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VICTORIA MOUL

Of Hearing and of Failing to Hear: The Allusive Dialogue with Virgil in Milton's *Epitaphium Damonis*

The *Epitaphium Damonis*, Milton's Latin elegy of 1639 for his friend Charles Diodati, is a long poem, running to 219 lines, and a notoriously allusive one. Every critic has commented upon the density of reference incorporated within it, above all to Virgil.[1] Louis Martz remarks that "verbal echoes of Vergil are so frequent that the poem seems to grow within a Vergilian matrix" (36). In addition, several commentators, including Stella Revard, John Hale and Colin Burrow, have made a case for its importance to Milton's careful poetic self-presentation in the early years of his career— an assessment usually based upon its striking climactic position as the final poem of the 1645 volume, and the vision of an English epic which lies at its heart.[2]

Many of these insights I wish to take as read; but I want to press a bit harder Martz's idea of the poem "growing within a Virgilian matrix." Critics have on the whole not considered the extent to which the specific imported

1 Thanks are due to Jonathon Katz, Denis Feeney, Barbara Lewalksi and Raphael Lyne, all of whom, in different ways and at widely different times, have been influential upon my reading of Virgil and of Milton.

Hale, for instance, notes: "Virgilian allusion stands out most in the *Epitaphium*, being foregrounded as the borrowing or adapting of whole phrases, even half-lines, from the *Eclogues*" (*Milton's Languages* 42). See also: Hale, "Sion's Bacchanalia". Bush's commentary is a useful starting point for the classical material in the poem (297-323). Stella Revard is excellent on the poem's appropriation of neo-Latin literature, an aspect which I do not discuss here; but for all the strength of the reading, her almost total omission of Virgil's influence is nevertheless distorting (226-36).

2 I am thinking in particular of: Burrow; Hale, "Milton's Self-Presentation"; Helgerson 266-82; Knedlik; and Revard, *Milton and the Tangles of Neaera's Hair*, 226-36.

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Virgilian contexts—beyond, that is, the broadest implications of genre and tone— may be incorporated into Milton's poem and engaged with by him. My focus, then, is upon the *deployment*, as well as the identification, of structural Virgilian allusions. Above all, I am interested in the role these references play within the poem and the extent to which their use is a central part of its fabric: a dynamic, and even we could say dramatic, presence.

Lowell Edmunds, in his book *Intertextuality and the Reading of Roman Poetry* remarks that the metaphor of "dialogue" is a poor one for intertextuality, since in an intertextual relationship the later text "has the final word as soon as it has spoken and [the earlier text] can never regain its prequoted status" (144).[3] In general, I think his point is a useful one, but I want to argue that in the *Epitaphium Damonis* Milton's allusions work to make that textual "loss" (Virgil's own loss of his "prequoted status") a metaphor for all the several losses of the poem, personal and poetic alike. Inevitably, in a poem as long and as rich as this one, I can only hope to give the barest indication of possible remarks and reading strategies; but I hope that the selection of examples I present at least gives some sense (*pace* Edmunds, or rather with a knowing nod to him) of the allusive "dialogue" of the poem.

To begin with the basics, the Virgilianism of the *Epitaphium Damonis* is apparent from the outset to anyone with even the haziest memory of undergraduate Virgil. The metre is not only the Latin hexameter in its Augustan form but, as John Hale has demonstrated, a markedly Virgilian version of it.[4] The combination of pastoral names and motifs make its generic allegiance immediately obvious: in the opening lines we find Daphnis, Hylas, Thyrsis, Damon and the vocabulary of nymphs, fountains and shepherds: "fluminaque, fontesque vagos, nemorumque recessus" ("the rivers, and the wandering streams and the woodland dells," 6).[5] The elegiac theme is

3 Although I take issue with Edmunds on this specific point, his work, and those of other classicists working on intertextuality, have been crucially influential upon the development of this article. I have in mind particularly: Hinds, and Fowler.

4 Hale notes that the proportion of first foot dactyls in the *Epitaphium Damonis* (around 65%) is close to Virgil's average, and that the frequency with which the ictus and accent clash in the fourth foot (before being resolved in the fifth), at around 62 %, is also approximates very closely to the figure for the *Eclogues* ("Sion's Bacchanalia" 118-19).

5 Both text and translations of the *Epitaphium Damonis* are taken for convenience from Carey and Fowler 267-83. Translations of the *Eclogues* are my own, although I consulted Guy

reminiscent of the laments for Daphnis (Theocritus 1 and Virgil's fifth eclogue), as well as those for Bion and Adonis. The generic connection is made explicit in the opening aside addressed to the muses themselves: "(nam vos et Daphnin et Hylan, / Et plorata diu meministis fata Bionis)" ("(for you have remembered Daphnis and Hylas, and the long lamented fate of Bion)," 1-2).[6] Just as Virgil's *Eclogues* challenge their generic limitation, so too—if even more boldly—does the *ED*, which climaxes at lines 162-78 with a "sneak preview" of a British epic: the "gift" Thyrsis was preparing for his lost friend before his death.

