

HUMANIST AND PURITAN TRADITIONS IN MILTON'S PASTORAL POETRY:  
SYNCRETIC SHEPHERDS UPHOLDING RELIGIOUS LIBERTY FOR DISSENTING  
PROTESTANT GROUPS

by

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I dedicate this study to my mother, whose love of literature inspired me.

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## ABSTRACT

This study examines John Milton's purpose for writing pastoral poetry in the 1630s. Trained in the liberal arts at Cambridge University and raised in a devout Puritan household, Milton creates exemplars of his shepherds in his pastoral poetry by juxtaposing the pastoral traditions of antiquity with the political and spiritual realities of Early Modern England. Within the satiric and critical traditions of the pastoral, Milton criticizes the rigid, traditional Christian doctrines pervasive in his own time, as well as the morals of church and courtly hierarchies; however, he expresses common human dignity in his shepherds, thus advocating through them for the values of his own Puritan humanism. In these portrayals Milton reaches into the mythological past to symbolize the shepherds' ancient pagan traditions. Engaging his audiences to act in the same ethical ways as his syncretic shepherds, Milton addresses Puritan audiences like the Egertons and his classmates at Cambridge University, as well as his learned Italian humanist friends. Following the Renaissance humanist tradition of conjoining the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, Milton asserts that he is not a paranoid Puritan but rather a dignified Puritan humanist. Broadly concerned with the way in which syncretic shepherds create an ethic of religious liberty for dissenting Protestant groups, this study examines the *Nativity Ode* in each of the five major chapters to trace Milton's consistent assertion of the dignity of his syncretic shepherds by blending in them the best aspects of Greco-Roman pastoral and Puritan humanist traditions. The study seeks to establish that, in *Arcades* and in *A Mask*, pagan wisdom informs shepherds who deliver characters from harm and lead them to safety. Finally, the study maintains that Milton's syncretic

shepherds in *Lycidas* and *Epitaphium Damonis* achieve the highest rewards of apotheosis and entry into heaven in both pagan and Christian traditions, symbolizing the sainthood Puritans were denied by the strict doctrinal enforcement of the Catholic and Anglican churches' bishops. In sum, in his early poetry, Milton creates dignified syncretic shepherds in order to blend Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions and to serve as moral and ethical examples that assert that dissenting Protestant groups deserve religious liberty.

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## CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

Trained in the liberal arts at Cambridge University and raised in a devout Puritan household, John Milton wrote pastoral poetry in the 1630s that exemplified shepherds, who combined the pastoral traditions of antiquity and Early Modern England. Many of Milton's modern English contemporaries saw no merit in conjoining classical gods and Christ. Richard Crashaw, for example, anxiously ignored the pagan deities and instead associated classical shepherds with the biblical ones to adore Christ. Some Early Modern English writers, however, like Ben Jonson, used both Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values. For Jonson and other writers who espoused Renaissance humanism,<sup>1</sup> pagan texts taught virtues of wisdom, justice, fortitude, and temperance, and these writers used gods like Pan to represent virtues. Indeed, the young Milton believed that the spirit of Pan was alive, and he wished to symbolize the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions

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<sup>1</sup> Based on Jean Seznec's *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* and Laurence Lerner's *The Uses of Nostalgia*, this study defines Renaissance humanism as a philosophy that focused on the agency of the individual and the liberal arts, and believed all religions were ultimately one. "Beneath the rind of myth fiction is the sap of moral and sacred philosophy" (Lerner 164). Jean Seznec writes that "Humanists build an artificial edifice out of disparate elements—scenes, episodes, motifs, chosen from an immense reservoir of pagan and Christian antiquity" (287).



independently and conjointly. In his *Nativity Ode*, “L’Allegro,” *Arcades, A Mask*, *Lycidas*, and *Epitaphium Damonis* Milton creates dignified syncretic shepherds, who embody and coordinate the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions and serve as moral and ethical examples of why non-Anglican dissenting Protestant groups deserve religious liberty.

Written in 1629 as a Christmas gift for both Jesus Christ and his friend Charles Diodati, Milton’s *Nativity Ode* proclaims more Puritan than humanist inclinations. The Puritan Milton banishes many pagan gods and “Th’ old dragon under ground” (168), but the humanist Milton does not exile the shepherds’ god Pan because he came “to live with them below” (90). Blending classical and Christian traditions with Pan representing both a pagan god and Jesus Christ, Milton’s shepherds “all their souls in blissful rapture took” (98). Writing pastoral poetry Milton appropriates the Christian image of Christ as Good Shepherd, and he grafts it to the protective power and wisdom of the classical shepherds’ pagan god, Pan. Furthermore, in his “L’Allegro” Milton’s shepherd Thyrsis embodies the classical, pastoral attribute of “telling his tale” (67). Milton follows in the tradition of Theocritus’ *Idylls* and Vergil’s *Eclogues*, who both draw upon the wisdom and myth in Thyrsis’ stories. Appearing in “L’Allegro,” Thyrsis becomes a prominent syncretic shepherd figure in Milton’s *A Mask*, *Lycidas*, and *Epitaphium Damonis*. Thyrsis represents the protective power belonging to both classical and Christian sources.

Critics of his early poetry's use of classical and Puritan elements have noted Milton's attempt to write pastoral inclusively, allowing for a Puritan humanism<sup>2</sup> that aligns the best of Christian morality and classical ethics. Mary Anne McGuire and Barbara Lewalski write of the readers' expectations that classical mythology is included in Milton's pastoral because of her deification the visitors "praise" (McGuire 462) and "pay homage" (Lewalski 59) to the Lady. Furthermore, Ken Hiltner argues for the power of Milton's deities in their connection to their natural habitat. These three critics reveal the importance of the environment in Milton's pastoral poetry. Pastoral characters have faith in nature, which is worshiped as divine. With his characters faith in their environs, Milton presents the liberating force of nature that allows characters and readers to make free spiritual decisions. In contrast to a liberating connection with nature for his characters, Stephen Orgel, Neil Forsyth, and Leah Marcus claim that Milton employs

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<sup>2</sup> In his *English Literature in the Sixteenth Century* C.S. Lewis notes the modern polarity that has developed between the words "Puritan" and "humanist"; however, Lewis claims that, in the late sixteenth century, the words were more closely related (17). "By a puritan the Elizabethans meant one who wished to abolish episcopacy and remodel the Church of England on the lines which Calvin had laid down for Geneva" (17). "By a humanist I mean one who taught, or learned, or at least strongly favored Greek, and the new kind of Latin; and by humanism the critical principles and critical outlook which ordinarily went with these studies" (18). "It is evident if we use the words in this way we shall not see our period in terms of conflict between humanists and puritans" (18).

some classical characters to reveal the trickery of the court or high church. Milton creates these characters in order to teach his readers to distance and separate themselves from the tyrannical policies of King Charles I's court and Archbishop Laud's church.

Milton's pastoral poetry employs syncretic shepherds; they are interpreted from pagan gods and classical characters and allegorized as Early Modern and Christian types, which do not fall merely in the middle of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian value scale. Instead, Milton uses his shepherds to target the Egertons, Cambridge classmates, and learned Italian humanists, encouraging these readers to exercise religious liberty in their struggle with the church-state establishment and use all natural and divine knowledge from Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian world views in order to arrive at the religious practice they find acceptable. Milton's shepherds hold together the extremes of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values which are at odds, but Milton moves effortlessly between them to advocate for religious liberty. In turn, Milton gives his audience an ethical means by which to ease religious strictures and achieve religious independence from the Roman Catholic and Anglican bishops,<sup>3</sup> as well as from other

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<sup>3</sup> In *The Life of John Milton* Barbara Lewalski notes, "Milton's studies during 1632-1638 focused on Church history and culminated in a commonplace book. Milton dates his moral and aesthetic distaste for patristic texts to 1634-1638" (65). Since he had such distaste for most Church Fathers, Milton abhors Catholic Church clericalism, and the culture it created. Milton had a problem with Church Fathers who promoted the bishops and papacy. The fourth pope of the Roman Catholic Church was Clement of Rome. In his

severe doctrines, based on patristic texts.<sup>4</sup> Milton uses classical deities and his shepherds to show that there is some truth in every quest to understand divine mysteries. In order to

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*Letter to the Corinthians*, Clement argues for the apostolic authority of the bishops and papacy (“Pope St. Clement I”). In asserting the authority of bishops as rulers of the church, Clement lost Milton’s favor because Milton prefers lay control and shared governance of church authority.

<sup>4</sup> According to William Riley Parker, “During this time [1632-38] he studied a lot of church history and kept a common place notebook: ethical, economic, and political. Milton liked the *Historia* of Eusebius and the *Historia* of Socrates Scholasticus. Fathers such as Cyprian are remaining sparks of original truth, but he notes the heresies and vanities of Justin Martyr, Clement, Origen, and Tertullian” (146-47). In his *First Apology* Justin Martyr claims that before Christ the *logos* created seeds which allowed for Christian pagans although they didn’t know it (“The First Apology”). Translation and textual criticism were important works for the Church Fathers, and Origen was a primary scholar in this field. In addition to his translations, Origen wrote of the pre-existence of souls and final reconciliation of everything to God (“Origen and Origenism”). However, Milton believed pride would separate some people from God. Finally, Tertullian was the first Latin writer to advance the idea of the Trinity, and he wrote a treaty on the necessity of baptism (“Tertullian”). Milton rejected these biblical interpretations and represented his dislike of these texts in his early poetry for his audience.

liberate dissenting Protestant traditions from court and church traditions, Milton creates a vision of a religious anti-establishment in government, allowing individuals the freedom and choice of a customized religion.

Milton's desire for religious liberty grows organically from his Renaissance humanism. Jean Seznec's scholarly work *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition and Its Place in Renaissance Humanism and Art* discloses "the artist's dilemma," in which Renaissance humanists combined pagan and Christian elements:

If too obvious, his subject matter risked the scorn of the connoisseur; if too complicated, the indifference of the larger public. How would they represent strange mythological figures? Masques provide brilliance in total effect and extravagance of detail . . . [and] the glorification of an individual. . . . Humanists build an artificial edifice out of disparate elements—scenes, episodes, motifs, chosen from an immense reservoir of pagan and Christian antiquity. The humanist's mythological purpose is to translate a series of concepts into a succession of images; now, as we fully understand them, the images of the gods are emblems replete with meaning. They have incomparable utility. (284-87)

Critics furthermore note Milton's use of syncretism in his early poetry. Laurence Lerner notes that Milton is both a humanist and Puritan. Philip Phillips argues Milton converts his muse, using both pagan and Christian traditions. Given Milton's Cambridge education in the liberal arts of classical grammar, logic, rhetoric, languages, and poetry, and his call

for self-interpretation of scripture, guided by charity, Milton's syncretic poetry rejects the practical and traditional art of Christian Theology but nonetheless synthesizes classical and Judeo-Christian worlds.

In 1644 Milton wrote his *Aeropagitica*, in which he seeks to liberate the press from governmental prepublication censorship. Milton's advocacy for freedom of the press and religious liberty requires the premise of an uninhibited truth-quest, acknowledging that everyone seeks truth; however, only fragments of truth are revealed to individuals. In *Aeropagitica* Milton writes, "It is almost as good to kill a man as to kill a good book" (720). This philosophy of liberty is present in his pastoral poetry of the 1630s when Milton uses syncretism. Although early seventeenth-century cavalier and metaphysical poetry becomes more popular than pastoral poetry,<sup>5</sup> Milton chose to write in the pastoral mode because he could infuse Puritan morality and pagan ethics into the shepherd figure. Among early seventeenth-century Puritans, pastoral poetry was tarnished by William Prynne's libel that pastoral literature celebrates and promotes wrongfully amorous shepherds' games.<sup>6</sup> In this heated climate between Puritans and the

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<sup>5</sup> "Pastoral poetry fades in the early 1600s because it is not writing full of intrigue—it is not cavalier, it is not colloquial, and it does not have the short, concentrated passion of metaphysical poetry" (Greenblatt 1355).

<sup>6</sup> "Groups of Puritans square off firmly against the Caroline court, arguing against the *King's Book of Sports* because the Sabbath is reserved for prayer and the promotion of a Sabbath sport is blasphemous. William Prynne and his book *Histriomastix* are at the

Caroline court in the 1630s, Milton seizes the opportunity to write pastoral poetry, in which he can use both Puritan and pagan pastimes and motifs to argue for religious liberty and individual morality. Open-minded Puritans and faith-filled humanists who think critically are Milton's audience: the Egertons, Cambridge classmates, and his Italian humanist friends are the fit but few audience who receives his message of religious liberty for dissenting Protestant groups through his celebration of the humanities.

Lorna Sage, Richard Neuse, G.F. Sensebaugh, C.A. Patrides, and John T. Shawcross argue Milton's calling to a career as poet shows his combination of Puritan and humanist values. As a poet, Milton must balance what he believes to be the best humanistic and Puritan values, such as human agency, virtue, and morality. Clay Daniel notes classical deities may represent an anomaly or chaos for Milton, which his Puritan beliefs help structure. With chaos and grief, J. Martin Evans and Peter Sachs note Milton

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center of the Caroline court and Puritan debates. Prynne accuses King Charles of promoting pagan and popish pastimes, lulling the people of England into a malaise by advancing the amorous shepherds' games of dancing, maypole, archery, whitson ale, leaping, Morris dances, vaulting, and May Day frolics. Although Charles I had a distaste for the vulgar, the antiquarian nostalgia for a vanishing "Merry England" justified the publication of the *Book of Sports* in 1633-34. For Charles the court masque was as much a confessional as an affirmation of power—a forum for acknowledging his sins of state along with proposed correctives" (Marcus 14).

uses the pastoral elegiac tradition to amplify his own feelings of grief. Using the liberal arts and the finest aspects of pagan and Christian religions, Milton provides consolation for both the deceased and those who remain on earth, encouraging those who are left on earth to fulfill their human potentials.

William Riley Parker claims Milton uses classicism and Puritanism for his audience, whether they are the Egerton family, Cambridge classmates, or learned Italian humanists. Finally, Cedric Brown asserts that the ethics of freedom are necessary for the shepherd to be an unworldly teacher who teaches religious liberty. In order for Milton to teach others through his poetry, he must maintain both a humble and dignified persona. In order to accomplish this, Milton invests his shepherd characters with both characteristics.

In addition to Milton's 1630s audience and modern critics, Early Modern critics of pastoral proclaim its merit. Abraham Fraunce finds literary pleasure in Pan, as well as a reason to write love poetry. As an Early Modern critic of pastoral poetry, his critical approach is similar to twentieth-century critics' treatments of pastoral.<sup>7</sup> In *The Arcadian*

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<sup>7</sup> Early twentieth-century critics of pastoral and Milton have noted that close reading of language is an effective way to read pastoral. William Empson is concerned with the poet's effective use of language and the function of the pastoral poetic form. In *English Pastoral Poetry*, William Empson argues that "The essential trick of the old pastoral, which was felt to imply a beautiful relation between rich and poor, was to make simple people express strong feelings (felt as the most universal subject, something fundamentally true about everyone) in learned and fashionable language (so that you



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wrote about the best subject in the best way)” (11). Milton’s syncretic shepherds gain natural knowledge and appeal to all humanity with the idea that proper choices are required. In *The Well Wrought Urn*, Brooks argues, “Milton could not afford to exploit mere contrast. . . . Milton, one feels, is quite as emphatic in his belief that the artistic requires a deliberate act of will as was Kant in his insisting the ethical involves deliberate choice” (50). The shepherds apply their natural knowledge in deliberately choosing between extremes.

Late twentieth-century critics have also noted pastoral’s literary beauty. In *Pastoral*, Peter Marinelli comments on the art of pastoral: “The art of pastoral is the art of the backward glance . . . the product of melancholy longing. The pastoral poet reverses the process of history” (9). Marinelli asserts that the image of the shepherd, looking back in time, is a fundamental device of pastoral poetry. The nostalgia of pastoral lends itself to syncretism, combining the best human and divine qualities of civilizations. As the shepherd’s life represents a basic form of human existence, the reader connects with the shepherd, and the poet is able to elevate the shepherd’s words and actions. Marinelli illuminates the art of the backward glance, whereby the reader must consider carefully how the poet creates nostalgia. The artistic quality of writing the past is present in pastoral and imbues this mode with a joyful melancholy.

James Sambrook notes features of earlier pastoral poetry and connects it to Milton’s work. In *English Pastoral Poetry* Sambrook writes that “a feature of earlier pastoral that Milton most readily assimilates into his work is the turn to hope in

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shepherds' immortality" (82). Sambrook gives an example of this in the first part of *Lycidas*: "it's the shepherd or poet and his expected reward" (82). Sambrook suggests the connection of the virtue "hope" and its external phenomenon of reward.

Paul Alpers is also interested in the virtue of the poet's artistry. In his book *What Is Pastoral?* Alpers interprets the pastoral tradition as the poet's attempt to create shepherds who represent aspects of humanity. Alpers argues the reader can understand pastoral best by analyzing the way in which the poet creates shepherds: "The herdsman of pastoral poetry is conceived as the opposite of the hero: he is able to live with and sing out his dilemmas and pain, but he is unable to act so as to resolve or overcome them" (68–69). The way in which the reader understands the shepherd is through the poet's "dialogue form of ordinary eclogues" (102). The eclogue lends itself to artistry. The poet crafts statements and responses which are often formulated to understand suffering. Common pastoral word choices include: "hungry sheep," "foul contagion," and "the grim wolf"—all within the compass of pastoral representation (105). These phrases signify the melancholy in pastoral; however, the backward glance of the shepherd, coupled with these words, produces artistically rich language. Alpers notes that the language of pastoral is beautiful, and nowhere are the motives of pastoral convention more strikingly evident than in the most remarkably ritualistic poem in English, the double sestina "Ye goatherd gods, that love the grassy mountain, in Sidney's *Arcadia*" (113). Alpers argues the shepherds' songs about loss are crafted beautifully, but the necessity of hope, the promise of reward, and the act of contemplation are the virtues the poet instills in the

*Rhetorike: or The Praecepts of Rhetorike Made Plaine by Examples*, Abraham Fraunce creates an eclogue between Nico and Pas to celebrate a pastoral virtue. Nico says, “Who doubts but Pas fine pipe againe will bring / The auncient praise to Arcade shepheards skill? / Pan is not dead, since Pas begins to sing.” The irony Fraunce notes in his literary study is the life of the Shepherd Pan in Pas. Fraunce’s pastoral critical approach aligns him with many twentieth-century literary critics’ commentary on pastoral (vide n. 7) because pastoral represents a common humanity and its quest to understand the divine. Milton embraces the literary use of Pan because he syncretizes in this figure the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values, believing that all cultures seek to understand the divine. In his *Aeropagitica*, Milton notes that everyone seeks to know human origins and apprehends fragments and elements of the mystery, regardless of its source. This is important because both traditions hold magnificent pieces of spirituality. Through Pan’s life as a shepherd-poet and god, liberated readers can ascertain the truth-value he presents as a character.

Many Early Modern English poets did not negotiate humanism and Puritanism as well as Milton, but rather they preferred strict (Puritan) Christian readings of pastoral as shepherd types worshiping the baby Jesus. English poet and Anglican priest Richard Crashaw was a Cambridge University student when “[i]n 1643 the Puritans occupied

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shepherds to sing these songs. The melancholy is given aesthetic value with the virtue of hope in the poet and shepherd’s immortality. Alpers’ study celebrates the linguistic richness found in early seventeenth-century English poetry.

Cambridge, violently disrupting Crashaw's life there. He fled to Paris and to the English court in exile, becoming a Roman Catholic in 1645" (Greenblatt 1740). "Crashaw's favorite subjects are typical of [Counter-Reformation and] baroque art: the infant Jesus surrounded by angels and cherubs [unlike in Milton's *Nativity Ode* where most of the pagan deities are banished, but Pan comes quietly to reside]" (Greenblatt 1739-40). In his pastoral poetry Richard Crashaw writes about classical shepherds Tityrus and Thyrsis, and in his "In the Holy Nativity of Our Lord God: A Hymn Sung as by the Shepherds," Richard Crashaw blends his classical and biblical shepherds. When he sees the Christ child, Tityrus exclaims,

I saw the obsequious seraphims  
 Their rosy fleece of fire bestow,  
 For well they now can spare their wings  
 Since heaven itself lies here below. (59-61)

Crashaw banishes Pan and pagan deities from his version of Christ's nativity and advances the common Catholic imagery of angels and cherubs, assuming that pagan characters have converted to Christianity, and thus taking them out of their original context and tradition. Of course Crashaw's approach argues for singularity of purpose in all creation worshiping the Christ child; however, it is not as poised as Milton's *Nativity Ode* working with non-Christian elements. Regardless of the poem's religious diversity or doubt, Milton assures his audience of his firmness of purpose and composure in expressing his truth and charity of Christianity. Milton works soberly in multiple traditions.

In their original context the pagan gods are a liberating force. With his contemporaries Milton shares some ideas regarding how the artist ought to use them. According to Milton's biographer, William Riley Parker, "*Arcades* [and Milton's early poetry are] in the manner of Ben Jonson and his tribe, and conforms gracefully to contemporary taste" (83). "The posthumous son of a London clergyman, [Jonson] was educated at Westminster school under the great antiquarian scholar William Camden. There he developed his love of classical learning" (Greenblatt 1441). In "To Penshurst" Jonson writes about this ancient and humble estate, which takes joy in cleanliness "of soil, of air / Of wood, of water; therein thou art fair" (7-8). In this clean environment,

Dryads (wood nymphs) do resort,  
 Where Pan and Bacchus their high feasts have made,  
 Beneath the broad beech and the chestnut shade;  
 The taller tree, which of a nut was set  
 At his great birth where all the muses met.  
 There in the writhed bark are cut the names  
 Of many a sylvan, taken with his flames;  
 And thence the ruddy satyrs oft provoke  
 The lighter fauns to reach thy Lady's Oak. (10-18)

In his praise of Sidney, Jonson invokes the classical world, showing his Renaissance humanist training and elaborating on the poet's inspiration.

Jonson asks if the “free provisions” of Penshurst’s are sufficient for visitors

far above

The needs of such? Whose liberal board doth flow

With all that hospitality doth know;

Where comes no guest but is allowed to eat,

Without his fear, and of thy lord’s own meat;

Where the same beer and bread, and selfsame wine,

That is his lordship’s shall be mine. (58-64)

In Renaissance humanist fashion Jonson brings together lord and peasant, “But all come in, the farmer and the clown” (48). Furthermore, with his Renaissance humanist training, Jonson does not allow his speaker to judge the guests: “Here no man tells my cups; nor, standing by, / A waiter doth my glutton envy” (67-68). At Penshurst there are ethics, which call for self-governance. However, this self-governance is rooted in traditional morality and religion:

They are and have been taught religion; thence

Their gentler spirits have sucked innocence.

Each morn and even they are taught to pray,

With the noble household, and may, every day,

Read in their virtuous parents’ noble parts

The mysteries of manners, arms, and arts. (93-98).

While his focus on traditional Anglicanism is not aligned with Milton’s message of religious liberty for dissenting Protestant groups, Jonson’s focus on the arts connects the

two in Renaissance humanism, where the arts of grammar, logic, rhetoric, math, music, and philosophy inspire both writers to reach back to ancient times and bring its virtue to Early Modern England.

The Puritan John Milton believed virtue was in his call for liberation. Specifically, Milton directs his call for liberty against the bishops. In his book *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England* Christopher Hill identifies a specific problem Puritans had with the Church of England's leadership, their bishops:

When in 1637 the bishop of Hereford succeeded in having the circuit judges' order against clerks' ales recalled, the reasons he gave were (i) ales brought the people more willingly to church; (ii) they tended to civilize them and to compose local differences; (iii) they increased love and unity, being of the nature of feasts of charity; (iv) they brought rich and poor together. The emphasis is on social cohesion and solidarity which were fast losing their reality. The bishops' agreeable picture of Sundays spent in love, unity and drinking might well conflict with the puritan stress on Sabbath religious education and on the inculcation of an individual morality. (192-93)

Milton does not have a problem with the moderate consumption of ale: "Then to the Spicy Nut-brown Ale, / With stories told of many a feat" ("L' Allegro" 100-01), but Hill identifies Milton's problem with the bishop correctly, as an invasion by the bishops into individual morality. With his desire for individual choices in morality and virtue, Milton uses his syncretic shepherds as dignified exemplars of individuals who are open to all

traditions and choose wisely among these traditions for themselves; they are not paranoid as Puritan extremists like William Prynne were about an Anglican return to Catholicism, but instead they desire religious liberty in ethics and morals. However, Milton felt these choices were limited by the Church of England. Archbishop Laud, King Charles I's selected prelate, is an unethical and tyrannical shepherd according to Milton because he eliminates the people's liberty.

Milton reads and learns from his contemporaries as well as classical sources in order to fashion the most aesthetically and philosophically pleasing shepherds, and these syncretic, symbolic characters appear frequently in his early verse. Shepherds support the theme of faith, for example, in *Nativity Ode*, in which the image of the quiet infant Christ silences the cacophony of the pagan gods.<sup>8</sup> Milton creates shepherds who may find the path of virtue in recognition of their god Pan:

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<sup>8</sup> Peter Marinelli notes the richness of the pastoral tradition: "Pagan in its origin, it soon becomes Christian through the happy coincidence of meaning in the word pastor, shepherd, and priest, and through the influence of pastoral life in the Scriptures: The Shepherd Abel, the Shepherd David, Christ the Good Shepherd, the Lamb of God, the Shepherds present at the Nativity, the entire pastoral atmosphere of the Song of Songs; the Shepherd's life is a basic form of human existence and is found in all civilizations" (10).

For Milton, Abel's virtue is that he performs a good deed and offers his goods of fortune—the fat portions of his sheep—to his father, Adam. The shepherd David's love



The Shepherds on the Lawn,  
 Or ere the point of dawn,  
 Sat simply chatting in a rustic row;  
 Full little thought they then,  
 That the mighty Pan  
 Was kindly come to live with them below. (85-90)

In this case, Pan is the syncretic form for Jesus Christ. Because Pan is guardian of the flocks, the shepherds ought to revere him. Milton employs this blended meaning to stress

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for the Almighty and humanity is expressed in the Psalms he composed. David exemplifies the poetic virtue of artistic creation and immortality, and Milton looks to David as the pastoral ideal. Milton worships the Good Shepherd, Jesus Christ as Lamb of God, and, for Milton, Christ's death and resurrection are the ultimate answer to pastoral suffering; furthermore, the shepherds' contemplation of Christ's life and death provides reason for suffering. The Song of Songs offers the pastoral environment, and the shepherds at the nativity offer gifts to the Christ child. These shepherds recognize some debt their humanity owes Christ. Milton was captivated with the idea of the shepherds giving gifts to the Christ child. He himself wanted to give a gift to the Christ child. In fact, Milton wrote *Nativity Ode* as a gift. Commentators have noted the power of this gift. Philip Phillips argues, "Milton suggests that the poet's gift of an ode or verse takes rank over the material gift of the wise men—another important aspect of the Christian vates as God's chosen poet" (52).

the effectiveness and continuity of both traditions; the two protect each other under the aegis of religious liberty. Ovid writes of Pan's transformation into a poet. After Syrinx rejected Pan's advances and fled through the fields, "She arrived at the river Ladon peacefully flowing between its sandy banks. Since the waters were barring her away, she called on the nymphs of the stream to transform her" (40). As a result, she was transformed into marsh reeds. Pan learned this firsthand when, ready to capture her in his outstretched arms, he was left with only reeds. As he sighed with disappointment, "the movement of air in the rustling weeds awakened a thin, low, plaintive sound. Enthralled by the strange new music and sweetness of tone, Pan exclaimed, 'This sylvan pipe will enable us always to talk together!' And so, when he'd bound some reeds of unequal length with a coating of wax, a syrinx--the name of his loved one--stayed in his hands" (40-41). Milton uses Pan's history to teach his shepherds the power that poetry has to bind people, ideas, and value-systems, even under disparate circumstances. These circumstances existed in Early Modern England with the way in which writers regarded the pagan gods. Ben Jonson used the pagan gods to symbolize and teach virtue. However, philosophically, Milton stands alone. Milton believes the inclusion of the shepherds' worship of their deity Pan adds richness to his argument for religious liberty because it disestablishes the popular Christian view and allows space for individuals and groups to worship as they see fit.

