

IDH2930: (Un)common Read:

Paradise Lost

LIT0117

Section 2324

Clay.greene@ufl.edu

Office Hours: Zoom by appointment

Course Description:

No work of Western literature approaches the ambition, scope, and cultural resonance of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The last true epic poem, *Paradise Lost* reimagines the foundational myth of Adam and Eve from the Book of Genesis in a narrative that also includes the fall of Lucifer and his rebellious fellow angels, the Creation and destruction of the world, and all cosmological and scientific knowledge as it existed in Milton's time. Every page of *Paradise Lost* displays Milton's dizzying mastery of classical and biblical mythology, but they also show the result of his penetrating investigation into the foundational questions of gender, politics, and religion. While in *Paradise Lost* Milton sets out to "justify the ways of God to men," he also famously creates the first sympathetic portrait of the Devil in Western literature, prompting William Blake to declare that Milton was "of the Devil's party without knowing it." Milton's famously idiosyncratic, difficult, and grand poetic style exerted enormous influence on generations of writers after him, as did his pathbreaking decision to write his great epic without rhyme. All this makes *Paradise Lost* a necessary rite of passage for any student of literature but also a vital resource for anyone grappling with the most basic questions of how to live a worthy human life.

Assignments:

In-class discussion: 13 meetings, 30% of final grade

One of my goals for this class is to promote our abilities to discuss ideas in a critical and argumentative fashion. This means *disagreement*, something I will promote. Often students quickly try to smooth out their disagreements with other students or with me. This is a lost opportunity. The pressure to defend positions, adapt arguments, and find evidence leads us into deeper knowledge and insight. *Paradise Lost* is complicated, varied, and often ambivalent. Don't let anyone tell you they have a definitive interpretation of the poem—not even Milton.

In concrete terms, a good rule of thumb for participation is to be prepared to make one substantive comment per class. If I have not heard on you for a while, I may call on you to give you the opportunity to earn your participation points. Questions or requests for clarification also count as good participation. All comments and questions are encouraged.

Online writing posts: 6 total, 30% of final grade

You have biweekly reading responses (350 words) due on Sunday evening at 8PM. These will be argumentative in nature. I will be posing a few questions (based on the key course topics) for the first, third, and fifth responses, while the second, fourth, and sixth responses will respond to

another student's response from the previous week. These responses support a key aspect of the course goal: to discuss and come to a conclusion about a complicated interpretive problem, while responding critically (though in a friendly way) to the work of your peers.

Final presentation (Argument on core issue): 30% of final grade

The final presentation is a critical argument delivered orally in class on one of the key topics of the class: 1) Devil's party or God's party? 2) Man's party or woman's party? 3) Freedom party or slavery party? The presentation must point directly to quotations, moments, and ideas in the text. It will last about 10 minutes. It should be tight, controlled, and directed, while also demonstrating your understanding of how to read a complex work of literature. You may deliver this presentation alone or in pairs.

Out of Class Lectures and Debates: 10 % of final grade

The Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education is hosting four events this semester designed to spur free speech and vigorous debate about the foundations of our political order and moral life. These will not be "agreement sessions," in which one side gets to do all the talking. With one exception, they pair a progressive and a traditionalist thinker on an issue of contemporary relevance; for instance, Professors Barnett and Berman will be discussing constitutional interpretation, an issue of primary importance in the wake of the *Dobbs* Supreme Court decision. You should attend these and listen carefully and save your reflections for our class. The material of these debates and lectures is of a piece with our classroom goal: to think rigorously, to debate freely, and to honor the intelligence and personhood of everyone, whether or not they agree with us on sensitive religious and political matters. Milton, the first author to argue strongly against censorship is our guide here: "I cannot praise a fugitive and cloistered virtue, unexercised and unbreathed, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race where that immortal garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat." You **must** attend at least two of these sessions, and attending more than two will count for either a missed assignment or a missed class day. Be sure to check in with me when you attend.

Class Schedule:

Week 1 (1/9): Course overview

Week 2 (1/23): "Introduction" to *Paradise Lost* and Book 1

Week 3 (1/30): Book 1 (cont)

(First online writing post due)

Week 4 (2/6): Book 2

Thursday 2/9 Debate on the American Founding, Professors Adam Smith (Oxford) & Patrick Griffin (Notre Dame)

4 PM Judaica Suite (Smathers Library)

Week 5 (2/13): Book 3

(Second online writing post due, response)

Week 6 (2/20): Book 4

Week 7 (2/27): Book 5
(Third online writing post due)
Week 8 (3/6): Book 6

Tuesday 3/7 Debate on How Should we Interpret the Constitution?, Randy Barnett (Georgetown) & Mitchell Berman (U. Pennsylvania)
4 PM Library East Room 100 (Smathers)

Week 9 (3/20): Books 7 & 8

Monday 3/20 Politics and Free Speech, Peter Berkowitz (Stanford)
4 PM Library East Room 100 (Smathers)

(Fourth online writing post due, response)

Week 10 (3/27): Book 9

Week 11 (4/3): Book 10

(Fifth online writing post due)

Week 12 (4/10): Books 11 & 12

Week 13 (4/17): Conclusion and/or Final in-class argument (depending on enrollment)

(Sixth online writing post due, response)

Thursday 4/20 What is “Western Civilization”?, Anthony Grafton (Princeton) and James Hankins (Harvard)
4 PM Library East Room 100 (Smathers)

Week 14 (4/24): Final in-class argument

Required Textbooks

Milton, John. *Paradise Lost*. Ed. David Scott Kastan. Hackett Publishing. ISBN-10: 0872207331.

Evaluation of Grades

Attendance and discussion 40%

Online writing posts 30%

Final presentation 30%

Out of class lectures 10%

Class Attendance and Make-Up Policy

Class attendance is expected and required. Attendance and discussion are 30% of the final grade, so each unexcused absence will result in a significant loss of points. Attending two out of class debates is also required and counts for 10% of the final grade. Attending more than two out of

class debates will count either for a missed assignment or a missed class day. The final project cannot be made up.

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting <https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/>. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at Gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge which states, “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”

The Honor Code (<https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduction-honor-code/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions. Furthermore, you are obligated to report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Instructor Biography

Clay Greene is a post-doctoral fellow at the Hamilton Center for Classical and Civic Education. He received his PhD in English and Renaissance Studies from Yale University and his BA and MA in English from the University of Alabama. He is interested in the connections of religion and politics in seventeenth-century English literature, especially the poetry of John Milton. He is currently completing a book on Milton and the Christian idea of "holy war." He likes to run, to walk, and to sit—in that order.