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Authorship from Homer to Wordsworth via Milton

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Somewhere on a spectrum of possible kinds of authorship between Homer and Wordsworth lies Milton. In *Paradise Lost* he stages himself as blind narrator, like Homer, but he also tells us, unlike Homer, how the poem gets written: the Muse "dictates to me slumbring or inspires / Easie my unpremeditated Verse" (9.23-24). In this respect, Milton is closer to Wordsworth, even his model. Yet there are important differences. Milton is not the main subject of his own poem. In the two allusions to Milton with which Wordsworth opens *The Prelude*, he collapses the distinction that Milton deliberately builds between the figure of himself as author/narrator and the various characters he creates and who, like Satan, are consciously made close to, but still separate from, himself.

Imagine a spectrum of possible kinds of authorship. At one end lies Homer, about whom we know absolutely nothing. He implores his Muse to help him sing about the anger of Achilles, or about that man of many turns, Odysseus, and we learn a good deal about both characters in those two remarkable poems, but we know as little about Homer as about his Muse. Even less. "He" is the empty "moi" to be filled by the singing Muses.[1] One prominent scholar, having edited the *Iliad*, declared that there is only one thing we know for certain about him, that he was not called Homer. "Homer" is "not the name of a historical poet, but a

[1] In the first line of the *Odyssey,* or at *Iliad* 2.484, for example, the first person pronoun appears in this oblique dative case: "Sing to me Muse" or "Sing to me Muses." Otherwise there is no direct reference within the poems to their author or singer.

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fictitious or constructed name" (West 364).[2] This was also the argument of Nietzsche's inaugural lecture at Basel in 1869, so it is hardly news. Ignorance of his identity did not stop at least seven different islands or city-states in various parts of the Aegean claiming to be the birthplace of Homer. As Goethe put it in his epigrammatic reply to Friedrich August Wolf's *Prolegomena ad Homerum* (1795):

> Sieben Städte zankten sich drum, ihn geboren zu haben;
> Nun da der Wolf ihn zerriβ, nehme sich jede ihr Stück. (478)
>
> Seven cities quarrelled over which gave birth to him;
> Now that Wolf has torn him apart, let each of them get a piece.
> (my translation)

Of course tourist traps generally try to be associated with great poets and to profit from the association, and places like Chios and Smyrna depended on trade and fame. But claiming an identity for Homer is also a sign of our human hunger for knowledge about authors. Anonymity is frustrating. We accept it, as Foucault said (828), only "à titre d'énigme."

At the other extreme from that furious tumult over the unknowable Homer, and curiously contemporary with Wolf, is the Wordsworth who gave to *The Prelude* the subtitle "Growth of a Poet's Mind," and for whom Keats invented that rather unkind phrase, "the egotistical sublime." For Wordsworth as for many of his contemporaries and followers, literature was drawn directly from the author's life. Macaulay, reviewing in 1831Thomas Moore's account of Byron's life, wrote:

> He was himself the beginning, the middle and the end of all his own poetry – the hero of every tale – the chief object of every landscape. Harold, Lara, Manfred, and a crowd of other characters, were universally considered merely as loose incognitos of Byron; and there is every reason to believe that he meant them to be so considered. The wonders of the outer world [. . .] all were mere accessories, – the background to one dark and melancholy figure. (423)

At this extreme of our spectrum, then, is the Romantic notion that all poetry is an expression of the author and, indeed, that that is what is

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[2] Others take the name of the poet to be indicative of a generic function. Nagy (*Best* 296-300), for example, takes it to mean "he who fits (the Song) together," based on the root *ar- in the verb *ararisko*, to fit or join; he stresses the analogy with a skilled carpenter in Pindar, *Pythian Ode* 3.112-14. Elsewhere (*Classic* 317) he also notes that he who made the wooden horse, a master joiner, was called Epeios, i.e. a craftsman of *epos*.

interesting about it. A similar attitude to literature also encouraged the writing of biography within the same period as the popularity of self-advertising poems. Edmund Malone, as James Shapiro has recently shown, had just launched the "mad dash" (Wells 32) to find clues in the plays for Shakespeare's life.[3] In the same spirit nineteenth-century readers took Hamlet and Prospero to be versions of Shakespeare, and thus tried to supplement their meager knowledge of his life.

