THE USE OF THE PASTORAL IN FOUR EARLY POEMS BY MILTON

Charles Baumgarten

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PREFACE

M.Y. Hughes' edition of Milton's poems has been used. Line references have not been given for short poems.

ABSTRACT

This essay is a study in the use of the pastoral in four early poems by Milton. Because of a long and ever-changing history, the genre of pastoral poetry is not strictly definable. It nonetheless structures expressions cast in its form in a particular way. A rough impression is taken of the genre and the major changes the form underwent is described. Milton's use of some elements of the pastoral in a poem not of that genre, the "Nativity Ode", is analysed to show how these elements are operative and make possible the final statement of the poem. With the same intent, the use of the pastoral in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" is analysed. Finally, it is shown how Milton's synthesis of the form readapts it to create the poetic pamphlet of the Roundheads --- "Lycidas".

CONTENTS

THE PASTORAL TRADITION

Like the typical Renaissance man, Milton borrowed from other authors whenever it suited his purpose. For this reason it would be a great injustice to look at his poems as they stand by themselves. His poetry depends largely on history. It stands on its own, but loses the rich and varied textures woven into it if not seen against and in conjunction with its various backgrounds. "Lycidas" by itself is a great poem and has the power to move even on first reading; but read for the first time and out of context, lacks subtlety. Seen in context, we perceive various attitudes and personas, become involved in various levels of irony, see satire at work, and see the multiplicity of the poet's experience. An important premise for approaching Milton, and one which cannot be overstressed, is that he is fully conscious of all the makings of his poems.

This is especially true for looking at Milton's use of the pastoral. Since rhetorical strategies depend largely on the nature of the audience, and since any poetic form can be interpreted as such a strategy, we must first ask who Milton's audience was to see why the pastoral attack was used. Milton was an academician and wrote for them, in his early poems at least. With such an audience, it is necessary

to evaluate and debate. Philosophic systems, cosmological orders, and social views are held up for close scrutiny. What is implicit in other poetic formulations is made explicit. It is a poetry that is premised on knowledge and extreme intellectual consciousness. Now as the Stuart reign progressed and convictions and attitudes began to polarize around political, economic, and religious issues, culminating finally in the Civil War, those academicians who did not pay obeisance to the Cavalier cause but still wanted to write, found the nature of their audience changing and lost much sympathy. Forced by the necessity of survival into the political arena by all the issues coming to a head, poets like Milton had to pledge their allegiance to the Roundheads. Frustrated in their desires to enter the power hierarchies of church and state, their art became more propagandistic, more didactic in tone, more willing and open to challenge the existing systems. These considerations can be seen operating in "Lycidas". More significant historically for art, was the development of the pamphlet as a weapon and concomitant with this, the development of prose through the endless Puritan tracts culminated by Bunyan in The Pilgrim's Progress.

The testament of "Lycidas" however, shows that the ancient and revered forms were not thrown away quickly or easily. They had great and recognized values as weapons. They were spears that could pierce where a battering ram

would not dent. If not sympathy, "Lycidas" would at least attract attention in the very circles it attacks. Significantly, this was Milton's last important poem in English before he turned to frontal attack in the pamphlets.

"Lycidas" can be taken as the last poem of Milton's youth. By the time of its writing, 1637, he had already been "church-outed by the prelates". His desired career cut off to him, Milton retired from Cambridge to a life of contemplation at Horton, his father's country estate. It was in this setting of the quiet English countryside that Milton composed the greatest pastoral elegy in the English language.

Edward King, poet of minor repute and fellow student of Milton, had not been "church-outed". On his way to Ireland his ship capsised and he was drowned. A group of his college friends wanted to commemorate his loss by the conventional volume of elegies. In 1638 the book was published with "Lycidas" as the concluding piece. The context of the poem was probably the main determining force behind Milton's choice of the pastoral mode. Besides, how else would it be possible to elegize King and still incorporate all he wanted to say in the poem? The pastoral genre offered Milton the possibility to go beyond the bounds of simple eulogy. As we shall see, the pastoral had become a superlative vehicle for the conveying of a multiplicity of messages.

It had achieved this quality simply because of its longevity. By the time Milton wrote, the tradition was almost two

thousand years old. Any artistic form blossoms or wilts according to its uses and adaptability. The duration of the pastoral's stay testifies how successful it was in meeting both these conditions. To be sure, it suffered a series of growths and degenerations and by the time Milton picked it up was on its way to its final depletion as a viable form. But Milton picked it up, took what was best, and created "Lycidas".

He was able to do this because of the view he had of the tradition. Milton's historical perspective is vast. It is safe to assume that he spent his years at Horton, and those previous at Cambridge, in developing it. He studied the modalities of the Greek and Latin tongues and thoughts, saw them remolded by the Medieval Christian Latinists, the early Renaissance humanists, and finally by people closer to his time. He saw the changes the pastoral form underwent and understood them. Many of his early poems use the convention in various ways and as he ripened as a poet, his use of the genre became more sophisticated and complex. By the time of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" we see him in full mastery of the pastoral technique which bears final fruition in "Lycidas". We will look at some of Milton's uses of the form. This will provide a key to the development of Milton as a poet generally and to how he taught himself to express ideas that are ultimately inexpressible: in other words, how he learned the trick of art. First however, we must look more closely at what Milton studied closely to paint in the

historical perspective and those aspects of pastoral that Milton found most useful such as the Golden Age, otium, and the function of song.

It should be made clear at the outset that there will be no attempt to define in explicit terms what pastoral poetry is. Such a definition is impossible.

> It cannot be too emphatically laid dowm that there is and can be no such thing as a "theory" of pastoral, or, indeed, of any other artistic form dependent, like it, upon what are merely accidental conditions. As I started by pointing out at the beginning of this work, pastoral is not capable of definition by reference to any essential quality; whence it follows that any theory of pastoral is not a theory of pastoral as it exists, but as the critic imagines it ought to exist.[1]

The reason for this is that the pastoral form had undergone too many radical changes for it to be neatly labelled as one thing. We will look, then, at several seminal examples of the form through its history and abstract from them descriptions of some of the elements that had come to be implied by the use of the pastoral when Milton took it up.

It would be best to begin by asserting the artificiality of the pastoral as a form. Even if we subscribe to the theory that Theocritus, (born ca. 315 B.C.), the originator of the form, was merely copying what he heard on the hills of Greece, his adoption of the shepherds' songs for his own purposes, and in the process, conscious or not, of formalizing them, implies their use as artifacts. For Theocritus was no shepherd and had no commerce with them. He was an academician, a poet, and wrote for his peers and patrons.

This at once sets up a tension that is inherent in all pastoral poetry.

> What does appear to be a constant element in the pastoral known to literature is the recognition of a contrast, implicit or expressed, between pastoral life and some more complex type of civilization. ... As a result of this contrast there arises an idea which comes perhaps as near being universal in pastoral as any --- the idea, namely, of the "golden age."[2]

The Golden Age, a time of bliss and harmony on earth, a time when the world's bounty supplied man with all he needed to live, presupposes a certain disposition on the part of the gods, or God, to man. Men were seen as the gods' children and as such were indulged. But with the theft of fire, or with the eating of the forbidden fruit, all this changed. Man now had to work to live and had to suffer pain. Society appeared, and with it, all the defects of civilized man.

But in the artificial world of the Golden Age that the pastoral assumes, these defects have no place. The Golden Age creates otium.

> Otium is a key word in the discussion of the pastoral.
>
> It is vacation, freedom, escape from pressing business, particularly a business with overtones of death. Within the pastoral, otium is two things; it is the condition under which the herdsmen operate, the social and psychological characteristics of their world; but it is also a function of the ethos of the poem, the dramatic realities within it. ...it is important to recognize that the otium of pastoral poetry is not, as is sometimes averred, an escapist mechanism, motivated by a generally pessimistic view about the real world.[3]

It is not escapist because of the function that otium serves. Only in this condition, it will be shown, is harmony with

nature, through song, possible.

Theocritus, though he recognises the distinction between the country and the city, is primarily concerned with his rhapsodising. This we can see in "Idyll IV: The Herdsmen". Battos and Korydon, two herdsmen, discuss in dialogue the fate of the herd Korydon is looking after. For it is not his herd; he is only tending it for Aigon who has gone to the city to take part in the wrestling matches.

> Battos. Alackaday, poor Aigon! your very kine will go
> To Hades, while you are thus in love with
> a luckless victory;
> And mildewed is the pipe which once you
> fashioned for yourself.
> Korydon. Not his pipe, by the Nymphs, not so; for
> when he went to Pisa,
> He left it me to keep; ... [4]

We should note the same idea occurring in the attack on the clergy in "Lycidas", but what is primarily of concern here is the lament for Aigon's having left the countryside in search of the lucre of the city and his having to leave his pipe, or song, behind as a consequence. He rejects the _otium_ of the shepherds' lot. This stipulates an attitude to poetry that is a constant motif in the pastoral tradition --- only the shepherd sings, and if he leaves his sheep, he must leave his pipe behind for him who will guard the flock. What is important for Theocritus is the song itself, and it is the act of singing around which his idylls revolve. His poems are self-contained in that they do not depend for existence on outside phenomena.

This was one of the controlling points in the early

pastorals but was one of the first to change. It has strengths and weaknesses, and what the later writers tried to do was incorporate the strengths into their adaptations of the form.

> Because pastoral sets up its own universe, which has no overt points of contact with the universe analyzed by anatomy and the confessional lyric, it is invulnerable to attack. The freedom of the pastoral swain is not functionally related to the political and social freedoms that have formed the centres of speculation in the past several centuries.[5]

So Theocritus could write encomiums of song without having to defend himself. He extols their virtues as a cathartic instrument as in "Idyll XI: The Cyclops".

> There is no other medicine, Nikias, against love,
> Neither by way of ointment nor of plaster, take my word,
> Save the Pierian Muses. A gentle remedy
> And sweet is that for men to use, yet very hard to find.

Polyphemus' song of his lost love is then recounted and the reader is left with this appraisal:

> Well, thus it was that Polyphemus shepherded his love
> With song, and found ease better so than if he had spent gold.

In the pastoral setting, song is the controlling element and by extension, it is the shepherd or singer to whom all things must pay obeisance. We must realize, however, certain limitations to his songs.

> The pastoral herdsmen, we conclude, are, if not children, at least protected by the same patterns that make the child's world familiar and pleasurable. The shepherd's range of understanding and reasoning is limited, but the limitation has its advantages; for ... the herdsman discovers all manners of realities, including some not commonly recognized, though he fails to become fully aware

> of their connection , or of the implications that may be drawn from them.[6]

The shepherd sings with no recognition of the fact of his isolation for his world is complete and perfect, not affected by the cares of civilized man. Such touches, it will be seen, can be added by the author to produce irony, but the pastoral song itself

> ... does not body forth a view of the world, except by accident and implication. It presents a picture of human intercouse that has philosophical analogues ... But it does not attempt to place man in his environment in conformity to a metaphysical or ideological scheme. This is to the advantage of the pastoral, for it escapes the need to confront what romantics discovered to be the chief difficulty, how man could be conceived both as a product of nature and as an autonomous being.[7]

Thus, because of certain limitations, the pastoral swain is allowed a freedom of action otherwise not possible. He is enabled to enter into a direct communion with nature and by his singing can even control it. This is not to say that his control is functional in that it literally does his bidding. The control is of a passive sort and what it allows is a harmonious relation with nature. The form this often takes has come to be called the "pathetic fallacy". It would be wrong to dismiss this figure lightly as a fanciful excursion, for underlying it is a key assumption of pastoral poetry. The shepherd, living harmoniously in the world, comes to embody nature, or, more correctly perhaps, (though not necessarily in terms of how a poet structures a poem), is embodied by nature. So when a shepherd dies, a part of nature dies with him, both literally from

an anatomical point of view, and figuratively in that he is a child of nature. We see this idea operating in a different context in Paradise Lost. In the state of innocence, Adam and Eve are children and parts of nature. But by eating the fruit, they sever this tie and nature reacts as though she lost a child, which of course she has.

> Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
> Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,
> That all was lost. Paradise Lost IX, 782-784

In the world of Arcadia, it is song that ties man to nature and what is lamentable is the loss of song. This occurs by the shepherd not living up to his obligation like Aigon, or by the shepherd dying.

It is the death of a shepherd, Daphnis, that is the subject of Theocritus' "Idyll I: Thyrsis", a poem that a multitude of poets, Milton included, have drawn on. It is, in short, the begetter of the pastoral elegy as a tradition. In it, Thyrsis elegizes Daphnis' death at the request of a goatherd. He begins his song with an invocation to the Muses, the patronesses of song, and this invocation, with slight variations, acts as a refrain as well.

> Lead now, I pray, dear Muses, lead you the pastoral song.
> Thyrsis am I of Etna; and sweet is the voice of Thyrsis.

The self-congratulatory line shows it is not out of place for him to sing as, having a good voice, he is in harmony with nature and so the Muses can visit him, being one of their company. He sings of Daphnis, who once in love,

vainly boasted that he would never fall in love again, and when smitten by Aphrodite with love for another Nymph, pined to death rather than succumb to his new love. The elegy starts with a question that Milton uses in "Lycidas" as well.

> Where were ye then, while Daphnis pined away, where were ye, Nymphs?
> Haunting Peneois' lovely valleys, or the glens of Pindos?
> For not by the great river of Anapos were ye dwelling,
> Nor upon Etna's heights, nor yet by Akis' holy stream.

The Nymphs were not by him because his death was unnecessary, even arbitrary. It was a denial of his union with nature. Nonetheless, all of nature mourns his passing. A procession of animals, men, and gods visit him on his deathbed and try to pursuade him to join them again. But in vain. He is determined to sever the tie. Even so, he does not want his music to die and invokes Pan to come to him.

> Come, lord, and take this shapely pipe, fragrant with honeyed breath
> From the sweet wax that joins it, curved to fit the lip so well.

He gives back to Pan, personifying nature, the symbol of their bond, and then asks nature to commemorate his passing by perverting her normal course.

> Bear violets henceforth, ye brambles, and ye thistles too,
> And upon boughs of juniper let fair narcissus bloom;
> Let all things be confounded; let the pine-tree put forth figs,
> Since Daphnis lies dying! Let the stag tear the hounds,
> And screech-owls from the hills contend in song with nightingales.

His final words thus invoke the pathetic fallacy. And Thyrsis' lament for Daphnis ends on a note made familiar by "Lycidas".

> ... but no more thread for the Fates to spin
> Was left him: down to the stream went Daphnis:
> eddying waves closed o'er
> The man loved by the Muses, whom every Nymph
> held dear.

The lament is not for Daphnis as a being, but for the passing of Daphnis as a carrier of song. He takes with him the symbol of the perfection of the green world. This crucial loss to Arcady is mourned at a crucial time.

> And the time of day chosen as the hour when otium could best be realized is noon. ... At noon the heat becomes unbearable and shade becomes a necessity of life; the intersection of morning and evening is a kind of death, which paralyzes nature and imperils its resurgence.[8]

It is at this time that the shepherds sing. The song can even be considered as helping nature get over this time of danger by the process of sympathetic magic. As such, it becomes a regenerative force. The time of day of the song becomes of less importance as the pastoral moves further and further from the actual life of shepherds. But the pastoral song is still only possible in a condition of otium. By retreat into the artificial world of otium, by ignoring the bonds of men, the poet cuts through the temporal sphere and achieves the stasis of the pastoral condition.

The achievement of this situation early became a dominant motif of the pastoral as it is implied by the idea of the Golden Age. After Theocritus, the isolation of the green

world became a formal poise; it was still a condition that had to be met for the poet to be able to unite fully with nature, but the terms of withdrawl could no longer be simply the shepherds singing their songs. As the pastoral developed, its contexts became larger too. In Virgil, the shepherd is seen against the background of social and political activity; in the Middle Ages, the Christian dimension was added. With these developments, the interpretation of otium changed as well. But it still remained the "functional ethos" of pastoral poetry. In "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso", for example, Milton uses two conceptions of otium in a way that forces the reader to draw a certain conclusion.

In his first eclogue, Virgil masks himself as one of the characters in the dialogue. Both had been dispossessed of their lands, but through the good graces of a god, (Augustus), Tityrus, (Virgil), was given back his estate. What Virgil does in the poem is to contrast the state of otium with that of labour and pain. Meliboeus complains:

> No more, my goats, shall I behold you climb
> The steepy cliffs, or crop the flow'ry thyme!
> No more, extended in the grot below,
> Shall see you browsing on the mountain's brow
> The prickly shrubs; and after, on the bare,
> Lean down the deep abyss, and hang in air.
> No more my sheep shall sip the morning dew;
> No more my song shall please the rural crew:
> Adieu, my tuneful pipe! and all the world,
> adieu! (104-112)[9]

Tityrus explains his happy lot thus:

> These blessings, friend, a deity bestow'd;
> For never can I deem him less than god.
> The tender firstlings of my wooly breed
> Shall on his holy altar often bleed.
> He gave my kine to graze the flow'ry plain,

> And to my pipe renew'd the rural strain. (7-12)

The comparison is founded in terms of song. Song, direct communion with the universe, is impossible unaccompanied by otium. But what is significant is that for Virgil this comes to be applied by forces that operate outside the green world, though they influence it and even determine the conditions that make the green world possible.

For Virgil, the recreation of the perfect is accomplished through the agency of social and political activity. Unlike the Theocritean shepherd, Virgil's singers do not create new worlds with their songs; what they do is eulogize the existing world or the possibility of the creation of a perfect age. They are not people who have withdrawn from the cares of the world; they seek to enter the world to change it. His fourth eclogue is an encomium to the birth of a son to Pollio, a Roman consul. The poem is quoted at length because of its importance in the development of the tradition. The poem came to be seen as a prophesy of the coming of Christ and themes and ideas first broached in it became integral to the pastoral mode, especially as developed by Milton.

> Sicilian Muse, begin a loftier strain!
> Tho' lowly shrubs, and trees that shade the plain,
> Delight not all; Sicilian Muse, prepare
> To make the vocal woods deserve a consul's care.
> The last great age, foretold by sacred rhymes,
> Renews its finish'd course: Saturnian times
> Roll round again: and mighty years, begun
> From their first orb, in radiant circles run.
> The base degenerate iron offspring ends;
> A golden progeny from heav'n descends. (1-10)
> .....

> The lovely boy, with his auspicious face,
> Shall Pollio's consulship and triumph grace;
> Majestic months set out with him to their
> appointed race.
> The father banish'd virtue shall restore,
> And crimes shall threat the guilty world no more.
> The son shall live the life of gods, and be
> By gods and heroes seen, and gods and heroes see.
> The jarring nations he in peace shall bind,
> And with paternal virtues rule mankind.
> Unbidden earth shall wreathing ivy bring,
> And fragrant herbs (the promises of spring),
> As her first off'rings to her infant king. (13-34)
> .....
> His cradle shall with rising flow'rs be crown'd:
> The serpent's brood shall die; the sacred ground
> Shall weeds and pois'nous plants refuse to bear;
> Each common bush shall Syrian roses wear. (27-30)
> .....
> Yet of old fraud some footsteps shall remain:
> The merchants still shall plow the deep for gain;
> Great cities shall with walls be compass'd round,
> And sharpen'd shares shall vex the fruitful ground;
> Another Tiphys shall new seas explore;
> Another Argo land the chiefs upon th'Iberian shore;
> Another Helen other wars create,
> And great Achilles urge the Trojan fate.
> But when to ripen'd manhood he shall grow,
> The greedy sailor shall the seas forgo;
> No keel shall cut the waves for foreign ware,
> For every soil shall every product bear. (37-48)

What we see in this poem is the full-blown otium that is the Golden Age. But as was noted in Theocritus, the idea of otium and its extension into the Golden Age is still not an escapist mechanism. "In Virgil's dream, the Golden Age is no escapist haven where men live apart but a union of mortal and immortal, of pastoral and power, achieved and maintained by virtus and set in an ideal landscape."[10] The key word is virtus --- social virtue and responsibility. More important however, we see that Virgil has changed the entire drift of pastoral poetry in a fundamental way. The

new direction that pastoral takes stems from the fact that Virgil writes from a social base. What this does is to give his poems a temporal context within their own structures. The pastoral no longer exists in a vacuum of time and space and must now always be seen in relation to the real world.

> A consul stands for two things unknown in the bucolic retreat, power and time. He is an emblem for the state and its works, the vita activa, the progress of civilization in peace and war. This dilemma can be restated as a double question: Can Virgil liberalize the pastoral world sufficiently to embrace such a creature as a consul within its exclusive, idealized frontiers? Can a pattern of politics and culture, subject to change and development, be evolved which could conform to a traditionally static vision?[11]

These, of course, are questions crucial to the understanding of later pastoral as well. How can Milton painfully aware of drastic changes causing his world to be in a state of flux, reconcile these views with, and express them in a form that would seem to negate such ideas?

From a modern vantage point Virgil admits an easy solution for "...the poet's final prayer is for the continuity not of change but of stable perfection in a time become timeless, an age which must be dated only from its start as its conclusion will hopefully never come".[12] The Golden Age will encompass all activity and negate the possibility of evil action. And on one level, the same solution applies to Renaissance writers. Thus, in "On The Morning Of Christ's Nativity", we see how Jesus has to work through time in order to suspend time, and within the

same context, the exercise of power by St. Peter in "Lycidas" is the epitome of Virgil's virtus and so, totally in keeping with the final vision of the Golden Age. Yet this remains only a partial solution for Renaissance Pastoral to which the Christian dimension had been added, as a social ideology by itself is no longer adequate. What happened, obviously, was that the idea of the Golden Age was given a Christian context and, as will be shown, its function as an operative member in the poems was given a broader scope. It is a static condition that came to be used as a basis for comparison and its enlarged use reflects in small the greater modification that pastoral poetry underwent beginning with Virgil. His establishing, in the pastoral, of a direct relationship between the Golden Age and the temporal world led to the genre itself taking on more of a formal function, the relationship itself becoming an important consideration. This change was further reinforced when the Christian ideal was incorporated into the pastoral as the final pose. The pastoral ideal thus served only to mirror Christian truth.

