

## Milton and the Role of the Poet

John Milton believed that the poet was the recipient of divinely bestowed talents and abilities, and that he should use those gifts in order to “inbreed and cherish in a great people the seeds of virtue, and public civility, to all the perturbation of the mind.”<sup>1</sup> In other words, he saw the poet as a priest-like teacher, capable of using his craft to instill particular values and virtues in his readership. In posturing himself in this way, Milton was likely responding to contemporary poets who wrote “popular” poetry on more frivolous topics like courtship and love. Though Milton was not alone in this understanding of the social function of the poet, his figuration of the poet as a divinely inspired prophet (particularly evident in *Paradise Lost*) was novel and would in fact shape the way in which later poets—especially the Romantics—visualized themselves and their own contributions to society.

Milton also believed that, as a poet, he served as the mouthpiece for the entire nation of England. He frequently signed his works: “John Milton, Englishman,” underscoring his sense of national identity while positioning himself as the voice of the English population.

1. Milton, John. “The Second Book.” *The Reason of Church Government*.  
[http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading\\_room/reason/book\\_2/index.shtml](http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/reason/book_2/index.shtml)