

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-64157-0 - John Milton: Paradise Lost: Books I and II

Edited by A. W. Verity

Excerpt

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## COMMENDATORY VERSES

IN PARADISUM AMISSAM SUMMI POETÆ  
JOHANNIS MILTONI

QUI legis Amissam Paradisum, grandia magni  
     Carmina Miltoni, quid nisi cuncta legis?  
 Res cunctas, et cunctarum primordia rerum,  
     Et fata, et fines, continet iste liber.  
 Intima panduntur magni penetralia mundi,  
     Scribitur et toto quicquid in orbe latet;  
 Terræque, tractusque maris, cælumque profundum,  
     Sulphureumque Erebi flammivomumque specus;  
 Quæque colunt terras, pontumque, et Tartara cæca,  
     Quæque colunt summi lucida regna poli;         10  
 Et quodcunque ullis conclusum est finibus usquam;  
     Et sine fine Chaos, et sine fine Deus;  
 Et sine fine magis, si quid magis est sine fine,  
     In Christo erga homines conciliatus amor.  
 Hæc qui speraret quis crederet esse futurum?  
     Et tamen hæc hodie terra Britanna legit.  
 O quantos in bella duces, quæ protulit arma!  
     Quæ canit, et quanta, prælia dira tuba!  
 Cælestes acies, atque in certamine cælum!  
     Et quæ cælestes pugna deceret agros!         20  
 Quantus in ætheriis tollit se Lucifer armis,  
     Atque ipso graditur vix Michaelæ minor!  
 Quantis et quam funestis concurritur iris,  
     Dum ferox hic stellas protegit, ille rapit!  
 Dum vulsos montes ceu tela reciproca torquent,  
     Et non mortali desuper igne pluunt:  
 Stat dubius cui se parti concedat Olympus,  
     Et metuit pugnæ non superesse suæ  
 At simul in cælis Messiaë insignia fulgent,  
     Et currus animes, armaque digna Deo,         30

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Horrendumque rotæ strident, et sæva rotarum  
 Erumpunt torvis fulgura luminibus,  
 Et flammæ vibrant, et vera tonitrua rauco  
 Admistis flammis insonuere polo,  
 Excidit attonitis mens omnis, et impetus omnis,  
 Et cassis dextris irrita tela cadunt;  
 Ad pœnas fugiunt, et, ceu foret Orcus asylum,  
 Infernis certant condere se tenebris.  
 Cedite, Romani Scriptorum; cedite, Graii;  
 Et quos fama recens vel celebravit anus: 40  
 Hæc quicunque leget tantum cecinisse putabit  
 Mæonidem ranas, Virgilium culices.

S. B., M.D.

## ON PARADISE LOST

WHEN I beheld the Poet blind, yet bold,  
 In slender book his vast design unfold,  
 Messiah crowned, God's reconciled decree,  
 Rebell'ing Angels, the Forbidden Tree,  
 Heaven, Hell, Earth, Chaos, all; the argument  
 Held me a while misdoubting his intent,  
 That he would ruin (for I saw him strong)  
 The sacred truths to fable and old song  
 (So Samson groped the temple's posts in spite),  
 The world o'erwhelming to revenge his sight. 10  
 Yet as I read, soon growing less severe,  
 I liked his project, the success did fear;  
 Through that wide field how he his way should find  
 O'er which lame Faith leads Understanding blind;  
 Lest he perplexed the things he would explain,  
 And what was easy he should render vain.  
 Or, if a work so infinite he spanned,  
 Jealous I was that some less skilful hand  
 (Such as disquiet always what is well,  
 And by ill imitating would excel) 20  
 Might hence presume the whole Creation's day  
 To change in scenes, and show it in a play.

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## COMMENDATORY VERSES

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Pardon me, mighty Poet; nor despise  
 My causeless, yet not impious, surmise.  
 But I am now convinced, and none will dare  
 Within thy labours to pretend a share.  
 Thou hast not missed one thought that could be fit,  
 And all that was improper dost omit;  
 So that no room is here for writers left,  
 But to detect their ignorance or theft. 30

That majesty which through thy work doth reign  
 Draws the devout, deterring the profane.  
 And things divine thou treat'st of in such state  
 As them preserves, and thee, inviolate.  
 At once delight and horror on us seize;  
 Thou sing'st with so much gravity and ease,  
 And above human flight dost soar aloft  
 With plume so strong, so equal, and so soft.  
 The bird named from that Paradise you sing  
 So never flags, but always keeps on wing. 40

Where could'st thou words of such a compass find?  
 Whence furnish such a vast expense of mind?  
 Just Heaven, thee like Tiresias to requite,  
 Rewards with prophecy thy loss of sight.

