

# ENGLISH 211: MILTON

Spring 2003

Mr. Pierce

**TEXTS:** Milton, John. The Riverside Milton. Ed. Roy Flannagan. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1998.  
Rivers, Isabel. Classical and Christian Ideas in English Renaissance Poetry. 2nd ed. New York: Routledge, 1994.

## ASSIGNMENTS:

- Feb. 4 Introduction
- Feb. 6 Sonnets, Flannagan, pp. 77-88, 250-59, 289-93
- Feb. 11 Memorize and perform one of the sonnets
- Feb. 13 Flannagan, pp. 31-47, esp. "On the Morning of Christs Nativity"; Rivers, Ch. 2
- Feb. 18 Flannagan, pp. 50-62, esp. "At a Solemn Musick"; Rivers, Ch. 3, 6
- Feb. 20 Flannagan, pp. 65-77, "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso"; Rivers, Ch. 9
- Feb. 25 Flannagan, pp. 89-93, 109-71, esp. Comus
- Feb. 27 First paper due
- Mar. 4 Flannagan, pp. 94-107, 236-44, esp. "Lycidas"
- Mar. 11 Flannagan, pp. 987-1024, Areopagitica; Rivers, Ch. 7, 8
- Mar. 18 Flannagan, pp. 297-378, Paradise Lost I
- Mar. 20 Flannagan, 380-412, Paradise Lost II
- Apr. 1 Flannagan, pp. 414-73, Paradise Lost III and IV; Genesis 1-3
- Apr. 3 Flannagan, pp. 474-559, Paradise Lost V to VII
- Apr. 8 Flannagan, pp. 560-621, Paradise Lost VIII and IX
- Apr. 10 Flannagan, pp. 622-87, Paradise Lost X and XI
- Apr. 15 Flannagan, pp. 688-710, Paradise Lost XII
- Apr. 17, 22 Group reports on Paradise Lost
- Apr. 24 Flannagan, pp. 711-50, Paradise Regained I and II; Luke 1-4

Apr. 29 Flannagan, pp. 751-82  
May 1 Flannagan, pp. 783-811, Samson Agonistes; Judges 13-16  
May 6 Flannagan, pp. 811-44, Samson Agonistes completed  
May 8 Second paper due

The Devil: The Englishman described me as being expelled from heaven by cannons and gunpowder; and to this day every Briton believes that the whole of his silly story is in the Bible. What else he says I do not know; for it is all in a long poem which neither I nor anyone else has ever succeeded in wading through.

--Don Juan in Hell

#### **COURSE REQUIREMENTS:**

Attendance and class participation  
Performance of memorized sonnet  
Participation in group oral report  
Two papers six to ten pages each

#### **GROUP REPORT:**

Several times through the semester groups of three will be asked to give a twenty-five-minute report on a topic relevant to the reading for that time. You will be asked to sign up for one of the groups, to meet with the group to divide up the work and plan the report, and to do some research toward the group project. The group may choose how to divide the time, what techniques of presentation to use, etc. You may even alter the topic on the basis of what you find, but please warn me well before class if you do. I will be glad to meet with your group if you wish.

#### **PAPER ASSIGNMENTS:**

For each of the papers you may choose any topic bearing on Milton's writing. Do read a couple of critical discussions relevant to the topic you choose, preferably after you have tentatively formulated your own ideas. Don't let your paper be taken over by the criticism, but indicate in the text where your views of a few crucial issues are located in comparison to the critics you have read. Listed below are some possible topics, but it is perfectly appropriate to write on something different. I would urge you to discuss your topic with me fairly early in the writing process; I would also be willing to look at a draft. The 6-10-page length should be considered only an indication of scope; write until you have carried out your purpose and then stop.

Papers should use 8 1/2 x 11 paper. You should either word-process, type, or write legibly in ink. Corrections are perfectly all right, and you may use both sides of the paper.

Papers are due either in class or by 4:30 at my office, Rice 106, If you need an extension, check with me in advance.

