

Milton and the Pastoral Mode: *The Epitaphium Damonis*

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The fates of Boethius and Thomas More alike have familiarized us with the picture of the scholar and humanist on the gibbet at the behest of some implacable despot.¹ John Milton (1608–74), who acclaimed the execution of Charles I in 1649, reversed these roles. Brilliantly gifted though he was, he is not therefore easily thought of as a humanist, certainly not as anything in the Erasmian mold, since he was too violent a partisan. Even claims that Milton was a “Renaissance” writer ring a little hollow. In the mid-seventeenth century, over a hundred years after the deaths of Leonardo (1519) and Raphael (1520)? Nevertheless, this article argues that the poet, even if an epigone, is not to be understood apart from the Classical tradition, and to that extent he is a humanist and even—perhaps—“Renaissance” author.² But the Classical tradition must not be interpreted in some woolly way. It offers a very precise yardstick against which deviations may be measured. Here, our concern is with the poet’s epic ambition.

Et quantum mihi restat ad Culicem! Lucan is supposed to have said (cf. Statius, *Silvae* 2. 7. 73), meaning perhaps that he had already attained brilliant success, while Virgil was still engaged on what were thought to be his *opera minora*—and perhaps more modestly that what he had done so far scarcely measured up to Virgil’s *juvenilia*. If Virgil established a pattern for the development of the European literary epic that was to become paradigmatic, it is clearly important to know what it was.

Virgil did not come to epic by an easy route. The *Life* by Donatus informs us (§19) that originally he toyed with a theme from Roman history. But he found it impossible to repeat what Ennius had done before him. He turned away—oddly, to a modern taste—to the pastoral. *Mox cum res Romanas incohasset, offensus materia ad Bucolica transiit*. He dropped these early epic plans, we also learn in one version of these remarks, because he was *offensus nominum asperitate*. It seems a curious reason, although since it is the reverse of what Quintilian (12. 10. 33) says about the *dulcedo* of

¹ *Io fei giubetto a me delle mie case*, says Dante’s Piero delle Vigne, *Inferno* 13. 151.

² English insularity should never be forgotten. Henry VII’s Chapel in Westminster Abbey, completed in a version of Gothic in the year of Leonardo’s death, is an amazing example.

Greek names, perhaps it is some indication that the exquisitely sensitive Roman felt again the incommensurability of the historical and the mythical already established by Aristotle in Chapter 9 of the *Poetics*.

Odd though this may be to modern taste, there is already here a replication of the precepts of Callimachus, who at the beginning of the *Aetia* (Book 1, fr. 1. 3–5 Pf.) had rejected the bombastic epic of war and history, and put forward instead the example of Hesiod, but of a Hesiod who was a shepherd (*Aet.* 1, fr. 2. 1–4):

ποιμῆνι μῆλα νέμονται παρ' ἴχνιον ὄξέος ἵππου
 Ἑσιόδῳ Μουσέων ἔσμῳς ὄτ' ἠντίασεν
 μ]έν οἱ Χάεος γενεσ[
]ἐπὶ πτέρνης ὕδα[

To the shepherd tending his flocks by the hoofmark of the swift horse, Hesiod, when the swarm of the Muses met him . . . to him the origin of Chaos . . . of heel . . . water.

1. Cf. μῆλα νέμοντι, Quintus Smyrnaeus, *Posthom.* 12. 310. Even though scholars find that Quintus was a shepherd at Smyrna (!), all the conventional passage means is that, by this time, even the pseudo-Homeric manner has to take on the color of the Hesiodic/Callimachean if it is to enjoy literary respectability.

2. ἔσμῳς here appears to compare the Muses implicitly with bees: cf. Διοῖ δ' οὐκ ἀπὸ παντὸς ὕδωρ φορέουσι μέλισσαι . . . *Hy.* 2. 110; μελιχρότεραι *Aet.* 1, fr. 1. 16; ἀλλ' ὀκνέω μὴ τὸ μελιχρότατον *Epigr.* 27. 2; *VRBANUM* . . . *mellifluis animatum Apibus*, . . . *fluent te mella canente*, Guidiccioni, *Ara Maxima Vaticana* (below, note 8) pp. 29–30; *As Bees / In spring time* etc, Milton, *P.L.* 1. 768–69.

Callimachus recommends therefore to the epic aspirant, not the versification of history to the glory of kings and great heroes which would become too common as the Hellenistic period advanced, but an epic under the patronage of Hesiod which would celebrate the origin of the world.

The stories of David and Amos show that there is already something religious about a shepherd who receives a revelation, as there is about the title Αἴτια; witness the many *aetia* dotting the Pentateuch. But “Hesiod” was also a stalking-horse, covertly enabling Callimachus to introduce a novel version of the Homeric. The first “Callimachean” epic we have, the *Argonautica* of Apollonius Rhodius, looks therefore like a conventional heroic tale, but its conventionalism is only apparent. It follows Callimachus’ own example in the *Hecale* of exploring the flip side of the heroic ideal, and it even shows some debt to the philosophical tradition.³ And what could Callimachus’ other epic, the *Galatea* (fr. 378–79 Pf.), have made of the attack of the Gauls on Delphi in 279–78?—a heroic theme, but hardly handled conventionally, if we judge by its list of exotic fish. But

³ Newman, *The Classical Epic Tradition* (Madison 1986) 78.

there was always room in this manner for the more obviously Hesiodic, even for a *Theogony*. This explains Callimachus' strong defence of Aratus (*Epigr.* 27), the Callimachean allegiance of Lucretius' *De Rerum Natura*, the plaintive admissions of *Georgics* 2. 475–84, and Book 6 of the *Aeneid*.

For Virgil then to adopt Callimachus' view of epic was no simple change of literary plan. The programmatic sixth *Eclogue* allows us to eavesdrop on the young poet's problems. In the poem, three points are relevant:

(a) It opens with a *recusatio*. This must be quoted:

cum canerem reges et proelia, Cynthus aurem
vellit et admonuit: 'pastorem, Tityre, pinguis
pascere oportet ovis, deductum dicere carmen.' 5
nunc ego (namque super tibi erunt qui dicere laudes,
Vare, tuas cupiant et tristia condere bella)
agrestem tenui meditabor harundine Musam.

