

The First Illustrations for *Paradise Lost*

by John T. Shawcross

A recent article by Suzanne Boorsch, "The 1688 *Paradise Lost* and Dr. Aldrich," in *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 6 (1972) 133-150, has shown that Henry Aldrich rather than John Baptista de Medina designed illustrations to Books II and XII and possibly that to Book I. These first illustrations for *Paradise Lost* appear in the fourth edition, that of 1688, an elaborate folio printing with an impressive list of subscribers. Notable was John Somers, later Lord Somers, who is often credited with having been the main force behind the new edition. There were three issues with three separate title pages, one listing Richard Bently as publisher, one listing Jacob Tonson as publisher, and a third listing both. At times, in error, it has been called Tonson's edition; at times, too, it appears bound with Milton's two other major poems. The illustrations, which are tipped in, include Robert White's engraving of the William Faithorne portrait (first done for *The History of Britain*, 1670), with John Dryden's epigram beneath, as frontispiece, and twelve engravings, one for each of the books of the epic. Seven engravings cite Medina as their designer (III, V, VI, VII, IX, X, XI); one gives Bernard Lens (IV); and four have no designer indicated (I, II, VIII, XII). Ten of the engravings were done by Michael Burghers (I, II, III, V, VI, VII, IX, X, XI, XII); one is by P. O. Bouche (IV); and one has no name attached (VIII). Prior to Boorsch's article, it had been assumed that Medina designed all but that for Book IV and that Burghers engraved all but that for the same book.¹

Ms. Boorsch got her first hint for the identification of Aldrich as designer from an inscription on the flyleaf of the 1688 copy in the Alexander Dyce collection in the Victoria and Albert Museum attributed to Joseph Warton. She adds: "Oddly enough, the copy of the book in The New York Public Library has almost exactly the same inscription. This was Horace Walpole's copy, and Warton and Walpole were friends" (p. 139). I had discovered this some while before and an article on Aldrich's contribution was awaiting publication in the *BNYPL* when Ms. Boorsch's discussion appeared. She does not identify people referred to in the inscription; she oddly assumes Walpole's autograph in the NYPL copy and does not cite differences between the two inscriptions (I rely here on her transcription for the Warton);

and she does not deal with the literary relationships of the illustrations. The following observations, therefore, attend to these matters and attempt to improve and correct Helen Gardner's inadequate descriptions in her aforementioned article.

Although Ms. Boorsch does not give the printing legend of the Dyce copy of 1688, it and the NYPL copy were printed for Richard Bently alone. The provenance of the NYPL copy has not been recorded.² On a blank leaf (recto) preceding the frontispiece an eighteenth-century hand has written:

This was the first edition in folio, undertaken by Tonson at the desire of Mr. Somers, afterwards Ld Somers. For this edition Medina, an artist then in vogue, designed the prints, all except two; that for the 4th book & the 12th book. The former was designed by B. Lens, senr, the latter, as Mr Harte informed me, by Dr Aldrich. The fine circumstance of Adam's hiding his face is obviously *taken* [copied] from Timanthe's Iphigenia, so celebrated by all antiquity. Dr Metcalf had the original drawing by Medina, For this edition Dryden wrote the famous six lines, placed under Milton's portrait. To this edition more of the men of genius & learning subscribed.

Milton dyed 1674. The first edition was in small quarto, 1667; the 2d edition octavo 1674, the third edition octavo also 1678. Mr Walpole.

The very similar inscription assigned to Warton apparently reads only "copied" and shows changes which would seem to postdate the inscription in the NYPL copy. A note in the same hand on an unsigned leaf after *Samson Agonistes* (the NYPL copy includes the separate publication in 1688 of *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson*), in reference to *PL IX*, 1105 (*recte* 1101), on the fig tree, quotes from Griffith Hughes' *The Natural History of Barbados*, Book 7; this was published in 1750 in London, thus dating these notes in the latter half of the century. The "me" (appearing in both inscriptions) informed by Mr. Harte was apparently Horace Walpole (1717-1797). "Mr. Harte" was Walter Harte, a good friend of Walpole. Harte (1709-1774) was a poet and vice-principal of St. Mary Hall, Oxford; he was also a friend of Alexander Pope and knew well George, Lord Lyttelton, the Earl of Chesterfield, having served as tutor to the latter's son, and Joseph Warton. While Walpole wrote on modern gardening, Harte produced *Essays on Husbandry* (1764; 2nd ed., enlarged, 1770). His *Poems*

on *Several Occasions* (1727) and *Amaranth; or, Religious Poems* (1767) include Miltonic imitations or allusions; see, for example, "To a Young Lady, with Fenton's Miscellanies," "To Mr. Pope," "The Vision of Death," "Macarius; or, The Confessor," and "Eulogius; or, The Charitable Mason."

