Background – Paradise Lost – Milton’s Epic:

At the very beginning of Paradise Lost (1667), Milton describes the content of his epic as “things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme” (line 16). His allusions to Homer, Virgil, Dante, and a host of lesser epic poets leave no doubt that Milton wanted Paradise Lost to sum up and also surpass all previous epics. The quality that would set Milton’s epic apart, of course, was that it dealt with great deeds on a cosmic scale at the dawn of Creation – rather than with early matters.

There is a formal, set way to begin an epic. At the outset, an epic poet does two things. The speaker invokes the Muse (one of the nine Greek goddesses who inspire poets and other practitioners of the arts and sciences) to speak or sing through the poet; and the speaker states the subject of the poem. Milton does both these things in the first, complicated sentences (lines 1-16) of Paradise Lost. Grammatically, this sentence begins in line 6 with the command “Sing, Heavenly Muse.” “Sing,” says Milton, and now we move back to line 1, “Of man’s first disobedience,” which is Adam and Eve’s first act of disobedience against God, who has forbidden them to eat of the fruit of a particular tree in Eden. The result, or “fruit,” of their disobedience is expulsion from and loss of Paradise, another name for the Garden of Eden. Yet, all is not lost, because a “greater Man” (line 4), Jesus Christ, has restored the possibility of Paradise to the human race.

Milton calls this argument “great” (line 24), for he is attempting to resolve a dilemma that has puzzled many people throughout the ages. On the one hand, we are told that through his Eternal Providence (line 25), God takes loving care of creation; on the other hand, we know that there are many very bad things in the world, such as war, crime, poverty, disease, oppression, and injustice. In Paradise Lost, Milton asserts that God is not responsible for these evils; instead, Adam and Eve’s disobedience gave Adam and Eve the freedom to choose between good and evil, and the strength to resist evil; yet they chose evil, and their offspring – all of us – have suffered the effects of their choice ever since.

This explanation is not original to Milton; many Christians have accepted it for centuries. Yet a reader need not accept this traditional explanation of the evil in the world in order to enjoy and admire the poem. (Indeed, some readers have found evidence in the poem that Milton himself did not really believe it.) The poem is rich enough to provide support for many different interpretations.

As you read, think about why evil exists. What is the source of its power to fascinate? The struggle of good versus evil is central to Paradise Lost – in this case, the conflict exists on a truly epic scale, as Satan first rebels (in Book I) against God and then (in Book IX) ensnares Adam and Eve to do likewise. In Milton’s epic, and in the Bible, this original choice of evil over good explains the burdens of humanity and our fateful tendency to misuse our reason and freedom to let pride override fear of God.

Reading Paradise Lost

Milton decided to write his epic in his native language and in Shakespeare’s meter, which is blank verse, or unrhymed iambic pentameter. Though blank verse was the usual meter in dramatic poetry, it was not used at all for nondramatic poems in Milton’s day and for long after. Most of Milton’s sentences are long, and many of them are not in normal word order (subject-verb-object). Also, his vocabulary includes words not used in ordinary prose today.

In Milton’s heroic, optimistic view of life, goodness was not goodness unless it resulted from a struggle to overcome evil. God purposely let Satan escape from Hell and establish himself on Earth, not only so that human beings would have something to fight against – and with God’s help triumph over. In one of his prose tracts, Areopagitica (1644), Milton describes life as a race in which good must compete with bad. Virtue, he says, is not virtue unless it is won in the “dust and heat” of the conflict with evil. And so, when Adam and Eve lose Paradise, they also gain something: Michael, who comes to dispossess them of their perfect garden, tells them how to live in the new, imperfect world. Practice good deeds, he says, and patience, temperance, faith, and love, and “then wilt thou be not loath / To leave this Paradise, but shalt possess / A Paradise within thee, happier far” (Paradise Lost, Book XII, lines 585-587).

Paradise Lost consists of ten books and 10,565 lines.

from: Holt, Rinehart, Winston’s Elements of Literature: Sixth Course – Literature of Britain with World Classics
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

5  Restore us, and regain the blissful Seat,

*  Sing Heav'nly Muse; that on the secret top Of Horeb or of Sinai didst inspire That Shepherd, who first taught the chosen Seed, In the beginning how the Heav'n's and Earth

10  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

* 15 Above th' Aonian Mount, while it pursues I pursue Things unattempted yet in Prose or Rime. 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

20  Wast present, and with mighty wings outspred Dove-like sat'st brooding on the vast Abyss And mad'st it pregnant: what in Me is dark, Illumin; what is low, raise and support; That to the highth of this great Argument

25  I may assert eternal Providence, And justifie the ways 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

30  Fav'rd of Heav'n so highly, to fall off From their 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, Stir'd up with envy and revenge, deceiv'd The Mother of Mankind; what time his Pride