The example of Homer, however, shows that inventing an author on the basis of his works is not confined to Romanticism or Shakespearean biography. All antiquity seems to have known about Homer's blindness: it is referred to as early as the *Homeric Hymn to Apollo*, 172 (c. 600 BC), and it looks as if it is based on the image of the blind bard Demodocus who sings at the court of Alcinoos in Book 8 of the *Odyssey*. He sings three narrative songs (8.62-82, 8.261-369, 8.471-520). Two of them he sings in the palace itself: he has to be guided to his seat and shown where the lyre hangs from a pillar above his head. These songs are, remarkably enough, from the cycle of the Trojan War itself, including the story of the great wooden horse. Odysseus (who has not yet revealed his identity) is at first distressed at reliving his own experiences, and then challenges the bard to sing the song he himself knows so well. Indeed the singing provokes Alcinoos to ask Odysseus who he is, which he has so far graciously refrained from doing, and this in turn leads Odysseus to tell the tale of his own adventures. For the next four books of the poem, as divided by the Alexandrian editors, Odysseus sings his own song. The poet for a time becomes his hero. The overlap is provoked by Demodocus' act of singing, clearly a kind of self-reflexivity on Homer's part, and it is no wonder that antiquity constructed its image of Homer on the basis of the blind singer he himself created (Graziosi, *Inventing* 132-42).[4]

The other song, which is performed in the market-place of Scheria to the accompaniment of dancing, is rather different, and in interesting ways. It is the amusing tale of the adultery of Ares and Aphrodite and their punishment by Hephaestus, trapped in his cunning net. This is the only one of the three tales given verbatim in the words of the bard, and it treats of things invisible to mortal sight, at least to all but bards. Indeed it insists on the visual aspects of the story: the sun, Helios, "who

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[3] Malone's edition of the plays, including a biography, was published in 1790. His *Attempt to ascertain the Order in which the Plays of Shakespeare were written* had come out twelve years previously. Wordsworth began writing *The Prelude* in 1798.

[4] Demodocus was the model for the invention of Homer, rather than the bard of Ithaka, Phemius, because of the association between blindness and prophecy, as in the case of Tiresias.

sees everything," notices the secret affair and alerts Hephaestus; the trap he sets for them is a net they cannot see; their punishment is to be looked at naked in bed and laughed at by the other gods (the goddesses stay home out of modesty). Thus the bard's blindness is compensated by the power of seeing what passes among the gods (Graziosi and Haubold 82-83). And indeed the whole *Odyssey* is like that. Its characters, even Odysseus, often do not know which god is doing what to them, but the poet, loved by the Muse (8.63), knows all: Odysseus, for example at 5.302-05, blames Zeus for the storm the poet knows Poseidon sent (5.291-94). The point of the Ares-Aphrodite story in its particular context is to illuminate the pleasure-loving life of these Phaeacians (as Horace recalled in paraphrase at *Epode* I.2.28), as well as to close, by contrast, the theme of the maiden princess, Nausikaa and her modesty. But it is also there to display the power of the bard to sing of what cannot usually be seen.

Quite a different response to our frustration at not knowing anything about the author has been to deny his existence. The disintegrationists, as they are usually called, many of them nineteenth-century German scholars beginning with the Wolf to whom Goethe wrote his epigram, broke up the received texts of Homer's poems into separate and shorter poems or what Macaulay called "lays." One person, after all, could not possibly have written those enormous epics, the seams were visible, and a good scholar could show you the stitches that held all those disparate poems together. It is hardly surprising that we know nothing about Homer, since he was no more than a sort of humdrum editor like the R (for redactor) who figures in scholarly accounts of the composition of what Christians call the Old Testament. Indeed it is no accident that the vogue of disintegrationism arose at the same time for both the Bible and for Homer, nor is it unrelated to that other nineteenth-century fashion – the various efforts to deny his plays to that lowly and elusive actor from Stratford called Will Shakespeare. Questioning authorship was all the rage: scholarship was out to deny him, or replace him.

