

**CONVERSION AS A NARRATIVE, VISUAL, AND STYLISTIC MODE
IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S WORKS**

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Short abstract

This study suggests that Blake's works can be understood as 'conversion works,' which seek to facilitate a broadly defined conversion in the reader or viewer. This perceptual, spiritual, and intellectual conversion is manifested in various ways in the texts, images, narrative structures, and style of Blake's works, which together create a mode of conversion that the reader/viewer encounters. Part I discusses the genesis of the narrative of Blake's own conversion – only partly supported by historical evidence – and introduces critical discussions of the conversion narrative as a genre. On the basis of the examples of Paul and Augustine, I show how the predominant interpretative paradigm of the conversion narrative (as an autobiographical reportage describing a one-off experience) is challenged by the shapes that conversion narratives have taken throughout history, suggesting a broader definition of conversion literature. In Part II, I analyze Blake's depiction of the wounded body of Christ in his illustrations to *Night Thoughts* (1796-97) in relation to eighteenth-century Moravian art, and the way in which that image is later used in *The Four Zoas* (1797-1807). I then discuss how the illuminated book *Milton* (1804-11) can be understood as a multilayered conversion narrative, how the manifestation of conversion in Jakob Boehme's works might have influenced it, and how a related conversion movement is manifested in *Jerusalem* (1804-20). Finally, I show how Blake represents conversion in his illustrations to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (1824-27) and the Book of Job (1823-26), now emphasizing the importance of vision and the

inclusion of protagonist and viewer in the divine body (the imagination). Together, these analyses show conversion as a gradually developing presence in Blake's works and they explore the conversion moment as a way into the shared salvific space of the body of Christ for fictive characters, author, and reader or viewer together.

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Long abstract

This study suggests that Blake's works can be understood as conversion works seeking to facilitate a broadly defined conversion in the reader or viewer. This perceptual, spiritual, and intellectual conversion is manifested in various ways throughout Blake's works in texts, images, narrative structures, and style, which together create a mode of conversion that the reader or viewer encounters when engaging with the book or image. By arguing this, the study moves the question of 'Blake and conversion' from the autobiographical perspective (from which it is usually approached) to the realm of Blake's works, where it helps to shed light on the content, aims, function, and literary, historical, and theological background of Blake's verbal and visual art.

Since the beginning of the twentieth century, it has been suggested from time to time that Blake underwent a crucial religious development, a 'conversion,' between ca. 1800 and 1804. This has been connected with what is seen as a return in Blake to a more orthodox version of Christianity, which leaves an impression on Blake's works, in which a more explicit use of Christian motifs and references is now employed. The supposed conversion is thus used to support a division of Blake's works into 'mythical' works from before ca. 1800 and 'Christian' works from after ca. 1800. However, this conversion is only partly supported by historical evidence, and the critical discussion of the extent to which we can speak of such a conversion is limited, only rarely venturing beyond the passing reference. At the same time, it is generally

acknowledged that Blake intended the reader or viewer of his works to become actively and creatively engaged in them, and that they seem to contain a certain call for change in the reader or viewer. In this thesis, I suggest that these two angles should be combined – that conversion should be used as an interpretative key with which to approach Blake’s works. It can be used at the time to point towards inherent themes and structures within Blake’s works, and to provide a critical framework with which to understand these works by relating them to conversion studies. I use the term conversion despite the fact that Blake does not himself often use it, finding it the most inclusive and suggestive umbrella term for the other terms related to it that Blake *does* use: ‘regeneration,’ ‘awakening,’ ‘rebirth,’ ‘self-annihilation,’ and ‘transformation.’

The thesis situates conversion in Blake’s works with particular reference to moments of conversion within his narratives, and to strategies for drawing the reader into active participation or awakening. I work from the assumption that each illuminated book or illustration series that I discuss represents a significant experience for the reader or viewer, by the end of which the reader or viewer may have undergone an intellectual, spiritual, and perceptual transformation or conversion. This conversion is facilitated within Blake’s works by his use of various conversion markers that occur even from Blake’s early works (such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*) onwards: the divine embrace, the divine fire, the meeting with Christ, the vision of the cross, and the rebirth (often immediately following an annihilation or consuming in fire) – all narrative moments that often occur towards the end of a work, alternatively as a crucial station half-way through. Although differently put in different works, the conversions of Blake’s characters within his works seem to represent a restoration of the convert as a member of the common divine body of

Christ (also identified by Blake as the imagination). Blake's conversions thus offer both an individual and a social or ethical perspective.

My discussion of Blake's works is structured around the in-depth analysis of three works, the illustrations to Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* (1796-97), the illuminated book *Milton a Poem* (ca. 1804-11), and the illustrations to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* (ca. 1824-27). The analysis of each of these is followed by a brief consideration of a related Blake work – a 'contrary' work – which addresses the same issues, but in a different way: these are *The Four Zoas* (ca. 1797-1807), *Jerusalem* (ca. 1804-20), and the illustrations to the Book of Job (1823-26), respectively. The thesis thus moves chronologically forward from 1796 to the mid-1820s, illustrating how conversion becomes an increasingly central dynamic within Blake's works. By alternating between illuminated books and commercial or commissioned works, and between text analysis and image analysis, I emphasize the points of continuity in Blake's works, and I approach each of the works acknowledging (as appropriate) its nature as a composite work.

In Part I, I discuss the rise of the scholarly narrative of Blake's own conversion in Blake criticism and assess the sources (mainly Blake's letters) that have been used to support it. I then introduce a critical discussion of the conversion narrative as a literary genre. By exploring the examples of the conversion narratives of Paul and Augustine, I draw attention to the literary complexity and the different shapes of the conversion narrative throughout history – a complexity that challenges the current predominant interpretative paradigm, which defines the conversion narrative as an autobiographical reportage describing an instantaneous, one-off experience. In particular, I show how the theological and literary tradition from Jakob Boehme represents an alternative understanding of conversion – and of conversion

texts – which calls for a broader definition of the conversion narrative. With this discussion, I thus move the emphasis from a historical understanding of conversion and of the conversion narrative, to an understanding of it based on its literary expression and on the way in which it stages a potential experience for the reader, that can be attained through the act of reading. Finally, I use a brief introduction to the presence of conversion in Blake's works from the first half of the 1790s as a transition to the close analyses in Part II.

I begin Part II with a chapter discussing Blake's depictions of the wounded body of Christ in his illustrations to *Night Thoughts*. I mainly focus on the analysis of one image from *Night Thoughts*, the Man of Sorrows, but also include related images, discussing how they relate to Young's original text, and how the pictorial choices Blake made in the illustrations might have been influenced by mid-eighteenth-century Moravian art (a tradition Blake may have been familiar with through his mother). This leads to a more general discussion of a possible Moravian influence on Blake's depictions of the crucified or wounded Christ ca. 1796-1822, seen for example in the way in which the distinctive Moravian way of depicting the side wound is deployed in Blake's art. I conclude that Blake adapts some Moravian motifs (those connected with rebirth and access to Christ's body as a saving space) and dismisses others (those dwelling on the more bloody details of the passion). Furthermore, I suggest that Blake seems to have experimented with these Moravian tropes from ca. 1797 and throughout the next two decades, only to shift his focus and leave them behind in his last years.

As a 'contrary' perspective, I discuss how Blake some ten years later uses the Man of Sorrows image again, as it appeared as an integral part of his unfinished illuminated manuscript *The Four Zoas*. The way in which the illustration is now used supports my identification in the preceding analysis of the Man of Sorrows as a

conversion image, and emphasizes the role Blake allocates to Christ's body as a locus of experience and transformation – as representing an entrance point to a saving space, as well as representing the saving space itself. The chapter thus points out that Blake makes several depictions of the crucifixion or the crucified or wounded Christ, in particular between 1797 and 1808, that seem to represent it as a positive locus of rebirth or conversion – despite the critical assumption that Blake focussed mainly on two aspects of the crucifixion, namely Christ's putting off his body of flesh or 'Sin' on the cross and the way in which he was already glorified on the cross – and correspondingly, that Blake paid less attention to aspects of the cross that were associated with Christ's wounds, suffering, or the doctrine of atonement.

In the next chapter, I explore how the illuminated book *Milton* can be understood as a multilayered conversion narrative, and how the manifestation of conversion in the works of Jakob Boehme might have influenced it – in particular the concept of self-annihilation in Blake's works, which he introduces in *Milton*, and which he might have learned from Boehme. In *Milton*, conversion has now moved to the foreground: the book is structured around the conversion of Milton, as he returns from heaven to embark on a spiritual and psychological journey towards restoration and the overcoming of his inner division. This central conversion, around which the narrative moves, is accompanied by other successful or unsuccessful conversions within the narrative, such as that of the character 'Blake' and the reader. Similarly, there are regular references in text and images to the conversion of Paul, emphasizing that conversion is at the centre of attention. Likewise, the explicit use of the Christ figure underlines that Milton's development is not solely psychological, but also spiritual (if, indeed, these two can be separated). *Milton* thus represents a highly complex narrative, which refers to and plays on several different narrative registers of

conversion. Together these registers point towards the importance of the moment of transformation in the present – a theme which applies both to the fictive characters within *Milton*, as well as to the reader, who moves through the difficult narrative of *Milton* like a traveller.

The contrary work to *Milton* is *Jerusalem*, which describes Albion's journey towards conversion and restoration. This journey is similar to that of Milton, but adds a crucial social and ethical perspective that was not emphasized in the spiritual portrait of Milton. The role of Christ as a brother and friend is now emphasized, leading to an understanding of the ideal relationship with the divine as mutual, and the narrative ends with a rare vision of restored common life *in* the divine body (the imagination).

In the last chapter, I use Blake's late illustrations to Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* to show how Blake creatively responded to a popular and widely read allegorical conversion narrative, shaping it into a narrative in line with – but also distinctive from – his other 'conversion works.' Here Blake re-visions Bunyan's narrative so that Christian's vision of Christ on the cross (which Blake unlike Bunyan places at the very centre of the narrative) and Christian's journey towards inner unity with himself and life in divine vision become its focal points. Blake has now moved away from his 'Moravian' experiments with the open(ed) body of Christ to an understanding of transformation before the cross as something which happens simply by *seeing* Christ, thereby emphasizing the transforming power of sight and vision. Blake thus connects Christian's conversion journey much more explicitly to his vision of, or meeting with, Christ than does Bunyan, reflecting the increasing Christocentric focus in Blake's theological understanding. Furthermore, Blake represents Christian's journey as a way into being in the imagination – and does so in a way which

emphatically includes the viewer in the narrative's quest for vision and restored existence.

As a final contrary perspective, I show how Blake uses the medium of the illustration series to reshape another well-known narrative, the story of Job in the Book of Job, into a conversion work. Blake centres his story of Job's conversion from adherence to the book to adherence to active vision around a central vision of Christ (as he does in the Bunyan illustrations). The engraving showing this vision (probably) did not occur in the first version of the series from ca. 1805-06, but was only incorporated into it in the 1820s – thus illustrating Blake's theological focus in the last years of his life. As in the Bunyan illustrations, the vision of Christ, the social and ethical implications of conversion, and the connection between imagination and conversion is underlined. However, Blake here explores more deeply the circular or repeated sense of conversion, showing how life in the divine body (restored existence) is not placed above or beyond. Instead, this restored existence is only realised when the convert partakes in earthly life and fully engages with it.

Together, these analyses show conversion as a gradually developing presence in Blake's works. They help to understand the aims and function of Blake's art and writing, and they underline the connection between Blake's original and commercial works. Finally, they emphasize the crucial link between conversion and the body of Christ. Conversion in Blake, then, is not simply something that happens *within* his works, but it is also something that happens *through* them – and the ultimate protagonist might then, as in many other conversion works, turn out to be the reader or viewer. Through experimenting with the relationship between the body of Christ and conversion, Blake explores the entrance points and ways to the divine body – the

imagination – and the way in which this shared space can provide a common meeting place for fictive characters, narrator, author, and reader.

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ABBREVIATIONS

B	Martin Butlin, <i>The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake</i> , vol. 1. New Haven: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1981.
BB	G. E. Bentley Jr, <i>Blake Books</i> . Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977.
Book of Urizen	<i>The (First) Book of Urizen</i>
BR	Bentley Jr., G. E. <i>Blake Records</i> . New Haven; London: Yale University Press, 2004.
E	<i>The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake</i> . Edited by David V. Erdman. Newly Revised ed. New York: Anchor Books, 1988.
EG	<i>The Everlasting Gospel</i>
Experience	<i>Songs of Experience</i>
FZ	<i>The Four Zoas</i>
Innocence	<i>Songs of Innocence</i>
J	<i>Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion</i>
KJV	The King James Bible
M	<i>Milton a Poem</i>
MHH/The Marriage	<i>The Marriage of Heaven and Hell</i>
ODNB	Oxford Dictionary of National Biography
OED	Oxford English Dictionary
PP	<i>The Pilgrim's Progress</i>
Songs	<i>Songs of Innocence and of Experience</i>
Three Principles	<i>The Three Principles of the Divine Essence</i>
True Repentance	'The First Treatise of True Repentance'
VLJ	<i>A Vision of The Last Judgment</i>

If not otherwise mentioned, Bible quotations are from the King James Bible, as this was the version Blake used. I have retained Blake's original spelling and punctuation.

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Part 1

1. CONVERSION: MATTERS OF INTRODUCTION AND CONTEXT

Father The Gate is Open[.]
 – *Letter from Blake to Thomas Butts, 23 September 1800, E711*

Ille liber mutavit affectum meum.
 (This book changed my disposition.)
 – *Augustine, Confessions 3.4.7*

Study Sciences till you are blind
 Study intellectuals till you are cold
 Yet Science cannot teach intellect
 Much less can intellect teach Affection[.]
 – *Blake, Annotations to Swedenborg's Divine Love and Divine Wisdom 237, E605*

1.1 Introduction

This thesis sets out to explore the ‘mode of conversion’ in Blake’s works, an aim which immediately calls for at least two clarifications, firstly of the term ‘mode,’ and then of the term ‘conversion.’ By using the term ‘mode,’ I hope to evoke the sense that conversion in Blake is not simply a theme or a motif within the works. Instead, the ‘mode of conversion’ manifests itself in various ways, running through Blake’s works in various shapes and forms, ranging from specific motifs to narrative structures, to more general stylistic trends. The mode of conversion thus describes a thread of motifs and structures that run through Blake’s works. Simultaneously, it also describes the manner in which these works are made and the ‘particular form, manner, or variety’ in which the ‘quality, phenomenon, or condition occurs or is manifested.’¹ It is this understanding of the mode of

¹ *Oxford English Dictionary*, second edition, 1989; online version September 2011, s.v. ‘mode,’ <http://oed.com/view/Entry/120575> (accessed 4 January 2012).

conversion – at once a motif within Blake’s works and a means of describing the rhetoric of their composition – which is the unifying principle of my analysis, and I will bring to bear on it the combined perspectives of conversion studies and Blake studies.

My work starts from the seemingly paradoxical observation that, although the narrative of Blake’s own conversion in Blake criticism is insufficiently supported by biographical evidence, an undercurrent of ‘conversion’ runs through Blake’s works all the same. This undercurrent of conversion appears in Blake’s works early on and develops throughout his career, so that by the end of his life it seems to have been one of the central Gestalts in his works – albeit one that only slowly comes into focus. My suggested double movement, then, involves leaving to one side the biographical narrative of Blake’s own apparent conversion, and to move ‘conversion’ to the foreground as an interpretative tool for understanding Blake’s works – for apprehending them as if they were ‘conversion books’ or ‘conversion works.’

As I will show, it has become common amongst some critics to refer to Blake’s conversion as an experience (or series of experiences) that took place between ca. 1800 and 1804.² However, there is very little (if any) biographical evidence that explicitly supports this, and there has been little critical discussion of what exactly is meant by referring to this ‘conversion’ anyway. Nor has there been any extended discussion of how this conversion might have influenced Blake’s works, apart from rather vague observations such as ‘Blake incorporated his new spiritual views into *The Four Zoas* and his subsequent works as well.’³ Thus there

² For discussion of these dates, see 1.2 below.

³ Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millenium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford, 1999), 70.

is, at the moment, no critical apparatus to determine the basis of this apparent conversion: is it mainly based on biographical evidence or argued on the basis of Blake's works? Partly on the basis of Blake's 'conversion,' an anachronistic distinction is often made between 'mythical' and 'Christian' elements in Blake's works, which are defined as occurring mainly in the works of the 1790s and the post-1800 works respectively. 'Anachronistic,' that is, because there is no indication that Blake himself distinguished between a 'Christian' and a 'mythical' register in his works, or between 'Christian' and 'mythical' works more generally (although he did acknowledge his own 'Enthusiasm' for Christ in *Jerusalem*, ca. 1804-20).⁴ Such distinctions occur only in later criticism, and in turn they are used as one of the main proofs for Blake's conversion – a somewhat circular argument, in other words. And although Blake's first explicit reference to himself as a Christian appears in 1798 ('To me who believe the Bible & profess myself a Christian,' he writes in his annotations to Bishop Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* 5, E614), which may support the paradigm of a significant religious development, the scarcity of biographical material and ego-documents – including statements in annotations – makes any argument based on such material insecure. Likewise, the presence of 'Christian' elements in Blake's works all through his life challenges a simplified division of his works into 'mythical' and 'Christian.'

At the same time, however, we can detect a mode of conversion in Blake's works, which Blake criticism has neither addressed nor articulated, either in connection with Blake's conversion or as a separate subject. This conversion occurs

⁴ 'The Enthusiasm of the following Poem, the Author hopes [*no Reader will think presumptuousness or arroganc[e] when he is reminded that the Ancients acknowledge their love to their Deities, to the full as Enthusiastically as I have who Acknowledge mine for my Saviour and Lord, for they were wholly absorb'd in their Gods*]' (J3, E145). The italicized text was later deleted by Blake.

in the sense of an individual or collective intellectual and spiritual transformation that leads to rebirth or regeneration. As I will show throughout this thesis, these manifestations of conversion within Blake's works are diverse and staged on different levels. They appear, for example, as conversions within Blake's works in which a character is converted and reborn – or as the unsuccessful conversion of a character. They appear in works in which conversion plays a minor role, as well as in works where conversion is placed in the very foreground of the narrative. Manifestations of conversion appear as Blake's apparently autobiographical comments (that have been interpreted as referring to his own conversion), as allusions to or illustrations of classical conversion narratives (such as John Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* and Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*), as visual representations of scenes of conversion, and so on. Alongside these markers of conversion, there is the sense that Blake works towards a reaction, change, and transformation in the reader or viewer through the act of reading, viewing, and *engaging* at large with his works – through his language, his style of writing, the composition of his works, the positioning of the reader or viewer, his use of different media within one work, his reworkings and reshuffling of the order of plates within works, his reuse of previous material in new contexts, and what we might call his general disorientation of the reader or viewer.⁵ This sense is generally acknowledged in Blake criticism, constituting what Leopold Damrosch Jr. articulated as Blake's demand that his readers enter into a 'visionary conversion experience' when engaging with his works: 'Both in linguistic and in structural form, Blake constantly points *beyond* his artifacts to a visionary realm that leaves

⁵ As I refer to illuminated works, to texts with no illustrations, to illustration series, and to single art works, I switch between using 'reader' and 'viewer' as appropriate. There is no qualitative difference with regards to my argument.

them behind.’ Thus, ‘to read Blake at all is to enter, however provisionally, into the quest. [...] Blake does not force us to accept his answers, but he demands that we enter into his mental strife and make it ours.’⁶ In other words, Blake proposes an experience of transformation to his readers, which is not prescriptive and only comes to life with the active involvement of the reader’s reading mind, soul, and spirit. In this way, the different manifestations of conversion in form and content all share the sense that the ultimate reference point is, in fact, placed *outside* the work in question: with the reader, or viewer, of Blake’s works.

It is, of course, not new to suggest that Blake’s challenging and composite works set about ultimately to change people, if not the world; as Northrop Frye put it, Blake had ‘an intense desire to communicate [...] All his poetry was written as though it were about to have the immediate social impact of a new play.’⁷ Thus the focus on individual change that the use of the term ‘conversion’ might produce is perhaps misleading: in Blake’s works, the end goal of the proposed journey is not individual change or individual happiness. On the contrary, the overcoming of a divided or separate being (which is how conversion is often represented) is intimately connected with – or even identical with – the recognition of one’s shared identity with all other beings within the divine body of Christ, the ‘Humanity

⁶ Leopold Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth in Blake’s Myth* (Princeton, 1980), 362, 369, 371. Damrosch’s concluding chapter is still one of the most perceptive discussions of Blake and the reader. For a recent example of a reader-oriented reading of a Blake work, see Susanne M. Sklar, *Blake’s Jerusalem as Visionary Theatre: Entering the Divine Body* (Oxford, 2011). Also Joseph Viscomi used the term ‘conversion’ to describe the transformation of the reader or viewer when engaging imaginatively with Blake’s works: ‘The student, disciple or reader undergoes a transformation or conversion; one comes to perceive self and world differently’ (Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (Princeton, 1993), 339, quoted in Tristanne J. Connolly, *William Blake and the Body* (Basingstoke, 2002), 11). W. J. T. Mitchell expressed an opposite view in 1982, dismissing ‘what is becoming an annoying tic in Blake criticism: the insistence that an ideal viewer of his work is at every instant undergoing a religious conversion’ (W. J. T. Mitchell, ‘William Blake’s Designs for Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*: A Complete Edition,’ *Modern Philology* 80.2 (1982): 203).

⁷ Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Boston, 1962), 4.

Divine' (*Milton* 2.8, E96), of which we are 'Members' (*Laocoön*, E273).⁸ However, the moment of transformation that Blake's textual and visual conversion rhetoric points towards – the 'point of sharp regeneration' (to quote one of Blake's sources of inspiration, Jakob Boehme, 1575-1624, *The Threefold Life of Man* 14.76)⁹ – is generally represented in individual rather than in collective terms. Although it does not follow from this that collective conversion is impossible, Blake usually represents the moment of turning (*con-versio*) as a moment of individual experience, even if the ultimate end goal is a spiritual, intellectual, ethical, social, and political restoration of the collective world. My distinction between individual and collective does not mean, therefore, that the two spheres are inherently separate – indeed, the realization of this is a crucial aspect of the transformation of the subject in Blake: 'General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every/ Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus' (J91.29-30, E251). However, collective regeneration, or the restoration of mankind to Christ's collective body begins in the present moment in each member. And it is this moment which is the focus of this thesis.

My argument and analyses are structured around a chronological journey through three different works that all explore the discourse of conversion in different ways and different media, and with different focal points. The analysis of each of these is followed by a brief excursus on a related Blake work – a 'contrary' or 'opposite' work – which shows how the same issues are addressed in a different

⁸ Cf. 1 Cor. 12:12-14: 'For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. [...] We [are] all baptized into one body [...] and have been all made to drink into one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many.' See in particular Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago; London, 2002) and Michael Ferber, *The Social Vision of William Blake* (Princeton, 1985).

⁹ Quoted in Kevin Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit: William Blake, Jakob Boehme, and the Creative Spirit* (Madison, 2004), 112.

way. This is a strategy which Blake himself used to undermine the pitfalls of ‘Single vision’ (To Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, 88, E722) in his works, and it is this particular technique that I try to recreate by pairing each long analysis with a shorter contrary vision. This technique is seen most typically within *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794), which has the subtitle ‘Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul’ (E7), but also in the relation between pairs of Blake’s works (such as *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* and *The Book of Thel*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *The (First) Book of Urizen*, the *Night Thoughts* illustrations and *The Four Zoas*, and *Milton and Jerusalem*). These twin works were not always produced at the same time, but do with similar frames of reference explore related themes from different perspectives, together creating a set of contrary or opposite works that mutually inform each other – and, most importantly, of which not one represents the whole truth.¹⁰ The point – which is fundamental in Blake’s thinking – is that two ‘contrary states’ do not mutually exclude each other, but *together* describe a complex human existence, in which ‘contraries’ (or ‘opposites’) generate a positive dynamic between them: ‘Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence [...] Opposition is true Friendship’ (MHH3, 20, E34-42). The negative correlation to these positive contraries and opposites is the situation in which opposites have become locked and turned into ‘negations,’ and one attempts to dominate and negate the other: ‘Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist:/ But Negations Exist Not’ (J17.33-34, E162).

¹⁰ In this light, the tendency in Blake criticism to see, for example, *The Marriage* as representing a more true version of existence than *Book of Urizen*, and as *Songs of Experience* as annulling the pastoral vision of *Songs of Innocence* is difficult to maintain – *The Marriage* and *Songs of Experience* might be more appealing and attractive to some modern readers, but nothing in Blake’s works suggest that they should be regarded as superior to their ‘contrary’ works.

Used as a structural technique in this thesis, the ‘contrary’ visions seek to emphasize the connections between Blake’s works and counterbalance the impression one might otherwise get of conversion as being definitively and prescriptively manifested in the three works that form the basis of my main analyses.

I begin Part I by introducing the narrative of Blake’s conversion in criticism and examine ways in which we can speak of conversion in Blake, as well as the limits to what we can conclude on the basis of the biographical material. My argument here is that, whereas it is difficult to conclude anything substantial about Blake’s own conversion, the appearance of motifs and tropes in his works that can be grouped together under the umbrella term of conversion justify applying the term to Blake’s works as an interpretative key with which to understand them. From there, I move on to an introduction to the critical discourse on conversion, showing how much of contemporary scholarship is based on the paradigm of conversion as a single, one-off event in a subject’s life, often described autobiographically in a conversion narrative. As I show, however, the shapes and forms of conversion texts in western Europe are more complicated than this one-off, autobiographically centred paradigm suggests – for example, the tradition from Boehme, who influenced Blake considerably, operates with a concept of repeated conversion. By discussing the conversion narratives of Paul and Augustine, I illustrate some of the difficulties that are connected with reading conversion texts as biographical evidence. Finally, I conclude Part I with a brief introduction to early traces of conversion in Blake, leading up to the work with which I begin my analysis: the *Night Thoughts* illustrations from 1796-97. Although many of these earlier works could be fruitfully read from the standpoint of conversion, I have chosen to pass lightly over the shorter and more widely discussed works from the early 1790s in

order to make space for deeper analyses of later works that use conversion as a focal point in a more direct and particular way. This choice has the further advantage of widening my discussion, so that my focus is less on Blake's illuminated books and more on the dynamics between his different modes of expression – the three main analyses are thus concerned with one illuminated book and two illustration series, with additional discussions on an illustrated manuscript, another illuminated book, and another illustration series.

These analyses are found in Part II, beginning with Blake's illustrations to *Night Thoughts* (1796-97). From this monumental work, I have selected a number of illustrations which depict the wounded body of Christ in a way which may be understood to refer to the visual tradition found amongst contemporary Moravians – a religious group with which Blake's family has recently been set in contact. By discussing the *Night Thoughts* illustrations' relationship with Young's text as well as with Moravian tradition, I show how Blake's representations of Christ's death and opened body can be read as loci of conversion – several years before his own suggested conversion and his 'official' turn towards Christian motifs. I then turn briefly to the illustrated manuscript *The Four Zoas* (ca. 1797-1807) for a contrary perspective, showing how Blake continued to explore the tropes of Christ's wounds, death, and rebirth in the years 1797-1807.

The next chapter examines conversion as it manifests itself in the illuminated book *Milton* (ca. 1804-11), which Blake began to work on just around the time of his alleged conversion and which is often understood as referring autobiographically to his own experiences. Here, conversion has become a much more dominant theme than earlier, with the book describing the journey of the character Milton as he returns to this world to be restored and to rectify what –

according to Blake – he misunderstood in his historical life. This central conversion, around which the narrative moves, is accompanied by other successful or unsuccessful conversions within the narrative, namely that of the character ‘Blake,’ the reader, and Milton’s emanation Ololon. Similarly, there are regular references in text and images to the conversion of Paul, emphasizing that conversion is at the centre of attention. We also see how the notion of self-annihilation begins to inform Blake’s engagement with conversion, a notion which I develop by discussing Blake’s relationship with Boehme (more specifically, by discussing Boehme’s sense of how conversion can take place in the reader while reading his conversion books). The contrary work following this discussion is *Jerusalem* (ca. 1804-20), which was initiated at the same time as *Milton* and shares many of its themes – here, however, the description of one individual’s inner journey has been replaced by a collective outlook, describing the journey of the collective body of Albion as he moves towards restoration.

I end the thesis with an analysis of a mature conversion work of Blake’s, his late – and rather overlooked – illustrations to *Pilgrim’s Progress* (ca. 1824-27). Here we see Blake illustrating a classical conversion narrative, which might appear to represent a theological position far from Blake’s own, but which Blake nevertheless interprets with perception and originality. The contrary companion to this analysis is Blake’s engraved illustrations to the *Book of Job* (1823-26), produced in the same period as the Bunyan illustrations and showing a similar response to the original text. Together, these Blake works in different genres reaching from 1796 to Blake’s final year 1827 each present a related – but distinct – representation of conversion. This selection of works – some of which are well known and widely critically addressed (*The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, *Jerusalem*, and the

Job illustrations) and some of which are less so (the *Night Thoughts* and *Pilgrim's Progress* series) – emphasizes the diversity and richness of Blake's corpus of works, as well as challenges the tendency in Blake criticism to focus on the illuminated books from the first half of the 1790s.

1.2 The narrative of Blake's conversion

We still only know a little about the minute particulars of Blake's religious life.¹¹ Although new facts are still unearthed from time to time – such as the discovery of Blake's probable connection with the Moravian tradition – it seems that the paucity of evidence regarding Blake's religious practice indicates that Blake was a privately practising Christian rather than a public worshipper. Contemporary sources note that Blake did not attend public worship for the last forty years of his life¹² and that he said to his wife Catherine shortly before his death: 'I have endeavoured to live as Christ commands, and have sought to worship God truly – in my own house, when I was not seen of men.'¹³ He was baptized in St. James's Church, Westminster, was

¹¹ But there are now several substantial studies of Blake and Christianity. See for example Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible* (New Haven; London, 2010), Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The New Apocalypse: The Radical Christian Vision of William Blake* (East Lansing, 1967), Magnus Ankarsjö, *William Blake and Religion: A New Critical View* (Jefferson; London, 2009), Margaret Bottrall, *The Divine Image: A Study of Blake's Interpretation of Christianity* (Rome, 1950), J. G. Davies, *The Theology of William Blake* (Oxford, 1948), Jean H. Hagstrum, 'Christ's Body,' in *William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes*, ed. Morton D. Paley and Michael Phillips (Oxford, 1973): 129-156, Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot, 2007), Jonathan Roberts, 'St Paul's Gifts to Blake's Aesthetic: 'O Human Imagination, O Divine Body,' *The Glass* 15 (2003): 8-18, Robert M. Ryan, 'Blake and Religion,' in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge, 2003), 150-68, Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*, Leslie Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies: The Great Code of Art* (Princeton, 1982), and Keri Davies and Marsha Keith Schuchard, 'Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family,' *Blake / An Illustrated Quarterly* 38.1 (2004): 36-43.

¹² John Thomas Smith, 'Nollekens and his Times,' in G. E. Bentley Jr., *Blake Records* (New Haven; London, 2004) (BR), 606-7.

¹³ Alan Cunningham, 'The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects,' in BR, 655. Bentley, however, notes that the passage 'like all Cunningham's

briefly connected with the Swedenborgian *New Jerusalem Church* in London in the 1780s, and was buried at the dissenting cemetery Bunhill Fields in London after an Anglican funeral service.¹⁴ Various attempts have been made to connect Blake with different dissenting groups: E. P. Thompson famously argued in favour of the Blake family belonging to radical dissenting group the Muggletonians,¹⁵ whereas the Moravian connection now seems the most credible – the argument being that Blake’s mother Catherine, together with her first husband, belonged to the Moravian community in Fetter Lane, London (the same community with which John and Charles Wesley had been connected before breaking off and forming the Methodists as a separate group). What we do know, however, is that throughout his life, Blake was critical – often fiercely so – towards the oppressive powers of institutional religion, which to him appeared more focussed on moral conduct than on the gospel, and towards the unimaginative Bible reading that he found in contemporary circles: ‘The Vision of Christ that thou dost see/ Is my Visions Greatest Enemy,’ he wrote ca. 1818 in *The Everlasting Gospel* (33.1-2, E524). Similarly, in ‘The Garden of Love’ from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794), the narrator walks to the ‘Garden of Love’ to find that a chapel has been erected there:

And the gates of this Chapel were shut,
And Thou shalt not. writ over the door;
So I turn’d to the Garden of Love,
That so many sweet flowers bore.

dialogue’ is ‘probably an embroidery of fact’ (G. E. Bentley Jr., *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven; London, 2001), 491).

¹⁴ Bentley, keen not to associate Blake too closely with any orthodox religious practice, notes that ‘Blake specified the Church of England service but not the Church of England clergyman’ (Bentley Jr., *Stranger from Paradise*, 436).

¹⁵ E. P. Thompson, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (New York, 1993).

And I saw it was filled with graves,
 And tomb-stones where flowers should be:
 And Priests in black gowns, were walking their rounds,
 And binding with briars, my joys and desires.
 (5-12, E26)

At the same time, Blake clearly identified himself as a Christian, who loved his Bible, engaged deeply with diverse parts of Christian literary tradition, and illustrated an abundance of biblical subjects throughout his career with great perceptiveness. According to Blake, the gospel consisted only of two main points, without which there was no true Christianity, namely mutual love and the forgiveness of sins: ‘Mutual Forgiveness of each Vice/ Such are the Gates of Paradise’ (*For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* 1-2, E259). Typically, through, he could also make positive (or provocative) comments about other parts of Christian tradition – for example about the way in which the Catholic church was the only one that truly practiced the forgiveness of sins.¹⁶

The question of Blake’s conversion, as it emerges in Blake criticism, usually (but not exclusively) refers to the period between ca. 1800 and 1804. The conversion is thus dated either to the period in which Blake and his wife lived in Felpham, Sussex (under the patronage of the poet William Hayley), or to the period immediately afterwards. The term ‘conversion,’ however, is not used in connection with Blake until 1965, and only from 1926 onwards do we have any critical notion of a shift in Blake’s works towards Christianity. Before then, the discussion of Blake’s religious views seems to have been more concerned with where on the

¹⁶ In his biography of Blake, Gilchrist writes that a ‘friend of Blake’s writes to me: “If it must be told, that he did not go to church, it should also be told that he was no scoffer at sacred mysteries; and, although thus isolated from the communion of the faithful, ever professed his preference of the Church to any sort of sectarianism. [...] One day, rather in an opposing mood, I think, he declared that the Romish Church was the only one which taught the forgiveness of sins’ (Alexander Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake*, ed. W. Graham Robertson (London; New York, 1907), 348).

spectrum of unorthodox or mystical Christianity he could be placed, and which (if any) religious community he preferred. It is notable that none of the early commentators (reprinted in Bentley's *Blake Records*, Appendix 1) mention any 'conversion,' or even any particular religious development in Blake's life. Typically, one of the first commentators, Benjamin Heath Malkin (writing in 1806 and possibly having gathered many of his facts from Blake himself),¹⁷ addresses the issue of Blake's personal religious life in rather vague terms, emphasizing independent enthusiasm and 'visionary' qualities and thus representing him as a classic solitary Romantic poet with a hint of 'madness:'

Enthusiastic and high flown notions on the subject of religion have hitherto [...] prevented his general reception, as a son of taste and of the muses. The sceptic and the rational believer, uniting their forces against the visionary, pursue and scare a warm and brilliant imagination, with the hue and cry of madness.¹⁸

Apart from that, Malkin appears more interested in Blake as an artist and a poet than in Blake as a Christian (although he does note that 'the book of Revelation [...] may well be supposed to engross much of Mr. Blake's study').¹⁹ Henry Crabb Robinson, on the other hand – himself of dissenting origin and later a Unitarian²⁰ – is the one amongst the early commentators who appears most interested in Blake's religious views. His 1811 essay on Blake, *Vaterländisches Museum* (written before he had met Blake in person) at the same time underlines Blake's orthodoxy, his generally-defined dissenting heritage (through his parents), and his connection with the

¹⁷ BR, 561.

¹⁸ Benjamin Heath Malkin, 'A Father's Memoirs of His Child,' 564. Malkin continues with criticizing his contemporaries' ignorance of Blake, summing it up thus: 'By them, in short, has he been stigmatized as an engraver, who might do tolerably well, if he was not mad' (ibid., 565).

¹⁹ Ibid., 567.

²⁰ R. K. Webb, 'Robinson, Henry Crabb (1775-1867),' in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford, 1999), 680.

Swedenborgian circles – as well as describing how Blake, like Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), lived in contact with angels:

Blake's religious convictions appear to be those of an orthodox Christian; nevertheless, passages concerning earlier mythologies occur which might give rise to some doubts about this. [...] Blake does not belong by birth to the established church, but to a dissenting community; although we do not believe that he goes regularly to any Christian church. He was invited to join the Swedenborgians under Proud, but declined [...] Our author lives, like Swedenborg, in communication with the angels.²¹

In 1852, when converting his diary into the *Reminiscences* manuscript, the impression Crabb Robinson gives of Blake is by and large the same, although he had now in fact *met* Blake and formed an acquaintance, if not a friendship, with him (the reminiscences of which gives us a valuable impression of Blake as he appeared in the last years of his life). Crabb Robinson now quotes Blake on a number of religious subjects (such as Christ, Boehme, and Manichean doctrine), recalling for example a conversation with him, in which Blake asserted: 'We are all coexistent with God – Members of the Divine Body – And partakers of the divine nature.' Crabb Robinson continues:

Blake's having adopted this Platonic idea led me on in our *tete à tete* walk home at night to put the popular question to him – Concerning the imputed Divinity of Jesus Christ[.] He answered – [“]He is the only God[“] – but then he added – [“]And so am I and So are you[“]²²

Crabb Robinson also takes particular note of the forthright way in which Blake spoke of his 'visions' – here from their first meeting at a dinner party:

I was aware of his idiosyncracies And therefore to a great degree prepared for the sort of conversation which took place at and after dinner[,] an

²¹ Henry Crabb Robinson, 'Modern Translation of 'Künstler, Dichter, und Religiöser Schwärmer,' in BR, 598.

²² Robinson, 'Reminiscences,' in BR, 696.

altogether unmethodical rhapsody on art, religion – He Saying the most strange things in the most unemphatic manner, speaking of his visions as any man would of the most ordinary occurrence.²³

Crabb Robinson does not, however, mention any ‘conversion’ – or significant development or change – in Blake’s religious life.

J. T. Smith (writing in 1828) is not principally concerned with Blake’s religious views either, but does seem keen to emphasize that Blake was not, despite his not attending church, an irreligious man: ‘Though I admit he did not for the last forty years attend any place of Divine worship, yet he was not a Freethinker, [...] nor was he ever in any degree irreligious. Through life, his Bible was every thing with him.’²⁴ It is also Smith who informs us that Blake, when facing death, thought he ought to be in the dissenting cemetery Bunhill Fields (as the rest of his family was there), but that he would like the service to be ‘that of the Church of England.’²⁵

Similarly, Alan Cunningham (writing in 1830) only rarely discusses the details of Blake’s religion. Instead, he calls Blake ‘by nature a poet, a dreamer, and an enthusiast’ and refers quite factually (as did Crabb Robinson) to Blake’s visions.²⁶ Cunningham describes Blake’s move to Felpham in 1800 in some detail – the period that later critics link with the conversion – and quotes from a happy letter from Blake to his friend, the sculptor John Flaxman, written after the arrival in Felpham.²⁷ There is still no mention of any religious conversion or development around this time, but Cunningham does note the sense of creative renewal in Blake

²³ Ibid., 695.

²⁴ Smith, ‘Nollekens and his Times,’ in BR, 606-7. Later he describes how Blake did not ‘at any time indulge in a game of chess, draughts, or backgammon [...] His greatest pleasure was derived from the Bible, – a work ever in his hand, and which he often assiduously consulted in several languages’ (ibid., 617).

²⁵ Ibid., 626.

²⁶ Cunningham, ‘Lives,’ in BR, 636.

²⁷ BR, 639.

in Felpham, which was later to be connected with his ‘conversion.’ ‘It was evident that the solitude of the country gave him a larger swing in imaginary matters.’²⁸

Cunningham also mentions Blake’s angels, here in relation to the drawings of visionary heads he produced later in life together with John Varley:

That all this was real, he himself most sincerely believed; nay, so infectious was his enthusiasm, that some acute and sensible persons who heard him expatiate, shook their heads, and hinted that he was an extraordinary man, and that there might be something in the matter.²⁹

Frederick Tatham’s *Life of Blake* manuscript from ca. 1832 also notes Blake’s connection with Swedenborg as well as his visions (or, as Tatham puts it, his ‘power of bringing his Imagination before his minds Eye, so completely organized, & so perfectly formed & Evident’).³⁰ Like the other early commentators, Tatham does not dwell on Blake’s religious views, although he does note that Blake’s habit

²⁸ Cunningham, ‘Lives,’ in BR, 640.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 648.

³⁰ Frederick Tatham, ‘Life of Blake,’ in BR, 673. Interestingly, Tatham in his discussion of Swedenborg compares him with the radical prophetic figure Richard Brothers (1727-1824) as an example of someone who was *actually* mad: ‘Richard Brothers [...] was really a decided madman, he asserted that he was nephew to God the Father, & in a mad House he died as well indeed he might. Brothers is only classed with Swedenborg in order to ridicule Swedenborg, & bring him into contempt. Blake & Brothers therefore must not be placed together’ (*ibid.*, 647). For more on Brothers in relation to Blake, see Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 122-33, and Morton D. Paley, ‘William Blake, the Prince of the Hebrews, and the Woman Clothed with the Sun,’ in *William Blake: Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes*, ed. Morton D. Paley and Michael Phillips (Oxford, 1973), 260-293. There are similarities and connections between Blake and the popular radical prophets of his day, but Blake does not seem to have become a follower of any of them. For example, he attended the first Swedenborgian conference together with the prophetess Dorothy Gott (see David Worrall, ‘William Blake, the Female Prophet and the American Agent: The Evidence of the Swedenborgian Great East Cheap Conference,’ in *Blake and Conflict*, ed. Jon Mee and Sarah Haggarty (Basingstoke, 2009), 48-64) and he was friendly with the fellow engraver William Sharp, who was first a follower of Brothers, then of the prophetess Joanna Southcott, who claimed to be pregnant with a divine saviour child, Shiloh (see Bentley Jr., *Stranger from Paradise*, 347). He even composed some lines on Southcott in his Notebook, ‘On the Virginity of the Virgin Mary & Johanna Southcott:’ ‘Whateer is done to her she cannot know/ And if youll ask her she will swear it so/ Whether tis good or evil none’s to blame/ No one can take the pride no one the shame’ (E501). Blake does not seem, though, to ever directly refer to Richard Brothers.

of answering questions in an enigmatic (or playful) way was especially pronounced when the subject was religion:

If he thought a question were put merely from a desire to learn, no man could give advice more seasonably [...] but if that same question were put for idle Curiosity, he retaliated by such an Eccentric answer, as left the Enquirer more afield than Ever. [...] He was particularly so upon religion. His writings abounded with these sallies of independent opinion. *He* detested priestcraft & religious Cant.³¹

To sum up, none of the early commentators refer to any conversion, change, or major development in Blake's religious views, except for his breaking away from the Swedenborgians some time around 1789-90.³² None of them place Blake in relation to any particular religious group (other than the Swedenborgians) apart from mentioning his dissenting heritage from his parents, and none of them indicate that the years in Felpham were particularly important with regards to Blake's religious or spiritual life. In other words, although such a conversion or change might have occurred, the early sources do not mention it – and the origin of the narrative of Blake's conversion thus lies much later.

In the first biography of Blake, Alexander Gilchrist's *The Life of William Blake* (1863) no conversion or religious change is mentioned either. Gilchrist calls Blake 'a transcendental Christian rather than a literal one' and refers – twice – to Blake's 'sentimental liking for the Romish Church.'³³ Generally, however, Gilchrist is more interested in discussing the difficult accusations of Blake's alleged 'madness' (which Gilchrist discusses with admirable sense)³⁴ than in discussing

³¹ Tatham, 'Life of Blake,' 684-85. Gilchrist also comments on Blake's mischievousness in conversation, noting how 'he would say things on purpose to startle, and make people stare' (Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake*, 345).

³² Rix, *William Blake*, 47-48.

³³ Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake*, 348.

³⁴ Commenting typically: 'So far as I am concerned, I would infinitely rather be mad with William Blake than sane with nine-tenths of the world' (ibid., 343).

Blake's Christianity; and in the few pages in which he does discuss Blake as a Christian, the impression the reader gets is one of gentle enthusiasm and playfulness, not fervent radicalism. Similarly, no conversion is mentioned in E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats's *The Works of William Blake* (1893) either. However, they do discuss – and at some length – how Blake in Felpham began a period of 'awakening,' which was to last 'a series of years.'³⁵ First, Ellis and Yeats draw attention to a letter from Blake to his friend and patron Thomas Butts written in Felpham in November 1802 (this the first letter of two written on the same day to the same recipient, and Jean H. Hagstrum later uses the *second* letter of these letters as a proof of Blake's conversion). In the first letter, Blake writes:

Tho I have been very unhappy I am so no longer I am again Emerged into the light of Day I still & shall to Eternity Embrace Christianity and Adore him who is the Express image of God but I have traveld thro Perils & Darkness not unlike a Champion I have Conquerd and shall still Go on Conquering[.]

(To Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, E720)

Ellis and Yeats do not, however, take this to indicate a conversion experience as such. They note that it 'has quite a deceptively conventional ring' and that 'the artist-fanatic [...] seems to have given place to a half-hearted evangelical believer recently recovered from a cold fit of sceptical vacillation.'³⁶ However, say Ellis and Yeats, the reader should not be fooled, as Blake's 'next words reveal that this is only an accidental resemblance of which the writer himself was entirely unconscious.'³⁷ Blake's letter continues: 'Nothing can withstand the fury of my Course among the Stars of God & in the Abyesses of the Accuser My Enthusiasm is

³⁵ Edwin John Ellis and W. B. Yeats, *The Works of William Blake. Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*, vol. 1 (London, 1893, reprinted 1973), 99-103.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 63.

³⁷ *Ibid.*

still what it was only Enlarged and confirmd' (E720 – 'the Accuser' being Blake's shorthand for 'Satan'). In other words, the 'half-hearted' evangelicalism did not last and the apparent conversion was not genuine.

However, later in their study Ellis and Yeats discuss another letter that has come to play a key role in the modern scholarly narrative of Blake's conversion. This was written to William Hayley in October 1804, when Blake had returned from Felpham to London, and describes his experience of going to the Truchsessian Gallery to see the works exhibited there:³⁸

O Glory! and O Delight! I have entirely reduced that spectrous Fiend to his station, whose annoyance has been the ruin of my labours for the last passed twenty years of my life [...] Suddenly, on the day after visiting the Truchsessian Gallery of pictures, I was again enlightened with the light I enjoyed in my youth, and which has for exactly twenty years been closed from me as by a door and by window-shutters. [...] Dear Sir, excuse my enthusiasm or rather madness, for I am really drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver into my hand, even as I used to be in my youth, and as I have not been for twenty dark, but very profitable years.
(To William Hayley, 23 October 1804, E756-57)

According to Ellis and Yeats, this letter epitomizes the 'awakening period of Blake's mature life.'³⁹ This 'awakening period' is not described, however, as a religious experience as such by Ellis and Yeats, but as an experience of aesthetic or artistic new-birth and a sense of personal confidence. It was, it seems, a rebirth of the artist and poet more than that of the believer:

The highest point of this awakening, the meeting-place where it joined hands with art and consciousness, appears to have been reached at this time as never before. Often Blake had seemed to himself to have arrived at the union of his working mind and his dreaming mind. But from now they promised to act harmoniously, and not as before, when the worker laboriously sought to record what the dreamer had happily experienced. This

³⁸ For more on this visit, see Morton D. Paley, 'The Truchsessian Gallery Revisited,' *Studies in Romanticism* 16.2 (1977): 165-77.

³⁹ Ellis and Yeats, *Works of William Blake*, 99.

union came to him in a flash of delight while studying a collection of pictures by the Old Masters.⁴⁰

Whilst not suggesting an actual religious conversion experience, then, Ellis and Yeats did manage to draw attention to Blake's experience in the Truchsessian Gallery and single it out as a crucial moment – the prism through which to understand Blake's development during this 'awakening period.'

Charles Gardner's study *Vision and Vesture: A Study of William Blake in Modern Thought* (1916) does not mention any conversion either. What he does do, however, is single out regeneration and spiritual new-birth as central themes in Blake's thought; and he discusses them in relation to a Methodist framework (and in relation to William Law [1686-1761] Boehme, and the Bible), thereby suggesting Blake's works were somehow centred around regeneration and rebirth.⁴¹ With D. J. Sloss and J. P. R. Wallis's *William Blake's Prophetic Writings* (1926), however, Ellis and Yeats's suggestion of an 'awakening period' is elaborated into a reading of Blake that distinguishes between the mythical works of the 1790s and the more explicitly Christian works from *The Four Zoas* onwards – and connects this distinction with the notion of a change in Blake's spiritual beliefs:

But at some time after 1797, when a fair copy of Vala [the first title of *The Four Zoas*] was begun, Blake's opinions underwent a striking and a far-reaching change. The necessitarianism of the earlier writings gave place to a belief in the existence of a beneficent Providence, seen in vision as a 'World of Eternals', the 'Divine Family', who united in 'One Man, Jesus, the Divine Humanity'. The change is accompanied by a much fuller use of symbols derived from Christian history and doctrine, but this does not lead to any diminution of his hostility to all dogmatic theologies and restrictive moral codes, which now are grouped under the general title 'Natural Religion.'⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Despite the extensive discourse of conversion in Methodist thought and culture, I will not go into details of Blake and Methodism. See instead Michael Farrell, 'Blake and the Methodists' (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2010).

⁴² D. J. Sloss and J. P. R. Wallis, *The Prophetic Writings of William Blake* (Oxford, 1926, reprinted 1957), 7.

Sloss and Wallis also connect this with a similar development in Blake's philosophy of art:

There is a continuous development towards the identification of 'Christianity', as Blake now calls his mystical philosophy, with Art, till in the Laocoon aphorisms the terms are interchangeable. The clearest indication of this change is the appearance of many new symbols and the disappearance of many old ones.⁴³

This represents the clearest articulation of the 'conversion' paradigm so far, though still without actually using the term 'conversion' (and as such it keeps the critical discussion at a distance from biographical assumptions about Blake's life and from an overly close association of this change with the more conventional conversions of the evangelical – and in particular the Methodist – tradition).

Mona Wilson's *The Life of William Blake* from the following year (1927), however, does not pick up on the 'significant change' paradigm, but paints a rather more mystically informed and Swedenborgian picture of Blake. She does, however, actually *use* the term 'conversion' (albeit in passing) when she discusses Blake's mystical 'illumination:'

Illumination, that is the renewal and increase of the first visionary intuition of the Eternal at 'Conversion', did not come to Blake as a merely personal revelation, a peaceful reassurance after the suffering of Purgation, but in the guise of a subversive rebellion against established religion, morality, and art.⁴⁴

Wilson also connects Blake with John Bunyan and with the Methodist movement, but does not on the basis of this suggest that Blake might have experienced a

⁴³ Ibid.

⁴⁴ Mona Wilson, *The Life of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford, 1971), 58.

conversion similar to them.⁴⁵ Similarly, Frederick C. Gill's *The Romantic Movement and Methodism* (1937) discusses parallels between the awakening programme of the Methodist movement and Blake. Gill points to how the call to individual and social conversion or awakening in Blake's works reflects a similar rhetoric in John Wesley's works, exemplified by Blakean phrases such as 'Awake arise to Spiritual Strife' (EG[k]74, E520), which might as well have been found in a Methodist hymn. According to Gill, Blake's writing thus represents a 'missionary activity' from 'an evangelist of art,' who also makes use of classical evangelical (or Methodist) tropes, such as the lamb of God and the Saviour.⁴⁶ (As we will see in chapter two, however, these tropes might also refer to a Moravian context.) Gill emphasizes how we need to understand Blake in relation to a wider religious context, and how Blake's works refer to a religiously charged rhetoric that was already available. He is also aware of understanding isolated religious statements in Blake too literally, as 'Blake did not always mean what the Evangelicals meant in their redemptive doctrines, but in their essential substance they were the same.'⁴⁷ Gill does not, however, at any point suggest that Blake himself experienced any kind of conversion; his argument is based on language and does not as such draw biographical conclusions.

Neither does J. G. Davies in *The Theology of William Blake* (1948) suggest any conversion. What he does stress, however, is Blake's positive attitude towards the evangelical movement, and in particular to the Methodists – but Davies is keen to emphasize that Blake was also critical towards the evangelical movement: 'Blake scathingly remarked that they 'cannot believe in Eternal Life Except by Miracle',

⁴⁵ Ibid., 63.

⁴⁶ Frederick C. Gill, *The Romantic Movement and Methodism: A Study of English Romanticism and the Evangelical Revival* (London, 1937, reprinted 1954), 155-56.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 157-58.

and that their only hope of salvation, which their very self-righteousness excludes, is by ‘a New Birth’ (quoting M25.33-34, E122).⁴⁸ The following year, however (1949), Bernard Blackstone published *English Blake*, in which, on the basis of Blake’s letters, he suggested that Blake turned towards Christianity during his stay in Felpham (a position similar to Sloss and Wallis, and contrary to Frye in *Fearful Symmetry* (1947), who emphasized the *continuity* of Blake’s vision). Blackstone, like Ellis and Yeats, draws attention to the first letter to Butts from 22 November 1802 (quoted above) reading it as proof of Blake’s newfound ‘devotion to Christ and to the cause of Christ.’⁴⁹ Blackstone does not, however, qualify ‘the two poems relating mystical experiences’ – namely a letter to Butts from 2 October 1800 describing a vision on the beach in Felpham⁵⁰ and the *second* letter to Butts from 22 November 1802 – as exactly conversion experiences, but rather as mystical visions. Blackstone also refers to the letter to Hayley from 23 October 1804 (describing the Truchsessian Gallery experience) as marking one of the ‘milestones in Blake’s spiritual career.’⁵¹ However, he connects Blake’s experience here more with a profound revelation regarding his work and his relationship with his wife Catherine than with a religious experience as such; in other words, he finds no particular religious quality in the letter, apart from Blake’s somewhat colloquial ‘I thank God that I courageously pursued my course through darkness’ (To William Hayley, 23 October 1804, E757). At the same time, however, Blackstone suggests that Blake’s experiences are reflected in his works from now on, for example in the theme and

⁴⁸ Davies, *Theology of William Blake*, 137.

⁴⁹ Bernard Blackstone, *English Blake* (Hamden, Connecticut, 1966), 374.

⁵⁰ See Jonathan Roberts, *Blake. Wordsworth. Religion* (London, 2010), chapter 2.

⁵¹ Blackstone, *English Blake*, 119.

form of *Milton*, ‘the intensely Christian poem,’⁵² and in his new explicit use of the Christ figure:

We cannot know precisely what Blake meant in his confession to William Hayley. All we can say for sure is that there is a change in his work after this date; and this change is towards a serener vision, a less tormented symbolism. [...] And one thing we shall notice [...] is that the figure of Jesus becomes much more vivid and definite in his work after this date.⁵³

Another study from this period, Margaret Bottrall’s *The Divine Image* (1950) – which is a great deal more perceptive than Davies with regards to Blake’s theology – continues in the tradition of Gardner and Gill in discussing awakening, conversion, or (as she mainly calls it) ‘regeneration’ as a central trope in Blake’s thought and works.⁵⁴ Containing interesting observations on Blake’s relationship with William Law and the Methodist tradition, Bottrall (like Sloss and Wallis, and Blackstone) distinguishes between two phases in Blake’s works: one of critical engagement with the Christian tradition, and one of more positive engagement. Like Sloss and Wallis, Bottrall makes a close connection between this interpretative paradigm and Blake’s personal life, and identifies Blake’s first Christian phase as ‘revolution,’ and the second as ‘forgiveness.’ On the transition from one period to the other – which Bottrall dates as beginning as early as 1795 – she notes:

There is no recorded event in Blake’s life to account for the change in symbolism which distinguishes the books written after the year 1795 from

⁵² Ibid., 374.

⁵³ Ibid., 121.

⁵⁴ Theologically speaking, conversion and regeneration are not the same, but in Blake criticism, they are often used interchangeably (see for example Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake’s Thought* (Oxford, 1970), chapter 6). Paley is, however, aware of mixing the two terms and justifies his collapse of the two terms with a footnote to a 1771 essay by John Blair, ‘On Regeneration.’ ‘Regeneration,’ writes Blair, ‘and Conversion, strictly taken, are not distinct Things; but these different Denominations, express the same Thing under different Views’ (quoted in *ibid.*, 142).

their predecessors. His whole religious attitude, however, underwent a change at this period. From the time when he began to work on *Vala*, [...] his mythological web is reinforced with christian symbols. [...] Some crisis, felt perhaps as a defeat, separates the Lambeth books from their successors.⁵⁵

A crucial point that Bottrall is keen to emphasize – and this is important to bear in mind in what follows – is that this ‘change in symbolism’ does not denote a complete change of overall vision (a critical position which combines Frye’s continuity paradigm with Sloss and Wallis’s change paradigm); the new symbolism simply represents a rephrasing of the original vision, not an abandonment of it.

In 1965 Hagstrum published the article ‘The Wrath of the Lamb: A Study of William Blake’s Conversions,’ which has become the cornerstone for arguing in favour of Blake’s conversion. Hagstrum does not refer to either Sloss and Wallis, Bottrall, or Blackstone, but adapts a similar interpretative paradigm of Blake’s development from the revolutionary energy of the 1790s to the more positive period of the early 1800s, a period which Hagstrum characterizes as ‘Christian love.’⁵⁶ Like Ellis and Yeats, Hagstrum operates with the notion of two conversion movements in Blake’s life: one pseudo-conversion, in which Blake converted to a too meek and humble version of Christianity, and then a genuine conversion in which Blake managed to incorporate his own revolutionary energy into a Christian framework. Hagstrum does not, however, include any views on if – and if so, how – this conversion relates to a Methodist or evangelically informed framework in

⁵⁵ Bottrall, *Divine Image*, 47.

⁵⁶ Jean H. Hagstrum, “‘The Wrath of the Lamb’: A Study of William Blake’s Conversions,” in *From Sensibility to Romanticism: Essays Presented to Frederick A. Pottle*, ed. Frederick W. Hilles and Harold Bloom (New York, 1965), 319.

Blake's world, for the religious context for Blake that Hagstrum outlines is different: it is that of Paracelsus (1493-1541), Boehme, and Swedenborg.⁵⁷

Hagstrum also finds the central evidence of the conversion in Blake's letters. The pseudo-conversion is, according to Hagstrum, described in the vision of Christ on the beach in Felpham that occurs in the letter to Butts from 2 October 1800. This apparent submission to Christianity, however (claiming that Blake now will be 'the determined advocate of Religion & Humility the two bands of Society,' To Thomas Butts, 2 October 1800, E712),⁵⁸ is no more than a 'temporary relief; and as for becoming an advocate of humility to please the friends of religion and order, Blake, if he ever referred again to the obedient promise of this letter, could only have regarded it as a capitulation.'⁵⁹ The genuine conversion, on the other hand, is constituted by 'an experience, or series of experiences' described in the second letter to Butts from 22 November 1802.⁶⁰ This letter contains what appears to be an autobiographical poem, according to Blake composed a year earlier, in 1801 ('Composed [...] a twelvemonth ago [...] <while> Walk<ing> from Felpham to Lavant to meet my Sister,' To Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, E720).⁶¹ The poem ends with the now famous lines:

⁵⁷ The evangelical and the mystical traditions do not, of course, mutually exclude each other. Although John Wesley expressed critical views of Boehme ('sublime nonsense, inimitable bombast, fustian not to be paralleled,' quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 21-22), he might have been inspired by him through William Law, who was an Anglican clergyman, Behmenist, and a considerable influence on Wesley. Wesley did not, however, agree with all his views, and they differed, amongst other things, on the issue of – conversion.

⁵⁸ Hagstrum has 'Humanity' instead of 'Humility,' thereby somewhat diminishing his own argument (Hagstrum, 'Wrath of the Lamb,' 322).

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ The poem does thus not describe a recent experience for Blake. As a consequence, the 'series of experiences' that Hagstrum refers to must either have happened a year earlier or in 1802. But if the experiences happened in 1802, Blake – instead of writing new verses – reached for the back catalogue when he wanted to communicate them to Butts. Whatever

Now I a fourfold vision see
 And a fourfold vision is given to me
 Tis fourfold in my supreme delight
 And three fold in soft Beulahs night
 And twofold Always. May God us keep
 From Single vision & Newtons sleep[.]
 (To Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, 83-88, E722)

In this poem, says Hagstrum, we find Blake's 'conversion experience' described:

The poet is no longer meekly submissive but angrily triumphant over the spectre that had tormented him. His mind now arrayed with light, he recommits himself to battle, taking up his spear, his bow, and his arrows, which glow in their golden sheaves as the heavens drop gore. Anger, energy, action now impel him, and he had become once again the dedicated artist-prophet.⁶²

Blake's genuine conversion, then – according to Hagstrum – shows itself in the fact that Blake's usual wrath and energy (what Hagstrum calls 'experience') is successfully united with Christian love ('innocence'), but does not submit to it. These experiences, continues Hagstrum, are put into mythical form in Night VIIa of *The Four Zoas* (a late addition),⁶³ in which Blake's mythical alter ego, Los, undergoes a similar conversion experience to that of Blake. Likewise, after Blake's conversion, two 'unmistakably new elements' enter Blake's thought: 'the rejection of violence and a dedication to what Blake will obsessively call *intellectual* battle' and 'a return to unorthodox Christianity, conceived of chiefly as the mutual and continuing forgiveness of sin.'⁶⁴

Hagstrum's article thus introduces the term 'conversion' into Blake criticism, and still remains that one article which is always cited when referring to

the reason, the distance in time between the poem and the letter has not received any particular attention in the critical discussion of Blake's conversion.

⁶² Hagstrum, 'Wrath of the Lamb,' 322.

⁶³ For a study of Blake's revisions to *The Four Zoas*, see Andrew Lincoln, *Spiritual History: A Reading of William Blake's Vala or the Four Zoas* (Oxford, 1995).

⁶⁴ Hagstrum, 'Wrath of the Lamb,' 324.

Blake's conversion (although the conversion paradigm is not adopted by all critics, for example Robert Ryan).⁶⁵ Hagstrum's article has thus had a considerable impact on the discussion of Blake and religion. Curiously, however, Hagstrum does not himself seem to mention Blake's conversion subsequently. Whether or not this should be understood as a recapitulation of the conversion thesis, it is an interesting fact that the conversion is not mentioned in Hagstrum's 1973 article 'Christ's Body' – even though Hagstrum here uses the 22 November 1802 letter to Butts (the 'real' conversion letter) again. This time, however, the letter is understood as describing Blake's experience of being united with – and even becoming – Christ.⁶⁶

When in the moment of great artistic and prophetic inspiration Blake says that he became 'One Man' with Los, he is virtually saying that he became Christ, who is often called One Man, the authenticator and supporter of all artistic form, the breath and finer spirit of all prophecy.⁶⁷

This more internalized experience of union with the divine has not, however, been taken on board by Blake criticism in the same way that Hagstrum's introduction of the loaded term 'conversion' was in 1965.

Martha England and John Sparrow's 1966 publication *Hymns Unbidden* does not follow the new conversion trail, but provides some interesting observations on the literary relationship between Blake and the Methodist tradition through comparing Charles Wesley's *Hymns for Children* (1763) and Blake's *Songs of Innocence*. As Gill did earlier, England and Sparrow underline the rhetoric of awakening in both Methodist texts and Blake's texts, and their shared interest in

⁶⁵ Robert M. Ryan, *The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824* (Cambridge, 1997) and Ryan, 'Blake and Religion.'

⁶⁶ The topos of internalizing Christ to the point of actually *becoming* him is well known in the early modern period. For a brief introduction to Abiezer Coppe, who is a good example of this, see Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 172-74, and Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 283-300. For a more comprehensive study of the topos, see Thomas H. Luxon, *Literal Figures: Puritan Allegory and the Reformation Crisis in Representation* (Chicago, 1995).

⁶⁷ Hagstrum, 'Christ's Body,' 154.

eliciting a change in their reader through *words* (be they read or sung, in private or in public). But in Thomas Altizer's theological study of Blake *The New Apocalypse* (1967) the conversion theme is taken up again. Altizer – placing Blake within the context of English radicalism, not of the evangelical movement – refers to Sloss and Wallis to support his point that the decade between 1797 and 1807, when Blake worked on *The Four Zoas*, was crucial in his life. Here,

Blake moved more and more deeply into a Christian and redemptive understanding of history and the cosmos. We have few clues to the personal ground of this transformation, the most important being a letter that Blake wrote to his patron, William Hayley, on October 23, 1804.⁶⁸

The letter that Altizer refers to is, of course, the Truchsessian Gallery letter. Drawing on Blackstone, Altizer understands this letter to represent the conversion experience that paves the way for Blake's incorporation of Christian motifs into his works: 'Christ does not appear in Blake's prophetic poetry until after his conversion or regeneration, when his prophetic activity for the first time became definitely Christian.'⁶⁹ At the same time, however, Altizer is keen to point out Blake's loyalty to his religious critique of the early 1790s, warning that

his vision is artificial and unreal at just those points where it contains the traditional language of belief [...] Blake is most deeply Christian when his language is most anti-Christian, his vision becomes most real when it is seemingly most blasphemous or atheistic, and his images of regeneration and of Jesus become most authentic when they are furthest away removed from their seeming original.⁷⁰

The discussion of Blake's conversion continues in Morton D. Paley's *Energy and the Imagination* (1970), in which a whole chapter is devoted to Blake and

⁶⁸ Altizer, *New Apocalypse*, 60.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 62-63.

‘regeneration.’⁷¹ Paley uses a quotation from William James’s classic conversion study *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902) as an epigraph for his ‘regeneration’ chapter, thereby constructing (as mentioned above) an interpretative framework in which ‘regeneration’ and ‘conversion’ are almost identical, and in which ‘conversion’ is defined in broad terms. ‘To be converted, to be regenerated, to receive grace, to experience religion, to gain an assurance,’ writes William James,

are so many phrases which denote the process, gradual or sudden, by which a self hitherto divided, and consciously wrong inferior and unhappy, becomes unified and consciously right superior and happy, in consequence of its firmer hold upon religious realities. This at least is what conversion signifies in general terms, whether or not we believe that a direct divine operation is needed to bring such a moral change about.⁷²

By using this broadly articulated epigraph, Paley distances his understanding of conversion from a more narrow evangelical definition and makes it possible for critics – with William James in hand – to discuss Blake’s conversion without necessarily implying any ‘direct divine operation.’ However, Paley’s understanding of Blake’s conversion appears quite literal, arguing that Blake had ‘such an experience’ in Felpham, *both* ‘sudden and gradual’ and extended over ‘a period of perhaps three years.’⁷³ Paley then refers to the ‘climactic moment’ at the end of *Milton* (where the character ‘Blake’ falls to the ground) as an illustration of this experience:⁷⁴

Terror struck in the Vale I stood at that immortal sound
My bones trembled. I fell outstretched upon the path
A moment, & my Soul returnd into its mortal state

⁷¹ Paley, *Energy and the Imagination*, chapter 6.