Indeed, Medieval Christianity easily took over the pastoral because little had to be changed in the genre to suit its purposes. Characteristics of the form became Christian analogues: the Golden Age was taken as Eden, the shepherd singer as David.[13]

One consequence of this radical flexibility, [the

> multiple purposes for which the pastoral was used by Medieval writers] ...was the creation of a new sub-genre of allegorical pastoral in which the entire form tends toward metaphor. The green world, freed almost entirely by the medieval pastoralists from the demands of realistic fiction, became invested with an aura of magical benevolence.[14]

Because of this development, Milton and others no longer had to base the pastoral on any idea of objective reality. The form itself became objective. Based totally on reason and rational use, the genre no longer had to interpret actual life as this was not needed for its statements, So the form developed its own realities --- its own world in fact, created by its metaphoric function --- and this allowed its users to explore different kinds of realities: personal and psychological as well as artistic, social, political, and religious. Now Theocritus to some extent explores such questions as well. But this is not meant to imply that the pastoral reverts. For always in its use, (by good poets and readers at any rate), is the consciousness of its development as a tradition and the ideas which it had taken on or sluffed off. This consciousness can be used for the production of irony and satire of a kind which Theocritus would be incapable of, not having a view of the tradition.

It must be realized too that the artifices and conventions of the mode were not static. Virgil provided the impetus for the first great change in the genre. The next great change occurred with the Christian poets who supplied the direct base for Milton's operations. During the Carolingian Renaissance, the association of the shepherd to Christ,

and the double uses of "Pastor" and "flock"

> ...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 remarke will be clear when we recall the ecclesiastical satire in "Lycidas" and remember that Edward King had intended to enter the church.[15]

But the main thrust for joining pastoral and ecclesiastical material came from Petrarch and Boccaccio, who

> ...used the pastoral solely as a means of expressing their political, religious, and moral ideas.
> .....
> The practice for making the eclogue a vehicle for didacticism and personal allegory, thus inaugurated by Petrarch and Boccaccio, characterizes in a varying degree the work of their successors in the pastoral literature of the Renaissance.[16]

This was a natural direction for the mode to take as its metaphors lent themselves easily to such uses. Not surprisingly therefore, in the Renaissance

> Pastoral was a genre critically regarded as allegorical by nature and tradition, and as particularly apt for veiled personal and ecclesiastical references. ...And when the Pastoral becomes fully acceptable, a congenial mode of Renaissance expression, it naturally broadens, changes, takes on new tasks and neglects old ones, assumes the colours and forms of new scenes and different peasants absorbs the tributes paid by primitive singers to Muses not Sicilian.[17]

It is with such a view of the tradition that Milton writes his poems and in them we can see these changes and how they operate.

The inclusiveness of the Renaissance pastoral was made possible by its long overview of the tradition which

enabled it to pick out and incorporate elements it found useful. The grasp of the Renaissance pastoral was further extended by the age's great addition to the form.

> In the Renaissance the habitual pairing of Nature and Art is the philosophical equivalent of an extraordinary efflorescence of pastoral literature. Of course the very existence of pastoral as a distinct genre has always been, in effect, an acknowledgment of the distinction between Nature and Art. Pastoral is by definition implicitly concerned with the discrepancies that may be observed between rural and urban, country and courtly, simple and complex, natural and artificial. Such literature, no matter what its pretensions to simplicity of form or matter, proves on inspection to be highly stylized and carefully calculated. The reason is simple. Bucolic fiction requires before all else a poet and audience sufficiently civilized to appreciate primitive simplicity, to recognize that the gain of Art means the loss of Nature. To regard pastoral literature as simple stuff because it sings simple things is to confuse the symbol with the thing symbolized. After all, nostalgia for natural simplicity is a sentiment denied those who have experienced only natural simplicity. Although the popularity of the pastoral genre may in any age be used as a convenient measure of the intensity of man's concern with the relationship of the natural to the artificial, it was only during the Renaissance that writers began to use the eclogue to deal overtly with the philosophical problem of Nature and Art. [18]

Considerations of Art and Nature greatly delighted and engrossed the Renaissance mind. With much of the universe called into doubt, man needed new ways of looking at the world and himself. This the pastoral provided. Old and familiar, new and strange, it was a form that could easily be handled and understood while lending itself to be used and seen from many angles. And as an art form that dealt to a large degree with Art itself --- the quintessential

expression of man --- it was bound to be popular. How else to discover man than through his artifacts? The age itself was expansionist, the pastoral perhaps reflecting this, and the great general increase in wealth made Art more widely available. Tie to this the Classical Humanist revival, now Christian as well, and the scene is ripe for bringing the pastoral out of its Medieval doldrums.

The question can now be more fully answered as to why poets continued to use the pastoral in the seventeenth century when the world view had so drastically altered and was on the threshold of even greater change. The scientific discoveries of the age alone would seem to suggest the discarding of the ancient, and in relation to the new knowledge, naive form. To some extent this question has already been answered in the course of the essay. But being crucial, this must be made explicit and needs expanding in the light of another significant feature of Renaissance Art. Though the formulation of man's view of the universe had changed, the basic concepts remained the same. God was still in Heaven, man still on earth; and whether the spheres revolved around the world or the world around the sun was basically, in expression at least, a problem of metaphor, not final philosophical or theological truth. But since man operates in terms of metaphor, this problem was greatly unsettling. And since Art reflects man's condition, the flux and confusion of the times is shown by that kind of Renaissance Art called Mannerism.

> Mannerism canvasses the elements of a fixed traditional pattern, unexpectedly combines them to achieve effects of dissonance, dislocation, and surprise, and illuminates the reader's mind, enabling him to reconsider the whole traditional pattern of their relationship. Mannerist works, even when they appear by classical standards to be unfinished, perverse, or inscrutible, do succeed in reflecting a real side of our psychological life.[19]

(Samuel Johnson's attack on "Lycidas" can be comprehended when we realize that he did not understand, let alone sympathise with, the poem's style.) The old forms were retained as they were part of the Renaissance psyche; their use was altered. Such a condition produces great stress. But this too is expressed in the style and even goes to define it.

> What at first glance seems to be overstrained wit is one indication of the revolution or readjustment in the arts; when a classical style is revised there are apt to be feverish symptoms in poetry and painting alike. That is, mannerism in sytle accompanies mannerism in thought and feeling. Mannerist art is "troubled" and "obscure;" if not "illogical." It treats its themes from unexpected points of view and eccentric angles, sometimes hidden. The mannerist uses thin or sour colour, nervous line, twisted or oblique space, and asymmetrical designs. His images and metaphors seem perverse and equivocal. His statements are intense and highly "expressive." ... Mannerist forms are only "relatively clear."[20]

They are "only 'relatively clear'" because man had to search for new metaphoric formulations with which to define himself, and being new, they were still rather obscure.

It is not surprising then, that apart from linguistic considerations, the pastoral affects double or multiple

standards in its images. The multiplicity and ambiguity of the real world must be reflected by the genre for it to make valid statements. In a different context and in different terms, William Empson sees the multiformity of the pastoral experience.

> An account of the double plot, then, is needed for a general view of pastoral because the interaction of the two plots gives a particularly clear setting for, or machine for imposing, the social and metaphysical ideas on which the pastoral depends. What is displayed on the tragi-comic stage is a sort or marriage of the myths of heroic and pastoral, a thing felt as fundamental to both and necessary to the health of society.[21]

It is precisely the tensions inherent in social and metaphysical ideals on which pastoral depends. This can take a variety of forms. In Theocritus, we have the purity of song set against lucrative wrestling matches; Virgil opposes the Golden Age and his iron times; the Medieval Latinists show the disjunction between earthly and Heavenly visions. The point is, there must be a tension between equal, or nearly equal forces to make pastoral work as serious or great poetry. Both sides of the debate, implied or direct, between the real and the ideal must have scoring points. In the pastoral poem, the ideal invariably wins.

And mannerism does not preclude the pastoral. In fact, they go well together as the genre, flexible enough due to its many historical uses,can accomodate any style, and especially well one full of ambiguities since the pastoral stance itself is inherently ambiguous and relies on stress. The form also provided the means, in the midst of confusion,

whereby a rational appraisal could be made. The static nature of Arcadia gave the poet a fixed referent from which to view his rapidly changing times. This function of the genre, so well known and continually used, led it to be taken as an objective metaphor. It was not subject to time or individual whim and so provided the objective viewing point needed for a reasoned attempt at definition. And the ambiguities of the pastoral make it a sympathetic vehicle for expressing the artist's position, since the form is "based on a double attitude of the artist to the worker, of the complex man to the simple one ('I am in one way better, in another not so good'), and this may well recognize a permanent truth about the aesthetic situation."[22]

Objectivity also creates a key distinction between pastoral and other kinds of poetry --- detatchment.

> It presents a bird's-eye view of characters in action rather than an intimate exploration of motives and impulses. ... It is probable that the pastoral was popular in the Renaissance because the rules of the genre permitted the poet to disregard, or virtually to refashion, his own feelings, and to disappear as a person behind the the artifact of the poem.[23]

We will see how this "anonymity", to use Ransom's term, allowed Milton publicly to express private concerns in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso". By asserting universal validity for a mode of conduct or a set of attitudes, he justifies such conduct or attitudes on his part without having to actually introduce himself into the poem. The same

process operates in "Lycidas", though made ironically bald by Milton's identification with "the uncouth Swain". Such an association is in keeping with the tradition.

> This character of the shepherd as a poet gives rise to another common motive: namely, the fiction that the writer of the elegy is himself the poetical successor of the dead shepherd. ... This sense of the personal relation as a poet to the subject of his song justifies the writer in allowing himself digressions concerning his own poetic achievements and aspirations.[24]

The irony this produces in "Lycidas" is due to emphasis, and forms the basis for the charges of Milton's insincerity in the poem. "We must recognize, however, that this type of confession is central to Christian Humanism in its best form, and that it is compounded of the medieval surrender to God and the Renaissance surrender to art."[25] "Lycidas" is only incidentally about Edward King, and like "Il Penseroso", is concerned with establishing the relationship between the poet, (all poets), and God and Art.

And concomitant with the distancing the pastoral allows, the poet can measure more accurately the audience's response. Milton knew his readers would be familiar with the tradition and that therefore the poems would be immediately accessible to them. This allows the creation of another level of irony --- a dramatic sort. The audience knew how images were traditionally used and would recognize and understand variations. They would know where the poet stood, and the poet knowing this, could, if he so chose, play cat and mouse games with their expectations. No matter how radical the stance, as in "Lycidas",

the genre subsuming this would force readers, on one level at least,to accept it. This gives the poet great dialectical power. "Lycidas", for example, even if read by the "corrupted Clergy then in their height", would have to be accepted, albeit by the subterfuge of individual innocence. And with regard to "Lycidas", apart from the benefits already mentioned as stemming from the tradition such as audience familiarity, poetic distance, an objective base for reflection, the adaptable ambiguity inherent in the form all with their attendant ironies, "Other requirements --- the ancient descriptions of pastoral peoples, the antiquity of the pastoral as a form of poetic discourse, the Hebraic parallels, the politico-allegorical interpretations, the observations of the intenser critics --- combined to make this choice certain."[26] And this choice made possible statements that in another form would take longer to elucidate hence losing the force of immediacy that the pastoral suspension allows.

