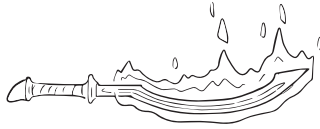


PARADISE LOST

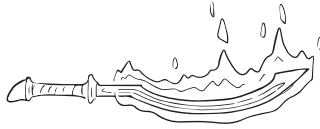
John Milton

With an Introduction by Grant Horner



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INTRODUCTION

“Henceforth I learne, that to obey is best”

~Adam, Book XII

John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* is widely considered one of the greatest artistic achievements in all of human history.

I would place it squarely in the constellation of what the British call ‘The Greats’ of literature, alongside Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil’s *Aeneid*, and Dante’s *Commedia*, and also on par with other great cultural artifacts such as Michelangelo’s Sistine Chapel ceiling and his incomparable marble David; the cathedrals of Milan and Chartres and Notre Dame de Paris and Florence and the Basilica of Saint Peter’s in Rome; and to Shakespeare’s greatest tragedies and comedies, the novels of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, Dickens and Eliot; Beethoven’s Ninth Symphony, Mozart’s two or three best operas; and the great tragedies of Sophocles, Euripides, and Aeschylus. It is massive, beautiful, terrifying. For that great eighteenth-century theorist of the Sublime, Edmund Burke, Milton’s epic was the ultimate literary example of the Sublime. Centuries before, the ancient Greek philosopher Longinus called such works of nature or art *that which transports us out of ourselves* with beauty, terror, and awe.

What many people may quite naturally think is the best marker of true artistic greatness is ‘universal acclamation’.

When everyone loves something, it must be excellent, right? I would counter that one of the surest evidences of a work's greatness is that *the work divides those who experience it*. It inspires very strong reactions, often of love or hate. Milton himself desires a "fit audience ... though few" (VII.31). I would argue that it is a serious error to call something great simply because everyone likes it. Readers have responded to the massive epic with everything from astonishment to confusion to pronouncements of intense boredom.

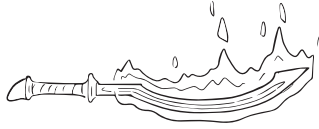
Because *Paradise Lost* does things to the reader. Very strange things.

I like to say to my students, "You don't read *Paradise Lost*—*Paradise Lost* reads you." In many ways, it is an indication not just of your learnedness, your aesthetic sensibilities, or your poetic imagination. It seems also to function as a test of one's spiritual discernment and sensitivity. It is no ordinary book—it stands alone, even as Milton intended (I.16).

Paradise Lost did not spring from nothing—Milton planned his greatest masterpiece from a very young age, and poured into it a long lifetime of learning. He may have been the most learned intellectual of the seventeenth century, and it shows everywhere in his poem. It is impossible not to be overwhelmed with Milton's intense classical knowledge, his theological richness, his poetic force, and his narrative power. This sense of being overwhelmed leads many readers to give up rather quickly—but this need not be the case.

This poem, simultaneously inviting and intimidating, combines epic poetry, lyrical sublimity, forceful rhetoric, deep theology, and transcendent questions, all while probing the most difficult queries put forth by the human spirit. It is utterly unique in the world of literary art, yet also deeply intertextual and marvelously connected to many works before and after it was first published in 1667.

Paradise Lost is an explicitly theological work of art. The poem and its author have all the signs of being Christian, and Reformed, and Puritan. It has been loved by believers

