ENGLISH 350B: PROSE AND POETRY OF THE 17TH CENTURY

PROFESSOR KATHY ACHESON

WINTER 1998

***DRAFT SYLLABUS***

INSTRUCTOR INFORMATION: My office hours are 2:00 to 3:00 Tuesday and Thursday in my office, HH225. If these times are inconvenient for you, please make an appointment. The best way to get hold of me is by e-mail: koa@watarts.uwaterloo.ca. The next best is by phone: x2122.

COURSE DESCRIPTION: In this course, we will read Milton’s epic Paradise Lost and supporting and critical materials relevant to the poem. Reading Paradise Lost really well is a lifetime’s work; our aims are more humble. We will, by the end of the course, be able to read the poem confidently and with pace, to understand the basics of its meaning, its structure and its power, and to bring to bear questions which arise from our culture and within contemporary literary criticism.

We will start by reading most of the poem (through Book IX) out loud in class. Everyone is expected to participate in this. Additional reading outside of class will help us to understand the immediate context of the poem, in terms of history, and in terms of Milton’s other works and his sources. We will have a chance to discuss these after our reading each class.

In the middle part of the course, I will give focused lectures on Books I-IX. (This does not mean formal lectures; please interrupt with whatever questions or comments you have at any time).

In the last third, we will discuss the relevance of influential twentieth century critical models to Paradise Lost. I will put on reserve a selection of essays which present methods of criticism including psychoanalytic, historicist, feminist, and deconstructive. We will discuss these in class and in your final essay you will apply one of these models to an episode or feature of Paradise Lost. After going over these, I will lecture on Books X, XI, and XII.

TEXT: Paradise Lost, by John Milton, ed. Scott Elledge. Please get this one as it has supporting material in it which we will read. Please note that the Bible to which we refer in this course is the King James Version; it would be a good idea to have a copy handy.

POLICIES:

On Plagiarism: Plagiarism occurs when you represent somebody else’s words or ideas as your own. Both intending and unwitting plagiarism are serious offences in university and I treat them as such. Take care to document your sources. While other people’s ideas can be essential to your work, take care also to use these to help you formulate your own ideas, rather than stand in for your own. Avoid paraphrasing and use direct quotation, so that the distinction between your work and your sources is clear.

On Lateness: Late essays are penalized at the rate of 2% (of a base of 100) per day, every day, including weekends. Late essays must be handed in to and dated by a secretary in the English Department. Late essays will not normally be given extensive commentary. Extensions will be granted for up to a week if you approach me before the due date; no need to give a reason. In the event of illness or other trauma, please talk to me and be prepared to show documentation (such as a doctor’s certificate) if appropriate.

On Attendance and Participation: Attendance is not, of course, required in university
courses. In my experience, students who do the best in courses are usually the ones who attend regularly. This may be because they have more prior experience and greater interest in the material than others, but their attendance helps their work because they keep the material more in the fronts of their brains and also have more chance of conversation on the course topic with their peers. Participation is likewise voluntary in university courses. By and large, however, the more you make known your thoughts and other experience to the instructor, the better able he or she is to understand your work and comment helpfully on it. I -- and your classmates -- also really appreciate questions about what you don’t know or understand, questions which take some courage to ask, as they are ways of making matters clearer for all.

ASSIGNMENTS:

1. Annotation exercise: Look up the annotation to a particular allusion in three or more editions of Paradise Lost (on reserve at Porter), and from this information seek out the original (i.e., a passage of The Odyssey, or of the Bible). In 2 or 3 well-written pages, cite briefly from the original, and summarize the annotations, making note of the agreements and disagreements between them. Due January 20; 20%

2. Position paper: Write an essay of five to seven standard pages in which you defend or attack one of the following positions in relation to Paradise Lost: 1) free will was a curse, and God should have known it; 2) Satan is the hero of Paradise Lost; 3) Paradise Lost is a misogynistic poem or 4) Adam needs the educational exercise the fall provides. You must support your argument with evidence from the poem, and may also use evidence from the selections from the Christian Doctrine, Milton’s prose, and the Bible in the back of your text. Due February 12; 30%

3. Final Essay: Write an essay of eight to ten standard pages in which you apply one of the theoretical models presented in the essays on reserve to a particular issue or feature of Paradise Lost. First, I want to see your thesis statement, which is the substantial first paragraph of your essay which presents the argument, summarizes its stages and suggests the evidence you will use. Thesis statement due March 24; 10%. The thesis statement will be returned to you on March 27, on which day I will meet with you individually. The essay is due April 2, to be returned in the last class. It is worth 30% of your final mark.

4. Final Test: We will have a final test during the exam period. However, this test is not worth very much and has only one question, which I will give you now: What is the relevance or irrelevance of Paradise Lost to the modern reader? Your essay-style answer may range from the personal to the academic to larger cultural issues. Irrelevance must be proved just as relevance is. You may make the argument that some aspects are relevant, and some are not. You may collect information and evidence for this test throughout the term, and shape your opinion accordingly. The argument should be well organized and stated. No aids will be allowed at the exam. The test will last one hour. Marks will be earned for persuasiveness and elegance of argument, solidity of structure, and use of evidence; that said, it is virtually impossible to fail this exercise. 10%

SCHEDULE:

January 6: Reading out loud; Book I

January 8: Reading out loud; Book II
Homework: sections in text called "Political and Religious Issues in the Time of Milton" and "A Short Life of Milton"
January 13: Reading out loud; Book III

January 15: Reading out loud; Book IV
Homework: “Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce” (361); “First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians” (457)

January 20: Reading out loud; Books V and VI
Homework: *Christian Doctrine*, “Of the Special Government of Angels” (414); Psalm 2 (439), Revelation 12.3-12 (460)
Annotation exercise due

January 22: Reading out loud; Book VII
Homework: *Christian Doctrine*, “Of the Creation” (409); “The Scale of Nature” by Elledge (464)

January 27: Reading out loud; Book VIII
Homework: any selection at least two pages long from “Great Writers on Milton, 1688-1929”

January 29: Reading out loud; Book IX
Homework: “Areopagitica” (382); *Christian Doctrine*, “Of the Special Gov’t of Man Before the Fall” (414), “Of the Fall of our First Parents” (415), “Of the Punishment of Sin” (418), “Of Man’s Restoration...”, “Of the Manifestation of the Covenant of Grace...”, “Of the Gospel, and Christian Liberty”

February 3, 5: Lectures on Books I and II (Epic, allusion, aggrandizement; opening of poem; Satan, character, heroism; the rebel angels; Milton’s evil)

February 10, 12: Lectures on Books III and IV (God and Christ; the Incarnation; Milton’s good and free will; free will and Christ; true heroism; structural irony; Adam and Eve; Eve’s creation; the garden and the order of nature; God in the garden and Satan outside)
Position paper due

****break****

February 24, 26: Lectures on Books V, VI, VII and VIII (heroism (Abdiel, Satan); epic battles; Raphael, storytelling, truth; Adamic naivete; the creation story; Adam’s creation)

March 3, 5: Lectures on Book IX (everything; division of labour; language of temptation; Satan stupidly good; eroticism of the scene; collapse of irony into chiasmus and oxymoron; Adam and Eve, oh fallen)


March 24: Lectures on Books X, XI and XII (history; Christian mercy; return to irony; the techniques of visualization in historical understanding; etc.)

Thesis statement due

March 26: continue with lectures on Books X, XI and XII

March 27: Thesis statement returned; meetings with Kathy

March 31: review and conclusion

April 2: no lecture, just come and hand in your essay

Essay due

April 7: essays returned; course evaluations