⁷² Quoted in *ibid.*, 142.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

To Resurrection & Judgment in the Vegetable Body[.]
(M42.24-27, E143)

In fact, Paley understands *Milton* (the most explicitly autobiographical of Blake's works) as describing, basically, 'the regeneration of one man, William Blake.'⁷⁵ The conversion experience does not only influence *Milton*, however, but also *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*, as new 'Christian' themes are added: 'the imagination,' 'the Incarnation, the Atonement, and the Resurrection.'⁷⁶ Paley is also the first critic to open up a discussion of what is meant by the term 'regeneration,' and how it appears in the New Testament as well as in Blake's more immediate contemporary religious context (such as in the works of Boehme, William Law, and the Methodist leader George Whitefield). Thus, Paley's study is valuable for teasing out in greater detail what is actually meant by Blake's conversion or 'regeneration' than, for example, Hagstrum. Paley returns to Blake's conversion in *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (1999), now stating that Blake 'during his residence at Felpham and immediately afterwards [...] had a series of visionary experiences that resulted in what can only be called a religious conversion.'⁷⁷ However, although Paley has now moved from using the term 'regeneration' to using 'religious conversion,' his argument and examples are the same as in 1970.

In *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (1980), Damrosch notes that 'there is no doubt that Blake underwent a serious spiritual crisis in the late 1790s and early 1800s, the outcome of which was a passionate if idiosyncratic return to Christianity' (thus suggesting an earlier date than Hagstrum, but later than Bottrall).⁷⁸ Whereas Damrosch discusses the conversion primarily on the basis of the 'Truchsessian'

⁷⁵ Ibid., 143.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry*, 70.

⁷⁸ Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth*, 245.

letter from October 1804, he now also points to yet another letter to Hayley from 1804, written on 4 December (the first known letter after the ‘Truchsessian’ letter), as an indicator of Blake’s new Christian orientation. Here Blake identifies himself with Christian (or ‘Pilgrim’), Bunyan’s protagonist from *Pilgrim’s Progress*: ‘I shall travel on in the Strength of the Lord God as Poor Pilgrim says’ (To William Hayley, 4 December 1804, E758), Blake writes.

More recently, Robert Rix in *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (2007) also touches upon Blake’s conversion, suggesting that instead of speaking of Blake’s ‘conversion’ experience we ‘may perhaps speak more sensibly of an intensification of ideas that were already present.’⁷⁹ Rix refers to Hagstrum and – like him – recognizes a change in Blake’s works after this ‘intensification,’ although he does not define this change further. Rix then (as others have done before him) suggests a connection between Wesleyan hymns and some of Blake’s verses or ‘songs’ (such as ‘England! awake! awake! awake!’, J77, E233). He also interestingly (if tentatively) suggests that ‘The Couch of Death’ from Blake’s first work *Poetical Sketches* (1783) can be read as a poeticized conversion narrative – and furthermore that it may have been inspired by Charles Wesley’s hymn ‘Where shall my wond’ring soul begin,’ ‘accepted widely’ to be the hymn he wrote (in the company of Moravians) on the night of his ‘decisive religious experience.’⁸⁰

Finally, in a recent doctoral thesis on Blake and the Methodists, Michael Farrell has returned to the question of Blake’s conversion. Farrell’s discussion has a biographical focus, concluding (on the basis of comparing with Methodist texts)

⁷⁹ Rix, *William Blake*, 4. The term ‘conversion,’ however, does not necessarily refer to a change of religion or denomination, but can just as well describe an intensification within one religious context – as Lewis Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian simply note, ‘fundamentally, conversion is religious change’ (Lewis Rambo and Charles E. Farhadian, ‘Conversion,’ in *Encyclopedea of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones (Detroit; London, 2005), 1969).

⁸⁰ Rix, *William Blake*, 23.

that Blake experienced something resembling a Methodist conversion – in Felpham (thus following Hagstrum and Paley), not when back in London or in the last years of the 1790s: ‘Blake’s conversion to a more inward-looking and Christ-centred theology at this time is clear, but it seems likely that his conversion has qualities in common with Methodist conversions rather than actually being one.’⁸¹

So while it has become increasingly common to refer to Blake’s conversion,⁸² it has received little attention as a discrete topic. It is often linked to what is thought to have been a difficult period in Blake’s life in the late 1790s, which is replaced by newfound happiness around 1801-04 (although Blake himself sometimes defined this dark period as reaching from 1784 to 1804).⁸³ But the date of the ‘conversion’ is disputed: some suggest a date as early as 1795-97 (John E. Grant and Bottrall)⁸⁴ whereas others suggest either some time during his stay in Felpham in 1801-03 (Hagstrum, Paley, and Farrell), or just after Blake’s return to London (Damrosch). It has also been suggested – often by critics from outside the Blake world – that Blake’s conversion happened during other periods of his life: Karl F. Morrison has qualified Blake’s childhood experience of seeing God ‘put his

⁸¹ Farrell, ‘Blake and the Methodists,’ 274.

⁸² Apart from those already mentioned, see Anne Kostelanetz Mellor, *Blake’s Human Form Divine* (Berkeley; London, 1974), 198, George Anthony Rosso Jr., *Blake’s Prophetic Workshop: A Study of The Four Zoas* (Lewisburg, 1993), 39, Henry Summerfield, *A Guide to the Books of William Blake for Innocent and Experienced Readers: with Notes on Interpretive Criticism 1910 to 1984* (Gerrards Cross, 1998), chapter 7, John E. Grant, ‘Jesus and the Powers That Be in Blake’s Designs for Young’s Night Thoughts,’ in *Blake and his Bibles*, ed. David V. Erdman (West Cornwall, 1990), 71-115, and Mark Crosby, ‘Sparks of Fire: William Blake in Felpham, 1800-1803’ (D.Phil thesis, University of Oxford, 2007), Introduction.

⁸³ In 1804, he writes to Hayley: ‘I have entirely reduced that spectrous Fiend to his station, whose annoyance has been the ruin of my labours for the last passed twenty years of my life [...] Nebuchadnezzar had seven times passed over him; I have had twenty’ (To William Hayley, 23 October 1804, E756).

⁸⁴ Grant, ‘Jesus and the Powers That Be,’ 71.

head to the window’ as a conversion experience,⁸⁵ whereas Antoon Geels has understood Blake’s experience of losing his brother Robert as triggering intense spiritual studies of Swedenborgian beliefs that might represent a sort of conversion.⁸⁶ There is, of course, no reason why Blake should not have experienced several conversions (as indicated in the use of plural in Hagstrum’s subtitle for his 1965 article ‘A Study of William Blake’s *Conversions*,’ emphasis added) – in 1826, Blake in the album of William Upcott indeed identifies himself as ‘William Blake [...] Born 28 Nov^r 1757 in London/ & has died several times since’ (E698). However, we have no evidence of him later recalling one particular (religious) experience as decisive in his life, apart from his early memories of childhood visions.⁸⁷ Blake criticism, however, often understands Blake’s conversion as one single turning (perhaps over some time), even though it would be perfectly justifiable to understand his life as a series of conversions: a conversion to Swedenborgianism around ca. 1788, a conversion to a more intense engagement with Christianity (or return to the Moravian roots of his childhood) from ca. 1796, and finally a conversion to the Christ who comes in vision and glory, not in the crucified or wounded body, in the 1820s. But we shall see in what follows that the idea of a ‘Christian’ shift in Blake’s work is more complex than the paradigm of a single decisive conversion allows. For example, some of Blake’s new ways of representing Christ are (as I shall argue) abandoned again once we get to the 1820s. So while it is true that Blake’s Christ of the 1790s is not the same as the Christ of

⁸⁵ Karl F. Morrison, *Conversion and Text: The Cases of Augustine of Hippo, Herman-Judah, and Constantine Tsatsos* (Charlottesville, 1992), 1. The incident was reported by Crabb Robinson and occurred in Gilchrist’s biography.

⁸⁶ Antoon Geels, ‘The Night is the Mother of Day: Methodological Comments on Three Cases of Religious Visions as Suicide Prevention,’ in *Autobiography and the Psychological Study of Religious Lives*, ed. Jacob A. Belzen and Antoon Geels (Amsterdam; New York, 2008), 110.

⁸⁷ Such as seeing a tree filled with angles on Peckham Rye (see BR, 10-11).

the 1800s, then neither is Christ of the 1800s the same as the Christ of the 1820s. Also, in the last years of Blake's life (as Christopher Rowland has shown) he reaches directly back to some of his religious critique of the early 1790s, thus creating a strong sense of continuity between his early and later works (or, as some have interpreted it, between the 'mythical' and the 'Christian' Blake).⁸⁸ Both of these points – the way that Blake's use of Christian tropes *kept* developing, and the connection between his early and his late critique of Christian orthodoxy – are thus obscured when we adopt the narrative of Blake's 'conversion' without further qualification.

The problem concerning the dating of the conversion – suggested to have happened during a period of around eight years – also illustrates the difficulty with which the term is used. For what do we *mean* when we refer to Blake's conversion, apart from the fact that we assume it influenced his works? Are we suggesting a decisive, conclusive, and instantaneous conversion experience along the lines of a Methodist conversion (like John Wesley, who famously dated his conversion to 24 May 1738 at 'about a quarter before nine')?⁸⁹ Or was it an internalized personal experience of spiritual growth and confirmation, ultimately independent of external factors? A sense of spiritual growth through Blake's reading of particular books? A sense of spiritual and imaginative awakening along the lines of what we later will see is laid out in the works of Boehme? A conscious conversion? An unconscious conversion? A sense of his art or work suddenly making sense? A twice-repeated feeling of liberation, first triggered by his move to Felpham and then by being back

⁸⁸ Cf. Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*.

⁸⁹ Henry D. Rack, 'Wesley, John (1703–1791),' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, May 2012, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/29069>, accessed 13 June 2012.

in London (and being acquitted of sedition)?⁹⁰ These questions are not, of course, mutually exclusive, but they do highlight some of the many ways in which speaking of ‘Blake’s conversion’ might be (and have been) understood. Yet whichever way we understand the ‘conversion’ (as an aesthetic, religious, or more broadly defined spiritual and intellectual sense of turning), it seems to be always implied in criticism that what we mean by Blake’s ‘conversion’ is *different* from what we mean by the conversions of, for example, Paul, Augustine, and Wesley. If it was not a traditional conversion (if we define that in part or in whole as submission to a particular religious system), then we rarely discuss what it might have actually involved (such as an experience of the divine, or reading of particular literature). In Blake criticism, therefore, ‘conversion’ seems removed – and comfortably so – from the critical discourse of conversion in history, theology, literature, and art. This discrepancy appears to be a result of the way that the term is usually defined in popular usage as well as in much of contemporary criticism: as instantaneous and once-in-a-lifetime. This understanding of the term is closely connected to its evangelical usage, even though conversion, as I discuss below, has been understood in more varied and diverse ways throughout tradition (for example as a continual or repeated movement).⁹¹

But by using the term ‘conversion’ about Blake *without* qualifying it, we are in danger of inadvertently placing Blake in an interpretative context that we might

⁹⁰ After a heated encounter with a soldier in his garden in Felpham, Blake was accused of sedition, but at the trial in 1804, he was acquitted.

⁹¹ As illustrated in D. Bruce Hindmarsh’s study of the early modern evangelical conversion narrative, the one-off paradigm is sometimes retroactively applied to conversion texts of earlier periods – for example *Confessions*, despite Augustine clearly describing his turning through a *series* of conversions (see below). A similar perspective was applied by Arthur Darby Nock in his classic conversion study (Arthur Darby Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo* (Baltimore, 1998), chapter 1) – as Nock laconically noted of the convert: ‘He cannot wed twice nor twice lose his soul’ (ibid., 5).

find ourselves struggling against, simply due to our choice of words. If, on the other hand, we dismiss for a moment the idea of a ‘conversion’ and look with fresh eyes on the material used as proof for it (the letters he wrote in Felpham and London, and the new explicit Christian tropes in Blake’s works), it becomes clear that the ‘conversion’ is in fact a stretched out, prolonged turning, which is reflected in Blake’s works over many years (stretching from the 1796-97 illustrations to *Night Thoughts* to some time in the 1820s). Thus I suggest that if we *do* want to speak of Blake’s conversion, we can rather acknowledge it as a *phase* in Blake’s works in its own right, rather than attempt to locate it biographically.

As for the large body of descriptive and personal letters from Blake in Felpham – different in style and level of enthusiasm from his usual letters written in London – the mere fact of their sudden existence does not necessarily indicate a corresponding sudden change in Blake’s spiritual views; as Frye noted, ‘with the Felpham period we get for the first time a series of letters of some continuity to aid us – and very treacherous allies they are.’⁹² Rather, it may simply be that Blake had more time and better reasons to write letters, once he had moved to Felpham. Neither is the coming of Christ in Blake’s works as sudden as the conversion paradigm might lead us to believe. Even the beginning of the explicit use of the Christ figure in the illuminated works is gradual from the outset, being – at least to an extent – prompted by the visual representations of Christ that were originally produced for *Night Thoughts*, and reused in *The Four Zoas*.

The narrative of Blake’s ‘conversion,’ then, is not straightforward, and in what follows, I want to pursue the question of Blake and conversion from a different angle to those of the studies mentioned so far. Whereas I do not intend to

⁹² Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 313. The enthusiasm of the Felpham letters was already noted in Ellis and Yeats, *Works of William Blake*, 51.

dismiss the possibility of Blake's conversion altogether, the question I ask is different, as I explore how conversion manifests itself and develops *within Blake's works*. I suggest that the 'Blake and conversion' question should be posed not so much of Blake himself as of the intellectual and spiritual transformation which manifests itself in his works. Whether or not Blake experienced a personal conversion, 'conversion' (as a broadly defined movement) *did* play a key role within his works. As I thus move the topos of conversion from the biographical realm back into Blake's works, the conversion discourse grows from being a minor question placed in the outskirts of Blake criticism (easily dismissed by critics with no interest in Blake's Christianity) to taking a key place in the interpretation of his works.

As for Blake's own use of the term 'conversion,' he only very rarely employs it directly.⁹³ In fact, Blake only directly uses the term 'conversion' twice, and never in a major work. It occurs first in 1810 in *A Vision of The Last Judgment*: 'the Knave who is Converted to Deism & the Knave who is Converted to Christianity is still a Knave but he himself will not know it tho Every body else does' (86-90, E564). Later, he uses the term in his 1826 annotations to Wordsworth's Preface to *The Recluse*: 'Solomon when he Married Pharohs daughter & became a Convert to the Heathen Mythology Talked exactly in this way of Jehovah' (E666). In both of these examples, 'conversion' is used to express a move from one religious community to another (not as a religious awakening within the context of one religious group), and neither of the two examples are from

⁹³ Although Augustine in *Confessions* also only uses the terms 'convert' or 'conversion' rarely, few would deny the crucial role of conversion in the work. Here, he only uses the term 'conversion' (or a cognate) about himself, and the conversion of others is described as being 'made Christian,' or as someone 'applying her mind' (Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, viii-x).

Blake's poetry: *A Vision of The Last Judgment* refers to one of Blake's visual representations of the Last Judgment, and the annotations to Wordsworth are simply annotations written a year before his death.⁹⁴

However, Blake frequently uses *other* terms that are traditionally connected with 'conversion,' not least in Blake's own time: 1) 'regeneration,' 2) 'new birth,' and 3) 'awakening' – and then 4) 'transformation,' which is not traditionally used as a conversion term, but seems to be so in the Blake corpus. The practice of using several different terms that all denote conversion is not new: in evangelical theology (as in Blake criticism), conversion and regeneration can be used interchangeably or collapsed into one term,⁹⁵ and in William Tyndale's address to the reader in his 1534 translation of the New Testament, he writes – after an exposition of conversion:

Wherefore now, whether ye call this *metanoia*,⁹⁶ repentance, conversion or turning again to God, either amending and etc, or whether ye say repent, be converted, turn to God, amend your living or what ye lust, I am content so ye understand what is meant thereby.⁹⁷

A survey of Blake's works and letters gives an impression of the frequency with which he used these terms, and reveals the periods in which he used them more

⁹⁴ *A Vision of The Last Judgment* probably refers to 'The Last Judgment' (ca. 1809, B645), perhaps including details from two earlier versions from 1806 and 1808 (B639 and B642) (Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (New Haven, 1981), 469-70). For more on the Wordsworth annotations, see Hazard Adams, *Blake's Margins: An Interpretive Study of the Annotations* (Jefferson, 2009), chapter 12.

⁹⁵ See for example Roger E. Olson, *The Westminster Handbook to Evangelical Theology* (Louisville, 2004), 80, 138-39.

⁹⁶ See pp. 50-51 below.

⁹⁷ Priscilla Martin, ed. *William Tyndale's New Testament* (Ware, 2002), 12. Tyndale defined conversion as consisting of four elements: confession, contrition, faith, and satisfaction or amends-making (ibid., 11). Cf. also John 3:1-8, 1 Pet. 1:3, and Titus 3:5.

frequently.⁹⁸ The term 1) ‘regeneration’ (or a cognate) is used seventeen times by Blake and only occurs in his works and annotations, not in any of his letters. It is notable that Blake only uses it regularly from *The Four Zoas* onwards (that is from ca. 1797), except for two early occurrences in his annotations to Lavater’s *Aphorisms on Man* (1788) written just before he began to publish his illuminated works. In the Lavater annotations, Blake uses ‘regeneration’ in a similar way to how ‘conversion’ was understood in contemporary evangelical circles, namely as a turning away from sin: ‘If man is considered as only evil. & god only good. how then is regeneration effected which turns the evil to good. by casting out the evil. by the good. See Matthew XII. Ch. 26. 27. 28. 29 v^s’ (489, E594).⁹⁹

Expressions that are connected with 2) ‘new birth’ are used occasionally (such as in ‘To Tirzah’ from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, which I will discuss later), although the exact term ‘new birth’ is used only twice. In his annotations to Bacon’s *Essays Moral, Economical, and Political* (1798), Blake adds a note to Bacon’s ‘The contemplative atheist is rare,’ saying that it is ‘A Lie! Few believe it is a New Birth’ (77, E626). And in *Milton* he notes that ‘The Elect [...] cannot Believe in Eternal Life/ Except by Miracle & a New Birth’ (25.32-34, E122). Another expression, ‘New Spiritual Birth,’ is used at the end of *The Four Zoas* about the character Jerusalem:

Jerusalem
Which now descendeth out of heaven a City yet a Woman

⁹⁸ This sectional view is based on a word search using the online Blake Concordance, which refers to Erdman’s *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (<http://www.english.uga.edu/~nhilton/ee/home.html>, accessed 7 November 2011).

⁹⁹ It is perhaps a coincidence, but the aphorism in question from Lavater that Blake comments on does not include either of the terms regeneration or conversion – but it *does* refer to a ‘dishonest knave,’ which links the aphorism verbally to one of Blake’s own two uses of the term conversion (the conversion of the knave in *A Vision of The Last Judgment*) quoted above.

Mother of myriads redeemd & born in her spiritual palaces
 By a New Spiritual birth Regenerated from Death[.]
 (122.17-20, E391)

‘Born again’ is also used once, namely in *The Everlasting Gospel*, in which Blake writes of Jesus that

When the rich learned Pharisee
 Came to consult him secretly
 Upon his heart with Iron pen
 He wrote Ye must be born again[.]
 ([k]11-14, E518-19)

Again, these examples are found in works produced after 1795 – the quote from *The Four Zoas* is from the late addition Night IX, the Bacon annotations from 1798, *Milton* from ca. 1804-11, and *The Everlasting Gospel* from ca. 1818. Furthermore, ‘birth’ is a frequent motif in Blake’s texts from early on, as well as being a frequently used visual trope (see for example the woman giving birth in MHH3, fig. 1).¹⁰⁰

The term 3) ‘awakening’ (and cognates) are also used frequently from Blake’s first work *Poetical Sketches* (1783) onwards, both as a textual and as a visual motif, and the concordance lists over one hundred entries. One example of how ‘awakening’ appears as a visual motif is in *There is No Natural Religion* (1788), when on the final plate Blake states that ‘Therefore God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is’ (E3). The penultimate plate (in copies B, C, and G) showed a figure lying flat on his back in the bottom of the page (fig. 2), but in the last plate (fig. 3), this figure is beginning to awaken: he has lifted his head and his legs and seems to have a halo, and a vine emerges from the last the word of the text, ‘is;’ in other words, the image seems to represent spiritual rebirth.

¹⁰⁰ ‘Fig. (x)’ refers to my appendix.

Lastly, 4) ‘transformation’ (in the passive form ‘transformed’) is only used three times by Blake, but notably these uses occur again only from *The Four Zoas* onwards. First, in *The Four Zoas*, Los ‘became what he beheld/ He became what he was doing he was himself transformd’ (55.22-23, E338). Then in *Milton*, ‘in the Optic vegetative Nerves Sleep was transformed/ To Death’ (29.32-33, E127). And finally in *A Vision of The Last Judgment*, Blake describes how Lot’s wife ‘being Changed into Pillar of Salt’ is an allusion to ‘the Mortal Body being renderd a Permanent Statue but not Changed or Transformed into Another Identity while it retains its own Individuality’ (79, E556).

While a word search such as this is of course in no way exhaustive, it nevertheless gives an impression of the frequency and context of Blake’s use of terms that seem to be related to conversion – if not of the term ‘conversion’ itself. What a word search does not take into account, however, is how these terms are translated into images, and how often (for Blake’s ‘alphabet of motifs’ often occurs both in text and image); the awakening figure, for example, is a very frequently used visual motif in Blake’s works. Thus an image search in the online William Blake Archive (with the caveat that the William Blake Archive does not yet include all images by Blake) results in 170 hits for ‘sleeping’ figures, nine hits for ‘giving birth,’ seven hits for ‘falling backward’ (only in works from *Milton* onwards), five hits for ‘rescuing,’ 109 hits for ‘Christ,’ 73 hits for ‘crucified,’ and so on. (These search terms were chosen to correspond to the most obvious conversion related scenes in Blake’s images, such as awakenings, births, meetings with Christ or another divine figure, and visions of the crucified Christ). To this should be added the well-known Blakean topos of the door or the gate, which occurs consistently throughout Blake’s works both in text and images as an indicator of change and

transformation (see for example the frontispiece to *Jerusalem*, fig. 4, and ‘The Soul exploring the recesses of the Grave’ from Blake’s illustrations to Robert Blair’s *The Grave*, ca. 1805-08, fig. 5). The centrality of this topos is illustrated by a letter from Blake written when he had first arrived in Felpham, in which he recounts a scene he witnessed: ‘I met a plow on my first going out at my gate the first morning after my arrival & the Plowboy said to the Plowman. “Father The Gate is Open”’ (To Butts, 23 September 1800, E711) – a comment which obviously struck a chord in Blake in a particular way (perhaps he understood it as a prophetic promise for his stay in Felpham).

Again, this overview does not represent an exhaustive list of conversions scenes in Blake’s images. But the data supports the impression of the word search that Blake’s works are set in a narrative universe in which conversion, awakening, and transformation play a central role. And as with the textual material, there are some indications in the images that motifs connected with conversion is increasingly used with time. For example, one of the most striking variations of the visual conversion scenes, the ‘falling backwards’ theme (for example into the arms of Jesus, as in *Jerusalem* pl. 37, fig. 6), *only* occurs from 1804 onwards. Likewise, the motif of ‘transformation of the subject through a vision of Christ’ (for example the crucified Christ as seen in *Jerusalem* 76, fig. 7) *also* only occurs from 1804 onwards. Although both of these examples might be understood as simply supporting the argument that Christ does not play a very explicit role in Blake’s works before 1804, another explanation might simply be that when he began printing *Milton* and *Jerusalem* in 1804, he had not produced a finished illuminated

book since 1795.¹⁰¹ And regardless of the exact time when Blake began to use the two visual tropes mentioned above, they still confirm my thesis that conversion scenes are present in Blake's works, and that they increase some time after 1795.

My use of the term 'conversion,' then, is an attempt to find a term that can include all the different terms mentioned above ('regeneration,' 'new birth,' 'awakening,' and 'transformation') without favouring one at the expense of another – and without limiting my discussion to connotations that are only connected with one of the terms. For example, the term 'regeneration' would blur the sense of the single *moment* of conversion being of particular importance, and 'transformation' would de-emphasize the spiritual or religious context of the scene. 'Conversion,' on the other hand, refers to – and can include – all the above terms, at the same time as it underlines the theological anthropology that lies at the heart of Blake's proposed 'turning.' The term has been understood in various – and contrary – ways in western Christian thought: as instantaneous versus extended over time; as a one-off conclusive event versus a continual process of converting and back-sliding; as initiated by God versus initiated by man; as prompted by the reading of text versus by religious experience or 'revelation;' as individual versus collective; as the conversion to another religion versus an awakening within one religion; as entering a monastic order, and so on. By using 'conversion,' I thus at the same time ground Blake within a Christian tradition of thought, *and* allow for the different ways in which conversion has been understood – and metaphorically communicated – to inform my discussion of Blake's conversion mode. Finally, the term 'conversion' is intimately tied with a discourse of representation, which has prompted a rich critical

¹⁰¹ *The Four Zoas* is an illustrated manuscript and is not currently included in the William Blake Archive, meaning that its images cannot be included in an image search. Blake usually marked the beginning of the printing of the work on its title page, not the date of its completion.

discussion, in particular of conversion and text, which provides my interpretative context for understanding Blake's works as works of conversion – and this is the discourse, which I will, by means of introduction, turn to now.

1.3 Conversion texts in tradition

A longstanding trend in conversion criticism focuses on the autobiographical elements in conversion narratives, and understands them principally within a historical, rather than literary, context (although the rhetorical nature of Augustine's *Confessions* has long been acknowledged). Up against this paradigm, Karl F. Morrison has suggested a reading of conversions narratives as indeed *texts*, that is, as cultural artefacts of a metaphorical and fictive (though not fictitious) nature.¹⁰² Thus the discussion of what are usually defined as 'conversion narratives' is widening – whereas they are often identified as autobiographical conversion texts, in particular from the Early Modern period, Morrison includes, for example, Constantine Tsatsos's fictional and non-autobiographical *Dialogues in a Monastery*

¹⁰² Karl F. Morrison, *Understanding Conversion* (Charlottesville; London, 1992) and idem, *Conversion and Text*. Curiously, Morrison's starting point in the latter is Blake's childhood 'conversion experience.' A related approach to Morrison's, albeit with a more narrow historical perspective and relating only to inter-confessional conversion, is used in Molly Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion in Early Modern English Literature: Verse and Change from Donne to Dryden* (Cambridge, 2009). A classic study on conversion from 1933 is Nock, *Conversion: The Old and the New in Religion from Alexander the Great to Augustine of Hippo*, but see also Alan Kreider, *The Change of Conversion and the Origin of Christendom* (Harrisburg, 1999) and for a sociological perspective Lewis R. Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion* (New Haven; London, 1993). William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience: A Study in Human Nature* (London, 1960) still has useful observations and has played a pivotal role in the critical discussion of conversion texts. For a study of the evangelical conversion narrative, see D. Bruce Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative: Spiritual Autobiography in Early Modern England* (Oxford, 2005), for a global perspective, see Peter van der Veer, *Conversion to Modernities: The Globalization of Christianity* (New York; London, 1996), and for an early modern perspective, see Lieke Stelling, Harald Hendrix, and Todd M. Richardson, eds., *The Turn of the Soul: Representations of Religious Conversion in Early Modern Art and Literature* (Leiden, 2012).

(1974) in his study.¹⁰³ Thereby the possibility of speaking more broadly of conversion texts (instead of conversion narratives, which is almost a technical term), the rhetoric of conversion, or the poetics of conversion opens up. It is in this field of widening perspectives on conversion that Blake's works should be situated: as an exploration of a broadly defined conversion mode within the works of an author whose works are clearly on a mission (as it were), but are so in a less prescriptive way than, for example, Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* is some 150 years earlier (although, as we will see, the two share a similar call to awakening). The point or 'mission' of Blake's works is not to convey a particular message or set system. Instead, the turning of the reader comes about through engaging imaginatively with his books – 'Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation,' the bard repeatedly declares in *Milton* (2.25, E96). As such, Blake's works do in fact have similar objectives as many more traditional conversion texts, as he stages the conversion of the reader as an intellectual and affective engagement with the crafted conversion work.¹⁰⁴ However, what this readerly conversion consists of is quite different from that which Bunyan stages in *Pilgrim's Progress*, which refers directly to 'wrong theology' versus 'right theology' (most clearly illustrated by the road leading to salvation and the road leading to damnation at the very end). Blake evokes a different tradition of conversion texts, of which Boehme's works provide one of the best examples. In Boehme (as I show in more detail in chapter 3), the conversion of the reader through the act of reading is, like in Bunyan, at the forefront. But here, the reader's conversion is less grounded in an

¹⁰³ Tsatsos (1899-1987) was the first president of the Hellenic Republic. See Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, case 3.

¹⁰⁴ My definition of the aim of the conversion text differs here from what we might call the apologetic conversion narrative, composed to assure its readers of the author's (or the protagonist's) adherence to the true faith, whatever that might be.

appropriation of particular theological truths and more in an *opening* of him or her, in which he or she discovers what is already within (although Boehme of course also writes from within a particular theological context, namely that of a Lutheran layman with a mystical outlook). But the way in which this readerly conversion in Boehme is communicated is not primarily through the use of autobiography, but rather through language and the structure of the texts; thus Boehme does not position the reader's 'turning' *outside* the text, but *within* it, in the act of reading. Similarly, Blake's 'conversion texts' do not rely on autobiography (although, again, autobiographical elements do occur) and do not advocate a set system of theological truths. Instead, they appear as keenly insisting on the inner transformation of the reader, and are correspondingly less preoccupied with the exact particulars of what the reader will find within.

My approach to Blake in this thesis, then, has implications both for Blake criticism and for the critical discussion of conversion texts. I propose a more inclusive definition of the conversion text than that with which current scholarship operates, one in which we shift the main focus from the author to the reader, explore the texts on their own terms, not (necessarily) according to the paradigm of the one-off, decisive, and conclusive conversion,¹⁰⁵ and pay close attention to form, style, structure, and language. The sense of conversion that I am using can best be sketched, then, not by asking 'what is conversion?' but by asking 'what is a conversion text?' (or 'what is a conversion image?') – or to put it in Blakean terms: what brings about the cleansing of the doors of perception so that 'every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite' (MHH14, E39)? This moves the perspective to the *expression* of conversion, the *communication* of it to a reader, and (if an

¹⁰⁵ The distinction between a decisive and a conclusive conversion experience is taken from Morrison, *Understanding Conversion*, 38.

autobiographical text) the *shift and externalization* from the private sphere of the author to the public sphere of the text and its reader(s), as the text is written. Conversely, the emphasis is less on any experiences that might lie behind the text – not because they are not valuable, but because the change in focus expands the definition of a conversion text to being a text which attempts to move its reader to a spiritual and intellectual transformation by manifesting conversion in various ways.

The conversion narratives of Paul and Augustine

The literary tradition of the conversion narrative is usually understood on the basis of two texts: the conversions of Paul in Acts and of Augustine in *Confessions*.¹⁰⁶ Both of these conversions are only known to us by their representation in textual form, and both became paradigmatic for the way in which later Christians described conversion in text (and perhaps even for the way they experienced conversion in the first place) – in particular *Confessions*, the echo of which is seen, for example, in Petrarch's famous account of his ascent of Mount Ventoux,¹⁰⁷ in the poet Cowper's conversion experience,¹⁰⁸ and in Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria* (1817).¹⁰⁹

¹⁰⁶ Although Saul only changed his name to Paul after his conversion (emphasizing the aspect of rebirth and new identity in it), I anachronistically use the name 'Paul' for both 'Saul' and 'Paul.'

¹⁰⁷ In *Epistolae familiares* IV.1 (1366).

¹⁰⁸ Cowper was Blake's predecessor as a protégée of Hayley. 'I flung myself into a chair near the window seat and, seeing a Bible there, ventured once more to apply to it for comfort and instruction. The first verse I saw was the twenty-fifth of the third chapter to the Romans.... Immediately I received strength to believe it. Immediately the full beams of the sun of righteousness shone upon me. [...] In a moment I believed and received the Gospel. [...] Unless the Almighty Arm had been under me I think I now should have died with gratitude and joy [...] I could only look up to Heaven in silence, overwhelmed with love and wonder' (*The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper*, ed. James King and Charles Ryskamp, 5 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford 1979), 39-40). The wordplay between 'Son' (Christ) and the 'sun' was popular in English, as seen for example in the works of Winstanley, George Fox, and Charles Wesley (Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge, 1996), 78, 141-42).

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew term that is used for ‘conversion’ is often *shub*, ‘return,’ although *panah*, *hapak*, and *sabab* also occur. These terms are used both literally about Israel’s¹¹⁰ return from captivity (Isa. 1:27; Jer. 29:14; Ezek. 16:53) and figuratively about re-turning to God (1 Sam. 7:3; 1 Kings 8:33; Isa. 19:22; Hos. 6:1; 7:10).¹¹¹ In Joel 2:12-14, we see the more rare motif of God himself converting (in the sense of turning favourably towards his people) and even ‘repenting:’ ‘turn unto the LORD your God [...] Who knoweth if he will return and repent, and leave a blessing behind him.’ A related meaning is seen in Jer. 15:19, in which we see the double turning of Jahve towards the subject and of the subject towards Jahve: ‘If you come back, I will take you back into my service’ (in the words of *The Jerusalem Bible*). More often in the Old Testament, however, the focus is on Israel’s need to repent, choose the right path (understood in the context of the ‘theology of the way’ which Thomas Thompson has identified),¹¹² and worship Jahve instead of other gods (Ez. 14:6).¹¹³

In the New Testament, on the other hand, the terms commonly used for conversion are *strepho* or *epistrepho* (or a cognate), to ‘turn around’ or ‘return,’ and *metanoia*, ‘repentance’ or ‘after-thought.’ These occur both separately and jointly, as seen in Acts 26:20, where Paul – immediately after the third account of his

¹⁰⁹ See Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Princeton, 1983), 205. Coleridge was also a Boehme reader; see below pp. 166, 170, 189.

¹¹⁰ ‘Israel’ in the sense of ‘God’s people’ as represented in the theological self-understanding of the Old Testament texts.

¹¹¹ David Lyle Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition in English Literature* (Grand Rapids, 1992), 159.

¹¹² See Thomas L. Thompson, *The Bible in History: How Writers Create a Past* (London, 2000), chapter 10, in particular 237-44. The theology of the way is also present in Acts 9:1-2, which describes the Jesus-believing Jews that Paul is keen on persecuting – this is the narrative immediately preceding the first account of Paul’s conversion (Ronald D. Witherup, ‘Functional Redundancy in the Acts of the Apostles: A Case Study,’ *Journal for the Study of the New Testament* 48 (1992), 79-80).

¹¹³ Kirsten Nielsen, “Omvendelse,” in *Gads Bibel Leksikon*, ed. Geert Hallböck and Hans Jørgen Lundager Jensen (Copenhagen, 1998), 134-35.

conversion – defines his mission as making Jews and Gentiles ‘repent (*metanoein*) and turn to God (*epistrephain*), and do works meet for repentance (*metanoias*).’ Together these two terms indicate a more individual and ethically charged movement of the subject from doing wrong to doing right than in the Old Testament. Notably, however, neither Jesus nor Paul frequently uses the terms in their proclamation of the *evangelion* (although there are of course examples, such as Jesus in Mark 1:15),¹¹⁴ even though conversion must be said to be an underlying dynamic in both – and in Paul, for example, ‘conversion’ has to some extent been replaced with the term ‘faith.’¹¹⁵ The one figure in the New Testament, who explicitly has conversion at the core of his preaching is John the Baptist, who in Matt. 3:2 proclaims ‘repent (*metanoete*) ye: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand.’

It is the three descriptions of Paul’s conversion in Acts that came to leave a distinctive mark on the conversion text. Although Paul’s is by no means the only conversion in Acts (we have the conversion of the Ethiopian eunuch in Acts 8, of the centurion Cornelius in Acts 10, and of the Philippian jailer in Acts 16), his is particularly emphasized and seems to play a particular role in the novel-like narrative of Acts – not least because it is recounted three times, and each time staged in a particular way (in 9:1-19; 22:6-16; and 26:12-16). None of these three accounts is autobiographical, even though Luke (the probable author of Acts) stages the last two as first-person retrospective narratives spoken by Paul. Together, the three descriptions of the conversion create a spiritual portrait of Paul as a believer in Christ, who gradually grows in stature from the helpless and blind new convert of

¹¹⁴ ‘The kingdom of God is at hand: repent ye (*metanoete*), and believe the gospel.’

¹¹⁵ Aage Pilgaard, “Omvendelse,” in *Gads Bibel Leksikon*, ed. Geert Hallbäck and Hans Jørgen Lundager Jensen (Copenhagen, 1998), 135.

the first conversion in chapter 9, who can neither eat nor drink, to the confident and action-oriented religious authority of chapter 26.¹¹⁶

In Paul's own writings – his letters to the gentile churches – we only have occasional comments that might allude to the Damascus Road experience, such as Gal. 1:12 ('I neither received it [the gospel] of man, neither was I taught it, but by revelation (*apokalypsis*) of Jesus Christ') and 1 Cor. 15:8 ('And last of all he [Christ] was seen of me also').¹¹⁷ None of these, however, definitely (or exclusively) refers to the 'Damascus road scene' as we know it from Luke's first account of it in Acts 9:1-19. So, although we have quite a good impression of the significance Luke later gave to a particular moment in Paul's life, we have very few clues as to how the experience looked through the eyes of Paul. Also, it is unclear from the Acts narratives and from Paul's possible allusions what actually constituted the experience: was it auditory, a vision, a revelation (Gal. 1:12), or the calling of a prophet in the tradition of the Old Testament – or perhaps all of these simultaneously?¹¹⁸ So what do we mean when using the term conversion about the experience? A conversion as *metanoiein* or *epistrephein*? Or conversion as a movement into an altogether different religious and social context? As Paula

¹¹⁶ Witherup, 'Functional Redundancy,' 77.

¹¹⁷ See Paula Fredriksen, 'Paul and Augustine: Conversion Narratives, Orthodox Traditions, and the Retrospective Self,' *Journal of Theological Studies* 37.1 (1986), 4. As Colleen Shantz notes, there is a tendency in Pauline studies to understand all Paul's references to religious experience or visions – with the exception of 2 Cor. 12's visit to heaven – as referring to the Damascus road experience, thus creating 'a lopsided (and potentially pitiable) portrait of Paul,' who 'becomes, in effect, someone who had one initiatory ecstatic religious experience on which he then reflected for the rest of his career' (Colleen Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy: The Neurobiology of the Apostle's Life and Thought* (Cambridge, 2009), 46). Shantz, instead, creates a portrait of Paul in which continued religious experience plays a pivotal role.

¹¹⁸ These questions have been addressed in numerous critical studies – see for example the classic study by Krister Stendahl, *Paul among Jews and Gentiles* (Philadelphia, 1976), Alan F. Segal, *Paul the Convert: The Apostolate and Apostasy of Saul the Pharisee* (New Haven, 1990), Shantz, *Paul in Ecstasy* – in particular 46-56 – and Richard N. Longenecker, ed. *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on his Life, Thought, and Ministry* (Grand Rapids, 1997).

Fredriksen notes (with reference to the discussion of whether Luther's religious development can be seen as a 'conversion,' thereby emphasizing the tension between the gradual formation of a new religious community and the perceived sudden, decisive, and iconic conversion of its chief ideologist):

If we do not say that Luther converted to Protestantism, then neither should we say that Paul converted to the Jesus movement (which *c.* 34 was still within Judaism), much less to Christianity (which *c.* 34 did not yet exist). Luke, of course, does see Paul as converting to Christianity. But by Luke's time, this new and self-consciously separate religious entity does exist, differing in culture, language, ethnic group, and geographical location from its rural Palestinian Jewish parent. Christianity in this sense only begins to come into being in the mid-first century: it cannot, therefore, serve as an interpretative background to Paul's 'conversion.'¹¹⁹

Thus, it is the later reworking of Paul's experience (or of one of Paul's experiences) by another author, Luke – and the use of it in Acts – which establishes the narrative of Paul's conversion. Whatever his own possible experience might have been, it is Luke's literary and metaphorical reworking of it that has come to be seen as the genesis of the conversion narrative. But even if the three retellings of the conversion in Acts might try to convey a sense of Paul's *gradual* movement into his new position as member of the Christian church,¹²⁰ this gradual sense was not generally picked up in later conversion discourse – for Paul's conversion came to be seen traditionally as the token *sudden* conversion of the most undeserving man by God's grace. As such, Paul's conversion was already in the Middle Ages looked upon not as an ideal conversion, especially not when compared with the prolonged, eagerly awaited, and deserved conversion of Augustine.¹²¹ And later, the Puritans preferred

¹¹⁹ Fredriksen, 'Paul and Augustine,' 16.

¹²⁰ See for example Witherup, 'Functional Redundancy.'

¹²¹ Bruce Corley, 'Interpreting Paul's Conversion - Then and Now,' in *The Road from Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on his Life, Thought, and Ministry*, ed. Richard N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids, 1997), 8.

Acts' account of Lydia whose heart was opened by the Lord to hear the words of Paul (Acts 16:14) to Paul's sudden, revelatory transformation – for Lydia matched the introspective slow turning of the Puritan heart towards God, whereas Paul did not.¹²² Thus, Paul's conversion became both an ideal and an anti-ideal: a comforting thought for any sinner, but not exactly a religious development to aspire to.

Some centuries later in northern Africa, Augustine (354-430) used the narrative of Paul's conversion in his own writing on the movement of the Christian subject towards God. In *To Simplician* (ca. 396), Augustine interpreted Paul's conversion as described in Acts as that one moment in which Paul's 'mind and will' were 'turned from' (*retorqueretur*) the wrong path and set in the right direction, thereby transforming Paul from 'a marvellous persecutor of the Gospel' to 'a still more marvellous preacher of the Gospel.'

The will itself can have no motive unless something presents itself to delight and stir the mind. That this should happen is not in any man's power. What did Saul will but to attack, seize, bind and slay Christians? What a fierce, savage, blind will was that! Yet he was thrown prostrate by one word from on high, and a vision came to him whereby his mind and will were *turned from* their fierceness and set on the right way towards faith, so that suddenly out of a marvellous persecutor of the Gospel he was made a still more marvellous preacher of the Gospel.

(*To Simplician* 1.2.22, my emphasis)¹²³

Typically, the active force in his conversion (God) not only has the power to throw him to the ground and blind him, but also reaches deep into Paul and stirs his mind towards him – a theme that also becomes central in *Confessions*.

¹²² Ibid., 12. In medieval literature, a gendered perspective could help shape conversion narratives, so that sudden conversions in the style of Paul (denoting *change*) were often used in the conversion narratives of men, whereas women's conversions were represented as gradual, prolonged movements, and thus denoting a *perfection* (Morrison, *Understanding Conversion*, 50-51).

¹²³ Quoted in Corley, 'Interpreting Paul's Conversion,' 6.

It is in *Confessions* (ca. 400) that conversion comes to the forefront of Augustine's work, and although much could be (and has been) said on conversion as it manifests itself in it, I will limit myself to four points that in particular inform my approach to conversion in Blake's works. The first point is about the way in which conversion in *Confessions* is intimately connected with words, narrative, reading, and writing.¹²⁴ This is the first and most obvious difference between the conversion narrative of Augustine and the conversion narratives of Paul. Paul's conversion is referred to by Paul himself (if the references in his letters are indeed to his conversion) as a revelation, not a doctrinal instruction, and by Luke as a private communication between Paul and Jesus, inaudible to Paul's travelling companions (but, of course, revealed to the reader of Acts). In *Confessions*, on the other hand, religious experience is inextricably connected with the reading of texts or the telling of stories (both of these two primarily, but not exclusively, represent an audible engagement with words at Augustine's time).¹²⁵ This connection between texts (or words) and religious experience might, then, represent a general point in Augustine's theory on the human subject's way back to God. Or, in a circular way, it might arise from *Confessions* itself as a literary work, thereby conveying the idea to the reader that conversion does indeed come about through reading – for example through reading this particular book.¹²⁶ What *Confessions* does not do is present a doctrinal system, which by the end of the book the reader can decide to follow or to disregard (a sense more present in later texts such as

¹²⁴ See Brian Stock, *Augustine the Reader: Meditation, Self-Knowledge, and the Ethics of Interpretation* (Cambridge; London, 1998).

¹²⁵ Stock notes that 'silent reading was not uncommon,' but that 'books of a literary, philosophical, or theological nature were normally read aloud' (ibid., 5).

¹²⁶ If so, Augustine's point has proved successful, even today: in Lewis Rambo's influential study of conversion, he notes that 'several converts have told me they were converted in the process of reading *The Confessions*' (Rambo, *Understanding Religious Conversion*, 159).

Pilgrim's Progress). On the contrary, reading in *Confessions* ultimately paves the way for 'mystical experience.'

Reading is a stimulus to meditation: the reader, focusing on the sensations created by words, uncouples the mental images of those same sensations from his or her thoughts about them, and is "taught from within." The reader thus follows a purely intellectual trajectory which leaves the physical text far behind. In this respect, reading is a prelude to mystical experience.¹²⁷

The text itself is presented as a personal witness from Augustine the man (and writer) to God, the 'you' of the narrative: 'You are great, Lord, and highly to be praised' (1.1.1), it begins, quoting Ps. 47:2.¹²⁸ But in the same way as the Psalms (from which, indeed, *Confessions* takes a great deal of vocabulary), this personal 'confession' is intended to be witnessed by the readers of *Confessions* also, prompting them to internalize, empathetically understand, and replicate Augustine's way in their own lives. This turning of the reader is pedagogically prefigured in the series of conversions that runs through the text, extending to, as Molly Murray notes, 'the latest person turning the pages of the *Confessions*.'¹²⁹ These are particularly present in Book 8, where we move closer to Augustine's conversion in the garden by the help of the conversions of Victorinus, Antony, the civil servants, and Alypius (to which Augustine adds his reflections on Paul's conversion, 8.4.9), but also earlier in *Confessions* (Book 3) with Augustine's sudden conversion to Cicero at the age of nineteen by reading *Hortensius* (3.4)¹³⁰ and his gradual

¹²⁷ Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 18-19.

¹²⁸ Quotations from *Confessions*, if not otherwise indicated, are from Augustine, *Confessions*, trans. Henry Chadwick (Oxford, 1991).

¹²⁹ Murray, *The Poetics of Conversion*, 10.

¹³⁰ Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 37. Of this conversion by reading, Augustine writes: 'The book changed my feelings. It altered my prayers, Lord, to be towards you yourself. [...] I began to rise up to return to you' (3.4). For a discussion of this, see Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 37-42.

conversion to Manichaeism at around the same time.¹³¹ These conversions continually strike the theme of conversion in the text, even when the character ‘Augustine’ loses sight of it – and end on a high note with ‘the cascade of references to “conversion” in the last, climactic book.’¹³²

The second point I will make is that in *Confessions* – as well as in subsequent conversion narratives – God is always turned towards the subject, even before the subject begins his or her turning towards God. God is positioned as the stable reality, ‘immutable and yet changing all things’ (1.4.4) and ‘the truth’ in ‘whom there is no changing nor shadow caused by any revolving’ (3.6.10), as Augustine puts it (quoting James 1:17). The *conversio*, then, is a reply to a divine being which *already* wills the subject. *Confessions* begins, before turning to the description of Augustine as a baby, by establishing this theological anthropology: ‘You stir man to take pleasure in praising you, because you have made us for yourself, and our heart is restless until it rest in you’ (1.1.1). And it asks God to restore the divine image in the subject: ‘The house of my soul is too small for you to come to it. May it be enlarged by you. It is in ruins: restore it’ (1.5.6). This theological anthropology, with its progressive movement towards restoration, fulfilment, and home (related to the Old Testament understanding of conversion as return from exile), came to influence Christian thinking immensely. To simplify somewhat, it represented a shift in focus from Paul’s more spatially informed, dualistic understanding of the Christian believer (based on the dichotomous distinctions between old versus new, flesh versus spirit, and being part of Christ’s body versus being outside Christ’s body) to a more temporally informed, gradual, and forward-looking understanding of human life. Thus *conversio* came also to be

¹³¹ Ibid., 44.

¹³² Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, x.

seen as a *reversio* (return),¹³³ as the beginning of the soul's homecoming and restoration, called by its maker – it is God who summons the soul home and who is the exclusive agent in the conversion; as Augustine later in the book recaptures his own conversion, it was 'your converting me to yourself' (8.12.30).

My third point has to do with the narrative tension in *Confessions* between the one moment and the gradual movement – a point which is perhaps nowhere better illustrated than by the fact that *Confessions* describes a series of conversions in Augustine's life (to Cicero, to Manicheism, and to Christianity), but is often read as the description of just one single conversion experience. As with Paul, the reception history of *Confessions* has focussed on that one moment in the Milan garden where Augustine (prompted by the voice of a child saying *tolle lege, tolle lege*, 'pick up and read, pick up and read') opens a Bible on Rom. 13:13-14 and reads 'in silence,' after which 'all the shadows of doubt were dispelled' (8.12.29)¹³⁴ – a reading which applies the sudden, one-off paradigm to a gradual conversion story. Yet even without such a reading, the tension between the one moment and the prolonged formation of Augustine the believer appears to be a constant driving factor in the text. To the reader of *Confessions*, it seems clear, then, that Augustine's conversion consists not of a one-off conclusive experience, but of a series of turnings which together form the slow formation of his 'will' (7.3.5) throughout the

¹³³ Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 10.

¹³⁴ However, even in this climax of the text, Augustine does not reveal what *exactly* is happening inside him, and how *exactly* his doubts are dispelled; the inner workings of the conversion, and what happened immediately after, remain hidden for the reader. What we are told about, however, is the reaction of Alypius (Augustine's 'alter ego,' *ibid.*, 27) and thereby – indirectly – that of Augustine: 'he joined me [Augustine] in making a good resolution and affirmation of intention' (8.12.30). However, even Alypius's experience constitutes a private, inaccessible experience: 'What had been going on in his mind, [...] I did not know.' This emphasis, at a critical place in the text, introduces the problem of 'other minds' (Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 110), which also marks the limits of the first-person narrative: we cannot, ultimately, gain access to Augustine's mind. Stock interestingly discusses how secrecy is connected with reading in *Confessions* in *ibid.*, chapter 3.

narrative (reflected upon and constructed as he writes his way through the text years later). At the same time, the conversion moment in the garden *is* a climax – but a mid-way climax, that is, carefully anticipated in the narrative and situated halfway through the book, thus representing at the same time the end of one period and the beginning of another. So, in the ‘sacred pas de deux’¹³⁵ between Augustine and God, the conversion in the garden is eagerly longed for, chased, and gained – and after it, the narrative is set free from the almost claustrophobic focus on Augustine’s quest for assurance, to include the wider perspective of the created world and more theoretical discourses.¹³⁶ At the same time, the experience in the garden is constructed as ultimately hidden, wordless (though coming about through reading in a codex), and private (although experienced with a convenient witness present, as is many of the other conversions in *Confessions*, for example Victorinus’s public conversion in 8.2.3-5).¹³⁷ Augustine’s conversion in the garden is a culmination, a beginning, and an end – but a silent, private, and almost hidden one. And although it is interpreted later as decisive, it is curiously never mentioned in any of his other writings.

My fourth, and last, point is that the conversion scene in the garden might not constitute the whole story of Augustine’s decisive conversion at all, as it is followed in Book 9 by an intense mystical experience – the vision in Ostia – which seems to represent a conversion in its own right. The Ostia experience might then represent yet another conversion (thus creating a pair of conversions similar to Augustine’s early simultaneous conversions to Cicero *and* to Manicheism in Book 3) – or it might represent the second movement of a conversion in two parts.

¹³⁵ Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, viii.

¹³⁶ For many readers, however, the narrative drive of the first nine books is undeniably more compelling than that of the last three – long – books.

¹³⁷ See Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 89-95.

According to Sarah Spence, for example, the problem with the conversion in the garden is that ‘there is no conversion. Nothing happens that has not happened before; no revelation occurs that cannot be explained fully in language.’¹³⁸ Spence argues that Augustine’s real conversion lies in Book 9.¹³⁹ Here we have the unveiling of all that is veiled in Book 8: an extended description of religious experience as well as access to the mind of Augustine (as far as language can even describe this experience, Augustine emphasizes). Again, the conversion happens in the company of another character, his mother Monica, but this time the companion is not simply an external witness to Augustine’s experience, but partakes in it. Notably, also, this conversion is not prompted by reading, but by conversation with his mother. Words cease, however, as they are transported together to a different sphere in which all communication is direct and no human words are necessary:

Our minds were lifted up by an ardent affection towards eternal being itself. Step by step we climbed beyond all corporeal objects and the heaven itself, where sun, moon, and stars shed light on the earth. We ascended even further by internal reflection and dialogue and wonder at your works, and we entered into our own minds. [...] And while we talked and panted after it, we touched it in some small degree by a moment of total concentration of the heart. [...] we extended our reach and in a flash of mental energy attained the eternal wisdom which abides beyond all things.

(9.10.24-52)

This ‘total concentration of the heart’ is an experience of ‘the eternal’ (9.10.24), in which all earthly (or fallen) boundaries are lifted: gender and family boundaries are dispelled, as Augustine and his mother share the vision equally and jointly; temporal boundaries are no more (‘in this wisdom there is no past and future,’ 9.10.24); and the constraints of human language are overcome (as illustrated when

¹³⁸ Sarah Spence, *Rhetorics of Reason and Desire: Vergil, Augustine, and the Troubadours* (Ithaca; London, 1988), 84.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

they ‘returned to the noise of our human speech where a sentence has both a beginning and an ending,’ 9.10.24).

This foretaste of heavenly fulfilment where ‘words, bodies, and genders are all transcended at one,’¹⁴⁰ is strikingly similar to Blake’s only extensive attempt to describe regenerated life. In the end of *Jerusalem*, Blake describes how, after a conversation between Albion and Jesus (perhaps similar to that between Augustine and Monica), Albion is annihilated and restored. In this ‘Life of Immortality’ (J99.4, E258), all communication is direct, all boundaries are dispelled, and everything and every one is connected:

And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright
Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions
In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect
Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine
Of Human Imagination
[...]
& they walked
To & fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting each in each & clearly seen
And seeing[.]
(J98.28-40, E257-58)

Even though there are no indications that Blake read Augustine (although Blake’s readings remain obscure)¹⁴¹ – and even though the topos of direct communication and dismissal of earthly markers in regenerated life is well known in Christian tradition – the parallels between the end of *Confessions*’s novel-like first part and the end of *Jerusalem* are striking. These parallels invite us, furthermore, to use Augustine’s *Confessions* to think through Blake’s conversion texts.

¹⁴⁰ Stock, *Augustine the Reader*, 18.

¹⁴¹ Blake’s library – however big or small – was not kept together after his death, and many of his books (including, for example, his Bible) are untraced. Books that we know he owned are included in G. E. Bentley Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford, 1977), 681-703. See also Adams, *Blake’s Margins*, chapter 12.

With regards to *Confessions*, we might ask why is it significant that Augustine retrospectively communicated his conversion as a movement in two parts – each different in nature, each experienced in the company of a different character, and each presumably representing a significant side of Christian life that Augustine wanted to represent, namely intellect (Book 8) and affect (Book 9). First, because it once again illustrates how later tradition has collapsed Augustine’s conversions into one single moment – and presumed that this moment was successfully communicated in words (is that not, after all, what Augustine does?). Second, because by using the structure of the ‘conversion in two parts,’ Augustine points exactly to the difficulties connected with communicating conversion or religious experience. The intellectual conversion, or dispensing of ‘shadows of doubts,’ is only one step out of several, and without an accompanying affective conversion, it is inadequate. The two conversion narratives thus bring something different to the total movement of turning, each representing something significant without describing it fully.¹⁴² Third, the two conversions emphasize to the reader the inherently literary nature of *Confessions*, which was my first point. *Confessions* is a literary work in which the author uses a version of his own life story to communicate – or to make a sign of – slow, gradual turning to the reader. It does not follow from this that it is untrue as autobiography, but the truth of it lies primarily in the way that Augustine later communicated the turning of the human subject through writing.

On the basis of both Acts and *Confessions*, then, it seems that the conversion text is not an accurate reportage, but a fictive literary artefact on a mission. Similarly, the centre of gravity in the spiritual portraits of Paul in Acts and

¹⁴² It seems, however, that the second conversion is ultimately more sophisticated, advanced, and closer to the divine source than the first.

Augustine in *Confessions* is not the development of the protagonist, but ultimately the development of the reader – and the (auto)biographical touches serve as a way to facilitate this. As Augustine (in an almost Blakean way) ends *Confessions*: ‘Yes indeed, that is how it is received, how it is found, how the door is opened’ (13.38.53).

After Augustine

Confessions was not, despite its significance, replicated or even quoted in any great measure until the emergence of the spiritual autobiography proper in early modern Europe, when what was perceived as the introspective, confessional, and personal form of *Confessions* became an ideal.¹⁴³ Thus the theological anthropology of Augustine may have influenced Christians from very early on, but the way in which he autobiographically described God and human subject turning slowly towards each other did not immediately result in a plethora of similar writings. However, conversion continued to be a topos always suspended between the poles of ‘point’ and ‘passage:’ ‘point’ representing *that* moment when the subject ‘turns’ (Augustine in the garden or Paul being thrown to the ground), and ‘passage’ representing everything outside this moment, which nevertheless refers to it (the building up to the conversion, the longing for it, the wider perspective, and the sometimes realized need for a repeated conversion). These ‘passages’ are represented in the long narrative of *Confessions* leading up to the conversion moments, in Charles Wesley’s similarly long account of moving slowly towards

¹⁴³ Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 23. Even autobiography took a long time after Augustine to catch on: according to Morrison, Herman-Judah’s account from the twelfth century was ‘the first autobiographical account of conversion extant in the Latin West after [...] *Confessions*’ (Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, 39).

conversion from February to May 1738,¹⁴⁴ or the insistence amongst followers of Boehme that continuous conversion is, in fact, nothing less than ‘true Christianity.’¹⁴⁵

If one aspect of conversion is that of the ‘passage,’ the other is that of the ‘point.’ This is epitomized above all by the immersion of the believer in the baptismal font or basin. Here, the believer is reborn as a new being in a liturgical event that also evokes the death of Christ. This baptismal rebirth – sometimes stressed in the design of the font with reference to the female genitals¹⁴⁶ – emphasizes the connotations of destruction and annihilation in conversion. In this light, conversion is the simultaneous death of ‘the old me’ and birth of ‘the new me.’ Thus, the old is understood as ‘death’ and the new as ‘life’ – or, as in the Methodist conversion narratives of the eighteenth century, the old is ‘sin’ and the new is (potentially) ‘perfect.’ Connected with this perspective is of course also the understanding that the final conversion of the human subject only happens in death – any conversion in human life can only possibly be temporary and anticipatory.

The temporary annihilation of the subject in conversion is, however, often represented as a joyful experience of leaving the isolated existence of the human subject to share in the common divine life – again, only available as a temporary and anticipatory experience here on earth. This joyful experience is illustrated for example in Bernard of Clairvaux’s description of the soul’s temporary visit to the ‘King’s chamber’ (only half an hour is allowed here)¹⁴⁷ and in eighteenth-century Moravians’ descriptions of the believer resting in the side-wound of Christ. I will

¹⁴⁴ Illustrated in the journal extracts included in John R. Tyson, ed. *Charles Wesley: A Reader* (New York, 1989), 93-101.

¹⁴⁵ Edward Taylor, *Jacob Behmen’s Theosophick Philosophy Unfolded* (London, 1691), 186.

¹⁴⁶ For example in Vester Egede Church, Denmark.

¹⁴⁷ Mette Birkedal Bruun, *Parables: Bernard of Clairvaux’s Mapping of Spiritual Topography* (Leiden; Boston, 2007), 204.

explore this last trope in the next chapter and for now simply note how the soul's temporary and continued daily conversion experience, as it joyfully worked towards a moment in the 'precious Side-hole,'¹⁴⁸ became an absolutely central topos in eighteenth-century Moravian spirituality.

My particular focus, however, is not on what conversion is or how it has been experienced. Instead, it is on how it has been metaphorically expressed and in particular how what I call conversion texts (or images) have staged conversion as an experience that is available to the reader (or viewer) when engaging with the text (or image) – and in this thesis, how this is exemplified in Blake. My definition of conversion is thus not qualitative, but refers broadly to the text's (or image's) request to the reader (or viewer) to let herself or himself be transformed – what Morrison calls the affective sense of the conversion narrative.¹⁴⁹ Within this definition, conversion can take many different forms: it can be polemic (as in Bunyan) or mystical (as in Boehme), use autobiography as a literary device (Augustine and the Methodist tradition), refer to other well-known conversion narratives such as *Confessions* (as seen above in Cowper and Petrarch), refer to an experience in front of a religious image (as the Moravian leader Count Zinzendorf did, as we will see), create an image before the reader of the crucified Christ (as John Donne in the poem 'Good Friday, 1613. Riding Westward'),¹⁵⁰ or, as we will see with regards to Blake in the following, stage it somewhere in between text, image, and reader. And it is Blake we will turn to now, first (and still by way of

¹⁴⁸ From a Moravian hymn quoted in E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (Harmondsworth, 1968), 408.

¹⁴⁹ Morrison, *Conversion and Text*, 22-34.

¹⁵⁰ Ending with a prayer for restoration in the *imago dei*: 'Burn off my rusts, and my deformity,/ Restore thine Image, so much, by thy grace,/ That thou mayst know mee, and I'll turn my face' (lines 40-42, A. J. Smith, ed. *John Donne: The Complete English Poems* (Harmondsworth, 1996), 330-31).

introduction) to the way in which his conversion mode dimly begins to show itself in his pre-1796 works, before it starts to take more form from 1796 onwards.

1.4 'Conversion' in Blake's pre-1796 works

The focus of this study lies on works that are all drawn from the period after 1796, since it is in these works that we find the most condensed exploration of conversion. This risks, of course, giving the impression that conversion is an altogether new register that suddenly falls from the sky (as it were) into Blake's works around 1796. However, I have chosen to offer in-depth analysis and attention to historical, literary, and theological background of works that are of particular interest with regards to the subject of conversion over tracing any possible reference to conversion in Blake's works. In what follows, therefore, I give a brief introduction to the presence of conversion in the better-known illuminated books from the first half of the 1790s, thereby emphasizing that conversion is a slowly evolving perspective, and that the analyses of my subsequent chapters start in medias res rather than being created ex nihilo.

It is in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake's undated illuminated book from between 1790 and 1793, that the conversion of a character first plays a significant role in a way that anticipates later Blake works. *The Marriage* – central in Blake's corpus and often perceived as an early manifesto¹⁵¹ – is a short, playful

¹⁵¹ See, for example, Jonathan Roberts, *William Blake's Poetry: A Reader's Guide* (London, 2007), chapter 3, David Fuller, ed. *William Blake: Selected Poetry and Prose* (New York, 2000), 121, and Nelson Hilton, 'Blake's Early Works,' in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge, 2003), 201-4. Already Swinburne in his *William Blake, A Critical Essay* from 1868 hailed *The Marriage* as the 'greatest of all [Blake's] books,' but Blake himself only offered it for sale once, in 1793, and never again (Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, 'Introductions and Notes,' in *The Early Illuminated Books: All Religions Are One, There Is No Natural Religion, The Book of Thel, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, ed. David Bindman (Princeton, 1993), 113, 116). He also never reused significant

work which combines different literary genres, characters, and authorial voices in a collage of text and images. Blake here manages to join together intimately – or indeed to marry – form and content in a remarkable way, which takes the technique used in his three previous illuminated works (*Tiriel*, *Songs of Innocence*, and *The Book of Thel*, all 1789) another step forward. Thus, the disjointed and interrupted sections of text, the different ordering of the plates according to copy, and the different visual impact of each copy are all devices that support the point posited in the text that ‘Without Contraries is no progression’ (3, E34). Thus the progression in the book – and the intellectual and spiritual progression of the reader that is implicitly proposed – arises from engaging apparent opposite meanings into what Blake calls ‘Energy.’ This is a challenge to the reader that requires active engagement and involvement, not simply passive appropriation: ‘Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy’ (4, E34). In *The Marriage*, true opposites do not exclude each other, but feed from the energy that is created through these opposites: ‘Opposition is true Friendship’ (20, E42). This often-cited doctrine is explored throughout the book with a wealth of opposite experiences for the reader, visible above all in the opposite relationship between text and image. Ironically, though, the statement, etched beneath an image of Leviathan, is unreadable in most copies of *The Marriage*, having disappeared when the sea around Leviathan was coloured.¹⁵²

One of the main conflicts in *The Marriage* is that between orthodox religion (represented by Swedenborg and angels and corresponding to ‘Reason’) and

material from it in later works, in the way that he, for example, used parts of *The (First) Book of Urizen* in *The Four Zoas* (compare for example *Book of Urizen* 10.35-13.11 and FZ54.11-55.9).

