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## Weak Milton

ROSS LERNER

Thus with the year  
Seasons return but not to me returns  
Day or the sweet approach of ev'n or morn  
Or sight of vernal bloom or summer's rose  
Or flocks or herds or human face divine  
But cloud instead and ever-during dark  
Surrounds me, from the cheerful ways of men  
Cut off and, for the book of knowledge fair,  
Presented with a universal blank  
Of nature's works to me expunged and razed  
And wisdom at one entrance quite shut out.  
So much the rather thou, celestial Light,  
Shine inward and the mind through all her powers  
Irradiate. *There* plant eyes. All mist from thence  
Purge and disperse, that I may see and tell  
Of things invisible to mortal sight!

—Milton, *Paradise Lost*<sup>1</sup>

Loss darkly authorizes poetic enterprise at the beginning of *Paradise Lost*'s third book. The possibility of poetry, of being able to “see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight,” depends on the inability to see. The images that the song conjures—flora, fauna, “human face divine”—appear to us, as readers, only insofar as they are absent to the poet’s “quenched” or “veiled” eyes.<sup>2</sup> The disruptive enjambment between lines 46 and 47—“from the cheerful ways of men / Cut off”—jarringly enacts the “expung[ing]” and “raz[ing]” of the visual bridge between the external world and the poet’s own thoughts. Within this lamentation of blindness, there is nonetheless compensatory inspiration, and it turns out to

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be better than vision itself: “So much the rather.” Figured by the infinitely complex “celestial Light” shining inward and planting eyes, Milton’s poetic election offers the possibility of recuperation, of being made a stronger poet than he ever would have been if still seeing. Being blind but able to see the invisible and tell about it in song is a gift that converts weakness into strength. Along with faith, the loss of phenomenal vision seems to be the necessary condition for a new mode of poetry rooted in invisible grace. It is this dialectic of privation and compensation that allows Milton to write *Paradise Lost*.

This beginning in weakness is itself a beginning again for Milton, and not simply because this passage comes in the third book of *Paradise Lost*. By locating the fundamental problem of a poetic voice’s emergence at the site of loss, the proem to book 3 implicitly directs readers to look back further to the emergence of Milton’s voice. To accept the familiar figure of the Miltonic poet finding unambiguous compensation for loss in the substitution of “celestial Light” at the moment of bereavement for mortal sight forgets this voice’s vexed beginnings prior to this loss.

Looking back to earlier lyrics, this essay examines Milton’s first published poem, “On *Shakespear*. 1630,” and a transitional elegy, “*Lycidas*,” to consider how Milton figures his own self-incipit as an inconsolable calling.<sup>3</sup> An epitaph for Shakespeare and an elegy for a friend, these poems register very different losses and, for that reason, provoke very different formal reflections on mourning. But both poems meditate on what Milton ultimately, and paradoxically, is incapable of doing, and it is this inability that constitutively shapes Milton’s early poetic calling. “On *Shakespear*” reveals Milton’s incapacity both to “witnes” Shakespeare and to write what the poem refers to as Shakespeare’s transcendent English.<sup>4</sup> “*Lycidas*” demonstrates Milton’s self-conscious incapacity to mourn a lost friend and fellow poet.

Critics from William Haller forward have often located in Milton’s early poetry, and especially in “*Lycidas*,” a clear, confident sense of his own divine calling to be a poet.<sup>5</sup> Our conviction in early Milton’s self-confidence structures even the most subtle and comprehensive recent work on Milton and self-representation. Stephen M. Fallon’s recent brilliant account of Milton’s sense of himself as a chosen figure of blamelessness, “oblivious of the effects of the fall in himself,” proposes that “Milton represents himself mainly to establish his authority in the world.”<sup>6</sup> Fallon contends that the chronology of Milton’s self-representations has a legible trajectory, “from early, relatively naïve, uncomplicated,

and univocal assertions of preternatural virtue, through the unsettling of this idealized self-construction, to the more conflicted and chastened self-representations of the mature Milton.”<sup>7</sup> I add a wrinkle to this account by folding the conflict of the end into the beginning, and thus locate another possibility that the trajectory Fallon has mapped elides: my claim is that Milton’s self-representation is anything but “naïve, uncomplicated, and univocal” in even his first published poem, and that we find some of the most vexed self-representations in Milton’s early attempts to understand and to depict his own poetic calling not as a form of chosen perfection but rather as a vocation he is too weak to achieve. These early poems do not represent the poet in order to establish his blameless authority in the world, but instead figure a poet in crisis, a poet whose longing for authority and the model of poetic potency it underwrites regularly draws him, speechless or stuttering, into encounters with his own weakness and paralysis. Whether responding to the absence of Shakespeare or the drowning of Edward King, these poems consider loss as a trial that paradoxically gives shape to and represents poetic vocation in the interruption of its capacity for stable genesis and compensation.

Dwelling with loss takes away from Milton’s own vocation-building power. Yet part of what this emphasis on weakness in early Miltonic lyric reveals is that such weakness is aesthetically and ethically transformative, even if it is antithetical to how critics usually construe Milton’s unparalleled commitment to will and virtue as religious, political, and artistic values. In insisting on the constitutive presence of weakness in Milton’s early lyric process and his own early self-conception as a poet, I aim to draw early Milton into the ambit of revalued weakness that has emerged in the works of Catherine Bates, Joseph Campana, and James Kuzner, who have in different ways sought to show the political and ethical value of weakness and disempowerment in Renaissance literature. Bates shows how Renaissance studies has methodologically foreclosed analyses of perverse, abject masculine disempowerment in English Renaissance lyric.<sup>8</sup> Campana proposes that the unnamed “central virtue” of the 1590 *Faerie Queene* is weakness itself, and in particular an embodied “shared vulnerability that would constitute the ground of ethical behavior.”<sup>9</sup> And Kuzner traces vulnerability as a central virtue in the Renaissance, recently claiming that Shakespeare and Donne cultivate dizzying, sometimes paralyzing states of “epistemological weakness” and failure, which can serve as ethical experiences of humility.<sup>10</sup>

