

1637

LYCIDAS

John Milton

Milton, John (1608-1674) - English poet and prose writer who is one of the most highly regarded figures in world literature and is widely considered the greatest poet since Shakespeare. Often called the "Puritan Poet," he had many of the good traits of the Puritans as well as many of the bad and spent much of his life immersed in political and religious controversy. Lycidas (1637) - One of Milton's minor poems. Written as an elegy on the death of Edward King, a fellow student of Milton's at Christ's College.

LYCIDAS

In this Monody the Author bewails a learned Friend, unfortunately drown'd in his Passage from Chester on the Irish Seas, 1637. And by occasion foretels the ruine of our corrupted Clergy then in their height.

Yet once more, O ye Laurels, and once more
 Ye Myrtles brown, with Ivy never-sear,
 I com to pluck your Berries harsh and crude,
 And with forc'd fingers rude,
 Shatter your leaves before the mellowing year.
 Bitter constraint, and sad occasion dear,
 Compels me to disturb your season due:
 For Lycidas is dead, dead ere his prime
 Young Lycidas, and hath not left his peer:
 Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew
 Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme.
 He must not flote upon his watry bear
 Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,
 Without the meed of som melodious tear.
 Begin then, Sisters of the sacred well,
 That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring,
 Begin, and somewhat loudly sweep the string.
 Hence with denial vain, and coy excuse,
 So may som gentle Muse
 With lucky words favour my destin'd Urn,
 And as he passes turn,
 And bid fair peace be to my sable shrowd.
 For we were nurst upon the self-same hill,
 Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill.
 Together both, ere the high Lawns appear'd
 Under the opening eye-lids of the morn,
 We drove a field, and both together heard
 What time the Gray-fly winds her sultry horn,
 Batt'ning our flocks with the fresh dews of night,
 Oft till the Star that rose, at Ev'ning bright
 Toward Heav'ns descent had slop'd his westering wheel.
 Mean while the Rural ditties were not mute,
 Temper'd to th' Oaten Flute;
 Rough Satyrs danc'd, and Fauns with clov'n heel,
 From the glad sound would not be absent long,

And old Damaetas lov'd to hear our song,
 But O the heavy change, now thou art gon,
 Now thou art gon, and never must return!
 Thee Shepherd, thee the Woods, and desert Caves,
 With wilde Thyme and the gadding Vine o'regrown,
 And all their echoes mourn.
 The Willows, and the Hazle Copses green,
 Shall now no more be seen,
 Fanning their joyous Leaves to thy soft layes.
 As killing as the Canker to the Rose,
 Or Taint-worm to the weanling Herds that graze,
 Or Frost to Flowers, that their gay wardrop wear,
 When first the White thorn blows;
 Such, Lycidas, thy loss to Shepherds ear.
 Where were ye Nymphs when the remorseless deep
 Clos'd o're the head of your lov'd Lycidas?
 For neither were ye playing on the steep,
 Where your old Bards, the famous Druids ly,
 Nor on the shaggy top of Mona high,
 Nor yet where Deva spreads her wisard stream:
 Ay me, I fondly dream!
 Had ye bin there-for what could that have don?
 What could the Muse her self that Orpheus bore,
 The Muse her self, for her enchanting son
 Whom Universal nature did lament,
 When by the rout that made the hideous roar,
 His goary visage down the stream was sent,
 Down the swift Hebrus to the Lesbian shore.
 Alas! What boots it with uncessant care
 To tend the homely slighted Shepherds trade,
 And strictly meditate the thankles Muse,
 Were it not better don as others use,
 To sport with Amaryllis in the shade,
 Or with the tangles of Neaera's hair?
 Fame is the spur that the clear spirit doth raise
 (That last infirmity of Noble mind)
 To scorn delights, and live laborious dayes;
 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 life. But not the praise,
 Phoebus repli'd, and touch'd my trembling ears;
 Fame is no plant that grows on mortal soil,
 Nor in the glistering foil

