

ENGLISH 389: POETRY AND PROSE OF JOHN MILTON  
DR. SARAH HIGINBOTHAM  
OXFORD COLLEGE of EMORY UNIVERSITY

## OVERVIEW

### Critical Reading and Writing as Attunement

Since 1667, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* has awed, angered, and inspired readers. It's a poem of enormous ambition and profound beauty, one that novelists, classical composers, punk rock bands, political radicals, and contemporary filmmakers have engaged with in creative and generative ways. Written by one of the most brilliant and educated men of the English Renaissance, this epic poem probes both the sweetness of romantic love and the corruption of the church and the political state — all the while demanding that its readers make active choices.

But Milton wrote more than epic poetry. His political, religious, and philosophical prose even influenced the roots of the United States' Bill of Rights. And he wrote sonnets, a masque, occasional poems, and other poetry, although nearly all of his poetry defies clear genres.

"Give me liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties," Milton writes in *Aeropagetica*. This semester in English 389, we will center on knowing, communicating, and arguing freely about Milton's poetry, prose, and all that it enkindles.

## IMPORTANT DATES

March 6	midterm
April 10	essay
April 24	commonplace book due
May 2	final exam 2-5 pm

SPRING 2018

10 - 11:40 a.m.

Language Hall 101

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Office hours: TTH 9 - 10 a.m.

Office: Humanities Hall 205B

## MATERIALS

### REQUIRED

*Complete Poetry and Essential Prose of John Milton*, Edited by John Rumrich and William Kerrigan, Modern Library, 2007

A blank book to be used as a commonplace book

### WEBSITES

[Canvas](#)

[Dr. Higinbotham's Website](#)

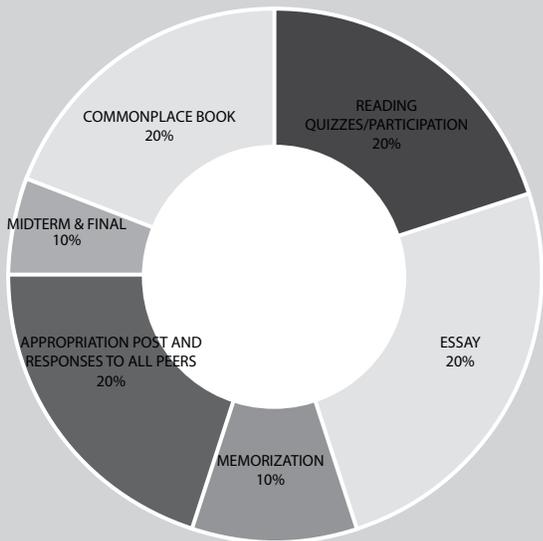
[Library Research](#)

[Voyant](#)

# EVALUATION

Every assignment will have specific and thorough guidelines that explain the project. You can access the assignment information on both Canvas and my course website. You can also discuss an assignment with me before it's due. While the assignments themselves are challenging, you should never feel lost or confused about the actual parameters of an assignment or my expectations. If you do, please ask questions in class, make an appointment to see me, or e-mail me.

## ASSIGNMENTS & GRADING



The **reading quizzes** will occur regularly at the beginning of class. The first quiz question will always be to write a quotation from the day's reading on the board, with your name beneath. Sometimes the reading quiz will be an impromptu essay on the reading. I will drop your lowest quiz grade, which includes a 0 received for a quiz given during a class absence. The grade includes your attentive and active participation in class (explained more fully below in "Classroom Policies").

In the **memorization**, you will choose at least thirty lines of Milton's poetry to memorize and recite.

The **essay** will be a 6-page, close reading of a short passage (less than 100 lines of poetry or 500 words of prose).

The **appropriation post** assignment provides you the opportunity to research and present on a work of art -- music, visual art, film, poetry, prose, even jewelry or landscape -- inspired by John Milton. You may also choose a political or philosophical work, such as the United States Bill of Rights. You will post images and/or links to your chosen appropriation, as well as 250 words discussing how the artist appropriates John Milton's work. You will also be required to respond to everyone's post with at least one, substantive sentence. The grade you are given includes your own post and sixteen responses, one for each student.

The **commonplace book** will be a collection of at least 100 quotes, divided into 10-12 categories, checked periodically over the course of the semester. Random commonplace book checks will count as quiz grades, so bring it to every class.

"Satan Descends Upon the Earth"  
Gustave Dore, 1866

"With me it fares now, as with him whose outward garment hath been injured and ill bedighted, for having no other shift, what help but to turn the inside outwards, especially if the lining be of the same, or as it is sometimes, much better. .'" John Milton, *An Apology*

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

“Plagiarism,” from the Latin word for kidnapping, is presenting another person’s work as your own. When you deliberately use someone else’s language, ideas, images, or other original material or code without fully acknowledging its source by quotation marks as appropriate, in footnotes or endnotes, in works cited, and in other ways as appropriate, you will be in violation of Emory Oxford’s Honor Code.

