‘Two Congenial Beings of Another Sphere’: Peter Sterry as a Theological Precursor to William Blake

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William Blake (1757-1827)

Luigi Schiavonetti after Thomas Phillips, Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection



Peter Sterry (1613-1672)

Stained glass window in the chapel of Emmanuel College, Cambridge (photograph by Edward Youansamouth)

In memory of

The Revd Brian Levick

(1930-2014)

Short Abstract

This thesis seeks to explicate, and develop an appropriate method for the elucidation of, the antecedents to the theology of William Blake in the writings of the seventeenth-century divine, Peter Sterry (1613-1672). While the radical religious scene of the English Revolution has long been recognised as offering important antecedents to Blake's thought, Sterry is a figure who has largely been overlooked. The exception to this is an essay, published in 1929, in which Vivian de Sola Pinto asserted the existence of 'startling affinities' between their ideas. Pinto's study was, however, limited by its failure to consider, firstly, the implications of its findings for our general understanding of the antecedents to Blake's thought in the seventeenth century and, secondly, the insight Sterry's writings may be able to offer into Blake's theological vision. These are the very questions at the heart of this dissertation. By addressing them, it seeks to shed new light on the nature of Blake's theology and its anticipations in earlier English thought. Given the lack of evidence that Blake read Sterry, and the limited effectiveness of the 'genealogical' method when it comes to Blake, it pioneers a bespoke 'analogical' method for the exploration of these issues. It proposes that Sterry is actually closer to the intellectual milieu of Commonwealth radicalism than one might expect and that his writings function effectively as a lens through which it is possible to discern how Blake consistently uses 'dualistic' language and imagery in an ethical and epistemological sense. The first finding suggests that the established view of the radical religious environment in Blake studies needs to be extended; the second challenges the widespread perception that Blake's thought is ultimately dualistic in an ontological sense, thus contributing to the elucidation of a perennial problem for Blake scholarship. Together, they underline Sterry's importance as a neglected theological precursor to the thought of William Blake.

Long Abstract

This thesis seeks to explicate, and develop an appropriate method for the elucidation of, the antecedents to the theology of William Blake in the writings of the seventeenth-century divine, Peter Sterry (1613-1672). It will be argued that Blake and Sterry can be considered as two 'congenial beings of another sphere'; words used by Charles Augustus Tulk in relation to Blake and Coleridge. While the radical religious scene of the English Revolution has long been recognised as offering important antecedents to Blake's thought, Sterry is a figure who has largely been overlooked. The suggestion that Blake and Sterry might have something in common was first made to me by my MA dissertation supervisor. It was in following up this lead that I became aware of an essay, published in 1929, in which the literary scholar Vivian de Sola Pinto asserted the existence of 'startling affinities' between their ideas. According to Pinto, Blake and Sterry share several key theological principles. These are a marked sense of divine immanence; notion of Christ as a communal reality; vision of self-love as that tendency which impedes the realisation of the Divine Image, accompanied by a strong emphasis on the necessity of forgiveness; belief in an innate faculty through the possession of which men and women may participate in the divine life; theory of multiple levels of perception; unusually lofty view of the role of artists and poets in rendering the Divine Vision accessible; close identification of the divine and human; and, finally, idea of the Devil as the principle of division and fragmentation. The correspondences Pinto claims to have found provide a warrant for the more extensive investigation of the parallels between Blake and Sterry undertaken in this dissertation, with the research questions at its heart having emerged out of the limitations of Pinto's account.

While Pinto's exposition of the resemblances between Blake and Sterry is more or less accurate as far as it goes—with all the parallels he identifies being substantiated in this thesis—he leaves two major areas of investigation completely untouched. These are, firstly, the implications of his 'discovery' for our general understanding of the antecedents to Blake's thought in the seventeenth century and, secondly, the insight Sterry's writings may be able to offer into Blake's theological vision, as expressed in his texts and images. These are the very questions at the heart of this dissertation. By addressing them, it seeks to shed new light on the nature of Blake's theology and its anticipations in earlier English thought. Given the lack of evidence that Blake read Sterry, and the limited effectiveness of the 'genealogical' method when it comes to Blake, it pioneers a bespoke 'analogical' method for the exploration of these issues. This involves treating Sterry's divinity not as a *source* for Blake's thought but as an instructive *analogue* to it. Through a creative comparison of their ideas, which may be likened to the construction of an extended metaphor, this dissertation examines the points of intersection between its two leading characters in order to elucidate questions of longstanding importance to Blake scholarship. In particular, it proposes that Sterry is actually closer to the intellectual milieu of Commonwealth radicalism than one might expect and that his writings function effectively as a lens through which it is possible to discern how Blake consistently uses 'dualistic' language and imagery in an ethical and epistemological sense. The first finding suggests that the established view of the radical religious environment in Blake studies needs to be extended; the second challenges the widespread perception that Blake's thought is ultimately dualistic in an ontological sense, thus contributing to the elucidation of a perennial problem for Blake scholarship. Together, they underline Sterry's importance as a neglected theological precursor to the thought of William Blake.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. Chapter 1 ('A vindication of Sterry's selection as a candidate for comparative study') is concerned with making the case that Sterry is a plausible precursor to Blake. In so doing, its purpose is to remedy the first major limitation of Pinto's account: its failure to consider the wider implications of his 'discovery' of Sterry for our understanding of Blake's intellectual antecedents in the seventeenth century. The chapter is intended to place Pinto's proposal on a firmer footing by, firstly, demonstrating the necessity of the analogical method adopted in this thesis through an investigation of Blake's contrasting responses to Milton and Boehme, and, secondly, showing how Pinto's fortuitous find can be accounted for by Sterry's unexpectedly close proximity to an established setting for Blake's ideas: the radical religious milieu of the English Revolution. This finding suggests that the regnant view of this environment, which has tended to foreground the political dimension of radicalism at the expense of the theological, needs some modification. The reason Sterry's relation to the prevailing picture of Blake's intellectual context must be dealt with first is because it is not until his preliminary credentials as a Blakean precursor have been argued for that his writings can credibly be used as an interpretative lens through which to study Blake's theology. I refer to Sterry's proximity to a favoured setting for Blake's thought as his 'preliminary' credentials for the reason that historical contextualisation is in this thesis not an end in itself, but a means of clearing the ground for that essential hermeneutical exercise, which will prove the definitive test of Sterry's qualifications. It should also be stressed at this point that it is not my purpose to present Sterry as the *closest* figure to Blake in the period, but to place him *alongside* the likes of Boehme, Coppe, and Winstanley, in the pantheon of Blake's theological predecessors.

The three remaining chapters deal with the second significant 'gap' in Pinto's treatment, its failure to consider how Sterry might inform our understanding of Blake's theology, by conducting an extended interpretation of Blake's texts and images using Sterry's writings as heuristic device. Their collective aim is to test the effectiveness of Sterry's divinity as a lens through which to expound theological themes in Blake. To achieve this aim, Chapter 2 ('The problem of "dualism" in Blake's theology') begins by delineating the interpretative conundrum which, I contend, Sterry's writings can be of assistance in resolving. This centres on the apparent inconsistency between Blake's anti-dualism and commitment to 'contraries' on the one hand and his continued, indeed extensive, use of apparently dualistic ideas and imagery on the other. In particular, Blake continues to make widespread use of the conventional distinction between the divine and satanic, which has been interpreted by some scholars as a clear manifestation of ontological dualism. The problem with such a construal, I suggest, is that it clashes with Blake's insistence that engagement with the polarities of existence is essential to human (and divine) flourishing. By presenting the critical position I wish to contest, the reason I consider it to be flawed, and the phenomenon in Blake for which an alternative explanation needs to be found—namely his polarisation of the divine and satanic—Chapter 2 sets the agenda for my reading of Blake in the light of Sterry. In so doing, it provides a clear articulation of the intellectual purpose which my comparison of Blake's and Sterry's theologies in this dissertation is intended to serve.

Having set out the problem, to the explication of which my juxtaposition of Blake and Sterry is directed, Chapter 3 ('The analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles') proceeds to a detailed comparison of the two central theological figures at the heart of this dissertation. It is at this point that Pinto's claim for 'startling affinities' between the theological principles of Blake and Sterry is substantiated. Through a far wider ranging investigation of the convergences and

divergences between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles, the chapter confirms the veracity of the correspondences Pinto claimed to have found (although some of the details of his account are disputed), adding both depth and clarity to the case for them as two 'congenial beings of another sphere'. In the process, a range of further intersections will also be identified and analysed. The point of this careful comparison of Blake and Sterry, based on the exposition of Blake's divine and satanic 'principles' in Chapter 2, is not simply to yield a neat list of their similarities and differences, which can be 'weighed' to ascertain the extent of their congeniality, but to construct a substantial, and compelling, picture of their resemblance which will contribute to the elucidation of Blake's apparent dualism. In other words, the contribution of the extended comparison conducted in this chapter to the thesis as a whole is not just to *document* the parallels between Blake and Sterry but to *use* them to shed light on Blake. The way I will do this is to suggest that the analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles is strong enough to enable us to posit a further resemblance that promises to illuminate Blake's polarisation of Christ and Satan: that Blake also shares Sterry's dialectical distinction between the two, set out most clearly in a section of *The Rise, Race, and Royalty*, which is thoroughly examined. The case I make can thus be considered a classic example of an 'analogical argument', which proceeds by positing the existence of further similarities between two entities or systems on the basis of those which are already known.

It is this inference which is put to the test in Chapter 4 ('An interpretation of Blake's "dualism" in the light of Sterry's distinction between Christ and the Devil'). In this chapter, Sterry's dialectical contrast between the divine and satanic, in which Christ is the principle of distinction and the Devil that of division, is used as a hermeneutical lens through which to explicate the nature of Blake's theological 'dualism'. Given the vast scope of the struggle between the divine and satanic in Blake's works, I select the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, where this tension is particularly conspicuous, as a case study. Before turning to this work, however, I seek to underline the appropriateness of using Sterry's distinction as an interpretative framework by showing how it coincides with what we actually find in Blake's texts and images. The characteristics which Sterry ascribes to Christ and the Devil, I propose, can readily be found in situations in Blake's corpus where either the divine or the satanic are in the ascendency. What this suggests is that the application of the structure of Sterry's theology to Blake's does not distort it, but brings into clearer focus a feature which is already *implicit* in it, namely that Christ and Satan are not so much discrete entities but divergent orderings of characteristics in which certain starkly contrasting patterns of being and perceiving are lived out. In short, they are competing approaches to the vital contraries of existence. When this perception is applied to the contrasting depictions of divinity in the *Job* series, it becomes clear that Job's 'oppressor' and saviour are not in fact antagonistic beings but divergent visions of the same divinity, in which different features are to the fore. In this case, the demise of the satanic does not involve a metaphysical change on the part of God, but a revolution in Job's theological perspective which is inseparable from a change in the way he relates to those around him. The fact that Job's dualistic mindset *is* that which is 'annihilated' reinforces how the ontological approach to Blake's binary concepts, set out in Chapter 2, is not only a distortion but a direct inversion of Blake's actual position. The central insight of this chapter—that Blake's distinction between the divine and satanic is not metaphysical but ethical and perceptual—constitutes Sterry's most significant contribution to the interpretation of Blake's theological vision.

The Conclusion will provide a brief retrospective on the dissertation as a whole, recapitulating how the research questions at its heart arose; the way in which these have

been approached; the answers which have emerged; and their wider implications for the field of Blake studies. There will also be a reflection on the benefits and limitations of the analogical method, including the difficulties I faced in its implementation (and how these have been negotiated), as well as a proposal of some further areas of investigation arising out of my study. In particular, it will be suggested that the precedent Sterry's writings provide for Blake's dialectical use of conventionally dualistic language invites the question of how widespread such usage was in the radical religious environment of the Commonwealth, and indeed beyond—a question which could potentially lead to the recovery of a neglected strand in the intellectual history of English Christian theology.

Acknowledgements

My first word of thanks is due to Chris Rowland, who has supervised this project with great dedication, wisdom, and kindness. I am particularly grateful to Chris for agreeing to take on this role beyond his retirement and consider myself exceptionally fortunate to be his last doctoral student working on Blake. Whatever value this thesis might have owes a great deal to Chris' diligence and enthusiasm, but he is certainly not responsible for any of its limitations.

If Chris has helped me to see this project to completion, it was Mark McIntosh, my MA dissertation supervisor at Durham, who first proposed to me that there might be an affinity between Blake and Sterry. I am very grateful to Mark for planting the seed in my mind from which this thesis has grown.

Sarah Apetrei offered me guidance when I was, like many students of theology, a complete stranger to the field of seventeenth-century English religion. Her subsequent invitation to present a paper on Blake and Sterry at the Ecclesiastical History Seminar provided me with a valuable opportunity to share my work, and receive constructive feedback, in a supportive environment. Alongside Paul Fiddes, whom I would also like to thank, Sarah participated in my Transfer of Status. The first chapter represents the fruit of my attempt to respond to their suggestion that the contextualisation of Sterry's thought is an essential component of the justification of his selection as a candidate for comparative study with Blake, for which I am much obliged.

Graham Ward and Joel Rasmussen, who conducted my Confirmation of Status, offered a different perspective on my research, pointing out how my work relates to the wider investigation of the links between Cambridge Platonism and Romanticism. I have not been able to explore this avenue as far as I would have liked, but am very grateful for their advice to reflect further on the advantages and disadvantages of my analogical method, as well as their encouraging comments on my submitted chapter.

My investigation of Sterry has taken me on several trips to the library of his old college, the final resting place of his literary remains. I would like to express my thanks to the Librarian and her staff for proving me with access to these precious handwritten documents, quoted by permission of the Master and Fellows of Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Two travel grants from the Faculty of Theology and Religion at Oxford helped to cover some of the expense involved. An invitation from The Revd. Jeremy Caddick to deliver a sermon on Sterry as part of a series on the stained glass windows in the college chapel provided me with an opportunity not only for a further visit to the Sterry collection, but also to share some of Sterry's inspiring words on the universality of divine love with present-day members of Emmanuel, which was a special privilege.

This project would have been impossible without a full AHRC doctoral award.

The same is true, although in a less pecuniary sense, of four women: my sister, mother, grandmother, and partner, whose patience, understanding, and support has kept me going during difficult periods, not least after a serious shoulder injury kept me from my desk for several months. Steph in particular has been there with me every step of the way, much as Job's wife accompanies him through his trials in Blake's illustrations.

Finally, I would like to thank Brian Levick, who sadly passed away nearly four years ago, for the interest he took in my theological studies from an early age. I treasure the memory of our conversations on the nature of God by his fire in High Bentham and, latterly, by the sea in Lytham St. Annes. This dissertation is dedicated to him with gratitude and affection.

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* Yale Center for British Art, Paul Mellon Collection
† British Museum
‡ Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens

Note: the four images not in the possession of the Yale Centre for British Art, which operates a generous Open Access Policy, have been redacted from the version of this thesis disseminated through the Oxford University Research Archive (ORA).

Note on primary texts/images and abbreviations

All Blake quotations are taken from *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008). As is common practice in Blake scholarship, references to his writings are included in the main body of the text within parentheses. The same method of citation has also been adopted for Sterry's writings so as to ensure consistency between the thesis' two central figures. References to Blake's images in Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 2 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981) are to the text volume, with the plate volume page number included in square brackets. Information on the location of particular works can be found in Butlin. The majority of Blake's images can also be viewed online through the William Blake Archive: www.blakearchive.org.

In all quotations from Sterry's writings, both printed and manuscript, I have followed the original text as closely as possible, retaining peculiarities in spelling, punctuation, capitalisation, and italicisation, as well as contracted forms (e.g. 'wch' = 'which'). I have, however, silently modernised the lettering where the retention of an archaic 'i'/'j' or 'u'/'v' form would obscure the sense of a word and replaced 'ff' with a capital 'F'. It should also be noted that I have adopted Emmanuel College Library's numbering of the Sterry manuscripts, which follows Pinto's ordering, not that of P. J. Croft and Nabil Matar, 'The Peter Sterry MSS at Emmanuel College, Cambridge', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 8/1 (1981), 42-56.

The place of publication for all primary printed sources, unless otherwise stated, is London. Dates of publication are given as they appear on the original title pages. Birth/baptism and death dates follow the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004 edition.

All biblical references are to the King James Version.

A	Blake, *America a Prophecy* (1793)
AGM	Sterry, *The Appearance of God to Man in the Gospel* (1710)
Ann. Bac.	Blake, annotations to Francis Bacon, *Essays Moral, Economical and Political* [1798] (1798)
Ann. Berk.	Blake, annotations to George Berkeley, *Siris* [Dublin: 1744] (*c.* 1820)
Ann. Lav.	Blake, annotations to Johann Caspar Lavater, *Aphorisms on Man* [1788] (1788)
Ann. Reyn.	Blake, annotations to *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds* [1798] (*c*. 1808)
Ann. Swed., DLDW	Blake, annotations to Emmanuel Swedenborg, *The Wisdom of Angels, concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* [1788] (1788)
Ann. Thorn.	Blake, annotations to Robert John Thornton, *The Lord's Prayer, Newly Translated* [1827] (1827)
Ann. Wat.	Blake, annotations to Richard Watson [Bishop of Llandaff], *An Apology for the Bible* [1797] (1798)
Ann. Words., *Poems*	Blake, annotations to William Wordsworth, *Poems* [1815] (1826)
ARAO	Blake, *All Religions are One* (*c*. 1788)
B	Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* (1981)

BR	G. E. Bentley, *Blake Records* (2nd edn., New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004)
BU	Blake, *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1794)
CCC	Sterry, *The Clouds in which Christ Comes* (1648)
CFC	Sterry, *The Commings Forth of Christ* (1650)
CWGW	*The Complete Works of Gerrard Winstanley*, ed. Thomas N. Corns, Ann Hughes, and David Loewenstein, 2 vols. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009)
DC	Blake, *A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures* (1809)
DFW	Sterry, *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will* (1675)
DNB	*Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004)
E	*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. Erdman (2008)
Eur.	Blake, *Europe a Prophecy* (1794)
EC MS	Emmanuel College Manuscript
ED	Sterry, *England's Deliverance from the Northern Presbytery* (1652)
EG	Blake, *The Everlasting Gospel* (*c*. 1818)
FZ	Blake, *The Four Zoas* (*c*. 1797-1807)
FGE	Sterry, *Free Grace Exalted, and thence Deduced. Evangelical Rules for Evangelical Sufferings* (1670)
GA	Blake, *The Ghost of Abel: A Revelation in the Visions of Jehovah* (1822)
GP	Blake, *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise* (*c*. 1820)
J	Blake, *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (*c*. 1804-1820)
KJV	King James Version
L	Blake, *The Laocoön* (*c*. 1826)
M	Blake, *Milton a Poem* (*c*. 1804-1811)
MHH	Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790)
NNR	Blake, *There is no Natural Religion* (*c*. 1788)
PA	Blake, *Public Address* (1810)
RRR	Sterry, *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man* (1683)
SCS	Sterry, *The Spirit Convincing of Sinne* (1646)
SIE	Blake, *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (1794)
T	Blake, *Tiriel* (*c*. 1789)
TCS	Sterry, *The Teachings of Christ in the Soule* (1648)
TWU	Sterry, *The True Way of Uniting the People of God in these Nations* (1660)
VDA	Blake, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793)
VLJ	Blake, *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810)
WGP	Sterry, *The Way of God with his People in these Nations* (1657)
WJB	*The Works of Jacob Behmen* [The 'Law edition' of Boehme], 4 vols. (1764-1781)

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790)

God bringeth forth his Works in contraries; Light and Darkness; Good and Evil; Michael and His Angels; the Dragon, and His Angels.

Peter Sterry, *The Commings Forth of Christ* (1650)

Introduction

Blake and Sterry as ‘two congenial beings of another sphere’

In an article of March 1830, published in the *London University Magazine* and probably written by Charles Augustus Tulk, we are told that ‘Blake and Coleridge, when in company, seemed like congenial beings of another sphere, breathing for a while on our earth; which may easily be perceived from the similarity of their works’.[1] The reason I have decided to include an extract from Tulk’s description of Blake and Coleridge in the title of this dissertation is because it eloquently captures that sense of sympathy and commonality that I shall argue also exists between Blake and the seventeenth-century English divine, Peter Sterry (1613-1672). Although Sterry died nearly a century before Blake was born, and is unlikely to have exerted any direct influence on him, the case I will be making is that they too were two ‘congenial beings of another sphere’, as a close examination of the ‘similarity of their works’ reveals. As Sterry is a little-known figure today, the last section of this Introduction will offer an account of his remarkable career and writings. Before introducing Sterry, however, it is necessary to explain the nature of this dissertation, setting out its background, aims, approach, and structure. I will start by recounting how I first became aware of a possible affinity between Blake and Sterry, before discussing the work of Vivian de Sola Pinto on this very subject, the limitations of which have informed the research questions at the heart of this thesis. Next, I offer an exposition, and justification, of the method it employs, setting this within the context of

[1] BR 516. See Morton D. Paley, *Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Fine Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 192.

the scholarly debate concerning how it is that one identifies an appropriate background against which to interpret Blake's work. It should be made clear from the outset that by 'background'—or indeed any of its synonyms like 'context', 'setting', or 'milieu'—I do not mean an intellectual environment that provides *sources* for Blake's ideas, but one which offers illuminating *analogues* rather than explanations of them. The significance of this distinction, which applies throughout this thesis, will be discussed at length in the methodological section.

1. *The critical background: Pinto's 'discovery' of Sterry as a theological precursor to Blake*

The origins of this thesis lie in a conversation I had with my MA dissertation supervisor in which he suggested that a passage I had read him from Blake's *A Vision of the Last Judgment* sounded 'exactly like' parts of Sterry's *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will*. Without this single observation, which is testimony to the range and sensitivity of Mark McIntosh's theological radar, it is quite unlikely I would ever have come across this obscure English writer. After reading a few pages of *A Discourse*, I was struck by the strange beauty and intricacy of Sterry's prose, which was quite unlike anything I had ever read before, and could see that there *was* a similarity with Blake, even if that resemblance was not easy to pin down or articulate. More important than the details of the specific correlation I found, was the sense I got that in the 'baroque exuberance' of Sterry's writing there was something more immediately redolent of Blake than in all the other 'mystical' authors I had been trawling through in the hope of finding a key to unlock the meaning of Blake's (to me at least) enticingly perplexing texts and images.[2] These seemed to be brimming with familiar biblical characters and Christian themes but

[2] The phrase 'baroque exuberance' is borrowed from Mark McIntosh, 'The Maker's Meaning: Divine Ideas and Salvation', *Modern Theology*, 28/3 (July 2012), 381.

as if transposed into a parallel theological universe quite unlike the one to which I was accustomed. My instinct was that Sterry's writings emanated from the same 'place' as Blake's, or at least one closer to it than anything else I had previously found, and might therefore help me to navigate his 'idiosyncratic version of systematic theology'.[3]

This impression is one which stayed with me as I embarked on doctoral study, during the very early stages of which I found an essay by the literary scholar, Vivian de Sola Pinto (1895-1969), which draws attention to what it claims to be striking parallels between Blake and Sterry, thus confirming to me that this avenue deserved some further exploration. Pinto's article on 'Peter Sterry: Puritan, Platonist, and Mystic' appears in a collection of 'Essays and Studies in Religion and Literature from Plato to Von Hügel'.[4] In this essay, published in 1929, Pinto refers to the work of Denis Saurat on Blake and Milton, suggesting that

> It may be of some interest, at a time when the writings of Blake are being more carefully studied and highly valued than ever before, and when scholarship is examining with a new interest the ideas of Milton…to draw attention to an almost forgotten contemporary of Milton…whose writings show such startling affinities to those of Blake that one is inclined to believe that Blake must either have had some knowledge of them or else have drawn inspiration from closely related sources.[5]

For Pinto, then, the importance of Sterry's writings lie in their 'remarkable affinity' to the work of his 'contemporary Milton and to those of William Blake'—'a point which has hitherto entirely escaped notice'.[6] Pinto's substantiation of this claim is restricted to the final section of his essay, which elaborates on the 'specific doctrines' that Sterry purportedly shares with Blake and Milton. I should explain at this point that the focus of

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[3] Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 3.
[4] Vivian de Sola Pinto, 'Peter Sterry: Puritan, Platonist, and Mystic', in *Speculum Religionis: Being Essays and Studies in Religion and Literature from Plato to Von Hügel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 161-93.
[5] Pinto, 'Peter Sterry', in *Speculum Religionis*, 162; Denis Saurat, *Blake and Milton* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1920).
[6] Pinto, 'Peter Sterry', in *Speculum Religionis*, 173.

this thesis is on Sterry's affinity to Blake, not Milton, although Sterry's association with Milton is briefly discussed in my biographical account and Blake's response to Milton is explored in the first section of Chapter 1. So, what are the parallels Pinto identifies?

Firstly, Pinto claims that, like Blake and Milton, Sterry 'believed that all things and all creatures, including the humblest and most repulsive, are essentially divine, or rather that they have some part of the Divine Life'.[7] Secondly, Sterry shares with them an unusual conception of Christ as the 'Greater Man…the composite personality which includes the spirits of all the regenerate, or the communion of saints'.[8] Thirdly, Sterry anticipates Blake's view (Milton is not mentioned here) that 'egoism, or excessive self-love was the supreme sin that prevented man from becoming a member of the Divine Image', with both foregrounding the importance of forgiveness in maintaining the unity of that Image.[9] Fourthly, when it comes to the 'faculty which enables man to partake of the divine life', Sterry is closer to Blake than Milton in raising the Spirit above Reason, even if he 'refused to be led into the violent antinomianism' which, according to Pinto, 'disfigures Blake's writings'.[10] Fifthly, Sterry's idea of 'double vision', in which there is a 'Two-fold Eye' (CCC 25), is said to foreshadow Blake's theory of multiple levels of perception (i.e. 'fourfold vision').[11] Finally, like both Blake and Milton, Sterry holds an uncommonly elevated view of artists and poets as 'Divine Spirits' (DFW 179) whose inspired creations serve to arouse in their audience 'the liveliest Images of the Divine Work, and the Divine Mind' (DFW 214).[12] These alleged intersections between Sterry and Blake, as well as Milton, are taken up again by Pinto in his later book, *Peter Sterry: Platonist and Puritan* (1934), where he makes three further points relevant to this study:

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[7] Ibid., 181.
[8] Ibid., 184.
[9] Ibid., 186, 187.
[10] Ibid., 187-8, 189.
[11] Ibid. 190-1.
[12] Ibid. 191-2.

(1) that Sterry's thought prefigures not only Blake but also Wordsworth and Shelley; (2) that Sterry comes very close to Blake's identification of divinity and humanity; and (3) that Sterry presents the Fall as 'the work of the Devil, who, like Blake's Urizen, is the principle of disunion, division and selfishness, breaking up the unity of the world'.[13]

The 'startling affinities' Pinto claims to have found, I would suggest, provide a sufficient ground for the more extensive study of the resemblances between Blake and Sterry attempted in this thesis. Before reflecting on the limitations of Pinto's treatment, and how they have shaped my research agenda, I should briefly mention the three other references to Sterry in relation to Blake I have encountered in the course of my reading. The first can be found in Désirée Hirst's book, *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (1964), which contains barely three pages of discussion of Sterry as a representative example of the revival of mystical and occult thought who is mentioned in a letter of Mary Pratt, an acquaintance of Richard Clarke (1719-1802), to Henry Brooke (1738-1806).[14] While Pratt's reference to Sterry as being 'quite in the Love Principle' is a memorable one, which alongside Clarke's inclusion of Sterry in a list of recent English mystics reveals how Sterry's writings were not entirely forgotten in the eighteenth century, Hirst's brief account treats Sterry merely as a small link in the chain of the transmission of esoteric symbolism.[15] No attention whatsoever is given to the question of whether Blake and Sterry might have anything in common other than a shared intellectual heritage. The second reference appears in Nigel Smith's monograph, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (1994). In the course of an exposition of Sterry's theatrical approach to salvation history, which may have been influenced by

[13] Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Peter Sterry: Platonist and Puritan, 1613-1672: A Biographical and Critical Study with Passages Selected from his Writings* (1934; New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 88, 97-8, 98.
[14] Désirée Hirst, *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964), 277-8, 285. On Richard Clarke see also E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 47-8.
[15] Richard Clarke, *Jesus the Nazarene, addressed to Jews, Deists, and Believers* (1795), 90.