Milton's artistry is on display in stanza VIII of *Nativity Ode* because the pastoral form of shepherds singing provides a home for philosophic contemplation. Milton shapes the poetic form and fills it with wisdom. He argues for what he knows—Greco-Roman

and Judeo-Christian conceptions of virtue. The most excellent way in which the shepherds could spend their time would be in conscious honor of Pan, their divine master, recognizing their debt to him for protecting their flocks. The pleasant scene allows the reader to engage more fully with this new focus and imagine that he/she is sitting comfortably on a hillside in pleasant conversation with leisurely time in which to express the self clearly.

Milton moves from a general discussion of shepherds in *Nativity Ode* to citing two very specific shepherds in “L’Allegro.” Corydon and Thyrsis<sup>9</sup> appear and imitate how “. . . every Shepherd tells his tale / Under the Hawthorn in the dale” (67-68). Because their tales are important, Milton uses these two shepherds in the poem to redefine those virtuous qualities given to them by Theocritus and Vergil and show how their classical inheritance can expand the debate over individuals’ and groups’ religious freedoms in Early Modern England. In this poem Milton sets Corydon and Thyrsis at a savory dinner of herbs and other country messes. Brooks suggests “L’Allegro” and “Il Penseroso” follow Milton’s first prolusion—whether day or night is more excellent—that examines what is virtuous (49). “‘Il Penseroso’s’ pleasures are hardly more contemplative than those which delight ‘L’Allegro.’ The happy man, too, is the detached observer, gliding through his world, a spectator of it, and reserving a certain aesthetic distance between it and himself” (52). Brooks argues the companion poems are about the

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<sup>9</sup> “Beginning with Theocritus’ Idyls, the rustic names come from countless classical and Renaissance pastoral poems” (Hughes 70).

joy of melancholy and the unity in variety: “The first scene is a dawn scene—sunrise and people going to work: the plowman, milkmaid, the mower, and the shepherd . . . ; we never see them at their work. . . . Nobody sweats in the world of ‘L’Allegro’” (57). The traditional tales of Corydon and Thyrsis lead a reader to understand Milton’s pastoral purpose more fully. The shepherds contemplate and sing about sad events, but their beautiful representation of these events is virtuous. Milton includes the classical shepherds Corydon and Thyrsis in a poem that argues the mirthful life is the best life lived because it emphasizes his artistic rendering of the melancholic life as a “backward glance.” Milton’s Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian Corydon and Thyrsis are able to hold together mirth and melancholy, as they hold together the ancient and Early Modern values systems.

Milton incorporates and adapts classic shepherds’ virtues and agency into his own poetry. One significant source that Milton uses for his pastoral poetry is *Idylls*. Sicilian poet Theocritus wrote about Thyrsis, Corydon, and Lycidas in his *Idylls*, which paint pictures of country life and shepherds. In “Idyll I,” according to Theocritus’ goatherd, Thyrsis outstrips all others in herdsman’s songs because Thyrsis’ lament for Daphnis is outstanding and worthy of honor. The goatherd offers a great reward to hear Thyrsis sing of Daphnis as he did once in a match against the Libyan Chromis. To delight him, the goatherd offers Thyrsis

Three milkings of a goat that suckles twins,  
 Yet has enough left to fill two pails. I’ll give you too  
 A deep cup, sealed with a layer of sweet wax

Two-handled, newly made, still smelling of the knife.

At its lip winds an ivy pattern, ivy dotted with

Golden clusters. (24-29)

The cup glorifies poetry and the competing poets who vie for the commemorative prize. The milk and cup are handsome rewards worthy of a famous song, sung by Thyrsis, the virtuous shepherd. Then he asks the Nymphs, “Where were you, Nymphs, when Daphnis wasted away, / Where were you?” (66-67). Thyrsis laments the suffering of Daphnis and is offended that the nymphs would not help. He continues to sing how various animals lamented the death of Daphnis. Hermes, followed by cowmen, shepherds, and goatherds, asks Daphnis the cause of his grief and what love he has lost. Aphrodite stops to ask Daphnis if he once boasted that he would not fall to love and inquire if now Daphnis has fallen victim of love. Daphnis vows to Aphrodite that even in Hades, he will be a source of grief for love. Daphnis invokes Pan’s help, asking if Pan will pipe his oaten reed and soothe his way to Hades. After his supplication, “Daphnis came to the river, and the waters closed above the man / Whome the Muses loved, and whom the Nymphs did not reject” (139-41). Thyrsis sings an offering to the muses.

Thyrsis sings sweetly of suffering. Daphnis is virtuous for his self-sufficiency and his choice to be true to himself. While Daphnis is not obedient to Aphrodite, he is obedient to Pan, dutifully obeying his god. Once again, Pan is a liberating force, freeing Daphnis from the fear and uncertainty of death. Thyrsis maintains excellence in poetry

because of his knowledge of Daphnis, choosing a good subject and rendering it with clear representation. Thyrsis is also tender toward Daphnis' memory and recognizes his debts to shepherds.

Milton chooses Corydon for "L'Allegro" because, in the tradition of Theocritus' "Idyll IV," Corydon exemplifies the Greco-Roman, and later Judeo-Christian, virtue of hope. In Theocritus' idyll Battus encounters Corydon, who looks after Aegon's cows. Battus asks if Corydon secretly milks Aegon's cows in the evening. Corydon then responds, "No, the old man puts the calves to them, and keeps an eye on me" (4). He shows the virtue of restraint. This is a virtue of necessity, for he must obey the wishes of his master; however, restraint precedes hope, and Corydon awaits the return of Aegon and a possible reward for his fidelity to his master. Battus complicates Corydon's excellence by claiming that Corydon keeps thin cows that are not a proper sacrificial offering to the goddess Hera. Corydon confounds Battus when, after he shows pietas to the gods, he argues, "I drive him to . . . the river Neaethus, where the best plants all grow: Restharrow, fleabane, and sweet-smelling balm" (24-25). Corydon reiterates that he fattens the cows for their sacrifice. In Corydon's mind, this pleases the gods, and thus he is fulfilling his duty.

Corydon's final virtue in "Idyll IV" is the most dramatic and the strongest case the poet Milton could use to answer the problem of suffering. Battus laments the death of Amaryllis. Corydon responds, "Cheer up, Battus, my friend. Things may be better tomorrow. / To live is to hope—it's only the dead who despair. / Zeus decides: one day it's fine weather and the next day it rains" (41-43). Theocritus writes powerfully of

Corydon's hope, who offers consolation to his friend Battus, who cannot reconcile himself to the pain caused by beautiful, young Amaryllis' death. For Milton Corydon exemplifies hope and liberty. Milton wishes to instill these qualities in his readers by highlighting the freedom Corydon feels from his trust in Zeus' decisions. If Corydon's trust, worship, and communal religious belief in Zeus were destroyed for a reading audience, Milton believes the message and liberating force would be lost. Corydon deprived of his belief in Zeus would ruin Theocritus's climactic moment of Corydon achieving peace and finding hope. Milton syncretizes this rich tradition in "L' Allegro" to reveal to his readers how Corydon's liberty and hope lead to mirth.

Lycidas is another classical shepherd who is extremely important in Milton's poetry because his death is given meaning from both the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions. Not only is Lycidas saved by Jesus Christ, but he is also given eternal life as the genius of the shore by the pagan gods. Milton does not find the mean between the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, but rather he celebrates both traditions fully, incorporating their highest prizes and sweetest answers to solve the problem of death. Milton's new shepherd lives simultaneously and eternally in both traditions.

Milton translates and uses the superior verse of Theocritus' Lycidas. In addition to the behavioral virtues of Thyrsis and Corydon, Milton is attracted to the poetic virtues of Lycidas. In "Idyll VII" Simichidas describes Lycidas:

The tawny thing of a thick-haired shaggy goat  
Hung from his shoulders, smelling of new-made rennet.

Under that was an ancient shirt, tied in with a  
 Wide belt. In his right hand he carried a curved stick  
 Of wild olive wood. Quietly he grinned at me, his eye  
 Twinkled, and laughter touched his lip as he spoke. (15-20)

The name of Lycidas, a traveler from Crete, evokes an epithet for Apollo, and Simichidas appropriately calls Lycidas the best of all pipers and calls his piping heart-warming. Milton finds virtue in Lycidas' excellence as well.

Another significant source that Milton uses in his pastoral poetry is *Eclogues*. Roman poet Vergil follows in the tradition of Theocritus, and Milton adapts the virtues and agency of Vergil's shepherds into his own poetry. Vergil's *Eclogues* are the first step in establishing the fame of the poet, and they are followed by his *Georgics* and *Aeneid*.<sup>10</sup> Milton uses Corydon as a model from the Vergilian tradition of "Eclogue II." In "Eclogue II" Corydon loves his master's darling Alexis, but when Alexis does not return Corydon's love, he suffers greatly. Corydon worries that this suffering will be his death at last, but he considers Pan, who "first taught to join with wax the row of reeds: Pan is guardian of the sheep and of the shepherds. . . . I have a pipe joined of seven unequal hemlock-stalks, a gift that Damoetas once gave me, and said as he died: Now hath it thee for second master" (Vergil 268-69). For Vergil's Corydon the god Pan is first because

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<sup>10</sup> In the Middle Ages, John of Garland refers to this as the *rota Vergiles*, or the ascendancy of the Vergil poet. Milton seeks to follow this pattern of ascendancy, by writing new pastoral, georgics, and the great epic *Paradise Lost*.



Pan protects his shepherds from uncertainty, liberating these shepherds to sing poetry. If Pan is not alive for him, Corydon cannot sing, and the reader loses the complex interaction between shepherd and god. Even with Pan's protection, Corydon wonders if he is caught in madness. He finally arrives at the decision that, if he is disdained by Alexis, he will find another Alexis. As he suffers through love's loss, Corydon seems to travel along the way to the greater good of helping others in loss. This is what Milton finds so attractive about Vergil's Corydon. In Corydon's crucial loss, he turns to Pan and poetry, and, at the end of his song, he is liberated by his hope to "find another" (269).

In "Eclogue IX," Lycidas and Moeris lament the approach of intruders in their fields. Lycidas claims that wickedness is despair. In this eclogue Vergil foreshadows the virtue that Milton would imbue so powerfully in his shepherds: hope. Lycidas says,

Daphnis, why gaze upward on the ancient rising of the  
Signs? Lo the star of Caesar, Dione's child, has advanced, the  
Star whereunder fields should rejoice in corn and the grape  
Gather colour on sunny hills. Engraft thy pear-trees, Daphnis;  
Thy children's children shall pluck their fruit. (289)

These lines of Vergilian hope for the future of the Roman Empire, founded in the children of the dynasty, are a pagan hope Milton can still appreciate. Vergil prophecies a triumphant and glorious future for the empire. In his poetry, Milton desires to achieve the goal of prophecy as well. In "Il Penseroso" Milton writes of the "virtuous Ring and Glass" (113) of Cambuscan. The end of the poem reveals why these things are virtuous: They persist "Till old experience do attain / To something like Prophetic strain" (173-74).

As in the ring and glass of Kahn, Milton believes contemplation brings one to the *summum bonum* of prophecy, and he seeks to join Vergil in prophesizing the birth and infancy of something great. With the virtue of hope in Vergil's characterization of Lycidas, Milton can use contemplative and excellent shepherds who have learned enough from life's experiences to see into the future and appeal to those same virtues in his audience: open-minded English men and women who find hope for the future by choosing, considering all knowledge from Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions.

How is Milton informed by the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, and what groundwork do these traditions establish for Milton's pastoral poetry of the 1630s? How does Milton's art develop? In Chapter II of this study, I examine Milton's *Arcades*. Milton writes *Arcades* as "Part of an Entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby at Harefield, by some Noble persons of her Family, who appear on the Scene in pastoral habit, moving toward the seat of State" (Hughes 77). Merritt Hughes dates this piece as 1632. I examine the Egerton family and the amorous shepherds' games of singing, dancing, and piping at the Harefield estate. Although the Egertons are Puritan in their learning, they seek Milton's pastoral entertainment because they seek to be inclusive of other traditions, value-sets, and religions, so as to advance the liberty of their own religious practices by means of Milton's syncretic shepherds. Milton's shepherds desire a queen like Lady Alice; furthermore they desire a place like the Egerton's estate. In the pastoral tradition location and place are critical to the songs of shepherds and nymphs. Pan sanctified the Arcadian fields with his love for Syrinx. And Orpheus blesses the river Hebrus, singing his love for Eurydice. The new English Arcadian fields will inspire other

syncretic shepherds, who are the guests of Lady Alice at the Harefield estate. The shepherds and nymphs trust in the leadership of Lady Alice: “The nymphs and shepherds have come from far off Arcady to England in search of a new patroness or presiding deity, whom they find in the aging countess—they seek and find in England [in Arcades] a new homeland for pastoral poetry” (Parker 84). Lady Alice receives the fullness of praise, respect, and honor in her deification because she has the richness of the classical tradition behind her, as well as that of the Judeo-Christian.

In Chapter III of this study, I examine Milton’s *A Mask*, written in 1634, and argue that Milton reveals the problem with some syncretic shepherds, particularly Comus, who is a depraved, false, and tyrannical shepherd. Milton uses Comus and his crew to represent rioters in the Forest of Dean, marking the boundary between England and Wales. These inhabitants of the forest opposed bitterly the Caroline court’s enclosure of lands. However, Milton uses syncretic shepherds to help solve the conflict of *A Mask*, as well. Thyrsis and Sabrina lead the Egerton children out of harm’s way, and, it is precisely the balance of their syncretic qualities which allow them to be ethical, moral, and virtuous. Milton calls the reader’s attention to the virtue of Theocritus’ and Vergil’s Thyrsis; he is not looking for a lost animal, nor “fleecy wealth” (504). A shepherd lad told Thyrsis to use “Haemony” (638); it works against all enchantments. *A Mask* concludes as the syncretic shepherd Thyrsis invokes Sabrina to help ensnared chastity—she sprinkles drops on the Lady’s breasts, fingers, and lips. This forms a barrier against Comus’ lust. Sabrina touches the seat upon which the lady sits to cool the heat of Comus, which has worked as an adhesive. In this way, the Lady is set free from Comus’ spell.

Without Sabrina's magic and her own virtue the Lady would have been ravaged by Comus. It is both the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values Milton places in Sabrina and the Lady which resolve *A Mask*. Again, it does not fall on deaf ears and minds in the Egerton family. As a result of *Arcades* (as demonstrated in Chapter II), the Egerton family is receptive to Milton's syncretism.

In Chapter IV of this study, *Lycidas* calls the reader to consider Theocritus' and Vergil's character and gauge the excellence of this shepherd, located in both the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions. The speaker Thyrsis finds consolation in both Lycidas' apotheosis and the thought that tomorrow he will enter fields and pastures new. This hope rests finally in the one who walked on water. However, Thyrsis who embodies Milton's own dilemma cannot escape the problem of death—a very early and untimely one. Edward King was Milton's classmate at Cambridge, and as King's ship was leaving England across the Irish Sea the boat wrecked and King drowned. Cambridge soon produced a volume of poetry to honor its deceased fellow. In 1637 Milton set pen to paper to honor his deceased classmate and decided a pastoral elegy would be the best way to eulogize King. Since King was striving to be a pastor in the Church of England and Milton believed King would have cared for the people well, Milton saw the pastoral elegy as a form that would work well. Furthermore, the pastoral elegy would serve as a way for Milton to objectify grief, for Milton sought to draw on generations of grievers and incorporate them into King's praises and his mourners' consolation. While Milton believes Lycidas, Edward King, was a good shepherd, he takes the opportunity in *Lycidas* to criticize the bad shepherds—the wolves in sheep's clothing (much like Comus) and to

urge his readers toward better self-governance. Milton wrote *Lycidas* during his Horton period of 1635-1638, a time when Milton was deep in his study of Church history.<sup>11</sup> This study led to Milton's loathing of Catholic clericalism and attacking the bishops in *Lycidas* with a claim that false shepherds have blind mouths. Not only was Milton critical that such shepherds did not know what they were talking about, but he was even more critical that they were being told what to say. For Milton the idea of pastoral is one of independent, enlightened conscience, one singing one's own song: It is not about mimicry or stealing other people's ideas. In his attack against Catholic and Anglican bishops, Milton believes his Puritan humanism is justified because people deserve ethical treatment in order to achieve their own virtue and liberty. It remains important for Milton to allow both of these beliefs to exist simultaneously in his syncretic shepherds, so one may use one, both, or a variation of both to overcome death. The speaker Thyrsis of *Lycidas* overcomes death by both beliefs, thereby arguing implicitly for religious liberty as a necessary means to achieve the truth all traditions seek.

In *Epitaphium Damonis*, Chapter V of this study, the peace of Thyrsis is destroyed; the death of Damon overcomes the shepherd-speaker with a deep, personal loss. Thyrsis repeats the phrase, "Ite domum impasti, / domino iam non vacat, agni" [Go home unfed, / I have no time for you, lambs<sup>12</sup>] (1-2). Milton's repetition of this phrase causes the reader to question why the shepherd doesn't have any time for the lambs.

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<sup>11</sup> See footnotes three and four.

<sup>12</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

Puritan humanism provides consolation for the loss of his dear friend. In his practice of the liberal arts, Milton writes Latin poetry that provides catharsis for his grief. For Milton it is through both the liberal arts and Christian eternal life that this relief would be possible. At the end of the poem Damon's apotheosis and entry into heaven render him a divine shepherd. Thyrsis notes the classical reward that Damon will be "Heroumque animas inter, divosque perennes, / Aethereos haurit lattices et gaudia potat / Ore sacro" [Among the souls of heroes and the immortal gods where he drinks the draughts of heaven and quaffs its joys with his sacred lips] (205-07). If Milton were a strict Puritan, this would not be the conclusion of the poem, but rather the reader would note the absence of the heroes, immortal gods, and alcohol from the Puritan heaven. The expansion of heaven is thanks to Milton's Puritan and humanist syncretism, and Damon deserves to dwell with the heroes and immortal gods because he sang their praises during his life, practicing the liberal arts of Pallas Athene. For Milton after Lady Alice, Sabrina and the Lady, and Lycidas, it is only natural that Damon receives the highest rewards of heaven, as Milton and Diodati shared a love for all things Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian, liberated by their shared syncretism.

In his pastoral poetry Milton uses the liberating forces of gods like Pan and shepherds from the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions to save his readers from the fear of misguided rule, harm, and death. Milton creates his syncretic shepherds to allow choices and liberate his reading audience from tyrannical, churchly control of their values and beliefs. Violence and death threaten everyone. With his syncretic shepherds

Milton safeguards a diversity of responses to these threats. Milton's Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian syncretism ensures religious liberty to all individuals of dissenting Protestant sects, allowing his readers to meet coercion, violence, and death with dignity, confidence, and hope.

## CHAPTER II

SYNCRETIC SHEPHERDS AND A DEIFIED QUEEN IN MILTON'S *ARCADES*

This chapter examines Milton's *Arcades*, which follows *Nativity Ode* and continues to show the tension between Milton's Christian and classical learning by allowing Milton to address the role of the pagan gods in his poetry. An occasional piece, Milton's *Arcades* is "part of an Entertainment presented to the Countess Dowager of Derby at Harefield, by some Noble persons of her Family, who appear on the Scene in pastoral habit, moving toward the seat of State" (Hughes 77). Merritt Hughes dates this piece as 1632. I examine the Egerton family and the amorous shepherds' games of singing, dancing, and piping at the Harefield estate, hoping to establish that Milton uses pastoral to stress his shepherds' Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian qualities and thereby to call for toleration toward dissenting Protestant groups. Although the Egertons are Puritan in their learning, they seek Milton's pastoral entertainment because they want to be inclusive of other traditions to advance the liberty of their own religious practices. In examining how the tensions in Milton's Puritan humanism find expression in the pastoral elements of *Arcades*, this chapter considers how Milton accommodates the expectations of the Egerton audience, located at the Harefield estate in the Forest of Dean. In *Arcades* Milton advocates tolerating religious dissent by strategically placing and using pagan gods to symbolize liberty for shepherds who attempt to practice a humane and virtuous life.

The pagan gods' banishment is the central theme of *Nativity Ode*. Milton banishes many pagan gods, most notably the Sun and its god Apollo: "And hid his head for shame



/ As his inferior flame, / The new-enlightened world should no longer need” (80-82). The poem later confirms the banishment of the pagan gods when: “Apollo from his shrine / Can no more divine” (176-77). However, Milton keeps one god close; most notably, Milton keeps Pan because his shepherds function as both followers of the pagan god and disciples of Christ. The classical shepherds are poets while Milton’s Early Modern shepherds are poet-priests. The pastoral enabled Milton to emphasize the value of personal liberty within a framework that was based in Christian humanist values. This message speaks to his desire to express that the Egerton family could find virtue in pastoral entertainment whose inspiration is the classical tradition while still holding to Puritan principles. In seeking to consider the degree to which this tension might limit or enhance pastoral entertainment, one recognizes the problematic space that pastoral occupied within rigid Puritan doctrine. The pastoral entertainment of *Arcades* might be objectionable to the Egertons as Puritans because singing and dancing shepherds are kinds that might lead individuals to ruin. However, as cultured aristocrats, the Egertons find also the literary merit in humanism that writers like Ben Jonson promote. Ultimately, a reading of *Arcades* demonstrates that the Egertons celebrate the marriage of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values by privileging shepherds whose composition and actions are ethical and facilitate religious liberty.

Critics of the poem have noted Milton’s effort to write pastoral that accommodates a humanist strain of Puritanism. For example, Mary Anne McGuire argues that “One expects in the *Arcades* a similar invocation of classical mythology-allusions, in other words, that are strikingly appropriate for praising an elderly matriarch

surrounded by her progeny” (462). Milton’s critical biographer and a scholar of literary forms, Barbara Lewalski notes that Milton’s use of images and mythology is subsumed in his art. She notes that in Milton’s *Arcades*, “it is the visitors, coming in pastoral guise from the Arcadian court, who pay homage to a far superior rural queen of a better Arcadia, directed by Genius, its guarding spirit” (59). Further, she writes that “Milton also began to explore here what his Mask would develop fully—a stance toward art and recreation that repudiates both the court aesthetic and Prynne’s wholesale prohibitions” (59). Ultimately, Milton’s early poetry navigates a way between the Scylla of the court—appropriating absolutely mythological images for its own purposes—and the Charybdis of wholesale prohibitions of classical learning. Writing as a Puritan humanist, Milton reflects his worldly and familial anxiety toward his vocation of poetry in his youthful work. Even more so, through his classical and Christian learning at Cambridge, Milton argues for a tenable appropriation of pagan gods for his Early Modern Christian worldview. In Milton’s early poetry, syncretism holds together the classical and Judeo-Christian worlds. Milton does not wish to be aligned with the complete repudiation of classical learning and associated with the Puritanism of those who wish to erase the culture and learning of the ancients, nor does he wish to be associated with what he perceives to be the absolutism of King Charles I’s reign and Archbishop Laud’s practices. Instead, Milton looks toward the inclusive nature of Ben Jonson’s (or Shakespeare’s) work, which balances the classical and Judeo-Christian worlds. Milton emulates Jonson’s work because it displays respect for all human forms of learning, valuing what the ancients thought about history, the cosmos, divinity, literature, math, and music. The

pragmatic consequence of Milton's verse in the 1630s is toleration for dissenting Protestant groups. In refiguring his pastoral poetry to accommodate this message of tolerance, Milton uses his classical learning to advocate liberty for all people, especially those who do not practice a Puritanism that calls for a strict and literal interpretation of sacred scripture, as well as people who do not practice the holistic systems of Charles I and Archbishop Laud.

In *Arcades* the English countryside becomes Arcadia, serving to represent a Golden Age, when mortals did not work and shepherds roamed the land with their sheep. Milton gives his poetic voice to a shepherd-speaker who represents both Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian cultures. Shepherds are poetic and follow in a long line of Theocritus' and Vergil's thoughtful creations. Both Theocritus and Vergil have Thyrsis and Lycidas sing of gods and characters who liberate humanity from tyrannical forces. The shepherd-speaker addresses the other shepherds, declaring, "This, this is she / To whom our vows and wishes bend, / Here our solemn search hath end" (5-7). The shepherds and nymphs who proceed across the Harefield estate, seeking Lady Alice, their patroness, see the Lady as a supporter of their endeavors whom they can love sincerely and honor with their promises. Their vows commit their loyalty and livelihoods to this new, English Arcadia, hallowing the ground with their promises. The shepherds' purpose in praising the Lady fully is redemptive, previously having given her only half the praise she is due, for "Envy did conceal the rest" (13). This message of redemption can be read as achieving a fullness through the classical inheritance. For these shepherds, the Lady serves as a better patroness than King Charles I, the current ruler of England, because she

recognizes their desire for recovering lost liberties in art and religion. Furthermore, it is through the classical inheritance that the shepherds can see her as a goddess, not limited to the English views of the 1630s that see Charles only in godly terms. In casting Lady Alice Spenser Egerton as a goddess, one of Milton's purposes is to show the goodness of her gender, an interpretation that is limited by the worldview of Charles' court. In the negotiated pastoral framework that Milton writes within, she deserves praise—symbolically rendered by her deification—for the way in which she looks over her flock. More importantly, she sympathizes with the shepherds' desires for liberty from an old Arcadia, patterned after Charles I's reign.

This version of Lady Alice is peerless: "Shooting her beams like silver threads. / This, this is she alone, / Sitting like a Goddess bright" (17-19). Juno dares not compete with her because there may be no god as great as she. In the classical tradition, Juno is associated with marriage and youth. In the traditional pastoral sense she would occupy the forefront. Here, however, Juno is subordinate because Milton sought to accommodate his pastoral to the ideals of Puritan humanism. In this way Lady Alice presides over the joining of the Old with the New Arcadia, where youthful shepherds find confidence in her leadership. Sitting alone, she reveals her independence. Latona gives birth to Apollo and Artemis in Greek mythology, after which she floats freely on an island. Milton uses this image of independence to symbolize the Egertons' distance between the Anglican crown and Puritan mainstream. Furthermore, Latona gives birth to poets and protectors, and these are the shepherds over whom Lady Alice presides.

Both the shepherd-speaker and the shepherds are in procession to meet Lady Alice. On their journey they are guided by a protecting deity, the Genius of the Wood. The hazards of journeying through the wood in ancient times still existed in Early Modern England. The Genius promises to lead the shepherds to Lady Alice and addresses the shepherds, saying:

I see bright honor sparkle through your eyes.  
 Of famous Arcady ye are, and sprung  
 Of that renowned flood, so often sung,  
 Divine Alpheus, who by secret sluice,  
 Stole under Seas to meet his Arethuse. (27-31)

The Genius claims that these shepherds are worthy not just as pastoral figures but also as representations of humanistic values. Those who have gathered for this performance at the Harefield estate are judged likewise to be honorable and virtuous, an audience appreciative of those classical and pastoral traditions as shaped by the higher values of Puritan humanism. For Milton these honorable and virtuous people have a right to their own liberty. Milton seeks out the virtue of the classical shepherds of Arcadia and wishes to show the equality of these ideal practices in the Early Modern guests of the Harefield estate. In his negotiated pastoral vision, the humanist Milton sees the virtue of classical shepherds while the Puritan Milton claims the virtue of the Harefield guests is a right for their religious liberty.

In expressing this refigured vision of the pastoral, the Genius articulates his own habits of reception. He describes the way in which he consecrates the Wood while also describing the way in which he listens to the music of the spheres:

Then listen I  
 To the celestial Sirens' harmony,  
 That sit upon the nine infolded Spheres  
 And sing to those that hold the vital shears  
 And turn the Adamantine spindle round,  
 On which the fate of gods and men is wound. (62-67)

The Genius of the Wood explains the way in which the music of the spheres keeps nature in balance, noting further that vulgar human ears cannot hear such music. One important exception is Lady Alice, in whose praise Milton enlists the pagan world and its pastoral song.

The young Milton shows his effort to stress the proper reception for poetry and music in other works as well. In *Nativity Ode*, for example, the silent, infant Christ provides the initial reason for the music and harmony of the spheres:

Ring out ye Crystal spheres  
 Once bless our human ears,  
 (If ye have power to touch our senses so)  
 And let your silver chime  
 Move in melodious time. (125-29)

Here, Milton writes that Christ banished the cacophony of the pagan gods in *Nativity Ode* and restored the music of the spheres to human ears, so Lady Alice can hear the harmony of pastoral poetry with humanistic ears. Scholar Jean Seznec, who traces the stellar influence of the pagan gods in Early Modern Europe in *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, writes,

Tertullian admits astrology was valid up to the birth of Christ; now, however, one can longer look to Saturn, Mars, and the other dead gods for knowledge of the future. Most devout Christians share the view of Origen: supported by texts from the bible, they still believe in the power of the stars—with limitation. . . . Stars function as signs through which the deity announces benevolent and malevolent intent. (43-44)

Milton's poetry acknowledges that the stars are divine signs. However, Milton imagines that the ancient stars inhabited by the gods Saturn and Mercury move below the divine creator of the universe. Below the supreme deity's gaze sit all forms of human understanding of the divine.

