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A Shepherd's Departure: The Spatial Structure in *Lycidas*

Yae Kanasaki

I. Introduction

Lycidas written by John Milton is a pastoral elegy in which he mourns the sudden death of his learned friend of Cambridge University, who drowned in Irish Sea. However, this poem was not appreciated as an elegy till the twentieth century. Many critics pointed out the lack of Milton's sincere grief. Therefore *Lycidas* was regarded as the prophetic, religious or pastoral poem. Recently, there appear some new interpretations regarding this poem as an elegy. The mental process of overcoming grief is praised by some critics. What kind of device does Milton use in this poem to show us the impressive process of recovery?

Generally, the process of recovery in the elegy tends to be expressed in terms of seasonal change or as passing time. Milton, however, doesn't describe a long term of time in this poem. He expresses a shepherd's change of mind without using so many lines. Though the short elegy is often criticized for its sudden or artificial mental changes, the process of recovery in this poem is very natural. Instead of passing the time, many changes of scene can be found in this poem. As the scene changes, a shepherd, the main character of this poem and persona of the author, travels to various times and spaces. He goes to the past, to the present, to historical time and in the end, to the future. At the same time, he visits various places in his imagination. His heart goes to Britain, Ireland, Italy, Greek, the mythological world and so on. These spatial transitions substitute for the long passage of

time.

II The World without Movement

In the first scene from line one to line twenty two, the shepherd expresses his profound grief passionately. Milton uses the words to represent his deep sadness and violent emotion: "harsh" (l.3), "crude" (l.3), "rude" (l.4) and so on. His mind is far from calmness. In Contrast, there is no movement in this space.

In this scene, the shepherd speaks only about Britain where Lycidas died. In line twelve, the shepherd refers to the sea. He says that he must sing for Lycidas who drifts alone: "He must not float upon his watery bier / Unwept, and welter to the parching wind, / Without the meed of some melodious tear." (ll.12-14). Although there is no specific place-name, the reader understands that this is the Irish Sea where the ship of Lycidas was wrecked. No description of movement is found here. Milton doesn't describe the scene in which the wave conveys the corpse of Lycidas to a far country. These description of the sea makes us imagine his lonely corpse floating upon the water. Generally, the description of the sea includes movement because the sea always flows affected by wave or tide. However, Lycidas only floats upon the sea and stays in the same place here. Therefore Milton tries to express the world without movement in this scene.

In addition, there appears no movement of time: "Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear, / Compels me to disturb your season due:" (ll.6-7). The word "season" (l.7) usually implies the passing time or the seasonal change. However the death of Lycidas stops the circulation of season here. Also the lives of fresh plants in the lines from one to five, "laurels" (l.1), "myrtles brown" (l.2) and "ivy" (l.2), are cutting off by the shepherd. His profound grief stops the current of time.

Thus, the movement stops in this scene reflecting the she

pherd's profound sorrow. He tells about the things which happen only at this moment. He thinks only about his sad situation. He never tries to recall the moment of Lycidas's death or never thinks about his own future. The death of Lycidas seems to shut the shepherd into a piece of the enclosed space.

III The Circulating World

In the scene from line twenty three to thirty six, the shepherd recollects his childhood in which he and Lycidas spent happy time. The typical pastoral world is spread out here. There is quietness in the shepherd's mind. Milton shows us a great distinction between this scene and previous scene. In these lines, the author uses the past tense. The difference in the tense makes the reader recognize the transference of the scene.

Together both, ere the high lawns appeared
 Under the opening eye-lids of the morn.
 We drove a-field, and both together heard
 What time the grey-fly winds her sultry horn,
 Battening our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
 Oft till the star that rose, at evening, bright,
 Toward heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel.

(ll. 25-31)

Here the landscape changes completely. In the first part, the shepherd describes the sea. In contrast, he writes about a typical pastoral field. Though there are descriptions of water, such as "fountain" (l. 24) and "rill" (l. 24), the reader imagines rather the vast grassland.

Also there are several descriptions suggesting the passage of time which the author never describes in the former scene. The shepherd tells about the change of the time from the morning to the evening using beautiful expressions: "eye-lids of the morn" (l.

26), "the fresh dews of night" (l.29) and "at evening" (l.30). The slow current of the day can be found. Though the shepherd describes only one day, the reader can imagine that the same peaceful day which has no change is repeated again and again. The shepherd and Lycidas live in the circulating time in this scene.