With some exceptions, critics are not used to thinking about Milton as a poet who cultivates weakness as an ethical and aesthetic value.<sup>11</sup> More than perhaps any poet in English, Milton seems intensely invested in the will: in free will as a concept to be defended and in willful mastery of poetic technique. In recent criticism as radically different as Gordon Teskey's and Joanna Picciotto's, Milton's commitment to free will as a theological and political concept underwrites accounts of his investment in empowering self-representation, in the strength of his will as a poet. For Teskey, "Milton worked out everything he would ever think before he wrote *Paradise Lost*"; his will as a poet is so strong that it manifests in a kind of absolute "shamanic" foreknowledge, preceding and determining the material making of his poetry and justification of free will.<sup>12</sup> In an idiom more attuned to Milton's involvement with experimental science, Picciotto claims that Milton's entire career is dedicated to bridging the difference between fallen human existence and its exemplary created model, defined by unfallen strength and liberty, and that this empowering commitment is meant to authorize "an ongoing process of experimental self-cultivation."<sup>13</sup> Like Teskey's, Picciotto's analysis produces an image of Milton who is most himself when he achieves and casts his readers into a world of willful "exertion."<sup>14</sup> This exertion is collective for Picciotto: ultimately indifferent to individual persons but nonetheless manifest through Milton's singular acts of willful labor. Teskey's and Picciotto's pathbreaking works offer vital insights into Milton's poetics, but I would propose that the author most known for his commitment to free will, to his own will as an author, and to cultivating the will and discipline of his readers also provides an alternative model, a minor version of himself and his poetic work that values weakness as an ethic opposed to, or at least oblique to, self-cultivating empowerment and foreknowledge.

If I aim to include Milton among the poets of weakness that Bates, Campana, and Kuzner have reclaimed, I am not arguing that early Milton imagines weakness as a virtue, or as an ethical model for relationality, or as an exemplary mode of living. Rather, weakness for him is immanent to his conception of poetic calling itself, and therefore to his poetic process too. Thus, whatever ethical or political value he might ascribe to weakness cannot be divorced from his formal poetic process and his representation of that process. Weakness is immanent to both poetics and to poetic self-representation in "On *Shakespear*" and "Lycidas." If we can describe the shape of this weakness more precisely, then we can

understand a possibility for poetic making and self-knowledge rooted in incapacity that Milton glimpses early on and that perhaps remains as background dissonance in even his most seemingly confident gestures of self-representation and articulation.

Milton's early thinking about poetic weakness emerges from a specific form of self-identification, his complicated affinity for St. Paul. As Barbara K. Lewalski notes, Milton's self-identification with weakness resonates with the Pauline adage with which Milton long identified after going blind: strength made perfect in weakness (2 Cor. 12:9).<sup>15</sup> But Milton's experimentations with weakness-as-calling both predate his blindness and exceed the form of the Pauline motto. Most critics, taking occasional encouragement from the poet himself, interpret Milton's idiosyncratic adoption of the Pauline motto as suggesting that strength emerges on the other side of weakness, that, in the poet's own words, "[t]here is a certain road which leads through weakness, as the apostle teaches, to the greatest strength."<sup>16</sup> I want to propose that early Milton was productively stuck on that road—that it did not, at least at first, seem to be a road that progressed definitively through weakness. Milton dwelled in weakness as a mode of poetic vocation itself. We risk neglecting this mode if we emphasize the young Milton's desire for strength, compensation, and authority. Though this essay does not participate in discussions of Paul's role in Renaissance political theology, it does find in Paul a model that Milton identifies and transforms for his early understanding of his own poetic calling. The recent resurgence of interest in Paul within Renaissance studies has not yet, to my knowledge, considered how interpretations of Pauline weakness and calling might function as a point of reference for poetic process and self-representation. Dwelling in weakness, rather than traveling through it, helps Milton in "On *Shakespear*" and "Lycidas" develop a deep understanding of loss as not only a personal, private issue but also a political, ethical, and aesthetic problem that reveals his poetic calling in incapacity rather than strength.

### I. DEAD LANGUAGE IN "ON SHAKESPEAR"

T. S. Eliot is perhaps the critic most committed to a vision of a weak Milton—but, in contrast with my view, he meant this as an insult. Yet Eliot's insistence on a weak Milton relates directly to how Milton theorizes his poetic vocation in "On *Shakespear*." Eliot accused Milton of enacting "violence" on the English language, arguing that he caused a deterioration of "the living English

which was Shakespeare's."<sup>17</sup> In contrast to the organic, "living" English that Eliot imputes to Shakespeare, Milton is charged with "writ[ing] English like a dead language."<sup>18</sup> Milton's poetry is like a crypt, completely hollowed of, if still haunted by, the hallowed logos of Shakespearean living English. Making blindness into a metonymy of Milton's weakness, Eliot proposes that Milton overcompensates for his extrapoetic incapacities by committing a "perpetual sequence of original acts of lawlessness" in verse, and that these acts, though seemingly strong, wither the language.<sup>19</sup> In his first published poem, "On *Shakespear*," Milton's distance from Shakespeare and the kind of "living" English Shakespeare wrote indexes Milton's weakness, and yet that weakness becomes the very instigation to a kind of writing that Eliot—and, critically in this poem, Shakespeare—would deny him. If Eliot sees writing in a dead language as a sign of weakness, Milton insists on embracing that weakness, on harnessing his own incapacities, rather than attempting to redeem or compensate for the loss of Shakespeare's living English. Milton sees his own dead language as giving greater life to poetic thought as an inadequate, inconsolable vocation:

What needs my *Shakespear* for his honour'd Bones,  
 The labour of an age in piled Stones,  
 Or that his hallow'd reliques should be hid  
 Under a Star-pointing *Pyramid*?  
 Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame,  
 What need'st thou such weak witnes of thy name?  
 Thou in our wonder and astonishment  
 Hast built thy self a live-long Monument.  
 For whilst toth'shame of slow-endeavouring art,  
 Thy easie numbers flow, and that each heart  
 Hath from the leaves of thy unvalu'd Book,  
 Those Delphick lines with deep impression took,  
 Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,  
 Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving;  
 And so Sepulcher'd in such pomp dost lie,  
 That Kings for such a Tomb would wish to die.<sup>20</sup>

Implying that Shakespeare's "honour'd Bones" require no human "labour" to consider them, "On *Shakespear*" implicitly questions whether it should exist at all. Even in death Shakespeare's living presence is so powerfully felt that it is paralyzing for both reader and poet who come after: "Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,

/ Dost make us Marble with too much conceaving.” So potent is the Shakespearean “name” that its vatic verse confronts reader and poet as an endangering affront. As readers of Shakespeare’s ever-present “name,” we have our “fancy”—our imaginative will and expressive power—made into “Marble.” “[T]oo much conceaving” is paradoxically a kind of paralysis, and I want to insist that this paralysis images a weakness on the part of both the reader and the poet in the face of Shakespeare’s book.