¹⁵² In the eight versions of the concerned plate that are currently available through The William Blake Archive (copies B, C, D, E, F, G, H, and I), the words are only partly visible in one copy, B (which is not coloured) – the word ‘friendship,’ however, is obscured, so that it seems to read ‘Opposition is True.’

antinomian religion (represented by devils and corresponding to ‘Energy’). Blake’s provocative conclusion is that original or true religion is now (in Blake’s time) found with ‘the Devils party’ (5, E35), in the ‘Bible of Hell’ (24, E44), and in an antinomian understanding of Christ. Contrarily, Blake criticizes how contemporary religion has frozen in orthodoxy, exemplified most extensively in the case of Swedenborg. *The Marriage* thus represents a fierce attack on Swedenborg, with whose emerging New Jerusalem Church Blake, as mentioned, had been involved – he and Catherine attended the First General Conference on 14 April 1789, but Blake was probably already in contact with the Swedenborgians before then.¹⁵³ But by 1790, Blake had already left the Swedenborgians and did not seem to have any scruples explicitly attacking Swedenborg (who had died in 1772) in his new work *The Marriage*. In fact, the plates containing his most extensive criticism of Swedenborg (pl. 21-24) were probably also the first ones finished, after which the rest of the work evolved.¹⁵⁴ Even the title of the work leaves the reader in no doubt of who the object of Blake’s satire was, being a reference to Swedenborg’s *A Treatise Concerning Heaven and Hell and of the Wonderful Things Within* (English translation from Latin 1784). Likewise, the ‘Memorable Fancy’ in MHH23-24 describing a discussion between an angel and a devil, probably refers to a ‘Memorable Relation’ in Swedenborg’s *True Christian Religion* (1771), in which

¹⁵³ Rix, *William Blake*, 52. Blake was not the only one of his circle with an interest in the Swedish mystic: his friend John Flaxman, for example, was – and remained – a Swedenborgian. Some English Moravians (such as the prominent minister Francis Okely) were also attracted to Swedenborg, and Robert Hindmarsh’s *Theosophical Society*, inspired by Swedenborg, included the painter Richard Cosway, who both knew Blake and was a friend of the founder of the Fetter Lane Moravian church, James Hutton, whose portrait he painted (Keri Davies, ‘Jonathan Spilsbury and the Lost Moravian History of William Blake’s Family,’ *Blake / An Illustrated Quarterly* 40 (2006-2007), 106). Cosway may even have taught the young Blake at Pars drawing school (Mark Crosby, ‘A Minute Skirmish: Blake, Hayley, and the Art of Miniature Painting,’ in *Blake and Conflict*, ed. Sarah Haggarty and Jon Mee (Basingstoke, 2008), 173).

¹⁵⁴ The point is Viscomi’s, quoted in Robert Rix, “‘In Infernal Love and Faith:’ William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,” *Literature and Theology* 20.2 (2006), 109.

angels and devils are ‘permitted to engage in Debate concerning God and Nature’ (77).¹⁵⁵ In *The Marriage*, Swedenborgianism is presented as the opposite of the vision of energy and life that Blake posits: Swedenborg is ‘the Angel sitting at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up’ (3, E34). In other words, his prophetic material has turned into dead vision, and his new church replicates the mistakes of most established churches:¹⁵⁶ ‘Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new; tho’ it is only the Contents or Index of already publish’d books. [...] Now hear a plain fact: Swedenborg has not written one new truth: Now hear another: he has written all the old falshoods’ (21, E42-43). And later on the same plate:

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.
(22, E43)

Again, the joke is on Swedenborg: anyone could have produced works of the same value as Swedenborg, Blake suggests, had he only had masters such as Paracelsus, Boehme, Dante, and Shakespeare at hand for inspiration.¹⁵⁷

The spiritual and intellectual awakening that is proposed to the reader in *The Marriage* is represented as the polar opposite of Swedenborg’s gospel (as according to Blake): it is revolutionary, based on energy as opposed to reason, and comes

¹⁵⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 112.

¹⁵⁶ For a comprehensive discussion of Blake’s critique of Swedenborg in *The Marriage*, see *ibid.* and *idem*, *William Blake*, chapter 7.

¹⁵⁷ Contemporary readers already noted similarities between Swedenborg and Boehme, but Swedenborg was keen to distance himself from a Behmenist frame of reference (Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 35-37). Incidentally, one of the striking similarities between the two is that Swedenborg, like Boehme, entertained the notion of continual conversion as opposed to that of a one-off conversion: ‘From his earliest infancy to the end of his life in the world and thereafter to eternity, a man who is in good is being born again every moment, not only as to interiors, but also as to exteriors, and this by amazing processes’ (*Arcana Caelestia* 5202, quoted in Emanuel Swedenborg, *Essential Readings*, ed. Michael Stanley (Wellingborough, 1988), 86).

from within, not from without.¹⁵⁸ *The Marriage* is the gospel of the antinomian Jesus, in which an angel can convert and be reborn as a devil (and this is considered advancement) – but it is also a gospel that ends in an ambiguous revolution in *A Song of Liberty*, which mirrors the terror of the French Revolution from 1793 onwards: ‘The fire, the fire, is falling! [...] Where the son of fire in his eastern cloud [...] stamps the stony law to dust, loosing the eternal horses from the dens of night, crying Empire is no more!’ (25.11-20, E44-45). Thus reason might have surrendered to the energy of revolution and the overthrow of orthodoxy – but without reason acting as ‘the bound or outward circumference of Energy’ (4, E34), energy, it seems, spirals out of control.

The most distinctive conversion in *The Marriage* is the conversion of an angel to a devil in the last plates of the main part of the book, after which *A Song of Liberty* follows. Although no copy of *The Marriage* exists that does not have *A Song of Liberty* bound with it, it seems that with it, the reader is transported to another narrative register (as well as visual style) – a sense which supports the critical assumption that *A Song of Liberty* was not created until after Blake had already finished the main body of *The Marriage*.¹⁵⁹ Whether or not *A Song of Liberty* is later than the rest of *The Marriage*, the conversion of the angel still represents a first narrative culmination within the structure of the book. The angel’s conversion begins in MHH22, where a discussion scene between an angel and a devil is set. Here, the devil approaches the angel sitting on a cloud and opens the

¹⁵⁸ See particularly MHH11 for a description of the way in which original poetic religion grew into a ‘system [...] which some took advantage of & enslav’d the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects [...] Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast’ (E38).

¹⁵⁹ David V. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet against Empire* (New York; London, 1991), 192. The date of *A Song of Liberty* is, however, disputed, as there is no agreement as to whether it refers to later or earlier events in the French Revolution – see Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi, ‘Introductions and Notes,’ 114-15.

discussion with a statement claiming that ‘the worship of God is. Honouring his gifts in other men each according to his genius’ (22, E43). Before long, the two are locked in bitter discussion. The angel preaches the gospel of orthodoxy and the devil that of the antinomian Jesus, rhetorically asking ‘did he not mock at the sabbath,’ and concluding that ‘no virtue can exist without breaking these ten commandments: Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse: not from rules’ (23-24, E43). Whereas this discussion in itself might not be remarkable, the angel’s reaction to hearing this antinomian gospel is, for instead of dismissing it, the angel surprisingly takes the message on board and gives up his position – and stretching out his arms, he embraces a flame of fire and ‘was consumed and arose as Elijah’ (24, E43). After this intellectual conversion (prompted by the devil’s argument) followed by the angel’s physical and emotional response to it (embracing the fire), the angel is transformed into ‘a Devil’ himself as well as the ‘particular friend’ of the narrator; together, they ‘often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense which the world shall have if they behave well’ (24, E44). Thus the first, main, part of *The Marriage* ends: with the conversion of orthodoxy and reason to antinomianism and energy.

The striking half-page illustration (fig. 8) that occurs in the lower part of the plate accentuates the theme of conversion in the text. This illustration, which some years later is turned into Blake’s famous image ‘Nebuchadnezzar’ (ca. 1795, B301-5), depicts a naked, crowned, and bearded man crawling on all fours towards the left of the plate, head turned towards the viewer. The figure is usually identified as the Old Testament king Nebuchadnezzar,¹⁶⁰ which is an identification mainly based on

¹⁶⁰ See for example Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi, ‘Introductions and Notes,’ 139. Kenneth Clark has pointed out that Blake’s source for the illustration is a woodcut of a werewolf by Lucas Cranach (ibid.).

Blake's own later identification of the figure as Nebuchadnezzar, the crown he is wearing, and the description in Dan. 4:33 that seems to match the image (according to which Nebuchadnezzar was 'driven from men, and did eat grass as oxen, and his body was wet with the dew of heaven, till his hairs were grown like eagles' feathers, and his nails like birds' claws'). If we also identify the figure as Nebuchadnezzar, this again enforces the sense of conversion within that last Memorable Fancy (MHH22-24), as the narrative of Dan. 4 is exactly that of Nebuchadnezzar's fall, exile, and restoration – in other words, his conversion. However, in the context of *The Marriage* (where Nebuchadnezzar is not directly mentioned in the text) we may also entertain the possibility that the figure could represent Elijah, whose name appears in the very same plate.¹⁶¹ Elijah too is connected with the theme of conversion (in Mark 9:11-13, for example, Jesus understood the preacher of conversion John the Baptist as Elijah) and with living in the wilderness (Milton in *Paradise Regained* understood Elijah's transformative experiences in the wilderness as a type for Christ's desert fast).¹⁶² Whether Elijah or Nebuchadnezzar, the crawling wilderness figure represents a striking opposite to the young figure that is depicted in the beginning of the text episode stretching from MHH21 to 24 (fig. 9).¹⁶³ The young figure is depicted as naked (like Elijah/Nebuchadnezzar) with curly hair (resembling Blake's own hair), crouching on the ground with legs spread wide apart and looking upwards – behind him a sunrise is shown. This figure of apparent hopeful rebirth and new beginnings (indicated by the sunrise, his nakedness, his ready physical posture, and the sense the viewer gets that he is just

¹⁶¹ Fuller, who also questions the identification of the figure as Nebuchadnezzar, instead suggests that he might represent George III, whose recent bout of insanity was public knowledge (Fuller, ed. *William Blake*, 145).

¹⁶² Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition*, 233-34.

¹⁶³ The episode is identified as a separate entity in Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi, 'Introductions and Notes,' 114.

about to stand up) at the same time refers backwards and forwards in *The Marriage*. Backwards, as it seems to represent a resurrection of the naked corpse depicted in MHH14 (presumably representing reason), and forwards towards the aged – and likewise naked – Elijah/Nebuchadnezzar. Together, these three figures represent a development or rebirth, which underlines the sense that *The Marriage* is concerned with the transformation of the subject – even if the narrative ends with the joyful conversion of the angel accompanied by the more ambiguous representation of Elijah/Nebuchadnezzar, perhaps anticipating the difficult revolution in *A Song of Liberty*.

The Marriage is not *about* religious conversion per se. But the book represents the genesis of some of the markers of conversion or spiritual transformation which will later reappear in Blake's works: a figure throwing himself into fire and instantly reappearing as a new being, a climactic conversion experience taking place at the very end of the main narrative, a decisive conversion experience being prompted by an encounter with Christ (in *The Marriage* it takes the form of hearing and internalizing the gospel of the antinomian Christ instead of actually seeing or meeting him), and finally the encounter with the divine being sealed with an embrace (in *The Marriage* an embrace of fire). These four conversion markers form the beginning of what we might call the alphabet of conversion in Blake and will all reappear in the following chapters in recognisable form – creating, along with the dynamic relationship between text and images, a sense of a transformation, or intellectual and spiritual conversion, which is being manifested in the reading present as the reader engages with the book.

There are also other conversion markers within Blake's pre-1796 works. I have already mentioned Blake's first two emblem books (precursors of the

illuminated books) *All Religions are One* and *There is No Natural Religion*, both of which refer to some of the same themes as *The Marriage* – perception, religion, and transformation. The specific theme of conversion, rebirth, and spiritual resurrection is particularly concentrated in a couple of plates. In *There is No Natural Religion* (1794 version), we see a conversion or awakening represented visually in the last two plates, where a corpse first lies flat on his back (fig. 2), followed by a mirror image in which the corpse awakens to a new life where divinity and humanity are more fully integrated (fig. 3), as per the text:

Therefore
 God becomes as we are,
 that we may be as he
 is[.]
 (E3)

As in *The Marriage*, then, the book ends with the vision of a final awakening or rebirth – a sense that has been retained in the 1795 version, where, although the two plates do not now occur consecutively, the narrative still ends with a depiction of the just awakening figure. In both versions, the title page resembles a gothic archway or door, which gives the impression (that we recognize from later Blake works such as *Jerusalem*) of the reader entering the book through a door – indicating reader participation and evoking the idea that the book itself poses an experience for the reader to go through. In the 1795 version, the title page is even preceded by a frontispiece which has been understood as a reference to the raising of Lazarus from the dead in John 12:17,¹⁶⁴ thus staging the book as one long movement from one resurrection (in the frontispiece) to another (in the last plate). The posture of the figure representing Jesus in the frontispiece – whose left arm is

¹⁶⁴ Ibid., 40-41.

raised above Lazarus, indicating a command – reappears from time to time in Blake, for example in the central vision of Christ in pl. 17 of Blake’s Job engravings (fig. 59), in ‘The Creation of Eve’ (B536 8), in two illustrations to *Pilgrim’s Progress*, ‘Christian meets Evangelist’ (B829 3) and ‘Christian Directed by Mr Worldly-Wiseman’ (B829 7, fig. 52), and in ‘The Conversion of Saul’ (ca. 1800, B506, fig. 45).¹⁶⁵

The idea of the book representing an experience is reflected in the theme of the traveller, wayfarer, or pilgrim (a classic conversion trope, as seen in *Pilgrim’s Progress*), which also occurs in Blake’s pre-1796 works. For example, in *All Religions are One*, a traveller or pilgrim with a broad brimmed hat and a staff appears in Principle 4 (pl. 7) with the accompanying text: ‘As none by travelling over known lands can find out the unknown. So from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more. therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists’ (E1). This traveller might be pointing back to the ‘Pilgrim with his crook & hat’ in the early satire *An Island in the Moon* (ca. 1784-85, E457)¹⁶⁶ and also appears in *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (1793), an illustration in Blake’s *Notebook* from ca. 1790-92,¹⁶⁷ and in *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* (ca. 1820, fig. 10). Later, there are parallels to the traveller in a *Night Thoughts* illustration, where a man with a broad brimmed hat enters a gothic door, as well as in the frontispiece to *Jerusalem*, where a similar figure opens a door which leads the reader into the

¹⁶⁵ Connected with this raising of Lazarus motif is the motif of a hovering figure with outstretched arms seemingly attempting to raise a horizontal figure or corpse beneath him – a version of Blake’s well known ‘gesture of outstretched arms’ identified by Warner, which implies creativity, regeneration, and the divinity in humanity (Janet A. Warner, *Blake and the Language of Art* (Kingston; Montreal, 1984), 87-105); see for example MHH14 and ‘The House of Death’ (B320). I return to the vision of Christ in Job in 4.4 and to ‘The Conversion of Saul’ in 3.3.

¹⁶⁶ Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi, ‘Introductions and Notes,’ 35.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, 35.

narrative (fig. 4).¹⁶⁸ Another early pilgrim traveller appears on pl. 3 of *Europe* (1794), which depicts a burdened traveller about to turn a corner, behind which a villain with a dagger awaits him (fig. 11). This traveller, or pilgrim, has similarities with Blake's later representations of Christian in *Pilgrim's Progress* and could be understood as referring to the allegorical conversion narrative topos of dangers lurking behind every corner of the pilgrim's way.¹⁶⁹ Thus *Europe* pl. 3 sets the scene for a transformative narrative by hinting at a well-known conversion trope, which (according to Norvig) he returns to again in pl. 13, thereby emphasizing the sense of a progressive journey:

Thus Blake insists on presenting the imagery of the pilgrim traveler serially, within a visual narrative that charts its own transformations through time – the reader's time. [...] Blake makes the journeying figure actually journey, from one plate to another, in a system of rhetorical sequence and consequence. [...] It is a "progress" that takes the reader through changes of response, making him or her the perceptual traveler.¹⁷⁰

However, *Europe's* discourse on revolution and Europe ends, like *The Marriage*, in revolutionary fires: 'The sun glow'd fiery red!/ The furious terrors flew around!' (15.3, E66). Together with *America* (1793) and *The Song of Los* (1795), *Europe* thus examines the contemporary theme of revolution in an eternal and global perspective,¹⁷¹ continuing Blake's practice of grouping 'contrary' works together

¹⁶⁸ For the *Night Thoughts* illustration (NT61), see Thomas H. Helmstadter, 'Blake and Religion: Iconographical Themes in *Night Thoughts*,' *Studies in Romanticism* 10.3 (1971), 209-10. Helmstadter identifies the traveller as a pilgrim and suggests that the costume might have referred to Blake's own, thus staging him as the traveller.

¹⁶⁹ Gerda Norvig, *Dark Figures in the Desired Country: Blake's Illustrations to the Pilgrim's Progress* (Berkeley; Oxford, 1993), 69-72. It has also been understood as referring to the contemporary genre 'Travellers Attacked by Banditti,' popular in the 1770s and 1780s (D. W. Dörrbecker, 'Introductions and Notes,' in *The Continental Prophecies: America: A Prophecy, Europe: A Prophecy, the Song of Los*, ed. D. W. Dörrbecker (London, 1995), 174).

¹⁷⁰ Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 71.

¹⁷¹ The three works explicitly refer to four different parts of the world: *Europe* to Europe, *America* to America, and *The Song of Los* to Africa and Asia.

that explore the same themes from different perspectives. As usual, motifs also move between the different works – thus *The Marriage*'s striking depiction of the naked reborn youth in the sunrise in pl. 21 is reused again in *America* pl. 6 (fig. 12).¹⁷² In the accompanying text, the theme of rebirth, resurrection, and positive revolution is continued, announced by Orc and making use of a figurative language connected with Jesus's resurrection in the gospels:¹⁷³

The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up;
 [...]

 Let the slave grinding at the mill, run out into the field:
 Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air;
 Let the inchained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing,
 Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years;
 [...]

 The Sun has left his blackness, & has found a fresher morning
 And the fair Moon rejoices in the clear & cloudless night;
 For Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease.
 (6.2-15, E53)

A related combination of death and rebirth is seen in the last plate of *The Song of Los* (thus again a rebirth or conversion is allocated to the very end of the book). Here, as in Blake's Last Judgment images (which I discuss below), we are confronted with a vision of the Last Judgment which is part destruction, part resurrection, and the grave is a womb out of which life is born (a trope I return to in the next chapter):

The Grave shrieks with delight, & shakes
 Her hollow womb, & clasps the solid stem:
 Her bosom swells with wild desire:
 And milk & blood & glandous wine
 In rivers rush & shout & dance,
 On mountain, dale and plain.

¹⁷² The skull, which in *The Marriage* was placed under his left knee, has now been moved to a position under the right knee, still emphasizing the scene is one of rebirth, victory over death, and the annihilation of the old 'I.'

¹⁷³ Fuller, ed. *William Blake*, 193.

(7.35-40, E69-70)

And then *The Song of Los* ends with the words ‘Urizen Wept’ (7.42, E70), which – it has been argued – emphasizes the sense of resurrection, referring perhaps to the (famously short) Bible verse ‘Jesus wept,’ which occurs in John 11:35 in the narrative of the raising of Lazarus.¹⁷⁴ Again, then, the final judgment-resurrection occurs when the narrative is just drawing to a close, continuing the pattern from *The Marriage*. But *The Song of Los* does not end in fire as does *The Marriage* (apart from the figure of Orc who appears as ‘a pillar of fire [...] a serpent of fiery flame,’ 7.27-28, E69). Instead, the last plate is dominated by green leafy vegetation, which gives the impression of a forest, and only one single figure is seen, falling headlong in the right side of the plate. This figure not only recalls other judgment scenes in Blake’s contemporary works (such as *America* pl. 7), but also his later representations of the Last Judgment produced between ca. 1806 and 1827 (B639-48). All of these are characterized by a circular energy in the image, which moves from Christ as the divine centre in the top, downwards on the right side of the image with bodies falling headlong into fire and hell (placed at the bottom), and then upwards again on the left side with rising, resurrected bodies (fig. 13).¹⁷⁵ These images are extraordinary not only because of their sheer attention to detail, but also because Blake’s own comments on the rationale behind them exist in writing.¹⁷⁶ These texts emphasize the intimate connection in the images between destruction and resurrection as well as the circular movement in the images indicating continuation or repeated experience. The Last Judgment, Blake seems to suggest, is not placed at the end of times, but takes place continually throughout a human

¹⁷⁴ Dörrbecker, ‘Introductions and Notes,’ 354.

¹⁷⁵ See Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 228-31.

¹⁷⁶ *The Design of The Last Judgment* (1808, E552-54) and *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810, E554-570).

subject's life: 'All Life consists of these Two Throwing off Error [...] continually & receiving Truth [...] Continually. [...] whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual' (VLJ84, E562). Through this life, and this continual circle ('continual' being a keyword that will reappear in connection with the Job illustrations) of judgment and salvation, of 'throwing off Error' and 'receiving Truth,' the human subject passes like a traveller:

Man Passes on but States remain for Ever he passes thro them like a traveller who may as well suppose that the places he has passed thro exist no more as a Man may suppose that the States he has passd thro exist no more Every Thing is Eternal[.]
(VLJ80, E556)

Interestingly, the very centre of the images – and particularly B642, the Petworth image – consists of a structure made out of angels and other figures that strikingly resembles the female genitals, thus literally centering the experience of judgment around an experience of rebirth.¹⁷⁷

Another trope in the pre-1796 works anticipates the later conversion tropes 'meetings with or visions of Christ,' or 'embracing a divine figure.' These embraces also occur in the pre-1796 material, particularly in the images. In the illustration above 'The Little Vagabond' from *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, for example, we see two kneeling figures embracing each other: one is a bearded elderly figure dressed in white and with a halo, probably representing the 'God like a father' (13, E26) from the text, and the other is a younger person hiding his head in the lap of 'God.' Although the illustration seems to address issues of protection, safety, and home (in line with the poem itself), rather than conversion or religious experience as such, the scene does seem to anticipate the way in which

¹⁷⁷ See Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 229.

similar meetings later appear in Blake's conversion discourse (such as the divine embraces in the *Pilgrim's Progress* illustrations, to which I will return). Another poem from *Songs*, however, 'To Tirzah,' more explicitly addresses the theme of a spiritual new birth. That this poem only occurs in later copies of *Songs* and was perhaps included in the collection as late as after 1803¹⁷⁸ supports the assumption that conversion or spiritual new birth were issues that were on Blake's mind in the first decade of the 1800s. In the image (fig. 14), we see a naked person (bluish in Copy E as if to indicate a corpse) swooning or falling to the ground, supported by two female figures. In front of him, a bearded figure with a pitcher bends over him; this figure is dressed in a yellow garment inscribed with the words 'It is Raised/ a Spiritual Body' (a quote from 1 Cor. 15:44, E30).¹⁷⁹ The sense of this being a conversion scene or a spiritual new birth – frozen in the moment of temporary annihilation – is enhanced by the text, which opens with the lines:

Whate'er is Born of Mortal Birth,
Must be consumed with the Earth
To rise from Generation free;
Then what have I to do with thee?
(E30)

The text itself is directed at Tirzah, a biblically inspired female figure representing the physical body in Blake.¹⁸⁰ It is to her that the narrator addresses the question

¹⁷⁸ Andrew Lincoln, 'Introduction and Notes,' in *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, ed. Andrew Lincoln (Princeton, 1991), 18, 200, and Fuller, ed. *William Blake*, 105.

¹⁷⁹ 'So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption, it is raised in incorruption. It is sown in dishonour, it is raised in glory: it is sown in weakness, it is raised in power: it is sown a natural body, it is raised a spiritual body' (1 Cor. 15:42-44). Blake, however, does not often use the term 'spiritual body.'

¹⁸⁰ Samuel Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (London, 1973), 407. Tirzah is one of the daughters of Zelophehad in Numbers 26:33 as well as the name of the capital of the northern kingdom of Israel, the apostate Jeroboam, in 1 Kings 14-16. She also appears in the Song of Solomon 4:4: 'Thou art beautiful, O my love, as Tirzah,/ comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners' (Fuller, ed. *William Blake*, 105, and Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 407).

‘what have I to do with thee,’ suggesting adherence to a worldview in which the natural world will be ‘consumed’ and a new existence arise from it (note how the term ‘consumed’ also appeared in the conversion scene in *The Marriage*, where the angel ‘was consumed and arose,’ 24, E43). The question also echoes Jesus’s words to his mother Mary in John 2:4: ‘Woman, what have I to do with thee?’ However, as one would expect from an *Experience* poem, there seems to be a discrepancy between the narrator’s proclamation of the (Christian) spiritual body over Tirzah’s physical body, and the death-centred way in which this adherence is expressed: ‘Mercy changd Death into Sleep’ (6, E30) and, in the last stanza, ‘The Death of Jesus set me free’ (15, E30). However, as the plate appears now, usually understood as belonging to the mid-1790s body of Blake’s works, it almost represents an echo of the future – namely the 1810s, in which the trope of Jesus’s death takes a more prominent place.¹⁸¹ And in the context of *Songs*, the text and image appear as an ambiguous comment on the relationship between physical and spiritual human existence, at the same time standing out from the non-mythical context of most of the other poems in *Songs* and – being the antepenultimate poem in the collection – as a widening out of the perspective in *Songs* to other, and later, Blake works in which these themes become more dominant.

But spiritual transformation or conversion is not just manifested in individual plates or tropes in many of the works predating the *Night Thoughts* illustrations. In a more profound way, conversion is connected with the way in which the works themselves move the reader towards a transformative experience (as in *The Marriage*). This energy is not confined to each separate work, but also to the way in which particular works relate to each other – together creating a vision of

¹⁸¹ See 2.1 below.

reality which is not monochrome, but where true vision seems placed somewhere in between two works. One example is the twin books *Songs of Innocence* and *Songs of Experience*, where each represents a corrective of the perspective on life represented in the other book. Or there is *All Religions are One* and *There is No Natural Religion*, which might represent two closely related (not opposed) perspectives, but which nevertheless have already engaged the reader in the intellectual activity of comparison simply by presenting themselves as twin books through their style and visual impact. Even *The Marriage* seems to have a twin companion, *The (First) Book of Urizen*, which challenges the vision of energy over reason that is posed in *The Marriage* (thus questioning the view of *The Marriage* as Blake's intellectual manifesto). Here, Blake explores how the world looks when reason is allowed to rule over energy (that is a contrary situation to *The Marriage*) and the consequences it has for Urizen, the pitiable and oddly moving main character of *Book of Urizen*. Again, form and content are intimately connected with the theme, here in a more conventional manner than *The Marriage* (*Book of Urizen* offers one continuous narrative with only one main character, and has clear graphic allusions to contemporary Bible editions.) At the same time, despite the controlled manner of the Urizen narrative and the joyless description of the Urizen figure (a stark contrast to the charming devil(s) of *The Marriage*), *Book of Urizen* leaves the reader with a strong sense of what is missing in the entertaining and intellectually playful *The Marriage*, namely emotion and compassion. Thus, *The Marriage* and *Book of Urizen* read *alongside* each other represent a double vision of the relationship between not only energy and reason, but also between intellectual and emotional life – the point being exactly that whenever one of the two predominates, the balance is shifted: opposites or contraries are dependant on each other. A similar

energy is seen between *Book of Thel* (1789) and *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), where Thel's non-conversion from innocence to experience (as 'with a shriek' she 'Fled back unhinderd till she came into the vales of Har,' 6.21-22, E6) is counterbalanced by Thel's antitype Oothoon in *Visions*, who throws herself into experience.¹⁸²

With this brief – and by no means comprehensive – introduction to the beginning of an outline of the conversion discourse in Blake's works from the first half of the 1790s, I will now turn to an analysis of the conversion mode in three main works and three 'contrary' companions.

¹⁸² Fuller, ed. *William Blake*, 110-11.

Part 2

2. BLAKE'S MAN OF SORROWS: CONVERSION AND THE BODY OF CHRIST

The crucified Christ is a prism or lens of reality,
that is, an eye, which Man is slowly trying to open.
– Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 401

If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination
approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought if he
could [...] make a Friend & Companion of one of these Images of wonder
[...] then would he arise from his Grave then would he meet the Lord in the
Air & then he would be happy[.]
– Blake, *A Vision of The Last Judgment* 82, E560

How is it we have walkd thro fires & yet are not consumd
How is it that all things are changd even as in ancient times[.]
– Blake, *The Four Zoas* 138.39-40, E407

2.1 Introduction

Around 1796, Blake began working on his monumental illustrations to Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, consisting of 537 watercolour sketches and 43 final engravings. However, only the first four Nights were published, after which the project was abandoned due to financial difficulties.¹⁸³ The series contained numerous illustrations depicting Christ, of which one of the most striking was a full-page representation of Christ as the Man of Sorrows (fig. 15). Almost a decade later, some time in the beginning of the 1800s, the image appeared again – now occurring in the illustrations appearing together with Blake's longest poem *The Four Zoas*, which was left unfinished around 1807. This time, however, the image occurred not only once, but three times within the last third of the manuscript. It is

¹⁸³ BR, 80.

this image – and the questions it raises – that this chapter revolves around. At first glance, the image makes the reader or viewer stumble, for Christ does not come across as particularly ‘Blakean’ – instead, he appears sentimental, almost conventional.¹⁸⁴ Likewise, the image reveals a preoccupation with the suffering of Christ and his wounded body that is not usually associated with Blake. Perhaps as a consequence of this, and probably also as a consequence of the generally limited critical interest in the *Night Thoughts* series, the image is often overlooked in Blake criticism.¹⁸⁵ In the following I suggest, however, that the image opens up a whole range of questions – not only concerning Blake’s interpretation of Young, but also concerning his connections with the Moravians, the presence of Christ’s body in his works, and the implications of both of these for Blake’s exploration of conversion.

After an introduction to Young and the world of *Night Thoughts*, my analysis of the Man of Sorrows image will form the basis of a discussion of Blake’s works in relation to the eighteenth-century Moravian tradition of visual art and of Blake’s depictions of the crucified, wounded, or risen Christ. To conclude the

¹⁸⁴ Although many of Blake’s depictions of Christ do, in fact, appear rather traditional.

¹⁸⁵ It is only in recent decades that the *Night Thoughts* series has attracted interest in Blake criticism – see, for example, Irene H. Chayes, ‘Picture and Page, Reader and Viewer in Blake’s *Night Thoughts* Illustrations,’ *Studies in Romanticism* 30.3 (1991): 439-71, Grant, ‘Jesus and the Powers That Be,’ Helmstadter, ‘Blake and Religion,’ and David V. Erdman, John E. Grant, and others, ‘Commentary,’ in *William Blake’s Designs for Edward Young’s Night Thoughts*, ed. David V. Erdman (Oxford, 1980). This might owe something to Young’s now unfashionable reputation or to the style of the illustrations. Thus, a typical nineteenth-century verdict on Blake’s illustrations is that ‘one is struck by their poverty, their monotony, and as a whole, their lack of interest. [...] they have something of the Blakeian touch, the Blakeian idiosyncrasy; but there is nothing of that wild grandeur, and little of that passionate symbolism which lifts many of the designs for his own scriptures into the clear empyrean of art, where their otherwise too manifest blemishes are forgotten’ (Alfred T. Story, *William Blake: His Life Character and Genius* (London; New York, 1893), 32). Likewise, the illustrations to *The Four Zoas* are often neglected, and if they are discussed, it is usually the *original* sketches made for *The Four Zoas*, not the reused *Night Thoughts* illustrations. For example, in Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, the discussion of the illustrations is relegated to a two-page appendix. An exception is Cettina Tramontano Magno and David V. Erdman, eds., *The Four Zoas by William Blake: A Photographic Facsimile of the Manuscript with Commentary on the Illuminations* (Lewisburg; London; Toronto, 1987).

chapter, I turn to this chapter's 'contrary' work, *The Four Zoas*, in which the Man of Sorrows image is used again, albeit now in a very different context and setting. The linking of these two works – one a commissioned illustration series, the other an illustrated manuscript – emphasizes the continuity between the different areas of Blake's work. It also draws the attention to the presence of the Christ figure in Blake's works before 1800, thereby challenging the paradigm of Blake's conversion as a sudden experience followed by a corresponding turn in his works. Instead, the impression that emerges in this chapter is one of a gradually intensifying, but ongoing, exploration of conversion throughout a longer period in Blake's life. This idea of an intensifying and ongoing exploration of conversion, apart from challenging the conversion paradigm, also questions some of Blake criticism's decided notions of Blake's Christianity – such as the notion that Blake recoiled from verbal and visual images connected with Christ's suffering and his wounded body.

2.2 Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*

The Complaint: or, Night-Thoughts on Life, Death, and Immortality can at first seem an unlikely work for Blake to have engaged with, both with regards to its style and its theological content (although the commission in 1795 must have been welcome for Blake, and he had known the family of the publisher Richard Edwards for several years).¹⁸⁶ Published serially in 1742-46, the poem's nine long Nights explore the themes of life and (in particular) death in a 'declamatory and hortatory

¹⁸⁶ Mitchell, 'Blake's Designs for *Night Thoughts*,' 198. Blake was, however, paid poorly for the illustrations (BR, 71).

style offset by exclamation marks.¹⁸⁷ After its publication, *Night Thoughts* was soon translated into most European languages (including the Scandinavian languages and Turkish)¹⁸⁸ and by 1800 it had appeared in more than forty editions in England alone.¹⁸⁹ The poem belongs to the tradition of Graveyard literature which also includes works such as the (once) Methodist James Hervey's *Meditations Among the Tombs* (1745/46, which quoted extensively from *Night Thoughts*)¹⁹⁰ and Robert Blair's *The Grave* (1745). Blake illustrated both of these: Hervey's *Meditations* was the subject of a late and very detailed painting by Blake (ca. 1820), which is similar in style to the Last Judgment images from 1806-27, and Blair's *The Grave* was illustrated by Blake in 1805 – although this project, like *Night Thoughts*, was also left unfinished, this time because of Blake's disagreements with the publisher Cromek.¹⁹¹ Blake actually mentions Hervey's *Meditations* and Young's *Night Thoughts* together in his early satirical text *An Island in the Moon* (1784). Here, he describes 'Steelyard the Lawgiver, sitting at his table taking extracts from Herveys Meditations among the tombs & Youngs Night thoughts' (8, E456), adding a cryptic note, saying 'This is unfair and ?I ?think?' (8, E456).¹⁹² *Night Thoughts* enjoyed enormous popularity in the eighteenth century (for example, John Wesley twice edited versions of it)¹⁹³ and continued to do so

¹⁸⁷ Shaun Irlam, *Elations: The Poetics of Enthusiasm in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Stanford, 1999), 175. The use of exclamation marks is particularly liberal in the Blake-Edwards edition.

¹⁸⁸ H. Forster, *Edward Young: The Poet of the 'Night Thoughts,' 1683-1765* (Alburch, 1986), ix.

¹⁸⁹ Irlam, *Elations*, 2.

¹⁹⁰ Stephen Cornford, 'Introduction,' in *Night Thoughts*, ed. Stephen Cornford (Cambridge, 1989), 8.

¹⁹¹ See Bentley Jr., *Stranger from Paradise*, chapter 7 (in particular 276-308).

¹⁹² We do not know when Blake read *Night Thoughts* for the first time; the edition we know belonged to him is from 1796, was without illustrations, and is now untraced (BB, 702). For an anecdote of Blake reading *Night Thoughts*, see BR, 233-34.

¹⁹³ Or more precisely, Wesley *pirated* an edition of *Night Thoughts* in 1744, and then – almost thirty years later, in 1770 – published the popular *Extract from Dr. Young's Night*

more or less until George Eliot's fierce attack on Young in the essay 'Worldliness and Otherworldliness' (1857), which successfully inoculated later generations against him.¹⁹⁴

Young (1683-1765) was a Church of England clergyman who wrote *Night Thoughts* after losing his wife, stepdaughter, and son-in-law within four years. This experience is reflected in the text's themes and melancholy tone as well as in its cast of characters: Young's deceased daughter appears in the role of 'Narcissa,' his son-in-law as 'Philander,' and his late wife as 'Lucia'; only 'Lorenzo,' the narrator's sceptical conversation partner (and the objective of his missionary efforts), does not appear to correspond to one identifiable real life figure.¹⁹⁵ The autobiographical perspective in the poem was acknowledged from early on – spurred on by comments such as the following from the Preface, situating the composition of the text in a setting of immediacy and feeling, not rational contemplation: 'As the Occasion of this Poem was *Real*, not *Fictitious*; so the Method pursued in it, was rather *imposed*, by what spontaneously arose in the Author's Mind, on that Occasion, than *meditated*, or *designed*' (Preface).¹⁹⁶ Young himself comes across now as the archetypal religious sensibility poet or 'man of feeling:' sensitive,

Thoughts. Charles Wesley had an equal interest in the poem: he transcribed it in 1754, and in 1773 set his daughter to learn the whole of Night IV by heart (Forster, *Edward Young*, 385) – a fitting choice of Night for him, as its focus on the crucifixion (which we will see illustrated below) corresponded with his own theology of the cross.

¹⁹⁴ Eliot was a merciless, but also rather witty critic of Young, characterizing him as 'a cross between a sycophant and a psalmist' (quoted in Robert N. Essick and Jenijoy LaBelle, eds., *Night Thoughts or, the Complaint and the Consolation. Illustrated by William Blake. Text by Edward Young* (Mineola; New York, 1975), iii). She noted how he seemed 'always at a telescopic distance from mother Earth and simple human joys,' and complained: 'Place him on a breezy common, where the furze is in its golden bloom, where children are playing and horses standing with fondling necks, and he would have nothing to say' (quoted in Forster, *Edward Young*, 397-98).

¹⁹⁵ See however Forster, *Edward Young*, 191.

¹⁹⁶ Unless otherwise indicated, all references are to Edward Young, *Night Thoughts*, ed. Stephen Cornford (Cambridge, 1989). For a discussion of the autobiographical perspective, see Cornford, 'Introduction,' 17-22.

cultured, widowed, morally irreproachable, intent on Christian awakening, and expressing a distinctive devaluation of the world.¹⁹⁷ And *Night Thoughts* was a pathetic and introspective poem which focussed almost exclusively on the inner, subjective world of the author and had little narrative drive – a characteristic recognized, and intended, by the author himself: ‘This Poem [...] differs from the common Mode of Poetry, which is from long Narrations to draw short Morals. Here, on the contrary, the Narrative is short, and the Morality arising from it makes the Bulk of the poem’ (Preface).¹⁹⁸

What is particularly interesting for this thesis is *Night Thoughts* as a work of conversion, and Young as a poet-prophet figure with a strong urge to fundamentally *change* the lives, hearts, and feelings of his readers through the means of writing.¹⁹⁹ In his *Elations* (1999), for example, Shaun Irlam discusses the importance of the conversion-plot, and in particular the conversion narrative of Paul, to mid-eighteenth century literature.²⁰⁰ However, as is evident from Irlam’s introduction, his definition of Paul’s conversion narrative is not confined to the three accounts of Paul’s experience on the road to Damascus in Acts. Instead, Irlam operates with a broader *idea* of Paul’s conversion as encompassing both a revelatory experience (by which I presume Irlam refers to the Damascus Road experience) and a hermeneutic conversion, which is evident in his subsequent proclamation of the gospel, and

¹⁹⁷ G. J. Barker-Benfield, ‘Sensibility,’ in *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832*, ed. Iain McCalman (Oxford, 1999), and idem, *The Culture of Sensibility: Sex and Society in Eighteenth-Century Britain* (Chicago; London, 1996) – see in particular chapter 5 for a discussion of the place of religious conversion in the making of the ‘man of feeling.’

¹⁹⁸ See also Cornford, ‘Introduction,’ 6.

¹⁹⁹ A perspective employed in *ibid.* as well as in Irlam, *Elations*.

²⁰⁰ Irlam, *Elations*, 8.

through which he translates his old worldview into a new semantic system.²⁰¹ As Irlam defines this double movement: ‘a moment of unworlding, the rupture with “the things of this world,” and a moment of otherworlding, the turn toward an ideal or transcendental world, a *u*-topia, and the inauguration of a new Self.’²⁰² In applying this linguistically founded conversion paradigm to eighteenth-century poets like Young therefore, Irlam does not simply emphasize the importance of the language and plot of the conversion text to poets such as Young. But in a more sophisticated – but perhaps also less obvious – way he elicits the ‘linguistic *microstructure* of conversion in the [...] epiphanic fictions told by poets in the eighteenth century.’²⁰³

Night Thoughts as a conversion text works on different levels. Although not an autobiographical conversion narrative in the conventional sense (that is, a text relating the conclusive conversion of the narrator some time in the past), it does commence with relating the narrator’s own conversion in Night I as a means of establishing his right to speak with authority on conversion.²⁰⁴ Then the poem quickly moves from the question of the narrator’s past conversion to the intended conversion of the unbeliever Lorenzo in the text:

LORENZO! with my Radius (the rich Gift
Of Thought nocturnal!) I’ll point out thee
Its various Lessons; some that may surprize
An Un-adept in Mysteries of NIGHT[.]
(IX.648-51)²⁰⁵

²⁰¹ This semantic conversion is represented by Paul’s reinterpretation of the Mosaic Law, by which he moves from relating to it as his primary category of knowledge to labelling it as ‘old’ (ibid., 12).

²⁰² Ibid., 8.

²⁰³ Ibid., 16.

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 184-85.

²⁰⁵ Quoted in ibid., 185.

Although the poem is didactically addressed at Lorenzo, Young also positions the reader of the poem – the as-yet unconverted reader, that is – as a target for his persuasive poem:

Could I touch these themes, as might obtain
Thine Ear; nor leave thy Heart quite disengag'd
The good Deed would delight me[.]
(II.18-20)²⁰⁶

In this sense Lorenzo can be said to play a part similar to that of the autobiographical narrator-protagonist in conversion narratives such as Augustine in *Confessions* or Bunyan in *Grace Abounding*: the one whom the reader moves so close to that it seems almost impossible not to experience some degree of identification. And from this identification, the act of replicating the protagonist's conversion in one's own life seems only a small step. Playing this role of a substitute autobiographical protagonist,²⁰⁷ Lorenzo could never have been split into several characters and conversation partners, all in need of conversion. Instead, he is very much 'the generic *individual*,' who could represent any reader, and his role thereby maintains the poem's narrow, almost claustrophobic focus on one subject that is a characteristic of many conversion texts from *Confessions* onwards.²⁰⁸

This anthropocentric (or 'egocentric')²⁰⁹ focus in Young's text is connected with the more general conversion or turn in the text from 'Nature' to 'Man' (or from 'life animal' to 'life moral') – a movement which, according to Irlam, can be traced

²⁰⁶ Quoted in *ibid.*, 184.

²⁰⁷ A point which is emphasized by the way in which the narrator and Lorenzo move closer and closer to each other during the course of the poem. Towards the end of the final Night, the narrator has moved so close to Lorenzo that he has seen into his heart: 'For I have peep'd into thy cover'd Heart/ And seen it blush beneath a boastful Brow' (IX.2073-74). Lorenzo and the narrator, then, can almost be seen as two sides of one personality (Cornford, 'Introduction,' 7).

²⁰⁸ Irlam, *Elations*, 192.

²⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

back to Paul's double movement of unworlding and otherworlding.²¹⁰ The movement from 'infidel' to 'man awake' in the text is staged as an increasing retranslation of the created world from referring to itself alone to being so intimately connected with the form of man that no nature exists outside the human form:²¹¹ 'And chang'd Creation takes its form from man' (VI.788). Consequently, the attempted conversion of Lorenzo – and the reader by extension – that increases in intensity throughout the text corresponds with a retranslation of epistemological context from that of nature (or earthliness) to that of divine life as it is manifested in human form. As Irlam puts it:

For the "Man awake" (II.312) the universe, existing exclusively and emphatically "for me," is ontologically saturated with humanity and [...] only for the "man awake" can the universe, natural or otherwise, possess any beauty, order, form, or intelligibility.²¹²

For all their differences, this 'Man awake' is strikingly similar to Blake's 'Man of Imagination' (Letter to Trusler, 23 August 1799, E702), and above all to the man of imagination's relationship with nature. Blake's man of imagination not only sees the world differently than the un-awakened person sees it, but he also shapes the world into divine form with his awakened vision:

This World Is a World of Imagination & Vision [...] but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity & by these I shall not regulate my proportions, & Some Scarce see Nature at all But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination

²¹⁰ Ibid., 188-89. In *Night Thoughts*, however, 'moral' means something altogether more positive than it does to the Blake reader: as Irlam notes, 'in its transcendental form, "the moral world" is simply God' (195).

²¹¹ Ibid., 194.

²¹² Ibid., 195. Cf. the way in which Augustine's progressing conversion is reflected in his increased praise of the created world in *Confessions*, in particular in Book 10.

Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed
such are its Powers[.]
(To Trusler, 23 August 1799, E702)

As such, nature only has a neutral value and is neither good nor bad in its unformed state, until it is shaped into form – or *converted* – by being seen with ‘the Imaginative Eye’ (VLJ70, E554); for ‘Where man is not nature is barren’ (MHH10, E38). As in Young, Blake’s re-translated form of nature is intimately connected with divine life, as ‘the Imaginative Eye’ sees the world in tune with the creative divine spirit. As Blake puts it towards the end of his life in *Laocoön*, ca. 1826-27: ‘The Eternal Body of Man is The IMAGINATION. that is God himself The Divine Body JESUS we are his Members’ (E273).

Thus *Night Thoughts* might not be a conversion narrative in the usual autobiographical sense of the term, but is nevertheless a work deeply immersed in the question of conversion – in the conversion of Lorenzo within the text, but also in that of the reader. The text does not simply describe (or prescribe) conversion, but positions itself as having an awakening or converting function. And although Young comes across as significantly more didactic and conventional than Blake does in his works,²¹³ Young’s purpose is rather less dry than the image often painted of him in Blake criticism: what he hoped to achieve through his nightly meditation was not an intellectual turning to the powers of reasonable, moral religion (in the negative Blakean sense of the word), but instead a ‘Revolution in our Hearts’ (III.297).²¹⁴ And if the theological Blake might not always have agreed with

²¹³ Although Blake also has his didactic moments, for example in *Jerusalem*: ‘The Spirit of Jesus is continual forgiveness of Sin: he who waits to be righteous before he enters into the Saviours kingdom, the Divine Body; will never enter there’ (3, E145).

²¹⁴ Irlam, *Elations*, 184. Cf. *Laocoön*: ‘If Morality was Christianity Socrates was the Saviour’ (E275).

Young,²¹⁵ *Night Thoughts* nevertheless seems to have made a considerable impression on him, judging from the monumental number of watercolour sketches it spurred: 537 all in all in less than two years, even though only 150 were ever to be engraved, according to the prospectus by Edwards.²¹⁶ And although Blake has been accused – already by contemporary readers – of producing overly literal interpretations of Young’s poetry,²¹⁷ the illustrations represent an extraordinary glimpse of Blake the reader responding creatively to a poetic work, as well as Blake the interpreter and commentator on Christianity. In particular, the reader notes how Blake places more emphasis on the role of Christ in his illustrations than Young does in his text, and sometimes suggests an image of Christ when there is only little or even no textual basis to do so.²¹⁸ This Christocentric reading of *Night Thoughts* is not only in line with Blake’s theology more generally, but also seems to inform the way that Christ develops throughout Blake’s works – and it is this Christocentric interpretation of *Night Thoughts* that I will now turn to, as exemplified in the Man of Sorrows image.

2.3 Christ as the Man of Sorrows in *Night Thoughts*

Context

The Man of Sorrows image (fig. 15) occurs in Blake’s illustrations to Night IV and was one of the watercolours that also made it into the engraved and published

²¹⁵ See for example Helmstadter, ‘Blake and Religion,’ 199-212.

²¹⁶ Mitchell, ‘Blake’s Designs for *Night Thoughts*,’ 198. Even if Blake may have needed the money, the sheer number of watercolours he produced must have far exceeded the number of sketches required.

²¹⁷ In 1830, Ebert’s *Lexikon* contained a description of Blake’s illustrations, explaining how they ‘oft sehr ausgezeichnet sind, aber die unglückliche Idee haben, Young buchstäblich übersetzen zu wollen’ – in the English 1837 edition translated as the illustrations being ‘of superior merit,’ but expressing ‘the unfortunate idea of wishing to interpret Young literally’ (quoted in BR, 501).

²¹⁸ Grant, ‘Jesus and the Powers That Be,’ 111. This, however, is not as evident in Blake’s reworking of Night IV, which *already* focuses on Christ, as in the other Nights.

Blake-Edwards edition. This Night, entitled ‘The Christian Triumph’ by Young, is the last Night in Blake-Edwards and appears in this edition as the most Christ-oriented one: in fact, there are no images of Christ at all in Blake’s *Night Thoughts* engravings until the frontispiece of Night IV (31E),²¹⁹ and then throughout Night IV, Christ is depicted in another three large engravings (out of twelve).²²⁰ This corresponds with the emphasis the text of Night IV places on the ‘wond’rous Deed’ on the cross (IV.222), the ‘wond’rous Cure’ of Christ (IV.318).²²¹ In fact, the term

²¹⁹ I thus do not understand 21E, ‘The Good Samaritan,’ as representing Christ, based partly on the fact that the anonymous description of the engravings that appeared in the Blake-Edwards edition does not do so either. For a contrasting view, see Christopher Heppner, *Reading Blake’s Designs* (Cambridge, 1995), 161-70. My references to the *Night Thoughts* illustrations are to John E. Grant et al., eds., *William Blake’s Designs for Edward Young’s Night Thoughts*, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1980), and follows the method of referencing established here: ‘NTxxx’ refer to the watercolours, whilst ‘xE’ refers to the engravings from the published version.

²²⁰ 34E, 38E, and 40E. The description of the engravings in Blake-Edwards gives them the following titles: ‘The resurrection of our Saviour, typical of the resurrection of all his servants from the grave’ (31E), ‘The Saviour represented in the furnace of affliction, and agonized with torture for the sins of the human race’ (34E), ‘Christ represented as the great philanthropist, receiving and instructing all ages and sexes’ (38E), and ‘The Saviour healing Affliction by a touch with his hand’ (40E) (Robert N. Essick and Jenijoy LaBelle, eds., *Night Thoughts or, the Complaint and the Consolation. Illustrated by William Blake. Text by Edward Young* (Mineola; New York, 1975), xv-xvii). Only two of the watercolour sketches of Christ made for Night IV do *not* appear in the engraved version, despite the fact that there are considerably more watercolours for Night IV than engravings (47 watercolours to 13 engravings, title page included). The first missing watercolour is NT142, showing a pensive Christ sitting on the ground in a typical sensibility pose (head resting in one hand and a sorrowful look on his face). According to what is probably Blake’s own marking in the text, this illustrates the line ‘He weeps! – the falling Drop puts out the Sun’ (IV.581). The second missing watercolour is NT144, showing Christ who pulls a figure out of a flood of flames, and taking its cue from the lines ‘Thou, who didst save him, snatch the smoaking Brand/ From out the flames and quench it in thy Blood!’ (IV.605-6). We do not know why Blake left out those two images in the engravings. One reason may be that as they appear in the watercolours, there are three large images of Christ in a row, which might have resulted in an overload of Christ in the engravings. These three are NT142 (not engraved), NT143 (engraved as Christ as the Great Philanthropist), and NT144 (not engraved). Of these three, Blake might have found Christ as the Great Philanthropist most fitting for his interpretation of Night IV and *Night Thoughts* as a whole – or it might have been the most interesting engraving, or simply suited the publisher better.

²²¹ Young here plays on Isaac Watts’s hymn ‘Crucifixion to the World by the Cross of Christ,’ changing ‘survey the wond’rous *Cross*’ into ‘Survey the wond’rous *Cure*,’ (Stephen Cornford, ed. *Edward Young: Night Thoughts* (Cambridge, 1989), 333, my emphases). He thereby connects it with the cluster of terms in Night IV related to sickness and health: ‘Wound’ (IV.160, 229), the ‘healing Hand’ (IV.164), ‘the Balm of Peace’ (IV.164), and the recreation of the ‘Self’ (IV.505).

‘cross’ (as a noun) does not at all appear in *Night Thoughts* until Night IV – and after Night IV, it is not used again at all except once towards the very end of the final Night IX (IX.2355).²²² Night IV, however, does not come across as a mournful meditation on the passion, but rather as a triumphant, almost ecstatic proclamation of the ‘wond’rous Deed’ – a sense which is particularly evident in lines 166-83, which are those illustrated by Blake with the Man of Sorrows, and in 575-95.²²³ As some have noted, in its triumphant tone the Night almost represents more of a climax than the final Night IX,²²⁴ thus still leaving the reader of the Blake-Edwards edition (which stops after this Night) with a sense of poetic climax.

Despite the triumphant sense of Night IV, the horror of the cross is also explored. The sun hides its face at the sight of the crucifixion (IV.245-55, a section which interprets the overcoming of death on the cross as a new birth),²²⁵ and the pain of the crucifixion is underlined throughout: the cross is described as ‘bleeding’ (IV.474-75) (as is heaven, IV.257), Calvary is described as ‘groaning’ (IV.575), and the terms ‘wound’ (or ‘wounds’) (IV.229, 671, 763) and ‘blood’ (IV.314, 322) are used frequently to produce an emotional response to the passion in the reader. In this connection, two related features are worth noting. The first feature is the way in which the cross has a visual function within Night IV. When a subject (or by extension the reader) turns her or his eye to the image painted of the cross in the text, there is transformation (or conversion) of the self in this contemplation:

²²² The terms ‘crucify’ or ‘crucifixion’ (or cognates), however, are not used at all in the poem. My word searches were conducted electronically on the basis of Edward Young, *Night Thoughts: With the Life of the Author and Notes Critical and Explanatory* (London, 1798).

²²³ Cornford, ‘Introduction,’ 4.

²²⁴ Irlam, *Elations*, 176.

²²⁵ ‘The Sun beheld it – No, the shocking Scene/
Drove back his Chariot; Midnight veil’d
his Face [...] Sun! didst thou fly thy Maker’s Pain?
or start/ At that enormous Load of
human Guilt,/ Which bow’d his blessed Head;
o’erwhelm’d his Cross;/ Made groan the
Center; burst Earth’s marble Womb,
/ With Pangs, strange pangs! deliver’d of her Dead’
(IV.245-55).

I gaze, and as I gaze, my mounting Soul
 Catches strange Fire, Eternity! at thee,
 And drops the World – or rather, more enjoys:
 How chang'd the Face of Nature? how improv'd?
 What seem'd a Chaos, shines a glorious World,
 Or, what a World, an *Eden*; heighten'd all!
 It is another Scene! another Self!
 (IV.499-505)²²⁶

The reader is here placed before an imaginative visual encounter with the crucified Christ, and in that contemplation, the soul 'catches fire' and the self is transformed – a response to the dead Christ which is also, as we will see, suggested by Man of Sorrows images, as well as perhaps in Blake's own later illustration series.²²⁷

The second feature is the cluster of motifs connected with Christ's pierced hands as loci of salvation in Night IV. Early in the Night – and these are exactly the lines that Blake chose to illustrate with the Man of Sorrows – Young introduces the concept of 'the healing hand,' which saves the human subject from guilt and sin:

What Hand the barb'd, evenomb'd, Thought can draw?
 What healing Hand can pour the Balm of Peace?
 And turn my Sight undaunted on the Tomb?
 (IV.163-65)

The narrator briefly contemplates that healing hand 'With Joy' (IV.166), only to realize that the hand – the hand of the creator God himself²²⁸ – is pierced with 'dire

²²⁶ For a discussion of this section in the context of the conversion narrative (as defined by Irlam), see Irlam, *Elations*, 207-8.

²²⁷ Blake illustrates the lines 'I gaze, and as I gaze, my mounting Soul/ Catches strange Fire' with a naked youth sitting on the ground with arms crossed in front of him, gazing towards heaven – and with hair that makes him look remarkably like Blake himself.

²²⁸ This identification between the creator and the redeemer was problematic to early Young readers. The author of a set of notes bound with a 1798 edition comments on this passage that 'it was not the hand that bled upon the cross that 'formed the skies:' although the Creator and the Redeemer united in the same person: the different characters must be referred to diverse natures, the human and the divine. In short, it was the same *person*, but *not* the same *nature*, that both *formed* and *bled*' (Young, *Night Thoughts: With the Life of the Author and Notes Critical and Explanatory*, 337).

Steel' and bleeding. The blood thereby becomes the 'Balm I want,' the remedy for salvation:

with Grief that *healing Hand* I see;
 Ah! too conspicuous! It is fix'd on high?²²⁹
 [...]

 The Skies it form'd; and now it bleeds for me –
 But bleeds the Balm I want – yet still it *bleeds*;
 Draw the dire Steel – Ah no! – the dreadful Blessing
 What Heart, or can sustain? or dares forego?
 (IV.166-173)

This nail ('the dire Steel') is not simply an instrument of torture, but also the peg on which the salvation and continuation of created life hangs, as the next lines reveal: 'There hangs all human Hope: That Nail supports/ The falling Universe: That gone, we drop' (IV.174-75). This represents the genesis of the series of crucifixion motifs, which runs through Night IV and ends with a passage that uses the (nail) 'wounds' as markers of the subject's access to redemption. It is here *through* the 'guardian Hand' and *through* 'his Wounds' that we are 're-admitted,' a trope playing on the double meaning of 'through' as both referring to a metaphorical register (in which our salvation is made possible through Christ's death) and to a literal register (in which we enter Christ's wounds as we enter through a door):²³⁰

Happy Day! that breaks our Chain;
 [...]

 And re-admits us, thro' the guardian Hand
 Of elder Brothers, to our Father's Throne;
 Who hears our Advocate, and thro' his Wounds
 Beholding Man, allows *that* tender Name.
 'Tis this makes *Christian Triumph*,²³¹ a Command:
 'Tis this makes Joy a *Duty* to the Wise;
 [...]

²²⁹ In the Blake-Edwards edition this question mark is an exclamation mark.

²³⁰ Young also uses the trope 'salvation through wounds' later: 'Believe, and look with Triumph on the Tomb:/ Thro' *Reason's* Wounds alone, thy *Faith* can die' (IV.762-63).

²³¹ Cf. the title of Night IV, 'The Christian Triumph.'

Seest thou *Lorenzo!* where hangs all our Hope?
(IV.666-76)

This continues into a passage on the divine ‘touch’ of the cross, which:

heals the Soul
Diseas’d, drives Pain from Guilt, Lights Life in Death,
Turns Earth to Heaven, to heavenly Thrones transforms
The ghastly Ruins of the mould’ring Tomb.
(IV.687-90)

These lines collapse Christ’s victory over death in general with the particular overcoming of death as the principal fiend in *Night Thoughts*, and Blake illustrated them with a depiction of Christ who bends down and touches the left part of the chest (just above the heart) of a naked man lying on the ground – the man looks towards Christ and lifts his arms towards him.

How, then, did Blake represent this Night with its strong focus on the cross and the crucified Christ in visual form? This question is particularly pertinent in the light of the critical assumption that Blake focussed mainly on two aspects of the crucifixion, namely Christ’s putting off his body of flesh or ‘Sin’ on the cross²³² and the way in which he was already glorified on the cross²³³ – and correspondingly, that Blake paid less attention to aspects of the cross that were associated with Christ’s wounds, suffering, or the doctrine of atonement.²³⁴ Certainly, for his engravings, Blake ignored many of the crucifixion tropes in Night IV and, on the

²³² ‘He took on Sin in the Virgins Womb/ And put it off on the Cross & Tomb,’ Blake notes in EG[i]54-55 (E524), adding ‘To be Worshipd by the Church of Rome’ (EG[i]56 (E524)). See Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, in particular 189, 207-10, and Morton D. Paley, *The Continuing City: William Blake’s Jerusalem* (Oxford, 1983), 113-19.

²³³ See Sklar, *Blake’s Jerusalem*, 117-19.

²³⁴ See Altizer, *New Apocalypse*, 75-85, Bottrall, *Divine Image*, 53-54, Davies, *Theology of William Blake*, chapter 7, and Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 95. Cf. Blake in *The Four Zoas*, Night IV: ‘Christ’s Crucifix shall be made an excuse for Executing Criminals’ (E833). The line, however, was erased in later versions of the manuscript. Cf. also Crabb Robinson’s account of a conversation with Blake in *Reminiscences*: when Robinson expressed the view that ‘Christ ought not to have suffered himself to be crucified, Blake replied, ‘He should not have attacked the govern[.] He had no business with such matters’ (BR, 696).

whole, produced a series of engraved illustrations that was peculiarly free from crucifixion images as compared with Young's text. Similarly, if we look towards the Night IV watercolours, the same appears to be the case, as they do not come across as particularly preoccupied with the crucifixion. Whether this is due to any reservation on Blake's behalf towards explicit images of the cross, or to a sense that pictorial variety must come before rigid adherence to the text illustrated – or to a combination of the two – we do not know. However, in two of the four engravings of Christ in Night IV, Christ is depicted with visible nail wounds and/or a side wound, thus at least to some extent reflecting Young's focus on the crucifixion. But when Young adheres to more graphic descriptions of Christ's wounds in his text, Blake – at least in the engravings – abstains from replicating these in his images. Mid-way through Night IV, for example, Young combines the two motifs of Christ writing one's name in The Book of Life (Rev. 20:12-15) and the blood of the cross as a *fons pietatis* or *fons vitae*,²³⁵ created when the Roman soldier's spear pierced the body of Christ and created the side wound (John 19:34). In *Night Thoughts*, these work together as an antidote to the 'fear of death:'

He writes
 My Name in Heaven, with that inverted Spear
 (A Spear deep-dipt in Blood!) which pierc'd his Side,
 And open'd there a Font for all Mankind
 Who strive, who combat Crimes, to drink, and live:
This, only this subdues the Fear of Death.
 (IV.312-17)

In Blake's visual interpretation, this passage is not illustrated literally. In the engravings, the plate on which the passage appears has no illustration at all, and in the watercolours, the illustration shows soldiers with spears seen from behind,

²³⁵ See A. Reinle, "Schmerzensmann," in *Lexikon des Mittelalters* (Stuttgart, [1977] - 1999).

thereby ignoring or abstaining from the *fons pietatis* motif (which is otherwise well known in Christian iconography). This supports the wider observation that whenever Blake depicts the side wound and/or the nail wounds in the engravings, they generally occur as clear-cut and almost sterile, not bloody – thus reflecting the triumphant aspect of the text, the risen Christ, at the expense of the explicit descriptions of the crucifixion. (I discuss the question of how there might be a tendency to more blood in the watercolours than in the engravings below.) The overall impression is thus that Blake's illustrations are true to Young's Christocentric vision in Night IV, but less focussed on the way in which Christ's overcoming of death is tied to his suffering on the cross. However, as a closer look at Christ as the Man of Sorrows will show, Blake does not steer as clear of the crucified Christ's body as he could have done.

The image

It seems that Blake took a particular interest in getting the Man of Sorrows illustration (34E, fig. 15) right: it appears both in the watercolour studies and the engravings, and is also known in several proofs (explaining how it could later occur in *The Four Zoas* in three different versions). It also represents Blake's only use in his images of the Man of Sorrows motif, defined as a Christ shown after the crucifixion, but before the resurrection, and with the five wounds visible. In Blake's texts, the motif occurs once in *The Song of Los*: 'And Jesus heard her voice (a man of sorrows) he recievd/ A Gospel from wretched Theotormon' (3.23-24, E67). However, there is a peculiar silence about the image in Blake criticism; it is briefly

mentioned in editions of *Night Thoughts* and *The Four Zoas*, but it is rarely discussed on its own at length.²³⁶

In the published engraving (34E, fig. 15), Christ stands frontally before the reader/viewer with open, slightly raised, arms. Only his head, arms, and lower part of the body are visible, because the inserted box showing Young's text covers his torso and upper part of the legs. He is dressed in a long white robe, wears a crown of thorns on his head, and is surrounded by flames. His eyes are large, dark, and sorrowful, and he is looking downwards in the direction of his left hand, but not directly at it.²³⁷ Although he is no longer on the cross, but in the grave, the nails are still – curiously – pierced into the open wounds of his hands and left foot. However, the wounds themselves are depicted as dried up openings, with no blood visible in or around them, but very large in size and having a peculiar elongated shape. Thus, the engraving comes across as a sentimental and un-bloody Man of Sorrows, which focuses on the sorrowful expression of Christ rather than on the bloody details of the crucified Christ's body (usually, a Man of Sorrows image shows all or some of Christ's five wounds as bloody, either just marked in red colour or with blood still running from the wounds). In other versions of Blake's Man of Sorrows, however, the blood is more emphasized than in the final engraving. In the coloured versions (such as NT121), drops of Christ's blood or 'bloody sweat' (Luke 22:44, a traditional trope in Christian iconography) are seen dripping from below the crown of thorns, and the nail wounds have a deep red colour, emphasizing them as *bloody* wounds rather than just openings (although no liquid blood is running or dripping

²³⁶ See a brief discussion in Hagstrum, 'Christ's Body,' 148-50.

²³⁷ In the watercolour version NT121, Christ's eyes are smaller than in the engraved version and his gaze is calm (NT121 is, however, reversed in relation to the engraved version, so Christ is looking at his right hand, not his left). As can be seen from the three different proofs for the engraving that feature in *The Four Zoas*, Blake experimented with the direction of Christ's gaze; in FZ115, he is looking directly at his pierced hand.

from them). The same tendency is seen in the early (black and white) proof used as the last of the three occurrences in *The Four Zoas*, where the blood or bloody sweat is also visible on Christ's forehead, although depicted here as clear drops.²³⁸

Traditionally, the Man of Sorrows as a visual motif combines the *vir dolorum* of Isaiah 53, the crucified Christ, and Christ as the Pantocrator.²³⁹ Although there are variations, it usually shows some or all of the following characteristics: Christ's body is seen in a frontal position (either in half or full figure), his head is sunken, his expression is suffering, his five wounds are visible, and although Christ is often shown as naked or only sparsely dressed, there are several examples in which he is dressed in a long white robe, as in Blake's engraving (such as Bellini's 'Le Christ Benissant,' ca. 1465-70). The setting of the image is after the crucifixion, and usually before the resurrection – sometimes in the tomb. The principal aim of the Man of Sorrows motif seems to be to create an emotional response in the viewer – it is an affective motif, before which the viewer is intended to go through an experience. As such the Man of Sorrows is distinguishable from many other depictions on Christ which refer to gospel scenes, evoking particular textual passages or narratives in the viewer. The Man of Sorrows, by contrast, does not refer directly to any textual source, as there are no descriptions available in the Bible of the period between the deposition and the resurrection. Instead, the motif draws on the presumed feelings of the viewer after having

²³⁸ Magno and Erdman, eds., *The Four Zoas*, 87. The bloody sweat also occurs as a *textual* motif in the lines accompanying the *second* occurrence of the Man of Sorrows in *The Four Zoas* (where the bloody sweat is not actually depicted in the image – this only occurs ten plates later in the third occurrence of the motif): 'Los wipd the sweat from his red brow & thus began [...] I am that shadowy Prophet [...] I also have piercd the Lamb of God in pride & wrath' (quoted in *ibid.*, 82).

