

## English 6750-03: *Paradise Lost*

Tuesday: 6:30-9 PM / 237 CLAS  
Spring 2009

Professor: Greg Colón Semenza

Office: 232 CLAS

Office Hours: Monday & Wednesday: 10-11:30; Tuesday: 3:30-5; Thursday: by appt.

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### **Course Description:**

We will delve deep into John Milton's *Paradise Lost*—both the epic poem and its 350-year-old reception history—with the aim of demonstrating the rewards of systematic close-reading, on the one hand, and the complex ways in which canonical works and authors are historically constructed, on the other. Over the course of the semester, you'll become familiar with the major British and American phases of Milton criticism and adaptation. The course will end by considering *Paradise Lost*'s influence on modern literature and popular culture, particularly the fantasy writings of Philip Pullman.

I was tempted to cross-list this seminar under “Theory” because a large component of it involves Reception study, an important and under-explored theoretical approach to the contingent nature of all literary interpretation and commentary. Perhaps no sub-field better demonstrates the importance and impact of reception theory than Milton studies. To demonstrate this fact, and to provide you with analytical and philosophical tools you will find useful in your own scholarship, I've organized readings in the following way: each week, our close-reading of one to two books of the poem will be supplemented by additional readings in both criticism (which I'm defining as either explication or commentary) and reception (which obviously overlaps with criticism quite a bit). Whereas the critical readings have been chosen to teach you about several of the larger debates in Milton studies—about God, about Satan, and about Eve and women more generally—the reception readings should offer you a sense of the ways *Paradise Lost* has been perceived and used since the seventeenth century.

### **Texts:**

- 1) Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Teskey (Norton Critical Edition)
- 2) Pullman, *His Dark Materials* [trilogy] (Dell Laurel)
- 3) Course Packet. Provided by Instructor

Useful Websites: <http://www.richmond.edu/~creamer/milton/> (please register with Milton-L)  
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~milton/>

**Assignments and Requirements:** Every assignment in this class is designed to achieve two goals: first, to increase your knowledge of *Paradise Lost* and the massive field of scholarship about the poem; second, to cultivate reading, research, and writing skills that will be vital to you both as a graduate student and, should you choose to go on to a Ph.D. program, as an assistant

professor. While you will receive grades on all materials that you turn in, I would prefer for a variety of reasons not to “weigh” assignments in terms of a percentage value. Your final research paper is, needless to say, the most important piece of work you will turn in, but all assignments should be approached with the same level of diligence. Assignments and their due dates are discussed below in greater detail. You are welcome, of course, to turn in most assignments early.

- 1) Attendance, preparation, and spirited participation
- 2) Twenty-minute oral presentation
- 3) 750-word proposal of final essay
- 4) Participation in out-of-class, introduction-writing workshop
- 5) 20-30-page scholarly essay (with cover letter)

**Oral Presentation:** Each of you will commit on the first day of class to researching either the scholarly conversation about a particular aspect of *Paradise Lost*, or the manner in which the poem and its author were received (i.e., read, understood, adapted, appropriated, etc.) in a particular historical period. Ideally, the work you do for this assignment will serve as the first step toward completing your seminar paper, which should be written on the same subject. Thinking of the two assignments as separate parts of the same project will allow you to spend most of the semester focusing on a single topic, which should, in turn, result in a more informed scholarly essay.

Prepare a comprehensive oral presentation of the major criticism and writings related to the topic. The point is not merely to read a series of annotations but, rather, to construct a prose narrative (or series of smaller narratives) describing the development of relevant writings related to the topic. You may wish to focus *most* of your attention on recent work, but you are required to look much further back and to construct a historical outline of the critical heritage dating back to the seventeenth century. The report must not be longer than 20 minutes. A comprehensive, properly formatted bibliography (Chicago or MLA) should accompany the document.

It is your job to *teach* yourself through your research, and the entire class through your presentation, the most important things that critics have said about the topic in question. Some of the issues you might consider: What do you understand to be the most important questions scholars have asked? What are the greatest controversies surrounding the topic? What do you think are the most influential arguments scholars have made? What are the current critical consensuses on the most important issues right now? Where do you see the particular conversations about this topic going in the near future? We will discuss the presentation in greater detail in class.

**Proposal of Final Paper Topic:** A concise “sell” of your proposed final paper topic, based on a conference-paper abstract. Make sure that your argument (claim + basis) is clearly stated and situated in relation to previous critics who have written on the subject. Also make sure that the pay-off of your contribution is clear. 750 words equal about 2-3 double-spaced pages. We will discuss this assignment in some detail in class. **Proposals are due on March 17th.**

**Introduction-Writing Workshop:** Over two consecutive weeks in April, I will meet outside of class with half of the class to spotlight introduction writing, since intros are undoubtedly the most important and complex components of scholarly essays. Several days in advance of your session you will be asked to email the entire class your introduction. At the session itself, your intro will be workshopped by me and your classmates. **Dates to be announced.**

**Scholarly Essay with Cover Letter:** Your goal should be to produce a *potentially* publishable article. While I have specified as a general guideline that the article should be 20-30 pages, reasonably longer essays can be justified. Along with the essay, please provide a professionally written cover letter on UConn letterhead. The cover letter should be addressed to an appropriate journal that you have researched and singled out for an initial submission. **The essay is due by email at midnight on May 6th.**

