**Notes – “On His Having Arrived at the Age of Twenty-Three”**

**“On His Blindness”**

Both of these poems are examples of the Italian sonnet form – Milton preferred the classical structure of octave, sestet to the Elizabethan three quatrain, couplet structure.

**“On His Having Arrived at the Age of Twenty-Three”**

ll. 1&2 – **personification** – time is characterized as a “subtle thief” who moves

swiftly on the wing – reminiscent of the Cavalier images

we’ve studied.

l. 4 – good **metaphor** here – Milton describes his unproductive youth as a “late spring”

yet to show “…bud or blossom…”

At a time when few people lived much beyond fifty, Milton might well have

reflected that to be twenty-three and to have still not produced anything of

value was cause for alarm!

ll. 6&7 – Milton is afraid that, now that he is approaching manhood, the freshness and

inspiration of youth may never come again.

l. 8 – Milton feels that others his age have accomplished more than he.

ll. 9-14 – in the sestet, Milton expresses the belief that his time will come, but only if

he dedicates himself ***completely*** to the will of God, his “great Taskmaster”

as we know, a very **Puritan** attitude.

**“On His Blindness”**

A rather poignant, very personal expression of Milton’s frustration over the loss of his sight – but also expressing a glimmer of hope for his continued service to God.

ll. 1&2 – lines express Milton’s bitter disappointment at no longer being able to enjoy

what he loves best – reading and writing.

l. 3 – “talent” here is an example of **allusion**, as the poet makes reference to the

parable of the talents from Matthew 25: 14-30.

ll. 4-7 – because of his blindness, the poet feels he cannot adequately make use of

the gifts that God has blessed him with – he will have nothing to show for

himself when the last judgment arrives.

ll. 9-14 – in this sestet, the poet takes comfort in the basic knowledge that different

people serve the Lord in different ways. God, who has no need of “…man’s

work,” may yet have work for Milton. The fact that Milton was able to

compose these two beautiful sonnets more than proves his talent was intact.

l. 14 – thus, we have this *very* famous final line – “They also serve who only stand and

wait.”