

## Material Dwellings in *Paradise Lost*\*

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*Paradise Lost* tells the stories of men, God and Devil in three geographical spaces: the Heaven, the Hell and the garden of Eden. By sorting out the traces of “things” in the epic, this study holds that Milton presents the readers with the lives of men, God and Devil in three different material dwellings. Combined with the “animism materialism” proposed by John Milton when he responds to the philosophical controversy of early modern “spirit and matter”, this study observes and appreciates the daily life of the three material dwellings in *Paradise Lost* from new materialism criticism. Thus, Heaven, Eden and Hell in the epic are not empty imaginations of the poet, but spaces with secular things that we can recognize. Milton uses secular things and three material dwellings full of things to show his understanding of a real Paradise.

*Keywords:* material dwellings, the Heaven, the Hell, the garden of Eden, paradise

### Introduction

At the age of 16, Milton was determined to create an epic in the paradigm of Homer and Virgil. *Paradise lost* was written in 1667. The publication of the epic in 1668 made it Milton’s one of the most famous works and one of the most influential epics in the history of western literature since Homer and Virgil. However, different from the theme of traditional western epic, *Paradise Lost* does not praise the achievements of the great heroes of ancient Greece, but narrates the lives of human being, God and Devil in three different geographical spaces by adapting the story of Adam and Eve, the ancestors of mankind, who were tempted by serpent to eat the forbidden fruit of knowledge from the Bible.

Scholars notice the three geographical spaces full of things described in the epic, namely the Heaven, Hell and the garden of Eden. In the study of Baroque Literature in the 16th and 17th centuries of Europe, Lihui Liu (2018) points out that “architecture in the Hell can only be a parody of heavenly architecture, and brilliance is only an appearance, which can not evolve into real sanctity” (p. 189). Blair Walden (1990) states that the fragrance and gold paved road in Heaven are often used to symbolize the oppression of the monarch in Renaissance literature, thus demonstrating that Milton’s God is the image of an imperial king (p. 236). Although scholars pay sporadic attention to the things in the epic, they all tend to regard things as symbols with religious or political significance, thus ignore the importance of “things” themselves in the work. The truth is, things

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constitute three complete and different material dwellings for characters in the epic: Heaven, Eden and Hell. The three material dwellings full of things are the important background for the development of the epic story.

In Book 5, God sends Archangel Raphael to teach Adam who living in the garden of Eden for reminding him that he would face the invasion of Satan. During the conversation, Raphael taught Adam that the principle of God's creation was "One first matter all" (5. 469-90), which means all existence in the world is composed of the same matter. Matters are different from degrees, not kind. Here is the question. Why does Milton want to depict such a world composed of same matter? In his theological work *De Doctrina Christiana*, he clarified his understanding of the world and uncover the mystery. *De Doctrina Christiana* is Milton's systematic arrangement of the Bible based on "the word of God" (Milton, 1973, p. 127). When explaining people's understanding of God, Milton points out that human beings tend to describe God in a way that they can understand. However, what we outline is not the real appearance of God, but the specific image of God within the scope that we can understand (Milton, 1973, p. 134). In fact, the real God himself is omniscient and incomprehensible. At the same time, Milton states that God is the omnipotent and good. All matter are created by God, so God himself is the source of all exist. Considering the exist of "sin", Milton declares that sin does not come from the good God. Sin is formed when God's creation invades its possession when it tries to occupy other things God creates.

At the beginning of the epic, Milton directly stated that the purpose of his creation of the epic was to "justify the ways of God to men" (1. 25-6). Thus, the purpose of Milton's writing is to present "the way of God" to people in a way we can recognize and understand.

