The Latin Development of John Milton’s

Poetical Voice in the 1645 Poems

Supervisors: Prof. Dr. Wilhelmus Verbaal
Prof. Dr. Jean-Pierre Vander Motten

Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of “Master in de Taal- en Letterkunde: Engels – Latijn” by Kwinten Van De Walle

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Acknowledgments

I would like to express my gratitude towards Prof. Dr. Verbaal for the amount of time and effort he has been willing to dedicate to me, and for offering me his invaluable feedback. I would also like to thank him for the many visits I was allowed to pay him in his office, where through sometimes lengthy dialogues I was able to develop my own scientific voice.

My gratitude also goes out to Prof. Dr. Vander Motten for his confidence and support, and for introducing me to those legendary opening lines to Paradise Lost, thus arousing my curiosity and passion for Milton.

Finally, I would like to thank my parents and sister for always believing in me and for putting up with me during the difficult moments of the writing process.
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I. Introduction

John Milton is undoubtedly one of the most influential writers in English literature. His legendary epic Paradise Lost has been analyzed from many different viewpoints, and research from a genre-theoretical perspective has proven to be very fruitful. Considerable attention has also been devoted to the minor English poetry in the 1645 Poems. The Latin poems, on the other hand, have received distinctly less consideration. This discrepancy becomes particularly peculiar, when one takes into account that the size of the Latin section to the 1645 Poems resembles that of the English section.

The 1645 Poems displays a carefully balanced construction. Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin, Compos'd at Several Times. Printed by his True Copies begins with a section of English poetry. A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle takes up the central section of the collection. The final section is reserved for Milton’s Latin poems. It consists of Elegiarum Liber Primus, a collection of seven elegies and some epigrams, and Silvarum Liber, a collection of miscellaneous poems. The collection’s clear subdivision makes the 1645 Poems a unique volume, in that other seventeenth-century poets either mingled their English and Latin poems or printed them in separate volumes.¹ The purposiveness of the 1645 Poems is confirmed by the fact that the collection is Milton’s first major poetic publication.²

We can safely assume that the Latin section constitutes an important part in the volume’s purposiveness. Bearing in mind that Milton lived in a time where Latin literature was attributed a central role in the school curricula and where many authors started their literary career in Latin before writing in the vernacular, it should indeed not be taken lightly

² Colin indicates that at the time of publication Milton was mostly known for his prose tracts, and that earlier publication of single poems had either happened anonymously (A Masque, Epitaphium Damonis and On Shakespeare) or with just a set of initials (Lycidas).
that Milton dedicated such a significant part of his early literary career to Latin poetry. This choice becomes even more striking if we consider that Milton here deviates from one of his greatest literary examples, Edmund Spenser, who did not publish any Latin works. Any accurate approach to the Latin poems should therefore pay particular attention to its poetical implications.

This master dissertation is highly concerned with these poetical implications. Originally, the dissertation was conceived of as a research on the creation of Milton’s pastoral voice in his minor poems. This idea was inspired by a pastoral reading of *Elegia Prima*, the earliest of Milton’s Latin poems, and the fact that Milton concluded his Latin career with the elegiac pastoral *Epitaphium Damonis*. It was my initial belief that the pastoral voice could be distilled from these Latin poems so as to be able to define a poetical evolution. It soon became obvious, however, that these poems were far too complex to be restricted to one singular poetic voice. A closer reading of the elegy cycle revealed a profound genre consciousness. Moreover, Milton’s intimate friend Charles Diodati was significantly addressed in the poetically important first and sixth elegies. It dawned that Milton was developing an intricate literary dialogue in his elegies. The focus of my research was thus shifted and became primarily concerned with the elegy cycle.

The first part of this dissertation provides a theoretical framework to allow for a proper analysis of the elegy cycle. This framework is primarily based on genre theory. Firstly, we will briefly investigate the literary reception of three prominent Latin authors (Ovid, Virgil and Horace) to indicate what genres they came to represent during the Renaissance. Secondly, genre theory will supply some useful definitions and terminology for our literary analysis.

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3 Most commentators define the *Epitaphium* as a pastoral elegy. In the light of the genre theoretical frame used in this dissertation, I utilise the term elegiac pastoral to indicate the pastoral as its primary genre and the elegy as the mood of the poem.
The bulk of this master dissertation constitutes a close generic analysis of the elegy cycle. The elegies have long been thought to be a rather random collection of poems by a young and mirthful Milton. Even though Revard recently produced a fresh outlook to correct these misconceived ideas, she nevertheless breaks up the cycle’s chronology and even leaves the fourth elegy undiscussed.\footnote{Revard, Stella P. Milton and the Tangles of Neaera’s Hair. The Making of the ‘1645 Poems’. Columbia, MI: University of Missouri Press, 1997.} Hence, I would like to suggest a full analysis of the cycle as it was constructed and arranged by Milton. This approach will immediately reveal how Milton consciously transforms the elegiac genre, and how at a conceptual level he is already concerned with his epic aspirations, much as Virgil accomplished in his Eclogues.

The range of this dissertation is not solely restricted to the Latin elegies. The sixth elegy allows us to briefly extend our consideration of Milton’s voice into the English section of the 1645 Poems through a link with the Nativity Ode. The final chapter develops a general argument about the second part of the Latin section before turning to the last three poems of the collection. These poems are particularly useful to confirm Milton’s evolution towards an epic vocation. Additionally, the concluding elegiac pastoral Epitaphium Damonis signifies Milton’s departure from Latin poetry, thus indicating his fully developed poetic voice.

In conclusion, I would like to indicate that Milton’s collection was republished in 1673. Several additions were made to this volume. For example, the English section was expanded by On the Death of a Fair Infant Dying of the Cough and several Psalm translations. The Latin section likewise contained several additional poems, most notably Ad Joannem Rousium Oxoniensis Academiae Bibliothecarium. I have chosen not to follow this second edition, because it disrupts the first edition’s purposiveness. Firstly, this edition deletes the first edition’s frontispiece and Virgilian quote, which suggested Milton’s adherence to Virgil as his literary model. Secondly, the additional poems break the original 1645 sequence. The Psalm translations, for instance, were inserted after A Masque, and Ad Joannem Rousium
was added after the *Epitaphium Damonis*. I prefer to focus on the closed structure of the 1645 edition, because it clearly maintains the sense of Milton’s developing poetical voice.
II. Theoretical frame

1. The reception of Virgil, Horace and Ovid in Renaissance England

The Renaissance led to significant literary developments in England and on the European continent. Classical literature is proven to have served as a crucial catalyst for the development of vernacular literatures. Under the impulse of humanist scholars, Latin and Greek literary and philosophical works were discovered or rediscovered. This renewed interest for classical literature resulted in the rise of translations, and the vernacular traditions thoroughly started to incorporate stylistic and thematic elements drawn from the classics. In England, as in many other European countries, school curricula were strongly developed in accordance with classical conceptions. Particular stress was laid on rhetorical and literary knowledge, which was mostly taught through Latin texts. Consequently, Renaissance writers possessed an active knowledge of the Latin language and its most prominent writers. English writers were strongly influenced by their classical education and paid particular attention to the ancients when writing in their own language. Indeed, vernacular literature was fundamentally considered to be inferior to its classical antecedent. Lyne indicates that literature during the Renaissance was conceived of in terms of “a hierarchy that put classical literature at the head of affairs, and could not avoid imagining vernacular literature in a subsidiary position”.\(^5\) Nevertheless, Renaissance literature was characterised by cultural aspirations and was intent on expanding itself to conquer its own position in the literary tradition. Lyne confirms that by the late sixteenth century England “was aspiring both forwards and backwards in time, wanting to gain from predecessors but wishing to foster its own independent future”.\(^6\)

\(^6\) Lyne, Raphael, 3.
John Milton’s poetic oeuvre quintessentially incorporates many of these Renaissance characteristics. Both his Latin and English poems reveal an exhaustive knowledge of his classical and neo-Latin literary precedents. Moreover, Milton’s Latin poems display such a thorough mastery of the Latin language, that we can safely presume a sense of bilingualism. In this respect, it is significant that Milton chose to invest great efforts in his Latin poetry. We have already indicated Milton’s proportionally large Latin poetic production in the whole of his works. Considering the fact that Milton is commonly accepted to have consciously developed his literary career, his decision to pursue a Latin career as well as an English one undoubtedly carries significant implications. Indeed, Milton in this respect clearly distinguishes himself from his most prominent English literary predecessor, Edmund Spenser. Spenser is usually acknowledged as Milton’s poetic father, though the link between the two poets is typically perceived “as one of spirit and educative mission, [rather] than as a matter of specific allusion or imitation of plot and style”. Spenser himself, however, never wrote or published any Latin works. This difference in approach adds to our notion of Milton’s conscious interaction with Latin literature. In fact, this interaction will prove invaluable for determining Milton’s poetics in our analysis of Milton’s Latin elegies and the other poems selected for the development of this dissertation. In this respect, it will be useful to briefly outline the Renaissance reception of three classical authors that play a prominent role in the discussed poems, namely Ovid, Virgil and Horace. This overview does not intend to go into too much detail by investigating the reception of individual works. Instead, it is more appropriate to indicate the authors’ general reception, because this will allow us to observe

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how they came to represent a particular kind of poetry, to which a specific poetical voice was attached.

A first important Roman author who is dealt with by Milton, particularly in his elegies, is Ovid. During the Middle Ages, the *Metamorphoses* was the work in Ovid’s oeuvre that received the most attention. This mythological collection was hugely allegorised for moral purposes, mostly through religious interpretations. This reception significantly changed during the Renaissance, when Ovid started to be analysed more from mythological and stylistic points of view. The *Metamorphoses* retained its popularity, especially since this mythological encyclopaedia contained a whole world of myths ready to be relocated to an English setting. Thus, literary interest for Ovid “centred above all on rhetorical analysis, appreciation of style and the rich mythological content”. His other poetic works also started to receive more attention. Ovid constituted an important part of the school curriculum. Versification, letter writing and rhetorical exercises were primarily taught out of Ovid’s works at English grammar schools. This increased interest and attention for Ovid resulted in a rise of the publishing of translations. These developments had far-reaching effects on the English literary culture:

Much of these exercises in imitation, encouraging scholars to translate and compose as closely as possible to the Ovidian model must have resulted in the style, tone and habits of thought of Ovid’s poetry becoming assimilated into the English writers’ and readers’ minds and must have formed the taste as well as the literary productions of subsequent years.

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10 Lyne, Raphael, 13.
12 Jameson, Caroline, 212.
13 Jameson, Caroline, 213.
Jameson indicates that Arthur Golding’s popular 1565 translation of the *Metamorphoses* succeeded in transferring Ovid’s myth into English culture.\(^{14}\) She designates Christopher Marlowe as the most important writer for Ovid’s stylistic reception. Marlowe produced an influential translation of the *Amores*, and introduced the epyllion or minor epic into the literary field: “the polish, lightness of touch, and humour so excellently rendered in Marlowe’s poems, as well as the obviously Ovidian delight in sensual appreciation of beauty, became the keynote of Ovid’s influence”.\(^{15}\) Significantly less attention was paid to Ovid’s complaint poetry. In this sense, Ovid came to represent a light-hearted kind of poetry characterised by artfulness, elegance and enjoyment. However, Puritan writers regularly criticised Ovid and his imitators for their profane use of poetry. In his discussion of the Ovidian epyllion and its Renaissance development, Mulvihill indicates that Ovidian imitators were often charged for their calculated eroticism, and that their poetry “[maintained] the pretence of a higher purpose, while openly catering to lower tastes”.\(^{16}\) A close analysis of the elegy cycle and the way in which the elegiac genre is treated will reveal that Milton shared the same critical opinion

The Renaissance conception of Ovid is distinctly opposite to the poetical position attributed to Virgil. Comparable to Ovid’s case, medieval commentaries on Virgil were characterised by their allegorical interpretations. The Renaissance once again marked a shift in literary reception. Analyses of Virgil’s work also started to focus on language and style, causing Virgil’s authority to be experienced “as a set of formal and stylistic pressures [rather] than as direct moral admonition”.\(^{17}\) Virgil’s literary career obviously served as a model for many Renaissance writers. The Virgilian triad had already been interpreted as representing a

\(^{14}\) Jameson, Caroline, 222.

\(^{15}\) Jameson, Caroline, 223.


natural order of three elocutionary modes by the ancient commentators Donatus and Servius in the fourth century. By the time of the Renaissance, this conception had developed into a rigid literary precept that was followed by many Renaissance writers, for example, Edmund Spenser. Virgil was thus associated with the abstract ideal of poetry. Whereas Ovid was firmly connected to light-hearted poetry, Virgil came to represent a serious kind of poetry. Virgil’s pastorals, even though rustic and lowly in nature, were quickly accepted to possess distinct poetic possibilities. Nichols summarises:

Although its subject matter is properly the lowly rustics who keep herds, it can be useful for worthwhile intellectual pleasures. . . . And its style, though humble (humile) is also graceful (gracile). In short, great things can be done in humble guise in this genre, and it is the tension between these two aspects of the pastoral that will animate almost all subsequent discussion of it.

Virgil was, however, essentially conceived of as an epic poet. Even his earliest work displays his later epic intentions. It is consequently not surprising that Virgil had a significant influence on the development of epic poetry during the Renaissance, “as poets are guided by Virgil to emerge out of a world of romance into a poetic realm of formal unity and ethical rigour”. The Aeneid provided an excellent example for authors wanting to enrich their vernacular literature, because “the poem also itself enacts a process of translation (in the literal sense of ‘moving across’) in the way it adapts material from the Homeric poems and their Hellenistic offshoots to suit a Roman setting”.

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20 Nichols, Fred J. (1969), 103-104.
Virgil’s works and serious poetics also lent itself to a particularly Christian interpretation. This interpretation method originated in Late Antiquity and was further developed during the Middle Ages. Christian writers had always “struggled to develop an appropriate response to the religious content of pagan poetry”.\(^\text{24}\) Having received a thorough rhetorical and literary education based on the ancients, Christian authors clearly understood the value of classical literature. Their most common response was to assign some elements of Christian truth to the pagan works, thus turning “pagan poetry into a kind of prophecy in need of interpretation to reveal its hidden meanings—a ‘poetic theology’ ((theologia poetica')).\(^\text{25}\) The allegorical method provided ample opportunities for recovering prophetic hidden truths in a classical work. This interpretation method was even incorporated by the humanist scholars. Virgil’s poetry was regularly subjected to this method. The fourth eclogue, for example, was commonly interpreted as a Messianic eclogue prophesying the coming of Christ. This method undoubtedly possessed intrinsic problems. On the one hand, Virgil’s works were being torn from their historical context to be assimilated to the values of a later culture. On the other hand, several passages are so profoundly pagan that they did not allow for a Christian interpretation.\(^\text{26}\) Italian Renaissance commentators consequently attempted to develop a compromise by distinguishing between the ‘ancient theology’ (theologia prisca) and ‘our theology (theologia nostra), that are conceived of as “two branches of a stream, parallel through much but not all of their courses”\(^\text{27}\). However, Kallendorf indicates that a final union of the theologia poetica and Christianity was not accomplished in any commentary, but in another literary work. Marco Girolamo Vida imitated the Aeneid in his Christian epic

\(^{25}\) Kallendorf, Craig, 44.
\(^{26}\) For example, the sixth book of the Aeneid with Aeneas’ descent into the underworld raised several problems.
\(^{27}\) Kallendorf, Craig, 50.
Christias which united “the worlds of learning and faith”. In this sense, Virgil’s stern epic voice with retrospective Christian possibilities will provide Milton with the ideal vehicle for countering the popular Ovidian poetics and for developing his own future epic voice.

The third Roman author who will be evoked in Milton’s early Latin poetry is Horace. However, since Horace will mostly play a conceptual role, it will not be necessary to present an overview of his literary reception. It will suffice to indicate some conceptual characteristics in his literary works that will prove useful for our analysis. Horace is commonly known as the poet-philosopher. His works display a wide range of philosophical ideas and reflections. Even though several philosophical traditions are represented, Horace’s philosophical preference lies with the Epicurean school. Harrison confirms that Epicureanism is Horace’s natural mode. As an Epicurean, Horace adheres to the doctrine of the mean and advocates temperance in all things. A second fundamental aspect in Horace’s poetry is that of friendship. White justly states that the development of a relationship in poetry usually “carries a meaning intrinsic to the poem or book”. This most definitely holds true for Horace who carefully inserts social relationships in his poetic material, thus causing “the addressee [to be] integral to the argument of the poem”. Milton will attribute these Horatian characteristics to his friend Charles Diodati, who consequently receives a Horatian-Epicurean voice in the elegy cycle.

Since the two most important poetical elegies are verse epistles addressed to Diodati, a consideration of Horace’s Epistles would be in place. The Epistles were published when Horace had already been accepted in the literary circle surrounding Maecenas. Even though these verse epistles seem to make up a rather arbitrary and miscellaneous collection, they

28 Kallendorf, Craig, 59.
32 White, Peter, 204.
share the unifying characteristic of a concern for ethics.\textsuperscript{33} The most significant source of inspiration most have been Epicurus’ correspondence with his friends and disciples. In this manner, the \textit{Epistles} clearly serve a specific purpose:

The epistolary medium could then, and with good precedent, both serve as a protreptic, and afford an opportunity for the expression of one’s true self and self-analysis. Indeed, autobiography and self-confession are part of an ‘effective protreptic tactic,’ making for a more gripping and convincing message exactly because that message does not resonate from the serene heights of superhuman wisdom, but is pronounced down below amid the fray by one who is only a little farther along the way.\textsuperscript{34}

The epistolary elegies to Diodati likewise provide Milton with an opportunity to reflect upon his own developing poetics in a dialogue with his intimate friend.

\section*{2. Genre poetics}

After this preliminary exposition of the Renaissance reception of these Latin authors, we can direct our attention to Milton’s conceptual construction of his early Latin poetry. Milton is commonly accepted to have pursued a Virgilian poetical career, just like Edmund Spenser did before him. In this respect, the 1645 \textit{Poems} would have to represent the pastoral start of Milton’s career. Neusse writes that “Milton is constantly interpreting, responding to Virgil’s Eclogues by way of allusion or outright appropriation of motifs”.\textsuperscript{35} This pastoral slant seems to be confirmed at the opening of the collection. On the one hand, the frontispiece shows the poet sitting by a window with a pastoral scene on the background.\textsuperscript{36} However, the

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{34} Ferri, Rolando, 127.
\textsuperscript{36} See Appendix 1.
\end{flushright}
frontispiece also contains a certain distancing, since Milton himself is not located in the pastoral setting but inside a house room. On the other hand, the epigraph on the title page was drawn from Virgil’s *Eclogues*: “Baccare frontem. Cingite, ne vati noceat mala lingua futuro” (Ecl. 7.27-28: “Gird my brows with ivy, lest slanderous tongues should harm the future poet”). This epigraph reveals that Milton clearly shared Virgil’s idea of a poetic progression. In spite of the occasional Virgilian allusion, Milton only turns to the pastoral genre at the end of both the English and Latin sections of his *Poems*. It is especially notable that Milton opens the Latin section of his volume with a cycle of elegies. Milton thus seems to commence his poetical career in a manner quite distinct from Virgil and many neo-Latin authors who chose to write pastoral poetry. This choice has been interpreted in several ways. Some believe it reveals Milton’s preference of Ovid over Virgil, while others interpret the elegies as having been written by a young mirthful poet who would gradually evolve towards a Virgilian poetics. A closer analysis of the elegies, however, lays bare a more complex structure which reveals that Milton adheres closer to Virgil’s literary concepts than would appear at first sight.

