

both were stubborn and proud men. Both had strong ideals for the family as the most meaningful union in life, and both believed in marriage as a personal sacrament between husband and help-meet. Leo was the beloved *pater familias* of his own children and grandchildren, and he was half of the most loving couple I have observed outside of Adam and Eve before the Fall in *Paradise Lost*. The most valuable memorial Leo will leave is his good and loving crop of bright and successful children and grandchildren, several of whom have, thanks to Leo, earned the advanced degrees that Leo himself had been denied.

I will miss Leo's knowledge and his careful judgments, no matter how much I debated them with him. I will miss calling him to ask his advice on one of my own footnotes or one of my own editorial decisions. I will miss his scrupulousness in checking every word of every article to appear in *Milton Quarterly* against original works he was always able to find in the New York Public Library. I will miss Leo's sense of humor, and I will miss him even as an intellectual opponent, since to debate with him was to sharpen one's own moral perceptions. I would also say to Leo, echoing what one of our mutual friends—a well-respected scholar and editor—wrote him, "Thanks for your help, Leo. Someday you will make of me a good scholar."

Milton as Historical Subject

Milton Banquet Address

Chicago, 1990

Leah Marcus

During the last ten years, Shakespeare has become the interpretive center for a vast interplay of poststructuralist methodologies. He has been deconstructed, decentered, unauthored, deauthorized, new-historicized, culturally materialized, his very name as often as not put in quotation

marks. "Shakespeare" in quote marks is Shakespeare called into question, made to denote a set of shifting cultural functions rather than a known literary figure with an established historical identity. It is curious how little of this vast interplay of poststructuralist energies has been brought to bear on the equally interesting subject of Milton. There have been exceptions, of course, but to a significant degree, Milton in 1990 remains Milton without the deauthorizing bracket of quotation marks, an identifiable historical figure seen against a landscape of significant historical developments in England, but never allowed to "die" in proper poststructuralist fashion, never allowed to meld into his or our own climate of ideas to the point that he loses his identity and becomes a set of cultural operations in the manner of "Shakespeare."

To say that Milton, in late twentieth-century critical discourse, has not been turned into a set of cultural functions is not to suggest that "Milton"—and here you must imagine that I have given him the dreaded quotation marks—fails to perform an important set of functions. Rather, I would like to argue, in the critical community today the name of Milton works to guarantee the continuation of a certain pervasive style of literary subjecthood that he himself may be credited with having invented and that we as Miltonists are reluctant to move out of. If Milton refuses to disappear under the rubric of history, or of deconstruction, or of the postmodernist "death of the author," that is because "Milton" to us means—quite precisely—resistance to all such decentering impulses. He, as much as any other single historical figure of the English Renaissance, may be credited with having inaugurated a new way of situating the author within literary history, or rather, of asserting the author's resistance to or transcendence of historical contingency by incorporating history within his conception of individual authorship.

In suggesting that Milton was at the defining forefront of new notions of literary authorship and literary history I am, of course, doing something that Miltonists love to do and that we seem to find reassuring on some very basic level. We

love to think of Milton as a great originator, and he seems to have liked to imagine himself that way. We love to think of Milton also as a great repository, encompassing all the knowledge of his day. The first time I taught Milton at the graduate level, I confidently assured my students that Milton could read Sanskrit. How could Milton not read Sanskrit? He could read just about every other known language. The next class period, I had to go back in chagrin and tell my students that the first Sanskrit scholars in England appeared only in the eighteenth century and that no, Milton could not read Sanskrit. But, we are likely to assert by way of damage control, he would have learned it with alacrity had the texts been made available to him, just as (I am convinced) he may well have learned Anglo Saxon in order to read Junius's *Genesis B*.

If we are to locate a specific point at which Milton may be said to have inaugurated the new view of literary subjecthood for which I am giving him credit, that point is his 1645 *Poems of Mr. John Milton, Both English and Latin, Compos'd at several times* and printed, the title page tells us, "by his true Copies." As Louis Martz has argued in his essay "The Rising Poet," Milton's volume of poems, with its many Virgilian echoes and its scrupulous attention to genre, asks us to view his achievement in terms of the development of his powers as a poet: "Milton's original arrangement creates the growing awareness of a guiding, central purpose that in turn gives the volume an impressive and peculiar sense of wholeness" (31). One of the things the volume does that I, at least, have not seen in earlier volumes of poetry in England, is to identify many of the poems in terms of the author's personal artistic development. The title page itself suggests attention to the "several times" at which the poems were "compos'd." For many of them, Milton supplies his age at the time of composition (though he appears to have erred on the side of precocity in some of his datings). The poems are ordered for the most part chronologically, so that we can follow his development as a poet. Milton asserts on the title page of the Latin poems that they were written "*Annum aetatis Vigessimum*," before the

