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# English Minor Poems Paradise Lost Samson Agonistes Areopagitica

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BY JOHN MILTON



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## BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

JOHN MILTON, 1608-1674

JOHN MILTON was born in Bread Street, London, on December 9, 1608. "My father," he wrote, "destined me, while yet a little boy for the study of humane letters. . . . Both at the grammar-school and also under other masters at home, he caused me to be instructed daily." At the age of seventeen he was admitted to Cambridge. Here his first years were darkened by unpopularity and a quarrel with the college authorities, but he worked diligently and by the time he received his Master of Arts degree in 1632, his unusual powers had won him recognition and esteem. At Cambridge he decided to abandon his original plan of entering the service of the Church, giving as his reason that he preferred "blameless silence before the sacred office of speaking, bought and begun with servitude and forswearing."

Milton's literary gifts were apparent early. *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity* was written while the poet was still at Cambridge. *L'Allegro* and its companion piece, *Il Penseroso*; two masques, *Arcades* and *Comus*; and *Lycidas*, an elegy for a college friend drowned at sea, were the fruit of six years of study, chiefly of the classics, that followed the termination of his university career. These years, passed quietly with his father in the rural setting of a small Buckinghamshire village, were succeeded by fifteen months of travel in France and Italy where he was widely received. He made a special visit to Galileo, "grown old, a prisoner to the Inquisition for thinking in Astronomy otherwise than the Franciscan and Dominican licensers thought."

Even in the pastoral setting of *Lycidas* there were unmistakable stirrings of Milton's concern with the problem of church reform. When, in 1641, this became one of the crucial issues in the rising tide of civil war, Milton emerged from his life of study and teaching. Renouncing his poetry for militant prose, he scourged those who favored Episcopacy, holding them responsible for arresting the course of the Reformation. His attack was framed in a series of pamphlets, the most elaborate of these being a treatise entitled *The Reason of Church Government urged against Prelaty*.

In 1643, when he was thirty-five, Milton married Mary Powell, the seventeen-year-old daughter of a Cavalier family. After a few weeks she returned to her home and seemed to have no intention of continuing the relationship. Two years later, however, she came back, and their married life was resumed. There were three daughters of this union and a son who died in infancy. Mary Powell herself died in childbirth in 1654.

In the same year that his wife left him, Milton wrote his famous treatise, *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce, Restored to the good of both sexes from the Bondage of Canon Law and other Mistakes*, asserting that marriage being a "private matter" could be dissolved in cases of incompatibility. This incendiary tract and another on the same subject happened to have been published without a license immediately after the enactment of a

new ordinance requiring the licensing of all works. Accordingly, proceedings against Milton were instituted. His answer was *Areopagitica*, a *Speech for the Liberty of Unlicensed Printing*, published the following year, without a license.

With the fall of the Stuarts in 1649, Milton mobilized his energies in the service of Cromwell and the Commonwealth. In answer to *Eikon Basilike*, a work of disputed authorship purporting to be the last meditations of Charles I, he wrote *Eikonoklastes*, a point by point refutation. Published the same year was a pamphlet entitled *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*, proving that it is lawful, and hath been held so in all ages, for any who have the power, to call to account a Tyrant or wicked King, and, after due conviction, to depose and put him to death, if the ordinary Magistrate have neglected or denied to do it. This was probably instrumental in Milton's appointment as Latin Secretary to the Council of State, a position he retained until 1660. The poet continued to defend the Commonwealth against the attacks of continental writers in a series of Latin tractates. This controversy raged for four years with an extraordinary degree of violence and personal vituperation; Milton's participation against the advice of physicians brought him to total blindness.

Turning once more to domestic affairs, Milton focused his attention on church reform, advocating the complete separation of Church and State and mutual tolerance between Protestant sects. In 1660, on the eve of the Restoration and with full awareness that his was one of the last voices to be raised against the "readmitting of kingship", Milton published *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* and a number of other pamphlets outlining a plan for a permanent parliament.