In the Renaissance period, which is characterised by a genre consciousness both in theory and in practice, Milton occupies a prominent position in that he displays a very profound genre consciousness. This holds true for his English poetry as much as for his Latin poetry. Milton particularly understood Virgil’s genre consciousness and the way he developed a generic interaction within his *Eclogues*. Virgil chose the bucolic genre as his literary starting point because he found its “programmatic self-consciousness . . . congenial to his intentions in making his first major poetic statement”. Even though Virgil starts off writing pastoral poems in imitation of his predecessor Theocritus, he quickly announces his

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37 See Appendix 2.
38 Sills, Kenneth C. M., 423.
41 Hubbard, Thomas K., 45.
intentions to emulate the pastoral genre. At the end of the third eclogue Virgil indicates that the Theocritan bucolic model can be transcended through the introduction of higher generic forms. Virgil subsequently embarks upon generic experimentation in eclogues 4, 5 and 6. In the later eclogues, Virgil returns to the conventional pastoral mode, but gradually deconstructs the genre to finally declare its bankruptcy in the tenth eclogue.

It will prove invaluable to introduce some concepts from genre studies to define Virgil’s generic interplay in the *Eclogues*, since these will also prove useful for interpreting Milton’s elegies. An interesting starting point is to consider genre as a form of thinking which conveys a certain view on the world. If the author wants to create a successful work, then he should learn to see through the eyes of the genre in order to proficiently describe his experiences. Medvedev states that “the artist must come to see those aspects of reality to which the given genre is adapted, to visualize them in the genre’s way, and to exploit the potential of that vision to express something genuinely new and valuable”. In this respect, genres should not be seen as an inhibition to the author, but as “a positive support. They offer room, as one might say, for him to write in—a habitation of mediated definiteness; a proportional mental space; a literary matrix by which to order his experience during composition”. In the case of the *Eclogues*, Virgil deduced a pastoral matrix from Theocritus’ *Idylls* to use as a frame for his own pastorals.

An essential characteristic of genres is its historical mutability. Fowler distinguishes two sorts of generic mutability. On the one hand, change is continually produced within an individual genre by the authors engaging with it. From time to time, however, literary works

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42 Hubbard, Thomas K., 75.
44 Morson, Gary Saul, and Caryl Emerson, 276.
46 Fowler, Alastair, 11.
can produce such profound alterations that the parameters and interrelations of several neighbouring genres are changed. Since authors always actively engage with the genre they write in, they inevitably take up a certain position towards its characteristics and conventions. In this sense, every literary work essentially brings change to its genre. This characteristic causes Fowler to result that “all genres are continually undergoing metamorphosis, . . . [because] literary meaning necessarily involves modulations or departures from generic codes, and therefore, eventually, alterations of them”. Generic mutability results in three distinct generic phases. The primary stage is the phase of assembly. The originator creates a work which contains the foundations of a genre for future authors to engage with. In the secondary phase, the originator’s successor recognises the genre’s potential and creates a sophisticated imitation, varying the primary form’s themes and motifs, perhaps adapting it to new purposes . . . but retaining its main features, including its formal structure”. Virgil’s *Eclogues* provides a prototypical example. The Latin author was inspired by the self-consciousness of Theocritus’ *Idylls* and utilised his predecessor’s work to develop his own poetic voice, thus creating a drastically different work with significant implications for the further development of the pastoral genre. In the tertiary phase, an author takes up the genre’s secondary state and applies it in a new way by providing a symbolical interpretation. Milton’s *Lycidas* is a tertiary pastoral, because the lamented shepherd is not only meant to refer to an actual individual, but also to symbolise the pastor.

Fowler introduces some vital terminology to deal with the generic complexity of literature. Since a genre is characterised by continual transformation, a literary work only represent a temporary form of its incorporated genre. Fowler consequently defines this particular generic embodiment as a ‘kind’, which possesses “a definite size, marked by a
complex of substantive and formal features that always include a distinctive (though not usually unique) external structure”.\(^{50}\) The term for a kind is always put in a noun form in keeping with its external structure. However, a literary work rarely adheres to one single genre. It can easily incorporate a second set of generic characteristics, thus resulting in a combined genre. The second set of characteristics are denoted by an adjective. This adjective represents the ‘mode’ of the literary work. Fowler indicates that modes “always [have] an incomplete repertoire, a selection only of the corresponding kind’s features, and one from which overall external structure is absent”.\(^{51}\) For instance, if Fielding’s *Tom Jones* is categorised as a comic novel, then it is novel by kind and comic by mode. This means Tom Jones is a novel with generic characteristics of the comedy genre.

Fowler also identifies several categories of processes resulting in generic transformation. It will only be necessary to discuss those categories instructive in the light of Virgil’s modifications to the pastoral genre. Some processes only result in transformations on the level of the work’s main genre. A first category contains the processes that establish a change in function. Whereas Theocritus’ *Idylls* can be considered as a random collection of poems depicting the charms and sentiments of the rustic life, Virgil introduces a profoundly programmatic function into the pastoral genre. The *Eclogues* thus become “a reflection of Virgil’s progressive self-realisation as a poet”.\(^{52}\) A second category of processes causes the literary work to act as a counterstatement to its genre. Virgil’s collection greatly altered the pastoral genre by gradually laying bare the genre’s insufficiency for further poetical ambitions. More profound transformations are obtained when genres are combined or mixed. The process most relevant for our discussion is ‘generic modulation,’ whereby one of the

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\(^{50}\) Fowler Alastair, 74.

\(^{51}\) Fowler, Alastair, 107.

\(^{52}\) Hubbard, Thomas K., 47.
genres acts as a modal abstraction. Fowler indicates that generic modulation occurs in several gradations:

In modulation, the proportions of the modal ingredient may vary widely, which leads to correspondingly various effects, from overall tones to touches of local color. In this way, ‘the poetic convention of one style’ or genre becomes quite literally ‘the poetic resource of all styles.’ Modulation is so frequent that we might expect it progressively to loosen the genres altogether, mingling them into a single literary amalgam.53

Virgil’s *Eclogues* displays a high level of generic modulation. We have already indicated that Virgil experiments with other generic forms after rejecting the Theocritan pastoralism of his first three eclogues. Virgil most notably engages with the epic genre. Virgil’s famous Messianic fourth eclogue, for instance, opens with the exclamation “Sicelides Musae, Paulo maiora canamus!” ([Sicilian Muses, let us sing things a little greater!])54. In the fifth eclogue, the typically pastoral theme of the death of the ideal shepherd Daphnis is dealt with in a high register and through an epic frame of reference, mostly to the *Iliad*. Even though Virgil opens the sixth eclogue with a recusatio of the epic genre in favour of the pastoral genre, he introduces the old poet Silenus who produces a mythological cosmic catalogue in an elevated epic tone. Hubbard adequately states that Silenus’ song represents “ways of writing epic without truly writing epic”.55 In other words, Virgil’s poems are of a pastoral kind, but are written in an epic mode. Even though Virgil departs from his experiments with grander generic forms at the end of the sixth eclogue, the rest of the eclogue collection resonates with his poetic ambitions. In the *Eclogues*, Virgil completely immerses himself in the pastoral genre. He not only proves himself to have mastered the genre, but even

53 Fowler, Alastair, 191.
54 Hubbard, Thomas K., 76.
55 Hubbard, Thomas K., 107.
transcends its generic boundaries. Even though Virgil greatly develops the pastoral genre’s potential, he quickly perceives that this generic enhancement is too restricted by the genre’s limitations and insufficiencies. Virgil feels his poetic voice is ready to “leave the shaded, isolated, echo-filled little world of the pastoral and move into more expansive forms of expression”. This leads to Virgil’s acknowledgement of the failure of the pastoral genre in his final eclogue, thus signifying his departure from the genre.

Virgil nevertheless leaves behind a pastoral kind whose poetic potential and possibilities have profoundly expanded through his many alterations. It is consequently not surprising that neo-Latin authors picked up on this potential to develop their own adaptations of the genre. This popularity resulted in an immense variety of tertiary stages of the genre. Apart from writing classicising pastorals, neo-Latin authors developed new forms, e.g., Sannazaro’s fishermen eclogues, and new uses, e.g., political invective or devotional purposes. Milton was very much aware of these generic changes. For instance, he introduced the invective in Saint Peter’s speech in *Lycidas*.

Even though Milton commences his Latin career by writing elegies, he treats the elegiac genre in a similar way as Virgil treated the pastoral genre. In accordance with the contemporary literary fashion, Milton starts off writing elegies. The programmatic first epistle elegy offers an explanation why Milton chose not to write pastorals. At the same time, however, the opening poem quickly reveals Milton’s dissatisfaction with the Ovidian elegiac genre. This elegy consequently ends in Milton’s first departure from the genre. This departure is clearly developed in the following death elegies. Quite different from regular death elegies, Milton does not provide a consolation for the deceased. This anomaly invites the reader to consider the elegies from a different viewpoint. A detailed discussion will reveal that the second and third elegy are appointed an epic mode and that they can be interpreted as an

instance of the typically epic journey into the underworld. The fourth elegy retains the previous elegies’ gravity of demeanour. Since several of the first elegy’s themes recur in this verse epistle, the fourth elegy suggests a temporary conclusion to the first set of elegies. The fifth elegy thematically represents a new beginning, since Milton here deals with the typically elegiac theme of the coming of Spring. Milton subsequently reflects upon the nature of two kinds of poetics in the sixth elegy, and develops a well-defined conception of his poetical ambitions and future epic career. Milton surprisingly adopts the persona of the love elegist in the seventh elegy of Milton’s first poetic cycle. This highly Ovidian elegy can be conceived as Milton’s statement that he possesses the skills that are necessary if he were to pursue an Ovidian career. The seventh elegy nevertheless comes to represent a generic dead end. Finally, the retraction at the end of the cycle completely rejects the elegiac genre. Milton explicitly states that he will not follow a slender poetical career. Instead, Milton indicates that he is ready to prepare himself for his role as an epic poet.

A brief comparison of Milton’s elegy cycle to Virgil’s *Eclogues* reveals significant similarities. Both authors choose a particular kind. Virgil chose the pastoral because of the genre’s self-involvement. Milton chose to write elegies because of its contemporary popularity. The overall development of both works displays a close tightly knit structure. Both poets transcend genre boundaries through epic modulation. They both develop a sense of aspiring towards a future epic career. Even though they actively set out to accomplish generic transformation, both writers lay bare their respective kind’s limitations and essentially abandon it. These parallels clearly indicate that Milton closely models himself on Virgil’s literary methods.

In this respect, we could state that Milton conceptually adopts Virgil’s pastoral voice, because he uses Virgil’s methods to deal with the elegiac genre. In his cycle, Milton brings
the elegiac to a tertiary phase. Fowler indicates that the second and third generic phase develop their proper treatment of generic features:

It is also characteristic of the tertiary phase that it should be informed by interpretation of generic features. The secondary kind may savor the primary kind aesthetically, and so in a sense ‘reinterpret’ it. But the tertiary takes individual conventions as material for symbolic developments that presuppose allegorical, psychological, or other interpretations of them.\textsuperscript{57}

In our analysis of the elegy cycle, we will try to focus on how Milton reinterprets the elegiac genre features in a Virgilian-pastoral way.

We can conclude that Milton’s elegy cycle consists of an interplay of poetical voices. Milton uses an Ovidian-elegiac voice as the primary basis for the cycle. This voice can be linked to the level of the kind, and is meant to represents the light-hearted interpretation of the elegiac genre in Renaissance England. The elegiac voice is very frequently overcome by the second important poetical voice, namely the Virgilian-pastoral voice which assumes an essentially epic character. It is this second voice that will introduce generic modulation to the elegiac kind. There is, however, a Horatian-Epicurean voice which plays a crucial part in the cycle’s development. This third voice does not belong to Milton, but is linked to his intimate friend Charles Diodati. A consideration of this last voice and its role in the elegies will be developed during the analyses of the elegies proper.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibidem.
III. Milton’s *Elegiarum Liber Primus*

1. *Elegia Prima* – The literary birth of Milton’s poetic voice

Milton’s opening elegy, *Elegia Prima ad Carolum Diodatum*, is the first important programmatic poem in his elegiac collection, *Elegiarum Liber Primus*. Milton displays a thorough knowledge of the long-established and greatly developed Latin literary tradition, and shows himself to be well aware of the implications of attributing himself, an unknown English poet, a position in this very same tradition. This awareness is clearly present in the way Milton consciously uses and adapts the conventions inherent to the treated literary genres. Even though Milton writes in the elegiac kind, he immediately reveals that his literary preference does not lie with the elegiac but with the epic genre. In fact, the first elegy resolutely dismisses the Ovidian elegiac tradition. Milton also develops a poetical stance towards the pastoral tradition. He rejects the pastoral kind in its Renaissance development, both in the neo-Latin and English literary fields. Through this rejection, Milton reveals how he draws inspiration from the Virgilian notion of epically orientated pastoral. In expressly taking up well-defined positions to several literary traditions, Milton already introduces his poetical objectives and ambitions. The elegy concludes with a sudden twist of events, thus signifying Milton’s intentions to change his current course.

Milton consciously chooses to launch his Latin poetical career in the elegiac genre, but his treatment of the generic characteristics carries meaningful implications concerning his opinions on the genre. In the beginning, Milton resolutely situates his poem in the elegiac genre. Fowler indicates that authors carefully construct the opening of a literary work, since it generically signals to the reader in which part of the literary field the work is located, thus helping the reader to select an appropriate mental set for his reading of the text.58 In this

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58 Fowler, Alastair, 88.
manner, the reader unconsciously creates what Jauss calls an ‘Erwartungshorizont,’ or a horizon of expectations. Fowler distinguishes three features that are indicative for the work’s genre: allusions, titles and opening topics. Milton utilises all three aspects in the opening to the elegy cycle. The title of the book, *Elegiarum Liber Primus*, and the poem, *Elegia Prima*, obviously locate this cycle in the elegiac field. Milton clearly confirms his choice of genre in the opening lines (ll. 1-8). These lines further specify that the first elegy is conceived of as a verse letter through the introduction of the topic of distance between the letter’s writer and addressee. Milton also inserts textual allusions drawn from the classical Latin elegists Ovid, Propertius and Tibullus to complete his generic frame. The attentive reader attunes his expectations to these signals, and consequently embarks upon a further reading with an elegiac mindset. However, Milton reverses certain elegiac themes and motifs in the poem, thus breaking through the reader’s expectancy horizon. In our analysis, we will focus on the implications of these transformations to lay bare Milton’s dissatisfaction with the elegiac genre.

These transformations should also be linked to Milton’s rejection of Renaissance pastoral in order to reveal Milton’s development of his Virgilian voice. Boehrer indicates that Milton rejects the contemporary state of the pastoral genre by opposing two major topic developments introduced by neo-Latin writers: “the denunciation of political abuses and the disparagement of urban life”.

We have already indicated that, in spite of its limitations and humble style, the pastoral genre was shown by Virgil to possess the potential to treat subjects that transcend its pastoral setting. Renaissance neo-Latin pastoral writers obviously utilised this inherent potential. In this sense, Petrarch and Boccaccio were the first to give prominence to and develop the political invective and the denunciation of the city in the fourteenth century.

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59 Ibidem.
century. These conventions were then taken up by later writers, e.g., Mantuan and Sanazarro, whose works Milton was certainly acquainted with. Milton resolutely opposes these developments to argue for a return to Virgil’s epic-pastoral bucolic voice.

_Elegia Prima_ is conceived of as an epistolary poem to Milton’s closest friend, Charles Diodati. After a brief introduction focusing on the exchange of letters (ll. 1-8), Milton talks about his rustication from Cambridge and his consequent return to London (ll. 9-24). Far from being unhappy about his expulsion from the countryside, Milton rejoices in the time he can spend in his home town (ll. 25-72): he reads excessively, visits the theatres to watch comedies and tragedies and allows himself to be captivated by young maidens in a suburban grove. These descriptions are followed by an apostrophe to London, praised for its maidens whose beauty far exceeds that of the girls in classical times (ll. 73-84). However, a close analysis of Milton’s activities will reveal that Milton is actually engaged in leisurely reading, and that this leisurely reading carries important poetical implications. In his leave-taking (ll. 85-92), Milton reveals his intentions to return to Cambridge, thus ending _Elegia Prima_ with an abrupt reversal of the ideas previously developed in the poem.

After the opening of the letter, Milton develops an opposition between the city and the countryside through the discussion of his exile in London. The elegiac reader is immediately reminded of Tibullus, whose elegiac persona is regularly described as pining away in the city and imagining an escape to the countryside where he can spend blissful times with his mistress. However, Milton’s exaltation about his being away from the countryside to enjoy the merits of London reverses the situation in Tibullus’ poetry. An explicit opposition is established between the city of London, which “figures as an emporium of cultivated delights”, and the provincial Cambridge, which receives negative associations (ll. 11-4).

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62 Boehrer, Bruce, 184.
However, the bare fields and the lack of gentle shades in line 13 reminds us of the pastoral genre, which also displays a tension between the city and the countryside.

By attributing such a prominent position to the city, Milton returns to the urban predominance over the countryside that Virgil had established in his *Eclogues*, most notably in the first and ninth eclogues. Milton thus opposes his Renaissance predecessors who depict the city as a political entity whose corrupting influence should be banished from the pastoral world. Milton’s elegy thereby “refuses the alliance common in neo-Latin pastoral between the attack on political corruption and a pronounced anti-urban sentiment”. The elegy also contains a rejection of the vernacular pastoral tradition. Inspired by Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calender*, English authors increasingly came to associate pastoral poetry with aristocratic patronage. Consequently, courtly entertainments more frequently received a pastoral setting and country values were being inscribed into a court ideology. Since pastoral poetry came to represent an assertion of royal power, its inherent potential quickly decreased. English pastoral poetry thus became a hollow genre with a strong tendency towards triviality and false leisure. This degenerate condition is commonly said to be criticised in *Lycidas*, when the poet wonders if he should not use his shepherd’s song to sport with Amaryllis and Neaera. In this sense, Milton’s refusal to attribute to the country its usual characteristics of the *locus amoenus* implies a rejection of the courtly pastoral vein. This rejection can be read as Milton’s reason for not directly following in Spenser’s literary footsteps. In conclusion, by exploiting the contrast between the city and the countryside Milton rejects the Renaissance pastoral poetry, and pleads for a return to the Virgilian concept of pastoral with its epic intents.

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63 Boehrer, Bruce, 186.
65 Patterson, Annabel, 158. Norbrook, David, 55.
However, Milton’s return to the Virgilian urban predominance simultaneously introduces a deviation from that same Virgilian model. Even though the city is initially perceived as something positive in the first eclogue, its predominance is experienced as rather negative in the light of the pastoral genre’s exhaustion. Milton, on the contrary, not only directs the negative connotations against the rural setting, he also “employs certain descriptive features of the pastoral *locus amoenus*” 66 in discussing his activities in London. In effect, Milton accomplishes a complete reversal of the value patterns established in Virgil’s pastorals. A particular instance of the city being attributed positive connotations occurs when Milton describes how he admires the beautiful maidens in a suburban garden:

> Sed neque sub tecto semper nec in urbe latemus,
> Irrita nec nobis tempora veris eunt.
> Nos quoque lucus habet vicina consitus ulmo
> Atque suburbani nobilis umbra loci. [50]
> Saepius hic blandas spirantia sidera flammam
> Virgineos videas praeterisse choros.
> Ah quoties dignae stupui miracula formae
> Quae possit senium vel reparare Iovis; (47-54)

[But I do not always hide myself away indoors, or stay in the city: the spring does not pass by me unnoticed. A dense elm grove nearby, and a magnificently shady spot just outside the city are my haunts. Here you can often see parties of young girls walking by – stars which breathe forth seductive flames. Ah, how

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66 Boehrer, Bruce, 192.
often have I been struck dumb by the miraculous shapeliness of a figure which
might well make even old Jove young again. (24)]

The words *lucus, ulmo* and *umbra* would typically be used to describe a pastoral *locus
amoenus*. The maidens are likewise introduced in a pastoral manner. The term *choros* is
regularly used both by classical and neo-Latin poets to describe nymphs or muses. In other
words, by accepting the city’s predominance Milton returns to the Virgilian pastoral kind to
reject the Renaissance kinds. Yet, by attributing a positive connotation to the city’s
predominance Milton distinguishes himself from Virgil’s model, thus revealing that he
intends to emulate Virgil.

