

Sonnet 22
John Milton (1655-56)

Cyriack, this three years day these eys, though clear
To outward view, of blemish or of spot;
Bereft of light, thir seeing have forgot,
Nor to thir idle orbs doth sight appear
Of Sun or Moon or Starre throughout the year, [5]
Or man or woman. Yet I argue not
Against heavns hand or will, nor bate a jot
Of heart or hope; but still bear up and steer
Right onward. What supports me, dost thou ask?
The conscience, Friend, to have lost them overply'd [10]
In libertyes defence, my noble task,
Of which all *Europe* talks from side to side.
This thought might lead me through the worlds vain mask
Content though blind, had I no better guide.

Notes

Introduction. This second sonnet addressed to Milton's one-time student, Cyriack Skinner, considers once again the poet's blindness. (Other poetic references to Milton's blindness include Sonnet 19, Sonnet 23 and *Paradise Lost* 3.22-36.) Barbara Lewalski says that this poem, "like those [addressed] to Fairfax, Cromwell, and Vane, was withheld from publication in 1673 because of Milton's reference to losing his vision in the service of liberty" (*The Life of John Milton*, 645 n. 50). It was published, along with sonnets 15, 16 and 17, in Edward Phillips's "Life of Milton," prefixed to *Letters of State* in 1694 as "To Mr. CYRIAC SKINNER: Upon his Blindness" on page xlvi. The text here follows that of the Trinity Manuscript. The poem was probably composed in 1655 or early 1656, as Milton became totally blind in February or March 1652.

Cyriack. Cyriack Skinner was the grandson of Sir Edward Coke, who served as Chief Justice of Common Pleas and the King's Bench from 1613-16 and authored the famous *The Institutes of the Law of England*. He served Milton as a reader and amanuensis.

sight appear. Milton also mourns his loss of sight in *Paradise Lost* 3.22-55.

overply'd. Overworked.