FAITH, SYMPATHY, AND CONSOLATION IN MILTON'S *LYCIDAS*

by

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ABSTRACT

In John Milton's *Lycidas*, the speaker's confusion over the death of Lycidas is represented to sympathize with other Christians who may have been in a similar situation of uncertainty and grief. As a Christian, Milton knew that confusion is one of the most disturbing enemies of a believer's faith. This thesis will look at Milton's approach in using both pagan and Christian notions in *Lycidas* and will argue that the poem is addressing a greater issue than merely serving as a personal elegy: it is about a Christian's faith and the uncertainty and confusion that arises during one's journey of faith. In that approach the poem raises the question of why a virtuous man like Edward King has to face death at an early age, which opens the discussion of God's justice. This thesis suggests that *Lycidas* is a poem about faith and trust in God and serves as a source of empathy towards all believers who like the speaker in *Lycidas* struggle with their unresolved questions in times of grief and sorrow. Milton allows the speaker to experience confusion in order to practice his faith. The confusion and questionings lead the readers to ponder God's ways. This thesis also looks at the pastoral aspect of *Lycidas* and will argue that the pagan tradition used in *Lycidas* does not interfere with Christian aspect of it but works to its advantage. Milton uses the pastoral elegy and pastoral world to represent mourning and thus creates a contrast with the Christian-world that offers consolation.

I. INTRODUCTION

After Samuel Johnson's complaint about John Milton's *Lycidas* for its lack of passion and its easy pastoral form, many scholars concluded that *Lycidas* is originated from Milton's self-concerns and that the poem is about Milton himself. Confirming E. M. W. Tillyard's belief that the real subject of *Lycidas* is not Edward King but Milton himself, Edward Wagenknecht argues that "the real subject of 'Lycidas' is not Edward King *qua* Edward King" but is "John Milton *qua* John Milton" (394). David Daiches in contrast argues that "if the subject of the poem is not simply Edward King as man, neither is it (as Tillyard would have it) simply Milton himself [but] it is man in his creative capacity as Christian humanist poet-priest" (qtd. in Bourdette 12). Other scholars have also pointed at the poem's self-reflective aspect, believing that the poem represents Milton's anxiety about his own life as a poet. The problem seems to be evident in the passage below when the speaker asks,

> Alas! what boots it with incessant care
>
> To tend the homely, slighted shepherd's trade,
>
> And strictly meditate the thankless Muse?
>
> Were it not better done, as others use,
>
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
>
> Or with the tangles of Neæra's hair? (64-69)

Stella Revard notes that "the poet seems less concerned that Lycidas has died without fulfilling his potential than that he himself might also die early and unfulfilled. Forgetting the dead man, he is impelled by the urgency of his own demands" (259). One thing to notice in this passage is that the questions arise in the language of pastoral, and as Paul J.

Alpers observed, these are pastoral questions. In his book, *What Is Pastoral?* Alpers explains that "what has usually not been recognized is that the poem's acts of questioning are themselves pastoral. They do not occur because a merely naïve and innocent consciousness is invaded by sterner realities to which it is inherently inadequate." "Rather" he argues, "they arise from the internal workings of usages and conventions whose 'strength relative to world' is indeed at issue in the poem but is finally confirmed by it" (97). Lawrence W. Hyman explains that *Lycidas* is a pastoral elegy, and therefore, "we do not read the poem literally, [and] we are not looking for real tears," but that "we read the poem, or should read it, as Rosemond Tuve has said, figuratively" (535).

Although we cannot say for certain whether—or how much of—the sorrow represented in *Lycidas* was related to Milton's own life, what we know for certain is that the poem is about grief and sorrow. Milton himself confirmed this when he re-published *Lycidas* in 1645 by adding a headnote saying, "in this monody the author bewails a learned friend, unfortunately drowned in his passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by occasion foretells the ruin of our corrupted clergy then in their height" (Milton, 39). Robert E. Jr. Bourdette explains that "if we keep in mind that 'Lycidas' is, first and foremost, a poem about grief, then the obvious complexities of the poem—the classical and Christian allusions; the seemingly artificial pastoral setting; … [and] the "remote allusions"…—can lead us to the human emotion at the heart of the poem rather than away from it into discrete details of Milton's biography or myth or "obscure opinions" (13). I agree with Bourdette that the poem is about grief and add that *Lycidas* is especially about a Christian's faith and serves as means of expressing *empathy* towards all believers who like the speaker in *Lycidas* struggle with their unresolved questions in

times of grief and sorrow. While confirming Daiches's argument that the poem is about a "Christian humanist poet-priest," I also consider that the poem could be related to King's death and/or Milton's own concerns in that regard, but I oppose the idea that the poem is solely about Milton himself. Milton is deliberately revealing uncertainty and confusion in *Lycidas* to allow the speaker to exercise his faith and to sympathize with other Christians who may have found themselves in a similar situation. The poem is about learning how to trust God during difficulties. I will look at Milton's use of classical pastoral mode and will argue that he uses this mode in his own approach; that is, he uses the classical pastoral both to represent mourning and to suggest that the speaker's endeavor in finding consolation in the pagan world is useless, and that the speaker must leave the classical pagan world and trust God in order to find true consolation for his sorrow and uncertainty. The speaker's endeavor in trying to find consolation in the pastoral pagan world may be compared with a believer's endeavor in trying to find peace and consolation through earthly values. Milton tells us in *Areopagitica* that "our faith and knowledge thrive by exercise" (260) and that we are purified by trial (248). Therefore, the speaker in *Lycidas* must experience sorrow and uncertainty to exercise his faith. Milton further explains in *Areopagitica* that, "good and evil we know in the field of this world grow up together almost inseparably, and the knowledge of good is … involved and interwoven with the knowledge of evil" (247). In that respect, the pagan aspect in *Lycidas* does not change the main subject of this poem; it helps the readers fall into knowing the Christian God, as Adam—according to Milton—fell into knowing good by evil (*Areopagitica* 247).

As the speaker in *Lycidas* retains his Christian view about death—that death is only a departure from this world into heaven—in his flesh and his soul he is also struggling with the reality of Lycidas's death, and therefore goes through confusion and uncertainty which I think is natural. The poem tells us that although confusion and uncertainty exist in this world, all shall be well at the end because Christ stands above all. Thus, by the end of this poem Milton offers sympathy and consolation to his readers, both of which are related to pastoral and Christian elegies. By combining the two worlds, Milton is creating a new world that has both the fiction of pastoral and reality; while as readers we take the pagan aspect as the mythological and unreal part of the poem, the Christian aspect gives us a way into the real world in which a believer's faith is constantly attacked by confusion, grief, and sorrow. Therefore, the sympathy and the consolation speak to real believers in the real world. By the end of *Lycidas*, not only do we find consolation, but the idea of death is transformed both in the mind of the speaker and the reader; death that used to mean a separation, now means being united with God. Looking from this Christian perspective, both the speaker in *Lycidas* and the readers find consolation.

The first chapter of this thesis presents the general introduction of my topic. In the second chapter, I will look at the formation of pastoral poetry and pastoral elegy from Theocritus to Milton. I will explain that there has been a significant shift in pastoral poetry during the Middle Ages and Renaissance, especially as pastoral was becoming Christianized. While these changes shaped Milton's view about pastoral mode, it is undeniable that Milton's inspiration comes mostly from Theocritus and Virgil. In the third chapter, I will look at the classical allusions in *Lycidas* and will argue that these

allusions create questions about the pagan ideas and reveal the importance of knowing

and trusting God (referring to Christian God). As the pastoral pagan aspect of this poem

helps in expressing mourning and sorrow, the Christian aspect helps in finding peace and

consolation. I will focus on the speaker's struggles and his uncertainty about life and will

argue that it is through these struggles that Milton is creating sympathy, and through

lamentation that he is leading readers to consolation; because without revealing his own

struggles the speaker could not sympathize with his readers, and without the grief and

sorrow there would be no need for consolation. In the fourth chapter, I will examine the

Christian allusions in *Lycidas* and how these allusions focus on a believer's faith and trust

in God. This chapter contains many references to bible as I believe Milton also used bible

as his main source in this poem. I will explain how these allusions highlight the

importance of having faith in God especially when confusion occurs. And finally, in the

last chapter, I will look at the poem's order and the speaker's change of view. The

speaker hopes to find consolation in his memories but realizes that the past can only bring

temporary consolation. Therefore, he decides to look into future and trust God. I will

argue that it is through his shift of view and his faith and trust in God that the struggles

are resolved, and the sorrow gives its place to consolation.

II. PASTORAL POETRY: FROM THEOCRITUS TO MILTON

In this chapter, I will look at pastoral poetry and the formation of pastoral elegy from Theocritus to Milton. This chapter does not present the history of pastoral poetry, but for the purpose of this thesis, I will have to limit my analysis to the works of a few pastoral poets, those mostly related to both pastoral elegy and to Milton's *Lycidas*. I will begin with Theocritus and will examine his works along with the works of other poets such as Moschus, Bion, Virgil and many others including Milton, who in many ways followed Virgil and Theocritus in *Lycidas*. I will look at how the pastoral mode has changed during the Middle Ages and Renaissance in which political and religious issue were occurring. As a result, the pastoral poetry went through alterations both in its subject and structure. Pastoral poetry became popular in Italy, Spain, France and finally England, and authors such as Dante, Petrarch, Boccaccio, Sidney, and even Milton who came later, created new versions of pastoral. The main focus, however, will be how these earlier poems affected Milton's approach in writing *Lycidas*, and how Milton is altering this mode.

Theocritus and the Pastoral Poetry

Pastoral poetry goes back to the Greek poet Theocritus, who's poems tell us that he was a native of Syracuse, Italy, and that he wrote some of his works about the twelfth year of Ptolemy Philadelphus (Greek Bucolic Poets, ix). He traveled in Greece and Egypt and seems to have studied poetry and medicine. Theocritus is considered the founder of pastoral poetry and wrote his *Idylls* in rustic and rural settings with the main characters being herdsmen and shepherds. Pastoral poetry depicts shepherds in a rural life who are often in harmony with nature and enjoy the simple life away from the city. Theocritus's

Idyll I is one of the most famous pastoral poems. In it, an unnamed goatherd and a

shepherd named Thyrsis compliment one-another for their piping and singing. Thyrsis

asks the goatherd to play his pipe, but he refuses to do so, explaining that this may wake

Pan, and instead asks Thyrsis to perform his famous song about the sufferings of Daphnis

in return for an ivy-wood cup as his prize. Thyrsis sings his famous song and thus

receives the cup. Most conventions in this and Theocritus's other *Idylls* have become the

basis for all pastoral poems and "although there is no evidence that Theocritus designed

this poem to begin a collection, … its concern with the origins and nature of bucolic

poetry is evident" (Theocritus, *Idylls* 15). The poem encompasses themes and motifs of

love, death, poetry, nature, lamentation, conversation, singing competition and bucolic

lifestyle. Singing is a convention that brings the shepherds together, and a way of

lamenting the death of another shepherd. Singing is also practiced as a contest. *Idyll V* is

one example in which a goatherd and a shepherd, Comatas and Lacan, engage in a

singing contest. *Idyll XI* also uses singing but not as a contest but rather as a remedy for

love. In this poem the speaker (presumably Theocritus) sings Polyphemus's song about

his unrequited love for the sea-nymph Galatea. Thus, singing comes in different

approaches: sometimes as a contest as we see in *Idyll V,* other times as an elegy over the

death of another shepherd as in *Idyll I,* or simply expressing the unrequited love we see in

the case of Polyphemus in *Idyll XI*. We can say that in *Idyll I* there is also the idea of

contest; while the competition is not quite achieved and Thyrsis seems to be the only one

competing for a prize, Vassiliki Frangeskou believes that "the description of the cup,

given by the goatherd with Thyrsis as his judge and prize-giver," itself is a type of contest

or *agon* as Frangeskou uses that term, because "only if the goatherd succeeds in his

description, will he have as his prize … Thyrsis' song" (24-25).

