

# A close study of john milton's literary device



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Literary devices are the different structures in which writers use to give a distinctive interpretation of their work. In lines 1-24 of the poem, " Lycidas" (1637), John Milton continuously utilizes literary devices in order to emphasize pathos - which in rhetoric, is an appeal to emotion. The literary devices Milton uses includes: imagery, allusion, metaphors, and diction. By adding these literary devices, the audience is able to sense the sentiments behind the words of the speaker.

" Lycidas" commences with the use of imagery in order to appeal to the speaker's sentimentalities. In lines 1-5, Milton writes:

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.

The Oxford English Dictionary defines " pluck" as " a sudden, sharp pull... a tug, jerk, or snatch." In these lines, Milton uses the image of the speaker picking berries from flowers in a harshly manner. Although the speaker does not yet express the reason for his emotions, the act of " plucking" the berries implies some aggression which suggests that he is angry or upset about something. Another element that adds on to this imagery is apostrophe.

Within these same lines, the speaker uses the word " your": " I com to pluck your berries" (3), " shatter your leaves before the mellowing year" (5). By

personalizing the inanimate objects, it gives a sense that the speaker is so affected by a particular event that he feels the need to hurt another being. The use of imagery in these lines successfully allows the readers to understand how the speaker feels without even having to explain why it is he is feeling that way.

In the subsequent lines, Milton writes, " Who would not sing for Lycidas? he knew/Himself to sing, and build the lofty rhyme" (10-11). The verb " to sing" in these lines is a metaphor for writing poetry, which is hinted when Milton mentions " lofty rhyme". In this portion of the passage, the speaker decides that he want to write a poem for King in reminiscent of his previous works. Singing is a very powerful way of expression, especially in religion. During mass in a Catholic church, the choir sings their praises to the Lord. The act of singing is also known to come from angels; when Jesus was born, angels were present and they were singing a hymn to express their happiness. When Milton uses this metaphor, it appeals to emotion by emphasizing that he wants to give back to his friend by acknowledging how great he was. In addition to singing being a powerful action, the speaker also mentions that King's rhymes were " lofty". According to the Oxford English Dictionary, the word " lofty" means " extending to a great height...." By describing King's poems as lofty, the speaker underlines the grandness of his works.

To further accentuate the greatness of Edward King, the speaker of the poem also adds: " He must not flote upon his watry bear/Unwept, and welter to the parching wind,/Without the meed of som melodious tear" (12-14). In these lines, the speaker proposes that King deserves to be mourned and that he deserves to be sung about - or in other words, written about. Knowing

that the speaker looks up to King insinuates that he was a good person, which then adds on to pathos because it gives the audience more of a reason to sympathize for the speaker's loss. Milton uses the phrase "melodious tear" in line 14 to describe the poem that should be made for King. The diction he uses in this line gives the term more beauty, recommending that the poem written for King should consist of beauty rather than being plain.

In the succeeding line, the speaker says, "Begin then, Sisters" (15). When the speaker addresses the "Sisters", he is referring to the muses who are able to help him find inspiration (OED) for the poem he is in the midst of writing. Wanting the help of the muses contributes to the pathos of the speaker because it shows that he wants his poem for his friend to be very good. He wants the help of the muses so that he can make the best poem he can for his friend who is now deceased. This also adds on to the speaker wanting the poem for King to be more than ordinary.

Finally, the passage closes with the lines 23 and 24 which state, "For we were nurst upon the self-same hill/Fed the same flock, by fountain, shade, and rill." In these lines, the speaker expresses that him and King had grown up together and have known each other for a very long time. Adding this fragment enhances the emotional aspects of this poem because we realize that the two characters had a very close bond, thus contributing to the pain that the speaker is going through now that his friend is gone. We know, from these lines, that the speaker and King were close especially because of the use of the word "same": "...upon the self-same hill" (23), "fed the same flock..." (24). The reason why knowing that the speaker and King were close

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adds on to the pathos of this poem is because it is confirmed that the reader had some sort of emotional attachment to the deceased. Had we known that the reader had no connection to King whatsoever, his death would probably not have been as sad.

In conclusion, John Milton carefully chooses the words within his poem "Lycidas" to really highlight the emotion that is felt after Edward King dies. He also carefully chooses the diction in order to explain to the audience why Lycidas (Edward King)'s death affected the speaker. Milton successfully achieves pathos by employing literary devices such as imagery, allusion, metaphors, and diction.