David Pareus' *Commentary upon the Divine Revelation* (1644), Smith observes how Sterry's use of 'Aristotle's *Poetics* to develop a notion of tragedy as the "tying" and "untying" of Aristotelian plots in the life of Christ and all Christians [is] an application of truly Blakean proportions'.[16] While there is every reason to suspect that this passing reference is a highly insightful one, it does little more than invoke Blake to indicate the universal scope of Sterry's 'visionary theatre' (to borrow Susanne Sklar's phrase). The third work to discuss Sterry in connection to Blake is Marc Standish's doctoral thesis on 'The English Roots of William Blake's Radical Vision' (University of Michigan, 1994). Standish's study, which attempts to show how Blake is no isolated oddity but part of a continuous English radical tradition, only amplifies Hirst's point: that Sterry's writings were known to some of Blake's contemporaries, including Clarke and Ralph Mather.[17] The two textual parallels Standish does identify, which centre on Blake's and Sterry's supposed disdain for the physical body as an obstacle to spiritual regeneration, are not particularly convincing and dealt with in the most cursory manner with no consideration of their significance for the interpretation of Blake's thought.[18] While not adding much to Pinto's work, these three references at least reinforce the impression that he may have been on to something when he pointed to the affinities between Blake and Sterry. It is to the elucidation of what that 'something' might be that this thesis is dedicated.

2. *The research questions arising out of the limitations of Pinto's account*

The problem with Pinto's exposition of the resemblances between Blake and Sterry lies not so much in the particular correspondences he detects, all of which will be dealt with

[16] Nigel Smith, *Literature and Revolution in England, 1640-1660* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1994), 18. For discussion of Pareus' apocalyptic commentary see Susanne Sklar, *Blake's 'Jerusalem' as Visionary Theatre: Entering the Divine Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 20-3.
[17] On the latter see Morton D. Paley, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999), 25-6.
[18] Marc Standish, 'The English Roots of William Blake's Radical Vision', PhD thesis, University of Michigan, 1994, 224-5, 261-2.

at greater length and substantiated at various points in this study, but its limited scope; inevitable considering its confinement to a single essay and a few scattered points in an introduction to a critical study of Sterry's writings.[19] The form in which Pinto's findings are presented means there is no opportunity for him to do more than set out the parallels with a few citations to support them. This is entirely understandable, given that Pinto's aim is not to expound the similarities, or their significance, but simply to rescue Sterry from the obscurity into which he had fallen, much as others had done for Traherne.[20] If there are two minor points at which I would contest Pinto's account, these would be his exclusive identification of Urizen with the Devil, and his suggestion that the parallels *must* indicate a genealogical link, whether direct or indirect, which is an inference that the evidence will not support.[21] Nonetheless, even if there is not much wrong with what Pinto *has* done, there are two major areas of enquiry he leaves completely untouched.

The first concerns the wider significance of the 'startling affinities' he claims to have found for our understanding of Blake's intellectual antecedents in the seventeenth century. If one were to compare Pinto's 'discovery' of Sterry as a theological precursor to Blake to an archaeological find, it might be likened to a fortuitous discovery, such as the unearthing of a horde of ancient coins by a gardener digging a patch of land, rather than a deliberate one, like the detection of a long-lost tomb following a protracted and painstaking excavation of a carefully selected site. As we have seen, Pinto was not conducting a methodical search for forerunners to Blake, but believed he had hit upon one in the person of Sterry, whose work was Pinto's principal interest. In other words,

[19] Sterry's advocacy of divine immanence is discussed in Chapter 1, section 3 ('Sterry and the Ranters'); his cosmic Christology in Chapter 3, section 1 ('"The perfection of Harmony is the Unity in Variety"'); his commitment to the forgiveness of sins in Chapter 3, section 1 ('"Blessed Neighbourhood"'); his identification of the Devil with the principle of self-love, and its role in the Fall, in Chapter 3, section 2 ('"A Sinner makes himself a Devil"'); his 'high' pneumatology in Chapter 1, section 3 ('Sterry, Vane, and Hutchinson'), as well as Chapter 3, section 1 ('"The true and essential body"'), which also deals with his lofty view of human creativity and celebration of the divine-in-human; and his notion of the 'Spiritual Eye' in Chapter 3, section 1 ('"A Divine Principle or Faculty of seeing Things"').
[20] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 5.
[21] On the first point see Chapter 3, section 2 ('"A Sinner makes himself a Devil"').

Pinto came to Blake via Sterry, not the other way round. None of this is intended as a slight on Pinto: my own discovery of Sterry was, after all, equally serendipitous. Even so, while important discoveries are often made by 'chance', their veracity is likely to be questioned, and their implications not fully grasped, until an explanation can be offered as to why they are not as random as they might first appear. In the case of the horde, its authenticity would be bolstered if, for example, it could be shown that similar artefacts had previously been found in the area and a Roman settlement is known to have existed nearby, facts which would account for why such treasure might have been expected to be found on that particular site. If a team of archaeologists had been excavating in the vicinity but missed the gardener's coins, they might wish to modify their picture of the region's history, and in turn their search parameters, in the light of the new find, so as to give their successors the best possible chance of detecting similar burials in the future.

By the same token, Pinto's discovery of 'startling affinities' between Blake and Sterry is likely to be treated with scepticism, and its significance for our understanding of the context of Blake's ideas not properly appreciated, until it can be accounted for in terms of Sterry's closeness (i.e. theological affinity) to an established setting for Blake's thought. The need for such an explanation is heightened in this case given that there is no decisive evidence that Blake read Sterry (even if the findings of this dissertation lend weight to the case that he *might* have done), which means that any resemblance that is found to exist cannot be put down to direct literary influence. In short, Sterry's preliminary credentials as a Blakean precursor would be greatly enhanced if it could be shown that Pinto's find is no aberration, but largely consistent with the picture of Blake's intellectual antecedents that has emerged in the nine decades since he wrote. In this case, Sterry would no longer seem an arbitrary candidate for comparative study, but a figure handpicked on the basis of his conformity to certain features of a widely

accepted template for identifying Blake's predecessors. At the same time, the fact that Sterry has been ignored by those scholars who have sought to locate Blake's intellectual background in the seventeenth century, particularly among the bourgeoning number of sectarian groups and independents, suggests that their conception of this milieu, and the investigative boundaries stemming from it, may need some adjustment.

The second, and if anything even more significant, issue Pinto fails to address is that of the *purpose* which the exploration of the resemblances between Blake and Sterry is intended to serve. In other words, apart from the potential insight into the context of Blake's ideas—an issue of no small importance to Blake scholarship in its own right—what is to be gained from comparing Blake and Sterry, and how might such a study best be conducted to realise this aim? In order to answer this question, which is fundamental to defining the scope and purpose of this thesis, we must reflect carefully on the nature of comparison, particularly the crucial role it plays in the hermeneutical process, as well as the peculiar difficulty Blake presents to his interpreters in this regard.

3. *'It is the analogue that is important, not the source': an exposition of the analogical method employed in this thesis*

It is arguable that the interpretation of any creative work—whether literary, artistic, or musical—is comparative in the sense that it involves situating the focal entity within an appropriate context, usually a 'tradition' of some sort, that renders it comprehensible, providing an ideological (using that term in a neutral sense) or aesthetic touchstone against which its 'meaning' can be determined. As George Steiner suggests, 'We seek to understand, to "place" the object before us—the text, the painting, the sonata—by giving it the intelligible, informing context of previous and related activity'.[22] The logic

[22] George Steiner, *What is Comparative Literature?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1.

behind this pervasive instinct to try to understand one creative work in terms of another to which it is seen to be generically related would seem to be some kind of inductive reasoning, whereby one seeks to approach that which is unfamiliar or poorly understood by way of that which is familiar or better appreciated. Thus, to give a random example, if one were attempting to study the enigmatic paintings of Hilma af Klint—an obscure early-twentieth-century Swedish artist whose pictures (exhibited at the Serpentine in 2016) are something of an art-historical anomaly—an obvious starting point might be to compare her with another contemporary female artist like Sonia Delaunay, whose works are better known and have received more extensive critical attention. What is crucial to recognise is that, no matter how 'self-evident' the context of any given creative entity might seem, it always represents a *decision* on the part of the interpreter. Nothing in the object of study itself, as John Kloppenborg observes in a different connection, 'tells us how to frame our reconstruction; there is no neutral or objective or self-evidently correct framework. The choice of framework is interpretative and a function of the theoretical issues' that concern each interpreter. Rather than being problematic, liable to distort the subject matter through unbridled subjectivity, the scholar's 'theoretical interests are what make the comparison productive of meaning'.[23]

While it is the case that all creative figures present their interpreters with the 'problem' of identifying a fitting context within which the locate their work, Blake is something of a special case in that he is much more difficult to 'place', as Steiner puts it, than most. This is something that was picked up by T. S. Eliot in his influential essay on Blake in *The Sacred Wood* (1920), where Eliot lamented that what Blake 'sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own, and concentrated his attention upon the

[23] John Kloppenborg, 'Sources, Methods and Discursive Locations in the Quest of the Historical Jesus', in Tom Holmén and Stanley E. Porter (eds.), *Handbook for the Study of the Historical Jesus*, 4 vols. (Leiden: Brill, 2011), i: *How to Study the Historical Jesus*, 277, 278.

problems of the poet'.[24] The same basic point is also made by Thomas Altizer: 'While Calvinism or medieval scholasticism…provide the basis for a conceptual understanding of the visions of Milton and Dante, no comparable source exists to give such a mode of entry into Blake's vision'.[25] Even if one might contest Eliot's and Altizer's claim that Blake *lacked* a tradition on the ground that, as we shall see in Chapter 1, he belonged to a radical sub-culture within English theological non-conformity—not a 'tradition' in the strict sense of 'something handed down', but a '*philosophia perennis* or persistent body of live thought'—it might well be conceded that identifying an appropriate 'informing context' is far harder, and more contentious, in Blake's case than in that of most writers.[26] This is reflected in the bewildering range of religious and philosophical traditions with which Blake has been linked, which include neo-Platonism, Gnosticism, Kabbalism, Swedenborgianism, Moravianism, Anglicanism, and Methodism.[27] The

[24] T. S. Eliot, *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism* (London: Methuen, 1920), 143.
[25] Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The New Apocalypse: The Radical Christian Vision of William Blake* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967), xii.
[26] A. D. Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 218.
[27] For neo-Platonism see George Mills Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961); Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 2 vols. (1969; London: Routledge, 2002); Edward Larrissy, 'Blake and Platonism', in Anna P. Baldwin and Sarah Hutton (eds.), *Platonism and the English Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 186-198; for Gnosticism see Stuart Curran, 'Blake and the Gnostic Hyle: A Double Negative', *Blake Studies*, 4/2 (Spring 1972), 117-33; William Dennis Horn, 'Blake's Revisionism: Gnostic Interpretation and Critical Methodology', in Dan Miller, Mark Bracher, and Donald Ault (eds.), *Blake and the Argument of Method* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1987), 72-98; Peter J. Sorenson, *William Blake's Gnostic Myth* (Lewiston: Edwin Mellen Press, 1995); Jos Van Meurs, 'William Blake and his Gnostic Myths', in Roelof van den Broek and Wouter J. Hanegraaff (eds.), *Gnosis and Hermeticism from Antiquity to Modern Times* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), 269-309; Nuttall, *Alternative Trinity*; Laura Quinney, *William Blake on Self and Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); for Kabbalism see Sheila A. Spector, *Glorious Incomprehensible: The Development of Blake's Kabbalistic Language* and *Wonders Divine: The Development of Blake's Kabbalistic Myth* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 2001); for Swedenborgianism see Mark Schorer, 'Swedenborg and Blake', *Modern Philology*, 36/2 (November 1938), 157-78; J. G. Davies, *The Theology of William Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 31-53; Morton D. Paley, '"A New Heaven is Begun": William Blake and Swedenborgianism', *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 13/2 (Fall 1979), 64-90; Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007); Magnus Ankarsjö, *William Blake and Religion: A New Critical View* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2009); for Moravianism see Marsha Keith Schuchard and Keri Davies, 'Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family', *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 38/1 (Summer 2004), 36-43; Keri Davies, 'The Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family: Snapshots from the Archive', *Literature Compass*, 3/6 (2006), 1297-1319; Wayne C. Ripley, 'The Influence of the Moravian *Collection of Hymns* on William Blake's Later Mythology', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 80/3 (Autumn 2017), 481-98; for Anglicanism see Davies, *Theology of William Blake*, and Robert Ryan,

reason Blake is more demanding in this regard than the likes of Dante and Milton lies not only in his eclecticism, although that no doubt plays a part, but in the distinctive nature of his response to tradition, which, as will be illustrated in relation to Milton in Chapter 1, is characterised less by passive replication than active transformation. Los' words, 'I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans' (J10:20, E153), are rightly taken as a definitive statement of Blake's attitude towards his own intellectual forebears; a disconcerting consequence of which is that, as Frye observes, 'Blake is the kind of writer who may show startling resemblances to someone he had not read…and no resemblance at all to someone he had read attentively'.[28] This dissertation will argue that Peter Sterry falls very much into the former camp.

One of the most pressing hermeneutical challenges facing Blake's interpreters, then, is that of *how* to decide on a suitable comparative context within which to place him; an issue which has received surprisingly little attention in Blake scholarship, with the exception of Joseph P. Natoli's chapter on 'Sources and Analogues' in his annotated bibliography, *Twentieth-Century Blake Criticism: Northrop Frye to the Present* (1982), which contains some astute reflections.[29] Without always being openly admitted, two general responses to this problem, indicated by the title of Natoli's chapter, have been operative within the field since its inception, which we may refer to as the genealogical and the analogical. In their original setting, Darwinian evolutionary theory, these terms referred to two kinds of similarity between species: one which can be put down to their descent from a common ancestor (genealogy) and one which can be ascribed to their

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The Romantic Reformation: Religious Politics in English Literature, 1789-1824 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 43-79; for Methodism see Jennifer G. Jesse, *William Blake's Religious Vision: There's a Methodism in His Madness* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2013) and Michael Farrell, *Blake and the Methodists* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).

[28] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 12.

[29] Joseph P. Natoli, *Twentieth-Century Blake Criticism: Northrop Frye to the Present* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), Chapter 9.

similar response to comparable environmental conditions (analogy).[30] The genealogical method in Blake studies is thus distinguished by the attempt to trace the lineage of his ideas back to specific *sources*, which can then be used as modes of entry into his work. E. P. Thompson's *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (1993), which argues for Blake's Muggletonian ancestry, is a classic example of this approach. The analogical method, on the other hand, seeks to shed light on Blake's corpus using texts which may not have influenced him, but nevertheless provide instructive *parallels*. This method is the one utilised by scholars who turn to thinkers who either cannot be shown to have been familiar to Blake, as is the case with Sterry, or could not have been known to him. Altizer's deployment of Hegel's dialectical system as a 'guide to Blake's visionary world' and Lorraine Clarke's application of Kierkegaard's concept of 'dread' to the role of the Spectre in Blake's later epics are exemplary of this approach.[31] Other thinkers to whom Blake has been related by way of analogy include such luminaries as Goethe, Novalis, Schlegel, Marx, Nietzsche, Freud, Jung, and Yeats.[32]

Despite the widespread application of the analogical method by Blake scholars, there remains something of an (I would argue unhealthy) obsession with the *derivation* of Blake's ideas. This manifests itself not only in the kind of compulsive source-hunting typified by the work of Kathleen Raine, but also an insidious assumption, which is often left unstated: that the use of a writer whom Blake can be shown to have read requires

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[30] See John Ashton, *The Religion of Paul the Apostle* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000), 11-22.
[31] Altizer, *New Apocalypse*, xii; Lorraine Clarke, *Blake, Kierkegaard, and the Spectre of Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).
[32] See, for example, Martin Bidney, *Blake and Goethe: Psychology, Ontology, Imagination* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1988); Joachim J. Scholz, *Blake and Novalis: A Comparison of Romanticism's High Arguments* (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1978); Steven E. Alford, *Irony and the Logic of the Romantic Imagination* (New York: Peter Lang, 1984) [on Schlegel]; Minna Doskow, 'The Humanized Universe of Blake and Marx', in Robert J. Bertholf and Annette S. Levitt (eds.), *William Blake and the Moderns* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), 225-40; Harvey Birenbaum, *Between Blake and Nietzsche: The Reality of Culture* (Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1992); Diana Hume George, *Blake and Freud* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980); Edward F. Edinger, *Encounter with the Self: A Jungian Commentary on William Blake's 'Illustrations of the Book of Job'* (Toronto: Inner City Books, 1986); Hazard Adams, *Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1955).

little or no justification while one for whom there is no evidence of reception in Blake can only be enlisted in the interpretative cause after protracted special pleading. I have found this to be the case with Sterry, whose selection as a figure for comparative study has required considerably more defence than, one suspects, would have been necessary for, say, Swedenborg. In other words, sources continue to have a greater prestige than analogues. This assumption can be seen at work, for instance, in Morton D. Paley's *The Traveller in the Evening: The Last Works of William Blake* (2003), which goes to great lengths to show that Blake *could* have read this or that work, smuggling an entire library of sources into the discussion on the basis of circumstantial evidence alone. My point is not that Paley should not have devoted so much time to the justification of his selection of comparative material, but that his energy has been misdirected: it is the way in which Paley *uses* his 'sources' to such great effect to elucidate Blake's thought that substantiates their selection, not the fact that Blake might have read them. This is not only because establishing the provenance of Blake's ideas is an extremely precarious exercise, as illustrated by the undermining of Thompson's Muggletonian hypothesis by new evidence concerning Blake's mother's early association with the Moravians, but because whatever illumination is gained by comparison, as Natoli insists, 'derives from the fact that we have treated the suggested source not as a source but as an analogue'.[33]

What I think Natoli is getting at here is that, unless we believe that sources can be substituted for Blake's work, finding one does not actually take us very far. In order for a source to be useful it must help us to see something *in Blake* more clearly. In this case, the value of any given text—whether it be Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress*, which Blake knew inside out, or Maritain's *Art and Scholasticism* (an example borrowed from Thomas Merton's MA dissertation on 'Nature and Art in William Blake'), which he

[33] Natoli, *Blake Criticism*, 176. On Blake's mother see the references for Moravianism in n27 above.

could not possibly have read—should not be determined by whether Blake was familiar with it, but the critical perspective it can afford his interpreter, as well as the quality of insight this vantage point produces.[34] This principle was distilled as long ago as 1924 by Frederick E. Pierce who, at the beginning of an article on a topic close to the subject of this dissertation, offered the following insightful reflection:

> Our records of what Blake did or did not read are very scanty, and discussions of his probable sources must often resolve themselves into guess-work. If likenesses occur between his poems and those of some earlier period they may indicate direct borrowing or merely a debt on the part of both to some common source, such as the German mystic Jacob Boehme, who is known to have had some influence on Milton and his contemporaries. Also we believe that original minds may occasionally arrive at marked likenesses of thought and expression by sheer chance. The following parallelisms indicate the possibility of borrowing, rather than certainty. *Their value, however, lies less in their evidence about sources than in the fact that they may throw some light on Blake's attitude and meaning*.[35]

Not only did Pierce grasp the essential distinction between genealogical and analogical resemblances, but he also recognised that their worth is to be evaluated against the *same* criterion: the insight they can provide. In so doing, Pierce anticipates Frye's dictum that 'In the study of Blake *it is the analogue that is important, not the source*'.[36] This is not to suggest that all studies devoted to the ancestry of Blake's ideas are to be dismissed, but that they must be redeemed by converting their sources into analogues; or, as Natoli articulates, 'source-hunters' are not to be feared so long as students learn 'to treat the sources as analogues and to distinguish attempts at applying the analogue to Blake unimaginatively' from those which 'present analogues in so compelling a fashion' that

[34] Merton's dissertation is reprinted in *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton*, ed. Patrick Hart (New York: New Directions, 1981), 387-453.
[35] Frederick E. Pierce, 'Blake and Seventeenth Century Authors', *Modern Language Notes*, 39/3 (March 1924), 150. Italics mine.
[36] Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 12. Italics mine.

we are able to 're-see' Blake's work in a fresh light.[37] It is the latter to which this study of the convergent resemblances between Blake and Sterry aspires.

With this principle in mind, the adoption of an analogical method in this thesis should not be seen as a merely defensive move, forced upon me by the lack of evidence that Blake read Sterry, but a positive response to the imperative, set out by Pierce, Frye, and Natoli, to demonstrate Sterry's value in terms of the light he can throw on Blake's 'attitude and meaning'. Even if it *could* be shown that Blake read Sterry, it would still be incumbent upon me to defend his selection by showing, firstly, why he is a plausible analogue in the light of what is already known about the antecedents to Blake's thought in the seventeenth century and, secondly, what his writings help us to understand better about Blake's theology. The first chapter is devoted to the first task; those which follow to the second. Before setting out precisely what I believe the critical perspective is that Sterry can offer Blake's interpreter, as well as the structure of this thesis, I would like to briefly consider *how* an analogical comparison functions, with a view to refining, and further elucidating, the analogical method employed in this dissertation. Given the lack of explicit reflection on this issue within the discipline of Blake studies, we must turn to another field—comparative religion—for some guidance.

The most illuminating account of the comparative endeavour that I have found is that offered by the eminent historian of religion, Jonathan Z. Smith. In his vindication of comparison as a legitimate means of investigating early forms of Christianity, Smith provides the following incisive observations on the nature and practice of comparison:

> …comparison does not necessarily tell us how things "are" (the far from latent presupposition that lies behind the notion of the "genealogical" with its quest for "real" historical connections); like models and metaphors, comparison tells us how things might be "redescribed"…A comparison is a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge. It lifts out and strongly marks certain features

[37] Natoli, *Blake Criticism*, 176, 177.

> within difference as being of possible intellectual significance, expressed in the rhetoric of their being "like" in some stipulated fashion. Comparison provides the means by which *we* "re-vision" phenomena as *our* data in order to solve *our* theoretical problems…Comparison, as seen from such a view, is an active, at times even playful, enterprise of deconstruction and reconstruction which, kaleidoscope-like, gives the scholar a shifting set of characteristics with which to negotiate the relations between his or her theoretical interests and data stipulated as exemplary…It is the scholar's intellectual purpose…which highlights that principled postulation of similarity which is the ground of the methodological comparison of difference being interesting. Lacking a clear articulation of purpose, one may derive arresting anecdotal juxtapositions or self-serving differentiations, but the disciplined constructive work of the academy will not have been advanced[.][38]

There are several features of this account which are worth noting, being just as relevant to my study of the similarities between Blake and Sterry as they are to the comparative study of religions. The first is that comparison does not provide access to some 'objective' reality—that is a truth detached from the observer—so much as disclose how something might be understood. So, comparison of Blake and Sterry will not necessarily tell us that they *are* similar but that they *might be conceived of* as 'alike' in certain respects. While this distinction might seem a rather pedantic one, it serves to reveal how the privileging of the genealogical in Blake studies, and the history of ideas more generally, can act as a cloak for the scholar's interests, enabling them to circumvent the demanding task of justifying the selection of a particular 'comparate' (entity being compared) on the basis that its connection with the focal object exists *independently* of their linking of the two—often for unspoken polemical or ideological (using that term in a negative sense) reasons—making their 'choice' no more than a reflection of the nature of reality. The second feature I would like to highlight is the 'metaphorical' nature of comparison, using the term 'metaphor' in Donald Davidson's sense of one 'among endless devices that serve to alert us to aspects of the world by

[38] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (London: SOAS, 1990), 52-3. Italics Smith's.

inviting us to make comparisons'.[39] Just as metaphors are not factual descriptions of reality but creative combinations of distinct entities intended to rouse 'the faculties to act' ([To] Rev. Dr. Trusler, 23 August 1799, E702), so comparisons serve to bring together two or more discrete entities with a view to inspiring meditation on the ways in which they might be conceived of as related. The collocation of Blake and Sterry in this dissertation might, then, be thought of as a kind of extended metaphor, whereby their placement next to each other elicits contemplation of their commonalities—a strategy I hope will be generative of new insights.

The third feature of Smith's account to which I would like to draw attention is how comparison, like metaphor, works by deliberately 'distorting' the things it sets side by side, accentuating those features which lend themselves to being described as similar while marginalising those which might be considered to set them apart. So long as this magnification of certain features and minimisation of others is conducted sensitively, with explicit reflection, it has a contribution to make to the advancement of knowledge. Indeed, even when the 'exaggeration' is overdone, it does not *necessarily* produce false answers, but may itself be a useful heuristic device. Thus, to offer an example from this thesis, reflection on Sterry's theological affinities with the Ranters, which might be thought to push the analogy *too* far, has helped me to see how Blake is much closer to Sterry on the need for some kind of restraint than I had assumed.[40] Even so, I have sought to test my interpretation of Blake through the lens of Sterry against previous critical construals, both amenable and hostile to my own, so as to guard against the danger of serious misrepresentation. Crucial to the avoidance of this pitfall is the candid acknowledgement of those points at which Blake and Sterry part company, something I have tried to do wherever feasible. I would certainly want to distance myself from the

[39] Donald Davidson, 'What Metaphors Mean', *Critical Inquiry*, 5/1 (Autumn 1978), 40.
[40] See Chapter 1, section 3 ('Sterry and the Ranters').

claim that Blake's and Sterry's theologies are identical, which, quite apart from being untrue, defeats the very purpose of their 'alignment'. As F. J. P. Poole cautions, 'the postulation of identity precludes the possibility of comparison by obliterating the "gap" [between the entities being compared] and rendering comparison tautological'.[41] For my comparison of Blake and Sterry to be a fruitful one, therefore, it must carefully negotiate the dialectic between their similarity on the one hand and their difference on the other, being vigilant that one does not eclipse the other.

This brings us to the fourth pertinent feature of Smith's account: the heuristic, and creative, nature of comparison, which is not an exact science, with a rigidly defined set of procedures, but (again like the creation of metaphors) a matter of trial and error. In the writing of this dissertation, I have experimented with several 'correspondences' between Blake and Sterry which either turned out to be unsound or failed to produce the critical insight I had hoped for. Rather than considering these efforts as unsuccessful, I prefer to see them as a necessary—if painful and laborious—part of comparative study, indispensible to the development of more compelling and instructive correlations. The fifth and final feature of Smith's account I would like to underline is his critical insight that, in order for a comparison to constitute a genuine contribution to knowledge, it has to do more than just expose similarities and differences: it must serve a clearly defined intellectual purpose, usually centred on the explication of a specific research 'problem'. This chimes with Kloppenborg's argument, quoted earlier, that the scholar's 'theoretical interests are what make the comparison productive of meaning'. In the case of Blake and Sterry, it is a central contention of this thesis that an investigation of their affinities promises to shed light on the problem of Blake's apparent dualism, to the delineation of which the second chapter is entirely devoted. This interpretative puzzle, which has long

[41] F. J. P. Poole, 'Metaphors and Maps: Towards Comparison in the Anthropology of Religion', *Journal of the American Academy of Religion*, 54/3 (Autumn 1986), 417.

exercised his interpreters, revolves around the 'contradiction' between Blake's critique of dualism and celebration of contraries on the one hand and the presence of what seem to be dualistic terms and images throughout his work on the other. It is my proposal that by viewing Blake's verbal and visual creations (this thesis is just as concerned with the pictorial as the literary aspect of Blake's corpus) through the lens of Sterry's writings, it is possible to see how Blake's 'dualism' is ethical and epistemological, not ontological, in nature. Put more simply, Blake's binary terms relate not to the nature of reality itself, but the way we look at, and respond to, it, with salvation being a matter of transforming our vision and conduct at the same time. Blake's thought is thus essentially consistent.

4. *The outline of this thesis: a 'route map' of its argument*

At this stage, it is necessary to provide an overview of the structure of this dissertation, explaining the reasoning behind the ordering (and treatment) of the material, as well as how the individual chapters fit together in the overall argument. As each of the chapters comes with its own detailed introduction, expounding the arrangement of its constituent sections, I will concentrate here on their *overall* contribution to, and location within, the thesis as a whole, leaving the smaller scale summary of the architecture for the moment.

This dissertation is divided into four chapters. As I observed earlier, Chapter 1 ('A vindication of Sterry's selection as a candidate for comparative study') is concerned with making the case that Sterry is a plausible precursor to Blake. In so doing, its purpose is to remedy the first major limitation of Pinto's account: its failure to consider the wider implications of his 'discovery' of Sterry for our understanding of Blake's intellectual antecedents in the seventeenth century. The chapter is intended to place Pinto's proposal on a firmer footing by, firstly, demonstrating the necessity of the analogical method adopted in this thesis through an investigation of Blake's contrasting

responses to Milton and Boehme, and, secondly, showing how Pinto's fortuitous find can be accounted for by Sterry's unexpectedly close proximity to an established setting for Blake's ideas: the radical religious milieu of the English Revolution. This finding suggests that the regnant view of this environment, which has tended to foreground the political dimension of radicalism at the expense of the theological, needs some modification. The reason Sterry's relation to the prevailing picture of Blake's intellectual context must be dealt with first is because it is not until his preliminary credentials as a Blakean precursor have been argued for that his writings can credibly be used as an interpretative lens through which to study Blake's theology. I refer to Sterry's proximity to a favoured setting for Blake's thought as his 'preliminary' credentials for the reason that historical contextualisation is in this thesis not an end in itself, but a means of clearing the ground for that essential hermeneutical exercise, which will prove the definitive test of Sterry's qualifications. It should also be stressed at this point that it is not my purpose to present Sterry as the *closest* figure to Blake in the period, but to place him *alongside* the likes of Boehme, Coppe, and Winstanley, in the pantheon of Blake's theological predecessors.

