The Poet in the Poem: Blake's *Milton*

by Anthony Apesos

William Blake inserts himself both in the text and the illustrations of his illuminated book Milton *as he does in no other of his works. This essay examines these instances of self-inclusion and argues that they serve as self-corrections within the overt function of the poem as a correction of John Milton.*

WILLIAM Blake includes himself in the text and in the illustrations of his brief epic *Milton*[1] as he does in no other of his works. Blake's embedded presence in *Milton* takes several forms. Most often noted is the long Bard's Song that initiates the action of the poem, in which Blake allegorizes his three-year residence at the sea-side village of Felpham where he moved to live near his patron, William Hayley.[2] Less commented upon, perhaps because they are so obvious, are Blake's occasional authorial addresses to the reader and, something in *Milton* that is in no other of Blake's poems, his presence as a character in its unfolding narrative.[3] Immediately before the poem's

[1] For a discussion of *Milton*'s distinction between brief and diffuse epic and its relevance to Blake's other works, see Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1969), 314–25.

[2] S. Foster Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1924), 167–82 and 405–10.

[3] There are four book-length commentaries on *Milton*: David E. James, *Written Within and Without: A Study of Blake's Milton* (Frankfurt am Main: Lang, 1978); John Howard, *Blake's Milton: A Study in the Selfhood* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976); Susan Fox, *Poetic Form in Blake's Milton* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976); and Mark Bracher, *Being Form'd: Thinking Through Blake's Milton* (Barrytown, NY: Clinamen Studies, Station Hill Press, 1985); and three extended studies of the Blake-Milton relationship: Thomas Ludwig Minnick, "On Blake and Milton: An Essay in Literary Relationship," PhD diss., Ohio State University, 1973; Denis Saurat, *Blake and Milton* (Bordeaux: Y. Cadoret, 1920); and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, *Angel of Apocalypse: Blake's Idea of Milton* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975). Also, there is an entire

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climactic finale, Blake writes that he was caused to move to Felpham that he "might write all these Visions" (36[40]: 24).[4]

Milton contains Blake's most beautiful passages of nature poetry, which were certainly inspired by life at Felpham, but beyond the location's natural beauty, it was the events at Felpham that made the writing of this poem possible and necessary for Blake. Here I will show that the combination of Blake's difficulties with Hayley, his renewed and deepened reading of Milton facilitated by his association with Hayley, and a particular visionary experience Blake had at Felpham all merged into the writing of Blake's most autobiographical work. I also hope to show that Blake's presence as a character occurs so he can be depicted directly witnessing the poem's events and, paradoxically, to emphasize that *Milton* is not an account of actual events but the product of Blake's writing. The tensions between Blake's presence as character and author work together in Blake's effort to achieve his intentions of correcting John Milton and saving William Blake.

Outside of David F. James's excellent study,[5] other discussions of *Milton* neglect to notice both the importance and strangeness of Blake's presence in the poem, and none considers Blake's presence in the text in relation to the illustrations. Like James, I believe Blake's inclusion of himself in the poem has autobiographical significance, but James's emphasis is on the significance of Blake's appearance in *Milton* as an aspect of Blake's career as a poet, whereas I hope to show how these manifestations of the author's presence in the poem also work in Blake's struggle to forgive Hayley and so to resolve the personal psychic distress that stemmed from his conflict with his patron. Blake demonstrates in *Milton* both the difficulty and majesty of the process of forgiveness and in so doing offers the reader an anatomy of how forgiveness is achieved.

"Special Issue Devoted to Blake's Milton," *Blake Studies* 6 (1973). Jackie DiSalvo, in her *War of Titans: Blake's Critique of Milton and the Politics of Religion* (Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), concentrates on the *Four Zoas*, reading it as a revisioning of the Fall that opposes Milton's version in *Paradise Lost*. Her discussion of Blake's *Milton* is brief and limited to the "Bard's Song."

[4] The text of Blake's works that I use is the David V. Erdman edition of *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, rev. ed. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982). The numbers used here follow Erdman's edition, which uses two numberings for some plates; the first follows that in Geoffrey Keynes edition of *The Complete Writings of William Blake with Variant Readings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966); and the bracketed number is that in David V. Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake* (London: Oxford University Press, 1975).

[5] James, *Written Within and Without*, 143–85.

BLAKE AS AUTHOR

The title page of *Milton* immediately presents Blake to the reader in an unprecedented manner (figure 1). A naked idealized figure of Milton, shown from behind, steps forward as though into the page and thus into the book as a whole. Milton's raised hand breaks the title (his own name) into halves: MIL TON.[6] The inscription continues, "a Poem in 2 Books / The Author & Printer W Blake[.]" In the illuminated books Blake used "author and printer" on the title pages only in the *Songs of Innocence* and of *Experience* and *The Book of Thel*. In all of the books printed after these—the so-called prophetic books—"author" is not used, "printed by" was enough,[7] and only the title page of *Milton* identifies the work to be a "poem,"[8] though of course the others were also poems. The words "a Poem . . . Author & Printer" make explicit that *Milton* is a literary creation and so serve to put the entirety of the poem in quotation marks and thus to undermine a literal reading of any of its parts. This undermining act is to clarify to the reader the correct attitude toward the text: Blake wants us to approach it neither as a record of his own hallucinations nor as an account of Milton's posthumous life, but as a *poem* about John Milton by William Blake.

There are four extant copies of *Milton*[9] that were printed by Blake himself from plates that he created through his technique of relief etching; this is the method Blake used to publish all of his major works. Each plate is decorated with at least some interlinear or marginal illustrations; others have larger illustrations with text; and a few pages hold full-page illustrations with no or very little text. Copies A, B, and C were printed with black ink. Copy D was printed in reddish brown ink. After Blake printed each copy, he hand-painted it with watercolors, possibly assisted by his wife Catherine, so every version of each page is unique. Copy B has one added page not in A. Copy C has four more

[6] Thomas A. Vogler, "Re: Naming Mil/Ton," in *Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality*, ed. Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), 142.

[7] Jerome J. McGann, *Towards a Literature of Knowledge* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 22–24.

[8] John B. Pierce, "Rewriting Milton: Orality and Writing in Blake's Milton," *Studies in Romanticism* 39 (2000): 449.

[9] Two of the copies are available in book form: Copy B in William Blake, *Milton*, ed. and commentary Kay Parkhurst Easson and Roger R. Easson (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1978); and Copy C in William Blake, *Milton a Poem, and the Final Illuminated Works: The Ghost of Abel, on Homers Poetry [and] on Virgil, Laocoon*, ed. with notes and introduction Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi (Princeton, NJ: William Blake Trust/Princeton University Press, 1993). All four copies are online in *The William Blake Archive: A Hypermedia Archive* (http://www.blakearchive.org).

