

Paradise Lost Book 9 Lines 421-790

By John Milton

Excerpt describing the temptation of Eve

(If you'd like to read this section online, there are links to help you with difficult words. Go to https://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/pl/book_9/index.shtml)

He sought them both, but wish'd his hap might find
Eve separate, he wish'd, but not with hope
Of what so seldom chanc'd, when to his wish,
Beyond his hope, Eve separate he spies,
Veild in a Cloud of Fragrance, where she stood, [425]
Half spi'd, so thick the Roses bushing round
About her glowd, oft stooping to support
Each Flour of slender stalk, whose head though gay
Carnation, Purple, Azure, or spect with Gold,
Hung drooping unsustaind, them she upstaies [430]
Gently with Mirtle band, mindless the while,
Her self, though fairest unsupported Flour,
From her best prop so farr, and storm so nigh.
Neerer he drew, and many a walk travers'd
Of stateliest Covert, Cedar, Pine, or Palme, [435]
Then [voluble](#) and bold, now hid, now seen
Among thick-wov'n Arborets and Flours
Imborderd on each Bank, the hand of Eve:
Spot more delicious then those Gardens feign'd
Or of reviv'd Adonis, or renown'd [440]
[Alcinous](#), host of old [Laertes Son](#),
Or that, [not Mystic](#), where the Sapient King
Held dalliance with his fair Egyptian Spouse.
Much hee the Place admir'd, the Person more.
As one who long in populous City pent, [445]
Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the Aire,
Forth issuing on a Summers Morn to breathe
Among the pleasant Villages and Farms
Adjoynd, from each thing met conceaves delight,
The smell of Grain, or [tedded](#) Grass, or Kine, [450]
Or Dairie, each rural sight, each rural sound;
If chance with Nymphlike step fair Virgin pass,
What pleasing seemd, for her now pleases more,
She most, and in her look summs all Delight.
Such Pleasure took the Serpent to behold [455]
This Flourie [Plat](#), the sweet recess of Eve
Thus earlie, thus alone; her Heav'nly forme
Angelic, but more soft, [and Feminine](#),
Her graceful Innocence, her every Aire
Of gesture or lest action overaw'd [460]
His Malice, and with rapine sweet bereav'd
His fierceness of the fierce intent it brought:
That space the Evil one abstracted stood
From his own evil, and for the time remaind
[Stupidly good](#), of enmitie disarm'd, [465]
Of guile, of hate, of envie, of revenge;

But the hot Hell that always in him burnes,
 Though in mid Heav'n, soon ended his delight,
 And tortures him now more, the more he sees
 Of pleasure not for him ordain'd: then soon [470]
 Fierce hate he recollects, and all his thoughts
 Of mischief, gratulating, thus excites.
 Thoughts, whither have ye led me, with what sweet
 Compulsion thus transported to forget
 What hither brought us, hate, not love, nor hope [475]
 Of Paradise for Hell, hope here to taste
 Of pleasure, but all pleasure to destroy,
 Save what is in destroying, other joy
 To me is lost. Then let me not let pass
 Occasion which now smiles, behold alone [480]
 The Woman, opportune to all attempts,
 Her Husband, for I view far round, not nigh,
 Whose [higher intellectual](#) more I shun,
 And strength, of courage hautie, and of limb
 Heroic built, though of terrestrial mould, [485]
 Foe not formidable, [exempt from wound](#),
 I not; so much hath Hell debas'd, and paine
 Infeebld me, to what I was in Heav'n.
 Shee fair, divinely fair, fit Love for Gods,
 Not terrible, though terrour be in Love [490]
 And beautie, not approacht by stronger hate,
 Hate stronger, under shew of Love well feign'd,
 The way which to her ruin now I tend.
 So spake the Enemie of Mankind, enclos'd
 In Serpent, Inmate bad, and toward Eve [495]
 Address'd his way, not with indented wave,
 Prone on the ground, as since, but on his reare,
 Circular base of rising foulds, that [tour'd](#)
 Fould above fould a surging Maze, his Head
 Crested aloft, and Carbuncle his Eyes; [500]
 With burnisht Neck of verdant Gold, erect
 Amidst his circling [Spires](#), that on the grass
 Floted redundant: pleasing was his shape,
 And lovely, never since of Serpent kind
 Lovelier, not those that in Illyria [chang'd](#) [505]
 Hermione and Cadmus, or [the God](#)
 In Epidaurus; nor to which transformd
[Ammonian Jove](#), or Capitoline was seen,
 Hee with Olympias, this with her who bore
[Scipio](#) the highth of Rome. With tract oblique [510]
 At first, as one who sought access, but feard
 To interrupt, side-long he works his way.
 As when a Ship by skilful Stearsman wrought
 Nigh Rivers mouth or Foreland, where the Wind
 Veres oft, as oft so steers, and shifts her Saile; [515]
 So varied hee, and of his tortuous Traine
 Curld many a wanton wreath in sight of Eve,
 To lure her Eye; shee busied heard the sound
 Of rusling Leaves, but minded not, as us'd
 To such disport before her through the Field, [520]
 From every Beast, more duteous at her call,
 Then at Circean call the [Herd disguis'd](#).

