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Jean-Louis Haquette

► **To cite this version:**

Jean-Louis Haquette. Milton in Veneto. The Circulation of the First Illustrated Italian Translation of 'Paradise Lost'. Jean-Louis Haquette et Helga Meise. From Press to Readers: Studies in the Materiality of Print Culture, Cultures & Temporalités (2), Éditions et presses universitaires de Reims, pp.143-159, 2024, Cultures & Temporalités, 978-2-37496-217-7. hal-04547513

HAL Id: hal-04547513

<https://hal.univ-reims.fr/hal-04547513>

Submitted on 15 Apr 2024

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	Auteur(s)	Jean-Louis HAQUETTE 
	Titre du volume	From Press to Readers
	Directeur(s) du volume	Jean-Louis HAQUETTE  Helga MEISE
	ISBN	978-2-37496-217-7 (broché) 978-2-37496-206-1 (PDF)
	Collection	Cultures & temporalités ; 2
	Édition	ÉPURE - Éditions et presses universitaires de Reims, avril 2024
	Pages	143-159
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MILTON IN VENETO

The Circulation of the First Illustrated Italian Translation of *Paradise Lost*

JEAN-LOUIS HAQUETTE

Université de Reims Champagne Ardenne, CRIMEL

Abstract: *Paradise Lost* is a good example of the circulation of texts and books in 18th century Europe, as the work progressively became a major reference in the epic tradition. The paper focuses on the first illustrated Italian edition of the text, as part of a wider project on Milton on the continent. In the history of this translation, cultural intermediaries, such as Paolo Rolli, the translator, but also a variety of actors (English travellers, Italian dilettanti, the Veronese publisher) play a major part as well as the will to establish Milton as a literary masterpiece. The form of the book, an in-12° and a folio edition, conceived together and illustrated (which is unusual for a first launch) is as significant as the critical paratext included in the volume. They both advocate for the literary status of *Paradise Lost*. Although banned by the Vatican, the folio edition was present in most convent libraries in Veneto. In some of these copies traces of reading or interventions on the images give a concrete testimony of appropriation practices.

THIS contribution is part of an ongoing research project on the publication of John Milton's *Paradise Lost* in Italy. It is based on

a still incomplete survey of the presence in Veneto libraries of copies of the Italian translation of the poem by Paolo Rolli (1685-1765). The aim is to reconstruct how this text circulated despite its being placed on the Index in 1732.¹

Published in ten books in 1677, then in twelve books in 1674, the year of its author's death, John Milton's biblical epic *Paradise Lost* quickly became the national poem that placed English literature alongside its continental counterparts. Joseph Addison was one of the key figures in this canonisation,² with the nineteen essays he devoted to *Paradise Lost* in his journal *The Spectator* between December 1711 and May 1712. The European dissemination of these texts, via the *Spectator's* many translations, helped to establish the epic's critical status, even though there was no shortage of French contradictors.³ On the other hand, most French and Italian translations of the poem included these essays in their paratexts. They became a kind of introduction to the poem.

It should also be remembered that the continental circulation of the Miltonian epic began at the same time in Italy and France. This is not a frequent chronological sequence for the dissemination of Anglo-Saxon literary works, since France often served as a relay to Italy.⁴ As was the case with Shakespeare, Voltaire was a pioneering figure. Unsurprisingly, in 1727, he had included Milton in the original English version of the *Essai sur la poésie épique*, linked to the publication of his *Henriade* in London. The chapter on the author of *Paradise Lost* appeared in the 1728 Paris translation by the Abbé Desfontaines,⁵ while the first French translation of the poem

1. Matteo Brera, "Non istà bene in buona teologia': four italian translations of *Paradise Lost* and the Vatican's policies of book censorship (1731-1900)", *Italian Studies*, 68, 1, 2013, p. 99-122, sur Rolli, p. 102-109.

2. He is not the first. Dryden, as early as 1688, in his famous "Epigram on Milton", put the author on the same level as Homer and Virgil.

3. See Jean Gillet, *Le Paradis perdu dans la littérature française, de Voltaire à Chateaubriand*, Paris, Klincksieck, 1975.

