MPhil Thesis

A Study of William Blake’s
*MILTON* a Poem

Sarah Joyce
University College London

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For my mother and late father
with much love
Abstract

This thesis explores and evaluates critical responses to William Blake’s *Milton A Poem*. Chapter One analyses these into three categories representing distinct but not necessarily exclusive assumptions concerning the poem’s meaning and purpose. These assumptions are

- that it is a work of mainly private significance exploring autobiographical events;
- that it presents a set of arguments concerning art and literature, cosmology, human ontology and Christian theology; and
- that it addresses its readers with a spiritually didactic, rather than argumentative purpose, aiming to provoke inner conversion.

The main argument of the thesis derives from the second assumption, but all three approaches contribute to its full response to the poem.

Chapter Two establishes that the poem was in production between approximately 1804 and 1818, a period of considerable personal upheaval in Blake’s life, during which he consolidated his views on British art and re-evaluated his relationship with Christianity. Chapters Three and Four present an interpretation of the poem’s narrative of Milton’s return which reflects these concerns. Chapter Five explores the significance of the variations between the four copies.

The thesis argues that *Milton* articulates Blake’s rapprochement between his antinomian and humanist values and his Christianity. The substance of *Milton* and the manner of its production and revision indicate that it may itself have been a vehicle of the development of Blake’s thought and his re-evaluation of his faith, since it is only in the fuller version printed in c. 1818 that Blake interpolated his concept of ‘states’ into the narrative of Milton’s return. This concept transforms the language of election and reprobation, freeing it from predestinarian associations and attaching it to a model of individual spiritual progression. An Appendix describes some intriguing parallels between aspects of *Milton*’s narrative and certain beliefs of the Muggletonians, and considers the possibility that their tradition may have informed Blake’s Christian inheritance.
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Introductory Note

*Milton a Poem* was first printed in an edition of three copies in c. 1811. A second edition of a single copy was created in c. 1818.¹ The copies are known as A, B, C and D. This mode of referring to the copies was developed by G. E. Bentley Jr.² Blake quotations are taken from the revised (1988) edition of David V. Erdman, *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, with commentary by Harold Bloom,*³ but the 51 plates of the poem are identified using Bentley’s system of numbers (1-45) and letters (a-f.) See Appendix 1 for details. Quotations from Erdman’s 1988 volume take the traditional form of ‘E.’ followed by page and line numbers.

¹ See Chapter 2 for the dates of composition and printing.
Chapter 1: Introduction

This introductory chapter begins with a survey of the editorial history and criticism of the poem, which has attracted a great deal of scholarship since facsimiles and letterpress editions became available more than a hundred years ago. The range of responses to the poem is extensive, and this survey cannot exhaust them. Instead, its aim is to indicate the general character of the major interpretations to date, beginning with the nineteenth-century facsimiles. The survey provides a necessary introduction to my own work presented in the rest of the thesis, which is intended to complement existing scholarship by exploring neglected aspects of the poem and its context.

I

I begin with a brief account of the critical input into the major editions of the poem. These are prioritised because the editorial annotations and commentaries printed with the poem are much more widely read than critical books and journals, and influence the contemporary reception of the poem more than those other media of scholarship. The editions are also critically important because of the special challenge that Milton presents to a reader: editors generally attempt to reduce the inaccessibility of the poem by providing interpretation, rather than simply reproducing it. I survey eleven editions here. The only important omission is David Erdman’s Illuminated Blake of 1975, which will be discussed in relation to the illustrations later in this chapter. Inevitably, the major editions of Blake’s works in which Milton is reproduced offer some of the same contextual information. Identification of citations from the bible or Paradise Lost are repeated in many editions, as is the common stock of knowledge of Blake’s biography. But there is also considerable disagreement between editors about the meaning and purpose of the poem. Each of the editions provides a subtly distinct vision of the poem, and these differences will be described in what follows.

In the last century, before any letterpress text of Milton was available, two facsimiles of copy A were published. The hand-coloured facsimile by William Muir was published in 1886, and the three volumes by Yeats and Ellis including a

G. E. Bentley’s two-volume edition William Blake’s Writings (Oxford, 1978) is also excluded because of the very minimal amount of commentary it provides.
monochrome photographic facsimile of copy A, with extra Plates from copy C, was published in 1893. In the notes to these two very different publications we can discover the germs of many of the major twentieth-century editorial interpretations.

William Muir published a dedicatory epistle, addressed to his patron Prince Victor of Hohenohe-Langenburg, with his facsimile. In this he describes the poem as 'the most difficult of the Works of William Blake that has yet been reproduced under my care', and begs to 'trouble your Highness with some information about the facts that probably determined its form and tone and substance'. With regard to substance Muir describes the poem as a primarily cosmological and ontological project preaching a complex and unique set of convictions:

Blake agreed with Kant in believing that time and space are realities, but realities which are very imperfectly revealed to us by our senses. He taught that there were about six separate and distinct kinds of times and spaces all co-existent and interpenetrative. Five of these were the realms of one of each of the senses, and the sixth sense, whereby man received perceptions to which other senses were dead. Each individual was supposed to have a sort of spectre of himself in each of these realms, and these six spectres made up the individual. Usually these six spectres remained together, but at times they could separate so that the one person could be in several places and times at once. Besides this, all these manifold times and spaces formed four separate but adjacent universes (emblematically represented on page 32), and these times and spaces and universes some times melted into each other and some times produced others, so that the six and the four were not constant qualities. In addition to all this, the moral faculties and the intellectual faculties some times took shape as spectres, so that man had probably eight emanations in all. These remarks apply not to men only, but also to the inferior animals and the supernatural beings, with limitations and exceptions which it is not easy to define.

This exposition is similar to many of the ontological interpretations that would follow in the next century: it is intended to improve Milton's comprehensibility, but provides, in its bewildering detail, a more daunting prospect than the poem itself. Following this explanation Muir expresses anxiety about the intelligibility of the poem, is moved to defend Blake against the charge of insanity, and finally recommends, not

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7 'I will now detail the contents of the book so far as they are intelligible', Muir, *Milton a Poem facsimile* (1886), 'Preface to Milton'.
8 'Notwithstanding all this fancifulness, however, Blake was quite sane. He could in all cases sharply distinguish between the judgments of his intellect and the 'intuitions' of his imagination, and when he
the philosophy, but the ‘splendid colouring and the wild designs’ as ‘the real charms of the book’. Muir ends his introductory missive with the double-edged regret that Blake wasted his energies on expressing his own singular vision, rather than fulfilling his talent for illustration:

What a pity it is that Blake did not employ his talents in illustrating the mythology of Scandinavia! How well he could have drawn Odin, and Thor, and Loki, and Freyja! He might have done for the Norse poems what Flaxman did for the Greek. And more!10

If Muir is the forefather of the apologists for Milton as a flawed account of ‘Blake’s metaphysics’, Yeats and Ellis foreshadow those who would see it as a profoundly personal vision concerned above all with art and poetry. They also made the first suggestion that the relationship between Hayley and Blake is a subject of the poem:

To a certain degree the character of the mild “Satan” in “Milton,” who seemed a brother while he was “murdering the just,” was partly suggested by Hayley with his depressing action on Blake’s art, afterwards forgotten and forgiven in view of his assistance at the trial for treason.11

Yeats and Ellis left much of the detail to be developed by S. Foster Damon in his 1924 book William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols. This would influence the editions of Keynes, Erdman/Bloom, Ostriker and Viscomi/Essick, as well as major critical works including Fearful Symmetry. The primary concern of the Yeats/Ellis edition of 1893 was not to elucidate biographical context, but to develop a complex allegorical reading of the poem, and especially of the bard’s song, as an account of poetic creation. They gloss Blake’s invocation to the muses according to an allegory in which Milton represents not a particular poet but the existence of religious poetry itself. His journey to earth represents the creation of such poetry by Blake:

He bids them tell what caused the spirit of religious poetry—symbolized by Milton—to leave its world of silent inner mood and come forth as manifest utterance. They answer it was the song of a bard or the creative imagination still dwelling in the natural man which persuaded Milton’s poetry of supernatural mind to descend.12

chose to give rein to the latter either in writing or drawing or action, it was by deliberate choice that he did so.’ Muir, Milton a Poem facsimile (1886), ‘Preface to Milton’.

9 Muir (1886), ‘Preface to Milton’.
10 Muir (1886), ‘Preface to Milton’.
The song explains how this imaginative work was obstructed by the impulse to obey certain rules of composition rather than rely solely upon the dictates of imagination:

Blake begins the true action of the poem by describing Satan—the opaque non-imaginative, who belongs to the first class. He pities imaginative emotion, Palamabron, and wishes to give it rest by taking its place, that is to say rule and method; and the generalizing, analytical and formal allegories of classic models or nature, each to do the work of imaginative impulse, as Hayley tried to help Blake, regulating both his art and his life for him. The creative mind permits him to do so, wearied out by his repeated offers.\(^{13}\)

Chaos follows, and the mediation of the assembly is that of the eternal mind:

Blake tells how the secondary or elementary powers through which the arts, whether of life or literature, work, rebel against this rule of the generalizing reason of the opaque and become egotisms ("madder") and strive for their own life against the power of Satan. The imaginative impulse, hearing their complaints, grows angry. He calls on the eternal mind to judge what has occurred.\(^{14}\)

For these editors, the remainder of the poem tells the story of the liberation of the imaginative mind from inhibiting forces, such as dogma or prescriptive literary tradition.

The covering is the man of tradition, dogma, custom, &c., which any idea or emotion gathers round it in the course of time. It is held together by the resolve of men to serve that idea, hence Milton, God himself in one aspect, has to ungird himself of his oath to himself or to his self-hood, before he can get rid of the mass of religious traditions which make it impossible for him to expand beyond himself.\(^{15}\)

The arena of this liberating event is simply Blake's own mind, and the apocalypse of the poem concerns only his own awakening and poetic renewal. They write that Milton 'comes to awake Blake and retire or vanish while a more purely mystical Christianity than his own is put forward. The result is to be the swallowing up of generation in regeneration, of the symbol in the symbolized.'\(^{16}\) In the twentieth century, several critics and one major edition—Erdman/Bloom—would present the poem primarily as a record of Blake's own poetic empowerment. Many more would pursue the broader vision of the poem as a document of personal and psychological content rather than as a contribution to a public debate on metaphysics and ethics.

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\(^{13}\) E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats (1893), Vol. 2, p. 265.

\(^{14}\) E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats (1893), Vol. 2, p. 266.

\(^{15}\) E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats (1893), Vol. 2, p. 281.

\(^{16}\) E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats (1893), Vol. 2, p. 293.
Thus the differences between these two nineteenth-century publications reveal two quite distinct approaches to the poem. Both approaches are echoed in the editorial annotations that appear in the letterpress and facsimile reproductions of our own century.

Geoffrey Keynes, writing a very brief introduction to *Milton* in the first full letterpress edition of 1925, presented the poem along Yeats/Ellis lines in the sense of identifying it as purely 'about Blake'. He regarded it as primarily descriptive of Blake's life in Felpham, which was characterised by a difficult relationship with his patron, 'who came to typify to him the perverter of Art and Truth, the originator of all errors', and an experience of intimate mental communion with John Milton. The following year saw another instance of the expository efforts of Muir, when Sloss and Wallis published their *The Prophetic Writings of William Blake*. Like Keynes they acknowledge that the poem 'deals directly with his life at Felpham', and that 'many passages... read like transcripts from actual visionary experience', but they regard the poem as primarily didactic rather than autobiographical. In their reading the poem exposes 'the fallacies of materialism in life and art', and promotes 'the principles of individual responsibility... the fundamental obligations to unconditional and unremitting abstinence from judgment, and especially from moral censure, and to perpetual self-discipline and spiritual purgation'. Sloss and Wallis report not only mental communion between Blake and Milton, but an intertextual struggle, as Blake 'deliberately sets himself to controvert' the argument of *Paradise Lost*. Whereas Keynes identifies Hayley as *Milton* 's 'source of all errors', Sloss and Wallis suggest merely that the bard's song's “frequent denunciation of ‘corporeal friends’” glances at Hayley, whose “genteeel ignorance and polite disapprobation” of visionary enthusiasm appear to have disturbed Blake's peace of mind at Felpham. For Sloss and Wallis, *Milton* is an argumentative poem addressed to the British public, stridently challenging

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19 Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 345.
20 Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 347.
22 Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 347. The quotation is from Blake’s letter to Thomas Butts of July 6 1803. ‘I am determind to be no longer Pesterd with his Genteel Ignorance & Polite
its moral views and its acceptance of the teaching of its national poet. They annotate Milton’s final speech on plate 43 (‘To bathe in the Waters of Life etc.’ plate 43, E. 142, l. 1-28) as a ‘challenge, as vigorous as any Blake ever flung to the thought, art, and morality of his time’.23

The next important edition of Blake’s works was Erdman’s The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, with commentary by Harold Bloom24. Bloom’s commentary shares features with the work of the previous editors, but also embodies a new approach. Like Keynes, he sees the poem as a record of Blake’s private experiences at Felpham, but for Bloom the key event in this experience is a crisis of personal confidence concerning the practice of art. Firmly in the tradition of Yeats and Ellis, he writes that ‘Blake’s subject is ... his own imaginative crisis as caused by contending forces within his own self. The fundamental Jobean trial of Milton concerns Blake’s ability to sustain his poetic vocation’.25 Bloom provided a more confident account of the biographical allegory than any of his predecessors, informing his reader of ‘a falling out at Felpham between the Elect Hayley-Satan and the Redeemed (or rather, redeemable) Blake-Palamabron.’26 He adds that ‘The Rintrah of the quarrel was evidently Blake’s deceased brother Robert, surviving as Blake’s visionary conscience.’ Like Yeats and Ellis Bloom is committed not only to the biographical allegory transposing Blake’s real-life tale of usurpation and strife, but to the issue of poetry (rather than, for example, class) as central to the conflict described by the song between Hayley and Blake. Bloom writes that ‘The formulaic repetition of “Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation” throughout the Bard’s Song is an effective intimation of how crucial Blake felt the whole episode to be to his poetic life. The Harrow of the Almighty is epic poetry, for by it Palamabron-Blake could harrow the natural world so as to compel a revelation’.27

In 1967, Geoffrey Keynes had a second opportunity to annotate Milton, for the publication of the first William Blake Trust facsimile, which reproduced copy D. He

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23 Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 423.
now took a broader view of the poem's content, stating that 'the main theme of the poem is an account of how Milton, realizing the errors he had committed during life, descended to Earth and entered into self-annihilation, so becoming the perfect man and saviour of the world.'

This is an instance of a third strand in the general interpretation of the poem. Here Milton's mode is taken to be not autobiography, or abstract argument, but gospel or apocalypse. It is taken to involve salvation in the traditional, Christian sense, rather than in the special sense attaching to Blake's experience of imaginative renewal. Keynes identifies the errors of which Blake accues Milton as Puritanism and quarrelling with his wives and daughters, and thus presents the Milton as a more outward looking and didactic work than his 1925 edition had envisioned. He also reiterates his earlier position concerning the personal aspect of the poem, writing that it 'was inspired to a large extent by Blake's feelings of outrage and frustration caused by Hayley's interference with his integrity as artist and poet'.

The next three publications under discussion are in a sense the most important, as they are the only collections of Blake's works that are currently in print and widely available in the UK in paperback. Between them they must absorb most of the responsibility for the assumptions imbibed by new students of the poem in the 1990s. They are W H Stevenson's Longman edition of 1971, Alicia Ostiker's Penguin edition of 1977 and Michael Mason's Oxford Authors edition of 1988.

Stevenson gives the most literal account in the Yeats/Ellis tradition of reading the poem as a record of personal experience. He assumes that 'an actual visit' is suggested by the poem's vivid account of Blake's meeting with Ololon. Similarly he informs his reader that the image of Blake binding on a sandal composed of 'all this Vegetable World' 'to walk forward thro' Eternity' on plate 19 (E. 115, l. 12-14) appears in the poem because Blake had a moment of epiphany whilst tying a shoelace.

the poem seems to be based on two personal experiences of which we have no proof but which we can conjecture from the text... The first was an inspiration in a shaft of light which struck B.'s foot as he was fastening his shoe in Lambeth... —i.e. before Sept. 1800. The second was a moment of profound ecstasy as a lark sang and the scent of wild thyme filled the air, one day during

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29 Keynes (1967), 'Description and bibliographical statement', unpaginated.
his stay in Felpham, 1800-03. The poem lies between these two events; the first was the primary inspiration which made B. feel himself with wearer [sic] of Los's prophetic mantle, which made him the heir of Milton, and led him to write this poem in which he attempts to reshape Milton's work; the second experience, though it forms a climax to the poem, may not have been part of its original plan.\textsuperscript{31}

Although Stevenson states that \textit{Milton} was essentially conceived in Lambeth in a moment of Blake's visionary identification with John Milton, he interprets the bard's song as an 'archetypal version' of Blake's quarrel with Hayley, which did not come to a head until 1803. He believes that this was the last part of the work to be written, added on at the end of \textit{Milton} as a complaint against Hayley's interference with the composition of its main narrative. This main narrative describes 'how the malign influence of the old Milton was to be countered when the spirit of the new Milton descended, in another generation, to B. himself'.\textsuperscript{32} Thus Stevenson's scheme presents a unique organic relationship between the poem's introductory song and main narrative. It is an attractive view, but he unfortunately provides no evidence of this order of composition other than his own supposition that the bard's song was written to express frustration at Hayley's interference. As the next chapter shows, it is unlikely that Stevenson's assumptions about the poem's composition are correct.

Alicia Ostriker follows the theme of universal salvation found in Keynes' annotations to copy D, as well as the personal aspect epitomised in the biographical allegory. She places the narrative of \textit{Milton} within a providential scheme by which the apostolic succession of poets brings about the eschaton. Blake's hallucination of Milton's return, 'a moment of revelation in which he 'saw' all this happening, one day in his Felpham garden, and fainted', is placed in the context of global redemption:

B. assumes that the poet's task is no less than the salvation of Mankind. He acts through divine inspiration and conveys-as best he can, within his historic and personal limitations-divine truth. As history proceeds, poets embody more and more of truth, and expose more and more of error. The final result of this process will be the Coming of Jesus. Now, as B. sees it, Milton was a true poet, but did not escape error. His self-righteous religion interfered with his vision. To correct this, Milton must return to earth, annihilate his moralistic selfhood, and reunite with his rejected inspiration, which takes the form of a female 'emanation' Ololon. He is aided in this quest by all the powers of divine

\textsuperscript{31} Stevenson (1990), p. 487.

\textsuperscript{32} Stevenson (1990), p. 488.
imagination, and assailed by all the powers of mundane error. His ultimate
success brings the entire universe a step nearer to its final fulfilment in Jesus.33

This understanding of the poem as embodying Blake’s ambitions to help bring the
whole world to salvation through challenging John Milton’s works does not prevent
Ostriker from endorsing the biographical reading of the bard’s song, which is rather
narrower in scope than her general vision of the poem. This is curious because, as I
will argue below, the reading of the song as a response to Paradise Lost, rather than
an attack on Hayley, is much more satisfactory, and particularly for Ostriker, who
views the poem as a conscious exercise in revisionist literary history. Nevertheless,
Ostiker annotates the bard’s song with a confident biographical gloss:

In this song, which allegorizes Blake’s difficulties with his patron Hayley,
SATAN (Hayley) precipitates a quarrel with PALAMABRON (Blake) which
results in Satan’s exclusion from Los’s family and his identification with
URIZEN (the god of Reason and Moral Law).34

Ostriker’s vision of the global reach of Milton is shared by Michael Mason, who avoids
the biographical emphasis, focusing instead on the poem as a mainly spiritual and
theological project. He expresses the ‘historical theme of Milton’ thus:

Blake, living in Lambeth, has discerned the falseness of orthodox Christianity’s
claim to offer a new spiritual dispensation, and comes to Felpham inspired to
express his vision. He composes a new account of Christian universal history
(the bard’s song of Book I) which essentially rewrites the story of Satan as told
in Paradise Lost…. [T]he Father and Son of Paradise Lost are implicated by
the bard in the rebellion in Heaven (where Satan’s consort is called ‘Leutha’ by
Blake, rather than ‘Sin’) and in the spiritual enslavement of mankind… (which
is here due to the religion of the Old Testament and not to the sinfulness of
fallen Man). Paradise Lost had laid these to Satan’s charge alone.

Milton hears the bard’s song, and realizes that he has not only given a
false account of universal history, but has renewed the reign of false religion in
his own poetic creation. He must descend to Earth and atone with his death.35

Mason’s account is similar in some respects to that of Ellis and Yeats, concerning the
poem as an account of the internal drama of Blake’s consciousness.

His incarnation will be as part of the poet Blake, and the latter’s poetic genius,
or Los, at first opposing this development, is reconciled to it by the ‘prophecy’
that Milton will ascend again from Felpham. There is still the very important
objection that Milton’s work has tended to encourage the rise of deism, at the
expense of true enthusiastic religion, but Los in a crucial speech… urges that to

be militant on behalf of the latter would be to repeat the calamity of the Reformation.... Milton affirms his power, having died into life as Blake, to transform mankind's spiritual being without imposing a new religion.\textsuperscript{36}

Unlike Keynes, Mason identifies Milton's medium of global salvation as poetry, and indeed as Blake's poetry.

Only two major editions remain, and both are facsimiles. The first is edited by Kay Parkhurst Easson and Roger R. Easson, and first published in 1978. The other is the Viscomi and Essick facsimile of copy C, published by the William Blake Trust in 1993. Easson and Easson have the most developed view of Milton as a spiritually didactic work, although unlike the other soteriological readings in Ostriker, Mason and Keynes (copy D), the emphasis is not on Blake or Milton as the saviour of the world but on the teaching that the \textit{individual} must work out his own salvation. A similar emphasis on individual spirituality was found in Sloss and Wallis. Like Mason, Easson and Easson concentrate on the literary rather than personal relations, reading the bard's song in the context of \textit{Paradise Lost} rather than Blake's Felpham sojourn. The recurrent motif for Easson and Easson is the spiritual journey and their claim is that the poem both records one such journey and aims to inspire an answering quest in the reader:

\textit{Milton} is the book in which Blake teaches how "all the Lord's people" can become prophets. In \textit{Milton} Blake defines the spiritual journey which renews prophecy in every moment of human time.\textsuperscript{37}

The didactic relationship Blake aims to establish with his reader is mirrored in the poem by his designation of John Milton as his own teacher:

As Milton undertakes a spiritual journey with Blake's narrative, it is as if John Milton and his works are teaching Blake about their identity and simultaneously guiding Blake to discovery of his poetic and prophetic role.\textsuperscript{38}

A remarkable model of reading is derived from another didactic exemplar: Milton's willingness to learn from the bard:

\text{[T]he reader must enter Milton loving Blake, letting Blake take refuge in the reader. Milton's reaction to the Bard's song, his epiphany of recognition, exemplifies the kind of reaction Blake seeks from his reader; it is that transforming vision which launches the pilgrim upon his quest for spiritual knowledge; without it no journey, no quest is possible. If we fail to enter}

\textsuperscript{36} Mason (1988), p. 565.
\textsuperscript{38} Easson and Easson (1979), p. 139.
Milton lovingly we could become judgmental; we could attempt to assert control over Blake’s text. Then we would be the tyrant readers Blake would deplore. If the reader surrenders to Blake and opens to Blake’s teaching, however, then Milton manifests potential for the reader’s regeneration.39

As part of their account of the saving power of Blake’s Milton, Kay and Roger Easson develop a very detailed account of the cosmological assumptions expressed in the poem. They argue that the poem’s reader is required to grapple with Blake’s difficult ‘visionary geography’ as a crucial part of the spiritual journey defined by the poem, which includes a cleansing of the ‘doors of perception’.40 Several editors have been reluctant to provide a coherent response to the cosmological material in Milton. This includes a statement that the world is flat,41 and that the Newtonian globe rolling through voidness is an illusion created by the trickery of the telescope, which distorts the senses of its user but gives him no accurate vision of the objects at which he aims it.42 The poem also includes descriptions of Golgonooza, Beulah, Ulro, Al-Ulro, Or-Ulro, Bowlahoola and Allamanda; of twenty-seven layered heavens, of the vortex, and of the activities of the sons of Los, who oversee the precarious union between body and soul in the individual human.43 All of these descriptions are given in the narrative voice, culminating in the statement on plate 26 that ‘every Natural Effect has a Spiritual Cause, and Not / A Natural: for a Natural Cause only seems, it is a Delusion / Of Ulro’, (E. 124, l. 44-6) which Bloom glosses with a note of embarrassment: ‘plate 26 ends with a denial of all natural causation, an extravagance even for Blake’.44 Other editors have described this material as a ‘vision’, which does not commit them to the belief that Blake thought himself to be transmitting true information to his reader in these passages. Essick and Viscomi come close to this latter belief, when they annotate the passage on plate 28 beginning ‘The Sky is an immortal tent built by the Sons of Los’ (E. 127, l. 4-22) with an anecdote of Samuel Palmer:

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40 Easson and Easson (1979), p. 158.
41 Plate 14: ‘Thus is the earth one infinite plane’ (E. 109, l. 32).
42 Plate 28, ‘As to that false appearance... of a Globe rolling through Voidness’ (E. 127, l. 15-18).
43 Golgonooza: plate 4, E. 99, l. 1-2; Beulah: plate 30, E. 129, l. 1-30; Ulro etc.: plate 34, E. 134, l. 8-18; Bowlahoola and Allamanda: plate 23 E. 120-121, l. 48-67; plate 24, E. 125, l. 42-8; twenty-seven heavens and mundane shell: plate 16, E. 110-1, l. 21-30; vortex: plate 14, E. 109, l. 21-35; sons of Los: plates 26, 27 and 28 passim, E. 126-8.
According to Samuel Palmer, Blake once became ‘irritated’ with ‘scientific talk at a friend’s house, which talk had turned on the vastness of space, [and Blake] cried, out, “It is false. I walked the other evening to the end of the earth, and touched the sky with my finger.”’

(Bentley, Blake Records 301-2)

Easson and Easson, like William Muir before them, embrace Blake’s cosmological writing in Milton as a sincere and direct exposition of his unusual beliefs:

The reader’s task... is to acknowledge the relationship between the reality he has grown accustomed to thinking of as “normal waking consciousness” and the prophetic, visionary universe Blake creates within Milton. The crucial difference between Milton and most poetic fiction is that Blake is making a serious proposal for a visionary reality contrary to the scientific vision which comes naturally to us. Blake asks us to see Milton not as fiction but as truth.

The final edition is the facsimile of 1993 edited by Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi. In this edition we find another global soteriological reading rather than one concerning only Blake’s relationship with Milton and with his individual reader:

Milton celebrates a form of self-annihilation that attempts to overcome the self-centredness that radically divides a single self or a community from all others and casts that other as the enemy. This is, however, not merely a criticism of an unsavoury personality type, for Blake’s critique of selfhood goes to the heart of Western metaphysics [which] posits a unitary self as the basis of existence. It is an existence Blake wished to overcome and replace with a more fluid and open concept of being where the gulf between self and other is bridged—indeed, annihilated.

Like the Eassons, Essick and Viscomi take the cosmological arguments of the poem at face value, understating the literary aspect of this material.

The poem treats historical quantifications of time (the traditional ‘six thousand years’ of creation Blake refers to eleven times in the poem), the smaller calibrations that govern our daily lives, and the minuscule units essential to Newtonian physics and mathematics as the powerful but fallacious projections of a limited and limiting mentality—the result, as it were, of a political conspiracy of cosmic proportions. Milton, both explicitly in its intellectual content and implicitly in its form, proposes alternative ways of measuring our days.

In addition to this ambitious cosmic theme, Viscomi and Essick identify a theme of literary influence connecting Milton and Blake. Since the biographical interpretation of the bard’s song occupies a large part of their concerns, Essick and Viscomi find the

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46 Easson and Easson (1979), p. 139.
main theme of the poem to be the redemption of the role of poet and prophet, as practised by both Milton and Blake:

Much as Blake had to come to terms with that portion of his own personality which found its external corollary in the person of William Hayley, Milton (in the course of Milton) becomes conscious of those portions of his self and his culture that inhibited his being 'a true Poet' and struggles to cast them out. In Blake's view, Milton's errors infected his life and writings with classical paganism, moral self-righteousness, and rational materialism. Hayley was the contemporary embodiment of these flaws, evinced by his contempt for Blake's poetry and his contributions to the late eighteenth-century conversion of Milton the revolutionary poet-prophet into a versifier of conventional pieties.\(^49\)

According to these editors, Blake's aim was 'the reformation of Milton himself by himself'. They add that:

This is necessary since only individuals can confess, repent and be saved (at least in the Protestant tradition). To accomplish something so radical, Blake imagines the return of Milton to this world-in the flesh-or at least in the 'body' of Milton a Poem. The process finds its religious precedent in the incarnation of Christ, but it is also a literalization of the idea of influence, of a living poet repeating, reformulating, and in a sense completing the work of a much admired but flawed precursor.\(^50\)

This history of editorial annotations shows the enduring attraction of the biographical reading of the poem, absent from only a minority of accounts (Muir, Sloss and Wallis, Easson and Easson, Stevenson, Mason). This most recent edition has the most detailed and emphatic account of the allegory, although a very curious reason is given for this:

E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats, writing in 1893, were the first to suggest that Blake's experiences with Hayley lay behind the story of Rintrah, Palamabron, and Satan, most of which is concentrated into the so-called 'Bard's Song'.... Each character is a 'state'... which any individual can inhabit or escape, but we can begin to grasp the multifarious allegory by taking Satan to be Hayley and Rintrah and Palamabron as contrary aspects of Blake's response to Hayley-the mild and acquiescent (Palamabron) and the wrathful (Rintrah), the latter requiring expression to free Blake from the bonds, both economic and psychic, tying him to Hayley.... Recently criticism has tended to shun biographical readings of the 'Bard's Song', apparently on the supposition that to pursue them would reduce the universal to the petty. We suggest to the contrary that the origins of Milton in Blake's relationship with Hayley and the poem's veiled

\(^{48}\) Essick and Viscomi (1993), p. 11.
\(^{49}\) Essick and Viscomi (1993), p. 16.
\(^{50}\) Essick and Viscomi (1993), p. 16.
references to it provide a grounding in quotidian experiences that make the work more accessible, more human in everyday terms.\textsuperscript{51}

It seems uncharacteristically lame for Viscomi and Essick to promote this reading on the grounds that it makes the poem seem less difficult, although this could indeed be the main reason for the popularity of this tradition. The editorial history of \textit{Milton} shows that the perceived scope of the poem has generally expanded since it was read in the nineteenth century as a bizarre cosmological treatise or a highly personal account of poetic inspiration. Since the publication of the most lavish hand-coloured Blake Trust facsimile in 1967, the poem’s ‘main theme’ has been an account of Milton’s becoming ‘the perfect man and saviour of the world.’\textsuperscript{52} Essentially this view of the poem’s ambitious subject matter can be found in the modern editions of Mason and Ostriker and a similarly grand view is taken by Viscomi and Essick.

Broadly speaking, we have discovered three differing, but not mutually exclusive, basic conceptions of the poem, of emphasis and preference rather than of absolute disagreement. The first of these conceptions is that \textit{Milton} is fundamentally an expression of the poet’s unique inner world, in a period of particular mental and psychic turbulence. The act of self-expression represented by the poem is pursued by Blake—perhaps for therapeutic reasons—and presented to the public in a gesture of triumphant self-vindication. This is broadly the view forwarded by Bloom and by others who favour the biographical reading of the Bard’s song. Viscomi and Essick recall the ‘aspersion of madness’ cast against Blake by Hunt, and suggest that Rintrah’s implicit defence of the Methodists against the charge that they were madmen ‘is also a self-defense.’\textsuperscript{54} Viscomi writes in \textit{Blake and the Idea of the Book} that \textit{Milton} is the work referred to in the Public Address as Blake’s response to his detractors.\textsuperscript{55}

The manner in which my Character <has been blasted these thirty years> both as an artist & a Man may be seen particularly in a Sunday Paper cald the Examiner... & the manner in which I have routed out the nest of villains will be seen in a Poem concern[in]g my Three years <Herculean> Labours at Felpham which I will soon Publish.

(E. 572)

\textsuperscript{51} Essick and Viscomi (1993), p. 15.
\textsuperscript{52} Keynes (1967), ‘Description and bibliographical statement’, unpaginated.
\textsuperscript{53} This is the view of Paul Youngquist in ‘Criticism and the Experience of Blake’s \textit{Milton}’, \textit{SEL} Vol. 30:4 (Autumn 1990), pp. 555-571. I discuss it further in chapter six.
\textsuperscript{55} Viscomi (1993), p. 316.
Readings of this kind focus on the continuity between the poem and private or unpublished writings of Blake's. In particular they note the theme of true and false art, found in the poem from the Preface to its closing monologues, and obsessively pursued in Blake's private notes of the *Milton* period, and published in the *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809. So for Bloom, as well as for others, the poem is seen as an account of Blake's role as artist and poet, and an analysis of the difficulties he has experienced in this role.

We are now encroaching on the second view, which is that *Milton* is fundamentally a set of arguments presented to the public, concerning issues of general concern such as cosmology, ethics, art and theology. In this view, the bard's song could be read as a commentary upon the national epic of *Paradise Lost*, and upon contemporary conceptions of ethics and Christian worship. The material in *Milton* which baffles the public gaze, such as the unexplained zoaic fragments, or which is not obviously relevant to the argumentative project, such as Blake's depiction of his cottage at Felpham or his illustration of his dead brother Robert, is not readily absorbed by this kind of interpretation.

Thirdly, the poem can be regarded as didactic in a more intimate way: as a work of spiritual instruction, aiming not to argue with its reader, but to challenge him spiritually. This view, epitomised by Kay and Roger Easson, better accommodates the non-didactic autobiographical material because of the more personal emphasis. Although Easson and Easson do not mention spiritual autobiography, their dominant motif of the individual spiritual journey invites recollection of *Pilgrim's Progress*.

The view towards which this thesis inclines is essentially of the second kind: it is seen as fundamentally argumentative, and public in its concerns. Nevertheless, I agree with Easson and Easson that it anticipates a lone reader, distinguished by uncommon resourcefulness and dedication. Despite Blake's fascination with the setting of the assembly, and his vision of the immediate apprehension of poetry

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57 The bard's song involves two assemblies: the bard's assembled audience which includes John Milton and the assembly called within the bard's fiction by Palamabron. The chaotic debate in these fora contrasts with another set of groups in *Milton*. Ololon, the Seven Angels that attend Milton during his journey, and the corporate presence of Jesus are groups of individuals who have become fully united, and act in unison.
through a singing bard, *Milton* is a readerly text. The manner of its repetitions is not the reassuring recapitulation of oral poetry, but a continual questioning and revision of previously received information and understanding. It is a poem which requires its own book as its medium, so that the reader can turn the pages back and forth, continually re-evaluating the meaning and significance of the ‘system’ at which it hints but which it does not deliver in any readily discernible form. I view *Milton* as a ‘Public Address’ which must be encountered individually, and which is greatly complicated by the inclusion of certain elements—such as private autobiographical detail—and the adoption of certain narrative procedures which are not accessible to public intellectual consumption. This broad view will be established in my third and fourth chapters. My fifth chapter discusses the poem’s revisions, and describes the evolution in Blake’s religious thought evinced by the added plates.

More immediately, it is necessary to indicate two objections to some of the editorial annotations that have been summarised above. The first concerns the lack of narrative and dramatic awareness shown by most editors. The significance of a certain passage may derive from an aspect of the narrative rather than from its relationship with Blake’s life or with other writings by Blake. For example, most editors regard the great confrontation between Los and his sons on Plates 20, 22 and 23 as containing the heart of Blake’s argument in *Milton*. They assume that one of Blake’s characters is directly expressing his own views. Bloom identifies Blake’s position with that of Los: ‘Los warns against “fury premature”, like the religious violence of the Protestant reformers. There is some element of self-chastisement on Blake’s part, of the gathering conviction that even for the prophet a mode of patience is necessary.’

Although a union between Blake and Los has taken place before this encounter, this does not necessarily mean that Los’s dramatic role as a character has been subsumed within Blake’s internal dialogue, nor does it obviate the narrative context of this speech, namely a debate with his sons about the meaning of Milton’s return. Whilst there is some obvious sense in the comment of Yeats and Ellis upon Milton’s final speech that ‘Milton... utters Blake’s own manifesto upon the purposes of his poetry’, there is a much more ambiguous narrative context to the debate between Los and his

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sons. Stevenson completely ignores this when he assumes that Blake is using both opposing voices as his own. He writes of Rintrah and Palamabron’s comments following ‘Seeing the churches at their period of terror & despair...’ (E. 117, l. 40 ff.):

From this point B. gives way to an outburst of his own feelings. The spirits of evil, Rahab and Tirzah, have been very active in his age.... Voltaire and Rousseau: B. vents his hatred against them for their abstract theorizing. He presumably disliked Voltaire’s self-assured scepticism (from the pride of Rahab) and Rousseau’s rationalistic perfectionism (from Tirzah, queen of Nature, which Rousseau claimed to follow).\(^\text{60}\)

There is no doubt that Blake disapproved of Voltaire and Rousseau, but distilling the conflict into a simple expression of Blake’s views misses a more subtle point. Blake is dramatising the conflict amongst Christians concerning the interpretation of and response to various events and religious movements, of which the life and imagined return of Milton is an example. Rintrah and Palamabron are in despair at the course of Christian history and predict that Milton’s return will bring about further strife, which they wish to prevent by imprisoning him. Los responds by rejecting this kind of historical intervention, which perpetuates strife between Christians, and emphasising hopes of apocalyptic deliverance from history. The confrontation between these two positions seems to be an important aspect of the debate Blake wishes to conduct in Milton, which continues to explore the tension between expectations of historical change and the desire for the end of history. This interpretation is not offered in any of the editions. Indeed, having identified the speech of Rintrah and Palamabron as a vehicle for Blake’s ‘own feelings’, Stevenson goes on to make the same claim for Los’s response. He suggests that Los’s advice to his own sons to ‘break not / Forth in your wrath lest you also are vegetated’ is addressed by Blake to himself:

> Probably a warning to himself: do not be carried away by anger or you will become embittered and hardened\(^\text{61}\)

Viscomi and Essick warn that the reader of Milton must not expect normal characters;\(^\text{62}\) however, I believe that Blake intends to uphold the dramatic function of his characters more than some editors suggest. For example, Sloss and Wallis assume

\(^{60}\) Stevenson (1990), p. 524.

