

Mourning Place in Pastoral Elegy

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This paper seeks to centralize the role of the pastoral place, of generic convention, as it functions within John Milton's pastoral elegies, focussing on "Lycidas" and the Latin elegy "Epitaphium Damonis."¹ I do not mean to trace out these poems' generic markers and echoes, as this has been done extensively elsewhere.² Rather, I would like to focus on the speaker of these poems, the shepherd-elegist, as a figure who is inscribed by the worldview of a pastoral landscape so that I may, in turn, address the violent disruption to this landscape which the event of death has provoked and which the elegies themselves attempt to remedy. Within the much more voluminous criticism of "Lycidas" one may note a paradigmatic trend that has occluded the importance of the shepherd-elegist's generic center.³ Samuel Johnson's commentary on the poem offers perhaps the best known instance of this perspective:

In this poem ["Lycidas"] there is no nature, for there is no truth; there is no art, for there is nothing new. Its form is that of a pastoral, easy, vulgar, and therefore disgusting; whatever images it can supply are long ago exhausted, and its inherent improbability always forces dissatisfaction on the mind [...] We know that they [Milton and King] never drove a field, and that they had no flocks to batten. (60-61)

Johnson's comments polarize convention and sincerity, suggesting that the shepherd figure is both hackneyed and improbable, since neither Milton nor King were in fact shepherds (nor Charles Diodati for that matter). In his essay "Literature as Context: Milton's *Lycidas*," Northrop Frye seeks to qualify this fission by expanding the notion of sincerity into two concepts: "personal sincerity" and "literary sin-

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cerity.”⁴ “If we start with the fact that *Lycidas* is highly conventional and that Milton knew King only slightly,” Frye argues, then “we may see in *Lycidas* an ‘artificial’ poem” which lacks “personal sincerity” (210). However, Frye continues, “*Lycidas* is a passionately sincere poem” in terms of “literary sincerity” precisely because of “Milton’s [deep interest] in the structure and symbolism of funeral elegies” (210).

My present interest is in highlighting the shepherd-elegist’s literary sincerity—his full generic weight—as an interpretive crux that is inscribed at the center of the poem. Granting the seemingly transparent assumption that the speakers of “*Lycidas*” and “*Epitaphium Damonis*” are shepherds from a harmonious pastoral setting confronted by the event of death, certain more provocative questions arise: How prepared is this figure to mourn? What capacities can a shepherd, a wandering emanation from the pastoral, have for elegy? How, indeed, is this figure’s pastoral center inflected by the death-event which brings the poem into being? And how, in turn, is the mourning of this death inflected by the elegist’s pastoral center? These questions are essentially questions of place, and it is my aim to show that the shepherd-elegist, as a survivor of a disrupted pastoral place, speaks an elegy that strives not only to place the deceased within an otherworldly, protective enclosure but, perhaps more urgently, to reconstitute the unstable boundaries of the pastoral itself. Death has caused intense disruption within the pastoral landscape, cutting the dialogic pair in two. At the center of this cut is the pastoral elegist who has lost companion, dialogue and—most traumatically—*place*. Cast as a figure of placelessness, an *unheimlich*⁵ wanderer, the shepherd-elegist works through the elegy to restore his own sense of place within the altered pastoral landscape. He must, after all, go on living there. It is his place.

Mourning the death of Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jacques Derrida remarks, in *Béliers*, upon the ontological position of the surviving friend in terms which are pertinent to our current discussion. Evoking Freud and Heidegger, Derrida speaks of the surviving friend as *unheimlich*: the survivor, Derrida suggests, becomes homeless, or placeless, fol-

lowing the death of his companion. "Survival carries within itself the trace of an ineffaceable incision," writes Derrida (8). This incision, or cut, begins with the event of death itself, the "blind Fury with [...] abhorred shears / [Who] *slits* the thin-spun life" as Milton describes it in "Lycidas" (75-76; emphasis added).⁶ Following the event of death, the incision "multiplies itself" (Derrida 7) and the cut which had begun as an external event becomes internalized by the survivor. "One interruption affects another" (7), asserts Derrida. Death begins by cutting one person off from another, and then it proceeds to cut the survivor off from himself. The dialogic world which the friendship, the coming together, had constituted is violently severed and although, as Derrida writes, "the dialogue [...] will forever be wounded by [death's] ultimate interruption" (6) the survivor persists, cut in two, speaking singly in a once dialogic landscape. "Death," Derrida contends, "is nothing less than an end of *the world* [...] every time" (8), not only for the deceased but for the survivor who is left "in the world, outside the world, deprived of the world" (8) which that dialogue had once constituted.

