







MILTON

Paradise Regained  
The Minor Poems  
and  
Samson Agonistes



JOHN MILTON

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PARADISE REGAINED  
THE MINOR POEMS  
AND  
SAMSON AGONISTES

*Complete and Arranged Chronologically*

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## CHRONOLOGY

- 1608, Dec. 9. Birth in Bread Street, Cheapside, London.  
1620. Admission to St. Paul's School.  
1625, Feb. 12. Matriculation at Christ's College, Cambridge.  
1629, March. Promotion to B. A. degree.  
1629, Dec. *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity*.  
1632, July. Promotion to M. A. degree.  
1632, July, to 1638, April. Residence in the house to which John Milton Sr. had retired in Horton, Buckinghamshire.  
1634, Sept. 29. *A Mask (Comus)* performed.  
1637, Nov. *Lycidas*.  
1638, April. Departure for Italy.  
1639, Aug. Return to England.  
1639-40. Establishment in London and beginning of school-keeping.  
1640-41. Plans for tragedies and epics on national and biblical themes in the Cambridge manuscript.  
1641, late spring. *Of Reformation in England*.  
Early summer. *Of Prelatical Episcopacy*.  
Late summer. *Animadversions upon the Remonstrant's Defence against Smectymnuus*.  
1642, Jan. to March. *The Reason of Church Government Urged against Prelaty*.  
March to April. *Apology for Smectymnuus*.  
Whitsuntide. Marriage with Mary Powell, separation following about a month later.  
1643, Aug. 1. *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* first published.  
1644, June. *On Education*.  
July. *The Judgment of Martin Bucer concerning Divorce*.  
Nov. *Areopagitica*.

1645, March. *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion*.

Late summer. Reconciliation with Mary Powell.

Autumn. Publication of the collected Minor Poems.

1645-46. Work begun on the *History of Britain* and on *De Doctrina Christiana*.

1649, Feb. *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*.

March. Appointment as Secretary for Foreign Tongues to the Council of State.

Oct. *Eikonoklastes*.

1651, March. *Defensio pro Populo Anglicano*.

1652, May. Death of Mary Powell.

1654, spring. *Defensio Secunda*.

1655. *Defensio pro se*.

1656, Nov. Marriage with Katherine Woodcock.

1658, Feb. Death of Katherine Woodcock.

1660, March. *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth*.

1663, Feb. Marriage with Elizabeth Minshull, who survived him until 1727.

1667. *Paradise Lost* first published.

1671. *Paradise Regained* and *Samson Agonistes* first published.

1674, Nov. 8. Death.

## INTRODUCTION

### I. YOUTH—THE LATIN POEMS

1. If it is true, as Mr. John Crowe Ransom believes, that "the great repute of the Miltonic style is a consequence of the scarcity . . . of poets who have mastered the technique of Latin poetry before they have turned to their own," then Milton's Latin poems should be the most alluring of all the roads that an explorer of the poet can follow. So in recent years they have proved to the investigators who have given us "the new Milton." Modern interest has been focused less upon their art, however, than upon their revelation of Milton's mind and of the "unconscious" meaning of his English poetry. Analysis of "the man and thinker" has rather obscured the artist to whom Mr. Ransom would bring us back. Because in some of the elegies Milton poured himself out with less reserve or with a kind of unreserve distinctly other than that of his most amazingly personal prose, it has sometimes been assumed that they are confessions about his adolescence hardly less intimate than those of Mr. Wells about his callow years in *Experiment in Autobiography*. They are hardly that, though they are full of an engaging candour. Searchers for autobiography will find it there a-plenty and they may be fortunate enough to find some other things to boot. Even to the reader who has no Latin the prose translations in the present volume have much to say about the development of the poet's mind and still more to suggest about the growth of his art. Although Milton segregated them in a section of their own when he first collected his poems, English, Latin, Greek, and Italian, for publication in 1645, and kept them by themselves again in 1673, his careful dating indicates that he expected them to have the

