THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL: BLAKE'S MYTH OF SATAN AND ITS CULTURAL MATRIX

BY PETER A. SCHOCK

> I have been commanded from Hell not to print this as it is what our Enemies wish
>
> —Annotations to Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* (1797)[1]

The prolegomenon to Blake's "Bible of Hell," *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–1793) presents a programmatic expression of much of his interconnected political, moral, and metaphysical thought in the early 1790s: the conviction that apocalypse, manifest in the French Revolution, is imminent, the idea of expanded sense perception, the dual principles Blake calls the "Contraries," and an unconventional ethics based on energy and infinite desire. The rhetorical vehicle of intellectual argument in *The Marriage* is a defamiliarized version of the mythology surrounding Satan, a reshaping of this tradition characteristic of Romantic art—transformed myth becomes the channel for ideological transactions. In *The Marriage*, the infernal world has been reenvisioned: from the infernally partisan narrator to the oracular "voice of the Devil," at each level the entire fiction is constructed in such a way as to present Blake's leading ideas as if they come from a hell imagined in startlingly unconventional terms.

The diabolism of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* participates, of course, in the widespread revision of the myth of Satan during the Romantic era. By the end of the eighteenth century, among the literate classes of England, belief in the existence of the Devil had practically vanished. Yet English and Continental Romantic writers, painters, and popular artists exhibit a resurgent fascination with the myth of Satan, and in their work the Devil assumes a prominence never exhibited before or since, nearly rivaling Prometheus as the most characteristic mythic figure of the age. English writers in the Romantic era develop Satan into an ideological symbol with a broad range of functions: expressing rebellious or unconventional political, moral, and religious values, and producing correspondent literary effects, such as irony and satire.

Informed by recent studies of Blake's milieu (especially those by

ELH 60 (1993) 441–470

Marilyn Butler, Jerome McGann, and Robert Essick), we can study the "satanism" of *The Marriage* with historical precision, starting from the assumption that Blake was, around 1790–1793, a partisan myth-maker, a member of "the Devil's party" in a different sense than has been assumed in the familiar, ironized readings of the diabolism of this work.[2] To be specific: in these years Blake's alienation from the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church coincided with the strengthening of his ties to the radical circle of Joseph Johnson, the London bookseller. As Blake's sense of identification with this group increased, he was drawn toward a bold revision of the myth of Satan, blending this with elements of the Johnson circle's ideology as he conceived it from his visionary perspective. In this way Blake converted a traditional or "official" story in the service of institutional Christianity into a myth embracing revolution, moral revisionism, and apocalypse. In *The Marriage*, then, the myth of Satan exhibits what Raymond Williams, extending Gramsci's conception of hegemony, has called an "oppositional formation," a specific practice which counters the cultural dominance of institutions and traditions.[3]

In Blake's work, the myth of Satan emerges in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and in the revolutionary prophecies of the early 1790s—*America* (1793), *Europe* (1794), and *The Song of Los* (1795). In these works, Blake develops the satanic figures of the Devil and Orc into mythological vehicles of desire and energy; the two figures embody a moral and political rebelliousness identified with apocalypse. In every subsequent prophecy Blake continues to transform the myth: eventually turning Satan into a tyrannic figure, Blake carries this development to the point of exhausting the myth in his last illuminated book, *The Ghost of Abel* (1822). Yet the figure of Satan, which informs so much of Blake's pictorial and verbal art, does not appear significantly in his work before *The Marriage*. There satanic myth suddenly erupts. What led Blake then to reconceive the identity and role of the traditional villain of his culture? Blake's myth of Satan emerges at this time, because like other Romantic-age revisions of the myth, it arises out of a matrix of specific cultural forces and influences, converging in this case in the early 1790s. One dimension of this matrix is religious: the decline of belief in the existence of the Devil and the rise of syncretic or comparative mythography established Satan as a mythic figure, freeing him for artistic and ideological purposes. The second involves the widespread ideological appropriation of the myth by both conservatives and radicals in England during the early years of the French Revolution, which charged the myth with political meaning. The third

dimension of the cultural matrix is the interpretation of Milton's Satan in the criticism and illustration of *Paradise Lost* during the age, which increasingly idealized the fallen archangel, representing him as a sublime, human, and heroic figure. These three dimensions together brought about this result: the religious myth of the adversary lost authority, and the figure of Satan was reconstituted by ideology and by the idealized conception of Milton's Satan. In Romanticism Milton's charismatic fallen angel survives as an ideological vehicle, a mythic standard-bearer of moral, political, and religious values.

Each of the three dimensions of the matrix of Blake's myth of Satan can be identified not only in his general cultural milieu, but in the circle of writers and artists surrounding Joseph Johnson as well. For many years Blake had received engraving work from Johnson, and by the early 1790s Blake was at least an occasional guest at Johnson's weekly dinners, where a coterie consisting of William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Henry Fuseli, Joseph Priestley, and Thomas Paine met.[4] Here Blake encountered the radical and rationalistic ideology of the Johnson circle; since Johnson published or sold the work of many of these figures, visits to his bookshop would have also made Blake familiar with their thinking. Of special significance for Blake's mythmaking in *The Marriage* was the religious writing of this circle, which along with the skeptical and syncretist French thought underlying it desacralized the biblical myth of Satan—and in the cases of Paine and Priestley, interpreted it as a universal fable appropriated by institutional Christianity to gain power. The ideological critique of the myth of Satan, which begins with Voltaire and culminates in Paine, underlies Blake's transformation of Christian diabology in *The Marriage*. In addition, the politically charged myth had been used propagandistically to demonize members of the Johnson circle; this registers in *The Marriage*, where Blake transforms and celebrates their satanic group identity. Finally, the rehabilitation of Milton's Satan in criticism and illustration registered especially strong responses in the Johnson circle. Fuseli's Milton Gallery project and the writing of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft all bear witness to this group's readiness both to idealize the fallen archangel and to fuse his figure with their ideology.

I. THE DESACRALIZED MYTH

The ravaging of the mythic component of Christianity in the eighteenth century by philosophical skepticism, rationalism, and Deism did not spare the Devil. Since those who upheld the literal truth of

scripture were already fighting a rearguard action, the doctrines concerning Satan, themselves only extrapolations from various passages of the Bible, were seldom invoked as foundations of faith. Thus theological dogmas involving Satan and hell faded; regular preaching on the subjects subsided.[5] The idea of eternal damnation itself gradually lost its power over the mind during the eighteenth century, as D. P. Walker's study, *The Decline of Hell* has shown.[6] The doctrinal atrophy and demythologizing impulse were pervasive: for example, neither Butler nor Paley even mention the Devil in their classic apologies for the faith, the *Analogy of Religion* (1736) and *Evidences of Christianity* (1784). Even the puppet shows of Covent Garden in the 1780s dramatize the eighteenth-century death of the Devil; on this diminutive comic stage, he is slain by Punch:

> The Devil with his pitch-fork fought,
> While Punch had but a stick, Sir,
> But kill'd the Devil, as he ought.
> Huzza! there's no Old Nick, Sir.[7]

The Devil's demise made possible the later reshaping of the myth: Satan became artistic and ideological raw material when many began to declare his story a mere myth, a frequent assertion in an age of increasing interest in comparative mythography. Voltaire promoted this shift in perspective with his influential attacks on the historical authority of the Bible, or its "natural sense," as Blake approvingly described Voltaire's polemics.[8] Although Voltaire was not the first to argue it, in his writing the eighteenth-century reversal of the key assumption of Christian allegoresis—that pagan myths descend from and distort biblical stories—arrives with a vengeance.[9] In the *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764) Blake would have found Voltaire insisting that the Christian tradition of the war in heaven and the fall of the rebel angels has no biblical foundation, but was derived from a myth circulating through various cultures in the Middle East: Greek, Egyptian, and Chaldean (that is, Persian); its source, Voltaire believed, was India. Further, Voltaire points out that Satan is mentioned nowhere in the Pentateuch, nor does Genesis even hint that Satan inhabits the serpent.[10]

In the last decade of the century came a violent attack on revealed religion—and with it, a deconstruction of the myth of Satan—by a member of the Johnson circle. Thomas Paine's *The Age of Reason* (1794) not only ridicules the Christian story of the origin of evil by the hand of Satan; it systematically reduces the narratives of the war in heaven, the Fall of man, and the Redemption to the level of mere

fable—"the Christian mythology," as Paine derisively calls it. In addition to redefining Christian diabology as myth, Paine follows Voltaire and assimilates it to pagan tradition: the war in heaven, Paine claims, derives from the Greek myth of the Titanomachia. The Church mythologists, Paine argues, have adapted the myth to "the purposes of power and revenue": the spuriously sublime story of God's supernatural antagonist—the "deification of Satan"—mystifies and reinforces the key doctrines of Original Sin, Atonement, and Redemption used by state religion to "terrify and enslave mankind."[11] Although Paine did not publish *The Age of Reason* until 1794, Blake was probably acquainted with these inflammatory ideas by 1790 or earlier.[12] Nor were Paine's influential assumptions about Christian mythology uncommon: Holbach, with whose writing Blake was almost certainly familiar, also demotes the Christian myth of Satan by running together the story of the fall of the rebel angels and that of the Titans. And the syncretic mythographer, Charles Dupuis, also universalizes the mythology surrounding Satan's struggle with God, incorporating the story into his totalizing pattern of the solar myth.[13]