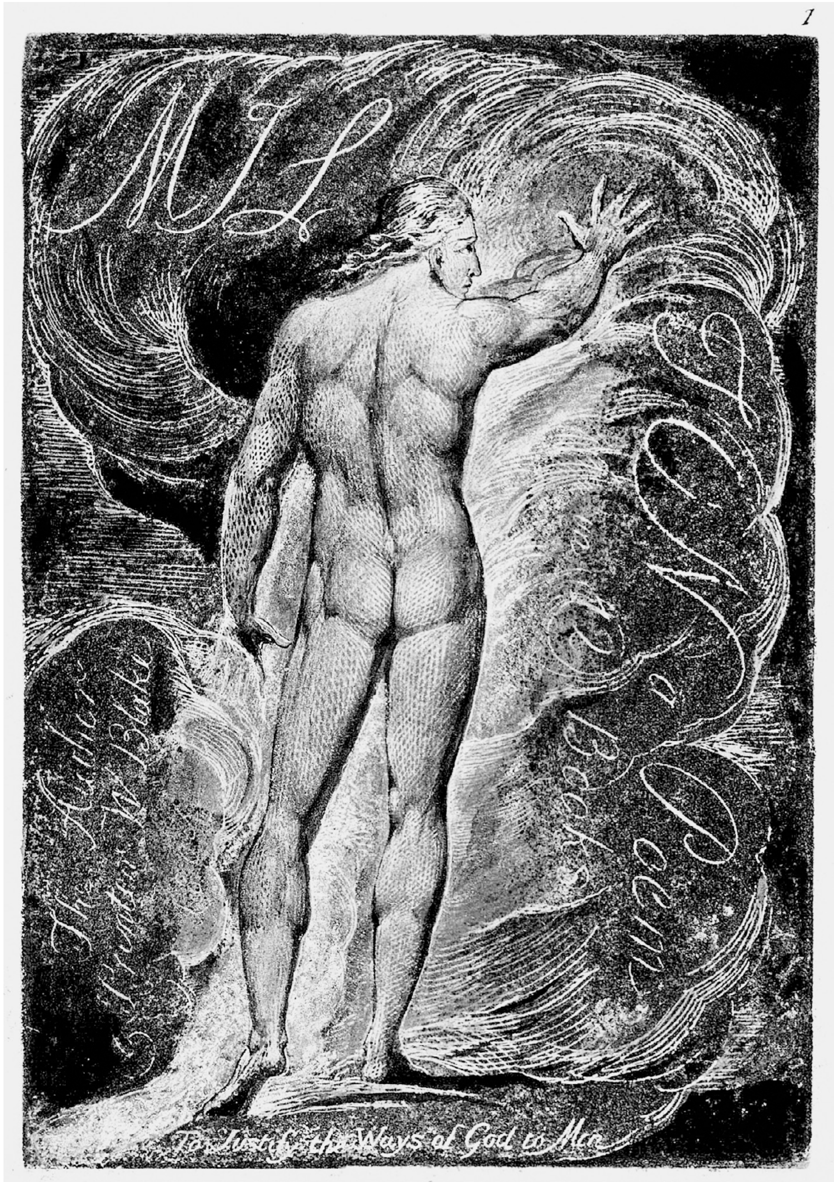

Figure 1. Milton *Copy D, Plate 1. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2014 William Blake Archive. Used with permission.*

added, and D adds one more still. Blake excluded the preface from both C and D. I hope to address the significance of these variations in the future; I will mention here only those needed for my argument as they become relevant. As others who have written about this poem have done, I will take the longest, Copy D, as my prime text for consideration, and I will also, as have others, consider the preface, although it is excluded from D.[10]

In the preface, Blake directly addresses the reader in a prose polemic that condemns the influence of Greek and Roman writers and sculptors as destructive to the arts and also enlists the reader to oppose any further degradation. On the same page is the famous lyric that begins, "And did those feet," in which Blake declares he will not cease from mental fight until "we have built Jerusalem, / In Englands green and pleasant Land" (1[i]: 15). For Blake, the writing of *Milton* is a battle in that fight, and in reading it we must become brothers-in-arms with Blake engaged in mental fight.

The poem proper starts with an invocation for inspiration to the Daughters of Beulah. In the preface, Blake demeans the traditional Muses as the mere daughters of memory; according to Blake, it is the Daughters of Beulah who offer true inspiration. In Blake's mythos, Beulah is that place of repose from the vigorous exercise of the imagination that Blake calls Eden. As spirits of rest, the daughters of Beulah can be the sources of dreams. The dream as a locus of inspiration is consistent with Blake's previous, unfinished epic *The Four Zoas: A Dream in Nine Nights*, in which some of the characters and events in *Milton* were rehearsed. As we will see, much in *Milton* concerns the period of Blake's residence in Felpham, which he elsewhere referred to as his "three years slumber on the banks of the Ocean" (*Jerusalem*, Plate 3). Blake specifically asks the daughters of Beulah to tell of Milton's descent through their realms, i.e. Beulah (2:2). But he also asks them to speak of Milton's place before the descent and of Milton's journey "into the deep" (2:20), which is to say, our world, beneath Beulah. So the daughters of Beulah are not invoked as simple witnesses to recall what happened in their realm—for this, mere Muses, daughters of memory, would be sufficient; instead, they are called on as the source for what they cannot witness but must imagine. In this specific manner of summoning the daughters of Beulah he is

10 Wittreich (*Angel of Apocalypse*, 105, n. 13) questions the correctness of including the preface with readings of Copy D, which he sees as contrary to Blake's intention. But the validity of Wittreich's reservations does not offset the obvious importance of the preface within Blake's writings.

reiterating what he states in the title page: this is a poem, a work of the imagination, of which Blake is the author.

As the author, Blake calls on his inspiration to work on him as a particular physical organism:

> Come into my hand
> By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm
> From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry
> The Eternal Great Humanity Divine. planted his Paradise[.]
>
> (2:5–8)

Blake places the source of the poem in his own brain—an object of anatomical fact. Yet for visionary Blake, the brain is not a mechanism that produces the mind. Instead, for Blake, the physical brain where paradise is planted is analogous to "the Flowers [that] 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" (31[34]: 46–49). From this center in his brain, open to Eternity, down the nerves to his writing hand, Blake informs us that his poem is both an inexplicable product of the imagination and a physical act performed by a living man.

Blake's presence as the physical cause of this work is stressed again when twelve pages later he refers to "Albions land: / Which is this earth of vegetation on which now I write" (14[15]:41). There is a sudden shift to present tense here that thrusts Blake again into the reader's presence. And again six pages later, Blake will break the narrative with a reminder of his bodily presence as the maker of the text:

> 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!
>
> (20[22]:15–17)

These direct addresses to the reader by the corporeal Blake frame and follow the Bard's song where Blake's presence in *Milton* continues, but now in the Bard's Song that presence is covert.

FELPHAM ALLEGORIZED

After the invocation, the poem takes us to its subject, Milton. Blake asks of the Daughters of Beulah, "Say first! what mov'd Milton" (2:16)—who although in Heaven one hundred years is unhappy—to make his unprecedented descent. The cause is the prophetic song of a Bard deliv-

ered to an assembly in Eternity where Milton is in the audience. The Bard begins with "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation" (2:25)—a phrase he repeats seven more times in the course of his recitative. Succinctly characterized, the Bard's song is the recounting of a labor dispute[11]—although it is much more than that. Insofar as it is such, it is an allegorization of the relation between Blake and his patron William Hayley, the man who brought Blake to Felpham. Of the consideration of Blake's time at Felpham with Hayley, one may agree with Northrop Frye's assertion that "[i]t is not necessary to know much of this in order to understand the poem."[12] But to understand how Blake came to write *Milton* and how that writing served Blake in his life, it is essential. The following will demonstrate that it is not possible, as Frye suggests, to dismiss Blake's experiences at Felpham as mere "suggestions for the material."[13]

Blake rented from Hayley a cottage in the seaside village of Felpham. There he lived with his wife, Catherine, and, sometimes, his sister, for three years. He went to Felpham to work for Hayley as illustrator for several of Hayley's literary projects, most notably his *Life of Cowper*, and to paint a frieze of portraits of poets for Hayley's library. Hayley helped Blake get other commissions and encouraged him to do portrait miniatures. All of this Blake did with industry and pleasure, as his letters attest.[14] To Thomas Butts, Blake wrote on September 23, 1800:

Our Cottage is more beautiful than I thought it, & also more convenient, for tho' small it is well proportion'd, & if I should ever build a Palace it would be only My Cottage Enlarged [. . .] I have begun to Work, & find that I can work with greater pleasure than ever. Hope soon to give you a proof that Felpham is propitious to the Arts. (Keynes, 19)[15]

Again May 10, 1801 to Butts:

Mr Hayley acts like a Prince. I am at complete Ease [. . .] my present engagements are in Miniature Painting. Miniature is become a Goddess in my Eyes [. . .] Sussex is certainly a happy place, & Felpham in particular is the sweetest spot on Earth, at least it is so to me & My Good Wife[.] (Keynes, 24)

11 Leslie Tannenbaum, "Hirelings and Laborers: Biblical Parable in Blake's Milton," *Revue LISA* V (2007): 122–32.

12 Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 325.

13 Ibid., 326.

14 Most of what transpired between the two poets is known from Blake's letters; see Geoffrey Keynes, *The Letters of William Blake* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1968).

15 The numbering of the letters follows Keynes, *The Letters of William Blake*.

On September 11 of that year, he wrote of his work for Hayley, and he expressed his interest and admiration of Hayley's work:

I continue painting Miniatures & Improve more & more, as all my friends tell me; but my Principal labour at this time is Engraving Plates for Cowper's Life, a Work of Magnitude, which Mr Hayley is now Labouring with all his matchless industry, & which will be a most valuable acquisition to Literature[.] (Keynes, 25)

Blake's estimation of Hayley's biography of Cowper was accurate—it is Hayley's most enduring work, and its method of quoting liberally from primary sources pioneered the approach of modern biographers.[16]

Further letters show that Blake's contentment at Felpham did not last. January 10, 1802, he wrote to Butts that Catherine was suffering from ague and rheumatism: "her sickness is always my sorrow." And Blake expresses reservations about Felpham: "When I came down here, I was more sanguine than I am at present; but it was because I was ignorant of many things which have since occurred, & chiefly the unhealthiness of the place." In the same letter he clarified what these "many things" were:

My unhappiness has arisen from a source, which if explor'd too narrowly, might hurt my pecuniary circumstances, As my dependence is on Engraving at present, & particularly on the Engravings I have in hand for Mr H[ayley].: & I find on all hands great objections to my doing any thing but the meer drudgery of business, & intimations that if I do not confine myself to this, I shall not live[.] (Keynes, 28)

In the same letter Blake goes on to say that he was at the same time "under the direction of Messengers from Heaven, Daily & Nightly[.]" Drudgery is bad enough; when the drudgery pulled Blake from inspiration, it was unendurable.

