THE COMPLETE POETRY AND ESSENTIAL PROSE OF JOHN MILTON

Edited by William Kerrigan,
John Rumrich,
and Stephen M. Fallon

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A Chronology of Milton's Life

1608 (December 9) John Milton born on Bread Street in London.

1615 (November 24?) Brother Christopher born.

1620 (?) Enters St. Paul's School under the headmastership of Alexander Gill, Sr. Begins his friendship with Charles Diodati. Thomas Young tutors Milton at home.

1625 (February 12) Admitted to Christ's College, Cambridge.

1629 (March 26) Receives his B.A. degree. In December writes *On the Morning of Christ's Nativity.*

1632 (July 3) Receives his M.A. degree. Retires to his father's country house at Hammersmith for continued study.

1634 (September 29) *A Masque* performed at Ludlow Castle in Wales.

1635 or 36 Moves with his parents to Horton.

1637 *A Masque* published (dated 1637 but possibly published in 1638). Mother, Sara, dies in Horton on April 3. *Lycidas* written in November and published the next year.

1638–9 Milton tours the Continent from April or May 1638 to July or August 1639. Charles Diodati dies in August 1638.

1639 Settles in London, where he makes his living as a tutor.

1641 Earliest antiprelatical tracts—*Of Reformation* (May), *Of Prelatical Episcopacy* (June or July), *Animadversions on the Remonstrant's Defense* (July)—published.

1642 Publishes *The Reason of Church Government* (January or February) and *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (April). Marries Mary Powell in June or July. In August she leaves him and the Civil War begins.

1643 *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* published in August.

1644 The second edition of *The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* published in February; *Of Education* in June; *The Judgment of Martin Bucer* in August; *Areopagitica* in November.

1645 Two more divorce pamphlets, *Tetrachordon* and *Colasterion*, published in March. Reconciles with Mary in July or August and moves to a larger house in Barbican in September.

1646 *Poems of Mr. John Milton* published in January, dated 1645. Daughter Anne born July 29.

1647 (March 13) On or about this date his father dies, leaving Milton the Bread Street house and a moderate estate. (September–October) Moves to a smaller house in High Holborn.

1648 (October 25) Daughter Mary born.

1649 (January 30) Charles I executed. *Eikon Basilike* published a week later. (February 13) *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* published, with a second edition in September. (March 15) Appointed Secretary for Foreign Tongues and ordered to answer *Eikon Basilike*. (May 11) Salmasius's *Defensio Regia* arrives in England. (October 6) *Eikonoklastes* published, answering *Eikon Basilike*.

1651 (February 24) The *Pro Populo Anglicano Defensio* (*A Defense of the English People*) published, answering Salmasius. (March 16) Son John born.

1652 (February or March) Total blindness descends. Daughter Deborah born May 2. Wife Mary dies on May 5. Son John dies in June.

1653 Duties as Secretary for Foreign Tongues are reduced by the addition of an assistant. Cromwell installed as Protector in December.

1654 *Defensio Secunda* (*Second Defense of the English People*) published in May.

1655 Milton is pensioned in April and though he continues to work for the Protectorate, devotes more time to private studies. *Pro Se Defensio* (*Defense of Himself*) published in August.

1656 (November 12) Marries Katharine Woodcock.

1657 (October 19) Daughter Katharine born.

1658 Probably begins work on *Paradise Lost*. Wife Katharine dies on February 3. Daughter Katharine dies on March 17. Cromwell dies in September, succeeded by his son Richard.

1659 *A Treatise of Civil Power* published in February. Richard Cromwell resigns in May. *Considerations Touching the Likeliest Means to Remove Hirelings out of the Church* published in August.

1660 *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* published in February, with a second edition in April. Charles II proclaimed king in May. Milton arrested and imprisoned between September and November and released in December.

1663 (February 24) Marries Elizabeth Minshull. Moves to a house in Artillery Walk, near Bunhill Fields.

1665 Around June, moves to Chalfont St. Giles to avoid the London plague.

1667 (October or November) *Paradise Lost* published as a poem in ten books.