### **Material World of "Animist Materialism"**

To understand the geographical space full of things in Milton's poetry, we must understand Milton's conception of the world, that is, his understanding of ontology. To deeply understand the formation of his thoughts, we need trace back to its contemporary historical background and ideological sources. The seventeenth century England, in which Milton lived, was an era of great political and religious turbulence in British history. It was also an era of very active humanistic thought. Philosophers at that time had a heated debate on the existence of "spirit and matter". Milton himself, as a politician and thinker, has been actively concerned about the fate of the country and the development of society. He has made unremitting progress in knowledge to complete his destiny as a "prophet poet". Naturally, Milton participated in the philosophical disputes at that time.

On the relationship between spirit and matter, Descartes, the founder of modern western rationalist philosophy, advocated the dualism of mind and body, that is, spirit and body exist independently. Descartes pointed out that the spirit or human mind can only be understood as inseparable. He believes that objects or bodies and souls are two non interfering entities created by God. The body will die, and the soul will not die; The soul is conceptual, and the body is functional. therefore, spirit and object are two completely different beings (Descartes, 1992, p. 50). Hobbes, as one of the philosophers who had the greatest influence on British thought at that time, was also the first Mechanical materialist who systematically put forward the world outlook of mechanical materialism in modern times, boldly denied the existence of immaterial (Hobbes, 1992, p. 102). Hobbes expounds that the material thing in charge of human thinking is the human brain. Marx believes that Hobbes's view is that thinking must not be separated from thinking matter. Matter is the subject of all changes. In a word, for Hobbes, all existence is material, and the so-called spirit is just absurd existence.

In response to the fierce debate on “spirit and matter” at that time, Milton gradually formed his own “animism materialism” monism. Stephen Fallon (1991) combed in detail the formation process of Milton’s “Animism Materialism” and pointed out that Milton’s thought was mainly influenced by Plato and Renaissance Platonism. He believed Milton experienced the process of gradual transition from early dualism to late monism from his literary works (p. 179). Seth Herbst (2017) believes that the ideological traces of Milton’s monistic materialism can be seen in Milton’s poems as early as in 1629 (p. 38). N. K. Sugimura (2009) pointed out that Milton was influenced by Aristotle. She thinks Milton formed his own understanding of the material world, and endowed material diversity in his literary creation (p. 165). In Milton’s view, all existence is composed of the same matter, which is flowing and living. In the Book 5 of *Paradise Lost*, he made a literary expression of the philosophical thinking of “animism materialism”. Before the fall of mankind, God sends Archangel Raphael to the garden of Eden to warn Adam and Eve to be careful against the invasion of Satan. During the conversation, Adam and Eve provide food to Raphael thus introduce the topic he wants to know about the life of the inhabitants of Heaven. Raphael answers as follows :

O Adam, one Almighty is, from whom  
 All things proceed, and up to him return,  
 If not depriv’d from good, created all  
 Such to perfection, one first matter all,  
 Indu’d with various forms, various degrees  
 Of substance, and in things that live, of life;  
 But more refin’d, more spiritous, and pure,  
 As neerer to him plac’d or neerer tending  
 Each in thir several active Spheres assignd,  
 Till body up to spirit work, in bounds  
 Proportiond to each kind. So from the root  
 Springs lighter the green stalk, from thence the leaves  
 More aerie, last the bright consummate floure  
 Spirits odorous breathes: flours and thir fruit  
 Mans nourishment, by gradual scale sublim’d  
 To vital Spirits aspire, to animal,  
 To intellectual, give both life and sense,  
  
 Fancie and understanding, whence the Soule  
 Reason receives, and reason is her being,  
 Discursive, or Intuitive; discourse  
 Is ofttest yours, the latter most is ours,  
 Differing but in degree, of kind the same. (5. 469-90)

It can be seen that Milton has a complete set of ideas about ontology. As Raphael said, it is the Almighty God who created all things in the world. God is the origin of all exist. God created all things in different forms. Although all things exist in different forms, they are essentially composed of the same matter. The difference between all beings lies not in their composition, but in the degree of composition. At the same time, all things are constantly changing and flowing. They can approach God with the degree of purification, and degenerate into thicker substances because of the decline in turbidity. As Fallon (1991) illustrates, Milton’s animism holds that spirit and matter are only a form of tangible existence, and their difference lies in the degree rather than the

essence. Therefore, Milton's spirit is not an existence coexisting with other beings, but contains the existence of things (p. 102). Milton's difference in all things is actually the difference in "kind". Thus, Milton's "animism materialism" advocates that the soul is a substantive and tangible matter, and things are layered and flowing.