On January 30, 1803, he wrote to his brother James that he had had enough. Not only had Catherine been ill, but also he has determined to leave Felpham "because I am now certain of what I have long doubted, Viz that H[ayley] is jealous [. . .] and will be no further my friend than he is compell'd by circumstances. The truth is, As a Poet he is frighten'd at me & as a Painter his views & mine are opposite; he thinks to turn me into a Portrait Painter [. . .] but this he nor all the devils in hell will never do" (Keynes, 31).

[16] For more on the Blake/Hayley relationship see Wittreich, "Domes of Mental Pleasure: Blake's Epics and Hayley's Epic Theory," *Studies in Philology* 69 (1969): 101–29; and Morchard Bishop, *Blake's Hayley: The Life, Works, and Friendships of William Hayley* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1951), which is sympathetic to Hayley.

Hayley thought that portrait painting and engraving could help Blake find some material success. But for Blake this practical solution to Blake's economic needs made Hayley his enemy; as he wrote to Butts:

> That I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoy'd, & that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream Dreams & prophecy & speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals; perhaps Doubts proceeding from Kindness, but Doubts are always pernicious, Especially when we Doubt our Friends [. . .] 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. (Keynes, 32)

In this letter he tells about the long poem that he wrote "from immediate Dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time [. . .] 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 [i.e. to Felpham]." On July 6, he informs Butts that "This Poem shall, by Divine Assistance, be progressively Printed & Ornamented with Prints & given to the Public. But of this work I take care to say little to Mr H[ayley], since he is as much averse to my poetry as he is to a Chapter in the Bible. He knows that I have writ it, for I have shewn it to him, & he has read Part by his own desire & has looked with sufficient contempt to inhance my opinion of it" (Keynes, 33).

S. Foster Damon[17] was the first to show how this troubled relationship is retold in the Bard's song with Satan and Palamabron, two sons of Los, standing in for Hayley and Blake, respectively. Satan, like Hayley, wants to interfere with the work of Palamabron; like Blake, Palamabron at first acquiesces to the intrusion but later rebels. A great Solemn Assembly is gathered before which Satan "who will not defend Truth, may be compelled to / Defend a Lie, that he may be snared & caught & taken" (8:47–48). There Leutha, Satan's emanation,[18] characterizes Satan/Hayley succinctly as doing "unkind things in kindness! with power armd, to say / The most irritating things in the midst of tears and love" (12[13]:32–33). But the mild, if irritating, Satan, now snared,

[17] Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*, 168–82 and 405–10.

[18] An emanation in Blake's myth is the alienated portion of the whole bisexual individual. They are, with one exception, female. (Shilo, the emanation of France, is male.) See S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1965).

caught, and taken, shows before the Assembly his more terrifying aspect. Trapped there, Satan takes on the character of Rintrah, another of Los's sons, and reveals his anger,

> For Satan flaming with Rintrahs fury hidden beneath his own mildness
> Accus'd Palamabron before the Assembly of ingratitude! of malice[.]
>
> (9:19–20)

Then Satan exposes his alarming depths, which

> pervert the Divine voice in its entrance to the earth
> With thunder of war & trumpets sound, with armies of disease
> Punishments & deaths musterd & number'd; Saying I am God alone
> There is no other! let all obey my principles of moral individuality
> I have brought them from the uppermost innermost recesses
> Of my Eternal Mind, transgressors I will rend off for ever[.]
>
> (9:23–28)

Before the astonished Assembly, Satan's bosom opened opaque "in an extreme blackness and darkness" (10:33) as "a vast unfathomable Abyss" (10:35). Los and his emanation Enitharmon at this "knew that Satan is Urizen" (10:1). Urizen is the insane form that reason takes when reason pretends to supremacy over all other human faculties. Satan is Urizen because he is intolerant, despotic, and punishing. The revelation of Satan's nature ends the Bard's song, at which point Milton immediately rises up and says "I go to Eternal Death!" (14[15]:14) because, he says, "I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!" (14[15]:30).

What in the Bard's portrait of Satan spurs Milton's sudden identification with him? Certainly, if Milton is Satan and Satan is Hayley it must follow that Hayley and Milton are in some sense the same to Blake. Satan obviously resembles Hayley in his mild pitying form—the meddling intruder who wants to be helpful. It is not *that* Satan who is the immediate cause of Milton's rising up in the heavenly assembly to announce that he is "that Satan," "that Evil One." Instead Milton sees himself in the Satan who

> created Seven deadly Sins drawing out his infernal scroll,
> Of Moral laws and cruel punishments[.]
>
> (9:21–22)

Milton recognizes the Satan who did this as the God that he portrays with approval in *Paradise Lost*, and so he must confess that the Urizenic doctrine of his greatest masterpiece is his own.

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, written ten years before his Fel-

pham residence, Blake wrote his views about the theodicy of *Paradise Lost*: "In the Book of Job Miltons Messiah is call'd Satan" (*MHH*, plate 5). The history of human enslavement by rational restraint on human energy is "written in Paradise Lost. & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah" (*MHH*, plate 5). Throughout the *Marriage*, Blake continues his ironic inversions of Satan and devils versus the Messiah and angels. The Devils that Blake converses with are all embodiments of the energy that leads to human fulfillment; the angels are all restrainers who would crush human energy and imagination. These angels, like the Messiah of *Paradise Lost*, are the Satan in the Book of Job. The cruel "Angelic" restrainer who enforces the false morality of conventional ethical codes is, for Blake, the Covering Cherub that prevents the return to Eden. So the revealing of tyrannical Urizenic Satan is an unveiling of the deeper aspect of the mild, angelic Hayley/Satan: both are identical as agents that restrain the soul from the delights of energy. The mild/angelic Satan who resembles Hayley at the beginning of the Bard's Song may not resemble the horror that moved Milton, but that this Urizenic Satan is hidden within the mild Satan is important to Blake's vision of Milton and to his feelings toward Hayley.

J. A. Wittreich[19] sees this inversion of good devils and cruel angels in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as less straightforward than I do. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* certain passages are assigned to the "voice of the Devil," including these judgments of Milton; because of this Wittreich does not believe we should take them as Blake's opinion. But everything in the *Marriage*'s constant shifts of voice and location underscores Blake's own agreement with the "voice of the Devil." Certainly the motto that sums up the message of the *Marriage*, "One Law for the Lion & Ox is oppression" (*MHH*, plate 24), is a clear condemnation of the "Angelic" point of view as embodied by the idea of the original sin as told in *Paradise Lost*. Wittreich does not think that Blake agrees with the voice of the devil that says:

> 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. (*MHH*, plate 5)

Wittreich makes what might sound like a Blakean rebuttal to this: "True prophets [belong] to no party."[20] There is nothing I see in the *Mar-*

[19] Wittreich, *Angel of Apocalypse*, 201–18.
[20] Ibid., 216.

riage or elsewhere in Blake that makes me think Blake would approve of this statement. Blake stresses the importance of contrary views in the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. To say that for a prophet there are no parties is to put the prophet within the slumberous realm of Beulah "where all Contrarieties are equally true" (30[33]:1). But prophetic speech is the product of battles of contrary parties: this is the energetic substance of Edenic vision. The *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *Milton* are the two works where Blake most directly addresses his disagreement with Milton, and they are also extraordinary in being the only ones where he chooses to manifest his presence. But while the *Marriage* critiques Milton's ideas and writing, in the poem *Milton*, it is also Milton the man who is the subject.

* * *

Blake's idea of John Milton must be understood against his patron's *Life of Milton*.[21] Hayley's *Life of Milton* was more than a biography; it was also a defense against the slurs that fill Samuel Johnson's biography of Milton. Johnson's famous quip there about *Paradise Lost*, "None ever wished it longer than it is,"[22] is the most gentle of Johnson's attacks. Johnson is critical not only of the poetry but also of the man. No matter what Milton did, Johnson finds the worst motive for it. Of Milton's defense and use of blank verse, Johnson writes that Milton, finding it "easier than rhyme, was desirous of persuading himself that it is better."[23] Of Milton's domestic life: he held women in contempt "as subordinate and inferior beings. That his own daughters might not break the ranks, Milton suffered them to be depressed by a mean and penurious education."[24] Johnson considers not only that Milton was "an acrimonious and surly republican" but also that his politics were "founded in an envious hatred of greatness, and a sullen desire of independence . . . pride disdainful of superiority . . . he hated all whom he was required to obey." His "desire was to destroy . . . not so much [from] love of liberty as repugnance to authority."[25] Johnson wonders that Milton who "justified the murder of his king . . . should sell his services, and

21 Hayley, *The Life of Milton in Three Parts. To Which Are Added, Conjectures on the Origin of Paradise Lost: With an Appendix. By William Hayley, Esq.* (Dublin, 1797).

