

Life of john milton

[Literature](#), [Poem](#)



Milton continued to write poetry during this period of study: his *Arcades* and *Comus* were both commissioned for masques composed for noble patrons, connections of the Egerton family, and performed in 1632 and 1634 respectively. *Comus* argues for the virtuousness of temperance and chastity. He contributed his pastoral elegy *Lycidas* to a memorial collection for one of his Cambridge classmates. Drafts of these poems are preserved in Milton's poetry notebook, known as the Trinity Manuscript because it is now kept at Trinity College, Cambridge.

Family

Milton and his first wife, Mary Powell (1625–1652) had four children: * Anne

(born 7 July 1646)

* Mary (born 25 October 1648)

* John (16 March 1651 – June 1652)

* Deborah (2 May 1652 – ?)

Mary Powell died on 5 May 1652 from complications following Deborah's birth. Milton's daughters survived to adulthood, but he had always a strained relationship with them. On 12 November 1656, Milton was married again, to Katherine Woodcock. She died on 3 February 1658, less than four months after giving birth to a daughter, Katherine, who also died. Milton married for a third time on 24 February 1662, to Elizabeth Mynshull (1638–1728), the niece of Thomas Mynshull, a wealthy apothecary and philanthropist in Manchester.

Despite a 31-year age gap, the marriage seemed happy, according to John Aubrey, and was to last more than 11 years until Milton's death. (A plaque on

the wall of Mynshull's House in Manchester describes Elizabeth as Milton's "3rd and Best wife".) Two nephews, John Phillips and Edward Phillips, were well known as writers. They were sons of Milton's sister Anne. John acted as a secretary, and Edward was Milton's first biographer.

Blindness

But in the course of his work for the government, his eyesight had begun to fail, and by 1651 (43) he was completely blind.

Death

He ended his days in a small house near Bunhill Fields, alone with his wife and a maid. He died in 1674 (66) without pain or emotion, according to testimony at the time no one in the room noticing his passing.

Published poetry

Milton is the author of dramas such as *Samson Agonistes* (1671) as well as lyrical sonnets, of which the finest were in fact inspired by the death of his second wife. Altogether John Milton would write twenty-three sonnets. In a very real sense therefore these can be considered as exceptions. He uses such moments to express his thoughts and feelings on specific events, historical or personal. In his lifetime, moreover, he was mainly known for his political pamphlets. As a poet during the age of Shakespeare, he was born less than a decade after the death of this one. Milton might have been less appealing than such a master of the English language but he was nonetheless destined to become one of the best writers England would ever

know. Having sided with the parliamentarians against the monarchists, Milton would begin a political career with responsibilities comparable to that today of an undersecretary of state for foreign affairs.

However the restoration of the monarchy in 1660 will mean that he is both fined and imprisoned in the famous still standing today Tower of London. Eventually pardoned, Milton would from then on lead a rather retired life devoted entirely to writing until his death in 1674. Milton's poetry was slow to see the light of day, at least under his name. His first published poem was *On Shakespear* (1630), anonymously included in the Second Folio edition of Shakespeare. In the midst of the excitement attending the possibility of establishing a new English government, Milton collected his work in 1645 *Poems*. The anonymous edition of *Comus* was published in 1637, and the publication of *Lycidas* in 1638 in *Justa Edouardo King Naufrago* was signed J. M. Otherwise the 1645 collection was the only poetry of his to see print, until *Paradise Lost* appeared in 1667.

Paradise Lost

Main article: Paradise Lost

Milton's magnum opus, the blank-verse epic poem *Paradise Lost*, was composed by the blind and impoverished Milton from 1658 to 1664 (first edition) with small but significant revisions published in 1674 (second edition). As a blind poet, Milton dictated his verse to a series of aides in his employ. It reflects his personal despair at the failure of the Revolution, yet affirms an ultimate optimism in human potential. Milton encoded many references to his unyielding support for the "Good Old Cause".[31] Milton

followed up *Paradise Lost* with its sequel, *Paradise Regained*, published alongside the tragedy *Samson Agonistes*, in 1671. Both these works also resonate with Milton's post-Restoration political situation. Just before his death in 1674, Milton supervised a second edition of *Paradise Lost*, accompanied by an explanation of "why the poem rhymes not" and prefatory verses by Marvell. Milton republished his 1645 *Poems* in 1673, as well a collection of his letters and the Latin prolusions from his Cambridge days.

A 1668 edition of *Paradise Lost*, reported to have been Milton's personal copy, is now housed in the archives of the University of Western Ontario. *Paradise Lost* is an epic poem in blank verse by the 17th-century English poet John Milton. It was originally published in 1667 in ten books, with a total of over ten thousand individual lines of verse. A second edition followed in 1674, changed into twelve books (in the manner of the division of Virgil's *Aeneid*) with minor revisions throughout and a note on the versification.[1] The poem concerns the Biblical story of the Fall of Man: the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angel Satan and their expulsion from the Garden of Eden. Milton's purpose, stated in Book I, is to "justify the ways of God to men".[2] *Paradise Lost* is widely considered one of the greatest literary works in the English language.[3]

The poem begins strong as follows:
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)

Some of the famous verses from Paradise Lost include:

The mind is its own place, and in itself

Can make a heav'n of hell, a hell of heav'n.