Milton constructed the world in *Paradise Lost* on the basis of "animism materialism". Although critics represented by Samuel Johnson (2006) believe that Milton's poetry is uncoordinated because the whole epic narrative is full of confusion between spirit and matter (p. 109). William Kerrigan (1983) believes that the success of *Paradise Lost* lies largely in the poetic effect of ontological defense Milton made (p. 230). Milton not only expressed his views on things, but also directly responded to the biggest philosophical controversy over his time. In his view, God created all things, and all existence is composed of the same matter. In fact, in Milton's works, we can see things in Heaven, Hell and the garden of Eden. Different from the vague and untouchable world in the traditional description, Milton's Heaven, Hell and Eden are quite concrete.

Heaven in *Paradise Lost* is not abstract to readers. Geographically, God threw Satan and the rebels from heaven, "Nine times the Space that measures Day and Night" (1. 50). In the whole universe, Heaven is above, Earth is in the middle, and Hell is below. Heaven occupies the highest position in the whole universe. In the unreachable heaven, God and angels are the residences. The archangels with power live in their own palaces. They will consult with God in Heaven. The boundary of heaven is "from thir blissful Bowers /Of Amaranthin Shade, Fountain or Spring" (11. 79). It is surrounded by high walls and guarded by sentries.

The images of God and angels in Heaven are also very specific. C. S. Lewis (1969) once asserted that Milton's God is unpopular precisely because Milton's God is no longer as terrible, mysterious and vague as the traditional image of God (p. 130). Milton's God is not the traditional mysterious image of God. He sits in the court of heaven, assembles the angels together, and make a voice to convey instructions to the son of God and the angels. In addition, angels can "see, smell, touch, taste,/ Tasting concoct, digest, assimilate,/ And corporeal to incorporeal turn" (5. 411-13). Milton's angels are "nor in mist, the common gloss" (5. 435). They have "real hunger" (5. 437). So they have the appetite for food and the can digest foods they eat. When the angel visited the garden of Eden, Adam asked Eve to take out the stored food for entertainment, When Adam was wondering is what he provided suitable. Raphael not only sat with Adam and Eve to eat. He also tells Adam that angels need food like people. Milton's depiction of Heaven in secular palaces is often wrongly interpreted as that heaven is Milton's empire (Evans, 1996, p. 130). In fact, Milton's paradise is not only the place where God and angels live, but also the metaphor of the ultimate paradise that people want to pursue.

In the epic, Hell is at the bottom of the universe. Although Satan encouraged his rebel angels to "make a Heav'n of Hell, a Hell of Heav'n" (1. 255). From the description of their living environment, the contrast to the Hell where the fallen angels live and God's Heaven is very clear. Here, there are "Adamantine Chains and penal Fire" (1. 48). The non luminous flame burns on the scorched earth filled with stenchs and poisonous flame. They built "Pandæmonium" to imitated the palaces in Heaven, with gold roof, "Doric pillars overlais/ With Golden Architrave" (1. 714-715), but actually they have no choice to live in another place.

The archangels before the fall were covered with incomparable brilliance, which was even brighter than the stars. After the fall, they are something like corpses. They "lay floating" (1. 196), "Chain'd on the burning Lake, nor ever thence/ Had ris'n or heav'd his head" (1. 210-11). Although they have not lost the shape of angels, all the glory of angels have been lost, and now they lie randomly in the Hell. The assembled angels no longer have the

light steps when walking in heaven, but “walkt with to support uneasie steps” (1. 295). Their glory disappeared with the changes of their body. Rebellious angels are lying like the dead, with sad and worried. Everything in Hell shows a miserable life of them.

