

MILTON'S POETICS OF BECOMING

INSTRUCTING THE CONFLICTS IN *PARADISE LOST* AND ITS RECEPTION

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Why is Milton's poetry so open to re-reading? Why do so many of Milton's students not think what they used to think about *Paradise Lost*? In this course, we respond to the tumultuous reception history of John Milton's poetry, in particular his epic *Paradise Lost*, by examining his compositional mode as an invitation to repeated and revised interpretation. We familiarize ourselves with the seventeenth-century religious, political, and cultural events influencing Milton's poetry, but this is primarily a formalist account focused on a close reading of his texts. We begin with his shorter early verse; we look when necessary into his major prose; and we read in full the texts of *Paradise Lost*, *Paradise Regain'd*, and *Samson Agonistes*.

COURSE ARGUMENT

The Milton industry often broils with controversy over the state of his ideas, often forgetting to engage with those ideas on their own terms, which is to say as they function poetically. Had Milton, like Spenser, written a note articulating his "generall end...to fashion a gentleman," much of this controversy would be cleared up, I think, so long as it is remembered that Spenser and Milton have very different understandings of gentility. To have written that letter, though, would betray the stylistic core of *Paradise Lost*, which always aims to educate its readers by leading them to an interpretive impasse that must then be understood on its own terms and not explained away. At any rate, that letter would have indicated to Milton's audience that *Paradise Lost* is not a poem claiming to present ontological truths drawn from Milton's view of Christian universal history. Instead, Milton makes *Paradise Lost* a postlapsarian platform for epistemological education by way of incongruous interpretive experience. *Paradise Lost* consistently creates perceptual paradoxes for its readers that cannot be resolved without recourse to some grounds of truth that exist outside the poem, which is, in short, Milton's allegory for Christianity after the skeptical crisis.

I argue Milton aims not to *teach* (O.E. *tæcan*, "to show, point out") his readers the answers to the problems of Christian humanism but to *instruct* (L. *instruere*, "to build within") for them the complexity of those problems. Rather than indoctrinate his readers with a static set of privileged knowledge, Milton builds within his readers the capacity to gain knowledge themselves. It is the difference, Milton believes, between being *smart* (O.E. *smæart* "sharp, severe, stinging") and becoming *intelligent* (L. *intelligentia*, "understanding"). That is, *Paradise Lost* is a poem not of being but of becoming, especially insofar as he defines virtue not as performance of propriety but as choice of that performance.

This course uses a philosophical analytic – *being and becoming* – that is both ancient and modern to articulate the compositional mode Milton develops for an unrelentingly skeptical Christian poetry. After some preliminary discussion of Milton's use of important words and poetic devices – the Miltonic "seems" and the problem of semblance, the Miltonic "or" and the problem of choice – we contrast a poetics of being in Metaphysical verse and Milton's early attempts with his discovery of language as the unassailable divide that separates him from the possibility of accurately representing divinity and truth. We proceed, slowly, through *Paradise Lost*, where I hope to instantiate my understanding of Milton's compositional style and also demonstrate its predictably disconcerting effect on readers who have come to *Paradise Lost* over the ages. We conclude with a look at Milton's last two poems, *Paradise Regain'd* and *Samson Agonistes*, where I'll describe how the theology of Christian humanism transformed into an ironic rhetorical posture, and how Milton's irony is still useful for modern ethics.

REQUIRED TEXT

The Riverside Milton, ed. Roy Flannagan (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1998).

RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

The John Milton Reading Room, ed. Thomas H. Luxon (http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/reading_room/contents/index.shtml).
The Cambridge Companion to Milton, second edition, ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

MILTON'S POETICS OF BECOMING

INSTRUCTING THE CONFLICTS IN *PARADISE LOST* AND ITS RECEPTION

The Milton-L, ed. Kevin J. T. Creamer (<http://johnmilton.org/>).

Via the UCI Libraries' English and Comparative Literature Subject Guide
(<http://www.lib.uci.edu/online/subject/subpage.php?subject=engcomp>):

The Oxford English Dictionary

The New Princeton Encyclopedia of Poetry and Poetics

Cambridge Companions Complete Collection

MLA International Bibliography

Silva Rhetoricae (<http://rhetoric.byu.edu/>)

The Johns Hopkins Guide to Literary Theory and Criticism (<http://litguide.press.jhu.edu/index.html>)