\(^{61}\) Stevenson (1990), p. 537.

\(^{62}\) ‘A character may represent several concepts at the same time, and several characters tend to merge and indicate the same concept. But to speak of ‘a’ character may be misleading, for some (including Milton) seem to have multiple personalities that inhabit different places (heaven, Jerusalem, Blake’s
that the parodic purpose of the bard's song overrides Blake's concern for the stability of his character fictions. They identify Leutha as a fully pernicious character, and go on to explain her exemplary act of self-sacrifice in terms of a parodic purpose in conflict with this characterisation:

The present myth, with its vague suggestion of the Miltonic description of Sin (*Paradise Lost*, ii. 747-814), is not repeated elsewhere. Though called a Daughter of Beulah, Leutha appears to belong rather to the same class of symbols as Vala and the Daughters of Albion. She is contrasted with Elynittria as Vala with Jerusalem (*J.*, pp. 20-24), and ultimately gives birth to 'the Spectre of Sleep, nam'd Death' and to 'Rahab' (*M.* 11.41). The only point in which she differs from the general nature of the 'disobedient Female' is in her act of self-sacrifice, in offering herself a ransom for Satan, and taking on her his sin. Possibly here, as elsewhere (see *Milton*, Introduction), Blake's chief purpose is to correct the Miltonic history of Satan, by carefully avoiding any suggestion of vengeance against Satan, and emphasizing the contrary doctrine of forgiveness and self-sacrifice by exhibiting it even in Leutha.\(^{63}\)

The assumption that Blake's characters represent a permanent system of ideas rather than belonging primarily to their local dramatic contexts, leads editors to register certain aspects of *Milton*'s narrative as anomalous within the Blake canon. For example, the belief that Los is the representative of Blake's imagination creates a certain blindness in the editor of *Milton*, where Los's activities are ambiguously distinguished from the practices by which Rahab and Tirzah form the human body. Where the bard's song tells us that 'Three Classes are Created / By Enitharmons Looms, & Spun beneath the Spindle of Tirzah', Sloss and Wallis object that "'The mention of Tirzah as spinning in the company of Los and Enitharmon is a difficulty, unless, as in *M.* 28.53, she perverts the 'mild influences' of the Eternal Prophet and his Emanation, or unless the distinction is made as in *J.* 18.7 'Vala [=Tirzah] produc'd the Bodies, Jerusalem gave the Souls.'"\(^{64}\) My reading of the poem, presented in chapters 3 and 4, and that of other critics (for example Peter Otto),\(^{65}\) show that Los's role in the poem is not preserved from error or contradiction. The expectation of Sloss and Wallis that Blake can be held to a consistent ontological system is also disappointed in the poem's narration concerning Ololon:

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\(^{63}\) Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 368.

\(^{64}\) Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 360.

The general significance of Ololon remains dark, and perhaps necessarily so, since so much of it appears to be a record of Blake’s own mystical experience. All that can be attempted in the way of exposition is to notice the points of contact with the body of Blake’s more familiar symbolism, and to suggest with all diffidence a possible line of interpretation. The initial conflict of Ololon with the Starry Eight repeats the main doctrine of this poem, the iniquity of any attempt at moral judgement such as implied in the expulsion of the Eight. Incidentally it illustrates the curious conception of the possibility of error even among Eternals, and this again is brought into relation to the notion that the principles of continual forgiveness and self-sacrifice are fundamental in the supreme state of existence. It is also noteworthy that, as in the earlier Book of Urizen, some at least among the Eternals act without fore-knowledge: the dwellers in Ololon do not know that in banishing the Eight they are fulfilling part of the divine purpose of regeneration (M 19. 31-57). All this is very confusing and not easily to be reconciled with the commoner statement of ideal unity in the supreme state of existence, expressed symbolically as the appearance of the ‘Eternals’ or of ‘all Eternity’ as ‘One Man, Jesus’, the ‘Divine Humanity’ or as a ‘Divine Family’.66

The perplexity stems from the unwillingness to read Milton on its own terms, or as a re-evaluation of Los or the Eternals as they appeared in former poems. One consequence of this is that most editions shy away from making any response to particularly difficult passages in Milton for which the habit of cross-referencing is not fruitful. One example is the very demanding sequence on plate 28:

In Allamanda & Entuthon Benython, where Souls wail:
Where Orc incessant howls burning in fires of Eternal Youth
Within the vegetated mortal Nerves; for every Man born is joined
Within into One mighty Polypus, and this Polypus is Orc.

But in the Optic vegetative Nerves Sleep was transformed
To Death in old time by Satan, the father of Sin & Death
And Satan is the Spectre of Orc, & Orc is the generate Luvah
(E. 127, l. 28-34)

Sloss and Wallis merely indicate the shortcomings of their primary mode of annotation: ‘No passage elsewhere throws light on this conception of Orc, nor is there any similar use of the symbol Polypus.’67 Other editors make no comment at all.

My second objection is related to the first, but concerns more specifically the assumption that the bard’s song is a biographical allegory rather than a poetic tale crafted for other purposes. The various attempts to read the bard’s song as an allegory of Blake’s Felpham troubles are flawed because this biographical situation appears to

correspond poorly to the narrative sung by Blake’s bard. In the earliest full account of
the biographical allegory, Damon forges a connection between the major elements of
the song and Blake’s life at Felpham:

It was just such poetasters as he who got the applause of the world and
prevented the real artists from winning their due; and thus kept the world
immersed in bad taste. But what was the cause of the Hayleys? Had they
always been in power? No: there had been the days of Elizabeth, a time which
would be the glory of England forever, a time of peace of wealth spiritual and
material, a time of great poets. What had happened since then? Blake saw the
black cloud of Puritanism spreading over Europe, ruining the cathedrals and
abbeys, closing the theatres, preaching the deadly duties of warring upon our
neighbours. It had blotted out the glories of the Renaissance, it had scorned
and suppressed all beauty, had reduced religion to a system of ethics enforced
by law, had turned all but a very few into fools or hypocrites, and had dealt the
old spirit of ‘merry England’ a blow from which it had never recovered.
Outwardly, Puritanism had involved England in a series of wars such as would
have been impossible under the pacifistic policy of Elizabeth; internally, it had
brutalized the people with a cruel system of impossible ideals. Chief among
these were the conceptions of absolute chastity for the unmarried, and perfect
fidelity for the married. And who was responsible for Puritanism? The answer
must have been unexpected even to Blake: it was his beloved Milton! For
though Milton ‘was a true Poet, and of the Devil’s party,’ he was led astray by
the mad logic of his times. He had supported Cromwell’s schemes for making
England moral by force of armed law; he had celebrated Virtue and taught that
Lust was Sin; and he had reduced his Deities to Abstractions. Being the
greatest man of his time, he was therefore its greatest sinner; all the more so,
since his pernicious errors still were spreading.68

Damon’s ingenuity here does not prevent the question: why should freethinking Hayley
be associated with Puritanism? Did Blake really arrive at the desire to write a poem
about Milton because of a series of frustrations ultimately caused by the influence of
Puritanism on his patron? In answer to this I must offer my own version of Hayley’s
input into Milton, which is not, in my view, to be found in his provision of the model
for a major character, but in his authorship of a profoundly provoking text, The Life of
Milton.

Rather than reasoning back from ‘the Hayleys’ to ‘Milton’ it is more likely that
Blake, stung by Felpham provocations took solace from his long-standing sense of
communion with his hero John Milton,69 and returned also to his long-standing desire

67 Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 404.
69 Expressed in his letter to Flaxman of 12 September 1800 (E. 707).
to articulate the precise nature of Milton’s poetic failings.\textsuperscript{70} This mixed agenda could even have arisen from a sense of himself and Milton, along with ‘Poor Romney’ as Hayley’s victims.\textsuperscript{71} For Blake felt that Hayley had interfered significantly with the work of both himself and Romney, and may have perceived that in his \textit{Life of Milton} he had interfered the reputation of Milton. There is a fascinating passage in this biography where he lavishes praise on Manso for his influence upon an afflicted poet. He calls him

‘the bosom friend of Tasso; the friend who had cherished that great and afflicted poet under his roof in a season of his mental calamity, had restored his health, re-animated his fancy, and given a religious turn to the latest efforts of his majestic muse.’\textsuperscript{72}

Hayley must have been thinking of himself here, for he clearly prided himself on his own skill with afflicted poets such as Blake, whom Hayley described as ‘utterly unfit to take due Care of Himself’.\textsuperscript{73} The presumption that one man is responsible for the ‘turn’ of the ‘efforts’ of another’s muse would have been powerfully provocative to Blake, whose resentment of Hayley’s ‘disapprobation’ of the efforts of his own muse is well documented in Blake’s angry letters of 1803.\textsuperscript{74} However, the impact on Blake of the \textit{Life of Milton} may be much more extensive. Despite the undeniably personal nature of Blake’s quarrel with Hayley, \textit{Milton} may represent a response to him as a writer, thinker and cultural force, rather than simply as a disagreeable patron. For the confrontation between Blake and Hayley that \textit{Milton} represents is about the memory and contemporary evaluation of John Milton.

\textsuperscript{70} The comments on Milton in \textit{The Marriage of Heaven and Hell} show that he had been formulating his criticism of \textit{Paradise Lost} since 1790 or before.
\textsuperscript{71} Letter to James Blake, 30 January 1803, E. 725.
\textsuperscript{72} Hayley \textit{Life of Milton} (1796), p. 49.
\textsuperscript{74} To Butts, 10 January 1803: ‘I find on all hands great objections to my doing any thing but the meer drudgery of business’, E. 723-4; to James Blake, 30 January 1803: Hayley ‘jealous as Stothard was & will be no further My friend than he is compell'd by circumstances’, E. 725-6; to Butts, 6 July 1803: ‘he is as much averse to my poetry as he is to a Chapter in the Bible... his imbecile attempts to depress Me only deserve laughter’, E. 729-30.
II

Hayley's *Life* is itself a response to another work: it is devoted to correcting the account of Samuel Johnson, in which Milton appears as an object of some grudging admiration but not of affection. Hayley's aim is to inspire his countrymen to share his own love of Milton's character as well as of his works. He defends his subject against Johnson's many charges: of coldness, egotism, unpopularity, contempt for women, flattery of Cromwell. At the heart of this defence is an argument concerning Milton's moral character, which he repeatedly characterises as that of the unblemished ascetic. The greatest challenge Hayley acknowledges to his defence of Milton is the poet's regrettable life-long commitment to the left-handed pursuits of political pamphleteering and ecclesiastical dispute.\(^{55}\) Between his distaste for these activities and his relentlessly moralistic approbation of his subject, Hayley contrives to produce a pro-monarchical life of Milton, which absolves the dead poet of his political views and reduces him almost to the status of conduct-book philosopher:

*The Paradise Regained is a poem, that deserves to be particularly recommended to ardent and ingenuous youth, as it is admirably calculated to inspire that spirit of self-command, which is, as Milton esteemed it, the truest heroism, and the triumph of Christianity.*\(^{76}\)

Hayley argues that if he had lived longer, Milton would have developed into a true friend of the constitution.

*Vehement as he occasionally was against kings and prelates, he spoke of the sectaries with equal indignation and abhorrence when they also blame the agents of persecution; and as he had fully seen, and has forcibly exposed, the gross failings of republican reformers, had his life been extended long enough to witness the Revolution, which he might have beheld without suffering the decrepitude or imbecility of extreme old age, he would probably have exulted as warmly as the staunchest friend of our present constitution can exult, in that temperate and happy reformation of monarchical enormities.*\(^{77}\)

The book appears to have inspired a most contrary response from Blake. Hayley attempts to combine a sentimental vision of Milton the man with praise for his spotless moral virtue. Blake answers with a vision of the stony patriarch dictating law to his

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\(^{77}\) Hayley (1796), pp. 214-215.
ossified female coterie. Hayley defends Milton against Johnson’s famous ‘Turkish’ slur, citing his warm sensibilities on the one hand, and his sheer bad fortune on the other. He tells us that

Such austerity and moroseness have been falsely attributed to Milton, that a reader, acquainted with him only as he appears in the page of Johnson, must suppose him little formed for love; but his poetry in general, and especially the compositions we are now speaking of, may convince us, that he felt, with the most exquisite sensibility, the magic of beauty, and all the force of female attraction.  

Concerning his filial relations, Hayley diverts all blame away from Milton:

The tender and sublime poet, whose sensibility and sufferings were so great, appears to have been almost as unfortunate in his daughters as the Lear of Shakespeare.

Blake is much firmer with Milton, confronting him with the responsibility for restoring his domestic relations from the first. As soon as he has made his crucial identification with the bard’s Satan, Milton understands that his three wives and daughters ‘might be resum’d / By giving up of Self-hood’ (plate 16, E. 110 l. 2-3)  

Blake’s early annotations to Lavater include the suggestion that feminine faults such as vanity and jealousy must be blamed upon men. Lavater’s aphorism ‘A great woman not imperious, a fair woman not vain, a woman of common talents not jealous, an accomplished woman, who scorns to shine—are four wonders’ is answered ‘let the men do their duty & the women will be such wonders, the female life lives from the light of the male. see a mans female dependants you know the man’ (E. 596). Hayley attempts to engage his reader’s sympathy for his subject by an account of his brave response to his blindness, which is characterized by expressions of faith and contentment. In answer to the mockery of his foes Milton expresses supreme confidence in his relationship with God:

Let them know that I am far from considering my lot with sorrow or repentance; that I persist immovable in my sentiment; that I neither fancy nor feel the anger of God, but, on the contrary, experience and acknowledge his paternal clemency and kindness in my most important concerns, in this

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78 Johnson, Lives of the English Poets ed. G. B. Hill (Oxford, 1905), p. 157: ‘What we know of Milton’s character in domestick relations is, that he was severe and arbitrary. His family consisted of women; and there appears in his books something like a Turkish contempt of females, as subordinate and inferior beings.’

79 Hayley (1796), p. 20.

especially, that, by the comfort and confirmation which he himself infuses into my spirit, I acquiesce in his divine pleasure, continually considering rather what he has bestowed upon me, than what he has denied.\textsuperscript{81}

In a letter to a friend Milton wrote ‘For if, as it is written, man lives not by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God, why should not a man acquiesce even in this? nor thinking that he can derive light from his eye alone, but esteeming himself sufficiently enlightened by the conduct or providence of God. As long, therefore, as he looks forward, and provides for me as he does, and leads me backward and forward by the hand, as it were, through my whole life, shall I not cheerfully bid my eyes keep holiday, since such appears to be his pleasure?’\textsuperscript{82} Blake, in reply restores Milton’s sight to him, and confronts him with evidence of his domestic, intellectual and artistic shortcomings. The first sight afforded to Blake’s imagined Milton is the torment of his estranged ‘emanation’: both his intellectual and artistic vision and the problematic women in his life.

Say first! what mov’d Milton, who walk’d about in Eternity
One hundred years, pondring the intricate mazes of Providence
Unhappy tho in heav’n, he obey’d, he murmur’d not. he was silent
Viewing his Sixfold Emanation scatter’d thro’ the deep
In torment! To go into the deep her to redeem & himself perish?

(plate 3, E. 96, l. 16-20)

Unlike Hayley, it is clear that Blake holds Milton responsible for the alienated condition of his family.

Hayley’s defence of Milton hinges upon the same notions as Blake’s encounter with that poet: his fierce pursuit of moral perfection, his sense of his own unique poetic election, the ‘austerity and moroseness’ which isolated him personally. The \textit{Life of Milton} emphasises its subject’s belief in the divine election of national poets. Writing of the ‘critical art of composition’ manifested in the Bible, Milton says ‘These abilities, wheresoever they be found, are the inspired gift of God, rarely bestowed, but yet to some (though most abuse) in every nation’. Milton promises to obtain his work ‘by devout prayer to that eternal spirit, who can enrich with all utterance and knowledge, sends out his Seraphim with the hallowed fire of his altar to touch and purify the lips of

\textsuperscript{81} Hayley (1796), p. 106.
\textsuperscript{82} Hayley (1796), pp. 118-119.
whom he pleases'. Hayley overlays his subject’s sense of free election and grace with an equal emphasis on the importance of justification by works, entering frequently upon the theme of Milton’s moral worthiness of his talent, itemising the elements of his ascetic programme: little sleep, much study, frugal nutrition, no intoxicating drink.

He appears to have thought with a celebrated ancient, that perfect morality is necessary to the perfection of genius; and that sublimity in composition may be expected only from the man, who has attained the sublime in the steady practice of virtue. Hayley quotes Milton’s own statement of this position:

I was confirmed in this opinion, that 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 pattern of the honourablest things; not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men, or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy. He even argues that the late blossoming of Milton’s mental powers is proof that his life-long moral rectitude had earned him the favour of Providence. Once again Hayley uses Milton’s righteousness to compensate for his politics, and even suggests that Milton’s release from this concern was a reward for his high morals:

however Various the opinions of men may be concerning the merits or demerits of Milton’s political character, the integrity of his heart appears to have secured to him the favour of Providence; since it pleased the Giver of all good not only to turn his labours to a peaceful end, but to irradiate his declining life with the most abundant portion of those pure and sublime mental powers, for which he had constantly and fervently prayed, as the choicest bounty of Heaven.

Blake returns Milton to a broadly political context and submits his notions of virtue and of election to a sustained interrogation. The reformation of Milton’s character in Milton involves first of all his identification with the Elect only in the ironic sense of the group who attempt to impose cruel moral codes on the rest of society. The challenge to Milton is political in that he is removed from the private realm of virtue and reward, which he has found to be empty, having experienced no happiness in heaven, and made to address the broad ideological impact of his works, above all Paradise Lost. This aspect of the poem is explored more fully in chapters 3 and 4.

83 Hayley (1796), p. 70.
84 Hayley (1796), p. 74.
85 Hayley (1796), p. 74.
86 Hayley (1796), pp. 169-70.
Even in minor respects Blake seems to echo or respond to Hayley. For example, Hayley may have influenced Blake’s association of Milton with Newtonian science. Hayley writes, rather anachronistically, that ‘expressions in Paradise Lost have led an Italian biographer of the poet to suppose, that while he resided at Florence he caught from Galileo, or his disciples, some ideas approaching towards the Newtonian philosophy’. He also reports that Milton always wore black and always carried a sword. This information may be reflected in Milton’s descent ‘clothed in black, severe & silent’ (plate 39, E. 138, l. 8) and in Blake’s judgement that he was ‘curbd’ by the ‘silly Greek & Latin slaves of the Sword’ (plate 1, E. 95).

However, there may be a more profound connection between Hayley’s book and Milton. My suggestion is that there is some continuity between the tone of certain passages in the Life of Milton and the rhetorical style associated with Milton’s Satan. This argument is not intended to revive the biographical allegory, whereby Satan represents the interference of Hayley’s false artistic values with Blake’s poetic practice during his stay at Felpham. Rather, it introduces the element of class into the antinomian theme Blake inaugurates with his characterisation of Satan, who is associated with the emblems of law and justice.

Hayley’s style in his biography of Milton may be relevant to Blake’s poem. Wherever he apportions blame, he also offers praise and, occasionally, pity. The effect is superior, chiding and very effectively dismissive. Johnson is the main candidate for this treatment, exemplified from the first by a combination of approbation and regret:

Yet it must be lamented (and by the lovers of Milton in particular) that a moralist, who has given us in the Rambler, such sublime lessons for the discipline of the heart and mind, should be unable to preserve his own from that acrimonious spirit of detraction, which led him to depreciate, to the utmost of his power, the rare abilities, and perhaps still rarer integrity of Milton.

Hayley extends this tone of regret to Milton’s political life. To excuse this he recalls the saying of Montaigne ‘I would come again with all my heart from the other world to give any one the lie, who should report me other than I was, though he did it to honour me.’ Accordingly he declares ‘I shall not therefore attempt to deny or to excuse the

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87 Hayley (1796), p. 37.
88 Hayley (1796), pp. 195, 196.
89 Hayley (1796), preface, p. xi.
fatiguing heaviness or the coarse asperity of his ecclesiastical disputes. He even goes so far as to tar Milton with the same brush as Johnson:

It was the opinion of Johnson, and Milton himself seems to have entertained the same idea, that it is allowable in literary contention to ridicule, vilify, and depreciate as much as possible the character of an opponent.

Blake's characterisation of Satan is emphatically a matter of rhetorical style as well as of flawed beliefs and evil impulses. Blake identifies not only an ideology—that of authoritarian, legalistic religion—but also the manner and rhetorical strategies which best serve such an ideology. Blake calls it 'Pretence to benevolence', and it is Satan's trademark, shared by his class the elect, as also by the 'idiot Questioner' denounced by Milton in his final speech, who 'smiles with condescension... talks of Benevolence & Virtue, / And those who act with Benevolence & Virtue they murder time on time' (plate 43, E. 142 l. 19-20). The manner of the Accuser is summed up in Satan's discreet campaign on Palamabron:

Of the first class was Satan: with incomparable mildness,
His primitive tyrannical attempts on Los, with most endearing love
He soft intreated Los to give to him Palamabron's station,
For Palamabron return'd with labour wearied every evening.
Palamabron oft refus'd, and as often Satan offer'd
His service, till by repeated offers and repeated intreaties
Los gave to him the Harrow of the Almighty; alas, blamable,
Palamabron fear'd to be angry lest Satan should accuse him of Ingratitude & Los believe the accusation thro' Satan's extreme Mildness. Satan labour'd all day: it was a thousand years:
In the evening returning terrified, overlabour'd & astonish'd,
Embrac'd soft with a brother's tears Palamabron, who also wept.

(plate 5, E. 100, l. 4-15)

It is this skill at dissimulation that leads Palamabron to fear that he will be deprived of justice if he pleads before Los:

Then Palamabron, reddening like the Moon in an eclipse,
Spoke, saying: You know Satan's mildness and his self-imposition,
Seeming a brother, being a tyrant, even thinking himself a brother
While he is murdering the just

(plate 5, E. 100, l. 20-23)

Eventually the fury beneath the mildness is revealed: 'For Satan, flaming with Rintrah's fury hidden beneath his own mildness, / Accus'd Palamabron before the Assembly of

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90 Hayley (1796), p. 75.
Pretended pity is a most effective tool of Milton’s Satan, as it masks his vindictive challenge to Palamabron in a guise of innocent concern. In a most Satanic development of his own attack, Hayley finally offers pity to Johnson:

But the little delight that Johnson confesses himself to have taken in the poetry of Milton was rather his misfortune than his fault; it merits pity more than reproach.\footnote{Hayley (1796), p. 110.}

The full grounds for pity are spelt out mercilessly:

He was, indeed, as far from enjoying the poet’s ear for the varied modulations and extensive compass of metrical harmony, as he was from possessing the mild elegance of his manners or the cheerful elevation of his mind.\footnote{Hayley (1796), p. 222.}

Although I am suggesting primarily a textual relation between the Life of Milton and Milton, it is clear that Blake experienced similar provocation from Hayley’s personal style: Blake complains bitterly about the same habit of mild disparagement that we have seen in use against Johnson. He wrote to Thomas Butts on July 6 1803 as follows:

Mr H. approves of My Designs as little as he does of my Poems, and I have been forced to insist on his leaving me in both to my own Self Will; for I am determin’d to be no longer Pester’d with his Genteel Ignorance & Polite Disapprobation. I know myself both Poet & Painter, & it is not his affected Contempt that can move me to anything but a more assiduous pursuit of both Arts.\footnote{Keynes, The Letters of William Blake with related documents (Oxford, 1980), p. 58.}

However, there may be other clues to the genesis of Milton’s Satan. His false pity, which masks malice recalls the pity and contempt economically combined in Hunt’s damming appellation of Blake as ‘an unfortunate lunatic’.\footnote{Bentley (1969), p. 216.} This attack is expressly cited in the ‘Public Address’ as a source of the poem.\footnote{Blake’s perception of Watson’s Defence of the Bible is another example of the combination of orthodox moral values with a most spiteful, and yet moderate manner of reasoning. The connection between legalistic and prescriptive morality and cruelty is asserted in principle in the Annotations: ‘All Penal Laws court Transgression & therefore are

\footnote{The manner in which my Character <has been blasted... may be seen particularly in a Sunday paper cald the Examiner... & the manner in which I have routed out a nest of villains will be seen in

\footnote{Bentley (1969), p. 216.}
cruelty & Murder’ (Letter 3, E. 618). The Bishop demonstrates the truth of this maxim in his role as accuser and even would-be executioner of Thomas Paine. The Bishop’s opening address to Paine must be quoted at length because it establishes his Satanic mode:

SIR,

I have lately met with a book of your’s, entitled—“The Age of Reason,” part the second, being an investigation of true and of fabulous theology;—and I think it not inconsistent with my station, and the duty I owe to society, to trouble you and the world with some observations on so extraordinary a performance. Extraordinary I esteem it; not from any novelty in the objections which you have produced against revealed religion, (for I find little or no novelty in them), but from the zeal with which you labour to disseminate your opinions, and from the confidence with which you esteem them true. You perceive, by this, that I give you credit for your sincerity, how much soever I may question your wisdom, in writing in such a manner on such a subject: and I have no reluctance in acknowledging, that you possess a considerable share of energy of language, and acuteness of investigation; though I must be allowed to lament, that these talents have not been applied in a manner more useful to human kind, and more creditable to yourself. I begin with your preface. You therein state—that you had long had an intention of publishing your thoughts upon religion, but that you had originally reserved it to a later period in life. I hope there is no want of charity in saying, that it would have been fortunate for the Christian world, had your life been terminated before you had fulfilled your intention.  

Blake instantly identifies the aggression in this writing, and it is this which informs his response to the Bishop:

Presumptuous Murderer. Dost thou, O Priest, wish thy brother’s death when God has preserved him?

(E. 612)

But it is not the malice which angers Blake so much as does the smoothness:

it is all Daggers & Poison; the sting of the serpent is in every Sentence as well as the glittering Dissimulation. Achilles’ wrath is blunt abuse: Thersites’ sly insinuation; such is the Bishop’s. If such is the characteristic of a modern polite gentleman we may hope to see Christ’s discourses Expung’d. I have not the Charity for the Bishop that he pretends to have for Paine. I believe him to be a State trickster.

(E. 612)

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The Bishop’s mild, superior manner continues to provoke Blake:

In addition to the moral evidence (as you are pleased to think it) against the Bible, you threaten, in the progress of your work, to produce such other evidence as even a priest cannot deny. A philosopher in search of truth forfeits with me all claim to candour and impartiality, when he introduces railing for reasoning, vulgar and illiberal sarcasm in the room of argument. I will not imitate the example you set me; but examine what you shall produce, with as much coolness and respect, as if you had given the priests no provocation; as if you were a man of the most unblemished character, subject to no prejudices, actuated by no bad designs, not liable to have abuse retorted upon you with success.  

Blake explodes:

Is not this Illiberal Has not the Bishop given himself the lie in the moment the first words were out of his mouth Can any man who writes so pretend that he is in a good humour. Is not this the Bishops cloven foot. has he not spoil’d the hasty pudding

(E. 616)

The Bishop’s cloven foot is his facility with delicate accusation, the smooth inquisitorial skills of the state trickster. The rhetoric of fair play, moderation, impartiality and reasoned debate is altogether at odds with what it conceals: a primitive murderous intent and the punitive purpose of the state inquisitor. The Bishop himself would be a strong candidate in the traditional attempt to match the allegorical personages of the bard’s song with real people. Certainly An Apology for The Bible and The Life of Milton may be relevant contexts for Blake’s poem. The value of identifying such contexts is that it establishes Milton as a product of public discourses as well as private experiences. Stuart Curran rightly objects to the predominance of biographical interpretation in Blake studies, because it deters wider historical and intertextual contextualization of the epics:

[W]e must end... the most pernicious vestige of the era when mad Blake prompted irrational criticism—what I would call the flying inductive leap. Yeats and Ellis are the most famous, but neither the least nor last, to re-write Blake by unsubstantiated assertion.

Asserting the gnostic origins of Blake’s ‘Hyle’, who appears twice in Milton and more frequently in Jerusalem, Curran rejects the old association between Hayley and Hyle. This association has the effect of rooting Blake’s concept of evil firmly in his personal

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58 Watson (1797), Letter 1, p. 9.
59 Curran, Stuart, ‘Blake and the Gnostic Hyle: A Double Negative’, in Essential Articles for the
experience involving Hayley. Just as I argue that Milton’s bard’s song derives from more ambitious goals than villifying Hayley, Curran protests that Jerusalem’s Hyle derives from a more broadly significant context than Blake’s difficulties with his patron:

S. Foster Damon... glossed Hyle as “the Bad Artist” and launched his career through dozens of later commentaries where all his similarities with Hayley were expanded upon, amplified—and invented. Frye, Erdman, and Bloom are no exceptions. And the most recent complete edition of Blake’s poems [Stevenson, 1971] informs all the budding intellects of the British Isles that “‘Hyle’ derives from ‘Hayley’, the self-satisfied intellectual.”

Although the reader of Milton is not explicitly referred to any texts other than Paradise Lost and the Bible, its characterisation of Satan gestures towards public as well as private contexts: the state church and its orthodox apologists, as well as those who had shown pity and contempt for Blake and his work. There is also an element of class conflict in this characterisation. This has been related by Frye to the tensions between Blake and Hayley, but, again, can be related to Blake’s stance towards British culture more widely. The antinomian convictions expressed in Milton may themselves be identified as a product of class. E. P. Thompson notes that ‘in cultural or intellectual terms it is significant that antinomianism is an artisan or tradesman stance.’ With Hayley, as with the Bishop, it was ‘polite disapprobation’ that Blake could not tolerate. Thompson’s study of the links between antinomianism and the tradesman class, and his account of the relations between this class and the ‘polite society’, is relevant here.

Everything in the age of ‘reason’ and ‘elegance’ served to emphasise the sharp distinctions between a polite and a demotic culture. Dress, style, gesture, proprieties of speech, grammar and even punctuation were resonant with the signs of class; the polite culture was an elaborated code of social inclusion and exclusion.

Thompson adds that antinomianism ‘can be seen as an extreme recourse open to the excluded’:

The profoundly paternalist character of the dominant social thought and moral sensibility is curtly challenged by the antinomian vocabulary of the humble

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saints persecuted by the temporal powers. Above all, antinomianism offered a central challenge to the Moral Law in a society whose legitimating ideology was precisely that of Law.... [T]his same polite and rule-governed society multiplied new prohibitions and capital offences on every side, placing the altar of Tyburn at the centre of its institutions.  

This account, antinomian culture is the context in which Hayley’s influence upon Milton should be evaluated. Hayley had attempted to redeem John Milton as a pillar of this polite culture. Blake responds by imagining Milton in just this mode, as a discredited Satan, declaring ‘I hold the Balances of Right & Just & mine the Sword’ (plate 39, E. 140, l. 54). Significantly, Thompson uses Milton to epitomise Blake’s ‘conscious posture of hostility to the polite culture’, quoting the preface’s address to the ‘Young Men of the New Age’, which he says ‘assumes the tones of class war’. Hayley had attempted to promote the affectionate memory of John Milton to the polite culture of his day, stressing his personal morality and the morally edifying uses of his poems. His regicidal politics are brushed aside as a mistake:

Milton undoubtedly thought, what an ardent political writer of the present age has not scrupled to assert, that ‘Charles the First lived and died a hypocrite.’ These two acute judges of mankind were, I believe, mistaken in this idea: it seems more probable, that this unfortunate prince was flattered into a persuasion, that he was really the meritorious martyr his adherents endeavoured to represent him.

Blake might also have taken offence at Johnson’s account of Milton, but its tone would have been more acceptable to him than that of Hayley. Johnson offers ‘blunt abuse’ of Milton’s politics, which he paternalistically characterises as a product of envy, insubordination and disobedience:

His political notions were those of an acrimonious and surly republican ... Milton’s republicanism was, I am afraid, founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence; in petulance impatient of controll, and pride disdainful of superiority. He hated monarchs in the state and prelates in the church; for he hated all whom he was required to obey.

If Hayley wanted to reinvent Milton for the consumption of a polite, paternalistic culture, and Johnson had rejected him on behalf of that culture, then Blake’s epic has Milton identify with and then ‘cast off’ the values of this culture in his

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107 Johnson (1905), pp. 156-7.
encounter with Satan. My third chapter presents a reading of the bard's song as a radically antinomian fable describing the power of ideological values to distort perceptions and behaviour. My second appendix returns to this antinomian theme and to Thompson, with a discussion of some links between Blake's argument in Milton and the theology of the Muggletonians. It is necessary now to extend our survey of the poem's reception to the critical field at large.

III

In discussion of the editorial annotations published with photographic and typographical reproductions of Milton, we defined three broad conceptions of Blake's project in creating the poem: to explore his private concerns and review the events of his visit to Felpham; to assail his contemporaries with an argument about cosmology and ethics, and to nurture the spiritual development of a devotional reader. I have suggested the importance of the second view, which emphasises the poem's interaction with public discourses and debates. In this section I will refer to some of the critical works on Milton, indicating the particularly interesting and important arguments that have been made about it. Detailed criticism of the poem began in 1924 with S. Foster Damon's William Blake, His Philosophy and Symbols. This work was very influential on later criticism and on the editions themselves. Like most of the works I will discuss, it belongs to the second type of approach outlined above, representing an attempt to articulate the argument of Milton, which it characterises as the rejection of Puritanism, inspired by Blake's experience of its effects on Hayley.

Two subjects dominate critical discussions of Milton: theology and cosmology. Many critics, from Damon onwards, describe Blake's supposed argument concerning these subjects in terms of a response to John Milton or to an aspect of his reputation. For example, the poem may be read as a repudiation of the theological vision of Paradise Lost, or as a critique of certain ontological and cosmological assumptions found in that poem. Most agree that John Milton is an object of criticism more than admiration in Blake's poem, although an early exception is Frederick Pierce, who published in 1927 an essay arguing that Blake's criticism was reserved for those readers who had misunderstood Milton: 'Blake wrote Milton to correct not Milton's
errors but *errors due to the misinterpretation of his teaching by later generations.*

Pierce finds a sympathetic response to Milton even in the catalogue of violence and idolatry associated on plate 37 (E. 137-8, l. 15-46) with ‘Milton’s Shadow’: ‘I question whether “Milton’s Shadow,” which seems to be kept distinct from Milton, and obviously inferior, does not represent what literary historians would call “the Milton tradition,” the degraded misinterpretation of his thoughts by readers and critics who could not rise to his level.’ In this reading, no development of Milton’s values is required before he ‘returns to the world to teach men the true gospel about art and ethics.’ Most critics, however, assume that Milton is indeed one of the targets of the poem’s attacks, and debate arises only concerning the details of the critique advanced against him.

One of the key debates concerns the theological argument of *Milton*, and the entailed critique of Milton’s religious thought. There are two main topics in contention: the poem’s apocalyptic or millenarian theme, and its analysis of the theology of atonement. There is also a degree of consensus: most critics assume that *Milton* articulates Blake’s rejection of the basic theology of *Paradise Lost*, in which God is envisioned as essentially remote from humanity, and in which man’s relationship with God is defined by obligation, failure and sin, necessitating Christ’s redemption. It is clear that Blake’s theology aims to collapse the rigid ontological distinction between God and Man, celebrating the divinity within humanity, and promoting a mystical experience of this. *Milton* contains a plea of just this kind, delivered in the authorial voice:

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Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand?  
It has a heart like thee; a brain open to heaven & hell,  
Withinside wondrous & expansive; its gates are not clos’d,  
I hope thine are not: hence it clothes itself in rich array;  
Hence thou art cloth’d with human beauty O thou mortal man.  
Seek not thy heavenly father then beyond the skies...  
(plate 18, E. 114, l. 27-32)
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However, whilst urging a new understanding of the nature and human experience of God, Blake continues to use much of the language of Christianity, and to provoke his

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109 Pierce (1927), pp. 172-3.  
110 Pierce (1927), p. 165
reader’s recollection of the bible. His vision of salvation, typically expressed in
rhapsodic or obscure passages such as conclude *Milton*, persistently involves Jesus and
other Christian symbols. Theological debates about *Milton* involve analysis of how
much orthodox understanding of these symbols is retained in Blake’s use of them. For
example, *Milton* closes with Blake’s reinvention of the idea of Jesus’s second coming.
This event is provoked by Milton’s act of self-annihilation and by his union with
Ololon. The ensuing vision of Jesus dramatises Blake’s alternative divinity, as the
Saviour is a collective presence, incorporating John Milton. It ends when Blake
collapses in his garden, and yet it is invested so heavily with portentous biblical
resonance that it appears also to express millennial or apocalyptic expectations of a
significance far greater than the local setting of the Felpham garden implies. Does the
poem then express faith in the apocalyptic shape of all history, or does it replace this
faith by investing the visionary experience of the present with the import and
significance normally attaching only to the description of cosmic eschatological events?
*Milton*’s theme of providence has raised exactly this debate.

David Riede takes for granted that ‘Blake, of course, denied that God is
inexpressibly other than man’.

He argues that the poem rejects the theology of
obedience that John Milton derived from his unBlakean divinity, and that it dramatises
the dire consequences of this obedience, and the wonderful results of Milton’s
imagined liberation from his meek, unhappy, passive condition shown at the opening of
the poem. Milton’s unhappiness in heaven arises from his teaching that we are
hopelessly cut off from God in our guilty state and wholly dependent on the
intervention of Christ to repair the breach caused by disobedience and sin. According
to Riede, *Milton* rejects the ‘deluded belief constantly reiterated in *Paradise Lost* that
mankind, fallen into materiality, is exiled from eternity and so must learn to wait
meekly and patiently in time’. ‘From the start’, writes Riede, ‘Blake’s theme is that
passive, obedient acceptance of restraint by a mysterious Providence is inimical to
imaginative vision and prophetic utterance’.

