

Genesis A lines 104-22

Genesis A is one of two Old English poems recounting events relating to the Biblical book of Genesis (the other enjoying the imaginative epithet *Genesis B*). It is one of our oldest surviving Old English poems, probably being composed in the eighth or ninth century. This extract aims to help you—with assistance in the tutorial—to read some of its magnificent account of the Creation for yourself in the original language. I've provided contextual glosses in Modern English, and emphasised continuity in the language by giving some of the less obvious Modern English relatives of some of the Old English words in square brackets. Old English poetic metre is unlike later English metres: lines are divided into two halves, linked not by rhyme but by the alliteration of the first stressed syllable in each. Vowels alliterate with one another. To help you follow this, I've **emboldened** metrically alliterating letters. The passage given comes after an account of Satan's fall, and corresponds to GEN 1:1–2. John Milton almost certainly knew of *Genesis A*, and parts of it may have had some influence on *Paradise Lost*. You can find a prose translation in S. A. J. Bradley (ed. and trans.), *Anglo-Saxon Poetry* (London: Dent, 1982), p. 15.

Ne wæs hēr þā gīet nymþe heolstersceado	ne not; wæs was; hēr here; þā then; gīet yet; nymþe except; heolstersceado darkness-shadow [for heolster- cf. <i>Hell</i> : both originally had meanings to do with hiding things]
wiht geworden, ac þes wīda grund	wiht a thing [cf. <i>not</i> , <i>nowt</i> , <i>nought</i> < <i>ne an wiht</i> 'not one thing']; geworden become, happened (so ne wæs ... geworden means 'had not happened, had not come into being') ac but, rather; þes this; wīda wide, broad; grund expanse [cf. ground]
stōd dēop and dim, drihtne fremde,	stōd stood; dēop deep; and and; dim dark; drihtne is an inflected form of <i>drihten</i> 'lord', meaning 'to/ from the lord'; fremde foreign, estranged (so drihtne fremde means 'foreign to the Lord, estranged from the Lord')
īdel and unnyt. On þone ēagum wlat	īdel desolate (cf. <i>idle</i>); unnyt useless; on on; þone that; ēagum is a plural inflected form of <i>ēage</i> 'eye', meaning 'with eyes'; wlat looked
stiðfrihþ cining, and þā stōwe behēold,	stiðfrihþ strong-spirited; cining king; þā stōwe that place (<i>stow</i> still occurs a lot in place-names, such as West Stow 'place to the West'); behēold beheld
drēama lēase, gesēah deorc gesweorc	drēama is a plural inflected form of <i>drēam</i> 'joy', meaning 'of joys' [yes, it's the origin of <i>dream</i>]; lēase lacking, describing the <i>stōw</i> (so stōwe ... drēama lēase literally means 'place ... lacking of joys', or more idiomatically 'a joyless place'); gesēah saw; deorc dark; gesweorc clouds [cf. <i>swarthy</i>]
seomian sinnihte sweart under roderum,	seomian to hang, linger; sinnihte is an inflected form of <i>sinniht</i> 'perpetual night' meaning 'in perpetual night'; sweart black [another relative of <i>swarthy</i>]; under under; roderum is a plural inflected form of <i>rodor</i> 'sky, firmament' (so under roderum means 'under the skies')
wonn and wēste, oðþæt þeos woruldgesceaft	wonn dim; wēste empty [cf. <i>waste</i>]; oðþæt until; þeos = <i>þes</i> 'this'; woruldgesceaft world-creation
þurh word gewēarð wuldorcyninges.	þurh through; word word/words; gewēarð happened, came into being; wuldorcyninges is an inflected form of <i>wuldorcyning</i> meaning 'the wonder-king's' (so þurh word ... wuldorcyninges means 'through the wonder-king's words')
Hēr ærest gescēop ēce drihten,	hēr here; ærest first [cf. <i>ere</i> 'before']; gescēop created [cf. <i>shaped</i>]; ēce eternal; drihten lord

helm eallwihta, heofon and eorðan,

rodor aræerde, and þis rūme land

gestapelode strangum mihtum,

frēa ælmihtig. Folde wæs þā gýta

græs ungrēne; gārsecg þēahte

sweart synnihte, sīde and wīde,

wonne wægās. þā wæs wuldortorht

heofonweardes gāst ofer holm boren

miclum spēdum.

helm **protector** [cf. *helm(et)*]; **eallwihta** is an inflected form of **eallwiht** 'all things' meaning 'of all things' (so this means 'Here the eternal lord, protector of all creatures, created ...'); **heofon** heaven; **eorðan** earth
rodor sky, firmament; **aræerde** raised up; **þis** = *þes, þeos* this; **rūme** spacious [cf. *room*]; **land** land

gestapelode established; **strangum mihtum** is a plural inflected form of *strang miht* 'strong power', meaning 'with strong powers'

frea lord; **ælmihtig** almighty; **folde** the surface of the earth [related to *field*]; **þā** then; **gýta** yet

græs grass; **ungrēne** ungreen; **gārsecg** the sea; **þēahte** covered [cf. *thatched*]

sweart dark, describing *gārsecg*; **synnihte** = *sinnihte* in the perpetual night; **sīde and wīde** far and wide

wonne dark; **wægās** waves, tracks, ways; **þā** then; **wæs** was; **wuldortorht** wonder-bright, describing *gast*

heofonweardes heaven-guardian's [for *weard* cf. *ward(en), guard(ian)*]; **gāst** spirit [cf. *(holy) ghost*]; **ofer** over, across; **holm** sea; **boren** borne

miclum spēdum is a plural inflected form of *micel spēd* 'great success', meaning 'with great successes'