COURSE SCHEDULE

- Session 1 The Marked Way: Readerly Becoming and Herman Melville's Private Encounter with Milton's Theology
Melville & Milton: An Edition and Analysis of Melville's Annotations on Milton (2004), ed. Robin Grey
Form and Freedom: Milton's Canonicity and T. S. Eliot's Readerly Becoming
T. S. Eliot, "A Note on the Verse of John Milton" (1936)
T. S. Eliot, "Milton" (1947)
Fish with Fish gan War: Readerly Becoming and the Status of Discovery in Stanley Fish's Essays on Milton
Stanley Fish, "Discovery as Form in *Paradise Lost*" (1967)
Stanley Fish, "Interpreting the Variorum" (1976)
Stanley Fish, "How Milton Works" (2001)
- Session 2 The Poetics of Being in Metaphysical Poetry
John Donne, *Poems* (1633): *La Corona* (ca. 1607-10)
Henry Vaughan, *Silix Scintillans* (1650): "Religion," "The British Church," "The Retreat," "Silence, and Stealth of Days!," "Peace," "Corruption," "Unprofitableness," "The Dawning," "The World," "Man,"
Henry Vaughan, *Silix Scintillans* (1655): "The Authors Preface to the Following Hymns" and "To my most merciful, my most loving, and dearly loved Redeemer"

BEING AND BECOMING IN MILTON'S EARLY VERSE

- Session 3 When Good and Evil Were Separable: Christian Heroism and a Poetics of Being in Milton's Early Verse
John Milton, *Poems* (1645): "On Time" (ca. 1626-37)
John Milton, *Prolusiones* (ca. 1625-32; p. 1674): I
John Milton, *Poemata* (1645): Elegy 6 (1629)
John Milton, *Poems* (1645): *On the Mourning of Christs Nativity* (1629)
- Session 4 "Imperfect words": Truth and Milton's Discovery of Language in "At a Vacation Exercise"
John Milton, *Prolusiones* (ca. 1625-32; p. 1674): III
John Milton, *Poems* (1673): "At a Vacation Exercise" (1628)
"We on Earth with undiscording voice": Sound, Sense, and Contingency in Miltonic Language
John Milton, *Prolusiones* (ca. 1625-32; p. 1674): II
John Milton, *Poems* (1645): "At a Solemn Musick" (ca. 1632-33)
John Milton, *Poems* (1673): "To Mr. H. Lawes, on his Aires" (1645)
- Session 5 The Truth about Knowledge: The Ontology of *Areopagitica* and Milton's Epistemology
John Milton, *Prolusiones* (ca. 1625-32; p. 1674): IV and VII
John Milton, *Areopagitica* (1644)
- Session 6 "Regaining to know God aright": Language, Sensation, and Milton's Theory of Habitual Education
John Milton, *Prolusiones* (ca. 1625-32; p. 1674): VI
John Milton, *Of Education* (1644)
- Session 7 Hence False Deciding Poet: Choice, the Miltonic "Or," and the Poetics of Becoming
John Milton, *Poemata* (1645): Elegy 6 (1629)
John Milton, *Poems* (1673): Sonnet 17 (ca. 1655)
John Milton, *Prolusiones* (ca. 1625-32; p. 1674): Proem to Prolusion III
John Milton, *Poems* (1645): "L' Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" (ca. 1632-33)
- Session 8 The Perfect Hero Left Unfinished: Christian Tragedy and the Poetics of Becoming in Milton's Early Verse
John Milton, *Poems* (1645): "On Time" and "Upon the Circumcision" (ca. 1626-37),
John Milton, *Poems* (1645): "The Passion" (ca. 1632-33)
Talent, Promise, and Disappointment: Suffering and Skepticism in Milton's Sonnets

MILTON'S POETICS OF BECOMING
INSTRUCTING THE CONFLICTS IN *PARADISE LOST* AND ITS RECEPTION

- John Milton, *Poemata* (1645): *Ad Patrem* (ca. 1631-32)
 John Milton, *Poems* (1645): Sonnet 7 (ca. 1632)
 John Milton, *The Reason of Church-Government* (1642): Proem to "The Second Book"
 John Milton, *Poems* (1673): Sonnet 19 (ca. 1652) and Sonnet 23 (ca. 1658)
- Session 9 Becoming Milton: Identity, the Irony of *Lycidas*, and the Poetics of Becoming
 John Milton, *Poems* (1645): *Lycidas* (1637)
- Session 10 Poetry in the "Wilde Wood" of Milton's *Maske*: Subjunction, Interrogation, and the Cultivation of an Active Audience
 John Milton, *A Maske Presented at Ludlow Castle* (1634; p. 1637)