In either of these cases, I suggest, whether to claim his homeland or to discredit him altogether, both readers and scholars were responding to the mystique of the author. If only we knew something about the author, we would know more about the poem or plays. For the same reason, so much ink has been spilled on the mysterious Turoldus who is named at the end of the oldest manuscript of the *Chanson de Roland*: "Ci falt la geste que Turoldus declinet" is how those enigmatic words read, but whether he who thus declines were the source, the singer or the scribe no-one knows, any more than we really know what "declinet" means (Nitze).

One wonders, then, whether Foucault was right to diminish the importance in some ill-defined earlier time of what he famously called "the author function." He argued that texts we today "call 'literary' (stories, folk tales, epics and tragedies) were accepted, circulated and valorized without any questions about the identity of their author. Their anonymity was ignored because their real or supposed age was a sufficient guarantee of their status" ("What is an Author?" 245). The argument, such as it is, smacks rather of that fantasy about "oral tradition" or "folk narrative" which has often functioned as an ill-defined "other" for the idea of literature as writing. Neither Homer's nor the Roland's readers have been happy to bask in that anonymous ancientness that guarantees status. Under a similar impulse, and for some time now in critical theory, the author, or what Burke (ix) calls "situated subjectivity," has been staging a brave return. Even Barthes, who killed him off, still needed him. "I desire the author: I need his figure [. . .] as he needs mine" (*The Pleasure of the Text* 27).

Somewhere between the extremes on our imaginary spectrum of authorship lies Milton. He fills *Paradise Lost* with allusions to Homer and even claims he wants to be like Homer, or at least "equalled with [him] in renown" (*Paradise Lost* 3.34) because he too is blind. In an early poem, written as a student at Cambridge long before he went blind, he declared his ambition to write about "Kings and Queens and Hero's old / Such as the wise *Demodocus* once told / In solemn Songs at King *Alcinous* feast" ("At a Vacation Exercise" ll. 47-49).[5] Among Homer's several adjectives in praise of Demodocus, curiously enough, "wise" does not occur. Milton was already projecting a composite image of the author he wanted to be, both poet and lover of wisdom. In the same poem he also imagines being able to hear Apollo sing "To th' touch of golden wires" (l. 38).

Yet in strict contrast to Homer, Milton very carefully managed his public reputation – more so than any previous writer, even Spenser and Ben Jonson.[6] He wrote so much about himself in fact that a whole book has been filled with these passages, many quite long (Diekhoff). We know that authorship in early modern England was often a composite affair involving several collaborators or at least the cooperation of printers and publishers in the production of texts, to the point that it might become a matter of some importance to sort out responsibilities.

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[5] All quotations from Milton's poetry are from the Riverside Milton (Flannagan) and from the prose, the Yale edition (Wolfe).

[6] Helgerson links these three poets as "laureates" in contrast with gentleman amateurs like Sidney, and insists on the importance of print technology for the wealth and fame it could bring.

Hobbes, for one, formulated clear legal definitions of literary authorship within more general forms of ownership and the delegation of authority.[7] The author was defined as the owner of his text and thus as an individual who might be punished or subject to litigation.

In this context Milton stands out strongly. Especially after his blindness rendered him even more dependent on "amanuenses, acquaintances, printers, distributors and retailers" (Dobranski 9) he made an extraordinary effort to distinguish himself as the one who controlled the works he produced. The contract he signed with Samuel Simmons – £5 for *Paradise Lost*, with more to follow depending on sales – is the first surviving contract on record between an author and a publisher (Lewalski, *Life* 453, Dobranski 35-36, 78). He did collaborate when it suited him. Indeed his first intrusion into polemical pamphlet writing was probably as the anonymous author of "A Postscript" to a work produced by five Presbyterian polemicists whose initials make up the acronym Smectymnuus by which they were collectively known.[8] But soon he was writing this characteristic passage in *Areopagitica* (1644) which asserts the rights of the author, not only over the censor, but over and above his collaborators:

> When a man writes to the world, he summons up all his reason and deliberation to assist him; he searches, meditates, is industrious, and likely consults and confers with his judicious friends; after all which done he takes himself to be inform'd in what he writes, as well as any that writ before him (Wolfe 2: 532).