[Honor Code](#)

[Process for academic misconduct](#)



Portrait of John Milton, National Portrait Gallery, London

## MISTAKES ARE WELCOME

Milton’s epic poem is about a big mistake, how it happened, the consequences, and -- crucially -- the recovery. Everyone is bound to make mistakes. Especially when taking risks. A writing teacher I admire, Nick Carbone, has this to add about plagiarism:

Unfortunately, the term “plagiarism” is more technical than practical. It’s used to describe equally mistakes in handling and citing sources and deliberate cheating and lying about the authorship of the work you hand in. In fact, one refuge of many cheaters is to say that they merely made mistakes in source handling. So by plagiarism in this course I want us all to distinguish between fraud and cheating, which is always wrong, and mistakes in learning, which are inevitable, correctable, and for many people, necessary for learning. Mistakes are welcome; deliberate fraud is not. (“Talking about Plagiarism: A Syllabus Strategy”)

## THE QUALITY OF FAILURE

One of the greatest obstacles to learning is the fear of failure. Students have sometimes been taught that they need to be perfect – or as close to perfect as possible – in order to be validated, approved, and rewarded. But I think that there are things far more important than perfection: curiosity, risk taking, persistence, integrity, self-awareness, and often failure itself. I want you, in the words of Edward Burger, to make for yourselves “a mind enlivened by curiosity and the intellectual audacity to take risks and create new ideas, a mind that sees a world of unlimited possibilities.”

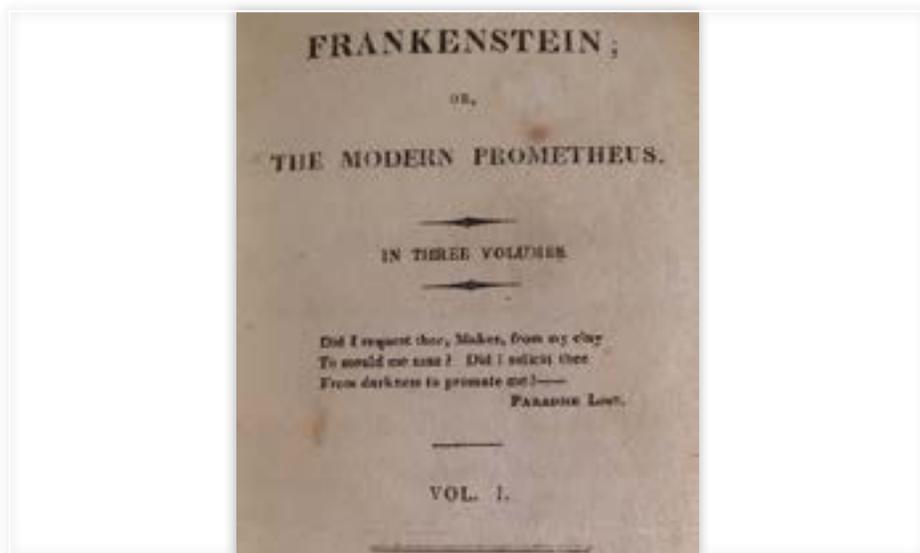
For this reason, part of the course will involve addressing how you handled failure this semester in English 389. Have you been willing to challenge yourself and take risks that might result in failure? Have you been aware of when you have failed, and refused to give up in the face of failure? Have you found ways to use your failure to create something new and interesting? Have you grown from your failures? I hope – in the spirit of Milton’s own risk-taking – that you will allow yourself to take risks and learn from them.

## REVISION

You have the opportunity to revise any of your projects this semester. The ability to accept and act on criticism is one of the most important critical abilities you can develop. Can you hear constructive criticism with an open mind, build on lessons learned, and make revisions in response to suggestions? If so, I will assess your revised project a second time. A revision isn't just a quick fix of the obvious errors, but a "re-vision," or another look at your project, in which you address feedback. If you choose to revise, it can only help, not hurt your grade. The revision must include a cover letter, in which you explain to me what and why you revised what you did. You may send revisions as e-mail attachments, but make sure I respond and tell you I received the revision. If I do not respond within a day, I did not receive the revision.

Revisions are due one week from when you receive a grade and feedback from me. If you revise an assignment, I will average the two grades as your assignment grade.

**Please note:** Some scholarships and academic tracks require that you maintain a certain grade point average. My grading policies are fair, and I'm always willing to discuss concerns you have over any specific grades when I return them to you. But I will not negotiate an overall course grade based on your jeopardized scholarship (or any other social or funding pressures).



Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, 1818, with epigraph from John Milton's *Paradise Lost*

## DISAGREEMENTS

I think most of what I have learned that is of any consequence has arisen from disagreeing with someone else. I welcome your respectful disagreements with me. If we all interpret what we read and discuss in the same way, we have a problem, because no true thinking will occur. At the prison where I teach, the new students are very hesitant to disagree with their peers, or me, because in the prison universe, disagreements almost invariably escalate into violence. But the incarcerated students gradually learn that disagreements make the classroom environment more interesting, productive, generative, and challenging. My classroom is not Plato's Cave.

Please note that the college classroom is a place where ideas are exchanged respectfully. I look forward to an environment where this will occur, but I don't have much tolerance for distracting behavior, such as rudeness, texting, sleeping, or talking during class. If your participation is disruptive to the classroom discussion, if it creates a hostile, intimidating, or offensive environment, you are subject to removal from the classroom at my discretion.

[Emory's policy on respect and consideration in the Code of Conduct](#)



William Blake's *The Temptation of Eve*



*Paradise Lost*, From the Folger Shakespeare Library vault

## LATE ASSIGNMENTS

In order to make the evaluation process fair to students who submitted their work on time, I will accept late assignments only if you communicate with me about it before the assignment is due. Every day an assignment is late, the maximum grade you can receive will be lowered by a letter grade (ten points). This includes weekends and there are no exceptions.

Any assignment that is not submitted will be recorded as a 0 (“zero”) and averaged with the rest of your grades. This can damage your course average severely: For example, if you have completed five assignments with a 92 average but don’t submit a sixth assignment (which is counted as a “zero”), your overall average will be a 77.

### COMMON POLICIES

Emory Oxford common policies, course completion, attendance requirements, participation in class, non-discrimination, accommodations, academic misconduct, syllabus modifications, and learning outcomes are available on the website. You will be responsible for these policies, and when you sign the Statement of Understanding, you affirm that you are familiar with these policies.

### CLASSROOM POLICIES

In addition to respectful, engaged participation, I have the following classroom policies: 1) no laptops unless we are specifically using them, for example during the workshop days; 2) cell phones on silent and in your bags; 3) you should ask at least two questions or make two comments in each class. If speaking during class is extremely uncomfortable for you, you may write down your comments and/or questions and give them to me at the end of class. Alternatively, if you are very enthusiastic about speaking in class, please refrain from making more than five comments or asking more than five questions. You may write down what you were not able to say and I will read it after class. I also urge you to come to my office hours, and if they do not suit your schedule, arrange alternative office hours with me. This is to keep the entire class equitably participating during the time we have together.



Oxford College, Emory University.

### Salvador Dali, Paradise Lost 1974



## WEEKLY SCHEDULE

THURSDAY JANUARY 18	INTRODUCTIONS, SYLLABUS "ON SHAKESPEARE"
TUESDAY JANUARY 23 THURSDAY JANUARY 25	"ON THE MORNING OF CHRIST'S NATIVITY" <i>AEROPAGETICA</i> AEROPAGETICA OUTLINE (SCHWARTZ)
TUESDAY JANUARY 30 THURSDAY FEBRUARY 1	<i>ON EDUCATION</i> "LYCIDAS"
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 6 THURSDAY FEBRUARY 8	SONNETS 1-8 "THE PASSION" "L'ALLEGRO" AND "IL PENSEROSO"
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 13 THURSDAY FEBRUARY 15	SELECTIONS FROM <i>THE TENURE OF KINGS AND MAGISTRATES</i> SONNETS 9-23
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 20 THURSDAY FEBRUARY 22	GENESIS 1 - 3 <i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 1 <i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 1
TUESDAY FEBRUARY 27 THURSDAY MARCH 1	<i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 2 <i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 3
TUESDAY MARCH 6 THURSDAY MARCH 8	<b>MIDTERM</b> (IN-CLASS, OPEN-BOOK ESSAY) <i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 4
TUESDAY MARCH 13 THURSDAY MARCH 15	SPRING BREAK SPRING BREAK
TUESDAY MARCH 20 THURSDAY MARCH 22	<i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 5 <i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 6
TUESDAY MARCH 27 THURSDAY MARCH 29	<i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 7 <i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 8
TUESDAY APRIL 3 THURSDAY APRIL 5	<i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 9 <i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 9
TUESDAY APRIL 10 THURSDAY APRIL 12	ESSAY DUE <i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOK 10 <i>PARADISE LOST</i> , BOOKS 11-12
TUESDAY APRIL 17 THURSDAY APRIL 19	<i>SAMSON AGONISTES</i> JUDGES 13-16 <i>SAMSON AGONISTES</i>
TUESDAY APRIL 24 THURSDAY APRIL 26	COMMONPLACE BOOK DUE REVIEW
MAY 2	FINAL EXAM, 2 - 5 PM