Set off to th' world, nor in broad rumour lies,
 But lives and spreads aloft by those pure eyes,
 And perfect witness of all judging Jove;
 As he pronounces lastly on each deed,
 Of so much fame in Heav'n expect thy meed.
 O Fountain Arethuse, and thou honour'd fount,
 Smooth-sliding Mincius, crown'd with vocal reeds,
 That strain I heard was of a higher mood:
 But now my Oate proceeds,
 And listens to the Herald of the Sea
 That came in Neptune's plea,
 He ask'd the Waves, and ask'd the Fellon winds,
 What hard mishap hath doom'd this gentle swain?
 And question'd every gust of rugged wings
 That blows from off each beaked Promontory,
 They knew not of his story,
 And sage Hippotades their answer brings,
 That not a blast was from his dungeon stray'd,
 The Ayr was calm, and on the level brine,
 Sleek Panope with all her sisters play'd.
 It was that fatal and perfidious
 Bark Built in th' eclipse, and rigg'd with curses dark,
 That sunk so low that sacred head of thine.
 Next Camus, reverend Sire, went footing slow,
 His Mantle hairy, and his Bonnet sedge,
 Inwrought with figures dim, and on the edge
 Like to that sanguine flower inscrib'd with woe.
 Ah; Who hath reft (quoth he) my dearest pledge?
 Last came, and last did go,
 The Pilot of the Galilean lake,
 Two massy Keyes he bore of metals twain,
 (The Golden opes, the Iron shuts amain)
 He shook his Miter'd locks, and stern bespake,
 How well could I have spar'd for thee, young swain,
 Anow of such as for their bellies sake,
 Creep and intrude, and climb into the fold?
 Of other care they little reck'ning make,
 Then how to scramble at the shearers feast,
 And shove away the worthy bidden guest.
 Blind mouths! that scarce themselves know how to hold
 A Sheep-hook, or have learn'd ought els the least
 That to the faithfull Herdmans art belongs!
 What recks it them? What need they? They are sped;
 And when they list, their lean and flashy songs

Grate on their scannel Pipes of wretched straw,
 The hungry Sheep look up, and are not fed,
 But swoln with wind, and the rank mist they draw,
 Rot inwardly, and foul contagion spread:
 Besides what the grim Woolf with privy paw
 Daily devours apace, and nothing sed,
 But that two-handed engine at the door,
 Stands ready to smite once, and smite no more.
 Return Alpheus, the dread voice is past,
 That shrunk thy streams; Return Sicilian Muse,
 And call the Vales, and bid them hither cast
 Their Bels, and Flourets of a thousand hues.
 Ye valleys low where the milde whispers use,
 Of shades and wanton winds, and gushing brooks,
 On whose fresh lap the swart Star sparely looks,
 Throw hither all your quaint enameld eyes,
 That on the green terf suck the honied showres,
 And purple all the ground with vernal flowres.
 Bring the rathe Primrose that forsaken dies.
 The tufted Crow-toe, and pale Gessamine,
 The white Pink, and the Pansie freakt with jeat,
 The glowing Violet.
 The Musk-rose, and the well attir'd Woodbine.
 With Cowslips wan that hang the pensive hed,
 And every flower that sad embroidery wears:
 Bid Amaranthus all his beauty shed,
 And Daffadillies fill their cups with tears,
 To strew the Laureat Herse where Lycid lies.
 For so to interpose a little ease,
 Let our frail thoughts dally with false surmise.
 Ay me! Whilst thee the shores, and sounding
 Seas Wash far away, where ere thy bones are hurld,
 Whether beyond the stormy Hebrides,
 Where thou perhaps under the whelming tide
 Visit'st the bottom of the monstrous world;
 Or whether thou to our moist vows deny'd,
 Sleep'st by the fable of Bellerus old,
 Where the great vision of the guarded
 Mount Looks toward Namancos and Bayona's hold;
 Look homeward Angel now, and melt with ruth.
 And, O ye Dolphins, waft the haples youth.
 Weep no more, woful Shepherds weep no more,
 For Lycidas your sorrow is not dead,
 Sunk though he be beneath the watry floar,

So sinks the day-star in the Ocean bed,
 And yet anon repairs his drooping head,
 And tricks his beams, and with new spangled Ore,
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky:
 So Lycidas sunk low, but mounted high,
 Through the dear might of him that walk'd the waves
 Where other groves, and other streams along,
 With Nectar pure his oozy Lock's he laves,
 And hears the unexpressive nuptial Song,
 In the blest Kingdoms meek of joy and love.
 There entertain him all the Saints above,
 In solemn troops, and sweet Societies
 That sing, and singing in their glory move,
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.
 Now Lycidas the Shepherds weep no more;
 Hence forth thou art the Genius of the shore,
 In thy large recompense, and shalt be good
 To all that wander in that perilous flood.
 Thus sang the uncouth Swain to th' Okes and rills,
 While the still morn went out with Sandals gray,
 He touch'd the tender stops of various Quills,
 With eager thought warbling his Dorick lay:
 And now the Sun had stretch'd out all the hills,
 And now was dropt into the Western bay;
 At last he rose, and twitch'd his Mantle blew:
 To morrow to fresh Woods, and Pastures new.

THE END