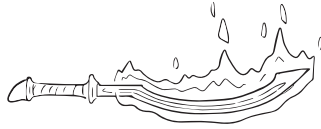


BOOK I

This first Book proposes, first in brief, the whole Subject, Mans disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was plac't: Then touches the prime cause of his fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the Serpent; who revolting from God, and drawing to his side many Legions of Angels, was by the command of God driven out of Heaven with all his Crew into the great Deep. Which action past over, the Poem hasts into the midst of things, presenting Satan with his Angels now fallen into Hell, describ'd here, not in the Center (for Heaven and Earth may be suppos'd as yet not made, certainly not yet accurst) but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest call'd Chaos: Here Satan with his Angels lying on the burning Lake, thunder-struck and astonisht, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in Order and Dignity lay by him; they confer of thir miserable fall. Satan awakens all his Legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; They rise, thir Numbers, array of Battle, their chief Leaders nam'd, according to the Idols known afterwards in Canaan and the Countries adjoining. To these Satan directs his Speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining Heaven, but tells them lastly of a new World and new kind of Creature to be created, according to an ancient Prophe-sie or report in Heaven; for that Angels were long before this visible Creation, was the opinion of many ancient Fathers. To find out the truth of this Prophe-sie, and what to determin thereon he refers to a full Council. What his Associates thence attempt. Pandemonium the

Palace of Satan rises, suddenly built out of the Deep: The infernal Peers there sit in Council.

Of Man's first disobedience, and the fruit
 Of that forbidden tree whose mortal taste
 Brought death into the World, and all our woe,
 With loss of Eden, till one greater Man
 Restore us, and regain the blissful seat, 5
 Sing, Heavenly Muse, that, on the secret top
 Of Oreb, or of Sinai, didst inspire
 That shepherd who first taught the chosen seed
 In the beginning how the heavens and earth
 Rose out of Chaos: or, if Sion hill 10
 Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
 Fast by the oracle of God, I thence
 Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,
 That with no middle flight intends to soar
 Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues 15
 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.
 And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer
 Before all temples th' upright heart and pure,
 Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first
 Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread, 20
 Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss,
 And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark
 Illumine, what is low raise and support;
 That, to the height of this great argument,
 I may assert Eternal Providence, 25
 And justify the ways of God to men.
 Say first for Heaven hides nothing from thy view,
 Nor the deep tract of Hell say first what cause
 Moved our grand parents, in that happy state,
 Favoured of Heaven so highly, to fall off 30
 From their Creator, and transgress his will
 For one restraint, lords of the World besides.
 Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?
 Th' infernal Serpent; he it was whose guile,
 Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived 35



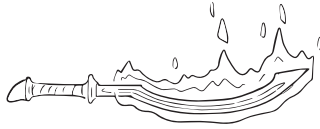
BOOK II

The Consultation begun, Satan debates whether another Battle be to be hazarded for the recovery of Heaven: some advise it, others dissuade: A third proposal is prefer'd, mention'd before by Satan, to search the truth of that Prophesie or Tradition in Heaven concerning another world, and another kind of creature equal or not much inferiour to themselves, about this time to be created: Their doubt who shall be sent on this difficult search: Satan thir chief undertakes alone the voyage, is honourd and applauded. The Council thus ended, the rest betake them several wayes and to several employments, as thir inclinations lead them, to entertain the time till Satan return. He passes on his journey to Hell Gates, finds them shut, and who sat there to guard them, by whom at length they are op'nd, and discover to him the great Gulf between Hell and Heaven; with what difficulty he passes through, directed by Chaos, the Power of that place, to the sight of this new World which he sought.

High on a throne of royal state, which far
Outshone the wealth or Ormus and of Ind,
Or where the gorgeous East with richest hand
Showers on her kings barbaric pearl and gold,
Satan exalted sat, by merit raised
To that bad eminence; and, from despair
Thus high uplifted beyond hope, aspires
Beyond thus high, insatiate to pursue
Vain war with Heaven; and, by success untaught,