*Elegia Prima* contains other important implications for Milton’s poetics. After his
harsh description of Cambridge, Milton expands upon his happy state in London, and
contrasts his own exile to that of Ovid:

O utinam vates nunquam graviora tulisset
Ille Tomitano flebilis exul agro,
Non tunc Ionio quicquam cessisset Homero
Neve foret victo laus tibi prima Maro. (21-4)

[Ah! If only that poet who was once a tearful exile in the land of Tomis had
never had to put up with anything worse than this: then he would have been a
match for Ionian Homer, and you, Virgil, outdone, would not enjoy supreme
glory. (23)]

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and page references for all subsequent translation citations from this book are in the text. For practical reasons,
this edition will later be referred to under the editor’s name.

68 Boehrer, Bruce, 194.
These lines contain an explicit literary evaluation of Ovid’s poetry. Milton clearly states that Ovid is no match for the epic poets Homer and Virgil. The young poet already reveals that he considers epic poetry worthier than the elegiac genre. Milton subsequently recounts how he can freely devote his time in London to the Muses and to arduous reading (l. 25-6). Then he describes his leisure activities: he discusses comedy, tragedy and his walks in the suburban garden. Commentators have noted that Milton’s account of comedy and tragedy is put in remarkably classical terms. Moreover, Milton uses elusive instead of active verbs in his description. For example, the theatre receives him (l. 27: excipit); raging tragedy is said to brandish its sceptre (l. 38). These elements imply that Milton does not visit the theatre, but that he is actually reading. Milton significantly writes that he occupies himself with these genres when he is tired (l. 27: fessum). In other words, comedy and tragedy are here dismissed as pastime genres. Since these genres are not associated with the Muses, Milton reveals he will not devote his attention to them in his writings.

Milton’s visit to the suburban grove should likewise be interpreted on a poetical level. This section is commonly interpreted as the amatory centre of the poem. Nevertheless, one should keep in mind that Milton is still occupied with his leisurely reading. This time Milton turns his attention to classical elegies. The elaborate treatment of the elegiac genre, combined with the fact that Milton is currently writing an elegy, signifies that the section will reflect on Milton’s own elegiac conceptions and intentions. Not surprisingly, this section opens with literary echoes to Ovid’s poetry. The phrase “tempora veris eunt” (l. 48) echoes Ovid’s “tempora veris erunt” (Fasti 1.496/2.150/4.902) and “tempora noctis eunt” (recurs five times in Amores I.6). Even though Milton returns to the elegiac kind after his brief comic and tragic excursions, he transforms yet another elegiac theme to indicate his modulation of the genre.

Instead of adopting the elegiac adoration for a single mistress, Milton admires several beautiful maidens at once.

This generic modulation is indicated by an introduction of significant imagery. The shades denied to Milton in the bare fields of Cambridge are explicitly linked to the poetic god Apollo (ll. 13-4). When the young poet does encounter these shades amongst the elms in the suburban garden (l. 50), Milton implicitly reveals that he deems the city suitable for Apollo’s worshippers, an honour not granted to the reedy Cam. Apollo’s suitability for the city is further evoked by “lucus” and “virgineos choros”. Lucus carries religious associations, since its primary definition is not merely grove (a deduced meaning utilised by John Carey in his translation), but a sacred grove. It has also been noted that chorus is frequently used to describe the Muses. Virgil, for example, refers to them as “Phoebi chorus” in his sixth Eclogue (l. 66). We can also detect an echo to Petrarch’s Bucolicum Carmen 3. Here, the leader of the virginea chorea or virginal choral dance hands the poet a laurel bough, symbolising his association with Apollonian poetry. The virginei chori in Elegia Prima actually represent the Muses who symbolise Milton’s dawning poetic ambitions. These concepts are introduced into the urban setting, which was already shown to be worthy of Apollo’s reign. Milton consequently associates his poetic aspirations with Apollo. The intertextual reference to Virgil’s sixth eclogue provides a crucial interpretation key. We already referred to the poem’s epic intentions. Virgil here evokes the god Apollo as the patron god of epic poetry. In other words, Milton’s poetic inspiration by the Muses is linked to profoundly epic ambitions. Milton’s transformation of the generic feature of the elegiac love for one woman, and his insertion of the epic lucus and Apollo achieve an essentially epic modulation of the poem. Milton has revealed his poetic intentions for the elegiac genre.

Milton wants to emulate the elegiac genre by adding an epic modulation, just as Virgil once achieved the same result for the pastoral genre.

Milton’s ambitions also involve a national poetic enterprise. These aspirations can be read in Milton’s excitement over the beauty of the English women. He urges the classical beauties to admit defeat and to be content with a second place (ll. 63-70). Especially the poet’s apostrophe to London reveals his poetic enterprise:

Gloria virginibus debetur prima Britannis,
Extera sat tibi sit foemina posse sequi.
Tuque urbs Dardaniis Londinum structa colonis
Turrigerum late conspicienda caput,
Tu nimium felix intra tua moenia claudis
Quicquid formosi pendulus orbis habet.
Non tibi tot caelo scintillant astra sereno

Quot tibi conspicuae formaque auroque puellae
Per medias radiant turba videnda vias. (71-80)

[The first prize goes to the British girls: be content, foreign woman, to take second place! And you, London, a city built by Trojan settlers, a city whose towery head can be seen for miles, you are more than fortunate to enclose within your walls whatever beauty there is to be found in all this pendent world. The stars which spangle the calm sky above you . . . are fewer in number than the host which can be seen all a-glitter in your streets: girls whose good looks and golden trinkets catch the eye. (24)]
Milton here adopts a very disengaged and epic tone, which creates a strong contrast with a similar excerpt in Ovid’s *Ars Amatoria*. The adjective “Dardaniis” (l. 73), referring to one of the mythical founders of Troy, is typically used in epics, e.g., *Aeneid* 6.650/7.422 and Lucan 2.393. The adjective “turrigerum” (l. 74) likewise carries epic echoes (A. 7.631/10.253, Lucan 1.188, and Silius Italicus 4.408-9). Milton’s epic modulation and intent on elegiac emulation is also reflected in the reference to the stars. In the *Ars Amatoria*, Ovid writes that the city of Rome has as many lovely girls as there are stars in the sky (1.59). Milton transcends Ovid by stating that London’s beautiful maidens outnumber the stars. These lines should undoubtedly be read on a poetical level. In his comparison of women all over the world, Milton is still referring to them as muses. In other words, Milton prefers British poetry over classical poetry. In the subsequent lines, Milton continues his epic modulation, when he situates Venus in the city, claiming that she preferred London over her patron cities Cnidos and Paphos (ll. 77-84). As Virgil once drew the Trojan gods to the Italian peninsula in the *Aeneid*, Milton here tries to introduce the ancient gods to the British Isles. Milton thus portrays London as the new Rome, and indicates that he means to contribute to its poetic greatness.

The poem concludes with a very resolute poetical decision. Milton abruptly announces his intentions to leave London and to return to the harsh Cambridge countryside:

> Ast ego, dum pueri sinit indulgentia caeci,
> Moenia quam subito linquere fausta paro;
> Et vitare procul malefidae infamia Circes
> Atria, divina Molyos usus ope.
> Stat quoque iuncosas Cami remeare paludes,
> Atque iterum raucae murmur adire Scholae. (85-90)
[But for my part I intend to quit his fortunate town as quickly as possible, while the blind boy’s indulgence permits, and, with the help of divine moly, to leave far behind the infamous halls of faithless Circe. I am to return to the Cam’s reedy marshes and face the uproar of the noisy University again. (24)]

The reversed value pattern that was established throughout the poem still stands. The city is still *fausta* and the countryside filled with *murmur raucae Scholae*. Yet, Milton feels the need to leave the city to avoid Circe’s malign influence. In pastoral literature Circe is regularly called upon by spurned lovers who try to use charms and incantations to reverse their unhappy fates. The association first appears in Theocritus’ second idyll. It recurs in Virgil’s eighth eclogue, and is consequently copied by many writers in the pastoral tradition. In this manner, Circe comes to represent a pernicious indulgence in amorous poetry. This association is enhanced by the fact that “malefidae Circes / Atria” alludes to Ovid’s work (M. 13.968/14.9-10/14.446-7). Milton’s avoidance of Circe thus symbolises a resolute rejection of the Ovidian-elegiac voice. Indeed, it has been noted that the young poet does not get caught in one of Cupid’s carefully-spread nets (l. 60), and that he is never struck by an all-consuming love typical of the elegiac poet.\textsuperscript{71} Milton manages to escape Circe’s charm with the help of divine moly, the magical herb which also protected the hero of the Odyssey. Milton subdues the elegiac voice through the help of the epic genre. As *Elegia Prima* draws to a close, Milton finishes his leisurely reading. He feels he has indulged himself in light poetry long enough. It is time for him to turn his attention once again to more important matters. Milton is determined to return to Cambridge, a place of learning where he can prepare himself for his future epic career.

A close analysis of *Elegia Prima* reveals that this early poem carries important poetical implications. The idea of a young and mirthful Milton writing the elegy cycle should

\textsuperscript{71} Revard, Stella P., 15-16.
clearly be abandoned. Firstly, Milton displays a thorough knowledge of Latin literary traditions and imposes a rigid hierarchy unto the different genres. Comedy, tragedy, pastorals and Ovidian poetry are all deemed inferior to the epic genre. But Milton also takes up clear positions to the literary genres in the poem. Comedy and tragedy provide no poetical interest for Milton. The pastoral and elegiac genres are more elaborately treated. Milton rejects the pastoral genre in its Renaissance forms in favour of the Virgilian kind. However, Milton also manages to surpass Virgil himself in a veritable tour de force by locating himself in the city, which is attributed positive characteristics and poetical potentiality. Whereas Virgil only abandons the pastoral genre at the end of his poem, Milton here signifies that he will not be dealing with the pastoral genre directly. Instead, Milton turns his attention to the genre which ultimately caused the pastoral’s bankruptcy in the tenth eclogue. In this concluding eclogue, the elegiac poet Gallus is introduced into the pastoral landscape, looking for a relief from his passionate love for Lycoris. Yet, whereas the pastoral songs earlier had managed to contain love’s powers and provide a fundamental cure for love, they do not succeed in providing a solace for Gallus. In other words, Milton actually starts his Latin poetic career where Virgil left off in his eclogues. The first elegy already reveals that Milton succeeds in emulating the elegiac genre through the reversal of certain elegiac themes and the epic modulations.

A final consideration should be made about the addressee of *Elegia Prima*. Milton has addressed his first Latin elegy to his most intimate friend Charles Diodati. Even though it is perfectly common for elegists to address poems concerning love and other elegiac themes to a male friend, it is noteworthy to indicate that Diodati acts as addressee for Milton upon several occasions, mostly in the Latin poems. Significantly, both *Elegia Prima* and *Elegia Sexta* are written to Diodati. Both elegies occupy an important position in Milton’s book of

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72 Revard, Stella P., 14.
73 *Sonnet IV* is the only non-Latin poem addressed to Diodati. It nevertheless also corresponds with the literary relationship Milton establishes between Diodati and himself.
elegies, because these are the elegies that reveal a great deal about Milton’s developing poetics. Diodati even becomes the main subject of *Epitaphium Damonis*. This intensely personal pastoral elegy is the closing poem of the Latin section of the 1645 *Poems*. The *Epitaphium Damonis* not only acts as a final farewell to Diodati, it also signifies Milton’s final departure from Latin poetry and reveals a mature poet who is ready to pursue higher poetic aspirations. It seems hardly coincidental that Milton chose to develop his Latin poetic voice in relation to Charles Diodati. We will return to this aspect in an analysis of *Elegia Sexta*, because this elegy focuses more on a Milton’s relationship with Diodati and a possible connection to Milton’s conceptions of poetics.

2. *Elegia Secunda* and *Elegia Tertia* – An epic journey to the underworld

The resolute rejection of amorous poetry at the end of the first elegy brings us to the next elegiac topic of death in *Elegia Secunda* and *Elegia Tertia*. It initially seems strange that Milton writes funeral elegies after his resolute announcement to turn his attention to serious epic poetry. However, the second elegy is thematically linked to the epic closure of *Elegia Prima*. Milton thus signifies that he is still in the process of the generic modulation of the elegiac genre. This modulation will present itself thematically in Milton’s treatment of the *consolatio*. In fact, the funeral elegies represent the two stages of Aeneas’ journey in the underworld. *Elegia Secunda* represents the journey towards the underworld, and *Elegia Tertia* can be read as a visit to the Elysian fields. In these elegies Milton also introduces the poetical issue of the treatment of the pagan classical tradition in a Christian context.

*Elegia Secunda.* *In Obitum Praeconis Academici Cantabrigiensis* is a funeral elegy written for Richard Ridding, the beadle of Cambridge university. The poem consists of three apostrophes. The first and longest is addressed to Ridding, and Milton here mourns the beadle’s death (ll. 1-16). Milton rebukes the goddess Persephone in a second apostrophe (ll. 20-24).
17-20), and finishes by urging the university to mourn and by inviting appropriate lamentations for the deceased (ll. 21-4). This short elegy is rather ironical in nature and does not provide a *consolatio*. This is due to the fact that the elegy is mainly meant to introduce the theme of death and to establish a link with the first elegy.

The connection with *Elegia Prima* is accomplished in two ways. The Roman god Mercury serves as the most prominent link. Milton uses the Latin word *praeco* to describe Ridding’s occupation as university beadle (l. 3). The basic meaning of *praecox*, however, is actually ‘herald’.\(^{74}\) Mercury is, of course, primarily known as the herald of the gods in classical mythology. Oblique references are also made to Mercury’s patronage of shepherds in Milton’s metaphorical description of Ridding’s tasks:

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Te, qui conspicuous baculo fulgente solebas
Palladium toties ore ciere gregem. (1-2)
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[You who, resplendent with your glittering mace, used to rouse Pallas’ flock so often with your call. (26)]\(^{75}\)

The reference to Mercury is made explicit when Milton compares Ridding to the wing-footed Cyllenius (13-14: “Cyllenius / Alipes”), Cyllenius being an alternative name for the Roman god. Mercury connects the second elegy with the first through the divine moly, because he gave the magical herb to Odysseus in the tenth book of Homer’s epic. Mercury did not only act as a herald for the gods, he was also the herald of death who guided the souls of the deceased to the underworld. The figure of Mercury in the poem thus continues the epic modulation established in the first elegy, and serves as the introducer of the funeral theme. The second link to the first elegy is established in the apostrophe to the university. One is immediately reminded of the fact that Milton had announced his return to Cambridge as a

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signification to occupy himself with serious matters. The link is confirmed by the fact that “scholis” (l. 24) is located at the end of the verse, just like “scholae” in the first elegy (l. 90). This connection reinforces the continuation of the epic modulation.

Having introduced the theme of death in the second elegy, Milton properly elaborates upon the subject in his third elegy. *Elegia Tertia. In Obitum Praesulis Wintoniensis* was written for Lancelot Andrewes, bishop of Winchester. Since the elegy was written for a bishop, Milton’s tone is more appropriately serious than in *Elegia Secunda*. The poem opens with Milton pondering over many people recently fallen into death’s fearful clutches (ll. 1-14). The third elegy also contains an apostrophe in which death is reprimanded for wanting to exert its power over the whole of nature (ll. 15-30). This apostrophe is followed by Milton’s description of the setting sun, and the poet lays himself down in his bed and falls asleep (ll. 31-6). In his dream Milton visits a heavenly afterlife (ll. 37-52) and encounters the bishop (ll. 53-65). The elegy concludes with Milton’s awakening (ll. 66-8).

Milton continues his epic modulation in this elegy. For example, the setting of the sun beneath the Tartessian ocean in line 32 is drawn from Virgil (G. 3.359) and Silius Italicus (6.1/10.537/17.590). The epic modulation especially occurs in the description of the paradise. The ground that shone in many colours because of the many flowers is compared to Iris, the rainbow goddess (ll. 41-42), who acts as a messenger to the gods in Homer’s *Iliad* and Virgil’s *Aeneid* (4.700-1). The flowery paradise is said to surpass even the mythological gardens of Alcinous (ll. 43-44), which is elaborately described in the Odyssey (7.112-32). Milton concludes his description by comparing the paradise to the heavenly home of the morning-star Lucifer (ll. 49-50). His use of Lucifer’s name as the adjective for light-bringing echoes Homer who describes Lucifer as the herald of light (ll. 23.226). Apart from the generic
modulation, Milton has followed “the standard formula of neo-Latin funeral” by describing the poem’s paradise in pagan classical terms.76

However, Milton deviates from this formula in his depiction of Andrewes in the afterlife by introducing Christian elements in the poem:

Ecce mihi subito praesul Wintonius astat,
Sydereum nitido fulsit in ore iubar;
Vestis ad auratos defluxit candida talos, [55]
Infula divinum cinxerat alba caput.
Dumque senex tali incedit venerandus amictu,
Intremuit laeto florea terra sono.
Agmina gemmatis plaudunt caelestia pennis,
Pura triumphali personat aethra tuba. [60]
Quisque novum amplexu comitem cantuque salutat,
Hosque aliquis placido misit ab ore sonos;
Nate veni, et patrii felix cape gaudia regni,
Semper ab hinc duro, nate, labore vaca.
Dixit, et aligerae tetigerunt nablia turmae, (53-65)

[Suddenly the Bishop of Winchester appears, close by me. A star-like radiance shone from his bright face, a white robe flowed down to his golden feet and his god-like head was encircled by a white band. As the reverend old man walked forward, dressed in this way, the flowery earth quivered with a joyful sound. The heavenly hosts clap their jewelled wings: the pure upper air rings with the blast of a triumphal trumpet. Each spirit embraces his new companion and

76 Revard, Stella P., 49.
Van De Walle 37

greets him with a song, and one of them, with peaceful lips, uttered these syllables: ‘Come, my son, and receive in happiness the joys of your Father’s kingdom; henceforth be free from cruel toil, my son, for ever.’ When he had spoken the winged squadrons touched their harps. (55)]

The bishop’s star-like radiance (l. 54) is said to be drawn from the Exodus. Even though the phrase Milton uses in line 59 to introduce the heavenly hosts is inspired by Virgil’s description of the spirits in Elysium (A. 6.644), it can easily be read as referring to the angelic hosts in a Christian Heaven. The unusual Latin term “nablia” (l. 65) is most commonly used in Judeo-Christian writings, and the term “aliger” (id.) is recurrent in Vida’s Christian epic. The words spoken by Andrewes in lines 63 and 64 carry biblical echoes. Milton’s vision of Andrewes in heaven thus adds a certain Christian conceptual dimension to the poem.

