

Proseminar Religion in English Literature, Seventeenth Century to Present

01	16.04.	Reading Test , Preliminaries Introduction: Religion in English Literature
02	23.04.	Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (I) → Presentation: Christianity – A Short Introduction
03	30.04.	Milton, <i>Paradise Lost</i> (II) → Presentation: Romantic Hero or Fool? Literary Criticism and the Problem of Satan in <i>Paradise Lost</i>
04	07.05.	Term Paper Writing (I): Research and Documentary Skills
05	14.05.	Swift, <i>Gulliver's Travels</i> , Term Paper Writing (II): How to Write an Abstract → Presentation: Catholics vs. Protestants - A Short History of the Reformation (with special emphasis on Great Britain)
	21.05.	no class ("Bergferien")
06	28.05.	Rushdie, <i>The Satanic Verses</i> (I) → Presentation: Islam – A Short Introduction
07	04.06.	Rushdie, <i>The Satanic Verses</i> (II) → Presentation: <i>The Satanic Verses</i> as a Postmodern Novel – Theoretical Backgrounds and Characteristics of Postmodern Writing
08	11.06.	Hogg, <i>The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner</i> vs. Robertson, <i>The Testament of Gideon Mack</i> (I) → Presentation: From Bakhtin's Dialogism to Kristeva's Intertextuality – Theoretical Backgrounds for an Intertextual Reading of Hogg and Robertson
09	18.06.	Hogg, <i>The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner</i> vs. Robertson, <i>The Testament of Gideon Mack</i> (II) → Presentation: "Imagine No Religion" – A Short Introduction to Atheism
10	25.06.	Introduction to "New" Spiritualities – Alternative Spiritual Paths , Macdonald, <i>Holy Cow!</i> (I) → Presentation: A Short Introduction to Buddhism Deadline topics If you have not signed up for a term paper topic yet, do so today.
11	02.07.	Macdonald, <i>Holy Cow!</i> (II) → Presentation: A Short Introduction to Hinduism Deadline abstract Deadline for term paper abstracts – no submissions will be accepted after this date.
12	09.07.	"The Gods Are in Your Every Breath" – Poetry as Spiritual Communication in Wicca → Presentation: Wiccan Poetry – Sample Analysis of Two Poems
13	16.07.	Term Paper Writing (III): Writing Skills, Citation Technique, Avoiding Plagiarism

Background Presentations – List of Topics

Background presentations will inform participants about the facts and theories needed for an informed discussion of the texts. Each student wishing to write a term paper in this course must sign up for a background presentation and provide a handout, **to be submitted electronically, 12 p.m. on the Friday before class**. Presentations may, but do not have to be related to the topic of your term paper.

	date	Topic	Student(s)
02	23.04.	1) Christianity – A Short Introduction (handout may be submitted by 12 p.m. on the Monday before class)	
03	30.04.	2) Romantic Hero or Fool? Literary Criticism and the Problem of Satan in <i>Paradise Lost</i>	
05	14.05.	3) Catholics vs. Protestants - A Short History of the Reformation (with special emphasis on Great Britain)	
06	28.05.	4): Islam – A Short Introduction	
07	04.06.	5) The Satanic Verses as a Postmodern Novel – Theoretical Backgrounds and Characteristics of Postmodern Writing	
08	11.06.	6) From Bakhtin's Dialogism to Kristeva's Intertextuality – Theoretical Backgrounds for an Intertextual Reading of Hogg and Robertson	
09	18.06.	7) "Imagine No Religion" – A Short Introduction to Atheism	
10	25.06.	8) A Short Introduction to Buddhism	
11	02.07.	9) A Short Introduction to Hinduism	
12	09.07.	10) Wiccan Poetry – Sample Analysis of Two Poems	

Term Papers – List of Topics

Do remember to sign up for a topic **online on StudOn** in time so you can write your abstract without time pressure (deadline for abstracts: July 2nd). **Students who fail to sign up will have a topic assigned to them.**