Another characteristic of *Idyll I* and many other pastoral poems is cordiality *mixed* with a sense of reserve and obscure personalities of the characters. Having an unnamed goatherd in *Idyll I* who excuses himself for not playing his pipe preserves the obscurity of the goatherd's character. While the goatherd's excuse seems reasonable, the reader is still not quite convinced that he is being completely honest or there is another purpose for his refusal to play his pipe. This approach is also seen in *Idyll VII* in which the shepherd Lycidas has an enigmatic, reserved yet humble and friendly character. In Virgil's first Eclogue too, there is a sense of distance between the two characters, Meliboeus and Tityrus. Although Tityrus invites Meliboeus to his farm, he does not seem to be sympathizing with Meliboeus and his situation. The feeling of distance and the obscurity of the characters do not take away the sense of cordiality in these pastoral poems but give them depth and strength, in accord with William Empson's approach for "putting the complex into simple" (23) in *Some Versions of Pastoral*.

Moschus and Bion

Born in Syracuse, Italy, Moschus is another classic pastoral poet. Moschus "was a student of the grammarian Aristarchus, who taught at Alexandria from about 180 to about 144 BCE. The year 150 would possibly be about the middle of the life of Moschus" (The Poetry of Moschus by Moschus*).* While there is a debate whether it was Moschus or Bion who was the second bucolic poet, chronologically Moschus is considered the successor to the Greek Theocritus, based on information from Suidas—a lexicographer who lived in the tenth century. Many of Moschus's works are lost, but of those this survive three poems, "Love in Flight," "Europa," and "Lament for Bion" are his most famous.

However, the work "Lament for Bion" that used to be attributed to Moschus, is now believed to have been written by another unnamed poet. It is assumed that the work was written by a student of Bion, who imitated his master's "Lament for Adonis" (The Poetry of Moschus by Moschus). James Holly Hanford mentions an echo of the "Lament for Bion" in Milton's *Lycidas* in the way everything in nature mourns for the deceased (415), which eventually goes back to Theocritus's *Idyll 1* in which every creature mourns for the death of Daphnis.

Bion was also a pastoral poet who was born in Smyrna, known today as İzmir, Turkey. He is considered the third pastoral poet after Theocritus. Bion's "Lament for Adonis" is a pastoral elegy which was probably inspired by Theocritus's *Idyll XV* in which two countrywomen go to see the Festival of Adonis. The elegy focuses on Adonis's death and depicts Aphrodite's lament for Adonis. The scene in this elegy changes several times— from Aphrodite's bed to Adonis in the hills, and Aphrodite and the dying Adonis—and the emphasis is on speech and movement (Bion, *Lament for Adonis,* 504). The poem laments the death of Adonis who was slain by a wild boar. It begins with the scene in which Love wakes Adonis's beloved Venus (Aphrodite) and tells her that Adonis is dead. Adonis is depicted dying in the hills, his thigh pierced and his blood dripping on the snow. Distraught with grief, Venus wanders over the face of the world. Then all nature mourns him, the hills, the valleys, the streams, the flowers, etc. Venus bends over Adonis's corpse and tries to revive him, then consigns his soul to Persephone the goddess of the underworld. Adonis's blood and the tears of Venus together spring up as mingled wildflowers. Then Adonis's body is prepared for burial with flowers, perfumes, and ceremonies. Venus is advised in the final lines of the poem

to leave her grief for today, because as time goes by and the seasons run their cycle, her grief will also be renewed (The Poetry of Bion by Bion). Anna C. Brackett believes that Milton in his *Lycidas*, as well as Shelley in his "Adonais" followed the ancient poets Bion and Moschus, asserting that "Milton chooses Moschus for his model at the beginning using an invocation [here referring to "Lament for Bion," which is no longer attributed to Moschus], while-Shelley closely follow[s] Bion" (361). As Brackett mentions, this may have happened unconsciously, but the resemblance is undeniable. The speaker in Milton's *Lycidas* invokes the nine muses to help him in his song and tells them, "Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well / That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring, / Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string" (15-17). In "Lament for Bion" the speaker invokes the Sicilian Maidens, telling them, "Begin, O Sicilian Maidens, a song of sorrow, begin, O Muses!" (8). However, both allude to Theocritus's *Idyll I* in which Thyrsis begins his song with similar lines: "Begin, dear Muses, begin the pastoral song" (Theocritus, *Idylls* 25). Thus, the similarity between Milton's *Lycidas* and "Lament for Bion" could eventually result from both works using Theocritus's *Idylls* as their model for elegies.

Virgil

Then comes Virgil, the Roman poet, who lived between 70 and 19 BC, also followed Theocritus in depicting bucolic life in his eclogues, but he altered some of the ideas: Theocritus's Sicily became Virgil's Arcadia, and the contrast between rural and urban life became intense in Virgil's eclogues. His *Eclogue I* is the best example in that regard. Meliboeus discusses his ill fortune in losing his lands with Tityrus who on the contrary will keep his lands. While Meliboeus is unhappy about the situation, Tityrus remains

contented, telling Meliboeus that "it is a god who gave [him] this peace" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 25), and when Meliboeus asks who this god of his is, Tityrus replies: "The city which they call Rome" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 27). Virgil combines the ideal bucolic theme with the political issues of his time. As Ernest A. Fredricksmeyer observed, "there is a fusion in this poem, a successful integration of the imaginary and the real, of the fiction of bucolic-rustic existence and historical-political reality" (210). On one hand Virgil is separating the two characters according to their economic situations, and on the other he is telling us that neither character is genuinely free. It seems that this eclogue is taking away the peaceful pastoral space from its characters; Meliboeus loses his lands and Tityrus, who did not lose that space, must come under the law of men instead of nature and therefore his peace is dependent on the city law. Urban and political forces are invading the pastoral world and readers realize in this first eclogue that they are no longer in Theocritus's pastoral world. According to Alpers, in *What Is Pastoral?* "Virgil's new representation of shepherds brings about a modification of pastoral song" (24), and this is presumably because during that time the city life was becoming the focus of attention and new issues and concerns were rising. "It might be argued that Virgil re-visioned Theocritus's pastoral pieces through his Roman/romantic/romanticized sensibility that developed and refined the mode as an agent of transformation" (Greenberg 444). While the alterations cannot be denied, nevertheless, Virgil's eclogues keep basic pastoral conventions in common with Theocritus's *Idylls*. For example, like Theocritus's *Idyll V*, Virgil's *Eclogue III* is a singing contest between two shepherds, Menalcas and Damoteas, both of whom are declared winners by Palaemon, another shepherd who is watching their contest. Similarly, in Virgil's *Eclogue V* the shepherd Menalcas engages in another

singing contest with a shepherd named Mopsus. Not only is this Eclogue similar to Theocritus's *Idyll V* but also to his *Idyll 1* in that in Virgil's *Eclogue V* the two shepherds also sing for the death of Daphnis. Virgil's alterations of pastoral poetry are not pushing his eclogues away from the pastoral mode but bring Virgil's own contemporary issues into it.

Pastoral Poetry of Middle Ages and Renaissance

Pastoral poetry never stopped changing; In the late Middle Ages, Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio (chiefly the latter two), insisted that allusion was intrinsic to pastoral, and through the Renaissance and beyond, "'pretty tales of wolves and sheep' (in Sidney's phrase) were conventionally held to conceal deep hidden meanings – biographical, political, didactic, religious" (Chaudhuri XIX). The term "elegy" itself changed its meaning after the classical use; in classic literature any poem that was written in elegiac meter could be considered an elegy regardless of its subject. It was during the 16th century that "subject" became the most important characteristic of an elegy; an elegy thus became a poem that lamented the death of a loved one regardless of the type of meter the poet decided to use. In pastoral elegies, along with nature, shepherds would come together and mourn for the deceased, and usually would bring flowers for the deceased. In the late fifteenth century, pastoral elegies became especially fashionable in Italy, and spread from Italy to Spain, and from Spain to France and ultimately to England. In France, in 1531, Clément Marot published a pastoral elegy on the death of Madame Loyse de Savoye, which became one of the most elegant modern elegies. This poem was believed to be the model of Edmund Spenser's "November" in his *Shepheardes Calender*, and from this time the pastoral elegy became popular in England (Norlin 294-95). *The*

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Shepheardes Calender is a collection of twelve eclogues, each representing a month of the year and different stages of life. The change of seasons reveals the mutability and unpredictability of life: "Spenserian pastoral is confrontational rather than escapist and more inclined to chart the landscape of wish-frustration than that of wish-fulfilment" (Mccabe xii). Spenser's "November" is a lament on the death of Dido, who is believed to be Queen Elizabeth by some scholars. Mary Parmenter proposed this identification in her article, "Spenser Twelve Aeglogves" in which she reveals: "what if she [Dido] were Elisa, the English Queen—alluded to as Dido, Virgil's Elisa, or Elissa—she who had of late been 'dead' indeed to the Earl of Leicester, to the Sidneys, to all who saw her true self lost and gone by reason of her policy of, marrying the heir to the throne of France?" (214). While this elegy shares many similarities with classical pastoral elegies, Merritt Y. Hughes argues that we cannot know for certain how many and what forms of the Greek idylls were available to Spenser when he wrote his *Calender* (191). Hughes concludes that "all of Spenser's adaptations of Greek pastoral poems, both in *The Shepheardes Calender* and elsewhere, have a long series of French or Italian precedents behind them and are better evidence of his absorption in the literary fashions of his time than they are of his appreciation of Greek literature" (193-94).

Although the time before the 16th century England was showing a lack of interest in Greek pastoral poetry, which could have its root in religious concerns, pastoral poetry and pastoral elegies gradually found their way into England both due to its popularity around other parts of Europe and its change of subject, as the pastoral mode was becoming even more Christianized. Gregory Kneidel asserts that "Spenser presents his readers with the model of godly pastoral rhetoric that has its basis in Pauline theology

and that was especially current and controversial in the decades surrounding Spenser's emergence as a poet" (275). The terms "pastoral" and "shepherd" were used both in classic literature and Christian theology. The term "pastor" has been used in classical Latin as "a person who has charge of a flock (*literal* and *figurative*)" (OED, I.) and in post-classical Latin as "a person who has the spiritual care of a body of Christians, as a bishop, priest, minister, etc." (OED, 1. a.). "The Bible yield[ed] its own pastoral material, most famously in Psalm 23 but with more metaphoric potential in the allied but distinct topos of Christ the Good Shepherd. This topos enters into piquant interaction with the trope of 'pastoral care' in the clergy, and its extension in ecclesiastical allegory" (Chaudhuri XXV). During Renaissance and beyond, Psalm 23 has been written in several versions as a Christian pastoral song by different authors, including Henry Lok's version from his *Sundry Christian Passions* (1593), George Herbert's "The 23d Psalme" from *The Temple (1633)*, and a version by Nicholas Breton called "The Lord He Is My Shepherd" from his prayer collection *The Soules Heavenly Exercise* (1601).