Besides Paine, two other writers in the Johnson circle made reconceiving the Christian mythology of Satan possible. The controversial biblical scholarship of Alexander Geddes, published extensively by Joseph Johnson from 1781 to 1797, called into question the scriptural basis of Christian diabology. In the preface accompanying the first volume of his unfinished translation of the Bible (1792), Geddes reviews the history of interpretations of Genesis 3: he concludes by describing the narrative as "mythology" and refuses to identify the serpent with Satan.[14] And in Joseph Priestley's reply to *The Age of Reason*, he reproves Paine for dwelling on the myth of Satan, which is only a product of the misreading of scripture: "The history of *Satan*, though found at full length in *Milton*, where Mr. Paine probably learned it, is not found in the writings of *Moses*, who does not so much as mention Satan, or the devil. . . . it is most probable that the sacred writers meant only an allegorical, not a real person. Our Saviour calls Judas a 'devil. . . .'"[15] Although Priestley attacks the myth from an angle opposite to Paine's (Priestley believes in the historical truth of the Bible), he also regards the myth of Satan as a priestly imposition, a doctrinal corruption akin to Original Sin and the Atonement.

By 1790–1793, then, the theological and mythographic basis on which Blake reappropriated the myth of Satan is well established. The arguments of Voltaire, Paine, Holbach, Dupuis, Geddes, and Priestley all have one obvious implication for an artist like Blake: destroyed as

a pattern of traditional belief, the story of Satan has become a desacralized and flexible form, its structure and meaning open to radical reshaping and ideological manipulation. Like these controversialists, Blake held a conception of the meaning of scripture which is anything but literalist and pious. It is skeptical and syncretist, as the assertions of *All Religions are One* (1788) indicate: "The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius. . . . The Jewish & Christian Testaments are An original derivation from the Poetic Genius . . ." (1). Since all deities are projections of the Poetic Genius, it follows that the figure represented in so many cultures as the antagonist of God may be radically reconceived. If Satan is no longer regarded as the author of evil, then it becomes possible to suggest along Gnostic lines that his potential identity has been suppressed or distorted by Christian tradition, or that a new identity may be fashioned for him. Blake explores both possibilities in *The Marriage*.

II. SATAN AS POLITICAL SYMBOL

Ideological appropriations of the myth of Satan begin to appear in the 1790s, when the Devil is resurrected in the political symbolism of this decade. The bewildering events of the revolutionary years demanded from English writers and artists images as frames of reference to render these developments coherent and to reflect or shape public opinion about them. Among the many representations of the French Revolution—cannibalism, parricide, natural cataclysm, vernal regeneration—the myth of Satan was widely employed as an ideological symbol, functioning as a vehicle of polarized political discourse.[16] That is, the events of the Revolution were frequently interpreted as His Satanic Majesty's work; moreover, those employing the myth rarely transvalued it, invoking it almost without exception in a conventional sense—Satan personified the evil of the opposition, whether revolutionary or reactionary. For example, Alexander Pirie called the Revolution the "beast rising out of the *bottomless pit*, or vast abyss, as its politics are mischievous and deep as hell, and its actions works of the Devil."[17] The British government itself seems to have begun propagandizing in this vein as early as 1791, disseminating through newspapers and pamphlets apocalyptic prophecies that "cast the French Republic in the role of the Beast of Revelation."[18] But on the radical side, those who hailed the Revolution as the prophesied millennium saw the thrones of Europe as satanic. Joseph Priestley declared that the ten horns of the Beast of Revelation were the ten monarchies of

Europe, that the pope was antichrist, and that both thrones and pope would fall.[19] The most celebrated Millenarian prophet of the 1790s, Richard Brothers, had a vision politically compatible with Priestley's prophecy: in 1791 he saw "Satan walking leisurely into London . . . dressed in White and Scarlet Robes." Not long after this vision of Satan in full regalia, Brothers became intensely interested in politics, and tried to warn the House of Commons not to oppose the French Revolution, which he declared was God's judgment against monarchy.[20]

The satirical prints of the 1790s consistently demonize English radicalism, replicating the conservative application of the myth to the portent of France.[21] In Burkean fashion, William Dent's "A Word of Comfort" [22 March 1790; fig. 1] identifies Satan's pawns in the third attempt to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts during March 1790: Priestley and Charles James Fox, the leader of the liberal Whig faction. Here Priestley preaches from a tub marked "Fanaticism" (religious dissent), denying the Devil's existence to Fox, while Old Nick lurks behind and mocks Priestley. Dent's print comments directly on Priestley's theological position and its political implications: the Unitarian leader's repeated attacks on the dogmas of the Fall and Original Sin arise out of a naive denial that human nature is evil and in the grip of Satan. Hence, Priestley is oblivious to or ambitious to conceal the connection between the dissenters' campaign against religious tests and the evil of the French Revolution, with which English dissent warmly sympathized. The link was clear enough to English conservatives, who feared that the dissenters wished to pull down the Church as the French Jacobins had recently done. Dent's print thus implies that Priestley's comforting word from the tub-pulpit inspired Fox's speech of March in the House of Commons supporting the dissenters and praising the Revolution, and represents the theology of Priestley and the politics of both men as the connected delusions of secular liberalism: the two men are blind to the existence of the Devil, who invisibly animates both their reformist ideology and the Revolution.[22] Isaac Cruikshank's "The Friends of the People" (1792) reveals that satanic Jacobins are the guiding lights of the liberal reform group of that name: Priestley sits at a table with Paine, while a bat-winged demon perches between them, atop a pile of guns. Books are scattered everywhere in the room, with titles like "Plots," "Rebellions," and "Rights of Man."[23] In Cruikshank's most striking satanic print, "A Picture of Great Britain in the Year 1793" [1794; fig. 2], the forces of good and evil—that is, God and William Pitt versus Satan, Fox, and Richard Sheridan—struggle over the temple of the British Constitu-

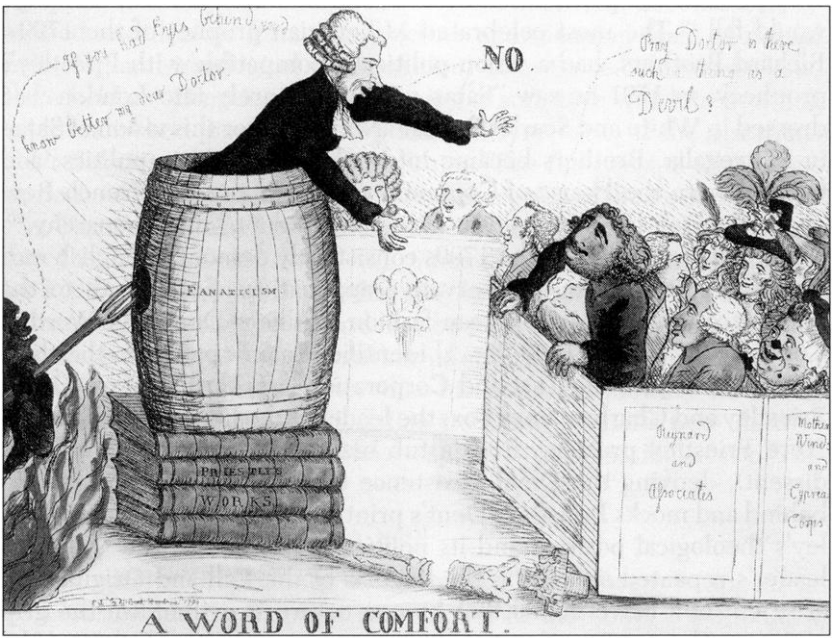

Figure 1. *William Dent. "A Word of Comfort (1790). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.*

tion.[24] The Devil leads a group of London radicals, seeking to blow up the temple: applying his pitchfork (labeled "Reform") to its base, Satan cries "better to reign in hell than serve in heaven." Underlying the forces of good, a caption to the left presents God the Father's first speech in *Paradise Lost* 3, in which he confidently foresees both the temporary success and final downfall of Satan; thus God looks down on the temporarily dangerous but ultimately ineffectual English Jacobins. Cruikshank dedicated the print to the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers, a prominent anti-Jacobin group; the work may therefore have been commissioned. Whether or not this print is propagandistic, it is every bit as conventional as the other ideological deployments of the myth of Satan in this age. The only exception to this pattern—and even here the context is ironic—appears in *Politics for the People* (1793), the journal of the radical printer, Daniel Isaac Eaton: a series of pronouncements

