

ENGL 226

2006

# God and the Poets: Christian Traditions in English Poetry

## COURSE OUTLINE

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### COURSE ORGANISATION

#### *Teaching staff*

Peter Whiteford VZ 920, Ext. 6820 [Peter.Whiteford@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Peter.Whiteford@vuw.ac.nz)  
(Course co-ordinator)  
Tatjana Schaefer VZ 914, Ext. 6802 [Tatjana.Schaefer@vuw.ac.nz](mailto:Tatjana.Schaefer@vuw.ac.nz)

#### *Class times and places*

Lecture theatre: Mon, Tues: Hugh MacKenzie 002; Wed: Murphy 220  
Lecture times: Mon, Tues, Wed 11.00–11.50  
Tutorials: *one of*: Mon 12.00-12.50, VZ108;  
Wed 10.00-10.50, VZ105;  
Wed 12.00-12.50, VZ105;  
Wed 1.10-2.00, VZ105.

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;
- be familiar with the central beliefs and basic concepts of Christianity, and the ways in which they have been influential in English poetry;
- be familiar with some major anthologies of Christian verse and the principles governing the selection of their materials;
- be able to discuss a major text in a formal academic essay.

## **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, 2006); 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.

## **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 distributed separately. 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 three 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 three pieces of written work:

- 1 a short commentary on a poem by Gerard Manley Hopkins;  
length: 1000-1200 words; value: 15%; due date: 28 July
- 2 an essay on *Paradise Lost*  
length: 2000-2500 words; value: 35%; due date: 4 September
- 3 a minor research project  
length: 2000-2500 words; value: 40%; due date: 13 October

In addition, 10% of the final mark is set aside for tutorial assessment. Criteria pertaining to tutorial assessment will be distributed within the tutorials, but broadly speaking the assessment will focus on general preparation, responsiveness and participation in discussions, and fulfilment of specific set tasks.

**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 the first assignment and topics for the essay and research project will be distributed separately.

### ***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) if readily available. Work submitted by the new 'due date' will be graded in the normal way. No penalty will apply.

#### (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 (Professor Robert Easting). The Head of School 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***

This course operates a policy of blind marking. **You must submit all your written work with a cover sheet that contains your Student ID number, not your name.** 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 should be submitted in a physical (paper) form, not online or as an email attachment.

### ***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 Heazlewood 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.

### **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. In 2006, the Writer in Residence, Bernadette Hall, will visit the class (probably in mid-September) to talk about her recent publication of a poetic sequence based on the Stations of the Cross.

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      2006**

WEEK		<b>Section A: Creation Sings</b>		
1	July	Mon	10	Organisation and preliminaries; two poems
		Tues	11	Dimensions of religion; the framework of Christianity
		Wed	12	The Bible as source
2		Mon	17	God as artist/architect/composer
		Tues	18	'Morning has broken'; Caedmon's hymn
		Wed	19	The human dimension in creation
3		Mon	24	God – hidden or lost
		Tues	25	Hopkins and the sacramental view of nature
		Wed	26	Hopkins, 'The Wreck of the Deutschland' (to be confirmed)
<b>Section B: Loss of Eden</b>				
4	Aug	Mon	31	Spring and Fall et alii
		Tues	1	Original sin - the doctrines
		Wed	2	Milton
5		Mon	7	Milton
		Tues	8	Milton
		Wed	9	Milton
6		Mon	14	Milton
		Tues	15	Milton
		Wed	16	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	4	Annunciation
		Tues	5	Nativity
		Wed	6	Epiphany and Transfiguration(s)
8		Mon	11	ministry
		Tues	12	Dream of the Rood
		Wed	13	Langland
9		Mon	18	Langland
		Tues	19	contemporary views of Passion
		Wed	20	Resurrection
<b>Section D: Wrestling with God</b>				
10		Mon	25	Poetry and meditation
		Tues	26	Donne
		Wed	27	Herbert
11	Oct	Mon	2	Herbert
		Tues	3	Hopkins
		Wed	4	Hopkins
12		Mon	9	R. S. Thomas
		Tues	10	R. S. Thomas
		Wed	11	James K Baxter