When I wanted to sing of kings and their battles, Apollo plucked my ear, and added this advice: "A shepherd, Tityrus, should feed fat sheep, but thin-spun should be his song." For now I—since you will have a superfluity, Varus, wishing to celebrate your doughty deeds and fearful wars—I will rehearse my country music on the slender reed.

3. Cf. βασιλῆων (πρῆξιας? δῆριας?) Callimachus, *Aet.* 1, fr. 1. 3–4; *proelia / victas et urbes*, Hor. *Odes* 4. 15. 1–2.

4. τὸ μὲν θύος ὅτι πάχιστον *Aet.* 1, fr. 1. 23; παχὺ γράμμα καὶ οὐ τορὸν Call. fr. 398; *pingue pecus domino facias et cetera praeter / ingenium*, Hor. *Sat.* 2. 6. 14–15; *pingui nil mihi cum populo*, *Catal.* 9. 64.

5. *deducta tunc voce leo*, Lucilius, 985 M.; *deducta mihi voce garrienti*, Cornificius, Buechner, *Frag. Poet. Lat.*, fr. 1, p. 116; *deducta . . . voce*, Prop. 2. 33. 38.

6. *super . . . erunt*: τὰ μὴ πατέουσιν ἄμαξαι *Aet.* 1, fr. 1. 25; οὐδὲ κελεύθῳ / χαίρω, τίς πολλοὺς ᾧδε καὶ ᾧδε φέρει Callimachus, *Epigr.* 28. 1–2; οὔτοι ὡς ἐν δη- | μοκρατία· ἔξουσία γ(άρ) (ἔστι) | πολλῶ(ν), Schol. Lond. ad *Aet.* 1, fr. 1. 44, Pfeiffer, I, p. 7, 59–60.

8. Μοῦσαν . . . λεπταλέην *Aet.* 1, fr. 1. 24; λεπταὶ ῥήσιες *Epigr.* 27. 3–4; *Callimachi Manes . . . exactus tenui pumice versus eat*, Prop. 3. 1. 1, 8.

(b) It outlines a theory of epic (31 ff.) so deeply dependent on metamorphosis that we seem to be hearing a sketch of Ovid's later poem rather than of anything Virgil himself actually carried out. This impression is deceptive. The *Aeneid* is also Virgil's *Metamorphoses*, a flickering, umbrageous screen (*fugit indignata sub umbras*) on which nothing is ever one thing long.

(c) It concludes with allusions to Hesiod and Orpheus (65, 70–71).

What we must not do therefore is think of the Virgil that we know as abandoning Alexandrianism for heroic poetry, since he had already abandoned such poetry (*res Romanae*) for the Alexandrianism of the *Eclogues*, and was unlikely to retrace his steps (how could he?). Virgil moved towards the *Aeneid* while profoundly modifying, but still in some sense remaining faithful to, these original ideas. The *Georgics* exorcised some of his preoccupation with the Hesiodic, and even, if we think of the concluding episode, Orphic, although the theme of heroic anthropomorphism in that poem is not yet sufficiently explored. In the *Aeneid* itself, metamorphosis, transposed into the tragic key, triggers a whole complex polyphony of literary allusion. Book 6 allows Anchises to develop a cosmology (724 ff.).

But, although the pastoral plays some role in the epic, for example in Books 7 and 8, its thematic is never dominant. Aeneas in Libya is what Aeschylus calls a *κακὸς ποιμήν* (*pastor agens telis* 4. 71), but he is never a love-lorn swain of Theocritean or Bionian vintage. He has too strong a sense of his own destiny for that.⁴

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As a student of the Classical tradition, the Milton of *Paradise Lost* naturally exemplifies the Virgilian pattern, but his is a case of what may be called arrested development. This explains the unease which has been felt with his great epic ever since its publication in 1667. The elements which, in Virgil, are presented in clear and orderly succession, in Milton, are inchoate and commingled. We expect:

1. The abandonment of the pastoral, or at the very least its assumption into and transformation within a larger epic mold. It is this progression which enables the Hesiodic/Callimachean poet to relate the story of the origin of the world from Chaos, or to launch into cosmogony of some kind (Lucretius). This is why the supreme poet of this apocalyptic tradition is Dante, but a Dante who had defended his poetic program in an eclogue⁵ and who had been guided precisely by—Virgil.

2. The elevation of the satiric (comic, iambic) into the vatic. This was a sequence followed in lyric by Horace, and explains the satiric elements persisting, but not undigested, in the *Odes*. The Augustan poets' allegiance to the vatic ideal has been explored by me elsewhere. It is evident, for example, how much this side of their achievement appealed (again) to Dante.

⁴ An interesting study might be made of the elevation (and ultimately therefore disappearance) of the pastoral convention in the *Aeneid* into that of the Homeric/Stoic ποιμήν λαῶν.

⁵ *La corrispondenza poetica di Dante e Giovanni del Virgilio* etc., edd. G. Albinì and G. B. Pighi (Bologna 1965) 40–44.

3. The musical and tragic evocation of an inconstant world in which the hero, driven by destiny, pursues his stormy course towards a shadowy victory. The last word of the *Aeneid*, as of the penultimate line of the *Eclogues*, is *umbrasumbrae*. This epic tradition (the only genuine tradition of such poetry to survive from antiquity other than as a mere fossil) is inherently incapable of carrying a univocal message. This explains the tensions we feel in Lucretius.

But in Milton we find the impossible attempt to make the Hesiodic/Callimachean epic do duty as the purveyor of unchanging truths (to "justify the ways of God to men"). Since the means are incommensurate with the end, certain awkward consequences follow from the attempt to square the circle:⁶

1. The pastoral persists into epic, so much so that its model of ill-starred swain and inconstant nymph twists awry the Pauline theology of the Fall.
2. The satiric is pursued for its own sake (e.g. 3. 494, "the backside of the World;" cf. 10. 867 ff., on women, and below on the Barberini bees).
3. The inconstant world, which this style cannot allow itself to reflect as a mirror of the way things are, is treated at a comic level, in spite of assurances we receive (*P.L.* 9. 5–6) that tragedy is intended.⁷ Here, Milton's debt to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* and to Nonnus' *Dionysiaca* must be given full value.

