

**The Cambridge History of English and American Literature in 18 Volumes,
Volume VII. v. Milton. § 17. *Paradise Regained*.
Cavalier and Puritan (1907-21)**

The exact relations of *Paradise Lost* and its sequel or pendant are rather uncertain. It is so perfectly natural that Milton should have written this sequel that, perhaps, some people may hardly look further; and it is equally natural that some time should be allowed to pass between the successive publications. It has, however, been customary to accept the statement of the aforementioned quaker Ellwood to the effect that he, visiting Milton at Chalfont during his retreat before the plague, “pleasantly” said to the poet, “Thou hast said much here of ‘Paradise Lost,’ but what hast thou to say of ‘Paradise Found’?” Whereupon Milton answered nothing and “sat some time in a muse”; but, next year, in London, showed Ellwood the poem. Of course, if this be true, it was finished—considerably before the publication of *Paradise Lost*. There is, however, a good deal that is suspicious about this statement; it is not confirmed or supported by Phillips or any other contemporary authority; and there is against it strong evidence of a kind which receives too little general attention—the evidence of prosody. Critics who take very different views of Milton’s versification admit equally that there is a difference between that of the two poems—a difference specially suggesting some interval between their composition; but less between that of *Paradise Regained* and its companion in publication *Samson Agonistes*.

At any rate, these two were published together in 1671 [9](#) by one John Starkey, who lived at the prelatial sign of The Mitre in Fleet street. They had been licensed (again by Tomkyns) on 2 July, 1670. Of the details—copies printed, terms of publication and so forth—we do not, in this instance, know anything; but, as the book is said to be “Printed by J. M.,” it has been supposed that it was an independent venture of the poet’s own. The sale was less rapid than that of *Paradise Lost*, or (which is improbable) the edition was much larger—at any rate, it was not exhausted for nine years, and the tradition of the comparative unpopularity of the poem is early. Phillips says that it was “generally censured to be [*i. e.* criticised as being] much inferior to the other, though *he* [his uncle] could not hear with patience any such thing.” He would have had more than his usual uniqueness if he could have heard it with patience; but an author’s partiality need not bear all the blame of

his impatience. The inferiority which the “general censure” of *Paradise Regained* has continued to ascribe, though it may be admitted to some extent, is an accidental, and, so to speak, artificial, inferiority. The subject is certainly less interesting: partly because it allows of less addition, traditional or original, to the scriptural narrative, and, partly, because the conclusion is even more foregone. It is probable that, to Milton, with his semi-Arian views, the succumbing of Christ to temptation was a sufficiently epical contingency: to the orthodox and the infidel alike, it lacks that element. The poem is rather long for the actual action and yet rather short in itself—a mere episode in the real “Regaining of Paradise.” And there are other objections which may be made, some from what may be called the point of view of the professional critic, some from more popular approaches.

But, in purely poetic value, *Paradise Regained* is little inferior to its predecessor. There may be nothing in the poem that can quite touch the first two books of *Paradise Lost* for magnificence; but there are several things that may fairly be set beside almost anything in the last ten. The splendid “stand at bay” of the discovered tempter—“T is true I am that spirit unfortunate”—in the first book; his rebuke of Belial in the second, and the picture of the magic banquet (it must be remembered that, though it is customary to extol Milton’s asceticism, the story of his remark to his third wife, and the Lawrence and Skinner sonnets, go the other way); above all, the panoramas from the mountain-top in the third and fourth; the terrors of the night of storm; the crisis on the pinnacle of the temple—are quite of the best Milton, which is equivalent to saying that they are of the best of one kind of poetry.

Note 9. Observe that, if Ellwood be right, *Paradise Regained* must have been kept complete and unprinted for five years, by a poet who was in bad health and advancing age, in spite of what has been shown to have been a rather flattering reception, so far as sale went, of the earlier poem.