

A Student Guide

Milton

Paradise Lost

David Loewenstein
Second Edition

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Milton

Paradise Lost

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MILTON

Paradise Lost

DAVID LOEWENSTEIN

Department of English, University of Wisconsin, Madison



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo

Cambridge University Press

The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK

Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521832120

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First published in print format 2004

ISBN-13 978-0-511-16250-3 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-10 0-511-16250-2 eBook (Adobe Reader)

ISBN-13 978-0-521-83212-0 hardback

ISBN-10 0-521-83212-8 hardback

ISBN-13 978-0-521-53979-1 paperback

ISBN-10 0-521-53979-X paperback

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For Stella Amadea

The world is all before you . . .

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Preface and note on abbreviations

Milton's friend and contemporary, the poet Andrew Marvell, was struck by the sheer audacity and boldness of *Paradise Lost*:

When I beheld the Poet blind, yet bold,
In slender Book his vast Design unfold,
Messiah Crown'd, God's Reconcil'd Decree,
Rebelling Angels, the Forbidden Tree
Heav'n, Hell, Earth, Chaos, All; the Argument
Held me a while misdoubting his Intent,
That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)
The sacred Truths to Fable and old Song.

These commendatory lines from Marvell's "On Mr. Milton's *Paradise Lost*" (1674) capture well the extraordinary cosmic scope of Milton's sublime poem and the ambition of its blind, prophetic author. This "Mighty Poet" would (as Marvell observes later) soar "above human flight" as he dares to give new imaginative expression to divine truth—even at the risk of sacrificing it to fable—in an epic poem fully rivalling its precursors, as well as the very Bible itself. A sensitive and astute reader of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Marvell recognized that it was a "landmark" of sorts, for no other poem in Milton's age had attempted to do so much by lifting, in the words of the archangel Raphael, "Human imagination to such highth / Of Godlike Power" (*PL* 6.300–1). The "vast Design" of *Paradise Lost* combined epic form and sacred themes to create a poetic composition entirely new. Along with Marvell, the reader of *Paradise Lost* today might well continue to respond to this most ambitious and perilous poetic enterprise with a sense of wonder, admiration, and apprehension: "At once delight and horror on us seize" – so Marvell later in the same poem sums up his response. In treating *Paradise Lost* as a "landmark" of world literature

and in attempting to define major aspects of this visionary poem for the non-specialist reader, I have tried to convey something of Milton's imaginative daring and creative originality, qualities immediately apparent to one of its most perceptive contemporary readers.

Quotations from Milton's poetry are taken from Merritt Y. Hughes's edition, *John Milton: Complete Poetry and Major Prose* (Indianapolis, 1957), while Milton's prose is cited from the Yale edition of *The Complete Prose Works of John Milton*, gen. ed. Don M. Wolfe, 8 vols. (New Haven, 1953–82). The Yale edition of the prose is cited in my text as YP, followed by the volume and page number. Biblical citations are from the Authorized (King James) Version.

Finally, I would like to thank those individuals who offered valuable critical advice as I was preparing this book: Katharina Brett, Thomas Corns, Robin Grey, Michael Silk, Peter Stern, Kevin Taylor, James G. Turner, and Andrew Weiner. I am saddened, however, that Peter Stern did not live to see its completion, since he was, in Miltonic terms, the begetter and prime cause of the series *Landmarks of World Literature*. I can only hope that this book measures up to the exacting standards he set as general editor.

For the new edition of this book, I have revised and updated the guide to further reading and made some minor corrections in the main text.

Chronology

	Milton's life and significant works	Historical and cultural events
1608	Born in Bread Street, Cheapside, London on December 9; his father was a scrivener, musician, and composer.	
1609		Shakespeare, <i>Sonnets</i> ; Jonson, <i>Epicoene</i> and <i>The Masque of Queens</i> . Clarendon born. Suckling born.
1610		Galileo reports on his telescopic observation of the heavens. Henry IV of France assassinated. Jonson, <i>The Alchemist</i> ; Shakespeare, <i>The Winter's Tale</i> (?).
1611		Shakespeare, <i>The Tempest</i> ; King James Bible; Donne, <i>The First Anniversary</i> .
1612		Death of Henry, prince of Wales. Donne, <i>The Second Anniversary</i> .
1613		Galileo, <i>Letters on Sunspots</i> . Crashaw born (c. 1613). La Rochefoucauld born.
1614		Raleigh, <i>The History of the World</i> ; Jonson, <i>Bartholomew Fair</i> , Webster, <i>The Duchess of Malfi</i> .
1616		Ben Jonson, <i>Works</i> ; James I, <i>Works</i> ; Chapman's <i>Whole Works of Homer</i> . Death of Shakespeare and Cervantes. (cont.)