Therefore Milton shows to us a completely different world, a pastoral world in which time circulates gently. A shepherd invites the reader to a new world different from the motionless world of the former scene.

IV The Shepherd's Journey

In the third scene which is from line thirty seven to line one hundred and eighty five, there appear many spatial transitions. A shepherd's imagination moves from place to place.

At first, the shepherd talks about his profound sorrow for the loss of Lycidas again. He grieves for the ruin of the place in which he and Lycidas spent their childhood. Here he returns to the real world from the past world. Milton shows the reader that the Shepherd stops fleeing from cruel reality.

Then the shepherd asserts the nymphs' responsibility for his dear friend's death. He begins to imagine the sea and the water here. This sudden change of the scene from the wood to the sea impress the distinction of the place more strongly on the reader.

For neither were ye playing on the steep,
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie,
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
Nor yet where Deva spreads her wizard stream: (ll.52-55)

In these lines, the shepherd notes the various places where the nymphs might play when Lycidas's ship was wrecked: "the famous Druids, lie," (l.53), "Mona high" (l.54) and "Deva spreads

her wizard stream" (l.55). Druid is an ancient Celtic group of priests. Mona is an old name for Anglesey Island which floats upon Irish Sea. Anglesey Island is near the city Chester where Lycidas embarked on the ship. The names of "Druids" and "Deva" make the reader imagine Ireland where Lycidas died. Also the river Deva is the source of the Chester water supply. It implies the ship's route which Edward King took. Milton shows us that the shepherd returns to Ireland Sea again which he describes in the first part of the poem. However, the author tries to express this sea more specifically than in the former description by enumerating the place-name. At the same time, the shepherd's visit to various places in his imagination here makes us imagine the current of water. The movement of water reflects the change of the shepherd's mind, and implies the shepherd's intention to start his consolatory travel for his future from where his grief begins to flow.

Also he uses some specific place-names when he tries to accept the fact of Lycidas's death considering the mythology in which the Muse can't help her dear son Orpheus.

What could the muse herself that Orpheus bore,
 The muse herself for her enchanting son
 Whom universal nature did lament,
 When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
 His gory visage down the stream was sent,
 Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore. (ll.58-63)

The shepherd describes "Hebrus" (l.63) and "Lesbian shore" (l. 63). "Hebrus" is an old name of the river Maritsa which flows in the southeast of the Balkan Peninsula. "Lesbian shore" suggests Lesbos Island which is in Aegean Sea. These names are often described in the works of Ovid and Vergil. These descriptions show us that the shepherd has a long journey from Ireland

where Lycidas sunk to distant Greek world where the reader in those days can't visit so easily. The far distance between these two places emphasizes the great movement of the place. In this scene, the reader is invited to travel in a different world with the shepherd.

Then, there appears the image of water again. The shepherd also mentions the specific place-names: "O fountain Arethuse, and thou honoured flood, / Smooth-sliding Mincius, crowned with vocal reeds, / That strain I heard was of a higher mood:" (ll. 85-87). In this part, he describes Italy. "Arethuse" (l. 85) is a fountain of Ortigia Ireland in Sicily. The river "Mincius" (l. 86) flows in the north Italy. It is said that "fountain Arethuse" implies Theocritus who was born in Sicily. Some critics say that "Mincius" suggests Virgil who was born in Mantua. These two names are often found in Roman pastorals. These words make the reader imagine the far away land again. The reader can feel the long journey of the shepherd. The shepherd returns from the Greek world to Italy here. The shepherd begins to take a return passage from the far away world to Britain where Lycidas died.

Next, he refers to the mythological gods. The shepherd asks "Neptune" (l. 90) about the sea which sunk Lycidas's ship. Then, "Hippotades" (l. 96) answers the shepherd's question. "Hippotades" is a Homeric and Ovidian name for "Aeolus", the god of wind. He says "The air was calm, and on the level brine, / Sleek Panope with all her sisters played." (ll. 98-99). "Panope" is one of fifty sea nymphs who are called Nereids. This name is also found in the works of Virgil. The mythological gods talk about the sea of the real world in which the shepherd lives. The shepherd travels between his own world and the ancient Grecian world.

After that, the shepherd tries to accept the fact of his dear friend's death and find consolation.

