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CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

WORTHY OF FAITH?

Authors and readers in early modernity

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This chapter will consider how the traditional (classical Roman and European medieval) definition of the "author" as "one worthy of faith" (the faith of the reader, obviously) is put increasingly to the test during the early modern period, as the notion of literary writing gradually moves from epistemological (vatic) and/or ethical-rhetorical models toward what Terry Eagleton has called "the ideology of the aesthetic" – that is, toward suspension of readerly belief in the moral fidelity and intellectual credibility of the literary writer. In a classic formulation, the literary author as a distinctive "personal" and individual presence, indeed as willful demi-deity "making worlds," first emerges in what we sometimes still call the Renaissance: first in the Italy of Dante and Petrarch, and then, gradually, spreads throughout the nascent vernacular traditions of western Europe. What follows will rehearse some clichés of the topic, one hopes in an appealing way, and lay out to shift the terms of the discussion in others. In particular, I will focus on the intuitively obvious, yet not always thoroughly explored, point that any notion of authorship is intricately tied to ideas, and realities, of readership. More especially, I will explore, on the one hand, the question of authorial control over the meaning of a text as this takes shape in the experience of its readers and, on the other, how such readers may either trustingly embrace the offered sense of the text or willfully reshape it.

The topic of late medieval and early modern authorship can be confronted in any number of productive ways. It can be written in terms of the shift from Latin to vernacular literature (or of the parallel developments in both); of the increasing prestige (the "rebirth" as it were) of classical literary and philosophical models; of the gradual process of secularization and the formation of a lay cultural elite; of the development of new models of education that also involve a certain expansion in the number of literate subjects; of the cataclysmic shift from manuscript to print culture; of the struggle between an incipient bourgeoisie and an evolving aristocracy. Any history of authorship will vary according to the time and/or place one focuses on, to the forms of social organization under which the writing occurs (republic or principate, city-state or nation-state, etc.), and to the religious affinities of the writer and/or reader (especially after Luther) – not to mention the question of the ethnicity, gender, and/or class of the writers and readers involved.[1]

The tale I will tell here will only address some of these issues, and most of them tangentially. Rather, I will take a simpler, but I still believe telling, path. My writers are the most typical types of authors in this period – white, male, upper class – as, basically, are their readers. Beginning with a standard late medieval definition of what an author is and how he ideally relates to his readers, I will then examine a series of symptomatic texts reaching from the fourteenth to seventeenth centuries where the authorial struggle to command the "faith" of the reader is played out in a wide variety of ways. For reasons of conviction I begin well before the established starting bells of early modernity (the press; voyages of discovery; Protestantism; the proto-modern nation state). For reasons of training, I will weight my discourse heavily, though not exclusively, to Italian cases. And as for readers, I will take the easy way out: my writers are also understood to be readers, and their texts to represent, however one-sidedly, a variety of relationships into which these two inextricably intertwined figures, at once lovers and enemies, masters and servants, may enter.

In book four of the *Convivio* (*Banquet*, *c*. 1303–6), Dante Alighieri offers two definitions of what an "autore," an author, is, only one of which will concern us here (4.6).[2] The primary definition he provides is a slightly modified version of the principal medieval etymology of the word: "au[c]tor" comes from a Greek word, *autentin*, meaning "worthy of faith and obedience." This definition was, by all historical accounts, the best known in the Middle Ages, which had it originally from Cicero, who used it in reference to the (rhetorical) authority of a legal witness, that person's ability to command *fides* (trust or faith) in court. In context, Dante's use of the word refers to two types of (non-literary) "authorities": Aristotle as the personification of philosophical belief – worthiness and the Holy Roman Emperor, specifically the late Frederick II (d. 1250), whose judicial commands must be obeyed. The combination of "faith" with "obedience" in authority, however, ultimately comes from the Christianization of the Roman legal concept, whereby God becomes *the* archetypal figure of the Author, creator of the "book of the world," omniscient and omnipotent, worthy to be both absolutely believed and perfectly obeyed. And there is good reason to think that at base Dante is imagining his own poetic making as deriving from, and modeled on, that of his own Maker.

Dante's use of the loaded term "autore" is complex, since it at once disavows its relevance to himself and tacitly appropriates it, raising himself up to the level of the great classical *auctores*. The stated aim of the discourse on authority in book 4 is to show that he is showing due respect, faith, and obedience for *other*, non-literary *authors* (i.e., Aristotle and Frederick) as he treats the topic of "nobility" as a quality inherent in the individual rather than handed down genealogically. This humble posture is mirrored in the form of the text too, since in it Dante places himself in the role of a reader, and specifically of a commentator upon classical philosophical and literary authorities, secondarily, and, primarily, upon one of his own canzone, which begins "the sweet rhymes of love."

Here, however, there is an obvious complication: throughout the prose of the *Convivio* Dante adopts the posture of the traditional medieval "lector," the modern, humble commentator on the (long-dead) classical, and biblical, *auctores*, whose texts are not read for the "personal" content they might contain, the individual intentions they might realize, but for the truths they bear. But in declaring his respect for the

writings of Aristotle his transparent purpose is to win "faith and obedience" for his own views on nobility ("treating of nobility," he says, "I have to show myself to be noble" [4.8]). And in writing a commentary on "the "sweet rhymes of love," he is placing his own works in the position previously reserved for Aristotle, Virgil, and other *autores*.

