

THE IMPORTANCE OF JOHN MILTON IN THE ENGLISH POETRY

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Abstract: John Milton was a very important English poet, author of the monumental Paradise Lost (1667), which was to have a major influence on literature in his country, and especially on the romantic poets. He was born in 1608 on Cheapside street in London. Born into a cultured religious bourgeois family, Milton is intended to take holy orders, but a trip to Italy after his mother's death together with reading the Italian poets Torquato Tasso (1544 - 1595) and Dante (1265 - 1321) would make him want to become a writer.

Key words: a major influence on literature, romantic poets, political and religious history, lyrical sonnets

After studying at Cambridge he decides against all odds to abandon the all-ready mapped out career in either the church or even at university in order to be able to dedicate himself to the art of writing. Some say today that already then Milton would have a sense he would leave the world the gift of his oeuvre. In any case, at this point he would retire instead to the family home, and would spend a lot of his time reading Greek and Latin classics, as well as studying political and religious history. It is then also he would start writing his first poems. Milton would also write a series of political pamphlets. Some would be against the church, both the Catholic and the Protestant, always as a fierce advocate of the freedom of worship. Others would for the freedom of the press and for the right to divorce. Introduction Milton is the author of dramas such as Samson Agonistes (1671) as well as lyrical sonnets, of which the finest were in fact inspired the the death of his second wife. Altogether John Milton would write twentythree sonnets. In a very real sense therefore these can be considered as exceptions. He uses such moments to express his thoughts and feelings on specific events, historical or personal. In his lifetime, moreover, he was mainly known for his political pamphlets. As a poet during the age of Shakespeare, he was born less than a decade after the death of this one. Milton might have been less appealing than such a master of the English language but he was nonetheless destined to become one of the best writers England would ever know. Having sided with the parliamentarians against the monarchists, Milton would begin a political career with responsibilities comparable to that today of an undersecretary of state for foreign affairs.

However, the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 will mean that he is both fined and imprisoned in the famous still standing today Tower of London. Eventually pardoned, Milton would from then on lead a rather retired life devoted entirely to writing until his death in 1674. Paradise Lost was first published in 1667 even though it had been written almost 10 years before. Milton was actually getting blind by the time he started work on it. To help him with his writing he would get assistants, and most famously the English metaphysical poet Andrew Marvell (1621 - 1678). It would take some time, but his epic poem Paradise Lost would be critically received even abroad where, for instance, the famous French poet and critic Charles

Baudelaire (1821 - 1867) would praise it highly. A kind of theological treaty through poetry on the origin of man, the work gets its inspiration as much from the Bible for its content as from Virgil's (70 - 19 BC) twelve-book Latin epic poem Aeneid for its form. Originally published in ten parts, the book would be written in blank verses.

A second edition embellished with minor revisions would follow in 1674. Indeed, this time it would be reorganized in twelve parts in order to be reminiscent of Virgil's famous work. More specifically, the poem deals with the Christian view on the origin of man, and refer to the temptation of Adam and Eve by Satan as well as their eventual expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Paradise Lost tells the story of Lucifer, the fallen angel, who has just been defeated by the armies of God. With his army Lucifer is preparing to resume attacks against heaven when he hears of a prophecy. That a new species of creatures is about to be created by heaven. He then decides to go alone on an expedition to heaven and finds the new world. After having easily fooled an angel by changing his appearance he gets into heaven and finds Adam and Eve. God finds out about this but since he created man free, he decides to do nothing. His son, however, finds this rather cruel and begs his father to take upon himself the sins of men, to which God essentially agrees. After doubting a little Satan puts together a plan in order to undermine both God and man. Indeed, having learned that God forbade humans to eat the fruit of the tree of knowledge he tries to get into Eve's dream and tempt her but unintentionally will also awaken Adam who will hunt him away.