Above all it was the idea of authorship as a vocation which informed the image Milton would constantly present of himself (Lewalski, "Authorship"). Already in that "Vacation Exercise" poem he was seeking "some graver subject" on which to exercise his talents, and the Sonnet "How Soon Hath Time" shows him painfully conscious of achieving little compared to his contemporaries. Soon he was thanking his father for making it possible for him to be the poet he was born to be (*me genuisse poetam,* "Ad Patrem" l. 61). In the autobiographical preface to Book Two of *The Reason of Church Government*, his first signed tract, he represents himself as responding to God's trumpet blast (Wolfe 1: 803).

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[7] "For that which in speaking of goods and possessions, is called an Owner, and in latine, Dominus [. . .] speaking of actions is called Author. And as the Right of possession, is called Dominion, so the Right of doing any Action, is called Authority" (Hobbes 217).

[8] *An Answere to a Book Entituled, An Humble Remonstrance,* published in March 1641; the postscript was first identified as Milton's by David Masson, a conjecture confirmed by recent stylometric analysis: see Campbell and Corns (139).

True, he had toyed with the idea of patronage as a practical support when *Arcades* and *Comus* were written for the Countess of Derby and the household of the Earl of Bridgewater. But when he fantasizes about it in his poem of gratitude to Manso (Milton 234-35), who had cared for Tasso, he inverts the conventional idea: the patron's claim to immortality derives from his association with the poets, and Milton ends up pronouncing his own praises on Olympus! His first volume of verse in 1645 addresses no patron: it is introduced by personal tributes from Italian scholars and poets he met in Italy, plus Sir Henry Wotton of Eton and Henry Lawes, who had written the music for *Comus*.

These texts show the early Milton beginning to define himself among contemporary ideas about authorship: collaboration, patronage, vocation. Also very early he articulates what is perhaps the most unusual of all Milton's ways of presenting authorship, the link of life to writing. "He who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things, ought himself to be a true Poem, that is, a composition, and patterne of the best and honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroick men, or famous Cities, unlesse he have in himselfe the experience and practise of all that is praiseworthy" (Wolfe 1: 890), as he wrote in all seriousness in one of the early tracts, *An Apology for Smectymnuus*. In further autobiographical passages he presents long and revealing versions of his life that are clearly designed to function as an ethical proof, in the Aristotelian tradition of rhetoric, for the correctness of his political positions, whether hostility to bishops or the right of the people to execute the king. "One purchases authority by demonstrating one's own gravity and virtue" (Fallon x, 39-40).

This procedure poses a problem for many readers of Milton. Puritans usually write at length about their sins, religious failings, backslidings, painful recoveries, conversions. But Milton had no faults. He never confesses to any sins, rarely even to any mistakes. Even when he changes his mind, as he does about Calvin and Presbyterians, he never admits he once thought another way. There is one brief "retraction" of his youthful Latin Elegies in the 1645 edition of his poems, but even there it isn't clear what he means exactly. The flaws he does talk about, often at great length, are all other people's. So tiresome is this aspect of Milton's constructed *persona* that some recent biographers, such as Barbara Lewalski (xiii) or Stephen Fallon, have to insist at the outset that they still admire or even like the man. Like Coleridge, Fallon (xiii) finds that a sense of Milton's intense egotism gives him the greatest pleasure: "The egotism of such a man is a revelation of spirit." Milton writes as if untouched by human frailty. He often "scrutinizes himself, finds nothing amiss, and asserts his innocence" (21-22). A telling contrast is with Bunyan: Milton's guardian angels find Satan "Squat like a Toad, close at

the eare of Eve" (*Paradise Lost* 4.806), but in Bunyan the one likened to the toad is himself. He writes in *Grace Abounding*, "I was more loathsome in my own eyes than was a toad" (84). The Jesus of *Paradise Regained* is obviously an idealized version of the flawless Milton himself, and decidedly difficult to sympathize with for that reason.

