The 1688 Paradise Lost and Dr. Aldrich

S U Z A N N E B O O R S C H

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John Milton's Paradise Lost, published in 1667, first appeared in an illustrated edition twenty-one years later. This was the fourth edition, in folio, put forth by Jacob Tonson in 1688. Tonson had taken the precaution of getting subscribers to the book before undertaking the expense of an illustrated publication; their five hundred names, listed at the end of the book, comprise most of the prominent literary and political figures of the time. The practice of getting subscribers to pay for books, which was to be important in English publishing from that time on, was just beginning, and this was the first time Tonson had used it. The venture was a success, and Tonson followed it with many others, but when later he had his portrait painted for the Kitkat Club, he chose to have himself shown holding a copy of the 1688 Paradise Lost (Figure 1). This book, then, was published in an edition of at least five hundred copies; the Metropolitan Museum purchased a copy in 1966.

The illustrations are twelve copperplate engravings, frontispieces for the twelve books into which the epic is divided. Seven are signed by J. B. de Medina as designer, and one by Bernard Lens, while four have no designer's signature. All were engraved by Michael Burghers, or Burgese, except for the Lens design, engraved by P. P. Bouche. The illustrations have been treated in some detail by various writers,1 who have discussed especially the relationship between illustrations and text, and so that subject will not be treated here. It is, rather, the authorship of the unsigned illustrations that will be discussed, for the various writers have all assumed that, since Medina signed the majority of the engravings, he was also the creator of the four unsigned ones. This, however, is not the case.

Figure 1

Stylistic comparison shows that three of the unsigned illustrations—the first, second, and twelfth—differ greatly from the nine others. The first (Figure 2) is the best of the entire series, with a strong central figure dramatically lit from below, and turbulent heads, wings, arms, and flames in the foreground balanced by the horizontals of the architecture and pits of flame behind.

The second (Figure 3) and twelfth (Figure 5) are less powerful but nonetheless unlike the ones by Medina, in both style of drawing and style of composition. In the illustrations by Medina the focus is softer; the figures do not stand out clearly from the background, and
everything—figures, drapery, clouds, trees—seems to be made of the same light, wispy substance. All but one of the illustrations signed by Medina show more than a single moment or episode, creating compositions that are disunified and diffuse, whereas the three unsigned ones mentioned show a single scene, with relatively large figures that dominate the composition. (The one exception among the illustrations Medina signed is that for Book VII [Figure 17]; here the style of drawing is Medina’s but the style of composition is not. Interestingly enough, this is the only one signed “Medina delin.,” not “inven.”—or “inv.” or “invenit”—as the others are; this point will be returned to below.)

The stylistic argument need not be pressed, for the evidence of the engravings themselves is corroborated in conclusive manner—by the existence, in the Victoria and Albert Museum, London, of the drawings by Medina after which the engravings were made. These are accompanied by a sort of title page, made after the artist’s death by Francesco Pellegrino, which states categorically: “Original drawings, Eight in number, Being All that were ever Designed for Mr. Milton’s Poem of Paradise Lost, by St. John Baptist of Medina” (Figure 7). The drawings have not been published before and thus are not widely known. They came to the Victoria and Albert in the bequest of the Reverend

**FIGURE 5**
The Expulsion from Paradise, frontispiece to Book XII. Engraving by Burghers after Raphael’s Expulsion

**FIGURE 6**
The Expulsion. Engraving by Nicholas Chapron after Raphael’s Expulsion. From the Aldrich collection, The Picture Gallery, Christ Church College, Oxford
Alexander Dyce, a scholar of English literature, who died in 1869. The Dyce bequest also included a copy of the book.  

The son of a Spaniard who lived in Brussels, Medina had arrived in London in 1686, when he was about twenty-seven. As far as anyone knows, he had never illustrated a book before. According to George Vertue, he made designs for an Ovid, but these were never published. Vertue's impression was that Medina "would have made a good history Painter had he liv'd were suitable encouragement was to be mett with." In 1688 he went to Edinburgh, where he became the most sought-after portrait painter in the city and had a lucrative, if not artistically notable, career until his death in 1711. The self-portrait shown in Figure 8 was painted a few years before his death.