²³⁹ Bernhard Ridderbos, 'The Man of Sorrows: Pictorial Images and Metaphorical Statements,' in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos, and R. M. Schlusemann (Groningen, 1998), 158. For more on the *vir dolorum* of Isaiah in art, see Martin O'Kane, *Painting the Text: The Artist as Biblical Interpreter* (Sheffield, 2007), chapter 5.

imaginatively faced the events of the passion story, and creates an intimate, almost private, space between the viewer and the dead Christ. Here, Christ's sacrifice is spelled out and emotionally received by the viewer in realization and spiritual (re)awakening,²⁴⁰ which is why Man of Sorrows motifs were often used in private devotion cards.²⁴¹

What does Blake's image look like, then, when seen in relation to the Man of Sorrows tradition? As noted, the affective response to encountering the wounded Christ is already present in Young's text, where Young paints images of the cross before the eyes of the reader while simultaneously calling for an affective, emotional, enthusiastic response to his text. Thus, at the very bottom of the Man of Sorrows plate in the Blake-Edwards edition,²⁴² we read:

My Heart! awake,
What can awake thee, unawak'd by *this*,
[...]
To feel, is to be fired;
And to believe, *Lorenzo!* is to feel.
(IV.194-200)

This affective sense is replicated in Blake's image by his decision to use a Man of Sorrows motif, as well as more specifically in Christ's large, dark eyes seemingly

²⁴⁰ For two different views on how the viewer could respond emotionally to a Man of Sorrows, see O'Kane, *Painting the Text*, chapter 5, which focuses on a negative emotional response, 'horror,' versus Timothy Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence, and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge, 2006), 107, which points towards the tradition that draws positive feelings of 'compassion' for all things out of the contemplation of the Man of Sorrows.

²⁴¹ Kate Challis, "Devotional Image," in *The Oxford Companion to Christian Art*, ed. Hugh Brigstocke (Oxford, 2001), <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t118.e731> (accessed 12 June 2012).

²⁴² Butlin notes that at the printing of Blake-Edwards, new pagination meant that lines moved in relation to the watercolours. The lines quoted here are thus placed higher and more centrally on the plate concerned in the watercolours (Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 180), whereas the line 'With Joy, – with Grief, that *healing Hand* I see' (IV.166) occurs on the *previous* plate, not as the first line on the Man of Sorrows plate as in Blake-Edwards.

begging for compassion. On the other hand, the horror of the crucifixion *is* likewise present in the image, since Blake picks up on Young's image of the nails as at once 'dire Steel' and the upholders of the universe (Blake's own marking in the text indicates that the illustration directly refers to the line 'Draw the dire Steel – Ah no! – the dreadful Blessing,' IV.172). This equivocal trope is represented by Blake by including the nails in the image and – most unusually for a Man of Sorrows – depicting them as still pierced into the very large and emphasized wounds in Christ's hands: Christ's 'healing Hand,' even in the grave, is *still* pierced with the nail and 'fix'd on high' (IV.166-67).²⁴³ Thus not only the wounded hands and feet, but also the nails themselves, are to be seen and contemplated by the viewer – a sense which is emphasized in early coloured versions of the *Night Thoughts* Man of Sorrows such as NT121 by Christ's head being turned downwards, thus making Christ look in profile directly towards his own pierced hand. Likewise, in the next engraved plate, the trope of horror when faced with the sufferings of Christ is continued, as Blake here depicts the sun 'averting his face [...] from the shocking spectacle of our Lord's sufferings.'²⁴⁴

The focus in a Man of Sorrows image is often on Christ's wounds (the effects of the crucifixion) rather than on the nails (the instruments of the crucifixion): the Man of Sorrows shows his wounds to the viewer, sometimes even

²⁴³ If the nails feature in a visual representation set after the deposition from the cross, they usually appear separately as the *arma Christi* (detailed depictions of the instruments of the passion that were used for devotion especially from the fourteenth century onwards) (Gabriele Finaldi, *The Image of Christ: The Catalogue of the Exhibition Seeing Salvation* (London, 2000), 158), or, as in Meister Francke's 'Man of Sorrows' (ca. 1430), as seen on the cross behind Jesus (see O'Kane, *Painting the Text*, 148, illustration 35). Hymns addressing these *arma Christi* appeared in the fourteenth century: 'Hail triumphal iron, by piercing the breast of the Saviour, you opened the gates of heaven to us' (Finaldi, *The Image of Christ*, 158). Cf. also how in Blake's 'Christ nailed to the Cross: The Third Hour' (ca. 1800-03, B496), the nails are depicted – rather exaggerated in size – *next* to the cross.

²⁴⁴ As per the explanatory notes in Blake-Edwards (Young, *Night Thoughts or, the Complaint and the Consolation. Illustrated by William Blake*, xvi).

pointing towards his side wound or opening it slightly with his own hands (as in the Italian sculpture ‘Christ showing the Wounds on his Side,’ ca. 1420-25)²⁴⁵ – an opening which can either emphasize the wound as a refuge for the believer or as a door to Christ (John 10:9).²⁴⁶ There are some examples that show Christ with nails pierced into his wounds but unattached from the cross – as in Blake’s engraving – but they are rare.²⁴⁷ Similarly, the setting of Blake’s *Man of Sorrows* is unusual, as Christ is not set within the empty and closed *raum* of the tomb (as if often the case), but is surrounded by flames. These flames do not seem to be drawn from Young’s text, but instead invoke visual representations of Christ in Limbo such as Albrecht Dürer’s (a Blake favourite) woodcut ‘Christ’s Descent into Limbo’ (ca. 1510) and Hieronymus Bosch’s painting ‘Christ in Limbo’ (ca. 1575). At the same time, the flames might also refer to the Blakean link between the divine and fire: ‘God [*of Fire*] and Lord [*of Love*]’ (J3, E145 – see also Blake’s inscription on the illustration to Hervey’s *Meditations* ‘God out of Christ is a Consuming Fire,’ E691, which draws on Hebrews 12:29, ‘our God is a consuming fire’). And in the context of *Man of Sorrows* images as transformative and affective, these flames might even suggest the trope of fire as a conversion marker in Blake’s works that we saw in *The Marriage*, when the angel embraced the flame and was reborn.

²⁴⁵ See reproduction in Finaldi, *The Image of Christ*, 177.

²⁴⁶ ‘I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.’ This meaning applies in particular to the Italian sculpture, being (probably) placed above a doorway (ibid., 176).

²⁴⁷ One example is a late medieval wood carving (1335-40) from a crucifix in Würzburg in which Christ is still on the cross; however, his arms are detached from it and held in front of him as in an embrace, and the nails are still pierced into his hands (see Gertrud Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, trans. Janet Seligman, vol. 2 (London, 1971-72), 485). Another example is a 1479 painting from the studio of Friedrich Herling, showing an ‘Eucharistic Man of Sorrows with corn-shoot and vine’ (see Schiller, *Iconography of Christian Art*, 712). In this painting, a vine and a corn shoot spring together from a stem between Christ’s feet, move upwards, and are pierced through his hand wounds.

To sum up: Blake's Man of Sorrows positions itself as a straightforward representation of an easily recognisable motif. However, the wounds are very large in size, and so are the nails. There is no blood visible in or around the wounds, but there are drops of blood on Christ's forehead. And although the sense of the image appears to be sentimental (as evidenced by Christ's large, sorrowful eyes), it does not seem that the reader should react to it with sentimentality as such. Furthermore, the still-present nails in the image do not entirely fit in with our idea that Blake recoiled from dwelling on the more unpleasant aspects of the crucifixion (although they do fit Young's text), and the flames in the image are nowhere to be found in Young's text. In order to understand the image more fully as an image of conversion, I shall now widen the perspective of this study to explore the Moravian visual tradition, which might have influenced Blake's works, and in which we find a rich context for understanding Christ's wounds, with or without blood, as transformative openings.

2.4 Entering Christ's body with Blake

Eighteenth-century Moravianism and art

One of the major discoveries of recent Blake criticism has been the fact that Blake's mother, Catherine Blake, was connected with the Moravian congregation in Fetter Lane in London through her first marriage (before Blake was born), from ca. November 1750 to November 1751. The claim was made in a 2004 article by Keri Davies and Marsha Keith Schuchard,²⁴⁸ and after the initial discovery, more

²⁴⁸ Davies and Schuchard, 'Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family.' A connection between Blake and the Moravians had, however, been suggested earlier, but without the same level of archival evidence: first in Thomas Wright, *The Life of William Blake*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Olney, 1929), 2, and then in Margaret Ruth Lowery, *Windows of the Morning: A Critical Study of William Blake's Poetical Sketches, 1783* (New Haven, 1940), 14-15.

details have been published on the possible connections between the Fetter Lane community and the Blake family. Davies and Schuchard have, for example, suggested that Catherine Blake continued to be in contact with the Moravians even after she married Blake's father,²⁴⁹ and that Blake was in contact with two Moravians as an adult, namely the artist Jonathan Spilsbury and the poet James Montgomery, between 1800 and 1807.²⁵⁰ However, since the discovery of this Moravian connection very little work has been carried out to explore a possible Moravian influence on Blake's *works* – and the few studies that do exist focus almost exclusively on Blake's texts. Thus, Davies, Schuchard, and Magnus Ankarsjö all claim that there are traces of Moravianism in Blake's texts, whereas others – such as Rix – question the extent of the influence.²⁵¹ But only one article by Schuchard has explored Blake's visual art within a context of Moravian art – and this article overlooks crucial material concerning the visual representation of Christ.²⁵² There is not enough space here to provide a comprehensive overview of Blake's relationship with the Moravians, or to identify every trace of Moravian influence in Blake's works. But I would like to explore one small, crucial – but overlooked – area of this potentially vast field of research: namely the possible Moravian influence on Blake's representation of Christ's body – Christ's body understood here not as a theological idea, but as an actual *body* in which transformation is to be found. I am following, therefore, the path opened by Schuchard, and enquiring further into a possible Moravian influence on Blake's art

²⁴⁹ Marsha Keith Schuchard, 'Young William Blake and the Moravian Tradition of Visionary Art,' *Blake / An Illustrated Quarterly* 40 (2006-2007), 84.

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 95, and Davies, 'Jonathan Spilsbury.'

²⁵¹ Rix argues that Christ's wounds do 'not register in [Blake's] vocabulary or imagery' and doubts whether Blake shared the Moravian values of 'strict control over congregational members, the emphasis on atonement, and the rule of the Elders' (Rix, *William Blake*, 9 – see also 22). A similar reservation towards the Moravian material is expressed in Susan Matthews, *Blake, Sexuality and Bourgeois Politeness* (Cambridge, 2011), 9.

²⁵² Schuchard, 'Young William Blake.'

– on Blake’s images of Christ in general and on the *Night Thoughts* Man of Sorrows in particular. Although eighteenth-century Moravians also had a strong culture of writing (in particular hymn writing and autobiographical writing),²⁵³ it is in Blake’s images rather than his texts that Moravian influence is most apparent. And given the pivotal role of the visual tradition in the life of the community, this is hardly surprising: it is hard to imagine that Blake, if he had been exposed to this tradition as a child, would have remained indifferent to it.

The protestant community of Moravians (the *Brüdergemeine*) originated from the followers of John Huss in late fourteenth-century Moravia. In 1722, these Bohemian brothers (as they were known) were given shelter by Count Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf and soon set up the new settlement Herrnhut near his estate in Saxon Upper Lusatia.²⁵⁴ Here they lived in a strictly regulated but also vibrant and deeply cultured communal setting – at once a small and close-knit community and soon deeply immersed in missionary efforts. Moravian theology was distinctively Christocentric with a particular emphasis on Christ’s historical body, which was celebrated in every detail, including traditionally shameful parts such as the genitals²⁵⁵ – and by extension, so was the body of every believer, likewise in every detail. The five wounds of Christ played a central part in mid-eighteenth-century Moravian spirituality which focussed on the side wound as a place of refuge and

²⁵³ See Gisela Mettele, ‘Erudition vs. Experience: Gender, Communal Narration, and the Shaping of Eighteenth-Century Moravian Religious Thought,’ in *Self, Community, World: Moravian Education in a Transatlantic World*, ed. Heikki Lempa and Paul Peucker (Bethlehem, 2010) and Katherine M. Faull, *Moravian Women’s Memoirs: Their Related Lives, 1750-1820* (Syracuse, 1997). Autobiographical writing was not, however (as these references might give the impression of), a gendered activity.

²⁵⁴ The same region which Boehme originated from.

²⁵⁵ For example, a reproduction of a miniature depicting a completely naked Christ on the cross can be seen in Paul Peucker, ‘Kreuzbilder und Wundenmalerei - Form und Funktion der Malerei in der Herrnhuter Brüdergemeine um 1750,’ *Unitas Fratrum* 55/56 (2005), 137, illustration 3.

rest that the believer could resort to. But it was also, crucially, understood as a location of rebirth and transformation, a point emphasized by representing the side wound in the shape of the female genitals. This sexually charged blood-and-wounds spirituality reached its culmination in the period that has traditionally (and dismissively) been termed the ‘Sifting Time’ (*Sichtungszeit*), reaching from ca. 1743-50 – and although the extent and spread of the Sifting Time outside the settlement of Herrnhag is now disputed,²⁵⁶ it remains the case that the mid-eighteenth century represented a particularly fertile and above all experimental period in Moravian spirituality. It is the repercussions of this period that provide the setting for Blake’s works within a Moravian context – his mother becoming a member of the community in the last year of the Sifting Time.

There are indeed various similarities between Blake and the Moravians. First and foremost, Blake shares the Moravians’ Christocentric focus, emphasizing the incarnation of the divine in the human form – and the consequent possibility of experiencing the divine not as ‘a God afar off,’ but instead on a personal and intimate level as ‘a brother and friend’ (J4.18, E146). Blake also shares the

²⁵⁶ For a discussion of the dominant paradigm of the Sifting Time as historical fiction, see Craig D. Atwood, ‘Sleeping in the Arms of Christ: Sanctifying Sexuality in the Eighteenth-Century Moravian Church,’ *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 8.1 (1997), 27 (in which it is argued that ‘the Sifting Time, if there was one, had little to do with Moravian theology and devotion but, rather, was a breakdown in discipline in the Herrnhag community’), and idem, ‘Interpreting and Misinterpreting the *Sichtungszeit*,’ in *Neue Aspekte der Zinzendorf-Forschung*, ed. Martin Brecht and Paul Peucker (Göttingen, 2006). Atwood argues that we do not know exactly what caused embarrassment amongst later Moravians with regards to the Sifting Time (as relevant original sources are now lost, either intentionally or unintentionally). He suggests, however, that it was homoerotic or homosexual tendencies in the Sifting Time, that made later Moravians brush over it, not (as often assumed) an excessive blood and wounds spirituality (idem, ‘Deep in the Side of Jesus: The Persistence of Zinzendorffian Piety in Colonial America,’ in *Pious Pursuits: German Moravians in the Atlantic World*, ed. Michelle Gillespie and Robert Beachy (New York; Oxford, 2007), 52). For more on homoeroticism and homosexuality in the Sifting Time, see Paul Peucker, ‘“Inspired by Flames of Love:” Homosexuality, Mysticism, and Moravian Brothers around 1750,’ *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 15.1 (2006): 30-64. I use the term Sifting Time with care in the following as a shorthand for the particularly flourishing and experimental spirituality of the 1740s.

Moravians' general devaluation of reason and corresponding focus instead on 'joy',²⁵⁷ their willingness to depict and describe parts of the human body that other religious communities suppressed;²⁵⁸ their tendency (or at least Zinzendorf's tendency) to antinomianism;²⁵⁹ their idea that the childlike state was particularly spiritual and that each believer should become like a child again (and the consequent value they placed on the spiritual education of children);²⁶⁰ their global and trans-racial outlook, which was reflected in their significant missionary endeavours;²⁶¹ and the importance they placed on music and singing.²⁶² Generally, eighteenth-century Moravians – both in Germany and in England – laid particular emphasis on the place of art, music, the senses, and experience, which resulted in a rich and well-developed liturgical life including much use of visual aids such as paintings and sculpture; one striking example comes from a 1748 liturgical festival in Herrnhag in which all single brothers of the community entered their choir house through a large image of the side wound.²⁶³ Although this event belongs very

²⁵⁷ For the importance of 'joy' in Blake, see Makdisi, *Impossible History*, for example xiii-iv.

²⁵⁸ See Craig D. Atwood, 'Christ and the Bridal Bed: Eighteenth-Century Moravian Erotic Spirituality as a Possible Influence on Blake,' in *Re-Envisioning Blake*, ed. Mark Crosby, Troy Patenaude, and Angus Whitehead (Basingstoke, 2012), 160-179.

²⁵⁹ See Craig D. Atwood, *Community of the Cross: Moravian Piety in Colonial Bethlehem* (University Park, 2004), 50-51.

²⁶⁰ Colin Podmore, *The Moravian Church in England, 1728-1760* (Oxford, 1998), 132-34. Boehme also emphasized the spiritual state of children, noting in *Aurora* that 'many times little children might be their parents' schoolmasters and teachers, if parents could but understand, or would take notice of them' (12.89) (quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 59).

²⁶¹ A perspective which in Blake is reflected, for example, in the four global prophecies in *America*, *Europe*, and *The Song of Los*, and in a poem like 'The Little Black Boy' from *Innocence*.

²⁶² Blake's probably most well known work today is indeed *Songs*, and he was known by contemporaries to often sing – even on his deathbed, he was singing (unidentified) hymns. For an interpretation of this scene in a Moravian light, see Davies, 'Jonathan Spilsbury,' 109.

²⁶³ 'Late that evening the single brothers presented an illuminated display of the sidehole at the entrance to their choir house. The whole scene that followed intended to portray the penetration of the sidehole. First, a representation of Christ smeared with blood was shown under a triumphal arch; then a brother appeared dressed as a Roman soldier and pierced the

much to the Sifting Time (the centre of which was indeed Herrnhag), it still gives a vivid impression of the liturgical innovation, and indeed fearlessness, of mid-eighteenth-century Moravians. And while Moravian life in the chapel in Fetter Lane in London might not have gone to such liturgical extremes (Peucker notes that the *Wundenmalerei*, the painting of Christ's bloody wounds, never became as popular in England as in Germany),²⁶⁴ the basic experimental and above all experiential approach to liturgy and the role which art played in it would have been similar.²⁶⁵ If Blake was indeed exposed to such a vibrant culture as a child (or if he resumed contact with Moravians in the beginning of the 1800s), it is hard to imagine that it would *not* have left an impression on the mind of the sensitive boy that comes across in childhood anecdotes of Blake.²⁶⁶ However, there are no direct references

side of the Christ figure. In that instant a stream of blood burst from the sidehole and splashed onto Christel's [the young spiritual leader of the single brothers] choir ribbon. After Christian Renatus [i.e. Christel] washed his hands in the stream of blood the Christ figure disappeared, only to leave behind a huge image of the sidehole, large enough for a person to bend down and enter the choir house through it. And this is exactly what Christian Renatus, Rubusch, and all the others in attendance did; thus they physically penetrated the sidehole' (recounted in Peucker, 'Inspired by Flames of Love,' 48). Moravian communities were strictly separated into 'choirs' according to gender, age, and civic status – a separation that was not, however, maintained to the same extent in the community in London. The Moravians in Fetter Lane did not live together (unlike, for example, the Fulneck community in Yorkshire), although they were divided into choirs and did at one point acquire a house in Islington where members could experience a form of community life. On the Yorkshire congregations it is worth noting that three of them began as Boehme study groups (Podmore, *Moravian Church*, 45, 52, 99, 136-68).

²⁶⁴ Paul Peucker, 'A Painter of Christ's Wounds: Johann Langguth's Birthday Poem for Johann Jakob Müller, 1744,' in *The Distinctiveness of Moravian Culture: Essays and Documents in Moravian History in honor of Vernon H. Nelson on his Seventieth Birthday*, ed. Craig D. Atwood and Peter Vogt (Nazareth, 2003), 26. The author Johann Langguth, in a 1744 birthday poem to his friend, the painter Johann Jakob Müller, writes: 'I haven't heard from Woundspainters in a long time,/ especially not from Englishmen since many days and years' (quoted in *ibid.*, 27). In comparison, Langguth in the dedication of the poem rather amusingly calls himself 'current director of the Wound and Nailhole Painting Academy in Herrnhut' – although no such academy existed (quoted in *ibid.*, 25).

²⁶⁵ For more on the liturgical life in Fetter Lane, see Podmore, *Moravian Church*, chapter 5, especially 143-50. It is important to keep in mind, however, that according to Moravian theology, any rigid separation between liturgy in the narrow sense of the word and daily life was anachronistic: *all* aspects of life were liturgically charged, even sleep (Peucker, 'Kreuzbilder,' 140). Cf. Blake in *Jerusalem*: 'We who dwell on Earth can do nothing of ourselves, every thing is conducted by Spirits, no less than Digestion or Sleep' (3, E145).

²⁶⁶ See Gilchrist, *The Life of William Blake*, chapter 2.

to Fetter Lane or to the Moravian community in any of Blake's known ego-documents, so any discussion of an influence needs to be based solely on Blake's works.

Thus art, and the idea of its deeply transformative power, were key features of Moravian life and thought from its beginning in Herrnhut, to the extent that the Moravians were accused of worshipping images in the 'popish' way.²⁶⁷ Zinzendorf in particular was a passionate advocate for the genuine experience that could arise from engaging with art, and his own conversion allegedly took place when he meditated on an *Ecce Homo* painting by Domenico Feti – a motif closely related to the Man of Sorrows and with a similar intention of evoking an emotional response in the viewer.²⁶⁸ As Zinzendorf put it, 'ins Herz mahlt man ewig bleibende Bilder, Kreuz-Bilder' ('in the heart one makes forever lasting images, images of the cross,' my translation).²⁶⁹ Many Moravian church halls were decorated with paintings, including the Fetter Lane Chapel in London, but only very few of the artworks have survived.²⁷⁰ Likewise, painting was considered as a preaching activity comparable

²⁶⁷ Peucker, 'Kreuzbilder,' 169-70.

²⁶⁸ Peucker notes, though, that it was mostly subsequent Moravian tradition that qualified Zinzendorf's experience as a conversion. In his diary, Zinzendorf himself simply described it as a highly affective spiritual experience, and particularly underlined the joint effect of the image and its accompanying text: 'Ego pro te haec passum sum; tu vero, quid fecisti pro me?' ('I have suffered these things for you; and you, what have you done for me?' – my translation) (ibid., 167).

²⁶⁹ Quoted in ibid., 168.

²⁷⁰ Ibid., 139, Peucker, 'Painter of Christ's Wounds,' 23, and Podmore, *Moravian Church*, chapter 5. Many of the paintings from Herrnhut were lost in fires, and the collection of paintings in the Unity Archives in Herrnhut (started before 1780) consists mostly of portraits. In general, the blood and wounds paintings of the mid-eighteenth century seem to have been neglected, and today many surviving Moravian halls come across as deceptively clean and light in their appearances, leaving not much trace of the earlier emphasis on the visual arts. For a photographic impression of a well restored Moravian town, see Jørgen Bøytler and Jørgen Toft Jessen, *Christiansfeld: Life and Houses* (Copenhagen, 2005). The reason for the neglect of Sifting Time art is not certain, and by the end of the eighteenth century, paintings for communal use were no longer produced (Paul Peucker, 'Communication through Art: The Role of Art in Moravian Communities,' in *Self, Community, World: Moravian Education in a Transatlantic World*, ed. Heikki Lempa and Paul Peucker (Bethlehem, 2010), 261).

to sermons, as illustrated in a 1760 entry in a congregation diary: ‘A depiction of the crucifixion of our Lord, that Br. Haidt had made for these days, was put up during this day to preach to their eyes.’²⁷¹

The Moravian philosophy of art was centred around the conception that each artwork made the subject depicted in the artwork fully and actually *present*. This almost literal understanding of art referred back to the importance placed on the physical incarnation of Christ – art works depicting Christ, in the same way as sermons on him and communal singing about him, made him present in the midst of the community. And the idea of Christ’s presence within the *Brüdergemeine* was crucial – and literal to the extent that ‘Jesus’ was the first name on a 1744 list of community members in Herrnhut.²⁷² Especially with regards to portraits (a popular Moravian genre) and depictions of gospel scenes, this literal understanding meant that the person depicted in the image was actually present in the setting in which the image was used, for example within the liturgy. Thus a painting of Christ was placed on a white throne for the Chief Elder’s Festival in Herrnhut in 1748 (the understanding being that Christ was the ‘chief elder’ of the church) and every man and woman present went up to the painting and ‘kissed the hands and mouth of our adorable Elder and sang and was joyful.’²⁷³ Here, the image of Christ not only represented him, but also ensured that he was actually present in the midst of the festival celebration.²⁷⁴

This active use of art within a liturgical or celebratory setting (as opposed to art works being produced to be simply passively displayed) is typical of mid-

²⁷¹ Quoted in Peucker, ‘Communication through Art,’ 265.

²⁷² Also Jesus’s complete details were filled out in the register: name: ‘Jesus,’ birthday: ‘25th Dec,’ homeland: ‘Bethlehem,’ profession: ‘carpenter,’ arrival date in Herrnhut: ‘13 August 1727,’ and so on (my translations from Peucker, ‘Kreuzbilder,’ 131).

²⁷³ Quoted in Peucker, ‘Communication through Art,’ 256.

²⁷⁴ In a similar way, portraits of Zinzendorf were displayed when celebrating his birthday (ibid., 250).

eighteenth-century Moravianism; the art works were grounded in the *Festkultur*²⁷⁵ of the community and played a vital, central, and indeed transforming role in life there. This unsentimental idea of art as situated and applied was also reflected in the way in which art works were produced. When intended for a specific feast or festival, they were often produced quickly and afterwards either disposed of or used for a different purpose: by using interchangeable accompanying text banners, a painting could easily be adapted to the different occasions²⁷⁶ – a practice that shows an interplay between texts and images which seems strikingly related to Blake's way of thinking with respect to his composite works and his reuse of old material in new connections.

Other characteristics in Moravian artworks were that they were often created without a border around the image, thereby suggesting that no boundary existed between the viewer and the artwork, or that they were left unfinished with, for example, the background of the artwork not fully painted²⁷⁷ – and again, we might draw a parallel to Blake, who often framed images with a border printed or painted directly on the plate, as seen in *Songs*. Alternatively, the artwork could be surrounded by elaborate borders in a style which, again, reminds the Blake reader of the style used in *Songs*²⁷⁸ – with the reservation that elaborate decorative borders, and for that matter the combination of visual and textual elements, was not exclusive to Moravians but widespread in pietistic communities.²⁷⁹ Artworks were often colourful, richly decorated, and populated with little animals such as birds and fish (Moravian language was characterized by the frequent use of the German

²⁷⁵ Peucker, 'Kreuzbilder,' 125.

²⁷⁶ Peucker, 'Communication through Art,' 259.

²⁷⁷ Peucker, 'Kreuzbilder,' 164-66.

²⁷⁸ Schuchard, 'Young William Blake,' 88-90.

²⁷⁹ Martin Scharfe, *Evangelische Andachtsbilder: Studien zu Intention und Funktion des Bildes in der Frömmigkeitsgeschichte vornemlich des Schwäbischen Raumes* (Stuttgart, 1968), 320-26 and illustration 109.

diminutive ‘-chen’), and hymns were transcribed, decorated, and pinned to the walls – a practice which might be reflected in the tradition that Blake’s mother used to pin his early works on the wall.²⁸⁰ The popular portraits, both of women and of men, had a feminine expression,²⁸¹ and the sitter often appeared smiling, sometimes pointing with his or her hand to the left side of the chest – the place where Christ’s side wound, according to Moravian tradition, was placed. And finally, mid-eighteenth-century Moravian art was characterized by a deep exploration of the blood-and-wounds theology, which had had its precursors, for example, in medieval western Christianity, but was taken to a whole new level now as the centre of Moravian spirituality.²⁸²

A typical example of this blood-and-wound terminology can, in fact, be taken from the very letter which Blake’s mother Catherine Armitage wrote in November 1750, asking to be allowed to join the Moravian community.²⁸³ Catherine writes – spelling mistakes included – that ‘I should be glad if I could

²⁸⁰ Cunningham noted in 1830 that it was Blake’s ‘chief delight to retire to the solitude of his room, and there make drawings, and illustrate these with verses, to be hung up together in his mother’s chamber’ (quoted in Schuchard, ‘Young William Blake,’ 84). The reference is to Blake as a young apprentice with James Basire (started when he was 14), not as a young child.

²⁸¹ The gender-bending of mid-eighteenth-century Moravians is interesting, especially in the context of the strict gender separation in the communities. Thus, each believer was positioned in a gendered relationship – the mystical marriage – with Christ the bridegroom, in which the soul was essentially seen as female, whether created as a man or a woman. Correspondingly, Jesus was the only true male (Atwood, ‘Sleeping in the Arms of Christ,’ 36) – albeit a wounded, penetrated male (idem, ‘Deep in the Side,’ 55).

²⁸² For more on this tradition, see Caroline Walker Bynum, *Wonderful Blood: Theology and Practice in Late Medieval Northern Germany and Beyond* (Philadelphia, 2007). Similarly, the concept of using eroticized images to describe Christ’s side wound was seen before, for example amongst the Cistercians (A. S. Fogleman, *Jesus is Female: Moravians and the Challenge of Radical Religion in Early America* (Philadelphia, 2007), 84).

²⁸³ Davies and Schuchard, ‘Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake’s Family,’ 40-41. The dating of the letter is based on the letter from Catherine’s then husband, Thomas Armitage, who wrote his petition to join the Moravians in November 1750 – and died exactly one year later. Catherine’s letter is reproduced in idem, ‘Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake’s Family,’ 40, and in Marsha Keith Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried: William Blake and the Sexual Basis of Spiritual Vision* (London, 2006), 344.

allways lay at the Cross full as I do know' and that 'last Friday at the love feast our Saviour was pleased to make me Suck his wounds and hug the Cross more than Ever.'²⁸⁴ This sucking of the wounds was a typical (almost stereotypical) Moravian topos of the time and was also used, for just one example, in the Hymns to the Wounds, which were sung regularly until the 1790s.²⁸⁵ Here the believer prays *to* the wounds in a call-response arrangement:

Purple wounds of Jesus	You are so succulent, whatever comes near becomes like wounds and flowing with blood.
Juicy wounds of Jesus	Whoever sharpens the pen and with it pierces you just a little, and licks, tastes it.
Near wounds of Jesus	I do not want to be even a hair's-width from your hole. ²⁸⁶

Catherine's letter also ends with quoting a hymn, thereby reflecting the Moravian emphasis on music and song as a means to stir the emotions of the believer and facilitate the conversion of the heart. The 'spring,' which Catherine prays to be able to drink from, is the fountain of Christ's blood (the *fons pietatis* or *fons vitae*), springing with healing blood and water:

Here let me drink for ever drink
nor ever once depart
for what I tast makes me to cry
fix at this Spring My heart
Dear Saviour thou has seen how oft
Ive turnd away from thee
O let thy work renewd to day

²⁸⁴ Quoted in Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, 344.

²⁸⁵ The 'Hymns of the Wounds' consisted of the second half of the *Wundenlitanei* (Litany of the Wounds) (Atwood, 'Deep in the Side,' 54). The *Wundenlitanei* is transcribed in idem, *Community of the Cross*, appendix 3. In here, the wounded hands showed where names were written in the Book of Life at the Last Judgment (see *ibid.*, 207) – one of the motifs also used by Young above, p. 100.

²⁸⁶ Quoted in Craig D. Atwood, 'Zinzendorf's "Litany of the Wounds",' *Lutheran Quarterly* XI (1997), 207.

Remain eternally[.]²⁸⁷

The letter is signed ‘Catherine Armitage.’

The distinctive Moravian motif of the side wound originated in the traditional trope of blood and water running from Christ’s side at the crucifixion, which also appears in non-Moravian depictions (most obviously so in images of Christ as the *fons pietatis* or *fons vitae*). In the second half of the 1740s, however, the Moravians came to centre their piety more specifically on the side wound itself, as opposed to on the blood and water running from it (although this was not neglected altogether), and began to develop ideas of entering and living *in* the side wound.²⁸⁸ As this new metaphorical language developed, it was reflected in the community’s art works as well. The side wound was extremely popular until ca. 1750, after which it began to be suppressed and the theological and artistic focus shifted to Christ as – the Man of Sorrows.²⁸⁹

The pictorial representations of Christ with the side wound, or the side wound as an isolated motif, were distinctive in style. When the side wound was depicted on Christ’s body, it was placed usually on his *left* side, not on his right – a practice which goes against most of western European tradition in which the side wound appears on Christ’s right side (alternatively towards the middle).²⁹⁰ Zinzendorf in particular emphasized the meaning of this diverging tradition in 1743, although later in life he seemed to become less certain as to the exact position of the

²⁸⁷ Quoted in Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, 344.

²⁸⁸ Also Thomas a Kempis suggested finding rest in Christ’s wounds: ‘Rest in Christ’s passion and live willingly/ in His holy wounds. If indeed you escape into/ Jesus’ precious wounds and stigmata/ You will sense a great comfort in your tribulation’ (quoted in David Nirenberg, ‘The Historical Body of Christ,’ in *The Body of Christ: In the Art of Europe and New Spain, 1150-1800*, ed. James Clifton (Munich, 1997), 22).

²⁸⁹ Peucker, ‘Communication through Art,’ 257.

²⁹⁰ Adolf Spamer, *Das kleine Andachtsbild vom XIV. bis zum XX. Jahrhundert* (München, 1930), 160, and Peucker, ‘Kreuzbilder,’ 133.

wound.²⁹¹ Notwithstanding Zinzendorf's later uncertainty, images from the mid-eighteenth century exclusively (as far as I am aware) show the side wound on the left, thus emphasizing the Moravians' identity of belonging to a *Herzensreligion* (heart religion),²⁹² speaking to the heart rather than the head. On Christ's body, the side wound was often shown as open, red, and elliptical with blood running or dripping from it. Similarly, the four nail wounds could also be depicted in an open elliptical shape reflecting that of the side wound, or as diamond-shaped (see Johann Valentin Haidt's painting 'Thomas Doubting,' 1758, fig. 16).

It was, however, the side wound depicted as a separate motif (detached from Christ's body) that came to represent a distinctive tradition within Moravianism. It appeared in various connections, from larger art works to be used in a communal setting to little painted cards to be used in private devotion.²⁹³ Here it appeared as a stylized version of the side wound on Christ's body, either open and elliptical in shape or diamond-shaped, and with the concept of 'living in the side wound' represented in a rather literal manner by, for example, showing everyday scenes – a bed, a table – *within* the side wound (fig. 17 and 18). This understanding of the side wound is exemplified in an often-quoted Methodist hymn from this period, reminding us of early Methodism's close connection with the Moravians²⁹⁴ – as well as of the side wound as a trope which, although probably nowhere more widely used than amongst Moravians in the 1740s, also played a role within other religious communities:

O precious Side-hole's cavity
I want to spend my life in there...

²⁹¹ Ibid.

²⁹² Podmore, *Moravian Church*, 126.

²⁹³ Peucker, 'Kreuzbilder,' 166.

²⁹⁴ For more on this, see Podmore, *Moravian Church*, chapter 3.

There in one Side-hole's joy divine,
 I'll spend all future Days of mine.
 Yes, yes, I will forever sit
 There, where thy side was split.²⁹⁵

Finally, the stylized side wound could also simply be used as a visual shorthand for Christ's body – thus a 1748 diary entry speaks of a depiction of Christ represented not as an actual body, but instead just as 'a side hole shining from the clouds.'²⁹⁶

As much as the side wound represented refuge, rest, and home, it also contained more dynamic aspects of rebirth, entrance, change, and transformation, which are the aspects particularly pertinent to my discussion of conversion.²⁹⁷ This is where the custom of depicting the side wound as a 'womb' arose in Moravian spirituality, a trope visually represented as the side wound shaped as the female genitalia. Again, the theological reasoning behind combining Christ's un-shameful wound with the 'shameful' female genitalia originated in Christ's full *Menschwerdung*, incarnation, whereby all shame connected with the physical body – and particularly the traditionally shameful parts – was removed. Instead, at least in the Sifting Time, *exactly* these body parts should be focussed on or even worshipped in joy, not in shame.²⁹⁸ Again, the metaphorical connection had precursors in Western tradition: in the Middle Ages, for example, James of Milan in *Stimulus amoris* could pun *vulnus* (wound) and *vulva*,²⁹⁹ and in late medieval *arma Christi* images the side wound could be represented in the shape of the female

²⁹⁵ Quoted in Thompson, *Witness against the Beast*, 408. It has been pointed out that the Methodists' use of a sexualized metaphorical language was not, in fact, as excessive as one might think from reading Thompson's account (Phyllis Mack, *Heart Religion in the British Enlightenment: Gender and Emotion in Early Methodism* (Cambridge, 2008), 43).

²⁹⁶ Quoted in Peucker, 'Communication through Art,' 257.

²⁹⁷ Atwood, 'Zinzendorf's "Litany of the Wounds",' 197.

²⁹⁸ Atwood, 'Sleeping in the Arms of Christ,' 28-33, 43. Although there are numerous very explicit examples of this (for example the festival celebrating the circumcision of Christ), this focus could also take on less scandalous, and one might even say sensible, forms, such as the suggestion to enjoy marital sex (*ibid.*, 26-28).

²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

genitals (and by extension so could the nail wounds).³⁰⁰ Likewise, spiritual rebirth had often been visually represented in the shape of the female genitalia, that were depicted, for example, in baptismal fonts or in medieval illustrations of Jesus's words to Nicodemus in John 3:3 that 'except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God'³⁰¹ – a visual tradition also reflected in Blake's already mentioned representations of the Last Judgment (fig. 13). With the 1740s Moravians, however, the womb/wound connection came to a particularly high point, leaving the Moravian community with a wealth of striking metaphorical images – and leaving their opponents shocked.³⁰² Now the side wound became a womb that believers should move through in rebirth as through a door – in other words, both an entrance and an exit. Here in the words of Zinzendorf:

Now I will see whether you are a divine child. That I will see in your longing for your Mother's womb, in whether you have entered into the new world through the right door, through which the Πληρωμα [fullness] [...] of the new Spirit exited, namely through the side of Jesus.³⁰³

Thus the side wound represented, in effect, the very gates of heaven in a literal reading of John 14:6 ('no man cometh unto the Father, but by me'). As Zinzendorf put it, 'no one is directly adopted by the Father, he passes first through the Savior; no one is directly born through the Holy Spirit, he goes first through the Canal of

³⁰⁰ David S. Areford, 'The Passion Measure: A Late-Medieval Diagram of the Body of Christ,' in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. A. A. MacDonald, H. N. B. Ridderbos, and R. M. Schlusemann (Groningen, 1998), 211-14.

³⁰¹ See Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 230-31.

³⁰² Thus an outraged German Lutheran pastor in Pennsylvania, Heinrich Melchior Mühlenberg, writes in 1750: 'I ask you to examine the Twelfth Part [...] of their hymns [...] where you will discover that these obscene birds [the Moravians] – with your permission – have compared women's genitalia, vagina of the uterus, with the side of the Savior of the world which on the cross had been pierced by a spear' (quoted in Fogleman, *Jesus is Female*, 73).

³⁰³ Quoted in Atwood, 'Sleeping in the Arms of Christ,' 47-48.

the Saviour.³⁰⁴ The side hole thus represents a doorway through Jesus, as well as a ‘womb of rebirth’³⁰⁵ – a rebirth that was represented as an experience of moving into the side hole, expressed as an erotic union with Christ. Here again Zinzendorf:

And as soon as they are with him, there is an embrace, a kiss, a heart, thus he draws like a magnet, rises them all up to himself, lays them all deep in his holy side, so that a soul in that hour and at that moment when it has experienced it can say: much happiness to eternal life, if only my whole life could remain like this!³⁰⁶

However, this joyful conversion experience seems to rather represent the continued conversion in the life of the already-believing, not the initial conversion which – despite being somewhat differently expressed in a Moravian context than the Pietist conversion struggle (*Busskampf*) – could still be the result of a difficult process:

Whether this experience [the initial conversion] afterwards turns first into a joy of your heart, into a surprising joy such as you have never felt before in your whole life, or into a dreadful shame or profound sorrow, it is all the same, for this depends on the circumstances.³⁰⁷

In the context of this thesis, however, it is the conversion in and through the side wound/womb, and particularly the way in which this was represented visually, which is interesting.

To sum up: in mid-eighteenth-century Moravianism, in Germany and beyond, art played a pivotal and transformative role in the life of the community. In what has been termed the Sifting Time, the most popular motifs were those concerning the crucified Christ and his wounds. In the second half of the 1740s, the side wound as a separate, stylized motif became popular, but from 1750 onwards,

³⁰⁴ Quoted in Atwood, ‘Deep in the Side,’ 55.

³⁰⁵ Ibid.

³⁰⁶ Quoted in Atwood, ‘Sleeping in the Arms of Christ,’ 35.

³⁰⁷ Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 49.

the side wound was suppressed on behalf of the Man of Sorrows as a central motif. However, regardless of whether an image depicted a wound still on Christ's body, or appeared separately, the value of it was the same: the wounds of Christ represented spiritual rebirth, transformation, the washing off of sins, refuge, and home. Perhaps most strikingly for the modern interpreter, however, the wounds were not loci of a melancholy or sentimental contemplation of the sufferings of Christ, but of a joyous, triumphant, and positive engagement with his saving body.

Moravian traces in Blake's images

In drawing the connection back to Blake, we can first establish that the emphasis on the importance and transformative quality of art also applied to the English Moravians. The Moravian headquarters in London, Lindsey House in Chelsea, had what Peucker calls an 'outstanding' collection of thirty-eight historical paintings displayed in the staircase in the early 1750s – the same period that Blake's mother was a member.³⁰⁸ Schuchard has suggested, based on an 1806 comment by Malkin (who knew Blake), that Blake might have been taken to visit Lindsey House as a child; Malkin noted that Blake 'very early in life, had the ordinary opportunities of seeing pictures of noblemen and gentlemen, and in the king's palaces.'³⁰⁹ It is certainly not unthinkable that Blake's mother took Blake to see Moravian images – Moravians after all placed a special emphasis on the spiritual agency and education of children, and they would encourage them to explore matters spiritual, artistic, and visionary.³¹⁰ Indeed, Schuchard notes the presence of Christopher Henry Müller in the London Moravian community, who had 'the Care of the Children's Oeconomy,'

³⁰⁸ Only very few of these paintings have survived, but a list of their titles and a sketch of their arrangement exists (Peucker, 'Communication through Art,' 264).

³⁰⁹ Quoted in Schuchard, 'Young William Blake,' 92. Cf. however BR, 562.

³¹⁰ Schuchard, 'Young William Blake,' 88.

a part of which was instruction in art and engraving.³¹¹ Compare this with the tradition that Blake's mother took a particular (and 'private,' according to Cunningham) interest in Blake's early artistic development and encouraged the young Blake's early 'visions.'³¹² Moreover, even if Blake never did see the collection in Lindsey House, the chapel in Fetter Lane – destroyed in the Second World War – would similarly have been decorated according to Moravian custom: with white washed walls, but painted galleries as well as any occasional art works.³¹³ Furthermore, when Lindsey House was sold in 1774, many of the paintings were moved to Fetter Lane,³¹⁴ which was open for attenders whether members of the community or not – thus not only the Wesley brothers, but also Swedenborg attended services here.³¹⁵ Many of the paintings in both Fetter Lane and Lindsey House were by the Moravian painter Johann Valentin Haidt and had been personally commissioned by Zinzendorf, when he moved to London in 1749 (the same year the Moravians became a recognized Episcopal church in Britain).³¹⁶ When Haidt emigrated to America in 1754, he took some of his London paintings with him – and thus we are still able to get at least some idea of the mid-eighteenth-century paintings that would have surrounded London Moravians. I return to some of these below.

In addition to these possible childhood influences on Blake, Schuchard and Davies, as mentioned above, have suggested that Blake was in contact with two Moravians, the artist Spilsbury and the poet Montgomery, between 1800 and 1807 – and that they might even have taken Blake back to visit Fetter Lane, where Haidt's

³¹¹ Ibid., 92-93.

³¹² Ibid., 84.

³¹³ For a description of the Moravian hall in Fulneck, which Fetter Lane would probably have resembled, see Podmore, *Moravian Church*, 144-47.

³¹⁴ Schuchard, 'Young William Blake,' 95.

³¹⁵ Ibid., 84.

³¹⁶ See Podmore, *Moravian Church*, chapter 5.

images could still be seen.³¹⁷ Schuchard argues this specifically on the basis of similarities between Haidt's painting 'The Crucifixion' and Blake's two paintings 'Mary Magdalene Washing Christ's Feet' (B488) and 'Christ the Mediator: Christ Pleading before the Father for St. Mary' (B429), noting that Blake's two images were produced in exactly the period of Blake's renewed Moravian contact.³¹⁸ Although part of my research in the following section supports this thesis, we shall see that it is also possible that Moravian themes were already present in Blake's works before 1800.

Ankarsjö also stresses a Moravian influence on Blake. One of his main textual proofs of this influence is 'The Grey Monk' from *The Pickering Manuscript* (ca. 1807, thus coinciding with Blake's suggested period of renewed Moravian contact) – which does indeed use a language that could have been inspired by Moravian imagery of Christ's bloody wounds:³¹⁹

The blood red ran from the Grey Monks side
His hands & feet were wounded wide
His Body bent his arms & knees
Like to the roots of ancient trees[.]
(5-8, E489)

However, Ankarsjö hardly analyses any Moravian traces in Blake's images, except for singling out the crucified Christ in *Jerusalem* pl. 76 (fig. 7) as having an 'extraordinarily Moravian look.' The argument, however, comes across as rather vague – here Ankarsjö recounts in first person:

I was quite unexpectedly taken aback by the extraordinarily Moravian look of the crucifixion scene of *Jerusalem* pl. 76. [...] However, I was not

³¹⁷ Schuchard, 'Young William Blake,' 95.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

³¹⁹ Ankarsjö, *William Blake and Religion*, 108-10.

immediately able to point to any specific features, it was simply a striking overall impression. Here was the typically clear Moravian emphasis of the wounded and bleeding hands and feet of Christ.³²⁰

Ankarsjö does not indicate which copy of *Jerusalem* he is referring to. But if one looks towards Copy E,³²¹ there are indeed features in the image that might refer to a Moravian visual tradition, such as the dark blood running from Christ's nail wounds (even though the emphasis of the image is usually understood as being not on the wounds, but on the Johannine glorification of the crucified Christ).³²² However, it is possible to be more specific than Ankarsjö, in particular with regards to two features in the image. First, the human figure before the cross seems to react to the crucifixion with peculiar joy, perhaps reflecting a joyful worship of the cross inspired by Moravian spirituality.³²³ Second, the side wound, which goes unmentioned by Ankarsjö, is placed on Christ's *left* side (as according to Moravian custom), rather than on his right side. In fact, a brief tour through Blake's images reveals that Blake *uniquely* depicts the side wound on the left side, never on the right side.³²⁴ Considering that a historical connection between Blake's family and the Moravians has been established, the most obvious explanation for Blake's

³²⁰ Ibid., 111. The explanatory footnote does not make Ankarsjö's observations any clearer – he simply notes that when he consulted Keri Davies on the matter, Davies 'quite enthusiastically [...] agreed that the illustration gives a Moravian impression' (ibid., 147).

³²¹ The only copy currently available in the online William Blake Archive, and also the one reprinted in the William Blake Trust edition (William Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, ed. Morton D. Paley (Princeton, 1991)).

³²² Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 223, and Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*, 117-19.

³²³ Warner, for example, noted the 'dancelike movement of Albion in both *Albion rose* and *Jerusalem 76*' (quoted in Paley, *Continuing City*, 114). This interpretation is based on the similarities between the figure of 'Albion' in *J76* and Blake's image traditionally known as 'Glad Day.' Blake captioned the engraved version of this (not reproduced in Butlin), which is probably from the early 1800s, 'Albion rose from where he laboured at the Mill with Slaves Giving himself For the Nations he danc'd the dance of Eternal Death' (Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 27).

³²⁴ See, for example, B597, B579, B417, B418, and B401.

practice must be that he followed the Moravian lead.³²⁵ However, the conclusion that Ankarsjö draws from J76 – namely that this depiction of a ‘Moravian’ Christ is typical for Blake’s ‘late [...] artistic career’ (my emphasis) – is challenged as soon as we investigate the matter more closely, for as will be shown below, Blake in 1822 notably *abstains* from showing Christ’s wounds, as he edits them out of motifs where they had once occurred. This critical attention to when Blake abstains from using a Moravian trope or motif is a perspective which neither Schuchard, Davies, nor Ankarsjö include when discussing Blake and the Moravians; and although this is a difficult task – trying to point out what is *not there* – it is a useful exercise and, as we will see, also appropriate (a related question would be whether we can detect any change or development in Blake’s use of Moravian imagery). Such an increased awareness of some of the central Moravian themes that Blake abstains from might give a fuller picture of his possible relationship with this particular Christian tradition in a way that makes it possible to move beyond the vague conclusion that ‘Blake knew the Moravians.’

This attention to what is not there becomes particularly relevant if we pay another visit to the *Night Thoughts* illustrations. Although Young was certainly not a Moravian, the passion-centred imagery he uses in Night IV can sometimes resemble that of contemporary Moravians, in particular his descriptions of the crucified Christ and his wounds, his invitation to an emotional engagement with the Man of Sorrows, and his longing (on Lorenzo’s behalf) for a new birth. And although these themes are not at all exclusive to Moravian culture (as indeed Young’s work demonstrates), it is perhaps hard to believe that Blake, if he was

³²⁵ Dürer also occasionally depicted the side wound on the left, but not as consistently as either the Moravians or Blake (Vladimir Gurewich, ‘Observations on the Iconography of the Wound in Christ’s Side, with Special Reference to its Position,’ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 20.3/4 (1957), 361).

indeed brought up in contact with Moravian culture, would not have recognized Young's explicit use of such imagery. Nevertheless, the illustrations do not seem overall to reflect a Moravian inspiration – and of the engravings, at least, only two show a possible Moravian influence: the title page to *Night IV* and the *Man of Sorrows*. In both of these, the Moravian influence seems restrained.

The title page to *Night IV*, 31E (fig. 19), was originally intended as a general title page to the whole *Night Thoughts* project. In the engraving, we see a triumphant naked Christ rising up through the clouds with outstretched arms, exhibiting a side wound and one nail wound on each foot. All of these wounds are elliptical in shape – although significantly more closed than the wounds on the *Man of Sorrows* – and not bloody. The side wound is seen on Christ's left side, as per Moravian custom, but is not very prominent in size, emphasising that this is indeed the *risen* Christ. However, if we look towards the development of the image, we realize that Blake has carefully inserted these wounds into a motif where they did not originally appear. First, it has been suggested that Blake's inspiration for the engraving came from a Richard Westall illustration to *Paradise Lost*³²⁶ – but Westall in his original depicts Christ with no side wound visible and only the slightest shade of what might be a nail wound in his right hand. Second, and more importantly, in the first state of Blake's image – the watercolour NT1 – Christ is shown with *no* wounds at all, either side wound or nail wounds. So although we cannot know Blake's reason for inserting these wounds into the finished engraving, which might be that he wanted to conform to the focus on the crucified Christ in Young's text, it certainly shows us that he had an awareness of the significance of showing these wounds – and that when he did insert them, he either consciously or

³²⁶ Luisa Calè, 'Blake and the Literary Galleries,' in *Blake and Conflict*, ed. Sarah Haggarty and Jon Mee (Basingstoke, 2009), 199-205.

unconsciously chose to do so by placing the side wound according to a significant Moravian practice.³²⁷

Also in the Man of Sorrows engraving (34E, fig. 15), there are – we see now – features that might have been inspired by Moravian tradition. First, as mentioned, the Man of Sorrows motif played a central role in Moravian iconography after ca. 1750. Second, although no side wound is shown in the engraving (as Christ's torso is hidden behind Young's text), the nail wounds have a distinct open elliptical shape (fig. 20), a style which is similar to the Moravian shape of the side wound – thus suggesting that the nail wounds might occur as substitutes for the side wound. Depicting the nail wounds as elliptical, and not circular (either completely circular or slightly torn), appears to be unusual in the tradition of Western art.³²⁸ However, when looking towards Moravian art, we do find examples of elliptical nail wounds on Jesus that mirror the distinct shape of the side wound, for example in Haidt's already mentioned 'Thomas Doubting' (1758, fig. 16 – the Doubting Thomas motif was a Moravian favourite and occurs on the list of 'sacramental acts of the Saviour' that Haidt used to paint from in 1749).³²⁹ Here the nail wounds on both hands and feet are widely open and elliptical (almost diamond shaped), reflecting the equally

³²⁷ When Blake's friend Thomas Stothard did his illustrations to *Night Thoughts* a few years later, an illustration appeared in Night IV which resembles Blake's title page to Night IV (31E) strikingly and which also, curiously, shows Christ's side wound on his left side (see reproduction in Young, *Night Thoughts: With the Life of the Author and Notes Critical and Explanatory*, illustration inserted after 68).

³²⁸ There are some examples of slightly elliptical nail wounds in, for example, two late medieval works: an engraving by Israhel van Meckenem 'The Man of Sorrows' (ca. 1490) (Richard Harries, *The Passion in Art* (Aldershot, 2004), illustration 20) and an English woodcut, 'The Image of Pity' (ca. 1500) (Finaldi, *The Image of Christ*, 152, 154-55, catalogue number 60,) – and also perhaps in Grünewald's 'The Resurrection' from the Isenheim altarpiece (ca. 1510-16, esp. Christ's feet), and Rogier van der Weyden's 'The Last Judgment' (1443-51, esp. Christ's left foot) (N. MacGregor and Erika Langmuir, *Seeing Salvation* (London, 2000), illustrations 58 and 67 respectively). Also in late medieval *arma Christi*, the nail wounds could take on the elliptical shape of the side wound.

³²⁹ Peucker, 'Kreuzbilder,' 173.

widely open side wound that Thomas enters with his fingers. No blood is running from any of the wounds, either from the side wound or the nail wounds, which emphasizes that the focus in the image is indeed not the blood, but Christ's resurrected body (underlined by Thomas looking towards heaven) and its identifying marks, the wounds.

Although the painting was executed in America in the 1750s, it is feasible that Haidt had used the motif of the elliptical or 'side wound shaped' nail wounds beforehand, perhaps during his years as an active Moravian artist in London – although there are also examples of his paintings in which the nail wounds are shown as circular, for example his 'At the Foot of the Cross' (1758, fig. 21).³³⁰ It is also clear from Zinzendorf's *Wundenlitanei* that an exchange of meanings could occur between the side wound and the nail wounds – here Thomas enters his hand into not only the side wound, but also the nail wounds: 'And Thomas, whom the Lord commanded,/ Felt in the side and the nail wounds.'³³¹ Similarly, open elliptical or diamond-shaped hand wounds reminding the viewer of the distinctive (stylized) shape of the side wound appear in an illustration from an *Atlas zur Geschichte der Brüdergemeine im 18. Jahrhundert* (fig. 22). Here, Christ bends over a globe, holding his wounded hands above it. He is fully dressed, thus not showing his side wound, but both of the nail wounds in his hands are in the shape of an open side wound, perhaps as substitutes for it. Both the Haidt painting and the atlas illustration thus indicate that although the nail wounds were also painted in the more common circular shape, some Moravian artists experimented with nail wounds in the shape of the stylized side wound. And although neither of these examples show the nails still pierced into the wounds, as Blake does, he might at least have been

³³⁰ The painting is also known as 'Lamentation over the Body of Christ.'

³³¹ Quoted in Atwood, *Community of the Cross*, 253.

inspired to use the elliptical nail wounds shaped like side wounds from Moravian sources such as these. It would certainly not be, as Schuchard has pointed out, the only possible influence from Haidt on Blake.³³² However, Blake's unusual depiction of the nails as still pierced into Christ's wounds does not appear to derive from Moravian tradition, which did not generally pay much attention to the instruments of the passion (except for, occasionally, the Roman soldier's spear) – instead, Blake's stimulus to use them must have come from Young's text.

Despite Blake's engraved version of Night IV not giving an overall Moravian impression, there are more possible Moravian traces to be found in the *Night Thoughts* watercolours. Here, two consecutive images, NT264 and NT265, stand out. NT264 (fig. 23) was originally intended as a frontispiece to the Second Volume of *Night Thoughts*, thus immediately following Night IV.³³³ The image shows Christ frontally and in half figure with outstretched arms in something between an embrace and a cruciform shape. The image is very dark, but Butlin identifies the motif as 'Christ ascends over two sleeping soldiers.'³³⁴ What Butlin does not mention, however, is the prominent side wound on Christ's left – Moravian – side. This is probably the largest side wound in all Blake's images, and this time it is not just a slit (as in the engraved Night IV title page, fig. 19) or a narrow elliptical shape, but a wide opening, which in addition is clearly emphasized with red colour. Likewise, both the nail wounds in Christ's hands are large and open in a shape very similar to that seen in the Moravian atlas or in Haidt's 'Thomas Doubting,' not elongated as in Blake's *Man of Sorrows*. Thus as a whole, the image comes across as showing not just what can be interpreted as a familiarity on Blake's behalf with

³³² See Schuchard, 'Young William Blake,' 93-95.

³³³ Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 216.

³³⁴ *Ibid.*

the visual tradition of the Moravians, but also his willingness to use this tradition even when not forced to do so – being a frontispiece, not an illustration of a particular section of text, Blake would probably have had a free hand to choose whichever motif he preferred. And finally, the image shows us a Blake who might not revel in a full blood-and-wounds imagery, but nevertheless does not steer as clear of it as he could easily have done.

In the following image, NT265 (fig. 24), this Moravian impression continues. NT265 was intended as the title page to the Second Volume and shows, in Butlin's words, 'a man (? Doubting Thomas) clutching at the risen Christ who displays his wounds.'³³⁵ Here, however, the wounds are much less prominent than in the previous image. The nail wounds in Christ's hands are circular, but not as large as in NT264 and not with the same open quality to them. Similarly, the only visible nail wound, which is on the right foot, is only depicted as a slit and thereby resembles the nail wounds on the title page, 31E (fig. 19) – it *might* refer to the side wound due to its elongated shape, but is not open. Likewise, Christ's side wound is considerably smaller than in NT264 (fig. 23) and has the shape of a narrow slit – it is not open, but rather almost healed. What does, however, emphasize the side wound clearly in the image is the man at Christ's feet, who moves intensely towards it: his eyes are fixed on it, his mouth is open, and his right arm reaches towards it, his fingers almost touching it – thus seemingly illustrating the well-known Moravian topos of longing for the side wound. Thus, not only is the side wound again placed on Christ's left side here, as per Moravian custom, but Blake also seems to refer to the central Moravian motif of the Doubting Thomas – again when there is no pressing argument in Young's text to do so (as the image occurs on a

³³⁵ Ibid.

title page to a Night that has no particular interest in this trope). And even though the wounds are not nearly as prominent as in the immediately preceding NT264 (fig. 23), the figure of ‘Thomas’ draws attention to the side wound in a most remarkable way.

There are some other examples of possible Moravian tropes in the watercolours, such as NT127, where we see Christ from the back as he rises towards heaven. Again the nail wounds on his hands and feet are elliptical and resemble the side wound in shape, as in the Man of Sorrows. Interestingly, however, the line from Young’s text which Blake here illustrates is ‘Humanity/ Triumphant past the Crystal Ports of Light’ (IV.291-29), thus underlining the incarnated and resurrected Christ’s full human nature – in other words, an emphasis related to the central Moravian topos of Christ’s *Menschwerdung*. And for one last example – although this is more speculative – NT177 shows Narcissa’s gravestone with a garland, illustrating the line ‘Shall form a Garland for *Narcissa*’s Tomb’ (V.292).³³⁶ However, the shape of this garland looks strikingly similar to stylized representations of the side wound in Moravian tradition, prompting us to wonder whether Blake here resorted to a visual trope perhaps well-known to him from early in life – as we will see, he certainly seemed to use exactly this stylized shape some years later in *The Four Zoas*.³³⁷ Thus, judging from the *Night Thoughts* illustrations, Blake makes use of motifs (Doubting Thomas and the wounded Christ)³³⁸ and

³³⁶ Ibid., 205.

³³⁷ Inside the garland there are letters that, according to Butlin, spell ‘Night...ghts’ and thus refer to the title of the poem (ibid.). However, these letters just might also refer to the German ‘Nichts’ and ‘Ichts’ instead – terms that are not Moravian, but belong in the universe of Boehme, of whom more in the following chapter; ‘Nichts’ and ‘Ichts’ are concepts relating to being, ‘Nothingness’ and ‘Selfness,’ respectively. However, there is no other evidence of Blake writing, or indeed reading, in German.

³³⁸ Blake might have used the motif of Doubting Thomas on at least one other occasion, as Butlin, referring to William Rosetti, mentions a tempera called ‘Christ overcoming the incredulity of St. Thomas,’ which has been untraced since 1863. However, Butlin notes that

tropes (the side wound on the left, and side wound shaped or open nail wounds) that might reveal a Moravian influence. However, he does so in a way which appears restrained and understated (perhaps reflecting the suggested more subdued style of the English Moravians) – and he uses those motifs earlier (1796-97) than the period in which Schuchard and Davies have suggested he re-established contact with Moravians (1800-07). This suggests either a stronger influence from earlier, perhaps childhood, Moravian contact or a more continued influence. But what if we include material from beyond *Night Thoughts* and look, for example, towards Blake's depictions of other Moravian favourites such as the crucified or risen Christ?

First, there is Blake's 'Christ Appearing to the Apostles after the Resurrection' which exists in three versions, all executed just before the *Night Thoughts* illustrations in ca. 1795 – a motif which, it has been noted, is connected with Blake's Doubting Thomas image above (fig. 24) via the kneeling man on Christ's right side, looking towards Christ's wounds.³³⁹ Again, in all three versions, Christ has a visible side wound, it is placed on his left side, and he exhibits nail wounds in hands and the only visible foot. In B325 (fig. 25), all visible wounds – side wound, two hand wounds, and a foot wound – are, again, merely slits. They all have the same shape and size, and the hand wounds are horizontal, thus exactly mirroring his side wound. The foot wound is ever so slightly opened. In B326 (fig. 26), however, the side wound might still be a slit, but the hand wounds are now vertical and slightly more opened and elongated. The foot wound has the same size and shape as in B325. Finally, in B327 (fig. 27), the wounds are less visible (due to the blurred state of the print), except for the hand wound placed immediately before

'this may be a mistake for the large colour print from the Butts collection' (=B325) (ibid., 177).

³³⁹ Grant, 'Jesus and the Powers That Be,' 82-83.

‘Thomas’s’ gaze. This wound is more open and emphasized than any of the above, and although still vertical, it has a diamond shape similar to the wounds in NT264 (fig. 23). Supporting the emphasis on the wounds in these images even more, Butlin notes that there might have existed a related image explicitly called ‘Christ showing the print of the nails to the apostles,’ which has been untraced since 1863.³⁴⁰

Apart from the reference to the popular Moravian Doubting Thomas motif here, another possibly Moravian-inspired trope occurs: that of the kneeling disciple on Christ’s left with his head to the ground and what appears to be a keen interest in Christ’s left foot. Firstly, there was a particular attention in Moravian spirituality not only to the nail wound in the foot, but also to feet in general. Thus the washing of Jesus’s feet by Mary Magdalene and Jesus’s washing of the disciples’ feet were two other motifs on Haidt’s list of ‘sacramental’ subjects to paint, and Zinzendorf’s oldest daughter was painted in a portrait where ‘she had her foot in the water while the Savior was washing and kissing the foot’ – the portrait of the girl was, of course, displayed on her birthday.³⁴¹ Similarly, Blake also painted Mary Magdalene washing and kissing Christ’s feet in 1805, an image which Schuchard has discussed the possible Moravian influence on, in particular from Haidt.³⁴² Secondly, it is also seen in crucifixion scenes by Haidt, for example in ‘At the Foot [sic] of the Cross’ (fig. 21), that someone has a particular interest in Christ’s foot; in Haidt’s image, a kneeling figure has moved very close to the foot and appears to be either kissing it or ‘sucking the wounds.’ And although there is no direct contact between the mouth of the kneeling figure and Christ’s foot in Blake, the proximity between the figure’s face and the wound is certainly suggestive. All in all, then, the three depictions of

³⁴⁰ Butlin notes, however, that the title might also just refer to one of the ‘Christ Appearing to the Apostles after the Resurrection’ (Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 177).

³⁴¹ Peucker, ‘Communication through Art,’ 252.

³⁴² Schuchard, ‘Young William Blake,’ 94-95.

‘Christ Appearing’ all represent a seemingly positive engagement with Christ’s wounded body that is ‘early’ (1795) and belongs to a period before any ‘conversion’ or any renewed Moravian contact. The depiction of Christ in these images is thus surprising if Blake indeed was not too concerned with the idea of the crucified Christ’s body – for here the resurrected Christ is shown in a manner that suggests Blake somehow gave these wounds positive connotations.³⁴³

This leads us to some of Blake’s depictions of Christ *on* the cross. As noted above, the focus in these is usually on the glorification of Christ rather than on his suffering, his wounds, or his blood – however, there are some possible Moravian traces to note. In ‘The Crucifixion: Behold thy Mother’ (B497, fig. 28) from 1805 there is – naturally – not yet any side wound (since this only occurred after Jesus’s death, John 19:34). However, the wound on Jesus’s left foot is elliptical, perhaps reflecting the shape of the side wound. No blood is running from it, but Jesus’s hands are coloured red from the blood, and fairly large nails are pierced into them.³⁴⁴ Neither is there yet any side wound in ‘Christ Crucified Between the Two Thieves’ (B494, fig. 29) from the same period, ca. 1800-03. Instead, fairly large nails are used (both on Christ and the ‘two thieves’), and there is blood on Christ’s feet and left hand.³⁴⁵ In this image, however, the wounds do not have any clear shape, except for the nail wound on the foot of the thief on Christ’s left, which is elliptical.

³⁴³ For the positive sense of the images, Butlin notes with reference to B325 that ‘the design seems to be the counterpart to ‘The House of Death’ [...] which suggests that the meaning may be, exceptionally for the series [of large colour prints, 1795, B289-329], a positive one, contrasting the merciful God of the New Testament with the vengeful God of the Old’ (Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 176).

³⁴⁴ In Butlin, the image is reproduced in black and white, hence suppressing the bloody aspect.

³⁴⁵ Again, this is not obvious in Butlin as the image is not reproduced in colour.