Hee boulder now, uncall'd before her stood;
But as in gaze admiring: Oft he bowd
His turret Crest, and sleek enamel'd Neck, [525]
Fawning, and lick'd the ground whereon she trod.
His gentle dumb expression turn'd at length
The Eye of Eve to mark his play; he glad
Of her attention gain'd, with Serpent Tongue
[Organic](#), or impulse of vocal Air, [530]
His fraudulent temptation thus began.
Wonder not, sovran Mistress, if perhaps
Thou canst, who art sole Wonder, much less arm
Thy looks, the Heav'n of mildness, with disdain,
Displeas'd that I approach thee thus, and gaze [535]
Insatiate, I thus single, nor have feard
Thy awful brow, more awful thus retir'd.
[Fairest resemblance of thy Maker](#) faire,
Thee all things living gaze on, all things thine
By gift, and thy Celestial Beautie adore [540]
With ravishment beheld, there best beheld
Where universally admir'd; but here
In this enclosure wild, these Beasts among,
Beholders rude, and shallow to discern
Half what in thee is fair, one man except, [545]
Who sees thee? (and what is one?) who shouldst be seen
A Goddess among Gods, ador'd and serv'd
By Angels numberless, thy daily Train.
So [glorz'd](#) the Tempter, and his [Proem](#) tun'd;
Into the Heart of Eve his words made way, [550]
Though at the voice much marveling; at length
Not unamaz'd she thus in answer spake.
What may this mean? Language of Man pronounc't
By Tongue of Brute, and human sense exprest?
The first at lest of these I thought deni'd [555]
To Beasts, whom God on thir Creation-Day
Created mute to all articulat sound;
The latter I [demurre](#), for in thir looks
Much reason, and in thir actions oft appeers.
Thee, Serpent, sottlest beast of all the field [560]
I knew, but not with human voice endu'd;
Redouble then this miracle, and say,
How cam'st thou speakable of mute, and how
To me so friendly grown above the rest
Of brutal kind, that daily are in sight? [565]
Say, for such wonder claims attention due.
To whom the guileful Tempter thus reply'd.
Empress of this fair World, resplendent Eve,
Easie to mee it is to tell thee all
What thou commandst and right thou shouldst be obeyd: [570]
I was at first as other Beasts that graze
The trodden Herb, of abject thoughts and low,
As was my food, nor aught but food discern'd
Or Sex, and [apprehended nothing high](#):
Till on a day roaving the field, I chanc'd [575]
A goodly Tree farr distant to behold
Loaden with fruit of fairest colours mixt,
Ruddie and Gold: I nearer drew to gaze;