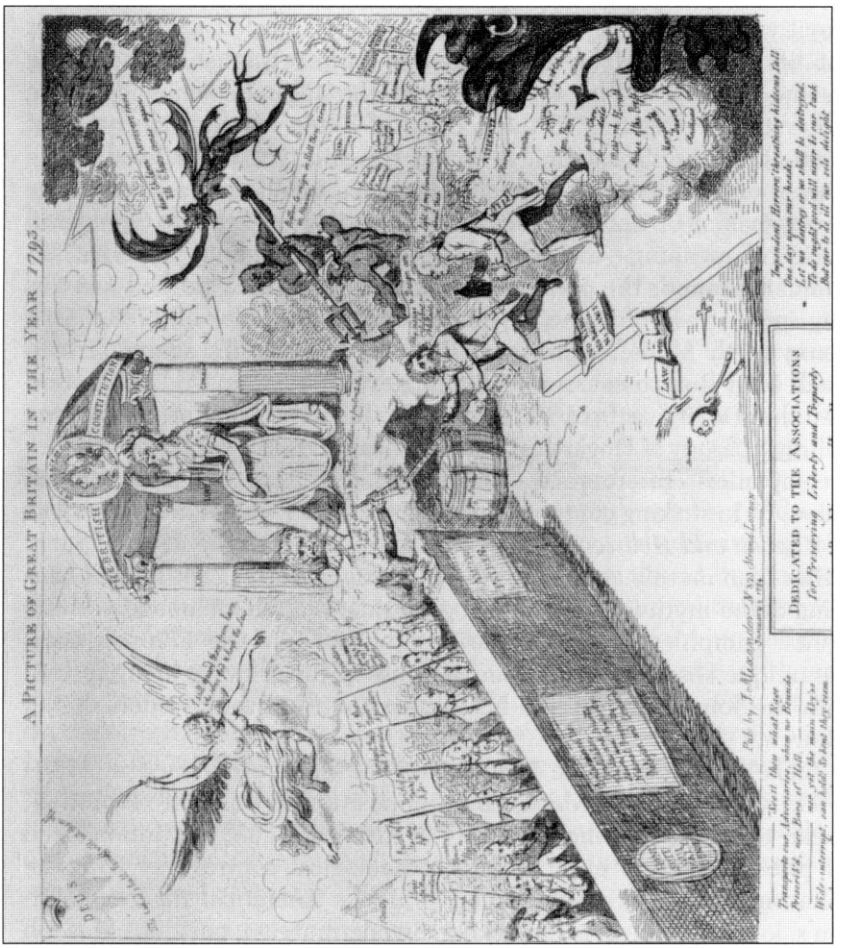

Figure 2. *Isaac Cruikshank. "A Picture of Great Britain in the Year 1793" (1974). By permission of Trustees of the British Museum.*

titled "The Origin of Jacobinism" begins with the assertion that "the Devil was the *first Jacobin*, for which he was hurled neck and heels out of heaven."[25] Deriving from the earlier English conservative maxim, "The First Whig was the Devil," the slogan becomes approving rather than castigating in the context of Eaton's radical journal. But in all other cases, "satanic" becomes the abusive label affixed to the opposition, the means by which the many human figures and chaotic events making up a complex social movement are reduced to typological clarity of meaning—a single, diabolical causal agency.[26] Above all, satanizing brands the political adversary; propaganda worked just this way in the case of Paine. William Jones's pamphlet of 1792, "One Pennyworth More," represents Paine as the Devil's agent, sent to teach John Bull to eat cannibalistic "Revolution soup."[27] "Paine, Sin, and the Devil," a broadside of 1793, functions similarly: adapting Gillray's parody of Hogarth's "Satan, Sin and Death" (1764), the picture accompanies "Intercepted Correspondence from Satan to Citizen Paine."[28] In striking contrast to all of these deployments, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* reconstructs the political use of the myth of Satan rather than merely applying it in conventional terms. Yet Blake's handling of the myth is no less ideological than the satanic imagery in the prints, pamphlets, and millenarian prophecies of the 1790s; it takes the unique shape it does in part because of his growing identification with the Johnson circle and his disaffection from the Swedenborgian Church.

Blake's interest in the New Jerusalem Church declined in 1789–1790, when the latter declared its opposition to political revolution, began to emphasize the centrality of the decalogue, institutionalized its priesthood, and entered into a theological controversy with the Johnson circle. Since September 1789, the *Analytical Review*, Johnson's journal, had been attacking Swedenborgian positions; Joseph Priestley later went on the offensive with his *Letters to the Members of the New Jerusalem Church* (1791).[29] That the Birmingham New Church minister practically dispatched the mob to Priestley's home in the Loyalist riots of 1791 would have struck Blake as an action which drew the party lines with unmistakable clarity. These events, along with Blake's perception that Paine and Priestley were represented by propagandists as satanic figures must have spurred him to invert the conventional political symbolism. That is, the satanic myth of *The Marriage* derives partly from Blake's discovery of a demonic group identity in Johnson's radical circle.[30] This partisan stance he retained

as late as 1798, as his marginalia to Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* suggests: at the top of the title page of the bishop's vindication of state religion, Blake summed up his indignant response as follows: "I have been commanded from hell not to print this as it is just what our enemies wish."

The phrase "the Devil's party" thus acquires ideological resonance, and Blake's satanic mythmaking in *The Marriage* develops in specific terms this stance of opposition. In striking contrast with the Johnson circle's conception of the Christian mythology of Satan, Swedenborg's visionary writing—especially *Heaven and Hell* (1784), which is the parodic foundation for *The Marriage*—perpetuates the conventional conception of hell and the traditional identification of the demonic with evil. These conceptions of the myth must have appeared to Blake as the props of the priestly oppressiveness and increasing conservatism, both theological and political, of the New Jerusalem Church. To counter this, therefore, Blake was drawn toward a revolutionary reshaping of the myth of Satan, in a direction complementing and even going beyond the bold, desacralizing views of biblical and satanic myth held by Priestley, Paine, and others. Whether employed by the Swedenborgian New Church or by the Old Church, the mythology surrounding Satan forms part of the "sacred codes" informing religious tradition, the priestly imposition used to oppress humanity with fear. Paine's object in *The Age of Reason* is to smash the power of this mythology; Blake's political aim in *The Marriage* is altogether different, because he sees the myth of Satan as susceptible to an imaginative reshaping along the lines of revolutionary ideology. Blake consequently makes this myth the vehicle of new values, using it to embrace instead of anathematize the demonic portent of revolution, and to imagine a world of liberated energy and desire.

III. THE RISE OF MILTON'S SATAN

Mingling with the theological and ideological dimensions of the cultural matrix, the contemporary idea of Milton's fallen angel informs *The Marriage*, appearing in the notorious interpretation of *Paradise Lost*. This third dimension of the matrix of the myth is a crucial and pervasive influence, involving a gradual, widespread shift in response to the most widely published and influential long poem in England during the eighteenth century. The reinterpretation of Milton's Satan in the criticism and illustration of *Paradise Lost* in the eighteenth century imaginatively grounds the Romantic myth of Satan: by envisioning Milton's fallen angel as a sublime human figure, this recon-

ception of Satan makes him a ready vehicle for oppositionist ideology. At the beginning of the eighteenth century, to declare Satan the hero of *Paradise Lost* and to depict him accordingly was a daring step. By the end of the century that Satan is the hero was no longer much in question. More importantly, it was now becoming acceptable to assert that Satan is not only the formal hero (that view had been established by Dryden in 1697), but a grand human figure as well. Hugh Blair's pronouncements on Satan in *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783) are representative views; they rest on the attention to Satan's sublimity, which had increasingly characterized English criticism of *Paradise Lost* since John Dennis. For Blair, the center of Milton's sublime description of the archangel ruined (*Paradise Lost* 1: 589–94) is the personality of Satan: his commentary focuses on the "high superior nature, fallen indeed but erecting itself against distress" and filters out practically every reminder of the depraved nature, absurdity, and final degradation of Satan. Whereas earlier critics like Addison had emphasized these latter qualities, Blair humanizes Satan, emphasizing that he "is actuated by ambition and resentment, rather than by pure malice."[31] The intensity of the vogue for Satan's sublimity is most vividly illustrated by Philip de Loutherbourg's proto-cinematic machine of the 1780s, the Eidophusikon. The culminating scene in this device, which illuminated moving pasteboard models with colored lights and used elaborate sound effects, was titled "Satan arraying his Troops on the Banks of the Fiery Lake, with the Raising of Pandemonium, from Milton." In Edward Francis Burney's drawing of this scene, the gigantic, winged figure of Satan stands in the foreground, addressing the angelic host from a dais between the massive pillars of Pandemonium.[32] This kind of sublime visual representation of Satan perhaps influenced Blake even more profoundly than the revisionary criticism of Blair and others: in the early 1790s, English artists like James Barry, Richard Westall, and Henry Richter were depicting Satan for the first time in an idealized, heroic manner. Before this decade, English illustrators of Milton had without exception portrayed the fallen archangel in monstrous or at best in merely human form.[33] Because of uncertainties in dating, there is no clear prototype for the new image of Satan; but the exulting, muscular figure of Barry's "Satan and his Legions Hurling Defiance toward the Vault of Heaven" (circa 1792–1797; fig. 3) breaks decisively with the traditional representation of Milton's Satan. Moreover, Blake, who knew Barry, probably saw this picture and was influenced by its heroic conception of Satan: he in fact develops an uncannily similar figure in a notebook sketch,

Figure 3. *James Barry. "Satan and his Legions Hurling Defiance toward the Vault of Heaven" (ca. 1792–97). By permission of the Trustees of the British Museum.*

transforming it into the emblem-image of "Fire," the satanic figure and prototype of Orc who first appears in "A Song of Liberty," the tailpiece added to *The Marriage* in 1792–1793.