1670 (around November 1) *History of Britain* published.

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

1672 *Artis Logicae* (*The Art of Logic*) published.

1673 *Of True Religion* published. An enlarged edition of *Poems* published, also including *Of Education*.

1674 *Epistolae Familiarum* (*Familiar Letters*) published, including his *Prolusions*. *Paradise Lost. A Poem in Twelve Books* published around July 1. Milton dies November 9 or 10 and is buried in St. Giles, Cripplegate.

ON SHAKESPEARE

This poem is dated 1630 in the 1645 *Poems*, but if actually written that early, was not published until the Second Folio of 1632, where it appeared anonymously under the title "An Epitaph on the Admirable Dramatic Poet W. Shakespeare." We know nothing of the circumstances linking Milton to the makers of the Second Folio.

It is satisfying in several ways that this should be the first printed of Milton's English poems. The great poet of the age to come begins his career by honoring the great poet of the age just past. He does so by calling attention early on to the extraordinary fame, the amazing hold on living memory, that is to this day such a remarkable aspect of the Shakespeare phenomenon.

What needs my Shakespeare for his honored bones,
The labor of an age in pilèd stones,
Or that his hallowed relics should be hid
Under a star-ypointing pyramid?
Dear son of Memory, great heir of Fame,
What need'st thou such weak witness of thy name?
Thou in our wonder and astonishment
Hast built thyself a livelong monument.
For whilst to th' shame of slow-endeavoring art,
Thy easy numbers flow, and that each heart
Hath from the leaves of thy unvalued book
Those Delphic lines with deep impression took,
Then thou our fancy of itself bereaving,
Dost make us marble with too much conceiving;
And so sepulchered in such pomp dost lie,
That kings for such a tomb would wish to die.

1–2. It seems likely that the idea of the Folio as a monument (though hardly original) derives in this case from poems affixed to the First Folio, especially Ben Jonson's *To the Memory of . . . Shakespeare* 22–24.

3. **hallowed relics:** Shakespeare's (metaphorical) sainthood is implied.

4. **star-ypointing:** pointing to the stars. An archaism popularized by Spenser, the *y*-prefix is a metrically handy vestige of Middle English. Usually joined to past participles (cp. *Nat Ode* 155, *L'All* 12), here it is used with the present. The bibliographical record suggests that this ungrammatical combination of past and present tenses was intended.

8. **livelong:** durable. The 1632 Folio reads "lasting." The usage is unique and seems designed to stress Shakespeare's *living* presence.

10. **numbers:** rhythmic verses. As Heming and Condell remarked in their preface to the First Folio, "His mind and hand went together. And what he thought, he uttered with that easiness, that we have scarce received from him a blot in his papers." Cp. "inspires/Easy my unpremeditated verse" (*PL* 9.23–24). *That* substitutes for *whilst* (9).

11. **unvalued:** The primary sense is "invaluable," but "not regarded as valuable" lurks in the background (it was so used by Shakespeare).

12. **Delphic:** Apollo, the god of poetry, had his oracle at Delphi.

14. **make us marble:** Cp. *Il Pens* 42n. It is not the book that entombs Shakespeare but its en-

SONNET 13

Milton's admiration for the person and art of Henry Lawes was not affected in the slightest by the musician's ardent royalism. Nor was Lawes himself affected in the slightest by the young poet's equally ardent Puritanism. From 1630 Lawes was a member of the King's Private Music, which involved composing, planning, directing, and performing in court entertainments. During these years he continued his role as music tutor to the children of the Egerton family, and it was in this capacity that he was responsible for commissioning the young and unknown Milton to write the words for *Arcades* and *A Masque.*

As a musician, Lawes did not actually create a new style in songs. His work belonged to a period style in the middle seventeenth century that reversed an older manner by allowing poetry some role in determining the music.