The three remaining chapters deal with the second significant 'gap' in Pinto's treatment: its failure to consider how Sterry might inform our understanding of Blake's theology, by conducting an extended interpretation of Blake's texts and images using Sterry's writings as a heuristic device. Their collective aim is to test the effectiveness of Sterry's divinity as a lens through which to expound theological themes in Blake. To realise this aim, Chapter 2 ('The problem of "dualism" in Blake's theology') begins by delineating the interpretative conundrum which, I contend, Sterry's writings can be of assistance in resolving. As I explained above, this centres on the apparent inconsistency between Blake's anti-dualism and commitment to 'contraries' on the one hand and his

continued, indeed extensive, use of apparently dualistic ideas and imagery on the other. In particular, Blake continues to make widespread use of the conventional distinction between the divine and satanic, which has been interpreted by some scholars as a clear manifestation of ontological dualism. The problem with such a construal, I suggest, is that it clashes with Blake's insistence that engagement with the polarities of existence is essential to human (and divine) flourishing. By presenting the critical position I wish to contest, the reason I consider it to be flawed, and the phenomenon in Blake for which an alternative explanation needs to be found—namely his polarisation of the divine and satanic—Chapter 2 sets the agenda for my reading of Blake in the light of Sterry. In so doing, it provides that 'clear articulation of purpose' which, as Smith insists, is essential if comparative study is to advance the 'disciplined constructive work of the academy'.[42]

Having set out the problem, to the explication of which my juxtaposition of Blake and Sterry is directed, Chapter 3 ('The analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles') proceeds to a detailed comparison of the two central theological figures at the heart of this dissertation. It is at this point that Pinto's claim for 'startling affinities' between the theological principles of Blake and Sterry is substantiated. Through a far wider ranging investigation of the convergences and divergences between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles, the chapter confirms the veracity of the correspondences Pinto claimed to have found (although some of the details of his account are disputed), adding both depth and clarity to the case for them as two 'congenial beings of another sphere'. In the process, a range of further intersections will also be identified and analysed. As I have indicated, however, the point of this careful comparison of Blake and Sterry, based on the exposition of Blake's divine and satanic 'principles' in Chapter 2, is not simply to yield a neat list of

[42] Smith, *Drudgery Divine*, 53.

their similarities and differences, which can be 'weighed' to ascertain the extent of their congeniality, but to construct a substantial, and compelling, picture of their resemblance which will contribute to the elucidation of Blake's apparent dualism. In other words, the contribution of the extended comparison conducted in this chapter to the thesis as a whole is not just to *document* the parallels between Blake and Sterry but to *use* them to shed light on Blake. The way I will do this is to suggest that the analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles is strong enough to enable us to posit a further similarity that promises to clarify Blake's polarisation of Christ and Satan: that Blake also shares Sterry's dialectical distinction between the two, set out most clearly in a section of *The Rise, Race, and Royalty,* which is thoroughly examined. The case I make can thus be considered a classic example of an 'analogical argument', which, as Paul Bartha elucidates, operates by citing 'accepted similarities between two systems in support of the conclusion that some further similarity exists'.[43]

It is this inference which is put to the test in Chapter 4 ('An interpretation of Blake's "dualism" in the light of Sterry's distinction between Christ and the Devil'). In this chapter, Sterry's dialectical contrast between the divine and satanic, in which Christ is the principle of distinction and the Devil that of division, is used as a hermeneutical lens through which to explicate the nature of Blake's theological 'dualism'. Given the vast scope of the struggle between the divine and satanic in Blake's works, I select the *Illustrations of the Book of Job,* where this tension is particularly conspicuous, as a case study. Before turning to this work, however, I seek to underline the appropriateness of using Sterry's distinction as an interpretative framework by showing how it coincides with what we actually find in Blake's texts and images. The characteristics which Sterry ascribes to Christ and the Devil, I propose, can readily be found in situations in Blake's

[43] Paul F. A. Bartha, *By Parallel Reasoning: The Construction and Evaluation of Analogical Arguments* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 1.

corpus where either the divine or the satanic are in the ascendency. What this suggests is that the application of the structure of Sterry's theology to Blake's does not distort it, but brings into clearer focus a feature which is already *implicit* in it, namely that Christ and Satan are not so much discrete entities but divergent orderings of characteristics in which certain starkly contrasting patterns of being and perceiving are lived out. In short, they are competing approaches to the vital contraries of existence. When this perception is applied to the contrasting depictions of divinity in the *Job* series, it becomes clear that Job's 'oppressor' and saviour are not in fact antagonistic beings but divergent visions of the same divinity, in which different features are to the fore. In this case, the demise of the satanic does not involve a metaphysical change on the part of God, as is claimed by Altizer, but a revolution in Job's theological perspective which is inseparable from a change in the way he relates to those around him. The fact that Job's dualistic mindset *is* that which is 'annihilated' reinforces how the ontological approach to Blake's binary concepts, set out in Chapter 2, is not only a distortion but a direct inversion of Blake's actual position. The central insight of this chapter—that Blake's distinction between the divine and satanic is not metaphysical but ethical and perceptual—constitutes Sterry's most significant contribution to the interpretation of Blake's theological vision.

The Conclusion will provide a brief retrospective on the dissertation as a whole, recapitulating how the research questions at its heart arose; the way in which these have been approached; the answers which have emerged; and their wider implications for the field of Blake studies. There will also be a reflection on the benefits and limitations of the analogical method, including the difficulties I faced in its implementation (and how these have been negotiated), as well as a proposal of some further areas of investigation arising out of my study. In particular, it will be suggested that the precedent Sterry's writings provide for Blake's dialectical use of conventionally dualistic language invites

the question of how widespread such usage was in the radical religious environment of the Commonwealth, and indeed beyond—a question which could potentially lead to the recovery of a neglected strand in the intellectual history of English Christian theology.

With the background, aims, approach, and structure of this thesis now hopefully in focus, all that remains to be done before launching into the investigation proper is to introduce Sterry himself.[44] Due to the constraint of space, it will not be possible to give an exhaustive account; but the ensuing section is at least intended to provide a summary of all the essential information about Sterry's career and writings relevant to this thesis.

5. *Introducing Sterry: an overview of his career and extant writings*

Peter Sterry was born in Southwark, London, on 14 September 1613 and baptised in the parish church of St. Olave's at five days old.[45] He was the son of Anthony Sterry (1584-1632), a cooper originally from Ruardean in rural Gloucestershire, and his wife Julia.[46] Little information survives about Sterry's childhood, other than that he probably lived in Horsleydown Lane, entering Emmanuel College, Cambridge, on 21 October 1629, at the age of sixteen. The choice of Emmanuel, a college with a reputation as 'the nursery of the Puritan movement', is a clear indication of his parents' theological inclinations.[47] It was at Emmanuel, where Sterry received his BA in 1633-4 and MA in 1637, that he first came under the influence of Benjamin Whichcote (1609-1683), a leading figure in the intellectual movement which would later become known as Cambridge Platonism.[48]

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[44] Engaging biographical accounts of Blake can be found in the popular Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (1995; London: Folio Society, 2008), and more scholarly G. E. Bentley, *The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2001).
[45] This biographical outline is heavily dependent on Pinto's account in *Platonist and Puritan*, 3-63, and Nabil Matar's entry on Sterry in the DNB.
[46] The nature of Sterry's father's trade and social status is discussed further in Chapter 1, section 2.
[47] Francis J. Bremer, *Congregational Communion: Clerical Friendship in the Anglo-American Puritan Community, 1610-1692* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1994), 21.
[48] 'Sterry or Stirry, Peter', in J. Venn and J. A. Venn (eds.), *Alumni Cantabrigienses*, 2 vols. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), i: *From the Earliest Times to 1751*, Part 4, 160. For more on the Cambridge Platonists see Chapter 1, section 2.

It was Whichcote who would preach Sterry's funeral sermon four decades later (AGM, 'The Publisher to the Reader'). At Emmanuel, Sterry would also have come into contact with Ralph Cudworth (1617-1688), John Smith (1618-1652), John Worthington (*bap*. 1618, *d*. 1671), and Nathaniel Culverwell (*bap*. 1619, *d*. 1651).[49] It is interesting to reflect on Sterry's early association with Cudworth in particular, given their respective activities during the Civil War and Commonwealth.[50] There is also a remote possibility that Sterry first met John Milton, with whom he would go on to work closely, during his time at Cambridge.[51] Within two years of receiving his MA Sterry had left university, never to return, becoming chaplain to the prominent parliamentarian, Robert Greville, Lord Brooke. It was in Brooke's household that Sterry met his wife, the widow Frances Asheworth (*d*. 1681), whom he married in February 1641.

Sterry's distinction as a theological thinker is indicated by his selection in May 1643, at the age of twenty-nine, as the youngest member of the Westminster Assembly of Divines; a body with an average age of forty-nine (the next youngest member was the wonderfully named Lazarus Seaman; Sterry's senior by six years).[52] It is of interest to note that Sterry was accused of antinomianism after delivering a speech in October 1643 which came a little too close to confounding justification and sanctification for at least one of the other members' likening.[53] Considering Sterry's theological affinities with Sir Henry Vane and Anne Hutchinson—who, as we shall see, rejected sanctification as a reliable sign of justification—it is not at all clear to me that Alison Teply is right to describe this incident as a 'strange' (out of character) one, which 'must

[49] Henry More (1614-1687) has the distinction of being to only central member of the group *not* to have gone to Emmanuel: he attended Christ's College.
[50] For Cudworth see David A. Pailin's entry in the DNB.
[51] Pinto, 'Peter Sterry', in *Speculum Religionis*, 165-6.
[52] On the Westminster Assembly see Robert S. Paul, *The Assembly of the Lord: Politics and Religion in the Westminster Assembly and the 'Grand Debate'* (Edinburgh: T & T Clarke, 1985). For the ages of its members see Larry Jackson Holley, 'The Divines of the Westminster Assembly: A Study of Puritanism and Parliament', PhD thesis, Yale University, 1979, 232, 340.
[53] See Paul, *Assembly of the Lord*, 179-80.

surely have been blow up out of all proportion as a result of a rather incoherent speech betraying Sterry's lack of experience'.[54] On the contrary, it seems to be entirely in keeping with the radical edge Sterry's divinity consistently displays, which was evidently there from the very beginning. In November 1645, Sterry preached his first sermon to Parliament, going on to become a popular preacher at St. Margaret's, Westminster, over the next fifteen years.[55] That Sterry became installed as something of a fixture at Whitehall at this time is suggested by a hostile anecdote in *Gangraena*, where Thomas Edwards tells the story (which he had heard on 28 April 1646) of a 'religiously affected' young maid who, having been drawn to the Independents, became servant to a family who 'would go to heare Mr. *Sterry* at White-Hall' on Sunday mornings.[56] It would seem that Sterry attracted Cromwell's attention during the late 1640s, for he was appointed 'preacher' or chaplain to the Council of State on 19 July 1649; a position Sterry had held informally since 16 February, little over a fortnight after the execution of King Charles. Writing in 1662, the Scottish Presbyterian minister Robert Baillie revelled in the fall from grace of 'the two Goodwins, blind Milton, Owen, Sterrie, Lockier, and others of that maleficent crew', thus placing Sterry at the very epicentre of the Commonwealth.[57]

The extent of Sterry's involvement with this group of 'Independents upon whom Cromwell frequently relied for advice in religious matters', and Milton in particular, is

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[54] Alison J. Teply, 'The Mystical Theology of Peter Sterry: A Study in Neoplatonist Puritanism', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004, 90. On Hutchinson's rejection of sanctification see Chapter 1, section 3 ('Sterry, Vane, and Hutchinson').

[55] For Sterry's parliamentary sermons see John F. Wilson, *Pulpit in Parliament: Puritanism During the English Civil Wars, 1640-1648* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), 89, 92, 119.

[56] Thomas Edwards, *The First and Second Part of Gangraena* (3rd edn., 1646), 119.

[57] *The Letters and Journals of Robert Baillie*, ed. D. Laing, 3 vols. (Edinburgh, 1841-2), iii, 443; Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 40. As well as John Milton and Sterry, Baillie is referring here to John Goodwin (*c*. 1594-1665), Thomas Goodwin (1600-1680), John Owen (1616-1683), and Nicholas Lockyer (1611-1685). To this 'maleficent crew' he might also have added the names of Philip Nye (*bap*. 1595, *d*. 1672), Hugh Peters (*bap*. 1598, *d*. 1660), Joseph Caryl (1602-1673), and Jeremiah White (1629-1707).

revealed by two curious pieces of administrative history.[58] The first is the appointment of Sterry, on 14 August 1650, alongside Milton, Nye, and Thomas Goodwin to 'view and inventory all the records, writings and papers belonging to the assembly of the Synod, so that they…may be forthcoming for the use of the Commonwealth'. The second is the employment of a 'Mr. Sterry', on 8 June 1657, to assist Milton, in his role as Secretary for Foreign Tongues.[59] Even if this 'Mr. Sterry' was not Peter, but his brother Nathaniel (*d*. 1698), these brief glimpses into the inner workings of the republican regime suggest that Sterry and Milton were on close professional, and most likely, personal terms. We know that Sterry was already resident at Whitehall when Milton arrived: David Masson describes how 'There was no difficulty, it seems, in providing lodgings for Mr. Sterry and Mr. Goodwin within the Palace; and, at last, Milton's duties about the Council having become more numerous and close, he was offered rooms there too'.[60] Sterry and Milton could almost have been neighbours and would certainly have met each other at Council meetings. As well as cataloguing the papers of the Westminster Assembly and, perhaps, helping Milton, Sterry served the Commonwealth in several other capacities, including as a reviewer of theological works, member of the Board of Commissioners or 'Triers' (founded to advise the government on the suitability of ministers), advisor on the question of the readmission of the Jews to England, and cataloguer of the library of James Ussher, the Bishop of Armagh renowned for calculating the date of creation.[61] Perhaps his most important, but largely undocumented, role, however, was as personal chaplain to the Lord Protector; a

[58] Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 54.
[59] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 20-1, 33-4.
[60] David Masson, *The Life of John Milton*, 6 vols. (London: Macmillan, 1859-1894), iv (1877), 153.
[61] For further details see Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*. In the light of Sterry's millenarianism—discussed in Chapter 1, section 3 ('Sterry, the Fifth Monarchists, and universalism')—it is worth noting Ussher's contribution to apocalyptic interpretation and influence on Puritan eschatology. See Alan Ford, *James Ussher: Theology, History, and Politics in Early-Modern Ireland and England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), especially 76-84.

position which Pinto suggests 'was not unlike that of a court chaplain under the monarchy, though his functions and influence were probably wider'.[62] Indeed, it would seem that Sterry became something of an apologist for the government, in which case Nabil Matar may not be far wide of the mark when he calls Sterry 'one of the theological pillars of the Interregnum'.[63]

Following the Restoration, Sterry went into a brief period of hiding, but received a royal pardon (transcribed in EC MS 296) on 9 November 1660, less than a year after his final Whitehall sermon. Pinto's suggestion that 'Sterry's conformist friends such as Whichcote, and possibly Henry More, were instrumental in obtaining the document for him' seems a plausible one.[64] Since Cromwell's death in 1658, Sterry had been serving as chaplain to Philip Sidney, Viscount Lisle (1619-1698), at his estate in West Sheen, Richmond, where Sterry established a small devotional community called the 'Lovely Society'.[65] This consisted of Sterry's wife, their children, Peter, Joseph Lee, Frances, and Gratiana, as well as several pupils, who each adopted a fictional name from Honoré D'Urfé's historical novel, *Astrea* (translated 1657-8), set in fifth century Gaul: Sterry refers to himself as 'Adamas', his wife 'Amasis', and his son Peter 'Sylvander', with 'Belinda', 'Calianthe', and 'Scipio' being less easy to identify. During the 1660s, Sterry continued to deliver occasional sermons to small congregations in and around London. These suggest that Sterry may have abandoned, or at least modified, his earlier belief in the establishment of the Kingdom of God through military or political means in favour of its realisation within the souls of individual believers, although there is no reason to suppose that Sterry considered the two to be incompatible. Matar suggests that two late

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[62] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 20.
[63] *Peter Sterry: Select Writings*, ed. N. I. Matar (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 6.
[64] Pinto, 'Peter Sterry', in *Speculum Religionis*, 168.
[65] On which see N. I. Matar, 'Peter Sterry and the "Lovely Society" of West Sheen', *Notes and Queries*, 29/1 (February 1982), 45-6; '"Alone in our Eden": A Puritan Utopia in Restoration England', *Seventeenth Century*, 2/2 (July 1987), 189-98.

sermons, preached in March and May 1670, 'show Sterry's adoption of the doctrine of realized eschatology (possibly under the influence of the Quakers)'.[66] After the passing of the Declaration of Indulgence, in March 1672, Sterry was one of the first preachers to be granted a licence, which allowed him to operate in Berkhamstead, Hackney, and Bishopsgate.[67] As Sterry died on 19 November in the same year, falling seriously ill in the May, he would have had little opportunity to take advantage of this new freedom. He was buried in the church of Little St. Helen's, Bishopsgate; a remnant of medieval London which now lies inconspicuously in the shadow of the Gherkin.

The only writings by Sterry to be published during his lifetime, apart from the sermons to which Matar refers (*Free Grace Exalted, and thence Deduced. Evangelical Rules for Evangelical Sufferings*, 1670), were his parliamentary orations. These are, by date of publication, *The Spirit Convincing of Sinne* (1646); *The Clouds in which Christ Comes* (1648); *The Teachings of Christ in the Soule* (1648); *The Commings Forth of Christ* (1650); *England's Deliverance from the Northern Presbytery* (1652); *The Way of God with his People in these Nations* (1657); and *The True Way of Uniting the People of God in these Nations* (1660). In addition to these sermons, which provide a valuable insight into Sterry's theology during his period of greatest national influence, there are three more extensive collections which were published posthumously: *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will* (1675), *The Rise, Race, and Royalty of the Kingdom of God in the Soul of Man* (1683), and *The Appearance of God to Man in the Gospel* (1710). All three are essentially fragmentary works, assembled from Sterry's sermons, catechisms, and letters after his death; although the first is perhaps the most internally consistent of the three. It has to be said, however, that there is nothing shabby about the material they contain, the quality of which is from a literary perspective alone comparable to some of

[66] N. I. Matar, 'Peter Sterry (1613-1672)', DNB.
[67] G. Lyon Turner, *Original Records of Early Nonconformity under Persecution and Indulgence*, 3 vols. (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1911), ii, 878, 957, 967; Pinto, 'Peter Sterry', in *Speculum Religionis*, 168.

the greatest works of that golden age of English letters.[68] A small collection of Sterry's prayers was published as late as 1785.[69] In the long title of *The Appearance*, there is an advertisement for another projected volume of Sterry's writings which never appeared. The works listed can clearly be identified as those contained in the Emmanuel College manuscripts, which were produced by a 'circle of amanuenses' or 'family scriptorium' intent on recording Sterry's words for posterity.[70] These seven invaluable documents, some bound in sheepskin and others in calf, were preserved by Sterry's descendants, travelling to Australia and back before finally being deposited on permanent loan in the Special Collections of his *alma mater* during the Second World War.[71] A representative selection of letters, and extracts from several of the mystical and philosophical discourses contained in these manuscripts, has been made available by Matar in his *Select Writings* (1994), with Pinto's *Platonist and Puritan* also containing a few snippets of material; most notably Sterry's treatise on 'The Chariot' (MS 291, 166-70), a meditation on the divine throne-chariot (*merkabah*) described in Ezekiel 1.[72] It is nevertheless fair to say that a large portion of the treasure contained in these volumes remains confined within their dusty covers. To list only two of the most important items referred to in this dissertation, Sterry's essay on the nature of eternity ('An Eternity of duration', EC MS 291, 106-54), containing the only *explicit* assertion of universal salvation in his entire corpus, and extraordinary description of the divine world ('The Palace of the Sun', EC MS 294, 169-84), remain inaccessible to the public.

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[68] Vivian de Sola Pinto, 'Peter Sterry and his Unpublished Writings', *Review of English Studies*, 6/24 (October 1930), 385.
[69] *Prayers selected from the New Testament; Kempis of the Imitation of Christ; Dr. J. Everard; William Law; and, chiefly, Peter Sterry*.
[70] P. J. Croft and Nabil Matar, 'The Peter Sterry MSS at Emmanuel College, Cambridge', *Transactions of the Cambridge Bibliographical Society*, 8/1 (1981), 42.
[71] Matar, *Select Writings*, 25.
[72] For Blake's appropriation of this image see Chapter 3, section 2 ('"A Sinner makes himself a Devil"').

1

A vindication of Sterry's selection as a candidate for comparative study

Introduction

The aim of this chapter is to vindicate Sterry's selection by situating him in relation to a context which has widely been regarded as offering important antecedents to Blake's ideas: the radical religious environment of the English Revolution, aptly referred to by the shorthand of 'the world turned upside down'.[1] Its contribution to the dissertation as a whole will not only be to substantiate the use of Sterry's writings as a hermeneutical lens in later chapters but also, in the process, to determine his distinctive contribution to the elucidation of Blake's intellectual background, thus addressing the first significant limitation of Pinto's exposition outlined in the Introduction.

The most immediate objection to Sterry's selection is likely to be the lack of evidence that he exerted any influence on Blake. The first section will therefore address this issue head-on, illustrating: (1) why the analogical method employed in this thesis is necessary in the first place and (2) why Sterry is a particularly promising figure from an analogical point of view. It begins by sketching the consensus that Blake's work harks back to the heady days of the English Republic, underlining the difficulty involved in tracing any direct influence on Blake by writers of this period, which has led scholars to focus on analogical resemblances rather than genealogical links. The main exceptions to this situation are Jacob Boehme and John Milton, both of whom Blake refers to directly

[1] Borrowed from the title of Christopher Hill's classic study, *The World Turned Upside Down: Radical Ideas During the English Revolution* (1972; London: Penguin, 1991).

as important intellectual predecessors, making them the two seventeenth-century writers most conducive to a genealogical approach. After presenting the evidence for Blake's familiarity with both figures, I go on to question the viability of this method in the light of Blake's divergent responses to Milton and Boehme. This contrast serves to underline the danger inherent in the basic premise of the genealogical method: that a thinker will automatically be illuminating of Blake simply because he can be shown to have read their work. The reason Boehme is a potentially more instructive resource for students of Blake's theology than Milton is not because he exerted more 'influence' on Blake but due to the fact that he anticipates Blake's guiding principle—the presence of contraries in divinity—whereas Milton retains a dualistic perspective. Likewise, the reason Sterry can be seen as a promising candidate for comparative study is not because he influenced Blake, but because his theology is analogous to Blake's. As I show, Sterry is an unusual example of a dialectical divine, in the 'Behmenist' mould, who comes as close as any writer in the period to anticipating Blake's distinctive concern with contraries, which is why he deserves to be taken seriously as a potential theological precursor to Blake.

Having dispatched the most pressing objection to Sterry's selection, the next section responds to the second major argument which is likely to be levelled against his suitability as a candidate for comparative study: the fact that *prima facie* Sterry does not seem to fit the established picture of 'the world turned upside down'. I propose that the regnant view of this environment in Blake studies has four central features, which form the criteria by which scholars have sought to identify Blake's forebears. While Sterry's 'radical' credentials do not appear to be robust when measured against these criteria, I contend that this does not mean he should be excluded from the radical sphere without further ado. This is not only because, on second inspection, he may actually be closer to this influential setting for Blake's thought than he initially seems, but also because the

standard benchmarks for identifying Blake's seventeenth-century predecessors are not as inclusive as they might be, being based on too narrow a view of the sectarian milieu. In particular, the notion that radicalism is a largely, even exclusively, 'secular' entity is shown to be entirely misguided.[2] Rather than being marginal to their interests, theology was the motor of the radicals' revolutionary social and economic schemes. In this case, far from undermining Sterry's suitability as a candidate for comparative study, the fact that he is not the most openly political of writers—though the highly political nature of his role in the Cromwellian regime is not in doubt—would positively reinforce it, if it could be shown that he shares a range of *theological* principles with the radicals. This is because consideration of Sterry would then offer an opportunity to redress an imbalance that has encumbered the quest for Blake's antecedents in the seventeenth century: the foregrounding of the political dimension of radicalism at the expense of the theological.

That Sterry does indeed share several key theological principles with those on the 'left wing' of the English Revolution is confirmed in the last section, which studies Sterry's personal associations and intellectual affinities with several prominent radical groups and individuals. It starts with an investigation of Sterry's close ties to Sir Henry Vane, who during his brief tenure as governor of Massachusetts became embroiled in a bitter theological dispute which would become known as the Antinomian Controversy. This centred on the rift between the supporters of Anne Hutchinson within the Boston church and other colonial congregations on the role of human agency in the redemptive process. Vane's active support of the Hutchinsonian faction is significant given how closely his views would later become identified with Sterry's. Through a consideration of Sterry's theological similarities with the Boston antinomians, two radical features of Sterry's thought—his doctrine of free grace and enthusiasm—are exposed. Next, I turn

[2] The dismissal of Civil War radicalism's theological dimension is well exemplified by the claim of A. L. Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel: A Study in the Sources of William Blake* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1958), 35, that the sectarians' ideas were 'in essence…political ideas in a religious form'.

to Sterry's connection with a sectarian movement regularly invoked as the furthest limit of religious radicalism in the English Revolution: the 'Ranters'. After the evidence for Sterry's possible contact during the 1630s with two figures who would go on to become leading Ranters has been examined, I suggest that this association raises the question of Sterry's precise relationship to these practical antinomians. The answer which emerges is that although Sterry was undoubtedly a critic of the Ranters, there were fundamental continuities between his theological vision and theirs. Finally, I briefly draw attention to two further features of Sterry's thought which link him to the sectarian environment: his millenarianism and universalism, concluding with the observation that the contours of Sterry's divinity closely follow those which we would expect to find in the melting pot of 'the world turned upside down'. This finding confirms that Pinto's discovery is no anomaly, but largely consistent with the established view of Blake's background in the culture of radical non-conformity which thrived in England during the 1640s and 50s.

1. *Elucidating Blake's antecedents in Commonwealth radicalism*

Blake and 'the world turned upside down'

In the decades since Pinto first pointed to a possible affinity between Blake and Sterry, a consensus has emerged in Blake scholarship that seventeenth-century radicalism is *the* place to search for parallel material to illuminate Blake's political and theological ideas. Blake's close engagement with Milton and Boehme (discussed below), as well as familial background as the son of 'an honest shopkeeper of the old school, and a devout man—a dissenter', provide ample justification for the excavation of this milieu.[3] As 'radical' is such a slippery term, I should explain from the outset that it is used in this

[3] Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, 2 vols. (2nd edn., London: Macmillan, 1880), i, 55.

dissertation to refer to the most extreme of the sects which emerged or grew in the absence of effective press censorship and ecclesiastical discipline between around 1640 and 1660: Baptists, Levellers, Diggers, Fifth Monarchists, Muggletonians, Quakers, Ranters, Seekers, and a miscellany of individual prophets, visionaries, and mystics who cannot be neatly placed in any particular camp.[4] These various sects and individuals have also been collectively classified under three further headings, which require explanation: 'antinomians', 'enthusiasts', and 'millenarians'. Antinomianism—literally the stance of being 'against the law' (*nomos*)—refers to a diverse set of ideas, going back to the New Testament, revolving around the conviction that Christians are in some sense no longer subject to an external but an internal authority, so that one's actions are driven by the Spirit within rather than the Letter of the Law.[5] Enthusiasm, which can be seen as the epistemological foundation of antinomianism, designates the belief that one is 'full of God': the Greek *entheos*, from which *enthousiasmos* derives, means to be inspired, even possessed, by the divinity.[6] In this sense, enthusiasm, which like antinomianism was used as a term of abuse, is closely related to apocalypticism, understood not as a preoccupation with the 'Last Things' but a mode of discernment in which the 'direct disclosure of heavenly knowledge', whether through visions, dreams, or auditions, is prioritised over Scripture, reason, and tradition.[7] Millenarianism strictly

[4] I am thinking here of the likes of George Foster, John Pordage, John Robins, and Thomas Tany.
[5] On antinomianism see, for example, Gertrude Huehns, *Antinomianism in English History: With Special Reference to the Period 1640-1660* (London: Cresset Press, 1951); Theodore Bozeman, *The Precisianist Strain: Disciplinary Religion and Antinomian Backlash in Puritanism to 1638* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); David R. Como, *Blown by the Spirit: Puritanism and the Emergence of an Antinomian Underground in Pre-Civil-War England* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004).
[6] On enthusiasm see, for example, Ronald Knox, *Enthusiasm: A Chapter in the History of Religion, with Special Reference to the XVII and XVIII Centuries* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950); Clement Hawes, *Mania and Literary Style: The Rhetoric of Enthusiasm from the Ranters to Christopher Smart* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); James D. G. Dunn, 'Enthusiasm', in Lindsay Jones (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Religion*, 15 vols. (2nd edn., Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), iv, 2804-9; Lionel Laborie, *Enlightening Enthusiasm: Prophecy and Religious Experience in Early Eighteenth-Century England* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2015).
[7] See Christopher Rowland, 'Apocalyptic: The Disclosure of Heavenly Knowledge', in William Horbury, W. D. Davies, and John Sturdy (eds.), *The Cambridge History of Judaism*, iii: *The Early Roman Period* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 776-97.

refers to that variety of eschatological expectation, also known as chiliasm, concerned with the thousand year reign of Christ on earth (Rev. 20). It can, however, also be applied more generally to any soteriological scheme in which redemption is conceived of as at once imminent, total, ultimate, this-worldly, and collective.[8] While these three labels must be handled with care, they provide expedient shorthand for tendencies that pervaded the radical religious hinterland of the Commonwealth.

