

Victor Hugo's *Et nox facta est* (*And There Was Night*) part of the unfinished epic poem: *The End of Satan*

I

He¹ had been falling in the abyss some four thousand years.

Never had he yet managed to grasp a peak,

Nor lift even once his towering forehead.

He sank deeper in the dark and the mist, aghast,

Alone, and behind him, in the eternal nights,

His wing feathers fell more slowly still.

He fell dumbfounded, grim, and silent,

Sad, his mouth open and his feet towards the heavens,

The horror of the chasm imprinted on his livid face.

He cried: "Death!" his fists stretched out in the empty dark.

Later this word was man and was named Cain.²

He was falling. A rock struck his hand quite suddenly;

He held on to it, as a dead man holds on to his tomb,

And stopped. Someone, from on high, cried out to him: "Fall!

The suns will go out around you, accursed!"

And the voice was lost in the immensity of horror.

And pale, he looked toward the eternal dawn.

The suns were far off, but shone still.

Satan raised his head and spoke, his arms in the air:

"You lie!" This word was later the soul of Judas.³

Like the gods of bronze erect upon their pilasters,

He waited a thousand years, eyes fixed upon the stars.

The suns were far off, but were still shining.

The thunder then rumbled in the skies unhearing, cold.

Satan laughed, and spat towards the thunder.

Filled by the visionary shadow, the immensity

Shivered. This spitting out was later Barabbas.⁴

A passing breath made him fall lower still.

II

The fall of the damned one began once again.—Terrible,

Somber, and pierced with holes luminous as a sieve,

The sky full of suns withdrew, brightness

Trembled, and in the night the great fallen one,

Naked, sinister, and pulled by the weight of his crime,

Fell, and his head wedging the abyss apart.

Lower! Lower, and still lower! Everything presently

Fled from him; no obstacle to seize in passing,

No mountain, no crumbling rock, no stone,

Nothing, shadow! And from fright he closed his eyes.

And when they opened, three suns only

Shone, and shadow had eaten away the firmament.

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All the other suns had perished.

III

A rock

Emerged from blackest mist like some arm approaching.

He grasped it, and his feet touched summits.

Then the dreadful being called Never

Dreamed. His forehead sank between his guilty hands.

The three suns, far off, like three great eyes,

Watched him, and he watched them not.

Space resembled our earthly plains,

At evening, when the horizon sinking, retreating,

Blackens under the white eyes of the ghostly twilight.

Long rays entwined the feet of the great exile.

Behind him his shadow filled the infinite.

The peaks of chaos mingled in themselves.

In an instant he felt some horrendous growth of wings;

He felt himself become a monster, and that the angel in him

Was dying, and the rebel then knew regret.

He felt his shoulder, so bright before,

Quiver in the hideous cold of membraned wing,

And folding his arms with his head lifted high,

This bandit, as if grown greater through affront,

Alone in these depths that only ruin inhabits,

Looked steadily at the shadow's cave.

The noiseless darkness grew in the nothingness.

Obscure opacity closed off the gaping sky;

And making beyond the last promontory

A triple crack in the black pane,

The three suns mingled their three lights.

You would have thought them three wheels of a chariot of fire,

Broken after some battle in the high firmament.

Like prows, the mountains from the mist emerged.

"So," cried Satan, "so be it! I can see!

He shall have the blue sky, the black sky is mine.

Does he think I will come weeping to his door?

I hate him. Three suns suffice. What do I care?

I hate the day, the blueness, fragrance and the light."

Suddenly he shivered; there remained only one.

IV

The abyss was fading. Nothing kept its shape.

Darkness seemed to swell its giant wave.

Something nameless and submerged, something

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That is no longer, takes its leave, falls silent;
And no one could have said, in this deep horror,
If this frightful remnant of a mystery or a world,
Like the vague mist where the dream takes flight,
Was called shipwreck or was called night;
And the archangel felt himself become a phantom.
He shouted: "Hell!" This word later made Sodom.⁵
And the voice repeated slowly on his forehead:
"Accursed! All about you the stars will go dark."
And already the sun was only a star.

V

And all disappeared slowly under a veil.
Then the archangel quaked; Satan learned to shiver.
Toward the star trembling livid on the horizon
He hurled himself, leaping from peak to peak.
Then, although with horror at the wings of a beast,
Although it was the clothing of imprisonment,
Like a bird going from bush to bush,
Horrendous he took his flight from mount to mount,
And this convict began running in his cell.
He ran, he flew, he shouted: "Star of gold! Brother!"⁶

Wait for me! I'm running! Don't go out yet!
Don't leave me alone!"

Thus the monster
Crossed the first lakes of the dead immensity,
Former chaos, emptied and already stagnant,
And into the lugubrious depths he plunged.
Now the star was only a spark.
He went down further in universal shadow,
Sank further, cast himself wallowing in the night,
Climbed the filthy mountains, their damp gleaming front,
Whose base is unsteady in the cesspool deeps,
And trembling stared before him.

The spark

Was only a red dot in the depth of the dark abyss.

VI

As between two battlements the archer leans
On the wall, when twilight has reached his keep,
Wild he leaned from the mountain top,
And upon the star, hoping to arouse its flame,
He started to blow as upon some ember.
And anguish caused his fierce nostrils to swell.

