

A Pragmatic Study Person Deixis In Milton's Lycidas

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المخلص

تهدف هذه الدراسة الى تسليط الضوء على دور بعض الضمائر في توضيح إحدى أهم الثيمات في قصيدة جون ملتون "ليسيداس" والتي هي الموت. وتتضمن توطئة تضم بعض تعريفات الضمائر وتفسيراتها والتي تعتمد على السياق الذي ترد فيه. كما تضمن مبحثاً عن جدلية الحضور والغياب والتي تتوضح من خلال استخدام بعض الضمائر مثل: نحن و هو، وأنت (بشكلها القديم والحديث)، حيث تلعب هذه الضمائر دوراً بارزاً في إظهار ليسيداس حياً وحاضراً تارة وميتاً وغائباً تارة أخرى، المسألة التي تبني عليها الثيمة الأساس لهذه القصيدة.

Abstract

This study aims at shedding light on the role of person deixis in expressing one of the main themes of Milton's "Lycidas", which is death. It is built on a supposition that Milton deliberately uses certain person deixis in certain situations to show his two states of mind concerning the presence and absence of his friend. The use of person deixis "we" serves the two opposite states, now it shows the referent as alive now as dead. "He" and "Thou" are also used- when the poet addresses Lycidas to show the controversy of presence and absence in so far as they are used equally. Furthermore, the poet's use of "thou" when he refers to Lycidas and "ye" when he addresses other referents, participates in showing the sanctity of Lycidas a matter which totally depends on the poet's knowledge of Latin and his awareness of the use of T/V distinction.

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Introduction

Since poetry is a special use of language, it is quite convenient to devote a broad area for the role of language in showing some of its aspects which may be still hidden unless some words, expressions or sentences draw our attention to them. Meanwhile other directions pave the way for critics to explore some corners of language which actively participate in conveying new thoughts concerning the main theme of a poem and enriching the process of analyzing it.

In Milton's 'Lycidas', which is an elegy or a lament for a creative man cut off before he achieves his full potential and in which Milton identifies with Lycidas' death and contemplates his thoughts and feelings about his own past, present, and future and about the great task master's will,⁽¹⁾ deixis plays a vital role in enriching the theme of death in this poem and expressing the poet's view concerning its inevitable power. The poet knows how to make this deixis functional. He employs it in certain situations where the events are in their highest peak and the context is flexible enough to give way to deixis to work in a proper manner since "it is a process where by words and expressions rely absolutely on context".⁽²⁾ Moreover deixis, sometimes, cannot be interpreted unless one is fully aware of the fact that "it is a reference by means of expression whose interpretation is relative to the (usually) extra linguistic context of the utterance".⁽³⁾ Hence, the addressor, the addressee, and the time or place of the

utterance give the critic a good chance to understand the functions of deixis.

Deixis –almost in all its types – is used by Milton in his "Lycidas" deliberately in order to concentrate on a certain poetic subject and to take his reader to different spaces and times and to make him share the desired mood which Milton assigns for him.

"Lycidas" is a text which mainly deals with the death of a young Cambridge graduate called Edward King who is supposed to have been the poet's friend and who drowned in the Irish Sea when he was on his way home – on the 10th of August 1637. ⁽⁴⁾ Hence, the controversy of presence and absence, proximity and distance shows itself here and there in the poem. It represents a mediator between the living friend and the dead and between the world of remembrances and that of reality. The poem has movements which stagger between these poles. Arthur Baker divides the poem into three movements, each of which depicts Lycidas in a different image and job. In the first movement, between lines 15 – 84, Lycidas is looked at as a poet – shepherd whereas in the second movement which occupies the next 45 lines depicts him as a priest – shepherd of the church. The third and final movement which starts from line 132 and ends in line 186 deals with the apotheosis of Lycidas as he is warmly received by the saints of heaven. ⁽⁵⁾ These staggering movements work together with a

special functional deixis to express the poet's feelings and the main theme of his poem.

I. I Person Deixis: The Controversy of Presence and Absence

Presence and absence represent the core of Milton's discussion in "Lycidas". When the poet casts his memory back to the by – gone days he spent with his friend, Lycidas becomes close to his sight and he remembers him as a shepherd who shared him the same job and who never departed him:

For we were nursed upon the self – same hill,
.....
We drove a – field, and both together heard,
(Lycidas, LL 23 - 27)
.....
But the fair guerdon when we hope to find,
And think to burst out into sudden blaze,
Comes the blind Fury with th' abhorred shears
And slits the thin – spun of life
(LL 73 – 76).