To Mr. H. Lawes, on his Airs

Harry, whose tuneful and well-measured song
First taught our English music how to span
Words with just note and accent, not to scan
With Midas' ears, committing short and long,
Thy worth and skill exempts thee from the throng,
With praise enough for Envy to look wan;
To after-age thou shalt be writ the man
That with smooth air couldst humor best our tongue.
Thou honor'st verse, and verse must lend her wing
To honor thee, the priest of Phoebus' choir
That tun'st their happiest lines in hymn or story.
Dante shall give Fame leave to set thee higher
Than his Casella, whom he wooed to sing
Met in the milder shades of Purgatory.

2. **to span:** to measure, as with the hand; here referring to the words matched with notes of proper length and stress.
3. **to scan:** to determine the number and nature of poetic feet.
4. **With Midas' ears:** to scan improperly or tastelessly; Midas was given ass's ears as a punishment for preferring the music of Pan to that of Apollo (Ovid, *Met.* 11.146–79); **committing short and long:** placing a long syllable in a short note, or vice versa.
5. **exempts thee:** singles thee out.
12–14. On the threshold of Purgatory, Dante greets the shade of his friend Casella, a Florentine musician, and asks for a song; Casella proceeds to sing Dante's *Amor che me la mente mi ragiona* (*Purg.* 2.76–117).
14. **milder shades:** The threshold was less dark than the rest of Purgatory.

Then to advise how war may best, upheld,
Move by her two main nerves, iron and gold,
In all her equipage; besides to know
Both spiritual power and civil, what each means,
What severs each, thou hast learnt, which few have done.
The bounds of either sword to thee we owe;
Therefore on thy firm hand religion leans
In peace, and reckons thee her eldest son.

8. **iron and gold:** In his *Commonplace Book*, Milton quoted Machiavelli's *Discourses* 2.10 on the sinews of war being steel rather than gold (Yale 1:498).
9. **equipage:** apparatus of war.
12. **bounds of either sword:** limits of the jurisdiction of the two swords, spiritual and civil (church and state).
14. **eldest son:** despite Vane being, as we are told in the opening words of the sonnet, *young in years*.

SONNET 18

This poem was occasioned by events that took place in the Italian Alps in April through May 1655.

The Vaudois or Waldensians, who traced their origins to the twelfth century and according to some retained an Apostolic purity in matters of worship, lived in Alpine villages in France and Italy. In Italy the sect had been granted the right to settle in the Piedmont Valley by the Duke of Savoy, but the Vaudois had infiltrated villages forbidden by the treaty. The duke dispatched an army. In April 1655 around 1,712 Vaudois were massacred with great ferocity—burned alive, impaled, mutilated, hurled from precipices. Some fled for France and died of exposure in the mountains. When their leaders called for support from Protestant states, England responded fervently. Cromwell commanded a general fast, raised thousands of pounds for the victims, formed an alliance, wrote to various European leaders, including the Duke of Savoy, sent an envoy (Sir Michael Morland) to the duke, and seriously considered sending an army. Milton wrote this sonnet.

On the Late Massacre in Piedmont

Avenge O Lord thy slaughtered saints, whose bones
Lie scattered on the Alpine mountains cold,
Ev'n them who kept thy truth so pure of old

1. **Avenge:** The word is being used with biblical force; see Rev. 6.9–10 and Luke 18.7–8.

When all our fathers worshipped stocks and stones,
Forget not: in thy book record their groans
Who were thy sheep and in their ancient fold
Slain by the bloody Piemontese that rolled
Mother with infant down the rocks. Their moans
The vales redoubled to the hills, and they
To Heav'n. Their martyred blood and ashes sow
O'er all th' Italian fields where still doth sway
The triple tyrant: that from these may grow
A hundredfold, who having learnt thy way
Early may fly the Babylonian woe.