THE IRONY OF HELL IN *PARADISE LOST*

- Session 11 Milton's Reader and Interpretive Contingency: Time and Experience in *Paradise Lost*
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): The Arguments
 Synesthesia in *Paradise Lost*: Inspiration by Dictation and Depiction in the Invocations
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 1.1-33, 3.1-55, 7.1-50, and 9.1-47
 Modes of Justification in the Age of Milton
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 1.1-33
- Session 12 Truth and Beauty: Potency, Morality, and the Miltonic Incommensurability of Divine and Human Sovereignty
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 1.1-330
 "New Names": Milton's Moralization of the Epic Catalog
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 1.331-620
 The Iconography of Pandemonium
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 1.620-797
- Session 13 Republicanism and Apostasy in Pandemonium: Experience, Authority, and the Ironic Narration of the Great Debate
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 2.1-628
 "Thou art my Father, thou my Author": Theology, Literary Theory, and the Creation of Sin
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 2.629-1055

THE IRONY OF HEAVEN IN *PARADISE LOST*

- Session 14 The Irony of Heaven in *Paradise Lost*
- Session 15 The Word of God: The Predicament of the Theology Lesson in Heaven
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 3.1-417
 "Directly": Divine Omniscience, Miltonic Cosmology, and Satan's Wandering Flight
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 3.418-742
- Session 16 "A happy rural seat of various view": The Shape of Paradise and the Labor of Cultivation in Milton's Eden
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 4.124-501 and 598-775
 Satanic Ethics: Opposition, Nominalism, and Contingency in the Nephrites Soliloquy
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 4.1-123, 502-597, and 776-101
- Session 17 "Yet Evil whence?": The Problem of Evil in Eden
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 5.1-219
 Milton's Problem with the Problem of Evil: Theodicy, the Father's Decree, and the Ontological Fallacy
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 5.219-571
- Session 18 Milton's *Of True Religion*: Christian Formalism and Limits of Toleration
 John Milton, *Of True Religion* (1673)
 Republicanism and Apostasy in Heaven: Politics, Theology, and the Irony of Miltonic Analogy
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 5.572-907
- Session 19 Panegyric or Parody?: Potency and the Miltonic Predicament of War in Heaven
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 6.1-669
 "Remember, and fear to transgress": Terrorism and the Anxiety of Evil
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 6.670-912

THE IRONY OF EDEN IN *PARADISE LOST*

- Session 20 The Irony of Eden in *Paradise Lost*
- Session 21 Negative Theology and the Language of Accommodation in the Creation of the World
 John Milton, *Paradise Lost* (1666, 1672): 7.1-640

MILTON'S POETICS OF BECOMING

INSTRUCTING THE CONFLICTS IN *PARADISE LOST* AND ITS RECEPTION

Session 22	“The prime Wisdom”: Prelapsarian Knowledge and the Irony of Milton’s Christian Humanism John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1666, 1672): 8.1-216
	“Of inward less exact”: Intelligence, Education, Mysogony, and the Etiology of the Fall John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1666, 1672): 8.217-653
	The Mystification of Marriage in Milton’s Divorce Tracts John Milton, <i>Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce</i> (1643)
Session 23	The Temptation of Trial: Sexism, Narcissism, and the Irony of the Perverse Event in Eden John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1666, 1672): 9.1-411
	New Laws, New Minds, New Councils: Reason and the Irony of Milton, Satan, and Eve on Trial John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1666, 1672): 9.412-838
	“We are one”: The Etiology and Effect of the Fall in <i>Paradise Lost</i> John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1666, 1672): 9.838-1189

THE POSTLAPSARIAN WORLD OF *PARADISE LOST*

Session 24	The Postlapsarian World in <i>Paradise Lost</i>
Session 25	The Miltonic Simile and Satan’s Metamorphoses: Figures of Justice and Revenge John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1666, 1672): 10.1-706
	“Discord first”: Tragedy and Postlapsarian Discourse John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1666, 1672): 10.706-1104
Session 26	“Good with bad expect to hear”: Tragedy, Discourse, and Milton’s Postlapsarian Epistemology John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1666, 1672): 11.1-901
Session 27	Readerly Becoming and the Miltonic Text: Interpretive Error in Adam’s Education John Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (1666, 1672): 12.1-648

CHRISTIAN HUMANISM IN MILTON’S FINAL POEMS

Session 28	The Absence of Emotion: Stasis, Certainty, and the <i>Sermo Humilis</i> in <i>Paradise Regain’d</i> John Milton, <i>Paradise Regain’d</i> (1670): Books I-III
	“But <i>Eve</i> is <i>Eve</i> ”: Intuition, Discourse, and the Irony of Milton’s Christian Humanism in <i>Paradise Regain’d</i> John Milton, <i>Paradise Regain’d</i> (1670): Book IV
Session 29	Broken Vows: Religious and Sexual Infidelity in <i>Samson Agonistes</i> John Milton, <i>Samson Agonistes</i> (1670): 1-996
	“All is best, though we oft doubt”: Milton’s Christian Skepticism in <i>Samson Agonistes</i> John Milton, <i>Samson Agonistes</i> (1670): 997- 1758
Session 30	How Milton Ought to Change After September 11: Revenge Tragedy and <i>Samson Agonistes</i> Stanley Fish, “Spectacle and Evidence in <i>Samson Agonistes</i> ” (1989) John Carey, “A Work in Praise of Terrorism? September 11 and <i>Samson Agonistes</i> ” (2002)