The poem is structured around a refrain, repeated seventeen times, which sets off each verse paragraph: "ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni"; "go home unfed, lambs, your shepherd has no time for you now."[7] The structural motif of a refrain is an established feature of classical pastoral, appearing in the first and second of Theocritus' *Idylls*, the *Lament for Bion* (previously attributed to Moschus), and Virgil's eighth eclogue. The imperative form of the line imitates these examples.[8] Milton's version is indebted more directly, however, to two distinct lines from the *Eclogues*: *E.* 7. 44: "ite domum pasti, si quis pudor, ite iuvenci" ("Go home now you're fed, if you have any shame, go on with you, bullocks") and the final line of the entire collection:

Lee's Penguin parallel text in their preparation. Virgil is cited from Sir Roger Mynors' Oxford Classical Text edition.

6 "Hylan" here has a long first syllable, noted as a "false quantity" by Carey and Fowler (269); but it is suggestive that the fullest reference to Hylas' story in the *Eclogues* also includes a (very Alexandrian) metrical irregularity introduced for emotive and rhetorical effect and centred upon this name. At *E.* 6. 43, "Hyla Hyla", the second "a" scans short (as usual) but the first long, followed by a hiatus. The alert reader might also note the presence of a form of "memoro" in the line, the verb identified by Ross as an intertextual marker in his coining of the phrase "Alexandrian footnote" (77-78).

7 The refrain occurs at lines: 18, 26, 35, 44, 50, 57, 62, 68, 74, 81, 87, 93, 112, 124, 139, 161 and 179. Hale writes well of the changing force of the refrain in the course of the poem ("Sion's Bacchanalia" 121).

8 *Eclogue* 8 actually has two refrains: "incipe Maenalios mecum, mea tibia, versus" (22ff.) and "ducite ab urbe domum, mea carmina, ducite Daphnin" (68ff.). The Greek examples are similarly imperative in form.

"ite domum saturae, venit Hesperus, ite capellae" ("Go home well-fed, little she-goats, for the evening star is coming," *E.* 10. 77).

The natural rhythms of the pastoral world, by which the well-fed livestock return home at the end of the day (and the close of the song), are inverted by Milton's *unfed* lambs. But that inversion is itself Virgilian. In the first eclogue unfed goats, rather than Milton's lambs, are associated with the failure of the pastoral world and of pastoral song:

> carmina nulla canam; non me pascente, capellae,
> florentem cytisum et salices carpetis amaras.
> (*E.* 1. 77-78)
>
> (I will sing no more songs; if I am not there to graze you, little goats,
> you'll crop the flowering clover and the bitter willow-shoots.)

So Milton's Latin both invokes and inverts its classical model; but so too does the very *sound* of the verse, and it is this kind of feature in which I am particularly interested. In the refrain of the *Epitaphium Damonis*, the elision required by the hexameter obscures and merges the distinction between the final "-um" of "domum" and the "im-" of "impasti," almost returning the line to the Virgilian text ("ite domum pasti") in which it has its roots. This small-scale element of the hexameter is a moving demonstration of a feature characteristic of the poem, and of its allusive patterning most particularly: a kind of yearning to be the text that it is not; a longing to return to the poetic language it at once invokes and supersedes.

Already Milton's loss of Damon (that is, of Diodati) is aligned with Meliboeus' loss of his land, and with it the pastoral genre itself. The association between personal grief and recovery, the loss of pastoral, and the movement towards a new genre, is a feature of the poem throughout. Commentators have remarked upon the generic pressure in Virgil's *Eclogues*: from the beginning of the collection, the pastoral setting, and with it the conditions for pastoral song, is threatened politically and poetically, put under pressure both by events and other genres. Milton's poem appropriates that pressure, connecting it with the death of a named individual; but more than that, it has caught up Virgil, the *Eclogues* and their language as a whole into the framework of the "pastoral" that is lost.