4. **stocks and stones:** a standard phrase (*OED* "stock," 1d); see Jer. 2.27, 3.9.
5. **thy book:** the book of human actions to be consulted on Judgment Day; see Rev. 5.1.
10–13. Editors often cite the old saying that "the blood of martyrs is the seed of faith."
12. **triple tyrant:** The pope wore a three-tiered miter.
13. **thy way:** the true faith.
14. Puritans identified the Church of Rome with the Babylon whose doom was prophesied in Rev. 17–18. There are also Old Testament prophecies of the destruction of Babylon, with warnings to flee before the calamity occurs (Jer. 50–51, Isa. 48).

SONNET 19

This poem presents several points of controversy.

What is its date? What is its mood? Some experts, thinking the poem to have been written soon after Milton's total loss of sight in 1652, stress the author's uncertainty over whether God will ever ask him to work again. The main spiritual task of the poem is Milton's need to resign himself to this uncertainty. Others would date the poem later, in 1655–56, on the assumption that the sonnets were numbered chronologically in the 1673 *Poems,* and *Sonnet 18* was pretty clearly written in 1655. But the sonnets are *not* placed in perfectly sequential order (Morse). It is moreover hard to believe that someone who had just published *A Second Defense* (1654) and the *Defense of Himself* (1655) would speak of himself as uselessly hoarding his one talent. The year 1652 is the more probable date of composition.

Why would Milton say, whether in 1652 or 1655–56, that blindness had come to him "Ere half my days"? The poet was, after all, forty-three in 1652. It has been suggested that his father, who died at eighty-four, encouraged a sanguine calculation of the time allotted him on this earth; but if Milton believed that he had not yet reached the halfway point in 1652, he must have been confident in outliving his father. We have no solution to this difficulty and would simply remark that Milton wanted to do a very great deal in this life.

What does the analogy at the end of the poem mean? In the sonnet as a

whole, Milton defeats beforehand a threatened impatience. He imagines God come to assess his labors, finding that he has done nothing since his blindness, and chiding him for that inactivity. Milton imagines that he would in turn chide God Himself by asking, "Doth God exact day labor, light denied?" Milton calls this a "murmur," a complaint, and we therefore know its tone to be sarcastic. "God, are you really being Godlike in chiding me for my lack of labor? How can you expect me to work in the dark night of my blindness?" But patience overcomes this fantasized complaint, and in the process lays to rest the terrifying implications of the parable of the talents (see Haskin 29–53). God will not chide. God, unlike an earthly taskmaster, does not need our work or our talents. Acceptance of the will of God is itself service enough. Then Milton alludes to angels that "post," doing the bidding of God, as opposed to angels "who only stand and wait." Both serve God. *Wait* may mean "attend as a servant" but surely also has the common sense of "stay in expectation," waiting to be given a bidding to do, a job to complete. For the time being, waiting is God's bidding. But Milton, it once again seems appropriate to remark, wanted to do a very great deal in this life.

When I consider how my light is spent,
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,
And that one talent which is death to hide,
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent
To serve therewith my Maker, and present
My true account, lest he returning chide,
"Doth God exact day labor, light denied?"
I fondly ask; but patience to prevent
That murmur soon replies, "God doth not need
Either man's work or his own gifts; who best
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his state

1. **When I consider:** The opening is formulaic; cp. Shakespeare, *Sonnet 15:* "When I consider everything that grows."
3. **that one talent:** See the parable of the talents in Matt. 25.14–30. The man with one talent hid it and was punished by being cast into the outer darkness.
4. **useless:** not in use, with a glance at usury (see Matt. 25.27); **bent:** determined.
5. **therewith:** with my spent light and useless talent as the cause or occasion of this greater determination to serve (*OED* 3b).
6. **true account:** Cp. "my certain account" in *Apology* (Yale 1:869).
7. Cp. "I must work the works of him that sent me, while it is day: the night cometh when no man can work" (John 9.4). Cp. also the parable of the vineyard, where all the day laborers, no matter how long they work, receive the same wages (Matt. 20.1–16).
8. **fondly:** foolishly.
9. **murmur:** complaint.
11. **mild yoke:** "My yoke is easy" (Matt. 11.30).

Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed
And post o'er land and ocean without rest:
They also serve who only stand and wait."

