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Question: - Discuss the apparent incongruity of Christian and Pagan ~~the~~ elements in Lycidas.

Answer: - Dr. Johnson was perhaps the first to point out the somewhat indiscriminate mixing of Christian and Pagan elements in these terms. "With these trifling fictions are mingled the most awful and sacred truths, such as, ought never to be polluted with such irreverent combinations... Here they are indecent and at least approach to impiety!"

Another critic has also remarked "Here amid bucolic imagery and Pagan dramatic personae, Christianity can have no place."

The points sought to be made out by these critics are (i) Paganism and Christianity are ~~contradictory~~ antithetical according to popular conception. Milton has grouped together Pagan deities with Christian personages. (ii) The introduction of St. Peter and

reference to Christ is incongruous from the artistic standpoint as well as from the point of view of Christian sentiment, according to which it is almost a sacrilege to place St. Peter in the company of pagan deities and superstition.

In defence of Milton, we may say that such a mixture is permissible in poetic fiction and is not without honourable precedents in English literature. Poets of Milton's time were not infrequently indulged in such mixtures of pagan myths and Christianity. Milton had before him the great example of Spenser whom he regarded as his master and whose 'Shepherd's Calendar' exercised considerable influence on him. Dr. Johnson and critics like him could hardly understand that beauty wherever it was found either in the pagan world or Christianity, appeared to Milton was admittedly no unmeaning

scorner of things pagan. Besides, it has to be remembered that Lycidas is basically a pagan poem in structure, conception or sentiment, being cast in the conventional style of pastoral oral poetry with its paraphernalia of classical gods and goddesses, nymphs of the sea and the river, huge monsters of the deep, giants of the mountains, Satyrs and Fauns. The introduction of the Christian element into this pagan framework is accounted for by the fact that Milton was a child of the Reformation, and that both Puritanism and Christianity invariably kept intruding into his poetry. The strong criticism of the English Church put into the mouth of St. Peter, is entirely inspired by the puritanical fervour of Milton. There is another mixture of Paganism and Christianity in the latter part of the poem where he suddenly introduces a classical belief

after expression of the Christian sentiment that Lycidas is not dead but living a perennial life in heaven. He believes that Lycidas will be the guardian deity of the Shore as a reward for his earthly tribulations and will be always ready to save all persons wandering on the dangerous ocean. This latter conception is a purely Pagan one and its justification lies in the fact that Milton's inordinate thirst for beauty led him to introduce it in this particular content. There is no doubt that the digression and the bringing on a Christian theme in a Pagan setting, constitute somewhat of an artistic flaw. But if we keep in mind the fact that it is not so much the death of Edward King as Milton himself that "King is but the excuse for one of Milton's personal poems." The objection, raised by critics

loses much of its force. This is a clear evidence of Milton's Puritanical fervour of the fact that it is not so much the whole system of church government that Milton repudiates here as the corrupt clergy. Besides, we cannot but admire the poetic skill with which he affects the combination and synthesis of these two apparently contradictory elements. It is open to us to condemn the combination of these two elements from the point of view of orthodox Christianity or that of a nimble pastoral poem, but we cannot speak in superlative terms of this seemingly antithetical combination of Milton's daring originality for the sake of beauty. It was his inordinate thirst for beauty that drove Milton to seek it wherever he found it. The result is what would seem to be irreconcilable has been fused together in one total

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impression of sweet harmony

The end.

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