

## Milton the Epic Poet

Early in his career, Milton boldly stated his intention to craft an epic poem that would rival those of Homer and Virgil, two of his biggest influences. You will learn about the conventions of epic poems in a later unit (see Unit 3.3), but you can visit Poet.org's definition<sup>1</sup> of the genre now if you prefer. Note that while Milton's *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are conversant with and emulative of a number of epic poetry conventions, they are also radical reconceptualizations of the genre. To begin with, rather than featuring the heroic warrior of the traditional epic as his protagonist, Milton chose a married couple (Adam and Eve). We will discuss this divergence in greater detail later in this course.

Milton believed that the epic poem was the noblest form of literature to which man could aspire, with drama coming in as a close second. While he thought highly of his shorter lyrical poetry (especially his elegies), he believed that epic poetry represented a higher calling and a greater use of his own skills. To a certain extent, he considered his dedication to epic poetry something of a vocation; in *Reason of Church Government*, he asserts that the epic poet should maintain a relatively sober, serious, and ascetic existence as he prepares to write about the noble topics of heaven, hell, and God. (Both *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained* are concerned with man's fall and expulsion from Eden and the aftermath of that traumatic sequence of events. You will read these masterpieces later in this course.)

1. <http://www.poets.org/viewmedia.php/prmMID/5779>