4. It is the case with Shakespeare or Ossian. The translations by Pierre Le Tourneur played an important role in Italy. See Francesca Bianco, "La mediazione di Pierre Le Tourneur nelle prime traduzioni italiane di Shakespeare (Giustina Renier Michiel e Michele Leoni)", *Italica Belgradensia*, 1, 2019, p. 99-117.

5. Voltaire published a French version of his essay in 1733, which greatly mitigated

appeared the following year.⁶ Yet, interest in *Paradise Lost* had already emerged in France in some literary circles.⁷

The publishing history of the Italian translation of *Paradise Lost*

It was also in 1729 that Paolo Rolli published the first Italian translation of the first six books, in London. The following year, this translation was published in Italy, in Verona, by Alberto Tumermani. Paolo Rolli (1687-1765) was a brilliant pupil of Vincenzo Gravina; his talents as an improviser had brought him to the attention of English aristocrats on their Grand Tour. He settled in London in early 1716. A teacher of Italian to the aristocracy (and even to the royal circle), he was also a librettist for the royal opera.⁸ He was angered by Voltaire's criticism of Italian epic poetry and *Paradise Lost* in *An Essay upon the epic poetry of the European nations* (1727). A fervent supporter of Milton, he published observations on Voltaire's essay first in English, then in French, which defended both the Italian poets and the author of *Paradise Lost*.⁹ If the Italian translation in London was launched to be educational,¹⁰ it seems quite clear that the Italian edition was intended both to make Milton better known

the praise for *Paradise Lost*.

6. It is signed by Nicolas Dupré de Saint Maur (1695-1774), and it is likely that the Abbé de Boisemorand (1680-1740) made a major contribution to it. See John Martin Telleen, *Milton dans la littérature française* [1905], Geneva, Slatkine reprints, 1971, p. 25 sq.
7. See Jean Gillet, (fn 3), chap. 1.
8. See George Dorris, *Paolo Rolli and the Italian Circle in London, 1715-1744*, The Hague, Mouton, 1967.
9. Voir Simone Carpentari-Messina, "Voltaire et Paolo Rolli: les deux versions de l'*Essai sur la poésie épique*", in Lucette Desvignes (Ed.), *Travaux comparatistes*, Saint-Étienne, Centre d'études comparatistes et de recherche sur l'expression dramatique, 1978, p. 81-110 and Jean-Louis Haquette, "Paolo Rolli & Voltaire: modèles littéraires et contestation critique", *Italica belgradensia*, 1, 2019, p. 81-97.
10. The aim was to have students read poetry in Italian, using a familiar English text.

and to counteract Voltaire, since the *Remarks on the Essay*, this time in Italian, accompanied the translation of the first six books in 1730.

It is worth interjecting a methodological remark here. The case we are studying is a reminder that, when it comes to ‘cultural transfers’, it is not uncommon that paths do not run in a straight line from point A to point B, in this case from London to Italy. It is thus a certainty that Rolli had discovered Milton before arriving in England in early 1716. It is possible that he did so in Paris, on his way to London. He frequented the literary circles close to the Abbé Conti, who was one of the first in France to express his admiration for the Miltonian epic (and this before his first visit to England). Rolli had already begun translating the poem before arriving in the English capital. In English, in 1728, he declared:

When I was in France, I was acquainted with some learned Frenchmen that understood English and had read Milton's *Paradise lost*, and they admired that battle [between the angels] as a prodigious fine poetical description. One of them whose name I don't remember, who was a great friend to the noble and learned venetian Abbate Conti, had undertaken to translate the poem; and when he read the two first books translated by me, he said that the Italian language was the fittest for it, that the French could never make so literal a translation [...].¹¹

This implies that Rolli began his translation at the end of 1715, in Paris, thirteen years at least before its publication in London... It is even possible that it was in Rome that he became acquainted with the English epic poem, via the English aristocrats who frequented the Arcadia¹² and/or through Addison's *Spectator*, which was circulating in Italy at the time. Thus the ‘transfer’ of the English poem from

11. *Remarks on upon M. Voltaire's Essay on the epic poetry of the European nations*, London, Thomas Etlin, 1728, p. 14-15. It is possible that the anonymous figure would have been Dupré de Saint-Maur. Further enquiry would be needed to ascertain the fact.