12–14. In the traditional angelology of Pseudo-Dionysius and Aquinas, the five lower orders are sent out to execute God's will, while the four higher orders stand ever in God's presence and transmit his commands to the lower orders. But Milton seems not to have accepted this distinction. Leonard rightly notes that in *Paradise Lost* all the angels, however exalted their rank, carry messages and perform tasks. The word *only* in line 14 implies that standing and waiting is not as dignified as posting *o'er land and ocean*; and *wait* may well imply that in the future a command will be given (see headnote).

Right onward. What supports me dost thou ask?
The conscience, friend, to have lost them overplied
In liberty's defense, my noble task,
Of which all Europe talks from side to side.
This thought might lead me through the world's vain masque
Content though blind, had I no better guide.

10. **conscience:** consciousness.
11. **In liberty's defense:** In January 1650, the Council of State ordered Milton to reply to Salmasius's *Defensio Regia*. He later said that his physicians had advised him that the task would result in blindness. Milton persisted, sacrificing his eyesight "for the greatest possible benefit to the state" (p. 1082).
12. **all Europe talks:** Not quite, but the *First Defense* did achieve some European notoriety (see Parker 1971, 32–38).
13. **vain masque:** The idea of life as a staged drama was commonplace; Bacon's *Of Truth* takes note of "the masques and mummeries and triumphs of the world."

SONNET 23

It is regrettable that one of Milton's most moving lyrics, possibly the most moving, should be enveloped in an unpoetic atmosphere of puzzle solving and scholarly debate. But that is the situation. For two centuries editors had assumed that the "late espousèd saint" of this sonnet was Katharine Woodcock, Milton's second wife. Then in 1945, William R. Parker wrote the first of a number of pieces urging the claims of Mary Powell, Milton's first wife.

Many of the facts cut in two directions. For example, Mary died in May 1652, three days after giving birth to Deborah, her third daughter. Katharine died in February 1658. Although she had given birth to a daughter in October 1657 (who would outlive her by only six weeks), Katharine's death was due not to childbirth but to consumption. With regard to which dead wife is Milton most likely to have thought of the Old Testament ritual of purification after childbirth? Katharine died long after the time prescribed for this purification (eighty days if the child was a daughter) had expired, whereas Mary did not survive the purification period. Milton might have thought: "Katharine lived beyond the time of uncleanness yet was not returned to me, save in a dream." But he might equally well have thought: "Mary did not live through the time of uncleanness. Would that she had, and would that she had been returned to me, as she is in this dream." It is well to bear in mind, whatever one decides, that the poem's "purification in the Old Law" is metaphorical for the wife's return to her husband, again to be "mine," and in the larger design of the poem prepares for the higher purity of her mind in line 9.

Milton, entirely blind in 1652, never saw Katharine but enjoyed "full sight" of Mary for many years. Which wife is more likely to be veiled? Katharine, the wife he never saw? So many interpreters have decided. It may be significant

that Admetus does not recognize Alcestis while she is veiled, whereas Milton, surely, is in no doubt over the identity of the veiled shade in his dream. Perhaps the veiled face symbolizes his blindness, the fact that in this life he could form no image of her face even if she were to return to him. In Heaven he will behold her without the "restraint" of blindness. Thus far the evidence favors Katharine. But what is implied and not implied by "such, as yet once more I trust to have/Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint"? The phrase "yet once more," which seems to allude in a personal and mysterious way to *Lycidas*, implies that the event in question will occur three times (once, once more, yet once more). Now the lines favor Mary Powell by suggesting that Milton has had "full sight" of her on this earth, in this dream (the veil not counting against "full sight"), and trusts to see her again in Heaven. But Katharine Woodcock is not entirely ruled out. The "yet" in "yet once more" could conceivably be an intensive, indicating that the event will happen twice (once, yet once more). Milton could be saying that he has full sight of Katharine in the dream (the subsequent detail of the veil again being regarded in the context of the dream's "day" as no compromise in "full sight") and will see her face-to-face in Heaven.

