ENGLISH 350B: English Poetry and Prose of the Seventeenth Century, Part Two
WINTER 1998-99
PROFESSOR KATHY ACHESON
HH 225/X 2122: OFFICE HOURS T/TR 2:30-3:30, OR BY APPOINTMENT
E-MAIL KOA@WATARTS.UWATERLOO.CA

Welcome to English 350B. In this course we will read the whole of John Milton’s epic poem, *Paradise Lost*, and some supplementary material, including excerpts from Milton’s prose and from the *Bible*. We will talk about what’s going on in the poem, the theological and philosophical concepts it relies upon and advances, the literary techniques by which it is crafted, its literary predecessors, the historical circumstances in which it was written, and the relevance of some postmodern critical concepts to the poem. We will emerge with a basic understanding of the poem, with an appreciation for its extraordinary craft and structure, and with greater knowledge about its significance to our culture at large, and the discipline of English studies in particular.

TEXTS

I have ordered the Norton edition of *Paradise Lost*, edited by Scott Elledge. It is *required*, as it has supplementary material which I want you to have available. I have assigned supplementary reading from the text and from the *Bible*; this is optional, but I advise you to read the sections which pertain to issues in which you are interested, particularly those which pertain to your essay topics or might help you with the tests.

I also advise you to have on hand an English *Bible*, preferably a King James Version. This version is not used in churches now, although it is still popular and is available for less than $10 in paperback editions in bookstores. Check secondhand bookstores. A modern version of the Bible will not be nearly as useful, but is better than nothing.

The English department uses the *Little, Brown Compact Handbook*, Canadian edition, by Murray McArthur and Jane Aaren. It is available in the bookstore. If you don’t have it, you should get it.

POLICIES

**On Lateness:** Tests can not be made up. Sufficiently dire conditions may excuse a student from sitting a test and from having a mark which counts in the total. I would like these conditions attested to by doctor’s letter or certificate. Other assignments will be discounted 2% per day, including weekends; I will not give extensions, and I will not accept submissions after classes end, except in circumstances which warrant an INC or similar grade. Late assignments must be handed in to and dated by a secretary in the English department.

**On Academic Offences:** Any time you pass off any work, whether in writing or in thinking, which was done by another person, as your own, you are committing plagiarism. This includes work done by an editing service. This does not normally include notes made from lectures or the fruits of conversation with your peers. Improper or imprecise paraphrasing and quotation are plagiarism. (Paraphrasing should, as a rule, be avoided, as it is always less precise than quotation.) Submission of all or part of work done for another course (without prior permission from the instructors) is also an academic offence. If you aren’t sure, ask, because the results of an academic offence can be extremely detrimental to your record.

**On Attendance and Participation:** Generally, attendance at and participation in university courses is voluntary, and I assign marks for neither. In my experience, however, students who attend, or participate, or both, do better in courses. For many who do so, both their attendance and their
marks are due, in part, to greater experience and interest; however, all students, including those with
little prior experience and less interest, benefit from keeping the matter in the fronts of their heads,
from making acquaintance with others in the class, from clarifying issues and problems with peers
and the professor, and from making their interests, problems, and abilities clearer to the professor.

ASSIGNMENTS

Tests: In lieu of an exam, we will have six short tests, each worth 5% of your final mark. These tests
will be written prior to the lectures on the material in question. I will give you three questions here;
the test paper will have two of those questions on it; you are to write a brief, interesting, cogent, and
perhaps even brilliant essay on one of the questions. You may use your text and marginal notes you
have made in the text. You may want, on occasion, to look up some concepts in a dictionary of
literary terms before the test, but no other research is required. You have half an hour for each test.
The essay will be graded on the quality and organization of the argument and the use and range of
evidence; spelling, punctuation, paragraphing, etc. count, although to a lesser degree than they do in
essays.

Test One: Books I and II: January 12
1. Discuss the characterization of Satan. (E.g., what’s his problem? What drives him? What makes
the other angels listen to him?)
2. How do the rebel angels characterize God?
3. In what ways do the first two books express the epic qualities of this poem?

Test Two: Books III and IV: January 26
1. Discuss the characterization of Christ. (You could consider him in contrast to Satan, or perhaps in
relation to Adam and Eve as they appear in BIV.)
2. Discuss the concept of free will. (You might want to consider not only God’s statements on the
topic, but the exercise of it in the garden by Adam and Eve.)
3. Discuss the dramatic irony constructed in the relationships between Books I and II and Books III
and IV.

Test Three: Books V and VI: February 9
1. Discuss the significance and meaning of story-telling in these books.
2. How is God’s goodness depicted in Raphael’s stories?
3. How is the meaning of faith developed in these books?

Test Four: Books VII and VIII: February 25
1. How is the concept of free will developed in these books?
2. How is the creation of man related to creation in general? What does this tell us about man’s
relationship to God?
3. What forms of knowledge are available or unavailable to Adam, and why?

Test Five: Book IX: March 9
1. What causes the fall of man?
2. How and why is the temptation depicted as sexy by Milton?
3. What is tragic about the fall?

