

A Milton for All Seasons

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The many radical rereadings of *Paradise Lost*



John Milton; illustration by Laura Breiling

Reviewed: **What in Me Is Dark: The Revolutionary Afterlife of *Paradise Lost*** by Orlando Reade

John Milton wrote *The Readie and Easie Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* in early February 1660, in a final, furious attempt to persuade Parliament not to end England's turbulent, eleven-year experiment in self-governance. By the time it appeared in print, at month's end, its failure was all but guaranteed; General George Monck, commander of the English forces in Scotland, had forced the return of Parliament's deposed Royalist members, and the new assembly was preparing the legislative ground for the return of Charles II, the exiled Stuart heir to the throne. The pamphlet's opening lines, added just before it went to press, are a master class in understatement. "Although since the writing of this treatise, the face of things hath had som change," Milton begins, "I thought best not to suppress what I had written, hoping that it may now be of much more use and concernment." Addressing himself directly to "those who are in power," he urges them not to act in haste or "to refuse counsel from any in a time of public deliberation." Then the mask of equanimity slips, revealing the bitterness beneath: "If thir absolute determination be to enthrall us, before so long a Lent of Servitude, they may permitt us a little Shroving-time first, wherin to speak freely, and take our leaves of Libertie."

Indeed, apart from its title, this last published work of Milton's prose—the capstone to two decades of bold, often scandalous advocacy on behalf of freedom from the tyrannies of church and state—expresses little faith in the ease of securing liberty or the readiness of any of the constituencies to which it appeals: not Parliament, not the army, and certainly not the English people, who, having "justly and magnanimously abolished" monarchy, were now evidently content "to fall back or rather to creep back...to thir once abjur'd and detested thralldom of Kingship." But he permits himself a flicker of optimism in the final lines: "I trust I shall have spoken perswasion to abundance of sensible and ingenuous men [and] to som perhaps whom God may raise of these stones to become children of reviving libertie." It's an evocative image, compounded of scriptural reference (the dry bones raised to new life by the prophet Ezekiel), classical allusion (the army bred from dragon's teeth by Cadmus, the stones raised by the music of Amphion's lyre), and a strong dose of messianic fervor—a hint, to those with ears to hear, of where Milton was headed next.

Seven years later the first edition of *Paradise Lost* appeared in print. At the midpoint of his epic poem on the fall of man, Milton channels the defiant tones of *The Readie and Easie Way*, summoning his muse

with mortal voice, unchang'd
To hoarce or mute, though fall'n on evil dayes
On evil dayes though fall'n, and evil tongues;
In darkness, and with dangers compast round,
And solitude; yet not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers Nightly, or when Morn
Purples the East: still govern thou my Song,
Urania, and fit audience find, though few.

The invocation of Urania irresistibly—if misleadingly—identifies the poet with his doomed antihero, since it comes just after Milton has finished recounting the saga of the war in heaven, which ends with Satan's rebellious forces hurling themselves down "to the bottomless pit." And as Orlando Reade's new study of the "revolutionary afterlife" of *Paradise Lost* suggests, more than a few readers have been eager to join them there. *What in Me Is Dark* tracks the poem's reception by dissidents, rebels, reformers, and actual and would-be outlaws of all stripes, from the eighteenth century to the present. The motley crew—which includes anticolonial freedom fighters, abolitionists, feminists, Black radicals, Communists, and antifascists alongside white supremacists, Hells Angels, and reactionary gurus of the alt-right—testifies to the force and appeal of Milton's creation and to the inherent instability of his cause. True liberty entails the freedom to be wrong.

Reade begins with one of the more inspiring cases—and one of the few in which a reader does not assume that Milton was, in William Blake’s formulation, “of the Devil’s party without knowing it.” On the contrary, in 1948, when a young inmate of the Norfolk Prison Colony in Massachusetts, a recent convert to the Nation of Islam, found a copy of *Paradise Lost* in the prison library, in “either volume 43 or 44 of The Harvard Classics,” he recognized the poem’s villain at a glance:

The devil, kicked out of Paradise, was trying to regain possession. He was using the forces of Europe, personified by the Popes, Charlemagne, Richard the Lionhearted, and other knights. I interpreted this to show that the Europeans were motivated and led by the devil, or the personification of the devil. So Milton and Mr. Elijah Muhammad were actually saying the same thing.