lively interest of a portrait of the artist as a very young man. His odd way of using ordinal numbers—calling himself in his seventeenth year until his eighteenth birthday—*may* have been due to a desire to strain the excuse of youth with the puritanical public of 1645. Yet that was the year of the publication of *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion*, his two final salvos in defence of liberal divorce laws; and in his dating of his youthful poems he can hardly have conceded more than a jot to the prejudices of his public. On his own account he seems to have looked back with some regret upon his confession of “love at first sight” in the seventh elegy; but, on the whole, he was proud of his Latin poems—proud of the “erotic” fifth elegy, proud of the record of his friendship with Charles Diodati in the first and sixth elegies and in *Damon’s Epitaph*, proud of the record of his Italian triumphs in *Manso* and *Salzilli*, proud even of the horrific, schoolboy, mock epic *On the Fifth of November*, in which so good a classicist as Professor E. K. Rand sees more power than, and almost as much beauty as, he does in the epyllion that Virgil wrote as a boy of eighteen, the *Gnat*. In reconstructing Milton’s life in terms of his poetry we have to reckon with his Latin verse all the way from the first elegy in 1625 or 1626 to *Epitaphium Damonis* in 1639 or 1640, two years later than *Lycidas*.

2. In Milton’s boyhood everything seems to have conspired to make him a linguist and a poet, but his father was the archconspirator. Business acumen, musical tastes, extraordinary faith in his sons, and dominant religious interests marked the man into whose home at the sign of the Spread Eagle in Bread Street, London, the boy was born on the ninth of December, 1608. How stern his father’s religious principles really were is open to question. He had broken with his father, Richard Milton, a loyal Roman Catholic who twice suffered the financial martyrdom of the fine for recusancy; but he may have been less of a Puritan than his famous son, for his forgotten son, Christopher, grew up with conservative principles both in politics and in religion and had his reward by being appointed to a judgeship under Charles II. Because

he was a scrivener, John Milton, Sr., is usually described as a kind of solicitor; but he was less a lawyer than a banker, and at heart—as Milton reminded him in the poem addressed to him—he was a musician and perhaps a poet too.

3. The careful education at home as well as at St. Paul's School—for which Milton so cordially thanks his father in that poem—seems to have been begun with the ministry as its goal. In a familiar passage in the preface to the second book of *The Reason of Church Government* Milton speaks as if he had come up to his final degree at Cambridge with the clear resolve to take orders and had then been disappointed and “church-outed” by the oath enjoining support of episcopacy, “which, unless he took with a conscience that would retch, he must either straight perjure, or split his faith.” Long before he took his degree, however, he must have resolved, at least subconsciously, to live the life of a man of letters. The years of independent, post-graduate study which were given to him at Horton, followed by sixteen very handsomely subsidized months in Italy, prove that, on the whole, the older man shared his hopes and dreams. The sonnet *On his being Arrived to the Age of Twenty-three*—which Mr. W. R. Parker proposes to date a year later, *i.e.* in 1632, just after rather than before the residence in the paternal home in Horton began—was sent in a letter to an unknown friend who seems to have felt that he should have gone into the Church, but there is no reason for supposing that the friend spoke for his father. On the other hand, we have the evidence of the Latin poem addressed to his father that his education had been most liberally planned. The poem's record of the training which began with private tutors several years before he entered St. Paul's School at age twelve is strikingly like the ideal scheme of studies which he drew up at age thirty-six, for boys preparing to serve their country “justly, skilfully and magnanimously.” Latin was the starting point and Greek was soon added, then Hebrew, and then Italian, French, and Spanish; but no language was treated as an end in itself. They were all keys to literature and life. His own Latin must have begun under tutors when he was a



