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The Descent of Ancient Night Upon Heav'n: An Addition to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book Three

Ted Snyder

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Online Winter Seminar

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Abstract

The overall concept that I work from in this addition to *Paradise Lost* is a rather Satanic move. Satan plays with Eve's understanding of the Tree of Knowledge in Book 9, changing the idea of "forbidden Tree of Knowledge" to "Tree of Forbidden Knowledge." Similarly, when I saw that God was hidden behind "unapproached light" (3.4-5), I wondered, is this unapproached or unapproachable? Milton states unapproached, which implies that it can be approached, and thus it seems that God is hiding. Also, Milton personifies the non-Biblical Chaos and his court (2.959-967), which makes me wonder, why? Milton does not specify that God created them. God is referred to as increate (3.6), which does not mean everything else is the creation of God. Night is even referred to as eternal (3.18), which suggests that Night is not a creation of God. Also, is God merely increate from the perspective of humans and angels, a story he has told his creations to hide his own creation? Often times in mythology Chaos predates Order (and it may be implicit in Genesis 1). If Chaos predated God, then it seems that Chaos could be God's creator. This would connect the Abrahamic mythos to other proximate mythoses. In the Egyptian mythos, for example, the first beings created are twins, a brother and sister, which would suggest that God would have a sister. If God is light (as Milton makes clear), then the sister is dark, or eternal Night, eldest of all things. Another motivation for creating this addition comes from the ranks of the divine in *Paradise Lost* being primarily male, which seemed an imbalance in the original. (Milton does state that the celestials could take either sex, but despite this, they manifest as male.) Of the limited female divine or semi-divine characters within the text, Night appeared the most logical candidate for empowerment. For context, these lines occur in Book 3, immediately prior to the shift to Satan. Thus, as the angels sing, praising the Father and the Son, Night fills the sky, causing their fingers to misplay upon their harps and their eyes to not see. As Satan had just visited Chaos and Night prior to these events, it seems appropriate for Night to come visit, in turn, God. Night is introduced using mythological allusions, following Milton's style, without regard for the reader's comprehension. Thus, Night is referred to as the Egyptian sky goddess, Nuit (pronounced as a single syllable ["Newt"]), and the Babylonian goddess of chaos, Tiamat (417418). As Milton is wont to do,

Tiamat is not referred to by name, but by reference ("Marduk's foe"). Next, the phrase "cloud / Of light" is broken by a line break, indicating how Night has pierced God's cloud. This is followed by a Miltonian "darkness visible" term, "fuligin effluence." (419) Fuligin is black; effluence is radiance, often associated with light and used as a God word, but the darkness of God's own sister would equal his light, and thus the phrase displays her equivalent power. As fuligin does not appear in my *Shorter OED*, I believe Gene Wolfe coined it. Thus, it is an allusion his *Book of the New Sun*, where he defines fuligin as the color darker than black. As Milton filled the poem with allusions, this, as well as Wolfe's definition, seemed appropriate. "Dim suffusion" (420) references Milton's blindness, in terms that he used, and it seemed that, when indicating the effect Night's arrival has on the celestial beings, Milton would focus upon her darkness removing their sight (which is similar to God's light being blinding, again, showing their equivalence). The blindness referred to as "blighting" (420) comes from the descriptions of the leper house later in the poem. Her power is such that the blindness seems like a disease, which is otherwise unknown in Heaven. When Night is named, she has a line of her own: "Eldest of all, she, *ancient Night* arrived." (422) Stating "she" within the middle of the line not only adds a much-needed syllable, but it also interrupts the flow the text, causing the reader to slow down and consider the text, which is a technique Milton has used repeatedly. I do not know if I need to comment on the irony of her genuflecting before launching into what I hope is a withering incrimination of God. Milton's use of alliteration was challenging to replicate. The most notable example comes as part of Night's condescension to God, where she refers to him as "a prince of plenty" (426). This is a reference to Charles II and the extravagance of his reign as well as a reference to God's need for making things to surround and praise him. This also leads to the next allusion. Just as Cronos gained his power from castrating his father, Uranus, I have God responsible for de-eyeing Chaos (428-429). Of course, Freud has pointed out the associations between a man losing his eyes and castration; Milton, being sensitive to his own blindness, could unconsciously seize upon this image. If God's power comes from his removal of Chaos's eyes, which would be logical if God was indeed the creation of Chaos, then we have a solution to God's omniscience (it came from one of Chaos's eyes) and for his hiding behind unapproached (not unapproachable) light. God does not want his creations to see his use of Chaos's eye for omniscience (432-436). (An objection could be Chaos's utter lack of power in *Paradise Lost*; however, bear in mind that God has castrated him and stolen his power, and now Chaos is impotent like Uranus. Also, note that both in Genesis and in *Paradise Lost* God creates out of Chaos – God cannot create *de novo*, it seems, and thus, his castration of Chaos matches with the source material.) A modern reader would also see the term "googly orb" (434) and realize that the eye strapped to God's forehead appears as a googly eye, like is used on dolls and stuffed animals. No wonder God needs to hide. Throughout the text I try to work in line breaks to emphasize words and phrases. Line 426 starts with "King of this Heav'n"; line 430 starts with "Your desire for creation." In both cases, this is for emphasis. Line 432 starts with "Oculus." I am concerned that with the denseness of the text readers might overlook that God's creations are made of the stuff of Chaos's eye ("Whom of your / Wing'd flock know themselves as substance of his / Oculus?" [430-432]), so starting with this word helps the reader follow along. Also, as God wears Chaos's other eye on his forehead, the source of his omniscience, line 436 starts with "Omniscience" for emphasis. Next, I use Milton's technique of varying capitalization to differentiate between darkness and Darkness. The first describes Satan, who is a shadow cast by God's light (439). This is a darkness that is created by God, different from the original Darkness. The text suggests that Satan, known for his beguiling ways, may have beguiled God into thinking that Satan's darkness is true Darkness, and thus Satan's lack of threat is a sign of God's power (440-442). However, darkness existed before Satan (Night is the eldest of all things within Milton's poem), and this is true Darkness, indicated by a capital letter (443). The idea of darkness / Darkness also is seen in the earlier use of fuligin as the color darker than black; doubtlessly fuligin is Darkness. These lines end with irony. Night has just chastised God for his desire to create (which we see throughout *Paradise Lost*) and for his desire for praise from his creations (another reoccurring theme), yet using power from Chaos to do so. The angels, having been blinded, must be experiencing fear, as they think none can match God in power. When Night leaves and vision returns, they praise God because they realize their powerlessness without

