

**“Enough! or Too Much”: the functions of media interaction
in William Blake’s composite designs**

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Abstract

Visual art and written text have been described as historical sisters, linguistic twins and warlike enemies. These attempts to exclusively define the capabilities of each medium are inherently limited, contradictory and inaccurate. A better understanding of their individual capability and cooperative possibility can be achieved by examining the ways in which each functions in relation to the other on the composite page. William Blake's designs provide an excellent arena in which the functional interaction between the arts can be observed.

Blake's visual additions to the poetry of Thomas Gray, Robert Blair and Edward Young demonstrate that the visual image is capable of interrupting the stability of exclusive textual meaning. However, this does not undermine the capability of either medium to assert meaningful possibility. Rather, the excess of Blake's visual imagery amidst another's poetic page produces a pluralisation of media and representative potential that avoids the extremes of hierarchical definition and all-inclusive meaninglessness.

In contrast, Blake's own composites feature visual art and textual expression that both contribute to an overall evasion of definitive interpretation. However, their unpredictable interrelations and inconsistencies amplify and distort one another on the composite page, sustaining a relationship that is neither exclusively harmonic nor discordant. Thus, the non-synthetic "marriage" of contrary states that provides the subject matter of the Songs and the Marriage is also an accurate model for the overall relationship between visual art and text in Blake's designs.

A consideration of historical context reveals the contradictory currents that direct and antagonise Blake's designs and suggests that the perception of the relationship between the "Sister Arts" often depends on such temporal conditions. While acknowledging the limitations imposed by historical circumstance, this study also recognises that late eighteenth-century uncertainties encourage innovative reconceptualisations of composite interaction. In both form and content, Blake's designs contain yet contend with a variety of perspectives, and are invaluable examples of the individual and interactive plenitude that visual art and text are capable of. Overall, Blake's work highlights the unique role that the multi-media space plays in creative and critical efforts to understand the functional capability of each representative medium.

Abstract (Français)

Les arts visuels et écrits entretiennent tour à tour des liens de parenté historique, des relations de jumeaux linguistiques ou encore d'ennemis en temps de guerre. Mais il est essentiellement limité, contradictoire, et inexact de tenter de définir ainsi exclusivement les capacités de chaque art. Il est nécessaire, afin de mieux comprendre leur capacité individuelle et coopérative, d'examiner les manières dont chaque art fonctionne en relation avec l'autre sur la page composite. Les illustrations de William Blake offrent justement un terrain propice à l'observation de l'interaction fonctionnelle entre les arts.

L'art visuel de Blake qui accompagne la poésie de Thomas Gray, Robert Blair et Edward Young démontre que l'image est capable d'interrompre la stabilité du sens textuel exclusif. Cependant, cela ne suspend en rien la capacité de chaque art à exprimer une possibilité de sens. L'excès de l'imagerie visuelle de Blake située dans le texte poétique d'un autre artiste produit plutôt une pluralisation des arts et du potentiel représentatif, évitant ainsi les extrêmes de la définition hiérarchique et du non-sens de l'amalgame.

Au contraire, les compositions de Blake intègrent art visuel et expression textuelle, qui contribuent tous deux à éviter toute interprétation définitive. Cependant, leurs interrelations et inconstances aléatoires s'amplifient et se transforment l'un l'autre sur la page composite, nourrissant ainsi une relation qui n'est ni exclusivement harmonique ni discordante. Le « mariage » non synthétique d'états contraires dont il s'agit dans Chants de l'innocence et de l'expérience et Le mariage du ciel et de l'enfer sert donc aussi de modèle efficace à la relation générale entre art visuel et texte dans les illustrations de Blake.

Si l'on considère le contexte historique, des courants contradictoires apparaissent qui motivent et que dénoncent en même temps les illustrations de Blake. La perception de la relation entre les « arts sœurs », pour reprendre l'expression anglaise de « sister arts », dépend toutefois de telles conditions temporelles. Tout en reconnaissant les limites imposées par la circonstance historique, cette recherche prend aussi en compte la manière dont les incertitudes de la fin du dix-huitième siècle ont encouragé des reconceptualisations innovatrices de l'interaction composite. Dans leur forme comme dans leur contenu, les illustrations de Blake assument des perspectives variées autant qu'elles les questionnent. Ce sont de précieux exemplaires de la plénitude individuelle et interactive dont sont capables les arts visuelles et écrites. En somme, l'art de Blake souligne le rôle unique joué par les multimédias dans les efforts créatifs et critiques pour comprendre la capacité fonctionnelle de chaque art.

A Note on the Text

When referring to specific examples of Blake's text, I have made every effort to provide a corresponding page number in Erdman's 1988 edition of The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake. I have followed standards set in most current examples of Blake criticism and abbreviated the reference to include "E" and the page number: i.e. (E 207). As this edition indicates the original plate numbers upon which the text appears, I have chosen to maintain simplicity and not to include plate numbers in parenthetical references. However, references are made to plate numbers in the main body of this dissertation when considering examples of Blake's visual images.

When referencing certain selections from Blake's Songs, the titles of which are repeated for distinct poems within Innocence and Experience, I have attempted to clarify the location of my specific example through the use of parenthetical indicators: (I) and (E) respectively. Also, the copy letters (B, C, AA) referred to in relation to any of Blake's works respect and maintain current critical labels and standards. To illuminate my own descriptions of Blake's visual art, I have included reproductions of some of Blake's designs in an appendix. Figural references to these reproductions are included in the main body of the thesis. However, when comparing multiple copies of the same plate, I have opted not to include all variations considered. In these cases, I have provided a representative image, but comparisons between the copies mentioned within this text can be made through the online Blake Archive (<http://www.blakearchive.org/>). When viewing specific plates of the electronic editions of Blake's illuminated books in the archive, simply pressing the "compare" button after selecting all pertinent copies will allow the user to view these copies together in a single window.

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Introduction: The Crooked Road of Excess

He alone can conceive and compose, who sees the whole at once before him.

-Henry Fuseli, from Aphorisms on Art

The blank page is an irresistible space defined by and for human expression, one that demands to be filled with all manner of representation. This inviting arena, suited for many types of expressive recording, from words and language to graphic images and colours, persists through and has even been expanded and enhanced within our age of electronic publishing and hypertext. Once filled, the page becomes a source, a repository, and an intermediary that possesses, contains and refracts expression away from its origins, exporting mediated assertions into the eyes of anyone willing to turn toward it. Although the single page upon which the artist or writer directly makes their mark is quite flexible and open to experimentation, the mass-produced printed page, restricted by the limits of cost and technology, is traditionally a mapped territory that tends to either exclude all but a single medium or to contain several, segregated forms of expressive representation. However, in the last few decades, as increasingly flexible tools of design and production have become more accessible and affordable to the individual and have reduced the cost of mass production, visual images and words have been creatively combined in ways that challenge not only the various definitions of each medium, but also the very idea of the book itself.

In contrast, most artists and writers in late eighteenth-century England were at the financial and technological mercy of patrons and publishers and the reach of their creativity was limited to the initial execution of the work. In spite of the lively theoretical discussion of the potential relationship between the arts during this period, the distribution of visual art and the publication of words were regulated by different industries, different commercial expectations and distinct consumer interests. Without photographic or electronic technology, engraving was one of the few ways in which the

visual arts could be mass-produced and combined with the typeset word. While a number of illustrated books were published during this time, their words and engraved images were often composed independently of one another and the visual art was expected to simply “illustrate”, to contribute to or adorn that which was represented by the printed word. Indeed, individuals such as Sir Joshua Reynolds, who became known for both their writing and visual art, tended to distinguish such talents and produce each separately. Thus, few examples of the creative attempt to explore an actual interaction between words and visual images can be found during this or any other period prior to the twentieth century.

William Blake’s work is one example of such rarity. His composite books reveal a particular effort to preserve the uniqueness of the original work of art and to push against the limits imposed on the reproducible page while still taking advantage of print technology. Combining artist, writer, printer and publisher into a single step, Blake’s experiments resist creative restriction and necessitate innovative techniques in composition, execution and production. Echoing this condensation of process, and enabled by its particular procedure, Blake’s books also involve various degrees of integration and interactivity between graphic art and the written word. However, Blake’s works encompass more than an unproblematic technical suturing of media. They variously challenge the accepted boundaries of each form of representation by involving both in an impositional, dynamic relation on the page. This intersection of forms, which encompasses both collision and co-operative interplay, contributes to the excessive, indefinite and paradoxical content of these complex books and continues to promote interpretative difficulty and disagreement.

Despite the uniquely integrated form of Blake's composite plates, critical encounters with these works have utilised an approach that either ignores the graphic art in favour of the text or considers the visual images as supportive marginalia to the primary communication of the text. Established and reinforced by traditions of publication and printing, this attitude reflects an approach to the page that is fundamentally questioned by the excesses of Blake's integrated designs. While historical shifts in the approach toward each medium have also affected various schools and branches of Blake criticism, an overall privileging of the text as the primary vehicle for expression has persisted, and it is only recently that the non-textual portions of Blake's page have been given the critical attention necessary for a more integral understanding of Blake's composite art. Still, there remains much to be explored in relation to the interplay of media on the Blakean page and this study attempts to not only investigate the various effects of this media marriage in the arena of Blake's work, but to use these encounters to reconsider aesthetic notions of the particular capacities of text and graphic art in general. This will be done by initially examining examples in which Blake's graphic images are added to a pre-existing text, then comparing the functioning of these artistic additions to the dynamic between integrated media on Blake's own composite pages. It must be stressed that this study, by using the entire Blakean page as its unit of analysis, will avoid the partiality of approaches that exclusively or primarily discuss either the text or the graphic images. Such an integrated consideration will demonstrate the flexibility of visual art and text in general, but will also reveal that the capabilities of these media on the composite page are influenced more by the content of each, the extent and nature of their interaction, and the larger context within which they interact, than by fundamental boundaries inherent in the media themselves.

Friendly Enemies: The Relationship Between the Sister Arts

We need to ask of a medium, not what “message” it dictates, but what sort of functional features it employs in a particular context.

-W.J. T. Mitchell, from Iconology

Prior to engaging in a close examination of some of Blake's attempts to bring graphic art and text into affective and expansive proximity, it is necessary to interrogate and justify the vocabulary that will be regularly used throughout the course of the argument. "Text" and "word" will refer to written, engraved or printed language, "image", unless otherwise specified, will refer to graphic, visual, non-textual forms of representation, and "design" will be used to signify the total visual field of the composite page. "Composite" art or design, although generally suggesting a work realised in more than one medium, will specifically refer to the combination of text and graphic images on the same page. Although the extent and ratio of such combination varies with each work, the implication and consequence of such variation will be thoroughly considered in the examination of particular examples of William Blake's composite art.

I will avoid the commonly misused and temporally referential adjectives "plastic" and "verbal" to describe the painted image and the written word respectively. These misleading terms do nothing to advance an understanding of the arts themselves and their characterisation restrictively ascribes inherent properties to each medium without accounting for contextual and individual differences that may challenge such associations. For instance, while "plasticity" suggests flexibility, mobility, pliability and impressionability, its exclusivity fails to account for the spatial and temporal rigidity often attributed to the perspectival image. The visual and spatial nature of written and printed texts also inherently challenges the restricted perception that exclusively classifies these expressions as verbal utterances.

When discussing Blake's art, I will also try to avoid the term "illustration", as this too-strongly suggests an image that is largely determined by the accompanying text.

Although this submissive function is often common in works that feature both media, Blake's unique approach to the composite page demands a descriptive term for the image that signifies more than just its illustrative capabilities. Thus, "illumination" is a better term, for it suggests that Blake's art is, itself, a source of light (rather than just an illustrative shadow) which reveals more about the text that it accompanies. Yet, as I will attempt to show, Blake's composite designs can be compared to a two-star solar system in that the arts, in the words of Ulrich Weisstein, mutually illuminate each other. As well, this system of dual illumination and influence, while different in each instance, is often unstable, highly dynamic and subject to excessive and multiple sources of gravity.

In addition to defining these essential terms, the ever-changing perceptions of the relationship between graphic art and text throughout history and the issues that perpetuate such debate need to be explored and understood before encountering the interdependent utilisation of these media on the Blakean page. Although the written word and the painted or drawn image each have distinct developmental histories that vary through different times and regions, explorations of the potential convergence between the two often generalise their historical, material, expressive and representative intersections. As well, metaphorical analogies, which attempt to clarify this relationship in familial and political terms, often contradict and exclude each other in a strained effort to attribute certainty or to systematise such a dynamic relation. The main contenders in the exploration of interart relations are poetry and painting and, although it must be noted that Blake's work employs more than just a poetic use of words and utilises an artistic technique that creates visual images from a combination of drawing, painting and engraving, the history of thought surrounding the potential relationship between poetry and painting is a useful and fruitful way of entering into a discussion about Blake's

composite art. Indeed, many of the issues raised in specific reference to the relationship between “poetry” and “painting” can be applied to a more general consideration of the relation between visual art and the written word.

Prior to encountering specific examples of Blake’s distinctive and delimiting employment of graphic art and text, it will be useful to comparatively introduce some specific critical positions that attribute limited features to each medium while attempting to reduce their individual and interactive capabilities. James Merriman stresses that painting and poetry, while both possessing an imitative power, each have different strengths and efficiencies: painting and drawing directly convert visible surfaces of represented objects to the surface of the painted surface, whereas literature enables the indirect conversion of visual qualities and non-visual conditions to verbal and written representations (162). Interestingly, this common critical position is echoed in a suggestion by Paul Cezanne that literature is suited to abstractions while painting is better suited to the representation of the concrete (Rice-Sayre, 86). Cezanne’s perceptions imply, though, that this limited conception of artistic media remains potent because of the willingness of artists to subscribe to critical definitions. Overall, what this view suggests is that the imprecision of language, its temporal nature and its dependence on grammatical convention make it an efficient way to mediate and communicate the invisible, emotional, moral, spiritual and intellectual world and an inefficient means of accurately representing the visible world. Conversely, the visual arts, which require interpretative recognition rather than translation, are more immediately spatial, are less limited by conventional grammars, and are more adept at the representation of the phenomenal world and less efficient when trying to convey the particular complexities of more abstract conditions, symbolic figures or psychological states.

Merriman further suggests that the visual arts are restricted and inefficient in their representative narrative potential for the simple reason that visual artists have no reliable means of controlling the observation sequence of their audience (309-10). As well, the historical painter must choose a single moment out of a continuum of moments (310). While this appears to be true for an individual painting, it appears to break down if one conceives of a series of paintings or images, for the set acquires temporal significance in addition to the conventionally perceived spatial attributes of each individual image. Indeed, the Bayeaux Tapestry is an excellent example of this. Although it relies on Latin inscriptions for identification, its panoramic, sequential representation of the invasion of England by William the Conqueror unifies visual specificity and detail with temporal progression. Similarly, while an isolated sculpture is relatively restricted in its storytelling potential, the continuous spiral frieze of Trajan's Column quite effectively commemorates an historical sequence. Thus while Merriman's views are not uncommon, their reinforcement of a definitive and restrictive approach has not prevented artists from challenging such perceived limitations

A common way of describing the relation between poetic text and painting is 'sisterly' and the history of speculation on the Sister Arts often reveals an undecided oscillation between different levels of interartistic comparison, analogy, equation and distinction while maintaining a fundamental emphasis on the inherent similarity and familial connection between the two. Quite possibly this metaphor has its origin in the mythological Greek muses. Curiously, while Calliope, Euterpe, Erato and Polyhymnia are the muses specifically responsible for poetic inspiration, there seems to be no sister who directly presides over the art of painting, likely because the friezes and images that

decorate Greek pottery were considered crafts rather than arts and thus were not worthy of mythological representation.

The dynamic history of the attempt to ascertain the relation between the Sister Arts demonstrates some of the earliest attempts to analytically distinguish between graphic and textual expression, despite the use of a connective metaphor. In Plato's Cratylus, Socrates asserts the imitative power of words and pictures and suggests that both can represent objects but do so in different ways. While no imitation completely expresses the entire reality of the object, and while pictures may resemble things more than names, both names and pictures have some connection with the object and are not just conventionally assigned. As well, Socrates cautions that both words and pictures can be falsely assigned to objects and further confirms this in Plato's Republic by suggesting that both painting and poetry, the "Sister Arts of imitation" can inaccurately represent the world (Plato 478, 279). However, the philosopher, preserving an old rivalry, makes poetry his primary target because poets not only offer an inferior view of truth but also "feed and water" the emotions and passions of men instead of restraining them by reason" (477). He recommends that unless poets and citizens can be trained to "discern the true nature of the beautiful" (288), poetry should be banished from the ideal state because of its allegorical, fictional, imaginative and thus potentially misleading capabilities (279). This judgement of poetry, which stresses the classical favouring of the arts as mimetic imitations of ideal form, reflects the philosophical idealism behind Greek art, which, with its rationalist emphasis on technique and arithmetic precision, sought to both represent and idealise nature (Venturi 40-42).

Aristotle, in his Poetics, further defines the different types of imitation that poetry and paintings are suited for. He suggests that painting imitates using "colour and form"

and is related to spatial stasis, while poetry imitates “language, rhythm and harmony” and is related more to the temporal movement of music and dancing (Hagstrum 6). He further suggests that each form is limited in what it can achieve (6). Horace takes this a step further in his Ars Poetica, and, echoing Plato, claims that the artistic, mimetic idealisation of the natural object is better achieved through painting than through poetic representation (9). Indeed, as Gombrich notes, the scope of classical art is largely limited to the imitation of the human figure in a limited number of formulaic, stereotypical postures (142-44).¹ Thus far, these early, but persistent views of poetry and painting seem to recognise the similar potential for the mimetic and imitative capacities of both Sister Arts, but also begin to distinguish differences between and limits to such capacities.

Despite his apparent favouring of the imitative capacities of painting, Horace is known for the phrase ut pictura poesis which has often been translated as “as in painting, so in poetry”. Hagstrum corrects this to some extent, suggesting that in the context of Horace’s views, the statement suggests that “as sometimes in painting, so occasionally in poetry” (9). Taking such correction further, critics like Wesley Trimpi make the argument that in the particular passage in which this statement appears, Horace “draws primarily upon a specific context in the history of rhetoric...[and] is not concerned directly with literary or pictorial representation” (Trimpi 2). Instead, Trimpi argues,

¹ Just as many of the persistent conceptions regarding the inherent properties of graphic art and text have been inherited from these classical analyses, the influence of classical notions on European perception from the Renaissance through to the eighteenth century prompted figures like Poussin and Le Brun to pursue the expressive codification of the human body in an extension of Gombrich’s above observation. Christopher Heppner, in Reading Blake’s Designs recognises certain critics have identified Blake’s efforts to create expressive bodies in his graphic art, but worries that this criticism will weaken “potential awareness of the history of Blake’s search for communicative and powerful modes of expression” (9). To combat this, Heppner’s own writing attempts to preserve the expressive potential of Blake’s bodies while avoiding the formulaic and systematic temptation to find a “univocal visual language that serves as an interpretative key to Blake’s work (9).

Horace's words actually suggest that painting is used as an analogy to support the suggestion that "the critic [of poetry] should not cavil over faults in particular passages if the total achievement of the poet is admirable [...] In themselves, [Horace's] lines describe different types of style which must be judged in relation to their appropriate conventions" (15). Yet, despite attempts by contemporary critics like Trimpi and Hagstrum to recontextualise Horace's statement, the decontextualised translation remains a foundation for the Sister Arts tradition.

Another classical statement of the supposed relationship between painting and poetry comes from Plutarch, who, attributing the following to Simonides of the fifth century BC, figuratively suggests that "painting is mute poetry and poetry a speaking picture" (Hagstrum 10). Trimpi suggests that this statement "has contributed to the continuous misunderstanding of Horace's context", especially when critics like Hagstrum continue to juxtapose the two quotes (31).² In relation to the origins of Plutarch's quote in particular, though, T. J. B. Spencer reveals that not only was Simonides "a witty but unreliable judge of things in general", but also that Plutarch both suggests that one must eventually overcome the belief suggested by the quote, and, actually, in his *Symposiacs*, contradicts the saying and offers the alternative that "poetry is vocal dancing and dancing is silent poetry" (Spencer 175). It seems, then, that the main seeds of the Sister Arts tradition have been transplanted from their original contextual soil. However, this knowledge cannot cancel the consistent historical perceptions of parallelism between the arts that the familial metaphor has encouraged.

² Trimpi notes that "Hagstrum combines the phrases of Simonides and Horace in a dual epigraph for his *The Sister Arts*" (31).

In Medieval thought, the relationship between poetry and painting became more complicated, specifically in relation to composite books where marginal art and religious texts played on the same illuminated page. Initially, eleventh- and twelfth-century hybrids between picture and text were “interlinear”, portraying similar ideas in different media (Camille 20). That is, in this composite space, the mystical aesthetic of the text allowed a focus on universals (Gombrich 152) and a bold, imaginative freedom to supplant the artist’s mimetic subservience to reality (Hagstrum 56), while still demanding that the image succumb to the authority of the religious word. However, in this restricted space, graphic images soon became expressions of argument and antagonism toward the text (22). The more authoritative the words, the more unstable and illusory the images on the edge became (26).

The pious authority of the word and the vulgar brushstroke’s distortion of religious expression carried over into the Renaissance, where the now-feuding sisters battled for dominance. On one side, painted expression tended to value idealistic form and classical order (Gombrich 152), but continued its secular rebellion by focusing on the human form and reflecting the scientific idealisation of man in the spatial representation of universals (155). Indeed, this neoplatonic vision called on the artist to purify and recreate the world, erase its flaws and present universal ideals through a particular representation of nature (155-6). Further, while the initially French movement towards classical imitation in literature and sculpture successfully drew from many surviving Greek and Roman examples, painters found it more difficult, for there were few actual classical precedents to work from until the eighteenth-century excavations of Pompeii and Herculaneum (Spencer 176). Although most examples of Greek and Roman painting had not withstood the classical decay of the middle ages, written descriptions of lost paintings

had survived (179). Thus, Renaissance art critics were much more eager than literary critics were to reinforce the connection between the poetry and painting in an effort to ensure that painting remained capable of achieving a stylistic proximity to the other arts (176).

Although classical traditionalism did influence Renaissance literature, poetic expression continued to strengthen its exclusive partnership with mental conception, drawing from the medieval alliance between the word and religious imagination, expression and ecstasy (Hagstrum 70). Despite this divergence in the practised capabilities of the arts, an overall ideal was maintained that several arts working together (or at least stylistically co-ordinated) could produce a harmonious whole (90). The Baroque period that followed gave rise to the artistic antithesis between the classical forms of the Poussinists and the colourful creativity of the Reubenists (an antagonism that continued through the eighteenth century), but reinforced the close relation between the Sister Arts, not by equating their ability, but by harmonising their purpose in the didactic religiosity of the composite emblem. On the printed page, the emblematic reunion between the art object and the epigram maintained the values of each art while permitting one to be the interpreter of the other (96).

In the eighteenth century, ut pictura poesis “became not a casual comparison, but a commandment for poets and painters” and renewed notions of translatability, transferability and complementarity between the arts (Mitchell Blake’s Composite Art 16-17). Thus it remained in the artists’ best interests to forge a close bond between words and images. Indeed, William Hogarth, in the 1730s and 1740s, pioneered and popularised a genre of painted series that visually estimated the progression of narrative stories while addressing contemporary topics of interest and offering moral commentary. Gombrich

notes that “Hogarth accepted the idea of art as a language and seized eagerly on the possibilities it offered for the creation of characters with which to people his imaginary stage” (350). The Harlot’s Progress, The Rake’s Progress, Marriage à la Mode and Industry and Idleness, popularised through reproducible and affordable engravings, are examples of this attempt by Hogarth to tell moralising tales through a series of images. Hogarth’s success both inspired literary translations and continued to influence later literary figures, such as Dickens and Thackeray. As well, the formal stylistics that allow him to emulate narration through pictures remain an important branch of the family tree that has led to our own modern comic books and graphic novels. This is not to say that Hogarth did not influence other artists of his time. Indeed, while it is difficult to ascribe a direct path of influence, Blake’s own practices, including the reluctance to use nature as a foundation for the painted image, the turning away from academic formulations and imitations, the resistance to patronage, the use of engraving to produce affordable copies of original art, and the willingness to cross the boundaries between words and visual images all owe something to Hogarth’s previous work and successes.³

However, Gotthold Ephraim Lessing, an aesthetic philosopher who remained influential in Blake’s period and who specifically advances many notions that Blake’s composite art challenges, resisted the increasing popularity of the harmonisation of graphic art and poetic text, raising a strong critical voice that drew from classical distinctions and rivalries. In his Laocoön, he reacts against this close reunion of the sisters, re-emphasising the differing abilities and continual rivalry between painting and

³ For a discussion of many of these characteristics in relation to Hogarth, see Gombrich’s Art and Illusion (349-350), Margaret Drabble’s The Oxford Companion to English Literature 5th Ed. (466-467) and Hogarth’s “The No Dedication” as quoted in Lorenz Eitner’s Sources and Documents in the History of Art: Neoclassicism and Romanticism 1750-1850 (104-105).

poetry, and frowning upon any attempts by either to imitate the other. Lessing segregates the two media, assigning form, colour, space, bodies, visible properties (91) and suggestive stillness (109) to painting, while reserving sound, time, action (91), process (100) and motion (139) for poetry. He also reconfirms the Renaissance conception that poetry's sphere is that of "inward vision" (87), but suggests that its "arbitrary signs" (43) ensure the "inadequacy of all verbal expression" to conjure a definite image (134-5). His is a call to respect the limits and distinctions of each art:

Painting and poetry should be like two just and friendly neighbors, neither of whom indeed is allowed to take unseemly liberties in the heart of the other's domain, but who exercise mutual forbearance on the borders, and effect a peaceful settlement for all the petty encroachments which circumstances may compel each to make in haste on the rights of the other.
(110)

The figurative language that Lessing employs here effectively elevates a question of aesthetics into a battle for territory and power in the arena of the page. That is, Lessing metaphorically injects a political dimension into this exploration of the capabilities and functions of different forms of creative expression, introducing a parallel between real-world conflict and the persistent antagonism perceived between the arts. Lessing thus emphasises the contest between the arts, the struggle for superiority that lies behind this prolonged critical debate. Despite an apparently diplomatic call for peaceful friendship (after such strong delineation), Lessing tips the balance between the arts by proposing that poetry, via the intangibility of its images, encompasses a wider sphere that contains the limited aspects of painting and suggests the infinity of imagination (43) and echoes opinions similar to those asserted by Edmund Burke on the 'sublime' eight years previously.

Over time, poetry and painting have thus been examined as strangers who share certain characteristics, as sisters that have grown up and developed together and, more recently as twins who each obey the parental authority of linguistic structure and meaning. Curiously, definition, discussion and debate surrounding the interrelation between these particular arts is usually carried out using language, and subsequently, but not surprisingly, a bias prevails that favours language as the primary and superior mode of expression on the composite page. Indeed, the present study inherently participates in this conflict of interest by using language as the primary means of reflecting upon and examining the relation between text and image. One of the fundamental interests of this analysis, though, is to self-consciously reflect upon how it is possible to write about this relationship in relation to the Blakean page without succumbing to the partiality inherent in writing itself. Perhaps the metaphorical use of language evidenced in the examples above, which allow the arts to intersect within a figurative common ground that avoids explicit definition but indirectly describes their relationship, is a linguistic strategy that facilitates such an unprejudiced possibility.

Despite the potential advantages of figurative comparison, Jean Seznec notes that the various metaphors used to describe the relation between art and text reveal a number of quite different and exclusive aesthetic assumptions. Some insist on a fundamental unity and make an effort to reduce the arts to a single, essential principle, which ultimately allows for interchangeability, correspondences and commutability between the arts. Others, such as Gotthold Ephraim Lessing's effort to segregate poetry and painting, work to enforce an essential disunity and difference, and to erect theoretical and interpretative boundaries between the arts. Historical attempts to unify the arts via periodization, such as Mario Praz's Mnemosyne, perceive a familiarity between all the

arts of a particular period and consider the “spirit of the age” to be a master key for all the arts (Seznec 570). Against this, however, Alastair Fowler notes that “period styles often did not prevail at the same time in different arts and artists” (Fowler 491). John Passmore also cautions that “the use of period predicates can confuse if they lead the historian to suppose that a period must be monolithic, that everyone who writes during that period must either be consciously adopting or consciously rebelling against the norm” (Passmore 585). Factual approaches look at actual contacts between artists and writers and attempt to situate the artist within a network of mutual, cultural and contextually affective influence (Seznec 571). Again, though, Fowler cautions that “art has its own life and history and is not always linked to society or civilisation in a directly causal way” (492). Each of these exclusive and specific attempts to relate the art of painting and the art of literature, then, have been criticised as partial, or as a false and reductive metonymy that ignores the complexity of each art. Thus far, no single approach stands out as being able to sufficiently account for the elaborate nature of their relation.

As James Merriman notes, the continuing fascination of the possibility of a parallel between the arts has turned casual phrases into assertions of near identity between the two, or into prescriptive decrees which ideally assert that painting should be like poetry or vice versa (153). Merriman further suggests that interrelational studies of the arts are continually hampered by “improper sampling, the metaphorical transfer of terms, arbitrary conversion, sheer subjectivity and... free associationalism” (156). While this does make for confusing terminology and often leaves many assumptions unexamined, Merriman seems overly uncomfortable with such interactivity, indirectly suggesting that he favours exclusive distinctions between the arts.

In addition to Merriman's observations, many comparative examinations of the arts, while claiming to be interdisciplinary and impartial, often implicitly betray an alliance to or favouring of one or the other. As a result, the comparison becomes an unbalanced competition and a hierarchy is usually developed with one of the arts established as the central paradigm. Such studies fail to examine equally the extent of each medium's capabilities. Indeed, much interart comparison is inherently evaluative or judgmental and thus self-limiting. What this suggests is that any general attempt to attribute a fundamental nature to each of the arts is a restrictive and ultimately incomplete endeavour and that preconceived biases about the specific functions and interrelations of the arts need to be discarded. As W. J. T. Mitchell argues in *Iconology*, "there is no essential difference between poetry and painting, no difference, that is, that is given for all time by the inherent natures of the media the objects they represent or the laws of the human mind". However, "there are always a number of differences in effect in a culture which allow it to sort out the distinctive qualities of its ensemble of signs and symbols. These differences [...] are riddled with all the antithetical values the culture wants to embrace or repudiate" (49).

In an effort to avoid the limitations of the problematic critical practices identified thus far, the following examination of Blake's particular uses of text and graphic image will avoid evaluative and generalising methods and, instead, interrogate a variety of specific examples in an attempt to recognise the varied potential of their composite interaction. Eventually I will attempt to locate connections between these unique formal intersections and the social and historical conditions in which they appeared. My objective is not to argue in favour of pre-existing, abstract and prescriptively defined

functions attributed to mediating tools, but to demonstrate the inherently rich potential of each medium that the interactivity, excess and context of the Blakean page reveals.

It is thus necessary to remain cautiously aware of the problematic implications of definitive labels already selected to represent the different media that this project considers. Just as there are many different types, styles, forms and techniques of “graphic art” that challenge the inclusion of all under a single term, the general labels of “text” and “written language” also tend to problematically homogenise or at least equate all forms of linguistic expression in a reductive gesture. Although such terms will be regularly used throughout this study, an effort will be made to distinguish between different uses of these forms of expression. For example, in contrast to the nonmetric characteristic of prose language, written poetry is, traditionally, the transcribed record of an imaginative, rhythmic and often metrical use of spoken language⁴. Thus, its printed materiality not only further solidifies the lyric aural structure of the poetic expression, but also contains the immaterial movement of the spoken word and the inherent potential of the flexible, arbitrary symbol for figurative plurality. Exploring the particular nuances of this type of written language, then, identifies poetry’s ability to enable and sustain a rich contradiction of stability and possibility. The recognition and identification of such capabilities will become extremely useful when discussing Blake’s particular utilisation of and resistance to poetic traditions. Again, though, it is necessary to remain aware of

⁴ Although two types of language use are differentiated for the sake of argument here, it must be noted that this difference is merely a measure of their respective levels of formal structure. Situated at different points along the same spectrum, “poetry” and “prose” are not absolutes, but are points of reference that are open to combination and variation. As the current study progresses, it will become increasingly apparent that the contrary interrelation and the potential for impositional hybridity observed between these distinct “types” of expressive language is a recurring and definitive feature of the relationship that Blake weaves between other contraries such as graphic art and text, innocence and experience, black and white, and heaven and hell.

the variations that are encompassed by the single term “poetry”, such as lyric, narrative and didactic forms, each of which utilise and restrict the possibility of poetic language to varying degrees. Indeed, the differences between lyric and didactic uses of poetic language will become crucial to the arguments presented in forthcoming chapters.

Despite the awareness of distinction within definition promoted above, it must be emphasised that such categorisation remains permeable and flexible rather than comprehensive or exclusive, especially when describing Blake’s composite art. Any attempt to definitively describe Blake’s utilisation of each medium using predetermined categories is ultimately frustrating, for no matter how malleable the parameters of such categories become, at some point, they will be incapable of containing the protean fluctuations of Blake’s creative experiments. In the same way that graphic art and text overlap and impose on each other on Blake’s composite page, works such as The Marriage of Heaven and Hell collect and combine various types and functions of written expression and challenge the limits of categorisation through this proximity. Adding to the instability that results from excessive juxtaposition, Blake’s collected writings, which include examples of poetry, prose, aphorisms, fragments, proverbs, narratives, lyrics and rhetorical criticism, sustain a figurative use of language throughout. Figurative departures from standardised or accepted uses of language, whether poetically structured or informally prosaic also preserve possibility within apparent stability. Thus this paradoxical synchronicity of stability and possibility, reinforced by a number of innovative and combinative features, remains an essential characteristic of Blake’s work and will figure heavily in upcoming observations.

In a sense, the general capabilities of graphic art and text already challenge their terminological distinction. Although different from the schematic nature of Chinese

pictograms or the synechdochic or metonymic qualities of Egyptian hieroglyphic ideograms (in which representation is abbreviated and in which drawing, painting and writing are simultaneous and unified), written English language is pictorial; that is, it uses arbitrary visual phonemes and logograms to represent aural elements of the spoken language.⁵ The words and sentences that result from this combination of written alphabetic symbols themselves become symbolic units that ideally record, communicate and conventionally indicate meaningful information about the world. Despite the inherently visual nature of written language, however, it is still traditionally characterised as a medium that captures the spoken utterance and crystallises it on the page. Such a view contributes to the perception that printed text embodies the temporal, discursive and dialogic characteristics of spoken conversation.

Jacques Derrida's Of Grammatology challenges this conception of language, however, by arguing that such a phonocentric privileging of speech in Western theories of language presupposes an organisational and absolute foundation outside the play of language that is ultimately illusory. Derrida's challenge usefully questions not only the communicable intention of the "speaker", but also the representative and deterministic power of the text overall, and has had immeasurable influence on critical practice over the last half century. Indeed, Derridean notions remain crucial for the current study, contributing to an argument which will be demonstrated as a consistent effect of media combination in Blake's composite work: "that the meaning of any text remains radically

⁵ W.J.T. Mitchell, in his Picture Theory, phrases this best when he suggests that "Writing, in its physical, graphic form, is an inseparable suturing of the visual and the verbal, the 'imagetext' incarnate" (95). Yet, in Iconology, which further clarifies the relationship between the pictogram, the hieroglyph and the written word, Mitchell does acknowledge that Jacques Derrida's Of Grammatology problematises this conjunction by removing "spoken language from its dominant

‘open’ to contradictory readings” (Abrams 203). Despite the effect of Derridean critical theory on contemporary interpretative practice, written language, exactly the medium employed by the current study, remains a primary vehicle for intended determinism in communication; that is, notwithstanding the awareness that Derrida provides, we remain involved with and ultimately dependent on a Lockean ideal of the communicative potential and clarity of textual representation and exchange. Adapting some of Derrida’s theoretical views while remaining dependent on an incompatible use of language to explore those views may seem inherently contradictory, but the current study, in the spirit of Derrida, resists attempts to exclusively adopt Derridean conceptions of language as an absolute truth or foundational paradigm. Rather, preserving both the verbal and visual characteristics associated with written language enriches its overall potential and asserts language as a variously employable tool rather than an inherently definable thing. The current study specifically utilises written language in the context of the expectations and conventions of academic discourse, but examines how the various functions of language are affected by its proximity to and interaction with visual art on Blake’s composite pages.

This intent to more fully understand language through indirect comparison rather than direct definition is similar to the way in which Ezra Pound’s creative placement of unfamiliar Chinese ideograms throughout his Cantos calls attention to the similarities and differences between two types of representation and reminds us that the printed alphabetic word, although distinct from the representative intent of the pictogram, is also a material figure, a series of lines in conventional shapes, an unspoken object in addition to the

place in the study of language and communication and [replacing] it with the general notion of the graphein or gramme, the graphic mark, trace, character or other sign” (26-29).

representation of a temporally executed verbal utterance. The written word thus combines both spatial and temporal qualities and has both visual and verbal potential, as an object and as a conventional verbal utterance. Often ignored in literary study, this graphic quality of written language is something that needs to be recognised and considered in any study of William Blake's composite art. Indeed, as Jerome McGann suggests, "to read Blake's illuminated poems, or any newspaper, is to be reminded of the crucial importance which spatial relations play in the structure of texts" (113).⁶ Blake's Laocoön, which features a central image surrounded by a multidirectional weave of words and phrases, is an example that reinforces McGann's claim, for it strongly emphasises that written words and their spatial configurations are just as much images, as much a physical part of a design, as the line is in a drawing or the colour is in a painting.

Just as written language relies on the line to create its alphabetic symbols and to string together its words, painting also traditionally relies on the line, but also on tint, shading and colour to produce form. Merriman, continuing to promote his limiting thesis that each medium differently limits representative possibility, suggests that painting can only represent the visual qualities of objects (162). While this statement ignores many twentieth-century developments in the visual arts that have left the object behind, Merriman does allow that non-visible qualities can be suggested by conventional visual clues (162), similar to the way that the abstract symbolic forms of written language can conventionally refer to non-visible conditions. Indeed, the symbolic potential of the

⁶ While I agree with the overall emphasis of McGann's point here, his comparison between Blake's designs and any contemporary newspaper's economic use of space is somewhat misleading and wrongfully ignores the historical and contextual disparity between two very different composite forms.

visual image is a primary reason that it has been increasingly portrayed as a linguistic medium in the past century.

This brief examination of the history of criticism surrounding the relationship between graphic art and text has revealed the limitations of assigning inherent and exclusive characteristics to either and has thus supported the notion that each art has the capability to emulate the functions traditionally and exclusively attributed to the other. Indeed, historical factors, perspectives and contexts play a large role in the theoretical discontinuity surrounding the issue of the relationship between visual art and the written word. Interestingly, the late eighteenth century is a period that experiences a great deal of discontinuity and uncertainty and, as a result, William Blake creates his composite pages in an atmosphere of contradictory and competitive aesthetic theories: on one side, a renewed interest in the artistic relations suggested by ut pictura poesis and, on the other, Lessing's politicised call for segregation that seems to reject the visual in its embrace of language. In Blake's time, then, the form and function of one's artistic expression carry both political and aesthetic implications. Curiously, until Blake, the warlike conflict that Lessing defines between graphic art and poetic text had been primarily the product of critical debate, the battles taking place in contemplative written meditations and treatises rather than on composite creative pages themselves. Aside from the antagonism noted in later examples of medieval illuminated manuscripts, printing conventions and isolated traditions had largely maintained a peaceful segregation between the two arts. As well, creative experiments that endeavoured to demonstrate parallels between the arts usually did so using either graphic images that attempted to function narratively and symbolically or text that attempted descriptive portraiture. Blake's composite work offers both a uniquely performative challenge to and justification of many of Lessing's speculative

metaphors, hosting the Sister Arts debate on a page without predetermined borders or hierarchies.

Despite Blake's experimentation and Lessing's distinctions and preferences, a conception of the image in symbolic terms, perhaps encouraged by the marked increase in comparative discussions of the Sister Arts in the eighteenth century and reinforced by the structuralist critical movement in the mid-twentieth century, has led to our contemporary critical re-equation between painting and poetry in the arena of linguistics. That is, painting is has recently been largely perceived semiotically, as a 'readable' text, and critically, at least, the two sisters are closer than ever. While this trend would appear to effectively answer the above concerns regarding the critical tradition of distinguishing between and segregating the capabilities of the arts, the equation of the sister arts under the banner of language inherently privileges the word over the visual image and also limits each in that it excludes distinction as much as other theories exclude intersection.

This idea of the linguistic similarity between text and art, of a "visual language" is strongly supported in the pages of E. H. Gombrich's Art and Illusion. This influential book equates artistic style with linguistic vocabulary and echoes many modern critical voices in suggesting that an artistic period or style, "like a culture or climate of opinion, sets up a horizon of expectations, a mental set, which registers deviations and modifications with exaggerated sensitivity" (60). In other words, the history of artistic representation is the history of imitative and imaginative stylistic evolution and revolutions, a dynamic relationship between normative expectations and individual expressions. In an important counter to the Platonic conception of the visual image noted above, then, Gombrich suggests that the period and the artist transform the representation beyond mere imitation (64). It follows, then, that if painted vision does not remain

neutral and definition becomes elastic, then symbols, not natural signs, are present on the painted surface (87, 100). Just as language is a common medium individually and creatively used to articulate the world of our experience, “all art is conceptual”, and the periodic conventions, or common “visual language” of stylistic visual expectation is utilised by the artist’s subjected and subjective vision (87, 90).

While the metaphoric equation of visual art and language is helpful in that it highlights the intersections between different forms of mediated representation, one must keep in mind that all metaphors are essentially false at some level. Visual art is not language, although it has the potential to behave as such. Art is similar to, yet remains distinct from language. To assume equation is to go beyond the understanding offered by the metaphoric overlap and to forget distinction, distort relation and oppress potential. Indeed, Gombrich’s universalised “language” metaphor becomes most inadequate when one encounters Blake’s composite page, for not only does the proximity of both media visually invalidate such equation, but Blake’s graphic art and text both challenge linguistic expectations.

Although Gombrich’s metaphoric use of “language” to describe the changing normative symbolism that becomes available to artists of a particular period is useful, then, it becomes misleading when trying to understand the potential for artistic resistance to stylistic expectations. Although academic teaching books of formulae and proportions can be compared to vocabularies and dictionaries (167), the resistance of the artists to academies and the struggle against schema so evident throughout the eighteenth century remains more than a mere revision or expansion of this artistic “language” (174). Before becoming too romantic in my historical overview of revolutionary artists striving to break with tradition, it must be noted that the term “revolution” (and, indeed, the historical

practice of social revolution) inherently suggests a modified return to that which was left behind. Indeed, in his subtle condemnation of the ability of impressionist and abstract styles of modern art to evade interpretative effort, Gombrich betrays his alliance with the revolutionary tendency to return to the conditions that prompted the turn. While many artistic attempts to protest against the schematic “language” of art have merely resulted in an amendment to that language, certain efforts at breaking with tradition, including Blake’s, have variously succeeded in dislodging the image from the limits of expectation while resisting interpretative standardisation. This is not to say that works of art which attempt to shatter codified standards of communication, such as abstract and impressionist works, are completely unrestricted or are not assimilated by common stylistic expectation or symbolism. As Gombrich suggests using a troublesome linguistic metaphor, the artist needs the initial restrictions of a vocabulary, for where everything is possible and nothing unexpected, communication must break down (376). Indeed, in the example of Blake, it has been pointed out by numerous critics that Blake has not only drawn from the artistic vocabularies of his day, but that his work has also exceeded those limits and influenced twentieth century standards of composite design.

Despite this inevitable participation in the collective artistic tradition, the ever-present potential for artistic innovation and ambiguity must also be recognised, for the inherently imaginative use of the conventional symbols of language and image prevents a generalised articulation or full interpretation of a particular creative expression (389). While interpretative ambiguity remains consistent with Gombrich’s perception of art as a language, the evasive excesses that prevent the particular example of William Blake’s “difficult” composite designs from being successfully and collectively mapped, assimilated or understood, either in the eighteenth century or today, suggests that

particular uses of the image have the potential not only to participate in the imaginative ambiguities of language, but also to challenge a linguistic system with something other than itself. The former potential is revolutionary, while the latter is apocalyptic. Blake's composites embody both.

Laura Rice-Sayre and Henry Sayre continue to problematically promote the Sister Arts as sign systems unified by a semiotic affinity and base this assertion on the flawed foundation that their semiotic affinity is supported by the prevalent tendency to metaphorically describe one art using the vocabulary of the other (88-89). This line of reasoning ignores many attempts by contemporary artists to escape the signifying potential of both image and text, and neglects to mention the barriers to the theoretical understanding of the arts that such metaphorical substitution has produced. However, in an interesting theoretical move that avoids the pitfalls of complete equation and supports the above notion that art has the potential to challenge a linguistic system with something other than itself, these critics claim that painting and poetry are two distinct, yet parallel systems of signification which display simultaneous autonomy from and affinity with each other. Taking a step beyond Gombrich and accounting for the unique interart dynamic of the composite page, Rice-Sayre and Sayre further suggest that this autonomy and affinity is strongly illustrated in cases where the two arts appear together (89). That is, each art influences our perception of the other in such cases, for not only can our experience of a visual image be pushed or pulled emphatically by accompanying textual signifiers, but our understanding of a poem can also be changed depending on the graphic art that we attach to it. Each can potentially give the other a different context (90). Although remaining in the province of semiotic affinity, Rice-Sayre and Sayre recognise that critical bias plays a large role in the interpretative favouring of one art over another in

composite works. They stress that the poetic text has traditionally been the favoured centre of meaning because readers not only have become used to gratuitous illustration (91), but they have also conventionally thought of images and texts as differently embodying the same system of signification. While this is a first step to undermining a traditional linguistic bias, I remain unconvinced that Rice-Sayre and Sayre's alternative that image and text similarly embody different systems of signification is all that distinct. Certainly, their theory allows for the potential of each art to recreate the other, to transform the other rather than merely representing or describing the other (93). Also, they do open up the possibility that art and text are capable of being both co-operative and individually authoritative (96). Despite these promising assertions and despite repeated claims of the difference between the signifying systems of the image and the text, art and text here remain equated under the umbrella of semiology. Roland Barthes, in Elements of Semiology, notes that "It is true that objects, images and patterns of behaviour can signify and do so on a large scale, but never autonomously; every semiological system has its linguistic admixture" (Barthes 10). While Rice-Sayre and Sayre might oppose this inevitable link between semiological systems and language, the unique, non-linguistic system of signs that they attribute to painting is never explicitly defined or distinctly separated from a linguistic model. Thus, while the autonomy and affinity of the two arts are necessarily asserted here, the overall linking of art with semiological systems merely repeats the problematic and structurally limiting metaphor of art-as-language offered by Gombrich's analysis.

While Gombrich's art-as-language metaphor limits human communication to the encoding and decoding of symbols in a problematic system of normative expectation and individual perception, Marshall McLuhan's suggestion that the medium is the message

proposes that there is more to communication than symbolic content.⁷ The form of the content and differences between such forms are equally important. Prior to his better-known and often controversially optimistic examinations of various forms of media in the twentieth century, his books The Gutenberg Galaxy and The Medium is the Massage offer a persuasive regional history of the technological evolution of the word through speech, writing, print and type, and explore the social and cultural effects of such change. While this well-supported argument continually teeters on the verge of reductive historical idealism, it importantly shifts the interpretative consideration of media from content and meaning to form and function, which will become crucial in later chapters devoted to Blake's composite art. Not only does McLuhan distinguish functional differences between different forms of the same medium, he also asserts that "every medium of communication is a unique art form which gives salience to one set of human possibilities at the expense of another set" (Stearn 30). While this standpoint risks fortifying the segregation between the arts in the spirit of Lessing, it also provides an important contemporary counter to essentialist theories that seek to place the uses and capabilities of graphic art under the rule of language.

While McLuhan does focus on the history of the changing technology used to produce and distribute both language and artistic form, his comparative observations on the differences between the pictorial image and the written text are few and far between. However, his focus on language remains crucial not only because McLuhan perceives

⁷ When McLuhan asserts that "the medium is the message", he is suggesting that "the 'message' of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs" (Understanding 24) rather than the content of a particular example. While his explorations tend to examine the more general functions of media as a result of their formal particulars and tend to overlook the potential for differences in individual works, McLuhan crucially re-introduces the importance of form and function to this discussion of the Sister Arts.

written language as largely a visual medium, thus implicitly linking it with the image and reversing the usual bias in the history of the comparison, but also because his focus on function provides yet another critique of the use of linguistic metaphors to understand the image. His explorations of the social changes prompted by written and printed language leads him to suggest (and this is a crucial suggestion in the context of this study of Blake's integrated designs), that "the phonetic alphabet forced the magic world of the ear to yield to the neutral world of the eye" (Massage 41). As opposed to all-inclusive and inefficient pictographic and hieroglyphic writing that gives pictorial expression to oral meanings, alphabetic language, "a construct of fragmented bits and parts which have no semantic meaning in themselves, and which must be strung together in a line, bead-like, and in a prescribed order", extends and amplifies human capability. However, this technology also fosters and encourages "the habit of perceiving all environment in visual and spatial terms" (Massage 44), divides human faculties (Understanding 83) and separates signs and sounds from semantic and dramatic meanings (90). For McLuhan, then, alphabetic perception involves the reduction of a dramatic, verbal, "complex, organic interplay of spaces" that requires the use of multiple senses into a single, unified, continuous and pictorial space that is restricted "to a merely visual code" (Gutenberg 59). This reduction and containment of the inclusive, boundless and mythic audile-tactile space of the spoken word into the linear logic and visual stress of the written word promoted a new world-view of uniformity, connectivity and continuity (Massage 44). The rationality and visual tendency of the written alphabetic line of text, then, became "the organising principle of life" (45). As will be demonstrated in later chapters, Blake's composite art resists the inherently reductive and divisive mediating function that McLuhan attributes to the printed word, while also demonstrating that the "neutral world

of the eye” can be as dynamic and diverse as the “complex organic interplay” of the pre-technology world that McLuhan celebrates. As well, McLuhan’s historical survey, however reductive, reveals that Blake’s multi-media creations are not aberrations in the development of artistic perception, but are technologically and aesthetically inventive reactions to existing conditions that paralleled many other attempts to resist conceptual and expressive restriction.

As the alphabet influenced the thought processes and practices of its users, the regulating processes of the printed word confirmed and extended the new visual stress, homogenising but also privatising and isolating the users of language.⁸ Print technology encouraged the “exactly repeatable pictorial statement, a logical grammar... and the concepts of relativity and continuity” (Gutenberg 155). To illustrate the extent of the impact of this technology, McLuhan usefully reminds us that the ancient Greek definition of poetry differs markedly from our own. Their poetic expression was a collective and didactic vehicle for spiritual, ethical and social living, a rhythmically and metrically organised oral transmission that inspired memory, recall and a mythic awareness of a complex group of causes and effects (Massage 113-4). Plato’s writing discourages this, however, condemning oral poetic tradition as encouraging conformity, discouraging argument, and providing a barrier to abstract, speculative reasoning (114). Although prose retained many oral characteristics for centuries after the advent of printing

⁸ Indeed, McLuhan suggests that few people have had the power to recognise and resist these media effects. To him, “the man in a literate and homogenised society ceases to be sensitive to the diverse and discontinuous life of forms” through a “subliminal and docile acceptance of media impact” (Understanding 33-4). Interestingly (especially in relation to the study of Blake), he identifies the figure of the artist as the one most likely to “discover how to enable one medium to use or release the power of another” (62) and to “sidestep the bully-blow of new technology of any age, and to parry such violence with” an “integral awareness” (71). McLuhan also hypothesises that “the hybridizing or compounding” of media agents “offers an especially

(Gutenberg 166), McLuhan claims that, directly following from Gutenberg's invention of moveable type and the printed word in the fifteenth century, Platonic ideas gradually succeeded in displacing mythic perception (Message 114). "Like easel painting, the printed book added much to the new cult of individualism. The private, detribalised, fixed point of view became possible and literacy conferred the power of detachment [and] non-involvement" (50). Further, "typography tended to alter language from a means of perception and exploration to a portable commodity" (Gutenberg 195).

Artistic perspective, a Renaissance innovation that stressed the visual, static and isolated point of view and conceptualised space as a container of objects while also distorting and disintegrating the more dynamic experience of the image encouraged by earlier pictorial conventions, paralleled the alterations in the functioning of language that McLuhan attributes to the printing press (138, 156). In contrast, earlier, pre-perspective artistic forms and conventions reflected a more integrated and non-perspectival sensory conception of a world where time and space remained all-inclusive, horizonless and boundless (57). Indeed, McLuhan characterises early Greek art as a "mosaic of items" which coexist and interplay in a flat field (81). In this non-perspectival mosaic form of art and in the verbal, non-pictorial space of the spoken word, each thing resonates or modulates its own space in two dimensions, but this "two-dimensional mosaic is, in fact, a multi-dimensional world of interstructural resonance" and "dynamic simultaneity" (25, 56-57, 156). In contrast, "the three-dimensional world of pictorial space... is, indeed, an abstract illusion built on the intense separation of the visual from other senses" (56-7).

This three-dimensional reductive isolationism, encouraged by developments in the forms,

favourable opportunity to notice their structural components and properties", to, in effect, expose their formal functions (57).

techniques and subjects of fifteenth-century art and writing, is echoed by, reinforced by and extended to other disciplines through the next centuries. Indeed, as McLuhan suggests, “technological forms can shape the sciences as much as the arts” (98). The causal, connective, ordered and determinate science of Newton, Bacon’s systematic classifications and catalogues of the natural world, and the analytical philosophies of Locke are symptomatic of the functional and far-reaching influence of the perceptual changes inspired by developments in representative form.

Interestingly, McLuhan notes that this perceptual change was tempered by a growing artistic resistance, in which Blake was an important participant, that struggled to “retain and regain the integral, the interplay of sense in a world that was seeking madness by the simple road of isolation of the senses” (220). According to McLuhan’s model, the seeds of this revolt are inherently present in the combined effects of alphabetic culture and print technology, for private, heterogeneous individualism and mass, homogeneous centralism are both paradoxically encouraged (263). In the atmosphere of the eighteenth century in which humanity had “refined and homogenised and visualised itself to the point of self-alienation”, this resistance emerged not only in the form of political revolution, but also by the artistic and literary search for a new form of “natural man” (254). McLuhan effectively demonstrates that Pope, Cervantes and Rabelais each viewed print as a delirium, as a transforming and metamorphosing drug (304). Importantly, Blake’s creative output also reflects a strong concern with the limitations brought about by an unwary acceptance of changing patterns of human perception and McLuhan notes that he “spent his life describing and fighting” against this closed system of perception (314, 315).

McLuhan mourns the perceived reductive effects that print culture has had on social and cultural perception and suggests that the “single-plane lineal, visual and sequential codification of experience is quite conventional and limited” (69). Further, he suggests that typographic alphabetic convention and the perspectival pictorial image have functionally reinforced each other’s representative uniformity, order, linearity, sequence and homogeneity. This formal visual perspectivism, brought about by media conditions, subtly influences perceptual expectations and can be linked with cultural trends and social conditions. McLuhan perceives that one such trend has been a general tendency toward the practice of reductive classification and hierarchy, for “any phonetic alphabet culture can easily slip into the habit of putting one thing under or in another” (91). If McLuhan is right, then the functional effects of media forms have played a self-perpetuating role in both the hierarchy and homogenisation associated with the arts since the Middle Ages.

Although he focuses on language and suggests that its written form has been the primary cause of structural shifts in other disciplines and pursuits, McLuhan, drawing on Blakean terms, importantly notes and resists the harmful and hypnotising effects of a limited and limiting “single vision”, of the isolation, homogenisation and standardisation that print encourages. Indeed, while McLuhan’s description of the consequences that result from technological developments in expressive media initially appears to emphasise the inevitability of such influence, his later recognition of a number of creative efforts to resist such imposition tempers his fatalism with the potential agency of the individual artist. For example, he favours James Joyce’s prose efforts as the most successful attempt to resist against the tyranny of print, suggesting that Joyce’s “broken or syncopated manipulation” of printed text permits “inclusive or simultaneous perception of a total and diversified field” (316). Joyce’s text thus signifies a perceptive and

liberating turn away from typographic principles through a “parataxis of components representing insight by carefully established ratios, but without a point of view or lineal connection or sequential order” (316). Through the example of Joyce, then, McLuhan indicates that it is possible to individually utilise the medium and the technology against its own inherent properties, forms, functions and effects, opening up quite a crucial avenue of argument that can be just as effectively considered in Blake criticism as well. However, following McLuhan’s own model, it must be emphasised that Joyce’s particular resistant turn would have been difficult to successfully produce or consume without the influence and example of emerging media (photography, cinema) that were already shifting the boundaries of expressive form and function and extending perceptive resources. Similarly, Blake’s work contains, yet crucially transforms many contemporary influences and traditional predecessors. Yet his innovative technologies and unique composite designs also signify his role as a pioneer who initiated and promoted changes that were not as readily received as Joyce’s.

Many of McLuhan’s ideas, then, present a further challenge to some of the reductive categorisations that I have already been resisting in this discussion of the relationship between graphic art and text. Although he stresses the shift from verbal to visual characteristics in language as alphabetic and print technology moved the word from the lips to the page, it is important to note that a printed, poetic use of language remains a complex interplay of verbal structures and visual properties. Similarly, although Renaissance convention and photographic technology have contributed to and reinforced a general perception of the artistic image as a single static moment in time, the image does have the potential to condense or re-order time (Understanding 169). After McLuhan’s examination, then, both graphic art and poetic text appear to inherently

possess more depth and potential than the prior equational or segregational theories of the sister arts. While both are primarily visual, each has the unique potential to resist imposed limitations on itself and to challenge and exceed the limitations of the other. The recognition of the capability of these media to participate in such resistant excess will prove to be crucial to the current understanding of Blake's composite art.

As McLuhan confirms, such potential can be realised or at least exposed in the hybrid "meeting of two media", which

is a moment of truth and revelation from which new form is born. For the parallel between two media holds us on the frontiers between forms that snap us out of the Narcissus narcosis. The moment of the meeting of media is a moment of freedom and release from the ordinary trance and numbness imposed by them on our senses. (63)

It is important to keep in mind, then, that for McLuhan, the function of a creative work depends both on its form and on its particular use rather than on its content. That media forms and technologies have the power to influence, follow, create, and resist cultural and social perception and practice will be useful when considering the broader social context that impacts upon and is impacted by Blake's particular use of media.

One potential difficulty in incorporating McLuhan's ideas here, though, is that although the perception that mediated expression has the power to function as an influence on large-scale social and cultural levels and has noticeably encouraged current trends toward studying artists within their formal and historical context, McLuhan refuses to address the possibility that media forms and uses might also have an influence on and be influenced by the meaning potential or content of a work.⁹ That is, McLuhan's

⁹ Throughout most of his writing, McLuhan adamantly excludes the content of a work from playing a role in its effective functions. He clearly states this in Understanding Media, indicating that "the effect of a media form is not related to its content" and that "the effects of technology do

exclusive focus on the medium being the sole message, while effective in shifting critical perspective away from its traditional focus on the content of a work, merely encourages the critic to occupy the other side of a polarity. To avoid critically emulating the restrictive and isolational function of print media, then, it would be better to consider how the form and the content of a work interrelate and interplay. That is, how do the two affect each other? Further, how do both reflect and influence the social, political and historical contexts within which the work is produced? It is the purpose of the present study to concurrently consider the form, content and context of Blake's composite pages in an attempt to attain a more comprehensive understanding of their dynamic and interactive complexity.

While McLuhan centres his argument on words and language, W.J. T. Mitchell, in Picture Theory, alternately approaches the relationship between the arts with a focus on pictures and images. Indeed, Mitchell questions the entire foundation of McLuhan's argument by rejecting "the medium is the message" as an effort to "make the obvious, practical differences between [painting and poetry] into metaphysical oppositions which seem to control our communicative acts" (Picture 161). Thus, Mitchell reacts against a perceived suggestion by McLuhan that differences between media result in differences in meaning (160). While the above examination of McLuhan suggests that Mitchell's interpretation is not, in fact, what McLuhan is suggesting, Mitchell's overall intention is to turn the critical consideration of the sister arts away from a historical, comparative and differential approach, towards a more theoretical and inclusive examination that considers many types of relations between the arts (84-89). Mitchell asks us to recognise the

not occur at the level of opinions or concepts, but alter sense ratios or patterns of perception steadily" (32-33).

presence and possibility of coexistent similarity, resemblance, analogy, difference, antagonism, division and collaboration when looking at the sister arts and thus, like Rice-Sayre and Sayre, promotes interart relations as a dynamic and complex interaction that is simultaneously harmonic and discordant. Further echoing the Rice-Sayre and Sayre position, Mitchell still assumes that pictures have their own “semiotic order” and, although he is careful not to exclusively rely on the theoretical foundations of semiology, his main premises continue to depend heavily on this perceived point of intersection between the sister arts (66).

At times, Mitchell is so adamant in his attempts to overturn McLuhan’s focus on the necessity of including a consideration of different forms and functions in our conception of the sister arts’ relation that he virtually ignores any distinction between language and the image. With a heavy reliance on general semiotics and an appeal to communication theory, Mitchell asserts that “from the standpoint of referring, expressing intentions and producing effects in a viewer/listener, there is no essential difference between texts and images” (160). In an effort to support what he perceives to be the natural and inherently ekphrastic principles of each art, he continues that “language can stand in for depiction and depiction can stand in for language because communicative, expressive acts, narration, argument, disruption, exposition and other so-called ‘speech-acts’ are not media-specific, are not ‘proper’ to some media or another” (160). While Mitchell does briefly acknowledge that there are “important differences between visual and verbal media at the levels of sign types, forms, materials of representation and institutional traditions” he maintains that there is no essential difference between texts and images “in the pragmatics of communication, symbolic behaviour, expression [and] signification” (161). Interestingly both McLuhan and Mitchell refuse to consider the

possibility that functional differences in the employment of various media, which one critic embraces and the other passes quickly over, have the potential to effect the semantic or communicative capacity of an expression. As will be demonstrated in upcoming chapters, Blake's composite page is an arena in which the communicative potential and formal function of expressive representations are crucially interdependent.

Awkwardly, Mitchell's above homogenisation of the sister arts in an effort to realise the full implications of the relational metaphor openly contradicts an alliance with Foucault that he makes in his second chapter. In this chapter, Mitchell calls attention to self-referential "metapictures", such as René Magritte's *Les deux mystères*, as specific examples that question the already-crumbling dominance of language over the image, "reveal the inextricable weaving together of representation and discourse", and "undermine the assumptions that underwrite the separation of the verbal and visual disciplines" by illustrating the general qualities of multistability and shifting hybridity that he attributes to all arts (68, 83).¹⁰ In his attempt to theoretically encourage this impurity of the arts, Mitchell aligns himself with Foucault's suggestion that "the relationship of language to painting is an infinite relation" and suggests that such a relationship "holds open the gap between language and image" and "allows the representation to be seen as a dialectical field of forces, rather than a determinate 'message' or referential sign" (64-5). Thus, whereas McLuhan calls exclusive attention

¹⁰ While both Mitchell and McLuhan appear to agree that current cultural and critical emphasis is shifting away from language toward a preference for the image, and that this shift is positively disrupting the limitations practised by print-based cultures, both arrive at this conclusion via different paths. Mitchell implicates that McLuhan's own approach participates in the segregational and divisive ordering that he condemns print technology for enforcing, while Mitchell himself appears to fall into the reductive and limited trap of visual and semiotic homogenisation that McLuhan also lists as a negative effect of the visual standardisation of language. It is as if both critics are aware of the failing strength of their mediating captor, but

to the differentiation between representative forms in an effort to break away from a focus on content and meaning, Mitchell hopes to break McLuhan's pictorial and textual frames in an effort to overcome determinacy, exclusion, differentiation, isolation and the repetitive revolution of either/or in contemporary theories of representation. In doing so, though, Mitchell tries to contradictorily assert both his agreement with Foucault that neither words nor images "can be reduced to the other's terms" and his own claim that there is no essential difference between the two (64, 161). Both of these opinions are concurrently held in an uneasy alliance by Mitchell's attempt to stress the unstable, hybrid and interactive nature of all media.

As mentioned, however, Mitchell's reliance on semiotics and on his claim that the introduction of semiotics into art history has been a liberating event (210) produces many of the same complications that Rice-Sayre and Sayre face, inevitably leading him to privilege language while vehemently denying its exclusive power. Although establishing the image as a complex intersection of "the seeable, the sayable and the palpable" (244) and elevating the image above the object by calling attention to its representative and presentational intricacies, Mitchell also asks us to recognise that "writing makes language... a 'sister art' to the spoken word, an art of both language and vision" (113). In an attempt to illustrate his claim of the hybridisation of the arts, then, Mitchell rejects McLuhan completely and offers the space of writing as the place where a true interaction of image and word "seems to be a literal possibility" (113). Mitchell utilises the term "visible language", suggesting that we take both portions of this term literally and consider "seeing and speaking, painting and printing" as converging "in the medium

both remain somewhat rooted in traditions and can only cope by asserting language against language.

called ‘writing’” (113). He further suggests that writing works against the dominance of the word over the picture by displacing “the image—the picture, likeness or simulacrum—and the iconology that aspires to be its science” (114, author’s emphasis) and replacing it with an evasive absence and artifice that enables us to say what we see, see what we say, and combine sight, sound, picture and speech (114). Despite this apparently diplomatic attempt to reconfigure the written unification of visual and verbal forms of representation into an ambassador for the inherent hybridity of all media, Mitchell’s written term itself betrays a lingering and fundamental imbalance. “Visible language”, although defined as a term that apparently equalises the image and the word, inherently asserts “language” as the primary noun and applies “visible” as an adjective that modifies, but cannot become equal with that which it assists. Imagistic visibility becomes a quality of language rather than an equally powerful co-operational contrast.¹¹ While Mitchell strives to find a composite art form that illustrates both the “pictorial turn” and the idealistic balance that he theoretically promotes, many of his examples continually return language to a dominant position.

Picture Theory remains one of very few recent books devoted to the continuing ambiguity surrounding the relation between the language and the image. For this reason, and also because it ambitiously examines many different possibilities of composite or collaborative relations between the arts, Picture Theory is necessarily an important theoretical cornerstone for any attempt at understanding the complexities of the sister arts.

¹¹ The subordination of the visible to language inherent in the term “Visible language” actually implies a participation in his own characterisation of a Hegelian dialectic. Mitchell condemns this type of dialectic as a dependence between master and slave (225) that preserves and sustains hierarchy (despite synthetic progression). While Mitchell attempts to alternately align himself with what he calls a “Blakean dialectic” which he sees as working through equal contradictions interminably (418), his term, “visible language”, unwittingly returns him to a Hegelian model.

However, it remains an unstable foundation if taken on its own. Internally, the book is a loosely connected and useful probe of various media collaborations including discussions of metapictures, ekphrasis, abstract painting, photographs, movies and television.

Nevertheless, the ambitious scope of the book as well as the distance and differences between many of the chapter-bound topics constructs an overall argument that is porous and partial. Although Mitchell appears to realise this, stating in his apologetic Introduction that the book is “a progress report on an incomplete project” (7), some inconsistencies and nagging contradictions prevent the reader from discovering exactly what this project is. While relying heavily on semiotics to describe and define many fundamental aspects of language and the image, Mitchell simultaneously seems reluctant to agree with his own foundational assumptions, admitting that no neutral or scientific vocabulary, including semiotics, “can transcend or master the field of representation” (417). He also rejects the sequential and canonical historicism of comparative studies of the sister arts, but self-consciously and, it seems, inevitably, falls into this very trap of historical idealism while exploring the transition between modernist and post-modern views of language and the image, and while supporting a cultural studies approach to media collaborations which calls for an exploration of representation in the “concrete conditions of our moment” and culture (423).

While these contradictions can easily be explained as signs which point to the complexities of the sister arts relation and to the dynamic nature of media that Mitchell continually asserts, they make it finally impossible to construct a clear picture of Mitchell’s theory. In his efforts to avoid the formal distinctions between media that McLuhan’s focus on form and function asserts, Mitchell ends up blurring the boundaries between media and subtly supports a semiotic homogenisation of representation that

McLuhan would condemn. Picture Theory finally shifts away from an ahistorical focus on media and from the central claim that “there is no essential difference between texts and images” from a semantic point of view, to raising questions of professional and cultural responsibility in dealing with historical and contemporary media forms. Mitchell concludes with the affirmation that culture and representation are so closely linked that it becomes difficult to distinguish between the two. Oddly and ironically, then, this conclusion returns us to McLuhan’s “the medium is the message”.

Our picture of the nature and effects of words and images is quickly becoming a complex mosaic of interrelated positions. Gombrich identifies some useful ways of perceiving the various vehicles for meaning in various media, while McLuhan calls attention to the larger context, to the form and function of such media. As Mitchell has hinted, however, the potential for the composite use of media in a design and the possibility that discourse and representation are inherently sutured in many individual media makes it necessary to consider the functions and effects of each medium on other media in addition to the formal properties, symbolic content and social context of each. Oleg Grabar, while maintaining a connection with Gombrich, Mitchell, and Rice-Sayre and Sayre in that he perceives all arts as belonging “in some fashion to a general theory of communication” (Grabar 562), stops short of semiotically or linguistically equating their capabilities. Grabar notes that “each medium possesses its own range of possible effectiveness in transmitting what was meant to be ‘intelligible’” (561) and illustrates the problems that the image faces in trying to communicate or function with the same semantic potential as literary expression. Grabar questionably claims that “a narrative in visual form is effective as narrative only when its textual source is present” or apparent and that “narrative images do not serve to tell a story, but to remind the viewer of a story”

(564). This generalisation fails to recognise the narrative power of the filmed image, the innovations in visual narrative exemplified by contemporary graphic novels, and, most importantly, Blakean images that explicitly contradict textual statements, but remain spatially aligned with such statements on the composite page. Perched on generalisations that only account for a narrow application and perception of graphic images, Grabar concludes that “opportunities for effectiveness in communication are far greater in literature than in the visual arts”. However, recalling Rice-Sayre and Sayre, he goes on to suggest that perhaps the communicative function of visual art is toward an “entirely different kind of intelligible message”. An additional observation that adds weight to this possibility is that “the abstract possibilities of language lead in literature to concretely definable subjects and images while the concrete elements perceived visually lead to the definition of the arts in abstract, ‘modal’ terms” (565).

Grabar vaguely asserts that the “visual arts form a world apart, difference in essence from the world of literature”, noting that “parallel responses to a work of art are never in the same medium”. That is, the critic who writes of the visual image “removes himself from the means of expression of the subject of his investigation” but “has no choice but to do so if he wants to communicate” or even “think”(566). In an effort to define this unique “essence”, Grabar suggests that the “visual world, because it is generally interpreted in another medium than itself, possesses intrinsically a semantic field which is almost as large as the intellect of its observer” and that, overall, “a greater freedom of interpretation exists for the visual observer than for the literary reader” (567). Overall, then, while Grabar stops short of specifically delineating the “essence” of visual expression (a slippery slope, indeed), his suspicion of the equation of art and language leads him to usefully speculate that “the true function of the visual arts is to express

something which is impossible... to express verbally” (566, my emphasis). Although restrictively associating the graphic image with a single, “true” function at the same time as it extends the possibilities of the image beyond the boundaries of narrative and linguistic communication, Grabar still manages to argue for pictorial intelligibility and the overall inadequacy of textual expression to completely translate any visual image. When considered in relation to the evasive nature of Blakean composite pages and the volumes of critical commentary that are collectively unable to exhaust their interpretative difficulty and expressive potential, this definition of the image as something that can be intelligible yet still evade verbal interpretation appears quite appropriate.

Jean Laude’s refutation both of the Sister Arts paradigm and of contemporary linguistic equations of the arts is much more bold than Grabar’s vague assertions and problematic use of communication theory as a critical standard. In a manner that recalls Lessing’s Laocoön, Laude asserts that “absolutely everything distinguishes a literary text from a painting or a drawing: its conception, its method of production, its modes of appreciation, its identity as an object irreducible to any other object, and its autonomous functioning” (471). However, in a diplomatic move that avoids Lessing’s segregational extremism, Laude admits that while the specificity of text and painting prevents our equating them, the fact that “they can’t be dissociated from temporal existence “to which they are linked and within which they are juxtaposed”, prevents us from completely separating the two (471).

Laude then goes on to crucially attack the critical use of linguistic principles in the understanding of the visual arts by advancing a potential difference in the perception of image and text. Poetry and painting differ because of their material agents and because of the thought that transforms them into works (480). We exert an effort when reading a

text, but our efforts are never exhaustive. Conversely, while images appear to assert themselves to the immediacy of perception and allow us to merely register them without understanding them, we can avoid being directed by images by variously deciphering, appraising, refusing, subverting or demystifying them. However, this “reading” of the image is not the same as reading a text (477). To use the same terminology or technique, “to approach and to consider a drawing or a painting with instruments that are meant to be used in the study of a poem is tantamount to accepting the postulate that the drawing and the painting are merely means to fashion that which can be easily fashioned by a poem” (478). Laude suggests that, as of yet, “no critical examination of works of art have identified the specificity that is required by critical tools”, and reminds us that these critical tools must be “capable of specifying levels of comparison registered in the functioning of works” (478-79).

Laude further identifies a functional difference between the reading of a book and the visual scanning of a painting, claiming that the linear, progressive model of the experience of reading a book differs from the ocular pauses, accentuations and changes in direction that characterise the perception of a painting (480).¹² Crucially, Laude indicates that such stops prevent “us from attempting any linguistic recovery or from succumbing to the expressionist temptation”, and uses this difference to argue against the application of semantic critical strategies to painting (481). Suggesting that painting functions on a level of “figurative thought”, different from the literary or the mathematical, Laude maintains that “painting and poetry refer to distinct domains” and “require specific critical tools that have been adapted for them” (479, 480, 483).

¹² Laude does admit that this model for reading and writing a text is merely a general metaphor that can be and has been challenged by various authors (e.g. Joyce’s *Finnegan’s Wake*) (480).

Laude thus provides another example of critical resistance to a linguistic equation between the expressive functions of the arts. However, this results in terms and phrases, such as “distinct domains”, which recall Lessing’s segregational extremism. At the same time, Laude’s exclusive association between figurative thought and the visual image uncomfortably prohibits any correlation between literary expression and figurative functioning. While such an approach quickly becomes inadequate when examining Blake’s composite pages and although any generalisation of perceptual or receptive patterns is essentially erroneous, Laude’s observations raise the crucial question of what happens when one looks at a Blakean page. That is, if such marked differences exist between the simple perception of graphic images and text, what does the eye do when confronted by the interplay of media in the same space? If interpretative variation suggests perceptual variation, then the heterogeneous history of Blake’s critical reception indicates that Laude’s position is essentially limited in its restrictive portrayal of the expressive capabilities of graphic art and text. However, this critical history also justifies Laude’s attempt to identify potential differences between the two media and confirms his statement regarding the inadequacy of interpretative methodology.

Like Grabar and Laude, Susan Langer reacts against the perceptions that “it has lately become acceptable again to assert that all the arts are really just one Art” and “that the apparent difference between painting and poetry [...] are superficial” (75). Having asserted a perspective that contradicts those held by Gombrich, Mitchell and Rice-Sayre and Sayre, she shifts her critical concern to the functions of different media, and importantly but briefly examines the interactive functioning of art and text on the composite page. This type of exploration, although relatively rare, brings us still closer to some of the specific issues that surround the interplay of the arts on the Blakean page.

While suggesting that these arts can be conceived of as a unified creative effort called “Art”, she maintains that the material differences between the arts allow each to maintain its own unique creative potential (78). However, in an awkward move, she then rejects the possibility of artistic hybridity on the composite page by suggesting that “there are no happy marriages in art—only successful rape” (86). Her extreme position suggests that one art always dominates and assimilates the other on the composite page (85). While there is always a possibility in specific instances of composite design that one art may take precedent over the other, to universalise this competitive perception is to ignore not only the historical, material, expressive and representative similarities and differences between the arts as suggested throughout the present chapter, but also to assume and emulate a one-dimensional audience with the tendency toward exclusion in their search for meaning on the page. The composite design provides an arena in which the two media are forced to interact and, as Rice-Sayre and Sayre have more diplomatically suggested, a complex intersection of autonomy and affinity becomes readily apparent when the two arts are collaboratively presented. Although I will continue to resist the extremity of Langer’s universalisation of antagonism between media on the composite page, her use of “rape” as a metaphor to describe the capacity for violence between the two importantly reminds us of the political dimensions that consistently characterise and influence artistic interaction. Maintaining an awareness of both the political and aesthetic implications of Blake’s composite art will allow this study to achieve an understanding of the integration between the form, content and context of Blake’s work.