It is, however, the self-presentation of Milton in the great poem with which we are most familiar, and with which it is much easier to sympathize. In *Paradise Lost* he stages himself as blind narrator – part of a much more elaborate characterization in the four proems that are, in their length and personal references, unprecedented in earlier epics. He is "fall'n on evil days" (7.25) and everything that implies about the political situation of the author. He even tells us how the poem gets written, as the Muse "dictates to me slumbring, or inspires / Easie my unpremeditated Verse" (9.23-24). All the things we wish we knew about Homer.[9]

In this respect Milton is obviously closer to Wordsworth, and we might argue that he initiates the Romantic cult of the author. Both poets write extensively about themselves and assume that the readers will be interested. And yet there are important differences. Milton is not the main subject of *Paradise Lost*, nor did he suffer from that Romantic inability to write proper drama, i.e. to invent characters who, like Shakespeare's, are not himself – Keats's "chameleon poet."[10] Thus in the famous opening lines of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth consciously echoes and extends what Milton's narrator tells us about Adam and Eve at the end of *Paradise Lost* ("The world was all before them," 12.646), but these words are now the poet on himself ("The earth is all before me," 1.14), not describing the situation of his characters.

Even more significantly, a few lines earlier Wordsworth, delighted to find himself leaving the city, buries a further allusion to Milton – and this time to one of the Homeric similes with which the narrator dramatizes Satan. In a celebrated passage in Book 9, just as he goes to meet Eve, Satan, "as one who long in populous City pent," is compared to a man who leaves the smelly city, goes into the countryside to breathe the clean air, and meets a pretty girl:

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[9] After writing these words, I came across Samuel Johnson on these "short digressions": "who does not wish that the author of the *Iliad* had gratified succeeding ages with a little knowledge of himself?" (1: 175).

[10] In the letter of 27 October 1818 to Richard Woodhouse in which he mentions "the Wordsworthian or egotistical sublime," Keats contrasts it with the character of "the chameleon poet" who has no self, and who takes "as much delight in conceiving an Iago as an Imogen."

> Much hee the Place admir'd, the Person more.
> As one who long in populous City pent,
> Where Houses thick and Sewers annoy the Aire,
> Forth issuing on a Summers Morn to breathe
> Among the pleasant Villages and Farmes
> Adjoynd, from each thing met conceaves delight,
> The smell of Grain, or tedded Grass, or Kine,
> Or Dairie, each rural sight, each rural sound;
> If chance with Nymphlike step fair Virgin pass,
> What pleasing seemd, for her now pleases more,
> She most, and in her look summs all Delight. (9.444-54)

Within a few lines of this simile, Satan finds himself, in an even more famous phrase, "Stupidly good," such is the effect of Eve.

A complicated series of allusions, via Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," links this simile to Wordsworth. In the opening lines of the 1805 *Prelude* Wordsworth addresses the breeze:

> O welcome messenger! O welcome friend!
> A captive greets thee, coming from a house
> Of bondage, from yon city's walls set free.
> A prison where he hath been long immured. (1.5-8)

The commentators note the allusion to Exodus 13:3, "out from Egypt, out from the house of bondage," and then argue about whether this is London, Bristol, or Goslar. There is also an important and explicit reference to Coleridge's "Frost at Midnight," to the lines in which he addresses his son:

> My babe so beautiful! it thrills my heart
> With tender gladness, thus to look at thee,
> And think that thou shalt learn far other lore,
> And in far other scenes! For I was reared
> In the great city, pent 'mid cloisters dim,
> And saw nought lovely but the sky and stars.
> But thou, my babe! shalt wander like a breeze
> By lakes and sandy shores, beneath the crags
> Of ancient mountain, and beneath the clouds. (ll. 49-56)

