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## **Paradise Lost and the Youthful Reader**

Joan F. Gilliland

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**In lieu of** an abstract, here is a brief excerpt of the content:

### ***Paradise Lost and the Youthful Reader***

*Joan F. Gilliland (bio)*

*Paradise Lost* is not usually considered a children's book today; indeed it often poses problems for modern college students—if they read it at all. And though there is much talk of children and offspring in the poem, no

child actually appears as a character. But in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, in fact not many years after the first publication of *Paradise Lost* in 1667, it was being recommended to young people, edited for them, and, most important, read by them. Young people's editions proliferated in both England and America, and a school text of *Paradise Lost* was even published in Calcutta in 1844. Not only were editions prepared for the young, but excerpts were included in anthologies, and the poem was cited in grammar and rhetoric texts.

The reasons for this widespread desire to introduce children to *Paradise Lost* were both religious and aesthetic. As William Sloane reports, in 1710 Joseph Downing included Milton in *The Young Christian's Library*, a reading list that suggested devotional and didactic reading and just one other poet, George Herbert. Edmund Burke and Richard Baron both recommended Milton to young people, Baron saying, "MILTON in particular ought to be read and studied by all our young Gentlemen as an *Oracle*" (Havens, p. 27). In America, Benjamin Franklin included Milton among "the best English authors" to be studied in the Sixth class at the Philadelphia Academy (Sensabaugh, p. 36). Several eighteenth-century editions of Milton's work were intended for young people, among them a "Collection of Poems from our most Celebrated English Poets, designed for the Use of Young Gentlemen and Ladies, at Schools" (1717), which "included eighteen selections from the epic," and *The Beauties of Milton, Thomson, and Young* (1783), for "the rising youth of both sexes" (Havens, p. 25, 26). And Dr. Dodd's *Familiar Explanation of the Poetical Works of Milton* (1761) appealed "especially to Parents, and those who have the Care of Youth; if they are desirous that their Children and Trusts should be acquainted with the Graces of the British Homer . . . . The fair Sex in particular will receive great Advantages from it" (Havens, p. 25).

School editions of Milton's poetry, and specifically *Paradise Lost*, continued to be published in the nineteenth century. Stevens' *Reference Guide to Milton* lists at least twelve nineteenth-century editions of *Paradise Lost* or selected books of *Paradise Lost* that are explicitly marked as school texts. Published in [End Page 26] England, America,

and India, they bear such labels as "For the Use of Schools," "Especially Adapted for Elementary Schools," and "The National School Series." Further, many other editions not so plainly earmarked would clearly have been appropriate for use in schools. As James Buchanan said in 1773 of an edition of the *First Six Books of Paradise Lost, rendered into Grammatical Construction*,

as it exhibits a view of every thing great in the whole circle of Being, it would (besides greatly improving them [schoolboys] in their own language) wonderfully open the capacity, improve the judgment, elevate the ideas, refine the imagination, and, finally, infuse a just and noble relish for all that is beautiful and great in the Aeneid and Iliad.

(Havens, p. 27)

The implication is that a study of *Paradise Lost* in English would then lead naturally to the classical epics which preceded it.

Rendering *Paradise Lost* into grammatical construction seems to have been a favorite use for the poem in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. George F. Sensabaugh says that by the Revolutionary period popular textbooks in America "presented Milton as an authority on the correct and effective use of the English language," thus bringing his work "before a large captive audience" (p. 99). Sensabaugh mentions Robert Lowth's *A Short Introduction to English Grammar*, published in Philadelphia in 1775, which quotes Milton, and Ralph Harrison's *Rudiments of English Grammar* (1777; Wilmington, 1788), which draws on *Paradise Lost* to illustrate the ways poetry and prose differ. And Raymond Dexter Havens comments in a footnote to his discussion of Milton's popularity that "Many Americans now [1922] living learned grammar by parsing *Paradise Lost*" (p. 26...

must slide down the stairs, and disappear under the desk. On our tin was built to represent the captain, makes his first appearance to tell the crew and passengers they are in for a long night. As the storm worsens, a second and third instance by the captain punctuate the tale. Until, at last, there is no hope of saving the ship. This is the real story, the one likely to hold the attention of a young audience, but for Erasmus it serves only to bring us to the central question: *what do mortals do in such a world? What do Christians do?* This is the focus of Erasmus's cology, and those who respond inappropriately become the object of satire. Each of the colloquies does the same. "Confiteor," Erasmus explains in his epilogue, *De Utilitate Colloquii*, "a benefit through a trick," and observing the classical description of good literature, *debe et iocet*.