Although the latter half of the 20th century saw the rise of theorised semiotic affinities between art and text that challenged perceived autonomies of the individual sister arts, Grabar, Langer and Laude caution against this renewal of ut pictura poesis

optimism that essentialises a linguistic trait across the arts and fuels the contemporary search for meaning. The claim that the visual and textual arts are “competing” sign systems (Rice-Sayre 88) does nothing to obscure the reductive suggestion here that art is merely a language. I find, in contrast, that the words of John Passmore, while possessing a provocative intensity that is potentially alienating in its implicit resistance to potentially illuminating theoretical models, still communicate an important warning to those who wish to understand the autonomies and affinities of the media used in composite works. He states that “there is in several places a suggestion that the arts might be unified by way of Lévi-Straussian structures, or transformational linguistics, or communication theory [...]. So often literary and artistic theory go whoring after the latest intellectual fashions. And the effect is to obscure the peculiarities of art and literature, peculiarities on which it is vital to insist against the psychoanalyst, the Marxist, the structuralist, or what you will” (586-7, author’s emphasis). His assertion, despite its reactionary flavour, significantly identifies the importance of avoiding prescriptive approaches to interart comparison in favour of returning to a close examination of particulars and peculiarities. However, to view those peculiarities as completely exclusive is to adopt a position akin to Susan Langer’s, which, with its perception of the extreme antagonism of the arts on the composite page, seems just as limited.

Overall, then, this introductory survey of the perception of the relationship between the Sister Arts of painting and poetry provides a fertile topsoil of terms and opinions to nourish the forthcoming exploration of the relative function of graphic art and text on Blake’s composite page. Generally, there has been a movement from the classical equation of the Sister Arts that sees them as aligned more with the strengths of visual representation and imitation, through a distinction and a post-medieval development of

their differences, to a re-equation and theoretical limitation of their representative capabilities under the symbolic strengths of linguistic representation. As has been suggested, however, there are contemporary critics who explicitly resist the view of art as language. Passmore asserts that painting “is not a language in the sense in which English is a language, with vocabulary and a grammar” (578). He goes on to suggest that “there could, of course, be a dictionary of iconographic symbols...but form has neither a vocabulary nor a grammar” and that “the gross over-extension of the concepts of ‘language’ and ‘grammar’ is one of the principal sources of the intellectual confusion characteristic of our age” (578-9). Indeed, while the linguistic equation of the arts makes it easier for both literary critics and art critics to communicate in this interdisciplinary age, these critics “do not need a common vocabulary” (586, author’s emphasis). Using an initially flawed common metaphorical vocabulary to subsequently define metaphysical principles of interrelation is not an appropriate critical direction and reveals the opacity and misidentification that the careless application of terms can produce.

To illustrate further, it could be posited that all arts have become equal in the current world of computers and data exchange. Images, words and music have become packets of data that can be exchanged, copied, stored and moved with ease. The data languages that allow anyone to store and exchange various media are merely translations of these arts into a common format that reveals nothing about their fundamental similarities or differences. Similarly, although the current art-as-language critical conception does expand the possibility for expression in painting, it has become a way of reductively interpreting painting as just another text or structured collection of symbolic icons, and neglects its unique capabilities, including the ability to imitate the “real” and to present the abstract image. This survey, then, furthers the idea that the artistic image and

the poetic text are capable of a diverse range of representational activity. While each have traditionally been employed for certain types of representation, they are both capable of emulating the capabilities of the other. Historically, painting and poetry have been compared and contrasted in terms of their overall material, their expressive and representative abilities, their stylistic uses at a given point in time, and, less frequently, their interactive and functional potential.

Instead of initially aligning with a predetermined model that views poetry and painting as historical sisters, linguistic twins, warlike enemies or incompatible species, then using such a model to offer yet another interpretation of Blake's designs, the current study will use a close examination of the employment of the two media in Blake's composite work to reconsider the potential of each medium and the inherent complexity of their interplay on the same page. Initially, Blake's graphic additions to others' poetry will be used to demonstrate that a number of the current critical approaches to Blake's artistic expression, which align themselves with some of the theories explored above, are insufficient. These particular uses and capacities of the graphic image will then be usefully compared with instances in which Blake is able to create the entire composite page, exposing the functional variety of arts that have often been restrictively defined. In a sense, Blake's work and the findings regarding the functional potential of graphic art and text in general will "impose" on one another and facilitate an expansion of critical perception regarding each. While this initially appears to be a circular form of self-justification, recall that the purpose of this study is not to promote interpretative readings, but rather to discover why the Blakean page is particularly resistant to such restrictive attempts.

A close investigation of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell in chapter 5 will introduce the inclusive and flexible metaphor of “marriage”, which quite effectively describes the interplay of graphic art and text on Blake’s composite page and offers a potential resolution of the antagonistic theories that have been explored here. In using “marriage” to describe the various interrelationships between the arts on the composite page, I neither wish to normalise nor sexualise the arts and their coexistence, although the metaphor does imply a great deal of historical, religious, normative, traditional and ritualistic baggage that needs to be clarified and simplified in this case. What the application of this metaphor does achieve, however, is a view of the arts as all too human, in that each instance of artistic expression is as unique as the individuality of their makers, and as distantly related to, affiliated with, and as distinctly autonomous from each other as human beings are to other members of their species. This is not to say that the literal implications of this metaphoric relation should be excessively applied, that the arts should be allegorised, anthropomorphised, socialised or literalised as human or as completely dependent on their creators. However, the contextually-dependent characteristics of each art and the complexities of their relations can be understood as being born within and thus inherently reflective of a human social model.

To apply the metaphor loosely, then, in an attempt to avoid the exclusionary specificity of other efforts to understand the relativity of the arts, “marriage”, in Blakean terms, is the coming together of two individual elements, of “contraries” in a bond that allows them to connect, exchange and develop a close, interactive relation while

maintaining their own distinct identities.¹³ This metaphoric relation, as defined here, neither limits the relation to certain pairings nor specifies the conditions that bring about such a relation. However, the metaphor does include many aspects of the exclusive theories already considered. As will become clearer through the study of Blake's specific works, a Blakean "marriage" involves constant co-operation, but also constant negotiation. This relation, which permeates both the form and content of many of Blake's books does not exclude the potential for selfishness, power relations, rape or divorce, but it does allow for difference within similarity, for heterogeneity within a homogenous arena. The Blakean marriage of contraries is a relationship in which a unity of effect can still coexist with a sense of difference.

This relation is not inherent or necessary, just as it is not inherently necessary to combine text and art or to consider them together. Like the above survey of the possibilities and limitations of each art, we can explore each art as an individual medium. However, like a Venn diagram, each marriage of art and text allows the critic to examine the functioning of each relative to the other and to discern which elements are essential to or excluded from such a relation. This marriage also allows media to change together, to produce something greater than the sum of its parts, but, unlike a dialectic progression, it is not a consistent, perfect or necessarily lasting synthesis. Formed by individual artists who explore various levels of commitment and hold varying expectations, the marriage between graphic art and text can be harmonious, awkward and antagonistic to varying degrees, but it always remains dynamic and revealing. Blake's own composites reveal a wide spectrum of interart relation that is surprisingly rich in variation and diversity.

¹³ The Blakean notion of "marriage" and his exploration of "contraries" is something that will be specifically examined in more detail in the consideration of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell in

While I am defining marriage quite idealistically and generally here in an effort to illustrate its appropriateness in describing the complicated and often excessive space of composite art, each marriage of art and text can involve the idealised possibilities offered above, but may also include various differences that emerge from the historical situation and context within which the work is produced and consumed. Just as the general idea of literal marriage differs through the centuries and just as each instance of marriage is a variation of the historically pertinent ideal, so the figurative application of marriage to the relation between art and text on the composite page also depends on historical and individual factors. By examining the specific qualities of and experimentation with the artistic relation as practised by individual artists in their historical context, we can come to a better understanding of not only the inherent qualities of the arts themselves, but also the perspective, adaptation, resistance and acceptance that each artist brings to the included media. The purpose of this study is not to evaluate artists and their capabilities, but to examine specific relations to and uses of the forms, functions and content of the arts that mediate creative expression.

This brief survey of the perceived relation between words and images ends, then, with a metaphorical definition that excludes none of the perspectives that have been examined above, but eliminates the exclusivity of each approach. Although this conception of the composite relation will prove quite useful in the following examination of William Blake's efforts with the two arts, its effectiveness will also be tested. I am not entering into this specific study with an inflexible theoretical tool. My hope is that this metaphor, while definitive in the relation that it proposes, remains liberal and inclusive enough to accommodate wide variations in artistic form, function and combination, and

will facilitate an honest critical exploration of composite art without pre-determining either a structural relativity or inherently favouring one medium over another. This does not eliminate a consideration of potential imbalance in any example, but leaves such ratios up to the contextual properties and conditions of each instance. The following chapters will continue to examine encounters and comparisons between graphic art and text by looking closely at composite examples of William Blake's work. This focus, both on Blake, whose expressive capability evidences an insatiable thirst for experimentation and variety, and on pieces that variously combine words and images, will not only add to the current understanding of Blake and his work, but will also provide a more inclusive account of the relationship between poetry and painting and explore some of the effects of this interaction of form, content and context on the expressive potential of a composite work. That is, I am not searching for meaning in Blake's designs—there are enough alternative interpretations of his work already in existence to satisfy any critical hobbyhorse. Rather, this methodological exercise appeals to the composite nature of Blake's work to account for the instability and excess of meaning that has been produced by the critical response to his designs. I am thus interested in how the potential for meaning is affected and disrupted by the interactive functions of media forms on Blake's composite page and how such processes can be described.

Artistic Roots and Poetic Springs: Blake's Gray Designs

What has reasoning to do with the art of painting?

*-William Blake, from Annotations to
Sir Joshua Reynold's Discourses*

Having explored the various opinions which emerge from the consideration of the dynamic relationship between the Sister Arts, I now wish to examine a few very different contemporary critical approaches to William Blake's artistic additions to others' work not only to investigate the ways in which current criticism applies the limiting view of art-as-language to Blake, but also to suggest that even more liberal searches for "meaning" in Blake's work ignore some of the fundamental functions of his visual art on the composite page. This examination will initially indicate the exclusive limitations of specific critical approaches, but finally suggest that certain elements of each can be effectively combined to produce a more thorough consideration of the exchange between words and visual images in Blake's designs and the ways in which this exchange affects communicative potential.

Although chapters 2 and 3 will only consider Blake's visual additions to others' writing (an activity quite distinct from Blake's own composite art), focusing on this basic and familiar form of relation and interaction between words and visual images is a useful first step in defining some of the parameters and exploring the potential variety inherent in composite marriages. I will begin by commenting on Christopher Heppner's Reading Blake's Designs. Following this, an examination of the commentary of Irene Tayler and Frank Vaughan on Blake's addition of visual art to the poetry of Thomas Gray will narrow the focus of this inquiry to particular examples, and will allow the chapter to include a direct and detailed engagement with some of Blake's original designs. Indeed, the Gray drawings, although often passed over by critics, remain extremely fertile ground for speculation, for Blake's patron, John Flaxman, allowed Blake a great deal more freedom in the execution of these designs than was possible in many of the artist's other

commissioned works.¹⁴ Although Heppner, Tayler and Vaughan differently consider Blake's role as artist and the extent of his agency as an illustrator, they all inevitably raise similar questions regarding the nature of each medium and the implications of media interaction on the same page. A detailed examination of specific examples of Blake's visual additions to Gray will attempt to address such questions and, in doing so, begin to account for the radical critical disparities that pervade the search for meaning in Blake's work.

Christopher Heppner, in Reading Blake's Designs, offers some useful critical suggestions for the examination of Blake's visual additions to others' poetry. He suggests that "more time should be spent on the relationship between the text of the story being illustrated and Blake's design", for "Blake's designs can bear Blakean meanings without being in any way direct illustrations of his own poetic mythology" (170). That is, Blake's visual images can supposedly interact with others' words in a recognisably "Blakean" manner. Heppner defines this manner while examining Blake's visual additions to Young, observing that "Blake respects the moral intent and the actively personifying imagination of Young, but feels free to [artistically] extend his own commentary on the situations and images presented by the text, and free to extend Young's values in directions of his own" (170).¹⁵ This tendency of Blake's visual art to simultaneously

¹⁴ While Blake and Flaxman were not always in artistic, theoretical or political agreement, Flaxman proved to be a generous and encouraging friend to Blake. Flaxman's emotional and financial support became crucial for Blake between 1795 and 1798, and continued through to the early nineteenth century. This was a time of war and potential revolution, when the amount of work for a stubborn and radical artist dwindled in the atmosphere of tension, fear and caution that pervaded London. It was during this period that Flaxman asked Blake to execute the Gray designs as a gift to the patron's wife (Vaughan 14).

¹⁵ Blake's relationship to Young, as perceived by Heppner, suggests a parallel between textual annotations (such as Blake's marginal commentary to Reynolds) and artistic illustration. However, Heppner does perceive these to be different processes, for textual annotations would

extend yet respect the directions of accompanying text will remain useful throughout the current study. However, Heppner's conjecture that Blake's creative objectives are directly and fully realised through his productions relies on an intentionalist path that will not be followed here.

In examining the interaction between William Blake's art and the text that it illustrates, Heppner sides with a theoretical premise that initially seems to favour a semiotic approach to art. This allows Heppner to perceive meaning as a product of the relational exchange between text and art. From this foundation, Heppner makes some unique claims: Blake's illustrative paintings do not communicate in the same way that paintings traditionally have. Blake's images and forms are not entirely iconic or historical. Rather, his visual figures communicate meaning primarily by their relation to the texts that accompany them. According to Heppner, Blake has made "the human form into a kind of word" (261), implying that the interplay of his illustrated human figures translates into a type of syntax that depends more on their interrelation within the design than their historical associations. In addition, although meaning is produced by the relative interplay between the two media, interpretation of the visual design is heavily dependent on the textual portion of the discourse (title, poem, quote) to which it refers. By asserting that the visual image (traditionally considered to be a fixed and atemporal medium) is, for Blake, affected and altered by the text, Heppner reinterprets Blake's designs as examples of discursive meaning production (not fixed or conventional meaning inherent in the icon, but meaning emerging from process, discourse and

have more stable/iconic signifying power to challenge another textual assertion. If one subscribes to Heppner's view, artistic illuminations would possibly be less able to oppose/invert the original text than textual commentary, but more likely to vary and extend it (170). Such simple

relation). To summarise, then, Heppner offers a two-tiered argument: first, art is dependent on its discourse with its textual context for meaning production. Second, Blake's art itself can be interpreted as discursive. That is, meaning cannot be assigned specifically and fixedly to Blake's figures, but is instead produced by the interactions of figures within the design or the interaction between the design and the text. While Heppner's argument does liberate the image from inherent and exclusive assumptions regarding its communicative capability, it uneasily redefines the visual image in textual terms.

Heppner's model is thus an overarchingly semiotic one, where meaning is ultimately generated from the cumulative interactions between translatable signs. Heppner's semiotic essentialism, which a priori seems to accept that textual and artistic signs are unproblematically interactive, resurrects one of the concerns raised in the previous chapter regarding the uncritical equation of signs between media. To universalise the semiotic model is to ultimately favour the properties of language as a viable metaphor for describing the communicative and meaningful functions of Blake's art.¹⁶ Although this linguistic model is inherently reductive, Heppner does effectively demonstrate that it works against the segregational politics and the more traditional views of artistic design, such as those found in Lessing's Laocoön. Recall that Lessing differentiates visual art and text by suggesting that visual art is inherently atemporal, fixed and stable (Lessing 16-17). Prior to Modernist efforts that attempted to detach the

interrelationships could almost be portrayed as a game of rock/paper/scissors: Text opposes text; art extends text; text overwhelms art; art and art are meaningless!

¹⁶ Indeed, the title of Heppner's book, Reading Blake's Designs, strongly demonstrates this linguistic bias and illustrates the overall attempt to subject Blake's art to a textual dominance. Not only is Blake's art dependent on the poetic text that it accompanies, according to Heppner,

painted image from its traditional role of representing the figure and object, painting was viewed as the visual, descriptive representation of a spatial and temporal instant, as representing a single moment in time from a single point of view. This view of the visual image also hints that the perception of that image is instantaneous and based on iconic association, excluding that image from a discursive process of meaning production. Language, on the other hand, is traditionally perceived to be associated with action, motion and play (139). The poet can illustrate the process of creation and succession in time, whereas the painter can only show us what already exists and present coexistence in space (100, 109). In relation to these perceived divisions, meaning generated by the painting can be said to be traditionally iconic and associative. Conversely, meaning generated by language can be said to be an evolving and shifting process of syntactic sign relation. Meaning is continually modified as the text is examined, for one has to consider each new signifier in relation to the structure that has been established prior to its introduction. This traditional opposition between the representative and communicative functions of painting and poetry is what Heppner perceives Blake to be problematising.

Heppner suggests that Blake's art attempts to "embody" a more linguistic basis of meaning production, in that it is the relations between the elements or figures in the painting, and not merely the figures themselves, which establish meaning (Heppner xiv). Initially, Heppner claims that Blake has the ability to create powerful single bodies, but has trouble articulating them together in an interactive syntax (23-4). Then, suggesting that Blake "borrows" classical figures and gestures in his designs in a form of adoptive visual quotation that largely ignores the original context (33-4), Heppner makes the

but any artistic potential for independence from the text is still safely contained by an interpretative semiotic/linguistic framework.

further claim that the “meaning of Blake’s figure is decided not by [its] original context...but by the new contexts, visual and textual, that Blake has created around it” (37). That is, the visual figure has a range of potential meanings associated with its context rather than a stable, univocal meaning (56). It is a “site of a process of meaning production, rather than simply a container of established meaning” (59). Such an observation is an essential fortification of the focus of the current study, in which the search for what Blake’s pages mean is transplanted by the effort to determine how Blake’s pages produce an unresolvable excess of meaning. Heppner suggests that Blake moves from an expressive reliance on bodies toward a textual preference, shifts the locus of meaning from isolated figures/nouns to relational syntax, and thus treats the visual figure as a discursive sign, rather than an iconic, historical referent that solely possesses a meaning-in-itself (69-70). This move towards understanding the picture as containing an internal “discourse” in which the figures within the painting interact with each other to produce meaning allows Heppner to present Blake as an artist who attempts to bring visual meaning out of historical fixity and into imaginative, discursive currency.¹⁷

Meaning in Blake’s designs is thus a complex product of the relation between the elements within a design, between the design and the poetic text that it illustrates and also between the historical iconography of figures and gestures, and the new context in which

¹⁷ The same goal can be accomplished without subscribing to a generalising linguistic model. Recall that Marshall McLuhan condemns the historical move towards the dominance of language as one that restricted and disassembled the complex, organic interplay of pictorial space (Gutenberg 9) demonstrated by the resonant, two-dimensional, non-perspectival mosaic of Greek art. Unlike Heppner, McLuhan offers this “primitive” pictorial model as a means by which the segregation between the arts (caused by alphabetic influence in the first place) can be overcome. Curiously, Blake’s own art has been accused of lacking perspective. This, coupled with Heppner’s own claim that Blake has the ability to create powerful single bodies, but has trouble articulating them together in an interactive syntax, suggests that Blake is not trying to create a “textual” picture that incorporates relational syntax and discursive signs, but that he may be utilising pre-alphabetic artistic practices to resist the “single vision” of written language.

they are placed. Blake's visual images, then, interact energetically with the texts that he chooses to illustrate, even when he departs widely from them (xv). Discourse, evidenced both in the art itself, and in the interaction between text and design, establishes the textual model of meaning production as a way of visualising the communicative actions and interactions between the parts and the whole of composite designs.

This model is both tempting and persuasive, and also reflects a current preference in semiotic, post-structuralist theory which destabilises and problematises the clarity of meaning that can be attributed to figures or signs. Yet strangely, following the assertion that Blake uses visual figures in a more contemporarily textual (discursive and fluid) fashion, Heppner posits that the text which the visual additions accompany embodies a more iconic, stable function. For Blake, according to Heppner, meaning becomes "a game of metaphorical extension, steered by the verbal context supplied" (69). Blake's artistic figures can be seen as ciphers and zeroes which are to be given definition by attached texts, for the texts embedded within the artistic images point to the relationship between figures as controllers of much of the meaning of a design (70). In this way, Heppner sees Blake's art as moving towards a textual model of visual meaning, but also, by foregrounding the importance of a "name, title or text" in the establishment of "clear" interpretations of the potentially indefinite visual design, argues that the written word demands an iconic view of meaning (70, 98-99). This attempt to describe Blake's approach to the presence of art and text on the same page initially appears to work towards a unification of design and text that foregrounds relational, discursive meaning production by subtly bringing art over into the textual camp. However, by suggesting that Blake re-establishes names, titles and texts as stable starting points for the interpretation of his artistic elements by "revealing the dependence of their meaning upon words",

Heppner actually repolarises the two sisters (75). In other words, Heppner posits the text as the stable frame and Blake's art as a subservient fluid adornment that strangely depends on the text for referential meaning while structurally emulating the discursive properties of its supposedly semiotic sister (266).

Heppner does recognise the "continual interplay between free creativity and existing stories and characters" (88). He acknowledges that "the visionary artist maps out a structure of his own upon an existing poetic or narrative structure, inventing a design that uses the existing text as the embodying vehicle for a new vision, which will have some relationship to the existing text, but one that will have to be determined in each case" (89). This is a shrewd move, for it amplifies the inventiveness of the destabilised visual image, while still reminding us of its supposed dependence on the stable elements of textual icons. So, although invention is generally seen to take precedence over history and the textual "name" (80), Heppner sees Blake's illustrative inventions as crucially related to already established historical names and figures (96). In this way, Fuseli's related anxiety, as quoted by Heppner, about the "danger of unintelligibility" resulting from the total displacement of names and history by pure invention is avoided by Blake (81). Blake:

accepts the need for the painter to make use of known figures and stories through which to communicate his message, while claiming the recognised right of the inventor to change and add to the known narrative. Without a recognition of those names and stories, the viewer can respond only to the energy changes visible in the design, which are not always explicit enough to support a clear interpretation. (99)

Indeed, "the attachment of a name, title or text makes smart viewers out of dumb ones, richly complex designs out of apparently simple ones....A name or a title

enormously increases the computational resources of a viewer of a design” and “allows us to begin to interpret the image” (98, 261).

Thus, Heppner’s assertion of the iconic nature of names and historic referents promotes text as a starting-point of interpretation, while simultaneously suggesting that Blake’s visual images, being discursively and textually structured, evidence a dispersal of interpretative and communicative efficiency and embody a range of potential meanings (56). Still, this Lockean view of textuality combined with a logocentric conception of Blake’s visual images as being dependent on the stable written word maintains Heppner’s linguistic bias. Indeed, he ultimately attributes any meaning found within Blake’s composite art to a linguistic origin: “if the meaning of a figure can be reassigned by a text, meaning is more finally in the camp of language than in that of the naked visual image” (64). This bias is clarified in Heppner’s consideration of Blake’s visual additions to Young’s Night Thoughts when he suggests that

these illustrations came into being as a response to the text being illustrated, and were designed to appear on the same page, to be part of the same visual space, explored by the same eye. That relationship does not preclude the expression of difference, but it does insist that such difference be interpreted in relation to the text illustrated. (152)

Indeed, not only is the poetic text the gravity which restrains the potentially unstable visual image, but Heppner finally concludes that Blake “extends but does not finally subvert Young’s meaning”, whatever Young’s “meaning” may be (155).

Although this appears quite democratic and indicates an interpretative respect on the part of the artist, it ultimately reaffirms the centrality of the text as “a directing and filtering structure, foregrounding certain possibilities and suppressing others” (151) and relegates

Blake's illustrative design to the status of mere ornament.¹⁸ This attempt to reduce the complexity of the composite relation into a hierarchy, ruled by an ultimately paradoxical view of textuality illustrates the problems produced by Heppner's continuous search for stable meaning.

Heppner's hopeful search for a clear, "intelligible and aesthetically viable" (261) interpretation of Blake is quite telling. The hunt for clarity in Blake has been continually re-negotiated by many a hopeful critic and Heppner's book is one of the latest attempts to "understand" Blake. Despite the problems associated with such an attempt, Heppner rightly asserts that Blake often uses recognisable figures, visual gestures and names in the composition of his designs, and often changes or modifies the figures in relation to their placement in the new context of Blake's inventive design (37). In making this claim, however, Heppner suggests something that he does not seem to support: that "the artist's freedom to invent around and over the text that provides the body for the action" may involve invention that supersedes not only the historical context of borrowed visual gestures or figures, but also the poetic text itself that the designs illustrate (104). In other words, even though the above suggests that Blake's art is both original and shaped by the imagery of the associated text, the illustrative inventiveness can also reasonably be seen as presenting different interpretative possibilities for the poetic text itself (120).

Thus, I offer a major challenge to Heppner's claims: Why does Heppner politicise the interaction between text and visual image into a subtle victory of language over image, a victory of meaning over fluctuating dynamics, and suggest that Blake the poet is

¹⁸ Although the meaning of Blake's visual figures can be said to be contextually dependent on the composition of the design and the relation of the design to the text, why can the meaning of the text not be challenged by the figure as much as the meaning of the figure can be reassigned by the text?

ultimately victorious over Blake, the aspiring Michelangelo (70)? Further, although the extension and variation of textual assertion through visual art is a useful relationship to consider when looking at composite art, why does Heppner so vehemently exclude the potential for Blake's visual images to oppose and invert the textual assertions that they accompany? Although Heppner does recognise limits to the power of text and context over the meaning of a design, why, in claiming an ultimately textual victory, does he not consider the possibility that Blake's art can powerfully modify or unsettle the text (151)? The very nature of discourse is exchange. The modification of meaning is essentially bi-directional, but Heppner's view of the textual element in Blake's illustrative image/text relations, is that it is clarificational, (that it removes ambiguity by specific identification), and that it is articulate, (that it discerns relationships between figures more precisely than design) (64). Thus, Heppner suggests a hierarchical relation between text and design in which the poem occupies the superior position and clarifies the relational meanings that Blake's design cannot accomplish alone. Indeed, while I am not opposed to the possibility that visual art can function as a language, to essentialise this possibility or to ultimately privilege textual expression ignores the expanded possibilities for meaning production that the initial model of discursive relations between art and text promotes.

Why assert that the addition of visual images to a poetic text is an active rather than a passive exercise, but subject this activity purely to the service of the text (171)? Heppner does this in order to "interpret" the opaque constructions of this complex creator. His conservative attempt to establish that the meanings of Blake's drawings ultimately depend on the "name" or text suggests that not only is meaning ultimately attainable through the text, but also that if the text has an iconic, anchoring function in relation to the design, the design can be seen to fully express yet safely contain the fluidity of the

artistic, creative imagination. I wish to offer the alternative that tensions persist, not only between the historical/iconic/ associative and discursive/relational/fluid uses of both written text and visual figure, but also between the visual figure and accompanying text as to the final site of meaning, for each can modify the other. In other words, although I realise that Heppner's assertions may be a retreat from predominant critical methodology which favours an oppositional and inversive relation between Blake's illustrative art and his source texts, I wish to avoid this either/or scenario and leave room for a complex interplay between variation, extension, opposition and inversion within the arena of Blake's composite art. Although Heppner's ultimate purpose is to encourage and promote an interpretative appreciation of Blake's complexities and depths, I propose that such appreciation is not displaced by inclusively reconsidering the complexities of his composite pages. Resisting the polarities while avoiding their synthesis and embracing the heterogeneity that Heppner suggests but does not emphasise (that both text and visual image are at least capable of iconic and discursive meaning production, that neither is limited to either the spatial, descriptive arena or the temporal, developmental arena) will certainly be more helpful when the discussion turns to Blake's own composite art, where visual art and text are concurrently created and finely woven, ensuring that the design is less easily divided and reduced to a hierarchical, interpretative relation.

It is useful to turn to Irene Tayler's commentary on Blake's visual additions to Gray's poetry to find a counterpoint to the perceived shortcomings and contradictions that persist in Heppner's approach. Tayler's book examines and provides a facsimile of a series of water-colour designs that Blake painted in the margins of the pages of a 1790 edition of Gray's poems. Completed sometime between 1797 and 1799, the unique volume was presented as a private commission to the wife of his friend and supporter,

John Flaxman. As there was only one copy of this visually embellished volume, the book was nearly lost and, following its rediscovery in 1919, was not reproduced and published until 1922. Currently, the original pages are kept at the Yale Center for British Art.

While critical interest in Blake's visual additions to Gray's poems has slightly increased in the 30 years following the 1971 publications of the full-colour Trianon Press edition, Irene Tayler's critical volume, and a recent Dover reprinting, these 116 designs are often only briefly mentioned or considered in Blake criticism and remain largely unexplored.

Although written prior to Heppner's book, and although often much more reductive than Heppner's detailed considerations, Tayler's critique anticipates some of Heppner's claims while avoiding some of the either/or polarisations identified earlier. Similar to Heppner's claim that Blake's art functions as an enhancement which varies and extends the meanings of the poetic composition, Tayler claims that "Blake's vision of Gray's vision" is, for the most part, not "opposed to the type of visualisation that Gray expected—rather, it builds on it, trying to force it into use as a more fully active tool of language" (Tayler 31). Indeed, Tayler asserts that Blake's visual art is derived from "Gray's own language", but "expands Gray's language and build[s] a 'stubborn structure' from its 'rough' English basement" (41). At first glance, it appears as if Tayler, like Heppner, privileges textual superiority and restricts the functional potential of both media by uniting art and language under a semiotic, structural view of visual art. Indeed, Tayler largely refrains from discussing any perceived differences between the Sister Arts and seems to progress on the a priori assumption that their interaction is largely unproblematic on a structural level. However, at one point, Tayler asserts that "Gray's metaphors and personifications were written to be visualised" and proposes that Blake uses the "visualising capacity in Gray's language to go beyond" that language (45). This

suggests that text and visual art, while capable of functional and interactive integration, retain a fundamental distinction for Tayler, rather than being, as Heppner implies, Siamese-twin sisters at the semiotic level. For Tayler, then, language is a “rough basement”, rather than a guiding iconic gravity, and the associated visual art is a stubborn structure that is similar enough to integrate with the text, but distinct enough to prevent it from being assimilated by the text.¹⁹

Thus while it appears that Tayler maintains Heppner’s view that the text is the foundation upon which the accompanying artwork relies, this visual expansion of the text is a more “stubborn” process. This allows Tayler the critical room to assert that, for Blake, “illustration [is] no servile art, never merely a matter of following the dictates of another mind and never merely a commercial enterprise” (7). Although finding that the images that Blake adds to the pages of Gray’s poetry are often in accordance with the text of the poem as she understands it, Tayler also leaves room for Blake as a critical presence. She suggests that Blake’s art can be seen as a type of literary criticism, in which a poet’s work is met “not with doctrinal comment, but with the full confrontation of ‘interpretative illustration’” (9). Tayler claims further that Blake’s visual art “[locates] and [exposes] the visionary promise in [the poet] and in himself” and is thus an example of “art interpreting art, commending or correcting it”, a “revision of vision”, and “visionary criticism” (9, 147).

In an extended examination of Blake’s visual additions to “Ode on a Distant Prospect of Eton College” that offers one such example of this “visionary criticism”, Tayler asserts that Blake “illustrates Gray’s language with fidelity and precision, but

¹⁹ Unfortunately, Tayler’s lack of specificity problematises this vague attempt to assert that there are essential differences between the sister arts.

achieves at the same time a forceful and important critical commentary on the poem` (39-41). The ability to recognise the extent of the critical ‘commentary’ in the way that Tayler does seems to require an extensive familiarity with Blakean symbolism, but Tayler suggests that structural tensions within the poem itself, amplified by the accompanying visual images are enough to alert even readers who are unfamiliar with Blake to this critical interplay (43-44).²⁰

Although Tayler and Heppner both suggest that there is a necessary connection between Blake’s art and the text that it accompanies, Heppner emphasises that the meaning of the composite remains dependent on the primary influence of the original text, whereas Tayler suggests that the assertions associated with the source text can be modified and even challenged by the accompanying visual image. While this difference does seem to polarise the two perspectives, note Heppner’s admission that the text does not completely delineate Blake’s artistic additions, and that Blake may accept or reject the claims of his source text via the visual image (Heppner 260-61). Similarly, despite seeing Blake as a ‘corrector’ of others through art, Tayler consistently asserts that Blake’s visual images both enhance (extend) and complicate (vary) the poetic text. While Heppner and Tayler each emphasise opposing functions to describe the effects of Blake’s image upon the proximate text, then, both admit to the diverse and overlapping functional potential of each medium. I hope to preserve the potential that these critics subtly announce while also softening their respective emphases, calling attention to the rich possibilities of

²⁰ This reference to “structural tensions” hints at Tayler’s own alliance with formalist theoretical practice that values well-wrought artistic production. This formalist stance is furthered by her projection of the role of the structuralist critic onto Blake by claiming that his visual art often plays a corrective, editorial role to an already contradictory text. Despite this bias, Tayler’s claim

variation, extension, opposition and inversion that coexist within Blake's composite pages.

In an approach similar to Heppner, Tayler asserts that Blake's drawings are not merely decorative, but enriching in the sense that the subsequent dialogue between the pictorial and verbal elements of the work enhances the monologue of the poetic text.²¹ However, Tayler avoids the desire for clear interpretation that leads Heppner to favour the superiority of the text in meaning production, and promotes the results of Blake's artistic additions to Gray's poetry as a play of co-operation and contradiction between poet and illustrator. Rather than taking a critical stance which necessitates the favouring of either visual art or text, and rather than promoting the simultaneously co-operative and contradictory relation between picture and text as a power game despite her use of linguistic metaphors, Tayler asserts that the maintenance of this structural tension enriches an overall "vision" that belongs to neither poet nor artist. In other words, specific "meanings" or "interpretations" are less important than the depth and complexity that the visual images bring to the textual expression. This "vision" is a widescreen view of artistic expression, a non-linear, often illogical stretch toward an excessive totality that encompasses much more information and interplay than text or art can indicate alone.

Blake's additions to Gray's "Ode on the Spring" provide an excellent example of the way in which composite designs can challenge and strain a fixed perspective offered through lyrical language. This example is especially engaging and complex, for Blake

that Blake's art often introduces contradictory perspectives into the basic structure of Gray's language is one worthy of further consideration (34-41).

²¹ As has been suggested, this casual metaphoric appeal to linguistic and communicative models, while adequately illustrating Tayler's perception of the interaction between art and text, implicitly privileges language and imposes a limitation on the functional potential of the visual image.

not only makes artistic additions to Gray's poem, but also adds textual, self-reflexive commentary that will help us to further establish his work's position relative to Gray and simultaneously clarify the function of his artistic images in relation to Gray's poetic offerings. "Ode on the Spring", which initially describes the spring season as a time of sensual connection, presents a contemplative moralist who reasons in solitude.

Generalising and establishing hierarchies with his "sober eye", the moralist contrasts man to nature, finds man insignificant, then equates the inconsequential flutter of insects to human existence.²² Thus, Gray's narrator recognises a fundamental irony of enlightenment "progress", where human understanding is increased to the point where human insignificance is recognised. The insect's reply to the moralist, though, points out that the moralist, while implicitly placing himself above the human mass for recognising the triviality of human existence, is not only one of the flies, but a solitary, removed one who has wasted his own spring. Thus, in the insect's revolutionary reply, the hierarchy is reversed: the youthful, social "insects" occupy a more desirable position than the lone thinker. Gray's insect, although condemning the "moralist", proposes a way to overcome the enlightenment thinker's fate in the form of a subtle carpe diem moral: "frolic while 'tis May", sacrifice the individuality that leads to isolation, return to the active, "busy murmur" of the generalised mass and do not waste youth and life in thought. This notion that wisdom is a greater folly than innocence is also echoed in Gray's "Ode on a Distant

²² An interesting connection that surfaces here involves a comparison between Gray's narrator and the type of man that Alexander Pope criticises in book two of his Dunciad. Pope laments: "O! Would the Sons of Man once think their Eyes/And Reason given them but to study Flies!/See Nature in Some partial narrow shape/And let the Author of the whole escape" (453-6). Pope's earlier writing thus disagrees with the enlightenment pursuits of Gray's narrator (and also the ignorance of Gray's insect) and condemns the analytical, scientific vision that allows the importance of the particular to overshadow a more religious consideration of an all-encompassing creator. It is worthy to note that Blake's counter-solution, discussed below, manages to marry the

Prospect of Eton College”, which equates youthful innocence with bliss and advances the possibility that the mere perception of youth is enough to “breathe a second spring” into one who’s youthful paradise has been destroyed by thought. This privileging of innocence does little to resolve the melancholy of the “Ode on the Spring”, however, for not only have the moralist’s meditations overthrown humanist values, but the narrator is also impossibly invited to return to an already lost and condemned innocence.

Blake’s poem, “The Fly”, while published separately from the Gray designs, offers a textual counterpoint to the above ideas. Indeed, Blake’s Songs, the collection in which this poem appears, is an extended and multifaceted extension of the very same themes that Gray addresses in “Ode on the Spring”. “The Fly” specifically rejects Gray’s problematic strategies of hierarchy and ignorance and presents an alternative possibility. Blake’s solitary moralist does not begin the poem with thoughtful reflection, as Gray’s narrator does, but rather, like the personified hand of “rough Mischance” that harms man and insect alike in Gray’s “Ode”, Blake’s narrator initially engages in thoughtless action and brushes away the summer play of a little fly. Already, then, contrasts between the perspectives offered by these two poems are evident. Gray’s thoughtful narrator is invited to return to thoughtless activity at the end of his “Ode”, while Blake’s narrator begins “The Fly” by exchanging thoughtless action for thoughtful reflection.

Interestingly, and perhaps fittingly, this initial ignorant activity of Blake’s narrator harms the very creature, the insect, which, for Gray, acts as an ambassador of such action. The reflective stanzas that follow the harmful conduct of the narrator’s “guilty hand” (a phrase deleted from the poem’s final version), are apologetic, suggesting a sense of humility and

either/or opposition between Pope and Gray by discovering the interdependence between the particular and the whole.

conscience that neither Gray's narrator, nor the sportive fly that chides him, possess. Indeed, in the second stanza of Blake's poem, as Kathleen Raine in Blake and Tradition (165) has aptly noted, the narrator humbly recognises that he is as insignificant as the fly, then manages to avoid the melancholy of Gray's narrator by also recognising that the fly is as significant as he, choosing the more optimistic and self-flattering option. An essential difference between the approach of the two poets, though, is that where Gray's narrator promotes a general, metaphoric, and largely abstract equation between insects and humankind and condemns both, Blake's narrator uses simile to recognise an intersection between an individual fly and an individual man and finds vastness within particularity. In doing so, he remains respectful of their individuality, recognises relativity between the two without hierarchy and maintains an optimistic humanist stance by rejecting a generalist and critical one.

The third stanza of "The Fly"—"For I dance/ And drink and sing,/ Till some blind hand/ Shall brush my wing"—reinforces a key advantage that Blake's narrator has over Gray's. The thoughtful contemplation that has emerged as a result of thoughtless interaction allows Blake's narrator to recognise his own interdependence with the playful fly and to condemn the blind, thoughtless type of perception that would place one creature above the other. In contrast, Gray's isolated narrator constantly systematises and ranks that which he observes. For Gray, nature, although secondary to the narrator who perceives and classifies it, reigns over insects and men. Despite the narrator's superior contemplative awareness, he, unlike Blake's self-aware narrator, needs to be reminded by an insect that he is not only a part of the lesser category that he has just placed insects and men within, but that his solitude puts his position even further beneath that of the lowly collective. The sportive insect, then, although reversing the narrator's hierarchy, practices

the same type of divisive ordering that produces the narrator's ignorance and, further, offers a solution that merely repeats the process. Opposing both Gray's narrator and the alternative offered by the naïve insect, Blake's thinker, individually enlightened beyond an enlightenment standpoint, promotes a state of awareness that leaves room for insects and men, youth and age, contemplation and action. Thus, Blake's poetic strategy in "The Fly" reconfigures Gray's style, structure and subject, allowing an escape from the lingering futility of the "Ode on the Spring". Blake's poem recalibrates the contemplative eye to recognise individuality over generalisation and to perceive relativity and interdependence without resorting to hierarchy or dismissal, simultaneously preserving and redirecting enlightenment perspectives.

This philosophical difference and poetic relationship between the poets is also reinforced by a couplet, written by Blake and inserted beneath the list of his designs for Gray's "Ode on the Spring":

Around the Springs of Gray my wild root weaves
Traveller repose and dream among my leaves.

The phrase "springs of Gray" condenses the season and the idea of a fresh source of flowing water into a single term, and links Gray and his poetry with both. In his "Ode", Gray implies that the songs of the warbler and the "cuckow" epitomise the "untaught harmony" of the spring season, while Gray's poetic speaker stands removed from such harmonies by directly identifying himself with "contemplation's sober eye". Blake's association between Gray and the spring season in his couplet suggests that Gray's own equation between spring and an untaught harmony is unintentionally characteristic of the poet and his own songs. What, then, is implied in the connection between Thomas Gray's work and the untaught harmony of spring? Morris Eaves, in The

Counter-Arts Conspiracy, notes that in the eighteenth century, “harmony” was used to describe a “unity of effect” and became both a technical recipe and a standard of judgement of a work of art (246). More generally, though, harmony was useful to enlightenment thought, for it encouraged repetition, extension, translation, clarity, collaboration and improvement, and favoured a general vision over idiosyncrasy (250-1). Indeed, Gray’s narrator is chided for his isolated thoughts that have harmed rather than improved the perception of humanity, and, in true enlightenment style, is invited to harmonise with the masses. However, the term “untaught”, in conjunction with “harmony” amplifies the irregularity and irresolution of the ode, the lingering tension and incompatibility between the isolated thinker and the mass and also recalls springtime youth and innocence, implying that the insect’s invitation involves a measure of ignorance. Indeed, this reading of “untaught harmony” recalls Blake’s phrase from his 1808 annotations to Reynolds’ Discourses, “To Generalize is to be an Idiot” (E 641). Also evident from Blake’s Reynolds annotations is his aversion to the Royal Academy’s attempt to “teach” general principles of art, and his favouring of intuition, “identity and melody” over reason, “similitude and harmony”. In relation to the present discussion, then, it can be offered that Blake, in print at least, favours “untaught melody”. While this stance allows Blake to favour the independent assertiveness and individuality of Gray’s narrator that the insect finally criticises, the contemplative, metaphorical reasoning that Gray’s narrator employs throughout the Ode simultaneously and clearly distinguishes him from Blake. Thus, Blake’s phrase implies that the spring-like, “untaught harmony” of Gray’s poem (and, perhaps, Gray’s own life), is a fresh, but failed and ultimately misguided attempt at reconciliation between the solitary thinker and the society that he has condemned.

This interpretation concords with the other meaning of “spring” implied by the context of Blake’s couplet. The figurative connection with watery springs associates Gray’s poem with protean instability, linear flow and progress that leads away from smaller sources towards a more generalised ocean. Instability is illustrated by the unresolved tension that persists throughout the “untaught harmony” of Gray’s Ode. The linear, unidirectional flow of a natural spring parallels the developing current in the solitary thinker’s thought that remains irreversible. Finally, progress towards generalisation is demonstrated by the constant pull of the insect’s invitation to discard individuality and join the generalised play of springtime.

In relation to Gray’s unstable linear spring, Blake’s “root” suggests a branching growth that draws nourishment from its environment. The term “wild” inserts a sense of freedom and autonomy. Unlike Gray’s “untaught harmony”, then, which connects dependence with ignorance, “wild root” suggests a budding independence that relies on, but is not restricted by its source. This characterisation of the “wild root” as a combination of imaginative freedom and pro-enlightenment stability recalls the narrator of Blake’s “The Fly”, whose individualised employment of enlightenment rationalism and humanism allows him to exceed the limitations that contain Gray’s generalising thinker.

Despite these differences, it is crucial to note the implied interdependence between the two poets. As exemplified by the initial comparison between the “Ode on the Spring” and “The Fly”, Gray’s original springs are the source, the nourishment for Blake’s own creative “wild root”. Also, as implied by Blake’s couplet, the root “weaves” “around” the springs, protecting, preserving and containing them, as well as transforming them into new configurations. Together, this apparent alliance invites readers to emulate

Blake's narrator of "The Fly", to "repose and dream", to pause in their mechanical enlightenment progress and employ their creative imaginations (rather than mere critical reason) "among" the artistic thoughts of others.

To understand the full implications of Blake's couplet, however, we must return to its original context. As mentioned, the couplet is a small textual addition that Blake inserted into his illustrated volume of Gray's poems and thus, Blake's words, although useful in describing a more general relationship between the poets, refer to the function and effects of Blake's artistic interaction with Gray's poetic text.

Gray's pictorialist poetry was no stranger to illustrative accompaniment in the eighteenth century. Gray's friend Richard Bentley prepared designs for six of Gray's poems in 1753. Henry Fuseli illustrated "The Descent of Odin" around 1771 and completed three illustrations for an 1800 edition of Gray's poems (Tayler 15). "The Bard" was drawn by John Saunders in 1778 and painted by Richard Westall in 1798, and Henry Singleton executed Odin and the Prophetess in 1793 (Monk 201). In a poem to Bentley, Gray celebrates the harmonic possibilities of the Sister Arts:

See, in their course, each transitory thought
 Fix'd by his touch a lasting essence take;
 Each dream, in Fancy's airy colouring wrought
 To local Symmetry and life awake!

The tardy Rhymes that us'd to linger on,
 To Censure cold, and negligent of Fame,
 In swifter Measures animated run,
 And catch a lustre from his genuine flame.
 (Hagstrum 288)

Note that the first stanza suggests that illustrative visual art has the power to "fix" transitory language, while the second suggests that illustration makes rhymes that are "tardy" and "cold" move faster. In these few lines, Gray challenges exclusive and

segregational definitions of the sister arts, suggesting that language can be both fixed and fluid, and that the visual image has the potential to function as a catalyst for such diversity. Jean Hagstrum accurately observes that Gray's poem gives "high praise to the power of illustration and views the combination of the two arts as a happy one in which poetry is invigorated and improved" (288). Indeed, Gray does seem to envy the "lasting essence", "genuine flame", "strength", "easy grace" and "unerring line" of the visual arts, and in contrast to his "Ode's" preference for hierarchy and generalisation perceives an beneficial integration between the two.

Blake's dedication to Mrs. Flaxman at the end of his illustrated volume of Gray echoes this perception of the Sister Arts:

A little flower grew in a lonely Vale
 Its form was lovely but its colours pale
 One standing in the Porches of the Sun
 When his Meridian Glories were begun
 Leapd from the steps of fire and on the grass
 alighted where this little flower was
 With hands divine he moved the gentle Sod
 and took the flower up in its native clod
 Then planting it upon a mountains brow
 'Tis your own fault if you don't flourish now

M.E. Bacon chooses to interpret this verse as indicative of the relationship between Blake, Flaxman and Hayley, and Frank Vaughan interprets the poem as referring to Blake's frustrated attempts to gently "educate" Anne Flaxman. However, the artistically self-conscious tone of the earlier couplet implies that this dedication can be interpreted in a similar manner. That is, although Blake, the artistic "mover" respects Gray's flower "in its native" unrefined "clod" of language and, in a seemingly collaborative effort that recalls Gray's words to Bentley, attempts to illustratively elevate it into colourful prominence, the dynamic between the transplanting figure and the

transplanted flower explicitly favours the creativity and agency of the artist's "divine" hands. Blake's assistive, elevational visual additions respect the original text, yet possess the ability and agency to "move" the original, to change its context in hopes of increasing or enriching its "colour". The actions of the "One" who moves the flower in its native clod are all centred around the flower itself, but the flying "mover" who resides on steps of fire is quite powerful indeed in relation to the flower. While the textual flower becomes, in Heppner's words, "the embodying vehicle for a new vision", without the artistic aid of the "One", the poetic flower would remain formal, lonely and colourless (89). It is the actions of Blake, as artistic illuminator, that extend the textual visions of the poet (89). However, the final line of the dedication seems to indicate that, despite Blake's artistic assistance, the eventual flourishing or failing of the transplanted text depends on the integrity of that original text. That is, in contrast to Gray's suggestion that art can fix transitory language or animate lacklustre rhymes, thereby repairing the deficiencies of a text, Blake's dedication takes no responsibility should the composite volume fail, suggesting that no amount of illumination will glorify an inadequate or insubstantial shadow of thought as that artistic action functions to procure a potential that is already within the text itself. While the revitalisation of the lonely flower supports Heppner's favouring of the original poetic text, this colourful composite vision has resulted from, included, yet extended beyond Gray's initial poetic form and meaning.

Blake's dedication, then, not only suggests that the artist's activity improves upon the formally adequate, but imaginatively inadequate verse of a cautious, melancholic and isolated poet, but also that, in this case, visual art diversifies a restricted textual creation. Indeed, Tayler supports the above reading, for she also uses this dedication poem to demonstrate "what [Blake's] visionary enlargement could do for the poetry of the partial

poet” (Tayler 161). However, an overall reversal of Gray’s implied hierarchy that would favour Blake’s artistic authority is prevented by the source of Blake’s melody: Gray’s springs of untaught harmony. As Heppner has hinted, Blake’s visual additions to the poetry of others are often limited by the limitations of his source. Indeed, Blake’s dedication suggests that Blake, as artist, can only act on Gray’s initially deficient original. Yet these visual images are more powerful than Gray’s Sister Arts celebration would like to admit: They are powerful enough to effect change. Blake’s artistic activity illuminates Gray’s ideas, but also transforms them into an assertion of the artist’s own melody and medium. These interactive ideas and media co-exist on the same page, individual yet relative, comprising an overall excess of assertion that, recalling Blake’s Fly philosophy, should not be completely equated, divided, or ranked.

Returning to the couplet provides further support for these claims. Gray’s springs of language, fluid, but channelled, are the origins of Blake’s wild artistic root. Tayler suggests that “wild” implies that Blake’s “root” does “not always follow the implied dictates of its host” (47), supporting the claim that Blake’s visual art sometimes follows an alternate path to that of the text, but also reinforcing Heppner’s emphasis that the illustration is “rooted” to or nourished by the text. Although “weaves” and “around” in the above couplet could be interpreted as capturing and overpowering actions, Tayler aptly suggests that we see this conjunction as neither a violent nor violating one. However, she then goes on to suggest that the traveller is invited to dream “the visionary experiences that these two minds united can offer us” (47). Her use of “united” seems to over-simplify the interaction between poet and painter and, like the earlier reduction that fails to take into account the possibility of interactive tension between media, Tayler here not only forgets her own assertions that poets and painters can be confrontational, but also

fails to notice the powerful tension in relation to the ownership/ domination of the work caused by the possessive “my leaves”.

Interestingly, the characteristic differences between the two media suggested by the couplet’s metaphors both parallel and challenge those outlined in Lessing’s segregational Laocoön. Blake’s illustrative “root” suggests an anchor, a securing force and, in its relation to the traditional notions of pictorial art derived from Lessing, it also suggests the atemporality, fixity and stability of the pictorial image. In contrast to the root’s stability, but similar in nature to its wildness, Gray’s “springs”, so named by Blake, recall the fluidity and movement of the verbal lyric.

Although Blake’s couplet seems to agree with Lessing’s characterisation of the arts, he rejects the hierarchical and competitive ranking of the arts that both Gray and Lessing embrace. Blake’s artistic root is also simultaneously “wild”: interwoven with and dependent on the poem itself, but also a branching agency that challenges the traditions of artistic fixity, meaning and stability. In further contrast to Lessing, Blake’s couplet suggests that the limited and limiting powers of a rationalist use of language can be overcome when art and text work in tandem. Recall that Gray’s narrator relies on a poetically expressed rationalism and employs the word as a structuring divider that names and classifies his world but also isolates him from the rest of the universe. Although Blake attempts to mend such division in “The Fly”, his own words also lead to an assertion of difference and distance from Gray, once again resulting in division and opposition. The choice to add artistic imagery to Gray’s text allows Blake to play around the structured ode and to avoid the type of reasoning and learned contemplation that is criticised yet practised poetically by Gray. Gray’s type of contemplative creation, which is also favoured as an artistic principle by Joshua Reynolds, is rejected by Blake, who

states in his annotations to Reynolds' Discourses: "What has Reasoning to do with the Art of Painting?" (E 647).

To exemplify the process by which Blake artistically asserts the philosophical differences between himself and Gray while remaining faithful to aesthetic principles that resist exclusion and hierarchy, it will be useful to examine closely a few composite pages from "Ode on the Spring". While this series of pages is a fertile collection for interpretative speculation, my intention here is to demonstrate that Blake's artistic efforts allow him not only to collaborate with and enhance Gray's poetic imagery, but also to confront, relocate and diversify the didactic direction of Gray's spring.

Prior to starting this close examination, though, a digressive justification needs to be made. In the following pages, there is an effort made to translate some of Blake's images into words so that they can be discussed in the context of this argument. At first glance, this ekphrasis may seem antithetical to the directions of the previous chapter, which established a position against current critical efforts that privilege text over visual images and treat the visual image as if it were a text understood by appeals to a linguistic paradigm. However, while my intention here is not to equate, interpret, find meaning, to "read" both types of media or to boil both down into a single matrix, I am somewhat restricted by this means of communicating my ideas about Blake. A dissertational, academic use of words to construct a logical argument that demonstrates how the artistic image can function to overcome some of these self-same textual restrictions appears quite dangerous, self-defeating and futile at best. The established traditions of an academic use of language, though, offers a vehicle that, although potentially as unreliable as other forms of communication, will hopefully ensure the least receptive deviation from my intended arguments. Consider an attempt to make the same argument in images; imagine

that you hold an version of Heppner's book in your hands that has been illuminated by me in the same way that Blake illuminates Gray's poetry. My project would then be an artistic attempt to recreate Blake's processes, to argue through example, much like Joseph Viscomi's useful attempts to understand Blake's methods of relief etching by participating in and recreating the unique conditions of production. As I am not as "radical" as Blake and do not wish to spurn the "Royal Academy" just yet, in the sense that presenting a Doctoral dissertation committee with an illuminated version of a contemporary critical work would fly in the face of my academic aspirations, I have chosen to communicate my perceptions of Blake's position towards language in a more traditional form. While this textual description of Blake's art, supplemented by reproductions of specific images in attached appendices, will inevitably involve a measure of translational assumption, the overall intention is to establish the function of Blake's art in relation to the source text by showing how it not only potentially connects with but also manages to deviate from the words, methods and assertions of Gray. Thus, although the means might appear similar, the ends of my textual "translations" differ from interpretative attempts in that they avoid reductive and inflexible conclusions in favour of discovering Blake's unique way of simultaneously expanding and critiquing the textual visions of others.

The first illustrated page of Gray's "Ode on the Spring" is the frontispiece for the this collection and presents a composite layout that is maintained throughout the rest of the Gray designs (see fig. 1). Blake's addition of pictures to the overly large margins of this already-printed volume allows both word and visual image to appear on the same page, but a line drawn around Gray's pre-existing text frames, contains and segregates the text from the surrounding visual images. Unlike Blake's own composites, then, where

words and pictures often intersect, overlap and collide, this boxed text, or “text box” here prevents Gray’s words from coming into direct contact with Blake’s visual images. As well, these text boxes are rarely integrated with the architecture of the visual images. Instead, they most often appear on the composite page as mysteriously separate spaces within the design and act as foregrounded, opaque objects that obscure portions of the visual image. One result of this configuration is that the text boxes appear to have been added to a pre-existing visual design, obscuring the actual process in which pictorial elements are added in the margins of Gray’s already-existing text.

The text box on this page identifies the collection as consisting of “Poems by Mr. Gray”. Blake’s added images show a naked, curly-haired figure who, on the back of an ascending and disproportionate swan, touches a musical instrument.²³ Indeed, the title that Blake supplies for this visual image is “The Pindaric Genius receiving his Lyre”. It is possible to interpret the figure on the swan as an image of Gray himself, as the features do resemble the picture identified as Gray on page 2. If this is, indeed, the case, the visual art of the title page and its textual title, both supplied by Blake, initially could be understood to signify a fundamental respect for the poet.

On page 2, Blake “draws” the poet into the picture (see fig. 2). Titles supplied by Blake for the composite pages that make up this particular poem appear in this page’s text box, and identify this figure and its features with Gray. Such an identification breaks down the disconnection between the poet and the narrator of the following ode and

²³ It is useful to note that swans have, from Greek times, traditionally been associated with music and song. A swan is fabled to sing beautifully before it passes away, and a Pythagorean fable suggests that the souls of all good poets including that of Apollo, God of music, pass into swans (Evans 1050). Although I do not wish to suggest that Blake is using the image of the swan to exclusively establish this flattering classical allusion in connection with Gray, the potential for association is useful in that it does convey Blake’s fundamental respect for the poet.

suggests a more explicit relationship between the two. This resemblance carries through the pages and weaves the curly-haired image of Gray with a possible personification of the purple year on page 3, images of the contemplative moralist on pages 4 and 6 and, if we stretch our interpretative desires far enough, the posture of the personified figure of “rough mischance” on page 5. While there is none of Gray’s own text to consider on page 2, Blake’s visual image calls attention to the source of the words that are to follow, illuminating his poet-figure with a single light source and placing him in a barren setting, surrounded by abstract geometry.

On page 3, a spiralling clutter of sketched roots and vegetation replaces Spartan surroundings (see fig. 3). Gray’s Ode on the Spring begins:

Lo! where the rosy-bosomed hours,
Fair Venus’ train, appear,
Disclose the long-expected flowers,
And wake the purple year!
The Attic warbler pours her throat,
Responsive to the cuckow’s note,
The untaught harmony of spring:
While, whisp’ring pleasures as they fly,
Cool Zephyrs thro’ the clear blue sky
Their gather’d fragrance fling.

A number of variously positioned figures, easily identifiable as personifying Gray’s “hours” and “Zephyrs”, are postured to suggest movement and activity. Two figures reach for (or point at) the smiling naked figure who resembles the figure of Gray on page 2 and who, in a “crab-walk”-like position, suspends himself above the ground by perching his hands and feet on roots that are beginning to extend into branches.²⁴

²⁴ I do not wish to commit to either possibility here, because doing so would be to participate in the interpretative exclusion that Blake’s ambiguous figures resist. Rather, to consider both possibilities simultaneously reveals the complex levels of perception that Blake attempts to unfold. The indeterminate gesture embodies both the accusation and invitation of the sportive fly

Whether this figure represents the poet, the newly-woken purple year, or both remains unclear. Blake's title for this page suggests that the figure is indeed the "Purple Year, awakening from the roots of Nature". While Heppner would perhaps suggest that this is a definitive point in the reader's search for meaning in the design even though the text is Blake's, we must remember that this is a cumulative series of designs. With this in mind, it becomes evident that, although the figure on page 3 may indeed be a personification of the "purple year" as suggested by Blake's title and the section of Gray's poem that is present on the page, when one considers the resemblance between the differently identified figures on page 1 and 2, the different scenes that they inhabit and the subtle links (suggested by Gray's textual images and Blake's couplet, titles and visual art) between the purple year, the process of awakening, roots, the narrator of Gray's poem, Gray himself and Blake, the apparent interpretative simplicity of the link between Blake's image and Gray's poem is quickly shattered.

While this figure has already become a dense weave, a nodal point of multifunctional elements, consider this further complication: while textual and pictorial "roots" are exclusively Blake's addition to this composite series, Gray's "long-expected" spring flowers, which, presumably, awake from nature's roots (as textually introduced by Blake), are illustratively portrayed as bearing infant figures. These infants suckle at the breasts of airborne female figures who pluck them from the flower petals. Indeed, the posture of the purple year/poet-figure could easily be interpreted as indicative of sexual

on later pages. Blake's illustration does not respect the chronological progress of the text, instead condensing a variety of moments and possibilities into a single figure. This condensation artistically hints at the earlier-indicated paradoxes that are shared by the contemplative moralist and the solitary fly, yet the encounter is not definitively rejected or rewritten as it is in Blake's "The Fly". Rather, this is one of many artistic methods that inclusively encourage escape from

participation in this overall picture of creativity, fertility and birth. The pictorial images of female figures also condense many elements of Gray's text: like the "hours" or "Venus' train", they disclose the flowers, like the "Cool Zephyrs", they gather and fling skyward the presumably fragrant infants and petals, and like the insects (and, by Gray's metaphoric implication, mankind) that "taste the honied spring" and eventually chide the poet-figure later in the poem, these figures fertilise the flowers, intrigue the poet-figure's gaze and gesture toward the poet. Relating the condensed figure of the poet, as indicated above, to this additional, condensed pictorial image and placing both in the multiple contexts of the text, the design, the series of pages that encapsulate the poem and the series of composite poems that make up this collection is quickly becoming an overwhelming task. It is as if Blake attempts to incorporate a variety of Gray's poetic ideas and images, as well as his own ideas, into each artistic image and each interaction between these condensed images. Traditional strategies of analysis and interpretation that attempt to "read", reduce and simplify this expanding and relative universe are obviously ill-suited for the task. Yet it must be pointed out that the rapidly growing complexity and apparent excess contained within this small series of composite designs does not endlessly expand and eventually fragment into paradoxical nonsense. Bending and blending associative elements without breaking their individual or interactive coherence prevents this composite effort from disintegrating into meaninglessness. Blake's images avoid the nihilistic potential that results from of comprehensive association and inconclusive representation, instead functioning as catalysts for a further expansion of

the first-person, linear perspective invoked by the language and situations contained in Gray's ode.

perspectival diversity by extending the existing associative multiplicity of Gray's poetic images.

However, in addition to the emerging and complex relativity between all of the elements of the composite collection, including Gray's original text, Blake's visual images include small and surprising "quantum" particulars, pictorial icons that challenge efforts toward understanding this composite excess and threaten to rupture the spatial boundaries of the Gray collection by forcing extraneous considerations and relations. These considerations, brought about by the image, allow a further escape from the limits of Gray's boxed text, but also bring more to bear on this original text. For example, the six-pointed star that sits between the open-mouthed bird and the text box on page 3 is not mentioned in the text of Gray's poem and is the only occurrence of this image in the series of visual images for this poem. However, it does appear twice more throughout the Gray designs. On page 5 of "The Progress of Poesy", a poem whose pages Blake also artistically populates with small flower figures and Aeolian lyres, the six-pointed star sits among the branches of two trees, in much the same position as the "Ode on the Spring" occurrence. Within this grove float nine sphere-carrying figures, a cherub and two female flutists in a nearly symmetrical composition. Again, the text makes no mention of this star, but instead describes Cytherea's or Aphrodite's day celebrations where "rosy-crowned loves" sing and dance in a celebration of beauty. This iconic repetition connects the already-complicated composite weave of "Ode on the Spring" with that being created in the illuminated pages of Gray's "Progress of Poesy". Such a connection increases the possibility for and complexity of meaning within this composite vision while encouraging and extending the density of potential allusion and association between the two individual series of pages.

Samuel Foster Damon, in A Blake Dictionary, concatenates Blake's written comments on stars and demonstrates the variety of symbolic import that they possess. While this further increases the allusive potential of the drawn image and expands the Blakean context of the star, a reliance on particular written uses or characterisations of the symbol can potentially lead to attempts at reductive and definitive interpretation, and obscure the expansive and connective functions of the artistic image that is being considered here. Rather than making an attempt to interpret the specific meaning of the star image and to simplify (and ignore) many of the subtleties within and between the two distant pages by establishing the icon as a thematic signpost or "key", I wish to assert that its repetition between poems increases the expressive potential of each illuminated poem by acting as a simple, connective conduit.

The six-pointed star appears again on page 7 of "The Bard" in a less recognisable form. Although again drawn above the text box, three roughly-executed six-pointed stars adorn what appears to be a whip or cat-o-nine-tails, brandished by a crowned, bearded figure as he descends from the sky toward terrified figures below. While this instance of iconic repetition is perhaps a bit of a stretch in that the stars here appear less like symbols and more like unremarkable elements in a larger design, it still potentially extends the connection between the different poems and pages of the illustrated Gray volume.

Outside of the Gray volume, this star again appears in one other example of Blake's visual art, Plate 91 of Jerusalem. Here, lines wound around a six-pointed star connect with the chest of a reclining figure. In The Illuminated Blake, David Erdman's commentary draws numerous links between this design and others in Jerusalem (370), furthering the already-identified expansive interconnectivity that threads throughout Blake's work. While later chapters will argue that the composite dynamic in Blake's

visual additions to the works of others is somewhat different from that in his own pages, what is important here is that Blake's repetition is an expansion of a recognisable icon that connects and complicates different pages in the same collection, while also intertextually extending this connective depth beyond the isolated interaction of Blake and Gray. Curiously, and perhaps fittingly for the direction of this argument, the plate of Jerusalem on which this star appears contains a textual assertion that "he who wishes to see a Vision; a perfect Whole Must see it in its Minute Particulars" (E 251). Indeed, the example of the six-pointed star that we have traced effectively illustrates how rapidly a minute particular can become a nodal point of excessive interrelation.

While identifying links between this and other pages of Jerusalem, Erdman makes an attempt to interpret the significance of this star by appealing to the historical and religious significance of the icon. Although this interpretative gesture reductively illuminates only one possibility of meaning for the star, it does call attention to a further extra-Blakean layer of significance, which, when added to the already-extensive function of the icon as connective conduit, increases the inferential power of this minute particular to a critical mass. The six-pointed star, a Judaic symbol, is sometimes characterised as "Solomon's Seal" and its symbolic association with the wisdom of King Solomon is of especial interest to the original appearance of the star in the visual additions to Gray's "Ode on the Spring". Solomon's Seal itself, though, is a plant with a curious link to the "root" metaphor that Blake offers in the couplet that characterises the relation between his work and Gray's. The root of this plant is said to have medicinal or healing value and, as the stems and flowers of this plant decay "the root-stock becomes marked with scars that resemble starry signets or seals" (Evans 1018). When this associative combination of the wisdom, healing and marks that indicate decay is added to Blake's already abundant

contextual and inter-textual utilisations of the star icon, and this concentration is then linked to the already dense interconnection of elements that have appeared in the first three pages of “Ode on the Spring”, the result is an excess that defies reductive interpretations.

This compound “vision” (consisting of both visual artistic images and visual language) is more than merely a “double” vision or binocular vision incorporating the distinct viewpoints of Blake and Gray into a single false perspectivism. Blake’s visual designs resist definitive, singular interpretation and, as will become apparent through the rest of this chapter, resist temporal and figural consistency or linearity. Thus, while Gray’s lyric argument could be characterised as being dependent on monocular vision and a first-person point of view (while offering an illusion of perspective by opposing the fly to the moralist), Blake’s extra-peripheral artistic additions are excesses that include but cannot be absorbed by Gray’s limited and limiting language.

Indeed it would be much simpler (and much more traditional) if Blake created a composite which exclusively incorporated his own words, images and esoteric symbols, illustrated Gray’s poem faithfully or at least rejected Gray’s poetic images completely in his artistic illuminations. What destroys such simplicity and often frustrates Blakean scholars is Blake’s unique insistence on adding to, rather than replacing Gray’s textual images, notions and directions. As a result, the exclusive strength of Gray’s textual voice is lessened and becomes part of an inclusive, multiple vision.

While only half of the composite pages of the “Ode on the Spring” have thus far been considered, Blake’s visual art has already introduced an almost opaque multiplicity into the basic considerations of Gray’s poetic text. As Frank Vaughan, drawing from Mitchell, suggests, Blake generates his own images in addition to Gray’s textual ones,

syncopating or separating the text and visual image with disparities that complicate and alter the equation of text and design (5). Although a further exploration of this series would reveal that this density of possibility continues to increase, there is more than enough evidence thus far to exemplify that the complex dynamic indicated by Blake's couplet is indeed achieved here by adding image to text. Also, while this is, formally, a "reading" of the function of Blake's designs, I have not searched for exclusive meaning (Blakean or otherwise) in the specific images as if they were merely another meaningful text. One clarification must be made, however. Many of the rich, multiple and dynamic connections between textual and visual images do, as Heppner suggests, depend on the text as a definitive starting point. Indeed, both Blake's titles and Gray's words have been instrumental in establishing such initial connections. Beyond Heppner and beyond illustration, though, this critical exercise has also revealed that connective gestures between the distinct properties of text, title and image are only the first and perhaps the simplest of Blake's simultaneous efforts toward connective similarity and disjunctive distinction. As Vaughan suggests, Blake's "freedom was not complete, but he was no slave to the aspirations of the text" (25).

Blake's designs trace a familiar but ultimately different path from that of traditional illustrative practice, interrupting the traditional practice of "reading" the image according to a textual key. The disruption of this receptive expectation catalyses a process that eventually allows the image to modify Gray's textual assertion and to expand the relationship between text and image from a one-way to a two-way process. Crucially, then, an unexpected excess of "meaning" is produced by the image's liberating function on the limits of the text. These properties are not inherent in the solitary image, but are functional possibilities activated by the simultaneous presence of art and text. That is, the

image allows Blake to expand beyond the limitations of Gray's words while still retaining a connection to the initial text. This is accomplished without participating in a linguistic dialogue that restricts his perspective to either opposition or agreement.

The findings from this examination are partially supported by Frank Vaughan throughout his detailed study of the Gray designs. Vaughan comparatively notes that Blake and Gray hold a similar belief that "poetry should define man out of the natural world" (19). As well, both Blake and Gray borrow from others to conjure and resist traditional bonds (21). For Blake, however, words offer more than a narrow and opaque conduit; they are "forces, vortices of the imagination" that possess "conjuring power" (20). Language itself, for Blake, has "a richness that denies the capacity to have a single inalterable truth", and Blake uses the richness of Gray's figurative and probing language to turn "placidness... into a discomfort that forces the viewer to think" (20-21). Vaughan notes a further distinction between Blake and Gray in his claim that although Blake's visual images flow from "both the text and the tradition surrounding it", they often ignore Gray's poetic intent, sharing his "imaginative vitality" but contesting his "intellectual errors" and creating an opening to move beyond Gray's melancholic retreat by pursuing their own course (22). Blake's utilisation of the visual image allows him to both transcend direct confrontation and encourage a "multiplicity of perspectives" (15).

Specifically, Vaughan identifies the lack of perspective and point of view, the altering of light sources, interdependent figural relations and an inconsistent attitude toward the text box and the text itself throughout the Gray designs as symptomatic of Blake's visual resistance to cause and effect logic and the tradition of temporal progress (23). Vaughan characterises this resistance as suggestive and seductive rather than assertive, absolute or combative (29, 34). He suggests that Blake activates the poem's

language, literalises it, adds to it and alters it, often generating ideas beyond the speaker's concerns (27). Further, "a single design... neither merely expresses nor completes the idea of the text, nor even simply creates a dialogue with the text" (27). Indeed, when examining the Gray designs, "we should not presume the designs are more or less dependent on the text for their order [and] we should not preserve the primacy of the text" (30). In this composite collection, then,

the relationship of the design to the text is therefore far more complex and extended than words such as use or correction or dialogue can capture... It is plain that Blake did not seek dialogue or a dialectic with the individual poems. To do either demands a sense of equality between text and design that does not exist in the Gray series... In the Gray designs, Blake, with his polysemous technique moves from merely following Gray... to an ironic literalism that forces him beyond Gray's intentions... Yet the intent is more seduction than rape and more inclusively transcendental than exclusively independent. (33-34)

Despite Vaughan's exaggerated overall presentation of Blake as an apocalyptic and prophetic illustrative seducer, his general suggestion that the Gray designs "were created to deny the fatal sentiment behind the statement, 'Where ignorance is bliss/'Tis folly to be wise'"(34) is an accurate and appropriate characterisation of the function of Blake's visual additions. Blake's art, as suggested by his couplet, consists of wild, imaginative "roots" that conventionally depend on, unconventionally deviate from, and also remain symbiotically beneficial to the word in a composite attempt to emerge from enlightenment restriction and limitation. Indeed, Blake's visual images, although ultimately different from poetry, connect with and add to, but can neither exclusively oppose nor overcome Gray's words. Blake's individualist, "wild" drawing and painting, then, answers enlightenment rationalism and illustrates his philosophy in "the Fly" by connecting him with Gray while also depicting his melodic hopes beyond a merely harmonic illumination of Gray. In a sense, Blake's artistic additions encourage a

“controlled” rupture of the constraints and effects of the language they surround. By “controlled”, I am suggesting that Blake’s artistic additions serve neither as negation nor as a deconstruction of the original text.²⁵ While Blake’s artistic response to the text does emerge from Gray’s restricted contemplation, it does not dismiss Gray’s ideas completely. As the dedication suggests, Gray is still on his own: “Tis your own fault if you don’t flourish now”. Yet Blake still invites readers of Gray’s poetry to take a rest from their exclusive progression through words, and, like the purple year, to reawaken among the artist’s inspired, elusive and various leaves that feed from Gray’s textual springs.

As Heppner and Tayler have already noted, Blake’s visual art and textual annotations stem from and rely on the text. What this analysis has added to their observations, though, is that Blake’s artistic additions follow the approach to creative production implied by “The Fly” by relying on Gray’s words for nourishment while also overcoming Gray’s restrictions without directly opposing them in a textual annotation. The rooted image is fed by the textual spring and established relative to the word, but Blake’s illustrative activity in this example is not a confrontational, oppositional revolution—Blake was historically disillusioned by such turns. More accurately, we can

²⁵ Blake’s visual images do not dissolve the apparent “meaning” of the text among an infinite number of alternative possibilities or directly “answer” Gray’s poetry. However, they do call attention to the restrictive nature of both Gray’s ideas and his medium of communicating such ideas. Blake’s artistic interaction with the text, involving a variety of simultaneous and often contradictory functions such as atemporality mixed with sequential progress and imagistic consistency mixed with unpredictable figural metamorphoses, extends Gray’s initial ideas without exploding them. Blake’s visual art functions as both an emphatic underline and as an expansive tangent, a root that both branches away from the original text and maintains a co-operative relation with its textual source. The composite product thus resists the extremities of protean indeterminacy and exclusive meaning, truth and structure. Blake’s art constructively complicates and includes rather than destructively simplifying or dismissing the original text, presenting the reader with a dense concurrency of perspectives.

take Edward Larrissey's statement that "Blake's description of the moment when vision is renewed ascribes it to the intervention of a brother or fraternal spirit" and extend it here (76).²⁶ Gray's vision is renewed through the intervention of fellow artist Blake and textual vision is renewed through the intervention of a sister image.

Art and text, although capable of intersecting with, translating and emulating each other, are as different, but also as related as Blake's narrator and the Fly that he comes to respect. This sense of simultaneous relativity and individuality, without hierarchy, of an unstable truce between co-operation and conflict is enabled by the marriage of visual art and text. This is Blake's answer to the Sister Arts debate and a refutation of those critics who reduce his visual images to yet another text in their attempts to "read" his designs. This weave between word and image echoes Blake's and Gray's connections with and reactions to enlightenment ideas, and also recalls the differences and dependencies that the composite work creates between the two poets.

The interaction between this instance of Blake's text, Gray's text and Blake's visual art, then, reveals correlative and contradictory complexities that result in an ambiguous framing of excess, rather than merely a dialogue between opposing views or a hybridised monologue. Such excess illustrates the necessity of preserving yet furthering the specific critical assertions of Heppner and Tayler to more fully comprehend the dynamic of Blake's art.

Going beyond Tayler, then, I offer that Blake can be seen to be interacting with the lyric visions of Gray by preserving, modernising, decorating, maintaining, revising and contradicting them with visual images. Blake respects the sanctity of the original

²⁶ Larissey's comment is based on Blake's own accounts of a supposed visit from the spirit of his dead brother, who imparted the knowledge necessary for Blake to invent his relief-etching

creation, and does not directly compete with it by adding artistic embellishments in the same medium, as he does in his textual annotations to Reynolds, for example. Rather, he embellishes the original presentation with another medium of expression, opening up a complex arena of tension and conjunction. This composite contains an interaction between two related, but different media that results in an enriched, more complex, yet unpossessed expression, rather than a stable, homogenous assertion. In claiming this, however, I wish to avoid the dialectical trap of suggesting that a synthetic or evolutionary work is produced. Although the above claims seem to assert a family tree of artistic interaction, in that an offspring is re-produced by the coming together of two parents, I wish to assert that the marriage of the Sister Arts is not completely productive. Indeed, I wish to avoid the problematic nature of the parental metaphor altogether, for it unnecessarily complicates the argument by requiring parallel constructions of gender and power issues in the textual arena. I have already attempted to illustrate the reductive, binary problems that result from bringing power relations into the discussion of illustrative art via Heppner.

Interestingly, though, the consideration of the marriage and offspring metaphors in relation to the Sister Arts metaphor produces some pertinent problems that support my earlier claim that the interaction between visual art and text is not completely productive. As “sisters”, painting and poetry are metaphorically related as artistic modes of expression, yet they each remain distinct and individualised. Any attempt at “coupling” the sisters to produce a synthetic offspring or child is impossible. Metaphorically, the relation is incestuous, as well as sterile, so claims that such a relation produces any type of evolutionary product or united meaning are problematic as well. Instead of seeing

technique of engraving.

illustrated text as any type of dialectical synthesis or offspring, or as a battlefield in which two combative siblings fight for supremacy, it is more useful to consider the product as an encapsulated dynamic, as a containment of two expressive perspectives that remain distinct, yet consider a variety of ideas in different media in the same space. This view is adequately reflected by the “marriage” metaphor suggested in chapter 1. It needs to be reiterated, however, that the text does come first in these examples which consider Blake’s illuminations of others’ texts, and Heppner is thus partially right in asserting that examinations of the visual images can always begin with the text. However, both Vaughan and Tayler’s refusal to position the text as an ultimate authority by suggesting that Blake’s visual art can ultimately contradict, modify, correct or enhance the poetic idea seems to avoid some of the reductive problems of Heppner’s “reading” and hint at the overall futility of applying traditional interpretative strategies to composite art.