Dante, in the *Convivio* and elsewhere, stages himself as both reader and as writer. As reader of the works of the ancient *auctores*, his clear purpose is to learn how to become one of them: a point dramatized most obviously in the *Comedy* when the character named "Dante" meets "Virgil" and salutes him as "master and author," saying that he has learned to be a poet from his readings ("from you I have taken the beautiful style that has brought me honor" [*Inferno* 1.85–7]). Indeed, by the end of his long journey in the Roman poet's company, it is clear both that he has gone beyond Virgil as a writer and that in fact he has turned the tables, becoming the author of the character "Virgil."

In entering into direct personalized relationship with Virgil and, elsewhere, in simultaneously occupying the roles of poet and reader of his own poems, Dante levels the distance between *auctor* and *lector*, and apparently implies the potential for his own readers to do the same in reading him. In this passage from early in Convivio, the point is stated baldly:

> I intend as well to show the true meaning of those [the *canzoni* to be commented upon] which may not be seen by some unless I recount it, because it is hidden under the figure of allegory: and this [exposition] will not only give good pleasure when heard, but also subtle teaching, both in how to speak [i.e., to write poetry in this way] and how to understand the writings of others. (1.2.17; my translation)

This passage already reveals some of the problematic consequences of Dante's restructuring of the relationship between writer and reader. On the one hand, by collapsing the difference between them, he suggests the potential for any (modern) reader to become an author, to raise himself up to the level of the ancients (and at the same time to lower them down to his). On the other, in explicitly dictating the meanings of his poems, revealing his hidden intentions, he clearly attempts to wrest control over the text from the possible (mis)interpretations of his own readers – a natural consequence of his understanding of what he himself has willingly done in reading Aristotle, Virgil, and even the Bible itself.

While Dante's theory and his practice bring into view a "new," dynamic image of the writer/reader relationship, what is at stake is not a fixed idea about what that relationship will consist of, but rather a fluid set of possibilities, beginning with the potential interchangeability of the two roles, as well as the special case of the "self-reader." This relationship may vary according to multiple parameters: intimacy vs. suspicion, understanding vs. misunderstanding, identification vs. reification, supplication vs. interpellation, and so on. In looking at what comes after, then, we will see not a single version of the relationship but the contingent instantiation of one or more of the possibilities inherent in the complex.

Dante's proximate and eminent successor, Petrarch, who disingenuously declares himself to have read little or nothing of Dante, seems instead to have learned a great deal about the entanglement of readership and writership from him. In an infamous epistolary response to a gift of the *Comedy*, accompanied by accusations of envy from his peer/pupil Boccaccio, Petrarch indicts Dante, without naming him, for wasting his writings on an ignorant vernacular audience unable to understand in the least what it is reading (*Familiar Letters* 21.15). Nonetheless, Petrarch certainly learned the trick of dramatizing himself in conversation with ancient writers of the past (for example, in the *Secretum* and *Familiar Letters*, book 24) from Dante and his "Virgil," similarly using it at once to appropriate their authority for himself and to transform it by historicizing and personalizing it. In a famous example, Petrarch writes a letter to "Cicero," turning the Roman orator into the Italian laureate's reader, at once praising him for his abilities as a writer and scolding him for his political and moral failings.

In fact, Petrarch, far more than Dante, not only dramatizes the dependence of the writer on his readers (most notoriously in the unfinished *Letter to Posterity*), but also emphasizes the failings of the latter and asserts his superiority to and control over them. In the first of his *Familiar Letters*, Petrarch asserts that his authorial personality disappears as he changes his style to match the needs of each individual reader:

> [In my letters], I . . . had to correspond with many [friends and acquaintances] who differed considerably in character and station. As a result, the letters were so different that in rereading them I seemed to be in constant contradiction. . . . Indeed, the primary concern of a writer is to consider the identity of the person to whom he is writing. . . . [W]riting entails a double labor: first to consider to whom you write, and then what his state of mind will be at the time he undertakes to read what you propose to write. These difficulties compelled me to be very inconsistent . . .

And yet, this careful matching of style to audience also silently attributes extraordinary power and versatility to the protean author, who is able to understand precisely the needs of each individual reader and to adapt his style not only to that person's personality in general but also to his state of mind at the specific moment of reading. The posture of self-effacement thus poorly conceals an absolute will to control the way in which one will be read in every individual instance.

An even more complex and conflicted staging of the writing self in relation to its readers appears in the opening sonnet of his *Canzoniere*:

> You who hear in scattered rhymes the sound of
> those sighs with which I nourished my heart during my first
> youthful error, when I was in part another man from what I
> am now:
> for the varied style in which I weep and speak
> between vain hopes and vain sorrow, where there is anyone
> who understands love through experience, I hope to find
> pity, not only pardon.

But now I see well how for a long time I was the
talk of the crowd, for which often I am ashamed of myself
within;
and of my raving, shame is the fruit, and
repentance, and the clear knowledge that whatever pleases
the world is a brief dream.

