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While there is little doubt that Blake read, absorbed, and stole from Chatterton, especially early in his career, the standard assumption has been, stemming largely from Margaret Lowery's *Windows of the Morning*, that Blake's borrowings from his near contemporary merely signal his indebtedness to the eighteenth century, particularly to the minor poets of the latter half of that century.¹ Trying to deal adequately and fairly with verbal echoes is, of course, extremely risky, as the recent counterpoint between Michael Tolley and Michael Ferber over Thel's Motto newly demonstrates (*Blake Newsletter*, Summer 1976). So much of the verbal poetic tradition impinges upon a poet's unconscious memory that it is more often than not impossible to assign a phrase's ultimate origin.² And, especially with a poet like Blake, such assignment is all the more difficult because of his habit of wrenching, upsetting, or even perverting the sense of the original to fit his own purposes--which include frequently a turning of the echo (or quotation or near-quotation) against itself.

One of the means Blake uses to accomplish such reversals or self-destructions is the introduction into the verbal context of a contrary (or at least superficially unrelated) allusion which, in its thematic import and usually clear Blakean affinities, dominates the total verbal and imagistic context to the point where assumptions about Blake's indebtedness to the first "source" are effectively short-circuited by the second.

Let me take a simple and characteristic case in point. At the close of the Memorable Fancy preceding the Proverbs of Hell Blake's Devil "folded in black clouds" writes "with corroding fires" the following:

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?

As has been pointed out by others,³ the immediate source of the first line, at least, seems to be Chatterton's *Bristowe Tragedie*:

Howe dydd I knowe thatt ev'ry darte,
Thatt cutte the airie waie,

Myghte nott fynde passage toe my harte,
And close myne eyes for aie? (ll. 133-36)

The speaker is "Syr Charles Bawdin," who is about to be executed, the particular context his memory of escapes from death in battle and the consequent irony of his present predicament. The sharpness of the contrast with Blake's context needs no comment. Indeed so obviously irrelevant to Blake's purposes are both Chatterton's context and the "darte," even if somehow manipulated to "fit," that one wonders whether there is any point to Blake's making the allusion at all. It seems merely an unconscious (or perhaps even conscious) borrowing of a felicitous phrase.

Even early, however, such borrowing of felicities is not Blake's habit. And that is not the case here either. The trope of "cutting the air" (or the water) has a long history in literature, extending certainly as far back as Homer, Virgil, and Ovid⁴--and appearing prominently at least twice in Spenser (whose influence on Blake's *Poetical Sketches* is demonstrably substantial). For example, in *The Faerie Queene* the angel attending Guyon, who is "laid in swowne," is described, in part, by Spenser thus:

two sharpe winged sheares [i.e. wings]
Decked with diuerse plumes, like painted Iayes,
Were fixed at his backe, to cut his ayerie wayes.
(II, viii, 5)

Further, Canto VIII is introduced by an account of the "care" of "heavenly spirits" who

with golden pineons, cleave
The flitting skyes, like flying Pursuivant,
Against foule feends to aide us militant.
(stanza 2)

And this is followed by a comparison of Guyon's protector with

Cupido on Idaeian hill,
When having laid his cruell bow away,
And mortall arrowes, wherewith he doth fill
The world with murdrous spoiles and bloudie pray.
(stanza 6)

Here, then, is the likely "source" for Chatterton's passage, wherein he translates Spenser's heavenly spirits into the warrior martyr who, though obviously no longer protected from harm, reasserts throughout the latter half of the poem the righteousness of his life and career, his readiness to die, and his faith in a future life in "the land of bliss" with "God in Heaven."

That Blake knew these lines from Spenser is, of course, a matter of speculation; but in view of his apparently wide and careful early reading of Spenser it is likely.⁵ Further, in *An Hymne of Heavenly Love* the nine orders of angels are presented "with nimble wings to cut the skies, / When he [God] them on his messages doth send" (ll. 66-67), a passage that may have suggested to Blake his characteristic perversion of angel-messengers into the Devil who conveys his wisdom to "the minds of men" by corrosive writing.