Finer tuning picks up from the poet many inconsistent voices, as if at one moment he understood fully the polyphonic instruments he has at his disposal, and then again believed they could be played to deliver an unambiguous message. Milton is often and rightly praised for his music. But it was Thomas Mann who defined music as "systematic ambiguity" (*die Zweideutigkeit als System*).

To understand all this, one has to begin with Milton's beginnings. Just like Virgil, he was early drawn to the pastoral and, predictably, his *Lycidas* (1637) contains a *recusatio*. But this is a refusal which sets, not the epic against lowlier poetic ambition, as in Virgil's allusion to *reges et proelia*, but pastoral against amorous dalliance:

Alas! What boots it with uncessant care	
To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,	65
And strictly meditate the thankles Muse,	
Were it not better don as others use,	
To sport with <i>Amaryllis</i> in the shade,	
Or with the tangles of <i>Neæra</i> 's hair?	
<i>Fame</i> is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise	70

⁶ The metaphor is drawn from *Paradiso* 33. 133–35.

⁷ Scholars sometimes note Milton's comedy, e.g. in Book 9, without troubling about the flagrant contradiction this implies with the "tragic" of 9. 6. This will not do for the reader who cares about theology, as Milton did.

(That last infirmity of Noble mind)
 To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes;
 But the fair Guerdon when we hope to find,
 And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
 Comes the blind *Fury* with th' abhorred shears, 75
 And slits the thin-spun life. But not the praise,
Phoebus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;
Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
 Nor in the glistering foil
 Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies, 80
 But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
 And perferet witnes of all judging *Jove*;
 As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
 Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed.

66. Virgil, *Ecl.* 1. 2: *silvestrem tenui Musam meditaris avena*; 6. 8: *agrestem tenui meditabor harundine Musam*.

68. *Ecl.* 2. 14: *Nonne fuit satius tristes Amaryllidis iras* etc. Corydon is disappointed by Alexis, and wonders if he would not have done better to stay with Amaryllis. The English poet has reversed the image, while retaining the Virgilian structure.

71. Tacitus, *Hist.* 4. 6: *quando etiam sapientibus cupido gloriae novissima exiit*. This allusion to Helvidius Priscus seems rather to anticipate the anti-royalist sentiments of the mature politician.

77. Virgil, *Ecl.* 6. 3-4: *Cynthus aurem / vellit et admonuit*.

78. Virgil had courted some sort of poetic fame (*Geo.* 3. 8-9), but closer to Milton is perhaps a programmatic elegy of the Roman Callimachus (*Prop.* 3. 3. 17-20):

non hic ulla tibi speranda est fama, Properti:
 mollia sunt parvis prata terenda rotis;
 ut tuus in scamno iactetur saepe libellus,
 quem legat exspectans sola puella virum.

But, if Propertius is encouraged by Apollo to abandon epic for love elegy which will be a partner in the erotic game, the Christian poet is encouraged to pursue pastoral, rather than a life of dalliance, in hope of fame in heaven. What we expect if we follow the Virgilian analogue is that he would be encouraged to see pastoral and the Hesiodic as a stage on the road to epic. Already the Miltonic reluctance to abandon the pastoral mode, considered as somehow superior, less corrupt, is plain. Its alternative is outside literature altogether.

A fresh impulse towards the epic came when Milton visited Italy (1637-39), for which he had prepared carefully by learning Italian. This was no doubt part of the reason for his close friendship with Carolo Diodati, son of an Italian Protestant family who had migrated to London. Because of this excellent preparation, and the desire of Urban VIII to re-establish old ties

with England now that Charles I had succeeded to the throne,⁸ the poet was warmly welcomed.

Disturbed by the trial of Galileo, scholars are not always kind to seicento Italy, although Milton himself never doubted its central importance for him. The greatness of French classicism, as it would mature later in the century, is undeniable, but, in spite of the dazzle exercised by the Sun-King, it would be as foolish to conclude that the extraordinary creative power of the Italians had waned when Milton was among them as it would be to conclude that post-Augustan Rome had no aesthetic. Sometimes the imagination soars above and beyond the written page. Milton was the contemporary of Gianlorenzo Bernini, who, in succession to Maderna, completed work on the Palazzo Barberini in 1633, and who, when later invited by Louis XIV to work on the Louvre, is reported to have answered: "Non mi parlare delle cose piccole" ("Do not trouble me with little things"). By comparison with St. Peter's, it was *una cosa piccola*.⁹ He was the contemporary of Borromini, of Guarini. In painting, the varied holdings of the Palazzo—though not all of them of course could have been seen by the poet—give some notion of the widespread use in the art of the day of chiaroscuro, and, in Caravaggio's (†1609) *Narcissus*, of a mirror effect pleasing to the Mannerist. In music, the rich polyphony of Palestrina (†1594) was rivalled by new theories of operatic, dramatic monody, thought to be the revival of the Greek theatre. Monteverdi's *Orfeo* was produced in 1606, his *L'Adone* in 1639, the very year Milton visited Venice. The Barberini in fact were considerable patrons of music, and Domenico Mazzocchi's *La Catena d'Adone*, drawn from Marino, was produced under their auspices in 1626. Roman opera also drew upon the epics of Ariosto and Tasso. If a parallel for Milton's poetry were to be sought in contemporary art, it would be with these works and their essential staginess that he should be compared, as already his *Comus* and the eulogy of the London theatre in his *elegia prima* (27–28) suggest:

Excipit hinc fessum sinuosi pompa theatri,
Et vocat ad plausus garrula scena suos.

