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The Annotated Milton

Complete English Poems



Edited and with Annotations Lexical, Syntactic,
Prosodic, and Referential by Burton Raffel

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BURTON RAFFEL

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The Fallen Angels entering Pandemonium from *Paradise Lost*, Book 1,
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J O H N M I L T O N

was born in London on December 9, 1608. A brilliant scholar, he received his B.A. and M.A. from Christ's College, Cambridge, and began writing poetry. Instead of entering the ministry, he retired to his father's country house and for the next five years read day and night, devouring most of the existing written works in English, Greek, Latin, and Italian. During this period he wrote the masque *Comus* (1634) and "Lycidas" (1637), an elegy memorializing a college classmate. In 1638 he went on a tour of Europe, spending most of his time in Italy. He returned home prematurely because of the religious unrest in England and began writing tracts that branded him a radical. In 1642 he married Mary Powell, a seventeen-year-old girl. Within six weeks, she returned to her parents' home, and Milton wrote a series of angry pamphlets advocating divorce on the grounds of incompatibility. Eventually, she returned and bore him four children, three of whom survived. By 1651 Milton's poor eyesight failed completely, leaving him blind. After his wife's death, he remarried, only to have his second wife die some months after childbirth. His third marriage, to Elizabeth Minshull, was a longer and happier one. At the Restoration, Milton narrowly escaped execution because of his politics, but was left impoverished. Now he returned to writing poetry and created the masterpieces for which he will be forever remembered, beginning with *Paradise Lost* (1667). He followed this epic with *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* (jointly published in 1671). Milton died in 1674. Along with Chaucer and Shakespeare, Milton is one of the true giants of our language.

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C H R O N O L O G Y

1608	Milton born, 9 December, in London
1618?–20?	tutored by Thomas Young
1615? 1620?–25	St. Paul's School
1625	begins at Cambridge University, enrolled in Christ's College
1629	March, B.A. degree
1632	March, M.A. degree
1632–38	residence at his father's house
1634	September, <i>Comus</i> performed at Ludlow
1637	3 April, death of Milton's mother
1638–39	European tour: France, Italy, Switzerland
1640	schoolteacher, in London
1641	<i>Of Reformation in England</i> <i>Of Prelatical Episcopacy</i> <i>Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's</i> <i>Defense</i>
1642	May/June, married Mary Powell <i>The Reason of Church-Government</i> <i>An Apology for Smectymnuus</i> October, Civil War begins
1643	<i>The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce</i> April, Milton's father comes to live with him
1644	<i>Of Education</i> <i>The Judgment of Martin Bucer Concerning</i> <i>Divorce</i> <i>Areopagitica</i> Milton's sight begins to fail
1645	<i>Tetrachordon</i> <i>Colasterion</i>

- 1646 *Poems*
29 July, daughter Anne born
- 1647 March, death of Milton's father
- 1648 25 October, daughter Mary born
- 1649 30 January, Charles I executed
The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates
March, appointed Secretary for Foreign
Tongues, Council of State
- 1650 left eye fails
- 1651 *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*
16 March, son John, born
- 1652 February/March, complete blindness
2 May, daughter Deborah born
May, Mary Powell Milton's death
16 June, death of son, John
- 1654 *Defensio Secunda*
- 1655 *Pro Se Defensio*
- 1656 November, married Katherine Woodcock
- 1657 19 October, daughter Katherine born
- 1658 February, death of Katherine Woodcock
Milton
17 March, death of daughter Katherine
3 September, Oliver Cromwell's death
- 1659 *A Treatise of Civil Power in Ecclesiastical Causes*
Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church
- 1660 *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*
May, Charles II restored to the throne
Milton arrested, released
- 1663 February, married Elizabeth Minshull
- 1665 resided at Chalfont St. Giles during
plague
- 1667 February, ten-book edition of *Paradise Lost*
- 1669 *Accidence Commenced Grammar*
- 1670 *History of Britain*
- 1671 *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes*
- 1672 *Joannis Miltoni Angli, Artis Logicae Plenior Institutio*

1673

Minor Poems (enlarged edition)
*Of True Religion, Heresy, Schism,
Toleration*

1674

Paradise Lost, twelve-book edition
8 November, Milton's death, in London

P R E F A C E

The first version of what would become this book was written into the pages of another editor's disservedly famous edition of Milton. Principally lexical and syntactic commentary, these early annotations stemmed directly from an extremely common quandary, namely, a teacher fundamentally (though by no means completely) dissatisfied with the textbook from which, for lack of anything better suited to *his* classroom, he goes on teaching. That sort of dissatisfaction can be lived with; it can finally be put to the side; or it can lead, as mine has, to a completely new book.