Return Alpheus, the dread voice is past,
 That shrunk thy streams; return Sicilian muse,
 And call the vales, and bid them hither cast
 Their bells, and flowrets of a thousand hues. (ll.132-135)

"Alpheus" is a river god who pursues the nymph "Arethusa". In Sicily, there is a legend about her that Diana transforms "Arethusa" into "fountain Arethuse" of Ortigia Island. The shepherd also talks about the "Sicilian muse". He imagines Sicily as he describes in line eighty five and eighty six. The author tries to impress on the reader again that the shepherd begins to return from far away world to Britain.

In the next piece from line one hundred and fifty two to line one hundred and sixty four, the shepherd begins to think more positively. There are many spatial transitions. The shepherd returns to England. There appear various specific place-names when the shepherd imagines the land where Lycidas goes.

Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides
 Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
 Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
 Or whether thou to our moist vows denied,
 Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
 Where the great vision of the guarded mount
 Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold; (ll.156-162)

This part shows us the spatial transitions distinctively. The first place where the corpse of Lycidas goes is "Hebrides" (l.156). "Hebrides" means the group of islands which is in the west of Scotland, north of the Irish Sea. The shepherd returns again to the sea where Lycidas sunk after the journey in a different time and place. It implies that the shepherd can accept the loss of his friend. Next, he describes Britain. He shows us the place where

"Bellerus" (l.160) exists. "Bellerus" is an imaginative giant man whom Milton made. It is based on the word "Bellerium" which means "Land's end" in Latin. "Land's End" is a name of a cape in Cornwall, which is in the southeast of Britain. The dead Lycidas goes southward in these lines. Then the shepherd sees "Namancos and Bayona's hold" (l.162). "Namancos" is a name of the mountainous lands in the southwest of Spain. "Bayona" is a fortress near "Namancos". Some critics say that these names imply the strife between Britain and Spain. However, these place-names also imply the spatial movement and the hope of the shepherd. Describing Land's End and Spanish place suggests that he is not satisfied with the rest of Lycidas in peace under the sea. The shepherd hopes that Lycidas goes to the far away place where ordinary people can't arrive.

In the end, the shepherd attains consolation in his mind. In lines from one hundred and sixty five to one hundred and eighty five, Lycidas was apotheosized. In this part, there is no severe description of sadness. Here he can recover peace in mind.

So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
 Through the dear might of him that walked the waves;
 Where other groves, and other streams along,
 With nectar pure his oozy locks he laves,
 And hears the unexpressive nuptial song,
 In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love. (ll.172-177)

The shepherd is healed completely by this apotheosis. In this part, the nature of time differs from the former parts of the poem. There appears no description representing the passage of time here. However, the time isn't stopping. Eternal time appears. Also, space changes in this part. The description of heaven makes the reader imagine the higher place. The reader can feel the end of the shepherd's journey here. Milton describes this

temporal and spatial transcendence to impress us with the accomplishment of the shepherd's consolation.

Thus, the shepherd is cured gradually by traveling through the various worlds. The use of the specific place-names give us the concrete imagery of his travel. The movement in historical time and in the vast space, giving dynamism to the poem, shows the process of the shepherd's recovery.

V The Shepherd's Departure

The last scene which has only eight lines, from line one hundred and eighty six to line one hundred and ninety three, are regarded as the epilogue of *Lycidas*. As the change of the narrator implies, the time and place also change widely in these lines. These eight lines have been perceived as problematic.

Thus sang the uncouth swain to the oaks and rills,
 While the still morn went out with sandals grey,
 He touched the tender stops of various quills,
 With eager thought warbling his Doric lay:
 And now the sun had stretched out all the hills,
 And now was dropped into the western bay;
 At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue:
 To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new. (186-193)

The main reason which causes the arguments about this part is sudden appearance of a new narrator. Generally, in the elegy, one narrator is used throughout. The authors usually write elegies in the first person narrative because the elegy is a poem in which the author mourns the death of his familiar person. Milton also uses the first person narrator in this poem, except being this epilogue. However, there appears suddenly a third person narrator here. The uncouth swain begins to speak in this epilogue though the general end of the pastoral elegy in those days is the scene

of apotheosis. For four hundred years, critics have discussed the reason why Milton added this unique epilogue to the poem. The temporal and spatial changes of this scene may resolve the problem.

Milton shows us that the story of the shepherd and Lycidas is a song sung by the uncouth swain. Some critics examine this problem from the viewpoint of narratology. Some of them point out that there is a frame of nested narrations. Stanley Fish tries to explain this issue by describing the anonymity of the narrator.