35  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,

40  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 Pow'r
Hurl'd headlong flaming from th' ethereal Skie,
With hideous ruin and combustion down
To bottomless Perdition: there to dwell
In adamantin 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 vanquish'd, rolling in the fiery Gulf,
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
Mix'd with obdurate pride and steadfast hate.
At once, as far as Angels ken, he views
The dismal situation waste and wild.
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 only to discover sights of woe:
Regions of sorrow, doleful shades; where peace
And rest can never dwell; hope never comes,
That comes to all: but tor
ture 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 their pris'n ordain'd
In utter darkness; and their portion set
As far remov'd from God and light of Heav'n;
As from the Centre thrice to th' utmost Pole.
O how unlike the place from whence they fell!
There the Companions of his fall, o'erwhelm'd
With floods and whirlwinds of tempestuous fire,
He soon discerns; and weltring by his side
One next himself in pow'r, and next in crime,
Long after known in Palaestine, and nam'd
Beëlzebub. To whom th' Arch-enemy,
And thence in Heav'n call'd Satan, with bold words
Breaking the horrid silence thus began:
If thou beest He! but O how fall'n; how chang'd
From Him, who in the happy realms of light
Cloth'd with transcendent brightness did'st outshine
Myriads tho' bright: If He whom mutual league,
United thoughts and counsels, equal hope
And hazard in the glorious Enterprize
90  Join'd with me once; now Misery hath join'd doth join

* In equal Ruin: Into what Pit thou seest

From what highth fall'n: so much the stronger prov'd
He with his Thunder: and till then who knew
The force of those dire arms? Yet not for those,

95 Nor what the potent Victor in his rage
Can else inflict, do I repent, or change
(Though chang'd in outward lustre) that fix'd mind,
And high disdain from sense of injur'd merit,
That with the Mightiest rais'd me to contend;

* 100 And to the fierce Contention brought along
Innumerable force of Spirits arm'd,
That durst dislike His Reign; and Me preferring,
His utmost pow'r with adverse pow'r oppos'd
In dubious battel on the plains of Heav'n,

105 And shook his Throne. What. tho' the field be lost?
All is not lost; th' unconquerable Will,

* 109 And study of Revenge, immortal hate;
And Courage never to submit or yield:
And what is else, Not to be overcome?

* 110 That Glory never shall his wrath or might
Extort from Me, to bow and sue for grace
With suppliant knee; and deifie His pow'r,
Who from the terror of this Arm so late
Doubted his Empire: that were low indeed,

115 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 advanc'd,

120 We may with more successful hope resolve
To wage by force or guile eternal war;
Irreconcileable to our grand Foe,
Who now triumphs, and in th' excess of joy
Sole reigning holds the tyranny of Heav'n.

* * So spake th' Apostat Angel, though in pain,

126 Vaunting aloud, but rack'd with deep despair:

* And him thus answer'd soon his bold Compeer.

O Prince, O chief of many throned Pow'r's,

* That led th' embattel'd Seraphim to war

130 Under thy conduct, and in dreadful deeds

* * Fearless endanger'd Heav'n'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,
135 That with sad overthrow and foul defeat
  Hath lost us Heav'n, and all this mighty host
  In horrible destruction laid thus low;
  As far as Gods and heav'nly Essences
Can perish: for the mind and spirit remains
140 Invincible, and vigour soon returns;
  Though all our glory' extinct, and happy state
Here swallow'd up in endless Misery.
But what, if he our Conqu'rour (whom I now
Of force believe Almighty, since no less
145 Than such could have o'er-pow'rd such force as ours)
Have left us this our spirit and strength intire
* Strongly to suffer and support our pains? Stronglier
That we may so suffice his vengeful ire:
  Or do him mightier service, as his Thralls
* 150 By right of war: whate'er his business be, our
Here in the heart of Hell to work in fire,
  Or do his errands in the gloomy Deep.
  What can it then avail, though yet we feel
* Strength undiminish'd, or eternal being, have
155 To undergo eternal Punishment?
  Whereto with speedy Words th'Arch-Fiend reply'd:
* Fall'n Cherub, To be weak is miserable, Here to dwell
  Doing or Suffering: but of this be sure,
* To do ought Good never will be our task, will never
160 But ever to do Ill our sole delight,
  As being the contrary to His high will
  Whom we resist. If then his Providence
Out of our evil seek to bring forth good,
  Our labour must be to pervert that end,
165 And out of good still to find means of evil:
  Which oft times may succeed, so as perhaps
* Shall grieve him, if I fail not; and disturb disturn
    His inmost Counsels from their destin'd aim.
* But see the angry Victor hath recall'd repress'd
170 His Ministers of vengeance and pursuit Instruments
* Back to the Gates of Heav'n: The sulphurous Hail,
    Shot after us in storm, o'er-blown hath laid
The fiery Surge, that from the Precipice
  Of Heav'n receiv'd us falling; and the Thunder,
175 Wing'd with red lightning and impetuous rage,
* Perhaps hath spent his shafts, and ceases now its
To bellow through the vast and boundless Deep.
Let us not slip th' Occasion, whether scorn
Or satiate fury yield it from our Foe.

