

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-68810-0 - John Milton: Paradise Lost: Books VII and VIII

By the Late A. W. Verity

Excerpt

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PARADISE LOST.

BOOK VII.

P. L. VII. VIII.

I

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THE ARGUMENT.

Raphael, at the request of Adam, relates how and wherefore this World was first created : that God, after the expelling of Satan and his Angels out of Heaven, declared his pleasure to create another World, and other creatures to dwell therein ; sends his Son with glory, and attendance of Angels, to perform the work of creation in six days : the Angels celebrate with hymns the performance thereof, and his reascension into Heaven.

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BOOK VII.

DESCEND from Heaven, Urania, by that name
 If rightly thou art called, whose voice divine
 Following, above the Olympian hill I soar,
 Above the flight of Pegasean wing!
 The meaning, not the name, I call; for thou
 Nor of the Muses nine, nor on the top
 Of old Olympus dwell'st; but Heavenly-born,
 Before the hills appeared or fountain flowed,
 Thou with eternal Wisdom didst converse,
 Wisdom thy sister, and with her didst play 10
 In presence of the Almighty Father, pleased
 With thy celestial song. Up led by thee,
 Into the Heaven of Heavens I have presumed,
 An earthly guest, and drawn empyreal air,
 Thy tempering: with like safety guided down,
 Return me to my native element;
 Lest from this flying steed unreined (as once
 Bellerophon, though from a lower clime)
 Dismounted, on the Aleian field I fall,
 Erroneous there to wander and forlorn. 20
 Half yet remains unsung, but narrower bound
 Within the visible diurnal sphere.

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Standing on Earth, not rapt above the pole,
More safe I sing with mortal voice, unchanged
To hoarse or mute, though fallen on evil days,
On evil days though fallen, and evil tongues ;
In darkness, and with dangers compassed round,
And solitude ; yet not alone, while thou
Visit'st my slumbers nightly, or when morn
Purples the east. Still govern thou my song, 30
Urania, and fit audience find, though few ;
But drive far off the barbarous dissonance
Of Bacchus and his revellers, the race
Of that wild rout that tore the Thracian bard
In Rhodope, where woods and rocks had ears
To rapture, till the savage clamour drowned
Both harp and voice ; nor could the Muse defend
Her son. So fail not thou who thee implores ;
For thou art Heavenly, she an empty dream.

Say, Goddess, what ensued when Raphael, 40
The affable Archangel, had forewarned
Adam by dire example to beware
Apostasy, by what befell in Heaven
To those apostates, lest the like befall
In Paradise to Adam or his race,
Charged not to touch the interdicted Tree,
If they transgress, and slight that sole command,
So easily obeyed amid the choice
Of all tastes else to please their appetite,
Though wandering. He with his consorted Eve 50
The story heard attentive, and was filled
With admiration and deep muse, to hear
Of things so high and strange, things to their thought
So unimaginable as hate in Heaven,
And war so near the peace of God in bliss,

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BOOK VII.

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With such confusion ; but the evil, soon
 Driven back, redounded as a flood on those
 From whom it sprung, impossible to mix
 With blessedness. Whence Adam soon repealed
 The doubts that in his heart arose ; and now 60
 Led on, yet sinless, with desire to know
 What nearer might concern him, how this World
 Of Heaven and Earth conspicuous first began ;
 When, and whereof, created ; for what cause ;
 What within Eden, or without, was done
 Before his memory—as one whose drouth
 Yet scarce allayed still eyes the current stream,
 Whose liquid murmur heard new thirst excites—
 Proceeded thus to ask his Heavenly guest :
 “Great things, and full of wonder in our ears, 70
 Far differing from this World, thou hast revealed,
 Divine interpreter ! by favour sent
 Down from the Empyrean to forewarn
 Us timely of what might else have been our loss,
 Unknown, which human knowledge could not reach ;
 For which to the infinitely Good we owe
 Immortal thanks, and his admonishment
 Receive with solemn purpose to observe
 Immutably his sovran will, the end
 Of what we are. But, since thou hast vouchsafed 80
 Gently, for our instruction, to impart
 Things above earthly thought, which yet concerned
 Our knowing, as to highest Wisdom seemed,
 Deign to descend now lower, and relate
 What may no less perhaps avail us known :
 How first began this heaven which we behold
 Distant so high, with moving fires adorned
 Innumerable ; and this which yields or fills

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All space, the ambient air wide interfused,
Embracing round this florid Earth; what cause 90
Moved the Creator, in his holy rest
Through all eternity, so late to build
In Chaos; and the work begun how soon
Absolved; if unforbid thou may'st unfold
What we not to explore the secrets ask
Of his eternal empire, but the more
To magnify his works the more we know.
And the great light of day yet wants to run
Much of his race, though steep; suspense in heaven,
Held by thy voice, thy potent voice, he hears, 100
And longer will delay to hear thee tell
His generation, and the rising birth
Of Nature from the unapparent Deep;
Or if the star of evening and the moon
Haste to thy audience, Night with her will bring
Silence, and Sleep listening to thee will watch;
Or we can bid his absence till thy song
End, and dismiss thee ere the morning shine.”
Thus Adam his illustrious guest besought;
And thus the godlike Angel answered mild: 110
“This also thy request, with caution asked,
Obtain; though to recount almighty works
What words or tongue of Seraph can suffice,
Or heart of man suffice to comprehend?
Yet what thou canst attain, which best may serve
To glorify the Maker, and infer
Thee also happier, shall not be withheld
Thy hearing; such commission from above
I have received, to answer thy desire
Of knowledge within bounds; beyond abstain 120
To ask, nor let thine own inventions hope

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BOOK VII.