The poem achieves inner coherence no matter which woman a reader has in mind. It may point us toward the sonnet's emotional force to glance briefly at the way in which possession is drawn out in the course of the poem. "Methought": the dream vision was mine, entirely private, more so than I knew at the time. It was a vision of "my" late saint, and this blossoms into a still more emphatic "Mine" at the opening of line 5. He trusts "to have" full sight of her in Heaven. To "my fancied sight," the goodness in her face could not be plainer. Then at last she (in answer to the poet's desire?) inclines "to embrace me." But Milton awakes, she disappears, and in the end all of the poem's yearning mineness has only the empty, sightless "my night." How fragile, how pregnant with despair, was that opening "Methought"!

But Gerald Hammond has recently suggested that the cruel twist of fate at the end of the poem can also be viewed as a display of mental strength. The dreamer appears to remain entirely passive. He confesses to no coaxing, no response; the veiled woman bends to embrace him. The speaker's one positive act is to awaken at just that moment. Could it be an escape? The embraces of a woman come back from the grave might restore to a man everything he has lost and most desires to have again, but they might also draw him into the dead world of the past. Perhaps Milton, in losing the image he thought was "mine," regains his life. Perhaps his awakening "is not passive, but an act of heroic resistance" (Hammond 216).

Methought I saw my late espousèd saint
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,
Whom Jove's great son to her glad husband gave,
Rescued from death by force though pale and faint.
Mine as whom washed from spot of child-bed taint
Purification in the Old Law did save,
And such, as yet once more I trust to have
Full sight of her in Heaven without restraint,
Came vested all in white, pure as her mind:
Her face was veiled, yet to my fancied sight,
Love, sweetness, goodness in her person shined
So clear, as in no face with more delight.
But O as to embrace me she inclined,
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

1. **Methought I saw:** As in *Sonnet 19,* the opening is formulaic; see Ralegh's "Methought I saw the grave where Laura lay." **late espousèd saint:** Critics make a great deal of whether *late* modifies *espousèd,* which would make the phrase mean "recently married saint" and cast doubt on Mary Powell as the woman in question, or instead modifies *espousèd saint,* which would make the phrase mean "recently deceased wife." The first reading is strained.
2. **Alcestis:** In Euripides' *Alcestis,* Admetus can escape death by persuading someone to die in his place, and his wife, Alcestis, volunteers. Hercules rescues her from Death and returns her, pale, trembling, and veiled, to her husband.
5. **as whom:** as one whom.
5–6. God lays down the ritual prescriptions for purifying women immediately after childbirth in Lev. 12. During this time, women would not be seen by their husbands.
7. **yet once more:** The opening phrase of *Lycidas.* See headnote.
8. **without restraint:** Hammond (217, 221–23) notes the erotic force of "restraint" in *PL* 8.628. The end of the purification ritual signaled a resumption of sexual relations.
9. **all in white:** Cp. Rev. 7.13–14, 19.8.
10. **Her face was veiled:** as was the face of Alcestis (see 2n), though Milton, unlike Admetus, immediately recognizes his wife.
13–14. Among the numerous classical precedents for this failed embrace are Aeneas's three attempts to clasp the shade of his wife (*Aen.* 2.789–95) and Achilles' attempt to embrace the dream image of Patroclus (*Il.* 23.99–107).

ON THE NEW FORCERS OF CONSCIENCE UNDER THE LONG PARLIAMENT

Milton entered the pamphlet wars of the 1640s as a supporter of the Presbyterians in their struggle against Anglican Prelacy. *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1642) took up the cause of five Presbyterian ministers who, under the joint pseudonym SMECTYMNUUS, were engaged in disputes with Bishop Joseph Hall. But by the time *On the New Forcers of Conscience* was written, probably late in 1646, Milton was firmly allied with Independents in opposition to the Presbyterians, who in his mind had come to resemble the Anglican prelates they had originally sought to oust.

