Milton

English 350B
TTh 1-2:20; HH 280
Winter 2004

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Office Hours: TuTh 2:30-3, W 1-2, or by appointment in HH 246

Milton, *Samson Agonistes and Shorter Poems* (Harlan Davidson)
Recommended Web Site: The John Milton Reading Room
(http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/)

Aims of the Course
The principal aim of this class is to assist each student's critical evaluation of Milton's poetry. We will seek to understand what this poetry means from philosophical, theological, ethical, political, historical, and literary critical perspectives, among others.

Methods and Requirements
Class time will be devoted mainly to discussion of specific poems, and the greater part of this will be spent on a thorough critical assessment of *Paradise Lost*. Careful reading of the poems will be expected prior to discussion. Background readings will be recommended. Graded work comprises:

1) Response papers. In these very informal 2-page (400-500 word) papers you will explore responses to a central thematic, formal, or theoretical question that interests you in the week's reading. Your papers should be focussed and should refer to specific words and actions in the readings, but they need not argue or take a position. There will be one due at the start of class early Tuesday beginning the second week (January 13). You will receive one point for each response paper you complete on time to a maximum of ten—meaning that everyone is free to skip one of the eleven (although there is no penalty for completing all eleven). Papers falling below the 400-word requirement may not receive full credit. **Weight = 10%**

2) Two formal essays, the first 1200-1500, the second 2000-2500 words long (typed, double-spaced). Late papers will be accepted without penalty only if prior permission has been granted. Otherwise, the penalty will be 2% per day. The essay assignments appear on pages 3-4 of this syllabus. **Weight = 20% and 30%**

4) A cumulative final exam, two hours in length. **Weight = 40%**

The Faculty of Arts urges instructors to include the following “Note on avoidance of academic offenses” on all course syllabi:

“All students registered in courses of the Faculty of Arts are expected to know what constitutes an academic offense, to avoid committing academic offenses, and to take responsibility for their
academic actions. When the commission of an offense is established, disciplinary penalties will
be imposed in accord with Policy #71 (Student Academic Discipline). For information on
categories of offenses and types of penalties, students are directed to consult with the summary of
Policy #71 which is supplied in the Undergraduate Calendar (section 1; on the Web at
http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/info/cal/UW/policy_71.html). If you need help in learning how to
avoid offenses such as plagiarism, cheating, and double submission, or if you need clarification
of aspects of the discipline policy, ask your course instructor for guidance. Other resources
regarding the policy are your academic advisor and the Undergraduate Associate Dean.”
Also, Associate Dean Ager recommends “How to Avoid Plagiarism and Other Written Offences:
If I suspect that you have committed an academic offense in this class, I will report it to the
Associate Dean; if the offense is confirmed, the normal result is a failing grade on the assignment
and academic probation.

TENTATIVE SCHEDULE

Week One: Introduction to the class; Religious sonnets (7 ["How soon hath time"], 14 ["When
faith and love"], 19 ["When I consider"], 23 ["Methought I saw"]; Political sonnets (11
[“A book was writ of late”], 12 [“I did but prompt the age"], 15 ["On the Lord General
Fairfax"], 16 ["To the Lord General Cromwell"], 17 ["To Sir Henry Vane the Younger"],
18 ["On the late Massacre in Piedmont"], "On the New Forcers of Conscience,")

Week Two: Comus; "Lycidas"

Week Three: Paradise Lost, Book I

Week Four: Paradise Lost, Book II

Week Five: Paradise Lost, Books III-IV

Week Six: Paradise Lost, Books V-VI; first essays due Feb. 12

Reading Week, February 16-20

Week Seven: Paradise Lost, Book VII

Week Eight: Paradise Lost, Book VIII

Week Nine: Paradise Lost, Book IX

Week Ten: Paradise Lost, Book X

Week Eleven: Paradise Lost, Books XI-XII

Week Twelve: Samson Agonistes; second essays due April 1

***Final Exam TBA***
Essay Assignment #1

Write an essay about a short passage (preferably under thirty lines) in Books I-VI of Paradise Lost. Assume that the poem is shaped in part by a controlling authorial intention, and consider 1) what the passage reveals about that intention (what exactly is said, and how does this statement fit into the whole poem?), 2) how the passage achieves this revelation (both the style of the passage and the narrative form of the poem will likely be relevant here), and 3) how well the passage succeeds in communicating what you take to be the author's intention (can you point to specific strengths in either the passage's style or its role in the narrative, or are there problems that you can identify with either of these?).

Your essay should perform all three of these tasks in a way that will reveal their interrelation, and it must argue a clear thesis about these matters. It must also take the form of a unified and well-structured defence of your thesis. Your grade will be based primarily on the strength and originality of your thesis and of your supporting arguments; felicity and correctness of expression will also count. The essay should be 1200-1500 words long (typed, double-spaced) and follow a consistent documentation format (e.g. MLA, Chicago).