I teach Milton as an English poet, one of the very greatest, most influential, important, and deeply challenging the language has ever known. Although I firmly believe, like most scholars, that the more we know about any writer the more we can understand and also appreciate the resonating excellences and profundities of his or her work, I also believe that some of the things we can know are more useful than are others. Milton's English poetry seems to me so overwhelmingly primary to both appreciation and understanding of his place in English literature that his Latin poetry shrinks to tertiary significance, and his profusely vigorous prose to secondary significance. Accordingly, this edition of Milton contains none of the Latin (or the Italian) poems, either in the original language(s) or in translation. It contains none of Milton's prose.

The text of the English poems, however, is not only complete, but has been conservatively modernized and edited for maximum accessibility. Nothing has been done to interfere in any way whatever with the prosody of these poems. The vexing problem of syllabified versus unsyllabified vowels has been preempted by (1) the use of spelling to indicate each prosodically suppressed vowel (usually by means of an apostrophe, sometimes by such spellings as "shouldst" or "didst"), and (2) the addition of an ac-

cent mark each time a vowel is syllabified ("wingèd," "blessèd"). My prosodic markings are consistent throughout this book. When, therefore, a word such as "winged" is mono- rather than bisyllabic, I have added neither an apostrophe nor an accent mark; the reader can assume that any word without one of those marks does not in my judgment require one.

Rather too much has been made of Milton's spelling, much of which is conventional and, though appropriate to his time, without significance in ours. His punctuation is in general (though not universally) a reliable guide to verse movement. I have punctuated, and capitalized, as conservatively as possible. But I have not hesitated to interpret Milton's use of semicolons and colons as requiring, in our time, a sentence-ending period. Nor have I hesitated to add reader-friendly paragraphing.

I would have been happier had my annotations been able to be placed alongside the line they refer to. The economics of publishing makes this impossible. But since I do not believe that lexical annotations consisting only of a single word are truly satisfactory, I have often given three or four or even more words in each gloss. Placing all annotations at the bottom of the page does, therefore, have at least the advantage of clearly separating annotations one from the other.

Most of my lexical annotations are to words rather than to phrases, clauses, or sentences. As a teacher, I have found that students need to know what the components mean, just as much as they need to know the meaning of the finished product. Indeed, understanding syntax becomes a good deal easier when the components are clearly understood—and many of my annotations are syntactic as well as lexical. All syntactic material is placed in square brackets: [verb]. If, as is usually the case, annotations are both lexical *and* syntactic, the lexical portion always precedes the syntactic.

I have tried to annotate everything a student—any student, all students—might need to know. Not being able to predict on which page a student might first come upon material opaque to him or her, I have annotated repeatedly, tirelessly, and for some readers surely excessively. But I would much rather be safe than sorry.

Translations of the original (and it is striking how often Milton, though writing in a form of English, requires something very like translation) are always set in quotation marks. Render-

ings of anything more than a single word, however, are signaled first by a repetition of the words being annotated, and second by an equal sign placed immediately after that repetition:

evil store = an abundance of evil

those in servitude: servants

When the annotation is more commentary than rendering, the colon is replaced by an equal sign:

due time = in the time that, properly, it should take

When there are multiple meanings (and Milton is enormously fond of layered meaning, as also he is far fonder of wordplay, including puns, than his reputation would suggest) that are sufficiently distinct from one another, I have grouped them under numbered headings:

(1) perilous, rash, risky, (2) enterprising

Lexical glosses involving more than one word, but not involving semantic layering, simply employ commas:

common, ordinary, uneducated

The slash is used to indicate that one of the words or phrases in a multiword annotative definition has distinct alternative possibilities:

having no material being/body

care for/prediction of the future

Note that the slash places in the alternative *only* the word immediately before it. Thus the first example above should be understood as “having no material being or body,” and the second as “care for or prediction of the future.” One additional example may make this clearer:

not maternal/the mother of

This should be understood, accordingly, as “not maternal, not the mother of.”

