

# THE CANONICAL LIFE AND TIMES OF JOHN MILTON

1608-1674 CE



Portrait of John Milton, age 10 painted in 1618. Painted by Cornelis Janssens van Ceulen (1593-1661).

# THE EARLY LIFE AND EDUCATION OF JOHN MILTON

- As a boy, Milton attended Saint Paul's considered one of the best in England at the time for their teachings in Latin and Greek.
- For what wasn't covered at Saint Paul's, Milton's father paid for additional tutors (in subjects like modern languages like French and Italian).
- At the age of 17, Milton went to Cambridge University and was known for being accomplished in Latin composition in both verse and prose.
- While a student at Cambridge, Milton wrote Latin poetry and some English poetry, including "Ode on the Morning of Christ's Nativity," often considered a masterpiece (later critics like C.S. Lewis and T.S. Eliot called the poem such).
- In 1630, at the age of 22, Milton obtained his B.A. from Cambridge and two years later got his Master's from the same school.
- To complete his education, Milton yet again used his father's money to travel and study throughout Europe for fifteen months

   spending time in Italy and running into people like Galileo.

Young John Milton Set Out To Do One Thing: To Be The Greatest Poet In The English Language. With His Affluence, His Education, His Passions, And His Determination, John Milton Seemed To Be Off To A Great Start.



Portrait of John Milton, roughly age 21, painted in 1629 by an unknown artist.

### THE BUILDUP TO THE ENGLISH CIVIL WAR

- Milton's tour of Europe got cut short he canceled plans to go to Sicily and Greece in order to go home because of political and religious turmoil and strife.
- The English Puritans and Scottish Presbyterians were challenging the legitimacy of the English monarch, King Charles I.
  - Queen Elizabeth I had no children and named no heirs, whereupon her deathbed supposedly named King James I as her successor, continuing Protestantism as the religion of the nation (as opposed to Catholicism).
  - King James I begot King Charles I, continuing the line and Protestantism in England.
- Parliament, the legislative body of the land (with the king being the executive, but with more power than we picture it having today), hadn't been called to order by the king for a decade.
- King Charles I was attempting to collect taxes and rule without the aid of Parliament through ruling by decree (think executive orders), desperately needed money to quash rebellions in Scotland so he called to order a "Short Parliament" that was, as the name implied, quickly dismissed after three weeks when The House of Commons demanded that their grievances also be heard after a decade of not being called. This happened in 1629 – the same year as this portrait of John Milton was painted.
- King Charles I's army proved to be ill-trained and was unable to defeat the Scots; this led to a campaign in which they took Newcastle. King Charles I had no choice but to call Parliament. This next session lasted 20 years, right up until the English Civil War began.

## JOHN MILTON: A PARLIAMENTARIAN, NOT A ROYALIST

# Participation in the English Civil War (1642-1651)

- Milton wrote multiple pieces of prose in support of Parliament between the 1640s and 1650s.
- King Charles I was beheaded in January of 1649 as a traitor of the state.
- Oliver Cromwell, an English military and political leader, fought on the Parliamentarian side and became Lord Protector of England, Scotland, and Ireland from 1653 until he died in 1658.
- In 1649, Milton was appointed secretary for foreign tongues to the Council of State (in charge of foreign policy and official correspondence) and served until Cromwell's death in 1658 (9 years).

# On the Tenure of Kings and Magistrates (1649)

"If men within themselves would be govern'd by reason, and not generally give up thir understanding to a double tyrannie, of Custom from without, and blind affections within, they would discerne better, what it is to favour and uphold the Tyrant of a Nation. But being slaves within doors, no wonder that they strive so much to have the public State conformably govern'd to the inward vitious rule, by which they govern themselves."

"The *Greeks* and *Romans*, as thir prime Authors witness, held it not onely lawfull, but a glorious and Heroic deed, rewarded publicly with Statues and Garlands, to kill an infamous Tyrant at any time without tryal: and but reason, that he who trod down all Law, should not be voutsaf'd the benefit of Law."

# On The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates was used to help justify the execution of a king.

This work was published two weeks after the execution of King Charles I. This document was used by the new government to defend their actions for the regicide (murder of a king).

The full title of this piece is: "The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates: proving that it is lawful, and hath been held so through the ages, for any, who has 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 deny'd to do it. And that they, who of late so much blame Deposing, are the Men that did it themselves."



Engraving of John Milton, roughly age 67, by William Faithorne (1616-1691) in 1670.