Exactly when these colloquies first entered the schools we do not know. For some reason, Erasmus abandoned his plan to have the *Enchiridion* and other colloquies published in England and dedicated to Roger Wernford, a schoolmaster at St. Andrew's in London, in 1518, just months before they were published instead by Froben. It may have been that Erasmus had another school in mind—St. Paul's, refounded by Colet and then, after Erasmus in 1528, Erasmus had already contributed two letters to St. Paul's, *de Capite* and *De Constitutione*, and it is possible that Colet wanted a third, a reader, to go with the rhetoric and grammar. But most of the early students are not specific about texts they were using, instead, a general program of study like that of Erasmus's *De Brevitate Studii*. Not much later, however, we hear of the students at Winchester and Eton being taken off the colloquial vulgares and being given the *Colloquia* and *Terrae*, and even Erasmus testified to the use of the *Colloquia*. Goussier's *Class of Grammar* (1974), a magnum opus about the benefits of a proper education, has boys of the lower forms (through the fourth) being read the *Colloquia* immediately after their grammar.

Three school editions, both in Latin and in English, continue the tradition. In 1606, William Barlow translated seven *Colloquia* and by 1671 there is a complete translation by one H. M. Giese. Occasionally we find dual-language editions such as that of John Clarke, printed in Philadelphia in 1720, even while we continue to get Latin editions like that of George Clark

(Boston, 1895). The range of these texts, more than designed for the schools, suggests a variety of uses for Erasmus's *Colloquia* as Latin letters as well as a Latin reader and as to English reader.

The colloquy was not a new genre in the sixteenth century; the Romans had used glossaries and colloquial vulgares to teach their students Greek, and, in addition to Erasmus's, we have an inquiry in the medieval *Matricula Scholasticorum*, *Misellianus's Psychologia*, and the *Colloquia* of *Conteritas*. But no one denied the utility of the school colloquy with the arrangement of a good story as intelligibly as Erasmus did.

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Helen M. Gibson is a member of the department of English at the University of Colorado in Boulder.

## Paradise Lost and the Youthful Reader

by Jan A. Galloway

*Paradise Lost* is not usually considered a children's book today, indeed it often poses problems for modern or, I argue, students. If they read it at all. And though there is much talk of children and catering to the young, notably in the preface to a 1667 edition, it was being recommended to young people, edited for them, and, most important, read by them. Young people's editions proliferated in both England and America, and a school text of *Paradise Lost* was even published in California in 1844. Not only were editions prepared for the young, but essays were included, as introductions, and the poem was treated as grammar and rhetoric, as well.

The reasons for this widespread desire to introduce children to *Paradise Lost* were both religious and aesthetic. As William Sloane reports, in 1710 Joseph Dimsley included Milton in *The Young Gentleman's Library*, a reading list that suggested devotional and didactic reading as well as more poetic, George Herbert, Alfred, Burke and Richard Brome both recommended Milton to young people. Brome saying, "MILTON in particular ought to be read and studied by all our young Gentlemen as in Charles"

(Hovers, p. 27). In America, Benjamin Franklin in the 1760s called Milton among "the best English authors" to be studied in the South class at the Philadelphia Academy (Sensabaugh, p. 26).

Several eighteenth-century editions of Milton's work were tailored for young people, among them "Collection of Poems from our most Celebrated Poets, Partly Purged, designed for the Use of Young Gentlemen and Ladies, at Schools" (1717), which "include[s] eighteen selections from the epic," and *The Beauties of Milton, Thomson, and Young* (1783), for "the rising youth of both sexes" (Hovers, p. 25, 26). And Dr. Dodd's *Familiar Exposition of the Several Works of Milton* (1761) appealed "especially to Parents, and those who have the Care of Youth; if they are desirous that their Children and Pupils should be acquainted with the Works of the British Poets . . . The last Sex, in particular will receive great Advantage from it" (Hovers, p. 25).

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