"Dr. Aldrich" was Henry Aldrich (1647-1710), divine and scholar, granted the B. D. and D. D. degrees from Christ Church, Oxford, in 1683. He was canon and dean of Christ Church and was in charge of much of the publication coming out of Oxford. Ms. Boorsch cites some of the basic facts about him; however, we should note that Aldrich was, besides an architect, a painter or adapter of prints for publication from Oxford. The production of the 1688 folio is closely associated with Christ Church, and we can note such connections as the following. Robert White was the engraver for the Oxford University Press, producing, for example, the Almanac for 1674. He also did an engraving of Medina's portrait of George, Earl of Melville. Michael Burghers was also an engraver for the Press, producing the Almanac for 1675 (though it was rejected) and for the years 1676-1724. According to Aldrich's biographer, "any engraving by Burghers in a non-specialist Oxford book of 1675-1710 is likely to have been selected or adapted by Aldrich . . ." and Aldrich possessed the proof copies of the plates for the *Paradise Lost* illustrations.⁴ Further, a large number of subscribers to the edition are associated with Christ Church, including Aldrich, Medina, White, and Burghers. Lens's association with the volume is not extraordinary when we note that he produced a plate for Jonathan Swift's *The Tale of a Tub* (1710), the illustrations for which were chosen by Swift and Sir Andrew Fountaine, late of Christ Church and a pupil of Aldrich. Moreover, one of the illustrations, called "Lord Mayor on his great horse" (see Hiscock, pp. 11-12), is suspiciously in Aldrich's style.

"Dr. Metcalf" in the inscriptions was the very prominent Theophilus Metcalfe, son of Samuel of London, gentleman, who matriculated at Hart Hall in October 1706, received the B. A. in 1710, the M. A. in 1713, the B. Med. in 1716, and the D. Med. in 1724. He died at Ambrosden, Oxford, on 11 February 1757. The Metcafes were an illustrious family in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, becoming baronets later in the century. The family traces itself from Theophilus Metcalfe (fl. 1649), a professional writer, and from Adrian or Francis Metcalf of St. Mary's Hall, who in mid-seventeenth century became a Doctor of Physic and a member of

the faculty.⁵ Note that Harte was vice-principal of St. Mary's Hall and his information might have come through such a source. The "Original drawings, eight in number, being all that were ever designed for Mr. Milton's poem of *Paradise Lost*, by Sr. John Baptist of Medina" are in the Victoria and Albert Museum in the Dyce collection.

The problem of the writer of the note in the NYPL copy of 1688, which Ms. Boorsch simply bypasses, lies in the ascription "Mr Walpole." But the handwriting is that of Horace Walpole, as comparison with any of the numerous examples of his autograph available will attest. The formation of some letters, like capital M, may take two forms; the combination of letters, like "Th" or "er," is consistent; the numbers (note "7" and "8"), the tails sometimes found on final letters ("all" or "Walpole"), specific letters like "s" and "x" all appear in authenticated holograph. In the Berg Collection of The New York Public Library I have compared such items as Walpole's notes to Vol. III (1763) and Vol. IV (1771) of *Anecdotes of Painting in England* (Strawberry-Hill: Thomas Farmer 1762-1771 [1780]), e.g., see III 51, 93, 115; IV 58, 89, 90, and his holograph letter to Mrs. Dickerson, dated Otranto, 31 July 1785. Certainly the note in the 1688 edition does not appear elsewhere in Walpole's works printed during the eighteenth century, nor in the Yale edition of the letters. The replacement of "taken" by "copied" and its underscoring likewise indicate that the note is not copied from some printed source. His usual signature, however, was "Hor. Walpole," and there is no evidence that he owned a copy of this edition of *Paradise Lost*. Perhaps the answer to the odd ascription in the note is that Walpole was setting down this information at someone's specific request in that person's copy of the poem (adding a comment on the celebrated fig tree as well) rather than for himself. This someone would have been, one suspects, a younger and less prestigious acquaintance, one who knew him rather formally as "Mr. Walpole." The note has a formality about it and an informational tone (why else the second paragraph?) that seems more consistent with the speculation than with a belief that Walpole was making the entry for himself.