# A TIMELINE OF JOHN MILTON'S LIFE BEFORE PUBLISHING PARADISE LOST IN 1667

- 1642 Marries Mary Powell
- 1650 Starts to go blind
- 1652 Wife Mary dies along with Milton's son leaving him with three daughters, the eldest of which is 6 years old
- 1652 Goes completely blind
- 1656 Marries Katherine Woodcock
- 1658 Katherine dies in childbirth along with the child
- 1658 Lord Cromwell dies
- 1658 is probably when Milton started writing Paradise Lost
- 1660 The Monarchy is restored with King Charles II
- 1660 Was arrested and had his books burned but was later released only to have a death warrant out later for his arrest but was hidden by friends (like the poet Andrew Marvell)
- to the execution block, had the corpse beheaded, then had the head exhibited on a pike (the way traitors to the state were executed)
- 1663 Married Elizabeth Minshull (this wife outlived Milton)

# AFTER PARADISE LOST

Milton continued to publish, including a sequel *Paradise Regained* in 1671, a book of short poems in 1673, and a second edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1674.

Milton died later that year in 1674.

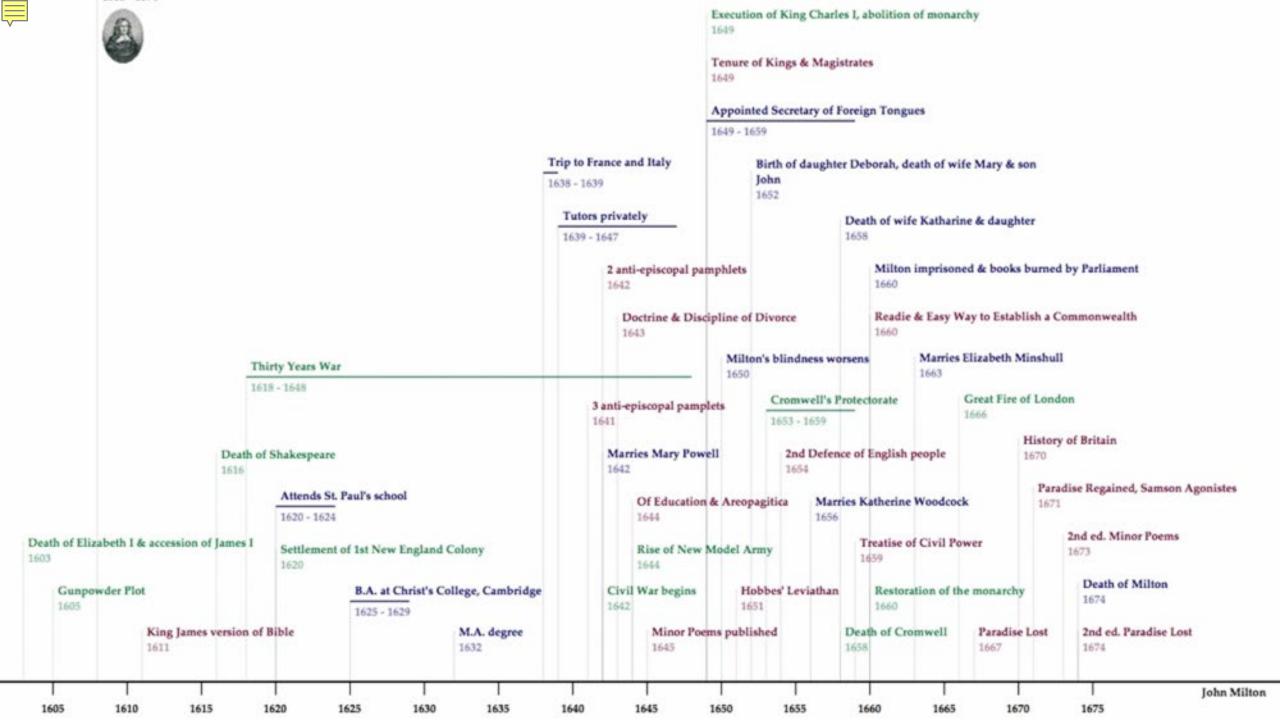
Milton, during his time, was known moreso as a political figure than as a poet.

Despite Milton's contemporaries, even his political opposition, praising Paradise Lost as a poetic masterpiece, Milton was not buried with other poets like Spencer in the poets corner of Westminster Abbey, but with his father in London's church Saint Giles.

