

EN 8523: Seminar in English Literature, 1485-1660

Writing about the Fall:

Paradise Lost and the Genesis Tradition

Tuesdays, 6:00-8:50



In this class we will study Milton's *Paradise Lost* in the context of commentary on and adaptations of the first three chapters of Genesis. We will study the exegetical tradition as developed by theologians and other commentators and look at how poets and other writers responded to and adapted this tradition for their own ends. If you have ever wondered—Where was Eden located? Did Adam and Eve have sex while they were there? Did they have navels? What did they eat? How did the snake talk to them? And in what language?—this class is for you. The story of the Fall was a powerful religious myth that allowed people to explain, among other things, the origins of human life, the organization of social life, the persistence of pain, suffering, and death, and the existence of evil.

We will spend about seven weeks reading *Paradise Lost* slowly and thoroughly. In addition, we will study other notable examples of Fall literature from the 17th century, including poetry by John Donne, Andrew Marvell, Amelia Lanyer, and others, Margaret Cavendish's *The Blazing World*, and an operatic adaptation of *Paradise Lost* by John Dryden. We will conclude the semester with 20th and 21st century adaptations of Milton's poem by C.S. Lewis and Philip Pullman in order to explore how writers continue to draw upon this rich tradition of commentary and lore in order update old myths and—sometimes—write entirely new ones.

Assignments will include a midterm exam, 1 short essay, an article-length seminar paper, and a brief research presentation.