Medina's drawings correspond to the engravings for Books III and V–XI (Figures 9, 10, 13–26), in other words, those with his signature along with that for Book VIII, which by its style can be seen to be by the same hand. A comparison of drawings and engravings shows that the engraver was faithful to the rather limp quality of the work he was reproducing. One of the drawings, that for Book IX, was reversed in the engraving, possibly a mistake but more probably a conscious decision by designer or engraver that the composition would look better that way (Figures 21, 22). The draw-


ings as a group are bland and have little aesthetic interest; they are competent drawings of the period, but their chief interest here is in establishing that Medina did not create the illustrations for Books I, II, and XII.

The question then is: who did? A glance at the work of Bernard Lens (Figure 11) rules out any thought that these three might have been designed by him. But again, evidence toward an answer exists, and not far from the Medina drawings. On the flyleaf of the 1688 *Paradise Lost* in the Dyce collection is a handwritten inscription by an earlier owner, Joseph Warton:

This was the first edition of the *Paradise Lost* in Folio, undertaken by Tonson, at the desire of Mr Somers, afterwards Lord Somers. For this edition, Medina, an artist then in Vogue designed the Prints, all except Two: that for the 4 Book & the 12. Book. The former was designed by B. Lens senior, the latter, as Mr Harte informed me, by Dr. Aldrich. The fine circumstance of Adam’s hiding his face is obviously copied from Timanthe’s *Iphigenia*, so celebrated by all Antiquity. Dr Metcalf had the original drawings by Medina. For this Edition Dryden wrote the famous six lines placed under Milton’s Portrait. To this Edition most of the Men of Genius & Learning in the Kingdom

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**Figure 9**
Christ adored by angels; Satan alighted upon the world; Satan’s passage to the sun; Satan alights on Mount Niphates; Adam and Eve in Paradise, frontispiece to Book III. Engraving by Burghers after a drawing by Medina.

**Figure 10**
Drawing by John Baptist de Medina (1659–1711) for Book III of *Paradise Lost*. The Medina drawings are pen and bistre, all about 11¾ by 7¼ inches. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.
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. The Metropolitan’s copy does not have the inscription, nor do ten other copies I have seen or inquired about. The writer of the inscription, of course, ascribes only the plate for the twelfth book to another hand, still assuming that Medina had designed those for the first two. But since we know that Medina did not design these, and since these have certain similarities to the twelfth, we may hope to have found the artist for all three.

Who, then, was Dr. Aldrich?

The Dr. Aldrich in the 1680s was Henry Aldrich, canon of Christ Church College, Oxford, and its dean from 1689 to his death in 1710. It seems at first glance unlikely that this Oxford scholar, of whom it is said by one writer that he “threw in his lot with the High Church Tories,” would have had anything to do with the republication, in London, of a work of the “regicide” Puritan poet. But the first glance is deceptive.

It seems to have been at the urging of the lawyer John Somers (later Lord Somers, lord chancellor under William and Mary), as mentioned in the handwritten inscription, and also with the encouragement of Dryden, that the young Jacob Tonson decided to publish the illustrated edition. The name of Francis Atterbury is also mentioned in connection with it. Atterbury was then in his twenties, a tutor at Christ Church; after Aldrich's death he became dean of Christ Church and later bishop of Rochester. A letter from Atterbury to Tonson, dated November 15, 1687, shows that Atterbury was involved in the project from the start:

Mr. Creech assur'd me on Saturday that ye last Cutt was not convey'd, & therefore I thought I might stay a post longer than the time you fix'd. This I chose the rather to do, because having been in ye country some time, I have not had lately ye opportunity of rememb'ring some people of their promises to subscribe. The truth is severall people putt in their names, who did not immediately deposit their mony, so that I was willing before I sent you any thing to make ye subscribers' & my account even. I have receiv'd about 5 pound 8 in Crowns. . . . The thinness of ye University, particularly our house, and ye expectations people are in of greater affairs [William of Orange had landed at Torbay ten days earlier, and rebels were joining him at
Messiah with his chariot and thunder drives into the midst of his enemies; they leap into the place of punishment, frontispiece to Book VI. Engraving by Burghers after a drawing by Medina

Exeter] have been ye cause that this thing has not gone forward so well as it would have done at another time; especially if you had gone on immediately with it upon ye first proposal, all people were then strangely fond of it. 

In a letter to his father in 1690, Atterbury wrote: “... and I am forced to be useful to the Dean in a thousand particulars; so that I have very little time.” It is not unlikely that in 1687 he already worked closely with Aldrich. In any case, the edition definitely had a connection with Christ Church.

