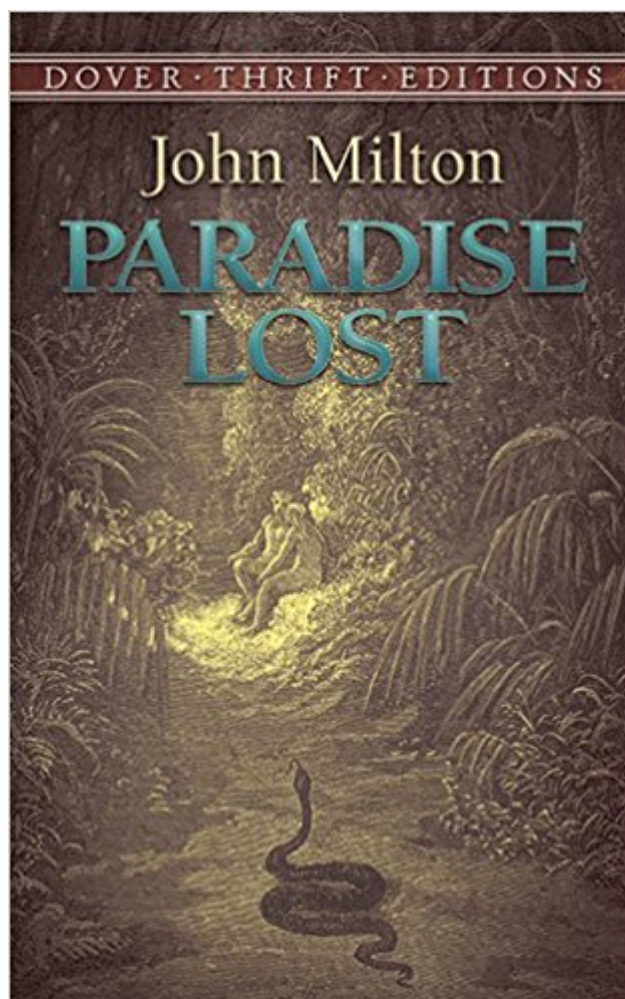


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Paradise Lost (Dover Thrift Editions)



Synopsis

Milton's great 17th-century epic draws upon Bible stories and classical mythology to explore the meaning of existence, as understood by people of the Western world. Its roots lie in the Genesis account of the world's creation and the first humans; its focus is a poetic interpretation "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." In sublime poetry of extraordinary beauty, Milton's poem references tales from Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, and Virgil's *Aeneid*. But one need not be a classical scholar to appreciate *Paradise Lost*. In addition to its imaginative use of language, the poem features a powerful and sympathetic portrait of Lucifer, the rebel angel who frequently outshines his moral superiors. With Milton's deft use of irony, the devil makes evil appear good, just as satanic practices may seem attractive at first glance. *Paradise Lost* has exercised enormous influence on generations of artists and their works, ranging from the Romantic poets William Blake and Percy Bysshe Shelley to Joseph Haydn's oratorio *The Creation* and J. R. R. Tolkien's *The Lord of the Rings*.

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Customer Reviews

Paradise Lost was not part of my core curriculum in science and mathematics. I was of course aware that scholars considered it a great work, a classic. But it seemed a bit daunting - long, difficult, dated, and possibly no longer relevant. A few years ago I made two fortunate decisions. I elected to read Milton's *Paradise Lost* and I bought the Norton Critical Edition (edited by Scott