180 Seest thou yon dreary Plain, forlorn and wild,
The seat of desolation, void of light,
Save what the glimmering of these livid flames
Casts pale and dreadful? Thither let us tend
From off the tossing of these fiery waves;

185 There rest, if any Rest can harbour there:
And re-assembling our afflicted Powers,
Consult how we may henceforth most offend
Our Enemy, our own loss how repair;
How overcome this dire calamity;

190 What reinforcement we may gain from Hope;
If not, what resolution from Despair.

Thus Satan talking to his neerest Mate
With head up-lift above the wave, and eyes
That sparkling blaz'd; his other parts besides

195 Prone on the flood, extended long and large,
Lay floating many a rood; in bulk as huge

* [As whom the Fables name, of monstrous size,
Titanian, or Earth-born, that warr'd on Jove,
Briareos, or Typhon whom the Den

200 By ancient Tarsus held, or that Sea-beast]
* Leviathan, which God of all his works
* Created hugest that swim th' Ocean stream:
* Him haply slumb'ring on the Norway foam,
* The Pilot of some small night-founder'd Skiff,

205 Deeming some Island oft, as Sea-men tell,
* With fixed Anchor in his skaly rind,
Moors by his side under the Lee; while night
Invests the Sea, and wished morn delays:

** So stretch'd out huge in length the Árch-fiend lay,

210 Chain'd on the burning Lake: nor ever thence
Had ris'n or heav'd his Head, but that the Will
And high permission of all-ruling Heaven
Left him at large to his own dark designs:
That with reiterated crimes he might

215 Heap on himself damnation, while he sought
Evil to others: and enrag'd might see
How all his malice serv'd but to bring forth

* Infinite goodness, grace and mercy shewn
On Man by him seduc'd; but on himself

220 Treble confusion, wrath, and vengeance pour'd.
Forthwith upright he rears from off the Pool
His mighty Stature; on each hand the Flames
Driv'n backward slope their pointing spires, and roll'd
* In billows, leave i' th' midst a horrid Vale.

225 Then with expanded wings he steers his flight
Aloft, incumbent on the dusky Air
That felt unusual Weight, 'till on dry Land
* He lights, * if it were Land that ever burn'd
With solid, as the Lake with liquid fire:
230 And such appear'd in hue, as when the force
Of subterranean Wind transports a Hill
Torn from Pelorus, or the shatter'd side
Of thund'ring Ætna, whose combustible
* And fuel'd entrails thence conceiving Fire,
235 Sublim'd with mineral fury, aid the Winds,
And leave a singed bottom all involv'd
With stench and smoak: Such Resting found the Sole
* Of unbless'd feet. Him follow'd his next Mate,
Both glorying to have scap't the Stygian flood,
240 As Gods, and by their own recover'd strength,
Not by the sufferance of supernal Power.
Is this the Region, this the Soil, the Clime,
Said then the lost Arch-Angel, this the Seat
That we must change for Heav'n? this mournful Gloom
245 For that celestial Light? Be' it so, since He
Who now is Sov'rain can dispose and bid
* What shall be right: farthest from him is best,
* Whom reason [hath] equal'd, Force hath made supreme
Above his equals. Farewel happy Fields,
250 Where Joy for ever dwells! Hail horrors, hail
* Infernal world! and Thou, profoundest Hell,
* Receive thy new Possessor; one who brings
A Mind not to be chang'd by Place or Time.
The mind is its own place, and in it self
255 Can make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n.
What matter where, if I be still the same,
And what I should be; all but less than he
Whom Thunder hath made greater? Here at least
* We shall be Free; th' Almighty hath not built
260 Here for his Envy will not drive us hence:
Here we may reign secure: and in my choice
To reign is worth ambition, tho' in Hell:
Better to reign in Hell, than serve in Heav'n.
But wherefore let we then our faithful Friends,
265 Th' associates and copartners of our loss,
Lye thus astonish'd on th' oblivious Pool;
And call them not to share with us their part
In this unhappy mansion, or once more
With rallied Arms to try what may be yet
270 Regain'd in Heav'n, or what more lost in Hell?
Footnotes