The most interesting image with regards to a Moravian context is perhaps ‘Michael Foretells the Crucifixion’ from Blake’s *Paradise Lost* illustrations. In the 1807 version from the Thomas set (B529 11, fig. 30), there is no side wound and no blood visible at all, only large nails. However, in the version of the same motif from the following year, the impression we get is different: for in the Butts version from 1808 (B536 11, fig. 31), Christ suddenly not only *has* a side wound, but it is also an open side wound from which drops of blood are dripping down (fig. 32) – the only example in Blake of a side wound with dripping blood, as far as I am aware. Furthermore, the blood is now *flowing* both from Christ’s hand wounds and, in particular, from his feet (fig. 33). Thus the image reveals Blake’s familiarity with a more blood-and-wound-oriented tradition of depicting the crucifixion, at the same time as being one of Blake’s crucifixions in which Christ is the least glorified. The focus here, it seems, is on Christ’s wounded and bleeding body, not on his glorification. Interestingly, however, in the third version of this motif from 1822 (the Linnell set, B537 3, fig. 34), the image has again changed character completely. Now the side wound has completely disappeared, and there are only slight indications of nail wounds on hands and feet³⁴⁶ – the red colour has disappeared, leaving the wound only to be indicated by a shadow. Instead, Blake’s emphasis is now on the glorified Christ: strong rays of light are emanating from Christ and engulf his spectators in a manner similar to the glorified (but bloody) Christ in *Jerusalem* pl. 76. This is an interesting development of the motif: what in 1807 was not a particularly blood-and-wound-centred crucifixion changed, in 1808, to a depiction of Christ with an open, bloody side wound and blood running from hands

³⁴⁶ This goes unnoticed by Butlin who simply notes: ‘Blake has added rays emanating from the Cross absent in the earlier version [...] otherwise it is close to the Butts watercolour except in looseness of handling’ (Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 386).

and feet – which in 1822 turned into a vision of the glorified Christ rather than of the wounded Christ.

What can we conclude from these three related images? Firstly, we cannot know whether the development of the motif owed to possible changes in Blake's personal theological outlook, whether he was in contact with Moravians around 1808, or if his patrons had anything to say as to the execution of the images – at least they all seem to have had 'spiritual' interests.³⁴⁷ However, on the basis of this small selection of wounds, and on the basis of the presence of blood and a side wound in *Jerusalem* 76,³⁴⁸ we can conclude that he was not unaware of the tropes of the open elliptical side wound from which blood is dripping, and the bleeding hands and feet. He did, however, use these tropes with care in the first decade of the 1800s, and by 1822 not at all – a development that might denote a shift in Blake's theological emphasis, in particular his understanding of Christ. Thus the question that looking back upon this chapter raises is not so much whether Blake was familiar with a Moravian visual tradition and metaphorical language, or whether this Moravian tradition is reflected in *Night Thoughts*. Rather, it urges us to ask the more specific questions of what *exactly* in Moravian tradition did Blake choose to incorporate into his own work, and why?

As Caroline Walker Bynum has pointed out, Christ's blood and Christ's wounds do not actually signify the same thing, although the technical term blood-and-wounds theology that is often applied to the Moravians tends to give that impression. According to Bynum, Christ's wounds signify entrance, home, refuge,

³⁴⁷ Revd. Joseph Thomas was Rector of Epsom, Surrey, Linnell was a dissenter and enthusiast (Bentley Jr., *Stranger from Paradise*, 222-23, 365-68), and Butts might have been inclined to Methodism (Farrell, 'Blake and the Methodists,' 18).

³⁴⁸ This is by no means an exhaustive list of all side wounds and nail wounds in Blake – see, for example, 'The Resurrection' (1805, B502), in which there is a visible but very small side wound, and 'The Ascension' (ca. 1803-05, B505), in which Christ is seen from behind exhibiting the nail wounds (reflecting perhaps NT127).

nourishment, and community, whereas his blood signifies exit, cleansing, fertilization, intoxication, and so on: the wound thus represents *entry* into the body of Christ (both in a physical and in a metaphorical sense), and the blood represents *exit* from the body of Christ.³⁴⁹ In fact, devotion to the wounds ‘is not, as is sometimes said, the source of blood devotion or closely related to it,’ as the wounds are rather ‘hymned as doorway or access, refuge and consolation, than as violation; to penetrate is to open the way.’³⁵⁰ This opening of the way happens not by force or violence, but gently, as exemplified by Dionysius the Carthusian (d. 1471):

And note that Augustine says that John says that the soldier “opened” the side of Christ; he does not say “struck” or “wounded”. For truly a door, like a window, is opened, and thus the soldier opened for us the spiritual door through which the sacraments of the church flow, without which no one enters into true life.³⁵¹

So the wound worship in mid-eighteenth-century Moravianism – and also more generally – belongs to a different, and more positive, interpretative framework than that of blood worship: it originated already in the thirteenth century and was ‘a sweeter, sunnier piety than the fourteenth- and fifteenth-century appeal to blood.’³⁵² This distinction is worth keeping in mind when asking how Blake seems to have creatively responded to the Moravian visual tradition, if that is indeed what he did. For although neither blood nor wounds register in great measure in his images, both tropes are nonetheless, as we have seen, present – the blood less so, and the wounds to a larger degree. Whereas blood as dripping or flowing from Christ’s wounds seems to mainly occur in the first two decades of the 1800s (seen in the version of

³⁴⁹ Bynum, *Wonderful Blood*, 10.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 14-15.

³⁵¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 171.

³⁵² *Ibid.*, 15. The distinction between the ‘sweeter, sunnier’ wounds on the one hand and the blood on the other hand might have been slightly blurred within the generally joyous and sunny spirituality of mid-eighteenth-century Moravianism.

‘Michael Foretells the Crucifixion’ from 1808 and the crucifixion in *Jerusalem* pl. 76 from between 1804 and 1820), Christ’s wounds themselves seem to be of interest to Blake already from 1795 onwards (with the three ‘Christ Appearing’ images, the recurrent use of the motif of Doubting Thomas, and *Night Thoughts* illustrations such as 31E, 34E, NT264, and NT265).³⁵³ And later – at least around 1822 – *both* the wounds and the flowing blood are replaced by an emphasis on the glorified Christ on the cross instead, who comes to the subject in vision (as we will see in the illustrations to *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Job*), not as a wounded, opened body. As illustrated through the prism of Moravianism, Blake accepts the trope of the joyful wound to the degree of wanting to experiment with it over some time from 1795, whereas he uses the visual trope of Christ’s blood in a more restrained way in the first decade of the 1800s (thus coinciding with Davies and Schuchard’s suggesting of a renewed Moravian contact in this period).

One thing that these experiments with wounds and blood from ca. 1795 to 1822 emphasize, then, is that Christ’s body does play a particular role in Blake’s works. Blake criticism often focuses on the body of Christ in Blake as a perceptual *Raum* (‘the Human Imagination/ Which is the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus. blessed for ever,’ M3.3-4, E96) or the way in which it corresponds to Paul’s concept of being *en Christo*³⁵⁴ – in other words as a cognitive space rather than a physical space or an actual body. Likewise it is, as mentioned, often observed that if Blake addresses the trope of Christ’s body on the cross, his emphasis is on Christ’s putting off ‘all mortality’ here (FZ111.38, E383) or on Christ’s glorification. However,

³⁵³ Even though in *Night Thoughts* the blood is emphasized with red colour in coloured versions of the Man of Sorrows and NT264, it is never dripping or flowing from the wounds and thereby seem to emphasize the wounds trope rather than the blood trope. The only red drops in the Man of Sorrows are the few drops of blood or bloody sweat.

³⁵⁴ Roberts, ‘St Paul’s Gifts to Blake’s Aesthetic: ‘O Human Imagination, O Divine Body,’’ 8-18.

what we have seen in this chapter is an engagement with the physical presence of Christ in Blake's images and a developing experimentation with iconographical markers of the wounded body, that together challenge the critical neglect of the role of Christ's crucified or wounded body, and the way in which this is related to Blake's concept of the divine body as the imagination. Christ's body in the second half of the 1790s, it seems, is occasionally represented as indeed the opened body – an icon, in other words, of the entrance to the 'Divine Body of the Lord Jesus' (M3.4, E96) as a cognitive room. Thus NT264 (fig. 23), where the wounded Christ ascends over the two soldiers, might be understood as an invitation to the viewer to join Christ in his body, to move upwards with him through the gates of his flesh. And likewise, the immediately following Doubting Thomas in NT265 (fig. 24), together with the three 'Christ Appearing' images, might accentuate the same trope of entrance *to* Christ *through* Christ. Thereby, these early experiments with Christ's opened, and open, body might represent a crucial step in what is to become a dominant motif in Blake's thought: that of identifying Christ's body (which we can all partake in) with the imagination (which we can also all partake in), as seen in particular in the late engraving *Laocoön* (ca. 1826-27) – as already quoted above, 'The Eternal Body of Man is The IMAGINATION. that is God himself The Divine Body JESUS we are his Members' (E273).

The sense of Christ's wounds as entrance points or access points, drawing on the idea of the side wound as a 'womb of souls' out of which one is delivered into a new life, might thus be – I suggest – one perspective in which to understand the Man of Sorrows in *Night Thoughts*. Here, the womb-shaped nail wounds were even accompanied by flames of fire as a Blakean marker of transformation, rebirth,

or conversion – and the viewer is invited *into* Christ's grave with him, as well as *out of* the grave with him.³⁵⁵

For God himself enters Death's Door always with those that enter
And lays down in the Grave with them, in Visions of Eternity
Till they awake & see Jesus[.]
(M32.40-42, E132)

This grave is, then, also in itself a womb³⁵⁶ – a trope pointing towards the importance that comes to be placed on the act of self-annihilation in this process of rebirth in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.

There is, however, one problem with the Man of Sorrows in *Night Thoughts*: for the viewer, the nails block the access to Christ's body. These nails, although true to Young's text, only emphasize for the viewer the claustrophobic impression of there being no way out of the grave – an impression which is underlined by the engraving immediately following, which instead of offering relief from the image of the Man of Sorrows only emphasizes it, as the sun hides his face so as to not see the cross. With no immediately following depiction of Christ with the nails removed from the wounds – which would have made the open wounds accessible for the viewer – the nails (however hopeful and sustaining Young represents them in the text) *remain* pierced into Christ's wounds. And it is exactly from this ever-blocked access to Christ's body that Blake takes his cue when he later recycles the Man of Sorrows image in *The Four Zoas* – the work I have chosen as a contrary or opposite

³⁵⁵ Cf. Charles Wesley on the awakening of the man 'fast bound in sin and nature's night' in the hymn 'And Can it Be:' 'I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;/ My chains fell off, my heart was free;/ I rose, went forth, and followed thee' (quoted in Gorringe, *God's Just Vengeance*, 167).

³⁵⁶ Cf. the connection between the grave and the womb in *The Song of Los* discussed above (pp. 77-78).

vision to *Night Thoughts*, representing Blake's own version of nine long Nights in words and images.³⁵⁷

2.5 A contrary: The Man of Sorrows in *The Four Zoas*

Blake soon returned to the Man of Sorrows. By 1807, he had spent three years in Felpham under the (not always welcome) supervision of his new patron William Hayley, had been through a traumatic court case after having been accused of sedition, and had moved back to London. During this whole time he had with him the *Vala* manuscript (later renamed *The Four Zoas*), which he probably began in 1797 – the same year he finished the *Night Thoughts* engravings. Work on the manuscript happened in several stages which can be detected in great detail in the text – an interpretative method used by Andrew Lincoln³⁵⁸ – but I will simply note the overall shift from the manuscript appearing not particularly Christian to drawing heavily on explicitly Christian motifs. These late 'Christian' revisions consist chiefly of Night VIIb and additions to Nights VIII and IX and were probably made up until Blake finally left the manuscript around 1807.³⁵⁹ The creation story of *The Four Zoas* is thus significant, since it shows us Blake caught exactly between his

³⁵⁷ In *The Four Zoas*, Blake used a similar structure to *Night Thoughts*, as he divided it into nine 'Nights.'

³⁵⁸ Lincoln, *Spiritual History*.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 222. See also here for other additions to the manuscript. If Blake had renewed contact with Moravians between 1800 and 1807, and if this indeed influenced his depictions of Christ (as the bloody 1808 depiction of 'Michael Foretells the Crucifixion' versus the bloodless 1822 version could indicate), then it is just possible that there are even further experiments with Moravian tropes in *The Four Zoas* than the few I cover in the following – for example the crucifixion of Luvah in p. 92, upon which the narrator notes 'Is not the wound of the sword Sweet & the broken bone delightful' (92.36, E365); Enitharmon's song to Los in p. 34; and the recurrent references to Jesus as the Lamb of God. Such a Moravian reading of *The Four Zoas* might effect a reinterpretation of some of the sexualized motifs, for example the female genitalia in the images that are currently understood negatively as dramatizing 'the fear of female sexuality that Blake sees at the heart of patriarchy' (Andrew Lincoln, 'From *America* to *The Four Zoas*,' in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge, 2003), 221).

‘mythical’ period before ca. 1800, and his ‘Christian’ period after ca. 1800 (if we adopt the conversion paradigm)³⁶⁰ – and as the work represents Christ’s entering the scene as an active figure both in text and images in what would probably have been an illuminated book, had Blake ever finished it.

The first occurrence of the Man of Sorrows in *The Four Zoas* is in Night V, p. 59. This proof is the second state of the engraving and is very similar to the final engraved version in *Night Thoughts*.³⁶¹ As in *Night Thoughts*, Christ’s torso is covered by an inserted plate with text, but Young’s text has now been replaced by Blake’s, in his own handwriting. The image shows, according to Magno and Erdman, ‘Christ as almost as bewildered as Los, crucified with the black steel that is hammered not into a tree but into flames of wrath – the crucifixion that will be made an excuse for deadly vengeance’ (a description which supports the notion of Blake’s reservations towards the crucifixion).³⁶² However, what I am looking for in particular is indications of Blake using the image as an icon of rebirth or transformation, as this would support my earlier suggestion that the Man of Sorrows signifies the possibility of rebirth through Christ’s body. If we look towards the context of p. 59, then, the immediately preceding plate does in fact show a depiction of Enitharmon in labour, on which Magno and Erdman note that ‘Enitharmon was first drawn lying on her back, with the feet of Jesus – as Luvah, as Orc – standing on her belly. In the final position, this is more clearly illusory and her crossed legs indicate her resistance to penetration – or to giving birth.’³⁶³ In the text, the child

³⁶⁰ Lincoln discusses the problem of understanding Blake’s own ‘conversion’ in relation to ‘conversions’ in *The Four Zoas* such as Los’s (see for example Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 224, 289).

³⁶¹ Magno and Erdman, eds., *The Four Zoas*, 173. This features the most comprehensive discussion of the images in *The Four Zoas* in relation to the text.

³⁶² *Ibid.*, 58.

³⁶³ *Ibid.*

has significant connotations of Christ, as ‘The Enormous Demons’ hail the ‘new born king’ as ‘Luvah King of Love’ (but also as ‘King of rage & death’).³⁶⁴

The groans of Enitharmon shake the skies the labring Earth
 Till from her heart rending his way a terrible Child sprang forth
 In thunder smoke & sullen flames & howlings & fury & blood
 [...]

 The Enormous Demons woke & howld around the new born king
 Crying Luvah King of Love thou art the King of rage & death[.]
 (58.16-22, E339)

Thus the first Man of Sorrows is set within the context of a birth of a saviour-like child, namely Orc, who plays the role of the revolutionary child in Blake’s mythology (as well as representing a lower form of Luvah, another Christ substitute).³⁶⁵ The post-natal scene continues on p. 59 (with the Man of Sorrows), where Los assumes fatherhood of the child and ‘Enitharmon nursd her fiery child in the dark deeps’ (59.25, E340) – after which, on p. 60, the scene turns into the narrative known from *Book of Urizen* where Los, mad from jealousy and unsatisfied sexual desire, nails Orc to a mountain and reclaims Enitharmon for himself. This scene, of course, draws heavily on crucifixion tropes, from the nailing of Orc to Enitharmon’s reaction as the grieving mother who witnesses her son’s innocent suffering:

The Spectre dark
 Held the fierce boy Los naild him down binding around his limbs
 The accursed chain O how bright Enitharmon howld & cried
 Over her son.
 (60.27-30, E341)

Thus the Man of Sorrows illustration, with its large nails and exaggerated nail wounds, prefigures Orc’s innocent nailing in the text on the following plate.

³⁶⁴ Ibid., 59.

³⁶⁵ Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 309-10.

Similarly the flames surrounding the Man of Sorrows prefigure the following text: Orc is ‘fiery’ in 60.13 (E341), as the landscape in p. 59 was one of ‘consuming fire’ (59.11, E340) both in text and image. Finally, the trope of the womb (in the image reflected in the elliptical wounds) as an entrance into another reality is hinted at with the building of the city of Golgonooza in the following p. 60, which Magno and Erdman refer to as ‘a contracting structure [...] the gate of Golgonooza named Luban, the vagina, which opens into this world.’³⁶⁶ In this light, the Man of Sorrows image in p. 59 becomes an icon for the sub-narrative of Orc as the sacrificial child in pages 58-60, born out of Enitharmon’s womb (signified by the open elliptical nail wounds) only to later be nailed with the acceptance of his father (signified by the pierced hands and feet). At the same time, the plate functions as a spiritual response to the bloody birth of Orc in the text – Christ’s *lack* of blood in the image, his dried up wounds, and his calm gaze stand opposed to Enitharmon’s ‘groans’ and the ‘howlings & fury & blood’ of the birth.

The second Man of Sorrows occurs in Night VIII, p. 107. Although this proof version is very similar to p. 59, Blake has made Christ appear slightly more sorrowful as well as made his star-shaped halo a bit brighter. The plate is now set within a context of three consecutive full-page images of Christ, of which two are *Night Thoughts* proofs, and only the middle one, the Man of Sorrows, contains a significant amount of text. First p. 106 depicts the triumphant, resurrected Christ with side wound and nail wounds, which we recognize as the title page from *Night Thoughts* Night IV (31E, fig. 19). Then p. 107 shows the now well-known Man of Sorrows, and finally p. 108 (the only non-*Night Thoughts* image in the sequence)

³⁶⁶ Magno and Erdman, eds., *The Four Zoas*, 58.

depicts Christ's 'walking the earth,' as per Magno and Erdman.³⁶⁷ Thus, the sequence of images inverts the usual chronology of the salvation story, placing the resurrection (p. 106) before the grave (p. 107) and the grave before the life of Jesus (p. 108).

The reader arrives textually (as there is no text on p. 106) at this second Man of Sorrows directly from Los's curious confession in p. 105 'I also have pierced the Lamb of God in pride & wrath/ Hear me repeat my Generations that thou mayst also repent' (105.52-53, E380) – a similar motif to that found in Methodist hymns of the nails as made out of human sin: 'My sin gave sharpness to the nail,/ And pointed every thorn.'³⁶⁸ This confession corresponds with the human guilt in Young's Night IV, which was applied to each believer (and by extension to each reader), so that one could identify with the narrator when exclaiming 'For Guilt, not Innocence, His Life He pour'd;/ 'Tis Guilt alone can justify His Death' (IV.308-9). In between p. 105 and p. 107's Man of Sorrows, however, we have p. 106's triumphant, rising Christ (the title 'The Christian Triumph' has simply been removed, leaving an empty space), whose wounds Magno and Erdman now understand as indicators of newly won freedom: 'The unhealed wounds in feet and left breast [...] remind us [...] that slavery or crucifixion is not bypassed – but also assure us that Orc too shall become free.'³⁶⁹ Passing on from here to p. 107's Man of Sorrows, there are two points in particular to note. First, the crucifixion of Jesus is now represented within a perspective of history (or salvation history) rather than as in pages 58-60 set within a separate sub-narrative. History is here represented as always having

³⁶⁷ Ibid., 81. Magno and Erdman also understand these three illustrations as belonging together.

³⁶⁸ Quoted in Gorringe, *God's Just Vengeance*, 167.

³⁶⁹ Magno and Erdman, eds., *The Four Zoas*, 82. Magno and Erdman also connect the side wound with Los's wound in p. 48, when Enitharmon is torn from his side.

been in need of a redemptive death – although this is phrased as someone dying not for ‘man’ but for ‘Satan.’

And those in Eden sent Lucifer for their Guard
 Lucifer refusd to die for Satan & in pride he forsook his charge
 Then they sent Molech Molech was impatient They sent
 Molech impatient They Sent Elohim who created Adam
 To die for Satan Adam refusd but was compelld to die
 By Satans arts. Then the Eternals Sent Shaddai
 Shaddai was angry Pachad descended Pachad was terrified
 And then they Sent Jehovah who leprous stretchd his hand to Eternity
 Then Jesus Came & Died willing beneath Tirzah & Rahab
 Thou art that Rahab Lo the Tomb what can we purpose more[.]
 (107.42-51, E381)

Thus the Man of Sorrows is now set within a discussion of the reason for this crucifixion, which emphasizes Christ’s willing offer over against all those before him.

Second, the Man of Sorrows is to be understood within the context of Los’s confession or realization of the connection between his own guilt and Christ’s sacrifice for him. This confession forms part of Los’s realization of potential shared identity with Christ, which is crucial³⁷⁰ – and closely connected with Albion’s later realization of Christ’s nature and sacrifice in *Jerusalem*, namely that a true relationship with Christ is marked by mutual love and friendship. This revelatory moment in the narrative of *The Four Zoas*, both to Los and to the reader, is emphasized by the monumental impact that the three successive images of Christ give. From this perspective, the Man of Sorrows comes to have more of a revelatory function rather than standing as a monument over the scandal of the cross. The image represents a reality which Los, a character within the narrative, reacts affectionately to and adopts as truth (as Zinzendorf before the *Ecce Homo*), but it is

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 82.

not the end of Los's journey in *The Four Zoas*, only a significant step on the way. Thus Los's revelation is similar to Albion's revelation in *Jerusalem* pl. 76, where Albion *sees* for himself how Christ on the cross is similar to him – yet it is not until p. 96 that Albion fully internalizes this realization and acts on it, as he sacrifices himself for his 'Friend/ Divine' (96.31-32, E256) rather than the other way around.

The shared identity between man and Christ is also what is hinted at in the following p. 108, Christ 'walking the earth' – a sketch showing a bearded man with open, outstretched arms exactly mirroring the position of the resurrected, rising Christ in p. 106, to the extent that if the two images are placed on top of each other, they fit almost exactly. His body has no wounds, and the sketch, as Magno and Erdman note, is similar to depictions of Los throughout *The Four Zoas*, for example p. 116.³⁷¹ From one perspective, then, the figure is Christ, and from another, he is Los – or rather, he is Los seen in the light of Christ (a point emphasized by the depiction of the restored Los in the final design of this Night).³⁷²

The third appearance of the Man of Sorrows is on the very last plate of the penultimate Night VIII, p. 115. This version of the image is much closer to the early watercolour version than the two previously used in *The Four Zoas*: Christ looks directly towards his left pierced hand, his head is now in profile, and his eyes are smaller and less sorrowful (Magno and Erdman suggest that he seems to 'verge upon impatience if not wrath').³⁷³ Similarly, the blood or bloody sweat on his forehead is more accentuated here, whereas the nail wounds, still in the shape of a side wound, are still bloodless. Again, the image seems consciously related to the textual context on the previous plate. Here, the central theme is the grave, as first

³⁷¹ Ibid.

³⁷² Ibid.

³⁷³ Ibid., 86.

Enion – speaking from the grave herself – explains the sacrifice of the Lamb of God:

In pain he sighs in pain he labours in his universe
 Screaming in birds over the deep & howling in the Wolf
 Over the slain & moaning in the cattle & in the winds
 And weeping over Orc & Urizen in clouds & flaming fires
 And in the cries of birth & in the groans of death his voice
 Is heard throughout the Universe wherever a grass grows
 Or a leaf buds The Eternal Man is seen is heard is felt
 And all his Sorrows till he reassumes his ancient bliss[.]
 (114.21-28, E385)

Upon hearing these words, Los weeps,

And Los & Enitharmon took the Body of the Lamb
 Down from the Cross & placd it in a Sepulcher which Los had hewn
 For himself in the Rock of Eternity trembling & in despair[.]
 (114.30-32, E385)

Finally, to further qualify this scene as a real lamentation at the cross, a woman cries over him: ‘Jerusalem wept over the Sepulcher two thousand Years’ (114.33, E385). Thus the Man of Sorrows image depicts ‘the Lamb’ in the grave as the others are mourning outside. However, this sepulchre is not only a grave, it is also a birthplace – a locus in which birth and death are so closely interconnected that they almost occur simultaneously (‘in clouds & flaming fires/ And in the cries of birth & in the groans of death his voice/ Is heard’): the Man of Sorrows is not only dead, he is also just being born. This aspect might be underlined by the revelation motif in the text (‘John Saw these things Reveald in Heaven/ On Patmos Isle & heard the Souls cry out to be deliverd,’ 115.4-5, E385), making the overall impression of the Man of Sorrows image one of ‘a third blast of the trumpet,’ as Magno and Erdman

put it³⁷⁴ – a third and last view of Christ as the Man of Sorrows before the final revelation begins in Night IX.

Where the text on p. 107 described the dawning revelation of Los, the revelation on p. 115 is different: it addresses not the state or nature of one individual (Los), but the development from the entombment of Christ to the Deism and Natural Religion of Blake's time. Understood in this light, Christ's displeased gaze on the nail which is still pierced into his hand also comes to address his dissatisfaction with the way in which he is *still* crucified, albeit now to the concepts of Natural Religion and Deism, rather than to a physical cross. These misunderstood forms of Christianity leave no room for the mystery of the resurrection or for the reverted chronology of pages 106, 107, and 108 that once facilitated Los's revelation:

The Ashes of Mystery began to animate they calld it Deism
And Natural Religion as of old so now anew began
Babylon again in Infancy Calld Natural Religion[.]
(115.22-24, E386)

Thus Night VIII ends with a call for another spiritual rebirth or another retelling of the salvation story – and this is indeed where Night IX begins, once again situating the reader at the locus of the grave from p. 114. Here, in p. 117, we are met with a curious combination of the Emmaus narrative (Luke 24:13-53), the motif of Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus,³⁷⁵ and that popular Moravian topic of Doubting Thomas faced with the wounds of Christ. And this is where Blake finally seems to propose a release from the three hanging images of Christ or the Man of Sorrows in the grave – in revealing that although to their 'Phantom Eyes' (and also

³⁷⁴ Ibid.

³⁷⁵ Lincoln, *Spiritual History*, 123.

the viewer's eyes) Christ 'appear'd still in the Sepulcher,' he is *actually* present amongst them:

And Los & Enitharmon builded Jerusalem weeping
 Over the Sepulcher & over the Crucified body
 Which to their Phantom Eyes appear'd still in the Sepulcher
 But Jesus stood beside them in the Spirit Separating
 Their Spirit from their body. Terrified at Non Existence
 For such they deemd the death of the body. Los his vegetable hands
 Outstretchd his right hand branching out in fibrous Strength
 Siezd the Sun.
 (117.1-8, E386)

And this is the beginning of the final revelation of Night IX, 'A mighty sound articulate Awake ye dead & come' (117.12, E386) – but the Man of Sorrows from *Night Thoughts* has outplayed his role and does not occur again in this final Night.

The Four Zoas in its late incarnation is a monumental work³⁷⁶ written over many years and incorporating an encyclopaedic selection of themes, motifs, and references in an illustrated edifice, which even by Blakean standards is challenging and almost unstable in its structure and appearance: being unfinished, the order of the pages is still disputed, there are two 'Night VII' and more than one ending to Night I, and the mix of original sketches and *Night Thoughts* proofs give a mosaic-like visual impression. It is a work that draws lines far into the two Blake works begun around 1804, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. And above all is it a work which, as it appears now, incorporates 'the descent, crucifixion, resurrection, and second coming of Jesus'³⁷⁷ into what constitutes Blake's first attempt of exploring in epic form a movement from divided existence to regenerated unity – of the four Zoas

³⁷⁶ Including the revisions, the manuscript consisted of more than 4,000 lines. Also the sheer size of the leaves used for the manuscript was significantly larger than earlier (ca. 41 x 32 cm, as compared to the 23 x 17 cm of *America* and *Europe*, the largest of Blake's early works). These large sheets of paper were originally provided for the *Night Thoughts* illustrations (Bentley Jr., *Stranger from Paradise*, 197-98).

³⁷⁷ Lincoln, 'From *America* to *The Four Zoas*,' 224.

Tharmas, Urthona/Los, Luvah, and Urizen; of Albion, whose members the four Zoas are, and whose ‘Death and Judgement’ the work, as per its subtitle, describes;³⁷⁸ and of Los, ‘His fall into Divison & his Resurrection to Unity/ His fall into the Generation of Decay & Death & his Regeneration by the Resurrection from the dead’ (4.4-5, E301).

It soon becomes clear that awakening or rebirth plays a particular role in this movement towards unity, and that this awakening or rebirth is connected with the figure of Christ. It also becomes clear that it is connected with an enjoyment of the human body, as reflected in the explicitness of some of the illustrations: ‘The transformation allows a new delight in the body and a new sense of kinship with others to emerge, a new social fabric.’³⁷⁹ This ‘delight in the body’ is particularly present in the original sketches for the manuscript, which has a large proportion of images that make use of sexually explicit imagery. These images, however – as well as the sometimes likewise sexually explicit language – have a function within the narrative other than shocking or indeed ‘awaking’ the reader; they have meanings, even spiritual meanings, that go beyond the shock value and are valid and significant within the narrative. This is illustrated in one of the most striking sketches in the work, which occurs in Night III and depicts a naked woman with a gothic church covering her genital area (fig. 35). The implication here of a holy quality to the female genitals is significant with reference to rephrasing (female) sexuality as positive, as opposed to shameful or suppressed. But it also addresses the incarnated Christianity which does not only embrace the physical body to a certain extent, but embraces – indeed emphasizes – the *full* humanity of the divine;

³⁷⁸ ‘The torments of Love & Jealousy in The Death and Judgement of Albion the Ancient Man’ (E300).

³⁷⁹ Lincoln, ‘From *America* to *The Four Zoas*,’ 227.

as God says to Christ in *The Everlasting Gospel*, ‘Thou art a Man God is no more/ Thy own humanity learn to adore’ ([k]71-72, E520). And thus we return to a possible influence from the Moravian spirituality of the mid-eighteenth century, in which sexualized metaphors were not intended as a goal in themselves, but ultimately as a means to experience the joy of unity with the divine. The way to God – or the ‘Gates of Paradise,’ also the title of one of Blake’s works³⁸⁰ – the Moravians taught, was through the body: their own bodies as well as the body of Christ. This sexualized metaphorical language not only embraced images of male as well as female genitals, but also emphasized these loci as holy places – indeed, in exactly the same way as in Blake’s sketch, as chapels formed for worship.³⁸¹ Thus Zinzendorf notes on the genitals:

All this we have, that we may become Saviours in this World, Saviours of the Member of that Body, which the Lamb has instructed us, of that little Model of a Chappel of God, of that Vice-Church, where also something represents itself of the Members of Christ, as in us Men, who are the Head.³⁸²

These holy gates also appear in *The Four Zoas* at the very end of Night I as ‘the Inner gates of Enitharmons bosom,’ from where Los (if he was allowed) could ‘enter into Beulah thro her beautiful gates’ (22.2,7, E313) – a plate which is illustrated with an obvious outline of a large ‘womb’ (fig. 36), strikingly similar to the stylized side wound–womb of the Moravians and thereby suggesting once again that their visual alphabet was one that was readily available to Blake.³⁸³

³⁸⁰ First published as *For Children: The Gates of Paradise* in 1793 and then as *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* around 1820.

³⁸¹ Schuchard, *Why Mrs Blake Cried*, 40.

³⁸² Quoted in *ibid.*

³⁸³ The image is also reproduced in *ibid.*, 290.

Thus we have moved through the first perspective on Blake's conversion, namely as an entry to the body of Christ – an entry, as well as a body, which, as we saw, plays a role or occupies a space in Blake's works already from 1795 (and thus earlier than the period which is traditionally recognized as Blake's 'Christian' period). The chapter in particular raised three issues: 1) the problem of dividing Blake's works into 'mythological' and 'Christian,' 2) the suggestion that we investigate what is not there when discussing Blake's possible relation to the Moravians, and 3) the presence of Christ's body in Blake's work, not least the uncomfortable presence of his wounded and/or bleeding body. It also pointed out the tropes of blood and wounds are not necessarily interconnected or interdependent, even though they often occur together. Thus the significance of Christ's open wounds in Blake's works lies not in their testimony to the crucifixion, but elsewhere: in the joyful celebration of Christ's body as an entrance point to the 'Humanity Divine' (J96.37, E256), to the Gates of Paradise, and to the imagination.

3. 'TO PUT OFF SELF:' THE CONVERSION OF MILTON

Schreibe Für die Todten! für die, die du in der
Vorwelt lieb hast; denn sie kommen zurück als
Nachwelt!
– Herder³⁸⁴

But [Milton] could not be always in other worlds: he must sometimes revisit earth.
– Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Poets: Milton*³⁸⁵

My World is dead
A new World rises[.]
– Young, *Night Thoughts IV.45-46*

3.1 Introduction

Some years before Blake gave up working on *The Four Zoas*, he started working on the two illuminated books *Milton a Poem* and *Jerusalem The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, the engraving of which Blake probably began when he had returned to London from Felpham in 1804.³⁸⁶ Like *The Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem* are complex epic poems that combine the mythological universe of Blake's illuminated works from the first half of the 1790s with increasingly explicit references to Christian motifs, themes, and language. As I have already sought to show, it does

³⁸⁴ Quoted in Anders Holm, *Historie og Efterklang: en studie i N. F. S. Grundtvigs tidsskrift Dannevirke* (Odense, 2001), 75.

³⁸⁵ Samuel Johnson, *Lives of the Poets*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Oxford, 1977), 123.

³⁸⁶ Blake might have started working on both earlier than 1804, but today *Milton* is usually dated 1804-11 and *Jerusalem* 1804-20, based on the inclusion of the year '1804' on the title pages of both. Copies A, B, and C of *Milton* were finished ca. 1811, D was not finished until 1818, and up until 1818 six additional plates were executed – and no copy contains all plates available. The copy reproduced in the William Blake Trust 1993 edition is C, whereas Erdman's edition refers to Copy D (except for including the Preface which only occurred in A and B) – following, however, the page numbering established in *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (London, 1966). *Jerusalem* exists in ten copies, with A, C, and D being printed by Blake in 1820 – sixty plates (of one hundred) may, however, already have been completed by 1807. Copies B and E were printed the following year, Copy F printed in Blake's last year, 1827, and H-J are posthumous copies (The William Blake Archive, <http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/work.xq?workid=jerusalem&java=yes> (accessed 13 May 2012)).

not necessarily follow from this that Blake did not draw on and refer to the Christian myth in the early works – but it is only from *The Four Zoas*, and particularly in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, that it moves more explicitly to the foreground. Similarly, as we have just seen, Christ was already present in Blake’s commercial visual works (like the *Night Thoughts* illustrations) when he begins to be present in Blake’s own illuminated works. Nevertheless, *Milton* and *Jerusalem* represent a second phase in Blake’s production of illuminated works, in which explicitly Christian material is incorporated to a greater extent than it was before, both in text and images. ‘Jesus,’ for example, does not speak in first person at any length in the illuminated works before *The Four Zoas*, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*; there are no visual representations of the crucifixion in the illuminated works before *Jerusalem*; *Milton*’s Preface declares that ‘We do not want either Greek or Roman Models if we are but just & true to our own Imaginations, those Worlds of Eternity in which we shall live for ever; in Jesus our Lord’ (1, E95); and Blake himself (as mentioned in Part I) acknowledges the ‘Enthusiasm’ shown for ‘my Saviour and Lord’ in *Jerusalem*, which he hopes the reader will not ‘think presumptuousness or arroganc[e]’ (J3, E145). This development is perhaps reflected in Blake’s changing relationship with the Bible during the same period, after which – as Rowland notes – ‘a more positive engagement with the Bible as the prime source of his inspiration’ can be detected, though ‘the Bible *appropriately read*’.³⁸⁷ And though this new explicit use of Christian motifs, or turn to the Bible, need not necessarily denote a qualitative change in Blake’s relationship with Christianity – or in the importance of

³⁸⁷ Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 3. The hundred or more temperas and watercolours of biblical subjects that Blake produced for Butts between 1799 and 1809 also support the sense of an increased engagement with explicitly Christian motifs (B376-526). A significant number of Blake’s large colour prints from ca. 1795 (B289-329) also depicted biblical motifs, and also belonged to Butts’ collection.

the Christian myth to Blake's works – this new register hardly goes unnoticed by the reader of the illuminated works.

However, following gradually from the development illustrated with *Night Thoughts* and *The Four Zoas*, Christ plays a central role in *Milton*, and above all in *Jerusalem*: through him, we experience our own connectedness with the divine in the imagination (as a perceptual and spatial category), we see the now-central concept of forgiveness of sins practised and proclaimed, and we understand that the divine is not 'a God afar off,' but 'a brother and friend' (J4.18, E146). Christ is the ideal being, in whom divine and human are completely integrated and now represents a more personal and intimate perspective of Blake's Christianity. Here, the focus is less on the potentially repressive forces of institutional religion (as in the first half of the 1790s), and more on the possibility of a personal relationship with Christ and an overcoming of destructive forces. In other words, the possibility of happy regeneration and conversion has moved to the foreground. It is this particular strand – central to the plot of *Milton* – I am seeking out in this chapter.

The fundamental problem which *Milton* sets about to resolve is that Milton – 'Unhappy tho in heav'n' (2.18, E96) when the narrative begins – according to Blake never managed to fulfill his prophetic potential and become a fully integrated person when on earth. In his heavenly state his existence thus remains divided. Stirred on by the long introductory 'The Bard's Song,' Milton begins his descent back to earth and his quest for internal unity, which is described as union with his female counterpart, Ololon (whose parallel descent and pilgrimage is described in *Milton's* Book II).³⁸⁸ Milton's union is finally achieved through self-annihilation,

³⁸⁸ Her story in *Milton* is another narrative of conversion that I could have explored. Cf. the way in which Christian's pilgrimage in *Pilgrim's Progress* is followed by his wife Christiana's pilgrimage in the Second Part (see chapter 4).

also identified as the destruction of his Spectre/Satan, after which the collective conversion, ‘the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations’ (43, E144), can begin in the final plate. This collective conversion is never, however, consummated, as the narrative breaks off as it is about to begin. Part of Milton’s quest is to discover the inseparability between divine and human, as one of the historical Milton’s gravest misunderstandings, according to Blake, was his insistence on the separation between these two spheres:³⁸⁹ ‘Seek not thy heavenly father then beyond the skies,’ Milton is instructed (20.32, E114) – a point illustrated by his journey being figured as a *descent* from heaven to earth rather than as an ascent from earth to heaven.³⁹⁰

This is the fundamental plot of *Milton*. Around Milton’s steady progress, however, the narrative universe is unstable, fragmented, changing, and sometimes appears to have no grounding in time and space: the increasing disorientation of the reader in the book counterbalances, it seems, the increasing (re)orientation of Milton. Within the narrative space of *Milton*, everything comes together in a single moment, the present; the author becomes a character within the narrative, and obvious autobiographical references are included; a quest for restoration and unity comes about through encountering and internalizing text, as Milton moves from the Bard’s oral song to Jesus incarnated in writing, appearing in ‘a Garment dipped in blood/ Written within & without in woven letters’ (42.12-13, E143) towards the

³⁸⁹ See, for example, David Riede, ‘Blake’s Milton: On Membership in the Church Paul,’ in *Re-Membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*, ed. Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson (New York; London, 1987), 257-77.

³⁹⁰ Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 98. Thomas A. Vogler notes that Blake only uses the word ‘descent’ four times in his works, all of these in *Milton* (Thomas A. Vogler, ‘Re: Naming *Mil/Ton*’ in *Unnam’d Forms: Blake and Textuality*, ed. Nelson Hilton and Thomas A. Vogler (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London, 1986), 154). Generally in Blake, the direction from heaven to earth is predominant (similar to the New Jerusalem coming down from heaven in Rev. 21:2), although his poem known as ‘To my Friend Butts I write’ from a letter to Butts, 2 October 1800 (E711-14), has been understood as describing a visionary ascent to the heavenly world in the manner of Jewish and Christian apocalyptic texts (Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 133-36).

very end³⁹¹ – and all of this ends up creating a book which really seems only to describe the beginning of, or prelude to, *another* story, for *Milton* ends with a strong sense of new beginning rather than closure:³⁹²

The Ovens are prepar'd
The Waggon ready: terrific Lions & Tygers sport & play
All Animals upon the Earth, are prepar'd in all their strength[.]
(42.37-39, E144)

Milton is also preoccupied with the transformative power of writing and the figure of the poet as divinely inspired. This sense is underlined by the fact that, there is a stronger sense here than in many of the other illuminated works that the images are indeed *illustrations* of the text and refer directly to it not as contrary visions, but supporting and ever deepening the narrative of the text.³⁹³ Similarly, text and illustrations in the book, as well as in individual plates, seem to be separated to a greater degree than in other illuminated works, with more full-page illustrations and conversely more plates with only text, as well as clearer boundaries between what is text and what is illustration (for an example of Blake's previous lack of distinction, see the title page of *Songs of Innocence*, fig. 37). In *Milton*, Blake instead explores the transformative power of the *word*, and the power of one poet (Blake) to transform another poet (Milton) through writing: as The Bard's Song (the long poem within the poem) repeatedly states, 'Mark well my words. they are of your eternal salvation' (3.5, E96). And as 'Blake' himself breaks into the narrative and becomes involved in it, the boundaries between text, author, and characters within

³⁹¹ For more on orality and writing in *Milton*, see John B. Pierce, 'Rewriting Milton: Orality and Writing in Blake's *Milton*,' *Studies in Romanticism* 39.3 (2000): 449-70.

³⁹² For more on *Milton* as a prelude, see Thomas A. Vogler, *Preludes to Vision: The Epic Venture in Blake, Wordsworth, Keats, and Hart Crane* (Berkeley; Los Angeles; London, 1971), chapter 3.

³⁹³ A more contrary relationship between text and image was seen, for example, in the conversion of the angel in the text of MHH24 and the accompanying depiction of Elijah/Nebuchadnezzar.

the narrative are slowly challenged.³⁹⁴ In the penultimate plate, as we take leave of the other characters of the work also, we leave Blake as he ends up returned to the garden path outside his house in Felpham with trembling bones ‘To Resurrection & Judgment in the Vegetable Body’ (42.27, E143). This is, it seems, a narrator/character who (like Milton) has gone through an experience that has, or is about to, change his world fundamentally.³⁹⁵

Milton’s principal theme is the psychological and spiritual conversion of Milton. Thus it comes as no surprise that *Milton* has played a crucial role in scholarly reconstructions of Blake’s own conversion. Critics have often understood the new incorporation of explicitly Christian motifs as a reflection of Blake’s ‘conversion’ and have interpreted the ecstatic scenes in the book’s text and images as referring to Blake’s own visionary experiences in Felpham.³⁹⁶ The autobiographical perspective in *Milton* is also a crucial question for this study, since autobiography plays such a central role in foundational conversion narratives – explicitly in the case of texts such as *Confessions*, and more obliquely in allegorical conversion narratives, such as *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which are closer in style to *Milton*. Both *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Milton* are allegorical or mythical texts in which the route taken by the protagonist traveller determines the reader’s way through the book, and in which the voice or character of the narrator becomes more pronounced and present towards the end of the narrative. This view of *Milton* as

³⁹⁴ Blake does not refer to himself as ‘Blake’ in *Milton*, only (once) as ‘William’ (pl. 29). I, however, use the form ‘Blake’ in the following, unless I specifically want to stress the connection with the ‘William’ plate.

³⁹⁵ I discuss whether ‘Blake’s’ experience in *Milton* qualifies as a conversion below.

³⁹⁶ See for example Paley, ‘Truchsessian Gallery Revisited,’ 174, Hagstrum, ‘Christ’s Body,’ 154, Bentley Jr., *Stranger from Paradise*, 269, and Bryan Aubrey, *Watchmen of Eternity: Blake’s Debt to Jakob Boehme* (Lanham, 1986), 125-26. Also Blake’s relationship with Hayley in Felpham is generally understood to have influenced *Milton* and left autobiographical traces in it (for one example, see Mary Lynn Johnson, ‘Milton and its Contexts,’ in *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake*, ed. Morris Eaves (Cambridge, 2006), 236-37).

Blake's version of an allegorical conversion narrative or textual pilgrimage is not new, but has also been suggested by, for example, Norvig, who notes that it is clear that Blake 'thought of *Milton* as a conduct book for readers embarking on such a pilgrimage' as Milton's, quoting a letter to Butts from 1803:

I hope that all our three years trouble Ends in Good Luck at last & shall be forgot by my affections & only rememberd by my Understanding to be a Memento in time to come & to speak to future generations by a Sublime Allegory which is now perfectly completed into a Grand Poem[.]
(To Butts, 6 July 1803, E730)

Norvig continues:

As a "Memento in time to come," for himself and for "future generations," his own experiences need to be purged of their private emotional content [...] and transmuted into a symbolic statement – a spiritual autobiography that was simultaneously a "Sublime Allegory." This is precisely the motivation of Christian biography and allegory from the Book of Acts (on which so many Puritan autobiographies were modeled, including Bunyan's *Grace Abounding*) to Augustine's *Confessions*, Dante's *Commedia*, and *The Pilgrim's Progress*.³⁹⁷

As in *Pilgrim's Progress*, there are monsters to conquer on the way through *Milton*: Milton battles with his Spectre ('the Reasoning Power in every Man,' J54.7, E203), with Urizen, and with his selfhood to arrive at unity (insofar as these three can be separated). Meanwhile, the narrator battles with Milton, his grand poetic predecessor and perhaps father figure³⁹⁸ – and the reader, in turn, battles with the text and images of *Milton*, creatively and critically making sense of Blake in the

³⁹⁷ Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 98.

³⁹⁸ Blake's relationship with father figures generally appears complex, and it has been suggested that he and his father had a difficult relationship; it might be telling that Blake was always, the story goes, moved to tears by the parable of the prodigal son (Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth*, 269-72). Cf. the inclusion of a full-page illustration depicting Blake's brother 'Robert' in pl. 33 of *Milton*, as well as Blake's battle in Felpham with another father figure, Hayley, which was also reflected in *Milton* (Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, 'Introduction and Notes' in *Milton a Poem and the Final Illuminated Works: The Ghost of Abel, On Homers Poetry [and] on Virgil, Laocoön*, ed. Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi (Princeton, 1993), 28). A good reinterpretation of the Blake-Hayley relationship is found in Crosby, 'Sparks of Fire.' Cf. also Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York, 1973).

same way that Blake combatively makes sense of Milton within the work.³⁹⁹ All of these battles come together – along with the ongoing battle in Blake against God as distant lawgiver – in the striking illustration on pl. 15 (fig. 38): here, a young energetic man (seen from behind) is about to grab by the throat an elderly figure (‘Urizen’), who is bearded and seated behind two tablets of the Law. Below, a caption reads: ‘To Annihilate the Selfhood of Deceit & False Forgiveness’ (E807).

The central concepts of the selfhood and its annihilation represent the most significant development of the conversion mode in *Milton*, and I suggest here that they were probably at least in part inspired by Blake’s familiarity with the writings of Boehme. I therefore begin this chapter with an introduction to Boehme and the way in which he might have influenced Blake, for although Boehme’s influence on Blake is not limited to *Milton*, this is where we find the most obviously central Behmenist concepts playing a central role in a Blake work. As in my last chapter, this historically founded context does not serve a simply historical purpose; as much as it helps to outline a main influence on Blake, the purpose is to show not only how Boehme thought about conversion, but also how he staged it within his works as a possibility for the reader – a perspective which might in turn inform the way we think about *Milton* as a conversion work. After this introduction to Boehme, I will return again to *Milton*.

³⁹⁹ ‘Combatively’ is a term inspired by Riede, ‘Blake’s Milton,’ for example 258.

3.2 Jakob Boehme and Blake

Jakob Boehme (1575-1624) was born near Görlitz in Upper Lusatia.⁴⁰⁰ He grew up a Lutheran on the brink of the Thirty Years' War in an environment characterized by fierce discussions between Lutherans and Calvinists, and became a shoemaker. When Boehme was twenty-five, he experienced a sudden illumination or 'conversion:' first, when watching light reflecting in a pewter vessel, he experienced being possessed with 'Divine Light' and then, when going into a field for some air, he suddenly beheld 'the Wonder-workes of the Creator in the Signatures of all created things, very cleerly and manifestly laid open.'⁴⁰¹ Subsequently he embarked on a series of theological writings. His first work *Aurora* (or *Morgenröthe im Aufgang*, 'Morning glow ascending') took twelve years to write and was left unfinished, with Boehme later insisting that it should remain so.⁴⁰² When *Aurora* was put into circulation in 1612, the town authorities of Görlitz banned him from writing, a ban which Boehme initially observed. But in 1618 he took up writing again, and despite facing continued opposition from the local Lutheran pastor, Gregorius Richter, Boehme produced a large number of theological

⁴⁰⁰ Unless otherwise indicated, biographical information is from Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany, 1991).

⁴⁰¹ This was how his friend Abraham von Franckenberg described Boehme's experience. Quoted in Ariel Hessayon, 'The Teutonicks Writings: Translating Jacob Boehme into English and Welsh,' *Esoterica* 9 (2007), 133. Franckenberg's detailed description became legendary, and Behmenists did not seem to mind the fact that it did not originate from Boehme himself (Weeks, *Boehme*, 1-5). There are also, however, some references to the experience in Boehme's own works, in particular in *Aurora*, chapter 19. Here it is described (as recollected twelve years later) as ultimately indescribable, except for the fact that it was like a 'resurrection from the dead,' or a rebirth: 'the greatness of the triumphing [...] I cannot express, either in speaking or writing; neither can it be compared to anything, but to that wherein the life is generated in the midst of death, and it is like the resurrection from the dead' (19.11, William Law, ed. *The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher*, vol. 1 (London, 1763), 184). There are similarities here to Augustine's description of his mystical conversion experience in Ostia – see pp. 59-61. References to Boehme's works follow the numbering in the edition used.

⁴⁰² See Cecilia Muratori, 'Introduction,' in *Aurora Nascente*, ed. Cecilia Muratori (Milano, 2007), 60-67.

texts such as *The Three Principles of the Divine Essence* (1619), *Signatura Rerum* (1621), and *Mysterium Magnum* (1623). These were all circulated in manuscript form except for the treatise collection *The Way to Christ*, which was compiled by Boehme's followers and printed in 1624, the final year of his life. Boehme gained a considerable readership and left a definitive mark on German intellectual history, inspiring thinkers such as Schopenhauer, Schelling, and Hegel (who noted in *Lectures on the History of Philosophy* that with Boehme, philosophy 'first appeared in Germany with a character peculiar to itself').⁴⁰³ Boehme's works also soon appeared in English translations, many of them by John Sparrow and John Ellistone; and between 1645 and 1662, most of Boehme's works and letters were printed in English.⁴⁰⁴ He gained a considerable readership in England, which included, for example, radical theological thinkers such as Abiezer Coppe, Lodowicke Muggleton, and perhaps also Gerrard Winstanley, as well as established figures such as Philip Herbert (Earl of Pembroke), Charles I's daughter Elizabeth, and perhaps Charles I himself.⁴⁰⁵ Boehme's thought continued to be explored in England, for example with the Cambridge Platonists and the Philadelphian Society under the leadership of Jane Lead (1624-1704, who took over after John Pordage, another prominent English Behmenist), and several Boehme study groups were founded – a few of which later became Moravian societies.⁴⁰⁶

⁴⁰³ Quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 19.

⁴⁰⁴ Hessayon, 'The Teutonicks Writings,' 130.

⁴⁰⁵ For more on the reception of Boehme in England, see B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge, 1996) and Sarah Apetrei and Ariel Hessayon, eds., *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception* (London, forthcoming).

⁴⁰⁶ Podmore, *Moravian Church*, 99. There were indeed overlaps between Behmenist and Moravian circles (Rix, *William Blake*, 14). The Moravian minister Francis Okely, for example, was a friend of the prominent Behmenist William Law and also author of *Memoirs of the Life of Jacob Behmen* (1780) – he also, incidentally, became acquainted with Swedenborg and read his works, albeit with 'mingled disapproval and dissent' (Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 35). And Blake's friend Richard Cosway, who also had

One of the figures who came to play a crucial role in the reception of Boehme in England was the Anglican theologian and clergyman William Law (1686-1761).⁴⁰⁷ His edition of Boehme – mainly consisting of translations by Sparrow – was published posthumously with illustrations by Dionysius Andreas Freher (1649-1728), a German Behmenist who lived most of his life in London.⁴⁰⁸ This was the only English Boehme edition to be accompanied by Freher's designs, and the same edition that Coleridge owned.⁴⁰⁹ Blake must also have known the Law edition, as he commented on Freher's illustrations in 1825, calling Boehme 'a divinely inspired man,' praising 'the figures in Law's transl.n as being very beautiful,' and claiming that 'Mich:Angelo co^d not have done better.'⁴¹⁰ It is not difficult to see why Freher's illustrations might have appealed to Blake. The three designs appearing towards the end of Law's volume three are, for example, multilayered images with numbered flaps for the reader to lift in succession in order to move through the image. The first design moves from showing earth and the seven planets to showing man – then the reader, by lifting flaps within the man's heart, is taken through 'Fire,' 'Tincture,' 'Majesty,' and 'Ternarius,' to 'that incomprehensible Point, which is most significantly called NOTHING and ALL.'⁴¹¹

Apart from this, we do not know exactly which Boehme works Blake was acquainted with, although there are indications that he owned more than one

Moravian connections (see above p. 68) is said to have owned an original Boehme manuscript (Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (London, 1996), 151).

⁴⁰⁷ Law did not read Boehme until ca. 1733-35, so his famous *A Serious Call to a Devout and Holy Life* (1729) is not influenced by Boehme (E. Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688-1791* (Oxford, 1986), 234).

⁴⁰⁸ Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 15.

⁴⁰⁹ Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 26. Coleridge was given the edition by Thomas De Quincey and annotated it copiously (Timothy Morton, 'The Plantation of Wrath,' in *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution*, ed. Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (Cambridge, 2002), 67).

⁴¹⁰ As recounted by Crabb Robinson (BR, 423-24).

⁴¹¹ Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 101.

edition: in an 1864 letter, Frederick Tatham (who inherited many of Blake's books) noted that Blake owned 'a large collection of works of the mystical writers, Jacob Behmen, Swedenborg, and others,' but no specific titles are mentioned.⁴¹² Given the easy availability of Boehme's works in English, however, it is not hard to imagine that Blake would have owned other Boehme editions than the large Law edition – perhaps some of the cheap, readily-available collections of mystical or prophetic texts in which Boehme was often included.⁴¹³ He might also have known Boehme's works from early in life: although the first direct reference to Boehme does not appear until *The Marriage* (1790-93), a Behmenist influence has been suggested in *There is No Natural Religion* and *All Religions are One* (both 1788).⁴¹⁴

Nevertheless, Blake nowhere discusses Boehme critically, we have no annotated copy of Boehme belonging to him (as we do with Swedenborg),⁴¹⁵ and there are only two direct references to Boehme in Blake's works and known letters. The first is the passage from *The Marriage* already quoted in Part I (p. 69) in which Blake claims that any 'man of mechanical talents' could produce 'ten thousand volumes' of the same quality as Swedenborg's 'from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behmen,' and 'from those of Dante or Shakespear, an infinite number' (22, E43). Although this reference has occasionally been understood as a denigration of Boehme – placing him as a lesser poet than Dante and Shakespeare and claiming that any person of 'mechanical talents' could produce work of 'equal value' with

⁴¹² BR, 57. These were probably Boehme's works in English translation, although Tatham later in the same letter claims that Blake had 'a most consummate knowledge of all the great writers in all languages' (ibid., 57).

⁴¹³ Iain McCalman, ed. *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776-1832* (Oxford, 1999), 420.

⁴¹⁴ See now Wilson, *Life of William Blake*, 57.

⁴¹⁵ Blake annotated Swedenborg's *Heaven and Hell* in 1784, *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* in 1788, and *Divine Providence* in 1790 (see E601-11).

him⁴¹⁶ – the point seems to be rather the opposite: namely that even if a person of ‘mechanical talents’ produced these works, they would still only be like ‘a candle in sunshine’ (22, E43) and of inferior value to the originals.

Blake’s second direct reference to Boehme occurs in a letter to Flaxman from September 1800. In a poem that was included in the letter and intended to praise Flaxman, Blake lists some of his poetic-prophetic influences:

Milton lov'd me in childhood & shew'd me his face
 Ezra came with Isaiah the Prophet, but Shakespeare in riper years gave me
 his hand
 Paracelsus & Behmen appear'd to me.
 [...]
 The American War began[.]
 (To John Flaxman, 12 September 1800, E707-8)

As in the first reference, Boehme is mentioned together with Paracelsus, and together they are placed in the company of the poets Milton and Shakespeare and the prophets Ezra and Isaiah (all of whom Blake admired). Furthermore, Blake now in an autobiographical manner lists these names as sources of inspiration – early sources of inspiration, that is, since Blake appears to have known them from before the American Revolutionary War began in 1775 (when he was seventeen).⁴¹⁷

Thus Boehme’s influence in Blake’s works is not primarily found in direct references, but as an integrated part of Blake’s universe. In order to show this, we will first look at some examples of the more specific or easily identifiable traces.⁴¹⁸ The ‘abyss,’ for example, which is a recurrent term in Blake’s works, seems to draw

⁴¹⁶ See, for example, Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 40.

⁴¹⁷ Sklar, *Blake’s Jerusalem*, 29.

⁴¹⁸ For more on the similarities between Blake and Boehme, see Aubrey, *Watchmen*, Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 2 vols., vol. 1 (Princeton, 1969), Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought*, 190-204, Marsha Newman, “‘Milton’s Track’ Revisited: Visual Analogues to Blake’s Vortex in the ‘Law Edition’ of Boehme,” *Interdisciplinary Literary Studies* 5.2 (2004): 73-93.

on Boehme's concept of the *Ungrund* (of which 'abyss' was the English translation).⁴¹⁹ Also, they both explore a degree of monism and reject theological dualism: the wrathful God of Fire is a central image in Boehme, in whose works 'God calls Himself a strong, jealous God and a consuming fire' ('The First Treatise of True Repentance' 49),⁴²⁰ just as Blake – as mentioned earlier – notes that 'God out of Christ is a Consuming Fire' (*Epitome Hervey*, E691). Also the idea of the universe as one body and of Christ being present everywhere occurs in both Boehme and Blake, a notion connected with the Kabbalistic idea of Adam Kadmon.⁴²¹ Both show what we might call an apocalyptic understanding of spiritual revelation as connected with the use of spiritual sight or the spiritual senses, and as being always accessible: in Boehme, Paradise 'is only withdrawn from our Sight and our Source; for if our Eyes were opened, we should see it' (*Aurora* 10.98),⁴²² whereas Blake attempts through art to 'open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes/ Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity' (J5.18-19, E147). Both also operate with the idea of the prelapsarian subject as androgynous, a state which is to be acquired again after the resurrection; in Boehme, Adam 'was neither man nor woman, just as we will be neither after our resurrection' (*Three Principles* 10.18),⁴²³ as in Blake the sexes were only divided with the fall and will only be reunited when humanity is restored, as exemplified

⁴¹⁹ 'Abyss' occurs, for example, in Edward Taylor's explanatory list of Boehme terms 'Some Words used by *Jacob Behmen* explained near to his deep Sense,' where it is defined as 'an Infinity peculiar only to each of the Three Principles' (Edward Taylor, *Jacob Behmen's Theosophick Philosophy Unfolded* (London, 1691)).

⁴²⁰ Jacob Boehme, *The Way to Christ*, trans. Peter Erb (New York; Ramsey; Toronto, 1978), 60. Erb uses the translation 'on True Repentance,' but I, for the sake of clarity, continue to use Law's title 'Of True Repentance' (Law's edition being probably the closest we get to a standard English edition). The numbering of text sections also varies between Erb and Law, and they disagree on which treatises to include in *The Way to Christ* and in which order.

⁴²¹ Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 98-120.

⁴²² Quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 64.

⁴²³ Quoted in Weeks, *Boehme*, 116.

indeed in *Milton*.⁴²⁴ Both emphasize that transformation and judgment happen *within* the hearts of each subject, and that the divine reality, or Christ, is likewise present *within*, not *without*:

The holy Man hath his Church about him every where, even in himself; for he always standeth and walketh, sitteth and lyeth down in his Church. He liveth in the true Christian Church; yea, in the Temple of Christ. The Holy Ghost preacheth to him out of every Creature. Whatsoever he looketh upon, he seeth a Preacher of God therein.

(‘Of Regeneration or the New Birth’ 6.152)⁴²⁵

Blake and Boehme also both insist on directing their works to the heart as opposed to the head (reflected in Coleridge’s comment in *Biographia Literaria* that Boehme ‘contributed to keep alive the heart in the head’ in him),⁴²⁶ and place the imagination in a central role in the awakening or conversion of the subject. They share an ecumenical focus on the eschatological brotherhood as encompassing all fallen divisions – a view which was also central to the Moravians, who of course originated from the same region as Boehme (a region characterized by considerable religious diversity and a pronounced mystical influence).⁴²⁷ Blake and Boehme both

⁴²⁴ Fuller, ed. *William Blake*, 302. The division of the sexes is illustrated in *Book of Urizen*, chapter V. The restoration of the united subject is illustrated in the penultimate plate (99) of *Jerusalem*, where the divine form embraces an androgynous figure representing the human subject, perhaps a related figure to Boehme’s ‘masculine Virgin’ (*Of the Election of Grace* 5.116, William Law, ed. *The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher*, vol. 4 (London, 1763), 191).

⁴²⁵ Law, ed. *Works of Jacob Behmen*, 4:64.

⁴²⁶ ‘The writings of these Mystics [George Fox, Boehme, and Law] acted in no slight degree to prevent my mind from being imprisoned within any single dogmatic system. They contributed to keep alive the heart in the head; gave me an indistinct, yet stirring and working presentment, that all the products of the mere reflective faculty partook of DEATH’ (Coleridge, *Biographia Literaria or Biographical Sketches of My Literary Life and Opinions*, 152).

⁴²⁷ As Boehme put it: ‘*There is but one God*; but when the veil is put away from thy eyes, so that thou seest and knowest *him*, then thou wilt also see and know *all* thy brethren, whether they be *Christians, Jews, Turks, or Heathen*’ (*Aurora* 11.58, quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 68). Cf. the structure of *Jerusalem* as divided into the chapters ‘To the Public,’ ‘To the Jews,’ ‘To the Deists,’ and ‘To the Christians,’ and the radical title of one of Blake’s early works, *All Religions are One*. For more on the particular religious history of Boehme’s home region, see Weeks, *Boehme*, chapter 1.

express a devaluation of formal education, insist on the spiritual capacity of children,⁴²⁸ insist on their own works as being anti-elitist and accessible, operate with the concept of a fallen divine language that will one day be restored to man, and share the idea of different spheres of the universe relating dynamically and energetically to each other (as reflected in Blake's concept of positive contraries). In short, both valued creation and change over stagnation, and energy and imagination over reason – although both also admitted that reason should not be abolished altogether, but only allocated its proper place alongside creation or 'energy.'⁴²⁹ Following from this, both Boehme and Blake understand the imagination as closely related to form, organisation, image, and articulation⁴³⁰ – as Blake puts it in his *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809):

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 moral 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.
(37, E541)

And finally both Boehme and Blake operate with the notion that continual self-annihilation is a crucial waypoint towards an integrated existence with the divine being – as the English Behmenist Edward Taylor wrote in 1691 on 'The Great affair of Man's Happiness depending upon the Conversion of his Will:' 'It is real Resignation that brings a Death upon Self-hood, and that must continually be

⁴²⁸ Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 59.

⁴²⁹ In Blake's works this point is illustrated most clearly in *Jerusalem* 98, where the trio that he usually uses to represent reason – Bacon, Newton, and Locke – are taken up in the heavenly chariot together with the representatives of imagination Milton, Shakespeare, and Chaucer.

⁴³⁰ Weeks, *Boehme*, 151-52.

performed.⁴³¹ This last point of continual ‘resignation,’ or conversion, was, as also mentioned in Part I, particularly emphasized by later Behmenists – amongst them William Law who was famously criticized by John Wesley, advocating instead an instantaneous New-Birth. According to Law, ‘regeneration is not to be considered as a thing, done, but as a state that is progressive, or as a thing, that is continually doing,⁴³² to which Wesley replied:

A child is born of a woman in a moment, or at least in a very short time. Afterwards he gradually and slowly grows, till he attain to the stature of a man. In like manner, a child is born of God in a short time, if not in a moment. But it is by slow degrees that he afterward grows up to the measure of the stature of Christ.⁴³³

For the Behmenists, however, continual conversion and regeneration equalled a dynamic relationship with the divine – in fact, it ultimately denoted ‘true Christianity:’

The true new Regeneration in the Spirit of Christ is always new; and that continually and successively renewed, if indeed it be true, not as the natural Birth of Children into this World [...] but rather as the growing of the Embrio in the Womb to a formed, animated, perfect Child: Nor as an Arrow flying through by the force of its first push, but as a Ship sailing through successive Perils, and always returning to its latitude from various aberrations, and passing through raging Surges, as over so many Deaths. [...] For the Lord himself teacheth, saying to his Disciples, who none doubts were before that converted, Except ye be converted, and become as this little Child, ye cannot enter into the Kingdom of God: [...] Conversion upon Conversion is true Christianity.⁴³⁴

⁴³¹ Edward Taylor, *Jacob Behmen's Theosophick Philosophy Unfolded* (London, 1691), Publisher's Preface. The ‘resigned’ will is Boehme's positive term for the will that has given up selfhood and surrendered itself to the divine.

⁴³² William Law, *The Grounds and Reasons of Christian Regeneration, or, the New-Birth: Offered to the Consideration of Christians and Deists*, Fourth ed. (London, 1756), 38, 73. Later in the text, Law uses ‘conversion’ and ‘awakening’ synonymously (48, 93).

⁴³³ John Wesley, *The New-Birth: A Sermon on John iii.7. “Ye Must Be Born Again”* (London, 1797), 11.

⁴³⁴ Edward Taylor, *Jacob Behmen's Theosophick Philosophy Unfolded* (London, 1691), 186.

Similarities notwithstanding, there are also notable differences between Boehme and Blake. The central place that Boehme gives to natural religion and the way in which God's plan and wonder is revealed in nature, for example, is not generally reflected in Blake. Where Boehme drew heavily on – and frequently referred to – nature in *Aurora* (in its subtitle also called 'a Description of Nature'),⁴³⁵ Blake generally insists on human form over nature's formlessness: 'Where man is not nature is barren' (MHH10, E38). These differences are not clear-cut, however: Blake in a later letter noted that 'to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself' (To Trusler, 23 August 1799, E702) and famously described seeing 'a World in a Grain of Sand/ And a Heaven in a Wild Flower' (*Auguries of Innocence* 1-2, E490), whereas Boehme could note that 'in Man lyes all whatsoever the Sun shines upon, or Heaven contains, as also Hell and all the Deeps' (*Of the Election of Grace* 13.79).⁴³⁶ For both, then, nature and human form are intimately connected and mutually reveal each other, if perceived in the right perspective – but Boehme still expresses this with a more pronounced emphasis on, and more imagery drawn from, the natural world than Blake.