Again, though, the Johnson circle appears to figure especially prominently in Blake's conversion of Milton's Satan into an ideological symbol. In 1790 Blake expected considerable employment as a engraver for the Johnson and Edwards project, in which paintings by Blake's friend Henry Fuseli were to be engraved as illustrations in an edition of Milton to be printed by Joseph Johnson. Although the endeavor proved abortive, Fuseli began sketching his Miltonic subjects in 1790; Blake probably saw these sublime portrayals of Satan in progress. But the satanic mythmaking of *The Marriage* not only expresses Blake's identification with Fuseli's project; it very likely also bears the influence of the talk of the Johnson circle, as Howard has suggested.[34] Milton's epic probably was a frequent topic of conversation; and this discussion would have been colored not only by the romantic biases toward Satan that had been building in English criticism for decades, but more importantly by the politicized conception the circle held of the Christian mythology. The writing of William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft exemplifies this conception of Milton's Satan, merging their values with the image of Satan fostered by critics and illustrators. In the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Godwin turns Milton's sublime fallen angel into a symbol of noble, virtuous resistance to arbitrary power, while Wollstonecraft's *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792) analogizes Satan to the female "outcast of fortune" who rises "superior to passion and discontent." Blake similarly adopts the figure of Satan as the personification of his unconventional ethics of desire.[35] Established by criticism and illustration as a heroic and humanized figure, Satan is readily adapted to the ideological content Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Blake seek to project.

IV: SATANIC MYTH IN *THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL*

The cultural influences which enter *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* are pervasive, but they do not determine the character of its satanic myth. Blake's response to the desacralized myth, to satanic political symbolism, and to the Romantic interpretation of Milton's Satan transforms the myth in a way unparalleled in the Johnson circle or in the culture outside of it. In the synthesis of Blake's perspective and the secular rationalism of Paine, Priestley and others, the satanic myth of *The Marriage* either revises or goes beyond the ideological positions of the Johnson circle. For instance, the prose conclusion to

the verse "Argument" which opens *The Marriage* delivers a millenarian prophecy which identifies Christ, revolution, and apocalypse, and satanizes all three in a way distinct from all other political appropriations of the myth:

> As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise; see Isaiah XXXIV & XXXV Chap: (plate 3, 34)[36]

To conflate the regeneration of hell in 1790 (the date Blake penciled on this page of one of the copies of *The Marriage*) with the fulfillment of Christ's mission is to assert that a satanic reprise of the resurrection of Christ is now taking place: the latter is an event identical with the revival of the Eternal Hell. This satanic prophecy concludes by taking on a more specific reference, when the narrator proclaims the "dominion of Edom" and superimposes the geography of the biblical lands onto the map of Europe. In the same way that Isaiah 63 prophesies vengeance on Israel from the land to the southeast (associated by Christian exegetes with Antichrist), the narrator envisions the northward flow of revolution from France. And the second sense of Edom—Esau, the disinherited older brother of Jacob and eponymous founder of the nation of Edom—intensifies the satanic portent of the prophecy: descending typologically from Cain and ultimately from Satan, the red man of Genesis 25:30 and 27:40 now breaks his yoke amid the upsurge of hell.[37] These declarations are on the one hand more politically oblique than the apocalyptic prophecies of Brothers and Priestley, yet much more daring in their reshaping of the ideological myth of Satan. Aside from the reference to Swedenborg, Blake's prophecy avoids the direct equation of specific events and figures with scriptural meanings; his mode here is more indirect than the usual political appropriations of satanic myth in the early 1790s, which explicitly identified Monarchy, Jacobinism, or Tom Paine with Antichrist or Satan. Yet in another, more important respect, Blake exceeds them all. Millenarian prophecies surrounding the French Revolution were commonplace, entertained by the minds of rationalists like Priestley and Paine as well as enthusiasts like Brothers. Nor was invoking Christ to justify revolution uncommon at this time: in his sermon of 14 July 1791, Mark Wilks declared that "Jesus Christ was a Revolutionist."[38] Yet no other prophecy of this time enthusiastically satanized either Christ the revolutionary or the vision of apocalypse by revolution: Blake alone envisions the joint action of the reviving hell, the satanic risen Christ,

and Edom, the land of Antichrist, as triggering an apocalypse: "Now . . . is the return of Adam into Paradise."[39] Nor is the infernal Christ a casual identification on Blake's part: it reappears in the last Memorable Fancy of *The Marriage*, where a characteristically outspoken Devil claims that the allegiance of the impulse-obeying, rule-breaking Christ is to hell (plate 21, 43). Indeed the prophecy itself of a demonically driven apocalypse, the reader discovers later, is represented as a portion of an infernal Book of Revelation: "the ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true. as I have heard from Hell" (plate 14, 39). Satan and Christ, infernal Revelation, divinely sanctioned revolution out of hell: in each case the effect is to overwhelm a binary opposition, joining together what not only traditional Christianity but the Millenarianism of the 1790s have put asunder. To fuse them is to achieve an ontological "critical mass," fully grounding the cluster of revolutionary values *The Marriage* projects.

The infernal revelation of the Argument also specifies its ideological occasion: the abandonment of the teaching of Swedenborg, the linen clothes cast off by Blake's satanic Christ. In *Heaven and Hell* (1784), Blake not only perceived the metaphysical underpinnings of the conservatism and ritualism of the New Church; in the same work he discovered the means of overturning the Swedenborgian world view—by rendering satanic myth the vehicle of revolutionary values, the antithetical ideology of the Johnson circle. For Blake's diabolical revision of Christian mythology in the opening plates of *The Marriage* involves the transformation of the meanings Swedenborg attaches to the divine and infernal worlds. Swedenborg's treatise carves up reality into opposed worlds of good and evil ruled by God; heaven and hell reflect each other symmetrically in all features and are balanced by an equilibrium which only God can regulate.[40] Blake initially read and annotated *Heaven and Hell* acceptingly, approving of Swedenborg's equation of heaven with the world of spirit and hell with the external and material: next to a passage drawing this metaphysical distinction Blake wrote "under every *Good* is a hell. i.e. hell is the outward or external of heaven. & is of the body of the lord. for nothing is destroyd" (602).[41] Yet within two years Blake was to transform this dualism by inverting it in *The Marriage*, identifying hell with an inner world of spiritual energy, heaven with the sterile outward bound of reason. Furthermore, its concern with "equilibrium" notwithstanding, *Heaven and Hell* is a revelation of angelic ascendancy over the infernal world: "the Lord permits torments in the hells" to prosecute his policy of

"restraining and subduing evil and of keeping the infernal crew in bonds."[42] While Swedenborg justifies the action of the angelic police in hell, "to whom it is granted to look into the hells and restrain insanities and disturbances there," *The Marriage* overturns angelic authority; the narrator represents them as merely bemused onlookers when he describes himself "walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity" (plate 6, 35).[43]

The final sentences of the Argument entirely replace the dualism and authoritarianism of the Swedenborgian perspective with the "infernal metaphysics" of the Johnson circle. The latter reveals what actually constructs the world: the unregulated struggle of Contraries, which produces not the standstill of equilibrium but movement and action:

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Existence.
>
> From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason[.] Evil is the active springing from Energy.
>
> Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell. (plate 3, 34)

To oppose Swedenborgian equilibrium, Blake projects his version of the metaphysics of the Johnson circle, assimilating and transforming materialist ideas from Priestley's *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777) and Holbach's *System of Nature* (1770) to develop his own pronouncements about the Contraries.[44] Pressed into service because their outlook is contrary to Swedenborg's thought, Priestley and Holbach describe not just the behavior of physical bodies but the emotions of love and hate in terms of the energies of "attraction and repulsion," thus implying a virtually monistic continuum.[45] By transvaluing this materialism—as the subsequent pronouncements of the Devil indicate, Blake reads "body" with Idealist spectacles—Blake transforms its concepts into an account of the infinite forces and energies abstracted and reduced by the religious into the dualisms of soul and body, good and evil.