Derrida's speaking of death as a lost dialogue directly suggests pastoral elegy itself, where the fundamentally dialogic world of pastoral becomes the monologic voice of elegy.⁷ Pastoral elegy's lost dialogue, further, suggests a loss of home, a loss of the world which the now-absent dialogue had constituted. This, I would argue, is the status of the shepherd-elegist as "Lycidas" and "Epitaphium Damonis" begin: a placeless figure mourning a lost companion and, moreover, mourning the loss of pastoral's prototypically dialogic construction. Where there were two, now there is one, and that one must now make his way through an altered landscape. On the surface of taxonomy, the ontological disruption of place with which the surviving shepherd is confronted is clear: the genealogy indicated by the rubric *pastoral elegy* (the mode's status as the offspring of two independent *modes*, *pastoral* and *elegy*)⁸ is about as fundamentally incongruous a meeting as one can imagine. What, after all, has the pastoral to do with elegy? "Pastoral feeling," in Paul Alper's phrase, is characterized not by mortality

but by “the warmth of the sun, fresh air, and [...] free perambulation with purpose temporarily suspended”(6), characteristics which all suggest a harmonious view of time. As Orlando observes in *As You Like It*, “there’s no clock in the forest”(III.ii.291-92). Contrary to the harmonious temporality of pastoral, elegy’s temporality is, as Peter Sacks writes in *The English Elegy*, a setting of “extreme discontinuity”(23), a linear urgency which is decidedly “unpastoral”(Alpers 6). The coming together of *pastoral* and *elegy* in *pastoral elegy* represents, I would suggest, a coming together of antithetical temporalities, and it is the shepherd-elegist (as my hyphenated nomenclature indicates) who embodies this converged antithesis.⁹

The notion that death moves violently counter to the pastoral is centralized in the opening lines of “Lycidas”:

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,
And with forc’d 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, [...] (1-8)

In part conventional, self-protecting modesty—“denial vain and coy excuse” (18)—the poem’s opening also establishes early the troping of death as a violence done to the pastoral landscape. “Bitter constraint and sad occasion dear / Compels me to disturb your season due.” The survivor’s elegy, figured as an unripe, unskilled picking of foliage before fruition, ignores pastoral’s harmonious, cyclic flow—its *season due*—and damages the pastoral landscape, “shatter[ing]” its “leaves before the mellowing year.” Thus the shepherd, a steward of the pastoral, becomes—in his initial reaction to death—an instrument that damages the pastoral landscape. This oddly inverted relationship speaks of the cut, the fission, which the event of death has triggered between the surviving shepherd and his pastoral landscape. In “Epitaphium Damonis,” we similarly witness a surviving shepherd

whom death has cut off from his landscape. Indeed, the elegist of “*Epitaphium Damonis*” seems to be even more violently cut off from his landscape, his sense of dislocation serving as an organizing principle of the entire elegy, given in the refrain “*Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni*” [Go home unfed, my lambs, for your troubled master cannot tend to you].¹⁰

Both poems present responses to nature which mimic each elegist’s respective concern over prematurity and belatedness: Lycidas has died too young, and the shepherd-elegist is a (self-styled) premature talent; Damon has been dead two years, “*Et iam bis viridi surgebat culmus arista, / Et totidem flavas numerabant horrea messes, / Ex quo summa dies tulerat Damona sub umbras*” (9-11) [And by now twice has arisen the green ear of grain (*arista*), and just as many (*totidem*) years has the yellow crop been harvested and counted since his last day (*summa dies*) had carried Damon below, to the shades], thus casting his mourner in a position of belated grief and song. The play on “*sub umbras*” here is delightful in its blending of a place of pastoral living into a place of death: in the context of Damon’s death it means, indeed, “to the shades,” or “in the underworld”; however, this is an ironic reapplication of the phrases’s more regular usage within pastoral, where “*sub umbras*” refers to the place in which shepherds meet to engage in dialogue (Milton, in fact, employs this very usage at line 148 of “*Epitaphium Damonis*”). As Lycidas’s elegist’s concern with prematurity is further troped as a premature plucking of fruit, the belatedness of Damon’s elegist is analogously reflected in his response to his surroundings; rather than breaking the fruit before its time, he lets his surroundings overgrow, neglected:

Heu! quam culta mihi prius arva procacibus herbis
 Involuntur, 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. (63-67)

[Alas, how my formerly (*prius*) cultivated fields are overgrown with useless weeds, and the tall wheatfield (*seges*) itself sags from blight! The neglected

grape withers unwedded on the vine, and the myrtle groves delight (iuvo) me not; my sheep also are disgusting (taedet), *but* they are sad and turn their faces to (convertunt) their master.]

These pastoral elegies present responses to nature which display not only the shepherd-elegist's severance from a harmonious relationship with his surroundings but, moreover, scenes which mimic each elegist's respective concern over prematurity and belatedness. In both instances place—the pastoral place—is damaged by the event of death, by the shepherd-elegist's encounter with death, either through neglect or direct violence.

