

English Program Fourth Semester

English II, AECC- IV

John Milton "On His Blindness".

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Sonnet 19: When I consider how my light is spent

JOHN MILTON

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one Talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my Soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide;
"Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?"
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is Kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er Land and Ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

[Source: <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44750/sonnet-19-when-i-consider-how-my-light-is-spent>]



About the poet:

John Milton was born in London on December 9, 1608, into a middle-class family. He was educated at St. Paul's School, then at Christ's College, Cambridge, where he began to write poetry in Latin, Italian, and English, and prepared to enter the clergy.

His extensive reading included both classical and modern works of religion, science, philosophy, history, politics, and literature. In addition, Milton was proficient in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, Spanish, and Italian, and obtained a familiarity with Old English and Dutch as well.

During his period of private study, Milton composed a number of poems, including "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity," "On Shakespeare," "L'Allegro," "Il Penseroso," and the pastoral elegy "Lycidas." In May of 1638, Milton began a 13-month tour of France and Italy, during which he met many important intellectuals and influential people, including the astronomer Galileo, who appears in Milton's tract against censorship, "Areopagitica."

After the Restoration of Charles II to the throne in 1660, Milton was arrested as a defender of the Commonwealth, fined, and soon released. He lived the rest of his life in seclusion in the country, completing the blank-verse epic poem *Paradise Lost* in 1667, as well as its sequel *Paradise Regained* and the tragedy *Samson Agonistes* both in 1671. Milton oversaw the printing of a second edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1674, which included an explanation of "why the poem rhymes not," clarifying his use of blank verse, along with introductory notes by Marvell. He died shortly afterwards, on November 8, 1674, in Buckinghamshire, England.

Paradise Lost, which chronicles Satan's temptation of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Eden, is widely regarded as his masterpiece and one of the greatest epic poems in world literature. Since its first publication, the work has continually elicited debate regarding its theological themes, political commentary, and its depiction of the fallen angel Satan who is often viewed as the protagonist of the work.

Genre:

Milton's "On His Blindness" is sonnet that follows the Petrarchan sonnet style. The sonnet is divided into octave and sestet. The sonnet's rhyme scheme is *abba abba cde cde*.

Central Theme of the Sonnet:

The sonnet "On His Blindness" depicts the poet's sorrow and grief over the loss of his eyesight and ultimately, in the end, his submission to God's Will. The sonnet revolves around the idea of faith in God, frustration, acceptance, patience, God's omnipotence, God's omnipresence. According to the poet at the end we all have to accept whatever good or bad happens to our life.



We are the creations of God and God comes to our help when we seriously need him, for that we have to hold our patience. But finally whatever happens be it good or bad, we have to accept it, considering this to be the God's will. Finally, complete submission to the will of God is what one needs to practice as the greatest service to the almighty.

Synopsis :

"On His Blindness" refers to the struggles John Milton had after he lost his sight. John Milton's eyesight began to fail in 1644. By 1652, he was totally blind. A man without "light", means eyesight he now resides a world that is full of darkness. He lost his eyesight even before his life was halfway over ('ere' means 'before'). After losing his eyesight he feels that the 'talent' he has got, that is his ability to read and compose, is of no use now. His sharp intelligence that sets him apart from the rest of the people is now 'useless' to him. In spite of losing the gift of eyesight he does not lose the will to use his skill (reading and writing skill) in service of his 'Maker', God. The poet wishes to serve God but he is not sure whether God will entertain any work as a kind of payment from the people who have lost their eyesight, hence he decides to 'fondly ask'. He was about to ask this question to God, but at that time his 'patience' steps in to stop him from asking this foolish question. Patience points out that God is complete in himself and he does not need anything or anyone. God does not need "man's work" or man's service of any kind. He is the almighty, the supreme. God is like 'King' in possession of unlimited resources. The only means of serving God is acceptance. Accepting whatever good or bad or suffering and misfortune comes in the way of life. The poet concludes that even if he is blind and unable to do any service to Him, he should only remain loyal to Him and should keep on accepting all the mental and physical suffering that God may inflict upon him. It must be remembered that even silent attendance is also a kind of service to Him. His only hope is his faith in the mercy, kindness and justice of God. The poet is full of grief after losing his eyesight but he endures his suffering with fortitude. In this sonnet, Milton uses the power of patience to rescue human beings from various grief, disappointment and despair that they come across in the course of life. Milton in this sonnet tries to resolve an age old dilemma, that does God need the service of mankind? The answer is that those who resign themselves unquestioningly to the will and wishes of God are his best servants.

References:

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