In this swift summation, Reade observes, the author of *The Autobiography of Malcolm X* offers “an astonishing interpretation of a Christian poem written three centuries earlier,” seizing *Paradise Lost* to diagnose and answer “the radical needs of the present.”

Certainly, as a critic, one can marvel at the confidence and concision of that reading. On the other hand, brief as it is, there’s plenty in it to quibble with. For starters, as Merve Emre recently pointed out in her review of Reade’s book in *The New Yorker*, Milton’s poem isn’t in volume 43 or volume 44 of the Harvard Classics. (It’s in volume 4.) More seriously, Paradise is Adam and Eve’s lost home, not Satan’s; Milton mentions knights only to tell us not to look for them in his epic, and Richard the Lionheart doesn’t appear at all. For Emre, such forcing of the poem to fit the reader’s own agenda, however worthy, leaches it of its properly revolutionary power. “Perhaps a more authentically radical way to read *Paradise Lost*,” she writes, “is to insist on the scandal of its strangeness, to yield to its alien vision”—in short, and not to put too fine a point on it, to read *Paradise Lost*. Fair enough.

But I wouldn’t be so quick to claim close reading as the real radicalism, or to dismiss the value of motivated (or, indeed, accidental) misreading. After all, Malcolm X knew he was a partial reader of *Paradise Lost*; that was the whole point of the encounter, which he cites as evidence of his determination to gain, “with every additional book that I read, a little bit more sensitivity to the deafness, dumbness, and blindness that was afflicting the black race in America.” The fact that Milton would have had other things on his mind didn’t give him pause.

This is the paradoxical strength of Reade’s approach, too. It’s unusual, and instructive, to encounter a work of criticism so at ease with the idea that its cherished object might, at best, be useful to its readers—answerable to their needs and their purposes. And if Reade cannot always manage the tension between his desire to attend to those needs and purposes and his attachment to the actual poem, that struggle itself reveals the contradictory impulses of deference and resistance, attention, appropriation, and misapprehension that sustain the life of any work of art.

A bigger problem with the book is its structure. *What in Me Is Dark* is divided into twelve chapters, each focusing on one reader or community of readers and one book of *Paradise Lost*. But the reception history of the poem doesn’t neatly track with its narrative unfolding. Lots of readers are galvanized by the Satan of the early books; no one is particularly excited about the potted biblical history in Books 11 and 12. So Reade’s bifocal approach works best early on, when he connects the soaring rhetoric of Milton’s fallen angel-in-chief to the libertarian ideals and moral hypocrisies of figures like Thomas Jefferson and William Wordsworth. It works less well in later chapters, where he strains to connect, say, Hannah Arendt’s fraught relationship with Martin Heidegger to the postlapsarian Adam and Eve.

It isn't just that Arendt's ideas in *The Human Condition* about work, forgiveness, and starting anew are, as she insists, "strictly secular," however much they have in common with the teachings of Jesus; it's also that the two mentions of *Paradise Lost* in that book are both citations not of the poem but of Karl Marx's enigmatic pronouncement that Milton wrote it "for the same reason that a silkworm produces silk," because "it was *his* nature." Whatever Marx meant by this—something to do with the subsumption of labor by profit in the unnatural regime of capital?—Arendt disagreed with him. Yet it isn't clear that she disagreed with him about the meaning of *Paradise Lost*—or that she (or Marx, for that matter) read the poem at all.

Reade is on firmer ground when charting the influence of *Paradise Lost* on the architects of the American and Haitian Revolutions. John Adams wrote of reading Milton's poem on a "hazy, dull Day" in 1756: "That mans Soul, it seems to me, was distended as wide as Creation." When Thomas Paine sought to stiffen the spines of the American colonists in their rebellion against the crown, he cribbed from Milton's Satan: "Never can true reconciliation grow where wounds of deadly hate have pierced so deep." Ben Franklin's unorthodox private liturgy included a prayer said by Milton's Adam and Eve. And Thomas Jefferson copied into his commonplace book an array of passages from *Paradise Lost*, including Adam's pointed question to God: "Among Unequals what Society/Can sort, what Harmony or true Delight?" Reade notes that the question was "grimly significant for Jefferson," whose sexual relationship with Sally Hemings likely began when she was a young teenager and his property under American law.