Some recent readers have attempted to redeem this paralysis as salutary ecstasy. In an ingenious and subtle reading, Paul Stevens locates in Milton’s reference to marble not the threat of petrification but the redemptive wonder of Shakespeare’s late romances, while Nicholas McDowell, indebted to Stevens’s observation of Milton’s possible allusion to Spenser’s “Hymne of Heavenly Beautie” in the “bereaving”/“conceaving” rhyme, has more recently seen reflected in Milton’s marbled self and reader an ecstatic “glimpse on earth [of] the wondrous face of heavenly wisdom” in Shakespeare’s book.<sup>21</sup> While these redemptive readings of petrification in “On *Shakespear*” are compelling, it is hard to find them completely persuasive. There remains a threat of annihilation in that stoniness, a freezing of self that feels more like potentially irredeemable self-loss than communion, a death-in-life more reminiscent of Adam’s stoniness when he sees Eve fallen in *Paradise Lost* than wondrous grace.<sup>22</sup> Shakespeare’s name becomes something like Medusa’s gaze, turning us into stone as we attempt to contemplate it. So compelling and awesome is the self-originating Shakespearean name, that it robs us of our ability even to read it. Even if the experience of glimpsing Shakespeare’s book can be transformational or ecstatic, critics have been too quick to associate such transformation with knowledge and empowerment. In such literal astonishment we can locate instead a model of poetic process inseparable from unknowingness and weakness.

These and other recent readings of these lines have tended to overlook the fact that Milton’s image of the petrified reader of Shakespeare’s book is also an image of his own paralyzed process of poetic production. Petrification may be what Shakespeare produces in all his readers, but it is also, most paradoxically, what it produces in the reader writing this poem on Shakespeare—Milton himself. When Aaron Kunin says of these lines that “[t]he fancy, an image-producing faculty, is ‘bereaved’ of itself because it is overwhelmed by someone else’s fancy and therefore ‘astonished,’ turned to stone (in this case, marble),” his analysis does not ad-



dress the specific consequences of the foundational fact that this astonishment is also the position from which Milton composes, the constitutive articulation of his own lines taking place ostensibly while petrified by Shakespeare's lines.<sup>23</sup> This omission is, however, eminently understandable. Given the "shame" of Milton's own "slow-endeavouring art," how is the poet able to distance himself from his own "bereav[ement]" of voice in order to create a verse that seems to "flow" out of his own ossified petrification as "Marble"?

In one sense, the very fact that Milton writes "On *Shakespeare*" in praise of Shakespeare's name and his book's power to paralyze him suggests a deep ambivalence. Directly after the reference to "thy name," the speaker insists, "Thou in our wonder and astonishment / Hast built thy self a live-long Monument." The intimacy of life and death in "live-long Monument" indicates again the power of Shakespeare's name, alternatively gracing itself before or inflicting itself upon us posthumously. Yet, at the same time, the fact that Shakespeare's self-constructed "Monument"—the one that makes our own acts of monumentalization void—is in our "wonder and astonishment," in our own petrified gaze, seems to depose the originality of Shakespeare's name by making it our possession. At the very least, the name becomes an object dependent on our taking "impression[s]" from the "leaves" of Shakespeare's corpus. Taking impressions alludes at once to the materiality of the printed page of Shakespeare's book and to Stoic conceptions of memory as impression: taking might be glossed as perceiving, receiving, stealing, or generating.<sup>24</sup> Moreover, the ambiguity of "Hast built thy self a live-long Monument" urges us to think of the tripleness of "thy self" in its nominative, dative, and accusative declensions. As nominative, Shakespeare has himself built the monument. As dative, he is utterly present in it; it is a monument to himself. As accusative, Shakespeare has built this livelong monument out of himself. Shakespeare's monument becomes, read in all registers, a text he has built out of himself and left behind for himself, a reflexive tomb for his own name. Yet the grammatical ambiguity of "Hast built thy self a live-long Monument" makes it unclear if this monument can indeed fully contain the numinous presence of Shakespeare's name. Perhaps it too, like the "piled Stones" and Pyramid of the first quatrain, is "weak witness." In a similar sense, the speaker's exaltation of Shakespeare as "Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame," reinscribes Shakespeare's presence and primacy as functions of our own will to remember him; this name becomes dependent upon our own petrified faculties. Shakespeare's ostensibly transcenden-

tal originality and livelong presence seem to have been demoted to secondary offspring—"Dear son" and "heir"—utterly dependent on the taking of monument and audience.

"On *Shakespear*" ascribes to Shakespeare's name a character that is either overwhelmingly palpable or perversely dependent on the speaker's and reader's look, will, and memory—their taking—for any semblance of presence. Paul de Man asserts that "Doth make us marble" (the Wordsworthian paraphrase of this Miltonic line) "cannot fail to evoke the latent threat that inhabits prosopopeia, namely that by making the death [*sic*] speak, the symmetrical structure of the trope implies, by the same token, that the living are struck dumb, frozen in their own death."<sup>25</sup> If he is correct, then the threat inherent in prosopopeia is consciously self-inflicted, which ironically makes Shakespeare's name present to us only in our petrified inability to read it. The sense of empowerment in the usurpation of "my *Shakespear*" in line 1 thus opposes the overwhelming sense of originality and fecundity in Shakespeare's autonomous name.

Rather than just providing us with a paradox of ambivalent exaltation and usurpation, Milton in "On *Shakespear*" begins a project of founding his own "slow-endavouring art" as one that must contend with the absence of an all-grounding name: weak Milton. Milton's fall away from Shakespeare's "living English" may be read as a "sham[ing]" process through which the Miltonic voice authorizes itself in weakness while transgressing a monument of authority. Milton maintains a vexed self-relation to his "shame[ful]" position. This self-representation is not only a fact of the anxiety of influence whereby Milton would seek to supplant Shakespeare's name with the name of his own poetic authority, but also suggests a quest to confront the loss of this name in its incomprehensibility. Shakespeare's "name" is only a "live-long Monument" to "living English" insofar as it is inaccessible, unreachable, and absent to our speculation in "On *Shakespear*." This is for Milton a productive failure to attain the putative Shakespearean name that represents living English, a weakness that offers a new vision of poetics. Miltonic vocation emerges as an agonal duty to witness and negotiate loss, in exile from the name of tradition. "On *Shakespear*" thus comes to insist on the absence of that name—on the weakness of Milton's dead language—as an impetus to figuration of the poet in his failure to wield a living English, in his weakness and astonishment.