Although Riede does not resolve all aspects of the complex discussion of Providence in *Milton*, he argues clearly that

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111 David Riede, ‘Blake’s Milton: on membership in the Church Paul’ in *Re-Membering Milton*, eds.,
salvation is imagined by the poem as a present spiritual experience to be actively sought rather than a deferred gift ultimately to be bestowed by God:

Milton was tempted to his ‘unexampled deed’ by a creative impulse antithetical to quiet obedience—and the ‘unexampled deed,’ of course, is his departure from the false heaven to rewrite the cosmic scheme of Paradise Lost: ‘Things [still] unattempted yet in Prose or Rhyme’. Blake’s lines mock Miltonic patience not only in the invocation to Paradise Lost but in other passages as well. Milton asks ‘What cause / Mov’d our Grand Parents... Who first seduc’t them...?’ but Blake adds a note of impatience: ‘what mov’d Milton... What cause at length mov’d Milton...?’ The addition of ‘at length’ implies that Milton has been rather slow, but it also echoes a later passage from Paradise Lost to show the source of his hesitation is his belief that Providence decrees the role of humanity to be an indefinite waiting in a vegetative state until by degrees of merit rais’d

They open to themselves at length the way
Up hither, under long obedience tri’d
And Earth be chang’d to Heav’n, and Heav’n to Earth,
One Kingdom, Joy and Union without end

The apocalyptic union projected in these lines is admirable, but from Blake’s perspective it should take place here and now, in the human imagination, not in the indefinite future and beyond the skies. Milton’s patient ‘long obedience’ merely forestalls imaginative apocalypse, rather than bringing it about. Like the devils in Hell whose discussion of Providence finds ‘no end, in wand’ring mazes lost’ (PL II. 561), Milton in heaven can only endlessly ponder ‘the intricate mazes of Providence’.113

For Riede, then, Milton defines providence as a present reality, unconnected with the passage of time or with personal or national history.

A more complex view is put by Peter Alan Taylor’s essay ‘Providence and the Moment in Blake’s Milton’. Like Riede he argues that providence in Milton relates primarily to private spiritual experience. The final work of providence, the last judgement does not take place in the public historical realm:

For Blake, the Second Coming is not to be only the unique event that concludes history, but a continually ongoing event that redeems man in history, because, as he says in his “Vision of the Last Judgment”:

Whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth, a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual.

[PL 652]

Rejection of error occurs in the moment of inspiration, and in that moment, in the “Last Judgment,” the inspired individual becomes one with Jesus, as Milton has at the end of the poem.114

114 Peter Alan Taylor, ‘Providence and the Moment in Blake’s Milton’, Blake Studies, 4:1
The arena of such providence is the individual self: 'it is actually in the mind of the poet that the providential circuit is completed... in the moment that transcends time'.

Taylor describes a trajectory from Blake’s earlier hopes for a historical manifestation of providence to his ultimately quietist stance. He asserts the similarity between this development and John Milton’s own disillusionment, expressed in *Paradise Lost*, concerning the immanence of eschatological events. He argues that Los speaks for Blake when he urges his sons to be patient, expressing Blake’s own loss of faith in an immanent historical apocalypse:

By the time of *Milton* Orc’s place as Blake’s hero is taken by Los, who must struggle to retain his vision of a nature potentially redeemable despite the constraints of history. Orc’s displacement reflects Blake’s fading reliance on political revolution as a historical force. In *Milton* Blake explicitly identifies himself, not with the revolutionary Orc, who remains bound in chains throughout the poem, but with Los, who knows that man cannot anticipate the workings of providence and who cautions against precipitous action... Los recognizes in Milton’s return a sign that the period given to creation is nearly at an end, but he urges patience even at this time because he knows he is working within a providential design that cannot be hastened.\(^{115}\)

Whilst Taylor’s primary understanding of Blake’s providence concerns an immediate spiritual experience, he also describes a belief in the providential shape of history. It is this belief which necessitates patience, as it entails no immanent millenarian expectation. Taylor writes that Milton’s mature vision of providence emerged as a consequence of his ‘withdrawal from his earlier position of millenial expectation’. In *Paradise Lost*,

the progress of history, as recounted by Michael to Adam, affirms the workings of providence in temporal affairs, but the advent of the Second Coming is relegated to the indefinite future. Milton’s altered view is illustrated with even greater clarity in *Paradise Regained*; when Satan tempts Christ to assert himself as the Messiah and lead the captive Israelites from under the Roman yoke, Christ replies that he chooses rather to place the fate of his people in his Father’s hands: “To his due time and providence I leave them” (III:440). When Christ—and Milton—rely on providence, they rely on the shaping force that directs history in patterns that even Christ, the wisest of men, cannot fully comprehend.\(^{116}\)

\(^{115}\)Taylor (1971), p. 46.

\(^{116}\)Taylor (1971), p. 44.
Mitchell condemns the essay for arguing that the poem reveals in Blake 'a growing conservatism or a flight into romantic idealism'. This is because Taylor does not either ascribe to Blake the radical position that there is no divinely controlled shape to history, or the opposite belief that we are living in the eschatological period. Taylor indicates that the poem points to an ultimate 'real', historical, public apocalypse and to an immediate 'private' apocalypse, but not to an immediate or immanent public revolutionary event, which, he implies, would not be 'in accord with Blake's altered view of revolutionary action as a way of changing history'. Mitchell's dissatisfaction with Taylor's position may arise in part from its failure to account for a deep ambivalence in the poem itself. Taylor assumes that Los represents Blake's and the poem's view of providential expectation, but does not account for the conflict within Los's own position. Los's speech urging patience also contains an overflowing of apocalyptic longing:

O when shall we tread our Wine-presses in heaven; and Reap
Our wheat with shoutings of joy, and leave the Earth in peace
(plate 22, E. 119, l. 45-6)

Passages about the great harvest and the winepresses, including the final lines of the poem, contain both the urgency expressed by Los, and a strong suggestion of the public, collective aspect of apocalypse. Neither quality of this writing is acknowledged in Taylor's account of the poem's patient stance, or of his wholly psychologised understanding of the second coming.

The ambivalence missed by Taylor is expressed ably by Steven Vine. He identifies the tension at the end of the poem between a real historical apocalypse and an ongoing experience of an apocalyptic visionary life:

In spite of the poem's declared doctrine, it seems that history never quite becomes apocalypse in Milton; indeed, instead of the elimination of history, apocalypse in the poem becomes a continual series of 'annihilations' in history.  

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Similarly, Thomas Vogler writes that ‘MIL/TON does not conclude with the end of
time, but with the hoped-for beginning of a moment that can be multiplied.’
Peter Otto draws on his readings of Jerusalem, as well as of the notebook work called A
Vision of the Last Judgement, and of Milton in order to articulate this Blakean paradox
of an eschatological experience of historical time:

In ontic time it is true that apocalypse appears at the very moment that Error is
consolidated and the Antichrist appears. From this perspective it does indeed
seem that regeneration bears no relationship to the history that precedes it, but,
in vision, apocalypse can be seen to be an event which occurs throughout the
six thousand year extent of the fallen body of Albion.... Vision is... able to see
in the ‘now’ both the fact of enclosure and the possibility of regeneration. The
fallen world closes the self within a dull round of six thousand years duration
and so postpones regeneration: the apocalypse is ‘not yet’. But this round is a
moment in the life of Albion, and therefore apocalypse and regeneration can be
pictured as crowding in on all sides of the fleeting moment of withdrawal. The
reality of apocalypse is ‘now’. On the one hand ‘Error or Creation will be
Burned Up... the Moment Men cease to behold it’ (VLJE565). On the other
hand ‘Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New
Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct
Contrary’.... In casting off the enclosure of the self a last judgement passes
upon the self, but this event must be repeated again and again, for the
apocalypse is ‘not yet’.

A similar set of ambiguities within Milton fuels another debate, which concerns
the poem’s analysis of atonement theology. This theme is introduced in the invocation,
which denounces the ideology of the False Tongue, by which the death of Jesus has
been interpreted as benefiting humankind as ‘an offering and an atonement’. The
theme is sustained throughout the bard’s song with its references to ‘Calvarys foot’
and to the doctrine that ‘Christ took on sin in the virgin’s womb and put it off on the
cross’ (plate f, E. 98, l. 3). The bard recalls the incarnation and death of Christ in
terms which appear both to deplore the incarnation and to celebrate its results:

For then the Body of Death was perfected in hypocritic holiness,
Around the Lamb, a Female Tabernacle woven in Cathedrons Looms
He died as a Reprobate, he was Punish’d as a Transgressor!
Glory! Glory! Glory! to the Holy Lamb of God.
(plate 11, E. 107, l. 25-9)

121 Peter Otto, Constructive Vision and Visionary Deconstruction: Los, Eternity, and the Productions
Many critics feel that the association of Christ’s life and death with hypocrisy and punishment is intended to indicate the inherently evil nature of atonement doctrine. However, the bard’s joyful outburst also evokes the possibility of a positive view of it. This positive view is reinforced by parallels between the willing death of Christ and Milton’s own mission of self-annihilation. All critics and readers accept that self-annihilation is a positive value promoted by the poem. The disagreement arises over whether the teaching of self-annihilation replaces all formulations of the doctrine of salvation through the death of Christ, or whether it is an extension and validation of such doctrine.

Florence Sandler states the latter case in the course of her argument that Blake’s primary task in Milton is to ‘purge and clarify the religious vision of John Milton, master spirit, Christian, poet-prophet and republican.’ At the heart of this purpose was to draw attention to ‘the corruption of love and prophecy that consists in the cult of sacrifice, sanctioned by the official doctrines of Jesus’ atonement on the Cross’. For Sandler it is not the celebration of Christ’s death which offends Blake, but the way in which it has been interpreted:

Only the Spectre or Satan demands Human Sacrifices, Blake protests…. Only contrition and forgiveness, born of love, can respond to Jesus’ laying down his own life in love.

Sandler’s account of Blake’s rejection of the sacrificial understanding of Christ’s death is balanced by the assumption that this death nevertheless remains central to Blake’s vision of redemption. Both aspects of this position can be readily identified in Blake’s writings beyond Milton. On the one hand Blake wrote that ‘Christ’s Crucifix shall be made an excuse for Executing Criminals,’ (E. 697) and told Crabb Robinson that Christ should not have allowed himself to be put to death. On the other hand he wrote with admiration of Christ’s willing death: ‘The only thing for Newtonian & Baconian Philosophers to Consider is this: Whether Jesus did not suffer himself to be Mock’d by Caesar’s Soldiers Willingly, & to Consider this to all Eternity will be Comment Enough’ (E. 669).

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124 Bentley, (1969), p. 311: ‘He was wrong in suffering himself to be crucified’.
Accordingly, many critics regard *Milton* as offering a modified account of salvation through Christ’s death, in which this death is afforded a unique exemplary, but not vicarious status. These include Steven Vine, Peter Otto, W. J. T. Mitchell, James Rieger, Mary Lynn Johnson and Margaret Hall. Only a few critics regard celebration of the death of Christ as a total abomination in *Milton*. One example of this view is found in the edition of Easson and Easson, who assume that the symbolic value for the churches of Christ’s passion is a sign of their Natural Religion:

Established upon a curse, constructed upon a system of sacrifice and offerings, Natural Religion and the teachers of its false doctrines even made Jesus, “the image of the Invisible God,” its “prey: a curse, an offering, and an atonement / For Death Eternal.” Subsequently, this Natural Religion sought its emblems in the miracle of virgin birth, the cruelty of the crucifixion, the life and death of Christ in the natural body, as its doctrine “Christ took on Sin in the Virgin’s Womb, & put it off on the Cross” symbolizes.

As well as the cruelty and ideological dangers associated with traditional atonement theology, some critics identify a further critique of it. This derives from the traditional Pelagian objection to classical atonement theology, namely that guilt is not transferable from one individual to another. This logically invalidates accounts of Christ’s death assuaging our guilt. There is evidence that Blake himself held this view, again deriving from Crabb Robinson, who records that Blake told him in connection with atonement doctrine ‘It is a horrible doctrine—If another man pay your debt I do not forgive it.’

Easson and Easson identify the vicarious model of the atonement as ‘the major temptation of Natural Religion: the deception that we can be saved by a teacher’. Similarly, Peter Otto has made a close study of the bard’s song, which he reads as an analysis of the flawed nature of mediated relationships, epitomised by the atonement scenario. This kind of reading creates an important distinction between the poem’s opposing models: vicarious atonement and self-annihilation. Whilst self-annihilation is expressed in terms strongly reminiscent of the sacrificial scenario of atonement, the crucial difference is that it is an action undertaken by an individual on his own behalf.

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The emphasis on addressing one's own 'Satan' or 'Elect' or 'Selfhood' reconciles the poem's advocacy of self-annihilation with its rejection of the sacrificial model of atonement.

The second major debate on the poem's intellectual content concerns cosmology and imagination. Northrop Frye initiated this debate by reading Milton as confirmation of his one of his core beliefs about Blake, namely that he 'is protesting against the implication that man is material to be formed by an external world and not the former or imaginer of the material world'. Frye argues that Blake's poem aims to correct John Milton's relationship with this phenomenal created world, to teach him 'to see the physical world as Satanic rather than divine'; to acknowledge 'the vision of Paradise Regained, in which Satan offers Christ so many of the "good" things of a fallen world that it eventually dawns on us that the world and the devil are the same thing, and that thing an illusion.' In his 'Notes for a Commentary on Milton', Frye states that 'Milton resolves to return to the world in human form to bring about a dialectical opposition between imagination and nature, and to stop the cycle of nature from turning.' This reading emphasises the poem's sustained exploration of an invisible world of spiritual animation within the human body and phenomenal world at the close of Milton's first book, which concludes with the statement 'Nature is a Vision of the Science of the Elohim' (plate 28, E. 128, l. 64-5). Apprehension of nature as a vision is the role of imagination, which is passionately defended by Milton at the close of the poem. Because imagination is placed in binary oppositions with 'memory' or 'nature', it is viewed by Frye and his followers primarily as an alternative faculty of perception, overriding the data of the senses. It is also opposed to the methods of 'Bacon, Newton and Locke', Blake's standard representatives of empirical philosophy. Imagination as the fuel for literary or artistic creativity is the secondary, and related sense of the term.

A difficulty with such cosmological readings is that they do not appear to take due account of the literary qualities of the poem. As I argued above in relation to the

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editions, too many critics assume that the cosmological passages spring solely from Blake's desire to correct commonly held views such as that our world is a 'Globe rolling thro Voidness' (plate 28, E.127, l. 16). Whilst Blake may have held unconventional cosmological views and wished to promote them in his poem, there is an added quality to much of this writing which takes it beyond the realm of exposition. For example, it is not appropriate to regard the rhapsodic descriptions of the labours of Los's family at the conclusion of Book One as simply expounding an anti-Newtonian cosmological argument. This material belongs to a larger project within the poem promoting a certain kind of spiritual discipline, by which our normal confidence in our perceptions of the world of matter is deliberately suspended. Thus we are invited to imagine the area described by the body of a fly as a vast space 'wondrous & expansive' (plate 18, E. 114, l. 29). Blake's point might be that our complacency about the solid and familiar nature of objects is leading us to habits of spiritual and mental rigidity and ossification. A connection of this kind is made on plate 27:

the poor indigent is like the diamond which tho cloth'd In rugged covering in the mine, is open all within And in his hallowd center holds the heavens of bright eternity (plate 27, E. 126, l. 36-8)

The sustained vision of the plasticity of the dimensions of space and time may express a spiritual purpose to encourage the spirit of awe and wonder which in turn gives support to Blake's claim that each human being is invested with the divine presence. In order to promote this spiritual doctrine Milton exploits an aesthetic effect created by denying the dominant discourses controlling our normal understanding of space and time. For this reason it is not appropriate to identify the purpose of Milton as the repudiation of false cosmologies. The aesthetic effect of the poem depends on our inability to accept these passages as true factual exposition.

There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find Nor can his Watch Fiends find it, but the Industrious find This Moment & it multiply. & when it once is found It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed (plate 35, E. 136. l. 42-45)

The mentally arresting effect of this passage is not achieved through persuading us that it is a correct statement of objective fact. We may find the vision of time as an interactive element of our experience enticing, but most readers are unlikely to accept it
seriously. It is this unacceptability of the idea that our experience of time is contingent that enables this passage to have its impact on us, forcing us to confront intellectually and emotionally just how stifling are our normal mental habits. I am attempting to distinguish two alternative understandings of Milton’s sceptical cosmology: that the poem denies the objective reality of space and the impersonal progression of time; and, in the second place, the view I hold, that the poem attempts to suspend belief in those realities for the purpose of revealing to us the limitations entailed in our normal view of space and time. As De Luca writes:

The value of the World of Los passage is not to be found in the lessons of its cosmography, but rather in the exuberance of its invention and the multitudinous variety of its scope. The responsive reader passes through it and returns to the narrative, and to Milton’s ultimate confrontation of Satan, with an enhanced sense of how crucial it is to overcome Satanic one-dimensionality.  

Several critics read the cosmological passages in the poem without this latter insight. David E. James and John Fuller state that the poem argues the unreality of the world defined by empiricism. Fuller states that Milton denies ‘our usual conceptions of time and space’. ‘For Blake’, he adds ‘time and space are not absolutes exterior to the perceiving mind but relatives dependent on it’. James asserts that:

In place of the post-Newtonian universe of scientific fact, in which reality is reduced to materiality and religion to deism, Blake proposes a dynamic, subjective universe of spiritual expansion

More awareness of the literary qualities of Blake’s cosmological writing is shown by Leslie Brisman and Ronald L. Grimes, who focus on time, and on the soteriological implications of the poem’s vision of the malleability and recuperability of this dimension. Brisman contrasts the role of Los as the guardian of lost time and the incapacity of Milton’s Satan to conquer time. In Paradise Lost the devils forget the past and are doomed continually to relive it; whereas Satan of Paradise Regained cannot think about the future. Grimes connects this role of Los with his depiction as an eternal youth:

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135 Leslie Brisman, Milton’s Poetry of Choice and Its Romantic Heirs
Since the possibility of an eschaton of imagination is ever-present, not, as in some first-century eschatologies, just a possibility at the historical end of the world, Los is said to be the eternal youth. He is the time of imagination, not the time of atomistically conceived history or the time of restless sleep.\(^{136}\)

The poem's challenge to the dominant view of linear time and causality is linked to dissatisfaction with the slow Miltonic providence we have already discussed. Grimes comments that Milton's dynamic vision of time is at odds with the steady providential approach to apocalypse:

> The end which is anticipated [by Milton] is not the kind to be waited upon with patience in the face of martyrdom. Rather the telos of past and present is written and imagined forward in such a manner that the vision of the "end" breaks back in upon the present and past and reshapes them.\(^{137}\)

This vision of time is another aspect of the poem's challenge to the limited hopes for redemption expressed in Paradise Lost. It invites the reader to see the poverty of a soteriological programme based on the indefinite waiting according to the linear procedures of time. In challenging purely argumentative interpretations of the cosmological materials in the poem, we have entered into the third kind of reading identified above, in which the poem is regarded as engaging the reader spiritually rather than intellectually. For these cosmological passages are best construed as a spiritual rather than intellectual challenge to the reader. Or, perhaps as challenging the reader spiritually by demonstrating to him the contingency and paucity of his intellectual beliefs, as well as how deeply entrenched and far reaching they are. The narrative style of the poem is frequently presented by critics as Blake's primary mode of spiritual assault on his reader.

The poem's vision of time and space is formulated deliberately and necessarily in opposition to dominant discourses. Similarly the narrative style of Milton may derive partly from Blake's intention to challenge his reader's quotidian expectations. Several critics have commented that the disjunctive and repetitive style endorses the vision of the plasticity of time expressed by Los and in the narrative voice. Some stress the collapsing of spatial and chronological distinctions in the poem, such that apparently separate happenings are revealed as aspects of a single, momentary event.

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\(^{137}\) Grimes (1973), p. 70.
Damon noted in 1924 that ‘Practically all the action of the epic passes in one moment.’\textsuperscript{138} Susan Fox’s book \textit{Poetic Form in Blake’s Milton} is devoted to the exposition of the narrative mode of the poem and states that

\begin{quote}

The act that ends the millennium, the day, the moment, occurs in all its complexity on all levels of reality at the same instant. It is composite not only of the descents of Milton and Ololon, but also of the purgations of Los and Blake, the appearance of Jesus, and the renovation of Satan and Milton—all of which occur simultaneously with Milton’s realization of the Bard’s prophecy.\textsuperscript{139}
\end{quote}

James and Fuller find powerful reasons for this unusual narrative project. James defines this project as follows:

\begin{quote}

At first sight, \textit{Milton} seems to contain material of two kinds: it seems to be both a discursive explication of Blake’s theories of how the universe is made up, his \textit{De Rerum Natura}, and also a description of certain specific events which happen in that nature. Yet items of the second kind do not withstand the kind of scrutiny one would expect to be appropriate. On analysis, it becomes apparent that \textit{Milton} contains only one event, a kernel paradigm of action that is reproduced in a number of forms and contexts. Even what appears to be the most extended action, the record of Milton’s experiences, consists essentially of one act of imaginative vision. The apparent narrative, rather than placing that act in a series of other actions to which it is related by chronological cause and effect, simply explores its meaning through a number of metaphors. Finally, the separate narratives which appear to be discrete are again united in that all are different symbolic expressions of, or alternative perspectives on, the same act, and each is resolved simultaneously with the others. Blake’s act of perception, Ololon’s act of affirmation, and Milton’s annihilation of his spectre are all different renditions of the one act of perception.\textsuperscript{140}
\end{quote}

James argues that the confusion experienced by the reader is intentional:

\begin{quote}

For \textit{Milton} is a poem that manifestly attempts, through its poetic form, to change the reader’s consciousness. It \textit{is} a difficult poem to read, and part of its importance is the challenge it presents to our ordinary reading habits. Blake’s intention was not simply to transmit information, but to modify quite specifically and radically our whole perceptual process; the poem insists on the uniqueness of its form as intrinsic to its meaning.\textsuperscript{141}
\end{quote}

James, like Frye believes that it is above all the relationship between the individual and the external world, including the natural world, which Blake intends to reconfigure through his poem’s inculcation of the imagination. Fuller finds the same purpose in the difficult narrative style.

\begin{footnotesize}

\textsuperscript{138} Damon (1924), p. 179.
\textsuperscript{140} James (1978), p. 5.
\textsuperscript{141} James (1978), p. 1.
\end{footnotesize}
A poem which denies, as *Milton* does, our usual conceptions of time and space would negate this aspect of its subject by its form were it a sequential narrative of events taking place in fixed and separate locations. For Blake time and space are not absolutes exterior to the perceiving mind but relatives dependent on it. All the poem’s shifting locations are therefore aspects of one human-divine imagination in which the experience has its being—Milton’s, Blake’s, and, in so far as we are fit readers, our own. And since *Milton* records, with all its contributing factors, a single moment of transcendent awareness, all the events of the poem (though literature by its nature compels us to follow them sequentially) are shown as taking place simultaneously in that moment of pure being, a moment in time and yet out of time such as Eliot describes in *Four Quartets*, a moment in which life is for the time not the half-real dream that Prospero describes as our normal waking state. The extraordinary form of *Milton* which imposes such strains on the poem’s intelligibility finds its justification, if anywhere, in its attempt to render as well as record this experience of being outside time as we usually experience it.¹⁴²

Beyond the central debates surrounding *Milton* as a work of theology or cosmology are some valuable readings, which explore the relationship between Blake and his vision of Milton in terms other than merely the doctrinal substance of his poems. A significant theme in the poem’s reception has been the analysis of the extent to which Blake is hostile to his poetic forbear Milton. Stephen Vine writes of such a submerged hostility, expressed at a deeper level than the conscious critique of Milton’s life and works. Vine notes the slashing and dividing of Milton’s name on the titlepage:

As a radically revisionary text, Blake’s *Milton* usurps the authority of its poetic father’s truth, daringly reinventing him. But this re-invention also involves an act of disinventing, insubordination and violence, and the text gives Milton a new body in a move that, as the title page suggests, also disembodies and unnames him.¹⁴³

Since the early 1970s, Joseph Anthony Wittreich Jr. has argued for a much more positive connection between Blake and Milton, mediated by Hayley. Wittreich is almost alone in regarding Hayley’s influence on Blake as beneficial, and argues repeatedly that Blake’s epics sprang from his imbibing ‘the Milton tradition’ from Hayley.¹⁴⁴ He argues that Hayley taught Blake both a new understanding of Milton and of epic poetry itself:

For while the grand lines of Blake’s epic design are owing to Milton, many of
its ‘minute particulars’ derive from Hayley—from An Essay on Epic Poetry
(1782) and from The Life of Milton (1796). An Essay charts the course for
a new kind of epic poetry—a course that Blake meticulously follows. The Life
and the essays appended to it forge an attitude toward Milton and his epic
predecessors that Blake accepts and, in his own writings elaborates and
extends.145

Accordingly, Wittreich rejects the standard biographical reading of the Bard’s song as
an attack on Hayley.

Blake seems to have realized that Hayley provided him with an introduction to
the epic poets and their poetry, with a heightened sense of poetical tradition
and its relation to the individual talent, with a deepened understanding of
Milton, with exposure to an impressive library and assistance in learning Greek,
Latin, and Hebrew.146

Wittreich is one of many critics to suggest a special relationship between Milton and
Paradise Regained:

The chief architect of the Romantic myth and the Romantic epic is Blake, who
found in Paradise Regained the most perfect embodiment of Milton’s vision;
but it also marks a shifting away from the traditional emphasis on the myth of
creation and fall and lets the accent fall, in characteristic Romantic fashion, on
the myth of reintegration.147

He regards Blake as consciously imitating Milton’s development towards Paradise
Regained:

With Blake, even in his efforts of the 1790s, the epic poem becomes mind-
centred: its action is internalized; its interest is psychological. That is, of
course, the direction in which Milton was moving in Paradise Lost and the kind
of epic he achieved in Paradise Regained.148

Most critical accounts of the poem’s esteem for Milton argue a middle position
between the hostility and the devotion described by Vine and Wittreich respectively.
Leonard Deen stresses the Christological transfiguration of Milton at the poem’s
conclusion, which resolves Blake’s criticisms of his forbear into a remarkable tribute:

If Blake has a disagreement with Milton, he presents it with extraordinary tact.
In any case, since what Blake and his wife actually produce is the illuminated
poem Milton... we are apparently to see the poem itself as the conception and

145 J. A. Wittreich, Jr., ‘Domes of Mental Pleasure: Blake’s Epics and Hayley’s Epic Theory’, Studies
in Philology 69 (1972), pp. 102-3.
146 Wittreich (1972), p. .
147 Wittreich (1972), p. 110.
rebirth or second coming of Milton as if he were Christ: Milton’s corrected vision of Christ mediated by Blake.149

Similarly Bette Werner and Stephen Cox express the poem’s ambivalence about Milton. Werner writes that

The poem is testimony to Blake’s deep admiration of his predecessor, whom he honors with the imagery of prophecy and the title of “Awakener”. Still, Blake represents the poet at the beginning of his account as unhappy, though in heaven, as he looks down upon his sixfold emanation, scattered through the deep in torment. 

Although Blake believed that Milton’s poetry contained an essential core of authentic vision, he was convinced that this essence remained hidden within a veiling cloud of error. Milton’s emanation is thus originally imagined as a dark cloud spreading across Europe, contaminated by the limitations of his severe Puritan morality, by a theological position that Blake deplores, and by the rationalizing propensities of his scholastic background. In Blake’s vision of the final conflagration, however, when Ololon enters the purifying “Fires of Intellect,” her enfolded clouds are transformed into the apocalyptic garment dipped in blood that surrounds the triumphant Saviour. Milton’s poetry is revealed to be in essence inspired.150

Cox suggests that Blake may have felt rivalrous towards Milton:

Blake’s attempt to demonstrate the priority of intellectual vision to history is especially apparent in his choice of John Milton as a vehicle of his own identification with Christ, Milton was the historical figure with whom Blake felt the strongest sense of kinship and rivalry. He revered Milton as the great poet and prophet of dissenting Protestantism, and he clearly wished to surpass Milton’s accomplishments. He also regarded Milton as an example of an ugly dialectical phenomenon that can result from the relationship between inspiration and temporal experience. Milton the Puritan politician, Milton the moralist, Milton the patriarchal paterfamilias could not have been an attractive figure to Blake.151

Of particular interest are the accounts of Blake’s response to Milton as poet and artist, as well Christian and thinker. Murray McArthur identifies in Milton a critique of the dead poet’s vision of his own inspiration. McArthur notes that whereas Milton dictated Paradise Lost, and invoked a singing muse, Blake identifies himself as the scriptor of his poem, and, in his invocation, instructs his muses ‘to assist him in

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executing the physical act of writing'. McArthur associates Milton’s dictatorial mode with his legalistic theology:

As a result of his oral dictate, Milton and his six-fold muse have mineralized into “seven rocky masses terrible.” Milton himself has become the “Rock Sinai,” a location Blake identified with what he saw as the dictatorial prohibitions of the Mosaic code.\(^{153}\)

In this reading, Milton’s vision of God and of the source of his inspiration was dangerously remote from our world. McArthur notes the contrast in Blake’s work:

The epic voice of *Paradise Lost* has become an epic hand in *Milton*. Rather than wrapping his singing robes around him and declaiming in fearful eloquence, he insists on both his role as scriptor and his location: “Albions land: / Which is this earth of vegetation on which now I write.”\(^ {154}\)

Milton’s vision of creativity is one of the causes of his unhappiness in Blake’s heaven:

He expected to find a single transcendent language in heaven, the language of pure presence that he associated with Urania; instead, he finds the dramatic dialogues of Blake’s mythology…. Blake reverses time to transmit an enlarged awareness of the creative act to his precursor.\(^ {155}\)

On a similar theme, David Riede notes the poem’s allegation against Milton’s capacity to express his own poetic vision, stymied by the abject humility inherent in his own theology:

[T]he immediate effect on Blake as Milton enters into his foot and his ‘Spectrous body’ redounds over the sources of inspiration on Horeb and Sinai is to make him doubt the ability of his tongue to speak:

Oh how can I will my gross tongue that cleaveth to the dust
Tell of the Four-fold Man …

The lines parody Milton’s view, frequently reiterated in *Paradise Lost*, that human (or even angelic) speech cannot adequately describe the works of the Almighty.

What thought can measure thee or tongue relate thee?\(^ {156}\)

Riede states Blake’s argument that ‘Milton must recognize that true inspiration comes not from subduing the flesh to the spirit and taking dictation from a distant God, but from accepting the creative energies of the senses as a part of the Eternal Great


Humanity Divine. An alternative articulation of Blake’s critique of Milton’s source of inspiration is offered by R. Paul Yoder, who stresses Milton’s classicism:

In *Milton a Poem*, Milton the poet is inspired by the Bard’s Song to leave Eternity and return to earth in order to correct the errors perpetuated by his life and work, and especially by *Paradise Lost*. When Milton rises, his first words are “I go to Eternal Death!” the Nations still / Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam” (*Milton* 14:14-15, E. 108). These words suggest that Blake’s critique of Milton is also a critique of the classical tradition which Milton explicitly engaged (in the invocation to Book IX of *Paradise Lost*, for example) but which in Blake’s eyes he failed to dispatch.

The debates described so far account for only two of the three general approaches to the poem we discovered in the editorial annotations. There are also some critical works which aspire to assess the poem from the point of view of Blake himself. The classic readings by Frye and Damon contributed the anti-Hayley interpretation, in which the poem is perceived as a lengthier and more complex version of the private notebook doggerels to which Blake apparently resorted when tormented by rage against his patron. In a refreshing reading Paul Youngquist accentuated the therapeutic function of the poem in relation to mental instability rather than anger. He expresses dissatisfaction with the expository preoccupations of Blake scholarship, suggesting that *Milton* should be read as a psychic ‘drama of Blake’s poetic empowerment’. He wrote in 1990 that ‘the poem awaits a criticism adequate to its rigors’. His own attempt argues that it was written as a form of self-therapy in the course of Blake’s attempt to overcome mental illness:

If criticism is to be equal to the task of interpreting *Milton*, it must give up the old fiction of a difference between Blake’s visions and hallucination. However intellectual, those visions are the fruits of a pathological distortion of consciousness, an experience that reveals a world, or more precisely, elements of *this* world, hitherto closed from sight and mind. Blake has seen Milton, beheld Ololon, and his poem is in part an attempt to come to terms with these experiences. Pathology becomes a subject for poetry when Blake places these visions at the center of *Milton*.

He states that ‘the Bard’s Song is all about madness’, which he identifies as ‘a thematic preoccupation in a poem whose aim is to proclaim Blake’s poetic empowerment.’

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Youngquist then, the accomplishment of the poem *Milton* allowed him to validate his own experiences of hallucination, which ‘takes on legitimacy and significance through myth, which in *Milton* possesses a specific personal function, for it becomes Blake’s means of interpreting that radical otherness he confronts in vision.’ This suggestion is discussed more closely in the concluding chapter of this thesis.

Aside from this speculation as to Blake’s psychological need to write poetry such as *Milton* there is another important critical discussion attempting to express the function of the poem within its author’s life and development. This concerns the poem as a vehicle of Blake’s political development, for the poem has long been read as a watershed in Blake’s career, separating him permanently from his politically optimistic Lambeth period. Sloss and Wallis gloss Los’s reprimand of his sons ‘Break not / Forth in your wrath’ (plate 25, E. 122, l. 57-8) as follows:

> These lines show how far Blake has travelled from the revolutionary and antinomian position of the Lambeth books.\(^{160}\)

The most recent edition of the poem offers a similar interpretation of another passage. Viscomi and Essick write of Los’s recollection of the old prophecy as:

> Los wrongly fears that Milton will release Orc (the reprobate aspect of his self) from the ‘Chain of Jealousy’... As an allegory about the Miltonic tradition in poetry, the fear is that a return of Milton’s voice through Blake will mean a return to Milton’s political revolutionism rather than the (even more revolutionary) reconstitution of his true self as a poet.\(^{161}\)

This is itself a strange interpretation of Los’s sudden memory, since it terminates his fear and depression rather than triggering it: ‘At last when desperation almost tore his heart in twain / He recollected an old prophecy’ (plate 18, E. 115, l. 56-7). However, the argument it gestures towards is a popular one: with *Milton* Blake established an entirely new context for his millenarial revolutionary hopes, namely, the reconstruction of the individual self rather than upheavals in the public domain of history. Similarly, David E. James compares the disappointments of Blake and Milton, and argues that Blake sets out to teach his precursor his own hard lesson:

> His new evaluation of the imagination has convinced Blake of the defect in his own previous work, in the deficiencies of the political vision of the Lambeth books, and similarly of the parallel defects in Milton’s own vision. Recognition of the divinity of the imagination is the core of Milton’s education just as it is

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\(^{160}\) Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 398.

for Blake, both in the poem and in his life outside the poem. In both cases the
necessary concomitant is a realization of the limitations of any vision of
regeneration that does not ascribe the controlling role to the imagination. Only
the redeemed poet can free Orc from his chains of jealousy. Like Milton in his
poem, Blake himself acquires a new vision of Jesus, and in doing so turns his
‘back on these Heavens builded on cruelty’ (32:3), on the political vision of his
youth.162

Later he adds that

Though Milton is expressly an attempt to change the conditions of human
existence, the means of change are radically opposed to traditional means of
reform and in certain instances antithetical to them. Milton learns that he can’t
serve God and politics; he can’t write literature and political propaganda.163

Murray McArthur identifies the same political attitude expressed in the poem’s
message to Milton:

Milton became estranged from his muse and used his sinister or left hand to
write political pamphlets. The whole purpose of Milton is to correct these
linguistic and historical errors and restore Milton to himself as a poet.164

Harold Fisch’s argument is different but with similar consequences. He denies that
Blake’s poem is an attempt at theodicy, at reconciling the reader with our history,
suggesting instead that the poem rejects the historical perspective altogether in favour
of anatomising the ecstatic moment of visionary apprehension.165 Morton Paley’s
account of the Blakean trajectory from ‘Energy’ to ‘Imagination’, has led many to see
Milton as an expression of political despair.166 Indeed, Bronowski argued this in 1943.

In her 1992 book The Promethean Politics of Milton, Blake and Shelley, Linda Lewis
suggests that not only has energy given way to imagination in Milton, but that it shows
that the ‘spirit of inspiration, truth and prophecy is ailing’. From Los’s failure to avert
the chaos and tragedy of the Bard’s song, and his refusal to release Satan from his
mills, Lewis concludes that Blake is admitting the inevitability of the misery of
economic tyranny.167

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Damon (Providence, 1969), pp. 36-56.
166 Morton Paley, Energy and the Imagination: a Study of the Development of Blake’s Thought
167 Linda Lewis, The Promethean Politics of Milton, Blake and Shelley (Columbia,
Few critics make the opposite argument, that *Milton* demonstrates continuity with Blake's positive radicalism of the 1790s. Mitchell argues that 'it expands and deepens the religious and political radicalism of Blake’s earlier work.' Cooper finds a political relevance in Blake’s autobiographical appearance in *Milton*, since this stresses the present historical moment rather than the remote setting of myth:

> [T]he *Book of Urizen* ends with the emergence of ordinary fallen time and space. Blake refrains from extending its history to 1794, the time of writing, for to do so would force him to abandon the safety of impersonal narration and confront his own involvement in the events he is describing. Hence the increasingly direct autobiography of his later poems: the intermittent autobiographical allegories in *The Four Zoas*, the consistent but concealed personal allegory in the Bard’s Song of *Milton*, a poem that culminates when the author casts off his own mythological shroud and steps into the narrative *in propria persona*, and finally the all-but-explicit allegory of Los’s struggle with the spectre of anxious self-doubt and the author’s ongoing efforts to compose *Jerusalem*.

Cooper also stresses the ‘historicist conclusion’ to the poem, in which ‘the author enters his poem as a limited individual whose vision of Jesus is poignant transitory’. For Mitchell, such a conclusion presents a keen challenge to the reader:

> Blake’s prophecies before *Milton* asked the reader to contemplate the events of history from an eternal perspective. Revolution is depicted as something that must break out as surely as the annual birth of spring or the onset of puberty… *Milton* calls the reader, not to contemplation, but to action. It dramatizes the eternal perspective only to subvert its detachment from history and to force the reader to abandon the position of aesthetic disinterest.