The hypocrisy of those who fought for freedom on their own behalf while enslaving others was plain to some: at a dinner in Oxford in 1777, the year after the signing of the Declaration of Independence, Samuel Johnson raised his glass "to the next insurrection of the negroes in the West Indies." Johnson's critique of the American revolutionaries strongly resembled his critique of Milton himself, whose great poem he reluctantly admired and whose advocacy for the ostensibly republican, often authoritarian regime of Oliver Cromwell he despised: "They who most loudly clamour for liberty do not most liberally grant it."

That irony was, of course, abundantly evident to those who were themselves enslaved. In his autobiography, the abolitionist Olaudah Equiano recalled his first glimpse of the island of Montserrat as a child captive on a slave ship bound from West Africa to the Caribbean, with a reference to Milton's Hell:

Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace
And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all, but torture without end
Still urges....

Slavery was hell, but enslaved and formerly enslaved readers of *Paradise Lost* did not tend to follow the Romantics in identifying with Satan: like the young Malcolm X, they saw the devil in the guise of their white oppressors.

In 1791 the enslaved people of Saint-Domingue, the most lucrative of the French Atlantic colonies, rose up in armed revolt under the leadership of Toussaint Louverture, a former slave who cast himself as heir to the revolutionary spirit of the Enlightenment. The English were torn between schadenfreude and fear: first they tried to seize the colony for themselves; then, having fought to a humiliating draw, they negotiated a peace; finally, they righteously denounced Louverture's capture by Napoleon's army. Wordsworth wrote a sonnet for the imprisoned hero, in which he channels the grand style and spacious line of *Paradise Lost*:

Thou hast left behind
Powers that will work for thee; air, earth, and skies;
There's not a breathing of the common wind
That will forget thee; thou hast great allies;
Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
And love, and man's unconquerable mind.

As Reade points out, Milton's Satan supplies the poem's penultimate word, lending Wordsworth's calm certainty a defiant subtext. "What though the field be lost?" Satan demands of Beelzebub,

All is not lost; the unconquerable Will,
And study of revenge, immortal hate,
And courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else not to be overcome?

The implied identification—anticolonial Black liberator with vengeful fallen angel—is vexed, to say the least; one of Louverture's successors rejected it outright. In an 1817 pamphlet entitled *Reflexions on the Blacks and Whites*, Baron de Vastey, a "free man of color" appointed as secretary to King Henri Christophe, then ruler of the northern part of Haiti, summoned the intellects of the European Enlightenment to defend Haitian sovereignty against the French. Marveling at the stubbornness of the "Beelzebub colonist[s]," Vastey likens them to Milton's fallen angels, who, "though vanquished, thunderstruck, and precipitated into the abyss, still struggle by every method their villainy can suggest to recover the empire of which a just and retributive God has for ever deprived them." The powers that work for freedom are necessarily divine; Satan and his followers are merely thwarted imperialists.

This is, inarguably, the right reading of *Paradise Lost*, which was written, as Milton declares, to "justify the ways of God to men." But throughout the poem's history it remains something of a minority view. The difficulty, famously, is Milton's God, whose cranky omniscience is, as Reade puts it, "a problem both for the plot and for Milton's theology." Anticipating in Book 3 the Fall of man, thousands of lines before it occurs in Book 9, God sounds irritated to the point of exasperation with his new creation:

Whose fault?
Whose but his own? Ingrate, he had of me
All he could have; I made him just and right,
Sufficient to have stood, though free to fall.

Verb tenses are a grammar alien to an eternal being: we haven't yet met Adam and Eve, but for God they already exist in disappointing retrospect. "Many readers find it difficult to like this intemperate God," Reade observes; within the poem, even his only begotten Son seems to find him trying.

As Reade argues, the God of *Paradise Lost* is perpetually on the defensive because "he doesn't want to be mistaken for a Calvinist." That is, he—like Milton—wants to preserve the essential zone of human freedom foreclosed by the doctrine of double predestination, according to which some souls are saved, the rest are damned, and all of this was decided by God before the beginning of time itself. Milton's God cannot help knowing what will happen to Adam and Eve. (For that matter, neither can Milton's readers.) But he insists that his foreknowledge is no constraint on their free will; it "had no influence on their fault."

