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English 326: Reading John Milton

John Milton is one of the greats --one of the most read and most commented on authors of English literature. In this class we will concentrate most of our attention on reading John Milton's Paradise Lost-- the only complete epic written in the English language. While we will, in the context of the poem, discuss Milton's politics, religion, attitudes toward marriage and women, we will discuss Paradise Lost mostly on its own terms-- with minimal reference to historical and cultural context. The assignments in the class are all designed to engage you in close readings of Milton's works to fully appreciate their formal and creative elements. We will read Paradise Lost over the entire block; we will also use some of Milton's other poetry and prose works, as well as critical articles, to help us read more closely and better understand the poem.

Required Texts:

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*. Ed. David Scott Kastan
Cambridge Companion to Paradise Lost. Ed. Louis Schwartz

Other readings, as assigned, are available on Moodle:

You must print and bring to class all reserve/Moodle readings

Goals for this course:

My goals for this class:

- working together to understand John Milton's Paradise Lost,
- focusing on Milton's other texts and scholarly and critical materials for our discussions and written work,
- engaging in close readings and learning (or reviewing) literary terms and techniques to assist in those readings,
- enjoying texts and taking pleasure in discussing those texts.

Your goals should include:

- approaching *Paradise Lost* as a text to be enjoyed as well as studied
- learning about your own reading process
- placing literary works at the center of our discussions,
- coming to class prepared,
- entering into discussion with respect for one another and for differences in interpretation,
- looking closely at one another's and one's own writing.

This course supports the Educational Priorities and Outcomes of Cornell College with emphases on knowledge, communication, reasoning, and inquiry.

A Guide to this course

Responsibility. As students in a liberal arts college, you are responsible for your own engagement in the academic conversation. This means reading the syllabus, reading all the assigned material for the course, and turning in assignments on time. Please read the syllabus carefully and check it and the schedule before asking me about due dates, assignments, etc.

More importantly, responsibility means asking questions, coming to class having already formulated your own thoughts about the material. It means relying on your own reading for your opinions. Do not access Spark Notes or Pink Monkey or any other website or printed materials designed to explain the course material for you. And if you do not understand an assignment, a grade, a topic of discussion, please come to me and ask.

Reading. In this class, I ask you to adopt an approach that is both imaginative and analytical. Reading imaginatively means getting caught up in the poem, treating it with both curiosity and respect; whether the material is familiar or radically different from your own experience, allow yourself to go along--at least briefly--with the world presented in a given text. At the same time, I ask that you read analytically, asking what the author's purpose is, examining the structure and language of a text, questioning why an author chose a certain form or expression, and interrogating how the different elements of a text contribute to the author's ideas.

Discussion. I have structured this course so that most in-class time will be devoted to discussion of assigned reading materials. By sharing our observations and experiences of a text, we can achieve a fuller, richer understanding of it. Discussions are not easy, however, and they are seldom characterized by one brilliant observation after another. Rather, discussions often give rise to incomplete, flawed or even inaccurate observations that we can, together, critique and correct. Several skills are necessary to ensure productive class discussions.

* Read the assignment. The entire class suffers if even a few people haven't completed the reading. No one--student nor professor--can participate without having done the reading. In this class reading means going over the material several times.

* Listen carefully. Rather than anticipating your response to a speaker's point and working out in advance how you want to reply, listen to all of what members of the class are saying; reflect on their words and then formulate a response. You might consider what other members of the class are *not* saying as well as what they are saying.

* Speak constructively. A discussion is not a time for speech-making. Craft your remarks so that they help the entire class move forward in its search for meaning. If you tend to be quite comfortable speaking in groups, you may need at times to restrain yourself and give others a chance to speak. Conversely, if you are quite shy, you will need to find ways of speaking up. Most importantly, you need to be willing to share what you think and be open to opposing viewpoints. This means both critically evaluating what your classmates say, and voicing those criticisms clearly but respectfully. It is possible to disagree with someone and still respect that person. Showing support of the class by listening carefully, asking questions of class members, responding to what people have said and expressing appreciation of others' views all demonstrate respect and will help form an environment where all members feel comfortable voicing their views. At the same time, inattention, ostentatious yawning, sleeping, talking to neighbors or rude responses show a lack of respect for members of the class and your own intellect.

Writing. In addition to other assignments, you will be responsible for two papers. These papers present you with an opportunity to read Milton's text carefully and articulate that reading formally.

Required Work:

Participation 10% Active class participation, vital to your success and the success of this course, means coming to class ready to articulate, examine, and negotiate the responses you have formed. I will not base your participation grade on the brilliance of your comments but rather on how well your presence in class helps discussion. This means not only speaking constructively but also refraining from activities that would inhibit class discussion. More specifically: talking a lot will not necessarily get you an A; refusal to participate does not merit a passing grade.

