

# ミルトンの『リシダス』を虚心坦懐に読む

ジェイムス・スコット\*

## Toward a Literal Reading of Milton's *Lycidas*

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### 概 要

ジョン・ミルトンの『リシダス』の最初の14行は、劇的な独白の舞台を作っているように見える。それらの行の織りなす臨場感は、76行目のまん中まで持続している。けれども、その臨場感は、76行目のまん中で生起する時制の変化で雲散霧消させられるように見える。『『でも、言葉じゃないよ』、とフィーボスは答えて、私の震える耳にささやいた。』羊飼いが現在形で問を発しているとすれば、一体またどうして、フィーボスは過去形で答えたのであろうか。

現在形から過去形への時制の変化は、長年、ミルトン学者たちの関心の的であった。しかしながら、終結部即ち『リシダス』の最後の8行で語られている内容を私たちが理解すれば、当該の時制の変化は、極めて容易に説明を付けることが可能である。終結部は、羊飼いがその詩の最初の185行を語るただ一人の人物であることを確認させてくれるし、また、その羊飼いが暫時自ら詩作して、一人口ずさんでいるのを暗示している。私たちが

そのことを十分に理解すれば、詩全体の中に見られる時制の変化を容易に説明することができる。例えば、運命の女神が羊飼いの邪魔をして、常に彼を殴り殺すことができる時にも、羊飼いは歌を作りながら、自分がなぜ羊の世話をする過酷な労働に我が身を捧げなければならないかを尋ねる。そのとき羊飼いは、フィーボスが答えを返す間、口を閉ざしてじっと聞き入る。フィーボスが語り終わると、羊飼いはフィーボスの答えを歌に仕立て上げる。フィーボスが語り終わったあとに羊飼いはそうするからこそ、羊飼いは過去時制を用いるのである。『リシダス』の中のそのほかの時制の変化も同様に、説明することが可能である。

以上概要を述べた流儀で時制の変化を説明すれば、『リシダス』とは正に、ミルトンがもともと語っているように、それは「仲間のエドワード王の死を記念するために書かれた牧歌的哀歌」だったのである。

**KEY WORDS :** *Milton, Lycidas, pastoral, elegy, tense*

The first fourteen lines of John Milton's *Lycidas* appear to set the stage for a dramatic monologue :

Yet once more, O ye laurels, and once more,  
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,  
I come to pluck your berries harsh and crude,

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And with forced fingers rude  
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.  
Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear  
Compels me to disturb your season due :  
For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime,  
Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer.  
Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew  
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
He must not float upon his watery bier  
Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
Without the meed of some melodious tear.<sup>1</sup>

The present tense verbs in the first six lines--“come,” “Shatter,” “compels”--set the scene in the speaker’s present--i. e., he conveys his thoughts and actions at the same time that he thinks those thoughts and performs those actions. The next eight lines tell us why the speaker is plucking the berries and shattering the leaves. His actions are part of the ritual he is going through as he prepares to sing an elegy to his deceased friend Lycidas.

Through the middle of line 76, the poem continues to give the impression that we are observing the speaker as he composes and sings his elegy. In lines 15-22, he asks the Muses to provide the musical accompaniment for his song and expresses the hope that someone will compose a similar elegy when it is the speaker’s turn to die. In lines 23-36, the speaker identifies himself as a shepherd and recalls how he and Lycidas used to tend their flocks of sheep and sing songs together. In lines 37-49, he describes the sense of desolation that he shares with Nature now that Lycidas is gone. In lines 50-63, he laments that nothing could have been done to save Lycidas’s life. And in lines 64-76, he questions the wisdom of devoting his life to tending his flocks and singing songs, when Death can strike at any time and wipe out everything.

This illusion of immediacy--this sense that we are observing the shepherd while he is composing and singing his song--appears to be undermined by the second half of line 76 and by line 77 :

“But not the praise,”

Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ear.

“Replied,” and “touched” are past tense verb forms. If the shepherd is asking his question *now*, how can Phoebus have replied in the *past*?

Phoebus’s reply is followed by a series of additional tense shifts that can easily serve to further confuse the reader’s sense of time. At lines 88-92, we find the following :

But now my oat proceeds,  
And listens to the Herald of the Sea  
That came in Neptune’s plea.  
He asked the waves, and asked the felon winds,

What hard mishap hath doomed this gentle swain?

That is, the shepherd's oat listens to the Herald of the Sea, who asked the waves and wind to tell him what happened to Lycidas. The reader is entitled to ask how the oat can be listening *now*, if the Herald asked his question in the *past*. Subsequently, at line 96, "sage Hippotades their answer brings," but at line 103, "Next, Camus, reverend sire, went footing slow." Again, the reader is entitled to ask how it is possible that Camus "went" (past tense) after Hippotades "brings" (present tense).