This vocation, in turn, is rooted in an implicit reworking of the Pauline calling as a form of passionate experience that articulates

itself in weakness. Even while showing that he can perform the “easie numbers” that have been imputed to Shakespearean verse, the Miltonic poet seeks to disorder such smooth-flowing prosody by affirming an excessive poetic form: a sonnet with an excess couplet. Emphasizing the weakness of his own poetic calling allows us to think more clearly about the vagrant, troubled frequencies of Miltonic voice rather than adopting a view that either settles in advance or ultimately fixes upon his capacity for certain self-representation and authority. It allows us to take Milton’s later identification with—and, as I have argued, his transformation of—the Pauline emphasis on embracing weakness as a mode of poetic and autobiographical reflection even before his blindness.

## II. NEGATION IN “LYCIDAS”

In Milton’s elegiac vision of poetic calling in “Lycidas,” we find a yet more sustained examination of how weakness can at once shape and threaten Milton’s poetic voice. Recent work on “Lycidas,” such as that of Neil Forsyth, has shown convincingly how the motor of the poem is a studied ambivalence, its affective energies torn between praise and mourning for Edward King, on the one hand, and, on the other, anger at what King (who “was already creeping off in the crypto-Catholic royalist-Laudian direction of the wolf”) was becoming before his premature death.<sup>26</sup> Yet such ambivalence runs deeper: it structures vocation and creativity, too. Expanding “On *Shakespeare*”’s astonished energies, “Lycidas” seeks not only to witness but also to remake the world in the unremitting expression of weakness.

The trajectory of “Lycidas” at first seems markedly unlike the affirmation of weakness for which I argued in the reading of “On *Shakespeare*,” moving as it does from a “compel[led]” sense of trauma in earlier verse paragraphs to the “repair[ing]” of Lycidas’s “drooping head” as Genius of the shore (lines 7 and 175). Rather than shaping poetic voice within an affirmation of weakness, “Lycidas,” as many have argued, appears to redeem loss through transcendence. The poem seems, that is, to replace a lost friend with a hypostatized sign, moving from weakness to strength through a process of substitution.<sup>27</sup> Some have gone so far as to dismiss “Lycidas” as a mere “epitome of the old elegy ... with its consolation and strong closure.”<sup>28</sup> By reading closely the interruptions within the poem’s narrative of mourning, I contend that “Lycidas,” rather than univocally culminating in totalizing

substitution, insists on a particular kind of weakness: the inability to redeem deprivation.

In much criticism on "Lycidas," the major discontinuities in the poem, which might call into question its successful processes of mourning, are usually located with the procession of mourners in the middle of the text, starting with what John Crowe Ransom calls the "incredible interpolation" of Apollo at line 76.<sup>29</sup> Whether seen as intentional or not, as Victoria Silver has shown, "Lycidas" courts incoherence nowhere more than during the polyphony of its central verse paragraphs.<sup>30</sup> Whereas the profusion of voices in the middle passages is often seen as a crisis within the poem, the voice in the beginning and ending of the poem is traditionally taken to be the most self-coherent. Whether in psychoanalytic, metrical, or theological terms, critics who emphasize the resolvability of the beginning and ending insist on a narrative of progress: a movement from legible trauma to successful mourning; a movement from metrical irregularity to reparative, regularized ottava rima; a movement from poetic insecurity to forward-looking confidence. As Fallon puts it, "The maturity, understatement, and restraint of the closing stanza comments on the agitation of the poem's opening and measures the distance the poet has traveled."<sup>31</sup> I wish to complicate that critical tendency by recovering the self-reflexive difficulties in the early parts of the poem and juxtaposing those scenes with the ostensible consolation of the ending. I propose that Milton in "Lycidas" seeks to form a unified symbol by mastering the objective elegiac material out of which the poem arises, but that death's negation emerges in the poem as an excess that resists the substitution of a symbol—the Genius of the shore—for the fellow poet's unrecovered corpse. Enacting its own weakness as the incapacity to mourn, the poem issues a subterranean protest against what Peter Sacks claims is an essential characteristic of elegy: the "substitutive turn or act of troping" that "any mourning must perform," which does not "fail to invent or accept an adequate figure for what [the mourner has] lost."<sup>32</sup> In doing so, the poem insists on the failure of progress and recovery, and figures the poet's own immanent work within the poem as too weak to achieve final empowerment or adequate substitution, positing and then negating what Fallon describes as "the confidence earned by the process described in the poem."<sup>33</sup>

Milton's well-known emphasis on virtue, preparation, and trial throughout much of his work comes up against a limit case with "Lycidas" in the inability to prepare for loss:

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more  
 Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never sear,  
 I com 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,  
 Young *Lycidas*, and hath not left his peer:  
 Who would not sing for *Lycidas*? he knew  
 Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.  
 He must not flote upon his watry bear  
 Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,  
 Without the meed of som melodious tear.

Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,  
 That from beneath the seat of *Jove* doth spring,  
 Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.  
 Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,  
 So may som gentle Muse  
 With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn,  
 And as he passes turn,  
 And bid fair peace be to my sable shrowd.

(lines 1–22)

The opening repetition of “once more” simultaneously inscribes “*Lycidas*” within a cultural tradition that naturalizes death and yet underscores the singularity of the event of loss. The weakness of unpreparation and prematurity, which is linked with the Miltonic poet’s feeling of having come too late to this landscape of mourning, thus become the threatening conditions for the poem: “For *Lycidas* is dead, dead ere his prime.” The poet experiences the loss of *Lycidas* as a double death—“dead, dead”—not fully locatable either in its actual occurrence or its recollection, which makes the rituals that sanctify bereavement appear false. Indeed, the speaker seems to seek revenge upon nature for its having taken away *Lycidas* before he could emerge as a ripe poet in “his prime,” reciprocating by “[s]hatter[ing]” the leaves “before the mellowing year.” Yet there is an element of “constraint,” of compulsive repetition, in this shattering of the images of nature’s approaching fecundity “with forc’d fingers,” the speaker describing his “disturb[ance]” as “comp[ulsion],” a weak, unwilling struggle to grasp the event of death’s occurrence.

This experience of compulsive weakness in “Lycidas” shifts the focus swiftly from the radical event of loss to the inevitability of death. The poet’s invocation of the muses to “somewhat loudly sweep the string” marks the first shift in the poem from vocative to imperative, underscoring the urgency of song in the repetition of “Begin.” But the speaker then moves to invoke another “gentle Muse” (one other than the “Sisters,” gendered masculine) to beseech “favour” for his own “destin’d Urn”:

So may som gentle Muse  
With lucky words favour my destin’d Urn,  
And as he passes turn,  
And bid fair peace be to my sable shrowd.