• • • if the introduction of a narrative perspective suggests that everything presented as spontaneous was in fact already spoken, this is no more than a confirmation of what has long since become obvious; if the new voice is unidentified, it is only the last in a series of unidentified voices or of voices whose single identified voice have long since been lost or blurred; and if the unidentified voice is impersonal it is merely a continuation of the mode the poem has finally achieved. (Fish 279)

He regards "the uncouth swain" as an anonymous or impersonal narrator. He points out that the word "uncouth" means not only "unsophisticated", but also "unknown or strange". He states that the appearance of the unidentified narrator deprives us of the sense of reality which the presence of the first person narrator formed in the first one hundred and eighty five lines. So he concludes that these eight lines narrated by the anonymous narrator gives the sense of the end of the poem. I agree with his opinion in the point that the impersonal narrator appears to finish the poem. However, the appearance of the swain also suggests the spatial distinction. Though Fish doesn't emphasize the change of place, there is an obvious transition in the landscape in these eight lines. With the appearance of the new narrator, the

shepherd jumps into a new dimension different from the world in which the shepherd mourns for Lycidas. Therefore Milton describes the uncouth swain to impress us more vividly with the spatial movement.

Now I would like to consider the change of the world surrounding the narrator. A pastoral world is found here. Some critics say that this pastoral world is the same one which Milton describes in the shepherd's retrospect. They say that the time of this scene circulates again. Certainly, the time begins to pass smoothly here. There are some descriptions which suggest the current of time. The author describes the morning: "the still morn went out with sandals grey" (l.187). Also the sun begins to move in these lines. However, the pastoral landscape of this scene is different from the one in the retrospective scene. Time doesn't circulate here because there is an obvious difference in the nature of time between these two scenes. In this scene, time passes straightly. The descriptions of the sun and the swain's movement suggest such straight movement of time. For example, the author represents only the sunset: "And now was dropt into the western bay;" (l.191). Milton doesn't show us a sunrise or coming of a new day which imply the circulating world. However, instead of such expression, the author represents the movement of the swain. In the last line of the poem, the swain declares that he will go to new pastures: "To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new." (l.193). The author shows us that the swain will see a sunrise in a new place. This movement of the swain suggests that he hopes for new days which are completely different from the past days. In this point, the reader can see the obvious temporal distinction between this part and the retrospective part from line twenty three to line thirty six. As I discussed in section III, the shepherd has the same days which continue forever and he hopes for days which do not change. The time

circulates in the scene of the shepherd's memory. In contrast, in this epilogue, the swain hopes for a new tomorrow. He seems to hope for a break with the past and the coming of new different days. The coming of new life makes us feel the straight movement. So time begins to flow straightly in this epilogue. This movement implies that the swain tries to take a walk to the future. Therefore there is a temporal difference between two pastoral worlds.

At the same time, there is a spatial difference between these two parts. For, the pastoral world here shows us a vast expansion of the field compared with the pastoral world described in the shepherd's memory. In the lines from twenty three to thirty six, Milton only represents the sight of hill in which the shepherd and Lycidas spent happy days. In this epilogue, the author describes the several places. As I mentioned before, the swain goes to new pastures in line one hundred and ninety three. Milton uses also the imagery of sea here. He expresses the sunset: "And now was dropt into the western bay;" (l.191). The word "bay" makes us imagine the broad sea which spreads vastly. Moreover, the description of this line suggests the explicit distinction between this part and the shepherd's retrospective part. In line thirty one, Milton uses the expression which is similar to this line: "Toward heaven's descent had sloped his westering wheel." (l.31). According to Oxford English Dictionary, "westering" means "That declines from the meridian towards the west". In line thirty one, the shepherd describes the star moving in the sphere and sinking into the western horizon. Also in line one hundred and ninety one, the sun drops into the western bay. Both the sun in the epilogue and the star in the retrospective scene sink into the west. However, the imageries which these two lines give us are different. The description of the star in line thirty one makes us imagine the circulating stars in the limited place. In contrast, in

line one hundred and ninety one, the reader can imagine the broad space in the description of the sunset because the sun drops into the sea. The difference of the imagery in these similar descriptions emphasizes the difference of the pastoral world between these two scenes. The space in the epilogue opens toward the broad world.