Very much like *Convivio*, this poem constitutes a retrospective rereading and reinterpretation of the writer's life and his works, but it does so without erecting any formal barriers between the past self who wrote and the present reader who looks back on and interprets that writing. The present "I" is only "in part" different from the past one. And the "interpretation" of past poetic writings is itself a poem, one which is set *before* the lyric collection it introduces and glosses, reversing the proper historical order. That "I" is, in other words, in open oscillation between the roles of reader, writer, and subject of Petrarch's poetic texts.

This poem also serves as an example of the dialogue that Petrarch consistently attempts to create with his "other" readers (the readers who are not himself), modern as well as ancient. From the outset, the poem is directed to a plural audience (in Italian the initial "you" is a plural form, "voi"). Rather than using the dominating imperative typical of Dante's apostrophes to his readers in the *Comedy*, Petrarch opens with hopeful subjunctives: "where there is anyone who understands love through experience, I hope to find pity." In the brief compass of the poem's 14 lines a range of dialogic possibilities are opened up, and in most the poet is more in the readers' power than otherwise. The reader can be an equal, who shares an experience and offers empathetic pity, or a superior, who can grant "pardon." The majority of readers, however, respond to Petrarch's writing by scripting him to their own taste: "for a long time I was a tale told by all people." In this image, the readers turn the tables on Petrarch, becoming a sort of collective author of a *favola* – tale or fable – that defines and debases him. Finally, and reversing direction yet again, the last line, which seems to culminate Petrarch's humiliation, projecting his complete submission to readerly authority, suddenly turns the tables on his readers, reducing them to part of the englobing *mondo* whose readerly pleasures are no more than a "brief dream," and reinstituting the authorial "I" in a position of judgmental superiority over them.

In comparing Dante's and Petrarch's modes of staging the reader/writer dialectic, we might say that where Dante lifts one medieval reader (himself) up to the level of the classical author and assumes the possibility of perfectly realizing his writerly intentions not only in the works he produces but in the responses they receive, Petrarch tends to bring the classical reader down to his own level and to stress the internal conflicts and flaws that collapse the distance between them, both morally and textually. Despite these radical differences, there is no question that the drive to control the terms of the reader/writer relationship is just as strong in Petrarch as it was in Dante. To offer a variant on a very old contrast between them: if the latter's readers were rapidly converted into Dante critics, unable, except obliquely and deviously, to use the Dante–Virgil relationship as a model for their own relationship to Dante, the former, to echo W. H. Auden's phrase, "became his admirers." By this

I mean (as Auden certainly did not), that, on the one hand, Petrarch ventriloquized a full gamut of readerly responses to his writing, and pre-emptively assumed the role of "his own harshest critic," and, on the other, that vast numbers of his later readers "became him" in the sense that generation after generation wrote lyric poetry on the model of Petrarchan authorship.

If Dante's work patently demands the "faith" of his readers in its revelatory truths, commanding moral obedience to its strictures while precluding the close imitation of its author's prophetic art, Petrarch's clearly does not demand either faith or obedience, but sets up a model of self-reproducing, narrowly circumscribed, poetic authorship whose traces are still visible today. Petrarch defines poetry as an ornamental, "exquisite" speech, rejecting the vatic – theological claims of near contemporaries – such as Mussato, Boccaccio, Salutati, and, of course, Dante – and setting it in opposition both to the revelatory but crude language of biblical scribes (*Familiar Letters* 10.4) and the suasive powers of political rhetoric (13.6). Where Dante joins artisanal mastery of the poetic art with the power/knowledge of the *autore* from *autentim*, Petrarch prefers a version of the former in specific opposition to the latter, cordoning off the poet's profession as at once limited and unique. Whatever the intrinsic convictions that moved him to adopt this stance, there is no doubt, in fact, that it also serves as a means of isolating and protecting him from the claims, attacks, and appropriations of readers.

The author–reader relationship as it appears in both Dante and Petrarch is one of a doubling between the two figures and at the same time of a struggle for control between the two of them. In describing the power dynamic shaping this relationship, I have only alluded in passing to the specific configuration – that of "servant" intellectual and master patron – which, at least since Jacob Burckhardt's account of the "alliance" between tyrants and artists and Hans Baron's counter-discourse about the "resistance" of Florentine humanists to Milanese tyranny, has been at the center of scholarly discourse on Renaissance authorship. It would take more space than is here available to describe the way in which both writers are intimately concerned both with attempting to shape the moral and political behavior of the readerly powers-that-be and with avoiding the apparently inevitable subjection to them. It is certainly the case that the figure of the prince-patron as privileged reader of Renaissance texts increasingly comes to the fore in the fifteenth century and beyond, to a certain extent displacing, or at least competing with, the central question of the relationship between ancient authorities and their modern readers/imitators.