The context of this passage is that of Satan not yet really considering revenge. At that point he is instead deciding to make the most of the situation. This is confirmed only a few lines later when he makes the very famous utterance: Better to reign in hell, than serve in heav'n.

The following quote is from a point in the work when God is talking with his son and angels about the fact that since angels and man were given free will, it would have been meant changing their nature to have intervened and prevented their sin: The first sort by their own suggestions fell,

Self-tempted, self-depraved: man falls deceived

By the other first: man therefore shall find grace,

The other none

Finally, let us consider the following quote where Milton tells us about Eve having been deceived:

Greedily she engorged without restraint,

And knew not eating death;

It is interesting to note that even though Paradise Lost was to become considered as a major influential work, it did not meet immediate success when it was first published in 1667. It was not until 1688, a little over ten years after Milton's death that the poem would start to be widely recognized.

Perhaps such late recognition has partly to do with the fact that by the time

of his death Milton was not only broke, but he had been alienated out of intellectual life in his own country. In 1670 he would publish his controversial *The History of Britain*, and in 1671 *Paradise Regained*, dealing with the temptation of Christ. Milton would die in London on November 8 1674. The same year would appear the second edition of *Paradise Lost*.

Characters

Satan

Satan is the first major character introduced in the poem. Formerly the most beautiful of all angels in Heaven, he's a tragic figure who describes himself with the now-famous quote " Better to reign in Hell than to serve in Heaven." He is introduced to Hell after he leads a failed rebellion to wrestle control of Heaven from God. Satan's desire to rebel against his creator stems from his unwillingness to be subjugated by God and his Son, claiming that angels are " self-begot, self-raised",^[4] thereby denying God's authority over them as their creator.

Adam

Adam is the first human created by God. Though initially alone, Adam demands a mate from God. Considered God's prized creation, Adam, along with his wife, rules over all the creatures of the world and reside in the Garden of Eden. He is more intelligent and curious about external ideas than Eve. He is completely infatuated with Eve, which while pure in and of itself, eventually contributes to his reasons for joining Eve in disobedience to God.

Eve

Eve is the second human created by God, taken from one of Adam's ribs and shaped into a female form of Adam. In her innocence, she is the model of a good wife, graceful and submissive to Adam. Though happy, she longs for knowledge and, more specifically, self-knowledge. Her first act in existence is to turn away from Adam and look at and ponder her own reflection. Eve is extremely beautiful and thoroughly in love with Adam, though may feel suffocated by his constant presence. One day, she convinces Adam that it would be good for them to split up and work different parts of the Garden. In her solitude, she is tempted by Satan to sin against God. Adam shortly follows along with her.

The Son of God

The Son of God is the spirit that will become Jesus Christ, though he is never named explicitly, since he has not yet entered human form. The Son of God shares total union with God, and indeed is understood to be a person of the Godhead, along with the Father and the Spirit. He is the ultimate hero of the epic and infinitely powerful, singlehandedly defeating Satan and his followers when they violently rebel against God and driving them into Hell. The Son of God tells Adam and Eve about God's judgment after their sin. However, he sacrificially volunteers to eventually journey to the World, become a man himself, and redeem the Fall of Man through his own death and resurrection. In the final scene, a vision of Salvation through the Son of God is revealed to Adam by Michael. Still, the name, Jesus of Nazareth, and the details of Jesus' story are not depicted in the poem.[7]

God the Father

God the Father is the creator of Heaven, Hell, the World, and of everyone and everything there is. He desires glory and praise from all his creations. He is an all-powerful, all-knowing, infinitely good being who cannot be overthrown by even the great army of angels Satan incites against him. The poem begins with the purpose of justifying the ways of God to men, so God often converses with the Son of God concerning his plans and reveals his motives regarding his actions. The poem portrays God's process of creation in the way that Milton believed it was done, that God created Heaven, Earth, Hell, and all the creatures that inhabit these separate planes from part of Himself, not out of nothing.[8] Thus, according to Milton, the ultimate authority of God derives from his being the "author" of creation. Satan tries to justify his rebellion by denying this aspect of God and claiming self-creation, but he admits to himself this is not the case, and that God "deserved no such return/ From me, whom He created what I was." [9][10]

Raphael

Raphael is an angel who is sent by God to warn Adam about Satan's infiltration of Eden and to warn him that Satan is going to try to curse Adam and Eve. He also has a lengthy discussion with the curious Adam regarding creation and events which transpired in Heaven.

Michael

Michael is a mighty archangel who fought for God in the Angelic War. In the first battle, he wounds Satan terribly with a powerful sword that God designed to even cut through the substance of angels. After Adam and Eve disobey God by eating from the Tree of Knowledge, God sends the angel

Michael to visit Adam and Eve. His duty is to escort Adam and Eve out of Paradise. But before this happens, Michael shows Adam visions of the future which cover an outline of the Bible, from the story of Cain and Abel in Genesis, up through the story of Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

Interpretation and criticism

The Creation of Man, engraving from the 1688 edition, by John Baptist Medina The writer and critic Samuel Johnson wrote that *Paradise Lost* shows off “[Milton’s] peculiar power to astonish” and that “[Milton] seems to have been well acquainted with his own genius, and to know what it was that Nature had bestowed upon him more bountifully than upon others: the power of displaying the vast, illuminating the splendid, enforcing the awful, darkening the gloomy, and aggravating the dreadful.”