Articulating this account is a new spokesman for Blake's infernal monism. Swedenborg's God is so formidable an authoritarian that no leader of the opposition exists: *Heaven and Hell* contains no Satan—in fact, Swedenborg debunks the myth, describing it as the consequence of an excessively literal reading of the words "Satan" and "devil" in the Bible.[46] Blake counters this by introducing a Devil with a voice

of prophetic authority, whose contrary metaphysical principles announce that the conventional dualism of body and soul is a delusion. His elusive third assertion concludes that we possess not a soul and body but a spiritual body, from which both energy and reason emanate: "Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy."[47] Like the doctrine of contraries, Blake's monistic merging of body and soul is infernally partisan: it expresses his conception of the ideology of the "Devil's party." Michael Scrivener has argued persuasively that the rationalistic Johnson circle would have responded unsympathetically to the religious enthusiasm of *The Marriage*, but it does not follow that Blake was unreceptive to their ideas, or that, as Scrivener holds, in *The Marriage* he positions himself against Priestley.[48] The Devil's metaphysics evinces neither Blake's rejection nor passive assimilation of Priestley's Christian materialism, but his appropriation and transformation of it. In an early instance of his practice of visionary correction, the complex response through which Blake engaged figures like Dante and Milton, he turns the thesis of *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* into a vehicle for refuting the attenuated spirituality and dualistic nature of both Swedenborgianism and traditional Christianity. The Devil's assertions both echo and revise those of Priestley, who announces in his opening pages that "the principal object is, to prove the uniform composition of man, or that what we call *mind*, or the principle of perception and thought is *not a substance distinct from the body*."[49] Priestley reduces mind to matter, but to Blake's perspective he does so suggestively: for example, his conviction that matter itself possesses powers, and his belief that every atom will be resurrected in the Last Judgment would have led Blake to conclude that his own conception of matter and Priestley's were not far apart.[50] Consequently, Blake seized hold of the latter's materialism to refute traditional dualistic metaphysics, transforming Priestley's conception of the body into the Devil's infernal monism.

The well-known assertions about *Paradise Lost* that appear next in *The Marriage* constitute an ideological interpretation of Milton's Satan which demonstrates both affinities with and departures from the Johnson circle's response to Milton, particularly as it figures in their tendentious writing. Blake develops Milton's sublime fallen angel into a personification of infinite desire; appropriated in somewhat less startling terms by William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, Satan similarly functions as a vehicle of the values these writers articulate and

project. In his *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793), Godwin interprets Satan as a virtuous rebel who cherished "the spirit of opposition . . . because he disdained to be subdued by despotic power. He sought revenge, because he could not think with tameness of the unexpostulating authority that assumed to dispose of him."[51] Godwin's extraordinary interpretation practically screens out Satan's negative qualities—significantly here, his authoritarianism. He reads Satan's rebellion exclusively as a theological displacement of the value he defines in the *Enquiry*: Godwinian virtue or benevolence springing from a rational perception of justice, the line of resistance against arbitrary power which governs through "prescription and precedent."

In a note attached to the second chapter of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft identifies both herself and the figure of the solitary female with Milton's fallen angels: in spurning scenes of "humble mutual love," she confesses that she has "with conscious dignity, or Satanic pride, turned to hell for sublimer objects."[52] "The grandest of all human sights," she asserts, is the "outcast of fortune, rising superior to passion and discontent." This last expression reiterates her point in the text—that "the noble struggles of suffering merit" alone deserve admiration. In both formulations, Wollstonecraft seizes on the heroic image of the fallen archangel struggling against adversity to exalt the fallen woman or the widow's power to bear a single life with dignity.[53] In a manifesto which everywhere else cautiously urges that women be educated so as to become more capable wives and mothers, the satanic idealization of the solitary woman is striking and emphatic: it points directly, if fleetingly, to Wollstonecraft's deeper values, as opposed to the more modest ideals which inform the *Vindication*.

Blake's interpretation of *Paradise Lost* in *The Marriage* adopts Satan as the vehicle for a refinement of infernal ethics, the introduction of the principle of desire. To make the case that desire should be liberated from restraint, the narrator presents *Paradise Lost* as an exemplum. Construed through the infernal interpretive principle of unconscious intentions (Milton was "of the Devils party without knowing it" [plate 6, 35]), Milton's epic does not justify the ways of God to man, nor does it chronicle the struggle of good and evil: *Paradise Lost* narrates the usurpation of authority by reason and the consequent expulsion of desire. Thus Blake's ideological reinterpretation of Milton, like those of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, makes Satan exclusively the embodiment of a value-system. Yet Blake's method of transforming Satan is

more thoroughgoing. Not only is the critique of *Paradise Lost* textually more central to *The Marriage* (Godwin and Wollstonecraft marginalize their interpretations of Satan in appendices and footnotes); *The Marriage* suggests that Milton's epic has coopted and perverted the most fundamental story of western culture, burying its meaning. For Blake's Devil reads Satan's story as a distorted and corrupt version of his own, corrupted because Milton's conscious allegiances to God's party led him to garble the story. Although Milton does not, for example, assign to Satan "the command of the heavenly host," Blake's narrator "corrects" this point to insist on the primacy of desire/the Devil, "the original Archangel." Moreover, the humanized and heroic figure of Satan is invested here with more comprehensive significance than Godwin and Wollstonecraft assign him: the value Blake's Satan embodies, which can be construed on several levels, subsumes the social and political ideals the other two writers discover in the fallen archangel. The "desire" which Satan personifies has not only the antinomian significance developed at length in the Proverbs of Hell, and the implicitly political drift as well (desire is, after all, the platform of the "Devil's party," which numbers the revolutionist Milton among its sympathizers). Enclosing these dimensions of meaning is the metaphysical: Satan incarnates the infinite desire of man. As Blake articulated it in terms of the unqualified Idealism of *There is No Natural Religion* (1788), such desire possesses an infinite reality outstripping the world grasped by the senses.

In the subsequent passages, Blake's reworking of Christian diabology in *Paradise Lost* and the Bible becomes even more iconoclastic, producing shock effects reminiscent of the handling of biblical myth in *The Age of Reason*. As if licensed by Paine, Blake plays irreverently with suspect official stories. The infernal narrator points out that whereas Milton at least named his characters correctly, in the erroneous sacred code of the Biblical mythological names are assigned incorrectly: "But in the Book of Job Miltons Messiah is call'd Satan" (plate 5, 34). That is, the true name of the figure who torments Job is not Satan, but Messiah or Governor. "For this history has been adopted by both parties" (plate 5, 34), the speaker continues: Job is the version of the story told by the Angels, and *Paradise Lost* is the Devil's version, albeit somewhat corrupted by Milton's allegiances. At this point the narrator shifts the ground and introduces an enigmatic narrative intended to correct Milton's distorted account of the original expulsion. The Devil's redaction inverts Milton's narrative of the fall of desire in

terms analogous to the Gnostic myth of the creation by a fallen demiurge:

> It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out. but the Devils account is, that the Messiah fell. & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss
>
> This is shewn in the Gospel, where he prays to the Father to send the comforter or Desire that Reason may have Ideas to build on, the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he, who dwells in flaming fire.
>
> Know that after Christs death, he became Jehovah.
>
> (plates 5–6, 34–35)

Inverting the official account, the infernal version of *Paradise Lost* presents the Governor falling "up" from the Abyss, presumably after an unsuccessful attempt to usurp the place of the Devil, the original Archangel. The Messiah's subsequent theft of the essence of hell inverts both the Promethean fire-theft and Milton's conception of Hell as an imitative counterpart of Heaven. Since the ontological primacy of hell, energy, and desire has already been established by the voice of the Devil, it becomes a natural conclusion that heaven is created by derivation from hell.