Next I wend my weary way towards the pageantry of the rounded theatre,
and the voices from the stage call my attention to the applause they
stimulate. (tr. N. G. McCrea, adapted)

⁸ Especially evident in the poem of Lelio Guidiccioni, *Ara Maxima Vaticana* (Rome 1633) 22: *Sed non ulla frequens magis, aut reverentior, Vrbi . . . quam . . . Anglia . . . etc.*

⁹ Bernini was also a literary artist. In 1644, while in Rome, the English diarist John Evelyn wrote: "Bernini . . . gave a public opera, wherein he painted the scenes, cut the statues, invented the engines, composed the music, writ the comedy, and built the theatre"; cf. R. Wittkower, *Gian Lorenzo Bernini, Sculptor of the Roman Baroque* (London 1955) 1.

The whole passage to v. 46 deserves study. It is here, and not in the Italian occasional poetry of the day, that we should seek poetic congeners even for his epic. "Renaissance," if provisionally acceptable as a catch-all term, is ultimately quite inadequate for this complexity, as it is, for example, for the poetry of Giambattista Marino (†1625), whose old patron Milton met and impressed.

Milton was entertained in Rome by Cardinal Francesco Barberini, the Papal *nipote*, whose epitaph is still seen on the right by the visitor to the *sagrestia* in St. Peter's,¹⁰ and the poet relates in a letter to the librarian Lucas Holsten¹¹ that, when it was announced that he had arrived at the door of the Palazzo to attend an evening reception, the Cardinal himself went out to escort his guest to join the party, a signal honor conferred by a Prince of the Church on a Protestant foreigner barely thirty years old. Milton paid repeated tribute to an Italian singer, "Leonora," whom he heard, and one may imagine what the effect of her arias and other *musica da camera* amid the candlelight of some splendid, frescoed *salone*, perhaps that on whose ceiling we still contemplate Pietro da Cortona's glorification of the Barberini family (1633–39), surrounded by the richly garbed audience of ladies, churchmen, diplomats, poets, scholars and soldiers, might have been on the impressionable and musically gifted poet. A *teatro* was attached to the Barberini Palace, where productions were noted for their spectacular effects. Bernini himself designed the sets for Rossi's *Erminia sul Giordano*, produced there in 1633.¹² Landi's pious *San' Alessio*, with libretto by Cardinal Giulio Rospigliosi, later Clement IX, was put on in 1632. The year 1634 witnessed the same author's *Vita di Santa Teodora*. Milton himself attended Rospigliosi's comedy *Chi soffre, spera* in the Barberini theatre in 1639.¹³ Was it here that *Samson Agonistes* began to take shape in his mind? Is it a libretto for a score that was never written?

Elsewhere in Italy too he had enjoyed singular courtesy. The Florentine Antonio Francini wrote, for example:

¹⁰ Set up in 1682, it praises the Cardinal, *inter alia*, for his *beneficentia in omnes / etiam remotissimorum* [sic] *nationum homines*. Its mistake in gender has therefore endured in this public place for over three centuries.

¹¹ D. Masson, *The Life of John Milton* (London 1875) 634; cf. L. von Pastor, *Geschichte der Päpste XIII*. 2 (Freiburg im Br. 1929) 909. The energetic efforts devoted by Urban VIII to improving the accessibility of the Vatican Library are still appreciated by the scholars who use the Barberini Catalogue.

¹² The title-page of the 1637 edition of this work is reproduced in *Heritage of Music I*, edd. Raeburn and Kendall (repr. Oxford–New York 1990) 82, where a number of relevant remarks about the Barberini contribution to the development of Roman opera may be studied.

¹³ Von Pastor (above, note 11) 953.

Nell'altera Babelle
 Per te il parlar confuse Giove in vano,
 Che per varie favelle
 Di se stessa trofeo cadde su'l piano:
 Ch'ode oltr' all'Anglia il suo più degno Idioma
 Spagna, Francia, Toscana, e Grecia e Roma.

In proud Babel, so far as you are concerned, Jove confounded tongues to no purpose—Babel that, because of its different languages, fell to the plain as a trophy to its own defeat. Not only England, but Spain, France, Italy, Greece and Rome hear their most worthy utterance.

Here, we read *inter alia* a tribute to Milton's knowledge of Spanish. Naples was a Hapsburg (Aragonese) domain. Has the poet's possible debt to Spanish literature ever been investigated?

The epic ambition, or at least potential, must have been clearly visible to contemporaries. The Roman Ioannes Salsillus (Selvaggi) wrote:

Graecia Maeonidem, iactet sibi Roma Maronem,
 Anglia Miltonum iactat utrique parem.

Let Greece boast of Homer, and Rome of Virgil. England boasts of Milton, a match for both.

What had Milton done in 1639, what was he showing to fellow poets and to the world of letters in general that could possibly justify this kind of praise? Is something lost or suppressed—something in Italian?

Count I. B. Mansus, the former patron of Tasso and Marino, echoes the famous remark of Pope Gregory the Great:

Ut mens, forma, decor, facies, mos, si pietas sic,
 Non Anglus, verum hercle Angelus ipse fores.

If only your religious beliefs matched your intellect, your beauty, your grace, your appearance, your demeanor! You would be not an Angle but an Angel.

Milton's interest in Italian epic is clear. He translated Dante on the Donation of Constantine. At some point he came to admire Ariosto enough to quote from him at the start of *Paradise Lost* (1. 16, "Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rime" = "cosa non detta in prosa mai ne in rima," *O.F.* 1. 10), and he stayed with Manso in Naples. A Latin poem (1639) is evidence both of the admiration he felt for the old man, and of the epic pull:

O mihi si mea sors talem concedat amicum
 Phoebæos decorasse viros qui tam bene norit,
 Si quando indigenas revocabo in carmina reges,
 Arturumque etiam sub terris bella moventem;
 Aut dicam invictae sociali fœdere mensae,
 Magnanimos Heroas & (o modo spiritus adsit)
 Frangam Saxonicas Britonum sub Marte phalanges.