The edition is connected with Oxford in another respect, most germane to this discussion: the man who made the copperplates was the engraver for the Oxford University Press. Arriving in England after Louis XIV took Utrecht, Michael Burghers seems to have gone straight to Oxford, and he did most of the engravings in the press’s illustrated books and for the famous Ox-

ford almanacs over a period of almost fifty years. In fact, he has been credited by some writers with the invention or choosing of the designs for these. But the provision of designs for the almanacs, rather than being done by Burghers, seems to have been the work of Henry Aldrich. The late W. G. Hiscock, in his short biography of Aldrich, brought this fact back to light—for it was known to Aldrich's contemporaries. Furthermore, Hiscock writes that it was Aldrich who supervised much of the engraving at the Oxford Press.


In fact, he states that Aldrich possessed proof copies of the plates for the *Paradise Lost*; presumably these were in existence in Christ Church when Hiscock wrote, but, unfortunately, they can no longer be found there.

Aldrich, whose portrait by Sir Godfrey Kneller (Figure 12) was painted a year or so after the publication of the illustrated *Paradise Lost*, was distinguished in so many areas that those who know of him in one field are surprised to learn how accomplished he was in others. The eighteenth-century author and printer John

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**FIGURE 17**

Raphael relates how the world was created, frontispiece to Book VII. Engraving by Burghers after a drawing by Medina

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**FIGURE 18**

Drawing by Medina for Book VII. Victoria and Albert Museum, London
Nichols calls him “that universal master of human science.” Architecture and musicology are probably his best-known pursuits. He designed the Peckwater quadrangle in his own college of Christ Church, and All Saints Church on High Street. His collection of musical manuscripts and editions was the best in England of the day and still ranks among the top. In addition, he wrote a highly respected treatise on grammar and a book on logic. He was also known for his genial sociable spirit, his constant smoking, and his composition of glee and catches. The well-known translation of a Latin poem, said to have been written by Jean Sirmond, listing reasons to drink is but one small product of his engaging mind:

If all be true that I do think,
There are five reasons we should drink,
Good wine, a friend, or being dry,
Or lest we should be by and by,
Or any other reason why.

In sum, his was a mind that was analytical and discerning.

Adam and Eve go forth; Eve urges her going apart; the Serpent induces Eve to eat the forbidden fruit; Adam eats of the fruit; they cover their nakedness, frontispiece to Book IX. Engraving by Burghers after a drawing by Medina.

One other trait of Aldrich’s should be mentioned: modesty, reflected in a desire for privacy, which caused him to shun publicity for his many achievements during his lifetime and to request that his letters and papers be destroyed after his death. The request was carried out, and thus knowledge of his activities remains more speculative than it might otherwise have been.

Less well known than Aldrich’s collection of music is his collection of engravings. These number some two thousand, many apparently acquired during an extensive trip to the Continent. Among the collection, still together in the Christ Church Gallery, Italian engravings form the largest group, many of them by Marcantonio and his school, including several sets by different artists after Raphael’s frescoes in the Vatican. There are also a good number of French, some English, and a few Dutch and German works. It is this collection that supports the thesis that Aldrich was intimately associated with Oxford engraving, for many of the figures in the prints are found again, unmistakably, in

the almanacs and books published by the press during his tenure.

His contemporaries were aware of a connection; Thomas Rymer gives clear evidence that Aldrich’s role in the production of the almanacs was then known, at least among those seventeenth-century literati who spent so much time waging their tireless and elaborate battles of the printed page. Referring satirically to Aldrich, Rymer wrote:

Those who nowadays set up for universal scholars, are commonly men but of rambling Pedantical Learning. . . . They may be so well versed in Astronomy, too . . . to furnish out an Almanack every year, (set off and adorned with Curious Italian Sculptures, whereby it becomes not only useful, to find out the Day of the Month, but at the same time serves instead of a Picture in a Closet, and by Consequence is never out of Date).11

The Oxford antiquarian Thomas Hearne wrote in his notebooks, under the date April 6, 1712:

They have printed Caesar’s Comm[entaries] at Lon
don, in a very large Folio. . . . This is the book that the