22 Johnson, *Johnson's Life of Milton*, ed. Frederick Ryland, Bell's English classics (London, 1894), 72.

23 Ibid., 78.

24 Ibid., 52.

25 Ibid., 51–52.

his flatteries, to a tyrant" (i.e. Cromwell).[26] Milton was "one of those who could easily find arguments to justify inclination"[27] and who loved "himself rather than truth."[28]

The sum of Hayley's defenses against these attacks is that they are immoderate, "the intemperate language of hatred, and very far from being consonant to truth,"[29] that they are "[exacerbated] by party rage," and that they may "serve to caution every fervid spirit against that outrageous animosity, which a difference of sentiment in politics and religion is so apt to produce."[30] Hayley's defense is more about Johnson's tone than about the substance of Milton's life and writings.

For Blake, the defense that Hayley mounts is misdirected. First, Blake accepts as true many of Johnson's statements about Milton, though Blake would not have found blame in Milton's republican sentiments nor in his hate of arbitrary authority; on the other hand, Blake could not have approved of Milton's treatment of his wives and daughters. Second, and what is more important, two of Milton's greatest errors, according to Blake's thinking, are ignored by both Johnson and Hayley.[31] First, the notion that our salvation from eternal damnation requires a blood sacrifice in the form of Christ's death was, for Blake, the gravest error. Milton's God is omnipotent and he is also "Love without end" (*Paradise Lost* 3.142). Yet Milton presents the need for Christ's death as necessary for the mechanism of salvation. An omnipotent God could not be subject to such cruel causality nor would He, if all loving, have created such a mechanism. If "the Spirit of Jesus is continual forgiveness of Sin" (*Jerusalem*, plate 3) as Blake held, then no Christian can believe in eternal damnation—not even for Satan and his crew of rebel angels.[32] Blake explains how this is so: because there is a difference between *individuals* and the *states* they pass through.

[26] Ibid., 22.
[27] Ibid., 15.
[28] Ibid., 16.
[29] Hayley, *The Life of Milton*, 227.
[30] Ibid., 176.
[31] Several commentators (Wittreich, *Angel of Apocalypse*, 231–50; Philip Cox, "Blake, Hayley, and Milton: A Reassessment," *English Studies* 75 [1994]: 430–41; John Sutherland, "Blake's Milton: The Bard's Song," *Colby Quarterly* 13 [1977]: 142–57; and Fredrick E. Pierce, "The Genesis and General Meaning of Blake's Milton," *Modern Philology* 25 [1927]: 165–78) ask whose Milton is in Blake's poem. Certainly Blake knew both Johnson's and Hayley's opinions (as well as others), but Blake's idea of Milton is like neither of theirs; it is his own.
[32] Jeanne Moskal, *Blake, Ethics, and Forgiveness* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994).

> Distinguish therefore States from Individuals in those States.
> States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease:
> You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which can never Die.
> (32[35]:22–24)

Kindness or cruelty, curiosity or fear, patience or anger, cheerfulness or despondency—these are states that the individual can put on and off. The individual has the power through the imagination to leave cruelty, fear, anger, and despondency and to take on the loving energetic states of kindness, curiosity, patience, and cheerfulness.[33] The states are mere garments, and Milton's God is a "dunce" because he does "not know the Garment from the Man" (*Gates of Paradise—For The Sexes*, plate 19). States of error should be rejected by each individual, but no individual is damned by Christ.

Second, Blake also could not have agreed with the vision of Eden in *Paradise Lost*, which to him would have seemed like the repose that is Beulah. The work that Adam and Eve are required to perform is some light gardening and restraint from consuming the fruit of one forbidden tree. Restraint is no virtue for Blake, and he conceived of the labors of Eden to be mental and strenuous. Milton's Eden is certainly not Blake's.

Northrop Frye wrote that "the notion that Blake was primarily concerned to 'correct' Milton's theology and domestic difficulties rests on a story of Crabb Robinson's which is much better ignored."[34] Frye rejects Robinson's account[35] for reasons given in a mere footnote: "Blake is alleged [by Robinson] to have complained that Milton was grievously in error in saying that the pleasures of sex arose from the Fall. Milton, of course, said nothing of the kind[.]"[36] Actually, he did. The pleasures of Adam and Eve before the Fall are mild compared to the passionate mutual fulfillment of desire after it. Milton, though he might not approve, makes it perfectly clear that sex after the Fall, as presented in *Paradise Lost*, is ecstatic.[37] But even without Robinson's account, the evidence that Blake wished to correct Milton is provided by the poem

[33] I take this catalogue of virtues from the contemporary follower of Blake and corrector of Milton, Philip Pullman, *The Amber Spyglass* (New York: Dell Laurel Leaf, 2003), 464.

[34] Frye, "Notes for a Commentary on Milton," in *The Divine Vision: Studies in the Poetry and Art of William Blake*, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto (London: Victor Gollancz, 1957), 101.

[35] Crabb Robinson, *Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence of Henry Crabb Robinson*, ed. Thomas Sadler (New York, 1877), 29.

[36] Frye, "Notes for a Commentary on Milton," 101, note 2.

[37] Damon (*William Blake, His Philosophy and Symbols*, 175) recognizes a distinction between pre- and postlapsarian desire for Blake.

Milton itself. Ultimately the notion that *Milton* was written as a correction of Milton, the poet and the man, rests on the recognition of Satan as himself by Milton, the character in the poem, after he hears the Bard's song. The Bard's song shows the deep relation of the mild and terrific manifestations of Satan's error, and Milton recognizes these errors as his own, manifest in both his life and thought. This recognition is what moves Milton to descend, and it is the impulse to move Milton to correction that moved Blake to write this poem.

Up until the end of the Bard's song, Blake is present as the author and, though disguised as Palamabron, within the Bard's song. After Milton recognizes himself as Satan and he begins his descent, then, suddenly, Blake depicts himself as a character acting within the narrative of the poem itself. He sees Milton's fall "thunders loud and terrible . . . into the Sea of Time & Space [i.e. into Blake's world where he writes] [. . .] I saw him in the Zenith as a falling star, / Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow or swift" (15[17]:45–48). The shift from omniscient voice to the first person is as sudden and jarring to the reader as the event experienced by the character Blake: "And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, [Milton] enterd there; / But from my left foot a black cloud redounding spread over Europe" (15[17]49–50). The entrance into the bones of Blake's left foot shows the humility of Milton in the depth of his descent. The black cloud is Milton's errors and their influence made visible.[38] There is a passage that recounts this influence as the weaving "a new Religion from new Jealousy" (22[24]:38):

> Asserting the Self-righteousness against the Universal Savior,
> Mocking the Confessors & Martyrs, claiming Self-righteousness;
> With cruel Virtue: making War upon the Lambs Redeemed;
> To perpetuate War & Glory. to perpetuate the Laws of Sin[.]
> (22[24]:42–45)

With that passage Blake declares, "Miltons Religion is the cause" (22[24]:39). The errors of his religion leave Milton before he enters Blake, preparing him for the next stage in his correction. Blake places an interlinear illustration of the contact of the falling star Milton with his left foot in immediate proximity to the description of the event that it depicts (figure 2).

[38] Ibid., 413.

17

As when a man dreams, he reflects not that his body sleeps,
Else he would wake; so seemd he entering his Shadow: but
With him the Spirits of the Seven Angels of the Presence
Entering; they gave him still perceptions of his Sleeping Body;
Which now arose and walkd with them in Eden, as an Eighth
Image Divine tho' darkend; and tho walking as one walks
In sleep; and the Seven comforted and supported him.

Like as a Polypus that vegetates beneath the deep!
They saw his Shadow vegetated underneath the Couch
Of death: for when he enterd into his Shadow: Himself:
His real and immortal Self: was as appeard to those
Who dwell in immortality, as One sleeping on a couch
Of gold; and those in immortality gave forth their Emanations
Like Females of sweet beauty, to guard round him & to feed
His lips with food of Eden in his cold and dim repose!
But to himself he seemd a wanderer lost in dreary night.

Onwards his Shadow kept its course among the Spectres; call'd
Satan, but swift as lightning passing them, startled the shades
Of Hell beheld him in a trail of light as of a comet
That travels into Chaos: so Milton went guarded within.