Oh, if only my fate would grant me such a friend, who knows so well how to honor inspired poets, if ever I shall come to sing of my country's kings and Arthur who stirs war even beneath the earth; or to tell of the knightly fellowship of the unconquered Table and, if inspiration lasts, show the Saxon armies yielding to British arms.

83. *modo vita supersit*, *Geo.* 3. 10. See *Epitaph. Dam.* 168, quoted below. The relevant point is that this is the language of a *recusatio* used also by Tasso: *forse un dia, Ger. Lib.* 1. 4. 7.

In this poem, his epic thoughts are still centred on history, on *reges et proelia*. Perhaps he was thinking of Tasso's two epics on the Crusades.

But Tasso was also the author of the pastoral *Aminta*, and Manso was also the former patron of Giambattista Marino (1569–1625), once the most famous poet in Europe. Marino's *Adone*, dedicated to Louis XIII of France and his queen Maria de' Medici,¹⁴ tells the story of the adventures of Adonis and Venus. Adonis is a countryman, a huntsman, a denizen of the Arabian forests (1. 45–46), reminiscent, when we first meet him, of the Aeneas of the first book of Virgil's epic. But Marino adds to the *Aeneid* a long rhapsody about his hero's physical beauty, a rhetorical topos with a lengthy history.¹⁵ It is in these elaborate personal descriptions that we find so much anticipated of this quite un-Virgilian aspect of Milton.

Adonis, who was worshipped with the offering of κήποι ("gardens," "flowerpots;" cf. *P.L.* 9. 440), is part of the Alexandrian pastoral (Theocritus 15, Bion, the Εἰς νεκρὸν Ἀδωνιν), and this aspect of the story explains why it had already attracted the youthful Shakespeare. Did it attract the youthful Milton, who certainly relates the tale in *Paradise Lost* (1. 446–53)? Is the possibility left out of account because the structural role of the pastoral in the lead-up to European epic (or, in the case of Shakespeare, epic drama) is ignored by critics unfamiliar with the Classical tradition—and with the crucial importance of Italian literature?

The invocation of Book 10 of the *Adone* is noteworthy:

Musa tu che del Ciel per torti calli
infaticabilmente il corso roti,
e mentre de' volubili cristalli
qual veloce, e qual pigro, accordi i moti,
con armonico piede in lieti balli
de l'Olimpo stellante il suol percoti,
onde di quel concento il suon si forma
ch'è del nostro cantar misura e norma:

5

¹⁴ It was placed on the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* by Urban VIII in 1627 and 1628, but this does not seem to have had much effect on its influence. For Milton, it might have been an extra attraction.

¹⁵ Cf. Call. *Hecale*, fr. 274 Pf.

tu divina Virtù, Mente immortale,
 scòrgi l'audace ingegno, Urania saggia, 10
 ch'oltre i propri confin si leva e sale
 a spaziar per la celeste spiaggia.
 Aura di tuo favor mi regga l'ale
 per sì alto sentier sì ch'io non caggia.
 Movi la penna mia, tu che 'l Ciel movi, 15
 e detta a novo stíl concetti novi.

Muse, you turn the course of heaven unwearying through complex paths, you reconcile the movements of the luminous planets, one fast, another slow, and with rhythmic foot in joyful dances strike the ground of starry Olympus,¹⁶ giving rise to the sound of that harmony which is the measure and norm of our singing. Divine Virtue, Immortal Mind, guide the bold spirit, wise Urania, which above its ordinary bounds rises and ascends to walk through heaven's expanse. May the breeze of your favor guide my wings along so high a path, that I may not fall. Move my pinion-pen, you who move the heaven, and dictate to a new style new thoughts.

10. "Sing Heav'nly Muse . . . I thence / Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song, / That with no middle flight intends to soar . . .", *P.L.* 1. 7, 12-14.

14. "Least . . . I fall," *P.L.* 7. 27, 29.

15. "If answerable style I can obtaine / Of my Celestial Patroness . . .," *P.L.* 9. 20-21.

In general, although the poet is clearly also thinking of Horace's *Descende caelo . . . Calliope* (*Odes* 3. 4. 1-2), one may compare:

Descend from Heav'n *Urania*, by that name
 If rightly thou art call'd, whose Voice divine
 Following, above th' *Olympian* Hill I soare . . . (*P.L.* 7. 1-3)

But, quite apart from all this, Marino's whole habit of resuming his Italian predecessors, and notably Boccaccio, his display of erudition, his Joycean (and Callimachean) awareness of language as a calculated instrument of fantasy and make-believe, his allegorization, his intrusion beneath the surface of the poem of his own personality coloring the narrative—these features put us in the presence of Milton, even if his leisurely, Ariosto-like pace does not. In general, it seems impossible to believe that this long conjurer's mantle wrapped by the Italian around the story of the seduction of a young and handsome hero in a garden of delights by the goddess of love had no influence on Milton's ultimate epic thought and conception.

While staying with Manso in Naples, Milton planned to visit Sicily. The visit never took place. It is alleged that he was forced to abandon his plans by news of the imminent Civil War in England, and there were stories that, if he lingered in Rome on his way back, the English Jesuits were

¹⁶ *Musae, quae pedibus magnum pulsatis Olympum*, Ennius, *Ann. fr.* 1 Sk.

plotting to assassinate him. But he did linger in Rome, quite safely, for another two months, and then went on to visit Florence, Bologna, Ferrara, Venice, eventually to return by way of Geneva.¹⁷ Perhaps then these excuses about the imminence of the Civil War are quite false, and there was a psychological reason hindering Milton from visiting Sicily. If he had confronted the reality, he might have been less able to treat it as a country of the mind which he did not need to visit because he was trapped there already. "Why, this is hell, nor am I out of it."