The achieving of a static condition, or viewing point, is what the pastoral strives for and what became its most powerful use. Being caught in space and time, we are in a state of perpetual motion. From this it follows that we can have no fixed perspective and thus no absolute definition, due to linguistic inadequacies, of final reality or infinity. Other structures thus become necessary for a final synthesis of the infinite or the ideal. For Theocritus, who neither moralizes nor preaches, this structure is implied in the idea and function of the song itself. When Virgil looked

around him and saw his world in a state of social, political and economic flux, he turned to the vision of the full-blown otium of the Golden Age. From this pastoral vantage point, he dedicated his poems to this or that influential patron and preached his ideal for a greater Rome, accomplished through virtus, the structure of moral social and political conduct that results in the Golden Age. Also, the same static nature of the pastoral made possible its use as a vehicle for the ecclesiastical satires of the Renaissance, for all satire depends on a fixed view of at least one of its terms: a bad condition is contrasted with a perfect idea; or the possibility of a better dispensation is shown by exposing an entrenched evil.

It is to such purposes that Milton employs the pastoral as well. Looking around him and like Virgil seeing chaos --- Donne had even called Heaven into doubt --- he searches for a stable base from which to cast his reflections. In his search he ravishes the pastoral and leaves "Lycidas", its greatest progeny. Two frameworks combine to make his vision possible: one is the dogma and theology of Christianity; the other is the pagan pastoral. The religious one ties up the universe neatly, and by its implication provides a fixed moral and didactic perspective. The pastoral mode by itself, being pagan, served no truth function. But it did allow the creation of a perfect and static scene from which mortal man could perceive perfection.

Notes to Chapter One

[1]W.W. Greg, Pastoral Poetry and Pastoral Drama (New York, 1959), p. 417.

[2]Ibid., pp. 4-5.

[3]T.G. Rosenmyer, The Green Cabinet (Berkeley, 1969), pp. 67-68.

[4]R.C. Trevelyan, A Translation of the Idylls of Theocritus (Cambridge, 1947). All subsequent quotations from Theocritus' poems are taken from the same volume, so are not noted in the text of the essay.

[5]Rosenmyer, p. 108.

[6]Ibid., p. 57.

[7]Ibid., p. 18.

[8]Ibid., p. 76.

[9]Dryden's translations of Virgil are used. G.R. Noyes. ed., The Poetical Works of John Dryden (Boston, 1950). As with the poems of Theocritus, subsequent quotations from Virgil are not noted.

[10]M.C.J. Putnam, Virgil's Pastoral Art (Princeton, 1970), p. 157.

[11]Ibid., pp.137-138.

[12]Ibid., p.143.

[13]E.W. Tayler, Nature and Art in Renaissance Literature (New York, 1964), p. 96.

[14]Ibid., p. 98.

[15]J.H. Hanford, "The Pastoral Elegy and Milton's 'Lycidas'", Milton's "Lycidas": The Tradition and the poem, ed. C.A. Patrides (New York, 1961), p. 43.

[16]Ibid., p. 44.

[17]F. Kermode, English Pastoral Poetry (London, 1952), pp. 28-29.

[18]Tayler, pp. 4-5.

[19]R. Daniells, Milton, Mannerism and Baroque (Toronto, 1963), p. 11.

[20]W. Sypher, Four Stages of Renaissance Style (New York, 1955). pp. 106-107.

[21]W. Empson, Some Versions of Pastoral (London, 1950), pp. 30-31.

[22]Ibid., p. 15.

[23]Rosenmyer, p. 15.

[24]Hanford, pp. 34-35.

[25]D.C. Allen, The Harmonious Vision (Baltimore, 1954), p. 53.

[26]Ibid., p. 55.

"ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY"

Like Virgil's "Fourth Eclogue", the ode, "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" is an occasional poem eulogising what is seen as a portentous birth. The statement of the peom, simply put, is that the birth of Jesus Christ momentarily created perfection on earth and that this perfection was but a glimpse of the ultimate salvation of fallen man that the birth implies. The problems for Milton in writing this poem were how perfection could be described in the limited terms of human understanding and how the vision of final redemption can be expressed without, in effect, paraphrasing the Bible or writing a theological tract. This Milton achieves by adopting a pastoral stance, enabling him to sing of perfection, and by drawing on pastoral metaphors with which he can establish a vision of perfection.

What then is the poet's stance, and how does it affect the poem? Rephrasing the question will allow a fuller solution. The "Nativity Ode" is pervaded by much singing and harmony which offset and finally overthrow the din and clamour of the false gods. Not the least of the singing is done by the poet himself. What is the nature of his song and why does he sing it?.

The action of the poem results from the meeting of, and clash between, heavenly and mundane terms brought on by the bringing of the former to earth. This necessitates the

specific localising of the poem in time and place which Milton does in the prelude: "This is the Month, and this the happy morn" and by the Magi travelling, thereby implying the destination of Bethlehem. The time is the winter solstice; the longest night; the point at which the old year dies and the new year is born: the place is the stable. This situation is analogous to the Theocritean shepherds' noontime bower, both being critical to the action of the poems. As is common in the pastoral, Milton uses, by allusion, regeneration myths to strengthen his point. By further extending the analogy, we see from Theocritus, that the only action possible at the time is song, this alone fitting harmoniously with nature. The same principal operates in Milton.

> Say Heav'nly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein
> Afford a present to the Infant God?
> Hast thou no verse, no hymn, or solemn strain,
> To welcome him to this his new abode,
> Now while the Heav'n by the Sun's team untrod,
> Hath took no print of the approaching light,
> And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright? (15-21)

Song is here shown to have the function of welcoming the deity to earth. It being realistically impossible to establish a direct relationship, from the point of view of time, between the birth of Christ and the rising of the sun, harmonious song, corresponding to the ordered stars and fulfilling the same God-praising, illuminatory function as light, is used to fill the darkness. The placing of song before sight is appropriate biblically as well. In the beginning <u>was</u> the word. It is the prime generative and creative force, all action

resulting from its invocation. Also, it was the Humanist belief, seen in the concept of oratio ratio, that reason entered man through the hearing faculty. So expressions or manifestations of God, being ultimate reason, are best apprehended by our ears, the sense to which poetry and song are directed. And in keeping with the heavenly incarnation, the agency through which song is deployed on earth must be heavenly as well. So Milton presents us with the conceit of a "Heav'nly Muse" laying the gift of song at the babe's feet to tide him over till the dawn. The Muse is implored to hurry so that this harmonious gift can take its rightful place ahead of the baser, mundane ones of "The Star-led Wizards" who have no commerce with the perfection of the moment, as suggested by the slur of their being called "wizards", invoking ideas of the unnatural and the ungodly.

> Have thou the honour first, thy Lord to greet,
> And join thy voice unto the Angel Choir,
> From out his secret Altar toucht with hallow'd fire. (26-28)

The Muse and song become like the angels and their song and is purified and purged of evil. The allusion of the last line is to Isaiah VI, 6 and 7.[30]

> Then flew one of the seraphims unto me, having a live coal in his hand, which he had taken with the tongs from off the altar: And he laid it upon my mouth, and said, Lo, this hath touched thy lips; and thine iniquity is taken away, and thy sin purged.

Being the Muse's temporal voice, Milton identifies with her and by implication gives himself a heavely purpose and

the Muse a worldly identity. In this way he can function in the way that Theocritus' shepherds do. Thus removed from temporal reality he can establish harmonious relations with general nature and, in the context of the "Ode", participate directly as a controlling element in the establishing of heaven on earth. This then is poetry and the poet's function to Milton. In the "Ode" he is enabled to fulfill this function by adopting the pastoral stance.

Having in the prelude so established the correct attitude towards his subject, Milton proceeds in the song to describe the effects of the birth. The first effect is the perfection of temporal nature. The incarnation itself temporarily establishes a situation like the Golden Age on earth and is expressed by images of order, perfection, purity and unity. So not surprisingly, while looking ahead to future events that will establish the Christian ideal, Milton reaches back and draws on the pastoral metaphor of the Golden Age, with all its attendant formulations, that unifies space and time and gives a complete picture of perfection. This perfection is best seen by the pathetic fallacy, which is how nature reacts to the birth.

Theologically, the first consequence of confrontation with the Godhead is awe. So, in the first verse of the "Hymn" this is shown as nature's immediate reaction.

i
It was the Winter wild,
While the Heav'n-born child,
  All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies;
Nature in awe of him
Had doff't her gaudy trim,
  With her great Master so to sympathise:
It was no season then for her
To wanton with the Sun, her lusty Paramour.

ii
Only with speeches fair
She woos the gentle Air
  To hide her guilty front with innocent Snow,
And on her haked shame,
Pollute with sinful blame,
  The Saintly Veil of Maiden white to throw,
Confounded, that her Maker's eyes
Should look so near upon her foul deformities.

Struck with this visitation, imperfect nature subjects herself to the vision. This is accomplished through the mimetic process of the pathetic fallacy. Nature copies the ideal virtues so that she can emulate the purity of God and strip herself of vain pretensions. She is therefore depicted the image of a nun covering her body with a white veil. The pathetic fallacy idealises and perfects nature. She is thus able to associate with the deity. Her subjugation leads to greater freedom, similar to that of the shepherd singer, since a measure of power and control is bestowed upon her with her active participation as she becomes an agent of the new dispensation. This is contrasted in the poem with the false gods who do the opposite and so lose all power. Nature then, is seen as acting from rational, humanistic motives. It is for this reason that she is personified, this allowing expression of such motives by inanimate forces. The personification also establishes an

association between nature and man which shows the unity in God's action throughout the universe. But this association cannot behandled completely by the human terms of personification since nature cannot be heroic. Realistically, she cannot act; she can only provide a setting for action; her power, like the pastoral swain's, is passive. What completes the association are the images of pastoral perfection, developed through the pathetic fallace. In the "Ode", the pathetic fallacy is not even a trick of fancy for, as in Virgil, it is established by a force exterior to man and nature. With its application, the states of man and nature are equated.

iii
But he her fears to cease,
Sent down the meek-ey'd Peace;
She crown'd with Olive green, came softly sliding
Down through the turning sphere,
His ready Harbinger,
With Turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,
And waving wide her myrtle wand,
She strikes a universal Peace through Sea and Land.

iv
No War, or battle's sound
Was heard the world around:
The idle spear and shield were high up hung;
The hooked Chariot stood
Unstain'd with hostile blood,
The Trumpet spake not to the armed throng,
And Kings sat still with awful eye,
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by.

v
But peaceful was the night
Wherein the Prince of Light
His reign of peace upon the earth began:
The Winds with wonder whist,
Smoothly the waters kiss't,
Whispering new joys to the mild Ocean,
Who now hath quite forgot to rave,
While Birds of Calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

The equation is accomplished by the identical reactions of nature and man to the figure of Peace descending to the earth. The reaction is in the terms of the common image of both taming their inherent violence. Man lays down his arms, and nature controls her often destructive forces, transforming them into gentle caresses.

A significant distinction occurs here between the invocations of the pathetic fallacy in Theocritus' elegy for Daphnis and in Milton's "Ode" that one should keep in mind when reading "Lycidas". In the elegy, the trope is invoked but is not seen operating in the real world; in the "Ode", real nature actually changes and the fallacy is used as literal description as well as metaphor. Nature perfected cannot be actualised in the pastoral elegies because the otium that the dead poet was assumed to have had is destroyed. But Christ's incarnation creates otium on the largest scale, and nature changing in accordance to this, demonstrates the great power of God.