Thus we can look at Blake’s illustrative embellishment to others’ works as neither synthetic, nor revolutionary, but instead suggest a continual artistic/critical tension within combination. In other words, this is both a resolution, and an unstable encapsulated dynamic of simultaneous confirmation and contradiction between distinct and related ideas, meanings and media. In this way, the composite product of a text illustrated by Blake is a hybrid and ultimately open structure, worked on by multiple architects and constructed from diverse materials, where no single creator dominates and no single meaning or interpretation resides. The tensions between these creators produce the longevity of the illustrated work itself and the text is temporally revitalised, brought back into currency because of this artistic attention, in the same way that art is often resurrected by critical discourse. Blake’s critical engagement with the text is creatively offered in another medium, which makes the resulting interaction all the more distinct

from familiar critical practices, and necessitates that the examination of that interaction take such a distinction into consideration.

A detailed examination of another example of Blake's illustrative additions to Mrs. Flaxman's volume of Gray's poetry will help to establish that the functional complexities of the image and the media relationship suggested by the "root" and "spring" metaphors in the pages of *Ode on the Spring* are not unique to that particular set of Blake's visual images. As well, an additional sample will more explicitly demonstrate some of the ideas that have emerged from the above engagement with Blake criticism and methodology, and further determine the relationship between Blake's creative output and the prevailing eighteenth-century views of the Sister Arts.

Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" wittily combines high burlesque and beast fable. Although the cautionary epigram at the end of the poem maintains a didactic stance and extends the lesson learned beyond this particularly mundane example of a house pet's death, this narrative lyric humorously employs the form of an ode to memorialise the foolish feline. The more serious implications of Gray's "lesson" are thus trivialised by the interaction between the form and the subject of this poem. However, this humorous contradiction also invites a relaxation of the reader's critical faculties and thus light-heartedly communicates Gray's didacticism to a potentially more receptive reader. Blake's visual additions to this poem overshadow this levity somewhat, extending Gray's conclusive associations throughout the rest of the poem by maintaining a inconstant and often hybridised visualisation of animals and people. Further, unlike the "Ode on the Spring" pages, there is neither a definitive and guiding couplet inserted by Blake at the beginning of the poem, nor an abundance of figures or details in the images themselves. At first glance, then, these designs appear to be a deceptively simple series

of illustrations that focus more on the human parallels to this cat's activities than the humorous potential of the Ode. This is not surprising, though, for Blake is not often remembered for his sense of humour and, other than his satiric and vengeful work "Island in the Moon", critics often accurately suggest that this earnest visionary lacked such sense.

The text box on the frontispiece of this composite work contains the title of Gray's poem and is surrounded by some very strange figures indeed (see fig. 4). A hybrid between a cat and a woman (evidenced by the fact that the humanly proportioned, yet fur-covered, claw wielding thing that perches on the text box wears a wing-shaped corset and bonnet), with red eyes and a subtle smile on its whiskered face, looks down upon two apparently sexless, humanoid-amphibian creatures. One of the gold-coloured fish-things evidences a gestural motion in its posture that suggests a welcoming, open-armed embrace, yet the placement of these figures in the design, as tending away from the perched cat-woman, along with their bulging eyes and downturned mouths (if any expression can be "read" from such subhuman figures at all) suggests adversity and avoidance. The initially straightforward and very basic textual signifiers "cat" and "fishes" in the title are already disrupted by their presumably corresponding images which apparently "humanise" the subjects and, drawing from Gray's later inference, extend the referential power of the textual signifiers. Although the poem can be read as quite a playful allegory concerning human affairs, the visual images precede our encounter with the body of the poem and thus present a curious spectacle indeed. Blake's choice to combine the allegorical and literal properties of the poem's subjects in the

frontispiece does not just create a connection between the animal and the human, but presents such a combination as monstrous.²⁷

Returning to our examination of the first page, then, the fish figures flee from the cat-woman, stretching away from the darker part of the water that they inhabit and towards a brighter area of the design. A corresponding darker patch in the sky (where the cat-woman perches), while ominous, also seems to cup, contain or stabilise the figure on its perch. However, the title of the poem suggests that neither the textual perch, nor the dark area will prevent the death of this “favourite cat”, as the cat drowns in a “tub of gold fishes”. In Blake’s visual images, this “tub” has no discernible boundary. The division of the page into water and air relationally privileges the extensive body of water that reaches the distant horizon-line, darkens into an opaque illusion of depth and allows the fishy figures within to spread their limbs. By contrast, the solid text box upon which the compact cat-woman perches seems small, crowded and insufficient indeed.

²⁷ Neither human, nor animal, Blake’s figures here are reminiscent of the grotesques that often play in the margins of medieval illuminated religious texts. According to Michael Camille, medieval marginalia was a “concoction of hybrids, mingling different registers and genres” (13) just as the illuminated page itself mingled verbal and visual media. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries, as text became a more stable, official, and authoritative medium of recording, rather than just a cue for speech, such moments of textual and artistic intersection, according to Camille, no longer showcased mere “supplementation and annotation”, but also became a site for “disagreement and juxtaposition” (20-21). Although Camille suggests that the “demise of this marginal tradition might be attributed to the printing press” (158), it is possible to see Blake’s illustrative action as an eighteenth-century affront to the printing industry and an echo of many of the circumstances surrounding twelfth-century marginal gloss. As I have suggested, Blake’s illustrative additions to others’ work appears to combine the contrasting motivations offered by Heppner and Tayler (which, indeed, seem to be encapsulated by Camille’s suggestions about the evolving functions—supplementation, annotation, disagreement and juxtaposition--of medieval marginalia). Not only was the process by which Blake produced and printed his own composite works a private challenge to the restrictive regulations and determinations of the printing industry, but his illustrative assertions to other’s work, like those of the medieval illuminator, “problematise the text’s authority while never totally undermining it” (Camille 10).

Illustrative fluidity predominates, then, engulfing the solid text, much like the airborne moisture of the approaching cloud has engulfed the marooned cat-woman, and much like the hint of the textual title which suggests a forthcoming death by drowning. Even in the frontispiece, the springs of Gray's text have given way to the sublime ocean of Blake's artistic illumination. Thus far, then, the visual images present much more information than the text, and do so much more inconclusively. Although these visuals supplement the title statement somewhat, they are already flooding the page with contradiction (an ocean instead of a tub), condensation (cat-woman-thing rather than a "cat") and ambiguity (sexless humanoid amphibian-demons). The relationship between the title statement and the accompanying visuals is proportionate to the relation between the crowded text-box that seems engulfed by the painted water within the design.

It is difficult to examine these pages without organising one's observations into a reductive "reading" of the design. Indeed, one could argue that the above paragraphs are merely a close "reading" of many possibilities without settling on one of them, a varied interpretation of the page's textual and visual cues. What I am hoping to accomplish, however, is to display the excessive potential for differing interpretations that this composite procures. Blake does not merely "illustrate" the text. He does not simply translate the language of the poem into corresponding visual cues by drawing and painting representations of the objects associated with the textual nouns and relating such images within the design according to actions suggested by verb placement. While correspondence is always present in these images, Blake's artistic output suggests both an interpretative and creative agency on the part of the artist. Blake, then, as creative artist, surrounds the textual statement with visual illustration, interpretation and innovation. This agency is faithful to the text as its catalyst, but goes beyond the limits of the

definitive title via the inherent arbitrariness of the signs themselves. The artistic addition adds another layer of ambiguity, for unless the visual forms bear iconic or emblematic significance, their “meaning” is even more open to possibility than the symbolic linguistic signifier, for visual art forms can be separately or simultaneously iconic, indexical and symbolic. For example, in the page discussed above, one cannot clearly identify or determine the nature of the figures in the water. The figures do seem to be related to the word “fishes” in the title, but their unfamiliar form questions the assumed “meaning” or clarity of the textual signifier. They could be fish, humans, devils, males, females or sexless; they could represent good or evil or imply some symbolic significance that I do not have the capacity to recognise.²⁸ Further, the forms could represent combinations of all, some, or none of the above possibilities. Whether there is a “right” interpretation is not important; what is important is that Blake’s artistic addition radically increases the amount and types of information on the page. Such an increase interrupts and affects the logic, linearity and meaningful structure asserted by the textual statement and creates not merely an extension to the text, but a richly oscillating dynamic of possibility. The generic function of the “Ode”, already afloat in an ambiguous, polarised engagement between moral and fable is further opened by the expansive fluidity of the added image. Rather than being channelled by the text, Blake’s art disengages the text from its referential moorings—Blake supports the text, but sets it adrift without engulfing it. Although this sounds similar to Heppner’s suggestion that the text retains a determinate

²⁸ Indeed, the figures bear resemblance to the scaly creature in the bottom left of “The Old Dragon”, one of Blake’s six water-colour illustrations to John Milton’s “On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity”. As well, their webbed, bat-like wings reappear in “The Flight of Moloch” (from the same series) and on the back of the woman on the left side of the pedestal in the unused title page for Robert Blair’s *The Grave*. (See Robert Essick’s book entitled William Blake at the Huntington for reprints of these pages.)

strength as a point of reference within a more fluid artistic expansion, recall that Heppner advances this possibility for the purpose of instigating a “reading”. To use the text as a starting point for the determination of meaning in this case is to try to put the composite ocean into a semiotic “tub”. To read these designs is to fill the tub and ignore the rest. What I am doing here, in contrast (and to exhaust the metaphor), is to suggest that Blake’s interpretative artistic “filling” of the structural gaps in the textual tub actually overfills the container and leads to a reversal of their relation: although the text is initially responsible for art that surrounds it in the composite, the signifying excesses of the art actually become the larger container for the text. Indeed, this relationship is already asserted literally by the design of the composite pages, in which Blake’s added images surround Gray’s words. This dynamic of excess between art and text is, indeed, framed by the composite design of the page, but, just as the reaction between the art and the textual statement disrupts the communicative capabilities of the text, subsequent pages, when considered together, compound this destabilising excess exponentially.

Thus, the next page is even more curious (see fig. 5). Here, we witness an inconsistency in figural representation that will continue throughout the pages. The monstrous hybrid grotesques have been replaced by recognisable images of cat and fish, yet each animal in the design has a miniature human figure on its back, as if the literal and allegorical reference has been suspended. The figure on the back of the cat appears to be a plump, possibly naked female (in relation to the slimmer figures below), but certain identification and sexing of the figure is impossible, for there are not enough adequate visual clues in this page. In relation to the other pages of the poem and the feminine pronoun used to identify the cat in the poem itself, one may assume that the figure is female, but such assumptions are ultimately impossible to maintain conclusively.

Similarly, the figures that ride on the backs of the fish are somewhat vague to discern, but the background figure seems to be female, as suggested by the profile contour of a breast that the figure in the foreground comparatively lacks. The length of the hair cannot be taken as a sexual signifier, for both fish-riders have longish hair. Thus, the sexual uncertainty of the humanoid fish in the first page resurfaces in relation to the miniature human fish-rider in the foreground of the second, while the apparent female nature of the cat-woman in the first page is blurred by the androgynous figure on the back of the cat in the current page. In such an intensely gendered allegorical verse, the confusion introduced by Blake's images ultimately complicates the didactic simplicity of Gray's "message".

Not only have the animal and human components been separated within the visual image, but the interaction between the cat and fish figures in the design has also been severed. Each seems to be unaware of the other, and the gaze of the animal is outward, toward the reader/viewer, while the gaze of the human figures remains internally focused within the page. As well, the relation between water and air has been equalised somewhat and suggestions of depth have been purged, but there is still no illustrative sign of the "tub". Whereas the text box in the first page was mostly surrounded by water, the present design positions the text box more fully in the air, with only its bottom fifth in the water.

Interestingly, the contents of the text box cannot be completely ascribed to Gray on this second page. The text box frames handwriting (presumably Blake's), rather than set type, and this writing consists of Blake's titles to his visual images.²⁹ These titles,

²⁹ It must be reiterated that Blake's additions to this volume of Gray's poems are done by hand. Blake draws and writes directly on the already-printed pages of text and does not employ the

however, are based on the text of the poem, often combining lines of Gray's text that are separated by a few intervening lines in the poem itself. While this is a standard late eighteenth-century and early nineteenth-century practice for titling illustrations, in this composite situation in which the artist asserts his creative agency much more explicitly than the commercial illustrator, Blake's particular utilisation of Gray's text becomes an important factor in determining their overall relationship on the page. Blake thus largely re-composes and re-forms Gray's original phrases to provide concentrated, abridged textual titles for his artistic additions. This action requires additional commentary for two reasons: the dynamic of the interaction between art and text is shifted by the addition of these titles. Blake's textual additions assist in the further complication of the art-text relation, because he now contributes to Gray's text in two media, one of which directly alters the original text. This is similar to the already discussed insertion of Blake's couplet that precedes Gray's "Ode on the Spring", but in this instance Blake has not merely added his own words, he adds textual variants of Gray's original poem. Second, Blake's adjustment of Gray's text in the second page is more than mere abridgement in two cases.

The first instance of textual alteration beyond abridgement is when Gray's line "A whisker first, and then a claw," is changed to "A Whisker first α then a Claw α". I am assuming here, that the "α" is Blake's hand-written version of the ampersand ("&"), as he practices the same substitution in the line "She saw; and purr'd applause" by changing it to: "She saw α purr'd applause" in the title for plate 3. The addition of the final "α" in the line that ends title 4 seems insignificant, but becomes crucial when one looks closely

relief etching technique that plays such a large role in his own composites and often necessitates a comparison between various copies. In this case, there is only one, original copy of this

at its relation to the visual image added to page 4. In this page, which will be discussed in greater detail below, the figure of the cat predominates as the darkest spot in the design. “Reading” the cat’s image from right to left we follow the textual process of the nymph in the title, who, “hapless” and “with wonder” sees the “whisker first”, then “a claw”. But Blake’s title suggests that we see beyond the limits of Gray’s text “α” follow this line of sight beyond the text-box in the design to reveal the torso and legs of a woman. Although Blake’s visual art remains the same whether the “α” continuing the sight of the nymph beyond the text is there or not, here Blake textually modifies Gray’s poetic line by making it an incomplete statement, leaving it open in preparation for the excess visualisation of the artistic image. Concisely, then, the changes that Blake’s title makes to Gray’s text for page four turns a complete statement into an unfinished fragment, opening a grammatical gap that is then filled, once again to excess, by Blake’s artistic representation that combines cat and woman.

The second occasion where Blake textually alters Gray’s poem is in the title to page 6. He changes Gray’s line: “Eight times emerging from the flood” to “Nine times emerging from the flood”. This is an obvious attempt by the illustrator to forcefully alter the “meaning” of the original. As Tayler observes, whereas “Gray’s ‘eight times’ allows for the ninth and fatal submersion, Blake’s ‘Nine times’ dismisses the feline point, making explicit...the death only anticipated by Gray, then raising the ‘spiritual body’ for a tenth and new life” (63). While this is an interesting “reading” of the change, I wish to maintain that the interpretation of these details is not of primary importance here. What is important is that rather than creating the inconclusive ambiguity that I am associating

with his illustrative additions, Blake's textual substitution has produced, for Tayler, an argumentative contrast to Gray's original poem.

The text of the title to page 6 is itself akin to Tayler's view of Blake as a critic, editor and reviser of the text. In this title, Blake responds to Gray's poem in the same medium, creating a textual dialogue rather than artistic interruption and excess. It is useful to further distinguish between Blake's two types of interaction with Gray's text by returning to some of McLuhan's ideas. In Understanding Media, McLuhan suggests that literate, print-based cultures favour linear forms of experiential perception and organisation: "'Rational', of course, has for the West, long meant 'uniform and continuous and sequential'" and, in a sense, textual (30). By inserting textual titles on page 3 that alter Gray's original text, by responding to Gray in the same medium as Gray's poetic assertions, Blake participates in the linear textual game of asserting his individuality against Gray's, and reinforces the common rhetoric of textual point and counterpoint. Although it could be argued either that Blake is resisting the uniformity of print culture by offering his textual responses as hand-written script, or that the resulting textual dialogue at least "cools" down the "hot" media of print by illustrating the possibility of responsive participation, Blake still participates in the "hot and explosive medium of the phonetic alphabet" (36). His titles thus become arguments and revisions, and introduce Blake as a critic. His individualised textual assertions allow Blake to be approached through traditional methods of interpretation, reading, analysis and classification in relation to Gray's perceived textual "meaning".

Blake's visual images, though, offer a very different form of addition to both his text and Gray's, interfering with the interpretative processes that have historically been applied to text and more recently to art that has been critically reduced to the status of

text. McLuhan, in delineating the difference between television and print media, offers a contrast that is equally useful when considering the difference between Blake's visual images and the textuality that both Blake's titles and Gray's poem are composed of: "The difference is akin to that between the old manuscripts and the printed word. Print gave intensity and uniform precision, where before there had been a diffuse texture. Print brought in the taste for exact measurement...that we now associate with science and mathematics" (276). "Reading" print also leads to the search for meaning and interpretation that I have been resisting here. Blake's art, like medieval illuminated manuscripts does not "project the author, so much as involve the reader" (277). As McLuhan suggests, Blake's counterstrategy (and I suggest here that this is an artistic counterstrategy) is "to meet [eighteenth-century] mechanism with organic myth" (38). Although McLuhan's argument quite possibly centres on the esoteric, privatised myths that Blake creates in his prophetic works, I would like to alternatively suggest that Blake visual images are capable of meeting and shattering the limited powers of textual assertion and the limiting reductions of interpretive "reading". This artistic diffusion and confusion evokes a non-linear dynamic of space, time and reference around the linear structure of even the most symbolic and open of poetic texts.

To explain this further, consider the following quote from McLuhan in the context of the above discussion of the frontispiece of Gray's poem. Representational art

enables us to locate the single incident in time and space....In visual representation of a person or an object, a single phase or moment or aspect is separated from the multitude of known or felt phases, moments and aspects of the person or object. By contrast, iconographic art uses the eye as we use our hands in seeking to create an inclusive image, made up of many moments, phases and aspects of the person or thing. (291)

Although McLuhan asserts this while explaining the tactile-like, “nonvisual mosaic structures of modern art”, I argue that the same statement can be made about the visual mosaic of Blake’s art. That is, Blake’s visual images successfully condense many moments, phases and aspects of Gray’s textual signs into a single mosaic-like artistic image and carry this condensation, unpredictably, across several composite pages. One could argue, though, that the collection of pages that illustrate Gray’s “Ode” form a kind of continuous narrative, and thus bear characteristics similar to the linear, temporal progression of the lines of Gray’s poetic narrative and Blake’s textual titles. If this were the case, then Tayler’s suggestion that we see Blake as a critic would be warranted. However, analyses of the first two pages have already shown that Blake is effecting more than merely a critical or structurally progressive response to the text. As suggested earlier, the addition of Blake’s artistic additions (which seem both authorised and unauthorised by the poetic text) produce a composite work that extends, varies, opposes, inverts and, most importantly, interrupts the textual signification or messages, resulting in an unauthored composite excess of information.

Moving on to page 3 reveals more inter-illustrative shifting and presents the first opportunity for comparison between the text of the poem and Blake’s visual image (see fig. 6). Again, the relation between the woman and cat has changed: the obviously female figure now reclines on a solidly painted strip that divides water from air and is overlaid by the text box. Her pointed ears and facial colouring and eye shape suggest resemblance to her counterpart on page one. However, the figure on page 3 has human hands and feet, and is clad in a full-length gown, unlike the clawed, furry thing that Blake draws on the title page. From behind the text box, a tail protrudes that is similar to the one on the first

page, but the obscuring nature of the box prevents one from concluding either that the tail is attached to the female figure, or that the tail belongs to a separately represented cat.

The poem itself introduces the setting as the side of a “lofty vase” that is painted with flowers. Upon this edge, the pensive tabby Selima reclines and gazes on the “lake” of water within the vase. Although the two earlier pages place no boundary around the water, the current visual design seems to temper the earlier oceanic expanse somewhat, by depicting the metaphorical “lake” with shoreline and bottom. Such depiction, though, still overfills the textually-specified vase and remains aligned to the more expansive referent. Here, the design presents the ambiguous woman-cat on a largely undefined surface, overlooking a large expanse of water that contains an assortment of submarine flowers. Although the text, to this point, merely introduces a cat on the side of a vase, Blake’s anticipatory artwork has already been playing with the varieties of representative connection between the animal fable and the moral allegory that the poem eventually marries. All the elements of the current text can be recognised as being present in the current visual image, but the arrangement of such elements within and across the first three pages has already anticipated, condensed and deformed the linear revelations of the poem.

As well, the visual relations between figures and the shifting dynamic of the represented figures themselves exceed the suggestions of the text. For example, two figures in the bottom left corner of page three seem to represent two underwater lovers. Their human form is offset by their smaller proportions in relation to the woman-cat above, and also by the folded wing/fin-like anatomy protruding from their backs. It is tempting to equate these figures with the fish on the previous two pages, but a few details resist such an equation. Recall that the amphibious, humanoid figures in the first page are

apparently sexless and of equal proportion to the cat-woman on the text box. On page 2, the corresponding figures have been represented as miniature human forms astride two recognisable, largely proportioned fish. The humanoid figures on page 2 are ambiguously sexed, although one seems to have breasts and both have long hair. In the current page, one figure has long hair and the other, short, curly hair. Neither have obvious sexual organs, although both are naked. However, one of the figures has partially exposed its chest and no discernible breast development is visible, suggesting that this figure is possibly male (yet not quite human). To maintain a complete correspondence between the figures in all three pages is to ignore the shifts in representation that occur.

Additionally, the text has made no mention of the fish by page 3, save for the title. The submarine figures have been inconsistently represented, again anticipating the allegorical contents of the text, but going beyond what is already and eventually suggested by the text. Indeed, Gray does not explicitly indicate either the number of fish or the nature of the fish (aside from their role as objects of temptation) in relation to the allegorical fable. One could argue that the context of the poem suggests many possible interpretations for the fish, but never explicitly defines such possibilities. Blake's art has variously filled in this textual opening. Instead of providing a visual "reading" of the figures and reinforcing such an interpretation with consistent representation, however, he has maintained an ambiguous, non-progressive variety of figural representation that fills Gray's textual gap with excess, and interrupts the linear textual narrative development of both the fable and its allegorical possibility with an all-at-once-and-more dynamic.

At the same time that this excess is produced, however, Blake's art largely translates the original text's signifiers into equivalent visual representations. The woman-cat, like the textual tabby, gazes narcissistically upon her own reflection and the tail curls

in a possible declaration of joy. Her illustrated face is, indeed, “round”. The “snowy beard” corresponds to the fluffy collar on the woman-cat’s clothing. Her illustrated hands suggest a representative condensation, for one resembles a human hand and the other, represented in a slender profile that does not allow the separate fingers to be as readily distinguished, seems to combine both the indefinite paw of the cat on page 2 and the tapered claws of the cat-woman on page 1. (This becomes more evident in the depicted reflection of the figure in the water, where the lines that delineate the fingers on the woman-cat’s left hand are absent, suggesting a paw-like shape.) Again, though, whether such correspondences are accurately interpreted here or not is not important. What I am attempting to show is the concurrent presence of correspondence, ambiguity and contradiction that these pages contain.

Advancing to page 4, which has already been partially examined in relation to Blake’s title, further shifts and inconsistencies are artistically evident as the textual structure expands into metaphorical and allegorical juxtaposition (see fig. 7). As suggested above, the cat and woman are again illustratively presented as a hybrid, but their hybridised relation is again uniquely represented. Like a grotesque experimental vivisection there is a marked suture between the cat form and the human form. However, the text box obscures much of this sudden conjunction. Clouds seem to be forming in the upper left-hand corner of the page. The submarine flowers of the previous page are nowhere here and the lake bottom, upon which the two human-fish figures reclined on page three, is no longer present. The two underwater figures now stretch their limbs much like their counterparts on page one, but take no notice of the gaze of the cat-woman that has turned its attention away from her reflection and toward the swimmers. Indeed, the art for this page is more of a “motion capture”, a snapshot of activity, in contrast to

the largely static composition of page three. The winged/finned people-fish, metaphorically figured in the accompanying text as “angel forms”, “Genii” and nymphs, have retained the primarily human form of page 3, but their arms blend with their fins rather than ending in hands, and one of the creatures’ feet taper to toeless points. This configuration of the limbs of the underwater figures has no precedent in the preceding pages and presents yet another variation of combination. Further, conservative representation obscures most of the visual cues that would allow a viewer to distinguish the sex of the nude, underwater figures. Their hair length is again ambiguous, but the curly hair of the apparently male character in the previous page seems to have been maintained. The other figure, however, appears to have breast contours, but such an assumption is problematic, for the contours seem to suggest a shape halfway between the chests of the male and female figures on page 5. Face shapes and details are equally ambivalent in this page as well.

A surprising portion of the design is the sudden appearance of an old woman represented in the top right section of the page. Not only does her posture recall the cat-woman from the previous page, but the contours of this old woman’s body blend effortlessly into the clothed human portion of the cat-woman in the foreground. This postural echo and contour affinity is contrasted by the spatial distinction between the hybrid cat-woman figure in the foreground and this new figure in the background. The maintenance of this illustrative tension between affiliation and distinction certainly increases the possibility for various relational interpretations between the figures and stretches beyond the suggestions of the poetic text that inhabits this particular page.

Indeed, if this page is taken in isolation, the text is mute in relation to the new figure. However, further examination reveals another of Blake’s artistic techniques that

further disrupts the linearity of the poetic narrative and contributes further to the excess of interpretative possibility. The only other figure to appear in the poem is Fate personified, who, in the text of page 5, sits by and smiles. As the old woman appears in the visual art on pages 4 and 5, and since she is seen cutting a rope that Tayler suggests is a symbol for “the thick-spun thread of Selima’s life” (62), one could conclude, as Tayler does, that this old woman is the Fate from the text of page 5. Yet the correspondences between the cat-woman and the new figure, along with the introduction of the new figure prior to the text’s mention of Fate and the fact that the figure on page 4 does not appear to be smiling, problematises the certainty of such an identification. Further, the artwork on page 5 depicts the old woman in a position of activity (see fig. 8). It appears as if she has thrown or pushed the head-down figure into the water. If she is Fate, as Tayler suggests, her illustrated depiction does not concur with the line “Malignant Fate sat by and smil’ d”. This illustrated old woman is not the passive spectator of the text, but an active participant in the visualised action that circles the text box of page 5. To complicate things further, the position and posture of the old woman perched on the text box of page 5 echoes that of the cat-woman on the frontispiece and recollects the already discussed correspondences between the two suggested by page 4. Simultaneously, however, the female figure that plunges into the water is distinct from the old woman. The maintenance of this ambivalence in the relationships between the figures in the design, and between the textual cues and the illustrated dynamic, complicates the simple textual allegory that juxtaposes cat with female and fish with gold (23-4). Indeed, the visual images, initially based on cues from the text (and not necessarily the text that shares the visual image’s particular page), take on an inter-referential, but also conflictual relation,

compounding the layers and levels of signification to the point where meaningful consistency gives way to a more turbulent dynamic of possibility.

To exemplify the above claims, a further examination of page 5 is useful. In this visual image, the figure balancing on the text box echoes the frontispiece, but seems to still be resting on the largely indistinct shore, rather than being perched fully on the text box. In this page, too, the perspective has changed from the frontal view of the previous two pages to a profile view. The fleeing figures, when compared to the figures in the frontispiece, have changed the direction of their flight and, although still heading away from the dark portion of the water (and the sharp corner of the text box), are also heading towards the shoreline. Continuing the inconsistency between pages, the underwater figures are given a unique shape and proportion. They are depicted as an armour-clad man and woman, and thereby visually represent the metaphor of scaly armour in the previous page's text box.³⁰ This type of "illustration", or literalisation of a textual description, distinguishes itself from the functional potential of other visual images examined throughout this chapter and is thus worthy of consideration. Instead of "figurally" expanding upon a literal use of language through visual means, this example literalises an image which is textually figural. In this instance, then, there is a complete inversion of the function of Blake's image and of the usual relation between a "literal"—lettered—medium and a "figural" or visual one. This particular correspondence between the Sister Arts displays the diverse possibilities of each medium and demonstrates the variability of Blake's use of visual art. While the restrictive literalisation of a textual

³⁰ Interestingly, they also quite clearly resemble Blake's portrayal of Satan in "Christ Offers to Redeem Man", an illustration that Blake executes from Milton's Paradise Lost. Although intertextual illustrative correspondences have long been recognised in Blake studies, the

metaphor seems antithetical to the proposed ends of expansion that I have argued, this inverted antagonism contributes two important and complementary results: First, this visual literalisation of armour demonstrates that an illustrative use of art to represent textual imagery is not always servile in nature—it, too has the potential to disrupt textual assertion, whether literal or figurative. Second, while the presence of this literalisation in the midst of contrary ambiguities pluralises the functional potential of visual art on the composite page, such multiplicity does not detract from the overall effect Blake's expansive imagery. Rather, Blake's inconsistent employment of visual imagery in response to the text adds a further dimension of uncertainty into an already unstable composite relation. Indeed, the functional multiplicity of visual art within the same work serves as a powerful demonstration against the segregational perception of media that so permeates Lessing's Laocoön. An awareness of these plural functions further prevents the current study's promotion of the disruptive potential of visual art on textual specificity from merely echoing similarly restrictive perception and necessitates an overall recognition of visual flexibility that counters exclusivity in any form.

Returning to the depiction of the armour-clad figures, the man, who gazes directly at the viewer of the page, holds a spear and a shield, while the woman carries two spears. Although their literal and figural arms are raised in a way that recalls the frontispiece, the limbs no longer suggest a potential embrace. Thus, an echo between page 1 and 5 is clearly identifiable, but it is both a distorted and an enhanced one, similar to the way that the artistic additions disrupt, yet amplify the text.

possibility of such correspondence in this context serves to further the argument that Blake's art functions to disrupt the structures and limits of the associated text.

The figure of a woman no longer bears any resemblance to or features of the cat and sinks headfirst into the depths of the water. On page 6, she is represented with hands clasped and her head upturned, no longer sinking, but rising (see fig. 9). Again, this visual image depicts textual suggestions from the previous page, for the only text that inhabits the text box on page 6 consists of the final few lines of the poem's moral caution that abandons the beast fable altogether. The old woman and the clouds are gone, the two fish from page 2 have reappeared without their riders, and the young woman, like this page's text box, is mostly submerged within the water. Because of the static nature of the image itself and the already-discussed asynchrony between the visual images and the text, it is difficult to determine whether she is rising for the eighth time (as Gray's text suggests), the ninth time (as is suggested by Blake's title for the page), or merely trapped, like the ice-bound traitors of Caïna, the First Ring of the ninth and lowest circle of Hell in Dante's Inferno.

As has been mentioned, all six pages arrange the design so that the visual imagery frames the text boxes that contain the poem. Blake's use of framing has been considered by a number of critics. Frederick Burwick, in his analysis of Blake's own composite work, notes Blake's consistent practice of framing "the text within the visual medium" (128).³¹ Burwick further suggests that Blake is aware that "lines could be read as limits, but he also [knows] that the limits of opaqueness and contraction [can] open into

³¹ Further, Burwick (although aligned with the art-as-language critics) identifies the varieties of framing technique that Blake variously employs, pointing out that the composite artist "either made the relationship of his visual and verbal message immediate, with no dividing frame...or he has mediated his verbal message through a visual frame, whether informally interpretive...or formally structured and stylized" (128). As well, Blake at times "gives us in sequence a visual narrative mediated through a frame containing the verbal text" and at other times, provides "only captions" rather than framing a text (128). The final framing variation that Burwick considers is Blake's Laocoön, which, in his terms, "mediates the visual image through a welter of polemical graffiti" (128).

translucence and expansion” (132). Peter Schwenger connects this paradoxical quality of Blake’s illustrative hopes to Blake’s practice of framing, suggesting with an appeal to Derrida that “the framing process that is necessary to the creation of any work implies at the same time two very different things. On the one hand: lack, lacuna, hollowness, emptiness. On the other hand: energy, vividness, image and excess of image” (Schwenger 102). Echoing the movement from opacity to expansion, the above analysis of Gray’s pages have suggested that Blake’s simple drawings (forms consisting of lines) that frame the text function to both distort and concentrate the poetic narrative, leading to an excess of interpretative possibility. Burwick introduces the metaphor of the window to describe the function of the frames of Blake’s designs for The Book of Job. This metaphor also accurately describes the function of Blake’s artistic framing of the text in Gray’s Ode, for just as Blake’s art leads to, yet frames and contains, an excess of representation and relation, the window frames, yet does not truly contain, that which is perceived through it. Indeed, Blake’s contemporary and friend, Henry Fuseli, similarly makes “effective use of windows, mirrors and frames to engage the participation of the viewer and extend the dimensions of reality” (Burwick 153).

Just as Blake’s title to page 6 alters Gray’s account of the drowning cat-woman and suggests a resurrection beyond the punishment that textually frames the moral of the poem, it is useful to consider Blake’s artistic additions to the text as that which not only drowns the limitations of the word and interpretative attempts, but also allows for a metaphorical resurrection of the composite as something beyond the text. Like Selima, the reader/interpreter of the text, reaching for the temptation of golden meaning in the ocean of the composite, drowns in the well-wrought textual urn that has fostered Blake’s artistic ocean, and can be resurrected by such an experience toward a more

comprehensive mode of perception. Similarly, the drowned text is resurrected with the help of Blake's artistic additions, like the little flower that is transplanted and elevated to the mountain in its native clod, or like the springs of Gray that contain and recall, yet also give rise to Blake's wild root.

This analysis has examined the extra-mimetic capabilities of Blake's visual images in regards to the objects and relations suggested by a proximate text and has reinforced the earlier claims that his art imitates, re-presents, and expands upon textual signification, but also disrupts spatio-temporal textual convention, linguistic structure and overall meaning to produce something greater than a language.³² Thus far, the attempt has been to examine the various attributes of the visual additions for this poem to demonstrate how the resulting composite design contains an excess of information and maintains a high level of ambiguity, thus resisting the certainty of interpretation. Although this descriptive effort has attempted to include as much detail as possible about the individual pages and to compare and contrast the pages with each other, the poem and Blake's titles, it would be foolish to suggest that this cataloguing effort has been exhaustive. Indeed, Irene Tayler, in her attempt to "read" Blake's visual art as a critical counterpoint to Gray, produces an equally detailed description of the pages that often corresponds, contradicts, but, most importantly, supplements the current study with further possibility. However, while not exhaustive, this effort has engaged enough with the examples to illustrate the initial premises that the function of the composite form resists interpretative readings, and that Blake's artistic additions to others' texts overfills the structure of the text with excess, yet frames that excess in an approachable way. The

additional details that Tayler observes in the images further supports this premise. In a sense, Blake's illustrative additions create a composite window through which monocular (cyclopean) vision becomes multiplied, more inclusive and less reductive.

Returning to an earlier metaphorical appeal, the viewer, like Gray's Selima, can recline, repose and dream on Blake's composite coastline and perceive the expansive, rich and dynamic ocean that constantly erodes the stable textual shore. Blake's ocean of images invades this solid textual space; the beach becomes more difficult to define and the coastline becomes impossible to measure. The division between the artistic ocean and the textual land is an unstable shifting hybridisation of signifying solid and liquid possibility wherein any attempt to find consistent, exclusive and stable meanings becomes futile. While textual and artistic representation have been characterised as muted reflections of the world of space, time, form, action and emotion, like the safe shadows that play on the inside of Plato's cave, Blake's artistic efforts suggest that their conjunction overcomes some of these representative shortcomings. As a result, models of reading the Gray designs that rely on interpretative limitation and reduction become problematic.

This chapter concludes with the assertion that Blake's artistic additions to Gray are not merely critical responses to the text. They do not exclusively constitute a commentary, clarification or complication. They distinctly amplify Gray's text toward excess, exceeding revolution and rupturing through the boundaries of logic, formalism, dialectic and the word. Most importantly, the composite dynamic that results from the

³² Recall that this is a complete contrast to Lessing's view, which offers that poetry is the wider sphere that both contains the limited aspects of painting and suggests the infinity of the imagination by the intangibility of its images (43).

addition of Blake's visual images to Gray's existing words interrupts reductive attempts at interpretation based on textual models of production.

It is useful to appeal to Jean Baudrillard to assist in illustrating this conclusion further. In "Requiem for the Media", Baudrillard examines the sequence TRANSMITTER-MESSAGE-RECEIVER (encoder-message-decoder) suggesting that each communication process is "vectorized into a single meaning, from the transmitter to the receiver" (136). Overall, then, the transmission of a message excludes reciprocity and "what really circulates is information, a semantic content that is assumed to legible and univocal" (136). However, Baudrillard suggests that if one responds to this message without opposing one semantic system to another, such a response "simply smashes the code" and "presents itself as a transgression" (140). That is, following an ambiguous response to a transmission, "it all collapses", for "there is no code for ambivalence; and without a code, no more encoder, no more decoder" (136). This subversion is exemplified by Blake's artistic additions to Gray's text. Their encouragement of ambiguity and refusal to adhere to a systematic iconography prevents his efforts from being reductively perceived as a legible criticism or even as an exclusive reinforcement of the original text. Instead, the excessive information and interconnection that Blake's non-linear, dynamical art introduces results in an interruption of the textual message and eliminates the need for us, the viewers of the composite work, to decode it or reduce it in a traditional manner. This does not mean that Blake's visual images cause a deconstructive or post-structural void. As I have suggested, Blake's artistic designs, when combined with Gray's lyric text, cause a collapse of both textually-based narrative linearity and the vectorised signification of the didactic poem. This is not a deconstructive function, though—it is not about simply exposing the emptiness of the

sign. That is, Blake, by drawing within the textual space, is able to expand the poetic and representative potential of Gray's language, interrupt its logic, and encourage further creative and liberating collaborations by necessitating a greater level of reader involvement while continually frustrating interpretative efforts. This simultaneity and dynamic density, this critical mass of spatio-temporal excess that results from this particular juxtaposition between image and word, suggest that this particular composite marriage, bound both by linguistic structures and solidly drawn lines, still retains an expressive potential, resists traditional "readings" and encourages a more expansive and non-analytical type of critical engagement. It is useful to conclude this attempt to understand the functional interactivity between Blake's artistic additions to Gray with an appeal to McLuhan's phrase "the medium is the message", for it appears, in this case, that the liberating function of the composite form supersedes the message that can be "read" or "interpreted" from the original work, and, indeed, becomes the message, or overall communication of the process.

Illuminating Death: Blake's Engagement with Blair and Young

This discussion has not pointed towards a semiotic reading
but has sought to demonstrate that interpretation is a highly
conventional activity...

-Jonathan Culler, from The Pursuit of Signs

As noted in chapter 2, the success of Blake's subtle interruption of Gray's text depends largely on the indefinite, inconstant and often-simultaneous identification and disjunction created between artistic and textual images. Recall, from the examination of the composite pages of "Ode on the Spring" and "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat", that the arrangement of Blake's visual images variously complicates the relative simplicity of Gray's linguistic assertions by concatenating multiple textual references into a single image, by including unexpected inter-textual and extra-textual images, and also by constructing novel and shifting relationships between icons, figures and other elements of his designs. As well, the temporal linearity of the lyric narrative is often disrupted when visual images appear prior to or well after their specific textual reference. While the written titles that Blake chooses for his illuminations often display and reinforce some of these same functional characteristics, as textual supplements they are more prone to exclusively oppose Gray's original with a new assertion or merely repeat Gray's words than to ambiguously supplement the poem. The association of lyric disruption with the particular placement of visual art in relation to the original text suggests that the overall design of the composite page plays a substantial role in sustaining Blake's aesthetics of excess.

If the functional effects of the Gray volume are promoted by the overall design of its composite pages, which incorporate shifting but identifiable ratios and relations between two media, then how does one approach Blake's collaborations with other source texts, which feature markedly different interrelations and spatial configurations between the written word and the visual image? It would be a mistake to generalise from the functions, dynamics and effects of the Gray composites and assume that they, by default, consistently apply throughout the various projects that introduce Blake's visual images to

the written work of others. Each of Blake's collaborative illuminations is particular in its composition, design, execution and historical circumstance. Despite these differences, however, it will become apparent that the dynamic interaction between art and text, between authorial individualism and creative collaboration, and the resistance to linguistic imitation, syntactical order and translation evidenced in the Gray designs are continually asserted throughout Blake's other illustrative projects.

In the 1808 illustrated edition of Blair's The Grave Blake had substantially less involvement with and influence upon the finished product than he had enjoyed with the privately produced Gray drawings. Robert H. Cromek, the publisher, initially promised the work of drawing and engraving to Blake and even credited Blake with both in a November 1805 prospectus (Essick and Paley 19). Later that month, however, a revised prospectus stated that Louis Schiavonetti would engrave "from designs invented by William Blake" (19). What this meant for Blake was that while he received a single guinea for each design, the less creative but more traditionally skilled Schiavonetti made 60 guineas per engraving. Morris Eaves, drawing from Alexander Gilchrist's nineteenth-century biography of Blake, has speculated that Blake's eclectic and extreme engraving techniques were at odds with the more conservative expectations of Cromek and the paying public (Counter-Arts 263). Schiavonetti's profitable role, then, was one of preserving the substance of Blake's original drawings while also normalising and taming their style for more generalised public consumption. This type of respectful modification, this artistic "translation", may at first appear somewhat similar to the kind of editorial adjustment that Blake's drawings effect on Gray's poetry. However, it must be emphasised that not only does Blake encounter Gray in another medium (that is, he engages with Gray's text using the visual image whereas Schiavonetti, although using a

different technique, recreates Blake's original in the same visual medium), but Schiavonetti's role is one of containment and censorship, of redrawing and restraining Blake's bounding lines as opposed to Blake's attempt to elevate, diversify and colour Gray's poetic flower.

Ironically, an 1813 reprint edition of the work, which contains more prefatory information than the original edition, refers to the late Schiavonetti, who died in 1810, as a "friend" (xlvii) of Blake and celebrates the engraver posthumously, stating that he "toiled on uncheered by the sunshine of patronage" (xxxv-xxxvii). Blake, underpaid for his designs, unable to engrave his own work for the Blair volume and embittered by the further suspicion that his idea for an etching of the Canterbury Pilgrims was stolen by Cromek, painted by Thomas Stothard, engraved by Schiavonetti (Eaves Counter-Arts 2) and advertised in the 1808 Grave publication, refers to his relatively successful and respected rival as "Assassinetti" in his private notebook (E 504). Yet, in a show of possible sympathy, Blake also suggests that the engraver was hounded to death by the demands of entrepreneurial publishers (504). Blake thus reserves the bulk of his silent anger and frustration for Cromek, whom he calls "Screwmuch" in the pages of his notebook. Condemning the publisher in a number of short verses, Blake writes: "Cr---- loves artists as he loves his Meat/He loves the Art but tis the Art to Cheat" and "A Petty sneaking Knave I knew/O Mr Cr---- how do ye do" (E 509).

Despite this bitterness and the relatively little money that Blake received for his designs, the fact that R. Ackerman reprinted the volume just five years after its initial 1808 printing indicates its popularity relative to other Blake projects. As well, the 1813 edition not only reprints flattering and complementary "remarks on the moral worth and picturesque dignity" of Blake's designs written by Henry Fuseli, but adds further praise in

an anonymous biography of Blair that does not appear in the 1808 edition. In the Blair biography, it is written that Blake's "pencil, imbued with the fiery genius and bold correctness of a Michael Angelo, is directed by the boundless imagination of a Dante" (xxix).³³ Of course, this promotional fanfare is a not-so-subtle form of advertising for the reprinted volume that uses inflated praise to supplant Cromek's original behind-the-scenes lack of confidence in Blake's engraving style as well as Blake's lingering dissatisfaction and animosity. However, such praise strengthened the reputation that Blake eventually received for the Blair designs, as they, along with his illuminations for Young's Night Thoughts, were the primary works for which Blake was recognised in his own time (Tayler 6).

Despite the shared responsibility for production, and despite the aforementioned praise and popularity of Blake's designs, Blake remained fully responsible for the designs in the eyes of reviewers, who criticised his practice of drawing spiritual figures as if they were tangible objects (Essick and Paley 26-7). While this criticism seems to have had a minimal effect on the work's sales, Blake took such critical responses very seriously. In his Descriptive Catalogue of 1809, he defended artistic practices that were being characterised by reviewers as idiosyncratic and somewhat archaic as follows:

The connoisseurs and artists who have made objections to Mr. B.'s mode of representing spirits with real bodies, would do well to consider that the Venus, the Minerva, the Jupiter, the Apollo, which they admire in Greek statues, are all of them representations of spiritual existences of God's immortal, to the mortal perishing organ of sight; and yet they are embodied and organized in solid marble. Mr. B. requires the same latitude and all is well. The Prophets describe what they saw in Vision as real and existing men whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the

³³ This description aptly recognises the simultaneous and contradictory sense of bounded precision and unbounded multiplicity that coexists within Blake's Grey designs.

Apostles the same; the clearer the organ the more distinct the object. A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing mortal eye can see does not imagine at all. (E 541)

It seems unjust that Blake, an underpaid inventor of designs that inspired engravings within in a popular publication be solely targeted by critics to the extent that the above defence becomes necessary. To make matters worse, the other participants in the production of this work are excused from similar criticisms because of a perceived disconnection from the process of invention. Such focused critical responses make it easier to understand Blake's frustration at the lack of control and disconnection produced by the compartmentalising practices of the publishing industry.

As mentioned above, many people besides Blake contributed to producing the original edition of this work, which includes Blair's original verse, Schiavonetti's engravings, T. Bensley's printing, Fuseli's introduction, anonymous interpretative explanations "Of the Designs" (possibly by someone named Malkin) and Cromek's profitable role as publisher. Unlike the relative freedom that Blake enjoys with the Gray designs, then, this fragmented mode of production removes some of his creative control and effects some distance between his initial artistic response and the final product.³⁴ It must be re-emphasised, though, that Schiavonetti's engravings, although filtering Blake's

³⁴ It is this fragmentation and isolation of the various components of a published work that Blake reacts against in his own illuminated books. Instead of accepting partial participation in collective, harmonic efforts that only serve to weaken and normalise his creative melody, Blake's own projects allow him to simultaneously become the author, illustrator, engraver, printer and publisher of a composite book. This practice brings invention and execution into the same hands at the same time and offers a liberating alternative to the criticisms that Blake levels against those who would separate the two. (See E 576 for such criticisms).

images through another creative hand, remain, as engravings traditionally do, faithful to Blake's original designs (but, as Blake would argue, unfaithful to his own imagination). What this means for the current study, then, is that, although the specific lines, shadings and perhaps even the proportions of the etched images can be attributed to Schiavonetti, we, like Blake's contemporary critics, can look at both the elements of the designs (figures, objects and backgrounds) and the basic relationships between those elements as being fundamentally Blake's creations after Blair's verse. With such awareness and despite the involvement of so many other hands in production of the Blair volume, a close examination of specific designs can be made in relation to the text to discover whether the functions of Blake's art, outlined in the previous chapter's study of the Gray composites, are also evident and successful here.

Before turning to the images themselves, it will be useful to examine the poetic dedication to Queen Charlotte that appears on the first page of the volume.³⁵ This verse, written by Blake, not only allows him to showcase two talents in this conglomerate work, but also contains some striking echoes of his interaction with the Gray poems:

The Door of Death is made of Gold,
That Mortal Eyes cannot behold;
But, when the Mortal Eyes are clos'd,
And cold and pale the Limbs repos'd,
The Soul awakes; and, wond'ring, sees
In her mild Hand the golden Keys:
The Grave is Heaven's golden Gate,
And rich and poor around it wait;
O Shepherdess of England's Fold,
Behold this Gate of Pearl and Gold!

To dedicate to England's Queen

³⁵ While he had intended the dedication to appear in the midst of one of his visual designs, much like the layout of each page in the Gray volume, the decision was made to print the dedication poem only (thus saving Cromek the expense of having to pay Schiavonetti for a thirteenth engraving).

The Visions that my Soul has seen,
 And, by Her kind permission, bring
 What I have borne on solemn Wing,
 From the vast regions of the Grave,
 Before Her Throne my Wings I wave;
 Bowing before my Sov'reign's Feet,
 "The Grave produc'd these Blossoms sweet
 "In mild repose from Earthly strife;
 "The Blossoms of Eternal Life!"
 (E 480)

Blake's golden door of death is a poetic figure of transitional beauty, which welcomes the soul that has just been released by the mortality of the body into the immortality of Heaven. Recall that fish, also "gold", are the cause of Selima's transition between life and death in Gray's prescriptive "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat". Recall also, that one of Blake's titles for the Gray designs alters Gray's line "Eight times emerging from the flood" to "Nine" times, suggesting not only death, but resurrection in a direct textual contradiction of Gray's moral purpose. Indeed, to resurrect Selima would suggest, against Gray's intent to use her death as a warning, that she was rewarded with immortality for her "wand'ring eyes", her lack of caution, her curiosity and giving into temptation. In his textual annotations to Berkeley's *Siris*, Blake emphasises that Plato, or philosophical man with his mathematics and moral prescriptions "did not bring Life & Immortality to Light Jesus only did this" (E 664). This sheds some light on Blake's subtle protest against Gray's poetic intent. The fish, which in Gray's poem brings death to Selima, but which through Blake's art and titles becomes a symbol of lived life and resurrection, has also long been a symbol for Christ. It seems, then, that Blake perceives a limitation to Gray's moralising aims, yet also sees a golden opportunity in the poet's symbolism that can be used to break the textual commandment that Gray establishes.

Another annotation to Berkeley, which further reinforces Blake's resistance to Gray's cautionary fable, states that "The Whole Bible is filld with Imaginations & Visions from End to End & not with Moral virtues" (E 664). Blake's small textual change thus challenges Gray's moralising limitations with a subtle biblical reference that is amplified by its connection with Blake's later dedication in the Blair volume. Despite the difficulties he experiences while working within the fragmented system of production that gives rise to the Blair volume, then, Blake still manages to, textually at least, weave a wild, complicating and liberating symbolic golden root between his earlier and later artistic collaborations. While these interconnections and contradictions further establish Blake's New Testament opposition to Gray's Old Testament assertion and hint at his desire to exceed the poet's limitations, as a textually-based argument the different positions remain unresolved. It is, finally, the insertion of visual images which illustrate and promote intertextual and extratextual excess beyond the moralising limitations of Gray and allow a simultaneous vision, a singularly condensed juxtaposition of perspectives, to be presented without establishing a textual law, a prescriptive perspective, or a synthetic harmony.

While Blair's Grave, as an example of the "Graveyard School" of poems, is generally known for using the subject of death as a motif for moral instruction and thus would appear to be fundamentally at odds with Blake's opposition to prescriptivism, Blake's dedication to Queen Charlotte at the beginning of the poem initially hints at a more agreeable relationship between his own desires to bury the limitations of prescribed mortality and Blair's resurrectional revelations. More specifically, Blake, using language that, in its vague reference, possesses the potential for concentrated and simultaneously multiple meaning, praises both the poem and its literal counterpart as "Heaven's Golden

Gate”, as doorways to spiritual and visionary understanding and renewal. Recall, though, that unless one looks closely at Blake’s poetic and artistic additions to Gray and recognises that they persistently encapsulate both a respectful promotion of and disagreement with the poet’s views, it is difficult to perceive any explicit or sustained contention with the poet. That is, it is easy for a viewer to notice only the decorative and co-operative dimensions of Blake’s additions, for his arguments are subtle and rarely establish a completely oppositional stance. Despite the initial appearance of Blake’s respect for and agreement with Blair, then, attention to the final three lines of the dedication recalls the couplet that Blake inserts in the second page of Gray’s “Ode on the Spring”, and hints that the functional relationship between his artistic additions and the text of Blair’s poem is similar to that found in the Gray volume.

Like the springs of Gray that feed the wild root of Blake’s inspired visual additions, this dedication suggests that Blair’s fertile poem is the inspiration for the sweet blossoms of artistic vision that Blake reveals.³⁶ This metaphor hints at the inherent fertility of The Grave, of death and of Blair’s verse, but also reveals that it takes the elevated visions of Blake to encourage the awakening of the soul beyond The Grave and to realise the dynamic capacity for “Eternal Life”, for depth and possibility that lies dormant within the mortal limits of the poet’s verse. Blake, then, suggests that his colourful artistic blossoms, while emerging from The Grave, are somewhat removed from the earthly considerations and limitations of their source when he writes that his

³⁶ Interestingly, the multiple, but subtly related metaphors in these two textual reflections never occupy the same space at once and thus avoid a figurative fallacy. However, Blake’s different metaphors (wild root and blossoms, springs and the grave) define similar relationships and also, through the repetition of certain words or phrases, call attention to each other. The simultaneous similarity and distinction between the two increases the density of potential meaning by

“blossoms” exist “in mild repose from Earthly strife”. Indeed, Blake repeats the word “repose” twice in this dedication, drawing yet another connection between the current dedication and the Gray couplet, in which readers are invited to stop their one-way journey through life, to repose and dream among Blake’s artistic leaves. Curiously, the connection suggested by the intertextual repetition of the term “repose” does more than merely recollect or repeat the previous incarnation. Rather, the word, in its new contexts, develops and enriches the initial occurrence in much the same way that Blake’s art functions in relation to the poetic text that it illustrates. Recall, in the Gray couplet, that readers are invited to stop, to “repose” and dream, or imagine, among the illustrated leaves of the Gray volume. In the dedication to the Queen that begins the Blair volume, however, “repose” is used not to describe a reader’s first step toward expansive perception, but to describe the “cold and pale” limbs of the body after death. Yet, like the reader’s journey beyond the text, but on a more epic scale, Blake suggests here that to “repose” in death is also a first step, a rest or sleep that leads towards the soul’s imaginative awakening. That is, both the earthly grave and Blair’s Grave are temporary resting-places that become spaces of transformation when subjected to Blake’s “vision”.

Later in the dedication, “repose” is used again, but in a less definitive way, and can be interpreted as suggesting that either the grave itself is a site of repose or that the blossoms that emerge from the grave exist “in mild repose from Earthly strife”. Perhaps, though, “repose” is not exclusively applied here, and Blake’s words allow both the grave and the blossoms to exist in this state of removal and rest. Indeed, a literal grave is an immobile resting-place, and Blair’s poem of the same name, despite its meditative and

constructing a concentrated compound of intertextual reference that expands readerly perception of the metaphorical relationship, while avoiding the blurring that comes from mixing metaphors.

reflective subjectivity, possesses the didactic inflexibility of moral dictation. How, then, does this compare to Blake's characterisation of Gray's similarly moralising verse as a fluid and mobile spring? If one continues the logic of the previous chapter and links the characteristics of mobility and immobility to the perceived inherent properties of fluid, temporal text and stationary visual art respectively, then Blake's possible characterisation of Blair's poem as a place of repose explicitly contradicts these formal perceptions. Perhaps, though, Gray's springs and Blair's grave cannot be solely characterised and equated by their textual form. Gray's collection of lyric poems begins with the spring, with the emergence of life, and ends with "An Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard", ends at the grave, at the same doorway where Blair begins his textual journey. While there is some overlap in content, then, each author remains differently focused: Gray writes of life's journey and Blair is concerned more with how the path of life influences the progress of the soul beyond the grave. Blake seems to recognise this in his metaphorical differentiation between the two, and may have more in common with Blair's spiritual concerns than with Gray's earthly experience. Indeed, it is much easier for Blake and his artistic images to enter and emerge from Blair's still grave than to intersect with Gray's mobile poetic springs. However, both the couplet in the Gray volume and the dedication in the Blair volume establish that Blake intends his artistic additions to have a similar relationship to the different poets' verse. That is, both the wild root and the blossoms that are Blake's images are intended to emerge from, transform and extend their textual source.

The metaphor of the "blossom" creates an additional link with the dedication to Ann Flaxman at the end of the Gray volume. Whereas Blake sees Gray's poems as colourless, earthbound flowers that require an artistic transplant and spiritual elevation,

the dedication to Queen Charlotte suggests that Blake's art has now become the flower itself and Blair's poem only serves as the fertile soil, the doorway that the vision emerges from. As mentioned, however, the two poets deal with very different segments of human existence and Blake, metaphorically at least, seems to be responding appropriately to those distinctions while maintaining some consistency in his own functional aspirations as an artist. Through these metaphors, Blake makes the claim that his art, at once the powerful mover, the wild, solid root and the "Blossoms of Eternal Life" acts to renew the poems and challenge their reader's perceptions by expanding their inherent limitations. In a sense, then, while Blair's Grave is a doorway that Blake's art must force open, and while Gray's springs are the source that Blake's wild artistic root must transform, Blake's art is an idealised source that encourages transformation, an open doorway between the textual line from the spring to the grave and the resurrected, creative reader. As suggested by his textual insertions, then, Blake intends his art to be an essential part of a process of "Eternal Life", a process of renewal and transformation between imaginative expression and creative perception that is largely prevented by the prescriptive moral content and restricted textual form of these poems. The question remains, though, whether the added presence of his artistic designs, in relation to the pre-existing text, is enough to create a composite doorway that is neither completely dependent on nor entirely neglects the poetic source. As was seen in chapter 2, Blake's designs do manage to effectively resist and respect Gray's lyrics by subjecting them to the expansive excesses of disjunctive visual imagery. Having recognised that Blake has similar intentions in regards to Blair's poem through the above examination of his dedication to the Queen, it remains to be seen whether his artistic efforts function in a manner similar

to the Gray illuminations given the circumstances of shared production that surround the Blair volume.

Indeed, one characteristic of the 1808 Blair publication that draws attention to the lack of control that Blake had over the final product is the ordering and positioning of the engraved plates throughout the book and between different editions. In keeping with a more traditionally illustrative configuration, the Blair volume contains fewer images than the Gray collection, and there is a greater overall segregation between images and text. That is, the engraved images in the Blair publication occupy their own distinct pages and do not frame text boxes as do those supplied for Flaxman's book of Gray's poems. Rather, text is variously and inconsistently included on the engraved pages in the form of titles, quotations from the poem, or a combination of both.³⁷ The quotations from Blair's poem that appear underneath seven of the twelve images connect the image to specific places in the text of the poem, but as the published image in the 1808 edition is often opposite a different section of the poem than its quotation indicates, the potential for

³⁷ Even the titles that are included underneath each engraved plate are of questionable origin. It is not known whether Blake had a hand in providing these titles or even whether he specified which quotation from Blair's poem should accompany each of the seven engraved pages that include such quotations. Given Blake's lack of involvement in the final overall publication, it is highly doubtful that the titles are his. Even with proof to substantiate one of the possibilities, it would certainly be erroneous to assume that the titles accurately identify and label the contents of each image. For example, the plate entitled "The Soul Exploring the Recesses of the Grave" has no accompanying quote from Blair's poem to support the identification of the female figure who holds the candle as being the "soul". Even if this title is an accurate naming of the figure, the engraving contains much more detail that neither the title nor the poem can account for. For example, the male figure above the underground arch and the helmeted body engulfed in flames remain unidentified by any textual cue. It is quite possible, then, that any interpretation of these illustrations that has been based on the titles, the quotations or even on the descriptive appendix titled "Of the Designs" is fundamentally flawed. While some of these images can be connected with passages from Blair's poem with little difficulty, others, such as the textually unprecedented "Soul Exploring the Recesses of the Grave" silently caution the viewer against assumptions that would favour the accuracy of an unconfirmed title. This example makes it easy to realise the traditional power that a textual title holds over a visual image. While the current study, for the sake of brevity, often identifies images by their titles and discusses the plates as if the titles were

multiple associations and for establishing connections between disparate sections of the text is tempting but also frustrating for readers. As well, the narrative, connective pathways between visual images, so effectively exploited and interrupted by Blake throughout the consistently illustrated Gray volume, is present, but less evident in this publication, where the ratio of printed text to engraved image is much greater. As a result, both the relationship between text and image throughout the volume and the configuration of text and image within the space of each plate lend an emblematic quality to the Blair images that cause them to have more in common with Blake's plates for The Book of Job than the Gray watercolours. That is, they more easily encourage episodic, condensed and multiple associations, while also retaining a greater potential for mobility independent from the original text. Initially, then, it seems that Lessing's traditional call for peaceful segregation between media and his subtle preference for textual superiority is respected in the Blair volume. The image is completely excluded from the pages of printed verse, whereas the pages that present an image consistently welcome a definitive textual ambassador that frames, contains and chains the picture with specific references.

Like the Gray images, though, the textual titles as well as Blair's poem itself do not completely explain or account for all of the particulars within Blake's designs. "The Day of Judgement" is an excellent example of an image that not only contains an excessive amount of minuscule detail that goes well beyond its brief title, but also offers a complex panorama of biblical resurrection that far surpasses the mere 77 poetic lines in which Blair considers life beyond the grave (see fig. 10). Indeed, whereas Blair writes a hopeful but limited account of the heavenly peace that awaits the "good man" after death,

correct in their identification of specific figures, note that the arguments that utilise these specific examples constantly call the specificity and accuracy of such titles into question.

Blake's image shows the full spectrum between salvation and damnation and paints a less comforting picture of life after death than Blair.

Another more specific example of the way in which Blake's designs exceed Blair's poetic considerations can be found by looking at two plates entitled "The Reunion of the Soul and the Body" and "The Soul Hovering over the Body reluctantly parting with Life" (see figs. 11 and 12 respectively). Both of these plates, if the titles are accurate, seem to portray the corporeal body as male and the soul, who appears equally substantial, as female. Their visual separation and reunion are sexually charged and the male body provides a stark contrast to the awakening skeletal corpse of the title page, while also drawing a strange and complicated parallel to the image of "The meeting of a Family in Heaven", which already contains some questionable figural relations (see fig. 13).³⁸ To further complicate Blake's sexualised distinction between the soul and the body, while Blair's verse does characterise the body and soul as a "Fond Couple! linked more closely than a wedded pair" (Blair 377) and describes the soul as "she" (357-8), it also, in exact opposition to Blake's artistic portrayal of the soul as female, suggests that the soul returns to its body with "all th' Impatience of a Man/ That's new-come Home" (757-758). Thus, diverging from his practice of using inconsistent and contradictory images in the Gray watercolours, but again emphasising his resistance against the text, Blake's designs unexpectedly establish a figural consistency here that contrasts with Blair's multiple and

³⁸ There is an unmistakable parallel between the embrace of the adult figures of "The Meeting of a Family in Heaven" and the two younger siblings to their right. While I do not wish to dwell on the incestuous suggestions of this figural echo, the male/female embrace is further complicated by the suggestion from the other two plates that the image of the soul is sexually opposite that of the earthly body and that the two have a spirit/substance heterosexual relationship. Such a relation causes one to wonder whether the portrayed "spirits" in the illustrations actually represent sexually opposite bodies and whether there is an implied relation between the longing of the soul and the body, the desire of a husband and wife, and sibling affection.

contradictory textual characterisations. It could be argued, however, that Blair's characterisation does remain consistent, for the identification of the soul as female is not contradicted by likening its reunion with the body to the impatient behaviour of a man returning home. To claim that Blair's descriptions of the soul are inconsistent would be unnecessarily to misidentify the sexualisation of the figure with its gendered conduct. Regardless, Blake's figural consistency in the depiction of the soul and the body, whether accurate or antithetical to Blair's opaque metaphorical intentions, does serve to connect these two designs in the same way that the repetition of the six-pointed star in the Gray designs functions to expand the image beyond its specific textual context while maintaining the integrity of the collection. In this example, Blake's sexual portrayal of the body and soul, while emerging from Blair's language, raises more questions about the place of earthly sexual relations and their potential spiritual parallels than Blair's poem can or does. To complicate matters further, however, in the plates that feature the deaths of the good old man and the strong wicked man, Blake portrays the "soul" image of each, not as a feminine counterpart, but as an exact likeness of their respective corporeal bodies. In this way, then, Blake's designs, first through an unexpected consistency, then through an equally unexpected deviation from that consistency, once again manage to exceed a textual perimeter without completely opposing, neglecting or discarding it.

Another characteristic of the Blair publication that further resists Lessing's triumph of the text is that different editions of the publication display different placements and orderings of the engraved plates in relation to the poem. For example, neither the 1808 nor the 1813 editions present the plates of visual art in the same order. The comparative chart that follows effectively demonstrates these differences:

1808 Edition	1813 Edition
1. The Skeleton Reanimated	2. Descent of Christ
2. Descent of Christ	7. Descent of Man
3. A Family Meeting in Heaven	11. Death's Door
4. The Counsellor, King, etc.	5. The Death of the Strong Man
5. The Death of the Strong Man	10. The Good Old Man
6. The Soul Hovering over the Body	6. The Soul Hovering over the Body
7. Descent of Man	9. The Soul Exploring
8. The Last Judgement	4. The Counsellor, King, etc.
9. The Soul Exploring	1. The Skeleton Reanimated
10. The Good Old Man	12. The Reunion of Soul and Body
11. Death's door	3. A Family Meeting in Heaven
12. The Reunion of Soul and Body	8. The Last Judgement

While some of the reprints of these editions claim to preserve Blake's intended order, I have yet to find the source that makes this intention clear. While the original 1808 edition places the illustrated pages opposite various pages of text from the poem itself, the 1813 reprint published by Ackerman not only re-orders the plates, but also segregates the images from the poem, separating them from Blair's text with a prose explanation of the images entitled "Of the Designs" that originally appeared at the end of the 1808 volume. Incidentally, a 1903 printing, heralded as a "new edition", re-integrates the plates by placing them throughout the pages of poetry but again alters the order of the images by including "A Family Meeting in Heaven" as the second plate. Thus, whereas the Gray designs are directly integrated with poetic text-boxes on the same page, and the soon-to-be-discussed Young designs, also integrated with the poem itself, are linked with specific lines of text by way of asterisks, the Blair plates remain less connected with the text of the poem. As a result, the overall mobility of these designs between the various editions, as well as Blake's inclusion of elements within the designs that are not mentioned by Blair's verse, have both inspired and frustrated many different interpretative attempts. Following from the common structural precedent of arranging the Songs of Innocence and the Songs of Experience into contrary pairs, some critics have

variously “discovered” similar pairings between the Blair designs, such as considering the image that portrays the death of the strong and wicked man alongside that which shows the death of the good old man (Essick and Paley 49). Certainly, these pairings reveal and enhance elements of each design that might not be apparent when considered individually or as a sequence, but to tidily and exclusively pair the designs is to restrict one’s consideration of their interaction with the rest of the set (not to mention the rest of Blake’s designs).

Attempts to discover within the designs an inherent narrative progression that is either affiliated with or independent from their poetic source have also been interrupted by the inconsistency of their ordering.³⁹ Such discrepancy has prompted Samuel Foster Damon, in an introduction to a 1963 reprint of the designs only, to suggest that the engravings be considered apart from the text and be studied as one of Blake’s prophetic books rather than as mere illustrations to Blair’s poem. An uncredited statement appearing in the introduction to the “Of the Designs” explanatory text from the 1808 edition partially supports Damon’s attempt by suggesting that “These designs, detached from the Work they embellish, form of themselves a most interesting poem.” However, this statement not only makes a problematic and textually-dominant equation of linear progression between a series of designs and a textual poem, but also, against the connective suggestions of Blake’s dedication to the Queen, follows Lessing’s lead by

³⁹ Attempts to arrange the designs in a linear progression engage in the same kind of exclusive critical practice as pairing the images. As we have seen with the Gray designs and as has been briefly indicated in relation to the Blair designs, Blake’s illustrations simultaneously create a complex relational weave and an antagonistic tension that oscillates within and between Blake’s creative projects, and also includes extra-textual references. Frequently, the effort to understand Blake’s composite pages results in an oversimplification of their functional properties and content. This type of critical focus, while usefully clarifying a certain portion of the whole, often eclipses or ignores the rest.

encouraging a segregational consideration of the poem and the images created to accompany that poem. Such segregation also ignores the connective power of the quotations from Blair's poem that accompany many of the designs and inextricably link them to specific lines within the text.

While both the statement from "Of the Designs" and Damon's own thesis favour a sequential and progressive narrative interpretation of the designs, their efforts do little to solve the difficulty of discerning an appropriate sequence for the constantly shuffled set of images. Also, recalling Blake's dedication to the Queen, which emphasises the links between the images and Blair's verse, to accept Damon's exclusive consideration of the designs becomes just as fallacious as considering Blake's own illuminated poetry without its art (as many teachers of Blake have opted to do). Indeed, Damon's equation between the Blair designs and Blake's own "prophetic books" awkwardly ignores the composite, multi-media nature of Blake's solo creations. One progressive thing about Damon's enthusiastic efforts, however, is that although they do exclude consideration of Blake's interdependency with the poetry that he illuminates, they usefully counterbalance Heppner's strong argument for text-image contingency by emphasising the independence that also persists through Blake's illustrative collaborations. Much like the Gray designs, then, but with the added characteristic of not being completely anchored to specific textual pages, Blake's visual additions to Blair have made the various critical efforts to exclusively contain these images within structural, interpretative tubs largely unsuccessful and unsatisfying.

Does a change in the order of the designs potentially affect the meaning of the whole? This is a difficult question, for it assumes that there is, to begin with, a standardised or inherent "meaning", that such a meaning can be affected, and that this

meaning has a fundamental connection to the designs. Perhaps a better question would be: what effect, if any, does a change in the order of the designs have on the communicative possibility of the composite whole? As has been suggested in the previous chapter, and as Blake appears to indicate in his dedication to the Queen, his designs function in both a dependent and transformative manner. Although the Gray images are integrated with the text in such a way that their order does not become an issue, we have seen that, when considered as a series, they do not completely respect the linear progress and gradual revelations of the text that they accompany. Rather, by quickly concentrating and complicating the iconic nature of the images and the relationships between figures, they both resist and refer to a unidirectional connectivity.

While the mobility of the Blair images might seem to serve similar functional ends as the Gray designs, their overall distinction from the textual page places them more in the realm of independent expression. That is, they can easily be removed from the volume, considered separately, or considered alongside the text without making much of an impact on the text itself. Indeed, the images are continually overwhelmed by textuality, however mobile they might be from edition to edition. Titles and quotations frame them, they appear amidst every few pages of text, and, even in the first edition, they are explained and annotated in an appended section titled “Of the Designs”. It seems, then, that despite Blake’s use of illustrative techniques that so effectively disrupt the limiting effects of Gray’s textual form and poetic content, the segregation of and limited number of visual plates in the Blair volume allow Blair’s didactic verse to predominate overall.

While it could be suggested that Blake has less to resist against philosophically here, given that Blair’s Grave is concerned more with the levelling human passage

through death than with the materialist and moral concerns of Gray, a closer reading of Blair's poem shows that this is not the case. The Grave lingers at the burial site, exploring the ways of meeting one's death, the pains of mourning and the coldness of the literal tomb. Only in the last five pages does it attempt to transcend its materialistic concerns and address the possibility of resurrection. Following Essick and Paley's suggestion that half of Blake's designs can be linked to Blair's brief engagement with resurrection, it becomes evident that author and artist each have a different focus. Blake's designs could thus be viewed as artistic extensions that blossom from Blair's more limited soil in an effort to transform Blair's poetic Grave from a resting place to a transitional space. However, publishing considerations, such as the continual reordering of the designs between editions and the aesthetic spacing of the images evenly throughout each edition regardless of their concentrated textual association, persistently inhibit the composite excesses found throughout the Gray volume.

This is not to say that the functional potential of Blake's visual art is completely subdued by the process of production. If Blake's images, as suggested by their textual titles, focus on themes of resurrection as Essick and Paley have noted, then such a concentration, in its attempt to make up for textual neglect, inevitably strains Blair's poetic efforts at closure by forcing open death's door, by showcasing a more expansive view that does manage to somewhat exceed the limits of The Grave.⁴⁰ As well, a volume

⁴⁰ Curiously, to emphasise resurrection is to return to a distinction between human beings, to accent the different spiritual fates reserved for the good old man and the strong wicked man on the day of judgement. This emphasis and distinction largely opposes the bulk of Blair's poem, which repeatedly demonstrates the equivalency of death for all. Indeed, the last few pages of Blair's poem, which briefly suggest that the temporary nature of death is soon left behind for the all-encompassing and peaceful embrace of Heaven's portals (683-4), fails to account for the spiritual fate of anyone other than "the good man" (710). So, although Blake's images exceed the limits of the grave, their concentration also reminds the reader/viewer that limitation and division persist even beyond the grave's levelling powers.

that includes both the text and the images will maintain this unresolved tension between textual focus and artistic expansion regardless of the placement or spacing of the designs. Indeed, to spread the designs throughout the text, as in the 1808 edition, may actually amplify visual interruptions of Blair's consideration of mortality by allowing the theme of resurrection to artistically permeate the entire poem and serve as a consistent reminder of the world beyond Blair's words.

Further evidence of the functional ability of Blake's visual art can be found in critical work that identifies possible linear sequences and potential pairings of the designs. Each new connective identification reveals that Blake's images are able to weave concurrent (but not always stable) structures and links in amidst Blair's textual course. Indeed, though, the direction of Blair's text is quite different from the linear, progressive path evidenced by the specific examples of Gray's Odes that were considered in the previous chapter. Blair's poetic compass can be characterised as directionless and self-enclosed, as a reflective, meandering purgatory that circles around the subject of death and fades as resurrection looms. Blake's images, however, work to trace unexpected tangents that interrupt Blair's self-enclosed set of meditations, providing many avenues that invite further, extra-textual consideration.

In addition to the examples of the "Day of Judgement" image and the sexualised portrayal of the body and soul mentioned above, a further instance of Blake's illustrative tangents is useful to include here. The images entitled "Death of the Strong Wicked Man" and "The Death of The Good Old Man" can easily be established as an oppositional pair (see figs. 14 and 15 respectively). Although mirrored, they are similarly composed, each presenting a prostrate male figure surrounded by mourning women. While the strong wicked man's soul, unaccompanied and engulfed in flames as it passes through a

window, raises its hands against an unseen hell below, the soul of the good old man, guided by angels and surrounded by clouds, clasps its hands in prayer and looks upward to Heaven as it passes through a window in the room. Blair's poem only briefly mentions the peaceful death of the good man (712-13) in an effort to demonstrate that he who follows Christ has no need to fear death. Many of the elements in Blake's image of the good man, such as the New Testament upon which the old man's hand rests and the sacramental bread and wine on the table in the background, emblematically support this poetic association, but are not directly mentioned by the text. In contrast, while Blake's image presents the strong, wicked man's soul as meeting quite an opposite end, Blair's words do not mention this hellish fate. Indeed, Blair does not even characterise the strong man as wicked. Instead, he introduces the dying figure to establish that not only is physical strength helpless in the face of death, but that even the strongest man fears his own death. Here, the title and quotation have questionably linked Blake's visual image to a passage in the poem that offers a somewhat different consideration of the strong man. Regardless of whether Blake intends his figure to represent the strong man or whether the plate merely presents a spiritual fate contrary to that of the good man, Blake's images go well beyond the focus of Blair's text. This is done not only in the particulars of the design, but also by the symbolic inclusion of the threat of Hell, something that Blair's verse does not directly consider.

In their portrayal of a familiar cultural binary between Heaven and Hell, however, these two plates appear to function in a conventional manner that undermines Blair's reformatory attempt to reconsider the soul's progress. In this sense, the functional potential of these images is quite the opposite of the dynamic procedures described in relation to the Gray designs. Yet, such apparent limitation is largely dependent on one's

subscription to the critical judgement that encourages the pairing of these two designs. If considered as an isolated pair, they do, indeed, reinforce a conventional binarism. However, when examined in relation to Blair's verse, they call attention to textual omission, visually offering an alternative to Blair's verse that increases the inclusiveness of the composite whole while avoiding direct argumentation. Further, if considered in relation to the rest of the designs, some of which were critically condemned for their innovative representation of spirits as corporeal figures, the conventional orthodoxy of this pair of images is diffused among and challenged by these unorthodox visualisations. The entire collection of images consists of a much more inclusive and complex vision than this particular pairing indicates. Finally, Blake's relentless questioning of the binary opposition of Heaven and Hell in his own earlier composite work The Marriage of Heaven and Hell (which will be examined in further detail in chapter 5) introduces an intertextual challenge to the apparent reductivism of these two designs. Overall, then, a pair of images that initially appears to offer a much more limited view than Blair's didactic verse actually functions on many levels as an expansion of the poet's considerations.

A further example of the manner in which Blake's art encourages connections and relations that branch off from and exceed Blair's textual considerations can be found by looking at the difference between the design for the title page and the plate entitled "The Reunion of the Soul and the Body". In each of these images, Blake introduces a different presentation of the body that inhabits the grave and is on the brink of resurrection. The title page shows a reclining skeleton, its jaw slightly open, which seems to be rising toward the bell of a horn held by a descending, muscular and naked male figure (see fig. 16). Whether a transparent shroud covers the skeleton or the bones merely rest against

contour-shaped linen is difficult to discern. Regardless, the remnants of this body seem to be awakening to the sound of the horn. The bones are completely surrounded by flames and smoke and, while the depicted flames each point toward the descending figure in the right of the image, only the forearms and hands of this figure reside within the smoky space—the rest of the inverted trumpeter is surrounded by the white space and text of the title page. In contrast, the “Reunion” plate portrays the entombed body, not as a skeleton, but as a muscular male figure that resembles the descending trumpeter of the first plate (see fig. 11). This figure, unlike the skeleton, is on its knees, draped below the waist in cloth and reaching toward a figure that descends from the top centre of the plate. This descending figure is no longer a male trumpeter, but has become a clothed female “soul” who embraces and kisses the male body. Flames are again present, and clouds of smoke seem to extend from the raised arms of the male “body”. These dark clouds have left little white space in this image, save for a v-shaped part caused by the descent of the female figure.