**\*Note on Email Submissions of Work:** In the cases of two particular assignments—the proposal and the final critical essay—I ask that you submit your work by email. Please note that if you do not receive an email acknowledgment that I have received your paper within 8 hours from the time you submitted it, the paper was not received and is, therefore, overdue. Make sure you save the “Sent” receipt in your mail account.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

<b><u>January 20</u></b>	<p><b>Introduction</b> to course; sign-up for topics; historical background on Milton and seventeenth-century England.</p>
<b><u>January 27</u></b>	<p><b>PL:</b> Book 1</p> <p><b>Criticism:</b> Danielson, “The Fall of Man and Milton’s Theodicy”</p> <p><b>Reception: The Long View:</b> Semenza, “The Legacy of Milton’s ‘Mangl’d Body’: Fetishism and Idolatry since 1652”</p>
<b><u>February 3</u></b>	<p><b>PL:</b> Book 2</p> <p><b>Criticism:</b> Lewis, from <i>Preface to Paradise Lost</i></p> <p><b>Reception: The Seventeenth Century:</b> The Early Lives (Aubrey, Wood, Phillips); Marvell’s “On Mr. Milton’s <i>Paradise Lost</i>” (p. 377, ed. Teskey)</p>
<b><u>February 10</u></b>	<p><b>PL:</b> Book 3</p> <p><b>Criticism:</b> Empson, from <i>Milton’s God</i></p> <p><b>Reception: The Early 18<sup>th</sup> Century:</b> Moore, from <i>Beautiful Sublime</i>; Sensabaugh, from <i>Milton in Early America</i></p>
<b><u>February 17</u></b>	<p><b>PL:</b> Book 4</p> <p><b>Criticism:</b> Fish, from <i>Surprised by Sin</i></p> <p><b>Reception: The Eighteenth Century:</b> Johnson, “Life of Milton”; Griffin, from <i>Regaining Paradise</i></p>
<b><u>February 24</u></b>	<p><b>PL:</b> Books 5-6</p> <p><b>Criticism:</b> Forsyth, from <i>The Satanic Epic</i>; Blake, from the “Marriage of Heaven and Hell” (p. 389, ed. Teskey); Shelley, Preface to <i>Prometheus Unbound</i> (p. 393, ed. Teskey)</p> <p><b>Reception: The Romantics:</b> Newlyn, from Intro to <i>Milton and the Romantic Reader</i></p>
<b><u>March 3</u></b>	<p><b>PL:</b> Books 7-8</p> <p><b>Criticism and Reception: Feminism:</b> Gilbert, “Milton’s Bogey”; Webber, “Feminism and <i>Paradise Lost</i>”; Wittreich, from <i>Feminist Milton</i></p>

<u>March 10</u>	<b>NO CLASSES: SPRING BREAK</b>
<u>March 17</u>  <b>Proposals Due</b>	<b>PL:</b> Book 9 <b>Criticism:</b> Bryson, from <i>The Tyranny of Heaven</i> <b>Reception: The Nineteenth Century:</b> Nelson, from <i>The Sublime Puritan</i> ; Sensabaugh, from <i>Milton in Early America</i>
<u>March 24</u>	<b>PL:</b> Book 10 <b>Criticism:</b> Eliot, “Milton I” and “Milton II” <b>Reception: The Modernist Turn:</b> Murray, from <i>Milton: The Modern Phase</i>
<u>March 31</u>	<b>PL:</b> Books 11-12 <b>Criticism:</b> Rumrich, from <i>Milton Unbound</i> <b>Reception: The New Milton Criticism:</b> Herman, from <i>Destabilizing Milton</i>
<u>April 7</u>	<b>Pullman, <i>The Golden Compass</i></b> <b>Criticism:</b> Knoppers/Semenza, from <i>Milton in Popular Culture</i>
<u>April 14</u>	<b>Pullman, <i>The Subtle Knife</i></b>
<u>April 21</u>	<b>Pullman, <i>The Amber Spyglass</i>, 1-273</b> <b>Reception: Milton on Film &amp; TV:</b> “It’s God vs. Satan, but without the Nudity”
<u>April 28</u>	<b>Pullman, <i>The Amber Spyglass</i>, 274-465</b>
<u>May 6</u>	<b>Final Papers due at 11:59 PM</b>

**ORAL PRESENTATION TOPICS**

February 17 <sup>th</sup>	Post-Colonial Milton	Ramon E.
February 24 <sup>th</sup>	Milton and the Romantics	Jon A.
March 3 <sup>rd</sup>	Feminism/Eve/Gender Studies	Tara H.
March 17 <sup>th</sup>	Victorian Milton	Christina H.
March 24 <sup>th</sup>	Satan	Laila K.
March 31 <sup>st</sup>	Milton in America	Lori C.
April 7 <sup>th</sup>	Milton and Post-Modernism	Matt H.
April 14 <sup>th</sup>	Milton and Popular Culture	Joe F.
April 21 <sup>st</sup>	Milton and Popular Culture	Lucy S.

## REVISED COURSE SCHEDULE

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**March 30\***  
Monday

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**Reception: The Modernist Turn:** Murray, from *Milton: The Modern Phase*

**April 7**

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**April 28**  
Till 9:30

**Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass***

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**Final Papers due at 11:59 PM**

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