



John Milton (1608-1674) was an English scholar and writer best-known today for his epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, and his strong views on free speech.

Milton, who lived during England's Civil War, really wanted the Parliamentarians to defeat the Royalists. When that actually happened, he was sure better government would follow.

Milton was disappointed, however, when his country restored its monarchy after Oliver Cromwell died. To Milton—now a blind man in his fifties—the restoration was like the loss of paradise.

When Charles II became king, during the Restoration, he was still angry with the people who were largely responsible for the beheading of his father, Charles I. Although John Milton was not involved with the King's beheading, he had written pamphlets supporting the Parliamentarians. For that, he served time behind bars.

Milton might have lost his own head had it not been for the actions of some friends—such as Andrew Marvell—who intervened on his behalf. As a result, Milton was pardoned.

After his pardon, Milton published his most-famous work, “Paradise Lost.” Viewing himself as one of Western literature's greatest poets—alongside writers like Dante, Virgil and Homer—Milton tells a tale not of military glory but of spiritual heroism.

His story resonates, even now, because we still care about his topics. For example:

- Is life fair?
- Is the world filled with justice or injustice?
- Is the freedom to choose our own path important?
- Does fate determine how we live our lives?
- Is that fate predetermined?
- If it's predetermined, what is the point of making our own choices?
- Is the freedom to choose a gift or a curse?
- If we know the rules, and choose to break them, whose fault is that?
- Does resisting temptation make us virtuous?
- Can we be virtuous if there are no temptations for us to resist?

- Does obedience mean anything, to anyone, if there is no way to disobey?
- If our relationships are never tested, how could we ever know whether they are strong?

While Milton's use of 17th-century English may seem weird to us, his thoughts are deep and his ideas and questions are worth pondering ... even today.

In fact, some scholars consider *Paradise Lost* "one of the most influential texts of western literature." David Loewenstein tells us why that is so in *Milton: Paradise Lost*. Thanks to Cambridge University Press—and Google Books—some segments of Loewenstein's "student guide" are [available for online reading](#).

This image depicts Milton in his later years. Click on it for a better view.

Credits:

John Milton, as his image appeared in "Paradise Lost: A Poem in Twelve Books." Published in London; printed by Miles Flesher, from Richard Bently, at the Post-Office in Russell-Street, and Jacob Tonson at the Judge's-He.

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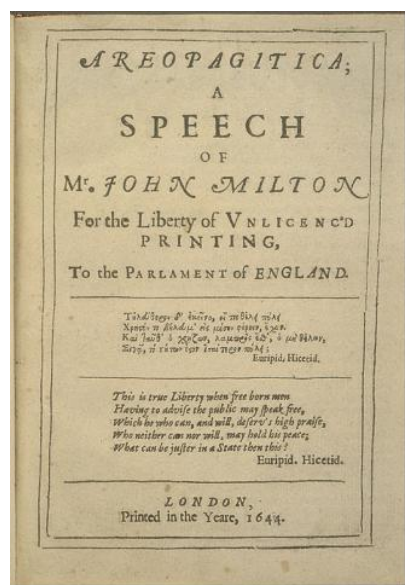
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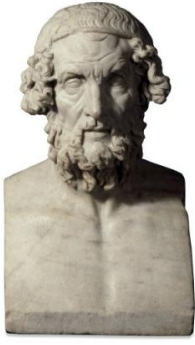
### Areopagitica - by John Milton

Image online, courtesy UK National Archives.

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### Homer - Ancient Poet

Image online, via the British Museum website.

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### English Civil War - Background

This video clip, from Dr. David Starkey's documentary on the British monarchy (*Monarchy with David Starkey*) helps us to understand what happened during England's Civil War. Copyright, BBC, all rights reserved. Online via BBC Worldwide Channel at YouTube. Clip provided here as fair use for educational purposes.

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