- **V. 6.** That on the secret top Of Horeb, Secret Valleys, secret Coves, come frequently in Poetry; but secret top of a Mountain, visible several Leagues off, is only met with here. Our Poet dictated it thus, That on the secret top Of Horeb: from Exod. i. 5 Moses came to the mountain of God, Horeb. And God said, Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place whereon thou standest is holy ground. So our Author, V. 619. VI. 25. Sacred Hill. And Spencer, in Fancies Unveiled, I. 10. 54; and as frequently in the Classic Writers, Mos, Moser, hieron oras. Some perhaps may prefer the present Reading,Secret top; because in most Countries the high Mountains have against rainy Weather their Heads surrounded with Mists. True, but yet it's questionable, whether in the wide and dry Desert of Arabia, Mount Horeb has such a cloudy Cap. I have in my Youth read several Itineraries, where the Travellers went up to the Top of Horeb; and I remember not, that they take notice of its Cloudiness. And a just Presumption lies against it from Holy Writ, Exod. xvi; where the Israelites, encamp'd at the foot of Horeb, could find no Water; which was provided miraculously, when Moses smote the Rock with this sacred Rod: for all Natural History informs us, and Reason vouches it, That a Mountain, whose Head is cloudy, has always running Springs at its Foot. But allowing all, and granting that Horeb was like the European Hill; yet not Poet hitherto has on that account said The Secret; but the Cloudy, Misty, Hazy, Grey Top. Nay, allow further, That Secret Top is a passable Epithet; yet it is common to all Mountains whatever: but Horeb, whose Ground was holy, Horeb the Mountain of God, Exod. iii. 1.; Kings xix. 8, deserved a peculiar Epithet. If therefore (which the best Poets have adjudged) A Proper Epithet is always preferable to a General one; and if Secret and Sacred are of a near Sound in Pronunciation; I have such an Esteem for our Poet, that which of the two Words is the better, That, I say, was dictated by Milton.

- **V. 13.** To my adventurous Song, &c.] Some Acquaintance of our Poet's, entrusted with his Copy, took strange Liberties with it, unknown to the blind Author, as will farther appear hereafter. 'Tis very odd, that Milton should put Rime here as equivalent to Verse, who had just before declar'd against Rime, as no true Ornament to good Verse, but the Invention of a barbarous Age, to set off wretched Matter and lame Meter. I am persuaded, this Passage was given thus:

  'Twas to my adventurous Song, That with no middle flight intends to soar Above th' Aonian Mount, while I pursue Things unattempted yet in Prose or SGene.

Let's examin the Particulars: Weir, the properest here of all Metaphors, which is justified and prov'd by the following Words, Flight, and Soar. So III. 13.

  Thee I revisit now with colder Wing.

And IX. 45.

Damp my intended Wing. Nor let it be objected; that in the IX, the Wing is intended by the Poet, but here the Wing it self intends. For that is an allow'd Figure, and frequent in the best Writers. So II. 727. Father, what intends thy Hand, she cried.

And 738.

That my sudden Hand Prevented spares to tell thee Yet by Deeds, What it intends.

- **V. 15.** While it pursues.] The Author, I believe, gave it in the first Person. While I PURSUE; as III. 15. While in my flight I sung of Chaos.

- **V. 16.** In Prose or Rime? The Author gave it, Things unattempted yet in Prose or SGenes.

But the 13th Verse being once chang'd into Adventurous SGenes, that Word could not be here repeated; and so for Song was substituted Rime. It may be said, He took Rime from Ariosto, Cant. I. Coa, non det Prensia mag, ne in Rima. But Ariosto's Poem is in Rime, Milton's neither in Rime nor Prose: So that this Argument is even yet unattempted in either of them. But it's v. 150.

  Flow'd from their lips in numerous Verse:

And in the Mask, one of his Juvenile Poems, For I will tell you now: What never yet was heard in Tale or Song.

- **V. 28.** Nor the deep Tract of Hell.] Tract is properly not a deep, to hide from view; but a plane expanded Surface, expos'd to view; Terraque tractusque maris, caelumque profundum. Better therefore, Nor the deep Glimpse of Hell. So II. 12. For since no Deep within her Gulp can hold Immortal vigour: And often besides.

- **V. 33.** Who first seduced them to that foul revolt? T'Infernal Sergeant.] A manifest Imitation of Homer, Iliad, I. 8. To τα' ουράθη τεθεί ηρά ουνεκηκα ταξιδευ
ei Létous και Dios huios. Léoutes kai Dios huios.

- **V. 35.** Decre'd The Mother of Mankind.] I believe the Author spoke it thus, in address to Eve: which will raise the Sense; Decree'd.

  Tres, Mother of Mankind.

- **V. 39.** To set himself in Glory] above his Peers.] Our Poet had not at first so settled his whole Scheme, as to be uniform and selfconsistent in all its Parts. Satan's Crime was not, to aim above his Peers: God himself had plac'd him above them; as Abdiel the good Angel says to Satan, V. 812.

  Ingrate, In place thy self so high above thy Peers. His Ambition was to be above the Messiah, as it is at large shewn in the Sequel. Put it therefore thus, Aspiring 

  To Place and Glory] above the Son of God. So V. 862.

