

ENGL 226

Trimester 2, 2008

# God and the Poets: Christian Traditions in English Poetry

## COURSE OUTLINE

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### COURSE ORGANISATION

#### *Teaching staff*

Peter Whiteford VZ 801, Ext. 6820 [Peter.Whiteford@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Peter.Whiteford@vuw.ac.nz)  
(Course co-ordinator)  
Greg Martin VZ 907, Ext. 9599 [Greg.Martin@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Greg.Martin@vuw.ac.nz)

#### *Class times and places*

Lecture times: Mon, Wed, Fri 10.00-11.00: Hunter 220  
Tutorials: *one of:* Mon 9.00-9.50, VZ105;  
Wed 11.00-11.50, VZ106;  
Thur 11.00-11.50, VZ509;  
Fri 9.00-9.50, VZ105.

**NB** The number of tutorials offered will depend on the final enrolment. Not all of the above times may be available.

Tutorial lists will be compiled as soon as possible in the first week of term and posted on the English noticeboard in the foyer outside HM 206, and on the Blackboard site. Tutorials will begin in the second week of the term.

The tutorials are a very important part of the course; you should always try to prepare fully for them, to take the appropriate text with you, and to contribute to the discussion.

#### *Further information*

Additional information or notification of changes will be provided in lectures and tutorials and made available through the course Blackboard site. If you have a question or problem, you should consult the course co-ordinator.

#### *Confirmation of enrolment*

Please check that your name is included on the class list (via the tutorial listing). If it is not, you should check your enrolment with the Enrolment Office.

## COURSE CONTENT

### *Aims and Objectives*

This course explores the ways in which poets writing in English across ten centuries have written about, been influenced by, and responded to the central beliefs of Christianity. It will provide an overview of those central beliefs, and of their historical development, but the primary focus will be on the range and depth of the literary responses to Christianity. The course will also consider some prominent anthologies of religious or Christian verse in order to examine the principles governing their compilation.

By the end of the course, you should:

- be familiar with all of the texts studied and responsive to the detail of individual works; [Assessment item 1 and 2]
- be familiar with the central beliefs and basic concepts of Christianity, and the ways in which they have been influential in English poetry; [Assessment item 2 and 4]
- be able to discuss a major text in a formal academic essay; [Assessment item 2]
- be able to conduct literary research on a given topic. [Assessment item 3]

## SET TEXTS

There are only two texts required for the course: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. John Leonard (Penguin Classics, 2003); *God and the Poets An Anthology of Christian Poetry* (Victoria University of Wellington, 2008); available from the Student Notes Centre. Other material may be distributed in class. You are free to use an alternative edition of *Paradise Lost*, but you should make sure it is a complete text, and preferably a recent scholarly edition that includes useful explanatory notes.

You will see from the course programme that the main text for study in Section B is John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. However, we won't study the whole poem, and you aren't expected to read the whole poem (although you are, of course, welcome to do so). Below are the passages that I will expect you to have read. Note that the poem is divided into twelve books; each book begins with a short prose argument. You should read the argument for all twelve books.

Book I:	1-168, 242-263, 622-669.
Book II:	1-473, 746-814.
Book III:	80-265.
Book IV:	1-113, 285-535, 610-775.
Book V:	1-128, 224-245, 507-543.
Book VI:	Argument only.
Book VII:	519-557.
Book VIII:	Argument only.
Book IX:	The whole book.
Book X:	92-288, 441-521, 706-732.
Book XI:	46-66, 251-293, 423-470, 840-end.

## SECONDARY READINGS

Although the major focus of your attention will be the authors and works you are studying, you will also want to give some attention to secondary material, and I encourage you to do this—anything which helps you to think and increases your understanding is valuable. On the other hand, the secondary material must never become a substitute for your own thinking. Moreover,

while much of the secondary material is excellent, some is very uneven in quality and other material may not offer a useful model for undergraduate writing. This caution applies in particular to material that is available online. You need to be very careful about assessing the scholarship and reliability of such material. A bibliography will be made available separately on the Blackboard site. This will offer advice about background readings in religious materials (Biblical, devotional, theological, and so on) as well as in literary materials.

## MANDATORY COURSE REQUIREMENTS

The minimum course requirements which must be satisfied are:

1. completion of all of the pieces of assessment listed below, and
2. as in all English courses, attendance at at least 70% of tutorials.

Tutorial attendance is an important aspect of the teaching and learning programme for this course, and you are strongly advised (and, indeed, expected) to plan to attend all tutorials. However, from time to time there may be unusual circumstances, such as illness, which prevent your attendance. In ENGL 226, I regard the mandatory requirement of only 70% attendance (i.e. 8 of the 11 tutorials) as making provision for such circumstances.