The questions posed above have been answered by different critics in different ways. John Crowe Ransom suggested that Milton deliberately violated the "canon of logic" in order to set *Lycidas* apart from more conventional pastoral elegies.<sup>2</sup> Donald M. Friedman acknowledged that the tense shifts confuse the reader, but argued that the "discomfort we feel as a result of such disorientation is a vital part of the experience of the poem."<sup>3</sup> And Stanley E. Fish suggested that the tense shifts serve to silence the individual voice of the shepherd and replace it with a communal voice (presumably that of all people who accept Christ as their savior).<sup>4</sup>

I would suggest that a far simpler and more plausible answer to the questions posed by the tense shifts is provided by the poem's coda, or epilogue--the last eight lines, spoken by an unidentified speaker, who provides a comment on what the shepherd has done :

Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills,  
While the still Morn went out with sandals gray :  
He touched the tender stops of various quills,  
With eager thought warbling his Doric lay :  
And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,  
And now was dropt into the western bay :  
At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue :  
Tomorrow to Fresh woods, and pastures new. (lines 186-93)

"Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills" identifies the shepherd as the sole speaker of the entire poem through line 185 and, hence, refutes Friedman's claim that the shepherd's voice is silenced part way through the poem. "While the still Morn went out with sandals gray" suggests that the shepherd is singing his elegy over time--it doesn't just take place in an instant. And "With eager thought warbling his Doric lay" gives the impression that the shepherd is composing his elegy at the same time that he is singing it.

If we put these thoughts together--that is, if we recognize that the shepherd is composing and singing his song *over time*, then we can easily account for the shifts in tense. Lines 1-63 pose no problem. The shepherd gathers berries and shatters leaves, asks the Muses to accompany his song, recalls the happy times he spent with Lycidas, describes the sense of loss now that Lycidas is gone, and laments that nothing could have been done to save Lycidas's life. Then he asks the following questions :

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

The shepherd listens in silence while Phoebus replies to his question. After thinking matters over, the shepherd incorporates Phoebus's reply into his song:

“But not the praise,”  
Phoebus replied, and touched my trembling ear. (lines 76-77)

Because the shepherd is incorporating Phoebus's reply into his song *after* Phoebus has given that reply, the shepherd uses the past tense.

Next, the shepherd listens to a procession of speakers--the Herald of the Sea, Camus, and the Pilot of the Galilean Lake--who are concerned with what happened to Lycidas. In each case, the Shepherd listens *first*, and records the speaker's words *later*. Consequently, in each case the Shepherd uses the past tense when recording another person's speech.

The one exception to the practice described immediately above is Hippotades: “And sage Hippotades their answer brings” (line 96). But that can be explained easily enough. All we need to do is to assume that in this particular instance, the shepherd jots down the line at the same time that he sees Hippotades coming to bring his answer.

After line 131, the shepherd is finished recording the speeches of other personages. Consequently, in line 132, he reverts to the present tense and continues in the present tense until he finishes his song, at the end of line 185. At line 186, an unidentified speaker takes over and speaks in the past tense, commenting on what he has seen the shepherd do.

The chief advantage to reading *Lycidas* in the way I have suggested above is that it enables us to see *Lycidas* as being what its author claimed it to be--a pastoral elegy written to mourn the loss of his colleague, Edward King, who was drowned in a shipwreck.<sup>5</sup>

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>John Milton, *Lycidas*, in *Seventeenth-Century Prose and Poetry*, edited by Alexander M. Witherspoon and Frank J. Warnke (New York: Harcourt, Brace, and World, Inc., 1963), p. 892. I will use the Witherspoon and Warnke

edition of *Lycidas* throughout.

<sup>1</sup>John Crowe Ransom, "A Poem Nearly Anonymous," reprinted in *Milton's Lycidas: The Tradition and the Poem*, edited by C. A. Patrides (Columbia, University of Missouri Press, 1983), pp. 83-84.

<sup>2</sup>Donald M. Friedman, "The Swain's Paideia," condensed by the author and reprinted in *Milton's "Lycidas": The Tradition and the Poem*, p. 288.

<sup>3</sup>Stanley E. Fish, "*Lycidas: A Poem Finally Anonymous*," reprinted in *Milton's Lycidas: The Tradition and the Poem*, pp. 337-39.

<sup>4</sup>Edward King, who went to college with Milton, was drowned in a shipwreck in 1637. *Lycidas* first appeared in a volume of memorial poems on King that was published in 1638.

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