The nature of infinity is this! That every thing has its
Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro Eternity.
Has passd that Vortex, he percieves it roll backward behind
His path, into a globe itself infolding; like a sun:
Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty,
While he keeps onwards in his wondrous journey on the earth
Or like a human form, a friend with with whom he livd benevolent.
As the eye of man views both the east & west encompassing
Its vortex; and the north & south, with all their starry host;
Also the rising sun & setting moon he views surrounding
His corn-fields and his valleys of five hundred acres square.
Thus is the earth one infinite plane, and not as apparent
To the weak traveller confin'd beneath the moony shade.
Thus is the heaven a vortex passd already, and the earth
A vortex not yet pass'd by the traveller thro' Eternity.

First Milton saw Albion upon the Rock of Ages,
Deadly pale outstretchd and snowy cold, storm coverd;
A Giant form of perfect beauty outstretchd on the rock
In solemn death: the Sea of Time & Space thunderd aloud
Against the rock, which was inwrapped with the weeds of death
Hovering over the cold bosom, in its vortex Milton bent down
To the bosom of death, what was underneath soon seemd above.
A cloudy heaven mingled with stormy seas in loudest ruin;
But as a wintry globe descends precipitant thro' Beulah bursting,
With thunders loud and terrible: so Miltons shadow fell,
Precipitant loud thundring into the Sea of Time & Space.

Then first I saw him in the Zenith as a falling star,
Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow or swift;
And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enterd there;
But from my left foot a black cloud redounding spread over Europe.

Then Milton knew that the Three Heavens of Beulah were beheld
By him on earth in his bright pilgrimage of sixty years

Figure 2. Milton *Copy D, Plate 17. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2014 William Blake Archive. Used with permission.*

The image showing the moment of the star falling into Blake's foot is repeated as a full-page illustration (figure 3) between books 1 and 2. We know it is him even though he is shown as an idealized figure because Blake labels the image in large letters "William." As in the small interlinear illustration, he shows himself thrown backwards in a position of pain/surprise/ecstasy. In the full-page image, three stone steps are behind the figure. Can we guess that William had to descend them to be present for Milton's descent? Nothing in the text suggests this, but the implication in this image that Blake has just come down these stairs presents the possibility of a degree of contingency in the event, as though Blake could have missed the moment of Milton's union with him, or that Milton may not have descended at all. As we will see, the causal relation of the details of Blake's life to Milton's descent justifies this inference. Over and above surrounding the inscription, the black cloud swirls upward from Blake's foot.

Four pages later (figure 4), there is another full-page illustration with the same pose in mirror image labeled "Robert," signifying Blake's younger brother who died in 1787, thirteen years before Blake went to Felpham. In this pose, as Sutherland writes, "both men are collapsing backwards as if struck dead." Sutherland goes on, "Since we know Robert did die, the pictures seem to imply that the inward events symbolized by the descent of Milton struck William Blake with a critical intensity like that of death."[39] Perhaps, but to this I will add a comment and a question: Robert was already dead before the event depicted, yet his image follows that of Blake. Since Milton is the star entering William's foot, is Milton also that star entering Robert's foot? In Blake's personal mythology, Robert posthumously taught Blake the method of relief etching that he used in his illuminated books.[40] Blake's tribute to Robert reflects the printing process itself: it was generated by a transfer process from the "William" page, or, as I would guess as more likely, the "William" plate is a transfer from the "Robert" plate.[41] In showing the falling star in both plates, Blake is offering to his dead brother a gift signifying inspiration and so commensurate to his debt to him, a gift

[39] Sutherland, "Blake's Milton," 157.

[40] G. E. Bentley, *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 32–33.

[41] I suspect this because if it were the origin of the "William" page, it would more directly acknowledge Robert as the source of the method. For Blake's methods of etching, see Michael Phillips, *William Blake: The Creation of the Songs from Manuscript to Illuminated Printing* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993).

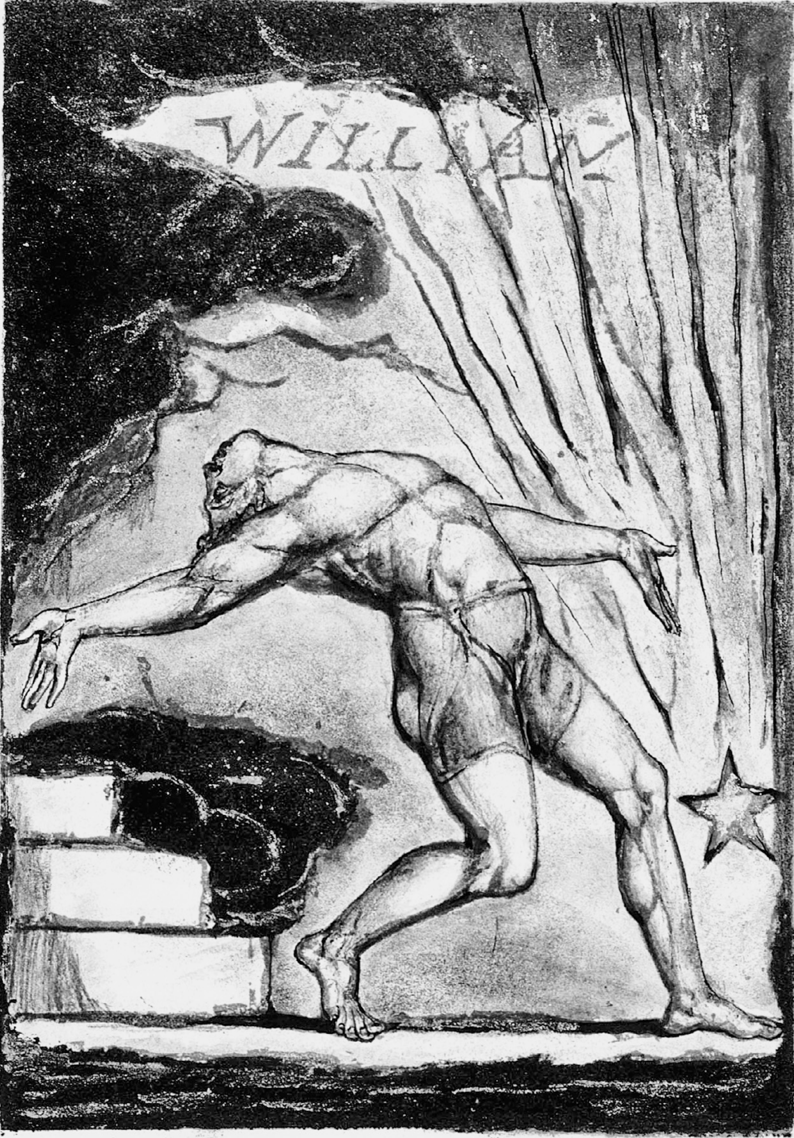

Figure 3. Milton *Copy D, Plate 32. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2014 William Blake Archive. Used with permission.*

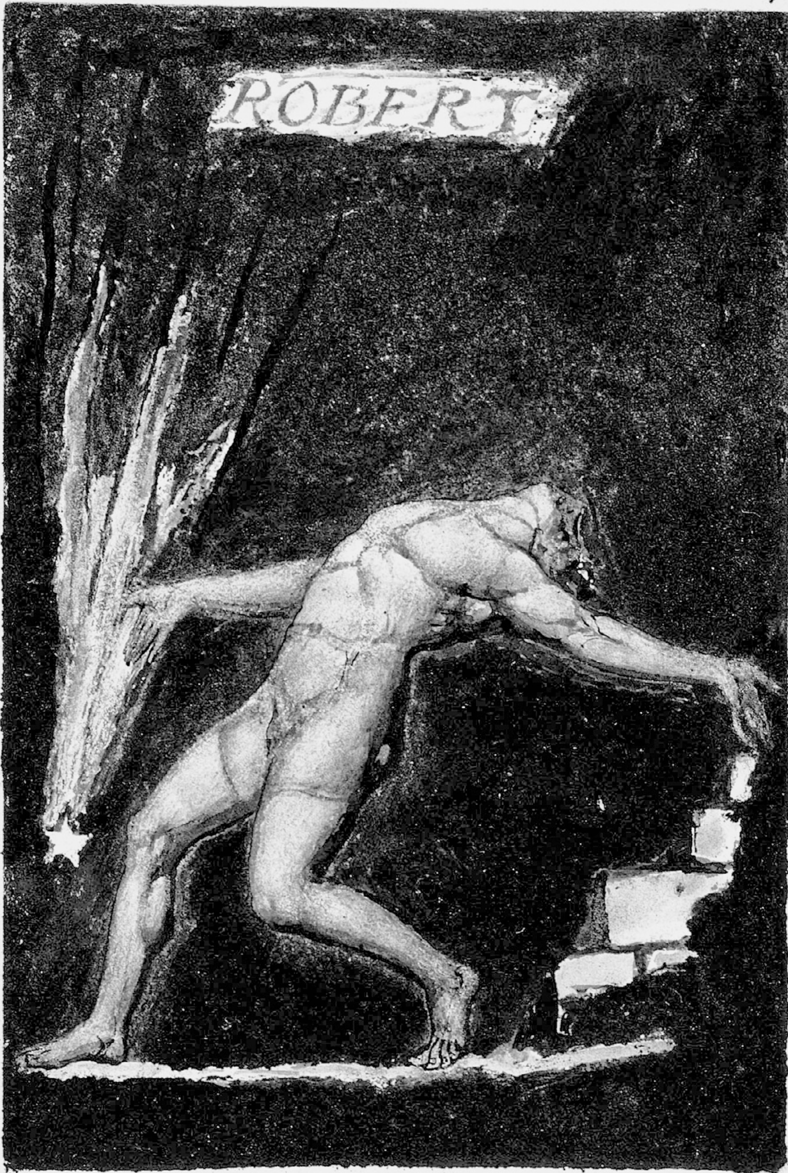

Figure 4. Milton *Copy D, Plate 37. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2014 William Blake Archive. Used with permission.*