Milton and Pastoral Elegy

Milton, who came after all these poets, knew most of their works and used many of their approaches in *Lycidas*. The greatest influence on Milton's *Lycidas,* however, comes from Theocritus and Virgil. As indicated previously, the name "Lycidas" has been used by these poets before; Stella Revard explains that "in their *Idylls* and *eclogues*, Theocritus and Virgil depict pastoral work and pastime, and in *Idyll 7* and in *Eclogue 9*, respectively, introduce us to two countrymen named Lycidas" (257). In Theocritus's *Idyll 7*, Lycidas is a poet-goatherd "whom Simichidas induces to exchange songs with, as well as pleasantries and even considered opinions on poetry" (Brown 59). One reason that Milton

has borrowed the name Lycidas is that Lycidas in *Idyll VII* seems to be a prophetic

character: humble, and yet beyond an ordinary goatherd. His song is a prayer for

Ageanax so that he will safely set sail to Mitylene. He prays that "may everything be in

his favor, and may he reach the harbor after a good voyage" (Theocritus, *Idylls* 123). In

Milton's *Lycidas*, Edward King as Lycidas also had to travel by waters and sail over the

Irish Sea, but unlike Ageanax, he did not have Lycidas's prayers. Yet the name does

agree with Milton's Lycidas as "the genius of the shore" (183) in that like Lycidas in

Idyll VII, who sent his prayers as a protection, Milton's Lycidas becomes the guardian of

sea who protects others from the dangerous flood. Charles Segal confirms that "Lycidas's

song in *Idyll 7* has several analogous effects, notably in the sudden evocation of the

movements of the sea and its depths, its harsh marine life, and its mythology, an effect all

the more striking because everything in the poem up to that point has focused on the

land" (216). Lycidas's songs and prayers in *Idyll VII* reminds us of Milton's Lycidas who

overcomes the harshness of the sea and later becomes the "genius of the shore." In

Virgil's *Eclogue IX,* Lycidas is a shepherd who is having a dialogue with another

shepherd, called Moeris. Moeris complains about losing his farm, telling Lycidas, "O

Lycidas, we have lived to see the day … when a stranger, holder of our little farm, could

say: 'This is mine; begone, old tenants!'" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 83). This Eclogue focuses on

singing and tells us that singing can be a remedy for sorrow. Lycidas suggests that they

sing together while going home, "we may yet go singing on our way—it makes the road

less irksome" (89), but Moeris prefers that they finish their task first, saying to Lycidas,

"Our songs we shall sing the better, when the master himself has come" (89).

Milton follows the classical elegies to express grief and mourning in *Lycidas*, but

he does not conclude the poem with mourning. In line 10 of *Lycidas* the speaker asks, "Who would not sing for Lycidas?" Here there is a reference to Virgil's *Eclogue X* in which the speaker similarly invokes the nymph Arethusa and tells her: "who would refuse verses to Gallus?" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 89). He continues, "for him even the laurels, even the tamarisks wept. For him, as he lay beneath a lonely rock, even pine crowned Maenalus wept, and the crags of cold Lycaeus. The sheep, too, … the shepherd came, too; slowly the swineherds came; Menalcas came, …Apollo came" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 91). In *Lycidas,* too, the speaker asks every creature to mourn for Lycidas, "Thee, Shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves, / With wild thyme and the gadding vine o'ergrown, / And all their echoes mourn." (39-41). While Milton follows these classical poems, he uses yet a new approach in *Lycidas*, and that is, resolving the grief by offering consolation through Christ. "In Milton's eyes the pastoral element in *Lycidas* was neither alien nor artificial. Familiar as he was with poetry of this kind in English, Latin, Italian, and Greek, Milton recognized the pastoral as one of the natural modes of literary expression, sanctioned by classic practice, and recommended by not inconsiderable advantages of its own" (Hanford 403). Perhaps the most distinctive characteristic of *Lycidas* compared to other pastoral elegies before it, is its message of hope and the consolation that comes at the end of the poem. It is true that there is consolation in other elegies such as Bion's *Lament for Adonis*, but the consolation that Milton offers differs from other elegies in that the speaker in *Lycidas* is consoled because he is looking at something beyond pain and sorrow, whereas in *Lament for Adonis,* Venus is advised to cease her wailing for today, and stop her lamentations, because she "must lament *again* and weep *again* another year" [*my italics*] (Bion, *Lament for Adonis* 517). While in

Lycidas the consolation mingles with joy and hope, *Lament for Adonis* is based on despair and even expects more sorrow coming in the future. Wilfred P. Mustard points to the special imagery of Greek dirges, and the pathetic contrast between the immortality of nature and the mortality of man and explains that "the seasons pass and return, the leaves and flowers fade and come again, but man dies and comes not again" (162). This special imagery is seen in Milton's *Lycidas* when Lycidas dies, but death is resolved when the speaker imagines Lycidas in heaven at the end of the poem. Thus, Milton has created a pastoral elegy that transcends the conventions. Alpers mentions that "the poem differs from its predecessors [in that] there is no represented gathering of shepherds to lament their dead fellow. This makes the poem less predictable and rule-governed than earlier pastoral elegies, but the effect is to enhance the depth and energy with which it reveals the significance of their conventions" (93). But "the gathering of shepherds" is not entirely removed in *Lycidas* but used differently; as Alpers confirms, *Lycidas* was published in a volume of memorial poems and thus "the poets and readers of such a collection are metaphorically brought together as shepherds" (94). Another difference is that *Lycidas* is heavily Christian. One of the most striking moments in *Lycidas* is the appearance of St. Peter, as the pilot of the Galilean lake, who talks to the speaker about God's justice. This change of theme from pagan allusion to biblical allusion has confused many scholars. But one thing we must remember is that the whole structure of *Lycidas* is based on Christianity, and subjects such as death, suffering, sorrow, faith, and confusion all eventually find their place and purpose in Christian doctrine. Even when Milton uses classical conventions, it does not interfere with the Christian aspect of the poem. Unlike classical elegies, *Lycidas* concludes with the celebration of a new life in heaven and with

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the Christian message that death is being united with God in a new heavenly home.

III. THE CLASSICAL ALLUSIONS IN *LYCIDAS*

In this chapter, I will look at the classical allusions and will argue that these allusions do not come against the Christian aspect of this poem but work to its advantage. I will analyze mourning and sorrow and their importance in pastoral poetries. I will also look at the problem of seeking earthly fame and the speaker's earthly view that created doubt and uncertainty in his mind. There is also the questioning of evil and God's justice in that regard. I will compare such questionings in *Lycidas* with Boethius's questionings in his work, *The Consolation of Philosophy,* and will argue that Milton's approach is similar to Boethius's in that they both acknowledge the pain and struggles but also resolve those struggles through a consolation that comes from God. Both in Boethius's *Consolation* and Milton's *Lycidas* the characters realize the importance of having faith and trust in God and will decide to look at God as their ultimate happiness.

The Significance of Flowers in Pastoral Elegy

One reason that Milton uses pastoral mode is that pastoral is related to death and mourning. As Richard P. Adams confirms, "the conventions of pastoral elegy were appropriate because they had been hammered out over the centuries by poets concerned, as Milton was, with the problem and the mystery of death" (183). But again, when he gives the speaker a heavenly vision of Lycidas's death, Milton is changing the meaning of death in the minds of his readers from death being seen from the classical pastoral view to the Christian pastoral view. In the beginning of *Lycidas* the speaker is telling the flowers and the plants that he came "to pluck [their] berries harsh and crude" (3), "before the mellowing year" (5), because "sad occasion dear / Compels [him] to disturb [their] season due" (6-7). Here the speaker is picking the berries before they are matured. This

both represents Edward King's early death, as well as the speaker's state of faith and his understanding of the "sad occasion." In other words, everything in the beginning of the poem is in its primary stage. Marcia Landy notes that the flower images contain the idea of both death and resurrection in nature and explains that although an individual flower dies, the promise of its continuation is assured and "in Christian terms, this continuity is related to the motif of death and resurrection" (308). Milton is using the flowers both to represent mourning and to foreshadow the resurrection of Lycidas through Christ. Karl P. Wentersdorf explains that all the flowers mentioned in the beginning of *Lycidas* have a long literary tradition: "laurel" in the first line refers to Apollo and thus is a symbol of poetic success, which Edward King could not earn because of his early death. This early death also "prevented King from achieving fulfillment in human love, a theme prefigured in the poet's intention to crush the dark leaves of 'Myrtles' —the shrub sacred to Venus." And finally, as a Christian pastor and theologically learned virtuous man King was potentially worthy of an "Ivy" chaplet -- an ancient symbol of great learning (275). The plucking of these flowers could be a symbolic act of turning away from pagan traditions, as they cannot help the speaker to find consolation. Later in *Lycidas* the speaker asks the valleys to bring all their flowers from purple to crow-toe (hyacinth), to pink flower (dianthus) and pansy, etc. He turns to flowers and seeks consolation in nature only to find that the flowers cannot serve Lycidas, because there is no body to leave the flowers with. Bourdette confirms that "having found no enduring satisfaction in that conceit, [in nature], or indeed elsewhere, but having no other choice since no other version of pastoral has offered consolation, the speaker returns to this elemental image of mourning nature. He indulges in this last desperate imagining to avoid total despair only to realize

that it, too, is a final dead-end in the search for consolation" (17). While flowers have a root in classical pastoral elegies, they also have a Christian connotation: in the book of Psalm flowers represent death: "As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more" (King James Bible Online, Ps.103. 15-16). Milton himself tells us about the mortality of human life later in this poem, that before we know it "Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears, / And slits the thin-spun life" (75-76). Milton's use of flowers in *Lycidas* does not lead the speaker to consolation but reminds him that neither flowers nor nature can bring solace and comfort, and it is only through Christ that one can find consolation in times of grief and sorrow.

Orpheus

In *Lycidas,* Milton allows its speaker to go beyond mourning. After singing and lamenting for his shepherd friend, the speaker steps into reasoning. The classical pastorals do not question to find answers; rather, the questioning is a part of mourning. In Theocritus's *Idyll 1* Thyrsis sings a song about the death of Daphnis, asking the nymphs, "Where were you, Nymphs, where were you while Daphnis pined away?" Thyrsis does not question to find answers, but the questioning is a part of the elegy and mourning and an emphasis on the death of Daphnis. In *Lycidas,* however, the speaker questions to find answers, and when he does so, he builds a bridge from confusion to faith, and from sorrow to hope. We can say that this is also Milton's bridge from classical pastoral into his own version of pastoral, one that is parallel with Christian doctrine. The speaker in *Lycidas* asks a similar question, "Where were ye nymphs when the remorseless deep / Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?" (50-51). The response tells us that unlike

Christ who can be in many places at once the nymphs and the pagan gods can only be present at one place at a time. The nymphs were either "playing on the steep … where the famous Druids lie," (52-53) or "on the shaggy top of Mona high" (54), or near the "Deva stream" (55). The speaker questions the nymphs further saying: "had ye been there… what could that have done?" (57). Here the speaker is reasoning that even if the nymphs had been there, they could not have saved Lycidas from drowning. He continues, "What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore, / The Muse herself, for her enchanting son, / Whom universal nature did lament" (58-60) do? Even Calliope, Orpheus's mother, could not have prevented her son's death. Milton uses Orpheus's story not only to follow the classic tradition of using Orpheus myth in pastoral elegies, but also to reveal Orpheus' mortality. Although Orpheus was a great musician and a prophet, he did not have the power to save himself, nor could he save Eurydice. After Eurydice dies of the fatal bite of a snake, Orpheus plays mournful songs and through his music he charms the king and the queen of the Underworld, Hades, and Persephone. However, he fails to save Eurydice. Orpheus does not have the power to save Eurydice but is dependent on the king and the queen of the underworld. Although they allow Eurydice to go home with Orpheus, through one small mistake Orpheus loses Eurydice. Orpheus not only cannot save Eurydice, but he himself could not escape death when it came upon him. After his death, Orpheus's head and his harp were thrown into the river Hebrus and carried on to the island of Lesbos. To many scholars, Orpheus' sufferings and death, gentle and good character resemble Christ's. In that regard, Caroline W. Mayerson notes that:

> The integration of the Orpheus myth with Christian ideas and symbols in Lycidas
> properly directs our attention to the euhemeristic and allegorical interpretations of

the legend in Milton's literary milieu. Euhemeristic interpretation, when applied to

Orpheus, had two results: the conception of Orpheus as an ancient prophet, and

the identification of Orpheus with Christ. (192)

It is true that the resemblance exists, but the story of Orpheus in *Lycidas* also reminds us

of the ways in which Orpheus is different from Christ. Neither Orpheus nor Calliope

could defeat death is one example. Although "Orpheus 'dying to redeem' Eurydice and

himself is a type of Christ" (Ulreich 364), he cannot bring the dead to life, and that is the

characteristic attributed to Christ only, and not any other gods or prophets. Orpheus uses

poetry and music to rescue Eurydice and to console himself from sorrow and is

dependent on the decision of the king and queen of the Underworld to save Eurydice, but

"Lycidas in the kingdom of 'the blest' requires no rhetorical rescue from the underworld,

nor need the woods and waves be 'charmed' by Orpheus in a world redeemed by Christ"

(Dawes 188). Another characteristic that separates Christ from Orpheus is the power of

healing. When Eurydice was bitten by snake, Orpheus could not heal her because unlike

Christ who can heal any illness, Orpheus did not have the power of healing. Orpheus's

story in *Lycidas* reminds us of death and separation but also of Christ's power over death.