Comparisons between early and late works of both Blake and Milton can lead to widely different conclusions. Aaron Fogel compares the trajectory from ‘London’ to *Milton*, with the progress of Milton’s career:

> Simply put, Blake wrote “London” when his revolutionary hopes were still at their strongest. The blackened Church and the running blood are forbears of the modern wall poster which makes the voice of the people apparent. The images of protest in “London,” for all the recognition and silence and ineffectiveness in the poem, are relatively open, and the crescendo of class hatred and class vengeance has a sense of forward movement. The later Blake of the early 1800s turned to a poem about Milton in the midst of the severe reaction to the French Revolution; Milton offered Blake a precedent for dealing with a period of reaction and personal dejection. Milton was the example of

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170 Cooper (1990), p. 641.
continued “progress of voice,” in spite of the apparent muting of open protest.\textsuperscript{172}

Another task of political criticism is to identify the poem’s network of contemporary references. Bronowski was the first to attempt this, with his assessment that ‘The world of Milton is frankly that of the Industrial Revolution’.\textsuperscript{173} Subsequent critical readings have also focused on the depiction of labour in the Bard’s song. Stuart Crehan argues that the quarrel over the division of labour in this song is an allegory, not of Blake’s relationship with Hayley, but of the ‘whole social order’.\textsuperscript{174} In Crehan’s estimation Blake’s depression at Felpham arose from the frustration and guilt of ‘suppressing his radicalism’, rather than simply from painting miniatures instead of writing.\textsuperscript{175} Crehan indicates a general context for the late epics thus:

New sects, mass confessions and conversions are usually the product of extreme social change, crisis and upheaval. Revolution in France, then war, high taxation, inflation and famine, the dispossession of small tenant farmers and their families, urban alienation, and the proletarianisation of independent artisans such as the handloom weavers, pushed capitalism’s new victims either towards violent protest and insurrection, political agitation, or, in periods of defeat, towards what E. P. Thompson has called the ‘chiliasm of despair’. Groans and tears, sighs and trembling, weeping and self-division, howls and shudderings, terror and astonishment, as well as joy, peace and bliss, fill the pages of The Four Zoas, Milton and Jerusalem. Blake was responding to his immediate spiritual-religious environment.\textsuperscript{176}

David Erdman’s response to Milton focuses on its echoes of contemporary wars, and, like Bronowski argues that the poem’s longing for destruction is Blake’s desire for a ‘Last Judgment’ upon the present order of society, and on the King’s warmongering government.\textsuperscript{177} Perhaps the fullest account of contemporary allegory in Milton is that in Jackie DiSalvo’s 1983 book War of Titans: Blake’s critique of Milton and the politics of religion. In her reading the Bard’s song is about exploitation and class war, in which Palamabron represents the ‘liberal Parliamentary reformers, the progressive wing of the respectable class’; Rintrah ‘a fomenter of apocalyptic

\textsuperscript{175} Crehan (1984), 301.
\textsuperscript{176} Crehan (1984), 287.
\textsuperscript{177} David Erdman, William Blake, Prophet Against Empire: a poet’s interpretation of the history of
revolution', and 'Satan himself belongs to that class of the elect, the Calvinist bourgeoisie'. The horses and gnomes of the harrow represent slaves and the working class. The fable of usurpation is read as follows:

Parliamentary power seems to have fallen into Satan’s hands and the revolution under the dominion of a hypocritical class hiding its own self-interest under pretences of reform.

In DiSalvo’s reading this is not a discussion of Blake’s contemporary milieu, but ‘an explicit historical commentary on the English Revolution’. The purpose of Milton’s return, she suggests, is ‘to re-evaluate the revolution he helped to make and to confess what terrible “acts have been perform’d”’.

In essence, his revelation is that “Satan is Urizen” (M10:1) —the revolutionaries have by Blake’s time become a new oppressor class. The plot revolves around a sequence of alliances and betrayals, with an original cooperation among Palamabron, Rintrah, and the Gnomes falling apart as Palamabron is drawn into a league with Satan against his former friends...

There is an interesting insight here into that civil war which had seen very disparate interests unite against the King and then fall into contention among themselves. The revolution, one might say, was waged by a fragile united front comprised of middle-class forces—the Presbyterian Parliament and Independent army officers—joined by humbler subjects whose needs were voiced by rank-and-file Levellers and radical, sometimes communist, propagandists.

It was these ‘lower-class’ radicals who were betrayed in the 1650s. ‘Cromwell had forcibly suppressed the Levellers; Diggers were persecuted and scattered; “mechanick” preachers were silenced and arrested under the Blasphemy Act.’ This highly specific and ambitious reading should be seen as a testament to the powerfully suggestive nature of the bard’s song, rather than the definitive account of it. Part of this power is created by the sheer simplicity of its basic fable of strife amongst brothers leading to chaos. In this way it recalls Chaucer’s stark tale of the three ‘riotoures’ whose quest to find and kill Death leads them to a cache of gold and terminates in their mutual destruction of each other. This tale has traditionally been interpreted according to the structures of dramatic irony created by Pardoner’s own account of his evil deeds.

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However, as David Lawton has shown, this form of elaboration is an unnecessary distraction from the tale itself, and derives from critical assumptions informed by the novel, an inappropriate generic context for Chaucer’s tales.¹⁸³

Like the Pardoner’s Tale, the bard’s song is archetypal, describing a scene of disunity which resembles all situations in which friendship devolves into conflict. In the most popular allegorical scheme Blake’s three brothers are said to represent two aspects of Blake and the Hayley that confronts them. Although doubt must be cast upon claims that the song is fully allegorical, it is clear that it contains a temptation to allegory created by the three names given to the brothers. Rintrah, both phonetically and by association with the argument of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, suggests rage and roaring: ‘Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burdend air’ (E. 33). Satan belongs to Judeo-Christian tradition and his name means ‘Accuser’. Palamabron is a patently invented name, and the most richly suggestive. Alongside ‘Parliament’,¹⁸⁴ the name has been identified as suggesting the essence and spirit of friendship itself. Aaron Fogel analyses it as ‘pal + ama + bro, or all the varieties of brotherly congregation and speech’.¹⁸⁵ In a reading derived from this definition the song would be read as a fable demonstrating the dangers in friendship, which cause Palamabron to pray ‘O God protect me from my friends’ (plate 7, E. 102, l. 5). This reading would be more satisfactory than the traditional one, since the song shows Palamabron undermined by Los as well as Satan. A major problem with the biographical reading is that Los does not have an obvious role in the allegory even though he is a pivotal figure in the story, and guilty along with Satan of mistreating Palamabron. As a tale of friendship, anger and sly accusation the bard’s song has much in common with Blake’s own life, not only in Felpham but throughout. Blake’s life-long failure at male friendship is perhaps the more relevant biographical context than the specific situation in Sussex. His letters to Butts and his brother make the same connections: ‘This from Johnson & Fuseli brought me down here & this from Mr H will bring me back again’ (E. 724); ‘H is jealous as Stothard was … I must own that seeing H. like S Envious… made me very

¹⁸³ David Lawton, Chaucer’s Narrators (Cambridge, 1985).
uneasy’ (E. 725). Similarly, notebook epigrams identify Blake’s experiences with Hayley as part of a trend:

Was I angry with Hayley who usd me so ill
Or can I be angry with Felphams old Mill
Or angry with Flaxman or Cromek or Stothard
Or poor Schiavonetti whom they to death botherd
Or angry with Macklin or Boydel or Bowyer
Because they did not say O what a Beau ye are
At a Friends Errors Anger shew
Mirth at the Errors of a Foe

(E. 504)

The desire for friendship and the difficulty of sustaining it in the face of anger, jealousy and dissembling is a theme of interest to Blake throughout his career. Detailed and ingenious allegorical readings of the bard’s song are not necessary to grasp its argument. Its simplicity and apositeness to Blake’s biography or to another scene of strife such as described by DiSalvo should not lead us into misreading it as a historical allegory yoked to one situation exclusively.

As well as Blake’s personal history of radicalism, his evolving sexual politics have also been scrutinised in Milton by Northrop Frye, Margaret Storch, Susan Fox, Alicia Ostriker, Jeanne Moskal, Eugenie Freed, Brenda Webster and John Howard. Frye’s comments pertain to the poem’s attitude to the question raised in both Johnson and Hayley’s biographies, of Milton’s attitudes to women. He writes that one is struck by the fact that Milton never sees beyond this sinister “female will”. His vision of women takes in only the hostility and fear which it is quite right to assume toward the temptress who represents moral virtue, like Delilah among the Philistines or Eve before the tree of knowledge, but which is by no means the only way in which women can be visualized. There is no emanation in Milton; no Beatrice or Miranda; no vision of the spiritual nature of love. The love of Adam and Eve before the Fall is shown us only to make clear what

186 Especially in Songs of Experience ‘A Poison Tree’, E. 28 and Jerusalem ‘Friendship cannot exist without Forgiveness of Sins continually’, E. 201; Jesus to Albion: ‘if I die I shall arise again & thou with me / This is Friendship & Brotherhood without it Man Is Not’; Albion: ‘Do I sleep amidst danger to Friends!’ E. 255-6.
dangers are concealed in it, and to contrast with the lust that emerges when these dangers are realized.\footnote{Frye (1947/1990), p. 352.}

Margaret Storch explores the contrast between evil, threatening women in \textit{Milton} and the benign twelve year old virgin with whom Milton becomes reconciled at the end. She argues that the conflict between males in the poem is the psychologically necessary preparation for the characterisation of Ololon: it is through the assertion of masculinity that Blake overcomes his dominant image of the malevolent mother.\footnote{Storch (1990), pp. 131-156.} She writes:

\textit{Milton}, Blake’s most autobiographical major work, has as its main theme the resolution of conflict and male rivalry in images of union and reconciliation. Women are peripherally present in the poem, in various threatening aspects, mingled with some of the most benign images of women that Blake produced, above all, Ololon, the Emanation of Milton. At the end of the poem, Ololon descends to Blake as an innocent figure integral to the creative harmony of the conclusion.\footnote{Storch (1990), p. 131.}

Jeanne Moskal, however, points out the poem’s insistence on the evaporation of all female characters as a necessary element in the redemptive male fusion with which the poem concludes.\footnote{Moskal (1994), p. 105.} Fox writes that \textit{Milton} crystallises a doctrine of contrariety, ‘around the central metaphor of the relations of male and female’.\footnote{Fox (1986), p. 79.} This requires that Ololon play a role equal to that of Milton, but Fox argues that Blake’s vision of femininity is too restrictive to allow this. Her comment on Ololon’s unveiling at the poem’s conclusion is that ‘she may have cast off what Mitchell—and surely Blake as well—would consider “false femininity,” but what they might call the “true femininity” she retains is every bit as restrictive and almost as damaging to the poem’s vision of mutuality’.\footnote{Fox (1986), p. 86.} Interestingly, she observes that the attempt in \textit{Milton} is not sustained in \textit{Jerusalem}: ‘The active/positive female alternative suggested, however ambivalently, by Ololon is sabotaged in \textit{Jerusalem} by Blake’s requirement of a totally positive—and hence, even at this point in the development of his attitudes, totally will-less—female principle.’\footnote{Fox (1986), p. 88.} Similarly Alicia Ostriker asserts in relation to both \textit{Milton} and \textit{Jerusalem} that ‘female figures are either powerful or good; never both’.\footnote{Ostriker (1986), p. 230.}
explores the limits Blake imposes upon his harmonious vision of the sexes, which is associated with Beulah, a ‘world of self-abnegating nurture’. She remarks that:

It seems impossible for Blake to imagine real men and women coexisting in a state of peace. Outside of Beulah, Blake’s portrayals of women’s murderousness go on.\textsuperscript{196}

Eugenie Freed is alone in asserting that Blake’s myth achieves a true androgyny in its vision of Ololon and Milton. She argues that Blake articulated ‘a concept of gender that was remarkable for its time in its sensitivity to female sexuality, and its breaking down of sexual stereotypes, notwithstanding that Blake had only in part succeeded in freeing himself from the handicap of the culturally ingrained attitudes of his time.’\textsuperscript{197}

Some conclusions can be drawn from this summary of the critical debates surrounding \textit{Milton}. One is that \textit{Milton} is felt to be a very important text in any view of who Blake was and what he felt and believed. The poem is invested with the potential to reveal Blake’s vision of the Miltonic tradition and of his own place in relation to it; as well as the nature of his mature religious and political beliefs. These questions are the major source of motivation propelling Blake studies, and \textit{Milton}’s position in Blake’s career, as well as its status as ‘the most personal document Blake has left us’ make it a key source for the quest to describe the mature Blake. However, one danger is that a generalising project of this kind can lead to inadequate reading of the poem. The simplicity and precision of argument sought by many critics is not found in the poem. The most accurate and successful readings of the poem seem to be those that have evolved from a more modest agenda, such as David Riede’s discussion of the Pauline allusions, or Aaron Fogel’s article on the aesthetic effects created by the poem’s proper nouns and other rhetorical strategies. In my chapters outlining my reading of the poem I imitate work of this kind as far as possible. Although I share in the desire of most critics to understand Blake as well as his poem, the critical debates I have described show that the poem yields more when read with attention to its detail. Accordingly, I ground my own readings in the narrative of the poem as well as in its discursive passages.

A further conclusion to be drawn from the critical studies of the poem is that the impact of contemporary discussions on Blake as a printmaker has not yet been felt

\textsuperscript{196} Webster (1987), p. 221.
by critical readers of *Milton*. Whereas scholarship on the *Songs* has long pursued an interest in the differences between various copies, there is no critical discussion of this kind concerning *Milton*. This thesis explores this aspect of *Milton* as a work in progress in four distinct manifestations between 1800 and c. 1821 when Blake apparently made his final revision of copy C. This kind of work is valuable because it emphasises the specificity of *Milton*, which many very influential critics have not adequately expressed.

One important omission is outstanding in our survey of critical responses to *Milton*: the interpretation surrounding the poem’s illustrations. It is to this discussion that we finally turn.

**IV**

The visual element of *Milton* has attracted much less comment than its verbal text. It comprises nine full-page designs: Plates 1, 8, 13, 15, 21, 29, 33, 38, and 41. The design on the final plate occupies almost the whole page, with only a single line of poetry. There are marginal or interlinear designs or both on every plate except plate 2 which contains the preface. Particularly significant are designs covering a third to a half of the page such as found on Plates a, d, 3, 4, 16, 30, 32, 36, and smaller designs on 12, 14, 26, 42, 43 and 44. These include several trilithons and altars, a Cain and Abel scene, a picture of Enitharmon raving in Canaan, female groups suggesting Milton's 'six-fold emanation', Blake's cottage at Felpham, a rocky cross section of Albion's cliffs, and numerous birds, insects, plants and human/vegetable forms.

The full-page designs are of two kinds. Plates 1, 8, 13, 15, 21, 29 and perhaps 45 can be confidently associated with passages in the text describing aspects of the narrative, respectively Milton embarking upon his journey; Satan or Rintrah in flames witnessed by Rintrah/Satan and Palamabron or perhaps Los and Enitharmon; Milton taking off the robe of the promise, and ungirding himself from the oath of God; Milton struggling with Urizen; Blake's encounter with Los; Blake's experience of Milton entering his foot; and Ololon triumphantly flanked by corn—which does not reflect any precise moment in the narrative but blends with the general tone of its conclusion.

More mysterious are Plates 33, 38 and 41. Plate 33 mirrors plate 29, but with 'ROBERT' rather than 'WILLIAM' its caption. Plates 38 and 41 depict scenes of an apparently sexual nature, despite the absence of such activity in the narrative. Plate 38 has been interpreted as Milton and Ololon, or as Albion and Britannia. Many commentators associate plate 41 with the cruel baptism of Milton by Urizen on plate 17: 'Silent they met. and silent strove among the streams of Arnon / Even to Mahanaim, when with cold hand Urizen stoopd down / And took up water from the river Jordan: pouring on / To Miltons brain the icy fluid from his broad cold palm' (E. 112, 1. 6-9).

Whilst Milton is one of the most thoroughly facsimiled of Blake's books-colour facsimiles are available of Copies B (Easson and Easson 1978), C (Viscomi and Essick 1993) and D (Keynes William Blake Trust 1967) and Erdman's Illuminated Blake (1975) reproduces copy A in monochrome-the typographical editions do not present much information about the designs, and reproduce very few of them. Keynes reproduces the 'egg' diagram of plate 32, and the title of 'Book the Second', with its mirror writing. Keynes explains in his preface that visual material is incorporated only 'where Blake has woven words or sentences into his designs, or has etched a sentence, or even a stanza, in reversed writing'. He adds that 'Blake certainly intended to indicate by reverse script that these passages were to be read from another spiritual, or inside, aspect of existence.'

Several features distinguish the Milton illustrations from those in other works. They are 'more directly related to the events described in the poem than is usual in the Illuminated Books' And yet there is 'a higher proportion of unillustrated pages of text than in any other of the major Illuminated Books. As Viscomi and Essick express it, the poem 'has a good many pages devoted almost exclusively to letters jammed together'. Sloss and Wallis point out that it also contains (on plate 15, a full-page design with caption 'To Annihilate the Self-hood of Deceit and False Forgiveness' E. 807) 'the only clear instance in the engraved books where a design is

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199 Keynes (1967), unpaginated.
200 Keynes (1967), unpaginated.
Sloss and Wallis reproduce the title-page from copy C as frontispiece to their first volume of Blake’s works, and a monochrome facsimile of plate 4 with rocking stone, dolmen and tiny horseman. Erdman (1966) reproduces the same half-page designs as Keynes; Stevenson (1971) reproduces none of Blake’s designs but supplies a map of ‘Biblical Palestine’, identifying the sources of many of Blake’s biblical allusions in the poem. Ostriker’s 1977 edition contains no facsimiles and barely mentions any of the illustrations. Mason in 1988 followed the same policy, defended in his introduction:

In recent years the doctrine has gained ground that Blake’s text, where it was illustrated, can only be read adequately in conjunction with the illustration. This poses great problems for the modern editor-who has to strike a balance between the unsatisfactory extremes of direct facsimile and mere description of the illustration-but, more troublingly, the enhancement of our reading of Blake which was expected to flow from attention to his illustrations has simply not occurred. 

It is perhaps as an effect of this generally low level of information available in scholarly typographical editions that there are few critics who incorporate an understanding of the illustrations into a general view of the poem. For until the Essick and Viscomi facsimile of copy C in 1993 there was no facsimile which provided a detailed scholarly commentary on the poem. Although Muir, Keynes and Easson and Easson had all supplied editorial prefaces providing a general introduction to the poem, none appended scholarly annotations to the text. The approach embodied in these publications resembles a distinction by which Sloss and Wallis assess the value of the late copy D, which is visually more splendid than other copies:

The fourth copy we are inclined to regard as primarily a work of art. By 1815 Blake had outgrown the position defined in Milton and was content that the text in this fourth copy should be subordinated to the splendours of its coloured and gilded page.

The major readings of Milton’s illustrations converge on three particular aspects of the graphic sequence: the representation of females; the theme of brotherhood and the new depiction of familiar and domestic scenes. In addition to the analysis of these iconological elements in Milton, there is also some interesting work relating to the

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202 Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 344.
204 Sloss and Wallis (1926), vol. 1, p. 352.
specific graphic styles used in the poem to its meaning and significance in Blake's development. The primary source of this kind of reading is W. J. T. Mitchell's essay 'Style and Iconography in the Illustrations of Blake's Milton'. Mitchell relates the two categories of full-page designs-engraved and relief etched-to two distinct stances towards the aesthetics and culture of commercial engraving. White-line engraving mimics the practices of commercial intaglio engraving, although the effect is much darker as the image is created by scraping lines into the relief surface, which prints as solid black. (In intaglio work the image is created from inking the engraved furrows of the plate, so that the result is black lines on white, not white on black). Relief etching is a rejection of the labour-intensive, naturalistic medium of intaglio engraving, and is, as Viscomi notes 'autographic': it is similar to sketching in that the stroke made upon the plate with pen and acid-resistant ink is the line that will print from a raised surface when the surrounding plane has been eaten away by acid. The opposition between this technique and commercial engraving can be expressed as direct, crude or primitive art versus fashionable sophistication; symbolic art versus naturalistic; \textit{insp\textbackslash i\textbackslash kio\textbackslash i\textbackslash ov} versus \textit{jo\textbackslash ab\textbackslash ow}. Mitchell argues that Milton announces Blake's formulation of these oppositions, and his rejection of engraving.\textsuperscript{205} He suggests that the comparatively small quantity of illustration and the predominance within this small quantity of relief etched designs in the poem may have been intended to disappoint readers who would open the book in the hope of enjoying sophisticated graphic achievements. Blake had come to associate such engravings with a 'web' or 'network' of falseness and rationality. This is the web of cross-hatching in which John Milton is enmeshed, as a symbol of error, in the four white-line engravings in which he is depicted. So of plate 13 Mitchell writes, 'although Milton has shed the garments which symbolise his allegiance to Puritanism, his work has not really begun. He has not yet descended to "Self-Annihilation," and so the "false body," the rational, linear network of commercial engraving still covers his body in a fine mesh.'\textsuperscript{206} It is only during his struggle against Urizen that Milton emerges from this mesh:


We see Milton's body now in time and space, cleansed of the linear network, striving with his own Selfhood, depicted as Moses with the tables of the Law or as Urizen, the personification, in this context, of Milton's tendency to value reason over the imagination. The "false body" is no longer a network around Milton's form: it has now been projected as a body external to Milton.207

The designs on Plates 38 and 41 both show an engraved Milton, and both present a negative view of his condition. In plate 41 'his posture and expression seem curiously distorted. His body is thrown out of joint, his torso twisted at an impossible angel so that his right hip appears to be jammed up into his rib-cage. His face is turned to the side with an expression of lassitude, melancholy, and perhaps some pity for Urizen (who seems to be fainting). The air of solemn determination which governed his expression in the first two plates is gone; instead, we see deep cleavages in his chin and brow, a strikingly literal way of rendering psychological division.'208 Similarly a mood of despair hangs over Milton in his embrace with Ololon on plate 38. Mitchell reads this as 'a vision of Milton and his female counterpart, Ololon, as a forlorn Adam and Eve at the mercy of the elements and beasts of prey. Milton's descent does not culminate, as we might expect, in a glorious reunion with his lost emanation (the "annihilation of Selfhood," we should recall is continuously associated with a rapprochement between Milton and his Emanation); on the contrary, our last vision of Milton with his Bride is one of despair and torment.209 The cross-hatched engravings of Milton dramatise his unhappiness first revealed in plate 3: 'unhappy though in Heaven', and the further suffering entailed in his journey to Eternal Death. In this respect they make a significant contribution to the poem's narration of Milton's journey, the arduous aspect of which is perhaps insufficiently stated in the text. Peter Butter has pointed to an unintentional irony in the contrast between the courage attributed to Milton in undertaking the 'unexampl'd deed' of his return to earth and the obscure, but not clearly painful nature of the self-annihilation to which he submits at the poem's conclusion.210 This imbalance in the text is corrected to some extent by the illustrations. For whilst the obscurity persists-it is not clear why Milton is pictured

208 Mitchell (1973, 'Style'), p. 56.
209 Mitchell (1973, 'Style'), p. 56.
with the stooping Urizen, or abandoned to the elements with Ololon—the designs clearly show Milton in anguish.

It is similarly apparent from broader thematic readings that the illustrations contribute significantly to the poem’s argument, and to its analysis of certain ideas, such as the relations between the sexes and brotherhood. Several critics are fascinated by the depiction of women in the poem, culminating in the full-page design of a triumphant Ololon, flanked by human wheat sheaves. John E. Grant argues that this design confirms the centrality of Ololon to Milton’s self-annihilation and to the poem’s conclusion. This redeems Blake from the ‘hard Miltonic-sounding things he says elsewhere about female dominance’, and shows ‘that the leadership of a woman is necessary to the fulfillment of time.’ Erdman expresses surprise that the poem should conclude with Ololon:

Where is Milton? In Blake. Where is Blake? One Man with Los-in Jesus. The text would seem to prepare us to see in the central figure the human form divine that presides at the harvest as One Man, Jesus, in whom all the figures, male and female, have consolidated.

Dennis Welch responds: ‘Milton has not disappeared from plate 50, as David Erdman fears; the poet dwells within his emanation as she dwells within him.’ But this appearance of Milton within Ololon does appear to contradict the text account of the dissolution of her feminine state and her final appearance as a Moony Ark and as an enveloping presence: ‘The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment’ (plate 44, E. 143, l. 12). The final design may correct what feminist critics view as the poem’s sinister insistence that the series of male unions which the poem celebrates requires the evaporation of female presences. However, the relation between text and design remains enigmatic, unless the final design depicts not the poem’s conclusion but Ololon’s preparation for her own act of self-annihilation, which will terminate her embodiment as a female.

Welch and Mitchell have commented upon the relationship between Blake’s Ololon to Milton’s Lady in *Comus*. For Welch, Ololon redeems the Lady’s Thel-like rejection of the flesh:

Unlike the Lady, who fears and scorns the belly god Comus, Ololon journeys willingly and intrepidly into the darkest regions of fallen humanity, Or-Ulro—“the Stomach & Intestines terrible, deadly, unutterable.”

But Mitchell questions the extent to which a full redemption of Milton’s Lady is enacted in the poem. He argues that the very crudeness of the sketch of Ololon is an indication of the limitations that John Milton’s literary output places upon Blake’s redemption of him. For inasmuch as Ololon echoes Milton’s pious and highly rational defender of chastity, Blake is unable to depict her as a fully developed woman. Mitchell notes the general absence of ‘comely, well developed images of the naked female form. All the plates except the last are dominated by masculine figures, and few of the plates attempt to render the beauty of the female form as in the Lambeth books or *Jerusalem*.”

Mitchell regards both this scarcity and the sketchy nature of plate 45 as intentional:

This crudeness is, I suspect, quite intentional. The text presents Ololon in a state of potentiality, not full imaginative realization. She adopts the female role only in the concluding episode of the poem, and then only to cast it off during her encounter with Milton…. Blake does not, as is frequently assumed, transform Milton’s Lady into a fulfilled Jerusalem, however. She is more like Oothoon… casting off error, but not yet fully liberated. She is only an image of a certain hopeful potential in Milton’s work, not an embodiment of the final view of women Milton actually held. For *that* vision we return to the last view Blake gives us of the relation of the sexes [plate 38]. This plate does not literally illustrate any passage in the poem, finding its best caption in *Jerusalem* 94, the description of Albion and Britannia lying on their rock: “Over them the famishd Eagle screams on boney Wings… / deep heaves the Ocean black thundering”… In terms of its immediate context, however, I think we should consider this a depiction of Milton and Ololon, a rendition of Blake’s view of where Milton left the problem of the sexes. The design conflates the imagery of Adam and Eve (spending their first night outside the garden?) with that of Prometheus awaiting the descent of Jupiter’s bird of prey, or even more appropriate, Oothoon awaiting Theotormon’s Eagle.

Just as the visual representation of Ololon goes further than the textual discussion of her role, the theme of brotherhood is explored through the illustrations in more detail.

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than the text can provide. For example, the illustrations feature two sets of fraternal relationships that are not mentioned in the text. Whilst 'Cainan' appears twice on plate 37, there is no mention of Cain and Abel. They are unmistakably present, however, in the small designs that accompany the bard's song. Similarly, Blake's relationship with his deceased brother Robert is brought into Milton's discussion of fraternity by the designs, although Robert plays no part in the textual narrative.

The vignette of Cain and Abel is on plate 12, directly below the words 'the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity / To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen' (plate 12, E. 108, l. 1-3). The contrast between these sentiments and the image of the slain Abel and the fleeing Cain may be deliberate. The bard has told the story of fraternal relations darkened by malevolence, in which attempts at protection and the limitation of damage appear to have failed, and yet he asserts the 'all-protecting' role of the 'Divine Humanity'. His story is followed by that of Cain and Abel, which is the second fall of Genesis, the further spreading of evil from its mundane origins in the disobedience of Adam and Eve. Just as Milton followed his account of the fall with an argument concerning vicarious salvation through the intervention of Christ, Blake's fall account leads directly to discussion of atonement, a 'great murmuring in the Heavens of Albion... concerning / The Lamb the Saviour' (plate 12, E. 108, l. 5-6). Leslie Tannenbaum has written about Blake's iconography of Cain and Abel, comparing it to contemporaries, who focused on the 'tragic emotions of pity and terror', identifying with Abel. Blake's enduring interest is in 'Cain's torment, his flight from a wrathful god'. For Blake the Cain and Abel story demonstrates the destructiveness of the system of retributive justice, and the Christian theology of vicarious punishment that devolves from it. This design then contributes to the theme of the dangers inherent in fallen male relationships, and the theological resolutions proposed by Christianity: a scheme of election and reprobation by which the victim's position is validated; a sacrificial religion by which the sinner may achieve vicarious salvation. Tannenbaum observes the presence of the sacrificial altar in all Blake's representations of Cain and Abel, and of Cain's inability to escape it:

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217 Leslie Tannenbaum, 'Blake and the iconography of Cain' in Essick and Pearce, eds., Blake In His Time (Bloomington, Indiana, 1978), pp. 23-34.
The altar binds Cain to Abel in an obviously destructive relationship. Criminal and victim are bound together by a warped system of justice that separates wrath from pity and yet binds the two together.\textsuperscript{218}

In Erdman’s reading it is this altar which is split apart to form rising steps, symbolising imaginative transcendence, in the background of Plates 29 and 33. Whereas Cain and Abel worshipped at the stone altar, William and Robert turn away from the transformed stones and face each other in unity.\textsuperscript{219}

The full-page design of plate 8 has also been found to illuminate the theme of brotherhood. Peter Otto interprets it as an integral element in the argument of the bard’s song. He understands the song as an analysis of ‘triangular’, mediated relationships, and finds this developed in the design. None of the three figures is meeting another’s gaze, although each is inclining towards another, and appealing to another:

In the spatial arrangement of feet, bodies, hands, and eyes we see the translation of a face-to-face relationship into the triangular structure of a mediated one.\textsuperscript{220}

Otto’s reading may have developed from Mitchell’s argument that the difficulty of determining which figure corresponds to which of the three brothers in the song is a deliberate strategy:

\begin{quote}
[T]he complexities of identification are an intentional device on Blake’s part, and that they serve to embody central themes in the poem. Blake presents us with three distinctive human types, three radically different “States of the Soul” in bodily form, and challenges us to label and judge them. He forces us, in other words, to create our own system of “Three Classes of Men” from the welter of verbal and visual images provided by the total context of the book. Whom will we cast out? the figure in torment or the cool escapist? We are left, I would suggest, in the position of the middle figure, wavering and uncertain.\textsuperscript{221}
\end{quote}

Erdman interprets the design as a warning that ‘Brothers who are divided and not receiving the light nor the voice that changed Saul to Paul will act as Cain and Abel, of whom we are shortly reminded.’\textsuperscript{222} Robert and William are brothers who do receive such light, as the star touches them on Plates 29 and 33. ‘William’s turning away from

\textsuperscript{218}Tannenbaum (1978), p. 29.
\textsuperscript{221}Mitchell (1973, ‘Style’), p. 66.
the altar... and toward his brother, each with tarsus forward, is as if the two true brothers... Rintrah and Palamabron, turned from the false, illusory brother Satan, falsely elevated to confront and touch one another.\textsuperscript{223} Mitchell writes that 'Blake's relation to Robert is the implicit existential foundation of the poem, the concrete experience of masculine love which lies behind the concept of the prophetic brotherhood.'\textsuperscript{224}

The last major theme explored in the commentaries upon \textit{Milton}'s illustrations is the greater familiarity and domesticity of these designs, compared to those in the Lambeth books. Mitchell writes that 'Blake seems to have abandoned in this book the use of the void or abyss as a setting for the human form: why is almost every full-page design "grounded" in such a literal sense, with a horizon line indicating the junction of earth and sky?'.\textsuperscript{225} In answer to his own question he writes:

Blake’s abandonment of the void in favor of a “grounded” sense of pictorial space in \textit{Milton} reflects both the internal themes of the poem and the personal issues which he assimilated into those themes. Certainly the basic actions of \textit{Milton}, the descents of Milton and Ololon from the false security of the "Heavens of Albion" into the world of Generation, are embodied in the abandonment of the void. A central theme of \textit{Milton} is the renunciation of a false transcendence, the refusal to escape into a heaven for the Elect, “in which all shall be pure & holy / In their Own Selfhoods”. But Milton’s realization that he must return to earth is also Blake’s realization that he must “up ascend / Forwards from Ulro from the Vale of Felpham... and return to London, united with Los and Milton to “listen to the cry of the poor man”... Blake, like Milton, had to overcome the temptation of a false transcendence, which the “heavenly” air of Felpham was threatening to become.\textsuperscript{226}

The new use of the horizon in Blake’s large designs is connected by Mitchell with Blake’s willingness to represent himself both verbally and pictorially in his poem.

Blake’s return from the impersonally rendered void of the Lambeth books in \textit{Milton} is accompanied by the emergence of himself and his family, both living and dead, as characters in his poetry, and of his dwelling places (Lambeth and Felpham) as explicitly named settings. For the first time in his prophetic books Blake speaks \textit{in proppria persona}, declaring, after he has become one man with Los and Milton, a new and more substantial connection to immediate existential realities:

\textsuperscript{222} Erdman (1973), p. 75.
\textsuperscript{223} Erdman (1973), p. 80.
\textsuperscript{224} Mitchell (1973, ‘Style’), p. 68.
\textsuperscript{225} Mitchell (1973, ‘Style’), p. 47-8.
\textsuperscript{226} Mitchell (1973, ‘Style’), p. 59.
every Space that a Man views around his dwelling-place:
Standing on his own roof, or in his garden on a mount,
Of twenty-five cubits in height, such space is his Universe...

[plate 28, E. 127, l. 5-8]

Erdman notes that the picture of Blake's cottage ""domesticates"" the vision, making
Blake's point... that the poet's work is done in his own ""neighbourhood"" or not at
all.228 Like Mitchell, Erdman notes that the poem concludes in a mood of expectation
rather than resolution.

The word ""Finis"" on plate 50 marks the end of this poem... not of Time.
Albion has failed to stand up; Blake has returned to his ""mortal state"".229

The scope of the poem, then, extends beyond its own events. For this reason Erdman
suggests that the couple on plate 38 'represent the Lord's People whom the poem
must move, or Milton and Blake will have been moved in vain.'230 The horizon in the
poem and its domestic scene on plate 36 combines with certain passages in the text to
connect our own world with that of the poem. This extends the poem's challenges
into the arena of the reader. These challenges are to reformulate the self and turn away
from the altar of sacrifice and the theologies of holiness and mediation it symbolises,
and to embrace the other in a brotherhood characterised by love and by fierce
opposition but not by the fratricidal conflict of Cain and Abel or the seductive attempts
of Satan on Palamabron, which mask aggression not love.

The effect of the designs on the three categories of critical reading identified in
this introduction is most positive for the personal biographical approach, since the
illustrations enforce the text's preoccupations with friendships of a benign and
dangerous nature. This is the simplest way of understanding the full-page illustration
of Robert, Blake's dead brother of whom he wrote to Hayley that 'with his spirit I
converse daily & hourly in the Spirit. & See him in my remembrance in the regions of
my Imagination. I hear his advice & even now write from his Dictate' (6 May 1800,
E. 705). There is also a connection to be made with various ambiguously sexual
allegations against Hayley that appear in the notebook and perhaps find an echo in the

227 Mitchell (1973, 'Style'), p. 60.
228 Erdman (1973), p. 82.
229 Erdman (1973) p. 87.
230 Erdman (1973), p. 84.
account of Satan overwhelmed by his feminine urges in concupiscent love for
Palamabron. Blake complains in his Notebook of Hayley's attentions to Catherine:

And when he could not act upon my wife
Hired a Villain to bereave my Life
(E. 506)

This could be an allegation of a sexual overture, or could simply point to an attempt by
Hayley to influence Blake through his wife. Blake speculates ambiguously on the
manner of Hayley's conception: 'Of H's birth this was the happy lot / His Mother on
his Father him begot' (E. 506). Arguably, two of the designs in Milton suggest sexual
contact between men (Plates 21 and 41). Damon states that Leutha represents
'Hayley's repressed homosexuality'. Whether or not this is the case, Blake would
have been aware of the failure of Hayley's marriage, and the scene depicting lovers on
plate 38 is itself mildly disturbing. Both man and woman appear unwell or depressed,
and the hovering bird of prey is felt by many critics to be a sinister presence.

Some encouragement is offered by the illustrations to the cosmological
accounts of the poem, in the zoaic map describing 'Milton's track', and by the insistent
visual associating the human form with various species of vegetation. The fate against
which Los warns his sons—'lest you are vegetated' (plate 25, E. 122, l. 58) is
graphically depicted in many mournful illustrations of tormented figures whose limbs
are turning into leafy or barren branches, especially on Plates 23 and 25. These
marginal illustrations in particular add to the tone of the 1811 copies,

These etchings are of a wonderful radiance and display naked forms in various
acts of worship or exaltation; there is a suggestion of homosexual fellatio in
one of them, just as there is in one of the relief etchings, thus adding a quality
of strangeness to Blake's association with Milton.232

231 S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake*
The relief etchings (Plates 8, 15, 21, 29, 33, 45) have a different impact from the white line engravings. These are surely the ‘wild pictures’ to which William Muir directed the attention of his patron. They embody a striking and immediate aesthetic, deliberately sketchy and primitive, and deriving from this a quality of vibrancy and, in each case, of movement. Rintrah or Satan writhing in flames, Milton striving with Urizen, Blake turning to Los, William and Robert transfigured in ecstatic vision and Ololon emerging from her husk-like robe all project a quality of energy and activity. Essick and Viscomi sum up Blake’s aesthetic in the full-page designs:

Blake probably deployed these unusual graphic techniques [white line engraving and relief etching] with the intention of creating an illustrated book with an antique or primitive aura in accord with the pursuit of ancient origins in the text. Many images have a sculptured quality, created through white-line modeling to give a sense of volume (title page), or to give the appearance of having been chiseled in alto relievo from stone (Plates 29 and 33). The emergence of recognizable forms out of darkness visually captures something of the emotional tenor and even the plot of a poem in which the contending forces of dark and light, error and revelation, play central roles. The designs are gestural rather than imitative in two senses: they record the artist’s gestures that produced them, like sketches and unlike highly finished paintings; and they gesture towards visual reality rather than trying to reproduce it through sophisticated methods of perspective and naturalistic lighting.

