

B.A. Hon (Engg) Part I On Line class by Dr. J.N. Singh
Lycidas as a Pastoral elegy

Lycidas is a fine poetic composition by John Milton, the greatest non-dramatic poet in English literature. A pastoral elegy is a poem of lamentation for someone near and dear to the poet. ~~poet~~ The main characters are represented by shepherds against the pastoral background. Here John Milton laments the death of his dear friend King Edward by presenting him as a shepherd named Lycidas. The poet presents himself also as a shepherd.

Before going to evaluate Lycidas as a pastoral elegy, it is essential to take into the account the conventions of the pastoral ~~elegy~~ poetry. The pastoral poetry as a literary form began in the third century B.C. - The Eclogues of the Greek poet Theocritus is regarded as the first known pastoral poem. In this poem, Theocritus write of the life of the Sicilian shepherds - He was later on followed by other Greek poets like Bion and Moschus Moschus along with and the Latin poet Virgil who lived from 70 to 19 B.C. The shepherd's life is in obvious contrast to that of the warrior, who enjoyed popularity in the primitive societies.

Now the question arises again: - Why is Shepherd liked and loved by the poets & inspiring them to write pastoral poems? It is so because the Shepherd lives a peaceful life close to Nature. Again, he has sufficient time for songs or other amusements. The Shepherd need not much skills or strength to look after his sheep. Even the young or children may very well take care of the sheep. The pastoral poetry, therefore, became a picture of carefree youth, love, and friendship and song.

Gradually, pastoral convention began to make the shepherds represent, not only poets and scholars, but prelates also. This grew out of the Gospel metaphor of the good shepherd for Christ. In this way, pastoral verse came to be used for satirizing bad priests and corruption in the Church. Lycidas follows ~~the~~ Petrarch and the Latin poets of the Renaissance.

It is within the region of pastoral tradition of poetry that the pastoral elegy had become a distinct form. The lament for a dead ~~shepherd~~ shepherd became a common feature of the pastoral elegy. For example, Virgil's elegy, laments the death of a fellow poet, his friend Gallus.

So far as Lycidas as an elegy is concerned, it has a number of pastoral elements in it. The central character of the poem is Edward King who has been presented here as Lycidas, a shepherd who has died.

and it is ~~the~~ death being lamented
by the poet in this poem. Lycidas
is the name of a shepherd used in
Theocritus (Idyll VIII), in Bion
(Idyll II) and in Virgil
(Eclogue IX). By making
'Lycidas' the title of the poem,
Milton seems to suggest that
he wanted to express his
grief not in the direct,
straightforward manner,
but in the conventional
style of pastoral poetry.