very little boy, and he may have learned it like the child, Montaigne, who was allowed to hear little else spoken in the house. In any case, he learned it—as we gather from what he says to the most famous of his tutors, Thomas Young, in the fourth elegy—from highly trained and intelligent men with whom he built up a friendship as they rambled together on Parnassus. The Italian sonnets, which Mr. Smart proved to have been written certainly before, and probably long before, the Italian journey, show how articulate he was, perhaps while still an undergraduate, in the formal language of Petrarch; and the tributes to his spoken Italian, French, and Spanish by his admirers in Rome and Florence suggest a flexible command of contemporary idiom in all three languages. Yet it is clear that he had no interest in languages as such and despised a linguist who would “pride himself to have all the tongues that Babel cleft the world into, yet if he have not studied the solid things in them, as well as the words and lexicons, he were nothing so much to be esteemed a learned man, as any yeoman or tradesman competently wise in his mother dialect only.” At school and at Cambridge he hated the ceaseless exercises in the classical languages, and in the tractate *Of Education* he condemned the “preposterous exaction [of] forcing the empty wits of children to compose themes, verses, and orations” in “miserable Latin and Greek.” But a practical and even an artistic faculty for self-expression in Latin was a prime object in the scheme of education which he drew up in 1644. No twentieth-century schoolboy ever hated the drudgery of languages more than Milton did, but his hatred was born of impatience to go exploring through the realms of gold in half a dozen tongues and to find his feet as an artist in the common speech of all educated men—Latin.

4. The ability to write with poetic power in that language seems to have dawned upon him like an afflatus about 1626—the year which saw three of the elegies, the epyllion *On the Fifth of November* and several lesser poems. Except *On the Death of a Fair Infant*, he had written no English poetry of importance and he was to write very little more English verse

before the hymn *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* in 1629. Even after that marvellous success in English he was to go on writing in Latin with increasing mastery for ten more years. Then, deliberately, he stopped. Barring the ode *To John Rous* and a few scraps of Latin verse scattered in his prose, he chose thereafter to be an English poet. In 1638-9 his hexameters of compliment to his Neapolitan host, Giovanni Baptista Manso, look forward to an epic about the British hero, Arthur, and in *Damon's Epitaph* (ll. 170-8), his last serious poem in Latin, he made explicit his resolve to write thenceforth in English. Looking backward a little more than two years later, in the preface to Book II of *The Reason of Church Government*, he explained that his motive had been "God's glory by the Honour and Instruction of my Country. For which Cause," he added, "and not only for that I knew it would be hard to arrive at the second Rank among the Latins, I applied myself to that Resolution which Ariosto followed against the Persuasions of Bembo, to fix all the Industry and Art I could unite to the adorning of my native Tongue."

5. From our distance the resolve to honour God and England by writing in English looks self-complacent, but the admission of incapacity to reach the first rank among the Latins cost Milton a pang. He was thinking less of the ancients than of his own contemporaries; men like the Scot, George Buchanan, who had won a European reputation with Latin elegies as Ovidian and gay as Milton's fifth, *On the Coming of Spring*. Buchanan's satires on the Franciscans helped to provoke Milton's sallies in *On the Fifth of November* against the mendicant friars in their "Cimmerian darkness." By "the Latins" he meant, in the main, to refer to the great Italians whose mastery of Latin verse had been hardly inferior to their fluency—figures like Pontano, Vida, and Sannazaro. In elegies like Sannazaro's and in epics like his *De Partu Virginis* and Vida's *Christias* Milton found a more personal and idiomatic Latin than even he could command. Yet in spite of his regret that he could never rank with these men, he was ready, in 1640, to let them go their way while he went another and a very

different path. Even in the hands of men of genius, classical Latin was not a very flexible medium. For some subjects it might serve better than a living language, but to write it well a man had to steep himself so deeply in the poetry of one or more of the ancients that he submitted to a kind of personal domination—as Milton confessed in *Smectymnuus* that he had once done with Ovid. Indeed, the history of his development as a versifier in Latin is the record of his emancipation from Ovid to become a disciple and, in a way, a rival of Virgil. The elegies are a tissue of Ovidian reminiscences, but it was Virgil who moved him when he wrote *Ad Patrem* and the fine poem addressed to his famous host in Naples, Giovanni Baptista Manso, and *Epitaphium Damonis*. For a time he was interested in Horace, for he experimented with Horatian metres both in Latin and in English; in Latin when, for example, he wrote *On the Death of the Vice-Chancellor*; and in English—if I am right in believing that the late date traditionally assigned to the lines is incorrect—when he translated Horace's fifth ode, "almost word for word, without rhyme, according to the Latin measure." The Horatian mood in sonnets like that *To Mr. Lawrence* proves the survival of his affection for Horace in later years. But Ovid and Virgil were passions with him. Whenever he wrote poetry, they were always at hand, haunting his thoughts; yet in 1640 he was ready to relinquish their imitation in their own language to others.