Nevertheless, Milton’s modification of the conventional neo-Latin consolatio signifies deeper poetical intentions. In spite of its Christian dimension, the image of the bishop in heaven ultimately fails to provide Elegia Tertia with a sincere consolatory effect. West correctly indicates that “Milton’s vision of Heaven is remarkable for the degree to which it utilizes the details of an earthly Paradise”. Because this paradise strongly focuses on the gratification of the human senses and lacks religious fundamentals, it would hardly have been considered appropriate for Andrewes’ profoundly Christian spirituality. Moreover, the description of the bishop significantly utilises several epic echoes, instead of depicting him in Christian terms overall. Lines 55 and 56, for instance, are both drawn from Virgil (A. 1.404 and 10.639). Milton’s transformation of the elegiac consolatio through generic modulation still fits in with Milton’s epic experimentations announced at the end of Elegia Prima. The depiction of the afterlife should consequently not be read as a Christian paradise, but as the

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78 Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 74.
79 West, Michael, 235.
80 West, Michael, 236.
classical Elysian fields. The insertion of the Christian elements seems to indicate that Milton’s third elegy should be read as an exploration of the poetical possibilities to adapt the classical tradition to a Christian context.

3. *Elegia Quarta* – The end of an epic learning process

*Elegia Quarta* is the second epistle elegy in the collection. Even though the poem at first sight does not appear to be linked to the previous elegies, it should not be dismissed as a mere “vehicle for showing off one’s poetic abilities”.\(^1\) Quite the contrary, the verse letter unites the first four elegies and provides a conclusion to the first structural part of the elegy cycle. The poem is characterised by the same serious intents and epic modulation displayed in the three previous elegies. The elegy acts as a logical sequel to the third elegy in its continuation of the Christian incorporation of classical literature. Moreover, the subject of political conflicts and war in Europe had already been announced in the first part of the preceding poem.\(^2\) Milton also provides a reflection on the contrast between vernacular and Latin poetry. *Elegia Quarta* significantly reintroduces three themes from the first elegy (tutelage, exile and epic) to signal the closure of the first part of the elegy cycle.

The fourth elegy is a verse epistle Milton addresses to his former tutor Thomas Young, who was performing the office of chaplain in Hamburg. The first part of the letter is structured like a typical epistle elegy. Milton orders his letter to make haste at the beginning of the poem (ll. 1-16). The poet consequently praises Young’s noble nature and expands upon the importance of his tutelage (17-38). Milton then imagines Young’s reaction to the letter and begs him to excuse his tardy writing (ll. 39-68), before shifting the poem’s topic to Young’s exile and the political situation in continental Europe, where the Thirty Years War is

\(^2\) El. III. 9-12.
raging (69-104). The letter is rounded off with the supporting advise not to despair and to take
courage in God’s protective powers (105-126).

Milton’s epic modulation of the elegiac genre reaches an obvious climax in *Elegia Quarta*. A brief consideration of the opening serves as an appropriate example:

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Curre per immensum subito mea littera pontum,
I, pete Teutonicos laeve per aequor agros,
Segnes rumpe moras, et nil, precor, obstet eunti,
Et festinantis nil remoretur iter.
Ipse ego Sicanio fraenantem carcere ventos       [5]
Aeolon, et virides sollicitabo deos;
Caeruleamque suis comitatam Dorida Nymphis,
Ut tibi dent placidam per sua regna viam. (1-8)
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[Make haste, my letter, run across the wide ocean! Off you go! Seek out the
lands of Germany over the smooth sea. Put an end to this idle delay! Do not let
anything prevent your going, I beg you, or check the speed of journey. I, for
my part, will importune Aeolus (who keeps the winds pent up in their Sicanian
den), and the green sea-gods and sky-blue Doris (with her attendant nymphs) to
grant you an undisturbed passage through their kingdoms. (61)]

Even though the speeding on of the letter is a typically elegiac convention, Milton manages to
upgrade its tone with epic reminiscences. The second line is an adaptation of Virgil’s “I,
sequere Italiam ventis, pete regna per undas” (A. 4.381). The third line is a compilation of
phrases drawn from Silius Italicus’ *Punica* (8.214-215) and Statius’ *Thebais* (11.349). The
mythological figures of Aeolus, the god of the winds, and the Nereids granting safe passage to

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83 “Elegia Quarta” in Carey, John, 55-63.
ships, are typically epic. This epic modulation is omnipresent, and the poem becomes even more profoundly epic when Milton discusses the war on the continent. In this sense, *Elegia Quarta* definitely does not agree with the cycle’s allegedly frivolous nature. Hanford comments that “Milton writes with an accent of sincerity which leaves no doubt of the hold which the subject has taken on his emotions, but he indulges in no such aesthetic dreaming as in the first elegy”.

The epic modulation is closely linked to tutelage and education, the first of the recurring subjects from the first elegy. At the end of the first elegy, Cambridge had been connected to Milton’s epic rejection of amorous elegies. The second and third elegies were also written from the Cambridge countryside. Milton’s epic experimentation consequently implies that a Cambridge education provides the poet with the opportunity to prepare for a future epic career. The link between education and epic preparation is more strongly represented in the fourth elegy, when Milton expands upon Young’s tutelage. Firstly, Milton significantly introduces some historical and mythological tutor-pupil exemplars (ll. 23-8). Young is compared to Socrates, Aristotle, Phoenix and Chiron. The significance of these comparisons lies in the pupils to whom these exemplars were tutor. Socrates tutored Alcibiades, Aristotle Alexander the Great, and Phoenix and Chiron were tutors to Achilles. These three men are most renowned for their wartime achievements. Alcibiades was a key general during the Peloponnesian War. The Macedonian Alexander conquered many territories and established a huge empire in a relatively short time. Achilles was the fiercest and deadliest of the Greek heroes besieging Troy in the *Iliad*. Their tutors prepared them for the epic future that lay in store for them. Milton’s similes thus imply that Young’s tutelage prepared him for his future epic poetic career. This is ultimately confirmed in the subsequent lines:

84 Handford qtd. in Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 79-80.
Primus ego Aonios illo praeeunte recessus  
Lustrabam, et bifidi sacra vireta jugi,  
Pieriosque hausi latices, Clioque favente,  
Castalio sparsi laeta ter ora mero. (29-32)

[I was the first to wander under his guidance through the Aonian retreats and over the forked mountain’s sacred, grassy slopes. There I drank Pieria’s waters and through the goodness of Clio, three times I made my happy mouth wet with Castilian wine. (62)]

The three localities in these lines (Mount Helicon, Mount Parnassus with the Castilian spring and Mount Pierus) were all sacred to the Muses, and were commonly used by epic poets when calling upon the Muses for poetic inspiration. It was Young who introduced Milton to epic poetry, thus preparing him for his epic future.

The second theme *Elegia Quarta* shares with the first elegy is exile. A textual link is established through “patrii . . . penates” (l. 85), which echoes “patrios . . . penates” (1.17) in Milton’s description of his exile. However, Young’s exile in Germany obviously differs from Milton’s. Whereas Milton was happily exiled to London, Young suffers a harsh and dangerous exile on the conflictive European mainland. Milton’s apostrophe consequently differs from his lauding address to London in the first elegy:

Patria dura parens, et saxis saevior albis  
Spumea quae pulsat littoris unda tui,  
Siccine te decet innocuos exponere faetus;  
Siccine in externam ferrea cogis humum, [90]  
Et sinis ut terris quae r ant alimenta remotis  
Quos tibi prospiciens miserat ipse Deus,
Et qui laeta ferunt de caelo nuntia, quique
Quae via post cineres ducat ad astra, docent?
Digna quidem Stygiis quae vivas clausa tenebris, [95]
Aeternaque animae digna perire fame! (87-96)

[O native country, hard-hearted parent, more cruel than the white cliffs of your coastline, battered by foaming waves, is it fitting that you should expose your innocent children in this way? Is this the way you treat them, iron-hearted land, driving them onto foreign soil and allowing them to search for their food in distant shores, when God Himself, taking thought for you, has sent them; when they bring joyful news to you about heaven and teach the way which leads beyond the grave to the stars? You really deserve to live shut up in hellish darkness and to die of a never-ending hunger of the soul! (63)]

Whereas Milton lauded London for its beautiful maidens in Elegia Prima, England is now chided for its harsh parenthood. On a poetical level, Milton is reflecting on the relationship between English and Latin poetry. Milton here rejects, or rather modifies, the opinion he expressed in the first elegy. Milton’s own exile was situated within his own country. In this sense, Milton’s poetical statements were based on an intranational English viewpoint. Milton recognises that writing vernacular poetry is considered more noteworthy than writing Latin poetry. The fourth elegy, on the other hand, develops the English-Latin relationship from an international viewpoint. English poetry is found to be too rude and undeveloped for an international audience, and threatens to disappear into a literary unknown. We thus encounter an additional reason why Milton decides to commence his poetic career in Latin. The Latin poems allow Milton to reflect upon the contrasts between English and Latin poetry, and their
respective reception in England and abroad. For the moment, Milton deems it too early for him to turn to writing in the vernacular.

The epic provides the third thematic link between the discussed elegies. The epic theme was only briefly touched upon at the end of the first elegy in the reference to the divine moly. In the fourth elegy, however, the epic theme is more prominently present in Milton’s description of the political situation in Europe. A significant development is noticeable in this part of this poem, because Milton returns to the third elegy’s experimentation of utilising classical poetry within a Christian context. Milton initially uses classical imagery to depict the war situation (ll. 69-86). The deity Fama (l. 71) regularly appears in classical epic contexts (e.g., A. 4.188 and Thebais 9.32). Milton also mentions Enyo and Mars, the Roman goddess and god of war (l. 75, 77, 78), and refers to Astraea (ll. 81-2), the last goddess to leave earth at the end of the Bronze Age. Milton’s rebuke of England then provides a turning point. After the apostrophe, the poem is surprisingly void of classical imagery. Instead, Milton converts to the Bible as his source for exemplary inspiration. These exemplars are nevertheless interspersed with phrases drawn from classical literature. A brief consideration of the last biblical image provides a clear example:

Inque fugam vertit quos in Samaritidas oras,       [115]
Misit ab antiquis prisca Damascus agris,
Terruit et densas pavido cum rege cohortes,
Aere dum vacuo buccina clara sonat,
Cornea pulvereum dum verberat ungula campum,
Currus arenosam dum quatit actus humum,       [120]
Auditurque hinnitus equorum ad bella ruentum,
Et strepitus ferri, murmuraque alta virum. (115-122)
[He who routed those troops which the age-old city of Damascus sent out from her ancient territories against the frontiers of Samaria, and spread panic among the massed battalions with their trembling king, when the clear-noted war-trumpets shrilled through the empty air, and the whinnying of charging cavalry was heard, and the clash of steel and the deep distant roar of shouting men. (63)]

The excerpt refers to a passage in the second book of *Kings*, where God forces the Syrian army to flight by causing them to hear the noise of a great army (7.6-7). Milton’s expansion on the story consists of verses that could easily be found in a classical epic. For example, line 119 is an adaptation of Virgil’s “quadrupedante putrem sonitu quatit ungula campum” (A. 8.596).

*Elegia Quarta* with its three recurring subjects from the programmatic first elegy provides a conclusion to the first four elegies. Having rejected the amorous elegy genre in the first elegy, Milton retreated to the reedy Cambridge in the following elegies to immerse himself in his epic studies and experimentations. These elegies also provided Milton with an opportunity to reflect on how to treat the pagan and Christian literary tradition. *Elegia Tertia* explored the possibilities to accommodate the classical tradition to Christian ideas. This practice was quite common among neo-Latin poets, who chose to preserve the classical concepts rather than actively adapt them to Christian standards. *Elegia Quarta*, on the other hand, can be regarded as a try-out to see if classical literature can be utilised to reinforce the Christian tradition. In spite of an adequate use of Latin literary resources, the two traditions remain separate entities and the experiment does not result in a successful fusion. The fourth elegy can also be regarded as a temporary conclusion, since Milton will once again turn his attention to the Ovidian love elegy in the next poem. Milton significantly returns to the city, thus implying a revival of his poetic ambitions. In fact, this new stage has already been
announced in the fourth elegy, when Milton describes Thomas Young as one who “teach[es] the way which leads beyond the grave to the stars” (l. 94: “quae via post cineres ducat ad astra, docent”). The fourth elegy, represented by Young, acts as the transition from the underworld journey in the second and third elegies to the poetic aspirations in the fifth and sixth elegies. More specifically, through the affection for his former tutor Young (l. 70), Milton departs from the stern epic experimentations in *Elegia Secunda* and *Elegia Tertia*. The love theme, so suddenly abandoned at the end of the first elegy, will fully resurface with the breaking of spring in *Elegia Quinta*. Elegies 2, 3 and 4 thus represent the divine moly at the end of *Elegia Prima*. Since Milton is now epically harnessed against the pernicious influence of Circe’s magic, he will succeed in curbing love’s erupting power, thus accomplishing a transcendence of the elegiac genre’s boundaries.

### 4. *Elegia Quinta* – A Virgilian intermingling of genres

Whereas the previous three elegies were characterised by the wintry subjects of death and war, the fifth elegy reintroduces a livelier subject into the elegy cycle. *Elegia Quinta*. In *Adventus Veris* is the poet’s celebration of the coming of spring, a subject quite common among the neo-Latin poets of the Renaissance, especially in lyric poetry. The spring subject was already announced in the first elegy. Before describing the beautiful maidens in the suburban grove, Milton wrote that spring did not pass him by unnoticed (1.48: “irrata nec nobis tempora veris eunt”). The fifth elegy consequently picks up on the first elegy’s love theme. Since Milton added a significant poetical meaning to this theme, one would expect Milton to embark upon a similar enterprise in *Elegia Quinta*. Our expectations are confirmed, when Milton’s treatment of this conventional subject quickly takes a sudden turn at the beginning of the elegy. The poet himself is deeply moved by the coming of spring and feels a

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strong divine inspiration stirring inside, urging on his poetic powers. This inspiration causes Milton to once again aspire to new poetical heights. In contrast to the first elegy, however, Milton does not reject the love theme, but actively incorporates it into the poem to achieve the elegiac genre’s ultimate emulation by raising it to a cosmic level.

_Elegia Quinta_ opens with a short description of nature, but quickly shifts to the poet’s awakening poetic powers. The description of spring winds repelling the winter cold and of the reviving Earth (ll. 1-4) knows many literary precedents, and seems to lead the poem into a typical spring song. Yet, the poet suddenly shifts the focus to himself and his reviving poetic powers (ll. 5-8), and immediately attributes this regeneration to the god Apollo:

Castalis ante oculos, bifidumque cacumen oberrat,
Et mihi Pyrenen somnia nocet nocte ferunt.
Concitaque arcano fervent mihi pectora motu,
Et furor, et sonitus me sacer intus agit.
Delius ipse venit, video Peneide lauro
Implicitos crines, Delius ipse venit. (9-14)

[The Castalian fountain and the forked peak swim before my eyes, and at night my dreams bring Pirene to me. My soul is deeply stirred and glows with its mysterious impulse, and I am driven on by poetic frenzy and the sacred sound which fills my brain. Apollo himself is coming – I can see his hair wreathed in Penean laurel – Apollo himself is coming. (89)]

The poetic tone adopted here does not correspond to any elegiac or lyrical voice. These lines rather remind us of classical oracles or priests possessed by Apollo. Milton thus re-establishes his epic voice. Reverd confirms that “instead of saluting the spring by adopting the persona of

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a shepherd-singer or rustic poet, [Milton] takes on the voice of one of Apollo’s poet-priests, who, welcoming the god of poetry and prophecy, falls into a poetic trance”. The poet then announces that spring will be sung by Apollo himself, since she provided this poetical inspiration (l. 23: “Ver mihi, quod dedit ingenium, cantabitur illo”). At a poetical level, Milton indicates that he is ready to confront the power of the Ovidian love theme that he fled away from in the first elegy, with his loftier epic voice, developed in the previous elegies.

Milton’s revived poetic powers can also be linked to Milton’s poetical intentions for the elegiac genre. Milton’s reading of elegiac poetry in *Elegia Prima* triggered his poetical ambitions for the first time. Inspired by Virgil’s emulation of the pastoral genre, Milton realises that the elegiac genre contains a similar potential. The epic modulation, the maiden-muses and the Apollonian associations in *Elegia Prima* revealed Milton’s ambitions. In spite of these elements, Milton does not yet achieve the ultimate Virgilian emulation. Mention has already been made that Virgil’s fourth to sixth eclogues are conceived of as epic experiments. The fifth eclogue plays a central part in these experiments. Virgil here develops a dialogue between the epically orientated Mopsus and the pastorally orientated Menalcas. Together they enter into a confrontation with death. By adapting their voices to one another, they succeed in overcoming death through their poetry. Virgil thus accomplishes his most developed “complex generic intermingling and cross-fertilization”. As announced at the end of the first elegy, Milton actually repulsed the elegiac genre in elegies 2 to 4. He achieved this effect by using the epic modulation to impose an epic structure onto the elegies, namely the underworld journey and war. By contrast, Milton does not utilise his epic modulation to impose an epic superstructure onto the fifth elegy. He adapts his epic voice to the poem’s elegiac theme to achieve a generic blending similar to that achieved by Virgil. This radical change in approach is reflected in the elegy’s conception. The fifth elegy is conceived of as a song (ll. 23, 27),

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87 Revard, Stella P., 17.
88 Hubbard, Thomas K., 99.
whereas Milton highlights the written nature of the other elegies. The first and fourth elegies are verse epistles; the second and third are obituaries.

Another important characteristic which distinguishes *Elegia Quinta* is that the spring song is of a dialogic nature rather than the result of an individual voice:

*Iam Philomela tuos foliis adoperta novellis*

*Instituis modulos, dum silet omne nemus.*

*Urbe ego, tu sylva simul incipiamus utrique,*

*Et simul adventum veris uterque canat.* (25-28)

[You are already beginning your warbling song, Philomela, hidden among the unfolding leaves, while all the grove is silent. I in the city, you in the woods, let us both begin together and both together sing the coming of the spring. (89)]

In accordance with his renewed epic aspirations, Milton situates himself in the city, which he had identified as Apollo’s realm in the first elegy. Milton’s return to the city not surprisingly coincides with Apollo’s inspiring presence. The poet’s singing partner, on the other hand, is located in the countryside. The nightingale is fittingly attributed a rural poetic voice through the use of the word *modulos*, which is regularly used in pastoral poetry. The contrast between the singers is reminiscent of the poets in Virgil’s fifth eclogue. The link with this eclogue is enforced by the use of the verb *incipere*. Milton thus indicates that he intends his fifth elegy to achieve a similar generic intermingling as Virgil’s eclogue. The poet himself takes up an epic voice, whereas the nightingale’s voice receives an Epicurean mindset. This Epicurean voice will be fully developed and linked to Diodati in the sixth elegy.

89 Virgil uses *modulari*, the verb derived from *modulus*, several times when he talks about composing pastoral verses: Ecl. V.14 and X.51.

90 The verb occurs on line 10, when Menalcas invites Mopsus to start singing.
Elegia Quinta nevertheless treats a completely different subject than that of Virgil’s fifth eclogue. Two other intertextual elements in the initiation of the poetic dialogue signify that Milton was thematically inspired by another one of Virgil’s eclogues. The phrase “omne nemus” and the name Philomela both occur in the sixth eclogue. In Virgil’s poem, Silenus’ cosmic song at a given point treats stories of uncontrolled and destructive love passion. Milton returns to this theme in the fifth elegy, but he reveals different intentions. In the sixth eclogue, Virgil writes that the entire wood will sing, if the poem were read by someone captivated by love.\(^9\) Since the woods in the fifth elegy remain distinctly silent, Milton indicates that he has not fallen to love’s charms. Milton thus reveals his intentions to emulate his model by assigning the love theme a meaningful position in the natural order of things.