When from the boughes a savorie odour blow'n,
Grateful to appetite, more pleas'd my sense, [580]
Then smell of sweetest Fenel or the Teats
Of Ewe or Goat dropping with [Milk at Eevn](#),
Unsuckt of Lamb or Kid, that tend thir play.
To satisfie the sharp desire I had
Of tasting those fair Apples, I resolv'd [585]
Not to deferr; hunger and thirst at once,
Powerful perswaders, quick'nd at the scent
Of that alluring fruit, urg'd me so keene.
About the mossie Trunk I wound me soon,
For high from ground the branches would require [590]
Thy utmost reach or Adams: Round the Tree
All other Beasts that saw, with like desire
Longing and envying stood, [but could not reach](#).
Amid the Tree now got, where plenty hung
Tempting so nigh, to pluck and eat my fill [595]
I spar'd not, for such pleasure till that hour
At Feed or Fountain never had I found.
Sated at length, ere long I might perceave
Strange alteration in me, [to degree](#)
Of Reason in my inward Powers, and Speech [600]
Wanted not long, though to this shape retain'd.
Thenceforth to Speculations high or deep
I turn'd my thoughts, and with capacious mind
Consider'd all things visible in Heav'n,
Or Earth, or [Middle](#), all things fair and good; [605]
But all that fair and good in thy Divine
Semblance, and in thy Beauties heav'nly Ray
United I beheld; no Fair to thine
Equivalent or second, which compel'd
Mee thus, though importune perhaps, to come [610]
And gaze, and worship thee of right declar'd
Sovran of Creatures, universal Dame.
So talk'd the [spirited](#) sly Snake; and Eve
Yet more amaz'd unwarie thus reply'd.
Serpent, [thy overpraising](#) leaves in doubt [615]
The vertue of that Fruit, in thee first prov'd:
But say, where grows the Tree, from hence how far?
For many are the Trees of God that grow
In Paradise, and various, yet unknown
To us, in such abundance lies our choice, [620]
As leaves a greater store of Fruit untoucht,
Still hanging incorruptible, till men
Grow up to [thir provision](#), and more hands
Help to disburden Nature of her [Beareth](#).
To whom the wilie Adder, blithe and glad. [625]
Empress, the way is readie, and not long,
Beyond a row of Myrtles, on a Flat,
Fast by a Fountain, one small Thicket past
Of [blowing](#) Myrrh and Balme; if thou accept
My conduct, I can bring thee thither soon. [630]
Lead then, said Eve. Hee leading swiftly rowld
In tangles, and made intricate seem strait,
To mischief swift. Hope elevates, and joy
Bright'ns his Crest, as when a [wandering Fire](#)

Compact of unctuous vapor, which the Night [635]
Condenses, and the cold invirons round,
Kindl'd through agitation to a Flame,
Which oft, they say, some evil Spirit attends
Hovering and blazing with delusive Light,
Misleads th' amaz'd Night-wanderer from his way [640]
To Boggs and Mires, and oft through Pond or Poole,
There swallow'd up and lost, from succour farr.
So glister'd the dire Snake, and into fraud
Led Eve our credulous Mother, to the Tree
Of prohibition, root of all our woe; [645]
Which when she saw, thus to her guide she spake.
Serpent, we might have spar'd our coming hither,
[Fruitless](#) to mee, though Fruit be here to excess,
The credit of whose vertue rest with thee,
Wondrous indeed, if cause of such effects. [650]
But of this Tree we may not taste nor touch;
God so commanded, and left that Command
Sole Daughter of his voice; the rest, we live
[Law to our selves](#), our Reason is our Law.
To whom the Tempter guilefully repli'd. [655]
Indeed? hath God then said that of the Fruit
Of all these Garden Trees ye shall not eate,
Yet Lords declar'd of all in Earth or Aire?
To whom thus Eve yet sinless. Of the Fruit
Of each Tree in the Garden we may eate, [660]
But of the Fruit of this fair Tree amidst
The Garden, God hath said, Ye shall not eate
Thereof, nor shall ye touch it, least ye die.
She scarce had said, though brief, when now more bold
The Tempter, but with shew of Zeale and Love [665]
To Man, and indignation at his wrong,
New part puts on, and as to passion mov'd,
Fluctuats disturbd, yet comely and in act
Rais'd, as of som great matter to begin.
As when of old [som Orator](#) renown [670]
In Athens or free Rome, where Eloquence
Flourishd, since mute, to som great cause address,
Stood in himself collected, while each part,
Motion, each act won audience ere the tongue,
Sometimes in highth began, as no delay [675]
Of Preface [brooking](#) through his Zeal of Right.
So standing, moving, or to highth upgrown
The Tempter all impassiond thus began.
O Sacred, Wise, and Wisdom-giving Plant,
Mother of [Science](#), Now I feel thy Power [680]
Within me cleere, not onely to discern
Things in thir Causes, but to trace the wayes
Of [highest Agents](#), deemd however wise.
Queen of this Universe, doe not believe
Those rigid threats of Death; [ye shall not Die](#): [685]
How should ye? by the Fruit? it gives you Life
[To Knowledge](#), By the Threatner, look on mee,
Mee who have touch'd and tasted, yet both live,
And life more perfet have attaind then Fate
Meant mee, by ventring higher then my Lot. [690]