The ambiguity of “So may” is in tension with the absoluteness and unified image of “my destin’d Urn,” which Harold Bloom describes as the major irony of the poem: the inevitability of death is precisely that from which the Miltonic poet “swerves.”<sup>34</sup> In thus seeking to create a song that might properly mourn Lycidas, the Miltonic poet shifts from recollection to self-reflection to repression. The poet turns to witness the catastrophe of the past—the loss of Lycidas—only then reflexively to turn upon himself in consciousness of his own death. He then turns yet once more in a movement that appears to suppress the threat to self in poetic production. The weak incapacity to mourn is indexed in part by such an untimely collapse of temporalities. It is the temporal heterogeneity of the opening, wherein time is irrevocably mixed, that prevents any decisively redemptive movement forward or backward.

The poet follows the conflation of grief for Lycidas and grief for the self with the introduction of yet another temporality: a prelapsarian past—one before the death of Lycidas—that is characterized by presence and mutuality:

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 eye-lids of the morn,  
We drove a field, 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'ns descent had slop'd his westering wheel.  
 Mean while 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.

(lines 23–36)

This passage works by way of a complex layering of tropes: the self-identical relationship with nature—“self-same hill”—functions as a metonymy for the relationship with the mother’s body—“nurst upon”—that itself functions as a metonymy for a putative state of precultural, prelinguistic grace, all of which comes to stand in for the time the poet and King spent together studying at Cambridge, their alma mater. The poet seeks to affirm this nostalgic vision with the chiasmus of “Together both ... both together,” which locates Lycidas and the poet’s intimate community in the dark recesses “ere” the onset of day. The chiasmus implies not only reciprocity but also a mutual enclosure that excludes deprivation: the move from lamentation of Lycidas’s loss to fear of self-loss is thus projected backward into a figuration of Lycidas as an idealized mirror image of the poet’s own nostalgia for coherence and innocence as enabling of poetic strength. Bringing the verse paragraph to a close with a commemoration of “our song,” the mythos of mutuality seems to be confirmed in the chorus of their two voices.

Yet recalling “our song” cannot fully suppress the conjunction of uniqueness and repetition embedded in the radical temporality of Lycidas’s death, the doubleness of the “heavy change” it has wreaked on any strict faith in the regeneration of cyclical time represented by the “westering wheel”: “But O the heavy change, now thou art gon, / Now thou art gon, and never must return!” (lines 37–8). Seemingly insistent on the hollowness of the “now” in the lines’ spondaic stammers, the poet appears to locate presence in an organic past that has been lost. Yet the poem makes use of a nostalgic past only to negate it. The possibilities of change, loss, and absence within the putatively prelapsarian are present even in the speaker’s disavowal of them: the double negatives—“were not mute” and “would not be absent long”—imply that the turn to a nostalgic myth of the past cannot protect against the rupture of seasonal return that death revealed. With these double negatives, the poet self-reflexively signals his incapacity to overcome loss, a weakness not so easily overcome.

If at the end of the second and the third stanzas the speaker longs for the intimacy shared with Lycidas in nature, then “now” his faith in any such transcendent figure has passed. In the dismemberment passage, an idiosyncratic sonnet itself, earlier idealization is denied in the confrontation with the awful rending of Lycidas’s body:

Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep  
 Clos’d o’re the head of your lov’d *Lycidas*?  
 For neither were ye playing on the steep,  
 Where your old *Bards*, the famous *Druids*, ly,  
 Nor on the shaggy top of *Mona* high,  
 Nor yet where *Deva* spreads her wisard stream:  
 Ay me, I fondly dream!  
 Had ye bin there—for what could that have don?  
 What could the Muse her self that *Orpheus* bore,  
 The Muse her self, for her enchanting son  
 Whom Universal nature did lament,  
 When by the rout that made the hideous roar,  
 His goary visage down the stream was sent,  
 Down the swift *Hebrus* to the *Lesbian* shore.

(lines 50–63)

The speaker invokes the Muses only then to dismiss their agency; unlike the heavenly Muse at the beginning of book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, these Muses offer no compensation. This dismemberment passage reveals the poet’s and the Muses’ weakness in the face of nature’s ability to break human will, to wound body and consciousness. Even if the Nymphs, those protective cultural myths projected onto nature, had been there, the speaker questions what power they would have been able to exercise. It is through the failure of signs to represent loss that the poet seeks to confront it. By looking at the correction Milton made in the Trinity manuscript of “Lycidas,” we can see Milton struggling with how to represent the loss of Lycidas.<sup>35</sup> The tentative, ambiguous “might lament” becomes a more affirmative expression of grief by becoming “did lament,” though even that still feels less strong than the absence of any auxiliary verb would convey (line 60).<sup>36</sup> If earlier drafts of “Lycidas” contain euphemisms such as “goarie scalp,” “divine head,” and “divine visage” to name Lycidas’s *sparagmos*, the final version employs “goary visage,” which seeks to do justice to the abject loss of Lycidas’s “head.”<sup>37</sup> We can thus note Milton laboring to image the event of loss as directly as possible, but coming up



against his inability to do it. In the move to “goary visage,” the poet employs a kind of prosopopeia in order to ascribe a face to the absent, irrecoverable friend. Milton’s use of prosopopeia seems reflexively aware of de Man’s claim that prosopopeia is driven by a desire to make the other present through a figuration that “deprives and disfigures to the precise extent that it restores.”<sup>38</sup> Yet for Milton, in contrast to de Man, this weakness is not simply privative. Instead it is the failed struggle to capture loss here that constitutes the effectiveness of the poet’s attempt to witness it. If “goary visage” tries to image the loss more directly than, say, “goarie scalp” and thus, through that figuration, to mitigate loss, then the figuration’s inevitable disfiguration of the head of Lycidas dramatizes the productive failure of consolation, the weak tribute of poetic figuration itself. Milton insists on this inability to substitute for the dismembered body, even if he feels compelled to do so, rendering this internal sonnet a weak but necessary ritual.