end of his twentieth year. He even includes botched attempts, as a way of calling attention to the growth of his poetic powers. "On the Passion," as we all know, is printed in the 1645 volume (and in modern editions) incomplete, with the author's explanation, "*This Subject the Author finding to be above the yeers he had, when he wrote it, and nothing satisfi'd with what was begun, left it unfinished.*" To us, with our post-Romantic inheritance of critical attention to the "growth of the poet's mind," Milton's authorial interventions in the 1645 volume may appear rather unremarkable: one of the achievements of the nineteenth century was to look at literary authorship in developmental terms, to chart the biographical emergence and transformations of genius for all canonical writers, not only for Milton. I suspect, however, that Milton's tactic looked much newer, perhaps even strange, to his contemporaries. His authorial interventions are quite unprecedented in an English volume of poems; at least I have never seen anything earlier approximating Milton's, although Janell Mueller has suggested to me that George Gascoigne can be considered a partial precursor. Earlier authors had arranged their work in a way that marked a pattern of poetic development in general rather than individual terms, according to the Virgilian *rotula*, for example, but none had so overtly inserted his own voice in the text as a commentary on what he had achieved (and even the age at which he had achieved it). By comparison with Milton, the *Workes* of Ben Jonson is quite reticent—Jonson offered dates for some of his works and placed them in an order that might suggest poetic development and generic significance—his "Epigrams" suggest a biographical trajectory, but one offered only silently through the poems themselves. Other near-contemporary volumes, like Milton's, celebrate the poetic precocity of the author. Thomas Randolph's poems were published after his untimely death in 1630 at the age of twenty-nine or thirty. The title-page portrait to the second edition shows him as a mere youth—much younger than his age at the time of his death, given as twenty-seven on the title page. One of the dedicatory epistles asserts,

Laugh at the botching artist's mis-attempt.
(Masson trans. 3:459)

Traditionally, these lines have been interpreted as a malicious jibe at William Marshall, who meticulously carved out the Greek letters with (we are asked to suppose) not the least knowledge of Greek or curiosity about what the lines might mean. We are invited to recognize the "real" Milton here, in these verses, through language rather than picture. By these lines, Milton is establishing a "fit audience though few"—those readers learned enough to comprehend the Greek are treated with intimate familiarity. They are "my friends," *filoi*; they are invited, implicitly, to form a kind of learned coterie in recognition of Milton—to compare the engraved face with his real, living face, and to laugh along with Milton at the engraver's incompetence.

English engravers were indeed, by and large, less than skillful, at least if one compares them, as Milton surely did, with their more expert counterparts on the Continent. I wonder, though, whether William Marshall was either so incompetent or so ignorant a gull as Milton's verses imply. Other portrait frontispieces by him (like that of Donne in the 1635 *Poems* or Robert Herrick in his *Hesperides*) display considerable skill. Readings of the frontispiece to Milton's 1645 *Poems* assume that Milton's joke was on Marshall: the engraver was doomed, not knowing it, to carve out his own condemnation by fashioning the inscription. I would suggest, instead, that Marshall may well have been in on the joke, and that Milton's frontispiece needs to be read in terms of a long line of earlier English examples that all assert, through one device or another, the inadequacy of the visual by comparison with the verbal as a means for communicating the author's mind and being. The title page and frontispiece to the Shakespeare First Folio provide an excellent example which I have analyzed at some length in *Puzzling Shakespeare*: the strikingly large picture of Shakespeare seems to intimate the author's presence; the verses opposite assert otherwise. A "true" portrait of Shakespeare and his "wit" is to be found in his writing, not his

effigy: "Reader, looke, / Not on his Picture, but his Book." There are many other examples. Du Bartas's *Devine Weekes and Workes*, as Georgianna Zeigler has been kind enough to point out to me, similarly offers a portrait, but cautions the reader that Du Bartas has "limned" himself much more successfully with the pen through his writings within. Similarly, an engraving of Jonson from the 1620s declares, "O could there be an art found out that might / Produce his shape soe lively as to Write" (reproduced in Riggs 281). Lancelot Andrewes's posthumous volume of sermons shows Andrewes gesturing away from himself and toward a volume in his hand; the accompanying verses urge the reader not to dwell on the portrait, but to proceed immediately to the pages of divinity that follow. Marshall's frontispiece of Donne for the 1635 *Poems* carries a similar message: the portrait from Donne's youth is an altogether inadequate image of his "last, best Dayes" as a writer of divine poems. In the same vein, the title page of Randolph's poems depicts the engraved image of a young boy who looks about fourteen (the precocious Randolph who penned verses while his fellows were playing with nuts and apples) yet the inscription places the poet's age at the time of his death as twenty-seven. Here again, the art is not to be trusted. The lot of an English engraver was not a happy one. Insofar as such craftsmen undertook frontispieces and title-page portraits, they were laboring in a craft fated to be undermined within the volume itself in favor of the superior portraiture of language.