12. Among whom Lord Burlington (Richard Boyle, 3rd earl of Burlington, 1694-1753) major patron of the arts in its time.

England to Italy, through translation, began either in France or in Italy itself ...

Cultural intermediaries

As Rolli was busy with multiple tasks in London, the full publication of the translation had to wait until 1735, and for Italy until 1740. As the first six books had been placed on the Index in 1732, the Verona printer chose a Paris address on the title page, which deceived nobody as his name was definitely linked with Verona ... Thus, from the 1740s onwards, the complete Italian translation of *Paradise Lost* began to circulate widely in Italy and, despite its condemnation, found its way into many monastic libraries. The passage from London to Italy was made possible by a cultural intermediary in direct contact with the London literary milieu, who was both a skilled versifier and an opponent to Voltairian ideas on modern epic poetry.

On the Italian side, it was the Veronese literary circle, dominated by the figure of Scipione Maffei (1675-1755), that made the print distribution of translations possible.

Here too, the question of cultural intermediaries is important: the circulation of books is linked to that of real people. Although the translation is dedicated to Scipione Maffei, the man does not appear to have initiated it. It is the publisher Giovanni Alberto Tumermani (active between 1726 and 1764)¹³ who reveals to us part of the origin of the translation of the first six books:

Il signor Robinson, gentil uomo inglese di gran condizione, e di gran talento, che con mylady Lechmore sua consorte, venendo di Londra si è trattenuto in questa città alcuni giorni, mi fece vedere quest'operetta, dicendomi desiderare, che si pubblicasse in Italia. Mo pregai subito di concederla a me ben informato del merito dell'autore. Me nell'istesso

13. On this publisher, see Elena Bao, *In bianco e nero. Il libro illustrato veronese nel XVIII secolo*, PhD thesis, supervised by Enrico Maria Dal Pozzolo, University of Verona, Department of culture and civilization, 2018, p. 165 sq. (online on core.ac.uk).

*tempo risolsi di stampare la traduzione fatta del medesimo di questo famoso poema non ancora noto in Italia. Quanto all'ortografia, ho ritenuta esattamente quella dell'originale, che mi è stato dato di propria mano dell'autore.*¹⁴

According to the bookseller, it was not Rolli himself who instigated the publication. This might have seemed the most likely scenario, since Rolli sought to disseminate his ideas widely, as evidenced by the fact that he had his remarks translated and printed in French in Paris. But if we are to believe the publisher, it seems that an Englishman brought a copy of Rolli's criticisms in English. Sir Thomas Robinson (1703-1777),¹⁵ first Baron of Rokeby (Yorkshire), was a politician and amateur architect, a friend of Lord Burlington.¹⁶ He undertook the Grand Tour and was elected Member of Parliament in 1727. On 25 October 1728 he married Elizabeth Howard, widow of Nicholas Lechmere. Robinson and his wife's sojourn in Italy is therefore to be situated between the date of their marriage (October 1728) and the date of Rolli's translation (1730). The reference to Robinson's explicit request for publication may suggest financial patronage, but there is no dedication to him to confirm the fact.

In any case, an Italophile English intermediary was the initiator, but it should be emphasised that it was the bookseller who decided to add the poem in Italian, no doubt to reach a wider audience, a readership not necessarily familiar with the controversy between

14. Al lettore, *Il Paradiso perduto, poema inglese del signor Milton, tradotto in nostra lingua...*, Verona, Turmermani, 1730, n. p. "Mr. Robinson, a noble Englishman of great condition, and great talent, who with mylady Lechmore his consort, on his way from London stayed in this city a few days, showed me this little work, telling me that he wished it to be published in Italy. I immediately begged him to grant it to me, well-informed of the author's merit. At the same time I resolved to print the same author's translation of this famous poem not yet known in Italy. As for the orthography, I have retained exactly that of the original, which was given to me by the author's own hand." [my translation]

15. See *Dictionary of National Biography*, London, Smith, Elder and Co, 1885-1900, Vol. 49, p. 49-51.

16. On his links with Lord Burlington, see Geoffrey Webb, "The Letters and drawings of Nicholas Hawksmoor relating to the building of the mausoleum at Castle Howard, 1726-1742", *The Volume of the Walpole Society*, Vol. 19, 1931-1931, p. III.