Despite the poem’s insistence on this weakness, it moves on from this moment to its most self-assertive passages. The image of Phoebus “touch[ing] my trembling ears,” and the incipient connection between Apollo and consolation, remains unconvincingly sublime (line 77). But this unconvincingly sublime excess of meaning does not prepare us for the even more shocking substitution at the end of the poem. There is little preparation in “Lycidas” for the implausible imperative, “Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more,” in the penultimate verse paragraph or the increasing regularization of meter that follows (line 165). The arbitrary assertion of strength merely works to underscore the poet’s weakness in the face of loss. The apotheosizing figuration of Lycidas’s “head” as a star, part of that cosmic cycle—“So sinks the day-star”—of departure and return which was earlier denied, “repairs” a loss that the poet earlier declared was irrevocable (lines 168 and 169). Pace Sacks’s comment that this act of substitution offers closure at the end of the poem, and pace Rosemond Tuve’s sense that this moment in the poem achieves “[r]estraint and tranquility,” I would argue that the unanticipated utterance of “Weep no more” is itself a violent overcompensation, working as protest of the unavailing narrative of substitution.<sup>39</sup> As Forsyth has recently put it, “Why anyone should believe this transparent and belated fantasy is not clear.”<sup>40</sup> Unlike Forsyth, I see this arbitrary bid for consolation as a self-conscious revelation of the poet’s own weakness, regardless of whether it is also, ultimately, as much a “veiled critique” of Lycidas as it is a genuine elegy.<sup>41</sup>

If the resolution of grief is a repression of the trauma of the dismemberment passage, then this repression itself works by way

of a violence, a violence that refuses to accept the irrecoverable loss of Lycidas. But rather than being satisfied with Christ's mounting high of Lycidas, the poet repeats the apotheosis of Lycidas:

Now *Lycidas* the Shepherds weep no more  
 Hence forth thou art the Genius of the shore,  
 In thy large recompense, and shalt be good  
 To all that wander in the perilous flood.

(lines 182–5)

If Lycidas has already been “mounted high, / Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves,” then why must the process “Now” be repeated by the poet's own act of poesis (lines 172–3)? It is unclear whether “Hence forth thou art” and “shalt” function as constative or performative speech acts—indeed, the meaning of the passage seems to “wander” between these two possibilities. Is the poet merely describing the “large recompense” granted by Christ through grace? Or does the poet himself, in his own act of poetic construction, posit Lycidas's status as Genius of the shore? Indeed, this is another site to register Milton's interest in Arminianism, for the lines occult the relationship between grace and works. It remains uncertain whether Christ's grace alone determines Lycidas's salvation or whether the poet must act in ways that can effect it.<sup>42</sup> The doubleness of “Hence forth thou art” as both constative and performative mirrors syntactically the relationship between grace and works. Is Lycidas's salvation a matter entirely of Christ's grace, which the poet comes to recognize only after a period of mourning? Or does the poet performatively manifest or even cause the salvation of Lycidas through “recompense”?

The performative reading, in which the poet himself makes Lycidas into the Genius, renders the act of declaration a form of transgressive recompense: Christ's grace was not enough and so the poet effects the transformation himself. If this passage is seeking to describe a “recompense” that it itself posits or, in fact, is, then we should read the icon of the Genius of the shore as a haunting subversion of poetic authority rather than a poetic fiat fashioning the poet as a Christological maker of a totalizing symbol that helps the project of “forging a nation.”<sup>43</sup> Linking recollection—“the perilous flood”—and repression—“weep no more”—the poem's marking of its substitution for Lycidas as itself a fiction, in the sense that the poem is the only instrument of Lycidas's transformation, complicates attributions of an asser-

tive sense of poetic vocation that emerges from the resurrection of the Genius of the shore. If we consider, by point of comparison, Johann Gottlieb Fichte's designation of nationalism as the ideology that transforms the external borders of a nation into the internal borders of consciousness of its subjects, we see that the Genius of the shore becomes not only a guardian at the border of the nation, but also a kind of specter within the poet's mind, a lost object that cannot be forgotten or replaced.<sup>44</sup> Incorporated in such a way that confounds proper mourning, the Genius of the shore is a substitution that has nonetheless been incorporated as a narcissistic fantasy of presence and protection. The fact that recompense occurs ambiguously through an incorporation that is effected by Christ or the poet disperses the possibility for real substitution. As Christopher Warley has put it, the end of the poem "wraps the poem in a total fiction and undermines the fiction that had been operating."<sup>45</sup>

In Milton's "Lycidas," only by locating within the very "[s]hatter[ing]" prospects of being called too early to "sing" "once more" can the poet reimagine the departed in elevated form. It is for this reason that the poem can so effectively be seen as concerned with a poetic vocation, with the capacity for refiguration that the poem simultaneously suffers, enacts, and celebrates. It does so in order to achieve ends that are both more and less than merely remedial—more in the sense that it aims to transform temporality itself, less in the sense that it registers remedy as impossible. The end of the poem inaugurates a series of new "now[s]" that will continue to be perpetually reworked and reworkable. As suggested by the richly ambiguous late image of "tears" being "for ever" wiped from Lycidas's eyes and the pun on mourn in "still morn" in the final stanza, the poem proposes a kind of perpetual—repeated yet infinitely refined and productive—mourning as a revolutionary possibility rooted in the weakness of bearing witness to loss (lines 181 and 187). For our concerns, the question of whether King is the nominal or the real subject of the poem is beside the point. To say, as Raymond N. MacKenzie recently has, that "Milton simply uses King as a kind of metaphor for or projection of himself and his own fears" seems to result from a misrecognition of what the form of elegy offers beyond the personal.<sup>46</sup> Making an elegy that fails at personal mourning need not be a narcissistic projection or generic betrayal but might instead be read as a revelation of the poet's weakness, his incapacity to transform, on his own, the structures that make sudden, irrecoverable loss possible and fit, redemptive compensation impossible. King's death provokes the

affective disturbance that the poem, in technique and theme, undergoes, resists, and refracts. "Lycidas" both participates in and negates the historical conditions of elegy through its form; and this, its transformative immanent critique, takes place in part through a refusal to reduce loss and mourning to a personal register. The poet is called to a vocation in which the weakness of his position makes him incapable of its mournful performance—and that weakness becomes immanent to the form of the poem as much as it does to the poet's self-representation. To return to Milton's transformation of Paul's motto, the poet's strength is not so much made perfect in weakness; instead, weakness has become the condition for a poetics undefined by strength, a poetics articulated in and through its own failures, open to endless revisionary creation.

### III. CONCLUSION

In this essay I have tried to show that two of Milton's early poems paradoxically cultivate weakness as an ethical and aesthetic value immanent to both poetic vocation and poetic technique. In closing, I would like to return to my beginning, Milton's proem to book 3 of *Paradise Lost*, to suggest briefly how the "weak Milton" gestured to in these pages might be projected onto the poet's futures too. Earlier I offered a widely accepted reading of Milton's account of his own blindness at the beginning of book 3, claiming that blindness makes possible greater strength. My emphasis on divine illumination, God's implantation of eyes in the mind that "may see and tell / Of things invisible to mortal sight," allies itself with David Quint's succinct summary of how in this passage "the eye of faith compensates the poet for his physical blindness."<sup>47</sup> I staged this reading to show that Milton often theorizes his own weakness as a strength, and I turned to earlier verse to demonstrate Milton's lingering with weakness. In emphasizing the proem to book 3's irradiating compensation, I followed a deeply insightful critical tradition that has traced the emergence of Milton's most confident claims for prophetic and poetic vision in *Paradise Lost* from his weakness. William Kerrigan, for example, witnesses in this proem "a way to strength through weakness" in which Milton confidently proclaims himself a vessel of God's light.<sup>48</sup> Similarly, Picciotto claims that from testifying to his own blindness a "spectatorial" or unfallen Adamic body "triumphantly emerges" in book 3's proem and this "inspired labor generates the poem we are reading."<sup>49</sup>