The image of pastoral perfection thus established on earth allows a further resolution.

viii
The Shepherds on the Lawn
Or ere the point of dawn,
  Sat simply chatting in a rustic row;
Full little thought they then,
That the mighty Pan
  Was kindly come to live with them below;
Perhaps their loves or else their sheep,
Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep.

ix
When such music sweet
Their hearts and ears did greet,

> As never was by mortal finger struck,
> Divinely-warbled voice
> Answering the stringed noise,
> As all their souls in blissful rapture took:
> The Air such pleasure loath to lose,
> With thousand echoes still prolongs each heav'nly close.

We see that it makes possible the apprehension of perfection by humans in physical terms. Milton's use and description of the shepherds to demonstrate this is interesting for they are only pale reflections of pagan pastoral swain. They have no contact with the harmonies of nature and do nothing to establish such contacts. They do not function as singers, only chat trivially. The placement of their loves and their shepherdly duties in the same line debases this love, showing its mundane level and thus the silliness. This kind of love, though adequate for the pagan pastoral, and so expanded and idealised by it, is insufficient for the enlarged Christian version. So the shepherds have to wait until the next verse for enlightenment to be bestowed upon them, Still, the glory of the situation causes them to harmonise unwittingly and in spite of themselves, though in the minor fashion of their sitting in the order of their "rustic row". More significant than all this, however, is the order in which the celestial music strikes the shepherds. They perceive it first through the heart, the seat of emotion, and then through the ears, the path for reason. In this case, the shepherds' simplicity works to advantage in establishing the final Christian ideal --- love for God --- as there is no rationalising process to go through or to impede the establishing of this state.

People are able to hear the celestial music because the sympathetic attitude of nature, now perfect, toward the Divine creates audible resonances between the superlunary and the temporal spheres. Man can also see perfection operating through the agency of the pathetic fallacy as nature is directly observable. These ideas working together produce the echo image at the end of stanza ix. But this perfection is not allowed to remain and in the next verse Milton broaches the idea of the necessity of process.

x

Nature that heard such sound
Beneath the hollow round
  Of Cynthia's seat, the Airy region thrilling,
Now was almost won
To think her part was done,
  And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;
She knew such harmony alone
Could hold all Heav'n and Earth in happier union.

It is as yet impossible for the perfect age to exist on earth and so nature is only "almost won". It is finally won by the action in Paradise Regained. So the present harmonies are only a "happier union" and not the happiest. Nonetheless, because the present situation portends the final joy and results from the same sources, it is connected to the harmony of creation. The result is the vision of the Golden Age that a Christian Muse brings;

xii

Such Music (as 'tis said)
Before was never made,
  But when of old the sons of morning sung,
While the Creator Great
His constellations set,
  And the well-balanc't world on hinges hung,
And cast the dark foundations deep,
And bid the weltering waves their cozy channel keep.

This unification of the present with the ideal sets the conditions for the final action of the poem --- the rout of the pagan deities. This too is made operative in terms of sound and is seen most clearly between the harmony of the epiphany and the clamour of the retreating gods. The last section of the poem is noisy, this only being a prelude to their final silencing.

xix

The Oracles are dumb,
No voice or hideous hum
  Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.
Apollo from his shrine
Can no more divine,
  With hollow shriek the steep of Delphos leaving.
No nightly trance, or breathed spell,
Inspires the pale-ey'd priest from his prophetic cell.

xx

The lonely mountains o'er,
And the resounding shore,
  A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament;
From haunted spring and dale
Edg'd with poplar pale,
  The parting genius is with sighing sent;
With flow'r inwov'n treeses torn
The nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

Because of the harmony, the oracle is dumbfounded and their "hum", an allusion to the Israelites' murmuring against God and Moses during their wanderings in the desert, is stopped. Only those in tune with the harmonies can speak or sing, showing again the formative power of words. The old dispensation is dead, has no more power or control and so is silent. This humming occurs again to perform a similar function in "L'Allegro" and ironically, especially in the light of "Lycidas", what is also stopped is the protection provided

by the pastoral "Genius". Although he uses their elements, Milton must state, in this poem, that pagan forms are not allowed in the Christian world. But the reluctance of the dismissal is seen in the pathos of the image of the disarrayed nymphs. Only toward these is there any kind of comparison.

Yet no matter what forms are used, their metaphors are inadequate and cannot be totally perfect. This is realised by Milton and is his concession to our temporal ears. It also shows how conscious he is of the makings and of the limitations of his own poems.

xi

At last surrounds their sight
A globe of circular light,
  That with long beams the shame-fac't night array'd,
The helmed Cherubim
And sworded Seraphim
  Are seen in glittering ranks with wings display'd,
Harping in loud and solemn choir
With unexpressive notes to Heav'n's new-born Heir.

xiii

Ring out ye Crystal spheres,
Once bless our human ears,
  (If ye have power to touch our senses so)
And let your silver chime
Move in melodious time;
.....

Milton qualifies his use of images because he realizes that the things he wants to say are finally beyond human ken. So the music is "unexpressive", and he wonders in an aside if we can perceive it at all: "(If he have power to touch our senses so)". This problem is inherent in the language and can be seen by the type of image he has to use for his primary statements. This is the "Radical image".

> Truth is its goal. The realist employs it bravely. The mystic uses it humbly, since there is no pretense that its two terms are of equivalent imaginative value. He will not liken Divinity to the might of the ocean, but to the perfection of the circle.[2]

(We should note the prevalence of globe images in the "Ode"). Milton is no mystic, but confronted with the problem of expressing a mystery, is obliged to use their techniques.

> This type of image, as might readily be inferred, is a common resort of the mystic. Driven from the possibility of literal statement, he still confronts a mystery which demands some measure of expression. Humility may force him to dispense with a bold attempt to comprehend the mystery through the highly sympathetic Expansive figure. Radical imagery is to some degree incongruous; and the mystic believes that between his noblest conception and the object of his faith an incongruity is inevitable. He will turn therefore to this unadorned and confessedly inadequate type of metaphor, perhaps finding in its seeming precision a semblance of logical validity.[3]

This problem, of course, does not occur in describing the false gods, since themselves being created by man, are totally knowable.

The result of this linguistic inadequacy is the setting up of a double standard within the images. This is not peculiar to the "Ode" but is present in any poem attempting expression of ultra-human phenomena. The operative term of the metaphor is known not to accurately reflect the final truth and works only by suggestion. Not surprisingly therefore, this condition is inherent in all pastoral poetry since the final ideal is perfection. The condition is resolved by the reader willfully suspending knowledge of contextually inappropriate meanings and implications, or by

his ideationally filling in the gaps of the inadequate image. A fusion of the two standards within a poem is thus possible, for unless the poet wants to exploit the clash between them, (as in "Lycidas"), they need never come into contact with each other. Or, knowing that certain associations will automatically be rejected or made by the reader, he can use the inherent ambiguity of the images, by a limited juxtaposition of their terms, to establish his proper conclusion. It is due to this process that we take the pastoral swain seriously and do not laugh at his ingenuousness.

The most drastic occurrence of this phenomenon in the "Ode" appears in stanza viii. Jesus and the shepherds are functionally related, but the shepherds are "silly" and too strong an association would demean Jesus. A certain diminution though, is precisely what is wanted as it establishes Christ's humanity, allowing him to work on earth as well as in Heaven - on all levels of space and time. Christ the shepherd is mortal; at the same time we can recognise his divinity. Here, instead of being divisive, the reconciliation of these contradictory shepherds --- the incarnation --- allows the perception of a greater unity, as, knowing or seeing Christ, embodying both time and timelessness, we are enabled to understand, indeed see, the manifestations of God's perfection while still on decaying earth. In the poem, the birth acts as the great resolution of the clash between the temporal and the transcendent: the final unification of the

double standard. By it, the actors in the poem, and the reader himself, can comprehend the harmonies of the cosmos. The incarnation makes possible the compression of time and space which allows total vision as it establishes the Golden Age on earth. The comparison of the present music and spacial arrangements (the angels' "glittering ranks" as well as the shepherds' "rustic row"), to that of the creation in stanzas xii and xiii, permits the retrogression/progression --- it no longer matters which as there is no direction in static perfection --- to the pastoral conceit of the Golden Age in stanza xiv. This vision, accomplished by the contraction and confusion of time, and seen by the justaposition of tenses in "Time will run back ..." where the future and past cancel each other out, will eventually eliminate the necessity for time, leaving only a static, perfect present. But throughout, Milton is very particular in keeping the poem rooted in the ongoing present. The first line of the poem establishes this; the union of stanza x is as yet "happier", not happiest; stanza xvi shows that process must still be suffered, with

> And then at last our bliss
> Full and perfect is,
> But now begins; ... (II. 165-167)

showing the present position in the process. It is this concern with process that takes the "Ode" out of the realm of pastoral. Arcadia is an imaginary world of static perfection. Consequently, many of its terms expound or intimate ideals of perfection. It was natural then, for

Milton to use these terms in this poem as they allowed him to express the perfection created by God.

Notes to Chapter Two

[1]M.Y. Hughes ed., John Milton: Complete Poems and Major Prose (New York, 1957), p. 43 n.

[2]H.W. Wells, Poetic Imagery Illustrated from Elizabethan Literature (New York, 1951), p. 227.

[3]Ibid., pp. 131-132.

"L'ALLEGRO" AND "IL PENSEROSO"

It has already been shown that the pastoral allowed the poet to slip in and hide behind a shady tree. There can be no doubt that in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" Milton himself is somewhere in their Arcadian world. The poems do not center only around abstract questions; L'Allegro and Il Penseroso are parts of Milton himself. They live through his experience and through these characters, he could bring problems that vexed his mind out into the open for a better look, while at the same time protecting his identity. The poems then, become a marking point for one of the many rites of passage into maturity. The final rite is seen in "Lycidas" where "youthful Jollity" is finally overthrown and firm commitment made. To determine a course of action, Milton sets up two possible alternatives and evaluates them. The form of the poems is thus determined. Each is an encomium --- a standard grammar school exercise,[1] and together they form an academic débat.

That both poems are meant to be read in conjunction is hardly worth mentioning as they cannot survive as serious intellectual entities on their own. Both poems are hypotheses. From this point of view we can understand the extreme idealizations and generalisations that would make mockery of each poem separately. Neither alone are to be

or can be, taken seriously. The conclusion of the poems then, must be seen in terms of their commentaries on one another. The final stance of the poems falls between the two but lands much closer to "Il Penseroso". The assertion is that contemplation is more conducive to the discovery of truth than play. As a result, "Il Penseroso" is a nobler being.

The subject of the debate presents a particular problem for the rhetorical success of the characters and the poems themselves. How can their arguments and actions be made to demonstrate the conclusion without one being made out as a buffoon and without the poems being thought of as hardly more than pieces of whimsy? Obviously the first requirement it that the subject be taken seriously. Further, both sides must have at least what seems equally strong evidence to support their cases. Both these conditions are met. But the success of the poems is due almost wholly to Milton's manipulation of the pastoral genre. It is through the terms of the pastoral medium that the debate is carried on and finally won by Il Penseroso. Milton gives the pastoral world a Christian base and, as in the "Nativity Ode", extends the pastoral function of singer as mediator between the temporal world and the Golden Age to that of the Christian prophet. Thus by establishing the pastoral stance as the correct method for seeking truth, the argument of "L'Allegro" is shown to be false as he operates outside the green world.