6. Even after making due allowance for Dr. Johnson's principle that "nearly every . . . flourish of fine motive in Milton's life was an afterthought," I believe that he stopped writing in Latin for the reasons that he gave in *The Reason of Church Government*; but it is worth pausing to ask whether he might ever under any circumstances have tried to write a long poem in Latin for all Europe to read—the audience for which the *De Doctrina Christiana* was boldly intended. In Latin prose Milton was to feel himself sure of a public as long as he lived and in Latin prose he was utterly at ease in expressing himself. In verse he could not have the public that he desired, and he was beginning to feel the constraint of an art which involved

the combination of countless phrases from the classics, used for their idiomatic rather than their allusive value. Such a phrase was the greeting in Virgil's first eclogue to the peasant who has had the good fortune to escape in a general eviction of his neighbours from their farms—"Fortunate senex" (Fortunate old man!). Milton's use of the words to congratulate his famous Neapolitan host, Manso, upon the fame that he enjoyed as the patron of Torquato Tasso is apt, but the reminiscence does not help the meaning. More appropriate is the echo in his compliment to Manso of Virgil's saying in the *Aeneid* (VI, 130 and 730) that by virtue men mount the skies, and his use of Virgil's words in the *Georgics* (III, 9) to promise Manso an immortality of fame on the lips of men. Less appropriate is his reminiscence in *Epitaphium Damonis* of Virgil's description (*Georgics* III, 433) of a dangerous field snake that comes writhing on "with head erect and eyes of fire." At the climax of his dirge for Diodati Milton introduced the celestial Cupid with eyes of flame that dart their sparkles far and wide among the stars. Seemingly with no sense of incongruity, the god's fiery glances are described in virtually the very same words that Virgil used to describe the adder. The incongruity is really less than it seems, for the picture in the *Georgics* has drama and beauty. In his later Latin poems, however, Milton's echoes of the classics have a subtle, two-fold propriety. When he paused in his lament for Diodati to imagine a group of his friends calling him in vain to join their field sports, there was a reminiscence of a kindred passage in Virgil's *Eclogues* (X, 42-3):

Hic gelidi fontes, hic mollia prata, Lycori,  
Hic nemus . . .<sup>1</sup>

In Virgil's lines there is a note of frustrated love which is a faintly heard undertone in Milton's. He was seeking a particular effect of allusive depth and distance and he achieved

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<sup>1</sup>Come, see what pleasures in our plains abound,  
The woods, the fountains, and the flow'ry ground.  
(Dryden's translation.)

it; but at the price of imitating both Virgil and—if Mr. T. P. Harrison is correct in a recent surmise—Castiglione, who used the Virgilian motif with more than Virgilian pathos in one of the most famous of the pastoral elegies of the Renaissance, *Alcon*.

7. For most modern readers the least impressive of Milton's Latin poems is likely to be the little epic on the Gunpowder Plot, *In Quintum Novembris*, which he wrote at age seventeen. Its ties with *Paradise Lost* and with *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* entitle it to a moment's consideration. It is a torso, for Milton outgrew it as he worked on it, and threw it aside with an apology for a conclusion. The events of the Plot's discovery are huddled into a few final lines. Milton was interested only in the preliminaries; Satan's inspection of the wide world, ending in the discovery of the happy island of England, and the steps for its undoing taken by the fiend. Warton compared the account in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* (II, 787-96) of the goddess Envy ranging over sea and land to fix at last upon the peaceful city of Athens for molestation. Envy gains her ends by whispering a crime into the ears of the sleeping Athenian princess, Aglauros; and Milton's Satan gains his by breathing the outrage of the Gunpowder Plot into those of the sleeping Roman prince, Pope Paul V. From the cave of Phonos in the bowels of the earth Paul convokes a frightful council of monsters—Murder, double-tongued Treachery, Craft, Contention, Calumny, Fury, Fear, and pale Horror—and the Plot is hatched. Behind the cave stretched a venerable tradition going back to Hesiod's account in the *Theogony* of Night and its horrid children; but its atmosphere was familiar in several popular poems such as *The Purple Island* of Milton's admired Phineas Fletcher. In Fletcher's satires, the *Locustae* and its English counterpart, *The Apollyonists*, Milton found a treatment of the Plot which justified all that is most extreme in his own poem. His glory in the premature glee of the diabolical consistory over the prospect of James and the Parliament blown sky-high together matches Fletcher's so closely that he might have been paraphrasing. Then, abruptly, he turned to a description of