Unlike the traditional pastorals, *Lycidas* refuses to accept death as being the ultimate

power in this world and allows the speaker to continue his search for answers.

The Problem of Fame

Not only there is a comparison in *Lycidas* between Orpheus and Christ, but also Orpheus

and Lycidas as well. The most notable resemblances are that Orpheus and Lycidas were

both poets, both virtuous, and both died young. The feeling of sympathy in *Lycidas* is

toward both Orpheus and Lycidas. Orpheus' poetry and songs could not save Eurydice

nor himself from being killed, and similarly King's virtuousness could not save him from early death. The speaker's confusion over Lycidas's death is evident in the passage below, which, as I mentioned earlier, is a questioning passage for many scholars:

> Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
>
> To tend the homely slighted shepherd's trade,
>
> And strictly meditate the thankless muse,
>
> Were it not better done as others use,
>
> To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
>
> Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?
>
> Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
>
> (That last infirmity of noble mind)
>
> To scorn delights, and live laborious days;
>
> But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
>
> And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
>
> Comes the blind Fury with th'abhorred shears,
>
> And slits the thin-spun life. (Lycidas 64-76)

The speaker is questioning the use of effort or the "uncessant care" in doing what is right in a world that does not appreciate the good. He questions: were it not better then, to "sport with Amaryllis in the shade, or with the tangles of Neaera's hair," instead of trying to do the right thing day after day? "Neaera" is an allusion to Virgil's third Eclogue. Milton's editors explain that "Neaera" is "the name of the poet's mistress in many classical and Renaissance pastorals" (Orgel and Goldberg 755). In Virgil's *Eclogue III* Menalcas aware that Damoetas has stolen a flock, tells the sheep that, "while your master

fondles Neaera, and is afraid that she prefers me to him, this hired keeper milks his ewes twice an hour, and the flock are robbed of their strength and the lambs of their milk" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 37). Thus, the tangles of Neaera's hair that the speaker has been avoiding could be a symbol of the tangles of earthly pleasure that could lead to weakness and distraction. The speaker is questioning whether it is worth avoiding earthly pleasures and live virtuously. "Amaryllis" is another fruitless activity that the speaker seems to be avoiding. "Perhaps the most familiar echo [of the name 'Amaryllis'] would be of the opening lines of … [Virgil's] first Eclogue, which combines idleness (*lentus in umbra*) with the beauty of Amaryllis" (Lee 585). In this Eclogue, Meliboeus tells Tityrus that: "you, Tityrus, lie under the canopy of a spreading beech, wooing the woodland Muse on slender reed, but we are leaving our country's bounds and sweet fields. We are outcasts from our country; you, Tityrus, at ease beneath the shade, teach the woods to re-echo 'fair Amaryllis'" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 25). Thus, avoiding "tangles of Neaera's hair" and "Amaryllis in the shade" could mean avoiding earthly pleasures and idleness. Tityrus's idleness and his lack of care can take us back to the "Parable of the Talents" in Matthew 25.14-30, in which Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to a man who, before travelling into a far country, delivered his goods to his servants. In this story after the man comes back and settles accounts, each received earnings according to their productive use of the talents received from the man, except the one who had one talent and did not earn anything with because he had hidden it in earth to keep it safe. When the lord finds out that he earned nothing from the talent he becomes angry, calling him a "wicked and slothful servant" and says, "take therefore the talent from him and give it unto him which hath ten talents." According to Oxford English Dictionary the definition

of "talent" in the "Parable of the Talents" is one's mental endowment, or natural ability; the "power or ability of mind or body viewed as something divinely entrusted to a person for use and improvement" (OED, III. 5.). Thus, by "talent" Jesus means the God-given gift or ability that He has entrusted his servants with and will expect them to use those talents to serve God. But while the speaker in *Lycidas* is aware of the importance of fulfilling one's God-given gift or "talent," at this stage he is looking at the situation from his earthly view; even though he is resisting the idleness and earthly pleasures and trying to live "laborious days" to fulfill his talent, it seems that he is expecting an earthly reward, "fame." The speaker tells us that "the fair guerdon … we hope to find" will soon vanish before our eyes, because that blind Fury will "slit the thin-spun life" (76). Milton's editors explain that by "Fury", Milton is referring to "Atropos, the Fate who cuts the thread of life" (Orgel and Goldberg 755). Thus, if this "guerdon" or reward can be taken away by earthly death, then it is an earthly reward. The speaker in *Lycidas* is seeking an earthly reward, until Phoebus Apollo, the god of sun and poetry "touch[es] [his] trembling ears" (77) and tells him that "Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil" (78), "But lives and spreads aloft [in heaven] by those pure eyes / And perfect witness of all-judging Jove" (81-82). Phoebus continues that Jove (referring to the Christian God) will look at each human's deed and therefore advises the speaker to expect his reward in heaven (83-84). Here again there is a reference to Virgil's *Eclogue VI* when the poet says: "when I was fain to sing of kings and battles, the Cynthian [Apollo] plucked my ear and warned me: A shepherd, Tityrus, should feed sheep that are fat, but sing a lay fine-spun" (Virgil, *Eclogues* 61). Here, like the speaker in *Lycidas,* the shepherd is refrained from seeking earthly desires. Instead of singing for kings and battles (epic song), the

shepherd is advised to sing a delicate shepherd's song, and to remain humble. Because

humility, while seems to be "lowly" in this world, in the Kingdom of God it is considered

a highly regarded and excellent virtue. It is true that in the pagan version (in Virgil's

Eclogue VI) the focus is on virtue and not on Christianity, but Milton is using this

classical reference to take us back to Christianity. Milton follows Christian doctrine, in

which fame and honor are not found in epics, earthly fame, or earthly powers, but in

humility: "And whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased; and he that shall humble

himself shall be exalted (Matt. 23.12). Both in *Lycidas* and Virgil's *Eclogue VI* the

shepherds are advised to look above and beyond earthly fame and desires and instead

seek internal values. Thus, through Phoebus Apollo, Milton gives us the Christian answer

to the problem of seeking earthly fame and earthly reward.

Lycidas and *The Consolation of Philosophy*

Lycidas is similar to Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy,* not only in its treatment

of fame but also in its function as a theodicy. E. H. Dye confirms that, "copies of *The*

Consolation were available to Milton" and "Chaucer's version of *The Consolation* would

very probably have been valued by Milton as a resource for stimulating thought" (4). In

Lycidas, the speaker's confusion and his lament for his situation, his worldly view about

fame and happiness, all resemble the story of Boethius who finds himself in prison,

disconnected from his old world and the earthly values that he once regarded as important

to his life. In his *Consolation,* Boethius mourns his situation and cannot understand

God's judgment. Like the speaker in *Lycidas,* he asks questions to find answers. And like

the speaker in *Lycidas,* Boethius's faith is tested by God when he finds himself in an

unfortunate situation. John S. Coolidge asserts that "Boethius' protest that he has allowed

himself worldly ambition … touches on a concern very close to Milton's heart, and one that is near allied to the anxiety with which the passage on fame in *Lycidas* deals" (180). Coolidge explains that Philosophy's cure for desire of glory is not to destroy it or cut it off, nor to discredit it, but to show how insignificant the extent of even the greatest worldly fame is; any fame that can be achieved in this world is inadequate to the human heart's desire for it. What Boethius means is that "fame and the other good things of this world are truly good, and the desire of them is good desire; the error comes in hoping to find that desire fulfilled 'on mortal soil'" (180-81). In *Lycidas* Milton tells us that fame "scorn[s] delights" and makes one "live laborious days" (72), but the problem is not that fame makes one's life harder but that after labor there is no reward. Milton confirms Boethius's view about the error of seeking fame, that hoping to find that desire fulfilled on earth is useless. He acknowledges fame as being something useful but only if it is used for God's glory because that is the only way the desire can be fulfilled and the labor will be rewarded. Milton uses Phoebus Apollo's speech to tell us about the truth, and this truth is parallel to Christian doctrine and to Boethius' *Consolation,* which itself supports Christian doctrine. While the *Consolation* is usually considered a philosophical text, its main subject and its truth cannot be far from Boethius's Christian view. Matthew D. Walz confirms that:

> In fact, adherence to orthodox Christian teaching, especially in the face of
> Arianism, may have contributed to Boethius's imprisonment and execution.
> Indeed, during certain periods in the Catholic Church he was venerated as a
> martyr, while in the Orthodox Church he always was and still is. Historically
> speaking, we will never know whether Boethius was a true martyr, in the sense

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that he was put to death as an explicit witness to the truth of Christianity. [But] we

can say confidently … that he took his faith seriously and showed no little interest

in its mysteries. It makes sense, then, to consider Boethius's take on Stoicism in

light of philosophical commitments that accord with Christian faith. (409)

While it is Lady Philosophy that console Boethius, she uses Christian theology. Lady

Philosophy's speech is a theodicy. This takes us to another similarity between the two

texts (*The Consolation and Lycidas*), that is, their approach to theodicy. The speaker in

Lycidas complains about the unpredictability of life, and how "the blind Fury" or Fate

slits the thin-spun life unexpectedly. "Milton saw in the drowning of Edward King the

problem of evil raised in an agonizing and immediate form: what kind of universe was

this in which a young man of promise could be cut down just as he was beginning to

realize his potentialities? What kind of God would permit this to happen?" (Sendry 437).

In book 4 of Boethius's *Consolation,* Boethius also asks Lady Philosophy about the

injustice of this world, which he had found "so inexplicable and troublesome" (81). Lady

Philosophy tells him about Providence and Fate. She explains that the generation of all

things, the course of mutable natures and everything that is subject to change take their

course, order, and form from the mind of God. In other words, everything is governed by

the unchanging mind of God and "when this government is regarded as belonging to the

purity of the divine mind, it is called Providence; but when it is considered with reference

to the things which it moves and governs" it is called Fate. Fate therefore is "the

disposition by which Providence joins all things in their own order" (Book IV, 82).