Rolli and Voltaire, but interested in reading a poem whose reputation was already partially established in Italy. Significantly, the title page places the translation in first position, accompanied by Rolli's remarks (fig. 1).



fig. 1

Title page, *Il Paradiso perduto*, poema inglese del signor Milton, tradotto in nostra lingua... , Verona, Tumermani, 1730. Cliché de l'auteur

The form of the books

In addition to cultural intermediaries, it is important to consider the materiality of the objects in which texts are embodied in the course of their transnational circulation. The first part of the Italian translation is in octavo format, and comprises 440 pages, the only illustration being the printer's mark. This seems quite normal for the launch of the first translation of a foreign text. In London in 1729, the same translation appeared in folio format, without illustrations, but with decorative woodcuts (at the head and end of each book); this rather surprising choice of format may be explained either by the desire to present *Paradise Lost* as a reference work, or by the

target audience, which was aristocratic (English nobles, sufficiently Italophile to buy the Italian translation of an English text that was about to become canonical). This is confirmed by the complete London edition, not published until 1735. Logically in the same format, it received financial support from Frederick, Prince of Wales, to whom it is dedicated. Paolo Rolli was the Italian teacher of the Prince and his two sisters.¹⁷



fig. 2

Adam and Eve, copperplate,
Book I, *Il Paradiso perduto*,
poema inglese del signor
Milton..., Verona, Tumermani,
1740. Cliché de l'auteur

The complete Italian edition in 1740,¹⁸ in two volumes, technically adopted the in 12° format,¹⁹ but its dimensions made it similar to

17. See George Dorris, *Paolo Rolli and the Italian Circle*, (fn 8).

18. *Il Paradiso perduto, poema inglese di Giovanni Milton, del quale non si erano pubblicati se non i primi sei canti, tradotto in verso sciolto dal Signor Paolo Rolli*, Paris [Verona] Tumermani, 1740, in-12, 2 Vol.

19. It is defined by the printer as 'in-dodici grande' at the end of the 1740 volume. *Il paradiso perduto*, 1740, (fn 18), Vol. 1, n. p. [533].

an octavo (18.5 cm high, compared with 20.5 cm for the first in octavo part of 1730). It is illustrated with twelve engravings, one for each canto, in addition to Milton's portrait (fig. 2). It thus seems that the good sale of the first part convinced the publisher to invest in an illustrated edition. It should be noted that this was the first illustrated edition on the European continent.²⁰ Tumermani obviously thought he could reach a wide audience, but one that was wealthy enough to choose to buy a more expensive illustrated edition.

In 1742, the folio format appeared,²¹ which is a likely sign of the newly acquired status of the English poem in Dante's homeland, despite the translation being placed on the Index. Given the significant difference in price (from 18 to 31 lire), this edition was aimed at collectors and institutions. The folio edition was announced in 1740 in the publisher's catalogue that was added to the end of the first volume of the 'duodecimo' edition. However, it was not launched with a subscription, which implied that this was either an investment entirely at the expense of the bookseller-printer, or he received external financial support.

Despite the sumptuous nature of the folio, the engravings from the 1740 edition were retained. However, they are inserted in a completely different composition, itself not lacking in majesty. Instead of being full-page, off-text engravings, opposite the beginning of each canto, they have been transformed into head-of-page vignettes, accompanied on each side by a decorative copperplate frame. The text is set out in two columns, separated by a vertical woodcut ornament. The decorations surrounding the engravings are different for each book and adapted to the content of the main image. The figure in the first book, depicting Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden,²² is

20. In Great Britain, the first illustrated edition, folio-sized and launched by subscription, was produced in 1688 by Jacob Tonson. As far as we know, this 1742 Italian book was the first illustrated edition of *Paradise Lost* on the European continent (in France it would appear 50 years later).