The shepherd-speaker takes over for the Genius of the Wood and tells the other shepherds,

I will bring you where she sits  
Clad in splendor as befits  
Her deity.  
Such a rural Queen  
All Arcadia hath not seen. (91-95)

The Egerton family's praise for Lady Alice likened her to a deity whose values are shaped by the best aspects of Puritan belief. In this literary deification, Milton reveals how his pastoral work is broadened and made inclusive by his humanism because in *Nativity Ode* the Puritan Milton was not venerating any deity except Christ. Moloch and "The brutish gods of Nile as fast, / Isis and Orus, and the Dog Anubis haste" (211-12). At the end of *Nativity Ode*, the Babe is laid to rest by the Virgin blest. There is unusual emphasis on the Roman Catholic image of the Virgin blest by the Puritan-humanist poet Milton. Seeking in his earlier poetry to write about and incorporate Christ's passion into his Puritan-humanist vision, Milton searches also for a way to appropriate an image of Mary into his *Nativity Ode*: "Heav'n's youngest-teemed Star / Hath fixt her polisht Car" (240-41). The Puritan Milton places Christ in the center of the cosmos, as heaven's youngest and most venerable star, but Mary is on the periphery of this image. In Milton's Puritan-humanist configuration, Mary receives a crown; however, she is not the only queen in heaven because Milton makes room for others. The humanist Milton deifies the rural Queen of All Arcadia, Lady Alice. This contrast is important because in *Nativity Ode* the Puritan Milton exiles Lars, gods of cities, and Lemures, spirits of the dead, from any existence "In consecrated Earth, / And on the holy Hearth" (189-90).

The contrast is marked between the two poems, but the contrast demonstrates the ability of the Puritan and humanist poet Milton to move effortlessly toward a synthesis of humanism and Puritanism. As *Arcades* concludes, the shepherd-speaker urges the other shepherds and nymphs to abandon Lycaeus, Cyllene, and Erymanth and "Bring your Flocks, and live with us. / Here ye shall have greater grace, / To serve the Lady of this



place” (103-05). Just as Lars and Lemures have been cast from their homes and locales, the shepherd-speaker claims it is time for the shepherds to leave Arcadia. As New Arcadia, England holds much better prospects for these gentle swains who will see their pastoral environs reinforced by better, humanist-infused values: “The nymphs and shepherds have come from far off Arcady to England in search of a new patroness or presiding deity, whom they find in the aging countess—they seek and find in England [in *Arcades*] a new homeland for pastoral poetry” (Parker 84). The literary humanist John Milton declares the English countryside to be the new, golden place for pastoral poetry.

In *Arcades*, Milton’s countryside is full of shepherds and nymphs. These country folk are guests of the Egertons who share their political and religious sympathies. Milton casts them as shepherds because of the classical tradition of wise and sensitive shepherds. Thyrsis, Lycidas, and Corydon sought wisdom and liberty. The Egertons’ shepherds seek their liberty and support from Alice Spenser. She married Sir Thomas Egerton and became the stepmother to Sir John Egerton, the Earl of Bridgewater, who gave this *Arcades* mask-entertainment in her honor, a sign of his regard for Lady Alice. The shepherd audience shares the Earl’s adulation for the Lady: “And they—audience—may have remembered that Cybele was the inventor of musical instruments and that she was worshipped as a protectress of shepherds” (McGuire 462). McGuire explains that

Milton is also invoking here another well-known myth regarding Arcadia when he describes the shepherds as descendants of natural features of the land and the nymphs as vegetation produced out of the soil. Plutarch, among others, held that the Arcadians were autochthonous, that they were

born out of the land. The generative implications of the earlier references to the Countess Dowager's maternal qualities are further developed. The arcades spring forth from the Arcadian land, but, as the earlier allusions to Latona, Cybele, and Juno indicate, they are also born of a mother-goddess. The image of matriarch is superimposed upon the image of the mother-earth, both celebrated as sources of life. (468)

According to McGuire, the audience of shepherds and nymphs sees a maternal figure in Lady Alice. Milton's mythology of Latona, Cybele, and Juno suggests radiance, birth, marriage, and productivity. Suggested by these images, creativity and productivity require a free environment in which to establish their virtuous genealogy. This is why Milton seeks the audience of the Egertons and their guests, who are aligned mutually and understand the rationale for Milton's plea for independence between biblical literalism and royal absolutism within this pastoralized expression of Puritan-humanist values.

The Egerton estate at Harefield was located in the Forest of Dean, which is in Wales, the southwest of England and is bordered to the south by the River Severn. The Milton family houses at Hammersmith and Horton, with "Oxford's Bodleian Library 35 miles away" (Lewalski 65). The Forest of Dean was, however, not a political place of tranquility. Christopher Hill, one of the twentieth century's foremost seventeenth-century scholars, writes about England before, during, and after the English Civil War. According to Hill, in *The World Turned Upside Down*, early seventeenth-century writers claimed,

In the Forest of Dean lived people of very lewd lives and conversations, leaving their own and other counties and taking the place for a shelter as a

cloak to their villainies. In 1610 James I suggested that the House of Commons should take action against the multitudes of cottages on waste grounds and commons, especially forests, which were nurseries and receptacles of thieves, rogues, and beggars. (41)

It is not a coincidence that the Egertons lived in a place to which the crown voiced objections. Although the Egertons sought to distance themselves from the crown, they were not allied with those who lived in the Forest of Dean in a tradition of resistance against the crown, for these “rogues” did not share the same taste as the crown in art, politics, and religion.

Milton takes on this pastoral drama because he seeks Lady Alice’s patronage, but also he wants to work with the mask form, which allows him to practice dramatic dialogue and characters without venturing into the world of the dramatic stage, where his Puritan family might have questioned the morality of his desire to be a playwright. In addition to its subtle poetic nod toward drama, the masque also allows Milton to expand his pastoral framework, where he can explore more poetic treatments of liberty. Patriotism, freedom, love of place, and women’s equality find expression within this new pastoral vision.

The poem’s deification of Lady Alice Spenser is accepted by the Egerton family and used as a sign of respect toward her by her stepson, the earl of Bridgewater. This gesture indicates the Egerton family does not object to Milton’s project of bringing Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values together. This literate family does not have Milton cast Lady Alice as a saint in verse. This is certainly a way to honor an individual

within a literary context. However, for the Egertons, this is not enough, or, rather, it is not complete. In choosing to honor Lady Alice through the staging of a masque, the Egertons assure that she receives the fullness of praise, respect, and honor in her deification because the young Milton seeks to assure that she has the richness of the classical tradition behind her, a tradition strengthened by her simultaneous and syncretic adherence to Judeo-Christian values. Milton's syncretic shepherds assure that Lady Alice and the Egerton family are liberated from strict Puritan doctrines and are free to practice whatever values and religion they deem fit within the context of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions.

William Riley Parker notes the biographical details of his early adulthood that demonstrate Milton's family connections with the Egertons, his history of classical studies, and the vocational crisis in his post-Cambridge years. Together, these facts reveal tension between his Puritan and classical inclinations. Milton earned his M.A. from Cambridge in 1632, and his thesis defense was entitled *Oratio pro Arte* (Parker 104). Milton's defense of humanist art and the environment and desire for religious tolerance in the seventeenth century clearly reflect the influence of Milton's education, which formed the values that underlie his advocacy of toleration for religious dissent in *Arcades*.

Milton's loyalty to a Puritan-humanist syncretism made his vocational decision even more difficult. Would Milton become the Anglican, Puritan priest whom his family desired and made plans for with his education? Parker writes, "When Milton bade farewell to his classmates [in 1632] and returned home, he had not yet decided against a career in the church, to which he was 'destined as a child'" (121). However, at the age of

twenty-four, Milton maintained that he had yet to realize true adulthood. Because he was disappointed in his Cambridge education he was not ready to “precipitate himself into a pulpit” (121). These gradual revelations allowed Milton to realize he was being called to become a poet-priest. The combination of Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values marks the marriage of poet and priest because the poet knows ancient knowledge of all things including the divinity of priests.

Milton’s ministry is certainly balanced by his humanist studies. “That Milton had little sympathy with the severely puritanical views of Prynne’s *Histriomastix* is evident from a major interruption which he permitted in the Hammersmith studies” (Parker 124). *Arcades* is full of the Early Modern spirit for classical learning and the quest for writers to show erudition in classical learning.

Generally, *Arcades* fits within the larger pattern of Milton’s poetry of the 1630s, which enters the English cultural context of Puritan versus humanist, and the humanist’s syncretic context: its hallmark lies in combining historic, physical, moral, and encyclopedic traditions. Parker writes, “*Arcades* is in the manner of Ben Jonson and his tribe, and conforms gracefully to contemporary taste” (83). Milton’s *Arcades* conforms to the way in which Jonson deified his patronesses. In 1600, Jonson wrote “Queen and Huntress” to praise Queen Elizabeth I:

Queen and huntress, chaste and fair,  
 Now the sun is laid to sleep,  
 Seated in thy silver chair,  
 State in wonted manner keep;

Hesperus entreats thy light,

Goddess excellently bright. (1-6)

She is compared “to Cynthia, or Diana, goddess of chastity and the moon—with whom Queen Elizabeth was constantly compared” (Greenblatt 1555). For purposes of patronage, the poet elevates and deifies his patroness, positioning her effectively within the tensions between humanist tradition and Puritan beliefs. However, in this case, in 1600, Jonson has even further reason to praise Queen Elizabeth. She tolerates Jonson’s religious dissent. The years 1598-1610 are acknowledged as Jonson’s Roman Catholic period. In depicting her graciousness through classical and humanist learning, Jonson elevates and extols Queen Elizabeth as an example of a sovereign who tolerates dissent. Milton’s deification of Lady Alice in *Arcades* follows and is patterned after Jonson’s portrayal of the tolerant Queen. Furthermore, English cultural life in the 1630s is ready for more humanists. The struggle between extreme Puritan views that sought to cleanse culture of classical learning on one hand and absolutist royal and clerical views that sought to control all classical learning on the other hand enabled Milton to negotiate a place for himself and other humanists with Puritan views, a place that he attributed to the best elements of his society. The Egertons stood in contrast to the growing schism between Puritan and Royalist polarities that were becoming more divergent in English society because the family integrated courtly art and games with Puritan morality.

According to Christopher Hill in *Society and Puritanism in Pre-Revolutionary England*, the *King’s Book of Sports* said the opposite about labor and feasting on the Sabbath (170). He writes that James I’s “motive for issuing the original *Book of Sports* in

1618 was the action of the Lancashire mps who in 1616 had issued a comprehensive series of orders against violation of the Sabbath, and required the clergy to read them from the pulpit once a quarter. . . . In this respect, then, as well as in its anti-pagan aspect, the puritan attack on Sunday sports should be seen as part of an attempt to impose the ethos of an urban civilization on the whole realm, especially the dark corners” (189, 191). Milton understood this contradictory impulse to control secular activity as a sign of the demise of Puritanism. Moreover, Milton did not desire to enter law or business in London, but rather he sought the refuge of Hammersmith and Horton after he completed his M.A. in 1632. While this is studious leisure, it was not the active lifestyle demanded by Puritan leaders in the seventeenth century. Furthermore, the Egertons at Harefield estate, in the Forest of Dean, were not living the industrious lifestyle demanded by Puritans in London. In a culture becoming increasingly polarized between Puritans and Royalists, one begins to feel the isolation of well-meaning Puritans who had humanist leanings.

Hill argues that “*The Book of Sports* of 1618 and 1633 must have seemed wickedly devilish to puritan and industrious men because it appealed to slovenly, popish, backward-looking men” (193). This may be the reason Milton and the Egertons were not allied closely with mainstream Puritans; however, Milton and the Egertons also avoided “popish, backward-looking men” who embodied the most doctrinaire aspects of Puritanism. The humanist sympathies shown by Milton and embodied by the Egertons looked back to classical time and through the Middle Ages while seeking to bring the best of learning to the seventeenth century.

In *Arcades*, the shepherd-speaker claims that Lady Alice

Might ... the wise Latona be,

Or the tow'ring Cybele,

Mother of a hundred gods;

Juno dares not give her odds (20-23)

As McGuire explains, Latona was best known as mother of Apollo and Diana, and she is specifically cited in the text for her wisdom (462). Milton mentions Cybele as a mother figure and includes the detail of her turreted crown, suggesting her role as a city-building, civilizing force. Juno was, of course, Queen Mother of the Olympians and patroness of married women. The comparison of the Countess Dowager with these three goddesses thus serves most simply to develop her as a governing force, to ally her with domestic concerns, and to present her as a wise mother, that is, as a source of both life and a source of knowledge (462).

But why does one expect an invocation to classical mythology when praising and deifying someone? In *The Survival of the Pagan Gods: The Mythological Tradition in Renaissance Humanism and Art*, Jean Seznec explains, "Official deification was for [the ancients] merely earthly rulers whom the gratitude or adulation of their subjects had raised to a place in heaven" (11-12). Seznec believes there are four traditions in which Early Modern writers used pagan mythology: historic, physical, moral, and encyclopedic. Milton employs the historic tradition of the pagan gods in *Arcades* because for Milton the gods demonstrate wisdom and learning, building great civilizations; this is respectful to all those who have gone before Milton. He employs the physical tradition of the classical



world in which the ancients regarded and venerated motherhood. Without ancient veneration for motherhood, history would not have been as bright—like the image of the Virgin blest in *Nativity Ode*; it retains also ancient truth (142), justice (142), and wisdom. Milton uses the moral tradition in the Early Modern reception of the classics to capture the virtues of truth, justice, and wisdom as embodied in and practiced by Latona, Cybele, and Juno. Finally, as McGuire suggests, Milton uses the ancient female gods as sources of knowledge. This habit, in turn shows Milton’s participation in the encyclopedic tradition, which is where the Early Modern scholar pays homage to the ancients for all their knowledge.

The Genius, or protecting deity of the Wood, tells the story of Alpheus’s pursuit of Arethuse, who was transformed into a stream by Diana and escaped under the Adriatic to Sicily, but the pursuing waters of Alpheus overtook her. Furthermore, the Genius receives his power over the wood “by lot from Jove” (44) and “live[s] in Oak’n bow’r” (45). The Genius lives on the land [of the Egertons] and blesses it:

And all this hallow’d ground,  
 And early ere the odorous breath of morn  
 Awakes the slumb’ring leaves, or tassell’d horn  
 Shakes the high thicket, haste I all about,  
 Number my ranks, and visit every sprout  
 With puissant words and murmurs made to bless. (55-60)

Milton describes the Genius of the Wood’s home and artful practice in the physical tradition. Again, this is a gesture to his audience. For the Egertons as audience there is

something important, almost sacred about their estate, situated in proximity to the ever contentious Forest of Dean. Milton hallows their estate in the physical tradition of the ancients. The Oak's bower is home to many classical spirits and deities, and Milton suggests they might find just as good a home on the Egerton estate as they found in Vergil's and Ovid's haunts. Nature comes alive and is animated by the symbiotic relationship among the genius, the leaves, the thicket, and the sprouts. The humanist Milton understands the respect the ancients gave to nature, so he in turn allows the Egertons to respect nature according to the terms of his negotiated, updated pastoral vision.

At the end of *Arcades* the shepherd-speaker casts Lady Alice as a deity.

Importantly, she can divinize the land. The shepherd-speaker is eager for this connection to take place, where humanity, nature, and divinity merge. They need such a leader to secure their land for them, for location and place are critical to the songs of shepherds and nymphs. Pan sanctified the Arcadian fields with his love for Syrinx:

Though Syrinx your Pan's mistress were,

Yet Syrinx well might wait on her.

Such a rural Queen

All Arcadia hath not seen. (106-09)

And Orpheus blesses the river Hebrus, singing his love for Eurydice. Because of the shepherd-poets Pan and Orpheus, these places become significant as pastoral hallmarks. Love transforms Pan's fields and Orpheus' river because it connects humanity, nature,

and divinity. The new Arcadian fields will inspire other shepherd-poets. These locations in the new arcadia will prove fruitful for the shepherd-poet to achieve fame, establishing England as a seat of pastoral poetry.

Milton's *Arcades* promotes the toleration of religious dissent that is justified with Humanism. Lady Alice is praised throughout the *Arcades* as divine. Yet, in terms of the actual powers Milton accords her, she is simply a worthy individual, divine only in the sense that she is divinely blessed (McGuire 465). Like the image of the Virgin blest from *Nativity Ode*, the Countess Dowager is certainly a source of succeeding generations of life, but, as McGuire writes, "she is also a source of virtue and knowledge for those who can see her as a model of human excellence, a recipient of divine blessings, and a 'rural Queen' of a well-governed realm" (468). The realm in the Forest of Dean is certainly independent. Its regulation would no doubt require independent governance in order to avoid collusion with Puritans or Royalists.

The actual movement towards the seat of the Countess Dowager is "a visual metaphor for a conceptual journey that takes the travelers from a simplistic view of generational transition to one that includes a sense of learned moral responsibility" (McGuire 468). The Egertons share with other Puritans the view that the Caroline government is morally bankrupt, but the Egertons need a way to express this in non-mainstream Puritan views. According to Seznec, the humanist view is that under the rind of mythology there is virtuous and sweet philosophy in the fables (20). In *Arcades*,

Milton proposes and the Egertons receive the message that virtue is contained in classical mythology, and this realization allows them to make claims of their own worthiness for religious liberty.

This Queen, domiciled in England, proves better than any Arcadian Queen:

Though Syrinx your Pan's mistress were,

Yet Syrinx well might wait on her.

Such a rural Queen

All Arcadia hat not seen. (106-09)

According to the speaker, Lady Alice will command more love than Pan's lady Syrinx because the Queen is beautiful and desired by the shepherd-speaker with the reference to Syrinx's subservience to the Queen. To surpass Syrinx, Lady Alice needs to exist within her tradition. Since Lady Alice embraces the tradition of Pan and Syrinx, she represents hope for the speaker, for she may be able to institute a new seat of pastoral poetry, a syncretized version that accommodated both classical and Puritan humanism and was nestled in the countryside of England beside one of its most contentious, yet most pastoralized environs. Milton's message consoles the Egertons because liberty for dissenting Protestant groups is an effective way to quell the animosity among Laudian Anglicanism, Roman Catholicism, and Puritanism. A new seat of pastoral poetry in England advances hopes for the ethical choices of Milton's Puritan humanism, choices that promise peace among oppositional forces.

## CHAPTER III

## MILTON'S SYNCRETIC SHEPHERDS AND THE RESTORATION OF LIBERTY IN

*A MASK*

In this chapter I examine Milton's *A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle*, written in 1634, and I argue that as a depraved, wily shepherd, Comus represents for Milton the confusion and misrule of paganism, as well as the oppressive force of tyrannical bishops against Puritans that he perceived as a threat to the Egerton family's delicate political and social positions. However, the shepherd Thyrsis and the goddess Sabrina of the river Severn represent the order and protective powers of humanism, as well as the positive ethics of dissenting Protestant groups, guiding the three children of Thomas Egerton, the Earl of Bridgewater, to safety. Taken together, they represent for the Egertons a path toward stability and dignity. Played by the Earl's only daughter, the Lady of *A Mask* is guided furthermore to safety by her own practice of Christian virtues. Barbara Lewalski has argued that Milton's creation of the virtue of chastity for the Lady was depicted out of his own Puritan beliefs and literary demands.<sup>1</sup> However, following the patterns of Renaissance humanism which connected Early Modern values with classical virtues, I maintain that Milton's depictions of the virtue of chastity align with classical virtues of

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<sup>1</sup> Lewalski writes that, while he created the Lady of Comus, until he was married, "Milton held himself bound to the idea of chastity" (*The Life of John Milton* 68).

temperance and moderation, virtues he sought to associate with the House of Bridgewater and to impress upon the Earl's children, justifying through this virtuous and ethical behavior the Egertons' rights to religious liberty.

With his classical and Early Modern literary alignment, Milton follows the model of Ben Jonson's "A Sonnet, to the Noble Lady, the Lady Mary Wroth" and "Inviting a Friend to Supper," which together illustrate the negotiated vision between the classical and Early Modern world. However, Milton goes further than Jonson. Milton not only incorporates wisdom and learning from the ancient world, but he also incorporates what he perceives as the finest elements of Puritanism and dissenting Protestant ethics and values, opposing the ornate aesthetics and doctrinal mandates of Catholicism and Anglicanism. Commenting upon Clement of Rome's patristic text *Letter to the Corinthians*, in which Clement argues for the apostolic authority of the bishops and papacy,<sup>2</sup> Milton's *A Mask* exhorts its readers to see the need for their independence from the bishops, who, Milton argues, are puffed up with pride like Comus and act like anti-shepherds—not true biblical helpers of Christ. In order to create religious liberty for his readers from clericalism, Milton syncretizes Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values in *A Mask* to produce a hybrid pastoral that once again relies upon syncretic shepherds who, in their interactions with the Lady, promote religious liberty and valorize individual Christian conscience for the Egerton family, as they do for other dissenting Protestant

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<sup>2</sup> See "Pope St. Clement I." *Newadvent.org*

groups. These syncretic shepherds help demonstrate Milton's continuing effort to articulate a Protestant ethic that defines itself in opposition to mainstream Anglicanism and Catholicism and in alignment with the best visions of classical humanism.

The conflict in *A Mask* develops as the three children of the Earl are shown leaving the estate to go pick berries. The brothers separate from their sister, the Lady, but they fail to return. Thyrsis greets the wandering brothers, who are distraught now and seek their sister, the Lady who has been abducted by Comus. Although they did not know it, he threatens to seduce or harm her. At this juncture Milton calls the reader's attention to the virtues of liberty and justice—shown in Theocritus' and Vergil's character of Thyrsis. How could Milton allow his shepherd, Thyrsis, to practice virtue similar to the classical masters? Thyrsis is not looking for a lost animal, nor "fleecy wealth" (504). A shepherd lad told Thyrsis to use "Haemony" (638) to resist all enchantments that threaten his moral compass. As the action rises, the brothers enter Comus' palace forcefully, seizing and shattering the cup that represents the Puritans' desire to liberate themselves from the ornate and ritual world of the Catholic Church. However, they leave Comus' wand untouched. In their attempt to purify the Church of England of Roman Catholic practices, sixteenth and seventeenth-century Puritans stripped church altars of their ritualistic vessels, including chalices and bishops' crosiers (wands) and, instead, moved the congregation's focus to pulpit, in order to receive the biblical word. Even though Thyrsis has told the brothers to take the wand, they do not recognize the necessity in doing so to stop his debilitating spell over the Lady.

The climax of *A Mask* occurs as Thyrsis tells of Melobius' plan regarding Sabrina, goddess of the Severn River; its *genius loci*, she serves maidens by protecting them from harmful pursuit. *A Mask* concludes as Sabrina helps the ensnared Lady—sprinkling restorative drops on the Lady's breasts, fingers, and lips. This healing tincture reinforces the Lady's own nascent virtues and forms a barrier against Comus' lust. Sabrina touches the seat upon which the Lady sits to cool the heat of Comus, which has heretofore worked as an adhesive, and the Lady is set free from Comus' spell by both her own virtues and by Sabrina's timely intercession, symbolizing Puritan wishes to free themselves from the strong, dogmatic hold of the bishops over the church.

Thus Milton crafts a narrative that shows that without Sabrina's magic and her own chaste virtues, the Lady would have been ravaged by Comus. Therefore, the expression of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values of charity, which Milton places in Sabrina, and chastity, which he associates with the Lady, resolves *A Mask*. Again, the message is calculated to highlight the virtues that Milton wishes to express and to associate with the Egerton family. Having been primed for this message in *Arcades* (argued in Chapter II), the Egerton family is receptive to Milton's pastoral narratives of lowly but syncretic shepherds to underscore this message once again in *A Mask*.

Laurence Lerner writes that it was difficult and painful for the poet Milton to use the pagan wisdom that he encountered in developing his humanist values. In *The Uses of Nostalgia*, Lerner argues, "Strict Puritan doctrine did not accommodate the wisdom of the pagans because the fall of Adam and Eve eliminated wisdom, and Christ did not guide



the ancients to God. [Yet] Milton was both Puritan and Humanist” (164). Commenting on Milton’s difficult personal negotiations between Christ and the Classics, Lerner writes,

Since the culture of Christendom was permeated with the pagan mythology that came to it from the ancient world, the problem of what to do about paganism was the problem of what to do about antiquity. There were two solutions: Syncretist (Humanist) and Puritan. Syncretism, the pagan gods interpreted allegorically, can be seen as a foreshadowing of Christianity. . . . In the sixteenth century there was a good respect for Greek myth among humanists who believed all religions were ultimately one . . . ; beneath the rind of myth fiction is the sap of moral and sacred philosophy (Seznec). . . . The syncretist and Puritan argument hinges on how seriously one takes the Fall of Man. If the Fall extinguished wisdom, Pan is not wisdom but devilish council . . . , and it’s painful for him [Milton] to use the wisdom of Pan. (163-64)

Some of Milton’s syncretic, humanist “pain” is that he could not believe all religions were one. Milton’s syncretism was challenged by his belief that religious practices assumed varied forms and held varying beliefs. Believing that Roman Catholicism and Laudian Anglicanism were morally inferior to dissenting Puritanism, Milton rejected ornateness in the Roman Catholic and Anglican churches as well as the dogmatic rule of their bishops. For Milton, true religious freedom lay in resisting these doctrinal mandates. In his view, syncretism and humanism liberate dissenting Protestant religions, allowing for one’s free choice among many religions as guided by true Godly influence.

*A Mask* demonstrates how Milton's syncretic character is most evident in his shepherds. For example, in *Nativity Ode* Milton does use the wisdom of Pan, and in *A Mask* Milton discerns the wisdom of Thyrsis and Sabrina to be valuable while he judges Comus' ideas to be grounded and based on chaos. What can the reader conclude from Milton's discernment among ancient sources and their application to the precarious politics of Early Modern England? First, Milton believed that religious liberty allowed one to see the spiritual value in all religious and intellectual traditions. Thus, the pagan wisdom of Thyrsis and Sabrina cannot be discarded, for, in fact, their wisdom serves to highlight the wisdom of other marginalized or dissenting groups.

Critics note the syncretic character of Milton's thinking in his early poetry. For example, in his "Milton's Ludlow Masque" in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, Cedric Brown argues that the Ludlow mask was special because the poet strongly advertised an ethic of religious freedom by articulating a belief in vocational idealism, and so Brown believes that Milton thinks, "the true pastor is the unworldly teacher, who expresses religious reform—true religion from false religion" (34-35).<sup>3</sup> In 1634 Milton wrote as a poet-priest for an audience who wishes religious liberty from the reductionist dogma of Roman Catholicism and the Church of England. According to Brown, "Milton uses allegory to express his religious feelings" (35). Furthermore, as Ken Hiltner notes, it

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<sup>3</sup> "Such expression of godly fervor, however wrapped up in pastoral, are unusual in masque. Perhaps the elaborateness of the pastoral function . . . takes the edge off the fervor. The religious allegory was vital to the meaning of Milton's text" (Brown 35).

is the *genius loci*, or the place's protecting spirit, that works in accord with the divine to help humanity (60). Reinforcing Milton's belief in the moral and spiritual value to be found in all traditions and perspectives, Hiltner asks why the "Attending Spirit is impotent to save the Lady, while Sabrina is able to harness the power of the River Severn to save the Lady from Comus" (62). Hiltner's question points to Milton's purpose in arguing for the liberty of dissenting Protestant groups through a syncretic use of pagan mythology in conjunction with true, authentic religious guidance because long experience on these islands enables England's inhabitants to decide freely in religious matters.