Referential (informational) annotations use both the colon and, somewhat differently, the equal sign:

a Titan, daughter of Gaia (earth) by Zeus: goddess of justice

Horeb = Sinai, in Exodus and Deuteronomy

Nimrod (“hunter”): see Genesis 10:8–10

When I do not know with reasonable certainty what Milton is referring to or saying, I have said so, using a simple question mark:

not specified: the basic nature of the Godhead?

face (defiantly)? await?

Although commentary, in the usual scholarly meaning, has been almost completely avoided in these annotations, it has sometimes been unavoidable. I have kept it as brief as possible, and have usually introduced it by the signal “i.e.”:

i.e., the act of building, *not* the structure being built

The pronunciation of Greek names and, on occasion, of certain other words, often requires elucidation, which I have kept as minimal as possible:

Calliope [4 syllables, 2nd and 4th accented]

Hecate [trisyllabic], ghost-world goddess

One early reader commented that users of this book might sometimes find themselves dizzy, forced constantly to look up and down the page, from text to footnotes and back, on and on and on. Depending on the opacity of Milton’s vocabulary, the turgidity of his syntax, and the frequency and insistence of his allusions, these pages necessarily vary enormously in their density

of annotation. Lexically confident readers are advised to ignore as many of my annotations as they can. But it would be much appreciated if lexically well informed readers, and indeed anyone who finds any of the errors, omissions, and unclarities I have struggled to eliminate, would send me corrections.

I N T R O D U C T I O N

Understanding and appreciating John Milton—Milton, that is, as an English poet—depends less on a knowledge of Christian doctrine or the rise and then the decline and fall of Puritanism as a governing force in British life, less on a wide-ranging familiarity with classical poetry and medieval and Renaissance European scholarship (including but certainly not limited to alchemy, astronomy, and astrology), and less on an awareness of the intellectual currents of seventeenth-century Europe than on the ability to understand why poetry such as the following—*not* by Milton, but written nearly a hundred years before the publication of *Paradise Lost*—maintained a continuing and sometimes worshipful readership well into the twentieth century:

Lo I the man, whose Muse whilom did mask,
As time her taught, in lowly Shepherd's weeds,
Am now enforced a far unfitter task,
For trumpets stern to change mine oaten reeds,
And sing of Knights' and Ladies' gentle deeds;
Whose praises having slept in silence long,
Me, all too mean, the sacred Muse areeds

[advises, teaches]

To blazon broad amongst her learnèd throng:
Fierce wars and faithful loves shall moralize my song.

Help then, O holy Virgin, chief of nine,
Thy weaker Novice to perform thy will,
Lay forth out of thine everlasting scryne [chest for
books/documents]

The antique rolls which there lie hidden still,
Of Faery knights and fairest Tanaquil [wife of
Tarquinius; here Queen Elizabeth]

Whom that most noble Briton Prince so long
 Sought through the world, and suffered so much ill,
 That I must rue his undeservèd wrong:
 O help thou my weak wit, and sharpen my dull tongue.

The scholarly (but not necessarily merely literate) reader will immediately recognize these lines, and their author, and will know the massive and so long beloved English epic from which they come, Edmund Spenser's *The Fairy Queen*. And any reader at all, after a quarter of an hour's exposure to *Paradise Lost* in particular, will have at least some sense of the similarities of Milton's work to that of Spenser. These include:

- insistently lofty, elevated diction, expressive of the urgent conviction that poet and reader are engaged not in some casual, friendly dialogue or in mere entertainment, but in an activity at once both serious and highly moral; note that in line 7 the Muse is called "sacred"
- constant, even fundamental reference to past persons and events, including regular allusions to past intellectual belief structures (and note, please, the use of the plural; we here meet classical Muses and shepherds along with medieval knights, Roman along with British history, pagan along with Christian religion, and so on)
- frequent reliance on archaically tinted vocabulary (I have here modernized spelling, but the attentive reader will not be fooled)
- markedly convoluted syntax, with sentences being stretched (and bent) over many lines
- what modern poets and readers might call a long breath line—rhythms that elongate and tend to roll like the waves of the sea, rather than (as in much modern poetry) poke and dart even as they loll

