Description

Epic poetry is a competitive and self-referential genre. Virgil imitates and revises Homer, Dante makes Virgil his guide through hell and most of purgatory before leaving him behind, and Milton transforms the entire epic tradition. Since Milton’s engagement with and criticism of the epic are essential elements of *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*, we will focus on his dialogue with Homer, Virgil, and Dante and their differing conceptions of heroism.

Requirements and Procedures

By the morning of each class you must send me by email (gwp@hss.caltech.edu) a question on the reading. I will choose one of the questions for a short quiz, which will take place at the beginning of class.

You must write two papers, each 2,000 words long, on topics of your choosing. You must send me a short paragraph stating your thesis or at least describing your topic a week before the paper is due. Pick a topic that has not been extensively discussed in class unless you have something original to say about it. The first paper is due April 30 at 5 pm; the second, which must be on *Paradise Lost* and/or *Paradise Regained*, is due June 11 at 5 pm. Please send the papers to me as email attachments, preferably in Microsoft Word format; name the files with your surname and the number of the paper (e.g. smith1.doc). If you’d like me to read a draft of your paper before submitting it to be graded, I’ll be happy to do so (provided you submit it early enough). I grant extensions but do not comment on late papers; I only grade them.

Two-thirds of your grade will be based on the papers, and the other third on the quizzes and class participation. The course may only be taken for grades.

The easiest way to communicate with me is by email, but I am happy to speak to you in person or on the phone. My office is 208 Dabney, and my extension, 3601.

Required Texts

Schedule

March 30  Introduction.
April 1   Homer, *Iliad* 1–8
April 6   Homer, *Iliad* 9–16
April 8   Homer, *Iliad* 17–24
April 13  Virgil, *Aeneid* 1–3
April 15  Virgil, *Aeneid* 4–6
April 20  Virgil, *Aeneid* 7–9
April 22  Virgil, *Aeneid* 10–12
April 27  Dante, *Inferno* 1–17
April 29  Dante, *Inferno* 18–34
May 4     Dante, *Purgatorio* 1–17
May 6     Dante, *Purgatorio* 18–33
May 11    Dante, *Paradiso* 1–17
May 13    Dante, *Paradiso* 18–33
May 18    Milton, *Paradise Lost* 1–2
May 20    Milton, *Paradise Lost* 3–5
May 25    Milton, *Paradise Lost* 6–8
May 27    Milton, *Paradise Lost* 9–10
June 1    Milton, *Paradise Lost* 11–12
June 3    Milton, *Paradise Regained*

If you don’t have time to read all of the *Iliad*, read books 1, 2. 1–493 (Fagles, p. 115), 3–4, 6, 9, 16, 18–24.