The theory of place which I am extending in this essay is deliberately (and necessarily) selective: primarily, I take Aristotle's pronouncements in the *Physics* as my organizing hypothesis (cf. *Physics* 212a14-21). It is in the *Physics* that Aristotle provides the metaphor of place as being something very much like a vessel.¹¹ This metaphor is instructive, as it emphasizes place as a collocation whose purpose it is to gather, hold together, and protect. The pastoral landscape of the eponymous genre is itself a bounded, protective enclosure. Place, within the pastoral, in every sense, *holds*, an operation that is predicated as much by what is inside the pastoral place as by what is outside of it: in the *Januarye* woodcut of *The Shepheardes Calender*, as Colin turns toward the city, one recognizes that he must, simultaneously, turn his back to the pastoral.¹² As Edward Casey writes of the holding operation of place, "what holds the collocation there is the landscape's horizon within which [one is] situated by means of a distinguishable *here vs. there* that forms the epicenter of the place where [one is] at" (248-49).¹³ This Aristotelian "here vs. there" notion of bounded place is pertinent to our current discussion of the surviving shepherd of "Lycidas" and "Epitaphium Damonis," who is attempting to reconstitute and regain the boundaries of his own pastoral place, for this restoration of place can only be achieved by reconstructing the *horizon* of the pastoral. The "here vs. there" boundaries of the pastoral, that is, must be rebuilt. The transgressing element—death and the deceased himself—must be, in a physical, spiritual, and ontological sense,

moved. It is only through the creation of a “there”—a new landscape, a new place—for the deceased that the shepherd-elegist’s “here,” the pastoral, may be reconstituted.

The first step toward the recovery of place for the elegist is the bringing to presence of the deceased. As Lloyd Kermode notes, until the deceased can be possessed in some measure, it is impossible to fully mourn the loss and, paradoxically, to release it: “[The] double-bind of the community’s need to settle the lost one in a context of absence and safety (e.g., the woods, heaven) yet also to possess some token or reminder, some presence relating to the lost one” (13) is central to the work of mourning. But it is precisely this impulse which cannot be satisfied within “*Lycidas*.” The deceased’s body is nowhere to be found. The poem immediately draws us into the surviving shepherd’s perplexity over the physical absence of the other:

For *Lycidas* is dead, dead ere his prime,
Young *Lycidas*, and hath not left his peer:
Who would not sing for *Lycidas*? [...] (8-10).

The effort here is to orientate oneself, using the repetition of the deceased’s name as a form of recovery and a bringing to presence.¹⁴ The name “*Lycidas*” is spoken three times in as many lines in the poem’s opening section; it is spoken only twice in the poem’s subsequent 145 lines, and then three times again in quick succession in the song’s final verse paragraph. “The survivor leans upon the name,” (26) Sacks writes, discussing elegiac convention. “The name, by dint of repetition, takes on a kind of substantiality” (26). “The griever must be convinced of the actual fact of loss” (24).

For the elegist of “*Epitaphium Damonis*,” the conflict between the physical absence of the deceased and the importance of presence in the process of mourning is all the more pronounced: the elegist is two years too late. Indeed, the pair had been separated *before* the death, and physical absence—the severance of their coming together—was indistinguishable from death. “Ah!,” the elegist complains, “quoties dixi, cum te cinis ater habebat, / ‘Nunc canit, aut lepori nunc tendit

retia Damon / Vimina nunc textit varios sibi quod sit in usus” (142-44). [Ah, often I would say, although dark ashes already held you (habebat): “Now Damon is singing, or stretching (tendit) nets for hares; now he is weaving twigs together (textit) for a variety of uses.”] Historically, this speaks of the intense fragmentation of the period, of not only an often criss-crossed and stymied flow of information about loved ones but also of incorrect information, of rumours of death and, as here, instances of unknown deaths. The elegist longs for clarity, longs for the position of witness as a necessity of mourning: “Ah! certe extremum licuisset tangere dextram, / Et bene compositos placide morientis ocellos, / Et dixisse, ‘Vale! nostri memor ibis ad astra’” (121-23). [Assuredly (certe) had I stayed, at the last (extremum) I might have touched his hand and closed his eyes, him who was gently passing away (placide morientis), and said: “Farewell, remember me as you go toward the stars.”] To say “farewell,” (Vale!), to watch Damon go “toward the stars” (ad astra) marks a desire, besides that of saying one’s good-byes, of having witnessed a transition from one world, one place, to another—a transition from “here” to “there.” As Ellen Lambert writes in *Placing Sorrow*:

Like Castiglione, he [the shepherd-elegist of “Epitaphium Damonis”] feels his grief the more intensely because he was not there at the time of his friend’s death [...] and he too spins fantasies of reunion, not realizing that his friend is already dead. The poem itself becomes, like “Alcon,” an attempt to effect a symbolic burial, a symbolic farewell. (182)

In “Lycidas,” too, the elegist lacks a body to sing over. The absence of a corpse is presented in fact in terms of a frustrated convention: there is no hearse to cover with flowers, only the desire to do so:

Throw hither all your quaint enamell’d eyes,
That on the green turf suck the honied showers,
And purple all the ground with vernal flowers.
Bring the rathe Primrose that forsaken dies,
The tufted Crow-toe, and pale Jessamine,
The white Pink, the Pansy freakt with jet,
[...]

