

Octave (lines 1-8):  
Questions how he can serve God by writing poetry if he is blind.

Tone in octave is questioning, peevish, annoyed, self-pitied and self-centred.

Paradox (lines 1-2): He spends his days ("light") writing poetry but now, before half his life is over, his light (eyesight) is "spent".

Before my life is through.

Extended metaphor (lines 3-5): God is compared to the lord, while the speaker is the 3<sup>rd</sup> servant who has buried the money.

Capital letter shows that he Personifies his virtue of courage & wisdom.

Oxymoron: God controls His followers with kindness. Allusion: New Testament: Jesus says that his followers will have a yoke put around their neck, as oxen as symbol of obedience.

Sestet (lines 9-14): Patience answers his question; reminds him that God doesn't need anything from mankind – He is sufficient unto himself.

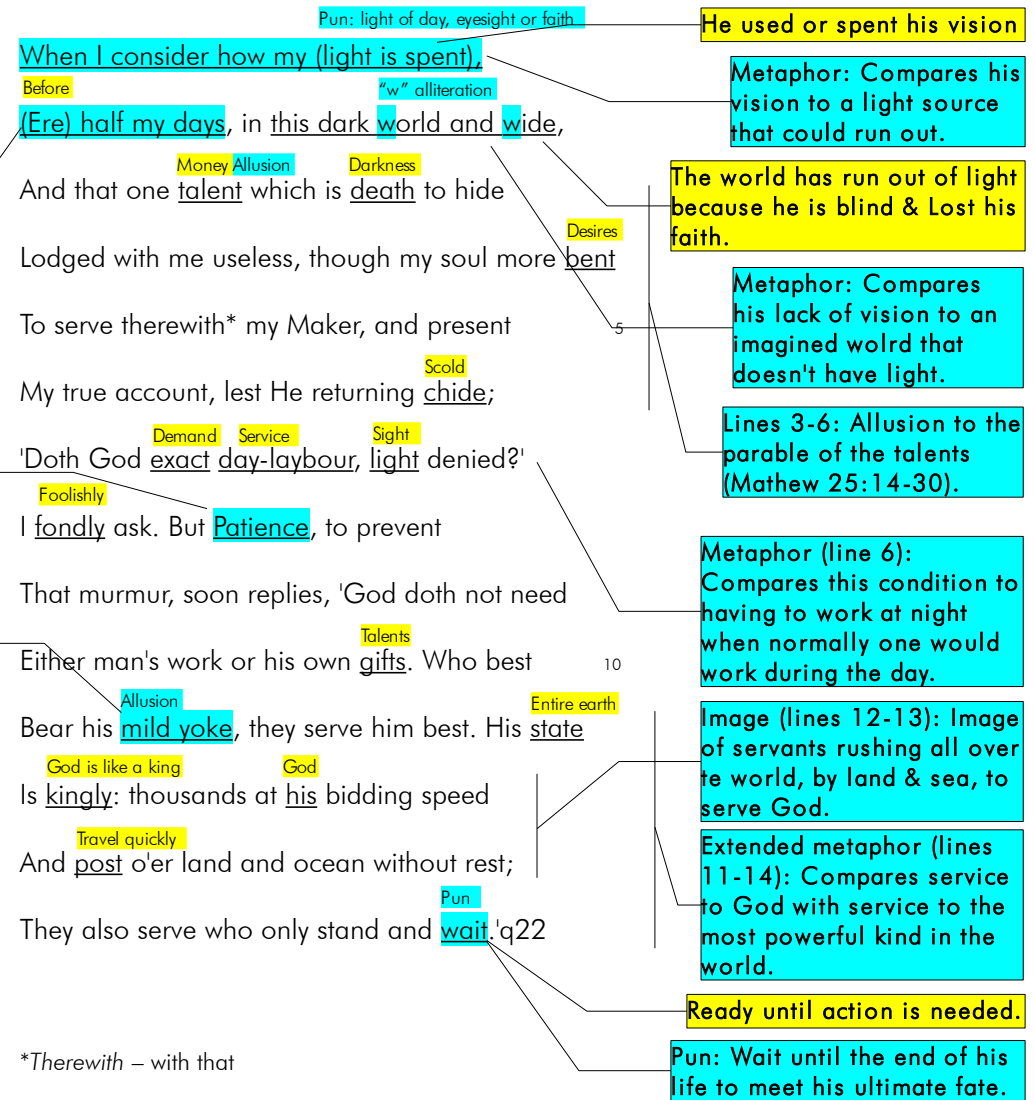
Tone shifts dramatically in sestet to acceptance & resignation (giving up) to his plight.