Apparently, the speaker and the participant were together nursing and driving their folks far from other shepherds. The word "both" suggests a matter which decisively contrasts the familiar collective job of shepherds. In moments of the act of remembrance everything is modified and "the contemplated characters of things are

broken from their historical setting and made available to express the needs and impulses of the experienced mind".⁽⁶⁾ Milton, the shepherd, recalls some remembrances which show his friend – shepherd and him leading their folks alone in different spaces and times. He successfully achieves this by using the inclusive (we) to show Lycidas' close relation with him for deixis identifies "objects, persons ... in terms of their relation to the speaker in space and time".⁽⁷⁾

Though memory is connected with past and though Milton employs it properly in so far as he takes his reader to some past times, yet he breaks this proper flow by referring to the present represented by the verbs "hope" and "comes". However, this shift universalizes the subject and puts it in the circle of facticity and expresses man's losing battle against time but keeps the poet and his friend in the heart of the problem.

The last line of the poem announces a sharp cut with inclusive (we) and the poet turns indirectly to the exclusive (we) where the addressee is not included:

Tomorrow to fresh woods, and pastures new. (L. 193).

This movement to reality dismisses all the poet's fantasies and remembrances and assures two eternal facts: the first is that who dies will never return and the second is that "the living must go on and the dead has no more hope of accompanying them"⁽⁸⁾ and life must go on despite the fact of death.

The controversy of presence and absence which shows itself partly in the use of (we) deepens in the use of (thou) and (he) where subjectivity plays a decisive role in this matter because "deictics are always subjective in the sense that they can be interpreted only with reference to the speaker".⁽⁹⁾ However, it is not an easy mission to talk about this subject "for the simplicity of these forms disguises the complexity of their use".⁽¹⁰⁾ Milton intended to balance between Lycidas whom he sees and addresses and Lycidas who is absent and is out of the conversational act. He is depicted and described in his past, present, and future. In the same manner the controversy of presence and absence springs in the use of (thou) and (he). Milton uses (thou) to refer to Lycidas five times and uses (he) five times too. He uses (thou) when he addresses Lycidas as if alive and standing in front of him or at least is not out of his sight; now suffering the harshness of death and its cause (the sea), now standing at the shore guarding each place and person where death is incapable of preventing him from playing an active role:

But O the heavy change, thou art gone,
Now thou art gone, and never must return
(LL. 37 – 38).

It is clear that the poet has just returned from the illusive world which his memory provided him with to the world of reality where his friend has been fully taken by death. This obligatory taking is shown

through the verb (go) which is rarely passivized. However, Lycidas is seen by the poet and is informed that his trip will be eternal and does not know an end. Milton also recognizes what death means: it is that "darkness which contains neither the sun nor the moon and stars. One must walk on the path all alone".⁽¹¹⁾ In another moment of contemplating the fate of his friend in this endless sea, the poet addresses his friend as if he could see him:

Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
Visit's the bottom of the monstrous world;
(LL. 157 – 158).

Despite the prior knowledge of the poet concerning his friend's fate, he imagines him as a living friend who could hear him wherever he is; therefore, the poet uses the second person pronoun (thou) when he addresses him. He still imagines his friend alive and he questions whether Lycidas responds to his tearful prayers (moist vows) or not:

Or whether thou to our moist vows denied, (L. 159).

Again in the world of illusion the poet addresses his friend and asks him to answer his inquiry as if he were alive and present. Even when he receives no answer, not even a single word from his friend, he cannot confess and cannot imagine him as being dead. Instead he adds sanctity to him by addressing him as the guard of the shore:

Hence forth thou art the genius of the shore, (L. 183).

When the poet returns from his illusive situations with his friend to the world of reality he becomes fully aware of the fact that what time takes cannot be regained and he will be absent forever. Hence, absence arises in the world of reality and the poet no more addresses Lycidas as present. He urges himself and other poets to lament Lycidas, the absent, the dead, and the distal:

Who would not sing for Lycidas? He knew
Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
(LL. 10 – 11).

The verb (sing) in both lines means (compose poems) and the poet devoted his ability to write an elegy for the dead Lycidas who belongs to another different world.

On another occasion, the poet regrets Lycidas' end who seems far and dead:

He must not float upon his watery bier. (L. 12).

Now Lycidas is absent and the poet takes this fact into consideration and he addresses him with the third person pronoun (he). Looking at Lycidas as absent and dead, the poet informs others and himself about Lycidas' fate and he no more addresses him face to

face. Instead, he tells us that Lycidas will be resurrected and will enjoy eternity in the other world:

Sunk though he beneath the watery floor,
So sink the day – star in the ocean bed,
(LL. 167 – 68).