Other critics have noted how Milton's complementary humanist and Puritan visions are expressed in *A Mask*. In "The Case for Comus," Stephen Orgel argues that "The Lady is tricked by what she is most familiar with, the civilized virtues of the courtly world she has just left, grace, charm, generosity; tricked by everything her experience tells her to trust" (36). Because the Lady stands for strict Puritanism and Comus for unruly paganism, Milton negotiates between the two in his syncretic representation of Puritan humanism. Loran Sage also writes about the syncretic ethic that emerges from Milton's negotiated Puritan and humanistic influences in *A Mask*. In "The Coherence of Comus," Sage argues that "Milton sets moral values against aesthetic values" (90). Locating aesthetic values in the symbols and allegory of classicism, Sage argues that Milton mines the moral values of classicism and aligns them with Puritanism.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See pages 90-91, in which Sage argues for three levels of moral versus aesthetic. Level one is the children, level two is Thyrsis, and level three is the world of Comus.

Furthermore, John Major notes how firmly rooted Milton is in the traditions of Renaissance humanism by describing similarities with Shakespeare. In “*Comus* and The Tempest,” Major argues, “The Attending Spirit [Thyrsis] in *Comus* may correspond to Shakespeare’s Ariel” (181), explaining that both characters demonstrate magical powers tempered by wisdom. In this way, Milton’s shepherd characters reflect his syncretic use of classicism in alignment with Puritanism to establish how moral direction can be realized through religious freedom.

Other critics note the liberating effect on religion of Milton’s combination of humanism and Puritanism. In “Metamorphosis and Symbolic Action in *Comus*,” Richard Neuse argues that “the symbolic and ritual scenes of the Lady’s paralysis and liberation by Sabrina present a genuine complication and resolution. Originated in the initial clash between the Lady and *Comus*, this complication corresponds with Milton’s problem of choosing a career” (50). Neuse notes the Puritan humanist struggle that the young Milton faced in finding his career. Milton realized that if he were a strict Puritan, he would precipitate a pulpit; however, if he were strictly a humanist, he might still seek court patronage to write poetry. Guided by his syncretic habits, Milton considered how he could do both, and thus he becomes a poet-priest, encouraging his readership to use its individual consciences in spiritual and religious matters. Finally, Milton responded also to social pressures by conjoining value systems; in “Milieu of *Comus*,” G.F. Sensebaugh argues that Milton’s “Puritan inheritance and his age asked that he marry, but his dedication of time to serious study demanded that he forego the joys of conjugal life” (246). The humanist in Milton resisted the strict Puritan calling of a youthful marriage.

In *The Politics of Mirth*, Leah S. Marcus writes, “Comus is an attempt to encourage Bridgewater in his opposition / resistance to Laud” (177). Milton’s pastoral works encourage leaders like Bridgewater to resist Archbishop Laud, so there are options for those who dissent from the Church of England’s high services. From this survey of critical opinions, we see that the syncretic character of Milton’s thinking was established by his own struggles and through his own negotiations of personal, social, and political conflicts. He responded against the perceived authority of patristic texts about the clergy and bishops, offering a solution that a poet could also be a priest. Milton’s resolutions lay in his ability to syncretize binaries of thought regarding clerical life and the perceived paganism of poets to achieve a morally tenable solution. This is the habit of thought by which he portrays his select syncretic shepherds.

This intellectual habit finds best expression in *A Mask*, in which Milton builds the foundation for syncretic values as Daemon is sent by Jove to guard the young brothers and the Lady against Comus. Milton uses the Lady’s temperance and prudence to expose Comus, the base, duplicitous anti-shepherd. Milton’s concern for the safety of children is a result of his commission for *A Mask* because he is writing it for the Earl of Bridgewater, who has three children. In celebrating the Earl’s political appointment, Milton claims the Earl’s family is part of that accomplishment because the Earl has raised his children well—with a strong moral compass tempered by judicious choices. Milton wishes to foreground this accomplishment in conjunction with a celebration of the Earl’s political accomplishments in a tenuous time. Representing Milton’s concern for justice and valuing the safety and healthy formation of children, the sky-god Jove sends Daemon to

preserve the innocence of the children. Here, Milton uses syncretism to show that Jove performs the same function of justice, in classical terms, as the Christian God performed in seventeenth-century England. And critics have noted the political overtones in this portrayal. According to Leah S. Marcus in *The Politics of Mirth*, “Comus sets up a Ludlow versus Whitehall bout [because] Milton’s Attendant Spirit talks instead of many crowns, many thrones available to all of virtue’s servants in the afterlife. The language is clearly scriptural and poses an alternative interpretation of the Attending Spirit’s speech, which conflicts with the nascent political allegory. . . . The most plausible figure for Charles I in Milton’s political allegory is Neptune—for sea power” (182-83). Milton disorients his audience.<sup>5</sup> In *Writing the English Republic*, David Norbrook writes, “Milton writes oppositional poetry in the 1630s. . . . He is mostly opposed to Henrietta Maria and her French Catholicism. For Milton the bishops are tyrannical, and classical republicanism is virtuous” (109-12). The use of syncretism allows Milton a wide array of literary characters to draw upon because it was part of the seventeenth-century English

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<sup>5</sup> Marcus’ argument examines then a field of questions related to the political context in which *A Mask* was performed: “Why was Comus’ palace in the woods? Is this in response to James and Charles sending royalty out into the woods, repastoralizing England?” (188). “Milton believes a free choice of pleasure is base submission, so Comus dismantles Caroline pastoral rhetoric. But Milton supersedes James and Charles’ repastoralized visions for England by providing his own negotiated Puritan and humanist framework for pastoral” (188).

educational curriculum, in which Greek and Roman writers, such as Homer, Vergil, and Ovid were widely read. Furthermore, his syncretic habits enabled him to use classical references with which his audience would be familiar. Above all, the syncretic character of his thinking provided a liberating platform for Milton to evaluate virtues across culture and time.

Thus, Jove provides guidance for his favorite mortals, who receive the escort of Daemon. Unable to tolerate the injustice of exploitation, Jove nevertheless doesn't wish to compromise the freedom of his young charges. And so Daemon exchanges the sky robes of Iris for the weeds and likeness of Thyrsis, the swain, whose soft pipe and smooth-dittied song stills the wind. Lerner explains how Milton's syncretism is at work within the scene, "where the Attending Spirit is from Jove's court, but the crown of Virtue is Christian, the Golden Key is St. Peter's, and Ambrosial / Sin worn do not go together. The Attending Spirit is both pagan and worldly, and naturally Thyrsis [is in] disguise" (165). In this way, Lerner acknowledges the syncretism of Thyrsis and highlights Milton's using both pagan and Christian elements. Why for Milton does Thyrsis need to have both pagan and Christian symbols? Milton replaces the traditional Christian holder of the Golden Key to suggest that each member of his audience holds his or her own Golden Key. Finding guidance in their own moral choices and liberated spiritual practices, Milton believes his readers can unlock the gates of heaven.

Daemon attempts to be "lowly wise" in the shepherd's dress because he seeks to aid humanity, and he also collects the rich tradition of pastoral's simplicity as he interacts with the children. Both Jove and Daemon discern that the lost children may be more

receptive to a homely shepherd than a sky god. In one respect, Thyrsis is on the same level as the children because they understand the guiding functions served by shepherds. From the perspective of genre, Milton is trying to simplify the complex world of deceit and treachery, so he chooses shepherds to represent honesty in the lowly weeds of Thyrsis. However, he complicates the picture by showing how not all shepherds are honest. Adding complexity to *A Mask*, he places the ethically and morally questionable Comus in shepherd's weeds.

According to Lerner, Milton's humanist and Puritan struggle is seen in stanza VIII of the *Nativity Ode*, where shepherds sit idly chatting not knowing their great God Pan has arrived (164):

The Shepherds on the Lawn,  
 Or ere the point of dawn,  
 Sat simply chatting in a rustic row;  
 Full little they thought on  
 That the mighty Pan  
 Was kindly come to live with them below  
 Perhaps their loves, or else their sheep,  
 Was all that did their silly thoughts so busy keep. (85-92)

In reading this scene, Lerner identifies the matter crucial to Milton's syncretic habits: "If Christ is the mighty Pan—if pagan mythology was an anticipation of Christianity—why were the old gods so fiercely banished on his arrival?" (Lerner 164). Since Milton wrote *Nativity Ode* in 1629 as a gift to Christ and Christmas greeting for Charles Diodati, the



reader is inclined to note Milton's strict Puritan inclinations. In *Nativity Ode* Milton establishes the syncretic character served by these rural figures, banishing almost all of the pagan gods on the grounds of their malevolence in favor of humanity's non-classical, newly found free will in Christ.<sup>6</sup> Lerner continues to argue that "Pan is accepted still into Christian terminology, and the nymphs, banished, grieve at the coming of Christ" (Lerner 164). Here, Milton neither solved this dilemma of a Puritan-humanist negotiated pastoral vision nor answer the question of how the anticipation of the pagan gods for Christianity called for their banishment (164). However, this reading of the shepherd Pan's place in Milton's *Nativity Ode* and early pastoral poetry shows Milton's comfort and willingness to accommodate aspects of pagan learning that he believes to be virtuous and wise. In *The Survival of the Pagan Gods*, Jean Seznec writes it was more difficult for Renaissance humanists than medieval humanists to reconcile pagan learning into their own ideologies partly because of the time and space which separated the ancient world from the Early Modern world.<sup>7</sup> These points confirm that in his early poetry Milton accepted some

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<sup>6</sup> "Stars cannot act against the will of god; they cannot force man to sin. They function as signs through which the deity announces benevolent and malevolent intent. According to Augustine, stellar influence can be overcome by man's free will" (Seznec 44).

<sup>7</sup> "Medieval thought found points of agreement and formulas for reconciliation with the pagan spirit. The Renaissance on the other hand perceived this historical distance and had to make a conscious effort to establish harmony between two worlds separated by a lapse of centuries. When this effort failed the antique world which had proved incompatible

pagan wisdom into his negotiated pastoral vision, but, subscribing to the philosophy of Renaissance and Puritan humanism Milton took issue with Justin Martyr's patristic text. In "The First Apology," Justin Martyr claims the *logos* planted seeds in the pagan world,<sup>8</sup> converting pagans to Christians; however, Milton recognized the time and differences between antiquity and early-modern life. And for the maturing Puritan humanist, it made more sense for Milton to juxtapose the pagan and Christian worlds, revealing both the excellence and wisdom, as well as the folly, in both traditions.

Furthermore, Pan is significant because Milton used the god to liberate shepherd-pastors from strictly teaching church doctrine. Pan the shepherd becomes an image for Milton's vision of poet-priests. However, Milton uses Comus in *A Mask* to issue a warning that there are shepherds whose full intent is to deceive and impose tyrannically their will on their sheep—rather than to liberate the sheep to follow virtuously their own well-formed consciences.

Milton presents Comus as an anti-shepherd who is out of control and has lost the positive values of temperance and wisdom from his classical and Early Modern inheritances. For Milton Comus stands for excessive court revelries, tyrannical rulings of bishops, and the libertine excesses of pure classicism. Born of Bacchus and Circe, Comus inherits his parents' predominant traits: the tendencies toward revelry of Bacchus and the  


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 with Christian culture, appeared all the more as a perfect harmony in itself. In that world physical beauty and carnal desire, heroic pathos and playful amorousness, had never entered into conflict with moral and theological concepts" (322).

<sup>8</sup> See "The First Apology (St. Justin Martyr)." *Newadvent.org*.

attractiveness of Circe. As the god of wine, and through his excessive indulgence, Bacchus serves as the antithesis of temperance. Circe attracts sailors to her shore, and those sailors lose their discerning minds, becoming trapped on her island. In this way, Circe embodies the habits of temptation. Thus, the child of Bacchus and Circe is neither temperate nor prudent.

Leaving his parents as a young adult, Comus takes to the deep wood, where following the tempting habits of his mother, he sets about in offering weary travelers his orient liquor in a crystal glass. After drinking from Comus' glass, his victims are transformed into bestial forms: wolves, bears, or goats, all reflecting the ugly aspects of their personalities. In these altered states the travelers do not recognize that they are disfigured, so Comus can play upon the travelers' passions and use them sweetly to shape the travelers toward his will. In portraying the consequences of succumbing to Comus' temptations, Milton prompts readers to judge whether Comus seems to be giving the travelers a choice of entertaining their indulgences. Because Comus knows already the weakness in the traveler's passions, Milton alerts his audience to the false choice that this false shepherd presents to the travelers.

Comus' symbolism would be especially evident to the audience gathered at the Earl of Bridgewater's estate. Lewalski writes, "Bridgewater was a Royalist and Calvinist. With his bestial rout Comus is made to figure on one level Cavalier licentiousness, Laudian ritual, the depravity of court masques and feasts, as well as the unruly holiday pastimes Comus embodies as well as the seductive power of false rhetoric and the threat of rape" (63). In portraying Comus as the antagonist, Milton seeks to limit this seductive

rhetorical power in his pastoral vision. While the threat of rape certainly exists and the Lady finds aid in the river goddess Sabrina, Milton's pastoral vision prompts his audience away from excessive political, social, and religious control, moving them toward an attitude of self-empowerment that enables individuals to make choices which will be in their own best interests.

For example, if Comus knows that his traveler, when succumbing to temptation, is destined to be transformed into a bearded goat, he is sure to appeal to the lust of the traveler, exploiting the individual's wealth or vulnerability—a sort of highway robbery, where the robbers surprise lonely and weary travelers on the road, taking their goods. The allegorical representation of vice as a literary character is pervasive in the English literary tradition of morality plays. It figures also in Spenser's *Faerie Queene*, where Spenser presents animal analogues for the six vices, where the Lion is full of pride and the goat embodies lechery. By similar means, Milton enhances the duplicitous impulses of Comus, who is able to manipulate his guests' weaknesses.

Comus welcomes night, asking, "What hath night to do with sleep?" (122). Thus Milton creates a scene of disorder at night for Comus to perform his self-interested and salacious deeds in. The poet uses the juxtaposition purposefully, as seen in Comus' sentiment that "only daylight makes sin" (126). At night Comus performs rites by hurling spells and magic into the air. As portrayed by Milton, Comus uses deceptive and false magic. Leah Marcus notes, "Once Comus invokes the goddess of nocturnal revelry, Cotytto, the party starts getting rough. There would have been an unsettling disparity between the grim necromancer described by the Attending Spirit and the graceful poet

appearing before the audience” (189).<sup>9</sup> As perpetuated with his “magic dust” (164) Comus’ illusions are juxtaposed with his image of a harmless villager wearing shepherd’s weeds. In the light of day, the similarities and differences between Comus’ and Thyrsis’ wearing shepherd’s weeds are blurred by Milton. Developing through this contrast a deeper sense of discernment, his audience begins to realize that Milton sometimes posits the wolf dressing in sheep’s clothes, referring to the way in which tyrannical bishops can appear to be gentle and merciful.

The conflict of *A Mask* develops as the three children of the Earl leave the estate to go pick berries, but then the brothers separate from their sister (the Lady of the poem) and do not return. Their absence leaves the young girl alone and vulnerable to any dangers which may lurk in the wood. His audience saw her vulnerability as a legitimate concern, for wild animals stalk the forest, as do many unsavory human characters. Used to having guardians, the Lady is now lonely and afraid. As she walks, the Lady hears “the tumult of loud mirth” (202). This reaction is shaped according to the Lady’s senses and by her strict Puritan perception. While mirth may convey an image of sweet pastoral liberty, for her it conveys also caveats of illusions and deceptions. The Lady may be too

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<sup>9</sup> “In terms of contemporary polarities, neither conservative Anglican nor Puritan audiences could locate Milton’s portrayal of King Charles’ *Book of Sports* controversy in *A Mask*” (Marcus 190). “The gentle shepherd Comus turns into a more sinister one in *A Mask*, in which Milton withholds information to shift to pastimes’ relationship with courtly power” (192).

young, naïve, and strictly Puritan to recognize the sweet liberty of mirth, but Milton also portrays her wary condemnation of Comus' mirth as a blessing for her and ultimately an aide to her safety. Within the context of Puritans cleansing the Church of England of the Roman Catholic practices of bishops' ales and drunken holyday revelries, Milton casts his Lady to stand soberly opposed to Comus' nocturnal revelry. To suggest this virtue further, the speaker says, "The love-lorn Nightingale sings a sad song" (234-35). The speaker associates the Lady with the nightingale's sober song because she hears disorder in the manner of Comus and his crew. Her association with melancholy serves the speaker's purpose to emphasize her virtues of temperance and prudence, for these virtues are elevated by sobriety. Milton reveals the Lady's aversion to "the tumult of loud mirth" (202), highlighting its disorder. Aided by her own nascent but virtuous Puritanism, the Lady is able to resist the temptations offered by this mirthful disorder.

In the rising action one can see how Milton represents the false choice that Comus presents to the Lady, a choice at odds with the syncretic values he ultimately seeks to champion. The conflict commences as Comus meets the Lady, telling her he saw the brothers "under a green mantling vine" (294). The difficulty in reuniting with her brothers is not only because of the uncertain path the Lady faces, but also because of what the conflict represents: her negotiation between Puritanism and pagan values. In articulating his false choice to her, Comus claims he knows each way and alley by daylight. So in the meantime, he'll see her to a cottage where she'll be safe. Initially the Lady trusts the false Shepherd's words. To the reader's surprise, the Lady does not associate the riotous noise she previously heard with Comus; rather, she trusts his

appearance, and she trusts his courtesy. In “The Case for Comus,” Stephen Orgel argues that the reader is most attracted to Comus (35). “What he [Comus] offers, however, is not what is in his heart—adoration, marriage, a crown, regal power—but simple hospitality, the simplest, and therefore the most persuasive, of lies” (36). The Puritan training of the Lady trusts simplicity, and in projecting his false virtue Comus embodies that simplicity. By doing so, Milton reveals the dissonance between appearance and reality as a function in the Lady’s formation of a more refined moral sense, suggesting Puritans who sought to internally reform the Church of England were being deceived. Her father influences her to trust the appearance of the lowly shepherd, and the courteous words Comus speaks strike her as sincere because they are words which ought to be sincere. Thus Comus gains the Lady’s trust and leads her to “a low / But loyal cottage, where [she] may be safe / Till further quest” (319-21) while readers recognize the precariousness of the choice she makes in this vulnerable state.

In their separation, the second brother fears for the Lady’s safety, but the elder brother expresses his hope in the hidden strength of her virtues. Lerner writes, “The elder brother makes a classical argument for chastity, falling on magical powers of the earth: Milton learns this from Spenser & Shakespeare’s country superstitions—this is the attending spirit’s world” (166). The elder brother claims no goblin or magician has power over true virginity, and he uses the huntress Dian as an example because Dian out-witted those who pursued her. But, the elder brother warns of the defilement and contagion of lust:

But when lust

By unchaste looks, loose gestures, and foul talk,  
 But most by lewd and lavish acts of sin,  
 Lets in defilement to the inward parts,  
 The soul grows clotted by contagion,  
 Imbodies and imbrutes, till she quite lose  
 The divine property of her first being. (463-69)

Milton writes of the contagion that threatens the Lady's virtue. He will later use similar ambiguous pastoral imagery in *Lycidas* as the contagion of the wolf in sheep's clothing will infect the whole flock. In *A Mask*, however, the defilement of lust is the contagion that spoils one's soul. Without the proper guidance provided by a sense of discernment and syncretic habits of mind, contagion will overtake the divine property of one's being.

In several contexts, Milton's character Comus is not necessarily evil, but instead may embody a deprivation of his own inherent good. More directly, Comus stands as the antithesis of syncretic virtues. Ken Hiltner writes, "What makes Comus so fascinating is that he is not, as one might have expected him to be in portrayal by dualistic medieval theology, anti-Christian because he is thoroughly Earthy. . . . But Comus is as much not of the Earth as he is not of a heavenly realm" (69). For Hiltner Milton's Comus ignores his connection to the goodness of the earth—the material of his composition. Milton's theory of divine composition is unique to Early Modern thinkers. In earlier ages,



philosophers interpreted dualism from Plato and Aristotle.<sup>10</sup> However, Milton extends these ideas to argue that everything is divinely infused, whether it is rock, tree, animal, or human being, and that a syncretic appreciation of all influences likewise provides a path to higher moral awareness. This syncretic habit is essentially a spiritualized materialism. Throughout Milton's works, he suggests that spiritual leaders, without syncretic discernment, follow the example of Comus: They are the shepherds who become the wolves and rob the material well-being of their flocks. Milton imagines a place where the spiritual and material come together so that he might defend the lowly sheep from becoming prey to the meddling wolves in shepherd's garb. Of course, the complication is that some good shepherds exist, as embodied in the protagonists who take a stand against Comus. And the discerning reader surely recognizes the value of this distinction. Even though in 1642 he writes against the English bishops in *The Reason of Church Government Urged Against Prelaty*, Milton is not too much of a reductionist to say that there are not good shepherds.

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<sup>10</sup> Patristic writers like Origen and Tertullian note the split between matter and spirit, or body and soul. Comus represents this problem for Milton because in order for one to be virtuous and ethical like Sabrina, one must simultaneously be composed of spirit and matter.

One such shepherd who has Milton's approbation is Thyrsis,<sup>11</sup> and he greets the distraught brothers who continue to seek their sister. Not looking for a lost animal, nor "fleecy wealth" (504), Thyrsis is distinguished thus from false shepherds. Milton saw the clerical shepherd's trade as one which invites lowly fellows who dream of the prestige and wealth of a bureaucratic position in the Laudian church. Milton argues that such well positioned shepherds have no real talents, but they are willing to perpetuate a system which exploits its followers. Milton portrays Thyrsis as resistant to this deception because his works are consistent with his words. With full honesty, Thyrsis joins the search for the lost Lady. Cultivating the discernment of his new charges, he tells the brothers about Comus and how he gives his "baneful cup" (525) to "thirsty wanderers" (525), thus changing them into brutes. Thyrsis reveals that he heard the Lady's voice at Comus' rout. The second brother continues to be afraid for her while the older brother holds firm to his trust in their sister's safety. This is an important distinction. Milton reveals there are some Puritans who are paranoid; however, there are those who are dignified and have confidence in their purpose. The older brother, the Lady, and Milton's

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<sup>11</sup> Even though, as Hiltner points out, the Attending Spirit is a *daemon*—a divine spirit who may have presence on earth—and only later in the Mask the Attending Spirit's humble acknowledgment of Sabrina's power earns the Attending Spirit the proper invocation of shepherd (66). Therefore, Hiltner argues it is only through the Attending Spirit's humility and understanding of earthly connections that Milton allows him to be called shepherd.

syncretic shepherds represent the dignity of their claim for religious liberty—they are not paranoid Puritans. The younger brother demonstrates a primeval fear for the sister’s survival, recognizing that in her unwariness she would be an easy target and that she could easily be overpowered. Projecting his feelings about himself in the wood, he expresses constant anxiety in his worry for her. Thyrsis tells the brothers that swords will do no good as forest battles require other weapons, especially a cultivated sense of moral discernment.

A shepherd lad tells Thyrsis to use “Haemony”<sup>12</sup> (638) to resist all enchantments. Neuse writes that, because the attending spirit changes into the Shepherd Thyrsis, “the solution to the Lady’s problem lies, in pastoral fashion, at a lower level” (54). Ken Hiltner claims, more specifically, that virtue resides in one’s connection to the earth, demonstrating in this argument the etymology of the words “peasant” and “pagan”.<sup>13</sup> In fact, critics have noted that linguistic choices and etymological roots convey the sense of virtue that Milton depicts in his syncretic shepherds. Neuse continues, “Haemony thus illustrates the pastoral spirit of humility in its etymological sense of what is closest to the soil (humus), and the Spirit’s language points the reader to a distinctively pastoral ideal” (53). Both Neuse and Hiltner agree that Milton’s inclusion of haemony suggests the connections of earth and heaven, syncretizing classical and Early Modern values.

And the problematic status of haemony’s power is crucial to the syncretic value system that Milton tries to advance. Do the brothers really believe in the magic root?

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<sup>12</sup> A weed or bean (Neuse 53).

<sup>13</sup> See *Milton and Ecology*, 33.

Milton creates the tension of the elder brother trusting in the sister's virtues against using magic. Since the elder brother is so in tune with the sister's virtue, the reader deduces that the older brother may not see the benefits of haemony; however, the younger brother, full of anxiety, and not trusting in the power of the sister's virtue, is much more open to relying upon the benefits of haemony to reunite the siblings safely. And these differing views affirm the different positions that must be reconciled to bring the family back together. What is the older brother's influence over the younger brother? Initially, the reader is inclined to feel as though the older brother had gained the trust of the younger brother by believing in the sister's virtue; however, the younger brother appears now to have abandoned that trust. Milton positions the magic root skillfully among the brothers and Thyrsis, thus requiring them to reconcile contradictory positions as the narrative unfolds. Thyrsis urges the brothers to break Comus' glass and seize Comus' wand. If they do so, Comus will have no glass to use to intoxicate and no wand to wave magic spells; however, if the older brother is hesitant to see the efficacy of haemony, it is not clear if he will think it necessary to eliminate the power of the wand, which he may perceive as impotent. If the brothers can save their sister, this conflict will be resolved as they face off with Comus. And Milton structures the narrative so that they achieve a measure of syncretic resolution as they prepare for this pivotal confrontation.

While alone with the Lady, Comus argues that she “wastes Nature” (711) because she is not interested in his sexual advances.<sup>14</sup> He claims if the entire world were temperate they would drink water and wear wool. The all-giver would remain unrecognized and people would become impotent in their complacency. Thus we see Comus’ philosophy of indiscriminate utility. Comus believes every natural impulse can and ought to be fulfilled. Lorna Sage argues that the Lady’s virtue of chastity is more than mere renunciation of sexual desire. In “The Coherence of Comus,” Sage argues, “She [the Lady] already possesses the power that Thyrsis as artist preeminently wields over the material world – the power to recreate beauty and order out of its unnatural chaos” (92). While Comus represents chaos or the excesses of the pagan world and tyranny of the bishops, the Lady reveals how a tempered, virtuous individual conscience produces beauty and order. As the Lady calls Comus a liar and argues that nature must be

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<sup>14</sup> Milton’s early life influence cannot be ignored in the character of the Lady. In *Milton and Sex* Edward Le Comte imagines the way in which sex influenced Milton. The first chapter of Le Comte’s book is entitled, “Under Discipline,” describing the way in which the youthful Milton sought artistic excellence through chastity however difficult. Le Comte cites Milton’s own letters in which he states he defied Puritan precedent and stared down a beautiful woman. Le Comte also points to Milton’s “Elegy” in which Milton depicts the lustful world of pagan gods. This is a place of freedom for Milton. Moving away from strict Puritan doctrine, Milton can follow his own inclinations in the pagan world and negotiate, on his own terms, his Puritanism and humanism.

used temperately and prudently, Milton enables her to advocate religious liberty against those who try to form a tyranny over dissenting conscience. As shown by her example, nature is innocent and demands temperance:

Thou hast nor Ear nor Soul to apprehend  
 The sublime notion and high mystery  
 That must be uttered to unfold the sage  
 And serious doctrine of Virginitie. (784-87)

In resisting his advances, she criticizes Comus' rhetoric and claims he only tries to charm her judgment. Comus claims her argument "is mere moral babble" (807) and claims she is full of too much melancholy, and therefore she must drink the cordial Julep.

With his denunciation of the Lady's virtue, readers see Comus' opaque and directionless morality as a mismatched combination of contradictory syncretic impulses that achieve no higher purpose. According to Marcus, "It does not really matter whether Comus is identified as a pagan, Catholic, or medievalizing Anglican, for in any case his call for a humble surrender to the cycle of the green world encourages a pre-Reformation stupor of ignorance finally leading to spiritual perdition" (195). Milton wants to highlight the lack of ethics in Comus' voice. For Milton, similar to any situation that is too extreme or too dogmatic, there ought to be a middle-ground. And, in portraying Comus as unable to achieve this middle ground, Milton continues to negotiate his own Puritan humanism, and its virtues help him to achieve a sort of moral transcendence. Lerner writes, "The Attending Spirit's powerful plant is Haemony, and he asks if the Christian world transcend this or does the pagan world reach out to the Christian world. . . . The

Attending Spirit fights Comus with Comus' weapons because Comus is deeply pagan and loves the earth" (174-75). Also noted by Ken Hiltner, Comus is a fascinating character, showing Milton's belief that one can be from the earth and not of it, serving as a false shepherd and demonstrating some of the excesses of paganism, which the Lady tempers with her strict but untested Puritan ethic.