So Coleridge's complaint about being reared in the city is "quietly trumped," as Lucy Newlyn has put it (149),[11] by Wordsworth's celebra-

[11] At *Prelude 1805* 8.601-10, Wordsworth congratulates himself that he "did not pine / As one in cities bred might do," and as Coleridge did, "beloved friend." Coleridge is indeed the supposed addressee of the whole poem.

tion of his own rural childhood. In the 1850 version of *The Prelude*, the Exodus allusion is further buried and instead we get closer to Coleridge's language and Milton's Satan:

> Whate'er his mission, the soft breeze can come
> To none more grateful than to me; escaped
> From the vast city, where I long had pined
> A discontented sojourner: now free,
> Free as a bird to settle where I will. (1.5-9)

Five lines later he says "The earth is all before me," and insists that with his "chosen guide," not Milton's Providence any longer, but "nothing better than a wandering cloud," nonetheless, "I cannot miss my way" (1.14-18).

If we follow up Wordsworth's two allusions to Milton in the opening lines of *The Prelude* we can find, I think, contrasting paradigms of authorship. In the one, the direct allusion, Wordsworth simply enlists himself in a great tradition, and wants us all to recognize it. In that respect he is like the Milton who invokes parallels with Homer, and also, quite deliberately, like the Milton who carefully managed his own self-presentation. But the other, the allusion via Coleridge, is both more casual and more complex. The phrase "city pent" does indeed lead back to Milton,[12] and Wordsworth may have recognized the allusion in his friend's poem. In revising his own poem, he may even have introduced the word "pined" as a kind of echo or sound-memory ("the vast city, where I long had pined"), and so making a further connection to the Miltonic original.[13] We are not, as in the case of the other allusion, explicitly required to read Wordsworth's poem as an extension of Milton's. Wordsworth's language alludes loosely to Milton's simile, but this is allusion working at a different level of poetic consciousness.

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[12] Finch (10-11) also notices the allusion to Milton, but his interest is in autobiographical issues and in Coleridge. Hollander (80) briefly explores Coleridge's address to Lamb in "This Lime-Tree Bower My Prison" as one who "pined / And hunger'd after Nature, many a year, / In the great city pent," along with Keats's echo in his sonnet "To one who has been long in city pent."

[13] Ricks, following Hollander, explores this kind of allusion in *Friendship* and less often in his earlier work such as *Allusion*. For Ricks, Wordsworth characteristically used to soften originals, not as parody, but in dreaming of restoration. "What he does in this poem is what he loves to do: to transmute nightmares into dreams for kindly issues. Such redemptions, such feats of rescue and renovation, are characteristic of how his mind works with allusions, and not his mind only but his heart." Thus Wordsworth echoes Milton's fallen angels building Pandemonium for the prayer that Cologne cathedral might one day be completed (*Allusion* 104).

Does it matter then that in both cases Wordsworth adapts language that Milton used not for himself but for his characters? It does if we are trying to read Milton through Wordsworth, that is, to understand how Milton and Wordsworth, working with the same idea, can differ so radically, how each stands out more clearly against the other. It is less significant that Wordsworth deliberately adapted Milton's words about Adam and Eve than that he unconsciously, or semi-consciously, collapsed the distinction between Satanic character and Miltonic narrator (as many did and have done): the language for either fuels the expression of the author's self. In doing so, Wordsworth loses, or ignores, the tension that Milton deliberately builds between the figure of himself as author/narrator and the various characters he creates and who, like Satan, are consciously made close to, but still separate from, himself.

I tried to make clear in *The Satanic Epic* how much of our reading of *Paradise Lost* depends on the relation of Satan and narrator (Forsyth 114-46). Indeed even the idea of authorship itself becomes more interesting through the link with Satan. Milton invents two angels who tell Eve stories (and one of them Adam hears too). One is Raphael's supposedly true story of the War in Heaven, which is clearly beyond the understanding of its audience, the other is Satan's remarkable tale of how he found a special tree in the garden and what happened to him when he ate its fruit: he became, in that wonderful phrase that Eve uses to him "speakable of mute" (9.563). Satan is thus, like Milton's narrator, one of many story-tellers in the poem. The similarity of Satan and the Milton who dramatizes his own narration has been noted by countless readers, and variously explained. The most obvious of these parallels results from Milton's decision to have his narrator fly. Anne Ferry (16-55) notes with memorable consonance that the epic voice is divided into bard and bird, but never calls attention to the most obvious effect of giving him wings.

