

**Milton and the English Revolution**

ENGL 3290/HIST 3051

MW 2:55-4:10, Rockefeller Hall 103

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Was John Milton a revolutionary poet? How do his political tracts — and those of his contemporaries — help us to understand *Paradise Lost*? This course will read Milton's poetry in the context of the English revolution of the mid-seventeenth century, foregrounding his engagement with debates on religion, freedom, and regicide, as well as his experience of revolution and reaction. Milton's involvement in politics has been a cause for embarrassment, if not outright disdain, among the generations of readers who believe that great poetry must rise above politics. Those who celebrate Milton's political sympathies have often been deaf to his poetic voice. In this course, we explore the inextricability of poetics and politics not only in Milton's work, but in the culture of seventeenth-century England.

In addition to *Paradise Lost* and other shorter poems by Milton, we will be reading Milton's major polemical pamphlets on divorce, censorship, tyranny, and the execution of kings. Further readings will include court masques, satires, and writings by religious and political radicals. This course fulfills the English department's pre-1800 requirement, and the history department's pre-1800 and non-US course requirements.

**BOOKS AND READINGS**

- John Milton, *The Major Works*, eds. Jonathan Goldberg and Stephen Orgel (Oxford World Classics). [\$18.95, available at Buffalo Street Books]
- All other readings are available on blackboard

**REQUIREMENTS**

- **4 response papers** (1-2 pages) to the week's reading; you choose which week, but at least one must be completed before Sept. 23, and least two completed by Oct. 14, and all four response papers must be submitted before the last day of class. Response papers should be turned in at or before the Wednesday of the week in which the reading is assigned
- **1 mid-term paper** (6-8 pages)
- **1 take-home final exam** (8-12 pages)
- **Attendance and preparation** Our class meetings will be a combination of lecture and discussion. Unless otherwise noted on the syllabus, please prepare all readings for the week by our Monday class session.

WEEK 1      Art and Politics/History and Literature

M Aug. 31      Course Introduction: The Reception of Milton and the Problem of History and Literature

W Sept. 2      Discussion: The Debate Poem

Reading:

- *L'Allegro and Il Penseroso* (Milton)

WEEK 2      Court Culture and its Discontents

Reading:

- *A Masque Presented at Ludlow Castle ("Comus")* [1634] (Milton)
- Ben Jonson, *Pleasure Reconciled to Virtue* [performed 1618, published 1641]

M Sept. 7      Lecture: Aristocratic culture/court culture

W Sept. 9      Discussion: Comus

WEEK 3      Poetry and Political Engagement

Reading:

- *Second Defense of the English People* [1654] (Milton)
- *Sonnet 7* [1632] (Milton)

M Sept. 14      Short biographical introduction to Milton and Discussion

W Sept. 16      Lecture: Introduction to the English Civil War

WEEK 4      Milton the Great Divorcer

Reading:

- *Doctrine and Discipline of Divorce* [1643] (Milton)
- Selections from William Whately, *A Bride-bush, or a Wedding Sermon* [1617] (blackboard)
- *Anon., The Parliament of Women* [1646] (blackboard)
- *Anon., Now or Never, or A New Parliament of Women* [1656] (blackboard)

M Sept. 21      Discussion: Marriage, gender, and governance

W Sept. 23      Discussion: Was Milton a Feminist?

WEEK 5 Crisis in the Church

## Reading:

- Selections from Laurence Clarkson, *The Lost Sheep Found* [1660] (blackboard)
- Selections from Thomas Edwards, *Gangraena* [1646] (blackboard)
- "On the new Forcers of Conscience" [1643] (Milton)
- "Debate on Ministry" from Ann Hughes, *Seventeenth-century England: A Changing Culture* (blackboard)
- Selections from *De Doctrina Christiana* [composed 1640-1660] (Milton and blackboard)

M Sept. 28 Lecture: Religious controversy in the seventeenth-century

W Sept. 30 Discussion: On Christian Doctrine (Milton's relation to Arminianism, Arianism and other isms)

WEEK 6 The Revolution in Print

## Reading:

- *Areopagitica* [1644] (Milton)
- Selections from Richard Overton, *Arraignment of Mister Persecution* [1645] (blackboard)

M Oct. 5 Discussion: Licensing and Liberty

W Oct. 7 Class in Kroch on Print Culture

WEEK 7 Charles I, Man of Blood

M Oct. 12 **Fall Break**

W Oct. 14 Lecture: The execution of Charles I

**Mid-term paper due Friday October 18**

WEEK 8 Regicide

## Reading:

- Excerpts from the Trial of Charles I (blackboard)
- Elizabeth Poole, *An Alarum of War* [1649] (blackboard)
- *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* [1649] (Milton)

M Oct. 19 Discussion: Trial and Execution of Charles I

W Oct. 21 Discussion: *Tenure of Kings and Magistrates*

WEEK 9 Tyrants, Martyrs, and Radicals

## Reading:

- Charles I (John Gauden), *Eikon Basilike* [1649] (blackboard)
- *Eikonoclastes* [1649] (Milton)
- Selections from Gerrard Winstanley, *The New Law of Righteousness* [1649] (blackboard)
- John Locke, "Of Property" from *Second Treatise of Government* [1689] (blackboard)

M Oct. 26 Discussion: *Eikon Basilike* and *Eikonoclastes*

W Oct. 28 Discussion: Property and Society (Winstanley and Locke)

WEEK 10 Revolution Betrayed

## Reading

- Selections from Edward Sexby, *Killing no Murder* [1657] (blackboard)
- Selections from John Dryden, *Astraea Redux* [1660] (blackboard)
- *The Ready and Easy Way to Establish a Free Commonwealth* [1660] (Milton)

M Nov. 4 Lecture: Collapse of the Commonwealth

W Nov. 6 Discussion: *Ready and Easy Way*

WEEK 11 Authority and Rebellion

Reading:

- *Paradise Lost* [1667/1674], Books I-III (Milton)

M Nov. 9 Discussion: Books I and II

W Nov. 11 Discussion: Book III

WEEK 12 God's Little Project

Reading:

- *Paradise Lost*, Books IV-VIII (Milton)

M Nov. 16 Discussion: IV-V

W Nov. 18 Discussion: VI-VIII

WEEK 13 Transgression and Punishment

Reading:

- *Paradise Lost*, Books IX-X (Milton)

M Nov. 23 Discussion: Books IX-X

W Nov. 25 Thanksgiving Break

WEEK 14 Labor and Action

Reading:

- *Paradise Lost*, Books XI-XII (Milton)
- *Samson Agonistes* [1671] (Milton)
- Sonnet 16 [165?] (Milton)

M Nov. 30 Discussion: History and human action in *PL* and begin *Samson Agonistes*W Dec. 2 Discussion: Sonnet 16 and *Samson Agonistes***Take-home final exam due December 9th**