Blake's narrator continues diabolizing Christian myth in a radical reshaping of John 14:16–17. Through a literal interpretation of the "cloven tongues like as of fire" (Acts 2:3), in which the Holy Ghost descends upon the disciples, the Comforter that Christ promised his disciples "will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance" (John 14:26) becomes the infernal Holy Spirit of Desire which furnishes mere Reason with "Ideas to build on." The passage completes the inversion of the official story by conflating the "Jehovah of the Bible" with the Devil: as the original version on the copper plate apparently read not "he, who dwells," but "the Devil who dwells in flaming fire," Blake's first thoughts fused the two even more closely.[54] The basis of this bizarre transformation of Jehovah's identity lies in the infernal imagery of the Old Testament: the wrathful conflagrations prophesied by Isaiah (66:15) and Ezekiel (15:6–7), the burning bush, and the pillar of fire all suggest the idea that Jehovah's demonic identity has been disguised in the official account. To conclude the argument for the primacy of Hell, Blake revises the doctrine of Adoptionism to envision a demonic apotheosis which redeems the Messiah: after death he becomes the infernal father.[55]

Taken as a whole, the reversal of Milton's narrative and the inver-

sions of scripture echo and appear to enact Paine's suggestion that the orthodox account should have been told "the contrary way," reversing the positions of God and Satan.[56] Yet here, as in other instances, Blake's revision of biblical myth overshoots Paine's: the latter's fundamental assumption is that the official story of Satan—the war in Heaven, the temptation of Eve, and the Fall of man—appears in a new light when rationally analyzed. Absurd, profane, and hopelessly inconsistent with the power and wisdom of God, it is nothing more than a "strange fable." Yet the myth of Satan—like the rest of the Christian mythology—serves as a powerful instrument "to terrify and enslave mankind."[57] Because of the power of the myth of Satan, Paine takes it up at the opening of *The Age of Reason* so as to destroy the authority of priestcraft by demolishing its mythic foundation. In *The Marriage*, Blake reveals a similar awareness of the power of institutionally appropriated myths, the "system" of "Priesthood" formed from "poetic tales," "which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar" (plate 11, 38). But Blake also perceives—as Paine did not—that these myths potentially contain another form of power. Both Paine and Blake aim to take oppressive myths out of the hands of the Church mythologists; what sets Blake apart from Paine is his commitment to achieve more than this by revising myth. Whereas Paine seeks to deconstruct and smash the contemptible fables, Blake reshapes them into a Bible of Hell, a set of fictions expressing liberating, revolutionary values.

Added in 1792 or 1793 as a tailpiece to *The Marriage*, "A Song of Liberty" returns to the apocalyptic political prophecy of plate three, which closely associated the infernal world with moral liberation and, somewhat obliquely, with revolution in France. But "A Song of Liberty" expands into a global panorama of revolution in America, Spain, and Italy; and it envisions the universal conflict through demonic myth, in which the "new born fire" appears as a more explicit personification of political revolution. The new intensity and scope of Blake's satanized millennial prophecy derive from the probable occasion of "A Song of Liberty"—the victory of the French at Valmy, and the startling subsequent developments, the declaration of the Republic and the establishment of the revolutionary calendar.[58] In an extremely compressed mythic narrative, the unnamed fiery "terror"—the prototype of the Orc-figure introduced in the subsequent political prophecies—is no sooner born than he rebelliously confronts the "starry king," a figure which conflates Milton's God the Father with the archetypal monarch:

> 8. On these infinite mountains of light now barr'd out by the atlantic sea, the new born fire stood before the starry king!

> 9. Flag'd with grey brow'd snows and thunderous visages the jealous wings wav'd over the deep.
> 10. The speary hand burned aloft, unbuckled was the shield; forth went the hand of jealousy among the flaming hair, and hurl'd the new born wonder thro' the starry night.
>
> (plates 25–26, 44)

The narrative of this confrontation so condenses the Miltonic rebellion in Heaven and the expulsion of Satan into mythic shorthand that the demonic figure does not fall into a region of fire, but is born in the element, and rises like Milton's Satan, armed with spear and shield. That Blake here imagines revolutionary energy specifically in terms of the satanic figure collectively developed by English artists is implied by the related sketch, dating from 1792–1793, in Blake's notebook, for *The Gates of Paradise*, plate 5 [fig. 4]. A mirror-image of Barry's Satan, Blake's "Fire" stands among swirling flames, with arms outstretched, holding spear and shield like the new born fire of "A Song of Liberty"; a partially deleted caption on the notebook page ties the image of Orc's prototype directly to Satan's ascent from the burning lake, quoting *Paradise Lost* 1:220: "[Forthwith upright] he rears from the Pool."

The aftermath of the Expulsion is the collapse of the starry king's reign and the reappearance of the new-born fire as the rising sun and the victorious spirit of revolution:

> the son of fire in his eastern cloud, while the morning plumes her golden breast,
> 20. Spurning the clouds written with curses, stamps the stony law to dust, loosing the eternal horses from the dens of night, crying Empire is no more! and now the lion & wolf shall cease.
>
> (plate 27, 45)

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell thus concludes with a satanic vision of worldwide political revolution, and an infernal figure in the role of liberty leading the people, an image unprecedented in any deployment of the myth of Satan in the Romantic era. By the end of this work, all of the elements of Blake's revolutionary myth of Satan are in place—the ethics and metaphysics of Energy, the satanic prophecy of revolution, and their mythic embodiments, the Devils and the Son of Fire. In the succeeding prophecies, *America*, *Europe*, and *The Song of Los*, the figure of Orc replaces the Devil and the Son of Fire as the satanic agent of revolution and apocalypse, carrying the central role in Blake's myth until *The Book of Urizen*.

In her provocative discussion of Blake's career in *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries*, Marilyn Butler contends that it is a mistake to "read

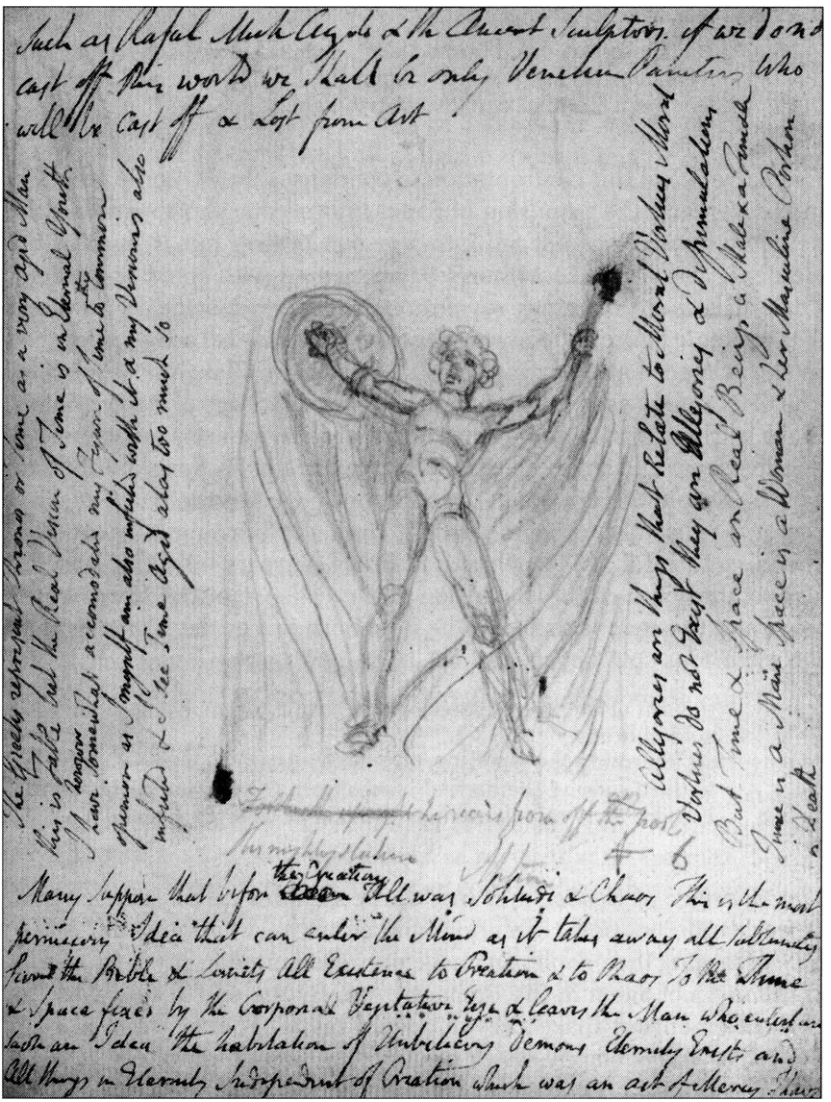

Figure 4. *William Blake. Preliminary Sketch for "Fire" (Notebook, ca. 1792–93). By permission of the British Library.*

Blake as though he were singlehandedly the author of his own text." Blake's work has a "corporate author," says Butler, his radical "urban sub-class."[59] Given the complexity and diversity of the cultural influences operating on the satanic mythmaking in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Butler's assertion matters: its explanatory power should be weighed. And in fact each of the episodes in *The Marriage*—the satanic millenarian prophecies, the infernal refutations of Christian and Swedenborgian constructs, and the appropriations of Milton's Satan and biblical myth—exhibits a fascination and freedom with Christian diabology which was encouraged if not made possible by the climate of thought in the 1790s, especially in the Johnson circle. Blake's syncretic and skeptical conception of the authority of the Bible—as an "original derivation" of Genius—has affinities with the often derisive attitude toward scripture held by the Johnson circle. However offputting the visionary enthusiasm of *The Marriage* might have been to them, its irreverence toward "all Bibles or sacred codes" was congenial; the skeptical tone of this phrase differs little from that of Mary Wollstonecraft's dismissal, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, of the creation of Eve as "Moses's poetical story."[60] Such a shared attitude toward biblical myth licenses the boldest transformations of satanic myth in *The Marriage*. However, while Blake's improvisations on demonic biblical myth share the assumptions about the Bible which inform *The Age of Reason*, his artistic handling of myth in *The Marriage* frequently implies a radically different conception of the potential function and value of the Christian mythology. As Essick argues in his study of the affinities between Paine and Blake, in *The Marriage* we are constantly aware of a tension between Blake and the corporate author, in the syntheses he attempts between his own visionary outlook and the secular radicalism of the Johnson circle.[61] So too with Blake's appropriation of satanic myth in *The Marriage*, which consistently subsumes and transforms the intellectual positions of various members of the circle. In each case Blake enters into and simultaneously separates himself from the ideology of this group, refashioning it in the process. The relationship of *The Marriage* to its cultural ambience is rich; however, exploring the elements of Blake's satanic myth finally reveals not how this work emerges from a homogenizing corporate author, but how it distinguishes itself.