Knowing that Boethius is confused about his unjust execution and the unfair course of

life, Lady Philosophy tells Boethius that things may *seem* confused and discordant, but

that does not mean that they are out of order or unjust. She explains that everything is governed and directed toward the good and that "nothing is done for the sake of evil" (Book IV, 83). In other words, trials will eventually lead to good, because everything eventually is governed by the Providence of God, and even Boethius's unjust execution is not based on uncontrolled chance but is governed by Providence. Lady Philosophy is asking Boethius to trust God even if he does not understand His ways. Like the speaker in *Lycidas,* Boethius in *Consolation* also experiences confusion and uncertainty but eventually finds consolation through his faith and trust in God. And like the speaker in *Lycidas*, he finally realizes that he must set his eyes on heaven instead of seeking earthly values. Boethius's character had to exercise his faith in order to step into a higher level of faith and finally consolation. *The consolation of Philosophy* "describes the education of Boethius's character, as his eyes are turned away from the earth and into the heavens, so that he moves from confusion to clarity, from forgetfulness to remembrance, from reason to intelligence, and thus from time to eternity" (Hawley 21).

However, just like the speaker in *Lycidas,* before he achieves that place of clarity and peace, Boethius's character was looking at earthly reward for doing good. Boethius tells Lady Philosophy: "instead of being rewarded for true virtue, I am falsely punished as a criminal" (Book I, 10). He further explains that his possession, reputation, and honor are all ruined because he tried to do good (Book I, 11). Boethius is confused about the justice of this world. His confusion and his questionings are similar to the speaker's questioning for justice in *Lycidas*. Like Boethius who both acknowledges the injustice of the world and vindicates God's goodness at the same time, the speaker in *Lycidas* also both questions and answers the course of Fate and divine goodness. The speaker's sorrow

over Lycidas's death is resolved when he realizes that death has no power over Lycidas.

If we apply Lady Philosophy's response to Milton's *Lycidas* that "nothing is done for the

sake of evil" then we can conclude that even Lycidas's death is done for a greater

purpose, a purpose that the speaker may not understand at this stage, much as Boethius

could not do at first.

The Pagan gods

Another classical allusion in *Lycidas* is the reference to the pagan gods, who are confused

about the death of Lycidas. Neptune, the god of sea, neither knows what happened to

Lycidas, nor could he save him. Thus Herald (Triton) who "comes in Neptune's plea'

(90) askes the waves and winds and "question[s] every gust of rugged wings" (93), but no

one knew Lycidas's story. Thus, the god of winds, Hippotades replies, that no wind had

escaped from his cave, and even Panope the sea nymph was calm. He then blames the

fatal and perfidious ship, built on an ill-fated time that sunk and caused Lycidas's death.

The pagan gods' confusion and their lack of knowledge tell us of their powerlessness and

inability as well as their ignorance over Lycidas's death. Martin R. Kalfatovic confirms

that "the figures from classical literature… make no claim on Lycidas and assert only

innocence in his death. Camus's appearance is likewise non-active in the sense that he

merely demands to know the cause of Lycidas's death. It is only with the appearance of

the pilot of the Galilean lake that a figure with power or control of water forces appears"

(209). The pagan gods are confused about the power of nature and this confusion

confirms their lack of power over nature. "Virgil, *Eclogue V*, [also] complains of the

decline of Nature's kindly powers" (Norlin 299). But Milton is taking this convention and

using it in his own approach; while even the pagan gods cannot understand nature's

power, in comparison we have Christ who has the power to rebuke the wind and waves, as well as the power to stop death from happening, as we read in Luke 8.22-25: as Jesus sailed with his disciples to go to the other side of the lake, He fell asleep, and as He was asleep there came a storm. Being frightened, His disciples awoke Jesus, saying, "Master, master, we perish." Then He arose and rebuked the wind and the raging water, and they ceased and were calmed. This story tells us that even nature obeys Christ. Milton is creating a comparison between the power of pagan gods—who are themselves confused about Lycidas's death—and the power of Christ, to tell us that only Christ has power over nature. After Jesus calmed the sea, He asked His disciples, "where is your faith?" This story is not only related to the story of *Lycidas* in its subject of voyage and the concerns around it, but also in the importance of having faith in the times of difficulty and sorrow. As Christ was teaching His disciples to have faith in times of trouble, so is Milton telling us that we must put our faith in God when we encounter difficulty and sorrow. While the pagan gods believe that Fate is controlling one's life, Milton, like Boethius, tells us that Fate is governed by Providence. Thus, the classical allusions do not contradict the Christian aspect of this poem but remind us of the Christian God: the pagan allusions are similar to the trials that both Boethius and the speaker in *Lycidas* encounter; they are a reminder that there is a greater power than what we see and feel around us. Orpheus reminds us of Christ, who in comparison, has the powers that Orpheus lacks. Amaryllis and Neaera's hair remind us of the danger of seeking earthly pleasures and idleness and this knowledge encourages us to seek God instead. And finally, when Phoebus Apollo comes in, he is referring to Christian tenets of humility and the importance of seeking God and heavenly reward.

IV. THE CHRISTIAN ALLUSIONS IN *LYCIDAS*

While the structure of *Lycidas* is pastoral, it follows Christian doctrine. I am emphasizing this because as many scholars have also observed, it is impossible to understand the true meaning of *Lycidas* without looking at its Christian aspect, which I believe is the whole of *Lycidas*. In this chapter, I will look at the Christian allusions and will argue that these allusions teach us the importance of having faith during difficulties and being able to trust God when things seem to be confusing. St. Peter as the Pilot of the Galilean lake appears to tell the speaker about the justice of God and the importance of having faith in God. I will examine Peter's own struggle with having faith as a disciple of Christ and will look at some of those situations related to *Lycidas*.

The Pilot of the Galilean lake

After the speaker realizes that the pagan gods could not save Lycidas, and that they could not provide any answer, then enters St. Peter, "The pilot of the Galilean lake, / [and] two massy keys he bore of metals twain"/ (The golden opes, the iron shuts amain) (109-11). Milton "drew on more than one tradition of pastoral" in this poem (Tayler 103). The appearance of St. Peter creates a noticeable shift between the pagan and the Christian worlds. The term "Galilean lake" takes us back to the Galilean Lake and St. Peter's occupation as a fisherman before Jesus called him for His mission. In Luke 5 we read that after a long night's toil when Peter could not catch any fish, Jesus came to him, and asked him to let down his nets, and when he did so there was a great multitude of fishes. "When Simon Peter saw it, he fell down at Jesus' knees, saying, Depart from me; for I am a sinful man, O Lord." But Jesus told him, "Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." After this when they arrived on the shore, Peter (along with James, and John, the

sons of Zebedee), forsook everything and followed Jesus (Luke 5.1-11). The importance of this story is that, while Peter was fixing his eyes on mortal reward for the toil he was doing, Jesus showed him a heavenly reward and gave him a heavenly task. This goes back to what Phoebus said to the speaker in *Lycidas*, that fame grows not on mortal soil, but lives and spreads in heaven. Peter's situation, exhausted from a night's toil and having found no fish, can be compared to the speaker in *Lycidas* who tells us about his incessant care for which there seems to be no reward. Having St. Peter as the pilot of the Galilean lake indicates Peter's change of life and his growth in spirit after he followed Christ. Milton is giving him the title "pilot" because he is not the same Peter that Jesus met him on the Galilean Lake. He went through trials and sufferings and even died for Christ and here in the story of *Lycidas* he has become the pilot of the Galilean lake. St. Peter became the founder of the Church after he forsook *everything* and followed Jesus, after he fixed his eyes on Christ. Through Peter's story Milton is touching on the importance of spiritual growth through one's faith.

The Two Massy Keys

The two massy keys that St. Peter is carrying allude to biblical account of Jesus giving Peter the keys of the kingdom of heaven. The keys tell us about authority and power, but also of faith. When Jesus asked his disciples, "who do you say I am," Simon Peter answered and said, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God," and Jesus told him, "And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matt. 16.13-19).

Peter receives this authority because of his faith in Christ. Peter is one of the best examples in the bible when it comes to the subject of faith: he is the one who denied Christ three times before the rooster crows, he is the one who walks on water because of his faith and almost drowns because of his lack of faith, and he is also the one who tells Jesus without doubt that He is Christ, the Son of the living God. This is perhaps why Milton alludes to Peter in *Lycidas*: *Lycidas* is about faith and spiritual growth. But one may ask why St. Peter appears unexpectedly and interrupts the classical pastoral world. He comes unexpectedly precisely to *interrupt* the classical pastoral world, as God himself interrupts us in the midst of our earthly activities, to remind us of higher values.

The two massy keys symbolize authority and power. They tell us that St. Peter as the pilot of the Galilean lake was given the power to save Lycidas from drowning, and therefore, "chance" has no part in play in Lycidas's death, or, if it did, it was playing the part that God had given it the permission to. Again, if we go back to Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy*, everything eventually is done for the sake of good and not evil, and I believe this idea is also present in *Lycidas*. St. Peter tells the speaker, "How well could I have spared for thee, young swain, / Enow of such as for their bellies sake, / Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?" (113-15). It seems like St. Peter is telling the speaker that he could have saved Lycidas from drowning, but he did not. And that is the main question that remains unanswered, that: if St. Peter could have stopped Lycidas's death then why didn't he? And why did God allow this to happen? By not giving us the answer Milton is telling us (through St. Peter's voice) that whatever the reason we must trust God. St. Peter's speech is a theodicy. What Milton is revealing here (and perhaps reminding himself as well) is that there *was* a greater purpose behind Edward King's

death and that one must trust God in all things even when it is hard to understand. While many scholars view St. Peter's speech to be about God's justice, I will add that it is also teaching the speaker (and other Christians) about trust and faith in God. Even after the speaker imagines Lycidas in heaven, this question of why God allows a virtuous man such as Edward King die early while the wicked man lives in comfort remains unanswered and for a good reason; St. Peter wants the speaker to have faith without understanding, because as we read in *On Christian Doctrine*, "the seat of faith is not in the understanding, but in the will" (Sumner, *The Prose Works of John Milton* 342).

The Hungry Sheep

Ernest Tuveson notes that "'the "Galilean lake' often is taken to indicate the episode of the calling of the disciple; but, perhaps much more important, it also recalls the final charge, when Jesus appeared for the last time to his disciples (John 21). Once more Peter is summoned from his fishing boat, this time for eternity" (447). A significant aspect of this chapter (John 21) is understanding the importance of having faith without asking: in John 21 we read that this time too Peter (along with other disciples) could not catch any fish for the whole night. Around morning Jesus stood on the shore and said unto them, "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes" (John 21.6). When they arrived on the shore, "Jesus saith unto them, Come and dine. And none of the disciples durst ask him, Who art thou? knowing that it was the Lord" (John 21.12). The disciples did not ask if He was Jesus himself who arose from death, because they had faith that He was Christ himself.

But more importantly John chapter 21 reminds us of Jesus' conversation with

Peter: "So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He [Jesus] saith unto him, Feed my lambs. He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, Feed my sheep. He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, Feed my sheep" (John 21.15-17). "The threefold calling, it was conventionally explained, reestablished [Peter] in faith and loyalty, obliterating his earlier threefold denial" (Tuveson 448). The threefold calling also shows Christ's emphasis on the importance of being selfless and caring for His flock. This story takes us back to *Lycidas,* in which St. Peter refers to corrupted shepherds who do not feed their flock: "The hungry sheep look up, and are not fed" (125). By shepherds here Milton refers to the unsuitable priests who do not serve God but instead think about their own selves. This takes us to another reference to bible in the book of Ezekiel in which God tells the teachers of Israel "woe be to the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! should not the shepherds feed the flocks? Ye eat the fat, and ye clothe you with the wool, ye kill them that are fed: but ye feed not the flock" (Ezek. 34.2-3). E. L. Brooks confirms that Peter's address in *Lycidas* is close kin to the pastoral prophecy of Ezekiel, when "the religious teachers of Israel had become renegade, profligate, and self-seeking" (67). In *Lycidas* the reference to the unworthy shepherds who "for their bellies sake, / Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold (113-15) also goes back to the "Parable of the Good Shepherd" in the book of John in which the bad shepherds *climb* into the fold. In this

parable Jesus said: "I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep" (John 10.11) and in comparison, we have the unworthy shepherds who "entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but *climbeth* up some other way" [my italics], whom Jesus calls "a thief and a robber" (John 10.1).