The Restoration put an end to Milton's public life and forced him to go into hiding. Just why he was not executed with the other prominent supporters of the Commonwealth is not clear. At the age of fifty-two, after nineteen years of stormy political activity, he again turned to the studious and literary pursuits of his youth. To this last period of his life belong his greatest poetic achievements: *Paradise Lost* (1667); its sequel, *Paradise Regained* (1671); and finally *Samson Agonistes* (1671). His prose writings of these last years include a miscellany of scholarly and historical works and *De Doctrina Christiana*, the final statement of his religious position, which by a series of mischances was not published until 1825.

Underlying this vigorous literary activity was the loneliness of Milton's personal life. Totally blind at the time of Mary Powell's death, he lived in helpless dependence on his motherless daughters, who grew up resenting him and careless of his comfort and wishes. This bleak home life was interrupted briefly in 1656 by the poet's marriage to Katharine Woodcock, who died in childbirth less than a year later. In 1663 he married Elizabeth Minshull, then but twenty-five. She seems to have brightened his last decade, which was passed in quiet study tempered with music and the company of friends. Weakened by the gout and other maladies, he died on November 8, 1674, and was buried beside his father in the church of St. Giles Cripplegate.

*MISCELLANEOUS POEMS*

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## MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

### On the Morning of CHRISTS Nativity

*Compos'd 1629*

I

**T**HIS is the Month, and this the happy morn  
Wherin the Son of Heav'ns eternal King,  
Of wedded Maid, and Virgin Mother born,  
Our great redemption from above did bring;  
For so the holy sages once did sing,  
That he our deadly forfeit should release,  
And with his Father work us a perpetual peace.

II

That glorious Form, that Light unsufferable,  
And that far-beaming blaze of Majesty,  
Wherewith he wont at Heav'ns high Councel-Table, 10  
To sit the midst of Trinal Unity,  
He laid aside; and here with us to be,  
Forsook the Courts of everlasting Day,  
And chose with us a darksome House of mortal Clay.

III

Say Heav'nly Muse, shall not thy sacred vein  
Afford a present to the Infant God?  
Hast thou no vers, no hymn, or solemn strein,  
To welcom him to this his new abode,  
Now while the Heav'n by the Suns team untrod, 20  
Hath took no print of the approaching light,  
And all the spangled host keep watch in squadrons bright?

IV

See how from far upon the Eastern rode  
The Star-led Wisards haste with odours sweet,  
O run, prevent them with thy humble ode,  
And lay it lowly at his blessed feet;  
Have thou the honour first, thy Lord to greet,  
And joyn thy voice unto the Angel Quire,  
From out his secret Altar toucht with hallow'd fire.

I



## MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

### THE HYMN

#### I

It was the Winter wilde,  
While the Heav'n-born-childe, 30  
All meanly wrapt in the rude manger lies;  
Nature in aw to him  
Had doff't her gawdy trim,  
With her great Master so to sympathize:  
It was no season then for her  
To wanton with the Sun her lusty Paramour.

#### II

Only with speeches fair  
She woo's the gentle Air  
To hide her guilty front with innocent Snow,  
And on her naked shame, 40  
Pollute with sinfull blame,  
The Saintly Vail of Maiden white to throw,  
Confounded, that her Makers eyes  
Should look so neer upon her foul deformities.

#### III

But he her fears to cease,  
Sent down the meek-eyd Peace,  
She crown'd with Olive green, came softly sliding  
Down through the turning sphear  
His ready Harbinger,  
With Turtle wing the amorous clouds dividing, 50  
And waving wide her mirtle wand,  
She strikes a universall Peace through Sea and Land.

#### IV

No War, or Battails sound  
Was heard the World around,  
The idle spear and shield were high up hung;  
The hooked Chariot stood  
Unstain'd with hostile blood,  
The Trumpet spake not to the armed throng,  
And Kings sate still with awfull eye,  
As if they surely knew their sovran Lord was by. 60

#### V

But peacefull was the night  
Wherin the Prince of light

His reign of peace upon the earth began:  
 The Windes with wonder whist,  
 Smoothly the waters kist,  
 Whispering new joyes to the milde Ocean,  
 Who now hath quite forgot to rave,  
 While Birds of Calm sit brooding on the charmed wave.