Machiavelli provides an excellent starting point for considering the complex situation of the author in the sixteenth century. In various ways he offers the perfect sequel to Dante's and Petrarch's attempts to convert themselves from readers of the ancient authors to their authoritative peers. Most famously, in the letter to Francesco Vettori describing the composition of *The Prince*, Machiavelli writes:

> When evening comes . . . I enter the ancient courts of ancient men, where, received by them in a loving manner, I batten on that food which alone is mine and for which I was born, where I am not ashamed to talk with them and to ask of them the reasons for their actions, and they, in their humanity, answer me. (my translation)

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Yet with Machiavelli this form of the author–reader dialectic is in the service of, and subordinate to, increasingly desperate attempts to persuade another sort of reader, men of power, that his "gift of counsel" deserves their "faith and obedience," that his words possess the force of truth (and the truth about force!). In the dedicatory letter to *The Prince*, Machiavelli justifies his apparent presumption in offering unsolicited advice to the Medici family as follows:

> Nor would I wish that it be considered presumptuousness if a man of low and base estate dares to discourse about and to give rules concerning the government of princes; because, as those who paint landscapes place themselves low on the plain to consider the nature of mountains and high places, while to consider that of low places they place themselves high upon the peaks, similarly, to know well the nature of the populace it is necessary to be a prince, while to know well that of the princes it is necessary to be one of the people. (my translation)

Having ostentatiously failed to command the attention of his ideal princely reader, Machiavelli would then address his next major work, the *Discourses*, to those who are *not* princes, but deserve to be (presumably because they take him seriously), and would expose the mechanism by which the writing of history can be seen as a tissue of obsequious lies designed to placate powerful readers:

> [n]or should anyone deceive themselves because of Julius Caesar's glory, hearing him so greatly celebrated by writers, because those who praise him are corrupted by his good fortune and frightened by the duration of the Roman empire which, ruled under that name, did not allow writers to speak freely about him. But whoever wishes to know what free writers would have said about him, should see what is said about [the unsuccessful conspirator] Cataline. (1.10; my translation)

An ideal sequence may appear to be completed when, frustrated at the failure to win the trust of those who shape the world, Machiavelli turns to literature, or rather to comic drama, as a poor second best, as appears in the prologue to his comedy the *Mandragola* (*c*. 1517):

> And if this matter is not worthy of a man who wishes to appear weighty and wise, because of its insubstantiality, excuse him thus: that he strives with these vain thoughts to make his sad time sweeter, because he has nowhere else to turn his face, since he is cut off from . . . other undertakings. (my translation)

Then follows a degraded vision of the author/audience relationship as one of mutual bad-mouthing, where parity is parodied, and the rejected author seemingly embraces an uneasy alliance with the "vulgar herd." Machiavelli's constant appeal, however rhetorical, to "the effectual truth of things" (*The Prince*, chapter 15) as the basis for belief in him as author paradoxically culminates with a retreat into a world of literary-theatrical fiction whose pretense to credibility is, as he puts it, "enough to break your jaw with laughing."

Machiavelli's contemporary and, in his express view, chief peer and rival, Ludovico Ariosto, is in many ways the paradigmatic example of the early modern "author-God," ostentatiously exercising control over the denizens of his chivalric world through his first-person narrative emanation, as well as over his readers, for example by repeatedly creating and frustrating the desire for narrative closure through his elaboration of the medieval romance technique of *entrelacement*. Ariosto's authorial role is, however, and by now predictably, articulated in relation to a gamut of readers – his Estense patrons (Cardinal Ippolito and then Duke Alfonso I), his unnamed beloved, and the "ladies and knights" who are his courtly peers. Moreover, there is his own feigned role as faithful reader-rehearser of the chronicles of Bishop Turpin and his empirical but dissimulated vocation as reader-continuer of Boiardo's *Innamoramento di Orlando*.

Curiously, not withstanding his stance of poetic omnipotence, Ariosto repeatedly represents the author–reader relationship as one of misunderstanding and antago-nism, of which he himself is chief victim. The culmination of this process, which can be documented throughout his *Orlando furioso*, comes with the final encomiastic tribute to Cardinal Ippolito d'Este, whose life is woven into the prophetic tapestries decorating the pavilion of Trojan Cassandra, under which the dynastic wedding of Ruggiero and Bradamante is celebrated. Mythical Cassandra, whose prophetic truths are always disbelieved, always taken as signs of madness, is, I argue, the poet's feminized figuration of himself and the poetic art generally – his/its impotence in the face of courtly masters unwilling to face the harsh truths about themselves and their world which the *Furioso*, however obliquely, would show them. More famously, in the lunar episode Ariosto makes St John the Evangelist and author of the Apocalypse (to whom Dante repeatedly assimilates himself as "theologian-poet") depict the poet–patron relationship – from Homer through Virgil and Lucan to his own days – as utterly mercenary, a tissue of lies predicated on poets who puff up reputations for pay or tear them down for revenge. The process by which Dante, modern reader, claims for himself the "faith and obedience" owed not only to Virgil and the classical *auctores* but, far more ambitiously, to the human authors of the Bible, comes full circle as Ariosto not only exposes the whole of literature as a tissue of lies, but even implies that the Gospel of John itself is a mendacious exercise in compensated obsequiousness.

Perhaps Ariosto's most extraordinary exercise in asserting and subverting the poetic author's claims on the belief of his readers comes in a little-known passage from the so-called *Five Cantos* (an incomplete addition to or a continuation of the *Furioso*). The passage in question concerns the success of Gano (that is, Ganelon), Carlomagno's privy counselor, in winning his sovereign's unwarranted trust, to the end of dividing the Christian heroes from each other by making each believe that his faith in the others has been grossly betrayed. The whole canto is shot through with the language of faith and belief, always in an ironic vein, and the climax comes as Gano prepares his greatest deception of Carlo:

I once read in a very old book, the name of whose author I cannot remember, that Alcina [the malevolent fairy] gave to Ganelon an herb . . . that constrains everyone to belief in the words of whosoever eats it. God showed that herb to

Moses on Mount Sinai, so that he could then use it to make the hard people humble and pious. Then the demon showed it to evil Mohammed, for the perdition of the African and Eastern peoples: he kept it in his mouth as he preached and it drew those who heard him to his false laws.

