



“Me miserable!” Gustave Doré’s illustrated engraving for *Paradise Lost* (1866).

English S220E Milton

Department of English
Yale University, Summer 2022
May 30 – July 3

MW 7:30-8:30 p.m. (Eastern Standard Time)

<https://yale.zoom.us/j/98109600662>

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Overview

A study of John Milton’s poetry and his engagement with the cultural, social, and political struggles of the seventeenth century. We will explore Milton’s noisy effort to reinvent the sound and feel of English poetry. And we’ll confront his systematic attempts to use literature to force a rethinking of his age’s fractious engagement with questions of political sovereignty, slavery, terrorism, physical disability, the relation of the sexes, the right to divorce, the path to heavenly salvation, and the very identity of God himself. Along the way, we’ll observe Milton wrestle with the definition of the human being: is he or she fundamentally *individualist*, and thus predisposed to what we call “social distancing,” or is she or he fundamentally *sociable*, and thus most comfortable living in pairs or groups? Our main texts are Milton’s *Paradise Lost* and *Samson Agonistes*. At the term’s end, we will descend briefly into the hallucinatory, soul-shattering universe of William Blake, the late eighteenth-century poet and artist who experimented with his own versions of aspects of *Paradise Lost*. In Blake’s *The Book of Urizen*,

a graphic novel in verse, we'll find a grotesque and horrifying critique of Milton's representation of the creation of the universe.

Students will watch or listen to pre-recorded lectures, and will meet online for biweekly seminar discussions. Satisfies the Renaissance requirement for the English Major. Distributional Requirements: Humanities, Writing.

Course Texts

John Milton, *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon. ISBN-13: 978-0679642534

The online course lectures, recorded before the Kerrigan edition appeared, refer to the Merritt Hughes edition of Milton. A list of corresponding references to the more recent Kerrigan edition is given for each of the assigned lectures on the "Readings" page. All additional readings will be posted on Quercus.

Requirements

- Two papers (one 4-6 pp. and one 6-8 pp.) Suggested paper topics and guidelines will be distributed. Students will have the chance to revise and resubmit their first paper.
- Three short written responses posted online over the course of the term (see explanation below)
- Regular attendance and participation in biweekly online class meetings (see the schedule below). There are so few class meetings for this course, that missing even one session puts you at a real disadvantage. If for some reason you must miss a class, you are obliged to write two additional responses: one for the class you missed and one for the next class meeting. (In other words, that's two additional written responses for each class meeting you miss.)

Grade Breakdown: short essay (20%), long essay (40%), three responses (20%), attendance and participation (20%)

Schedule of Assignments

Page numbers refer to the Kerrigan edition. Copies or links to the readings for Monday, May 30 and Wednesday, June 1 are available on our Canvas website.

Monday, May 30 - Introduction: The Poet's Nativity

- "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity" (1629), pp. 18-30
- "At a Vacation Exercise in the College" (1628), pp. 11-15
- "Elegia sexta" (1629), pp. 190-193

Lecture 1: Milton, Power, and the Power of Milton

Lecture 2: The Infant Cry of God

Wednesday, June 1 - *Paradise Lost*: The Brightness Visible of Hell

Paradise Lost (1667), “The Printer to the Reader,” and Books I and II, pp. 291-358

Lecture 9: *Paradise Lost*, Book I

Lecture 10: God and Mammon: The Wealth of Literary Memory

Monday, June 6 - *Paradise Lost*: Hail Holy Light

Paradise Lost, reread Books I and II and lines 1-55 of Book III, pp. 293-362

Essays on Milton’s similes by Geoffrey Hartman (“Milton’s Counterplot”) and Stanley Fish (selection from *Surprised by Sin*), available on our Canvas website

Lecture 11: The Miltonic Simile

Lecture 12: The Blind Prophet

Wednesday, June 8 - *Paradise Lost*: Heaven and Earth

Paradise Lost, Book III, pp. 359-83

“The Christian Doctrine,” pp. 1159-1165, 1171-1181

Lecture 13: *Paradise Lost*, Book III

Paradise Lost, Book IV, pp. 384-417

Excerpts from Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan* (1650)

Lecture 14: *Paradise Lost*, Book IV

Friday, June 10 - Paper #1

Upload Paper #1 (4-6 pp.) to the “Essay 1 Submission” by midnight EST

Monday, June 13 - *Paradise Lost*: Flashback to the First Event in History

Paradise Lost, Books V and VI, pp. 418-75

Lecture 15: *Paradise Lost*, Books V-VI

Wednesday, June 15 - *Paradise Lost*: Creation Stories

Paradise Lost, Books VII and VIII, pp. 476-516

Lecture 16: *Paradise Lost*, Books VII-VIII

Monday, June 20 - *Paradise Lost: The Fall*

Paradise Lost, Books IX and X, pp. 517-84

Lecture 17: *Paradise Lost*, Book IX

Lecture 18: *Paradise Lost*, Books IX-X

Wednesday, June 22 - *Paradise Lost: The Aftermath of the Fall*

Paradise Lost, Books XI and XII, pp. 585-630

Lecture 19: *Paradise Lost*, Books XI-XII

Lecture 20: *Paradise Lost*, Books XI-XII (cont.)

Upload (optional) revision of Paper #1 to the “Essay 1 Revision Submission” by midnight

Monday, June 27 - Reading *Samson Agonistes* after 9/11

Samson Agonistes (1671), pp. 709-761

The Bible, Judges, chap. 13-16

Lecture 23: *Samson Agonistes*

“Of That Sort of Dramatic Poem Which is Call’d Tragedy,” pp. 707-709

“The Passion” (1630), pp. 30-33

Essays on Milton and terrorism by John Carey, “A Work in Praise of Terrorism?,” and D.D. Gutenplan, “Is Reading Milton Unsafe at Any Speed?”

Lecture 24: *Samson Agonistes* (cont.)

Wednesday, June 29 - *The Book of Urizen: A Decreation of Paradise Lost*

William Blake, *The Book of Urizen* (1794), including Blake’s illustrations

Sunday, July 3 - Paper #2

Upload Paper #2 (6-8 pp.) via the “Essay 2 Submission” by midnight EST.

Note about the required three short written responses:

Each student must produce three written responses over the course of the term. Each response should center on the specific passage noted, or the question asked, under the “Directed Reading Response” link of the “module” for each class meeting (beginning Wednesday June 1). Your contribution should be the length of a brief paragraph and should be posted on the course’s Canvas website before 5pm (Eastern Standard Time) on the day of our class meeting. You will likely find yourself sharing a prompt or passage with a fellow student, and so you can choose

whether to initiate a response (by clicking “reply” to the “Directed Reading Response” question itself, or by clicking “reply” to one of your classmate’s contribution to an ongoing discussion thread). Use these postings to share reflections, ask questions, launch arguments, express puzzlement, or do something else altogether, about the material assigned for the upcoming class.

You must also regularly read the online discussions, even when not assigned to post for that session. You may find that a point you articulated earlier has been taken up, agreed with, or, in the spirit of Miltonic disputation, even refuted.

Feel free to re-use any response you’ve written in one of the two essays. Just add a footnote indicating where you’d written that before. You may also refer in one of your essays to one of your classmate’s written responses, in which case you would also footnote the source.

Your three required responses must be spread out over the course of the term, with only one response for any given week. Be sure you’re posting a response for an upcoming class, and not a class meeting that has already occurred. If you for any reason must miss a class meeting, you are obliged to write two additional responses: one for the class you missed and one for the next class meeting. (In other words, that's two additional written responses for each class meeting you miss.)