

**Carleton University
Fall 2020
Department of English**

**ENGL 4301A / 5303F: John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and the Intellectual Tradition
Prerequisites: Fourth-Year or Graduate Standing**

**Location: Synchronous (on-line) Seminar
The course is located on my culearn page, enter Big Blue Button Session
Fridays: 2:30-5:30
Instructor: Donald Beecher
Email: donald.beecher@carleton.ca
Office: 1908 Dunton Tower (beginning next year)
Phone: 613 520 2600 ex. 2305
(It's a help line for atheists; no one answers)
Office Hours: By e-mail (send enquiries any time)**

Ideas into Experience: Milton's *Paradise Lost* as an Epic Encyclopedia

The stature of Milton's great poem needs no special defense; even Dryden acknowledged with admiration and regret that Milton had surpassed them all, without fully realizing that he had also brought to a close the age of the pansophic poem. It is a monumental work in so many ways, not the least of them its dramatic representation of ideas drawn from a lifelong program of reading and study. This course is designed to bring its members into a close encounter with the text and into dialogic exchange with others in the seminar engaged in a mutual discovery of some of the prevailing ideas that find representation in this work. Milton's epic was created at a moment in cultural and intellectual time, but the ideas themselves have histories going back to ancient, medieval and Renaissance sources. The history of ideas is a critical perspective in its own right, worth knowing about as a discipline, and worth mastering as a vehicle to a fuller understanding of literature in general. Just what those ideas may include will be yours to discover, but among the master concepts, you might find justice, obedience, punishment, angels, hell, salvation, eschatology, creation, reprobation, uxoriousness, the fortunate fall, dreams, memory, prayer, paradise, and honeymoon (I intentionally left out hero and predestination). Unfolding this poem in relation to its informing ideas is a rewarding experience, one that from class to class has never come close to repeating itself. The material is so rich, you could take this course over and over!

This course will deal with *Paradise Lost* as a work conceived after a lifetime of reading which prepared the author for his great task. The work is grounded not only in biblical culture, both Judeo as well as Christian, but in the Church fathers, the writers of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as in

Renaissance works ranging through all the received topics of that age. Our goal will be to identify as many of those sources and traditions as possible in working systematically through the text. Milton calls upon these multiple traditions both as a poet and as an apologist for the Christian world order, making *Paradise Lost* a contribution to the history of ideas by drawing upon a vast legacy. Our collective concern, then, is a hermeneutical one in relation to this encyclopedic tradition.

Each class meeting will be devoted to one of the twelve books. A small delegation of students, in accordance with our numbers, will provide a seriatim *explication* of each book in relation to its intellectual history. My estimate is that I will be calling on each of you to contribute in this manner three times during the term. These exercises will provide you with occasions to explore the theological, linguistic, poetic, historical, mythological, biblical, and scientific backgrounds to the poem, including Milton's own writings, such as the divorce tracts or *On Christian Doctrine*, in order to explicate the lines. The informing discipline behind all these presentations may variously be described as "intellectual history" or "the history of ideas," which is more than simple source studies. It is an important distinction. These presentations can be exploratory and methodologically experimental, to a degree. I will not be grading them, although they are a critical and requisite component of the course. The final grade will be based on two 7-9 page papers, each presenting a Miltonic "idea" in its historical context. The choice of topics is as vast as the poem itself, from angelology to zoology. I will be concerned with just how much of a sense of the history of that idea you can bring to Milton's development of it in the text. You will have to balance encyclopedic amplitude with Miltonic precision, making the bridge from historical meanings to the argument of the poem. These papers can, of course, make use of anything that you have presented in class, but they should reveal the greater rigor that one normally brings to cogent and concise written work, including a clear explication of ideas, problems, methods, and the measure of progress the paper contains in exposing those ideas.

Both papers are due on or before Friday, Dec. 11. This is, quite officially, the last day on which term work can be submitted in any course in the university—that's what I am led to understand in any case. But even if the dates could be fudged, let's not. Or I could set earlier dates and then we could negotiate up to Dec. 11. But does that make any sense? So plan for accommodating any or all of the following: computer failures, asteroid showers, shredder pets, flu, panic, family arguments, procrastination, flooding, shotgun weddings etc. You can deliver your papers to me as e-mail attachments.

Class performance philosophy: we become a kind of pedagogical committee of the whole in moving through a small part of the vast potential that constitutes the intellectual world of this generic poem of natural man in a divine cosmos. I would ask each of you to look for engaging ideas and perspectives to enlighten and challenge the class, and to present them with as much clarity and precision as you can. You are, during your presentations, the channel to an understanding of your chosen topic and thus a vital part of the learning experience of everyone present. You may work from a completed text in the manner of a conference paper, or from notes, elaborating on your ideas for a period of 20 minutes before we move to open discussion. That discussion and commentary should be a time of exploration, but also a time to listen for hints of early feedback, which is to say, impressions of the success of the paper and the cogency of its ideas. These are impressions and potential objections you will want to address or build on in the final papers. Make yourself as much of an expert on your ideas as your preparation time allows and do yourself proud. And for my own personal sake, I would ask you all to speak bravely, clearly, and audibly in complete sentences (!), after first adjusting your microphones to be audible. BBB seems to be a really effective delivery system, but in electronically distanced circumstances, there is always some loss of clarity and communication acuity. We all need to help each other in this regard, or we lose valuable time.

