

## John Milton - A poet

John Milton was the greatest poet of the Puritan Age. He brought a <sup>new</sup> force into literature by adding to the Renaissance culture, ~~and~~ love of beauty and the tremendous moral earnestness of the Puritan. After Shakespeare, the greatness and splendour of English poetry began to fade, but Milton restored this quality to English poetry. Milton was essentially a Puritan poet. He possessed a tremendous moral fervour. From early youth, he felt that he had a great purpose to accomplish; a noble mission to fulfil. He wanted to write poetry in the service of God; he wanted to serve his Maker with his inborn gift of poetry, as he tells us in the Sonnet 'On His Blindness'. Even his early poetry, which is dominantly lyrical, shows his puritanical tendencies. 'Comus' contains an unmistakable moral purpose. The ode 'On the Morning of Christ's Nativity' is a puritan's tribute to Lord Christ. Similarly, there is a lofty moral purpose in 'Lycidas'.

Milton possessed a keen, though restrained sense of beauty. Milton's devotion to form and coherence separates him from the great Romantics, and gives to the beauty of his verse a delicacy and gravity of its own. Like Ben Jonson



he favoured the classical conventions rather than the happy-go-lucky methods of Romanticism but, unlike Jonson, he never allowed the scholarship to chill his creative imagination.

Nowhere is this quality of beauty better displayed than in the early poems in 'L'Allegro', 'Il Penseroso', 'Comus' and 'Lycidus'.

Milton wrote a number of Sonnets on various subjects in which he seldom treats of love which was the usual subject of Sonnet-writers before him. His Sonnets deal with patriotism, duty, music and the subjects of Political interests. He also wrote a few personal sonnets of which the best-known are 'On His Twenty-third Birthday' and 'On His Blindness'. His Sonnets are simple but majestic records of the feelings of the poet. Historically, they are of great importance because they mark that return from the true English form of the sonnet to the Petrarchan model.

Milton's Paradise Lost is the greatest epic in English Literature. Indeed, with its sublime imagery, its harmonious verse, its Titanic background of heaven, hell and the limitless void that lies between, is unsurpassed in any literature. It is a colossal epic, not of a man or a hero, but of the



whole race of man. The splendours of heaven, the horrors of hell, the serene beauty of Paradise and the sun and planets suspended between celestial light and gross darkness are described with an imaginative fervour. Adam and Eve commit the folly of partaking of the forbidden fruit and consequently expelled from the Garden of Eden. This is the primary theme of ~~The~~ Paradise Lost and is stated in the very opening lines of Book I:

"Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
Of that forbidden tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought death into the world, and all our woe,  
With loss of Eden, till one greater Man  
Restore us, . . . . ."

Close by this theme of Man's Fall lies the secondary theme of Paradise Lost which seeks to

" . . . . . assert eternal providence,  
And justify the ways of God to men."

In this epic, Milton describes the range of God's grace, and vindicates the infallibility of His wisdom. Like a true Puritan, Milton justifies God's dealings with men and Devils.

Milton's language and versification have high merits. His style is full of majesty. His blank-verse is harmonious

and diversified. His poetry is so packed with learned allusions and scholarly references, and he uses so many Latinisms, that the average reader can hardly understand him. Milton's style stands at an opposite pole from that of Shakespeare and his contemporaries. Milton has often been criticised for his frequent use of Latinate words and idioms, and sometimes, he has been accused of lacking a true ear for the movement and rhythm of natural English.

The end

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