What the 'radicals' shared, despite their remarkable diversity, was an overriding preference for autonomy over heteronomy: the indwelling Spirit, not outward forms and conventions, was held to be the chief source of theological insight. Alongside this, there was a commitment to action in a world permeated by suffering and injustice, rather than habitual devotion to a perfunctory, second-hand faith, less interested in the problems of the present than the promise of salvation in the world to come. This dedication to *active* struggle against inequity and oppression in all its forms is encapsulated by Winstanley's watchword that 'action is the life of all', while the relegation of abstract reflection is epitomised by Cudworth's maxim that 'Ink and Paper can never make us Christians'.[9] Christopher Rowland has drawn attention to the way in which 'The radicals understood better than the orthodox that the life of the Spirit, chaotic and revolutionary as it was, represented a central strand of the New Testament', being at 'the very heart of what it

[8] Yonina Talmon, 'Millenarian Movements', *European Journal of Sociology*, 7/2 (1966), 159-200. On millenarianism see also, for example, Norman Cohn, *The Pursuit of the Millennium: Revolutionary Millenarians and Mystical Anarchists of the Middle Ages* (1957; London: Pimlico, 2004); B. S. Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men: A Study in Seventeenth-Century English Millenarianism* (London: Faber, 1972); B. W. Ball, *A Great Expectation: Eschatological Thought in English Protestantism to 1660* (Leiden: Brill, 1975); Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1975); Richard Bauckham, *Tudor Apocalypse: Sixteenth-Century Apocalypticism, Millenarianism and the English Reformation, from John Bale to John Foxe and Thomas Brightman* (Appleford: The Sutton Courtenay Press, 1978); Katharine R. Firth, *The Apocalyptic Tradition in Reformation Britain, 1530-1645* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1979); J. F. C. Harrison, *The Second Coming: Popular Millenarianism, 1780-1850* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979); John M. Court, *Approaching the Apocalypse: A Short History of Christian Millenarianism* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2008).

[9] Gerrard Winstanley, 'A Watch-word to The City of London, and the Army', in CWGW, ii, 80; Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons* (Cambridge, 1647), 5.

meant to share in the divine life'.[10] This 'radical' theological and hermeneutical strand, then, is typified by a sense of continuity with the past, as well as view of the present as the decisive moment (*kairos*) when the divine purpose will be fulfilled.[11] Indeed, it is a central premise of radical—literally 'pertaining to the roots'—Christianity that there is a synchronicity with the events of the biblical narrative, in which the gifts of the Spirit *continue* to be poured out 'upon all flesh' (Acts 2:17). This 'immediate revelation', to borrow Anne Hutchinson's phrase, provides access to those divine truths 'inaccessible to the intellect', which Sterry calls 'Heavenly Things' (AGM 46).[12] These experiential verities transcend those lifeless 'truths' enshrined in churches, libraries, and institutions.

The distinctive features of Christian radicalism outlined above can be found, in an astonishing variety of ways, in the writings of the men and women at the margins of the English Revolution. They can also be detected throughout Blake's corpus, which presents Christ as someone who 'acted from impulse: not from rules' (MHH23-4, E43); challenges received wisdom on the basis of claims to visionary authority; and resounds with the call to participate in the building of 'Jerusalem, In Englands green and pleasant Land' (M1, Preface, E96). The extensive parallels between Blake and the Interregnum radicals have led several generations of scholars to consider him an heir to 'the world turned upside down'. On the basis of Blake's non-conformist family background, Mark Schorer was one of the first to see the 'mood of Protestantism in the Commonwealth' as a likely setting for Blake's ideas, identifying numerous parallels with Quakers, Seekers, Levellers, and Diggers.[13] A decade later, A. L. Morton argued that Blake's intellectual

[10] Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 160.
[11] Christopher Rowland, *Radical Christianity: A Reading of Recovery* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1988), 3.
[12] Hutchinson's notion of 'immediate revelation', discussed in section 3 ('Sterry, Vane, and Hutchinson') below, is cited as a prime example of apocalyptic radicalism by Christopher Rowland, 'Apocalypticism and Radicalism', in John J. Collins (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Apocalyptic Literature* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 407-8. The OED defines mysticism as the 'belief in or devotion to the...apprehension of truths inaccessible to the intellect' (definition 2: 'mystical theology').
[13] Mark Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision* (1946; New York: Vintage Books, 1959), 123.

roots can be traced back to 'the Antinomian sects who flourished in England…during the revolutionary decades of the seventeenth century'. According to Morton, Blake's tragedy is to be 'the greatest English Antinomian, but also the last'.[14] Michael Ferber followed Morton in maintaining that 'seventeenth-century antinomianism provides a horizon against which to view Blake's ideas on liberty and the forgiveness of sins', describing him as 'a Holy Ghost Christian, an "enthusiast," like Gerrard Winstanley'.[15] Similarly, Jon Mee also noted the widespread 'parallels and continuities between the unrespectable radicals of the 1790s and the regicides and ranters of the Interregnum'.[16] Around the same time, E. P. Thompson, keen to extract Blake from the 'polite' culture with which he had become entangled in the scholarship of Kathleen Raine and others, argued that Blake's 'equation of the Moral Law with State and Church' takes us back directly 'to the intellectual world of Diggers, Ranters, Behmenists, hermeticists, and heresiarchs of the Interregnum', declaring that 'the closer we are to 1650, the closer we seem to be to Blake'.[17] Saree Makdisi, in his attempt to distinguish Blake's stance from the 'hegemonic' radicalism of Paine and Thelwall, has linked him with 'the resurgence during the 1790s of forms of popular enthusiasm and radical antinomianism, explicitly reaching back to the writers and activists of that earlier moment of revolutionary crisis in the seventeenth century'.[18] Most recently, Christopher Rowland, who concurs with Makdisi's assessment that 'Blake inherited the non-conformist, antinomian sub-culture, not the Enlightenment radicalism of Paine', has explored the 'affinities in hermeneutical

[14] Morton, *Everlasting Gospel*, 34, 36.
[15] Michael Ferber, *The Social Vision of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 117, 70.
[16] Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 66. See also Mee's later study, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).
[17] E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), xiv, 22, 46.
[18] Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 20.

approach' between Blake and figures like Coppe, Cudworth, Denck, and Winstanley.[19] Even if the roots of this subversive strand of Christianity reach back through the Radical Reformation and millenarian movements of the Middle Ages to the pages of the New Testament itself, there is a pervasive sense that radical Christianity reached its apogee in England around 1650 and attained its most enduring expression in the poetry and art of William Blake.

The continuity between the radicalism of the 1650s and 1790s—explored in a collection of essays edited by Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith—has been accounted for by the fact that some of Blake's contemporaries may have been acquainted with the writings, and more probably the ideas, of their seventeenth-century forebears.[20] Makdisi, for instance, claims that the links to Commonwealth era radicals had been 'fortified and sustained all through the eighteenth century by the republication of seventeenth-century antinomian, Ranter, and millenarian tracts'.[21] Still, the existence of a continuous radical tradition, spanning the century and a half between the English and French revolutions remains contentious, having yet to be fully documented. What seems likely is that the radical spirit was not extinguished at the restoration of the monarchy but, in the process of coming to terms with what Christopher Hill has dubbed the 'experience of defeat', was subtly transformed into a variegated non-conformist culture every bit as vibrant, if not quite as militant, as the sectarian scene which preceded it, but even more difficult to trace.[22] Recent work on the reception of Jane Lead (1623-1704) has gone some way towards verifying Paula McDowell's hunch that the Philadelphians 'served as important carriers of an underground tradition that

[19] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 157-180.
[20] Timothy Morton and Nigel Smith (eds.), *Radicalism in British Literary Culture, 1650-1830: From Revolution to Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002).
[21] Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 304.
[22] Christopher Hill, *The Experience of Defeat: Milton and Some Contemporaries* (London: Faber, 1984).

extends from Böhme to Blake'.[23] Despite the significant advances that have been made, however, it remains fair to say that the quest for specific vectors or lines of influence on Blake remains an extremely precarious one, as Thompson's bold but ultimately ill-fated attempt to establish Blake's Muggletonian heritage reminds us. It is for this reason that, in seeking to elucidate Blake's intellectual antecedents in the seventeenth century, most scholars have agreed with A. D Nuttall's contention that 'the tracing of close verbal connections is in a way beside the point'.[24] There are, however, two notable exceptions to the rule that Blake's forebears in 'the world turned upside down' are virtually impossible to trace, offering an opportunity to demonstrate how, even in those rare cases where it is practicable, the application of the genealogical method is of limited utility when it comes to Blake.

On Blake's intellectual horizon, there are no two more imposing presences than John Milton (1608-1674) and Jacob Boehme (1575-1624), although Dante Alighieri (1265-1321) and Emanuel Swedenborg (1688-1772), who fall outside the period with which this thesis is concerned, also have strong claims.[25] Milton, the great republican apologist and Commonwealth civil servant with a literary reputation second only to that of Shakespeare, hardly requires any introduction. Boehme, on the other hand, although no less remarkable or influential a figure, is altogether less well-known today, so stands in need of a brief foreword.[26] Born in the provincial city of Görlitz in Upper Lusatia,

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[23] Paula McDowell, 'Enlightenment Enthusiasms and the Spectacular Failure of the Philadelphian Society', *Eighteenth-Century Studies*, 35/4 (Summer 2002), 528; Ariel Hessayon (ed.), *Jane Lead and Her Transnational Legacy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016).
[24] A. D Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998), 218. On this point see also Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 160-1.
[25] On Blake and Dante see, for example, Albert S. Roe, *Blake's Illustrations to the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953); David Fuller, 'Blake and Dante', *Art History*, 11/3 (September 1988), 349-73; Ralph Pite, *The Circle of Our Vision: Dante's Presence in English Romantic Poetry* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), 53-67; Antonella Braida, *Dante and the Romantics* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 151-178. For Swedenborg see n27 to the Introduction above.
[26] The two best biographies of Boehme are John Stoudt, *Sunrise to Eternity: A Study of Jacob Boehme's Life and Thought* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 1957) and Andrew Weeks, *Boehme: An Intellectual Biography of the Seventeenth-Century Philosopher and Mystic* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1991).

Boehme seems to have had led an uneventful life as a shoemaker until one day in 1600 when he suddenly experienced an intense vision, apparently triggered with the sight of a pewter dish glistening in sunlight. The remarkable effect this revelation has on Boehme is best described in his own words: 'In this Light my Spirit suddenly saw through all, and *in* and *by* all the Creatures, even in Herbs and Grass, it knew God, who 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 Being of God*'.[27] It would be no exaggeration to say that Boehme spent the rest of life pursuing this 'mighty *Impulse*' to explicate the divine nature as he, quite literally, saw it. Boehme's enormous literary output is testament to the endurance of this original inspiration. Most of these writings were translated into English by John Sparrow and his cousin John Ellistone between 1645 and 1662. While Boehme's impact on seventeenth-century English (and Welsh) religious radicalism may not have been as extensive as once assumed, his influence is still likely to have been considerable, if not readily distinguished from that of 'the wider tradition of continental mystical, prophetic, and visionary writings that he epitomized'.[28]

Blake's acquaintance with Milton and Boehme is recorded in a short, untitled, poem which Blake included in a letter to his friend, the sculptor John Flaxman:

> Now my lot in the Heavens is this; Milton lovd me in childhood & shewd me his face
> Ezra came with Isaiah the Prophet, but Shakespeare in riper years gave me his hand
> Paracelsus & Behmen appeared to me. terrors appeard in the Heavens above
> And in Hell beneath & a mighty & awful change threatend the Earth

[27] Jacob Boehme, *Aurora* 19:12, WJB, i, 184.
[28] Ariel Hessayon, 'Jacob Boehme's Writings During the English Revolution and Afterwards: Their Publication, Dissemination, and Influence', in Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (eds.), *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 78. See also M. L. Bailey, *Milton and Jacob Boehme: A Study of German Mysticism in Seventeenth-Century England* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1914); Rufus M. Jones, *Spiritual Reforms in the Sixteenth and Seventeenth Centuries* (London: Macmillan, 1914), 208-34; Nils Thune, *The Behmenists and the Philadelphians: A Contribution to the Study of English Mysticism in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries* (Uppsala: Almquist and Wiksells, 1948); Serge Hutin, *Les Disciples Anglais de Jacob Boehme aux XVIIe et XVIIIe Siècles* (Paris: Éditions Denoël, 1960).

> The American War began…
>
> (12 September 1800, E707)

More important than the dates which may be implied by Blake's reference to specific historical events, is the fact that he describes both figures as dynamic presences who appeared to him *personally*. There is a sense of intimacy and, in the case of Milton, even love. Blake's extensive engagement with Milton can be observed in his comments on *Paradise Lost* in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (discussed below); illustrations to Milton's poetry; and remarkable exploration of inspired hermeneutical engagement in *Milton*, a poem which dramatises the process by which 'prophet progenitor' (Milton) is redeemed by prophetic successor (Blake).[29] When set against this impressive list of examples, his encounter with Boehme might seem rather limited, giving rise to only two explicit references, including the one quoted above (the second is discussed below), no pictorial depictions (though Blake's illuminated books may contain visual allusions to Freher's illustrations to the so-called 'Law edition' of Boehme); and certainly no entire epic devoted to him. Such an impression would, however, be an unfortunate one. As several specialist studies have shown, the influence of Boehme's thought on Blake was probably significant, even if it would be going too far to call him a 'Behmenist' in any straightforward sense.[30] That Blake owned works by Boehme is revealed in a letter Frederick Tatham—to whom Catharine Blake left many of her husband's books—wrote to Francis Harvey: 'I have possessed books well thumbed and dirtied by his graving hands, in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French, and Italian, besides a large collection of works

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[29] On Blake's Milton illustrations see Pamela Dunbar, *William Blake's Illustrations to the Poetry of Milton* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980). The term 'prophetic progenitor' is borrowed from Susanne Sklar, *Blake's 'Jerusalem' as Visionary Theatre: Entering the Divine Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 28.

[30] G. E. Bentley, 'William Blake and the Alchemical Philosophers', BLitt thesis, University of Oxford, 1954; Bryan Aubrey, *Watchmen of Eternity: Blake's Debt to Jacob Boehme* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986); B. J. Gibbons, *Gender in Mystical and Occult Thought: Behmenism and its Development in England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 191-8; Kevin Fischer, *Converse in the Spirit: William Blake, Jacob Boehme and the Creative Spirit* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2004); Elisabeth Engell Jessen, 'Boehme and the Early English Romantics', in Hessayon and Apetrei (eds.), *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme*, 180-95.

by mystical writers, Jacob Behmen, Swedenborg, and others'.[31] Although it is entirely possible that Blake owned, or had access to, multiple editions of Boehme's writings, it is most likely the 'Law edition' that he possessed: Crabb Robinson's diary entry for 10 December 1825 records how Blake described Freher's illustrations as 'very beautiful', claiming that Michelangelo 'co^{d} not have done better'.[32] It is unfortunate that Blake's personal copy of Boehme, which, judging by the books of his which do survive, would have contained spirited and revealing annotations, has not survived. Still, it is fairly safe to assume that Blake was intimately conversant with Boehme, as he was with Milton.

This fact might be seized upon by scholars of a genealogical bent as a valuable opportunity to use authenticated 'sources' as interpretative keys to unlock the meaning of Blake's words and images. The problem with this approach is that it assumes Milton and Boehme will *necessarily* be illuminating of Blake simply because he can be shown to have read their work; a premise which (as I hope to show) can be highly misleading. This is because Blake's reception of his predecessors is rarely, if ever, characterised by wholesale appropriation. Rather, Blake treats his 'sources' as inspirational springboards for novel departures and formulations in his own prophetic vision. Nowhere can this distinctive approach to tradition, which combines admiration and iconoclasm in equal measure, be seen to better effect than in Blake's response to Milton, which we shall consider before his engagement with Boehme.

Milton: 'of the Devils party without knowing it'

Although Milton's influence on Blake is frequently emphasised, the extent to which Blake's response to his predecessor is defined by what Harold Bloom has labelled 'the

[31] BR 57.
[32] BR 423.

anxiety of influence' is often overlooked.[33] According to Bloom, all poets, whether they would admit it or not, are anxious to free themselves from the limitations imposed upon them by their literary ancestors, adopting various strategies of creative 'misprision' to neutralise the threat which tradition is felt to pose. By deliberately *misreading* the great works of the past, modern poets open up a fertile space in which genuinely original works can be conceived. Those poets who succeed in this venture are considered to be 'strong', whereas those who fail are regarded as 'weak', producing uninspired poetry which is a pale reflection of former glories. Whether Bloom's theory is universally applicable or not, it brilliantly captures the nature of Blake's engagement with Milton. This is typified not by passive veneration, but an active creativity, so that the Miltonic inheritance is critiqued, and transformed, by Blake in the act of forging his *own* unique literary and artistic vision. In the words of Los, which are often taken as a statement of Blake's personal approach, 'I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans/ I will not reason & Compare my business is to Create' (J10:20-1, E153). In a sense, then, Blake remedies what Sterry fails to do, which is to adopt a controversial stance towards Milton, his intellectual predecessor and Sterry's contemporary.[34]

The hermeneutical process by which a 'strong' poet carves out their own niche by counteracting the influence of their illustrious forerunners is epitomised by Blake's *Milton a Poem*, in which the later poet unpicks the various threads of his predecessor's work and weaves them together in a new pattern, thereby 'redeeming the inadequacies

[33] Harold Bloom, *The Anxiety of Influence: A Theory of Poetry* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1973).

[34] On Sterry's association with Milton see the biographical section of the Introduction above. As there is no contemporary record of their relationship, it is not possible to confirm the plausible suggestion of Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Peter Sterry: Platonist and Puritan, 1613-1672: A Biographical and Critical Study with Passages Selected from his Writings* (1934; New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 21, that 'Milton found Sterry a thoroughly congenial companion'. It is, however, worth noting that the first few lines of Milton's 'At Solemn Music' are transcribed by an unidentified hand in EC MS 289, 182—a tantalising indication that Milton's verse may have been staple reading in the Sterry household.

of Milton's writings and life'.[35] If there is one image which exemplifies this exchange, in which the creative energy of the original poet is harnessed by his successor without simply being replicated, it is plate 42 of *Milton*. This seems to depict a literal exchange of seminal potency, with a kneeling figure appearing to extract with their mouth what is contained in the groin of a figure standing in a circle filled with fire, an inspirational emblem. It could be that the figures stand for Blake and Los, but it is equally possible that they represent Blake and his distinguished forebear, Milton.[36] What is certain is that Blake did not think of Milton simply as a dead poet, with a reputation and ideology in desperate need of rehabilitation, but a vigorous adversary whose 'Opposition is true Friendship' (MHH20, E42). So, when Jackie DiSalvo suggests that *Milton*'s intention is to 'restore the image of the fiery prophet, clouded by eighteenth-century orthodoxy', she fails to appreciate how Blake saw *himself* as the infernal prophet and Milton as a mouthpiece for orthodoxy.[37] The same oversight is also evident in Joseph Wittreich's claim that 'Blake's purpose in invoking Miltonic contexts…is not to dismiss the poet's theology' but 'to redeem Milton's Christian vision from the encumbering intrusions of orthodoxy'.[38] Although it is true that Blake seeks to save Milton from his theological 'errors', it is also the case that the redemptive process Blake initiates is one which, like the cathartic fires of Sterry's Hell (CCC 23), dissolves the old form of Milton and raises him in an entirely new 'Angelicall'—or in this case 'diabolical'—form.[39]

The theological 'errors' Blake detects in Milton are profuse, ranging from his legalistic morality, repressive sexual ethics, and patriarchalism to his (surprising for a

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[35] Christopher Rowland, 'Blake and the Bible: Biblical Exegesis in the Work of William Blake', *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, 7/2 (April 2005), 150.
[36] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 237.
[37] Jackie DiSalvo, *War of Titans: Blake's Critique of Milton and the Politics of Religion* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1983), 6.
[38] Joseph Wittreich, *Angel of Apocalypse: Blake's Idea of Milton* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975), xviii.
[39] For a fuller discussion of Sterry's cathartic vision of Hell see Chapter 4, section 3 ('"Refining the Gold by fire": a reflection on Satan's fate in the light of Sterry's and White's universalist soteriology').

republican) invocation of divine monarchy. If there is one filament which binds these various strands of disagreement, it is Blake's commitment to a dialectical approach to the tension between reason and energy, restriction and freedom, as opposed to the dualistic one he discerned in Milton, whom Blake believed to be on the side of restraint rather than liberty. Blake's dialectic is deeply embedded in his myth, where Los, the personification of the creative impulse, and Urizen, the archetypal agent of ratiocinative demarcation, engage in an ongoing struggle for supremacy within the individual and society. Even though Blake's sympathies lie predominantly with the poet-prophet figure (which is not to say that his depiction of Urizen lacks pathos and self-identification), his mythological narrative concludes not with the vanquishing of the cosmic patriarch, but the establishment of a dynamic balance between Los and Urizen. This coming together of contraries, in which both sides retain their individuality, can be seen, for example, on plate 98 of *Jerusalem*, where Milton, Shakespeare, and Chaucer are joined by Bacon, Newton, and Locke in a redeemed universe where the 'fearful symmetry' ('The Tyger', E24-5) between imagination and reason, poetry and science, has been restored. Denis Saurat was therefore only half right when he wrote that 'the elemental parts of human life are passion and reason; but in Milton reason rules over desire, while Blake's aim is to set passion free from all control of reason'.[40] It cannot be too strongly stated that Blake's objective is *not* to unshackle passion from all restraint, which would result in the kind of formless chaos he abhorred, but to set up a creative equilibrium between the 'Prolific' and 'Devouring' sides of life (MHH16, E40). While a more detailed account of Blake's 'doctrine of contraries' must be postponed until Chapter 2, what is crucial to note at this stage is how Blake's dispute with Milton centres on Milton's preference for reason *over* desire, which Blake sees as indicative of Milton's devotion to the dualistic

[40] Denis Saurat, *Blake and Milton* (Paris: F. Alcan, 1920), 3.

world-view of mainstream Christianity.[41] 'The essence of false (Miltonic) theology', as Rowan Williams expounds, 'is in the centrality of control—"reason" taking charge of desire, with the result that desire itself is cast as "evil" and good becomes an exercise in damage limitation which seeks to keep desire within bounds; and, conversely, desire will then always appear as rebellion'.[42]

Blake's most detailed critique of Milton along these lines can be found in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plates 5 and 6, where Blake turns to *Paradise Lost* for an exemplar of the propensity to negate the contraries of existence. Speaking in 'The voice of the Devil', which he has adopted for satirical effect, Blake observes how

> Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling. And by being restrained it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire. The history of this is written in Paradise Lost. & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah. And the original Archangel or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is calld the Devil or Satan and his children are call'd Sin & Death[.]
>
> (5, E34)

Blake's proposal here is that the negating ideology at the heart of Christian orthodoxy, responsible for the divorce of reason from energy and the suppression of the latter, is typified by Milton's divergent portrayals of Christ and Satan in his great epic. What he suggests is that *Paradise Lost*'s Messiah resembles a rational governor, whose role is to restrain energy. Conversely, its Devil is the epitome of desire, which for Blake means the 'Poetic Genius' or 'Spirit of Prophecy' (ARAO, E1). That Milton should portray the vigorous Satan as the father of wickedness and mortality is, from Blake's point of view, decisive evidence that Milton is implicated in the reduction of Christianity to 'a religion of restraint and morality, right and wrong'; the end result of which is that 'the Spirit, or

[41] The other side of the comparison, Sterry's dialectical divinity, is expounded below ('Sterry: a dialectical divine at the heart of the Cromwellian regime'). On Sterry's commitment to the interplay of contraries as an integral part of divine and existence see also Chapter 3, section 3.

[42] Rowan Williams, '"The human form divine": Radicalism and Orthodoxy in William Blake', in Zoë Bennett and David B. Gowler (eds.), *Radical Christian Voices and Practice: Essays in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 155.

energy, is not only evacuated of its dynamism and creative power but worse, ends up being identified with the Devil, characterized as evil'.[43] As Blake puts it, 'in Milton; the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five sense. & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!' (6, E35). Ironically, then, Blake presents the 'fiery prophet' of the English Revolution as the poet of enforced compliance, unwittingly promoting the complete regulation of the creative Spirit through the imposition of ratiocinative constraints.

Shrewd interpreter of the Bible that he was, Blake points out how *Paradise Lost* is at odds with the Book of Job (and for that matter other parts of the Bible) where it is 'Milton's Messiah [who] is call'd Satan' (5, E34). So, whereas *Paradise Lost* presents the despotic restrictor of energy as the Messiah, in Blake's interpretation of the Book of Job (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4), the divinity responsible for curtailing Job's freedom by demanding total obedience to his dictates is identified with Satan. Put more simply, Blake believes Milton has got the features of Christ and Satan mixed up. The reason for this confusion, Blake submits, is because the same 'history' of the regulation of energy by reason has 'been adopted by both parties', but recounted from opposing ideological perspectives. To those on the side of moral virtue, dogmatic principles, and conformity, it appears as if the Spirit (desire) has been 'cast out' of Heaven, whereas to those in favour of forgiveness, impulse, and creativity, it is Milton's restrictive Messiah who falls, forming 'a heaven of what he [steals] from the Abyss' (5-6, E34-5). The former perspective corresponds to that of the 'conservative' angels; the second to that of the 'radical' devils. Blake turns to the doctrine of the Harrowing of Hell and Christ's promise to his disciples that he will pray for the Father to send 'another Comforter'—the Spirit-Paraclete—(Jn. 14:16), to corroborate the devils' version of events: 'This is shewn in the Gospel, where he prays to the Father to send the comforter or Desire that

[43] Christopher Rowland, '"For thine is the Kingdom & the Power & the Glory & not Caesars or Satans Amen": William Blake, Politics, and Theology', in Anthony Clarke and Andrew Moore (eds.), *Within the Love of God: Essays in Honour of Paul S. Fiddes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 233.

Reason may have Ideas to build on, the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he, who dwells in flaming fire. Know that after Christs death, he became Jehovah' (6, E35). The basis of this assertion, as Peter Schock recognises, 'lies in the infernal imagery of the Old Testament: the wrathful conflagrations prophesied by Isaiah (66:5) and Ezekiel (15:6-7), the burning bush, and the pillar of fire all suggest…that Jehovah's demonic identity has been disguised in the official account'.[44] Jehovah is not 'demonic' in the sense that he is malevolent, but that he exhibits all those (from the angel's perspective) 'diabolical' qualities, such as inspiration, which are classically symbolised by fire. It is precisely because Milton presents Hell as a 'great furnace flamed' (*Paradise Lost* I, 62), thereby sanctioning the 'official account', that Blake's Messiah must descend *there* in order to retrieve the fire of creative potency required to reignite Milton's frigid Heaven.

However critical Blake may be of *Paradise Lost* for inverting the characteristics of the divine and satanic, the imaginative superiority of its Satan over its Christ assures Blake that Milton had intuitively grasped the true nature of the messianic, even if his authoritarian ideology and dualistic metaphysics had prevented him from realising this consciously: 'The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it' (6, E35). Having assimilated *Paradise Lost* to the point that (in the words which Karl Barth uses to describe the exegetical task in the Preface to the second edition of his classic commentary on Romans) he had 'almost forgotten' he was 'not its author' and was 'able to speak in his name', Blake believed he had redeemed Milton by understanding him better than he had understood himself.[45] It is difficult to imagine a better example of a 'strong' poet overcoming the 'anxiety of influence' than this.

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[44] Peter Schock, '*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: Blake's Myth of Satan and its Cultural Matrix', *English Literary History*, 60/2 (Summer 1993), 461.
[45] Karl Barth, *The Epistle to the Romans*, tr. Edwyn C. Hoskyns (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1933), 7-8.