Reading Group and Evaluation 15% Close readings are often best accomplished in small groups. In order to facilitate this, you will meet in pre-assigned small groups most mornings to engage in close textual analysis of the day's reading (see Moodle handout "Reading Groups" for meeting times and places).

Your purpose is to engage deeply with Milton's text before you come to class. Use this time to help each other answer questions, figure out what's going in the text, grapple with particularly dense passages--anything that requires you to focus on the fine details of Milton's texts. I will meet with different reading groups from day to day. At the end of the course, you will write a short essay (at least 2 pages) evaluating your and your peers' participation in the group. I will grade you on the consistency and helpfulness of your participation as determined by my own observations, your essay, and the essays from your group. You must submit an evaluation essay to get credit for this assignment.

Short paper and Recitation 15% The fullest appreciation of poetry involves reading it aloud, or reciting it from memory, fluently and with expression. This assignment asks you to memorize and perform a short passage (at least 20 lines) for the class and submit a short textual analysis of the same (or extended) passage. Passages are listed on the schedule: performances and papers are due the day we discuss the lines. If you want to recite and write on an alternative set of lines, you must get my permission. Everyone must sign up for lines by the Wednesday of the first week.

Your performance should reflect your interpretation of the passage's meaning. For example, if your passage is Satan's first speech and you interpret the speaker to be passionately angry, you could underscore that interpretation with your facial expressions, tone of voice, and gestures. While you are only required to read the poem "with feeling," you are free to expand this assignment. You could adapt Milton's style to a hip-hop or rap version, you might sing it, or perform it in any other way that *enhances* your audience's affective reception of the piece. Your guiding rule for your performance should be to capture the rhetorical effect intended by Milton's lines.

You'll follow your performance with brief comments. Why did this passage interest you? What are the challenges involved in interpreting it? What questions about the poem/poet/period did the exercise raise for you? Please keep your performance and comments to 15 minutes. You may have an additional 5 minutes to respond to questions and take suggestions. Be sure to practice and time yourself. I will evaluate your performance on the basis of your thoughtfulness about the poem, clarity of articulation, and ability to stay within the time limits. I will evaluate your essay on its clear, thoughtful and organized analysis of the passage. You should pay particular attention not only to the passage, but how it fits into the poem as a whole.

Long paper 30% A 9-12 page paper on *Paradise Lost*. Details to follow. You should begin this paper by the beginning of week 2.

Take Home Final exam 30% Comprehensive. This exam will cover everything on the syllabus.

Class Policies:

Check your Cornell email at least once per day.

Turn your cell phone off--not on vibrate.

Attendance: In this class, attendance is not optional. I realize, though, that sometimes exigent circumstances or illness may require you to miss a class session. In those cases, you are responsible for contacting a fellow student to get notes and assignment

information. Because absences and tardiness affect the entire class, excessive tardiness or missing **more than two class sessions** may lower your final grade. More than four absences may be grounds for failure in the course. *Note: I comply with college policy on 15-day drops: "The instructor should agree to sign the form if and only if the student (a) has complied fully with the instructor's attendance policy, (b) has taken all the tests and turned in all the papers or projects that were due by the 15th day, and (c) has made, in the opinion of the instructor, a determined effort to learn the material, complete the work, and participate in the class."

Papers: All written assignments are due at the time and date indicated on the syllabus. I accept late papers only when warranted, and I may significantly lower the grade of any late paper. I assign written homework specifically for use in class, thus I do not accept late homework assignments under any circumstances. Type or word-process and double-space all essays. Include one-inch margins on all sides, use an appropriate type font (12 point Times New Roman, for example), and use MLA citation style. (Check here for more information:

<http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/resource/747/01/>

Revisions. You may revise the first essay if you meet ALL of the following conditions:

- * You have discussed the revision plan with me
 - * You turn in the revision and the original paper (with my comments) on a date negotiated with me, usually within five days of receiving the original paper back.
- The higher grade stands.

Academic Honesty: The campus policy regarding academic honesty, found in The Catalogue, states: "The College considers Cornell students to be responsible persons whose maturity will develop in a community that encourages free inquiry. The College expects the highest degree of personal integrity in all relationships. Any form of dishonesty is a violation of this spirit and of College rules"

<http://www.cornellcollege.edu/catalogue/academic-info/academic-honesty.shtml>

At the College, penalties for academic misconduct range from a reprimand to indefinite suspension from the college. At the very least, academic misconduct in this course will result in a grade of F for the assignment in question and possibly for the course .