(3.21–2)

The passage presents itself as an allegory of courtly rhetoric, capable of persuading the ingenuous sovereign-reader of whatever it asserts, regardless of truth value or ethical content. Moreover, as in the *Furioso*, the power of language to command un-warranted belief spreads out to include the revealed truths of Christianity – no distinction can be discerned between the persuasive powers of Moses and those of Mohammed, as of their respective sacred books – both command assent of their hearers/readers based on the magical power of their words.

The passage cuts in two directions simultaneously: it promulgates a perverse fantasy of the author to command the faith and obedience of the most powerful of princes, while it also reveals that such trust is founded on sheer linguistic per-formance, suspended above a moral-epistemological void. The Ariostan narrator makes it clear that he and the poem he speaks for and from form a privileged instance of the problem depicted. Invoking the "old book" of "an author whose name [he] cannot remember," he parodically invokes the medieval cult of authority, figuring himself as credulous reader, while implying that the belief of his own reader is thoroughly misplaced. Thus, even as Ariosto previews a collapse of the assumptions (political, moral, metaphysical) in which his culture is grounded, and with them all possibility of a trusting relationship between author and reader, he allows the reader to confine this crisis to the marginal space of a "literary" text: his own. Ariosto's understanding of authorship is beginning to be "literary" in a modern sense, in that it refuses its own claims as a mode of knowledge and of moral action, openly inviting its readers' disbelief – at once recalling and undermining Dante's "witness-author."

Closely related to this Ariostan travesty of the author as one "worthy of faith" are two major French texts of the sixteenth century – the prologue "of the Author" to François Rabelais', *Pantagruel* (1532) – and Michel de Montaigne's address "To the Reader" at the opening of his *Essays* (first edition, 1580). Rabelais's prologue presents *Pantagruel* as a sequel to and a rewriting of the anonymous *Chronicles of Gargantua* in such a way as to evoke, however ironically, the appropriative reinterpretation of the Hebrew Bible in the Christian New Testament. Following a tradition later taken up by Cervantes, Rabelais's book is said to be the creation of a pseudonymous author stand-in, Alcofribas Nasier, thereby distancing the "truth" of the text from its historical author and suggesting an elaborate rhetorical strategy of simultaneous self-presentation and self-effacement.

Immediately relevant here is how this boastful first-person author-figure puts both the Gargantua tradition and his own sequel to it into a lineage of books (including the near-contemporary *Orlando furioso*) that have performed miraculous cures on credulous readers:

Most illustrious . . . noblemen . . . who gladly devote yourselves to all gentle and honest pursuits, you have recently seen, read, and come to know *The Great*

and Inestimable Chronicles of the Enormous Giant Gargantua, and as true believers have nobly believed them . . . I would have every man put aside his proper business . . . in order to devote himself entirely to this book . . . I have known high and mighty noblemen . . . [whose] refuge and comfort, and their method of avoiding a chill was to re-read the inestimable deeds of the said Gargantua . . . But what shall I say of the poor victims of pox and gout? . . . Their one consolation was to have some pages of this book read to them. . . . It is peerless, incomparable, and beyond comparison. . . . The world has thoroughly acknowledged the great returns and benefits proceeding from this Gargantuine Chronicle. For more copies of it have been sold by the printers in two months than there will be of the Bible in nine years.

This passage parallels Ariosto's ironic assimilation of poetic to biblical writing. In this case, however, the question of authorial credibility and readerly credulity is dramatized through direct address. Having referred to the miraculous benefits of the Gargantua chronicles for those readers who have believed in them, and having indeed compared their popularity favorably to that of the Bible, the narrator invites the reader's blind faith in this new and even better text:

I, your humble slave, offer you now another book of the same stamp, though one a little more reasonable and credible than the last. But do not suppose – unless you wish to be willfully deceived – that I speak of it [*Pantagruel*] as the Jews do of the Law. I was not born under that planet, nor have I ever come to lie, or to affirm a thing to be true which was not. I speak of it as a lusty Onocrotary – no I mean Crotonotary of martyred lovers and Crocquenotary of love. *Quod vidimus testamur*.

Through the reference to the Law of the Old Testament, the oblique reference to the traditional iconography of Christ as pelican (onocrotary), and the echoing of St John's claim to bear eyewitness testimony to the contents of the Book of Revelations, Rabelais turns *Pantagruel* into a simulacrum of the New Testament, and his alter-ego into a truth-telling biblical witness-author, worthy indeed of "faith and obedience."[3]

The first effect is to create an ironic contrast between the obvious lies of Alcofribas and the biblical witness of St John, discrediting the bravado of the literary author and redrawing an ever-sharper line between literature's fictions and the revealed truths of the Bible. In closing, however, the prologue takes a disturbing turn:

Therefore, to make an end of my prologue, I offer myself, body and soul, tripe and bowels, to a hundred thousand basket-loads of fine devils in case I lie in so much as a single word in the whole of this History. And, similarly, may St. Anthony's fire burn you, the epilepsy throw you, the thunder-stroke and leg-ulcers rack you, dysentery seize you, and may the erysipelas . . . through your arse-hole enter up, and like Sodom and Gomorrah may you dissolve into sulfur, fire, and the bottomless pit, in case you do not firmly believe everything that I tell you in this present Chronicle.