The antithetical nature of Blake's engagement with Milton, delineated above, indicates just how important it is to balance Morton D. Paley's assessment that 'with the exception of the Bible, Milton's poems are by far the greatest literary influence on Blake's poetry and art', with an appreciation of the fact that Blake is responding—in true Bloomian fashion—*against* that influence.[46] This is not to deny that Blake found much positive inspiration in Milton (his conviction that 'the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration', M1, Preface, E95, is an obvious example) but to point out that, even if Milton was ultimately on the Devil's side, Blake's critique of Milton's 'angelic' perspective is so thoroughgoing that it severely problematises, if not precludes, the use of his writings as a framework through which to read Blake himself. In short, Milton represents more of a problem than a resource for Blake's interpreters, highlighting the danger inherent in the underlying premise of the genealogical method. Blake's marginalia furnishes us with further examples—Swedenborg, Watson, Bacon, Reynolds, Wordsworth, Thornton—of figures whom Blake certainly read but would be of limited utility in elucidating Blake's thought, other than by way of offering striking *contrasts*. The distortion that would result from using any of these writers as a 'source' for Blake's ideas in any positive sense would be close to a direct inversion of his true values. In Milton's case, his exclusive equation of reason with Christ (good) and desire with Satan (evil) runs completely counter to Blake's own treatment of these contrasts as coinherent contraries 'necessary to Human existence' (MHH3, E34).

[46] Morton D. Paley, 'William Blake's *Milton*/*A Poem* and the Miltonic Matrix of 1791-1810', *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 80/4 (Fall 2011), 786.

Boehme: 'a divinely inspired man'

If Milton's handling of contraries deviates from Blake's, the same cannot be said of Boehme, whom Blake spoke of as 'a divinely inspired man'.[47] The largely sympathetic reception Boehme enjoys, alongside Paracelsus, in *The Marriage* contrasts sharply with the response Milton receives. On plate 22, which contains the second explicit reference to Boehme in Blake's corpus, Boehme is compared positively with Swedenborg, but (so it would seem) less favourably with Dante and Shakespeare: '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' (E43). Although this statement might be read as being disparaging towards Boehme, implying that any person of 'mechanical talents' could produce works of equal value, Elisabeth Engell Jessen is probably right to submit that 'the point seems to be rather the opposite: namely, that even if a person of "mechanical talents" had produced these works, they would still only be of inferior value to the originals. As in the rest of *The Marriage*, the joke is on Swedenborg'.[48] As Blake's comment suggests, even though he deeply admired Boehme, he was not content to hold 'a candle in sunshine', but intended to seize the fire that blazed in his forebear's writings and rekindle it in his own work. As Robinson wrote to Dorothy Wordsworth, Blake 'is not so much a disciple of Jacob Bohmen…as a fellow Visionary'.[49] But what was it about Boehme that Blake found more congenial than Milton?

The most plausible reason for Boehme's warmer reception in Blake is that he found in the Teutonic Philosopher a kindred spirit who also sought to 'unify existence

[47] BR 423.
[48] Jessen, 'Boehme and the Early English Romantics', 182.
[49] BR 437.

without destroying its essential polarity'.[50] This affinity might also help to explain why Boehme does not receive the degree of extended attention that Milton does: if Blake is in fundamental agreement with Boehme then there is less scope for that antipathy on which true friendship depends. That Boehme's theology prefigures Blake's central 'doctrine that all of life is informed by opposed yet complementary forces called "contraries", which, when allowed to interact without restraint, impart to life that creative tension and dynamism that are among its essential characteristics', has long been recognised.[51] While we must be careful not to assume that Boehme anticipates *every* aspect of Blake's doctrine of contraries (nowhere in Boehme do we find, for example, anything like Blake's sophisticated unveiling of the ways in which the moral or qualitative bifurcation of contraries serves the interests of wealth and power), there is little reason to question the claim of Cyril O'Regan that 'Boehme's powerful statements about contradiction or contrariety (*contrarium*) in the heart of the being of beings, or God, attracted Blake'.[52] Even a cursory reading of Boehme will reveal how he heralds Blake's own repudiation of dualism, conceived as the attempt to split reality into binary opposites, one of which predominates over the other: good over evil, Heaven over Hell, eternity over time, soul over body. Rather than completely separating life's polarities or uniting them in a static coincidence of opposites, Boehme, like Blake, places them in *dialectical tension*. Thus, to give an example from volume three of the 'Law edition', Boehme declares that 'the God of the holy World, and the God of the dark World, are *not two* Gods; there is but *one* only God. He himself is the whole Being; he is Evil and Good, Heaven and Hell; Light and Darkness; Eternity and Time; Beginning and End:

[50] Bryan Aubrey, 'The Influence of Jacob Boehme on William Blake', PhD thesis, Durham University, 1981, abstract. This thesis forms the basis of Aubrey's later study, *Watchmen of Eternity* (1986).
[51] Martin K. Nurmi, 'Blake's Doctrine of Contraries: A Study in Visionary Metaphysics', PhD thesis, University of Minnesota, 1954, ii-iii.
[52] Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 75.

Where his Love is *hid* in any Thing, there his Anger is *manifest*'.[53] Boehme's exploration of the contrariety in divinity is forged by Blake into the governing principle of his entire system: 'Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence' (MHH 3, E43). Like Boehme, Blake was convinced that 'without poison and eagerness there is no Life: and from thence ariseth all contrariety and strife: and it is found, that the strongest and most eager, is the most useful and profitable: for it *maketh* all things, and is the *only cause* of all mobility and life'.[54] Boehme's assertion of 'an eternal Contrariety between Darkness and Light' in the divine nature as the very motor of existence places him, in direct contrast to Milton, very much on the Devil's side and therefore squarely in Blake's camp.[55]

What the stark contrast between Blake's responses to Milton and Boehme tells us is that, even when Blake's intellectual precursors in 'the world turned upside down' *can* be identified genealogically, which is not often, this method does not automatically lead us to writers who are going to be helpful in clarifying Blake's thought. So, while we can be confident Blake read both Milton and Boehme, he took a controversial stance with the former and a congenial one with the latter, making Boehme a potentially more illuminating resource for explicating Blake's theology than Milton. This is not because Boehme exerted a greater 'influence' on Blake but because Boehme anticipates Blake's guiding principle—the necessity of contraries—whereas Milton (in Blake's judgement) remains committed to a more conventional, dualistic, theological framework. This finding substantiates Natoli's crucial observation, quoted earlier, that any insight to be gained by comparing Blake to another thinker stems 'from the fact that we have treated

[53] Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum* 8:24, WJB, iii, 33. See also *Aurora* 8:7, WJB, i, 61.
[54] Jacob Boehme, *The Threefold Life of Man* 2:8, WJB, ii, 9.
[55] Jacob Boehme, *Of True Resignation* 3:7, WJB, iv, 38.

the suggested source not as a source but as an analogue'.[56] What we should be looking for, then, are not genealogical links, but analogical resemblances, which means that Boehme would be a more suitable figure for comparative study than Milton, even if there were no concrete evidence that Blake read his work. With this principle in mind, the rest of this section will argue that the reason Sterry deserves to be taken seriously as a potential theological precursor to Blake is not because he can be shown to have *influenced* Blake, but because his theology, like Boehme's, is *analogous* to Blake's. In particular, Sterry shares Blake's distinctive concern with contraries in divinity, developing a dialectical understanding of the relationship between Christ and Satan which, I believe, can help to shed light on the problem of Blake's apparent dualism, presented in Chapter 2.

Sterry: a dialectical divine at the heart of the Cromwellian regime

In the light of Blake's positive response to Boehme, outlined above, it is of interest to note that Sterry provides what has been described by Nabil Matar as 'the most detailed and balanced of the early reactions to Boehme in England'.[57] This fact is significant not because it shows that Blake's and Sterry's ideas were somehow 'genetically' related to each other, having a common ancestor (i.e. Boehme), but because any affinity between Sterry and Boehme is likely to be a good indicator of congeniality with Blake. Sterry's response to Boehme can be found in one of his letters to Morgan Llwyd (1619-1659), an Independent minister who translated two of Boehme's works into Welsh.[58] Writing

[56] Joseph P. Natoli, *Twentieth-Century Blake Criticism: Northrop Frye to the Present* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), 176.
[57] N. I. Matar, 'Peter Sterry and Jacob Boehme', *Notes and Queries*, 33/1 (March 1986), 34.
[58] G. F. Nuttall, *The Holy Spirit in Puritan Faith and Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1946), 16n5. On Llwyd see also E. Lewis Evans, 'Morgan Lloyd and Jacob Boehme', *Jacob Boehme Society Quarterly*, 1/4 (1953), 11-16, and G. F. Nuttall, *The Welsh Saints: Walter Cradock, Vavasor Powell, Morgan Llwyd* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1957).

in January 1652, Sterry offers Llwyd the following appraisal of Boehme, or 'Beaumont' as Sterry anglicises his name, which he had promised Llwyd in a previous letter:

> Concerning Beaumont, whom I have much perused, I have this to offer you…Those things, wch so farre, as I understand him, are Unsavoury to my Spirit, are; 1. His Exaltation of ffree-Will after ye manner of ye Arminians. 2ly, His making yt Blessednes, wch Christ hath purchased for us to bee onely age Restitution of ye ffirst Adam, ye ffirst Paradise & ye Bringing of us to Angels thrones. 3ly. His Darke, Confused, Mistaken (as I humbly conceive) Discourses of ye Trinity. 4 His over-much affectate, Mixtures with Heathenish Philosophy, & chymistry. All these things, wch for ye present occurred in my memory have made mee jealous, yt hee saw ye Glory of Creation, & not ye Difference betweene ye Two Creations, ye Two Adams, ye Two Images; One Earthly, Naturall; ye Other Heavenly, Spirituall. Wn I first saw him, I believed, & saide, yt wch I have seen since proove true by manifold experience, yt many by reading him, have bin led aside from ye Mystery of ye Gospel…Yet on the other side; I cannot but confesse, yt ye Lord Jesus hath ministred, as much Heavenly Pleasure, & Profite to mee by reading of him, as of any Discourses, besides those of ye Holy Scriptures. I have met with rich Depths, sweet Heighths in him.[59]

To contend, as Dewey Wallace has done, that these are 'the words of someone open enough to learn from the German mystic but with strong reservations about him' seems to underplay drastically the compliment that Sterry pays Boehme.[60] For Boehme to be situated at the very pinnacle of Sterry's reading list, to be surpassed only by the Bible, is quite a commendation from a writer for whom 'The Scriptures are my *Spectacles*' (TCS 33). It would seem closer to the truth to suggest that Sterry's words to Llwyd are indicative of someone who had been so enchanted by Boehme's writings that he was willing to overlook the significant misgivings he had about them in order to receive the treasure they contained. The very fact that Sterry was willing to engage so extensively with Boehme, despite his 'strong reservations', which occur 'precisely at those points where a Calvinist might be expected' to disagree with the Teutonic Philosopher (i.e. on

[59] 'Letter to Morgan Llwyd (ii)', in *Peter Sterry: Select Writings*, ed. N. I. Matar (New York: Peter Lang, 1994), 45-6.
[60] Dewey D. Wallace, *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 80.

the doctrine of Free Will contra the Arminians and on the doctrine of the Trinity contra the Socinians), tells us more about the flexibility of Sterry's Calvinism—if it is indeed accurate to call him a Calvinist at all—than it does about his estimation of Boehme.[61] Sterry's warning to Llwyd that those not 'well instructed in ye Mystery of Christ…will be perverted by him', did not prevent Sterry himself from assimilating Behmenist concepts and imagery, even adopting Boehme's personal pen name, 'fellow-Lilly of the Valley', in his last surviving letter to Llwyd in September 1656.[62] Matar has suggested that Sterry's 'turn from political military millenarianism to the kingdom within' may also have been precipitated by his study of Boehme.[63] Whether this was the case or not, Sterry's judgement that the 'Lord gave [Beaumont] his Spirit by Measure, leaving much Darknes mingled with light' is heavily outweighed by his claim that 'ye Spirit of Christ run[s] along like Rivers of Milke, & Honey thorow his Writings, wch seeme to have an Authority & Glory in them, beyond yt of ye Scribes, & Pharisees'.[64] If the evidence of Sterry's letter to Llwyd is taken on balance, then the scales tip decidedly in Boehme's favour—an encouraging sign so far as Sterry's affinity with Blake is concerned.

What is even more promising, however, is that Sterry is not only an admirer of Boehme, albeit a critical one, but a divine who developed his own brand of dialectical theology, in which contraries are candidly presented as integral to the divine Being. The dialectical character of Sterry's divinity is signalled by his embrace of fire as a symbol of the divine rather than the satanic, as is the case in Milton. Thus, in *The Way of God with his People in these Nations* (fittingly Sterry's Guy Fawkes Day sermon for 1656!), Sterry informs the House of Commons that

> It is frequent in Scripture to set forth the Miraculous Appearances, and Works of invisible Powers, either of *God*, or of the *Angel*, or of

[61] Ibid.
[62] Matar, 'Peter Sterry and Jacob Boehme', 35.
[63] Ibid.
[64] 'Letter to Morgan Llwyd (ii)', 46.

> the *Holy Ghost*, by *Fire*…A Pillar of Fire led the Children of *Israel* through the Wilderness; Horses of fire, and Chariots of fire, carried *Elijah*, when he was afraid of an Army of Enemies; the *Holy Ghost* descended in the form of fiery Tongues upon the *Apostles*. The Lord promiseth by the Prophet *Esaiah*, to be a wall of *Fire* round about his People. And *John* the *Baptist* tells us in the Gospel of St. *Matthew*, that *Jesus Christ*, shall Baptize his People with the *Holy Ghost*, and with *Fire*.
>
> (6-7)

This appreciation of the incendiary symbolism of the Old and New Testaments (Sterry might also have selected numerous passages from Revelation), ensures that there is no danger whatsoever of the flames being banished from Sterry's Heaven, as they are from Milton's. On the contrary, Sterry's heavenly world is an intensely fiery one; which is a good litmus test for any writer's theological congeniality to Blake, whose illuminated books are surely some of the most flame-filled creations in the history of English art. The impression that Sterry, unlike Milton, does not exile the flaming, energetic, side of God to Hell but, like Blake and Boehme, accords the Spirit its proper place in the divine economy is confirmed by the copious texts in which Sterry explicitly affirms that 'The Nature of God is the *Glass*, in which all Natures are first formed, and seen. The Natures of Light and Darkness, Shame and Glory, Joy and Misery; to say all, the Natures of Love and Wrath, the two Contrary heads of all distinct Natures' (RRR 184).

The most emphatic statement on the presence of contraries in divinity in Sterry's corpus, which forms the second epigraph to this dissertation, can be found in the Epistle Dedicatory (i.e. Preface) to *The Commings Forth of Christ*, 'a Sermon Preached before the High Court of Parliament, on *Thursday* the first of *Novemb*. 1649' (as the title page states) and published the following year. In this sermon we find a proclamation which closely anticipates, in spirit and language, Blake's definitive statement in *The Marriage*, plate 3, which forms this thesis' first epigraph ('Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human

existence'): 'God *bringeth forth his* Works *in* contraries; Light *and* Darkness; Good *and* Evil; Michael *and* His Angels; *the* Dragon, *and* His Angels' (10).[65] While the passage from Blake may be (characteristically) more 'humanistic' in tone, referring to 'Human existence' rather than God's works, the essential principle is the same: those elementary contrasts which define existence are not to be explained in terms of the existence of two ultimate principles but the twofold nature of reality itself. It is not merely the case that God brings forth contraries: he comprehends them, in their actuality, in his own Being. As Sterry explains later in his prefatory epistle, 'Darkness, *and* Light, *are* Both in God; *not onely* Representatively, *but* Really; *not in their* Ideas *onely, but their* Identities; *yet not* Materially, *nor* Formally, *but* Eminently; *after a more* Perfect *manner than they are in* themselves' (13). Sterry's categorical statement on God bringing forth his work '*in* contraries' appears in the context of his exegesis of 1 Corinthians 12:6 ('And there are diversities of operations'), which he suggests points to a 'double diversity': diversity in 'the Works' and in '*the* Ways of Working' (i.e. *what* God creates and *how* he creates it). Diversity in God's works means that everything that exists has been fashioned by him, with the implication that he has formed not only that which is attractive and delightful, but also that which is crude, grotesque, and even fearsome. This point is made using the analogy of a craftsman who expends a great deal more effort and expense on one item of furniture than another, according to the purpose it is intended to serve, and may even frame an object so hideous that it bears no obvious relation to him at all:

> Heaven *is a* work, *on which he layes out much* cost *and* skill, *to make a* Throne *for Himself. The* Earth *is a* cheaper *and* courser *piece of* Work, *for a* Foot-stool. Hell *is his* strange Work: *A* work, *in which he* estrangeth *himself from himself*; *in which he goes to the vastest Distance, to bring forth a* Work *most unlike himself*; *in which he* hides *the* Workman *in the* Horror *of the* Work, *and* shews *him, by* hiding *him so deep*.

[65] The Epistle Dedicatory is unpaginated, but I have numbered its pages from the title page ('To the High Court of Parliament') for convenience.

(10)

Diversity in God's ways of working means that even though he produces all things, he does so utilising two different devices, one tuned to love and the other to wrath. These contrasting implements are identified as the right and left hands of Christ, which feature in the Parable of the Sheep and the Goats (Mt. 25:31-46). '*The* Twofold Principle. 1. *Of* Love. 2. *Of* Wrath', according to Sterry, '*are the* Two Hands *of* Jesus Christ, in *or* by *which* he *worketh All*, Matth. 25.33. *All* Good *things are wrought in a* Principle *of* Love, *through the* Good Angels. *From the* Right hand *of* Christ…*All* Evil *things are wrought in a* Principle *of* Wrath, *through the* Devil, *from the* Left hand *of* Christ' (10). One could not wish for a clearer enunciation of the principle, which is at the heart of Blake's theology, that the struggle between Christ and the Devil is *not*, in C. S. Lewis' words, 'a war between independent powers'.[66] Like Blake, Sterry insists that the contrasts we find in the world are to be ascribed to the 'doubleness' of the divine *modus operandi*, which is to create by love on the one hand and wrath on the other; an idea recalling Boehme's notion that 'there are two Wills in one Being, and they cause *two Principles*: One is the Love and the other is the Anger or the Source [or property] of Wrath'.[67]

The reason Sterry is so committed to preserving this duality in God's mode of operation is due to his recognition that to reject the Law is also to repudiate the Gospel, for the Old and New Covenants are indispensible counterparts or, as Blake might put it, necessary contraries:

> *The* Law *moves upon the* two fore-wheels *of* Precepts, Prohibitions: *the* two hinder-wheels *of* Promises, Punishments. *He, that takes off these* Wheels, *must cut off the* Two *Almighty* Hands *of* Jesus Christ: *the* two-fold Mysterie, *from the* Divine Nature, Love, *and* Wrath. *If all things do* flow forth *from the* Divine Fulness; *if they do* re-flow *into the Sea of* Divine Glory: *yet is it in* two Divided channels; *the* Spirit *of* Christ, *the* Devil: *by* two different Moaths; Love, *and* Wrath.

[66] C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1952; London: HarperCollins, 2002), 45.
[67] Boehme, *The Threefold Life of Man* 2:9, WJB, ii, 9.

(CFC, Epistle Dedicatory, 17)

In addition to the bodily image of hands and potamic metaphor of river estuaries, Sterry also uses the symbol of horns to depict the duality inherent in God's operation. Thus, in *The Clouds in Which Christ Comes*, Sterry observes how

> *Habakkuk* speaks of Christ in the Spirit: *C*.3.*v*.4. *His Brightnesse was as the Light: Hornes were in His Hands, and there was the Hiding of Power*. All the Spirituall Discoverys of Christ are as *Hands of Light*, by which He puts forth Himself, and takes hold of the world. The Invisible Spirit, the Presence of the Godhead in it's Two-fold Piercing Principle of *Love* and Wrath; These are the Hornes in the Hands.
>
> (50)

That love and wrath represent progressive stages in the revelation of divinity is made clear in another interesting passage from *The Way of God with his People*: 'As the *Left Hand* of God is his wrath, his strange work, his Disguise: so his *Right Hand* is Love, his naked Face, his proper form, where he is seen, as he is, as the Saints shal behold him' (11). This notion anticipates what we find in Blake's *Job* series, where Job initially sees *only* God's left hand, his wrath (Engraving 11; Figure 1), before discerning his right and left hands perfectly balanced in the divine humanity of Christ (Engraving 17; Figure 2).

It is, therefore, abundantly clear from Sterry's presentation of love and wrath as the right and left hands of God that he is a resolute dialectician. Like Blake, he takes a distinction that is usually interpreted dualistically and recasts its two poles as mutually dependent contraries, contributing to an ultimate, differentiated, unity. This approach to the polarities of existence runs throughout his theology, in which (as we shall see in the third section of Chapter 3) contrasts like God and creature, time and eternity, finite and infinite, Heaven and Hell, above and below, Spirit and Letter, unity and diversity, are coinherent contraries rather than adversative negations. In short, Sterry shares Blake's fundamental insight that, as one Muggletonian poem quoted by E. P. Thompson puts it,

'all contraries are manifested by contraries'.[68] Nowhere is this perception more clearly articulated than in Sterry's advice on the interpretation of Matthew 6:6 ('But thou, when thou prayest, enter into thy closet, and when thou hast shut thy door, pray to thy Father which is in secret; and thy Father which seeth in secret shall reward thee openly'): 'We cannot understand what the *Reward* is, except we know what the *Openness* of it means. The *Secret* and the *Openness* are set as *Opposites* and *Contraries* one to another. So they illustrate each other, and are to be interpreted by *one Principle*, as respecting *one Thing*' (AGM 147). What we have in Sterry, then, is a dialectical divine, at the heart of the Commonwealth, who comes as close as anyone in the period to anticipating Blake's concern with contraries in divinity. This suggests that Sterry's theological writings, like Boehme's, may provide an enlightening guide to Blake's own dialectical thought, even if Blake never read a word of Sterry. In this case, the fact that there is no evidence that Sterry exerted any influence on Blake, either direct or indirect, is no reason to exclude him from a discussion of Blake's theological predecessors in the seventeenth century. What may, however, disqualify him in the eyes of some is that Sterry does not, at least at first sight, appear to fit the established picture of 'the world turned upside down' in Blake studies. In the next section, I will respond to this potential objection to Sterry's selection by illustrating how this initial impression is not only misleading but based on too narrow a conception of the radical religious milieu, thus amplifying the prevailing picture of Blake's primary intellectual background in the light of Sterry.

2. *Sterry and 'the world turned upside down'*

The established view of the sectarian scene of the 1640s and 50s in Blake studies is one which has been largely shaped by the Marxist recovery of English radicalism during the

[68] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 72.

twentieth century, exemplified by Christopher Hill's masterpiece of 'history from below', *The World Turned Upside Down* (1972). Although the historiography of the English Revolution has moved on from Hill, rejecting aspects of his methodology and interpretation, his overarching account of Commonwealth radicalism along broadly Marxist lines continues to dominate the quest for Blake's intellectual antecedents in the period.[69] This is perhaps not surprising given that two leading Marxist historians—A. L. Morton and E. P. Thompson—have been directly involved in the excavation of this setting in the search for Blake's predecessors, as we saw in the last section. The regnant picture of 'the world turned upside down' in Blake studies has four central features, which supply the criteria by which scholars have sought to identify Blake's forebears. These are, in ascending order of importance: (1) the exclusive identification of the radical environment with Hill's 'revolt within the Revolution', which effectively denies the radical status of the classical, Cromwellian, republicans; (2) the depiction of radicalism as a largely, even exclusively, lower-class phenomenon, which borders on a conflation of the radical with the popular; (3) the related implication that, as a largely popular entity, radicalism is incompatible with the 'polite' culture of the universities, dominated by classical—especially neo-Platonic—learning; and (4) the assumption that radicalism is an essentially 'secular', as opposed to 'religious', phenomenon, thereby marginalising the theological underpinnings and expression of the radicals' progressive political views. So, if a Blake scholar were invited to prepare a 'suspect description' of a seventeenth-century English radical likely to anticipate Blake's ideas, they would probably specify a figure committed to Hill's failed revolution, of plebeian or artisanal status, who displays an attitude of marked hostility to the 'respectable' culture of the

[69] For a balanced account of the limitations of Hill's approach see Michael J. Braddick, 'Introduction: Christopher Hill's *The World Turned Upside Down*, Revisited', *Prose Studies*, 36/3 (2014), 175-84.

universities, and champions socio-economic reforms which are recognisably 'secular' (and therefore modern), in the sense of being devoid of transcendental referents.

When tested against these four criteria, Sterry's 'radical' credentials, and hence likelihood of prefiguring Blake in any significant way, may appear rather weak. Firstly, Sterry's position as chaplain to the Council of State and later Cromwell himself suggest that he is a world away from 'the world turned upside down'. If we identify a 'radical' by their loyalty to Hill's unsuccessful revolution, the ground-breaking schemes of the Diggers, Levellers, and Fifth Monarchists, then Sterry seems to be firmly on the side of the revolution which succeeded (at least in the long term) in establishing the Protestant ethic. Indeed, so close was Sterry to the republican regime that he has been described as 'a seventeenth-century spin doctor', providing 'theological justification for Cromwell and his son'.[70] Secondly, as the son of a 'gentleman', Sterry is of a higher social class than the 'small tradesmen and artisans' with whom Blake is generally linked.[71] Thirdly, as an associate of the Cambridge Platonists (discussed below), Sterry might be thought of as perilously close to the 'polite' tradition of 'Behmenist, hermetic, neo-Platonist, and Kabbalistic thought', mined by S. Foster Damon, Milton O. Percival, George Mills Harper, Désirée Hirst, and Kathleen Raine for symbolic keys to unlock Blake's myth, which Thompson and others have rejected as a credible background to Blake's thought.[72] One suspects that if Thompson had stumbled upon Sterry he would have thought of him as precisely the sort of respectable university educated neo-Platonist, with hermetic and kabbalistic interests, who appears 'to say some of the things that

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[70] Ceri Sullivan, review of *Peter Sterry: Select Writings*, ed. N. I. Matar (1994), *Notes and Queries*, 43/3 (September 1996), 349.
[71] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 6; Morton, *Everlasting Gospel*, 12.
[72] S. Foster Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (1924; London: Dawsons, 1969); Milton O. Percival, *William Blake's Circle of Destiny* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1938); George Mills Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961); Désirée Hirst, *Hidden Riches: Traditional Symbolism from the Renaissance to Blake* (London: Eyre & Spottiswoode, 1964); Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 2 vols. (1969; London: Routledge, 2002).

Blake is saying, but is saying them in a different way'; that is without the 'conscious posture of hostility to the polite culture', which Thompson insists 'is not some quaint but inessential extra' but the very essence of Blake's tradition.[73] Fourthly, and most decisively, Sterry's writings are 'religious' in the sense that they deal almost exclusively with theological subjects while making virtually no *explicit* reference to present social, political, and economic arrangements. It would therefore be difficult to argue for Sterry's radicalism on the basis of his anticipation of recognisably modern, 'secular', principles, as might be possible for, say, Winstanley. On first inspection, then, Sterry does not appear to fit the radical 'suspect description', which is likely to be part of the reason (his obscurity being another contributing factor) why he has not been picked up on the radar of those scholars who have been interested in tracing Blake's intellectual antecedents in seventeenth-century radicalism.

On second inspection, however, the accuracy of this initial impression, and the appropriateness of some of the criteria on which it is based, can be called into question for several reasons. To start with the first criterion, even if one concedes that in order to be considered 'radical' a figure must endorse reforms which go *beyond* those officially sponsored by the Commonwealth, there is evidence to suggest that Sterry probably did back at least one change 'in state, church or society which would have gone beyond the official programme of the mainstream puritan-parliamentarians': complete religious toleration.[74] An early indication of Sterry's tolerationist leanings is the patronage he received from Lord Brooke, who prior to the Civil War was considered one of the most radical among the Lords: Clarendon deemed him one of the only peers who had been a 'positive' enemy to the fabric of the Laudian church as early as 1641, while Baxter identified Brooke as a counterpart to Sir Henry Vane (to whom we shall return) in the

[73] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, xvi, xviii.
[74] Gerald Aylmer, 'Presidential Address: Collective Mentalities in Mid Seventeenth-Century England: III. Varieties of Radicalism', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5th ser., 38 (1988), 1.