And so Milton aligns himself with a pattern established by his predecessors, who pair Puritanism and paganism in conflict to intensify the tension that persisted in Early Modern England. The rising action continues when the brothers break into Comus' palace, seizing Comus' cup, but ignoring Thyrsis' instructions to take his wand. In his "Comus and The Tempest," John M. Major claims, "Comus may correspond to Shakespeare's Caliban [because] both creatures are offspring of degraded beings" (182). Both Shakespeare and Milton participated in the Renaissance tradition of using mythology as symbolism to represent the tyranny of these magicians.

Before Milton, England's humanism was rife with conflict and ideas. Lerner writes, "Since 1579 and Spenser's 5th eclogue of the shepherd's calendar, English society was rejecting [paganism]. . . . In the end, Herrick renounces paganism, but most of his poetry is pagan-like. Herrick's 'Corrina's Going a-maying,' Jonson's 'The Sad Shepherd' are literary and immediate—the story of Robin Hood Maulding corresponds to Comus" (172-73). In this cultural milieu Ben Jonson asserts the need for a vibrant literary life rooted in humanism, just as Milton would assert a comparable humanist vision in his depiction of syncretic shepherds, who conjoin the best elements of multiple traditions to achieve a higher moral sensibility.

And a sense of temperance, embodied in the developing moral vision of the Lady and gradually adopted by her brothers, is crucial to this vision. In his “Inviting a Friend to Supper,” Jonson’s genteel invitation to dine stands in stark contrast to the way in which Comus demands the Lady’s attendance as his own appetite become more evident. Stephen Greenblatt notes, “The classical values Jonson most admired are enumerated in ‘Inviting a Friend to Supper,’ which describes a dinner party characterized by moderation, civility, graciousness, and pleasure that delights without enslaving—all contrasting sharply with the excess and licentiousness that marked the banquets and entertainments of imperial Rome and Stuart England” (1443).

Howsoe'er, my man  
 Shall read a piece of Virgil, Tacitus,  
 Livy, or of some better book to us,  
 Of which we'll speak our minds amidst our meat;  
 And I'll profess no verses to repeat:  
 To this, if aught appear which I not know of,  
 That will the pastry, not my paper, show of.  
 Digestive cheese and fruit there sure will be;  
 But that which most doth take my muse and me  
 Is a pure cup of rich canary wine,  
 Which is the Mermaid's now, but shall be mine;  
 Of which, had Horace or Anacreon tasted,  
 Their lives, as do their lines, till now had lasted.



Tobacco, nectar, or the Thespian spring  
 Are all but Luther's beer to this I sing.  
 Of this we will sup free but moderately,  
 And we will have no Polly or Parrot by;  
 Nor shall our cups make any guilty men,  
 But at our parting we will be as when  
 We innocently met. No simple word  
 That shall be uttered at our mirthful board  
 Shall make us sad next morning, or affright  
 The liberty that we'll enjoy tonight. (20-42)

With Jonson's poem in mind, it is clear to the reader how Milton's purpose is highlighted in Comus' excess. In humanist terms, Comus serves an important allegorical purpose, representing leaders who rule over their followers' choices and deny individuals the liberty to negotiate their own visions. Furthermore, Jonson's "canary wine" inspires and elevates the moral tenor of the meal (37). In contrast, Comus' cup produces violence and fear. In the unequal exchange of Comus' cup between the Lady and Comus, Milton expresses the need to move more toward the Renaissance humanist ideal of using classical values to inform poetry. The exchange of the cup symbolizes the need to achieve a more syncretic moral vision, where one is at liberty to join in communion with a group despite grave differences.

Even though Thyrsis told the Lady's brothers to take his wand, they do not recognize the necessity to stop Comus' spell. The younger brother would have been more

likely to try and take and break the wand; however, the older brother appears more idealistic and may have deemed a broken wand unnecessary in the defeat of Comus. But the ambiguity over the inaction is significant because it expresses a need for further moral and intellectual development where the brothers learn to discern wisely from both the pagan and Christian traditions. While the older brother tries to influence the younger, he creates a rift between the brothers and the plan Thyrsis has laid out for them. Like conflict between Puritans and the Church of England regarding Roman Catholic practices and patristic texts, this dissension hurts ultimately their sister, who still remains Comus' captive. Thus, he puts a spell on the Lady and binds her to the stone chair, and through their inaction and disobedience the brothers become complicit in her captivity. Eventually, they will learn the lessons that both Sabrina's paganism and their sister's Christian virtue will teach.

The climax of *A Mask* occurs as Thyrsis tells of Melobius' plan regarding Sabrina, goddess of the Severn River. Sabrina, the pure virgin and daughter of Lochrine, chased by Guendolen, jumped into the Severn, where rescuing nymphs take her to Nereus' Hall. In her escape Sabrina sought the sweet liberty to follow her own will, instead of being victim of Guendolen's plan for her (Hiltner 59). Even if the consequence was a departure from mortal form, Sabrina so desired the happiness of liberty that she was willing to be received by the nymphs. She became a goddess of the river. As the outcome of the events confirm, she was rewarded for her courage, and she serves as a sign to others—particularly the Lady, her brothers, and others under Comus' spell—of the actions needed to gain true freedom. The shepherds pay tribute to her and throw sweet

garland wreaths into her stream because they recognize her courage, and they wish to draw inspiration from her life. Sabrina can unlock the Lady's spell since she loves maidenhood and since she left her mortal form in order to salvage her virginity.

*A Mask* concludes as Sabrina helps ensnared chastity—she sprinkles drops on the Lady's breasts, fingers, and lips. Again, these tinctures prove medicinal, forming a barrier against Comus' lust. Sabrina touches the seat upon which the lady sits to cool the gums of Comus, which has worked as an adhesive. The gums lose their adhesive power, and so the Lady is set free from Comus' spell. Sabrina was able to set the Lady free because Sabrina practices truthfully what she preaches. She has lived a virtuous life, and she applies these virtues honestly to the Lady. Sabrina liberates the Lady, and in exploring the significance of this action, Neuse writes,

Sabrina becomes a symbolic expression of man's lower nature seen truly in a new light, transformed, namely as no longer in conflict with spirit and reason, but as harmoniously responsive to them. Milton envisions the essential harmony and continuity between the spiritual and sensual faculties. What in the garden state is an unbroken continuity, however, must be recovered as such in the dark forest of this world. (58)

And in this way, Milton demonstrates Sabrina's transformative power. She is not only a spirit, but also a powerful agent capable of affecting change on earth. Leah Marcus argues, "Milton frees the lady in *Comus* and frees the Puritan party from a limiting stance. He uses haemony and traditional holiday observances' use of light. Sabrina frees the Lady from rape and allows her to be merry" (199). The Lady's freedom, once

regained, expresses Milton's pastoral vision of harmony between Puritan and humanist polarities, as the agents of that freedom are a Puritan morality that aligns itself with classical virtues.

Milton's *A Mask* addresses the power of eroticism and its adverse effects on Comus. Jonson's Renaissance humanism expresses also the power of eroticism and establishes how the humanist framework might temper it somewhat. In his sonnet to Lady Mary Wroth, Jonson "pay[s] tribute to Wroth's sequence [Pamphilia to Amphilanthus], and notably to its erotic power" (Greenblatt 1550):

I that have been a lover, and could show it,  
 Though not in these, in rhymes not wholly dumb,  
 Since I exscribe your sonnets, am become  
 A better lover, and much better poet.  
 Nor is my muse, or I, ashamed to owe it  
 To those true numerous graces; whereof some  
 But charm the senses, others overcome  
 Both brains and hearts; and mine now best do know it:  
 For in your verse all Cupid's armory,  
 His flames, his shafts, his quiver, and his bow,  
 His very eyes are yours to overthrow.  
 But then his mother's sweets you so apply,  
 Her joys, her smiles, her loves, as readers take  
 For Venus' ceston, every line you make. (1-14)

Jonson claims human love enhances his poetry and elevates the reader above a captivity to mere lust. Comus serves as an antithesis of that vision of love. This suggests a pure love ought to be sought in poetry between the sensual excess of classicism and the moral rigidity of Puritan doctrine.

Sabrina liberates the Lady from the lies and deception of the false shepherd, and now the Lady experiences sweet liberty. And here readers are cued directly into the limitations of Comus' vision. The problem with Comus' argument to the Lady for mirth was that it was only the basest kind of mirth. Comus' perspective was too narrow because he didn't realize that the Lady was far more interested in the mirth and sweet liberty of her own freedom, which she safeguarded through deliberate, free, and thoughtful choices.

The swains dance and play in sport like Mercury. "The victory over Comus encourages Bridgewater's triumph over Laud" (Marcus 210). And the pastoral environs of Ludlow Castle factor heavily into the masque's moral message: "The whole point and purpose of Comus was to honor and entertain the new Lord President of Wales and his assembled guests, and to give three of his children the opportunity to act. Ludlow Castle was near the Welsh border, and its remoteness from London had much to do with the nature of the masque" (Parker 129). In this remotely staged but deliberately constructed mask, Milton demonstrates the liberating power of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions by placing Bridgewater's children in the safety of these traditions.

The story of Sabrina's apotheosis cannot be ignored by such a literate family as the Egertons, who, in their continued patronage of Milton, signal that such a syncretic usage of Sabrina and the Lady confirms and elevates Milton's wise women, as also

demonstrated in *Arcades* with Lady Alice's character, and is to be applauded fervently because it was through her syncretism the Lady escaped the tyranny of Comus.

Translated allegorically, the poem confirms that the Egertons seek to escape the political and religious tyranny of their time. The family desires that its Puritan worship be respected in society. As with the Lady, the Egerton family's religious-liberating force is pluralism, through which society accepts the many faces of worship and allows for the perspectives of disparate groups, locating a higher truth in its syncretic combination. By using syncretic shepherds and a negotiated Puritan-humanist pastoral vision, *A Mask* demonstrates Milton's desire to advocate for the rights of dissenting Protestant groups.

## CHAPTER IV

PROTECTING LIBERTY: SYNCRETIC SHEPHERDS IN *LYCIDAS*

John Milton wrote *Lycidas* in November 1637, and it was published in a 1638 Cambridge memorial volume in honor of Edward King,<sup>1</sup> his deceased classmate who drowned aboard an Irish Sea shipwreck in August 1637.<sup>2</sup> Building on the idea that his shepherd characters embody the best elements of multiple intellectual and religious traditions, Milton's *Lycidas* expresses the idea that King would have been a good shepherd in part because of King's classical and Christian learning at Cambridge, which created the outlook of a syncretic shepherd, one who could serve as a model to Milton's Cambridge reading audience. English Puritans felt there were bad shepherds within the English clergy who, under the misinformation of patristic texts and the tyrannical watch of Archbishop Laud, set to coercing the faithful to unnatural, overly ornate, and inauthentic forms of prayer and worship.<sup>3</sup> In *Lycidas* Milton responds with the dignity of his syncretic shepherds, stressing, once again, the necessity to religious liberty of dissenting Protestant groups. This message shapes Milton's conclusion. By the end of *Lycidas*, the syncretism of Milton's Puritan humanism become evident; both visions exist

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<sup>1</sup> Its title was *Obsequies in the Memory of Mr. Edward King* (cf., Revard 247).

<sup>2</sup> See Shawcross, *John Milton: The Self and the World*, 30, 94.

<sup>3</sup> "During the 1630s, of course, Archbishop William Laud exerted so many interpretations of parochial duties and enforcements that many ministers came to oppose him" (Shawcross 176).

under a benevolent God, who, in subsuming all traditions, enables a message that advances Milton's argument for religious liberty by allowing religious conviction to be expressed without dogmatic requirements.

Milton's shepherd characters offer this message in *Lycidas* by protecting humanity from the moral chaos and dangers of ornate worship in its quest to understand and worship the divine. Milton's *Lycidas* participates further in the Renaissance elegiac tradition, which was distinguished by appropriating classical elements to accommodate the public mourning of an individual. Ben Jonson's elegies "To John Donne" and "Epitaph on S.P., a Child of Queen Elizabeth's Chapel," for example, demonstrate the Renaissance impulse to praise the memory of the deceased within the traditions of classical humanism and Christian spirituality. The syncretic tradition resonates also in Milton's praise of Edward King, which makes use of classical motifs within the Christian elegiac tradition. However, Milton creates a bipartite consolation that allows members of his audience to find the greatest degree of solace in the tradition of their choosing.

Milton's religious poetry has received attacks from critics throughout the centuries,<sup>4</sup> and within this context *Lycidas* remains one of Milton's most controversial works. Critics from the early twentieth century tend not to grant Milton credit for a well-

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<sup>4</sup> In *The Reinvention of Love*, Anthony Low writes T.S. Eliot attacks Milton to clear the way for a new kind of poetry (158). F.R. Leavis' political morality was not compatible with Milton's morality (159). However, C.S. Lewis and Douglas Bush are among Milton's first modern defenders (159).



developed examination of religious impulse in his writing, claiming his religion is not traditional enough, or that there is no political connection with Milton's religious views. For example, T.S. Eliot is "at odds with Milton's zealous Christianity, which disavows the old traditions Eliot espouses" (Low 158). Later in the twentieth century, after the trauma of the great wars, some critics were no longer at odds with Milton's religious writing and were willing to credit him with exploring themes associated with religious liberty.

In fact, it is necessary to read Milton's early poetry—especially *Lycidas*—with the idea of religious liberty in mind—a pursuit which Milton creates through his syncretic combining of multiple intellectual traditions. In "Milton's Early Poetry on Death," Clay Daniel asks, "What is the relationship of Christianity and Classicism in his early poems? Not a complement. Not a subordinate" (26). Daniel argues that "to Renaissance intellectuals classicism was an anomaly and Christianity resolved the anomaly" (26). In Daniels's vision of Milton's classicism, Christians understood that the classical world's traditions differed from those of the Christian world and enforced that contemporary readers must understand the context of multiple traditions in which Milton writes. This suggests a traditionalist approach is necessary in reading and understanding Milton's syncretic shepherds. In *Lycidas*, for example, Milton uses pagan traditions associated with death within its own context to highlight the feelings of loss which were well known to the ancients, and also to equate this grief to that experienced within a Christian context.

William Riley Parker notes that Milton's use of classical tradition captures what loss meant to the ancients, so the effect is amplified for dissenting Early Modern readers, compounded by a sense of their having lost religious liberty.<sup>5</sup> Christopher Hill comments upon the pastoral tradition within which *Lycidas* was written. In *Milton and the English Revolution*, Hill argues, "In *Lycidas* the pastoral tradition stood Milton in good stead with Greville, Sidney, and Spenser, and the advantage of the pastoral mode, then, was that sharp criticism could be made, and the key supplied to those in the know" (50). This statement confirms that *Lycidas* is about religious liberty and wise syncretic shepherds who give the key of St. Peter to individuals, so that these individuals may choose the correct religious path for themselves. Further, J. Martin Evans argues, "It is precisely through his dialog with the tradition of pastoral elegy that Milton first came face to face with some of his most profound and personal anxieties about the future direction of his own life" (41). Evans comments as well that Milton uses the classical tradition to convey his own heavy grief for King's passing.

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<sup>5</sup> Parker writes, "The artificial language and pretty symbolism [in *Lycidas*] of the pastoral are not intended, it must be understood, to disguise or deceive. Instead they serve to generalize the specific and actual; they bring the solace of tradition to present sorrows. The pastoral tradition was both learned and artificial, but simplicity was its essence. . . . Milton, however, realized that pastoral simplicity went beyond the mention of flocks and fauns and rural ditties; he dared to express the age-old sense of loss in language plain and repetitious" (159).

How can Early Modern Christian authors feel loss in classical terms? In *The English Elegy* Peter Sachs writes,

King's death was an accident—there was no one to blame, and yet, Milton, no doubt realizing that he needed some actual target for his anger, chose to rage against the conspiracy of those “perfidious” forces that strike down the good while leaving the wicked in triumph. It is this channeling of wrath outward to revenge that contributes so fully to his resolution of the question of justice, and to his completion of the work of mourning.

(93)

His exposure to a full field of classical motifs and narratives provided a dramatic cultural context for Milton to channel his anger over King's untimely passing. Through Milton's emphasis on the arbitrary and anomalous nature of the classical world, the poet transfers his anxiety to the reader about the good suffering and dying while the evil prosper. Like in Theocritus' “Idyll I,” Daphnis “chose rather to die than yield” (Patrides 34). Milton's ethical, syncretic shepherds do not want to give in to tyrannical and evil forces. In *A Mask* Sabrina flees her pursuer, choosing to drown in the Severn River, and the Lady opposes Comus' advances until her liberation. In his pastoral poetry, Milton's syncretic shepherds are his positive response to why the good suffer because these shepherds protect the right of ethical treatment and reduce the scope of tyranny.

In articulating his anxiety, Milton also conveys a sense of freedom within the humanist tradition. In his portrayal of the syncretic shepherds and other classical motifs, Milton creates a world of choices where “daffadilles fill their cups with tears, / To strew

the laureate hearse where Lycidas lies” (150-51). To convey this sense of loss, Milton constructs choices that allows his readers to discern what fits them best.

The purpose served by his syncretic shepherds enables Milton to separate virtuous poet-priests from harmful ones. In “*Lycidas: A Wolf in Saint’s Clothing*,” Neil Forsyth argues that “the clergy are Milton’s true sinners. Even though satire was common in Manturian and Spenserian pastoral, Milton’s wolves in sheep clothing seem out of sync with the rest of his poem. This is not only anti-clerical satire, it is clerical denunciation” (689). This statement confirms that Milton conjoins classical motifs with Christian-humanist concerns for purposes of liberating dissenting Protestant believers from tyrannical leadership. In her biography *The Life of John Milton*, Barbara K. Lewalski writes, “In *Lycidas* the issue for the speaker is, how can he and why should he devote himself to poetry and God’s service when Lycidas’s death seems to indicate that the world is chaotic and life is meaningless” (115). Both critics reveal that in the space between the Christian and classical world, Milton creates a place for himself as a poet, and in portraying his syncretic shepherds to channel his sense of grief he expands the religious liberty of his readers.

Milton’s syncretic shepherds reveal how one can construct a virtuous life based on ethics and morality when confronted by chaos and injustice. Edward King was a classmate of John Milton at Cambridge College. After King’s death by shipwreck in August 1637, Cambridge College invited King’s classmates to write verse memorializing his life, which the college published in 1638 as a collection of poems, titled *Obsequies in the Memory of Mr. Edward King* (Revard 247). In composing *Lycidas*, Milton answered

this call, and in memorializing the life of Edward King, Milton's speaker begins to expose the injustice of King's young and untimely death when the speaker, lamenting the passing of Lycidas, claims he "come[s] to pluck your [Laurels and Myrtles] berries harsh and crude" (3). On the sad occasion of Edward King's drowning, the speaker compares the plucking of the unripe berries from the Laurels and Myrtles to the untimely removal of Lycidas from mortality. Because these berries were unripe and Lycidas had not achieved his ambition, Milton felt compelled to write a pastoral elegy. Although poetry of intrigue and cavalier and metaphysical poetry had become more popular than pastoral in the 1630s, Milton chose pastoral to look back to an ideal setting and environment and to cast his syncretic shepherds in an age associated with their virtues.<sup>6</sup> Furthermore, pastoral may provide more expressive means of uttering grief than the Holy Writ.

Conjoined with this theme of premature death, Milton provides also motifs associated with parenthood. Peter Sachs notes, "The figures of nursing suggest the benevolent, nourishing mother, the loss of whom I have claimed to be an inescapably recapitulated element of any mourning. [*Lycidas* was] written seven month after Milton lost his mother" (99). The maternal imagery applies to the classical world, as does the paternal imagery of the sun, which serves as "a symbol of paternal power" (100). In combining the theme of premature death discussed above with these motifs of

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<sup>6</sup> "Theocritus' *Idyll 1* would have occurred to Milton when he first learned that King was drowned" (Patrides 36).

parenthood, Milton manages to express the deep grief parents feel for the loss of their children. Once again, Milton uses classical grief to amplify the feelings of Early Modern loss.

Since Edward King embodied the figure of Lycidas and possessed the qualities to make a good shepherd, the poet feels it necessary to express that sublime human quality in classical terms, asking “Who would not sing for Lycidas?” (10). These words echo in Vergil’s “Eclogue X,” when Vergil has his speaker ask who would not sing for Gallus? Milton echoes Vergil respectfully, but with his grave tone Milton begs the reader to consider why this sober, grave elegy is written in the pastoral mode. Traditionally it served as a mode to convey praise and to register the complexities of grief; furthermore, Milton understood the pastoral mode as a vehicle to elevate the lowly wise shepherd above the controlling tyrant. Milton saw hope in the pastoral ministry of Edward King, believing that a mature King would not turn the practice of the religion in the dictatorial direction that Laud was taking it. In addition to Lycidas “not float[ing] upon his watery bier unwept” (12-13), the speaker holds up Lycidas as an exemplar of scholarship, leadership, humility, and altruism.

Written three years after Milton composed *A Mask* in 1634, *Lycidas* foregrounds a shepherd who, in embodying the best aspects of the classical, Christian, and humanist traditions, is much more moderate and temperate than the villain shepherd Comus of *A Mask*. Identified by some critics as a profile of the tyrannical Archbishop Laud, Comus seeks to deceive the Lady (the Egerton’s daughter) and to profit from her naïve trust in his homely shepherd’s weeds. In contrast, Lycidas embraces the lowly station of the

shepherd and acquires as much knowledge as he could from the seemingly banal existence of being a shepherd. This quality is shown in Milton's observation that the learned songs of Lycidas are a "loss to shepherd's ear" (49). Unlike the impressionable Lady, who confronts the deceitful Comus, Lycidas faces death, the final enemy, and in portraying this Milton attempts to answer the question of why the good suffer or die young and the evil prosper. Milton explores pagan and Christian traditions, finding the good are ultimately rewarded with Elysium or Heaven, but, according to Milton's *Aeropagitica* life is a battlefield, and there must be both good and evil, multiple aspects of society—much like Milton juxtaposes paganism and Christianity:

I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. (728)

Although full of doubt, Milton's shepherd-speaker Thyrsis recognizes he must confront the chaos and uncertainty of the world in order to prove his virtue.

Within the process of exploration the speaker invokes the gentle Muse who may favor the speaker's "destined Urn" (20). Representing a *memento mori*, the urn signals for the reader that the exploration of grief in this poem could be self-reflexive. If such an excellent young man as Edward King, or Lycidas, dies early in life, who is to believe that a sense of divine justice governs human mortality? The sincerity of Milton's lament has been questioned, most notably by Samuel Johnson (Hughes 116). However, the "sincerity" of Milton's lament and his quest to find meaning in it is confirmed by the

form his poem takes—pastoral elegy—for with this form Milton begins universalizing his private loss into the grief humanity feels for any such untimely loss within its proper context and tradition. In the midst of his emptiness, the speaker remembers with fondness the time he shared with Lycidas. The speaker Thyrsis and Lycidas drove the fields together, for example, “Batt’ning our flocks with fresh dews of night” (29). Something restorative and healthy lies in the shepherds’ nourishing of their flocks because it is the purpose of their existence; the shepherds understand the sheep and work to ensure the wellbeing of the fold.

Setting a sound example for future church leaders and Milton’s fit audience of Cambridge University scholars, these shepherds do not deny the material wellbeing of the sheep. In turn, the shepherds receive inspiration from the fold and also from their teacher, “Old Dametas [who] loved our song” (36). Recalling those shared by the young Milton and King, the teacher approves of the poetry and songs of his student-shepherds, thus providing in this encouragement a model for the fit leadership that they will one day provide. Even though the speaker and Lycidas occupy here a lowly office or station, the teacher loves the work they do and provides encouragement while knowing their abilities are still developing. At this point in the poem, it is not necessary for these shepherds to occupy a higher position in society because their song affects the ears of Dametas, an accomplished judge and mentor. Evans writes,

*Lycidas* as pastoral elegy is heir to Spenser’s “Astrophel,” Moschus’ “Lament for Byron,” Virgil’s “Eclogue X,” and Theocritus’ “Idyl I” and in poems written within this tradition the poet typically represents himself as



a shepherd mourning the death of a beloved companion whose departure has afflicted the entire natural world with grief. After consigning the sheep to the care of another shepherd and invoking the assistance of the muses of pastoral poetry, he proceeds to sing a dirge to his deceased friend in which he recalls the idyllic days they spent together in the countryside. (39)

The young shepherds make poetry to give voice to their grief, and they compose their songs as tribute to the lost shepherd. Milton uses the image of the speaker and Lycidas composing beautiful poetry and songs for Dametas in preparation for the later poems they will compose to pay fitting tribute. Guided by Dametas' early teaching, their early mirth and joy are in the creative expression of poetry itself, where juxtapositions of classical and Christian traditions enhance creativity. Later, they compose more somber notes in expressing their loss. Unlike Comus, who seeks mirth excessively by deceiving people and going against their will, Lycidas uses this poetic recreation to lead his flock responsibly by giving voice to their grief. In his lowly wisdom Lycidas embodies intellectual freedom and a capacity to lead his flock during their dark hours of lament.

The conflict arises as the speaker remarks, "O the heavy change" (37). The speaker had lost his friend Lycidas, with whom he had sung beautiful songs nourishing the sheep and in conjunction with whose success he had developed his classical and Christian learning and wisdom. However, with Lycidas' passing the welfare of the flock is now put into question because that relationship has come to an end. Here readers are reminded of the importance of fit guidance in crisis by Milton's use of the classical tradition, which demonstrates how expressions of grief enable individuals and families to

adjust properly to the death of a loved one. While Milton's speaker appears to be focused upon his own loss, wondering how he will reform himself in the absence of Lycidas, his concern is also for the wellbeing of the flock he leads, representing Milton's Cambridge audience who he believes will receive and act upon his ethical, syncretic message of religious liberty for dissenting Protestant groups. In fact, his concern is central to all of humanity because measured grief and mourning help the survivors endure in the absence of their loved ones.

Furthermore, the survivor lovingly mourns for the deceased. The speaker's grief multiplies, and all nature grieves for the deceased shepherd, whose passing is shared with the flock, so that "all their echoes mourn" (41). The living beings in the natural world who once enjoyed fellowship with Lycidas now lament his death. Milton saw nothing excessive or overwrought about this shared grief, for he wished to express the idea that all of nature is divinely infused, and, as such, has a divine connection with Lycidas. However, the speaker's connection with Lycidas is primarily human and has been shaped by their poetic exchanges: "[From] Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrobe wear, / When first the White-thorn blows; / Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherd's ear" (47-49). The speaker creates a noteworthy analogy, describing how the frost and coldness of a natural death first envelopes the natural being, creating a hardened and numb exterior. Upon hearing the news of Lycidas' death, the shepherd becomes paralyzed with grief. Life stops and shatters, and the speaker must be ready to collect the pieces; however, these flowers bloom after the frost, allowing Milton to suggest that by their bloom these flowers represent future religious tolerance and that Lycidas' early death is a prelude to

the coming good. Moreover, Milton must be ready to express this message to his audience, his Cambridge University classmates who contributed to and read *Obsequies in the Memory of Mr. Edward King*, and in this way Milton articulates a paradigm for syncretic shepherds who stand in variance with what he saw as clerical and Laudian tyranny and excess.

The context for *Lycidas* in Renaissance humanism (and Puritanism) is nicely demonstrated by Ben Jonson's "To John Donne." Jonson shows his respect to the great scholar-writer Donne, who brought together classical and Christian values:

Donne, the delight of Phoebus and each Muse,  
 Who, to thy one, all other brains refuse (the muses shower all favor on  
     Donne);  
 Whose every work, of thy most early wit,  
 Came forth example and remains so yet;  
 Longer a-knowing than most wits do live,  
 And which no affection praise enough can give.  
 To it thy language, letters, arts, best life,  
 Which might with half mankind maintain a strife.  
 All which I meant to praise, and yet I would,  
 But leave, because I cannot as I should. (1-10)

Jonson's tribute finds echoes in Milton's poem. Like Donne, *Lycidas* delighted in the muses and showed early wit. Jonson recognizes Donne's accomplishments and feels inadequate in representing his praise for Donne fully. A reading of his poem offers hints

that Milton also may have felt some lack in fully expressing his admiration for Edward King, as the speaker observes, “For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime, / Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer” (8-9). By the end of *Lycidas*, however, Milton is not claiming as Jonson does that he “cannot as [he] should” (10). Ultimately, in his poem Milton combines both humanism and Puritanism to praise Edward King forever by syncretizing the traditions that enable his tribute.

