

**ENGLISH 5331**  
**MILTON**  
Spring 2002

Dr. Cannan  
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**Course Description**

John Milton is perhaps best remembered today as the beloved author of *Paradise Lost*, the greatest epic in the English language. But during his day, Milton had an international reputation as a propagandist, radical thinker, regicide, and, when *Paradise Lost* was published in 1667, an outcast. Although critics soon acknowledged his poetic merits, Milton's popular reputation in the eighteenth century was largely based on the success of lavish, operatic productions of *Comus*. And influential critics from Samuel Johnson to T. S. Eliot have had difficulty getting past Milton's controversial positions on politics and theology. Even as late as the 1960s, Milton's position in the canon was not assured. So why, at the beginning of the twenty-first century, does Milton warrant A Course of His Own? Over the course of the semester, we'll consider Milton's contribution to English literature as we read the major poetical works. In what ways does Milton adhere to and depart from existing literary models (English, Continental, and Classical)? What, according to Milton, was the societal function of poetry and drama? How did contemporary politics, morality, and his readership affect what he wrote? What kind of influence (literary and otherwise) did Milton have on other writers? A better understanding of Milton's life and poetic achievements will provide a valuable context for appreciating seventeenth-century English literature from Shakespeare to Dryden, and give us insight into modern critical practice and canon formation.

**Required Text**

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

You may also be asked to photocopy or download supplemental texts for class discussion.

**Discussion Schedule**

- 1/23 Course Introduction
- 1/28 Milton's Sense of Career: Prolusions III and VI; *Ad Patrem*, Excerpts from *Reason of Church Government Urged* and *Second Defence of the English People*
- 1/30 A On the Morning of Christ's Nativity
- 2/4 Prolusion I; AL=Allegro and All Penseroso
- 2/6 ALycidas, Sonnets VII, XI-XII, XVIII-XIX, XXIII
- 2/11 *A Mask Presented at Ludlow-Castle, 1634 (Comus)*
- 2/13 *Comus*
- 2/18 *Samson Agonistes*
- 2/20 Preface to *Paradise Lost*. **Proposal for Paper #1 Due.**

- 2/25 *Paradise Lost*, Book I  
 2/27 *Paradise Lost*, Book II
- 3/4 *Paradise Lost*, Book III  
 3/6 *Paradise Lost*, Book IV
- 3/11 Open. **Paper #1 Due.**  
 3/13 Midterm.
- 3/18B3/22 Spring Break!
- 3/25 *Paradise Lost*, Book V  
 3/27 *Paradise Lost*, Book VI
- 4/1 *Paradise Lost*, Book VII. **Proposal for Paper #2.**  
 4/3 *Of Education, Paradise Lost*, Book VIII
- 4/8 *Paradise Lost*, Book IX  
 4/10 *Paradise Lost*, Book IX
- 4/15 *Paradise Lost*, Book X  
 4/17 *Paradise Lost*, Books XI-XII
- 4/22 Dryden, *The State of Innocence*  
 4/24 *Paradise Regained*, Books I-II
- 4/29 *Paradise Regained*, Books III-IV  
 5/1 Peer Review for Paper #2
- 5/6 Open. **Paper #2 Due.**  
 5/8 What have we learned? Course Evaluations.
- 5/15 Final exam (8:00 am).

**NOTE: *This syllabus is tentative and subject to change. Any additions, modifications, etc. will be announced in class.***

## Policies

**Attendance:** You are required to attend all class meetings. If you do not attend class, you will miss important discussion and will almost assuredly fall behind in the readings. More than 3 unexcused absences will adversely affect your final grade, and may constitute grounds for failure.

**Reading:** To do well in this course, you must read *carefully* and think *intelligently* about what you have read. You must read each text *before* its scheduled discussion date. You are strongly advised to re-read each text both before and after we discuss it. If you do not read the texts, or if you read only half-assed synopses (which are often inaccurate and sometimes even longer than the actual text), you are defeating the entire purpose of the course. In addition, good readers should be able to articulate their thoughts about what they have read. Consequently, substantive class participation is expected from everyone.

**Writing:** We will have frequent in-class writing exercises. You also will write two papers. The first will be relatively brief (i.e., 5 pp.), the second will be slightly longer (8-10 pp.), and both will solve an interpretive problem of your choice. Each paper will be preceded by a proposal in which you will submit your topic and interpretive problem for my approval. I will hand out detailed assignment sheets for both papers early in the semester.

**Presentation:** You will give a 10-15 minute presentation on a topic of your choice. The date of your presentation will depend on its connection to the reading assignments. I will hand out a detailed assignment sheet outlining the requirements of the presentations.

**Exams:** There will be two exams, a midterm on March 13 and a (non-cumulative) final on May 15. The exams will require detailed knowledge of what has been said in class as well as the assigned readings, and they will be closed book. You are responsible for information offered by me and by your classmates in class discussions.

<b>Grades:</b>	Attendance, Participation, & In-class writing	10%
	Presentation	10%
	Midterm	20%
	Final	20%
	Paper #1	15%
	Paper #2	25%

**NOTE:** *You must satisfactorily complete all assignments to pass the course.*

**Office Hours:** Think of my office as an extension of the classroom and use my office hours to discuss any aspect of your reading problems, confusions, complaints, suggestions for further reading, etc. Please note that in addition to my regular office hours, I am also happy to set up mutually convenient conferences by appointment.

**Communication:** If during the semester you encounter any problem (physical, intellectual, etc.) that adversely affects your course work, please contact me immediately. Please note that I am almost always accessible via e-mail. *Do not* wait until several weeks after the fact to inform me of any incapacitating difficulties. I will be less than sympathetic.

**Special Needs:** Individuals who have any disability (either permanent or temporary) which might affect their ability to perform in this class are encouraged to inform the instructor at the start of the semester. Adaptation of methods, materials, or testing may be made as required to provide for equitable participation.

### **Conclusion**

This is an ambitious course: in 15 weeks, we will read Milton's major works and we will learn how to speak and write intelligently about what we have read. Be forewarned that this material is difficult and at times often obscure. But Milton's works are still read because, regardless of their age, they reward us with insights into contemporary thought, an understanding of our literary heritage, and even a better understanding of who we are today.