
Lycidas: How to Write an Essay about a Poem

Description

This seminar is about a single poem: John Milton's *Lycidas*. Part of the course will be a review of important critical work on *Lycidas*, literary precursors to and influences upon the poem, its contemporary influence on other poets, and the poem's bibliographic history (where it comes from, the different versions in Milton's lifetime, etc.). In short, a survey of the various scholarly approaches to this poem. This is also a course designed to train students to write professional, scholarly essays about the poem, what is often termed a "research methodology" seminar. This seminar will walk students through the various tasks and documents that go into producing worthwhile scholarship. Students will produce an initial abstract or paper proposal early in the term, followed by a conference paper (right around week nine), a literature review, substantive written comments on two of your classmates conference papers, a three-sentence elevator description, and finally an article-length seminar paper and revised abstract. The central assumption of this course is that essays change over the course of researching and writing them: i.e., an argument develops through the reading that one does while writing it; one doesn't do the reading first, and then write. As a result, I will ask students to produce quite a lot of writing early in the term and to share this writing with others in the class. That also means that some class periods will have something of a workshop or writing-group feel to them, so plan accordingly.

Readings

Lycidas (in its various iterations and editions)
Important books and essays written about the poem
Other classical and contemporary pastorals and elegies that influenced Milton
Later poems influenced by Milton's elegy
The work of your scholarly comrades in the seminar
Examples of research notes provided by the instructor

Required Texts

The Library

Requirements

One paper proposal/abstract, one literature review and bibliography, one conference paper presentation, two series of comments on classmates' papers, one three-sentence elevator description of the project, and one article-length seminar paper (with revised abstract).