21. *Il Paradiso perduto, poema inglese di Giovanni Milton, del quale non si erano pubblicati se non i primi sei canti, tradotto in verso sciolto dal Signor Paolo Rolli*, Paris [Verona] Tumermani, 1742, in folio, 253 p.

22. It would be worth commenting on the iconographic choice that substitutes Adam and Eve for the traditional Satan in the image linked to the first book,



fig. 3
Beginning of Book 1, *Il Paradiso perduto*, poema inglese del signor Milton..., Verona, Tumermani, 1742. Cliché de l'auteur

framed by foliage and flowers (fig. 3), while the figure in the second book, showing a grinning Satan, is framed by instruments of violence (saw, nail, hammer, chain, torch, knife, hook) (fig. 4).



fig. 4
Headpiece, Book II, *Il Paradiso perduto*, 1742. Cliché de l'auteur



fig. 5
Headpiece, Book III, *Il Paradiso perduto*, 1742. Cliché de l'auteur

entirely devoted to the fallen angel.

In the third book, the composition depicting the Son ready to sacrifice himself for the redemption of Adam, the instruments of the Passion are represented (fig. 5), and so on. The coherence of the iconographic project is therefore obvious. Each book ends with an engraved vignette in the tailpiece position, replacing the woodcut ornaments of the 1740 edition. The publisher described them in detail in his 'prospectus' of 1740:

*Nel fine del primo canto, la testa del satiro, opera di Scilace antico intagliator Greco, disegno del Picart inciso dal Sig. Francesco Zucchi. La Gemma da cui fu tolto il disegno è un amatiso esistente nel museo Strozzi di Roma. Nella fine del III. Canto, un bosco opera bellissima di Monsieur Chasteau Olandese.*²³

It should be remembered that this arrangement of copper engravings within the typographic pages required two press runs (the engraving press and then the typographic press); it thus represented an additional cost compared with off-text engravings. This clearly shows the importance of iconography in the publishing project, which aimed to give Milton's poem an appearance hitherto unseen on the European continent. This reflects the cultural status accorded to the text in the tradition of Addison, as already mentioned. But other issues are also at stake, which link social distinction and literary culture. Firstly, on Paolo Rolli's side, since part of the prestige of the work fell to the translator, but also on the side of the two new dedicatees, Antonio and Andrea Gazola (1695-1776). They belonged to an erudite Veronese family of recent nobility, and if, as Elena Bao assumes, the two figures granted financial aid,²⁴ it was indeed a

23. *Il Paradiso perduto*, 1740, (fn 18), Vol. 1, p. 533-534. "At the end of the first canto, the head of the satyr, the work of Scilace antico intagliator Greco, drawing by Picart engraved by Signor Francesco Zucchi. The Gem from which the drawing was taken is a beloved existing in the Strozzi Museum in Rome. At the end of the III. Canto, a beautiful woodcut by Monsieur Chasteau of the Netherlands." [my translation] The artist is Nicolas Chasteau, ca. 1680-1750, see Elena Bao, (fn 13), Vol. 1 p. 376, and Vol. 2, p. 6.

24. Elena Bao, (fn 13), Vol. 1, p. 392.

question of reinforcing their cultural and social prestige through this patronage.

In terms of book production, the circulation of *Paradise Lost* in Europe was therefore contrasted: in France, until the very end of the 18th century, editions of the 1729 translation remained in standard format (duodecimo or octavo), without illustrations, whereas in Italy, illustrations appeared from the first complete translation onwards. Then very quickly, in the same movement, a prestige edition followed, in folio. It shows that Italy, which did not enjoy the European literary centrality of France, was much more open to the renewal of models, thus confirming a literary law that changes in values and models often come from the peripheries.²⁵

Copies and uses

To conclude this contribution, I would like to present three copies of the folio edition, preserved in the Veneto region, one in Padua and the other two in Venice. They reveal the uses to which the books were put, which is of course part of the process of their circulation. Fortunately, they all contain material traces of their use. All three come from monastic libraries, which bears testimony to the fact that the ban on the Index in 1732 obviously did not deter these three convents from buying the work ten years later. Those responsible for the acquisitions must have considered that this was a major biblical poem that transcended religious controversy, since Milton was, as we know, a fairly radical Protestant.²⁶ However, there are in these copies a number of interventions that give an idea of how Milton may have been related to these books.

