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Undergraduate Research Awards Submission Essay
A Quandary of Errors: The Problem of Innocence in Paradise Lost

When I began working on my research paper for Professor Pfeiffer's Milton seminar, I knew that I wanted to work with the concept of innocence in *Paradise Lost*. I was fascinated by the conflict between Adam and Eve's apparent lack of sin in the Garden of Eden and the rebukes they received from Raphael before eating the forbidden fruit. As I started my research, one problem I encountered was that of finding a theoretical framework in which to situate my argument. I had a vague idea of using a theory I had heard about at a conference presentation involving innocence and childhood, but when that did not pan out, I was stuck. One day, sitting in the Milton section of the stacks and flipping through sources which seemed relevant, I stumbled across some definitions in one of Milton's own theological works, *De Doctrina Christiana*. His ideas about the nature of sin and innocence proved to be the perfect framework for my ideas.

However, the bigger problem with looking at Milton, of course, is that so much has already been said. Conversations about innocence in *Paradise Lost* have been going on for centuries, and when I started delving into the research process, it was difficult to find an entry point into that dialogue. However, one of the reminders that Rebecca Seipp gave during our library workshop proved very useful: look at the works cited page, find out who your sources are citing, and use that information to backtrack down the 'scholarly lineage' of your topic. Using this technique, I was able to find a series of articles and books which engaged each other in a debate about the nature of innocence in Milton—Millicent Bell and E. M. W. Tillyard, who both disagree openly with C. S. Lewis, are later refuted by Diane Kelsey McColley. This debate provided me with an entry point into the ongoing conversation, allowing me to not only make an argument but to engage with a community of Milton scholars, building on and questioning their ideas.