To strew the Laureate Hearse where *Lycid* lies. (139-44; 151)

The shepherd-elegist's frustrated desire to cover the hearse of the deceased with flowers represents a double longing for the presence both of the body and the ontological solidity which pastoral elegy's self-reflexive and self-repeating structure entails.¹⁵ As Barbara Johnson notes, the strewing of the hearse with flowers is a "conventional mode[] of consolation [...] of pastoral elegy" (69); critics tend to emphasize the poem's inability to enact this convention as a testing of the pastoral. However, since the breakdown of the flower convention is a corollary of a deeper absence—the absence of the corpse of Lycidas—it is this which must be addressed.¹⁶

As I have suggested, the shepherd-elegist must *place* the deceased's body outside of pastoral's "here" so that he may reconstruct his landscape's horizon. The inability to possess the body of either Lycidas or Damon, the inability to bring it to presence, I would argue, tropes the shepherd-elegist's desire to locate and move the deceased to an identifiable "there." This desire is made visible when one notices, in "Lycidas," just how frenetically cast the body's present, undesirable status is in the *no-place* of the sea. The description of the body of Lycidas is given vivid motion—and, one might add, intensely ironic and disturbing motion, given that it is a corpse—as it travels through the poem, ungraspable: Lycidas, in the poem's opening, "float[s]," and "welter[s]" in a "parching wind" until the "remorseless deep / Close[s] o'er [his] head," and "s[i]nk[s] so low [his] sacred head," which the sea then "Wash[es] far away" as Lycidas is "hurled" by the "sounding seas," "under the whelming tide" and, finally, cast to "the bottom of the monstrous world." The descent of Lycidas's body begins at line twelve and does not reach the "bottom of the monstrous world" until line 158.¹⁷ The body's "downward trajectory" (Johnson 22) reaches its nadir at line 167 ("Sunk though he be beneath the watery floor"). This *end* is a place, as Barbara Johnson notes, at which the narrative of Lycidas's body "has finally reached a resting point" (22). If we recall the Aristotelian notion of place as constructed by a "here vs. there" relationship, we see just how suggestive the descent of Lycidas is: he

ends up, as Johnson correctly notes, “as far outside the pastoral world as it is possible to go” (23). (Until, of course, his ascent, which is able to begin only after this lowest point has been reached.) To begin to repair the rift of pastoral place which the event of death has occasioned, the elegy precisely needs to get Lycidas “as far outside the pastoral as it is possible to go.” The Shepherd-elegist also needs to make sure that he stays “there” by combating motion with the spatial fixity of place. The elegist’s, and indeed the elegy’s, first success is in sinking the body in an identifiable “there” far outside the pastoral and stopping its motion.

Damon’s elegist’s response to the absence of a body is equally revealing: lacking a corpse, he turns to memory as a surrogate means by which to create the necessary bringing to presence of the deceased. The function of memory as a surrogate means by which to create place—a means by which to combat temporality—is clearly suggested by the cognitive function of memory. As Edward R. Casey writes of memory, “one basic dimension of the world in which the past is kept is *place* [...] memories are, if not expressly *about* place, richly rooted in them and inseparable from them” (284-89). Memory, that is, attempts to freeze time *in* place. The elegist of “Epitaphium Damonis” repeatedly slips into the landscape of memory in precisely this manner, attempting to recover the deceased and fix him in a specifically remembered place, a “vision of remembered pastoral felicity” (Lambert 182). For example, as the elegist asks, “At mihi quid tandem fiet modo?” (37), or “quis mihi fidus / Haerebit lateri comes, ut tu saepe solebas / Frigoribus duris, et per loca foeta pruinis, / Aut rapido sub sole, siti morientibus herbis, / [...] / Quis fando sopire diem cantuque solebit?” (37-40; 43) [*But* what finally (tandem) will become of me now (modo)? What faithful companion will stay close by my side like you often did in the harsh (duris) cold of winter (frigoribus) and through (per) places ugly with hoarfrost (pruinis), or when the grass was dying of thirst beneath the first sun [...] Who now will distract my days with talk and song?], the lines following the question provide a conciliatory moment of recollection, a bringing to presence of a lost

past and place. "Pectora cui credam?" (45) [To whom shall I trust (credo) my heart?] the elegist asks. This asking brings immediately forward the severed past whose combined role as an object of comfort and mourning is so skillfully cast as a series of stabilizing memories blended into the interrogative:

quis me lenire docebit
Mordaces curas, quis longam fallere noctem
Dulcibus alloquiis, grato cum sibilat igni
Molle pirum, et nucibus strepitat focus, at malas auster
Miscet cuncta foris, et desuper intonat ulmo (45-49).

[Who will teach me to relieve (lenio) my biting cares and to shorten the long night with sweet (dulcibus) conversation, while on the pleasing fire soft pears hiss, and nuts crackle on the hearth, *but* out of doors (foris) the wicked (malas) south wind is distorting everything into confusion and, from above (desuper), roaring through the elms?]

At first a frightened question of what the elegist is to do, followed by a remarkable bringing to presence of a pleasantly recalled scene from the past in which the pair roasted pears, and chestnuts, sheltered in dialogic discourse through an otherwise dark night. Memory, however, fails the elegist; indeed, the great pain which the elegist finally confesses is that his landscape, the very *place* in which friendship and dialogue once flourished, is now a *place* of loss, of aloneness: "At iam solus agros, iam pascua solus oberro, / Sicubi ramosae densantur vallibus umbrae, / Hic serum expecto; supra caput imber et Eurus / Triste sonant, fractaeque agitata crepuscula silvae" (58-61). [*But* now alone through the fields, alone through the pastures, I forage (oberro); wherever the branches thicken shade in the valleys, here (hic) I await the evening; above my head a rain storm (imber) and the south wind (Eurus) make a mournful sound (triste sonant) in the agitated twilight of the forest.]