The technical aspect of Milton’s composition is the subject of the next chapter. Chapters three and four offer my own reading of the poem, and chapter five returns to technical and bibliographical debates to gauge the impact of the chronological development of the poem into four subtly unique versions embodied in the four copies. The concluding chapter explores further the personal function of Milton in Blake’s life, and returns to the question of his alleged madness. Two appendices relate firstly to the different schemes of numbering in the copies, explaining Bentley’s indispensable scheme of referring to the plates. The second appendix presents brief results of research into the thought of the radical sect of the Muggletonians, and how aspects of their worldview find an echo in Milton. This group has been linked to Blake through genealogical speculation and, more importantly through a shared vocabulary, identified by E. P. Thompson in his 1993 book *Witness Against the Beast*. Thompson’s emphasis was on defining Blake’s socio-political milieu by articulating the context of

233 David Erdman describes the major motifs of the large designs as ‘dancing, striding and confronting’, Erdman (1973), p. 73.
radical dissent. My research concerns the theological sensibility of this group, and how the theological argument of *Milton* may interact with this tradition.

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Chapter 2: The Composition of Milton A Poem

In the preceding survey of editorial and critical responses to Milton it was frequently apparent that our understanding of the poem depends on assumptions about where, when, and how Blake wrote it. For many critics, these are unexamined, and, upon closer inspection, certain popular assumptions appear likely to be wrong. For example, many critics assume that the poem was written during Blake’s stay at Felpham. This chapter shows that it is much more likely that composition began after Blake had returned to London in 1803. Since Blake’s mid-life biography is widely regarded as an important context for the poem, it is important to date all aspects of its composition and production as accurately as possible. Many critics have regarded the Felpham context as paramount for the interpretation of Milton, assuming that Blake was composing it at Felpham; turning to it by night to vent feelings of frustration and anger daily provoked by hours spent working with Hayley: ‘the warmhearted indefatigable Blake works daily by my side.’ Damon asserts that Milton was the poem Blake showed to Hayley ‘at his own desire’, with the result that he ‘looked with sufficient contempt to enhance my opinion of it’ (E. 730). However, the true period of Milton’s evolution extends far beyond the three-year sojourn which was its primary inspiration. Milton was in production long after the sun had set on his anger of 1803, long after his trial and acquittal of 1805, after the Cromek and Stothard affairs, after the exhibition of 1809. It is ultimately a product of Blake’s most obscure period when he withdrew from commercial engraving, before meeting Linnell in 1818 and enjoying the admiration of The Ancients after 1820. In order to confirm the later dating of the poem’s production, and the new perspective on the poem deriving from it, it is necessary to enquire more closely into Blake’s method of composition itself.

I

The first question about Blake’s methods of composition concerns the relation between the invention of his text and designs and their execution in his medium of relief etching. Robert Essick explored this question in William Blake and the

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1 Bentley (1969), p. 82.
2 Damon (1924), p. 173.
Language of Adam. Two of Essick’s claims concern us, namely, that Blake composed his poetry very rapidly, a feat made possible by his deep immersion in his linguistic idiom and the oral formulaic character of his writing; and that his verbal and artistic conception of the illuminated books was indistinguishable from their execution in the medium of relief etching. Essick notes the frequent recurrence of formulaic sequences in Blake’s verse, and suggests that they indicate the possibility of rapid composition. Blake’s ‘Dictation’ proceeded at the rate of ‘twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines... without Premeditation’ (E. 729). If this is an accurate description of Blake’s experience of composition, his poetic diction must have been almost self-generating.

Essick gives several examples supporting this possibility, such as the following:

The composite term ‘age-bent’ appears seven times in The Four Zoas, ‘The Mental Traveller’, and Jerusalem. In each instance, Blake added the same alliterative companion to create a formulaic epithet, ‘blind & age-bent’. In all but two of their occurrences, these words describe the character of Enion. Her name evokes the formula which then becomes a significant part of what ‘Enion’ means within Blake’s allegory.4

Essick compares two passages from The Four Zoas. They both appear on the same page of the manuscript, but they date from very different stages of the composition of the poem. The first is in the calligraphic hand, indicating that it is a fair copy. The second is ‘scrawled sideways in pencil in the left margin’, at a late stage in the poem’s development when plans for transferring the text for an engraving had clearly been abandoned,5 and ‘he converted what began as a finished work of calligraphy into a working manuscript with a good many deletions and interlinear revisions’.6 The fair copy reads as follows:

Alternate Love & Hate his breast; hers Scorn & Jealousy
In embryon passions. they kiss’d not nor embrac’d for shame & fear
His head beamd light & in his vigorous voice was prophecy
He could controll the times & seasons, & the days & years
She could controll the spaces, regions, desart, flood & forest

(E 305, l. 24-28)

5 Essick argues that this may have been Blake’s earliest plan for Vala in ‘The Four Zoas Intention and Production’ in Blake, Spring 1985, pp. 216-20. Viscomi follows Essick in this: (Blake and the Idea of the Book (Princeton, 1993), p. 318.
The 'hastily written lines' are inserted into the text just above:

Astonishd sat her Sisters of Beulah to see her soft affections
To Enion & her children & they ponderd these things wondering
And they Alternate kept watch over the Youthful terrors
They saw not yet the Hand Divine for it was not yet reveald
But they went on in Silent Hope & Feminine repose
(E 305, l. 14-18)

Essick suggests that similarities between these passages indicate the possibility that the verbal component of Blake's works may have been composed with remarkable ease and rapidity:

When these passages are printed together, as they are in Erdman's edition of The Complete Poetry and Prose, with only five intervening lines and no indication of their physical differences in the manuscript, we sense no sudden shift from preliminary jottings to a finished poem. The language is all of a piece. The roughest draft contains the same tone, diction, and rhythm of the fair copy: the fair copy preserves the language of the preliminary through whatever stages of revision may have come between.... [T]he differences between marginal drafts and sections in script, and the disruptions in narrative sequence throughout The Four Zoas, are not much greater than what we find between contiguous passages in the long poems Blake published in relief etching, Milton A Poem and Jerusalem.

Blake's fluency with his own poetic idiom is suggested by the similarity between his poetic diction and the prose of some hastily penned letters. Writing to Butts 'in haste' he uses expressions that would be echoed in Milton with little alteration:

There is no Medium or Middle state & if a Man is the Enemy of my Spiritual Life while he pretends to be the Friend of my Corporeal. he is a Real Enemy—but the Man may be the friend of my Spiritual Life while he seems the Enemy of my Corporeal but Not Vice Versa
(E. 728)

Essick's argument about Blake's aesthetic doctrine of the unity of conception and execution is also convincing. He begins with observations about the illuminations:

Blake's unique method of relief etching provided a medium for his most radical experiments in the interweaving of graphic conception and execution within a seamless process of production. Rather than transferring a design prepared in a different medium to the copper, the relief etcher can compose directly on the plate.... [T]he very nature of relief etching promotes the use of the copperplate as both sketching surface and graphic surface, for designs can be altered on the plate as freely as pencil on paper at any point prior to the application of acid.
Essick extends these observations to suggest that Blake’s material process was facilitating and engendering major reconceptions of the work of art at the stages of printing, colouring, and even at the point of determining the order in which the pages should be bound. He also argues that Blake’s acceptance of the uncontrollable aspects of illuminated printing, particularly colour printing, constituted a dispersal of the creative responsibility for the perpetual reconception of the art work throughout the stages of execution, so that the medium itself was allowed to determine some of the features of the final product.

Essick brings the verbal content of the illuminated books into this discussion of the unity of conception and execution. He seems (in his 1989 book) to envision a full-scale manuscript draft for Milton and Jerusalem, for he suggests that the date of 1804 on the titlepages ‘may be the year Blake finished a draft of the poems and began etching them’. I shall challenge this suggestion later in this chapter. At the moment it is only necessary to observe the two ways in which Essick claims that the composition of the illuminated books also falls within the compass of Blake’s fundamental aesthetic doctrine ‘Invention depends Altogether upon Execution or Organization. as that is right or wrong so is the Invention perfect or imperfect’ (Annotations to Reynolds E. 637). Firstly, Essick suggests that Blake treats the copperplate as the fair copy of his manuscript draft, and that several artistic decisions are made at this final stage of fair copying:

Relief etching joins manuscript and printable letters in one continuous operation. There are no extant manuscript fair copies for the poems in Blake’s illuminated books, for these are unnecessary. Blake could, and in all probability did, proceed directly from working drafts, such as those appearing in his Notebook, to writing in reverse on the copperplate. The fair copy and the printing plate are one. Nor is there any evidence that Blake established details of format, such as line length, letter size, and number of lines per plate, prior to the seriatim writing out of the text in acid-resist on plates. The great variety of letter sizes in Jerusalem, and the way words are squeezed together toward the right margin (left on the copperplate), suggest that Blake became even freer in his compositional habits when writing his last extended text etched in relief. The result is best described with an almost oxymoronic composite term, a ‘printed manuscript’.

Secondly, Essick delves further back in the development process of the epics to demonstrate that Blake’s use of language itself, in the earliest stage of composition,
more immediate and fluent than that of many other poets. He cites Shelley’s resigned account of the unbreachability of the gulf between poetic inspiration and any mode of execution: ‘... when composition begins, inspiration is already on the decline, and the most glorious poetry that has ever been communicated to the world is probably a feeble shadow of the original conception of the poet.’ Blake’s fluency of composition was seen in Essick’s extracts from *The Four Zoas* quoted above. He goes on to develop an argument to explain this fluency by an analysis of the similarity between Blake’s epics and oral poetry. He suggests that Blake’s composition draws upon an intertextual medium of oral fragments in which Blake is deeply immersed, and which generates his verse with the ease and immediacy that he expresses in his comments about dictation.

In *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, Joseph Viscomi invokes Essick’s book, developing his argument in one particular. He argues that both *Milton A Poem* and *Jerusalem* were generated through a process of composition that did not depend upon a completed draft, written out seriatim on copperplates. Viscomi even suggests that the poems could have evolved upon copper from their very earliest conception, finding their first form in Blake’s backwards writing and designing upon the plate. However, he does not insist on this and it is not crucial to his argument.

Such texts were probably not written directly on copper plates, although that was possible, but quickly on paper. When rewritten on the plates in a careful italic, the text could still evolve, because the writing varnish could be erased or scratched off before the plate was etched should changes be required. Because plates were probably etched a few at a time, Blake was not locked into his first thoughts. Thus illuminated printing allowed immediacy and revision; it allowed Blake to write prophecies “from immediate Dictation twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time without Premeditation,” but, like drawings, where the final image is literally drawn out of the initial marks, the text fixed through the etching represents a separate and possibly later stage of the production process. Books could thus unfold organically, one or a few plates at a time, evolving in unforeseen ways.

This is the element of innovation of Viscomi’s position: ‘that composition and production went hand in hand, that Blake did not wait till he had a completed text to

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Viscomi puts forward six arguments for this account of Milton A Poem and Jerusalem: the length of time given to them; the ways in which they overlap and evolve one from the other; the discrepancies between their projected numbers of chapters or books, as stated on the title pages, and their actual number; the fact that Blake printed 'finis' on plate 45 or Milton A Poem before going on to produce at least two more plates; Essick's study of Blake's use of oral formulas; and Cumberland's comment from the summer of 1804: 'Blake has eng.d 60 Plates of a new Prophecy'. Two of these deserve careful attention here: the question of timing and Cumberland's memo.

If there was a draft of the whole of Milton A Poem before any of the poem was etched, why did the etching go on for so long? If etching began in 1804, as the title page suggests, then why was the poem not printed until c. 1811? This printing date has been suggested (by Viscomi and Essick) in the light of evidence about Blake's work schedule in 1809 and 1810, when he held his exhibition and engraved his Canterbury Pilgrims. Blake seems to have been impatient to publish Milton A Poem, as two statements which seem to be about the poem suggest. In 1805 he tells Hayley 'It will not be long before I shall be able to present the full history of my Spiritual Sufferings to the Dwellers upon Earth & of the Spiritual Victories obtain'd for me by my Friends' (E. 767). In the 'Public Address' of c. 1809, Blake writes:

The manner in which my Character has been blasted these thirty years, both as an artist & a Man, may be seen particularly in a Sunday Paper cal'd the Examiner, Publish'd in Beaufort Buildings (We all know that Editors of Newspapers trouble their heads very little about art & science, & that they are always paid for what they put in upon these ungracious Subjects, & the manner in which I have routed out the nest of villains will be seen in a Poem concerning my Three years' Herculean Labours at Felpham, which I will soon Publish. Secret Calumny & open Professions of Friendship are common enough all the world over, but have never been so good an occasion of Poetic Imagery. When a Base Man means to be your Enemy he always begins with being your Friend. (E. 572)

Both statements look forward to the publication of Milton A Poem, which may still be in progress when the second statement is made. Viscomi argues that Blake failed to

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11 Viscomi correspondence.
13 Erdman also states that it is unlikely that the 1808 watermarks in copies A-C represent the printing date: 'After his "1795" prophecies Blake may not have resumed his Illuminated Printing until after his 1809 Exhibition of paintings. In a letter of December 1808 he explains that he has "long been turned out of" his "former pursuits of printing"' (1988) p. 806.
print *Milton A Poem* earlier than c. 1811 because he was too busy. The work of composing and etching *Milton A Poem* may or may not have been complete before the period of intense activity that prevented him from printing it.

It may be impossible to know the precise date of the first printing session, and how soon after the completion of etching this took place. However, certain parts of the poem were certainly not etched (because not composed) before the second half of 1808 (for example, plates 17 and 22, which refer to Hand). If the etching project began in 1804, then the absolute minimum period during which plates were etched for *Milton A Poem* seems to be around four years (1804 to August 1808). If the text was already drafted by 1804, it is hard to see why the execution of the etchings took so long.\(^1^4\)

The second strong piece of evidence is Cumberland’s comment. Viscomi writes:

Cumberland, a fine printmaker in his own right, knew the difference between manuscript and plates, and between illuminated printing and conventional engraving. He is surely using the word “engraved” generically to refer to copper plates that had been transformed through tools into printable artefacts. The point is that sixty plates of a work that grew to be one hundred were already committed to copper; Blake may have ultimately rejected or re-etched some of them, but he was sure enough of his text—of his divinely inspired source—to have fixed at least this much of it to metal. And even if Cumberland somehow conflated plates from two prophecies and the sixty plates were not exclusively of *Jerusalem*, the point is still the same. Indeed, had the latter been the case, it would further support the theory that work on the two books overlapped, as their shared 1804 engraved date suggests.\(^1^5\)

Sixty plates of either *Milton A Poem* or *Jerusalem* or both were committed to copper well before the composition of either was complete (Plates 71 and 22 of *Milton A Poem* have material later than this). This would seem strongly to support Viscomi’s position that the relief-etched epics evolved through production. This position is radically different from the older hypothesis (Bentley, Erdman),\(^1^6\) that *Milton A Poem* was mainly written in draft at Felpham and that this handwritten draft was slowly

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\(^{1^4}\) See Viscomi’s comment, *BIB*, p. 23: ‘As my own experience indicates... writing backward is only slightly more difficult than writing forward’.


\(^{1^6}\) Erdman (1988), p. 806 estimates that the 1803 letters refer to a draft of *Milton A Poem* or a draft comprising *Milton A Poem* and *Jerusalem*. Bentley (1978, p. 721, and 1977, p. 307) also speculates that ‘Perhaps Blake had in draft a poem which comprehended the actions that were later divided between *Milton* and *Jerusalem*’.
reproduced in the medium of relief etching once Blake had returned to London, where
he composed and etched a few extra plates for the poem. It is important to
discriminate between these contrary views of the composition process because it is
desirable to identify as far as possible the immediate biographical circumstances
surrounding the evolution of Milton. This would be true for any detailed study of a
work that had been created so entirely by one individual, but holds especially for
Milton because of its autobiographical content, and because of the tradition of reading
it as 'the most personal document which Blake has left us'.

The arguments of Essick and Viscomi are compelling, but, to be entirely
conclusive, it would be necessary to identify the textual blocks of the poem and to
generate a persuasive account of their composition. Viscomi's method of identifying
textual blocks in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is described in Blake and the Idea
of the Book. It involves a technical analysis of the calligraphy and sizes of the
impressions. In the case of The Marriage this allowed Viscomi to show that plates
21-24 of the poem formed the earliest core of the composition, and that they were
written on a copperplate previously used for a large relief etching 'The Approach of
Doom'. These technical features confirm a thematic reading in which the material in
this section is found to cohere as a discrete unit, judged to belong to the earliest stages
of work on the poem. Although the plates used for Milton are irregular and are not
identifiable as quarters, inspection of the fluctuations in Milton's calligraphy, its
graphic content and the pauses and recapitulations of its narrative provides evidence
that it was etched in several phases, a few plates at a time.

An analysis of the textual units of Milton is not always straightforward. The
Bard's song shares the same themes and characters throughout, but it does not seem
that all the plates in the sequence shown in copies A and B belong to the same period
of composition. The production of plate 4 is not likely to have followed directly that
of plate 3. The two plates do not form a natural sequence. Blake may have etched
plates 4 and 5 in some relation to each other, but without determining from the outset
how precisely they would fit together in the collated poem. Five seems to follow 4,
but 4 does not follow very well from 3. Blake's later decision to insert three extra

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17 Damon (1924), p. 182.
plates between 3 and 4 may reflect a dissatisfaction with how the early sequence had turned out.

Plates 5 to 7 hang together very well, both thematically and by the way that they look. They tell the story of Satan, Palamabron and Los with no awkward leaps. The next text page, plate 9, looks very different. It is much smaller (5, 6 and 7 are almost identical in size) and has more interlinear decoration. It also begins a new episode: the speech of Leutha, and a very clear textual unit, marked by three pages with catchwords, two of which are almost identical in size (10 and 11). Plate 12 finishes the Bard’s song and begins the story of Milton’s descent. Like plate 9 it belongs to two episodic units.

The next text plate (14) may begin a new unit. There is a narrative shift, although it is not awkward (indeed it would not be out of place within a single plate in this part of the poem); but the calligraphy of plate 14 is much tighter than that of 12, and it begins another sequence of three plates linked by accurate catchwords and smooth narrative progression. These plates (14, 16 and 17) do not share any similarity in size (16 may be related to 4: they are very close in length and identical in width—both are strikingly narrow). Plate 17 does not have a catchword, but follows on directly to plate 18, which is linked to 19 with a catchword. Therefore 14 to 19 could be a unit. Plate 18 may be related in size to plates 31 or 23, and plate 19 is similar in size to plate 20. Plates 16 and 17 were interrupted in copies C and D to incorporate plate d, the lament of the Shadowy Female, and the reply of Orc.

Plates 20 to 23 are a clear episodic unit (excluding plate 21, a full page design). They record the debate between Rintrah, Los and Palamabron. Plates 24 to 28 clearly belong together thematically: they all discuss the universe of Los. They may break apart into two compositional units as they comprise two sets of plates linked by catchwords: 24-26 and 27-28. In this part of the poem there are a lot of plates with similar dimensions: 19, 20, 22, 24, 25, and 27. Plate 26 is a visible exception; it is also the plate of which Bentley notes that it ‘shows (under the bottom cliff) the plate-maker’s-mark stamped on the versos of copperplates.’

The Second book begins with a section of three plates linked by catchwords and sharing the theme of Beulah and the Songs of Beulah. The catchword on plate 31
('And'), could however, work for plate 34 as well as plate 32; plate 34 also mentions the Songs of Beulah, but it is the beginning of a new narrative episode: the descent of Ololon. In copy D Blake interrupts the sequence of plates 30-32, by interposing plate e. The abrasions in copy C also indicate that it was first placed in that position in that copy. Blake changed his mind and finally moved plate e to a new position after plate 32. Viscomi suggests that the order 30, 31, e, 32 (the first ordering of copy C, and, following that copy as a model, copy D) 'makes more sense thematically' (p. 328). This is not the case. Plate e fits much better after plate 32, because that seems to be a natural break in the narrative, as the Songs of Beulah come to an end and the story of Ololon is about to resume. Plates 30 to 32 do not share any particularly close similarities in size.

Thirty-four, 35 and 36 share the same tight calligraphy and good continuity, although they do not share similarities in dimensions. The next block is not a new departure thematically, but is distinguished from this section by larger, thicker handwriting on plates 37 and 39. Plate 40 has strong continuity with plate 39, as it continues Satan's speech. Therefore plates 27 to 40 may be a compositional unit. Plates 39 and 40 are close in size. This block may also extend to plate 42 (41 is a design), because there is a design at the bottom of the plate, a feature which may indicate the end of a compositional unit. Forty-two is closer in calligraphy to 41 than it is to 43, although it is visually more similar to 43, because both plates are smaller than the preceding text plates (but they are not a match). Thematically, it seems to belong with plate 43, as it begins with something of a narrative shift, and it starts the speech of Milton that plate 43 concludes. Perhaps it is a unit on its own. Plate 43 may belong to a final unit with 44, beginning and ending with quarter page illustrations. The small calligraphy would be consistent with this.

To sum up, a preliminary view suggests the following blocks: 3; 4; 5-7; 9-12; 14-19; 20-23; 24-26; 27-28; 30-32; 34-36; 37-42 (?); 43-44. Despite the preliminary nature of this analysis, it is possible to make one provisional observation that may reveal something about Blake's method of episodic production. Narrative discontinuity does not by itself signify a new unit: this often occurs within a single plate. Sometimes a new section is suggested by a change of calligraphy rather than a

new turn in the narrative. However, some of the blocks I have suggested do share a particular narrative feature. Plates 20 and 34 seem to begin with deliberate recapitulations of the plates before. Thus a new compositional unit may be marked more by careful continuity than by a narrative shift.

Before assuming that *Milton* was composed incrementally through execution on copper in the years following his return from Felpham, it is necessary to acknowledge some of the reasons for the old assumption that composition largely took place in Sussex. In 1803 Blake sent two letters to Butts in which he explains that he has written a long poem:

But none can know the Spiritual Acts of my three years' Slumber on the banks of the Ocean, unless he has seen them in the Spirit, or unless he should read my long Poem descriptive of those Acts; for I have in these three years composed an immense number of verses on One Grand Theme, Similar to Homer's Iliad or Milton's Paradise Lost, the Persons & Machinery entirely new to the Inhabitants of Earth (some of the Persons Excepted). I have written this poem from immediate Dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without Premeditation & even against my Will; the Time it has taken in writing was thus render'd Non Existent, & an immense Poem Exists which seems to be the Labour of a long Life, all produc'd without Labour or Study. I mention this to shew you what I think the Grand Reason of my being brought down here. (To Butts 25 April 1803, E. 728-9)

Thus I hope that all our three years' trouble Ends in Good Luck at last & shall be forgot by my affections & only remember'd by my Understanding; to be a memento in time to come, & to speak to future generations by a Sublime Allegory, which is now perfectly completed into a Grand Poem. I may praise it, since I dare not pretend to be any other than the Secretary; the Authors are in Eternity. I consider it as the Grandest Poem that this world contains. Allegory address'd to the Intellectual powers, while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is my Definition of the most Sublime Poetry; it is also somewhat in the same manner defin'd by Plato. This Poem shall, by Divine Assistance be progressively printed & Ornamented with Prints & given to the Public. (To Butts 6 July 1803, E. 730)

It is extremely tempting to apply these two letters to *Milton A Poem*. Coming towards the end of Blake's stay at Felpham, they tell of a long poem about Blake's 'Spiritual Acts' there. They give a strong indication of Blake's sense of external agency acting upon his life and work and shaping its purpose: 'I mention this to shew you what I think the Grand Reason of my being brought down here'. This chimes unmistakably with the following from *Milton A Poem* plate 36:

For when Los joind with me he took me in his fiery whirlwind
My Vegetated portion was hurried from Lambeth’s shades
He set me down in Felphams Vale & prepared a beautiful
Cottage for me that in three years I might write all these Visions
(E. 137, l. 21-4)

If these letters do describe the composition of Milton A Poem, then the hypothesis of
London composition must be wrong, for Blake claims that his poem is already written
in 1803. The letters also describe a manuscript draft. If Milton is the work referred to,
we must also reject Viscomi’s argument that there was no prior manuscript from which
Milton was later etched. However, there are good reasons for resisting the assumption
that these letters refer to Milton. Bentley argues that they cannot refer to the poem as
we know it, because parts of it clearly belong to the period after Felpham (plates a, 17
and 22). Also, Milton A Poem is not, compared to Vala or Jerusalem, ‘immense’. Moreover, there are positive reasons for arguing that the poem describes is Vala, as
Viscomi argues (following Mann and Essick)²⁰

Vala ‘appears to have been written and revised beginning in 1797, the date on
its title page, throughout the Felpham years, and again between 1803 and 1807’.²¹
Thirty-eight pages of Vala were at one time stitched together, presumably in
preparation for engraving or letterpress printing. Engraving is much more laborious
than relief etching and requires not only a manuscript, but a fair copy. Viscomi argues
that Blake’s plan to have his poem ‘printed and Ornamented with Prints’ indicates
conventional publication, in line with Blake’s plans for Vala rather than illuminated
printing. The ornamentation of the Night Thoughts plates was structurally separate
from the boxed text; whereas in illuminated printing there is a higher level of
integration between text and design, with many of the designs clearly belonging to the
same moment of composition as the verbal text, rather than being superadded
ornaments.

If the 1803 poem was Vala, then the theory that Milton A Poem was composed
after the return to London may remain intact.²² However, the poem itself states that

²² For Viscomi and Essick, it is not London composition per se which is important, but the argument
that composition took place through execution. The execution of much of the poem demonstrably
took place in London after 1803. Therefore it is important for them to refute the claim that Milton A
Poem is the poem whose composition is described in the 1803 letters.
the place of composition was Felpham: 'He set me down in Felphams Vale & prepared a beautiful / Cottage for me that in three years I might write all these Visions' (plate 36). There is no doubt that the events of the Felpham years impressed themselves very deeply upon Blake. From the beginning he seems to have had a strong sense that Felpham would bring about important spiritual encounters 'because it is more Spiritual than London' (E. 710). Before he left Felpham he had already begun to conceptualise his time there as a block of three years: 'my three years’ Slumber on the banks of the Ocean' (E. 728); 'all our three years trouble' (E. 730). The description of the Felpham period as three years of the deepest personal significance recurs at the end of 1805 in a letter to Hayley. Over two years after leaving he discusses the Felpham period with the utmost intensity:

You, Dear Sir, are one who has my Particular Gratitude, having conducted me thro’ Three that would have been the Darkest Years that ever Mortal Suffer’d, which were render’d thro’ your means a Mild & Pleasant Slumber. I speak of Spiritual Things, Not of Natural; of Things known only to Myself & to Spirits Good & Evil, but Not Known to Men on Earth. It is the passage thro’ these Three Years that has brought me into my Present State, & I know that if I had not been with You I must have Perish’d

(E. 767).

Over two years later he is attributing his ‘Present State’ to the spiritual events of Felpham. In c. 1809 (‘Public Address’), Blake writes of ‘Three years’ Herculean Labours at Felpham’ (E. 572), and the same period is named in Jerusalem: ‘After my three years slumber on the banks of the Ocean, I again display my Giant forms to the Public.’ (E. 145). The manner of his frequent recollections of the experiences at Felpham indicate that they feed into all his epics. This period is also explicitly related by Blake to what may have been his most profound spiritual experience, recorded in an extraordinary letter to Hayley of 23 October 1804:

For now! O Glory! and O Delight! I have entirely reduced that spectrous Fiend to his station, whose annoyance has been the ruin of my labours for the past twenty years of my life. He is the enemy of conjugal love and is the Jupiter of the Greeks, an iron-hearted tyrant, the ruiner of ancient Greece. I speak with perfect confidence and certainty of the fact which has passed upon me. Nebuchadnezzar had seven times passed over him; I have had twenty; thank God I was not altogether a beast as he was; but I was a slave bound in a mill among beasts and devils; these beasts and these devils are now, together with myself, become children of light and liberty, and my feet and my wife’s feet are free from fetters. O lovely Felpham, parent of Immortal Friendship, to thee I am eternally indebted for my three years’ rest from perturbation and the
strength I now enjoy. Suddenly, on the day after visiting the Truchsessian Gallery of pictures, I was again enlightened with the light I enjoyed in my youth (E. 756)

If the events of Felpham lie behind Blake’s epics, and his resurgence of creativity after 1804, then ‘all these Visions’ (plate 36, E. 137, l. 24) may refer to all three epics. If this is so, then the act of writing Blake mentions—‘that in three years I might write all these Visions’—may indicate not poetic composition, but the spiritual events that must precede it. Blake’s statements about his writing may often be exaggerated: inflated by enthusiasm, such as inspired the promise of ‘12 books’ and ‘XXVIII Chapters’ for Milton A Poem and Jerusalem respectively. Similarly, the mention of a ‘perfectly completed’ poem in July 1803, when none of Blake’s epics was complete. Moreover, Blake at times wrote about his works in a way which is clearly not literal. Another example from Felpham:

And Now Begins a New life, because another covering of Earth is shaken off. I am more famed in Heaven for my works than I could well conceive. In my Brain are studies & Chambers fill’d with books & pictures of old, which I wrote & painted in ages of Eternity before my mortal life; & those works are the delight & Study of Archangels

(To Flaxman, 21 September 1800, E. 710).

It could be that the claim on plate 36 of Milton is a similar utterance in that Blake is representing mental or spiritual activity ‘In my Brain’ as books which he has written. Another way of approaching this question is to ask whether he was ‘recording his stay at Felpham in a visionary manner after the fact’, or ‘writing it up as it was happening to him’. There is a great immediacy in parts of the poem, particularly from plates 36 to 44, where the Felpham setting is most explicit. But this does not confirm that the poem was written there, or even soon after Blake’s leaving. As we have seen, the immediacy of Blake’s Felpham experiences does not seem to have faded in the years following his return to London.

II

The printing of the four copies appears to have taken place in two printing sessions several years apart. It has always been clear that copies A, B and C belong to a different period from copy D, because of the watermarks and the different printing
styles. The contribution of recent scholarship is a detailed account of Blake’s method of producing illuminated books, which establishes the likelihood that the printing of copies A, B and C took place in a single session (except for printing of the extra plates a to e of copy C). This development largely depends upon Viscomi’s generalised theory of edition printing, or printing illuminated books in sets. This theory is best summarised by Viscomi:

Most copies of illuminated books were compiled from impressions printed and colored in small editions.... [E]dition printing and coloring refute a few of the most basic assumptions in Blake scholarship, that illuminated books were produced “one by one” (Grant 281) “as [Blake] got commissions” (Davids and Petrillo 154) or “with a particular customer in mind” (E 786), and “over many years, beginning... in the late 1780s and not ending until the last years of his life” (Essick, “Materials” 857). The presence of stock in the absence of explicit... strongly suggests that Blake, like any printmaker setting himself up as a printdealer, produced the initial sets of books in the most practical, efficient, and conventional manner possible—and not that he was “issuing different editions for different audiences” (Illuminated Blake 16).

The traditions of eighteenth-century printmaking and the material similarities among illuminated prints (like inking accidentals, which cannot be repeated except with sequential pulls) reveal edition printing’s technical certainty; near exact repetition of coloring features reveals its theoretical necessity. The assumption that illuminated books were produced on a “per-copy basis” is self-contradictory: it cannot account for near-exact visual and material similarities among copies except by implying that a controlling style or prototype was in effect during a given period or for that specific book, which of course, undermines the assumption that each copy is unique or newly invented.

As Viscomi notes, the assumption that Blake’s books were produced singly has been deeply ingrained in Blake studies. In the case of Milton, certain features of the poem’s four copies have given its editors extra encouragement in this assumption. Despite the similar appearance of copies A, B and C, the books vary considerably in small details. Two of these details in particular have seemed to suggest that Blake altered the copper

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23 Viscomi, correspondence.
24 Bentley, Blake Books, pp. 305-311. Copies A, B and C have watermarks J WHATMAN/1808. A: 1, 3, 8, 18. B: 3, 6, 8, 10, 24, 29, 31, 36, 40. C: 4, 7, 26, 41. Bentley also lists c and 3 of copy C, but Viscomi has shown that the watermarks on those plates probably read '1818' (BIB, p. 325). Copies A to C are printed in black, whereas copy D is printed in red and red and black, 'and the colouring is lighter and stronger than in the other copies. Some letters and details of features are touched in ink and the effect is splendid' BB. pp. 310-11.
plate between printing copies A and B. In the first place, copy A has a unique reading of line 21 on plate 3: ‘That cause at length mov’d Milton to this unexampled deed’. All other copies read ‘What cause…’. Bentley (1977, p. 312) states that ‘That’ in A was mended in the copper to ‘What’ in B-D. Accordingly, Essick in his catalogue of the Huntington Collections (1983, p. 169) records copy B’s plate 3 as ‘Second state’, which rules out a single printing session for copies A and B. Viscomi, on close examination of copy A (which my own examination corroborates), states ‘Actually, Blake wrote “What” on the plate, but on the impression on copy A he made the right arm of the W into a T. The other three impressions read “What” because they were printed as written’ (1993, p. 420 n. 21). This re-examination removes one mistaken assumption. A similar confusion over plate 24, line 60 has also been resolved. Alone of all copies, copy A has this line intact. I quote Erdman’s text (1988, p. 120) from line 55 to 61:

But in Eternity the Four Arts: Poetry, Painting, Music, 
And Architecture which is Science: are the Four Faces of Man. 
Not so in Time & Space: there Three are shut out, and only 
Science remains thro Mercy: & by means of Science, the Three 
Become apparent in Time & Space, in the Three Professions 
Poetry in Religion: Music, Law: Painting, in Physic & Surgery: 
That Man may live upon Earth till the time of his awaking

Line 60 (in italics) is only present in copy A. Once again, the question arises whether this is evidence for Blake altering the plate between printing copy A and later copies. Erdman makes the confusing statement ‘Line del in copper in C D; compare similar deletions in Jerusalem Plates 3 and 7328 (1965, p. 729). The comparison is misleading. Of plate 3 of Jerusalem it is clear that ‘At some point Blake attacked the copper plate, gouging out words and entire passages’.

In the case of Milton plate 24, however, it seems that Blake’s method of removing his text did not involve gouging away the relief surfaces of the copper plate, but rubbing away printed words from the paper. Both Bentley (1977, p. 315) and Essick (1983, p. 169) corroborate this, and Essick records that in copy B ‘small fragments of the letters’ remain visible. My own examination of copy B in the Huntington Collection confirms this. The Essick/Viscomi facsimile of

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28 Erdman seems to have overlooked the absence of this line in copy B.
copy C distinguishes the stages of production at which this erasure took place in copies B-D:

60 Erased from the paper after printing and colouring in copies B and C (reproduced here). Similarly erased in copy D, after printing but perhaps before colouring.  

Plates 3 and 24, then, do not seem to have existed in more than one state, and the variations between the impressions drawn from them do not militate against Viscomi’s theory of a single printing session for copies A, B and C.

There are, however, two Milton plates, and possibly three, that do exist in more than one state. The two certainties are plates 13 and 38, both full page designs for which proofs exist (the only extant proofs of any Milton plates). The third possibility is plate 43, impressions of which vary in such a way as to suggest that the first state is recorded in copy B, and that other copies record a later state of this plate. This is an extremely perplexing suggestion, as it would appear to rule out the printing of copies A to C in a single edition, and suggest that copy B was the first to be printed. Essick observes the variant in his 1983 catalogue to the Huntington Collections, and it is not recorded elsewhere. His 1993 facsimile of copy C (with Viscomi) does not mention the problem. The catalogue reads:

Pl. 43: First state? A line, printed from the plate, defines the left elbow of the woman far right and crosses over the left arm of the woman second from the right. This makes it appear that the woman far right is holding her own hands rather than extending her right hand to grasp the hand of her companion third from the right, as in all other impressions. Either this line was removed from the plate or not inked in other impressions.  

My examination of all copies of the poem does not confirm that the etched line was wiped of ink before printing in other copies. Wiping can sometimes be detected by tiny smudges, but these were not found. However, many indications of serial printing of plates from copies A, B and C were found, such as accidental splatters of ink which appear in all three impressions of the same plate, showing that three pulls have been taken from a single inking of the plate. Even if extra work was done on this plate before the impressions of it found in copies A and C were taken, the batch printing

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hypothesis for the bulk of the *Milton* impressions in the first three copies has been conclusively confirmed.

Plate 13 clearly existed in two states. The first state is seen in copies A, B and C, and the second is seen in the separate proof of this plate (in the Philadelphia Museum of Art) and in copy D. The variant does not interfere with the question of the printing of the first three copies. Essick discovered the variant and recorded it in 1981:

In comparison to the impressions in copies A, B... and C of *Milton*, the Philadelphia example shows fewer relief plateaus between white-line cross-hatchings just below the figure's left breast, apparently the result of more tool work in this area. The clearest difference, however, and one that can not be explained simply as inking and printing variations, is the boldly scratched white lines below and to the left of the man's right foot, clearly visible in the Philadelphia impression but not in copies A, B, and C. This same second state with additional white-line work also appears in copy D of the illuminated book... Thus, the second state was executed rather late in the production of *Milton*, sometime between c. 1808 when copies A-C were printed and 1815 (or later) when copy D was printed.32

The first state of plate 38 is known only from copy A. The second state is seen in copies B-D and on the separate impression now in the Essick collection.33 The extra work on the plate, which was carried out between the printing of the impression in copy A and the other impressions, is described by Viscomi and Essick in their 1993 *Milton* facsimile:

The white-line work added to the second state is most clearly visible in an impression printed in black in [the Essick collection], but can also be seen in copies B and C.... The woman's face was highlighted by scraping away relief areas on its left side; additional white lines were cut on her left arm just above the elbow. The woman's right arm and hand were added on the impression in copy A with pen and ink work just left of the man's head (just left of his upper arm) and visible in the Harvey impression and copies B and C, was already present on the plate in the first state and was obscured by mottled inking in the copy A impression. We suspect, however, that the white-line hand was added as part of the work that created the second state.34

The fact that plate 38 appears in a second state in copies B-D is a problem for Viscomi's theory of edition printing. Essick describes his separate impression of the plate thus:

*Milton*, pl. 38. "Woodcut on Copper" technique, 2nd st., plate 13.5 x 10.5 cm. printed in gray-black ink on a wove sheet 23.2 x 15.7 cm. Very probably part of the first printing of c. 1810-11 in which *Milton* copies A-C were also produced.\(^{35}\)

Plate 38 was clearly subject to some extra work between its first printing for copy A and the printing of the second state in the separate impression and the impressions in copies B and C. If the Rinder impression was 'part of the first printing', then this printing session must have been flexible enough to allow this extra work to take place. Plate 38 is executed in white-line, and the design may not have been etched in acid: the metal could have been partly or wholly removed with the burin or etching needle. The extra lines could have been scraped on the plate quite rapidly, so that printing could resume.