Launching himself into the spring poem for the second time, Milton initially maintains the same epic modulation that characterised the previous elegies. Milton describes how the spring sun chases away night’s darkness (ll. 31-40). This movement from darkness to light can easily be read as a poetic metaphor: “we see the contemplative poet turning his back on the fruits of aloneness and the remembrance of past joys to become the emotionally driven younger poet seeking the green fields of action”.\(^9\) Milton has indeed proceeded from the grave and contemplative death and war subjects to the livelier subject of spring in this renewed song, as was announced in the fourth elegy. This section contains the grandiloquent images and tone characteristic of Milton’s epic modulation. The halls of Jove (l. 37: “Iovis atria”) are highly reminiscent of Circe’s infamous halls in the first elegy (1.87-8 “Circes / atria”), and serve as a signal of Milton’s early rejection of elegiac in favour of epic poetry. Even when the poet draws our gaze away from the skies, and focuses on some characters’ reactions to the breaking of day (ll. 41-48), e.g., a shepherd stretched out on the top of a crag, or the moon goddess Diana retreating into the woods to hunt, Milton still manages to preserve

\(^9\) Ecl. VI. 9-12.
\(^9\) Shawcross, John T., 345.
his dignified tone by drawing some phrases from classical epics. The section is concluded by Phoebus himself, who spurs on Aurora to leave her impotent marital bed and to gaze upon the young and energetic Cephalus (ll. 49-54). With these mythological references the topic of love is inevitably introduced into the poem.

The central love section of the poem is crucial to Milton’s poetical intentions (ll. 55-95). The coming of spring revitalises the Earth “who [throws] off her wintry old age to greet the renewed and youthful sun god”. The revived Earth voluptuously lays bare her rich beauties to invite Phoebus’ embrace. The earth’s vernal courting is an idea which occurs in Virgil’s *Georgics* (2.325-7), but was ultimately drawn from Lucretius’ didactic poem *De Rerum Natura* (1.250-1/2.992-3/5.318). It is in here that Milton’s conversation partner reveals its influence for the first time. As the love theme is introduced in its full erupting sexuality, the nightingale acts as an Epicurean mediation between Milton’s stern epic voice and the light-hearted subject of amorous elegiac poetry. This Epicurean influence will act as a catalyst to enable the generic intermingling Milton established as the main objective for the elegy.

This intermingling immediately takes place in the description of earth’s courting. In spite of an abundance of sexual imagery, Milton manages to continue his epic modulation. For example, the “flamina verna” in line 68 echoes Statius’ *Thebais* (3.671-2). Milton more importantly introduces various epic echoes of his earlier elegies. For instance, the sacred *lucus* of the first elegy reappears in line 61 (“sacro . . . luco”). Earth is subsequently compared to Ops, goddess of fertility, who is described wearing a turreted headdress (l. 62: “Cingit ut Idaeam pinea turris Opim”). The turreted headdress reminds us of Milton’s apostrophe to London (1.74). Line 69 contains several echoes to the third elegy: “Zephyrus . . . odorifer” (3.44, 47); “plaudit . . . ala” (3.59). The adjective “salutiferum” (l. 73) also occurs in the fourth elegy (4.46). These echoes signify that Milton’s epic voice is also active in the fifth

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93 Revard, Stella P., 21.
elegy. However, instead of subduing the elegiac genre, Milton adapts his voice to the elegiac contents of the poem. The poet also establishes a contrast with the singer in Virgil’s sixth eclogue. Whereas the latter simply portrays scenes of love’s uncontrollable passion, the former inserts the love theme into the natural order of life by introducing the institute of marriage:

Nec sine dote tuos temeraria quaerit amores
Terra, nec optatos poscit egena toros,
Alma salutiferum medicos tibi gramen in usus
Praebet, et hinc titulos adiuvat ipsa tuos.
Quod si te pretium, si te fulgentia tangunt [75]
Munera, (muneribus saepe coemptus Amor)
Illa tibi ostentat quascunque sub aequore vasto,
Et superiniectis montibus abdit opes. (71-8)

[The Earth is not so indiscreet as to seek your love without offering a dowry in return: she is no beggar-maid, praying for a desirable match. She is bountiful, and supplies you with health-giving herbs for use in medicine, and so does something on her own account to increase your glory. If money and glittering gifts touch your heart (love is often bought with gifts), she lays before your eyes all the worth she keeps hidden away under the huge ocean and the heaped-up mountains. (90)]

Earth’s courting is definitely not described as a frivolous seductive act. Instead, she lays bare her riches and presents them as a dowry to the sun god. Love is thus institutionalised in the form of marriage, and its practical advantages are emphasised. Marriage provides mutual benefits for both sides. The earth revives under Phoebus’ benign influence, and her fertility
enriches the god and increases his glory. In this marital context, the lines uttered by Earth should be read as a nuptial song rather than an elegiac lover’s complaint.\textsuperscript{94} This reading is supported by an intertextual link to the previous elegy. On line 88, Earth invites Phoebus to lay his head down in her lap (“Huc ades, et gremio lumina pone meo”). The word \textit{gremio} appears in the same metrical position on line 41 in the fourth elegy, when Milton imagines Young and his family’s reaction to the letter. This reference becomes especially meaningful, if we consider that Milton here transformed a scene from Ovid into a marital image.

The poet then indicates how Earth’s children, both gods and men, follow their mother’s example by joining in marital spring rituals (ll. 96-118). Commentators indicate Lucretius’ exordium as one of the possible sources for this section.\textsuperscript{95} The idea of love as the driving force behind the generational continuation of life does indeed provide a strong basis for these lines. The representation of Venus and Hymen, the patron god of marriage serve as an excellent illustration:

\begin{verse}
Ipsa senescentem reparat Venus annua formam, \\
Atque iterum tepido creditur orta mari. \\
Marmoreas juvenes clamant Hymenaeæ per urbes, \ [105] \\
Litus io Hymen, et cava saxa sonant. \\
Cultior ille venit tunicaque decentior apta, \\
Puniceum redolet vestis odora crocum. \\
Egrediturque frequens ad amoeni gaudia veris \\
Virgineos auro cincta puella sinus. (103-110)
\end{verse}

\textsuperscript{94} Stella, Revard P., 21. \\
\textsuperscript{95} Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 106.
are shouting ‘Hymenaeus!’ – the sea-shore and the hollow rocks resound with ‘Io Hymen!’ Hymen arrives, all decked out and very spruce in his traditional costume; his fragrant gown has the scent of tawny saffron. The girls, with their virgin breasts bound about with gold, run out in crowds to the joys of the lovely springtime. (90)\]

The goddess Venus is not depicted as her usual passionate seductive self, but rather appears as the Neo-Platonic symbol of an omnipresent generative Love. 96 Skulsky indicates that Venus’ and Hymen’s appearance in the poem form “a superficial link between the themes of eros and just order,” thus symbolising “the origin of culture and social harmony”. 97 In other words, love is no longer an unbridled disruptive power, but becomes an essential element in marriage, which ensures the continuation of human culture and society.

At a poetical level, Milton’s generic intermingling reaches its climax in these lines. Milton’s epic voice has become completely attuned to the elegiac love theme, and the elegiac genre has been heightened through the epic modulation. This cross-fertilisation has transformed Elegia Quinta into a cosmic song. 98 The poetical ambitions for the poem had already been indicated by Milton’s return to the city and Apollo’s inspiring influence. The virginal maidens (l. 110) once again reappear as a symbol for the Muses to signal Milton’s poetic achievement. Milton’s achievement to raise the elegy genre to cosmic proportions is confirmed in the evening section of the poem (ll. 119-30). Milton describes how Satyrs and several rural deities engage in love games with mountain and forest nymphs. These mythological figures who are usually characterised by their lustfulness and unbridled sexuality, are here depicted as joining in the cosmic order of nature by bringing fruition to spring. Since the Dryads and Pan also appear in Virgil’s fifth eclogue (58-9), they can also be

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97 Ibidem.
98 Skulsky, Harold, 607.
interpreted as an indication of Milton having accomplished a similar generic cross-fertilization.

Milton contemplatively concludes *Elegia Quinta* with a personal prayer (133-40). Having celebrated the coming of spring, Milton expresses the wish that it may last as long as possible. This wish is typical of classical and neo-Latin spring songs.\(^99\) However, these lines contain a significant amount of Virgilian echoes. Milton thus acknowledges Virgil as his poetical model, and ultimately designates his own poetical voice as a Virgilian voice. Woodhouse provides the following comments:

> The essence of the experience which the poem records is Milton’s recognition that the emotions whose dawning power over him is recorded in *Elegies* 1 and 7, are universal in their sway. Common to all humanity, and having their counterpart in the life of nature, they not only inform classic myth, but are intimately connected with the poetic impulse itself: from these emotions springs the very power by which the poet gives them utterance.\(^100\)

We can clearly perceive Milton’s poetical evolution in the elegy cycle. Having rejected the elegiac voice in the first elegy, Milton embarks upon his epic experimentations in dealing with the stern subjects of death and war in elegies 2, 3 and 4. Milton eventually achieves elegiac mastery by recognising and incorporating its love theme in his horizon of poetical experiences. The intertextual references and rewritings all confirm the idea that Milton’s Virgilian modulations are intended to actively dismiss and transform the Ovidian-elegiac light-heartedness and sexuality.

Milton nevertheless indicates that the establishment of his poetical voice was achieved in dialogue with a rural nightingale with an Epicurean voice. Milton twice reiterates the

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\(^99\) Revard, Stella P., 26.

\(^100\) Woodhouse qtd. in Bush, Douglas, 96. We can justly wonder, though, if the first and seventh elegies are really testimonies to these emotions’ dawning power over Milton. We will return to this subject in our analysis of *Elegia Septima*. 
importance of this dialogue, when Lucretian echoes provided him with an Epicurean catalyst in the elegy’s process of generic intermingling. The significance of this literary dialogue will further be developed in *Elegia Sexta*. Here, Milton attributes the Epicurean voice to his friend Charles Diodati. Diodati’s central role in the elegy cycle was already suggested by the fact that Milton addressed the programmatic first elegy to his intimate friend. Several indicators suggest a link between the nightingale and Diodati. Firstly, the word “modulos” (l. 26) is also used in connection with Diodati in the sixth elegy (6.7). Secondly, both the nightingale and Diodati are situated in the countryside. The most important resemblance is the Epicurean voice, which receives a Horatian context in the next elegy.

5. *Elegia Sexta* – A dialogue of poetics

*Elegia Sexta* is Milton’s second epistle elegy to his close friend Charles Diodati. Having successfully managed to elevate the elegiac genre to cosmic proportions in the fifth elegy, Milton explicitly embarks upon a consideration of poetics and its implications. He reflects upon the nature and relationship of lyric and epic poetry. The young poet distinctly relates his poetic ambitions to the latter group, thus explicitly defining his poetic vocations. These poetical reflections will nevertheless be developed in a dialogic relationship to the elegy’s addressee. Milton resolutely designates a specific poetical position to himself and to Diodati. It will be interesting to involve the few extant letters of Milton and Diodati in our analysis of the poem, to help us reach a better understanding of the dialogue that is being established between the two intimate friends. Milton also refers to one of his English poems, *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity*, which was composed around the same time as this elegy. *Elegia Sexta* will consequently reveal significant aspects of Milton’s Latin poetics in relation to the English section of the 1645 *Poems*. 
Some preliminary information on Diodati and his friendship with Milton is required in order to support our analysis. Charles Diodati was born in Middlesex in 1609/1610. His father Theodore was physician of Tuscan descent. The family moved to London in 1618 close to where Milton was living. The two probably met in Saint Paul’s School around this time, since Milton wrote in the head note to *Epitaphium Damonis* that their friendship dates from childhood. Diodati matriculated at Trinity College, Oxford. He took his BA degree in 1625 and his MA degree in 1628. Just like Milton, Diodati considered pursuing a church career as he matriculated as a student of theology at the Academy of Geneva. He eventually refrained from entering the church and pursued a medical career, probably serving an apprenticeship in his father’s practice. Charles Diodati died in 1638, while Milton was undertaking his journey in Italy. In spite of their close friendship, few letters have survived. Apart from *Elegia Prima* and *Elegia Sexta*, we possess two undated letters from Diodati to Milton, written in Greek prose, and two Latin prose letters from Milton to Diodati.

In *Elegia Sexta*, Milton seems to attribute quite opposing positions to himself and Diodati. Milton indicates in the head note that his elegy is an answer to a verse epistle from his friend. Therein, Diodati had excused himself for the poor poetic quality of his epistle on the grounds that a magnificent reception by his friends in the country had prevented him from paying proper attention to the Muses. In his answer, Milton does not blame his friend for enjoying the festal merriments, and even suggests that Diodati should use these to his advantage. Milton subsequently mentions several prominent lyric poets who were known to draw inspiration from wine and banquets. Having associated Diodati with this type of poetry, Milton then reflects on and aligns himself with epic poetry.

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Commentators usually generalise this opposition by classifying Milton as the stern poet and Diodati as his light-hearted friend. They utilise the extant letters to confirm the characterisation they read into the sixth elegy. Campbell remarks:

The exchanges between Milton and Diodati depict Milton as a serious and austere student with a passion for learning, and Diodati as his light-hearted and playful friend with a great appetite for conviviality and the life of the countryside; the literary persona is not a reliable guide to temperament, but the portrait of Milton can be verified from other sources, so it is not unlikely that the literary image of Diodati was a faithful reflection of his character.\(^{102}\)

In the first extant letter to Diodati, for example, Milton playfully chides his friend for not having answered his previous letter, writing that “your habit of studying permits you to pause frequently, visit friends, write much, and sometimes make a journey”.\(^{103}\) Milton distinctly opposes his own studying method which does not allow any distractions. Diodati’s first letter reveals a cheerful author.\(^{104}\) The second letter especially is said to confirm each of the friends’ characters.\(^{105}\) Diodati celebrates his staying in the country and recommends Milton to be merrier:

But you, extraordinary man, why do you despise the gifts of nature? Why such inexcusable perseverance, bending over books and studies day and night? Live, laugh, enjoy your youth and the hours, and stop reading the serious, the light and the indolent works of ancient wise men, wearing yourself out the while.\(^{106}\)

\(^{102}\) Ibidem.


\(^{106}\) Ibidem.
Both men actively seem involved in creating and reinforcing a certain characterisation of themselves in their letters.

The main question one can pose, however, is whether this established relationship is truly as clear-cut as scholars usually presume. The previous quote already indicates the dangers involved in such an oversimplified dichotomy. Even though Diodati does advise Milton to be merrier, his counsels mostly seem directed at Milton’s excessive studying, which threatens to wear him out. Diodati’s main motivation is temperance, rather than a carefree nature. The letters also depict Milton’s closest friend as a learned man. Since Diodati undertook a study in theology and later chose a medical career, it is safe to say that light-heartedness will not have been his dominant trait. Furthermore, the quote reveals that Milton is preoccupied with studying light as well as serious poetry. *Elegia Prima* likewise portrays a distinctly less serious Milton. His letters also indicate that he does not shy away from playfulness. It would therefore be unwise to maintain such a strict characterisation, let alone draw real-life conclusions.

It could however be more interesting to consider this characterisation from a poetical point of view. We have already indicated that Milton addressed his programmatic *Elegia Prima* to Diodati. Milton also involves his friend in his reflections upon the nature of poetics in *Elegia Sexta*. Milton thus establishes a poetical dialogue with Diodati in these epistle elegies. This argument can firstly be supported by an aspect characteristic of letters. Epistolary correspondences between friends often possess the quality of a prolonged dialogue. A second indication directly relates to our specific situation. A recurrent theme in Milton and Diodati’s prose letters is the lack of a kindred spirit to engage in “philosophical and learned conversation[s]”. In this sense, *Elegia Sexta* should be regarded not merely as Milton’s

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personal reflections, but also as a poetical dialogue being developed between the poet and Diodati.

The poetical position of the participants is established through their respective spatial locations at the beginning of the poem. We have already indicated the connection that can be made between the nightingale of the former elegy and the Diodati of the *Elegia Sexta*. Milton here continues to situate himself in the city in accordance to his contemplation of a higher poetical vocation. Diodati, on the other hand, is enjoying the merits of the countryside. The poem immediately opens with a distinct appreciation difference. Milton’s empty stomach indicates that his poetic hunger has not been satiated by their poetical accomplishment of *Elegia Quinta*, as opposed to Diodati whose stomach has been filled (l. 1-2). The dialogue is then initiated in the next lines:

At tua quid nostrum prolectat musa camoenam,

Nec sinit optatas posse sequi tenebras? (3-4)

[But why does your muse lure mine out into the open, and not allow her to seek the obscurity which she desires? (121)]

Diodati’s Greek verse letter, describing Diodati’s participation in December feasts (ll. 9-12), spontaneously evokes a response from Milton’s Latin muse. The originally rural Camenae deities were the Latin equivalent to the Greek Musae. Milton, who was ready to move on to new poetic heights, is suddenly called back by Diodati to reflect on his vocation and to explicitly define his conceptions of poetics. In this manner, we can expect *Elegia Sexta* to represent a temporary conclusion of the elegy cycle.

Milton further aligns Diodati with lyric poetry by discussing its benefits. Milton explains that poetry associated with wine and festivities, appeals to and pleases multiple gods,

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even Phoebus and his troop of muses (ll. 14-8). Milton subsequently names some of the lyric genre’s main exponents (ll. 19-28). Milton then adds Diodati to the list and strongly urges him to pursue this line of action, expanding on the effects it will produce (ll. 29-54). It is not surprising that this section can best be understood, when interpreted on a poetical level. Milton here reflects on his own elegy cycle and reveals the important role Diodati was granted therein. Before moving to exemplary lyric poets, Milton dismisses Ovid’s poetry as unsuccessful due to a lack of wine:

Naso Corallaeis mala carmina misit ab agris:
Non illic epulae non sata vitis erat. (19-20)

Ovid sent back poems from the land of the Coralli, but they did not have banquets or cultivate the vine there, so the poems were no good. (121)

The exile theme strongly reminds us of the first elegy and Milton’s rejection of Ovid’s poetry. Not only does Milton reiterate this rejection, he also places lyric poetry in contrast to Ovid’s. In other words, both Milton and Diodati take up positions against the elegiac genre. The section also refers to the fifth elegy, when Milton describes Phoebus’ inspiring influence:

Percipies tacitum per pectoral serpere Phoebum,
Quale repentinus permeat ossa calor, (45-6)

You will notice Phoebus creeping silently into your heart, like a sudden warmth flowing through your bones. (122)

Milton thus reveals Diodati’s role in the two elegies that were actively involved in transforming the elegiac genre. The beautiful maidens in Elegia Prima represented Milton’s ambitions to raise the elegiac genre to new poetical heights; the full transformation ultimately took place in Elegia Quinta.
However, Diodati’s alignment to lyric poetry is narrowed down to one poet in particular. Having rejected Ovid as an appropriate representative, Milton introduces three lyrical poets as appropriate examples: Anacreon, Pindar and Horace. Even though Milton connects these poets through their famed love of wine, they share another characteristic. Their poetry frequently leans towards more serious genres. Anacreon wrote a couple of hymns, and both Pindar’s and Horace’s odes contain philosophical messages. Horace proves the most crucial of the three, because Milton explicitly associates Diodati to this Roman author. As soon as Milton addresses Diodati to convince him to follow this poetic tradition, he utilises Horatian phrases to support his argument:

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\begin{align*}
\text{Iam quoque lauta tibi generoso mensa paratu,} \\
\text{Mentis alit vires, ingeniumque fovet.} \quad \text{[30]} \\
\text{Massica foecundam despumant pocula venam,} \\
\text{Fundis et ex ipso condita metra cado.} \\
\text{Addimus his artes, fufumque per intima Phoebum} \\
\text{Corda, favent uni Bacchus Apollo, Ceres.} \\
\text{Scilicet haud mirum tam dulcia carmina per te} \quad \text{[35]} \\
\text{Numine composito tres peperisse deos.} \\
\text{Nunc quoque Thressa tibi caelato barbitos auro} \\
\text{Insonat argua molliter icat manu. (29-38)}
\end{align*}
\]

[And now a sumptuous table strengthens your mind and warms your genius with its rich array. Your goblets of Massic wine foam with poetic power, and you pour out verses which were stored up inside the bottle. Then again, you have artistry, and Phoebus is present in your heart of hearts. Bacchus, Apollo and Ceres are on your side, above all others. No wonder you are the]
mouthpiece for such lovely poems: three gods have combined their godheads and speak through you! Now, too, the Thracian lyre, with its gold engraving, plays for you, as a skiled hand softly plucks it. (121)]

This excerpt contains several echoes to Horace. Reference to Massic wine is made by Horace in his odes (1.1.19: “veteris pocula Massici”). The *condita metra* can also be read as an echo of a phrase in one of Horace’s satires (2.1.82). The phrasing in line 37 even knows a double precedent in Horace’s odes (1.1.34, 1.32.4). Moreover, the image of a laden table and foaming wine goblets is commonly used in Latin satire, a genre Horace was also skilled in. This reference frame is actually already present at the beginning of the poem, when Milton mentions Diodati’s filled stomach. The idea of saturation or *saturitas* is central to the genre and is even at the basis of the genre’s name ‘satura’. This connection to Horace is confirmed by Diodati’s own letters, which portray a Horatian voice rather than a light-hearted one. Firstly, indication has already been made of Diodati’s temperance in his advice to Milton. This theme of temperance, which occurs more frequently in both letters, can easily be connected to Horace. Secondly, Diodati complains about lacking a proper conversation partner in both his letters to Milton. As indicated in the second chapter, friendship is a theme which is central to Horace’s writings. Thirdly, Diodati shares Horace’s preference of the countryside over the bustle of urban life. These themes are usually linked to Horace’s Epicurean tenor. Hence, Milton distinctly situates Diodati in a Horatian-Epicurean position. Diodati is consequently associated, not so much with lyric poetry in general, but with poetry of a philosophical-Epicurean kind, which is mostly preoccupied with earthly aspects of life. Even though Milton does not deny that this poetry and its outlook on life has its merits, he still essentially feels that his own poetics should strive to fulfil a higher purpose.