## VI

The Stars with deep amaze  
 Stand fixt in stedfast gaze, 70  
 Bending one way their pretious influence,  
 And will not take their flight,  
 For all the morning light,  
 Or *Lucifer* that often warn'd them thence;  
 But in their glimmering Orbs did glow,  
 Untill their Lord himself bespake, and bid them go.

## VII

And though the shady gloom  
 Had given day her room,  
 The Sun himself with-held his wonted speed,  
 And hid his head for shame, 80  
 As his inferiour flame,  
 The new enlightn'd world no more should need;  
 He saw a greater Sun appear  
 Then his bright Throne, or burning Axletree could bear.

## VIII

The Shepherds on the Lawn,  
 Or ere the point of dawn,  
 Sate simply chatting in a rustick row;  
 Full little thought they than,  
 That the mighty *Pan*  
 Was kindly com to live with them below; 90  
 Perhaps their loves, or els their sheep,  
 Was all that did their silly thoughts so busie keep.

## IX

When such musick sweet  
 Their hearts and ears did greet,  
 As never was by mortall finger strook,  
 Divinely-warbled voice  
 Answering the stringed noise,  
 As all their souls in blisfull rapture took:  
 The Air such pleasure loth to lose,  
 With thousand echo's still prolongs each heav'nly close.

## X

Nature that heard such sound 101  
 Beneath the hollow round  
     Of *Cynthia's* seat, the Airy region thrilling,  
 Now was almost won  
 To think her part was don,  
     And that her reign had here its last fulfilling;  
 She knew such harmony alone  
 Could hold all Heav'n and Earth in happier union.

## XI

At last surrounds their sight  
 A Globe of circular light, 110  
     That with long beams the shame-fac't night array'd,  
 The helmed Cherubim  
 And sworded Seraphim,  
     Are seen in glittering ranks with wings displaid,  
 Harping in loud and solemn quire,  
 With unexpressive notes to Heav'ns new-born Heir.

## XII

Such Musick (as 'tis said)  
 Before was never made,  
     But when of old the sons of morning sung,  
 While the Creator Great 120  
 His constellations set,  
     And the well-ballanc't world on hinges hung,  
 And cast the dark foundations deep,  
 And bid the weltring waves their oozy channel keep.

## XIII

Ring out ye Crystall sphears,  
 Once bless our human ears,  
     (If ye have power to touch our senses so)  
 And let your silver chime  
 Move in melodious time;  
     And let the Base of Heav'ns deep Organ blow, 130  
 And with your ninefold harmony  
 Make up full consort to th'Angelike symphony.

## XIV

For if such holy Song  
 Enwrap our fancy long,  
     Time will run back, and fetch the age of gold,  
 And speckl'd vanity  
 Will sicken soon and die,

And leprous sin will melt from earthly mould,  
 And Hell it self will pass away,  
 And leave her dolorous mansions to the peering day. 140

## xv

Yea Truth, and Justice then  
 Will down return to men,  
 Th'enameld *Arras* of the Rain-bow wearing,  
 And Mercy set between,  
 Thron'd in Celestiall sheen,  
 With radiant feet the tissued clouds down steering,  
 And Heav'n as at som festivall,  
 Will open wide the Gates of her high Palace Hall.

## xvi

But wisest Fate sayes no,  
 This must not yet be so, 150  
 The Babe lies yet in smiling Infancy,  
 That on the bitter cross  
 Must redeem our loss;  
 So both himself and us to glorifie:  
 Yet first to those ychain'd in sleep,  
 The wakefull trump of doom must thunder through the  
 deep,

## xvii

With such a horrid clang  
 As on mount *Sinai* rang  
 While the red fire, and smouldring clouds out brake:  
 The aged Earth agast 160  
 With terrour of that blast,  
 Shall from the surface to the center shake,  
 When at the worlds last session,  
 The dreadfull Judge in middle Air shall spread his throne.