Yet, minding Milton's early dwelling in weakness, we might view the poet's assertion of compensation for blindness at the end of this poem as a less unambiguous testimonial of inspiration than it seems at first sight. Recently, Fallon has persuasively argued that the poem to book 3 reveals "substantial anxiety about inspiration"—that its claim to divine illumination is less certain than most critics have declared.<sup>50</sup> Fallon demonstrates that we cannot see the concluding divine compensation as laying to rest Milton's own doubts about his blindness because the poem is structured around "an unceasing oscillation between despair and confidence."<sup>51</sup> Attending to the early theorization of weakness in Milton's poetics might allow us to continue to locate in passages like this one—which seems to offer us a vision of Milton at his most confident—energies that reveal Milton's deep interest not only in his fears and anxieties (as Fallon shows) but also in his inabilities and failures. We need not "[p]urge and disperse" these inabilities.

Perhaps what the poem to book 3 figures for us is not so much the triumphant emergence of prophetic or spectatorial vision but rather two different kinds of weakness: on the one hand, the inability to see, which Milton must experience to become the instrument of God as light, and on the other hand, the poet's seeming inability to be certain about his own divine illumination, the potential impossibility of ascertaining the source of what might inspire him. John Guillory has said of the poem to book 3 that the "inspiration has taken place, and yet we have not seen it."<sup>52</sup> But what if Milton cannot have seen whether inspiration took place either?<sup>53</sup> Perhaps, ultimately, Milton's weakness in the poem to book 3 resides in his inability to be certain about the presence and effect of divine inspiration. After the initial apostrophe to Light, Milton puts forward a complex set of definitions of the terms that will define his divine illumination:

Since God is light  
 And never but in unapproachèd light  
 Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee,  
 Bright effluence of bright essence increate.  
 Or hear'st thou rather pure ethereal stream  
 Whose fountain who shall tell?<sup>54</sup>

Readers usually struggle with the extraordinary difficulty of lines 5–6. But Kerrigan offers the more accessible question posed in lines 7 and 8 as the crux hidden in plain view, because the poet "permits the light to keep the secret of its own beginnings."<sup>55</sup> An

understanding of “weak Milton” may be relevant here and lead us to take those lines as the poetic and epistemological core of the proem. The inability to know this “fountain” initiates and compounds the poet’s inability to know whether he is inspired by God. This weakness may explain what Fallon has observed about Milton’s own oscillation between anxiety and confidence at this moment in the poem, but I would recast this oscillation not as an unsuccessful suppression of anxiety but rather as the weak, generative “wander[ing]” that Milton describes himself undertaking in this proem:

Yet not the more  
Cease I to wander where the muses haunt  
Clear spring or shady grove or sunny hill,  
Smit with the love of sacred song.<sup>56</sup>

The topographical and syntactic ambiguity of Milton’s ceaseless wandering performs the “love of sacred song” with which he is “[s]mit” but whose origins he cannot know. This loving, wandering inability to know—even more than the confident, compensatory irradiation of the proem’s final lines—may in fact be the “fountain” of some of late Milton’s greatest poetic achievements and also his greatest failures, the origin of a technical and epistemological weakness that continues to keep his works from being rendered marble with too much conceiving.

## NOTES

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<sup>1</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Gordon Teskey (New York: Norton, 2005), book 3, lines 40–55.

<sup>2</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 3.25–6.

<sup>3</sup> Milton, “On *Shakespear*. 1630,” in *Poems of Mr. John Milton Both English and Latin, Compos’d at Several Times* (London: Humphrey Moseley, 1645), p. 27; EEBO Wing (2d edn.) M2160; and Milton, “Lycidas,” in *Poems*, pp. 57–63. Subsequent references to “Lycidas” are from this edition and will be cited in the text parenthetically by line number. As Milton’s first published poem, “On *Shakespear*” originally appeared anonymously in the second folio as “An Epitaph on the Admirable Dramaticke Poet, W. SHAKESPEARE” (in *Shakespeare, Mr. William Shakespeares Comedies, Histories, and Tragedies Published According to the True Originall Copies* [London: Robert Allot, 1632], A5r; EEBO STC [2d edn.] 22274).

<sup>4</sup> Milton, "On Shakespear," p. 27.

<sup>5</sup> William Haller, *The Rise of Puritanism: Or, the Way to the New Jerusalem as Set Forth in Pulpit and Press from Thomas Cartwright to John Lilburne and John Milton, 1570–1643* (New York: Harper, 1957), p. 322.

<sup>6</sup> Stephen M. Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace: Self-Representation and Authority* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2008), pp. x and xi.

<sup>7</sup> Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace*, p. xii.

<sup>8</sup> Catherine Bates, *Masculinity, Gender, and Identity in the English Renaissance Lyric* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2007).

<sup>9</sup> Joseph Campana, *The Pain of Reformation: Spenser, Vulnerability, and the Ethics of Masculinity* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2012), p. 17.

<sup>10</sup> James Kuzner, *Shakespeare as a Way of Life: Skeptical Practice and the Politics of Weakness* (New York: Fordham Univ. Press, 2016), p. 2. See also, Kuzner, "Donne's *Biathanatos* and the Public Sphere's Vexing Freedom," *ELH* 81, 1 (Spring 2014): 61–81.

<sup>11</sup> For a recent exception, see Eric B. Song's "abject" Milton in *Dominion Undeserved: Milton and the Perils of Creation* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 2013), pp. 5–8.

<sup>12</sup> Teskey, "Thinking Moments in *The Faerie Queene*," *SSt* 22 (2007): 103–25, 117. This claim about Milton's quasi-divine poetic foreknowledge segues into Teskey's proposal that Milton, unlike Spenser, is a thinker of the *archē*—an argument that in nearly identical terms introduces and underwrites Teskey's analysis of Milton in *Delirious Milton: The Fate of the Poet in Modernity* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 2006).

<sup>13</sup> Joanna Picciotto, *Labors of Innocence in Early Modern England* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press 2010), p. 402.

<sup>14</sup> Picciotto, p. 416.

<sup>15</sup> Barbara K. Lewalski, *The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography* (London: Blackwell, 2000), p. 338.

