

The first literary work by an Englishman to be genuinely illustrated: Milton's masterwork, *Paradise Lost*.

Milton, John. *Paradise lost. A poem in twelve books...*The 4th ed., adorn'd with sculptures. London: Printed by Miles Flesher, for Jacob Tonson, 1688. 14 15/16 inches (380 mm), 2 pp. l., 343 [i.e. 345], [6] pp. front. (port.), 12 plates. Bound with John Milton's: *Paradise Regain'd... To which is added Samson Agonistes*. London: Printed by R.E. and are to be sold by Randal[1] Taylor, 1688.

John Milton (1608–1674) may stand second (only) to Shakespeare as an English poet, but he has qualities, or rather distinctions—political and religious—not to be found in the playwright. *Paradise Lost*, above all, made Milton's verse for at least two centuries a touchstone for the patriot and the clergyman. His renown as the republican poet of the sublime was not attained instantaneously. According to Wordsworth (who invoked his example in the famous sonnet beginning: "Milton! thou should'st be living at this hour...), even though "the early editions of the *Paradise Lost* were printed in a shape which allowed them to be sold at a low price, yet only three thousand copies of the Work were sold in eleven years."

The original edition of *Paradise Lost* appeared in 1667 in small quarto, with a second edition (in octavo) following in 1674, reorganized from ten books into twelve, and with the addition of a prefatory poem by Andrew Marvell, who had saved the compromised cromwellian Milton from imprisonment (or even death) on the restoration of the monarchy in 1660. A third edition was published (also in octavo) in 1678, after the poet's death. All three editions were published by Samuel Simmons. The copyright then passed into the hands of that prince of publishers, Jacob Tonson (1656–1736): it made his and Milton's fortune. The publication of the illustrated folio edition of *Paradise Lost*, reproduced here, heralded a change in the poet's popular reputation. Although ancient works—Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Virgil's *Aeneid* or Aesop's *Fables*— and Italian classics—the epics of Dante, Tasso, and Ariosto—had long attracted the artist, *Paradise Lost* was the first original literary work by an Englishman to be genuinely illustrated. Such was the importance of the edition to Tonson's career and fame that he chose to be

shown holding the book in his portrait by Sir Godfrey Kneller (1717).

With 500 subscribers (listed on **Spreads 194–97**), it was also one of the earliest publications to be sponsored by the great and good, if only for motives of Whig party piety. Tonson's descendants continued to publish and promote the works of Milton for the next century, commissioning new, more rococco embellishments as fashions changed. English book illustration, like English portraiture, then depended extensively on foreign artists, chiefly Dutch, French and German, many of them Protestant refugees from the Roman Catholic continent. The draughtsmen for this edition were John Baptist de Medina (1659–1710) of Brussels and the elder Bernard Lens (1631–1708) of Holland; the engraver was the Dutchman Michael Burghers. The most impressive plates are those displaying a central character in chiaroscuro, as in Book I (**Spread 10**), where Satan summons: “His Legions, Angel Forms, who lay intrans't Thick as autumnal leaves ...” or the opening to Book II (**Spread 24**), depicting Satan's passage out through the Gates of Hell, his wings no longer feathery and angelic but leathery and bat-like, with Sin behind him to the left and Death to the right, his dart poised.

Tonson's edition not only established Milton's fame, it established *Paradise Lost* as a source of inspiration to artists, not least to William Blake who, in addition to painting a suite of watercolor illustrations to the poem in 1807, produced a color-printed book of his own, entitled simply *Milton*, in which the republican poet returns from the dead to insist that Blake correct the grave errors in *Paradise Lost*.

Bound in at the end of this copy (after the text of *Paradise Lost* at **Spreads 10–193**) is a uniform edition of the same date of Milton's *Paradise Regain'd* (**Spreads 197–231**) and *Samson Agonistes* (**Spreads 231–62**). Both were published by Randall Taylor—Tonson did not yet own copyright to these poems.