the tower of the goddess Rumour and wove together his memories of Ovid's description of her seat with that of Chaucer in *The House of Fame*. After thirty lines on this congenial theme, Rumour is commissioned by the Almighty to spread a report of the Plot throughout England. She does so, and the little epic sags suddenly to an end.

## II. *L'ALLEGRO* AND *IL PENNEROSO*

8. Recently Mr. Tillyard has thrown altogether new light upon *L'Allegro* with his evidence that it dates from Milton's later years at Cambridge. Its strange exordium—"Hence, loathed Melancholy," *etc.*—reads with a new meaning and gaiety if it is felt as some kind of reaction against the horrific monsters from the cave of Phonos which Milton evoked to celebrate his second fifth of November at the University. Certainly the Stygian cave with its horrid shapes, the brooding darkness, and the Cimmerian desert are the very stuff out of which *In Quintum Novembris* is concocted. For some time opinion has been moving away from the traditional view of *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* as voicing the moods of the studious recluse at Horton as he drifted through the orchard lanes, inviting his soul. All the evidence indicates that Milton's life at Horton was that of a much more systematic student than he had been at Cambridge. At Horton, except *Comus* and *Lycidas*, he wrote little poetry and most of it was composed under the pressure of various occasions. Horton itself has been regarded as the occasion prompting the two companion poems, but a college exercise would serve that purpose just as well. Indeed, the tone of *l'Allegro's* walk in the country is quite in the mood of an undergraduate on holiday. It is just Milton's mood in the seventh elegy, where he strolls in the fields around London; and in the first, where he confesses to having used his rustication to haunt the fields and groves, and to having been as much disturbed by the passing bevvies of girls as *l'Allegro* was by the starry "Cynosure of neighbouring eyes."

9. The evidence suggesting that the strange exorcisms which open *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* flowed from undergraduate high spirits is still more cogent. In the first prolusion, or academic exercise, Milton had to make an address to his tutors and fellow students on the assigned question, "Whether Day is more excellent than Night." The result was a formal yet playful Latin oration which repeats Hesiod's account of the birth from Chaos of Erebus and Night and goes on—like Hesiod, and like Boccaccio in his *Genealogy of the Gods*, and like many later mythographers—to make Night the mother of a hideous brood; Tribulation, Envy, Fear, Guile, Poverty, Sickness, and others no less dire. The theme was traditional and Milton knew that his audience would be familiar with many treatments of it, from that in Hesiod to Shakespeare's

O comfort-killing Night, image of hell!  
 Dim register and notary of shame!  
 Black stage for tragedies and murders fell!  
 Vast sin-concealing chaos! nurse of blame!  
 Blind muffled bawd! dark harbour for defame!  
 Grim cave of death! whispering conspirator  
 With close-tongu'd treason and the ravisher.<sup>1</sup>

Mr. Tillyard thinks that at the first line or two of either *L'Allegro* or *Il Penseroso* Milton's audience of undergraduates (reading his verses or hearing them as a part of some entertainment like that in which the lines *At a Vacation Exercise* are embedded) would scent parody of familiar themes and begin to grin. If his view of the matter is to prevail, there is still comfort for those who will grieve over the loss of the two poems as the fine flowering of "the Horton period" in the fact that a poet like Lovelace could use the same motif, at least half seriously, in a love lyric like *Night: To Lucasta*:

Night! loathed jailor of the lock'd up sun, . . .  
 Thou dost arise our living hell,  
 With thee groans, terrors, furies dwell,  
 Until Lucasta doth awake,  
 And with her beams these heavy chains off shake.