that transcends death. But if the star at Robert's foot is William's gift to him, I don't see that it is necessary for it to be Milton. Regardless of Blake's obscure motives, what is clear is that the two figures in each plate fall backwards away from each other and form a parenthetical embrace of the first three pages of book 2. These tell more about Ololon, Milton's emanation, who must descend from Beulah to rejoin Milton.

Blake appears in three more places in the text of book 1. Each of these is actually the same moment—a fact which is easy for the reader to miss because there is so much dense material separating them. Seen together, their identity as one moment is obvious:

> And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enterd there[.]
> (15[17]: 49)

> But Milton entering my Foot; I saw in the nether
> Regions of the Imagination; [. . .]
> 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: [. . .]
> And all this Vegetable World appeard on my left Foot,
> As a bright sandal formd immortal of precious stones & gold:
> I stooped down & bound it on to walk forward thro' Eternity.
> (21[23]:4–14)

> While [. . .] I bound my sandals
> On; to walk forward thro' Eternity, Los descended to me:
> And Los behind me stood; a terrible flaming Sun: just close
> Behind my back [.]
> (22[24]:4–7)

After binding on the sandals "in the Vale / Of Lambeth," Blake "became One Man with him arising in [Blake's] strength: / Twas too late now to recede. Los had entered into [Blake's] soul: / [Los's] terrors now posses'd [Blake]" and Blake "arose in fury and strength" (22[24]: 10–14). The moment of Los's entry into Blake's soul is depicted in a full page illustration (figure 5) that shows a naked (or nearly so, with a loincloth in Copies C and D) Blake kneeling with a sandaled foot forward, head turned and bent sharply back and up to regard Los standing behind him. Los's right foot is back, overlapped by the edge of the burning disk from which he is emerging. His left foot is forward, squarely placed on the hillock where Blake kneels. Los's gesture and gaze seem to combine attitudes of surprise and acceptance toward his coming union with the poet.[42]

[42] For other ideas on these plates, see David V. Erdman, et al., *The William Blake Archive, A Hypermedia Archive*. Milton, Copy A, Objects 29 and 33; Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake*,

Figure 5. Milton *Copy D, Plate 47. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2014 William Blake Archive. Used with permission.*

In the poem, the time of Milton's descent and Blake's union with Los is placed before Blake's time in Felpham. In Copies A and B, this page is collated immediately after the telling of it in the text; in Copies C and D it is inserted near the end of the poem as pages 43 or 47, respectively. Because the later copies have more text pages added to book 1, the immediate reason for Blake's relocation of this plate may have been to help balance the lengths of the two books. The original location of this illustration near the event told is not surprising. Though the rearrangement in Copies C and D of this page to the end of the second book of *Milton*, Blake creates a proximal relation of an earlier event that is causal to a later one. The moment of union of Milton, Blake, and Los is thus presented as a visual flashback that clarifies it as the cause of the poem's climax.

In book 2, Blake makes his final appearance, which occurs in his garden at Felpham as Ololon, the sixfold emanation of Milton, descends to earth. The number six derives from the three wives and three daughters of Milton—but Ololon should not be misunderstood as a compound of these six women. Instead, these women in Milton's life are recollected through the number six as an emblem of all that is feminine from which Milton's unforgiving religion has alienated him. Ololon is much more than sixfold; she has been described earlier in book 2 as multitudes having many children, and these all formed a fiery circle. But in Blake's garden Ololon appears in a milder aspect.

Before reading the page (36[40]) that records Ololon's descent, the reader cannot help first seeing, filling the bottom third of that page, an illustration, in its topographical verity, utterly atypical of Blake, clearly captioned, "Blake's Cottage at Felpham" (figure 6). Here the reader finds the two-story cottage with its two chimneys, thatched roof, garden transected by a path, a small grove of five or six trees, and behind them a distant horizon perhaps representing the sea. A few birds fly over the cottage. In the path before the garden, near the identifying caption, is the figure of a man walking to the right. In the sky before the man over the grove of trees, a female figure with extended arms seems to stride to the left with streams of drapery, and perhaps wings, behind her. The man does not look up at her. As clearly as the caption in the picture identifies the location, so does the text above the illustration identify the figures and how they got there:

248–49, and 253–54; and Henry Summerfield, *A Guide to the Books of William Blake for Innocent and Experienced Readers: With Notes on Interpretive Criticism, 1910 to 1984* (Gerrards Cross: Colin Smythe, 1998), 673–74.

40

When on the highest lift of his light pinions he arrives
At that bright Gate. another Lark meets him & back to back
They touch their pinions tip tip: and each descend
To their respective Earths & there all night consult with Angels
Of Providence & with the Eyes of God all night in slumbers
Inspired: & at the dawn of day send out another Lark
Into another Heaven to carry news upon his wings
Thus are the Messengers dispatchd till they reach the Earth again
In the East Gate of Golgonooza, & the Twenty-eighth bright
Lark. met the Female Ololon descending into my Garden
Thus it appears to Mortal eyes & those of the Ulro Heavens
But not thus to Immortals. the Lark is a mighty Angel.

For Ololon step'd into the Polypus within the Mundane Shell
They could not step into Vegetable Worlds without becoming
The enemies of Humanity except in a Female Form
And as One Female: Ololon and all its mighty Hosts
Appear'd: a Virgin of twelve years nor time nor space was
To the perception of the Virgin Ololon but as the
Flash of lightning but more quick the Virgin in my Garden
Before my Cottage stood for the Satanic Space is delusion

For when Los join'd with me he took me in his firy whirlwind
My Vegetated portion was hurried from Lambeths shades
He set me down in Felphams Vale & prepard a beautiful
Cottage for me that in three years I might write all these
Visions
To display Natures cruel holiness: the deceits of Natural
Religion
Walking in my Cottage Garden, sudden I beheld
The Virgin Ololon & address'd her as a Daughter of Beulah

Virgin of Providence fear not to enter into my Cottage
What is thy message to thy friend: what am I now to do
Is it again to plunge into deeper affliction? behold me
Ready to obey, but pity thou my Shadow of Delight
Enter my Cottage. comfort her, for she is sick with fatigue

Figure 6. Milton *Copy D, Plate 40. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress.* *Copyright © 2014 William Blake Archive. Used with permission.*

> For when Los joind with me he took me in his firy whirlwind
> My Vegetated portion [i.e.,Blake the living man in his mid- forties] was hurried from Lambeths [the part of London where Blake resided for most of his life] shades
> He set me down in Felphams Vale & prepard a beautiful
> Cottage for me that in three years I might write all these Visions [. . .]
> Walking in my Cottage Garden, sudden I beheld
> The Virgin Ololon & address'd her as a daughter of Beulah[:]
> Virgin of Providence fear not to enter my Cottage[.]
>
> (36[40]:21–28)

So we know that the man is Blake and the figure in the sky is Ololon. A few lines above she is said to be "descending" (36[40]:10) as we see in the illustration. She is called a "Virgin of twelve years" (36[40]:17) who then "Before my Cottage stood" (36[40]:20), where Blake speaks to her. Two pages hence in a full-page illustration (figure 7), Blake depicts in his more typically idealizing idiom two reclining figures who have been variously identified as Albion and his emanation; Milton and Ololon; or as Blake and Catherine.[43] This disagreement in interpretations is symptomatic of the fluidity of identities of Blake's characters. Yet, within the context of both the poem and Blake's biography, William and Catherine must be the primary identities of the two figures in this plate, where we see them lying in an embrace on a rocky shore during the three years' slumber by the sea. Above the couple, a menacing eagle flies. Some commentators have read the eagle benignly, but this can only be done by ignoring its source in one of Blake's illustrations to Hayley's *Ballads Founded on Anecdotes Relating to Animals*.[44] This eagle is a direct quotation of the bird that Blake engraved to illustrate Hayley's poem "The Eagle" (figure 8). In Hayley's poem, the story's heroine "deem'd / The royal bird her friend." But she soon discovers her error and she must fight it to the eagle's death to save her infant son. As one of Blake's illustrations to Hayley's poetry, and especially in its depiction of an enemy mistaken for a friend, the eagle over Catherine and William must represent Hayley. This plate is a visionary counterpart to the previous one. The depiction of Blake's cottage shows the physical Blake receiving a vision while the idealized depiction of Hayley, Blake, and

43 The different interpretations are summarized in Summerfield, *A Guide to the Books of William Blake*, 675. Also see Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake*, 258–59, and *The William Blake Archive*, Milton, Copy A, Object 38.