Boehme also places a greater emphasis on the concept of sin than Blake, in whose works the term is notably absent and where the concept of moral sin is generally abandoned – the closest we get to a concept of sin is probably 'error,' in particular from *The Four Zoas* onwards.⁴³⁷ Where Boehme, for example, in 'Of Regeneration' notes that 'we find of ourselves that Sin is living, lusting, strong, and

⁴³⁵ The full title in Sparrow's translation, and thus also in Law, is *Aurora. That is, the Day-Spring. Or Dawning of the Day in the Orient Or Morning-Redness in the Rising of the SUN. That is The Root or Mother of Philosophy, Astrology & Theology from the true Ground. Or a Description of Nature.*

⁴³⁶ Quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 67.

⁴³⁷ Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth*, 249. See Jeanne Moskal, *Blake, Ethics, and Forgiveness* (Tuscaloosa; London, 1994), chapter 2, for a discussion of error and forgiveness in Blake. Moskal, however, sets error more in relation to evil than to sin.

powerfully working in the Flesh, and therefore it must be somewhat else, which doth not co-operate with Sin in the Flesh, nor willeth it, that is the New-Birth in Christ' (1.7),⁴³⁸ Blake states that 'Satan thinks that Sin is displeasing to God he ought to know that Nothing is displeasing to God but Unbelief & Eating of the Tree of Knowledge of Good & Evil' (VLJ90, E564), and 'The Gospel is Forgiveness of Sins & has No Moral Precepts' (*Ann. Watson* 108, E619). Finally, the image of the cross appears much more frequently in Boehme's works than in Blake's, even with previous chapter's discussion in mind. Here, it is often represented as a topographical marker of a saving reality that Boehme as well as the reader can navigate after: 'I fly to You under Your cross,' Boehme writes, typically, in 'Of True Repentance' (44).⁴³⁹

Partly owing to a pronounced element of inaccessibility in both Blake and Boehme as well as to their difference in style and form, exact differences, overlaps, and similarities between the two (for example with regards to theological particulars) can be hard to tease out – as Foster Damon laconically put it, Boehme's influence on Blake is 'generally overlooked, because Behmen is hard reading.'⁴⁴⁰ These difficulties should not, though, disturb the overall observation that Boehme had a considerable impact on Blake's imaginative world. It is clear that something in Boehme struck a deep chord in Blake and helped shape not only the minute particulars of Blake's universe, but also more fundamental structures in Blake's thought: his theological anthropology, his views on God and Christ, and his emphasis on the imagination's place (and thereby the place of literature and art that stirs the imagination) in the spiritual development of the subject. Finally, Boehme

⁴³⁸ Law, ed. *Works of Jacob Behmen*, 4:49.

⁴³⁹ Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 53.

⁴⁴⁰ Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 40.

might not only have helped shape the content of Blake's books, but also their form and intention (insofar as it is possible to speak of this) – in other words, Boehme might have helped to shape Blake's idea of what a book can do and be.⁴⁴¹ Both Boehme and Blake produced books that are meant to stir the reader towards a spiritual and intellectual awakening through the act of reading – to stage a meeting between text and reader in the reading present, or 'Eternal Now' (*Annotations to Lavater* 407, E592), where an opening of the reader's 'Center' (FZ98.11, E370) can take place.⁴⁴² This experience is available to all readers regardless of social standing and level of knowledge, for, as Boehme characteristically writes, 'if you would understand the High Mysteries, you need not first put an Academy on your nose, nor use any such Spectacles.'⁴⁴³ Or as Blake writes in one of his letters to Trusler:

I am happy to find a Great Majority of Fellow Mortals who can Elucidate My Visions & Particularly they have been Elucidated by Children who have taken a greater delight in contemplating my Pictures than I even hoped. Neither Youth nor Childhood is Folly or Incapacity Some Children are Fools & so are some Old Men. But There is a vast Majority on the side of Imagination or Spiritual Sensation[.]
(To Trusler, 23 August 1799, E703)

Despite the insistence on the accessible form and value of their own works, both writers have been accused of producing difficult works, bordering on the inaccessible. The style and character of their works thus stand in contrast to the readability that both insisted on, and the spiritual transformation that the act of reading could potentially lead to, 'that the formes and conceived word in God's children' (writes Boehme) 'may be stirred up, whetted and exercised, and the truth

⁴⁴¹ This formal and stylistic similarity between the two has not been sufficiently critically explored yet – see, however, Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, chapter 4.

⁴⁴² Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 131. For the 'opening of the center' trope in Blake and Boehme, see Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 2 vols., vol. 2 (Princeton, 1969), 151-71, and Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 131-34.

⁴⁴³ Quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 25.

come forth to light' (*Mysterium Magnum* 22.55).⁴⁴⁴ At the same time, this very inaccessibility (in particular in Boehme, whose works Gordon Rupp characterized as 'a superior science fiction rather than philosophy')⁴⁴⁵ has been praised as being particularly suited for the purpose of stirring up the reading subject. William Law, for example, noted of Boehme:

Though I have been reading for more than two years some one or other of his books with the utmost attention [...] yet presently I am led into such depths as I know not where I am and talked to in such a new, intricate, and unintelligible language as seems quite impossible to be comprehended. Sometimes I almost suspect that the author understood not himself.⁴⁴⁶

Or as the early English Behmenist Durant Hotham described the experience of reading Boehme in 1650: 'Me thought the reading of him was like the standing upon a precipice or by a cannon shott off, the waft of them lickt up all my brains.'⁴⁴⁷

Both Boehme and Blake, indeed, use personal and experimental styles of writing.⁴⁴⁸ According to Boehme, his writing was especially intended to hit the divine chord within the reader – not in order to convey religious information, but to awaken what was already present within: 'I will so write in a divine, and also in a creaturely Way, that I might stir up any one to desire and long after the Consideration of the high Things' (*Three Principles* 2.5). Likewise Blake writes to Trusler:

⁴⁴⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 64.

⁴⁴⁵ Rupp, *Religion in England*, 233.

⁴⁴⁶ Quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 21.

⁴⁴⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁴⁴⁸ William Law noted on Boehme's style that it 'is what it is, strange and uncommon; not because he wanted learning and skill in words, but because what he saw was quite new and strange, never seen or spoken of before; and therefore if he was to put it down in writing, words must be used to signify that which they had never done before' (quoted in *ibid.*, 62-63).

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

(To Trusler, 23 August 1799, E702)⁴⁴⁹

The form, language, and style of Blake's and Boehme's works are thus closely connected with the message that the works communicate. Thus, for example, Boehme figures his *The Way to Christ* as a pilgrimage for the reader through increasingly difficult texts, complete with directions to the traveller from the narrator. And conversely, the cleansing of 'the doors of perception' (MHH14, E39) in *The Marriage* is conveyed through the surprising conversion of a central character, an angel, to its diametrical opposite and a series of textual interruptions that force the reader to constantly stop for re-orientation. Both Blake and Boehme thus work on the assumption that their books should be entered imaginatively and experientially,⁴⁵⁰ and Boehme even that they can bring damnation upon the reader if not entered with good intentions – here from the Preface to 'Of True Repentance:'

If you wish to use this little book correctly, and are in earnest, you will truly know its value. However, I wish to warn you if you are not in earnest, leave untouched the precious Names of God [...] This little book belongs only to those who wish eagerly to repent, and who have a desire to begin. They will experience both the words that are in it and the source that gave rise to them.⁴⁵¹

The conversion of the reader, then, consists not so much of acceptance of particular religious points, but of the opening of him or her, the rousing of the faculties to act, and the turning of the reader's gaze to himself or herself in a search for the revelation of divine being: as Blake put it in *Jerusalem*, 'There is a Throne in every

⁴⁴⁹ Cf. however Blake's annotations to *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* (1798): 'Obscurity is Neither the Source of the Sublime nor of any Thing Else' (194, E658).

⁴⁵⁰ For a reading of *Jerusalem* in this perspective, see Sklar, *Blake's Jerusalem*.

⁴⁵¹ Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 27.

Man, it is the Throne of God' (30.27, E176). This revelation is potentially available for everyone and everywhere, but is at the same time indescribable and therefore, by definition, not prescriptive. The works of both Blake and Boehme, then, work towards a revelatory experience in the reading present, like a veil being drawn or a gate being opened, not towards a gradual, slow growing in Christ (in the manner of, for example, Augustine) – here explained by Boehme with reference to his own illumination:

The gate was opened unto me, that in one quarter of an hour I saw and knew more than if I had been many years together at a University; at which I did exceedingly admire, and I knew not how it happened to me; and thereupon I turned my heart to praise God for it[.]

(To Caspar Lindner on the Attainment of High Knowledge)⁴⁵²

This insistence on the transformative, or prophetic,⁴⁵³ potential of language in both Blake and Boehme refers (besides possible personal experience) also to their shared idea of an original divine language now lost – the *Natursprache*, as Boehme terms it. As Blake puts it: ‘All had originally one language, and one religion, this was the religion of Jesus, the everlasting Gospel’ (*Descriptive Catalogue* 44, E543).⁴⁵⁴ In both, this original divine language has been disturbed and forgotten, so that (in Boehme’s words) ‘men understand nothing at all more of the Holy Ghost’s language, what the spirit of God hath spoken in Moses and the Prophets’

⁴⁵² Robin Waterfield, ed. *Jacob Boehme: Essential Readings* (Wellingborough, 1989) 63-64.

⁴⁵³ For the use of the term in relation to Boehme, see Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, chapter 3.

⁴⁵⁴ For more on the trope ‘the everlasting gospel’ – also the title of Blake’s work from ca. 1818 – within early modern mystical and radical traditions, see Thompson, *Witness against the Beast*, Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, in particular 159-60, Rix, *William Blake*, 13-17, and Makdisi, *Impossible History*. The concept is based on Rev. 14:6 and was developed by Joachim of Fiore.

(*Mysterium Magnum* 60.49-50).⁴⁵⁵ As the divine spirit within is rediscovered, however, there is a possibility that the prophetic language can be restored. In Blake, this is envisioned at the end of *Jerusalem*, where (in the vision of the restored world) it is again possible to communicate directly – and moreover, to communicate without words – in the original divine language:

And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright
Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions
In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect
Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine
Of Human Imagination[.]
(98.28-32, E257-58)

In other words, when formerly separated subjects join in the divine *Raum* of Christ's body – 'The Imagination/ [...] JESUS we are his Members' (*Laocoön*, E273) – direct communication is restored, and the intermediary function of art and literature is no longer needed. This direct 'conversing' in the restored world is set up against 'talking' in *A Vision of The Last Judgment*, making the point even more clear: 'Here they are no longer talking of what is Good & Evil or of what is Right or Wrong & puzzling themselves in Satans [*Maze*] Labyrinth But are Conversing with Eternal Realities as they Exist in the Human Imagination' (90, E562).

The works of both Boehme and Blake, in other words, are attempts to rediscover the *Natursprache* in each reader, not as a memory of a distant past, but in the present 'Eternal Now' – and reading (and with regards to Blake, engaging with images) comes to represent a possible way into this rediscovery. In this sense, both Boehme and Blake create conversion books, as they use language, art, and the

⁴⁵⁵ Quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 54. An equivalent to this is Blake's description of the gradual shrinking of the human race in the creation story of *Book of Urizen*: 'The remaining sons of Urizen/ Beheld their brethren shrink together/ Beneath the Net of Urizen;/ Perswasion was in vain;/ For the ears of the inhabitants,/ Were wither'd, & deafen'd, & cold:/ And their eyes could not discern,/ Their brethren of other cities' (28.11-18, E83).

stirring of the reader's imagination as a means towards a revelation of the divine reality and being within each person – and in both, this transformation or conversion is aimed at through different formal, stylistic, and narrative experiments. To illustrate Boehme's different attempts of staging this readerly conversion, I will now look more closely at one of his earliest and one of his last works: the manuscript *Aurora* and the treatise 'Of True Repentance' from *The Way to Christ*.

As mentioned, Boehme later insisted on the unfinished nature of *Aurora*, as he came to argue that *Aurora* represented only the first step in the spiritual development of the reader – being unfinished, it could more clearly point the reader towards subsequent works, in which Boehme's vision was more clearly articulated:

There wants about Thirty Sheets to the End of it. But seeing the Storm has broken them off, therefore it was not finished; and in the mean while it is come to be Day, so that the Morning-Redness [that is the Aurora] is passed away, and since that Time, the Work has gone on by Day. And it shall so stand, for an eternal Remembrance, seeing the Defect herein is supplied in the other Books.

(*Aurora* 27)⁴⁵⁶

Aurora is particularly interesting because it is the first work from Boehme's hand, and because it deploys explicitly autobiographical references to his illumination within the text. It is also, even by Boehme's standards, an exceptionally labyrinthine and difficult work, characterized by Andrew Weeks as 'the ruin of an unfinished edifice' – Weeks continues, 'examining its floorplan, one might doubt that it could ever have been completed.'⁴⁵⁷ The text is presented as having agency in itself and of soliciting a relation between narrator and reader in which – through the act of reading – there is 'comfort' for the reader in the spiritual pilgrimage that lies ahead

⁴⁵⁶ Law, ed. *Works of Jacob Behmen*, 1:269. Cf. the way that the ending of *Milton* seems to prepare the reader for another experience rather than offering closure for an experience.

⁴⁵⁷ Weeks, *Boehme*, 62.

for him or her, just as there is company (represented by the presence of the narrator in the text) for him or her: ‘I write,’ says Boehme,

not for mine own glory, but for a *comfort* to the Reader, so that if perhaps he be minded to walk with me upon my *narrow* bridge, he should not suddenly be discouraged, dismayed and distrustful, when the gates of hell and God’s wrath meet him, and *present* themselves before him.
(*Aurora* 19.22)⁴⁵⁸

The autobiographical references to Boehme’s own experience both give authority to his pronouncements on spiritual matters, and help to point out the direction for the spiritual wayfarer (although further signposts are, contrary to *The Way to Christ*, absent from the text that follows). That Boehme deploys autobiographical references in *Aurora* with the reader’s *future* spiritual experience in mind, rather than the narrator’s *past* experience, should become clear if we compare the longer reference to Boehme’s illumination in chapter 19 with Franckenberg’s hagiographical account of it (in which Boehme, rather than Boehme’s reader, is the focus).⁴⁵⁹ In *Aurora*, Boehme describes his initial sense of melancholy, the sudden and indescribable illumination, and last but not least his ‘impulse’ – after the experience – to communicate its content to others:

I fell into a very deep Melancholy and heavy sadness, when I beheld and contemplated the great Deep of this world [...] no Scripture could Comfort or satisfie me [...] Suddenly [...] my spirit did break through the Gates of Hell, even into the innermost Birth or Geniture of the Deity, and there I was embraced with Love, as a Bridegroom embraceth his dearly beloved Bride. But the greatnesse of the triumphing [...] I cannot expresse either in speaking or writing: neither can it be compared with any thing, but with that, wherein the life is generated in the midst of Death, and it is like the Resurrection from the Dead. In this light my spirit suddenly saw through all, and in and by all the Creatures even in Herbs and Grasse it knew God, Who

⁴⁵⁸ Quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 63.

⁴⁵⁹ For another longer autobiographical account of the experience, see the letter to Caspar Lindner (in Waterfield, ed. *Jacob Boehme*, 62-81).

he is, and How he is, and What his will is: and suddenly in that light my will was set on by a Mighty impulse, to describe the Beeing of God.
(*Aurora* 19.5-13)⁴⁶⁰

Franckenberg, writing in 1651, on the other hand, dwells much more on details and much less on conveying the mystical experience, which is designed to enable the reader to recognise it, should it occur. Here from the translation of Franckenberg's account, as it appears in the Moravian minister Francis Okely's *Memoirs* of Boehme:

He [Boehme] was in the Beginning of the 17th Century, viz. 1600, being in the 25th Year of his Age, enraptured a second Time⁴⁶¹ with the Light of God, and [...] by means of an instantaneous Glance of the Eye cast upon a bright Pewter-Dish, [...] introduced into the innermost Ground or Center of the [...] hidden Nature, Being however somewhat dubious, in Order to rid his Mind of such a supposed imaginary Conceit, he went to the Green [...] where, in Spite of all his Efforts to the contrary, this Sensation of the Glimpse he had received grew stronger and stronger in him continually; to such a Degree, that by Means of the Signatures formed upon them, or by their Figures, Lineaments, and Colours, he was enabled to look as it were into the Heart and into the most intimate Nature of all the Creatures.
(Franckenberg 10-11)⁴⁶²

However, Boehme is not in Franckenberg's version overwhelmed by a desire to share his experience. Instead, he keeps it to himself:

⁴⁶⁰ Jacob Boehme, *Aurora*, trans. John Sparrow (London, 1656), 425-27. Hagstrum actually refers to Boehme's illumination in the 1965 article that launched the narrative of Blake's conversion. He, however, connects the experience with the much later (1622) *Signatura Rerum* ('that most Blakean book'), not with *Aurora*, and suggests that Boehme's 'sweet quality, lovely, pleasant, mild, and meek, that mitigates "fierceness and wrath" – the gracious, amiable, blessed, friendly, and joyful love – is surely one of the clearest anticipations of the Mercy, Pity, Peace, and Love of Blake's animated nature' (Hagstrum, 'Wrath of the Lamb,' 314). This understanding of Boehme as 'pleasant' and lacking 'fierceness and wrath' is not representative of general Boehme criticism.

⁴⁶¹ For other early religious experiences in Boehme's life, see Weeks, *Boehme*, Introduction and chapter 2, in particular 40-41. The illumination in 1600 is, however, usually seen as *the* formative religious experience.

⁴⁶² Francis Okely, *Memoirs of the life, death, burial, and wonderful writings, of Jacob Behmen* (Northampton, 1780), 7-8.

This Discovery overspread him with Joy; but he said nothing, thanked God, minded the Affairs of his Family and the Education of his Children, and lived in Peace and Friendship with all Men; mentioning little or nothing of this Light he had received and of his interior Conversation with God and Nature, to any Person whatsoever.
(Franckenberg 10-11)⁴⁶³

Another curious feature in *Aurora*, which seems to be related to the author's experience of illumination, is that Boehme consistently refers to the manuscript as a personal and individual icon that he only reluctantly offers to the world. A note included at the end of published version reads: '*This Book is wrote in a magical Sense or Understanding, for the Author himself only, who knew of no other Readers; he supposed he made this Work only for himself, but God has disposed it otherwise*' (26).⁴⁶⁴ Later he uses the term 'Memorial' to refer to *Aurora*, thereby again emphasizing that it was written 'only for himself,' that is with *himself* in mind *as reader* to work as a reminder of what he experienced in his illumination.⁴⁶⁵ This implies that *Aurora* might represent the closest we get in Boehme to a transcription of spiritual experience, conveyed in such a mystical form or 'magical sense' that is most suited to either induce *another* spiritual experience in the reader (that is, in Boehme himself), or produce the sweet memory of the initial experience. In other words, Boehme must have believed that spiritual revelation was, as least to some extent – and even if experienced as indescribable – possible to communicate through text (even if it be a private text).⁴⁶⁶

⁴⁶³ Ibid., 8. Cf. Jesus's instruction to the disciples, after Peter has identified him as Christ: 'And he charged them that they should tell no man of him' (Mark 8:30).

⁴⁶⁴ Law, ed. *Works of Jacob Behmen*, 1:269.

⁴⁶⁵ Cf. Blake's reference to one of his works, probably *Milton*, in a letter as 'a Memento in time to come' to 'speak to future generations by a Sublime Allegory which is now perfectly completed into a Grand Poem' (To Butts, 6 July 1803, E730). The poem in question might also be *The Four Zoas* or *Jerusalem*.

⁴⁶⁶ We do not know, of course, whether Boehme's calling *Aurora* a memorial for private use was really self-defence against contemporary critics, of which there were some (see Weeks, *Boehme*, in which the most comprehensive account of Boehme's context is found).

But while emphasizing *Aurora* as a ‘Memorial’ written for his own private use, Boehme does not address himself as reader as someone with particular knowledge about his own life and experiences – on the contrary, the reader of *Aurora*, private ‘Memorial’ or not, is externalized as someone other than the narrator and addressed as such. Thus in the beginning of chapter three, for example, Boehme feels compelled to explain the composition of the work to the reader, asking the reader not to be ‘offended at the Simplicity of the Author: for this Work comes not from *his Reason*, but from the Impulse of the Spirit’ (3.1).⁴⁶⁷ *Aurora*, then, neither comes from reason nor addresses itself to reason, but to spiritual experience: it reminds the reader of this experience – or points the reader towards such an experience, should the reader still lack it. So its agency lies not in its communication of a system addressed to the purely intellectual mind, but in its opening of a gate to experience, addressed to spirit and emotion. Following from this, *Aurora* can come to function as a ‘Memorial’ in *any* reader’s life, a personal yet public icon of experience, which both leads to this experience and reminds one of it – a point emphasized by the fact that the text did not occur in printed form in Boehme’s lifetime, but was passed on from reader to reader in manuscript or manuscript copy, exclusive, private, and powerful. But did Boehme’s idea of *Aurora* as representing a particular and personal relation in the reader’s life actually work? At least to some extent, it seems that it did: William Law noted that ‘in

⁴⁶⁷ Law, ed. *Works of Jacob Behmen*, 1:32. According to Crabb Robinson, Blake also allegedly composed his works according to the Spirit(s), not to reason (thus in a similar way to Boehme and Young, cf. p. 88). As Crabb Robinson wrote to Dorothy Wordsworth in 1826: ‘[Blake] told me yesterday that when he writes – it is for the Spirits only – he sees the words fly about the room the moment he has put them on paper And his book is then published’ (BR, 437).

reading of him I am always at home, and kept close to the kingdom of God that is within me.’⁴⁶⁸

In the late ‘Of True Repentance’ (1622), the ‘opening’ of the reader’s ‘center’ is facilitated in a more prescriptive, pedagogical, and conventional way. The terminology used here is topographically inspired, describing the very beginning of the reader’s ‘way’ to a destination (the treatise being the first in *The Way to Christ*). What we see here is a much more closely structured, almost allegorical composition of a text in which the reader is guided in one particular direction rather than opened chaotically into a large mystical field of ‘wonder-workes’ as in *Aurora*. The journey of the text as a structural and rhetorical principle has now become more explicit, more refined, and less perplexing than in *Aurora*, but perhaps also less playful and innovative. ‘Of True Repentance’ – as a printed work *already* a more stable, set, and potentially authoritative text than the manuscript icon of *Aurora* – is similar to *Aurora* in representing a companion with whom the reader can walk over a ‘narrow bridge,’ but dissimilar to it in its exact indication of the way in which this shall happen. As Boehme puts it in the beginning, again referring to his own experiences:

Since the poor soul groans and stands in weakness, and receives neither true sorrow for past sins nor any comfort, I say to it: “I shall describe a way in which I myself have gone, which he is to do, and what happened to me.” If he desires to follow it, he will experience what is hereafter described.
(‘Of True Repentance’ 11)⁴⁶⁹

But as the text appears to the reader, the ‘way in which I myself have gone’ (in the form of autobiographical references) is, in fact, more absent than in *Aurora*, for here

⁴⁶⁸ Quoted in Isabel Rivers, ‘Law, William (1686–1761),’ ODNB, Oxford University Press, 2004; online edn, Oct 2007, <http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16154>, accessed 13 June 2012.

⁴⁶⁹ Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 31.

we see only glimpses of references to Boehme's own illumination. As a consequence, a shared experience or shared identity between narrator and reader is established to a much lesser extent, and there is not much authorial claim to authority through autobiography. Instead, Boehme now speaks with the authority of someone who already has a readership and a voice, in a style which is more prescriptive than the fluid and opening quality of *Aurora*; tellingly, *Aurora* was a 'rising dawn' (as the title indicates), but *The Way to Christ* (in which 'Of True Repentance' occurs) is 'the way.'⁴⁷⁰ And with 'Of True Repentance,' being the first treatise in the collection, the beginning of the 'way' is described not as one moment of revelation, insight, or illumination, but as a movement through 'repentance,' 'confession,' 'prayers,' and 'warnings' (as the section headers indicate). Similarly, in the later treatise from *The Way to Christ*, 'The Fifth Treatise on the New Birth,' the new birth is explained and set within the larger context of salvation history in a way which seems to speak more to the rational believer than to the only just awakening soul from *Aurora*: 'Here we now *understand* what our new birth properly is' (4.1, my emphasis).⁴⁷¹ At the same time, Boehme now seems to have a clearer vision of the awakening function of the text as *text*:⁴⁷²

The written word is merely an instrument by which the Spirit leads. [...] The Spirit of God must be in the sound of the letters, otherwise no one is a teacher of God, but only a teacher of the letter, a knower of history [...] What a man begins and does in faith he does in the Spirit of God, which

⁴⁷⁰ In Boehme's letter to Caspar Lindner, he explains how his style of writing improved from *Aurora* to the later works: 'Then I obtained a better style in writing, also deeper and more grounded knowledge: I could bring everything better into the outward expression; [...] the godly reader, whose heart is opened, shall see that it is so' (Waterfield, ed. *Jacob Boehme*, 65).

⁴⁷¹ Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 152. This treatise is known as 'Of Regeneration or the New Birth' in Law.

⁴⁷² Even though Weeks notes of Boehme that 'although his work inspired numerous poets, he had no self-awareness as a poet' (Weeks, *Boehme*, 6).

works along in that work. This is pleasing to God, for He has made it Himself, and his power is in it. It is holy.
 ('Of the New Birth' 8.6)⁴⁷³

Although there is the sense in *Aurora* that the text has agency in itself, Boehme did not seem bothered about leaving it unfinished and moving on. In 'Of True Repentance,' however, the text is more intimately connected with the theological content of the book itself, described as the way in which the soul moves towards Christ in a continual movement of conversion. And consequently, Boehme as author and narrator is much more obviously positioned not just as the one with whom the reader is travelling, but also as the one who actually knows exactly which way they are going – and which way they are *not* going. The conversion of the reader, then, has moved from the autobiographical implications of *Aurora*, and the shared reader-narrator identity that Boehme suggested in it, to becoming a structuring principle in a text where reader and narrator are further apart. In this way 'Of True Repentance' begins to resemble allegorical conversion narratives like *Pilgrim's Progress*: it is laid out as a clearly outlined spiritual way at the end of which there is both salvation and damnation ('I [...] wander again on my pilgrim's path into my lost fatherland,' 44);⁴⁷⁴ the narrator is present as a clearly positioned voice which guides the reader through the orderly and subdivided text (with the help of subtitles and instructions such as 'How a man's soul is to awake itself in the grace of God');⁴⁷⁵ and the text represents an obvious plotting of the reader into a spatial and temporal reality or map – in 'A very Earnest Prayer,' for example, the reader stands 'now' before the cross and sees the crucified Jesus, to whom the reader prays (in a language that recalls my previous chapter): 'You have shown me [the wound] in Your hands,

⁴⁷³ Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 168.

⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 27 (subtitle).

Your hands pierced through with sharp nails, and You have shown me Your pierced side out of which ran blood and water. [...] Before You I sink myself into Your wounds and death' ('Of True Repentance' 40).⁴⁷⁶

It is in this sinking into Jesus's wounds that the beginning of 'the way to Christ' can be found, and what the reader is asked to imagine and perform is to resign his or her will to Christ – to sink into his sacrifice in mimetic annihilation of the selfhood. In this action of conversion, there is salvation, and this is where life in Christ begins. It is also where we, now, return to *Milton*.

3.3 Selfhood, self-annihilation, and the conversion flash in *Milton*

Of all Blake's works, it is in *Milton* that a Behmenist motif most obviously takes centre stage, as Milton's way to salvation goes through the gate of self-annihilation. But self-annihilation is not the only Behmenist touch in *Milton*. The emphasis on the present moment (or the Eternal Now), the role that text can play in the conversion process, and the insistence on unity – not separation – between divine and human are all themes that play a significant role both in Boehme's thought and in *Milton*. Furthermore, critics have noted visual connections between Freher's Boehme illustrations and *Milton*, which I discuss briefly below.⁴⁷⁷ And although Boehme's connection between self-annihilation and imaginative partaking in Jesus's death is played down a little in *Milton*, the trope is still present: 'Strike down my assumed "I" and destroy by Your death my "I"' ('Of True Repentance' 19),⁴⁷⁸ Boehme prays, proclaiming that Christ 'is the open gate through death,

⁴⁷⁶ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁷⁷ See Newman, 'Milton's Track.' Newman notes that with *Milton*, 'Blake's poetry moves inexorably in the direction of exploring and expressing the dynamics of regeneration' (ibid., 92).

⁴⁷⁸ Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 35.

through which we must go' ('On the New Birth' 5.11).⁴⁷⁹ In *Milton*, this has turned into:

For God himself enters Death's Door always with those that enter
And lays down in the Grave with them, in Visions of Eternity
Till they awake & see Jesus & the Linen Clothes lying[.]
(32.40-42, E132)

Thus self-annihilation as a gate to life is also shaped in *Milton* by the death of Christ and happens in a sense with him, but not as dominantly and repeatedly so as in Boehme. And notably, there are no visible representations in *Milton* of the entrance to salvation *in* Christ as being located in his wounds – a trope which, as we have just seen, is very much present in Boehme: 'I sink myself into Your wounds and death' ('Of True Repentance' 40).⁴⁸⁰

It is probably from English translations of Boehme that Blake first picked up the terms 'selfhood' and 'self-annihilation.'⁴⁸¹ Coleridge also used 'self-annihilation' in *Religious Musings* (1794), but probably likewise knew it from studying Boehme.⁴⁸² The first recorded use of 'self-annihilation' in English was in John Trapp's 1647 commentary to Matt. 19:17 ('Here then our Saviour learns [...] self-annihilation'),⁴⁸³ but the term was also used early in the writings of Jane Lead, the spiritual leader of the Philadelphian movement, who lived in London in

⁴⁷⁹ Ibid., 158.

⁴⁸⁰ Ibid., 46.

⁴⁸¹ Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 126.

⁴⁸² In *Religious Musings* 43, he writes 'Till by exclusive consciousness of God All self-annihilated it shall make God its identity' (quoted in OED, second edition, 1989; online version September 2011, s.v. 'self-annihilation,' <http://oed.com/view/Entry/175110> (accessed 09 October 2011)). Some have argued that Coleridge – and Blake – did not get the term 'self-annihilation' from Boehme, but rather from David Hartley (who himself, however, was a Boehme reader) (John Howard, *Blake's "Milton": A Study in the Selfhood* (Rutherford, 1976), 177-78).

⁴⁸³ OED, second edition, 1989; online version September 2011, s.v. 'self-annihilation,' <http://oed.com/view/Entry/175110> (accessed 9 October 2011).

‘Paradisical Husbandry’ with the before-mentioned John Pordage.⁴⁸⁴ As for the term ‘selfhood,’ it was probably used for the first time in English in a 1649 translation of Boehme’s letters by John Ellistone: ‘I live to him [Christ] & not to my selfhood.’⁴⁸⁵ This selfhood does not, as it might sound to the modern reader, represent the positive core of humanity and integrity in each subject, but instead – in Boehme as well as in Blake – a negative concept to be destroyed in self-annihilation: ‘He [Christ] died to my Self-hood in his Death, and I also die to my Self-hood in his Death’ (*Signatura Rerum* 12.14).⁴⁸⁶ The selfhood is the distorted image of God in the soul, the part of the subject who only lives for itself, or the region in the subject that has turned away from God; as Boehme put it, ‘Selfhood lives in the Land of Death, viz. in the continual Dying, in the continual Enmity against God’ (*Signatura Rerum* 15.12).⁴⁸⁷ Consequently, this image must be erased for the *imago dei* to be restored: ‘awaken my disappeared Image in me’ (‘Of True Repentance’).⁴⁸⁸

In Blake’s works, ‘selfhood’ is one of the concepts (together with the forgiveness of sins), which becomes central from around 1804 onwards. It is not used before *Milton*, nor used again after *Jerusalem*, and only used once outside

⁴⁸⁴ Sylvia Bowerbank, ‘Lead, Jane (1624–1704),’ ODNB, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/16231>, accessed 13 June 2012]. In Lead’s extensive spiritual diary *A Fountain of Gardens* (1696), we read: ‘First I must caution you, with my self, to keep very Low, entering into a Self-Annihilation, so as a Nothing to be [...] that the All-Deifick Unction may arise as an overflowing Tide’ (Jane Lead, *A Fountain of Gardens: Watered by the Rivers of Divine Pleasure, and Springing up in All the Variety of Spiritual Plants; Blown up the Pure Breath into a Paradise, Sending Forth Their Sweet Savours, and Strong Odours, for Soul-Refreshing. By Jane Lead.*, vol. 1 (London, 1696), 14-15).

⁴⁸⁵ Epist. I. xxiii.6. Quoted in OED, second edition, 1989; online version September 2011, s.v. ‘selfhood,’ <http://oed.com/view/Entry/175277> (accessed 9 October 2011).

⁴⁸⁶ Law, ed. *Works of Jacob Behmen*, 4:99.

⁴⁸⁷ Quoted in Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 127. Cf. Augustine’s ‘region of dissimilarity’ in *Confessions* 7.20.16.

⁴⁸⁸ Law, ed. *Works of Jacob Behmen*, 4:19. The Law edition of ‘Of True Repentance’ is not divided into numbered sections.

Milton and Jerusalem, namely in *A Vision of The Last Judgment* (1810, so roughly contemporary with the two).⁴⁸⁹ ('Forgiveness,' on the other hand, is used sparingly in early works such as *Book of Urizen* – and 'forgiveness of sins' is used once before it appears in *Jerusalem*, namely in *Ann. Watson*, ca. 1798: 'The Gospel is Forgiveness of Sins & has No Moral Precepts,' 108, E619). As for 'self-annihilation,' Blake does not use the term before the late Night VIIb of *The Four Zoas*, and not consistently so until *Milton*.⁴⁹⁰ In Blake criticism, self-annihilation has sometimes been overlooked as a particular theological solution to a general anthropological and existential problem and thus considered only applicable to readers who subscribe to a Christian worldview.⁴⁹¹ Selfhood as a psychological concept, on the other hand, is generally considered a fundamental part of Blake's anthropology, neither religious in its base nor dependent on a religious solution. This separation of the two concepts selfhood and self-annihilation, however, artificially sets apart a religious register from a non-religious register in Blake's works in a way that blurs the fact that Blake's anthropology is always a *theological* anthropology – and that Blake's subject is always a religious being: 'Man must & will have Some Religion' (J52, E201). Instead, the concepts of selfhood and self-

⁴⁸⁹ Blake here describes his depiction of The Last Judgment: 'those who are in Eternity [...] merely appear as in a Cloud when any thing of Creation Redemption or Judgment are the Subjects of Contemplation [...] the Reason they so appear is The Humiliation of <the Reasoning & Doubting> Selfhood & the Giving all up to Inspiration' (91-92, E563).

⁴⁹⁰ For the term as a visual motif from ca. 1799, see Crosby, 'Sparks of Fire,' section 3. Although it has been argued that self-annihilation as a concept is already present earlier in Blake, for example in *The Book of Thel* (Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 121, and W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton, 1978), 87-106).

⁴⁹¹ See for example Crosby, 'Sparks of Fire' (11), in which self-annihilation is discussed as a *theological* term. This view of self-annihilation is often illustrated by disregarding the concept rather than explicitly discussing why it is being disregarded – for example, there is no separate entry for 'self-annihilation' in Damon, *Blake Dictionary*. For a discussion of whether a non-Christian reader should accept Blake's 'Christian' concepts, see Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth*, chapter 6, and for a recent study of self-annihilation in Blake, see John H. Jones, *Blake on Language, Power, and Self-Annihilation* (Basingstoke, 2010).

annihilation in Blake are integral to one other: self-annihilation (and the subsequent rebirth of the restored self) is the answer to the problem which the presence of selfhood poses – and selfhood must be continually removed in order to let the *imago dei* shine through and take root in the subject:

This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated away
To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.
(M40.35-37, E142)

This way from selfhood through self-annihilation to the beginning of new life, which is where *Milton* ends, is represented in the book as a pilgrimage through time and space. In one of the plates (32, fig. 39) this is illustrated in a map showing the four Zoas (Tharmas, Urthona, Luvah, and Urizen), the ‘mundane egg’ (meaning the ‘world of time and space, in which fallen Man incubates until he hatches and re-enters Eternity’),⁴⁹² the centre of the earth ‘Adam’ (towards which Milton is heading), and the opposite location ‘Satan.’ Cutting through the Zoas is a black line indicated as ‘Miltons Track.’ As the line marking Milton’s route illustrates, it is back *to* Adam and *past* Satan (or his Spectre) that Milton is travelling – and once he is at the centre of the mundane egg (and at the end of the narrative), new restored life can begin; as Essick and Viscomi put it, ‘like all eggs, this one contains the potential for new life to break the shell and emerge,’ leaving the end of *Milton* open to the beginning of a new narrative.⁴⁹³

To the Boehme reader, however, this map also brings to mind a Behmenist frame of reference, as it shows a striking resemblance with Freher’s thirteen planetary diagrams in the second volume of the Law edition, in particular with

⁴⁹² Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 288.

⁴⁹³ Essick and Viscomi, ‘Introduction and Notes,’ 29.

diagram 2⁴⁹⁴ (fig. 40, showing similar overlapping spheres as in Blake's image) and diagram 11 (fig. 41, showing Jesus's track as he enters creation as 'the Breaker').⁴⁹⁵ This creates a strong visual echo of Boehme – and of Freher's interpretation of Boehme – which also occurs elsewhere in *Milton*: namely in two plates that occur in the immediate vicinity of M32, plates 29 and 33. These show the figures 'William' and 'Robert' in what appears to be ecstatic conversion moments – beside each of them, a star falls from heaven, which clearly resembles the stars in Freher's diagrams 8, 9, and 10 (also in Law's second volume). And for one last parallel between Freher and *Milton*, also the male-female multilayered images from Law's volume three might also have left a trace in *Milton*, albeit a textual one, in the line 'A Male within a Female hid as in an Ark & Curtains' (37.40, E138).⁴⁹⁶

Milton: a conversion narrative

Milton is the poeticized conversion narrative of the historical figure Milton, as Blake recasts him in his imagination to liberate him from his errors and realign him with the poetic-prophetic spirit, the 'Poetic Genius.' At the same time, it is an exemplary conversion narrative, suggesting to the reader a spiritual transformation or conversion similar to the conversion described by Boehme (as annihilation, opening, and rebirth in Christ):

⁴⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁹⁵ Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 24. The term 'the Breaker' refers to Micah 2:13 and is used to explain the illustration in the notes at the end of William Law, ed. *The Works of Jacob Behmen, the Teutonic Theosopher*, vol. 2 (London, 1763), 31. Cf. also 'the track/ of Satan' in *Paradise Lost* 10.314-15 (quoted in Essick and Viscomi, 'Introduction and Notes' 29). For more on M32 in a Behmenist light, see Newman, 'Milton's Track.'

⁴⁹⁶ See in particular 'The First Table' and 'The Second Table' in the last pages of Law volume three. 'The Second Table' contains a little flap in the male-female chest called 'Selfhood.'

Christ broke and opened in the human essence the gates of our internal, heavenly humanity that were locked in Adam. Nothing now lies in this except that the soul leads its will out of the vanity of the (corrupted) flesh and direct it into these open gates in the spirit of Christ.

(‘Of the New Birth’ 4.1)⁴⁹⁷

This new birth or conversion in *Milton*, as well as in Boehme’s works, has three particular characteristics. First, it is not (as mentioned in Part I) a one-off experience, but rather an experience to be repeated whenever the convert falls back: as Blake put it in *Jerusalem*, ‘Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil, & requires a New Selfhood continually & must continually be changed into his direct Contrary’ (52, E200). Second, it is represented not as a slow continual movement, but as a sudden movement from the sphere of redemption to the sphere of salvation. This point refers to the fact that in Boehme, as in Blake, both Paradise and the Last Judgment are always present and available. As Boehme writes, ‘if [...] thy Eyes were opened, then in that very Place where thou standest, sittest or liest, thou shouldst see the glorious Countenance or Face of God, and the whole heavenly Gate’ (*Aurora* 10.98),⁴⁹⁸ so likewise Blake: ‘whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual’ (VLJ84, E562). And third, the awakening of the subject is connected with the use of the inherent imagination, which, not only in Blake but also in Boehme, plays a crucial role as ‘the transforming activity of faith.’⁴⁹⁹

For the word “faith” is not historical, it is rather a taking from God’s being, an eating of God’s being, [it is an] introducing of God’s being by means of the imagination into one’s soul-fire, in order to calm its hunger with it ... [the soul] must eat of God’s bread, in order to become a child.

(*The Human Genesis of Christ* I.11.8)⁵⁰⁰

⁴⁹⁷ Boehme, *Way to Christ*, 152.

⁴⁹⁸ Quoted in Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, 64.

⁴⁹⁹ Weeks, *Boehme*, 151.

⁵⁰⁰ Quoted in *ibid.*

It is perhaps no coincidence, then, that Blake's exploration of a Behmenist theme is represented as an illuminated book directed towards the reader's imagination, in which a historical poet is called back to life and imaginatively brought to walk the 'narrow bridge' with the narrator and the reader. The imagination in *Milton*, if nothing else, is a shared space.

It soon becomes clear, though, that although *Milton* is structured around bringing back Milton from the dead, it is not the past that Blake is interested in so much as the present – the Eternal Now – along with the way that past errors can be overcome by the use of the imagination. This is perhaps nowhere more clearly illustrated than in the title page illustration (fig. 42). Here, a naked man with his back to the reader (thereby asking the reader to follow him through the narrative as in *Jerusalem* pl. 1, fig. 4) stretches out his arm to smash the title of the book, which is seen above him, into the two syllables 'MIL' and 'TON.'⁵⁰¹ Who is the figure? From one viewpoint, it is Milton, the protagonist of the book. At the same time, however, it might be Blake, signifying his destruction of a 'name' in history in the text and his overwriting of an old story (that of the historical Milton) with a new one. Also, there may again be echoes of Boehme present in the images: the splintering of Milton's name into syllables resembles Boehme's practice of considering a word syllable by syllable in order to discover its true meaning. He writes, for example, that 'Sulphur [...] [is] understood to be thus. SUL is the Soul or the Spirit that is risen up, or in a Similitude [it is] God: PHUR is the *Prima Materia*,

⁵⁰¹ An alternative interpretation is that the title (i.e. Milton's name) is *already* broken in two – and that the figure rather than smashing it stretches out his arm in order to assemble the pieces again. This would underline the theme of unity and restoration in *Milton*. At the bottom of the title page, Blake has inserted Milton's motto from *Paradise Lost*: 'To Justify the Ways of God to Men,' thereby emphasizing that the book is composed in Milton's spirit (who, after all, was 'of the Devils party without knowing it,' MHH6, E35) – but without his wrong turns.

or first Matter out of which the Spirit is generated' (*Three Principles* 1.7).⁵⁰² Dividing Milton's name up into syllables on the title page lays out the purpose of the book for the reader: it is, the title page tells us, a breaking up of Milton into atoms and syllables, a close inspection, and a reassembly of his being into a new united existence.

As Bryan Aubrey has noted, both Blake and Boehme 'pick up the hint from St. Paul (2 Thess. 2.3), that falsehood must be embodied and revealed before it can be cast off.'⁵⁰³ This embodied falsehood, or selfhood, is Milton's Spectre, or Satan, which is overcome in *Milton* – a realization that comes in a flash to Milton in his first, immediate response to The Bard's Song, which opens *Milton* (beginning on M2):

Milton said, I go to Eternal Death!

[...]

When will the Resurrection come; to deliver the sleeping body
From corruptibility: O when Lord Jesus wilt thou come?
Tarry no longer; for my soul lies at the gates of death.
I will arise and look forth for the morning of the grave.
I will go down to the sepulcher to see if morning breaks!
I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death,
Lest the Last Judgment come & find me unannihilate
And I be siez'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood

[...]

I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!

He is my Spectre!

(14.14-31, E108)

The selfhood is thus given external form in order to be overcome. But Milton's early assessment of the act he needs to perform (for this is only pl. 14 of forty-three) in order to arrive at internal unity is only the beginning – a mapping out of the battle

⁵⁰² Law, ed. *Works of Jacob Behmen*, 1:10.

⁵⁰³ Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 138. 2 Thess. 2.3 reads: 'Let no man deceive you by any means, for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition.'

ahead and a naming of the monsters that must be conquered – whereas the actual conquering is still ahead. This first step came about within the narrative context of *Milton* through poetry, namely as a reaction to The Bard's Song – the long and complicated poem-within-the-poem, which amongst other things discusses the relationship between the Elect and the Reprobate, and of which Mary Lynn Johnson notes that 'whatever else [it] means, it means that art matters; poems have consequences.'⁵⁰⁴ Whatever it is exactly in the song that causes Milton to rise and embrace his quest, the basic awakening rhetoric of salvation in it has worked: 'Mark well my words, they are of your eternal salvation,' the Bard repeats, confident that he sings

According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity
To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen[.]
(14.1-3, E108)

Milton's own reply to his speech in M14 occurs towards the very end in another speech, which confirms that Milton's initial assessment of his cure was correct, and that he is now ready to consummate his conversion:

I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration
To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour
To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration
To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albions covering
To take off his filthy garments,⁵⁰⁵ & clothe him with Imagination
To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration[.]
(41.2-7, E142)

⁵⁰⁴ Johnson, 'Milton and its Contexts,' 241. The issue of the Elect and the Reprobate represents Blake's attempt to tackle some of the theological issues he found in Milton's work. Blake did not know, as we do now, that Milton did not in fact support the doctrine of the Elect and Reprobate (Milton's *De Doctrina Christiana* was published in 1823, by which time Blake had already completed *Milton*) (ibid., 238).

⁵⁰⁵ An image that recalls the depiction of a figure casting off his 'filthy garments' in M13 – cf. also the comment in *The Marriage*, that Swedenborg's 'writings are the linen clothes folded up' (3, E34).

Traces of Paul and his conversion

Let us return to the connections between *Milton* and Paul.⁵⁰⁶ This connection is particularly interesting within a conversion discourse, seeing that one of the ways in which Blake uses Paul in *Milton* is by holding up Paul's conversion as recounted in Acts as an ideal moment of direct connection between human and divine. Thus the Damascus road experience lurks in the background of *Milton* as a complimentary movement to the prolonged conversion of Milton, which runs through all the forty-three plates of the book. Where the backbone of the text describes Milton's continued struggle and long road to salvation, the repeated references to Paul's apocalyptic (in the sense of *apo-kalypsis* as un-covering) experience – as well as to related sudden experiences such as William's and Robert's ecstatic moments in plates 29 and 33 and the raising of Lazarus (invoked in M24.26-32, E120) – constantly pull the narrative in a complimentary way to Milton's prolonged conversion: towards a sense of immediacy, revelation, and vision, and a focus on the present moment. This present moment – Boehme's and Blake's common 'Lightning-flash,' as Aubrey calls it as he also connects it with Paul's conversion⁵⁰⁷ – is the instantaneous movement necessary to complement the gradual movement of Milton. It also points to the flash of inspiration under which the artist or poet, according to Blake, works:

Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery
 Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years.
 For in this Period the Poets Work is Done: and all the Great
 Events of Time start forth & are conciev'd in such a Period
 Within a Moment: a Pulsation of the Artery.

⁵⁰⁶ These have been noted in particular in Aubrey, *Watchmen*, Riede, 'Blake's Milton,' and Johnson, 'Milton and its Contexts.'

⁵⁰⁷ Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 120-26.

(28.62-29.3, E127)

This ‘Lightning-flash’ is illustrated on the plate immediately following, the ‘William’ plate (fig. 43) showing a naked man who throws himself backwards in ecstasy or surrender, a star falling towards his left foot. Above the figure, his name is written in large letters: ‘William.’ This plate illustrates the inspiration of the artist (‘William’) in ‘a Pulsation of the Artery,’ represents a conversion scene similar to Albion before the crucified Christ in *J76* (although in *Milton* depicted with no cross), and refers to the crucial scene in *Milton*’s text, in which Milton enters the character ‘Blake’s’ foot:

Then first I [Blake] saw him [Milton] in the Zenith as a falling star,
 Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow or swift:
 And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enterd there;
 But from my left foot a black cloud redounding spread over Europe.
 (15.47-50, E110)

Immediately above the text, a miniature version of ‘William’ in pl. 29 makes the connection between pl. 15 (numbered pl. 14 in the William Blake Trust edition) and pl. 29 impossible to miss.

In pl. 33, the ‘Lightning-flash’ is again illustrated in the full-page illustration of ‘Robert’ (fig. 44), which exactly mirrors the depiction of ‘William’ and probably is a reference to Blake’s much-loved younger brother, who died early.⁵⁰⁸

⁵⁰⁸ Blake saw Robert as a fellow artist, which explains why ‘Robert’ is also depicted in the moment of divine inspiration and vision in *Milton*. Robert was probably enrolled to study at the Royal Academy Schools when he was fourteen, and Blake used to teach him how to draw (some of Robert’s sketches are included in Butlin R1-11). After Robert’s death in 1786, Blake claimed that it was Robert who taught him the method of illuminated printing in a nightly vision (BR, 33, 43-45, and Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 617). In 1800 he reported that the two would still ‘converse daily & hourly in the Spirit,’ and that Blake would ‘See him in my remembrance in the regions of my Imagination’ – even sometimes ‘write from his Dictate’ (To William Hayley, 6 May 1800, E705).

Apart from these moments describing the sudden incarnation of poetic genius or spirit in the narrator (similar to the possession of his body by the muses in M2 and his becoming ‘One Man’ with Los in 22.12, E117),⁵⁰⁹ they also invoke Paul’s conversion as a traditional marker of sudden religious vision and enlightenment. This perspective is brought up by the reference in M15 to Blake’s ‘tarsus,’ a term which also (apart from referring to bones in the human ankle) refers to the name of the birthplace of Paul.⁵¹⁰ Paul’s conversion in Acts is thus drawn into the scene of Milton/the star descending into Blake and taking possession of him in a similar way to Paul being possessed by Christ – or indeed to the other well-known Saul (which was Paul’s Jewish name) in the Bible, namely the Old Testament Saul in 1 Sam. 10:6, who is taken over by the spirit of God, made able to prophesy, and is turned into ‘another man.’⁵¹¹

Other references to Paul in *Milton* also emphasize, as David Riede has argued, Paul the visionary over and against ‘the Church Paul’ (J56.42, E206). ‘Paul’ and ‘the Church Paul’ are not identical to one another, but opposites of one another (and not in the positive Blakean sense of the term ‘opposite’): Paul represents the positive figure of the visionary prophet-poet, who challenged tradition and walked

⁵⁰⁹ ‘Muses [...] Come into my hand/ By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm/ From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry/ The Eternal Great Humanity Divine. planted his Paradise’ (2.1-8, E96).

⁵¹⁰ Another meaning of ‘tarsus’ (now rare, but used in the eighteenth century) is ‘the thin plate of condensed connective tissue found in each eyelid’ (OED, second edition, 1989; online version September 2011, s.v. ‘tarsus,’ <http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/197924> (accessed 3 October 2011)). If this is what Blake also alludes to, it emphasizes the importance placed on sight and vision in his works – not least in a conversion context, as we will see in chapter 4.

⁵¹¹ Here it is Samuel who addresses Saul: ‘And the Spirit of the LORD will come upon thee, and thou shalt prophesy with them [a company of prophets], and shalt be turned into another man’ (1 Sam. 10:6).

forward with a new vision in hand (as does Blake in *Milton* 21.12-14, E115).⁵¹² The ‘Church Paul,’ on the other hand, represents the negative state in which the combative and spiritual energy of the true Paul has been reduced to a stagnated church, guided by set interpretations (similar to the Swedenborgian church in *The Marriage*).⁵¹³ It is this ‘Church Paul,’ not Paul the visionary that Blake alludes to in the two direct invocations of his name in *Milton*. First, Paul is mentioned after a longer reference to Lazarus (another figure who goes through the gate of the grave with Jesus and ‘down to the sepulcher to see if morning breaks,’ M14.21, E108):

I saw the Covering Cherub
Divide Four-fold into Four Churches when Lazarus arose
Paul, Constantine, Charlemaine, Luther[.]
(24.30-33, E120)

This foursome of ‘Churches’ is accompanied on the plate by miniature illustrations in the right margin of naked tormented bodies and forms, perhaps indicating what Blake saw as these churches’ shared dismissal and suppression of the body. The next direct reference to Paul, found towards the end of the book, is made in a similar connection:

Abraham, Moses, Solomon, Paul, Constantine, Charlemaine
Luther, these seven are the Male-Females, the Dragon Forms
Religion hid in War, a Dragon red & hidden Harlot[.]
(37.41-43, E138)

⁵¹² ‘And all this Vegetable World appeard on my left Foot,/ As a bright sandal formd immortal of precious stones & gold:/ I stooped down & bound it on to walk forward thro’ Eternity.’

⁵¹³ Riede, ‘Blake’s Milton,’ 258.

Again, it is here the Church Paul, not the visionary Paul that Blake alludes to – the resignation of the original visionary or revisionary spirit into what in *Jerusalem* is known as the ‘Wheel of Religion’ (77.13, E232).⁵¹⁴

The visionary Paul, on the other hand, is epitomized by the ‘Lightning-flash’ moment on the road to Damascus. This moment, for Blake, expresses the crucial moment for Paul, as his visionary, revisionary (in the sense of being made able to translate his previous intellectual and religious context into a new understanding), and revolutionary powers are released to change the course of his life.⁵¹⁵ This is where Paul becomes a prophet – or as Blake might also have put it – an artist.⁵¹⁶ This moment of vision for Paul also appears elsewhere in Blake’s works – and the two most obvious references to it occur around the same time as *Milton*: in Blake’s watercolour ‘The Conversion of Saul’ from ca. 1800 (B506, fig. 45) and in *Jerusalem* 77. In ‘The Conversion of Saul,’ produced for Butts, we see the traditional trope of Paul with his horse, looking towards heaven. Christ appears at the top of the image with his right arm outstretched, as he points out the direction in which Paul should proceed (thus illustrating the words ‘Arise, and go into the city,’ Acts 9:6, as Blake’s caption ‘Acts IX c. 6v’ below the image also makes clear). Where Christ only stretches out one arm, Paul below him has *both* of his arms stretched out in cruciform position. Thus he adopts Blake’s generally acknowledged gesture of submission, embrace, and self-sacrifice before the divine, which is also seen, for example, in the two plates ‘William’ and ‘Robert,’ as well as in *Jerusalem* pl. 76.⁵¹⁷ This, it seems, is a positive invocation of Paul’s conversion, contrary to

⁵¹⁴ When faced with this, the narrator cries out in despair: ‘Is this the law of Jesus/ This terrible devouring sword turning every way’ (77.14-15, E232).

⁵¹⁵ I am partly indebted to Riede for applying the term ‘revisionary’ to *Milton*.

⁵¹⁶ Cf. *Laocoön*: ‘Jesus & his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists’ (E274).

⁵¹⁷ For a brief discussion of ‘The Conversion of Saul,’ see Warner, *Language of Art*, 39-42, and for the cruciform arms as an indication of self-sacrifice, see chapter 3, in particular 88-

the one other obvious reference in Blake's works, namely in *J77*. Here, the conversion moment is referred to in an epigraph shown above the narrator's prose introduction to chapter four, 'To the Christians' (thus appearing immediately after pl. 76's crucifixion). At the top of the plate, to the left of the verse beginning 'I give you the end of a golden string,'⁵¹⁸ Blake writes "'Saul Saul'/'Why persecutest thou me'" – a direct quotation which occurs in all three accounts of Paul's conversion in Acts 9:4, 22:7, and 26:14. But in the prose text that follows, the connection with Paul's conversion is not developed. Instead, Blake calls the 'Christians' addressed in the title to awaken from the perspective of the 'Church Paul,' its moralistic worldview, and its repression of natural instincts such as the sexual instinct: 'I know of no other Christianity and of no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination [...] England! awake! awake! awake!' (77, E231-33). From this perspective, Christ's question to Paul ('why persecutest thou me') appears to be, in fact, directed to the 'Church Paul,' accusing it of persecuting the spirit of true Christianity as encompassing both 'body & mind' – a true Christianity which was present in the moment of Paul's conversion, but later disappeared in the Church Paul.

Back in *Milton*, the moment of Paul's conversion is again alluded to towards the climax of Milton's self-realization and battle with the Spectre/Satan. Here Blake

91. 'The Conversion of Saul' is the only depiction of Paul's conversion – or any other historical person's conversion, for that matter – by Blake. Blake did not produce many depictions of Paul, but the Butts series that 'The Conversion of Saul' belongs to contains five: in addition to 'The Conversion of Saul,' these are 'St. Paul Preaching in Athens' (1803), 'St. Paul before Felix and Drusilla: 'Felix Trembled' (ca. 1800-03), 'St. Paul Shaking off the Viper' (ca. 1800-03), and 'St. Paul and the Viper' (ca. 1803-05) (B506-10). Paley has pointed out that amongst the works that Blake saw exhibited in the Truchsessian Gallery in autumn 1804 was Rubens's depiction of the conversion of Paul (Paley, 'Truchsessian Gallery Revisited,' 170). That gallery visit, and the letter Blake subsequently wrote to Hayley (E756) has, as discussed in Part I, been one of the key proofs of Blake's own conversion.

⁵¹⁸ 'I give you the end of a golden string,/ Only wind it into a ball:/ It will lead you in at Heavens gate,/ Built in Jerusalems wall' (77, E231).

uses the phrase ‘trembling and astonishment’ twice within fifteen lines,⁵¹⁹ a phrase which also occurs in the first account of Paul’s conversion in Acts 9:6 (the same verse illustrated by Blake in 1800), when Paul – having fallen to the ground – ‘trembling and astonished said, “Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?”’ At the end of *Milton*, however, it is not Milton who reacts trembling and astonished, but Satan: ‘Satan heard; trembling round his Body, he incircled it/ He trembled with exceeding great trembling & astonishment’ (39.16-17, E140). Likewise, at the end of the same paragraph, ‘He trembled with exceeding great trembling & astonishment’ (39.31, E140). Although the question of Satan’s conversion is an ambiguous one in Blake (‘The State namd Satan never can be redeemd in all Eternity,’ FZ107.25, E380),⁵²⁰ this echo of Paul’s conversion certainly adds to the series of conversion references in *Milton*, which only serves to draw our attention further to this particular theme. And above all it adds to the steady intensification of the conversion theme towards the end of the book, which appears with the final conversion of Milton, the attempted conversion of the character ‘Blake,’ and the indirectly suggested conversion of the reader.

The figure of the visionary Paul is thus used in *Milton* to qualify the prolonged conversion of Milton throughout the book, and his slow turning from the only *partly*-realized visionary and revolutionary, that Blake considered Milton to be in history, to the prophet-poet that he only becomes with the help of Blake’s imagination and re-vision. As Paul appears in his conversion moment (depicted in Blake’s image, fig. 45, as receptive, submissive, and ecstatic like ‘William’ and ‘Robert’), he becomes another figure for the turning of Milton; Paul should thus be placed alongside the continual (Behmenist) and the prolonged (Augustinian) models

⁵¹⁹ Riede, ‘Blake’s Milton,’ 272.

⁵²⁰ See, for example, Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 358.

of turning, a figure for how a distorted or degenerated being (the ‘Church Paul’) can return to its original state (‘Paul’). This serves to emphasize the fact that Milton’s regeneration comes from within – and that it is only a restoration of, or building upon, an already present potential. This, in turn, emphasizes that as a complement to Milton’s prolonged turning in the book stands the equally important present moment or ‘Eternal Now.’

This present moment in *Milton* is not solely a temporal point but also a spatial location. It is a passage point or a gate that indicates both the moment *in which* the subject is being transformed and the place *where* the subject manages to break through: it is at the same time the temporal ‘Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find’ (M35.42, E136) and the spatial ‘Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find’ (J37.15, E183). It is the moment of transformation or conversion, which simultaneously happens in an instant *and* must continually or repeatedly be performed: ‘Such your lot, to be continually Redeem’d/ By death & misery of those you love & by Annihilation’ (M33.12-13, E133). It is the combined gradual and instantaneous turning in *Milton*, and at the same time the locale in which the opening, or the breaking through, happens (as described in *Jerusalem* when Jesus’s ‘breaking thro’ the Central Zones of Death & Hell/ Opens Eternity in Time & Space,’ 75.21-22, E231). This combined moment-locale also has a parallel in Boehme’s thought, namely in his so-called fourth property, which denotes the spatial-temporal point of birth, where darkness becomes light. This fourth property (out of seven properties in all)⁵²¹ is the point where transformation happens, and where the passage from death to life lies – in other words, the fourth property is the gate to life. Here self-annihilation takes place, emphasizing that the point of this

⁵²¹ For more on these properties and their function in Boehme’s thought, see Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit*, chapters 7-9.

annihilation is not annihilation in itself, but the powers that are released when it happens. It is, as Boehme called it, the active point of ‘sharp Regeneration’ (*The Threefold Life of Man* 14.76),⁵²² which all of the seven properties relate to:

As “soon as the stroke is given the astringent chamber is opened, and ... the forms of nature are awakened, and are as a turning wheel” [*Signatura Rerum* 2.40]. [...] In this wakening or opening the fourth property forms a center through which the mind, divine and human, may ascend or descend. It is through this center that God moves – or looks – into desire and will, and that follows therefrom.⁵²³

This turning point, or centre of rotation, as it appears centrally in *Milton*⁵²⁴ represents a distilled, refined, and enlarged textual use of the conversion moment in Blake, which has already manifested itself in various ways up until this point: here, ‘as the lightning-flash strikes, the selfhood is annihilated and a center opens.’⁵²⁵

This annihilation of the selfhood in the fourth property of *Milton* has two characteristics that are particularly worth noting. First, compared to *Jerusalem*, as well as to Boehme, the annihilation of the selfhood is less explicitly connected to an experience of Christ. Thus Milton does not experience a decisive vision of the crucified Christ, as Albion does in *Jerusalem*. Instead, Christ reveals himself to Milton as the incarnation of the Poetic Genius or the human form of divine writing, through which there is salvation for Milton the poet:

with one accord the Starry Eight became
One Man Jesus the Saviour. wonderful! round his limbs
The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment dipped in blood
Written within & without in woven letters: & the Writing

⁵²² Quoted in *ibid.*, 112.

⁵²³ *Ibid.* Fischer suggests that the epitome of the fourth property is seen in *Milton*, when Albion begins to ‘turn upon his Couch’ (20.25, E114).

⁵²⁴ Aubrey notes that ‘much of [...] *Milton* centers on a [...] moment of apocalypse, the meeting point of time and eternity, to which Blake ascribes a central importance’ (Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 121).

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, 135.

Is the Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression[.]
(M42.10-14, E143)

Second, the act of self-annihilation in *Milton* does not denote a complete destruction of the self, after which there is no form of individual being left, nor a sense of the subject having to sacrifice itself as such (even though we qualified the gesture of the cruciform arms as indicating ‘self-sacrifice’). Instead, Blake’s sense of form, and his (theological) focus on eternity in ‘this world’ rather than ‘out of this world’ or ‘in the hereafter,’ is sustained: the ‘Poetic Genius’ is, after all, ‘the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity’ (M14.1-2, E108). As Aubrey has pointed out, Blake thus develops Boehme’s concept of the positive version of the negative selfhood (the positive ‘Own-hood,’ *Meinheit*, versus the negative *Eigenheit*)⁵²⁶ into a dialectic movement in which the subject continually puts off selfhood and puts it on again – a dynamic which recalls Blake’s concept of contraries or opposites versus negations. As Aubrey put it:

Even the regenerate man must have a selfhood, for without it he could not set foot in the world, and Blake [...] knew that it was man’s duty to sanctify the world, not to escape from it. But the new born man must be wary; if he clings to his selfhood for longer than a “pulsation of the artery” it will take him prisoner. It must be put off at the very instant of its creation, and then put off again, and again, with each new appearance that it makes.⁵²⁷

So although Milton’s prescriptive conversion in *Milton* is manifested as a one-off event in the narrative, it is not prescriptive with regards to the point that it is a one-off; rather, the narrative of *Milton* is only one example of what must continually happen in the life of a subject – here articulated as Milton addresses Ololon towards the end of the book:

⁵²⁶ ‘Own-hood’ is Aubrey’s translation – Ellistone used the translation ‘selfhood’ for both *Eigenheit* and *Meinheit* (OED, second edition, 1989; online version September 2011, s.v. ‘selfhood,’ <http://oed.com/view/Entry/175277> (accessed 9 October 2011)).

⁵²⁷ Aubrey, *Watchmen*, 130-31.

The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man
 This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
 Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated away
 To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.
 (40.34-37, E142)

But whereas the slow conversion of Milton proceeds throughout *Milton* as the main storyline (punctuated by the references to Paul's 'Lightning-flash'), another attempted conversion surfaces from time to time: that of the character 'Blake,' who comes to life through a number of autobiographical references in the book (which evoke the autobiographical authorial presence of many conversion narratives). Blake's presence in the book is – unlike Milton's – locally and temporally grounded: he is usually situated in an identifiable location, for example in his garden in Felpham.⁵²⁸ Milton, by contrast, is constantly moving through time and space (although Blake does at one point transport himself to Golgonooza in the company of Los, with whom he has become 'One Man,' 22.12, E117). Blake's presence in *Milton*, therefore, occupies a number of different positions. First, he is positioned as the author of the work, a poet, whereby he is intimately connected with the discourse on poetry and its inspiration ('Muses [...] Come into my hand,' he calls in the beginning, 2.1-5, E96). Second, he is positioned in a complicated revisionary relationship with his poetic predecessor Milton, whom he both criticizes and lovingly gives poetic form, new life, and the lead role as protagonist in his work (in a variant of Milton's giving form to Urizen in M19):⁵²⁹ as a reader, one in fact gets the impression that Blake rather enjoys the powerful position that being the

⁵²⁸ Depicted in pl. 36.

⁵²⁹ Which follows Urizen's icy baptism of Milton in 'the river Jordan:' 'Milton took of the read clay of Succoth, moulding it with care/ Between his palms: and filling up the furrows of many years/ Beginning at the feet of Urizen, and on the bones/ Creating new flesh on the Demon cold, and building him' (19.8-13, E112).

creator (or puppet master) of *Milton* gives him, making Milton go wherever Blake wants and sending him on all sorts of difficult missions. And third, he is positioned as someone who is sometimes also possessed by something or someone else (as when Milton enters him), who has experiences that might be similar to Paul's visionary ecstatic experience on the Damascus Road (illustrated by the 'William' plate, 29, fig. 43), and who is ultimately returned to the path outside his own house, as everyone else heads off for the last harvest and judgment.