Milton's title page needs to be imagined as part of the same somewhat playful tradition. The frontispiece offers two or more "false" portraits of the author—the effigy which is too old and unlike, the shepherds outside the window who are too distant and too generalized to be Milton. The "real" Milton peers out at us only through the Greek of the inscription. Once again, words win out against the visual as a true portrait of the author. I can imagine that Marshall himself might have been in on the joke, at least to the extent that he collaborated knowingly in his own preempting when he carved out the inscription. As

a side note, I might mention that later engravers sought to rectify "botching" Marshall's "mis-attempt." Of the four copies of the 1645 *Poems* at the University of Texas, two have the original frontispiece. The other two have frontispieces affixed later—probably around 1700. One of these later renderings of Marshall shows Milton's face with some of the lines smoothed out; the other, in addition, depicts him almost smiling. But Marshall's 1645 frontispiece establishes a true or trustworthy authorial voice—one both engagingly intimate and self-referential—from among competing images of the poet. The rhetoric of Milton's frontispiece is thus altogether different from that of the First Folio or Du Bartas or Jonson or Andrewes, all of which defer the reader's sense of authorial presence from the portrait to the pages of text beyond. Milton's frontispiece instead offers his learned readers a voice which is clearly established as his own before the poetry is even encountered, and which seems to extend through the volume offering explanation and judgment of the author's youthful verses in the same way that it offers judgment and explanation of the inadequate engraving on the frontispiece. The reader is enticed into a continuous measuring of Milton's past poetic powers against those of a nearer present, into the construction of an individual history of the poet's progress. In terms of the frontispiece's "botching" portrait of Milton, however, I am tempted to think that Marshall got the last laugh: his image may look little enough like the Milton of 1645, but it is strikingly like the portraits of Milton in his sixties engraved by Faithorne and Dolle! Either the later engravers copied the 1645 image, or Milton in his sixties looked very much as Marshall had "aged" him earlier on. Was Marshall incompetent enough to fail to capture Milton's youthful visage, or prescient enough to recognize through facial structure the visage that Milton would later become?

However we may wish to answer these questions, we need to recognize what a startling innovation the 1645 *Poems* was. At a time when many people did not even know their own age, Milton (or his "voice") meticulously provides his age at

the time of many of the poems' composition. At a time when literary authorship was coming to imply a careful crafting and finishing of materials for the press, Milton supplies a poem ("The Passion") that is fragmentary and self-confessedly bad: his interest in charting his own development wins out over the more usual authorial desire to place only completed, successful works in print. By arranging his own poems in developmental order, by calling repeated attention, through both the frontispiece and the comments interspersed in the volume, to his own poetic achievement as a kind of *history*, Milton invented for England literary subjecthood as we have traditionally been taught to understand it. The author is a category larger than history in that history, in the form of biography, is brought within the compass of the individual life. What the volume accomplishes is something so ordinary and recognizable to us that we are likely to think nothing of it, but as I have already suggested, in Milton's age it was strikingly new: the invention of an individual literary life.

The life we are offered through the 1645 volume was, of course, a construct: readers of the verses are invited to forget that its author had been publicly vilified during the years immediately preceding for his diatribes on the subject of divorce. A year after the publication of the 1645 *Poems* Thomas Edwards offered a rather different public image of Milton by inscribing him among the monstrous heretics and grotesques of *Gangraena; or, a Catalogue and Discovery of Many of the Errors, Heresies, Blasphemies, and Pernicious Practices of the Sectaries of This Time, Vented and Acted in England in These Four Last Years*. It is not this history that Milton calls attention to in the poems, but a personal history of artistic development that effectively closes out the cacophonies of the world at large as they impinge on his personal history.

Why am I insisting so repeatedly on Milton's unusual achievement in the 1645 *Poems*? I am taking a highly traditionalist tack—Milton as grand originator—but with something less than traditional in mind. Let us go back to my initial point about Milton's apparent "immunity" to recent