Upper House, describing him as the sole 'noted gross sectary' in the Lords prior to the Civil War.[75] While Clarendon and Baxter are both hostile sources, it would seem that Brooke's support of religious toleration *did* virtually lead him to assert in his published writings that 'what men describe as heresy or sectarianism, was in fact a good thing'.[76] That Sterry is singing from the same hymn sheet as Brooke when it comes to the toleration of religious difference is strongly suggested by his own writings, which make an impassioned case for the acceptance, indeed celebration, of theological diversity. A good example is Sterry's unpublished sermon on Ecclesiastes 7:16, which outlines how one should not 'lay too much weight upon ye inward Opinions', which are not the truth itself but only 'ye Vessells' that 'hold this Treasure'. Observing how 'It frequently falls out, that, when two Saints have ye same spirituall sense of some Excellency in Jesus Christ…both of them express it in contrary notions', Sterry entreats his audience: 'Hast thou reason to thincke that ye substance of Truth, ye Lord Jesus dwells in any man, what ever his Opinions be, love him these opinions are but the leaves, & ye husks that shall fall to ye ground, but ye Truth, ye Substance, that endures for ever' (EC MS 291, 233, 235, 233, 242, 247-8).[77] Sterry's fervent appeal for the loving acceptance of diversity in theological belief, based on the multivalent nature of truth and provisional nature of all truth formulations, suggests that he would have been in favour of a far wider extension of religious freedom than most within the 'puritan-parliamentarian' camp would have been willing to endorse. As Wallace points out, 'Sterry's advocacy of toleration', which 'called in question the very certainty with which all sides maintained their positions', distinguishes him from those 'Independents who advocated only a limited toleration',

[75] Edward Hyde [first earl of Clarendon], *The History of the Rebellion and Civil Wars in England Begun in the Year 1641, Volume 1, Books. I-IV*, ed. W. Dunn Macray (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1888), 309; Richard Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae* (1696), 63; Ann Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War in Warwickshire, 1620-1660* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), 120-1.
[76] Hughes, *Politics, Society and Civil War*, 123. See, for example, *A Discourse Opening the Nature of that Episcopacie, which is Exercised in England* (1641), 90.
[77] Similar themes can also be found in Sterry's Preface to DFW.

placing him closer to the 'Puritan radicals'.[78] It may well have been the case, then, that Sterry felt himself better placed to influence government policy from within and that his role as private chaplain to the Lord Protector did afford him an effective platform from which to lobby for further toleration, even if he, like many others with progressive views, was forced to compromise. In this case, it would be unfair to exclude him from the radical sphere simply because of his enduring loyalty to the 'successful' revolution.

Turning to the second criterion, if we accept for the moment that radicalism is a mainly plebeian and artisanal phenomenon, it may be the case that Sterry is not quite as distant from this context as one might initially suspect. This is because Sterry might not have had quite as elevated a social background as his father's listing as a 'gentleman' implies, as can be seen from Anthony Sterry's will, dated 17 March 1631, which leaves Peter 'all my messuage or tenement wth the yard and appurtenances called or knowne by the name of the black beare scituate and being in Horsendowne lane in the parish of St Olave in Southwark together wth all the waynescott perticons and things therein'. Pinto speculates that the 'Black Bear may have been an inn or tavern, but it may also have simply been the sign of a cooper's yard and workshop'.[79] In either case, Sterry's inheritance seems to have been a rather humble one, indicating that he could have been brought up in an artisanal rather than mercantile family. This uncertainty concerning Sterry's original social status reflects the very ambiguity of the word 'cooper' (Anthony Sterry's recorded occupation in Peter's baptismal entry), which can just as easily refer to a *craftsman* 'who makes and repairs wooden vessels formed of staves and hoops' as it can to a *merchant* who trades the contents of such vessels, that is a 'wine-cooper'.[80] Anthony Sterry's financial ability to secure his son's education at Emmanuel College, Cambridge, would suggest the latter, but it is entirely possible that we are dealing with

[78] Wallace, *English Calvinism*, 55-6.
[79] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 6-7.
[80] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 6; OED definition of 'cooper'.

a case of 'social mobility' in which the Sterrys' social standing improved as they turned from making wine barrels to selling them. In any case, even if Sterry's social class was a relatively lofty one—and the patronage he received from Lord Brooke and Viscount Lisle shows that, whatever his background, Sterry did at least end up rubbing shoulders with aristocrats—this would be no reason to dismiss his radicalism out of hand. This is because radical ideas were *not* the exclusive preserve of plebeians, as Marxist historians and Blake scholars alike have often assumed, as we shall now see in relation to the third measure of radicalism: hostility towards the 'elite' culture of the universities.

While there can be no doubt that Sterry's university education and association with the Cambridge Platonists (to whom we shall turn shortly) does dissociate him from the plebeian matrix of radicalism, marking him out as a member of the 'polite' culture, it could be argued that those scholars who present radicalism as a principally popular phenomenon are guilty of putting the cart before the horse. By limiting radicalism to the 'uneducated' (that is not *formally* educated) lower classes—craftsmen, labourers, and those 'masterless men' Hill identifies as the sectarian constituency *par excellence*—scholars not only diminish the intellectual achievements of a writer like Winstanley, who despite not attending university formulated a political 'theory' no less impressive than that of Hobbes, but conceive of radicalism as a function of culture rather than a set of attitudes which might operate 'vertically' through society.[81] In making social class and education benchmarks of radicalism, they isolate a single attribute and make this the defining trait of the entire species. This is not to deny that there is a real difference between the refined, humanist, education Sterry received and the learning which men like Laurence Clarkson (a tailor) and Thomas Tany (a goldsmith) acquired for themselves, but to suggest that it might be more profitable to treat elite and popular

[81] For Hill's 'masterless men' see *World Turned Upside Down*, 39-56.

cultures as contraries rather than negations. After all, however 'respectable' an institution like Cambridge University might have been in the late Elizabethan and early Stuart period, the fact that it produced the apocalyptic commentaries of Dent, Brightman, and Mede (which fuelled millenarian expectations that would have horrified their authors), as well as nurtured the likes of Cromwell and Milton, suggests that it was actually a seed-bed for revolution.

The presentation of Commonwealth radicalism in terms of *conflict* between elite and popular cultures has recently been contested by Nicholas McDowell, who maintains that such a depiction obscures the extent to which radical discourse was shaped by their *interaction*.[82] McDowell's argument is well illustrated by the case of William Dell, who preached vehemently 'anticlerical and anti-intellectual sermons from the pulpit of St Mary's, Cambridge', as 'a university graduate, minister, and academic'.[83] Even though Dell graduated from Emmanuel with an MA in 1631 (while Sterry was a student there), going on to become a fellow of the college, one would be hard pushed to find a more hostile posture towards the 'polite learning of the Schools' than that reflected in Dell's statement (addressed to the university congregation!) that 'God by all his true servants shall destroy the studies of carnal Doctors, and Masters in Divinity, and shall dissipate all secular and Philosophical Learning, by the word of Truth in their mouths'.[84] Another one of Sterry's contemporaries at Emmanuel, Christopher Feake (whom we will meet again later), became a leader of the Fifth Monarchists—a millenarian movement which claimed, on the authority of Daniel 7 and Revelation 20, that the abolition of the Stuart dynasty would precede the foundation of a Fifth Monarchy, in which 'the Saints would

[82] Nicholas McDowell, *The English Radical Imagination: Culture, Religion, and Revolution, 1630-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2003).
[83] Ibid., 8.
[84] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, xviii; William Dell, *A Plain and Necessary Confutation of Divers Gross and Antichristian Errors* (1654), 18.

rule over the entire world until Christ returned to rule over his kingdom'.[85] Feake also displays a marked antipathy to 'the studies of carnal Doctors', observing in his Preface to Mary Cary's *The Little Horns Doom & Downfall* how 'many wise men after the flesh have been…much offended, that a company of illiterate men, and silly women, should pretend to any skill in dark prophecies, and to a foresight of future events, which the most learned Rabbies, and the most knowing Politicians have not presumed to hope for'.[86] The apparent inconsistency between Dell's and Feake's advancement of such subversive views and university educations can also be discerned in John Everard, one of the leading exponents of 'perfectionist' antinomianism in the pre-Civil-War period.[87] Everard, who had a Cambridge doctorate in divinity and secured his position through noble patronage, used his formidable learning in the service of rendering 'the central mystical anthropology of Medieval German spiritualism' available to 'poor *beggarly* fellows, *Tinkers* and *Coblers*'.[88] That Sterry shared the sentiments of Dell, Feake, and Everard is clear from his Ecclesiastes sermon, in which we find the following passage:

> If it were Opinions or Outward formes, upon which ye Peace of ye Saints depended, then happy were that man, that had ye greatest Wit, that were ye learnest Scollar…Let us bless that God & Father, who often leaves men with high notions & large comprehensions of things having a greate deale of Light of their owne in the darke: when poor, ignorant, low-capacitated men walke in the Light, & Sun-shine. How often do those; that come with large Vessells, goe emptie away; when ye poor man with his little Vessell is full of ye Light of God, and ye Joy of God overflowes[?]
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> (EC MS 291, 250)

Statements such as these should alert us to the fact that 'radical' views are by no means restricted to the writings of the 'illiterate' (i.e. not *classically* educated), but can also be found in the work of those *with* university educations.

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[85] P. G. Rogers, *The Fifth Monarchy Men* (London: Oxford University Press, 1966), 18.
[86] Mary Cary, *The Little Horns Doom & Downfall* (1651), Preface, unpaginated.
[87] On Everard's career see Como, *Blown by the Spirit*, 219-65.
[88] Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 136; John Everard, *The Gospel-Treasury Opened* (1657), 68; McDowell, *Radical Imagination*, 20.

Considering that radical attitudes, including the denigration of formal learning, were clearly not limited to 'mechanic' or 'tub' preachers, it seems likely that, in making a special case of Blake's 'particular current within bourgeois (and, often, artisan) Dissent', Thompson—and he is by no means alone—excludes an entire wing of educated radicals, among whom one might wish to place Sterry, who could provide instructive parallels to Blake's thought.[89] The Cambridge Platonists, with whom Sterry is often linked, are a good example of a group of thinkers who may have more to offer the Blake scholar than meets the eye. This collection of philosophical divines, mostly born in the 1610s and emanating from Emmanuel and Christ's Colleges are credited with reviving the thought of Plato and his successors.[90] The likes of Sterry, Cudworth, and Smith are conspicuous by their absence in most histories of the English Revolution, never mind the Marxist accounts of Civil War radicalism, having fallen victim to their reputation as otherworldly mystics detached from the political upheavals of their age. However, as Sarah Hutton's 'Radical Review of the Cambridge Platonists' has shown, this image is no longer tenable: 'Their close ties to the Commonwealth, the origins of so much of their thinking in the religious and intellectual ferment of the 1640s and 1650s, their uneasy relationship both with the so-called radicals of that period and the restored Anglican regime, all show that they belong to the political history of the period' and deserve to be included in a 'revised history of English radicalism'.[91] In this case, the

[89] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, xviii.
[90] On the Cambridge Platonists see, for example, John Tulloch, *Rational Theology and Christian Philosophy in England in the Seventeenth Century*, i: *The Cambridge Platonists* (2nd edn., London: William Blackwood, 1874); Frederick J. Powicke, *The Cambridge Platonists: A Study* (London: J. M. Dent, 1926); Ernst Cassirer, *The Platonic Renaissance in England* (London: Thomas Nelson & Sons, 1953); Gerald R. Cragg (ed.), *The Cambridge Platonists* (New York : Oxford University Press, 1968); C. A. Patrides, *The Cambridge Platonists* (London: Edward Arnold, 1969); G. A. J. Rogers, J. M. Vienne and Y. C. Zarka (eds.), *The Cambridge Platonists in Philosophical Context: Politics, Metaphysics, and Religion* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic, 1997); Charles Taliaferro and Alison J. Teply (eds.), *Cambridge Platonist Spirituality* (New York: Paulist Press, 2004).
[91] Sarah Hutton, 'A Radical Review of Cambridge Platonism', in Ariel Hessayon and David Finnegan (eds.), *Varieties of Seventeenth- and Early Eighteenth-Century Radicalism in Context* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2011), 182.

fact that they have been overlooked by those scholars interested in Blake's background in seventeenth-century radicalism—with the notable exception of Rowland's discussion of Cudworth—is something Blake scholars may wish to remedy.[92] The point should also be made that, if the Cambridge Platonists are a suitable group for Blake scholars to study, then Sterry can surely be seen as the most promising candidate, being the only one among them, to the best of my knowledge, to have developed a comprehensively dialectical divinity in which the Devil plays such a prominent role as (to quote Jacob Bauthumley) the 'dark side of God'.[93] It is certainly the case that Sterry is the member of the group most closely associated with the Cromwellian regime, being the only one to have made the decisive leap from the college quads to the corridors of Whitehall.

Turning now to the fourth marker of radicalism—the espousal of political ideas which are 'secular' as opposed to 'religious'—while it is true that Sterry's writings do not contain anything like, for example, the denunciation of the rich for hoarding wealth when their fellow human beings languish in dire poverty that one finds in someone like George Foster, there is a strong case to be made that they are inherently 'political' given the contexts in which they were produced and circulated: the Commonwealth sermons as parliamentary propaganda and the Restoration writings as theological encouragement for a beleaguered non-conformist community in times of trouble. However, the premise that radicalism is an entirely 'secular' entity, in which biblical symbols and theological ideas serve merely as the 'garb' in which properly political tenets are dressed, is wholly misguided: far from being marginal to their concerns, theology was the motor of the radicals' revolutionary social and economic schemes. This is true even of Winstanley, whom Hill deems the least theological, and therefore most 'secular', of the radicals; although Winthrop Hudson's claim that Winstanley 'was not interested primarily in a

[92] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 174-6.
[93] Jacob Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God* (1650).

practical program of social reform but in the approaching reign of God' goes too far in the opposite direction.[94] A much more balanced assessment of the relationship between theology and politics in Winstanley's thought is provided by Andrew Bradstock, who suggests that, however 'radically unorthodox' Winstanley's theology may have been, it played 'a far more significant role in shaping the Digger's praxis than many of his latter-day admirers have been prepared to acknowledge'. Bradstock picks up on two erroneous assumptions informing the perception that Winstanley was (or became) a 'secular' thinker: (1) that 'traditional' Christianity, thought of as transcendental in nature, provides a yardstick for determining the validity of alternative formulations; and (2) that Winstanley's immanentist theology, which approaches pantheism, constituted a repudiation of Christianity itself, not just the interpretation of it which happened to be ascendant in his day. What these premises fail to recognise, as Bradstock points out, is that Winstanley is not an isolated figure but 'can be located in that small but vocal tradition which, albeit from its fringes but nevertheless from within the professing Christian church itself, has continually set out to challenge perceived conservative and reactionary interpretations of the faith, positing instead an alternative reading of the gospel stressing themes of protest against injustice and hope for a radical new social order in the shape of the Kingdom or Reign of God'.[95] In this case, the very distinction drawn by Marxist historians like Hill, Morton, and Thompson between Winstanley's 'religious' and 'political' concerns does violence to the integrity of his thought, which belongs to a tradition in which Christianity and social justice go hand in hand; a crucial observation which, I believe, should be extended beyond Winstanley to Commonwealth radicalism in general. It could, therefore, be argued that Sterry's eschewal of topics that

[94] Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 183; Winthrop Hudson, 'Economic and Social Thought of Gerrard Winstanley: Was he a Seventeenth-Century Marxist?', *Journal of Modern History*, 18/1 (March 1946), 21.
[95] Andrew Bradstock, 'Sowing in Hope: The Relevance of Theology to Gerrard Winstanley's Political Programme', *Seventeenth Century*, 6/2 (Fall 1991), 189, 194, 195.

we would recognise as 'political' does not necessarily preclude his radicalism any more than Winstanley's concern with social and economic equality rules out his Christianity. Indeed, the relative neglect of the theological aspect of 'the world turned upside down' in Blake studies, shaped as it has been by Marxist historiography, offers a compelling rationale for turning to Sterry who, despite not being the most openly 'political' of writers (at least from a modern perspective), shares a wide range of *theological* principles in common with the radicals, as we shall now see.

3. *Sterry's radical theological credentials*

So far in this chapter we have established the limitation of the genealogical approach to the elucidation of Blake's intellectual antecedents, Sterry's most compelling credential as a theological precursor to Blake, and that Sterry should not be ruled out of 'the world turned upside down' on the basis of a conception of this context which is too narrowly focused on class and education while demoting its theological aspect. In order to justify Sterry's selection as a candidate for comparative study, however, it will be necessary to show not only that he should not be *excluded* from this environment, but that he should be *included* within it. What is required, in other words, is a follow-up to McDowell's observation that Sterry was 'associated throughout his career with more extreme religious radicals, although the exact nature of the association remains uncertain'.[96] This section is intended as a modest contribution to the explication of the issue to which McDowell draws attention, namely the exact nature and extent of Sterry's radical links, with the purpose of determining his proximity to the primary setting for Blake's ideas in the seventeenth century. I begin by exploring Sterry's association with Sir Henry Vane, and through him the Boston antinomians, which brings to light Sterry's advocacy of the

[96] McDowell, *Radical Imagination*, 93.

doctrine of free grace and recourse to visionary enthusiasm, before considering Sterry's possible involvement with two figures who would go on to become leading 'Ranters', efforts to distance himself from this sect, and, finally, promotion of millenarianism and universalism. To be clear, the point of this exercise is to show how Sterry shares a range of theological principles with the radicals, thus reinforcing my case that Pinto's claim of striking affinities between Blake and Sterry is no aberration, but largely consistent with the view of Blake's intellectual background which has emerged in modern scholarship.

Sterry, Vane, and Hutchinson

It was observed earlier that Baxter considered Sterry's first patron, Lord Brooke (1607-1643), to be a counterpart to Sir Henry Vane (1613-1662) in the Lords. The mention of Vane in tandem with Brooke should come as no surprise, given that Vane acted as agent for Brooke, as well as Lord Saye and Sele, in a proposed venture to establish a Puritan settlement on the Warwick patent (land which would eventually become Connecticut) when he moved to Boston.[97] In spite of its brevity, Vane's sojourn in New England, which lasted from October 1635 to August 1636, was a highly eventful one. During his time in the colony, Vane managed to attain its highest office, that of governor, become embroiled in the acrimonious theological dispute which would become known as the Antinomian Controversy, and lose the governorship to John Winthrop on the back of his involvement, returning to England have stirred up the waters across the Atlantic.[98]

At the heart of the Antinomian Controversy was a rift between the supporters of Anne Hutchinson (1591-1643) within the Boston congregation and the other colonial churches on the 'proper relationship between created nature and divine activity' in the

[97] William W. Ireland, *The Life of Sir Henry Vane the Younger* (London: Eveleigh Nash, 1905), 57.
[98] Ruth E. Mayers, 'Vane, Sir Henry, the younger (1613-1662)', DNB.

redemptive process.[99] While both parties accepted that salvation is not dependent on obedience to the Law, but comes through the free grace of Christ, they disagreed on the question of whether a person's advancement in holiness (sanctification) should be seen as a sign of their righteousness in God's eyes (justification). While those on Winthrop's side insisted that sanctification *could* be read as a sign of justification, Hutchinson, under the influence of the renegade preachers John Cotton and John Wheelwright, claimed that such an understanding jeopardised the key Protestant doctrine of salvation through faith alone (*sola fides*), castigating her opponents as legalistic advocates of the 'covenant of works'. For Hutchinson, it was axiomatic that salvation does not require the intercession of created 'means', specifically the rigorous disciplinary apparatus of mainstream Puritanism, but is effected solely through the Spirit's direct action within the soul, regardless of an individual's outward conduct. What condemned Hutchinson (at least in the eyes of the court before which she was finally hauled), however, was not so much her rejection of sanctification as her assertion of direct divine inspiration as the means by which she arrived at her conclusion. When interrogated about how she could be sure that her conviction derived from God, Hutchinson responded with the rhetorical question: 'How did Abraham know that it was God that bid him offer his son, being a breach of the sixth commandment?' As soon as the deputy governor, Thomas Dudley, answered, 'By an immediate voice', Hutchinson retorted, 'So to me by an immediate revelation'.[100] It was this resort to a mode of discernment that bypassed, even superseded, all human authorities that most concerned her accusers, who recognised the subversive nature of her words, causing them to place her under house arrest pending banishment.

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[99] William K. B. Stoever, 'Nature, Grace and John Cotton: The Theological Dimension in the New England Antinomian Controversy', *Church History*, 44/1 (March 1975), 22.
[100] Quoted by Michael G. Ditmore, 'A Prophetess in Her Own Country: An Exegesis of Anne Hutchinson's "Immediate Revelation"', *William and Mary Quarterly*, 57/2 (April 2000), 390-1.

According to Michael Winship's account of this affair, Vane, who was 'deeply taken with the radical possibilities in Cotton's theology', encouraged Hutchinson to 'set up her own conventicles' and (possibly) engage in 'her own theological speculation'. Contesting the view that the reason the reaction to the theological experimentation of the Boston church was so robust was because of the rise of a Hutchinsonian faction within it, Winship submits that the single most important factor in fanning the flames of the controversy was Vane's patronage, which lent Hutchinson's ideas a visibility and authority—and hence potential to destabilise the colony as a whole—which they might otherwise have lacked.[101] If Winship is on the mark, then Vane was a major participant in the controversy over free grace, weighing in heavily on the 'antinomian' side.

Vane's close involvement in this legendary episode is significant from our point of view given how closely his views would later become identified with those of Sterry. The earliest evidence we have for Vane and Sterry's friendship is to be found in a long minute recording Sterry's testimony to a House of Lords committee, on 24 January 1644, in connection with a supposed plot in which Vane was implicated, the details of which need not concern us here.[102] What this minute (the relevant extracts from which are quoted by Pinto) discloses is that 'Sterry was at this time on the most friendly terms with Vane and his family and that he was highly esteemed and trusted by them'.[103] In view of the fact that by 1639, when Sterry became Lord Brooke's chaplain, 'Vane was actively proselytizing in Brooke's circle', it is entirely possible that their association—and perhaps a 'Bostonian influence' on Sterry's divinity—went back even further.[104] The intimate link that was seen to exist between Vane and Sterry is reflected in Baxter's

[101] Michael P. Winship, *Making Heretics: Militant Protestantism and Free Grace in Massachusetts, 1636-1641* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 7.
[102] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 14-16; John Willcock, *Life of Sir Henry Vane the Younger: Statesmen and Mystic (1613-1662)* (London: Saint Catherine Press, 1913), 132-3.
[103] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 16.
[104] Winship, *Making Heretics*, 310n43.

witty, if disparaging, pun: '*Vanity* and *Sterility* were never more happily conjoined'.[105] In a more sympathetic, yet still critical, 'review' of Sterry's *A Discourse of the Freedom of the Will*, Baxter stated that he found in Sterry's treatise 'the same notions (for so far as he meddleth with the same subjects) as in Sr. *H. Vane*…but all handled with much more *strength* of *parts* and *raptures* of highest *devotion*, and *great candour* towards all others, than I expected'.[106] The claim for continuity between the thought of Vane and Sterry has also been advanced more recently. In the fullest study of Vane's theology to date, David Parnham proposes that Vane's response to antinomianism in the 1650s has 'interesting idiomatic and conceptual similarities' to the 'altogether more sophisticated' move made by Sterry.[107] While a thorough exploration of these correspondences, which would be a considerable undertaking, lies beyond the scope of this thesis, I would like to follow up Winship's intriguing suggestion that there may be 'traces of Vane's Boston days' in Sterry's writings. In doing so, my aim is not to show that Sterry was influenced by Vane's encounter with Hutchinsonian divinity, but to demonstrate that he does have theological affinities with the Boston antinomians, the study of which help to bring into focus two radical features of his own theology, which link him to Blake.

Winship elaborates his assertion of possible 'traces of Vane's Boston days' in Sterry's work by pointing to Baxter's association of Sterry's identification of the Law with the Letter in *A Discourse* with Vane, noting how Sterry's reading of 2 Corinthians 3:6 ('the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life')—a *locus classicus* for radical biblical hermeneutics included by Blake in Engraving 1 of the Job *Illustrations*—is identical to Hutchinson's.[108] In addition to this correspondence, Winship observes how Sterry, like Vane, stresses the Hutchinsonian themes of the witness of the Spirit, the unreliability of

[105] Baxter, *Reliquiae Baxterianae*, 75.
[106] *Richard Baxter's Catholic Theologie* (1675), Part 3, 107.
[107] David Parnham, *Sir Henry Vane, Theologian: A Study in Seventeenth-Century Religious and Political Discourse* (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson Press, 1997), 14.
[108] On Blake's use of 2 Cor. 3:6 see Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 23.

sanctification, and the unconditionality of grace.[109] For Winship, then, Sterry's affinity to Hutchinson through Vane is centred on his advocacy of the doctrine of free grace, according to which believers are justified solely on the basis of their faith, the result of which is the undermining of holiness as a sign of sanctification. Among the texts from *The Rise, Race, and Royalty* quoted by Winship is one in particular which encapsulates Sterry's 'antinomian' divinity, in which salvation is entirely unconditional or, as Blake puts it, 'without Money & without Price' (J61.22, E212):

> The Law is compounded of *Precepts*, and Promises dependant upon those Precepts, as condition of the Covenant to be performed mutually on both sides; of prohibitions and threatenings annexed. But, as the Sun is a Body streaming forth freely by a knot of Beams. So is the Gospel a knot of Promises, which are all *Love* in so many clear, unmixed Beams shooting themselves freely forth from the fulness, and force of Love alone in its Head-spring, the heart of God.
>
> (351)

That Sterry remained committed to this position to the very end of his life can be seen in a sermon on Romans 5:21, delivered on 29 March 1670, in which he describes 'the doctrine of free grace as a rock, as a rock of Eternity, on which the rock himself Jesus Christ…is founded, against which all the gates of hell shall not be able to prevail' (FGE 1). Before turning to the Ranters, there is one further point of contact between Sterry and Hutchinson I would like to discuss: his visionary enthusiasm.

Enthusiasm, as I defined it earlier in this chapter, designates the belief that one is directly inspired by the divinity. A prime example can be found in Blake's *Milton*, where the bard exclaims: 'I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing/ According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius' (13:51-14:1, E107-8). Although the term had a neutral, even positive, meaning in its original context—the Hellenistic mystery cults—it took on a pejorative connotation as soon as it was used to translate the German '*schwärmer*'; a

[109] Winship, *Making Heretics*, 245, 310n43.

word coined by Luther as an abusive term for Karlstadt and Müntzer.[110] Ever since, the label has been applied to those claiming 'direct divine inspiration, prophetic power or special revelations', especially when these supersede 'sacred texts (Scripture), traditions and institutions (the church)'.[111] This 'apocalyptic' mode of discernment is epitomised by Hutchinson's appeal to an 'immediate revelation', which inspired her, like Abraham, to flout the Law in the name of a higher authority, namely the voice of God within her soul. Like Blake's Jesus, Anne Hutchinson 'acted from impulse: not from rules'.

That Sterry shares Hutchinson's (and Blake's) enthusiastic prioritisation of the Spirit within as the highest arbiter of truth can be seen in a text from Sterry's very first parliamentary sermon, in which he employs two biblical images, derived from Exodus 13:21-2 and Genesis 3:24, to convey the primacy of the Spirit over reason: 'Reason is a *pillar* of a *Cloud*; the Spirit only is the *pillar* of Fire, which hath light in it. Reason is that *Gladius versatilis*, that sword in the hand of the Cherubim, that kept Paradise, a sword that turns every way. It may keep men from the tree of Life, but can never bring them to it' (SCS 25). In his final Whitehall sermon, preached some thirteen years later, Sterry goes even further, equating the Spirit with *both* of the pillars which directed the Israelites on their flight from Egypt to the Promised Land, thereby writing reason out of the picture altogether:

> You, to whom God hath given *Spiritual Senses*, and in whom he keeps those hitherto exercised, and awake: see the *glory*, which rests upon us, which is our Pillar of cloud by day, and our shining flame of fire by night, the *Holy Spirit*. This hath been, this alone is our *Guide*, our *Defence*, our *Resting place*, our *Glory* in the midst of all the Nations. Say not, how shal we discern this Spirit? As a Cloud by day, and a fire by night: so will the Lord make him evident to the seeing Eye, and to every one that waits for him.
>
> (TWU 23)

[110] Amy Nelson Burnett, 'Luther and the Schwärmer', in Robert Kolb, Irene Dingel, and L'ubomír Batka (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of Martin Luther's Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 512.
[111] Michael Heyd, 'The Reaction to Enthusiasm in the 17th Century: From Antistructure to Structure', *Religion*, 15/3 (July 1985), 280.

It would be fair to say that in these two texts, taken from sermons bookending Sterry's career as a parliamentary preacher, the supremacy of the Spirit is his own guiding light, as it was for Hutchinson. Unlike Hutchinson, however, Sterry offers a detailed rationale for his elevation of the Spirit within over all textual, customary, and institutional guides.

