

# Religious Education on Heavenly Inspiration and Intellectual Contribution to the Composition of Paradise Lost

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Production of a big work of Literature is not a task which can be dealt with by a single person. Grandness of the epic is so much that it is out of reach of a single person to undertake. There is an idea of a ‘mass’ behind a single thought as Virginia Woolf puts it in *A Room of One's Own*. Great thinkers and literary figures unanimously believe that human thinking is in nature a collective act, meaning that authors use the ideas and hints of their precursors and contemporaneous authors. Cooperation is the very essential need to be met; therefore, it is highly unlikely that *Paradise Lost* as a grand epic has been written by Milton singlehandedly. This fact can be elaborated on the term ‘shared intentionality’ proposed by thinkers which refers to collaborative interactions in which participants share psychological states with one another. One can say that texts are not produced out of void, but there are intricate networks of prior texts behind shaping them, consequently communal thinking is traceable either directly or indirectly in a particular text. Context of society in that time, Milton’s religiosity and his affinity with Protestantism, and the impact of his blindness, as it has been affirmed by loads of critics including T. S. Eliot, is other key factors in the process of the epic composition. Milton also received the inspiration and hints from different contemporary figures including John Donne, Spenser, Marvell and his child acquaintance Charles Diodati. So both manly and heavenly influences that could have had the impact on Milton are worthy to be wondered about.

**Key words:** *John Milton, Paradise Lost, Idea of mass, Communal thinking, Collectivism, Contribution.*

## Introduction

The title of this paper signifies the intellectual contribution either of heaven or of man given to John Milton which resulted in the composition of the greatest epic ever written namely *Paradise Lost*. The source of heavenly inspiration is the Bible, and Milton's relationships with his contemporary friends and the former pioneers are the source of manly contribution to *Paradise Lost*. This fact is not limited to this specific great work, but this is a universal fact that there are so many influences contributing to the production of great works. As Virginia Woolf claims in her *A Room of One's Own*:

Producing works of great importance is not bound to one single person. This enormous task cannot be executed by an individual single-handedly. *Paradise Lost* is a conspicuous example of a great work of literature due to its form and content. There is no battle greater than Satan's revolt against The Providence, which is the greatest battle of its own kind; moreover, great characters are dealt with in the course of epic including Adam, Eve, and Satan. In addition, the intention of Milton is to "justify the ways of God to Men" (Milton 5), which significantly deals with the most basic questions and needs of humanity. The greatness of *Paradise Lost* is acknowledged by Samuel Johnson who says: (Hadigol M, Kolobandy A. 2018; Machado AD, et al 2019; Sadeghpour F, et al 2017 ; Peteros E, et al 2019).

The greatness of his epic can be inferred from the claims of Matthew Arnold in his essay *The Study of Poetry* in which he elaborates on the importance of poetry and its power to express religion which is weakened by its attachment to material and can be compared to poetry. In this venue, *Paradise Lost* can be considered as the earthly version of the Bible.

In addition, Matthew Arnold elaborates that even though there can be many political allusions and issues detected in *Paradise Lost*, unlike the politics, literature can be assumed as the outcome of intellectual cooperation of prominent literary figures. Literary works can be seen as the accumulation of mutual consultation of ideas. As to the mission and function of literature, it is generally believed that literature unites, yet politics divides. In comparison to literature which is devoid of any charlatanism, politics is sharing self-benefit as Matthew Arnold touches upon it in his essay *The Study of Poetry*, "In politics, in the art of governing mankind, that is perhaps true. But in the order of thought, in art, the glory, the eternal honour is that charlatanism shall find no entrance" (Allen 504).

## Discussion

In order to make the notion of collective thinking clearer, definitions of two words, philosophy and thought, are crucial. Philosophy has been defined by dictionaries as the study of the fundamental nature of knowledge, reality, and existence, especially when considered as

an academic discipline. The word Philosophy is derived from the ancient Greek words philo - which means to love or to befriend with, and – Sophia meaning wisdom. “The ancient Greeks organized the subject into five basic categories: metaphysics, epistemology, ethics, politics and aesthetics,” (Wikipedia Philosophy-and-thinking).

Thought or thinking, being a mental power of mind, is a process allowing ideas to take shape and to be modelled in the world. Other words referring to similar concepts and processes in English are contemplation, idea, cognition, sentience, consciousness, and imagination.

Tomusello elaborates on ‘shared intentionality’ which “refers to collaborative interactions in which participants share psychological states with one another” (Tomusello: Ghamari E, Zadeh MH, 2018; Klimenko L, Posukhova O.2017). The composition of great literary works is the product of communal thinking, meaning that a single person is not capable of composing a work of high greatness. Michael Tratner argues in his review *Modernism and Mass Politics* that Eliot and Yeats “joined the masses” seems to follow the authors in interpreting Eliot’s statements about “the mind of Europe” in *Tradition and Individual Talent* by T.S Eliot or Yeats’ *Focus on the national or female unconsciousness in working-class people*.

Collectivism which can be defined as the sense that individuals are created by their class and their participation in a larger social life is completely traceable in Virginia Woolf’s *The Wave*. Michael in his review *Modernism and Mass Politics* subtly traces the development of a collective mind among the novel's six characters. Collectivism, the sense that individuals are created by their class and their participation in a larger social life, does seem vital to Woolf’s novel. But Tratner concludes that Woolf has overcome the fear of the masses and racial others he has analysed in her first novel. The *Voyage Out* which describes a larger and less visionary world, she again exhibits a desire to escape the masses and racial others. *The Waves* represents mental unity among six characters of the same class. Their communion cannot be seen as a sign that Woolf is allowing the working classes to penetrate upper-class consciousness.