5

His proud imaginations thus displayed: 10
 “Powers and Dominions, Deities of Heaven!
 For, since no deep within her gulf can hold
 Immortal vigour, though oppressed and fallen,
 I give not Heaven for lost: from this descent
 Celestial Virtues rising will appear 15
 More glorious and more dread than from no fall,
 And trust themselves to fear no second fate!
 Me though just right, and the fixed laws of Heaven,
 Did first create your leader next, free choice
 With what besides in council or in fight 20
 Hath been achieved of merit yet this loss,
 Thus far at least recovered, hath much more
 Established in a safe, unenvied throne,
 Yielded with full consent. The happier state
 In Heaven, which follows dignity, might draw 25
 Envy from each inferior; but who here
 Will envy whom the highest place exposes
 Foremost to stand against the Thunderer’s aim
 Your bulwark, and condemns to greatest share
 Of endless pain? Where there is, then, no good 30
 For which to strive, no strife can grow up there
 From faction: for none sure will claim in Hell
 Precedence; none whose portion is so small
 Of present pain that with ambitious mind
 Will covet more! With this advantage, then, 35
 To union, and firm faith, and firm accord,
 More than can be in Heaven, we now return
 To claim our just inheritance of old,
 Surer to prosper than prosperity
 Could have assured us; and by what best way, 40
 Whether of open war or covert guile,
 We now debate. Who can advise may speak.”
 He ceased; and next him Moloch, sceptred king,
 Stood up the strongest and the fiercest Spirit
 That fought in Heaven, now fiercer by despair. 45
 His trust was with th’ Eternal to be deemed
 Equal in strength, and rather than be less

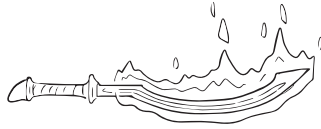


BOOK III

God sitting on his Throne sees Satan flying towards this world, then newly created; shews him to the Son who sat at his right hand; foretells the success of Satan in perverting mankind; clears his own Justice and Wisdom from all imputation, having created Man free and able enough to have withstood his Tempter; yet declares his purpose of grace towards him, in regard he fell not of his own malice, as did Satan, but by him seduc't. The Son of God renders praises to his Father for the manifestation of his gracious purpose towards Man; but God again declares, that Grace cannot be extended towards Man without the satisfaction of divine justice; Man hath offended the majesty of God by aspiring to God-head, and therefore with all his Progeny devoted to death must dye, unless some one can be found sufficient to answer for his offence, and undergo his Punishment. The Son of God freely offers himself a Ransome for Man: the Father accepts him, ordains his incarnation, pronounces his exaltation above all Names in Heaven and Earth; commands all the Angels to adore him; they obey, and hymning to thir Harps in full Quire, celebrate the Father and the Son. Mean while Satan alights upon the bare Convex of this Worlds outermost Orb; where wandering he first finds a place since call'd The Lybmo of Vanity; what persons and things fly up thither; thence comes to the Gate of Heaven, describ'd ascending by staires, and the waters above the Firmament that flow about it: His passage thence to the Orb of the Sun; he finds there Uriel the Regent of that Orb, but first changes himself into the shape of a meaner Angel; and pretending a zealous

desire to behold the new Creation and Man whom God had plac't here, inquires of him the place of his habitation, and is directed; alights first on Mount Niphates.

Hail, holy Light, offspring of Heaven firstborn,
 Or of the Eternal coeternal beam
 May I express thee unblam'd? since God is light,
 And never but in unapproach'd light
 Dwelt from eternity, dwelt then in thee 5
 Bright effluence of bright essence increate.
 Or hear'st thou rather pure ethereal stream,
 Whose fountain who shall tell? before the sun,
 Before the Heavens thou wert, and at the voice
 Of God, as with a mantle, didst invest 10
 The rising world of waters dark and deep,
 Won from the void and formless infinite.
 Thee I re-visit now with bolder wing,
 Escap'd the Stygian pool, though long detain'd
 In that obscure sojourn, while in my flight 15
 Through utter and through middle darkness borne,
 With other notes than to the Orphean lyre
 I sung of Chaos and eternal Night;
 Taught by the heavenly Muse to venture down
 The dark descent, and up to re-ascend, 20
 Though hard and rare: Thee I revisit safe,
 And feel thy sovran vital lamp; but thou
 Revisit'st not these eyes, that roll in vain
 To find thy piercing ray, and find no dawn;
 So thick a drop serene hath quench'd their orbs, 25
 Or dim suffusion veil'd. Yet not the more
 Cease I to wander, where the Muses haunt,
 Clear spring, or shady grove, or sunny hill,
 Smit with the love of sacred song; but chief
 Thee, Sion, and the flowery brooks beneath, 30
 That wash thy hallow'd feet, and warbling flow,
 Nightly I visit: nor sometimes forget
 So were I equall'd with them in renown,
 Thy sovran command, that Man should find grace;



