



NAXOS  
AudioBooks

POETRY



John Milton

# *Paradise Lost*

Read by **Anton Lesser**

*'The great  
Anton Lesser'*  
– **Stephen Fry**

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1	<b>Book I</b> Line 1: Of man's first disobedience, and the fruit	7:50
2	Line 128: O Prince, O chief of many thronèd Powers	4:47
3	Line 242: Is this the region, this the soil, the clime	6:38
4	Line 522: All these and more came flocking; but with looks	5:31
5	Line 622: O myriads of immortal Spirits, O Powers	5:35
6	Line 722: ...Th' ascending pile	4:19
7	<b>Book II</b> Line 1: High on a throne of royal state, which far	7:31
8	Line 119: I should be much for open war, O Peers	6:45
9	Line 229: Either to disenthronè the King of Heav'n	4:43
10	Line 310: Thrones and imperial Powers, offspring of Heav'n	5:16
11	Line 390: Well have ye judged, well ended long debate	2:38
12	Line 430: O progeny of Heav'n, empyreal Thrones	3:01
13	Line 506: The Stygian Council thus dissolved; and forth	5:51
14	Line 704: So spake the grisly terror, and in shape	8:36
15	Line 850: The key of this infernal pit by due	6:57
16	Line 968: T' whom Satan turning boldly thus. Ye Powers	5:02

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17	<b>Book III</b> Paraphrase: God sitting on his throne sees Satan...	1:54
18	<b>Book IV</b> Line 1: O for that warning voice, which he who saw	7:21
19	Line 114: Thus while he spake, each passion dimmed his face	3:17
20	Line 172: Now to th' ascent of that steep savage hill	3:35
21	Line 246: ...thus was this place	6:18
22	Line 358: O Hell! What do mine eyes with grief behold	5:29
23	Line 440: To whom thus Eve replied. O thou for whom	3:16
24	Line 492: So spake our general mother, and with eyes	3:08
25	<b>Books V–VIII</b> Paraphrase: Meanwhile, Uriel, descending	2:15
26	<b>Book IX</b> Line 1: No more of talk where God or angel guest	5:32
27	Line 99: O earth, how like to Heav'n, if not preferr'd	6:57
28	Line 204: And Eve first to her husband thus began.	3:46
29	Line 270: To whom the virgin majesty of Eve	5:27
30	Line 376: So spake the patriarch of mankind, but Eve	7:03
31	Line 494: So spake the Enemy of mankind, enclosed	4:12
32	Line 567: To whom the guileful Tempter thus replied.	2:35

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33	Line 613: So talked the spirited sly snake; and Eve	3:40
34	Line 679: O sacred, wise and wisdom-giving plant	4:12
35	Line 745: Great are thy virtues, doubtless, best of fruits	6:56
36	Line 856: Hast thou not wondered Adam, at my stay?	2:33
37	Line 896: O fairest of Creation, last and best	4:41
38	Line 960: So Adam, and thus Eve to him replied.	4:43
39	Line 1034: So said he, and forbore not glance or toy	6:18
40	Line 1134: Would thou hadst hearkened to my words, and stayed	3:16
41	<b>Book X</b> Paraphrase: Man's disobedience known	0:38
42	Line 68: Father Eternal, thine is to decree	9:06
43	Line 229: Meanwhile ere thus was sinned and judged on earth	4:57
44	Line 354: O parent, these are thy magnificent deeds	3:56
45	Line 460: Thrones, Dominations, Princedoms, Virtues, Powers	7:19
46	<b>Books XI and XII</b> Paraphrase: Meanwhile Sin and Death rejoice	1:52
47	<b>Book XII</b> Line 553: How soon hath thy prediction, seer blest	7:50

**Total time: 3:55:45**

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# John Milton

(1608–1674)

## *Paradise Lost*

*Paradise Lost*, the epic meditated and planned by Milton over many years (years which included the turbulence of the Civil War and the strictures of the Commonwealth), was completed in 1663 and published in 1667. In 1668 he added the prose arguments which provide plot summaries for each of the twelve Books into which the poem is divided.

John Milton, born in 1608, was educated at St. Paul's School and Christ's College, Cambridge. He achieved early fame as a scholar, poet and pamphleteer, arguing vehemently for the Puritan cause against King and Church. Political activity then occupied him for many years and he only truly returned to his first love, poetry, after the Restoration in 1660. Meanwhile, his private life had proved almost as controversial as his public life: he married

Mary Powell in 1642, but her swift return to her Royalist parents spurred Milton to some provocative pamphlets arguing for divorce. A reconciliation with his wife was followed by the birth of three children. Mary died in 1652 and Milton remarried in 1656: Katherine Woodcock, however, lived only until 1658. His third marriage, to Elizabeth Minshull, took place in 1663; she outlived him.

