
Paradise Lost “For the Pocket”: The 1711 Index and the English Canon

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How did *Paradise Lost* achieve its position at the center of the English literary canon? Answers to this question frequently begin with Joseph Addison’s *Spectator* essays (1712).^[1] In what might be called the first attempt to explicate the poem for the general reading public, Addison describes the virtues of *Paradise Lost* by showing how it measures up to Aristotelian and Longinian literary theory and to the epic standards of Homer and Virgil. Addison’s essays underscore the importance of an education in classical literature while simultaneously presenting a critical analysis that could be appreciated by readers without such an education. Samuel Johnson writes of Addison that he had “made Milton an universal favourite, with whom readers of every class think it necessary to be pleased” (Johnson 2:147). Yet, however crucial Addison’s essays were to the subsequent widespread appreciation of the epic and its inclusion in the canon, they were but one component of a complex marketing strategy conceived by bookseller-publisher Jacob Tonson, both owner of the *Spectator* and copyright holder of *Paradise Lost*.

Most historians of eighteenth-century literature agree that Tonson’s publishing contributions were essential to forming a canonical set of works. In an essay entitled “Creating an English Literary Canon, 1679-1720,” John Barnard adds the subtitle: “Jacob Tonson, Dryden and Congreve.” Paul Hammond concurs that Tonson was a “particularly significant” part of the process (Hammond 391). Tonson’s efforts to establish and then popularize many works to which he held the rights involved not only the translation of ancient classics but also the presentation of English works in ways that made them appear more *classical* themselves. Calling this innovative series of single-author works “Tonson’s vernacular classics,” Robert B. Hamm Jr. argues that this early development in the English literary canon was “manifested in the specific material qualities of this series of publications, in these books as concrete objects” (Hamm188).^[2] In addition to having

similar material qualities, books in this series contained paratextual supplements which, like Addison's essays, helped readers better understand the works. Examples of these supplementary readers' tools include illustrations, biographical narratives, histories of genre, glossaries, and indices.^[3]

The various tools conceived for *Paradise Lost*, starting with the majestic illustrations commissioned for the first folio edition (1688), were developed over the long history of Tonson's publication of the poem. From 1683-1736, Jacob Tonson (and, after 1718, his nephew of the same name) controlled a near monopoly on Milton's poetry. During this time *Paradise Lost* was first established as a high-cultural classic and then promoted to a socially wider range of readers.^[4] Focusing on a single moment in the fifty-year-long process of promoting the epic, this paper reveals some of the specific production choices that led to its successful reception and consequent canonization. In keeping with D. F. McKenzie's analysis of Tonson's 1710 collaboration with Congreve (which shows that the publisher was especially attentive to creating more reader-friendly formats at this moment in his career), this analysis turns to a previously overlooked publication that Tonson produced the following year, the first pocket edition of *Paradise Lost*. Examining this edition, especially its index, reveals the combination of factors—commercial, ideological, and aesthetic—through which the epic and its author were transformed into national treasures. These efforts, in turn, contributed to the successful inclusion of the epic in the early eighteenth-century English literary canon.

Just larger than a deck of cards, the duodecimo edition of 1711 was advertised in the *Spectator* as "For the Pocket" (Number 29, April 3, 1711). It appeared on the market in time for price-conscious consumers to purchase it before beginning Addison's eighteen-week series on the epic. The pocket book would have worked in conjunction with the Saturday morning *Spectator* essays to provide a socially wider range of readers the materials with which to appreciate increasingly numerous allusions to Milton. As the title-page announced, this ninth edition was "adorned with cuts." (29, 1711) This is to say that the first page of each of the twelve books was illustrated with miniature copies of the engravings by Jean Baptist Medina which had been commissioned to raise the status of the work in its 1688 folio format.^[5] Readers of

the small edition would now have access to graphic representations of key episodes which contained the potential to delight, to aid the memory, and to provide points of entry into the text for less-sophisticated readers. The 42-page index created especially for this edition was five times the length of its predecessor, “A Table,” created for the third folio in 1695. The imbalanced proportions of such a physically miniature book with such an enormous index suggest that Tonson prepared this edition for readers who might prefer approaching the difficult work topically or thematically. With almost 1,500 entries, this index allowed for the broad search of key terms through which readers could find select passages. The index also would have provided all readers, including those without an extensive education in ancient literature, a sense that the massive knowledge base from which Milton drew was somehow contained in and available through this list.