The MLA Handbook explains how to use and document sources. The Cole library website links to a summary of MLA documentation:

<http://www.cornellcollege.edu/library/ctl/ws/students.shtml>

Please see me if you have any questions about academic honesty or documentation.

Accommodations: If you have a documented physical or learning disability, you must talk to me in the first three days of class to arrange any necessary accommodations. Please refer to the Disability Services Overview for specific guidelines:

<http://www.cornellcollege.edu/disabilities/services/index.shtml>

Contacting Me: I am happy to meet you during office hours or by appointment if you want to discuss the readings, desire further guidance on the assignments, or if you want to discuss your work or progress in the course. Outside of class, email is the best way to contact me, but you may phone me at home if you need to reach me during the evening (895-8962). As a courtesy, please do not phone after 9 pm or before 7 am.

Schedule (n.b. this schedule is tentative and subject to change):

Reading groups meet from 10-11, Monday-Thursday, unless otherwise indicated

Class meets from 1-3 in Berlin, Monday -Friday, unless otherwise indicated

All readings are in *Cambridge*, unless otherwise indicated

WEEK 1

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| Monday | PM | Introduction to Milton |
| Tuesday | all day | Marathon Reading of <i>Paradise Lost</i> on the Orange Carpet <i>Cambridge</i> Chapter 7 |
| Wednesday | | Happy Thanksgiving. |

Week 2

Reading Groups meet 10-11 Monday - Thursday
Class meets 1-3, Monday-Friday

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| Monday | PL Book I; <i>Cambridge</i> Chapter 1 and review Chapter 7; Genesis 1-3 |
| Tuesday | PL Book II; <i>Cambridge</i> Chapters 2 and 3 |
| Wednesday | PL Book III; <i>Cambridge</i> Chapter 4; Sonnets XIX (When I Consider. . .) and XXIII (Methought I Saw) (poems handed out in class) Short Paper/Recitation Lines: III.1-55 invocation III. 227-265 (Jesus agrees to redeem humanity) |
| Thursday | PL Book IV; re-read II.747-814; Genesis 1 (Moodle) Short Paper/Recitation Lines: IV. 32-113 (Satan's first soliloquy) IV. 358-392 (Satan's second soliloquy) IV. 440-491 (Eve's first speech; relates her creation) |
| Friday | <i>Cambridge</i> Chapters 12 and 15 Short paragraph explaining your topic and your research process due at 1 PM |

Week 3

Reading Groups meet 10-11 Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday

Class meets 1-3, Monday, Tuesday, Thursday, Friday

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| Monday | <p>PL Book V; re-read II.642-673; 1021-1033; II.11-42); <i>Cambridge</i> Chapter 5 & Chapter 8</p> <p>Short Paper/Recitation Lines: V. 28-93 (Eve's dream) V. 224-245 (God explains free will) V. 519-543 (Raphael explains free will) II. 11-42 V. 772-802 (Satan exhorts angels in heaven to rebel)</p> |
| Tuesday | <p>PL Book VI; <i>Cambridge</i> Chapter 6</p> <p>Short Paper/Recitation Lines: VI. 296-353 (first day of war in heaven; Satan feels pain) VI. 609-628 (Satan and Belial engage in word play—puns) VI. 628-679 (second day of war in heaven; they use mountains)</p> |
| Wednesday | <p>Draft of long paper due at 8 AM; paper conferences all day</p> |
| Thursday | <p>PL Book VII & VIII; PL I. 1-75; Genesis 1-2 (Moodle)</p> <p>Short Paper/Recitation Lines: I. 1-75 VII. 1-39 (exact center of epic; Milton invokes the muse) VII. 109-130 (Raphael on knowledge—and its limits) VIII. 64-106 & 167-178 (Raphael cautions Adam against intemperate curiosity) VIII. 250-341 (Adam relates his creation) VIII. 354-451 (Adam requests a mate—argues with God)</p> |
| Friday | <p>PL Book IX; Genesis 3 (Moodle); <i>Cambridge</i> Chapter 13</p> <p>Short Paper/Recitation Lines: XI. 1-47 (final invocation of muse) XI. 205-384 (Adam and Eve discuss temptation and virtue) XI. 679-732 (Satan tempts Eve) XI. 745-779 (Eve contemplates temptation) XI. 856-885 (fallen Eve wonders whether to tell Adam) XI. 896-916 (Adam's fall)</p> |

Week 4 Reading Groups meet 10-11 Monday - Tuesday
Class meets 1-3, Monday-Thursday

Monday PL Book X

Short Paper/Recitation Lines:
 X. 720-844 (Adam's despair)
 X. 967-1006 (Eve's despair)

Tuesday PL Book XI

Wednesday PL Book XII

Thursday 1 PM Final paper due. PL--final conversation

Friday Take home final due at 5 PM