

Paradise Lost by John Milton [B2]

Capolavoro della letteratura universale, questo lungo poema in versi sciolti racconta la storia biblica della ribellione di Satana e della caduta di Adamo ed Eva, esibendo con maestria la ricchezza della lingua inglese.

After he went [blind](#) in 1654, the poet John Milton produced his masterpiece *Paradise Lost* by dictating the verses to his daughters, friends and assistants. An epic poem in [blank verse](#) or iambic pentameter, the verses came to him each night in his sleep. Milton had a tragic life; as well as losing his sight, he also lost two wives, two daughters and a son. *Paradise Lost*, published in its final twelve-book form in 1674, established him on a par with William Shakespeare, as one of the most important writers in the English language.

INFLUENTIAL WORK

Milton wrote his ten-thousand-line poem [to debunk](#) Classical heroism and extol Christian heroism, exemplified by the Son of God. It quickly became one of the most influential works in English literature. The poem concerns the biblical story of the fall of man from God's grace: the temptation of Adam and Eve by the fallen angel Satan, disguised as a snake, to eat the apple from the Tree of Knowledge. This is against God's express wish, and they are later expelled from the Garden of Eden.

DEATH INTO THE WORLD

Milton opens *Paradise Lost* by explaining the fatal disobedience of Adam and Eve. "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" "Dell'uom la prima colpa e del vietato Arbor funesto il malgustato frutto Che l'Eden ci rapì, che fa di morte E d'ogni male apportator nel mondo."

BLANK VERSE

The poet's use of **blank verse** (where the lines do not rhyme) was highly unusual. The poet's printer asked Milton to explain to the readers "why the Poem rhymes not." Milton himself said "Rhyme [was] the invention of a barbarous age." Audaciously, he said he would create "things unattempted yet⁵ in Prose and Rhyme". Miltonic **blank verse** became the standard for those trying to write English epics for centuries. The poet's own individual style is known as 'Miltonian'; which according to the Collins Dictionary means "solemn, elevated, majestic." Satan's Famous Phrase A perfect example of Miltonian writing is Satan's famous declaration about living in Hell. "What matter where, if I be still the same, And what I should be, all but less than 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: Here we may reign secure, and in my choice To reign is worth ambition though in Hell: Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n" "Che importa ov'io mi sia se ognor lo stesso, E qual deggio, son io? s'io sono ancora Nulla minor del mio nemico ov'egli Deponga il fulmin suo? Liberi almeno, Qui liberi saremo: questo soggiorno Egli non fece onde lo invidi, e quindi Sbandirci non vorrà: regnar sicuri Qui noi possiamo, e, al creder mio, quaggiuso Anco è bello il regnar; sì, meglio sempre Che in ciel servaggio, è nell'inferno un regno."

GROUNDBREAKING WORK

Contemporaries were **astonished** and mostly enchanted by Milton's **groundbreaking** work. Just one generation later, England's most famous lexicographer, Samuel Johnson, called *Paradise Lost* among the highest "productions of the human mind." The poem has exercised an enormous influence on not just English but also on global culture since its publication. Artists **bewitched** by the poem's power include Salvador Dalí, William Blake, Mary Shelley, Percy Bysshe Shelley, William Wordsworth, John Keats, John Steinbeck, Salman Rushdie and Philip Pullman.

POWERFUL WRITING

The incredible power of Milton's writing can be seen in his description of God casting out Satan and his rebel angels from Heaven. "Him the Almighty Power Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Skie With hideous ruins and Combustion down To bottomless perdition, there to dwell In Adamantine chains and penal Fire" "L'onnipossente braccio Con orrendo fragor, tra incendio immenso Precipitolli dagli eterei scanni Giù capovolto e divampante tutto In spaventoso e senza fondo abisso; Ove in catene d'adamante stretto A starsi fu dannato e in fiamme ultrici Quel tracolato sfidator di Dio."

GLOBAL REACH

The reach of English literature's most famous poem is truly global. It has been translated more often in the last forty years than in the previous three hundred! Translations now number more than three hundred, and in almost sixty languages, from Tamil to Tongan. A major reason for this popularity is that many rebellious or revolutionary groups around the world identify with Milton's characterisation of Satan — for many Romantic critics, the hero of Paradise Lost! — as trying to revolt against God the father.

APPRECIATING MILTON

Today, some parts of Paradise Lost are hard to understand, because the language is often dated, and it is full of religious and political references of the time. However, it is worth the effort trying to appreciate Milton's genius. The simple beauty of the words touches people without their even understanding the meaning. Paradise Lost is, after all, one of the greatest poems in the English language — and it has one of the greatest declarations of love ever written. Faced with losing Eve after she succumbs to temptation, Adam chooses to join her, as "to lose thee were to lose myself." "Certain my resolution is to Die; How can I live without you, how forgo Thy sweet converse and love so dearly joined, To live again in these wild woods forlorn? "E trascinati al precipizio ov'io, Io pur trabocco: che con te già fermo Son d'incontrar la morte! E come prive Di te viver potrei? come il soave Perder

consorzio tuo? come dal petto Svellermi il forte amor che a te m'annoda, E per questi ermi boschi errar solingo Un altra volta?".

A MAGICAL MASTERPIECE

Philip Pullman, one of Britain's most popular and most perceptive authors, who wrote his trilogy *His Dark Materials* (later filmed with Nicole Kidman and Daniel Craig starring) as *Paradise Lost* for teenagers, is brilliantly clear in his explanation of the magic of Milton's masterpiece: "No one, not even Shakespeare, surpasses Milton in his command of the sound, the music, the weight and taste and texture of English words." Milton's achievement is all the more remarkable when you consider that the poet's breathhtaking imagination came from sadly sightless eyes.

Glossary

- **blank verse** = verso sciolto
- **bewitched** = ammaliati
- **casting out** = espellere
- **command** = dominio
- **achievement** = risultato
- **blind** = diventare cieco
- **astonished** = sbalorditi
- **groundbreaking** = all'avanguardia
- **dated** = antiquato
- **thee** = te, a te
- **breathhtaking** = impressionante
- **to debunk** = smentire