The contrast between the index’s prodigious length and the book’s diminutive size reflects a shift in reading practices occurring at the time: indices were one of the emerging means of information management that facilitated contact with knowledge by an increasingly wide range of comparatively untrained readers. In the “Battle of the Books,” Jonathan Swift satirizes this sudden contemporary demand for summaries and indices, indicating both the proliferation and criticism of the practice.⁶¹ Roger D. Lund writes,

The Scriblerian hostility toward the growing importance of the index function is but part of their backlash against the democratization of knowledge, the professionalization of literature in general, and the reduction of knowledge itself to mere information. (Lund 39)

Historians of readership now articulate what contemporary satirists had already noticed. A growing and diverse readership wanted to possess more of what Pierre Bourdieu calls *cultural capital*, the forms of knowledge or education that provide advantages to people of higher social status. Yet, many of these new readers did not have the background, the time, or the temperament to read the necessary works thoroughly. The addition of indices allowed such readers to turn immediately to the passages that seemed most valuable to them. Barbara Benedict claims that turn-of-the-century publishers encouraged readers to

define themselves as selective readers while Steven Zwicker claims that publishers encouraged readers to think they were developing their own opinions while they were simultaneously being made more passive consumers of texts; both claims are supported by the increased inclusion of indices. Facilitating this seemingly paradoxical marketing strategy, indexes provided readers with an ostensible freedom circumscribed and guided by the creators of these and other tools. By including such an extensive index, Tonson was catering to the growing popularity of acquiring and managing knowledge through these devices instead of through extensive reading of the primary texts themselves.^[7]

The section on “Similes” exemplifies the way the index helped new readers read. The compilers’ creation of a category for a single figure of speech indicates the reading public’s developing taste for literary “how-to” books. *The Art of English Poetry* (1702), whose popularity demanded a fourth edition by 1710, promises

I. Rules for making verses. II. A dictionary of rhymes. III. A collection of the most natural, agreeable, and noble thoughts, viz. Allusions, Similes, Descriptions, and Characters, of Persons and Things that are to be found in the best English Poets.

Many readers wanted to learn how to participate in literary culture by studying lists of examples.^[8] The “Similes” section of the index met these demands. Working from the index backwards, the reader might see the epic itself as a store of examples to be studied. Four of the first five entries promise an increased understanding of characters in classical literature: Adam and Eve are likened to Deucalion and Phyrrah, Jupiter and Juno, Zephyrus and Flora; and their bower to Pomona’s arbor.^[9] Nine of the forty-nine similes related to Satan and his demonic cohorts exemplify figurative uses of astronomical images: they are likened to the sun rising in a mist, an eclipse, the longest train of a comet, the moon, a meteor, thunder clouds, the stars, a mountain rising by an earthquake, and to one planet rushing in opposition to another. The entries chosen also foreground the force of exotic references in literary expression: Pygmies, Turks, Lybia, Palestine, Ethiopia, Teneriff, and the Arabian Felix. Further figurative application of the world of exploration is given prominent position. The first entry chosen for “Adam and Eve after the Fall” is the simile that likens them to “the Americans as seen by Columbus.” Including a

“Similes” category makes *Paradise Lost* look valuable to readers of poetic instruction manuals, and, by including only 125 out of the countless similes contained in the epic, it constrains the lessons contained to easily manageable amounts.