A simple first glance at these two drawings, then, reveals both a similarity in design and a break in figural consistency. While it could be argued that the pair brackets a temporal progression between the time that the skeletal body is woken from death and the time that the soul reunites with the resurrected and reconstituted figure, the transformation of the body from bone to flesh remains temporally sudden and illustratively unexplained. Indeed, the “Reunion” plate further problematises the nature of the resurrected body in its portrayal of an embrace between spirit and corporeal substance, and raises larger unanswered questions as to what constitutes the resurrected body. Blair’s poem also remains necessarily vague on this point, suggesting that at the sound of the trumpet, “the slumb’ring Dust” of the body “shall wake:/ And ev’ry Joint

possess its proper Place,/ With a new Elegance of Form, unknown/ To its first State” (Blair 750, 751-54). The resemblance between the trumpeter from the title page and the body from the “reunion” plate could potentially provide an answer to this question, in that the “reunion” body could be seen as an amalgamation of the initial duality of the earthly bones and the heavenly trumpeter. However, this approach is also unstable, for to suggest that there is a symbolic reunion of heaven and earth between trumpeter and skeleton is to displace the importance of the reunion between the soul and body, which would then become a secondary fusion. Finally, to assume a union between trumpeter and skeleton ignores the lack of contact between the two figures (compared to the embrace of the soul and the body) and does not explain why the muscular male figure of the first plate is exclusively used to resemble the resurrected body in the “Reunion” plate. Such interpretative difficulties are ultimately caused both by Blake’s figural inconsistency and by his much-criticised attempts to figurally portray elements of the spiritual world. Thus the contemporary criticism that Blake faced, despite his argument that spiritual figures have been sculpted and drawn since classical times, was fair in that figural representation of the spiritual is aesthetically conceivable as long as spirit and flesh are not portrayed in the same way in the same space. To do so is to equate these states in the artistic field of vision, and to ultimately fail to portray a recognisable and necessary distinction between body and spirit. Fundamentally, then, the tension that persists between iconic representation and abstract textual conceptions in this particular example further reinforces the earlier assertion that Blake’s composite projects challenge theories which unproblematically ascribe mimetic and semiological capabilities to the visual arts.

Even if the temporal gap and figural inconsistency between the pair of engravings considered above is ignored, figural similarity between the male body portrayed in the

“Reunion” plate and those that appear in “The Soul Hovering Over the Body”, “The Death of the Strong Wicked Man”, and even the unidentified male figure in “The Soul Exploring the Recesses of the Grave”, acts to raise further questions about the nature of the resurrected body. While Blair claims that the reformed dust of the resurrected body possesses a “new Elegance of Form”, the resurrected body in Blake’s “Reunion” plate and the newly-dead body from “The Soul Hovering” plate are not all that distinct. If Blake intends to distinguish the “Reunion” body by somehow visually portraying Blair’s abstract “elegance”, his efforts have certainly evaded the efforts of this viewer. However, in fairness to Blake, the “Death’s Door” image condenses figural representations of mortal death and spiritual resurrection in a single plate and does display a distinction between the two that seems to agree with Blair’s textual differentiation (see fig. 17). Here, the aged body of the man entering death’s door is contrasted with the youthful muscular body of the illuminated male who sits on top of the tomb and glances upward.⁴¹ Indeed, it is almost as if Blake takes Blair’s statement about the levelling effects of the grave literally and represents this by standardising the image of the heavenly or resurrected body regardless of the mortal body’s appearance.

⁴¹ The former figure bears a strong resemblance both to the figure of the old man in “The Death of the Good Old Man”, to the bearded figure in “The Counsellor, King, Warrior, Mother and Child in the Tomb” and to two bearded figures in “The Descent of Man into the Vale of Death”. The similarity between these figures complicates and condenses each instance of the white-bearded man into an amalgamation of the other appearances. While these figures each differ somewhat in facial expression, they remain interconnected in other ways. For example, the bearded figure that enters death’s door uses a crutch similar to one of the men that descends into the vale of death. Likewise, the counsellor, while sharing the scowl of his death’s door counterpart, wears a plain robe similar to the one found on the good old man. In addition to the condensation effected by repetitive similarity between these figures, the “counsellor”, so identified by the title of the plate, is not named directly in Blair’s poem. Whether he is supposed to represent a sage, a negotiator, a teacher, a clergyman or a legal advisor is made all the more difficult by the possibility that the title is not Blake’s. This ambiguity in figural identity amplifies the already dense weave of excessive possibility around the bearded figure and recalls Blake’s similarly condensed figure of the poet in Gray’s “Ode on the Spring”.

Despite this specific agreement between Blair's poetic demarcation and Blake's visual contrast, the persistent figural similarity and representational repetition between seemingly unrelated plates allows Blake's art to evade the signifying certainty traditionally associated with the visual image and increases the potential for multiple identifications and interpretations that both expand and challenge the original text. For example, while the resemblance between the heavenly trumpeter and the resurrected body raises specific questions as to the nature of biblical resurrection and does not present a direct challenge to Blair's similarly vague poetic text, the resemblance between the muscular body of the wicked man and these heavenly figures does interrupt Blair's textual emphases. Recall that the pages from Blair's poem that deal with resurrection exclusively relate the desirable heavenly rebirth of the good man, while ignoring the fate of the others that are catalogued throughout the rest of the verse. Recall also that the bulk of the poem promotes the theme that all are equal in the grave. The artistic resemblance that Blake draws between the image of the wicked man and the images of heavenly and resurrected souls functions by calling attention to this fundamental contradiction in Blair's project: if the Grave is a temporary, transformative space for the body before the exclusive resurrection of the "good men" who follow Jesus, then all are not equal and the uniformity of the grave that Blair promotes is merely a temporary illusion. While this exposure of a structural inconsistency in Blair's poem is a potential effect of Blake's image and usefully illustrates how Blake's use of artistic representation can simultaneously enhance and challenge the source text, I do not intend these observations to be a part of an interpretative or exhaustive "reading" in the traditional sense. Efforts to find a consistent "reading" of Blake's images, to sustain an interpretative argument for

progressive expansion, argumentative contradiction or comparative equation by viewing the plates as pairs, as a sequence, as chained to the text or completely segregated from the poem, are subtly interrupted by Blake's representative inconsistencies and condensations. Like the fish-figures from the illuminations to Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat", then, the shifting characteristics and placements of the figures between these engravings variously function to invite and interrupt numerous interpretative possibilities, ultimately raising more questions than Blair's poem can answer and allowing the reader who follows Blake to go beyond The Grave. Blake's images, by exceeding and contradicting Blair's assertions, manage to unsettle Blair's poetic efforts at pacifying his readers' fears about death without being directly argumentative.

Blake artistic relationship with the graveyard poets did not end with his Blair drawings, however. Starting in 1795, nearly ten years prior to the publication of the Blair volume, Blake was commissioned by Richard Edwards to execute a series of designs for Edward Young's poem, Night Thoughts, which had originally been written between 1742 and 1745 (around the same time as Blair's Grave) and was widely read and revered. Blake produced 537 water-colour designs to accompany the poem, 43 of which were engraved and published along with a reprint of the first four sections, or "nights", of the poem by Edwards in 1797. This edition was, unfortunately, a financially unsuccessful publication, likely a victim of the overall economic recession that plagued England throughout the latter half of the eighteenth century. While the generic relationship between the poems provides an excellent opportunity to compare Blake's artistic interaction with each author's view of death, a closer look at some of the particulars of Blake's collaboration with Young's text reveals that there are more interconnections

between this composite work and his other illustrative projects than may initially be apparent.

The most striking link between the Blair and Young volumes is an intertextual repetition of the same design. Blake's design from page 19 of the Young volume, which shows a skeleton rising to the sound of a horn, is reused as the title page for Blair's Grave (see fig 18). Addressing such repetition, Peter Ackroyd suggests that Blake "possessed a coherent system of artistic signs that he could redeploy as the occasion demanded" (198). However, Ackroyd offers this argument to account for the figural repetition within the collection of Young designs, citing Blake's time limitations as a further motivation for these recurrent elements and arguing that Blake "does not so much reinterpret Young's poem as find equivalents for its meaning within his own imaginative repertoire" (198-99). The portrait of the artist that emerges from this characterisation is of an imagination bound by a self-imposed semiotic vocabulary. Although Blake did create a unique, but still somewhat incoherent mythological system of characters throughout his prophetic books, his work with other authors has thus far revealed a less imperious aesthetic and a creative imagination much less idle than Ackroyd would have us believe. While the recurring skeletal image recalls Blake's connective repetition of the six-pointed star image in the Gray volume and similarly creates an interpenetrating conduit between the two poems in which the image appears, the fact that a whole design has been transplanted in this case provides an crucial and unique opportunity to examine how the same image functions in different textual contexts.

It must be noted, however, that this duplication between volumes is not an exact repetition of the image. As has been discussed above, the job of engraving the Blair plates was given to Schiavonetti and he likely functioned as an editor of Blake's initial

sketch while etching. In contrast, Blake had much more control over the earlier Young project, and, while the extent of his participation in the selection of the designs for this volume is unknown, he did etch and engrave the chosen designs for publication. In the Schiavonetti version of the image for the Blair volume, flames are noticeable amidst the smoke and a slab of stone rests behind and parallel to the anatomically detailed skeleton, whose left arm rests along the length of its body. The descending horn-blower is fully outstretched and his body is slightly twisted, presenting his legs, hips and genitals frontally, but his visible facial features in profile. In Blake's rougher, etched version of this repeated image, however, neither flames nor the slab of stone are visible, and the less-detailed skeleton is propped up on its left elbow. In further contrast to Schiavonetti's version, the descending figure is frontally positioned, but his left leg is drawn up in an awkward foreshortening to obscure the genital area, his right leg is dramatically (and perhaps, impossibly) twisted, and only his neck and chin are visible as he arches his head back to blow the horn.⁴²

As Blake's sketches for the Blair designs have apparently not survived, it is difficult to conclusively determine which of the differences between these two designs can be attributed to Schiavonetti's hand. However, instead of speculating needlessly on

⁴² In addition to these differences in the execution of the representations themselves, there are many coloured copies of the Young collection. These are supposedly hand-tinted from models prepared by Blake, but I have not yet come across any substantial support for these claims. While certain plates from the poorly scanned online version of the coloured copy from the National Gallery of Victoria <http://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/collection/international/print/b/blake/night_thoughts.html> emphasise or contrast different areas of the designs than their uncoloured counterparts, I have not been able to see the original version of these coloured plates or compare them to other coloured versions. As well, although I agree that colour has the potential to affect the functional properties of an image, so much has often been made of small inconsistencies and differences in the colouring of other Blakean designs (despite the common knowledge that his wife often helped in the coloration of his plates), that larger critical issues have been obscured and left unresolved. Given these factors, I will refrain from making any unfounded generalisations or

possible “meanings” inherent in the arm positions of a skeleton or the visibility of a heavenly figure’s genitalia, it is more useful to ask whether these differences make any difference at all. In fact, they do. The flames, slab and profiled features of the horn-blower in the Blair design effectively connect that title page with other images within the Blair volume. The flames reappear in “The Day of Judgement”, “Christ Descending into the Grave”, “The Death of the Strong Wicked Man” and “The Reunion of the Soul and the Body” designs. The tomblike slab is also present in the “Reunion” plate, while the body and facial profile of the horn-blower are echoed in numerous plates, including, again, the “Reunion of the Soul and the Body”, “The Soul Hovering”, “The Death of the Strong Wicked Man”, “The meeting of a Family in Heaven” and “Death’s Door”. Similarly, the unique posture of Blake’s descending figure in the Young design bears a marked resemblance both to the backlit, Christ-like figure that rises through the clouds in the title page for *Night the Fourth*, and to the figure that descends on the right side of the text box on page four of the same volume. The differences between the two images, then, establish and reinforce an internal connectivity and consistency within their own volumes, while their similarity promotes a connection between the two separate projects.

In addition to the stylistic differences between the two plates, the image in each has a different relationship to the text that it accompanies. While there is no text box segregating the text from the image in the title page for the Blair volume, this is the only time in the collection that text and image appear so proximate. Recall that the Blair engravings occupy their own mobile pages and remain separate from the text of the poem. Only five of the eleven images (excluding the title page) are accompanied by text from

conclusions as to the role of colour in the Young images and, instead, continue my comparison between the form, content and context of the Blair and Young designs.

the poem, but all include anonymously assigned titles. However, unlike the Gray volume, where the poetic text is enclosed and separated from the image by a text box, the text that appears alongside these eleven images is separated from each image by a frame that contains the image. That is, the images in the Blair volume more traditionally reside inside boxed frames while the titles appear around the edges of the enclosed artistic space. The title page eliminates this framed division, relaxing compositional restrictions and easing positional tensions between the lines of the image and the lines of text. This spatial configuration between image and text, unique within this collection, brings two different media with different representational foci into complementary proximity. That is, on this title page, where one would expect to find a co-operative image that functions to condense and summarise the content of the poem much like the textual title, Blake has included an image of a skeletal body emerging from the grave and thus illustratively expands the scope of Blair's textual considerations to include a more visible consideration of resurrection. The lack of media segregation in this plate accents the compatibility and complementarity of the two creative emphases in a way that the rest of the isolated engravings throughout the volume cannot.

In contrast, while the images in the Young volume consistently appear on the same page as the text of the poem itself, the text box that accompanies the repeated trumpeter and skeleton design acts as an opaque foreground, obscuring a portion of the image and seemingly forcing an alteration in the position of the descending figure, whose bent leg avoids collision with the text box's corner. To further emphasise the dynamics of the text box on the Young design, it is useful to compare the descending figure in this plate to the similarly postured ascending Christ-figure on the title page to "Night the Fourth" (see fig. 19). Like the title page to Blair's "Grave", there is no text box present

here. Rather, the text appears within the image, amidst clouds that are being parted by the ascending figure. Perhaps this contrasting relation between two similar figures illustratively indicates that part of the “Christian Triumph” is the ability to overcome the limitations of the word. Indeed, Young’s narrator, initially affected by melancholy borne from a preoccupation with mortality, consistently reaches toward thoughts of immortality and the worlds beyond the grave. He is also preoccupied with the need to express this mental journey, but also worries that he will “Blaspheme [his] subject with [his] song” (Night the Fourth 191). Eventually he consoles himself and justifies his poetic explorations by suggesting that Reason and Faith are interdependent and necessarily reinforce each other. It initially appears, then, that Young’s emphases on resurrection and on the compatibility between reason and faith parallel the challenges to the limitations of Blair’s Grave offered by Blake’s visual art. Despite this apparent convergence, however, Blake’s artistic additions to Young are still spatially affected and limited by the opacity and inflexibility of Young’s boxed text, save for the title page of “The Christian Triumph”. This is the only page in the Young volume in which the image is not restricted by the text, in which the text and image interpenetrate. In addition, the scripted font used exclusively for this textual title is more stylistically integrated with the curved lines of the figures and clouds within the design than the block print that appears throughout the volume. Thus, Blake’s integrated designs not only offer a subtle critique of Young’s justification of meditative poetic reasoning as the sole path to expansive Truth, but also attempt to extend Young’s notions of compatibility and immortality to include both the form and content of the multimedia page. Blake’s images showcase the delimiting and unifying capabilities of the image, individually revealing and exceeding the textual

restrictions of these two Graveyard poets while conjoining their perspectives through intertextual repetition.

In addition to expanding the limitations of each text, the repeated design also demonstrates the inclusive capabilities of the image itself. While the trumpeter and skeleton in the Blair volume function as both a summarial design for the poem and as a dissenting vision against The Grave, in the Young volume the design accompanies a much more specific text. In the initial lines of Young's "Night the Second", the narrator, plagued by insomnia and woe, imagines being called to battle against this persistent melancholy by "clarion shrill,/*Emblem of that which shall awake the dead, /Rouse souls from slumber, into thoughts of heaven" (3-5). In the Young volume, lines of verse have been conveniently marked with an asterisk to indicate their exclusive affiliation with the design. In this case, the asterisk indicates that the image should be understood as symbolically representing the heavenly call to resurrection. However, the identification of the image with an "emblem" suggests the potential for a variety of pictorial functions: Cued by the text, the image could be examined as an ornament, allegory, symbol or any combination of these. In addition, the text itself exploits multiple meanings of "clarion", expanding its definition to include a trumpet that signals war.⁴³ Writing "life is war;/Eternal war with woe" (9-10), Young condenses these meanings of "clarion" and suggests that the trumpet that raises the dead from the grave (that is, the possibility of resurrection and immortality) also calls the living to battle against short-sighted and inconsequential melancholy. Despite being restricted to a single line of verse by an

⁴³ It is interesting to compare the potency of Young's "clarion shrill", which resurrects the dead and calls the living to battle, against the "cock's shrill clarion" of Gray's later "Elegy written in a Country Church-Yard". Gray's clarion, while suggesting its heavenly counterpart, is purely

asterisk, then, Blake's simple image, the same image that disrupts and extends Blair's entire verse, is also capable of supporting the variety of textual layers that Young introduces on the first page of "Night the Second". Thus, notwithstanding efforts in the Young volume to construct an inherent interdependence between image and text and contextually restrict the interpretation of the image as a mere reinforcement of textual statement, the inherently inclusive capability of the image, along with Blake's intertextual repetition of this particular design, re-empowers the image as a comprehensive centre for multiple possibility and association. This is not to say, however, that a viewer will inevitably encounter or realise the expansive function of Blake's images. One of the many possibilities for the Blakean image is that it can easily be perceived traditionally as an illustrative, supportive or decorative ornament to the text. However, the potential for underestimating the capability of these images does not inhibit their inherent ability to sustain connections beyond the single page and single text.

When comparing Blake's different projects, it is important to consider not only their formal details, but also their circumstances of production. While a more detailed historical contextualisation of the Blakean composite will be pursued in a later chapter, it is useful for the current discussion to note that the configuration of the Young designs is very similar to the Gray designs. Indeed, both were executed during the same time period: although the Young designs were commissioned and started in 1795 and work on the Gray designs likely began in 1797, there is a strong possibility that Blake was working simultaneously on the two projects in 1797. The creative continuity between the two projects is evidenced in the general stylistic practice of using a text box and a framing

mortal in this case and does not possess the power to raise "The rude Forefathers" from "their lowly bed".

image. While Blake subtly, but importantly, flirts with variances to this design style by occupying the text box with his own verse in the dedication to the Gray designs and by eliminating the text box in the title page to Young's "The Christian Triumph", he remains generally faithful to this design layout through both projects. Considering the three projects together, the tiered differences between the unmediated creative freedom in the Gray water-colours, the designs of the Young project which Blake was able to engrave but not to select, and the segregated and much altered Schiavonetti engravings within the multi-mediated Blair volume become apparent.

Like the definitive couplet and dedication in the Gray volume, it has already been noted that Blake manages to include a similarly revealing dedicatory verse in the extensively moderated Blair volume. Unfortunately, this is not the case in the Young publication: aside from Young's verse, an uncredited advertisement that discusses Young's poem and contains a brief paragraph on Blake's "bold and masterly execution", and an anonymous Explanation of the Engravings that attempts to explain and restrict Blake's inclusive images for the less perceptive viewer, there are no other textual voices in the work. Even without a Blakean textual cue to metaphorically hint at the excessive functions of his images, the precedent recognised within the other two volumes should be enough to justify a similar approach to the Young designs. However, Young's essay "Conjectures on Original Composition" provides an important clue to Blake's silence. Both the subject of and the particular metaphors used within Young's essay reveal themselves as possible inspirations for Blake's later meditations. While it is not certain if or when Blake encountered this particular piece, it is temporally possible that he came upon it during his work on Night Thoughts and had time to reflect on and respond to its influence prior to completing the Gray and Blair designs. Indeed, the metaphorical

overlap between Young's words and Blake's textual reflections on his artistic collaborations is almost too great to be merely circumstantial. In keeping with his habit of simultaneously opposing and extending the ideas of his sources, though, Blake's use of Young's metaphors is transformative, rather than merely imitative.

Young's "Conjectures" begin with a comparative differentiation between original and imitative writing that favours the former and links it with genius and renown. The author then uses this preference for original composition to argue against the prevailing view that ancient writers are masters to be imitated and modern writers should be their pupils. Young argues that many modern British writers also possess original genius and, while they should still strive to emulate their ancient counterparts, they may also consider themselves as rivals of these immortal examples. Young, using Joseph Addison as the prime example of a modern ideal, makes a connection between divine inspiration and original genius that strongly anticipates Blake's preoccupation with and continual definition of divine "poetic genius". Indeed, Blake's disagreement with Joshua Reynolds' notion that Genius can be learned or acquired through observation and mimicry recalls Young's condemnation of imitation as an activity that stifles modern creative genius. It must be remembered, however, that Reynolds and Young each promote a different branch of the arts. Young initially condemns an overactive press for contributing to a decline in the quality of British writing, and calls for a renewed effort toward creative originality in an effort to re-energise this perceived decay. Appearing a mere ten years later and continuing for another fifteen, Reynolds' discourses attempted to increase the respectability of painting in England by strongly encouraging English painters to learn from and imitate their continental counterparts. Despite these distinct

strategies borne from different circumstances, Young and Reynolds remain fundamentally at odds about the value of imitation in the arts.⁴⁴

However, just as Blake critically engages with Reynolds' Discourses through annotation and uses visual art to challenge and expand upon the poetry of others, he also uses Young's thoughts and metaphors pertaining to the creative act as a source for his own activity and commentary while simultaneously disagreeing with, extending and transforming the scope of Young's ideas. Indeed, the most striking thing about Young's "Conjectures" in relation to this discussion of Blake is that many of Young's metaphors are recycled by Blake not only in the dedication to Queen Charlotte in the Blair volume, but also in his couplet and dedication to Gray. For example, Young writes

The mind of a man of Genius is a fertile and pleasant field... it enjoys a perpetual spring. Of that Spring, Originals are the fairest Flowers: Imitations are of a quicker growth, but fainter bloom. Imitations are of two kinds; one of Nature, one of Authors. The first we call Originals and confine the term Imitation to the second. (Conjectures 872)

Recall that Blake writes of Gray's "spring", suggesting that the poet is a both an original source and, perhaps, one of Young's modern men of genius. However, Blake's artistic interaction, his wild root that weaves around the springs of Gray, would likely be considered by Young to be an imitation of authors and thus an Imitation proper. Young comments that an imitator, no matter how excellent, still "but nobly builds on another's foundation; his Debt is, at least, equal to his Glory; which therefore, on the balance,

⁴⁴ A humorous footnote to this theoretical disagreement is that while Reynolds' promotion of imitation is antithetical to Young's views, the simplicity and purity of his writing style was highly praised. Indeed, it was often compared to the writing of Addison, the same author that Young celebrates as a modern genius in his "Conjectures". While Young died in 1765, four years before the first of Reynolds' printed discourses, one wonders whether Young would have condemned Reynolds as a stylistic imitator who praised imitation, or uneasily accepted Reynolds, despite his subject matter, on the basis of his compositional merits.

cannot be very great” (873). It is obvious, though, that Blake refuses to be an imitator who produces faint blooms. Indeed, in contrast to Young’s categorisation, many of Blake’s own artistic and poetic creations depend neither on nature nor on other authors as their source, relying instead on Blake’s unique and esoteric creative imagination. As well, Blake’s interaction with the poetic texts of other authors has displayed a resistance to imitative translation and a penchant for creative disagreement and extension. Similar to the way in which Blake’s visual images interrupt and expand the suggestions made by the poems that they accompany, Blake borrows and transforms Young’s metaphors to characterise his own artistic project, echoing yet distorting their original application.

Another section of Young’s essay that recalls some of Blake’s self-reflexive metaphors on creative interaction states that “the pen of an Original Writer... out of a barren waste calls a blooming spring: Out of that blooming spring an Imitator is a transplanter of Laurels, which sometimes die on removal, always languish in a foreign soil” (author’s emphasis 872-3). Blake relies on the above metaphors in his Dedication to the Queen but also uses these same metaphors to both honour and counter Young’s overall statement when he hints that the sweet blossoms of artistic originality can be fertilised by something as barren and yet as rich as another author’s Grave. Further, in the dedication to Ann Flaxman at the end of the Gray volume, Blake defines his artistic actions as a well-intentioned and revitalising transplantation of Gray’s faint blooms and suggests that whether Gray’s poem thrives or languishes after this move entirely depends on the poet himself, opposing Young’s suggestion that an imitator is a harmful transplanter who divorces his source from its context and causes the original to suffer. In addition, whereas Young writes that “An Imitator shares his crown, if he has one, with the chosen Object of his Imitation” (873), Blake characterises his artistic ability to engage

with his poetic source as certainly a more powerful type of genius than the original creative poetic act. Indeed, Blake's composite actions and explanatory words reconfigure Young's perceptions so that Blake, while appearing to engage in what Young defines as imitation, actually displays the characteristics that Young assigns to an original production, which "may be said to be of a vegetable nature [that] rises spontaneously from the vital root of Genius; it grows, it is not made" (873). Blake's continual demonstration that imitation and originality, that the Liberal and Mechanical arts can productively coexist and intersect, actually follows a prescription that Young makes later in the "Conjectures", when he promotes respectful, but innovative emulation over imitation (881). Blake's own notions of his artistic departures from and extensions to the poetic text that he illustrates also follow Young's suggestion that the farther an artist is from a canonical textual source in terms of similitude, the nearer he is to that source in excellence (874). Thus, Blake's transformative disagreement with Young's aesthetic ideas, like the emulation of his poetic predecessors (including Young himself) with textual and artistic assertions of inventive novelty, actually follows Young's prescription for original genius exactly. Although Blake does not add a poetic statement to the Young designs, then, as he does to the Blair and Gray volumes, his respectful reconfiguration of the metaphors from Young's "Conjecture" in later poetic reflections as well as the emulative characteristics of his artistic engagement with others' poems, suggests that Young's work contributes to the position that Blake takes toward his composite collaborations.

Although I have already commented on Christopher Heppner's observations of Blake's illustrative work in chapter 2, it is useful to return to Heppner's observations in the context of the above argument concerning the Young illuminations to more fully

understand my use of and departure from his views. Although Heppner insists that Blake practices an artistic variation and extension of his textual source, rather than opposition or inversion, this critic also seems to subscribe to a differential and divisive definition of signification. To illustrate, in his chapter on the Young designs, Heppner opposes Morton Paley's claim that certain examples of Blake's artistic additions to Night Thoughts portray Urizenic figures. While I do not wish to enter the debate of whether or not these figures do, indeed, represent Urizen, Heppner rejects Paley's linking of Blake's own mythos to the Young illuminations on the grounds that this can produce an interpretation that eclipses consideration of Young's own text, and restates his earlier argument that textual "context has a large power over the meaning of a design" (151). This unresolved critical debate over particular images thus provides an important key to understanding the problems inherent in Heppner's overall approach to "reading" the Blakean image. Initially, he suggests that "the name Urizen brings too many uncontrollable meanings into a specific situation, and leads to a loss of the differences that produce meaning, to blindness rather than the insight of new knowledge" (Heppner 153). Thus Heppner, in an attempt to direct interpretative and associative traffic, aligns with an exclusive model of signification, one in which distinction and specificity play a large role in the establishment of "knowledge". Yet, a few pages later, Heppner, commenting on a different Night Thoughts design, rejects another Urizenic association on the grounds that it threatens to "oversimplify the complexity of Blake's response" to Young that, in this case, visually appeals to an extra-textual source while remaining consistent with Young's own imagery (155). Heppner is thus making a paradoxical attempt to defend Blake's illustrative complexity and controlled plurality while also trying to "read" these images using an incompatible model. To further complicate things, Heppner argues that Blake's

creative interaction with Young should be viewed as a composite and interactive “variation and extension” rather than as involving “opposition and inversion” (170).

It seems, then, that Heppner, while recognising Blake’s illustrative and pluralistic excesses, is unable to completely articulate the dynamics and functions of the artist’s response to Young, because he uses a textual model of interpretation that fails to fully contain the spectrum of excess that the Blakean image brings to another’s text. Heppner’s reliance on an either/or model of signification, which attempts to restrict the capacity of the image yet still promote a dialectically progressive and composite linear accumulation, is evidently insufficient in procuring a complete understanding of the functional complexities of Blake’s designs, which, as has been argued throughout my examination of Blake’s visual additions to the poetry of others, appears to embody a both/and simultaneity, an excess that not only includes opposition, inversion, variation and extension, but also can produce an expansion of perceptual restriction. While extending and enhancing the original text, Blake’s inclusive strategy also interrupts and subverts singular, exclusive and unidirectional meanings that are crafted by the poet and pursued by the critic. Blake’s activity produces neither noise, nor blindness. What it does reveal, however, is the insufficiency and incompatibility of traditional interpretative methods that take their cue from a textual dynamic. This is an artistic attempt to break through the limits of linguistic representation, to use the different properties and possibilities of the image, in conjunction with an author’s words, to exceed modes of perceptual determinism that are based solely on the written form of language.

Indeed, the dialectical model of synthetic, logical unidirectional progression and development that Heppner’s favouring of “variation and extension” echoes can be seen as a philosophical metaphor based on a textual way of perceiving the world. While syntactic

distinction between the letters and words of a sentence is a primary necessity, the ability of these components to progressively and cumulatively relate to and extend from each other is key in producing the overall coherence of the statement. This statement, in turn, is distinguishable from others and extends the model of differential, but compatible components to the next level. In contrast, the qualities of the Chinese calligram, a combination of writing and painting, of text and image that often combines many separate and sometimes contradictory components in a single figure, but does not order, privilege or synthetically cancel each crucial portion of the weave reflect and are reflected within some of the philosophical tenets of Buddhist and Taoist thought. Perceptual reliance on popular forms of communication is not a new idea; indeed, it is the root of much of McLuhan's writing. A textual mode of perception, although often so prevalent as to remain unnoticed, is something that Blake's writing simultaneously embraces, challenges and rejects. The visual image, however, unrestrained by the same formal linearity and exclusive commitment to extension, proves to be a much more effective challenge to textual dominance. Yet, as Heppner recognises, Blake does not reject either medium, but uses each to challenge and strengthen the other and to increase the overall potency and density of the communicative act. In a way, Blake's illustrative projects, and also his own composites, as will be discussed in the following chapters, resemble the Chinese calligram, combining, but not seamlessly synthesising, layers of written textual variation and extension with an excessive and multidirectional visual immediacy into a design that does more than merely describe or counter the textual foundations.

Before progressing to an examination of Blake's own composites, it is useful to briefly acknowledge a few other examples of his illustrative activity to writing that is not his own. These examples further the perception that his interactions do not follow a

standard or subordinate pattern, but display an experimentation that continually pushes against the constraints of composite traditions and expectations. While many of Blake's projects utilise writings by English authors, his efforts to produce the Illustrations of the Book of Job and his unfinished artwork inspired by Dante's Divine Comedy reveal that his interests and his artistic license go well beyond the perpetuation and enrichment of his national, historical peers. Having said this, however, it must be noted that not only do Blake's projects collect relatively recent British authors and classical and religious texts in the same group, suggesting, if not a similarity, then at least a historical lineage, but that Blake's interaction with these writers allows him to function as the unifying agent, and include himself as the self-elected leader or co-ordinator of this diverse and exclusive group. The Job plates, produced much later in Blake's career, display a distinctly different dynamic between visual images and text (see fig. 20).⁴⁵ Unlike the Blair, Young and Gray collaborations, the source text is not reproduced in its entirety. Rather, Blake identifies himself as the inventor and engraver of these composite plates that, while collectively titled Illustrations of the Book of Job, combine engraved visual images with a collage of many different textual statements isolated from both the Old and New Testaments. Here, then, Blake takes many more liberties with and makes many more departures from his source text than he is able to do with his earlier projects. Resultantly, Damon rightly characterises this work as more of an "interpretation" of the biblical book than as a collaborative or co-dependent effort (Blake's Job 3). Indeed, Damon's earlier view of Blake's Blair illuminations as a series that can exist independent of the verse is

⁴⁵ While it appears that Blake's interest in Job began as early as 1785, it wasn't until 1820 that he began work on watercolours that provided the basis for the engravings published in 1825 (Damon 7).

more aptly applied to the Job plates. These designs neither discard the textual source, nor reproduce its original coherence and thus occupy a unique position between Blake's collaborative artistry and his own composite creations. Although the Job designs deserve a much more comprehensive and detailed treatment in relation to the current argument, practical concerns limit the extent of such elaboration within a study that remains focused on the comparison between specific examples of Blake's artistic additions and his own distinct creations. Regardless, the basic acknowledgement of the unique composite configuration of these designs and their relation to a source text reinforces the observation that Blake's work consistently experiments with and creatively explores varying possibilities of media combination rather than repetitively relying on an artificial distinction or accepted composite paradigm.

Blake's sketches and watercolours for Dante's Divine Comedy, left unfinished at the time of his death, are yet another example of his efforts to bring the sister arts into closer proximity. These designs were begun in 1824 and commissioned by his charitable friend John Linnel, who had also commissioned the earlier Job engravings (Ackroyd 352). Echoing Blake's interaction with his textual sources in the examples discussed above, many of these incomplete images have been characterised as having "assimilated and redefined" the various artistic sources that inspired Blake throughout his life (355). As well, Ackroyd further suggests that Blake creates "a coherent and enduring landscape of the imagination that is related both to his own vision and to that of the Italian poet" (355). Empty praise aside, this observation figuratively reiterates my own argument that Blake practices respectful artistic collaboration with his sources while also resisting imitation or simple translation. Indeed, Blake's textual notes that remain on some of the unfinished images indicate his displeasure with the perception that Dante relied more on

reconfigured natural models than imaginative vision in his account of Hell, Purgatory and Paradise.⁴⁶ Despite this criticism, Blake's overall regard for Dante remains, as indicated in a passing comment within a scathing criticism of Swedenborg in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell:

Any man of mechanical talents may from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's. and from those of Dante or Shakespear, an infinite number. But when he has done this, let him not say that he knows better than his master, for he only holds a candle in sunshine (E 43)

This statement both asserts Dante as one of the bright "masters" of writing and also fortifies Blake's antagonism towards the exercise of mere technical prowess, imitative creativity or any pursuit of artistic fame that relies on a formulaic utilisation of methods or styles that are historically celebrated. As has been illustrated throughout the preceding pages Blake's designs evoke a dynamic co-dependency with the text that they accompany but also refuse to remain in the shadows as mere illustration, continually asserting themselves as another source of illumination and original emanation.

Unfortunately, Blake's unfinished images were never published alongside their source text. While some of the titles for the drawings and water-colours point to specific cantos of Dante's Divine Comedy, the final intentions of Blake and Linnel for bringing the two arts together in the same volume cannot be known. Thus any efforts to discern a formal configuration between these images and Dante's verse is impossible, and any attempt to compare Blake's artistic approach to Dante with the Gray, Blair and Young

⁴⁶ On design number 7, entitled "Hell Canto 3" in reference to Dante's text, Blake notes that "Every thing in Dantes Comedia shews That for Tyrannical Purposes he has made This World the Foundation of All & the Goddess Nature & not the Holy Ghost [...] Swedenborg does the same in saying that in this World is the Ultimate of Heaven This is the most damnable Falshood of Satan & his Antichrist" (E 689).

composites by examining the unfinished plates is speculative at best. Many speculative “readings” have been attempted, however: work by David Fuller and Rodney M. Bayne attempts to demonstrate that Blake read Dante carefully, and challenges the previous consensus established by Albert S. Roe and Milton Klonsky that “Blake saw Dante entirely in the light of his own mythological system” (Moskal 318). Jeanne Moskal questions this critical opposition and argues that Blake makes a “systematic critique of Dante” by interrogating the questions of forgiveness that Dante’s poem raises (319). Unlike those who position Blake as one who simply establishes himself in opposition to his source text, Moskal asserts that Blake’s own reception and re-interpretation of Dante exemplifies his approach to artistic interactivity overall, suggesting that “Blake writes about and illustrates forgiveness and accusation as the possible modes of action between reader and writer” (333-34). Thus, although Blake’s unfinished Dante images are unsuitable for the current analysis that looks at images and text on the same page, this interactive “Blakean” dynamic identified by Moskal as combining oppositional accusation and forgiving extension echoes, fortifies and extends some of the conclusions that have emerged from the Blair, Gray and Young investigations. Further, although establishing this position through exclusive interpretative readings of the images, Moskal’s inclusive reconfiguration of opposing critical views duplicates and usefully reiterates some of the intentions of the present study.

Before concluding this chapter, it must be pointed out that the literary examples considered here differ from Gray’s poems in one crucial regard. Although Gray’s “Elegy Written in a Country Churchyard” is often grouped with the graveyard contemplations of Blair and Young, this contemplative pastoral verse is a lyrical exploration of thoughts and feelings that does not maintain or consistently reinforce an overly didactic stance.

Indeed, the examples of Gray's verse that were considered in chapter 2 also explore philosophical considerations without becoming explicitly instructive. Even the moralising finale of the "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" is embedded within allegory and softened by the humour that emerges from its high burlesque treatment of the ode form. The marriage between Blake's art and Gray's verse is thus a complication of contemplation that expands the referential power of language, interrupts the conclusive urges of the poet's search and redirects some of the lyric meditations toward multiple possibilities. In contrast, the graveyard poems of Young and Blair offer a morbid morality and use the fear of death to promote a doctrinal argument regarding the ideal path of the soul toward religious salvation. While these poems are somewhat contemplative and cannot be completely distinguished from the process of thought and feeling that characterises Gray's lyric verse, their persuasive promotion of a specific moral and religious message qualifies them as inherently didactic. However, just as Blake's visual art interrupts the linear progress of Gray's thoughtful meditations, this chapter has demonstrated that these images also diversify focused moral argumentation by interrupting meaningful assertion with an excess of representative play. Put another way, the medium interrupts and complicates the message. Indeed, Dante's Divine Comedy and The Book of Job, briefly considered above, are also highly doctrinal pieces, and their intended teachings become somewhat tangled, obscured and difficult following the introduction of the wild roots of Blake's visual art. Thus, while the Blakean image functions slightly differently depending on the properties of its source text, its consistent ability to interrupt and complicate this text enriches the possibilities of that text, whether lyric or didactic in nature.

This chapter has demonstrated that the dynamic interaction between art and text, between authorial individualism and collaboration, and the resistance to linguistic imitation, order and translation evidenced in the Gray designs are maintained through the Blair and Young projects, despite differences in composition, design, execution, historical circumstances and the initial function of the poetic source. Blake's collaborative images become a way to interact with a variety of other texts without merely asserting more linguistic difference or challenging a unidirectional argument with an equally limited opposition. In this way, Blake's designs can be said to function as artistic resistance without rejection and to encourage cross-media and trans-historical connectivity, asserting respect for their proximate textual sources while avoiding the servile harmonies of translational and imitative illustration. Avoiding extremes of agreement or antagonism, then, Blake's image within a variety of composite marriages is capable of interrupting textual dominance with an interconnective excess of meaningful possibility that resists prescriptive communication and exclusive interpretation .

Overcoming Exclusion: Blake's Composite Songs

There is a place where Contrarities are equally True

-William Blake, from Milton Book the Second

Seest thou the little winged fly, smaller than a grain of sand?
It has a heart like thee; a brain open to heaven & hell,
Withinside wondrous & expansive; its gates are not clos'd,
I hope thine are not

-William Blake, from Milton Book the First

Thus far, Blake's visual art has been characterised as offering a constant challenge to the impositions, meanings and functions of text on the composite page. However, when considering Blake's own composite works, in which author and artist are one and the same, and in which image and text are more closely intertwined, Blake's approach to textuality and language must be interrogated just as closely as his utilisation of the visual image in previous chapters. If Blake's language functions differently from that of Gray, Blair or Young, if his utilisation of textuality is akin to the innovative and flexible use of the image in his other composite projects, then the overall dynamic of the composite page is dramatically altered as well.

The characteristics of Blake's textuality have been well-documented, argued and complicated by a number of critics, but a return to a prior example provides an excellent introduction to thinking about Blake's use of language. Indeed, previous chapters have already used examples of Blake's writing as definitive statements in the establishment of his artistic strategies. The example of Blake's dedication to Ann Flaxman in the Gray volume reveals just how dependent such textual evidence is on particular interpretations of figurative language. Recall that I've interpreted the dedication as characterising Blake as the "divine mover" and Gray as the flower in its "native clod". Recall also that M. E. Bacon and Frank Vaughan have offered alternative interpretations of the dedication. To further complicate matters, Peter Ackroyd, in a recent biography of Blake, chooses to interpret this particular verse in a completely different way. He suggests that Blake, taking a cue from a comment made by Ann Flaxman, adopts the flower metaphor as a description of his own position. That is, Blake is the mobile flower and either Flaxman or Gray himself is the divine mover. Ackroyd uses this interpretation to reinforce his

characterisation of Blake as one who, at times, “seems ready to subdue his own identity, and to adopt whatever persona or role is most agreeable to others” (204). While this seems antithetical to many other portraits of Blake that have identified him as a stubborn individualist, Ackroyd’s reading reveals a characteristic of Blake’s writing that has been both a blessing and curse for critics. An overall flexibility and synchronic multiplicity of interpretative possibility in Blake’s use of language have often led to the same excerpts being used to support opposing critical perspectives. In the above example, Blake has constructed an unambiguous relationship between ambiguous figures without providing a key to the reality that these figures represent. Robert Essick, in William Blake and the Language of Adam, confirms that this freedom of the signifier, this “polysemy and connotation [... was] welcomed as [a way] of overcoming the limitations of arbitrary and univalent reference” in the eighteenth century (72). Blake, then, was not alone in valuing the “non-referential or multi-referential powers of language” over “direct and exclusionary reference” (72). As Essick suggests, “the semantic surplus of the poetic sign, its energetic escape from the logical paradigms of reference to suggest more than it literally signifies, was not viewed as an encumbrance or threat, but as evidence of creative potential, a remnant of the Word’s original plenitude” (73).

Before relying too much on the arguments of other critics, it will be beneficial to directly examine some specific passages from his Songs of Innocence and of Experience to further explore Blake’s use of poetic language.⁴⁷ However, the history of this volume

⁴⁷ In an effort to remain focused on discerning the properties of the Blakean text, this initial consideration of the Songs will overlook both the visual images that accompany the poems and the aesthetic considerations of Blake’s methods of production. Following this discussion, these facets will be introduced to supplement the overall investigation into the dynamic between art and text on the composite page.

of poems is a complicated one and needs to be explained in some detail before encountering specific songs. Blake etched the thirty-one plates of Songs of Innocence in 1789 and printed between sixteen and eighteen copies at that time. In 1794, he joined the Songs of Innocence with the Songs of Experience to create the combined volume of fifty-four plates, Songs of Innocence and of Experience. While Blake continued to print the individual volumes of Innocence and Experience along with the combined volume, some collectors and dealers chose to combine the individual editions into one book themselves. In 1811, Blake printed his last two separate copies of the Songs of Innocence while continuing to produce copies of the combined volume until 1827. None of the twenty-four copies of the individual Songs of Innocence that are known to exist today (in addition to nine others bound in combined volumes) share the same order of plates. As well, Blake continually experimented by moving poems between the sections in various copies of the combined Songs. These factors combine to make it difficult to select a definitive version of either the separately produced volumes or collected Songs, and thus to formulate any critical interpretation based on the ordering of the poems within the collection is an impossible task. However, all but one of the copies of the Songs that Blake produced between 1821 and 1827 do maintain a standard ordering, and this sequence has usually been considered as the “final” version of the collected poems. Indeed, in a letter written sometime after 1818, likely to Thomas Butts, Blake outlined “The Order in which the Songs of Innocence & of Experience ought to be paged & placed” (E 772). Despite this authoritative list, the Songs, each copy individually printed, coloured and sold by Blake, retain a dynamic history and an organic inconsistency. There is no inherent “progress” or traceable evolution toward the ‘final’ arrangement and individual differences between copies set each apart from the others. Blake’s

collaborations with publishers, engravers and other authors are a stark contrast to this extreme of solitary creation, production and distribution that not only circumvents the influence and authority of the printing industry, but also swims against the current of mass production by allowing him to create unique objects out of the same work.⁴⁸

Although Blake does make use of reproductive print technology in that each page of each book starts as a print pressed from an acid-etched copper relief plate, his persistent reordering of the pages between copies, his tendency to inconsistently remove, alter or add elements, objects or figures to the printed images, and his variant colouring allows his book creations to each possess the individualised ‘aura’ of an original art object.

Although the text of each poem remains the same between the twenty-four copies of Innocence, the four copies of Experience and the twenty-six copies of the combined Songs that exist today, the properties of Blake’s poetic language promote the same type of shifting multiplicity in interpretation that the actual reordering, alteration and colouring of the plates promotes in the individualisation of each copy. The “Introduction” to Innocence is a simple rhyme composed primarily of monosyllables, making use of repetition, clear communication and comprehensible relationships to convey a sense of

⁴⁸ This particularity of each copy of Blake’s own composites continues to fuel many current debates that reach beyond interpretative issues. Some critics suggest that the very process of reproducing Blake’s illuminated books in print for a contemporary mass audience is antithetical to Blake’s fundamental philosophy of production and thus a material misrepresentation of his intentions. At the Friendly Enemies: Blake and the Enlightenment conference that took place in August 2000 at the University of Essex in Colchester, England, I had the privilege of witnessing an exchange between J. Hillis Miller and Joseph Viscomi on the implications of the online Blake Archive (<http://www.blakearchive.org>) in this regard. Viscomi defended the archive as a means by which everyone could be allowed uninhibited and economical access to Blake’s creations in their original, composite, full-colour form. Indeed, the extensive hypermedia archive, still in the process of construction, contains a wealth of primary and secondary resources, and also allows a user to compare different copies of Blake’s illuminated books on the computer screen at one time. While it has been an invaluable research tool in the writing of this project, Hillis Miller’s respondent concerns regarding the ethics and implications of digitally reproducing (or reducing) Blake’s creations into incorporeal streams of infinitely reproducible data still linger.

surface stability. The rhymes appeal to both aural and visual perception and resemble contemporary religious lyrics for children, such as Christopher Wesley's "Hymns for Children", published in 1763, and Christopher Smart's "Hymns for the Amusement of Children", published in 1770 (Lindsay 24). Yet Blake's "Introduction" hints at a linguistic opacity below the apparently clear surface of these innocent lyrics. The piper, initially piping wordless tunes, subsequently drops his pipe and sings, then takes pen in hand and writes at the request of a child who disappears as soon as the pen replaces the voice. While this movement from aural, non-linguistic and temporally bound performance to the written word that "Every child may joy to hear" is not inherently suspicious and seems to trace a path from solitary creation and happiness to a shared communicative joy, there have been many ironic counter-readings of this poem that question its overall innocence.

Thomas Frosch proposes that the child vanishes because "writing takes the piper beyond the child's capacity" (74). He goes on to add that the plucking of the reed and the staining of the "water clear" are "acts tinged with destructiveness" and that, overall, "to celebrate Innocence", the piper must leave it" (74). To Frosch, the "Introduction" portrays a "crisis of Innocence" and the Songs as a whole deal with the borderline between Innocence and Experience rather than each separately (75). Heather Glen also uses the "Introduction" to support the perception that innocence is not an ideal state, but one that is in the process of decay. She calls attention to a progression in the "Introduction" from undirected, timeless and spontaneous energy to an exchange where "spontaneity steadily disappears" and where energy is consequently fixed, "channelled and delimited" (66, 65). The labour of writing replaces the effortless activity of song, the

reciprocal exchange between piper and child gives way to “determined unilateral action”, and material creation involves a simultaneous pollution (“I stain’d the water clear”) (66). “To Blake”, she suggests, “the writing of a book seems to be a problematic activity”, for it utilises written language, a “medium at once unchanging in appearance and unpredictable in effect” (66). Glen notes that this unpredictability is hinted at by the uncertainty conveyed in such lines as, “Every child may joy to hear” and “In a book that all may read” (my emphasis). Yet the word ‘may’ “registers both a doubt and an affirmation”, and the poem at once becomes a movement “away from spontaneity, vitality and immediate responsiveness” and “a potentially joyful relationship not with one, but with ‘every child’ (68).

Angela Esterhammer attempts to extend this optimistic potential through speech act analysis and some creative wordplay. Initially identifying the word “hear” at the end of the poem as indicative of an overall conflation between oral and written language because of its use in describing the written form of the piper’s songs, she then goes on to point out the dominance of the letter combination “e-a-r” throughout the poem (Creating States 130).⁴⁹ Further, Esterhammer suggests that “r-e-a”, an anagram of “e-a-r” supports her argument that reading and hearing are interdependent throughout Innocence, and that this interdependence “invites us to participate in [the poem’s] performative dimension” (130). Resultantly, she characterises innocence as a state of “clear communication”,

⁴⁹ Esterhammer’s first observation echoes an earlier analysis by Robert Essick in William Blake and the Language of Adam. Essick, in his argument for the “synaesthetic” nature of Blake’s vision, the “congruence of the oral and the written”, notes that the “Introduction” to Innocence “unfolds without consciousness of any discontinuities among the media” as music is replaced by song, which, in turn, is replaced by written verse (182, 183). He, like Esterhammer, suggests that the last line returns us “to the auditory via the written” and optimistically concludes that “writing has not replaced voice but has [...] continued and preserved it for recreation by the audience” (183).

“comprehensible relationships”, “stable identities” and “symmetry” (126, 132).

Interestingly, she does admit that irony remains in some of these songs, but argues that such instances, which reflect the way that the innocent speakers have assimilated the words and world-views of less stable sources, are further examples of the innocent state of successful and complete communication (134).

The critical response to the “Introduction” to Innocence already reveals the depth, multiplicity and uncertainty that Blake’s ‘simple’ language can create. Vincent De Luca terms this deceptive ambiguity “difficulty made easy” or ambiguity clothed in simplicity (83). Before determining whether there are any significant differences between the languages of Innocence and Experience, it will be useful to examine further examples from Innocence to identify some specific ways that Blake’s verse achieves this interpretative diversity. In the poem “Infant Joy”, simple language again veils complex uncertainties:

I have no name
I am but two days old.—
What shall I call thee?
I happy am
Joy is my name,—
Sweet joy befall thee!

Pretty joy!
Sweet joy but two days old,
Sweet joy I call thee;
Thou dost smile.
I sing the while
Sweet joy befall thee.

(E 16)

This song begins with the words of a two-day-old speaker who not only lacks a name, but who also is questionably conversant and assertive at such a young age. A dash following line two appears to denote a change of speaker for line three, just as a dash between lines

five and six also seems to indicate such a change. However, the absence of similar punctuation between lines three and four, which is a logical place to assume that the speaking voice returns to the no-named infant, raises doubt regarding not only the function of the dash but also the identity of the speaker throughout the entire song. Indeed, an overall lack of indicative punctuation in this poem blurs the identity of the speaker and multiplies the potential for interpretative variation. Some critical perspectives even harness this lack of distinction between speakers to support an overall characterisation of innocence as a state of unity or a harmonic merging of identities (Lindsay 19) rather than protest or conflict.

A further ambiguity is generated by the word “joy” being used both as a name and as a characteristic of the infant speaker, for interpretations of a number of lines of the poem are affected depending on which use of “joy” is selected. Lines six to eight also raise an interesting question about the function of naming: does this infant’s name grow out of a demonstrated identity (“I happy am”), does the name itself determine the identity, subsequent behaviour and the feelings of the infant and of those who encounter the infant (“Sweet joy befall thee”), or are both possibilities simultaneously operating? In addition, note that, according to one possible assignment of speaker identities, the infant names and defines itself, limiting the other speaker’s agency to mere adjectival enhancement and confirmation. While Heather Glen suggests that this self-naming is a successful strategy of innocence which avoids definition imposed by another (26) and posits that the shared use of “joy” between the speakers illustrates a “mutual response to a mutually felt absence”⁵⁰ (131), there remains an inherent power relation within the naming process that

⁵⁰ Glen goes on to suggest that “Infant Joy” demonstrates the “autonomous selfhood” of the infant and offers “a more creative mode of relationship which expresses itself through a shared

exists even when one chooses their own name. Both the potential for deception and inaccuracy inherent in self-definition and the dangers of naming overall reemerge during a consideration of “Infant Joy” on plate 22 of Jerusalem:

The Infant Joy is beautiful, but its anatomy
Horrible ghaſt & deadly! nought ſhalt thou find in it
But dark deſpair & everlaſting brooding melancholy!
(E 167)

While I am not conclusively stating that “Infant Joy” is inherently ironic or contains the pessimistic seeds of experience under its apparently joyful surface, I am suggesting that the multiple possibilities for contrasting interpretation enabled by Blake’s polysemous use of language, his reluctance to definitively specify the identities of and divisions between speaking voices, and the intertextual reference asserted in Jerusalem does allow such a reading to simultaneously coexist with Glen’s more optimistic stance. From these opposing readings of a single poem in the Songs, one can go on to either elevate the state of innocence to a utopic ideal, or establish Blakean innocence as a state of ignorance that is just as dangerous as pessimistic experience. Consequently, the state of innocence is

language” (131). In opposition to the later, historically based opinion of Stanley Gardner that this exchange is between a “nurse and a foundling” (Gardner Tyger 135), Glen identifies the replying speaker as the mother and optimistically concludes that the infant’s “self-image is returned to it with tenderness and love” (Glen 132). Curiously, an earlier work by Gardner, Blake’s Innocence and Experience Retraced, written three years after Glen’s critical volume, echoes not only Glen’s opinion that this is an unassertive and reciprocal mother-child exchange but also her optimism through his assertion that this is a poetic affront to the indifference and emotional withdrawal borne from child mortality in the eighteenth century (Retraced 52-53). Gardner’s oscillating opinions aside, what Glen fails to notice is that although the infant’s process of self-naming is a translation of an experiential noun into a shared signifier, the “mother” returns ‘joy’ to the infant as a variously adorned abstraction. Rather than a relationship of mutual reciprocity, shared language and understanding, the infant attribute, as echoed name, has been ‘laundered’ of any experiential or operative significance and, as Essick notes (Adam 110), becomes part of a repeated abstract blessing (“Sweet joy befall thee”). This particular reading could be seen as a precursor to “Infant Sorrow”, where a “piping loud” and “helpless” infant is bound and swaddled by parental intervention, just as the infant Joy is bound by its abstracted name, and ends up sulking dependently on its mother’s breast.

enriched and expanded both by its unresolved ambiguity and its overall resistance to the abstraction that follows from definitive naming.

“The Little Black Boy” and “The Chimney Sweeper” are two other songs of Innocence which quickly expand from simple language to ambiguous excess. At the beginning of “The Little Black Boy”, a child questions his dark skin colour, defensively claiming that his soul is as “white as an angel or the English child”. He thus links white with godliness and darkness with a lack of goodness, but wonders where such a division leaves him, with a dark body and white soul. Seeking answers from his mother he receives an explanation that uses a material metaphor to explain spiritual progress, learning that God is the light of the sun and that dark skin, indeed the body itself, is merely an earthly cloud to shade the boy until he learns to bear the fullness of God’s “beams of love”. The narrator then innocently approaches a little English boy and repeats this explanation with a kindness (“I’ll shade him”), a sense of envy (“be like him”) and a spiritual optimism that reveals a lack of awareness regarding earthly prejudice and cruelty (“he will then love me”) and approaches pathos. During this narrative, however, the word “black” expands from a simple bereavement of light and a negative spiritual condition to an ambiguous cloud and potentially positive condition of protective shade. Further, “white”, initially linked to angelic purity, also becomes a restrictive “cloud” at the end of stanza six. The boy’s innocent retelling of his mother’s attempt at reassurance, then, actually breaks down the initial binary between black and white that has both informed the whole poem and defined the optimistic religious paradigm, and raises unresolved questions about whether the little black boy and the English boy are similarly clouded or differently shaded. This progressive expansion of connotative possibility surrounding

“black” and “white” does lead to an overlapping of contradictory metaphors, but such ambiguous integration leaves the poem exposed to a variety of prejudiced readings.

“The Chimney Sweeper” (I) also involves a little black boy, one whose skin colour has been applied by a life of orphaned urban slavery. This boy, swallowed by a sooty cloud of experience, also finds solace in a distant dream of “white” salvation. Superficially optimistic, this song offers a didactic message that being a “good boy” and doing one’s “duty” will bring one closer to God, allow one to overcome fear and persist through even the darkest earthly conditions. At the same time, however, the narrator’s innocent pathos implies a harsh social critique of a nation that allows these hopeful children to endure such experiences. This critique includes the reader as well, for they are “your chimneys” that the boy sweeps. The irony of this song is that the lesson learned from Tom Dacre’s vision is obedience to God that necessitates and mirrors the continuation of their dutiful and servile labour in the soot and dust of England’s chimneys. Here, Blake creates a poetic structure that buries optimistic dreams of freedom and the promise of reward between stanzas of empty enslavement: the sweepers dream of an expectant father but rise “in the dark”, rather than seeing the rising sun that the little black boy witnesses. Still, both seem to be blinded by their innocent faith in the light’s inevitability.⁵¹ This song, then, frames and embodies the problematic application of

⁵¹ Stanley Gardner acknowledges that in “The Chimney Sweeper” and “The Little Black Boy”, Blake is “already facing and transcribing experience” (Tyger 114). However, Gardner also suggests that, here, Blake is beckoning both boys from a world of experience to one of visionary innocence (112). The purity of their faith, he continues, embodies a “central theme of Innocence: unqualified reconciliation; and reconciliation in the face of intransigence” (113). At times, this optimistic stance seems to whitewash the lingering tragedy of the boys’ hopeful ignorance. However, Gardner bases his argument on historical evidence, noting that Blake composes both in 1788, a time when “the plight of the immigrant slaves” and a parliamentary act attempting to curtail the underage hiring-out of poor and orphaned children were the topics of contemporary conversation (110, 115). He also notes that the persistence of these injustices, despite public and

optimistic, but ambiguously symbolic vision in an attempt both to question religious didacticism and servitude and to explore the echoing (or perhaps even the origin, but certainly the maintenance) of such principles within political and social practice. The sweepers' ignorant application of divine principles to their daily lives ("So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm") is a conclusion that echoes the little back boy's problematic repetition of his mother's wisdom and reveals the insufficiency, incompatibility and overall hypocrisy of such a morality within contemporary conditions. It also subtly accuses, implying that if everyone were to do their duty to God, including the fathers and employers, then the fear and harm felt by these boys would no longer exist.

Calling attention to the persistent sorrow imbedded within the child's occupation, "weep" is associated with "sweep" in the fourth and fifth lines of the song. This wordplay, expanding "weep" to connote both a cry of sorrow and an underdeveloped verbal advertisement for child labour, is essential in establishing the young sweep as a figure deserving of sympathetic pity.⁵² Its proximity to the similar sounding "sleep" in

parliamentary efforts, would shift Blake's convictions and fuel the misgivings that were to emerge in the Songs of Experience (117).

⁵² Glen suggests that the children in the Songs of Innocence "have their own distinctive voices: they are not the objects of sympathetic or protesting comment—of any comment at all" (31). While this is an accurate description of the character of the poetic text itself, Glen initially neglects to consider that the reader may be the author of such commentary, guided by the subtle and apparently innocent rhetoric of the verse. As Glen points out, "the Songs of Innocence present points of view very different from the customary controlling one of polite adult rationalism" (31). Such a view, I argue further, can enable a similarly emotional sympathetic response that resists rationalism as well. Blake's language of Innocence, then, carries a didactic function, but one that remains subtle and relies on sympathetic understanding rather than empathetic identification with the speakers. Indeed, Glen does recognise this in a later examination of "The Chimney Sweeper", but suggests that the "sentimental 'pity' which informs contemporary protest verse is impossible here, for Blake allows no position from which it might be unhyprocritically directed" (96). As has been noted, this is because the reader is "inescapably implicated" in the child's story. While Glen furthers her position with the observation that the

line four also connects this sorrow to the dream that is to follow and to the slumbering social morality that causes this child's cry. Robert Essick usefully comments on this tendency of Blake's signifiers to "create their own patterns of association and generate meanings that play beneath and transgress the poem's normative grammar and syntax" by suggesting that "these eruptions of polymorphous secondary motivation threaten to disrupt arbitrary linguistic conventions and univalent meanings" (Adam 138). Such ambiguity is maintained in "The Chimney Sweeper" not only through these linguistic techniques, but also because of the identity of its speaker. That is, despite the appearance of ignorance, this narrative does originate from an experienced boy who seems quite perceptive and reflective, who not only translates Tom Dacre's dream into a moral tale and reconstructs his own story into a pitiful narrative, but also acts as a consoling father figure to the weeping Tom in the second stanza. The final, ambiguously directed moral, characterised by Glen as a disconcerting, "hypocritical rationalization, at best an empty phrase which can be charged with contradictory meanings" maintains this uncertainty as to whether the boy is an innocent and sadly hopeful victim or an experienced, manipulative and accusing judge (102). Both positions, however, explore "a mode of vision which challenges the dominance of established 'common sense'" (103).

A final example of the way that Blake employs ambiguous poetic language to expand restricted perception can be found in "Spring", another poem from the Songs of Innocence that makes use of overly simple diction. The poem itself is not a narrative tale, but rather a catalogue of the senses, of various observations of and responses to spring by

Songs of Experience also "express a concomitant suspicion of that categorical mode of vision which reduces difference to its own mould", the sympathetic response to these boys of innocence ideally avoids such reduction, promoting an expansion beyond one's narrow and hypocritical perceptions rather than a consumption of others' views (31).

infants and animals alike. While the first two stanzas offer observations and ascribe merriment to the objects perceived, the speaker participates in the celebration in the final stanza (“Merrily Merrily we welcome in the year”). While there is no uncertain “blackness” to contend with in this poem, the recurrence of words such as “white” and “lamb” constructs an intertextual bridge between this and the other songs of Innocence considered thus far. As a result, the already dense connotations surrounding these terms expand further and spill across the pages, increasing the potential for variant interpretation for this and the other songs. Indeed, critical response to “Spring” has been relatively small but consistently various. Glen dismisses this song with its “childish monosyllables and half-rhymes” as an insubstantial verse possibly intended to “offer practice in reading and pronunciation” to children (10). Lindsay attempts to link this poem with “Infant Joy”, claiming that both present “a monologue which subsumes a dialogue” (19). However, his suggestion that the third stanza of “Spring”, which reads: “Little Lamb/ Here I am./ Come and lick/ My white neck./ Let me pull/ Your soft Wool./ Let me kiss/ Your soft face./ Merrily Merrily we welcome in the Year.”, is actually a dialogue between the child and the lamb is unconvincing. While it is true that the lack of quotation marks in this case does preserve an uncertainty as to the speaker of each statement, I fail to see the relevance of such ambiguity unless one attempts to read something more into the tactile exchange between the speaker and the lamb. Stephen Behrendt also notes the presence of the lamb in “Spring”, and links this figure to other appearances of the lamb throughout the Songs. He uses this chain of figures to demonstrate that “‘meanings’ that accrue from readings of one song carry over and across to readings of others, and these resonances open up still other possibilities for meaning and signification” (61). At the extreme end of interpretative inventiveness, E.D. Hirsch,

who reads much more into this song's resonance than most, interprets the poem as a pastoral rendering of the last judgement, full of apocalyptic meaning and prophecy (198-99). Much more than just a critical refusal to believe that such a basic verse could be so simple, then, the above sampling of responses to "Spring" again demonstrate the capability of Blake's simple language to invite and sustain a variety of interpretative depth.

I am not merely claiming here that Blake's poetic use of language leads to a greater variety and possibility of meaning. Indeed, such qualities can be attributed to nearly all examples of poetic diction. What is necessary to highlight here in the context of the larger argument is the striking contrast in these lines between an apparent simplicity of language that implicitly promotes a thinness of presented meaning and the actual complexity or richness of interpretative and contextually produced meaning. Parallel to the conceptual focus of the Songs, the simplicity of Blakean language involves a supposedly innocent presentation of textual meaning that eventually becomes a site of uncertainty. Like the innocence of the Songs that calls attention to its own incapacity to contain and preserve itself from uncertainty and difficulty, Blake's simple text is ultimately unable to sustain its claim to self-evident meaning as it encounters contextual complexity and is subjected to factors that reveal language to be more than just an innocent vehicle for explicit expression.

As a result, the state of innocence is neither easily nor simply characterised by these poems. Each song further complicates innocence both by approaching it from a different perspective and by maintaining an ambiguous interpretative multiplicity. These poems, although often composed of simple statements, never quite define innocence, but instead provide different illustrations of this state of the human soul via poetic text and, as

will be explored, integrated artwork. As has been noted above, there is also no consistent order or progress to this collection of perspectives, for the plates in each printed volume of Innocence that survives have been placed in a different sequence. Resisting simple didacticism and celebrating language as more than just a structure that contains meaning, but also possessing a written form that, far from the wild pipings of joy, is inherently the result of a process of obscurity, solitude and silence, Blake's written Songs of Innocence already embody the tensions between expressive innocence and mediated experience that persist throughout the combined collection. In addition, the "Motto to the Songs of Innocence and of Experience", unpublished with the printed Songs but found in Blake's notebook without artistic accompaniment and placed under the heading of "Satiric Verses and Epigrams" in Erdman's Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake, further increases the tension and blurs the division between these two states. It reads:

The Good are attracted by Mens perceptions
 And Think not for themselves
 Till Experience teaches them to catch
 And to cage the Fairies & Elves

And then the Knave begins to snarl
 And the Hypocrite to howl
 And all his good Friends shew their private ends
 And the Eagle is known from the Owl
 (E 499)

While the "Motto" does not mention innocence directly, its title suggests that its few lines succinctly define the relationship between innocence and experience as explored through the collected Songs. As such, it provides a condensed and perceptive textual statement that exposes the folly of unguarded goodness and the restrictive but revelatory actions of experience. Yet, the possibility remains that Blake omits a consideration of innocence here, especially since he suggests in an inscription within the manuscript of The Four

Zoas that “Innocence dwells with Wisdom but never with Ignorance” (E 697). Indeed, neither the “Good”, who “think not for themselves”, nor the eventually experienced of the “Motto”, possess wisdom enough to be associated with this type of innocence. However, this intertextual appeal invites more complication than clarification. By linking innocence with wisdom and opposing it to ignorance, Blake appears to segregate innocence and experience into irresolvable opposition. To further this view, note that innocence is consistently associated with “youth” and “youthfulness” throughout Blake’s writing, while divisive and restrictive experience, on the other hand, is associated with aged ignorance, which is prone to “view a small portion and think that all” (E 216), for where “Perceptive Organs [close] their objects close” (E 265). Yet the above “Motto”, while mentioning nothing of wisdom and appearing as pessimistic as many of the songs of Experience, is not only an example of wisdom itself, but also mentions a youthful goodness that is eventually taught by experience. Thus the Motto’s involvement in establishing or modifying the character of Blakean innocence remains inconclusive and uncertain. Its absence from the printed volumes of the Songs raises further questions regarding its applicability to the collection overall. Furthering the difficulty that these eight lines have introduced into the attempt to clarify the specific relation between innocence and experience, the collection of mottoes and aphorisms that comprise “Auguries of Innocence” (E 490-93), further compound the growing opacity surrounding the concept. The “Auguries”, variously didactic, allegorical, prophetic and descriptive, introduce directions, prescriptions, cautions and perceptions that deal as much with figures of experience as they do with images of innocence. This consideration of the “Motto” and the “Auguries”, then, demonstrates some of the ways in which Blake’s

written language contributes to the overall evasiveness and impurity of Blakean innocence and encourages a continual integration with its sister-state, experience.

Thus far, the examples used to confirm the overall flexibility of Blake's poetic language have all been chosen from the Songs of Innocence. However, just as Blake employs the artistic image differently to achieve a variety of functions in its relation to language, the language that Blake uses to clothe experience is markedly different from the simple words and rhymes used to capture the piper's glee. In the "Introduction" to Experience, the dialogue between piper and child has been replaced by two voices: the omnipresent and dictatorial "voice of the Bard" and another that both defines the Bard's attributes and commands us to "hear" his voice. These voices, presenting figurative echoes of Biblical diction in dramatic and epic tones, are much more complex, cryptic and abstract than their innocent counterparts. This is due in part to a lack of distinctive punctuation that, similar to the songs of Innocence, makes it difficult to determine which voice is speaking. Such uncertainty contributes to the formation of "plausible, though incompatible interpretations" of the text and to the overall undecidability that the text of experience represents (Esterhammer, Constitution 153). Despite this interchangeability, these voices do not engage in any sort of dialogue or exchange. That is, both speakers, isolated from each other by their assertive monologues, demand no reply, but do command that their respective addressees passively listen and obey. Furthering the ambiguity and possibility for multiple interpretations, syntactical uncertainties and omissions in the first two stanzas of this "Introduction" create doubt as to which characteristics and actions should be attributed to each subject in the poem. Consider the following:

Hear the Voice of the Bard!

Who Present, Past, & Future sees
 Whose ears have heard,
 The Holy Word,
 That walk'd among the ancient trees.

Calling the lapsed Soul
 And weeping in the evening dew:
 That might controll
 The starry pole;
 And fallen fallen light renew!
 (E 18)

The lack of punctuation between lines two and three compounds interpretative potential in that the Bard either omnipresently “sees” through time and has himself heard the Holy Word (if one chooses to favour the parallel construction between these poetic lines and assumes that this is a catalogue of sensory perception), or omnisciently sees who it is whose ears have heard the Holy Word (if one chooses to conjoin these lines into a continuous statement because of the lack of divisive punctuation and assumes that the bard is a perceptive policeman). Either option assigns a power to the figure of the Bard that is subsequently questioned first by the pleading quality of the lament to the Earth in the third and fourth stanzas and further by the harshly critical poem “Earth’s Answer” that immediately follows this introduction in all surviving copies of Experience.

Blake’s personification of the “Holy Word” at the end of the first stanza is not in itself problematic. While left unexplained, it does suggestively define as holy that language which remains mobile and aural/oral. However, the lack of a pronoun in the second stanza generates an uncertainty as to whether it is the Bard or the personified “Holy Word” who calls, weeps and controls in these lines.⁵³ Regardless of one’s

⁵³ There are valid arguments for both possibilities. While the Holy Word would be the ideal candidate to call on the lapsed soul, the earlier reading of an omniscient Bard makes the poetic figure’s voice no less eligible. In addition, the description of one “That might controll/ The starry pole” is either a further attempt by the introductory narrator to infuse the Bard with additional

interpretative preference, either choice becomes subject to the repetition of “fallen” in line ten, which is either a harmless emphasis made for the purpose of maintaining poetic meter (and which remains a descriptive adjective for the “light” that follows), or a condition doubly applicable to the light and to the Bard or the Holy Word (depending on which has been chosen as the subject of the second stanza). Put more simply, whatever has the power to renew fallen light may need to share that fallen state. If this is the case, then the “lapsed Soul” is another potential candidate for control of the “starry pole” and it becomes likely that two subjects share the second stanza. Blake’s syntax does not exclude any of these possibilities.

The “lapsed Soul” also maintains a potential connection to the Earth that is addressed in the fourth stanza. If the second stanza is a description of what the Bard does and intends to accomplish through the monologue offered in stanzas three and four, then the fallen Soul is the Earth itself. But it is this ‘simple’ interpretation that raises the most difficult questions concerning not only the true power of the Bard, but also the accuracy and validity of the initial description of his capabilities. Overall, there is a subtle sense of irony in the Bard’s asking the Earth to “return”, for rotation is the natural motion of the Earth, and it will always return toward morning. Even more puzzling is the command that the Earth “Arise from out the dewy grass”, for grass grows upon the Earth itself. While this literal interpretative strategy ignores the many possible metaphorical associations that can be made, my intention here is to suggest that these lines, as foundations for any interpretation, are inherently unstable and contradictory. Indeed, as will be further illustrated below, the uncertainty produced by the difficult complexity of

potential strength, or another descriptive phrase linked to the Holy Word by a repetition of “That” at the beginning of the line.

the language of Experience undermines the didactic opinions and judgements of these poems, similar to the manner in which the apparent simplicity and unrealistic idealism in both the form and content of the poems of Innocence are undermined by a fundamental flexibility in the language itself. The language in both Innocence and Experience, then, is ultimately incapable of sustaining itself as a container of straightforward meaning. This failure introduces the complexity of experience into the arena of innocence, yet also interrupts the judgemental nature of experience with the inclusive excesses of innocent play.

Like the “Introduction” to Experience, “Earth’s Answer” begins with the words of a descriptive speaker who characterises the Earth before she speaks. However, this unidentified voice presents the Earth as a despairing female in stark contrast to the powerful Bard of the previous song. While these initial speakers in both poems do not directly address the figures that they describe, an exchange between the Bard and the Earth can be said to take place across these first two songs of Experience. Indeed, the title of this poem prepares the reader to expect an “answer” to the Bard’s lingering questions. Interestingly, these two poems, although adjacent and supposedly containing a dialogue, still spatially segregate the voices of each speaker so that no actual conversation takes place. Note also that while the Bard addresses the Earth directly (“Why wilt thou turn away”), the Earth only claims to hear “the Father of the ancient men”, and offers a general plea to no one in particular (“Break this heavy chain”). Although confirming the first stanza’s description of her as a pessimistic, despairing figure, Earth subsequently identifies herself as a prisoner of jealousy and the rest of her answer attacks this “selfish father of men” as the source of such restriction. Whether this father is the personified “Holy Word” from the “Introduction”, Moses, God, Jesus or the Bard himself, “Earth’s

Answer” neither explicitly defines, nor directly replies to the voice that she hears. In this way, she implicates all of these possibilities in a single accusation. Indeed, she does reconfigure some of the Bard’s exact words, shattering his hopeful suggestion that “The starry floor/ The watry shore/ Is given thee till the break of day” by revealing that “Prison’d on watry shore/ Starry Jealousy does keep my den/ Cold”.⁵⁴ Her monologue thus distorts as it echoes the commanding phrases of the Bard, implicating his ignorance, questioning his all-seeing wisdom and eventually twisting them into pessimistic accusations, criticisms and helpless but assertive lamentations. Yet her subsequent “weeping” actually forges a simultaneous likeness between the two, for it is conceivable that it is the Bard who does the “weeping in the evening dew” of the “Introduction”. Alternatively, Earth’s use of the word “ancient” links the accused father with the Holy Word “That walked among the ancient trees”. Although Earth’s usage may reinforce a reading that links this ancient father to the personification of religious law in Moses or the jealous God of the Old Testament, taken literally, it also implicates language itself and perhaps sheds some pessimistic and judgmental light on the shift from wordless music to the printed word portrayed in the “Introduction” to *Innocence*.⁵⁵

⁵⁴ Stanley Gardner briefly links the “watry shore” of this poem that which “separates Albion” from America, raising another possibility: that the bitter speaker of “Earth’s Answer” is an imprisoned Albion herself (*Tyger*, 231-32). If so, then the “Selfish father” could still conceivably be construed as a religious tradition that prevents the island from participating in the revolutionary flood of the age.

⁵⁵ Interpretations that favour a Biblical reading of the elements in these two poems raise the question of the Bard’s representative position. A prophet-like speaker inspired by the Holy Word, the Bard attempts to renew the lapsed, fallen soul through empathetic grief in the manner of Jesus. Were the Bard to be identified with Jesus, however, Earth’s indictment of restrictive religious bondage and the ineffective and ignorant efforts of the Bard to persuade the Earth to return to the light as if she was an uninhibited agent merely emphasises his ineffectiveness and powerlessness in the face of an incompatible god. Indeed, the order of these poems is crucial in this regard: Had the Earth spoken first, the Bard’s answer would have provided a possible solution to her captivity. As it stands, though, the Bard’s command is negated by the Earth’s continued captivity.

“Earth’s Answer” becomes, by song’s end, a call for freedom, specifically sensual and sexual freedom, asking all who listen to “Break this heavy chain [...] That free love with bondage bound”. Many layered contraries and the struggles and similarities between them are thus concurrently considered in this pair of poems: man/woman, abstinence/pleasure, human/nature, Old Testament/New Testament, Moses/Jesus, dark/light, and cold/heat are just a few of those examined thus far. None of these pairs sustain a stable binary opposition throughout these poems, however. Like innocence and experience, each remain distinct, yet both elements of each pair overlap. That is, just as the “Introduction” to Experience and “Earth’s Answer” attain no synthetic resolution, but each remain steadfast (while fundamentally multiple) in their respective perceptions of the same issue and exist as separate songs within the same volume, so too do “The Contrary States of the Human Soul” evade progressive dialogue in their collective unfolding. Exemplified by Earth’s altering echo, and similar to the distinct but cumulative repetition of certain words throughout Innocence, Blake’s treatment of these opposing likenesses allow him to maintain interrelationships between the distinct songs, to utilise but resist the independent self-containment of structured verse and to encourage the synchronic potential of language by expanding interpretative possibilities.

