

# THE POET AND APOLLO

*H. P.*

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“O, master of the golden lyre,<sup>1</sup>  
Dread twanger of the golden bow,  
I call upon thee, mighty sire,  
Old, outcast, blind, and full of woe.

“I have poured out my soul like rain  
Upon the dry and withered earth;  
And what has been my luckless gain?  
A wrinkled heart and honor’s dearth.

“All earthly things have I explored,  
Sounded the deeps of love and hate,  
And often hath my spirit soared  
High o’er the dark abyss of fate.

“Now therefore grant me what I seek,  
Some gift that none with me may share,  
A larger vision than these weak  
Unaided eyes could ever dare.”

So prayed a poet once of old,  
A poet wise, without a peer,<sup>2</sup>  
By long-pent agony made bold  
To seek his father’s pitying ear.

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<sup>1</sup> Apollo was the son of Zeus and Leto and was the god of music and poetry, typically depicted as playing a golden lyre. He was also known as the Archer with a silver bow (“Apollo”).

<sup>2</sup> A poet without a peer is a phrase to denote a poet who has no rivals, who is superior in talent to others.

Apollo heard, and sadly smiled,  
Then, murmuring scarce above his breath,  
“Bear thou,” he sighed, “unto my child  
My last and greatest gift, oh Death.”



## EDITOR'S NOTE

This poem focuses on a poet who prays to Apollo, seeking ability in his poetry that would elevate his skills to the next level, but is answered with death from the god of poetry. In seeking this higher level that “none with [him] may share,” (14) he is possibly trying to master ekphrasis, the utilization of words to describe a visual piece of art (“Ekphrasis”). He prayed for “A larger vision than these weak / Unaided eyes could ever dare,” (15-6). He sought an ability that he did not have in order to become a better poet, which could lie in being able to use words in order to better describe the “earthly things” he has seen. Because he was “A poet wise, without a peer,” (18) he already reached a level of superiority in comparison to other poets. The next level of achievement he yearned for could be through mastering the skill of using words to describe art.

In another aspect, what the poet wanted could be a more mortal desire. The ending of the poem leaves room for interpretation for the motives behind Apollo’s decision to give the poet death as what he sought. Because the poet already explored all earthly things, he wanted a gift that would be special to him and that no one else could have. H. P. could have held the belief that humans die alone, so giving the poet a gift that no one could share with him might have only been death. In the *Iliad*, Apollo is the healer under the gods (“Apollo”). Since he often functioned in this capacity, putting the poet out of his misery of seeking a higher ability with death might have been the best way to give him what he sought. Death could also be a way the poet would be able to gain even more superiority over his peers, being able to understand something out of their range of experience. In doing so, however, he would fail in being able to illustrate this knowledge and basic human fear through his poetry.

Many poets evoked Greek mythology to add another dimension to their poetry. “The ancient world must always possess an attraction for the scholar, the poet, and those minds that are enlightened by the elevating influence of a liberal education,” (H. P. R.). This attraction many poets found in the “ancient world” prompted them to include these aspects in their art: John Milton used numerous characters from classical mythology to “further Christianity: to teach a Christian moral or illustrate a Christian virtue,” (Osgood). In John Keats’ “Ode To A Nightingale,” he includes “Bacchus and his pards,” (32). H. P. focused this poem on a poet seeking something that no one else can have by praying to Apollo, utilizing this popular theme of Greek mythology. By including the god of poetry in this poem, H.P. shows the desperation of the poet by praying to the deity that has the upmost knowledge and power in this artistic field to enhance the poet’s skills.

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