PARADISE LOST

THE PRINTER TO THE READER[1]

Courteous Reader, there was no argument at first intended to the book, but for the satisfaction of many that have desired it, I have procured it, and withal a reason of that which stumbled many others, why the poem rhymes not. S. Simmons

The Verse

The measure is English heroic verse without rhyme, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Vergil in Latin; rhyme being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame meter; graced indeed since by the use of some famous modern poets, carried away by custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse than else they would have expressed them. Not without cause therefore some both Italian and Spanish poets of prime note have rejected rhyme both in longer and shorter works, as have also long since our best English tragedies, as a thing of itself, to all judicious ears, trivial and of no true musical delight; which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings, a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory. This neglect then of rhyme so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of rhyming.

1. The defense of blank verse and the prose arguments summarizing each book "procured" by Milton's printer, Samuel Simmons, were inserted in bound copies of the first edition beginning in 1668, with this brief note.

Book I

The Argument

This first book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject, man's disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was placed: 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 passed over, the poem hastes into the midst of things, presenting Satan with his angels now fallen into Hell, described here, not in the center (for heaven and earth may be supposed as yet not made, certainly not yet accursed) but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest called Chaos. Here Satan with his angels lying on the burning lake, thunder-struck and astonished, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in order and dignity lay by him. They confer of their miserable fall. Satan awakens all his legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; they rise, their numbers, array of battle, their chief leaders named, 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 prophecy 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 prophecy, and what to determine thereon, he refers to a full council. What his associates thence attempt. Pandaemonium 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

1. The first line's introduction of an exemplary man recalls the epics of Homer and Vergil. Milton's theme, however, is neither martial nor imperial but spiritual: humanity's disastrous failure to obey God counterpoised by the promise of redemption. **Of man's:** The proper name *Adam* is also the Hebrew word for generic man or humankind. He is both an individual male and, with Eve, the entire species: "so God created man . . . ; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1.27). *Of man* translates the Hebrew for "woman" (Gen. 2.23). **fruit:** Its dual meanings (outcome, food) are put in play by enjambment, a primary formal device by which Milton draws out sense "from one verse into another" (*The Verse*).

Brought death into the world, and all our woe,
With loss of Eden, till one greater man
Restore us, and regain the blissful seat,
Sing heav'nly 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
Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed
Fast by the oracle of God, I thence
Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

4. **one greater man:** Jesus, second Adam (1 Cor. 15.21–22; Rom. 5.19). Cp. *PR* 1.1–4.

5. **blissful seat:** translates Vergil's epithet for Elysium, *Aen.* 6.639.

6. **Sing heav'nly Muse:** the verb and subject of the magnificently inverted sixteen-line opening sentence. By invoking a Muse, Milton follows a convention that dates from Homer. Yet Milton's Muse is not the muse of classical epic (Calliope) but the inspiration of Moses, David, and the prophets (cp. 17–18n). **secret:** set apart, not common. When the Lord descends to give Moses the law, thick clouds and smoke obscure the mountaintop, and the people are forbidden on pain of death to cross boundaries around the mountain (Exod. 19.16, 23).

8. **shepherd:** The vocation of shepherd is a key vehicle for Milton's integration of classical and scriptural traditions. Moses encounters God while tending sheep on Mount Horeb (*Oreb*) and later receives the law on *Sinai,* a spur of Horeb (Exod. 3; 19). (Or the doubling of names may simply acknowledge the inconsistency of Exod. 19.20 and Deut. 4.10.)

9. **In the beginning:** opening phrase of Genesis and the Gospel of John.

10. **Chaos:** classical term for the primeval state of being out of which God creates, also referred to as "the deep" (as in Gen. 1.2) and "the abyss" (as in l. 21). **Sion hill:** Mount Zion, site of Solomon's Temple, "the house of the Lord" (1 Kings 6.1, 13). Adding to the persistent doubleness of the invocation, Milton requests inspiration from two scriptural sites associated with God's presence and prophetic inspiration. Both sites receive dual designations: Mount Horeb/Sinai and Mount Zion/Siloa's brook.