Again, the transparent bad faith of Alcofribas exposes his truth claims upon his reader as vacuous. On the other hand, something else happens: having in the first part of the prologue attempted to draw the reader into believing by the promise of miraculous benefits, the narrator now reverses field: *unless the reader believes* every word of the text he will suffer all of the ills, and then some, previously said to be cured by this book. Promise turns into threat. In so doing, it reveals a principal mechanism by which the Bible sets out to command readerly faith by alternately holding out the prospects of salvation and of damnation. Textual authority is represented as the product of the violent constraint of readerly belief – and thus the possibility of readerly resistance is tacitly entertained, even invited.

In contrast with, but also dialectically tied to, Rabelais's assault on canons of authorial credibility is the preface to Montaigne's *Essays*:

> This book was written in good faith (*bonne foy*), reader. It warns you from the outset that I have set myself no goal but a domestic and private one. I have no thought of serving either you or my own glory . . . If I had written to seek the world's favor, I should have bedecked myself better and should present myself in a studied posture. I want to be seen here in my simple natural, ordinary fashion, with straining or artifice, for it is myself that I portray. My defects will here be read to the life, and also my natural form, as far as respect for the public has allowed. Had I been placed among those nations which are said to live still in the sweet freedom on Nature's first laws, I assure you I should very gladly have portrayed myself here entire and wholly naked. Thus, reader, I myself am the subject of my book; you would be unreasonable to spend your leisure on so frivolous and vain a subject.

Montaigne's first-person claims to offer an image of himself "to the life," or almost, ostensibly contrasted with the indirections and distortions of the pseudonymous Alcofribas, as does the intimate second person singular address to the reader ("tu"), constructing "him" as friend or even family member. Yet, one can understand this authorial self-portrait as an alternative tactic for confronting a very similar set of circumstances. Most notably, Montaigne evokes the traditional category of the author–reader relationship based in trust, in faith, only irrevocably transform it. The "good faith" of the book is not a guarantee that its author either knows or tells the truth, nor does it claim for him the stoic constancy of faithful promise steadfastly maintained over time. Rather, it claims for its author *good intentions*, whether realized or not, and its commitment to the truth – compromised from the outset by cultural strictures on what is representable – is to record precisely his inconstant, fallible, private, ordinary humanity. Much as Petrarch insulates himself from readerly judgment by a strategic retreat into the privileged yet restricted domain of poetry, Montaigne cordons himself off in the world of private selfhood, anticipating and thwarting readerly doubts and attacks by an apotropaic confession of frivolity and vanity, not unrelated to Machiavelli's disclaimer in the prologue to *Mandragola*, and by representing himself not as imitable model but as singular instance. Where Dante's "self-reading" figures the author as "worthy of faith and obedience" in matters of objective truth and political consequence, Montaigne's only claim is

to self-knowledge, or, rather, to representations of the self's incomplete and frequently erroneous efforts to know itself. Tellingly Montaigne's subsequent defense against possible accusations of lying is the negative one of asserting that his memory is too weak to maintain a falsehood successfully ("Of Liars" [1.9]).[4] The reader has no grounds for complaint that his faith is being abused, because each utterance, true or not, is a "faithful" representation of the inconstant author and the unstable universe in which he dwells.

If Rabelais, like Ariosto, takes the crisis of readerly faith in authorial witness to a point of extreme crisis, where no text, not even the Bible, is above suspicion, and where the author overtly expresses his will to domination over the reader, Montaigne posits a thoroughly subjective text, neutral to objective truth, and embraces the reader as "another self." As against both of these, Torquato Tasso, writing in the growing shadow of the Counter-Reformation Church (itself in large measure a violent response to a "crisis of faith"), sets out to "save the appearances" in his crusader epic, *Jerusalem Delivered* (1581).

In many ways, Tasso can be seen as returning us to Dante's totalizing conception of the author and of the author–reader complex, at once reconciling literary representation with theological truth and constructing the epic author as the God of his own verbal universe. Indeed, Tasso's formulation in his *Discourses on the Art of Poetry* of the poet as "maker" in the image and likeness of the Judeo-Christian God is perhaps the most famous of its kind:

> In this marvelous domain of God that we call the world we see the sky
> . . . adorned with so great a variety of stars; and, descending from realm to
> realm, we see . . . on earth streams and fountains and lakes and meadows and
> fields and forests and mountains here fruits and flowers, there wastelands
> and emptiness. Nonetheless, the earth, which encloses so many and diverse
> things in its bosom, is one; and its form and essence are one; and one, the
> knot by which it joins and binds its parts in discordant concord. . . . Just so,
> I think, the excellent poet – who is called divine for no other reason except
> that by working like the supreme Artificer he comes to share in his divinity
> – can shape a poem in which, as in a little world . . . in which we find heavenly
> and hellish assemblies and see sedition, discord, wanderings, adventures,
> enchantments, cruelty, boldness, courtesy, kindness and love . . . And still, the
> poem which contains such a variety of matter is one; its form and its plot
> are one . . .