# ON MILTON'S DETERMINATION TO WRITE

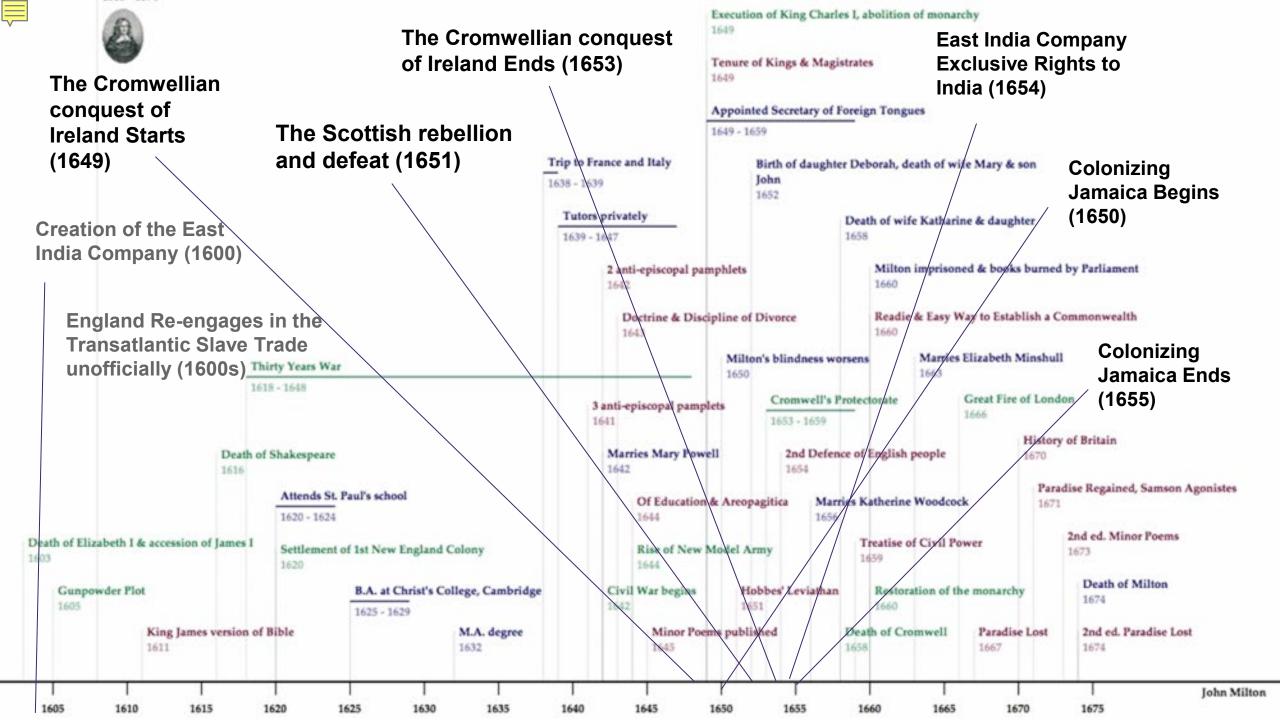
### In his lifetime, Milton wrote:

- Both in Latin and English
- Both in prose and verse
- Both in established poetic forms as well as inviting his own known as Miltonic Verse used in Paradise Lost, Paradise Regained, and Samson Agonistes
- Both as a sighted man and a blind man
- Both as a husband and as a widow (with young children and no sight)
- Both as a national political voice and an exiled pauper with a death warrant out for his beheading



But there is something missing from that timeline that's relevant to our analysis of Paradise Lost

- The Cromwellian conquest of Ireland took place from 1649 to 1653
  - Cromwell is a hated figure to this day in Ireland because of how bloody this conquest
    was
- The Scottish rebelled against Cromwell in June of 1651 to try and restore the monarchy to the throne and were defeated by September 3rd of that year - killing 3,000 and taking 10,000 prisoners who were sold into indentured labor in the West Indies, Virginia, and Maine.
- English privateers, also known as pirates, started to re-engage in the Transatlantic Slave Trade at the turn of the 16th century. While this became a full-blown crown-backed practice in 1660, after the fall of Cromwell, it also took place during his protectorship.
- Cromwell had eyes on colonizing Jamaica in the 1650s and it officially became an English colonies in 1655 when the English took the occupied land from the previous colonizers, Spain.
- The East India Company was established in the 1600s and backed the parliamentarians. Upon seizing power, Cromwell gave the company exclusive rights to colonize and exploit India in 1654.



