

Finding Subjectivity in Paradise Lost

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What, in Milton's view, is the nature of self-awareness? I try to answer this question by showing how Milton's depiction of human subjectivity in *Paradise Lost* emerges from his anthropological convictions about human nature. When Milton wrote Adam and Eve's first-person accounts of awakening in Eden, he poetically concretized a widespread seventeenth-century philosophical fantasy that sought to combine the evidence of experience with the explanatory power of an appeal to origins. Adam and Eve's accounts present imagined first-person access to the origins of human experience. By developing this impossible perspective of neonatal maturity—a completely new but nevertheless fully developed human consciousness—Milton answers a series of questions raised in ancient, medieval, and early

modern debates about self-awareness. By what means does one come to be aware of oneself? What is the self such that one can obtain knowledge of it? What form does such self-knowledge take? Milton responds to questions like these (posed by Aristotle, Cicero, Augustine, Avicenna, and others) by appealing to the phenomenological force of a poetic language that is "simple, sensuous, and passionate."

Coffee and refreshments will be served before the seminar.

This program is free and open to the public, but space is limited and **registration in advance is required**. Register online by 10 am, May 13 at:

www.newberry.org/renaissance

Organized by Stephen Fallon, University of Notre Dame; Christopher Kendrick, Loyola University Chicago; Paula McQuade, DePaul University; and Regina Schwartz, Northwestern University.