At lines 129-32 Thyrsis remembers an ideal pastoral moment: "o ego quantus eram [...]". This recollection at first appears to bear little relevance to his memories of Damon which precede it:

O ego quantus eram, gelidi cum stratus ad Arni
Murmura, populeumque nemus, qua mollior herba,
Carpere nunc violas, nunc summas carpere myrtos,
Et potui Lycidae certantem audire Menalcam.
Ipse etiam tentare ausus sum, nec puto multum
Displicui, nam sunt et apud me munera vestra
Fiscellae; calathique et cerea vincla cicutae,
Quin et nostra suas docuerunt nomina fagos
Et Datis, et Francinus, erant et vocibus ambo
Et studiis noti, Lydorum sanguinis ambo.
(129-32)

(O how grand I felt, lying by the cool, murmuring Arno, in the shade of a poplar grove, on the soft turf, where I was able to pluck violets and myrtle-tips, and listen to Menalcas and Lycidas competing. I was even bold enough to compete myself, and I don't think I can have been too unpopular, for I still have your gifts, rush baskets and wicker baskets and pipes fastened together with wax. What is more, Dati and Francini, famous poets and scholars both, and both of Lydian blood, made their native beech trees resound with my name.)

The allusion of line 131 to the second eclogue has often been noted; compare "pallentes violas, et summa papavera carpens" ("plucking pale violets and poppy heads," *E.* 2. 47). But the context of that line is also significant: the action which Milton's Thyrsis here represents simply as pastoral idyll (lying by a stream; plucking flowers) is, in its source, a pledge of love. In Virgil's poem, the most explicitly erotic of all the *Eclogues*, Corydon tells Alexis how the nymphs pluck flowers for him, and how he does the same, in a gesture bound to be hopeless: for Alexis will not be won over by gifts, and Corydon will always be outdone by a rival.

Attention to the context of the Virgilian line works on several levels: it alerts us to the almost erotic intensity of Thyrsis's passion for the Damon/Alexis/Diodati compound figure, but at the same time it betrays Thyrsis's attempt to delude himself. Virgil's text speaking behind his own words has revealed his current sorrow: Virgil's poem is not just about love, but specifically about *hopeless* longing. Damon (like Alexis, but so much more decisively so in death) cannot be bought with gifts—not even by the gifts, of cups and of an idea, around which the second half of the *Epitaphium* is structured.

At line 42 of Virgil's poem Corydon mentions two young goats "quos tibi servo" (which I am keeping for you); in Milton's version, Thyrsis's careful preservation of poetry and cups for Damon has been movingly transferred to the past tense: "haec tibi servabam" ("I *was* keeping these for you," 180, italics mine). The allusive structure makes Thyrsis's sense of loss more insistent because the references are themselves "lost." The shift from "servo" to "servabam" makes as it were a biographical point about the course of the fictionalised "Thyrsis's" life, but also a literary one: Virgil's "servo," as much as Thyrsis's loving action, is now irredeemably in the past. It has often been noted that Virgilian pastoral rotates around its own failure and supercession; in this poem Milton is expanding that element of the genre to encompass the loss not only of an idyll, but of a mode and a language: of Virgilian pastoral, even of Virgilian Latin, itself.

In these lines, then, the context of the allusion in the source-text fills in for us—speaks—the loss that Thrysis cannot bear to articulate; and something similar is in train earlier in the poem, at lines 69-73:

Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni.
Heu quam culta mihi prius arva procacibus herbis
Involvuntur, et ipsa situ seges alta fatiscit!
Innuba neglecto marcescit et uva racemo,
Nec myrteta iuvant; ovium quoque taedet, at illae
Moerent, inque suum convertunt ora magistrum.
Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni.
Tityrus ad corylos vocat, Alphesiboeus ad ornos,
Ad salices Aegon, ad flumina pulcher Amyntas,
Hic gelidi fontes, hic illita gramina musco,
Hic Zephyri, hic placidas interstrepit arbutus undas;
Ista canunt surdo, frutices ego nactus abibam.

("Go home unfed, my lambs, you master has no time for you now." Alas, how dense with pushing weeds are my once tended fields, and even the tall grain crumbles with rot. The ungrafted vine decays, its grape-clusters neglected, and the myrtle groves do not flourish. Even my sheep are wearisome, sorrowfully they turn their faces towards their master. "Go home unfed, my lambs, your master has no time for you now." Tityrus is calling me to the hazels, Alphesiboeus to the ash-trees, Aegon to the willows, lovely Amyntas to the streams: "Here are cool fountains! Here is turf covered with moss! Here are soft breezes! Here the wild strawberry tree mingles its murmurs with the mild streams." They sing to deaf ears. I managed to reach the thickets and escaped from them.)

