



# Milton in America

*Peter Ackroyd*

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## **Milton in America** Peter Ackroyd

When Peter Ackroyd, one of Britain's undisputed literary masters, writes a new novel, it is a literary event. With his last novel, *The Trial of Elizabeth Cree*, "as gripping and ingenious a murder mystery as you could hope to come across," in the words of the *San Francisco Chronicle*, he reached a whole new level of critical and popular success. Now, with his trademark blending of historical fact and fictive fancy, Ackroyd has placed the towering poet of *Paradise Lost* in the new Eden that is colonial America.

John Milton, aging, blind, fleeing the restoration of English monarchy and all the vain trappings that go with it ("misrule" in his estimation), comes to New England, where he is adopted by a community of fellow puritans as their leader. With his enormous powers of intellect, his command of language, and the awe the townspeople hold him in, Milton takes on absolute power. Insisting on strict and merciless application of puritan justice, he soon becomes, in his attempt at regaining paradise, as much a tyrant as the despots from whom he and his comrades have sought refuge, more brutal than the "savage" native Americans.

As always, Ackroyd has crafted a thoroughly enjoyable novel that entertains while raising provocative questions--this time about America's founding myths. With a resurgence of interest in the puritans (in the movie adaptations of *The Scarlet Letter* and the forthcoming *The Crucible*), *Milton in America* is particularly relevant. It is also entirely absorbing--in short, vintage Ackroyd.

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