Be that as it may, the most important point about Blake's context is that it is even more Miltonic than it may be Spenserian. In *Paradise Regained* "the Adversary"

with envy fraught and rage
Flies to his place, nor rests, but in mid air
To Council summons all his mighty Peers,
Within thick Clouds and dark tenfold involv'd.
(I, 38-41)

Similarly, "folded in black clouds" Blake's Devil hovers "on the sides of the rock" "on the abyss of the five senses, where a flat sided steep frowns over the present world." Milton's Satan must

tempt with wand'ring feet
The dark unbottom'd infinite Abyss
And through the palpable obscure find out
His uncouth way. . . . (II, 404-07)

And:

Into this wild Abyss the wary fiend
Stood on the brink of Hell and look'd a while,
Pondering his Voyage. . . . (II, 917-19)

Blake thus draws directly on Milton's abyss to help him define his own "abyss of the five senses" and "the present world." At the same time Blake surely recalled that Satan faced another "steep" when he reached the borders of Eden, "a steep wilderness" which to him "Access deni'd" (IV, 132-37). If so, then his Devil represents both the imaginative man, the artist, whose perception will not be restrained by the senses, as well as the Miltonic Satan who longingly connives to enter the "delicious Paradise" where, through those very senses (among other things, of course), Eve is tempted. Perhaps this duality explains why the Devil is unimaginatively "folded in black clouds" while at the same time his corrosives can melt "apparent surfaces away, and [display] the infinite which was hid" (*Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, pl. 14).

Although by virtue of these allusions alone the apparent allusion to Chatterton is effectively swallowed up by the thoroughly Miltonic framework, Blake may have recalled as well Eve's dream in Book V of *Paradise Lost*:

Forthwith up to the Clouds
With him I flew, and underneath beheld
The Earth outstretcht immense. . . . (V, 86-88)

Adam's subsequent interpretation of the dream interestingly involves, in familiar faculty-psychology terms, the senses:

of all external things,
Which the five watchful Senses represent,
She forms Imaginations, Aery shapes,
Which Reason joining or disjoining, frames
All what we affirm or what deny, and call
Our knowledge or opinion. . . . (V, 103-08)

Thus, if Blake indeed had this sequence in mind, he artfully transforms Eve's tempting prospect of the earth (engineered by Satan) from far above into the speaker's and the Devil's perspective, also from high above the earth, hovering "over the present world." But for them, of course, there is no temptation but rather the terror of the abyss of the five senses over which they may triumph not by resisting temptation but by imaginatively overleaping the constrictions of a sense-bound universe--by, in other words, perceiving (and hence creating) their own "immense world of delight" otherwise "clos'd by [their] senses five."⁶

Finally, we should note that the word "delight" itself, a favorite of both Spenser and Milton, is steadily associated by the latter especially with Eden, with God, with man as God's creation, with Adam's relationship to Eve, and the like. While Blake was surely aware of these associations, transforming them into his own conception of imaginative bliss in a Blakean Eden, he may also have had in mind passages such as the following dealing with God's creation of a sublunary world of delight:

Beneath him with new wonder now he views
To all delight of human sense expos'd
In narrow room Nature's whole wealth, yea more,
A Heaven on Earth. . . . (IV, 205-08)

In one sense, then, the entire Memorable Fancy is a dramatic enactment of or gloss on the first part of Plate 5 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Adam's interpretation of Eve's dream includes a discussion of Reason as the restraint of desire:

. . . what in sleep thou didst abhor to dream,
Waking thou never wilt consent to do. (V, 121-22)

Thus Eve's temptations, in the dream and in actuality, are clearly the models for Thel's failure in *The Book of Thel* and Oothoon's ill-starred triumph in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. And the transformation of Milton's Satan into the imaginative perceiver-creator-artist, whose worlds of delight are neither of the senses nor of the Miltonic God's Eden, is neatly prefigurative of Blake's later efforts in *Milton* to release the seventeenth-century poet from his "fetters."