On his return to London, never to leave England again, he found Diodati dead. The *Epitaphium Damonis* which he wrote to commemorate his friend still lingers with the pastoral and because of that still reveals a preoccupation with conventional epic heroics:

Ipse ego Dardanias Rutupina per aequora puppes Dicam, & Pandrasidos regnum vetus Inogeniae, Brennumque Arviragumque duces, priscumque Belinum, Et tandem Armoricos Britonum sub lege colonos;	165
Tum gravidam Arturo fatali fraude Jögemen Mendaces vultus, assumptaque Gorlōis arma, Merlini dolus. O mihi tum si vita supersit, Tu procul annosoa pendebis fistula pinu Multum oblita mihi aut patriis mutata camœnis	170
Brittonicum strides, quid enim? omnia non licet uni Non sperasse uni licet omnia, mi satis ampla Merces, & mihi grande decus (sim ignotus in aevum Tum licet, externo penitusque inglorius orbi) Si me flava comas leget Usa, et poter Alauni, Vorticibusque frequens Abra, et nemus omne Treantae, Et Thamesis meus ante omnes, & fusca metallis Tamara, et extremis me discant Orcades undis.	175

I myself will tell of Trojan ships in Richborough's waters, of the ancient kingdom of Imogen, Pandrasus' child, of Brennus and Arviragus, our champions, of old Belinus, and at long last of the Armoric settlers adopting British laws. Next will be the tale of Igraine, Arthur's mother by fateful guile, the false disguise and assumed weapons of Gorlois, the trickery of Merlin. If life but lasts, my pipe, long forgotten by me, will hang from yonder old pine tree, or changed to native music will celebrate a British strain. Yet why, not all things are possible to one man, not all things one man may hope. Big enough my reward, great my glory—and then let me be unknown for ever, and wholly without fame in the world abroad—if fair-haired Ouse read me, the drinker of the Alan, the eddying Humber, all Trent's woods, and before all else my own Thames, the Tamar dark with ore, and if the Orkneys study me amid their distant waves.

¹⁷ Masson (above, note 11) 645–58, followed by W. R. Parker, *Milton: A Biography I* (Oxford 1968) 169–82. If the poet left Naples in December 1638, in June 1639 he was still at Geneva. —General information on the *Epitaphium Damonis* is found in D. Bush, *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton I* (New York 1970) 282 ff.

168. *dolus* in the nominative has no construction: the poet is coasting rather than thinking. With the end, cf. *o mihi tum longae maneat pars ultima vitae, Ecl. 4. 53; modo vita supersit, Geo. 3. 10.*

169. *hic arguta sacra pendebit fistula pinu, Ecl. 7. 24.*

171. *non omnia possumus omnes, Ecl. 8. 63.*

175. *Rhodanique potor, Horace, Odes 2. 20. 20;]ου πίνοντες ἀφ' ὕδατος* Callimachus, fr. 186. 21 Pf.

One wonders what in fact contemporary Europe would have made of Trojan ships at Richborough (*Rutupium*), although in 1633, displaying an extraordinary knowledge of pre-Norman history (perhaps derived from Richard White's *Historiarum Britanniae Libri XI, 1597–1607*), Guidiccioni had certainly congratulated English kings on their loyalty to Rome (*Ara Maxima Vaticana*, p. 21):

Quot veniunt uno peregrino ab litore reges,
Lingentes Thulen? Hoc arsit Osuvius aestu,
Cnutus, Etelstanusque, Odoardus, Cedual, Ina,
Richardusque, aliique. Simul patria arva Britanno,
Arva Caledonio linquuntur . . .

How many kings came from a single foreign shore, abandoning Thule?
This passion inspired Osuvius, Canute, Ethelstan, Edward, Cedual, Ina,
Richard and their company. Briton and Scot together leave their native
lands . . .

It is in reading some of these Latinized British and Norse names that one begins to understand *offensus nominum asperitate* in the young Virgil's misgivings about historical epic.

But Milton's poem also shows something else. It begins as follows:

Himerides nymphae (nam vos et Daphnin & Hylan,
Et plorata diu meministis fata Bionis)
Dicite Sicelicum Thamesina per oppida carmen.

Nymphs of Himera, for you recall the tale of Daphnis and Hylas, the long-wept fate of Bion, sing a song of Sicily by the towns of Thames.

1. *Sicelides Nymphae, paulo maiora canamus, Ecl. 4. 1.*

2. *et meministis enim, divae, et memorare potestis, Aen. 7. 645* (repeated by the codex Romanus at 9. 529). This form of *memini* does not occur, for example, in Ovid or Lucan, making the Virgilian allusion all the more obvious.

3. *Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen, Geo. 2. 76.*

The *reges et proelia* in the background of line 2 are quite outflanked by the reminiscences of the pastoral and of Hesiod.

There is a jarring false quantity at the end of line 1 here. Milton knew as well as any man that *Hylas* has a short first syllable, if for no other

reason than because the word occurs three times in two consecutive lines of the *Eclogues* with the right quantity.¹⁸ An easy correction would have been to write *nam vos et Daphnin Hylanque*. This is not open to metrical objection. But in Milton's mind *Hylas* has become confused with ὕλη, "wood," which does have an initial *longum*,¹⁹ and that is evidence of a preoccupation with the "wild wood" (Marino's "Arabiche foreste") that may be traced all the way from *Comus* (312) to *Paradise Lost* (9. 910). Because the poet cannot get his relationship to the pastoral ("sylvan") straight, it even corrupts his memory of classical prosody.

In Milton's poem, *Daphnin* and *Himerides* are also telling. *Daphnis* occurs of course both in the *Eclogues* and in Theocritus, but his first introduction to Greek poetry seems to be owed to Stesichorus,²⁰ born at Maturus in Italy, and later active at Himera in Sicily. *Himerides* is not in fact found in any classical Latin author.²¹

The poet therefore, inventing an adjective to do so, evokes an ultimately Sicilian lyric predecessor, whom Quintilian (10. 1. 62) describes as *maxima bella et clarissimos canentem duces et epici carminis onera lyra sustinentem*. This predecessor sang the story of the shepherd *Daphnis* who was struck blind for infidelity (Aelian, *Var. Hist.* 10. 18):

