

ENGLISH 552

JOHN MILTON: POETRY, PROSE, AND POLITICS

SPRING SEMESTER, 2011

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Office hours: MWF 10-11, TTh 1:30-3:00, and by appointment

Text: *The Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, ed. William Kerrigan, John Rumrich, and Stephen M. Fallon (Modern Library, 2007).

Supplementary text: *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson (Cambridge University Press, 1999).

During the mid-seventeenth century, when England was in the grip of a political, religious and cultural revolution and poetry was widely regarded as frivolous, John Milton became, paradoxically, England's great Puritan poet. He had long identified with dissenting groups, held political office under Oliver Cromwell during the Civil War, and was noted for his liberal prose treatises on divorce and censorship, kingship and Christian doctrine. Any reading of his poems, therefore, needs to be informed by biographical, religious and political contexts as well as by the literary traditions within which Milton wrote. In this seminar, we shall read portions of Milton's prose treatises along with his poetry, and we shall study the political and social history of seventeenth-century England as well. Milton's literary heritage, too, will not be slighted – Expect to do supplementary reading in the Old and New Testaments, classical epic and drama – but that heritage is a part of a wider cultural heritage in which religion, economics, and politics all play a part. Milton was both of his time and for all time.

Reading for the seminar, often heavy and at times difficult, will richly reward the pains you take. It is crucial that you keep up with assignments: class participation will figure significantly in your final grade. You will be asked to do frequent reading in Milton criticism, to write précis of eight articles or book chapters, to report to the class about four of those you have found helpful, and to submit two research papers on topics of your choice, the dates for which are in bold. Pelletier Library has a considerable collection of scholarly books and journals on Milton with which you will want to become familiar, and of course the internet has numerous resources, though one needs to use caution in relying exclusively on the internet for information. Your final grade will be calculated as follows: Class participation, including précis and reports on critical articles: 30%. First research paper: 30%. Second research paper: 40%. But what are grades? Mere worldly things. You have, as Milton would argue, a paradise within thee happier far. So read until you go blind. *He did.*

On 2-hour reserve at Pelletier Library: Dennis Danielson, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Milton* (Cambridge, 1999); and P. J. Klemp, ed., *The Essential Milton: an annotated bibliography of major modern studies* (G. K. Hall, 1989).

Attendance Policy: I allow only two unexcused absences without penalty. Each additional unexcused absence will incur a 3 1/3 point deduction from your final grade. Absences will be excused only with *written* proof of cause – medical, institutional, or religious. Attendance counts.

DATE	ASSIGNMENT
1/20	Remarks on Milton's early life and times; trip to the library
1/25	Versions of Milton's life (xxi-xxx) and handouts: Shawcross and Flannagan. Also the Sonnets and "On the New Forcers of Conscience" (137-65).
1/27	Sonnets, continued; "Lycidas" (99-110) and the tradition of pastoral elegy; handout: Evans.
2/1-3	<i>Comus: A Mask Presented at Ludlow Castle</i> and the art of the masque: a study in cultural form and politics, chastity and Platonic idealism. Handout: Flannagan.
2/3	Précis due on <i>Comus</i>.
2/8-10	<i>Paradise Lost</i> Book 1: classical and biblical invocations; the epic tradition of warfare. Handout: Flannagan.
2/15-17	<i>Paradise Lost</i> Book 2: classical underworlds, Satan as tragic hero, and the dis-simile. See also Homer, <i>Iliad</i> 2.1-485; <i>Odyssey</i> 11; and Virgil, <i>Aeneid</i> 6.236-636.
2/17	Précis due on Milton's underworld or on the character of Satan.
2/22-24	<i>Paradise Lost</i> Book 3: the problem of celestial debate; Calvinism and the problem of free will. Also <i>Christian Doctrine</i> introduction (1137-39) and chapter 4 (1159-71).
2/24	Précis due on Milton's God.
3/1-3	<i>Paradise Lost</i> Book 4: Renaissance gardens and intimations of the fall; cf. Spenser, <i>Faerie Queene</i> 2.12 and Tasso, <i>Jerusalem Delivered</i> 14-16; also read <i>The Discipline and Doctrine of Divorce</i> (853-56, 865-79).
3/3	Précis due on Milton's Garden of Eden.
3/8	<i>Paradise Lost</i> Book 5: the gods at war; cf. <i>Iliad</i> 5 and 21.400-513; correspondences with the English Civil War.

- 3/10 *Paradise Lost* Book 6: typology of the good man as hero; read *Christian Doctrine* 1.2 (1145-52).
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- 3/15 *Paradise Lost* Book 7: the nature of creation and hierarchy; also read *Genesis 1-3* (King James version) and Ovid, *Metamorphoses* 1.
- 3/17 *Paradise Lost* Book 8: Milton and the new science; the structure of the middle.
- 3/18, 4 pm **Research paper #1 due (10-12 pages).**
- 3/19-27 Spring break
- 3/29 *Areopagitica* (922-66). Handout: Flannagan.
- 3/31-4/5 *Paradise Lost* Book 9: the psychology of temptation, Milton and misogyny, and the critical debate over Eve.
- 4/5 **Précis due on the nature of the fall, or on the character of Eve.**
- 4/7 No class.
- 4/12-14 *Paradise Lost* Book 10: quarrel and reconciliation.
- 4/14 **Précis due on some aspect of some aspect of Book 10.**
- 4/19 *Paradise Lost* Book 11: the purpose of educating man to history; also *Of Education* (967-81); cf. *Aeneid* 6.752-901.
- 4/21 *Paradise Lost* Book 12: the function of typology, and the apocalyptic vision.
- 4/21 **Précis due on either Book 11 or Book 12.**
- 4/26 *Samson Agonistes* and the traditions of classical tragedy; cf. Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* and Sophocles, *Oedipus Tyrannus*. Handout: Flannagan.
- 4/28 *Samson Agonistes* and biblical sources; read the *Book of Job* and the section on Samson in the *Book of Judges* (King James version).
- 5/3 *Samson Agonistes*: a political autobiography?
Précis due on *Samson Agonistes*.
- 5/9, 9am **Research paper #2 due (12-14 pages).**