A similarly troubled effect is enacted, in "Lycidas," by the shepherd-elegist's frustrated effort to bring the deceased to presence within his own memory. The project of utilizing memory as a surrogate mode of recovery is presented in lines 23-36:

For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
 Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.
 Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
 Under the opening eyelids of the morn,
 We drove afield, and both together heard
 What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
 Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
 Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning, bright
 Toward Heav'n's descent had slop'd his westering wheel.
 Meanwhile the Rural ditties were not mute,
 Temper'd to th'Oaten Flute;
 Rough *Satyrs* danc'd, and *Fauns* with clov'n heel
 From the glad sound would not be absent long,
 And old *Damaetas* lov'd to hear our song. (23-36)

What is being remembered is not merely a specific person, but a specific *place*, a pastoral place; in fact, one might remark that what is being remembered is the landscape of the pastoral mode itself. The memory contains all the markers of pastoral: nature “nurse[s]” the pair “upon the self-same hill,” as they, in reciprocity, feed “the same flock,” in a landscape of “fountain, shade, and rill.” What is remembered is a mode of existence, an activity of reciprocity between nature and man running the full, pastoral daily cycle. The elegist remembers not only the deceased but himself as well. As such, memory becomes another means by which the surviving shepherd attempts to recover not only the deceased but the pastoral, through a nostalgic turn toward the reassuring power of the memory of a place which predates the event of death. As Casey writes of the restorative power of placial memory: “place is eminently suited for the keeping operation which we found earlier to lie at the core of remembering [...] the past itself can be kept in place, right in place, especially when place is taken in its full landscape being” (284).

Since place and memory are conjoined one sees, in the lines quoted, a unification of place, deceased, and elegist: “*we* were nursed upon the *self-same hill* / Fed the *same* clock,” “*Together* both,” “*together* heard,” “*our* song.” But the precise problem with memory lies within its very effectiveness: that is, just as the dialogic construction of the memory—

we, together, our—comforts, it also destabilizes the memory. The other is, after all, gone, and it is clear that what the elegist misses most intently is the image of himself *with* his lost companion. He remembers, and longs for, *them*—the hills, *otium*, the dialogism of pastoral. Even as the elegist recalls his own pastoral past he reveals his sense of severance from that pastoral inheritance, proclaiming:

But O the heavy change, now thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return!
Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
With wild Thyme and the gadding Vine o'ergrown,
And all their echoes mourn. (37-41)

Following the Derridean paradigm of mourning, one observes that death has penetrated deep into the surviving shepherd, down even into his memory. Just as the surviving shepherd had once inhabited, and was inhabited by, the pastoral landscape he recollects as a *self-same hill*, so now he is inhabited by, and inhabits, a landscape inscribed by the heavy change of death¹⁸: “As killing as the canker to the rose [...] Such, Lycidas, thy loss to shepherd’s ear” (45-49).¹⁹ The failure of the memory to provide consolation is an important failure because it tells us that the rift, the cut, of death has passed through the shepherd-elegist’s surroundings, into him, all the way into his own past.

I would like to conclude this discussion of the role of place in these elegies by highlighting the two most important placements which have been under discussion as central facets of mourning: the placement of the deceased and, following from it, the placement of the survivor. Although, as I have argued, these two placings are entwined, for the sake of clarity it is perhaps useful to break the process in two. I propose therefore to first discuss the placement of Damon and then, focusing on the perplexing emergence of the new voice at the close of “Lycidas,” to discuss the placement of the shepherd-elegist, suggesting that the coda of “Lycidas” is a necessary framing device that recovers the memory landscape of lines 23-36 and by

which the poem speaks of the shepherd-elegist's ultimately successful recovery of, and replacement in, the pastoral landscape.

It is in the concluding ekphrasis of "Epitaphium Damonis" that the shepherd-elegist is able, at last, to place the deceased. The antithetical tension between the temporality which death suggests and the harmonious time which pastoral suggests, is addressed by this ekphrastic placing. Ekphrasis, in many respects, represents the ultimate atemporal placing, working to render the spatial in language, thus seeking to overcome the temporality of language.²⁰ "Time," Casey writes, "'displaces subsistence,' and it is not at all surprising that our distressful thoughts concerning the oblivion to which the past is prone are tied to time, to its dispersing movement" (254). The recompense of ekphrasis is that it emphasizes spatial fixity—emphasizes *place*—outside of the dispersing movement of time. This appeal is exactly right for the elegist of "Epitaphium Damonis," precisely the vehicle by which to place the deceased in not only a "there" but an atemporal, objectified "there." Milton, I would argue, is also quite aware of the irony involved in presenting Damon's emplacement as entwined with frustrated convention. The cups, that is, are gifts which (in keeping with the tradition of gift exchange among shepherds) the shepherd-elegist has been keeping (*servo*) for Damon. "Haec tibi servabam lenta sub cortice lauri. / Haec, et plura simul" (180) [These things I was saving for you (*servo*) under the tough laurel bark, these and more together (*plura simul*)]. Instead of giving the gift, however, the elegist offers a brief history, explaining, "tum quae mihi pocula Mansus, / Mansus, Chalcidicae non ultima gloria ripae, / Bina dedit, mirum artis opus, mirandus et ipse" (181-83) [At that time (*tum*), I thought to show you the two cups that Manso (Manso who is not the least glory of the Chalcidian shore), gave me; they are wonderful works of art, but Manso himself is wonderful]. But, of course, this is now not possible.