(cont.)

	Milton's life and significant works	Historical and cultural events
1618		Bacon appointed Lord Chancellor; Raleigh executed. Thirty Years War starts (to 1648). Cowley and Lovelace born.
1619		Kepler, <i>De harmonice mundi</i> .
1620	Enters St. Paul's school, London, where he receives a humanist education.	Religious migration of the Pilgrim Fathers to the New World. Bacon, <i>Novum Organum</i> . John Evelyn born.
1621		Donne appointed Dean of St. Paul's. Bacon impeached. Burton, <i>Anatomy of Melancholy</i> . Marvell and Henry Vaughan born. La Fontaine born.
1622		Molière born.
1623		Shakespeare's First Folio. Pascal born. Death of William Byrd.
1624		George Fox, founder of the Quakers, born.
1625	Admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge (February 12).	Death of James I; accession of Charles I and marriage to Henrietta Maria of France.
1626		Death of Bacon.
1628		Buckingham assassinated. Harvey's work on the circulation of the blood published. Bunyan born.
1629	Takes BA degree. Composes ode <i>On the Morning of Christ's Nativity</i> .	Charles I dissolves Parliament, governing without it until 1640.

1630	Prince Charles (future Charles II) born. Great Migration to New England begins.	
1631	Death of Donne and Drayton. Dryden born.	
1632	Galileo, <i>Dialogue on the Two Principal World Systems</i> . Van Dyck settles in England. Wren, Locke, and Spinoza born.	
1633		William Laud becomes Archbishop of Canterbury. Herbert, <i>The Temple</i> ; Donne, <i>Poems</i> . Death of Herbert. Pepys born.
1634	Performance of <i>A Mask (Comus)</i> at Ludlow Castle, September 29.	Carew's masque <i>Cochlum Britannicum</i> .
1635	Residence at Horton, Buckinghamshire; continues private studies.	
1637	Writes <i>Lycidas</i> (published in 1638). <i>Comus</i> published.	Descartes, <i>Discourse on Method</i> . Corneille, <i>Le Cid</i> . Death of Jonson.
1638	Begins continental tour in April: meets important patrons, scholars, and intellectuals in France and Italy including Hugo Grotius (famous Dutch writer, theologian, and jurist) and Galileo.	
1639	Visits theologian John Diodati in Geneva; returns to England in July. Writes <i>Epitaphium Damonis</i> to commemorate the death of his friend Charles Diodati.	First Bishops' War against Scotland. Racine born.

(cont.)

(cont.)

	Milton's life and significant works	Historical and cultural events
1640	Begins tutoring nephews in London.	Short Parliament; Second Bishops' War; Long Parliament meets; Strafford and Laud impeached; censorship breaks down. Aphra Behn born. Death of Rubens.
1641	Begins pamphleteering against episcopacy: <i>Of Reformation, Of Prelatical Episcopacy, Animadversions</i> published.	Execution of Strafford; Irish Rebellion; Grand Remonstrance. Death of Van Dyck.
1642	<i>The Reason of Church-Government, An Apology for Smectymnuus</i> published. Marries Mary Powell (July?) of a Royalist family; she returns to her family (in August?). <i>The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce</i> published.	Outbreak of Civil War; Battle of Edgehill. Death of Galileo. Theaters closed. Newton born.
1643		The Westminster Assembly of Divines; Solemn League and Covenant. Louis XIV becomes king of France. Browne, <i>Religio Medici</i> . Battle of Marston Moor.
1644	<i>Of Education, The Judgement of Martin Bucer, Concerning Divorce</i> , and <i>Areopagitica</i> published.	Laud executed; the New Model Army formed; victory at Naseby.
1645	Mary Powell Milton returns. Final divorce tracts, <i>Tetrachordon</i> and <i>Colasterion</i> , published. <i>Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin</i> registered for publication (published January 1646).	