critical heterodoxies of various kinds. I would contend that if Milton appears immune to recent critical methodologies, it is in large part because of the power of his own encoding of his life as literary history. The 1645 *Poems* may be said to have inaugurated a mode of self-representation that was to become further articulated in subsequent years and subsequent literary production. As the editors of the *OED* have noted, Milton provides the first usage of several meanings for the word "individual" and its derivatives. Sometimes he used the word in its traditional sense of "indivisible," but he also inaugurated usages that emphasized the self-sameness of a discrete unit and its separateness from others. He documented his literary life by hanging on to early versions of many of his works; he saved his poems in manuscript versions that allow us to do something we can rarely do for writers before him, but can commonly do for writers who came after. We can follow the process of the poem's development from first to later and more refined versions. As David Loewenstein and James Turner have noted, in his pamphlet wars, Milton habitually aestheticizes his own history: not only does he offer himself as a "true poem" (as Jonson might have earlier) but he imagines that individual "poem" to be forged out of the crucible of contemporary events. That is not to say that Milton failed to see himself as subject to contemporary history—only that he was constantly in the process of constructing a literary vision of his own individual life that transcended contemporary history "as ever in my great task-Master's eye." Milton's ongoing "autobiographical literary history" is by no means static, but constantly in a process of stalemate, challenge, and reintegration. In fact, its vulnerability is part of its appeal. The poet's life is constructed out of anguish, out of triumph over despair.

I do not think there is anyone calling him- or herself a Miltonist who is impervious to the nobility and pathos of Milton's literary history as it has come down to us through his writings. Part of the reason that poststructuralist approaches in general, and alternative historicizations of Milton in particular, are threatening to Miltonists is that

they appear to assault the "portrait of the artist" that Milton himself constructed so authoritatively and at such personal cost. To erase Milton's own self-authorship and sense of personal development, to deny his own version of his history in favor of some other alien to him, perhaps alien to his time—that seems a much greater violation in the case of Milton than in the case of someone like Shakespeare, who had no personal "literary history" to speak of before the compilers of the First Folio began to create it for him.

But what is being violated by the new -isms that some Miltonists find so threatening to the continuing health of Milton studies? Surely not Milton himself. He has been dead for several hundred years now; however sensitive he may have been to his reputation as an author while he was alive, he is blessedly impervious to such assaults in the grave, particularly if we accept his own favored doctrine of mortalism. No, the Milton who is being defended against the various threatening -isms of late twentieth-century interpretive practice is "Milton" in quotation marks—a function rather than a man, but imagined by the collectivity of Miltonists almost as if he were still a sentient being, a being kept alive by our continuing interest in him, by our continuing fidelity to his own project of literary self-definition, and not least, by our personal identification with him. Stanley Fish has recently suggested that Milton criticism is essentially over—it has all already happened in earlier forms. All that we can do, according to this highly conservative scenario, is reenact versions of past literary history: to destabilize hierarchy in *Paradise Lost* is to repeat Blake and Shelley, to deconstruct Milton is to rediscover Milton's own undermining of traditional generic categories, to intertextualize Milton is to rediscover the "multiple voices and traditions" inscribed within the text by the "editorial apparatus of the great eighteenth-century editions," and so on (Fish; see also Fish in Loewenstein and Turner 68n27). Milton, in this version, is always his own supplement, always already outside supplementarity. No doubt there have been recurring patterns of interpretive activity within Milton criticism, just as there have been in the history of

Shakespeare criticism, or any other. In fact, the notion that Milton's "literary history" is already complete is very similar to the sense of ennui and *déjà vu* that overtook Shakespeare criticism in the sixties and seventies—just before the new methodologies began to dismantle previous collective academic visions of what constituted Shakespeare. Fish's contention that the new -isms can only repeat earlier literary history is an interesting encoding of the profoundly Miltonic ideal that one can write one's own literary history—subsequent writings will merely elaborate and extend the author's own project. Insofar as we remain within that undoubtedly fecund yet limited perspective, we will remain within Milton's literary history, in fact within a peculiarly insular version of it, since Milton's own view of his history was more developmental than cyclical.

To get outside Milton in order to rediscover Milton, as some of us would like to, we need to find other histories with which to analyze and confront Milton's own. We need to separate Milton from "Milton" and try to piece out the extent to which our energies are bound up in the latter under the name of the former. To get outside Milton's own powerful self-voicing is not necessarily to silence him or disempower him, though it may have a profound effect on "Milton" and may to some degree disempower certain groups within the community of Miltonists. Fish's caveats notwithstanding, I doubt whether any of us has the power to keep Milton static, to keep Milton from changing in ways we can only begin to imagine. The idea is disquieting, but also rather liberating. Those of us who call ourselves (or get branded as) poststructuralists or cultural materialists or feminists or new historicists or practitioners of some -ism other than critical traditionalism find ourselves in the position of the engraver Marshall *vis à vis* the irate extensions of authorial voice that mock our botched attempts. I have suggested, in Marshall's defense, that what he saw when he created his oddly aged figure of Milton was an uncanny prefiguring of Milton's actual visage when he reached his sixties. Marshall's image was one that the author strongly repudiated, yet later came to

resemble. Perhaps the same can be said of the various -isms that seem to threaten Milton studies today: they offer a new set of "Milton" functions that some among the present community of Miltonists find uncouth, oddly unsatisfying; they offer a set of functions that may, in time, come to signify Milton.

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