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Things not revealed, which the invisible King,
 Only omniscient, hath suppressed in night,
 To none communicable in Earth or Heaven :
 Enough is left besides to search and know.
 But knowledge is as food, and needs no less
 Her temperance over appetite, to know
 In measure what the mind may well contain ;
 Oppresses else with surfeit, and soon turns
 Wisdom to folly, as nourishment to wind. 130

“Know then that after Lucifer from Heaven
 (So call him, brighter once amidst the host
 Of Angels than that star the stars among)
 Fell with his flaming legions through the Deep
 Into his place, and the great Son returned
 Victorious with his Saints, the omnipotent
 Eternal Father from his throne beheld
 Their multitude, and to his Son thus spake :

“‘At least our envious foe hath failed, who thought
 All like himself rebellious ; by whose aid 140
 This inaccessible high strength, the seat
 Of Deity supreme, us dispossessed,
 He trusted to have seized, and into fraud
 Drew many whom their place knows here no more :
 Yet far the greater part have kept, I see,
 Their station ; Heaven, yet populous, retains
 Number sufficient to possess her realms
 Though wide, and this high temple to frequent
 With ministeries due and solemn rites.
 But lest his heart exalt him in the harm 150
 Already done, to have dispeopled Heaven—
 My damage fondly deemed—I can repair
 That detriment, if such it be to lose
 Self-lost, and in a moment will create

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Another world, out of one man a race
Of men innumerable, there to dwell,
Not here, till, by degrees of merit raised,
They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tried,
And Earth be changed to Heaven, and Heaven to Earth, 160
One kingdom, joy and union without end.
Meanwhile inhabit lax, ye Powers of Heaven;
And thou, my Word, begotten Son, by thee
This I perform; speak thou, and be it done!
My overshadowing Spirit and might with thee
I send along; ride forth, and bid the Deep
Within appointed bounds be Heaven and Earth;
Boundless the Deep, because I am who fill
Infinitude; nor vacuous the space,
Though I uncircumscribed myself retire, 170
And put not forth my goodness, which is free
To act or not: Necessity and Chance
Approach not me, and what I will is Fate.’
“So spake the Almighty, and to what he spake
His Word, the Filial Godhead, gave effect.
Immediate are the acts of God, more swift
Than time or motion, but to human ears
Cannot without process of speech be told,
So told as earthly notion can receive.
Great triumph and rejoicing was in Heaven, 180
When such was heard declared the Almighty’s will;
Glory they sung to the Most High, good-will
To future men, and in their dwellings peace;
Glory to Him whose just avenging ire
Had driven out the ungodly from his sight
And the habitations of the just; to Him
Glory and praise whose wisdom had ordained

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Good out of evil to create ; instead
 Of Spirits malign, a better race to bring
 Into their vacant room, and thence diffuse 190
 His good to worlds and ages infinite.

“So sang the Hierarchies. Meanwhile the Son
 On his great expedition now appeared,
 Girt with omnipotence, with radiance crowned
 Of majesty divine, sapience and love
 Immense ; and all his Father in him shone.
 About his chariot numberless were poured
 Cherub and Seraph, Potentates and Thrones,
 And Virtues, winged Spirits, and chariots winged
 From the armoury of God, where stand of old 200
 Myriads, between two brazen mountains lodged
 Against a solemn day, harnessed at hand,
 Celestial equipage ; and now came forth
 Spontaneous, for within them Spirit lived,
 Attendant on their Lord. Heaven opened wide
 Her ever-during gates, harmonious sound
 On golden hinges moving, to let forth
 The King of Glory, in his powerful Word
 And Spirit coming to create new worlds.
 On Heavenly ground they stood, and from the shore 210
 They viewed the vast immeasurable Abyss,
 Outrageous as a sea, dark, wasteful, wild,
 Up from the bottom turned by furious winds
 And surging waves, as mountains, to assault
 Heaven’s highth, and with the centre mix the pole.

“‘Silence, ye troubled waves, and, thou Deep, peace!’
 Said then the omnific Word : ‘your discord end!’
 Nor stayed ; but, on the wings of Cherubim
 Uplifted, in paternal glory rode
 Far into Chaos and the World unborn ; 220

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For Chaos heard his voice. Him all his train
 Followed in bright procession, to behold
 Creation, and the wonders of his might.
 Then stayed the fervid wheels and in his hand
 He took the golden compasses, prepared
 In God's eternal store, to circumscribe
 This Universe, and all created things.
 One foot he centred, and the other turned
 Round through the vast profundity obscure,
 And said, 'Thus far extend, thus far thy bounds; 230
 This be thy just circumference, O World!'
 Thus God the heaven created, thus the Earth,
 Matter unformed and void. Darkness profound
 Covered the Abyss; but on the watery calm
 His brooding wings the Spirit of God outspread,
 And vital virtue infused, and vital warmth,
 Throughout the fluid mass, but downward purged
 The black, tartareous, cold, infernal dregs,
 Adverse to life; then founded, then conglobed
 Like things to like, the rest to several place 240
 Disparted, and between spun out the air,
 And Earth, self-balanced, on her centre hung.
 "‘Let there be light!’ said God; and forthwith light
 Ethereal, first of things, quintessence pure,
 Sprung from the Deep, and from her native east
 To journey through the aery gloom began,
 Sphered in a radiant cloud, for yet the sun
 Was not; she in a cloudy tabernacle
 Sojourned the while. God saw the light was good;
 And light from darkness by the hemisphere 250
 Divided: light the Day, and darkness Night,
 He named. Thus was the first day even and morn;
 Nor passed uncelebrated, nor unsung