The force of the passage is all the greater in this context because it stands as a critique of the ungainly multiplicity of Tasso's precursor and *bête noire*, Ariosto. For the same reason, however, its emblematic power is compromised, both because of its polemical aims and because the divine analogy it advances is, in the end, sheerly formal, making no essential claims for a correspondence between God's truth and Tasso's own fabrications. Indeed, in the same treatise, Tasso makes no truth claims at all for poetry, but instead follows Aristotle's *Poetics* in advancing the criterion of mimetic verisimilitude; that is, the convincing *appearance of truth* that elicits the reader's temporary and strictly provisional belief. Ironically, his argument in favor of a Christian subject

for a contemporary epic, such as his own *Jerusalem Delivered*, is not that it participates in Christian truth but rather that it enables the appealing representation of miraculous events, because readers are more likely to invest these with verisimilitude than the improbable marvels that appear in pagan literature.

In the light of this paradoxical vision of totalizing authorial mastery and of an art entirely aimed, not at representing "the true" but at eliciting readerly assent, we should now consider Tasso's remarkable version of the author–reader dialectic. If Ariosto, Rabelais, and Montaigne stage the writer–reader relationship within the confines of their texts (or on their immediate paratextual margins), in *Jerusalem Delivered* Tasso has scaled back the narrating "I" nearly to vanishing point, in keeping with Aristotelian canons of mimetic illusion. This does not mean, however, that the idea of the author as reader of his own work is absent from Tasso. What *has* happened is that Tasso's "readerly" moments have, once again, as if returning to the Dantean precursor, been formally separated from the writerly ones. Against even Dante's hybrid creations, the *Vita Nuova* and *Convivio*, where readerly and writerly voices alternate within an overarching formal structure, Tasso's self-readings are presented in the form of entirely separate texts: the so-called "poetic letters" of 1575–6 that discuss the process of writing and revising the poem with a series of interlocutors; the theoretical and regulatory *Discourses on the Art of Poetry* (1567; later revised as the *Discourses on the Heroic Poem*, 1594); the *Allegory of the Poem* (published 1581); and the *Apology in Defense of Jerusalem Delivered* (1585), which responds to various critical attacks against his work, including numerous invidious comparisons with none other than Ariosto.

The very large number of these works in which Tasso discusses either *Jerusalem Delivered* specifically or the rules of literary composition more generally suggests a new and dramatic evolution of the figure of the author as critical reader able to "explain himself." Tasso's critical writings document every phase of the composition of the poem: before, during, and after. The first *Discourses* substantiate his credentials as an author in command not only of his own compositions, but in fact of the art of poetry in general, within whose rules he will elaborate his own intentions. The "poetic letters" document the process of composition, the careful selections and revisions made along the way from the beginning to the end of writing. The *Allegory* and the *Apology* constitute versions of the more familiar authorial gesture of giving retrospective definition to the meaning of the text.

This sense of obsessive authorial drive to determine the meanings of his text is only reinforced by a consideration of the elaborate and highly documented revisionary process through which Tasso's epic took shape (in which even what we now call *Jerusalem Delivered* was only one, and not the final, step). The poem began as a handful of stanzas known as the *Gierusalamme*, which date from Tasso's sixteenth year (1560). It was then elaborated into an epic poem known as the *Goffredo* between 1573 and 1575, being revised in the period 1575–6 and finally published from an unauthorized manuscript in 1581 while Tasso was confined as a madman to the Ospedale of Sant'Anna in Ferrara by Duke Alfonso II d'Este. Although Tasso subsequently accepted and defended the *Liberata* as *if* it constituted his definitive redaction, that did not stop him from carrying out a further, drastic revision culminating with the publication of *Jerusalem Conquered* in 1593.

– Albert Russell Ascoli –

The more obsessively Tasso attempts to shape and control his text and to demonstrate his control over his art, his book, and its meanings, the clearer it becomes that his purpose in doing so is antithetical to Dante's. Where Dante affirms his own role as author by a critical reading of his text, thereby to establish authority over his readers, Tasso goes to ever-greater lengths to show that what he writes is precisely what his readers require that he write. In other words, Tasso responds to Ariosto's perception that his readers systematically misunderstand his text and convert it to their own meanings by attempting to demonstrate that *what he means is exactly what his readers want him to mean*.

The problem, however, is that the readerly demands put on him are of two, radically antithetical, kinds. On the one hand are the demands of the consuming public of readers who refuse to confront books that do not give them pleasure through a series of suspect devices that Tasso associates with Ariosto and with the popular genre of romance (marvels, digressions, erotic entanglements, and so on). On the other are the demands of "cultural authorities" that require strict adherence to a range of ever-stricter codes: particularly those governing poetic composition (especially Aristotle's *Poetics* and the proliferating sixteenth-century glosses on it), and those which, in the wake of the Council of Trent, command rigorous ethical and doctrinal orthodoxy. These two idealized readers are, obviously, in constant conflict with one another, as the protracted efforts of the *Discourses on the Art of Poetry* to mediate between them clearly reveal (for example in the tortuous efforts to square the poetic use of fiction, the marvelous, and multiple plots with the imperative for truth, verisimilitude, and formal unity show). Indeed, even the authoritative codes come into conflict with one another, so that adherence to classical, pagan poetic doctrines can, at times, put one at odds with Tridentine Catholic orthodoxy.