# Paradise Lost by John Milton

### The only copy of a surviving manuscript of *Paradise Lost* from 1665

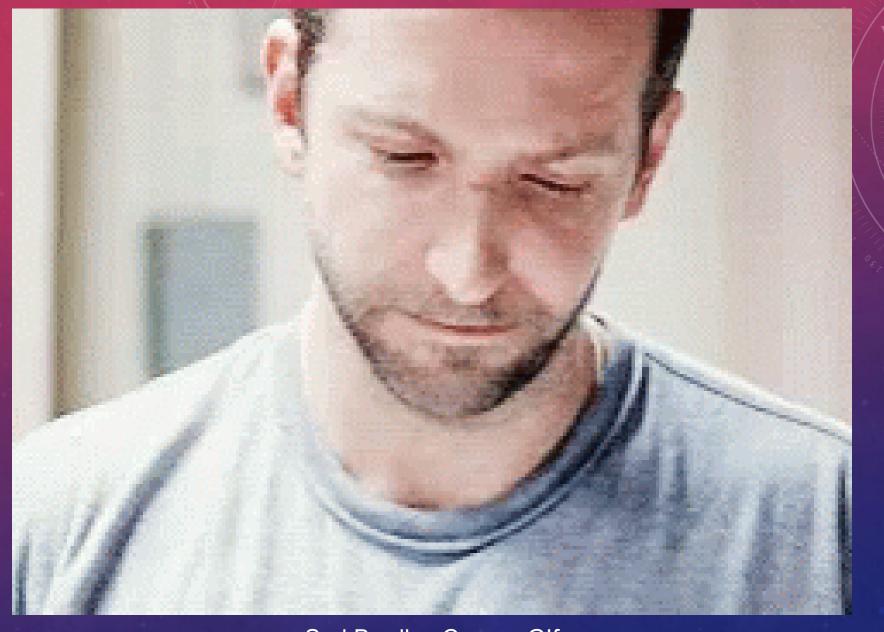
avadiso loft. Of mans fixed disobodiones, & the fruit Of that forbidden twoo, who fo mortall taft Brought Doats into the woulds, & all our woo. Shite losso of Edon, till one queatou man Rostono us, & nogamo the blisfull foato, Sing hoavily mufo, that on the forest for of Oxob ox of Sinas Didst infpino That shophoands, who finst taught the shopen foods, · fi the bogining how the Hoarns & Earts 10 Appoint of Chaos: Or if office hill Dolight thos mous, & Miloa's busons that flowed fast by the Oxatle of Gods; & thouse Invoke they aid to my adventuous fong That with no middle flight metonds to france Above th' donian mount; while it pour fues Things mattomptod yot in profe or whime. And shoifly thou O officity that doft profor Before all tomples th'upright houst & vand Inforust mo, for thou knowst ; thou from the fin Staft ovofont, a wite mighty wings outforced hove like fatst brooding on the valt Aby for Amadet it progrant: Tohat in mo is Janko

Allumino, what is low rails & support; That to the high of this groat augument I may about the ofornal Providonto. And justified the wayes of gods to mon. Say first, for hoavin hides nothing from they vion Now the door tratt of holl, fay first what taufor Mouth our grands paronts in that happin stato, favour's of hoavn to highly, to fall off from this Croaton, & transquotso his will How one wester aint, Londs of the world befiles! Who first sodurd thom to that foods wordt? The informal Sorpont; has it was, whof a quite offixade an wite enoy a neverye, does abide mo mother of markings; what time his various Had raft him out from heavn; nits all his hold of noboll dugolls, by whose and afring To fot himfolfo in glong above his poones Hos trufted to have equally the most High. If he opposed is a with ambitious aims Against the throne & monarthy of Gods, Raiffor improus warm in housin a battoll prouds White vains attompt. Him the Almighty power Rully hoad long flamoing from th'othorisal skie With hidoous rums & sombuftion Downs 35 bottom los posidition, those to drott

Paradise Lost is a 12-book epic poem written in blank verse depicting the biblical Fall of man told from two perspectives: that of Satan and that of Adam and Eve.

Why is there no movie preview? Well, because there's no movie.

There was *supposed* to be a blockbuster action movie version in the 2013 directed by Alex Proyas and had Bradley Cooper cast as Lucifer. The movie was cancelled due to budget concerns - it was going to cost an estimated \$120 million and was postponed multiple times before it was officially cancelled.