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110 Harrison, Stephen, 244.
In the poem’s next section, Milton develops a second poetical position with a different set of philosophical implications, which proves to be more in line with his own poetic ambitions. In turning his attention from light poetry to heroic poetry, “Milton reverses the elegiac poets’ common repudiation of the latter in favour of the former”. Milton has a well-defined opinion of what the lifestyle and moral nature should be of poets aspiring to write about epic subjects:

Ille quidem parce Samii pro more magistri
Vivat, et innocuos praebeat herba cibos; [60]
Stet prope fagineo pellucida lympha catillo,
Sobriaque e puro pocula fonte bibat.
Additur huic scelerisque vacans, et casta iuventus,
Et rigidi mores, et sine labe manus.
Qualis veste nitens sacra, et lustralibus undis [65]
Surgis ad infensos augur iture deos. (59-66)

[Let this poet live frugally, like the philosopher from Samos, and let herbs provide his harmless diet. Let a bowl of beech-wood, filled with clear water, stand by him, and may he drink soberly from a pure spring. In addition his youth must be chaste and free from crime, his morals strict and his hand unstained. He must be like you, priest, when, bathed in holy water and gleaming in your sacred vestment, you rise to go and face the angry gods. (122)]

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111 Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 120.
Milton thus explicitly defines the epic poet in terms of the classical idea of the poet-priest or *poetā vates*. The poet-priest should be fully devoted to his poetic vocation, which is inspired by the gods, and should lead a sober life so as not to distract himself from his poetic goals.

Milton also continues his reflections on the elegy cycle, and ultimately reveals the central role the epic poets have played in his early Latin poems. Milton uses mythological *poetae vates* to exemplify the moral traits epic poets should possess (ll. 67-76). Milton mentions the prophets Teiresias and Calchas, and the mythical musicians Linon and Orpheus. However, Milton concludes the list with an actual writer, namely Homer. The only figure obviously missing in this catalogue is Virgil. The Roman author is nonetheless implicitly present. When Milton expands on some Homeric story elements, he uses distinct Virgilian phrases and echoes. The reference to Pythagoras of Samos and his sober lifestyle earlier in the poem also reminds of Virgil, who led a distinctly Pythagorean life. Milton thus manages to evoke the most important epic poets in classical history, and indicates how they have played an important part in structuring the elegy cycle. Milton describes how “Homer guided Ulysses . . . through Circe’s halls, . . . and over the shallows made treacherous by the sirens’ song” and through the infernal king’s realms. The epic poets have likewise been guiding Milton. They prevented him from succumbing to Circe’s magic incantations and the beautiful maidens’ seductiveness in *Elegia Prima*. They acted as his guide in the underworld of *Elegia Secunda* and the Elysian Fields in *Elegia Tertia*. They helped him deal with the war situation in *Elegia Quarta*. They finally acted as his source of inspiration for his epic sanctification of love in *Elegia Quinta*. In other words, *Elegia Sexta* completes the cycle’s movement and closes its structure.

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112 Carey, John, 122.
In the concluding section to the sixth elegy, however, Milton shifts to a different topic that ultimately adds a Christian dimension to his poetical position. Having discussed the epic poet, Milton suddenly readresses Diodati and discusses a poem he is currently working on:

Paciferum canimus caelesti semine regem,

Faustaque sacratis saecula pacta libris,

Vagitumque Dei, et stabulantem paupere tecto

Qui suprema suo cum patre regna colit.

Stelliparumque polum, modulantesque aethere turmas,

Et subito elisos ad sua fana deos.

Dona quidem dedimus Christi natibus illa

Illa sub auroram lux mihi prima tulit. (81-8)

[I am writing about the king who was born of heavenly seed, and who brought peace to men. I am writing about the blessed ages promised in Holy Scripture, about the infant cries of God, about the stabling under a poor roof of Him who dwells with His Father in the highest heavens, about the sky giving birth to a new star, about the hosts who sang in the air, and about the pagan gods suddenly shattered in their own shrines. These are the gifts I have given for Christ’s birthday: the first light of the dawn brought them to me. (122)]

This section contains some remarkable peculiarities. First of all, commentators have commonly noted the discrepancies between the actual contents of the \textit{Nativity Ode} and the contents as described in these lines.\textsuperscript{113} Only lines 85-86 present us with the main themes of the \textit{Nativity Ode}, namely the birth of a new star, the singing angelic hosts and the pagan gods’ banishment. It would seem very unlikely that Milton originally did insert the other elements in

\textsuperscript{113} Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 125. Carey, John, 120.
his ode, only to rewrite it later. Instead, these lines invite an analysis on the level of poetics. Milton is actually consciously converting the *poeta vates*-concept into a Christian context. Line 81 could easily be associated with the preceding epic subjects. Bush notes that *pacifer* is frequently used as an epithet in Latin literature, and the phrase *caelesti semine* is recognised as a possible Virgilian echo.\(^{114}\) In this sense, it is not immediately clear that Milton is writing about Christ’s Nativity. This aspect can also help explain the discrepancy with the ode’s actual contents. These lines have been argued to “reflect the tradition of early Christian Latin hymn-writers”.\(^{115}\) Early Christian writers often shared a concern of how to treat the pagan literary tradition, and sought ways of incorporating this tradition’s most prominent representatives into their own writings. Milton’s reference to this tradition could thus mirror his own intentions to transform the classical epic into a genre more appropriate to a Christian context.

The distinctly Christian contents of the elegy’s final section retroactively redefines Milton earlier discussion of the epic poet’s moral and philosophical conduct. In fact, Milton already suggested a Christian dimension in the elegy through the use of lexical ambiguities, a method he applied in the third elegy. The feasts described in line 9 (“sollennes epulas, hilaremque Decembrim”), for instance, could refer to both the ancient festival of the Roman Saturnalia and the modern festivities of Christmas celebrations. The phrase “psallit ebur” (l. 43) likewise possesses a classical and a biblical interpretation possibility. Finally, Milton’s introduction to the epic genre (ll. 55-8) could also refer to modern Christian poems, in particular Torquato Tasso’s *La Gerusalemme Liberata*.\(^{116}\) These elements help to reinforce the importance of the additional Christian dimension attached to the epic poet’s characteristics. We have already indicated how Milton associates the epic poet with the *poeta

\(^{114}\) Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 124-125.  
\(^{115}\) Carey, John, 120.  
\(^{116}\) Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 121.
vates (ll. 59-66). These precepts can additionally be read as an appropriate moral code for a Christian poet-priest. He should lead a sober life untainted by sin. Not unimportantly, these lines also contain some Christian echoes. The phrase “sine labe” (l. 64) is a stock phrase which is also used in the Bible, for example, in the *Epistle to the Hebrews*. The bathing in purifying water (l. 65-6: “lustralibus undis / Surgis”) can easily be read as a reference to Christian baptism. Notably, commentators have indicated that the austerity associated with the mythological examples is invented by Milton himself.\(^{117}\) By portraying these poets as devout and priestlike figures, Milton is consciously revising the reader’s perception of the epic poet-priests to allow for a more Christian interpretation.

Milton thus constructs an epic voice with a distinctly Christian tenor into the poetical dialogue in *Elegia Sexta*. This second voice propagates philosophical precepts that are quite different from those of the philosophical-Epicurean voice attributed to Diodati. Even though Milton never explicitly aligns himself with this new voice in the elegy, he nevertheless manages to do so indirectly. Firstly, Milton’s empty stomach at the beginning of the poem provides an argumentum ex adverso to Diodati’s stomach, satiated by earthbound Epicurean poetry. Secondly, his discussion of the *Nativity Ode* establishes a connection through the initial continuation of the epic imagery and the Christian line of approach that retroactively redefines the classical concept of the *poeta vates*. Thirdly, Milton actually associates himself with one of the exemplary epic poets, namely the mythological Orpheus. The association is established, when Milton recommends Diodati to compose light poetry;

\begin{verbatim}
Nunc quoque Thressa tibi caelato barbitos auro
Insonat arguta molliter icta manu;
Auditurque chelys suspensa tapetia circum,
Virgineos tremula quae regat arte pedes. [40]
\end{verbatim}

\(^{117}\) Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 122. Carey, John, 120.
Illas tuas saltem teneant spectacula musas,
Et revocent, quantum crapula pellit iners.
Crede mihi dum psallit ebur, comitataque plectrum
Implet odoratos festa chorea tholos,
Percipies tacitum per pectora serpere Phoebum, [45]
Quale repentinus permeat ossa calor,
Perque puellares oculos digitumque sonantem
Irruet in totos lapsa Thalia sinus. (37-48)

[Now, too, the Thracian lyre, with its gold engraving, plays for you, as a skilled hand softly plucks it. In rooms hung round with tapestry the harp is heard, and its trembling strings direct the feet of the dancing girls. Let these sights, at any rate, catch your muse’s attention, and call back whatever powers sluggish drunkenness drives away. Believe me, while the ivory plectrum dances over the strings and the crowd of merry-makers, keeping time with it, fills the perfumed ballroom, you will notice Phoebus creeping silently into your heart, like a sudden warmth flowing through your bones. Girls’ eyes and girls’ fingers playing will make Thalia dart into your breast and take command of it. (121-2]

Milton writes that a Thracian lyre is being played for Diodati by a skilled hand. The lyre is here associated with Orpheus, who is commonly known as the Thracian bard. The skilled hand that is playing the lyre obviously belongs to Milton who is composing his *Elegia Sexta* for Diodati.

In *Elegia Sexta*, Milton establishes a poetical dialogue with Diodati that develops into a well-defined set of conceptions on poetics. Attributing a lyrical-Epicurean voice to his
closest friend, Milton simultaneously distances himself from this voice and its earthly poetics. Milton subsequently reinterprets the classical concept of the poet-priest or *poeta vates* by adding a Christian dimension and a strict moral conduct. Throughout the poem, Milton associates himself with this second poetic voice, thus assigning a certain direction to and setting definite objectives for his poetical career. Milton confirms this resolve upon several occasions. In the second extant prose letter to Diodati, written years after the sixth elegy, Milton expresses his wish to take his place amongst the greatest epic poets by aspiring to “an immortality of fame”.\(^{118}\) Hanford indicates that a similar conceptualisation appears in Milton’s *Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642):

> The formula . . . given [in *Elegia Sexta*] for the discipline of the epic poet is, allowing for the more exalted language of poetry, so precisely identical with that of the statement in the *Apology* . . . as to make it clear that Milton is in the latter statement looking back to and thinking in terms of his meditation in 1629. We may infer that the Latin utterance represents a definite resolution regarding his life work.\(^{119}\)

The sixth elegy occupies an important position in the cycle. Our analysis has clearly revealed that *Elegia Sexta* provides a closure for the first six elegies. There are two main arguments to support this conclusion. On the one hand, Milton reflects upon the earlier elegies and combines them into a unified whole. On the other hand, the sixth elegy creates a poetical frame together with the first elegy. This latter argument is confirmed by Diodati’s presence as the poems’ addressee. Moreover, the elegy actually connects with the other sections of the 1645 *Poems*. Firstly, the word *chelys* in line 39 is especially frequently in Statius’ *Silvae*, a collection of occasional poetry in various metrical forms which became very popular in the Renaissance. Milton thus introduces an oblique reference to his own *Sylvarum Liber*, in which


\(^{119}\) Hanford qtd. in Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 114.
he continues his engagement with Latin poetry. Secondly, the discussion of the *Nativity Ode* in the poem explicitly links Milton’s Latin poetical development to the English part of the collection. In conclusion, *Elegia Sexta* seems to close the elegy cycle and to guide the reader towards the other sections of the 1645 *Poems*.

Surprisingly enough, *Elegia Sexta* is followed by a seventh elegy, thus breaking the full circle of the cycle. This has raised several questions for literary scholars, especially since the sixth elegy was written over a year after *Elegia Septima*. Various speculations have been made about why Milton chose to break with the chronological sequence of the elegies. It seems highly improbable to assume that the poem was added at the last moment due to an initial doubt on Milton’s part to include it or not. This completely contradicts Milton’s complex and well-developed poetical structure. The seventh elegy becomes even more puzzling if one considers that it diametrically opposes everything Milton has accomplished in the previous elegies. This profoundly Ovidian elegy recounts how Amor furiously launches a major offensive against the poet, who then adapts the persona of the lovesick elegist. Commentators mainly present the following arguments to support *Elegia Septima*’s peculiar position. On the one hand, the seventh elegy seems to link up with *Elegia Prima* in its spring theme, the multitude of the beautiful English maidens and the persona’s strong personal experiences, thus creating for the cycle “a frame in keeping with the traditionally erotic character of elegiac verse”. On the other hand, several commentators consider the retraction to be Milton’s prime motivation. They argue that the retraction would seem greatly out of place if it had been inserted after the mainly serious sixth elegy and seems best to cover the eroticism of the love elegies. Our analysis of the first six elegies nevertheless reveals that Milton’s cycle is most definitely not characterised by traditional elegiac concepts, let alone by

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120 A suggestion made by Grierson. See Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 127.
121 Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 128-129.
122 Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 129.
eroticism. Moreover, why would Milton have bothered to write a retraction if *Elegia Sexta* could have provided the necessary serious conclusion to the elegy cycle?

Instead, I would like to propose to read the ending of the sixth elegy as a poetic crossroads. Readers can actually head in two different directions. On the one hand, they can follow Milton’s guidelines by turning to the *Nativity Ode* and the English poems. On the other hand, they can choose to neglect this indication by continuing their elegiac reading. An analysis of *Elegia Septima* will prove the latter direction to be a dead end. A brief consideration of the *Nativity Ode* as the proper sequel to the elegy cycle will consequently be in order. Our discussion of the elegy cycle will be concluded with an analysis of the retraction, which symbolises a full stop to Milton’s elegiac writings.

6. *Elegia Septima* – An elegiac dead end

The stern epic voice Milton established in the previous elegies is temporarily cast aside in *Elegia Septima*. The love god Amor unleashes his powers for the first (and immediately final) time to subdue Milton. As usual, it proves most interesting to interpret this entire love episode in the light of Milton’s poetics. The figure of Amor represents amorous elegiac poetry, and his attack could be read as a final temptation for Milton to abandon his vocation as an epic poet. The poet momentarily appears to succumb to Amor’s offensive, yet Milton reveals his superiority over the elegiac lovesick poet in the end by breaking off the poem at its elegiac climax. Milton obviously never intends to abandon his poetical objectives. Instead, Milton here confronts Ovid and his love poetry on their own territory. The seventh elegy can therefore be read as a deceptive start of a non-developed typically elegiac career. In an act of poetic boasting, Milton here reveals that he would have been perfectly capable of writing conventional elegies if he would have wanted to. But instead of representing the beginning of a amorous elegiac career, *Elegia Septima* brings the elegy cycle to a dead end.
Elegia Septima describes Milton’s ultimate confrontation with Cupid. The elegy opens with an overconfident Milton who “adopts the conventional pose of the young man proud that he has so far resisted Cupid and eager to heap ridicule and scorn on the god of love,” thus arousing the god’s anger (ll. 1-12). An enraged Amor consequently appears at the poet’s bed (ll. 13-26), threatening him and boasting of his own deeds (ll. 27-46). Milton nevertheless dismisses Amor’s threats and is still convinced that the god can do him no harm (ll. 47-50). The poet then sets off for a walk in the city to admire the beautiful maidens (ll. 51-60). When one charming girl in particular catches Milton’s eye (ll. 61-4), Cupid jumps into action and works his magic, causing the poet to be struck by a consuming passion (ll. 65-74). The girl, however, is carried off into the crowd and vanishes from Milton’s life forever, leaving him to suffer from his lovesickness (ll. 75-92). The elegy ends in a final prayer (ll. 93-102), in which Milton first admits Amor’s supremacy and begs to be released, before converting the imagery by asking for reciprocal love.

Milton primarily achieves his victory over Amor and Ovid’s love poetry on a stylistic level. Milton reveals his mastery of the elegiac genre in the poem’s style and tone. Martyn justly remarks that “[Milton’s] prosodic and verbal artistry is mostly flawless, rivalling the best of Ovid’s Amores”. Throughout the poem, Milton masterfully adopts the persona of the love elegist. He first develops the role of the elegist who boldly scorns Cupid and believes himself to be invulnerable to the god’s arrows. When the elegist finds himself struck by Amor’s stinging arrows, Milton likewise proves his skills by converting himself into the stereotypical complaining love struck poet.

Even though Milton successfully adopts an Ovidian voice, he only does so to turn it against its own genre. When compared to the genuineness of Milton’s tone in the earlier

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123 Revard, Stella P., 29.
elegies, the tone in Elegia Septima comes across as a very artificial and superficial. For instance, Milton’s heartfelt concerns for his former tutor in the fourth elegy greatly contrast with the mad love complaints in this elegy. The latter, in its exaggeration never quite rings true. It is precisely this artificiality that Milton carries to an extreme in his prayer to the love god:

Parce precor teneri cum sis deus ales amoris,
Pugnent officio nec tua facta tuo.
Iam tuus O certe est mihi formidabilis arcus,  
Nate dea, iaculis nec minus igne potens:
Et tua fumabunt nostris altaria donis,
Solus et in superis tu mihi summus eris.
Deme meos tandem, verum nec deme furores,
Nescio cur, miser est suaviter omnis amans (93-100)

[Spare me, I beg you. After all, you are the winged god of tender love, so do not let your actions be at odds with your office. Child of the goddess, you may be sure that I dread your bow now: you are mighty with your arrows, and no less so with your fire. Your altars smoke with my offerings, and you alone shall be supreme to me among the gods. Take away my madness, then – but no, do not take it away! I don’t know why, but every lover is miserable in a way which is somehow delightful. (77-8)]

The prayer possesses a strong Ovidian tone and style. The phrase “Parce precor” occurs regularly in Ovid’s works, for example, in his Heroides (7.163 / 16.11). The address “Nate dea” is likewise drawn from Ovid (Met. 7.690 / 12.86 / 13.168). The idea of the pain of love  

\[125\]  “Elegia Septima” in Carey, John, 72-78.
being somehow welcome to the poet (l. 100) is also commonplace in love poetry. This prayer obviously sounds hollow if we remember how Apollo deeply stirred Milton’s soul in *Elegia Quinta*.