Like the early, tragic loss of Edward King in *Lycidas*, Jonson also tries to address the mystery of a good youth dying prematurely. In his “Epitaph on S.P., a Child of Queen Elizabeth’s Chapel,” Jonson writes about the tragic loss of a promising youth:

Weep with me, all you that read  
 This little story;  
 And know for whom a tear you shed,  
 Death’s self is sorry.  
 ‘Twas a child that so did thrive  
 In grace and feature,  
 As Heaven and Nature seemed to strive  
 Which owned the creature.  
 Years he numbered scarce thirteen  
 When Fates turned cruel,  
 Yet three filled zodiacs had he been  
 The stage’s jewel;  
 And did act (what now we moan)

Old men so duly,  
 As, sooth, the Parcae thought him one,  
 He played so truly.  
 So, by error, to his fate  
 They all consented;  
 But, viewing him since (alas, too late),  
 They have repented,  
 And have sought (to give him new birth)  
 In baths to steep him;  
 But, being so much too good for earth,  
 Heaven vows to keep him. (1-24)

Like Milton, Jonson uses figures from the classical world—the Fates, the zodiacs, and the Parcae—to capture the uncertainty, chaos, and human injustice in the case of a young man’s untimely death, questioning why the good die young. Jonson’s fates are cruel and seem to be out of order. Under heaven’s watch, the zodiacs or the stars appear also to have some distant control of the young man’s death. Recognizing the dazzling potential of the young man which is evident in this “child that so did thrive” (5) despite his “scarce thirteen” (9) years, the speaker’s faith in the divine and poetry is challenged by the young man’s untimely death, and he must endure because the rest of his life will test his virtue, faith, and dedication to poetry. The fates and the stars recognized only his glory and called him from this world. In an appropriate Renaissance humanist expression of grief, Jonson reveals a consolation in which the boy is praised both on earth and in heaven.

With its classical details Jonson's consolation does not have the power of Milton's bipartite consolation; however, it is consistent with the Renaissance humanist view that all traditions of people can receive consolation under the heavens.

Questioning why the good die and the evil prosper, Milton's speaker asks, "Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep / Clos'd o'er the head of your lov'd Lycidas?" (50-51). These lines suggest that the drowning of Edward King was "the occasion, rather than the subject of *Lycidas*" (Patrides 111).<sup>7</sup> But even Milton seems to recognize the futility of this lament in the face of larger cosmic forces. In "Milton's Early Poems on Death," Clay Daniel provides some perspective on Milton's attitudes toward death, asking, "How can we explain God's allowing a devout and skilled young clergyman to die while a corrupt and ignorant clergy continues to creep and intrude and climb over the face of the earth?" (25). The answer to this question lies with Milton's shepherd-speaker Thyrsis and his challenged virtues of faith and hope in poetry, but the confusion cast in the classical world adds to the lament. In *Nativity Ode*, Milton notes cacophonies of the pagan world before Christ's arrival and its silence after he arrives. One may ask if Christ's return will restore the earth to pre-lapsarian bliss. In its sober forecast of the Last Judgment, *Nativity Ode* cautions its readers against thinking a return to pre-lapsarian paradise is imminent:

But wisest Fate says no,

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<sup>7</sup> "The fact that King died by drowning perhaps fortuitously but nonetheless effectively opened up to Milton a much larger range of death and rebirth imagery" (Patrides 114).

This must not yet be so,  
 The babe lies in smiling Infancy,  
 That on the bitter cross  
 Must redeem our loss;  
 So both himself and us to glorify:  
 Yet first to those ychained in sleep,  
 The wakeful trump of doom must thunder through deep.  
 With such a horrid clang  
 As on Mount Sinai rang  
 While the red fire, and smold'ring clouds outbroke  
 The aged earth aghast  
 With terror of that blast  
 Shall from the surface to the center shake  
 Where at the world's last session  
 The dreadful Judge in mid air shall spread his throne. (149-64)

Until the Last Judgment, Milton writes, there will be always confusion on earth, and the disharmonies of the pagan world will continue in the ongoing corruption of Christianity. In juxtaposing these two worlds of confusion, Milton invokes a Puritan-humanist response in the option to endure patiently until the Last Judgment when Christ will return to redeem Christians. However, Milton still advocates—at least symbolically—for the ethical choice of deification that remains accessible in pagan culture. This choice is present in Lady Alice's deification, Sabrina's status as goddess, and Lycidas' deification

as genius of the shore and allows the reader to conclude that in the Renaissance humanist tradition Milton argues for a benevolent deity who judges all people sympathetically, based on the individual's virtuous desires. Even though patient endurance does not require a full denunciation of classical learning, it challenges Milton as he seeks the best elements that these two traditions share. Milton's syncretic dilemma is read in *Nativity Ode* because almost all of the classical deities, except Pan, are banished, and his syncretic shepherds in *Lycidas* give voice to the classical deities' confusion about Lycidas' death. The reader can feel the pain of Lycidas' death so much more when this confusion compounds and confounds the gods.

In commenting on the forces that bring order to this chaotic world and therefore address the anxieties of the poet, critic Clay Daniel observes, "When explaining apparently senseless death, the poems use Christian imagery to reveal a benevolent, omnipotent deity who uses death to chastise the wicked, exalt the pious, and enforce a benign order in the world" (26). As Daniel suggests, Milton uses Christian imagery to order the chaos of the classical world. In this way, Milton asks his audience to recognize the ancient suffering embedded within the pastoral elegiac tradition, and the analogous means that the pagan, Christian, and humanist traditions offer to mitigate this suffering.

In *A Mask*, with her great desire to escape the tyrant Guandelon, Sabrina was impelled to drown herself by diving into the Severn River. Any sensitive reader who understood the gravity of Sabrina's fall would have felt uncontrollable sympathy for the girl who had tried to escape the tyrant and found her freedom in death. At that moment it would not have appeared as if she had escaped anything—only death awaited her. So,



too, it appears Lycidas was unjustly rushed into the watery clutches of death. However, if Milton's reader recognizes the connection between Sabrina and Lycidas—their virtue, love of liberty, and temperance—the reader understands that Milton has infused these suffering characters with deific powers that are borne out of their superhuman suffering. But at this point the speaker does not sense Lycidas' closeness—only his absence, and only later readers learn to grasp Milton's message that their own vicarious suffering at Lycidas' demise will serve also a strengthening purpose.

The theme of absence resonates from the classical world, as shown in what Calliope—mother of Orpheus—felt at his loss. Milton establishes this connection for readers by asking:

What could the Muse herself that Orpheus bore,  
 The Muse herself, for her enchanting son  
 Whom universal nature did lament,  
 When by the rout that made the hideous roar,  
 His gory visage down the stream was sent,  
 Down the swift *Hebrus* to the *Lesbian* shore? (58-63)

After losing his wife Eurydice, Orpheus shunned women, maintaining in his grief a distance from his immediate community. In its place Orpheus substituted animals who never left his side. In posing the question above, the speaker wonders if Calliope might have done anything to draw close to a man who shunned the company of women? Echoing that concern, the speaker thus wonders if he has been shunned by the death of Lycidas. Evans writes that *Lycidas* is about Milton's worries about the value of poetry

and the calling of poet, equating the theme of absence and the motif of the pastoral with the requirements of sacrifice and withdrawal required by that calling:

Amaryllis & Neaera were the traditional names of nymphs who alternately torment and gratify the shepherds in pastoral poetry. . . . Orpheus was an exemplar of poetic eloquence but also the chastity necessary to achieve it. . . . The first, poetic production becomes a sublimated version of the second, sexual abstinence, [encouraging the poet to] make poems with Calliope instead of love. (44-47)

In envisioning his humanist role as poet, Milton aligns his vocation of poet with the strict Puritan doctrine of chastity before marriage. However, despite the moral requirement Milton uses his syncretic shepherds to realize the religious liberty to make this choice, while staying mindful of his poetic calling. He does not want to be coerced into an early marriage or prolonged chastity by religious decree; instead, just as his syncretic shepherds search for meaning in Lycidas' death on their own terms, Milton negotiates the terms of his calling in both spiritual and humanist terms.

Using Orpheus as a model, the speaker will have to sing to an audience who will listen to, and relate to, a song of grief; however, the speaker, if he is to learn from Orpheus, cannot follow his example, but must remain open to all listeners and find company in their grieving (or his head might be severed and set adrift down the river). Moreover, in giving up on the inspiration of Lycidas, the speaker will die a metaphoric death, a decapitation and drowning, and so his words will be silenced. Mindful of Calliope's failure to save her son, the speaker resents the muse, losing hope and

questioning his faith in the power of inspiration and poetry as a means of finding community. Full of despair, Milton's grieving speaker is at a loss as to how to interpret the death of Lycidas and questions whether his poetic efforts will enable him to pay proper tribute. The speaker is humbled by Lycidas' death and the uncertainty it brings, but it is a humility which is brought about by terror—the horror of looking into the universe and seeing absolute freedom and pure chaos and being unable to use poetry to bring this chaos into order. Ultimately, Milton's speaker confronts it in the poet's fit tribute to the deceased Lycidas. Lycidas studied hard, prayed regularly, was careful and took precautions, and so the speaker is unable to find any ethical, logical, or moral reason in Lycidas' death. So the speaker confronts the possibility that Lycidas died for no reason, creating a darkness that covers the speaker's soul and casts him into despair, calling into question a life that is governed only by the eventual fatality that is the consequence of all human motivation and choice.

In his paralysis, the speaker confronts the unfortunate condition of depression, which is sometimes addressed as melancholy, and the speaker struggles to reconcile this condition with the possibilities offered in religious liberty. As the names of the companion poems "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" suggest, the reader may assume a wide gap between mirth and melancholy. But Milton presents the two as companions or complements and not binary opposites. So while melancholy is certainly felt by the speaker and the reading audience of the Cambridge community who struggle with Lycidas' death, the question remains if the speaker will remain grounded, temperate, and moderate, capable of finding eventual meaning and consolation in the passing of his

friend. Briefly, the speaker considers forgetting the melancholy of Lycidas' death completely by embracing excessive mirth, and in this way Milton's readers are reminded of the example of Comus, who seeks his own pleasure in the pain of others. However, as the speaker confronts this option he realizes another course.

In this way, Milton's advocacy for religious and moral liberty becomes more evident. Instead of the shepherd's meditating upon the thankless muse, the speaker considers the mirth of nature and liberty, which is offered in another instructive motif from the classics—that of the pastoral figures of Amaryllis and Naera. In describing Milton's choice here, Evans claims that Milton defies deliberately the conventions of that motif: "Milton violates the long-standing convention whereby the sheep are delegated to the care of a companion while the shepherd himself is performing the song. For the duration of *Lycidas* no one is tending the flock" (48). This may not seem like a radical departure from the sobering thoughts of Lycidas' death, but if the speaker wishes to benefit fully from the example of Amaryllis and Naera, he may lose sight of his first ambition and his duty to glorify Lycidas in pastoral verse.<sup>8</sup> In the example of these joyful

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<sup>8</sup> Amaryllis was picking flowers on a mountainside when she met the shepherd Alteo and fell in love. "Naera was a nymph who was loved by the sun-god Helios, and she bore him two shining daughters, the rustic nymphs Lampetia and Phaethousa" (Atsma). In the myth of Amaryllis Alteo showed no interest in Amaryllis and said, "He would only fall in love with a girl who could bring to him a new type of a flower that he had never seen before" (Barbero). "Determined to win his love, Amaryllis traveled to the Oracle of

lovers, readers see a mixture of melancholy and mirth. But in reconfiguring the role they play within the poem, Milton's pagan and Puritan speaker Thyrsis uses them as a warning, highlighting the connection that he feels in consequence of his own grief.

Despite the joys that love offers, people may lose themselves in that rapture. The speaker considers the joy and mirth of human love, but is driven by both his divine love of poetry and his grief for Lycidas. After the speaker's period of mourning for Lycidas, he emerges beyond his doubts and struggles as aided by the classical motifs that he reinvents to assist and enable his own grieving process. He realizes that he must not lose hope and fall into despair during the time of melancholy; rather, he must remain hopeful that he and Lycidas' spirit will be reunited and restored in happier and more mirthful times.

He comes to the realization, moreover, that, though parted in this world, the two will meet in verse as enabled by the moral requirements embraced by the poet. Wishing for fame in the song he prepares for Lycidas, the speaker acknowledges fame is not a bad

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Delphi for guidance. The oracle instructed her that in order to win Alteo's heart she must sacrifice her blood for him. So Amaryllis stood in front of his house for thirty nights piercing her own heart with a golden arrow. On the thirtieth day a crimson flower grew from the blood of her heart, thus resulting in her winning Alteo's love in return"

(Barbero). Amaryllis and Alteo's celebration of love is mirthful but comes at a price for Amaryllis. She loses herself for thirty days in melancholy because she is completely focused on Alteo's demand, and she is not sure she will receive his love. But this melancholy precedes and is necessary for authentic, life-promoting mirth.

thing because it forces him on to embrace the virtue of fortitude. He will remain committed to the spirit of Lycidas, but his realization of fame will take time. As long as the speaker remains committed to capturing the spirit of Lycidas in his poetry, he will realize a kind of consolation by avoiding the despair of melancholy and abandoning all hope. His engagement with the moral imperatives of poetry motivates the speaker to remain faithful to the spirit of Lycidas. Furthermore, the speaker is cautioned by the words of Apollo, who warns him about the perils of impatient ambition:

Fame is no plant that grows in mortal soil,  
 Nor in the glistering foil  
 Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumor lies,  
 But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes  
 And perfect witness of all judging Jove;  
 As he pronounces lastly on each deed,  
 Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed. (78-84)

Negotiating fame's place between Puritanism and humanism, Apollo is a mouthpiece for Milton, who, by urging the speaker to remain and endure throughout the poetic process, lends authority to the claim that the speaker must persevere.<sup>9</sup> This is Milton's poetic trial, in which his virtue is tested.

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<sup>9</sup> In *Lycidas*, Milton considers how he can serve God as a poet (Daniel 44). "The classical world is full of fate, chance, and malevolence with the furies and chance. However, in the context of this chaotic world the swain contemplates earthly fame. For Milton earthly

The figure of Apollo is also significant to Milton's syncretic combining of traditions to illustrate the highest moral dimensions of each, and Milton operates in both of these traditions simultaneously: his poetic words pay respect to the classical tradition yet operate within his Puritan perspective. For Milton the prospect of fame exists under the watchful eyes of God; therefore, the desire for fame can coexist with Milton's hope for eternal life. However, the gods disdain the pastoral—fame comes not from recognition gained with success in the earthly pastoral realm because fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil. "Success [in poetry] needs the approval of Jove" (Daniel 48). In this way, according to Daniel, "Milton transforms the lowly pastoral into profound religious poetry that exalts the lowly wisdom of Christianity" (48). Thus Milton establishes his speaker's central purpose: If the speaker can work through his doubt, he will be able to see a vision of Lycidas. However, that beautiful vision takes time to mature. Yet in due time Thyrsis will see himself with Lycidas again, aided by the lessons of Apollo and his other shepherd figures who enable him to conjoin the finest moral aspects of the classical, Christian, and humanist traditions.

Next, Thyrsis addresses Neptune, asking what happened to Lycidas. And significantly, Neptune does not know, unable to provide some rationale for Lycidas' untimely death. The Sea God suggests that Hippotades didn't deliver hurricane winds, but the ultimate cause was "the fatal and perfidious bark" (100). With this vaguely defined fame would be an excellent complement to eternal life provided by his religion" (Daniel 48).

reason expressed, readers wonder if Lycidas may have been the victim of something so insignificant as a sudden change of winds or of human error in the ship-building or sailing process. According to Clay Daniel, “The classical landscape is where human life counts for very little, so the classical perspective may accommodate the injustices of death as a whim” (32). In contrast, Milton would present the responsible free will of humans and, from his Puritan and humanist positions, hint at positive ways to look upon death. Within the context of strict Puritanism, “death liberates the good souls from the sordid prison of the flesh, and death is thus a great blessing” (38); however, Milton does not see the world as a place to languish and wait upon death, “but rather he sees the world as a battlefield—a race where the immortal garland is to be run for” (42). Milton’s humanist perspective, in which one has agency and ought to strive for success, tempers the strict Puritan view of resignation to death.

However, then the reader wonders: why does this revelation not comfort the speaker fully? When Thyrsis considers the metaphorical dimensions of Lycidas’ plight, he suggests that the ship’s sinking points to the deterioration of the Laudian church. In this light, Edward King becomes a victim of Laudian excess and a too severe governance over his conscience. In developing this reading, in *Lycidas*, William Riley Parker writes, “we have passed through questioning, and indignation, and assurance of church justice. We have now been comforted with beauty. Our hearts are ready for belief” (163). In this way, Milton establishes that within the context of strict Puritan and Laudian codes, there was no space for the gods to operate. Therefore, the classical gods—such as Neptune and



Apollo—can offer only limited insight about Lycidas’ death to the grieving speaker.

Confirming the restrictions imposed by Laudian mandates, Kevin Sharpe writes,

Historians like Collinson and Tyacke have judged Laud the greatest calamity ever visited upon the Church of England because he disrupted the reformed consensus of the Church by rigorously imposing theological and ceremonial innovations. These historians sound like seventeenth-century Puritans who feared Laud was returning the Church of England to Rome. Laud’s career reflected the dispute between Calvinists (predestination to salvation or reprobation) and Arminians (grace and free will). (71)

Disputes arose also over the purpose of liturgy, and over time Laudian mandates were revealed to restrict the religious liberties of the English in ways that limited other, more basic freedoms. Schooled with the dual traditions of Puritanism and classicism, and recognizing the humanist dimensions in each, the young Milton saw the crippling consequences for these severe restrictions on English liberties.<sup>10</sup> And as *Lycidas* reveals,

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<sup>10</sup> In what way did the people of England think Laud was moving? “Laud believed these theological controversies were unmasterable in life. Laud sought peace and unity in the church” (Sharpe 73). “Laud did not want theological differences pursued with heat, passion, and controversy. Laud’s *Conference with Fisher the Jesuit* is Laud’s work that distinguishes his thinking from Rome. Laud writes that ceremonies are necessary as the ‘hedge that fences the substance of religion from all the indignities’” (74). “Laud preferred persuasion through beautiful architecture, music, and liturgy which led the

King did not have a choice in the matter, so he carried out those pastoral duties faithfully that were expected by the Church of England and according to Puritan doctrine.

As the speaker confronts the bleakest possibilities for Lycidas' passing, the reader notes a movement in the poem toward religious liberty and away from the restrictive influences of Laud and the bishops. The procession of mourners, including Camus, links the poetic world to the divine world. St. Peter, the pilot of the Galilean lake, "shook his mitred locks" (118) because the wolves in shepherd's clothing "Creep and intrude" (119). These "blind mouths" (119) feed upon their followers, robbing the flocks' material well-being. These leaders "haven't learned how to be shepherds" (121). St. Peter's blatant moralizing presents the deceased Lycidas in a very positive light, highlighting that Lycidas is the hope of shepherds. In this way, readers are led to see how the unity of the poem lies in how one reads the shepherd figures. Specifically, if one reads the shepherd-speaker and Lycidas as faithful shepherds who would have become effective church

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believer to worship in the Church of England" (75). "Charles I elevated Laud for 'his concern with ceremony and his pertinence as an administrator.' Charles needed churches, church yards, and clergy restored. It is an irony that it was Archbishop Laud (and Charles I) with whom the Puritans went to war. For both in his policies and in his personality, Laud had much in common with them. Like the Puritans he sought an upright and well-educated clergy; like them he was virulent against popery, hard against clerical failings and lay profligacy" (76).

leaders and guardians of humanity as well, the reader is able to appreciate Milton's juxtaposition of the classical pagan and Early Modern Christian parts of the poem.

The question of how Thyrsis is to reconcile the death of Lycidas is answered also by St. Peter. Having proven himself to be a good and righteous shepherd, Lycidas will find his justified place in a Christian heaven. Hinting at the perils of Laudian excess, the speaker teaches by negative example in the poem through St. Peter, who declares that "The hungry sheep look up and they are not fed" (125). The sheep "rot inwardly[,] foul contagion spread[s]" (126), and "the grim wolf...[has] privy paw" (127). Standing in contrast with those who have fallen prey to Laudian excess, Lycidas is seen as not a grim wolf, but as one who did not seek to exploit the material needs of his sheep and truthfully attested to their spiritual well-being. Ultimately, St. Peter's role is to confirm that Lycidas lived his life on earth well. In "Lycidas: A Wolf in Saint's Clothing," Forsyth argues that "Milton in 1637 was moving in an Armenian direction, in which sainthood was open to everyone, especially those who willfully sought it" (689). And with the guidance of the poem's syncretic shepherd figures, Lycidas seems to approach this condition of sainthood. Thus, in his use of syncretic shepherds, Milton allows a way for all fit believers, regardless of doctrinal debates, to achieve honor and respect in heaven.

St. Peter's harsh criticism of false shepherds culminates in the climax of the poem: his allusion to "The two-handed engine at the door" of heaven (130) suggests a condemnation of tyrannical bishops, as well as an apocalyptic vision, one in which the

sword of St. Michael represents the engine, ready to smite evil.<sup>11</sup> With this Godly protection established, St. Peter can close the gates of heaven to the recently deceased. Confirming the relevance of this symbolism, Peter Sachs writes that Milton pours so much energy into St. Peter's tirade because it is

bound to years of laborious preparation and self-denial, the anger against those who had prevented Milton from the possibility of church lecturing, the bitter fury against those who had punished Burton, Bastwick, and Prynne; the anger against a mother or muse who deserted the son she should have protected; the anger at having to mourn, at having one's rude fingers forced to their shattering work; the anger finally of any ambitious poet against his own thus far inadequate work. (110)

However, in his newly sanctified condition Lycidas does not need to worry about such energies misspent in mortal turmoil.

As a result of his achieving a Christ-like spirituality on earth, Lycidas gains admission to the joyous and mirthful kingdom, as Thyrsis reports. This poem and its climax express the speaker's sincere concern for the spiritual well-being of Lycidas, to

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<sup>11</sup> In *Milton and the English Revolution*, Christopher Hill writes, "St. Michael's Mount has a patriotic and anti-Spanish effect. The two handed engine at the door could be Bishop Laud, but Milton would have to have been careful because of censorship; it could also have been the shepherd's rod and crook, trying to describe a preacher preaching. The ship—institution—sinks, but Lycidas is still saved" (51).

whom he must pay fitting poetic tribute. In this light, the “two-handed engine at the door” (130) serves as a negative, apocalyptic image, reminding readers about what could have happened to Lycidas if he were not on a model of fit spirituality. Here, the reader senses the speaker has moved beyond his existential doubt of a chaotic and meaningless universe, governed by the horrors of radical free will, and accepts and is humbled by the divine. Furthermore, the speaker answers the question of why the good die and the evil prosper by asserting his poetic stature and claiming that by telling the story, Lycidas is reborn, recreated by the speaker. Since Thyrsis is the reason readers know that Lycidas defeated death and evil, the speaker-poet emerges from Lycidas as humanity’s response to death, evil, and injustice in the world. Because of his syncretic nature Thyrsis ensures religious liberty for his audience by deifying and sanctifying Lycidas. Circumventing the bishops’ authority and dogmatic rules about sanctification, the speaker’s syncretic qualities ensure his ability to sanctify his fellow shepherd.

Following this narrative climax, the action of the poem falls as the figure of the river Alpheus is reunited with fountain Artheuse, foreshadowing the reunification of the speaker and Lycidas. Shepherds throw wreaths and flowers in celebration of this reunion, showing the poetic connection that the speaker and Lycidas will always share and will one day celebrate in a similarly fit reunion. Here Milton unites the poetic impulse to the divine in the image of St. Michael, whose mount faces Bayona and Namancos, looking southward. Having recovered a sense of purpose in emerging through the process of grieving, Milton portrays St. Michael as a model of Christian grace and charity, whose purpose here rests in assisting mariners find their way home.

The poem concludes in a bipartite manner, in which Lycidas is granted eternal life as a protecting deity, but he is also given eternal life through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.<sup>12</sup> Having worked through his melancholy and, instead of arriving at despair and a meaningless universe, the speaker realizes the sublimely mirthful and divine attributes of Lycidas as genius of the shore who has realized eternal being in Christ. Milton elevates Lycidas from the humble shepherd's weeds to eternal genius of the shore, representing Milton's judicial power as a Puritan humanist to place Lycidas in heaven and to grant him sainthood. Like Sabrina and unlike Comus, Lycidas was a virtuous, truthful, and lowly-wise shepherd. In this way, he emerges as the embodiment of the best aspects of Milton's syncretic shepherd figures. Therefore, the shepherds move beyond their lamenting for his loss, and in the poetic recreation of Lycidas in heaven, Thyrsis defeats death and evil by granting the good Lycidas eternal joy:

Weep no more, woeful Shepherds, weep no more,  
 For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,  
 Sunk though he be beneath the wat'ry floor,

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<sup>12</sup> Milton uses the pastoral mode in *Lycidas* to praise the scholarship, poetry, and leadership of his Cambridge College classmate Edward King. The pastoral mode is also important for simplifying the complexities of Lycidas' death. Peter Sachs writes, "Consolation—the work of mourning—needs a reattachment to a new object of love, which is the apotheosized version of Lycidas" (114).

So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,  
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head,  
 And tricks his beams, and with new-spangled Ore,  
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:  
 So Lycidas, sunk low, but mounted high  
 Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves. (165-73)

Over the course of the poem, therefore, Milton elevates and deifies the lowly wisdom of Lycidas.<sup>13</sup> As the “Genius of the Shore” (183), Lycidas also finds new life through Christ. In this syncretized pagan and Christian role, Lycidas will serve and protect all who enter the Irish Sea.<sup>14</sup> The apotheosis of Lycidas as the genius of the shore is a complete expression of Milton’s syncretic shepherds, and in this role Lycidas protects and serves humanity forever. This idea conjoins classical and Christian concepts of what a good shepherd is, sustaining it forever in the spirit of Lycidas. Although in *Nativity Ode*

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<sup>13</sup> “The apotheosis of Lycidas bears a striking resemblance to the death of Orpheus. . . . In the final analysis it is the resurrection of Lycidas rather than the intervention of Phoebus that dispels the horror of Orpheus’ and Edward King’s deaths. Lycidas records Milton’s emergence from the persona of the uncouth swain, and this process becomes analogous to a Christian conversion experience” (Evans 49-51).

<sup>14</sup> According to Clay Daniel, the compensation for the loss of a good life on earth, according to Milton, is for one to be a celestial advocate for humanity whereby Milton continues his concentration on what’s happening on earth (29).

the speaker confirms that “The parting Genius is with sighing sent” (185), Milton re-establishes that Genius in *Lycidas* because he needs a symbolic representation of a Puritan saint, opposing Roman Catholic and Laudian practices. Readers learn that, in the *Nativity Ode*, the pagan gods would never permanently flee until the final judgment, so it stands to reason that Milton places Lycidas as the genius of the shore to provide a constant guiding beacon within the world’s state of chaos until the end of time itself.

However, Milton renders Lycidas as the genius of the shore with more cause and sympathy than to say he stands only among chaos. The humanist Milton acknowledges the good literary strength of the pagan genius, symbolizing protection but also capability and readiness to defend individuals of virtuous conscience.<sup>15</sup> And if he imagines Lycidas as genius of the shore in more than symbolic terms, Milton reveals too that God in his charity enables Lycidas to stand over the Irish Sea as a protective spirit.

For his readers, Milton’s bipartite conclusion results in a recognition of religious liberty and a movement away from tyrannical and dogmatic religion because the reader sees Milton’s constructed choices of St. Peter’s tirade and Lycidas’ apotheosis as an advocate for a doctrine-free Christianity. In reading the shepherd Lycidas in the tradition of Jesus Christ, but also as an apotheosis of a pagan spirit, Milton reinforces his syncretic

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<sup>15</sup> “[*Lycidas*’s] epilogue serves a triple purpose: It leaves the reader refreshed, Lycidas is rewarded in heaven, and Milton, the poet-priest-shepherd, facing the future with confidence. What were the fresh woods and pastures new? In general, they were the world of human society, the active world” (Parker 164).



shepherds within Renaissance humanist conventions by showing the power religions and poets have to memorialize the deceased. Milton advocates for the eternal happiness of the virtuous pagan evidenced by Lycidas as genius of the shore because in the Renaissance humanist tradition the supreme deity governs and subsumes all religious traditions. Even so, Milton does not wish to contaminate his Puritan tradition with Roman Catholic or high Anglican traditions. Separating himself from earlier traditions, Milton announces the centrality and importance of his syncretic shepherds with Lycidas' apotheosis and emergence from the waters into immortality as guided by the religious liberty and salvation in Christ.