Elledge). I read and reread *Paradise Lost* over a period of three months as well as the 300 pages of the Norton critical commentary. I was stunned by the beauty and power of Milton. Why had I waited so long to even approach such a literary masterpiece? Make no mistake. I had been right in several ways. *Paradise Lost* is difficult, it is long, and full appreciation requires an understanding of the historical and religious context. But *Paradise Lost* is a remarkable achievement. It explores questions regarding man and God that are as relevant today as in the 17th century. And the genius of Milton has never been surpassed. I found the Norton footnotes extremely helpful - definitions for rare or archaic words and expressions, explanations of the historical context, and links to the critical commentary section. The footnotes are at the page bottom, making them readily accessible. The Norton biographical, historical, and literary commentaries were fascinating in their own right. I may well as spent as many hours reading commentary as with *Paradise Lost* itself. John Milton led a remarkable life. His enthusiastic eulogy on Shakespeare was included in the second folio edition of Shakespeare in 1632. This was Milton's first public appearance as an author! While traveling as a young man he "found and visited" the great Galileo, old and blind, a house prisoner of the Inquisition for his astronomical heresy. Years later Milton, a close supporter of Cromwell, barely escaped the scaffold at the Restoration and was at risk for some period afterwards. Many considered Milton no more than an outcast, now old and blind himself, a republican and regicide who had escaped death by too much clemency. Within a few years this aging blind outcast created one of the masterpieces of the English language. Milton broke all English tradition by writing *Paradise Lost* in blank verse. Homer in Greek and Vergil in Latin had used blank verse, but English demanded rhyme. Although others failed to imitate Milton's blank verse (I suspect that none wanted to be compared directly with genius), the praise was without exception. Dryden, a master of rhyme, is attributed with saying, "This man cuts us all out, and the ancients too". Milton's characterization of Satan, Adam, Eve, the archangels Raphael, Michael, and Gabriel, and even God himself are masterful. The debates and arguments that evolve around free will, obedience, forbidden knowledge, love, evil, and guilt are timeless. And fascinating. And thought provoking. *Paradise Lost* will require commitment and patience and thought. The commitment in time is substantial. (I enjoy Samuel Johnson's subtle comment: "None ever wished it longer than it is.") But the return is a personal experience with great literature, one of the masterpieces of the English language. I consider myself fortunate to have made such an investment.

I have read "*Paradise Lost*" four times, and took no less than three semesters on it at university. This was the edition we used to work. Modernised spelling, coherent punctuation (plus variations of

it in the notes), good introduction, and enormous work in the notes; this edition has all you need for a good reading of the epic poem. As to the poem itself, some people are hard on it for all the wrong reasons. Remember that it is a 17th century poem, that English was not exactly similar as it is today, and that there are many, many words which were first used in English in "Paradise Lost". Milton was innovative with words, and he gave English new words, and expressions, such as the most famous "all Hell broke loose", which was first uttered in "Paradise Lost". A poem like this cannot be read without good notes, and this is what this edition has to offer. Notes aren't enough, though, they have to be good, and in this edition, they are. The poem itself is not burdened by the numbers of the notes, because there are so many, the editor decided not to show them in the text per se, but at the end of the book, you will always have the reference, the lines, which the notes are about. As to the poem itself, if you don't know it, you certainly know of the story of the Fall of Man, Adam and Eve, and the rebellion of Satan in Heaven. I'll only say that Milton's God is one seriously problematic figure in the poem, and that it caused centuries of academic discussion as to whether Milton's God is a good God or a devilish one, whether "Paradise Lost" was truly a "myth", in the old sense of a story which explains why we're here and how it got to be, or whether it was an attack on Christianity. Scholars still discuss this today, so make your own mind if you can!

When John Milton set out to write *Paradise Lost*, he had every intention of writing a masterpiece of the English language. He felt he was destined for greatness, and his creation does not disappoint. With over 9000 lines of some of the greatest poetry ever written, Milton does an incredible job of using classical and biblical allusions within a classical format to create a surprisingly modern and incredibly poignant look at the nature of God and man. Add on to this the fact that he was blind when he composed it, and you cannot call PL anything less than a work of genius. What separates this version from all the others available? The incredibly detailed work of the editors. The annotations of this edition are absolutely fantastic. They are plentiful (sometimes taking up as much as half a page), extremely informative, and surprisingly fun to read. Most annotated works such as this merely clarify antiquated vocabulary, but in this case the editors point out classical allusions, references to current events, and references to Milton's prose works. In addition to the prose and poetry associated with the text, the editors routinely mention the critical discourse (of which there is an unholy amount) associated with Milton. There are even moments where I laughed out loud at their comments. There is also a subtle touch to the annotations, in that there is no indication of annotations within the line. What I mean by this is that there are no bubbles or footnote marks in the body of the poem. The annotations at the bottom of the page simply point to a line number. This

allows the reader to ignore the annotations if they choose to do so. Another nice characteristic of this edition is the artwork and illustrations included. There's some really fantastic stuff in there. All in all, this is an excellent edition of an excellent poem.

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