44 William Hayley and William Blake, *Ballads: Founded on Anecdotes Relating to Animals* (Chichester, 1805). See Blake, *Milton a Poem, and the Final Illuminated Works: The Ghost of Abel, on Homers Poetry [and] on Virgil, Laocoon*, 31.

Figure 7. Milton *Copy D, Plate 42. Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. Copyright © 2014 William Blake Archive. Used with permission.*

Figure 8. *Frontispiece to "The Eagle." Huntington Library, San Marino, California.*

Catherine shows the spiritual condition of the inhabitants of the cottage before the vision. Blake lies gazing distractedly upwards; the arm that he asked the daughters of Beulah to inspire hangs limply, nearly touching the choppy waters that surround the rock where he reclines. His other arm rests on Catherine's thigh. In Copy A, his penis is erect, perhaps implying the potential for transformation; in the other copies this detail was effaced. Catherine turns toward him, clinging.

The sexuality of the couple is present but is no more engaged than Blake's inspiration. Dark rocks and sea surround. Catherine and William are stranded, isolated, and show no signs of struggle against their situation except that intimated by Catherine's questioning, expectant, yet sorrowful gaze. These two, as others have noted,[45] prefigure the reclining Adam and Eve in Blake's *Paradise Lost* illustration (figure 9). That Blake could see a correspondence between himself and Catherine in Felpham to Adam and Eve in the Garden is further attested to by the well-known story of Butts,[46] who found Blake and Catherine as they sat naked in their garden reading book 4 of *Paradise Lost*. But some differences between these pairs are significant. In the *Paradise Lost* illustration, the hanging arm of Adam has fallen from its embrace of Eve because he, like Eve, is asleep. Adam's pose shows spent energy, not the languor of depression. Rather than looking to her mate, Eve's sleeping eyes are shut as the evil words of the Satanic toad are spoken into her ear. Instead of resting on a soft couch of fruit like our first parents, Blake and Catherine lie on hard rocks.

Blake could not have intended either the full-page illustration of Robert or this one of William, Catherine, and Hayley to be understood by his readers. The personal information from his letters and from the memories of his friends is not knowledge that he could have expected of the reader. Blake needed to express more than he could intend or hope to communicate. He places himself in the book so we see him there—but so deeply is he embedded that there is more than he wants us to see.

However, with insight into the spiritual condition of Blake and Catherine we can see more clearly the generosity of Blake's address to Ololon when she descends to his garden.

45 Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake*, 259, and Blake, *Milton a Poem*, 31.

46 Alexander Gilchrist and Anne Burrows Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake, with Selections from His Poems and Other Writings*, a new and enl. ed. (London, 1880), 112. G. E. Bentley (*Blake Records*, 54) gives credence to the wish to debunk this story by some of Blake's associates. I do not. I trust the Butts's story as related by Gilchrist, because neither had any reason to fabricate it. The effort to discredit the story, on the other hand, is suspect, stemming as it did from the Victorian effort to normalize Blake.

Figure 9. *"Adam and Eve Asleep." Photograph © 2015 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. William Blake, English, 1757–1827.* Adam and Eve Sleeping (Illustration to Milton's "Paradise Lost")*, 1808. Pen and watercolor on paper. 49.2 × 38.7 cm (19⅜ × 15¼ in.). Museum of Fine Arts, Boston. Museum purchase with funds donated by contribution, 90.102.*

> What am I now to do
> Is it again to plunge into deeper affliction? behold me
> Ready to obey, but pity thou my Shadow of Delight
> Enter my Cottage, comfort her, for she is sick with fatigue[.]
> (36[40]:29–32)

Her response to his offer and request is to ignore it and ask:

> Knowest thou of Milton who descended
> Driven from Eternity; him I seek!
> (37[41]:1–2)

What follows is one of Blake's most terrific apocalyptic visions, in which Milton appears in a sequence of astonishing forms through to the final union of Milton and Ololon, which transforms into a vision of Jesus the Savior. All through the dense seven pages in which the vision unfolds with incomprehensible detail, Blake continually reminds the reader of his presence as witness to the events. Milton descends "down into my Garden" (37[41]:13). Blake "beheld Milton with astonishment" (37[41:15). Next, Milton

> Descended down a Paved work of all kinds of precious stones
> Out from the eastern sky; descending down into my Cottage
> Garden: clothed in black, severe & silent he descended.
> (38[43]:6–13)

And Blake fully enters his vision: "I also stood in Satans bosom & beheld its desolations!" (38[43]:15) The vision transforms the fabric of Blake's environment: "My Path became a solid fire, as bright / As the clear Sun" (39[44]:4–5). He tells us "I heard Ololon say to Milton" (40[46]:3), letting us infer that he is the auditor of the rest of their dialogue until the climax of their final union in which Milton and Ololon divide, flee, and descend "to Felphams Vale / In clouds of blood, in streams of gore" (42[49]:7–8). The starry eight that have accompanied his descent "became / One Man Jesus the Saviour. wonderful! round his limbs / The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment dipped in blood / Written within & without in woven letters: & the Writing Is the Divine Revelation," which Blake knows to be "a garment of war [. . .] the Woof of Six Thousand Years" (42[49]:10–15). This is to say the Savior appears clothed in the history of the world since its creation—history is the record of wars.

The vision ends, and Blake swoons and finds Catherine standing beside him:

> Terror struck in the Vale [. . .]
> My bones trembled. I fell outstretchd upon the path
> A moment, & my Soul returnd into its mortal state
> To Resurrection & Judgment in the Vegetable Body
> And my sweet Shadow of Delight stood trembling by my side [.]
> (42[49]:24–28)

The poem ends with the song of the Lark, who reminds Blake and the reader that this apocalypse is not the end of the world. History continues:

> Rintrah & Palamabron view the Human Harvest beneath
> Their Wine-presses & Barns stand open; the Ovens are prepar'd
> The Waggons ready: terrific Lions & Tygers sport & play
> All Animals upon the Earth, are prepard in all their strength
> To go forth to the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations[.]
> (42[49]:36–43[50]:1)

* * *

Excluding his direct authorial addresses to the reader, I summarize Blake's appearances in the poem: Blake's conflict in Felpham with Hayley is obscurely recounted in the Bard's song. While residing in Lambeth, Blake sees Milton, having been moved by the Bard's song, descend to enter Blake's left foot. Blake merges with Los, and he and Milton are given a vision of history as the world of Los. Time has passed and Blake, now residing in Felphan, sees Ololon descend into his garden at Felpham. Milton appears, and Blake hears Milton and Ololon's discourse followed by an apocalyptic vision that leaves Blake in a swoon on the ground with Catherine by his side. The relation of events is circular: Blake's experiences at Felpham are the cause of Milton's descent, which propelled Blake to Felpham. Certainly Milton and the Bard are in Eternity, so they do not follow earthly clock time. Or, to put it differently, Blake's poem is the product of his mind, and as such it is a labor of Eden in eternity and so is free from the shackles of chronology.[47] As Blake makes clear on the title page, this is a poem that *he wrote* and, as the writer, can use what he chooses to accomplish his task of the salvation of Milton.

The effect of all of this is striking. The author, who has directly addressed us to say explicitly that he is writing what we are reading,

[47] Sutherland, "Blake's Milton," 144.

confounds expectation by crossing the boundary of his external presence to the text to appear within the recounted events. A look at the difference between the author's inclusion as a character in *Milton* and that of Dante within the *Divine Comedy* clarifies the strangeness of the later poem. The telling of the story in the *Commedia* is presented as the simple relation of past events recalled by Dante the narrator. In *Milton*, Blake stresses himself as the writer writing, thus making the events seem not recalled but created with the telling. As author, Blake stands on our side of the world of the poem and its events. By suddenly slipping into the events, he is in two places at once, just as in a dream where the dreamer sees the events of the dream from a localized somatic point of view then suddenly, strangely, sees himself from the outside acting in those events. This condition of multilocation is not exceptional in the poem but consistent with how Milton simultaneously rests in Beulah, wrestles with Urizen on the banks of the Jordan, and descends to enter Blake's left foot. Blake's dual locations clarify how we are to understand other multiple presences in the poem; this exemplification of multiple locations of characters and the jarring effect on the reader of shifting viewpoints are side effects of Blake's deeper intentions.