BOOK IV

Satan now in prospect of Eden, and nigh the place where he must now attempt the bold enterprize which he undertook alone against God and Man, falls into many doubts with himself, and many passions, fear, envy, and despare; but at length confirms himself in evil, journeys on to Paradise, whose outward prospect and situation is describ'd, overleaps the bounds, sits in the shape of a Cormorant on the Tree of life, as highest in the Garden to look about him. The Garden describ'd; Satans first sight of Adam and Eve; his wonder at thir excellent form and happy state, but with resolution to work thir fall; overhears thir discourse, thence gathers that the Tree of knowledge was forbidden them to eat of, under penalty of death; and thereon intends to found his Temptation, by seducing them to transgress: then leaves them a while, to know further of thir state by some other means. Mean while Uriel descending on a Sun-beam warns Gabriel, who had in charge the Gate of Paradise, that some evil spirit had escap'd the Deep, and past at Noon by his Sphere in the shape of a good Angel down to Paradise, discovered after by his furious gestures in the Mount. Gabriel promises to find him ere morning. Night coming on, Adam and Eve discourse of going to thir rest: thir Bower describ'd; thir Evening worship. Gabriel drawing forth his Bands of Night-watch to walk the round of Paradise, appoints two strong Angels to Adams Bower, lest the evill spirit should be there doing some harm to Adam or Eve sleeping; there they find him at the ear of Eve, tempting her in a dream, and bring him, though unwilling, to Gabriel; by whom question'd, he

scornfully answers, prepares resistance, but hinder'd by a Sign from Heaven, flies out of Paradise.

O, for that warning voice, which he, who saw
 The Apocalypse, heard cry in Heaven aloud,
 Then when the Dragon, put to second rout,
 Came furious down to be revenged on men,
 Woe to the inhabitants on earth! that now, 5
 While time was, our first parents had been warned
 The coming of their secret foe, and 'scaped,
 Haply so 'scaped his mortal snare: For now
 Satan, now first inflamed with rage, came down,
 The tempter ere the accuser of mankind, 10
 To wreak on innocent frail Man his loss
 Of that first battle, and his flight to Hell:
 Yet, not rejoicing in his speed, though bold
 Far off and fearless, nor with cause to boast,
 Begins his dire attempt; which nigh the birth 15
 Now rolling boils in his tumultuous breast,
 And like a devilish engine back recoils
 Upon himself; horror and doubt distract
 His troubled thoughts, and from the bottom stir
 The Hell within him; for within him Hell 20
 He brings, and round about him, nor from Hell
 One step, no more than from himself, can fly
 By change of place: Now conscience wakes despair,
 That slumbered; wakes the bitter memory
 Of what he was, what is, and what must be 25
 Worse; of worse deeds worse sufferings must ensue.
 Sometimes towards Eden, which now in his view
 Lay pleasant, his grieved look he fixes sad;
 Sometimes towards Heaven, and the full-blazing sun,
 Which now sat high in his meridian tower: 30
 Then, much revolving, thus in sighs began.
 O thou, that, with surpassing glory crowned,
 Lookest from thy sole dominion like the God
 Of this new world; at whose sight all the stars
 Hide their diminished heads; to thee I call, 35