Although Dante the pilgrim seems to walk or climb everywhere, the romantic Renaissance epic of Boiardo or Ariosto, imitating Lucian, was fond of having characters fly about. Nonetheless, Milton's is a striking departure from classical epic, where the relation of poet to Muse is one of modesty: Homer begins the *Iliad*'s Catalogue of ships, for example, by invoking the Muses who know all things, while we have heard only a rumour and know nothing (*Iliad* 2.485-86). Hesiod's Muses live on Helicon, but he cannot go there: they have to come to him, and he begs them to do so. Modesty of this kind, as we have seen, was not Milton's strongest characteristic, and he readily abandoned it along with the classical Muse herself, now only "an empty dream" (*Paradise Lost* 7.39). With his wings, Milton put on Satan's boundless Faustian ambition. His song is adventurous, and he intends with no middle flight to soar above the

Aonian mount, and aspires to sing of "things unattempted yet in prose or rhyme" (1.13-16) – though the fact that those famous words are actually a translation from Ariosto adds a certain indecipherable layer of irony to the bold claim to originality.

Far from allowing his unconscious identification with Satan to slip out unawares, as the Blake tradition would have it ("of the Devils party without knowing it," Blake 35), Milton invites us "to compare his portrait of the poet with his portrait of Satan. The similarities are not hidden; the differences are consciously and carefully defined" (Riggs 17). Writing *Paradise Lost* was a presumptuous thing to do, he admits (7.13), and he wants to ward off the potential punishment by anticipating it. He wants to ride Pegasus – a Renaissance commonplace for poetic inspiration since he had created the Muses' spring on Helicon, Hippocrene ("horse spring"), with a stamp of his hoof – but not to suffer the fate of one of his riders, Bellerophon (7.4-20). Indeed, being Milton, he claims to soar above the Olympian hill, and even "Above the flight of Pegasean wing" (7.4). It is no surprise that he also feels the need to pray for safety as he imagines himself descending from this Empyreal flight to his "Native Element" (7.16).

If we turn the prism, however, away from whatever the poet might be trying to achieve for his own private salvation to what the reader may thus be invited to perceive, then the insistent similarities of language extend the sense we already have of a potentially satanic narration. The effect is often to identify the two perspectives. Even in its chief point, the darkness of the Stygian pool and the darkness in which Milton's blindness obliges him to live, the *prooimion* to Book 3 recalls the voyaging Satan: both Satan and Milton use the formulaic "Chaos and ancient Night" (2.970), "Chaos and eternal Night" (3.18), and Satan himself describes that place, wonderfully, as "The dark unbottom'd infinite Abyss" and as "the palpable obscure" (2.405-06). Furthermore Satan's feet are "wandring" (2.404), he is "Alone, thus wandring" (3.667) through the newly created world, and, to reinforce the parallel, Milton proudly announces that, in spite of his blindness, "not the more / Cease I to wander where the Muses haunt" (3.26-27). But now notice the difference: Milton, knowing himself alone, nonetheless hopes for, prays for, the Muses' company. He has, he says boldly, been "Taught by the Heav'nly Muse to venture down / The dark descent, and up to reascend, / Though hard and rare" (3.19-21). Indeed this is the very moment when Milton explicitly invokes the parallel with Homer ("blind Maeonides," 3.35)[14] and his desire for similar renown. It is as if Homer, or rather the

[14] Milton includes at this point other blind precedents in antiquity, Thamyris, Phineus, and especially Tiresias (3.34-36).

Muse, has had to protect Milton from what he fears may be his main source of inspiration, that marvellously inventive and original Satan.