We can best see this working in terms of how the two poems use the concepts of Nature and Art.

The actions of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" stem from different motives: mirthful man looks for leisure, melancholy man searches for truth. Art can satisfy both so they both court and use it. Left at this, the debate is a stand-off. So we must ask whose Art is more fulfilling, by what standards is it measured, and what are the differences in the types of Art?

Both poems start with visions of the pastoral. The conceptions of both goddesses occur in a bower, and when we first meet the main characters, they are both in country settings. Woken by a lark L'Allegro goes for a walk in the countryside. Il Penseroso is in the woods trying to catch the nightingale's evening song. But L'Allegro does not let us keep this picture of him for long.

He walks the land with the plowman, the milkmaid, the mower, and the shepherd, all the time carefully avoiding them. Detatchedly observed, the rustics are used to fill in L'Allegro's bucolic picture; he does not enter their pastoral world. The country images are carefully distanced.
The pleasure he derives from the country is that of seeing the pastoral order, not of living the pastoral life. Everything set according to pattern, L'Allegro interjects his idyllic jaunt with a quick side-trip.

Straight mine eye hath caught new pleasures
Whilst the Landscape round it measure,
Russet Lawns and Fallows Grey,
Where the nibbling flocks do stray;
Mountains on whose barren breast
The labouring clouds do often rest;
Meadow trim with Daisies pied,
Shallow Brooks, and Rivers Wide.
Towers and Battlements it sees
Bosom'd high in tufted Trees,
Where perhaps some beauty lies,
The Cynosure of neighbouring eyes. (69-80)

The introduction of the "Towers and Battlements" of the city so early in the poem of supposed idyllic bliss creates a tension that can only be resolved in the city and by extension, (the terms of which will be later pursued), by "Il Penseroso". The above lines seem a hiatus in the movement of the poem. The disjunction though, is one of place, not theme; only the perspective has changed. And in spite of the view of the distant city, we are still held in the frame of L'Allegro' pastoral construct with the description of another pastoral scene. Nonethless we are warned that the Arcadian world of "L'Allegro" is somehow false. It is completely stylized and rigid; though there is action, it is lifeless for the man of Mirth as he does not enter into it. The mention of the city clinches our doubt. The pastoral tradition was born in the city and here it became an intellectual idealization and abstraction. This L'Allegro knows, as seen by his return to the the city after the country walk. But what he fails to see is that this construct can be put to higher uses. So his attempts to understand the bucolic life are doomed to failure from the start. It

becomes then, in this poem, an escape, and L'Allegro's song is escapist literature. This we know is not the point of pastoral poetry. So L'Allegro cannot operate in Arcadia and is drawn, ironically because it is itself the most highly structured of man's creations, to the city.

The city being or containing the "Cynosure" is ambiguous and ironic. For L'Allegro it can represent either an actual woman or the ideal of Beauty that Mirth presents. From Ovid, we also learn that the cynosure, the guiding pole-star, was created by the metamorphosis of Callisto, an Arcadian princess.[2] The "Cynosure" could then be a pastoral ideal which Milton uses to reinforce the irony of the idea of the bucolic paradigm residing in the city, thereby satirically undercutting completely the first half of L'Allegro's argument since he unknowingly leaves the pastoral world only to go right back to it.

On the literal level, it is only after the rustics have fallen asleep, weary from their work and tales, that it becomes clear that there is something lacking in Arcadia. For L'Allegro, the country jaunt is simply a day-trip. Milton always keeps a distance between him and the rustics. He is an observer only and the pastoral experiences are apprehended only vicariously. L'Allegro relates, but never takes part in the action of that world.

> Tow'red Cities please us then,
> And the busy hum of men (117-118)

shows that L'Allegro's affinities are firmly and finally rooted in the city. It is the "hum" of social interaction that is immediately appealing. This is not the angelic music of the "Nativity Ode" or the harmonies of "Il Penseroso", but at first hearing it is pleasant. It suggests that the "Tow'red City" is structured along the orderly lines of a beehive.

Throughout the urban passage too, a note of falseness keeps sounding. There is gaiety and excitement to be sure, but no real joy. The "weeds of peace" of the "Knights and Barons bold" are ironic as such men represent a throwback to a feudal, warrior society. The clothes are illusion. The men who sport them, even in the orderliness of the beehive court, are in constant competition. The image of the court, despite the trappings of peace, is martial.

> Where throngs of Kights and Barons bold,
> In weeds of Peace high triumphs hold,
> With store of Ladies, whose bright eyes
> Rain influence, and judge the prize
> Of Wit, or Arms, while both contend
> To win her Grace, whom all commend. (119-124)

In this setting, where the false stars of the ladies' eyes are what "Rain influence" and control the proceedings, Mirth ceases to become a prize worth winning, being the reward of meaningless games. The order of society is thus shown as sham as what it considers important is outside appearance, with no thought given to inner harmony. The "hum", in reality, is the buzz of rumour: the murmuring of the Isrealites.

And all the pomp and ceremony is reduced by Milton to the insubtantiality of a "youthful Poet's dream".

> There let Hymen oft appear
> In Saffron robe, with Taper clear,
> And pomp, and feast, and revelry,
> With mask and antique Pageantry ---
> Such sights as youthful Poets dream
> On Summer eves by haunted stream. (125-130)

It is an idle dream and perverse. In the pleasance, lulled by the running water, the vision, instead of being of Universal Nature, is of artifice. L'Allegro, instead of using the art of the pastoral to contemplate higher levels of reality, uses it onanistically to dream about other varieties of Art, thereby dooming himself both to ignorance, by refusing to develop, and to meaningless solipsistic artifice. These lines again reflect the basic irony inherent in the pastoral genre: only in the city, the seat of Art, is perfect nature, itself artificial, created. But wise use of the form can negate this irony. Perfect nature used as a dialectical tool to attain further synthesis, rather than as an end in itself, sidesteps all attack. This is how Milton uses the pastoral in "Il Penseroso".

Unlike "L'Allegro", "Il Penseroso" develops and expands the pastoral idea as it progresses. This is done primarily be developing its relation to Art and Nature. Il Penseroso searches for truth, and seeing Melancholy communing with the ideal, calls her to come to him so he too can fructify his quest.

Come pensive Nun, devout and pure,
Sober, steadfast, and demure,
All in a robe of darkest grain,
Flowing with majestic train,
And sable stole of Cypress Lawn,
Over thy decent shoulders drawn.
Come, but keep thy wonted state,
With ev'n step, and musing gait,
And looks commercing with the skies,
Thy rapt soul sitting in thine eyes:
There held in holy passion still,
Forget thyself to Marble, till
With a sad Leaden downward cast,
Thou fix them on the earth as fast. (31-44)

There are two points of note in this passage. Melancholy, as the image of the nun would suggest, is identified with Christian passion. Unlike the ladies' eyes in "L'Allegro" which merely "Rain" temporal "influence", those of Melancholy unite the worldly vision, (through which Christian passion must express itself), with the Heavenly by the compression of both spheres in her mind, accomplished by her looking from one to the other. Second, the image of Melancholy turning into a statue while contemplating the heavens suggests that, in mortal terms, Heaven can only be perceived through the application of Art which recreates the static perfection.

Nature however, unlike Art, is not able to help in the discovery of truth. This can be seen in the passage with the nightingale.

And the mute Silence hist along,
'Less Philomel will deign a Song,
In her sweetest, saddest plight,
Smoothing the rugged brow of night.
While Cynthia checks her Dragon yoke,
Gently o'er th'accustom'd Oak;
Sweet Bird that shunn'st the noise of folly,
Most Musical, most melancholy!

Thee Chantress oft the Woods among,
I woo to hear thy Even-Song;
And missing thee, I walk unseen
On the dry smooth-shaven Green,
To behold the wand'ring Moon, ... (55-67)

To hear the nightingale, Il Penseroso walks in the forest. But the woods for him are silent and he does not find Melancholy there. So he returns to the "dry smooth-shaven Green" and mimics the Goddess' star-gazing pose by reflecting on Cynthia/Diana, the chaste goddess of the moon. This movement introduces the pastoral tension of "Il Penseroso". Whereas in "L'Allegro" this tension was expressed in terms of the contrast between country and city, here it is seen in the contrast between the ordered garden and wild nature, or Nature and Art. There are several reasons for this. For Milton, nature, because of the Fall, is imperfect and therefore, in keeping with the Christian vision, cannot be deified as it is in the pagan pastorals. So truth cannot be achieved by union with it. Il Penseroso has to wait until Melancholy, through music, deigns to unite him with nature in the bower. We saw this idea operating in the "Nativity Ode" also, when only after nature is purified by an outside force can it become an operative memeber in the union to find harmony. In terms of the poetics of the "ode", nature is perfected by God. But it is man' s Art that is the stamp of "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso". God does not appear in these poems. If wanted he must be sought. Here lies the function of Art.

So Il Penseroso, walking in the wood at night, does not hear the ecstatic melancholy melody. Philomel's song is natural and spontaneous. Adequate perhaps for other versions, it does not fit Milton's pastoral scene as, recognizing the inadequacy of the natural song, Milton cannot make the bird and the pensive man coincide in the bower. Consequently, while still accepting the idea of the perfection of the nightingale's hymn, Milton does not allow Il Penseroso this easy union with actual nature; this would not be consistent with the philosophy of the poem. Instead, harmony is achieved through recreating perfect nature by Art, as Milton does in the dream sequence in the bower, or by the intercession of an outside force, which Il Penseroso prays for and which comes true in his dreams. Il Penseroso misses the bird in the night wood because he should not be there. The pleasance does not operate at night but at noon; Il Penseroso should be at his books studying the intellectual constructs that will develop his Art and lead him to knowledge. To these he repairs.

Leaving the wood, he pauses briefly "on the dry smooth-shaven Green" to watch the moon, ironically "Riding near her highest noon". Contrasting with the pastoral condition, midnight is the noon of study and Art. Il Penseroso is placed on the "Green" because it represents the ordered garden which Milton associates with Art. This conjunction again shows Milton's awareness of the workings of the pastoral.

However free and spontaneous its affectations, it is carefully structured, and such intellectual structures being Il Penseroso's main concern, are best represented not by chaotic or real nature, or the materialistic designs of L'Allegro's city, but by an ordered garden, itself an idealized, formally structured image of perfect nature.

As it has been shown to develop till this point, the debate is in a peculiar state. The reader knows logically, (he probably did from the start), who is going to win. And none but an out-and-out hedonist would quarrel with the outcome. But L'Allegro's position is still very strong and he still commands much sympathy. His errors can be dismissed as resulting from youthful inexperience. And the strength of his appeal is that he appeals to our visceral desires. From here on, however, he degenerates rapidly and loses all support.

In keeping with his nature, the evening's entertainment is climaxed by a visit to the theatre. This too is carefully arranged and limited. Tragedy has been banished and only the comedies of Jonson or Shakespeare are seen. Allied to this idea is the wish to be surrounded by Lydian music which was thought to take away mortal, "eating Cares". Stripped of these mundane preoccupations, and "Married to immortal verse", L'Allegro's soul will be able to untwist "all the chains that tie/The hidden soul of harmony". By ignoring the world, he hopes to achieve a union with the eternal. But again Milton makes the argument ring false.