University of New Orleans

NOTES

I would like to thank my colleagues, Nancy Easterlin and Joyce Zonana, who read this article in manuscript and made many helpful suggestions.

[1] William Blake, Annotations to *An Apology for the Bible*, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982), 611. All quotations from Blake's poems and prose (including annotations in books) are from this edition, hereafter cited parenthetically with plate and page number.

[2] The foundation of historical criticism of *The Marriage* remains David Erdman's "The Eternal Hell Revives," in *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 3rd ed. (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1977), 175–97. Building on his work are John Howard, "An Audience for *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*," *Blake Studies* 3 (1970): 19–52; Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries* (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1981), 39–53; Jerome J. McGann, "The Idea of an Indeterminate Text: Blake's Bible of Hell and Dr. Alexander Geddes," in *Social Values and Poetic Acts: The Historical Judgment of Literary Work* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1988), 152–72; and Robert N. Essick, "William Blake, Thomas Paine, and Biblical Revolution," *Studies in Romanticism* 30 (1991): 189–212. Northrop Frye was the first to define the "hell" of *The Marriage* in ironic terms; and it was necessary then to emphasize this point in order to lay to rest the diabolical conception of Blake suggested by his contemporaries, Thomas Butts and Frederick Tatham, and subsequently developed in Sadesque directions by Swinburne and by Mario Praz. See *The Letters of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1968), 43; G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), 417–18; Algernon Charles Swinburne, *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (1868; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), 158; Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1951), 278, 223. Frye drew a distinction between the two meanings Blake attaches to the word "hell," "one real and the other ironic" (*Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947], 198). Blake's real hell is the state of spiritual deadness he described in a marginal comment to Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* (1788), as being "shut up in the possession of corporeal desires which shortly weary the man" (590); his accompanying denial of belief in a traditional, literal hell informs Frye's characterization of the "hell" of *The Marriage* as merely ironic. Frye's emphasis on the ironic "hell" of *The Marriage* removed accumulating misapprehensions amounting to a crude conception of Blake as a literal satanist who simply inverted good and evil, but it has also authorized heavily ironized and skeptical readings of this work—heavy even considering its substantial investment in satire. For example, in his influential essay, "Dialectic in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*," *PMLA* 73 (1958): 501–4; reprinted in *English Romantics Poets: Modern Essays in Criticism*, ed. M. H. Abrams, 1st ed. only (New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1960), 80, Harold Bloom concludes that irony practically pervades *The Marriage* and that Blake "speaks straight" only on plates three and four. Later Bloom changed his mind, and in *Blake's Apocalypse* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1970), he claims that only in the fable of the devouring and the prolific (plate 16) does Blake abandon irony: "if ever Blake speaks straight, foregoing all irony, in *The Marriage*, it is here" (90).

From a different perspective Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. has also demystified Blake's hell. Like Frye, Wittreich commendably explodes the critical fiction of Blake's "satanism"; yet his arguments overshoot the mark by some distance, explaining away the diabolic excess of *The Marriage*: Blake's "sheer enthusiasm," Wittreich asserts, "often confused rather than clarified his views, especially those expressed by the Voice of the Devil, who speaks as erroneously and intemperately as the purveyors of the sacred codes whom he is assaulting" ("The Satanism of Blake and Shelley Reconsidered," *Studies in Philology* 65 [1968]: 821). Dan Miller's essay on *The Marriage* brilliantly deconstructs the paradigm of the contraries, but some of his specific findings—for example, that the utterance of the Devil is deeply self-contradictory—and his more

general conclusions—that *The Marriage* contains no voice of rhetorical authority—unduly reduce the scope and power of Blake's radical reshaping of satanic myth. Miller concludes that the Devil's pronouncement of the contrary "truths" about body and soul and energy and reason on plate four actually "weakens his claim to comprehensive truth" ("Contrary Revelation: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*," *Studies in Romanticism* 24 [1985]: 497). Later he concludes generally that "there is no voice to be believed in *The Marriage* other than an angelic or a diabolic voice, no order of values save those expressed by one or the other party, and no perspective on contrariety except one or the other contrary point of view" (506).

[3] Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 1977), 115–20.

[4] Erdman (note 2), 152–58.

[5] For a survey of this subject, see "Satan Expiring," chapter 4 of Jeffrey Burton Russell's *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1986), 128–67.

[6] D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell* (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1964).

[7] E. M. Butler, *The Fortunes of Faust* (Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1952), 65.

[8] These writings were available to Blake in popular translations, although he could also read French. It is useful to recall that Blake's response to Voltaire, despite the strictures of "Mock on Mock on, Voltaire Rousseau," had another side: Blake told Crabb Robinson that Voltaire was sent by God to expose the natural sense of the Bible (Bentley [note 2], 322).

[9] See Bertram Eugene Schwarzbach, *Voltaire's Old Testament Criticism* (Geneve: Librarie Droz, 1971), 179–230.

[10] See *Oeuvres Complétes*, 92 vols. (Imprimerie de la Société Littéraire-Typographique, 1785), 47:441–61 on the circulation of the myth. On the serpent of Genesis: see "Ange" and "Genese" (*Dictionnaire Philosophique*, *Oeuvres Complétes*, 47:454 and 52:28–29). In a later work, *La Bible enfin expliquée* (1776), the temptation of Eve emerges from Voltaire's critique as a piece of unprofound folktale prosopopeia: "La conversation de la femme et du serpent n'est point racontée comme une chose supernaturalle et incroyable, comme une miracle ou comme une allégorie" ("The conversation of the woman and the serpent is not at all represented like something supernatural, and incredible, like a miracle or an allegory") (43:16).

[11] Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, in *The Writings of Thomas Paine*, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway, 4 vols. (New York: AMS Press, 1967), 4:29, 25, 30, 22.

[12] Although *The Age of Reason* was published too late to influence *The Marriage*, Blake's acquaintance with the Johnson circle, not to mention his friendship with Paine, would have brought him into contact with the latter's thought; so he was probably acquainted with the ideas of *The Age of Reason* by 1790 or earlier—earlier because the provenance of Paine's treatise is uncertain: he supposedly composed it while imprisoned in France in 1793, but he curiously mentions only six planets in the solar system (69) even though Uranus was discovered by Herschel in 1781; it is more than likely that at least a rough draft of *The Age of Reason*—and with it its leading ideas—existed earlier than we have supposed.

[13] Holbach, *The System of Nature*, trans. Samuel Wilkinson, 3 vols. (1821; New York: Garland, 1984), 2:144–46. All religions, Dupuis says, mythologize the alternation of light and darkness into a cosmic conflict of good and evil—Ahriman versus Ormazd, Jupiter versus the Titans, God versus Satan. Dupuis interprets the combat of God and Satan in Genesis as an allegory reproducing this paradigm. The apparent triumph of the evil principle in the Fall of man symbolizes the onset of winter (Charles Dupuis, *The Origin of All Religious Worship* [1872; New York: Garland, 1984] 73–78). This idea was common; Paine used it in his reply of 1810 to Richard Watson's *Apology for the Bible (1797)*: "it is the *fall of the year*, the approach and *evil* of winter, announced by the ascension of the autumnal constellation of the *serpent* of the zodiac, and not

the moral *fall of man*, that is the key of the allegory, and of the fable in Genesis borrowed from it" (Paine [note 11], 4:262).

[14] Alexander Geddes, *The Holy Bible*, 2 vols. (London: R. J. Davis, 1792–1797), 1:ix–xi. Geddes's historical perspective on the study of the Old Testament alienated the Catholic hierarchy: his "fragment hypothesis" about the composition of Genesis undermined the integrity of Scripture. For a convenient summary of information about Geddes, see McGann (note 2), 158–70.