These lines evoke *E.* 7. 61-68 in which first Corydon and then Thyrsis use elaborate comparisons centred upon the trees of the pastoral landscape to delineate the extent of their love for Phyllis and Lycidas respectively:

> [Corydon:] Populus Alcidae gratissima, vitis Iaccho,
> formosae myrtus Veneri, sua laurea Phoebo ;
> Phyllis amat corylos: illas dum Phyllis amabit,
> nec myrtus vincet corylos, nec laurea Phoebi.
> [Thrysis :] Fraxinus in silvis pulcherrima, pinus in hortis,
> populus in fluviis, abies in montibus altis:
> saepius at si me, Lycida formose, revisas,
> fraxinus in silvis cedat tibi, pinus in hortis.
> (*E.* 7. 61-68)

> ([Corydon:] The poplar is dearest to Alcides, to Iacchus the vine, for beautiful Venus the myrtle, to Phoebus the laurels which are his own; but Phyllis loves the hazel bushes, and as long as she loves them, neither the myrtle nor Phoebus' own laurels can outdo the hazels.
> [Thyrsis:] The ash-tree is the fairest in the woods, in gardens the pine, the poplar by streams, on high mountains the fir; but if you come to see me more often, lovely Lycidas, the ash-tree will give way to you in the woods, in gardens the pine.)

In the seventh eclogue that motif is preceded by an amoebic exchange on how the land itself would grieve in the absence of a beloved, and we find the same progression here: lines 63-67 describe a neglected landscape literally "gone to seed." But where the desolation of Virgil's poem is hypothetical, Milton's Thyrsis sings it as real, and the second part of the amoebic dialogue which the allusion invites us to hear—that is, as it were, Damon's own voice—is pointedly lost.

The structural parallel between the two poems once more fills in for us what Thrysis cannot bear to say: while Tityrus and the others each have their favourite tree, all such preferences are now to him irrelevant. But spliced ("*inter*strepit") into the lines, and usually translated in quotation marks, are lines 71-72: "hic gelidi fontes, hic illita gramina musco, / Hic Zephyri, hic placidas interstrepit arbutus undas" ("Here are cool springs, here turf covered in moss / Here are western breezes, here the wild strawberry tree mingles its sound with the gentle waters"). Each of the host of pastoral characters "vocat" ("calls," 69) and this is what they seem to say: but their speech is drawn from another moment of erotic intensity in the *Eclogues*, *E.* 10. 42-43:

"hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata, Lycori, / hic nemus" ("here are cool springs, here soft meadows, Lycoris, here woodland"). Those lines continue: "hic ipso tecum consumerer aevo" ("here with you I could use up an age"). Milton's four "hic" phrases do not coincide with Virgil's: that fourth term, the hope of "tecum" is, as it were, tactfully suppressed by Thyrsis's friends in their attempt to console him; but the omission only emphasises Thyrsis's loss.

Thus in the *Epitaphium Damonis* the engagement between Milton's text and Virgil's is a dynamic one; we hear Thyrsis "hearing" Virgil, and hearing, too, the suppression or loss of Virgil along with that of Damon. The implicit use of an allusive recollection in this way amounts to a dramatic technique, and one not limited to the presence of the *Eclogues.*

Frequently, the emotional or dramatic context of an allusion in the text from which it is drawn not only deepens our understanding of Milton's poem, but also directs its (or Thyrsis's) flow. This dramatic use of an implicit allusive train of thought binds together transitions which at first appear obscure. At line 88, with the insistent repeated "venit" either side of a reference to one of Horace's most famous erotic odes (3. 9. 10), we recognise an echo of the tenth eclogue, in which Gallus plays his elegiac role in the pastoral landscape. There, too, we find the repeated "venit," twice to begin a line, twice in the middle:

> Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni.
> Venit Hyas, Dryopeque, et filia Baucidis Aegle
> Docta modos, citharaeque sciens, sed perdita fastu,
> Venit Idumanii Chloris vicina fluenti;
> Nil me blanditiae, nil me solantia verba,
> Nil me, si quid adest, movet, aut spes ulla futuri.
> (87-92)

> ("Go home unfed, my lambs; your master has no time for you now." Along comes Hyas and Dryope and Baucis's daughter Aegle (a clever musician, good on the lute, but her conceit lets her down), along comes Chloris, who lives by the Idumanean river. No charms, no comforting words, nothing which they can do, no hope for the future mean anything to me.)

Compare line 89 to Horace, *Odes* 3. 9. 10: "me nunc Thressa Chloe regit, / dulcis docta modos et citharae sciens" (now Thracian Chloe holds sway over me, expert in sweet rhythms and adept on the lyre); and the tenth eclogue:

> venit et upilio, tardi venere subulci,
> uvidus hiberna venit de glande Menalcas.

omnes "unde amor iste" rogant "tibi ?" venit Apollo :
[...] venit et agresti capitis Silvanus honore,
florentis ferulas et grandia lilia quassans.
Pan deus Arcadiae venit [...]
(*E.* 10.19-21, 24-26)

(The shepherd also came, the sluggish swineherds came; Menalcas came, wet through from winter mast. All ask him, "Whence that love of yours?". Apollo came [...] Silvanus also came, his head crowned in rural glory, tossing tall lilies on his head and flowering fennel. Pan came, the god of Arcady [...])