By elevating the simile (the figure of speech required to construct a long, descriptive epic simile) to the status of an index entry, the compilers also contributed to the growing appreciation of “the sublime style.” “The sublime” as a category of literary criticism had been gaining increased recognition in England since the English translation of “An Essay Upon Sublime,” (1698) attributed to Longinus. During the first decade of the century, Milton’s baroque, extravagant style was being justified to an audience with neo-classical tastes as exemplary of such a style. Nicholas Von Maltzahn shows how what he calls “the Miltonic sublime style” was being imitated and appropriated by now lesser-known poets for patriotic use. In the decade preceding the publication of the pocket edition, several writers of occasional verse deployed the emotional force of the sublime style to celebrate the country’s military victories. Emphasizing the emotional aspect of Milton’s technique allowed them to foster a nationalistic “fantasy of social and political cohesion powerfully underwritten by literature” (Von Maltzahn, 170).^[10] Featuring the literary technique “Similes” supported this process of appropriation by showing readers how the poem might be useful as a source for emotional rhetoric, by reinforcing the emerging popularity of the “sublime” style, and by serving as a guide to poetic composition.

The index also directs readers to the poem’s dramatic qualities. The most visually prominent entry on the first page (in that it is surrounded by the equivalent of four lines of white space rather than more index entries) is “Their State of Innocence.” Foregrounding the title of one of Tonson’s other best sellers, Dryden’s dramatic adaptation of *Paradise Lost*, *The State of Innocence* (1674), the reference also reminded readers that the story had been reduced into dramatic form, rendering the emotional encounters of *Paradise Lost* more immediately captivating to people who preferred the entertainments of the theater to those of the study.^[11] For those who chose to read both texts, the Dryden adaptation could serve as a further tool for readers, a study guide or a dramatic epitome of the more difficult text. The dramatic qualities of the work were further emphasized

by using characterization as a taxonomic category of the index. These entries are organized by characters' names, with each name followed by a list of dialogues, monologues, and episodes in which that character participates. For example, in the two pages devoted to "Adam," 80% of the entries indicate that he is speaking, and 40 of the 50 sub-entries under "Adam" begin with such phrases such as "discourse with Eve," "answer to Michael," and "speech to Raphael." Moreover, two of these speech-act entries—"Soliloquy lamenting her Transgression" and "Soliloquy [on the sentence pronounced on him]"—situate Adam as actor on stage. These, combined with the three entries for "soliloquy" under the entry for Satan, further suggest a theatrical flourish appealing to aficionados of stage plays and playbooks.

Among the characters listed in the index is the author himself. The entries about the author and his commentaries are significant because they illustrate not only an early instance of the conflation of the narrator and the author but also because they illustrate the concept of the *author-figure* and its role in book promotion and canon formation. The *author-figure* is not (only or even necessarily) the man who wrote the book but, moreover, a textually-created *persona* that the book producers of each edition can manipulate according to their interests and, in the case of posthumous publication, without the supervision of the book writer himself. In the twentieth century, the concept was introduced, in part, by Foucault's *author function* and further developed by Roger Chartier who explains that authorship refers not solely to a historical personage or his purported intentions but rather includes the larger group of agents who produced the book (Foucault *passim*; Chartier 28). Chartier's expanded understanding of authorship is particularly salient in all cases of posthumous publication in which the presented author necessarily becomes more of a created figure than an immediately participating, authorizing agent of production.

The eleven author entries in the pocket edition index demonstrate the process of refashioning the reputation of author-figure "John Milton" in the guise of an orthodox Christian poet rather than a political radical or apologist for religious dissent. Peter Lindenbaum indicates Tonson's role in separating the part of Milton's reputation known for his poetry from that part known for his politics. As soon as Tonson began to solicit subscriptions for

the first folio of 1688, he had to establish a “sharp division between John Milton the Poet and John Milton the Polemical Prose Writer” (Lindenbaum 32). For Tonson, depoliticizing Milton was necessary to obtain both Whig and Tory support for this expensive edition. It also indicates the political strategy of shifting cultural discussions away from partisan friction toward the purportedly apolitical world of politeness and polite expression.^[12] Lawrence Klein argues that this cultural strategy of elevating politeness to one of the highest social virtues was vital to Addison and Tonson’s ability to maintain the continued support of the politically powerful Kit-Kat Club Whigs (Klein 115). In the pocket edition the author is figured in a way that mitigates the association of the name “John Milton” with its previously dominant identity as a Puritan revolutionary and regicidal apologist. To this end, the index entries identify the author with the harmless, blind narrator of the invocation.^[13]