Test Six: Books X, XI and XII: March 30
1. How is the fall depicted as fortunate in these books?
2. How is the process of repentance dramatized through Adam and Eve?
3. How does Milton ensure that the story he has told is understood as the story of all man, of all
time, and of all truth in these books?
ESSAY

The essay you will write for this course will be a senior essay which advances a substantial argument, which draws on research and close reading of the poem which you have done, and which is well-written, neatly structured, and perfectly spelled. It will be 10 to 15 standard pages long (250 words/page: use ‘courier 12 point’ font or count the words using your word-processor’s speller). It will be researched and written in the following stages.

There are two possible approaches to this essay. The first is to research a historical topic and apply this to aspects of the poem. This topic could be any aspect of any of the following: the church, theological concepts, philosophical concepts, medicine, science, architecture, exploration and mapping, painting or sculpture, historicism, nationalism, gender, sexuality, individuality, government, self-government, etc. It could also be a literary historical topic, such as the epic, the use of the Bible in the poem, religious verse, Milton’s biography, etc.

Alternatively, you could approach the poem through a literary critical lens. Here you would have two main approaches to choose from. The first would be to analyze a major literary aspect of the poem, such as the use of irony, allusion, overall structure, dramatic characterization, or poetic form(s) or features. The second would be to analyze the poem from a particular critical point-of-view, probably one contemporary to our times. For instance, from your experiences in other courses, you may perceive ways in which deconstructive, epistemological, feminist, rhetorical, linguistic, or psychoanalytic models of criticism might work to illuminate Paradise Lost.

Research Report: 20% of final mark, due March 4

Whichever approach you choose, you will have to research your topic. For the historical approach, you will want to find out about the topic, and find out what people have said about the topic in relation to Milton’s works, especially PL. For the critical approach, you will want to research the method a little, and find out how it has been applied to works by Milton, especially PL.

The research report will be 3 pages or so. It will summarize the major findings of your research and state how you think this research applies to Paradise Lost. It will have a bibliography attached which will show all the works which have contributed to the report. It will be evaluated on the quality of research, the aptness of the summary, the logic and intellectual quality of the application to the poem, and the usual stylistic measures.

Thesis Statement: 10% of final mark, due March 16

The thesis statement is your full, plenteous, brilliant first paragraph of your essay. It is a substantial paragraph which will take most of one page. Its most important job is to outline your argument in the stages which you think are most logical, and which you will follow in the essay. It has a relentlessly logical structure: if this is true, and this is true, then the following must be true -- or at least arguable. It has an opening sentence, which sets the topic, and which is never of such a general nature as to be unprovable or plain dull (i.e., ‘since the dawn of time, man has been interested in himself’). It suggests the nature of evidence which will be used; in our case, this might be something like ‘the creation of the world, the creation of Adam, and the creation of Eve in Paradise Lost’ or some such thing. It concludes as every paragraph should. I will turn these around -- marked -- by Thursday, barring tornado, flood, freak ice storm or the like, with comments towards the writing of the final version of the essay.

The Essay: 40% of the final mark, due March 25
The essay will be marked as follows:

Thesis statement: 10%
Quality and structure of overall argument: 30%
Quality and use of evidence: 30%
Sentence and paragraph structure: 10%
Word choice: 10%
Grammar and spelling: 10%

In the last two categories, each error will cost one mark. The other categories are marked according to a standard letter-grade schema; i.e., in the second category, 26/30 means an A; 24/30 is an A-. 

CLASS SCHEDULE

January 5th: hello, syllabus
January 7th: Introduction
January 12th: TEST on Books I and II; Book I, Paradise Lost
January 14th: Book I; film, to be confirmed
January 19th: Book I; Book II; Homework: sections in text called “Political and Religious Issues in the Time of Milton” and “A Short Life of Milton”
January 21st: Book II
January 26th: TEST on Books III and IV; Book III
Genesis 1-3; Christian Doctrine “Of Divine Decree” (404), “Of the Son of God” (408), “Of Predestination” (406)
February 2nd: Book IV; Homework: “Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce” (361); “First Letter of Paul to the Corinthians” (457)
February 4th: Book IV
February 9th: TEST on Books V and VI; Book V
February 11th: Book V; Homework: Christian Doctrine, “Of the Special Government of Angels” (414), Psalm 2 (439), Revelation 12.3-12 (460)
February 15th - 19th: Reading week
February 23rd: Book VI; film, to be confirmed (Ascent of Man, Episode 6)
February 25th: TEST on Books VII and VIII; Book VII
March 2nd: Books VII and VIII; Homework: Christian Doctrine, “Of the Creation” (409); “The Scale of Nature” by Elledge (464), any selection at least two pages long from “Great Writers on Milton, 1688-1929”
March 4th: Book VIII; research report due; film, to be confirmed (Ascent of Man, Episode 7)
March 9th: TEST on Book IX; Book IX
March 16th: Book IX; thesis due
March 18th: Book IX
March 23rd: Film; Milton’s Paradise Lost: A Screenplay for the Cinema of the Mind (to be confirmed)
March 25th: Book X; essay due
March 30th: TEST on Books X, XI and XII; Book XI
April 1st: Book XII
April 6th: no lecture; return of assignments