

## Critical comment on Milton's Lycidas

John Milton's *Lycidas* is one of the greatest pastoral elegies in English literature. It was written in to mourn the death of Edward King, Milton's close friend and fellow student at Cambridge, who died in a shipwreck. Though written on a personal occasion, the poem rises above private grief and becomes a serious meditation on life, death, faith, poetry, and moral responsibility. Milton uses the traditional pastoral elegy form, but he reshapes it according to his own intellectual and religious vision.

In *Lycidas*, Milton presents himself and Edward King as shepherds, following the classical pastoral tradition. Nature, shepherds, and rural imagery dominate the poem, which connects it to Greek and Roman elegies. However, Milton is not fully satisfied with the artificial conventions of pastoral poetry. This dissatisfaction is evident from the opening lines, where he hesitates to begin his song and suggests that he is forced to write by grief rather than pleasure. This gives the poem a serious and reflective tone from the very beginning.

The structure of Lycidas is irregular and emotionally intense. Unlike traditional elegies that move smoothly from sorrow to ~~cos~~ consolation, Milton's poem shifts suddenly between grief, anger, doubt, and hope. This irregularity was criticized by Dr. Samuel Johnson, who felt that the pastoral setting and mythological references were artificial and unsuitable for real sorrow. However, later critics have argued that the poem's uneven structure reflects the natural confusion and pain caused by deep grief. Milton does not suppress ~~a~~ his emotions but allows them to appear openly in the poem.

One of the major themes of Lycidas is Milton's questioning of divine justice. He wonders why a talented and virtuous young man should die so early. This leads Milton to reflect on the value of learning and poetic effort. Through the figure of Phoebus, the poem suggests that true fame and reward do not come from earthly success but from God. This shows Milton's concern with his own poetic mission and his belief that poetry should serve moral and spiritual purposes.

A significant and controversial part of the poem is Milton's strong attack on corrupt clergy. Speaking through the voice of St. Peter, Milton criticizes church leaders who neglect their spiritual duties and care only for wealth and power. These clergy are described as blind mouths, feeding themselves instead of guiding their flocks. Though this passage may seem like a digression, it reflects Milton's deep concern for moral corruption in society and adds seriousness to the poem.

Milton also blends pagan mythology with Christian belief throughout *Lycidas*. Classical figures such as Phoebus, Triton, and the nymphs appear alongside Christian ideas of resurrection and eternal life. Some critics feel that this mixture creates confusion, but others believe it enriches the poem. Pagan mythology serves as poetic decoration, while Christianity ~~po~~ provides the final spiritual consolation.

Towards the end of the poem, grief is replaced by calm acceptance and hope. Milton affirms that Lycidas is not truly dead but lives eternally in heaven. He is compared to the rising morning star, symbolizing resurrection and divine

glory. The poem ends with the poet-shepherd rising and moving forward, suggesting spiritual renewal and acceptance of God's will.

In conclusion, Lycidas is not merely an elegy for a dead friend but a profound and complex poem that deals with universal themes of life, death, faith, and duty. Though it was criticized by early critics for its artificiality and irregular structure, modern readers recognize it as a masterpiece. Milton's intellectual depth, moral seriousness, and lyrical beauty make Lycidas one of the finest elegies in English literature.