- **V. 46.** With hideous ruin and combustion down.] Having said in Verse before, Huri'd handling Fleming; he superfluously adds Combustion. But I doubt not, he gave it thus, With hideous ruin and Confusion down.

So II. 995. Spoken of the same Event; With Ruin upon ruin, rout on rout, Confusion worse confounded.

- **V. 52.** Lay vonquisit]d. Vanky'd it is too low a Word for the Occasion. They were more than vonquisit'd, even while in Heaven, V. 851. Of their vapour drain'd Exhausted, spiritless, afflicted, fad'n.

  Our Author gave it, Lay Stenos'ro. Stoney'd, stoned, stunned, stunn'd; common in the elder Poets. So here, v. 266. Lie thus astonish'd on th'oblivious Pool.

- **V. 281.** As we ear'while astounded and amazed.

And in the Argument: Satan with his Angels, lying on the burning Lake, thunderstruck and astonish'd. Ibsa. Rolling in the fiery Gulf.] The Poet gave it, Rolling on the fiery Gulf. As it has been twice quoted already. So v. 195.

  His other parts behind Prome on the flood.

- **V. 210.** Chain'd on the burning Lake.

- **V. 280.** Grovling and prostrate on Prome of Lake fire.

- **V. 54.** But now the thought Both of lost Happiness and Lasting Pain Torments him.]
The Thought of Happiness, and then the Thought of Pain, are not One, but Two. So that it's probable, Milton gave it in the Plural. The Thoughts torment him.

- V. 63. No light, but rather Darkness visible. Darkness visible and Darkness palpable are in due place very good Expressions: but the next Line makes visible here a flat Contradiction. Darkness visible will not serve to discover Sights of Woe through it, but to cover and hide them. Nothing is visible to the Eye, but so far as it is Opaque, and not seen through; not by transmitting the Rays, but by reflecting them back. To come up to the Author's Idea, we may say thus, No light, but rather A TAWAKENED GLOOM.

Gloom is equivalent to Darkness; yet so as to be in some measure transparent. So here, v. 544. All in a moment through the Gloom were seen.

- V. 244. This mournful Gloom.
For that celestial Light.
Il. 858.

- V. 71. In utter Darkness, as far removed from God. Utter Darkness is absolute Darkness, and gives no notion of Place and Remoteness. The Poet therefore gave it, OUTER Darkness, as in Scripture, To skotos ti exeteron. So III. 16, read, Through outer, and through middle Darkness born.

- V. 74. As from the Center three to th'utmost Pole. From the Center to the utmost Pole is fictitious: The Distance is much too little, and might have been doubled thus with ease, As from Arctic to Antarctic Pole.

I would thus express it without any Comparison from things known to Us; which, though never so excessive, must needs fall too short:

So far removed from God and Light of Heaven;

Distance, which to express all Measures fails.

- V. 87. In the brightness didst outshine Myriads, thee: bright. I imitated from Homer, Odys. z. 110, where Diana excels all her Nymphs in Beauty, though all of them be beautiful.

- V. 91. Now Misery hath join'd in equal ruin. See the Series of the whole Sentence; Whom mutual League, united Counsels, Doth join'd with me on't, viz. in close Friendship; Now Misery has join'd in what? In closer Friendship? no, in equal Ruin. Great Sense, and great Comfort in this dire Calamity. Our Author spoke it, Now Misery doth join.

- Ao no equal Ruin. Equal Ruin, in redaction to equal Hope, now again join us in a stricter Friendship. He had in view that celebrated Passage of Ovid's Metam. I, soror, O conjux, O femina sola superstes, Quam commune mihi genus & patruelis origo, Deinde torus junxit; quam commune mihi genus & patruelis origo. Deinde torus junxit; nunc ipsa pericula juget. Tbid. In equal Ruin. Into what Pit thou seest? The Measure of this Verse is wrong; unless you make Ruin a Monosyllable; which no Poet, I believe, has yet done. Milton always allows it two Syllables: as here, v. 46. With hideous Ruin and combustion down. He spoke it thus, Aoe equal Ruin. To what Etern thou seest

From what Height fallst?

Depth is the natural Opposition to Highth, and not Plt. V. 542.

To disobedience fall'n,

And so from Heaven to deepest Hell.

- V. 100. Rais'd me to contend, And to the fierce Contention. Very dry this, and jejune. Contend, and presently again Contention, I believe our Author gave it, And to the fierce ENCOUNTER brought along.

So Il. 718.

Millions of fierce encountering Angels fought.

Spenser's Fairy Queen. I. 1. 1.
As one for Knighthly Jusy, and fierce Encounters fit.

- V. 107. And study of Revenge, immortal Hate. A. no comes not well here; when Hate, that follows, has no Conjunction; and it slackens the course of Passion, which loves Asyndet. Besides, Study wants its Epithet. Perhaps he gave it, so, exactly as it. 337. Revenge, tho' slow. And I. 604. Waiting Revenge.