Other refashionings of the author-figure in this edition complement the depoliticizing process. The paratextual component of a work which traditionally represents the first-person voice of the author to his patron, the prefatory dedication, is, in this case, written not by Milton but by Tonson to Lord Somers, the powerful Whig advisor to William and Mary. That the dedication gives thanks to this representative of the post-1688 balance of royalist and parliamentarian interests further diminishes any association of the book with the authorial voice of a pernicious radical. Next, as in all editions since 1674, the frontispiece is adorned with an engraving of the Faithorne portrait. But in this version the picture’s orientation is reversed so that Milton’s head is turned to his right, not to his left. This subtle (and perhaps even accidental) difference—easily overlooked on first glance—shifts the signifying value of the portrait so that Milton’s face now carries the symbolic connotations of something facing the “right,” of moral “rightness,” or even spiritual “righteousness.” Other prefatory material includes the previously-published commendatory poem by Andrew Marvell. The initials “A.M.” had been expanded to “Andrew Marvell” in an earlier edition, thereby allowing Tonson to continue to trade on the prestige of a poet whose work had become increasingly eminent since 1681.^[14] Moreover, the six-line epigram written by John Dryden for the folio edition was returned to its place under the 1711 portrait.^[15] However, here, for the first time, these lines are

followed by an author attribution: “Dryden.” From this point on, the endorsement of Milton as superior to Homer and Virgil bears the weight of the poet laureate John Dryden, neatly implying a posthumous laureateship for Milton as well.

This sort of prestige by association, the marketing and canonizing technique of lending status to one author by means of a direct or implicit association with another, was mastered by Tonson in the year 1711. An earlier purchase of the copyright to Shakespeare’s plays allowed the Tonson house to add the playwright to its single-author series of vernacular classics with the first multi-volume octavo set of collected plays: *The Works of Mr. William Shakespear* [sic] (1709). Don-John Dugas and Robert Hume show that rather than making Shakespeare more affordable to the general public, this set reflected Tonson’s presentation of Shakespeare “as a premium product, saleable as a luxury rather than a popular item” (278). So, when, after moving location a year later, Tonson changed his bookshop sign to “the Shakespeare’s Head,” he was in effect revamping his trademark to indicate that titles in his catalogue were not only classics but also markers of their readers’ opulence. Thus, from 1711 on, the name-recognition of the author-figure Shakespeare (and the accompanying pictorial colophon of the bard’s head) helped endorse all authors that appeared under the Tonson imprint.^[16] In an impressive example of synergistic, canon-forming marketing, the imprint on the title page of the pocket *Paradise Lost* reads: “Printed for Jacob Tonson, at Shakespeare’s Head, over-against Catherine Street in the Strand.” Further, this new geographical reference, “in the Strand,” indicates the principle route from London’s commercial center, “The City,” to the royal palace at Whitehall, a street on which were found palaces of bishops and courtiers. This location, known as a more fashionable address than his previous one, “within Grays-Inn Gate next Grays-Inn Lane,” would have underlined the implicit association of books in Tonson’s shop with the highest classes of consumers. Potential buyers would now associate the entire Tonson catalogue not only with the cultural status of the playwright whom Tonson was currently in the process of canonizing but also with the fashionable elite leisurely strolling on the promenade.