- reliance on more or less objectified conventions, which are the very farthest thing from “personal” to either the poet or his poem: e.g., the confession in line 3 not only of the poet’s incapacity for *this* task but of his general poetic ineptitude (he is here called to “a far unfitter task”—and see also “Me, all too mean,” in line 7, and the reference to his “weak wit” and “dull tongue” in the final line of the second stanza)
- a set of assumptions, apparently fixed and settled for all time, about trumpets being “stern” (line 4), knights and ladies “gentle” (line 5) and their prior praises plainly insufficient (line 6), poets and their readers being “learnèd” (line 8), what is old being always good (the “antique rolls” of line 13), royalty invariably “noble” if male and “fair” or even “fairest” if female (lines 14 and 15), and princely suffering being both romantic and unfair (lines 16 and 17)

And there is more. But this is the introduction to a book about John Milton, not Edmund Spenser, vastly influential on Milton as Spenser clearly was. All the same, to nail the point home, let me quickly carry the story of Spenser’s fame and influence into the nineteenth and, just barely, the twentieth century. William Wordsworth, at age thirty-one, was reported on Monday, the sixteenth of November, 1801, to be feeling “some what weakish,” but in compensation (and perhaps as a curative) “now at 7 o’clock reading Spenser” (*Journals of Dorothy Wordsworth*, 59). Eight days later, “after tea William read Spenser[,] now and then a little aloud to us,” his wife and sister (62). And on Thursday, the first of July, 1802, said to be “a very rainy day,” we learn that “we had a nice walk, and afterwards sate by a nice snug fire and William read Spenser and I read ‘As you like it’ ” (144). Plainly, Spenser traveled and was seen to belong in some pretty special company. Indeed, the very first poem in *The Complete Poetical Works and Letters of John Keats*, identified therein as “the earliest known composition of Keats,” is an “Imitation of Spenser” (1). Spenser’s tracks are all over the Keats volume, from a “Spenserian Stanza, written at the close of book v. of THE FAERIE

QUEENE" (8–9), a sonnet "To Spenser" (42), and three more "Spenserian Stanzas" aimed in 1819 at Charles Armitage Brown, in response (in Keats' own words) to "Brown this morning . . . writing some Spenserian stanzas against Mrs., Miss [Fanny] Brawne and me."

And Spenser's reach extends, as I have indicated, a good century further. In an 1858 letter to his sister, sent from Oxford, John Addington Symonds requests that he be sent his copy of Spenser (the request placed, in sequence, between Chaucer and "the large Milton" (*The Letters of John Addington Symonds*, I, 167). In another letter home the next year, he asks, "Has a small Spenser in 6 diamond volumes, come for me from Jeffries in Redcliffe Street? I ordered it when I was last in Clifton" (I, 200). Nor did Symonds' interest flag in later years. Almost thirty years along, he writes to Edmund Gosse, 16 May 1886, from Germany, expressing genuine concern about the possible misattribution of a sixteenth-century poem the style of which "seems to me suspiciously like that of Spenser" (III, 139). Writing in 1896 from his prison cell in Reading, Oscar Wilde requested "Spenser's Poems," among other books (*The Letters of Oscar Wilde*, 405 n). And, finally, in August 1912 Edward Dowden writes that "most of my reading hours were given to Spenser, and once again I went through the 'Faerie Queene' (though I can't say, as Southey did, that I have read it once a year" (*Letters of Edward Dowden*, 381).

Yet Milton not only participates in a long and strong tradition, connecting to it in more ways than I can here comment upon, but he has always been, and still remains, an immensely significant, powerful contributor to that tradition. He draws upon Shakespeare (he was born eight years before Shakespeare's death), as has everyone else. But he also adds to Shakespeare, as most others neither have done nor could do.

He scarce had ceased when the superior fiend
Was moving toward the shore, his ponderous shield,
Ethereal¹ temper,² massy, large, and round,
Behind him cast. The broad circumference
Hung on his shoulders like the moon, whose orb

¹ celestial

² hardness