Well might'st thou scorn thy readers to allure  
 With tinkling rime, of thy own sense secure;  
 While the Town-Bayes writes all the while and spells,  
 And, like a pack-horse, tires without his bells.  
 Their fancies like our bushy points appear;  
 The poets tag them, we for fashion wear. 50  
 I too, transported by the mode, offend,  
 And while I meant to praise thee, must commend.  
 Thy verse created like thy theme sublime,  
 In number, weight, and measure, needs not rime.

A. M.

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[More information](#)THE VERSE.<sup>1</sup>

The measure is English heroic verse, without rime, as that of Homer in Greek, and of Virgil in Latin; rime being no necessary adjunct or true ornament of poem or good verse, in longer works especially, but the invention of a barbarous age, to set off wretched matter and lame metre; graced indeed since by the use of some famous modern poets, carried away by custom, but much to their own vexation, hindrance, and constraint to express many things otherwise, and for the most part worse, than else they would have expressed them. Not without cause, therefore, some both Italian and Spanish poets of prime note have rejected rime both in longer and shorter works, as have also, long since, our best English tragedies; as a thing of itself, to all judicious ears, trivial and of no true musical delight; which consists only in apt numbers, fit quantity of syllables, and the sense variously drawn out from one verse into another, not in the jingling sound of like endings, a fault avoided by the learned ancients both in poetry and all good oratory. This neglect then of rime so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so perhaps to vulgar readers, that it rather is to be esteemed an example set, the first in English, of ancient liberty recovered to heroic poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of riming.

<sup>1</sup> Preceded by some remarks from the publisher:

*The Printer to the Reader.*

*Courteous Reader*, there was no Argument at first intended to the book; but for the satisfaction of many that have desired it, I have procured it, and withal a reason of that which stumbled many others, why the poem rimes not.—*S. Simmons.*

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# PARADISE LOST

## BOOK I

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## THE ARGUMENT

This First Book proposes, first in brief, the whole subject, Man's disobedience, and the loss thereupon of Paradise, wherein he was placed: 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 passed over, the Poem hastes into the midst of things; presenting Satan with his Angels now fallen into Hell, described here, not in the Centre (for Heaven and Earth may be supposed as yet not made, certainly not yet accursed) but in a place of utter darkness, fitliest called Chaos: here Satan with his Angels lying on the burning lake, thunder-struck and astonished, after a certain space recovers, as from confusion; calls up him who, next in order and dignity, lay by him; they confer of their miserable fall. Satan awakens all his legions, who lay till then in the same manner confounded; they rise: their numbers, array of battle, their chief leaders named, according to the idols known afterwards in Canaan and the countries adjoining. 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 prophecy 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 prophecy, and what to determine 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.

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## PARADISE LOST

## BOOK I

OF Man's first disobedience, and the fruit  
 Of that forbidden Tree, whose mortal taste  
 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, Heavenly 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 Heavens and Earth  
 Rose out of Chaos: or, if Sion hill 10  
 Delight thee more, and Siloa's brook that flowed  
 Fast by the oracle of God, I thence  
 Invoke thy aid to my adventurous song,  
 That with no middle flight intends to soar  
 Above the Aonian mount, while it pursues  
 Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.  
 And chiefly thou, O Spirit, that dost prefer  
 Before all temples the upright heart and pure,  
 Instruct me, for thou know'st; thou from the first  
 Wast present, and, with mighty wings outspread, 20  
 Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss,  
 And mad'st it pregnant: what in me is dark  
 Illumine, what is low raise and support;  
 That to the highth of this great argument  
 I may assert Eternal Providence,  
 And justify the ways of God to men.  
 Say first (for Heaven hides nothing from thy view,  
 Nor the deep tract of Hell) say first what cause  
 Moved our grand parents, in that happy state,  
 Favoured of Heaven so highly, to fall off 30