Reverend Dr. Aldrich several Years agoe propos'd to do with noble Cutts of his own Contriving. . . . But this Design being stopp'd I know not for what reasons, it was done at London, by Dr. Clarke of St. James's. . . . I have seen specimens of Dr. Aldrich's Design in several Sheets. 12

Twentieth-century writers on the subject of the Oxford almanacs, with no realization of Aldrich's role, have remarked the presence there of figures taken from well-known paintings. F. Madan said that "some of the figures are reminiscent of Raphael and other Italian masters." 13 C. F. Bell wrote—assuming that Burghers had made the designs—"The subjects are in many instances pasticci, figures being borrowed from various pictures by the old masters. . . ." 14 He mentioned specifically works by Raphael—the School of Athens, a sibyl from Santa Maria della Pace, and the cartoons for the tapestries of the Lives of Saints Peter and Paul—as sources for figures in the almanacs. These are all


FIGURE 25
Michael announces that Adam and Eve must leave Paradise; Eve sleeps while Michael leads Adam to a high hill and relates what shall happen until the Flood, frontispiece to Book XI. Engraving by Burghers after a drawing by Medina

FIGURE 26
Drawing by Medina for Book XI. Victoria and Albert Museum, London
FIGURE 27
Socrates accosting Xenophon, frontispiece to *Xenophon*, Oxford, 1691. Engraving by Burghers after figures from Raphael’s School of Athens. From a copy in the Library, Christ Church College, Oxford.

copied so directly that they are simple to spot, and Aldrich had prints of all of these. In fact, some drawings for the almanacs, presumably by Aldrich, which are copies of these prints, are still extant at Christ Church.15

As mentioned above, it was Hiscock who brought out that Aldrich supplied designs for Burghers to engrave, not only for the almanacs but also for many of the books. He goes on to specify instances of designs that are copies of engravings in Aldrich’s collection, for example, the frontispiece of Richard Allestree’s *The Art of Contentment* (1675), based on Vaillant’s Jacob’s Dream, and the frontispiece of the *Letters of Phalaris*, edited by Charles Boyle (1695), in which the source was P. Woeiriot’s engraving of the subject.

If, therefore, Aldrich provided the illustrations for Books I, II, and XII in *Paradise Lost* for Burghers to engrave, we would expect to find models for them in his collection of prints. And indeed, for Book XII (Figure 5), the design named as Aldrich’s in Warton’s

15. H. M. Petter, of Kingsbridge, Devon, is preparing a book on the Oxford almanacs, in which she will discuss Aldrich’s connection with them.

FIGURE 28
Drawing for the 1689 Oxford Almanac, by Henry Aldrich, after Raphael’s School of Athens. The Picture Gallery, Christ Church College. The figures of Socrates and Xenophon are to the left of the central group.
and Walpole's copies of the edition, the source is easily recognizable as Raphael's Expulsion, in the Vatican. Several engravings of this fresco were in the collection (Figure 6).

Much of the design for Book II (Figure 3) also has a source in Aldrich's collection. It is unmistakably Mantegna's Descent into Limbo (Figure 4), from which the original central figures were taken away and Satan, Sin, and Death added. The positions of two of the demonic monsters in the air were switched, and the complexity of the rocky background simplified. The Mantegna print is among the more striking in Aldrich's collection.

It only remains to find among Aldrich's engravings a source for the powerful illustration to Book I. Alas, this task is not that simple. A search through the collection of prints and through the library at Christ Church revealed no print or book illustration that could be identified as the prototype for this design.

Hiscock, in his biography, suggested one possible answer: he hoped to claim more for Aldrich than the role of intermediary. He wrote: "It would be highly creditable to Aldrich if we could be certain that he designed the striking first plate... in the Paradise Lost." Indeed it would, but it seems, on the contrary,

that we can be quite sure he did not. Hiscock mentioned two other illustrations he thought Aldrich might have created: "The frontispiece of Socrates accosting Xenophon in the 1691 Xenophon—partly edited by Aldrich—is probably the latter's own design. In his edition of Aristeas, 1692, the frontispiece of Aristeas bringing the Roll of the Law to Alexandria is also in his style." But these suggestions are those of a wishful biographer: Hiscock did not recognize that the figures of Socrates and Xenophon (Figure 27) were simply lifted from Raphael's School of Athens—as, indeed, Aldrich lifted the entire composition (with some substitutions of figures, some groups left out, and Raphael's central figures moved to niches below) for the Oxford almanac of 1689. His drawing for this is shown here (Figure 28). The Aristeas (Figure 29) was taken directly from an engraving of Minerva and the Muses, attributed to Meldolla or Falcone (Figure 30).