## xviii

And then at last our bliss  
 Full and perfect is,  
 But now begins; for from this happy day  
 Th'old Dragon under ground  
 In straiter limits bound,  
 Not half so far casts his usurped sway, 170  
 And wrath to see his Kingdom fail,  
 Swindges the scaly Horreur of his foulded tail.

## xix

The Oracles are dumm,  
 No voice or hideous humm

Runs through the arched roof in words deceiving.  
*Apollo* from his shrine  
 Can no more divine,  
 With hollow shriek the steep of *Delphos* leaving.  
 No nightly trance, or breathed spell,  
 Inspire's the pale-ey'd Priest from the prophetic cell. 180

## XX

The lonely mountains o're,  
 And the resounding shore,  
 A voice of weeping heard, and loud lament;  
 From haunted spring, and dale  
 Edg'd with poplar pale,  
 The parting Genius is with sighing sent,  
 With flowre-inwov'n tresses torn  
 The Nymphs in twilight shade of tangled thickets mourn.

## XXI

In consecrated Earth,  
 And on the holy Hearth, 190  
 The *Lars*, and *Lemures* moan with midnight plaint,  
 In Urns, and Altars round,  
 A drear, and dying sound  
 Affrights the *Flamins* at their service quaint;  
 And the chill Marble seems to sweat,  
 While each peculiar power forgoes his wonted seat.

## XXII

*Peor*, and *Baalim*,  
 Forsake their Temples dim,  
 With that twice-batter'd god of *Palestine*,  
 And mooned *Ashtaroth*, 200  
 Heav'n's Queen and Mother both,  
 Now sits not girt with Tapers holy shine,  
 The Libyc *Hammon* shrinks his horn,  
 In vain the *Tyrian* Maids their wounded *Thamuz* mourn.

## XXIII

And sullen *Moloch* fled,  
 Hath left in shadows dred,  
 His burning Idol all of blackest hue,  
 In vain with Cymbals ring,  
 They call the grisly king,  
 In dismal dance about the furnace blue; 210  
 The brutish gods of *Nile* as fast,  
*Isis* and *Orus*, and the Dog *Anubis* hast.

## XXIV

Nor is *Osiris* seen  
 In *Memphian* Grove, or Green,  
     Trampling the unshowr'd Grasse with lowings loud:  
 Nor can he be at rest  
 Within his sacred chest,  
     Naught but profoundest Hell can be his shroud,  
 In vain with *Timbrel*'d Anthems dark  
 The sable-stoled Sorcerers bear his worshipt Ark.      220

## XXV

He feels from *Juda's* Land  
 The dredged Infants hand,  
     The rayes of *Bethlehem* blind his dusky eyn;  
 Nor all the gods beside,  
 Longer dare abide,  
     Not *Typhon* huge ending in snaky twine:  
 Our Babe to shew his Godhead true,  
 Can in his swadling bands controul the damned crew.

## XXVI

So when the Sun in bed,  
 Curtain'd with cloudy red,      230  
     Pillows his chin upon an Orient wave,  
 The flocking shadows pale,  
 Troop to th' infernall jail,  
     Each fetter'd Ghost slips to his severall grave,  
 And the yellow-skirted *Fayes*,  
 Fly after the Night-steeds, leaving their Moon-lov'd maze.

## XXVII

But see the Virgin blest,  
 Hath laid her Babe to rest.  
     Time is our tedious Song should here have ending,  
 Heav'ns youngest teemed Star,      240  
 Hath fixt her polisht Car,  
     Her sleeping Lord with Handmaid Lamp attending:  
 And all about the Courtly Stable,  
 Bright-harnest Angels sit in order serviceable.

A Paraphrase on *Psalm* 114

This and the following *Psalm* were don by the Author at fifteen yeers old.