The terms of the meeting of L'Allegro's soul with the "soul of harmony" are in the worldly and practical considerations of poetics.

> And ever against eating Cares,
> Lap me in soft Lydian Airs,
> Married to immortal verse,
> Such as the meeting soul may pierce
> In notes, with many a winding bout
> Of linked sweetness long drawn out,
> With wanton heed, and giddy cunning,
> The melting voice through mazes running; (135-142)

There is too much self-indulgent attention to detail to make the plea against the "eating Cares" valid. The lines are a poetic feast. "Sweetness" is not enough but must be extended; the attention paid to the composition is "wanton"; and it is not enough for the lines to flow smoothly, but they have to go through "mazes" for merit. And more still: the song is even greater than Orpheus' and capable of recalling completely the dead into this world. This is the final irony: the use to which L'Allegro puts the kind of otium which Lydian music was traditionally thought to provide is not the pastoral release from mundane worries to develop the soul, but an escapist release from moral worries that vex the soul. The image for L'Allegro's ecstasy, the recalling of the dead to this world with song, negates any Christian vision completely. It revels in the ability to unite himself with the body and does not mention the soul at all.

So L'Allegro's notion of harmony can only be expressed in terms of destruction and lust. It is elicited by

sweetness that cloys, wantonness, and a "melting voice" that befuddles instead of clarifying. The "harmony" is seduced, not morally earned. Like an unwilling mistresss, she is bound in chains that the poet has to "untweist". It is a repulsive physical image that L'Allegro wears away with his sensual "melting voice". The delights of this kind of harmony are those of the flesh. L'Allegro supposes that through these means he can achieve transcendence. Il Penseroso, of course, is the complete oppositie. Instead of going to the theatre to see comedy, he invokes noble "Gorgeous Tragedy" to visit him. The use of Orpheus also contrasts the two characters.

> But, O sad Virgin, that thy power
> Might raise Musaeus from his bower,
> Or bid the soul of Orpheus sing,
> Such notes as, warbled to the string,
> Drew Iron tears down Pluto's cheek,
> And made Hell grant what Love did seek. (103-108)

Melancholy's power is ironically limited by the conditional "might". It is known that she can't literally raise the dead as L'Allegro tries Mirth to do, but by contemplating and reading the dead poets, their spirit is recreated in the living. It is not "Orpheus' self" of "L'Allegro" that Il Penseroso wants; it is the "soul of Orpheus". And this he can have as it lives on in the Greek's immortal Art just as the Art of the pastoral lets Il Penseroso keep to his soul-quest by placing him in the ideal, static bower, protecting him from work and the temporal cares of normal

daytime activity.

> And when the Sun begins to fling
> His flaring beams, me Goddess bring
> To arched walks of twilight groves,
> And shadows brown that Sylvan loves
> Of Pine or monumental Oak,
> Where the rude Axe with heaved stroke
> Was never heard from Nymphs to daunt,
> Or fright them from their hallow's haunt.
> There in close covert by some Brook,
> Where no profaner eye may look,
> Hide me from Day's garish eye,
> While the Bee with Honied thigh,
> That at her flow'ry work doth sing,
> And the waters murmuring
> With such consort as they keep,
> Entice the dewy-feather'd Sleep; (131-146)

Having by contemplation and the application of Art thus imaginatively united with the sympathetic Nature of the pleasance, Il Penseroso wakes to find himself in the centre of musical action.

> And as I wake, sweet music breathe,
> Above, about, or underneath,
> Sent by some spirit to mortals good,
> Or th'unseen Genius of the Wood. (151-154)

So the final union with the ideal is artistically complete as Il Penseroso is allied to both Nature and Art, which together, and with divine inspiration, can affect the perfection of the temporal sphere. For Il Penseroso's song is Christian and holy and he asserts his unswerving devotion.

> But let my due feet never fail
> To walk the studious Cloisters pale,
> And love the high embowed Roof
> With antic Pillars massy proof,
> And storied Windows richly dight,
> Casting a dim religious light.
> There let the pealing Organ blow
> To the full voic'd Choir below,
> In service high and Anthems clear,
> As may with sweetness, through mine ear,
> Dissolve me into ecstasies,
> And bring all Heav'n before mine eyes. (155-166)

Not surprisingly, the description of the church is reminiscent of the bower as they both now serve the same function. The "arched walks of twilight groves,/And shadows brown" are like the "high embowed Roof" and the "dim religious light". The destructive "melting" of "L'Allegro" here becomes the dissolution of ecstasy, the transcending of the body that makes possible the vision of Heaven.

With this vision and the studied ability to sing, Il Penseroso assumes a prophetic function. Through the terms of the pastoral mode, he can recreate the vision for our temporal senses and acts as a mediator between the audience and heaven. He is enabled to achieve this state because of the sureness of his emotions, knowledge and task. He unflinchingly pursues his goal and never strays from his proper tast. He seeks the happiness that is derived from a knowledge of truth.

The nature of L'Allegro's emotions however, is uncertain. He rushes back and forth from country to city --- from images of peace and tranquillity to those of hectic activity. He seeks leisure but does not comprehend joy or bliss. L'Allegro has unwittingly limited his own potentialities by pursuing the wrong emotion. He is blind to the fact that happiness, as demonstrated by Il Penseroso, must be earned. Unimpeded by reason, he bestialises himself and cannot conceive that rational emotion which is the love of God. The result of his not fully realising his humanity, by not combining these key parts of his psyche, can be seen in the illogical and

dreadful conclusions of his arguments: one, when taken to its logical end, shows him daring to raise the dea.

L'Allegro is so misguided because although he exists in a Christian framework, he ignores all its ideals. Playing the game by a wrong set of rules, he cannot win. This is the rhetorical strategy by which Milton sets him up for use as a foil. And this strategy is reflected in how each character conceives of and uses Art. In "Il Penseroso" the pastoral form is used throughout and developed to achieve finally a vision of heaven. Art is seen as a means to an end and Milton is in strict keeping with the historical tradition of the pastoral in that it is used to establish a union with an ideal. But in Art, as well as in theology, L'Allegro does not play by the rules. He does not stay in one mode and though pretending to be a pastoral singer, his song is finally not pastoral at all. Never staying in one place, he can never reach or comprehend a conclusion. For him, Art functions merely as a titillatory mechanism and has no relation to anything but himself.

Notes to Chapter Three

[1]R. Tuve, Images and Themes in Five Poems by Milton (Cambridge Mass., 1957), p. 35.

[2]Hughes, p. 98 n.

"LYCIDAS"

We have seen, in "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso", how by adjusting his stance to meet the needs of a particular situation, Milton could force the conclusion he wants. He uses the same procedure in "Lycidas" where he wants to show that in spite of the pervasive corruption and arbitrary quirks of fate that occur in the temporal world, it is still possible to lead a just and good life yielding both worldly and greater rewards. Appearing in a memorial volume written and subscribed to by academics, this statement directly attacked a large part of the poem's audience as from the academic circles came the "corrupted Clergy". So "Lycidas" can be seen as a piece of propaganda. As such, the problems Milton had to overcome were not merely to describe the fallen state of the world and a pattern of conduct, but more important, to get the reader to accept his invectives. Again the solution is affected by the use of the pastoral. By the manipulation of this common and popular form, Milton saw the possibility of making a widely disliked statement very forcefully. For on one level the poem is innocuous enough. "Lycidas" is in strictest keeping with the tradition and from this point of view can offer little threat. And what academicwould deny the worth and necessity of exposing corruption?

So seen from the surface, the poem could easily commandeer a large audience. Thus, by carefully directing violent and powerful forces hidden underneath the placid surface, Milton succeeds in conveying an unwelcome message.

We will begin by showing in a short, abstract form, how Milton used the pastoral to achieve his aim. In "Lycidas" Milton uses three historical variations of the form. Through these he satirizes the fallen world. Each form creates a different persona behind which the singer of the poem alternately hides. By allowing the reader to establish the falseness of one of the formulations, Milton forced him to accept the validity of the others. These carry the final statement of the poem which the reader, by association, is forced to accept. The poet makes himself invulnerable to attack because the reader can never be sure behind which mask he is hiding. He is finally seen to have brought the audience to his position. Such a use of the pastoral is made possible by not structuring the poem along the lives of conventional logic. This dislocates the audience as the poem cannot be attacked by the readers' usual terms. He is forced to enter the poem on its own terms and finally must accept Milton's conclusion. To see how the pastoral is manipulated to attain the desired result, we must first look at how Milton structures "Lycidas".

The progression of the poem and the achievement of the final ideal vision are not dependent on logical causality. There are no logical reasons either for the questioning of

the Nymphs to follow the description of the "heavy change", or for the discussion on fame to follow the questioning, or for St. Peter's interruption, or even finally for the deification of Lycidas. Much criticism of "Lycidas" has gone to show how its structure actually and logically leads to the conclusion of the apotheosis. Now while it is true that the ending rightly follows the statements of the rest of the poem, to insist that it is the termination of a linear logic is to misread the poem. A reader steeped in the tradition of the genre would not have to explain the ending in any way; he would not at all be surprised by it, and in fact, would expect it from the start. What might surprise him however, would be the mannerist lack of traditional logic.

> Pastoral elegies are dramatic monologues, giving the words of a single shepherd upon a single occasion; or they are dialogues giving, like so much printed drama, the speeches of several shepherd in a single scene. ... The composition is straightforward and explicity logical.
> Milton's elegy is otherwise.[1]

Unfortunately, Ransom goes on to suggest that this scholastic failing is due to Milton's rebellious nature. But Milton was too consummate an artist to rebel with no other purpose save the rebellion itself. The illogicality has formal functions. It reflects the temporal order and forces the reader to make associations in new ways. There is no assertion by a rational process, that moves from premise to conclusion, but plenty of emotional proof and development, which is carried on by the objective metaphoric constructs that the pastoral provided.

The structure of "Lycidas" is circular, as can be seen by the poem beginning and ending with discussions of the singer's own condition. We will see that the idea of the circle is vital to the poem. By the use of this structure, Milton is freed from the limiting logic of the line and so can make the various parts of the poem interact in different ways according to his purpose. And being placed in a circle, each part is given the semblance of equal strength and validity as no one part would seem to be closer to the Arcadian ideal of the Golden Age around which they revolve and to which they all point. The movements are connected not by logic, but by their reference to the common bucolic idea.

Each paragraph of the poem, except for the first and last which are not part of the elegy proper, points directly or indirectly to the ideal of the union with the universal order. The invocation is to the "Sisters of the sacred well" residing with Jove on Olympus. The song he will sing will thus be heavenly, inspired by his communion with the gods. When the singer and Lycidas play music while guarding their flocks in Arcadia, "Rough Satyrs danc'd, and Fauns with clov'n heel/From the glad sound would not be absent long ..." Their music creates harmony in nature. With Lycidas' death, the pathetic fallacy is used to show again the harmonious union with nature which the poem tried to recreate. In the questioning of the Nymphs, the song spans the entire universe in its movement from locale to locale:

the ocean, mountains, rivers, "Universal nature", and back to the ocean. By association, Lycidas is shown to have commerce with all these. The passage on fame establishes where true worth and Truth itself lies --- in the Golden Age of heaven, under the "perfect witness of all-judging Jove." The seventh paragraph refers back to the "higher mood" of Phoebus' speech and reinforces the pathetic fallacy by questioning the personified elements. St. Peter brings the vision of the Christian Heaven and after he leaves, the "Sicilian Muse" is reinvoked who proceeds to call up the catalogue of mourning flowers. Even the Angel, Michael, is asked to mourn. Finally there is the apotheosis of Lycidas: the ultimate union made explicit.