Also this scene makes us imagine visually the openness of the space. In line one hundred and ninety two, Milton describes the blue mantle of the swain: "At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue: "(1.192). Though a shepherd usually wears grey in the pastorals, Milton gives the blue coat to the swain intentionally here. Some critics state that blue is a traditional colour for a hope. Other critics points out the similarity with the blue mantle of Elijah, a Hebrew prophet who is found in the Bible. However, the blue mantle makes us imagine the broad sky. Though there appear the sunset and the red sky at the end of this scene, the reader can imagine a blue sky surrounding the swain who sings eagerly in the lines from one hundred and eighty six to one hundred and eighty nine. Peter Sacks states that "It [mantle blew] is perhaps only the coventry blue cloak of a shepherd. But how to distinguish it now from the blue sky surrounding the sun?" (Sacks 116). He points out that the both the swain's mantle and the sky have same blue colour, so that the reader can't distinguish the swain from the sky. Though Sacks emphasizes the similarity of the blue colour in the sky and the mantle, this description is intended to produce the broadness of this pastoral world visually. As he says, the reader can imagine that the swain's figure merges into the blue sky in this epilogue. This situation makes us imagine the wide blue space where the swain and the unified sky extend infinitely. So "his mantle blue" suggests visually the spatial expanse. This description also implies one of the characteristic points of this part which the author

doesn't express in the other parts.

In the last line of the poem, the shepherd goes to another place: "To-morrow to fresh woods, and pastures new." (l.193). The line lacks a verb. However, the word "to", compensating admirably the absence of verb, implies a movement toward a new direction. The meaning of "fresh woods, and pastures new" have been discussed. Nowadays, there are many interpretations of this line. Some critics insist that it implies the new puritan society which appears after puritan revolution. Other critics state that it is biographical. They say that it implies the journey to Italy which Milton took in 1638, the next year when he wrote *Lycidas*. Also there are some critics who state that it implies a change in poetic creativity. However, it seems to me that this expression doesn't imply the author's poetic career or his prophecy. This expression suggests the change of the shepherd's mind because Milton writes this poem in the genre of pastoral elegy which discusses the course of the author's recovery from the sadness of his friend's death. In this epilogue, the mind of the author is totally cured. There is no more sad or severe expression caused by the death of Lycidas. No reference to Lycidas is found here. They are replaced by some words which imply the calm mind of the author. Milton uses the word "tender" (l.188). He doesn't use such word in other parts of the poem. Therefore there is an accomplishment of the shepherd's recovery. Thus, the swain's movement to new pastures suggests the new condition of his mind.

Milton writes this epilogue to impress the reader more strongly with the accomplishment of the shepherd's recovery. As I mentioned above, this pastoral world is completely different from the other parts of the poem. The time moves straight in this scene. The swain is no more confined by the memory of the past. He goes to a new place at the end of the poem. This end suggests

the shepherd's departure toward the future.

VI Conclusion

Generally, in the elegy, the author doesn't change the temporal and spatial structure so much. The process of recovery tends to be described in chronological order, and several scenes of poems are generally arranged in one straight line. On the contrary, in *Lycidas*, Milton describes different worlds in every scene. The time changes in each section and the space also moves from scene to scene. First, the author describes a world with no passage of time. Next, the shepherd goes into the past world in which time circulates. There appears a calm pastoral landscape. Then, the shepherd visits various times and places. His journey starts from Irish Sea. Then he goes to Greek and Italy. He returns to Britain again and at last arrives in heaven in his imagination. The author crosses the historical world and the real world there. This shepherd's travel cures his mind little by little. In the epilogue, there is a new world in which time passes straight. Milton describes the swain's departure to new pastures.

Thus, there are many spatial transitions in *Lycidas*. The author doesn't arrange the scenes of *Lycidas* in a straight line. The scenes of this poem represent the fragments in which various times and places exist. Milton scatters many fragments from place to place. In this poem, the author makes the shepherd move from one fragment to another. Such movement gives deepness and immensity to the poem both in time and place, and makes the reader feel the course of recovery to be long in spite of the shortness of the poem.

The change of time and place also corresponds with the process of the shepherd's recovery. The shepherd's spirit is cured gradually as he travels in various spaces. Though there are some critics who point out the relation between the author's mind and

the swain's spatial movement in epilogue, I emphasize that all the transitions which we can see through this poem represent the process of the shepherd's recovery. Not only movement of space but also transition of time shows us the course of overcoming the loss of the friend. Thus the excellent structure of time and space gives to the reader a great catharsis. Milton expresses excellently the shepherd's departure by the spatial structure.

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