Eden is the human world built by God after the fall of archangels. Under observation of Satan, the picture of the garden of Eden gradually unfolds. Vegetation surrounds the wall of the garden of Eden. The trees in the forest are full of golden fruits. The sunshine, sunset glow and rainbow are beautiful. The breeze blows, the air is fresh. All are bursts of beautiful and pleasant scenery. Trees with noble colors, fragrance and taste grow here. Pearls and gold sands, all kinds of famous flowers, precious trees, and fragrant liquid can be found in Eden. Fruits, sheep, roses, vines, grapes, lakes, birds and eternal spring, this natural scene shows the treasure placed by God in the garden of Eden, just like “a Heaven on Earth” (4. 208).

When living in the garden of Eden, Adam and Eve have divine looks with “Truth, wisdom, Sanctitude severe and pure” (4. 293). After Satan arrived in the garden of Eden, he saw God created human being in his own image. Adam was witty and brave and Eve was soft and attractive. All the animals around them play freely. Milton shows the reader a scene in which the perfect ancestor of mankind lives in a real geographical space.

Thus, the poet depicts three material dwellings full of things. In his literary world, the poet also mentioned their similarities many times when describing Heaven, Hell and the garden of Eden. For example, the garden of Eden is built in the shape of Heaven, and man is created in the shape of God. The palace in Hell is built in imitation of the palace in Heaven. The rebel angels living in Hell look like the angels in Heaven. After betraying God, they were demoted to hell and their body shape changed. These three different worlds are full of the same material existence, but it is impossible for readers to confuse these three worlds. Milton’s three material worlds are composed of the same things, but they are very different, and the differences in the three worlds also bring readers completely different feelings.

### **Things and Differences: What is a Real Paradise?**

New Materialism pays attention to the “materiality” and “object shape” of things, and the microscopic material details such as the shape, color, attribute and location of things are endowed with cultural connotation and aesthetic meaning (Han, 2017, p. 95). Bill Brown (2015) uses “other things” to refer to “the thing of an object” and “object shape” (p. 291). Milton’s “animism materialism” holds that the difference of all things lies in species and shape, which coincides with the “materiality” advocated by the theory of New Materialism to some extent. Like New Materialism, Milton dispels the existence of subject and object. To them, things are not more passive existence. On the contrary, the materiality of things constructs different worlds and the real paradise in Milton’s world.

In *Paradise Lost*, the Archangel Raphael sent by God stressed in his teaching to Adam that human knowledge should “not surpassing human measure” (7. 640). Here, Raphael described to Adam the two material worlds, that is Heaven and Hell outside the garden of Eden which men live in. In the dialogue, Raphael asked Adam to tell about the memory of his life. Adam described the garden of Eden according to his memory since he comes to exist. When critics discuss Heaven, they often think that Milton’s Heaven is the epitome of the political society at that time. J. Martin Evans (1996) demonstrated that Milton’s God and Heaven were full of allusions to the colonial empire (p. 65). Richard Strier (2012) compares Heaven and the garden of Eden in poetry and

proposes that when reading poetry, people will feel that heaven is only a background place where rebellion occurs, rather than a real paradise (p. 44). Indeed, Heaven in poetry often receives little attention. On the one hand, It is because Heaven seems to be described unconstantly in the context of the dialogue between God and the son of God and Satan's rebellion. On the other hand, it is because the details of Heaven scattered in the text. Therefore, Heaven in the pic is often regarded as a fragment described intermittently in the chorus of war, flowers and angels, rather than a stable and complete description like that of Eden and Hell.

Scholars generally accept this idea and believe that Milton's writing of Heaven is bound by the text of the Bible (Gardner, 1965, p. 55). However, some scholars believe that the poet depicts an "unusual paradise" different from the traditional sense (Fallon, 1991, p. 81). Although critics have made various explanations for the description of Heaven, they all ignore the existence of Heaven as a perfect paradise in Milton's literary world under the construction of Milton's thought of "one first matter all".