It seems likely that the illustration for Book I of Paradise Lost was similarly copied. The print of Minerva and the Muses, from which the figure of Aristeas was taken, is not now in the Christ Church collection, and yet the connection with Aldrich is very clear, since he edited the 1692 Aristeas Historiae. Even the proof prints for the Paradise Lost, recently stated (by Hiscock) to be there, cannot now be found. Clearly, the source for the first Paradise Lost illustration could have passed through Aldrich's hands, even though it is no longer at Christ Church.

Leonard Kimbrell, in his unpublished dissertation on the illustrations for Paradise Lost, mentions (with no cognizance of Aldrich's connection with it) that this design seems perhaps to have derived from Raphael's St. Michael and the Devil (Figure 31) or perhaps the painting of the same subject by Reni. An engraving after the Raphael is part of the Aldrich collection, and it is similar, but it is not the unmistakable source the others are. Having seen how closely Aldrich copied the Expulsion, the Descent into Limbo, the School of Athens, the Minerva, and many others, one is virtually forced to believe that there must have been, here too, an obvious prototype.

The iconographic type of the figure is indeed that of a St. Michael—a winged figure with spear vanquishing a devil, often accompanied by his hosts. All that would have had to be done here is to make the ears pointed and to add the small horns sprouting from the forehead. It is possible that the source was an illustrated French book of the late sixteenth or the seventeenth century. In these are found compositions like that for Book I, their style akin to mannerism, with a large foreground figure, and small figures and often some elegant architecture in the background. An illustrated Bible, Apocalypse, or book of saints would be a likely source for such a St. Michael. The design could also have been copied from an engraving after a painting of St. Michael, now obscure or lost. It would be most satisfying to recover the source, to be able to credit the originator of this most handsome work.

But if Aldrich supplied these three illustrations, why did he not do the rest? (Medina must have come on the scene last, since otherwise it is difficult to explain his having done designs for Books III and V–XI.) Two possible reasons come to mind: one is that Aldrich might have got too involved in his many other projects.


FIGURE 31
St. Michael and the Devil, by Raphael. Musée du Louvre, Paris
A man of "rambling Pedantical Learning," with many diverse interests, is not likely to produce as quickly as a businessman impatient to get a return on his investment thinks he should. The almanac used a single design each year, and most other books for which Aldrich provided designs had a single frontispiece; he may have found the sustained effort of producing twelve more difficult than he had imagined. Another possibility is that Tonson, as soon as he realized that Aldrich was not producing original designs, decided he ought to hire someone who would do so.

One other thing Aldrich probably did, however, was to suggest—to Burghers, or Tonson, or Medina, if he had already been hired—that Book VII, in which the archangel Raphael relates to Adam and Eve the story of Creation, could be represented by a combination of figures from Raphael. This is the design upon which Medina put only that he "delin.," not that he "inven."

The roundels showing scenes from Creation parallel the four by Raphael in the Loggie. The convention of roundels against the sky illustrating what the figure is saying is used exactly as in Raphael's Story of Joseph, and Medina's figure of Eve is very similar to that of Joseph. Kimbrell suggested that Medina had taken the figure of the archangel from Raphael's Justice in the Stanza della Segnatura, but that figure seems even more like an angel from Santa Maria della Pace. Medina was different from Aldrich, however, in that he made some effort to change the figures, and he unified the composition by rendering it in his own style.

Perhaps Lens was hired, then fired when the quality of his work was seen. With eight designs still to be made, the newly arrived Medina was found, and he agreed to take on the job. He did eight, and he has since been widely credited with eleven; it is time for the error of the attribution to be known and for the interesting association of Aldrich with these—and with other illustrations—to be brought into a stronger light.

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20. These are all illustrated in Luitpold Dussler, Raphael, A Critical Catalogue of His Pictures, Wall-Paintings and Tapestries (London and New York, 1971). The Creation, pl. 146; the Story of Joseph, pl. 150 (Joseph, pl. 150 a, roundels, pl. 150 a, b); Justice, pl. 119; angel in Santa Maria della Pace, pl. 154 b, on top of the arch, to the left.