

Paradise Lost

John Milton

This excerpt comprises the first couple of stanzas of *Paradise Lost*, with notes. The text and notes are quoted here (with permission) to illustrate one use of the `versionotes` package (<https://www.ctan.org/pkg/versionotes>), and its response to collisions of notes. Also, because a day with *Paradise Lost* in it is a day improved.

The text is from <https://milton.host.dartmouth.edu> (Book 1). The general editor of this edition is Thomas H. Luxon, and the notes are Copyright 1997-2023, Trustees of Dartmouth College, with a CC BY-ND 3.0 licence; see the colophon at that site.

the midst of things: Milton announces that he intends to follow classical precedents by beginning his epic *in medeas res*, in the middle of things, and only later coming back, by reported action, to the action “past over” here. The story of the rebel angels being “driven out of Heaven...into the great Deep,” for example, comes in book 6.

Pandemonium: Literally, “all the demons.” Milton coins the name for the assembly hall of devils whose erection is recounted at the end of book 1.

Death into the World, and all our woe: This locution echoes fairly closely Virgil’s narrative voice in *Aeneid* book 4, announcing that death and woe followed the ersatz nuptials of Aeneas and Dido:

To the same cave come Dido and the Trojan chief. Primal earth and nuptial Juno give the sign; fires flashed in heaven, the witness to their bridal, and on the mountain-top screamed the Nymphs. That day was the first day of death, that the first cause of woe. (Trans. H. Rushton Fairclough in *Virgil* vol. 1 [Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1935] 407)

See also the Perseus Project edition of this passage. ¶ *one greater Man*: The messiah. ¶ *Heav’nly Muse*: Is the “Heavenly Muse” invoked here the same as the “Urania,” traditionally the muse of astronomy, invoked at book 7.1? More likely, contemporary readers would have first thought of the “Holy Spirit,” as the inspiration of Moses. ¶ *Oreb*: Moses, “That Shepherd,” received the Law on Mt. Horeb (Deuteronomy 4: 10) or its spur, Mt. Sinai (Exodus 19: 20). ¶ *chosen Seed*: The people of Israel. See Exodus 19-20. ¶ *In the Beginning*:

The opening words of both Genesis (Geneva) and the Gospel of John (Geneva). ¶ *out of Chaos*: One of Milton’s several heterodox positions. Orthodoxy held that God created everything *ex nihilo*, out of nothing (the “void” of Genesis 1:2; See Calvin’s Commentary on Genesis). Milton borrows the concept of chaos, or unformed matter, from Hesiod and Platonic philosophy (especially the *Timaeus* 53b). Milton was also a monist, holding that all things were created out of God; see book 5.468-490. ¶ *Sion*: To the haunts of the classical muses near the Castalian spring on Mt. Parnassus, Milton prefers to claim Mt. Sion and its brooks Kidron and Siloa, a kind of biblically authorized Parnassus. ¶ *Siloa’s Brook*: “The Pool of Siloam (Hebrew:

Breikhat Hashiloah) is a rock-cut pool on the southern slope of the City of David, the original site of Jerusalem, located outside the walls of the Old City to the southeast. The pool was fed by the waters of the Gihon Spring, carried there by two aqueducts” (Wikipedia, “Pool of Siloam.”) ¶ *adventrous Song*: Note the similarities between Milton’s opening and the opening lines of Virgil’s *Aeneid* and of Homer’s *Odyssey*.

Milton wants not only to compare his project to the ancient epics, but also himself to those poets and his main character, Adam, to their celebrated heroes. All of these comparisons raise interesting and complicated questions of authority, heroism, and nationalism in art. ¶ *Aonian Mount*: Mt. Helicon, in Aonia, sacred to the classical muses. ¶ *in Prose or Rhime*: The line ironically (maybe even sarcastically?) recalls the stanza 2 of canto 1 of Ariosto’s *Orlando Furioso*. ¶ *Dove-like*: The Holy Spirit appears as a dove in John 1: 32. See also

Paradise Regain’d 1.30-1. ¶ *brooding on the vast Abyss*: Milton’s “brooding” is a better translation of the Hebrew than the familiar “moved upon the face of the waters” of the Authorized version of Genesis 1:2. ¶ *pregnant*: Milton invites us to imagine the Holy Spirit copulating with the unformed matter of Chaos (“the vast Abyss”). In Milton’s monism, distinctions between spirit and matter are not absolute.

Book I

The Argument

This first Book proposes, first in brief, the whole Subject, *Mans disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise wherein he was plac't*: Then touches *the prime cause of his fall, the Serpent, or rather Satan in the Serpent; who revolting from God, and drawing to his side many Legions of Angels, was by the command of God driven out of Heaven with all his Crew into the great Deep*. Which action past over, the Poem hasts into the midst of things, *presenting Satan with his Angels now fallen into Hell*, describ'd here, *not in the Center* (for Heaven and Earth may be suppos'd as yet not made, certainly not yet accurst) *but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest call'd Chaos: Here Satan with his Angels lying on the burning Lake, thunder-struck and astonisht, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion, calls up him who next in Order and Dignity lay by him; they confer of thir miserable fall. Satan awakens all his Legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; They rise, thir Numbers, array of Battel, thir chief Leaders nam'd, according to the Idols known afterwards in Canaan and the Countries adjoyning. To these Satan directs his Speech, comforts them with hope yet of regaining Heaven, but tells them lastly of a new World and new kind of Creature to be created, according to an ancient Prophesie or report in Heaven; for that Angels were long before this visible Creation, was the opinion of many ancient Fathers. To find out the truth of this Prophesie, and what to determin thereon he refers to a full Council. What his Associates thence attempt. Pandemonium the Palace of Satan rises, suddenly built out of the Deep: The infernal Peers there sit in Council.*

