

**Carleton University  
Department of English  
Winter 2010**

**ENGL 5308W: Renaissance Studies  
A Seminar: *Paradise Lost* in the Context of Intellectual History**

**Time: Thursdays 10:05 – 12:55  
Location: 1816 DT**

**Instructor: D.B. Beecher  
Office: 1908 Dunton Tower  
Office Hours: TBA  
Phone: 520 2600 ext. 2305  
E-mail not available**

This course will deal with *Paradise Lost* as a work conceived after a lifetime of reading which prepared the author for his great task. The work is grounded not only in biblical culture, both Judeo as well as Christian, but in the Church fathers, the writers of ancient Greece and Rome, as well as in Renaissance works ranging through all the received topics of that age. Our goal will be to identify as many of those sources and traditions as possible in working systematically through the text. Milton calls upon these multiple traditions both as a poet and as an apologist for the Christian world order, making *Paradise Lost* a contribution to the history of ideas by drawing upon a vast legacy. Our collective concern, then, is a hermeneutical one in relation to this encyclopedic tradition.

Each class meeting will be devoted to one of the twelve books. A small delegation of students, in accordance with our numbers, will provide a seriatim *explication* of each book in relation to its intellectual history. You can work as a group, or subdivide the lines of the book among yourselves. My estimate is that I will be calling on each of you to contribute in this manner three times during the term. These exercises will provide you with occasions to explore the theological, linguistic, poetic, historical, mythological, biblical, and scientific backgrounds to the poem, including Milton's own writings, such as the divorce tracts or *On Christian Doctrine*, in order to explicate the lines. The informing discipline behind all these presentations may variously be described as "intellectual history" or "the history of ideas," which is more than simple source studies. It is an important distinction. These presentations can be exploratory and methodologically experimental, to a degree. I will not be grading them, although they are a critical and requisite component of the course. The final grade will be based on two 7-9 page papers, each presenting a Miltonic "idea" in its historical context. The choice of topics is as vast as the poem itself, from angelology to zoology. I will be concerned with just how much of a sense of the history of that idea you can bring to Milton's exploitation of it in the limited space allotted: 10 pages maximum! You will have to balance encyclopedic amplitude with Miltonic precision, making the bridge from historical meanings to the argument of the poem. These papers can, of course, make use of anything that you have presented in class, but they should reveal the greater

rigor that one normally brings to cogent and concise written work, including a clear explication of ideas, problems, methods, and the measure of progress the paper contains in exposing those ideas.

Both papers are due on or before Tues. April 6. Plan ahead.

The course text is *Paradise Lost*, ed. Scott Elledge, New York, Norton, 1993.

The meeting dates are as follows:

Jan. 5 Intro.  
Jan. 12 Book I  
Jan. 19 Book II  
Jan. 26 Book III  
Feb. 2 Book IV  
Feb. 9 Book V  
Feb. 16/23 Book VI  
Mar. 2 Book VII  
Mar. 9 Book VIII  
Mar. 16 Book IX  
Mar. 23 Book X  
Mar. 30 Book XI (and XII).  
Apr. 6 Book XII. ?

Requirements: All components of the course must be completed before a final grade can be assigned.

Plagiarism: The University takes this offense seriously. All ideas or passages of other scholars must be acknowledged in the appropriate manner, and the writing you submit must be entirely your own, and not have been submitted to any previous course.

The Paul Menton Centre is available to students with handicaps, Room 500, Unicentre.

The Student academic success centre is located in 302 Tory.

The Student Life Services is located in 501 Unicentre.

Research materials from the WWW are to be used with caution, given that little of it is vetted in the usual ways pertaining to academic research, such as it is to be found in books and academic journals.

If you are concerned about early feedback, I can give an appraisal of the seminar contributions in grade equivalents, even though this portion will not be graded *per se*.

Students requesting academic accommodation on the basis of religious observance should make a formal, written request to their instructors for alternate dates and/or means of satisfying academic requirements. Such requests should be made during the first two weeks of class, or as soon as possible after the need for accommodation is known to exist, but no later than two weeks before the compulsory academic event. Accommodation is to be worked out directly and on an individual basis between the student and the instructor. Instructors will make accommodations in a way that avoids academic disadvantage to the student. Students or instructors who have questions or want to confirm accommodation eligibility of a religious event or practice may refer

to the Equity Services website for a list of holy days and Carleton's Academic Accommodation policies, or may contact an Equity Services Advisor in the Equity Services Department.

For pregnancy, students requiring academic accommodation are encouraged to contact an Equity Advisor in Equity Services to complete a *letter of accommodation*. The student must then make an appointment to discuss her needs with the instructor at least two weeks prior to the first academic event in which it is anticipated the accommodation will be required.