the dallying with a false surmise, the escape into a region of pure romance,

*Where the great vision of the Guarded Mount*

*Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold,*

Some comfort is allowed." – **(Tillyard)** these sources of minor comfort, lead up to the greater comfort at the end.

*The fourth section* describes the resurrection of Lycidas and his entry into heaven "More truly it solves the whole poem by describing the resurrection into a new kind of life of Milton's hopes, should they be ruined by premature death or by the moral collapses of his country. The loss or possible loss of human fame is made good by fame in heaven; the corrupt clergy are balanced by,

*All the saints above*

*In solemn troops and sweet Societies,*

and the harsh forebodings of Peter, "the pilot of the Galilean lake", are forgotten,

*Through the dear might of him who walk'd the waves*

But above all the fourth section describes the renunciation of earthly fame, the abnegation of self by the great egotist, and the spiritual purgation of gaining one's life after losing it. As **Dr. Tillyard** *stresses, "death or the fear of death is not the whole subject of the elegy. The real subject is the resolving of those fears (and of his bitter scorn of the clergy) into an exalted state of mental calm.* The apotheosis of Lycidas in the penultimate paragraph has a deeper meaning: It symbolizes Milton's own balanced state of mind to which he won after the strength of *Lycidas* and the reason why it is a greater poem than C*omus* : in the one calm after struggle, in the other calm of a kind but without the preliminary struggle. It the above idea is accepted, it is possible to see in *Lycidas* a unity of purpose which cannot be seen in it if the death of King is taken as the real subject of the poem. In particular the less elegiac significance of the whole."

In *the Epilogue* consisting of the last eight lines of the poem, Milton "speaks directly, criticizes

what he has just written in his imaginary character, and intimate that he has stepped out of that character, and is about to turn to other occupations. Still the close is ideal, and studied from other pastoral poems:"

*To- marrow to fresh woods and pastures new*

*As pointed out above, this might be a hint of Milton's intended voyage* to Italy and Greece.

### 1.6.4 Lycidas as a Work of Art-Diction and Versification

As a work of art, *Lycidas*, in spite of the disparagement of Johnson, who was offended by its pastoralism, has received almost universal praise. **Mark Pattison** says that it is the high-water mark of English poetry and its full enjoyment a final fruit of consummate scholarship. '*Lycidas'* is the finest of the early poems of Milton and so it illustrates some of the best features of his early poetry as well as gives an indication of Milton's maturer style, the style of the great epics. According to **Legouis** and **Cazamain**, it is, "*an example of supreme perfection of stle, imagery and versification*." Milton is learning's revealed at every step and the elegy is heavy with a host of allusions, both classical and Biblical. For example there are references to '*the seat of Jove' 'Sister of the sacred well' and, 'rough Satyres and Founs',* Milton alludes to the 'nuptial song' at the marriage of the Lamb as given in 'Revelation'. References to 'the stormy Hebrides', Alpheus, and 'fountain Arethuse' all reflect the learning of the poet.

Milton has a rich evocative imagination and with the help of melody and magic of words he can make things vivid and appealing. He makes skilful use of poetic devices like alliteration, personification, similes and metaphors. Alliteration can be noted in expression like, '*Swart star sparly looks' and 'flames in the forehead'*, The Cowslips are personified and described as flowers drooping their heads in a pensive mood. A living pictorial image is to be noted in the lines:

*The air was calm and on the level brine*

*Sleek Penope with all her sister played,*

Lycidas being a pastoral poem provides Milton enough scope for the use of evocative images. The poem presents throughout a number of images of water. Cambridge is represented by the river Camus. St. Peter is the 'Pilot of the Galilean lake'; Christ is one who walked the waves. The apt use of sonorous prope names not only imparts music and melody but also dignity and stateliness to the style as in the following ;

*Looks towards Namancos and Bayona's hold*

*Latin construction and words in their origin Latin sense are frequently* used and this imparts epigrammatic terseness, brevity and density to Milton's diction. A number of fine memorable paspages are scattered all up and down the poem, as, for example,

*(1) Without the meed of some melodious tear.*

*(2) Ready to smite once, and smite no more.*

*(3) Tomarrow to fresh woods and pastures new.*

The style is skillfully varied in keeping with the requirements of thought and emotion. It has a poetical ness of manner that fits its pastrol mode, but it is also bitingly satiric, especially in stanzas where

the poet criticizes the contemporary clergy. It is passionately exultant. The style varies with the variety of poem's themes and the poet's moods. The harshly satiric St. Peter passage, the lyrical flower passage, the tragic vision of the drowned man in the sea, the severely assured close, are all skillfully varied in style and all together make up a varied and dramatic pattern. The style varies, rises and falls, in accordance with the fluctuations in Milton's moods.

As regards the versification of *Lycidas*, we can do no better than quote the views of **Hendord**; "*Meterically Lycidas* is a combination of regularity and freedom. The verse is prevailingly iambic pentameter varied occasionally by the introduction of three-foot lines. The rhyme varies from the couplet from to intricate stanzaic arrangements, with a sprinkling of unrymed lines. The poem closes with a stanza in *ottava rima*. In general Milton's formal models here are to be found in the metrical practice of contemporary Italian poetry. A more essential feature than the rhymescheme, however, is Milton's handling of the metrical pauses and his tendency to prolong his cadence through a succession of lines in what **Masson** calls a series of free rhythmic paragraphs. It is in Lycidas that Milton's verse first takes on the characteristic qualities of rich and sonorous harmony for which we have no other word than Miltonic."

## 1.7 Let us Sum Up

In this unit we have tried to gloss the poem Lycidas for you with copious notes, annotations and explanation of the devices used in the poem.

We have also tried to briefly sum up Milton's life and works so that you are able to assess the writer as a whole.

## 1.8 Review Questions

1. Write an essay on 'Lycidas' as a pastoral clegy.
2. Comment on the versification of Milton with reference to Lycidas.

## 1.9 Bibliography


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