Following the frustration of the possibility of gift exchange, the ekphrasis becomes more detailed, focussing on the circular nature of the described cups' engraving: "Et circum gemino caelaverat argumento. / In medio rubri maris unda, et odoriferum ver, / Littora longa

Arabum, et sundantes balsama silvae; / Has inter Phoenix, divina avis, unica terris" (184-87) [They are banded all around with a double motif. In the middle are the waters of the Red Sea, and the odoriferous spring, the far off shores of Arabia, and the woods of balsam. Among these is the Phoenix, divine bird, the only of its kind on the earth (unica terris)]. The cups' circularity, suggestive of atemporality, is also suggestive of a protective enclosure, which is precisely what I would argue the poem's concluding ekphrastic placement functions as. The cups, that is, act as an 'encircling embrace' around the deceased. "Place," as Casey writes, "offers protection against time's diasporadic or 'ecstatic' proclivity [...] by its encircling embrace, place shields, holds within and withholds rather than scattering subsistence in dissemination" (254). The ekphrastic placement of Damon brilliantly emphasizes this central tension of mourning, by positing a possible emollient that has been sought throughout the poem (recall: *quis me lenire docebit / Mordaces curas* ...): "Tu quoque in his—nec me fallit spes lubrica, Damon— / Tu quoque in his certe es" (198-99) [You also are among these—nor does elusive hope deceive me, Damon—assuredly you too are among these], the elegist exclaims, of Damon's placement. "Nam quo tua dulcis abiret / Sanctaque simplicitas, nam quo tua candida virtus?" (199-200) [For where else should your sweet and holy simplicity go, where your dazzling excellence?]. As we shall see of Lycidas's placement, mourning ceases immediately at the instant of emplacement, the instant at which the deceased has been moved into the decidedly unpastoral landscape ekphrastically rendered: "Nec tibi conveniunt lacrymae, nec flebimus ultra. / Ite procul, lacrymae; purum colit aethera Damon [...]" (201-03) [Tears for you are wrong, and I weep no more (nec flebimus ultra). Then, away tears! Damon dwells in the pure ether [...]] (purum colit aethera Damon)].

As we reach the coda of "Lycidas," Lycidas has already been placed into the secure "there" of heaven, a placement which ends his floating and weltering and, as a corollary, makes it possible that the shepherd-elegist may too find an end to his ontological drift. "So *Lycidas*, sunk low, but mounted high, / [...] / In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and

love" (172; 177). The work of the elegy has been successful in mourning, celebrating, and placing the deceased, but what now is to become of the surviving shepherd? This seems to be the question which the coda is interested in addressing, and it is the emergence of the coda's new voice which equips the poem to frame a response.

From the perspective of the framing coda, the reader looks back—looks, one might say, into—the pastoral landscape which the shepherd-elegist now, again, inhabits. The coda:

Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th'Oaks and rills,
While the still morn went out with Sandals gray;
He touch't the tender stops of various Quills,
With eager thought warbling his *Doric* lay:
And now the Sun had stretch't out all the hills,
And now was dropped into the Western bay;
At last he rose, and twitch't his Mantle blue:
Tomorrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new. (186-93)

Returning to lines 23-36, we may note the ways in which the coda recalls and recovers the pastoral memory sequence of lines 23-36. To facilitate a clearer discussion of the echoes present between the two sections, I provide them here, side-by-side:²¹

ll. 23-36

Coda

For we ere nurst upon the self-same **hill**,
Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and **rill**.
Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
Under the opening eyelids of the **morn**,
We drove afield, and both together heard
What time the **Gray**-fly winds her sultry horn,
Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
Oft till the Star that **rose**, at Ev'ning, bright,
Toward Heaven's descent had slop'd his **wester-**
ing wheel
Meanwhile the Rural ditties were not mute,
Temper'd to th' Oaten flute,
Rough *Satyrs* danc'd, and *Fauns* with clov'n heel
From the glad sound would not be absent long,
And old *Damaetas* lov'd to hear our song.

Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th' Oaks and **rills**,
While the still **morn** went out with Sandals **gray**;
He touch't the tender stops of various Quills,
With eager thought warbling his *Doric* lay:
And now the **Sun** had stretch't out all the **hills**,
And now was dropt into the **Western** bay;
At last he **rose**, and twitch't his Mantle blue:
To-morrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.