While production of the pocket edition gave an unprecedented number of readers access to the epic, the index, in

conjunction with Addison's essays, provided necessary guidance on how to read it. These methods of disseminating and popularizing while canonizing the epic provided a wide range of readers with the means to gain a portion of the cultural capital previously limited to the elite. Readers who had not received formal education in the ancient literature to which Milton alludes so often were now given some means of negotiating those allusions themselves. In the years to follow, the Tonson house continued to expand its tools for readers. The eighteen *Spectator* essays issued in serial form were appended to editions after 1720 as "Notes to the Text" and also bound as an individual book, which itself went into multiple editions. Tonson's four small editions of *Paradise Lost* from 1705-1719 prepared the market for a return to the folio size in 1720.^[17] By the time the Tonson house added the "Life of Milton" to the 1725 edition of *Paradise Lost*, one could say that the efforts to popularize the epic and canonize the author—brought about, in part, by the four small editions and the accompanying study guides—had succeeded.^[18] The inclusion of a biography of a man whose politics were loathed by Tories and embarrassing to Whigs indicates the triumph of the cumulative efforts in print to mitigate the personal history of the author-figure "John Milton." His biography was now suitable to function as a reading tool for what, by this time, had become established as the orthodox Christian epic of the English-speaking world. Providing a fruitful example of what might be gained from considering literary works in their print culture context, the pocket edition shows that the factors contributing to a society's ability to deem a work "great" or "a classic" are material as well as aesthetic. In answer to the question of how *Paradise Lost* achieved its position at the center of the English canon, we see that Addison's pedagogical success in elucidating its superior aesthetic qualities could not have been fully achieved without Tonson's commercial incentive to create and expand the market for the epic. That both men shared the same ideological goals invites even further analysis.^[19]

Notes

1. This reference to *the* canon is qualified by the understanding that it is not a predetermined, timeless list of titles but rather one

that is socially produced, constructed according to the values of the dominant socioeconomic group and its educational institutions. Further, this paper is predicated on the idea that, since the eighteenth-century reading explosion, canon establishment has depended on a work's not only being endorsed by the *literati* of society, but also, to a certain extent, accepted by the general reading public. For an overview of debates on English literary canon formation, see the two-part "Forum" in *Eighteenth-Century Life* 21.1 and 21.3 (1997), with Richard Terry, Thomas Miller, Clifford Siskin, Jonathan Brody Kramnick, Howard D. Weinbrot, Barbara Benedict, Trevor Ross, Robert Crawford, J. Paul Hunter, and Thomas Bonnell. The term "the canon" is used here as convenient shorthand for an admittedly fluctuating list of works of high literature that have continued to find endorsement in universities throughout the twentieth and into the twenty-first century.

2. Examples include the first multivolume set of Shakespeare's collected plays (1709) and single-author collections representing many of the seventeenth-century authors still anthologized today.

3. The inclusion of a "Life of the Author" in most books in this series further suggests that the tools for readers were intended to promote book sales but also to canonize the work and its author.

4. The means by which this transition was accomplished, including several relevant publications—by Tonson, his allies, and his competitors—between the production of the 1688 folio and the 1725 "Life of Milton" edition, is examined in a longer paper. After completing three exclusive folio editions of *Paradise Lost*, (1688, 1691, 1695), the Tonson house began to make the epic available to a wider range of readers by issuing smaller, illustrated versions in increasingly affordable formats: a large octavo, two-volume edition of *Poetical Works* in 1705, and a small octavo edition of *Paradise Lost* in 1707.

5. The illustration for Book IV is signed by Bernard Lens; those for Books I, II, and XII are sometimes attributed to Henry Aldrich.

6. In the *Dunciad*, Pope laments, “How Prologues into Prefaces decay, / And these to Notes are fritter’d quite away: / How Index-learning turns no student pale, / Yet holds the eel of science by the tail” (qtd. in Lund 18).