In Milton's poem the visitors represent not the pastoral divinities so much as eroticism itself. They even offer Thrysis the vocabulary of love elegy ("blanditiae [...] solantia verba") but Thyrsis, at once playing the role and repudiating the genre, refuses to be consoled. His thoughts in response, on the hardship and rarity of human companionship, strike a very different note. But if we miss that the nymphs are *elegiac* nymphs we miss not only the development of a theme which dominates the poem (the alignment of Thyrsis's love for Damon with erotic intensity) but also the significance of all the animals with their companion "sodales":[9]

Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni.
Hei mihi quam similes ludunt per prata iuvenci,
Omnes unanimi secum sibi lege sodales
Nec magis hunc alio quisquam secernit amicum
De grege, sic densi veniunt ad pabula thoes,
Inque vicem hirsuti paribus iunguntur onagri;
Lex eadem pelagi, deserto in littore Proteus
Agmina phocarum numerat, vilisque volucrum
Passer habet semper quicum sit [...]
(93-101)

("Go home unfed, lambs, your shepherd has no time for you now." Ah, how like one another are the young bulls which gambol through the meadows! They are all companions together, all of one mind. Not one of them singles out another from the herd as his particular friend. It's the same with wolves, they hunt their food in packs; and even the shaggy wild asses mate together by turn. The same law holds at sea: on the deserted shore Proteus counts his seals in ranks. Even the sparrow, the humblest of birds, always has someone [...])

[9] And in particular the sexual connotation of "iunguntur" ("join together" as in "mate," 98). For insightful remarks on the significance of this passage to Milton's career more generally, see Boehrer.

Our reading of the vignette of Proteus at the heart of this passage is also enhanced by an awareness of its model. The story of Proteus occurs in Homer at *Odyssey* 4 and is adapted by Virgil in the fourth book of the *Georgics*, lines 387-95 and 429-36. Milton's description echoes the latter of these sections:

When Proteus emerged out of the waves to seek his usual cave; around him the watery race that dwell in the mighty sea leapt for joy, spreading the bitter spray far and wide. The seals, scattered on the shore, lay down to sleep. He himself, like a shepherd in the mountains, when evening brings the cattle home from their pasture, and the lambs whet the wolves' appetite with their bleating, sat upon a rock in their midst and counted them. (G. 4. 429-36)

In Milton's lines the easy solidarity and companionship of the animal world, with the implied contrast to the human predicament ("nos durum genus" (106)), is overshadowed by Proteus' loneliness. That shift of emphasis is summed up by the alteration of the key Virgilian phrase: "diversae in litore phocae" ("seals scattered on the shore," *G.* 4. 432) becomes by Milton's "deserto in littore Proteus" ("Proteus on the deserted shore," 99). The impact of the adjective "deserto" (properly describing the shore) is effectively transferred to Proteus, the new subject of the line. This aspect is movingly reinforced by an allusion to an otherwise omitted section of the Virgilian text; "agmina phocarum numerat" ("he counts the ranks of seals," 100) echoes "consedit scopulo medius, numerumque recenset" ("seated on a rock in their midst, he counts them," *G.* 4. 436). Milton's Proteus, like Virgil's, counts his seals; but the phrase cues us to the intervening lines which, paradoxically, contain the heart of the allusion:

ipse, velut stabili custos in montibus olim,
vesper ubi e pastu vitulos ad tecta reducit
auditisque lupos acuunt balantibus agni
(433-35)

(He [Proteus], like a shepherd in the mountains, when evening brings the cattle home from their pasture, and the lambs whet the wolves' appetite with their bleating.)

These three lines constitute a revealing addition to our understanding of the emotional progression of Thyrsis's words: he has just mentioned sheep (97) and he thinks now of the loneliness of the shepherd in contrast to his flock and, in particular, of the loneliness of a man deprived of his companion.[10]

Moreover, "litore" or "litora" in this position is deeply Virgilian in its own right, and associated in particular with the *Aeneid*, its impact reinforced by several particularly close parallels.[11] Virgil too describes the shore as "desertus" and Milton's theme of man's solitude in the face of mortality echoes Virgil's description of Priam's body: "iacet ingens litore truncus" ("his mighty trunk lies on the shore," A. 2. 557).[12] In addition, Virgil (or rather Proteus) goes on to deliver a highly emotive version of Orpheus' despairing song, which itself features a further version of the phrase:

> ipse cava solans aegrum testudine amorem
> te, dulcis coniunx, te solo in litore secum,
> te, veniente die, te decedente canebat.
> (G. 4. 464-66)

> (He [Orpheus] himself would sing of his sorrowing heart to a hollow tortoise-shell lyre; singing of you, sweet wife, of you by himself on the lonely shore, of you, as the day was dawning, of you as it faded again.)