The intellectual foundation of Sterry's 'high' pneumatology can be found in his theory of discernment, according to which the Spirit within is the '*Spire-top* of Things' (RRR 24). In Sterry's epistemological scheme, there are three perceptual principles, sense, reason, and spirit, corresponding to sensory, rational, and spiritual objects (SCS 9-12). Anchoring his theory in 1 Corinthians 2:14—another of the radicals' favourite texts, quoted by Blake in Engraving 1 of the *Job* series—Sterry argues that each faculty is incapable of discerning objects of a higher order, although reason can discern sensory objects and the Spirit rational *and* sensory things: '*Spirituall things are spiritually discerned*…Can *Sense*, which is the *light of Beasts*, trace the workings, and sights of *Reason* in her Contemplations; or discerne the things of *men*? Can we see a *soule*, or an *Angel* by the light of a *Candle*? Divine things must have a Divine light to discover them, a Divine power, and principle to comprehend them' (TCS 24). Sterry's choice of imagery here is surely no coincidence: it is well known that the Cambridge Platonists, and Whichcote in particular, were fond of describing reason as 'the candle of the Lord' (Prov. 20:28).[112] While the *recta ratio* (right reason) of Sterry's Cambridge associates was by no means the isolated, purely ratiocinative, faculty which Robert Hoopes brands a 'sterile but serviceable instrument', but what we might today call a 'suprarational' power, including intuitive as well as imaginative modes of perception under its banner, Sterry still denies its capacity to discern spiritual realities.[113] Indeed, Sterry requisitions

[112] Robert A. Greene, 'Whichcote, the Candle of the Lord, and Synderesis', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 52/4 (October-December 1991), 617-644.
[113] Robert Hoopes, *Right Reason in the English Renaissance* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1962), 161.

Whichcote's favourite image on behalf of the Spirit, encouraging his readers to retreat 'into your *Chamber*, in which the *Candle* of the Lord shines; that is, into your *Spirit*, as it hath the Spirit of God' (RRR 96). The reason Sterry situates the Spirit at the apex of existence, therefore, is because it alone is able to perceive the highest, spiritual, objects.

Before proceeding any further, it must be stressed in the strongest possible terms that Sterry's distinction between 'spirit' and 'flesh' is not between the incorporeal and material, soul and body—a concept which would be at odds with Blake's insistence that 'Man has no Body distinct from his Soul' (MHH4, E34)—but that which *reveals* the divine and that which *obscures* it. Sterry holds strictly to the Pauline view, distilled by Philip Sheldrake, that what is 'opposed to the Spirit may as well be the mind or the will as the body or material reality…The "spiritual" is what is under the influence of, or is a manifestation of, the Spirit of God'.[114] So, rather than approaching the 'spiritual' as the negation of the physical, Sterry treats it as a level of reality transcending the dualistic divide between the material and immaterial. Nowhere is Sterry's understanding of the divergence between 'spirit' and 'flesh' more explicitly stated than in a letter to 'Scipio', dated July 1669, in which he explains:

> The Proper notion, and nature of a body is equally consistent with flesh, or spirit. Nothing more darkens ye mistery of ye Gospel, of all divine truth, than an universall mistake of ye nature of A body. This mistake ariseth from y^{e} [use of the term] in naturall Philosophy, where corporeall, or bodily substances are confined to that low and grosse materiality…and so contra-distinguished from spirits, as incorporeall, or unbodied substances…S^{r} you will find in scripture flesh and spirit opposed one to another, not Body, and Spirit…Every thing vailing ye supream glorie, fading, changeable, & shadowy, all y^{t} is made, ye whole creation, in all its visible or invisible part, is flesh; The glory its self, ye eternall life, substance and truth of all, is spirit.
>
> (EC MS 289, 109-10, 118; cf. RRR 260-1)

[114] Philip Sheldrake, *Spirituality and History: Questions of Interpretation and Method* (London: SPCK, 1991), 34.

In challenging the conventional view of spirits as 'incorporeal, or unbodied substances', Sterry anticipates Blake, who claims that 'A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing: they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce' (DC37, E541).

Returning to Sterry's enthusiasm, his confidence in the Spirit's capacity to guide the saints 'into all truth' (John 16:13) leads him to warn against placing one's trust in sense, reason, and even Scripture, advocating a total reliance on the Spirit. Thus, in an unpublished catechism, Sterry sets out 'five short Rules concerning ye Spirit':

> 1. Trust not your Senses, but in the Light & guidance of the Spirit.
> 2. Trust not your Reason, but in the conduct of this Spirit.
> 3. Trust not to the Scripture, without this Spirit Enlightning and Enlivening you.
> 4. Trust not to any Truth in any of your graces any further than this Spirit lives in and through them.
> 5. Trust to this Spirit alone for the knowledg of God, and all divine things.
>
> (EC MS 293, 97)

What this enthusiastic epistemology looks like in action can be illustrated using Sterry's third instruction as an example. It is essential for Sterry that 'we need no visible Judge on earth to determine our consciences; *What is Scripture*, *what is the sense of Scripture*. We have an invisible Judge and witnesse in our brests: *He that believeth, hath the testimony in himself* [1 John 5:10], for hee hath the Spirit' (SCS 25). So, rather than deferring to external authorities, such as learned commentaries or ancient creeds, Sterry urges believers to heed the witness in their own breast, determining the meaning of the Bible for themselves. This 'invisible Judge', whom Sterry identifies with the indwelling Christ, reveals heavenly mysteries to those with an ear to 'hear what the Spirit saith' (Rev. 2:11):

> Hast thou any Doubts, Difficulties, Wants, in the Mystery of Heavenly Light and Life? Thou hast a Master in thy own Breast. None teaches like him: Propound thy Darkness, thy Desires, to the Spirit of the Lord Jesus, in thine own Soul; there hearken to the private

> Whispers; there receive the inward Answers, Replies, Representations of that Spirit, which will pour forth itself into a Stream of sweet and deep Apprehensions, in a Flood of powerful, and glorious Manifestations, if thou wait upon it. It will give thee Life, Light, and Language, in Heavenly Things.
>
> (AGM 46)

This statement is typical of the rhetoric of enthusiasm in its prioritisation of the Spirit within in experiencing ('Life'), understanding ('Light'), and expressing ('Language') those divine truths which sensory perception and reason alone cannot receive.[115] So far as his theory of knowledge is concerned, then, Sterry is as unequivocal an enthusiast as Hutchinson, presenting the Spirit as an internal 'Master' who not only instructs those who listen attentively to him in 'Heavenly Things', but does so by responding to their deepest anxieties and yearnings with a torrent of revelation. But what evidence is there that Sterry personally *experienced* the 'Stream of sweet and deep Apprehensions' which await those who turn to the Christ within for enlightenment?

The most compelling piece of evidence that Sterry received special revelations by way of visionary experience is a remarkable letter he wrote to his daughter from the Sidney estate at West Sheen in 1661. Sterry opens the letter by telling his daughter how 'I was lately meditating upon that Scripture: Riches profit not in ye day of Wrath: but Righteousnes delivers from Death [Prov. 11:4]', before recounting how 'At ye reading of this I saw appearing within myself a Divine Spectacle'. What follows is an amazing description of the heavenly scene Sterry sees unfolding within himself. This spectacle, which Sterry witnesses while his 'natural Spirit' stands 'like a shadow in a dreame' (a reference to sleep?), falls into two parts, corresponding to the two halves of the biblical text which inspired it. In the first part, Sterry discerns the 'Image of ye Whole Creation' standing before him, regaling his spirit with a procession of life's treasures—'Honour,

[115] It is worth noting how Sterry's theological epistemology resembles not only Hutchinson's but that of later women writers like Mary Astell and Elizabeth Bathurst. See Sarah Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion in Early Enlightenment England* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 128.

Riches, Delight'. This sight is encircled by what Sterry describes as 'a day of Cloudes, of Stormes, and thunders; of Lightening, and Flames'. The flashes of lightening in this tempest reveal the 'Treasures of Life' to be 'hellish Spirits risen from below into those gaudy Showes', which are 'without warmth, Life, or Substance'. As the fire spreads, it consumes these lurid, but insubstantial, images, transforming them into 'Infernall fires, naked Devills', which one suspects they were all along. These diabolical spirits are identified by Sterry as the riches of the creature and their profit (or rather lack of it) in the 'day of Wrath'. In the second part of his vision, Sterry beholds another spirit, 'wch seemed a Circle of Light, sweeter then ever any eye beheld', in the midst of the hellish apparitions he has just seen. This luminous sphere is filled with the presence of Christ, in whose bosom the scene of wrath is contained, now taking on an altogether different appearance. Instead of being empty and lifeless, life's riches are now 'glorious, eternal Spirits', whose former parts are shown to have been 'acted in obedience, & conformity to this Jesus, ye Father's Wisdome, & Essentiall Forme'. Now even darkness and death 'have lovely Faces in this Circle, making up ye Consort of its glories', containing 'new Circles, new Heavens' within themselves. Offering a commentary on his vision, Sterry explains how just as the riches of the world are unprofitable in the 'day of Wrath', so in the day of love they are 'comprehended in a Circle of Divine Light, & Righteousnes, wch delivers from Death, & Wrath' ([To] 'My Dearest Daughter', EC MS 289, 37-9).

What is most significant about this account, which provides further verification of the dialectical nature of Sterry's divinity, is how it sheds light on Sterry's aphorism, 'Trust not to the Scripture, without this Spirit Enlightning and Enlivening you'. For Sterry, the witness of the Bible, like that of sense and reason, is not to be trusted unless it is verified by the Spirit, which means that it is ultimately one's *experience* that judges

the truth of the biblical text, not the other way round. It is through his vision that Sterry sees the 'meaning' of the Proverbs verse unfold before his 'Spiritual Eye'.[116]

Sterry's elevation of the indwelling Spirit above sense, reason, and Scripture, which parallels Hutchinson, suggests that Pinto was not entirely off the mark when he claimed that Sterry was 'exactly what men of the Restoration and the eighteenth century called an "enthusiast", that is, one who wrote as the spirit moved him with little regard to what men who had learned from Locke called "reason" or "good sense"'. Even if one might question whether Sterry is 'probably the most perfect example of an "enthusiast" in English literature until the appearance of Blake', Pinto is surely right to suggest that by Enlightenment standards Sterry belongs firmly in the 'enthusiastic' category.[117] This can be illustrated with reference to Coleridge's treatment of 'Spiritual Religion' in *Aids to Reflection* . In this work—which, as Rowland explains, seeks to 'distinguish between the "fanatical" and "safe" forms of mysticism'—Coleridge submits that the most effective defence against 'dangerous enthusiasm' (Mee's phrase) is the accumulated body of scholarship and tradition embodied in the church, which contains the fire of the Spirit within secure, rational, bounds.[118] In striving to protect the church against enthusiasm, Coleridge is also seeking to defend himself against the charge of 'favouring the errors of the *Familists*, *Vanists*, *Seekers*, *Behmenists*, or by whatever other names Church History records the poor bewildered Enthusiasts, who in the swarming time of our Republic turned the facts of the Gospel into allegories, and superseded the written Ordinances of Christ by a pretended Teaching and sensible Presence of the Spirit'.[119]

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[116] On which see Chapter 3, section 1 ('"A Divine Principle or Faculty of seeing Things"').
[117] Vivian de Sola Pinto, 'Peter Sterry: Puritan, Platonist, and Mystic', in *Speculum Religionis: Being Essays and Studies in Religion and Literature from Plato to Von Hügel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 171-2.
[118] Christopher Rowland, *Radical Prophet: The Mystics, Subversives and Visionaries who Strove for Heaven on Earth* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 61; Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*; *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation*, 136.
[119] S. T. Coleridge, *Aids to Reflection* (1825), 139-40.

The inclusion of '*Vanists*' (presumably the followers of Sir Henry Vane) in this roll-call of arch-enthusiasts is a sure indicator that Coleridge would have grouped Sterry with the 'poor bewildered Enthusiasts' had his memory survived as well into the early nineteenth century as that of his close friend. With this point and the earlier discussion of Sterry's championing of free grace in mind, it would seem that Winship might well have a point when he ventures that it may not be 'entirely coincidental that when Edward Hutchinson [Anne's brother-in-law] returned to England, he regularly attended Sterry's sermons'.[120]

Sterry and the Ranters

Apart from Sterry's association with Vane, and through him the Boston antinomians, there is one further 'radical' connection which deserves our extended attention: Sterry's links to the Ranters, a movement widely seen as marking the furthest limit of religious radicalism in the Interregnum. According to Morton, the Ranters represent 'the extreme left wing of the sects which came into prominence during the English Revolution, both theologically and politically'.[121] Despite the epithet 'Ranter' being a highly contentious one, which has even been 'debunked' as a myth by one historian, it is worth retaining as a convenient label for those 'spiritual enthusiasts' like Jacob Bauthumley, Laurence Clarkson, Abiezer Coppe, and Joseph Salmon who held, or were accused of holding, the most extreme views on the obsolescence of the Moral Law and presence of God in all creatures.[122] The popular image of the Ranters, the correspondence of which to reality is not easily verified, was one of free spirits united by their defiance, indeed inversion, of conventional morality, engaged in such 'sinful' activities as smoking,

[120] Winship, *Making Heretics*, 245.
[121] A. L. Morton, *The World of the Ranters: Religious Radicalism in the English Revolution* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1970), 70.
[122] J. C. Davis, *Fear, Myth, and History: The Ranters and the Historians* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), has controversially questioned the Ranters' very existence.

revelling in song and dance, gluttony, drunkenness, promiscuous lovemaking, and the parodying of the sacraments. They were, in short, regarded as antinomians of a practical variety, who in *acting out* their conviction that to 'the pure all things are pure' (Titus 1:15), broke every taboo of 'respectable' early modern English society. Whether as the invention of the sensationalist press (and perhaps modern historians) or one of the 'main movements of enthusiasm', the Ranters offer a compelling analogue to Blake's theology, sharing his interlocking principles that 'all Act is Virtue' (Ann. Lav. [226, blank], E601) and 'God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men' (MHH16, E40).[123]

In the light of Blake's affinity to the Ranters, the prospect that Sterry knew one of the most infamous Ranters, described in an early study of Commonwealth radicalism as the 'great Ranter', takes on even greater significance.[124] The possibility that Sterry met Abiezer Coppe (1619-1672?), albeit when Coppe was still a Baptist, is revealed by the diary of Thomas Dugard, who had taught Coppe for three years in his capacity as Master of Warwick School, adopting him as something of a protégé. It was most likely through Dugard that Coppe was able to attend Oxford before returning to Warwick at the outbreak of Civil War without having taken his degree.[125] As Ann Hughes has shown through her meticulous investigation of Dugard's diary, which covers the period from 1632 to 1642, Brooke's hospitality at Warwick Castle formed the focal point of 'a "parliamentary-puritan connection", a broad circle of the godly which comprised minor provincial figures and prominent national politicians, and which helped create the challenge to Charles I's personal rule'.[126] Dugard's diary records him dining frequently

[123] J. F. McGregor, 'Seekers and Ranters', in J. F. McGregor and B. Reay (eds.), *Radical Religion in the English Revolution* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), 129.
[124] Robert Barclay, *The Inner Life of the Religious Societies of the Commonwealth* (London: Barclay and Fry, 1876), 423.
[125] On Coppe's early life see Ariel Hessayon, 'The Making of Abiezer Coppe', *Journal of Ecclesiastical History*, 62/1 (January 2011), 38-58.
[126] Ann Hughes, 'Thomas Dugard and His Circle in the 1630s: A "Parliamentary-Puritan" Connexion', *Historical Journal*, 29/4 (December 1986), 793.

with Brooke and his guests, including Sterry, throughout the late 1630s and early 1640s. Sterry's presence in this circle of Puritan opponents to King Charles and Archbishop Laud raises the prospect that Sterry and Coppe crossed paths between 1640 and 1641.[127]

In addition to this potential link with Coppe, there is also the possibility that Sterry had been familiar, later in the 1640s, with a second individual who would go on to become to become a leading Ranter: Laurence Clarkson (1615-1667), the self-styled '*Captain of the Rant*', born in Preston, Lancashire, who passed through virtually the full spectrum of denominational identities—Presbyterian, Independent, Baptist, Seeker, Ranter—before ending his extraordinary spiritual journey as a Muggletonian.[128] In his autobiography, *The Lost Sheep Found*, Clarkson makes a brief reference to having preached 'some while' in London 'at *Bowe* [probably St Mary-le-Bow] in Mr. *Sterry's* place' around 1647; a time at which Clarkson had attained a 'high pitch of free Grace' under the influence of Tobias Crisp, the antinomian divine.[129] When this fragment of evidence is set alongside the Coppe link, the prospect emerges that Sterry may have had personal dealings with two out of the four most prominent Ranters in the years leading up to the emergence of this most feared sect. This begs the question of the exact nature of Sterry's relationship to these practical antinomians, who have widely been invoked as an important part of Blake's intellectual milieu. Was Sterry a 'tireless and informed critic of the Ranters' over a twenty year period, as Matar and Wallace assert, or did he, like William Erbery, feel pressure to 'dissociate himself' from them, as Pinto and Hill

[127] McDowell, *Radical Imagination*, 92-3.
[128] Laurence Clarkson, *The Lost Sheep Found* (1660), 26.
[129] Clarkson, *The Lost Sheep Found*, 23, 9; Nicholas McDowell, 'The Beauty of Holiness and the Poetics of Antinomianism: Richard Crashaw, John Saltmarsh and the Language of Religious Radicalism in the 1640s', in Hessayon and Finnegan (eds.), *Radicalism in Context*, 43.

claim?[130] Furthermore, if the latter is true, was this simply due to his former association with them or because there were genuine continuities between his theology and theirs?

The most obvious place to begin looking for answers to these questions is the Epistle Dedicatory to *The Commings Forth of Christ*, which Matar describes as the first 'Interregnum refutation of the movement' and 'intellectually structured presentation of Ranter doctrine not based on idle gossip and hearsay'.[131] Sterry begins by posing the crucial question at stake in the Ranter debate: 'Whether *a* Christian *in the Dayes of his* Flesh *may be set* free *from the* Moral Law?' (3). Sterry's 'intellectually structured' reply to this question is extremely intricate, even by his standards, but his argument may be summarised as follows. While Christians are 'entirely *free from the* Legality *of the* Law, *which is Carnality*', so that they are '*no more under the* Covenant of works, *no more under* Condemnation', Sterry insists that the 'Morality *of* Legal Things' remains active (5). In other words, although Christians are released from the Law as an external code ('*A* Command from without', as Sterry puts it, 4), the ethical principles enshrined in the Law are still applicable. This is because, being made in the Divine Image, human nature has certain inalienable characteristics, such as the division into sexes or distinct persons, which must be preserved. So, the immorality of adultery, for instance, lies not in the act itself, but its disruption of marriage; that joining of two persons in 'one flesh' which is supposed to be a reflection of the differentiated unity of God. The same basic principle, Sterry argues, applies to '*all* Laws *against* Intemperance, Sensuality, Inordinancy', the 'morality' of which consists in their prevention of '*the* Disordering *and* Defacing *of the* [Divine] Image' (6) in human beings. In the remainder of the Epistle Dedicatory, Sterry identifies, and dismisses, the six possible cases in which the morality of the Law would

[130] N. I. Matar, 'Peter Sterry and the Ranters', *Notes and Queries*, 29/6 (December 1982), 504; Wallace, *English Calvinism*, 55, 56, 79; Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 108-9; Christopher Hill, *Milton and the English Revolution* (London: Faber, 1977), 301, 315.
[131] Matar, 'Sterry and the Ranters', 504, 505.

no longer apply: (1) if God were and acted all things; (2) if a person were divinised; (3) if their actions were constantly determined by God; (4) if their actions were sometimes driven by God; (5) if the distinction between good and evil no longer existed; and (6) if there were a special dispensation in which God intended the flesh to be defaced.

What Sterry has to say about the continued applicability of the Moral Law, not as an external code but an internal disposition, in the Epistle Dedicatory—and his case extends further than space will allow me to follow him—is consistent with what we find elsewhere in his corpus. The notion that one who is led by the Spirit cannot sin (18) is also enunciated in *The Spirit Convincing of Sinne*, where Sterry states that 'This Spirit, cannot encourage to sin, comfort in sin; for his work is to convince of sin…No man that is led by the law of the Spirit of Life; can walk contrary to any law of Nature, common Honesty, civill Policie, or whatsoever is of good Report, praise worthy' (30). Similarly, in *The True Way of Uniting the People of God*, Sterry is at pains to make clear that his elevation of the Spirit above sense, reason, and Scripture is not intended 'as a pretence to the *Flesh*', describing 'a fleshly licentiousness justified by the name of the *Spirit*' as only a step away from 'sin against the *Holy Ghost*'. As in the Epistle Dedicatory, this is because the morality of the Law remains in force so long as individuals remain distinct from God: 'While we have the Life of *Christ* in these Earthly Bodies…*Ordinances* and outward *Forms* wil be of necessary use', even if they must 'flow naturally, kindly, and freely from the *Spirit*' (20-1). As for the distinction between the 'Divine Power, *as it is* Particularised, Circumstantiated, Confined *in each Creature*', which *is* the creature, and '*in its* Universal Concurrence', which *is* God, (Epistle Dedicatory, 11), Sterry reiterates in *A Discourse* how his 'design is to establish most firmely and clearly the immutable and everlasting bounds between God and the creature'. Applying the concept that 'the Act of creating, as it is in God, its Principle is God' but 'as it is in the Creature…is the

Creature' to sinful 'acts' (which are not positive acts but negations), Sterry notes how in 'like manner, the Privation of Grace [i.e. 'sin'], as it hath its beginning in the Author of Grace, from an Act of the Divine Wisdom and Will, designing, or determining the with-holding of it, is…Divinely-beautiful and good', whereas the 'same privation of Grace, as it is terminated and seated in a created Spirit, is an evil of Sin'—indeed the '*highest deformity*, the first, the greatest evil, the fountain of all evils, most properly, in its own nature, and in the Eye of God'. Sterry uses the examples of Nebuchadnezzar, Joseph's brothers, and Christ's crucifiers to illustrate his argument that sinful deeds on the part of particular persons are 'a *deordination*, a disorder, a real evil, the worst of evils', but on the part of 'the Divine Musician, the Master of the universal Musick, *skilful stroaks* and *tender touches* upon his Harps or Lutes, which are his Saints, making the universal, the eternal Harmony compleat in their Persons, and in his whole Work' (DFW 11, 154-5).

On the basis of Sterry's defence of the Law's 'morality' and maintenance of the distinction between God and the creature, it might be concluded that his antinomianism stops well short of that promoted by the Ranters, who erased the bounding line between divinity and humanity, abolished the distinction between good and evil (and with it the category of sin), even occasionally claiming that one cannot be released from any given 'sin' until it has been acted out with a clear conscience.[132] This would, in many ways be a fair assessment. The Ranters were certainly far less cautious about equating their own words and actions with those of God. In his first *Fiery Flying Roll*, for example, Coppe refers to 'my most Excellent Majesty, the King of glory, the Eternall God, who dwelleth in the forme of the Writer of this Roll'.[133] One suspects that Sterry would not have been comfortable with such an unqualified claim to actual divinity, which heralds Blake's conviction that human beings *are* God (MHH22-23, E43; J91:7-10, E251; Ann. Berk.

[132] Clarkson, *The Lost Sheep Found*, 14.
[133] Abiezer Coppe, *A Fiery Flying Roll* (1649), 14.

219, E664; EG[k]71-2, E520). It would also be true to say that the Ranters were closer to Blake in terms of their repudiation of ethical dualism—a feature of Blake's thought exemplified by his statement that 'Good & Evil are no more' (EG[f]21, E521; see also VLJ70, E554; 90, E562; 92, E563; 96, E563; 90, E564). Clarkson's view that 'sin hath its conception only in the imagination' and Bauthumley's perception that 'there are no [ethical] distinctions in God', closely anticipate Blake's position.[134] What distinguishes Sterry from the Ranters (and Blake), then, is his continued devotion to the conventional morality of his Puritan upbringing, deeply rooted in the biblical idea of holiness as the preserve of the deity, which they vehemently disputed. Indeed, Sterry's premise that the 'Soul stands in a Contrariety to the Divine Purity, Love, Light, and Immortality' (DFW 128) marks the point of furthest distance between his theology and Blake's.

However, even if Sterry worked hard to undermine the theological foundation of the Ranters' outright repudiation of the Moral Law, there are indications that he is by no means *as* distant from them, and by extension Blake, as Matar and Wallace would have us believe. For a start, although he never identifies himself *exclusively* with God in the manner of Coppe, the claims Sterry makes on behalf of the 'Spiritual Man'—the divine part of every human being—are every bit as exalted. In *The Appearance*, for example, Sterry declares that the Spiritual Man, which is one's 'Heavenly House' (reminiscent of Blake's 'Golden House on high', 'The Caverns of the Grave I've seen', 19, E480-1, and 'Eternal House', [To] George Cumberland, 12 April 1827, E784?), is 'a God-like Frame rear'd in God, sprung forth from the Root of the Godhead…Eternal in the Heavens, unchangeable in the highest state of Divinity and Glory' (16-17). Contrary to the sense one gets in *The Commings Forth of Christ*, where participation in divinity seems to be a rare honour in this life, Sterry's personal letters present the return of the saints to 'their

[134] Laurence Clarkson, *A Single Eye: All Light, no Darkness; or Light and Darkness One* (1650), 8; Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God*, 9.

proper native aire, element, & Seate…ye Eternal Spirit' ([To] 'R. L.', EC MS 292, 101) as an entirely more routine affair. Thus, in a letter to his daughter, Sterry beseeches her to 'Let your Spirituall man always appeare, & shine out thorrow faith in your Soule, as your true selfe, your proper Person, your Head, wch is your Crowne of pure Gold, & of Immortality, wch is your Spirit, one Spirit with your Glorified Bridegroom at ye right hand of God' (EC MS 289, 17). This sense of personal communion with Christ, which is not all that distant from the Ranters' claim to *be* God, is by no means unusual in his correspondence: in the letter recounting his visionary experience inspired by Proverbs 11:4, Sterry even urges his daughter to 'see your Mother in this Circle, as your Jesus in a Chariot of Angells' (EC MS 289, 39). It would seem, then, that Sterry was altogether less reticent about identifying individuals with God in private than he was in public. What his parliamentary audience would have made of such unguarded statements is not easy to say, but it seems likely that they would have been surprised by their closeness to Ranter pretentions to actual divinity, the propriety of which Sterry questions. No doubt, Sterry would have objected that the Ranters were wrong in equating their *Natural* Man with God; but then again they might have protested, as Coppe did, that 'I do not vainly, ignorantly, and blasphemously affirm my self, or any other meer creature, to be very God…But this I have and do affirm…That God Christ, is in the creature'.[135]

On the subject of divine immanence, it is worth noting that what Sterry has to say on the presence of God in all things is virtually indistinguishable from the Ranters and Blake, for whom 'every thing on earth is the word of God & in its essence is God' (Ann. Lav. 630, E599). That Sterry accepted what Coppe calls that 'Orthodoxal truth of Omni-presence' can be seen in *The Appearance*, where Sterry proclaims that God is

> ...in All, thro' All, on every Side, Beneath, above, beyond All, ever, every where the same, equally entire, equally undivided, equally

[135] Abiezer Coppe, *A Remonstrance of Sincere and Zealous Protestation of Abiezer Coppe* (1651), 4.

> unconfin'd, full of himself, encompassed with himself, that Sacred Circle of All-Being, of Infiniteness, of Eternity, whose Centre is every where, in the smallest Point of Things; whose Circumference is no where Bounded, spreads beyond all Bound or Measure; which yet with its whole Circumference, in its fullest Amplitude, lies every where compleat in its Centre, altogether undivided in the lowest, the least, the last Division of Things.
>
> (388)

The implication of God's omnipresence is made clear earlier in the same work: '*There is not the lowest Thing, which hath not God in it*' (276). Again, in *A Discourse*, Sterry asserts, this time in more poetic language, that the deity is '*entirely present* with all the Joys and Glories of eternity…in the *Depths* of *Hell* beneath as in the Heighth of Heaven above, in the *dust* of the Grave, in a wave of the Sea, as in the most shining Cherubim of flaming Seraphim' (75). This passage parallels Bauthumley's statement that 'God is in all Creatures…from the highest Cedar to the Ivey on the wall; and that God is the life and being of them all, and that God doth really dwell, and if you will personally; if he may admit so low an expression in them all'. The key difference, however, is that where Bauthumley adds, 'and hath his Being no where else out of the Creatures', Sterry qualifies his claim by stating that 'God is present to himself in every Creature, after the manner of a God'.[136] What this means is that, while God is present in all creatures, he does not lower himself to their level but retains his transcendence: 'as the Sun-beams fall on a Dunghill, and are not polluted, but shine on the Dunghill; so God is still himself to himself, high and glorious in the lowest Things' (AGM 276). So, while the Bauthumley statement verges on pantheism, the identification of God with the world, Sterry's view is closer to panentheism, the belief that while God is present in all things he is not equal to or dependent on them. Nonetheless, the fact that Bauthumley includes the moderating clause, 'if he may admit so low an expression', suggests that even he

[136] Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God*, 4.

may not be an advocate of the crude 'plebeian materialism' which Morton sees as one pole of Ranter divinity.[137]

The most decisive point of contact between Sterry's theological vision and that of the Ranters, however, is its assertion of God's absolute monopoly on power (i.e. the ability to act), coordinating good and evil in his harmonious design as an artist arranges light and dark in a painting. This is almost identical with the Ranter position, expressed by Clarkson, that 'all Powers are of God, so all acts, of what nature soever are produced by this Power', with the crucial difference that they considered it a justification of sin whereas Sterry resisted this conclusion.[138] It is striking that even in his Epistle Dedicatory to *The Commings Forth of Christ*, which Matar regards as a 'refutation' of the Ranters, Sterry actually *concedes* their central premise that the 'Divine Power' does all things, even if he insists it does so through contraries and subordinations, so that there are real ethical and hierarchical distinctions in the divine works (as we saw in section 1). This is surely remarkable considering the audience, who were about to take drastic legislative action against the Ranters, no matter how many qualifications Sterry introduces to fence his position off from theirs. The fundamental theological continuity between Sterry and the Ranters on this point becomes evident when one compares what Sterry has to say on the divine authorship of all things with the Ranter tracts, which were burned in public.