Through St. Peter's speech Milton is again asking the question of why a wicked person lives prosperously while Lycidas, who was a good shepherd, had passed away in his youth. We see this type of questioning in Psalm 73, which reads, "For I was envious at the foolish, when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps.73.3) and continues, "Verily I have cleansed my heart in vain, and washed my hands in innocency" (Ps.73.13). This goes back to the speaker's complain about his "uncessant care" in doing what is right. St. Peter does not tell the speaker the reason for Lycidas's death, but he does tell him that he should not envy such people. "Blind mouths" he calls them, who eat without knowing what they are eating. The wolf with privy paw daily devours their sheep and yet they say nothing because they have "blind mouths," or rather are themselves blind mouths; they can only eat but cannot see the reality (or the consequence) of their actions. In his book *Sesame and lilies* John Ruskin explains that "a 'Bishop' means 'a person who sees' [and] a 'Pastor' means 'a person who feeds.' The most unbishoply character a man can have is therefore to be Blind [and] the most unpastoral is, instead of feeding, to want to be fed, —to be a Mouth" (40). Being blind harms both the shepherd and the sheep, and so does greed and hunger. When Jesus tells Peter to feed His lambs in the book of John, He means that the sheep were entrusted to Peter and other men of church who were in the position of clergymen. The sheep are not the shepherd's but belong to Jesus, and He will take them back when He comes back. Again, this takes us back to the "Parable of the

Talents" in the book of Matthew. When Christ comes back and settles accounts with the shepherds that He entrusted His sheep to, He will ask them to provide their work. Those shepherds who were blind as well as those who were fed instead of feeding others, are to be punished. Thus, the evildoers, St. Peter explains, do not win but lose their place with God, and "that two-handed engine at the door, / Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more" (130-31). St. Peter's speech suggests that the speaker must not be envious of the evildoers who eventually will be punished by God, as we also read in the Psalm that, the speaker realizes that God has set them (the evildoers) in slippery places and cast them down to destruction (Ps.73.18).

The Two-Handed Engine

There are several interpretations of the "two-handed engine." Some scholars believe that it is the sword of the spirit, the word of God as we read in Hebrews, "For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword" (Heb. 4.12), and others refer to the book of Revelation when Christ "had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp twoedged sword" (Rev. 1.16). If we combine these two, we will have Christ's twoedged sword in Revelation that is the sword of spirit, the word of God. Thus, we could say that this two-handed engine could be the word of God which will bring justice. In the book of Revelation, Christ "which hath the sharp sword with two edges" (Rev. 2.12) tells John to write as follows to the Church of Pergamum:

> But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate.

Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the

swords of my mouth. (Rev. 2.14-16)

This sword in Christ's mouth is that sharp twoedged sword of justice which could be

"that two-handed engine at the door" that St. Peter refers to in *Lycidas*. In the above

verses of Revelation, we read that Christ through John tells the Church of Pergamum

about the consequences to those who hold to the corrupt doctrines of Balaam and the

Nicolaitans and therefore commands them to repent, or they will be judged by "the sword

of [His] mouth," which in Revelation 2.12 is described as a sharp sword with two edges.

While we see what seems to be this twoedged sword in Revelation used against those

who are holding to the corrupt teachings of Balaam and Nicolaitans, in *Lycidas* we see

the two-handed engine that is said to be used against the corrupt clergy and their false

teachings, who do not feed their sheep but think about their own benefits: "The hungry

sheep look up, and are not fed" (125). The sheep are not fed by true teachings of the

church but are swollen with wind and mist, or corrupt doctrines, and therefore "Rot

inwardly, and foul contagion spread" (127). Thus, the two-handed engine will act as an

instrument of justice to smite those who do not repent. The word of God is both that

twoedged sword that brings justice and the food that the sheep needs but does not receive.

Eating the right food (referring to spiritual food) is an important element of Christian

growth. Jesus himself tells us that "Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word

that proceedeth out of the mouth of God" (Matt. 4.4). Eating things sacrificed unto idols

that was practiced in the doctrine of Balaam caused corruption of the soul, as it also does

in *Lycidas* when the shepherds (clergy) do not feed their sheep the word of God, but false

teachings.

Ralph E. Hone suggests that the pilot of the Galilean lake is not Saint Peter, but Christ himself, who in 1 Peter 2.25 is described as "the Shepherd" and "Bishop" of our souls (58). If we assume that the pilot is Christ himself then the two massy keys in *Lycidas* could be "the keys of hell and of death" that Christ carries in Revelation 1.18. However, while in Revelation Christ tells us that He has the keys of hell and of death, in Matthew 16.19 Christ specifically tells Peter what he can open or shut with those keys, "whatsoever thou shalt *bind* on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt *loose* on earth shall be loosed in heaven [my italics]" which fits the description in *Lycidas* better: "The golden opes, the iron shuts amain" (111). Another thing to consider is that if we construe the pilot as Christ himself then why is there still mourning after the pilot appears? After the appearance of the pilot, the speaker turns to nature and to the pastoral world and asks the valleys to bring all their flowers to help him to ease the sorrow and join him in his grief. That the grief is still there suggests that the pilot is not Christ but St. Peter, because after the appearance of Christ the reader will expect to find hope and not mourning.

Him Who Walked the Waves

Lycidas, who sunk beneath the watery floor, "mounted high, / Through the dear might of him that walked the waves" (173). Here Milton is alluding to the account in Matthew of Jesus walking on water. Jesus asked His disciples to get into the boat and go to the other side ahead of Him while He sends the crowd away. Later that night when the ship was tossed with waves and winds, Jesus went to them walking on the sea. The disciples at first thought it was a spirit walking on the sea, but Jesus told them, "Be of good cheer; it is I; be not afraid." When Jesus walked on water, Peter asked Him to allow him to walk

on water with Him to which Jesus said, "Come," and Peter walked on water to Jesus; only when he doubted did he begin to sink. Jesus immediately caught him, and told him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt? (Matt. 14. 22-31). Christ taught His disciples that through their faith they can do great things even if they seem impossible. I believe Milton's reference to Christ's walk on water also indicates the importance of having faith, as Peter could walk on water only through his faith in Christ and not any other power. Richard P. Adams confirms that the appearance of St. Peter as the pilot of the Galilean lake "emphasizes the pattern of death and rebirth in two specific connections, the story of Peter's walk on the water, beginning to sink and being raised by Christ, and the fact that he was the keeper of the keys" (186). St. Peter appears when the speaker loses all hopes in pagan gods; the false gods could not give any answer or comfort to the speaker, but St. Peter talks to him about God's justice and teaches him to have faith, because faith is the path that the speaker must take in *Lycidas* in order to find consolation. His walk begins with sorrow because he is trapped in his past and in the conventions of classical pastoral; he seeks consolation in pastoral conventions of singing and turning to nature, and seeks answer in pagan world, but realizes that none can help him. The flowers cannot be used because Lycidas's body is drowned in the oceans visiting "the bottom of the monstrous world" (158). In response to this imagery, Barbara A. Johnson asserts that, "the pastoral mode has failed to effect consolation, as is clearly indicated by the progressions of images that finally places Lycidas as far outside the pastoral world as it is possible to go" (71). Milton is using this intense depiction to convey the message of hope, that though one may doubt and drown, or even sink through oceans and reach the bottom of the monstrous world, through his faith in Christ he can

still be saved and restored. There is a contrast between the body and the soul that while the body sinks to the lowest, the soul rises above. This realization that Lycidas's body is visiting the bottom of the oceans as well as losing his hope in finding consolation in nature, cause the speaker to step into a new place, where he finally tells the other shepherds, "Weep no more, woeful shepherds weep no more, / For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead" (165-66). The sorrow ends here, and a new perspective is born.

V. A CONSOLATION IN HEAVEN

In this chapter, I will look at how *Lycidas* moves from classical pastoral to Christian world. When Milton talks about the speaker's confusion, it is not necessarily to present us his own confusion, but he uses this confusion representationally. To not depict the confusion and sufferings would be to ignore an important aspect of Christianity. The speaker must find his faith challenged because that is the real world of Christianity. The speaker finds consolation at the end of this poem, but this does not mean that Milton himself realized the simple doctrine of life-after-death in Christianity while writing *Lycidas*; instead, Milton is using this idea to remind his readers of the life in heaven and heavenly reward when they are discouraged or made sorrowful by earthly hardships. This chapter looks at nostalgia and how it affects the speaker in this poem. The ideal past is compared to the ideal classical pastoral world and the future is where the consolation is waiting to be found. Although after the consolation the setting of the poem still seems to be pastoral, the speaker's mind no longer dwells on the traditions of pastoral world and does not follow those rules and ideas. He openly admits that Lycidas has a new life in the Kingdom of God in heaven. The speaker is no longer looking back but into "tomorrow['s] … fresh woods, and pastures new" (193).

The Ideal Past and Nostalgia

As the speaker in *Lycidas* is struggling with sorrow, there is also an inner struggle within him. While some scholars relate this to Milton's own struggle, I look at it as a struggle that happens to all Christians in their journey of faith. It is almost impossible to grow in one's faith without experiencing turmoil, because growth usually comes after such experiences. Milton is allowing the speaker to experience despair, sorrow and even doubt

in order to exercise faith. In line 23 the speaker is looking back to his past remembering

his memories with Lycidas, thinking about how they used to spend time together, when

they "nursed upon the self-same hill," and "fed the same flock" (23-24). He remembers

how they used to get up before the sun rises to drive their sheep afield, battening their

flocks (29). The speaker feels nostalgic for his past and therefore enters an idealized

world. The memories of the past are not entirely what create nostalgia in the speaker but

the present moment and the knowledge that things are not the same anymore. While the

word "nostalgia" has many interpretations and definitions, the original concept gives us a

clear definition: "nostalgia is from the Greek *nostos*, to return home, and *algia*, a painful

condition—thus, a painful yearning to return home" (Davis 1). If we look at the word

"home" metaphorically and consider home as an ideal place that we once lived in an ideal

past (where we felt peaceful and happy, or where we felt we belong), then nostalgia is a

painful yearning to return to that ideal place that once existed, whether it's a physical or

mental place. The speaker thus imagines an ideal past, (here in a physical place) in which

he used to spend time with Lycidas, and even though that place still exists, it is not the

same because something has changed and there is a feeling of loss. While this place, this

landscape in *Lycidas,* is metaphorically the green hills of a pastoral world, it could also

be the real physical place, Cambridge, where Milton and King both used to study.