To turn to the illustrations themselves, Gardner says that Medina chose to illustrate a single episode and to fill in as background subsidiary episodes. "But although this describes his method generally, he varied it according to the nature of the book he was illustrating" (p. 123). A more accurate description of Medina's work in the illustrations that bear

his name is that he attempts to epitomize the narrative sense of the whole book by focus on major events, by suggestion of their significance, and by iconographic detail. Although Adam and Eve do not appear in Book III, Medina depicts them in their idyllic world while, above, God and the angelic host hymn the crucifixion which will take place in the future (the cross is dominant in the upper left corner as we look at the picture, but it is at God's right hand⁶) and, below, Satan has approached Earth, on which he stands. In the background, in a lower central position, Satan is seen in Eden observing Adam and Eve. These details partially depict the substance of the book being illustrated but also indicate the significance of the events of the book beyond its specific lines. In the far background between Eden and God's Heaven is Uriel, the Regent in the Sun; to his left is seen a fluttering cherub, Satan; and to God's left are stars falling from the heavens (reminiscent of the fall of the rebellious angels and signaling the impending fall of good men in the future). A zodiacal legend finds Scorpio (the sign of the devil) separating Taurus (a sign of life-power and the earth) from Libra (the scales of justice). The disruption of the usual order of the zodiac indicates the significance. The hovering Satan talking with Uriel is directly below the cross, and the Satan in Eden is directly below that cherubic illustration of Satan. Medina has not simply chosen a single episode in Book III and augmented it with subsidiary episodes.

The illustration in Book V moves from a foreground (the lower details) backward to a background (the upper details). It takes us from the morning hymn to Raphael's approach to Adam, then to the domestic scene with Raphael talking to Adam and Eve, who has gathered their repast, and finally to a suggestion of the narrative to be told through the ominous clouds and sky at the top background. Book VI depicts the War in Heaven; the Son in the Chariot of God, shaped, appropriately, like the tablet from which Moses spoke the law and with four wheels and four cherubs, is in the upper center; the faithful angels are on the right center (as they face us), and the rebellious angels are on their left, falling to the burning lake below. The cherubs on either side of the chariot carry ensigns of Messiah: one shows the sacrificed *agnus dei*, another shows an open Bible. In the center of the lake below is Leviathan, a detail which picks up the simile in I, 200-210. Book VII, which describes the creation of the world, is given over to the narration of Raphael in the illustration. It presents the angel talking with Adam, Eve

standing somewhat aside, not hearing. The creation is shown by four circular insets at the top. Four symbolizes man and nature, and the circle God's perfection and eternity. Probably, therefore, Medina purposefully did not produce an inset for each of the days of creation. The first inset shows the ride of God into Chaos to order it. The second shows the Earth with land and water, and sky above. The third portrays the creation of light; the fourth, vegetation and animal life. The treatment of Book VIII, although not signed by him, does look like Medina's work. The smaller figures compare with those in the Book IX illustration. Here we have Adam surrounded by gentle animals (ones generally iconographically important), and centrally there are three episodes: Adam on the ground and Eve, standing, born from him; Eve in two different views as investigating the garden and lolling in admiration of herself; and Adam speaking with Raphael and pointing upward to where a radiant sun dominates this Edenic world. The design is included in the "Originals" cited before.