And Milton—*pace* Wordsworth, *pace* Blake—is on God’s side in the end. There is, from his perspective, a tragic grandeur in God’s predicament, burdened by awareness of all that is to come and bound by his own liberty-loving nature not to interfere: were it not for the Son’s self-sacrificing intervention, freedom would mean letting Satan win. Baron de Vastey seems to have responded to this demanding strain in the poem. “Hail to thee, happy land! Land of my choice! Hail to thee, Hayti, my country!” he writes in his *Reflexions*. “Sole asylum of liberty where the black man can lift his head to behold and participate in the bounties dispensed by the universal Father of Man.” There’s an echo of Satan here, to be sure—“hail horrors, hail/Infernal world”—but in hymning the happiness of choice, liberty, and participation, come what may, Vastey is singing Milton’s song.

Over the course of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, Milton’s radicalism was gradually eclipsed by his reputation for greatness. *Paradise Lost* became a classic: Coleridge placed it alongside Shakespeare’s plays on “one of the two glory-smitten summits on the poetic mountain.” By the early twentieth century, the overweening specter of literary mastery—what Virginia Woolf dubbed “Milton’s bogey”—could be conjured simply by uttering the poem’s name. In a 1918 diary entry Woolf reports that her “intellectual snobbishness was chastened this morning by hearing from Janet [Case, a friend and Woolf’s former tutor in ancient Greek] that she reads *Don Quixote & Paradise Lost*.” Spurred to emulation, Woolf wrote, “Though I am not the only person in Sussex who reads Milton, I mean to write down my impressions of *Paradise Lost* while I am about it.” Those impressions were mixed. On the one hand: “How smooth, strong and elaborate it all is! What poetry!” On the other: “I get no help in judging life; I scarcely feel that Milton lived or knew men and women.”

Perhaps for this very reason, because the poem is so eager to explain them and only intermittently invested in knowing them, women have been among the most cautious, skeptical, and insightful critics of *Paradise Lost*. They are revolutionary readers whose rebellious impulses are directed in no small part against the poem’s author, whom Woolf called “the first of the masculinists.” (“Milton was great,” muses the eponymous heroine of Charlotte Brontë’s 1849 novel *Shirley*, “but was he good?”) When Adam asks God for a companion equal to him, Mary Wollstonecraft was pleased to note, “Milton seem[ed] to coincide” with the argument of her own *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792). On balance, however, she found Milton’s Eve, “our first frail mother,” an uninspiring type: “When he tells us that women are formed for softness and sweet attractive grace, I cannot comprehend his meaning.” Contemplating the “paradisiacal happiness” of the unfallen couple, she observes in a stinging footnote, “instead of envying the lovely pair, I have, with conscious dignity, or Satanic pride, turned to hell for sublimer objects.”

Wollstonecraft’s daughter wasn’t so sure. She was still a teenager when she married yet another Satan-smitten Romantic poet, Percy Shelley, who regarded “Milton’s Devil as a moral being...far superior to his God.” The being created by the title character of Mary Shelley’s novel *Frankenstein; or The Modern Prometheus* (1818) is no such paragon; he is, as Reade notes, “both Adam and Satan,” a creature who yearns for a mate and comes to resent his existence, cursing his creator. He is also a monster and—in a brilliant metafictional touch—a reader of *Paradise Lost*. “I read it...as a true history,” the monster recalls of his first encounter with Milton’s poem.

I often remarked the several situations, as their similarity struck me to my own. Like Adam, I was created, apparently united by no link to any other being in existence.... [But] I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition; for often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter gall of envy rose within me.

Far from becoming a champion of human freedom, as does the tragic protagonist of Percy Shelley’s *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), Mary Shelley’s monster converts his envy, incel-like, into a spree of violence culminating in the murder of Frankenstein’s bride.

Milton's own relationships with women were less strained, but not by much: his first wife fled his home for three years just after they were married, and his grown daughters came to resent him bitterly, possibly because he made them serve as his unpaid secretarial staff. Those difficult ties served as a template for one of the great unhappy marriages in the history of the English novel, the union of Dorothea Brooke and Edward Casaubon in George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1871–1872). Reade's claim that when the twenty-eight-year-old Eliot called Ralph Waldo Emerson "the first man I have seen" she was imagining herself as Milton's Eve is a bit far-fetched, as is his speculation that her sympathy for Milton's indigestion was animated by her identification with his marital woes. But Reade's account of Eliot's crafting of *Middlemarch* as an extended rejoinder to *Paradise Lost*, and to the mythic figure of Milton himself, makes for one of his book's most enjoyable chapters.