Regardless of how close Milton and King were, the place is not the same after King's

death, and this change, this feeling of *loss* is evident in *Lycidas*. Trevor Laurence Jockims

examines mourning and death in Milton's *Lycidas* and *Epitaphium Damonis*, using

Jacques Derrida's view (evoking Sigmund Freud and Martin Heidegger), and notes that,

according to Derrida, following the death of his companion, the surviving friend becomes

homeless or placeless, and survival carries within itself an incision which begins with the event of death, and later multiplies itself. Derrida believes that this incision or cut which had begun as an external event later becomes internalized by the survivor; death cuts one person off from another and then cuts the survivor off from himself. The dialogic world is violently severed, and the survivor persists speaking singly in a once dialogic landscape (Jockims 193). Jockims suggests that Derrida's observation is similar to pastoral elegy in which the dialogic world of pastoral turns into the monologic voice of elegy and eventually a loss of the old world and that this is the situation of the shepherd-elegist in *Lycidas* (193). Place and landscape thus play an important role in this poem. The landscape, which was once a place of joy and delight, is now replaced with a sense of loss. The speaker, who is mourning for the loss of his friend, is unaware of his own inner displacement and thus responds in a confused manner. Milton is using the pastoral elegy to portray the sense of loss. The landscape, nature, and everything in it still exists, but it is not the same. Again, regardless of how close Milton and King were as friends, Cambridge is not the same place for Milton after King's death. It is unreasonable to assume that this incident (King's death) did not have any effect on Milton. It is also unreasonable to try to understand or conclude how much King's death affected Milton because there is really no way of knowing it. But this feeling of loss is clearly evident in *Lycidas*.

The speaker uses the landscape as a shelter from the reality of his friend's death because it is the only place that this dialogic world exists, and the only place that the speaker can find his lost shepherd. However, this shelter is not permanent because the landscape itself testifies to the loss of the shepherd. While mourning, the speaker keeps

remembering the reality in which Lycidas does not exist. Alpers mentions Isabel

MacCaffrey's observation about the rural setting and bucolic tone in *Lycidas*, that

according to MacCaffrey the rural setting is repeatedly left behind and changes as new

ranges of awareness open in the speaker's mind. MacCaffrey explains that this alteration

of landscapes and tones reflects two different worlds in *Lycidas*: the world of innocence

and the world of experience. The world of experience invades the world of innocence,

and the effect is the feeling of violation and distress (qtd. in Alpers 94). Going back to

nostalgia, we can also relate this to Stuart Tannock's idea of the two worlds of

prelapsarian and postlapsarian. The prelapsarian world is the speaker's world of

innocence and the postlapsarian is his world of experience. Tannock believes that

nostalgia works "as a periodizing emotion: that was then, and this is now" (456). If we

consider the prelapsarian world to be the innocent past, then the "lapse" is the Fall, and

the present is the postlapsarian world or "a world felt in some way to be lacking,

deficient, or oppressive" (Tannock 457), there is then a kind of order in *Lycidas* which

does in fact follow biblical order, or to be precise, Christian order. The speaker's world of

innocence that once existed in reality is now separated from it by the death of Lycidas,

and this incident (Lycidas's death) seems to be the "lapse" or the "Fall." Lycidas's death

is what challenges the speaker's faith and is the main cause of his confusion. The

prelapsarian world is where one can easily have faith in God and his judgments, because

there is no Fall to make things complex. Thus, Milton is telling us that the real exercise of

faith occurs when we encounter difficulties, when we are faced with challenges that we

cannot understand. In a postlapsarian world our faith is attacked and challenged

constantly. It is the place that makes us stronger, but also the place where we *feel* weaker.

We cannot become stronger in a prelapsarian world because there are no challenges. In John 16.33, Jesus tells His disciples that "These things I have spoken unto you, that in me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Therefore, even though there is tribulation, there is also cheer, hope, and Christ's peace, and I believe this is the message of *Lycidas*. Milton represents the past with a bucolic landscape and peaceful hills, similar to other pastoral settings that have no flaw. It is important that the past remains ideal because that is also the mindset of a believer who has yet not experienced many troubles. Going back to the discussion of innocence and experience, the Fall that divides these worlds is the *cause* which pushes the speaker from innocence to experience. When comparing the past and the present we must consider "the relatively sharp contrast that the experience casts on present circumstances and conditions, which, compared to the past, are invariably felt to be, and often *reasoned* to be as well, more bleak, grim, wretched, ugly, deprivational, unfulfilling, frightening, and so forth" (Davis 15). Not only does this contrast make the present circumstance seem grimmer and darker, but it also makes the ideal past even more bright and ideal. And that is how nostalgia works: it creates such a contrast that even the reader can feel that loss. In *Lycidas* even though the past seems to be an ideal place, the speaker can only visit that place and come back because eventually he realizes that he cannot find Lycidas there anymore. And because of this, the speaker finds his way back to reality. In her book, *The Future of Nostalgia,* Svetlana Boym talks about the two kinds of nostalgia that we may experience: the restorative and the reflective. She explains that "restorative nostalgia puts emphasis on *nostos* and proposes to rebuild the lost home [while] reflective nostalgia dwells in *algia*, in longing and loss, the imperfect process of

remembrance" (41). She also writes about the distinction that Freud made between mourning and melancholia: while the mourning is connected to the loss of something *known* or *defined* such as the loss of a loved one or a homeland, in melancholia the loss is not clearly defined (55). Boym continues that reflective nostalgia has both the elements of mourning and melancholia: "it is a deep mourning that performs a labor of grief both through pondering pain and through play that points to the future" (55). From this perspective it is reasonable to say that the speaker in *Lycidas* is involved in a reflective nostalgia: while the speaker ponders sorrow and pain, he is also willing to move forward. As much as reality (or the present time) seems grim, bitter, and unfulfilling, it is the only mutable world. It is true that the speaker can find consolation neither in the past nor in the present, but while the past remains unchangeable, the present benefits from the possibility of future change, or in other words, the hope of finding a remedy for that feeling of loss. The present time is the passage into the future, and the future is where consolation is waiting to be discovered. But the speaker cannot jump immediately from the ideal past into the ideal future; he must mourn, reason, struggle and endure sorrow while practicing his faith. The sorrow had to be expressed because "to not sing would be to choose psychological death—remaining fixated on the past, obsessed by an irreparable sense of loss, [and] ceasing to grow" (Landy 298).

Not only does the speaker use nostalgia as a remedy for his sorrow, but he also turns to singing. In pastoral poetry, singing is a fundamental convention (Alpers 81). The speaker turns to poetry and singing, and through singing he remembers the ideal past and becomes nostalgic about the world in which things seemed "better." The speaker's connection with nature and his singing has a therapeutic function which had been

expressed in earlier pastoral poems. Theocritus's *Idylls* begin with singing and mourning for Daphnis' death. In *Idyll XI* in which Polyphemus sings for Galatea, we notice that singing is compared and is even given a greater value than money or gold: "Polyphemus shepherded his love with singing, and he did better than if he had spent money" (Theocritus, *Idylls* 175). When the speaker in *Lycidas* is engaged in singing, he finds ease and comfort by releasing his emotions. The speaker asks, "Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew / Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme. / He must not float upon his watery bier / Unwept, and welter to the parching wind / Without the meed of some melodious tear" (10-14). Even with his Christian view about death—that death is a departure from this world into heaven—the speaker must sing and mourn for Lycidas because that is a characteristic of any human who is faced with a feeling of loss. Thus, through "melodious tear" (14) which is poetry and singing, the speaker is expressing his sorrow. The "'melodious tear' offers a striking synaesthetic figure. This tear must be sung and heard" (Shohet 104) to ease the pain and grief.

If we consider the ideal past as the ideal pastoral world and believe that the speaker is involved in reflective nostalgia, then we can conclude that the speaker is not trying to rebuild the lost home or the ideal pastoral world but is eventually moving away from it. This can also be Milton's own departure from the pastoral conventions and moving into a new world. The speaker in *Lycidas* engages in mourning but does not dwell in it. The mourning helps the speaker to move on as the classical pastoral world helps him to move toward a Christian world. And soon the speaker realizes that while the pastoral conventions in this poem comfort him, they can only bring temporary consolation and therefore his search goes on until he finds a new world in which there is

real comfort for his sorrow.

Confusion, Mourning, and Death

As I noted earlier, the speaker must mourn, reason and struggle in order to go from the ideal past into the ideal future. In line 37 of *Lycidas*, "But O the heavy change, now thou art gone," the speaker acknowledges that everything has changed. The speaker returns to reality, which is emphasized by the word "now." The repetition of the phrase, "now thou art gone" in lines 37 and 38 accentuates both the reality that Lycidas is really gone as well as the speaker's struggle to believe what has happened. In other words, the speaker is bringing himself back to reality unwillingly but forcibly. This unwillingness was proposed in the beginning of the poem too when the speaker told the flowers that he came to pluck their berries with "forced fingers" (4). Thus, very early in this poem Milton introduced a force that eventually challenges the speaker's faith in this poem. The phrase, "heavy change" has many connotations: according to OED, the word "change" means "the action of substituting one thing for another, …[or] succession of one thing in place of another (3. a.), as well as referring to "death" or the "substitution of one state of existence for another (3. b.). One way to construe "heavy change" is to think of it as a substitution of an old reality for dreams or memory; the past that once was the speaker's reality is now gone and this "heavy change," or the loss of the old reality, made the speaker confused and sorrowful. "Heavy change" could also be interpreted as the change of Lycidas's state of existence, or his death. This foreshadows Milton's Christian view about death that he reveals later in this poem. If death is the "substitution of one state of existence for another" (OED, 3.b.), then Milton is telling us that death is not the end of one's existence, and that Lycidas has only "gone" to another world and is not dead in a

sense that he does not exist. Milton deliberately applies this Christian view early in this poem to create consistency and coherence throughout the entire poem. While there has been uncertainty among scholars regarding the authorship of *On Christian Doctrine* it is reasonable to return to its perspective about death. According to *On Christian Doctrine,* "there is abundant testimony to prove that the soul (whether we understand by this term the whole human composition, or whether it is to be considered as synonymous with the spirit) is subject to death, natural as well as violent" (Sumner, *The Prose Works of John Milton* 275). Thus, if we assume that *On Christian Doctrine* is Milton's work, Milton believed that we die completely after death and will be resurrected again when Christ returns. Of course, *On Christian Doctrine* was composed years after *Lycidas* and thus Milton, if he was the former's author, may have changed his view during the years between. But as John K. Hale notes, "one does not absolutely need to know *De Doctrina* to probe the theology of Milton's poems" (34). Therefore, even if we assume that when writing *Lycidas* Milton believed that we die completely before resurrecting, he still believed that a faithful Christian *eventually* rises from death and goes to heaven, which confirms that Milton did not view death as the end of one's existence but believed that the same existence (or person) will live forever in the next life. The idea of life after death and immortality of the second life is confirmed in *Lycidas* when the speaker admits that Lycidas is in heaven, "In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love" (177).

 Lycidas confirms that a believer's faith will be challenged but one must trust God when those challenges occur. Although the speaker in *Lycidas* returns to reality (present time) he still needs time to ponder Lycidas's death. He continues his lamentation with nature. In line 39 the speaker says, "Thee shepherd, thee the woods, and desert caves, / …

And all their echoes mourn" (39-41), implying that all creatures must mourn for Lycidas, just as in Theocritus's *Idyll I*, Thyrsis and all creatures mourn for Daphnis. When the speaker tells us that the "willows" and "copses" no longer wave "their joyous leaves to [Lycidas's] soft lays" (42-44), not only he accentuates the idea of change and mutability, but also uses nature as a metaphor for church; just as nature has lost Lycidas's "soft lays" (poetry singing), so will the church lose Edward King's teachings and spiritual guidance. The most disturbing aspect of Lycidas's death and the main reason for the speaker's confusion is the questioning of what good can ever be conceived of his death, and, if nothing good will come of his death, then why would God allow this to happen. However, while the confusion exists, it does not mean that the speaker is losing his faith; rather, Milton is demonstrating the struggles that a Christian may have during their journey in this world, especially when one does not understand the situation. Milton affirms that the struggle and endurance is a part of any believer's faith and without them we will never grow. The speaker tells Lycidas that the news of his death was "as killing as the canker to rose" (45). A canker is "a caterpillar or other insect larva which attacks plants, esp. the buds and leaves" (OED, 3.). If we consider the rose a metaphor for life, then the speaker is telling us that in spite of its thorns even a rose is in danger of being destroyed; likewise in spite of his virtues even a clergyman like King is in danger of facing death in his youth. The rose can also be a metaphor for a Christian's faith; no matter how strong and pure our faith may be, it is always in danger, because we live among many "cankers" that may attack our faith. This is not to say that Milton believes that we have no control over our faith, but he is simply referring to the danger that is always present and may ruin us if we are not careful. Lastly, the rose is a representation

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of the speaker himself, and like a canker that attacks and kills the rose, the news of

Lycidas's death and the pain and sorrow that followed, are also killing the speaker,

metaphorically. Milton continues making other metaphors related to Lycidas's death --

that hearing such news was as killing as a "taint-worm to the weanling herds that graze"

(46), or as "frost to flowers" (47) -- to emphasize the uncertainty of our earthly life.