7. The predecessor of this index, the shorter “Table” (1695), used line numbers to help readers find subject references in the text, but when in the 1705 and 1707 reprintings the marginal line numbers were removed, the reprinted Table became virtually useless. On the other hand, the expanded index of the pocket edition, working with the restored marginal line numbers, was designed to facilitate actual use. However, the functional numbering system—specific to the small book in that it referred to *page* and line number rather than *book of the epic* and line number—limited use of the index to this particular edition only, which meant that if one wanted to benefit from it, one had to purchase that specific edition. This proprietary nature of the index was amended with the 1719 edition in which the reference system shifted to book and line number, allowing the index’s information to be applicable to all line-numbered editions.

8. Another example of a literary “how-to” book, *The Wits Commonwealth* (1597), had gone into over 20 editions during the seventeenth century. The subtitle of the 1707 edition promises profound knowledge in summary form: “a treasury of divine, moral, historical admonitions, similes and sentences.” The English desire for shortcuts to such nuggets of wisdom goes back at least to the sixteenth century, with the popularity of epigrams and *sententiae* as found in advice books and works such as Erasmus’s *Adagia*. Unique to the early eighteenth century is that an increased and more socially diverse readership wanted access to these shortcuts.

9. The fifth of this group of five similes may have provided an opportunity for the advanced marketing of another Tonson publication. Adam “Awak’d after carnal fruition, the first effect of his Fall” is likened to “Sampson Shorn by Dalilah.” The single Biblically-inspired vehicle for this tenor relies on readers’ awareness of this traditional typological connection to prepare the reader for the first duodecimo edition of *Samson Agonistes* (1713), soon to come.

[10.](#) Von Maltzahn reveals how these appropriations ran counter to important themes in *Paradise Lost*. For example, attention was drawn away from Milton's ideas about free will and the primacy of man's ability *to reason* and *to choose* and directed, instead, toward the emotionally moving features of *Paradise Lost*, including its dramatic qualities, its imagery, and moving descriptive passages.

[11.](#) For readers who had not yet bought the adaptation, the entry could have advertised the playbook which had been for sale at Tonson's shop since 1695 and was currently in its fifth edition. Dryden's adaptation is referred to a second time in the index under "I" for "Innocence, the State of it describ'd."

[12.](#) According to Zwicker, another means by which publishers succeeded in encouraging readers to cultivate their own opinions at the same time they were molding and taming their interpretive processes was the "refashioning of the author-figure to suit the times" (Zwicker 296). Whig constructions of Milton ever since the eighteenth century have exemplified this process.

[13.](#) Examples of conflating the author with the narrator can be found in the entries on the author's "Reflections," "in prospect of Adam's &c. Fall," "On Satan's premeditated Attempt," "On Eve's parting with Adam preceding it," and "On their Nakedness after the Fall."

[14.](#) Marvell's reputation as an accomplished poet had been secured through multiple editions of his poetry in the preceding thirty years and through his inclusion with other famous poets in the best-selling *Poems on Affairs of State* (1689).

[15.](#) "Three poets, in three distant ages born, / Greece, Italy and England did adorn. / The first in loftiness of thought surpassed; / The next in majesty; in both the last. / The force of nature could no further go; / To make a third, she joined the former two" (frontispiece, 1711). These lines had been omitted in the previous small editions of 1705 and 1707.

16. Tonson's changing the name and the corresponding sign of his shop to "the Shakespeare's Head" marks what was one of the first instances of the commercial exploitation of the image of Shakespeare as a cultural icon for literary excellence.

17. Five years later a poetry-writing manual appeared with a long appendix devoted solely to quotations from Milton: *The Shepherdess's Golden Manual to Which is Annex'd Elegancies Taken out of Milton's "Paradise Lost" by a Person of Quality* (1725). The selected quotations stressed the aesthetic and pictorial aspects of the poem.

18. Tonson's "Life of Milton" was not the first biography of Milton to be included with his works: John Toland had written a biography for his edition of Milton's collected prose works (1698), but Tonson's life was the first to be issued with *Paradise Lost*. It was a relatively late inclusion compared to "Lives" included in other works in the single-author series, which further suggests that the Tonsons understood refashioning the author-figure Milton to be a sensitive matter.

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