Wordsworth ignores the distinction so carefully constructed by Milton between author/narrator and Satan. *The Prelude* echoes both indifferently. And yet, and yet, we may perhaps allow slightly more insight, a higher level of reading consciousness, to Wordsworth's echo. For the famous simile of leaving the city at 9.445 is not quite so straightforward. It is introduced by a characteristically overlapping set of allusions, Adonis, Solomon, and including the gardens of Alcinous where Odysseus (Laertes' son, 441) had listened to Demodocus's song. The simile itself begins as if the "hee" it refers to is the last person in the narrative, Solomon, "the Sapient King" who "Held dalliance with his fair Egyptian spouse." We have to pause to realize that this "hee" is Satan, a trick Milton's narration often plays (Forsyth 124-28). What is more, the simile is not as carefully marked off from the narrative as Homeric similes usually are, so that Eve begins to appear as the "fair Virgin" before the simile ends: it merges back into the story of Satan's approach to Eve who "in her look sums all Delight" (452-54).

In his insistent way the great editor of Milton, Alastair Fowler comments on the Satan simile that "one has to be a very devoted member of the devil's party to stop short at sympathy with the townsman's need for a holiday and appreciation of beauty – without reflecting how mean it would be for him to take advantage of the country girl's innocence" (Fowler 465).[15] This extraordinary riff is one example among many of how Milton's commentators need to point out the dangers of that sympathy with Satan that the poem evidently invites. So in view of the complexities of the passage, and the deliberate parallels between Satan and Milton, Wordsworth may not have been so insensitive to Milton's meanings in finding himself in this Homeric and Satanic simile. He gets half the story at least.

What is missing in Wordsworth is the Renaissance playfulness about authorship that Milton inherited, and almost lost.[16] Many Elizabethan and Jacobean writers put versions of themselves into their works. Spenser introduces himself into his poems in the persona of Colin Clout, and celebrates his own wedding in his *Epithalamion. Astrophil and*

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[15] In Fowler's second edition (1998), the note is usefully expanded, but, as often, loses its rhetorical bite. Fowler also points to the biographical possibilities that emerge by connecting the passage with Milton's early "Elegia VII," but changed his mind for the second edition.

[16] I am deliberately ignoring in this context the complexities explored by Geoffrey Hartman in which Wordsworth's self is both represented and transcended, for which see Bennett, Gill 57. However one reads that layered and constructed self, there is little that is playful about it.

Stella suggests identification as well as ironic distance between Sidney and Astrophil. Sixteenth and seventeenth-century writers enjoyed playing on the boundary between self-disclosure and self-concealment. Are Donne's poems sincere professions of feeling based on personal experience, or are they witty and provocative exercises in role-play? They can be read both ways: Donne and his contemporaries knew that, paradoxically, authenticity is one role among others.[17] Shakespeare's *Sonnets* are one of the most consummate performances in these poetic games. We will never know for certain if the poet really loved a young man or a "dark lady," or who they were, but reading the poems makes it hard not to wonder – and not surely just for a modern reader infected by Romanticism.

Pound and Eliot needed to argue themselves out of the Romantic temptation, and pronounce an advance version of the death of the author. Ezra Pound insisted that "It's immensely important that great poems be written, but it makes not a jot of difference who writes them" (Harvey). Indeed this soon became a characteristic Modernist reaction to Romanticism, akin to Eliot's striving for "impersonality." Fortunately we are no longer slaves to that Modernist dogma, or its postmodern heir in Barthes and Foucault, and can allow it to take its historical place as a rather hysterical reaction to Romanticism or to simplistic biographical criticism. What has happened in more recent theory, to quote Burke's argument about those famous theorists (74) is that "the principle of the author most powerfully reasserts itself when it is thought absent," and further that "the concept of the author is never more alive than when thought dead." From our point of view, as I have tried to show, there are very real distinctions to be made among periods and writers when we try to assess the idea of the author, and it is now possible for them to come back into focus.

[17] I borrow this and other points in this paragraph from Hackett (21).

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