In Milton's works, all beings are dynamic and active. As Maurice Merleau-Pony (1964) put forward, the presence of things makes us "trapped in things", and our bodies are "things in things" (p. 163). In poetry, all existence is same matter. Angels, human beings and Deils live in a universe full of things. Milton presents a real ideal paradise with the material image of his poetry, "which is often a symbolic image that the author intends to express in the text, closely related to the theme" (Han, 2016, p. 73). Gold can be seen everywhere in the epic. Good angels's crowns are made of "Amarant and Gold" (3. 352). In a society with complex political hierarchy, precious properties such as crown, jewelry, feather cloak, or exquisite silk will accumulate historical significance and make their economic and aesthetic values become absolute values and exceed the values of all similar things (Meng, 2008, p. 162). Here, the gold on the crown and the immortal flower together mean eternity and immortality. In addition, the golden altar of Heaven is equipped with an incense burner, which emits the natural fragrance that can improve thinking. The "Kingly Palace Gate/ With Frontispice of Diamond and Gold/ Imbellisht, thick with sparkling orient Gemmes" (3. 505-507). The weapons of trained heavenly soldiers decorated with gold and diamonds. The "golden Sclaes" (4. 997) appeared when God intervened in the angel War. The kingdom of Heaven is a beautiful divine existence created by God.

On the contrary, rebellious angels have been trying to build palaces like Heaven after their fall. They build the land with gold and build the golden throne. They pursue the happy world built with gold in heaven, but their world is full of miserable. By peeping at the dark and rough material deep underground, their weapons are used to destroy others. Milton directly criticizes in his poetry that the fallen human beings kill each other with the same weapon. Therefore, the rebel angels rely on the form and appearance of gold to build the golden world. It is just an imitation of form, and it also reveals the information of material degeneration everywhere.

Sound is another important material existence of *Paradise Lost*. Herbst (2017) points out that Milton's monism and his thinking on music affect each other. He believes that Milton's music is a part of Milton's chain of material existence (p. 37). Gordon Teskey (2006) pointed out that music is constantly formed and sounded in the universe created by Milton and formed by God's matter (p. 86). Milton's material world is full of different music. Music not only exists on the form of matter, but also exerts force on other things.

Millions of spiritual Creatures walk the Earth  
Unseen, both when we wake, and when we sleep:  
All these with ceaseless praise his works behold

Both day and night: how often from the steep  
 Of echoing Hill or Thicket have we heard  
 Celestial voices to the midnight air,  
 Sole, or responsive each to others note  
 Singing thir great Creator: oft in bands  
 While they keep watch, or nightly rounding walk,

With Heav'nly touch of instrumental sounds  
 In full harmonic number joind, thir songs  
 Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to Heaven. (4. 677-88)

The music in Heaven can affect Adam and Eve thus sublimate their thoughts. Praise to God is like music, which can purify people's thoughts. In addition, even the geographical exist in nature will be influenced, "To Hill, or Valley, Fountain, or fresh shade/ Made vocal by my Song, and taught his praise" (5. 203-204). It can be seen that the music of Heaven, as a material existence, can arouse the thoughts of other beings in the world. In Hell, music is formed by a variety of musical instruments, such as trumpets, horizontal flutes. The music of hell makes the audience "ravishment (2. 554) the music, which inspired the army, "of Flutes an soft Recorders" (1. 551). These sounds made by real musical instruments are related to emotions such anguish, doubt and fear. Different music produces different forces and effects. The wonderful heavenly music purifies people's spirit, while the turbid noise in Hell is just a catalyst for pain.