It is still necessary to enquire when the printing session took place, and how much the colouring of the three copies was a single task. Viscomi argues that Blake would not have had time to print *Milton* plates (and the three copies of *Songs of Innocence* with which they were printed) at any time from 1808 until late 1810 or early 1811.\(^{36}\) Unlike relief etching, he suggests, printing was extremely disruptive of other work in the studio—in terms of space as well as time—and there is much evidence of Blake's involvement with other work in 1809 and 1810, the time of his exhibition and work on his large engraving *The Canterbury Pilgrims*. The dates of the first sales of copies of *Milton A Poem* are not known so can not be used to confirm the printing date.

Viscomi suggests that Blake generally coloured batches of impressions from the same plate together, before collating them into separate books. This is supported by the shared palette of copies A to C. However, this assumption must clearly be balanced by an account of the work on separate copies which could have taken place well after a first colouring session of c. 1811.

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\(^{36}\) The question of Blake's work schedule in 1809 is also brought up by Erdman (p. 806). Both Viscomi and Erdman cite the letter of December 1808 to George Cumberland (E. 770), in which he claims to be too busy for illuminated printing.
Between the two printing sessions of c. 1811 and 1818, a crucial episode in the evolution of *Milton A Poem* took place, the restructuring of copy C. Viscomi has traced a three stage history of copy C through such details as the watermarks on plates c and e and the size of the pages upon which plates b, a and d were printed, as well as the irregular numbering and the visible abrasions and conversions of old numbers into new. It seems that copy C was Blake's medium for the ongoing development of the poem after copies A and B had been sold. Viscomi's findings include the surprising discovery that plates c and e were added to copy C after copy D had been printed and sold. Copy D was probably sold to James Vine in c. 1818; the earliest owners that can be identified for copies A-C are Philip Hurd, Thomas Butts and T. G. Wainewright respectively.

Copy C, then, has five plates not found in copies A and B. It also lacks plate 2. The first question posed by this situation is 'when were the extra plates composed and etched?'

Their absence from copies A and B, with which copy C was initially printed in late 1810 or early 1811, suggests that they were either deliberately excluded from the printing session or, more likely, not yet composed and etched. Their presence in copy D, and the fact that they were printed in the style and on the same paper as the other plates in that copy, means that they were available for printing by c. 1818.

However, despite plates a-f having been etched by 1818, they were not all added to copy C by then. Viscomi demonstrates that between 1811 and 1818 plate 2 had been removed from the copy and plates b, a, d and f had been added to the book, but that plate f had been removed again. Plates c and e were printed for copy C on paper not

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39 This is shown by the fact that the numbers in the early part of copy C clearly once allowed for an extra plate in the Bard's song. 'The numbers on plates 3, 4, 5, and 6 needed to be altered to make room for plates b and a, but plates b and a needed to be numbered only once. That plates b and a, two freshly printed pages, were actually numbered twice and the original numbers of plates 4-6 were erased and then rewritten may represent an aborted attempt at restructuring the book with plate f. In such a scheme, plate f would have been numbered as 5, as it is in copy D, which would have forced plates 4 onward to be renumbered as 6, 7, 8, and so on, and for plate 3 to be renumbered as 2. That plate 5 was renumbered as 5 over an intermediate and erased "7" and that plate 3 was renumbered as 1 over an intermediate and erased "2" indicate that first, plates b, a, and f were added together with plate 2 extracted; and, second, that one of the newly added plates was itself extracted.'
used until c. 1820.\textsuperscript{40} So these were printed and added to copy C in a chronologically distinct revision from that which provided that copy with plates b, a and d. Consequently, they were numbered outside of the sequence established at the time of the first set of revisions, and marked with asterisks.

The third and final revision was the change of mind about the placing of plate e. First of all the asterisk was placed on plate 32. Finally this asterisk was rubbed out and an asterisk placed on plate e. The order for plate e in copy C, then was originally that of copy D—before plate 32—but ultimately it was placed after 32 (Viscomi pp. 327-8).

Essick and Viscomi suggest that whilst plates b, a and d ‘may have been added as early as 1811 or as late as 1818’, they were probably printed for copy C in the same press run as copy D, albeit in black ink rather than the reddish-orange ink used for copy D.\textsuperscript{41} This is further suggested by the frame lines added to copy C: ‘Blake did not begin using framing lines in his illuminated books until about 1818, when he reprinted six titles on paper watermarked ‘RUSE & TURNERS / 1815’,\textsuperscript{42} including the Milton plates to create copy D. Thus the completion of copy C was very probably connected with the printing and collating of copy D.’ This theory begs the question: if plates b, a and d were printed for copy C as late as 1818, why did Blake at that stage not also print plates c and e, which he was at that time including in copy D? Surely b, a and d were printed for copy C before the etching of plates c and e. It is certainly clear that plates c and e were not etched at the same time as the other plates: they have a different style of lettering, described by Erdman as ‘lighter, freer’ (E. 806)\textsuperscript{43} The most likely sequence for the printing of Milton plates after three sets of 45 in c. 1811 would seem to be: 1811-18: b, a, (f) and d of copy C; 1818: copy D; c. 1820-21: c and e of copy C.\textsuperscript{43}

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\textsuperscript{40} ‘J WHATMAN / 1818’, as found in Songs copy V and the first copies of Jerusalem. See Viscomi p. 326.

\textsuperscript{41} Essick/Viscomi (1993), p. 39.

\textsuperscript{42} Essick/Viscomi (1993), p. 38.

\textsuperscript{43} It is not entirely clear that Viscomi disagrees with this as there seems to be some inconsistency between the position taken in the 1993 facsimile and Blake and the Idea of the Book, which states that ‘copy C... was reworked and restructured more than once, probably before and certainly after—but not at the same time as-copy D’.
Finally, we turn to the printing of copy D. This copy has 1815 watermarks and stylistic differences from the earlier copies. It is printed in red and coloured more intensely. Viscomi argues that it was part of a deluxe edition of several titles:

The first concerted effort to replenish stock occurred c. 1818, when Blake, as he had over twenty years earlier with the large-paper copies, printed various titles in the same sessions. Using the same inks, printing format, paper, and palette, Blake produced *Visions* copies N, O, and P, *Thel* copies N and O, *Songs* copies U and T2, *Milton* copy D, *Urizen* copy G, and *Marriage* copy G. The printing ink was orange and various shades of orangish red. The paper was Ruse & Turners 1815.44

This edition, Viscomi suggests, was possibly initiated by a commission:

Vine’s two illuminated books, *Milton* copy D and *Thel* copy O, were stabbed together by Blake and not given frame lines, a significant omission since they were given to all the other copies of this set and nearly all subsequent copies of illuminated books printed in a colored ink.... The shared binding and the absence of a feature that quickly became standard suggest that *Milton* and *Thel* were the first of the Ruse & Turners copies to leave the studio, that they were sold before the aesthetic decision to frame pages was made. If so, then Vine’s purchases represents a commission and was probably the commission that initiated the production of the entire c. 1818 set of illuminated books.45

This statement completes our account of the composition and etching of the poem, and of the two major printing sessions in which it was produced. A further bibliographical chapter will discuss the differences between the four copies, and the attempts of the poem’s editors and commentators to account for Blake’s restructuring of the poem after the first printing session.

Chapter 3: Prophetic Vision in the World of Los and Satan

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a reading of the poem's main narrative: John Milton's journey to earth and ultimately to transfiguration in Blake's presence at Felpham. It is a journey beginning with a bard's song, which moves the listening Milton to declare 'I go to Eternal Death!... I in my Selfhood am that Satan' (plate 12, E. 108 l. 14, 30). This response may be related to the song's detailed and persuasive attack on Milton's works, and particularly *Paradise Lost*.

Reference to *Paradise Lost* is first made in the introductory invocation to the muses:

*Say first! what mov'd Milton... What cause at length mov'd Milton to this unexampled deed.*

(plate 3, E. 96, l. 16, 21)

The parodic echo of Milton's own invocation in *Paradise Lost* informs us that the bard's account should be read in parallel to the earlier epic.

*Say first, for heaven hides nothing from thy view Nor the deep tract of hell, say first what cause Moved our grandparents in that happy state, Favoured of heaven so highly, to fall off From their creator, and transgress his will For one restraint, lords of the world besides?*

(I.27-32, p. 44)

The answer to Milton's rhetorical question is 'The infernal serpent' (I.34, p. 44); to Blake's, 'A Bards prophetic Song' (plate 3, E. 96, l. 22). Milton promises a tale of guile and deception: 'he it was, whose guile / Stirred up with envy and revenge, deceived the mother of mankind' (I.34-5, p. 44). The result of the serpent's 'seduction' is 'man's first disobedience' (I.1, p. 40). The bard's song is also a cautionary tale describing a deception, but this deception differs radically from the temptations produced by the serpent to lure Eve into disobedience, for the 'False Tongue' refers primarily to the web of lies which constitutes Christianity:

*Tell also of the False Tongue! vegetated Beneath your land of shadows: of its sacrifices. and Its offerings; even till Jesus, the image of the Invisible God Became its prey; a curse, an offering, and an atonement, For Death Eternal in the heavens of Albion*  

(plate 3, E. 96, l. 10-14)
The ‘False Tongue’ is the whole Christological tradition by which the death of Christ has been deemed to ‘pay’ for sin. This is manifestly the tradition of Paradise Lost, which places the ‘sacrificial’ death of Christ at the pinnacle of a chain of events reaching from creation and original prohibition to temptation, sin, judgement, repentance, salvation and damnation.\(^1\) In Milton’s epic, the need for ‘an offering’ and ‘an atonement’ to save humanity from the consequences of sin is established even before the fall has taken place. In Book III the Father announces that the penalty of death cannot be revoked without satisfaction:

> He with his whole posterity must die,  
> Die he or justice must; unless for him  
> Some other able, and as willing, pay  
> The rigid satisfaction, death for death.

(I.209-212, p. 155)

Blake’s description of the False Tongue echoes the Son’s agreement with his Father. He declares man:

> once dead in sins and lost;  
> Atonement for himself or offering meet,  
> Indebted and undone, hath none to bring:  
> Behold me then, me for him, life for life  
> I offer, on me let thine anger fall.

(I.233-7, p. 156)

The angelic chorus responds to this offer with the cry ‘O unexampled love’ (I.410, p. 167). This is echoed in Blake’s description of Milton’s return as an ‘unexampled deed’ (Pl. 3, E. 96, l. 21). Thus, Milton’s return to earth is deliberately, and somewhat mischievously, compared to the Messianic mission to satisfy divine justice in Paradise Lost (III.294-5, p. 159), but ironically, his goal will be to defeat his own ideology of sin and salvation by casting off his selfhood, which includes his drive towards righteousness and holiness. At the outset of his journey Blake’s Milton ‘took off the robe of the promise, & ungirded himself from the oath of God’ (plate 12, E. 108, I. 13). Some critics have understood this disrobing as the rejection of the thirty-nine articles of the Church of England; however, it may also symbolise Milton’s rejection of the biblical association, reflected in Paradise Lost, between nakedness and

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\(^1\) *Paradise Lost*: ‘for these my Death shall pay’ (XI.36, p. 565); ‘Filial obedience: as a sacrifice / Glad to be offered’ (III.269, p. 158).
the shame of sin. In Book X the Son, 'pitying' the condition of Adam and Eve, clothes them in a double sense:

Nor he their outward only with the skins
Of beasts, but inward nakedness, much more
Opprobrious, with his robe of righteousness,
Arraying covered from his Father's sight.

(X.220-23, p. 518)

By disrobing Milton rejects this act of pity, because it is predicated upon the imputation of guilt and upon the unworthiness of the naked soul before God. Milton's naked image in the illuminations underscores this rejection. Blake's Milton finally denounces the kind of religion that entails prohibitions and penalties. Such religion is repeatedly associated with Satan, whom Milton confronts at Felpham:

laughing to scorn
Thy Laws & terrors, shaking down thy Synagogues as webs
I come to discover before Heavn & Hell the Self righteousness
In all its Hypocritic turpitude

(plate 39, E139, l. 41-44).

Contrasts with *Paradise Lost* persist throughout the bard's song, which includes a rival creation myth. In all versions of the song, there is a prior realm of three classes whose members fall into strife. This strife leads to a second act of creation which produces our world as a refuge for Satan. This latter world also contains 'Three Classes of Mortal Men' who 'overspread the Nations of the whole Earth' (plate 4, E. 100, l. 33). Both accounts differ significantly from that of Milton. In *Paradise Lost*, creation is carried out by the Son within the biblical six-day period, and pronounced good (VII.549, p. 390). For the bard, creation is altogether less successful. It begins, in the later copies, with the terrifying event of Urizen's incarnation. As in the *Book of Urizen*, Los has a role in this process, for he 'siezd his Hammer & Tongs; he labourd at his resolute Anvil' (plate b, E. 96, l. 7); however he does not control the ensuing process which is apparently spontaneous. Every stage of Urizen's embodiment is 'a State of dismal woe', described in terms of horror, torment, sickness, panting, trembling and weeping. Watching Urizen's transformation causes Los to develop from his own body two more figures who will participate in the first phase of creation: 'a Female pale' and 'a Male Form howling in Jealousy' (plate b, E. 97, l. 33, 36). The birth of 'All Los's Family' ensues and it is amongst this group
that the second phase of creation, producing our world, has its origins. On plate f and plate 4 the mundane creation of three classes is described as an event which is still ongoing in the present tense. The agents of this creation are ‘the Males at Furnaces’ as well as ‘Enithitharmons Looms’ and ‘Los’s hammer’. The songs of creation are not the angelic hymns of *Paradise Lost* (VII.601-632, p. 392-4), but a chant of derision at the limitations of the emerging human form:

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Ah weak & wide astray! Ah shut in narrow doleful form
Creeping in reptile flesh upon the bosom of the ground
The Eye of Man a little narrow orb closed up & dark ...
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(plate f, E. 99, l. 19-21)

The ensuing catalogue of human grossness and incapacity contrasts with Milton’s triumphant description of the success and purposefulness of the final work of creation:

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There wanted yet the master work, the end
Of all yet done; a creature who not prone
And brute as other creatures, but endued
With sanctity of reason, might erect
His stature, and upright with front serene
Govern the rest, self-knowing, and from thence
Magnanimous to correspond with heaven,
But grateful to acknowledge whence his good
Descends, thither with heart and voice and eyes
Directed in devotion, to adore
And worship God supreme, who made him chief
Of all his works
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(VII.505-516, p. 387-8)

Milton’s hymns to creation are further answered in Blake’s poem by the sustained lament of plate 4, which describes the three mundane classes amidst the emblems of poverty and retributive justice:

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Los lifts his iron Ladles
With molten ore: he heaves the iron cliffs in his rattling chains
From Hyde Park to the Alms-houses of Mile-end & old Bow
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(plate 4, E. 100, l. 29-31)

Aaron Fogel has written persuasively about the haunting sense of loss found throughout this plate, which is found in all copies. He suggests that this is created by the embedding of the syllable pronounced ‘rue’ in many words found in the passage beginning ‘The Surrey hills glow like the clinkers of the furnace: Lambeths Vale /
Where Jerusalems foundations began; where they were laid in ruins / Where they were laid in ruins from every Nation & Oak Groves rooted' (plate 4, E. 99, l. 14-16).

For the bard, human life is not structured by divine purpose; humanity did not derive from Adam and Eve, created good and happy and circumscribed by a single prohibition. Instead there is a primal realm of brotherhood which becomes infected by Satan’s malice. This aggression is ‘primitive’, its origins unexplained. Moral prohibitions emerge only after the crisis, and they are the product of the ‘tyrannical’ Satan (plate 5, E. 100, l. 4). Satan’s accusation against Palamabron of ingratitude and his creation of ‘Seven Deadly Sins’, of ‘Moral laws and cruel punishments upon the clouds of Jehovah’ (plate 7, E. 103, l. 19-22) gesture parodically towards *Paradise Lost* again. For although Milton’s poems do not contain ‘Seven Deadly Sins’ there is, of course, a pronounced theme of prohibition throughout *Paradise Lost*. God the Father, also named Jehovah in three instances,² calls Satan ‘Ingrate’ (III.97, p. 148), and speaks the sentence upon Adam and Eve ‘from his secret cloud’ (X.32, p. 508):

What rests but that the mortal sentence pass
On his transgression

(X.48-9, p. 509)

Despite the bard’s sustained contradiction of *Paradise Lost*, Milton responds to his song with immediate action, deciding to return at once to the world of conflict and division that has been described: ‘The Nations still / Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam; in pomp / Of warlike selfhood’ (plate 12, E. 108, l. 14-15). The song’s power both to persuade and to inspire Milton can be understood only in the light of a more detailed reading, particularly of the section describing the conflict between Satan and his brothers.

The action in this part of the song is simple enough. Three brothers, Rintrah, Palamabron and Satan all have agricultural roles: plowman, harrower and miller respectively. Los is their father, and Satan and Palamabron both defer to him as an authority figure. The core event that takes place amongst them is that Satan and Palamabron exchange roles for one day, at Satan’s persistent request. Neither performs each other’s work successfully. Disruptive recriminations follow, and a day of solemn mourning commences, but dissolves into anger and bloodshed. Palamabron

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seeks the authority of a solemn assembly. He and Rintrah appeal to the assembly which is described as ‘all Eden’. This assembly blames Rintrah, who is criticised for his anger. Los becomes enraged and attacks creation. Satan denounces Palamabron and claims to be God, announcing his ‘principles of moral individuality’, and the penalty for ‘transgressors’. He enters a state of deadly decline, and becomes separated from Palamabron. The assembly discusses the destiny of the new world which has formed around Satan, and assigns it a series of guardians, culminating in Jesus. Further analysis of Satan’s wrongdoing follows, as Leutha, his emanation, steps forward to share the blame.

Thematic interpretations of the narrative that I have summarised commonly focus upon pity and wrath. Indeed, many of the song’s audience condemn it on the grounds that ‘Pity and Love are too venerable for the imputation / Of Guilt’ (plate 11, E. 107, l. 48-9). Pity and wrath are certainly key issues in the song, just as they are in *Paradise Lost*. The emotion of pity in particular is closely scrutinised by the bard. An important example is Leutha’s expressed pity for Satan which echoes closely the Son’s judgement and clothing of Adam and Eve in Book X of *Paradise Lost*. The Son is described as ‘pitying while he judged’ (X.1059, p. 560). Leutha shows that where pity combines with judgement it is tainted with aggression. Although her action is intended to be messianically selfless (‘Offering herself a Ransom for Satan, taking on her, his Sin’, plate 9, E. 105, l. 30), her pity for Satan mingles with accusation and self-righteousness:

I humbly bow in all my Sin before the Throne Divine.
Not so the Sick-one; Alas, what shall be done him to restore?
Who calls the Individual Law, Holy: and despises the Saviour.
(plate 11, E. 106, l. 3-5)

However, pity and wrath feature in the narrative not simply as mistaken or dangerous sources of motivation, but as an example of the manner in which any prescriptive moral code can become a weapon against its conscientious adherents. The moral discourse

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3 (1.386, p. 66; I.487, p. 72; VII.602, p. 393).
4 For example: III.404-409:
   No sooner did thy dear and only Son
   Perceive thee purposed not to doom frail man
   So strictly, but much more to pity inclined,
   He to appease thy wrath, and end the strife
   Of mercy and justice in thy face discerned,
of pity and wrath is used to moderate, interpret and judge the behaviour of various characters in the bard’s song, with disastrous consequences. In other words, the song is about the ways in which our ethical discourses make us vulnerable to the manipulative attacks of Satan.

When Los is first confronted with the Palamabron/Satan disaster he blames himself for indulging pity. It appears he means Satan’s pity rather than his own, for Los has previously understood Satan’s request as a desire to ‘drive the Harrow in pitys paths’ (plate a, E. 98, l. 16). Satan’s professed pity is directed at Palamabron:

He soft intreated Los to give to him Palamabrons station;
For Palambron returnnd with labour wearied every evening
(plate 5, E. 100, l. 6-7)

Los’s analysis of the cause of the disaster is flawed. Its true source is not Satan’s pity, but his aggression against both Los and Palamabron and his success in concealing this from the former and manipulating the latter. Los also accuses Palamabron of inappropriate pity.

Henceforth Palamabron, let each his own station
Keep: nor in pity false, nor in officious brotherhood, where
None needs, be active.
(plate 5, E. 101, l. 41-3)

This is a false allegation against Palamabron, whose error was not caused by pity, or ‘pity false’, but by fear. Unlike Los, and unlike Satan himself, Palamabron is not deceived by Satan’s profession of pity and love. Palamabron never gives his agreement to Satan’s request, and the decision to give in to Satan is not made by Palamabron but by Los. Palamabron merely fails to protest at Los’s decision, which is the result of a sudden change of mind.

Palamabron oft refus’d; and as often Satan offer’d
His service till by repeated offers and repeated intreaties
Los gave to him the Harrow of the Almighty; alas blamable
Palamabron. fear’d to be angry lest Satan should accuse him of
Ingratitude, & Los believe the accusation thro Satans extreme
Mildness.
(plate 5, E. 100, l. 8-13)

... offered himself to die
Palamabron's weakness here is that he does not wish to appear to contravene a moral and social code of gratitude. This is a significant inhibition, as ingratitude is one of the crimes of Milton's Satan (III.97, p. 148).

As Palamabron fears, Los has no insight into Satan's motivation, despite Satan's 'primitive tyrannical attempts' on him (plate 5, E. 100, l. 5). Palamabron's predicament, faced with Satan's concealed aggression, is that he knows he is subject to Los's judgement, which is unreliable. Like Los, Satan is himself shielded from full knowledge of the motivations which have led him to make and repeat his request.

Satan wept,
And mildly cursing Palamabron, him accus'd of crimes
Himself had wrought. Los trembled; Satans blandishments almost
Perswaded the Prophet of Eternity that Palamabron
Was Satans enemy, & that the Gnomes being Palamabron's friends
Were leagued together against Satan thro' ancient enmity.
What could Los do? how could he judge, when Satans self, believ'd
That he had not oppres'd the horses of the Harrow, nor the servants.
(plate 5, E. 101, l. 33-40)

Pity is a most mistaken culprit in Los's analysis of these events. For what is really at stake is Satan's ability to deceive himself and those around him. This ability gives rise to Palamabron's fear to appeal to Los. Thus the proper theme of the song is the powerful nature of deceit and the vulnerability of those who submit to naive authorities. Following the first phase of the disaster, Palamabron berates himself for failing to warn Los:

You know Satans mildness and his self-imposition,
Seeming a brother, being a tyrant, even thinking himself a brother
While he is murdering the just
... O foolish forbearance
Would I had told Los, all my heart!
(plate 5, E. 100-101, l. 21-29)

Rintrah's anger emerges in the wake of these events. Although Los condemns pity, the assembly Palamabron summons condemns this wrath. However, we perceive from Palamabron's own case that fear overcame anger with disastrous consequences. As Los initially acknowledges, it is wise to be open about wrath:

If you consider it Wisdom when you are angry to be silent, and
Not to shew it: I do not account that Wisdom but Folly.
Every Mans Wisdom is peculiar to his own Individuality ...
Get to thy Labours at the Mills & leave me to my wrath.
(plate a, E. 98, l. 6-14)
On a casual reading the song appears indeed to be an analysis of the relationship between pity and wrath. The themes are presented in a portentous way in the mysterious sequence which opens plate f:

Palamabron with the fiery Harrow in morning returning
From breathing fields. Satan fainted beneath the artillery
Christ took on Sin in the Virgins Womb, & put it off on the Cross
All pitied the piteous & was wrath with the wrathful & Los heard it

(plate f, E. 98, l. 1-4)

One of the ominous consequences of Satan's separation is a new sundering of the two qualities.

And Satan not having the Science of Wrath, but only of Pity:
Rent them asunder, and wrath was left to wrath, & pity to pity.

(plate 7, E. 103, l. 46-7)

Pretended pity emerges from the narrative as Satan's major tool against those he wishes to attack—both Palamabron and Los—but this pretended pity is a successful weapon only because they lack either the ability to penetrate the deception (Los) or the courage to expose it (Palamabron). A failure of interpretation and a cowardly reliance on unworthy authority are the ultimate causes of the disaster described by the bard. Palamabron invokes authority even when he knows it is unlikely to aid him. We are told that Palamabron does not complain to Los in case Satan should accuse Palamabron of ingratitude and Los believe him. But when Palamabron discovers his maddened horses he still turns optimistically to Los:

... patience O my friends,
All may be well: silent remain, while I call Los and Satan.

(plate 5, E. 101, l. 29-30)

Los is as disappointing as Palamabron first supposes. This does not discourage Palamabron from invoking a further authority: a Great Solemn Assembly. However, he is moved to pray for his own safety:

O God, protect me from my friends, that they have not power over me
Thou hast giv'n me power to protect myself from my bitterest enemies.

(plate 7, E. 102, l. 4-5)

Although the design following the bard's song presents Cain and Abel, an image of distorted brotherhood, this prayer could refer to Palamabron's relationship with his father Los, rather than exclusively to Satan, as is often supposed. Satan's enmity has always been clear to Palamabron, and now becomes more generally apparent. Los has
failed Palamabron when he was expected to protect him. Likewise, Palamabron’s intention

That he who will not defend Truth, may be compelled to
Defend a Lie, that he may be snared & caught & taken
(plate 6, E. 102, l. 47-8)

presents a challenge to the inept Los as well as to the malicious Satan. Indeed Los joined Satan in making wrongful accusations against Palamabron.

The judgement of the assembly is against wrath rather than pity, and appears to provoke a general eruption of that very quality. Satan, Los and Rintrah all give way to destructive rage. Satan’s act is to declare his hostility openly and much more globally than before, when it was directed at Los and Palamabron. He also expresses a new agenda of moral codification and religious worship. Los attacks his creation in a most destructive way, echoing Satan’s practice of deceit.

Los in his wrath curs’d heaven & earth, he rent up Nations,
Standing on Albions rocks among high-reard Druid temples
Which reach the stars of heaven & stretch from pole to pole …
But he clos’d up Enitharmon from the sight of all these things
(plate 7, E. 103, l. 13-18)

Rintrah forms barriers which protect Palamabron but enforce Satan’s separation:

Rintrah rear’d up walls of rocks and pour’d rivers & moats
Of fire round the walls: columns of fire guard around
Between Satan and Palamabron in the terrible darkness.
(plate 7, E. 103, l. 43-5)

Leutha provides an analysis of the origins of the destructive anger of Satan in a tale of ‘admiration join’d with envy’ (plate 10, E. 105, l. 8) The Satanic method of attack is also confirmed:

To do unkind things in kindness! with power armd, to say
The most irritating things in the midst of tears and love
These are the stings of the Serpent! thus did we by them
(plate 10, l. 32-34)

It is valuable to contrast Palamabron’s prophetic inertia and compromising reliance upon inadequate authority for judgement with the bard’s confident tone throughout his song and his ready defence of it against the inquisition of his audience: ‘where hadst thou this terrible Song’. He confidently states the source of his genius, and identifies it, moreover as the source of his protection:

‘I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing
According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity
To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen
(plate 11, E. 107, l. 51 - plate 12, E. 108, l. 1-3)

Whereas Palamabron has sought protection from unreliable sources, or been offered the dramatic and perhaps destructive protection of Rintrah's flames against Satan's rage, the bard claims that his inspiration is his protection. If Palamabron had had such conviction he may have been able to prevent the disaster of Satan's fall, by preventing the exchange from taking place. In this sense he would have been protected by his own genius: by having the courage to express his knowledge of Satan and the confidence in his power to persuade.

The bard's second level of protection is provided in the refuge of a fellow poet's bosom:

> Then there was great murmuring in the Heavens of Albion
> Concerning Generation & the Vegetative power & concerning
> The Lamb the Saviour: Albion trembled to Italy Greece & Egypt
> To Tartary & Hindostan & China & to Great America
> Shaking the roots & fast foundations of the Earth in doubtfulness
> The loud voic'd Bard terrify'd took refuge in Miltons bosom

(plate 12, E. 108, l. 4-9)

Perhaps the refuge of Milton's bosom and the protection of the Poetic Genius are one and the same thing. What Palamabron lacked for his own protection was the confidence of inspiration. The bard has defined the poet as one who relies only upon the authority and protection of the inner conviction of Poetic Genius. This inner conviction that has evaded Palamabron, in a chain of events that have led to the formation and peopling of our world, will be demonstrated by the returned John Milton in the narrative that follows the song. Disturbingly, the song ends with a scene of 'delusion' in which Satan's emanation Leutha joins with Palamabron to bring about the final stage of the fall, the state of fallen humanity which will lead to human history (plate 11, E. 107, l. 36-44).

The song provides Milton with an alternative to his own view of the fall in *Paradise Lost*. It also provides him with a vision of salvation which allows him to formulate a positive response to the story. Whereas the outcome of his own theology was the passivity described as Milton's condition at the outset of Blake's epic, the bard's new version of events provokes him into immediate action. The main narrative
confirms what the song implied, namely that Satan's world of conflict and suffering is also our own world. The bard's darkest vision of Albion concerns its religious practice:

And the Mills of Satan were separated into a moony Space
Among the rocks of Albions Temples, and Satans Druid sons
Offer the Human Victims throughout all the Earth, and Albions
Dread Tomb immortal on his Rock, overshadowd the whole Earth:
Where Satan making to himself Laws from his own identity.
Compell'd others to serve him in moral gratitude & submission
Being call'd God: setting himself above all that is called God.
And all the Spectres of the Dead calling themselves Sons of God
In his Synagogues worship Satan under the Unutterable Name

(plate 9, E. 104, l. 6-14)

Rintrah and Palamabron confirm that the churches have been infected by a spirit of 'Self-righteousness against the Universal Saviour, / Mocking the Confessors & Martyrs, claiming Self-righteousness; / With cruel Virtue', and that even the visions of Swedenborg have been assimilated to an ideology which insists on 'Shewing the Transgressors in Hell, the proud Warriors in Heaven: / Heaven as a Punisher & Hell as One under Punishment' (plate 20, E. 117-8, l. 42-4, 50-52).

Another continuity between the bard's Albion and the historical world of the main narrative is the persistence of conflict and confusion. In particular, the narrative stresses the return of Milton as an event which evades confident interpretation, and provokes new divisions amongst Los's family, who now appear as the stewards of the fallen world. Milton's return as an event which evades sound interpretation. Blake experiences Milton's descent as a direct bodily impact, and yet cannot immediately interpret what has taken place:

But Milton entering my foot; I saw in the nether
Regions of the Imagination; also all men on Earth,
And all in Heaven, saw in the nether regions of the Imagination
In Ulro beneath Beulah, the vast breach of Milton's descent.
But I knew not that it was Milton, for man cannot know
What passes in his members till periods of Space & Time
Reveal the secrets of Eternity: for more extensive
Than any other earthly things, are Mans earthly lineaments.

(plate 19, E. 115, l. 4-11)

Los is fearful at his first sight of the falling Milton, sharing in Enitharmon's horror:

Los the Vehicular terror beheld him, & divine Enitharmon
Call'd all her daughters, Saying. Surely to unloose my bond
Is this Man come! Satan shall be unloosed upon Albion
Los heard in terror Enitharmons words: in fibrous strength
His limbs shot forth like roots of trees against the forward path
Of Miltons journey.

(plate 16, E. 110-111, l. 31-6)

His fears extend to the disbanding of his own family (plate 19, E. 115, l. 52). However, he reaches a new understanding through his recollection of an old story, often sung to the loud harp at the immortal feasts / That Milton of the Land of Albion should up ascend / Forwards from Ulro from the Vale of Felpham; and set free / Orc from his Chain of Jealousy' (plate 19, E. 110, l. 58-61). Los is unable to share this new-found understanding with his sons Rintrah and Palamabron because, as in the bard’s song, they do not trust his judgement. Once again, assumptions about pity and wrath cloud, rather than clarify, judgement of the present situation, as Rintrah and Palamabron dismiss their father’s speech on the grounds that ‘wrath now swayd and now pity absorbd him’, and he admonishes them ‘O Sons we live not by wrath. by mercy alone we live!’ (plate 23, E. 120, l. 46; plate 22, E. 119, l. 34).

When Los joins with Blake he gives a most confident account of his sublunar role as witness of human events: ‘both Time & Space obey my will. / I in Six Thousand Years walk up and down: for not one Moment / Of Time is lost’ (plate 20, E. 117, l. 17-21). However, as readers we have witnessed Los frequently isolated, anxious and passive. Los’s first response of terror at Milton’s return is to attempt to prevent it by presenting a vegetable barrier with his own body. This has sinister connotations within this section of the poem, which is decorated with visions of part-human, part-vegetable monstrosities. Los’s passive acts of witness (‘Los beheld’, plate 16, E. 111, l. 31; ‘Los heard’ plate 16, E. 111, l. 34; ‘Los saw’ plate 18, E. 115, l. 51; ‘Los heard indistinct in fear’, plate 20, E. 116, l. 4) culminate on plate 19 with the most poignant image of impotent anxiety:

Seven mornings Los heard them [Ololon lamenting], as the poor bird within the shell
Hears its impatient parent bird; and Enitharmon heard them:
But saw them not, for the blue Mundane Shell inclos’d them in.

(plate 19, E. 119, l. 28-30)

Los’s primary fear is of vegetation, the obscure but menacing condition of the human beings in his care. Rintrah and Palamabron fear the evil effects of religion and war.
These fears echo the predicament of the parent bird attending the distress of unhatched chick: Los's family is bound to a guarding role, but cannot fulfil it. For example, Rintrah and Palamabron observe the dangerous course of history and wish to intervene:

The Shadowy Female shudders thro' heaven in torment inexpressible!
And all the Daughters of Los prophetic wail: yet in deceit,
They weave a new Religion from new Jealousy of Theotormon!
Miltons Religion is the cause: there is no end to destruction!

Their response is to stir up the Methodist revival. However, they cannot control the reception of their prophets by the people of Albion. Once again the issue of interpretation arises: Swedenborg's visions have been twisted by the Churches and the Methodist revival has been met with a request for demonstrable proof of divine inspiration: 'shew us Miracles' (plate 20, E. 118, l. 62). Los and his family apparently superintend the process of vegetation, or becoming human:

Then Los conducts the Spirits to be Vegetated, into
Great Golgonooza, free from the four iron pillars of Satans Throne
(Temperance, Prudence, Justice, Fortitude, the four pillars of tyranny)
That Satans Watch-Fiends touch them not before they Vegetate

The close of the first book defines the world of nature as Los's six-thousand-year labour. This labour is described with fantastical detail, generating a vision of infinite tenderness towards the fragile and pitiable human subject. The work of Antamon, one of the Sons of Los, for example, is to form a body for the unborn 'little weeping spectre' who stands 'on the threshold of Death / Eternal'

The soft hands of Antamon draw the indelible line:
Form immortal with golden pen; such as the Spectre admiring
Puts on the sweet form; then smiles Antamon bright thro his windows
The Daughters of beauty look up from their Loom & prepare.
The integument soft for its clothing with joy & delight.

However, there is also a violent impulse latent within Los's attentions to humanity. He introduces himself to Blake as the guardian of six thousand years, but on plate 22 he gives a clear indication of how much he longs for those years to come to an end in the universal conflagration of apocalypse:

O when shall we tread our wine-presses in heaven; and Reap
Our wheat with shoutings of joy, and leave the Earth in peace ...
patient wait a little while till the Last Vintage is over:
Till we have quenchd the Sun of Salah in the Lake of Udan Adan
(plate 22, E. 119, l. 45-6, 59-60)

A shocking vision of the torments of the winepresses ensues on plate 24:

But in the Wine-presses the Human grapes sing not, nor dance
They howl & writhe in shoals of torment; in fierce flames consuming,
In chains of iron & in dungeons circled with ceaseless fires.
In pits & dens & shades of death: in shapes of torment & woe.
The plates & screws & wracks & saws & cords & fires & cisterns
The cruel joys of Luvahs Daughters lacerating with knives
And whips their Victims & the deadly sport of Luvahs Sons.
(plate 24, E. 124-5, l. 30-36)

This is the scene which Los incites his workers to create: ‘Go forth Reapers with
rejoicing’ (plate 25, E. 122, l. 44). This harvest is the context in which Los expresses
pity for the human weak: ‘Crave not for the mortal & perishing delights, but leave
them /To the weak, and pity the weak as your infant care’ (plate 25, E. 122, l. 56-7).