At the end of *Milton*, 'Blake' is represented as a figure that may have gone through a conversion-like experience in the book himself, but is left behind when the conversion of others (Milton) is consummated. He thus partakes in the discourse of conversion in *Milton* at the same time as he remains outside it. How? To begin with, the similarities between that most prominent autobiographical imprint in *Milton*, the full-page representation of 'William' and the falling star (pl. 29, fig. 43), and Blake's 'The Conversion of Saul' (fig. 45), inserts Blake (or 'William') directly into the conversion perspective.⁵³⁰ In both images, there is a simultaneous movement downwards and upwards: as Paul and his horse, and William and the star, move downwards, fall, or spread out their arms in submission, correspondingly Paul's vision of Christ (who points upwards and forwards) and the steps behind 'William' indicate that their physical fall is, in fact, the beginning of a 'spiritual ascent.'⁵³¹ Both images thus represent conversion as a being taken over by the divine spirit or the imagination: as Jesus inhabits Paul and authorises him to enter into a revisionary relationship with his past (Jewish tradition), so Milton inhabits 'William' and authorises him to put forward a new, revised understanding of him

⁵³⁰ The similarities between the two images have also been noted by Warner, *Language of Art*, 39-42, Essick and Viscomi, 'Introduction and Notes,' 27, and Johnson, 'Milton and its Contexts,' 244.

⁵³¹ Essick and Viscomi, 'Introduction and Notes,' 27.

(the product of which is *Milton*) – a moment of ‘continuity of prophetic charisma,’ reminiscent of when Elisha was given a double portion of Elijah’s spirit in 2 Kings 2:29.⁵³²

In the ‘William’ plate 29 (as well as the miniature depiction and the description in the text in M14/15), it is not simply the divine spirit that enters Blake – it is the Poetic Genius in the form of a star (as per the illustrations) and in the form of the poet Milton (as per the text). Likewise, the agency that Blake is given is twofold: he is implicitly urged to go forward as a prophet by the divine spirit (indicated by the illustration’s depiction of divine inspiration), and to use Milton’s inhabitation of him to facilitate Milton’s search for unity through self-annihilation (indicated by the text’s pointing out that the one who inhabits Blake is, in fact, Milton). In other words, ‘William’ (or ‘Blake’) is positioned as a poet working on the basis of true divine inspiration, and at the same time as an instrument for Milton’s spiritual pilgrimage. But the *apokalypsis* of ‘William’ does not include a vision of Christ above the ecstatic figure, as did ‘The Conversion of Saul:’ for according to Blake, one of the historical Milton’s theological errors was that he was too concerned with heaven and not concerned enough with earthly existence. What Milton needs in order to become whole, Blake thus suggests, is not a vision of Christ above, but a vision, or a revision, of himself – where eventually, also, he will find the divine spirit. As Boehme put it: ‘Where will you seek God? In the Deep above the Stars? You will not be able to find him there. Seek him in your Heart, in the Center of the Birth of your Life, and there you shall find him’ (*Three Principles* 4.8).⁵³³

⁵³² Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 147. Cf. Luke 1:17.

⁵³³ Law, ed. *Works of Jacob Behmen*, 1:22.

But the conversion of ‘William,’ then, becomes nothing more than a pseudo-conversion. ‘William,’ or Blake, may play the role of the poetic sidekick to Milton, but when Milton ultimately succeeds in his conversion, Blake is left behind in the manner of the narrator in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, who longingly sees Christian enter into heaven: ‘And after that, they shut up the Gates: which when I had seen, I wished my self among them’ (PP 162).⁵³⁴ Similarly in *Milton*:

Terror struck in the Vale I stood at that immortal sound
My bones trembled. I fell outstretched upon the path
A moment, & my Soul returnd into its mortal state
To Resurrection & Judgment in the Vegetable Body
And my sweet Shadow of Delight stood trembling by my side[.]
(42.24-28, E143)

As the poet finishes his work, ‘Blake’ is left behind in his mortal body, given over to the everyday continual struggle between resurrection and judgment (or the everyday oscillation between poetic inspiration and lack of it). Blake returns as after an act of *kenosis*, having exhausted himself in imaginatively bringing Milton to unity through writing. But he himself remains ultimately unconverted – at least until *Jerusalem*, where he will become more deeply engaged in the central conversion of the book through his externalised form and inter alia, Los (who notably also does not take part in the final conversion, ‘Harvest,’ and ‘Vintage’ of *Milton* 43.1, E144).⁵³⁵

One last presence demands our attention towards the end of the book, namely that of the reader. The reader is now positioned vis-à-vis the possibility of a conversion in a much more obvious way than, for example, in *The Marriage* and *The Four Zoas*. And as Blake himself becomes a more visible presence throughout

⁵³⁴ All references to *Pilgrim’s Progress* are from John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim’s Progress*, ed. James Blanton Wharey, Second ed. (Oxford, 1960).

⁵³⁵ Damon, *Blake Dictionary*, 251.

Milton, so does the reader. This dynamic is also again present in *Pilgrim's Progress*, the last pages of which show a progressive inclusion of the narrator's own voice and a use of the narrator as a character within the narrative, as he discusses with a gardener the course of the two pilgrims (Christian and his companion Hopeful).⁵³⁶ This inclusion of the narrator helps to build up towards the vision of Heaven and Hell at the very end, which I mentioned in Part I and will return to in the following chapter, which poses the question to the reader: which way do *you* choose?⁵³⁷ And although the posing of the implicit question is less exclusive and theologically explicit in *Milton*, the progressive inclusion of the character 'Blake' towards the end does indicate a gradual breakdown of the boundaries between fictive character, narrator, and author, which ultimately draws the reader in as well. As both *Pilgrim's Progress* and *Milton* draw towards their respective endings, it becomes clear to the reader that the figure of the narrator has been present within the book throughout and is now coming to surface – illustrating that transformation is possible not only within the narrative, but also outside the pages of the book. When 'Blake' enters the narrative of *Milton*, the boundaries between fictive and real are challenged, and the imperative 'Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation' (2.25, E96) suddenly appears directed not only at Milton, but also at the readers of *Milton*. Milton's struggle, transformation, and conversion – and 'Blake's' struggle and epiphanic, but unsuccessful, revelation – become suggestive, if not programmatic, for the reader.

⁵³⁶ 'Now I beheld in my Dream, that they talked more in their sleep at this time, then ever they did in all their Journey; and being in a muse there-about, the Gardiner said even to me, Wherefore musest thou at the matter?' (PP 156).

⁵³⁷ This is a common characteristic of allegorical writing (see Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 210, and Arlette M. Zinck, "'Doctrine by Ensample: Sanctification through Literature in Milton and Bunyan,' *Bunyan Studies* 6 (1995-96): 44-55).

This involvement of the reader in *Milton* is generally acknowledged, noting that her or his ‘own awakening is necessary for the completion of Milton’s task. [...] Albion cannot rise completely until all delusion, the reader’s included, is removed. The potential for personal awakening is the essence of the meaning.’⁵³⁸ Norvig also notes this, arguing that the idea of the readerly conversion is closely connected with the concept of ‘states,’ which is laid out in *Milton* and represents the erroneous stages that the subject moves through (‘The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is a State/ Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created,’ M32.34-35, E132):

The doctrine of States becomes an exhortation [...] to the reader to consider a new kind of conversion, a new kind of revolution and deliverance, one that involves entering into the vortex of one’s own inner images, or “states”, [...] in a conscious act of the imagination. [...] The effort of [...] *Milton* [...] is to make itself such a “state” of change. It works hard to frustrate memory and reason – especially reason about both psychological and narrative conversion – and to entice us to investigate our own “eternal salvation.”⁵³⁹

The reader, then, moves through the pages or states of the book as a pilgrim, seeking his or her own stable core of human existence – the imagination or, to use a more traditional theological term, the *imago dei*:⁵⁴⁰ ‘States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease [...] The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself’ (M32.23-32, E132).

⁵³⁸ Howard, *Blake’s “Milton”*, 159.

⁵³⁹ Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 99.

⁵⁴⁰ I thus disagree with Norvig’s conclusion to the above cited, arguing that ‘this is the opposite of the traditional Christian view, which speaks of a “new man” replacing the old’ (ibid.). The concept of a permanent core of the subject is, contrary to what Norvig expresses, present throughout Christian tradition – and not least within a perspective of conversion, which is usually understood as a restoration or a return to one’s original state, although now in a more developed form (a *reformatio in melius*) (see Gerhart B. Ladner, *The Idea of Reform: Its Impact on Christian Thought and Action in the Age of the Fathers* (Cambridge, 1959), 146-45, 287). As Boehme put it, ‘the mind of man seeketh after its native country again, out of which it is wandered, and would return again home to the eternal rest’ (Waterfield, ed. *Jacob Boehme*, 121, with no reference of original source).

Ultimately, then, the reader is positioned in a similar relationship to Blake and Blake's book as Blake is in relation to Milton and his texts in *Milton*. As Blake saves Milton through poetry in *Milton*, so the reader – the implicit hope seems to be – will in future also save Blake.⁵⁴¹ But despite numerous references in this conversion work to 'Jesus' and to great figures of the Christian tradition (Wesley, Whitefield, Luther, and not least Paul), and some references to the historical Milton's theology, the essence of the work is not doctrine, but spiritual and psychological transformation. *Milton* is the spiritual portrait of a figure who exemplifies and explores the theological anthropology of Blake, showing how 1) the subject must move through annihilation of the selfhood in order to gain unity and balance between opposing forces within him or her; 2) the subject's awakening can take place through the use of art (poetry and images) and the imagination (most clearly illustrated by Milton's conversion only being made possible by the imaginative powers of another poet, Blake, within an illuminated work to be read by a reader); and 3) in order to find the divine, one must travel inwards, not outwards.

In this sense, *Milton* aligns itself well indeed with the early modern Protestant tradition of spiritual autobiographies or spiritual portraits, which focused less on doctrinal particulars and more on the *experience* of the subject as it enters a relationship with a religious tradition (similar, for example, to *Grace Abounding*). *Milton*, and the spiritual autobiographies, are individual (fictive) narratives exploring collective, or universal, truths. What is perhaps missing from *Milton* from this perspective, however, is a vision of the social or ethical implications of self-

⁵⁴¹ A revisionary relationship with Blake's works that is already suggested in his open, antiauthoritarian form from early on: in the dynamic relationship between texts and images, and in different copies of the same work between which Blake has deleted or added sections and moved plates around – in short, in the general 'unstable' quality (to use a derivative term in a positive way) of Blake's works.

annihilation and the question of the subject's relationship with Christ – in short: the universal history of the world as opposed to the particular history of one convert, Milton. These aspects are instead addressed in more detail in what we might understand as the sequel to *Milton*, namely *Jerusalem*.

3.4 A contrary: conversion in *Jerusalem*

Coming to *Jerusalem* from *Milton*'s conversions with the expectation that it has something to offer the *Milton* reader, our question in the context of this thesis must be: who is converted in *Jerusalem*, and why? *Jerusalem* is, like *Milton*, explicitly positioned as a work of experience, transformation, and conversion, and in this brief subchapter I focus on its most central and obvious conversion: that of Albion.⁵⁴² *Jerusalem*'s discourse of conversion, like *Milton*'s, begins already in the frontispiece (fig. 4), which I have mentioned earlier: here, a man with a broad-brimmed hat (that makes him resemble the 'Traveller [who] hasteth in the Evening,' fig. 10) and golden sandals (that make him resemble the likewise sandal-wearing narrator in *Milton* who 'bound it on to walk forward thro' Eternity,' 21.14, E115) prepares to enter through a gothic archway, inviting the reader to join him on his way into the narrative – in his right hand he holds a golden globe of light. As is clear from the text in the frontispiece, however, the figure (sometimes defined as Blake, sometimes as Los)⁵⁴³ does not just enter the book or a gothic archway (gothic signifying, in Blake's works, spiritual capacity and 'Living Form,' *On Virgil*,

⁵⁴² Another interesting angle would have been to explore Los's role in the book as an externalized, and perhaps more successful, version of 'Blake' in *Milton*. However, even though he plays a crucial role in *Jerusalem*, he less obviously goes through a conversion-like experience himself, which is why I have disregarded this perspective – also despite the fact that it is Los, and not Albion, who takes on the role of the main traveller in *Jerusalem*.

⁵⁴³ Morton D. Paley, 'Introduction and Notes,' in *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, ed. Morton D. Paley (Princeton, 1991), 130.

E270)⁵⁴⁴ – he also enters a grave. That we should understand this as a grave is suggested by Blake’s inscription on the right side of the archway, which he later deleted: ‘Half Friendship is the bitterest Enmity said Los/ As he enterd the Door of Death for Albions sake Inspired’ (1.8-9, E144).⁵⁴⁵ So *Jerusalem* begins with the opposite movement to *Milton*: Milton began his journey with a return from the grave, but the narrative of *Jerusalem* begins with a journey into the grave (a motif which links it with other Blake works from the same period such as ‘The Soul exploring the recesses of the Grave,’ fig. 5, and ‘Death’s Door,’ fig. 46, both from Blake’s illustrations to Blair’s *The Grave*, ca. 1805-08).⁵⁴⁶

Although it is Los or Blake (the close connection between whom is well-established in Blake criticism),⁵⁴⁷ not Albion, who opens the narrative by embarking on a pilgrimage into the grave, he does it for ‘Albions sake.’ And it is the conversion, restoration, and healing of Albion (appearing as ‘sick’ with ‘disease’ in J36.1-11, E181-82) and his ‘passage through/ Eternal Death’ and ‘awaking to Eternal Life’ (4.1-2, E146), which forms the narrative backbone of *Jerusalem*. The task of the book is thus similar to the restorative journey or pilgrimage of Milton in *Milton*. But Albion, contrary to Milton, is at the same time a particular mythical figure and the collective body of England, the ‘Four-fold Man,’ ‘Humanity’ (15.6,

⁵⁴⁴ Cf. also Samuel Palmer describing in a letter from 1862 that ‘everything connected with Gothic art and churches, and their builders, was a *passion* with him. St. Teresa was his delight’ (BR, 58). Bentley, however, finds it likely that Palmer ‘considerably exaggerated Blake’s conformity’ (ibid.).

⁵⁴⁵ See Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, Additional Plate iii.

⁵⁴⁶ ‘Death’s Door’ also has close visual links with *America* pl. 8 (fig. 12), discussed on p. 77 above. A connection between the grave and the ‘womb’ in *Jerusalem*’s frontispiece is suggested in another deleted inscription on the archway, which identifies the entrance to the grave as a locus of possible rebirth and thus refers back to my discussion in chapter 2 of wounds, wombs, and entrances in *Night Thoughts* and *The Four Zoas*: ‘There is a Void, outside of Existence, which if enterd into/ Englobes itself & becomes a Womb’ (1.1-2, E144).

⁵⁴⁷ See, for example, Paley, *Continuing City*, 234-43, and Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth*, chapter 7. Los is the creative prophet-poet and blacksmith, who represents the imagination in Blake’s mythological universe.

E159), and the ‘Universal Man’ (32.26, E178)⁵⁴⁸ – and the story of his journey towards restoration is from the outset defined not simply as an individual one (a spiritual biography), but also a collective one: Albion’s restoration has an especially collective outlook. However, the exact diagnosis of what Albion suffers from is not immediately clear to the reader, as his fall occurred already before the beginning of *Jerusalem*. What is clear, though, is that he, like Milton, is in need of internal unity and annihilation of the selfhood; that during most of the book he is represented as sleeping; and – most importantly from the perspective of conversion – that he must be converted from the dominion of cold reason to life in the divine body (from ‘wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic/ Moving by compulsion each other’ to ‘those in Eden: which/ Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace,’ 15.19-20, E159).⁵⁴⁹ Thus the narrator in the first chapter explains his vision of the beginning of *Jerusalem* and articulates his wish to awake Albion through his poem (Albion’s ‘Emanation’ who is mentioned is the figure Jerusalem, from whom Albion has been separated and whose restoration to him plays a crucial role in the work):⁵⁵⁰

I see the Four-fold Man. The Humanity in deadly sleep
 And its fallen Emanation. The Spectre & its cruel Shadow.
 I see the Past, Present & Future, existing all at once
 Before me; O Divine Spirit sustain me on thy wings!
 That I may awake Albion from his long & cold repose.
 For Bacon & Newton sheathd in dismal steel, their terrors hang
 Like iron scourges over Albion, Reasonings like vast Serpents
 Infold around my limbs, bruising my minute articulations[.]
 (15.6-13, E159)

⁵⁴⁸ Sklar, *Blake’s Jerusalem*, 45.

⁵⁴⁹ The ‘wheel within wheel’ image originates from Ezek. 1:16: ‘The appearance of the wheels and their work was like unto the colour of a beryl: and they four had one likeness, and their appearance and their work was as it were a wheel within the middle of a wheel.’

⁵⁵⁰ For more on the oddly overlooked character of Jerusalem in *Jerusalem*, see Sklar, *Blake’s Jerusalem*, chapter 3.

The conversion and restoration of Albion comprises a reconnection with Jesus or re-formation in the divine body, which takes two main interconnected shapes in *Jerusalem*: it explores the trope of Albion's new form in Jesus, and it shows the collective, social, or ethical consequences of this new form.⁵⁵¹ The trope of Albion's new form in Jesus is founded in Blake's already mentioned identification of the imagination with the divine body of Jesus, towards which the unconverted subject moves. Albion must be awoken from the formless sleep and 'land of shadows' (4.6, E146) and take on his new form – a word which is used again and again in *Jerusalem* – in Jesus. A visual depiction of Albion in his sleepy state of error and fallenness occurs, for example, in pl. 37 (fig. 6), where we see him sinking back into the arms of Jesus. This image is anticipated by the last lines on the previous plate (numbered as 32 in Erdman), which refer to the state of Albion sunk into formlessness, and the recreation of Albion's 'Length,' 'Bredth,' and 'Highth' 'in' Jesus's body to come:

the Divine Mercy
Steps beyond and Redeems Man in the Body of Jesus Amen
And Length Bredth Highth again Obey the Divine Vision Hallelujah[.]
(32.54-56, E179)

A turning point in this movement from formlessness to form occurs with the depiction of Albion before the crucified Jesus in pl. 76 (fig. 7), which I have already mentioned several times. Let us look at it again. The image occurs just before the

⁵⁵¹ Although I have mainly used the term 'Christ' until now, I now use 'Jesus' instead, as Blake himself almost exclusively uses this name in *Jerusalem*. With regards to form as a theme in *Jerusalem*, the text's poetic form as well as the exquisite form of the images (which are amongst the finest in all of Blake's illuminated books) seem to stand in an opposite relationship to what has been called the 'antiform' of the text: 'The poem's structure undercuts the whole notion of predictable linear chronology by embodying it as chaos' (Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art*, 165, 170). Similarly, the structure of Albion's conversion is unusual, in that he – the pilgrim – is in fact asleep on a stone through most of the poem, whilst it is Los who actively works his way through the narrative and brings Albion's conversion to realisation.

fourth chapter of *Jerusalem* (addressed ‘To the Christians’),⁵⁵² in which the final restoration occurs. It shows Albion in an unusually active posture: not asleep on the rock (as in pl. 94), but upright and dynamic – the identification of the figures is based on the fact that in some copies (A and C), they are explicitly marked as ‘Jesus’ and ‘Albion.’⁵⁵³ Whereas Jesus, as earlier noted, hangs crucified on a fruit-bearing tree, blood running from his side wound and from the nail wounds in his feet, with closed eyes and radiating a great light, Albion stands below the tree – arms outstretched, open legs and groin, and head raised – in the posture that we have defined as signifying joyful submission and self-sacrifice in Blake’s visual alphabet.⁵⁵⁴ The scene does not seem to refer to any particular section of the text, but occurring immediately before the fourth, and last chapter, it comes to anticipate the restoration that Albion will experience here. What is crucial is that not only does Albion now seem to accept and submit himself to Jesus – a significant development from J4, where Jesus’s offer to

Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!
 I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine
 [...]
 Lo! we are One[.]
 (4.6-20, E146)

was met by Albion’s refusal, ‘[*We are not One*] [...] / By demonstration, man alone can live, and not by faith’ (4.23-28, E146-47). Albion now also *imitates* Jesus’s body, when he stretches out his arms in the same cruciform gesture as Jesus and tilts

⁵⁵² The other chapters are, as mentioned earlier, addressed ‘To the Public,’ ‘To the Deists,’ and ‘To the Jews.’

⁵⁵³ Paley, ‘Introduction and Notes,’ 257.

⁵⁵⁴ The stigmata shown in the image are hardly coincidental within the context of *Jerusalem*: they also occur in pl. 35’s illustration of Jesus creating Eve from Adam, in particular in his feet in a similar way to the *Night Thoughts* watercolour NT127.

his head to the same side.⁵⁵⁵ Although according to the structure of the narrative Albion has not yet been re-formed into, or have re-entered, the divine body (for this does not happen until the very end), his immediate response when faced with the crucified Jesus is nevertheless true: he unconsciously understands that Jesus's form is one to be imitated, and that he can enter into a relationship with Jesus in which the two stand before each other as 'mutual in love divine' (J4.7, E146) With no text to support his insight, however (as the illustration takes up the whole plate and does not directly refer to any text), the revelation remains hanging in the narrative of *Jerusalem*, introducing a latent dynamic that is not to be released until the very end.

When this end does come, it refers to the second point mentioned above, namely the collective, social, or ethical consequences of Albion's new form. On pl. 95, we see a visual depiction of Albion's rebirth, as he begins to rise up, naked and surrounded by the transformative flames that already occurred in the angel's conversion in *The Marriage* – the physicality of this rebirth emphasized by the fact that he 'trails part of his fleshly garment' behind him.⁵⁵⁶ This plate is followed by Albion's defining meeting with Jesus in the next plate, 96, in which he finally accepts – and understands the full implications of – what Jesus is offering him. Here, the text describes how Jesus appears to Albion, who 'knew that it/ Was the Lord the Universal Humanity' and 'saw his Form/ A Man' (96.4-6, E255). After this they finally communicate on mutual terms, Albion now recognizing that Jesus is indeed 'not a God afar off,' but a 'brother and friend' (as per Jesus's introduction of himself in 4.18, E146). Albion confesses to Jesus that 'my Selfhood cruel/

⁵⁵⁵ The two bodies are almost exactly the same size and similar in build, but whereas Albion is naked, Christ has been dressed in a loincloth.

⁵⁵⁶ Paley, 'Introduction and Notes,' 290.

Marches against thee deceitful' (96.8-9, E255), and asks Jesus to help him annihilate this selfhood – to which Jesus replies that

unless I die thou canst not live
But if I die I shall arise again & thou with me
This is Friendship & Brotherhood without it Man Is Not[.]
(96.14-16, E255)

And Jesus continues: 'Thus do Men in Eternity/ One for another to put off by forgiveness, every sin' (96.18-19, E255). After this articulation of the two cornerstones of Blake's Christianity around this time – true brotherhood and the forgiveness of sins – however, the scene changes completely, as a cloud appears and separates Albion from Jesus. This causes Albion not simply to understand intellectually what Jesus preaches, but also to experience it emotionally, as he now stands 'in terror: not for himself but for his Friend/ Divine' (96.30-31, E256). And as it is now Albion who throws himself into 'the Furnaces of affliction' to save his friend (not the other way around) – and as his 'Self' is finally 'lost in the contemplation of faith' – all becomes 'a Vision, all a Dream,' and the furnaces turn into 'Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine' (96.31-37, E256).⁵⁵⁷ With this sacrifice – Albion's giving himself up to save Jesus, not Jesus sacrificing himself for Albion – the restoration of the wider universe is also begun, as Blake moves into his only attempt at describing the restored world and its inhabitants: life *in* the divine body or form. Here, everything appears in its fourfold form⁵⁵⁸ and the opposites that (in the fallen world, as well as previously in *Jerusalem*) have appeared to be irreconcilable (no matter how positively we understand their dynamic relationship) are now taken up into the 'Chariots of the

⁵⁵⁷ Cf. the trope of Jesus as the *fons vitae*.

⁵⁵⁸ Cf. Blake in his letter to Butts, 2 November 1800: 'Now I a fourfold vision see/ And a fourfold vision is given to me' (83, E722).

Almighty' together: 'Bacon & Newton & Locke, & Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer' (98.8-9, E257) – the first three as usual representing the dominion of reason over imagination in Blake (as in J15.11, E159), the last three representing the true prophetic-poetic spirit. In this restored life in the divine body we find 'Resurrection' and 'Life,' 'Unity' and the 'Four Senses,' 'Outline,' 'Circumference,' and 'Form' – and of course 'Forgiveness of Sins which is Self Annihilation.'

Driving outward the Body of Death in an Eternal Death & Resurrection
Awaking it to Life among the Flowers of Beulah rejoicing in Unity
In the Four Senses in the Outline the Circumference & Form, for ever
In Forgiveness of Sins which is Self Annihilation. it is the Covenant of
Jehovah[.]
(98.20-23, E257)

And finally, this is where direct divine communication is available, in a possible reference back to Boehme's *Natursprache* (as well as to *Pilgrim's Progress*, in which the promise of free and true communication becomes more and more imminent as Christian and Hopeful approach the celestial city).⁵⁵⁹ In this restored divine reality, communication does not take place through language, but in forms: 'And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic' (98.28, E257).⁵⁶⁰ And with this lifting of the restraints of fallen language, *Jerusalem* can draw to its end – Albion fully turned, restored, and re-formed, and the world with him. Here the last lines of text:

All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone. all
Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied

⁵⁵⁹ Patricia Caldwell, *The Puritan Conversion Narrative: The Beginnings of American Expression* (Cambridge, 1983), 135.

⁵⁶⁰ Cf. earlier in *Jerusalem*, where the temporary function of language is referred to: 'Los built the stubborn structure of the Language, acting against/ Albions melancholy' (36.59-60, E183).

Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing
And then Awaking into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality.

And I heard the Name of their Emanations they are named Jerusalem[.]
(99.1-5, E258-59)

As the text slowly runs out, however, the book continues with two large images ('Forms'): pl. 99 showing the final uniting embrace in flames between the human form and the divine form (a further development of the embrace of the flames and the subsequent rebirth in *The Marriage*) – and pl. 100, showing active life in the divine body, represented by three figures with tools in hands: hammer and compasses, the golden disk from the frontispiece, and a distaff or a loom.⁵⁶¹ Work, it seems, belongs in the divine imagination.

Having moved through the conversions of Milton in *Milton* and Albion in *Jerusalem* it seems that the question is not how these conversions – and works – inform each other, but to what extent they can be separated. While *Milton* explores the particular story of Milton's Boehme-inspired way through self-annihilation to restoration, and of the role of the imagination – and in particular the role of poetry – in the process of cleansing the doors of perception and moving into the divine body, *Jerusalem* approaches the question of conversion and restoration from a different perspective. Here, the collective body of Albion, the collective body of England, and the collective communities of The Public, Deists, Jews, and Christians are addressed with a more explicit focus than in *Milton* on the political, social, psychological, and philosophical issues of Blake's times. Similarly, we see how the

⁵⁶¹ I thus deviate from the position of Paley and Damrosch, for example, who argue that pl. 100 cannot be a representation of restored life but is only, as Damrosch puts it, 'the best that the fallen imagination can do' – which 'by implication invites the viewer-reader to go beyond it' (Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth*, 334, and Paley, 'Introduction and Notes,' 297).

divine body (which in *Milton* is mostly referred to as a concept – the imagination or the Saviour) in *Jerusalem* takes on actual *form*: Albion’s decisive insight comes to him not as a consequence of his own experiences and reflections (as Milton’s in M41), but in vision. Here, he sees the form of Christ as a ‘brother and friend’ (J4.18, E146) and realizes that the passage to entering this divine body goes not only through contemplation, but through action: it is only when Albion sacrifices himself for Jesus as brother and friend, that he is immediately transported into the divine body – and the whole world with him. As Blake wrote in *The Marriage*, ‘God only Acts & Is’ (16, E40) and in *Jerusalem*:

Jehovahs Salvation
Is without Money & without Price, in the Continual Forgiveness of Sins
In the Perpetual Mutual Sacrifice in Great Eternity!
(61.21-23, E212)

From these two monumental conversion works, I now move on to Blake’s illustrations to one of the most well known and popular conversion texts in literary history, *Pilgrim’s Progress*, as well as his illustrations to the Book of Job. These two series, executed only a few years after Blake finished *Jerusalem*, further explore, as we shall see, some of the same themes: the body of Christ as a salvific space and the role of imagination and vision in the conversion of the subject. A thrice employed expression (occurring twice in *The Four Zoas* and once in *Milton*) will act as bridge between the world of *Milton* and *Jerusalem* and that of *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Job*, applying equally to both: ‘he became what he beheld’ (M3.29, E97).

4. 'SEEING IS BELIEVING:' CONVERSION IN BLAKE'S

PILGRIM'S PROGRESS AND BOOK OF JOB

Fear not dreams, fear not visions[.]
– Blake, *The French Revolution 180*, E294

Oft' have I heard of thine Almighty pow'r,
But never saw thee till this dreadful hour.
O'erwhelm'd with shame, the Lord of life I see,
Abhor myself, and give my soul to thee[.]
– Edward Young, *A Paraphrase on Part of the Book of Job*⁵⁶²

Yes, indeed, that is how it is received, how it is found, how the door is opened.
– Augustine, *Confessions 13.38.53*

4.1 Introduction

Around 1824, three years before his death, Blake started on a series of watercolours illustrating the First Part of Bunyan's allegorical conversion narrative *Pilgrim's Progress*. The series consists of twenty-eight watercolour sketches plus an additional one (B829 20, perhaps a rejected alternate),⁵⁶³ and Bentley has suggested (on the basis of a comment by Gilchrist) that Catherine Blake coloured the unfinished sketches after Blake's death.⁵⁶⁴ Blake criticism has largely overlooked

⁵⁶² *The Poetical Works of the Rev. Dr. Edward Young: With the Life of the Author*, vol. 4 (Philadelphia, 1805), 134. Young's *Paraphrase on Job* from 1719 consists almost solely of material from God's speeches in Job 38-41 and is accompanied by notes, in which exotic details about crocodiles and the stupidity of ostriches are explained. The *Paraphrase of Job* was often bound with *Night Thoughts*, as was also the case with the 1796 copy that belonged to Blake (see details in BB, 702).

⁵⁶³ See Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 181-82, 233-34. I do not include it in my discussion, following Norvig's argument that if Blake rejected the plate, he did not consider it central to his interpretation of *Pilgrim's Progress*. Thus my plate numbering is once removed in relation to Butlin and follows Norvig instead.

⁵⁶⁴ Gilchrist notes that 'aided by Mr. Tatham she [Catherine] [...] even finished some of the drawings' (quoted in BR, 481). Bentley concludes that the 'drawings' in question must be the *Pilgrim's Progress* illustrations, and William Rossetti in 1863 expressed the same view (Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 599). Butlin in his descriptions of the plates (B829 1-29) identifies which parts appear to have been brushed up, noting that the only one which seems not to have been touched by a later hand is 'Christian and Hopeful in the River' (pl. 27, B829 28).

the series, the only longer significant study being Norvig's comprehensive analysis from 1993,⁵⁶⁵ but I include it in the following for three main reasons. Firstly, because it would be curious not to include Blake's interpretation of a well-known conversion text in the context of this thesis – not least one that originates in a Calvinist context so apparently different from Blake's own theological outlook. Secondly, because together with the Job engravings, it illustrates the form that conversion or spiritual transformation takes in Blake's late works – showing how the body of Christ and its importance to the convert has now again developed, and revealing the emphasis that Blake now places on visionary experience and the restoration of the subject (over the moment of self-annihilation, for example). And thirdly, because it draws on the conversion themes and markers that we have already seen develop throughout this thesis, at the same time as it represents a particular development of them. This sets the series significantly apart from Blake's earlier works and connects it closely with the Job engravings, and – furthermore – it shows us Blake's now more fully developed idea that existence in the divine body and in the imagination is one. Again, it is the spiritual, intellectual, and perceptual development – the conversion – of one protagonist that is in focus, and his way from inner division to inner unity and restoration. But the way in which this restoration is arrived at is, as we will see, different in focus from earlier.

Norvig, on the other hand, is suspicious of this approach to the series and argues for an interpretation of it as it appears to viewers now (Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 124).

⁵⁶⁵ It is not, for example, included in Morton D. Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening: The Last Works of William Blake* (Oxford, 2003). The series is, however, discussed in Martin Butlin, 'An Extra Illustration to *Pilgrim's Progress*,' *Blake Newsletter: An Illustrated Quarterly* 5.3 (1972): 213-14, G. E. Bentley Jr., 'The Inscriptions on Blake's Designs to *Pilgrim's Progress*,' *Blake Newsletter: An Illustrated Quarterly* 6 (1973): 68-70, James T. Wills, 'An Additional Drawing for Blake's Bunyan Series,' *Blake Newsletter: An Illustrated Quarterly* 6 (1973): 62-67, Christopher Heppner, "'Under the Hill:' Tyndale or Bunyan?,' *Blake / An Illustrated Quarterly* 23.4 (1990): 200-1, and John B. Pierce, 'Bunyan at the Gates of Paradise,' *Blake / An Illustrated Quarterly* 23.4 (1990): 198-200.

As both main analyses in this chapter (*Pilgrim's Progress* and the 'contrary' Job engravings) refer to illustration series, and as Blake did not produce any longer poetical works in the period that I focus on (ca. 1823-27), this chapter is more descriptive and draws less on textual material than earlier. And as a result of the current lack of critical discussion of the Bunyan illustrations, I include the contrary work to a greater extent in this chapter than I have in the previous, in order to use the two illustration series to fruitfully enlighten each other.

Although Blake could express suspicion towards allegory ('Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct & inferior kind of Poetry. Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists,' VLJ68, E554), he clearly valued *Pilgrim's Progress*: 'Allegory is Seldom without some Vision Pilgrims Progress is full of it' (VLJ68, E554). He also occasionally compared himself to Bunyan or to Christian, the protagonist of *Pilgrim's Progress*.⁵⁶⁶ Although his comment in an 1804 letter to Hayley about 'putting John Milton with John Bunyan' might seem disparaging towards Bunyan, Blake's point is more complex. As Norvig has pointed out, the context of the letter was that Hayley wanted Blake to illustrate Hayley's unpublished material under Flaxman's supervision. Blake was not in favour of this prospect and replied:

I was about to have written to you to express my wish that two so unequal labourers might not be yoked to the same Plow & to desire you if you could to get Flaxman to do the whole because I thought it would be (to say the best of myself) like putting John Milton with John Bunyan

⁵⁶⁶ For more on Blake's relationship with Bunyan, arguing that Blake's position towards Bunyan changed from critical to appreciative in the early 1800s, see Norvig, *Dark Figures*, chapter 2. For a similarly positive use of the term allegory to that in *A Vision of The Last Judgment*, see Blake's letter to Butts from 6 July 1803, in which he describes an unnamed 'Grand Poem' that he had written in Felpham as 'Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding' (E730). The poem is probably *Milton*, but might also be *The Four Zoas* or perhaps *Jerusalem*.

(To William Hayley, 4 December 1804, E758)⁵⁶⁷

Later in the same letter, he again refers to Bunyan, now identifying himself with Christian (not Bunyan) and representing himself as the subject of a similar type of conversion to Christian's in *Pilgrim's Progress*:

I have lost my Confusion of Thought while at work & am as much myself when I take the Pencil or Graver into my hand as I used to be in my Youth I have indeed fought thro a Hell of terrors & horrors (which none could know but myself.) in a Divided Existence now no longer Divided. nor at war with myself I shall travel on in the Strength of the Lord God as Poor Pilgrim says[.]

(To William Hayley, 4 December 1804, E758)

This, as I mentioned in chapter 1.2, is one of the paragraphs sometimes quoted when referring to Blake's own 'conversion.'⁵⁶⁸

It was not only Blake (and Hayley) who connected Blake with Bunyan. In his last years, Blake's group of young disciples, 'The Ancients,' affectionately knew Blake by the name of 'The Interpreter,' and his house as 'The House of the Interpreter.'⁵⁶⁹ This referred to the central scene of the visit to the Interpreter's house in *Pilgrim's Progress* which Blake seems to have had a particular interest in; he had already illustrated 'The Man Sweeping the Interpreter's Parlour' (an emblem of the relationship between the law and the gospel) in 1794⁵⁷⁰ – a scene on which

⁵⁶⁷ Ibid., 93-94. Norvig points out that Blake's identification with Bunyan in the letter was prompted by Hayley's first comparing Blake with Bunyan, disparaging Blake's 'extravagant' enthusiasm by comparing it to Bunyan's 'mad enthusiasm.' Blake picked up on this negative identification and recast it – not only in the 1804 letter to Hayley quoted here (although this is the most direct reference) but on several other occasions also (ibid., 22, 86-96).

⁵⁶⁸ See, for example, Damrosch Jr., *Symbol and Truth*, 245.

⁵⁶⁹ BR, 404-5.

⁵⁷⁰ A second version from ca. 1821 also exists (BR, 405). The 1794 version is discussed in Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 48-61. In Bunyan's text, the Interpreter's dusty parlour (the dust representing original sin) is first swept by a man representing the Law. When this only makes the dust 'so abundantly [...] fly about, that *Christian* had almost therewith been

only one other Bunyan illustrator before him had worked⁵⁷¹ – and although he did not use that particular motif in the 1824 watercolours, he did include two other scenes from the Interpreter’s house.⁵⁷² Furthermore, other single plates referring to *Pilgrim’s Progress* exist from as early as ca. 1780,⁵⁷³ indicating that Blake had a longstanding interest in Bunyan’s work. Similarly, there are possible references to *Pilgrim’s Progress* in several of Blake’s illuminated books from early on, of which Norvig particularly singles out references in *The Marriage* (ca. 1790-93), *Europe* (1794 – here the burdened pilgrim appears as a central visual motif in pl. 3, fig. 11), Blake’s *Notebook* (ca. 1793-1818), and *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* (ca. 1820).⁵⁷⁴ Any copies of *Pilgrim’s Progress* (or other works by Bunyan) that might have belonged to Blake are, however, untraced.⁵⁷⁵

4.2 *Pilgrim’s Progress*

Pilgrim’s Progress was written in two parts, the first of which was published in 1678 and the second in 1684; this was after Bunyan’s spiritual autobiography *Grace Abounding*, which described his own spiritual ‘progress,’ had been published in 1666. *Pilgrim’s Progress* is an allegorical tale of the spiritual journey of ‘Christian’ who travels from the City of Destruction to the Celestial City. On the way he encounters various personified vices and virtues that all – in different ways – have

choaked,’ a ‘Damsel’ representing the Gospel sprinkles the room with water, after which it can be cleaned (PP 29-30).

⁵⁷¹ Namely the Dutch engraver Jan Luiken (Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 51-53). For the illustration history of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, see *ibid.*, 119-24 and appendices A and B.

⁵⁷² ‘The Man in the Iron Cage’ (pl. 12) and ‘The Man Who Dreamed of the Day of Judgment’ (pl. 13), both occurring immediately before the central pl. 14.

⁵⁷³ For example ‘An Allegory of the Bible’ (ca. 1780-85, B127) and ‘Christian in the Valley of the Shadow of Death’ (ca. 1780, B183 – untraced).

⁵⁷⁴ For more on these traces of *Pilgrim’s Progress* in other Blake works, see Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 61-86. In *Europe* 3, the ‘nameless shadowy female’ in the text also identifies herself as a traveller or pilgrim: ‘For I am faint with travel’ (1.7, E60), thereby accentuating the theme of pilgrimage.

⁵⁷⁵ As per the list of books owned by Blake in BB, 681-702.

an impact on his spiritual development. The journey itself is set within a landscape that fuses recognisable everyday locations and situations (such as towns, neighbourly relations, and marital problems) with folk belief (such as ‘Hobgoblins, and Satyrs, and Dragons,’ PP 64), biblical references manifested both in landscape and in dramatis personae (‘Into that Quagg *King David once did fall,*’ PP 62),⁵⁷⁶ and the language of chivalric romances (Christ ‘had been a *great Warriour,*’ PP 52).⁵⁷⁷ The result is a text deeply grounded in the Christian topography of salvation, using the familiar character of the pilgrim, the *viator* (traveller or wanderer), or the *miles Christi* (soldier of Christ) to exemplify Christian’s – and by extension each reader’s or Christian’s – allegorical journey through conversion to salvation.⁵⁷⁸

The narrative of the First Part of *Pilgrim’s Progress*, which I focus on here, begins when Christian (or ‘Graceless,’ as he is called before he is given a new name in the biblical tradition of Abraham, Jacob, or indeed Paul) runs away from his native town and family, convinced that the town will soon be ‘burned with fire from Heaven’ (PP 8).⁵⁷⁹ On his back, Christian carries a heavy burden, acquired through

⁵⁷⁶ Bunyan’s use of the Bible within the narrative is thus double: the Bible both provides the text that Christian relates to (Christian’s ‘book’ represents the Old Testament, while his ‘roll’ represents the New) and at the same time represents a frame of reference for the landscape around Christian and the people he encounters. This double register provides a powerful double pointing towards the Bible in Bunyan’s text.

⁵⁷⁷ Christopher Hill, *A Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People: John Bunyan and his Church 1628-1688* (Oxford, 1988), 202-4.

⁵⁷⁸ This type of allegorical representation is well known from the New Testament parables through to Prudentius’s (ca. 348-413) *Psychomachia*, to Bernard of Clairvaux’s parables (see Bruun, *Parables*, in particular part 2, chapter 1). *Pilgrim’s Progress* also, of course, belongs to a more local tradition of English allegorical texts such as William Langland’s *Piers Plowman* (ca. 1360-87).

⁵⁷⁹ Blake’s illustrations refer only to the First Part, and thus I do not discuss the Second Part here. A sketch by Blake exists, however, which may depict the ‘Pilgrimage of Christiana’ (B834) and thus refer to the Second Part. The Second Part is parallel to the First Part in that it describes the spiritual journey of Christian’s wife, Christiana, and their children (i.e. a collective body as opposed to Christian the lone traveller) as they travel in the footsteps of Christian to the City of God. Interestingly, Christian’s journey has left its mark on the landscape that his wife and children travel through in the Second Part: here, memorial stones have been raised to mark his victories and struggles (Hill, *Turbulent, Seditious, and Factious People*, 200, 226-30).

reading his ‘book.’ Before long he meets the character Evangelist who substitutes Christian’s book with a roll and sends Christian off on his way towards the wicket gate and, ultimately, towards heaven. Christian eventually reaches his goal, but only after many struggles, detours, and encounters, and along the way he develops an increased Christian understanding. Thus it is, for example, through contemplation of the cross that he is delivered of his ‘burden:’ ‘It was very surprizing to him that the sight of the Cross should thus ease him of his burden’ (PP 38), and later Christian himself takes on the active role of evangelist in relation to his companion, Faithful.

The text itself is set within a dream frame in which the narrator appears from time to time (increasingly so, as noted above, towards the end), and ultimately ends with the narrator waking from his dream again: ‘So I awoke, and behold it was a Dream’ (PP 163). Thus *Pilgrim’s Progress* is simultaneously a story focussed exclusively on the psychological and spiritual development of the protagonist, Christian, and a self-referential metanarrative with a highly visible narrator. In fact, if compared with *Grace Abounding*, it is clear that the allegorical character ‘Christian’ and the autobiographical subject in *Grace Abounding* undergo very similar experiences during their slow, gradual conversion with several setbacks (although only *Pilgrim’s Progress* explicitly uses the setting of the ‘journey’ and character of the ‘pilgrim’ to convey the conversion development within the text).⁵⁸⁰

As such, *Pilgrim’s Progress* appears as an externalized (or ‘contrary’) version of

⁵⁸⁰ Ibid., 206-7. As we will see below, there are also parallels between the narrator of *Grace Abounding* and other characters in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Both works are often understood to refer to the paradigm of one decisive, one-off conversion event. This is, for example, the case in Hindmarsh, *The Evangelical Conversion Narrative*, 50-52, in which Bunyan’s sudden ‘experience of relief under the promises of the gospel’ in *Grace Abounding* is understood as coming ‘as a bolt out of the blue’ (51). Likewise, Christian’s transformative experience before the cross is seen as *the* crucial experience in *Pilgrim’s Progress* – an understanding which Blake, as we will see, shares. However, it might just as well be argued that what *Pilgrim’s Progress* and *Grace Abounding* represent are two narratives of extended, gradual, and willed conversion with several high – as well as several low – points, not one single climax.

Grace Abounding: more entertaining, more clearly set within a binary dynamic of progress and regress, and less claustrophobic.⁵⁸¹

Thus there was plenty of material in *Pilgrim's Progress* to appeal to Blake as an interpreter and illustrator. He might have felt drawn, for example, to the text as an individual conversion story centred around the psychological, spiritual, and perceptual development of one character; as a narrative in which (personal) experience, and in particular the faculty of vision, was valued over conventional moral conduct and life according to the law (exemplified by Christian immorally leaving his family behind); and as a text which plays on the relationship between the binary motifs of 'the book' and 'the roll,' which Blake also used in his own works (he might even originally have picked these motifs up from Bunyan).⁵⁸² With regards to style and form, Blake might have been drawn towards the text's dream setting and use of the motif of sleep (a motif which also appears in several of Blake's works),⁵⁸³ the interplay between the narrative and the marginal notes,⁵⁸⁴ and the presence of the narrator who from time to time breaks off the narrative and reminds the reader that the story is, in fact, nothing but a dream. As mentioned, the narrator even enters his own dream narrative as an active character, especially towards the end; first by a poetical interlude called 'The Dreamers Note' (PP 137, in the chorus style that has been used throughout the narrative by Christian and his companions) and then by being directly addressed by one of the characters in his dream, a gardener, as he observes Christian and his friend Hopeful.⁵⁸⁵ Last but not

⁵⁸¹ For more on the relationship between the two and a partial refutation of *Grace Abounding* as the less successful counterpart to *Pilgrim's Progress*, see Michael Davies, *Graceful Reading: Theology and Narrative in the Works of John Bunyan* (Oxford, 2002).

⁵⁸² For examples, see below.

⁵⁸³ For example, Albion is asleep throughout most of *Jerusalem*, as discussed in the previous chapter.

⁵⁸⁴ For a short illustrative example of this see Zinck, 'Doctrine by Ensample,' 49-52.

⁵⁸⁵ Cf. p. 212 above.

least, Blake might have found Bunyan's project of turning or converting his reader through the experience of reading appealing, a project which is variously described as 'psychomachy' (Arlette M. Zinck), 'affective stylistics' (Stanley Fish), or simply 'allegory' (Norvig).⁵⁸⁶ One indication that the reader is positioned as much as a pilgrim in the text as Christian is the fact that although it is Christian's spiritual development the text describes, he soon takes on the role of teacher and guide for his varying companions, thereby launching the possibility that the roles of guide, pilgrim, and student in the text might be less categorical than they seem at first. As Zinck points out, Bunyan creates a text 'designed to lead [its] readers to a prescribed experience of spiritual conflict. The outcome of this spiritual conflict, however, is entirely dependant upon each reader's response.'⁵⁸⁷ Although the doctrinal content of *Pilgrim's Progress* (especially as represented in the dialogues between Christian and Hopeful towards the end) is thus different to, as well as being more prescriptive than, what we usually observe in Blake's works, a similar energy and a similar belief in the spiritually transforming power of art is present. Thus the *Pilgrim's Progress* images are 'didactic in the sense that they teach and have as their goal the activation of the transforming and transformative imagination of the viewer.'⁵⁸⁸

Blake's version of *Pilgrim's Progress* is faithful towards Bunyan's original with regards to chronology and structure, and Blake does not (as he does in the Job engravings) add scenes to the narrative that are not already there. He does, however, stretch some scenes and compress others, so that Christian's vision of Christ on the

⁵⁸⁶ Zinck, 'Doctrine by Ensample,' Stanley Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts: The Experience of Seventeenth-Century Literature* (Berkeley; Los Angeles, 1972), 224-64, 383-427, and Norvig, *Dark Figures*, in particular 210-11.

⁵⁸⁷ Zinck, 'Doctrine by Ensample,' 44.

⁵⁸⁸ Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 129.

cross comes to appear at the very centre of the visual narrative. Blake crafts the conversion of Christian as yet another quest for inner unity (in the manner of Milton or Albion) – a point which is simply, but effectively, illustrated by the way in which Christian up until his central vision of Christ is dressed in old rags that are divided into two pieces, a torn red top and torn blue trousers. After the vision, on the other hand, as his restorative journey has begun, Christian is dressed in a long gown, indicating unity. And finally Blake emphasises the way in which the journey through his images represent increased vision or, as we might put it in Blakean terms, increased partaking in the divine imagination. This theme is particularly reflected in Blake's use of the rainbow (or rainbow colours) in the images. The rainbow occurs for the first time in pl. 1 (fig. 47) above the dreamer and then subsequently throughout the narrative, whenever Christian experiences true contact with the divine – plates 3, 10, 11 (fig. 48), 14 (fig. 49), 15, and 17 – until in the final pl. 28 (fig. 50), the whole image has become engulfed in the visionary rainbow. This rainbow also occur elsewhere in Blake's works, often indicating a moment or particular concentration of spiritual or 'mysterious' insight. This is seen, for example, in Blake's depiction of 'Milton's Mysterious Dream' from the illustrations to Milton's *Il Penseroso* (ca. 1816-20, B534 11) showing Milton sleeping on a bank with his 'mysterious dream' indicated by a circular rainbow behind him with figures depicted *in* it, and the appearance of scrolls emphasizing the sense of spiritual insight – a motif strikingly similar to pl. 1 of his *Pilgrim's Progress*. Likewise, in Blake's description of his visual representation of The Last Judgment, a rainbow surrounds Jesus as the 'divine Humanity' (VLJ85, E562), and the wish is expressed

that the viewer could enter imaginatively ‘into these Images in his Imagination [...] Enter into Noahs Rainbow’ (VLJ82, E560).⁵⁸⁹

In the following, I focus in particular on three points of discussion that show Blake as a Bunyan reader and anticipate themes that will also be raised in the Job illustrations. These are: 1) the relationship between book and roll as signifiers of the relationship between the law and the gospel, and between text and experience or vision, 2) the question of linear progress versus circular movement in the narrative, and how this relates to rebirth or conversion, and 3) the role of Christ in the narrative and the way in which Blake gives Bunyan’s narrative an emphatically Christocentric bent. Of these, I pay most attention to the latter theme. For the sake of thematic coherence, I do not offer a comprehensive analysis of *Pilgrim’s Progress* such as that offered by Norvig. What I do in particular add in relationship to Norvig, though, is a deeper investigation of the vision of Christ in pl. 14 and a discussion of the way it relates to other visions of the crucified Christ in Blake’s works, as well as an exploration of the connection lines *between* the Bunyan and the Job illustrations, which Norvig does not explore.

4.3 *Pilgrim’s Progress* through Blake’s eyes

Book and roll

Blake seems to have been interested in the relationship between the two forms of text, the book and the roll (or scroll, as is the form he uses in his texts, for example FZ79.35, E355) from early on. The difference and relationship between the two are used in connection with his more general project of questioning the hegemony of

⁵⁸⁹ See also Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 224. Kathleen Raine has noted that Blake may have been inspired by Boehme’s use of the rainbow in *Mysterium Magnum* 33 as a ‘Figure of the last Judgment, showing how the inward spiritual World will again manifest itself’ (quoted in Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 366).

text and ‘memory’ over imagination and vision (reflecting Paul’s words in 2 Cor. 3:6 that ‘the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life’). In Blake’s terminology, memory represents blind adherence to tradition and passed down knowledge, whereas vision and imagination represent an active and creative engagement with the world, with texts, and with other people (in the ‘New Age,’ Blake writes in *Milton*, ‘the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration,’ 1, E95). In Blake’s works, it is rolls that represent the visionary, imaginative form of text, whereas books often represent ‘memory’ and adherence to the law – compare, for example, the positive image of the devil dictating from a scroll in *The Marriage* pl. 10 (fig. 51) with Urizen’s oppressive ‘books formd of metals’ in which he writes his ‘secrets of wisdom’ (*Book of Urizen* 4.24-25, E72). The trope of books and rolls also appears in the illustrations to the Book of Job, where it functions as a means to illuminate Job’s development from reliance on text over experience to reliance on experience over text, thereby allocating text to its proper place.⁵⁹⁰

Thus Blake immediately, as we would expect, picks up on the relationship between the book and the roll in *Pilgrim’s Progress*. Here, the book and the roll represent the Old Testament and the New Testament, respectively, or the law and the *evangelion* (these are also represented topographically as Mount Sinai versus Mount Zion, and in the dramatis personae as the man sweeping the Interpreter’s parlour versus the ‘Damsel’ sprinkling the room with water). Bunyan thus sets up the book and the roll as opposites, the book being consistently figured as negative (notwithstanding the fact that it was the book that in the first place brought Christian to that point of despair from which his *conversio* began), and the roll being figured as Christian’s positive travel companion, ‘the assurance of his life,

⁵⁹⁰ See Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, chapters 2 and 3.

and acceptance at the desired Haven' (PP 44). The motif of the law as the triggering factor behind Christian's initial despair at the outset of the narrative is underlined by two references in the very beginning that position Christian as a figure similar to Paul, unhappy under the law and *ready for a conversion*. First Christian cries out at the end of the first paragraph, '*what shall I do?*' (PP 8), and then two paragraphs later, '*What shall I do to be saved?*' (PP 9). This may refer to two exclamations in Acts that both appear in connection with a central conversion story: first in the first narrative of Paul's conversion in Acts 9:6, where Paul cries out 'Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?' and later in 16:30, where the prison keeper in Philippi, who is about to convert, cries 'what must I do to be saved?'⁵⁹¹ The use of these two references, when the narrative of Christian is just beginning, therefore diagnoses the problem with Christian's religion before his conversion (he knows only the burden of the law and not the freedom of the *evangelion*), and also anticipates his experiences ahead: like Paul and the prison-keeper, he will unexpectedly be given the *evangelion* and, like them, he will convert.

In Blake's *Pilgrim's Progress*, the identification of the book and the roll as Law and Gospel, respectively, is toned down a little – not least due to the fact that there is no accompanying text in the illustrations with which to make the identification explicit. The centrality of the two opposite forms of text is still emphasized, though. In pl. 2, we see Christian with the heavy burden on his back, hunched over his book and with a haunted look on his face, as he is reading. In the next illustration, when Evangelist presents the scroll to Christian, the importance of it is underlined by the fact that both Evangelist and Christ look down towards the scroll, not at each other – Christian even raising his hands in surprise. On pl. 7 (fig.

⁵⁹¹ Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 35-36.

52), the book is shown again, as Christian kneels before Mr Worldly Wiseman, again (as in pl. 2) eagerly consulting his book for travel directions. Meanwhile Mr Worldly Wiseman, the representative of a relationship with the law directed by ‘memory,’ stretches out his arm in the direction of Mount Sinai, thereby indicating that the form of reading that Christian practises in this image will ultimately lead him to the locus of misunderstood religion.

When the book and roll trope appears for the fourth, and last, time in the images, however, it represents Christian’s internalization of the roll in the arbour.⁵⁹² As the scene appears in Bunyan’s text, Christian falls asleep in the arbour, drops his precious roll, and continues without it – only later to realize that he has lost it, after which he returns to the arbour to find it. In Blake’s version, the scene takes on a different hue, as Blake connects it closely with the scene that he figures as the turning point of the narrative: Christian’s vision of Christ on the cross on pl. 14 (fig. 49), which initiates the restorative second half of his journey. The two images are positioned as interconnected by Blake inverting central structures from pl. 14 in pl. 17.⁵⁹³ In pl. 14 (fig. 49), the pictorial energy moves upwards: Christ is seen at the top of the image, stretching his arms slightly upwards. He is surrounded by a visionary light or cloud that spreads upwards, Christian below him looks upwards, and vertical structures in either side of the image support the bottom-up energy. In pl. 17 (fig. 53), on the other hand, the central structure encloses itself on Christian. Seated at the centre of the image with his rediscovered roll in hand, Christian reaches his left arm upwards in a gesture that seems to suggest that he is pulling divine energy down into himself, receiving it through his strong, receptive open

⁵⁹² A book also appears in pl. 15, but now it is held by one of the ‘Three Shining Ones’ and seems to represent the place of text in the renewed existence (thus, as we will see, similar to the restored book and scrolls in the Job engravings).

⁵⁹³ Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 177.

hand.⁵⁹⁴ The arbour around him inverts the shape of the visionary light, or cloud, in pl. 14, and together the structure of the arbour and its dense vegetation (dominated by red flowers) closes around him like a womb.⁵⁹⁵ At the top of the image, a rainbow – indicating that this is a moment of vision – reinforces the sense that the energy in the image is circular, centring on Christian, rather than being vertical. The point of the constellation of the two images, pl. 14 and pl. 17, thus seems to be that the vision of Christ that Christian experiences in pl. 14 must needs be followed by an internalization of the vision. In this internalization, Christian draws the heavenly vision into himself, applies it in an exploration of his own divine humanity,⁵⁹⁶ and thereby finally appropriates the roll (that is, the Gospel) and restores his relationship with text. Needless to say, neither roll nor book is ever seen in Blake's visual narrative again, Christian having discarded the one that only led him astray, and completely internalized the one that led him to the vision of Christ – a different perspective from that seen in the Job engravings where, as we will see, the protagonist's relationship with text is restored along the way.

Pilgrim's progress?

A second feature in *Pilgrim's Progress* that Blake picks up on is the tension between forward progress and circular movement. This tension is one that corresponds with many other conversion narratives – the obvious examples being Augustine's *Confessions* (with its prolonged narrative of a protagonist caught between longing for the one moment of assurance and not realizing that this

⁵⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁹⁵ Ibid. The red flowers from the arbour are also seen *on* Christian's body, where they appear like 'tiny flesh wounds' or 'the trickle of blood' (see *ibid.*, 178), thereby perhaps suggesting that Christian takes on the vision of Christ to the extent of becoming him (cf. p. 29 above). Significantly, these tiny red wounds or drops of blood also recall images of Christ on the cross, not least in the Moravian tradition.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 177.

assurance slowly grows while waiting for it), and the ‘one step forward, two steps backwards’ dynamics of *Grace Abounding. Pilgrim’s Progress* might at first seem to represent the pilgrimage of one man moving from A to B. But as Fish has pointed out, the question of progress in *Pilgrim’s Progress* is not at all simple, and the terms ‘progress’ and ‘pilgrim’ in the title are if not misleading then at least mildly disorientating for the reader, since they create expectations about the narrative that are often contradicted by the text.⁵⁹⁷ At one point towards the end of its narrative, *Pilgrim’s Progress* even appears to the reader as having moved backwards instead of forwards: for when Christian finally makes it to the last test (crossing the river) before he reaches the gates of Heaven, he is so weak and despondent that it is only with the determined help of his companion Hopeful that he reaches the other bank safely. The reader’s impression that the route Christian chose was, in fact, not ideal, is also emphasized when Christian converses with Hopeful towards the end of their journey (although he is identified as *the* pilgrim in the title, he is clearly not a model pilgrim but rather an example of the shortcomings that potential converts face). Here it becomes apparent that Hopeful followed an altogether different (and considerably easier) route to salvation.⁵⁹⁸ (An additional twist is that for the reader who is also familiar with *Grace Abounding*, it soon becomes clear that Hopeful, when he recounts his own conversion experience for Christian towards the end, describes a development strikingly similar to that of the autobiographical narrator in *Grace Abounding*, thereby identifying Bunyan with the more successful rather than with the less successful pilgrim).⁵⁹⁹

⁵⁹⁷ Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 233, and chapter 4, in particular 229-37. For an alternate view, see Valentine Cunningham, ‘Glossing and Glozing: Bunyan and Allegory,’ in *John Bunyan Conventicle and Parnassus*, ed. N. H. Keeble (Oxford, 1988), 217-40.

⁵⁹⁸ Fish, *Self-Consuming Artifacts*, 230.

⁵⁹⁹ Davies, *Graceful Reading*, 175-76.

This anti-progressive or regressive dynamic in *Pilgrim's Progress* works as a means to move the focus from Christian as 'the pilgrim' to the reader as 'the pilgrim,' for even when Christian fails in moving steadily forward, the reader still moves progressively through the pages of the narrative – and with each of Christian's setbacks, the reader is confirmed in her or his own progress.⁶⁰⁰ With this in mind, Bunyan's introductory promise to the reader in his *apologia*, 'This Book will make a Travailer of thee,' seems indeed to have become true, as the reader reaches the end of the text.⁶⁰¹ Here, the dreamer has awoken again ('and behold it was a Dream,' PP 163), and Bunyan in his 'Conclusion' warns '*See if thou canst Interpret it to me;/ Or to thy self, or Neighbour: but take heed/ Of mis-interpreting*' (PP 164).⁶⁰² The force of the narrative, therefore, is directed towards the reader. As I have mentioned before, however, one should not prematurely be confident of one's salvation: just as Christian almost fails to make it through the final test in the river, the reader could likewise easily lose sight of the way to salvation and end up in hell instead. As the narrator notes at the very end of the text: 'then I saw that there was a way to Hell, even from the Gates of Heaven, as well as from the City of *Destruction*' (PP 163).⁶⁰³ This theme of the salvation of some and damnation of

⁶⁰⁰ Cf. Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 210.

⁶⁰¹ Zinck notes that 'travailer' was not only associated with journeying or work in Bunyan's time, but also with the labour of childbirth. *Pilgrim's Progress* is thus from the very beginning positioned as a story of rebirth as well as of a pilgrimage (Zinck, 'Doctrine by Ensample,' 55).

⁶⁰² Here Bunyan anticipates the possibility of having to convert – or walk the pilgrim's way – again ('But if thou shalt cast all away as vain,/ I know not but 'twill make me Dream again,' PP 164) as well as any potential backsliding. This last point is illustrated in the text in a discourse between Christian and Hopeful: '*Hope*. Now since we are talking about him [Ignorance], let us a little enquire into the reason of the suddain back-sliding of him and such others. *Chr*. *It may be very profitable, but do you begin*' (PP 152).

⁶⁰³ For a short illustrative discussion of the way in which Bunyan sets up conditions for his readers to experience for themselves the doctrines discussed in the text and to test their own ability to discern the right way to salvation (even when Christian obviously gets it wrong, as – for example – in the arbour), see Zinck, 'Doctrine by Ensample,' 44-55.

others is, however, not reflected in Blake's illustrations, where it is the spiritual and psychological movement of Christian which is in focus.

How does Blake express the 'anti-progressive' qualities of *Pilgrim's Progress*? Firstly, he employs the technique of doubling, which he uses to indicate that Christian returns on a regular basis to places he has already visited or to situations he has been in before. Although this doubling is a subtle and sophisticated rhetorical manoeuvre,⁶⁰⁴ on an immediate level its effect on the viewer is clear. The doubling technique has the advantage of connecting disparate individual plates together, gives a sense of visual coherence, and, most importantly, underlines the sense that although Christian is moving forward, he is also walking in circles. However, as in Bunyan's text, this anti-progress is only clear to the viewer, not to Christian himself. To illustrate Blake's use of this technique, I will give two examples.

The first example is found in pl. 8, showing 'Christian Fears the Fire from the Mountain'⁶⁰⁵ (fig. 54, the mountain being Mount Sinai as the negative locus of the law), which is mirrored or doubled in pl. 23, 'Faithful's Martyrdom' (fig. 55, in which Christian's first companion is taken up to heaven in a scene mirroring Elijah's translation into heaven in a fiery chariot, 2 Kings 2:1-12). The two images appear particularly related through the flames of fire which dominate both images, similar colour schemes, and an upwards movement from the bottom left corner towards the upper right corner in both. These similarities underline the parallel content of both scenes (both Christian and Faithful are attempting to reach a

⁶⁰⁴ See Norvig, whose analysis of the series to a large extent is based exactly on this doubling motif (Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 134-213). Norvig does not, however, refer to the use of the same technique in Blake's Job engravings (see below).

⁶⁰⁵ The titles were inserted by a later hand, perhaps that of Tatham (Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 599), and I use those slightly amended by Norvig – for transcriptions of Tatham's titles, see B829.

destination which seems unattainable) and the references in both scenes to an Old Testament context (Mount Sinai and Elijah's translation into heaven). They also, however, emphasize their differences: whereas Christian's way up Mount Sinai is a long, dangerous, and solitary way that ultimately ends in defeat (he never actually makes it up the mountain), Faithful's way to heaven is immediate and victorious – he is simply taken up (takes a shortcut, in other words) and leaves Christian to walk the longer way. Christian, thus, is unsuccessful, Faithful is successful – and only the reader recognizes the similarities between the two scenes.

The second example is found in pl. 11, 'The Gate is Opened by Good-will' (fig. 48) which is doubled in the last image in the series, 'At the Gates of Heaven' (pl. 28, fig. 50). Again, similar colour schemes are used in the two plates, and they have a similar composition: in both images, the central structure – the doorway in pl. 11 and the two angels whose wings touch in pl. 28 – points upwards towards the top of the plate ('heaven') and seem to indicate a shape similar to Blake's now well-known trope of the gate or the (gothic) door. These doubled images together suggest that Christian's arrival at his ultimate destination might already have been realised much earlier, namely when Good-will opened the wicket gate for him. Blake thus calls to mind the theme of shortcuts and detours in Bunyan's text, suggesting that Christian might not actually have had to go the whole way from pl. 12 to pl. 28 – or that even though Christian did already arrive at his locus of salvation in pl. 11, he was not yet in a spiritual state to recognise it, and thus misinterpreted it as only a station on the way. There are other significant doubled loci in the series,⁶⁰⁶ and

⁶⁰⁶ Such as the two scenes in House of the Interpreter ('The Man in the Iron Cage' and 'The Man Who Dreamed of the Day of Judgment,' plates 12-13) doubled in the two scenes in Doubting Castle ('Christian and Hopeful in Doubting Castle' and 'Christian and Hopeful Escape Giant Despair,' plates 24-25); 'Christian in the Slough of Despond'/'Christian Drawn out of the Slough by Help' (plates 5-6) doubled in 'Christian and Hopeful in the River' (pl. 27, fig. 57); 'Christian at the Cross' (pl. 14, fig. 49) doubled in 'Christian at the

although the relationships between these doubled loci are different, they all give the viewer a strong sense of déjà-vu when moving through the series – as well as a sense of symmetry which is only emphasized by the fact that Blake chose to exactly double the number of images customarily used in illustrations of *Pilgrim's Progress*: twenty-eight images rather than fourteen.⁶⁰⁷

The anti-progressive or circular element in Blake's illustrations is reinforced by the fact that almost all of the characters that Christian meets face to face on his way have the appearance of being almost identical. This underlines the sense (which is also present in Bunyan's text) that the actual development or pilgrimage takes place at an inner, psychological, or perceptual level. From one perspective, it suggests that Christian does not actually move progressively forwards, but only walks around in circles, unable to discern the fact that Wordly Wiseman, Evangelist, Good-will, and the other characters that he meets are all one and the same (a fact which the viewer soon comes to suspect strongly). This interpretation is, however, contradicted by the fact that Christian *does* ultimately arrive at the 'Gates of Heaven.' Instead, these apparently identical characters add an element of suspense to the series, suggesting to the viewer that we cannot trust the outcome of the narrative until we have actually arrived at the final destination: if neither Christian nor we as viewers can distinguish the different characters from one another, how can we be sure that we are progressing? Or is something hidden from the viewer, so that Christian in fact *does* meet a new character every time, and it is only the viewer who is not able to discern this? The circular movement might, as

Arbour' (pl. 17, fig. 53); 'Christian Met by the Three Shining Ones' (pl. 15) doubled in 'The Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains' (pl. 26); and 'Christian Climbs Hill Difficulty' (pl. 16) doubled in 'Christian Passes the Lions' (pl. 18).