The final blow to Ovid’s love poetry is dealt in the two-line coda of the poem. Just when the elegiac artificiality reaches its climax, Milton suddenly effects a reversal of the preceding images. Even though this reversal is typical of Ovid’s elegies, Milton uses it against the elegiac genre:

Tu modo da facilis, posthaec mea siqua futura est,
Cuspis amaturos figat ut una duos. (100-2)

Only be gracious enough to grant that, if any girl is ever to be mine in the future, one arrow may pierce both our hearts and make them love. (78)

Quite opposite to resigning to his unhappy love, the poet indicates that he expects another girl to appear and even pleads for Cupid’s help in the future. The final line contains an echo of the Italian Guarini’s tragicomic pastoral *Pastor Fido*, whose main theme is faithful love. These lines thus remind of the fifth elegy’s incorporation of love in the marriage institution. Martyn analyses the coda as follows:

The poem appears to end in line 100 . . . suggesting the poet’s final resignation and permanent acceptance of his furores. But the final couplet completely reverses this image, in true Ovidian style, as the poet not only expects another girl . . . , but asks for Cupid’s help in ensuring mutual love. The ending neatly undercuts the whole persona of the love-sick poet, who turns out to be a protagonist for connubial bliss!126

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126 Martyn, J. R. C., 384-385.
In this manner, Milton skilfully turns Ovid’s stylistic device against his own writings to break away from the elegiac persona. Amor’s major offensive merely resulted in his own defeat.

Milton’s victory is also accomplished on a thematic level. Milton not only adopts Ovid’s style, he also enters upon an intertextual confrontation with the Roman elegist. Commentators have noted that “the poet’s interview with Cupid and the recital of the god’s triumphs . . . have some general and particular resemblances to Ovid’s *Amores* 1 and 2 and *Ex Ponto* 3.3, and to the encounter of the scornful Apollo and the conquering Cupid in the *Metamorphoses* 1.452 f.” The resemblances to the *Amores* and the *Metamorphoses* are most interesting to our discussion. In the first elegy of book 1 of the *Amores*, Ovid starts off with the elegist’s typical *recusatio* in favour of love poetry. Ovid recounts how he had intended to write serious epic poetry, when Cupid laughingly turned his verses into elegiac couplets. Ovid consequently chides the god for his actions and declares that he has no intention to write love poetry, because he does not have a boy or girl to compose his songs for. Ovid is immediately punished for his insults. Cupid fires his love arrow and Ovid is struck by a consuming love passion. The poet then resigns himself to Cupid and love poetry. In the second elegy, Ovid wholly takes up the persona of the love struck poet and sings of the god’s triumphant powers.

Milton takes up Ovid’s position in *Elegia Septima*, but he introduces some significant changes. Firstly, Milton uses two meaningful mythological figures to introduce Amor:

\[
\text{Talis in aeterno iuvenis Sigeius Olympo} \\
\text{Miscet amatori pocula plena Iovi;} \\
\text{Aut qui formosa pellexit ad oscula nymphas} \\
\text{Thiodamantaeus Naiade raptus Hylas. (21-4)}
\]

127 Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 130.
[This is what the Trojan lad looks like, while he mixes brimming goblets for infatuated Jove on ageless Olympus’ top; and this is what Hylas, Theodamas’ son looked like – Hylas, who lured the beautiful nymphs to his kisses and was stolen away by a Naiad. (76)]

Apart from the fact that these figures were indeed renowned for their beauty, they share another important aspect. Ganymede was kidnapped by Jove to become his new cupbearer. Jove’s main motive, however, was his love for the beautiful boy. Hylas is commonly known as Hercules’ lover. Both characters are here connected through the motif adulterous love.\(^{128}\) Amor is thus associated with illegitimate love, which explicitly contrasts with the faithful nuptial love at the end of the elegy. Secondly, Milton makes Cupid boast his own deeds (ll. 27-46). Whereas Ovid sings of Cupid’s triumph in his second elegy, Milton indicates through his elegiac persona that he refuses to do the same. In the first book of his *Metamorphoses*, Ovid introduces a scene similar to the events in his first elegy. Here, Cupid punishes the god Apollo, who chided him after having slain the chthonic Python, and forces the sun god to fall in love with the nymph Daphne. This scene is referred to in Milton’s seventh elegy:

\[
\text{Ipse ego si nescis strato pythone superbam} \\
\text{Edomui Phoebum, cessit et ille mihi. (31-2)}
\]

[It was I, in case you don’t know it, who tamed Phoebus while he gloried in the slaying of the Python. (77)]

Milton once again uses Ovidian echoes in his lines (*Met*. 1.447 “perdomitae serpentis”; 1.454 “victa serpente superb”; 1.460 “stravimus . . . Pythona”). Introducing this Ovidian Apollo, Milton simultaneously creates a contrast with the Apollo he has developed in his elegy cycle. Milton’s Apollo is an epic Apollo, an Apollo who does not succumb to love’s arrows and

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\(^{128}\) This implication is confirmed by the use of the term *amator*, which carries negative and adulterous connotations.
even assists the poet in conquering Amor’s poetry. Milton thus represents himself as Ovid’s superior.

Milton far surpasses Ovid in the final confrontation with love elegy in *Elegia Septima*. By adopting the persona of the typical love elegist, Milton turns the elegiac conventions against their own genre. Milton stylistically carries the genre’s artificiality to hollow extremes, and delivers a deadly stroke with the coda’s sudden reversal. Ovid’s defeat is also effected on a thematic level. Finally, Milton establishes a structural contrast between his and Ovid’s elegy cycles. Cupid’s intervention in Ovid’s *Amores* occurs at the beginning of the cycle, thus signifying the start of Ovid’s career as a love elegist. Amor’s intervention in Milton’s *Elegiarum Liber Primus*, on the other hand, occurs at the very end of the cycle. This reversal ultimately accomplishes the elegy cycle’s dead end. If *Elegia Septima* is to be interpreted as the start of Milton’s conventional elegiac career, it simultaneously signifies the end of that career. Amor’s attempts have clearly been in vain, since Milton’s score with the elegiac genre had already been settled in the previous elegies.

7. *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity* – A new beginning

Since Milton’s poetical career as a prototypical elegist is immediately abandoned in *Elegia Septima*, readers should be inclined to retrace their steps and to turn to *On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity* as the logical sequel to the sixth elegy. This course of action is justified for two other reasons. Firstly, the *Nativity Ode* is the first and only English poem referred to in the Latin poems. Secondly, Milton significantly chose the ode as the opening for the English section of his 1645 *Poems*. The sixth elegy would then signify the ending of Milton’s poetical development in the elegy cycle, and the *Nativity Ode* comparably symbolises the beginning of a new phase in the collection. Woodhouse relates the ode to the sixth elegy in the following manner:
The Ode teaches us to read the contrast of the elegiac and the heroic vein as a repudiation of the former, to transliterate the description of the heroic poet into Christian terms as the account of a dedicated spirit divinely inspired, and to see in the ascetic referred to, a turning towards that moral and religious preparation for his life-work on which Milton finally entered at Horton.\textsuperscript{129}

The \textit{Nativity Ode} is not supposed to be read as a heroic poem, though. Milton himself defines the poem as “patriis meditata cicitis” at the end of the sixth elegy (l. 89). This phrase carries obvious echoes to Virgil’s eclogues.\textsuperscript{130} Both the verb \textit{meditari} and the noun \textit{cicuta} significantly appear in the fifth eclogue (ll. 61, 85). These intertextual references reveal that Milton’s \textit{Nativity Ode} is composed in a higher strain similar to Virgil’s \textit{Eclogues}. The poetic nature of the ode is confirmed by the commentaries, which put it in line with Virgil’s Messianic fourth eclogue.\textsuperscript{131} The presence of the shepherds and the elaboration on the return of the Golden Age reinforce this link. In the prelude, Milton himself defines his poem as a “humble ode” (l. 24), but nonetheless highlights its “solemn strain” (l. 17).\textsuperscript{132}

Even though the \textit{Nativity Ode} at first sight seems to bear no conceptual resemblances to the Latin elegies, Milton does establish a clear connection in the last stanza of the prelude:

\begin{quote}
See how from far upon the eastern road
The star-led wizards haste with odours sweet,
O run, prevent them with thy humble ode,
And lay it lowly at his blessed feet; \[25\]
Have thou the honour first, thy Lord to greet,
And join thy voice unto the angel quire,
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{129} Woodhouse qtd. in Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 130.
\textsuperscript{130} The verb \textit{meditari} occurs in the opening to the famous first eclogue (l. 2) and in the sixth eclogue (ll. 8, 82). The noun \textit{cicuta} occurs in the second eclogue (l. 36).
\textsuperscript{131} Bush, Douglas (Vol. 2), 34. Carey, John, 102.
From out his secret altar touched with hallowed fire. (22-8)

The poet urging on his Muse to hasten towards the baby Christ reminds us of Milton urging on his poem in *Elegia Quarta*. This reference is reinforced by the fact that Milton also advised his elegy to present itself modestly to the addressee. The strongest argument, however, can be found in the final line of the stanza. This line refers to *Isa.* 6.6-7, where a Seraphim takes a burning coal from the altar and touches the prophet’s lips. Commentators agree that Milton knew and accepted the Seraphim’s symbolising the love of God. Milton “thus, unobtrusively but unmistakably, . . . avows love to be the motive of his birthday gift for Christ”.

In this sense, the *Nativity Ode* can surely be linked to the Latin elegies. The prelude nevertheless immediately reveals that the ode is not a typical Renaissance love elegy. The elegy, which is usually reserved for lowly and sensuous subjects, is here attributed a highly spiritual and religious meaning. Hanford adequately comments that “[Milton] contemplates the [Nativity], not at all with the loving surrender of a Catholic poet to its human sweetness, but with an austere intellectualized emotion stirred in him by the idea of its moral significance”. This transformation has ultimately been prepared by Milton in his Latin elegies. Milton’s modulation of the elegiac genre in the elegy cycle has paved the way for this heightened love poem.

Milton nevertheless establishes a clear distinction between the *Nativity Ode* and his elegy cycle. The imagery of the Seraphim touching the prophet’s lips with a burning coal “becomes for Milton the symbol of purification, dedication, and inspiration of the Christian poet”. Milton here takes up the role of the Christian poet-priest, which was only conceptually developed in the sixth elegy. As a Christian poet-priest, Milton inevitably looks

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133 Bush, Douglas (Vol. 2), 68.
135 J. H. Hanford qtd. in Bush, Douglas (Vol. 2), 41.
136 Bush, Douglas (Vol. 2), 68.
back upon his elegies in a different light. This is visible in the manner in which Milton treats several themes drawn from the elegy cycle. For example, Earth’s voluptuousness and vernal courting of the sun in *Elegia Quinta* strongly contrasts with her shameful guilt in the *Nativity Ode* (ll. 32-44, especially 35-6: “It was no season then for her / To wanton with the sun her lusty paramour”). The sun-god Apollo, who had been lauded for his inspirational powers, hides his head in shame when beholding Christ, a greater sun than him (ll. 79-84). The heightened nature of this new love song is also indicated in the following excerpt:

> But he her fears to cease,  
> Sent down the meek-eyed Peace,  
> She crowned with olive green, came softly sliding  
> down through the turning sphere  
> His ready harbringer,  
> With turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing,  
> And waving wide her myrtle wand,  
> She strikes a universal peace through sea and land. (45-52)

The goddess of peace, which was said to have been the last deity to flee the earth in *Elegia Quarta* (l. 79-80), here returns with myrtle in hand and guided by turtle doves. These attributes originally belong to the goddess Venus, but here receive a religious connotation. The interdependence of peace and love is already suggested in the turtle dove, who symbolises “constancy in love,” but is also biblically linked to peace.137 A last example of the various echoes drawn from elegy cycle can be found in the description of the armed angels “who are seen in glittering ranks with wings displayed (l. 114). This line is highly reminiscent of Cupid’s description in *Elegia Septima*, where he is also armed and displays his brightly

137 Bush, Douglas (Vol. 2), 73.
coloured wings (ll. 17-8). These examples clearly indicate that Milton reinterprets his elegies from a new Christian perspective.

This brief consideration of the *Nativity Ode* can help us draw some important conclusions about Milton’s poetics and the relation between his Latin and English poetry. The fact that Milton adapts or reinterprets his Latin poems on a different level reveals that he does intend his English poetry to be his main literary achievement. His Latin poetry nevertheless plays a crucial part, in that it serves as a poetical preparation for his English poetry. Milton utilises his classical and neo-Latin literary knowledge to actively develop his own voice and poetics. It is through this Latin preparation that Milton manages to achieve the literary grandeur in his English poetry. These poetical concepts can easily be illustrated by Milton’s treatment of the shepherds and the Golden Age in the *Nativity Ode*. These Virgilian themes act as a link between the classical pastoral and Christian traditions. However, Milton dismisses the classical Golden Age by stating that the true Golden Age will only return after the day of the Last Judgement (ll. 165-7), thus accomplishing a Christian transcendence over the pagan concept.\(^{138}\) As Virgil used his fourth eclogue to aspire to new poetical heights, Milton here intends to emulate Virgil by aiming for a Christian poetical horizon. Hence, the inspirational muse-maidens of *Elegia Prima*, who are compared to the stars, are here replaced by “Heaven’s youngest teemed star / . . . Her sleeping Lord with handmaid lamp attending” (ll. 240-2).

8. *Haec Ego Mente*… – A farewell to love poetry

The elegy cycle concludes with five elegiac distichs that are separated from *Elegia Septima* by a printer’s line. Even though some commentators tend to link the postscript to *Elegia Septima*, our analysis has clearly shown that Milton provides a proper ending to this

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\(^{138}\) Bush, Douglas (Vol. 2), 35.
profoundly Ovidian love elegy. Martyn confirms that the coda is “too complete an ending for one to accept that the following 10 lines could be attached to this elegy”.¹³⁹ A second group of critics usually interprets the retraction to apply to the love elegies, because Milton could hardly have referred to the funeral and epistle elegies as trifles.¹⁴⁰ In the light of our discussion of the seventh elegy as an elegiac dead end, the retraction seems to function as a resolute road block to emphasise, and possibly make explicit to the careless reader, Milton’s rejection of the elegiac genre.

Reading the retraction, we immediately notice that its tone is abruptly serious and its persona radically different when compared to the seventh elegy:

Haec ego mente olim laeva, studioque supino
Nequitiae posui vana trophaea meae.
Scilicet abreptum sic me malus impulit error,
Indocilisque aetas prava magistra fuit.
Donec Socraticos umbrosa Academia rivos [5]
Praebuit, admissum dedocuitque iugum.
Protinus extinctis ex illo tempore flammis,
Cincta rigent multo pectora nostra gelu.
Unde suis frigus metuit puer ipse sagittis,
Et Diomedeam vim timet ipsa Venus. [10]

[These lines are the trifling memorials of my levity which, with a warped mind and a base spirit, I once raised. This, in fact, is how mischievous error seduced me and drove me on: my ignorant youth was a vicious teacher, until the shady Academy offered me its Socratic streams, and taught me to unloose the yoke to

¹³⁹ Martyn, J. R. C., 385.
¹⁴⁰ Revard, Stella P., 40.
which I had submitted. From that moment onward the flames were quenched. My heart is frozen solid, packed around with thick ice; so that even the boy himself is afraid to let the frost get at his arrows, and Venus fears the strength of Diomedes. (237)]]\(^{141}\)

Milton relentlessly deprecates Ovid’s poetry and consequently rejects the poetic voice attached to it. Commentators justly compare the rejection to the peculiar epilogue of Virgil’s *Georgics*.\(^{142}\) Textual echoes to Ovid’s most important literary works indicate that Milton applies his rejection to the whole of the Roman author’s poetry. Line 2 was clearly drawn from Ovid’s *Amores*: “Ille ego nequitiae Naso poeta meae” (2.1.2). The phrase “sic me malus impulit error” is inspired by “me malus abstulit error” in Ovid’s *Tristia* (2.109). Milton melts echoes from two other works in the fourth line: “quis aetas longa magistra fuit” (*Heroides* 5.96); “animi indociles” (*Fasti* 3.119). The “extinctis . . . flammis” in line 7 resembles “extinctas . . . flammas” in the *Ars Amatoria* (2.441). Finally, reference is made to the story of Diomedes wounding the love goddess in the *Metamorphoses* (14.477-8, 15.769) and the *Epistulae Ex Ponto* (2.2.13). Milton dismisses these works as products of a light and trivial nature. Furthermore, in aligning himself to Diomedes and depicting his heart as frozen solid, Milton diametrically opposes Ovid, who explicitly states at the beginning of his *Remedia Amoris* that he is not Diomedes nor that his passions have cooled down (5-8).

However, Milton does not confine his rejection to Ovid’s poetry alone. Revard indicates that the retraction also includes the neo-Latin elegiac tradition. She reads additional echoes to Secundus’ *Elegia Solemnis* 2, thus analysing the retraction as a general rejection of elegiac poetry.\(^{143}\) The words “tropaea” and “nequitia” both occur in Secundus’ elegy. Secundus’ *Elegia Solemnis* 2 commemorates Julia, the maiden to whom he had dedicated his

\(^{141}\) “Haec Ego Mente…” in Carey, John, 236-7.  
\(^{142}\) Riley, E. H., 157.  
\(^{143}\) Revard, Stella P., 41.
first collection of elegies. The theme of a lost love consequently link the elegy to Milton’s *Elegia Septima*. Both Secundus’ and Milton’s personas confess that they have wasted their time in writing their elegy cycle. But whereas Secundus “forswears neither love nor love poetry,” Milton announces that he has become immune to love.\textsuperscript{144} Revard concludes that “[the retraction] can mark the end of Milton’s attempts to be a Renaissance Ovid or Propertius. Milton does not forswear love, but he does forswear a career as a Latinate praiser of a Cynthia or a Julia or a Neaera or even this or that nameless beauty”.\textsuperscript{145} This rejection strongly contrasts with Secundus’ statements, since Secundus went on to write a second book of elegies for another mistress. This contrast also adds an extra dimension to our interpretation of *Elegia Septima* as an elegiac dead end. Hence, the retraction undoubtedly signifies Milton’s resolute departure from the elegy genre.

Milton significantly introduces other literary echoes in the retraction. We have already indicated that this postscript strongly reminds of Virgil’s epilogue to his *Georgics*. It is not surprising that Milton opens his retraction with “mente . . . laeva”, a phrase which occurs in both Virgil’s *Eclogues* (1.16) and *Aeneid* (2.54). In other words, the elegiac voice is now definitively cast out by Milton’s Virgilian voice. Milton also refers to Diodati’s philosophical voice in lines 5 and 6. The retraction ultimately reveals why Milton chose to develop his elegies in connection to Diodati, and acknowledges the important role his intimate friend has played. Diodati and his earthbound Horatian-Epicurean voice provided Milton with the strength and determination needed for his future poetic career as a *poeta vates*. The Virgilian echo at the beginning of the retraction signifies that Milton is truly ready to assume his role as an epic poet. This is clearly visible in how Milton’s serious voice banishes the elegiac voice. Despite the many Ovidian echoes, it is Milton’s epic voice that dominates the retraction in tone.