## ASSESSMENT

This course is internally assessed, requiring four pieces of written work, the first and last of which are completed in class:

- 1 a short commentary on a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins;  
length: 1000 words; value: 15%; due date: in-class 25 July
- 2 an essay on *Paradise Lost*  
length: 2000-2500 words; value: 35%; due date: 1 September
- 3 a small research project  
length: 2000-2500 words; value: 35%; due date: 6 October
- 4 an in-class exercise;  
length: 1000 words value: 15% due date: in-class 10 October

**N. B.** You should pay attention to the word lengths set here. You may be penalised for being significantly under or over length. Quotations from the text being discussed (i. e. the 'primary' text) do **not** count as part of your word count. Details about all of the assignments will be distributed separately and will be on the Blackboard site.

### ***Due dates and extensions***

#### (i) Extensions

If you need an extension beyond the due date for any piece of work, you should ask **in advance** of the date, providing supporting documentation (e.g. medical certificate, note from the Counselling Service). Work submitted by the new 'due date' will be graded in the normal way. No penalty will apply. Extensions are granted by the course co-ordinator, not by your tutor.

#### (ii) Late work without extensions

Work submitted late without an extension will be counted, as long as it is received **within two weeks** of the due date. You will however be penalized by a lowering of the grade by one step for each week late and comments will be minimal.

(iii) Absolute deadlines

Extensions will not be granted beyond the final day of lectures without the permission of the Head of School, who may in exceptional circumstances grant extensions up to the end of the examining period.

**N.B.** It is sometimes possible that written work can go astray (although this rarely happens). You should make it a habit to keep a copy of any work submitted.

***Submission of written work***

Work should be submitted by 5.00 on the due date, using the drop boxes available on the eighth floor of the von Zedlitz building. Work must be submitted in a physical (paper) form, not online or as an email attachment, with the appropriate cover sheet.

***Return of written work***

Work which has been handed in on time will normally be marked within two weeks. Your tutor will either return your work in a tutorial, or will leave marked work with Helen O'Sullivan on the eighth floor of von Zedlitz.

***Aegrotat provisions***

Because this is an internally assessed paper, you should note carefully the provisions relating to aegrotat considerations. They are set out in the Examinations Statute in the Calendar, or on the University's website.

**RECOMMENDED WORKLOAD**

For a 22 point course at 200-level, it is recommended that you spend on average **15** hours per week **including class contact hours**. Therefore, you should spend about **11** hours of your own time in reading and preparation.

**GENERAL UNIVERSITY REQUIREMENTS**

Information relating to the general University requirements, to plagiarism, and to provisions for students with disabilities are available on the course Blackboard site. You are encouraged to read these. In particular, you should ensure you fully understand the University's policy with regard to plagiarism.

**COURSE SCHEDULE**

We will keep reasonably closely to the class schedule which follows, but there may be some variation to take account of interests and needs which emerge, or to allow for guest lecturers to participate in the programme.

You should make every endeavour to read ahead of the lectures; in particular, sections B and C include some longer poems (the excerpts from *Paradise Lost*, *Dream of the Rood*, and *Piers Plowman*) and it is important to have read these before we begin.

**ENGL 226: GOD AND THE POETS - CLASS SCHEDULE 2008**

WEEK		Section A: Creation Sings		
1	July	Mon	7	Organisation and preliminaries; two poems
		Wed	9	Dimensions of religion; the framework of Christianity
		Fri	11	Christianity and the Bible
2		Mon	14	God as artist/architect/composer
		Wed	16	'Morning has broken'; Caedmon's hymn
		Fri	18	The human dimension in creation
3		Mon	21	God - hidden or lost
		Wed	23	Hopkins and the sacramental view of nature
		Fri	25	In-class exercise 1
<b>Section B: Loss of Eden</b>				
4		Mon	28	Spring and Fall etc
		Wed	30	The problem of evil
	Aug	Fri	1	Milton: introduction, the epic
5		Mon	4	Milton: the figure of Satan
		Wed	6	Milton: the figure of God
		Fri	8	Milton: Adam and Eve and the Garden
6		Mon	11	Milton: Book 9 - the fall
		Wed	13	Milton and feminism
		Fri	15	other views, Edwin Muir
<b>MID-TRIMESTER BREAK (<i>Paradise Lost</i> essay due on return)</b>				
<b>Section C: The Life of Christ</b>				
7	Sept	Mon	1	Annunciation
		Wed	3	Nativity
		Fri	5	Epiphany and Transfiguration(s)
8		Mon	8	Views of Redemption
		Wed	10	Dream of the Rood
		Fri	12	Langland
9		Mon	15	Langland
		Wed	17	contemporary views of the Passion
		Fri	19	Resurrection
<b>Section D: Wrestling with God</b>				
10		Mon	22	Poetry and meditation
		Wed	24	Donne
		Fri	26	Herbert
11		Mon	20	Herbert
	Oct	Wed	1	Hopkins
		Fri	3	R. S. Thomas
12		Mon	6	R. S. Thomas
		Wed	8	James K Baxter
		Fri	10	in-class exercise 2