- V. 100. That Glory never shall his wrath or might. / Extort from me, to bow and sue for grace.

Glory is improper here: what is extorted from Satan, should be something from within him, his own Act, His Submission to sue for Grace. But Glory, viz. of God, is extrinsical to Satan, not extorted from him, but a remote Consequence of his Submission. Better therefore in my Opinion thus, That HOMEAS never shall his wrath or might Extort from me.

- V. 125. Though in pain, / Vaunting loud, but rack'd with deep despair.

This is embarrass'd. Thou in pain, but in despair, which But is thrown again, and a contrary Idea coming in the middle. Besides, Though in pain is low and vulgar. And ALTCO is unnecessary, when he speaks to one close by his Side. Better thus, at once:

So spake thy Apostat proud, with outward Vaunt, But thy rack'd with Pain and deep Despair.

- V. 127. And him thus answer'd soon his bold Comper.] From the Words score and bold, one would conceive a Character of the following Speech, as breathing Courage and Defiance. Milton, except here, always answers the expectation he raises. But Belethub in his following Answer is quite heartless and desponding. Who'll not believe the Author gave it thus?

And him thus answer'd V.S. His old Comper.

As V. 94.

Thus Adam answer'd so.

His old dear Companion, as Satan calls him, V. 673.

- V. 129. That led; and 131, endanger'd? If led and endanger'd, but put, be right; then the Sense is, Thrones, Powers, that led, &c. But it's better applied to Satan alone; and not make Belethub commend himself and other Thrones for what Satan had made his own sole Glory. Therefore the Poet gave it, lost, and ENanger'd; and put'st; as V. 737. Lought'st; Par. Rep. N. 156. Reflect'st; 493. Storm'st; 619. Hold'st.

- V. 131. And in dreadful deeds, fearlessly; if fearlessly be the right Reading, then the dreadful deeds must be those of Michael and the good Angels. But it's plain that they are here meant of Satan's Crew; for so II. 549.

Others sing

Their own Heroic deeds, but hopeless fall.

The Author therefore gave it, And in dreadful deeds Peerless, endanger'd of Heaven's perpetual King.

So here, Satan says, v. 113.

Who from the terror of this Arm so late Doubled his Empire. Peerless, matchless; as N. 608. 'Till the Moon Apparent Queen, unwav'd her peerless light.

And so II. 487. Satan is call'd, Their matchless Chief; and VI. 246, spoken of the same Battel: Till Satan who that Day Prodigious power had shewn, and met in arms No equal.

Paradise Regain'd, I. 233.

By matchless deeds Express thy matchless Sire.

Fairfax in Tasso. Ill. 59. Peerless in flight, in course grave and sound.

Ib. endanger'd of Heaven's perpetual King. The Word perpetual does not accord with the rest: for by them who acknowledg'd him perpetual, he could not be thought endanger'd. Better thus, Peerless, endanger'd of Heaven's omens, King. King from time immemorial; none heard of before him; as here, v. 639.

Monarch in Heaven, upheld by old Repute.
V. 147. Strongly to suffer and support our Pains: | The Sense plainly requires, What, if God has left us our Strength entire, to suffer our Pains the more strongly? Therefore the Author gave it, 

So he always uses to contract such Words into two Syllables; as in the following Verse, 

And do him mightier service in the deep. 

And vi. 731. 

And gladder shall resign. 

So happier, worthier, &c. 

V. 155. Whatever his business be | His Business God to work in Fire, or to do his own Errands in Hell! These Businesses Belzebub supposes God would injoin the Devils. He gave it therefore, 

What'ere our business be. 

As v. 159. Our task 

V. 154. Or eternal being | To feel Strength or eternal being, is an improper Expression: for if Being in general may be felt; yet they could not feel it as it is Eternal: for then they could not have heard Annihilation, as Belzebub does, ii. 146. The Author spoke it, 

have eternal being. 

So ii. 98. 

Happier far, 

Than miserable to have eternal being. 

Or it may be varied thus, 

Strength unimpaired; enjoy eternal being. 

V. 157. To be weak is miserable. | The Printer here has bestowed upon our Poet absolute Nonsense. To be weak is not by consequence to be miserable. Adam was frail and weak, even while he was happy in Paradise. But it's not Answer to Belzebub's Speech. He complain'd not of Weakness; on the contrary, he own'd that Vigour was return'd, and their Strength was undiminish'd: but he doubted what God's Design was in placing them in Hell, whether they should work for him, or merely suffer pain. To which Satan here should answer, That either way, working or suffering, 'twas miserable for them to live in Hell: The Author therefore gave it, 

To be here is miserable, 

Or rather thus, 

Fall'n Cherub, here to dwell is miserable. 

As ii. 57. 

And for their dwelling place 

Accept this dark opprobrious den of shame. 