The two songs entitled “Introduction” that begin each section of Innocence and Experience exemplify different characteristics of language use. The clear language and straightforward syntax used in the “Introduction” to Innocence persists throughout most of the poems in that series, although it has been noted that speaker identification becomes problematic in “Infant Joy”. Such ambiguity is extended in the “Introduction” to Experience and “Earth’s Answer”, where cryptic figures, enigmatic interrelationships and an overall lack of syntactic resolution obstruct any attempt to maintain a definitive

interpretative position. Determining whether such opacity is a quality shared by other songs of Experience necessitates a closer examination of further examples. “What can it mean?”, is asked in the first line of “The Angel”, a song of Experience that subsequently refuses to provide a definitive answer. The question comes after the speaker awakes from a dream and the rest of the poem is a seemingly straightforward recollection of that vision. However, the fantasy of the dream introduces a mythical figure (“an Angel mild”) with impossible physical characteristics (“he took his wings and fled”) and utilises hyperbole (“ten thousand shields and spears”) in such a way that a purely literal and simple reading is problematised. Figurative and allegorical readings are numerous, as the relationship between the dreamer and the Angel could be seen as representing sexual, generational, political or religious strife. Indeed, this distorted fable replaces the expected concluding epigram with an indeterminate, introductory question that remains unanswered by song’s end. Yet, like the “Introduction” to Experience and “Earth’s Answer”, “The Angel”, an open and flexible text, presents us with a character who cannot progress beyond her own perspective and, as a result, remains isolated and antagonistic toward the one who attempts to interact with her⁵⁶. On one hand, then, Blake’s language explicitly enacts the openness that his allegorical song indirectly advocates by offering a negative example. On the other hand, however, the indefinite figurative language that Blake employs stains “the water clear” and contributes to an overall opacity that

⁵⁶ Stephen Behrendt argues that the inability of the narrator to return the angel’s affection is caused by a prohibitive social context and uses this poem to support the notion that many of the voices of Experience have succumbed to a “surrender of independence of thought, action and vision” (69). While this is a conceivable interpretation, it must be noted that it is the Queen’s resistance to the charms of the Angel and her overall independence of thought and action throughout the verse that leads to her lonely demise. E.D. Hirsch Jr. does suggest, though, that her initial hypocrisy eventually “passes into habitual prudery”, an “irredeemably fallen state” that is “beyond redemption” (243).

resembles the impenetrable isolation of the dreamed Queen. In this way, Blake's Songs of Experience are not only criticise over-determined and restrictive language, but stand in subtle opposition to indeterminate language as well.

"The Angel", then, is a complex, double-edged reconfiguration of many of the themes that have already been discussed in relation to the distinction between Innocence and Experience. In addition, this song also stands apart in its ambiguous, but doubly critical stance on religion. Blake's critical preoccupation with religion, specifically restrictive and prescriptive spirituality becomes increasingly evident as one progresses through Experience. As has already been discussed, the Bard makes mention of his affinity to the "Holy Word" and the Earth criticises the same in her reply. Other songs of Experience, such as "The Garden of Love" and "The Little Vagabond" sustain interpretations that expose and rhetorically condemn the fundamental antagonism, social exclusion, and moral confinement that are preached and practised by the eighteenth-century church. "The Angel", however, while blatantly describing a turning away from the heavenly spirit, constructs an opposition that subtly condemns the Queen as she condemns her angel.⁵⁷ The angel in the dream, described as "mild", constantly wipes the Queen's "tears away" despite continual rejection. Whether the weeping Queen is acting as a coy mistress or truly hiding another "delight" from this unsuccessful suitor, her rejection and subsequent "arm'd" defensiveness seem unfounded. Just as the Bard's command to the Earth exposes flaws in his character, so the first-person narrative of the

⁵⁷ Gardner chooses to interpret the Angel more carefully, questioning its benign identity and reminding the reader that even Satan has his angels (Tyger 239). Indeed, in an unacknowledged nod to D.G. Gillham, he equates the Angel with "Cupid" (239). However, Gardner finally attributes this uncertainty surrounding the Angel's affiliation to the inconstant perspective of the speaker, noting an overall movement in the dream from self-deception to regret.

dreamer/Queen cannot prevent her actions from appearing excessively cruel when compared to those of the angel. Conversely, although the angel is described as “mild”, his duty is to “guard” the Queen, a term that recalls the imprisonment of the Earth by a jealous God. As well, he is eventually driven away by her weeping, something that the “maker who “smiles on all” and who “gives to us his joy/ That our grief he may destroy,/ Till our grief is fled and gone” in “On Another’s Sorrow” would never do. Indeed, it is almost as if the Angel himself is the cause of the Queen’s grief and through his fleeing attempts to destroy her grief. Unfortunately, this action only leads the narrator to replace grief with fear. Overall, though, whereas the Earth’s criticism of the “father of the ancient men” remains a dominant counter to the Bard’s problematic assertiveness, the Queen’s excessive antagonism toward the “mild” guardian angel has the potential to reverse the formerly established hierarchy, despite their shared condemnation of religious figures. Again, just as Blake’s use of poetic language questions the authority of language itself, so too do the words of his speakers continually question their own authority, even to the extent of creating apparent conflict and disunity between the collected Songs of Experience.⁵⁸ It appears, then, that within the dissonant state of Experience, no single voice or perspective exclusively rules, including the reader’s.

⁵⁸ In addition to the conflicts that “The Angel” exposes within Experience, Hirsch Jr. recognises this song as an “uncompromising satire on all the props of innocence—dreams, guardian angels, tears and naïveté” (241-2). The use of “satire” to characterise this verse seems extreme, for it is not immediately apparent that Blake meant to ridicule the figure of the Queen. Indeed, her growing awareness and cynicism lend a tragic character to this wasted life. The ignorant dreamer, however, may be more suited to satiric comment if one believes that the dream is an inadequate veil for an actual life of sustained chastity and embittered puzzlement. (It may, in fact, be the opposite: a dream of a restricted life that puzzles one who knows no inhibitions.) As with many other Songs, the relationship between the speakers remains uncertain. However, Hirsch’s recognition that this poem may contribute to an overall antagonism between Innocence and Experience remains valid.

In addition to the constant reordering of plates within the Innocence and Experience groupings, Blake often experiments by shifting specific poems between these sections. “Laughing Song”, found primarily in Innocence, moves to Experience in copy E of the collected Songs. As well, in copies C and D of the Songs, “A Dream” is placed in Experience whereas in all other copies it remains in Innocence. “The School Boy” and “The Voice of the Ancient Bard” are also variously mobile, with the latter poem actually appearing in both sections of copy O. Further, the poems “The Little Girl Lost” and “The Little Girl Found”, eventually finding a home in Experience, originate within many copies of the individually printed Songs of Innocence (Erdman Illuminated 69, 96-7). This border-crossing mobility of individual plates fortifies the standpoint that innocence and experience are not intended as exclusive opposites, but instead remain interrelated and co-dependent. In addition to this interactive dynamic between larger categories, the individual poems, while maintaining a self-sufficiency in that they do not depend on their inclusion in any specific series for meaning, echo the innocence/experience codependence on a smaller scale by maintaining connections to other songs through intertextual repetitions and similarities. Thus, the meaning that is attributed to them is potentially affected by the group that includes them, by their placement in relation to the other songs within a specific grouping, by the recurrence of certain words or phrases between poems that establish an inter-song connection and by an inherent flexibility and plurality in the poetic language itself that is encouraged by Blake's maintenance of ambiguity.

In Blake studies it is tempting to make the grand claim that Blake’s visionary language overcomes limitations to the extent that everything becomes interrelated, interpenetrating and interchangeable. While Blake uses poetic language in a polysemous way, to probe rather than define, to explore and expand rather than chart, this does not

mean that such language is open to all potential meanings. As Nelson Hilton aptly demonstrates in Literal Imagination, many of Blake's words weave incredibly complex associations throughout his entire corpus and act as parts of a coherent, but flexible and multidimensional structure rather than entropic noise. Adding to Hilton's terminology, an appeal to Umberto Eco's "poetics of openness" is useful to further characterise the effects of Blake's particular employment of language. In his essay "Openness, Information, Communication", Eco defines the poetics of openness as possessing a "tendency toward controlled disorder, toward a circumscribed potential, toward a freedom that is constantly curtailed by the germ of formativity" (65, author's emphasis). Further, the "open work" is one that invites its audience to "make the work together with the author", and which is "organically completed" yet still invites "a continuous generation of internal relations" (21). Stephen Behrendt notes that the definitive stability of Eco's concepts of the "poetics of openness" and the "open work" are useful in defining Blake's skill at poetically resisting an overall loss of structural coherence while pushing against the boundaries of linguistic limitation (10). While Eco defines these concepts in relation to a contemporary art that has generated an "expectation of the unpredictable" in its audience, it must be remembered that Blake was writing in a much different time (80). Although the historical and aesthetic context of Blake's composite art will be more fully explored in chapter 6, it is useful to note here that the late eighteenth century was no stranger to literary ambiguity and experimentation and that one's stylistic preference was often intertwined with one's social philosophies. Indeed, as Robert Essick points out, "semiotic freedoms were the natural allies and expressions of individual liberties in the political arena" (Essick Adam 73). While the majority of Blake's contemporary audience did certainly not expect the lack of didactic resolution or necessarily feel comfortable with

the unresolved questions of the Songs, those who perceived the complicated depths that Blake's poetic doorway opened may have already been looking for such potential. The curious thing about Blake's Songs is that one usually finds what they are expecting to find, whether it be light-hearted children's verse, simple binary oppositions or a revolution in perception; his poetic language sustains many different interpretative resolutions.

Most contemporary criticism confirms the above position that, despite an apparent surface simplicity, Blake's poetic language contains subtle fissures that promote an overall inconclusiveness and ambiguity. Heather Glen notes that while Blake's Songs contain examples that resemble popular children's verse of the period, certain poems more closely resemble argument or parody rather than conformational allusion and, in refusing to confirm reader's "basic expectations" act as a possible retort to didactic children's poetry (7, 14-15). Stanley Gardner corroborates this, suggesting that Blake's Innocence conveys "neither moral nor manners nor information", instead dissolving the distinctions of status and age and discounting the prescriptive duty of children to give thanks (Tyger 75, 79).⁵⁹ Glen argues further that Blake attacks eighteenth-century assumptions that readers are to be passive recipients of instruction and that all experience is susceptible to rational definition (Glen 26) by inviting his readers to "participate in a dynamic act of creation" (72). She does note that this apparent distrust and questioning of controlling definitions of polite 'common sense'" is not idiosyncratic to Blake, but also appears in the works of Paine and Swedenborg (26-28). Stephen Behrendt, citing the novels of Fielding and Sterne as further examples of intended instability that deprive

readers of the security of being able to trust the author as a truth-teller, confirms that eighteenth century literature is also full of experimentation with artistic forms and the construction of fundamental uncertainties (Behrendt 9).⁶⁰ These prompt the audience to ask the question: “What role does reality play in what I perceive?” (9). Glen presents Blake as one who does not merely echo these radical sentiments or formal practices, but explores their implications as well, often criticising the pessimistic anger that accompanies experience (170, 174). Indeed, Gardner suggests that Experience reports “on the misery and tyranny” of the 1790’s, a decade of domestic oppression and national and, for Blake, personal withdrawal, isolation and defensiveness (Tyger 130-31). Similarly, Glen reads the Songs of Experience as possessing an inherent sterility, fatalism and disillusionment in that they fail to imagine an alternative to the social system that they challenge (174-75). On the other hand, Innocence, “neither sentimental nor escapist”, portrays “operative” experiences that are expressed and enabled rather than imposed, abstracted, limiting or divisive (180, 222). While it appears that she favours innocence over experience, Glen concludes overall that the collected Songs affirm “fundamental human values [...] against the deformations of an exploiting social system” through a poetry that functions as a “dynamic and recreative mode of knowledge” (339).

Behrendt also comments on the Songs in their entirety, suggesting that they should not be seen as “separate lyrics ordered in a linear fashion” (21). Rather, the

⁵⁹ This list is extended later by Gardner to suggest that Blake’s Innocence contains no message, genuflection, family, fortitude, class, niceness, obedience, gratitude, high tone or breeding (Tyger 99).

⁶⁰ Behrendt also suggests that the revolutionary mindset of the period fed a revisionist and egalitarian literary impulse to promote heightened reader involvement in hopes of educating the ‘mob’ beyond authoritarian manipulation (11-12). Perhaps this impulse to expose the fictions behind conformist ‘truth’ offers an explanation as to why Blake continually creates designs to accompany established canonical literary works. Recall that these designs function as excessive destabilisers of meaning rather than simply confirming textual imagery.

separate voices of each “semi-independent” lyric form a “complex polyphony” or an overall texture and harmony and thus any reordering of the songs only affects the work for those trying to read from a linear perspective (21). Interestingly, however, Behrendt later recognises Blake’s aversion to musical harmony, “which his poems and prose alike link with rationalism and law”, and his “preference for melody, which he consistently associates with imagination and intuition” (44). Although characterising Blake’s Songs as a harmonic configuration, then, Behrendt does identify the collection as a work that addresses the imagination rather than reason and uses this to support his perception that Blake continually emphasises the meditative rather than the instructional function of art. That is, art functions as a catalyst in a “transformation of mental state” where the reader “is fundamentally altered by the transaction with the artist’s vision as it is mediated in the physical work of art” (22). While such a function might certainly be intended, Behrendt commits the very fallacy that he condemns by criticising those who both “belabour” Blake’s minute particulars and assign “narrowly determinate meanings to words and images” (39). Professing to be aware of Blake’s intentions while ignoring the extent of the criticism that runs against the current of these perceived intentions is just as exclusive a method as limited symbolic interpretation. While it may, at times, appear that I also engage in the same type of critical condemnation as Behrendt, my disagreement lies not with the particular readings that these critics offer, but with their attempts to dismiss, exclude or ignore the many other perspectives that persist around the same Blakean text. This recognition of multiple responses and a curiosity as to the processes by which a work can encourage and sustain such synchronic variety, has led me to the current exploration of how Blake’s unique deployment of poetic language and visual images expand the potential for multiple interpretations of his work and account for the

heterogeneous variety of critical response. Behrendt does agree, however, that Blake's texts "include and exploit [...] ambiguity, contradiction subversion and intellectual sabotage" to form, quoting Susan Fox, "an organic reality which we can perceive only through multiple perspectives" (39, 55).

In contrast to the position reinforced by Behrendt and Glen, Angela Esterhammer extends the opposition suggested by Blake's term "contrary states" to include the textual and communicative properties of Innocence and Experience. Esterhammer agrees that Experience raises unanswered and unanswerable questions, showcases the breakdown of relationships, resists clear characterisation and contains mutually contradictory narratives that produce plausible, but incompatible multiple interpretations (Creating States 135, 138-140). As well, equating the formal properties of the Songs of Experience with the content that they convey, she notes that "undecidability is crucial to the experience that the text represents", including uncertainty as to who is speaking and an uncertainty between literal and metaphorical interpretation (140). She perceives Experience and the experience of Experience overall as consisting of failed speech acts and unreliable and difficult communication that centrifugally relies on external specialised knowledge for understanding. As noted above, though, Esterhammer defines innocence as completely contrary to experience, suggesting that in this state, interrelation is the norm, communication remains clear and complete, and centripetal reliance on the text itself in all that one needs to achieve interpretative understanding (132-38). In her resistance to ironic readings of Innocence, she uses her characterisation of innocence to side with W. J. T. Mitchell and argue that Blake's writing is a medium capable of "full presence" rather than a suspect supplement to speech (129). However, the variety of unresolved criticism

surrounding individual songs of Innocence works against Esterhammer's claim that these songs embody stable identities and offer answerable and answered questions (132).

Overall, the uncertainties in the Songs prevent innocence from achieving purity and the pessimism of experience from overwhelming innocence completely. Northrop Frye suggests that while the Songs of Experience satirise innocence, showing "us the butcher's knife which is waiting for the unconscious lamb", the Songs of Innocence also satirise the state of experience by presenting a contrast to it that makes the hypocrisies of experience "more obviously shameful" (237). The apparently simple Songs of Innocence actually contain a rich variety, a depth of possible meanings that present a threat to those who are short-sighted enough to only perceive, construct and defend single narrative explanations.⁶¹ Indeed, the ignorance that innocence criticises in its optimistic celebration of diversity permeates the linguistic constructions of experience, where complex weaves of keyless allegories either tie themselves in impervious Gordian knots or unravel themselves by relying too much on overconfident generalisation and abstraction. This inherent inconclusiveness, however, which offers a glimpse of the poetic intelligence behind the speaker's ignorance, overthrows the pessimistic defeat that permeates experience and shatters it with excessive possibility, pointing to the holes that make up the often-debilitating net of complex language. Indeed, the contrasting characteristics of language that Blake employs to indirectly describe the "Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" actually function in the same way: both illustrate, embody and encourage an expansion rather than a narrowing in perception and make sure that neither simplicity nor obscurity suppress individual agency. It is this agency, kindled in the

⁶¹ This short-sighted group includes both ignorant innocents and those concerned with power who wish to sustain a customised and self-satisfying truth.

reader through the rhetoric of form and the particularity of the content in the Songs, that has led critics like Stanley Gardner to perceive these poems as the presentation of and persuasion towards a “moral awakening” (Gardner Retraced xviii).

In a study that uses Blake’s Jerusalem as a means toward supplementing, validating and, to an extent, challenging current poststructuralist theory, Molly Anne Rothenberg arrives at many of the same conclusions regarding Blake’s use of poetic language. She sees Blake’s textuality as a “horizon of plurality” that privileges dialogical and intertextual processes over monoperspectival narrative repression (128-29). His poems demonstrate the indeterminacy of textuality and language, not intentionally to transform his audience, but rhetorically to identify and expose varieties of oppression and tyranny (4, 97). Indeed, “a poem that calls into question a reader’s strategies for imposing determinate interpretations could help re-educate that reader into a profoundly different relationship with the world” (48). Curiously, though, she offers a Derridean suggestion that “the possibility that language will escape the intention of its author, that the text will free itself from its supposed referent, that the poem works to sever itself from determinate contexts, is fundamentally the way that language is able to ‘mean’” (47-48). In this light, then, she implicitly characterises Blake’s poetic text, which refuses “to provide a stable contextual determinant” and which indicates the “pernicious effects of such determinacy” (48), as being more faithful to the inherent function of language than determinate and authoritative uses of language that attempt to procure homogenous and totalising interpretation.

Vincent De Luca’s Words of Eternity, while focusing on Blake’s unique version of the sublime, is also in agreement with the above findings and usefully offers some general terms and metaphors to describe the characteristics and functioning of Blake’s

language. Claiming that Blake's composite pages "inevitably" lead to a pictorialisation of the text (something that will be further scrutinised later in this chapter), De Luca offers the term "verbal icon" to describe the properties of language that such pictorialisation entails. Blake's verbal icon, simultaneously definite and unfamiliar, presents an image of totality while propagating multifaceted ideas (80). As such, the verbal icon remains distant from "allegorization or ready translation" and gives rise to an overall "iconic vision" that possesses a "clearly marked outer form and an astonishingly compressed inclusiveness within" (80, 98). De Luca identifies Blake's language and his utilisation of the verbal icon as creating a "labyrinthine effect" of interconnected heterogeneity (137). Importantly, this becomes a doorway to sublimity for the reader and has the effect of producing "arrest, vertigo and disorientation" (98). De Luca's concepts can be easily applied to the above examination of the word "black" in "The Little Black Boy", "joy" within "Infant Joy", as well as the many ambiguously structured passages already considered that present "an image of totality, of an 'all' concentrated within formal bounds" (80). Indeed, even the terms "Innocence" and "Experience" become verbal icons as more of the songs are encountered, and eventually produce a type of overall structure that De Luca terms the "vortex". Examining the vortex passage from Book I of Milton, another Blakean text that appears straightforward, yet resists clear paraphrase and critical agreement, De Luca notes that it is an iconic passage in that it resembles that which it describes. This text, like so many other examples of Blake's writing is itself a vortex, "a structure that forces the understanding through the succession of verse lines to circle continually back on itself" between the poles of certainty and indeterminacy (83). While De Luca uses this metaphor in relation to a specific textual example, then, its applicability

to the structure of the collected Songs is invaluable to the further understanding of the destabilising function of Blake's poetic language.

Extending the above assertions with the comment that "Blake's formalist practices define no static aesthetic", Susan Wolfson, in her interrogation of Poetical Sketches, notes that Blake's consciousness of poetic form extends to the visual rhetoric of his scripts. Drawing further from De Luca, Roman Jakobson and Mitchell, she goes on to suggest that Blake's page involves "not just the interplay of the visual and verbal, but also the play of verbal as visual" (32, author's emphasis). Three years after the publication of Wolfson's book, Kathleen Lundeen's study of William Blake's composites entitled Knight of the Living Dead, strengthens this perspective by arguing that Blake makes language appear more as a material object than a transcendental sign (38). To illustrate, recall Esterhammer's example of the recurrence and anagrammatic reordering of "e-a-r" letter combinations throughout the "Introduction" to Innocence. In particular, she notes that Blake's unconventional spelling of 'chear' calls attention to the prevalence of "e-a-r" combinations (130). This, although perhaps partially the result of an overly sensitive critical gaze, does illustrate a basic tendency within Blake's poetic language to explore and experiment with the physical appearance of words on the page.

Indeed, Blake also employs eye rhymes, connecting words based on their visual similarity. For example, the final two lines from "The Tyger" ("What immortal hand or Eye/ Dare frame thy fearful symmetry") force the verbal reader of any period to either choose between pronouncing "eye" as "ee" or "symmetry" with an "aye" sound at word's end. While this choice depends on periodic convention and may, perhaps, be guided by the word "thy", Blake playfully precedes this stanza with a rhyming pair structured around a definite "ee" sound". To complicate things further, the first occurrence of a

similar phrase in the first stanza (“What immortal hand or eye/ Could frame thy fearful symmetry”) is followed by a rhyming pair of lines that utilises the “aye” sound. While pronunciation does not overtly influence the interpretation of these lines, this unresolved rhyme does arrest the fluid progression of this poem’s verbal form, emphasising the verbal non-symmetry of the words “symmetry and “eye”, this time calling attention to the “eye” rather than the “e-a-r”, and perhaps even linking the poem’s questioning of divine creativity and inspiration with that of the poet who creates a similar structural paradox. Indeed, a small shift in perspective to perceiving the words of the poem with one’s eye as purely visual artefacts avoids such uncertainty and recognises the formal coherence and symmetry of the visual text. It is possible, then, that while the questioning speaker of “The Tyger” lacks the ability to adopt a broader perspective and thus fails to understand that the tyger does possess an inherently non-fearful symmetry, Blake’s iconic poem forces the reader to avoid such failure by presenting an apparently flawed verbal poetic structure that redirects our perceptive thirst for symmetry beyond the ear’s limitations.

Wolfson’s agreement with De Luca extends to the notion that Blake’s introduction of “pictorial signifiers in the midst of alphabetic ones” has the “inevitable effect of inducing the eye to pictorialize the verbal portion of the plate” (De Luca 89). While this is certainly a possibility and has some notable implications for the current argument, the inevitability of such an effect has already been challenged by decades of critical inattention to Blake’s images or, at very least, a lack of consideration for the interaction between art and text on the composite page and countless attempts to read the images as a language. De Luca goes on to suggest, however, that the “reader is thus diverted from a sequential pursuit of words and lines to a visual contemplation of the whole block of text as a single unit” (89) and, as a result, “the meanings of the single words recede in

importance”, as does “the continuity of meaning from plate to plate” (90). While I agree with De Luca’s perception overall, his lingering affinity for pictorial signification hampers the strength of his resistance to continuity and meaning.

One instance where the materiality of Blake’s poetic text potentially affects its verbal continuity and meaning is “The Fly”. In chapter 2, a reading of this poem was used to support the position that Blake, in contrast to Gray, optimistically favours individuality, relativity and interdependence without resorting to hierarchical classification. Yet this earlier reading, like most interpretations of the poem, is based on the assumption that one needs to first read the stanzas in the left column from top to bottom, and then progress to the stanzas in the right hand column. When one looks at the plate, though, there is little indication that this is the intended order of the stanzas, and since “The Fly” is the only one of Blake’s printed songs to be divided into two columns, there are no other examples to confirm that this is the intended reading pattern (see fig. 21). Indeed, as Michael Simpson notes, in “Moral Law and the Rule of Grammar in Blake”, one could conceivably read the stanzas from left to right down the page, changing the overall impact and potential interpretation of the song (234-36). For instance, if what is normally considered stanza 4 becomes stanza 2 and is followed by the former second stanza, the speaker’s relation to the fly becomes much clearer: If the want of thought is death, then the narrator, with his thoughtless action is easily comparable to the dead fly. Further, if the stanzas that are conventionally considered to be 5 and 3 become the last two stanzas, then the conclusion of the poem becomes much more bleak, suggesting that the speaker does not feel any remorse for his actions and accepts that thoughtless living and killing are the order of the day. This reading, based on an alternative order that is not excluded by the placement of the text within the design, is in keeping with the pessimism

and irony traditionally associated with the critical approach to Blake's Experience and shatters the earlier suggestion that the speaker elevates himself beyond enlightenment limits. The way in which one perceives the visual configuration of stanzas in "The Fly", then, has a large impact on the meaning that is eventually ascribed to the poem and potentially affects one's perception of the Experience collection.

Interestingly, little has been made of this alternative order for "The Fly", primarily due to a critical consensus based largely on the pre-Experience and, as Simpson notes, purely textual version (235) found in Blake's notebook, in which the stanzas are assigned a numerical order by Blake. While this numbering in the draft version does favour the more conventional ordering of stanzas, it does not completely exclude the variant possibilities that the overall openness of Blake's self-published composites invites. Indeed this notebook version contains two deleted stanzas and other alterations that remind the reader that this is not a final version of the poem. As well, while Blake's numbering does seem to establish an intended order for the stanzas, stanza 5 is spatially situated before stanza 4 on the notebook page, suggesting that Blake composed the poem in a different order than the numbers suggest.

This interpretative appeal to the notebook version raises another issue regarding Blake criticism; that of the validity of self-referentially utilising certain portions of Blake's own texts as definitive keys that resolve some of the ambiguities found within his verse. Indeed, the current study has participated in such a critical practice in its earlier reliance on portions of Blake's text to understand the dynamics of his visual image. However, this methodology does rely on only those texts that accompany the visual images in question and thus attempts to avoid decontextualisation and the subsequent application of Blake's phrases as abstract maxims that define a consistent aesthetic.

Returning to our consideration of “The Fly”, one cannot completely rely on the notebook version to comprehensively anticipate all of the dimensions of a printed, final copy. Not only does Blake repeatedly alter his written texts throughout the composition process and maintain such variation within different copies of his final drafts, but the composite plate upon which the text of “The Fly” is printed includes the poem as part of a larger overall visual design. The notebook draft, then, can be considered as an incomplete textual version of the visual-textual “Fly” of Experience and thus its ability to validate certain interpretations of the composite work is inherently limited.

While the positioning of the poetic stanzas as objects within the plate’s design opens up the possibility for alternative readings, other visual aspects of the plate that surround the text seem to promote a singular columnar reading. The branches of the trees that frame the plate on the left and right margins intertwine with the textual stanzas and tend to divide the text from left to right, vertically encapsulating the blocks of text and suggesting the same order indicated by the numbers in Blake’s notebook. Simpson also notices this characteristic and attempts to argue against this authority of the graphic image by pointing out that other songs are similarly interrupted by graphic branches without “apparently arresting the reading” (236). What Simpson neglects to consider, however, is that, unlike “The Fly”, the text of “The Tyger” is arranged as a single vertical column on the page, so graphic boundaries would, at best, only briefly interrupt rather than redirect a reader’s progress. As well, the incomplete graphic divisions between stanzas of “The Tyger” are inherently compromised as boundaries, unlike the stringent vertical division caused by the unbroken branch that successfully separates the columns of “The Fly”.⁶² In

⁶² Simpson’s argument is further challenged by an appeal to Blake’s similar use of illustrated branches to separate columnar text in The Book of Urizen. Examination of the plates of Urizen

addition to the branches' confirmation of a conventional reading, some of the letters themselves organically extend beyond their conventional boundaries, echoing the vegetative representations that surround them and directing the eye to move downward. For example, the extension of the "y" in the word "away" that ends the first stanza pre-emptly the halting punctuation that follows and curls toward stanza 2. Conversely, stanzas 2 and 5 are doubly segregated from each other by a branching line, demonstrating that the graphic properties of "The Fly" plate alternately serve both connective and divisive functions.

The distinction between branches and text seem to blur in this example, while at the same time interacting to privilege a specific direction for a viewer's perceptual progress. As Simpson notes, though, "that the stanzas themselves do not lexically resist either of these formal possibilities consolidates the power and responsibility of the reader" (236). In further support of Simpson's celebration of textual openness, the rest of the plate presents a visual scene that, in its lack of direct representative translation of the

that feature text reveals a consistently unbroken vertical graphic border between two textual columns reminiscent of that in "The Fly". This border reinforces the numbered sections that biblically divide the book into chapters and verses and which direct the reader to advance through the text of each page by first reading down the left column, then down the right column before progressing to the next page. This established expectation works for all plates but one: 13^B, as featured in Erdman's *Illuminated Blake*, in which a mid-page image divides the text into four columns, two above and two below the opaque graphic. Although the image interrupts the continual reading of the vertical columns through the entire length of the page, Blake's numbering system here clarifies the textual order and compensates for the plate's awkward division. In addition to the vertical branches, incomplete horizontal branches, similar to those found in "The Tyger", serve to emphasise the distinction between already-numbered chapters and verses and also variously function to highlight certain words and phrases. Such stringent textual ordering, assisted by graphic cues, interestingly opposes the mobility of the illustration-only plates between different copies. As Erdman notes in *The Illuminated Blake*, each of the seven known copies of *Urizen* contains a different arrangement of plates (182). This recalls the dynamic between text and image evidenced in Blake's work for others' poetry and establishes *Urizen* as somewhat of a hybrid between interdependent and independent composites. While the argument that graphical techniques in Blake's *Urizen* confirm intended patterns of reading in certain *Songs* is useful, one must resist unequivocal subscription to the self-referential Blakean fallacy and remain aware that

text, does little to reinforce any interpretation of the stanzas. While the images of a girl playing shuttlecock and a woman helping a child to walk potentially extend Blake's poetic themes in new directions, they also contribute a measure of uncertainty if one uses them to assist in identifying the poem's speaker. Given the poetic speaker's self-identification as a "man" in stanza 2, the figures within the image that surrounds the poetic text defy expectations that assume an illustration to be a direct rendering of the text. Each of the unclarified images and interactions within the design can thus be seen to contribute to the connotative multiplicity and open uncertainty of the text. For example, the little girl's play is represented as the sportive swatting of an inanimate object, possibly linking the narrator's thoughtless action with an inconsequential game. The woman's interaction with the toddler, initially appearing restrictive and didactic in her attempt to teach the child to walk independently, can also be perceived to be a liberating one, for their arms form an image of cyclical interconnectivity. Similarities and distinctions between youth and age are also introduced by this image, but perhaps the most striking aspect of the design is its previously unacknowledged structural appearance of an endless human cycle, of growth that merely perpetuates the next generation of ignorance. This is evident in the subtle movement between the child who, face upturned, steps toward the playing girl, the girl who, still looking upward, turns in the direction of the woman during her thoughtless play at swatting the shuttlecock, and the woman who turns her attention down to the youth and, while perhaps thoughtful in her willingness to instruct, possibly echoes the thoughtless play of the younger girl and passes this ignorance on to a new generation. The problematic distinction between thoughtfulness and thoughtlessness

Blake's constant experimentation with media and their functions precludes the overall certainty of such an assertion.

within the poem is echoed in this unique visual context, but, like the instability that results from the recontextualised repetition of words and phrases throughout the Songs, this somewhat independent visual rendering distorts and complicates an already difficult relationship. The indefinite nature of this visual depiction (which is offered no interpretative key by the text of the poem) further blurs an already uncertain textual distinction between thoughtfulness and thoughtlessness.

I am not suggesting that the above examination of the image is a definitive interpretation. Indeed, this attempt has participated in one of the activities that I have repeatedly criticised: that of using the text as a foundation for the “reading” of an image. However, what the above exploration reinforces is that “The Fly” presents a composite design in which an open text is both expanded and restrained by the visual image within which it is embedded. This composite, then, unified in its mediated efforts toward openness, is restrained, but not restricted, allowing it to possess a richness of possible meaning, rather than a single, correct reading or an infinite and thus incomprehensible potential. Each instance of reception will determine which possibilities are recognised and realised, yet the interpretative exclusivity that results from either thoughtful analysis or thoughtless ignorance is disabled by a composite structure that resists exhaustion.

Blake’s “Tyger” is another plate from Experience in which the image spatially binds and representatively liberates the text (see fig. 22). While the configuration of stanzas on the page eliminates any doubt of their intended order, branches from the tree in the right margin still stretch between sections of the poem, dividing the stanzas into four groups, one each at beginning and end of the poem, and two groups of two in the middle. While I have not yet come across any interpretative attempts that utilise these divisions as a basis for argument, the groupings do frame the text into a visual symmetry that

reinforces my earlier observations. Of particular interest here, though, is the pictorial rendering of the tiger at the bottom of the page. As many critics have noticed, Blake's picture of the tiger seems quite unlike the fearful, fiery-eyed, and deadly image created by the text. Indeed, the very plainly rendered, wide-eyed and almost smiling beast is not very beastly and hardly frightening at all. However, ignoring the visual portrayal of the tiger for the moment, a closer look at the text reveals something that many critics have overlooked: aside from the few descriptors quoted above, direct adjectival enhancement of the tiger is scarce. That is, while Blake's tiger is described as "burning bright" and as possessing a "fearful symmetry", the overall textual "picture" of a fierce and dreadful beast traditionally associated with this poem is largely an assumption created from unanswered questions and phrases used to describe the creator and his tools. For instance, "dare" and "dread" are used repeatedly throughout the verse, but note that in each instance they are used to refer to the creator of the tiger and not the tiger itself. It seems, then, that while the animal subject and addressee of one of Blake's most famous poems is largely invisible, it has been recreated by a history of readers whose perceptual limitation echoes that of the speaker, for both equate the creator with the creation. It becomes apparent from Blake's drawing, though, that the art may have very little in common with the artisan. To be fair, the phrase, and "deadly terrors" could be used to definitively justify the intensity of Blake's tiger as more than an assumption. However, it is placed in an awkward phrase where subject confusion is perpetuated by the poetic structure, and thus it remains unclear whether the deadly terrors are to be associated with the hammer, the chain, the tiger's brain, or the anvil. Further, the phrase is used as a descriptor in a stanza that deals with the tiger's brain as its main subject matter. Thus, if associated with the tiger at all, these "deadly terrors" are part of its interior mental state,

something that perhaps, along with the discrimination between the visual image and textual construction, points to a similarly distorted and inherently flawed perception within the unidentified speaker.

The layered complexity arising from a lack of linguistic specificity and a hint of self-referential awareness on Blake's part creates a textual excess that, along with the discordance between the language and the image, pushes against perceptual attempts at restriction and definition. "The Tyger" is about a creator and a creation, a poem that, on the surface at least, presents a speaker who questions his creator. Most of these questions remain unanswered, though, and the rhetoric of the speaker's "Did he who made the Lamb make thee?", which implies an unmistakable opposition between the two creatures and an implicit critique of the creative force behind them, is sabotaged by Blake's drawing of an unthreatening tiger. Thus, in answer to the speaker's questions, Blake is the "eye" or "I" who "dares" to frame the "fearful symmetry" and linguistic inaccuracies of the poem with an image that is unthreatening to all but the poem's validity. Yet, more than just offering an artistic and ironic counterpoint to the speaker, as he often does in his artistic additions to others' work, Blake shrewdly places himself in the midst of this critique just by being the creator of both the text and the art of the plate. Blake, who makes "The Lamb" and "The Tyger", is implicated in his own speaker's characterisation of a possibly cruel and dreaded creator, despite the artistic undermining of this speaker overall. In addition, the reader's complicity in forming a clear image from uncertain words also implicates them in this questioning of creation, and Blake's picture of the tiger, which has been consistently characterised as antagonistic to the poetic image, calls attention to the readers' misperception of that image.

In both “The Fly” and “The Tyger”, then, Blake’s graphic art functions as a definitive border in its relation to the physicality of the text and as an uncertain representation in relation to the text’s already inconclusive content. While these functions persist throughout the Songs, they are not constant, and it is this inconsistency that furthers the unresolved overall excesses of the work. For example, unlike the standardised form of the pages upon which Blake illustrates the poetry of Thomas Gray and which feature a text box surrounded by various images, the different plates of the Songs contain an almost inexhaustible variety of spatial image-text relationships.⁶³ In “The Shepherd”, “The Lamb” and “The Little Black Boy”, Blake’s vegetative and populated marginal decorations act to decoratively frame the poetic text and reinforce a respectful segregation between the two media. These poems and their marginal images are segregated, but not entirely separated, for branches do approach the textual margins and vegetation curls through the first few letters of their titles. Breaching these boundaries somewhat, the “Cradle Song”, “Nurse’s Song” (I) and especially “Holy Thursday” plates display a text that is nearly “overgrown” and obscured by the marginal images, suggesting a unification that spatially defies Lessing’s delineation between image and text. Conversely and atypical of most of the illustratively fertile Songs of Innocence, “The Little Boy Found” and “Laughing Song” showcase a Spartan simplicity in their marginal decoration. In further contrast to the overgrown, integrated plates, “The Little Boy Lost”, “The Little Boy Found”, “Spring”, “The Little Black Boy”, “The Chimney Sweeper” (E), “The Angel”, “The Garden of Love”, and “The Little Vagabond” among others, all include major images that remain spatially isolated from the poetic text. Thus

⁶³ This consistency is dictated by compositional necessity in that Blake created the marginal Gray images around a block of pre-printed text, rather than possessing the artistic freedom to configure

each composite plate is a distinct experiment within the spectrum between image-text interplay and isolation. Appearing as a combination of the above configurations, the first plate of “The Ecchoing Green” contains an initial image distinctly separate from the text, but, but then includes large marginal figures and vegetation that join with the final image on the bottom of the second plate. The overall inconsistency of this image-text relationship throughout the Songs prevents one from attributing unique or consistent properties to either medium based on their configuration within the design, and also prevents the restrictive structuring of the composite form in an effort to pinpoint meaning.

To account for this experimental variety in image-text relations and for the blurring of formal characteristics traditionally attributed to art and text, it is useful to consider the unique method of production used by Blake in the creation of the Songs’ pages. It is well known that Blake claimed to have received inspiration for his peculiar technique of engraving and printing through a vision of his dead brother, Robert. Peter Ackroyd quotes an account from one of Blake’s contemporaries:

Blake, after deeply perplexing himself as to the mode of accomplishing the publication of his illustrated songs without their being subject to the expense of letter-press, his brother Robert stood before him in one of his visionary imaginations, and so decidedly directed him in the way in which he ought to proceed, that he immediately followed his advice. (111)

This process involves, according to Joseph Viscomi, “four basic stages: drawing a design on a copper plate with an acid resistant varnish, etching away the unprotected metal in acid to bring the design in relief, printing the plates on an etching press, and coloring the impressions by hand in watercolors” (Viscomi Reading 68). Blake started experimenting with this technique in 1788 and used it throughout the creation of the Songs. Although

and intermingle both image and text as he does in the etched plates of the Songs.

innovative, Ackroyd notes that variants of the process “had been employed for three centuries” (112). What is significant, however, is that this technique allows Blake to paint on rather than engrave the copper plate, and to create words and images “in a single operation”, thereby condensing, cheapening and controlling the entire process (112).

Viscomi notes that intaglio printing, a method used by Blake for The Gates of Paradise and The Book of Ahania, also allows for complete control over the process and for the combination of text and visual art, but adds that relief etching uniquely allows Blake to “write and draw autographically and reproduce certain book conventions, such as facing pages” (68).⁶⁴ “Autographic” engraving is defined by Viscomi as that which involves no resistance to the hand, or which is writing and “drawing in a literal sense” rather than just laboriously reproducing appearance of writing and drawing, as in copy-engraving (68).

Ackroyd further clarifies Viscomi’s use of the term “autographic”, explaining that relief etching allowed Blake to work on the copper plate “as if it were a sketch pad” (112), allowed him to engage in “spontaneous composition” without making “preliminary drafts or designs” (113). As well, this technique facilitated the unique coloration and detail of each copy of the Songs and caused him to stand out against “the trend of standardisation and mechanical conformity in printmaking or bookselling” (119).

This method of simultaneous composition and engraving crucially required that Blake include his poetic text as a mirror image on the plate. That is, he had to write

⁶⁴ Interestingly, Robert Essick, in “Teaching the Variations in Songs”, notes that Blake printed early copies of both the independent Innocence collection and the combined Songs recto and verso, but in later copies, printed on recto sides only (95). This, along with other details, such as adding framing lines around each plate, leads Essick to conclude that Blake’s own concept of the Songs shifted from a standard book to a series of framed prints (95-96). These alterations add further inconsistency to an already unstable collection by removing the possibility for the mutual illumination or integration of facing plates.

backward so that the words would appear correctly after the plate had been printed on paper. We can assume, then, that Blake viewed an often already-drafted poetic text as part of the pictorial image when he composed that image on the plate to be acid-etched.⁶⁵

Viscomi confirms this, suggesting that

As with upside-down drawings, the left side of the brain doesn't recognise the patterns and allows the subordinate right side, which is designed to process visual information spatially, to take over. Writing backward a text already known is drawing words: words cease to be symbols or names and become forms, marks, lines, things. (71)

If reverse lettering is enough to encourage the creative consideration of written text as graphic form, then as the poetic text becomes part of the design during the composition process, its linguistic function is suspended and it gains the potential to become more closely integrated with other pictorial elements on the page. Following the printing and colouring of each individual copy, the linguistic content of the words is reasserted, but the compositional interaction of the two media as part of an overall visual design lingers on and allows for a continued functional integration and overlap. In other words, the method of production enables textual elements to function both as linguistic signs and as visual art forms in Blake's Songs.⁶⁶ However, one would expect that a process that

⁶⁵ Many of the Songs appear in draft form in Blake's notebook, known as The Rossetti Manuscript. Just as this archive allows us to examine the process and evolution of some of Blake's poetic compositions, the different printings of the composite plates of the Songs allow us to follow the alterations that Blake's experimented with in each new copy. However, neither reveals the actual creative process that Blake engaged in to create the composite image on the copper plate. Any draft marks on the plate itself were consumed by the unforgiving acid, and the final copper relief has much in common with today's word-processor compositions that bear no tracks of the creative path to the final product. Joseph Viscomi's hands-on research into this composition process has revealed invaluable insights into the technical and aesthetic considerations that Blake may have had to face.

⁶⁶ Kathleen Lundeen, in Knight of the Living Dead, expresses the same idea, asserting that "the visual-verbal relationships in Blake's word-image art demystify empirically based language by making it appear less as a transcendental sign system and more as a material object in the world. Ironically, by showing language to have the tangible properties usually reserved for physical

unifies the functionality of one's media would also encourage a harmony in their content. Interestingly, this is only partially correct in the case of Blake's Songs. Whereas the traditional separation between text and artistic adornment of that text in the production of books has historically produced a concordance between the content of both with the text as the definitive medium, Blake's composite Songs upset this textually dominant hierarchy by including unmentioned visual details as well as omitting expected subjects in the artistic images surrounding the text. The effect of this is to implicitly question the assumed authority of the text as an anchor for the image. From a vantage point that is not commonly considered and which makes this argument clearer, it could be said that Blake includes textual details and omits poetic descriptions that the images do not anticipate and cannot account for. While it is fully possible and actually quite logical to conceive of the still, immediate visual images as the communicative foundation for the composite plate, an audience which generally ascribes primacy to the temporally dependent and arbitrarily signified written word, which exhibits "logocentric conditioning" (14) to use Stephen Behrendt's term, finds it easier to attribute any discord or deficiency to a failure of the image's habitual obedience than to an authoritative logos.⁶⁷ Challenging this perception, Blake's open text of the Songs, a simultaneous combination of uncertain linguistic signs and integrated visual objects, joins with layers of visual imagery that include vegetative ornament, miniature figures and major images to produce a fluctuating dynamic of

things, the text/design interplay remystifies it as well"(38). She also suggests that "the 'text-proper' interacts with the visual component on the page and often gravitates toward it, but is never merely pictorial" (23).

consonant and dissonant relationships on the same page. Further, Blake's method of production, which avoids compositional and functional segregation between the two media, breaks down the traditionally established hierarchy of primary, structural text and secondary, ornamental artwork.

In "Liberating the Sister Arts: The Revolution of Blake's 'Infant Sorrow'", John Bender and Anne Mellor similarly claim that through the Songs, Blake "denies the necessity of ranking the arts", resists "unified meaning" and avoids a "final synthesis arising from a dialectic between text and design" (298, 300, 302). However, they reach this conclusion by arguing that Blake's composites rebel against both the interdependent truce between the arts established through a Sister Arts tradition systematised by the Royal Academy in the eighteenth century and the segregated hierarchy of the arts promoted by Lessing. They clarify their resistance to the interdependency of the arts by suggesting that Blake's autonomous visual and verbal expressions are "independent, equally valid and irreconcilable" (299). To support this claim, Bender and Mellor appeal to "Infant Sorrow", proposing that picture and text in this case are "mutually exclusive" (300). With this exclusivity as a foundation, for their analysis, Bender and Mellor conclude that Blake artistically creates designs in which "the sister arts become sibling rivals without a father to resolve their contrariness" (307). I argue, however, that Blake remains the revolutionary and resolutionary "father" of both arts on the composite page, and that the unifying composition process described above allows for functional

⁶⁷ Lundeen agrees with this, stating that "given the hegemony of language in human interchange, all visual art, even that which is not accompanied by words, surrenders to language. The dominance of language is, in fact, so insidious, verbal metaphors control the very way in which critics describe non-verbal expression". She goes on to suggest that "an overview of Blake's word-image art shows his successive attempts to release the nonlinguistic 'voice' of visual art, which is too easily swallowed up by ordinary language" (40).

interdependence without overwhelming either medium or completely equating both. As well, it has also been demonstrated above that Blake's composite Songs facilitate expansive interpretative possibility and encourage perceptual freedom rather than encouraging "genuine anarchy" or re-establishing an unresolved "rivalry" or power game after a revolutionary turn that echoes Lessing's militaristic metaphors.

Returning to some of the plates previously considered in the examination of Blake's language will allow us to explore additional ways in which Blake's images work with an uncertain poetic text to encourage perceptual expansion in relation to both the form and content of the Songs. Given that the text of "The Little Black Boy" assigns unstable allegories to colours, consideration of the use of colour in the images that surround the poem seems appropriate. While the figures of the child and his mother the top of the first plate are consistently coloured with a dark pigment throughout the various copies of the Songs, the coloration of the children at the bottom of the second plate differs quite radically between printings (see figs. 23 and 24 respectively). In this image, two children are positioned beside a seated, bearded and robed shepherd-like figure. Faithfully illustrating the final stanza of the poem, one child, with clasped hands and upturned eyes, rests his elbows on the knees of the shepherd. The second child stands behind the first and touches this first boy's hair and shoulder with an outstretched hand. Given the poetic context, it can be confidently assumed that the child on the far left is the "little black boy" who narrates the poem and the middle figure is the "little English boy" who, shaded from the heat by the narrator, is finally able to "lean in joy" upon their "father's knee", the father being the adult figure on the right side of the page. However, while one would expect the figure on the left to be coloured darker than the boy in the middle, copies C and F of the collected Songs, printed in 1789, display no difference

between the two. In both of these printings, the three figures possess the same light pink skin tone, thus challenging the already blurred allegorical colour-scheme within the poem and raising the possibility that the narrator literally becomes “white” through his association and devotion to the English boy and the white light of the “father”.⁶⁸ Yet a later printing from 1795, copy R, presents a black boy that closely resembles his counterpart on the first plate of the poem, and another from the same year, copy L, displays a black boy so opaquely coloured that his facial and bodily details are obscured. In both of these cases, the father figure and the middle child remain a similar pink colour.

This colourful inconsistency continues in copies Z and AA. In copy Z, all figures take on a purplish hue, but the English boy’s skin still remains lighter than the narrator’s does. Copy AA, however, again presents undifferentiated boys, but, in a reversal of the coloration found on copies C and F, Blake has coloured both darkly. As well, the father in AA has become a multicoloured figure, but his blue robe sets him apart from the boys, as does the sun-like yellow halo around his head that appears in copies L, Z and AA, but not in C, F or R. I have tended to avoid commenting on the coloration of Blake’s images until this point, primarily because it is not clear which copies of the Songs Blake coloured himself. However, these two composite pages contain a text in which colour plays such a crucial and baffling role, that it seems even more bewildering to find the main figure portrayed in such inconsistent hues between copies. This simple, shifting property of the image on the second plate of “The Little Black Boy”, then, is variant enough to sustain the multiple possibilities offered by the text while also managing to invite other interpretations of the relationship between the three figures.

⁶⁸ Interestingly, the skin colour of the shepherd does not change throughout the printings. However, copy AA has shaded the “father” to the extent that he appears as a mottled combination

One other detail worth mentioning here is the difference between the two major visual portions of the design that are separated by the poetic text. The image at the top of the first plate shows the black boy and, presumably, his mother, sitting under the branches of one tree and facing toward the branches of another, more distant tree, beneath which the sun rests on the horizon. In the image on the second plate, the black boy is no longer with his mother, but has found the “father” haloed by the sun in a setting that looks suspiciously like an enlarged version of the distant tree from the first plate. Assisted by the vines that populate the borders around the poem and grow between the major images, this visual movement from mother to father, from shade to shade, from a primary child with its mother to a secondary shadow not yet directly engaged with the father figure, emphasises issues and transitions within the poetic text that are not often considered by critics or readers. As well, the pictures of the shepherd and sheep in addition to the child in the lap of its mother create visual links with other composite pages from the Songs that contain similar images. This results in an expansion of perceptive reference beyond particular composite pages that encourage a further openness and integration while still maintaining a distinction between individual works. Indeed, one could spend one’s whole career on the various occurrences and contexts of sheep, tigers, flowers, trees and grapes throughout the Songs and beyond, not to mention repeated gestures and similar spatial relationships between figures. Thankfully, critics like Erdman and Damon already have, and have exposed the rich weave of intertextual and interartistic references that populate Blake’s works. Returning to the current poem, though, and recalling that Blake’s composition process enables text as an integral part of the visual design, the placement of the poetic text within the design establishes its potential as both a barrier and a bridge

of light and dark pigments.

between the distinct pages and visual situations. Taken together, then, the form and content of text and image within “The Little Black Boy” sustain a number of branching interpretative possibilities and, through this expansive openness, work to challenge the viewer of the composite pages by refusing to simply reinforce the problematic and somewhat ignorant perceptions of the speaker.

Another example of visual alterations between printings of the Songs that can potentially interrupt interpretative certainty and further encourage the perceptive expansion invited by an open text can be found in the vegetative flourishes in the margins of “The Chimney Sweeper” (I), which are alive with vague human silhouettes in various poses and interactions (see fig. 25). Interestingly, some of these marginal figures, such as the two who reach for each other to the right of the fourth stanza and the three above the word “Sweeper” in the title are all but obliterated in the colouring of the Songs’ later printings (Copies Z and AA).⁶⁹ Further, within the prominent image at the bottom of the plate, the taller robed figure on the right side possesses a noticeable circular halo around its head in the later printings (copies Z and AA). This particular style of halo, reminiscent of that which appears in later copies of “The Little Black Boy”, appears to be absent in earlier printings, but closer inspection reveals the possibility of a subtle, more horizontally aligned halo that is difficult to differentiate from the background foliage. To become even more concerned with Blake’s minute particulars, note that this figure in copy Z is not only much shorter than its counterparts, but is also portrayed in a subtly different posture: less stooped and with a raised head. This alteration in the positioning of

⁶⁹ This, of course, could be explained by the progressive deterioration of the print quality as the same plate was used repeatedly by Blake over the years. However, given that Blake often modified the printed page following the application of the plate and hand-coloured the pages, the reason for the modification remains unclear.

the figure between printings further multiplies its overall interpretative potential. If this figure corresponds to the “Angel who had a bright key” and “opened the coffins” in stanza four of the text, Blake has, aside from the clearly defined halo in the two copies mentioned above, omitted obvious iconic cues that would identify this figure as such. As a result, critics find themselves in a position of having to justify such discrepancies to maintain coherence between the plate’s images and text. David Erdman has interpreted this “gowned figure” as “Jesus himself”, pointing to similarities between this and some of Blake’s New Testament images, and suggests that the key and the angel are merely textual metaphors “for the swiftness of salvation for chimney sweeps” (*Illuminated* 53). Erdman also assumes that the other figures represent “freed boys” rejoicing and running towards a river. While this “river” is made visible in later copies, like the marginal figures and the halo, its presence is uncertain in many printings of the *Songs*, especially copies R and L. Although minor, these changes, absences and unclear lines blur definitive interpretation of the images and prevent them from being fully identified with textual figures and happenings. Whereas the compositional process brings the two media together, the representational gap between the two not only prevents either medium from overwhelming the other, but also cleaves an opening through which a variety of possible alternatives are allowed to persist. Recall that the ambiguous language of Blake’s “The Chimney Sweeper” (I) has already been shown to promote the expansion of perception and sustain multiple interpretative possibilities. In this case, then, both text and image work together to promote an open work.

In contrast to the discordant relation between textual and visual representations identified thus far, there are some plates that offer an apparently unproblematic concordance between visual and textual depiction. For example, “The Shepherd”

displays a shepherd and his flock while relating a textual description of a shepherd, and “The Chimney Sweeper” (E) textually and artistically portrays the figure of a young sweep in an unwelcoming urban locale. However, definitive concordances between media in these two plates remains a rarity throughout the collection, for, while many of the images in the Songs can be linked with textual descriptions from the respective poems that they accompany, Blake’s designs frequently provide visual cues that the text cannot account for or omit simple visual details that would more closely link the image to the text. Indeed, these extra details or omissions often encourage a discrepancy between the image and the poem that remains unresolved, while at the same time providing new avenues for critical exploration and perception. Such discrepancies have subjected certain plates, such as “The Tyger”, to persistent critical scrutiny and debate, while apparently unproblematic plates like “The Shepherd” and “The Chimney Sweeper” (E) garner less attention and are often studied only as poetry for their allegorical, political, religious or historical significance.

Overall, then, the persistent differences and inconsistencies inherent in the image-text relation of Blake’s Songs enable a similar functional result for both media that remains consistent throughout the work. That is, each encourages a possibility and an evasive plenitude, and creatively practices what it representatively portrays. In contrast to the work explored throughout the preceding two chapters, here Blake’s art is not working against a formal, didactic and restricted use of language that invites generalised interpretation, but instead co-operatively parallels an already open text. The result, however, is the same: a composite work that sustains tension, contradiction and multiplicity and which encourages the viewer to adopt a flexible, layered and participatory mode of perception. Indeed, Brian Wilke rightly characterises the collection

as “kaleidoscopic” (119) and Vincent De Luca notes its “labyrinthine effect” (137). Collectively, Songs of Innocence and of Experience convey the many layers of and intersections between these complex states as without relying on the expository function of either medium. Blake’s composites do not tell, they reveal, and, like Blake’s poetic speakers, sometimes unwillingly so.

Indeed, to anticipate a challenge to this claim, I am not suggesting that every reader and every viewer of Blake’s composite pages will encounter the variety of perceptual dimensions that inhabit his work. I am also not claiming that this recognition of complexity requires any type of perceptual advantage or that I possess any unique capability above the average reader/viewer. Indeed, Norma Greco identifies a critical tendency to “resolve away [...] tensions presented by designs that don’t seem to ‘illustrate’ the text” (44). Similarly, David Lindsay notes that “the desire for perfect coherence in Blake’s work often distorts and devalues its contradictory elements” (42). What I am suggesting is that while Blake’s plates adapt to and provide support for many different positions that their audience might take, they retain the potential to engage with and encourage a variety of interpretative possibilities while also subtly challenging the stability of each. It must be reiterated, however, that Blake’s composite art in this case is not a completely open work. There are a finite number of branches that originate from this collection of songs, but an innumerable forest of possible leaves and seeds. This is in no small part due to the dynamic marriage between the two media that he employs. Blake’s designs establish and problematise innocence and experience through a constantly shifting interplay between text and visual art, demonstrating that each of these pairs of supposedly contrary conditions (that collectively establish both the form and the content of these composites) are similar in that they are not exclusive binaries, but instead

interact and overlap while continuing to exist individually. “The verse is part of the design and the design is part of the verse” (Ackroyd 122), just as Blake’s innocence and experience are “integral” and “interdependent” (Wilke 120). Each provides a contrast to the other, yet both work toward the same end of exceeding and overcoming the limitations of each.

The Fountain Overflows: Composite Excess in Blake's Marriage

Blake has too much meaning

*-W. J. T. Mitchell, from "Metamorphoses of
the Vortex: Hogarth, Turner and Blake"*

There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary:
The Negation must be destroy'd to redeem the Contraries.
The Negation is the Spectre, the Reasoning Power in Man
-William Blake, from Milton Book the Second

The depth of and interactivity between Blake's conceptions of innocence and experience become more apparent when compared to the relatively isolated definition of innocence offered by Emanuel Swedenborg in Heaven and Hell. Born Emanuel Swedberg in January 1689, this son of a Swedish bishop studied science in university, travelled, befriended Swedish nobility, and was ennobled and renamed Swedenborg in 1719. He claimed that God appeared to him in 1743 and gave him the ability to converse with angels. As a result, he committed himself to printing and publishing his visions in a large number of volumes between 1749 and his death in 1772. Following his death and growing popularity, the Church of the New Jerusalem, based on his teachings, was established in 1787. As well, the distribution of his writing was maintained by the Swedenborg Society, formed in London in 1810 and the Swedenborg Foundation, founded in New York in 1849, both of which still currently exist. Blake, perhaps through Flaxman, initially encountered Swedenborg's writings in 1787, soon after his brother's death in February of that same year (Ackroyd 102). In 1789, Blake and his wife, obviously sympathetic to Swedenborg's ideas, attended a conference of the New Jerusalem Church. Swedenborg's popularity among radical thinkers as well as his spiritual perceptions, including the suggestion that the material world contains eternity and that angels are men in perfect form, likely appealed to Blake's own visionary and creative philosophies (103-4). Although Blake initially sympathised with Swedenborg's ideas, the former's creative independence extends some of those ideas much further in his own work.

Whereas the line between innocence and experience for Blake is a blurred one, Swedenborg equates "innocence" solely with "good" and opposes it to "evil". He

suggests that the innocence of children, “is not genuine innocence”, but arises from their not knowing the difference between “good and evil, nor what is true and false” (Swedenborg 131). That is, children have not yet learned to divide their world into oppositions or to tidily classify and reduce their experiences into predetermined categories. Interestingly, whereas Swedenborg sees this as a deficiency, it has been suggested in previous chapters that Blake’s composite art functions as a catalyst that encourages a perceptual shift away from such habitual and established preconceptions. Because of their inability to distinguish oppositions, Swedenborg asserts that children are loving, content and without self-directed purpose and consequently unable to participate in evil that arises from self-love, anxiety and material desire. He concludes by representing childhood innocence as an impressionable condition ideal for the teaching of “manners, speech, and the rudiments of memory and thought” (131). Blake and Swedenborg thus agree on the vulnerability of childhood innocence, but whereas Swedenborg promotes a child’s inherent potential for learned goodness and wisdom, Blake, through poems such as “The Chimney Sweeper” (I) and “The Little Black Boy” acknowledges the inability of such innocence to identify and defend against worldly and religious predators. Further, while both link childhood innocence with a measure of ignorance, Swedenborg undervalues this type of innocence as an “external” property encouraged by unformed mental ignorance, while the ambiguity of Blake’s “Infant Joy” preserves the possibility that youthful innocence is actually a self-centred ignorance that resembles Swedenborg’s characterisation of evil. Recall that Blake’s “Infant Joy” portrays an autonomous and self-defining infant, one who is quite different from Swedenborg’s naïve and malleable child of innocence. Yet Blake’s poem resists simply

presenting the infant's agency as a blessing, instead portraying the baby as having an uncanny level of control usually reserved for the exploitative conditions of experience.

"Genuine innocence" according to Swedenborg, is not childhood innocence, but is the "innocence of wisdom", or willed innocence that comes from maturity, understanding and a devotion to God (132-3). An ideal life, then, is one that follows a path of Godlike innocence, beginning with the external and inexperienced innocence of childhood, faithfully and submissively choosing the path of God and good while growing within a world of experience, and finally achieving an angelic state in old age that synthesises wisdom and infancy (133). Innocence is thus a crucial part of both wisdom and goodness and is an exclusive condition, in that "they who are not in the good of innocence are not affected by it" and "all who are in hell are entirely opposed" to it (134, 136).

Swedenborg's segregation of good and evil and opposition between innocence and self-love is similar to Lessing's characterisation of the relationship between poetry and painting as isolated and combative. As has been demonstrated in the previous chapter, the delineation of innocence in the Songs is neither as prescriptive nor as polarised as Swedenborg's simple opposition. Yet, the visions of Swedenborg, like the "springs" of Thomas Gray, still provide inspiration and nourishment for Blake's own creations.

While Swedenborg's progressive life of innocence does not appear verbatim anywhere in the Songs, many of the characters in Blake's collection embody certain phases of this journey and some, such as the piper, the chimney sweeper and, to an extent, the little black boy of Innocence, move through naiveté to a position of wisdom, however problematic. Interestingly, Robert Gleckner's influential 1959 book, The Piper and the Bard, A Study of William Blake established a systematised perception of the Songs that

echoes Swedenborg's progression and which lingers even today.⁷⁰ Gleckner interprets the Songs as promoting the idea that the soul moves from an initial innocence, through experience, to a "higher innocence". As an example, he interprets the last line of "Infant Joy" as a prayer that the poem's infant will survive impending experience and achieve "Sweet joy" or "Christ, higher innocence, imagination, [and] wisdom" (299). Gleckner's perception of Blake's belief in a desirable "higher innocence" thus echoes Swedenborg's angelic synthesis of wisdom and innocence, but also emphasises Blake's commonly acknowledged preferences for the individualism of Christ and the imagination over the natural world. While it is impossible to determine whether the similarity between Swedenborg's progression and Gleckner's systematisation of Blake's Songs is due to Swedenborg's influence on Blake or the synthetic mind of a well-read critic, it usefully illustrates another example of the ability of Blake's composites to absorb and extend influential counterparts.

E.D. Hirsch Jr., although criticising Gleckner's systematic approach, participates in a similar extension of influence. Although maintaining the idea that the Songs chronicle the soul's progress, Hirsch twists Gleckner's paradigm of ascension into a cyclic departure from and return to the divine innocence of eternity (202).⁷¹ Despite their differences, Hirsch and Gleckner aptly illustrate the persistent influence that Swedenborg has had on Blake's work and on Blake criticism.

⁷⁰ My first encounter with Blake was in an undergraduate Romantics class with a professor who obviously preferred Gleckner's tidy systematisation to criticism that was beginning to celebrate Blake's poetic openness. Indeed, illustrating the impressionability of an "innocent" mind, I believed exclusively in Blakean "higher innocence" until a colleague in my final year of undergraduate study pointed out that this phrase is nowhere to be found in Blake's text.

⁷¹ The optimism of this cyclical model challenges and is challenged by the hint of cyclical ignorance already suggested in the previous chapter in relation to the visual imagery of "The Fly".

Hirsch's specific explorations of the interactivity between Blake and Swedenborg's philosophies is worth further examination. He claims that Blake's Innocence reveals the poet's initial agreement with Swedenborg's ideas whereas Experience reflects his subsequent antagonism, but goes on to complicate this oversimplified schema, suggesting that Blake makes an attempt to distance himself from Swedenborg's distinction between the "naïve innocence of children and the wise innocence of adults" by creating shifting and interpenetrating identities between child and parent, shepherd and sheep, God and man throughout the Songs (33).⁷² If this interpretation is accurate, then the modified consideration of Swedenborgian innocence that appears in the Songs again demonstrates the concurrence of influence and independence that persists throughout Blake's creative work and suggests that Innocence is more than an inspired agreement with Swedenborg, for it manages to avoid the linearity and progressive hierarchies that are so crucial to the structures of Swedenborg's philosophy. Further confirming that the relationship between Swedenborg's influence and Blake's thought is much more complex than Hirsch suggests, Swedenborg writes that "because innocence is the inmost principle in every good of heaven, therefore it so affects the mind, that he who is made sensible of it [...] seems to be taken out of himself, and to be as it were carried away with such delight, that every delight of the world appears comparatively as nothing. I speak this from experience" (136). Here according to Swedenborg, an awareness of heavenly innocence, borne from experience, allows one to perceive without subjective restraint, to transcend worldly restriction and to experience an ecstatic joy that is beyond material delight. This didactic and revelatory promise

⁷² This antagonism would later be tempered by "understanding" according to Hirsch's reading of plate 22 of Milton (158).

condenses many concepts and phrases repeatedly explored in Blake's work and demonstrates the persistent debt that Blake owes to Swedenborg, despite his apparent rejection of Swedenborgian principles around 1790. For example, the above passage asserts an interdependence between innocence and experience that has already been identified in Blake's Songs. As well, by positioning experience as a desirable vantage point from which innocence is perceived and understood, Swedenborg anticipates Blake's refusal to limit the extent of experience solely to a measure of pessimistic ignorance. Indeed, recalling Blake's comment, "Innocence dwells with wisdom, but never with Ignorance" (E 697) from the manuscript of The Four Zoas, in relation to Swedenborg's statement, provides further evidence of overlap between Swedenborgian definitions and Blakean explorations. One difference, however, is that Swedenborg's above statement prescribes a single truth and speaks from the vantage point of one who has experienced that truth. This "preaching", a beckoning set of directions for the unenlightened and a confirmation for those who already follow a similar line of thought, is very different from the resistance against exclusively championing or condemning either innocence or experience encouraged by the Songs' composite interplay. Indeed, Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell turns Swedenborg's invitation to enhanced perception into a rhetorical question written by a devil with corrosive fires: "How do you know but evr'y Bird that cuts the airy way, Is an immense world of delight closed by your senses five?". Blake's Marriage thus preserves the delight and the increased perception that Swedenborg values, but departs from Swedenborg's self-righteous path of selfless devotion to prescriptive heavenly wisdom.

Another instance in which one finds echoes of Swedenborgian delight in Blake's work is in the closing lines to "Auguries of Innocence":

Some are born to sweet delight,
 Some are born to endless night.
 We are led to believe a lie
 When we see not thro' the eye,
 Which was born in a night, to perish in a night,
 When the Soul Slept in beams of light.
 God appears and God is light,
 To those poor souls who dwell in Night;
 But Does a human form display
 To those who dwell in realms of Day.
 (E 492-493)

In this passage, God's spiritual appearance to those in the material world and his human appearance to those in the spiritual world recalls the Swedenborgian belief that divinity and materiality are present in each other. Oddly, Blake's lines seem to promote sensory perception over imaginative vision by suggesting that to see with anything else but the eye is to perceive falsely. Perhaps, then, instead of condemning "the abyss of the five senses" (E 35) and the physical world as some critics have suggested, Blake's work promotes an imaginary utilisation and expansion of the five senses that echoes his creative response to other artists and writers. The perspectival difference suggested by the above quote, however, is that whereas Swedenborg values and promotes a preferred state of unselfish awareness over the evil of self-love and blind materialism, Blake's lines offer similar hope both to those who experience the sweet delight of Swedenborgian wisdom and to those who are born to the endless night of ignorance. This difference represents a fundamental distinction between the two thinkers: while Swedenborg divides and categorises, promoting an exclusive and correct path like the church that he rejects, Blake's artistic openness interrelates and complicates, creating an uncertainty that invites agency and welcomes a number of perspectives.

The uncertainty that characterises the relation between innocence and experience and art and text within Blake's work can thus be extended to the relationship between

Blake's work and Swedenborg's ideas. This interrelation can be further understood by a figurative appeal to Swedenborg's comments on marriage. Swedenborg writes that "Conjugal love cannot exist between two persons of different religions, because the truth of the one does not agree with the good of the other, and two dissimilar and discordant principles cannot make one mind out of two [...] hence marriages in heaven are contracted between those who are in the same society, because they are in similar good and truth, but not between members of different societies" (198). Put simply and abstracted from the realm of interpersonal relations, Swedenborg indicates that there can be no true equation or marriage between diverse or incongruous things. Thus, in Swedenborg's universe, heaven and hell, wise innocence and self-absorbed ignorance, art and text, even his 'good' and Blake's 'truth', all of which could be said to be somewhat "dissimilar and discordant", are incapable of productive relations. Swedenborg's philosophical foundation once again reveals itself as one that fortifies incompatibility and inequality and embraces one set of principles only to condemn the other. As revealed in previous chapters, this is something that Blake's work consistently calls into question. Further emphasising the necessity of equality as a prerequisite for marriage, Swedenborg goes on to suggest that "When one wills or loves what the other wills or loves, both are free, for all liberty is the offspring of love; but where there is dominion, neither is free for one is a slave to the other" (200). To Swedenborg, then, liberty emerges from agreement, harmony and homogeneity, while inequality and hierarchy sustain and encourage slavery and dominion. However, his own writings continually establish such differences and inequalities, and also fortify a hierarchical paradigm by ultimately favouring and promoting good over evil. This self-contradiction reveals some of the elements in Swedenborg's reasoning that may have caused Blake to distance himself from the

Swedish thinker through the suggestion that liberty can arise from a marriage of sustained and interpenetrative differences.

One further example of this Swedenborg's oxymoronic promotion of hierarchical equilibrium is his assertion of the equilibrium between heaven and hell in an effort to explain free will:

It is well known that when two things mutually act against each other and the re-action and resistance of the one are equal to the action and the impulse of the other, neither of them has any force [...]. Such is the equilibrium between heaven and hell. It is not the equilibrium of two bodily combatants, whose strength is equal, but it is the spiritual equilibrium of the false against the true, and of evil against good. (300)

In this spiritual equilibrium, "man enjoys freedom of thought and will" and is equally influenced by the good of heaven and the evil of hell, which are actually mirror images of one another (300). However, in an awkward attempt to safely maintain the superiority of heaven, Swedenborg further describes this "equilibrium" as the "restraint" imposed by the good on the "raging of the hells" (301) and concludes overall that hell is "ruled" by the Lord and by the inhabitants' fears of "punishment", which "is the only means of restraining the violence and fury of the infernals" (302). Again, then, Swedenborg returns to a model of heavenly domination and fundamental inequality, despite his promotion of equilibrium.

Blake's The Marriage of Heaven and Hell can be understood as a creative reaction to some of these doubtful aspects of Swedenborg's philosophy. Produced around 1790, one year following Innocence and four years prior to his combining of Innocence and Experience into one volume, its extension, but also its evident inversion and satire of Swedenborg's writings indicates a turning point in Blake's attitude toward Swedenborg and supports Hirsch's above suggestion that Innocence and Experience each reflect a

different relationship between Blake and the Swedish philosopher's ideas. Blake's extension of Swedenborg's concepts in Innocence, his observation of the New Church's increasing institutionalisation and ritualisation, and perhaps also the influence of Henry Fuseli and Joseph Johnson likely influenced Blake's questioning of Swedenborg's philosophical and spiritual opinions (Ackroyd 147).

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is much more than a simple response to Swedenborg, though, and much more than the collection of lyric poems that forms the Songs. It is an aesthetic and political assertion, a point where Blake's critical annotations to other texts and his expansive illuminations of other's poetry move from responsive margin to creative centre. It is a signpost of departure and arrival, from the directness of a poetry based in the particulars of late eighteenth-century English society toward the complexity of an esoteric and reflective mythos that emerges from an epic imagination. It is a song of liberty that extends the practices that have been explored in previous chapters by respecting difference while exploring the interactive productivity between incongruities. Blake's wild root grows and is nourished by Swedenborgian concepts as it branches in different directions.

The title of the Marriage unites two supposed oppositions in an impossible relationship by Swedenborgian standards. In giving the majority of space in the volume to a consideration of hell, Blake's Marriage attempts to restore the equilibrium that Swedenborg initially posits, but eventually undermines with his heavenly preference. David Stewart, in "The Context of Blakean Contraries in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" disputes this, suggesting that Blake's text is an ironic repetition of Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell to the extent that it emulates but reverses the hierarchy between good and evil and thus remains a marriage of inequality and disequilibrium (44-5). Further,

Stewart uses the instance of the angel's transformation into a devil on plate 24 of the Marriage, along with Blake's annotations to Lavater, to fortify his argument that Blake promotes the transformation of one contrary into the dominant other. While this argument is plausible and also gains support from the fact that Blake was likely influenced by Boehme's notion of contraries, an examination of plates 5 and 20, along with evidence from discussions earlier in this exploration, suggests that the "contraries" of the Marriage are not completely distinct, segregated and combative opposites, but are, instead, interrelated pairs.⁷³

Plate 5 expands on an association from plates 3 and 4 between good, heaven and "the passive that obeys reason", and evil, hell and "the active springing from energy" by suggesting that restrained energy "by degrees becomes passive". In other words, the "opposites" offered above are nothing more than different points on the same scale, suggesting that there is a fundamental unity underlying the Marriage's contraries. According to the text of the Marriage, the wild root that connects good and evil is energy. It is what is done with this energy that defines the differences between heaven and hell. Further, plate 20 of the Marriage concludes a voyage between an Angel and a narrator who sympathises with the release of energy that the Marriage promotes in its restorative

⁷³ Jacob Boehme (Behmen), a German theosophist who lived between the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, proposes a view of contraries that involves one being transformed into the other, in an effort to explain the presence of evil in the world as a necessary force that must be transformed into good. As well, Boehme sees all manifestation as involving opposition and thus both good and evil as necessary to human, fleshly existence. The critical link between Boehme and Blake is not a new one. Martin Nurmi, in a 1957 study, recognises that the Marriage can be seen as a rejection of Swedenborg in favour of Boehme (28). However, while Boehme's influence can be perceived as the source of the concept of contrariness that Blake considers, contraries in the Marriage, such as reason and energy, do not engage in the transformative synthesis and progression that Boehme promotes. This leads Nurmi to state that "Blake's use of [Boehme's] conception is his own" (34). Incidentally, Nurmi also mistakenly suggests that Blake's contraries are "essentially stable and eternal identities" (34), failing to recognise,

response to Swedenborg's disequilibrium. In their voyage, the Angel shows the narrator a vision of Hell that is to be his eternal lot, but this vision is soon revealed to be a mere product of the angel's own perspective and disappears as soon as the angel departs. Subsequently, the angel is shown the narrator's perspective of the biblical universe as one populated by chained monkeys intent on copulating with and consuming each other in a constant battle between the strong and the weak. The narrator's vision thus supports the argument that although energies persist, they are perverted by the restrictions of moral and religious restraint. Further, the narrator suggests that the passive reason of this good angel's universe echoes the exclusive division and generalisation associated with Aristotelian analytic philosophy and logic. Recall that Swedenborg, like Lessing, participates in a similar attempt to divide, segregate and categorise. Following this exchange, though, the narrator is accused of imposing his "phantasy" on the Angel to which he replies: "we impose on one another". This statement clearly encapsulates the Marriage's approach to contraries and distances this work from an exclusive alignment with Behmenistic transformations or Swedenborgian hierarchies. The contraries within the Marriage, like the uncertain relation between innocence and experience, engage in a complicated exchange, enacting a mutual imposition rather than either a destructive combat or a transformative synthesis although, at times, they may appear combative or parallel. Also like innocence and experience, heaven/good and hell/evil coexist, interact and dynamically oscillate in many different interpenetrating combinations within Blake's Marriage. Further, while the energies of hell occupy much of the Marriage, when the Marriage is considered in relation to Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell, it becomes clear

especially in the case of energy and reason, that, like Boehme's notion of contrariness, the latter emerges from the former.

that it functions toward the production of an overall equilibrium of mutual imposition with Swedenborg's work. Thus many levels of interaction, from the media forms that comprise this composite work, through the contraries that supply its content, to the contextual consideration of its relation with Swedenborg's text, need to be considered when exploring the Marriage.

Amidst this creative attempt to move beyond a mere criticism of Swedenborg, to indirectly expose some of his misconceptions and hypocrisies while revealing the necessary interdependence and interactivity between segregated spiritual poles, plates 21 and 22 of the Marriage launch an explicit and clear attack on the Swedish thinker as a man full of "conceited notions", "vanity" and "confident insolence" who, in his emulation of the restrictive religiosity that he criticises, "has written all the old falsehoods" rather than "one new truth". The Marriage accuses Swedenborg of revealing "the folly of churches" by conversing with angels "who are all religious" rather than "Devils who all hate religion". As a result, the writings of Swedenborg are just a "recapitulation of all superficial opinions", merely a "candle in sunshine".