him, and they praise what he values most of all, his creations. However, as God has just been reminded of the fallacy within his ability to create, they are praising him for his deception. I would imagine the shame upon God would be overwhelming.

The Descent of Ancient Night Upon Heav'n

An Addition to John Milton's *Paradise Lost*, Book Three

by

Ted Snyder

The Argument: God hath foretold the Fall of Man through *Satan's* treachery and impudence, and as punishment, declares that Man and his Progeny must dye. Meek, the Son begs for Grace, offering his life for mankind's own; and hence God accepts and orders the Son's exaltation above all others mortal and divine. Choruses of Angels strike their harps and sing the glory of the God-head, Father and Son. Unbeknownst to all, *ancient Night* has flown from her throne at the side of *Father Chaos*. From above, she watches the divinities who reside in Heaven.

416 But harps tended by fingers divine struck
Foule, whilst overhead, like *Nuit* outstretched,
Or *Marduk's* foe, fell swift upon the cloud
Of light, a fuligin effluence vast,
420 Blighting all eyes with a dim suffusion.
Alighting before the high throne she came,
Eldest of all, she, *ancient Night* arrived.
Genuflecting, the *prima soror* spake:
Greetings I bring from *Father Chaos*, or
425 Have you forgotten your own kin, styled
King of this Heav'n, a prince of plenty? When
Your halls ring with Hosannas, does it seem
Your actions are now justified, stolen
From our progenitor's visage to meet
430 Your desire for creation? Whom of your
Wing'd flock know themselves as substance of his
Oculus? Hide thee in unapproached light
Lest they see upon thy clear brow a strap
Bearing the googly orb ye pulled forth from
435 The visage of *Chaos*, now font of thine
Omniscience? Ho, enough. Whilst thou taketh
From thy progenitor's realm, bethink thy
Brilliance and its antipodes. Recall
This *Satan*, but a poor shadow of thee,
440 His darkness weak, and mayest beguile thee
To think thy light unending, for shadow
Is not dark Night, shadow but creation

Of light, yet true Darkness knows no casting.
Remember, and despair at the sight of
445 These sable wings. Thus Eternal Darkness,
Night, rose, permitting sight to those Powers
Who, prostrating themselves, let forth praise for
Heav'n's King, louder, glorying creation.

A Few Words About "The Descent of Ancient Night Upon Heav'n"
(author's comments).

The overall concept that I work from in this addition to *Paradise Lost* is a rather Satanic move. Satan plays with Eve's understanding of the Tree of Knowledge in Book 9, changing the idea of "forbidden Tree of Knowledge" to "Tree of Forbidden Knowledge." Similarly, when I saw that God was hidden behind "unapproached light" (3.4-5), I wondered, is this unapproached or unapproachable? Milton states unapproached, which implies that it can be approached, and thus it seems that God is hiding. Also, Milton personifies the non-Biblical Chaos and his court (2.959-967), which makes me wonder, why? Milton does not specify that God created them. God is referred to as increate (3.6), which does not mean everything else is the creation of God. Night is even referred to as eternal (3.18), which suggests that Night is not a creation of God. Also, is God merely increate from the perspective of humans and angels, a story he has told his creations to hide his own creation? Oftentimes in mythology Chaos predates Order (and it may be implicit in Genesis 1). If Chaos predated God, then it seems that Chaos could be God's creator. This would connect the Abrahamic mythos to other proximate mythoses. In the Egyptian mythos, for example, the first beings created are twins, a brother and sister, which would suggest that God would have a sister. If God is light (as Milton makes clear), then the sister is dark, or eternal Night, eldest of all things.

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Roll Me, Softly

by

R. L. Boyer

I met you again, on the other side, late last night.

With a still, light touch you turned my perfect body

into a smooth, round stone—as tiny as a grain of
sand, a crystal ball shot through with rose. Then, I felt

you roll me, softly, through velvet fingertips, like an

Angel rolling the door from the Nazarene's tomb.