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The breath rushing from his chest
Is now upon earth and called hurricane.
With his breath a great noise stirred the shadow, an ocean
No being dwells in and no fires illumine.
The mountains found nearby took their flight,
The monstrous chaos full of fright arose
And began to shriek: Jehovah Jehovah!
The infinite opened, rent apart like a cloth,
But nothing moved in the lugubrious star;
And the damned one, crying: "Don't go out yet! I'll go on!
I'll get there!" resumed again his desperate flight.
And the glaciers mingled with the nights resembling them
Turned on their backs like frightened beasts,
And the black tornadoes and the hideous chasms
Bent in terror, while above them,
Flying toward the star like some arrow to the goal,
There passed, wild and haggard, this terrible supplicant.
And ever since it has seen this frightening flight,
This bitter abyss, aghast like a fleeing man
Retains forever the horror and the craze,
So monstrous was it to see, in the shadow immense,

Opening his atrocious wing far from the heavens,
This bat flying from his eternal prison!

VII

He flew for ten thousand years.
For ten thousand years,
Stretching forth his livid neck and his frenzied hands,
He flew without finding a peak on which to rest.
The star seemed sometimes to fade and to go out,
And the horror of the tomb caused the angel to shiver;
Then a pale brightness, vague, strange, uncertain,
Reappeared: and in joy, he cried: "Onward!"
Around him hovered the north wind birds.
He was flying. The infinite never ceases to start again.
His flight circled immense in that sea.
The night watched his horrible talons fleeing.
As a cloud feels its whirlwinds fall,
He felt his strength crumble in the chasm.
The winter murmured: tremble! And the shadow said: suffer!
Finally he perceived a black peak far off
Which a fearsome reflection in the shadow inflamed.
Satan, like a swimmer in his effort supreme,

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Stretched out his wing, with claws and bald, and specter-pale,
Panting, broken, tired, and smoking with sweat,
He sank down on the edge of the abrupt descent.⁷

VIII

There was the sun dying in the abyss.
The star, in the deepest fog had no air to revive it,
Grew cold, dim, and was slowly destroyed.
Its sinister round was seen in the night;
And in this somber silence its fiery ulcers were seen
Subsiding under a leprosy of dark.
Coal of a world put out! torch blown out by God!
Its crevices still showed a trace of fire,
As if the soul could be seen through holes in the skull.
At the center there quivered and flickered a flame
Now and then licking the outermost edge,
And from each crater flashes came
Shivering like flaming swords,
And fading noiselessly as dreams.
The star was almost black. The archangel was tired
Beyond voice or breath, a pity to see.
And the star in death throes under his savage glance,

Was dying, doing battle. With its somber apertures
Into the cold darkness it spewed now and again
Burning steams, crimson lumps, and smoking hills,
Rocks foaming with initial brightness:
As if this giant of life and light
Engulfed by the mist where all is fading,
Had refused to die without insulting the night
And spitting its lava in the shadow's face.
About it time and space and number,
Form, and noise expired, making
The forbidding and black oneness of void.
Then the specter Nothing⁸ raised its head from the abyss.
Suddenly, from the heart of the star, a jet of sulphur
Sharp, clamorous like one dying in delirium,
Burst sudden, shining, splendid with surprise,
And lighting from far a thousand deathly forms,
Massive, pierced to the shadow's depths
The monstrous porches of endless deep.
Night and immensity formed
Their angels. Satan, wild and out of breath,
His vision dazzled and full of this flashing,

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Beat with his wing, opened his hands and then shivered
And cried: "Despair! see it growing pale!"
The archangel understood, as does the mast in its sinking,
That he was the drowned man of the shadows' flood;
He furled once more his wing with its granite nails,
And wrung his hands. And the star went out.

IX

Now, near the skies, at chasm's edge where nothing changes,
One feather escaped from the archangel's wing
Remained and quivered, pure and white.
The angel on whose forehead the dazzling dawn is born
Saw and grasped it, observing the sublime sky:
"Lord, must it too fall into the abyss?"
God turned about, absorbed in being and in Life,
And said "Do not discard what has not fallen."⁹

* * *

Black caves of the past, porches of time passed
With no date and no radiance, somber, unmeasured,
Cycles previous to man, chaos, heavens,
World terrible and rich in prodigious beings,
Oh fearful fog where the preadamites

Appeared, standing in limitless shadow.
Who could fathom you, oh chasms, oh unknown times.
The thinker barefoot like the poor,
Through respect for the One unseen, the sage,
Digs in the depths of origin and age,
Fathoms and seeks beyond the colossi,¹⁰ further
Than the facts witnessed by the present sky,
Reaches with pale visage suspected things,
And finds, lifting the darkness of years
And the layers of days, worlds, voids,
Gigantic centuries dead beneath giants of centuries.
And thus the wise man dreams in the deep of the night
His face illumined by glints of the abyss.

~the Latin title of the poem suggests the biblical "And there was light" (Genesis 1:3)

1. **He**—Satan, formerly the rebellious Archangel Lucifer, thrown out of Heaven by God (Revelation 12:7-9 and Isaiah 14:12)
2. **Cain**—the first murderer, son of Adam and brother of Abel, the victim (Genesis 4:1-15)
3. **Judas**—Judas Iscariot, the apostle who betrayed Jesus (Matthew 26:47-50, 27:3-5)
4. **Barabbas**—the condemned criminal who was freed instead of Jesus (Mark 15: 6-15)
5. **Sodom**—biblical city, with Gomorrah a symbol of corruption and decadence. Both were destroyed by God (Genesis 18:20-19:28)
6. **Star of Gold! Brother!**—Lucifer means "Light Bearer"
7. **abrupt descent**—literally, escarpment, the steep wall before a fortification or cliff
8. specter **Nothing**—Satan
9. In the second part of *The End of Satan*, "Satan's Feather," the feather is brought to life by a divine glance and becomes the female spirit Liberty. She wins God's permission to plunge into Hell in an attempt to redeem her father (Part III), and in Part IV, the repentant Archangel is released and recreated as Lucifer.
10. **colossi**—giants of preadamite time