The echoes between the two passages are numerous. The direct repetitions of single words include: "hill" and "hills"; "rill" and "rills"; "morn" and "morn"; "gray" and "gray"; "western" and "westering,"; "rose" and "rose." In addition, various topical echoes may be identified: "song" is answered by the coda's "sang"; the "glad sound" and "oaten flute" of the earlier passage become the coda's "warbling" and "Doric lay"; "descent" is echoed in "dropped"; "pastures" in "a-field." These surface repetitions constitute a larger, essential pattern which the two passages share—a movement from morning to evening, across the whole pastoral daily round, with an emphasis on song. Missing, however, from the coda are the dancing satyrs and the dialogic singing patterns, but we have already had our song—the monody itself—which has functioned as a surrogate for the pair's singing. Despite the reading of the coda as a harbinger of Milton's desired movement toward epic, the coda clearly emphasizes the pastoral: the shepherd-elegist is going to pastures, however 'new' they may be. The final, framing voice creates a new landscape to be sure (since it now includes a direct apprehension of death), but it is a decidedly pastoral one.

With the echoing coda one can see the poem offering up the ontological solidity which the shepherd-elegist has been lacking all along: the elegist's memory of the pastoral, recalled and spoken by a new, detached voice, loses its nostalgic longing and becomes, as it echoes through the coda, a bracing known whose presence the reader feels at the core of the coda. The elegy is suddenly framed, by the coda, as a singing that has unfolded across a full pastoral day decidedly similar to the prototypical pastoral day recalled in lines 23-36. (Lycidas's ascent, too, in being associated with the "day-star," enacts this return to cyclicity). It is by once more recalling the memory sequence of the earlier passage that the coda makes the shepherd-elegist's return to the pastoral clear. After placing Lycidas in the secure "there" of heaven, the shepherd-elegist leaves off the work of mourning: he stops speaking the poem. Instead, the poem speaks him. The new framing voice allows the reader to view the pastoral-elegist not as an

actively mourning figure within a disrupted pastoral landscape but, rather, as a figure within a conventional setting. In a remarkable pulling back, the coda presents a placing of the shepherd-elegist not so fully depicted in “Epitaphium Damonis.” The framing voice provides another point—a “there”—which solidifies the boundary into which the “uncouth swain” is placed, locating him within a reconstituted, regained, pastoral place.

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NOTES

¹The sense of “conventional” as a “coming together” (from the Latin *convenire*) is doubly apt with regards to the pastoral. As Paul Alpers notes in *What is Pastoral?*, “pastoral poems make explicit the dependence of their conventions on the idea of [shepherds] coming together [...] for songs and colloquies” (81). A central trope of “Lycidas” is *the frustration of such dialogic convening*.

²For an exhaustive cataloguing of echoes and allusions in “Lycidas” see *A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton*, 2: 544-734. For a cataloging and discussion of the generic echoes of “Epitaphium Damonis” see the *Variorum*, 1: 282-324.

³This paradigm has long held a central position in discussions of “Lycidas.” Richard P. Adams’s pronouncement in 1949 that “it has been made increasingly evident by critics in recent years that the drowning of Edward King was the occasion, rather than the subject, of Lycidas” (111) suggests that readings centered upon the occasionality of the poem were vital long after Johnson’s commentary. Such readings, as I argue below, have tended to blur the epistemological force of the pastoral world inscribed at the center of the poem’s shepherd-elegist by shifting the focus away from genre and toward occasionality.

⁴Frye is certainly addressing Johnson, but as an exemplum of the “fallacy [which confuses] personal sincerity and literary sincerity” (210). The concepts are readily apprehended in terms of their everyday meaning—“personal sincerity” being a direct, subjective expression of feeling and “literary sincerity” being an expression mediated through conventional, recognizable tropes. Conventionality, in Frye’s view, as it pertains to his notion of literary sincerity, is a vehicle which makes articulation possible: “one may,” Frye writes, “burst into tears at the news of a friend’s death, but one can never spontaneously burst into song, however doleful a lay” (210).

⁵*Unheimlich*, as Derrida notes, is “untranslatable” (3); however, its lineage as a concept may be usefully traced. As Svetlana Boym has noted in her chapter “On Diasporic Intimacy” in *The Future of Nostalgia*, “Freud examined multiple meanings for the word *homey* (*heimlich*) from ‘familiar,’ ‘friendly’ and ‘intimate’ to ‘secretive’ and ‘allegorical.’ The word develops greater ambivalence until *homey* (*heimlich*) finally coincides with its opposite, the *uncanny* (*unheimlich*)” (251). See Sigmund Freud, “The Uncanny,” *Studies in Parapsychology* (New York: Collier Books, 1963). Derrida’s use of the word certainly includes these nuances but emphasizes, as I do, *unheimlich* as a condition of homelessness or placelessness analogous to Heidegger’s notion of homesickness or restlessness as communicated in *Being and Time* (cf. 188-91).

⁶Milton’s poems are quoted from the ed. by Merritt Y. Hughes.