Sad Bradley Cooper.Glf

# There are many popular works inspired by *Paradise Lost,* however.

There's also a 1996 documentary about murdered children titled *Paradise Lost: The Child Murders at Robin Hood Hills*- it has nothing to do with Milton.

- Poet William Blake printed illustrations for the poem, but also had references to Milton and the poem throughout his works and penned a poem called "Milton: A Poem" where Milton, like Satan, rejects heaven
- Mary Shelley uses a quote from Paradise Lost as an epigraph (aka an opening quote that highlights themes or influences for the work that follows) in her novel Frankenstein
- John Steinbeck's novel Dubious Battle is set in Book I of Paradise Lost
- Philip Pullman's trilogy His Dark Materials, made into both a film and a series (The Golden Compass), is heavily influenced by Paradise Lost
- Se7en references Paradise Lost as what inspired the killings taking place in the movie
- The 1997 film The Devil's Advocate starring Keanu Reeves and Al Pacino has a character named John Milton and quotes Milton in the ending - "Better to reign in Hell, than to serve in Heaven, is that it?"



Let's watch the trailer for *The Devil's Advocate* 



Let's watch Keanu Reeves say a line from Paradise Lost

According to the Academy of Poets, an epic poem is a long, often book-length, narrative poem written in verse form that retells the heroic journey of a single person or a group of persons. Elements that typically distinguish epics include superhuman deeds, fabulous adventures, highly stylized language, and a blending of lyrical and dramatic traditions.

Paradise Lost is an Epic Poem

Blank Verse is verse without rhyme that still uses iambic pentameter. Iambic pentameter, or one stressed syllable and one unstressed syllable, was also used a lot in *The Tempest*, so you should be familiar with how to read the meter.

Paradise Lost is written in blank verse.

# BOOK I OF PARADISE LOST



# THE FIRST SENTENCE

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast 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, dist inspire That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed, In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth Rose out of Chaos: Or if Sion Hill Delight thee more, and Siloa's Brook that flow'd Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence Invoke thy aid in my adventurous Song, That with no middle flight intends to soar Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.

# FROM THE KING JAMES BIBLE (1611) – THE BOOK OF GENESIS CH. 3

- 1. Now the serpent was more subtil than any beast of the field which the LORD God had made. And he said unto the woman, Yea, hath God said, Ye shall not eat of every tree of the garden?
- 2. And the woman said unto the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden:
- 3. But of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eat of it, neither shall ye touch it, lest ye die.
- 4. And the serpent said unto the woman, Ye shall not surely die:
- 5. For God doth know that in the day ye eat thereof, then your eyes shall be opened, and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil.
- 6. And when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree to be desired to make one wise, she took of the fruit thereof, and did eat, and gave also unto her husband with her; and he did eat.
- 7. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves.

- 13. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat.
- 17. And unto Adam he said, Because thou hast hearkened unto the voice of thy wife, and hast eaten of the tree, of which I commanded thee, saying, Thou shalt not eat of it: cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of thy life;
- 18. Thorns also and thistles shall it bring forth to thee; and thou shalt eat the herb of the field;
- 19. In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it wast thou taken: for dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

# HELL IS...

A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames No light, but rather darkness visible Serv'd onely to discover sights of woe Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace (65) And rest can never dwell, hope never comes That comes to all; but torture without end Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd: Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd (70) For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordain'd In utter darkness, and thir portion set As far remove'd from God and light of Heav'n As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole. O how unlike the place from whence they fell! (75)



Painting *Milton Dictating to his Daughter* by Henry Fuseli 1794

What does it mean for a blind man, blind during the writing of this epic poem, to describe hell as "darkness visible" and to describe heaven as "light" in contrast?

# According to Steven Swarbrick in his article "Object-Oriented Disability; The Prosthetic Image in *Paradise Lost*"

For T.S. Eliot, the answer to "what can an image be?" entails shifting our general "mode of apprehension," [to] a kind of aesthetic reeducation of the body. The goal, he writes, in reading Milton is not to see any image in the singular. Rather, "our sense of sight must be blurred":

We must [. . .] in reading Paradise Lost, not expect to see clearly; our sense of sight must be blurred, so that our hearing may become more acute. Paradise Lost [. . .] makes this peculiar demand for a readjustment of the reader's mode of apprehension. The emphasis is on the sound, not the vision, upon the word, not the idea; and in the end it is the unique versification that is the most certain sign of Milton's intellectual mastership.