The sorrowful irony of singing of a sweet "*con*iunx" (alone) on a lonely shore is echoing in Milton's line.[13]

These are dense and complex passages, but by following the allusive logic the emotional progression and the dramatic narrative of Thyrsis's song emerges both more clearly and more strongly. Allusions to Virgil are not only an external part of the poem—aspects which lend depth and power to our

[10] As Richard Thomas points out, this simile of Proteus is not only "generally" pastoral, but specifically reminiscent of the *Eclogues* in diction and tone (223).

[11] The word occurs about 80 times in this position in the *Aeneid*, compared to 37 instances in Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

[12] Hinds also identifies this line as a locus of allusion (8-11). Hinds's book was a primary influence in my earliest work on this poem.

[13] In preparing this article for submission, I have noticed that Boehrer also makes this connection in his article (792).

experience of it—but also internally dynamic. In a dramatic sense, we see their effect upon Thyrsis himself; it is as if these allusions (or rather, the memory of the poems to which they allude) are part of his memory of Damon and of their life together.

We have already touched upon the association between Thyrsis's loss of Damon and the loss of song in general, or pastoral song in particular. Repeatedly, passages in which allusions work to dramatic and emotive effect are signposted by the vocabulary of sound or silence.[14] A sophisticated version of the "Alexandrian footnote," this motif alerts us in part to what we are ***not*** hearing: the omitted lines, the suppressed connection. There are many examples of this, but for clarity I turn first to lines 130-35, discussed above. At line 132 Thyrsis claims: "et potui Lycidae certantem audire Menalcam." As well as being able to pluck the violets and myrtles, Thyrsis claims, he was "able to hear" Menalcas competing with Lycidas. Both Menalcas and Lycidas are figures in classical pastoral, from Theocritus (*Idylls* 7 and 8) and Virgil (E. 3 and 5), and their names often invoked in later neo-Latin eclogues. Although they never engage in a singing contest together, "certantem" evokes the amoebic "song-contest" structure adopted by both Theocritus and Virgil. But as we have seen, we do in line 131 "hear" the *Eclogues*, and in them the passion with which Thyrsis feels his loss. Once again, the loss of his companion is connected with the refusal or inability to "hear" pastoral poetry itself.

Something very similar occurs at line 73: "Ista canunt surdo, frutices ego nactus abibam" ("They sing these songs to the deaf. I managed to reach the thickets and escape"). As we have seen, this line concludes a verse paragraph which incorporates two specific and powerful references to the *Eclogues*. Here Milton plays upon his use of "canunt surdo." It is not only the noise of the west wind or the sound of the wild strawberry plants that Thestylis does not hear (although "canunt" surely encompasses these); nor is it limited to "what they—Tityrus and friends—say." It is quite specifically the dual allusion from the *Eclogues* (7 and 10, as outlined above), and perhaps in particular the very vocabulary of Virgil's nature: Thyrsis does not hear (he cannot bear to hear) the Virgilian terms, so evocative of love and of pastoral itself; he must escape to the non-Virgilian "frutices" (low bushes). Here Milton's great sensitivity to Virgilian diction lends force and weight to his departure from it. All the more

[14] It is also noticeable that many instances of the refrain are closely preceded by a line which includes a "sound- (or silence-) word": "silentum" (25); "sonant" (61); "solantia verba" (91); "graves [...] sonos" (159), and further examples at lines 43, 50, 91, 123, 137.

moving, then, when we remember that in the seventh eclogue, the lines which these most closely resemble (E. 7. 61-64) are spoken by Corydon; and that *Thyrsis*, in the original poem, replies with a version of his own: a version which Milton's Thyrsis cannot provide. For all his assertion of deafness, the resonance of these lines lies in all that is *not* sung, but which we *do* hear; here is pastoral fading, abbreviated and unbearable, as we listen.

A particularly subtle version of this kind of motif in the opening lines of the poem associates, once more, Damon's death with the loss of song and of genre, but adds to this mixture the conventional hope of poetic immortality. In lines 25 to 35 the horror of anonymity, that Damon might lie unwept and unremembered, is built up insistently, from the suggestion of "omne silentum" (the "absolute silence" to which the worthless dead are condemned, 25) and "indeplorato" ("unwept," 28) to the hopeful declaration of Damon's lasting glory: "constabitque tuus tibi honos, longumque vigebit / inter pastores" ("your glory will accompany you, and will flourish long among the shepherds," 29-30). The voice at this point is defiant, but uncertain: "si quid id est" ("*if* this counts for anything," 33, italics mine); in fact, the emotional intensity is conveyed less by the (rather conventional) promise of poetic immortality, than by the moving uncertainty of its articulation.