βουκολῶν δὲ κατὰ τὴν Σικελίαν ὁ Δάφνις, ἠράσθη αὐτοῦ νόμφη μία καὶ ὠμίλησε καλῶ ὄντι . . . συνθήκας δὲ ἐποίησε μηδεμίᾳ ἄλλῃ πλησιάσαι αὐτὸν καὶ ἐπηπείλησεν ὅτι πεπρωμένον ἐστὶν αὐτὸν στερηθῆναι τῆς ὄψεως ἐὰν παραβῆι. καὶ εἶχον ὑπὲρ τούτων ῥήτραν πρὸς ἀλλήλους. χρόνῳ δὲ ὕστερον βασιλέως θυγατρὸς ἐρασθείσης αὐτοῦ οἰνωθεὶς ἔλυσε τὴν ὁμολογίαν καὶ ἐπλησίασε τῇ κόρῃ. ἐκ δὲ τούτου τὰ βουκολικὰ μέλη πρῶτον ἦισθη καὶ εἶχεν ὑπόθεσιν τὸ πάθος τὸ κατὰ τοὺς ὀφθαλμοὺς αὐτοῦ. καὶ Στησίχορον γε τὸν Ἰμεραῖον τῆς τοιαύτης μελοποιίας ὑπέραξασθαι.

¹⁸ *Ecl.* 6. 43–44; cf. *Geo.* 3. 6. The Neapolitan poet J. Sannazaro has it right: *et vetus amissi cesserat ardor Hylae* (*Opera omnia latine scripta*, ed. Aldina [1535] 50). Giovanni Boccaccio, who certainly lived as a young man in Naples, and who in poem VI ("Alcestus"), line 148 (p. 60 in Janet Smarr's translation [New York 1987]) of his *Bucolicum Carmen* writes at the beginning of the hexameter *Ylas Spartanus*, is confusing *Hylas*, Hercules' squire, and *Hyllus*, Hercules' son and the ancestor of the Dorians. But who can believe that in scanning *Hylas*' name Milton followed Boccaccio rather than Virgil? However, when in this same passage Boccaccio tells the story of the two cups allegedly given to Meliboeus by *Hylas*, he says a great deal relevant to the two cups which Milton says he got from Manso (*Ep. Dam.* 181 ff.). Scholars have looked for these in his baggage rather than in the poems of Theocritus and Virgil. More on this in Bush (above, note 17) 318–19, who however overlooks this passage of Boccaccio. But if this was already a Renaissance topos? Manso after all was Neapolitan too.

¹⁹ As is shown in medieval Latin poetry, for example, where it enjoys its Aristotelian sense of "matter": Walter of Châtillon, *Alexandreis* 4. 182, 10. 11.

²⁰ D. L. Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci* (Oxford 1967) fr. 279.

²¹ It is not listed, for example, by D. C. Swanson, *The Names in Roman Verse* (Madison 1967).

When Daphnis was a shepherd in Sicily a nymph fell in love with him and became his mistress since he was so handsome. She made a covenant that he was to have no dealings with any rival, and threatened him with the doom of losing his eyesight if he should transgress. They had a mutual agreement about this. But later the king's daughter fell in love with him and in a drunken fit he broke his word and had intercourse with her. This led to the invention of pastoral song, whose theme was his loss of sight. It was Stesichorus of Himera who was the author of this genre of lyric.

But more than this. Stesichorus himself was also struck blind—for impiety, and for this tale Milton needed to look no further than Plato's *Phaedrus* (243a) or Horace's *Epodes* (17. 42–44):

infamis Helenae Castor offensus vice
fraterque magni Castoris, victi prece,
adempta vati reddidere lumina . . .

Castor, once offended by the fate of Helen besmirched, and mighty Castor's brother, yielded to entreaty and gave back to the poet the eyes he had lost.

So, although at the official, conscious level in his *Epitaphium Damonis* Milton speaks of his prospective epic in conventional terms, his vatic psyche knew something much more relevant to what he actually would do. Like Stesichorus, he would write an epic that was profoundly lyricized. Like Stesichorus, and like Stesichorus' pastoral hero Daphnis, he would go blind. Like Apollonius Rhodius' Hylas (*Arg.* 1. 1207 ff.), he would get into deep waters in a *hyle* (wood). And is it too cheap to add that some sort of personal confusion about sex (Mary Powell) would have something to do with it?

The pastoral eventually inspires much of the imagery associated with Milton's Eve. Milton is especially poignant when comparing Eve with Proserpina, raped by the infernal Pluto while busy with her flowers. In the famous passage, the introductory negative is fraught with *psychologisches Moment* (14. 268–72):

Not that faire field
Of *Enna*, where *Proserpin* gathring flours
Her self a fairer Floure by gloomie *Dis*
Was gatherd, which cost *Ceres* all that pain
To seek her through the world . . .

Negative comparisons are old, but dare one suggest that part of the heart-rending effect of the negative here reflects Milton's own failure to visit (to come to terms with) Sicily when he had the chance? An epic in which "pain" is a key word is not an epic of heroic action, but of profoundly subjective disquiet.

We can see how a Sicily held at mythopoeic level supplies in this way all the ingredients for a paradise that would be lost, even the fiery volcano (though Naples has its volcano too) that, already in Greek poetry, was the

woman and leaves the man to follow her action in a desperate act of love. But how can an act of love be the disobedience that ruins the human race?