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## PARADISE LOST

From their Creator, and transgress his will  
 For one restraint, lords of the world besides.  
 Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?  
 The infernal Serpent; he it was, whose guile,  
 Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived  
 The Mother of Mankind, what time his pride  
 Had cast him out from Heaven, with all his host  
 Of rebel Angels, by whose aid, aspiring  
 To set himself in glory above his peers,  
 He trusted to have equalled the Most High, 40  
 If he opposed; and with ambitious aim  
 Against the throne and monarchy of God  
 Raised impious war in Heaven and battle proud,  
 With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power  
 Hurl'd headlong flaming from the ethereal sky,  
 With hideous ruin and combustion, down  
 To bottomless perdition; there to dwell  
 In adamantine chains and penal fire,  
 Who durst defy the Omnipotent to arms.  
 Nine times the space that measures day and night 50  
 To mortal men, he with his horrid crew  
 Lay vanquished, rolling in the fiery gulf,  
 Confounded though immortal. But his doom  
 Reserved him to more wrath; for now the thought  
 Both of lost happiness and lasting pain  
 Torments him; round he throws his baleful eyes,  
 That witnessed huge affliction and dismay,  
 Mixed with obdurate pride and steadfast hate.  
 At once, as far as Angels ken, he views  
 The dismal situation waste and wild: 60  
 A dungeon horrible, on all sides round,  
 As one great furnace flamed; yet from those flames  
 No light, but rather darkness visible  
 Served only to discover sights of woe,  
 Regions of sorrow, doleful shades, where peace



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## BOOK I

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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 unconsumed.  
 Such place Eternal Justice had prepared 70  
 For those rebellious; here their prison ordained  
 In utter darkness, and their portion set,  
 As far removed from God and light of Heaven  
 As from the centre thrice to the utmost pole.  
 Oh how unlike the place from whence they fell!  
 There the companions of his fall, o'erwhelmed  
 With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,  
 He soon discerns; and, weltering by his side,  
 One next himself in power, and next in crime, 80  
 Long after known in Palestine, and named  
 Beëlzebub. To whom the Arch-Enemy,  
 And thence in Heaven called Satan, with bold words  
 Breaking the horrid silence, thus began:  
 "If thou beest he—but Oh how fallen! how changed  
 From him, who in the happy realms of light,  
 Clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine  
 Myriads, though bright! if he whom mutual league,  
 United thoughts and counsels, equal hope  
 And hazard in the glorious enterprise,  
 Joined with me once, now misery hath joined 90  
 In equal ruin: into what pit thou seest  
 From what highth fallen, so much the stronger proved  
 He with his thunder: and till then who knew  
 The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those,  
 Nor what the potent victor in his rage  
 Can else inflict, do I repent, or change,  
 Though changed in outward lustre, that fixed mind,  
 And high disdain from sense of injured merit,  
 That with the Mightiest raised me to contend,  
 And to the fierce contention brought along 100

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## PARADISE LOST

Innumerable force of Spirits armed,  
 That durst dislike his reign, and, me preferring,  
 His utmost power with adverse power opposed  
 In dubious battle on the plains of Heaven,  
 And shook his throne. What though the field be lost?  
 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?  
 That glory never shall his wrath or might  
 Extort from me. To bow and sue for grace  
 With suppliant knee, and deify his power  
 Who, from the terror of this arm, so late  
 Doubted his empire—that were low indeed;  
 That were an ignominy and shame beneath  
 This downfall; since by fate the strength of gods  
 And this empyreal substance cannot fail;  
 Since, through experience of this great event,  
 In arms not worse, in foresight much advanced,  
 We may with more successful hope resolve  
 To wage by force or guile eternal war,  
 Irreconcilable to our grand foe,  
 Who now triumphs, and in the excess of joy  
 Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heaven.”

So spake the apostate Angel, though in pain,  
 Vaunting aloud, but racked with deep despair;  
 And him thus answered soon his bold compeer:  
 “O Prince, O Chief of many throned powers,  
 That led the embattled Seraphim to war  
 Under thy conduct, and, in dreadful deeds  
 Fearless, endangered Heaven’s perpetual King,  
 And put to proof his high supremacy,  
 Whether upheld by strength, or chance, or fate!  
 Too well I see and rue the dire event  
 That with sad overthrow and foul defeat

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