And ii. 86. 

What can be worse, Than to dwell here? 

And I. 47. 

To bottomless Perdition, there to dwell 

Enchained in adamant and circling Fire. 

V. 159. Never will be our task | Smoother and stronger Accent thus, 

To do ought Good will never be our task. 

V. 167. And disturb — from their destined aim | To disturb from aim, instead of divert, avert, does not reach up to our Poet's usual Exactness. I persuade my self, he gave it, 

To disturb 

His inmost counsels from their destined aim. 

The Sense is unexceptionable, and the Word is authoris'd by our Author, in Troilus and Cressida. iii. 719. 

---- And all this ham-rhyme. 

In two other places, his Copies, perhaps erroneously, now have it, MISTURN. Distornare, a vulgar Word, Italick, as GalliCdlcetourn. And who knows not Milton's Inclination to revive Old words, or even coin new ones, especially with that Italian Stamp? 

V. 169. Hath recall'd His Ministers of Vengeance. | That is, the Good Angels; whom our Author in his first Three Books describes, as pursuing the vanquish'd Rout with Fire and Thunderbolts, down through the Chaos, even to Hell's Gates. This is a fine idea; but in the Sixth Book, where Raphael makes the Narrative of those Battles, the Author chang'd this idea for another, yet better; making the Messiah alone perform all Himself, Michael and all his Hosts standing still, and looking on. So that Satan's Crew leap'd down spontaneously from Heaven; Fire and Thunder pursuing them, but no Angels. As vi. 864. 

Headlong themselves they throw 

Down from the verge of Hav'n. eternal wrath 

Burnt after then to the bottomless Pit. 

So in Paradise Regained, i. 90. 

When his fierce Thunder drove us to the Deep. 

These few Passages therefore must be alter'd, to make this noble Poem consistent; and 'tis pity the blind Author had so good an Excuse for not doing it himself. This before us, may be thus adjusted, 

But see the angry victor hath repres'd 

His instruments of vengeance, and pursuit 

That drove us down to Hell; 

First Instruments in general mention'd, then specified Hell and Thunder. 

V. 176. Perhaps hath spent his shafts. | Thunder here is not made a Person; so that the Author gave it, its shafts. 

V. 191. If not, what resolution | What reinforcement; to which is return'd If not: a vicious Syntax: but the Poet gave it, for the Sense: 

V. 197. As whom the Fables name. | These four Lines from the Fables I am unwilling to believe Milton's. He compares Satan here to a Whale, so big as to be mistaken for a Promontory of Land. What need then of these fabulous Monsters, vulgar and known to the lowest Schoolboys, which make the sentence to lag, and the Sense to dwindle? To be in the Den of Taurus, doth not make Typhon the bigger: and Briareos Four syllables, for Briareous Three. 

Et contemptuosus Briareos & belius Lerna, 

cannot be justified. For though Hesiod has Briareos, it's pronounc'd Briareo, as Xenodoch is Xenodochi. Lastly, to call a Whale a Beast, what stuff is it? I leave them therefore to the Reader, content to set a Mark upon them, as supposing them, and more hereafter of this sort, spurious; and as knowing all Passages, that our Poet, blind, and then poor and friendless, had frequently foul Play. 

V. 202. Created hugest, that swim th' Ocean stream. | This Verse as Accents very abominous. To smooth it, I take the Rise from v. 196. ejecting the four Lines intermediate; 

In bulk like that 

Leviathan, whom God the mostest made 

Of all the Kinds, that swim the Ocean stream. 

And note, that v. 201. for when God, &c. the Author must have given it whom; since in the Line following he says him. 

V. 203. On the Norway Foam. | We allow Foam to be sometimes put for Sea or Water by our best Poets; especially those that are forc'd to it for Rime. As Spenser in his Epithalamion says to the Sun, 

Haste thee, thou fairest Planet, to thy home 

Within the Western Foam. 

But here it comes unhappily, for it must be very solid Foam, that can support a sleeping Whale. Better therefore with plain Simplicity, Foam or Deep. 

V. 204. Night-founder'd shaft | Foundering in the Sea Phrase is sinking by a Leak in the Ship. So that Night alone never can founder. Besides, Night is here superfluous; for in the close of this same Comparison he has Night again, while Night invests the Sea. The Poet gave it thus, 

The Pilot of some small woon-founder'd shaft; 

High-founder'd, almost founder'd: a good Excuse, why in that Extremity, and in the Dark, they took a Whale for firm Land: so ii. 940. speaking of Satan caught in a sort of Bog, 

Nigh-founder'd an he fears. 

Our Poet in vii. 412. describes this Leviathan again, as sleeping on the Deep like a Promontory, or swimming like a moving Land: Could he have revised his whole Work, he would have avoided the Repetition. 