\textsuperscript{144} Revard, Stella P., 41-2.
\textsuperscript{145} Revard, Stella P., 42.
IV. Milton’s further Latin poetical development

1. *Sylvarum Liber* – A laboratory for poetic experiments

Our analysis of Milton’s elegies has clearly revealed the closed structure of the cycle. The seven elegies were composed as a complex literary dialogue in which Milton develops his poetical voice and maps out his future career and intentions. The Latin section of the 1645 *Poems* was nonetheless comprised of more than the elegy cycle. Milton also added his early epigrams to his *Elegiarum Liber Primus*. This inclusion was mainly motivated by the shared elegiac metre. The other Latin poems were collected in a second book, called *Sylvarum Liber*. In this book, Milton experiments with several poetic genres and metres. For example, his *In Obitum Procancellarii Medici* is an obituary written in Alcaics, a metre Milton learned from Horace. Milton likewise experiments with the epic genre and its hexameters in his poem on the Gunpowder Plot, *In Quintum Novembris*. The collection even contains a couple of Greek poems, namely *Psalm CXIV* and *Philosophus Ad Regem*. This diversity of poems allowed Milton to practise a variety of metrical possibilities to prepare himself for his English poems.

Apart from the formal experimentation, the poems are also interesting in terms of their subject and themes. Critics have pointed out that *In Quintum Novembris* can be perceived as an imitation of Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and portrays a Satan that foreshadows his later version in *Paradise Lost*. Milton reintroduces and elaborates upon several poetical themes from his elegies. One important recurrent theme is the distinctive nature of the pagan and the Christian tradition. Milton already reflected on how the former should be adapted in order to be incorporated in the latter. This concept is at the heart of several of the poems in the collection. In *Naturam Non Pati Senium*, for instance, the question is raised whether or not nature suffers

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146 Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 142.
under the wheel of time. Milton starts off with a classical consideration of this question, and confirms time’s decaying influence which results in an apocalypse in the classical mythological world. Nevertheless, Milton abruptly breaks off his apocalyptic imagery and introduces God and the Christian time concept into the poem. The classical mythological imagery is then fitted into a universe regulated by God’s divine order. Milton actively adapts the pagan worldview and integrates it into a Christian context.

The concept of the poetical dialogue seems to have disappeared to the background. Even though Milton mostly seems to have left the explicit literary dialogues behind, he obviously still interacts with other Latin and neo-Latin poets on an intertextual level, e.g. the imitative interplay with the *Aeneid* in *In Quintum Novembris*. Since Milton uses the concept of the literary dialogue to develop his poetical voice, we might interpret the dialogical decrease as a clear indication that Milton’s voice mostly remains unaltered. Indeed, a brief overview of the subjects dealt with in *Sylvarum Liber* confirms that Milton has assumed his serious poetical voice. The obituaries *In Obitum Praesulis Eliensis* and *In Obitum Procancellarii Medici* are said to meet their goals appropriately.\(^{148}\) *In Quintum Novembris* with its epic experimentations reveals a young Milton’s first attempts at practising his epic voice. Some philosophical reflections are represented in *Naturam Non Pati Senium* and *De Idea Platonica*. Milton reflects further on his poetical vocation in *Ad Patrem*. A biblical context is explicitly introduced in the collection by the addition of a Greek translation of *Psalm CXIV*. The first signs of Milton’s future political writings are usually inferred from *Philosophus Ad Regem*. This overview reveals that the second part of the Latin section is clearly void from the poetical voice of the elegy cycle. If we were to closely analyse these poems following the same research method, we would undoubtedly obtain interesting results.

\(^{148}\) Bush, Douglas (Vol. 1), 68 & 160.
The limited time and space for this dissertation unfortunately do not allow for a more detailed analysis.

2. Ad Salsillum, Mansus and Epitaphium Damonis – Milton’s rise to epic poethood

Even though Milton had developed a distinctly epic voice and poetics in his elegy cycle, he refrained from writing a real epic work. The Latin poems nonetheless display an over-arching structure which enacts a progression in maturity. Revard confirms that the last Latin poems “present us with a more mature Milton who has already composed most of the English poems of the book”. The concluding Latin poems are of crucial importance for the 1645 Poems, since they mark both Milton’s definitive progression towards fulfilling his vocation as an epic poet and his departure from Latin poetry. After Epitaphium Damonis, his final poem for and about Diodati, Milton would not produce any Latin poetry meant for separate publication.

Milton significantly reintroduces poetical dialogues in the antepenultimate and penultimate poems, thus implying an initiation into a new phase of Milton’s further poetical career. Not unimportantly, the poems are addressed to two Italian poets Milton had met during his journey through Italy in 1638-1639. Milton undertook this journey as a completion of his personal studies, both poetically and educationally. The dialogues in these poems are quite distinct from the literary dialogue with Diodati. Instead of a Virgilian-Horatian interaction, Milton develops an essentially epic dialogue that increasingly reveals Milton’s rise to his vocation as England’s future epic poet. The epic intents of these poems is once again confirmed by Milton’s modulation of their respective genres.

150 Revard, Stella P., 2.
151 The only other Latin poetical writings he would produce afterwards are two verse headings for his Defensio pro Populo Anglicano and its sequel Defensio Secunda, and Ad Joannem Rousium Oxoniensis Academiae Bibliothecarium, written in 1647 when the Oxford University librarian John Rouse asked for a second copy of Milton’s work. This last poem was later added to the 1673 version of the Poems.
The first of these poems, Ad Salsillum poetam Romanum aegrotantem. Scazontes, was probably written shortly after Milton’s arrival in Italy. The poem was written to Giovanni Salzilli in response to his commendatory verses, in which he praises Milton’s epic qualities by expressing a preference to Milton over Homer, Virgil and the Italian Tasso. Milton in turn responds to these lauding words by hailing Salzilli as an epic poeta vates as well. Milton here modulates the scazons who are normally used for invective or satire. A contrast is developed between England, a home country plagued by furious winds, and Italy, a fertile land with its famous cities and its learned inhabitants. Milton thus reveals that his Italian journey was undertaken as a cultural enrichment of his private education.

The penultimate poem in the collection, Mansus, was the last poem Milton wrote in Italy. It was addressed to John Baptista Manso, Marquis of Villa, who had offered his warm hospitality to the visiting English poet. Milton uses the panegyric genre to express his gratitude towards Manso, but simultaneously transforms several generic conventions. One of the most significant conventions Milton changes is that of the relation between a poet and his patron. Manso is mostly praised as a patron and friend to poets, but Milton refuses to adopt the stereotypical servility prevalent in the panegyric tradition:

Instead of presenting a noble patron/guest who resembles Apollo, Achilles, Hercules, or Jove, served by a humble poet/host who resembles Chiron or Molorchus, Milton uses the metaphor the other way around: It is Milton, the poet, who graciously expresses his gratitude for the hospitality of patron/hosts like Manso and Chiron.

Milton’s alignment with the Apollonian position in the relationship signifies his progressively pronounced epic ambitions. Milton significantly takes up a different stance towards his native

152 Carey, John, 260.
153 Carey, John, 260.
country. Whereas Britain was still depicted as a harsh country in *Ad Salsillum*, the poet here praises the quality of English poetry and the rituals of Druidic religion. Milton consequently announces to undertake a British epic on a British theme, thus “translating to Britain a tradition of heroic poetry that had begun in Greece—a tradition worthy of emulation that Milton affirms he intends to follow”. The Italian journey poems consequently constitute a frame within which Milton attributes to the Italian journey its implications for his poetic development. The persona progresses from a quest for cultural and literary enrichment towards a self-confidence to be England’s future epic bard.

Milton’s poetic development is ultimately completed in the elegiac pastoral *Epitaphium Damonis*. The poem was written for Diodati, who died in August 1638 while Milton was still in Italy. Milton significantly concludes the Latin section of the 1645 *Poems* with this pastoral poem for his intimate friend. In contrast to the other Diodati-poems, the *Epitaphium Damonis* does not further develop a poetical dialogue, but laments a lost companion and the disrupted dialogue. Milton obviously does not write his lament in elegiac distichs, because he had completely rejected the genre in his elegies. In *Elegia Sexta* he had already indicated that the limping distich metre was inappropriate to express his love for Diodati. Milton chooses to write his laments in hexameters instead. By writing in the pastoral genre, Milton concludes his early poetic career the way Virgil started his. The importance of Virgil is not to be underestimated. Martz indicates that the *Epitaphium Damonis* is “the most deliberately Vergilian poem in the book”.

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155 Revard, Stella P., 218.
156 It is no coincidence that Milton reflected on the journey’s implications in Latin, since Milton mainly promoted himself as a Latin poem among the Italian literati. Haan indicates that “the Latin language, that universal language, thus becomes for the Milton of the Italian journey a network of communication and self-representation” (Haan 683).
157 Martz, Louis L., 36.
The poem contains crucial poetical implications. This is confirmed by the fact that Milton once again introduces generic modulation into the poem, thus surmounting the tradition.\textsuperscript{158}

The poem is resolutely situated in the pastoral tradition at the beginning, but Milton gradually builds towards the failure of the genre. The poet-shepherd Thyrsis, representing Milton, laments over the loss of his companion Damon, representing Diodati. Thyrsis is depicted in a pastoral landscape which is severely disrupted by the death of Damon. Milton initially adheres to the pastoral genre by portraying in Thyrsis the typically “placeless figure mourning a lost companion and, moreover, mourning the loss of the pastoral’s prototypically dialogic construction”.\textsuperscript{159} Thyrsis thus tries to restore the boundaries of the disrupted pastoral world and to re-establish a position for himself within that world. As the poem progresses, however, the generic conventions prove insufficient to relieve Thrysis’ grief, and the shepherd becomes completely isolated. The procession of mourners, for instance, refrain from joining in the poet’s mourning as they conventionally would. Thyrsis’ desolation is also noticeable in the poem’s refrain “Ite domum impasti, domino iam non vacat, agni” ([Go home unfed, lambs, your shepherd has no time for you now]\textsuperscript{160}. The subsequent digression on the Italian journey acts as the pivotal moment to the poem, in that Milton once again announces his epic intentions before elevating the poem to its ecstatic vision of Diodati in heaven.

The movement from the pastoral opening to the hymnic conclusion should undoubtedly be read on a poetical level. However, commentators mostly analyse the poem within its generic frame, and usually attribute the \textit{Epitaphium} an inferior position to its English equivalent \textit{Lycidas}.\textsuperscript{161} The ecstatic ending to the Latin poem is usually felt to be

\textsuperscript{160} “Epitaphium Damonis” in Carey, John, 270-286.
“strained and overwrought” and failing to provide true consolation for Thyrsis’ grief.\footnote{Lambert, Ellen Zetzel. \textit{Placing Sorrow. A Study of the Pastoral Elegy Convention from Theocritus to Milton.} Chapel Hill, N.C., University of North Carolina Press, 1976: 186.} Instead of forcing an evaluative opinion unto the poems, I would suggest a closer analysis to consider each poem in its poetical intentions. In this sense, the \textit{Epitaphium} should not be read within the limited context of the pastoral tradition. Milton essentially tries to provide a pastoral lament for Diodati’s death. This generic choice obviously corresponds with the earthbound poetical position that was attributed to Diodati in \textit{Elegia Sexta}. The lament’s development nevertheless reveals Milton’s weariness of and discontent with the genre by laying bare “the inadequacies of pastoralism in assuaging sorrow”.\footnote{Condee, Ralph W. (1965), 558.} Milton thus progresses towards a rejection of the pastoral genre, and by implication all earthbound genres, only to definitively accept his epic vocation. The poem also completes two other poetical evolutions. Firstly, the digression on the Italian journey and the intended British epic signify Milton’s abandonment of Latin in favour of English poetry. Secondly, the final lines provide a solution to the poetical problem of how to treat the classical and Christian literature. In these lines (ll. 212-9), Milton artfully fuses both traditions in his description of Diodati in heaven, which reaches a climax in the Bacchic ecstasy under the thyrsus of Zion (l. 219: “Festa Sionaeo bacchantur et orgia thyrso”). One can safely assume that, similar to Damon’s transformation into Diodati, Thyrsis finally becomes Milton. Milton thus assumes the role of the English Christian epic poet he has been developing throughout the 1645 \textit{Poems}. 

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\footnote{right see Ralph W. Condee (1965), Stella P. Revard; T. P. Harrison Jr., “The Latin Pastorals of Milton and Castiglione,” in \textit{PMLA} 50.}
V. Conclusion

A close generic analysis of John Milton’s *Elegiarum Liber Primus* clearly refutes the idea that the early Latin poems can be dispelled as trifling creations by a young and playful author. In spite of his youthful age, Milton already possesses a strong genre consciousness. He skilfully utilises this knowledge to emulate the elegiac genre by creating a complex literary work which far exceeds the generic boundaries and possibilities. Our analysis also indicates that the elegies were composed to form a structural unity and that they should be interpreted in their respective position within the cycle. To approach the cycle as a random collection of individual poems does not do justice to its ingenious complexity nor to Milton’s innovative creativity.

A detailed examination of the elegy cycle reveals that Milton resolutely deviates from the genre conventions. At the surface Milton writes in the elegiac kind. For instance, he writes in elegiac distichs. He also develops his poems in accordance with the main types: verse epistles in elegies one, four and six; funeral elegies in the second and third; amatory pieces in the fifth and seventh elegies. Nonetheless, the only real elegy in the cycle is *Elegia Septima*, which signifies both the beginning and the end of Milton’s elegiac career at the same time. The other elegies are epically modulated to effect a generic transformation. Many of these modifications run counter to the reader’s horizon of expectations and consequently require further consideration. The crucial key for an accurate understanding of the elegies can usually be found in the generic modulations themselves by interpreting them on a poetical level.

The central themes to the elegy cycle are the resolute rejection of the elegiac genre and the poet’s recurrent higher poetic ambitions. The programmatic *Elegia Prima* not only reveals Milton’s preference of epic over elegy, but also incorporates a rejection of several other literary genres, most notably the pastoral both in its neo-Latin and vernacular kinds. Milton’s admiration of the beautiful maidens and apostrophe to London nevertheless express his
intentions to emulate the elegiac tradition. At the end of the elegy, Milton announces his return to the countryside, and the imagery indicates a departure from the elegiac genre in favour of the epic. This departure is clearly illustrated in the following three elegies, which serve as epic experiments. In maintaining a strict epic modulation, Milton imposes an epic superstructure unto these elegies, so that *Elegia Secunda* and *Elegia Tertia* come to represent an epic journey in the underworld and *Elegia Quarta* an epic contemplation of war and exile. Milton’s generic emulation of the elegiac genre reaches its climax in *Elegia Quinta*. In this spring song, Milton establishes a generic intermingling between the epic and elegiac genres, and succeeds in elevating the elegy to cosmic proportions. Milton explicitly develops his poetical ideas in *Elegia Sexta*. He distinguishes earthbound poetry from epic poetry, and attributes a specific morality to their respective poets. Milton ultimately aligns himself with and singles out his future literary career as the epic poet. Milton then reinforces his rejection of the elegiac genre in the concluding *Elegia Septima*. Milton fully adopts the persona of the lovesick elegiac poet in this most profoundly Ovidian poem. However, the elegy proves to be a dead end, in that Milton locates the opening episode of the typical elegist at the end of his cycle. Milton’s feigned elegiac career thus comes to a premature ending. The retraction at the end of the cycle leaves no room for misinterpretation: the elegiac genre is curtly but forcefully rejected for the final time.

The elegy cycle is conceptually conceived as epic in nature and intents. Milton draws his inspiration for this literary enterprise from Virgil’s *Eclogues*. Even though Virgil chooses the rustic nature of Theocritus’ poetry as the basis for his own poetic cycle, he distinctly alters the genre through epic modulation. The epic slant is mostly accomplished through the elevated epic tone and register, which creates a discrepancy with the rustic origins of the poem. Hence, the *Eclogues* reveals a strong concern with the rejection of the pastoral kind. Virgil eventually does abandon the pastoral kind in his tenth eclogue, but he has nevertheless
realised a profound generic transformation. The same process is discernible in the elegy cycle. Milton is significantly intent upon rejecting the elegiac genre. His epic tone effects a similar distancing as achieved by Virgil. The most telling example of this technique can be found in *Elegia Quinta*. The spontaneous and licentious power of love is skillfully incorporated into the marital institution and becomes a cornerstone for a harmonious society. As a result, when Milton definitively abandons elegy in his retraction, he leaves behind a genre profoundly altered.

However, the enterprise of the elegy cycle was achieved through a poetical dialogue rather than by individual efforts. Milton significantly addresses the first and sixth elegies to his closest friend Charles Diodati. The epic experiments in elegies two to four are the individual product of Milton’s stern nature. Yet, they do not imply any poetical evolution, since Milton simply subdues the elegiac genre. *Elegia Quinta*, on the other hand, develops a true transformation of the elegiac genre. This transformation is effected in a dialogue with a nightingale singing from the countryside. The rural nightingale actually symbolises Diodati, whose philosophical-Epicurean voice acts as the catalyst in the fifth elegy’s generic cross-fertilisation. The importance of this Epicurean voice is confirmed in *Elegia Sexta* which develops a poetic dialogue with Diodati. Milton here redefines his friendship with Diodati in terms of the friendship between the Roman authors Virgil and Horace. The elegy attributes to each friend a distinct philosophical and moral stance: Milton adopts a Christian epic-Virgilian voice, whereas Diodati receives an earthbound philosophical-Horation voice. It is by means of the interaction between these two voices, which resolutely oppose Ovid’s poetry, that Milton is able to dismiss elegiac poetry and to define his own aspirations towards fulfilling his vocation as the new *poeta vates*.

Even though the elegy cycle is conceived of as a self-contained unit, it only marks the beginning of Milton poetic journey. Milton develops a well-defined concept of his poetics in
Elegia Sexta, but he does not yet assume his predestined role as the new English epic poet. Several of the cycle’s poetical issues recur in Silvarum Liber, the second section of Milton’s Latin poems, most notably the issue of how to incorporate the pagan tradition within a Christian context and the contrast between Latin and vernacular poetry. Moreover, the sixth elegy significantly establishes a link with the English section of the 1645 Poems, thus implying that the reader should read the English section as the logical continuation of the Latin elegies. The dead end of Elegia Septima and a brief consideration of the Nativity Ode clearly confirm this hypothesis. It is highly recommendable to conduct further research on the overall composition of both the English section and the Sylvarum Liber. It would also prove interesting to investigate a peculiar deviation from Virgil. Whereas Virgil conquers death in the fifth eclogue and declares the pastoral genre’s bankruptcy in the tenth eclogue, Milton overcomes love in his elegy cycle and chooses death as the cause of the pastoral’s bankruptcy in the Epitaphium Damonis. In spite of the many and voluminous commentaries, one can safely assume that research has not managed to get to the bottom of Milton’s poetry.

In the final Latin poems, Milton explicitly returns to the epic aspirations he had expressed in the elegy cycle. Initiating epic modulations and new poetic dialogues in Ad Salsillum and Mansus, Milton progressively represents himself as the epic poet he set out to be in the elegy cycle. His altering attitude towards Britain also reveals his intentions to write in the vernacular. Milton wholly accepts his epic vocation in the elegiac pastoral Epitaphium Damonis. The poet initially tries to overcome the loss of his intimate friend and dialogue partner Diodati in accordance with the pastoral conventions. These conventions utterly fail to provide any consolation, and the poet reintroduces his epic voice to depict Diodati in heaven. Revealing the pastoral genre’s inadequacy, the poem eventually reaches an epic climax in Diodati’s apotheosis which accomplishes a fusion between the classical and Christian tradition. Milton thus becomes the Christian epic poet of Paradise Lost.
Appendices

Appendix 1: Frontispiece to the 1645 Poems

[15 May 2010]
Appendix 2: Title page to the 1645 Poems

Bibliography