However, being surrounded by danger or being attacked by an opposite force does not

mean defeat; although the speaker is uncertain about things that are happening around

him, he has not lost his faith, but rather is struggling with confusion and sorrow and

through that struggle he is exercising his faith. *Lycidas* reveals that the turmoil and

confusion that life brings can challenge a believer's faith, but one's response to such

turmoil determines his trust in God. When the speaker in *Lycidas* finally responds with

faith, "grief and confusion are resolved not only into consolation but also into a sense of

confidence and responsibility" (Sullivan 32), and that responsibility is solely trusting God

and seeking his face in times of confusion and turmoil.

Voice in *Lycidas*

Milton's use of pagan pastoral along with Christianity in *Lycidas* has long been a

question to scholars. While Samuel Johnson may have complained about the poem's

pastoral form and its remote allusions, Robert Beum believes that "*Lycidas* succeeds, not

in spite of the pastoral elements, but because of them" (326). Beum continues, "Milton

has turned the often merely literary pastoral tradition into a kind of higher realism" (327).

The mixing of classical pastoral with Christianity has enriched the text. *Lycidas* follows a

structural order in which the speaker travels from sorrow to consolation and through the

classical pastoral world into the Christian world. Thus, despite its chaotic beginning, the

overall structure of *Lycidas* follows an orderly pattern: the speaker realizes the death of Lycidas, escapes from reality, and seeks consolation in memories but finds none. Then he turns to pagan gods and asks them about Lycidas's death only to find that they neither know about his death nor can help him. The speaker thus turns to nature and tries to find consolation by bringing flowers to the deceased. Realizing that there is not a physical body to leave the flowers with, the speaker finally turns his eyes toward Christ who gives him true consolation.

While *Lycidas* follows many classical pastoral conventions, it violates at least one principle, and that is resolving the conflict. Milton departs from the tradition of pastoral elegies in which the dialogues are typically not resolved. By breaking this law Milton retains his own conventions of order and reason, one that follows Christian doctrine. The poem begins with misery, then grief, faith, and finally victory over sorrow and death. Likewise, in Christianity, a believer travels from sin to guilt to repentance and finally receives Christ and therefore victory over sin and death. In Christian belief one acknowledges that *because* we are sinners, therefore we need Christ to save us. The same pattern occurs in this poem: because the speaker is in sorrow therefore, he needs consolation. Without sorrow there would be no need for consolation, and as Christ comes to forgive our sins, so is consolation necessary to remove grief and sorrow. Thus, mourning is crucial because as humans we cannot comprehend consolation and peace without knowing grief and pain. Milton uses faith as a bridge between sorrow and consolation. And like any bridge that connects or divides two places with one another, in *Lycidas* faith connects and divides the past and the future in addition to grief and consolation. Jon S. Lawry observes that "the past tense is usually delivered over to

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mourning and to a merely possible consolation, [while] the present and future, on the other hand, are usually occupied by voices for poetry and eternal judgment" (114). As the speaker moves toward the future, he is getting closer to hope. In bible it is said that: "Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11.1). The speaker's vision of Lycidas in heaven, therefore, is a representation of his faith. He is looking and believing in something that one cannot see with human eyes, but what can only be seen through one's faith. Misery and grief are resolved after the speaker learns to put faith and trust in God. And in a sense, we could say that there is a sense of repentance in the poem as well, but not repenting from sin—because as a Christian the speaker is already free from sin—but repenting from doubting. The word "repent" means "to review one's actions and feel contrition or regret for something one has done or omitted to do" (OED, 1. a.) as well as "to change one's mind" (OED, 1. a.), and also "to mourn" (OED, 4. a.). In *Lycidas* the speaker repents by changing both his mind and his view in order to find the consolation and victory over sorrow and death. Thus, there is a kind of division in this poem that separates grief from consolation. If we consider this division, or the speaker's change of view, as a kind of "repentance," then it is logical to say that we have one character with two internal perspectives, one from the old world that he steps out of and the other from the new world that he steps into. If we construe the word "repent" as "to mourn," then we have also another type of repentance in *Lycidas*; not only repenting in a sense of changing one's perspectives but also using mourning as a process of repentance. The speaker is using mourning to separate himself from the old life and old perspectives. The mourning is necessary for him to move forward. When the speaker envisions Lycidas in heaven, this separation is achieved and the poem shifts from sorrow

to solace: "Weep no more, woeful shepherds weep no more, / For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead" (165-166). While some scholars are confused about this change from the grief and sorrow to confidence and hope, Roberts W. French asserts that: "it seems to me clear that the speaker [in lines 1-164] is aware of Christianity and equally clear that he does not accept it with any real conviction" (French 22). French points at the previously Christian interpretations of the passages involving Phoebus and the Pilot of the Galilean lake and continues, "the point about both [passages] seems to me to be the way in which they stop short of a Christian position" and that "neither passage has anything to say about … the Christian consolation" (French 22). While it is true that the speaker before line 165 is not looking at the situation through his faith, I suggest that he is a Christian believer throughout the poem, who later decides to look at the situation through his complete faith and trust in God. If the speaker before line 165 was not a Christian believer, he would not envision St. Peter giving him hope and reminding him of God's justice. The Pilot's words as French agrees contain more hope than conviction (French 23) and that is because hope is what the speaker needs; it is through hope that the speaker will find his faith. And as I pointed earlier, "Faith is the substance of things *hoped for* [my italics]" (Heb. 11.1). By giving the speaker hope, St. Peter is helping the speaker to look at the situation through his faith. But the Christian consolation must wait until the speaker is reminded of Christ and Lycidas's resurrection through "him that walked the waves" (Lycidas 173). As Hyman notes, "the resurrection of Lycidas …is accepted by the speaker of the poem as a matter of faith, not of logic" (532). This is particularly important in that if we assume two different persons in *Lycidas*, or even the same person with two different beliefs (as French suggested) we will neglect the speaker's strength in having overcome his doubts

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and confusion in his journey of faith. If we associate Christianity only with the passages that come after lines 164, in which there are no pain or sorrow, we will overlook one of the most important aspects of Christianity which is the sufferings of a believer in this world. There are many places in bible that talks about sufferings and hardships of this world. In Romans 8.18 it is written that "For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us." Likewise in 2 Corinthians 1.4 we read about tribulation and God's comfort: "[God] Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." If there were no suffering in this world, God would not talk about His comfort and His peace in many places in bible. And I believe *Lycidas* is portraying a believer's struggles in his journey of faith in this world. Thus, the shift in *Lycidas*, the speaker's different views, and even the confusion and sorrow in this poem follow their own specific order that parallels Christian doctrine.

A Heavenly View

As the speaker in *Lycidas* steps into faith, he is also stepping out of confusion and into hope. The speaker is not regaining his hope and faith because he envisions Lycidas in heaven, but rather, he envisions Lycidas in Heaven because he chooses to have faith instead of doubt. He reminds himself that unlike the false gods who could not help Lycidas, Christ can in fact help Lycidas and heal the pain. Milton refers to the book of Isaiah to reveal his view about death -- that death has no dominion over a Christian believer because Christ "will swallow up death in victory; and the Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces" (Isa. 25.8). Not only does Milton refer to the book of Isaiah

but also to the book of Revelation: "God shall wipe away all tears from their [his people's] eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21.4). In *Lycidas* Milton tells us that Lycidas is "in the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love / There entertain him all the Saints above, …and sweet societies, … singing in their glory move, / And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes" (177-181). Thus death, pain, and sorrow disappear in the Kingdom of God, "the former things are passed away," and the idealized past and the classical pastoral world give over their place to the new world, the Christian world, or rather the Christian pastoral world. Lycidas sunk "beneath the watery floor; / So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed, (167-168). Milton compares Lycidas to the day-star (or the sun) that sinks below the ocean at evening but eventually rises in the morning sky, "And yet anon repairs his drooping head, / And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore / Flames in the forehead of the morning sky" (169-71). The sun is also a paronomasia for "The Son" as Jesus Christ, who was crucified and rose again. Susan Snyder acknowledges that "what must be emphasized here, however, is that this analogy with natural renewal has been made possible only by an *act in history*, the death and resurrection of Christ" (330). Snyder explains that there is a "disjunction between nature's cycles of rebirth and the once-for-all journey of the individual shepherd" (330). In that respect there are two perspectives: one is that the sinking and rising of the sun is compared to a believer's everyday struggles, suggesting that though they may fall repeatedly, they will rise again through their faith in Christ. And the other is that Christ's death and resurrection was a one-time victory over our sins, and therefore, though Lycidas sunk low, he mounted high, "Through the dear might of him [Christ] that walked

the waves" (Lycidas 173). As a result, the meaning of death is transformed in the mind of both the speaker and the readers. Death that in the classical pastoral world meant the end of one's existence, here in the Christian world means rather a change; the change in one's state of existence and ultimately being united with God. Not only does the speaker find consolation but also celebration in that Lycidas is in heaven with Christ. Not only does Milton resolve death and sorrow through the knowledge that Lycidas is in heaven, but he also returns to the question of fame and reward. As his reward, Lycidas is "the genius of the shore" (183) and will help "all that wander in that perilous flood" (185). He gets both reward and fame in heaven, as well as a duty and a responsibility to protect others from drowning.

It is true that as Christopher Grose observed, *Lycidas* both begins and ends in the pastoral manner (384), but the pastoral world is only the surface of *Lycidas*, whereas the Christian world is the underlying meaning and truth of this poem. In the last stanza the "uncouth swain" (who I believe is the same speaker) looks forward to "fresh woods, and pastures new" (193). Here again we have a perspective away from the past and towards the future. The "fresh woods" and "pastures new" represent the speaker's new perspective and his hopeful state of mind. The speaker has no more confusion, and the grief, sorrow, and conflicts have been resolved. Externally we still have the "oaks and hills" and a pastoral landscape, but internally the speaker lives in a Christian world. He finds consolation and joy in his inner self, and through his faith. The landscape still exists (*physically*) but it does not affect the speaker the way it used to. The speaker does not depend on nature and pastoral traditions to console himself but looks at God and the inner bliss and happiness that God gives him. The pagan pastoral is transformed into a

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Christian pastoral world, and Virgil's Arcadia became Milton's "Paradise Within."

Conclusion

Milton's main concern in *Lycidas* is not merely to create a personal elegy but to sympathize with his readers by allowing the speaker to exercise his faith and subsequently bringing consolation to his readers. Milton does not create confusion because he himself is confused, but he asks those questions regarding the uncertainty of life to lead his readers to answers. He uses mourning to offer consolation because without mourning there will be no need for consolation. Milton uses the classical pastoral world to take its readers to the Christian world, and from pagan gods to Christian God in heaven to reveal that God does not overlook sufferings and sorrow but will "wipe the tears for ever from [our] eyes (Lycidas 181).

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