Significantly, it is the proverbial reference of line 27 which introduces the first such hint of doubt: "Quicquid erit, certe nisi me lupus ante videbit" ("whatever happens, this is certain (unless a wolf sees me first)"). The line refers to the Roman superstition that a man seen by a wolf before seeing the creature himself would be struck dumb. On its own it is a neat, if slightly forced, imitation of that curious (and rather alien) Roman literary habit of referring to such portents. It is also a reminiscence of Virgil (a kind of pastoral guarantee of authenticity), but the powerful context of that reference has gone unremarked. Lines 51-54 of the ninth eclogue, from which Milton's line descends, are perhaps the most explicit statement in the *Eclogues* of the loss of song–here figured not as the death of a poet, or the erosion of a way of life, but simply as forgetting itself:

> [Moerim:] Omnia fert aetas, animum quoque; saepe ego longos
> cantando puerum memini me condere soles:
> nunc oblita mihi tot carmina: vox quoque Moerim
> iam fugit ipsa; lupi Moerim videre priores.
> (E. 9. 51-54)

> (Time takes everything away, even one's mind; I remember often as a boy singing the long suns asleep. So many songs I've now forgotten; even his voice is failing Moeris now: the wolves saw Moeris first.)

Once we have grasped the allusion, we realise that the proverbial superstition refers in Virgil quite specifically to the loss of *song*: "nunc oblita mihi tot carmina." The allusion is confirmed by a further echo of this passage at the close of Milton's next verse paragraph. Line 43, "quis fando sopire diem, cantuque solebit?" (Who will now sooth the day with talk and with song?), echoes lines 51-2 cited above. The great personal loss is made forcefully clear: Thyrsis has lost his "socium [...] canorum" (poet companion (34)); Moeris has lost his own young, singing self.

Yet amidst all this we have what we might term an epic intrusion: "si quid id est, priscamque fidem coluisse, piumque, / Palladiasque artes" ("[this is how it will be] if it is worth anything at all, that I have loyally kept the ancestral faith, and cultivated the arts of Pallas," 33-34). The force of the "priscamque fidem" is not immediately clear, but the striking final solitary "piumque" makes us think of Aeneas, that most famous preserver of ancestral rites.[15] Throughout the poem, Milton uses allusion to juxtapose this threat of total silence, of poetic collapse (the poetic death) which lies at the heart of the *Eclogues* with the proud grandeur and poetic power of epic aspirations: another way "out" of pastoral.[16]

Even the very opening of the *Epitaphium Damonis* bears an aural and metrical allusion which is not as straightforwardly "pastoral" as it seems: the third line of the poem, "dicite Sicelicum Thamesina per oppida Carmen" ("now sing your Sicilian song through Thames-side towns," 3) echoes *Georgics* 2. 173-76 in which Virgil declares his own power to make Rome—and native Roman literature—great by his song:

> salve, magna parens frugum, Saturnia tellus,
> magna virum: tibi res antiquae laudis et artem

[15] The two terms are brought together at *Aeneid* 6. 878, with a not dissimilar edge of lament: "heu pietas, heu prisca fides."

[16] On the poetic and personal evolution of the poem from pastoral to epic, see Revard 226-36. Knedlik describes how in the poem "[t]he apotheosis of pastoral is linked thematically and figurally to that of Damon" (160).

ingredior sanctos ausus recludere fontis,
Ascraeumque cano Romana per oppida carmen.

(Hail, great mother of crops, Saturnian land, a great mother of men. For you I broach the themes and art of ancient praise; for you I dare to unseal the sacred fountains, and sing an Ascraean song through Roman towns.)

The redirection of the lines as a plea addressed to the Sicilian Muses, rather than as a direct statement, does little to reduce the power or resonance of the allusion: in the Georgics, the lines are usually taken to refer to the future Aeneid.[17] Meanwhile, the opening words of the poem "Himerides nymphae" echo in their rhythm and position the opening phrase of the fourth eclogue, perhaps the least "pastoral," in its politically-inflected prophecy, of all the Eclogues: "Sicelides Musae, paulo maiora canamus" ("Sicilian Muses, let us sing of matters of a little more import," E. 4. 1). Even here, before Milton's poem has truly begun, the shadow of epic—and certainly of ambitions beyond the pastoral—crosses the pastoral landscape.