Eliot suggests that it is Milton's physical blindness that materially instantiates the "weakness" and "limitation" of his images, not as "a negligible defect, but as a positive virtue." Milton's "limitation of visual power" produces poor images, but images that are rich in cross-modal perception. As Tobin Siebers writes, "All disabled bodies"— and here I would add, all bodies—"create this confusion of tongues—and eyes and hands and other body parts. For the deaf, the hand is the mouth of speech, the eye, its ear. Deaf hands speak. Deaf eyes listen" (53). For Milton, the eye is in the hand and ear (of another). Paradise Lost testifies to this audiovisual and tactile assemblage of body parts: dictated by Milton, recorded by his daughter, and then read back to Milton, the poem—far from being negatively disabled by Milton's blindness becomes the site of a multisensory and trans-gender collaboration and production.14 Milton's imagery belongs to this prosthetic circuitry of eye-hand-ear-daughter.

# Let's contrast that idea though (from Kim Hall's *Things* of *Darkness: Economies of Race and Gender in Early Modern England*)

"He that cannot understand the sober, plain, and unaffected stile of the Scriptures, wil be ten times more puzzl'd with the knotty Africanisms, the pamper'd metaphors, the intricat, and involv'd sentences of the fathers..." - John Milton, *Reformation Touching Church Discipline* (1641)

A survey of Shakespeare's works demonstrates how modern literary criticism remystifies the appearance of blackness in literary works by insisting that references to race are rooted in European aesthetic tradition rather than any consciousness of racial difference...Similar evocations of blackness...occur with startling regularity throughout a broad range of Renaissance texts. ...Milton's admonitions against the "knotty Africanisms" of biblical commentary lies a broad discursive network in which the polarity of dark and light articulates ongoing cultural concerns over gender roles and shifting trade scriptures. I argue that descriptions of dark and light, rather than being mere indications of Elizabethan beauty standards or markers of moral categories, became in the early modern period a conduit through which the English began to formulate the notions of "self" and "other" so well known as the Anglo-American racial discourses (1-2).

Which mode of critical discourse is right? Is Paradise Lost a way in which Milton shares his rich perceptions outside of sight or a place where he exercises his early modern colonizing government's point of view?

Here's the thing about literature both of those, and more, are fair ways to read this passage. A text exists and is created in a multitude of contexts; when we use a critical lens like disability studies or critical race studies, we are focusing on specific interpretations of a text. Using one discourse to analyze doesn't negate or invalidate other discourses.

# BETTER TO REIGN IN HELL, THEN SERVE IN HEAV'N

In this the Region, this the Soil, the Clime, Said then the lost Arch-Angel, this the seat That we must change for Heav'n, this mournful gloom For that celestial light? Be it so, since he (245) Who now is Sovran can dispose and bid What shall be right: Fardest from him is best Whom reason hath equald, force hath made supream Above his equals. Farewel happy Fields Where Joy for ever dwells: Hail horrours, hail (250) Infernal world, and thou profoundest Hell Receive thy new Prossessor: One who brings

A mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n. (255)
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be, all but less then he
Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least
We shall be free; th' Almighty hath not built
Here for his envy, will not drive us hence: (260)
Here we may reign secure, and in my choyce
To reign is worth ambition though in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, then serve in Heav'n.

# LET'S LOOK AT SATAN

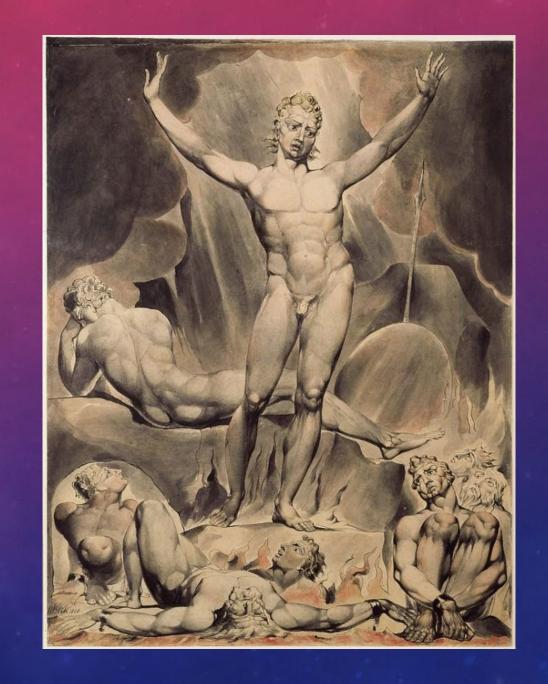
## Etymology of Lucifer (OED)

- 1. As a proper name, and allusively
  - a. The morning star; the planet Venus when she appears in the sky before sunrise (1050 ce to 1887 ce)
  - b. Day Star (1585-1599 ce) now an obsolete use of the word.