- 1) Religion as Paradox? Paradoxical Structures and their Effects in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Jonathan Swift's *Gulliver's Travels* (Book I)¹
- 2) Models of Christian Heroism? An Analysis of the Angels in *Paradise Lost*²
- 3) English Male Protestants Only? Exploring Marginalization in John Milton's *Paradise Lost*³
- 4) Storytelling in *Paradise Lost* – A Functional Analysis of the Variations of Satan's Rebellion⁴
- 5) "Free in thine own arbitrament"⁵? – The Problem of Free Will in John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*⁶
- 6) The Relativity of Good and Evil in James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner* and in James Robertson, *The Testament of Gideon Mack*⁷
- 7) Religion as Insanity? Faith and Mental Disorder in a Postmodern Society in *The Satanic Verses* and in *The Testament of Gideon Mack*⁸
- 8) Spirituality for Sale – The Commercialization of Religion in Salman Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses* and Sarah Macdonald's *Holy Cow! An Indian Adventure*⁹
- 9) "It Taints Nearly Every Religion" – Misogyny in Religion in Selected Contemporary Literature¹⁰

¹ You might want to consult Rosalie L. Colie's analysis *Paradoxia Epidemica* to explore what forms paradoxes can take and to what ends. Then identify some paradoxes of your choice in Milton's and Swift's texts and analyze their purpose. Finally, a synthesis comparing the different uses of paradox is required.

² This question aims at Uriel, Gabriel, the angelic guard, Raphael, and Abdiel – not at Satan. Analyzing the behaviour of the angels and its evaluation (by Milton's way of presenting them), try to come to a conclusion as to what the epic's ideal of Christian heroism is and if the angels match this ideal.

³ This is a topic concerned with the target group for *Paradise Lost*. Milton has been charged by critics with discriminating against Catholics, women, etc. Identify some of that criticism (e.g. Ishmael Reed, Christine Froula), pick some aspects of your own choice and explore them in relation to your primary text.

⁴ Milton has several different characters tell and re-tell the story of the rebellion. For this topic, compare Satan's account in 1.169-77, Chaos's account in 2.992-1006, the narrator's in 3.390-99, and Raphael's in 7.856-80. How and why do these stories differ? What is the function of these differences?
⁵ 8.637

⁶ Both Christianity and Islam are not unfamiliar with the concept of Divine Providence. However, choice is an important aspect both of Milton's *Paradise Lost* and Rushdie's *The Satanic Verses*. Discuss how the problem of free will is tackled within the two works and why the question is still virulent despite of the 300 years that have passed between the two dates of publication.

⁷ Hogg's 19th-century novel provided inspiration for Robertson's *The Testament of Gideon Mack*. Taking into account the different cultural contexts these books were written in, explore how the dichotomy of good and evil gradually dissolves in each of the texts.

⁸ Both of these contemporary novels feature characters who earn a living with religion, and both characters' sanity is in doubt. Explore the status of religion in a postmodern society that is essentially skeptical of grand narratives. Is religious vision/revelation in a postmodern society imaginable at all, or does it always have to be some form of psychological neurosis?

⁹ Gibreel Farishta stars in religious blockbuster movies. Sarah Macdonald, on her journey through India, encounters the commercialization of spirituality everywhere (including the movie industry, where she meets a real-life Gibreel). Explore how the commercialization is depicted, whether (and how) it is evaluated by the narrative voice, and what its function is in the context of the novels.

- 10) "If God Exists, He's Dead to Me" – Religion and Theodicy in Literature after 9/11¹¹
- 11) Contemporary Devil Figures in *The Satanic Verses* and *The Testament of Gideon Mack*¹²
- 12) The Doppelgänger – Origins of a Literary Motif and its Representation in James Hogg, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*
- 13) The Divine (Religion, Nature, Theodicy, Spirituality, ...) in Wiccan Poetry¹³

¹⁰ Look at Sarah Macdonald's *Holy Cow! An Indian Adventure*. Explore how women are marginalized in the different religious communities the protagonist visits. What is her perspective, and is it a specifically Western one? Does the novel suggest any solutions? Compare Macdonald's depiction of essentially patriarchal religions to the role of women in New Age spirituality, such as Wicca (consult, for example, the poems in your reader).

¹¹ Research theodicy for this topic. Atheists argue that a benevolent, all-knowing God cannot exist in a world where 9/11 is possible (similar arguments have been put forth after the Lisbon earthquake, WWII, and the holocaust). The quote in the title is from Macdonald. Explore how 9/11 changes the protagonist's search for spiritual truth. Consult and compare other texts, such as 9/11 poems by Christian and non-Christian writers.

¹² How are devil figures in contemporary literature different from older depictions of the devil? How does modern psychology influence our perception of 'evil'? Does postmodern relativism evoke something like "sympathy for the devil"?

¹³ Modify topic according to your own preferences. Text selection must be approved by course convenor.