Eternity, as a consolation, is further developed to become a fact which represents both Lycidas' immortality and the impossibility of his coming back. This is achieved through the use of the present simple tense of the verb (laves). Consequently the poet addresses him by using the third person pronoun (he):

With nector pure his oozy locks he laves, (L. 175).

Meditating the world of reality, the poet accepts what has happened and accepts the fact that Lycidas can neither hear nor can he be seen and he assures us that Lycidas (rose) with his (mental blue) to practice his job in the other world which sharply contrasts with ours. He also sees that (he) is convenient to address his friend:

At last he rose, and twitched his mantle blue: (L. 192).

The controversy of presence and absence which springs from the poet's continuous movements between the world of illusion and memory and that of reality is, as it has been shown, enriched and

carried out successfully by the clever use of some person deixis represented by the second and the third person pronouns in addition to (we).

Besides, the complexity we face concerning the use of (we), (thou), and (he) there springs another more complicated problem represented by the use of the second person pronoun (thou). This deixis needs a closer test for Milton uses both forms: the old (thou) and the modern (you), a matter which obliges anyone who writes about such a subject to offer a justification for this use. In English, as we know, there is no such a T / V distinction (from French form (tu) and (vous)).⁽¹²⁾ Hence, social deixis, which "is a reference to the social characteristics of, or a distinction between the participant or referent in speech and events",⁽¹³⁾ plays a remarkable role in this respect. Milton "turned his hand early to the writing of verse, both in Latin and in English."⁽¹⁴⁾ Hence, he is aware of this distinction. Furthermore, most of the images in this poem are derived or intertextualized with those of Latin poets such as Theocritus, Virgil and Sanarazo from whom he took little of the poem.⁽¹⁵⁾ His knowledge of Latin, however, helped him adopt this technique by which "the form of word used indicates the relative social status of the addressor and the addressee".⁽¹⁶⁾ In the body of the poem, Milton uses (thou) six times; all of the them refer to Lycidas but one refers to the god of the river Alpheuse:

O fountain Arethuse, and thou honoured flood,
(L. 85).

In this respect, Lycidas is looked at as a divine creature or at least a sacred person. This justification is quite possible since the poet orders the muses (goddesses of poetry) to mourn over Lycidas:

Begin then, sisters of the sacred well
That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,
Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string
(LL. 15 – 17).

Consequently, Milton knows that he addresses a person of a higher status or he wants to make him so. And since English cannot provide him with such distinction, he turns to the old and modern forms of this person deixis to carry out his intention. He uses the person deixis (ye) for the second person pronouns to refer to different things and addressees. This deixis is used seven times, three times for the nymphs, where they are depicted as less powerful characters and are inquired by the poet:

Where were ye nymphs when the remorseless deep
Closed o'er the head of your loved Lycidas?
(LL. 50 – 51).

In addition, he indirectly blames them and shows their helplessness in front of the destructive power of death when Lycidas was swallowed by the sea:

For neither were ye playing on the steep
Where your old bards, the famous Druids, lie
Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
(LL. 52 – 54).

Then, he mockingly asks about the benefit of their being there; they could definitely do nothing:

Had ye been there for what could that have done?
(L. 57).

Apparently, the muses seem to be in a lower status or at least the poet does not show any kind of respect to them for they could not save his friend.

The rest four person deixis (ye) are distributed as follows; two for (laurels and myrtles), one for (valleys) and one for (dolphins) which obviously seems as lower addresses or characters. The poem opens with the poet's threat of shattering the unripe boughs of laurels and myrtles:

Yet once more, O ye laurels and once more
Ye myrtles brown, with ivy never sere,
I come to pluck berries harsh and crude,

And with forced fingers rude,
Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
(LL. 1 – 5).

Now the poet is a doer and he is ready to punish these plants through shattering their boughs before their ripeness. He tries to do a parallel act to that of death ⁽¹⁷⁾ which took Lycidas while he was so young. These plants, which are sacred, used as crowns for heroes, are shown as weak and fragile while the poet depicts himself as a powerful speaker who usually tends "to use the (tu) version to a lower, younger and less powerful addressee". ⁽¹⁸⁾ The last two (ye) which are directed to (valleys) and (dolphins) (LL. 163 – 64) do not need any explanation to show their lower relation to the addressor and their weak relation concerning the subject we have already considered.

Conclusion

Milton deals with death in a very clever way in this poem which is built on the controversy of presence and absence. This controversy is expressed through a special use of deixis where one depicts the lamented person as present and living through memory and another depicts him as absent and dead. This controversy is made clear through the balanced use of (thou) which shows Lycidas as if alive and (he) which shows Lycidas as a dead friend. This balance is a product of an intentional planning which is consolidated by the two opposite use of (we) which also expresses presence and absence.

Notes

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