

The scope and varying perspectives of this slim volume form an excellent set of interlocking pieces to the puzzle of medieval punishment and penance. Taken in sum, the volume presents a compelling case for considering the two processes in conjunction: their nexus is extensive; the multivalence of each increases the points of interchange. The crossings and transfers of meaning, and the often strange medieval calculus of pain, in which suffering can be excessive, vicarious, validating, degrading, voluntarily undertaken, and brutally inflicted, are nicely brought to light in this collection, worthily conceived and deftly executed.

Abigail Firey, *University of Kentucky*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2022.87

Coming To: Consciousness and Natality in Early Modern England.

Timothy M. Harrison.

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020. 328 pp. \$30.

Coming To: Consciousness and Natality in Early Modern England narrates the process whereby consciousness came to be intertwined with natality through poetry, asserting the importance of poetic mimesis in articulating originary experience. Understanding natality as the space in which thought, experience, ego, and self intertwine before “being pulled into the ‘orbital drag’” of the concept of consciousness (15), Timothy Harrison crafts an impressive historical and philosophical argument, situating early modern poets as active proponents of the emerging concept of consciousness. Whereas previous scholarship understands the concept of consciousness as an invention of philosophers, Harrison challenges existing paradigms that place consciousness studies elsewhere, identifying the necessity of poetry in the development of consciousness. *Coming To* provides rich historical contextualization toward the book’s aim to not only identify the connection between natality and consciousness, but also point toward the social and political implications of that connection.

The book focuses on three key early modern writers, Milton, Traherne, and Locke, attending to their engagement with an emerging philosophical conversation: is human thought and consciousness rooted in innate knowledge or empirical contact with the world? Examining the semantic shift of *consciousness* as it becomes synonymous to *experience* and *thought* in parts 1 and 2, Harrison argues that the imagined neonatal maturity, achieved by poets such as Milton within *Paradise Lost*, cannot be left within the periphery when examining how the concept of consciousness emerged. Harrison suggests the unique ability of mimesis within poetry allows for an imagined state of originary thought that philosophers can only theorize about. Part 2, “Traherne and the Consciousness of Birth,” functions in tandem with part 1, further evincing the critical role of poetry in the development of the concept of consciousness. Harrison provides a

detailed analysis of Traherne's engagement with Descartes and the identification of ego in his adaptation of Milton's imagined originary experience.

Through lyric poetry, Traherne utilizes the perspective of infancy to "mimetically perform" Edenic neonatal maturity, advancing Milton's concept of consciousness toward an understanding of human consciousness as a spiritual substance (131). Traherne's concept of embryonic consciousness, according to Harrison, expands human consciousness back toward originary thought, the state of "minimal mental presence" (181)—a foundational concept for later philosophers such as Locke.

In the final section, "Locke and the Life of Consciousness," Harrison succinctly challenges paradigms that place consciousness studies outside the field of poetry. Because Locke traces the empirical foundations of originary thought, but cannot gain access to that originary thought without making imaginative assumptions about embryonic consciousness, Locke employs a "minimal form of mimesis." Harrison suggests Locke's minimal mimesis develops philosophical *poiesis*, "a form of writing that is alive to the givenness of revelation as it is to the abstractions of reason" (243). Locke's epistemology relies on the sensations of embryonic consciousness developed by poets such as Traherne and Milton. Harrison thus concludes as promised within the introduction—this unusual group of authors, when taken together, demonstrate the importance of poets, not just philosophers, in the emerging concept of consciousness.

Harrison employs a range of scholarly practices, expertly providing thorough but efficient historical and philosophical contextualization, alongside plentiful formal analysis of each primary text included within the book. Harrison's historicizing clearly demonstrates the ways in which political development affected each authors' works, but the most direct evidence of the reverse—the consequences of the connection between consciousness and natality upon politics—are analyzed briefly in Locke's treatises on free will stemming from empirical sensation and subjugation to a sovereign. Thus, the final topic alluded to in the introduction and final section provides an area for further studies—namely, the political consequences of the connection between consciousness and natality. The objective of the book is to identify the intertwined nature of consciousness and natality so as to place consciousness studies within poetry and literary studies, which Harrison accomplishes wonderfully. Any students of philosophy, history, or early modern literature will find this book useful. Harrison's book will undoubtedly become a staple text within childhood or women's studies for scholars interested in the history of consciousness in relation to infancy and motherhood. The book might even find foothold as a foundational text for those wishing to expand upon the political implications of infancy, consciousness, and sovereignty.

Shelby N. Oubre, *Texas Christian University*
doi:10.1017/rqx.2022.88