### 2. Still a name

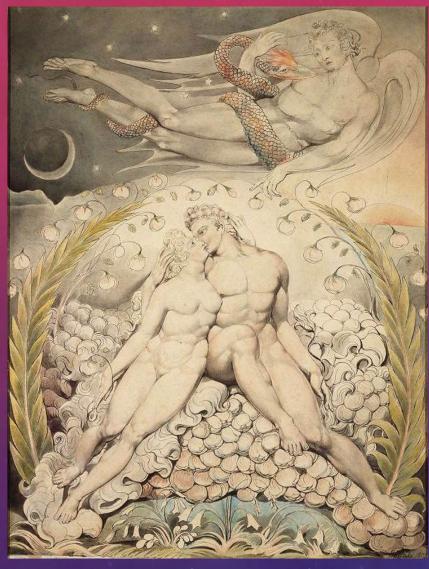
- a. The rebel archangel whose fall from heaven was supposed to be referred to in Isa. Xiv. 12; Satan, the devil (1300 ce to now)
- b. (Allusively). One who commits the sin of Lucifer, i.e. who seeks to dethrone God; occasionally applied to one who presumptuously rebels against an earthly sovereign (1549-1693) now an obsolete use of the word.

Satan Arousing the Rebel Angels by William Blake in 1808



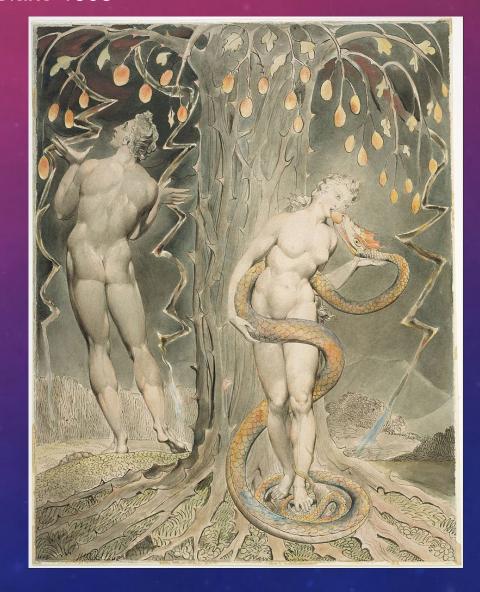
Given the OED's 2b use of the word Lucifer (below), would you argue that Milton identifies himself and his rebellion with Satan and the fallen angels in hell? Why or why not?

(Allusively). One who commits the sin of Lucifer, i.e. who seeks to dethrone God; occasionally applied to one who presumptuously rebels against an earthly sovereign (1549-1693) – now an obsolete use of the word.

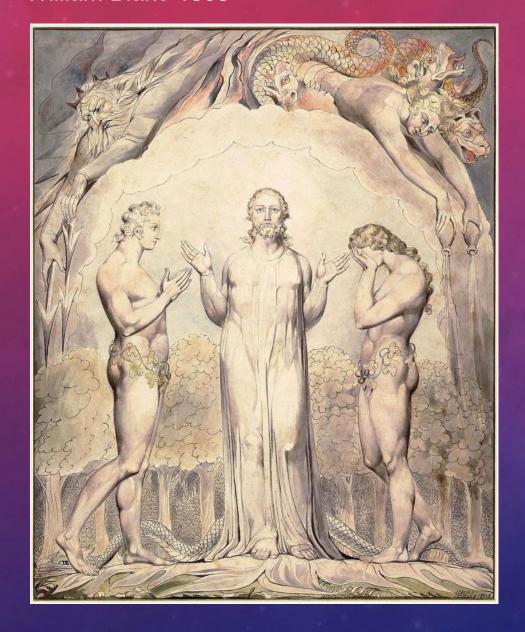


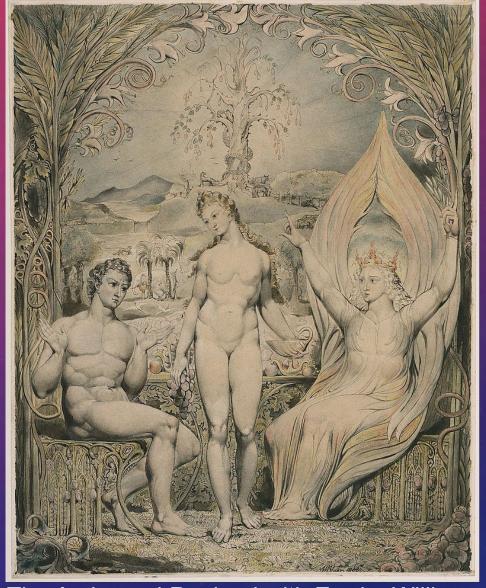
Satan Watching the Caresses of Adam and Eve by William Blake 1808