ASSIGNMENTS AND GRADING

My evaluation of your performance in this course will be based on eight papers of increasing sophistication, as well as some more routine forum posts:

Due	Weight	Assignment
Daily	10%	Forum posts, around 200 words each, due by midnight the night before class
Ses. 6	5%	250-word (two pages) exemplar of a passage in one of Milton’s early poems.
Ses. 11	5%	500-word (three pages) essay on <i>Lycidas</i> or the <i>Maske</i> .
Ses. 14	10%	750-word (three pages) essay on Milton’s Hell.
Ses. 20	15%	1000-word (four pages) essay on Milton’s Heaven.
Ses. 24	15%	1000-word (four pages) essay on Milton’s Eden.
Ses. 30	5%	500-word (two pages) essay on Milton’s Earth.
Final	5%	In-class essay on <i>Paradise Regain’d</i> or <i>Samson Agonistes</i> (student’s choice).
Final	30%	2,000-word (eight pages) research article to be developed and written in consultation with the instructor.

When evaluating student writing, my philosophy is to grade tough and offer tons of extra-credit. That is, I abide by the traditional scale in which a C really is average, and an A is something exceptional, but I want the option to

MILTON'S POETICS OF BECOMING

INSTRUCTING THE CONFLICTS IN *PARADISE LOST* AND ITS RECEPTION

reward improvement. The student who comes to my class with a gift for writing should have an A on his or her official transcript, and so should the student who couldn't construct a sentence at the start of the class but worked with me to write effective (even if not exceptional) papers. This system allows me to reward students for either an exceptional performance (they just write A papers because they're that good) or an exceptional effort (they work hard to improve their writing through the extra-credit assignments). There are several extra-credit exercises:

Due	Credit	Assignment
Various	2%	10-minute presentation, including at least one close reading, a thesis, and discussion questions.
1 wk. after rtn.	1-3%	Perform a substantial revision of a paper, based on instructor's comments.
Ses. 26	3%	Four-entry annotated bibliography for your research article.
Ses. 30	1%	Create an artistic response to <i>Paradise Lost</i> and present it to the class.

POLICIES

Reading: Reading assignments should be completed before the dates for which they are assigned (i.e. in time for class discussion).

Papers: Papers should be typed double-space in 12-point Times New Roman font, and printed on a laser-quality printer. They should be handed in on separate sheets of 8 1/2 X 11 paper, stapled in the upper left-hand corner. Margins should be one inch; paragraphs are to be indented one normal tab. Spaces should not be skipped between paragraphs. Bibliography and/or notes should follow MLA or Chicago Style.

Late Work: Late work will be marked down one-third of a grade (e.g. from a B to a B-) for each school day after the due date.

Attendance and Participation: I assume you will come to class, on time, and participate in our discussions, so you will not be graded on these points. Egregiously poor attendance (i.e. missing more than two classes) or egregiously poor participation (i.e. no questions or comments all quarter) will lower your final grade significantly. The upshot of my attendance and participation policy is that remarkably impressive students can expect me to raise their final grades. This policy is not arbitrary, but it is subjective, so you should do your best to get me to like you. The way to get me to like you is to come to class, always, and always prepared to contribute; make perceptive comments and ask intelligent questions in class discussion; come to office hours, and e-mail me, to discuss ideas; and be a generally decent human being.

Electronic Devices: Please don't use laptops, cell phones, and other electronic equipment, which offer too many temptations to your attention.

Plagiarism: All students are responsible for reading the UCI Academic Honesty Policy (see http://www.senate.uci.edu/9_IrvineManual/3ASMAApp.endices/App.endix08.html). If you have specific questions about what constitutes plagiarism, please ask. We shall approach our texts from a unique perspective, so it will be impossible for you to convincingly submit work that wasn't written for this class. That said, if you plagiarize work that you submit to me, I will do my best to make your life miserable, to the choral tune of an F for the course, a note on your official transcript, and a letter in your permanent file.

Disabilities: Students needing support services should contact the Disability Services Center at (949) 824-7494 (www.disability.uci.edu) as soon as possible to ensure that accommodations can be met in a timely manner.