⁷Pastoral expression, as Alpers notes, is most often cast dialogically: two shepherds, that is, singing to one another (Alpers 21-25). The way in which the act of dialogue itself represents—gives form to—other concerns of the pastoral may be noted in the various dichotomies which it plays out—country/courtly, nature/art, and, as exemplified by William Empson’s well known dictum, the complex/simple dialectic by which pastoral puts the “complex in the simple” (*Some Versions of Pastoral* 14). When we enter the realm of pastoral elegy we see Milton’s elegists singing monologically. “Lycidas” in fact emphasizes this in the prefatory note added to the 1645 edition, declaring itself a Monody.

⁸This statement is problematic, but necessary, even though a proper explanation would be far beyond the scope of the current paper. As Ellen Lambert notes in *Placing Sorrow*, it is not known “what would be most useful to know” (xxii); namely, “the extent to which the origins of the pastoral elegy are involved or distinct from those of the pastoral genre as a whole” (xxii). However, there is an important distinction to be made here regarding the types of temporality which both modes suggest—the former a cyclic, harmonious view of time presented within the *locus amoenus*, the latter an urgent, linear view of time dealing with “mortal loss and consolation” (Sacks 3).

⁹This is not to say that the pastoral world is without threats. As Lambert writes, “neither suffering nor death has ever been excluded from this paradise. And one can make at least a plausible case for the view that the pastoral dirge is the original pastoral song” [Lambert is here referring to Theocritus’s lament for Daphnis in his “first *Idyll*”] (xv). Although this may seem to problematize my view of pastoral’s harmonious temporality, I do not think that it substantively does. Yes, the pastoral is a threatened landscape but its horizon, in the here vs. there construction which I express, is composed precisely of the pastoral’s ability to stay these threats.

¹⁰“The words of the refrain are modeled on line 44 in Virgil, *Ecl.* 7. Milton uses the refrain 17 times; it occurs 19 times in Theocritus, *Id.* 1” (Milton, ed. Bush 163n18).

¹¹Aristotle writes: “just as the vessel is a transportable place, so place is a non-portable vessel” (212a13-15).

¹²Reproduced, among other places, in *The Yale Edition of the Shorter Poems of Edmund Spenser*.

¹³See Edward S. Casey’s “Keeping the Past in Mind,” collected in *American Continental Philosophy*. In terms of the Aristotelian notion of place, Casey draws directly from *Physics* (cf. 208b10-25).

¹⁴It would be difficult to overstate the importance of the play between presence and absence within (pastoral) elegy. In Peter Sack’s view, the mode presents “a perspective from which to reexamine the connection between language and the pathos of human consciousness” (xii) by animating an extreme instance (i.e. death) of one of the absences “which the use of language may seek to redress or appease” (xi).

¹⁵As Sacks has noted, pastoral elegies (perhaps none more so than “Lycidas”) are often “repetitions in themselves” of the entire genre to which they belong (23). “Epitaphium Damonis” begins, in fact, by creating presence out of generic echoes:

Himerides nymphae—nom vos et Daphnin et Hylan,
Et plorata diu meninistis fata Bionis—
Dicite Sicelicum Thamesina per oppida carmen. (1-3)
[Nymphs of Himera—for you remember Daphnis and Hylas and the
long-lamented destiny of Bion—repeat (Dicite) your Sicilian song
through the cities of the Thames.]

¹⁶Barbara Johnson describes the generic *unconventionality* of the elegist’s search for the body in “Lycidas” as “unprecedented in the history of pastoral elegy” (69).

¹⁷An important subtext involved in the distancing motion of the body is the critique of Platonic dualism which runs through the poem. “The image of the dead Lycidas,” Barbara Johnson writes, “is continually evoked as the swain attempts to picture where he is and what has happened to his body as well as his soul” (70). The body retreats, corporeality retreats but, Johnson argues, the poem ultimately suggests Milton’s monistic view of the relationship between the body and the soul in its apotheosis: “the image of Lycidas in heaven is not that of a shade or a disembodied soul; his corporeal nature is emphasized in heaven, just as it had been in the poem” (72).

¹⁸Inhabitation, that is, is bi-directional: as Heidegger writes in *Being and Time*, “what keeps us in our essential nature holds us only so long, however, as we for our part keep holding on to what holds us” (246).

¹⁹The phrase is not pathetic fallacy but an analogy which centralizes and unifies the shepherd-elegist’s knowledge of death (given in the synecdochal “ear,” itself a locus of knowing) *and* connects this knowing to a corruption of his natural surroundings. Death, as in the poem’s opening section, works against the pastoral setting.

²⁰For further discussion of the tension within ekphrastic poetry between stillness and motion see Murray Krieger's "Ekphrasis and the Still Motion of Poetry," which argues that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's argument in *Laöcoon, or On the Limits of Painting and Poetry* with regard to the dualistic distinction between painting's simultaneity and poetry's temporality may be interrogated and challenged: "poetry," Krieger argues, "through all sorts of repetitions, echoes, complexes of internal relations [...] converts its linear movement into [a] circle" (263).

²¹Words in **bold** denote direct repetitions among lines 23-36 and the coda; underlined words and phrases mark not specific repetitions but echoes in subject, theme, or idea.

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