25. See, for example, Sheffy, Rakefet, "The Concept of Canonicity in Polysystem Theory.", *Poetics Today*, 11, 3, 1990, p. 511-522.

26. His many religious pamphlets bear witness to this. See for example the synthesis by Joshua R. Held, "Religious approaches to Milton", *Modern Philology*, 118, 2, 2020, p. 304-317.

The Paduan copy, kept at the University Library under the reference B 71b 8, comes from the great Benedictine abbey of Praglia, in the Euganean hills, as indicated by the handwritten inscription on the title page: *Est monasterii Pratalea*. Apart from this reference, there seems to be nothing that makes this copy special, except that in 2017 I discovered a manuscript leaf between pages 66 and 67:

*L'error galleggia come paglia suole: / cerchi nel fondo chi coralli vuole.
Il Dryden citato dal Milton, che parla nello Spett.r quinto dei critici
superficiali.*

[Error floats like straw on its own: / Seek in the bottom whom corals will. The Dryden quoted by Milton, who speaks in the Spectator's fifth essay of the superficial critics.]

It is in a hand that seems to date from the eighteenth century. We obviously do not know who wrote this note nor to which exact purpose, but it shows that the book was read in depth in two respects. The quotation from Dryden is indicated as coming from an extract of one of Addison's essays, which appear in Italian translation at the end of the book (p. 25 of the second page of the volume²⁷). It is not chosen at random: Addison quotes Dryden to define the attitude to reading that he considers correct in the case of *Paradise Lost*: not to stop at errors on the surface, but to discover the profound beauties of the text.

The lines immediately following the quotation are as follows: "A true Critick ought to dwell rather upon Excellencies than Imperfections. to discover the concealed Beauties of a Writer, and communicate to the World such things as are worth their Observation;" this obviously defines Addison's critical approach in his essays. A little earlier, the author declared: "One great Mark, by which you may discover a Critick who has neither Taste nor

27. The first pagination applies to the text of the poem, the second to the critical apparatus that follows it: Milton's life (p. 1-14), Addison's essays (p. 15- 70) and Rolli's remarks (p. 71-96).

Learning is [...] that his Criticism turns wholly upon little Faults and Errors.”²⁸

The significance of the single leaf is clear enough: our reader agrees with Addison. But its significance is undoubtedly more than just aesthetic. We must remember that we are in a monastic context, and that the epic was on the Index. I don't think it would be an exaggeration to say that this maxim should also be applied to theological matters. It could be seen as a justification for the presence, and also the reading, of this epic in a monastery, despite its condemnation by the Holy See (for specific passages rather than for the overall perspective).²⁹

Another possible reading is to assume that the sheet of paper was deliberately placed between pages 66 and 67. We are in Book VI, which recounts the war in Heaven. Satan and Michael are fighting and one injures the other. Milton attributing a concrete body to his characters tells of the spill of angelic blood. The report of the Commission of the Index dwelt precisely on this all too human aspect of spiritual creatures.³⁰

If we assume that the leaf remained where its author had placed it, its position is not insignificant: it would minimize the theological error, to the benefit of the literary dimension. But this is only an assumption, since like the wisp of straw, the leaf may well have been moved during the life of the copy.

In the other two copies, the interventions do not concern the text, but the images. A number of engravings depicting Adam and Eve before the Fall, show them entirely naked. It is this nudity that has been hidden in both copies, a common monastic practice to avoid “close occasion for sinning”, according to Catholic moral phraseology.³¹

28. *Speſtator* 291, 2 February 1712 (edited by H. Morley, London, 1891, Vol. 2, online on www.gutenberg.org).