When she began writing *Middlemarch*, in 1870, Eliot and her partner, George Henry Lewes, were reading *Paradise Lost* aloud to each other in the evenings, and as she was finishing the novel, in 1872, Eliot wrote to a friend to congratulate her on doing the same: "Glad you are reading my demigod Milton!" She and Lewes had moved on to Samuel Johnson's *Lives of the Poets*, she adds, "which I read aloud in my old age with a delicious revival of girlish impressions." Reade argues that those girlish impressions contained the seeds of Eliot's characterization of young Dorothea Brooke, whose highest aspiration in life is to sacrifice herself on the altar of an intelligence as peevish, obstinate, and self-regarding as that of Johnson's Milton. "She felt sure that she would have accepted the judicious Hooker," Eliot writes, "if she had been born in time to save him from that wretched mistake he made in matrimony"—according to Izaak Walton's biography of Richard Hooker, the eminent divine's chief "affliction" was his marriage to his landlady's drippy daughter, who expected him to do household chores and help mind the children—"or John Milton when his blindness had come on; or any of the other great men whose habits it would have been glorious piety to endure."

In the event, Dorothea plights her troth to the dried-up Casaubon, whose pedantry she mistakes for genius. The spell fades quickly: Casaubon is cranky and crankish; "Dorothea had thought that she could have been patient with John Milton, but she had never imagined him behaving in this way." Casaubon himself is more perceptive. Early in their courtship, Dorothea asks him how she might prepare herself "to be more useful" to him in his studies: "Could I not learn to read Latin and Greek aloud to you, as Milton's daughters did to their father, without understanding what they read?" He wryly reminds her of the conclusion to that particular anecdote: "If I remember rightly, the young women you have mentioned regarded that exercise in unknown tongues as a ground for rebellion against the poet." (According to Milton's nephew and first biographer, Edward Phillips, they regarded it as "a Tryal of Patience, almost beyond endurance," and, as a maidservant later reported, "made away some of his books and would have sold the rest...to the dunghill women.")

Casaubon's allusion to Milton's familial strife, exposed to public scrutiny at the proving of his will, lends him a touching hint of self-awareness and shades Dorothea's idealism with irony. Reade describes the first half of *Middlemarch* as "a horror story about the waste of women's potential," but it might also be described as a tragicomedy of gendered expectations, male author and female helpmeet clutched in awkward and mutually unsatisfying embrace.

"George Eliot was no revolutionary," Reade admits; on the contrary, her satirical sense nudged her away from radical causes. Still, she provides a glorious new way to interpret *Paradise Lost*. The same can't be said for all of Reade's case studies; more than a few are neither revolutionary nor especially insightful readers of Milton. James Redpath, a white editor, newspaper owner, and abolitionist who had immigrated to the US from England, fancied himself a radical but alienated his Black collaborators by his eagerness to speak for them in the pages of his *Weekly Anglo-African*, including in an editorial that channeled the rousing cadences of *Paradise Lost* to champion the "voluntary emigration" of fugitive slaves to Haiti. And the founding members of the Mistick Krewe of Comus were frankly reactionary New Orleans segregationists who found in Milton's poem a repertoire of images sanctifying their racial hatred.

Indeed, throughout the middle sections of Reade's book, as the age of Enlightenment and revolution gives way to the age of the American Civil War, Reconstruction, and industrial capitalism, the liberatory potential of *Paradise Lost* proves harder for readers to grasp. Assimilated into the edifice of tradition, the poem and its author appear as distilled emblems of authority itself. Milton was a fool, in Friedrich Nietzsche's judgment, "enamoured of a moral monster"—the desire "to be more than an artist...the moral awakener of his nation." "*Paradise Lost* is not the less an eternal monument because it is a monument to dead ideas," wrote an early-twentieth-century biographer in half-hearted defense. "Milton is the worst sort of poison," declared Ezra Pound.

One could argue that the fascist Pound's dislike proves Milton's radical bona fides, but Reade is more careful than that. He sees that modernism's mistrust of Milton was grounded on some legitimate reservations, not only about the aesthetic and political agendas in which *Paradise Lost* had been enlisted but also about the poet's own towering ambition and achievement. Milton's poem "deals in horror & immensity & squalor & sublimity, but never in the passions of the human heart," wrote Woolf in her diary. "Has any great poem ever let in so little light upon one's own joys & sorrows?"