<sup>16</sup> Milton, *Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, 8 vols. (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1966), 4:589–90.

<sup>17</sup> T. S. Eliot, *On Poetry and Poets* (New York: Octagon Books, 1975), pp. 175 and 161.

<sup>18</sup> Eliot, p. 159.

<sup>19</sup> Eliot, p. 175.

<sup>20</sup> Milton, "On Shakespear," p. 27.

<sup>21</sup> Paul Stevens, "Subversion and Wonder in Milton's Epitaph 'On Shakespear,'" *ELR* 19, 3 (Autumn 1989): 375–88, 383–7; and Nicholas McDowell, "Milton's Regicide Tracts and the Uses of Shakespeare," in *The Oxford Handbook of Milton*, ed. McDowell and Nigel Smith (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 2009), pp. 252–71, 259.

<sup>22</sup> See:

The fatal trespass done by Eve, amazed,  
 Astonied stood and blank while horror chill  
 Ran through his veins and all his joints relaxed.  
 From his slack hand the garland wreathed for Eve  
 Down dropped and all the faded roses shed.

(Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 9.889–93)

<sup>23</sup> Aaron Kunin, "Shakespeare's Preservation Fantasy," *PMLA* 124, 1 (January 2009): 92–106, 102.

<sup>24</sup> See R. J. Hankinson, "Stoic Epistemology," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2003), pp. 59–84, 60–3.

<sup>25</sup> Paul de Man, "Autobiography as De-Facement," in *The Rhetoric of Romanticism* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1984), pp. 67–82, 78.

<sup>26</sup> Neil Forsyth, "'Lycidas': A Wolf in Sheep's Clothing," *Critl* 35, 3 (Spring 2009): 684–702, 697.

<sup>27</sup> See Peter M. Sacks, *The English Elegy: Studies in the Genre from Spenser to Yeats* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1985), pp. 90–117; and Lawrence Lipking, "The Genius of the Shore: Lycidas, Adamastor, and the Poetics of Nationalism," *PMLA* 111, 2 (March 1996): 205–21.

<sup>28</sup> Melissa F. Zeiger, *Beyond Consolation: Death, Sexuality, and the Changing Shapes of Elegy* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1997), p. 35.

<sup>29</sup> John Crowe Ransom, "A Poem Nearly Anonymous" (1933), qtd. in *Milton's "Lycidas": The Tradition and the Poem*, ed. C. A. Patrides, rev. edn. (Columbia: Univ. of Missouri Press, 1983), pp. 68–85, 83.

<sup>30</sup> See Victoria Silver, "'Lycidas' and the Grammar of Revelation," *ELH* 58, 4 (Winter 1991): 779–808.

<sup>31</sup> Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace*, p. 71. See also James Rutherford, "The Experimental Form of *Lycidas*," *MiltonS* 53 (2012): 17–37.

<sup>32</sup> Sacks, pp. 5–6.

<sup>33</sup> Fallon, *Milton's Peculiar Grace*, p. 71.

<sup>34</sup> Harold Bloom, "Preface: How to Read Milton's *Lycidas*," in *A Map of Misreading* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2003), pp. xiii–xxiii, xvii.

<sup>35</sup> Milton, "Corrigenda" to Trinity College Manuscript of "*Lycidas*," in *Milton's "Lycidas*," pp. 12–3. For especially rich analyses of the manuscript changes, see John Creaser, "Editing *Lycidas*: The Authority of *Minutiae*," *MiltonQ* 44, 2 (May 2010): 73–121; and James Grantham Turner, "Elisions and Erasures," *MiltonQ* 30, 1 (March 1996): 27–39.

<sup>36</sup> Milton, "Corrigenda," p. 12.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>38</sup> De Man, p. 81.

<sup>39</sup> Sacks, p. 114; and Rosemond Tuve, "Theme, Pattern, and Imagery in *Lycidas*," in *Milton's "Lycidas*," pp. 171–204, 203.

<sup>40</sup> Forsyth, p. 693.

<sup>41</sup> Forsyth, p. 699.

<sup>42</sup> See, especially on the question of Milton's ostensible embrace of an Arminian doctrine of resistible grace, Fallon, "Milton's Arminianism and the Authorship of *De doctrina Christiana*," *TSL* 41, 2 (Summer 1999): 103–27.

<sup>43</sup> Lipking, p. 213. On the ostensible Protestant nationalism of this moment in the poem, see also Sacks, pp. 115–7; and Alison A. Chapman, *Patrons and Patron Saints in Early Modern English Literature* (New York: Routledge, 2013), pp. 144–66.

<sup>44</sup> Johann Gottlieb Fichte, *Address to the German Nation*, trans. Isaac Nakhimovsky, Béla Kapossy, and Keith Tribe (Indianapolis IN: Hackett, 2013), pp. 158–74. See also Étienne Balibar, "Fichte and the Internal Border: On Addresses to the German Nation," in *Masses, Classes, Ideas: Studies on*



*Politics and Philosophy before and after Marx*, trans. James Swenson (New York: Routledge, 1994), pp. 61–84.

<sup>45</sup> Christopher Warley, *Reading Class through Shakespeare, Donne, and Milton* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 2014), p. 139.

<sup>46</sup> Raymond N. MacKenzie, “Rethinking Rhyme, Signifying Friendship: Milton’s *Lycidas* and *Epitaphium Damonis*,” *MP* 106, 3 (February 2009): 530–54, 545.

<sup>47</sup> David Quint, *Inside “Paradise Lost”: Reading the Designs of Milton’s Epic* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 2014), p. 99.

<sup>48</sup> William Kerrigan, *The Sacred Complex: On the Psychogenesis of “Paradise Lost”* (Cambridge MA: Harvard Univ. Press, 1983), p. 185.

<sup>49</sup> Picciotto, pp. 444–5.

<sup>50</sup> Fallon, *Milton’s Peculiar Grace*, p. 228.

<sup>51</sup> Fallon, *Milton’s Peculiar Grace*, p. 229.

<sup>52</sup> John Guillory, *Poetic Authority: Spenser, Milton, and Literary History* (New York: Columbia Univ. Press, 1983), p. 126.

<sup>53</sup> For an incisive account of Milton’s struggle to know who inspires him to write *Paradise Lost*, see Janet Adelman, “Creation and the Place of the Poet in *Paradise Lost*,” in *The Author in His Work: Essays on a Problem in Criticism*, ed. Louis L. Martz and Aubrey Williams (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1978), pp. 51–69.

<sup>54</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 3.3–8.

<sup>55</sup> Kerrigan, p. 149.

<sup>56</sup> Milton, *Paradise Lost*, 3.26–9.