In 1670 he would publish his controversial *The History of Britain*, and in 1671 *Paradise Regained*, dealing with the temptation of Christ. Milton would die in London on November 8 1674. The same year would appear the second edition of *Paradise Lost*. Importance in English Poet While Milton's impact as a prose writer was profound, of equal or greater importance is his poetry. He referred to his prose works as the achievements of his "left hand." In 1645 he published his first volume of poetry, *Poems of Mr. John Milton*, Both English and Latin, much of which was written before he was twenty years old. The volume manifests a rising poet, one who has planned his emergence and projected his development in numerous ways: mastery of ancient and modern languages Greek, Latin, Hebrew, Italian; awareness of various traditions in literature; and avowed inclination toward the vocation of poet. The poems in the 1645 edition run the gamut of various genres: psalm paraphrase, sonnet, canzone, masque, pastoral elegy, verse letter, English ode, epigram, obituary poem, companion poem, and occasional verse. Ranging from religious to political in subject matter, serious to mockserious in tone, and traditional to innovative in the use of verse forms, the poems in this volume disclose a self-conscious author whose maturation is undertaken with certain models in mind, notably Virgil from classical antiquity and Edmund Spenser in the English Renaissance. Like the illustrious literary forebears with whom he invites comparison, Milton used his poetry to address issues of religion and politics, the central concerns also of his prose. Placing him in a line of poets whose art was an outlet for their public voice and using, like them, the pastoral poem to present an outlook on politics, Milton aimed to promote an enlightened commonwealth, not unlike the polis of Greek antiquity or the cultured city-states in Renaissance Italy. When one considers that the 1645 volume was published when Milton was approximately thirty-seven years old, though some of the poems were written as early as his fifteenth year, it is evident that he sought to draw attention to his unfolding poetic career despite its interruption by governmental service.

Perhaps he also sought to highlight the relationship of his poetry to his prose and to call attention to his aspiration, evident in several works in the 1645 volume, to become an epic poet.

Thus, the poems in the volume were composed in Stuart England but published after the onset of the English Civil War. Furthermore, Milton may have begun to compose one or more of his mature works *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Samson Agonistes* in the 1640s, but they were completed and revised much later and not published until after the Restoration. This literary genius whose fame and influence are second to none, and on whose life and works more commentary is written than on any author except Shakespeare, was born at 6:30 in the morning on 9 December 1608. His parents were John Milton, Sr., and Sara Jeffrey Milton, and the place of birth was the family home, marked with the sign of the spread eagle, on Bread Street, London. Three days later, at the parish church of All Hallows, also on Bread Street, he was baptized into the Protestant faith of the Church of England. Other children of John and Sara who survived infancy included Anne, their oldest child, and Christopher, seven years younger than John. At least three others died shortly after birth, in infancy or in early childhood. Edward Phillips, Anne's son by her first husband, was tutored by Milton and later wrote a biography of his renowned uncle, which was published in Milton's *Letters of State* (1694).

Conclusion. JOHN MILTON, by common consent of critical opinion, holds a place among the first three great English poets. This is not to say that there are not a dozen, or even twenty, writers in the succession of English poetry who at times in individual quality touch a height equal to Milton's own. The word "great" is one that is commonly used about poets, often too easily, and generally, I suppose, with a difference. What is meant at the moment is that Milton stands pre-eminently for a very important kind of achievement in poetry, and, so far as can be seen in perspective up to our own day, there are hardly more than two other poets of whom the same thing can so definitely be said. There were many poets among the Elizabethans who in their best moments had as clearly the stuff of poetry in them as Shakespeare himself, but in breadth and consistency of performance Shakespeare transcends them all. It may be said that there is nothing which they did that he did not do as well and generally better. He was the chief and crowning glory of a vast range of poetic activity, practiced by many men of great endowments, and, profiting as he did by their efforts and example, he brought the whole movement to its most perfect expression. So that, both by his personal quality and the actual volume of his work, it is of Shakespeare that we think instinctively as the great poet of his time.

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