Significantly, Los is once again unable to convince his auditors of his vision:

So Los spoke. But lightnings of discontent broke on all sides round
And murmurs of thunder rolling heavy long & loud over the mountains
While Los calld his Sons around him to the Harvest & the Vintage.
(plate 25, E. 122, l. 63-5)

The harvest that Los wishes to initiate apparently serves punitive purposes, as the three
classes are separated out as wheat and chaff:

The Ancient Man upon the Rock of Albion Awakes,
He listens to the sounds of War astonishd & ashamd;
He sees his Children mock at Faith and deny Providence
Therefore you must bind the Sheaves not by Nations or Families
You shall bind them in Three Classes; according to their Classes
So shall you bind them.. Separating What has been Mixd
Since Men began to be Wove into Nations
(plate 25, E. 122, l. 23-29)

Los is in danger of simply inverting Calvinist categories

The Elect is one Class: You
Shall bind them separate: they cannot Believe in Eternal Life
Except by Miracle & a New Birth. The other two Classes;
The Reprobate who never cease to Believe, and the Redeemd,
Who live in doubts & fears perpetually tormented by the Elect
These you shall bind in a twin-bundle
(plate 25, E. 122, l. 32-37)
Los's harvest expectations echo the biblical vision of apocalypse: ‘we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness’ (2 Peter, Ch. 3.13). Similarly *Paradise Lost* looks forward to ‘the day ... of respiration to the just, / And vengeance to the wicked’ (XII.539-41, p. 636). In perhaps the most wrathful passage of all the almighty predicts the final exclusion of Satan by the Son who will

obstruct the mouth of hell  
For ever, and seal up his ravenous jaws.  
Then heaven and earth renewed shall be made pure  
To sanctity that shall receive no stain  

(X.636-639, p. 540)

Both Los’s speech and the apocalyptic vision of *Paradise Lost* reveal the incongruity between an antinomian agenda and a millennial vision structured upon the exclusion of one party, whether it be ‘the wicked’ or ‘the Elect’. The reformation of Los’s eschatological vision is the task of the returning Milton, who brings the poem to its antinomian conclusion. Milton’s return inaugurates a new understanding of Los’s situation in the fallen world. This new vision is Milton’s most profound response to the bard’s song, for it engages at the most personal level with the myth of three classes expounded in that song. On plate 18, Blake describes the complex details of Milton’s reincarnation. He exists and acts on four distinct levels:

Silent Milton stood before  
The darkend Urizen; as the sculptor silent stands before  
His forming image; he walks round it patient labouring.  
Thus Milton stood forming bright Urizen, while his Mortal part  
Sat frozen in the rock of Horeb: and his Redeemed portion  
Thus form’d the Clay of Urizen; but within that portion  
His real Human walkd above in power and majesty  
Tho darkend; and the Seven Angels of the Presence attended him.  
O how can I with my gross tongue that cleaveth to the dust,  

Tell of the Four-fold Man, in starry numbers fitly orderd  
Or how can I with my cold hand of clay! But thou O Lord  
Do with me as thou wilt! for I am nothing, and vanity.  
If thou chuse to elect a worm, it shall remove mountains.  
For that portion namd the Elect: the Spectrous body of Milton:  
Redounding from my left foot into Los’s Mundane space,  
Brooded over his Body in Horeb  

(plate 18, E. 114, l. 7-22)
This analysis of the four-fold Milton inaugurates the new ethical vision which will replace the inhibiting moral dogma demonstrated in the Bard's song and Los's punishing post-Calvinist agenda. Blake's vision of Milton consists of a 'Real Self' plus mortal, redeemed and elect parts: the categories of Los's three classes. If we look back to the Bard's song we see that it supports Los's understanding of the classes as three mutually exclusive groups of individuals destined to differing soteriological ends:

Here the Three Classes of Mortal Men take their fixed destinations
And hence they overspread the Nations of the whole Earth & hence
The Web of Life is woven: & the tender sinews of life created
And the Three Classes of Men regulated by Los's Hammer

The first, The Elect from before the foundation of the World:
The second, The Redeem'd. The Third, The Reprobate & form'd
To destruction from the mother's womb
(plates 4-5, E. 100, l. 32-35, l-3)

But it also, in version D, supports a reading akin to that implied by the narrative of Milton's embodiment:

For the Elect cannot be Redeem'd, but Created continually
By Offering & Atonement in the cruelties of Moral Law
Hence the three Classes of Men take their fixed destinations
They are the Two Contraries and the Reasoning Negative.
(plate f, E. 98, l. 11-14)

In this psychologized account the class of the Elect is 'Created continually' via the ideological cycle of sin and atonement: 'By Offering and Atonement in the cruelties of Moral Law'. John Milton's character echoes this understanding in his speech to Ololon:

Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man
All that can be annihilated must be annihilated
That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery
There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
The Negation must be destroyed to redeem the Contraries
The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man
This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal Spirit: a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated alway
To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination
(plate 42, E. 142, l. 28-37)

This definitive account identifies the Elect as the equivalent of the selfhood, and as the target of Milton's self-examination and self-annihilation.
Milton's soteriological role apparently renders Los redundant. Like Milton he has been in part responsible for the dark side of human history, having maintained nightly contact with the twenty-seven churches that are finally revealed as Satan's covering. Milton becomes a state: he comes to represent a permanent aspect of human potential, and to ensure that soteriological barriers no longer divide individuals into elect and reprobate, but demarcate transient states into which the individual may lapse, and from which he can graduate.

Los, then, becomes subordinate to Milton's 'Awakening', but is present in the poem's concluding sequence. Milton enters the vision of Christ on the shore at Felpham, whilst Los is returned to familiar history, and to his role as anxious listener, no longer the grim superintendent of harvest and vintage in the original, punitive sense.

Los listens to the Cry of the Poor Man: his Cloud
   Over London in volume terrific low bended in anger.
   (plate 44, E. 144, l. 34-35)

In Milton's new vision, wrath is restored to a new validity because it is now turned against the spectre, the Elect, the Selfhood, the reasoning power. Pity in the aggressive sense epitomised by Leutha's regard for Satan is not present because the framework of wrongdoing and accusation has been removed. Therefore, there is no way of identifying sinners as objects of pity to be acted upon by their moral superiors. Milton, in his final appearance, refuses to focus on Satan as a sinner, but takes aim resolutely at his own complicity with the Satanic empire. Just as the Divine Presence is announced on plate e to be constituted not by individuals but by States, it is the state of Satan that Milton attacks in the only way he usefully can: by destroying his own selfhood.

There is a moment in *Paradise Lost* which may have alerted Blake to the largely unfulfilled potential in John Milton to arrive at this quality of spiritual revelation during his natural life span. In Book XII of the epic, Michael reproaches Adam for his over-literal understanding of the military language which has dominated the account of God's dealings with his adversary Satan. Adam asks enthusiastically:

Needs must the serpent now his capital bruise
Expect with mortal pain: say where and when
Their fight, what stroke shall bruise the victor's heel
   (XII.383-5, p. 628)
Michael responds that salvation will come

Not by destroying Satan, but his works
In thee and in thy seed: nor can this be,
But by fulfilling that which thou didst want,
Obedience to the law of God, imposed
On penalty of death, and suffering death,
The penalty to thy transgression due,
And due to theirs which out of thine will grow:
So only can high justice rest apaid

(XII.394-401, p. 628)

John Milton’s return in the poetry of Blake extends this understanding that it is the Satan in oneself that must be annihilated, not a separate devil whose exclusion restores the primal state of innocence. Inspired by this new wisdom, Milton abandons the theology of obedience, prohibition and penalty. He requires obedience only from his own emanation: ‘Obey thou the Words of the Inspired man’ (plate 42, E. 142, l. 29). Similarly, Los in Jerusalem requires obedience of his spectre. In Milton, however Los struggles not with his own spectre but with the human race. The narrative suggests that Milton’s full humanity is essential to the saving role he takes over from Los. Whereas Los and his family attempt to act on humanity from outside of it (hence Los’s fear of vegetation), Milton and Ololon share fully in the human condition. Blake points out that certain insight is available only from such a position:

For Golgonooza cannot be seen till having passed the Polypus
It is viewed on all sides round by a Four-fold Vision
Or till you become Mortal & Vegetable in Sexuality
Then you behold its mighty Spires & Domes of ivory & gold

(plate 35, E. 135, l. 22-25)

With the return to embodied life they also assume the Miltonic burden of original sin. If the dominant mode of Los and his family is anxiety, for the returning Milton it is guilt. From the first recognition ‘I in my Selfhood am that Satan’ (plate 12, E. 108, l. 30), Milton proceeds to confront his serious and damaging acts. Ololon returns ‘Confessing their crime with humiliation and sorrow’ (plate 35, E. 135, l. 33). She goes on to blame herself for the expansion of deism: ‘Is Ololon the cause of this? O where shall I hide my face’ (plate 42, E. 141, l. 14). Ololon’s sense of personal guilt is the cause of a unique moment of rejoicing in the poem. After repeated instances of lamentation: by the Shadowy female, by London, Ahania, Los, Ololon, the Divine
Family, and by Beulah, Ololon's remorse sparks joy among the Starry Eight, for the path to salvation is now open, corresponding to Milton's 'passage broad, / Smooth, easy, inoffensive down to hell' (X.304-5, p. 523):

O how the Starry Eight rejoic'd to see Ololon descended!
And now that a wide road was open to Eternity,
By Ololons descent thro Beulah to Los & Enitharmon.
For mighty were the multitudes of Ololon
(plate 35, E. 135, l. 34-6)

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5 Jerusalem, Chapter 1, E. 153, plate 10, l. 29 ff.
Chapter 4: *Milton* as a Response to John Milton’s Theology

In *Milton’s* epiphanic resolution ‘Jesus the Saviour’ appears and walks forth, weeping ‘to enter into / Albion’s Bosom’ (plate 44, E. 143, l. 11, 19-20). His appearance is the result of the merging of the ‘Starry Eight’ into ‘One Man’. This ‘Eight’ consists of Milton and the ‘Seven Angels of the Presence’ who conversed with him during his return to Earth (plate e, E. 131, l. 2ff). This transient vision of Milton as an aspect of ‘Jesus the Saviour’ provokes our enquiry into the nature of the salvation offered by this figure. The same question is prompted at the poem’s opening, when Blake instructs his muses to expose the ‘sacrifices’ and ‘atonement’ of the ‘False Tongue’ (plate 3, E. 96, l. 10-13) and they respond with the bard’s song, which claims to be ‘of your eternal salvation’ (this is repeated seven times: Plates 3, b, a, 5 twice, 7 and 9, E. 96-105). If the poem exposes, as it promises to do, the falseness of doctrines of salvation by vicarious atonement, then what is the foundation of the salvation it proposes? To address this question we must look again at Satan’s fall in the bard’s song.

Satan’s fall is a result of his self-isolation from members of his family and from the assembly (plate 7, E. 103, l. 29). The effect of this is that ‘his bosom grew / Opake against the Divine Vision’ (plate 7, E. 103, l. 30-31). The new world which is created emerges from within Satan:

And there a World of deeper Ulro was open’d, in the midst
Of the Assembly. In Satans bosom a vast unfathomable Abyss.
(plate 7, E. 103, l. 34-5)

The fall is a result of hostility to both Satan’s fellows and to the ‘Divine Vision’ which he rejects. Indeed, from his perspective there is no fall, only a desired separation from ‘this accursed Family’ (plate 7, E. 103, l. 29). This desire for separation is one of the factors that renders Leutha’s intervention irrelevant.

But when Leutha (a Daughter of Beulah) beheld Satans condemnation
She down descended into the midst of the Great Solemn Assembly
Offering herself a Ransom for Satan, taking on her, his Sin.
(plate 9, E. 105, l. 28-30)

In the bard’s account, sin is Satan’s own creation, (plate 7, E. 103, l. 21-2). It is not an objective condition that Satan needs to be rescued from through Leutha’s act of ransom. What is clearly required is for Satan himself to abandon his ideology of
righteousness and his aggression towards others. It is his rage against others that has led to the new opacity in his bosom and his loss of the Divine Vision. It is obvious that he cannot be saved by an external agency, and yet Milton undertakes a mission to Satan: 'to loose him from my Hells' (plate 12, E. 108, l. 31). This mission involves attacking in himself the same impulses to 'Self righteousness' that have created the hell which surrounds Satan (plate 39, E. 139, l. 43). It is clear from the speech in which Milton addresses Satan that this act is intended to inspire others to the same act:

I come to discover before Heavn & Hell the Self righteousness
In all its Hypocritic turpitude, opening to every eye
These wonders of Satans holiness shewing to the Earth
The Idol Virtues of the Natural Heart
(plate 39, E. 139, l. 43-6)

It is important to note that Milton intends to save 'the Earth' simply by revealing 'to every eye' the cruelty and emptiness of Satan's 'Laws & terrors' (plate 39, E. 139, l. 42). There is no vicarious act of salvation that can substitute for the individual act that Milton aims to 'teach Men' to undertake:

Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of thy Churches
Is to impress on men the fear of death; to teach
Trembling & fear, terror, constriction; abject selfishness
Mine is to teach Men to despise death & to go on
In fearless majesty annihilating Self
(plate 39, E. 139, l. 37-41)

Following his self-annihilation Milton becomes one with Jesus. Blake thus boldly presents Milton's act as the equivalent of the passion of Christ, arguing that this brings about salvation only when it inspires an individual to imitate it. This imitation involves not physical death but the annihilation of the selfhood, of the bitter core of anger and self-righteousness discovered within Blake's Satan.

The language of self-annihilation thus maintains the centrality of the image of the saviour's death in *Paradise Lost*, but removes the penal and commercial rationale by which this death is supposed to complete the scheme of cosmic justice. A similar transformation is achieved in *Milton* of another element in *Paradise Lost*, namely the theme of providence. In Milton's epic, the aim of asserting 'Eternal Providence' (I.25, p. 44) involves explaining that mundane suffering resulted from Satan's success in converting humanity to his own disobedience. This triumph will finally be reversed as a result of the cosmic providential scheme initiated by the Son's decision to die for
man. Adam acknowledges his role in such a scheme as a meek one, comprising both obedience and dependence. Like its sequel *Paradise Regained*, *Paradise Lost* promotes a new poetic definition of heroism:

Henceforth I learn, that to obey is best  
And love with fear the only God, to walk  
As in his presence, and to observe  
His providence, and on him sole depend

(XII.560-64, p. 637)

Whereas Adam must rely on God for salvation, the narrative of *Milton* strongly suggests that the individual must be held responsible for saving himself, and that the role of God is only to motivate and inspire. Thus the arena of providence becomes the individual mind rather than the global stage of universal history. Whereas in *Paradise Lost* God is ultimately active, the ‘first mover’ (VII.500, p. 387), in *Milton* the function of divinity is merely to inspire human action. The poem states that providence began as a result of the lamentation of Ololon in their regret that they had expelled Milton:

they wept in long resounding song  
For seven days of eternity, ... all the Family  
Of Eden heard the lamentation, and Providence began.

(plate 19, E. 115, l. 17-18, 23-24)

But the providential event that follows does not resolve Ololon’s lamentations:

But all the Family Divine collected as Four Suns  
In the Four Points of heaven East, West & North & South,  
Enlarging and enlarging till their Disks approachd each other;  
And when they touch’d closed together Southward in One Sun  
Over Ololon: and as One Man, who weeps over his brother,  
In a dark tomb, so all the Family Divine, wept over Ololon.  
Saying Milton goes to Eternal Death! so saying, they groan’d in spirit  
And were troubled! and again the Divine Family groaned in spirit.

(plate 19, E. 116, l. 37-44)

The response of providence is the same as that of Los: listening and apparently impotent compassion:

Seven mornings Los heard them, as the poor bird within the shell  
Hears its impatient parent bird; and Enitharmon heard them:  
But saw them not, for the blue Mundane Shell inclos’d them in.  
... Los heard these laments.  
He heard them call in prayer all the Divine Family;  
And he beheld the Cloud of Milton stretching over Europe.

(plate 19, E. 116, l. 28-30, 34-36)
The Divine Family does not initiate any direct soteriological activity, but its very presence has an effect on Ololon:

And Ololon said, Let us descend also, and let us give
Ourselves to death in Ulro among the Transgressors.
Is Virtue a Punisher? O no! how is this wondrous thing:
This World beneath, unseen before: this refuge from the wars
Of Great Eternity! unnatural refuge! unknown by us till now!
Or are these the pangs of repentance? let us enter into them
(plate 19, E. 116, l. 45-50)

Rather than offering to intervene the Family instruct Ololon to renew the world:

Then the Divine Family said. Six Thousand Years are now
Accomplish’d in this World of Sorrow; Miltons Angel knew
The Universal Dictate; and you also feel this Dictate.
And now you know this World of Sorrow, and feel Pity. Obey
The Dictate! Watch over this World, and with your brooding wings,
Renew it to Eternal Life
(plate 19-20, E. 116, l. 51-6)

The Divine Vision simply encourages Ololon to follow the ‘Dictate’ she feels. The passage ends with the assertion that this Divine Vision is to be found in Ulro, as well as everywhere else (plate 20, E. 116, l. 2-3).

Milton thus retains the inherited language of salvation and providence, but uses it without implying the supernatural activity of an objectively existing deity. For salvation and providence derive from the deployment of the human imagination, the result of which is the vision of Christ or of the divine humanity. The Miltonic view of God as ontologically distinct from humanity and infinitely superior is not found in Blake’s poem. These are the attributes which Satan falsely claims for himself: ‘I am God alone / There is no other!’ (plate 7, E. 108, l. 26-6); ‘I am God the judge of all… / Fall therefore down & worship me’ (plate 39, E. 139, l. 51-2). A similar demand for worship by Satan occurs in Paradise Regained, and such worship occurs in Paradise Lost (PR IV.167-192, p. 498; PL II.478-9, p. 111). Milton’s epic also depicts with approval many instances of the worship of God, stating that this is the purpose of human existence (VII.515; 625-32, p. 394). In Milton, worship is generally associated with Satan, and with fear (Plates c, 9, 37, 39; E. 104, 138-9). The churches are also accused of creating and exploiting fear (plate 39, E139, l. 37-8). However, there are two instances where prayer has a positive effect. On plate 18 Blake breaks off from
his narration and addresses the source of his inspiration in terms that recall the
psalmists admonishment of himself to keep faith with Jerusalem:*

O how can I with my gross tongue that cleaveth to the dust,
Tell of the Four-fold Man, in starry numbers fitly orderd
Or how can I with my cold hand of clay! But thou O Lord
Do with me as thou wilt! for I am nothing, and vanity.
If thou chuse to elect a worm, it shall remove the mountains.

(plate 18, E114, I. 15-19)

The effect of this is immediate: Blake finds the courage to return to his account of the
'Four-fold Man': 'For that portion namd the Elect....' He has acknowledged his
doubts about his own capabilities, but has reassured himself by affirming his belief in
the boundless power of the source upon which he relies, the 'Lord'. This is easily
reconciled with the bard's comment upon his own creative source, which is the
inspiration of the 'Poetic Genius', which he clearly regards as equivalent to God:

The Bard replied. I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing
According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity
To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen
(Plates 11-12, E. 108-109, I. 51, 1-3)

Similarly Ololon's calling in prayer to 'all the Divine Family' (plate 19, E116, I. 35)
leads to their inspiration. This is expressed in the idea that they become united with
this family: 'One Man even Jesus / Uniting in One with Ololon' (plate 19,
E 116, I. 59-60). As stated above, the presence of Jesus merely encourages Ololon to
accomplish their intentions. Thus prayer is presented as a tool by which we access
inspiration. Milton argues that such inspiration derives from a source indivisible from
our humanity itself. Plate e states this argument directly, when the Angels of the
Divine Presence instruct Milton as to the nature of the divine. They state that it is the
human imagination which is the source of divinity and specifically reject the idea that
this divinity should be worshipped. They define Satanic religion as

Calling the Human Imagination: which is the Divine Vision & Fruition
In which Man liveth eternally: madness & blasphemy, against
Its own Qualities, which are Servants of Humanity, not Gods or Lords[.]
(plate e, E. 132, I. 19-21)

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* 'If I forget thee, O Jerusalem, let my right hand forget her cunning. If I do not remember thee, let
my tongue cleave to the roof of my mouth', Psalm 137:5-6.
The equivalence which Milton proclaims between the Human Imagination and the Divine Vision is expressed most directly in the narrative comment which follows the discussion of states on plate e. The end of mortal life is compared to the biblical discovery of the resurrection: the discarded body, like the empty shroud signifies the reversal of death. Mortal life is itself a death made bearable by the continued presence of God, who enters into the grave with us.

Thus they converse with the Dead watching round the Couch of Death.

For God himself enters Death's Door always with those that enter
And lays down in the Grave with them, in Visions of Eternity
Till they awake & see Jesus & the Linen Clothes lying
That the Females had Woven for them, & the Gates of their Fathers House
(plate e, E. 132, l. 39-43)

The poem thus asserts that God is with us in our life in Ulro, in which we are incarcerated in a human body and cut off from an original bliss: ‘their Fathers House’. This presence of God is to be located ‘in Visions of Eternity’. Blake’s account of the creation of Beulah makes an identical point.

And it is thus Created. Lo the Eternal Great Humanity
To whom be Glory & Dominion Evermore Amen
Walks among all his awful Family seen in every face
As the breath of the Almighty. such are the words of man to man
In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration,
To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Creating
(plate 30, E. 129, l. 15-20)

This vision of the intimate presence of the Eternal Great Humanity in inspired human speech contrasts starkly with Milton’s vision of postlapsarian communion with the divine:

To heaven their prayers
Flew up, nor missed the way, by envious winds
Blown vagabond or frustrate: in they passed
Dimensionless through heavenly doors; then clad
With incense, where the golden altar fumed,
By their great intercessor, came in sight
Before the Father’s throne: them the glad Song
Presenting, thus to intercede began ...
(XI.14-21, p. 564-5)

The argument that we have been tracing in Milton is a more sustained version of a belief mischievously advanced in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and stated again in the Laocoön engraving. In the former we read that ‘The worship of God is.
Honouring his gifts in other men each according to his genius, and loving the greatest men best, those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God' (E. 43). In the Laocoon ‘imagination’ is defined as ‘God himself’ (E. 273). Prayer or communion with God is simply defined as ‘the Study of Art’ (E. 274). Three passages in Milton indicate that to access one’s vast inner resources of imagination is to share in the being and creativity of God. Plate 27 tells us that a human being is ‘like the diamond which tho cloth’d / In rugged covering in the mine, is open all within / And in his hallowd center holds the heavens of bright eternity’ (E. 126, l. 36-8). This vast centre, ‘wondrous & expansive’ is guarded by Satanic agents, who wish to deny humanity this experience of inner divinity, and to promote the belief that God is ontologically remote from us, ‘beyond the skies’.

For every human heart has gates of brass & bars of adamant, Which few dare unbar because dread Og & Anak guard the gates (plate 18, l. 34-5)

The same expansive centre is found in a flower:

Thou perceivest the Flowers put forth their precious Odours! And none can tell how from so small a center comes such sweets Forgetting that within that Center Eternity expands Its ever during doors, that Og & Anak fiercely guard (plate 31, E. 131, l. 46-9)

It is this inner experience of eternity which fuels imagination and creativity. This point is made through an intertextual echo by which the opening of the guarded inner gates of heart and mind is compared with the moment in Paradise Lost where the gates of heaven open so that the Son can begin the work of creation:

heaven opened wide Her ever during gates, harmonious sound On golden hinges moving, to let forth The king of glory in his powerful Word And Spirit coming to create new worlds. (VII.205-9, p. 369)

In asserting that human imaginative activity is the equivalent of the divine act of creation, Milton rejects the theological argument of Paradise Lost, even while it appropriates its language and themes. Paradise Lost celebrates the unique creative and redemptive acts of the only God; Milton’s exemplification of salvation, providence and prayer repudiates this account. Yet the concept of divinity, and the language of
salvation, providence and prayer are retained in Blake's poem, and used to express faith not in a transcendent being but in the transforming power of the human spirit or imagination. The supernatural focus of Milton's works has vanished completely, and yet Blake uses the same myths of creation and fall and salvation and the same biblical language. The question which now asserts itself is why this inherited Christian vocabulary was apparently so indispensable to Blake, and why he chose so contrary a figure as John Milton to be the prophet whose imaginary reincarnation would provide the narrative vehicle by which a new vision of Christianity could be conveyed in Milton?

There are at least two possible answers to this question. Firstly, the rationale behind Blake's attempt to express an essentially humanist vision using theological language may derive from the same argument made by the chief protagonist of Milton, concerning the danger of simply replacing one corrupt religion with another. In his confrontation with Satan, Milton suggests that religious reformation has always failed because the new leader would inevitably continue the corruptions of the old:

Satan! my Spectre! I know my power thee to annihilate
And be a greater in thy place, & be thy Tabernacle
A covering for thee to do thy will, till one greater comes
And smites me as I smote thee & becomes my covering.

(plate 39, E. 139, l. 29-32)

This is apparently because the 'place' of Satan in relation to his 'Churches' is inherently corrupt. As his response to Milton's challenge on plate 39 confirms, Satan is the law giver and judge over his churches, demanding worship and threatening punishment (plate 39, E. 139-140, l. 50-56). Milton's refusal to take this place away from Satan is a refusal to abolish and somehow replace the Judeo-Christian tradition, which has given us 'Laws', 'Synagogues' and 'Heavn & Hell'. Instead he proposes to adopt a unique stance towards this tradition, in which the individual can benefit from it instead of being reduced to 'fear, terror, constriction: abject selfishness' (plate 39, E. 139, l. 39). This stance is created by self-annihilation, in which 'all that is not of God alone' is put off (plate 39, E. 139, l. 48). It is as a former apologist for Satan's churches that Milton is able to exemplify a new and redemptive stance towards them. If he had never taught the doctrines of disobedience and penalties, of heaven and hell, he would not be able identify these as the products of his selfhood, and he would not
be able to demonstrate the means of liberation from these doctrines for 'every eye'. When purged of such doctrines Christian traditions of salvation, providence and prayer can be understood along the lines described in this chapter: as elements of a faith affirming the liberating power of human imagination.

Another possible explanation for the Blake's commitment to redeeming the conceptual language of Christianity involves the aesthetic properties of such language. The expressive power of the vocabulary and rhetorical forms found in the Bible, and in Christian liturgies and literature (such as Paradise Lost) is used to great effect in Milton. The respect for the Bible expressed in the Preface is certainly reflected in what follows: 'The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid: of Plato & Cicero, which all Men ought to contemn: are set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible' (plate 1, E. 95). This sublimity is imitated throughout the poem, and it particularly apparent in two of its themes: the return of Jerusalem and the apocalyptic harvest. The bard's song asks 'When shall Jerusalem return & overspread all the Nations / Return: return to Lambeths Vale O building of human souls' (plate 4, E. 100, l. 17-18). This evokes the great sublimity and pathos of the Hebrew prophets, who interpreted Israel's history as a cycle of faithfulness and harlotry towards their God, the end result of which would be either utter desolation (Amos) or forgiveness and a new bond with God (Isaiah, Hosea). An echo of this biblical paradigm is found on plate 32, in which the Divine Voice addresses 'what will become Rahab-Tirzah-Vala, the aggregate Female Will'.

When I first Married you, I gave you all my whole Soul
I thought that you would love my loves & joy in my delights
Seeking for pleasures in my pleasures O Daughter of Babylon
Then thou wast lovely, mild & gentle

(plate 32, E. 132, l. 2-5)

The voice concludes with the prediction that this 'Virgin Babylon' will 'bring Jerusalem in thine arms in the night watches; and / No longer turning her a wandering Harlot in the streets / Shalt give her into the arms of God your Lord & Husband' (plate 32, E. 133, l. 21-3). Bloom suggests plausibly that this is an attack on sexual possessiveness, but more important than the substance of the passage is its aesthetic effect. It invokes, as a context for Milton's mission to Earth, the whole biblical drama

of God’s persistence in his plan to free Israel from its misery and addiction to false gods. The immediate context of the passage is the promise of Isaiah 62:

For Zion’s sake will I not hold my peace, and for Jerusalem’s sake I will not rest, until the righteousness thereof go forth as brightness, and the salvation thereof as a lamp that burneth ... Thou shalt no more be termed Forsaken; neither shall thy land any more be termed Desolate: but thou shalt be called Hephzibah, and thy land Beulah: for the LORD delighteth in thee, and thy land shall be married.

(Isaiah 62, 1-4)

Similarly Hosea writes ‘I will even betroth thee unto me in faithfulness: and thou shalt know the LORD’ (Hosea 2, 2). By writing in such a powerful biblical tradition, and by claiming such an audacious parallel for his literary endeavour, Blake generates the degree of emotive force that he deems appropriate to his story of Milton’s return, which is also the vehicle of his own rapprochement with his inherited Christian faith. The use of apocalyptic tradition works in the same way: it generates the most impressive associations possible for Blake’s account of his visions in Felpham and of the new understanding they have led him to. The bard’s song uses both biblical and liturgical language to command the attention of his audience: ‘Mark well my words, they are of your eternal salvation’; ‘Glory! Glory! Glory! to the Holy Lamb of God’ (plate 11, E. 107, l. 28). Perhaps Blake judged that the aesthetic power of the biblical tradition was indispensable to his epic project in Milton, despite its unacceptable legacy of righteousness and punishment, and despite the difficulty of disentangling it from theological traditions inimical to the ‘visionary form of Christianity’ he had embraced, which was ‘capable of transcending the critiques of institutional religion to which he had given priority in earlier symbolic narratives’.

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3 Cox (1992), p. 207.
Chapter 5: The Four Copies

Having provided an account of Milton's composition and general reception, and a reading of its dominant theme based on the 51-plate Erdman text, it is necessary to acknowledge the significance to this study of the variants amongst the four copies of the poem, for each copy of Milton is unique. This is in part a result of Blake's method of producing his illuminated books, by printing his copper etchings on his own press and hand colouring each impression before collating the pages into books. It is also a result of changes he made to the content of Milton after the first printing session of c. 1811, adding six new plates to the total and cancelling the plate with the Preface. The purpose of this chapter is to explore the nature of the differences between the four copies; to examine the ways in which these differences have been theorised by critics and accommodated by editors; and to offer a new understanding of their significance.

Copies A and B share the same number of plates in the same order. They were printed together with copy C and all three were coloured with the same palette. Copy C retains 44 of the original 45 plates: the Preface plate was removed from both copies C and D. Five extra plates were later added to copy C. Copy D is the product of a separate printing session in c. 1818, and contains the same 49 plates as copy C plus one addition, plate f. In copies C and D the original plate order from the first copies has been changed regarding plate 21 and Plates 24-6; copies C and D display different ordering of Plates e and 32. These developments concerning the contents and ordering of copies C and D are the product of an initial revision period of around seven years in which Blake continued to work on the poem. At the end of this chapter I describe my understanding of the general character of this continuing work, and the insights the added plates give us into the development of Blake's thought during this period of his life.¹

Before considering the differences between the copies arising from the poem's expansion after 1811, there is another category of variation that must be acknowledged. The hand colouring of the 1811 impressions has created some variation in the appearance of certain figures. The clearest example occurs on plate 41

¹ As discussed in Chapter Two, Blake probably began etching plates for Milton in 1804 at the age of 46 and printed his first edition in around 1811 at the age of 53. He was 60 at the time of the second
of copies A, B and C (see the illustrations at the end of this chapter). This shows the design of a standing and a kneeling figure by the sea or on a river bank. In each of the three copies the standing figure has a different facial expression. It is generally accepted that the standing figure is Milton, and that the stooping figure is Urizen. The scene is generally regarded as an illustration of the struggle between Milton and Urizen on the banks of the Arnon, in which Urizen stoops to cup icy water in an attempt to baptise Milton. Erdman has suggested that Milton is offering 'compassionate support to the collapsed body' of Urizen.² This seems a reasonable response to copy A, which Erdman's edition reproduces. In this copy the standing figure looks out towards the horizon with large eyes and an open expression. However, copy B's plate 41 shows Milton with a frown and sinister slanting eyes bearing down on the kneeling figure. In copy C, the standing man glances away with a pained expression that might suggest either compassion or personal anguish. Critics have debated whether this scene represents Milton's compassion for Urizen, expressed in the text in the description of his desire to impart new life to his adversary; or whether it represents a relationship between the two protagonists characterised by conflict, domination, anger, or even a sexual element. However, this debate has not recognised that it makes no sense to offer an interpretation that will serve for all copies. The facial expression of the standing figure dominates the entire design, and the visual image of Milton and of this contact with Urizen is therefore substantively different in these copies.

Not all of the variants point to such a contradictory relationship among the three 1811 copies. For example, copy B shows a water colour rainbow on plate 10, which is not present in copy A. In copy C the rainbow is on plate 9. Similarly the amount of nudity displayed in the full-plate designs differs in each copy. Plates 21, 29 and 33 show nude figures in copy A, whereas in copy B the figures wear inked-in garments on plates 29 and 33. Copies C and D have painted green shorts on these plates and inked-in shorts on plate 21. This kind of detail suggests that further work has been carried out on individual books, after the triple set of 45 plates was coloured as a group. The framelines on copy C, the ornamental frame on plate 30 of copy A and the gold highlights in copy B all indicate that Blake paid personal attention to each

copy of Milton, guaranteeing the uniqueness of each. This uniqueness, imparted both at the colouring stage and at the later stage when the triple set of coloured impressions had become three books, is stressed because of the debate, which has become increasingly dominant in the last decade, concerning the nature of Blake’s semiotic practice represented by the illuminated books. A study of Milton’s variations can contribute to this debate, which I will briefly summarise.

The debate concerning the uniqueness of each of Blake’s books, and how this uniqueness relates to Blake’s intentions, was dominated until the early 1990s by the idea that Blake was engaged in a deliberate rejection of the mechanical reproduction of books and images. The authenticity of each of Blake’s productions was guaranteed by the care he took to disrupt the processes of mere repetition, finishing every book by hand, and creating and publishing many versions of the same book. Jerome McGann wrote that this artistic practice represented Blake’s hostility to the institutions of book production and a fierce protectiveness about securing total authorial control over his own books. Stephen Leo Carr presented almost an opposite argument: that Blake carefully constructed the contradictions between copies of the same poem in order to undermine the very concept of a single, authorised original. In Blake and the Idea of the Book, Joseph Viscomi rejected such theorising in relation to the non-uniformity of Blake’s books, arguing that variations often arose accidentally from the medium of relief etching:

Before assuming ideological causes, one needs to examine the technical and material grounds for difference. Given the potential for variation, the absence of more pronounced differences among copies within an edition is quite surprising and the differences themselves seem minor, the inevitable result of a mode of production involving two people printing and coloring numerous impressions by hand, before collation, without prototypes, and within broad parameters of what was visually acceptable.

The evidence for edition printing is strong, and was presented in Chapter Two. This account of Blake’s printing practice has undermined the traditionally entrenched image of Blake producing illuminated books as single, hand-made works of art. The Blake imagined by Viscomi is the opposite of the radical introvert sketched by McGann:

The concept of difference is easy to imbue with ideological significance; it is readily interpreted as signifying Blake’s rejection of other modes of production and indifference to the market. Yet by reproducing the autographic gestures of drawing, a mode of representation that had become extremely fashionable and
that had stimulated the invention of other techniques than his own, Blake was responding positively to the market and to popular taste. Likewise, collating books from piles of impressions represents a very practical and efficient response to the task of producing books.\(^3\)

This argument relieves us of the need 'to picture Blake as an eminently impractical printmaker, continually setting up shop for the sake of one copy'. But although the discovery of edition printing proves that Blake was a more practical and conventional printmaker than was previously supposed, it does not prove that he made no deliberate attempts to exploit the potential for variation inherent in his medium. The hand colouring method allowed him to develop the possibilities of a single composition in different ways for each individual impression if he chose to. Viscomi assumes that proof of edition printing is proof of 'Blake's intentions, when their relation to production is properly understood.' However, his production-centred view forces him to suppose that such intentions were always guided by practical considerations. When discussing the different colouring decisions relating to plate 7 in the context of a large edition of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Viscomi's speculations appear unnecessarily restricted to such considerations:

The image as drawn on the copper plate did not contain clouds or sun: the weather and time were decided upon during the colouring of the impressions, after the penultimate lines were written: "Thus every morning wails Oothoon, but Theotormon sits / Upon the margined ocean conversing with shadows dire" ... Blake (or Mrs. Blake) had the option in each impression to focus on Oothoon or Theotormon—or both. That he or she painted three copies with rising suns, four with overcast clouds, and four with clouds and sun, all within the same session, may reflect a desire to diversify stock more than any inability to focus on one figure or favor one landscape over another.

This kind of explanation would certainly be inadequate to explain a variation which is clearly more than decorative, such as the divergence amongst the facial expressions on plate 41 of the copies of *Milton* created in the single edition of 1811. It has been argued by Jerome McGann and Stephen Leo Carr that the relationships between different copies of the same work is an aspect of the significance of any work by Blake, and this significance has been articulated in various ways. Robert Essick has rejected such arguments simply because Blake could not have expected the awareness of multiple copies to form part of his reader's response to his works. The reading

community which would access and compare all copies of Blake’s works did not exist in his own day, and was surely unimaginable to him. The possibility exists, however, that the variants had some private significance for him. For example, could the three Miltons of the three plate 41s produced in 1811 represent for Blake three aspects of the fourfold Milton of his imagination? The design seen in copies A, B and C could represent the states described in the epic: the pitying Elect, the enraged Reprobate and the tormented Redeemed respectively. This is unprovable, but it represents a kind of relationship between Blake and his illuminated books for which we do have some evidence. For example, Blake published *Jerusalem* in a form which made it impossible for anyone but himself to know the original content of plate 3. For reasons that are not given, he gouged out words from the surface of his address to the public, making this a permanently evasive act of communication, which teasingly emphasises its own reticence. Blake must have anticipated the bewilderment this would cause, but chose to withhold the missing information. Similarly, *Milton* has a secretive quality, such as the failure to explain the presence of ‘ROBERT’, a name with no relevance to the poem’s action or text. Although Viscomi is right to emphasise Blake’s efficiency and competence as a printmaker, and the fact that his medium of relief etching entailed an element of accidental non-uniformity which does not require ideological explanation, he cannot prove that Blake had no reason or desire deliberately to vary from copy to copy the act of interpretation of the printed design which hand-finishing constitutes.

There is a small amount of textual variation in the 1811 impressions that make up copies A to C in their original form. These were achieved by erasing words from the impression and writing the variant over the erasure using pen and ink. On plate 24, line 60 was removed (‘Poetry in Religion: Music, Law: Painting, in Physic & Surgery:’) from copies B and C (and also from copy D). On plate 3 the line ‘That cause mov’d Milton to his unexampled deed’ was altered in copies B and C (and also copy D) to ‘What cause ...’ On the titlepage copies B, C and D retain the original ‘12 Books’, whereas copy A indicates only 2 books.4 The most significant textual variations, however, relate to the removal and re-ordering of the original plates as they appear in copies A and B, and the composition, etching and printing of new plates.

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4 G. E. Bentley Jr., states in *Blake Books* that ‘12’ was altered to 2 on plate 1 of copies A and C. However, I inspected copy C in the New York Public Library and the ‘12’ is clearly visible.
which would be added to copy C and printed with the whole set of plates (except plate 2) for copy D. As explained in Chapter 2, it is likely that Blake intended to incorporate plate f into copy C, as well as copy D, so that the textual content of the two copies would be almost identical, the only difference concerning the positioning of plates 32 and e. It is heuristically convenient then, if not precisely accurate to regard the text of Milton as existing in an early version, represented by copies A and B, and a late version, represented by copies C (plus plate f) and D. If copy D was printed in 1818 then the period of revision was probably around seven years. The major features of this revision are the removal of the Preface and the addition of six extra plates. It is by considering these features that an understanding of the quality of Blake’s continued work with Milton can be established.