What are these? Certainly the salvation of Milton's eternal soul is a matter between John Milton and God. Blake's task cannot be concerned with Milton's soul but instead with his life on Earth as it endures in his writing. Milton must be saved by descending to Blake's and our world through Blake's text because it is in texts that Milton still exists in our world within his flawed writings. The Milton who is saved can only be so through poetry, the medium through which he endures in this world. In this, the contrast between the relationships of Blake and Dante to their respective great predecessors cannot be greater. Virgil is only Dante's guide, and his fate is ultimately unaffected by Dante's visit to Hell and Purgatory. By contrast, Milton is thoroughly remade through Blake's imagination in his poem. Blake the poet holds Milton's writing within his mind and holds there also an imagining of Milton's recognition of his errors.

The unfolding of these imaginings in Blake begins at the moment of the star entering his left foot. After that and his merging with Los, Blake must go to Felpham. Only there does the nature of Milton's error become explicit in his imagination through Blake's experience with the mild though satanic Hayley. As quoted above, Blake writes:

> For when Los joind with me he took me in his firy whirlwind
> My Vegetated portion was hurried from Lambeths shades
> He set me down in Felphams Vale & prepard a beautiful
> Cottage for me that in three years I might write all these Visions[.]
> (36[40]:21–24)

In that cottage, because of his engagement with Hayley's projects, Blake rereads Milton; in that cottage, as seen both in the illustration of himself with Catherine and the hovering Eagle (Hayley) and also in the Bard's song, Blake experienced in Hayley the character of Milton's mild yet satanic Messiah. And also in Felpham, near that cottage, Blake had a particular vision that he recounted in a letter sent to his friend Thomas Butts (November 22, 1802). In that letter, Blake transcribed a poem that he wrote more than a year earlier that describes a vision. The poem begins as a complaint: "Must the duties of life each other cross? / Must every joy be dung & dross?" It ends with a vision: "Los flam'd in my path [. . .] / The heavens drop with human gore." The result of this vision is the poem's conclusion: "Now I a fourfold vision see, / And a fourfold vision is given to me" (Keynes, 30). This brilliant and gory vision that raises Blake's consciousness is the germ of the apocalyptic climax of *Milton*.

The description of Milton's descent is a dilation of this earlier vision. It should not give one pause that Blake interchanges Milton, England's greatest poet, with Los, the Prophet of Eternity, because Blake compounds identities throughout *Milton*: Blake is joined to Los and also to Milton, who has been joined to the Bard—and as such the compound can synecdochally be called by the names of any of them. This is not to say that the experience Blake related to Butts is what we find in *Milton*, but that, like his other experiences at Felpham, Blake used it so he could "write all of these Visions" (36[40]:24). The operative word is not *see* but "*write*." Blake is not recording but *writing*; as the title page says, he is authoring a poem—a product of imagination, not of memory.

Paul Youngquist[48] argues that Blake is describing actual visions or hallucinations. Certainly, as any student of Blake knows, Blake saw visions—his letters and records of conversation repeatedly attest to this,

[48] Youngquist, "Criticism and the Experience of Blake's *Milton*," *Studies in English Literature* 30 (1990): 555–71. For extended considerations of Blake's mental health, see Andrew Cooper, "Blake's Escape from Mythology: Self-Mastery in *Milton*," *Studies in Romanticism* 20 (1981): 85–110; and Youngquist, *Madness & Blake's Myth* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989).

from a tree full of angels he saw as a child[49] to the visions of historical personages he drew as an old man.[50] Youngquist believes that the visions recounted in *Milton* are there because Blake was on the brink of insanity and that writing *Milton* saved him from madness. I agree with Youngquist that Blake's writing and art had a therapeutic function for him, but I don't see that Youngquist answers why and how Blake embeds himself in *this* poem. Blake saw visions all his life, but he places himself as their seer and as an actor in them only in *Milton*.

By making himself a character within *Milton*, Blake extracts and externalizes events from his own mind. In depicting himself as a recorder of events outside of himself, Blake stands outside of the drama of the vision and allows us to witness with him Milton's self-realization and salvation. But Milton's action is actually performed by Blake through his writing. Blake *writes* the vision that we read—outside of writing, the act of his authorship, the vision has no reality. In the creation of this vision of Milton's recognition of error, he creates an example for himself and for us of what such a self-correction must be. Blake helps us learn the nature of self-correction as he himself learned it through his authorship.

The moment of consummation at *Milton*'s climax is this:

> And I beheld the Twenty-four Cities of Albion
> Arise upon their Thrones to Judge the Nations of the Earth
> And the Immortal Four in whom the Twenty-four appear Four-fold
> Arose around Albions body: Jesus wept & walked forth
> From Felphams Vale clothed in Clouds of blood, to enter into
> Albions Bosom, the bosom of death & the Four surrounded him
> In the Column of Fire in Felphams Vale; then to their mouths the Four
> Applied their Four Trumpets & them sounded to the Four winds[.]
> (42[49]:16–23)

The reader of Blake immediately thinks of these four trumpet blowers as the four Zoas, but the word Zoa, it must be remembered, Blake took from the Greek word used for the four living creatures that accompany Christ at the Last Judgment, and the twenty-four and their thrones are the elders that also appear with Christ. Blake gives these to indicate that this event is a Last Judgment. Blake defines his notion of this in his notebook in the so-called "Vision of the Last Judgment."

49 Gilchrist and Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, 7.

50 Blake, *The Blake-Varley Sketchbook of 1819: In the Collection of M. D. E. Clayton-Stamm*, introduction and notes by Martin Butlin (London: Heinemann, 1969).

There he writes, "Whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual" (Notebook, 84).[51] The moment when truth is embraced and error rejected coincides with the descent of Jesus because such a decision is the putting off of selfhood, which is the essence of Christ. The descent of Christ is the sign of this decision, not its cause or effect. The miraculous nature of the embracing of truth is asserted when earlier, in the poem, Blake answers the demand "shew us Miracles!" (22[24]: 62) by

> Can you have greater Miracles than these? Men who devote
> Their lifes whole comfort to intire scorn & injury & death[.]
> (23[25]:1–2)

Los transferred Blake to Felpham so that this vision of the moment of self-correcting embrace of truth could be written and thus brought into being. Only after his conflict with Hayley, which so corroded Blake's mental equilibrium, was the writing of this vision possible and necessary. Milton's recognition of himself as Satan and his ultimate union with his emanation is one and the same as Blake's forgiveness of Hayley. When Milton says he goes to "self-annihilation," he is using another term for forgiveness, which for Blake is the putting off of selfhood and thus of putting another before oneself. The compounded Blake/Los/Milton came to Felpham to learn to forgive.

Blake's idea of forgiveness is explained in his discussion of the Last Judgment:

> Forgiveness of Sin is only at the Judgment Seat of Jesus the Saviour
> where the Accuser is cast out. not because he Sins but
> because he torments the Just & makes them do what he condemns
> as Sin &
> what he knows is opposite to their own Identity
> It is not because Angels are Holier than Men or Devils that
> makes them Angels but because they do not Expect Holiness
> from one another but from god only only [. . .]
> Angels are happier than Men & Devils because they are not
> always Prying after Good & Evil in one Another & eating
> the Tree of Knowledge for Satans Gratification[.]
> (Notebook, 93–94)

The simple phrases of Jesus, "Judge not lest ye be judged" and "Forgive us our trespasses as [i.e., to the extent that] we forgive those who tres-

[51] Blake, *The Notebook of William Blake: A Photographic and Typographic Facsimile*, rev. ed., ed. David V. Erdman with Donald K. Moore (New York: Readex Books, 1977), 84.

pass against us" are coded into obscurity in *Milton* so that when they are uncovered by the reader they may more deeply enter him. The very difficulty of the poem makes the committed reader's strenuous efforts at understanding into the equivalent of enlisting in the mental fight to build Jerusalem.

After Blake returned to London after his three years on the banks of the ocean, he continued doing errands for Hayley and writing letters to him. Blake's correspondence provides no hint of rancor. Indeed, Blake shows gratitude to his former spiritual enemy. Why this could be so is the story told in *Milton*.[52]

Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University

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