It is quite easy to subscribe to this condemning perspective without recognising its own inherent limitations and its function as one element of a contrary marriage. To be fair to Swedenborg, it must be reiterated that some of the notions within the Swedish writer's work provide important foundations for Blake's own ideas.⁷⁴ In Heaven and Hell, Swedenborg's suggestions that Heaven is divided into two kingdoms, three heavens

⁷⁴ In "In the Caves of Heaven and Hell: Swedenborg and Printmaking in Blake's Marriage", Joseph Viscomi also reminds us that in addition to Blake's agreement with and use of some of Swedenborg's notions, "Swedenborgian rhetoric, images and ideas figure consistently in the Marriage and helped to generate Blake's narrative counterstatements" (56). That is, the Marriage at once borrows from and satirises Swedenborg, preventing a one-sided characterisation of the association between the two.

and innumerable societies which collectively resemble one man, that every angel is a perfect human form and that the human body and human society correspond to these heavenly ideals that are almost platonic in nature, create an interpenetrating relationship between all things spiritual and physical, individual and collective, good and evil.⁷⁵ This interconnectivity and resultant complexity, although hampered somewhat by Swedenborg's partiality toward the dominant power of good and subsequent segregation of heaven and hell, precedes and influences the complexity and relativity within Blake's own work. As well, Swedenborg's suggestion that spirits retain a human form after bodily death opens up the possibility that heaven and hell are extensions of human desires and capacities, something favourably developed throughout the text of the Marriage (Ackroyd 103). Many of Blake's visual images also utilise human forms to portray spirits and souls.⁷⁶ Interestingly, just as heaven and hell are structured by Swedenborg as mirror images of each other, the critical protest of the Marriage against Swedenborg echoes Swedenborg's own dissent against established religious beliefs, demonstrating that the Swedish philosopher engages in the very practices that he supposedly reacts against. To avoid participating in a similar hypocrisy, the mirrored and satiric distortion of Swedenborg's writing that appears in the Marriage inverts the promotion of heavenly

⁷⁵ While Blake's Marriage echoes and distorts Swedenborg's thought in general, I have chosen to focus my comparative analysis on Swedenborg's Heaven and Hell in particular because it seems that the title of Blake's Marriage targets that work specifically. Indeed, as the above analysis has suggested, the Marriage, which is much more than a collection of reactive annotations to any particular text, still explores many of the specific terms addressed by Swedenborg in Heaven and Hell. While it could be argued that many of these same concepts are addressed more than a few times throughout the numerous volumes of Swedenborg's visionary verbosity, it is likely that Blake did encounter and closely read this particular work. However, if he owned and annotated a copy, it has yet to be located.

⁷⁶ Recall that Blake was criticised heavily after the publication of his illustrated edition of Blair's Grave for portraying both bodies and souls in a corporeal manner.

domination, celebrating and positing hell as the origin of active energy that opposes the passive reason of heaven.

Each of the distinct textual parts that make up Blake's Marriage similarly attempts to emphasise unrestrained energy over restrictive reasoning. "The Argument" on plate 2 fundamentally describes the expulsion of the "just man" from his "perilous path" to "the wilds where lions roam", by "the sneaking serpent" who's false humility corrupts that which the just man worked so hard to achieve.⁷⁷ Establishing a tone of indignation, the Marriage offers an allegorical justification for its subsequent attacks against the falseness, divisions and corrupted power of institutionalised religion.

Recall that on plate 3, heaven and good are textually linked with passivity while hell and evil are related to energy, and both are portrayed as necessary to life's dynamic. This associative inversion is an essential and distinctive feature of the Marriage. Just as the Songs' recontextualising repetitions and placement of textual assertions alongside discordant visual images challenge the meaningful authority of either medium and blur the distinction between innocence and experience, the Marriage's reversal of popular religious, philosophical and moral concepts complicates the validity of those beliefs through associative distortion. Plates 5 and 6 extend this uncertainty regarding the meanings of good and evil by suggesting that reason is the restraint that transforms energy into passivity. Although the notion that evil is restrained by reason is a common one, the use of "energy" as a synonym for "evil" questions the stability of the statement

⁷⁷ This chain of events that describes a gradual forgetting and enslavement of fundamental living energies is retold in a much more transparent way on plate 11. Oddly, this reasoned, linear retelling resembles didactic scholarship more than its open-ended poetic counterpart on plate 2 and, aside from its similar communication, appears mismatched with the excessive and convoluted proverbs that precede it and the fantastical memorable fancy that follows. Again, though, it provides yet another distinct piece in the collection of differences that is the Marriage.

by interrupting and distorting expected terminology. The apparent innocence of accepted doctrinal meaning is thus exposed and problematised through a simple manipulation and substitution of familiar referents with less definitive examples. In addition to this linguistic distortion, the above statement illustrates that the Marriage, like the Songs, continually promotes the interaction and transformative interrelation between apparently distinct concepts.

Indeed, in the midst of its cumulative critique of religious assumptions and Swedenborgian hypocrisy, the Marriage also criticises John Milton on Plates 5 and 6 for contributing to this ignorance by offering a limited and possibly mistaken account of the fall as a restraint and casting out of the Devil's energy by a reasoning Messiah in Paradise Lost.⁷⁸ However, Milton's liberal account of the Devil is praised and Milton is characterised as "a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it". In this way and despite his supposedly erroneous cosmogony, Milton is indirectly linked with the energy that Blake has already used to connect himself with Christ and Satan. Early in the Marriage, then, Blake assembles quite a formidable and contrary group of supporters. In the midst of this mobilisation, Plate 4 further denounces codified restrictions against the "Eternal Delight" of energy and condemns categorical divisions that segregate and punish this energy. To counter such restriction, the Marriage echoes Swedenborg's theory of the unity between body and soul, but inverts its original intent by using it to disseminate the

⁷⁸ According to Blake's text, the alternative history of the fall, offered by the Devil, is one in which the Messiah falls and forms "a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss". Blake appears to find support for this preferred reading (although he does recognise that history is adopted differently depending on one's perspective) in the Book of Job, where "Milton's Messiah", or reason, "is called the Devil or Satan". Based on this aberrant nomenclature, a convoluted argument on plate 6 supports this alternative perspective by equating Jehovah both with a resurrected Christ and with "he who dwells in flaming fire" (initially "the Devil", but Blake noticeably edits this in all copies), classifying all as comforters or "Desire that Reason may have ideas to build on".

“evil” energy and physical desires traditionally associated with and restricted to a distinct body.

In the previous chapter, the relationship between innocence and experience was summarised as a complicated overlap of interaction and difference and this relationship was extended to other apparent oppositions, such as black and white and even the graphic art and text that comprise his composite pages. The beginning of this chapter further explored the Songs’ ability to condense and synchronise without synthesising these “contrary states of the human soul” by differentiating this dynamic from Swedenborg’s progressive and hierarchical employment of the same terms. Already, then, this study has recognised a common treatment of the many contrary states that energise Blake’s dynamic and composite explorations. Yet a number of quite popular and “contrary” opinions exist regarding Blakean contraries and their dialectic potential, and these positions need to be reconsidered in light of the current argument..

David Gross, in “Infinite Indignation: Teaching, Dialectical Vision and Blake’s Marriage of Heaven and Hell” asserts that Blake’s sense of the active “inter-connectedness and mutual influence and determination of all aspects of human reality” is a holistic and totalising vision that promotes a consideration of Blake’s work in relation to “the dialectic” (177-8). However, Gross recognises that this term is, itself, a nodal point for multiple and often contradictory philosophical perspectives and promotes the necessity of both a historical consideration of the term and an awareness of which perspective is being appealed to when relating it to Blake’s work. Gross, citing Raymond Williams’ Keywords, notes that in early Greece, the term meant “the investigation of truth by discussion” (178) and primarily referred to the process of debate or argument. Plato extends this meaning by using the term to refer to both the art of the definition of

ideas and the science that views the interrelation of these ideas in the light of a single principle. Aristotle, however, uses it in a more limited way to describe reasoning rather than actual demonstration and experimentation and this sense of the term as a synonym for “logic” endures through the middle ages. In the late eighteenth century, German philosophers G.W. Hegel and J.G. Fichte turn to a reconsideration of the dialectic as a reconciliatory process to fuel their dissent against Kantian dualism. Hegel defines the dialectic as a natural process in which the self-suppression of restrictive and extreme finitude inherently undermines and negates itself by robbing such restriction of its potency and forcing consideration of its opposite. In other words, this dialectic dynamic suggests that all difference presupposes a unity, reveals the ultimate instability and changeableness of partial categories of understanding, and is a recognition, via negation, of the perpetuity of change. Hegel also introduces the dialectic of thesis—antithesis—synthesis in his approach to historical evolution, which has since become essential to the modern understanding and application of the term and has been utilised by many political thinkers both left and right.

A term identified with unification, synthetic vision, reform and dynamism seems inherently suited for consideration in relation to Blake’s work, especially since Hegel and Fichte were not only German contemporaries of Blake, but were also concerned with undermining the reinforced perspectivism and the limitations to comprehension proposed by Kant. Many critics, including M.H. Abrams, Jacob Bronowski, Mark Schorer and Thomas Altizer, have thus argued that Blake’s use of contraries parallels dialectic thought, and each have variously attempted to define Blake’s particular version of the

Hegelian paradigm.⁷⁹ David Punter, in Blake, Hegel and Dialectic, argues that Blake's dialectic is transcendental, synthetic and promotes social progression. However, Harold Bloom's well-known essay, "Dialectic of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell" conversely defines Blake's dialectic as one that marries contraries "without transcendence", without allowing them to "become one flesh or one family" because "by the 'marriage' of contraries Blake means only that we are to cease valuing one contrary above the other in any way" (57). Bloom hesitates to confirm that Blake's Marriage is about social progress, noting that, despite the assertion that "without contraries is no progression", Blake "does not build truth by dialectic", but rather promotes a "complex apocalyptic humanism" in the unresolved play between dialectic and rhetoric that generates the Marriage's revelations regarding the war of contraries. His first paragraph succinctly identifies the presence and limits of dialectic in both the form and content of the Marriage:

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell assaults what Blake termed a "cloven fiction" between empirical and a priori procedure in argument. In content, the Marriage compounds ethical and theological "contraries"; in form, it mocks the categorical techniques that seek to make the contraries appear as "negations". The unity of the Marriage is in itself dialectical,

⁷⁹ For example, the statements "one law for the lion and ox is oppression" (E 44) and "without contraries is no progression" (E 34) have been cornerstones in the argument that associates Blake with a Hegelian dialectic paradigm. The first quote is generally used to support Blake's resistance to "one law" and to make the argument for his inclination toward diversity and contrariness. The second maxim is then read as extending Blake's preference for either/or contraries to include a predilection for "progress". However, I tend to resist this intentionalist characterisation of Blake by appealing to the overall instability of his textual assertions. While the first statement does seem to promote differentiation and a respect for individual difference, the second uses a double negative to associate contrariness with progression, not to equate the synthesis of contraries with progression. Given that Blake's work displays a resistance to linear, unidirectional progress, oppression and either/or (twofold) vision, a reading of the above statements that supports inclusion and diversity rather than progressive and artificial/unnatural (a modern denotation of "synthetic") evolution would seem to be more appropriate. Regardless, both readings further demonstrate the interpretative flexibility inherent in Blake's writing.

and cannot be grasped except by the mind in motion, moving between the Blakean contraries of discursive irony and mythical visualisation. (55)

As Dan Miller confirms, Bloom “successfully avoids either reifying the contraries or collapsing them into a sterile unity” (504) and thus Bloom’s use of the term ‘dialectic’ in relation to Blake’s work leaves room for both contrariety and unity. Miller, following Bloom, goes on to suggest that while dialectical thought does have a role to play in the Marriage, “Blake’s ‘progression’ is not necessarily dialectical advance” (504). Rather, the Marriage promotes the sustenance of a “paradoxical mode of perception”, a “rule of incommensurable values” that avoids “the possibility of a common awareness” while also critiquing relativism (506-507). He concludes that “contrariety is other than dialectic” in Blake, for the Marriage forces a continual oscillation between the perception of the simultaneous dependence between and conflict of its contraries (504-5). Blake’s argument, delivered by “rhetorical acts that resist assimilation to a higher truth, figuration more complex than either symbol or traditionally conceived allegory, [and] a logic and a narrative that attain greatest power when they strategically violate coherence” (508) continually voids systematisation, monism and synthesis while also standing as “argument against all forms of dualism” (495).⁸⁰

Steven Shaviro’s “Striving with Systems: Blake and the Politics of Difference” dismisses Miller’s treatment of dialectic as a necessary contrary in Blake’s argument and avoids Bloom’s hesitancy by arguing that Blake’s works, including the Marriage comprise a “refusal of dialectics” that signifies “Blake’s rejection of the intellectualising and conceptualising procedures of rationalistic philosophy” (231-32). This refusal is

⁸⁰ Indeed, an entrenched dualism is all that dialectic requires to realise a negational synthesis, or monist outcome.

only partly evident in Blake's notion of contraries, which have often been recognised as "neither exhaustive nor mutually exclusive" (235). More importantly, however, while Shaviro sees the form of Blake's Marriage as "universalizing, conceptual and systematic", he also notes that the "ironic perspectivism and dramatic contextualizations" of its content creates a tension between systematisation and differentiation that "prohibits any dialectical movement from one level to another" (232). As a result, Shaviro characterises the Marriage as an overall contradiction, as an "authoritative voice which warns the reader that no voice is authoritative" and which, in its self-defeating, systematic approach to an "untotalizable differential movement, is thus intrinsically incomplete" (233-235). Shaviro's recognition of the concurrent participation of various layers of Blake's work (form and content) in the same contradictory dynamics that they contain and communicate is a necessary affirmation the interdependence between the parts and the whole of his creations, and an important endorsement of the current attempt to extend the consideration of such participation to the interplay between Blake's media. As well, the recurring impossibility of critical consensus surrounding the interpretation of Blake's work, again demonstrated in the above survey of opinion regarding Blake's relationship to the dialectic process, effectively, on yet another level, substantiates and illustrates the contrary dynamic identified by Shaviro as involving irreconcilable particulars that "incessantly refer back to one another, taking one another's place without ever achieving and reconciliation or teleological subsumption, in that movement of endless circularity which founds even as it exceeds the possibility of the hermeneutic circle" (235). Indeed, the fundamental evasiveness and irresolvable complexity of Blake's work continues to feed the excesses of the Blakean critical industry quite well, as the author of the current project can confirm.

While opinions differ, then, there does seem to be an overall reluctance by critics to impose a formulaic dialectic template on the form and content of Blake's Marriage. Turning away from the critical debate and returning to Blake's own writing in the Marriage provides some strong evidence to justify this prudent approach. Although the well-known statement, "Without contraries is no progression" from plate 3 has been the catalyst for the critical consideration of the relationship between Blake's composite Marriage and the dialectic, Plates 16 and 17, and their exploration of the interplay between two contrary portions of being, question the synthetic implications of the earlier quote.⁸¹ On plate 16, conflict between energy and restraint is reiterated in yet another way. Their friction is initially allegorised as a struggle between sensual giants and cunning minds, then quickly overlapped by a logical and metaphorical recasting of this antagonism as occurring between two classes of men, the "prolific" and the "devouring". The prolific thus related to the energy of sensual giants and the devouring thus related to the restraint of cunning and tame minds, the Marriage continues exploring the relationship between the two, exposing the necessary interdependence between them. The suggestion that "to the devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains, but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole" initially diffuses any notion of hierarchy between these contraries while also pointing out the limitations of each perspective. However, the conflict and co-dependence between these contraries is dependent on the very existence and interplay of these limitations. Blake's Marriage

⁸¹ Blake's Marriage fails to provide a clear definition of this "progression". Indeed, the whole argument of the Marriage promotes regression toward an unrestrained celebration of energy, while also calling for a more comprehensive perception of fundamental contraries. As well, the cumulative excess of a composite work that supports multiple concurrent interpretations seems to define an inclusive expansion of perception that avoids both generalisation and the temporal,

asserts that “the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea received the excess of his delights”. Further, and crucially for the current argument, “these two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence” (E 40 my emphasis). In the Marriage, then, the reconciliation, synthesis or negation of contraries destroys existence; the “progress” of life, the continuation of existence crucially depends on the dynamic energy produced by imposition and sustained conflict between its portions. Indeed, “One law for the lion and ox is oppression” (E 44). Plate 17 of the Marriage follows a description of the destructive potential of unification between contraries by accusing religion in general as being an attempt to “reconcile the two”, to subject all to the same code and thus to destroy existence.

There is a further depth to the Marriage's argument, however. Recall that plate 4 identifies all bibles and sacred codes as committing the same error of dividing and separating, of establishing an opposition between the energetic, evil body and the reasoning, good soul. At first glance, this seems to contradict his statement on plate 17 that accuses religion of endeavouring to reconcile such opposition. Yet, Miller's attempt to differentiate between contrariety and dialectic opposition, to distinguish between Blake's schema and the dialectic process, is the key to resolving this apparent contradiction. Recall that the contraries of good and evil identified in the Marriage are not opposites, but are, rather, different positions taken in relation to a universal energy. This is further confirmed on plate 16, when, in answer to a question that attempts to equate God alone with the “prolific” it is suggested that “God only Acts & Is, in existing

diachronic model of progression. As already suggested above, it is erroneous to exclusively define and equate Blake's explorations of “progress” with Hegel's definitions.

beings or Men". That is, the creative energy of God is in all existing beings and is the basis for all contrariness, yet restrictive religious codes based on reason have misidentified this energy as evil and seek to restrain it. Further, in the process of restraint, these religious codes attempt to exclusively separate and segregate good and evil, establishing them as oppositional doctrines and denying that they are both merely alternate and partial responses to a common energy. Although Swedenborg recognises the artificiality of the religiously defined dualism between body and soul, he still maintains a fundamental opposition between the good of heaven and the evil of hell. As we have seen, his attempt to reconcile such stringent opposition leaves room for hierarchy and oppression and it is because of this that Blake finally looks beyond Swedenborg's partial vision. The Marriage suggests that the church's strategy in advocating the reconciliation between the logical and thus dialectic oppositions established by their own religious doctrine is ultimately oppressive, and subjects both to a synthetic, oppressive and still-partial law. Indeed, reconciliation involves compromise and the subjection of each party to a common set of rules which, although appearing objective, still serves a particular interest. In contrast, Blakean contraries, being dependent on each other for existence and maintaining a fundamental, underlying connection in their relation to energy, are not negational oppositions and thus cannot cancel each other out in a developmental synthesis that promotes a subjective notion of progress. Indeed, Jerusalem contains the explicit statement that "Negations are not Contraries" (E 160). The alternative of perpetual conflict between Blakean contraries in the composite arena of the Marriage establishes the ideal of balance that Swedenborg proposes, but fails to realise. To reiterate, the reconciliation that Blake rejects is not a preservation of balance between

contraries, but a synthetic negation and sublimation of each under a single, limited and limiting rule.

While an appeal to some of the ideas that energise the Hegelian conception of dialectic relation helps to illuminate some of the dynamics that promote the energy of the Marriage, a straightforward application of a dialectic model tends to overwhelm and obscure Blake's indefinite subtlety with a formulaic linearity, implied monism and potential hierarchy promoted by the simplicity of the thesis—antithesis—synthesis triad. Indeed, the contrariety that Blake sustains throughout the form and content of the Marriage generates and depends on simultaneous, conflictual interpretation. Yet, as Shaviro notes, recalling the above recognition that the Marriage is a one-sided reaction to or reversal of the Swedenborgian promotion of heavenly good, Blake's Marriage takes “an aggressively polemical stance, [...] speaking from the side of one of the Contraries” and implying “that that side of the opposition is original [...] whereas the other side is derivative” (234).

Returning to a consideration of the overall argument of the Marriage, then, the combined reasoning and narrative of plates 12 and 13, which describe an imaginary dinner with the two imaginative Old Testament prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel, retell the story of the corruption of a vision uncovered by poetic genius, and continue to promote a return to the roots of such original perception. Respect for the “firm persuasion” and imaginative vision of these prophets is evident and the memorable fancy serves the purpose of recruiting them into an ever-growing company of energetic allies. In their company, Blake's speaker promotes himself as one who is also capable of “foregoing present ease and gratification”, and of participating in excessive behaviour in his “desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite”. However, in their answers to the

speaker's almost Socratic line of questioning, the prophets also reveal the ways in which the power of poetic genius that led to the "discovery of the infinite in everything" was eventually used to curse, conquer, subject and govern other nations. Despite such possibilities, the prophets continue to promote "the voice of honest indignation", as the voice of God and the energy, individualism and self-confidence of their own practice as a necessary prerequisite for poetic genius. Despite an obvious alliance with the prophets, Blake's speaker ends this memorable fancy with a question mark, rhetorically avoiding the errors of prescriptive didacticism that Swedenborg commits while still managing to maintain a persuasive tone.

A tone of determined persuasiveness continues on plate 14, and multiple metaphors, including doorways and platonic caves, are used again to identify currently enforced limitations to perception and creative energy. However, having repeatedly asserted the argument about what was, what currently is and what could be, and having amassed a veritable army of energetic free thinkers, Blake's Marriage adopts the indignation and firm persuasion of these prophets and begins to offer its own apocalyptic visions of perceptual liberation. Further, its revelations announce the way in which such a consuming liberation will be creatively and materially encouraged, and it becomes clear that the Marriage is not just an account of the energetic resistance to such restraint, but that it is, as Miller and Shaviro have noted, an essential tool and embodiment of that process.

In the Marriage, energetic ideas and a resistance to various forms of restraint are unified with Blake's unique method of production, presenting the marriage of formal function and content as a mutually strengthening confirmation. Reminding readers that the purpose of a fiery religious apocalypse is to consume creation and to reveal it as

infinite and holy beyond its finite and corrupt appearance, plate 14 of the Marriage promises to reproduce such an apocalypse on a smaller scale by printing “in the infernal method”, by using corrosive acid to “melt apparent surfaces away” and display “the infinite which was hid” within the copper plates used for printing. This “medicinal” process, which unifies a physical method of creative revelation with the emancipatory content of the words and images that emerge on the plate during the acid bath is Blake’s indirect way of reinforcing and extending the Swedenborg-inspired notion that the physical body and the spiritual soul, medium and idea, form and content are not completely distinct or separate. While differences may be apparent between the separate elements of each of these pairs, Blake, by making the form and content of the Marriage work toward the same end, effectively demonstrates and argues that such differences do not prevent but can actually enhance co-operative functioning. The vision that the Marriage promotes, then, draws from Swedenborg’s notions of interactive difference as defined by his exploration of heaven and hell, but is ultimately a revolution of perception against the finite or limited awareness that Swedenborg demonstrates in his inability to present the relationship between difference as anything other than combative.

The Marriage’s co-ordination between the formal function of the text and its content has been identified as a type of “performative utterance”, or “utterances that themselves perform the act to which they refer” by Gavin Edwards (27). Performative utterances differ somewhat from Marshall McLuhan’s equation between the medium and the message of a work in that McLuhan sees the medium as supplanting the content, whereas a performative utterance involves a co-operation and co-ordination of the two. Edwards, in a study that focuses on Blake’s paradoxical and aphoristic use of proverbial form recognises that the proverbs within Blake’s Marriage are not just “hellish”

alternatives to biblical proverbs, but ones that question “the finality of proverbs as such, refusing their authority” (47). John Villalobos suggests the same, concluding that Blake’s proverbs are “a critique and parody of proverbial wisdom” in an age that considered proverbs to be important intellectual documents (247, 248). Just as a full understanding of Blake’s Marriage necessitates an examination of Swedenborg’s Heaven and Hell, Villalobos aptly notes that to understand Blake’s particular misuse of prophetic form, one must be aware of the relation between the “Proverbs of Hell”, biblical proverbs and the eighteenth-century understanding of this traditional form of wisdom literature (248). In the eighteenth century, proverbs were understood as statements that “communicated religious truths” and lent “credence to religious ideas too difficult for rational analysis” whereas aphorisms “contributed to an understanding of proper ethical conduct” (252). The writings of Robert Lowth, an eighteenth century biblical interpreter, became the authority on proverbial study and gave his many contemporary readers tools toward the understanding of this form (253-55). Lowth identifies three proverbial forms—the synonymous, the synthetic and the antithetical—and notes that they all employ some form of parallelism and contrariety (253-4). Curiously, two of these “types” echo the terminology often associated with the logic and reasoning of Hegelian dialectic progress. More specifically, the first clause of the proverb states a theme or religious truism while the second extends and reinforces the first (255), much like Swedenborg’s marriage of equals. In addition to these definitions, Lowth reinforces the traditional view that a “‘literal’ interpretation of proverbs was unproductive, since proverbs were obscure and sublime” (254).

Blake playfully explores and expands upon these traditional forms, takes advantage of their inherent obscurity and exposes the forcible end to dialogue that

proverbs usually imply by refusing to provide common sense in a morally normative present tense and by offering questionable answers and indefinite arguments. Thus, by again distorting a traditional form to indefinitely communicate a resistance to restricted perception, Blake creates performative utterances that ironically undermine the textual form that they mimic. A good example that appears as deceptively simple as many of the songs of Innocence is “The bird a nest, the spider a web, man friendship” on plate 8 of the Marriage. While this statement does distinguish between different species it is also a generalisation that herds each of them “under their generic definite articles” (Edwards 43) and neglects individual differences. Similarly, Edwards notes that the Blakean proverb, “One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression”, also participates in this generalising type of neglect, combating one kind of oppression while participating in another (42-3).

Returning to the example of the bird, the spider and man, this proverb specifies each example while also drawing an indefinite connective parallel between them. The marked differences between each of the elements in this juxtaposition make the intended communication of the proverb not just obscure, but ultimately unclear. Amplifying this uncertainty is the presence of the spider’s web, which ominously interrupts an otherwise unproblematic comparison between the bird’s nest and human friendship, lending each of its analogues a sinister hue and interrupting the generalised interpretations traditionally associated with each. Indeed it is quite possible that there is no intended communication here. Alternatively, the indeterminacy itself may be the message, confirming Edwards’ classification of the proverbs as performative utterances.

Regardless of the intention, a crucial side effect of this indeterminacy is an equivocation, however unclear. The overall dynamic of this statement, then, “in which similarity subverts difference and difference subverts similarity” supplants the

anticipation of didactic finality that the proverb form promotes and thus Blake's proverb of hell becomes "a kind of riddle, with various and scarcely compatible solutions" that "provoke argument rather than ending it" (43, 45, 47). Harold Bloom's description of these proverbs as "restrained wisdom" (Bloom Dialectic 34) is somewhat inaccurate, then, for while the Marriage does use the restrictive proverb form to impart the energy of hell's wisdom, the indeterminacy of the content of the above examples weakens, undermines and finally ruptures the proverbial form and allows the Marriage to avoid Swedenborgian didacticism while echoing the Swedish thinker's style.

Not all of Blake's proverbs demonstrate such cryptic inconclusiveness, though. Just as the Marriage is composed of many different and often incompatible narrative forms, the collection of proverbs within this volume are a disorderly mixture of parodic distortion, inversion, imitation, opacity and "innocent" assertions of universal truth. Some, such as "Expect poison from the standing water", "Exuberance is Beauty" and "Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth" are definitive statements that still manage to challenge conservative perspective while reinforcing the dynamism, energy and increased perception that the rest of the Marriage promotes and embodies. Others, such as "The cut worm forgives the plow" and "The busy bee has no time for sorrow" reinforce traditional Christian values, while some, such as "A dead body revenges not injuries" and "Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires" satirically appear to contradict fundamental moral prescriptions if interpreted literally. Collectively, these statements offer support for and challenges to moral and spiritual traditions, and the juxtaposition of this variety of perspectives on the same page further avoids the analytical didacticism and exclusivity that Swedenborg's revisionist

writings retain. Nurmi suggests that such excess is effectively used in the Marriage to expose and inclusively transcend the repressive imposition of religious order (38).

The statement that ends the collection of proverbs, “Enough! or Too much”, further supports this reading, recalling and illustrating Blake’s overall commitment to variety, multiplicity and excess throughout this and other works. It condenses contrary reactions to the preceding list in a single utterance, both adding to and commenting on a diverse and inconclusive plurality rather than a partial or generalised perspective. Indeed, on plate 5 of the Marriage, Blake communicates his awareness of the blindness that limited perspective can cause when he observes that a common spiritual history has been “adopted” differently by the oppositional intentions of Milton and the author of the Book of Job. Against this, and unhampered by restraint, Blake’s Marriage communicates the perception of multiple and seemingly opposing positions, understanding their common root without negating their differences. Overall, then, just as this collection of diverse proverbs appears to act cumulatively rather than progressively by including many different forms and functions of statement that address a variety of subjects, so the disparate parts of the Marriage itself form a similarly disorganised coexistence of distinct perspectives.⁸² That is, the textual promotion of energy and liberty within the Marriage is reinforced by the concurrent diversity of textual forms throughout the work itself and thus Edwards’ identification of the Marriage as a performative utterance is quite apt.

Echoing similar capabilities found in the Songs and in Blake’s visual additions to others’ work Joseph Viscomi has commented extensively on the “unsettling” form of Blake’s Marriage. In “The Evolution of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell”, he rightly

⁸² Similarly, the individual and collected “Proverbs of Hell” textually establish the same type of indefiniteness and potential for variant interpretation as Blake’s individual and collected Songs.

observes that “time and space are freely manipulated” in the Marriage’s structure and notes the variety of historical critical response to this seemingly disjointed composition. It has been classified as a collection of “varied and pregnant fragments”, a “scrap book”, musical rondo, a heterogeneous “structureless structure”, an anatomy, a bible, a primer, prophecy, testament and even associated with the “news from hell” type of Menippean satire (Evolution 281-2). Viscomi argues, though, that despite its numerous influences, the Marriage’s structure or lack thereof is a direct result of its temporally fragmented production history (282). In a detailed study that attempts to determine the sequence of plate composition and execution so that the marriage can be re-read in the order of its production, Viscomi challenges perceptions that this work was conceived over a number of years during Blake’s increasing rejection of Swedenborg, instead claiming that it was composed throughout 1790 and evolved out of an already hostile attitude towards the Swedish thinker (285).⁸³ Viscomi also reiterates his well-known position that Blake’s method of plate production allowed for continual evolution and invention, even to the extent of “responding creatively to his own first prints” in successive printings (289). His research leads him to the opinion that Blake initially produces plates 21 to 24 as a separate pamphlet that promises a forthcoming “Bible of Hell”, and that the rest of the Marriage is a subsequent realisation of that promise, is itself a “Bible of Hell” that

⁸³ These claims are made following an intensive interrogation of physical evidence provided by the Marriage. Viscomi uses lettering style, narrative integrity and measurements that determine which plates were cut from the same sheet of copper to reconstruct a persuasive and detailed history of the work’s production.

parodies the eighteenth century view of the Old Testament as a collection of fragments (331-35) and reappropriates the biblical form for a very different purpose.⁸⁴

Despite its disorganised appearance, Viscomi still manages to locate an authoritative voice within the Marriage, suggesting, in opposition to critical commentary by Bloom and Gleckner, that the speaker is a transparent mask for Blake's own views (299n). If this is true, then the conflict between angels and devils in the Marriage, in addition to their literal interpretation, can be clearly viewed as a conflict between Swedenborg's religion and Blake's art, between prescriptive limitation and the artistic energy of creative, open-ended composition. Viscomi, in a related essay entitled "In the Caves of Heaven and Hell: Swedenborg and Printmaking in Blake's Marriage", argues that Blake the artist, as the voice of the devil who speaks throughout the Marriage, utilises his media to facilitate his role as an "enabler", as one who promotes and assists the perceptive awakening that is the subject of textual discussion (Caves 41). Ultimately, Viscomi relates the production of the Marriage, the necessary combination of invention and execution that Blake's method of relief etching demands, to the unification of heaven and hell and body and spirit that are explored throughout the work itself, further confirming the earlier characterisation of this work as a performative utterance that synchronically unifies its form and content (40).

While Viscomi also identifies the Marriage as anti-clerical criticism and as a promotion of self-motivated awareness, he primarily interprets it as an important justification of Blake's artistic practices, as an "aesthetic manifesto" (57). Indeed, the metaphoric discussion of Blake's methods of printmaking on plate 15 of the Marriage

⁸⁴ Nurmi counters this theory with the suggestion that the Marriage is a "unified form" that fully realises a "well-defined intention" (iii).

closely resembles the self-reflexive commentary that defines the purpose of his graphic additions to the poems of Thomas Gray. Viscomi thus extends the abovementioned unity between the form and content of the Marriage to include Blake's compositional technique, arguing that "Blake's means for opening the mind, the illuminated book, is also the paradigm for the open mind. Just as the illuminated plate displays the 'infinite' when its 'apparent surfaces' are melted away, so too perception" (41). That is, both the infernal method of composition and the manifestation of that method in each copy of the illuminated book are "cleansing agents" (41). For Viscomi, then, the illuminated plate and the open mind are at once causal and analogous. By emphasising Blake's unique method of printmaking to support this connection, though, Viscomi's analysis neglects the role that the composite nature of the page also plays in establishing and encouraging such openness. It still remains to be confirmed whether the same type of unified function of graphic art and text that enable the Songs to complicate the divisions between innocence and experience also occurs in the Marriage. If so, Viscomi's theory about the parallel intention of and functional unity between Blake's creative method and created manifestation could be comfortably extended to include the individual utilisation and composite unification of Blake's communicative media.

This chapter has already explored some of Blake's various attempts to complicate textual representation throughout the Marriage. Although the "message" of the Marriage, a contrary reaction to Swedenborg's religious philosophy, is much more explicit than that of the Songs, textual repetition, referential distortion and a non-linear inconsistency between the formal components of this work resist exclusive, divisive or hierarchical readings. These properties of the Marriage, in addition to similar examples from Blake's other work, demonstrate a consistent attempt to perforate restrictive and dogmatic

structures of representation and meaning in the same way that the “medicinal” acid of Blake’s “infernal method” of production corrodes “apparent surfaces” and displays “the infinite which was hid” (E 39). As has already been shown, the performative co-operation between method, textual medium and message is a powerful combination. It remains to be seen, then, whether the graphic art that Blake weaves throughout the textual contraries also participates in this energetic co-ordination of creative elements.

Curiously, though, the graphic art that prevails throughout the Marriage, given the already-established conjunction between the other traditionally distinct parts of its production, may have no other option but to function in tandem with its sister art. That is to say, within a work that simultaneously values distinction and imposition, there is certainly room for the same type of contrary composite relationship between graphic art and text that has been repeatedly located in Blake’s other work.

Although the ratio between visual art and text differs on each page of the Marriage, the title page, or plate 1 of this work, uniquely showcases a dominant and energetic visual image (see fig. 26). At the top of the page, barren trees whose branches arc together form a frame or enclosure that contains the images of static human figures and a number of birds. Below a ground line that unevenly divides the page, giving more room to the images beneath, the roots of these trees stretch toward a dynamic scene. On the left, flames fan upward and outward, apparently lending buoyancy to a number of paired and embracing figures who are “flying” in this subterranean space. On the right, providing a (possibly fearful) symmetry to the flames, are clouds. The most important area of the page, however, is near the bottom, where two figures, one resting on the clouds, feet to the right and head to the left, and the other surrounded by flames, feet to the left and head to the right, meet to share an embrace and a kiss in the middle of the

page. Like the amphibious figures who populate the illustrated pages of Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat", these two lovers are ambiguously sexed. Their physical conjunction, along with the association of each figure with distinct elements traditionally interpreted as pictorial symbols of heaven and hell (clouds and flames), strongly suggest that this image portrays a physical, bodily representation of the marriage of abstracts that the book's title promises.

While this interpretation is quite likely, its exclusive certainty is disrupted by a strong intertextual interplay with one of the images from Blake's visual additions to Blair's Grave. Recall that "The Reunion of the Soul and the Body" image from Blair's Grave portrays a male body, amidst flames, reaching up to embrace an embracing female body that descends through parted clouds. The similarity of this controversial portrayal of the female soul and the male body to the embracing figures on the title page of the Marriage is striking, especially if the Blair plate is turned 90 degrees to the left. One could argue that such a link is forced, for the Blair engraving is a mirrored reversal of the Marriage's title page, emphasises a vertical rather than a horizontal axis between its figures and was completed by Blake eighteen years after the first printing of the Marriage. However, excluding comparative possibility between different examples of Blake's work because of their temporal distance from each other is an impossible argument, for, as has been noted, there is no definitive copy of any of Blake's illuminated books and, further, unique copies of the Marriage were being produced by Blake as late as 1827. The other differences between these two images do not negate their similarity. Rather, their similarity, like the echo of repetition in the text and art of the Songs, maintains an interconnectedness between the two while inviting a comparative examination of their differences. This distortion and recontextualisation enhances the communicative variety

and referential potential of each image. Like the contraries that Blake discusses within the Marriage, then, these distinct yet overlapping graphic images crucially and necessarily impose on one another when considered together.

Together, these two images fortify some important concepts within the Marriage and bring a new perspective to Blair's Grave. Indeed, the lack of creative control that Blake experienced during the Blair project when the job of engraving was given to Schiavonetti is further minimised when one considers that this image, with its connotations of physical desire, apocalyptic energy and a marriage between heaven and hell manages to find its way into a popular edition of a poem that uses death to promote moral restraint in life. Conversely, Blake's attempts to associate Swedenborg's repair of the perceived division between the soul and the body with a rejection of religious restraint and limited perspectivism are given new strength through their association with Blair's vision of apocalypse. In addition, the suggestion of equilibrium and non-hierarchical balance between contraries hinted at through the horizontal embrace of the figures in the title page of the Marriage is highlighted by the contrasting vertical alignment of the Grave image, which reflects the traditional distinctions between high and low, heaven and hell that are maintained in Blair's text, despite the reunion between soul and body. Yet even Blair's position, which, like Swedenborg, promotes religious authority, moral restraint and hierarchical division, while seemingly supported by the "Reunion" engraving, is undermined by a further comparison between the title page of the Marriage and another engraving, "The Day of Judgement". Although "The Day of Judgement" presents a fairly traditional picture of religious post-apocalyptic atonement, the Marriage's title page offers a revisionary counterpoint to that traditional vision. The former engraving, an image of subjection, fear and authority as its title suggests, shows families on the left

rising to a solemn heavenly judge and judged individuals on the right falling into a hellish abyss. In contrast, the latter relief etching portrays a universal ascension resulting from a kiss and a physical embrace between the segregated poles of the former. This kiss is not a union that results in a homogenisation of its participants, nor is it a Swedenborgian marriage of equals, but it does portray a point of connection between distinguished elements. Thus the enforced segregation and symmetrical opposition that sustains the hierarchical dominion of heaven in the “The Day of Judgement” is implicitly challenged when the engraving is placed alongside its etched contrary, which offers an alternative relationship and an elevation based on energetic expression rather than restraint or fear. The Marriage’s title page, along with “The Day of Judgement” function together as a balance of contraries whose echoes invite imposition and a mutual sharing of referential possibility while their distortions invite a further expansion of perception that challenges Blair’s moral didacticism overall.

The textual content of plate 1 of the Marriage consists only of the title of the work. Yet, the placement of the words on the page as well as the appearance of those words function alongside and with the image in establishing an initial representation of the core interactions in the Marriage’s upcoming argument. The word “Marriage” is written in a flourishing script and its whorls and overlapping letters bear a resemblance to the branches that surround it while also providing a contrast to their apparent barrenness. These letters, which echo the depiction of wild roots and energetic vegetation that often twine between lines of text in nearly all examples of Blake’s composite art, retain an organic quality that is even more pronounced when contrasted with the stark, block letters that Blake uses to construct the words “HEAVEN” and “HELL”. There are a number of crucial points to consider regarding these latter representations. Whereas “Marriage” is

placed in the top section of the divided page, neither as high as the birds nor as low as the ground line, “HEAVEN” is placed below the feet of the relatively inactive figures among the trees. Spatially, it presents a barrier between the earthbound figures and the energetic activity below, much like the reasoned world of Blakean experience impedes the energetic world of innocence in the Songs. Further, as part of the ground or as a label that identifies the ground as “HEAVEN”, this word seems to provide little nourishment to the tree roots and to the barren world above. Although Blake could not help but place “Marriage” prior to “HEAVEN”, given the title of the piece, the spatial configuration of the words on the page, the relationship of these words to other graphic elements and the differences in the design of the words themselves creates a visual hierarchy that privileges the flourish of the former over the Spartan utility of the latter. As well, by placing “Marriage” in the sky, a space traditionally reserved for graphically symbolic representations of Heaven, as in “The Day of Judgement”, Blake’s design already upsets the heavenly domination that even Swedenborg’s radicalism preserves. “HELL” is printed in the same authoritative block capital letters as “HEAVEN”, perhaps suggesting the inherent similarity between the two that facilitates the proposed marriage, but also indicating the restrictive simplicity of each exclusive concept. While “HELL” is situated at the lowest point in this design, it is also engulfed in flame and placed amidst the various embracing figures on the page in contrast to the relative isolation of “HEAVEN”.

While traditional associative expectations are already disrupted due to the vertical hierarchy of the three terms and their relativity to the other graphic images on the page, such disruption is amplified by the already-identified horizontal interaction between the two embracing figures at the bottom of the design. That is, if one identifies these prominent human figures as Hell and Heaven from left to right, then the vertical textual

hierarchy that privileges heaven (despite its subservience to “Marriage”) is graphically challenged by this horizontal equilibrium. Interestingly, an alternate interpretative strategy produces the same results, for if one attempts to “read” the design from left to right (a common standard for the reception of printed text in English) and maintains the association between the contraries of hell and heaven and the embracing human figures, “hell” precedes “heaven”. This alternative hierarchy is a distorted pictorial echo of the text, and although antithetical to the larger dynamic of many of Blake’s composites and maintained by an antagonistic reliance on textual models of reception, it still manages to offer a challenge to the vertical, textual privileging of heaven over hell. Further, if one accepts the potential use of these words as labels for proximate elements of the design, as similarly practised in the political caricatures of James Gillray, a contemporary of Blake’s, the placement of “HELL” appears to encompass the flames, the clouds and the physical embrace, challenging the symmetrical balance between clouds and flames with a unifying generalisation that ultimately privileges one of the capitalised binaries over the other. While this is in keeping with the commonly recognised emphasis on hellish energy that persists throughout the Marriage and is asserted as a counterbalance to Swedenborg’s own unequal volume, the halo that the two embracing figures share in copy I of the Marriage iconically identifies them with heavenly angels in direct contrast to their spatial association with the word “HELL”. This unresolved paradox and explicit clash between adjacent textual and graphic representations places the signifying power of both into question and the perpendicular intersection between the vertical axis of the text and the horizontal axis of the image prevents either from dominating overall.

Between the boundaries of “HEAVEN” and “HELL”, however, placed in the middle of the page at the centrepiece of both axes, is an initially unobtrusive, but

extremely significant composite object. It is both word and image. As word, it abstractly signifies a relationship, a point of intersection, and can be universally applied. This simple word, “and”, whose sole purpose is to textually connect distinct terms, promotes unification without equation, including its subjects in the same list without reducing or synthesising them into a single category. As image, Blake has extended the letter “d” at the end of the word in an arc that circles around, encompasses, yet also reaches beyond the word itself.⁸⁵ This extension is a spiral whose open-ended inclusiveness is quite possibly a graphic echo of the function of this word itself. Further, as an abstract hybrid of graphic art and text, Blake’s composite representation of “and” presents itself as a unique type of performative utterance in that it both signifies and embodies conjunction. This sustained equilibrium and conflict between contraries across media, this page of divisions and intersections thus begins and characterises the Marriage.

As mentioned, the words on plate 1 of the Marriage function both as textual statement and as elements of the graphic image. In works where Blake adds visual images to other’s poetry, the already-established text usually remains quite distinct, often segregated from the encroaching artwork by a bounding line. In the Songs, Blake spatially offers a closer integration between text and graphic image, facilitated both by his method of production and by the fact of his being the creator of each. Much like the title page of the Marriage, many of the titles of the individual songs, as well as the title pages

⁸⁵ While it would be quite easy to speculate on the connection between this coiled extension and the spiralling serpents that populate the pages of Europe, America and even plate 20 of the Marriage, I wish to refrain from interpreting or making specific symbolic connections with this instance of composite hybridity. The word itself, as well as its graphic extension are abstract in the sense that “and” is a purely functional word rather than being in itself a representation and the swirled line that extends from and remains connected to the “d” is a shape that is neither geometrical, nor representative, but defines a space around the word that is both inclusive and open-ended.

for the individual copies of Innocence, Experience, and the collected Songs integrate the title text into the design, intertwining, intersecting and overlapping the lines of letters and images in a sort of composite marriage. While this mutual imposition seems more stylistic than functionally consequential in the Songs, the interaction of words and images on the title page of the Marriage suggests more than merely a spatial unification. While I have previously challenged the common perception that Blake's graphic images function exclusively as signs in an effort to distinguish them from their textual sister, their representative potential is evident in the number of "readings" that they have had to endure in the current study. Yet the persistent variance in such readings attests to the ability of these graphic images to successfully avoid the exclusivity of conventional signification. In my efforts to establish this characteristic of the Blakean image, it has consistently been assumed that Blakean text, although achieving its own level of indeterminacy in tandem with the image, is limited to its textual capabilities. What the title page of the Marriage further reveals is the capability of the word to function as part of the visual design and thus take on qualities that Lessing prohibits in his attempt to segregate the capabilities of each medium. This single page, then, showcases a reciprocal extension of the functional capacity of textual representation that balances the excesses that he consistently grants to the image. While each medium retains its particular strengths in the arena of Blake's composite art, then, each is also capable of representative activity traditionally associated with its contrary and that both can function against the expectations of representative and interpretative limitation. Such overlap means that each can impose on the other, but the fundamental differences that characterise each medium means that each can never become the other, as each retains its own specific strengths and unique capabilities, exactly like the marriage of compatible

but not combinable contraries considered throughout the Marriage. It appears, then, that the method of production, the message, its manifestation and the media used to construct such a manifestation function together as a fourfold vehicle for Blake's creative expressions.

In an even further complication of this already rich dynamic, recall that Blake's method of printing and the hand-colouring of each produced copy preserves the potential for variation and alteration between copies. While the text of the plates often remains unchanged, the deterioration of graphic resolution as each plate is reused can alter and even omit specific details and figures. As well, alternative colouring can significantly alter the spatial relationships of specific designs, potentially affecting the composite plate as well as the entire work. It has already been noted that a critical consideration of the differences in colouring between copies is a slippery slope due to the possibility that both Blake and his wife were both involved in the process and thus the importance of creative intention is somewhat diffused when it comes to assigning particular interpretative significance to colour or colour differences. However, the variation between a number of copies of the Marriage's title page provides an excellent example of the extent to which simple pigments can greatly affect the dynamic of a composite design, especially one as densely integrated as this.⁸⁶ Copy C, produced in 1790, is coloured in subtle hues, but differentiates the aboveground sky from the subterranean area of the design by filling the latter with brown and grey shades. This dark contrast gives the lower area of the title page the overall appearance of being underground, dimly lit only by the flames at bottom left. In contrast, the space above and below the dividing ground line in copy F (1794) is

⁸⁶ These copies of the Marriage have been digitised and are freely accessible through The Blake Archive (<http://www.blakearchive.org>).

coloured with the same light wash, creating a design in which this line looks artificially imposed and precariously balanced upon a large open space. In copy F, then, the flames and clouds at the bottom of the page appear to be the true horizon line. Copy D (1795) destabilises this even further, including some blue coloration amidst the lower flames that matches the sky above and which shifts the suggestion of a stable foundation exclusively to the opaquely coloured clouds on the bottom right of the design. Copy I (1827), extends such opacity throughout much of the design, returning to an overall sense of solidity by trading the light pastels that dominate the title pages for copies D and G for thicker applications of colour and darker shades. As a result, this particular copy of the design appears to provide its own internal frame while the spaces immediately above and beneath the horizon line are distinguished through colour differences rather than contrast.

Another anomaly between individual printings of the Marriage is the extent of the flames in copy H (1790) as compared to the relative symmetry maintained by both clouds and flames throughout the rest of the copies. In copy H the excessive colouring of the etched flames causes them to extend across most of the page, from lower left to the roots of a tree in the upper right corner of the design. In the process, their vivid colours engulf and nearly obliterate the visibility of many of the airborne figures as well as the word “and” in the middle of the page. Although in all copies these flames do make contact with the tree on the left of the page, this is the only instance in which the flames are connected with both trees on either side of the design. The connection of these flames with the tree roots implicitly suggests nourishment or at least a connective relationship, especially since the branches of the tree on the left that is consistently associated with the flames are depicted as much longer than those on the right. Perhaps as a result of this new connection, however, the configuration of tree branches is somewhat altered in copy

H: the branches that arc across the top of the page are extended and those from the right and left intersect, forming an enclosure that isolates the first three words of the title, the flying birds and the four figures on the horizon line from the rest of the sky. That the energetic and unrestrained flames of hell would lead to such complete containment seems oddly incompatible with the main argument of the Marriage. However it is possible that the roots of the trees planted in the bounding line of the seemingly artificial horizon of the Marriage's title page are not "wild" enough to successfully translate the excessive energy of the flame, instead using it to fuel a more restrictive project, much in the same way that Blake perceives the treatment of visionary wisdom by Swedenborg and the orthodox church. If this is the case, then the title page of copy H functions toward defining currently existing conditions or restraint as opposed to presenting a liberating vision of possibility. Again, though, to invest too much interpretative value into these discriminations is to neglect the possibility that whoever provided such variant colour for these particular plates was not as attentive to such differences. Yet in a work where form and content have been shown to be so crucially intertwined, this particular variability ultimately affects the whole. While these small differences between copies may appear minor, collectively they have the potential to affect the interpretation of each of these closely related elements and have the capacity to "colour" entire readings of the Marriage. At the very least, critical considerations of the Marriage that take its images into account need to consider all known printings and their differences before using such images as evidence for argument.

The third plate of the Marriage returns to a familiar and somewhat more segregated configuration of text and graphic image that recalls many of the individual plates of the Songs, where an ordered text is framed by prominent graphic imagery and is

also encroached upon by smaller marginal images (see fig. 27). The visual art that occupies the top and bottom portions of the page presents a number of human figures and repeatedly depicts bodily desires, functions and pleasures. The female figure at the top of the page is engulfed in flames, while the lower part of the page features both a woman giving birth and a kissing couple among clouds, echoing the horizontal meeting of these same elements on the title page, but distorting their configuration here so that the flames are placed above the clouds and are also separated from the clouds by the text. This vertical hierarchy of images is fortified by a text that defines Blakean contraries and differentiates this type of relation from the religiously defined opposition between good and evil, while also spatially functioning as a divisive element between dominant pictorial images.⁸⁷ In a sense, then, as a component in the page's overall composite design, the text formally produces the separation and divorce that is defined by its content. Although the textual content of subsequent pages of the Marriage offer an alternative to this segregational activity, and despite the current page's initial anticipation of an apocalyptic moment that will see the just man return to usurp the "sneaking serpent" thus ending such

⁸⁷ This interpretation differs from and appears to contradict my earlier characterisation of the inherent link between contraries and religiously defined good and evil. Indeed, both interpretations are somewhat correct, for while the segregated poles of religious definition are certainly not an exclusive model for Blakean contraries and are, perhaps, contraries taken to an exclusive extreme, the uncertainty of the passage overall maintains both a connection and distinction between contrariness and oppositional discrimination. That is, the root of religious opposition is an inherent contrariness and it is this that the Marriage exploits in subsequent pages, demonstrating the imposition, interaction and interpenetration between this supposed antagonism in an attempt to undermine such artificial divisions. Further, the repetition of the word "spring", linking it both with the dynamic activity of evil, the origin of religious goodness and, perhaps, even recalling Blake's characterisation of Gray's lyric poetry as a "spring", once again demonstrates that the complexity of Blake's content is illuminated by a concurrent, composite and often intertextual complexity of form. At the very least, the proximate variation of the use of the word "spring" on this page inherently links both contrariness and religiously-based opposition with "evil", complicating the term and thereby challenging segregational and judgemental oversimplifications offered by the Old Testament and supported by Swedenborg.

division, the overall text of plate 3 appears to be a performative utterance which communicates and generates a divided condition.

Conversely, despite their separation and the inclusion of hellish flames in the top image and heavenly clouds in the bottom image, it is difficult to define clear oppositional differences between the two primary images on plate 3. Further, they each bear an uncertain relationship to the text overall and consistently evade interpretative certainty. The woman in flames at the top of the page is able to sustain interpretations that identify her with the “new heaven”, resurrectional energy and the “Eternal Hell”, and the lack of a corresponding female figure in the textual description prevents any of these possibilities from dominating. Yet the textual identification on this page of a connective foundation between apparent contraries justifies such concurrent yet paradoxical interpretations by encouraging perception beyond the artifice of their supposedly incompatible antagonism.

The clouds that surround the figures at the bottom of the page are traditionally linked with heavenly association. Yet the physicality of the baby’s birth and the embrace of the nude lovers lends an openness to the image in the sense that bodily function and sexual interaction are nakedly and explicitly portrayed. Indeed, if we expect to find the linen-robed modesty of angels on these clouds, Blake certainly disappoints. The proximity of the final few lines of text and these images, and their potential connection, further complicates an already uncertain representation. One could easily associate the image of the emerging child with the statement “Good is Heaven” and the mobile lovers with “Evil is Hell”, as each phrase is conveniently situated near their respective images in the design. This association introduces a horizontal division that echoes its vertical counterpart discussed above, but also inverts the conjunction of right and left, emphasised on plate 1, into an opposition that divides consequence from event, procreation from sex

and the hierarchies of birth from the equalities of marriage.⁸⁸ In addition, associating the child with heaven supports Swedenborgian notions of innocence. However, these subscripted figures can also be connected with the proximate phrase: “Evil is the active springing from Energy” and such a connection completely reverses the perception of the depicted baby from heavenly goodness to an active, hellish evil.⁸⁹ Given Blake’s already-discussed antagonism toward Swedenborg’s perception of children, this association between the child emerging from the mother’s generative body and the active body springing from energy offers a pictorial counter both to Swedenborg’s vision of the inherent goodness of childhood innocence and also to the earlier connection on this page between that same image and Heaven. Finally, but not exhaustively, the left-to-right perception enforced by the text can be applied to the bottom image, thus promoting a spatio-temporal progression in which the separation of birth is countered by the eventual connection of lovers. Although the potential for a cyclical yet progressive return to the separation of birth results from such connections, perhaps providing a physical illustration of Hegelian dialectic, the lovers’ arms are extended toward the end of the page, suggesting an energetic forward movement that does not obey reason, rather than a rational return to procreative duty. However, the implied direction of the bottom image is countered by the leftward gaze of the woman in flames, but echoed by the left-to-right

⁸⁸ Indeed, one could invert my delineation by opposing the equalities generated by birth to the inequalities that persist through marriage. Blake’s work invites such a consideration of multiple perspectives and his indefinite page provides ample room for their simultaneous presence.

⁸⁹ This phrase can also be connected with the woman at the top of the page whose arms reach upward and outward, following the energy of the flame. Yet her backward gaze introduces a problematic counterpoint to this gesture and preserves the image’s unresolved overall tension.

movement of the flames that surround her, once again establishing the divided images as oppositions that contain contrariness within themselves.

Overall, the larger images on plate 3 relate to the text, but their resistance to consistent interpretative association persistently questions the evaluative divisions established by that same text. The images perform a contrary function to the text, then, in that they introduce uncertainty into the textual classifications while evading classification themselves. As well, the smaller marginal images that include human figures, a bird, serpentine abstractions and something that resembles a feather or an odd leaf all encroach on the divisive function and exclusive space of the text, physically demonstrating its inherent permeability.⁹⁰

To be fair, however, it must be noted that Blake's hand-written script does not fully comply with the rather barren and polarised description that I have offered here in an effort to distinguish between and perhaps unfairly systematise and oppose the function of Blake's media. Extended letters and flourishes recall the script that is used to present the word "marriage" on the title page, lending a dynamic energy to a textuality that supposedly confirms its own establishment of worldly division. Further, a close examination of Blake's initial textual associations contrasts the categorical certainty of those that end the page. That is, in the definition of contraries, attraction, reason and love

⁹⁰ David Erdman and others, in "Reading the Illuminations of Blake's Heaven and Hell" focus exclusively on the marginal particulars, using them as the basis for a re-interpretation of the entire Marriage. Their study effectively demonstrates that these smaller graphic images, often ignored or dismissed, do have the capability to fortify, alter or undermine interpretative positions. However, their study classifies the marginal images as "graphic transpositions of metaphoric language" (162) and identifies many of the repeated figures as "emblems" (204) in a somewhat restrictive attempt to place these visual particulars on par or at least to make them affectively compatible with a readable language. While this is certainly a potential approach for some of the marginal images, its universal application neglects the variety of functions that Blake's graphic art is capable of on the composite page and commits the same reductive error as other attempts to "read" Blake's designs.

are contrasted with repulsion, energy and hate respectively, but within these contrasts is an implied connection or relationship. This association is problematic, however, for while Blake subsequently demonstrates that “evil” is a subjectively defined identification, the above list links the “energy” that Blake is so intent on promoting with repulsion and hate, two extreme and oppositional terms that one would expect to find in Swedenborg’s preservation of polarity rather than in Blake’s Marriage. Perhaps this associative list rhetorically repeats traditional associations and distinctions so that the subsequent overturning of such limited perception in the following pages is amplified. Whatever the case, though, the uncertain yet distinct graphic images, along with a divisive but composite textuality that physically blurs the line between media and internally sustains contradiction, remain distinct in themselves, but also act together, producing a composite indefiniteness that reinforces Blake’s notions of impositional, interactive and overlapping contrariness.

Flames appear again on plate 4, implicitly linking its contents with plate 3 and the title page of the Marriage, but here a chained male figure is restrained within the flames, prevented from enjoying the “Eternal Delight” of this energy and incapable of making physical contact with a woman and child (see fig. 28). However, this woman, like the chains that bind the man, similarly restrains the child from reaching toward the energy of a glowing orb. Much is implied here, and potential interpretations can include perceiving the orb as a sun, or as the “son”, as Jesus who beckons to the youth as his elders maintain their alliance to a restrictive, systematic and divisive set of beliefs. However, the oppositions between male and female and fire and water, and the condensed echo of the figures from the bottom of plate 3 in the embrace between mother and child invite a number of equally viable interpretations. Specific details and exclusive readings aside,

though, this image variously depicts a clash between restraint and desire in which restraint appears to have the upper hand. This is a curious reversal of the unrestrained bodily energy of the images on plate 3. Indeed, plate 4 inverts the dominant functions and characteristics of both art and text from the previous page, presenting “The Voice of the Devil” as a graphically enhanced textual promotion of energy and a condemnation of division and restraint, while picturing the success of such restraint in the dominant image below. Notably, though, the universality of energy that the Marriage textually encourages does dominate the image, facilitated by both the active struggle or conflict that the figures embody, and the comprehensive coverage of the image by the placement of the energies of the orb and the flame. Plates 3 and 4, though, demonstrate and further expand the extensive capability and flexibility of Blake’s media, challenging theories that would restrain and divide the properties and functions of either.

Just as the recurrence of flame images link individual pages of the Marriage together and similar to the way in which the embracing figures of the title page recall the graphic portrayal of the reunion of the soul and the body from the Blair designs, so the design on plate 21 of the Marriage further demonstrates the intertextual variability of Blake’s visual images (see fig. 29). Atop a text that criticises Swedenborg’s intellectual vanity and exposes his hypocrisy, a youthful and solitary male figure sits and gazes up at the sky, his left knee resting on a subtly drawn skull. While this figure remains consistent throughout the various copies of the Marriage, the constantly changing background redefines the pictorial context of the figure with each new copy. Copy C is relatively barren, presenting the figure atop a green hill and underneath a clear yellow-red coloured sky. In copy H, the sky is dark and yellow streaks radiate upward and outward from behind the figure, perhaps suggesting a sunrise or sunset. Copy F is strangely coloured,

giving the figure a negative or shaded appearance, and the green hilltop has become a vaguely defined planar surface. Perhaps the strangest alteration occurs in copy D, in which two pyramids are placed behind the figure. These pyramids vanish in copy G, which, like copy H, again features lines radiating out from the figure, but these lines are produced in such a way that the sky above the figure seems to be folded and layered in upon itself. In addition, the figure now appears to be perched upon an island surrounded by water. In each of the printings mentioned thus far, the aforementioned skull is hardly noticeable and often unrecognisable as such. However, in copy I the skull is quite prominent, coloured white against a dark green background. As well, the hill appears to have been altered to resemble a scaled down earth, so that the figure, once dwarfed by pyramids but now comparatively monolithic, seems to be sitting upon a globe. Copy I also features an arch of apparently solid clouds that contains both the figure and the yellow rays that surround him. While this plethora of alterations between copies already makes it extremely difficult to establish a stable interpretative basis for the composite page that accounts for all versions, its representative possibility is further complicated if one attends to the repetitive utilisation of this figure in other works.

This same image, without the skull, is a part of “Death’s Door”, an engraving for the 1808 edition Blair’s Grave that shows an old man entering the door of a tomb, on top of which sits the youthful male figure surrounded by rays of light (see fig. 17). In the context of Blair’s poem, then, the male figure on the tomb is easily associated with resurrection and rebirth, but it is uncertain whether he represents the soul (which is sometimes represented as female in Blake’s designs), a transcendence of mortality, an angel, Jesus, or all of these. Appearing again on plate 8 of America, a work produced in

1793, this figure, along with a skull that has been placed to his right, sits above text that metaphorically celebrates revival and release.

Although such associations harmonise with the overall direction of the Marriage's argument, recall that the initial appearance of this figure in the Marriage coincides with a scathing indictment of Swedenborg. Indeed, the clouded frame and the skull in copy I effectively emphasises the association of this figure with restraint and death rather than freedom and life. In the Marriage, then, this figure, variously identified by critics as Satan and Swedenborg, potentially bears a negative association if one assumes that art and text function here in tandem. However, it is reasonable to also assume that this figure might also represent Blake, a non-rational artistic superscript to the script and scripture that Swedenborg fails to escape from. This figure with its many potential associations thus contains opposites within itself. Its appearance in the Marriage, along with all of its possible associations, imposes on other utilisations of the same figure and these additional occurrences in turn impose upon and increase the overall density of the Marriage. Such intertextual excesses enhance the performative properties of its graphic imagery and further establish the Marriage as a work that marries both form and function in its promotion of energy and avoidance of restraint.

Plate 16 offers another excellent illustration of the numerous capabilities of the graphic image by combining contrary uses of such images on the same page (see fig. 30). The dominant image at the top of this plate again suggests restraint, utilising framing and symmetry to contain its figures in a closed space. Conversely, the miniature marginal abstractions, although similarly restricted by a framing text, present small figures that stretch and arc, and lines that twist, curl and branch, drawing the eye along their playful path in all directions. Although static, these marginal images represent a frozen kinetic

moment and thus retain a potential energy and mobility that the imprisoned figures at the top of the page are incapable of. Indeed, even the stacked lines of text that usually appear quite rigid and ordered in comparison to Blake's more dynamic imagery, seem much less restrained here than the framed and cramped figures that crown the page.

Yet, immediately following this plate, pages 17 to 20 offer a "wall" of almost exclusive textuality that anticipates many of the pages in later composite works such as Milton and Jerusalem (see figs. 31 to 34 respectively). This memorable fancy even excludes many of the marginal abstractions and figures that seem to be so perpetual in Blake's work. However, a closer look at the subtle oscillations of the few examples of marginal pictorial presence on these pages reveals a continuation of the established marriage between the composite form of the work and its textually communicated content. The title of this memorable fancy and the lines just above it that end an argument concerning the necessity of a sustained distinction between contraries are surrounded by depictions of wildlife and foliage, a veritable miniature oasis of natural and unrestrained energy. However, as this memorable fancy begins and a heavenly angel leads the narrator through a church, mill and cave toward a dark void, the marginal flourishes diminish into literal extinction on plate 18. At this point, the text also becomes overpopulated with excessive and corrupted images as the angel presents his vision of Hell with the warning that this "hot burning dungeon" is to be the narrator's lot if he continues his "foolish" career of independent, creative energy. While these textual images involving hellish immensity and violence do emit an energetic mobility in that the scarcity of punctuation throughout most of plate 18 results in a flood of undifferentiated words, this imagery remains in the service of an allegorical moral prescription. The exclusion of marginal figures and larger images on this page results in the presentation of

an exclusive textual vision that, in its intention to produce fear, is used as a rhetorical weapon to gain power rather than question it. Following the angel's departure and the assertion of the narrator's contrary voice, which perceptively recognises the limited and limiting vision of heavenly images of Hell, the marginal graphic images of birds, animals, people and abstract lines return between the lines of text. As well, the narrator's own ironic textual vision demonstrates the ability of the textual image to challenge itself, to both establish and ridicule authority in the same way that the pictorial image can be employed for limitation or liberation as illustrated on plate 16. That the content of the textual "message" is thus enhanced and undermined by the material divorce and re-marriage of contrary media in these pages further supports the notion that the inherently dynamic potential of Blake's composite art makes it the ideal medium for the encouragement of perceptual expansion. Art and text, while capable of working in tandem to amplify a single idea, are also quite effective at preventing either from dominating the pages of Blake's composite works.

Given the importance of the composite relation between art and text in the reinforcement of the ideas in the Marriage, it has been suggested above that such ideas crucially direct the overall understanding of Blake's approach to his media. Indeed, it is useful to generally consider and recast Blake's utilisation of graphic images and text in light of his definition and demonstration of the imposition and interaction of contraries. Yet one must be careful not to carelessly universalise the contrariness of the Marriage's content, for to do so would be to ultimately restrict an understanding of Blake's composite form. As has been shown in this examination of the Marriage, Blake's graphic art and text possess variable functions and demonstrate a variable relationship with each new page. They are capable of not only remaining distinct, but also mutually imposing

on one another, conveying both limited and excessive associations, and functioning in tandem or as antagonists. Further, as expressive media and as tools that are capable of emulating each other, Blake's graphic art and text share a common foundation that prevents them from being completely opposite, binary or negational. However, they are distinct enough that they can never be synthetically resolved into a unified whole, even in composite form. Thus, if Blake's notion of contraries is perceived as a non-dialectic interaction, then the multifaceted relationship that graphic art and text experience within Blake's work can be unproblematically identified as a contrary one. This also implies that attempts either to exclusively unify, synthesise and transform, or to oppose, analyse and segregate these two media are as misguided and partial as the individual efforts of Swedenborg's hierarchical treatise, Hegel's dialectic progression, or Boehme's ontology. A full understanding of Blake's unique utilisation of art and text necessitates a co-ordination of one's investigation with an understanding of his consistent promotion of indefiniteness and unrestrained energy through a tension between integration and distinction that persists throughout all facets of his work. Thus, the metaphor of marriage that Blake applies to his contraries echoes and validates our earlier characterisation of this relation between media on Blake's composite page. Indeed, the promotion of unbound energy in the Marriage expands the potential for flexibility and adaptability of graphic art and text well beyond the experiments of the Songs, further exposing the inadequacy and partiality of Lessing's hierarchical aesthetics. It is impossible to avoid mixing metaphors, then, for the interactive marriage of art and text's contrariness also allows them to remain loyal to their characterisation as "Sister Arts" who showcase both the interconnective depth of familial love and the murderous friction of sibling rivalry. Blake's media are thus capable of concurrently sustaining this paradoxical comparison with marriage,

sisterhood and contrariness, not because the current study is unable to commit to a single vision, but because the excesses and indefiniteness of Blake's composite art, in tandem with the content of the Marriage, dynamically embrace a number of equally illuminating paradigms.

The Marriage collects many different forms of writing in a single work, interrogates these forms, excessively accumulates a diversity of content and exposes these textual properties to various relationships with visual artwork on the composite page. This work is not only a treatise against Swedenborg, an ontological redefinition, and a methodological manifesto of a unique type of relief etching and its intimate relation with the content of the Marriage, it is also a composite testing ground, an arena in which the consistent recombination of visual art and textual expression promotes a unique potential within each new configuration. Thus varied, the Marriage manages both to sustain a large population of difference, and to co-ordinate those differences in a collective but ultimately indefinite statement against restraint and limitation in general. In doing so, it promotes a greater understanding of the interdependent and impositional functioning of Blake's media on the composite page and the inherent diversity of such media.

Beyond the Page: Contextualising Blake's Composites

It is not what an artist intended or thinks—even about his art or his own works—that is important, but what he has presented.

-Stewart Crehan, from Blake in Context

The artist does not seek unity; he seeks to unite various things.

-Northrop Frye, from Fearful Symmetry

Cumulatively, the previous chapters' exploration of a number of Blakean composite situations has revealed the ability of the graphic image to initiate and enhance challenges to the stability of meaning conventionally expected from textually mediated expression. Chapters 2 and 3 demonstrated that although the disruptive function of Blake's visual images does not require textual complicity and is actually enhanced by intermedia antagonism, there remains a certain interdependence between graphic image and text on the composite page. That is to say, in situations where Blake's images are added to others' pre-existing textual expressions, the image does not function alone, but operates as a reactive and proactive "contrary" in the resulting composite marriage, introducing uncertainty into the inflexible, didactic and prescriptive nature of particular textual compositions. Chapters 3 and 4 have demonstrated that the composite Blakean page is a self-contained arena of evasive plenitude in which the production of meaning is interrupted by the combined function of simultaneously created graphic images and text. On these pages, a diachronic and hierarchical order of production is supplanted by a concurrent compositional interplay between graphic images that resist stable interpretation and simple, repetitive but often self-contradictory language that echoes, challenges and further distorts this visual uncertainty. The revolution of the image against an authoritative text in Blake's editions of Gray, Blair and Young thus gives way to a symbiotic and mutual affectation between functionally co-operative media on Blake's etched plates.⁹¹

⁹¹ By "co-operative", I do not mean that visual art and text support each other toward a definitive end. Rather, they both demonstrate the same ability to disrupt the meaningful signification of the other and thus the dynamic of the Blakean composite depends on this harmony of discord, this co-operative contrariness.

This tendency towards indefiniteness and plurality appears to contradict Blake's own commentary on his art, specifically, his resistance to "The Indefinite" in a letter to George Cumberland dated April 12, 1827 (E 783). While it is true that Blake's art primarily consists of strong lines and delineation rather than graded shades or colours, these lines have been shown to disrupt the interpretation of accompanying text, regardless of whether that text is his own already-playful writing or the didactic poetry of others. As a result, Blake's precisely executed graphic art, often incongruous with proximate text and diverse in its representative potential due to intertextual and contextual association, could be said to emphasise perceptual plurality through the promotion of indefinite signification. Blake's above resistance to the indefinite, then, is possibly mistaken, misleading or has been misinterpreted. While it may be that Blake has a less "difficult" end in mind when composing his composites, the critical history of these works and the current study demonstrates that the functional interrelationship between the two media has interrupted both the specificity of meaningful signification and Blake's specific authorial intentions. Indeed, Blake's early composites, such as the Songs and the Marriage, only appear simple if one critically subjugates one art to a supportive role for the dominant other, ignores their interaction or compares these early works to the more explicit complexity of the later prophecies. However, the composite form entangles these works in an indefinite difficulty in that two forms of representation challenge and eventually unravel the apparent specificity of each other on the same page. A closer examination of the context in which Blake's condemnation of the indefinite is situated conversely suggests that the tendency toward the promotion of plurality and diversity in his work is actually in keeping with his own comments and opinions.

Regarding the drawn line, Blake states in the same letter that “It is Itself & Not Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else [...] but since the French Revolution Englishmen are all Intermeasurable One by Another Certainly a happy state of Agreement to which I for One do not Agree” (E 783). Thus Blake’s equation of definiteness with being “Not Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else” implies that his notion of indefiniteness includes intermeasurability, agreement, and similitude, the same lack of distinction and individuality that he perceives in Englishmen since the French Revolution. This resistance to congruence reinforces the earlier interpretation of Blakean contraries and their maintenance within the composite page, but also importantly distinguishes Blake’s use of the word “indefinite” from its usage in this study. The indefinite plurality identified thus far in Blake’s work is nothing like Blake’s equation between indefinite and undifferentiated.

The above exploration of “The Indefinite” demonstrates the dangers of relying too heavily on Blake’s self-reflective commentary, which can be interpreted or misinterpreted to satisfy nearly any critical program. So far, this study has emphasised the Blakean page’s composite resistance to determinate meaning without completely attributing its dynamic indeterminacy to any specific or sustained intention on the part of the author. However, this is not to say that such self-reflexive statements are completely inaccurate or inappropriate—many do contribute to the understanding of Blake’s own ideas regarding his work. While this argument has appealed to Blake’s couplet and dedication in the Gray designs and his dedication to Queen Charlotte in the Blair volume as statements of Blake’s creative intent, they have also been tested against the functional capabilities of his graphic art rather than being immediately accepted as a definitive paradigm. Recall how a single, clear interpretation of the dedication to Mrs. Flaxman in

the Gray volume quickly becomes impossible amidst a number of equally plausible meanings. Many of these statements, then, are not Rosetta Stones, are not keys to some type of difficult, Blakean “code”, but are further examples of the way in which Blake’s use of media problematises conventional representation and codified expectation.

This study thus avoids a definitive reliance on fallacious intentionalist assumptions and directly associates the potential for the generation of excessive meaning with two other factors: the closely integrated configuration of media on the plate itself and an interdependent functioning of these media that promotes a resistance to interpretative certainty. However, the lingering danger of exclusively focusing on the text as a site of meaning overflow is that the importance of Blake, as origin of the work, tends to diminish. As no work of art is created in a contextual vacuum, how does one repair this distance while avoiding insupportable intentionalist conjecture? The works themselves provide the answer to this by making reference to prevailing conditions and issues in eighteenth-century England, Europe and America. Indeed, Blake’s own comparison, quoted above, between an “indefinite”, or undifferentiated aesthetic and his perception of the way that individualism has been subdued in England following the French Revolution calls attention to the presence of this link between socio-political and aesthetic concerns within his work. We can thus bring the works closer to their author by considering the composite books as historically situated artefacts that, in form and function, inherently reflect and respond to the contemporary conditions in which Blake lived and created.

Thus far, the current study has looked at aesthetic and interpretative concerns that persist in relation to Blake’s composite designs. By extending these considerations to include the exchange between Blake’s work and its contemporary social and historical

conditions, this final chapter introduces a political dimension into the relationship between visual art and text that may prompt questions as to why such parallels were not pursued earlier on. The intention behind this delayed consideration of the politics behind and within the composite page has been to allow the current study to explore and establish that which sustains the “difficult” dynamic of Blake’s composites without the guidance of ideological designs or motivations. While it could be argued that such a procedure is, in itself, an ideological move, it does allow the political aspect of media combination to emerge, to reveal itself, rather than being superimposed from without or even searched for. The overall purpose of this study is not to fulfil an expectation, but to discover some formal reasons why Blake’s designs continue to evade critical and interpretative expectations. In doing so, such aesthetic evasiveness can be considered in relation to external and existing political pressures and paradigms.

The last three plates of the Marriage, entitled “A Song of Liberty”, textually reinforce the figurative resistance to prescriptive restriction and continue the composite resistance to interpretative certainty explored throughout the previous chapter. In addition, though, these plates extend the Marriage’s largely abstract attack on segregational aesthetics by involving real-world locations and peoples in a figuratively apocalyptic textual drama. This composite “song” invokes various examples of restrictive rule but also implicitly calls for their ruin, specifically countering religious intolerance and priestly condemnations of unrestrained joy with an inclusive, performative energy, and promoting a widening of one’s perception beyond nationalist boundaries. Weaving a dense web of interrelation between artistic expression, philosophical argument and historical engagement, “A Song of Liberty” concurrently employs each of these capacities such that each echoes, undermines and reinforces the

others in an overall enhancement of the Marriage's democratic exploration of contraries. In doing so, this conclusion to the Marriage increases the density of the entire work by both relating and challenging aesthetic, religious and societal examples of constraint.

The connection of Spain, Rome, America, Albion and France to images of revolution and liberating renewal in "A Song of Liberty" has prompted a number of critics to view the entire Marriage as a social commentary. Martin Nurmi comments that the Marriage examines the "revolutionary philosophical bases of the apocalypse [Blake] saw augured in the American and French revolutions" (iii). To support this, Nurmi suggests, among other things, that the comment on plate 18 in which Leviathan "appeared like a fiery crest above the waves" to the east, "distant about three degrees" is an indirect reference to Paris, which is "about three degrees east of London" (51). Edward Ahearn also recognises this link between the Marriage and contemporary political struggles for liberation (33) and characterises the work specifically as a response to the French revolution, interpreting it as initially portraying the "disintegration of the original human being into deluded consciousness, sexual division, nationhood and international war", then presenting an apocalyptic philosophy promoting a regeneration of the lost spirit" (14-16). While the strength of this interpretation is debatable, it does recognise the link, the interplay and the imposition between Blake's composite work and the political and social contexts that surround and impact upon their creator.