29. See Matteo Brera, (fn 1), p. 102-109.

30. *Ibid.*, p. 106.

31. *Occasion prochaine de péché*, in French. See the article ‘occasion’ in Furetière’s *Dictionnaire universel* (1690), where the expression is recorded as common. It also exists in Italian: *occasione prossima di peccato*.

The copy in the convent of Saint Francis in Ceneda³² bears an *ex dono*, that of Brother Bartolomeo Zorzi, about whom the catalogues I have been able to consult provide no biographical information. He donated at least a hundred works to the library of his convent, the most recent dating from the early 1750's³³. Some have left their original collections: two can today be found in the Pennsylvania State University Library.



fig. 6

Modified headpiece, *Il Paradiso perduto*, 1742, [Biblioteca di San Francesco della vigna, Venezia, Shelfmark SMII G XI 086].

The book was most likely altered in the eighteenth century, when it entered the library of the convent (founded in the early seventeenth century).³⁴ The incriminating images were covered with ornamental engravings typical of the rococo style (fig. 6). I have not yet been able to identify their origin, but they seem quite close to the collections of ornaments, notably English, published between 1730 and 1740 by William Delacour³⁵ and Gaetano Brunetti.³⁶ One

32. Municipality in the province of Treviso, now part of the town of Vittorio Veneto. The copy is marked SMII G XI 086.

33. *Osservazioni sopra l'opuscolo che ha per titolo Arte magica dileguata, di un prete dell'oratorio*, Venice, Simone Occhi, 1750 et *Dissertazioni vossiane di Apostolo Zeno*, Venice, Giambattista Albrizzi, 1752-1753, 3 Vol.

34. See the Franciscans of Vittorio Veneto website: www.frativittorioveneto.it/La_storia.html

35. *The 4th Book of Ornaments*, London, 1743.

36. *Sixty different sorts of ornaments invented by Gaetano Brunetti, Italian painter*,

is struck by the obvious desire not to distort the aesthetic of the volume by choosing images in the same style. The copy thus ‘enriched’ makes all nudity disappear, even when it is in the background, as in Book V.

Only one image of female nudity has not been covered by a vignette, and that is the image of Venus at the end of Book IX. All that has been done is to cover her breasts and hips with wavy ink strokes. The final effect gives a most surprising impression, namely that she has been dressed in a swimming costume (fig. 7).



fig. 7

Modified tailpiece, Book IX,
Il Paradiso perduto, 1742,
[Biblioteca di San Francesco
della vigna, Venezia, Shelfmark
SMII G XI 086].

The copy in the ‘convent of the cemetery’³⁷ in Verona, as indicated by the label on the title page, is in a completely different condition. It is difficult to establish when the veiling of the images was carried out, and its original provenance, before it arrived at the convent,³⁸ is unknown. What is clear nevertheless, is that changes took place in two stages. The first consisted of covering the nudes with

London, 1736.

37. This copy, which shelfmark is CSCF SC U VII 8, is described in the exhibition catalogue: *La Biblioteca di San Francesco della Vigna e suoi fondi antichi*, Venice, 2009, cat. n° 21, p. 115-116.

38. See the notice on this library, on the website of San Francesco delle vigna Library: <https://www.bibliotecasanfrancescodellavigna.it/fondo-del-convento-ss-redentore-vr>.

thin purple paper, in books I, VIII, IX, X and XII. But a later reader scratched the paper, without removing it, which had the effect of making the incriminated images visible again (fig. 8). It is likely, but it is only a hypothesis, to think that the first intervention dates from the entry of the book into the convent library, and the second from a reader who was intrigued by the veiled images that made seeing them more desirable and was unable to repress his *libido videndi*. I will conclude with these images of this copy, as in their current state, between veiling and unveiling, they seem to me to be emblematic witnesses to the circulation of *Paradise Lost* in the Veneto region in the 18th century.



fig. 8

Modified headpiece, *Il Paradiso perduto*, 1742, [Biblioteca di San Francesco della vigna, Venezia, Shelfmark SMII G XI 086].