In his French introduction to the *Adone*, Marino's contemporary Chapelain defends the poem as an epic of peace, rather than war, a thesis likely to be of interest to Milton,²⁴ even though the English poet takes rather a different view of the role in peace of the heroic. Chapelain also mentions Nonnus. The debt of Milton's seduction scene to Nonnus may now be re-emphasized. Two passages are particularly relevant:

Παρθένε Περσεφόνηια, σὺ δ' οὐ γάμον εὔρες ἀλύξαι, 155
 ἀλλὰ δρακοντείοισιν ἐνυμφεύθης ὕμεναιοις,
 Ζεὺς ὅτε πουλυέλικτος ἀμειβομένοιο προσώπου
 νυμφίος ἡμερόνεντι δράκων κυκλούμενος ὀλκῶ
 εἰς μυχὸν ὄρφναίοιο διέστιχε παρθενεῶνος,
 σείων δαυλὰ γένεια· παρισταμένων δὲ θυρέτρῳ 160
 εὔνασεν ἰσοτύπων πεφορημένος ὄμμα δρακόντων,
 καὶ γαμίαις γενύεσσι δέμας λιχμάζετο κούρης
 μείλιχος· αἰθερίων δὲ δρακοντείων ὕμεναιῶν
 Περσεφόνης γονόεντι τόκῳ κυμαίνετο γαστήρ,
 Ζαγρέα γειναμένη, κερὸν βρέφος, ὃς Διὸς ἔδρης 165
 μούνος ἐπουρανίης ἐπεβήσατο, χειρὶ δὲ βαιῆ
 ἀστεροπὴν ἐλέλιξε, νεηγενέος δὲ φορῆος
 νηπιάχοις παλάμησιν ἐλαφρίζοντο κεραυνοί. (6. 155–68)

Ah maiden Persephoneia! You could not find how to escape your mating!
 No, a dragon was your mate, when Zeus changed his face and came, rolling
 in many a loving coil through the dark to the corner of the maiden's
 chamber, and shaking his hairy chaps: he lulled to sleep as he crept the eyes
 of those creatures of his own shape who guarded the door. He licked the
 girl's form gently with wooing lips. By this marriage with the heavenly
 dragon, the womb of Persephone swelled with living fruit, and she bore
 Zagreus the horned baby, who by himself climbed upon the heavenly
 throne of Zeus and brandished lightning in his little hand, and newly born,
 lifted and carried thunderbolts in his tender fingers. (tr. W. H. D. Rouse)

158: "Curld many a wanton wreath in sight of *Eve*," *P. L.* 9. 517.

Since in Milton's epic Eve is compared with Persephone, Persephone's seduction by Zeus in the form of a serpent may have particularly worked on Milton's imagination.

The child of this union is Bacchus ("Zagreus"), son of Zeus, who, as Nonnus' story progresses, is done to death by the Titans and then rises again. But later in the poem, Bacchus discovers the intoxicating juice of the grape with the help of the serpent (12. 319–28):

²⁴ "Peace hath her victories / No less renown'd than warr": *To the Lord Generall Cromwell, May 1652*.

ἀμφὶ δέ μιν σκολιῆσι δράκων δινωτὸς ἀκάνθαις
 λαρὸν ἔυρραθάμιγγος ἀμέλγετο νέκταρ ὀπώρης 320
 καὶ βλοσυραῖς γενύεσσι ποτὸν Βακχεῖον ἀμέλξας
 βότρυος οἰνωθέντος ἐπιστάζων πόμα λαιμῷ
 πορφυρῆ ῥαθάμιγγι δράκων φοίνιξεν ὑπήνην.
 καὶ θεὸς οὐρεσίφοιτος ὄφιν θάμβησε δοκεύων
 οἰνωπῆ ῥαθάμιγγι πεφυρμένον ἀνθερεῶνα· 325
 καὶ στικταῖς φολίδεσσι μετάρπρον ὄλκων ἐλίξας
 πετραῖν βαθύκολπον ἐδύσατο γείτονα χειρῖν,
 Εὖιον ἀθρήσας, ὄφιν αἰόλος . . .

A serpent twisted his curving backbone about the tree, and sucked a strong draught of nectar trickling from the fruit; when he milked the Bacchic potation with his ugly jaws, dripping the draught of the vine onto his throat, the creature reddened his beard with purple drops. The hillranging god marvelled, as he saw the snake and his chin dappled with trickling wine; the speckled snake saw Euaios, and went coiling away with his spotty scales and plunged into a deep hole in the rock hard by. (Rouse, adapted)

327: "Back to the Thicket slunk / The guiltie Serpent," *P. L.* 9. 784–85.

Dionysus then makes wine, and the satyrs get drunk on it. Here is the parallel with Eve's act in pagan mythology. The ancient motif of the serpent coiled around the tree, found in the classical world, for example, in a bronze fountain from the gymnasium at Herculaneum (Cardo V) showing a five-headed snake wound around a tree trunk, is still visible on the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. In general, it may be urged that no proper understanding of Milton's epic is possible without a detailed study of the *Dionysiaca* (reprinted 1569, 1606). But can there be a *Dionysiaca* which justifies God's ways to man? At the start of Book 7, Milton had banished "the barbarous dissonance / Of *Bacchus* and his Revellers" (32–33), that is to say, the *komos* he had tried to assimilate in his early masque of that name. But, like all these suppressed ghosts, did *das Verdrängte* then return in unassimilated form to haunt him?

Tristi fummo ne l' aere dolce . . . (Inferno 7. 121–22). The unassimilated satiric and comic ("carnival") to which reference has been made, caused by the inability consistently to move beyond the pastoral mode into epic, is shown by the fact that even the bees, with which in *P.L.* 1. 768 ff. the devils are compared, are a hit at the Barberini device,²⁵ sculpted repeatedly on Bernini's canopy in St. Peter's, the model for Milton's Pandaemonium.²⁶ In Milton, we seem really to be on the track of a negative satirist rather than a *vates*. Dante, who made no bones about calling his own

²⁵ A book of poems dedicated to Urban VIII is entitled *Apes Romanae*, and is called by Masson "450 bees of the Barberini" (above, note 11) 630.

²⁶ Parker (above, note 17) 172. Some believe more charitably that Milton was thinking of the Flavian Amphitheatre: A. P. Quennell, *The Colosseum* (New York 1981) 110. But we must beware of ascribing motivations like this to Milton.

titanic poem a *commedia*, had addressed Virgil as “anima cortese mantovano” (*Inferno* 2. 58). Bees had been for Callimachus a positive symbol.

Milton, who read Apollonius’ *Argonautica* with his English pupils, might have written a different kind of epic. He knew Italian well enough to compose poetry in it, and it is those poems that show a more humane side to his genius, less censorious of women, of popish trumpery, less right about everything. If only he had settled down in Naples with Manso! But these might-have-beens, like the closer study of the Italian poems, are matter for another time.

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