The allegorical use of the figures of the gloomy, "starry" king and the fiery "son" to illustrate the difference between the cyclical perpetuation of power and liberation from such "stony laws", condenses natural and biblical metaphors, lending a perceptual depth to the various examples of contemporary civil unrest that critics have linked with the subject matter of the Marriage. However, in keeping with the tendency toward

textual uncertainty that the form and function of Blake's works encourage, this interpretation is not entirely stable. Suggesting biblical and contemporary revolutionary parallels, "A Song of Liberty" seems to establish a conflict between a jealous king of the starry heavens and a "new born terror" of the Eternal Female, Earth. After the birth of this son/sun, the jealous king throws him into the western sea. Until this point on plate 26, the new son's "fiery limbs" and "flaming hair" associate him exclusively with fire and differentiates him from the grey, gloomy darkness of the starry king. However, near the bottom of plate 26, the gloomy king is linked with "thunder and fire" (my emphasis). As well, the lack of punctuation and unclear identification of the subject in phrase 17 produces an uncertainty as to the ownership of the "sullen flames". Although faded, these flames can be potentially associated with the king either directly, or as a part of the ruinous company that accompanies the king's descent in lines 15 and 16. The fiery link between the king and the son, as well as their simultaneous "fall" assists in blurring the distinction between these two figures. This overlap between the two erodes the antithetical opposition between them that initially promotes their conflict and creates problems when one attempts to equate them clearly with biblical figures or revolutionary politics. The mention of the king's "ten commands" on plate 27 encourages an association between him and the God of the Old Testament. Yet his darkness, ruinous activity, jealous rage, warlike violence and his possession of wings, while in keeping with both Old Testament portraits and reformation imaginings of this God, exposes the king as more akin to a corrupted angel, a Satan. Indeed, his violent expulsion of the son nearly out-herods Herod rather than exemplifying the expected behaviour of a monotheistic omnipotence. Regardless, the son reappears in the east, denies the commandments of the king and declares everything to be holy. While he could be interpreted as Jesus, his

association with fire, his emergence from the Earth, and his physical expulsion and fall from the starry night at the hands of a jealous ruler also links him with Satan, the fallen angel. Although this latter identification is in keeping with the hellish calibration of the Marriage and perpetuates a consistency in its promotion of unrestrained excess and joy, the lingering associations with Jesus as well as the enduring overlap between the king and the son unifies all three, prevents a clear identification of the figures and thus interferes in the production of an exclusively allegorical interpretation of this decidedly non-didactic narrative.

At the very least, then, the indefinite nature of this passage, in keeping with the functional potential of the rest of the Marriage, promotes its participation in a performative evasion of interpretative authority. However, the uncertainty surrounding the identity of the figures whose combative actions are described in “A Song of Liberty”, and the essential overlap between them casts a shadow over the surface optimism of the song’s energetic commands. In other words, textual associations that persist between the son and the king call the liberating potential and the apparent novelty of the rising son’s proclamations into question. If Nurmi and Ahearn are correct in their perception that the Marriage addresses the revolutionary spirit and politics of the age, then the above song, with its overlapping characterisations and overall uncertainty, casts some doubt on the novelty and effectiveness of revolutionary liberation. Further, the religious implications of the struggle between the king and the son, regardless of which biblical figures they are identified with, casts a similar doubt on the moral distinctions and religious precedents that influenced and inspired late eighteenth-century revolutionary politics.

The implications of this doubt on the work’s position in relation to the social concerns of its time are crucial. Just as Blake admires Swedenborg for his imagination

and spiritual materialism yet becomes disillusioned through the realisation that the Swedish heretic is promoting the same restrictive mindset as the religious institutions that he dissents against, so the Marriage's consideration of revolutionary social realities reflects an awareness that the energetic radicalism prevalent in Europe during the author's lifetime often discarded one form of political or religious oppression for another.

The final unifying and indiscriminate line, "For everything that lives is Holy", which recognises an inherent lack of or inability to sin in all living things, reclaims a term usually employed by repressive religious structures to differentiate and hierarchize, instead offering an overarching declaration against repressive hierarchical power structures, including those that emerge from the amnesia of revolution. Ironically appearing within a work that plays on the perceptual reversal of such exclusive distinctions, this placement of "Holy" redefines, delimits and liberates the word from its traditional usage, similar to the manner in which the earlier reversal of the terms "good and "evil" in the Marriage frees "evil" from its exclusively negative association. The ironic, distorted echo of the term works against the definiteness and potential authority of its declarative context, ensuring that the language of resistance does not merely repeat or return to the language of repression. As well, this statement resists the destructive and mindless collective energies that so frightened thinkers following the French Revolution, managing to avoid the undifferentiated "indefiniteness" condemned by Blake through its application of "Holy" individualisation to all and its universal granting of a license to act freely and passionately without being judged. Thus concluded, the Marriage appears as an idealised promotion of both revolutionary individualism and democratic equality.

Yet this celebratory conclusion of the Marriage is not as straightforward as it first appears. If the ironic echo subverts the declarative power of the original statement,

the effectiveness of that statement as a conclusive declaration of liberation is put into question. As well, the inherent and persistent danger of the ironic echo is that it still relies on the original vehicle to challenge that vehicle's original use rather than asserting a unique and oppositional counterstatement. Like the cumulative visual images that retain and bring their prior associations to each new context through much of Blake's composite designs, this recontextualisation does not completely efface the traditionally distinctive use of the word. Thus placed, "Holy" becomes a bi-directional, non-synthetic and self-contained contradiction, embodying both discrimination and inclusion while upholding the density and diversity of meaningful opportunity that such contrariety encourages throughout Blake's other work. Thus, the Marriage, which continually reinforces particularity, ends with a statement that uses the particularity of "Holy" to promote an overarching generalisation and inclusiveness that both upholds and challenges the rest of the work as well as its own power.

To add further graphic support to this claim and to also connect the above analysis to this study's overall focus on composite interaction, note that not only is there no period ending the statement or the work as a whole, but the "y" at the end of "Holy" graphically extends beyond its expected parameters (see fig. 35). More specifically, the tail of the "y", which initially tends leftward like other examples of this letter on the same page, uniquely curls to the right and extends towards the edge of the page. Thus, at the end of a statement that promotes a similarly liberating individualism within all that lives, the artistic function of this distinctively extended letter along with the multiple meanings suggested by "Holy" and the contradictory nature of the statement overall combine in a subtle overall assertion against the final nature of the phrase. At the same time, though, the above qualities can also be characterised as promoting openness and a resistance to

textual, political and religious doctrine, and the phrase can thus be conversely interpreted as a performative utterance that demonstrates the Marriage's overall argument. Thus the Marriage and its final song, both of which consistently question uniformity, appropriately end on a on a visual note of contrariety. Neither doctrinal nor declarative, then, The Marriage and its component parts are instead ideally democratic, composing, in the true sense of the word, an "argument", a balanced showcase of various perspectives in which no single perspective dominates and all are called into question. Accurately reflecting the political concerns, conditions and contradictions of its historical context, the Marriage's final statement, which declares yet undermines declaration and generally abstracts yet individually empowers, thus echoes the uncertain direction and commitment of energies born from reactive individualism.

This textually-produced uncertainty counters readings of the Marriage that base their findings on accepted notions of Blake's own stated opinions. Biographical characterisations of Blake generally define him as an individualist, a radical and a revolutionary supporter around the time that the Marriage was composed and interpretations of the Marriage often locate these same qualities within the work. While such perceptions can be found within the Marriage, the identification of their presence does not exhaust the work. The above analysis, which conversely identifies perceptive uncertainty, abstraction, inclusiveness, and revolutionary and religious doubt in the work of a man who has not only been promoted as a radical, but who repeatedly promotes clarity and specificity in his written commentary, demonstrates the danger and the misleading potential of too-closely equating a work with its author.⁹²

⁹² Indeed, if one remains steadfastly committed to associating the historical person of Blake with all that appears in his creative composites, it becomes almost necessary to offer evaluative

The apocalyptic regeneration that ends the Marriage thus compresses a number of perspectives, including an excitement surrounding the winds of change that revolution promises, and a cautious hesitation that implicitly hints that late eighteenth-century reactive protest excludes the necessary increase in perception that will prevent revolutionary turns from coming full circle. The Marriage's acknowledgement and inclusion of revolutionary world situations in its overall promotion of individual freedom and expressive variety demonstrates that although Blake's works have often been celebrated for their mythic universality, they remain very much situated in or at least influenced by a particular historical context. America, unlike the Marriage, is a much more transparent and specific exploration of revolutionary potential, and one that, textually at least, unashamedly celebrates the victory of American independence over British counterrevolutionary efforts (and further supports the above reading of the Marriage as a promotion of individual liberties and democratic equality).⁹³ Unlike the dramatisation of history that characterises Blake's The French Revolution, America idealises actual events without regard for historical chronology and prophetically predicts the "world-wide spread of the American idea" (Damon Dictionary 20). Within the imaginative boundaries of Blake's own works, at least, this prediction does come true:

judgements that assess the accuracy of his creations against his stated intentions. If this was the case, then given the above analysis, either a conception of Blake well-established by historical evidence would have to be altered, or the Marriage would need to be deemed a failure. To dismiss the work on such grounds, however, would be to ignore the wider correlation between the Marriage, the rest of Blake's composite work and its historical context.

⁹³ America's explicit criticism of Britain's counterrevolutionary war against the American colonies stands in stark opposition to the cautious opacity of Blake's later works. One possible explanation for this expressive courage is offered by David Erdman in Blake: Prophet Against Empire, when he suggests that Londoners were generally sympathetic to the revolutionary effort and critical of George III's tyranny (6). In this case America simply echoes popular opinion, despite the government's passing of an act against seditious writings that same year.

Europe and the Song of Los (which includes “Africa” and “Asia”) extend and continue the exploration of the revolutionary ideals within America (21).

Further extending this self-referential interconnection between Blake’s works, plate 8 of America contains two noticeable echoes from the Marriage (see fig. 36). The first correspondence is textual: The words that end the verses of Marriage’s “Song of Liberty” and appear just before the chorus, “Empire is no more! And now the lion & wolf shall cease” are repeated here with slight alterations as a final description of the morning after revolution. This connection between the two works promotes a new interpretative possibility for the figures of the king (as George III) and the fiery son (as America herself) in the Marriage’s “Song of Liberty”, enriching their already excessive potential and further highlighting the interaction between Blake’s works and their historical context. Recall, though, that textual inconsistencies in this song inherently problematise the idealism of the rising and revolutionary son. While this lingering doubt initially appears to contradict the idealistic textual portrayal of revolution in America, Damon supportively notes that the pictures in the composite pages of America already pessimistically “trace [...] the degeneration of the revolutionary ideals” implied by the text (Dictionary 21). While portions of Damon’s interpretation may be inaccurate or debatable, he importantly reconfirms the potential for visual images to sustain a contradictory potential in relation to textual perspectives within Blake’s work.⁹⁴

⁹⁴ Julia Rennert, in a somewhat cautious essay entitled “Narratives of Negativity: Blake’s Verbal and Pictorial Messages in America a Prophecy”, confirms this contradictory relationship through a close examination a number of America’s plates. Although she “reads” the elements of Blake’s visual art as if they were a subtext, her attention to detail and recognition of interart antagonism is a useful amplification of Damon’s premise.

The second correspondence between plate 6 of America and the Marriage is visual and, through a number of associations already introduced in the previous chapter, injects further doubt into the textual celebration of revolution. On plate 6, the naked figure atop a hill with his head upturned is initially recognisable as the figure associated with spiritual resurrection in the “Death’s Door” engraving for Blair’s Grave. Thus, even prior to its correlation with the Marriage, this image condenses political liberation and spiritual resurrection into a single figure, simultaneously politicising Blair’s text while adding a spiritual dimension to the actual political struggles that make up America. In the Marriage, recall that a similar figure appears on plate 21 atop a textual criticism of Swedenborg that describes him as a hypocritical radical who participates in the same type of ignorance as those he reacts against. Variations in the image between printings make it difficult to consistently interpret the figure in relation to the text, but its mere association with the critical portrait of Swedenborg is enough to taint the revolutionary (and, by association, spiritual) idealism presented in the text of America.⁹⁵

Perhaps what has allowed Blake’s work to exceed a contextual expiration date, in spite of its obvious historicity, is its composite ability to present an inclusive awareness beyond simple reflection or recreation through the maintenance of an excessive and concurrent signifying multiplicity that resists interpretative stability. As well, the creative displacement of contemporary particulars into defamiliarised and often inconclusive symbolical contexts, both visual and textual, encourages a perspectival distance from such particulars. While the textual promotion of freedom from restraint does, at times,

⁹⁵ Curiously, the designs on plate 8 of America and on plate 21 of the Marriage slightly differ in the placement of the skull and the clouds, preventing a direct or complete association between them. The result is an indefinite connection, a refracted echo rather than a conclusive equation between these images and their respective contexts.

verify a particular position in relation to the historical circumstances being addressed, Blake's creations still manage to practise what they preach in that the composite media's functional encouragement of indeterminacy prevents an idealist or dogmatic assertion of "freedom" as a specific political stance. In a manner better suited to the Marriage's suspicion of revolutionary circularity, it could be said that the composite excess of Blake's self-deconstructive creations dismantles a fixed subject position and avoids the recreation of a textually constructed or prescriptive subjectivity while continually encouraging interactive involvement. Indeed, when approached through these theoretical terms, the essential importance of the involvement of the visual image in Blake's composite work becomes much clearer. The disruption, distortion, amplification and multiplication of meaning that results from the dynamic and inconsistent relationship between visual art and text on the composite Blakean page evades generalisation and summary, and in doing so crucially maintains the "freedom" of both work and reader.

Such freedom is fortified by a decidedly anti-rationalist stance in both the form and content of Blake's works. As evidenced in the detailed examinations of specific plates from previous chapters, Blake's composite books promote and sometimes even demand a lateral, non-linear manner of exploration. In "The Fly", for example, the lack of coherence in the narrator's flawed rationale, amplified by discordant visual images, results in an absence of closure that challenges the very foundations of enlightenment reason. Recall also that a number of Songs, specifically in the treatment of their particular subjects (many of which are directly taken from the streets of late-eighteenth century London), contest the exclusivity of their own author's categories of Innocence and Experience. Stewart Crehan notes, however, that Blake's creative revolt is not "simply against rational analysis and the general laws of science... but against their social

consequences” (author’s emphasis, 46). Crehan’s observation is best illustrated by the accusations directed by Los toward the “Giants of Albion” on plate 91 of Jerusalem: “You accumulate Particulars, & murder by analyzing, that you may take the aggregate; & you call the aggregate Moral Law ... But General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every particular is a Man” (E 251). Los thus protests against the analytic and synthetic methodologies of a contemporary rationalism that reduces the individual into components that can be collectively generalised and controlled. This debasement of individualism is a necessary prerequisite for the establishment of restrictive control by dominant ideological forces. Indeed, Blake’s work often demonstrates, by rebelliously focusing on minute particulars as unique case studies, the extent to which this reduction of individualism within restrictive political, religious, aesthetic and economic spheres affects, channels and limits perception and imagination. Many of the Songs of Experience, including “The Garden of Love”, “Infant Sorrow”, “A Little Boy Lost”, “The School Boy”, “The Chimney Sweeper” exemplify such oppression.

A concurrent resistance to isolation, exclusivity and alienation often tempers the promotion of individuality found in Blake’s work (Crehan 71). Likely prompted by an increasing self-sufficiency in creative production that left Blake estranged from the formalisation and systematisation of the Royal Academy, isolated from his contemporaries and excluded from the possibility of social effectiveness, widespread fame or fortune during his lifetime, the composite works evidence a persistent tension between individual particulars and their interrelated multiplicity.⁹⁶ Supplementing this

⁹⁶ Crehan aptly notes that the Royal Academy, formed in 1768 to counter the 1760 creation of the Free Society of Artists (198), was the institutionalisation and incorporation of an exclusive group of artists under the king (200). As the artists of the Royal Academy mirrored the interests of the monarchy, unsympathetic artists risked being labelled as seditious traitors to the nation and the

tension is the fact that London, subject to revolutionary rumblings in the latter part of the eighteenth century and Napoleon's intent to invade at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was a city of suspicion and paranoia, or as David Erdman in Blake: Prophet Against Empire describes: a city "of gunpowder and panic" (365). It was also a time of rising taxes and prices, a loss of rights, child-labour, poverty, hunger, increasing crime, rioting and anti-English sentiment. Blake's composite work, often difficult to decipher because of inconsistent symbolic usage, obscure references, and incongruous visual imagery, observes and comments on many of these conditions, but employs the furtive caution of a creatively sympathetic mind in an anxious social context.⁹⁷ Worth specific mention is that the promotion of individualistic perception in Jerusalem is carefully asserted in the service of national resurrection.

These works represent more than merely a participation in and reaction to the social atmosphere of London at the turn of the century, however. They also contain the contradictions, the excessive particularity and the incessant currents of change that a poet

king. In such unstable times, to be an outcast from the Royal Academy was economically as well as politically dangerous. Blake's refusal to take membership in any society during his lifetime (his affiliation with the Swedenborgians was limited to attending a single meeting) extended to the Royal Academy, placing him in a precarious and ultimately segregated position. To be fair, however, his rejection with the organisation did revolve around their refusal to consider engravers on the same level as artists and writers.

⁹⁷ As Erdman notes, echoing opinions put forth in J. Bronowski's earlier book William Blake and the Age of Revolution, Blake writes sympathetically about the French Revolution in 1791 but never publishes this particular piece. After witnessing the ideals of revolution give way to the realities of counterrevolution, the Napoleonic wars, and the failed Peace of Amiens, Blake opts instead to "withdraw into an increasing isolation of obscure symbolism" (138-9). Bronowski aptly summarises this progression by suggesting that the world of the late eighteenth century and its revolutions first inspire Blake, then overwhelm him and urge him toward subtle expression (114). Indeed, counterrevolutionary persecution affects Blake directly in 1803. After a conflict outside his home in Felpham with a Dragoon named Private John Scofield, Blake is charged and brought to trial for sedition. Although acquitted, Blake becomes even further concerned with the creative concealment of his opinions.

of the city (Crehan 60) would encounter within the industrial urban experience. This dynamism fuels the aspirations of the individual voice that characterises Blake's unique composite artistry, but like the anonymous man who feels alone and isolated in the midst of a crowd, Blake's artistic expressions and excesses, while utilising many popular forms to individualised ends, remained largely unknown during his lifetime. Although this anonymity was appropriate camouflage in times of revolutionary paranoia, it remained a continuous source of frustration for Blake. Ironically, he is partially responsible for this isolation, which is fuelled by the increasingly esoteric character of his cautiously composed composites, his persistent individualism and by the desire to be free of repressive publishing conventions and dealers.⁹⁸ Blake's privately produced and distributed creations, which were exclusively neither art nor text and created in such a way to both facilitate reproduction and preserve the unique aura of the original work of art, were expensive luxuries shunned by consumers who expected either original art that possessed Royal Academy certification or mass-produced and affordable texts. Thus, both the material history and the composite content of Blake's works chronicle the collision and continuous negotiation between a collective local reality and an individual exotic imagination.

Blake's antagonistic relationship with the Royal Academy and other commercial mediators is worth highlighting here, not only to provide further illustration for the above argument, but also to demonstrate how similar Blake and his mercantile nemeses actually are, albeit on different scales. In an effort to remedy an English school of painting that had fallen far behind those of England's European neighbours, the Royal Academy

⁹⁸ Interestingly, Blake's dilemma seems to have no solution: His individualism causes him to reject the anonymity of patronage (especially following his service to Hayley), but also leads him

promoted the improvement of a progressive national style through education, systematisation and formalisation, appealing to a number of continental sources as its foundation, including Vasari's progressive canon of Florentine painters (Eaves Counter-Arts 19-21). This was an attempt to free artistic commerce from the restrictions of private patronage and its demand for portraiture, and to encourage a return to history painting and nationalist projects. As Morris Eaves notes in The Counter-Arts Conspiracy, the English School of painting, established by the Royal Academy, was economic in motivation, historical in form and openly prospective in its vantage (23). It was not the only attempt to enhance the reputation of English painting, however. Efforts such as John Boydell's 1789 Shakespeare Gallery, which inspired many imitators, were entrepreneurial efforts at profitable patronage that promoted historical art and patriotism in the service of private commercial interests. The Shakespeare Gallery also made effective use of the sister arts analogy in its effort to link English painting with the reputability of English poetry (41-44). In combination then, the Royal Academy, which produced a supply of painters and paintings, along with efforts like the Shakespeare Gallery, which made use of this supply and created a necessary demand for history painting by marketing themselves as public services that promoted education, nationalism and the advancement of the arts, created a cyclical economy and contributed to the concurrent rise of history painting and artistic commercialism in eighteenth century England (47-49). The growth of such commercialism was further assisted by Boydell's attempt, following Hogarth's example, to popularise engravings, prints and subscriptions to such reproductions.

It must be noted, though, that Boydell's Shakespeare Gallery was an eventual commercial failure, for the inefficiency of artistic manufacture clashed with time

toward the anonymity of creative solitude.

constraints, changes in public taste and the economic uncertainty of revolutionary times (57-8). In an unsuccessful effort to counter this financial and temporal pressure, Boydell relied less on skill and technique, introducing innovative engraving techniques that were more expedient and efficient. Blake reacted against such “innovation”, characterising this development of technical skills as reflective of the Royal Academy’s reliance on technique over imagination. Indeed, compositional “innovation” in the service of artistic commerce had already affected literary circles, as is evident by the reaction against “Grub Street” hacks earlier in the century.

Although Boydell’s efforts to encourage the arts and provide a market for engravers were applauded by some (64), his failure provided fuel for anticommercialist voices (90-93). In some ways, the commercial efforts to popularise English art both encouraged and undermined the efforts to resurrect a qualitative English School. Interestingly, much of this hostility toward the division of labour between patrons and artists, a feeling shared by Blake, was voiced by members of the Royal Academy such as John Landseer and Martin Shee. Thus, despite the late eighteenth-century rise of the British Institution that promoted art in the service of counterrevolutionary nationalism and initiated a shift away from merchant patrons and “academic-internationalist commercial projects” toward a form of state patronage (83-4), emerging romanticist notions of individualised, independent and anti-academic production were gaining a much more popular foothold.

In some ways, the changing face of English art and its marriage with new commercial enterprises was a blessing for artists like Blake, whose reaction to being subjected to Hayley’s whims at Felpham demonstrates the frustration that many artists experienced under the conditions of patronage. Yet, to Blake, the shift from

individualised authority through institutionalised systematisation to national patronage must have seemed as successful as the French revolution's replacement of Bourbon with Bonaparte. As well, entrepreneurial mediation such as Boydell's was yet another interruption between an artist and his public (72-3). Perhaps Blake's reaction to these various intermediaries would have been slightly diluted had they enabled his own successes. As it was, though, his exclusion from the Shakespeare Gallery, likely assisted by his individualist and anti-institutionalist antagonism toward the Royal Academy, left him undervalued and underemployed in an already difficult economic period.

Blake's artistic style idiosyncratically blends classical and Florentine methods of representing the human form, largely ignoring perspective while highlighting and challenging the ability of figures to communicate through a set of conventional gestures. While this style does appeal to acceptable artistic traditions and trends of his day, the particular use of such representative techniques in the service of expressive imagination is unique and certainly not exclusively in keeping with either the formalised and systematic prescriptions of Royal Academy expectation or the natural and sensual authority of an emerging Romanticism. Just as the content of Blake's works creatively showcases the porous interpenetration of apparent contraries, Blake's artistic style resists the authorities of reason and nature with an appeal to imaginative interplay. The precision of the artistic and textual line, along with the energy of variously imaginative and creative juxtapositions of media challenges mimetic subservience promoted by either institutionalised artistic instruction or sensory attunement to one's natural surroundings. In addition, Blake's inclusive method of production, a form of relief etching that integrates the reproducibility of the engraver's craft with the spontaneity of the artist's brushstroke, prevents full recognition by either practice. Interestingly, however, Blake's

variations on traditional methods are in keeping with the progressive model of art upon which the Royal Academy was founded.⁹⁹ Indirectly, then, Blake's practice and his subsequent antagonism to the English School reveals a contradiction between the Royal Academy's own restrictive prescriptions and their stated principles of openness and adaptability. Although the Royal Academy was initially meant as a educational catalyst for the revival of the English School's reputability, in practice, it was (judged by Romantic criteria) an exclusive institution that encouraged imitative education at the expense of imaginative creation. Curiously, these same technical concerns were the reasons that engraving was considered a 'craft' and remained unrecognised by the Academy. Blake's art, involving the reproducibility of engraving and the creativity of painting, simultaneously imitates and imagines the image while exploring its relation to the word in an excessive variety of design. In addition to this distinct utilisation of traditional styles, Blake's work often maintains a religious focus and considers the history of the imagination in a fallen world, further distinguishing his composite art from the markedly secular landscapes, history paintings and portraits of the traditional English school. As Eaves suggests, then, a mixture of traditional influence and individualist opposition causes contemporary issues surrounding religion, art, history and science to coalesce in Blake's art, which is itself already an integration of visual images and text (133).

⁹⁹ A closer comparison between Blake and the Royal Academy reveals that Blake's notion of progress is actually an effort to return to a state of innovative artistic production that precedes technical prescription and commercial concerns (Eaves 232-37). In practice, though, Blake's idealism is employed, not in the service of regression, but in the resurrection of qualitative creative practices within the existing eighteenth-century context of quantitative consumerism. The Royal Academy, on the other hand, providing an institutional solution to a commercial problem (96), favours innovation that streamlines the process of production, increasing the quantity and economic viability of English art.

This model of integration can be extended toward an understanding of Blake's creative relationship to his social context and establishes a bridge between his particular aesthetic practice and contemporary cultural conditions. Indeed, despite the often-noted distinction between Blake and the individual, merchant and national patrons of the arts in eighteenth-century England, to portray Blake as a prototype of the isolated and alienated Romantic creator is to ignore fundamental correspondences between this artist and his commercial and institutional context. Blake's move toward self-contained creation, manufacture, exhibition and distribution necessitates the same individualism and isolated production upon which private patronage is based. As well, his innovative and entrepreneurial spirit, his preference for a type of engraving that produces creative, but marketable reproductions, and his engagement with the Sister Arts tradition put him on par with the mercantile interests of John Boydell and the Shakespeare Gallery. Indeed, Blake's artistic involvement with the Gray, Blair and Young projects, along with his various designs for the works of Milton, Spenser and Chaucer display a similar desire to associate English art with its highly reputable sister. Such interart associations also convey some of Blake's nationalistic pride and concern, which become much more explicit in Jerusalem's artistic and spiritual call for national resurrection. This artistic nationalism does connect him with the counterrevolutionary and propagandistic efforts of the British Institution, although one stops short of suggesting that Blake's creative productions support England's counterrevolutionary war. Evidencing both nationalism and revolutionary sympathy in his work, then, Blake again contains a combination of contradictions that promotes a concurrent association with incongruous perspectives.

Blake's similarity yet resistance to various forms of patronage and commercial innovation continues such contradiction, but also calls attention to a useful

feature of Blake's continuing involvement with and utilisation of contraries. Against Bronowski's suggestion that Blake shifted his concerns from social to individual mental liberation (Bronowski 122-23), Erdman notes that Blake's call for the individual does not completely neglect the community. Rather, Blake promotes a union of individualism and communalism, a "juxtaposition of collective plurals with first-person singulars" (Erdman Prophet 175). This juxtaposition is evident in the inherent overlap between Blake's methods and strategies and those of various forms of patronage. Indeed, even the failure of Blake's solitary experiment in facilitating his own artistic commercial success can be considered as one more unsuccessful strategy in the commercialisation of art in late eighteenth-century England and provides another correspondence with the commercialist groups that he reacts against.¹⁰⁰ However, individualistic practices and an explicit attitude of resistance differentiate and isolate Blake overall from this commercial collective. Blake's unification of individualism with community extends further than his common ground with patrons, promoters and propagandists, however. In a rather bold attempt to circumvent the perceived restrictions introduced by the business of art on a private, institutional and national level, Blake elects as his patron the English public itself, whom he directly addresses in his Descriptive Catalogue. As Erdman observes, Blake has

¹⁰⁰ Blake is not exclusively concerned about commercial success. His independence as an artist and producer necessitates his involvement with both aesthetic and monetary concerns. This amplifies his recognition of the mutual antagonism between the two and results in a periodic oscillation between emphases in his writing. Indeed, though his efforts to bypass traditional channels of artistic commerce necessitated an exclusive involvement in the production and distribution of his own composites, Blake condemns the union of commerce and art as being detrimental to the imaginative potential of both English art and its audience. However, this relationship is not one that can be completely severed. In the Laocoön, a composite page that still manages to evade categorisation and definitive interpretation, money is directly opposed to art. However, as the composite form of the page emphasises, while these two contraries may be opposed, a simple textual statement is not enough to successfully secure their segregation. Rather, the opposition merely calls attention to their inevitable proximity.

faith in a capable audience and sees the public as the artist's salvation in a commercialist climate (Prophet 163). Although his public did let him down overall, as poor sales of his composite works reveal the difficulty of individually competing with larger channels of distribution, Blake's appeal to a mass audience extends the idealistic union between individualism and community mentioned above. Curiously, indirect presentation coexists with direct production and distribution, suggesting that this artist prefers to challenge his audience without interference from commercial interests or institutional prescription.

It is not enough, however, simply to consider Blake and his works in relation to the artistic community, industry and consumers of his time. His composite works, composed of both graphic art and text, also intersect with a community of writing traditions and expectations. William Richey, in Blake's Altering Aesthetic, primarily focuses on Blake's writing in his examination of the author's changing responses to classicism over the years. Richey initially suggests that Blake's neo-classical training accounts for the early tendency toward simplicity, primitivism, revolution and politicised discourse in his writing (5-6). In this way, Blake's early writing is characterised as a product of the conditions and expectations of his time, championing classicism to combat perceived conditions of economic, spiritual and creative repression (4).¹⁰¹ After Milton,

¹⁰¹ In a useful comparison between Blake's art and Burkean notions of the sublime, Richey importantly notes that Blake's celebration of and primary reliance on the human form as well as the well-lit and well-lined nature of his early aesthetic substantially opposes the darkness, obscurity, terror and human insignificance favoured by Burke (40). Richey goes on to define Blake's sublime as "humanistic" and "sentimental" in that it looks to the past for heroic ideals to emulate (44). Although Blake's work does manage to approach sublimity in a number of different ways, challenging the exclusivity of Burke's definition, Richey neglects to consider that Blake's altering aesthetic approaches and conjures the sublime by often incorporating some of Burke's notions and by utilising a creative vision rather than retroactive imitation. As well, it is difficult to locate any type of idealistic heroism in Blake's work, let alone classical heroism, for the perceptual excesses encouraged by composite interaction and representational inconstancy prevents a simple evaluation of Blake's characters and their actions. An alternative view of Blake's encounter with the Burkean sublime is found in Vincent De Luca's "Blake and the Two

however, Richey proposes that Blake turns against this same influence, “believing it to be the primary source of his society’s problems” (7). This counters the argument advanced by both Frye and Eaves that Blake’s work maintains a consistent aesthetic throughout. According to Richey’s examination of The Four Zoas, and Milton, Blake becomes disillusioned with revolution, contestatory politics and the divisive individualism and rivalry of classical heroism. Vala reveals a man turning to reformation, co-operation and charity (92-100) and in Milton, Richey finds an author both confessing and confronting the dangers of classicism (114). These dangers include didacticism, restrictive rationalistic moralism, the promotion of hierarchical structure, and the stealing, perversion, reduction and degradation of influential vision into recycled memory (142, 146-7, 160). The end result is that

whereas the neo-classical bard creates unity by subordinating all the specific features of his text to the moral lesson that he seeks to teach his largely passive audience, Blake seeks unity, oneness with his reader by abandoning all pretence to moral superiority and welcoming his readers into the minute particulars of the text they will mutually create. (147)

Richey’s assumption that Blake’s aesthetic is temporally dynamic accounts for much of the contradiction and complexity that persists if one considers Blake’s composite works as a whole. As well, Richey’s observations on the use of minute textual particulars in Blake’s work parallels some of the arguments made regarding his composites in previous chapters. However, the argument that the antagonism to classicism within

Sublimes”. De Luca recognises that although Blake’s work offers a criticism of Burke’s theoretical notions, Blake openly admires literary embodiments of this “cloudy sublime” (95). This conflict between respect and criticism is preserved within Blake’s own work through the employment of a prophetic biblical style, by creating “clear, yet difficult” texts (100) that redefine sublimity as grandeur borne from “minute precision” (93), and which instigate “a sort of blinding produced by an overdeterminate clarity of presence” (101, author’s emphasis). This view of the

Blake's work becomes exclusively contestatory and reformatory (150) in later works remains problematically adherent to classical models of antagonism and rivalry. Perhaps Richey attempts to disable this possibility with the suggestion that the reformatory efforts found within Blake's work continue to consider and include classical characteristics, if only to demonstrate their inadequacy. Still, a reformatory strategy is one that refracts the original model, that progressively alters an original based on an ideal of betterment. Such practices seem more suitable to the above definitions of classicist practice than to the anti-classicism that Richey attributes to Blake's later work.

Similarly, when one examines the details of the Marriage and of many of the Songs, earlier works that should display a classical bias according to Richey, it becomes quite evident that the "dangers" of classicism identified above are questioned even in these works. As well, it has already been suggested that the apparently "simple" songs are not simple at all, but are points in a complex interrelation that maintains contradiction within unity and individualism within community. The Marriage, too, presents apparently simple pieces that accumulate into a puzzling collection, overflowing the innocent clarity of its own language with an excess of concurrent and composite particularity. Locating anti-classicism in Blake's early works and classicist predisposition in both Blake's later work and in the structure of Richey's argument itself thus undermines the view that Blake's work progresses from simple, didactic exposition to complex, enabling integration. While it may be true that the appearance and complexity of Blake's works alter with each new composite experiment, the persistence of complexity and multiplicity throughout Blake's corpus and the cumulative richness of

Blakean sublime as a product of the "distinct line and formal clarity" is contemporaneously supported by Morris Eaves in William Blake's Theory of Art (Eaves 41).

their interaction that increases in density with each new addition voids the exclusive tidiness of Richey's claim of progression and his intentionalist assumptions. This theoretical limitation can be linked, perhaps, to Richey's focus on Blake's language and his reluctance to test whether this developmental paradigm still applies when considering the composite dynamic of Blake's multi-media work. It may be that Richey's criticism is influenced by the inherently progressive and linear characteristics of the textual medium that he both uses and analyses. Despite the resistance to such properties within Blake's work, Richey's reductive and progressive portrait of Blakean aesthetics synthetically overlooks coexisting contraries that are maintained in the form and content of Blake's creative composites.

Although Richey's argument is formulated to counter earlier claims made by Northrop Frye and Morris Eaves that Blake demonstrates a consistent aesthetic, the inclusiveness of these critics' arguments seem more suited to Blakean aspirations, as defined by Richey, than Richey's own thesis. Frye's Fearful Symmetry, which celebrates the imaginative character of Blake's composites, persists as one of the most involved and ambitious studies of Blake's work. Frye suggests that Blake's art is recreative and suggestive, is "the incorporation of the greatest possible imaginative effort in the clearest and most accurate form" (85, 87, 91). He is also one of the first critics to carefully examine the lack of distinction between conception and execution in Blake's creative process, an observation that has proven crucial to many succeeding studies of Blake, including those of Joseph Viscomi (93). While Frye's work remains an important resource, his conception of Blake's theory of art is arrived at through a careful correlation between Blake's own statements and his creative output. In fact, Frye's initial understanding of Blake's work in Fearful Symmetry appears to be based entirely on

Blake's own notes and commentary. While this appeal to artistic authority does produce some valuable insight, it also invests Blake with complete agency in the production and critical reception of his visual art. Oddly, the intentionalist foundation so relied on initially is then critically questioned (but never conclusively overturned) by Frye in the very next chapter of his study, which examines Blake's artistic views. In an effort to justify a Blakean poem as a perfect unity in the tradition of new critical practice, Frye notes that "it is a blunder to limit the meaning of art to what the artist may be presumed to have intended" and that a poet "is often a bad critic of his own work and is capable of saying inadequate or misleading things about it" (112). Ironically, Frye's claims are based on Blake's own commentary regarding the inadequacy of some of Wordsworth's poetic prefaces. Fearful Symmetry thus unintentionally embodies an inherent contradiction and emulates its subject all too well by using statements made by Blake as both an interpretative guide and as a caution against this very practice. The difficulty caused by such a contradiction is further compounded by Frye's consideration of Blake's work within a purely abstract universe of literary, religious and philosophical relation. Historical factors and influences, so important in later critical evaluations of Blake's aesthetic, are conspicuously absent here. Further, Frye's understanding of the relation between visual art and text in Blake's work remains uncertain. Although he segregates his investigations of Blake's visual images and Blake's use of language to different chapters, he uses the general term "art" when making statements about each media form, suggesting that statements such as the one quoted above may be applicable to both. More specifically, Frye defines Blake's visual art as relying on clear lines, detail and control to convey organic, imaginative and individualised vision (102, 104-106), while also characterising language overall as "the storm-center of meanings, sounds and

associations, radiating out indefinitely like the ripples of a pool” (114). Although Frye stops short from explicitly suggesting that Blake’s media similarly utilise specificity to achieve an excess of indefinite, inclusive meaning-potential, his definitions of each hint at such unity. Frye makes no attempt to explore the collision of visual art and text on Blake’s composite page, instead providing authoritative interpretations of Blake’s “storm-center” language as well as specific “readings” of visual images reprinted at the end of the book. Indeed, in a preface to the Beacon Press edition of Fearful Symmetry, Frye indicates that “If I were to write [this book] again, I should probably write a more conventional book, more concerned with the reader’s superficial difficulties with the text and designs, less concerned with recreating Blake’s thought and attitude in my own words”. Although enthusiasm and respect generate the hope that Frye’s imagined rewriting would engage more fully with the very difficulty generated by the combination of text and visual image, his wording hints that such “superficial” difficulty would easily be remedied by the provision of more authoritative interpretation. While the inconsistencies and gaps in Frye’s investigation do not completely negate the value of his contribution, they do suggest that, like Richey’s study, this keystone of Blakean criticism avoids fundamental questions of form and function and thus provides only a partial account of a much broader vision of the aesthetic nature of Blake’s difficult work.

Morris Eaves’ Blake’s Theory of Art adds yet another line to this increasingly complex picture, locating Blake’s expressions between the poles of enlightenment and romantic notions. He aptly notes that Blake’s unique aesthetic involves characteristics from each pole, such as the preference of mind over nature (which associates him with academic art and classical aesthetics) and the replacement of mimetic assumptions with expressive practices (which aligns him with romantic principles) (Theory 4-10). Eaves,

somewhat indebted to Frye's earlier study, goes on to suggest that Blake's individual aesthetic is characterised by a reliance on imagination, an imaginative establishment of individual identity that progressively integrates these contraries of intellect and expression, overcoming historical tradition (27, 32). In doing so, Eaves is careful to distinguish Blake's distinct individuality from what he perceives as the collective and prescriptive attributes of both enlightenment and romantic practices. His argument, then, presents Blake's aesthetic as a conglomeration of opposing and clearly defined social paradigms on an individual and imaginative level. However, while this inclusive model describes Blake's complex engagement with a variety of concurrent, late-eighteenth century ideas, Eaves seems intent on defining Blake's expressed identity and self-development as being isolated from or at very least, tangential to the effects of public forces. He does so in order to support the remainder of his argument, which equates Blake with his creations and thus attributes a direct, interpersonal quality to the relationship between author and reader.¹⁰² Although this insular construction is quite different from Richey's model of linear progression in that Eaves promotes Blake as one who possesses complete agency and intentionalism in the creation of a consistent aesthetic, it is as equally problematic. Indeed, Eaves' model is merely another form of synthetic progression in which a self-defined individual creatively emerges from and leaves behind a collision of coexisting social contraries. Although Eaves, like Frye, recognises the consistent complexity and distinctiveness of Blake's work, neither the creator or his creations are as tidily mapped, as synthetically reduced or as imaginatively isolated as Eaves would like us to believe. Blake's work is much more than the isolated,

¹⁰² Eaves' argument here could easily provide further justification for the intimacy of Frye's critical interaction with Blake.

internal expressions of a thinker who has forged a unique tangent to tradition; it is the ever-shifting product of a continual negotiation and constantly varying relationship between an individual and his social context.

The current examination of media interaction in Blake's composite art suggests a portrait of Blake as artist that shares some of the characteristics defined by Richey, Eaves and Frye, yet denies the exclusivity of each of the above and, importantly, considers the creator's vision as just one factor among many which contribute to the composite difficulty of Blake's work. Indeed, when considered simultaneously, the perpendicularity of the above critical perspectives approximates the maintenance of inconsistency and contraries that exist within Blake's own composites. The functions and effects of Blake's composite works, when considered alongside the history of their production, suggest an openness established through anti-systematic principles, a inclusive juxtaposition without harmony discordantly amplified through many scales. At all levels, Blake's work combines the influence of historical and existing conventions with an innovative utilisation of emerging notions. This employment and reconfiguration of social resources and paradigms demonstrates an individualism that remains integrated within and dependent on communal interaction. Thus, in the same way that neither medium maintains exclusive control or dominance in Blake's composite designs while both remain necessary in the production of a complexity that exceeds the sum of the designs' intentions and parts, Blake's work also relies on the continued and various interaction between tradition and innovation, between an indefinite content and an ever-shifting context, between individual imagination and social reception. The lingering irony is that Blake's lack of critical acclaim and commercial success during his lifetime significantly interrupts the universality of this parallelism, isolating his individualism and limiting the

effectiveness of his communicative participation in the artistic and political concerns of his day. Yet, just as the words of Gray, Blair and Young are challenged by the Blakean image, it is perhaps this contemporary isolation and exclusion which increasingly encourages the extremity of innovation that characterises the composite works and facilitates their persistent dynamic.

Despite this promotion of integrated individuality and persistent contrariety, Blake's work is not the only signpost of dissent in late eighteenth-century England. However, whereas canonical 'Romanticism' as embodied in the emerging Lake school or the sensibility movement was turning away from the machinations of mankind and attempting to clarify perception by appealing directly to instinct and nature, asserting themselves in opposition to inherited perceptions, Blake retained an antiquarian awareness, remained in the city, created and populated a personalised and parallel universe, and further complicated his own perceptions of this universe by utilising a novel recombination of mediated forms.¹⁰³ As this study has repeatedly demonstrated, Blakean excess is not a result of meticulously planned and intended inclusion. Rather, the particular configuration of visual art and text, and the functional effects of this combination on the respective representations of each medium are the catalysts for a multivalent, inclusive complexity. Although Blake is historically associated with reactionaries and rebels, and his writing is often seeded with political discontent, he does not fully author the disruptive functional ability of his creations. Rather, he merely, yet

¹⁰³ It is useful to note that the simplicity promoted by the language of Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads* linguistically follows Reynolds' call for expressive clarity and sensory perceptiveness in English art. Although Romantic individualism opposes Reynolds' preferences for uniformity, universalist generalisation and imitation, this partial overlap suggests a thread of continuity between these creative attempts at innovation in a period of artistic reaction,

significantly, mixes the reagents. The products of his imaginative insubordination remain unique for and beyond their time, particularly because their stated resistance involves and is amplified by the interactions of the visual image and the text that make up the composite form. There is, then, a politic inherent in the aesthetic relations enabled by the juxtapositions within Blake's work that may or may not necessarily parallel those of their creator, but which consistently echo the unrest of the age.

Understanding the inherently political nature of the interaction between visual art and text within the composite design and exploring such political capacity in relation to the works' late eighteenth-century social context will not only reconnect the current argument with its initial, formal concerns, but will also integrate these earlier considerations with the current characterisation of Blake's work as a largely unintended functional dynamic that inherently participates in and reflects its contemporary social climate.

Mitchell, in his book *Iconology*, asks the important question: "What is at stake in marking off or erasing the differences between images and words?" (1), and in asking this question, notes that every theoretical answer inevitably falls "back into prior questions of value and interest that could only be answered in historical terms" (3). Thus, the historicisation and politicisation of aesthetic concerns raised in the first few chapters of this study will provide the contextual perspective necessary to further comprehend the inherent difficulty of Blake's work and the motivations behind the numerous and conflicting critical positions that surround such work.

recombination and experimentation. Indeed, Blake and the Romantic poets all differently attempted to escape the tyranny of certain syntactic and semantic structures (Paulson 48).

Interestingly, Mitchell suggests that the enlightenment conception of the graphic image as a transparent window through which reality is perfectly represented to the understanding has been complicated by its subsequent equation with language. More accurately, perhaps, the modern, Derridean reconception of language as an enigmatic and deceptive system and the recent notion that graphic images must be understood as a kind of language has complicated the enlightenment idea of visual representation. Mitchell suggests that “images are now regarded as the sort of sign that presents a deceptive appearance of naturalness and transparency concealing an opaque, distorting, arbitrary mechanism of representation, a process of ideological mystification” (8). The irony of Mitchell’s commentary, given the scope of the present study, is that the functional ability of graphic art in Blake’s composites allows it to achieve the above complexity without being equated with language or suspected of deception. Indeed, Blake’s composites manage to interrupt standard models of representation and mechanisms of perception without prescribing or establishing new conventions. Further, most appeals to the “image-as-language” paradigm, especially in the critical history of Blake study, have been part of an effort to formalise the versatile image in preparation for a reductive interpretative reading. Interestingly, reductive interpretative reading, an almost outmoded approach to language in contemporary critical theory, persists in the study of the visual image, perhaps because of a presupposition of transparency and representative accuracy encouraged by photographic or cinematic conventions.

Mitchell goes on to suggest that

the history of culture is in part the story of a protracted struggle between pictorial and linguistic signs, each claiming for itself certain proprietary rights on a ‘nature’ to which it only has access. At some moments this struggle seems to settle into a relationship between free exchange along open borders; at other

times (as in Lessing's *Laocoon*) the borders are closed and a separate peace is declared. (43)

Mitchell does recognise, as I have suggested elsewhere in this study, that Lessing's "mutual respect of borders turns out to be an imperialist design for absorption by the more dominant, expansive art" of poetry (107). Against this general theoretical threat and the specific lack of influential or representative graphic artistry worthy of international markets, organised efforts were made to resurrect the commercial reputation of the pictorial arts in England in the late eighteenth century. However, this effort led to an institutionalisation of the visual arts that was not only exclusive, regarding engraving as a mere craft, but also in the standardisation of economical and efficient techniques of representation and reproduction. While official efforts thus participated in a level of definition, categorisation and dominance similar to the way in which Lessing imposed his rational aesthetic "laws" on the exclusive capabilities of poetry and painting, Blake's reactive and revolutionary composite works violated such laws. In Blake's work, graphic images and textual expressions are not directed toward an accurate representation of nature and thus circumvent the "struggle" for dominance that Mitchell chronicles. In addition, Blake's proficiency in both media and the innovative printing methods that allow him to take advantage of both talents works against the antagonism and division perpetuated by larger political and commercial interests in the arts.

Although effectively challenging inherent distinctions between the arts and thus questioning much of eighteenth century aesthetic theory with their versatile employment of inter-affective pictorial and textual expression, Blake's composites still manage to

assert the possibility of difference.¹⁰⁴ That is, although they avoid the exclusive “compulsion to conceive of the relation between words and images in political terms, as a struggle for territory, a contest of rival ideologies” they also avoid a “peaceful settlement under the terms of some all-embracing theory of signs” (43-44). This returns us to the aptness of the simultaneous sameness and difference at the heart of the metaphor of “marriage” from chapter 1. Indeed, as The Marriage of Heaven and Hell has demonstrated both in the form and content of its pages, the non-synthetic joining of “contraries” produces a controlled excess of possible interpretation, “too much” to be unproblematically reduced or simplified to a single vector (thus revealing the conventional nature of much interpretation), but just “enough” (often produced by the always-shifting interauthoritative play of confirmation and contradiction between distinct media) to avoid a nihilistic abandonment of meaningfulness.

Further, as a descriptor for the relationship and exchange between the arts on the composite page, “marriage” avoids the extreme (and still politically combative) equation of the arts via common linguistic principles. The current study has tried to avoid essentialising either textual or pictorial representation, revealing the various functional

¹⁰⁴ Such difference avoids systematisation in that Blake’s use of media on the composite page is not consistent. Indeed, in this regard, Blake’s composite dynamic provides a unique retort to the Derridean concept of différance. Blakean contraries, a categorisation that includes the media on Blake’s composite pages, are not fundamental oppositions, but are sites of interrelation and difference. Meaning emerges and resubmerges back into the flood of possibility within these pages (in a manner similar to Gray’s Selima) and thus consistent and definite perceptions of difference and opposition are quite difficult to sustain between this composite use of graphic art and text. In other words, both the form and content of Blake’s composite pages do not require an inevitable return to a systematic or exclusively meaningful perspective, thus avoiding the dependence on a logocentric systematisation of signification. While the search for potential systems in the form and content of Blake’s work has been the topic of much study and much contradiction, it has been unfortunately encouraged by the literal application of statements such as Los’ “I must Create a System, or be enslav’d by another Mans” (E 153). What many critics fail to acknowledge is that even Blake’s creative mythology, of which Los is a part, is itself inconsistent and contradictory when compared across his works.

potentials of these media through a close study of a number of composite examples rather than approaching Blake's work with a pre-defined conception of their inherent qualities or relationship. This does not mean to suggest that the Lessing's oppositional prescription or the view that both of these media behave like a language are somehow wrong. However, the assertion of these perspectives as overarching paradigms is a limited and limiting exercise, as Mitchell has suggested. In the dynamic space of the Blakean page, such conceptualisations remain possibilities in the larger functional capability of each medium. Thus the form and content of Blake's pages echo an uncertain historical context, in which various systems (aesthetic, religious, and political) were being simultaneously questioned, combined, overthrown and erected. Blake's composite art amplifies the creativity and possibility inherent in this uncertainty, framing it within the boundaries of the page and preserving it, even as the promise of revolutionary change was giving way to a new generation of systems.

One must be careful not to elevate Blake to the status of a fully conscious producer of innovative methods, designs and ideas. If anything, he is a frustrated artist who, sometimes unsuccessfully, tries to co-ordinate the desires of his individual creativity, the demands of his media and the restraints of his particular social context. More revealing and critically viable than establishing authorial intention or using such a perspective to evaluate the variable success of Blake's creative negotiation is the current focus on the functional effects of Blake's particular media combinations on communicative potential. Such a focus circumvents efforts at interpretative translation and relies less on the possibility of intentional genius than it does on the consequences of material design within a particular threshold of expectation or moment of history. Although Blake experienced a lack of success in his own time, his works encourage a

questioning of traditional limitation by revealing the limits of systematic thought, encouraging pluralistic perception and evading restriction. As Blake suggests in a letter of Aug 23, 1799 to Reverend John Trussler, “The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too explicit as the fittest for instruction because it rouses the faculties to act” (E 702). Blake’s works do not create a total or closed system, but demonstrate the insufficiency of totalising systems by revealing the participation of such systems in a broader field of perception in which contraries remain unresolved. The intentionalism of such an effect is not important. What is important is its functional cause, a shifting and variable configuration of two media in the same space that simultaneously undermine and support each other while evading systematisation. Equally important to the understanding of the effects of Blake’s particular form of media integration is its parallelism with the social and historical conditions that facilitate it.

Over the last number of years, critical examinations of Blake’s historical context have shunned the reductive and overly generalised nomenclature that neatly divides “Neo-classic” from “Romantic” perceptions and practices. Indeed, the current study would betray a fundamental hypocrisy if it were to employ such abstraction in a foundational way. However, while the richness, diversity and multiplicity of Blake’s historical context is unarguable, it is impossible to ignore that in the midst of the eighteenth-century’s dynamic trends and transformations, in the midst of industrial and social revolutions, an older perceptual system was simultaneously giving way and evolving, being both rejected and incorporated by new paradigms of thought and perception. Impacted by such perceptual transition, Blake’s works, which contain, reflect and refract the complication and contradiction of his age, appear keenly perceptive to our own fragmented times. This creative output, enriched by media interaction on the

difficult composite page, straddles and emulates irresolvable contextual contraries, attaining complexity and diversity on a variety of levels rather than embodying synthetic annihilation or exclusive association.

Conclusion: Energy is Eternal Delight

Exuberance is Beauty

*-William Blake, from The
Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Simply arguing that Blake's composite designs are points of convergence for a number of irresolvable and conflictual significations is not enough and certainly nothing new. What is distinct to this argument is that I have refused to exclusively apply the paradigm of textuality to Blake's visual images and have examined the various examples of these composite designs, not as an amalgamation of innocently straightforward signification, but as married contraries that avoid and challenge textual perspectivism, exclusion and hierarchy by playfully supporting multiple and often contradictory meanings within and between works. In Blake's artistic additions to the poetry of others, the graphic images function primarily against an employment of written language as the communicative instrument of exclusive, limited and limiting reason, but do so by unpredictably and often concurrently echoing and distorting the textual statement rather than merely opposing or negating it. To illustrate through the employment of a mathematical metaphor: the multiplication of a positive and a negative variable produces a negative result and the addition of a negative variable to a positive one ultimately results in a reduction of the original variable, at times to the point of completely negating it. However, both the inherent nature and specific employment of Blake's visual images prevent them from functioning in a purely negative or antithetical manner to proximate textual assertions. They maintain an indefinite and inconsistent relation to the written text and the composite result is neither a reduction nor a negation, but the production of an difficult and complicated excess of variability that resists single solutions. The contradictory multiplicity that overfills Blake's composite pages cannot be resolved by a dialectic progression and does not blur into a synthetic repetition of perspectival limitation.

In Blake's composites, both the written word and the visual image engage in an interactive variability in which each medium effectively disrupts the potential consistency of its "sister". In addition, the excess produced by these irresolvable marriages on the composite page is enhanced by the network of cross-referencing that occurs between different plates of a work and between different works themselves. I have not located the end result of this composite dynamic entirely in authorial intentionality, but have instead suggested that the Blakean composite page performs a historically appropriate resistance to enlightenment reasoning and analytics. Blake's work is not only a democratic art that echoes the late eighteenth century's spirit of change and renewal, but also a composite art, in which form, content, production and distribution are asserted against political, technological, religious and economic empires and systems of the day. Indeed, there is a parallel between the resistant character of some of Blake's textual assertions and the functional effects of media combination that nicely unifies form, content and function in these composites. But this harmony is not entirely tidy or consistently maintained.

James Mulvihill, in a comparison between the cumulative effect of Blake's textual excesses and the self-conscious criticism of the Frankfurt School, notes that Blake's work evidences what Habermas calls a "totalizing, self-referential critique". This manner of criticism, which turns against reason "as the foundation of its own analysis", is clearly present throughout the complexities and inconsistencies of Blake's creations (598). Mulvihill is aware, however, that "where resistance must always be conceived relative to something else [...] it is not possible to oppose without constructing" (617). Thus, just as Blake engages in alternative methods of creation and production to protect his own "genius" from the machinations of artistic economy, Los, in Jerusalem, builds Golgonooza, creating his own system to avoid being "enslav'd by another Mans"

(Jerusalem Plate 10, E 153). The lingering problem with this, though, is that if systems enslave, then critical revolutions or reformations, even ones that question reason itself and do so on an individual scale, will only lead to new forms of subjection. Answering this, Mulvihill finds that Blake's texts replace "the overarching unity of progressive argumentation" with epigrammatic tendencies, repetition and the "jarring disruptions of aphoristic insight" (619). While this argument accounts for some of the ways in which Blake's text resists its own rational tendencies, the current study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the manifestation of such resistance in Blake's multi-media arena. Extending Mulvihill's observations, then, what rescues Blake's composites from this unintended participation in the processes that they critique, is the particular engagement between text and visual art along with the functional effects of their composite form. As mentioned throughout the previous chapters, the non-linguistic nature of Blake's visual images problematises the persistent structure of an already resistant use of language. In addition, the effects of an inconsistent ratio of composite proximity, such as interart interruption, distorted repetition, cumulative excess, and indefiniteness maintained through unresolved contradiction, prevent the completion of any alternative system that Blake, his characters or his media attempt to create. In other words, the concurrent use of multiple media in Blake's case "unfinishes" his work, exploding a co-ordinated wholeness with a continual interpolation of enough or too much contrariness. What is left is a paratactic conglomeration of particulars on many scales, each of which is "at once a whole in itself and part of an immanently emerging whole of many such particulars, all resisting the reifying power of abstraction" (619).

This study emerged from an initial dissatisfaction with the ways in which the visual image has been critically perceived and interpreted. Indeed, my own attitude was

one of resistance, not only against the linguistic appropriation of the image, but also initially against the use of Blake's work as a potential challenge to such appropriation. Initially believing Blake's composite work to involve an overly simplistic and traditional employment of poetic text and graphic illustration, the understanding of which had been unnecessarily complicated by excessive critical scrutiny, I soon discovered that the excess was located in the work itself and that much of the critical response to Blake was partial. However, my initial scepticism towards Blake's work provided a useful contrary to many existing critical perspectives and resulted in an honest reconsideration and understanding of my subject. Having said this, I acknowledge that Blake's experiments with composite art are incredibly varied, and this study has only begun to re-examine the role and results of such media interaction in Blake's composite art. However, what I hope to have accomplished in the preceding pages is a reconsideration of many preconceived notions surrounding Blake's work and, as such, this project is an invitation to continue the study of Blake's composite designs with an increased attention paid to the complex multi-media dynamic of Blake's whole page, not just to the text or to an interpretative "reading" of the images. The persistent fascination shown toward Blake's work attests to the excesses and indefinite energies that remain to be discovered and integrated. The recent availability of the invaluable images collected in the constantly growing and freely accessible on-line Blake Archive, which allows scholars all over the world to instantly compare multiple copies of Blake's work that could only be previously accessed with an extensive travel budget and impressive credentials, will hopefully extend this fascination and provoke further interest and comment on the composite nature of his creations.

Appendix



Fig. 1. "The Pindaric Genius receiving his Lyre" from William Blake's "Ode on the Spring" designs; rpt. in Irene Talyer, *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) Plate 1.



Fig. 2. "Gray writing his Poems" from William Blake's "Ode on the Spring" designs; rpt. in Irene Tayer, Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) Plate 2.



Fig. 3. "The Purple Year awakening from the Roots of Nature" from William Blake's "Ode on the Spring" designs; rpt. in Irene Talyer, *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) Plate 3.



Fig. 4. "Midst the tide [...]" from William Blake's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" designs; rpt. in Irene Tayer, *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) Plate 1.

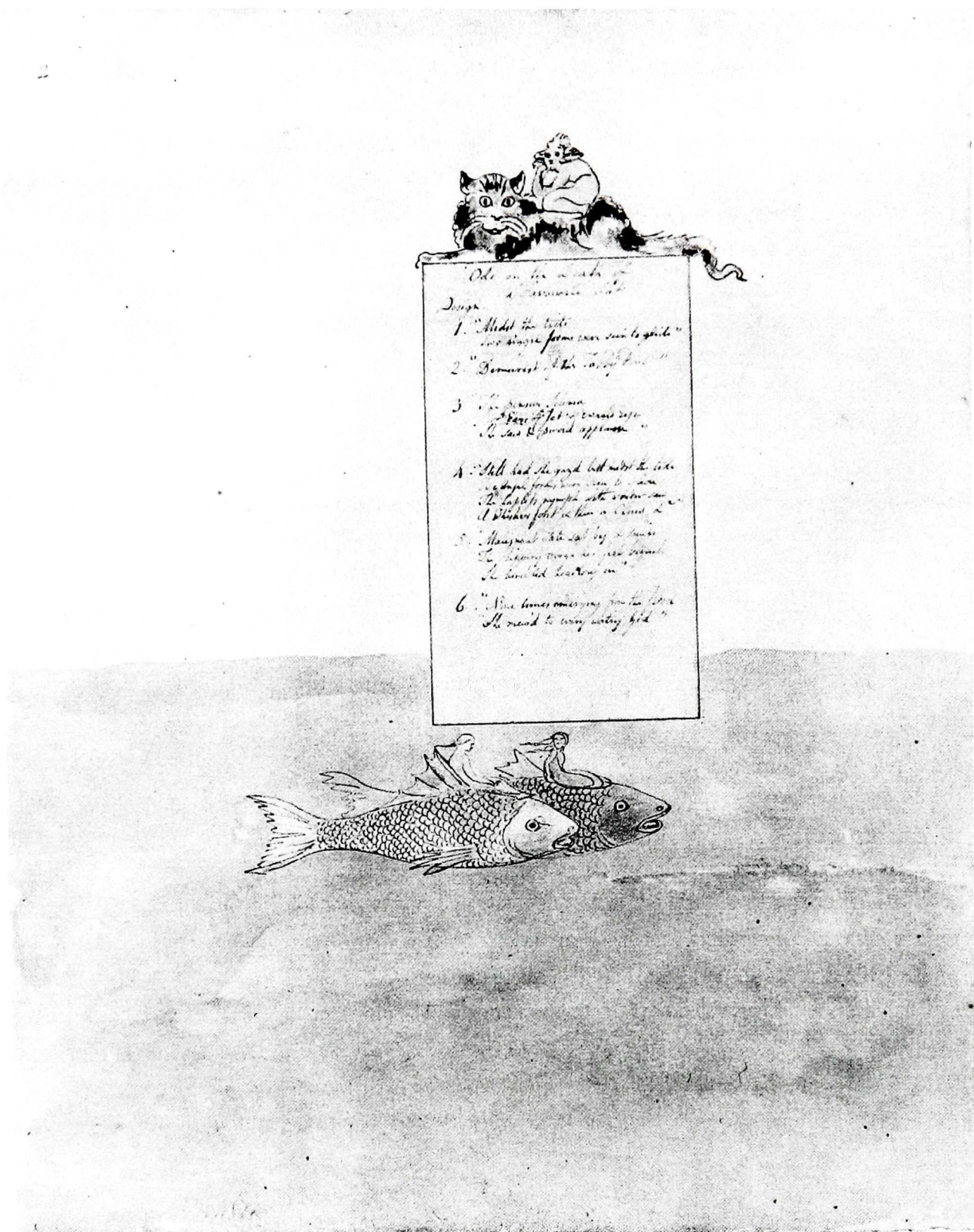


Fig. 5. "Demurest of the Tabby Kind" from William Blake's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" designs; rpt. in Irene Talyer, Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) Plate 2.

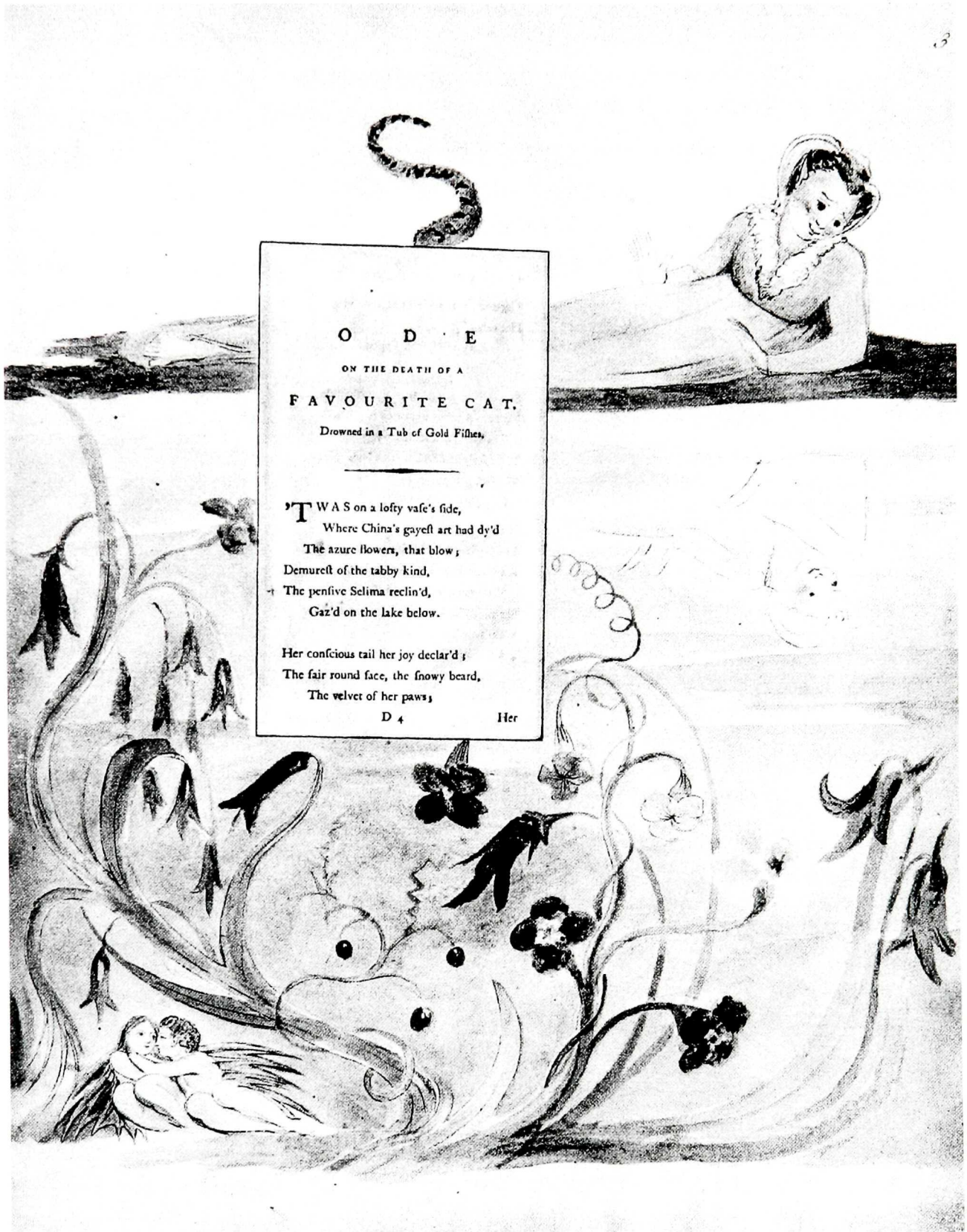
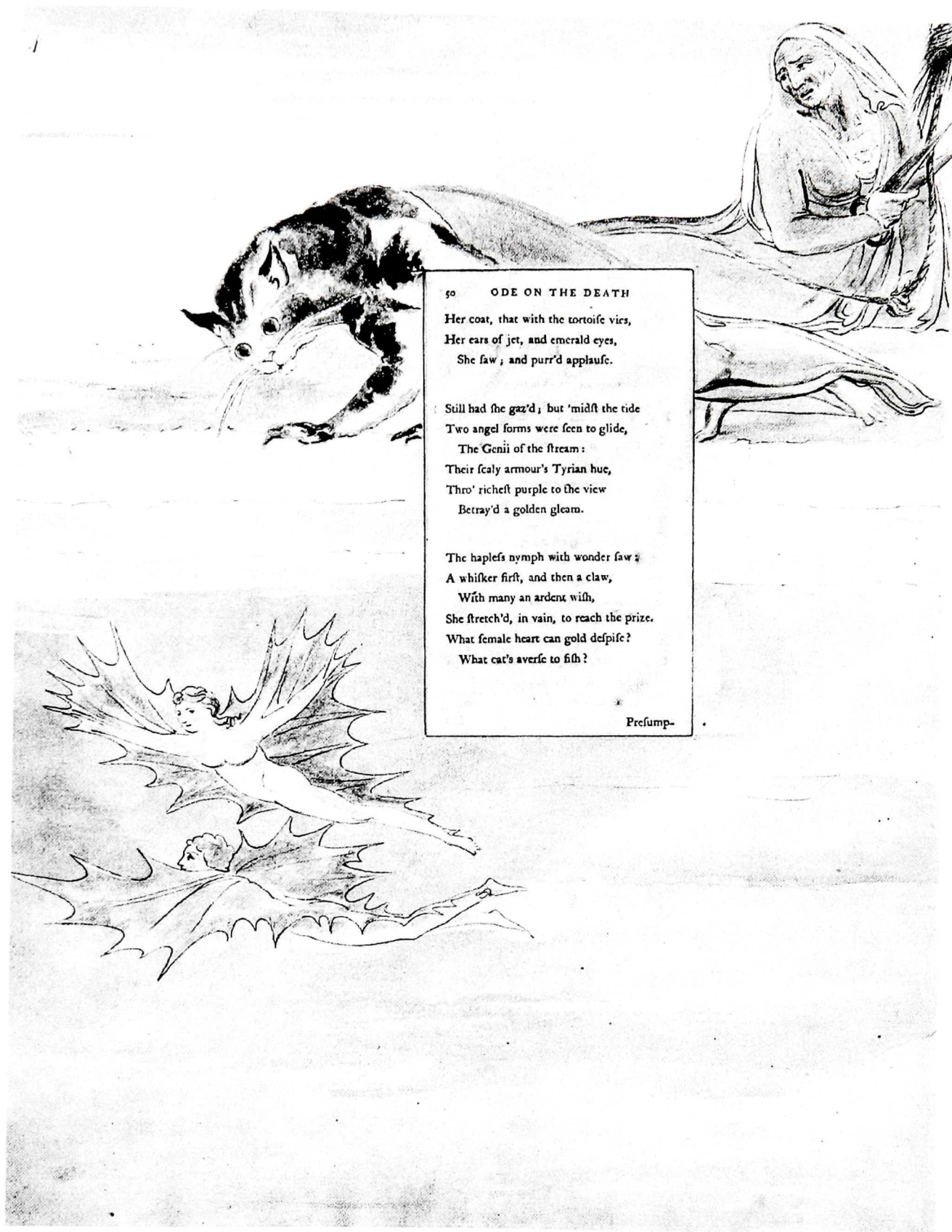


Fig. 6. "The pensive Selima [...]" from William Blake's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" designs; rpt. in Irene Tayer, *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) Plate 3.



50 ODE ON THE DEATH

Her coat, that with the tortoise vies,
Her ears of jet, and emerald eyes,
She saw; and purr'd applause.

Still had she gaz'd; but 'midst the tide
Two angel forms were seen to glide,
The Genii of the stream:
Their scaly armour's Tyrian hue,
Thro' richest purple to the view
Betray'd a golden gleam.

The hapless nymph with wonder saw;
A whisker first, and then a claw,
With many an ardent wish,
She stretch'd, in vain, to reach the prize.
What female heart can gold despise?
What cat's averrè to fish?

Presump-

Fig. 7. "Still had she gaz'd but midst the tide [...]" from William Blake's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" designs; rpt. in Irene Tayer, *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) Plate 4.

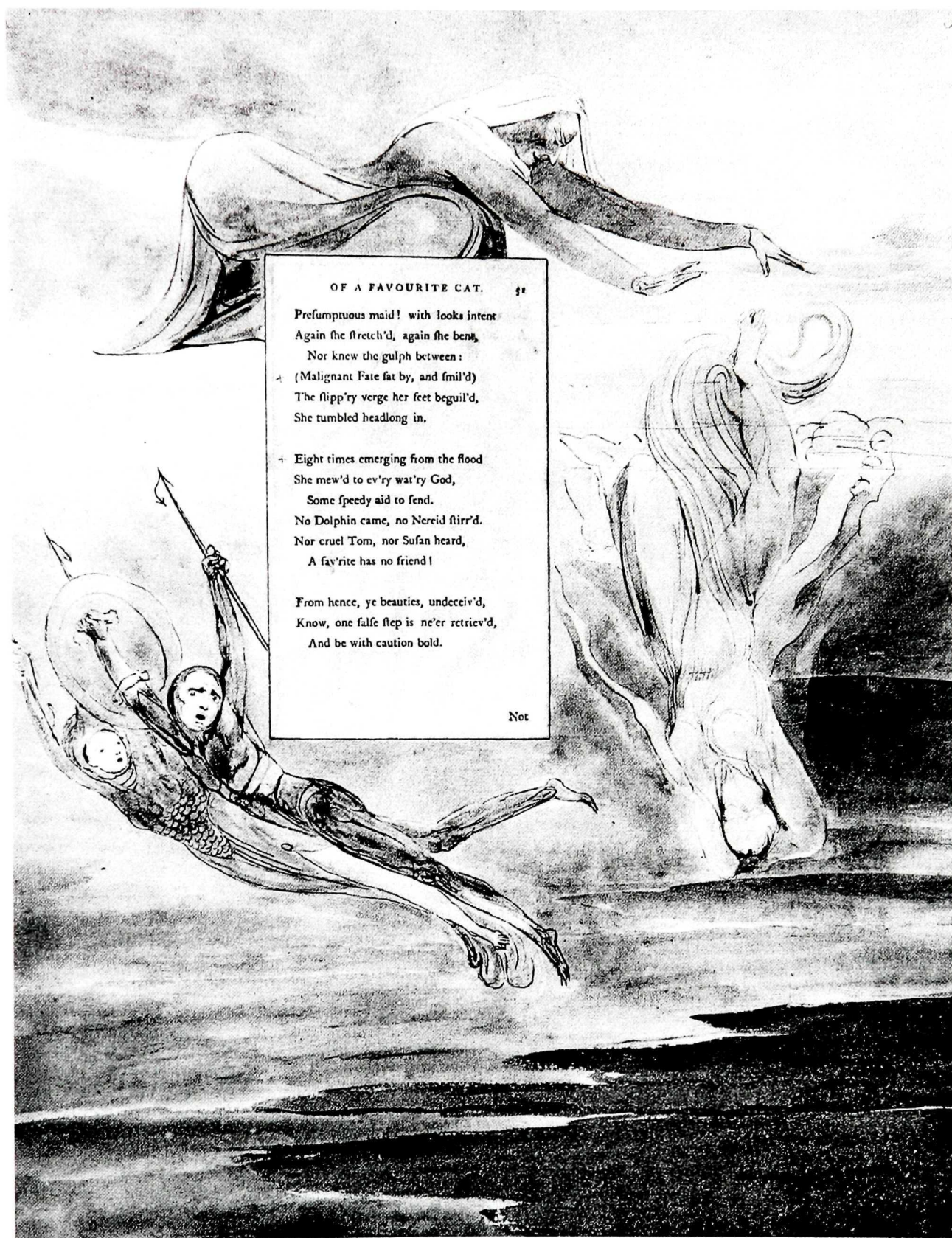


Fig. 8. "Malignant Fate sat by and smild [...]" from William Blake's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" designs; rpt. in Irene Tayer, *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 1971) Plate 5.

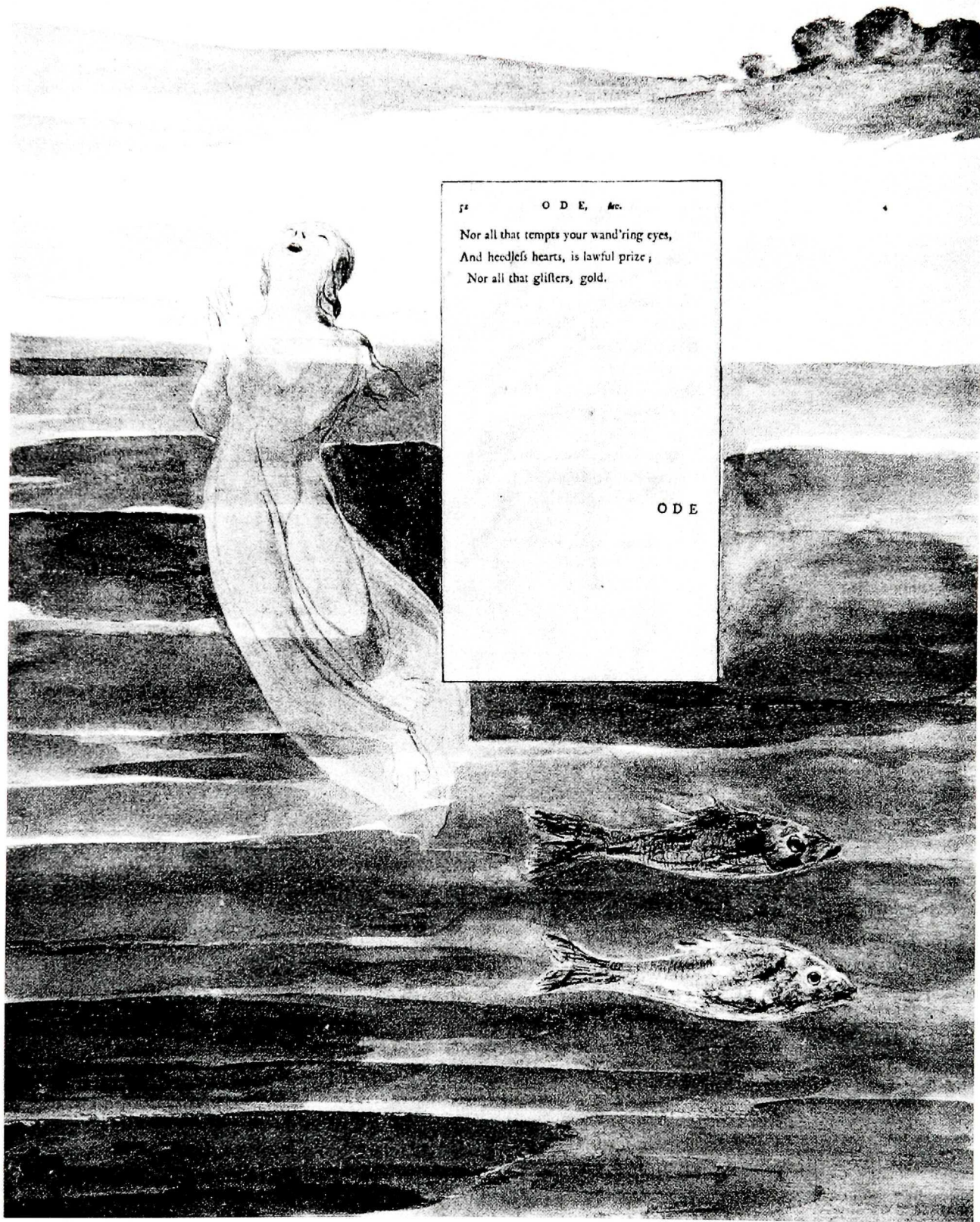


Fig. 9. "Nine times emerging from the flood [...]" from William Blake's "Ode on the Death of a Favourite Cat" designs; rpt. in Irene Tayer, *Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray* (Princeton, Princeton UP, 1971) Plate 6.