We are obviously a long way from Chatterton, from the eighteenth century, and from the "influence" of both. The *Bristowe Tragedie* passage must be seen then as merely the vehicle for Blake's manipulation

of Milton to his own, and ultimately to Milton's, benefit. If Chatterton's "darte" (a word which Blake uses only once in Chatterton's sense--in *King Edward the Third*, III, 176⁷) and its warlike associations remained in Blake's mind at all, they too become transmogrified into "Arrows of desire," "long winged arrows of thought," "Arrows of Love," and "Arrows of Intellect"--that is, the weapons of "Mental Fight" whereby even "Bacon & Newton & Locke" as well as "Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer" may "appear in Heaven." And perhaps Chatterton as well.

Ovid's Metamorphoses, Godolphin's *The Passion of Dido for Aeneas*, and Evelyn's *Lucretius* among others (*English Poetic Diction*, pp. 62-65), while Arthos lists Virgil's *Aeneid* and the *Georgics*, as well as Du Bartas, Sylvester, Chapman, Drayton, and Cowley (*The Language of Natural Description*, pp. 134-35).

⁵ We might also note, from *Mulopotmos*, the phrase "air-cutting wings" (l. 154).

⁶ We should recall that part of Satan's temptation (in the dream as well as later in reality) is the achieving of godhood:

Forbid'n here, it seems, as only fit
For Gods, yet able to make Gods of Men. (V, 69-70)

The difference between Blake's idea of "godhood" and Satan's (as well as Milton's) is a measure of both Blake's distance from the seventeenth century and the care with which he adapts Milton's Satan for his own prophetic purposes.

⁷ Both Spenser and Milton make heavy use of the word.

⁸ *Milton*, pl. 1; *Jerusalem*, pls. 33, 97, 98.

⁹ Another similar reversal of Chatterton, but without the assistance of Spenser or Milton, represents a more rudimentary form of Blake's absorption of his sources-- and thus may suggest one way that we can conjecturally date individual poems in the *Poetical Sketches* (or at least determine whether they are early or late). In the second stanza of *Guin, King of Norway* Blake virtually takes over whole Chatterton's stanza xli of the *Bristowe Tragedie*. But whereas Bawdin's speech extols the virtue of his noble father who taught him "To feed the hungry poor/ Nor let my servants drive away/ The hungry from my door," Blake's tyrants are those very nobles who "did feed/ Upon the hungry poor" and "drive/ The needy from my door." A more elaborate transformation, though still without the conversion factors of a Milton or a Spenser, is Blake's rewrite of Chatterton's stanza lxii in "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Songs of Innocence*, where Chatterton's ballad stanza is elongated into fourteens and the "councilmen" escorting Bawdin to his beheading become the "Grey headed beadles" leading the children into St. Paul's cathedral. Since Lowery concentrated on apparent similarities in wording, form, and tone, she ignores passages such as these which involve major transmutations by Blake.

¹ (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1940). See especially pp. 131-93, and also my note 9 below. Cf. T. S. Eliot's similar position in *The Sacred Wood* (London: Methuen & Co., 1920).

² For some of these difficulties see such studies as R. D. Havens, *The Influence of Milton on English Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1922); C. V. Deane, *Aspects of Eighteenth-Century Nature Poetry* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1935); John Arthos, *The Language of Natural Description in Eighteenth Century Poetry* (Ann Arbor: Univ. of Michigan Press, 1949); Bernard Groom, *The Diction of Poetry from Spenser to Bridges* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1955); Geoffrey Tillotson, *Augustan Poetic Diction* (London: The Athlone Press, 1964); and most recently Arthur Sherbo, *English Poetic Diction from Chaucer to Wordsworth* (East Lansing: Michigan State Univ. Press, 1975).

³ E.g. Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse* (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1963), p. 83, and most recently Geoffrey Keynes, ed., *William Blake: The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (London and New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1975), commentary on plates 6-7 (no page numbers supplied).

⁴ Sherbo, e.g., cites Dryden's *Aeneid*, Pope's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* (in the former of which we find "airy way" as well), Sandys'