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# Milton

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## Description

Do John Milton's major poems advocate violent political revolution? Or are they the work of a poet who turns away from politics to the solace of art? Milton's contention, in his theological treatise, *The Christian Doctrine*, that hatred of God's enemies is a religious duty has frequently unnerved readers. In fact, several critics have worried that Milton's last major poem, *Samson Agonistes*, advocates terrorism and exonerates its violent protagonist. In contrast to these claims about the fundamentally political nature of Milton's work, *Samson Agonistes*, *Paradise Regained*, and *Paradise Lost* have all, at one time or another, been interpreted as retreats from the world of politics and affairs of state. As a result of these widely disparate tendencies within Milton's oeuvre, his poems are a particularly fruitful site for exploring the relationship between literature and politics. Does art serve a political or ethical function? Should it? Should we even expect literature to have a function? In the course of answering these broad questions, we'll examine Milton's conceptions of freedom, ethical action, religious devotion, and gender relationships, as well as, and most importantly, his understanding of what poetry is. In the first half of the class, we will read *Samson Agonistes*, *Paradise Regained*, some of the shorter poetry, and two important prose treatises, on freedom of the press and companionate marriage and divorce. We'll devote the entire second half of the course to *Paradise Lost*. In addition, we'll spend some class time discussing, in considerable detail, important literary critical arguments about Milton's work and its place in literary history. The goal of exploring these arguments, and of a 400-level course more generally, is to give you the interpretive and critical tools to be not just a reader of, but also a sophisticated and engaged respondent to Milton's work.

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## Readings

<i>Samson Agonistes</i>	selections from the shorter poetry
<i>Areopagitica</i>	<i>The Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce</i>
<i>Paradise Regained</i>	<i>Paradise Lost</i>
<i>A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle</i>	

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## Text

John Milton, *The Major Works*, ed. Stephen Orgel and Jonathan Goldberg (Oxford UP, 2008). ISBN: 978-0199539185. New: \$18.95. Used: \$5.95.

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## Requirements

*Undergraduates*: five analysis papers, one historical/literary terms report, and a final research paper.

*Graduate students*: five analysis papers, one oral presentation, one seminar paper.