<sup>1</sup>*The Rape of Lucrece*, 764–70.

10. The formal contrast between the two poems is, in part, the opposition of day to night in the prologue. Like *L'Allegro*—and, it may be added, like the schoolboy verses in the *Commonplace Book*—the prologue pays its “ample tribute to the honour of Day.” At sunrise the birds in the tree-tops hail the Dawn and the first of them to herald the light is the cock, as he is in *L'Allegro*. The sun wears the same splendour in which *l'Allegro* sees him rise and “the clouds in garments of diverse hues, with festal show, in long procession, appear to be handmaidens attending the rising god.” In the poem Milton's couplets soon carried him far out of the realm of the prologue into the bright English landscape which Nicholas Breton had explored at the same swift pace in *The Passionate Shepherd*, and which had been familiar to Englishmen since it was discovered by one of the contributors to Tottel's *Miscellany*. But in design, although it includes a tribute to the gay pleasures of evening, the poem is a survey of Day and its moods, just as *Il Penseroso* is a survey of Night.

11. The real contrast between the two poems is, of course, one of mood, and it is Milton who is both the gay and the thoughtful dreamer. There is no conflict or tension, for both poems are aspects of the contemporary impulse to hunt for new and richer interests than the past afforded, in terms of which to revalue the medieval ideal of the contemplative life. It is *Il Penseroso*, with the Cherub Contemplation and divinest Melancholy as its presiding genii, that is the longer, if not the more successful poem. Dr. Johnson was right when he said that its mood seemed to him to carry over into *L'Allegro*. If the Doctor had read his Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* to better purpose than he did, he might have understood why this was so. Today everyone knows that in the “Author's Abstract of Melancholy,” which he prefixed to the *Anatomy*, Burton counted many of *l'Allegro*'s pleasures among what he considered the prime satisfactions of melancholy:

Methinks I hear, methinks I see,  
Sweet musick, wondrous melody,



Towns, Palaces, and Cities fine;  
Here now, then there; the world is mine;  
Rare beauties, gallant Ladies shine—  
Whate'er is lovely or divine.  
All other joys to this are folly,  
None so sweet as melancholy.

Certainly *L'Allegro* is the least morbid poem ever written and no passion for the theatre and the night life of a great city was ever healthier than Milton's; yet Burton recognized such indulgence as his in day-dreams and "castles in the air" as one of the symptoms of the disease whose victims "soothe up themselves with phantastical and pleasant humours."<sup>1</sup> The fact is that in *L'Allegro* no less than in *Il Penseroso*, like Jaques in *As You Like It*, Milton courted a melancholy of his own. It is essentially romantic and entitled to Mr. E. E. Stoll's comparison of it with that of Keats's ode on *Melancholy* and of Coleridge's on *Dejection* and of Shelley's *Stanzas Written in Dejection near Naples*. An alternative—though not a perfect one—to this view is to recognize a vein of irony running consistently through *Il Penseroso*. This, in accordance with his theory that the poem was written to amuse an academic audience, is what I understand Mr. Tillyard to do. To my ear, it is not possible to catch the irony in its glorious roster of Platonic and Hermetic studies and of classical and romantic reading. Yet it is a relief to have a touch of humour pointed out in the conclusion and to realize that Milton could poke fun at his most serious studies. Many readers will be prepared to follow Mr. Tillyard joyfully when he says of the prayer for the "peaceful hermitage" in "weary age" which ends the poem: "How charmingly callow, how perfectly appropriate to an audience of boys! It fits far worse the lips of a man who has retired into studious quiet already." If there is no irony in the passage, it can hardly be cleared of the charge of sentimentality. Englishmen must have had more than enough of the debate between the active and the contemplative lives in

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<sup>1</sup>*Anatomy*, I, ii, 2, 6.