Course Title: Milton’s *Paradise Lost*: A Poem About Life
Course Code: LIT 47
Instructor: Nicholas Jenkins
Location: live online
Logistics:

The class will meet on Zoom ten times: on every Tuesday between 21 September and 30 November (with no meeting on 23 November) from 7:00-8:50 pm PST. Sessions will be recorded and posted on Canvas, but please try to attend our meetings “live” if you possibly can.

Course Summary:

John Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (1667) is the most ambitious and complex poem ever written in English. Composed many years after Milton had gone totally blind, and published not long after he had been forced into hiding for fear of brutal public execution or assassination, it tells the Christian story of the angels’ rebellion in Heaven, the creation of the universe, and humanity’s fall into sin. One of the strangest and most eccentrically beautiful books ever written, it deals in a unique way with perennial themes of fear, sinfulness, revolt, free will, adoration and love. The fundamentals of human life are inscribed in this unfathomable work.

What does the Devil sound like? How do Adam and Eve talk to one another? What does Eden look like? Milton imagines all of this. *Paradise Lost* is a star in the poetic sky, exercising a powerful gravitational pull on authors and thinkers from Wordsworth to Mary Shelley to Malcolm X, who read the poem while he was in prison.

The poem is long, dense, allusive, and controversial. It challenges readers to debate questions about gender roles, sexuality, destiny, nature, and evil. To study Milton alone, especially when reading him for the first time, is sometimes to feel lost. This course offers students an opportunity to explore Milton’s epic work together, appreciating its imaginative power and debating how best to understand it. Think of this course as a once-in-a-lifetime journey best undertaken in a group.

*Please see course page for full description and additional details.*

Grade Options and Requirements:

- No Grade Requested (NGR)
  - This is the default option. No work will be required; no credit shall be received; no proof of attendance can be provided. On a purely
voluntary but highly encouraged basis, you can memorize around 30 lines of *Paradise Lost*.

- Credit/No Credit (CR/NC)
  - Score will be determined by student attendance and participation. On a purely voluntary but highly encouraged basis, you can memorize around 30 lines of *Paradise Lost*.

*Please Note: If you require proof that you completed a Continuing Studies course for any reason (for example, employer reimbursement), you must choose the Credit/No Credit option. Courses taken for NGR will not appear on official transcripts or grade reports.*

**Required Text:**


NB. In order for us all to have a shared frame of reference, we must all buy and use this edition.

**Process:**

Our goal is to read this great poem closely, to register its strangeness and its depth. I’ll gloss details and context wherever that is needed, but we won’t be learning a lot of historical background - rather, our focus is on the experience of the text itself. Each time we meet I’ll give a brief overview about a relevant topic or issue that I’d like us to think about together. And, rotating around the class, each week I’ll ask several class members to come with prepared with a question/problem/enthusiasm they have about something in the reading we’ve just done. These comments will form the basis of our discussions. We’ll also spend some time each week reading a selection of the poem aloud and discussing the details of the passage.

In order that the course be a meaningful one for you, it is vital that you do the reading before each session. (For most classes, the assigned amount of reading is relatively small.) Please bring your copy of *Paradise Lost* to class each time. This won’t be checked, obviously, but the more of your own comments/highlightings/underlinings you have in your book the better you should feel!

**Weekly Outline:**

Week 1: 21 Sept
Reading: Book 1
Week 2: 28 Sept
Reading: Book 2

Week 3: 5 Oct
Reading: Book 3

Week 4: 12 Oct
Reading: Book 4

Week 5: 19 Oct
Reading: Books 5 and 6

Week 6: 26 Oct
Reading: Book 7 and 8

Week 7: 2 Nov
Reading: Book 9

Week 8: 9 Nov
Reading: Book 10

Week 9: 16 Nov
Reading: Book 11

No class: 23 Nov

Week 10: 30 Nov
Reading: Book 12

Bibliography - Useful Milton Editions, Handbooks and Guides:

[they are helpful, but none are required reading for this class]
