

Here is a brief passage from *Paradise Lost* and two very differently inadequate paraphrases of it: one from the 18th century, one from the 21st. These paraphrases can help us see just how much Milton's language is doing that has nothing to do with what it means.

Nor was his name unheard or unadored
In ancient Greece and in Ausonian land.
Men called him Mulciber, and how he fell
From Heav'n, they fabled, thrown by angry Jove
Sheer o're the crystal battlements. From morn
To noon he fell, from noon to dewy eve,
A summer's day, and with the setting sun
Dropt from the zenith like a falling star
On Lemnos th' Aegean isle: thus they relate,
Erring. For he with this rebellious rout
Fell long before, nor aught availed him now
T' have built in Heav'n high tow'rs; nor did he 'scape
By all his engines but was headlong sent
With his industrious crew to build in Hell.

Paradise Lost (1.738-51)
Norton Critical Edition, Gordon Teskey (editor)
(1674 / 2004)

In Greece long since, and in Ausonian land,
Men call'd him Mulciber, the god of fire;
And fabled that he fell from heav'n's high battlements,
Thrown down by Jove for his enormous make:
From morn to noon, from noon to night, he fell,
A summer's day before he reach'd the Earth,
And falling upon Lemnos broke his leg,
And limping walk'd a cripple ever after.
Thus they relate, but erring—for he fell
With this rebellious rout long time before;
His wickedness beyond his art prevailing,
His heav'n-built palaces avail'd him not,
For he and all his crew were headlong sent
To try their structure-raising skill in Hell.

*A New Version of the Paradise Lost, or Milton Paraphrased. In
which the Measure and Versification are Corrected and
Harmonized*, George Smith Green. (1756)

His name was also known in ancient Greece
and Italy. Men called him Vulcan, the softener
of metal, and related in fable how, thrown
from Heaven by angry Jove, from morn to
noon to summer's eve he dropped from the
zenith like a falling star on the Aegean isle of
Lemnos. So they told the story, erringly, for he
with his rebellious company fell long before.
His high towers built in Heaven did not save
him, nor his forged machines of war. Along
with his industrious crew was he sent
headlong, to build in Hell.

Paradise Lost: The Novel,
Joseph Lanzara
(2008)