If you use scholarly or critical writing beyond what we have in the text, including Internet material, be sure to document the use specifically. Footnote any ideas that you take from such a text, and indicate with quotation marks any places where you use an author's words. When a text has been generally useful and you have no occasion to footnote to it, include it in a bibliography. Give book and line references when you quote from a long poem. It is appropriate to have other people read and comment on your writing before you turn it in, but of course you should have written whatever you put your name to. If you have any questions about proper use of others' work or documentation, feel free to consult with me. With each paper include the honor code affirmation in the following form: "I affirm that I have adhered to the Honor Code in this assignment."

Passion and restraint in a couple of the early poems  
Milton and the metaphysical conceit in a couple of the early poems  
Masks and identity in Comus  
Music as form and idea in Comus  
The ethics of grief and mourning  
Sincerity and the shepherd's mask in "Lycidas"  
Feeling and poetic shape in Milton's sonnets  
Voices and Milton's voice in Areopagitica  
The idea of liberty in Areopagitica and Paradise Lost IX  
Satan as Machiavelli's Prince  
Outward form and identity in the devils of Paradise Lost  
Michelangelo's Sistine frescos and Milton's visions  
Moralized landscapes in Paradise Lost  
Misogynist or feminist: Milton and Eve  
Poetry and assertion: the gnomic side of Paradise Lost  
The Book of Job and Paradise Regained  
Christ in Paradise Regained and Spenser's Guyon  
"How changed from him": The Satan of Paradise Regained  
Samson and the Oedipus of Oedipus at Colonus  
Catharsis and illumination as ends of Samson Agonistes  
The lyric voice in Samson Agonistes  
Wrestling with Milton: Shelley's Frankenstein as commentary on Paradise Lost  
How to be a radical humanist: The politics of one of Milton's poems

#### **SOME USEFUL CRITICISM ON MILTON:**

Douglas Bush, Paradise Lost in Our Time. Learned, humane defense of Milton, and a model orthodox reading of Paradise Lost.

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\_\_\_\_\_ and others, A Variorum Commentary on the Poems of John Milton. Splendid summaries of criticism, scholarship, and annotation on the minor poems and Paradise Regained (not on Samson or Paradise Lost yet).

- Anne Ferry, Milton's Epic Voice. A subtle exploration of the role of the narrator in Paradise Lost and related topics.
- Stanley Fish, Surprised by Sin. A detailed and ingenious reader-response interpretation of Paradise Lost as a poem that educates by a self-corrective process of reading.
- Roland Mushat Frye, Milton's Imagery and the Visual Arts. Detailed, learned study of the iconography in many of Milton's descriptions.
- Helen Gardner, A Reading of Paradise Lost. Sensitive, informed essays on some key issues of, especially on Satan and Adam and Eve.
- Christopher Hill, Milton and the English Revolution. A bit thesis-ridden, but immensely learned and useful on its emphasis on radical elements in Milton's thought.
- Barbara Lewalski, Milton's Brief Epic. The best and most detailed reading of Paradise Regained.
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- \_\_\_\_\_, The Life of John Milton: A Critical Biography. The definitive biography.
- C. S. Lewis, A Preface to Paradise Lost. Invaluable introduction and a provocative reading from an orthodox Christian perspective.
- I. G. MacCaffrey, Paradise Lost as "Myth." A thoughtful exploration of recurrent images and other patterns.
- Marjorie Nicolson, John Milton: A Reader's Guide. A good handbook, especially informed on the intellectual climate.
- Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson, eds., Re-membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions. An intelligent collection of post-structuralist, feminist, and new historicist essays.
- Christopher Ricks, Milton's Grand Style. Perhaps the best study of the poetic technique of Paradise Lost.
- Harold Skulsky, Milton and the Death of Man: Humanism on Trial in Paradise Lost. Intricate consideration of free will in Paradise Lost.
- W. B. C. Watkins, An Anatomy of Milton's Verse. Stimulating impressionistic criticism.