11–12. **Siloa's brook . . . God:** spring whose waters flowed through an underground aqueduct, supplied a pool near (*Fast by*) Solomon's Temple, and irrigated the king's lush garden (cp. 4.225–30). Jerome says it ran directly beneath Mount Zion (A. Gilbert 1919, 269). Scripturally, it symbolizes David's monarchical line (Isa. 7–8, esp. 8.6). In opening the eyes of the man born blind, Jesus sends him to wash his eyes with its waters (John 9). Cp. 3.30–31. **oracle of God:** the holiest place in the Temple, the tabernacle of the Ark of the Covenant (1 Kings 6.19). The classical Muses haunt a spring (Aganippe) on Helicon (cp. 15n), "the sacred well, / That from beneath the seat of Jove doth spring" (*Lyc* 15–16). In identifying the spring near the "Holy of Holies" as similarly a site of inspiration, Milton again links scriptural and classical prophetic and poetic traditions.

14. **no middle flight:** Milton will go beyond middle air, whose upper boundary is as high as the peaks of tall mountains, and soar to the highest Empyrean, the abode of God. His soaring ambition recalls the myth of Icarus, whose failure to follow a *middle flight* caused him to tumble into the sea (cp. 7.12–20).

15. **Aonian mount:** Helicon, Greek mountain favored by the Muses (cp. 11–12n). Hesiod says that while he tended sheep on Helicon (like Moses on Horeb), the Muses called him to sing of the gods (*Theog.* 22).

16. Translates the opening of *Orlando Furioso* (1.2) and is reminiscent of *Masque* 43–45; cp. similar claims by Lucretius (*De Rerum Nat.* 1.925–30) and Horace (*Odes* 3.1.2–4).

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
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 highth of this great argument
I may assert eternal providence,
And justify the ways of God to men. –
Say first, for Heav'n hides nothing from thy view
Nor the deep tract of Hell, say first what cause
Moved our grand parents in that happy state,
Favored of Heav'n so highly, to fall off
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
The mother of mankind, what time his pride
Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his host
Of rebel angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in glory above his peers,
He trusted to have equaled the Most High,
If he opposed; and with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarchy of God
Raised impious war in Heav'n and battle proud

17–18. 1 Cor. 3.16–17, 6.19. The *Spirit* is the Holy Spirit (l. 21). In Milton's theology, the diverse functions of the Holy Spirit derive from "the virtue and power of God the Father," in this case "the force or voice of God, in whatever way it was breathed into the prophets" (*CD* 1.6, p. 1194). The site of revelation progresses from Horeb/Sinai to Sion hill/Siloa's brook to, finally, the individual human heart.

21. **brooding:** Milton thus renders the Hebrew word translated as "moved" in the *AV* (Gen. 1.2) but as *incubabat* (brooded) in St. Basil and other Latin patristic authors (see also 7.235). Cp. Sir Thomas Browne, *Religio Medici:* "This is that gentle heat that brooded on the waters, and in six days hatched the world" (73).

24. **argument:** subject matter; cp. 9.28.

25. **assert:** take the part of, champion.

26. **justify:** vindicate; cp. Pope, *Essay on Man:* "Laugh where we must, be candid where we can,/But vindicate the ways of God to man" (1.15–16). Milton's word order permits dual readings: either "justify (the ways of God to men)" or "justify (the ways of God) to men." Cp. *SA:* "Just are the ways of God,/And justifiable to men" (293–94).

27–28. Milton introduces the narrative with a query, an epic convention; cp. "Tell me, O Muse, the cause" (Vergil, *Aen.* 1.8). Homer also depicts the Muses as all-knowing: "Tell me now, ye Muses that have dwellings on Olympus—for ye are goddesses and are at hand and know all things" (*Il.* 2.484–85).

29. **grand:** great, original, all-inclusive; cp. line 122.

30. **fall off:** deviate, revolt (as in l. 33).

33. Cp. *Il.* 1.8.

36. **what time:** when; cp. *Masque* 291, *Lyc* 28.