The panorama of Book IX, moving as in Book V from bottom to top and with depth perception from foreground to background, shows a dragon-like Satan and a snake to his right, Adam and Eve talking and then separating, Eve in converse with a reared-up serpent and eating an apple from a tree replete with fruit; next Adam partaking of an apple, and finally the now-fallen pair standing woebegone and dressed in leafy covers. Above the whole scene are stormy heavens with the thunderbolts of God shooting forth on the picture's right. Book X gives us a distraught Adam and Eve in the foreground, Satan with Sin and Death (a skeleton with a spear), and the bridge to Hell behind them, leading to a fiery scene peopled by many devils. Above are two guardian angels. On either side of the picture, a little more than half way up, are two interesting symbols: on the angels' right, now that the Fall has taken place, is the Tree of Knowledge (Life) entwined by serpents, and now on their left is the Sun bedimmed. The reversal of the symbols between the illustrations for Books IX and X makes clear the transference for man's world from the dominance of God to the dominance of Satan. Adam and Eve (Man) must repent sinfulness, undergo trial, and reject the Satanic before these dominances can be reversed again. The illustrations for Books XI and XII will thus place the human pair on the left of the picture, except for the depiction of Michael's guidance to Adam and of Eve's God-filled sleep in Book XI. The evil elements spread throughout the illustration for Book X, with Satan,

Sin, and Death shown from the center to the picture's left, with the fires of hell in the center, and with the assemblage of the devils to the picture's right and the tree entwined with serpents immediately above. As recounted in this book of the poem, Satan descends to Hell to announce his bad success, the devils become all manner of hissing serpents, and they partake of the apples of the tree which have now become ashes (the Apples of Sodom). Finally, Book XI pictures Michael encountering Adam with Eve somewhat separated from them. Above these figures and to the picture's right is the hill of speculation on which are Adam and Michael and below which is Eve asleep. To its left a lion pursues a female and a male deer, and a vulture pursues a male and a female bird. These last details are not part of Book XI, but they yield the thrust of the meaning of the Fall which Michael is imparting to Adam: no peace is now possible regardless of which direction one takes; rather rapine and avarice will share the land.⁷

Ms. Boorsch, elaborating remarks by Hiscock, shows that the illustration for Book II is drawn from Aldrich's copy of Andrea Mantegna's "The Descent into Limbo," and that for Book XII from his copy of Nicholas Chapron's engraving of "The Expulsion," based on Raphael's. Neither illustration is in any way like Medina's work and shows no likeness to his technique or use of symbolism. The illustration for Book I poses some problems, however. Leonard Kimbrell, in an unpublished dissertation (University of Iowa, 1965), suggested derivation from Raphael's "St. Michael and the Devil," an engraving based on this appearing in Aldrich's collection. Ms. Boorsch says, "it is similar, but it is not the unmistakable source the others are." If the Book I illustration is Aldrich's, it is far better than his other work and more symbolic; there is no external reason to assign it to Medina, and it does not very firmly show his technique.

NOTES

¹See C. H. Collins Baker, "Some Illustrators of Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1688-1850)," *Library*, 5th Series, 3 (1948), 1-21, 101-119; Helen Gardner, "Milton's First Illustrator," *Essays and Studies*, 9 (1956), 27-38, and reprinted as Appendix B in her *A Reading of Paradise Lost* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1965), 121-131; Merritt Y. Hughes, "Some Illustrators of Milton: The Expulsion from Paradise," *JEGP*, 60 (1961), 670-679, reissued in *Milton Studies in Honor of Harris Francis Fletcher* (Urbana: Univ. of Illinois Press, 1961), 62-71, and reprinted in *Milton: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. Arthur E. Barker (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1965), pp. 357-367; and Marcia R. Pointon, *Milton & English Art* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1970).

²A signature on the title page has been deleted and is illegible; however, it is not the same hand as the note's.

³W. G. Hiscock, *Henry Aldrich of Christ Church 1648-1710* (Oxford: Printed for Christ Church at the Holywell Press, 1960), p. 10.

⁴Hiscock, p. 11.

⁵See Anthony Wood, *Athenae Oxonienses* (London, 1726), 2nd ed., "Fasti," II 35, 51.

⁶Thus the background takes on God's perspective of right and left, and the foreground should be viewed as seen through God's eyes, Satan standing to the left, although he appears to be on the right as we view the picture. In the following set of pictures the perspective is similarly manipulated, for our right is the picture's left, and our left is the picture's right in terms of personages who look outward as God does in the Book III illustration. Right and left symbolize, of course, the good and the bad, the faithful and the sinful, respectively.

⁷Comparison with Ms. Gardner's remarks will indicate my almost total disagreement with her about details and symbols, intent, and relationship with the poetry. For example, when she treats direction, it is different from my understanding of direction and its symbolism; she does not recognize Medina's narrative technique as representing both the poem's present and futural time; etc.