Of Mans First Disobedience, and the Fruit
Of that Forbidden Tree, whose mortal tast
Brought Death into the World, and all our woe,
With loss of *Eden*, till one greater Man
Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,
Sing Heav'nly Muse, that on the secret top
Of *Oreb*, or of *Sinai*, didst inspire
That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed,
In the Beginning how the Heav'ns and Earth
Rose out of Chaos: Or if *Sion Hill*
Delight thee more, and *Siloa's Brook* that flow'd
Fast by the Oracle of God; I thence
Invoke thy aid to my adventrous Song,
That with no middle flight intends to soar
Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rhime.
And chiefly Thou O Spirit, that dost prefer
Before all Temples th' upright heart and pure,
Instruct me, for Thou know'st; Thou from the first
Wast present, and with mighty wings outspread
Dove-like satst brooding on the vast Abyss
And mad'st it pregnant: What in me is dark

Say first: Compare this with Homer's invocation to the muse in the Iliad 1.8.

one restraint: That is, the single injunction against eating from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil (Genesis 2: 17). ¶ *Lords of the World:* According to Genesis 1:28, human beings were created to "have dominion" over the rest of creation.

Hurl'd headlong flaming: This description recalls Pieter Bruegel's Fall of the Rebel Angels (about 1562). See also William Blake's 1808 watercolor illustration of the rebel angels' fall (told by Raphael at 6.864-66).

Adamantine: Unbreakable, rocklike.

Nine times the Space: In Hesiod's Theogony 664-735, the Titans take a similar fall at the hands of Zeus. Interestingly, though Milton alludes to the fall of the Titans here, he likens their nine-day fall, not to the fall of the rebel angels, but to the time they spent lying vanquished on the fiery gulf after their fall. Raphael, in book 6, line 871, however, tells Adam that the rebel angels fell for "Nine dayes".

kenn: Range, which in the case of angels must be presumed to be nearly limitless.

Illumin, what is low raise and support;
That to the highth of this great Argument
I may assert Eternal Providence,
And justifie the wayes of God to men.

Say first, for Heav'n hides nothing from thy view
Nor the deep Tract of Hell, say first what cause
Mov'd our Grand Parents in that happy State,
Favour'd of Heav'n so highly, to fall off
From thir Creator, and transgress his Will
For one restraint, Lords of the World besides?
Who first seduc'd them to that foul revolt?
Th' infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile
Stird up with Envy and Revenge, deceiv'd
The Mother of Mankind, what time his Pride
Had cast him out from Heav'n, with all his Host
Of Rebel Angels, by whose aid aspiring
To set himself in Glory above his Peers,
He trusted to have equal'd the most High,
If he oppos'd; and with ambitious aim
Against the Throne and Monarchy of God
Rais'd impious War in Heav'n and Battel proud
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' Ethereal Skie
With hideous ruine and combustion down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In Adamantine Chains and penal Fire,
Who durst defie th' Omnipotent to Arms.
Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night
To mortal men, he with his horrid crew
Lay vanquisht, rowling in the fiery Gulfe
Confounded though immortal: But his doom
Reserv'd him to more wrath; for now the thought
Both of lost happiness and lasting pain
Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes
That witness'd huge affliction and dismay
Mixt with obdurate pride and stedfast hate:
At once as far as Angels kenn he views
The dismal Situation waste and wilde,
A Dungeon horrible, on all sides round
As one great Furnace flam'd, yet from those flames
No light, but rather darkness visible
Serv'd onely to discover sights of woe,
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace

hope never comes: A deliberate echo of Dante's *Inferno* 3.9: "All hope abandon ye who enter here."

thir: Their. Milton's preferred spelling was "thir," and Flannagan reports that "their" was changed to "thir" in later stages of the 1674 edition. The same is true of line 499 and other lines.

from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole: Milton asks us to refer to the Ptolemaic model of the universe with the earth at the center of nine concentric spheres. On Milton's cosmology, Ptolemaic or Copernican, see also book 8. 119-68.

Beelzebub: "God of the flies" or "Chief of the devils." See Matthew 10: 25, Mark 3: 22, and Luke 11: 15. See also Christopher Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* and Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy* 1.2.1-2; see also the Wikipedia entry. ¶ *call'd Satan*: Originally Lucifer, "bringer of light," his name in heaven is changed to Satan, "enemy."

And rest can never dwell, hope never comes
That comes to all; but torture without end
Still urges, and a fiery Deluge, fed
With ever-burning Sulphur unconsum'd:
Such place Eternal Justice had prepar'd
For those rebellious, here thir Prison ordain'd
In utter darkness, and thir portion set
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n
As from the Center thrice to th' utmost Pole.
O how unlike the place from whence they fell!
There the companions of his fall, o'rewhelm'd
With Floods and Whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,
He soon discerns, and weltring by his side
One next himself in power, and next in crime,
Long after known in Palestine, and nam'd
Beelzebub. To whom th' Arch-Enemy,
And thence in Heav'n call'd Satan, with bold words
Breaking the horrid silence thus began.