V. 206. In his skaly rind | Sealy rind is unlucky here; for it falls out contrary, that the Whale has no Skales; or if he had them, by Proportion with other Fish, they would be so large, thick, and solid, that no Seaman could fix his Anchor through them. But the Author gave it otherwise, 

With fixed Anchor in this seaky rind. 

'Tis truly a Skin, so soft and thick, as to make it not incredible, that a small Anchor may be fix'd there without the Whale's feeling the Wound. They are struck with Harping-Irons, which cannot pierce a skaly Crocodile. 

V. 209. So stretch'd out huge in length the Arch-fiend lay. | Here Arch-fiend has the Tone in the first Syllable, disagreeably, better above v. 156. Th' Arch-fiend replied. Besides, so stretch'd out, that is, as the Whale lies stretch'd out. But that is improper; for the Whale cannot stretch out or contract any of his joints: he is always of the same Length; whether his Tail be bent or straight. Better therefore thus, 

So vast, stretch'd out in length, th'Arch-rebel lay. 

Arch-rebel, a v. 81. Arch-enemy. See vii. 414. 

V. 218. Infinite goodness. | Infinite goodness, in other Places, very proper, seems here a little too high. For Justice andrigid Satisfaction was exacted for Adam's Sin: As the Poet sets it forth in Books III. and X. Rather therefore here, 

NEW PROOFS of Goodness, Grace, and Mercy shewn.
V. 224. Leave i’th’ midst a horrid Vale. When Satan rais’d himself out of the Lake; by that Motion he made the fiery Waves to mount and roll on both sides of him, and in the midst, under him made a hollow. This is describ’d from Nature. But why is that Hollow peculiarly call’d Horrid? surely, the quiet Vale between was less horrid than the surrounding and tossing Billows with their threatening Spires. I would therefore have made it thus, In Billows, leave i’th’m midst a GAPING Vale.

V. 228. If it were Land that ever burn’d. This Verb WERE instead of Propriety about the Name, makes a Doubt about the Thing. Rather therefore, If Land IT MIGHT BE CALL’d, that burn’d. EVER burn’d, without doubt; and that’s inculcated on every Page. But it’s needless here; ’tis enough for the Doubt what to call it, if it was burning at that time.

V. 234. Combustible And fuel’d entrails Our Author here endeavours at a lofty Description of Mount Ætna; but as his Editor has us’d him, he expires in a swoln and empty Bombast. Who else ever said FUEL’d? or allowing it, is it not the very same with Combustible? And what is, Aot the Winds? Does the subterraneous Wind Aid itself? Nonsense. Or aid the natural Winds, that blow regularly? a desirable Aid indeed. Let’s try, if we can retrieve the Author’s Words: Whose combustible SULFUREOUS Entrails, thence conceiving Fire, Sublim’d with mineral Fury, TAKE THE WING.

V. 241. Of unbléss’d feet. Better accent thus, the sole of feet unbléss’d.

V. 247. Farthest from Him is best. This is express’d from the Greek Proverb, Porrô Dios te kai keraunou: Far from Jupiter, but far too from Thunder.

V. 248. Whom Reason hath equal’d. Both Sense and Measure are damag’d by that HATH, which could not come from the Poet.

V. 251. Infernal world! and Thou, profoundest Hell. ’Tis certain, that Infernal World here and profoundest Hell mean the very same; so that Satan addresses himself twice to One thing, as if it were Two. A Fault, neither to be forgiv’n Milton, nor suspected of him. But I am persuaded, he gave it, Hail, Horrors! HAIL ETERNAL WOE. But this the Editor thought to be a Saying too desperate, even for the Devil himself, and therefore he chang’d it to Internal World; not attending, that by this he made the Passage Tautology. But Satan’s Character is the better kept up by his saluting and congratulating Eternal Woe. He knew well, that was his unchangeable Doom; and he was not scared with the mere Word. This paints him to the Life, his obdurate Mind, his unconquerable Will, His Courage never to submit or yield. So that to salute and welcome His own Punishment, shews a Temper and Disposition truly Satantical.

V. 252. Receive thy new Possessor. After the preceding Words Farewell and Hail; He could scarce miss going on in the same Salutation Stile,

WELCOME thy new Possessor.

As in his History of Britain, p. 63. To welcome their new General, and in Christ’s Nativity a Juvenile Poem.

To welcome him to this his new Abode.

V. 259. God hath not built Here for his Envy. To raise Sense from mere Nonsense is much easier and surer of Acceptance, than to raise still Better Sense from Good or Tolerable. No doubt, God built Hell, as a Receptacle for Satan’s and his Crew: but to say, He built it not for his own Envy, as if he could ever wish to change Places with them, is something extravagant. Let’s reduce Milton’s own Words: Th’ Almighty hath no BUTT Here for his Envy; will not drive us hence.

No Butt, no Object, no Scope for his Envy here; He cannot think the Place too good and delightful for us.