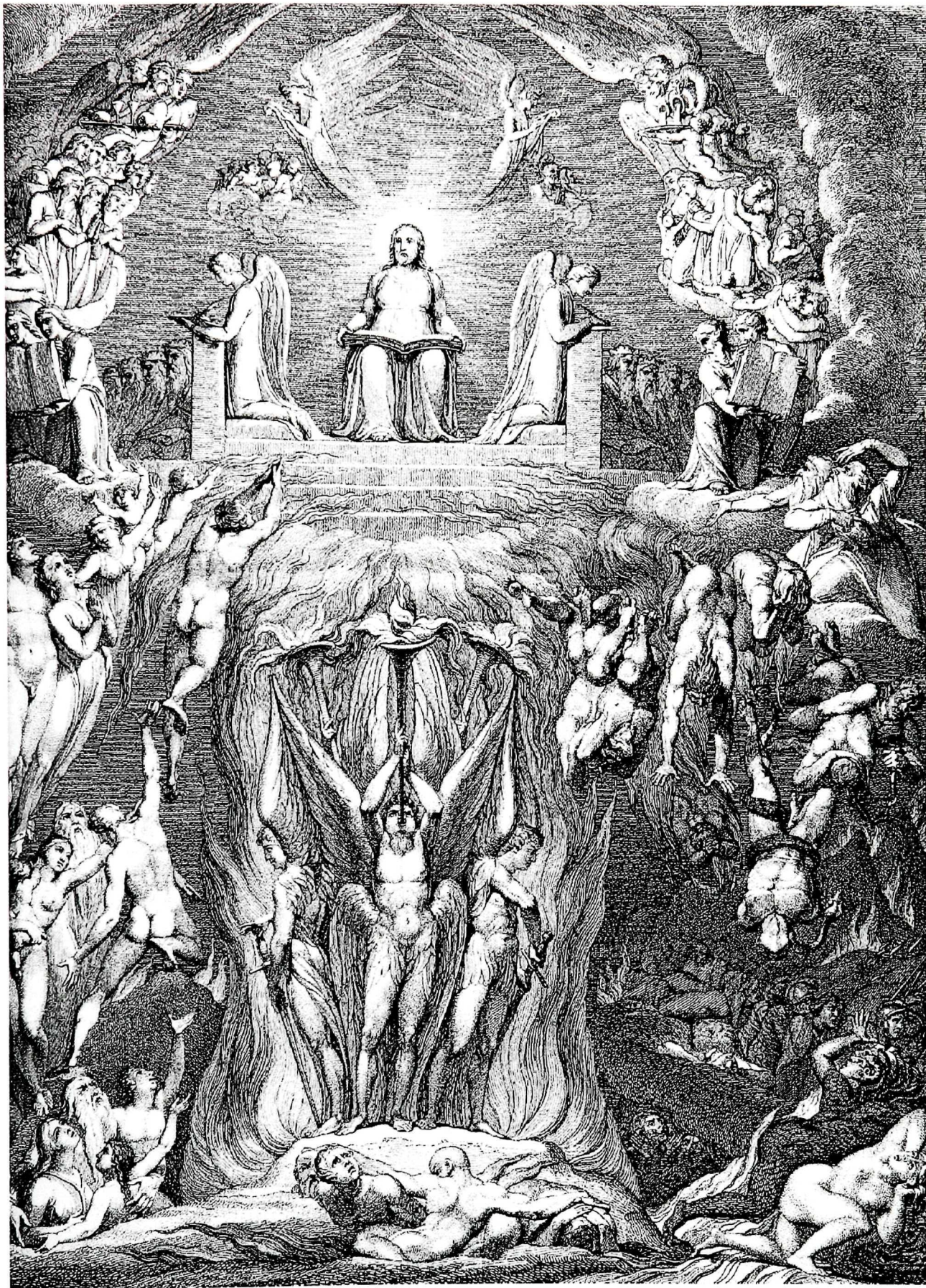


Fig. 10. "The Day of Judgement" from William Blake, Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Grave (London, 1808); rpt. in Samuel Foster Damon, Blake's Grave (Providence: Brown UP, 1963).



Fig. 11. "The Reunion of the Soul and the Body" from William Blake, Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Grave (London, 1808); rpt. in Samuel Foster Damon, Blake's Grave (Providence: Brown UP, 1963).

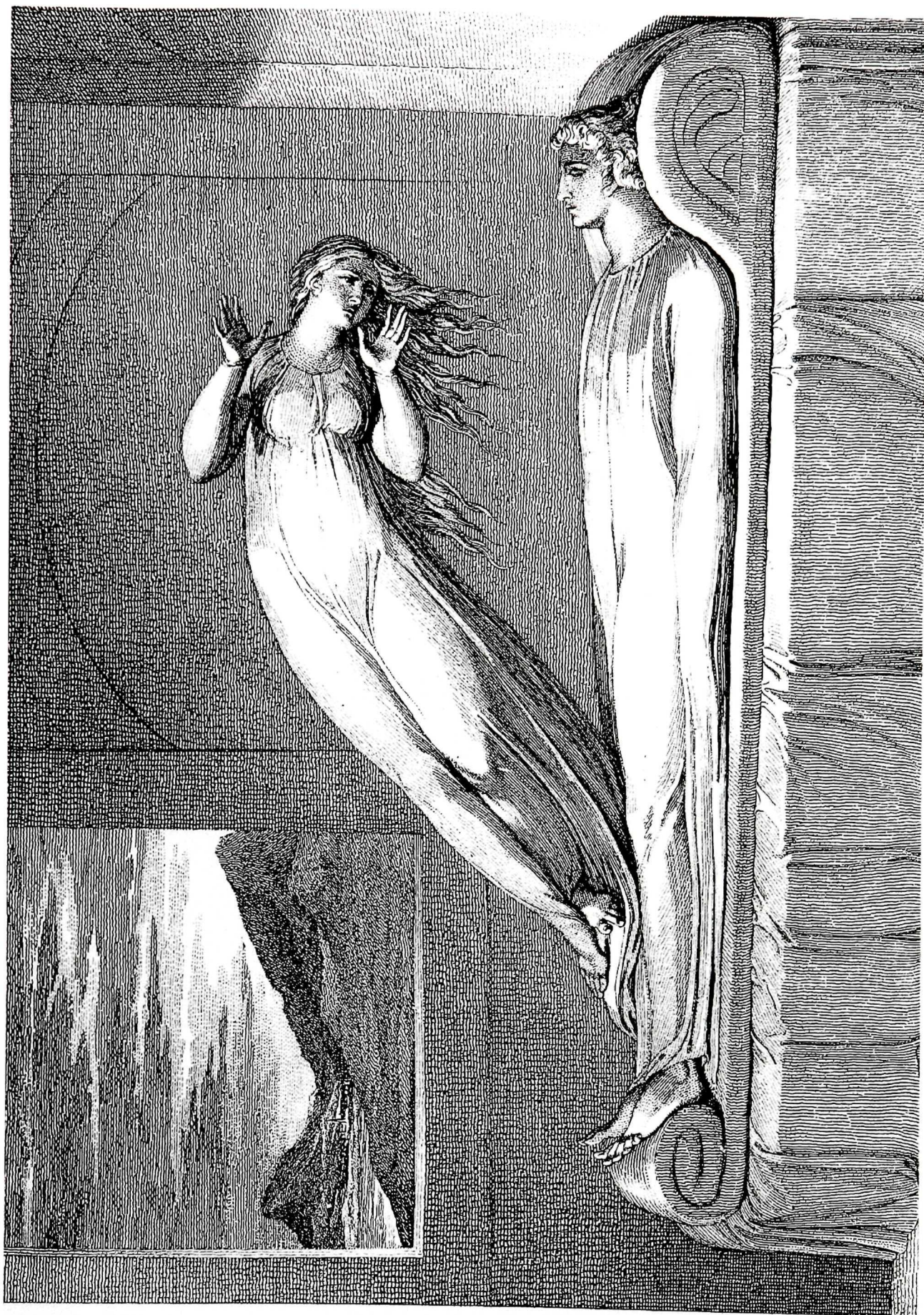


Fig. 12. "The Soul Hovering over the Body reluctantly parting with Life" from William Blake, *Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Grave* (London, 1808); rpt. in Samuel Foster Damon, *Blake's Grave* (Providence: Brown UP, 1963).

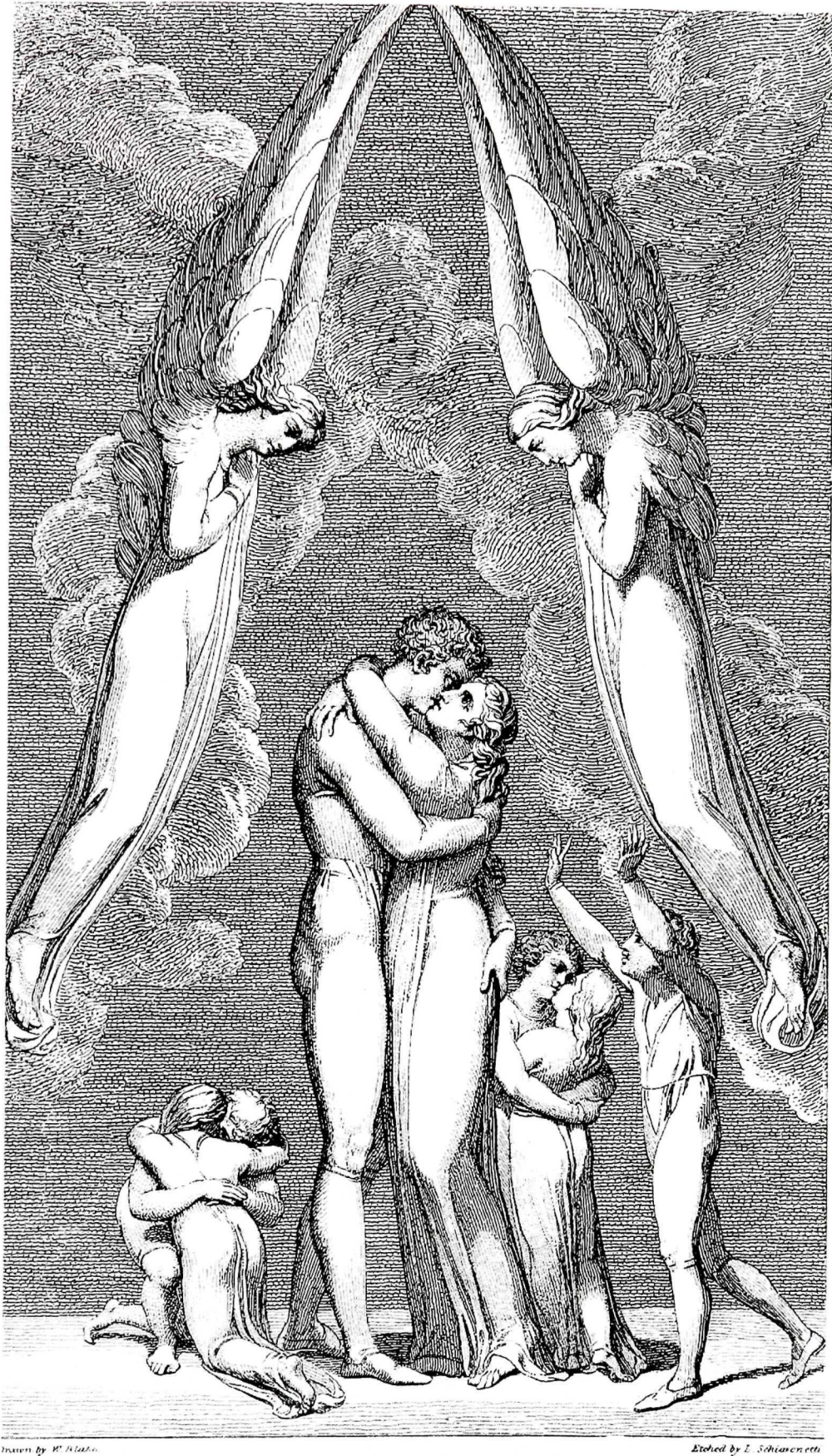


Fig. 13. "The meeting of a Family in Heaven" from William Blake, *Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Grave* (London, 1808); rpt. in Samuel Foster Damon, *Blake's Grave* (Providence: Brown UP, 1963).

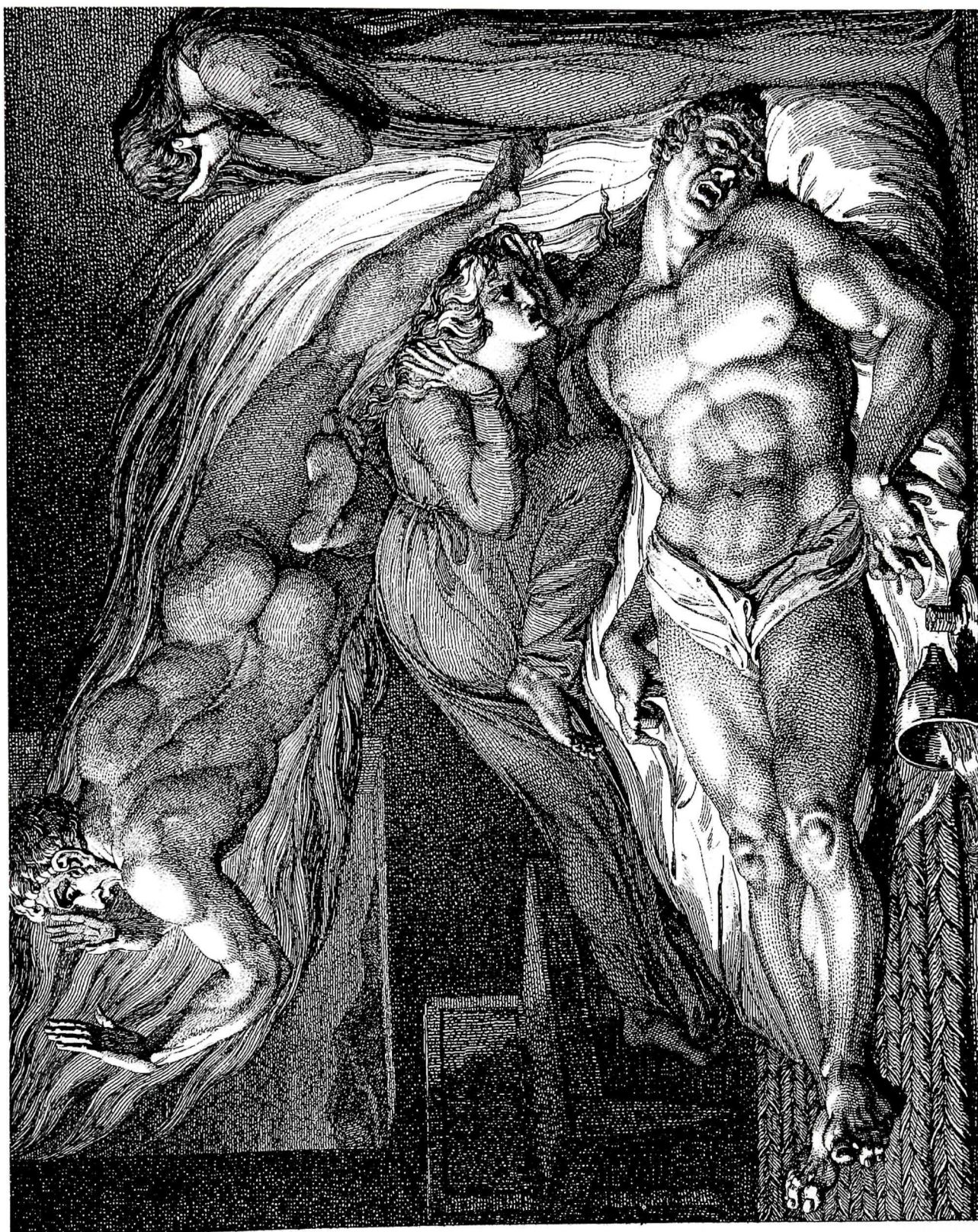


Fig. 14. "Death of the Strong Wicked Man" from William Blake, Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Grave (London, 1808); rpt. in Samuel Foster Damon, Blake's Grave (Providence: Brown UP, 1963).

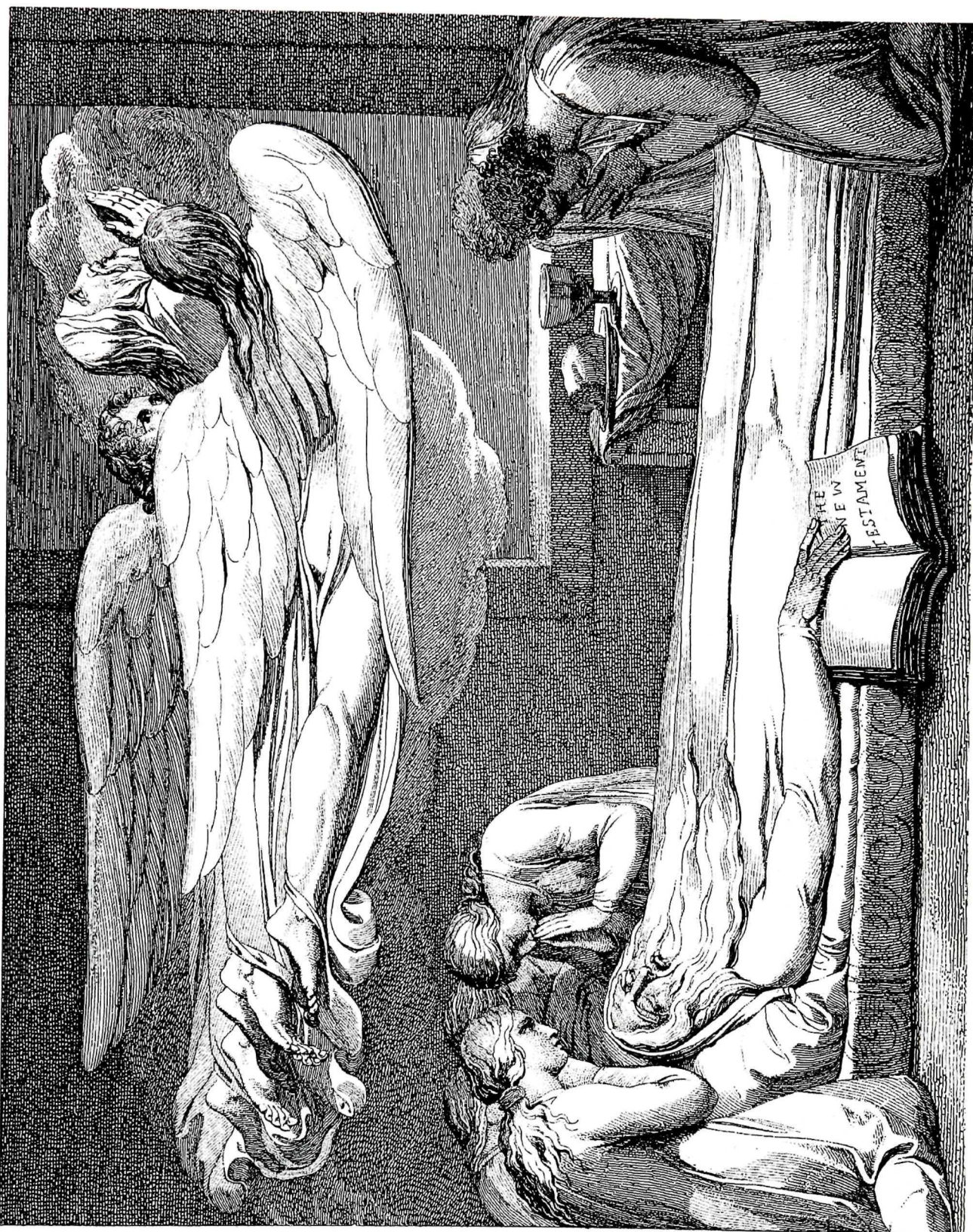


Fig. 15. "The Death of the Good Old Man" from William Blake, Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Grave (London, 1808); rpt. in Samuel Foster Damon, Blake's Grave (Providence: Brown UP, 1963).

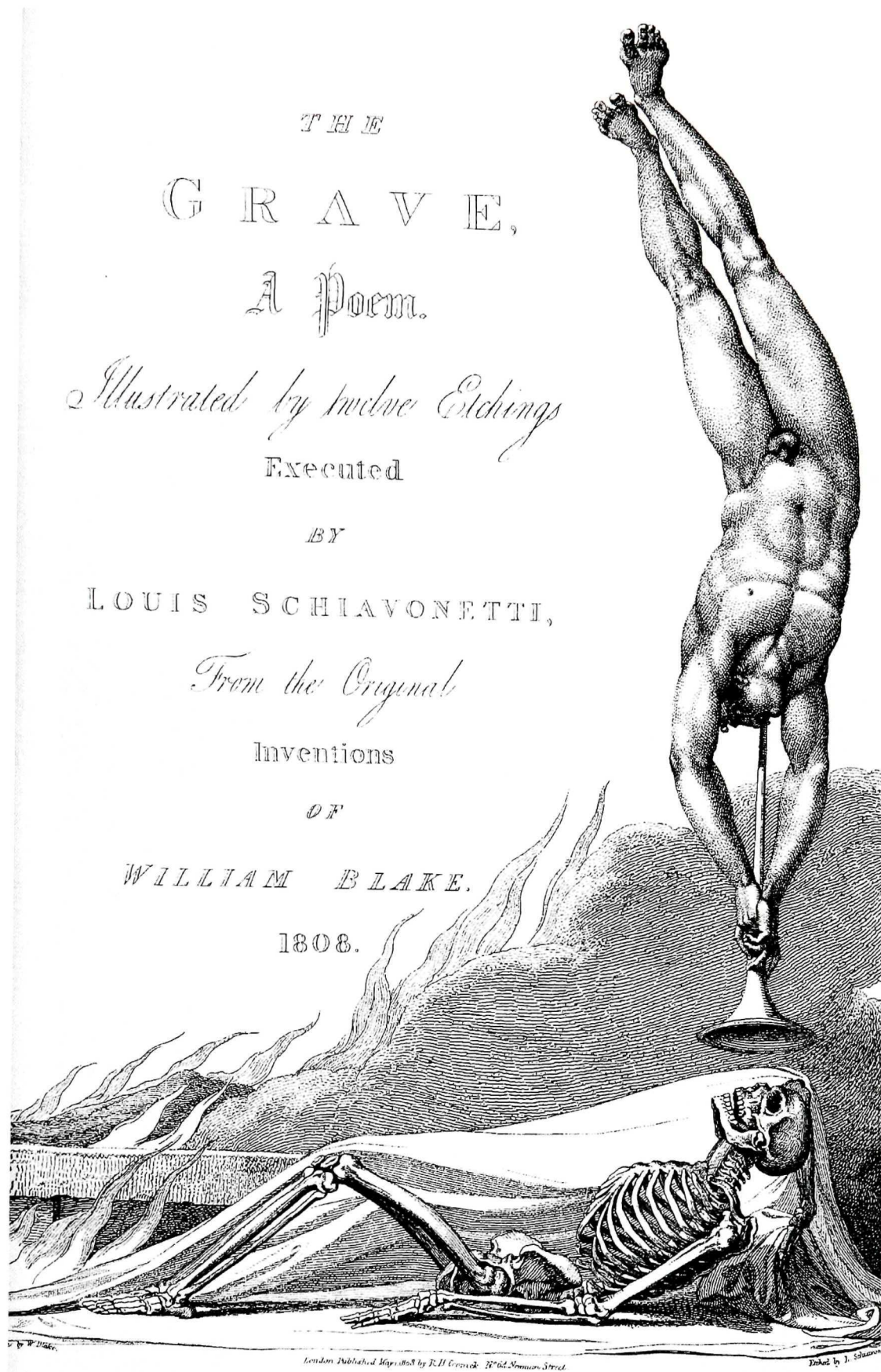
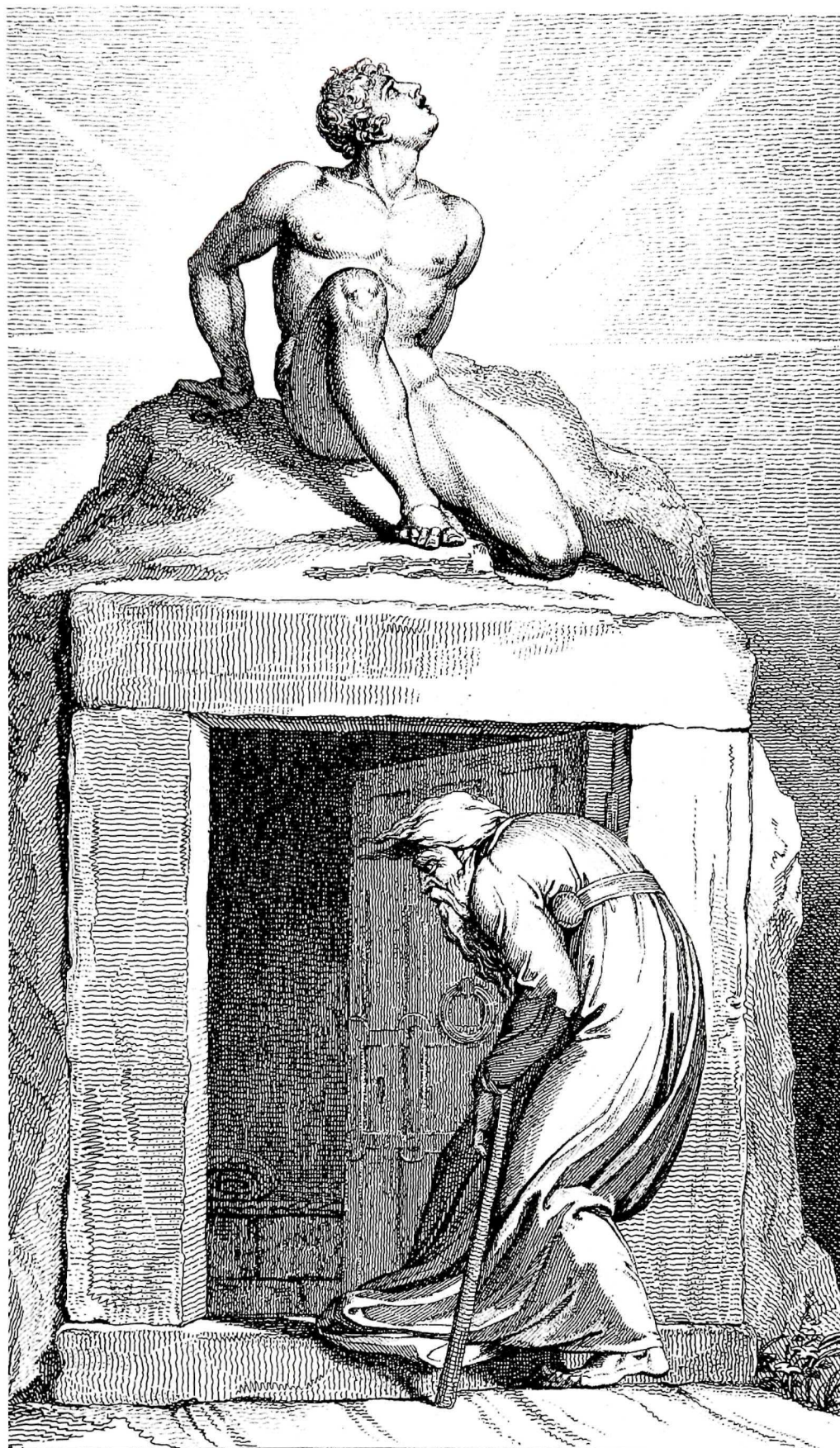


Fig. 16. "The Skeleton Reanimated" from William Blake, Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Grave (London, 1808); rpt. in Samuel Foster Damon, Blake's Grave (Providence: Brown UP, 1963).



Drawn by W. Blake

Engraved by L. Schiavonetti

Fig. 17. "Death's Door" from William Blake, Blake's Illustrations of Blair's Grave (London, 1808); rpt. in Samuel Foster Damon, Blake's Grave (Providence: Brown UP, 1963).

NIGHT THE SECOND.

“WHEN the cock crew, he wept”—smote by that eye
 Which looks on me, on all: that power, who bids
 This midnight centinel, with clarion shrill,
 • Emblem of that which shall awake the dead,
 Rouse souls from slumber into thoughts of heaven:
 Shall I too weep? where then is fortitude?
 And, fortitude abandon'd, where is man?
 I know the terms on which he sees the light;
 He that is born, is listed; life is war,
 Eternal war with woe: who bears it best,
 Deserves it least—on other themes I'll dwell.
 LORENZO! let me turn my thoughts on thee,
 And thine, on themes may profit; profit there,
 Where most thy need—themes, too, the genuine growth
 Of dear PHILANDER'S dust: he, thus, though dead,
 May still befriend.—What themes? time's wondrous price,
 Death, friendship, and PHILANDER'S final scene.

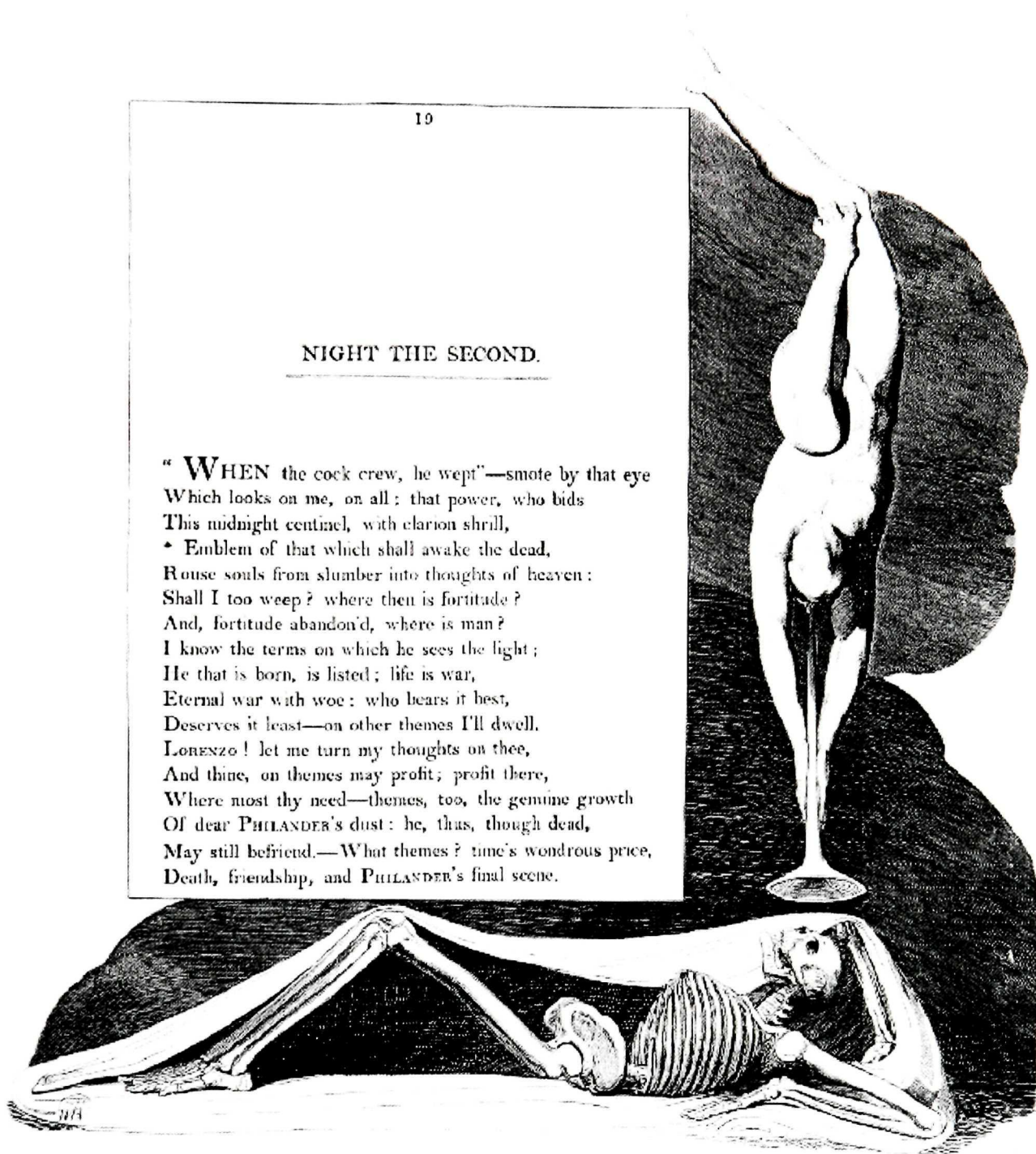


Fig. 18. “Night the Second” from Edward Young. The Complaint, and the Consolation, or, Night Thoughts. (London: R. Noble for R. Edwards, 1797) pl. 19; Treasures: The Digital Library. Ed. Mary Durio. May 1, 2003

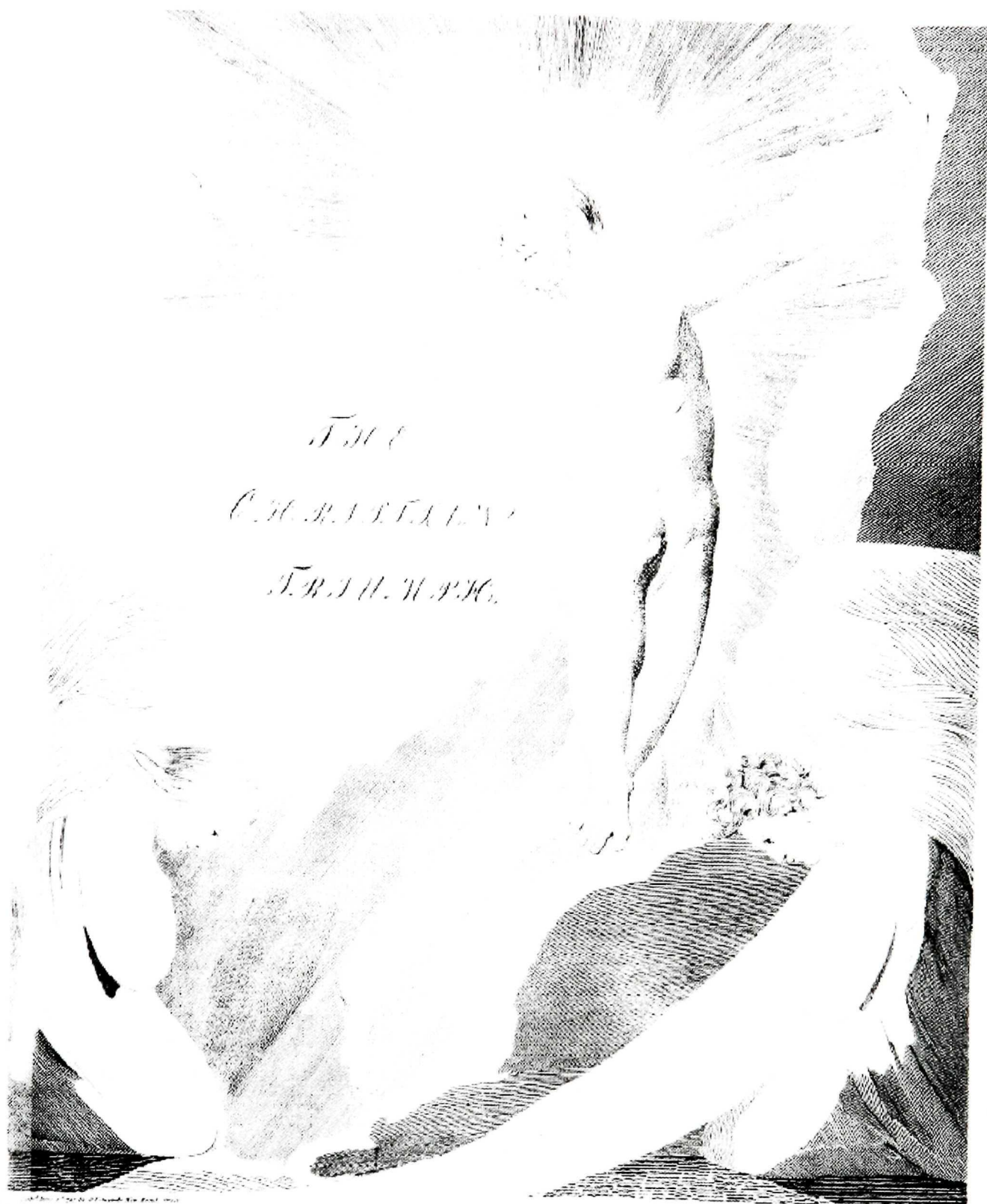


Fig. 19. "The Christian Triumph" from Edward Young. The Complaint, and the Consolation, or, Night Thoughts. (London: R. Noble for R. Edwards, 1797) pl. 65; Treasures: The Digital Library. Ed. Mary Durio. May 1, 2003 <<http://www.library.unt.edu/rarebooks/treasures/night/default.htm>>.

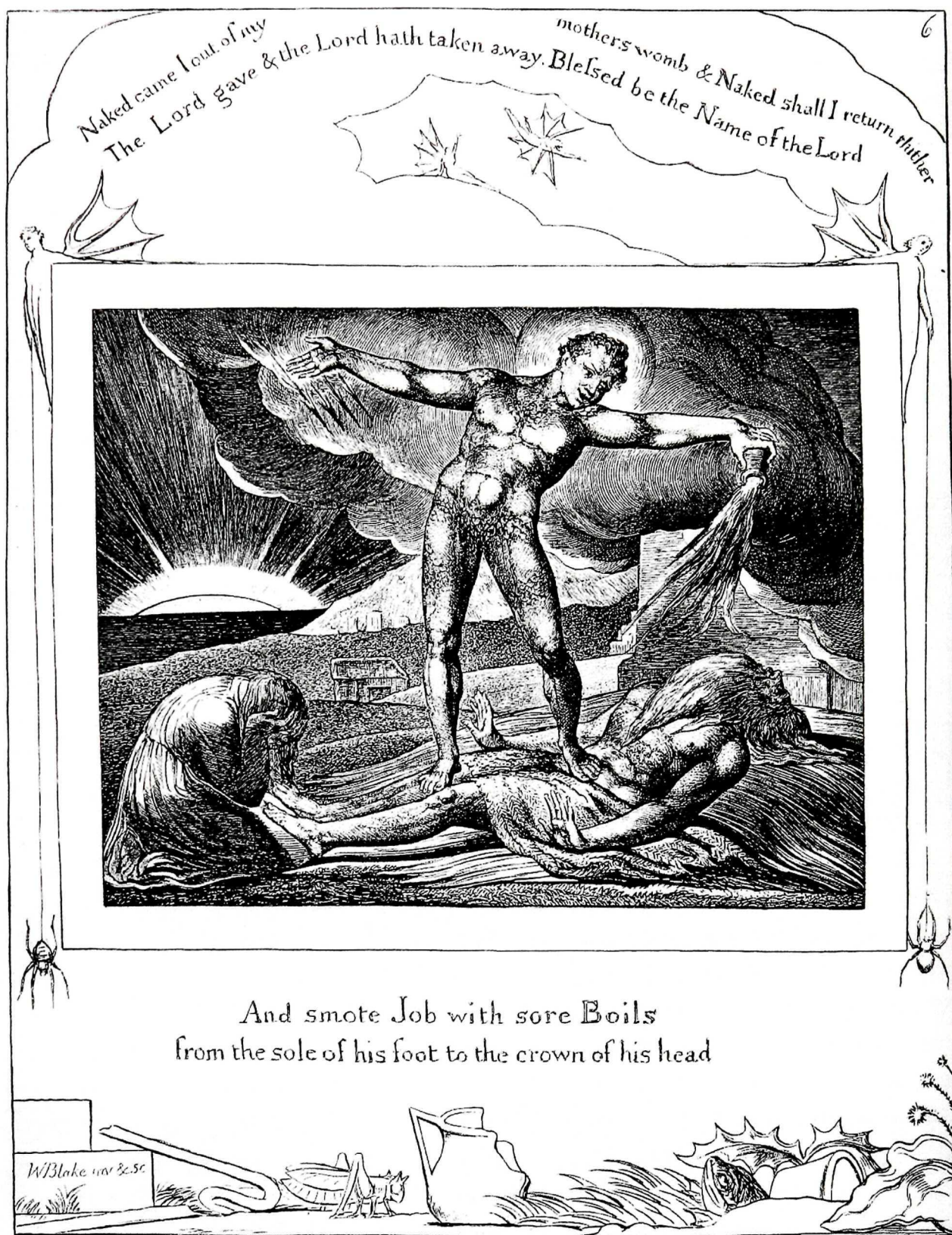


Fig. 20. "Satan smiting Job with Boils" from William Blake, *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (London, 1826) pl. 6; rpt. in Andrew Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 20.

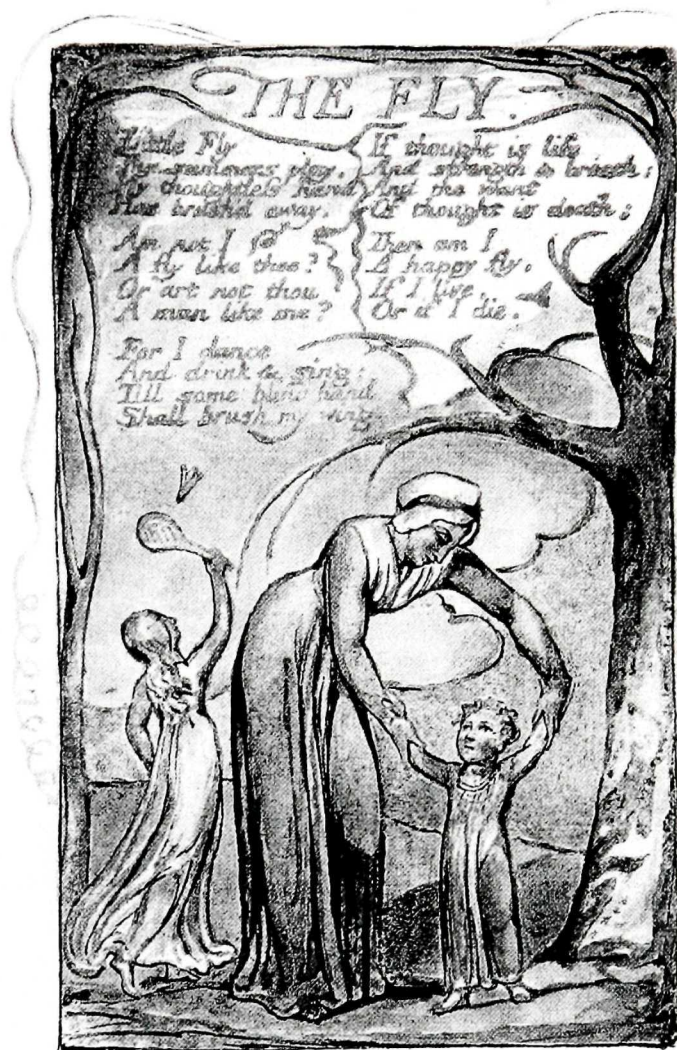


Fig. 21. "The Fly" (E) from William Blake, Songs of Innocence and of Experience, copy W (London, 1789, 1794) pl. 40; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 82.



Fig. 22. "The Tyger"(E) from William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, copy W (London, 1789, 1794) pl. 42; rpt. in William Blake, *The Complete Illuminated Books* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 84.

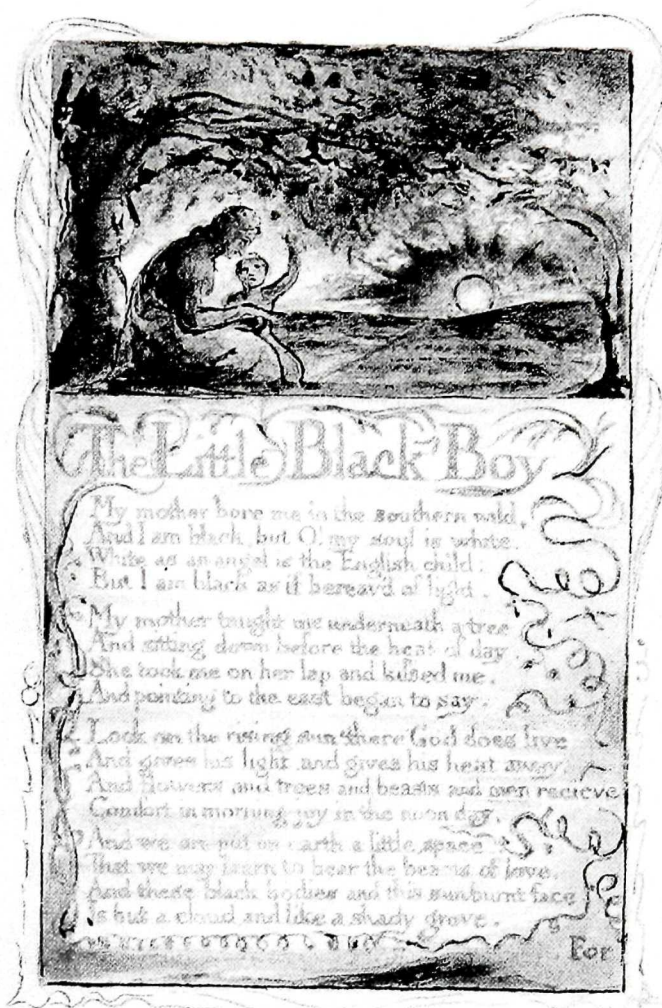


Fig. 23. “The Little Black Boy, Plate 1” (I) from William Blake, Songs of Innocence and of Experience, copy W (London, 1789, 1794) pl. 9; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 51.

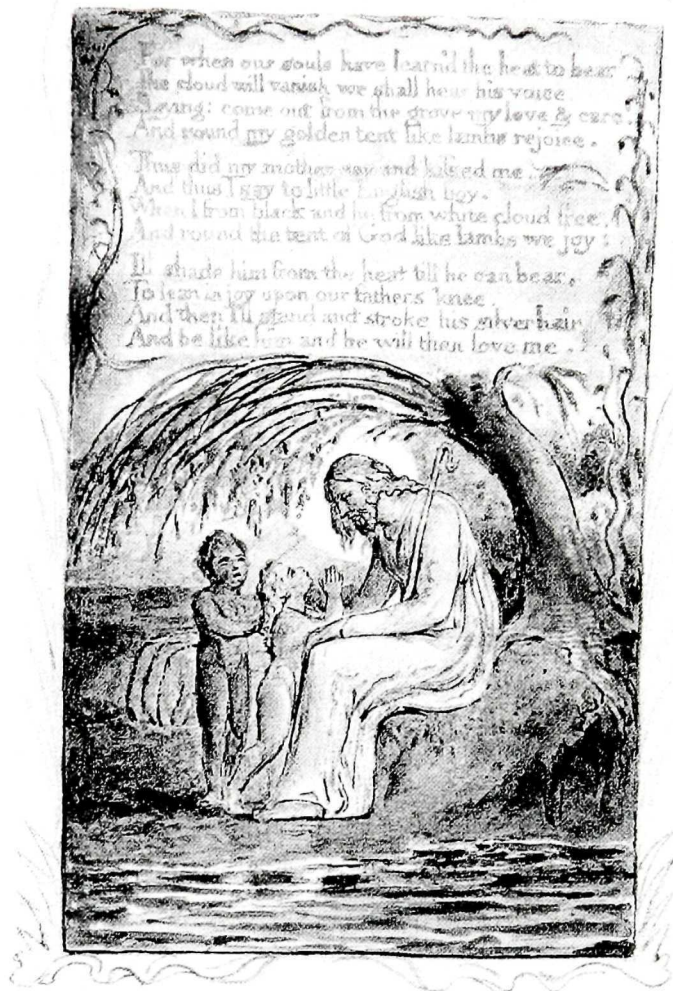


Fig. 24. "The Little Black Boy, Plate 2" (I) from William Blake, Songs of Innocence and of Experience, copy W (London, 1789, 1794) pl.10; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 52.

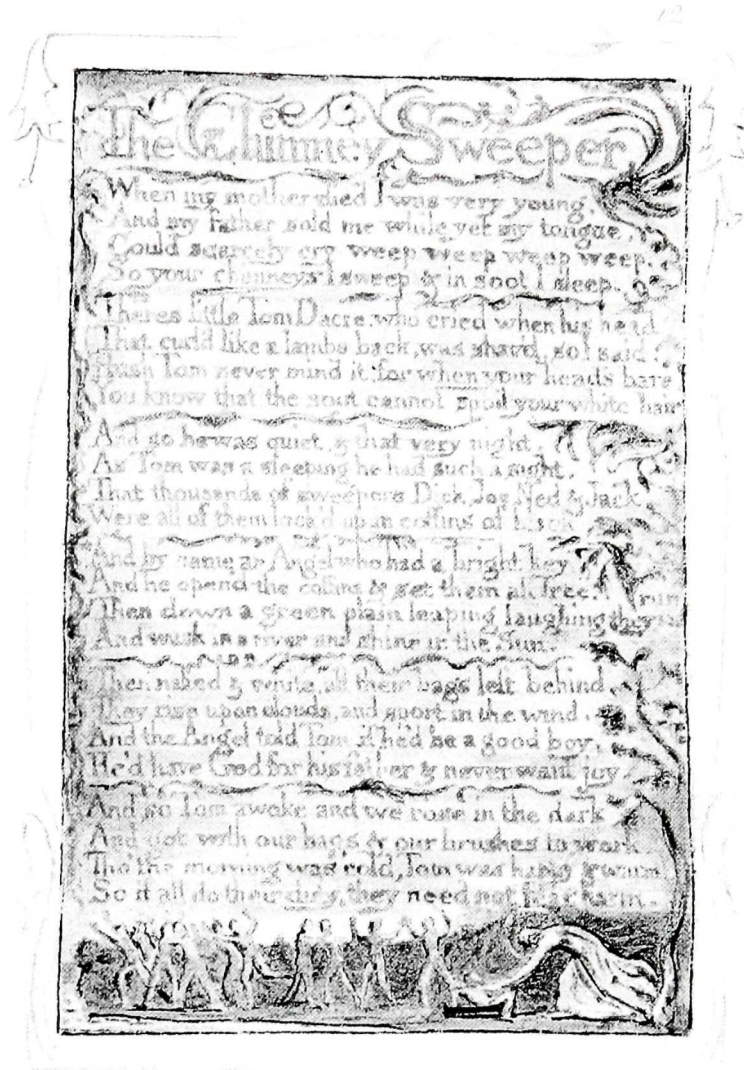


Fig. 25. "The Chimney Sweeper" (I) from William Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, copy W (London, 1789, 1794) pl. 12; rpt. in William Blake, *The Complete Illuminated Books* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 54.

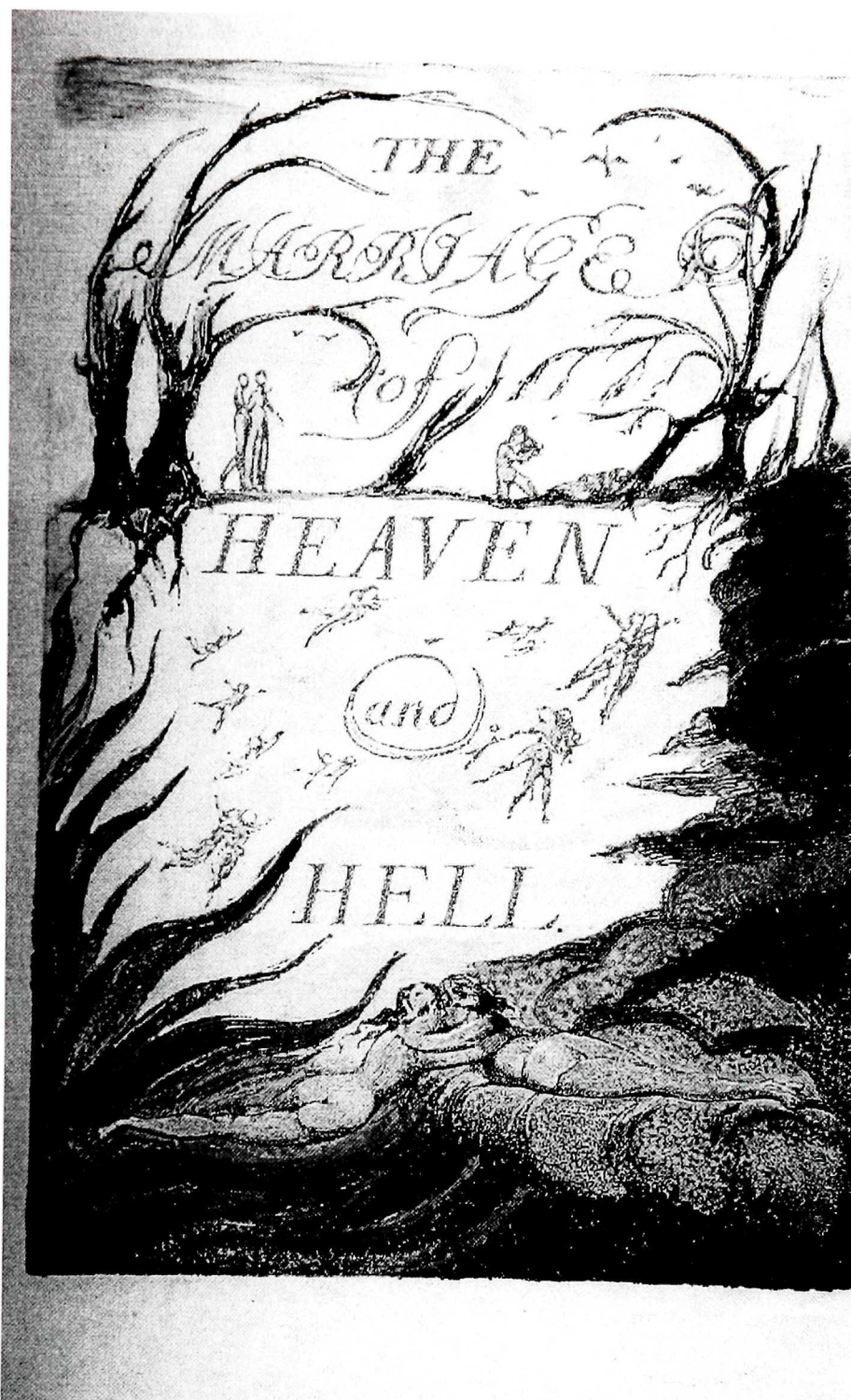


Fig. 26. "Title Page" from William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, copy F (London, 1790) pl.1; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 107.

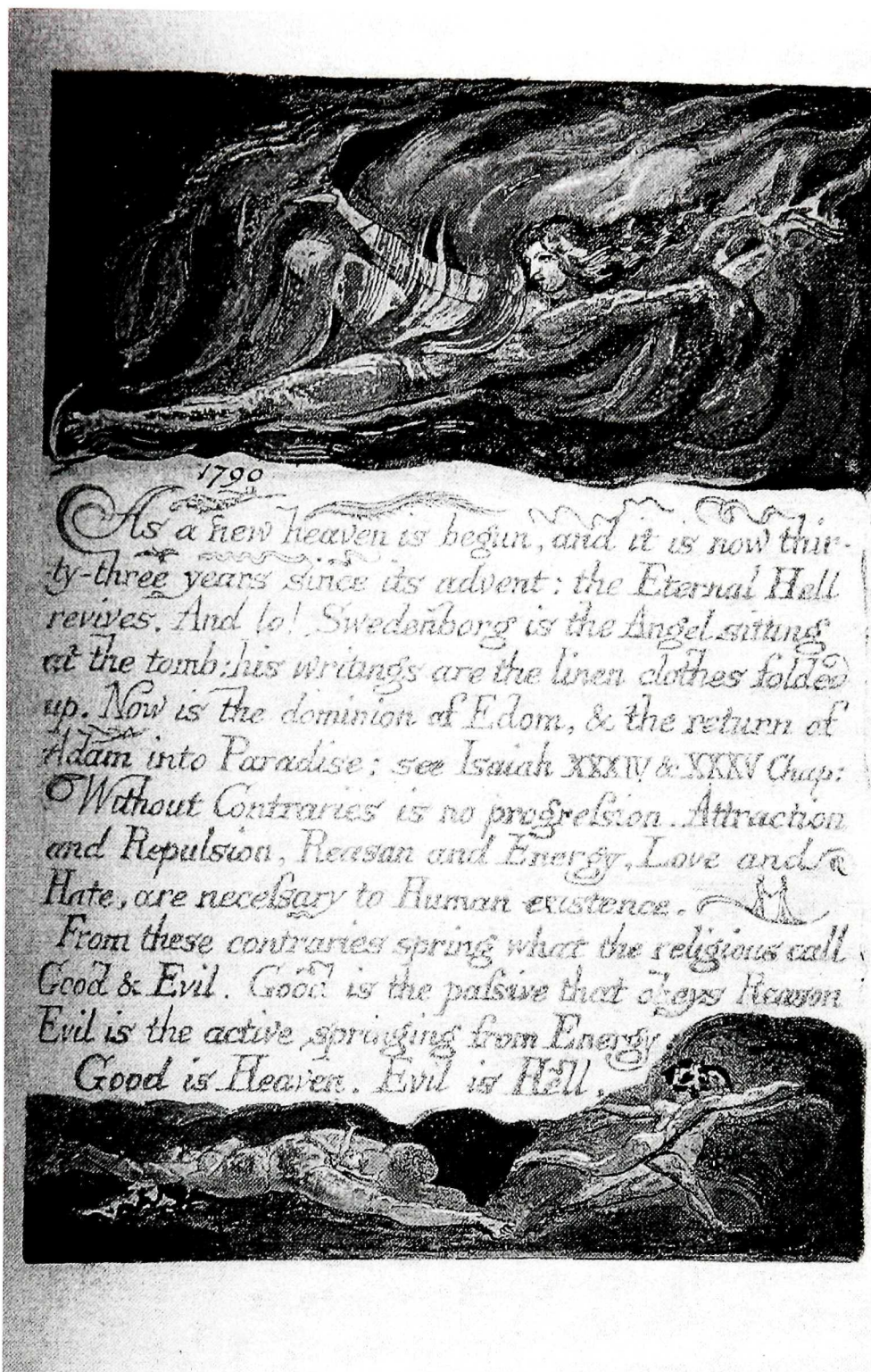


Fig. 27. "As a new heaven is begun" from William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, copy F (London, 1790) pl. 3; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 109.

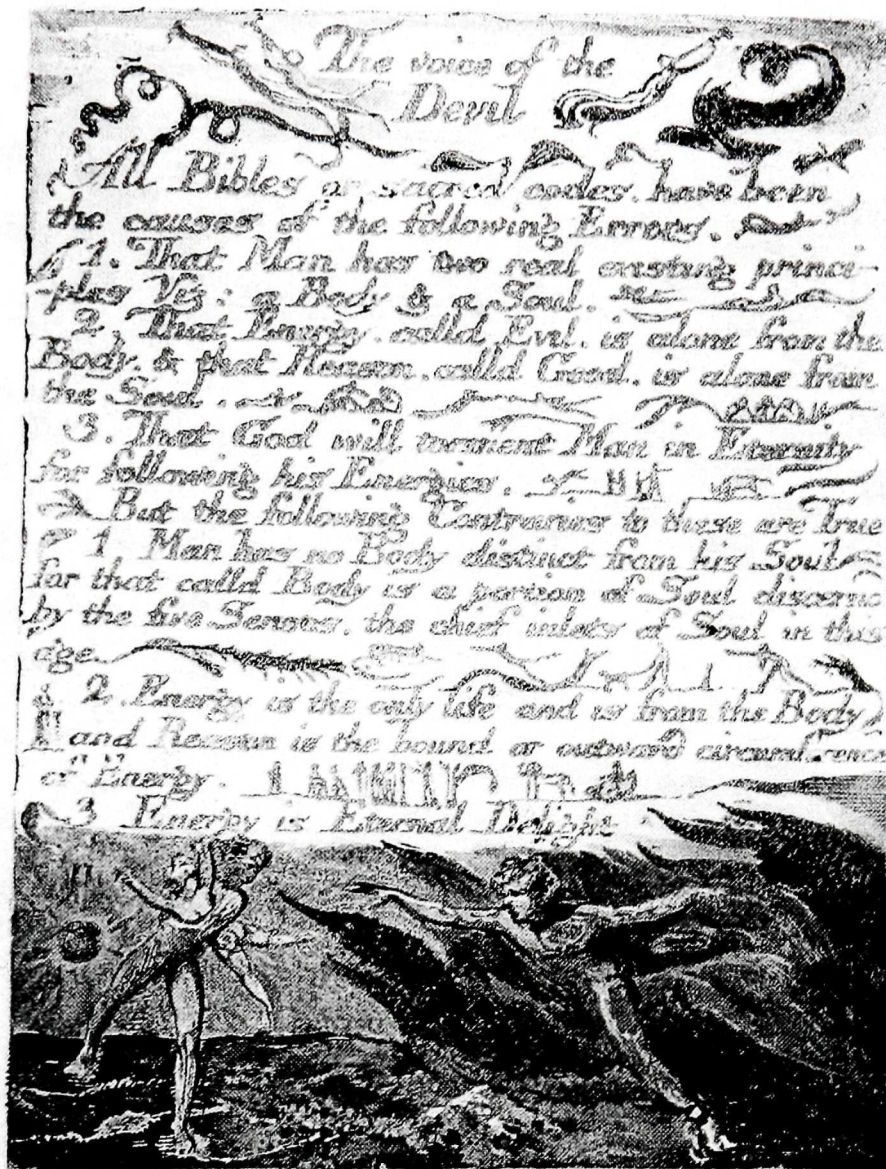


Fig. 28. "The voice of the Devil" from William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, copy F (London, 1790) pl. 4; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 110.



Fig. 29. "I have always found [...]" from William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, copy F (London, 1790) pl. 21; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 127.



The Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence and now seem to live in it in chains are in truth, the causes of its life & the sources of all activity, but the chains are, the cunning of weak and tame minds, which have power to resist energy, according to the proverb, the weak in courage is strong in cunning. Thus one portion of being, is the Prolific, the other, the Devouring; to the devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains, but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole.

But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea received the excess of his delights.

Some will say, Is not God alone the Prolific? I answer, God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men.

These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries

Fig. 30. "The Giants" from William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, copy F (London, 1790) pl.16; rpt. in William Blake, *The Complete Illuminated Books* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 122.

to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence.

Religion is an endeavour to reconcile the two.

Note. Jesus Christ did not wish to unite
but to separate them, as in the Parable of sheep and
goats! & he says I came not to send peace but a
Sword.

Messiah or Satan or Tempter was formerly
thought to be one of the Antediluvians who are our
Energies.

A Memorable Fancy

An Angel came to me and said O pitiable foolish
young man! O horrible! O dreadful state! consider
the hot burning dungeon thou art preparing for thyself
to all eternity, to which thou art going in such career.

I said, perhaps you will be willing to shew me
my eternal lot & we will contemplate together upon it
and see whether your lot or mine is most desirable

So he took me thro' a stable & thro' a church
& down into the church vault at the end of which
was a mill; thro' the mill we went, and came to a
cave, down the winding cavern we groped our tedi-
ous way till a void boundless as a nether sky ap-
peared beneath us, & we held by the roots of trees
and hung over this immensity, but I said, if you
please we will commit ourselves to this void, and
see whether providence is here also, if you will not
I will? but he answerd, do not presume O young-
man but as we here remain behold thy lot which
will soon appear when the darkness passes away

So I remained with him sitting in the twisted
root

Fig. 31. "A Memorable Fancy plate 1", from William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, copy F (London, 1790) pl. 17; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 123.

root of an oak, he was suspended in a fungus
which hung with the head downward into the deep.

By degrees we beheld the infinite Abyss, fiery
as the smoke of a burning city; beneath us at an
immense distance was the sun, black but shining;
round it were fiery tracks on which revolv'd vast
spiders, crawling after their prey; which flew or
rather swam in the infinite deep, in the most ter-
rific shapes of animals sprung from corruption,
& the air was full of them, & seem'd compos'd
of them; these are Devils, and are call'd Powers
of the air, I now asked my companion which was my
eternal lot? he said, between the black & white spiders

But now, from between the black & white spiders
a cloud and fire burst and rolled thro the deep
blackning all beneath, so that the nether deep grow
black as a sea & rolled with a terrible noise: be-
neath us was nothing now to be seen but a black
tempest, till looking east between the clouds & the
waves, we saw a cataract of blood mixed with fire
and not many staves throw from us appear'd and
sunk again the scaly fold of a monstrous serpent
at last to the east, distant about three degrees ap-
pear'd a fiery crest above the waves, slowly it rear'd
like a ridge of golden rocks till we discover'd
two globes of crimson fire, from which the sea
fled away in clouds of smoke, and now we saw, it
was the head of Leviathan, his forehead was di-
vided into streaks of green & purple like those on
a tigers forehead; soon we saw his mouth & red
gills hang just above the raging foam tinguing the
black deep with beams of blood, advancing toward
us!

Fig. 32. "A Memorable Fancy plate 2", from William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, copy F (London, 1790) pl. 18; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 124.

us with all the key of a spiritual existence.
 My friend the Angel climb'd up from his station into the mill; I remain'd alone, & then this appearance was no more, but I found myself sitting on a pleasant bank beside a river by moonlight hearing a harper who, sung to the harp. & his theme was, The man who never alters his opinion is like standing water, & breeds reptiles of the mind.

But I cease, and sought for the mill & there I found my Angel, who surprised asked me, how I escap'd?

I answer'd, All that we saw was owing to your metaphysics; for when you ran away, I found myself on a bank by moonlight hearing a harper. But now we have seen my eternal lot, shall I shew you yours? he laugh'd at my proposal; but I by force suddenly caught him in my arms, & flew westerly thro' the night, till we were elevated above the earth's shadow: then I flung myself with him directly into the body of the sun, here I clothed myself in white, & taking in my hand Swedenborg's volumes sunk from the glorious clime, and pass'd all the planets till we came to saturn, here I staid to rest & then leap'd into the void, between saturn & the fixed stars.

Here said It is your lot, in this space, if space it may be call'd. Soon we saw the stable and the church, & I took him to the altar and open'd the Bible, and lo! it was a deep pit, into which I descended driving the Angel before me, soon we saw seven houses of brick, one we enter'd; in it were a

Fig. 33. "A Memorable Fancy plate 3", from William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, copy F (London, 1790) pl. 19; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 125.

number of monkeys, baboons, & all of that species
 divided by the middle, grinning and snatching at
 one another, but withheld by the shortness of their
 chains; however I saw that they sometimes grew nu-
 merous, and then the weak were caught by the strong
 and with a grinning aspect, first coupled with &, then
 devoured, by plucking off first one limb and then ano-
 ther till the body was left a helpless trunk, this after
 grinning & kissing it with seeping fondness they de-
 voured too; and here & there I saw one savourily pic-
 king the flesh off of his own tail; as the stench ter-
 ribly annoyed us both we went into the mill, & I in
 my hand brought the skeleton of a body, which in
 the mill was Aristotle's Analytics. *E. A. 10*

So the Angel said: thy phantasy has imposed
 upon me & thou oughtest to be ashamed.

I answered: we impose on one another, & it is
 but lost time to converse with you whose works
 are only Analytics.

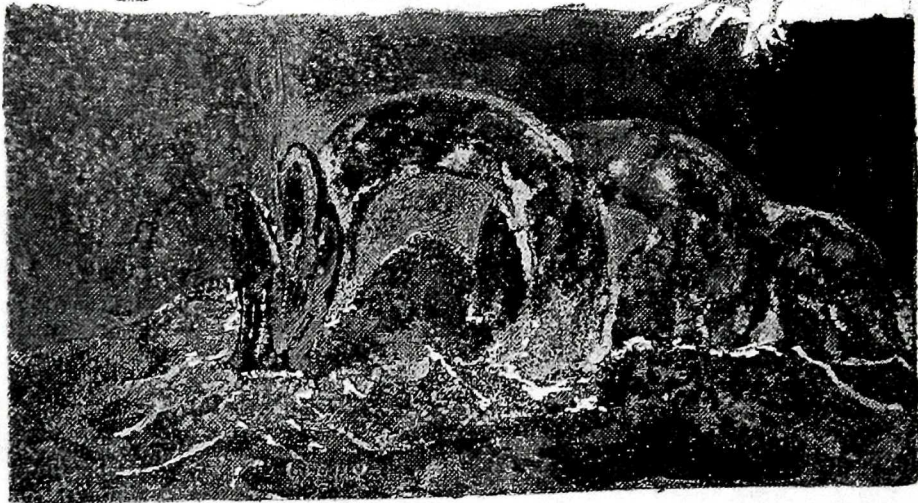


Fig. 34. "A Memorable Fancy plate 4", from William Blake, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, copy F (London, 1790) pl. 20; rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 126.

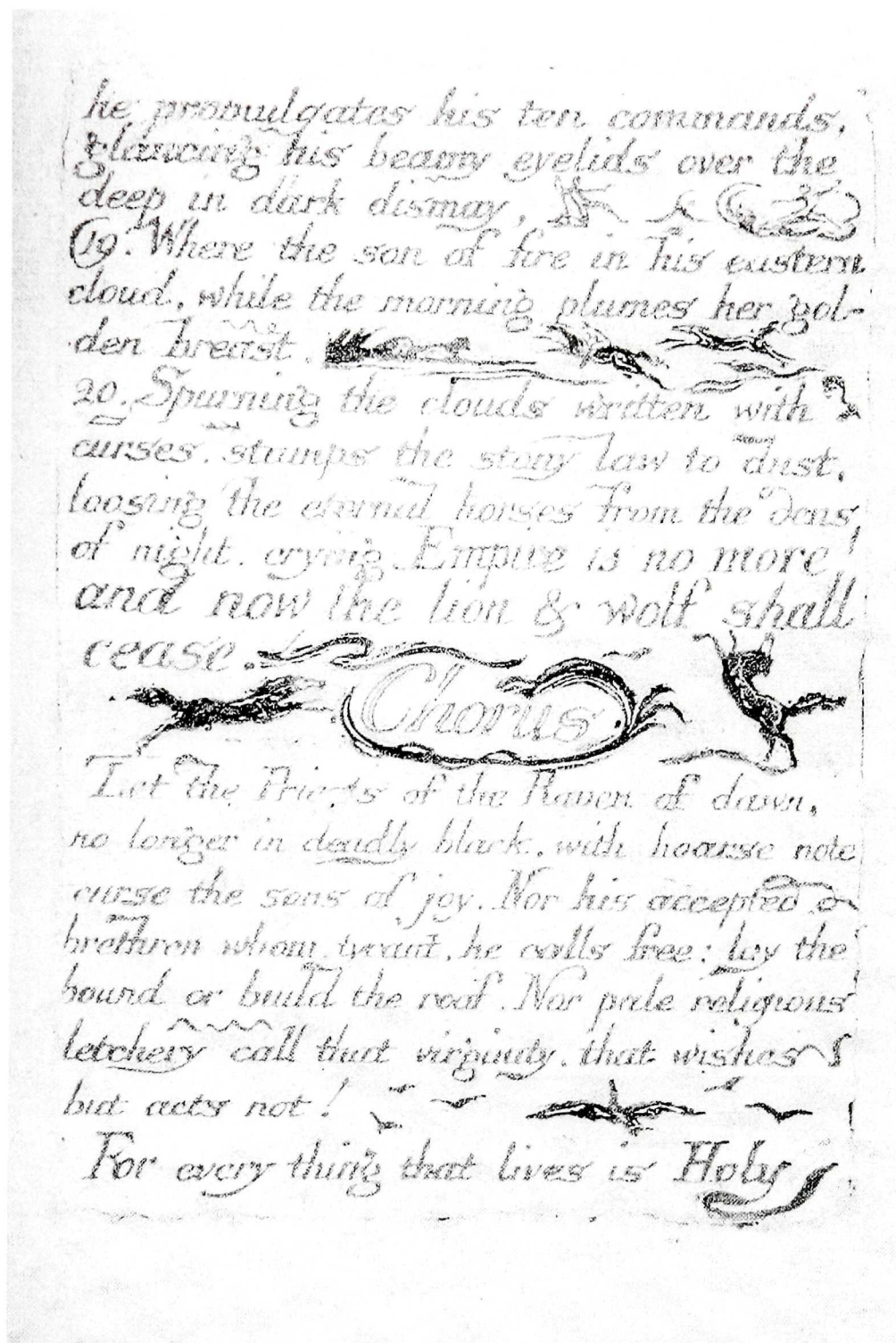


Fig. 35. "For everything that lives is Holy", from William Blake,
The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, copy F (London, 1790) pl. 27;
 rpt. in William Blake, The Complete Illuminated Books (New York:
 Thames & Hudson, 2000) 133.

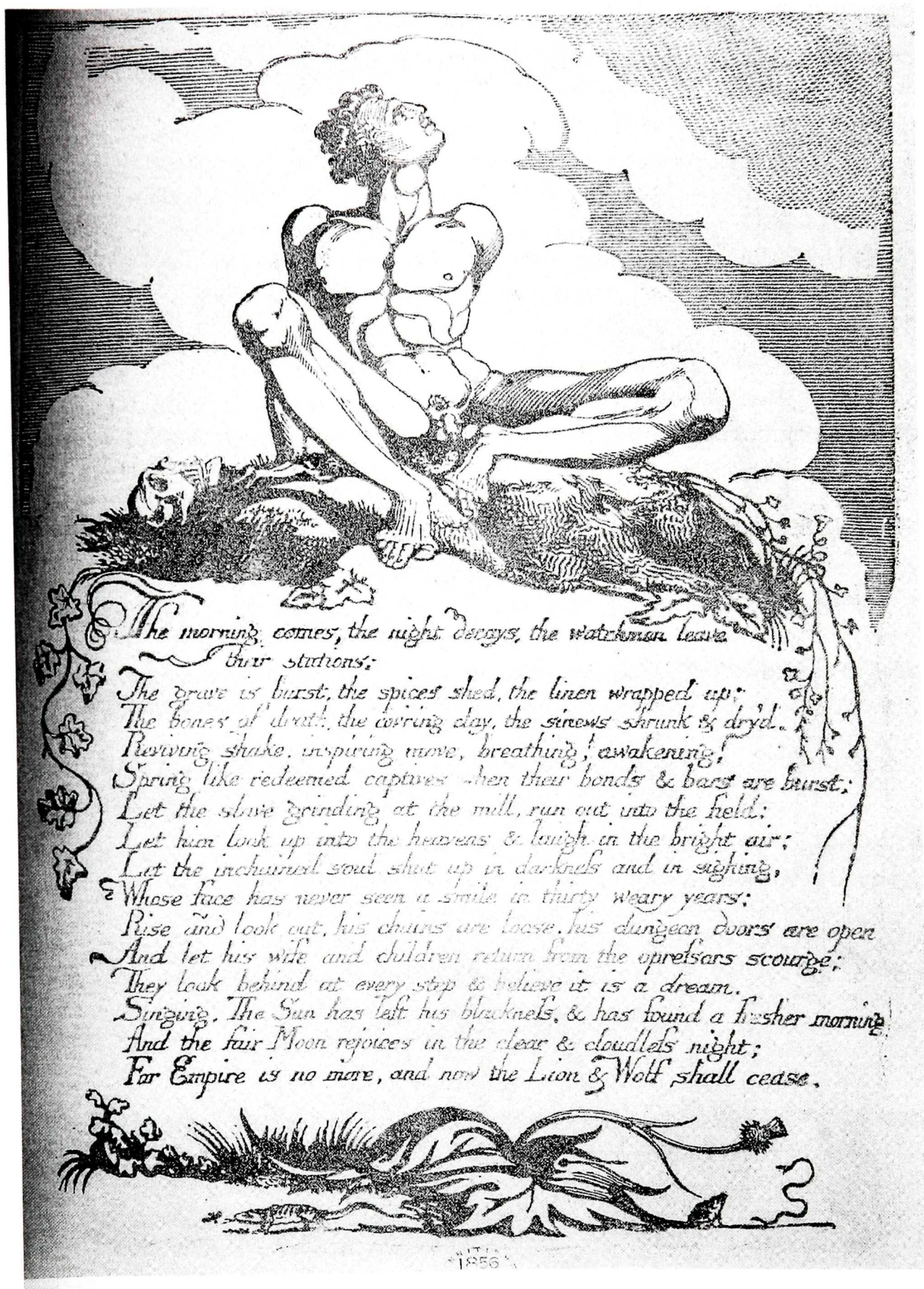


Fig. 36. "The morning comes [...]", from William Blake, *America*, copy H (London, 1793) pl. 8; rpt. in William Blake, *The Complete Illuminated Books* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 2000) 161.

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