# The Temptation and Fall of Eve by William Blake 1808



# The Judgement of Adam and Eve by William Blake 1808





The Archangel Raphael with Eve by William Blake 1808

# BOOK II OF PARADISE LOST

Satan wakes up to find he has a surprise daughter - Sin, and a grown grandson that he sired, Death.

## Origins of Sin

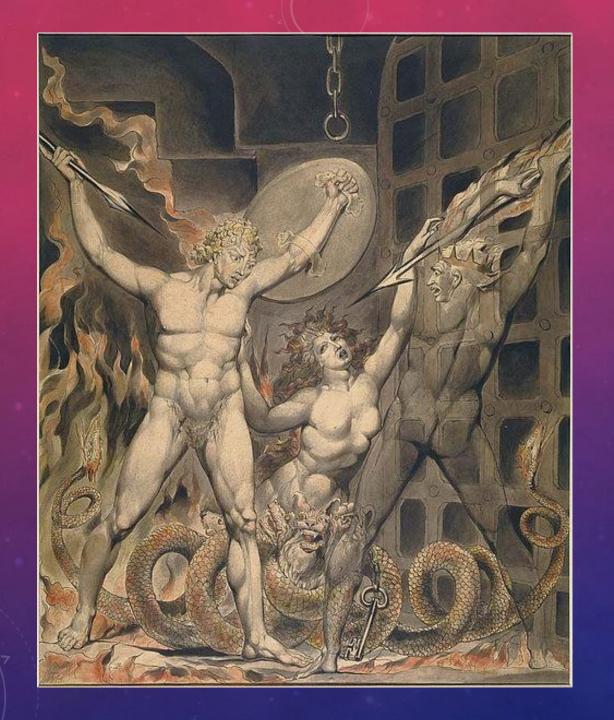
Hast thou forgot me then, and do I seem
Now in thine eye so foul, once deemd so fair
In Heav'n, when at th' Assembly, and in sight
Of all the Seraphim with thee combin'd (750)
In bold conspiracy against Heav'ns King,
All on a sudden miserable pain
Surprisd thee, dim thine eyes, and dizzie swumm
In darkness, while thy head flames thick and fast
Threw forth, till on the left side op'ning wide, (755)
Likest to thee in shape and count'nance bright,
Then shining Heav'nly fair, a Goddess arm'd
Out of thy head I sprung; amazement seis'd
All th' Host of Heav'n back they recoild affraid
At first, and call'd me Sin...(760)

## Origins of Death

...but familiar grown, (761) I pleas'd, and with attractive graces won The most averse, thee chiefly, who full oft Thy self in me thy perfect image viewing Becam'st enamour'd, and such joy thou took'st With me in secret, that my womb conceiv'd A growing burden... (767) ...Pensive here I sat Alone, but long I sat not, till my womb Pregnant by thee, and now excessive grown Prodigious motion felt and rueful throes. (780) At last this odious offspring whom thou seest Thine own begotten, breaking violent way Tore through my entrails, that with fear and pain Distorted, all my nether shape thus grew Transform'd: but he my inbred enemie (785) Forth issu'd, brandishing his fatal Dart Made to destroy: I fled, and cry'd out Death; Hell trembl'd at the hideous Name, and sigh'd From all her Caves, and back resounded Death.

# Inspired by Roman Classics - The Birth of Minerva (also called Athena)

- In multiple Greek and Roman myths, Minerva/Athena is born from Jupiter/Zeus's forehead, fully grown. Sometimes this is after Zeus sleeps with then eats Metis (a titan) for fear of her powerful offspring.
- When Minerva is born, she comes out fully clad in armor.
- Many of the myths also have Minerva banging on Jupiter's head from the inside with her axe, anxious to come out and giving Jupiter a headache.
- Once she was born, Jupiter had no issues and his headache went away.



Satan, Sin, and Death by William Blake 1808