## CHAPTER V

## LOOKING BACK: THE FRIENDSHIP OF MILTON'S SYNCRETIC SHEPHERDS

IN *EPITAPHIUM DAMONIS*

In this chapter, I examine the purpose of the syncretic shepherds Thyrsis and Damon in Milton's *Epitaphium Damonis*. Representing Milton's friend Charles Diodati, the death of Damon destroys the peace of the speaker Thyrsis. Thyrsis sings of Damon's death, and this song rivals Theocritus' account of Thyrsis' singing at Daphnis' death. Milton's Thyrsis repeats the phrase, "Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni" [Go home unfed, for your master has not time for you<sup>1</sup>] (18). This phrase and its repetition cause Milton's readers to question why the shepherd does not have any time for the lambs. According to strict Puritanism, the worst shepherd's action is abandoning his flock. At this moment, mourning controls Thyrsis, the shepherd-speaker, and Milton, the poet.

Furthermore, the Puritan humanist Milton's consolation is in expressing grief in the classical, humanist tradition, consolidating centuries of loss expressed in the pastoral elegy form, as seen in *Lycidas*.<sup>2</sup> According to William Riley Parker, *Lycidas* expresses

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<sup>1</sup> All translations are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> This style conforms to the Renaissance humanist tradition, as seen in Ben Jonson's "To William Camden," and "On My First Son," both of which express heartfelt grief learnedly. Jonson offers Camden his piety, while he offers his son the distinction of being his best poetry—wonderful, human consolations.

isolation, and *Epitaphium Damonis* conveys social interaction (187-88). The social atmosphere of *Epitaphium Damonis* is noticeable in that the poem serves “both as a memorial to Charles and as an expression of gratitude to his Italian hosts” (187), who are Milton’s audience for the poem. Crucial to his purpose for *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton’s learned Italian humanist friends, with whom he spent time on his 1638-39 continental tour, serve as a model for the poem’s friendship between Thyrsis and Damon and as an audience of syncretic shepherds; they reflect the ethics and virtues of the poem’s shepherds.

Milton offers Charles Diodati deification—eternal glory through the character Damon. John Shawcross notes, “The expression of apotheosis as union with God is not unusual” (33). Due to their friendship, their love of classical learning and the liberal arts, and their similarities in philosophical, world, and religious views, Milton praises Diodati in the loftiest of manners. The syncretic shepherds of Thyrsis and Damon align the best ethical and moral teachings of the Puritans with the wisdom and learning of the classical world. At the conclusion of *Epitaphium Damonis*, Thyrsis places Damon in the company of the saints, an image that asserts Damon has not been denied sainthood by the doctrinal narrowness of the Catholic or Anglican bishops. Milton creates this vision of heaven to confirm that people of dissenting Protestant beliefs have earned their religious liberty by means of their morals and virtues.

John Shawcross notes how close the friendship of John Milton and Charles Diodati’s was. In his *John Milton: The Self and the World*, Shawcross explains the houses of young Milton and Diodati were only a few blocks away, as was St. Paul’s, their

school (38). In this community the boys developed a close friendship, symbolically reflected in Milton's apotheosis of Damon, in which there are communal celebrations of song and dancing. William Riley Parker also details the close relationship of Milton and Diodati. As adolescents the two attended classes at St. Paul's School in London (70). Here, they experienced the same way of life. In their similar daily routines, Milton and Diodati would have experienced the same trials and joys. These commonalities of experience would all prove fertile ground for friendship to flourish in their lives. As the two studied classics and foreign languages, their academic interests merged, and the two wrote of these linguistic interests in Latin and Greek (70). As his passion for the classics deepened, Milton came to see Diodati as the embodiment of everything he studied (70). Diodati's family hailed from Italy, as did Vergil, one of Milton's most beloved writers. Diodati and his family spoke Italian and Latin, which were two of the languages Milton most treasured. Furthermore, Diodati and his family carried this tradition with them to England. Above all else, this was one of the most important things that cemented Milton's friendship with Diodati. Milton believed England absorbed and carried the literary torch from the ancient Mediterranean world and especially Renaissance Italy. England becomes the New Italy. Diodati is now the new, Italian-English man. As such, Diodati is "L'Allegro" and Milton is "Il Penseroso," the two complementing each other so well.

Critics have noted Milton's negotiation of humanism and Puritanism in *Epitaphium Damonis*. Some note his movement toward humanism. For example, J. Martin Evans notes that the sheep go home unfed in *Epitaphium Damonis*. The hungry

sheep are starving for nourishment. Evans finds this amiss and asks, “The absence of the shepherd’s traditional companion thus poses a further set of questions: instead of playing on the oaten flute shouldn’t the uncouth swain be feeding the flock himself? Instead of writing poems shouldn’t John Milton be ministering to the religious needs of his fellow countrymen?” (48). Evans stresses Milton’s humanism in the absence of traditional Puritanism. However, the Puritan Milton is not absent entirely from *Epitaphium Damonis*, as noted by other critics. Colin Burrows argues, “Both *Lycidas* and *Epitaphium Damonis* link the subjects of their elegies so closely to Milton—the poems seem to be exorcizing the death of the poet himself” (57). In *Spenser, Milton, and Renaissance Pastoral*, Richard Mallette argues, “The Christian elegist is able to imagine the dead shepherd in eternal glory and provide sacramental power to heal grief-stricken man” (120). Milton’s syncretism allows some critics to ask where the Puritan Milton is, while other critics see Damon in a Christian heaven. Clay Daniel writes, “Except in *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton takes up the darkest strands of classicism to represent the pagan” (26). John Shawcross explains, “Capping the pagan-Christian collocation is the thyrsus of Sion. The thyrsus was a staff twined with ivy and vine shoots borne by Bacchantes, and Sion is the heavenly city of God, that is, God himself” (35). In Damon’s apotheosis the reader observes Milton’s loftiest syncretic shepherd.

It was common practice of Renaissance humanists to note all religions were the same, especially in the realization of their ultimate heavenly prize; however, as the reader observes in Milton’s pastoral, dissenting Protestant groups are privileged with realizing fully the eternal glory of their religion within their own tradition, even as they are

juxtaposed to other traditions. This is important because some twentieth-century critics, such as T.S. Eliot and F.R. Leavis, chose to focus on poetics and politics rather than how important religion and religious liberty were to Milton. Anthony Low observes, “What we are no longer willing to accept as religious zeal we may still find palatable if we transform it into more purely a political zeal, into philosophical innovation or poetic strength” (176). While Milton’s poetry does contain many of these aspects, one ought to accept, at least the plausibility, that the Puritan humanist John Milton juxtaposes pagan mythology and Puritan Christianity for the purpose of supporting religious liberty.

In addition to Milton’s severe criticism of the bishops and clergy in *Lycidas*, Milton uses the pastoral mode to praise and elevate Edward King, showing the universal forms of grief, denial, and acceptance. For Milton’s speaker Thyrsis, *Epitaphium Damonis* is much more personal, and the grief is much rawer because the speaker loses his best friend—again.<sup>3</sup> In this way, the imagery and sensory language of isolation paralyzes the speaker, and he has to find a way to work through his grief. The pastoral world becomes dark and bleak, and the mode’s elements of praise and elevation vanish

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<sup>3</sup> John Shawcross explains that “by 1629-30 Milton and Diodati’s friendship had drifted. In *Elegia Sexta* Milton discusses *Nativity Ode* and awaits Diodati’s judgment; however, in his letter, Milton suggests Diodati has seemed unconcerned, and ‘has been less than seriously communicative about Milton’s hopes and activities’” (44). “With the removal of Diodati from a close relationship with Milton [in the 1630s] . . . [Milton takes] a deeper plunging into study and writing” (48).

but reappear at the end of the poem, as they are rediscovered by the speaker when the speaker conceives of the pastoral praise for the deceased Damon.

In order for Thyrsis to prepare Damon's praise, Thyrsis drives the lambs from his sight, substantiated by the sixteen-time repetition of the phrase, "Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni" [Go home unfed, for your master has not time for you, lambs] (26). Since Thyrsis is paralyzed with grief, he must remove the lambs, creating some distance between himself and Damon, which allows for cognitive space in order to sing Damon's praises. In this grief the speaker cannot feed the lambs, failing to complete a basic pastoral duty. The repetition denotes the recursive paralysis of Damon's death running through Thyrsis' head, and the speaker's difficulty in working (as a shepherd of sheep and human dealing with death) through his grief.

This repetition creates a dizzying effect because the audience feels as though the speaker has suffered the death of his best friend many times over (more specifically, the phrase is repeated sixteen times in the poem). That the speaker continuously suffers death, the loss of his friend, creates a deeper awareness for readers of the bond between Thyrsis and Damon, and, furthermore, the regret felt by Milton for losing his friend again in his final departure from earth. The speaker's repetition of grief draws the audience into sharing the speaker's grief, and sharing this deep emotion allows the audience to experience the pastoral world as uncertain and full of potential dangers.

Milton's Tuscan audience is aware of pastoral danger and realizes the humanist answer to danger and death lies in the arts and poetry.<sup>4</sup> Thyrsis addresses his audience directly and likens their poetic skill to Charles Diodati's.

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<sup>4</sup> "In Naples, Milton met John Baptista Manso. Milton learned that Manso was friends with Italian literary giants, Tasso and Marini" (Parker 170). Experiencing this literary tradition objectifies and enhances Milton's appreciation for Italian culture. Indeed, before Milton's 1638 departure for the continent, he had already learned and written Italian poetry. According to John Shawcross, Milton's Italian poems reflect Casa's influence, "But Sonnet 4 is addressed to Diodati, who was in Geneva by the middle of April 1630," (46) studying for the ministry. Shawcross asks, "Why does Milton choose Italian as a vehicle?" (46). I believe it is Milton's love of his dear friend Diodati and his origin, which makes him and the Italian tongue a direct descendent classical language, the language of the Italian Renaissance and most advanced learning in Europe.

As the conflict of *Epitaphium Damonis* centers on the death of Damon, loneliness is the result for Thyrsis. Shawcross notes, "Perhaps from the plague Charles died in the summer of 1638 and was buried at St. Anne's, Blackfriars (August 27, 1638)" (60). And Parker confirms this date: "Charles Diodati was buried August 27, 1638" (486). It is around this time Milton reaches Naples on his continental trip. It seems likely Milton may have learned the news here because Naples is a port city where news from English ships could have reached the young Milton. Having received the news of Diodati's death in Naples, Milton ever after associated Naples with Diodati's death. Certainly, the



Quamquam etiam vestry nunquam meminisse pigebit,

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Neapolitan John Baptista Manso was one of Milton's intended readers for *Epitaphium Damonis*. Making Manso his intended reader, Milton wishes to model his friendship with Diodati after the literary friendships Manso enjoyed. In Milton's letter to Manso, entitled *Mansus*, Milton writes of Manso's friendship with Torquato Tasso, and he holds this up as a learned, literary friendship. Milton cites a dialogue on friendship that Tasso wrote to Manso in the poem entitled *Jerusalem Conquered*, Book 20: "Among magnanimous and courteous cavaliers Manso is resplendent" (127). The pastoral tradition connects Manso and Tasso with muses, nymphs, and shepherds.

"Because of Tasso's gratitude for Manso's hospitality and friendship, Tasso sent Manso gifts of verse, and because of Manso's happy friendship with Tasso Milton believes Manso is written forever in literary history. This is also how Milton feels about Charles Diodati. Since Diodati has been Milton's excellent friend, he writes Diodati into literary history. Furthermore, Manso is an important audience for *Epitaphium Damonis* because Manso also befriended Marino, another important Italian writer" (Parker 170). Milton believes Marino found Manso's friendship and hospitality important because the muse visited Marino at Manso's house. The literary muse connects Manso to his friends. Accordingly, after the deaths of Tasso and Marino, Milton writes that Manso pens the family histories of the two writers, and Manso himself becomes a writer and secures his friendship with the two men. Milton follows suit, writing about his friendship with Diodati.

Pastores Tusci, Musis operata iuventus,  
 Hic Charis, atque Lepos; et Tuscus tu quoque Damon,  
 Antiqua genus unde petis Lucumonis ab urbe.

[Though I shall never grow tired of your memory, Tuscan Shepherds,  
 Youths working for the muses, yet here was grace, and here  
 was pleasantness, you also Damon, were a Tuscan, tracing your  
 descent from the ancient city of Lucca.] (125-28)

The qualities of the Tuscan shepherds are notable in comparison to Diodati. They love and serve the muse of poetry, filling songs with grace and gentleness. Diodati is exalted by the speaker above all other Italian shepherds.

Despite consolation from the audience, Thyrsis' faith is shaken in the divine order, revealing some of the chaos of the classical world and foreshadowing the ultimate importance of the syncretic character of Milton's shepherds, who have choices also for consolation in the Puritan tradition. "Hei mihi! Quae terries, quae dicam numina caelo, / Postquam te immiti rapuerunt funere, Damon" [Oh me! What deities will I call in earth or heaven, after they have ripped you mercilessly away in death, Damon?] (19-20). That the gods cannot be as honest as Damon and honor him by continuing his life startles the speaker. Milton invokes this classical motif from his earlier poetry. The gods flee with innocent life in *Nativity Ode*:

And sullen Moloch, fled,  
 Hath left in shadows dread  
 His burning idol all of blackest hue;

In vain with cymbals' ring  
 They call the grisly king  
     In dismal dance about the furnace blue;  
 The brutish gods of Nile as fast,  
 Isis and Orus and the dog Anubis haste. (205-12)

The *Nativity Ode*'s answer is, of course, that the birth of Christ may liberate the believer, waiting in earthly chaos for the Last Judgment and finding refuge from the pagan gods. Milton presents the same hope in *Epitaphium Damonis* and offers his readers the liberty to choose this hope. In waiting for his own judgment, Thyrsis seeks truth and honesty from the heavens, so the speaker is in an uncomfortable and intractable position since he perceives mendacity and chaos among the gods.

In constantly questioning himself, Thyrsis seeks answers. Certainly, these are all rhetorical questions, but they sound like those powerful, unanswerable questions that could drive one mad. If the shepherds and all of nature respect and love Damon, why do the gods not revere him enough to save his life? "Sicine nos linquis, tua sic sine nomine virtus / Ibit, et obscuris numero sociabitur umbris?" [And do you leave us in this way and shall your virtue go down without a name to be numbered with the company of the unknown dead?] (21-22). Similar to the problem of why the good die young in *Lycidas*, in *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton contemplates the premature death of Diodati, which results in self-questioning for Thyrsis and suggests that in Damon's absence, he must be the good in the world.

Thyrsis' good is located in his virtue—a critical component in Milton's conception of the characteristics of syncretic shepherds because it can be found in both the classical and Puritan traditions. Furthermore, virtue is one of the justifications Milton uses for his vision of seventeenth-century religious liberty. Based on these considerations, the speaker Thyrsis is confounded that the gods would not recognize and glorify such an essential aspect of Damon's humanity. However, Thyrsis imagines Mercury leading Damon from the dead, and he asks Mercury to restrain the whole of the brutal herd for Damon because Damon is a rare individual with special qualities, not belonging in the herd: "At non ille animas virga qui dividit aurea / Ista velit, dignumque tui te ducat in agmen, / Ignavumque procul pecus arceat omne silentum" [But he who divides the souls with his golden wand would not wish this, for he would lead you into a company worthy of you and would warn off the whole brutal herd of the silent dead] (23-25). Damon stands above the brutal herd because of his virtues of wisdom and prudence.

The struggle and grief Thyrsis articulates is the common mindset of friendship among animals (who follow the tyranny of unbridled desire or the dictates of those who control others' thoughts—whether religious, social, or personal), which the speaker uses to serve as a sharp contrast with his humanist friendship with Damon. Not concerned for other animals, the wolf runs and comes to its food in packs: "sic densi veniunt ad pabula thoes" [so the teeth [of the wolf] come to its food in packs] (97). It is easy for a wolf to join another group when one or more of the wolf's comrades have fallen. However, humans are a painful race, and humanity's song is usually sad. There is far more alienation among humanity than there is in the animal kingdom, according to Thyrsis,

because of humanity's free will to follow other traditions or at least to question one's own—running against the pack. Seeking some consolation for his melancholy, Thyrsis expects a great deal from friendship: learned conversations, polite behavior, cultural understanding, language skills, mutual respect, and complementarity. Imagining there is nothing learned about which the wolves can converse, or those who blindly follow one tradition alone, Thyrsis bases their interactions on instincts, which are basic survival skills for hunting food and obtaining shelter. A logical consequence is the limitation that bars the wolves from knowing any other culture than their own. It is fair to say that they certainly do not seek to understand the culture of the shepherds and sheep they destroy.

This pastoral allegory can extend to corrupt leaders whom Milton criticizes. According to Thyrsis, such leaders do not seek to understand the culture of the sheep whom they lead, but rather ignore the moral wellbeing and culture of their charges. For example, Milton saw moral hypocrisy in the bishops who preached to serve the poor, but Archbishop Laud himself was adorned in wealth. Given the poverty of Thyrsis' spirit with the loss of Damon, he elevates Damon and sings his praises because Damon's simplicity contrasts the ornateness of the bishopric. Milton has the advantage of retrospect, focusing on the joy he and Diodati shared when they were together. Looking back on their relationship, Milton aligns their similar interests, all the while making their relationship seem closer with their common enemy in the bishops: these wolves do not write in polished Greek letters. In fact, it is not only the moral and spiritual failings Milton criticizes, but he juxtaposes his and Diodati's classical intellectual capacity

against the bishops' because Milton perceives the bishops, as he writes in *Lycidas*, as "blind mouths," symbolizing uncritical thought.

Because of their shared construct of syncretic natures, Thyrsis and Damon enjoy a close bond. Their relationship facilitates Thyrsis' desire that Damon will be led from the underworld to Elysium or heaven. Those who blindly follow the bishops—the brutal herd—are not as worthy of heaven as Damon because they did not possess his virtue, ethics, and morality, all hallmarks of Milton's syncretic shepherds. The same is true for the son of Renaissance-humanist poet Ben Jonson. Jonson's "On My First Son" reveals the expression of loss of one of the closest human relationships, that of father and son:

Farewell, thou child of my right hand, and joy;

My sin was too much hope of thee, loved boy.

Seven years thou wert lent to me, and I thee pay,

Exacted by the fate, on the just day.

O could I lose all father now! For why

Will man lament the state he should envy,

To have so soon 'scaped world's and flesh's rage,

And, if no other misery, yet age?

Rest in soft peace, and asked, say, "Here doth lie

Ben Jonson his best piece of poetry."

For whose sake henceforth all his vows be such

As what he loves may never like too much. (1-12)

Jonson not only laments the loss of one so close to him, but he also finds consolation in the “soft peace” his son will receive in the afterlife. Milton also feels the same way and adds a suggestion that the speaker Thyrsis believes the purpose of Damon’s existence would serve a much better purpose on earth than in the afterlife because Damon could advance human learning and religious liberty. The speaker’s sentiments reveal it is a tragedy for both the education and freedom of humanity that Damon dies. For both humanist poets, Milton and Jonson, the purpose of life, coupled with the vocation of poet, is to create. Ben Jonson Jr. was a great source for his father’s poetry because he was a product of his father’s shaping. Similarly, Charles Diodati is great content for poetry because he inspired Milton to create.

For these reasons Milton has Thyrsis properly mourn Damon: “Quicquid erit, certe, nisi me lupus ante videbit, / Indeplorato non comminuere sepulchro” [What happens to him—Damon, certainly, unless the wolf first sees me, you will not be unmourned in the sepulcher] (27-28). As the story goes, if the wolf spots the human first, the wolf’s approach and presence can overpower the human and blind the individual. The wolf represents any surprise attack or mendacity that overcomes human beings. In this poem, the wolf represents death and bishops who threaten people’s religious liberty. While Milton was away in Italy on his continental excursion, he believed all was well with Charles Diodati in England. However, when word reached Milton likely sometime in late 1638, he was blind-sided and brought back to the reality that he had lost his dearest friend at home. Later in the poem, the speaker questions, “Ecquid erat tanti Romam vidisse sepultam?” [Was it so great to see buried Rome?] (115). The speaker

questions the necessity of his visit to Rome and the continent and leaves the reader thinking, again, about the repetition of “*Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni*” [Go home unfed, your master has not time for you, lambs] (112). Quite literally based on the sixteen repetitions in this poem, Milton would return home to England to mourn his dear friend Diodati, who had no more earthly time for him.

If Milton received news of Diodati’s death while in Naples in 1638, he must have struggled on his trip through the rest of Italy. Making the most of his continental excursion, Milton must have still questioned why he had undertaken this trip and allowed his friend to die without him in England. The humanist love of classical learning and Milton’s need to advance religious liberty as a tribute to Diodati were perhaps the only satisfying answers that came to the Puritan humanist Milton to justify his continued continental excursion after his dear friend Diodati had died. As Milton would write,

*Constabitque tuus tibi honos, longumque vigebit  
Inter pastores. Illi tibi vota secundo  
Solvere post Daphnin, post Daphin dicere laudes  
Gaudebunt, dum rura Pales, dum Faunum amabit-  
Si quid id est, priscamque fidem coulisse, piumque,  
Palladiasque artes, sociumque habuisse canorum.*

[Your fame shall continue, and long flourish  
among the shepherds. After their devotion to Daphnis they will  
soothe you and sing your praises. As long as  
Pales and Faunus love the fields, if there be any



Advantage to having cultivated the trust and arts of

Pallas Athene, and in having a comrade who was a poet.] (29-34)

Shepherds pay their respects to the deceased Damon because those shepherds recognize he is worthy of praise. As those shepherds seek fame for themselves, they are able to recognize what is worthy in another individual. Damon is lauded by the shepherds because of his learning, liberty, and virtue. The arts of Pallas Athene, or the liberal arts, including poetry, called Damon away from the traditional arts of law, medicine, and theology. Even during his struggle coping with the reality of Diodati's death, the Puritan humanist Milton claims that his syncretic shepherds will forever honor Damon because Damon serves as an eternal advocate for the humanist liberal arts of Pallas Athene. This is the reason for shepherds to honor Damon: he promoted the life-long friendship of shepherds through the arts.

The tradition of Renaissance humanism praised the learning of dearly deceased friends. In "To Camden," Ben Jonson praises his teacher Camden:

Camden, most reverend head, to whom I owe

All that I am in arts, all that I know

(How nothing's that!), to whom my country owes

The great renown and name wherewith she goes;

Than thee the age sees not that thing more grave,

More high, more holy, that she more would crave.

What name, what skill, what faith hast thou in things!

What sight in searching the most antique springs!

What weight and what authority in thy speech!

Man scarce can make that doubt, but thou canst teach.

Pardon free truth and let thy modesty,

Which conquers all, be once o'ercome by thee.

Many of thine this better could than I;

But for their powers, accept my piety. (1-14)

As Greenblatt writes, “[A] distinguished scholar and antiquary, [Camden] had been Jonson’s teacher at Westminster School” (1540). Jonson remembers Camden for his love of learning and the grace with which he passed it on to his students. Although he claims he does not learn as much as he ought from Camden, Jonson honors Camden as an intellectual giant, who promoted the liberal arts and deserves the praise of all humanists and English people because Camden advanced classical learning in England. Milton not only honors Diodati as an intellectual giant, but he also shares a kindred spirit and respects Diodati as an equal. To some degree, this validates Thyrsis’ friendship with Damon. While all the other shepherds appreciate Damon’s ability to sing poetry, only Thyrsis knows Damon was a unique man. Certainly for the speaker, the arts of Pallas Athene make themselves even more worthy when one encounters truly special people upon the quest. In Thyrsis’ quest he now has doubts about furthering his ability in the arts, but all Thyrsis need do is remember his friend Damon, and Thyrsis will not doubt he is on the right path.

Only months before the death of Charles Diodati, Milton left his parent’s Horton country house in 1638 to tour the continent. As William Riley Parker notes, “To Milton

the purpose of travel was not to learn principles but to enlarge experience, and make wise observation” (169). These experiences would give Milton an ethical basis for his argument in defense of religious liberty because he could observe Catholicism and offer correctives for the errors he believed were perpetuated by misinterpretation of scripture of the Church Fathers (Origen, Tertullian, Justin Martyr, and Clement).

From Paris to Nice, and Genoa to Tuscany, Milton traveled on to Siena, Rome, and Naples (170). His study of Roman history and the literary importance of the Italian Renaissance called Milton to acknowledge Italian soil in the philosophy he espoused. The humanism of the Italian Renaissance lifted Vergil to a place of eminence among medieval and Early Modern readers. According to Jean Seznec, “Vergil moralizes the gods” (87). This moral traditional of receiving pagan literature appealed to the medievals, Early Moderns, Jesuits, and John Milton because it offered a point of comfortable access for Christians into pagan literature and because pagan literature is essential to our identity, culture, and worldview in the West.

On October 20, 1638, Milton attended the supper at the English Jesuit’s College in Rome (Lewalski 96). Milton’s appearance may seem odd for the Puritan who rails against Roman Catholicism’s tyrannical leadership in the Pope and bishops, its ornate and ritualized worship services, and its Latinizing of the Hebrew and Greek scriptures, which violated Milton’s humanist inclinations for the advancement of the liberal arts in foreign languages, but I think the humanist John Milton was intrigued by the way in

which the Jesuits interpreted and taught pagan mythology.<sup>5</sup> Jean Seznec writes that pagan mythology appealed to the Jesuits because

[t]hey were nurtured upon ancient letters, the most scrupulous among them cannot rid themselves of their classical memories and ways of thinking; as humanists, they continue to love what they condemn, or should condemn. . . . The Jesuit Ottonelli writes painting and sculpture do not perpetuate the worship of gods; no risk involved in preserving their memory, now that superstition has disappeared. . . . The figures of the gods can inspire love of good and hatred of evil. (265-69)

In his poetry, the humanist Milton uses some of the reasons Ottonelli lists. In *Arcades*, for example, Milton juxtaposes Lady Alice with Latona, Cybele, and Juno, showing that the wisdom of the Egerton matriarch deserves literary deification because she has a strong ethical and moral stance for the religious liberty she advocates. Milton's audience of syncretic shepherds responds to the literary deification of the Egerton matriarch because they realize she advances religious liberty for them. In contrast, Comus, an anti-shepherd and son of Bacchus, promotes the tyranny and misrule which threatens bodily harm, a

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<sup>5</sup> According to Jean Seznec, "Mythology occupied a place of honor in the Jesuit colleges, and the Jesuits teach the science of emblems. . . . The Jesuits represented themselves in the guides of Mercury coming down from heaven as the messenger charged with orders from the gods. . . . In other words mythology proclaims philosophical truths and moral concepts" (276-78).

false shepherd depriving his sheep of the good. However, like Damon, Lycidas deserves deification because of his love of goodness, both ethically and morally. While he is concerned with the artistic choices the images and symbolism of the pagan gods give his poetry, Milton considers philosophical wisdom and moral questions in ways similar to the Jesuits.

The most important mythic influence in *Epitaphium Damonis* comes from Theocritus' "Idyll I," extending the complication of Diodati's death with the analogue of Thyrsis and Daphnis. Milton draws from Theocritus, who writes that Thyrsis mourns for Daphnis in "Idyll I" when he praises a goatherd for his sweet music who in turn claims that Thyrsis' music is sweeter than the muses' and requests Thyrsis' famous song of "The Sufferings of Daphnis." If Thyrsis will sing this song for the goatherd as he did in his match with the Libyan Chromis, the goatherd will give Thyrsis three milkings of a goat and a deep cup. Thyrsis then agrees to sing his song of Daphnis for the goatherd.<sup>6</sup> Since

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<sup>6</sup> At the beginning of Thyrsis' song he asks the nymphs where they were when Daphnis the cowherd wasted away. Jackals, wolves, and lions lamented Daphnis' passing. Oxen, bulls, heifers, and calves sang dirges for him. Hermes, cowmen, shepherds, and goatherds wanted to know why Daphnis was wasting away in Hades. Priapus asked if bitter love was the cause of Daphnis' grief. Daphnis tells Cypris that even from Hades, he will be a source of melancholy. Daphnis was loved by a nymph, who warned him if he slept with any other woman he would lose his sight. He lost his sight when an infatuated princess got him drunk and slept with him, rendering him blind. In Thyrsis' song Daphnis

Daphnis approaches death in his song, Thyrsis asks all things to run contrary. He asks the pine tree to sprout pears, the stags to tear the dogs apart, and the nightingale to cry out to the owls at day's dawn. Even though Aphrodite wished to raise Daphnis to life again, the thread which the Fates had given Daphnis had run out. Fates are the classical judges of life and death. However, if one were to read this in both the humanist and Puritan tradition (as Milton does through his use of syncretism in *Epitaphium Damonis*), death is not a tragedy. Milton writes that because of his death Damon is certainly among the gods: "Tu quoque in his certe es" [You are certainly also among them] (199). According to Clay Daniel, Milton believes that "Death liberates the good souls from the sordid prison of the flesh, and death is a great blessing" (38). Thyrsis tells how Daphnis comes to the river, but the river closes over Daphnis, as the admiring muses and nymphs watch. Daphnis' end is purposely created in a mysterious way by Thyrsis. This may be the river of the Underworld, or Daphnis may have drowned in an earthly river. Thyrsis ends his song, and the goatherd presents Thyrsis with the cup and goats for milking, as Manso presented Milton with cups. As Theocritus' Thyrsis laments the death of Daphnis, Milton's Thyrsis laments the death of Damon.

