John Milton
Sonnets

John Milton (1608-1674) was perhaps the last Renaissance Man, having read almost all relevant literary and historical material from classical times to his own day—in their original languages. But he was a passionate believer in the Puritan cause during the English Civil War and became the Latin Secretary of the dictator Oliver Cromwell during the interregnum. Spared after the Restoration, he went on to write the last great English epic poems, *Paradise Lost* (1667) and *Paradise Regained* (1671), which, because he had gone blind, he composed in his head and dictated to his daughters to write down. He is considered the greatest English poet after Shakespeare. “On Shakespeare” was published in 1632, “On His Blindness” in 1655.

On Shakespeare

What needs my Shakespear for his honored Bones,
The labor of an age in piled Stones,
Or that his hallowed relics should be hid
Under a Star-ypointing Pyramid?
Dear son of memory, great heir of Fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thy self a live-long Monument.
For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavoring art,
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued Book,
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
Then thou, our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;
And so Sepulchered in such pomp dost lie,
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

On His Blindness

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest He returning chide,
'Doth God exact day-labor, light denied?'
I fondly ask. But Patience, to prevent
That murmur, soon replies, 'God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state
Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;
They also serve who only stand and wait.'