The course text is *Paradise Lost*, ed. Scott Elledge, New York, Norton, 1993. Other critical editions could also serve. I plan to order a few copies of this book for the bookstore, which, I'm told, they can relay to you in some manner! Or you may want to go on line early and find a cheap used copy, although mail delivery can be very slow. A text ready to hand during the seminars will be essential.

The meeting dates are as follows:

Sept. 11 Intro. to the work
Sept. 18 Book I
Sept. 25 Book II
Oct. 2 Book III
Oct. 9 Book IV
Oct. 16 Book V
Oct. 19-23 Study Break
Oct. 30 Book VI
Nov. 6 Book VII
Nov. 13 Book VIII
Nov. 20 Book IX
Nov. 27 Book X
Dec. 4 Books XI, XII

Requirements: All components of the course must be completed before a final grade can be assigned:
i.e. the seminar presentations and the two term papers.

As a fourth-year and graduate seminar, I'm assuming that your basic critical writing skills are all in place and that there is no need for formal coaching on the challenges of effective academic writing from the perspective of mechanics. I have used many style sheets in accordance with publishers' wishes throughout my career, so I consider none sacred, but whichever one you use you should employ consistently. At this juncture, the formal conventions, such as noun-verb agreements! and correct spelling, are largely a matter of courtesy to your reader and a display of care and professionalism as a writer. In terms of the expression of ideas in the most cogent, effective, and persuasive ways possible, we are all lifelong apprentices. Each paper will require consideration and judgement in relation to its unique materials. Advice at this point becomes platitudinous, really; all of us are largely alone in our struggles to put our ideas forward with clarity and conviction, strategizing the best order of presentation, and developing conclusions that reach for new insights and even new territories of understanding, while participating in the great scholarly dialogue that constitutes the meeting of minds around literary questions. This comes with practice and a critical rereading of what you have written, including what bits of time you can pledge for ideas to settle and mature. (The term, I know, is short.)

PLAGIARISM (The official university policy)

The University Senate defines plagiarism as "presenting, whether intentionally or not, the ideas, expression of ideas or work of others as one's own." This can include:

- reproducing or paraphrasing portions of someone else's published or unpublished material, regardless of the source, and presenting these as one's own without proper citation or reference to the original source;
- submitting a take-home examination, essay, laboratory report or other assignment written, in whole or in part, by someone else;

- using ideas or direct, verbatim quotations, or paraphrased material, concepts or ideas without appropriate acknowledgment in any academic assignment;
- using another's data or research findings;
- failing to acknowledge sources through the use of proper citations when using another's works and/or failing to use quotation marks;
- handing in substantially the same piece of work for academic credit more than once without prior written permission of the course instructor in which the submission occurs.

Plagiarism is a form of intellectual theft. It is a serious offence that cannot be resolved directly with the course's instructor. The Associate Deans of the Faculty conduct a rigorous investigation, including an interview with the student, when an instructor suspects a piece of work has been plagiarized. Penalties are not trivial. They can include failure of the assignment, failure of the entire course, or suspension from a program. For more information please go to: <https://carleton.ca/registrar/academic-integrity/>

I would add to this, that borrowing work to boost grades is also self-defeating because it deprives the fraudulent practitioner of precious opportunities to develop his or her own writing skills in anticipation of seeking employment where those deficiencies will have real and costly consequences. It is one of the most central and vital of learning outcomes in humanities-oriented programs where acute literacy and honed communication skills are among the leading goals. If learning about literature is the immediate goal, effective writing and analytical thinking based on textual analysis, methodological approaches, and research skills are the generic and long-term goals. These are the transferrable skills that will ultimately matter the most in the world at large.

REQUESTS FOR ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION

Academic Accommodation You may need special arrangements to meet your academic obligations during the term. For an accommodation request the processes are as follows:

Pregnancy obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

Religious obligation: write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. For more details click [here](#).

Academic Accommodations for Students with Disabilities: The Paul Menton Centre for Students with Disabilities (PMC) provides services to students with Learning Disabilities (LD), psychiatric/mental health disabilities, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), chronic medical conditions, and impairments in mobility, hearing, and vision. If you have a disability requiring academic accommodations in this course, please contact PMC at 613-520- 6608 or pmc@carleton.ca for a formal evaluation. If you are already registered with the PMC, contact your PMC coordinator to send me your Letter of Accommodation at the beginning of the term, and no later than two weeks before the first in-class scheduled test or exam requiring accommodation (if applicable). After requesting accommodation from PMC, meet with me to ensure accommodation arrangements are made.

Please consult the PMC website for the deadline to request accommodations for the formally-scheduled exam (if applicable).

Survivors of Sexual Violence

As a community, Carleton University is committed to maintaining a positive learning, working and living environment where sexual violence will not be tolerated, and where survivors are supported through academic accommodations as per Carleton's Sexual Violence Policy. For more information about the services available at the university and to obtain information about sexual violence and/or support, visit: <https://carleton.ca/equity/sexual-assault-support-services>

Accommodation for Student Activities

Carleton University recognizes the substantial benefits, both to the individual student and for the university, that result from a student participating in activities beyond the classroom experience. Reasonable accommodation must be provided to students who compete or perform at the national or international level. Write to me with any requests for academic accommodation during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist. <https://carleton.ca/senate/wp-content/uploads/Accommodation-for-Student-Activities-1.pdf>