Milton, Search, and the History of Style

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Though scholarship on style has been quick to take advantage of the increased sophistication, power, and scope of current quantitative methods, it has neglected the potential of another seemingly more rudimentary digital tool. Search, Professor Shore argues, can transform the way we investigate and understand the history of style. The search engines already under development by corpus linguists, and those we take a hand building in ourselves, make it possible to unearth the rich and diverse histories of stylistic markers. In contrast to twentieth-century scholarship that understood the history of style as the succession or synthesis of Cicero’s genera dicendi—the levels, registers, or types of style—Professor Shore proposes a materialist history of style that takes Seneca as its early progenitor. As an example of such inquiry, this paper will recount the history of one prominent marker of John Milton’s style—his use of delayed adjectives—and describe the search engine Professor Shore is developing, in collaboration with a computational linguist, to investigate it further.

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 at:

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Organized by Christopher Kendrick, Loyola University Chicago; David A. Loewenstein, University of Wisconsin-Madison; Paula McQuade, DePaul University; and Regina Schwartz, Northwestern University.