Paradise Lost

by John Milton

edited by Eric Armstrong

Notes on this edition

The pronunciations presented here are not necessarily definitive, but are a starting place. Many are choices based on the meter of the line, showing how a word might be pronounced in an attempt to maintain the pentameter. In some cases these pronunciations are quite extreme: witness "ceremony - disyllabic (if possible!) [ˈsɛəˑ.mənɨ]". Also, I have attempted to give pronunciations to all "unfamiliar" words, or words whose pronunciation isn't immediately obvious from spelling. Not all proper nouns required transcription: "Taurus" seems familiar enough.

I have also chosen, before syllables beginning with r, to leave the schwa in diphthongs that might take "r-colouring" *un*coloured, or plain : "Oreb" as [ˈɔə ɹəb] rather than [ˈɔəˑ ɹəb] or [ˈɔ ɹəb]. In cases where these diphthongs preceed other consonants, I have chosen the r-colouring version, as in "Archangel" - [ɑəˑ ˈkeɪn dʒəl]. I feel these choices work best for the stage, but are a matter of taste.

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[1], or of Sinai[2], 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[3] hill
Delight thee more, and Siloa's[4] 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 th' Aonian[5] mount, while it pursues
Things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme.

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[1]Oreb - [ˈɔə ˌɹɛb]
[2]Sinai - [ˈsaɪ ˌnaɪ]
[3]Sion - [ˈsaɪ ˌɒn]
[4]Siloa's - [ˌsi ˈloʊ ˌəz]
[5]Aonian - trisyllabic [eɪ ˈoʊ nɪən]

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 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 height 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
From their Creator, and transgress his will
For one restraint, lords of the World besides.
Who first seduced them to that foul revolt?

Th' 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,
If he opposed, and with ambitious aim
Against the throne and monarchy of God,
Raised impious[6] war in Heaven and battle proud,
With vain attempt. Him the Almighty Power
Hurled headlong flaming from th' ethereal[7] sky,
With hideous ruin and combustion, down
To bottomless perdition, there to dwell
In adamantine[8] chains and penal fire,
Who durst defy th' Omnipotent[9] to arms.

Nine times the space that measures day and night
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.

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[6]impious - disyllabic [ˈɪm piəs]
[7]th'ethereal - trisyllabic [ðɪ ˈθi ɹiəl]
[8]adamantine - [æ də ˈman taɪn]
[9]th'Omnipotent - [ðɒm ˈnɪ poʊ ˌtɛnt]

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
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 has prepared
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 th' 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,
Long after known in Palestine, and named
Beelzebub[10]. To whom th' Arch-Enemy,
And thence in Heaven called Satan, with bold words
Breaking the horrid silence, thus began:--

"If thou beest he--but O how fallen! how changed
From him who, in the happy realms of light
Clothed with transcendent brightness, didst outshine
Myriads[11], 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
In equal ruin; into what pit thou seest
From what height 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 contentions brought along
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?

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[10]Beelzebub - [bi ˈɛl zɪ ˌbʌb]
[11]Myriads - [ˈmɪ ɹi ˌədz]