*Paradise Lost* is Milton's greatest work: Dryden described it in 1667 as 'one of the greatest, most noble and sublime poems which either this age or nation has produced'. Milton set himself the task of 'justifying the ways of God to men': in other words, to tell the story of Man's creation, fall and redemption so that his readers might be moved to appreciate God's wisdom and purpose.

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The poem paints unforgettably vivid and powerful pictures, both of characters and places, in magnificently subtle and sonorous blank verse. One of the most interesting aspects of his epic is the characterisation of Satan, who (in spite of Milton's efforts to disparage him) emerges as a tragic and in some ways heroic figure, evil though his intentions are.

Satan, the fallen rebel angel, defies God and seeks revenge by seducing Adam and Eve into disobeying their creator. The human pair are poignantly evoked: paradoxically frail yet perfect, their sense of their own humanity (after the fall) is Everyman's plight – we find ourselves, our capacity for wonder, love, shame, hope and despair, in them.

### **THIS ABRIDGEMENT**

This abbreviated version of the poem focuses especially on Books 1, 2, 4, 9 and 10. Prose summaries, based on Milton's own, are provided for those sections of the poem not included.

In *Books 1 and 2*, Satan and his comrades arise from their place of punishment, Hell, build the infernal city of Pandæmonium,

and resolve to seek the destruction of mankind. Satan undertakes the journey alone, passing through Chaos towards Earth.

*Book 4* describes Satan's penetration of Eden and introduces 'our first parents' Adam and Eve, in the perfection of Paradise.

*Book 9* is the dramatic climax of the poem: Satan successfully persuades Eve to eat from the Tree of Knowledge, she in turn draws Adam into sin, and their lustful union (followed by shame) represents the new truth of their situation.

*Book 10* tells the story of God's judgement, and Satan's triumphant return to Hell, swiftly followed by shameful and monstrous transformation.

In *Book 12*, Adam and Eve are consoled by an account of the future redemption of Man by Christ and, gently grieving, the pair depart from Eden to begin human history.

### **Notes by Perry Keenlyside**



**Anton Lesser**, one of Britain's leading classical actors, has worked extensively at the National Theatre, and is an associate artist of the Royal Shakespeare Company. His many television appearances include roles in *The Cherry Orchard*, *King Lear*, *The Politician's Wife*, *Vanity Fair*, *Perfect Strangers* and *Dickens*. Films in which he has appeared include *Charlotte Gray*, *Fairytale – A True Story*, *Imagining Argentina*, *River Queen* and *Miss Potter*. He is a familiar voice on radio, and has become particularly associated with his award-winning readings of Dickens for Naxos AudioBooks. He has also read *Tristram Shandy* for Naxos AudioBooks.



**Laura Paton** trained at LAMDA where she won the St Philip's Prize for Poetry and the Michael Warre Award. She has toured the UK extensively in productions as varied as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* and Oscar Wilde's *Salomé*. Among her other recordings for Naxos AudioBooks are Virginia Woolf's *Orlando*, and both volumes of *Grimms' Fairy Tales*.



**Chris Larkin** trained at LAMDA. Among his theatre appearances have been *A Taste of Honey* (Theatr Clwyd) and *The Lucky Chance* (Derby Playhouse). Television includes *Frank Stubbs Promotes*; films include *Grimby Last Stop* and *Angels and Insects*.

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Read by Anton Lesser



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**John Milton**

# *Paradise Lost*

Read by **Anton Lesser** with **Laura Paton** and **Chris Larkin**

*'Of Man's First Disobedience, and the Fruit  
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste  
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe...'*

*Paradise Lost* is the greatest epic poem in the English language. In words remarkable for their richness of rhythm and imagery, Milton tells the story of Man's creation, fall and redemption – to 'justify the ways of God to men'.

Milton produced characters which have become embedded in the consciousness of English literature – the frail, human pair, Adam and Eve; the terrible cohort of fallen angels; and Satan, tragic and heroic in his unremitting quest for revenge.

The tale unfolds from the aftermath of the great battle between good and evil to the moving departure of Adam and Eve from Eden, with human and eternal anguish intertwined in magnificent resonance.



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*"With Anton Lesser's spirited rendering of Paradise Lost playing in your car, road rage will be quite forgotten and traffic jams almost welcome."* – **Oxford Today**

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**ABRIDGED**

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