Reinventing the Classroom Edition: *Paradise Lost* Book IX Flash Audiotext

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Abstract

In the spring of 2005, a grant from the University of Texas at Austin made possible the development of a digital classroom edition of *Paradise Lost*, John Milton's seventeenth-century poem. The resulting prototype "audiotext" of Book Nine of the twelve-book epic incorporates and synchronizes text, explanatory notes, and audio within a Flash interface that resembles a book lying open on a table.

Poster Abstract

In the spring of 2005, Professor John Rumrich and I applied for and received a grant from the University of Texas at Austin to develop a digital classroom edition of *Paradise Lost*, John Milton's seventeenth-century poem. Our prototype "audiotext" of Book Nine of the twelve-book epic incorporates and synchronizes text, explanatory notes, and audio within a Flash interface that resembles a book lying open on a table. It uses a karaoke-style moving highlight to indicate the line currently being played in the audio track and a stationary highlight to mark annotated words and phrases. The application allows students to read the notes with less disruption to the reading experience than is possible with footnotes or endnotes: when the audiotext is in annotation mode, notes replace the text on the page opposite the one being read/heard. During audio playback, furthermore, the pages turn automatically, largely alleviating the interruption of page-turning and so encouraging users to continue reading. The guiding principle of our interface runs counter to that of hypertext theory and praxis — we seek to keep the user centered and focused on the primary text, which students find difficult to read due to its intricate syntax and archaic expressions. To facilitate an adequate depth of immersion, we avoid implementing potentially distracting website features that are useful in some contexts but have made reading literature online an unappealing prospect for many: hyperlinks, pop-up windows, and scrollbars. The audio voiceover serves to increase reading comprehension and confidence by allowing users to listen to experienced readers whose understanding of the poem is communicated through vocal pacing and inflection. The audiotext's combination of oral and visual language is especially fitting for an epic poem like Paradise Lost, which the blind Milton dictated to scribes. In alternative viewing modes, students can type and save their own notes and display a semi-diplomatic transcript of our 1674 copy-text (with a font similar to the original) in parallel with our modernized, annotated, reading (and listening) text. We have recently added audiotexts of books one and two of the epic to the project website at http://www.laits.utexas.edu/miltonpl.

Poster

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http://www.laits.utexas.edu/miltonpl
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