⁶⁰⁷ Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 122. See also Norvig's appendix B for examples of other illustration series.

Norvig has pointed out, be illuminated by a comment in Blake's *Descriptive Catalogue* on his image depicting Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (another pilgrim narrative), which refers to the concept of the subject's development through states:⁶⁰⁸

These States Exist now Man Passes on but States remain for Ever he passes thro them like a traveller who may as well suppose that the places he has passed thro exist no more as a Man may suppose that the States he has passd thro exist no more Every Things is Eternal[.]
(80, E556)

The apparently identical characters that Christian meets along his way – Evangelist (plates 3, 9), Worldly Wiseman (pl. 7), Good-will (pl. 11), The Interpreter (pl. 13), and two of the Shepherds of the Delectable Mountains (pl. 26) – also anticipate the identification game between the apparently identical characters Job, God, Christ, and Satan in the Job illustrations (above all because the apparently identical characters in *Pilgrim's Progress* all have a striking similarity with these four characters in Job). The feature of the seemingly identical meetings in the two series is, however, used for different purposes. In *Pilgrim's Progress* it is used to illustrate Christian's way through states which, as similar as they may seem to the viewer, describe very different stages in his spiritual development: in each state, reality is seen in a different light. In the Job engravings, on the other hand, the apparently identical figures that Job meets are used to emphasize the theme of images, self-images, and identity in the series. Both series, however, are structured around a crucial vision or meeting, which breaks through the circular or anti-progressive elements and moves the narrative forwards in a decisive direction: the vision of Christ.

⁶⁰⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 109.

Christian's vision

Christian's transformation in Blake's *Pilgrim's Progress* is centered around a progressive movement from division to vision, which has its centre in Christian's experience before the cross in pl. 14 (fig. 49). In staging this quest, Blake again crafts his conversion story as a double act: as with *Milton*, Blake both creates a narrative *Raum* for Christian to experience conversion or turning in, and himself performs a turning of the original author and/or work, by which he re-visions him – or his work – in a better form through peeling off his misunderstandings and retracing his original visionary and prophetic potential. His *Pilgrim's Progress* series can thus be seen as yet another 'salvage mission,' by which he seeks to restore the book's 'authentic imaginal content to its appropriate aesthetic genre' and free it from its doctrinal burden so that it could 'rise above the formula of "clouded ... Fable & Allegory" to be experienced as "Real Vision."' ⁶⁰⁹ This freeing of *Pilgrim's Progress* is performed, for example, by changing the ending from a Puritan vision of heaven and hell to an ending which employs an *apokatastasis* (universal salvation) perspective similar to the ending of *Jerusalem*, by neglecting the allegorical convention through which the protagonist fails in order to let the reader succeed, ⁶¹⁰ and by moving the theme of dreams and vision to the foreground of the narrative.

In order to show this journey towards vision, I will particularly focus on is the build-up to the first climax of the series exactly midway through the narrative, namely pl. 14, which depicts Christian's vision of Christ on the cross. Three of Christian's experiences in particular, which are narrated in three short sequences of

⁶⁰⁹ Ibid., 127-28.

⁶¹⁰ Ibid., 210.

plates, prepare him for this vision of Christ. The first of these preparatory experiences occurs in pl. 5 and 6, in which Christian falls into the Slough of Despond and is helped out of it by the appropriately named character Help. Pl. 5, shows how – in a dark and oppressive setting – Help has made it safely to the other side of the Slough on his own, whereas Christian, kept down by the weight of his burden, cannot make it across (this is a prefiguration of the penultimate plate which shows Christian and Hopeful *together* in the River). This first crisis in Blake's narrative is resolved in pl. 6, where we see Help bending down to pull Christian out of the Slough – in the upper right corner, the sun is now visible as a promise of the positive outcome of the crisis, and as a reflection of the visionary rainbow over the dreamer in pl. 1,⁶¹¹ which was an anticipation of the imaginative powers that the narrative will release. As Christian is pulled out of the dark water, he stretches his arms upwards in a gesture which represents the first attempt of an embrace in the series.⁶¹² Christian has his back to the viewer, as will be the case throughout the series whenever he has a positive embracing encounter with a figure who represents the divine (see pl. 11, fig. 48, pl. 14, fig. 49, and pl. 28, fig. 50). The pictorial technique of showing a figure from the back (as we have already seen in the title pages to *Milton* and *Jerusalem*) invites the reader to engage more directly in the visual narrative and facilitates an identification with the depicted figure. This

⁶¹¹ Ibid., 149.

⁶¹² Norvig also suggests that the space between Christian and Help in pl. 6 forms 'a womblike oval on the vertical axis of the drawing [...] [a] womb of interaction' (ibid.), an observation which takes on new interpretative potential now that Blake's Moravian connection has been established and with more pictorial 'wombs' in Blake's works detected (cf. chapter 2). If pl. 6 does indeed refer to a womblike structure, it enforces the sense that Christian's rebirth has already been initiated this early in the narrative, and that there is rebirth in the divine embrace (as seen also in *Jerusalem* 76 and perhaps in the *Night Thoughts* Man of Sorrows, whose slightly raised arms we could now also interpret as an invitation to a transformative embrace). Cf. how the deadly water of the Slough could be interpreted as an instrument of self-annihilation, and how the transformative and restorative womb returns in the arbour in pl. 17.

affective invitation, furthermore, functions as a continuation of the initial appeal to the reader in pl. 4, in which Christian was seen running directly towards the reader with outstretched arms and a panicky appealing expression on his face. Thus pl. 6 represents Christian's first taste of the (attempted) visionary embrace as well as the viewer's first taste of a more active, engaged, and above all subjective involvement in the narrative.⁶¹³ So just as Christian's way to an experience of conversion begins proper in pl. 6, the viewer's does too: the visual narrative moves from being something we observe to being something in which we are actively involved. We, in other words, have become part of Christian's journey.

The second of the experiences leading up to the vision of Christ is the short sub-narrative on plates 7, 8, and 9. Here Christian encounters Mr Worldly Wiseman who – contrary to the directions of Evangelist – directs Christian towards the locus of the law, Mount Sinai (pl. 7, fig. 52). At Mount Sinai, Christian is defeated by the fire from the mountain as he tries to climb it (pl. 8, fig. 54), after which, having realized his wrong turn, he falls to the ground at the feet of Evangelist (pl. 9, fig. 56). That this little visual novella forms a separate sub-narrative (as indeed it does in Bunyan's text) is emphasized by the fact that plates 7 and 9 clearly mirror each other in composition, thus marking the beginning and the end of the sequence. The narrative development in the three plates moves from Christian's misunderstood, misdirected, and unsuccessful encounter with Mr Worldly Wiseman to his successful and visionary encounter with Evangelist. In the two plates 7 and 9, Mr Worldly Wiseman and Evangelist look almost identical⁶¹⁴ and occupy the same space towards the right of their respective image – however, while Mr Worldly

⁶¹³ Ibid., 148.

⁶¹⁴ Norvig notes that the close similarities between the two was already present in the work of Bunyan's first illustrator (ibid., 151).

Wiseman has his left arm stretched out (and his right arm hidden behind his back),⁶¹⁵ Evangelist bends down towards Christian who is kneeling before him. And while Mr Worldly Wiseman superciliously commands Christian to go via the law (Mount Sinai) instead of heading directly to the wicket gate as he had been instructed by Evangelist in pl. 3 ('hear me, I am older than thou!,' Mr Worldly Wiseman argues, PP 18), Evangelist attends to Christian's spiritual state by bending down and demonstrating forgiveness of sins – an act which restores Christian to his original state ('as at first'):

Then *Christian* fell down at his foot as dead, crying, Woe is me, for I am undone: at the sight of which *Evangelist* caught him by the right hand, saying, All manner of sin and blasphemies shall be forgiven unto men; be not faithless, but believing; then did *Christian* again a little revive, and stood up trembling, as at first, before Evangelist.

(PP 22)

Fire plays a significant role in the sub-narrative from pl. 7 to 9. In pl. 8 on the mountain, the fire both represents the 'flashes of fire out of the Hill' from Bunyan's text that makes Christian 'afraid that he should be burned' (PP 20), and signifies the fact that Christian is now in that fiery place of transformation where the angel in *The Marriage* pl. 24 found himself.⁶¹⁶ For Christian, the misconception that is to be purified in the fire from the mountain in pl. 8 is his conviction that the central point of his 'book' is the law – a suppressive misconception which has been reflected in the stormy weather that has been dominating the images until now, culminating in the fire storm on pl. 8.⁶¹⁷ As pl. 8 shows, however, it is crucial for Christian to experience the inadequacy of the law for himself: even though Evangelist has tried

⁶¹⁵ Ibid., 152.

⁶¹⁶ As Norvig points out, this transformative state is again indicated by Blake's use of a womblike structure, which permits Christian's 'escape through a birth canal that issues downward, to the ground where he has his true footing' (ibid.). This observation supports my link between the divine fire and rebirth in Blake's works.

⁶¹⁷ Ibid.

to convince Christian that the way to salvation goes via the gospel, it is impossible for him to fully undergo this transformation of perception until he has experienced these inadequacies for himself.

The crisis is again resolved by Christian's meeting with a divine representative. In pl. 9 (fig. 56) Evangelist bends down, stretches both arms downwards and offers his hands to Christian, who lies kneeling with his face towards the ground, now repenting having followed Mr Worldly Wiseman's directions. In Evangelist's offering his hands to Christian, we again see an attempt or forerunner of the divine embrace, in which the divine and the human subject face each other, one or both with open, inviting arms (although in this image we only see Evangelist trying to raise Christian up, not actually holding him in his arms). At the same time as Evangelist bends down, the fire storm retreats and is now only visible on Christian's (right) side of the plate, indicating that 'the source of the storm and stress is not Jehovah, not an external threat from the Mosaic Law on Mount Sinai, but Christian himself.'⁶¹⁸ As the fire storm disappears towards the right of the image, a natural light originating from somewhere behind the fire takes over as the primary source of light (a light which in the following image has turned into a sun). This is a central moment of revelation for Christian which is crucial in preparing him for the rest of his transformation.⁶¹⁹ But since the plate is seen in side-view, with Evangelist and Christian both 'objectively' seen by the viewer in profile, not 'representatively' from the back, the viewer still lacks an emotional subjective experience of Christian's revelation in plates 7, 8, and 9, similar to the viewer

⁶¹⁸ Ibid., 153.

⁶¹⁹ The crucial character of the plate is reinforced by the fact that it is strikingly similar in composition to Job's climactic vision of Christ in pl. 17 of the Job engravings.

identifying with Christian in the Slough in pl. 6. This, however, is exactly what we get in the following separate sequence, namely plates 10 and 11.

In pl. 10, we see Christian who has finally made it to the wicket gate (the first goal on his quest), still clothed in rags and still with his burden on his back. The wicket gate is built in the gothic style (a symbol, as we have noted, of true vision in Blake), is coloured in the colours of the rainbow (also an indicator of vision), and bears the inscription ‘Knock and it shall be opened’ from the Sermon on the Mount in Matt. 7:7-8.⁶²⁰ The next plate (pl. 11, fig. 48) depicts the moment in which the wicket gate is opened and Christian is received into the arms of Good-Will, another figure who looks almost identical to Evangelist and Mr Worldly Wiseman. In pl. 11, the rainbow-coloured gothic doorway has come alive with angelic figures that move upwards to the central top point of the plate,⁶²¹ and Good-Will is surrounded by a warm light and has a halo. Thus, the attempted but unsuccessful divine embraces in plates 6 and 9 are now finally consummated, as the two figures now fully embrace each other – pencil lines behind Christian even indicate that he is rushing eagerly into Good-Will’s arms. Around the doorway, the rainbow colours have spread from the door to the wall itself, thereby indicating that Christian is now engulfed in vision, standing (as he is) almost upright in an embrace for the first time in the narrative (in the first attempt at an embrace, he was just being pulled up from the Slough, and in the second attempt, he was kneeling before Evangelist, face towards the ground).⁶²² This is, in other words, his first moment of visionary insight.

⁶²⁰ The Sermon on the Mount resonates all through Christian’s conversation with Good-Will in Bunyan’s text.

⁶²¹ Cf. pl. 1 as well as ‘Milton’s Mysterious Dream’ from Blake’s illustrations to *Il Penseroso* (B534 11) mentioned above.

⁶²² Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 157.

It is thus clear that Blake gave special attention to, and ascribed particular meaning to, the scene of Christian entering the wicket gate – even though the scene as it appears in Bunyan’s text seems to be of lesser importance than, for example, the meeting with Evangelist. As Norvig has argued, this may be because Blake attributed more significance in the scene to the forgiveness of sins than Bunyan had. By doing so, however, Blake built on an established tradition of interpretation of the scene. For example, all illustrated standard editions of *Pilgrim’s Progress* contained a depiction of the wicket gate, below which a verse (not by Bunyan) explained how ‘he that will enter’ must ‘stand knocking at the Gate’ but need not doubt ‘that is a knocker but to enter in;/ For God can love him, and forgive his sin.’⁶²³ Thus, Good-Will – despite being nothing but a gate-keeper – is elevated to a much more crucial role in Blake’s interpretation, representing here Christian’s experience of the doctrine of forgiveness of sins and showing how this experience can in itself lead the subject through something very close to the ‘Gates of Paradise:’ ‘Mutual Forgiveness of each Vice/ Such are the Gates of Paradise’ (*For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* 1-2, E259).⁶²⁴

The real climax to the sequence of anticipated and consummated embraces – which illustrates Christian’s increased spiritual awareness and is shown by his ability to stand increasingly upright when encountering representatives of the divine – occurs exactly halfway through Blake’s narrative in pl. 14’s vision of the crucified and glorified Christ (fig. 49). As in *Jerusalem* pl. 76, the cross is here depicted as a tree, and Christ appears as already glorified on the cross with light radiating from his body. Contrary to the other depictions of the crucified Christ we have seen, no blood and no wounds are visible (although some red-brownish colour running down

⁶²³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 158.

⁶²⁴ See *ibid.*, 157-59.

the tree trunk might be thin streams of blood, if they are not young vine branches). As we have also seen before, Christian and Christ face each other, both with arms raised but here without mirroring each other exactly: Christ – naturally – has his arms in the cruciform position, whereas Christian looks as if he is only just about to raise his arms and spread them out, his palms turned towards Christ and head his also raised towards him. To the left of Christian, his burden has fallen to the ground, and in the left corner, the entrance to the grave is seen.

The centrality of this plate is emphasized by the fact that Blake stretched the narrative structure of Bunyan's text considerably to place it exactly halfway through: whereas the vision of the cross occurs early in Bunyan's text (PP 38) and, although obviously important, does not particularly stand out in the narrative, Blake stretched the scenes leading up to the vision and correspondingly compressed the subsequent scenes, so that Christian's experience of Christ on the cross appears as the very transformative centre of the narrative.⁶²⁵ In this Blake differs from other previous illustrators, as the scene at the cross is only included in two of the five popular illustration series reproduced in Norvig's appendix B, namely John Sturt's (1741/1757)⁶²⁶ and Thomas Stothard's (1788) series – and in none of these is Christ's body visible. This corresponds with Bunyan's text in which it is the sight of the cross itself – but not of Christ's body – which evokes a strong affective response in Christian (similar to a viewer before a Man of Sorrows) and makes his burden fall from his back: 'it was very surprizing to him, that the sight of the Cross should thus ease him of his burden. He looked therefore, and looked again, even till the springs that were in his head sent the waters down his cheeks' (PP 38). However, even though Christian does not actually *see* Christ on the cross, when he recalls the

⁶²⁵ Ibid., 167.

⁶²⁶ The engravings in Norvig's appendix B are from two different editions.

episode later he nevertheless imaginatively inserts Christ into his mental image of the cross.⁶²⁷ Thus he answers Prudence's question about why he wants to go to Mount Zion with the words 'Why, there I hope to see him *alive*, that did hang *dead* on the Cross; [...] For to tell you truth, I love him, because I was by him eased of my burden, and I am weary of my inward sickness; I would fain be where I shall die no more, and with the Company that shall continually cry, *Holy, Holy, Holy*' (PP 50). Similarly, when Hopeful much later recalls his own experiences, he answers Christian's question 'and how was he [Christ] revealed to you' with the words: 'I did *not* see him with my bodily eyes, but with the eyes of mine understanding' (PP 142) – a phrase which recalls Blake's 'imaginative eye:' 'the Last Judgment begins & its Vision is seen by the [*Imaginative Eye*] of Every one according to the situation he holds' (VLJ70, E554).

In Blake's version, the scene at the cross has become one of vision and spiritual transformation, which pictorially points back towards pl. 1's (fig. 47) depiction of the dreamer as a crucial step on the way to ultimate deliverance.⁶²⁸ The barren cross that appears in other *Pilgrim's Progress* illustrations has now been replaced by living vision: the cross itself, as in *Jerusalem* 76, is a living tree, surrounded by vines which grow on either side of it as well as up the trunk. Despite this obvious parallel to an earlier visual element in another of Blake's works, the cross as a tree is also a motif in Bunyan's text: when Christian later in the narrative recounts his experience for Piety, he identifies the cross as a tree with a figure on it – although he admits that this is how it looked to his imaginative eye ('in my mind'), not necessarily to his 'bodily eyes:' 'I went but a little further, and I saw one, as I thought in my mind, hang bleeding upon the Tree' (PP 49). Christian in

⁶²⁷ Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 602.

⁶²⁸ For more on the relationship between pl. 1 and pl. 14, see Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 166-70.

Blake's image stands before the cross not with arms fully outstretched (as Albion in *Jerusalem* pl. 76), but half raised and turned with open palms towards Christ, suggesting that he would *want* to stretch his arms out fully, as well as indicating that he is still only halfway through his spiritual development. This is further emphasized by the fact that only the upper half of Christ's body is visible, confirming to Christian as well as to the viewer that Christian is definitely moving in the right direction, but that for now he only sees 'through a glass, darkly' (1 Cor. 12:13).⁶²⁹ And the absence of any wounds, blood, or openings on Christ's body (with the reservation that Christ is 'only lightly sketched in' and might have been waiting for more details)⁶³⁰ indicate that its salvific space can now be entered in a different way: through entering into the transformative vision.

Christian's vision of Christ in pl. 14 and his literal unburdening before the cross represents a pivotal shift in the narrative – carefully prepared in the narrative and explicitly moved to the prominent place exactly midway through the narrative. Faced with the cross, Christian's experiences from the previous plates come together; and he now for himself experiences – and emotionally responds to – the vision of Christ's divine humanity (a vision which he then fully internalizes in the *arbour*, pl. 17, fig. 53, as he realizes his own 'Humanity Divine,' M2.8, E96). As Blake moves this conversion experience to the centre of the narrative, he thus partly breaks up the progress (or anti-progress) of Bunyan's text and re-visions it into a narrative in which Christian moves from being spiritually troubled over hearing the

⁶²⁹ Ibid., 170. Christian's position to the right of the cross as well as his posture also recalls that of Adam in 'Michael Foretells the Crucifixion' (1808, Butlin 536 11, fig. 31, and 1822, 537 3, fig. 34), although Adam in both versions has his hands together in prayer. What the two versions of 'Michael Foretells the Crucifixion' and *Pilgrim's Progress* pl. 14 particularly have in common is, of course, that they both represent *visions* of the crucifixion by Michael and Christian respectively. The two are not witnesses to the crucifixion, but experience it imaginatively – as does, by extension, the viewer.

⁶³⁰ Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 602.

gospel, through emotional experience, appropriation, and conversion to, finally, increased knowledge and ultimate fulfilment. This structure of a crucial conversion experience situated half-way (or more than half-way) through a narrative is one that we recognize from *Jerusalem*, in which Albion's wordless submission to and imitation of Christ in pl. 76 was a prerequisite for his ultimate understanding of Jesus's gospel in the final plates (likewise, as we will see later, Job's vision of Christ is not the final destination on Job's road to restoration, but paves the way for it). Pl. 14's conversion is thus a representation of Christian moving from hearing of Christ to seeing him with his imaginative eye ('in my mind') or, like Hopeful, 'with the eyes of mine understanding' (PP 142). It is an experience of Christ which is connected with the transformative faculty of vision, but which does not, as earlier in Blake's works, depend on an opening of Christ's body either through wounds or self-annihilation. In Blake's *Pilgrim's Progress*, vision is transformative in itself.

The importance of the experience before the cross is further accentuated by the fact that in the immediately following image, Christian has his old rags removed ('the rotten rags of Memory,' M41.4, E142) and is dressed in white raiment by the three Shining Ones to mark his passing into a new spiritual state. This new, whole garment represents Christian's new state (unity within) as well as draws on the early Christian ritual of baptism, in which the newly baptised adult would be clothed in new white clothes – an understanding of baptism as representing the death of the subject and the simultaneous rebirth in Christ; as Paul put it in Romans 6:4, 'Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death, that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.' Therefore there might, after all, be a hint of self-annihilation in the image, which is illustrated with the inclusion of the entrance to the grave underneath

the cross – suggesting a perspective of Christian’s conversion before the cross as a temporary death or self-annihilation, after which his rebirth is marked by the white raiment. Blake even further emphasized the sense of sacramental transformation in pl. 14 as he added growing vines to the motif (the vine being a traditional metaphor for Christ),⁶³¹ and added red markings on the tree trunk that might indicate blood. The result is an image that plays both on the sight of the crucified Christ as evoking a conversion that is understood as the destruction of the old and the birth of the new (baptism), and on Christ as the sustenance for the traveller (Eucharist).⁶³² This conversion in the shape of Eucharist and baptism is, of course, not only offered to Christian, but also to the viewer (as Christian is now again positioned representatively with his back to the viewer).⁶³³

Spiritually reborn, enlightened, and clothed in new garments, Christian is now (on pl. 15) ready to begin the second half of his journey. He is now focussed less on annihilating his old self (the old rags) than on building up his new whole or integrated self (the white garments) and reclaiming his *imago dei*. I will not explore this restorative part of the journey in any great detail, but will examine just two more of the steps that lead Christian on towards his final conversion, both appearing towards the end.

Just before Christian’s arrival at the gates of heaven (at a point in the narrative when the viewer does not expect anything to go wrong anymore), Christian encounters yet another crisis: he finds himself unable to cross the River.

⁶³¹ Based on John 15:1-11, beginning ‘I am the true vine.’

⁶³² For more on the allegorical trope of Christ as sustenance (*viaticum*) to the traveller (*viator*), see Bruun, *Parables*, 94-96.

⁶³³ Blake seems not to have been adverse to the of sacraments, at least not as he expresses himself in *A Vision of The Last Judgment* in 1810: ‘He is the Bread & the Wine he is the Water of Life accordingly on Each Side of the opening Heaven appears an Apostle that on the Right Represents Baptism that on the Left Represents the Lords Supper All Life consists of these Two Throwing off Error [...] continually & receiving Truth [...] Continually’ (84, E561-62).

They then addressed themselves to the Water; and entring, *Christian* began to sink [...] a great darkness and horror fell upon *Christian*, so that he could not see before him; also here he in great measure lost his senses, so that he could neither remember nor orderly talk of any of those sweet refreshments that he had met with in the way of his Pilgrimage. [...] He had horror of mind, and hearty fears that he should die in that River, and never obtain entrance in at the Gate.

(PP 157)

In Blake's illustration on pl. 27 (fig. 57, by far the least finished of all the plates), Christian and Hopeful are shown together in the river. Hopeful is holding Christian in a tight embrace (the last in the series of embraces) and points towards 'the Gate [...] and men standing by it to receive' them (PP 157). With his back to the viewer, thereby for the penultimate time inviting the viewer to an emotional and subjective involvement in his story, Christian clings to Hopeful. The visual depiction of this last crisis – and this last joint adventure of Christian and Hopeful – has a light touch which sets it significantly apart from the dark colours in the depiction of the crisis scene that the two faced in Doubting Castle (pl. 24-25), as well as from Christian and Help's crisis in the Slough of Despond (pl. 6).⁶³⁴ Thus Blake seems to alleviate Bunyan's insistence on the constant danger of backsliding, not least as one moves closer to the goal and thinks oneself certain of salvation. For while Blake's image clearly shows a crisis, the light colours and the first sight of the inhabitants of the City of Heaven on the other shore indicate to the viewer that Christian is not actually *that* close to missing his goal, even though he might himself be under that impression. Another – related – interpretation would be that Christian at this point in Blake's narrative is more spiritually advanced than Christian is at the same point

⁶³⁴ Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 203. The lightness of the plate is also, of course, connected with the fact that it appears very unfinished and is only lightly coloured. Still, however, the last three plates 26, 27, and 28 form a clear visual contrast to the dark plates 24 and 25, both set in Doubting Castle. In these last three plates, the visionary rainbow colours from pl. 1 slowly gain ground, so that by the ultimate plate they dominate the whole image.

in Bunyan's text where, as we draw nearer to the end, the shortcomings of Christian's character become more and more clear.⁶³⁵ In Blake's version, there is no sense of this: with Hopeful with his arm safely around Christian, it seems only a question of time before Christian makes it to the other shore. Thus the image contrasts Bunyan's text in which the last pages are characterized by a much darker atmosphere emphasizing Christian's failings of character, and in which Christian's triumphant entrance through the heavenly gates is mercilessly followed by the rejection of Ignorance at the same gates. Blake's last three plates, by contrast, exhibit none of this darker atmosphere, for Blake endeavoured to tell a different story: that of one man's journey towards internal unity and restoration in the divine imagination. However, although the focus is on Christian's restoration to his own divine humanity – his own partaking in the divine body of the imagination – this individual conversion ultimately leads to collective restoration as well. Contrary to Bunyan's text, which all through to the end addresses the different fates of characters, Blake's visual narrative, as it develops, illustrates Christian's increasing sense of community – illustrated by the fact that from pl. 21 onwards Blake never depicts Christian alone; he is always with a companion. Thus Christian's growing awareness of himself as a member on Christ's imaginative body is, it seems, intimately connected with his awareness of other members as well.

And thus Blake's narrative ends in pl. 28 (fig. 50) with Christian's entrance to heaven. This entrance is not sudden and fiery like Faithful's on pl. 23 (fig. 55), but harmonious and depicted in light colours, for the rainbow from pl. 1 has now spread to cover the whole image – at the bottom of the image we even see the top of the trees below which the dreamer originally lay down in pl. 1. The energy in the

⁶³⁵ Ibid.

image moves upwards towards the golden light at the very top, and again Christian – together with Hopeful, who rises with him – is seen from the back (as are the accompanying angels), thus inviting the viewer to follow them. In contrast to Bunyan, however, there is no ultimate separation between Christian and the dreamer or narrator. Whereas the dreamer is left behind in Bunyan's text as 'they shut up the Gates: which when I had seen, I wished myself among them' (PP 141), there is no returning to the realm of the dreamer in Blake, and Christian is never again separated from the viewer.⁶³⁶ Thus the final restoration or integration does not just concern Christian, but also the dreamer-narrator and the viewer.⁶³⁷ And this is one of Blake's central points: that whereas in Bunyan's narrative the reader is ultimately pushed away from the text in order to effect a change or conversion in his or her own life, Blake's approach to the question of the viewer's involvement is fundamentally different, as the divine body of the imagination that Christian, the dreamer, and the viewer enter together is one which encompasses all. Through a creative engagement with the series of images that play out a narrative with no accompanying text, the viewer is involved both imaginatively and intellectually and ultimately included even in the final divine restoration. Thus the fact that the narrative never returns to the location of the dreamer in pl. 1 (as we will see in Job) is one of the clearest indications that the final restoration of *Pilgrim's Progress* is one which unites not just divided characters, but also divided narratives (as the narrative of the dreamer is incorporated in that of Christian). In that sense, Blake's *Pilgrim's Progress* becomes more than the story of the spiritual regeneration of one

⁶³⁶ See *ibid.*, 210. Other illustrations to *Pilgrim's Progress* did not return to the locus of the dreamer either (see examples in *ibid.*, appendix B).

⁶³⁷ Norvig argues this throughout her analysis, whereas I only paraphrase the final effect of that journey, not the stages of it, in which Christian, dreamer, and viewer weave in and out of the narrative.

man – it also comes to signify the regeneration of a divided text, allowing the separated characters of an allegorical Puritan conversion narrative (protagonist, narrator, author, and viewer/reader) to become united in one character: the divine body. And thus it succeeds in restoring exactly that vision to *Pilgrim's Progress* that Blake referred to some twenty years earlier ('Fable or Allegory is Seldom without some Vision Pilgrims Progress is full of it,' VLJ68, E554). It releases its prophetic material and restores it to its original possibilities in a similar way to when Milton the poet was converted back to his original self by the means of Blake's imagination two decades earlier.

4.4 A contrary: Converting Job

The last station on my journey through Blake's conversion landscape is the engraved series of illustrations to the Book of Job from ca. 1823-26. The first version of the illustration series, the watercolours produced for Thomas Butts, had already appeared in 1805-06, although at this point the series might not have included two of the most crucial plates in the final series: 'Job and his daughters' (engraving 20, fig. 58) and the plate usually known as 'The Vision of Christ' (engraving 17, fig. 59). Both of these might instead have been executed as late as the mid-1820s, and only later added to the early Butts watercolours as well.⁶³⁸ The Book of Job is the only Bible text that Blake illustrated in its entirety, although he was also working on an unfinished illustration series to Genesis as well as illustrations to the Book of Enoch at his death.⁶³⁹ However, the figure of Job seems to have followed Blake through a large part of his life, as indicated by works such

⁶³⁸ Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 409, 416-17.

⁶³⁹ See Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 95-97, 102-118. See also Paley, *Traveller in the Evening*, 260-79.

as the three drawings showing ‘The Complaint of Job’ from as early as 1785 (B162-64) through the Butts watercolours to the late engravings.⁶⁴⁰ But the late engraved series represents his most complex interpretation of the story of Job, as it is only here that Blake adds the crucial Bible quotations from both inside and outside the Book of Job in the margins, which introduce a whole new hermeneutical layer to the series, as well as the two new designs.⁶⁴¹

The Job illustrations thus belong to two different periods in Blake’s life: the Butts watercolours to the first decade of the 1800s, and the other series (including the engravings) to the 1820s, the last decade before Blake’s death. This double affiliation prompts two observations. The first is that Blake already in the first version of the series applied a unique perspective to the Job narrative, which changed traditional exegesis’s focus on the question of Job’s patience and unjust suffering to a question of Job’s spiritual conversion and the consequences this has for his relationship with the world around him.⁶⁴² And the second is that the late engravings represent a re-working of the first series, which further develops and

⁶⁴⁰ For other Job-related works, see Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 409.

⁶⁴¹ There are four main sets: the Butts watercolours (ca. 1805-06, B550), the Linnell watercolours (ca. 1821, B551), the sketchbook sketches produced in preparation for the engraved series (B557), and finally the engraved series commissioned by Linnell in 1823 and finished ca. 1826. Another set of watercolours produced for Linnell (the ‘New Zealand’ set) also exists, but might not have been compiled by Blake himself (see discussion in *ibid.*, 409). All of these series are alike, as Blake used tracings of the Butts watercolours to produce the later series (Paley, *Traveller in the Evening*, 220), as well as incorporating the additional two designs into the watercolours.

⁶⁴² However, Gregory the Great in his *Moralia in Job* (ca. 578-595), as well as other medieval commentators, had understood Job as a prophet of the resurrection of the dead, thereby establishing a frame of interpretation that could easily slip into a conversion discourse (Jeffrey, *A Dictionary of Biblical Tradition*, 403). Conversion is not, of course, the only perspective from which to approach the Job illustrations. However, Job’s conversion does remain *the* central theme in Blake’s interpretation. For a more comprehensive discussion of the series than I offer here, see Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, chapters 2 and 3 (which includes the suggestive perspective of God’s conversion – a perspective which I nevertheless overlook in the following), Bo Lindberg, *William Blake’s Illustrations to the Book of Job* (Aabo, 1973), Paley, *Traveller in the Evening*, 219-60, Harold Fisch, *The Biblical Presence in Shakespeare, Milton and Blake: A Comparative Study* (Oxford, 1999), 291-325, and Elisabeth Engell Jessen, *Bibelske motiver hos William Blake* (Copenhagen, 2009), chapter 4.

accentuates themes and motifs that are particularly emphasized in Blake's later works: the importance of vision, the unity between divine and human, and Christ's body as the imagination. This re-working is particularly visible in Blake's incorporation of tropes relating to the relationship between text and experience, his adding of a Johannine element (mainly via direct quotations), which occurs in *Jerusalem* also,⁶⁴³ and above all in his inclusion of the new design 'The Vision of Christ' at a crucial place in the narrative. Together these two observations suggest that Blake's later understanding of Job shifted to include a more pronounced focus on Christ's role in Job (a well-known typological perspective on the Book of Job already explored by Gregory the Great)⁶⁴⁴ and on the importance on vision.

These two tropes also, of course, represent a continuation of Blake's version of *Pilgrim's Progress*, and there are also further similarities between these two late illustration series that support my suggestion that the two can be seen as contrary works exploring similar issues from different perspectives. Both refer to a popular narrative with a prominent place in the Christian reading culture, and both are structured round the spiritual trials of one protagonist. Both also offer a vision of the original narrative which emphasizes the importance of visionary experience and the power of images over text: in the Bunyan series by not including any text at all (except for the inscription on the wicket gate, 'Knock and it shall be opened'), and in the Job engravings by confining all Bible quotations to the margins – thereby communicating to the viewer that it is the engravings, not the text which ought to be our focal point. Finally, of course, both series were produced around the same time,

⁶⁴³ Cf. Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 61-62, 223.

⁶⁴⁴ John Moorhead, *Gregory the Great* (London, 2005), 12. The tradition of Gregory identifies Job typologically with Christ, which is – as we will see – a different approach to that of Blake.

the Job engravings between 1823 and 1826, and the Bunyan illustrations between 1824 and 1827.

In the following, I will discuss whether Job's progress as understood by Blake differs from that of Christian, and whether his conversion adds anything to the road to conversion that we saw exemplified in the Bunyan illustrations. I discuss these questions in the following on the basis of three points that seem of particular significance in Blake's Job and also refer back to issues raised earlier in this thesis: 1) the question of unity, vision, and images, 2) the suggestion of conversion as a circular, repeated, or continual movement, and 3) the question of the social or ethical implications of conversion. With this thematic approach I jump directly into the central questions of the narrative without further introduction to the storyline of the Book of Job, the chronology and structure of which Blake follows – moving from the initial vision of the wealthy Job over his losses and misfortunes (brought on him with God's permission) to his final restoration to wealth and family life.

United in vision

For the first point on unity, vision, and images, we will look towards the three engravings 11, 13, and 17, all of which represent crucial waypoints on Job's way to restoration. Engraving 11 (fig. 60) depicts Job as tormented by his own image of God. This image refers back to Job's religious outlook at the beginning of the narrative as illustrated in engravings 2 and 5 (fig. 61) – a religious understanding characterized by the idea of fundamental distance, if not separation, between the world of God and the world of his subjects (a concept which, as we saw, Blake also criticized Milton for ascribing to). In engraving 11, the God of Job's imagination, however, shows his real image: with blazing hair, cloven hooves, and a snake

entwined around his legs, God presses Job (who lies horizontally on a bed) down. He points with one arm towards the flames of hell below Job, and with the other arm upwards towards what appears to be a large Bible at the top of the image (in the Butts watercolour, this Bible was the Tables of the Law instead, complete with Hebrew letters, and previously, in engraving 1, fig. 62, it was seen resting on Job's lap, indicating that he lived according to it). The point of the image seems to be that whichever religious duty Job performs in order to satisfy the image of God that he has created (such as when he gave out alms in engraving 5, fig. 61), and however much he studies the moral and religious law as laid out in the Bible (a misunderstood approach to engaging with the Bible, according to Blake),⁶⁴⁵ it will never be sufficient: God, as per the religious Job, will always torment him with new demands.

This, according to Blake, is the nightmare of the dutiful religious man, as indicated by the caption: 'With Dreams upon my bed thou scarest me & affrightest me/ with Visions' (Job 7:14).⁶⁴⁶ However, below the caption, a longer quotation (based on Job 19:22-27) anticipates a possible escape route from this harrowing God, who torments Job at night: 'For I know that my Redeemer liveth [...] after my skin destroy thou This body yet in my flesh shall I see God whom I shall see for Myself and mine eyes shall behold & not Another.' The quotation ends with the

⁶⁴⁵ Cf. his letter to Trusler from 23 August 1799: 'What is it sets Homer Virgil & Milton in so high a rank of Art. Why is the Bible more Entertaining & Instructive than any other book. Is it not because they are addressed to the Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation & but mediately to the Understanding or Reason' (E702-3). For more on the biblical hermeneutics of Blake's Job, see Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, chapters 2 and 3.

⁶⁴⁶ The captions all refer to the KJV, some more loosely than others, and I quote them as they appear in the engravings. The differences between the KJV and Blake might indicate an independent engagement with the Hebrew text (see *ibid.*). According to a letter from Blake to his brother James from 30 January 1803, Blake studied new languages in Felpham: 'I go on Merrily with my Greek & Latin: [...] I find it very Easy. am now learning my Hebrew [...] I read Greek as fluently as an Oxford scholar' (E727).

⁶⁴⁶ For example Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 23, and Paley, *Traveller in the Evening*, 233.

crucial ‘tho consumed be my wrought Image,’ where Blake’s differs from KJV’s ‘though my reins be consumed within me.’⁶⁴⁷ This supports the viewer’s suspicion that Job’s nightmare stems from two particular images that govern his life: his self-image (as a man of God), and his image of God (as a distant lawgiver). What particularly strikes the viewer, however, is how strikingly alike Job and God appear: they share many physical features and are (like Albion and Christ in *Jerusalem* pl. 76) of similar shape and build – in other words, they seem to be created in one another’s image. Thus God in engraving 11 appears as a misunderstood image that is really only a projection of Job’s own neurotic religiosity – a revelation of the fact that he is not the true God but instead Satan or, literally, ‘the Accuser’ (the Hebrew meaning of the name Satan, which Blake seems to have been aware of),⁶⁴⁸ or, in fact, Job’s selfhood: ‘I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!’ (M14.30, E108).⁶⁴⁹

Engraving 13 (fig. 63) represents the first positive step in Job’s conversion after engraving 11’s nightmare. The image, captioned ‘Then the Lord answered Job out of the Whirlwind’ (Job 38:1), now shows a benevolent version of God, although still depicted as looking strikingly like Job himself. His human right foot (instead of a hoof) now indicates that he is altogether different from the God in the nightmare.⁶⁵⁰ Job is seated, together with his wife, on the left side of the image, hands together in prayer and with their eyes lifted towards God in the whirlwind. Job’s three friends, on the other hand, hide their faces from the vision. God is seen

⁶⁴⁷ Job 19:22-27 is notoriously difficult Hebrew, and we might speculate as to whether Blake experimented with his own translation (Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 45). As it appears now, the verse emphasizes the sense that what engraving 11 is concerned with is images of God (and Job), not necessarily who they really are.

⁶⁴⁸ On the third state of the engraving ‘Our End is Come’ (B262 2), for example, Blake inscribed the words ‘Satans holy Trinity The Accuser The Judge & The Executioner’ (Butlin, *Vol. 1*, 142-43).

⁶⁴⁹ Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 47.

⁶⁵⁰ Lindberg, *William Blake’s Illustrations to the Book of Job*, 278.

with outstretched arms and the ‘creative’ hand gesture,⁶⁵¹ which indicates his status as creator of the world (in the following engravings, he indeed goes on to show Job the magnificence of his magnum opus, the world). God does not, however, look directly at Job. This may be an indicator of what is still missing in the vision, namely direct communication between Job and God – for Job may see God, but they do not *see* each other. The image, then, gives the impression not of a conclusive vision, but of a new chapter in the narrative. In this new chapter, God will approach Job in visions (as opposed to nightmares) and the two, divinity and humanity, will slowly draw nearer towards each other, until they see each other face to face. This last point is particularly indicated by the fact that God now appears in a horizontal composition *together* with Job, not seated high above him in a vertical composition representing distance and hierarchy (as in engravings 2 and 5, fig. 61).⁶⁵²

The middle section of the narrative, the visions of the world based on God’s speeches in Job chapters 38-41, comes to an end in engraving 17 (fig. 59), after which the reintegration of Job into the world begins (similar to the restorative second half of *Pilgrim’s Progress*). Just as the section was introduced by a vision of the divine in engraving 11, it ends with a vision of the divine in engraving 17. This image, captioned ‘I have heard thee with the hearing of the Ear but now my Eye seeth thee’ (Job 42:5), shows Job and his wife seated on the ground, eyes raised towards the figure standing before them. His arms are stretched out over their heads in what Warner calls the ‘regenerative aspect’ of the gesture: a blessing.⁶⁵³ Behind Job and his wife, Job’s three friends are seen – again, two of them hide their faces,

⁶⁵¹ Warner, *Language of Art*, 102.

⁶⁵² Although God was also depicted in a horizontal setting with Job in engraving 11, this was a misunderstood nightmare, not a reflection of reality.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, 105.

but the last one has now half turned his face towards the vision, thus preparing the viewer for the restoration of the friends when in the following engraving 18 Job prays for them. If we look back towards *Pilgrim's Progress*, the image comes across as a sequel to pl. 9's scene 'Christian Falls at the Feet of Evangelist' (fig. 56). The two engravings are similar in composition and features (Evangelist/the divine figure is clad in a long white garment and there is a great light in the background). There are, however, notable differences: Job is sitting upright and looks directly at the divine man, where Christian hid his face – and where Evangelist stretched his arms down towards Christian to raise him up, Job has already been raised up to a sitting position and is now receiving his blessing. Job also seems at ease for the first time in the series: his hands rest on his lap and his eyes are lifted directly towards the divine figure, who looks down on him. The image thus represents not only the divinity blessing Job, but also – more importantly – Job seeing the divine face to face for the first time and acknowledging him as the Human Form Divine (indeed as someone who looks exactly like Job himself): as written in the margin above the image, 'we shall see him as He Is' (1 John 3:2).⁶⁵⁴

This image has traditionally been understood as Job's vision of Christ, thereby representing a different (though related) divine figure to that of God in engraving 13 (fig. 63) – an image which it compositionally resembles. The connection between Christ and Job is, of course, strictly speaking anachronistic within the context of the Old Testament Book of Job (in which Christ has not yet been revealed), but nevertheless conforms to the longstanding tradition of

⁶⁵⁴ Raine argues that Job's sense of calm in the image also derives from the fact that his outer world and his inner world – represented as separate in engravings 1 and 2 – now come together and are integrated for the first time in the narrative (Kathleen Raine, *The Human Face of God: William Blake and the Book of Job* (London, 1982), 241).

understanding Job typologically as a pre-figuration of Christ. And although Blake in his image does not adopt a fully typological interpretation (Christ and Job appear as distinct – if similar-looking – figures), the link between Christ and Job originates within the typological tradition. As the extensive marginal quotations from the Bible – taken in particular from the Gospel of John – make clear, however, the main concern in the image is not to help the viewer distinguish whether the divine figure represents God, Christ, or even the Accuser. On the contrary: the point is that Job now realizes that he, Christ, and God partake in the same form and are, in fact, one. Thus in one quotation appearing below the engraving, we read ‘I & my Father are One’ (John 10:30) and in another ‘ye shall know that I am in/ my Father & you in me & I in you’ (John 14:20) – statements which in the context of John refer to the shared being between God and Christ, but in Blake’s Job is extended to include Job as well.⁶⁵⁵ The point is driven home by the fact that God, Christ, and Job look so similar in the images that they do actually, in an echo of the doubling technique in *Pilgrim’s Progress*, appear to be ‘One.’ Thus, as Job here sees the ‘Humanity Divine’ (M2.8, E96) face to face, again depicted in a horizontal composition and with the divine figure in the human shape standing so close to Job that his feet are touching Job’s knee, Job’s misguided image of a distant, judging God disintegrates and is replaced by an experience of the divine as ‘a brother and friend’ (J4.18, E146). Crucially, however, Job need not now experience a vision of Christ on the cross – his transformation happens simply by standing face to face with Christ and

⁶⁵⁵ Gregory in *Moralia in Job* also (as noted in Butlin, *Vol. I*, 416) makes the identification between God and Christ with reference to John 10:30 (‘I and my father are one’). However, he does so in his exposition of Job 38:34 (‘Canst thou lift up the voice to the clouds, that abundance of waters may cover thee’), not of 42:5 (like Blake). With regards to 42:5 (‘I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear: but now my eye seeth thee’), Gregory simply notes that ‘because [Job] had beheld more plainly the light of truth with the eye within, he more clearly discerned and beheld the darkness of his humanity’ (J. Bliss, ed. *Morals on the Book of Job*, 3 vols. (Oxford, 1844-1850), 3:665).

experiencing their shared form. From this awakening experience of seeing Christ's true form, Job can begin his journey towards inhabiting this form more and more. As a quotation loosely based on Psalm 17:15,⁶⁵⁶ occurring in engraving 2, reads: 'We shall awake up in thy Likeness.'

Three other aspects also suggest the centrality of the plate, all of which support the sense that this is where Job experiences his crucial spiritual and intellectual conversion. First, two open books and an open scroll are seen in the margin, now turned towards the viewer so that we, also, can read the text. These open, readable texts suggest that Job's relationship with text is being restored, as he has moved from a blind allegiance to a book that, as we will see, was represented in engraving 1, to an understanding of how the reading of texts must happen within the light of an experiential engagement with Christ or a partaking in the divine creativity. We now understand that it is only when Job leaves his books behind and allows for the vision of Christ to wash over him, that he is able to see God as he really is: as the Humanity Divine. And conversely, only when Job sees the divine nature for himself is the imaginative potential of the Bible revealed to him – the Bible text, literally, makes sense now. Second, the understanding of the image as a conversion scene, and not simply a vision and a blessing, is supported by the quotation at the very top of the margin: 'He bringeth down to the Grave & bringeth up' (1 Sam. 2:6), which adds strong connotations of death and rebirth to the image. Thus Job's transfer from the long night of his conversion, which had its negative climax in engraving 11 (fig. 60), into the light (which either emanates from Christ or from the sun, set just behind his head) has begun, so that he can gradually begin his journey of restoration. And last but not least, Blake – if Butlin is correct – only

⁶⁵⁶ Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 26.

some time in the 1820s inserted this plate into an already finished visual narrative (the Butts watercolours), thereby deliberately shifting the climax of the narrative forward from the restoration of Job in the last four engravings to the visionary experience of the Humanity Divine in engraving 17 which enables this restoration to happen. By the 1820s, it seems, Blake wanted there to be no doubt that Job's conversion was facilitated by a visionary experience of Christ as the human form divine: 'Now my Eye seeth thee.'

Converting and returning home

My second point – that in the Job engravings conversion is figured as a circular, repeated, or continual movement – is most clearly illustrated with reference to the very first and the very last engraving. In engraving 1 (fig. 62) we see Job and his family gathered under a tree. Job and his wife are seated facing the viewer, while their children kneel around them with hands gathered as in prayer. Job and his wife each have a large open book on their laps. In the branches of the tree above them, musical instruments are hanging untouched, sheep are asleep in the foreground, and on the left side a gothic church appears in the background. On Job's right the sun is setting, and on his left the moon is rising. The engraving's central caption reads simply 'Thus did Job continually' (Job 1:5), followed by the folk-tale-like introduction to the prose narrative in the biblical text, beginning: 'There was a Man in the Land of Uz' (Job 1:1).⁶⁵⁷ What, we may ask, did Job do 'continually'? The impression we get from the engraving is that he was a pious religious man, who made regular offerings (as the sacrificial altar depicted at the bottom of the margin

⁶⁵⁷ It is probable that the Book of Job's prose frame story (chapters 1, 2, and 42) did in fact circulate orally as a folktale before being transformed into the Book of Job in its current form (Robert Alter, *The Wisdom Books: Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. A Translation with Commentary* (New York; London, 2010), 4).

indicates) and continually led his family in prayer (as indicated not only by the praying children in the engraving but also by the words from the Lord's Prayer written in the margin above the illustration: 'Our Father which art in Heaven/hallowed be thy Name'). At the same time, as has been noted by several commentators, the term 'continual' has a negative ring to it, which suggests that Job performed his religious duties in an automatic or mechanical manner.⁶⁵⁸

In the last engraving of the series (engraving 21, fig. 64) we return to the same scene: again, Job is surrounded by his family under the tree, sheep in the foreground and Job at the centre of the image. Now, however, everyone is standing as they play the musical instruments that were untouched in engraving 1. The large books that Job and his wife held in engraving 1 have now disappeared, but the daughter in the centre carries a scroll (an indication of Job's restored relationship with text), and on her right another daughter carries a slim volume, which might be a pamphlet – perhaps, as suggested by Rowland, a piece of music.⁶⁵⁹ Now the moon is setting on Job's right, and the sun is rising on his left, showing that Job's long night is over and that this scene represents a new beginning.⁶⁶⁰ This last engraving thus represents the restored Job, who has not only gained a new family but also a new understanding of what it means to live as a man of God. As suggested by the absence of the large books from engraving 1 in the last engraving, by the active use of the musical instruments, and by the physical energy of the engaged family as compared with the still postures in engraving 1, Job's new religious understanding means a shift in him from passive to active – for the reborn Job does not practise his

⁶⁵⁸ For example Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 23, and Paley, *Traveller in the Evening*, 233.

⁶⁵⁹ Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 69.

⁶⁶⁰ Metaphors playing on the concept of darkness and night are also prominent in the biblical text of Job, not least in chapter 3, Job's 'death-wish poem' (Alter, *The Wisdom Books*, 8).

religion by the passive reading of books, but through imaginative and artistic engagement with the world around him. And although the sacrificial altar is now again depicted in the margin under the engraving (first causing the reader to wonder whether Job has back-slid and returned to his old religious practice), the inscription on its base makes it clear that this is not the case. It reads ‘in burnt offerings for Sin/ thou hast had no Pleasure’ (Heb. 10:6) and thus indicates the shift in Job’s understanding of religion. (In engraving 1, the inscription on the altar quoted 2 Cor. 3:6, ‘The Letter Killeth/ The Spirit giveth Life,’ and 1 Cor. 2:14, ‘It is Spiritually Discerned,’ thereby anticipating Job’s development to come.) This interpretation is supported by the fact that the gothic church from engraving 1 does not reappear in the last engraving: in the last engraving, God’s location has been internalized (in a similar way to how Christian internalized the vision of Christ in *Pilgrim’s Progress*).⁶⁶¹ Now Job worships through music and song in the midst of his own family – a point that is emphasized by the fact that the preceding plate, which centres on the place of imagination and art in Job’s new life, seems to be set in the choir of Job’s own, personalized church, decorated with illustrations from his experiences.

Alongside the sense of new, restored life in engraving 21, however, comes the sense of circularity, return, and homecoming.⁶⁶² From the perspective of conversion, this is particularly noticeable as it underlines two features that we have already observed in Blake’s works: the sense of conversion as a *reformatio in melius*, a reform to the better, and the sense of conversion as a continual or repeated

⁶⁶¹ The appearance of the church in engraving 1 is often understood as a promise of the visionary experiences to come, similar to the inscriptions on the sacrificial altar – an argument based on Blake’s approval of the Gothic (see for example Paley, *Traveller in the Evening*, 232).

⁶⁶² This is also characteristic of the typical folktale ending of the biblical text (Alter, *The Wisdom Books*, 178-79).

movement, not a one-off experience. As for the *reformatio in melius*, Job's gradual conversion experience seems ultimately to leave him exactly at the place he set out from, albeit as a truer and more integrated version of himself, who now relates to the world around him in imaginative praise and engagement. Thus it appears that his journey was one of self-discovery as well as one of revelation of the immanent divinity; for his experience of rebirth does not substantially change him into a different being, but allows him to realise his divine potential and become the one he was originally intended to be. Likewise, the concept of continual or repeated conversion seems also to be implicit in the last engraving's almost demonstrative return to the family scene under the tree.⁶⁶³ Although Job has now clearly taken his spiritual practice to a more active and engaged level, the familiar scene implies that the danger still persists that he might eventually forget his experience and return to his old ways – after all, the sacrificial altar is still visible, the ram and the ox are still waiting in the two bottom corners of the margin to be sacrificed, the sheep are still half asleep in the foreground of the engraving, and the sun and the moon will still rise and set. Thus Job may, it seems, be reborn and his eyes opened to 'the panorama of creation through which the divine life is made manifest'⁶⁶⁴ – but his new life in worship and imaginative engagement with the world takes constant practice and care, if he does not wish to return to his old ways of 'continually.' As Blake first wrote on the sacrificial altar on the last engraving, 21, but later deleted: 'Praise to God is the Exercise of Imaginative Art' (E688) – similarly, he also first wrote, and then deleted, the words 'Prayer to God is a Study of Imaginative Art' (E687) on the corresponding altar in engraving 1, thereby anticipating the

⁶⁶³ Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 16.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 71.

movement from passive ‘Prayer’ and ‘Study’ to active ‘Praise’ and ‘Exercise of [...] Art,’ which awaited Job.

‘In a Divided Existence now no longer Divided’⁶⁶⁵

As for my last point, that conversion has ethical and social consequences for Job, many have noted the significance given to Job’s social context: his wife, friends, and children (in particular his daughters, as per the Hebrew text also).⁶⁶⁶ Blake’s most obvious variation compared to the biblical text is thus the role he allocates Job’s wife, who (contrary to the original text in which she disappears after chapter 2) is constantly seen on Job’s side; the only engraving in which she does not appear is engraving 11’s nightmare vision. Throughout the rest of the narrative, she shares Job’s experience, from trials to visions, with him.

The social or ethical consequences of Job’s conversion become particularly evident in engravings 18, 19, and 20, where we see the restored Job implementing his new understanding of the ‘Humanity Divine’ into his life. In pl. 18 (fig. 65), captioned ‘And my Servant Job shall pray for you’ (Job 42:8), we see Job with his back to the viewer in front of a stone altar.⁶⁶⁷ He stretches his arms out widely in a posture similar to that of Albion before the crucified Christ in *Jerusalem* pl. 76 (as well as Paul in ‘The Conversion of Paul,’ although Paul is seen from the front rather than – representatively – from the back). From the altar, a flame rises directly to heaven (in the Old Testament a sign that God has accepted the offer – which in this context is notably *not* an offer but a prayer),⁶⁶⁸ a great light shines at the top of the

⁶⁶⁵ To Hayley, 4 December 1804, E758.

⁶⁶⁶ Alter, *The Wisdom Books*, 179. See Jeanne Moskal, ‘Friendship and Forgiveness in Blake’s Illustrations to Job,’ *South Atlantic Review* 55.2 (1990): 15-31 for a discussion of the role of friendship in Blake’s Job.

⁶⁶⁷ In the early Butts watercolour, Job has his front to the viewer.

⁶⁶⁸ Moskal, ‘Friendship and Forgiveness,’ 25.

image, and below the central caption we read ‘the Lord turned the captivity of Job when he prayed for his Friends’ (Job 42:10). This engraving represents the first of three signs indicating that Job has indeed been reformed. Here, Job practises the forgiveness that is so crucial to Blake’s later theological understanding, in relation to his friends (who, in fact, have acted more like accusers than friends). As the long quotation from the Sermon on the Mount, which is shown on the pages of an open book (again readable to the viewer) in the bottom left corner of the margin begins: ‘I say unto you Love your Enemies bless them that curse you do good to them that hate you & pray for them that despitefully use you & persecute you’ (Matt. 5:44). When he prays for his friends, Job is now able to stand upright for the first time in the series and to begin the restoration of his relationship with other people that takes place over the last four plates, which seems intimately connected – or even dependent on – his restoration in the divine body.

The reintegration of Job into true relationships with other people continues in the following engraving 19 (fig. 66), in which the roles have been turned around, so that it is now Job who benefits from the help and generosity of others. Here, Job is seated together with his wife under a tree (perhaps the tree from engraving 1), where they, with their heads bowed in gratitude, receive four almsgivers – the caption reading ‘Every one also gave him a piece of Money’ (Job 42:11). This design represents a sharp contrast to engraving 5 (fig. 61), in which we saw the not yet converted Job giving out alms, pleased with his own righteous and God-fearing act. The lesson that Job incorporates in engraving 19, it seems, is one of genuine humility and gratefulness. As he practises forgiveness and spiritual generosity towards his friends (engraving 18), so they return the favour – and so, more importantly, is he able to receive their favour in the right spirit – in engraving 19.

In the third emblem of Job's restoration to meaningful human relationships, engraving 20 (fig. 58) – the last stage before the final vision of the restored Job and his family – we see Job surrounded by his three (new) daughters.⁶⁶⁹ The setting appears to be the inside of a building, which, as mentioned above, resembles the apse of a church, with the walls behind Job lavishly decorated with scenes that refer to his own story.⁶⁷⁰ Job is shown in the 'outstretched-arm attitude with the creative-hand position for both hands,'⁶⁷¹ indicating that he is now in the midst of narrating and creating – or rather re-creating – his experiences for his three daughters. This engraving thus represents the making of Job the storyteller, showing how his recounting his experiences for the benefit of others directly reflects his new awareness of the centrality of vision and imagination in life (as opposed to his former adherence to books and outward religion). A similar scene appears in pl. 21 of *Pilgrim's Progress* (which I did not discuss above) in which Christian and Faithful discuss their experiences that are represented as miniature scenes set in circles over their heads, and thereby gain 'aesthetic mastery over the past of [their] mythic journey.'⁶⁷² In the marginal illustrations of engraving 20, a harp and a lute in the two bottom corners support the impression of Job's new imaginative and artistic engagement with experience. Job has, it seems, finally managed to live up to his divine and imaginative potential – as Blake put it in *Laocoön* at around the same time, ca. 1826: 'A Poet a Painter a Musician an Architect: the Man/ Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian' (E274). In engraving 20, this link between

⁶⁶⁹ According to the biblical text, Job lost his children (or more specifically, his sons) in chapter 1:18-20, but was given seven sons and three daughters upon his restoration (42:13).

⁶⁷⁰ In the Butts watercolour, the scene is set in the open. However, the even earlier tempera 'Job and his daughters' from ca. 1799-1800 (B394) shows an indoor setting for the scene similar to engraving 20.

⁶⁷¹ Warner, *Language of Art*, 102. Cf. God's similar gesture in engravings 13 (fig. 63) and 14.

⁶⁷² Norvig, *Dark Figures*, 187.

being a poet or artist and a Christian is explicit: when Job partakes in the divine imaginative activity of (re)creating, he is in his church. And correspondingly, he can only be fully restored when he has learned to be an active participant in the divine body of the imagination. Finally, these three emblems of reintegration are all summed up in the final engraving 21, in which Job is restored as a *pater familias*, as an artist (playing a harp), and as a reborn religious man who has realized that his God has ‘no Pleasure’ in ‘burnt Offerings for sin’ but rather (it is implied) in ‘praise’ and ‘exercise of [...] art’ (as per the inscriptions on the altar).

How does this compare with Christian’s experience of deliverance? Christian’s experience was in many ways similar to that of Job: in the course of a long journey he slowly grew in understanding, experienced a crucial vision of Christ as the human for divine and an internalization of it, slowly grew in partaking in the imagination as well as in his awareness of the world around him, and finally arrived at his destination. Along this progressive journey, the viewer gradually became more and more involved, until by the end of the narrative all characters involved in the story – including the reader – were offered access through the Gates of Heaven. However, the narrative offered no glimpse of what restored life on the other side of these gates looked like (this aspect literally remained left to the reader’s imagination), and ‘heaven’ thus remained a somewhat distant destination, even after all Blake’s effort to include us in it: located somewhere beyond the top of the final image. Despite all the circular and anti-progressive elements in the visual narrative, Christian’s progress was indeed very much a progress: upwards and onwards through the ‘States’ of increasing awakening.

The turning of Job, on the other hand, insists on the circular narrative movement of the original text, using it to craft a story in which Job is not taken up

to heaven, but instead realises heaven in his own surroundings. His final destination, notably, is not above, but below, and if the last plate of the series represents a heavenly vision, it is heaven on a restored earth (as described in Rev. 21:2, when the New Jerusalem comes down from heaven), not a translocated earthly existence. Similarly, his vision of Christ as the human form divine does not consist of a revelation of the entrance into Christ's body, but of a revelation of a divine form, which he can 'awake in the likeness of' in his own life. Similarly, his conversion is consistently experienced in the company of another person (his wife), a significant number of plates (four out of twenty-one) are concerned with reinserting him into a social context, and his restoration is only completed after three crucial steps: when he prays for his friends, when he accepts the favours of others, and when he takes on creative authority himself.

5. CONCLUSION

Let me go back to the beginning. In Part I, I defined a conversion text or a conversion work as an artistic endeavour that seeks to facilitate a turning, transformation, or conversion in the reader (or viewer). This broadly defined conversion can be manifested in many different types of fictive texts, whether using an autobiographical perspective or not; it need not refer to a change of institutional religious affiliation, but can just as well describe an awakening or intensification within one religious context; and it is often staged by an author as a gradual, prolonged, or even repeated process – even if it is frequently read as referring to one climactic moment. Most importantly, the conversion text often employs several different registers, since it does not simply seek to communicate an intellectual conviction or doctrinal content, but also a perceptual, spiritual, and affective transformation that is realised when the reader (or viewer) engages actively with the text (or art work). If this is successful, the conversion work represents and manifests a turning of mind, soul, and spirit through text (or image).

As we have seen, Blake's works – in their texts and their images alike – can be understood as referring to this intellectual, perceptual, spiritual, and affective transformation, for which the term conversion can be used as a common denominator. Engaging with this aspect of Blake's works can help to bring out three central perspectives in his corpus of works. Firstly, it enables us to ask more specific questions about how Blake related to his sources, to the religious context of his times and to his religious inheritance. Investigating how Blake's understanding of conversion was manifested in the texts and artworks of those sources reveals how

they might have informed the way in which Blake composed his works. Secondly, it provides us with a language with which to combine the generally acknowledged call for change made by Blake's works with Blake's use of tropes and metaphors from, and references to, a visual and verbal Christian framework. By using conversion as an bridge between these two interpretative frames, the extent of their intimate and inseparable relationship is made clear. And thirdly, it helps to emphasize the sense of continuity and development in Blake's works, revealing the relationship between what are sometimes approached as separate spheres of his corpus (the illuminated books versus the commercial works), as well as exposing how the narrative of Blake's own conversion has been used to divide his works into two chronologically founded interpretative categories: his 'mythical' pre-1800 works and his 'Christian' post-1800 works. As we have seen by approaching Blake's works through the lens of conversion, this 'Christian' development is introduced much more gradually than the paradigm of Blake's own alleged conversion suggests. Just as importantly, it keeps on developing throughout Blake's life. It does not follow from this that there is no significant development in Blake's Christian thought, or that a paradigm of continuity can now simply be applied to Blake's works. But this study's findings about conversion question the use of the two-part ('mythical'/'Christian') conversion paradigm, and suggest that the different phases or aspects of Blake's 'Christian' register should be taken into account and studied discretely.

What I called Blake's mode of conversion thus refers to the way in which conversion is manifested within Blake's works in various ways and on different levels: from the easily missed verbal references to Paul's conversion in *Milton*, to the narrative figure of the protagonist, who is transformed and reborn in fire towards the end of a text (as in *The Marriage* and *Jerusalem*), to the call to the reader and

viewer for active engagement with, and awakening or transformation through, imaginative conversion narratives such as the illustrations to the *Pilgrim's Progress* or *Milton*. This ultimate conversion, which the different strands of the conversion mode point towards and seek to realise, is over time identified in Blake's works more and more explicitly as a restoration of the subject to the divine body, which is the imagination (understood both as a collective space and as a body). This concept of entering the divine form is explored in different ways in the selection of works we have engaged with in this thesis. It develops from the first experiments of the opening into this body as found in Christ's wounds, on the cross, or in the grave in the illustrations to *Night Thoughts* and *The Four Zoas*, to the suggestion that the way into the divine body is to go through self-annihilation and a recognition of a relationship of mutuality with Christ in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* – to the transformative visions in Blake's versions of *Pilgrim's Progress* and the Book of Job, which enabled both the respective protagonists, as well as the viewer, to be taken into the shared divine space of the imagination.

Thus we have seen how the form of Christ comes to signify different aspects of the transformative rebirth: he is not only the *cause* of the awakening (Albion in *Jerusalem* is finally transformed by accepting him as a brother and friend), he is also the *entrance* to the restored reality (the opened body), as well as the *destination* of the conversion journey (the all-compassing divine body). This divine creative body, in the shape of the imagination, is evoked within Blake's works in a call to the reader (or viewer) to enter the narrative and join fictive characters, Blake the author, and Christ himself in the shared space of the imagination. When the reader/viewer actively engages in this shared space, it has the ability to break through the circles of death and reason and restore the kingdom of art and

imagination – Paradise – here on earth (not beyond in heaven). Conversion, then, becomes not the discovery of a way to a divine existence far away in an unknown land, but the discovery of what is already within. Like ‘Miltons Track’ (M34.24, E134), the convert’s track leads inwards to the centre of being, not outwards. In this restored existence, every ‘Man/ Or Woman’ is ‘A Poet a Painter a Musician an Architect’ (*Laocoön*, E274), and true unity with the self as well as with other beings (insofar as these can be separated) is attainable. It is this shared space, where reader, author, narrator, and fictive characters can meet, that Blake’s works seek to create, shaping narrative *Räume* in which conversion, transformation, and restoration is available in the reading present, not ‘afar off’ (J4.18, E146). But whatever shape the transitional moment of conversion – the point or passage of transformation – takes, its destination, according to Blake, is the same:

Here they are no longer talking of what is Good & Evil or of what is Right or Wrong & puzzling themselves in Satans [...] Labyrinth But are Conversing with Eternal Realities as they Exist in the Human Imagination[.]
(VLJ90, E562)

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