There is very little critical discussion of the development of Milton represented by the removal of the Preface and the addition of these plates, although it is of considerable significance for a general understanding of the poem. This may be blamed in part on the editors of typographical reproductions of the poem, who have often given the impression that either that Milton exists in only a single copy, or the only one copy is relevant. The 1925 edition of Blake’s works edited by Keynes states that ‘The plates are here numbered according to the arrangement found in copy D, the only complete copy of the original, with 50 plates.’ This privileging of copy D is further explained by its unique splendour: ‘Until the year 1923 only three copies of Milton were known to exist. In December, 1923, a fourth copy came to light. This copy has watermarks dated 1815 and is more elaborately coloured than the earlier examples.’ Despite this stated preference for the 50 plate version, Keynes actually printed an eclectic text, supplying the cancelled Preface plate. The same decision was made by Erdman and by Alicia Ostriker in the Penguin edition of 1977. The consequence has been the dominance of this eclectic text. Whilst the reader may appreciate having access to all the plates printed for Milton, the effect has been to obscure the distinctness of the early and late versions, discouraging any interpretation of the relationship between them. Sloss and Wallis, in their edition of 1926 did not foresee the future dominance of copy D, which they regarded as an unfortunate ‘marrying [of] the earlier version’. Rather than assuming that the latest printed copy is the most valuable, they dismiss it with the reasoning that ‘By 1815 Blake had outgrown the
position defined in *Milton*, and was content that the text in this fourth copy should be subordinated to the splendours of its coloured and gilded page.' This editorial decision was repeated later in the century by Stevenson and Mason. However, as the standard scholarly texts, Erdman and Keynes have influenced critical reception of the poem with their eclectic text following copy D more than those editors who favour the early version.

The idea that the latest copy should come to represent the poem apparently arises from editorial theories which are not properly adapted to the nature of Blake's works. It is a deeply entrenched assumption in textual studies that the role of the editor is to reproduce the text representing the author's final intentions. However, this approach has been questioned in recent debates, notably by Hans Zeller and, following him, Jerome McGann. Zeller notes that some texts exist in authorial versions so distinct as to reveal 'an altered authorial conception of the work.' He cites *The Prelude* as an example. In this case there could be no question of attempting to resolve the different editions into a single eclectic text. Although the level of variation between the copies of *Milton* is very much lower, the same status of distinct versions applies to them. Strictly, there are three versions of *Milton*'s text: that of A and B; that of C and that of D. As Viscomi has shown, Blake probably intended to add plate f to copy C, and he added plate e to that copy after he had collated copy D, in which plate e is positioned differently. However, the ordering of plates e and 32 is not a very significant variation because both plates stand alone, and treat a single theme. Neither continues directly from plate 31 or leads directly to plate 34. The plate that follows them in both copies C and D is plate 33, the full-page design of 'ROBERT'. The contrast between the version represented by copies A and B, and a later version: either C with plate f or D is clearly substantial enough to regard *Milton* as existing in distinct authorial versions. Zeller conceptualises these as follows:

If one imagines the textual history [of a literary work] in the shape of a 3-dimensional cylinder standing upright, then the different versions are horizontal planes perpendicular to the axis of the cylinder. The... purpose of a critical edition is to reproduce a particular plane, that is to say, an individual version. Contamination would mean the projection of one plane onto another. From a historical point of view the different versions are in theory of equal value. Each represents a semiotic system which was valid at a specific time,

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which the author later rejected, because he for some reason no longer found it adequate, in favour of another version which matched his new intention.\textsuperscript{6}

The desire to privilege the latest version stems from the assumption of progressive melioration:

The axiomatic preference for the final intention of the author as against his earlier intentions can be seen in two ways. Either it is based on the teleological notions that the work itself has a goal, or that the author envisages one, and that in the course of time he brings his work nearer and nearer to it... Or it is based on the related morphological notion that the work is an organism, and that its mutations are a “development”, an “organic growth”, a continual process of ripening, from the seed perhaps even to perfect maturity.\textsuperscript{7}

Copies A and B were presumably sold before Blake returned to \textit{Milton} to change its content. However, it seems inappropriate to regard them, as Keynes does, as incomplete. Blake’s further work on copies C and D does not render the early versions premature or unfinished.

Whether the author regards the alteration as an improvement of his work, or as an enhancement of its literary qualities, whether or not he declares the earlier version invalidated, or condemns it—for the historian, for the editor, the alterations mean an adaptation of the work to suit the altered circumstances, ideas and purposes of the author. For the editor there is no “best version”. In selecting the text to be edited he is not bound by the final intention of the author... In specific cases the choice of version for the edited text may depend on very different factors; the history of influence and reception may be decisive, or again the degree of corruption or purity of a particular version. As long as the editor sees his function as that of a historian, he has a wide range of freedom in the selection of the version for the edited text, but this version he must reproduce without contamination.\textsuperscript{8}

Such clarity as Zeller demands has not always been found in the editing of \textit{Milton}.\textsuperscript{9}

This lack of clarity has been reflected in the critical responses to \textit{Milton} which do not acknowledge the existence of at least two textual versions. In what follows I return to the themes presented in my reading of the poem in the last chapters to attempt an understanding of the significance of the new version of \textit{Milton} developed after 1811.

\textsuperscript{6} Zeller (1975), pp. 244-5.
\textsuperscript{7} Zeller (1975), p. 242-3.
\textsuperscript{8} Zeller (1975), p. 245.
\textsuperscript{9} Keynes and Erdman present the 51 plate eclectic text, which is clearly explained only by the latter; Sloss and Wallis and W. H. Stevenson print the added plates separately. Ostriker follows Keynes and Erdman, and Mason prints a shortened version of copies A and B, removing plate 4 because it “is widely regarded as an unsatisfactory later interpolation” p. 567.
The Preface introduces the poem with a strident rallying cry, which proclaims the theme of the poem to be the contemporary perversion of art by the deliberate and systematic use of fashion and market forces by 'a Class of Men' to depress the powers of the 'Young Men of the New Age'. The subsequent lyric suggests that the activities of 'Painters! ... Sculptors!' and 'Architects!' are the equivalent of building Jerusalem, and of renewing the presence of Christ in England. The lyric also appears to express Blake's personal confidence: 'I will not sleep from Mental Fight ... Would to God that all the Lord's People were Prophets.' The cancellation of this Preface has been speculatively attributed to several causes. Perhaps, in the period following the first edition of c. 1811 Blake ceased to feel such confidence, or the connection with his audience that is supposed in such a direct incitement to action within the a community which shared his own position: 'Rouze up... For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court & the University: who would if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War'. Susan Fox has suggested that Blake realised that the Preface was out of tune with the rest of the work, as its stridency contradicts 'the attitude of forgiveness and conversion' of the main narrative. However, the main body of the poem does not only emphasise forgiveness and conversion but advocates the mental war declared in the Preface, using the violent imagery of the winepresses and the annihilation of selfhood. I suggest that the Preface may have been removed because it focuses on the revival of British art. This is a theme which persists within the main poem, and occupies part of Milton's final speech, but with the composition of new plates Blake may have wanted to change the balance of the poem in order to emphasise other themes. Blake's eclectic concept of the selfhood lacks consistency and rigour, and comprises a catalogue of separate errors: reasoning, righteousness, and opposition to faith, true art and inspiration. In revising the poem Blake may have wanted to focus his attack more clearly, clarifying his argument about Christian tradition and removing the emphasis on 'Painters...Sculptors...[and] Architects'. The preoccupation with the state of British art surrounding the effective failure of the 1809 exhibition may have subsided in the following decade during which he revised and reprinted Milton.

Four of the extra Milton plates were added to the bard's song: b, a, f and c. Plate b describes the transformation of Urizen, repeated from The Book of Urizen and

The Four Zoas and plate a replaces plate 4 as the beginning of the bard's song. Plate f adds a description of the creation of the three mundane classes. Plates d and e add to the main body of the poem, plate d expanding the role of Orc and the Shadowy Female and plate e describing the doctrine of states which Milton learns in the course of his journey upon earth. Three general areas of revision and clarification can be identified from a reading of these plates. These concern the role of Los, the definition of states and the expanded theme of jealousy.

The new detail concerning the role of Los in the creation of Urizen and in relation to the fallen world contributes to the generally darker character of the second version. In all copies, Los occupies a role of leadership in the bard's song. In the main narrative he asserts the crucial role of himself and his family in the preservation of the human world for 'Redemption' (plate 22, E. 119, l. 52). Indeed, our world of 'human miseries' is described as 'The World of Los' (plate 28, E. 128, l. 62, 64). Despite this special role the late version emphasises his fallenness, and his complicity with the dark origins of our world. It stresses his failure to transcend this world. Plate b shows that Los superintended the gruesome incarnation of Urizen, and that the family that 'Builded the Looms of Generation' originated in Los's mirroring of the 'dismal' transmogrification of Urizen:

Terrified Los stood in the Abyss & his immortal limbs
Grew deadly pale; he became what he beheld: for a red
Round Globe sunk down from his Bosom into the Deep in pangs
He hoverd over it trembling & weeping; suspended it shook
The nether Abyss in tremblings; he wept over it, he cherish'd it
In deadly sickening pain; till separated into a Female pale
As the cloud that brings the snow: all the while from his Back
A blue fluid exuded in Sinews hardening in the Abyss
Till it separated into a Male Form howling in Jealousy
(plate a, E. 97, l. 28-36)

Plate c confirms this by asserting that 'Satan is Urizen' and that Los's isolation with Urizen and complicity with his spontaneous act of generation was repeated in the new world created as a result of the conflict amongst Los's sons. Los becomes incarcerated in this world with Satan, repeating his former relationship with Urizen:

And Satan vibrated in the immensity of the Space! Limited
To those without but Infinite to those within: it fell down and
Became Canaan: closing Los from Eternity in Albions cliffs
(plate c, E. 104, l. 8-10)
Connected with this new emphasis on Los’s crucial role in the founding of our world is a stronger emphasis on the social problems within it. The original Milton tells us that ‘Los listens to the Cry of the Poor Man’, but that cry becomes clamorous in copies C and D. Plate d contains a catalogue of human suffering: ‘sighs & heart broken lamentations / The misery of unhappy Families... the sick Father & his Starving Family... The Prisoner... the Slave... Famine... Pestilence... Cruelty... anxiety & care & desperation & death’ (plate d, E. 111, l. 5-25). The new plates in the bard’s song insist that it is this world which is the context for the fable of aggression, deceit and usurpation. Plates a and f assert the relevance of familiar places (‘South Molton Street’), people (‘Charles... Cromwell... James’), events (‘Fires in Golgonooza’), and institutions (‘Stratford Place: Calvarys foot’, suggesting Tyburn); both contemporary and historical. Plates c, d and e contribute to the darker mood of copies C and D with a new emphasis on Jealousy and the suffering connected with love. Milton expresses his self-division in the terms, familiar from The Four Zoas, of the desperate pursuit of the loved Emanation: ‘My spectre... follows my Emanation... / He hunts her footsteps thro’ the snow & the wintry hail & rain’. Los states that Satan’s new world has ‘Jealousy running along the mountains’ (plate c, E. 104, l. 13). On plate d jealousy is connected to the antinomian theme, as it is expressed in ‘accusations of Sin’. An exchange between Orc and the Shadowy Female is followed by Orc’s torment:

Jealous her darkness grew:
Howlings fill’d all the desolate places in accusations of Sin
In Female beauty shining in the unformd void & Orc in vain
Stretch’d out his hands of fire, & wood: they triumph in his pain
(plate d, E. 112, l. 42-5)

The only copy which was originally printed with the fully revised version is copy D. The was part of ‘deluxe’ edition of several illuminated books. Although many editors have commented on its unique splendour, there is no comment on the altered quality of the reading experience derived from this copy, irrespective of the added plates. The richer colours are used more sparsely, and the pastel water colour wash which suffuses the background of the text in early copies is not present. The same reddish brown ink was used in the copy E of Jerusalem, the only coloured version. Morton Paley finds a dark significance in this choice of colour: ‘The russet or
ochreous fibres that appear... in Jerusalem have a... sinister connotation', suggesting 'the fibrous matter underlying 'vegetative' reality'.

Perhaps the most significant development in the additional plates is the development of the idea of states. This is explained most clearly in plate e, where Milton's own destiny as a state is revealed: 'thou O Milton art a State about to be Created / Called Eternal Annihilation' (plate e, E. 132, l. 26-27). Plate f hints that the three classes may be states rather than fixed identities: 'For the Elect cannot be Redeemd, but Created continually / By Offering & Atonement in the cruelties of Moral Law'. Plate e also explains that the angels of God are not individuals, or beings, but states, or aspects of human experience. The resolution of the theme of salvation described in the previous chapter is completed only in these added plates. Copies C and D clarify the more ambiguous and inclusive early version by focusing the poem more keenly on the issue of salvation through Christianity. A significant aspect of this keener focus is the increased dualism of plates e and f. Plate e describes the experience of human life as death, and invokes the story of the three-day death of Christ to suggest that just as God entered that tomb, he enters with us the tomb of our own body and abides within us during our sojourn on earth, until we awake and leave the bodily garments behind in death, 'the Linen Clothes lying / That the Females had Woven'. Milton's entry into the state in which he discovers his mission of Eternal Annihilation is an example of the mundane experience of God 'in Visions of Eternity'. Earthly life emerges in this vision as a brief sleep or death, the end of which is the annihilation of the body. Whereas the early version of Milton presents a vision of self-annihilation as a figurative death, the continual purging of the spirit, expelling righteousness, plate e appears to express a longing for physical death, the escape from the tomb of embodiment. Plate f focuses on the body as a tomb isolating the human spirit from vision of transcendence, 'shut in narrow doleful form... / Scarcely beholding the great light conversing with the Void' (plate f, E. 99, l. 21-22).

I argued in the previous chapter that the doctrine of states is essential to Blake's rapprochement with Christianity, for it redefines the categories of election and reprobation according to a narrative of individual progression rather than rigid predestination. This accommodates the aesthetic tradition of Christianity to a vision of

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the personal spiritual journey, removing the traditional emphasis on righteousness and sin. Milton's expression of this doctrine achieves clarity and emphasis only in the later copies. This new clarity in Milton may derive from Blake's awareness of his own approaching death. Unfortunately there are very few personal writings by Blake from this period, but he wrote in 1825 that 'Every death is an improvement of the State of the Departed' (To John Linnell, 7 June 1825). In the year of his death he announced himself 'stronger & stronger' in 'The Real Man The Imagination which Liveth for Ever' as 'this Foolish Body decays'.
Illustration: Milton plate 41, copy A$^{12}$

Illustration: *Milton* plate 41, copy B

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Illustration: *Milton* plate 41, copy C

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Chapter 6: Conclusion

I have argued in this thesis that in composing and producing *Milton* Blake used his narrative of John Milton's spiritual journey as a vehicle for his own intellectual development at a particularly challenging period of his life. Milton may have seemed an appropriate figure for this purpose because of features of his biography which parallel Blake's: the temporal disappointments and the experience of intense spiritual and intellectual struggle, which engaged Milton throughout his life. But it is ultimately as the author of *Paradise Lost* that Milton appears in Blake's epic. It is Milton the Christian apologist whom Blake confronts, imagining a sequel to his earthly life in which the vision of salvation presented in *Paradise Lost* is brought to maturity. I have argued that the creation of *Milton* helped Blake to confirm his Christian enthusiasm. In this brief conclusion I shall explore another argument about the function of *Milton* in Blake's life: namely that it helped him to overcome madness. Madness is a minor theme in the epic: it features in the bard's song, where the horses are maddened by Satan, and later in Rintrah's account of the reception of his prophets Whitefield and Westley, who are accused of madness. Milton complains about this aspersion cast upon the inspired man in his speeches on Felpham beach. Blake's 'mad' visions are central to the poem's narrative: he claims to have experienced union with Los and Milton and to have witnessed the descent of Ololon, Satan and Milton to his garden for the mighty confrontation that concludes the poem.

The suggestion that these visions denote madness is sternly dismissed by Northrop Frye:

> A modern writer on Blake is not required to discuss his sanity, for which I am grateful: I could not do so without being haunted by one of his own epigrams: "The Man who pretends to be a modest enquirer into the truth of a self-evident thing is a Knave."  

Frye's view of Blake's visionary experience emphasises will, desire and freedom: the positive assertion of Blake's creativity over the data of 'sense experience'. He shifts the focus from the hallucinatory moment of vision to the finished works of Blake's art:

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It is no use saying to Blake that the company of angels he sees surrounding
the sun are not "there." Not where? Not in a gaseous blast furnace across
ninety million miles of nothing, perhaps; but the guinea-sun is not "there"
either. To prove that he sees them Blake will not point to the sky but to, say,
the fourteenth plate of the Job series illustrating the text: "When the morning
stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." That is where
the angels appear, in a world formed and created by Blake's imagination and
entered into by everyone who looks at the picture.\(^2\)

Paul Youngquist, however, insists on the pathological source of Blake's visionary art,
and argues, as we saw in Chapter One, that the composition of *Milton* was Blake's
means of coping with hallucinatory experience, bringing it under his own control
through the synthesis of his myth. Youngquist suggests that Blake was dependent
upon the myth-making aspect of epic poetry in order to triumph over a particularly
acute period of mania at Felpham:

> Blake writes in part to live; his mythology enacts a purposeful interpretation
of pathological experience-hence his confidence that such experience is in fact
proof of poetic empowerment. Blake discovers through his myth the purpose
of his suffering: "that in three years I might write all these Visions".\(^3\)

Peter Ackroyd, in his biography of Blake, argues that the imputation of madness
should be considered in the context of the 'cultural origins of insanity', writing that
'the more orthodox philosophers in [Blake's] period tended to equate any form of
religious enthusiasm with mental derangement; to claim divine inspiration, as Blake
often did, was to be almost automatically labelled insane. If he had lived in the early
decades of the seventeenth century his descriptions of 'Spirits' and 'Angels' would
have been considered exceptional but not necessarily inaccurate or fantastic; by the
latter half of the eighteenth century they were considered the delusions of madmen.\(^4\)

This seems a rather glib treatment of Blake's extraordinary mental and psychological
constitution. However, it was not only in his visions of angels and spirits that Blake's
unusual personality was apparent. W. J. T. Mitchell, notes his complaints of mental
torment:

> The "Spectrous fiend" that Blake subdues in *Jerusalem* is no easy conquest,
but a foe "even as a brother who was my enemy" who contrives to ruin
Blake's labor for twenty years of his life. Blake occupies an often ambiguous
borderline between the divine madness of inspiration, and the demonic

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\(^3\) Youngquist (1990), p. 567.
madness of incapacity and false or fruitless labor, a madness of irrationality, slavery, and compulsive repetition. If this latter kind of madness is "an aspersion... Cast on the Inspired by the tame high finisher of paltry Blots / Indefinite" (M 41:9-11), it is also an aspersion which Blake did not hesitate to cast on himself.  

In his experience of mental distress, Blake apparently identified with Cowper, whose mania took a religious form derived from Calvinism. Ackroyd considers that 'the story of Cowper's life acted as both a lesson and a warning to Blake—a lesson on the need for courage and self-confidence, and a warning against self-doubt and melancholy. He had known both melancholy and despair—indeed might be said that his life in these years [at Felpham] was poised between the two—but at least he had never for long lost faith in his visions'. The Calvinist source of Cowper's anguish links it to a significant social trend of an earlier historical period, documented by Christopher Hill:

Sociological and psychological historians have not got very far in explaining why there was so much despair in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, leading some to suicide, some to atheism, some to conversion. It seems to have been at its height in the hectic middle decades of the seventeenth century. It may be that anxiety was especially prevalent in this period because they were the years of the great economic divide, in which the lucky few might prosper whilst the mass of their neighbours were plunged into deeper poverty. Predestinarian theologies both stimulated anxiety and offered relief. Conversion perhaps played a role like that of the drug culture in our similar age of economic crisis, personal insecurity, and degradation.

Blake's experience of 'Despair' at the beginning of 1807 is pertinent to Milton, which was in progress at the time. Like the widespread spiritual anguish of the 1650s it can be related to economic insecurity. One of Blake's most candid statements concerning the subject of his troubled mental state is found in his letter to Hayley following the visit to the Truchsessian Gallery:

For now! O Glory! and O Delight! I have entirely reduced that spectrous Fiend to his station, whose annoyance has been the ruin of my labours for the last past twenty years of my life. He is the enemy of conjugal love... I speak with perfect confidence and certainty of the fact which has passed upon me. Nebuchadnezzar had seven times passed over him; I have had twenty; thank

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God I was not altogether a beast as he was; but I was a slave bound in a mill among beasts and devils... Suddenly, on the day after visiting the Truchsessian Gallery of pictures, I was again enlightened with the light I enjoyed in my youth, and which has for exactly twenty years been closed from me as by a door and by window-shutters.

(23 October 1804, E. 756)

In Ackroyd's reading of this letter the cause of 'the distress I have undergone' is anxiety about material concerns:

So he realised now that journeyman commerce and mechanical engraving had come close to ruining his life and his work. This was the 'spectrous Fiend' who had also been 'the enemy of conjugal love', a reference that suggests his sexual nature had also been thwarted by the pursuit of money and of work. It is significant that he did no more commercial engraving for eleven years; he had found 'the courage to suffer poverty and disgrace, till he ultimately conquers'.

Just as Blake returned to 'the light' enjoyed in his youth, and lost for twenty dark years, he envisioned John Milton as one who had lived most of his life as an atheist, only finding in old age the God that he had had in his youth. Nebuchadnezzar had the same history, worshipping and compelling the worship of a false idol, and losing his humanity and reason as a consequence. This situation is reversed by a return to religious belief:

And at the end of the days I Nebuchadnezzar lifted up mine eyes unto heaven, and mine understanding returned unto me, and I blessed the most High, and I praised and honoured him that liveth for ever, whose dominion is an everlasting dominion, and his kingdom is from generation to generation... At the same time my reason returned unto me; and for the glory of my kingdom, mine honour and brightness returned unto me; and my counsellors and my lords sought unto me; and I was established in my kingdom, and excellent majesty was added unto me. Now I Nebuchadnezzar praise and extol and honour the King of heaven, all whose works are truth.

(Daniel 5:34-37)

I am not suggesting that Blake lived through a period of atheism or idolatry, but that his relationship with his inherited faith evolved significantly in later life. The development of Milton is an indication of this evolution between 1811 and 1818. For a longer perspective, however, it is necessary to compare the vision of John Milton achieved in the epic with the references to him in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.

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10 Crabb Robinson: 'Bl: declared [Dante] a mere politician and atheist busied about this world's affairs—As Milton was till in his (M's) old age he returned back to the God he had abandoned in
of 1790. The earlier work Blake mocks Milton’s limited theology: ‘But in Milton; the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five senses. & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!’ (E. 35). In its own terms, *The Marriage* offers Milton a great compliment: ‘The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it’ (E. 35). This indicates that Blake had perceived the potential in *Paradise Lost* that he would later explore much more carefully in *Milton*, and that would lead him to imagine Milton as an antinomian hero who rejected the codes of law and punishment and became an advocate of spiritual liberty through self-annihilation. Similarly, in *The Marriage* Blake’s attitude towards Swedenborg is teasing and dismissive: ‘Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not written one new truth: Now hear another: he has written all the old falshoods’ (E. 43). In *Milton* Rintrah and Palamabron lament the corruption of the potential of Swedenborg’s writings by those who have twisted them, making him ‘the Samson shorn by the Churches’ (E. 117). In both cases, Blake has returned to an original source of inspiration and come to a more subtle and positive conclusion about its value, developing as a consequence, an important personal resource which would add to the contentment which his biographers describe as the product of his final years.

In claiming that the writing of *Milton* enabled Blake to re-affirm his allegiance to Christianity, I am not simply endorsing the arguments of those who have declared Blake a committed theist. Without offering any study of Blake’s narratives, Davies, for example, proclaims that ‘Blake repeatedly spoke of God as a Being who is above man and distinct from him, but who of His mercy comes and dwells with and in man’.11 When Davies writes that ‘Blake believed in “God the Father... Maker of Heaven and Earth,”’ he fails to explore the ways in which Blake’s poems constitute his ‘Divine Vision’, and is unable to distinguish this vision from his own understanding of God and his personal ‘experience of the Christian religion’.12 Other critics, such as Damrosch, Ackroyd and Mary Lynn Johnson have perceived the sincerity of Blake’s relationship with his Christian heritage, and become dissatisfied with the common view that Blake rejected the existence of God and defiantly

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appropriated the language of theism to his own humanist vision. Leopold Damrosch, for example, argues that Blake must be regarded as a religious poet, although he denies personal bias:

I myself (to speak frankly) have no religious belief, and no ulterior reason to establish Blake as a religious poet. But... we cannot describe his poetry fairly or do justice to its peculiar emphases if we suppose that he simply grounds in man all the values that used to be grounded in God.\(^\text{13}\)

Mary Lynn Johnson had made a similar point years before:

So long as we continue to reject Blake's Jesus as an unfortunate relic of a creed outworn, merely cemented to a profoundly non-theistic exaltation of man's imagination, our critical analyses will be unable to deal with any mature poem of Blake's as an artistic whole in which Jesus plays an all-important part.\(^\text{14}\)

Remarks such as these come closer than Davies to capturing Blake's relationship with Christianity in *Milton*, for they shift the emphasis away from the question of atheism or faith. Rather than asking whether or not Blake believed in God, they prompt enquiry into the definitions of God which Blake explores in his narratives, and in the various conceptions of God he chooses to present in them. The results of this latter enquiry in relation to *Milton* are paradoxical. For whilst it insists upon the centrality of the Christian story, it tells it without either embracing or finally rejecting its traditional supernatural dimension. This mature reticence transcends the rebellious position of the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, and in doing so relinquishes any simple didacticism. This study of *Milton* cannot tell us what Blake believed, but it does show that he evolved a new way of writing about God and Christ and their representation in the tradition typified by Milton. In this new mode Blake separates the spiritual element of Christianity from its tradition of prescriptive moralism, and celebrates the inspirational potential of the Bible and of religious language, whilst refraining from endorsing the supernatural claims of Christian theism.

Appendix 1: Plates and Pagination

The normative Blake text for this thesis is the revised *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (1988). However, Erdman’s manner of numbering the poem’s plates is not satisfactory. For example he identifies the final plate as 43 [50]. The [50] refers to the number given to this plate in copy D, but it is also numbered 45 in copies A and B and 46 in copy C. It is not numbered 43 in any of the four copies, but Erdman has arrived at this figure by declining to give a number to non-text plates. Copies C and D have 4 and 5 plates more than A and B. In order to refer successfully to the poem’s plates singly, regardless of the various configurations in which these appear in the four copies, we must use Bentley’s bibliographical description found in his *Blake Books* (Oxford, 1977) pages 304-320. The plates found in copies A and B are numbered 1-45 according to Blake’s numbering in those copies. The added plates in copies C and D are labelled a-f. The order of the four copies then is as follows:

A 1-45
B 1-45
C 1, b, 3, a, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, c, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, d, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, 32, e, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 21, 43, 44, 45
D 1, 3, b, a, f, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, c, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, d, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22, 23, 25, 26, 24, 27, 28, 29, 30, 31, e, 32, 33, 34, 35, 36, 37, 38, 39, 40, 41, 42, 21, 43, 44, 45

In copy C the order 1, b, 3 is a binding error: ‘the binder evidently became confused because there is also a ‘1’ on pi. 1, so he erroneously made the initial order: pl. 1, b, 3, a, 4-8 ... This is clearly an impossibility, for it makes the poem begin with a sentence fragment’.1 The following table gives the opening words or description of the 51 *Milton* plates, with Blake’s numbering in the variant copies C and D. It identifies the page number in Erdman’s 1988 edition on which each plate is transcribed, as well as the plate number given by Erdman.

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Plate (Bentley)</th>
<th>Incipit / Design</th>
<th>Erdman page</th>
<th>Erdman No</th>
<th>copy C No</th>
<th>copy D No</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Title-page with DESIGN: Milton</td>
<td>95</td>
<td>i [1]</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>PREFACE.</td>
<td>95-6</td>
<td>1[i]</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>MILTON Book the First</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>From Golgonooza the spiritual...</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>A/B By Enitharmons...C/D: The first...</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Mean while wept Satan...</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>102-3</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>7</td>
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<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>DESIGN: three figures, one on fire</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>He set his face...</td>
<td>104-5</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>For her light is terrible to me...</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Sick Couch bears the dark...</td>
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<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>According to the inspiration...</td>
<td>108-9</td>
<td>14 [15]</td>
<td>12</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>As when a man dreams...</td>
<td>109-10</td>
<td>15 [17]</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>DESIGN: Milton and Urizen</td>
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<td>16 [18]</td>
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<td>16</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td>And he also darkend...</td>
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<td>19 [21]</td>
<td>18</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>Two yet but one...</td>
<td>113-15</td>
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<td>19</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>And down descended into...</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Tho driven away...</td>
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<td>22 [24]</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>DESIGN: Blake and Los</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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<td>47</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Can you have greater...</td>
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<td>23 [25]</td>
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<td>DESIGN: ROBERT</td>
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<td>And all the Songs of Beula...</td>
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<td>34 [38]</td>
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<td>35</td>
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<td>35 [39]</td>
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<td>When on the highest lift...</td>
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<td>37</td>
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<td>37 [41]</td>
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<td>38</td>
<td>DESIGN: bird over couple on rock</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>DESIGN: Milton and Urizen?</td>
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<td>41</td>
<td>45</td>
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<td>42</td>
<td>Before Oolon Milton stood...</td>
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<td>40 [46]</td>
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<td>46</td>
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<td>43</td>
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<td>142-3</td>
<td>41 [48]</td>
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<td>44</td>
<td>Becomes a Womb?...</td>
<td>143-4</td>
<td>42 [49]</td>
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<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>To go forth to the Great...</td>
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<td>43 [50]</td>
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<td>50</td>
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<tr>
<td>a</td>
<td>Beneath the Plow...</td>
<td>97-8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>b</td>
<td>By Enitharmons Looms when...</td>
<td>96-7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>c</td>
<td>Then Los &amp; Enitharmon...</td>
<td>104</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8*</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>d</td>
<td>And Tharmas Demon of...</td>
<td>111-12</td>
<td>18 [20]</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e</td>
<td>And Milton oft sat up...</td>
<td>131-2</td>
<td>32 [35]</td>
<td>32*</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>f</td>
<td>Palamabron with the fiery</td>
<td>98-9</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>5</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 2: The Muggletonian Connection

The possibility that Blake's religious background included a Muggletonian connection, has been explored by E. P. Thompson in his book *Witness Against the Beast*. This book established many parallels between Muggletonian writings and Blake's imagery and beliefs. However, it did not pursue Muggletonian theology beyond the teachings concerning Reason, Moral Law, and the humanity of God. This appendix shows that as well as displaying the antinomian stance and suspicion of 'Reason' that Thompson identifies as Muggletonian traits, *Milton* shows particular parallels with two other aspects of Muggletonian theology: the doctrines which concern predestinarianism and the nature of God. There are two unique features of this theology: its exceptional doctrinal clarity and its stability over the many years that the Muggletonian Church survived. The sect was founded on the revelations experienced by John Reeve, who wrote several books before his death in 1658, detailing the beliefs urged upon his followers. Owing in part to the long life and firm leadership of Reeve’s deputy and posthumous successor Muggleton, there was very little evolution of those beliefs after the 1650s, and they were certainly professed by small groups in London during Blake’s life, well beyond it.¹

The chief concern of Reeve and Muggleton was salvation. From the beginning of his Commission, John Reeve claimed the ability to distinguish between Elect and Reprobate individuals, as he states in one of the primary texts of the Muggletonian people, *A Transcendent Spiritual Treatise*:

[T]he Lord spake unto me these Words, saying; I have chosen thee my last Messenger for a great Work, unto this Bloudy unbelieving World... whoever I pronounce blessed through thy Mouth, is blessed to Eternity; and whoever I pronounce cursed through thy Mouth, is cursed to Eternity.²

Reeve declared his message to be 'all Spiritual, concerning Men and Womens Eternal Weal or Woe in the life to come.'³ These opposite destinies were inflexibly fixed by a most extreme predestinarianism. In the words of Gordon Alexander, the first

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³ Reeve (1711), p. 6.
outsider to study them, 'There is a radical difference of race between the saved and
the damned':

The religious philosophy of Reeve and Muggleton hinges on their cardinal
document of the Two Seeds, which give rise to two distinct races of beings
whose attributes have come to be blended in human kind. At the root of their
faith are Two Prime Mysteries; the mystery of God becoming flesh, and the
mystery of the Devil becoming flesh. In Eve the Devil, a fallen Angel, once
the noblest of that race whose nature is pure Reason, dissolved himself into
seed; melted himself down, so as to lose personality; and Cain was born, a
man-devil. Cain and his descendants are the Devil made flesh; a totally
distinct race from Abel, and his brethren and their descendants, who, through
Adam, inherit the pure life of God'.

This focus on election and reprobation accounted for much of the substance of
Muggletonianism. It was a curiously irreligious sect, espousing no liturgy and using
no consecrated place of worship. The Muggletonian founders held a passive and
rather negative view of earthly existence. Focusing primarily on the arbitrary
document of salvation and reprobation, Reeve and Muggleton taught that there was
nothing an individual could do to influence his soteriological destiny. For this reason,
neither worship nor good works were advocated. Muggleton developed a pragmatic
morality, but refrained from claiming that there was any relation between salvation
and moral desert. Further, there was a doctrinal reason for avoiding worship: the
belief that God did not hear or notice prayers or indeed any other human activity.
Accordingly, there were no Muggletonian martyrs since their theology endorsed no
expectation of heavenly reward for suffering. Suffering was an expected part of life
in a grim world, but no spiritual value was accorded to it. Similarly, there was no
chiliastic expectation among the sect, although the apocalypse was thought to be
immanent in the 1650s. Muggleton wrote 'is it not a very unlikely Matter that the
infinite divine Majesty should come again personally to remain upon this bloody
Earth a thousand Years with his Saints, having suffered here already?'

If Blake had a Muggletonian background, it would very likely have provoked
such a comprehensive and deliberate rejection of both original and inverted

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5 See William Lamont, 'Lodowick Muggleton and 'Immediate Notice', in Christopher Hill, Barry
6 Barry Reay, 'The Muggletonians: An Introductory Survey, in Christopher Hill, Barry Reay and
predestinarian schemes as is found in *Milton*. As well as suggesting a source of Blake's opposition to predestinarian theology, there are other aspects of the unusual Muggletonian sensibility which may be relevant to *Milton*. The bleakness and godlessness of mundane existence expressed in the Muggletonian worldview is similar to the bard's vision of creation, which denies John Milton's picture of order and divine success and presents an alternative vision of chaotic generation, over which no benevolent divine presence exerts control. The Muggletonian belief that human life and history is beneath the notice of the divine being is perhaps reflected in *Milton*'s rejection of the Miltonic conception of providence, of the shape given to human history by the divine providential purpose which would finally bring it to fruition and salvation. In *Milton*, the activity of providence is exemplified by the transformation of private feelings of pity, grief, and remorse, which spontaneously develop into Ololon's renewed sense of purpose. The Muggletonians believed that God had entered the world in the person of his son Jesus and had been put to death there. God remained utterly dead for three days, and, upon resurrection, withdrew from human affairs. Christ endured his earthly torments utterly unsupported by God, who maintained no separate existence from his incarnate person.

The absence of God's overseeing influence upon earth is felt in the course of Milton's journey in Blake's epic: he finds the superintendents of earthly life in confusion and disagreement, with no omnipotent or eternal perspective from which to understand or control human history. The sons of Los raise up the prophets Whitefield and Wesley but are dismayed by the outcome of their preaching: public scorn and disbelief. The lack of a distinct divine presence in attendance upon human activities meant for the Muggletonians that an individual's salvation was a cause for anxiety that would not normally be alleviated except by the interior spiritual struggle that could lead to personal conviction of election. For this reason the vocabulary of the spiritual struggle was commonly used in Muggletonian writings.7 William Lamont describes the Muggletonian vision of Christ's incarnation:

When God became the Man Christ, and delegated His spiritual powers to Moses and Elias, He enjoyed in His journey into flesh the loneliness and

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insecurity of men. He therefore knew, as His fellow mortals did, the condition of not-being-noticed.8

A similar loneliness is experienced by Blake’s Milton in his return to earth, seeming ‘to himself... a wanderer lost in dreary night’ (plate 14, E. 109, l.16).

This suggestion of continuity between Milton and some aspects of Muggletonianism is not intended to shed light directly on the poem, but to establish, using the example of the Muggletonian hypothesis, that some of the poem’s mysteries derive from ignorance of the fine details of Blake’s cultural and theological background. If Blake’s Muggletonian heritage were proved, it would make sense of some of the puzzling aspects of Blake’s literary career. As David Worrall suggested in his introduction to The Urizen Books, it could be the ‘Muggletonian capacity to be quietly disputatious within one’s own writing or amongst a few like-minded friends which gave Blake the resources of intellectual stamina necessary to persist with the specialities of his illuminated books. Blake is not quite the voice in the wilderness he is sometimes imagined to be.’9 This would answer one of the anxieties about Blake voiced in W. J. T. Mitchell’s provocative essay ‘Dangerous Blake’, written long before Thompson published his Muggletonian research. Mitchell accuses Blake of ‘the cranky miscalculation of audience; the self-defeating strategies of isolation; the self-fulfilling prophecies of paranoia; the megalomania of “Giants & Fairies” and the solipsistic absorption in the silent, solitary obsession with “Writing” for no audience but oneself.’10 If Blake did come from this background he belonged to a tradition in which ambitious and sometimes grandiose writings were valued by and for small communities. There was no preaching or proselytising by Muggletonians: they did not believe in sharing their gospel abroad, but explained their faith only to earnest enquirers, favouring the written word. Something of this reticence may survive in the difficulty of Milton, which is not accessible to a casual reader, but aspires to demonstrate the truth of Blake’s reproach to Dr. Trusler:

[Y]ou ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considerd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act.

(August 23, 1799, E. 702)
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