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continues to elude the girl who seeks his love. Daphnis bids farewell to the animals of the mountain, saying he will no longer haunt the mountain's groves. Daphnis invokes Pan to come to Sicily's isles. He asks Pan to take his pipe and witness how love drags him off to Hades.

In relation to *Epitaphium Damonis*, Theocritus' "Idyll I" serves many purposes for Milton. Thyrsis' goatherd, as the audience, becomes Milton's Italian friends and readers of *Epitaphium Damonis*. As Thyrsis' goatherd encourages Thyrsis to sing his song, Milton's readers encourage the speaker sing his, yet once more. The gifts the goatherd bears for Thyrsis are substituted by Manso's presentation of Milton with two cups, which represent literary history, and Milton represents his gratitude toward Manso for the cups in the poem by stressing the importance of the liberal arts of Pallas Athene and showing how all the shepherds who labor in this trade form a tight-knit poetic community. After reading the poem the reader will agree Damon is a special and rare friend of Thyrsis, and it is proper for the speaker to honor Damon with his words, just as Thyrsis was honored by the goatherd with the cup. Thyrsis' new cup, full of goat milk, is a source of sustenance, refreshment, and inspiration. As the goatherd befriends and consoles Thyrsis after the loss of Daphnis, Milton's Italian readers become a metaphoric shepherd, consoling the speaker in this time of grief. Their characteristics as syncretic shepherds are important in that the audience's ideology aligns with the humanist and Puritan consolations which help the speaker work through his grief. Milton's Thyrsis resembles Theocritus' Thyrsis because both sing songs in the pastoral environment, and the grief of both immortalizes their friends and touches the readers. Their stories are told well in the pastoral environment because the contrast of an environment isolated by friendship is palpable for the reader and listener, and their praise for their friends is exquisite, as they write of their friends encountering the gods. Their friends become literary deities.

Damon becomes Milton's substitute for Daphnis, and by this substitution Milton praises his deceased friend, drawing upon the rich tradition of Theocritus having Thyrsis praise Daphnis. Damon is also an appropriate replacement for Daphnis because Damon, or "L'Allegro," the mirthful one, attracted many people, nymphs, animals, and other creatures by his personality. This magnetic personality caused the admiration and desire of many for Damon, but, according to the poem, and, like Daphnis, Damon guarded his virginity. As Daphnis continued to guard his chastity from fear of Hades, Milton's Thyrsis claims Damon will be elevated in the afterlife for his virtue on earth. Milton's analogue of Theocritus' "Idyll I" suggests gratitude to his leaned Italian humanist friends as well, who provide another model of friendship for Thyrsis and Damon by offering another layer of substitution for Damon.

With the death of Charles Diodati (Damon in the poem), it is difficult for Milton to find a replacement for the depth of friendship and the breadth of culture, learning, and thought of Damon. It is not only the death of a dear, close friend, but also the loss of the embodiment of Milton's scholarly ideal. Their multi-lingual letters represent a harsh loss for Milton of a rare and meaningful friendship. Milton's audience of Italian humanist friends becomes more important as a reminder of and substitute for Charles Diodati. With their ethnic, literary, and ethical composition, Milton's small audience of Italian humanists becomes a further example of syncretic shepherd friendship.

To whom shall Thyrsis confide his heart now that Damon is gone? "Pectora cui credam?" [To whom shall I confide my heart?] (45). This question haunts Thyrsis. Damon is the only individual Thyrsis knows on earth in whom he was able to confide



because he understood the syncretic shepherd's nature to value the liberal over the practical arts, like Milton's Italian audience. Could there be another friend for Thyrsis? Is there another Damon who could possibly emerge on England shores, after acquiring learning and knowledge from the Roman and Italian masters? Milton must look overseas toward his Italian audience; however, Thyrsis must accept the reality that his prized friendship is no longer human. The memories and hope for a future reunification must power Thyrsis through the despair.

Memory has, however, the power to cause despair for the speaker. The memories of their times spent together and all of the unique qualities of Damon could plunge Thyrsis into depression:

Cum Pan aesculea somnum capit abditus umbra

Et reptant sub aquis sibi nota sedilia nymphae,

Pastoresque latent, stertit sub saepe colonus,

Quis mihi blanditiasque tuas, quis tum mihi risus

Cecropiosque sales referet, cultosque lepores?

[With Pan asleep and out of sight in the shade of the oak,

And the nymphs returned to their seats below the water,

Shepherds hiding, and the ploughman snoring under the hedge,

Who then will bring back to me your mirth and attic salt,

Your culture and humor?] (52-56).

The speaker's loss is confounded by the gods' indifference. The classical world's lack of concern for Damon's death and Thyrsis' loss trouble the speaker. With the absence of

Pan, the shepherds, the nymphs, and the ploughmen, the pastoral world looks chaotic. In the noon-time of the speaker's existence, he seeks solace in the humanist and learned qualities from Damon. The pastoral world brought these shepherds together, and their appreciation of the liberal arts of Pallas Athene made them a unique and brotherly pair. Thyrsis' grief is compounded by Pan, by the nymphs' and the shepherds' distance, and by their lack of solidarity with the speaker and his loss. Surely, Pan as god of poetry would understand the loss of a comrade in the poetic arts. The pastoral world does not support, nor can it support, Thyrsis at its distance. From this pastoral origin, Thyrsis is ready to move forward with his poetic life.

Given the absence of Damon, the future of the syncretic-shepherd speaker Thyrsis is called into question. Nymphs wonder what is to become of Thyrsis: "Mirantur nympphae, et 'Quid te, Thyrsi, futurum est? / Quid tibi vis?'" [The nymphs ask, What is to be your future, Thyrsis? What do you wish?] (82-83). The nymphs respond as would an audience of learned Italian humanists, showing pity and curiosity for the shepherd who lost his friend. Yet, the speaker is unmoved by flattery and hope. Instead, he recognizes that he must persevere in the arts of Pallas Athene and work through his grief, for this will be Thyrsis' most appropriate way to praise and hold the memory of his fallen friend.

Before Damon was dead, Thyrsis said he had hope for the future. Now with the death of Damon, Thyrsis claims the arts of the learned doctors will perish. There will not be doctors sensitive enough to the transmission of cultural knowledge. The new doctors will only seek to gain profit from material lifted from these earlier cultures, instead of

completely contextualizing the learning of these ancient cultures. In a sense these new doctors become thieves or wolves.

The poem reaches its climax when the poet resolves to tell an epic story to the literary world: “Ipse ego Dardanias Rutupina per aequora puppes / Dicam” [I will tell the story of the Trojan ships] (162-63). Pastoral does not work for Milton any longer because it no longer has syncretic shepherds with champions like Damon and an audience sensitive enough to pastoral dwindles. The poet looks toward his future and tries to find fulfillment in epic because, whether it is the origin of the English nation or of all humanity, the poet’s Early Modern audience is ready to receive an epic tale of origin, human choice, and struggle. For him epic is public, and Milton wishes to leave his private, pastoral pain aside and delve into larger and broader themes.

Thyrsis’ pastoral departure weighs heavily on his heart: “Haec tibi servabam lenta sub cortice lauri.” [I was keeping these things for you under the tough-barked laurel] (180). In addition to its ability to repeal lightning, the laurel as crown symbolizes a poet who excels in the arts. The arts of Pallas Athene compel Thyrsis forward, and this leads to his consolation. As a newly determined epic poet, the speaker sees the laurel as encouragement in his new efforts, as well signifying Damon’s pure spirit.

Thyrsis continues to honor the syncretic nature of Damon. The two cups—“tum quae mihi pocula Mansus” [the two drinking cups from Manso] (181)—are literary gifts meant to encourage the young poet. On these cups literary history is inscribed, and Manso predicts Milton will make literary history. The gift becomes more personally

connected to the conclusion as Milton imagines this is a gift Diodati would have received. The speaker substitutes himself for Damon in receiving the gift.

The phoenix rises from the ashes, and the destruction Thyrsis' experiences from Damon's death is succeeded by rebirth. The speaker will experience new life in writing epic poetry because it will expand his horizons for humanity and literary history, but the speaker must first pay a fitting tribute to the departed Damon, and there is no more fitting tribute for the speaker to pay to Damon than the greatest praises of the classical and Puritan traditions.

*Epitaphium Damonis*' bipartite conclusion is the culmination of the importance Milton places in his syncretic shepherds, for Damon dwells in heaven among the gods. Damon's appropriation of classical rewards and his alignment with the virtues and morality of dissenting Protestantism show the effect Milton imagines for religious liberty:

Ite procul, lacrymae; purum colit aethera Damon,  
Aethera purus habet, pluvium pede reppulit arcum;  
Heroumque animas inter, divosque perennes,  
Aethereos haurit lattices et gaudia potat  
Ore Sacro.

[Be gone my tears! Damon inhabits the pure aether,  
the aether which he is pure enough to have, and his foot repels the  
rainbow.

Among the souls of heroes and the immortal gods  
He drinks the draughts of heaven and quaffs its joys

With his sacred lips.] (203-07)

The characteristics of syncretic shepherds help Thyrsis find consolation and conclude the poem. Thyrsis notes the classical reward that Damon will enjoy: “Heroumque animas inter, divosque perennes, / Aethereos haurit lattices et gaudia potat / Ore sacro” [Among the souls of heroes and the immortal gods he drinks the draughts of heaven and quaffs its joys with his sacred lips] (205-07). If Milton were a strict Puritan, this would not be the conclusion of the poem, but instead the reader would note the absence of the heroes, immortal gods, and inebriating drink from the Puritan heaven. The expansion of heaven is thanks to Milton’s Puritan and humanist syncretism, and Damon deserves to dwell with the heroes and immortal gods because he sang their praises during his life, practicing the liberal arts of Pallas Athene. From heaven the speaker also asks for Damon to “Dexter ades, placidusque fave” [assist and gently favor me] (208). Like Lycidas and with the full power of his syncretic shepherds, Milton’s speaker Thyrsis imagines Damon as a protecting deity of shepherds and poets. This classical attribute and reward are only possible as a result of the imagination of the humanist poet Milton, who stresses the connection of heaven and earth, where deities protect and favor mortals. Thyrsis notes how Damon’s Puritan virtues of “purpureus pudor” [the blush of modesty] (212) and “virginei” [virginity] (214) result in rewards of “corona” [a crown] (215) and “palmae” [palms] (216). For Damon Thyrsis conjoins these rewards: “Aeternum perages immortals hymenaeos, / Cantus ubi, choreisque furit lyra mista beatis” [You shall enact your part eternally in the immortal marriage where song and the sound of the lyre are mingled in

ecstasy with blessed dances] (217-18). Damon's joy will be so intense that Milton finds it difficult to describe it adequately, but he likens it to a marriage of song and the lyre.

Milton offers hope in the conclusion to *Epitaphium Damonis*, in which the syncretic shepherd Damon achieves the highest rewards of both the humanist-classical and Puritan traditions. Damon's apotheosis and entry into heaven render him a divine shepherd. For Milton, after Lady Alice, Sabrina and the Lady of *A Mask*, and Lycidas, it stands to Milton's poetic reason that Diodati should receive the highest rewards of heaven because Milton and Diodati are close, intellectual equals and shared a love of Greco-Roman learning and Judeo-Christian values and were liberated from strict dogmatic teachings of the bishops by this syncretism. However, this is Milton's last great shepherd to receive the honor of heaven (excepting Christ, who comes after Damon in Milton's great epic). Milton ends his pastoral poetry with Damon's apotheosis and entry into heaven and claims he needs catharsis from the task of writing an epic. He seeks to portray the truth of humanity's origin because his humanist and Puritan sufferings from the great loss of this learned friend and dear brother can find consolation in humanity's final destination and origin. The brotherly affection Milton felt for Diodati was never repeated during Milton's earthly existence. It is an alarming thought that the end of Milton's pastoral poetry is followed naturally by a long poetic drought in the English Civil War and only later his epic quest, in which Milton the writer and human being would go through wand'ring error until his own literary apotheosis and entry into heaven to meet joyfully his dear friend Diodati.

Importantly, Milton writes, “*pluvium pede reppulit arcum*” [his foot repels the rainbow] (206). John Shawcross asserts this image marks separation: “And in ‘*Epitaphium Damonis*,’ Diodati, as we have seen, has rejected the rainbow—the lower Elysium of Adonis—to ascend to the higher heaven with God. . . . The poem becomes an excursion in nostalgia and in wish-fulfillment” (54). With the full amount of religious liberty invested in his syncretic shepherd Damon, Milton writes that Damon’s syncretic nature allows him to choose (to reject the rainbow) and ascend the divine order into a higher heaven, one which aligns itself with Judeo-Christian beliefs and values. Because the poem concludes very personally when Milton imagines an eternal joy for his friend that would not have been possible without the syncretic nature of Damon and his combination of classical and Puritan reward, the critical reader cannot help but acknowledge Shawcross’s crucial point that Milton’s nostalgia for the friendship he and Diodati had in their youth is overpowering. The distance strengthens Milton’s beatified image of Diodati and Milton’s conviction to write poems pregnant with religious liberty, so others can ascend the higher Elysium, like Damon, who was not denied sainthood by doctrinal enforcement but given it instead through poetry.

Milton’s Italian and Latin-reading audience not only found in this poem a celebration of the liberal arts of Pallas Athene, but also their presence in it enhances the poem’s beautiful portrait of friendship and makes it easier for Milton to reflect upon his friendship with Diodati. It is a friendship based upon Italian customs and traditions, but it is enhanced by Diodati’s Puritan humanism, which calls for religious liberty. Milton’s Italian audience nods its heads in approbation as the audience sees the Italian tradition

planted and customized for English shores. Milton uses the rich tradition of Italian pastoral—aimed at an Italian audience who certainly understands pastoral’s rich tradition—to lament the loss of Charles Diodati and show theirs was not a common friendship, based on the praiseworthy models of friendship Milton witnessed in his Italian travels and by looking back on the Italian literary pastoral tradition. As Thyrsis turns his head with a backward glance, Damon nods in loving kindness as the shepherds praise his eternal song.



## CONCLUSION

Having focused on the liberal theological education at Cambridge University after a childhood spent in a devout Puritan household, John Milton wrote pastoral poetry in the 1630s to enrich and expand the biblical tradition of shepherds. In doing so, he set about to enhance the classical pastoral traditions by adding the ethos of the Renaissance humanist, creating syncretic shepherd characters that combine the highest values of both traditions. While some Early Modern English poets, including Richard Crashaw, saw no merit in conjoining classical gods and Christ, other Early Modern English writers, like Ben Jonson, glorified both Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values. The young Milton recognized the merits of the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions independently. In conjoining these traditions in his poetry, he confirmed that he was not a paranoid Puritan who feared a return to Roman Catholic rule, and became a confident spokesman, who, through the voices and actions of his dignified syncretic shepherds, advanced the argument that tyrannical rule by church and political leaders works against their efforts to serve the people in their charge. In *Nativity Ode*, “L’Allegro,” *Arcades*, *A Mask*, *Lycidas*, and *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton creates dignified syncretic shepherd characters, who in coordinating the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian traditions, serve as moral and ethical examples who embody an argument that dissenting Protestant groups deserve religious liberty.

The Puritan John Milton believed that poetry was the appropriate vehicle for his call for liberation from the English bishops, and although he wrote in a climate of Puritan paranoia, he did not fear a return in seventeenth-century England to the oppressive

climate of Roman Catholicism. Specifically, with his syncretic shepherds, Milton proclaims the interpretive and hermeneutic errors of the Church Fathers, especially Clement and Justin Martyr. Milton's syncretic shepherds emphasize that bishops or popes do not need to assert absolute authority or to suppression of dissenting voices to rule effectively; in fact, according to Milton, a message of tolerance and benign rule permeates scripture, and guided by scriptural authority, Milton emphasizes how syncretic shepherds can serve, protect, and rule more effectively according to their inclusive and non-tyrannical ways. Even as he is aware of the ethical overlapping among the Christian, classical, and humanist traditions, Milton rejects Justin Martyr's claim, based on interpretations of scripture and patristic texts, that pagans qualify as Christians because the logos of Christ planted seeds of Christianity in their pagan cultures. In contrast, Milton's impulse to juxtapose these disparate moral and spiritual traditions allow for pre-Christian people to find consolation through their own distinct forms of salvation while Christians find salvation in Christ. With his belief in the possibility of salvation across disparate spiritual traditions, Milton positions himself against those Church Fathers and thus directs his call for religious liberty against the bishops.

In refiguring the traditional tales of classical shepherds, Milton reveals his pastoral purpose more fully. The shepherds contemplate their fates and sing about sad events, but, in rendering these tragic tales with such beauty, Milton infuses them with an imperative of moral virtue. Milton introduces the classical shepherds Thyrsis and Lycidas in his poems, thus emphasizing the rich pastoral tradition that shapes his early poetry and also consolidates centuries of lament and joy into his characters. Milton's use of the

pastoral gives his artistic rendering of the melancholic life a “backward glance.” In directing this “backward glance” toward Early Modern society, he confirms how the moral aspects of the pastoral genre become relevant to the religious tensions in his own Early Modern world. In Milton’s *Thyrsis* and *Lycidas* readers see a syncretic blend of the highest Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian virtues. In the call for religious liberty that Milton’s syncretic shepherds advocate, readers see Milton’s own call for protest against the authoritarian bishops who enforced the dogmatic policies of King Charles I.

The Egerton family was a significant audience for Milton’s pastoral poetry. Puritan in his learnings, John Egerton, the first earl of Bridgewater, commissioned Milton’s *Arcades* and *A Mask* not only as pastoral entertainment but also to honor the convictions, ethics, and Puritan beliefs of his family and relatives. In paying respect to the wisdom and ethics of Lady Alice Spenser, his step-mother, the Earl of Bridgewater received joyfully Milton’s portrait of a deified Queen surrounded by syncretic shepherds. In offering his syncretic message to this receptive Puritan audience with distinct humanist leanings, Milton galvanized the Egertons’ hope for religious liberty in opposition to Charles’ Catholic-leaning court, meanwhile offering protest against those bishops who had been entrusted with reintroducing Catholic icons to Protestant churches.

In *Arcades* the shepherds and nymphs place their trust in the leadership of the Queen. William Riley Parker describes the significance of this gesture in noting that “The nymphs and shepherds have come from far off Arcady to England in search of a new patroness or presiding deity, whom they find in the aging countess—they seek and find in England [in *Arcades*] a new homeland for pastoral poetry” (84). The poem’s deification

of Lady Alice Spenser signals the respect felt toward her by her step son, the earl of Bridgewater. Likewise, in Lady Alice's deification, readers see the Egerton family's openness toward Milton's project of bringing Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values together—a message for a literate family schooled in the humanist tradition and one recognizing the value of artistic expression. Lady Alice Spenser was an important patron of the arts and one favorably represented in Edmund Spenser's work. Mindful of her appreciation of the humanist aspects of Spenser's poetry, Milton patterns his poems also after the aesthetic and philosophical virtues of Ben Jonson's works. Significantly, Jonson's "At Penshurst" serves as a literary bridge between the Sidney and Egerton estates as a work that confirms both families' love of classical learning and their appreciation for humanist ethics.

In commissioning Milton to pay tribute to Lady Alice Spenser in *Arcades*, the Egertons understood that any work that broadly sanctified her in glorious tribute would not be enough, or rather would not be complete. Instead, Milton insures that Lady Alice receives the fullness of praise, respect, and honor in her deification because she appreciates the best aspects of the classical and the Judeo-Christian traditions that shape her moral and spiritual perspective. This portrayal elevates Lady Alice from the limitation of mere sainthood and confirms her complex appreciation for multiple literary traditions. More important, her portrayal in *Arcades* confirms Lady Alice's appreciation of and intellectual engagement with humanist learning, thus also confirming the right of the Egerton family to engage in whatever ethical and religious practices they deem fit within the context of multiple intellectual and artistic traditions.

Similarly, in *A Mask*, in which Sabrina's magic and the lady's virtue combine to mitigate the ravaging designs of Comus, Milton likewise honors the Egertons by highlighting the multiple traditions that justify their quest for religious liberty. Here Milton honors the Earl of Bridgewater and his daughter, who played the role of the Lady, including her in a narrative that modeled the means by which one makes virtuous choices. By enabling her to assert her virtue of chastity in warding off Comus' advances, Milton again confirms the Egertons as formidable proponents of humanist virtue, and as devoted advocates for religious liberty. As a character, Comus represents the kings and bishops' tyranny and dogmatic control which Milton's "fit but few" audience rejects. In rejecting the dogmatic and morally suspect positions that Comus stands for, Milton asserts the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian values embodied in Sabrina and the Lady, an elevation of cultural syncretism that brings the narrative of *A Mask* to an appropriate resolution.

The Egertons do not ignore the story of Sabrina's apotheosis. Milton, with their patronage, syncretically portrayed the virtues of Sabrina and the Lady, as the Lady escaped the tyranny of Comus by reconciling disparate pagan and Christian traditions to choose her way forward. In allegorical terms, the poem implies that the Egertons sought to escape the political and religious tyranny of their time, desiring that their Puritan worship be respected in society. As with the Lady's struggle and ultimate liberation, religious pluralism becomes the family's liberating force, leading them past the climate of dogmatism and intolerance.

In his attack against Catholic and Anglican bishops, Milton believes his Puritan humanism is justified because people deserve ethical treatment in order to realize their own virtue and liberty. In his publication of *Lycidas* in a Cambridge University collection of poems entitled *Obsequies in the Memory of Mr. Edward King*, an anthology that honors the life of deceased classmate Edward King, Milton likewise urges his audience of Cambridge University classmates to consider the condition of their religious liberty. Like the Egertons, and confirmed by his tribute to their continuing pursuit of autonomy and fit spiritual practice, Milton's fit-but-few audience of Cambridge University students had the power also to influence and shape culture. During their years of ministerial training at Cambridge, many students were prepared to embrace the practices and protocols of the Church of England. Their education was based on what Milton believed to be false patristic interpretations by Justin Martyr and Clement of bishops' authority. Recognizing the limitations of this body of spiritual practice, Milton took it upon himself to teach these classmates that the English bishops followed incorrect scriptural interpretations. In this effort to nudge his contemporaries toward what he saw as a healthier strain of religious practice, he saw also how syncretic shepherds, who valued individual liberty and well-being, would liberate the church's flock from the "wolf with privy paw" and would restore the fold to fit practice.

Within this poetic tribute to Edward King, the pastoral mode is also important for simplifying the complexities of *Lycidas*' death. In *Lycidas*' apotheosis, the speaker works through melancholy and, instead of arriving at despair and the prospect of a meaningless universe, discovers the divine attributes of *Lycidas* as genius of the shore while

simultaneously having his eternal being in Christ. Ultimately, Milton elevates Lycidas from the humble shepherd's weeds to eternal genius of the shore because, like Sabrina and unlike the anti-heroic Comus, Milton sought to portray Lycidas as a virtuous, truthful, and lowly wise shepherd—a syncretic shepherd who could have made a difference in the Church of England. Furthermore, one finds freedom from death, realized in the prospect of eternal life in Lycidas as both humble shepherd and eternal genius. It remains important for Milton to allow both of these beliefs to exist simultaneously, using them in appropriate combination to overcome meaninglessness and death. Thyrsis as the speaker of *Lycidas* overcomes death by embracing both beliefs, thereby confirming the truth of dissenting Protestant claims for religious liberty against the dogmatic strictures of the bishops.

Beyond the syncretic character shown in the portrayal of *Lycidas*, Milton continued this pattern in *Epitaphium Damonis*, for Damon's apotheosis and entry into heaven likewise confirm him as a divine shepherd. Thyrsis notes the classical reward that Damon will receive: "Heroumque animas inter, divosque perennes, / Aethereos haurit lattices et gaudia potat / Ore sacro" [Among the souls of heroes and the immortal gods he drinks the draughts of heaven and quaffs its joys with his sacred lips] (205-07). If Milton were a strict Puritan, this would not be the conclusion of the poem, but rather the reader would note the absence of the heroes and immortal gods from the Puritan heaven. Instead, the symbolic expansion of heaven accommodates, according to Milton's Puritan humanism, the "lowly wise" as well.

Charles Diodati, his friend at St. Paul's School and intellectual counterpart, died in the summer of 1638. Milton reflects upon their relationship, deciding that their friendship conforms to patterns of literary friendship and that Damon deserves to dwell with the heroes and immortal gods because the two practiced the liberal arts of Pallas Athene. In *Epitaphium Damonis*, the liberal arts help Milton reconstruct a friendship that cooled in 1630 and ended in 1638. In Damon's absence, Milton modeled a humanist friendship based on the warmth and encouragement he had experienced on his continental trip from his Italian hosts, notably Manso. This traditional model of friendship is important because it gave life to Damon, his absent friend of Italian heritage. As a syncretic shepherd, Damon represents also the hopes of religious liberty for dissenting Protestant groups. John Shawcross writes,

In "Epitaphium Damonis" Diodati is worthy because of his "sweet and holy simplicity," his "radiant virtue," his "blushing modesty," his "youth without blemish," and because he did not taste of "the delight of marriage." The reward of virginity is salvation, according to Revelation 14:4: "These are they which were not defiled with women; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth." Likewise in his friendship for Milton, Diodati has shown his worthiness (ll. 37-56). The apotheosis is certain, to Milton, and implied when he cites the passing of the eleventh day. (34-35)

In the example of Damon, Milton proves that someone who is not a member of the Catholic or Anglican churches can achieve salvation based on his or her merits and



virtue. Using what he believes to be Damon's virginity and the example Revelation 14:4, Milton argues to his audience of Italian humanists that dissenting Puritans have earned a rightful place in heaven, thereby validating his claim for religious liberty from the bishops.

After *Lady Alice*, *Sabrina and the Lady*, and *Lycidas*, Milton grants Damon the highest rewards of heaven, for Milton and Diodati shared a love for all things Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian and were both liberated from the constraints of doctrine by their shared syncretism; however, Damon represents Milton's last great shepherd to receive the honor of heaven, thus signaling the transition from concerns addressed in his early poem and those conflicts that remained to come. As an older poet, writing after years of conflict, trials, and hardship, the mature Milton writes of Jesus Christ. For Milton, the loss of a dear friend and brother and the affection Milton felt for Diodati was compounded by reflections upon their untimely separation as close friends in 1630. Damon comes to embody the best aspects of the pastoral, syncretic shepherd because Milton felt his friend embodied these virtues in a friendship that had existed in its prime more than a decade before. The distance provided Milton the reflection necessary to instill his shepherd Damon with the ultimate syncretic qualities that come to stand for humanist principles that would guarantee liberty to Puritans (including Diodati and Milton). In the summer of 1638, the most important things Diodati and Milton shared were their faith in God and their appreciation for the classical traditions that shaped the arts.

In his pastoral poetry, Milton uses the liberating forces of syncretic shepherds to save his readers from the fear of misguided rule from the bishops and Church Fathers. Milton creates his syncretic shepherds to promote choice and liberate his reading audience from tyrannical, doctrinal control of their values and beliefs. Facing threats of violence and death, Milton's syncretic shepherds assert a diversity of responses to these threats. Milton's Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian syncretism hopes to ensure religious liberty to all individuals of dissenting Protestant sects, allowing his readers to meet the threats of coercion, violence, and death with dignity, confidence, and hope.

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