When the blest seed of *Terah's* faithfull Son,  
 After long toil their liberty had won,  
 And past from *Pharian* fields to *Canaan* Land,

Led by the strength of the Almighty's hand,  
*Jehovah's* wonders were in *Israel* shown,  
 His praise and glory was in *Israel* known.  
 That saw the troubl'd Sea, and shivering fled,  
 And sought to hide his froth-becurled head  
 Low in the earth, *Jordans* clear streams recoil,  
 As a faint host that hath receiv'd the foil. 10  
 The high, huge-bellied Mountains skip like Rams  
 Amongst their Ews, the little Hills like Lambs.  
 Why fled the Ocean? And why skipt the Mountains?  
 Why turned *Jordan* toward his Crystall Fountains?  
 Shake earth, and at the presence be agast  
 Of him that ever was, and ay shall last,  
 That glassy flouds from rugged rocks can crush,  
 And make soft rills from fiery flint-stones gush.

*Psalm 136*

Let us with a gladsom mind  
 Praise the Lord, for he is kind,  
 For his mercies ay endure,  
 Ever faithfull, ever sure.

Let us blaze his Name abroad,  
 For of gods he is the God;  
 For, &c.

O let us his praises tell,  
 That doth the wrathfull tyrants quell. 10  
 For, &c.

That with his miracles doth make  
 Amazed Heav'n and Earth to shake.  
 For, &c.

That by his wisdom did create  
 The painted Heav'ns so full of state.  
 For, &c. 20

That did the solid Earth ordain  
 To rise above the watry plain.  
 For, &c.

That by his all-commanding might,  
 Did fill the new-made world with light.  
 For, &c.

And caus'd the Golden-tressed Sun,  
All the day long his cours to run. 30  
For, &c.

The horned Moon to shine by night,  
Amongst her spangled sisters bright.  
For, &c.

He with his thunder-clasping hand,  
Smote the first-born of *Egypt* Land. 40  
For, &c.

And in despight of *Pharao* fell,  
He brought from thence his *Israel*.  
For, &c.

The ruddy waves he cleft in twain,  
Of the *Erythraean* main.  
For, &c.

The floods stood still like Walls of Glass,  
While the Hebrew Bands did pass. 50  
For, &c.

But full soon they did devour  
The Tawny King with all his power.  
For, &c.

His chosen people he did bless  
In the wastfull Wildernes. 60  
For, &c.

In bloody battail he brought down  
Kings of prowess and renown.  
For, &c.

He foild bold *Seon* and his host,  
That rul'd the *Amorrean* coast.  
For, &c.

And large-lim'd *Og* he did subdue,  
With all his over hardy crew. 70  
For, &c.

And to his Servant *Israel*,  
He gave their Land therin to dwell.  
For, &c.



## MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

He hath with a piteous eye  
Beheld us in our misery.  
For, &c.

80

And freed us from the slavery  
Of the invading enemy.  
For, &c.

All living creatures he doth feed,  
And with full hand supplies their need.  
For, &c.

Let us therefore warble forth  
His mighty Majesty and worth.  
For, &c.

90

That his mansion hath on high  
Above the reach of mortall ey.  
For his mercies ay endure,  
Ever faithfull, ever sure.

## The Passion

## I

Ere-while of Musick, and Ethereal mirth,  
Wherwith the stage of Ayr and Earth did ring,  
And joyous news of heav'nly Infants birth,  
My muse with Angels did divide to sing;  
But headlong joy is ever on the wing,  
In Wintry solstice like the shortn'd light  
Soon swallow'd up in dark and long out-living night.

## II

For now to sorrow must I tune my song,  
And set my Harpe to notes of saddest wo,  
Which on our dearest Lord did sease er'e long,  
Dangers, and snares, and wrongs, and worse then so,  
Which he for us did freely undergo.

10

Most perfect *Heroe*, try'd in heaviest plight  
Of labours huge and hard, too hard for human wight.

## III

He sov'ran Priest stooping his regall head  
That dropt with odorous oil down his fair eyes,  
Poor fleshly Tabernacle entered,  
His starry front low-rooft beneath the skies;