Petrarchan sonnet: 14 lines

Autobiographical: represents the poet's life experiences – Milton began to lose his sight in 1644, & by 1652 he was completely blind.

## On His Blindness

John Milton (1608-1674)



**Allusion:** Reference to a statement, person, place, event or thing that is known from literature, history, religion, mythology, politics, sports, science, or popular culture.

**Enjambment:** The running on of the thought from one line, couplet, or stanza to the next without a syntactical break/punctuated pause.

**Oxymoron:** A poetic arrangement of words to create a paradoxical expression/contradiction, which combine two opposite terms. Example: a pointless point of view; bittersweet.

**Paradox:** a contradiction in terms; words with an implication that is opposite to their meaning.

**Pun:** a play on words that may sound the same but be very different in meaning.

**Extended metaphor:** A comparison between two unlike things that are introduced in the beginning of a poem and continues throughout a series of sentences in a paragraph or lines in a poem.

### What is the poem about?

#### What is the subject of the poem?

🍏 Autobiographical: represents the poet's life experiences – John Milton was a Puritan (a strict English Calvinist) who recognised that he had an amazing ability to write poetry. When he developed glaucoma by about 1650 and went blind while his poetic ability had still not been fully explored, he worried that God would hold it against him and punish him for not using his poetic talent.

#### Who is speaking?

🍏 1<sup>st</sup> person narrator: a blind man.

#### What is the location/setting of the poem?

🍏 The setting of the poem is in darkness, because the man is blind.

### Themes and messages of the poem:

🍏 Inner conflict – This poem shows the inner conflict of a blind man who had wished to do his best to serve God by his writings, but he couldn't do this because he became blind. He believed that he cannot serve God, write poetry anymore, because he was blind.

🍏 The spiritual light/Faith in God - "Light" is important to the poet, not only for his sight but also for his inner light/faith in God. Although he lost the light of his eyes, he is still alive with his inner light/faith in God that supported him and gave him power. He learned that everyone, even those with flaws, or who cannot see, have a purpose in life and can serve God.

### Attitudes and feelings in the poem:

#### Tone of the poem:

🍏 **Octave:** questioning, peevisish, annoyed, self-pitied and self-centred as he wonders how he can be expected to serve God if God removes his ability to do so.

🍏 **Sestet:** acceptance and resignation (giving up) to his plight.

The poem ends in an optimistic tone; he realises that he too has a role to play and he too can serve God, even if it is in a less obvious and active way than he did before.

### Form and structure of the poem (rhyme, rhythm, line length, stanza length, etc.):

🍏 Typically Petrarchan **rhyme scheme:** abba; abba; cde; cde

🍏 14 lines divided into an octave and sestet ending with a couplet.

🍏 Autobiographical: represents the poet's life experiences.

🍏 **Octave:** The poet uses the 1<sup>st</sup> person pronoun no less than eight times.

The poet is thinking about himself.

🍏 **Sestet:** The poet is thinking of God.

**Type of poem:**

🍏 Petrarchan sonnet: 14 lines divided into an octave and sestet ending with a couplet.

**Poetic devices (e.g. metaphors, similes, enjambment, alliteration, personification, etc.):**

🍏 Explained in the poem above.

**Personal response to the poem (how do I feel, what impact does the poem have on me):**

🍏 YOUR PERSONAL RESPONSE!

**Lines 3-6: Allusion to the parable of the talents (Mathew 25:15-30):**

🍏 The master of three servants goes away on a journey and gives them each some money (called talents) and tells them to use the money wisely. On his return he rewards the first two servants who have put their coins to good use and doubled their money. The third servant buries his talent and presents the master with this one talent on his return. His master punishes him for laziness and casts him out into the darkness.

**Reference to "talent":**

🍏 Refers to Christ's parable. In the parable the word "talent" means coin, but the word takes a more modern meaning in this poem, of gifts or special abilities we are blessed with.

🍏 Milton has been given a gift/talent for writing poetry, just as the servants were given coins.

🍏 If Milton "hides" or buries his gift, as the third servant buried his coin, it would be equivalent to his spiritual death in that he would be unable to serve God. He feels he will be called to account for his failure to use of his gift.

**Milton and his "talent":**

🍏 Milton compares himself to with this servant – his own talent/gift to write poetry – is "lodged" him "useless" as he is blind and cannot write, even though he is "more bent", more determined than ever to serve God with his talent. He wishes to present a good "account" to god to show that he used his gifts wisely and to the glory of God, in order to avoid being chided (scolded) and cast into the darkness.

**What does Milton mean when he says, "in this dark world and wide"?**

- The world has run out of light because he is blind and he lost his faith in God.
- He is also referring to the world around him which was "dark" and "wild" (the word "wide" meant "wild" in Milton's day) - meaning evil.