

The Renaissance Studies Program
“Renaissance Cultures in Transit” Lecture Series
Presents the fifth lecture by

JESSICA WOLFE

*Moral Horizons: Milton, Homer, and the
Problem of Deliberation*

4:00 p.m., Friday, October 7, 2011
Walnut Room
Indiana Memorial Union



In *Paradise Lost*, Milton often employs Homeric conventions to mark moments of decision or deliberation: ‘pondering scenes’ in which characters totter on the precipice between contrary moral choices; unresolved battles that threaten to tilt one way or another; divine judgments that hang in the balance. All these Homeric conventions, and others like them, mark what Milton calls “the moments and turnings of humane occasions,” and they help to establish for him a heroic model for Christian liberty that resides in “patience” and in “fortitude” as well as in the ability to stride the razor-sharp edges of moral and spiritual choice.

Among these Homeric conventions we may include Milton’s repeated invocation of the Horai, who preside over the temporal seams of noon and twilight that mark many of the poem’s most decisive moments. These figures, deeply and complexly indebted to Homeric and Hesiodic cosmology, provide a macrocosmic counterpoint to Milton’s representation of the juridical process of the conscience. The Horai, as this presentation will illustrate, mark the moral horizons of Milton’s poem, governing choices whose outcome is uncertain or rather subject to the turn and counter-turn of ‘revolving’ minds. Such a reading helps to elucidate Milton’s debts to the *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, poems that provide much of the poetic vocabulary used by Milton to describe a world contingent upon the workings of the umpire conscience.

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