Shall that be shut to Man, which to the Beast
Is open? or will God incense his ire
For such a petty Trespass, and not praise
Rather your dauntless vertue, whom the pain
Of Death denounc't, whatever thing Death be, [695]
Deterr'd not from atchieving what might leade
To happier life, knowledge of Good and Evil;
Of good, how just? of evil, if what is evil
Be real, why not known, since easier shunn'd?
God therefore cannot hurt ye, and be just; [700]
Not just, not God; not feard then, nor obeyd:
Your feare it self of Death [removes the feare](#).
Why then was this forbid? Why but to awe,
Why but to keep ye low and ignorant,
His worshippers; he knows that in the day [705]
Ye Eate thereof, your Eyes that seem so cleere,
Yet are but dim, shall perfectly be then
Op'nd and cleerd, and ye shall be as Gods,
Knowing both Good and Evil as they know.
That ye should be as Gods, since I as Man, [710]
[Internal Man](#), is but proportion meet,
I of brute human, yee of human Gods.
So ye shall die perhaps, by putting off
Human, to put on Gods, death to be wisht,
Though threat'nd, which no worse then this can bring. [715]
And what are Gods that Man may not become
As they, [participating God-like food](#)?
The Gods are first, and that advantage use
On our belief, that all from them proceeds;
I question it, for this fair Earth I see, [720]
Warm'd by the Sun, producing every kind,
Them nothing: [If they](#) all things, who enclos'd
Knowledge of Good and Evil in this Tree,
That whoso eats thereof, forthwith attains
Wisdom without their leave? and wherein lies [725]
Th' offence, that Man should thus attain to know?
What can your knowledge hurt him, or this Tree
Impart against his will if all be his?
Or is it envie, and can envie dwell
In Heav'nly brests? these, these and many more [730]
Causes import your need of this fair Fruit.
Goddess humane, reach then, and freely taste.
He ended, and his words replete with guile
Into her heart [too easie entrance](#) won:
Fixt on the Fruit she gaz'd, which to behold [735]
Might tempt alone, and in her ears the sound
Yet rung of his perswasive words, [impregn'd](#)
With Reason, to her seeming, and with Truth;
Mean while the hour of Noon drew on, and wak'd
An eager appetite, rais'd by the smell [740]
So savorie of that Fruit, which with desire,
[Inclinable](#) now grown to touch or taste,
Sollicited her longing eye; yet first
Pausing a while, thus to her self she mus'd.
Great are thy Vertues, doubtless, best of Fruits. [745]
Though kept from Man, and worthy to be admir'd,

Whose taste, too long forborn, at first assay
 Gave elocution to the mute, and taught
 The Tongue not made for Speech to speak thy praise:
 Thy praise hee also who forbids thy use, [750]
 Conceales not from us, naming thee the Tree
 Of Knowledge, knowledge both of good and evil;
 Forbids us then to taste, but his forbidding
 Commends thee more, while it inferrs the good
 By thee communicated, and our want: [755]
 For good unknown, sure is not had, or had
 And yet unknown, is as not had at all.
[In plain](#) then, what forbids he but to know,
 Forbids us good, forbids us to be wise?
 Such prohibitions binde not. But if Death [760]
 Bind us with after-bands, what profits then
 Our inward freedom? In the day we eate
 Of this fair Fruit, our doom is, we shall die.
 How dies the Serpent? hee hath eat'n and lives,
 And knows, and speaks, and reasons, and discerns, [765]
 Irrational till then. For us alone
 Was death invented? or to us deni'd
 This intellectual food, for beasts reserv'd?
 For Beasts it seems: yet that one Beast which first
 Hath tasted, envies not, but brings with joy [770]
 The good befall'n him, [Author unsuspect](#),
 Friendly to man, farr from deceit or guile.
 What fear I then, rather what know to feare
 Under this ignorance of good and Evil,
 Of God or Death, of Law or Penaltie? [775]
 Here grows the Cure of all, this Fruit Divine,
 Fair to the Eye, inviting to the Taste,
 Of vertue to make wise: what hinders then
 To reach, and feed at once both Bodie and Mind?
 So saying, [her rash hand](#) in evil hour [780]
 Forth reaching to the Fruit, she pluck'd, she eat:
 Earth felt the wound, and Nature from her seat
 Sighing through all her Works gave signs of woe,
 That all was lost. Back to the Thicket slunk
 The guiltie Serpent, and well might, for Eve [785]
 Intent now wholly on her taste, naught else
 Regarded, such delight till then, as seemd,
 In Fruit she never tasted, whether true
 Or fansied so, through expectation high
 Of knowledg, nor was God-head from her thought.

(And you thought Iago was good at deception!)