In terms of smell, the aroma of Hell brings people physical and mental pleasure. Angels take the "Heav'nly fragrance filld/ The circuit wide" (5. 286-87). In the garden of Eden, Satan smelled "vernal aires" (4. 265), "pure now perer aire" (4. 153), "Native perfumes" (4. 158), which made people feel "Vernal delight and joy" (4. 155) and "pleas'd" (4. 163). Smell in Heaven and Eden makes everything happy. Heaven is with "grateful smell" (4. 165), and Eden's residence is "With flourets deck't and fragrant smells" (5. 379). All the smells in Heaven and Eden are beautiful existence. However, Hell is filled with burning sulfu, a poisonous stench, "related to the fire that destroyed Sodom and Gomorra and the pursuit of alchemy" (Holly, 2018, p. 231) used to mark guilty people. When Satan is mentioned, it is the fishie fume (4168). Sin and Death, "snuff'd the semll/ Of mortal change on Earth" (10. 272-73), smells of "living Carcasses design'd/ For death" (10. 277-78). From the smell, Milton depicts a different world that people yearn for and disgust.

In terms of diet, human food is basically similar to angel food. "With Angels Food, and rubied Nectar flows/ In Pearl, in Diamond, and massie Gold,/ Fruit of delicious Vines, the growth of Heav'n." (5. 633-35). The archangel told Adam that God, like man, has an appetite, but the diet should follow certain restraint to meet the appetite, but with meats and drinks they had suffic'd / Not burd'nd Nature (5. 450-51). The devil's diet is always related to greed. Death, son of Satan and Sin not only devours his mother, but also "with eternal Famin pine" (10. 597). Satan and his rebels greedily picked beautiful fruits after becoming snakes. However, apple turns to "bitter Ashes" (10. 567). Milton was influenced by the Christian thought of moderation. He believed that the restraint of food was also the promotion of virtue, and the lack of moderation was the manifestation of depravity.

After Eve and Adam broke the commitment with God, their appearance changed. First of all, the appearance that originally symbolized their innocence was lost, and they began to decorate their appearance with clothes. With this loss of innocence, you feel that all their strength has been shaved just like Samson. Strength is lost here

as a material thing. Then they began to cry. After Adam realized that he had eaten the forbidden fruit of knowledge after his fall.

Before Adam and Eve fell, he praised Adam and Adam's beauty with words. Every appearance of Adam and Eve is accompanied by a description of their beauty. Adam was handsome and tall, and Eve was Adam's partner. When Eve first met Adam, she even felt that Adam was not as beautiful as herself. But because of Adam's wisdom and reason, Adam was in a dominant position in the garden of Eden. However, after they ate the forbidden fruit of knowledge, there was no description of their beauty. Adam and Eve's daily clothes are also defiled and stained. They covered the private parts of their body with leaves, the earliest clothes for human beings. Milton associates spiritual degeneration with external image change.

### Conclusion

God created all things, and all things show God's divinity in different forms. In this sense, the degeneration of spirit is also shown through external forms. Even the same substance has different implications. And the true virtue is manifested not only through the heart, but also through the outside. However, if we blindly pursue the imitation of external forms, it is impossible to create a real paradise. Milton's Christian identity makes him create an ideal paradise according to the standards of Christian doctrine. Stout(2005) pointed out that the material world is a part of personal experience and writing for writers (p. 7). Gold is the sacred manifestation of heaven, but the blind pursuit of gold decoration is the manifestation of depravity. Beautiful music can arouse inner pleasure, and noisy music is the embodiment of degeneration. The smell of heaven is refreshing, while hell is often associated with stench. The ideal diet are restrained, while greed is the manifestation of sin. The change of appearance is also related to the change of heart. Milton shaped his paradise with his Christian ethics.

*Paradise Lost* depicts the real paradise in Milton's idea by his describing of the stories that take place in the three material worlds. With the help of these seemingly ordinary details of daily life, Milton decrypted his vision of paradise: a world full of happiness and joy. In the world composed of all things, all beings can bring a pleasant feeling, so that people can constantly rise in the spirit mountain to get close to God. In the same world composed of things, things full of divinity and goodness can produce a pleasant feeling, which is a real paradise that people can realize.

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