With all the parts indicating the final ideal, it is wrong to assume that this ideal is the point of the poem. But the reader, expecting a conventional elegy, would approach "Lycidas" with precisely this assumption. The unconventional lack of logic, then, would act to dislocate him. This is the effect Milton wants and is how "Lycidas" derives its power. The reader, because of his intimacy with the tradition, easily enters the poem, whereupon he is forcibly presented with an apparent pattern of discord. Expecting in an elegy to see a linear pattern towards resolution, he is confronted instead with a series of images and situations that do not depend on normal sequences of space or time. This kind of logical progression, based on temporal values, is precisely

what is shown to be false by the poem: King dies before his time; the good are not rewarded; the wicked flourish; and the ideal vision itself, negates temporal realities. The immediate effect is that his normal perspective, based on mutable time and space, is jarred loose and finally rendered invalid. Not able to use his own methods of perception, the reader must adopt the objective ones of the pastoral world that Milton supplies. Having forced the audience onto his own ground, Milton can easily control its responses. This he does by his handling of the pastoral genre.

To arrive at the idea of the Christian Golden Age, and to show the possibility of proper earthly conduct, Milton unites the Christian version of the pastoral with Virgil's pastoral of power and puts this union against the Theocritean pastoral of song. It is easy to see why. In the pagan pastoral, the realization is always present that except for the subject of the elegy, union with the final vision is ephemeral at worst and transitory at best. The vision is not made to operate on earth. But the Christian God does not romp through Elysian Fields. He is stern, wrathful, jealous, and wilful. He is the God of power. Yet he is just, and no matter how severe, his actions,or those of his emissaries, like St. Peter, are the embodiment of Virgil's <u>virtus</u> though more elevated because of His absolute incorruptibility. And through Christ, God works on earth to establish the Golden Age for all.

Which of the versions of the pastoral Milton gives as the stronger is obvious and can be seen in the poem by comparing the judgment scenes. Both Jove and St. Peter are figures of judgment. But Jove is clearly the lesser as he deals only with reputation. St. Peter's judgment is apocalyptic. The relative strength of the songs can also been seen in how each is described.

> 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 (85-88)

After Phoebus speaks, the poem moves on easily and the god's voice is just a "higher mood". But when St. Peter speaks, everything stops and listens.

> Return Alpheus, the dread voice is past
> That shrunk thy streams; return Sicilian Muse (132-133)

Until the entrance of "The Pilot", the poem was in a pagan setting and Phoebus' voice was made possible through the agency of the "Sisters of the sacred well". So after his speech the poem can proceed without qualification. St. Peter's, however, is the "dread voice" of heaven that creates awe. St. Peter replaces the pagan with a Christian setting and the former, being less valid, must withdraw from the action of the poem. But as Milton still wants to use the pagan form, he is forced to invoke the "Sicilian Muse" anew.

Here we can see the key to how Milton structures the rhetoric of "Lycidas". By playing these two types of song, (the pagan and the Christian), against each other,

what Milton does is to split the attention of the audience and so divert its negative thrust against that which he is willing to let go.

Milton uses a similar technique to be able to sing and criticize with impunity. The different versions of the pastoral enable different kinds of singers to operate in the poem. As with the songs, Milton sacrifices one so that the Christian singer is left alone to voice the proper song. This correct singing is the activity by which evil is avoided and reward achieved, as exemplified by Lycidas. But the song is no longer solely of heaven as it was in "Il Penseroso". The heavenly song, combined with the Virgilian pastoral of power, has direct influence on the world. This changes the nature of both the singer and the song.

The first fact we must recognize is the isolation of the singer. This is the normal condition of the pastoral swain but usually he is ignorant of it or deliberately ignores it. Here however, the singer's first act is to bewail the isolation caused by his friend's death. This is Milton letting the reader know directly that he is aware of his position as poet. In "Lycidas", he flouts the idea that he stands alone against the world. He has lost his friend and singing companion;he extols the unique and solitary place of the poet --- especially one commercing with truth; he tackles the corrupt clergy single-handed and twin-engined. He knows where he is at all times and

always knows what he is doing. Even within the poem, the singer recognizes the difference between the two songs: the pagan pastoral is "false surmise" while the Christian version is the "faithful Herdsman's art". In spite of this distinction, the pagan form still has recognized value. St. Peter's visit does not banish it completely and the elegy itself is seen in the last movement to be sung by an "uncouth Swain". It is recognized that to affect actions in this world, the poet cannot sing only songs that ignore the world.

Through the course of the poem then, Milton always has his singer changing personas to meet the requirements of the situation. To show Lycidas' union with nature, the singer is pagan; in the passages showing the union with God, he is Christian. But the most important mask adopted, in terms of the poem as a piece of propaganda, is that which results from the association of the singer with Lycidas himself. In the first lines of the poems, Lycidas cannot be matched.

> 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: (1-9)

But there is ambiguity and irony in his relation to his dead friend. The homage to Lycidas' superiority is undercut by the overstressed unreadiness of the opening lines and

by:

> For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
> Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill. (23-24)

This suggests equality. The following description of their identical bucolic pursuits of a shared day further supports their likeness. And as the poem progresses, the figures of Lycidas and the singer tend to merge even more. When St. Peter speaks, it is uncertain to whom he refers.

> "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? (113-115)

On the first level, he talks to Lycidas. But then we realize that he talks to Milton who relays the message to the reader. And with Milton "church-outed", St. Peter's words can be a nice ironic rationalization expressing feigned gratitude. By the end of the poem, the singer is just as elevated as his subject, being able to recreate and tell of the perfection Lycidas has achieved. The "Genius of the shore" can equally be Milton or King. King is the protecting diety; Milton, King's poetic successor, is the mediator between the elements that meet at the multi-meaning shores of the world. He is the Puritan rhetorician and poet/pamphleteer proclaiming his truth.

This truth is the knowledge of the corruption of the world and results in the satire of "Lycidas".To convince an audience that its whole life style is bad or false is without doubt the most difficult task of the rhetorician. Satire is the form that serves just this function.

It can easily be accommodated by other modes and has a natural affinity to the pastoral.

> Pastoral is a form of mediation, over the difference between the condition of the poet and the condition of those about whom he writes, which explains why his descriptions of Nature, of the simple shepherd and clean sheep, constitute at least an oblique comment on Art, on the complex virtues and vice of the audience. Pastoral has, therefore, a satirical reflex, and possesses, despite its reputation to the contrary, a definable moral dimension.[2]

Their use together even adds further dimensions to each. Satire adds bite to the pastoral; the pastoral makes satire more aesthetically pleasing and thus more open to reception. By invoking the green world, an ideal situation is automatically implied and works to create a satiric juxtaposition to the real world. Milton does this by describing the ideal shared day. It is a picture of Theocritean otium in which song is the instrument by which harmony with nature is achieved. When Lycidas and his friend sing, even the "Rough Satyrs danc'd", showing the song's power. But left in this form, the satire would be common, easy, and unchristian, and so could easily be dismissed, especially by a Renaissance audience.

Milton does not stop here however. The vision of the ideal pagan world is only an initial feint to draw out his opposition. He knows that this vision is bound to be rejected so it is not made the operative term of his satire. The direct attack is made through the personas of the Christian singer and Lycidas. The best example of this is

the invective against the clergy.

> The realistic sort of pastoral (the sort touched by mock-pastoral) also gives a natural expression for a sense of social injustice. So far as the person described is outside society because too poor for its benefits he is independent, as the artist claims to be, and can be a critic of society; so far as he is forced by this into crime he is the judge of the society that judges him. This is a source of irony both against him and against the society, and if he is a sympathetic criminal he can be made to suggest both Christ as the scapegoat (so involving Christian charity) and the sacrificial tragic hero, who was normally above society rather than below it, which is a further source of irony.[3]

This relates uncannily well to how Milton makes the singer function in the poem. His isolation has already been noted and from this position he throws his critical barbs at the church. He is partly criminal too, as his isolation, in real terms, was due to his radical religious views.From this stance, he judges and is judged. And that he is a sympathetic criminal is made clear when we read the description of the corrupt, materialistic clergy who

> Of other care they little reck'ning make,
> Than how to scramble at the shearers' feast,
> And shove away the worthy bidden guest (116-118)

He is sympathetic by comparison, and through the mask of Lycidas, both versions of Christ can be applied. In

> So Lycidas, sunk low, but mounted high,
> Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves (172-173)

Lycidas, and so by implication the singer, is associated with the sacrificial vision of Christ. Death is the necessary first step in achieving a greater elevation. By:

> 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. (100-102)

the unnecessary death --- though inevitable as the "Bark", representing both the church and the body, is built under the dispensation of fallen nature --- invokes the idea of Christ as scapegoat. This is achieved by the suggestion of preparation for ritual sacrifice in the description of the act of building a damned boat. There is also the suggestion that the singer shares in this sinking elevation by the mimicry of his head sympathetically bowed to mourn the untimely death.

While the pagan ideas can be dismissed as fancy,what St. Peter says, and the singers he says it through, must be taken seriously. What he says is Christian fact and cannot be dismissed. The evil will get their just deserts. Those who maintain that there is no corruption in the church, must still agree with the argument by saying that if the prelates were evil, the attack would not be misdirected.

Defenders of the church would point out that the whole song is sung by a pagan swain and so is not valid. This is precisely what Milton set his audience up to do. He allows them an easy and insignificant victory by sacrificing the persona of the pagan pastoral poet. But in "Lycidas", whose parts are not connected by logic, the whole is not invalid because of one faulty part. So the Christian vision would still stand. And any objection would be tempered by the fact that the poem eulogises a churchman. It would be difficult for a cleric to attack a poem that praises another cleric.

Finally, even the dismissal of the pagan form is ambiguous. Milton allows the dismissal, but only for the purpose of argument, not in fact. So in spite of all possible qualifications, the clergy is still seen as corrupt. The pastoral tradition stipulates that is a shepherd leaves his sheep, he must also leave his song to those who will guard the flock. The corrupt clergy can no longer guide or sing. Who else, in the poem, can take the rôle of the shepherd singer but the "Genius of the shore"? It is he who is "good/To all that wander in the perilous flood". Realistically this is impossible as Lycidas is dead. But as was shown, the figure of Lycidas is ambiguous and finally it is Milton himself, who, by proper use of his art, assumes the responsibility.

We have seen then, how by drawing on the whole pastoral tradition, Milton extracted those elements he needed and by carefully structuring their use, was able to say what he wanted, to whom he wanted. A brilliant rhetorician, his use of the pastoral enabled him to enter circles that would otherwise have been closed to him. A brilliant poet, as a means for attacking his enemies, he created "Lycidas", one of the most beautiful poems in the English language.

Notes to Chapter Four

[1]J.C. Ransom, "A Poem Nearly Anonymous", Milton's "Lycidas: The Tradition and the Poem, ed. C.A. Patrides (New York, 1961), p. 79.

[2]Tayler, pp. 56-57.

[3]Empson, p. 17.

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