A similar dynamic operates at lines 168-71, in which Milton interrupts his overview of possible topics for a British epic with a dense cluster of programmatic allusions, a dramatisation of the poet's route to an epic register.

[...] O mihi tum si vita supersit,
Tu procul annosa pendebis fistula pinu
Multum oblita mihi, aut patriis mutata camoenis
Brittonicum strides, quid enim?

(O, if I have any time left to live, you, my pastoral pipe, will hang far away on the branch of an old pine tree, entirely forgotten by me, or else, transformed by the native muses, will you whistle a British tune?)

Line 169 echoes E. 7. 24 extremely closely, in which Corydon's threat to cease singing evokes the sense of fragility pervading the *Eclogues*: "hic arguta sacra pendebit fistula pinu" ("here on the sacred pine shall hang a clear-voiced pipe"). That aspect of the allusion—the threat to the poet's song—is reinforced by the following line: "multum oblita mihi" reminds us of "nunc oblita mihi tot carmina" ("now so many of my songs are forgotten," E. 9. 53)

[17] On the epic "proemium" contained within the *Epitaphium Damonis*, see Revard, "Milton and the Progress of the Epic Proemium," especially 122-28.

especially as the elision of the second syllable of "multum" places both instances of "oblita mihi" in the same metrical position. But in Virgil's poem, as in Milton's, the threat of silence is only one of two options.

[Corydon:] nymphae noster amor Libethrides, aut mihi carmen
quale meo Codro concedite (proxima Phoebi
versibus ille facit); aut, si non possumus omnes,
hic arguta sacra pendebit fistula pinu
(E. 7. 21-24)

([Corydon:] Nymphs, our beloved, Libethrians, either grant me song such as you grant my Codrus (at poetry he is second-best only to Phoebus), or, if we can't all succeed, here on the sacred pine shall hang a tuneful pipe.)

That second option, of a different kind of poetry ("aut patriis mutata camoenis [...]" (170)) is anticipated by the allusion of the opening words of the sentence. "O mihi tum si vita supersit" (O, if there is any life left for me (168)) reminds us not of the *Eclogues* but rather of the third book of the *Georgics*: "primus ego in patriam mecum, modo vita, / Aonio supersit rediens deducam vertice Musas" (I will be the first, if life allows, to lead the Muses down from the Aonian mountain [Helicon] into my native land (10-11)). This famous passage goes on to imagine the poetic project in terms of a temple upon the banks of Mincius in Mantua (Virgil's homeland), and is traditionally interpreted as an anticipation of the *Aeneid*: the generic pressure which threatens to destroy the new genre of the *Eclogues* even as it is being written is here, despite the elegiac tone and context, rewritten not as pressure, but as hope.

We can end where we began, with the poem's refrain, progressively "re-read" as the elegy proceeds: from a poet-shepherd too distracted by grief to feed his flock, and associated by age, sorrow and failure to the loss of song itself, to a figure who has grown up and out of pastoral, as his loss of pastoral song makes way for a new and greater mode. The generic pressure exerted on pastoral which is a feature of the *Eclogues* is itself imitated and redeployed in Milton's poem: Thyrsis's loss becomes the beginning of epic, and the "things" Thyrsis was keeping for Damon are appropriately wrapped in the bark of victor's laurel: "haec tibi servabam lenta sub cortice lauri" ("I was keeping these things for you in supple laurel bark," 180).

Milton's allusive practice in this poem is extraordinarily dense and involved. In this, just as much as his choice of metre, word order and ictus, he

is proving himself a consummate imitator of Virgil. It is not only that he is adopting and re-writing the (Virgilian) pastoral form; within the poem, the echoes of Virgil, the context of those echoes, the joyful second line which disappears in Milton's text and is left resounding in the reader's (as in Thyrsis's) ear become themselves not only a way of figuring his loss, but actually of representing it. Within this poem, for this moment, the loss of his (Italian) friend has become the loss of Virgil—our alienation from the Virgilian text by our time and our language as well as the insistent sadness, the immanent loss which characterises the *Eclogues* themselves.

But—most remarkably—Virgil is also the way out of grief, the generic pressure exerted upon the pastoral world which forces Thrysis up and out, into georgic endeavour and towards a vision of epic accomplishment. Thyrsis offers his dead friend the gift of an idea he has been saving for him, and in so doing he comes to see that this very idea emerges from the pastoral memory of their friendship. Milton has lost Virgil (and Latin) only to extend to himself the hope of finding him again in an English epic. If we don't read the *Epitaphium Damonis*, if we don't read this Latin elegy, this elegy for a kind of Latin, in and through Virgil, we scarcely read it at all.

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