[15] Joseph Priestley, *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever, Part III* in *Theological and Miscellaneous Works*, ed. John T. Rutt, 25 vols. (London: G. Smithfield, 1817–1832), 4:161.

[16] A pertinent discussion of English representations of the French Revolution in writing and art is Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution* (1789–1820) (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1983), 1–36.

[17] Alexander Pirie, *The French Revolution Exhibited in the Light of the Sacred Oracles* (Perth, 1795), 49.

[18] Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins Univ. Press, 1975), 167.

[19] Garrett (note 18), 130–36.

[20] Garrett, 181–82.

[21] Whether these prints reflected or shaped public opinion is uncertain. M. Dorothy George largely dismisses the propagandistic function of the popular print, which was a commodity made to sell by reflecting shifting public opinion (*English Political Caricature*, 2 vols. [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959], 1:1–3. But Peter Thomas observes that during this time "prints replaced ballads as the chief influence on and reflection of popular opinion over the whole range of society" (*The American Revolution*, vol. 1 of *The English Satirical Print 1600–1832*, 7 vols. [Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986], 12).

[22] The most thorough account of the movement to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts is found in Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty* (Cambridge: Harvard Univ. Press, 1979), 65–98.

[23] H. T. Dickinson, *Caricatures and the Constitution*, vol. 2 of *The English Satirical Print 1600–1832* (Cambridge: Chadwyck-Healey, 1986), plate 49. Formed in April 1792, the Friends of the People hardly merited the label "satanic": they advocated not revolution but moderate reform of Parliament as a means of heading off revolution. Neither Paine nor Priestley belonged to the group. See H. T. Dickinson, *British Radicalism and the French Revolution 1789–1815* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1985), 8.

[24] H. T. Dickinson (note 23), plate 56.

[25] Daniel Isaac Eaton, *Politics for the People*, 1.12 (1793): 173.

[26] For a discussion of a similar use of myth after 1793 to simplify the interpretation of the French Revolution, see Paulson (note 16), 40.

[27] Robert Hole, "British Counter-Revolutionary Popular Propaganda in the 1790s," in *Britain and Revolutionary France: Conflict, Subversion, and Propaganda*, ed. Colin Jones (Exeter: Univ. of Exeter, 1983), 57.

[28] Alfred Owen Aldrige, *Man of Reason: The Life of Thomas Paine* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1959), 183.

[29] *Analytical Review* 5 (1789): 61–64, 352–53; *Analytical Review* 6 (1790): 80, 332–33; 10 (1791): 546; 11 (1791): 517–20; 14 (1792): 190–93.

[30] Arguing that the specific audience of *The Marriage* was the Johnson circle, Howard (note 2) was the first to imply that "the Devil's party" refers to this group (30).

[31] Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* 2 vols. (London, 1783), 1:69; 2:472–73.

[32] Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1978), 121–27.

[33] The illustrations of *Paradise Lost* which precede the 1790s as well as those of the Romantic painters are reproduced in Marcia Pointon, *Milton and English Art* (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1977), 1–59; but see William L. Pressly, *The Life and Art of*

James Berry (New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1981), 152–53 on the dating of Barry's illustrations; see also Leonard Kimbrell, "The Illustration of *Paradise Lost* in England—1688–1802" (Ph.D. diss., Univ. of Iowa, 1965).

[34] Howard (note 2), 33.

[35] William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. F. E. L. Priestley, 3 vols. (Toronto: Univ. of Toronto Press, 1946), 1:315–26. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, ed. Carol Poston (New York: Norton, 1988), 25.

[36] See Isaiah 34 and 35.

[37] Leslie Tannenbaum (*Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies* [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1982], 109–33) ably expounds the typology and symbolic biblical geography in this passage.

[38] Mark Wilks, *The Origin and Stability of the French Revolution; A Sermon Preached at St. Paul's Chapel, Norwich, July 14, 1791*. Quoted in Mark Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision* (New York: Henry Holt, 1946), 205.

[39] Jon Mee's article, "The Radical Enthusiasm of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*" (*British Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies* 14 [1991]: 51–60), demonstrates the affinities between *The Marriage* and other millenial prophecies of the early 1790s; but he adduces no other prophecy which manifests diabolical enthusiasm.

[40] Martin Nurmi was the first to suggest that Blake refutes the Swedenborgian principle of equilibrium with the concept of the contraries (*Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell: A Critical Study*, Research Series III of the *Kent State University Bulletin* 45 (1957): 19–23.

[41] The passage in Swedenborg reads as follows: "That the Hells are so many and various, appears from it's being given me to know, that under every mountain, hill, rock, plain, and valley, there were particular Hells of different extent in length, breadth, and depth. In a word, both Heaven and the World of Spirits may be considered as convexities, under which are arrangements of those infernal mansions. So much concerning the Plurality of Hells" (602).

[42] Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1946), 379.

[43] Swedenborg (note 42), 352.

[44] See Terence Hoagwood, "Holbach and Blake's Philosophical Statement in 'The Voice of the Devil,'" *English Language Notes* 15 (1978): 183. To rationalize Blake's skeletal doctrine of the contraries, which originates in his marginalia to *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* (1788), involves difficulties. Is it a monistic or dualistic account of the nature of things? It is clear that the contraries exist as fundamental principles, the conflict or tension of which constructs reality; the nature of their interaction is less easily understood. Other than Blake's insistence on the progression through contraries, the doctrine bears little resemblance to the schema of Hegelian dialectic. The most searching discussion of Blake's ambiguous rhetoric surrounding the contraries is Miller's (note 2), which finds Blake's conception of the contraries to be neither monistic nor dualistic (496). Two other useful discussions of the contraries are Leopold Damrosch, Jr., *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1980), 176–81, and Nurmi (note 40), 19–23.

[45] Of matter, Priestley asserts that "*powers of attraction* or *repulsion* are necessary to its very being . . ." (*Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* in *Works* [note 15] 3:219). See also Hoagwood (note 44), 183, for compatible statements by Holbach.

[46] Swedenborg (note 42), 352.

[47] Having denied the dualism of body and soul, the Devil appears to reinstate it by proclaiming that the body is the source of energy. This could be viewed as a contradiction, a deployment of irony disclosing the erroneous vision of the Devil. But to read "the body" in the second contrary principle as a "spiritual body"—a unitary existence, of which the sensible body is only the outward portion—seems the best solution to the problem here. Otherwise, it is hard to see why Blake would want the Devil to sound so thick-headed just at this point, especially since he appears to have so much

authorial backing elsewhere. It seems too obvious an error to be ironic; it is either a slip on Blake's part or a kind of shorthand in keeping with the terseness of the Devil's words: that is, "body" means the soul-body entity. Miller (note 2) is in agreement: Blake's Devil "means not the fallen body, but the human form that, 'if the doors of perception were cleansed,' would appear as 'infinite' as the soul" (497).

[48] Michael Scrivener, "A Swedenborgian Visionary and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*," *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 21 (1987–88): 102.

[49] Priestley (note 16), 3:220; emphasis added.

[50] Priestley's ambiguous materialism is expertly discussed in Robert E. Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism: British Natural Philosophy in an Age of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970), 263–64.

[51] Godwin (note 35), 1:324.

[52] Wollstonecraft (note 35), 25.

[53] Ronald Paulson (note 16) has read this passage perceptively and uncovered the intersection of ideology and the appeal of Milton's Satan: "a wronged woman . . . in relation to men is a Satan to whom active evil is to be preferred to passive good. As widow—as mother in relation to her children—woman is a self-sufficient Satan who has no need for man at all" (86).

[54] Why Blake chose to soften the identification of Jehovah and Devil is not clear—perhaps because he recognized it was too explicit and controversial; the other inversions of divine and infernal do not manifest such a head-on confrontation with orthodoxy. In any case, in all but two of the eleven copies of the *The Marriage*, a large and awkward blank space is the only vestige of "Devil"; in copies D and I this space is filled by a flame and a red blot and a gold blot respectively (see David V. Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake* [Garden City: Anchor Books, 1974], 103).

[55] Blake later invokes an infernal Christ who acts from impulse and not from rules (plate 23, 43), distinguishing him from Messiah just as he splits Satan and the Accuser. But the passage here appears to conflate Christ with the restraining Messiah, fallen and alienated from the infernal Father. In one other instance (many years later) Blake subscribed to Adoptionism: he told Henry Crabb Robinson that Christ had no business attacking the Roman government; when Robinson objected that this description of Christ's failings was "inconsistent with . . . sanctity & divine qualities," Blake replied that "Christ was not yet become the father" (Bentley [note 2], 540).

[56] Paine (note 11), 4:31. Essick (note 2) suggests that Paine provided the hermeneutic of reversal informing Blake's counter-narrative (196–97).

[57] Paine, 4:31, 22.

[58] Erdman (note 2), 192.

[59] Butler (note 2), 43.

[60] Wollstonecraft (note 35), 26.

[61] Essick (note 2), 194.