

### Guidelines

• Paper is due **Friday, August 2** by 5:00pm under my office door or in my mailbox in South Hall. Your paper will be graded down one-third of a grade for each day it is late, beginning after 5:00 on Friday. This paper is worth 35% of your final grade. *You cannot pass the class if you don't turn in the paper.*

• Papers should be 5-6 pages typed (1250-1500 words) double-spaced with one inch margins. Title pages are not necessary, but do have a title. Save your work in multiple places.

• The goal of this essay is to demonstrate an ability of making sense and making use of Milton's poetry. You should demonstrate that you can read Milton's verse with a strong level of reading comprehension and that you can go beyond that comprehension to say something specific--and original--about the text.

• To achieve these goals, you will want to **focus** your essay. I recommend that you pick a specific passage from Paradise Lost to work through your chosen paper topic. You want to demonstrate your ability to comprehend and analyze Milton's language. Therefore it is important for you to ground your essay in a specific section of the text, which will then serve as evidence for your claim(s). You can focus on one specific passage (anywhere from 10-50 lines long) or a couple of chunks from different sections of the text. You are also free to use quotations from other parts of the texts but I am interested in seeing a sustained and in depth engagement with the text.

• Go beyond translation. Avoid plot summary in your paper, though you may use short statements about the plot in order to contextualize your argument. Milton's language is often complex and hard to follow and you will need to work out what the text is saying. But don't stop there. I'm mostly interested in *your* thoughts, not Milton's. Don't settle for writing about *what* he says; ask *why* he says it, *how* he says it, and notice *when* and *where* he says it.

• While you may use points brought up in lecture or discussion, go beyond these points and discuss *unexplored issues*.

• Your paper should have a **clear and interesting (original) thesis**. Your thesis must be an argument that requires textual support. You can test your thesis by asking yourself if someone could make an argument *against* it. If no one could, then it is self-evident and does not need a paper to support it (i.e. "Satan feels remorse at different points in PL" is a relatively unarguable--and obvious--statement). Please remember that a "paper topic" is not the same thing as a thesis; a paper topic is only meant to as a subject from which you need to make a thesis. Importantly, you should do in your paper what you claim in your thesis.

• You should logically and clearly argue your point(s). Presentation, that is, logic, connection between points, introduction, conclusion, word choice and evidence, is vital. **How you say something is as important as what you are saying.**

• You should use **textual support**--i.e. quotations--to support your argument. When you use quotations, you must use the correct form (MLA--see handout). Also, remember to set up your quotations so that they flow logically at the sentence level. make sure they don't randomly pop up in your paper. There should be a clear reason why you are using specific textual support. Don't just stick a quotation in and leave it hanging. You need to talk about it, analyze it, take it apart.

• The best papers will be focused and specific with close attention to the text *and* will also situate the argument within the poem at large.

• If you use any sources outside the poem (including supplementary material from the Elledge edition), please make sure they are properly acknowledged.

• Proofread your papers; they should be free of spelling and grammatical errors.

Final Paper--guidelines and topics

Topics

- Discuss the ways in which Milton's voice **interrupts** the narrative of PL. You will certainly want to look at the openings of books I, III, VII, and IX and focus from there--don't try to write on all of them, although you may focus on one or two and refer to the others. You may also want to discuss how Milton interrupts his narrative in other, less blatant ways. What is being achieved in these interruptions? How do they help us to understand the text better? How do they fit in with the narrative structure in the books in which they occur?
- Consider how the words "**knowledge**" and "knowing" are used in PL. Books V, VIII, and IX are especially important here. Sticking closely to the text, make an argument about the ways that "knowledge" is constructed. You will probably want to look at the Milton Concordance (in the Reserve Book Room) to see when "knowledge" appears in the poem. Who gets to know things? When is knowledge withheld and what are the consequences of this?
- Analyze the way **gender** divisions and/or hierarchies are constructed in PL. Certainly you might look at Adam and Eve, but you may also look at other ways in which the text invokes these divisions (the description of Sin, the muses, the personification of certain inanimate objects). How is gender constructed through appearance? Through activities?
- Investigate the **erotics** of PL. You might want to look at Adam and Eve and how their sex before the fall is different than their postlapsarian sex. You might look at Satan and his erotic desires. You may consider sexual imagery in its explicit and implicit forms. What (if anything) does the separation of passion and reason have to do with sexual desire? You might also explore the notion of the homoerotics of the angels; consider Raphael's answer to Adam's question at the end of Book VIII.
- Consider **warfare** in PL. You will want to look at Books VI and/or XI. What do you think the war in heaven ultimately achieves? What is Milton's vision of war? Is Paradise Lost a poem about war? You might consider the historical framework in working on this topic. How--especially in Book XI--are war and death intimately linked? You might want to consult the Milton Concordance and look up "war" and "warfare."
- Examine places in the text where someone is **watching** or being watched. Is there a type of surveillance going on? Does power lie in the gaze? Certainly you might consider God's omniscience, but you might also look at Satan's gaze in Book IV and IX. Consult the Milton Concordance to locate where in the text "watch" words are used ("watch(ing)," "spy," "see," etc.).
- The particular questions attached to each topic are meant only to get you thinking. They are not meant to supply either a limit or a framework for your paper.
- I encourage you to develop your own topics. If you do choose to do this, **you must run your idea/thesis by me first.**
- I am more than happy to meet with you in private to talk about your papers. You should, however, try to see me before too long. Coming to see me the day before it is due will probably not be very helpful to you. Also, when you come to my office hours don't come as a tabula rasa (blank slate). Come with issues, ideas, problems--it's most helpful for you if you come with actual writing--a thesis statement, at least, or a rough draft. Make an appointment if you can't come to my OHs.
- The writing lab in CLAS (Campus Learning Assistant Services) is available to you for free up until July 31st. Take advantage of this great service especially if you are having trouble with organization, thesis development, logic, and other writing problems. Drop by building 300 (across the bike path and walkway from South Hall and the Supply Cabinet) to sign up.