

# JOHN MILTON

## LIFE (1608 - 1674)

John Milton was born into a Puritan family. He studied at Christ's College Cambridge from 1625 to 1632. By 1639 Milton had been drawn into the religious and political controversies leading up to the Civil War. Over the next 20 years, Milton would win fame as a political propagandist and outspoken defender of republicanism and political freedom. In 1649 he was appointed Secretary of Foreign Tongues to the Council of State, a post in which he had to translate all official foreign correspondence.

By 1651, Milton had become virtually blind and the last fifteen years of his life were marked by public disgrace and private misfortunes. When the king was restored to the throne, Milton's works were burned in public and he himself went into hiding. He was imprisoned and only released after payment of a heavy fine, which left him impoverished.

These are the years of Milton's greatest poetic achievements. He devoted himself entirely to poetry and produced *Paradise Lost, Regained* and the long verse drama *Samson Agonistes*. He died in 1674.

## ACHIEVEMENT

Milton was a versatile poet and excellent in a variety of forms, from verse tragedy to lyrical poetry. As a lyric poet, Milton made a particularly significant contribution to the development of sonnet. Milton's sonnet celebrate moral heroes like the Puritan General Fairfax, or protest against religious persecution, as in *On The Late Massacre in Piedmont*, inspired by the massacre of the Waldenses, a protestant sect, by the Duke of Savoy in 1665.

## PARADISE LOST

Milton's *Paradise Lost* was considered extremely ambitious because Milton wanted to write an epic poem in English to match the classical epics of Homer and Virgil.

The central event is the Fall of Man, the Biblical story in which Satan in the guise of a serpent tempts Adam and Eve to eat the fruit of knowledge, for which they will be banished from Paradise. Satan does this out of envy for God's love of man and to revenge his defeat after his rebellion against God.