This conflict is further reflected in the oft-discussed lines in the exordium to the *Gerusalemme*, where the authorial "I" puts in his one prominent appearance in the poem, attempting to negotiate between the demands of the heavenly Muse for scrupulous adherence to an orthodox faith and the need to cater to the debased tastes of the "world":

> O Muse, who do not bind your brow with transient [impermanent] laurels in Helicon, but rather up in Heaven among the blessed choirs you have a golden crown of immortal stars: inspire my breast with celestial ardors; make clear my song; and pardon me if I weave ornaments into truth, if I adorn in part my pages with other delights than yours. You know that the World runs there where seductive Parnassus most pours out its delights, and the truth, seasoned in sensuous verses, has persuaded the most skittish by enticing them. (I.4.–5; my translation)

Such ambivalence accounts well for the protracted revisionary process, in which Tasso attempted to accommodate now one, now another imaginary or actual reader's objections.

Perhaps the most exemplary of Tasso's attempts to make his poem ventriloquize the voice of an authoritative readership is his decision (documented in the "poetic letters") to send copies of the *Goffredo* to a number of leading intellectuals for their

comments, in order to ascertain that the poem conformed to generally established rules for poetic composition. During this same period, Tasso voluntarily submitted not his poem but himself for examination by the Holy Inquisition, not once, but twice (1575 and 1577), with the express purpose of ascertaining that his beliefs conformed to post-Tridentine doctrinal imperatives.

Given his accomplishment in both literary composition and literary theory, Tasso appears as among the most explicitly masterful of the authors surveyed in this chapter, perhaps on a par with Dante himself. Yet his self-awareness as author expresses itself consistently as an anxiety, even a terror, that his writerly autonomy will put him at odds with empirical readers, and especially with those two most critical groups of readers: the inquisitors (who twice exonerated him) and the literary critics (who did not!). Where Dante's self-reading goes to prove that he is worthy of the "faith and obedience" traditionally due to the *auctores*, Tasso's efforts as critical reader of his own work are consistently aimed at proving that, as writer, he has due respect for the authority of his readers, particularly his "official readers." The irony of the matter, of course, is that notwithstanding very real pressures from the Church, his Estense patron, and the literary establishment, those official readers are at least as much an internalized creation of Tasso's own imagination as they are a reality.

To sum up: in the course of this chapter we have followed a path, at once linear and circular, from Dante's emergence as writer and reader from the Middle Ages, where *auctor* and *lector* alike were – normatively – vehicles by which a relatively homogeneous culture ventriloquized its values, to the self-critical, individualized world of the Renaissance, and thence to Tasso's attempted return to a world where authorial intentions and readerly understandings coincide with the "official story" put out by the potent machinery of a nascent state apparatus.

By way of a coda, let us turn briefly to Cervantes' *Don Quixote*, a book notoriously predicated on an excess of readerly faith, to the point where such excess becomes the very substance of the narrative. Cervantes' work has often been used to mark an epoch in the history of authorship, and particularly of author–reader relations, as the founder of what would become the literary genre par excellence: the novel (whose name, at least in English, tellingly evokes "the new"). This entire chapter could, in retrospect, be taken as the prehistory not only of Quixote's pathos-drenched habits of reading but also of the elaborate narrative apparatus that Cervantes erects to buffer and complicate his own and his readers' relations to the book: the "found" manuscript, written in Arabic by the imaginary Cide Hamete Benengeli; the demystificatory dedicatory letter and parodic celebratory verses attributed to the great fictional personages of the chivalric tradition; the remarkable Part II, predicated not only on Cervantes' rivalry with the usurper-author, Avellaneda, but also on Quixote's and Sancho's knowledge that they themselves have become characters in a book, and on their encounter with vicious aristocratic "readers" (the duke and duchess) bent on exploiting these characters for their own vacuous amusement. The novelty and modernity of *Quixote* have their sources, then; one may point particularly to Montaigne's brilliant stratagem of making the author's "good faith" not the guarantor of the texts but its subject. From the perspective developed here, Cervantes does the same for the reader's "faith and obedience." That is not to deny either the beauty or the importance of *Don Quixote* – far from it. Cervantes' book undoubtedly

offers among the most incisive readings and elaborations of the early modern author–reader dialectic; never more so, of course, than in making its ostensible author a man of another faith entirely.

NOTES

1   I use the masculine pronoun for writers, since the occupation was normatively gendered male in the period.
2   I deal extensively with the importance of the second etymology, the poetic author from avieo, in Ascoli, *Authority in Person: Dante and the Making of a Modern Author* (forthcoming).
3   In the first edition the reference to St John was explicit – the revision seems to have been a response to the understandable outrage of ecclesiastical and academic authorities.
4   Timothy Hampton, on p. 190 of his *Writing from History: The Rhetoric of Exemplarity in Renaissance Literature* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1990), astutely points out a later passage in which Montaigne blames on bad memory departures from the truth which in others would have been caused by "bad faith" ("Of Experience": 3.13).

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