It is not necessary to consult secondary sources to write this essay, and doing so could hinder your creativity. If you do make use of such sources in your essay, however, be sure that they do not control or determine your argument; rather, your critical engagement with them, whether it takes the form of agreement or disagreement, must serve to advance, and must be clearly subordinate to, your own original thesis. Also be sure to cite all use of such sources fully and scrupulously.

DUE DATE: FEBRUARY 12, 1:00 P.M.
For this essay, you are free to write about any topic of interest to you, provided that a consideration of some aspect of *Paradise Lost* constitutes a significant part of your endeavour. Your essay still must argue a clear thesis, and it must again take the form of a unified and well-structured defence of your thesis. The strength and originality of your thesis and supporting arguments will again be the most important factors in determining your grade, followed by the felicity and correctness of your expression. This essay should be 2000-2500 words long (typed, double-spaced) and follow a consistent documentation format (e.g. MLA, Chicago). If you wish to consult secondary sources, see the guidelines set out in *Essay Assignment #1*.

The following list of topics is meant to be suggestive only, giving some indication of the range of topics you might explore. If you wish to write about a different topic, you must receive my approval by March 25.

1) Evaluate Milton's representation of God in *Paradise Lost*.

2) Write an essay about several scenes of temptation in *Paradise Lost* and a shorter work, such as *Comus* or *Paradise Regained*.

3) Investigate Milton's use of classical allusion and/or the Bible.

4) Examine Milton's views of women in the divorce tracts and relate your findings to his representation of Eve and/or Dalila.

5) Consider the relationship between the themes of liberty and obedience in *Paradise Lost*.

6) Write about the importance of music in Milton's poetry.

7) Explore the varieties of prayer in *Paradise Lost*.

8) Read a recent book that attempts to historicize Milton's poetry by placing it in a contemporary political context. Evaluate this book's success at illuminating *Paradise Lost*.

9) Consider Milton's treatment of prelapsarian sexuality in relation to traditional accounts.

10) Compare the character Satan in *Paradise Lost* with his namesake in *Paradise Regained*.

11) Analyze the verse of *Paradise Lost*, or compare this verse to that of *Samson Agonistes*.

12) Choose a key word or pattern of imagery in *Paradise Lost* and pursue its significance as a way of opening up the poem.

DUE DATE: APRIL 1, 1:00 P.M.
Sonnets by John Milton

How soon hath time, the subtle thief of youth,  
Stol’n on his wing my three and twentieth year!  
My hasting days fly on with full career,  
But my late spring no bud nor blossom shew’th.

Perhaps my semblance might deceive the truth,  
That I to manhood am arrived so near,  
And inward ripeness doth much less appear,  
That some more timely-happy spirits endu’th.

Yet be it less or more, or soon or slow,  
It shall be still in strictest measure ev’n  
To that same lot, however mean or high,  
Toward which time leads me, and the will of heaven;

All is, if I have grace to use it so,  
As ever in my great task-master’s eye.

Methought I saw my late espoused saint  
Brought to me like Alcestis from the grave,  
Whom Jove’s great son to her glad husband gave,  
Rescued from death by force though pale and faint.

Mine as whom washed from spot of childbed taint,  
Purification in the old Law did save,  
And such, as yet once more I trust to have  
Full sight of her in heaven without restraint.

Came vested all in white, pure as her mind:  
Her face was veiled, yet to my fancied sight,  
Love, sweetness, goodness, in her person shined  
So clear, as in no face with more delight.

But O, as to embrace me she inclined,  
I waked, she fled, and day brought back my night.

When faith and love, which parted from thee never,  
Had ripened thy just soul to dwell with God,  
Meekly thou didst resign this earthy load  
Of death, called life; which us from life doth sever.

Thy works and alms and all thy good endeavour  
Stayed not behind, nor in the grave were trod;  
But, as faith pointed with her golden rod,  
Followed thee up to joy and bliss forever.

Love led them on, and faith who knew them best  
Thy handmaids, clad them o’er with purple beams  
And azure wings, that up they flew so dressed,  
And spoke the truth of thee in glorious themes

Before the judge, who thenceforth bid thee rest  
And drink thy fill of pure immortal streams.

A book was writ of late called Tetrachordon;  
And woven close, both matter, form, and style;  
The subject new: it walked the town awhile,  
Numb’ring good intellects; now seldom pored on.

Cries the stall-reader, Bless us! What a word on  
A title page is this! And some in file  
Stand spelling false, while one might walk to Mile-End Green. Why, is it harder sirs than Gordon,  
Colkitto, or Macdonnel, or Galasp?

Those rugged names to our like mouths grow sleek  
That would have made Quintilian stare and gasp.  
Thy age, like ours, O soul of Sir John Cheke,  
Hated not learning worse than toad or asp,

When thou taught’st Cambridge and King Edward Greek.

When I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days, in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide,  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent

To serve therewith my maker, and present  
My true account, lest he returning chide;  
Doth God exact day-labour, light denied,  
I fondly ask; but patience to prevent

That murmur, soon replies, God doth not need  
Either man’s work or his own gifts, who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best; his state  
Is kingly. Thousands at his bidding speed

And post o’er land and ocean without rest:  
They also serve who only stand and wait.