It is, of course, a manuscript of Milton's verse that the protagonist of *A Room of One's Own* hopes to see when she requests—and is politely, regretfully, firmly denied—access to the library of an unnamed Oxbridge college: "Ladies are only admitted...if accompanied by a Fellow of the College or furnished with a letter of introduction." The "kindly gentleman" delivering the message appears to Woolf's narrator "like a guardian angel barring the way"; this postlapsarian Eden is for male readers only. Of all the writers whose strengths and shortcomings Woolf confidently appraised in her diary, the feminist literary scholar Susan Gilbert notes in an indispensable 1978 essay on women readers and *Paradise Lost*, Milton alone left Woolf "feeling puzzled, excluded, inferior, and a little guilty"—in a word, fallen. He has that effect on a girl.

But Woolf got her revenge. Among the guests at Clarissa Dalloway's party is a Milton scholar, "a very queer fish," whom she scrutinizes, in Reade's nice image, "as a naturalist catalogues a rare species." First Clarissa notes "his prodigious learning and timidity; his wintry charm without cordiality; his innocence blent with snobbery"; then, seeing he is bent on picking a quarrel with a fellow guest, a young poet, she glides over to intervene, introducing and eviscerating him in one stroke: "He knows everything in the whole world about Milton!"

Such knowledge can be deadening. (That, I suppose, is one way of summarizing *Paradise Lost*.) Reade's own relation to Milton was reinvigorated, he says, by teaching *Paradise Lost* in a youth correctional facility and a New Jersey state prison during a stretch of years when he was trying, and mostly failing, to write a dissertation on Renaissance poetry. He is careful not to sentimentalize his incarcerated students or their responses to his teaching. "The role of education programmes in America's prison system is complicated, to say the least," as he observes. But reading *Paradise Lost* with them forced him to shed some of his anxious deference to the poem, attuning him to its imperfections and—what may amount to the same thing—its vitality. Unlike Jordan Peterson, the self-appointed dean of the manosphere, who has claimed *Paradise Lost* is "a prophecy" of modern spiritual decline, "rationality...ascendant from the ashes of Christianity," and whose nutty self-identification with Satan supplies Reade with his book's final, cautionary interlude, Reade himself has no totalizing vision of the poem or its politics. They are both, he says, for readers to make "sense of in their own ungovernable ways."

It is a modest conclusion, at interesting odds with the book's subtitle on the poem's "revolutionary afterlife." But not every reader of *Paradise Lost* is radicalized by the experience; a good many, by Reade's own account, have found in Milton's vision of fallen human nature fodder for conservatism, cautious liberalism, nihilism, or outright authoritarianism. This is what fallenness means: what is dark in *Paradise Lost*—its rage and disillusionment with the benighted masses, its misogyny, its totalitarian impulses and apocalyptic

cravings—cannot be extricated from its generous, humane, and liberatory qualities, the splendor of its images, or the beauty of its verse. Nor, if they could be, would the poem necessarily be better for it. Edmund Burke, no friend to revolutions, described *Paradise Lost* as “uncertain, confused, terrible, and sublime to the last degree.” He meant it at least partly as a compliment.

There is also this: one underrated benefit of becoming a classic—the kind of book “everybody talks about...and nobody reads,” as Reade reports an anonymous nineteenth-century wit saying of *Paradise Lost*—is that readers who expect to be bored or dutifully impressed can find themselves utterly bowled over. At some point in the late 1960s, Freewheelin’ Frank Reynolds of the San Francisco Hells Angels took a large dose of LSD and picked up a copy of Milton’s poem: “Wowowowowow! Dig, this book gave me such a rhythm of words of *my* inborn instincts which gives me the flourish of mind of being reborn.” And at a 1966 lecture on trade unions the Trinidadian writer and activist C.L.R. James likened Stalinism to the English Republic under the increasingly dictatorial rule of Oliver Cromwell. In fact, he digressed, “I believe that Milton, in *Paradise Lost*, was saying, ‘Look here boys. This man of great power and authority, Cromwell, upsets the regime.’ He had been with Cromwell all the time but in the end he was doubtful.” Satan, James speculated, “was derived from his knowledge of Cromwell”; autocracy is humanity’s great antagonist. “That is what I think. I cannot prove that,” he concluded. “But somewhere I am going to write that down so that it will be left for somebody to take up.”