Metaphorizing the working classes as dark forces makes them invisible as an actual group of people living and working in bad conditions and beginning to organize in powerful ways. Tratner almost acknowledges this when he describes a form of co-optation. He claims that working-class women in *Ulysses* and *To the Lighthouse* do not "replace 'us' the writers, who can shape the meaning of their acts". Authors chose the working classes not by shaping their acts because any author shapes his or her characters' acts, but by identifying them as a metaphoric heart of darkness inside "us," which "we" can come to accept. Tranter places “Parallel with Joyce and Woolf that overwhelms the political distinctions” (Tratner 2). From *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* to *Ulysses* to *Finnegan’s Wake*, we can see a



progression away from individualism toward collective consciousness. By *Finnegan's Wake*, Joyce seems to have concluded that individuals do not even exist, turning every character into a 'mass' and giving the thoroughly anti-elitist name 'Here Comes Everybody' to his antihero.

## **Heavenly and earthly cooperation**

### ***Heavenly Inspiration of Paradise Lost***

*Paradise Lost* was written after the Restoration of Charles II in 1660, who returned the Church of England to the way it used to be in his father's time before the Civil War. In this tumultuous era, Milton was considered follower of Puritanism, and his advocacy of Puritanism is evident in *Paradise Lost*. We might see Abdiel in

There are plenty of parallels between Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the Bible. The complexity of the Bible like Psalm 22 is explicitly felt, while one reads *Paradise Lost*. As Professor Cormican asserts, reading Milton's epic works with no religious experiences and biblical knowledge is analogous to a child's reading of *Romeo and Juliet* with no experience on passion of love, leaving the child perplexed. The idea of interconnectedness of *Paradise Lost* and the Bible is acknowledged by a lot of critics. The biblical allusions can achieve their effects only if they are recognized by the reader. Reading the book of *Genesis*, one can find interesting correspondences with Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The book itself is comprised of two separate parts. In *Genesis A*, the stories of the Creation, the rebellion of the angels and their fall, and the creation of man and his fall from Heaven are narrated. *Genesis B* continues the story of the fall of Lucifer and the rebellion of other fallen angels. Abundancy of phrases and statement can reinforce the idea of the close relationship between *Paradise Lost* and the Bible. For

In the mentioned 13 lines, there are at least fifteen diverse biblical allusions to Romans 5:12, 19; Genesis 2:17; I Corinthians 15:45, 47; Psalm 23:3; Exodus 34:2, 3; Exodus 3:1; Exodus 24:12-18; Genesis 1:1; John 1:1; Nehemiah 3:15; Isaiah 8:6; Psalm 28:2; Psalm 2:6; Deuteronomy 4:10; Exodus 19:18. In these 13 opening lines Milton tries to set the scene and atmosphere for the entire poem. The overall atmosphere of the epic is replete with or reaches back to Chaos, Creation, and the Fall, besides, it deals with the gradual working out of God's Providence in Redemption and Restoration. Milton's language is so much Biblical-like, replete with Biblical incidents and allusions, that even his explanation regarding the fallen angels as "heathen gods" is acceptable to a reader familiar with the Bible to consider these angels as falsifications of God. Nevertheless, there is no statement in the Bible about fallen angels becoming heathen gods. In the *Book of Revelation*, it is mentioned that those who have overcome temptation and pride will be given new names in Heaven (Revelation 3:12) while these fallen angels "Got them new Names" upon earth in pagan idolatry.

Thou hast a few names even in Sardis, which have not defiled their garments, and they shall walk with me in  
A dungeon horrible, on all sides round  
As one great furnace flamed, yet from those flames  
No light, but rather darkness visible  
Served only to discover sights of woe, (Milton 5)

Blindness provided Milton with a profound understanding of darkness without boundary. We draw nearer to him in darkness than in light. Close your eyes, you would walk with Milton. (Tague 12)

### **Conclusion**

It is highly unlikely that *Paradise Lost* as a grand epic has been written by Milton singlehandedly. Grandness of the epic is so much that it is out of reach of a single person to undertake. Great thinkers and literary figures unanimously believe that human thinking is in nature a collective act, meaning that authors use the ideas and hints of their precursors and contemporaneous authors. By the same token, Milton was inspired by a lot of philosophical and literary precursors. A lot of critics and anthropologists believe that humans are more likely to think in collectivity. Generally, cooperation is really vital and it is specific to humans; as a result, they are able to form a "we" that acts which consists everything from a collaborative party to a cultural collaboration. Collectivism in human thinking is an idea which has been put forward by Tumasello. He attributes several features to human's way of thinking which is centred on collectivism. Milton's blindness, as it has been affirmed by loads of critics including T. S. Eliot, is another key factor in the process of the epic composition. Had Milton not gone blind, the epic would have been in a completely different shape. Most parts of *Paradise Lost* owe a lot to Milton's blindness. If Milton had not become blind, he could not have meticulously described different parts. The other source of inspiration for Milton was the Great Bible. It served as the prior text to *Paradise Lost*. Milton became acquainted with the Bible and other religious texts. Therefore, it should not come as any surprise that *Paradise Lost* shares a lot of parallels with the Bible.

Overall, based on the variety of texts and sources throughout the paper, it can be argued, for sure, that the composition of *Paradise Lost* owes a lot to other literary, religious, and philosophical texts and authors. Besides, Milton's ambience was influential, meaning that Milton could not have only relied on himself for authoring his epic; therefore, both heavenly and manly cooperation must have been met during composition of this work.



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