We have already seen how Sterry presents God as the 'Master of the universal Musick…making the universal, the eternal Harmony compleat'. The 'eternal Harmony' to which Sterry refers is one which includes 'a Variety extending it self to the remotest, the highest *Contrarieties* Affirmative or Negative', by which he means 'good, and evil, in their greatest Latitude'. In this case, the dynamic contraries of 'love and hatred, war

[137] Morton, *The World of the Ranters*, 70.
[138] Clarkson, *A Single Eye*, 7.

and peace, embracing, and abstaining from embracing, life and death, destruction and salvation, [all] have their time and season' in the divine economy, which will ultimately bring all things to perfection. The radical implication of this providential scheme is that even the most direful acts, including Christ's crucifixion, are to be 'attributed at once to the determinate Counsel of God', which orders all things 'unto good, the highest Good, the supream End, the universal Order, the Divine Glory' (DFW 150-5). Not only does Sterry's scheme resemble Clarkson's notion that 'all Powers are of God', it also closely parallels Bauthumley's belief that 'all accidents and occurrences are the manifestation of that supream Will and Power which is immutable', serving the 'designe of his own glory', with the consequence that, despite being 'unlawful', those 'acts or motions that fall below, or tend to the crossing of this design…also [ultimately] tend to the glory of God'.[139] In the light of this shared conviction, it is hardly surprising that Sterry was so concerned that his theology might be taken to 'confirm the *Ranters* in their *licentious Principles* and Practices. For, why should not *Sinners* with the freedom of all sinful pleasures *rest* and *rejoyce* in the *absoluteness* of the Divine Conduct, the Perfection of the Divine Order and Beauty, which guides them through all [?]' (DFW 156).

On balance, then, it would seem that while Sterry was, like Winstanley, an opponent of the Ranters, he would certainly have felt pressure to distance himself from them, not only due to his possible links to Coppe and Clarkson, but because there *were* genuine continuities between his theology and theirs, as Sterry clearly recognised to his discomfort.[140] So, when Matar claims that the 'Ranters were Sterry's bane' from 'his early preaching career at Whitehall, during his private chaplaincy to Cromwell, and finally as a Restoration nonconformist preacher in London' he is right, but not quite in the way he intends: Sterry detected in the Ranters teachings which were perilously close

[139] Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God*, 35, 6, 33.
[140] For Winstanley's opposition to the Ranters see, for example, 'A Vindication of those, Whose endeavors is only to make the Earth a common treasury, called Diggers', in CWGW, ii, 235-40.

to his own, but leading to a conclusion—practical libertinism—which was an affront to his engrained Puritan moral sensibility, so sought to insulate himself against the accusation that the '*Opinions* of the *Ranters*' (DFW 153) flow inexorably from the very brand of dialectical divinity he promoted (before the very parliament which legislated against the Ranters!) by going on the offensive.[141] In spite of his protestations to the contrary, it is not clear to me that Sterry's argument that the same act can be a 'sin, *in its* own Place' but a 'Glory…*in the* Light *of* God' (CFC, Epistle Dedicatory, 17) is an entirely convincing confutation of the Ranters' case that, if the divinity is absolutely sovereign, 'sin it self doth fall in compliance with the glory of God, as well as that which we call grace'.[142] It is to Sterry's credit that, as D. P. Walker remarks, he was 'too honest not to face the antinomian implications' of his deeply held belief that 'Nothing is *mean and vile*, seen in a right and universal Light' (DFW 30).[143]

Sterry, the Fifth Monarchists, and universalism

Before concluding this section, I would like to draw attention to two further features of Sterry's theology which link him to 'the world turned upside down', which can only be treated here in summary: his millenarianism and universalism. In relation to the first characteristic, Bernard Capp has noted how Sterry held the view that the 'army of the elect nation' would establish the rule of the saints on earth and that Christ was the sole rightful heir to the Crown of England.[144] The millenarian tenor of Sterry's early sermons reaches a crescendo in *The Commings Forth of Christ* which, with its fixation on 'dates and computations', is considered by Matar to be 'one of the most consciously

[141] Matar, 'Sterry and the Ranters', 506.
[142] Bauthumley, *The Light and Dark Sides of God*, 33.
[143] D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 119.
[144] Capp, *The Fifth Monarchy Men*, 37, 51.

millenarian of the Fast sermons of the 1640s'.[145] In 1653, the Fifth Monarchist leader John Rogers cited this particular sermon in support of his belief that the 'Deliverance' had started in 1647 or 1652 and would continue for between 35 and 45 years.[146] Sterry's acquaintance with Morgan Llwyd, mentioned earlier, has also led Matar and Wallace to venture that Sterry acted as an intermediary between the government and even 'more radical Welsh Independents, such as Vavasor Powell'.[147] Powell, who was nominally a Baptist, became an itinerant preacher at the age of twenty-two, developing 'strong Fifth Monarchist leanings' following the dissolution of the Barebones Parliament.[148] One of Powell's closest friends was none other than Christopher Feake, another of Emmanuel's militant sons, who is remembered as 'one of the most loquacious and virulent' of the Fifth Monarchists. Sterry is known to have met with Feake after Cromwell had failed to secure his loyalty, presumably in the hope that Sterry's millenarian credentials—and possibly familiarity with Feake—might help to reconcile this Feake to the government's side.[149] Although no record of their conference has survived, it is tempting to speculate that Sterry and Feake might have traded Cambridge reminiscences as well as prophecy.

Sterry's universalism, which Wallace sees as Sterry's 'most notable connection to radicalism', places him in the select company of a handful of figures who 'denied the existence of eternal punishment' at the time.[150] This facet of Sterry's thought, which has received more attention than any other, is revealed in his unpublished treatise, 'That the State of wicked men after this Life is mixt of evill, & good things', where he affirms that salvation is 'confirmed to be most universall', including 'the falne Angells as well,

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[145] Matar, *Select Writings*, 5.
[146] John Rogers, *A Tabernacle for the Sun* (1653), 15; Matar, *Select Writings*, 5.
[147] N. I. Matar, 'Peter Sterry and Morgan Llwyd', *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 2/8 (October 1981), 275-8; 'Peter Sterry, the Millennium and Oliver Cromwell', *Journal of the United Reformed Church History Society*, 2/10 (October 1982), 338-9; Wallace, *English Calvinism*, 55.
[148] Rogers, *The Fifth Monarchy Men*, 40-1.
[149] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 29; Wallace, *English Calvinism*, 55.
[150] Wallace, *English Calvinism*, 57; Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 177.

as the elect Ones' (EC MS 291, 150). While the explicitness with which this point is made here is not matched in Sterry's published works, it is consistent with what he has to say elsewhere about the transience of God's wrath and permanence of his love: 'The rain will be over; the storm will be pass't away. The sweet, and clear, the Golden, the Glorious smiles of Love will return after the Storm, and Rain. These will rest the Last in the Face of God, and upon thy Spirit. Wrath is but for a moment…Eternity is for Love' (RRR 385).[151] Like Blake, Sterry considers the view that 'God will torment Man in Eternity' (MHH4, E34) to be an error. Sterry's universalist soteriology has been studied in relation to that of his fellow Cromwellian chaplain, Jeremiah White (1629-1707), whose Preface to *The Rise, Race, and Royalty* 'suggests that his friend's influence on his thought and spirituality had been profound'.[152] Though it is impossible to be certain, Walker is probably right to assume that the 'Dying Saint' who confirmed the doctrine of *apocatastasis* to White was Sterry.[153] Through White, Sterry may also have exerted an indirect influence on Jane Lead and her disciple Richard Roach (1662-1730), who authored the Preface to White's *The Restoration of All Things* (1712).[154] Roach selected Revelation 14:6 as an epigraph to the work, bringing us right back to that 'characteristic trope and rhetoric of the everlasting gospel' which has been viewed by Thompson and others as so close to Blake's theological centre of gravity.[155] We shall return to Sterry's and White's universalist soteriology towards the end of Chapter 4 (where it will be used to shed light on the fate of Satan in Engraving 16 of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*), but for the moment it will be instructive to recapitulate the findings of this section.

Sterry's intimate association with Vane, theological affinities with Hutchinson, links to the Ranters, and identification with the Fifth Monarchists' political and military

[151] Quoted by Walker, *Decline of Hell*, 108.
[152] Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion*, 230.
[153] Jeremiah White, *The Restoration of All Things* (1712), 133-4; Walker, *Decline of Hell*, 105.
[154] Apetrei, *Women, Feminism and Religion*, 228, 231.
[155] Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast*, 24n3.

millenarianism, indicate that he is not quite the polite, otherworldly, neo-Platonist that Hill, Morton, and Thompson had in mind as a foil for their unrefined, artisanal, radical. What I have uncovered in this section lends weight to Wallace's view that 'Sterry was on the cusp between the more radical Independents and the yet more radical mystically inclined sectarians and free spirits', and should therefore 'be distinguished from the mainstream of disciplinary Puritans'; a judicious assessment which surely undermines his own classification of Sterry as a Calvinist.[156] If I were asked to locate Sterry on the theological map of the Commonwealth, I would either place him in 'the world turned upside down' or so close to the radical edge of Independency that he might fall into this melting pot of heterodox sectarianism at any moment. The thin, at times invisible, line separating Sterry from those freer spirits inhabiting the radical religious milieu of the Interregnum is more a matter of temperament than essential divergence in theological stance, although his repudiation of practical antinomianism might finally stop him from tipping over the edge. It has to be said, however, that if Sterry is to be excluded from the radical scene on this basis, then so should many other figures, including Winstanley, which would be to throw the baby out with the bathwater. Sterry's retention of holiness and the morality of the Law should not be allowed to obscure the fact that the majority of his key theological principles—contraries in divinity, free grace, enthusiasm, divine immanence, millenarianism, and universalism—are practically identical with those of the 'most extreme of the radically religious'.[157] In these crucial respects, the contours of Sterry's divinity closely follow those that we would expect to find in 'the world turned upside down', placing Sterry in close proximity to a recognised background for Blake's thought. What Sterry's affinity to the 'radicals' confirms, however, is that the picture of radicalism pioneered by Marxist historians and appropriated by Blake scholars has been

[156] Wallace, *English Calvinism*, 56.
[157] Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed*, 10.

too restrictively focused on the 'revolution which never happened', class, education, and politics, thus failing to detect 'Blakean' signals from outside its narrow range.[158]

Conclusion

It was observed in the Introduction to this dissertation that Pinto's discovery of striking parallels between Blake and Sterry might be treated with scepticism, and its importance for our understanding of the background to Blake's ideas not appreciated, until Sterry's purported affinity to Blake could be explained in terms of his proximity to a recognised context for Blake's thought. The purpose of this chapter has thus been to substantiate Sterry's preliminary credentials as a candidate for comparative study by situating him in relation to what is widely seen as Blake's primary intellectual setting: 'the world turned upside down'. After introducing this context and the consensus that Blake's work harks back to it, I drew attention to the difficulty involved in tracing any direct influence on Blake by writers of this period, with the notable exceptions of Milton and Boehme, both of whom Blake mentions by name. This offered an opportunity to put the genealogical method to the test. Through an exploration of Blake's divergent responses to Milton and Boehme, it was argued that the reason Boehme is a potentially more helpful resource for theological interpreters of Blake than Milton has nothing to do with their respective 'influence' on him, but stems from the fact that Boehme's theology anticipates Blake's, whereas Milton's diverges from it. By the same token, the reason Sterry deserves to be included in a discussion of Blake's intellectual antecedents is not because he influenced Blake, but because his theology prefigures Blake's, sharing its distinctive concern with contraries in divinity. With Sterry's leading credential as a theological precursor to Blake established, the chapter went on to address the second major objection likely to

[158] Hill, *World Turned Upside Down*, 15.

be levelled against his selection: his apparent distance from the radical religious milieu. We saw how, despite not initially seeming to belong to this environment, Sterry should not be summarily excluded from it for two main reasons: (1) he may actually be closer to it than first impressions suggest; and (2) the standard benchmarks for identifying Blake's forerunners are based on too narrow a view of 'the world turned upside down'. The standard picture of this environment in Blake studies was found to ignore an entire wing of educated 'radicals', while also minimising radicalism's theological component. These limitations were underlined by an extended investigation of Sterry's radical links, which exposed that, apart from his rejection of pantheism and practical antinomianism, Sterry's central theological principles are very close, if not identical, to those one would expect to find in the radical religious hinterland of the English Revolution.

While I have not sought to demonstrate that Sterry is the figure *most* congenial to Blake in the period, which is far too high a threshold, I hope this chapter has at the very least placed Pinto's proposal on a firmer footing, vindicating Sterry's selection as *a* credible candidate for comparative study in the process. Beyond that, it is hoped that it has also made a modest contribution to the explication of Sterry's divinity, not least its 'radical' orientation, as well as the development of an analogical method that could be used to justify the examination of other seventeenth-century figures. I am thinking here of the likes of John Everard, Ralph Cudworth, John Smith, and Jane Lead, who do fit the usual template of Blake's precursors but may have more to offer Blake scholars than meets the eye. Of course, identifying Sterry as convincing precursor to Blake only takes us so far: it does not explain how the similarities might have come about or tell us how well Sterry's work might function as a heuristic device for elucidating theological themes in Blake's corpus. The first question lies beyond the scope of this thesis, but the second lies very much in its purview, forming the heart of the following chapters, which

will test the effectiveness of Sterry's writings as an interpretative lens through which to clarify Blake's apparent dualism; a problem which has long exercised his interpreters.

2

The problem of ‘dualism’ in Blake’s theology

Introduction

Having substantiated Sterry’s credentials as a figure for comparative study, this chapter seeks to outline the problem in Blake’s theology that, I contend, Sterry’s writings can help to resolve. This centres on the apparent inconsistency between Blake’s celebration of ‘contraries’ and critique of negation on the one hand and presentation of an ongoing struggle between the divine and the satanic on the other, which has been interpreted by some scholars as involving a conflict between two ultimate principles or divinities.

The chapter opens with an exposition of the critical view I want to challenge, as set out most influentially by Leopold Damrosch and Morton Paley, namely, that Blake’s thought is ultimately dualistic in a metaphysical sense. It is argued that this perception goes back to Blake’s lifetime, as is illustrated by the journal of Henry Crabb Robinson (1775-1867). As I show, Robinson’s comments anticipate the arguments of Damrosch and Paley in several ways. First, Robinson notices the centrality of ‘dualistic’ themes, like the contrasts between nature and spirit, God and Satan, to Blake’s thought. Second, he picks up on Blake’s paradoxical claim that while the natural and satanic are opposed to the spiritual and divine, the former ‘realities’ do not actually exist, causing Robinson to regard Blake’s intellectual system as wildly inconsistent. Third, Robinson associates Blake’s purported endorsement of two principles with Gnosticism, an ancient religious heresy commonly identified with a radical dualism between matter and spirit, as well as belief in the presence of two deities, one perfectly transcendent and the other a hubristic

legislator and creator. Like Robinson, Damrosch finds a logical contradiction in Blake's thought between its monistic and dualistic tendencies, although Damrosch suggests that this 'discrepancy', and Blake's ongoing efforts to resolve it, lends his work a vigour and interest it might otherwise have lacked. If Damrosch presents the most robust and fully developed case for Blake's potent—if reluctant and inconsistent—dualism, Paley does the same for Blake's 'gnostic' affinities, claiming that his 'division' of matter and spirit, Jesus and Jehovah, becomes even more marked in his final works. Taken together, the dualistic interpretations of Blake put forward by Robinson, Damrosch, and Paley represent a major strand of interpretation which, I believe, has entirely misconstrued the various antitheses we find in Blake's work, not least the theological contrast between the divine and satanic with which this dissertation is primarily concerned.

The reason I consider dualistic readings of Blake to be flawed is presented in the second section, which further expounds Blake's doctrine of contraries. It is proposed that what distinguishes Blake's approach is the manner in which he treats the antitheses of life not as mutually exclusive entities, one of which seeks to dominate the other, but as coinherent aspects of one reality. Blake calls these interdependent pairings, the dialectic between which is essential to human (and divine) flourishing, 'contraries'. I contend that these dynamic, creative, polarities can be found at every level of Blake's work, which promotes the celebration, not abjuration, of the opposites at play *within* human beings and the world at large. Blake's dedication to a dialectical approach to the contraries of existence leads him to take issue with the tendency, identified as a central feature of traditional 'religious' discourse, to divide reality along moral (good/evil) and qualitative (sacred/profane) lines; a process he eventually calls 'negation'. As well as obscuring the complexity of each particular situation, Blake believes that the negation of certain key virtues, such as desire, has reduced Christianity to a religion of rational

restraint. To combat this situation, Blake takes the opposite extreme, joining the 'Devils party' and promoting the delights of energy (MHH4, E34), which does not mean that he is intent on eliminating order altogether. On the contrary, Blake's intention is to replace the ethical and qualitative divisions of mainstream 'religion', reflected in conventional morality bolstered by the concept of holiness, with a vibrant tension between contraries. In this case, it is highly unlikely that Blake is a dualist, as Damrosch and Paley contend, which leaves us with the challenge of developing an alternative to their ontological accounts of the (apparently) autonomous entities we find in Blake's poems and pictures.

In order to bring this problem into clearer focus, the chapter's last two sections take what is arguably the most conspicuous, and from a theological viewpoint certainly most significant, contrast in Blake's corpus—that between the divine and satanic—and subjects it to close scrutiny. This extended exposition of the divine/satanic antithesis in Blake's texts and images is intended to serve two functions in the argument as a whole: first, to show that one *does* find the kind of contrasting, even conflicting, depictions of divinity that could lend itself to a dualistic construal and, second, to provide a broad canvas against which the nature and extent of the correspondences with Sterry can be ascertained. The third section investigates Blake's divine principle, the Divine Body, in its epistemological and ethical aspects, forming the background for the comparison with Sterry in the first section of Chapter 3. The fourth section, which provides the context for the second section of the third chapter, focuses on the ethical side of Blake's satanic 'principle', the Selfhood. My rationale for devoting more time to the Selfhood than the Spectre, which is its epistemological equivalent, is simply that the parallels with Sterry are not as strong in this area, although one significant intersection on the 'intellectual' side of the satanic will be highlighted in Chapter 3, section 2 ('The Devil's Body').

1. *Dualistic interpretations of Blake: Robinson, Damrosch, and Paley*

Robinson: 'The same half crazy crotchets'

The view that Blake espouses the existence of two ultimate principles, and is therefore an ontological dualist, is one with a long pedigree in the reception of his ideas. Indeed, this perception existed even during his lifetime, as Robinson's diary, which contains the fullest record of Blake's conversation to have survived, reveals. One topic which crops up repeatedly in the journal, covering five meetings in the winter of 1825/6, is Blake's distinction between spirit and nature, God and Satan, which Robinson interprets as two independent, mutually opposed, realities, in spite of the fact that Blake (paradoxically) claims that the natural and satanic do not actually exist. This apparent contradiction leads Robinson to dismiss Blake's thought as hopelessly, indeed vexingly, inconsistent.

In their first meeting, on 10 December 1825, Robinson observes how among the 'unintelligible [sentiments]' which Blake was 'continually expressing' was his contrast 'between the natural & the spiritual world—The natural world must be consumed'. In this vein, Blake informed Robinson that 'Bacon, Newton & Locke are the three great teachers of Atheism…Satan's doctrine', defining atheism as any philosophy 'which assumes the reality of the natural & unspiritual world'. At the same time, Robinson also notes how 'on this & other occasions he spoke as if he denied altogether the existence of evil…It being sufficient to consider all things as alike the work of God', which does not seem to sit comfortably with his alleged espousal of two ultimate principles, nature and spirit, with the former being associated exclusively with Satan. This 'contradiction' causes Robinson to despair of ever being able to present Blake's ideas in any coherent manner: 'It is easier to repeat the personal remarks of Blake than these metaphysical

speculation[s] so nearly allied to the most opposite systems'.[1] This counsel of despair is one which, as we shall see, has been echoed by Damrosch.

A similar pattern emerges in their second conference, which took place a week later. Robinson's diary entry for 17 December opens on the resigned note for which the previous report had set the tone: 'I fear I shall not make any progress in ascertaining his opinions & feelings…there being really no system or connection in his mind all future conversations will be but varieties of wildness & incongruity'. What led Robinson to conclude that Blake's 'metaphysical' speculations were devoid of logical consistency in particular was what Blake had to say about Satan. When Robinson 'observed that [as] a child I thought the Manichaean doctrine or that of two principles a rational one', Blake 'assented to this…Yet soon after he denied that the natural world is any thing. It is all nothing and Satan's empire is the empire of nothing'.[2] The frustration Robinson felt at the inconsistency he perceived in Blake's simultaneous affirmation of Satan's 'reality' but repudiation of the existence of his dominion—the natural world—is reflected in the rather abrupt prose of the subsequent entries, which bear out Robinson's fear that 'all future conversations' will simply be variations on the same extravagant inconsistencies.

Robinson's report of their next discussion, on Christmas Eve, reads: 'A call on Blake…I read him Wordsworth's [incomparable] Ode which he heartily enjoyed—The same half crazy crotchets [about] the two worlds—the eternal repetition of which must in time become tiresome'.[3] So, it is clear that by their third encounter Robinson was becoming increasingly frustrated with Blake, not only for his supposed inconsistencies, but the obstinacy with which he held to these 'conflicting' principles. By their fourth meeting, on 6 January 1826, Robinson hardly considered it 'worth while to write down'

[1] BR 423, 424, 422.
[2] BR 426, 427.
[3] BR 429.

Blake's dialogue, it being 'so much a repetition of his former talk'.[4] In his entry for 18 February 1826, their final meeting, Robinson's irritation at Blake's conversation, which he had previously likened to a monotonous piece of music that repeats the same notes ('crotchets') over and over again, is reflected in his inclusion of a quartet of etceteras after the briefest of recitals: 'his philosophy he repeated—denying Causation asserting everything to be the work of God or the Devil[,] That there is a constant falling off from God—Angels becoming Devils…Every man has a Devil in him and the conflict is eternal between a man's Self and God—&c &c &c &c'.[5]

When Robinson came to revise his diary entries for his *Reminiscences* (1852), he provided an extended version of Blake's assertion of Wordsworth's 'atheism', which is worth quoting for its amplification of the 'two principles' leitmotif, which Robinson links to 'gnostic' heresy:

> The eloquent descriptions of Nature in Wordsworth's poems were conclusive proof of Atheism—For Nature is the work of the Devil[.] On my obtaining from him the declaration that the Bible was the work of God, I referred to the [commencement] of Genesis—In the beginning God created the Heaven & the Earth—But I gained nothing by this for I was triumphantly told that this God was not Jehovah, but the Elohim and the doctrine of the Gnostics repeated with sufficient consistency to silence one so unlearned as myself[.]

With the benefit of hindsight, Robinson has found a label to attach to Blake's position, even if he realises that Blake's alleged affinity to the 'Gnostics' might be at odds with his denial of 'the reality of the natural world'.[6] Yet, even three decades later, Robinson

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[4] BR 432.
[5] BR 435.
[6] 'Gnosticism' is an umbrella term for a spectrum of beliefs which were anathematised by the early church but continued to resurface during the Middle Ages in such elusive groups as the Paulicians, Bogomils, and Cathars. These beliefs centred on the idea that the material universe—in which human souls are held captive and from which they can only be liberated through *gnosis* ('knowledge')—is not the creation of the true God but an inferior divinity known as the *demiurge* ('craftsman'). Although the existence of Gnosticism as a discrete religious entity has been disputed, which some historians of ancient religion even calling for the abandonment of the category altogether, scholars continue to apply the concept to Blake, using it to distinguish his 'dualism' from mainstream Christianity. This approach is, however, highly misleading: dualistic modes of thought have been a central feature of much Christian theology down the ages, as the emergence of Satan as an autonomous opponent of the divine will attests.

is no closer to making sense of Blake's unconventional philosophy, 'in which…there can be found no principle, as there is no ascertainable law of mental association'.[7] What is remarkable about Robinson's detailed account of his meetings with Blake in the winter of 1825/6 is not only how it coincides with what we find in Blake's writings, but how closely it anticipates the views of later scholars.[8] In particular, the idea that in advocating the existence of two ultimate principles, one of which does not actually exist, Blake is an emphatic, if entirely inconsistent, dualist, has been repeated in modern Blake studies, which has also followed Robinson in linking Blake to Gnosticism.[9]

Damrosch: 'a dualist who wishes he were a monist'

Perhaps the most influential modern construal of Blake's thought along dualistic lines is that presented by Leopold Damrosch in *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (1980), the central argument of which bears an uncanny resemblance to Robinson's account, even if it adds considerable detail and critical reflection to the case for Blake's 'troubled dualism—his dualistic monism' as 'an inescapable feature of his thought'.[10] 'Despite years of trying earnestly to see the myth as philosophically coherent', Damrosch believes 'that potent contradictions lie at the heart of Blake's system and that the never-ending struggle to reconcile them gives his work its peculiar energy and value'. Like Robinson, Damrosch identifies 'inconsistencies' in Blake's thought which, he maintains, 'make it possible to quote passages on two or more sides of every important

[7] BR 701, 700, 692.
[8] The distinction between nature and spirit can be found, for example, in M26:44-6, E124; Ann. Words., *Poems*, 375, E666; [To] Thomas Butts, 10 January 1803, E723-4. In the first, Blake speaks of the 'Vegetable', which is often distinguished from the 'real' or 'eternal' (e.g. J77, 'To the Christians', E231), thus providing an analogue to the nature/spirit antithesis. Blake's contrast between 'the natural & the spiritual world' also finds a parallel in his error/truth opposition, as outlined in VLJ94-5, E565, where it is asserted that the 'Corporeal' (error) has no existence and will be consumed at the Last Judgement. Satan's association with nature is implicit in VLJ94, E565, and explicit in Ann. Bac. 75, E625.
[9] See the references for Gnosticism in n27 to the Introduction above.
[10] Leopold Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 175.

question'.[11] The area of Blake's thought most at odds with itself, Damrosch contends, is that concerning the existence of two ultimate principles. Thus, at the start of his chapter on 'The Problem of Dualism', Damrosch asks the question: 'Was Blake a dualist or a monist?' Although he recognises that the reason it is so difficult to provide a definitive answer to this question is because 'in certain respects Blake was both', Damrosch insists that Blake's devotion to the unity of reality (monism) is entirely eclipsed by his 'opposition' between the natural and spiritual realms (dualism), just as it was for Robinson:

> There is a consensus nowadays that Blake has nothing to do with conventional distinctions between mind and body, subjective and objective realms. Yet we constantly find him saying "The Natural Body is an Obstruction to the Soul or Spiritual Body," and that "Imagination [is] the real & eternal World of which this Vegetable Universe is but a faint shadow & in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more"…These passages—and there are scores of them—refuse to be rescued from the imputation of dualism.

In the light of this apparent contradiction, between Blake's repudiation of the Cartesian mind-body dualism on the one hand and contrast between nature and spirit on the other, Damrosch confidently proclaims Blake to be 'a dualist who wishes he were a monist'.[12]

Having identified Blake as a dualist, Damrosch picks up on something Robinson had also discerned: how Blake's 'dualism' is most peculiar in that it 'denies itself to be such by constantly defining half of the duality out of existence'. Blake's concept of the 'fallen body', which 'may be unreal in the technical Neoplatonic sense', but is 'far from being vague or shadowy', is discussed as an example. Assuming the 'fallen body' to be the *physical* corpus, Damrosch declares that 'Blake's ambivalence toward the body, and more generally his tendency to dualism, are not incidental ambiguities' but 'built into his philosophy'. While fully aware that Blake's devotion to contraries and claim that the

[11] Ibid. 3, 5.
[12] Ibid. 165, 166.

natural world is non-existent have precedents in earlier thinkers like Nicholas of Cusa (1401-1464), Boehme, and the neo-Platonists, Damrosch is oddly unwilling to explore the possibility that these specialists in 'mystical vision' may help to illuminate Blake's 'dualism', dismissing their dialectical thought as no less contrary to empirical reality: 'I do not deny that analogues to Blake's position may be found in Boehme and elsewhere; I deny that they make sense'. In exposing how 'Blake's monism wars with his dualism because he strives unceasingly to reconcile the desires of the heart', which tend towards unity, 'with the facets of experience', which reveal only division, Damrosch believes he is doing Blake a service: 'As human beings if not literary critics, we surely owe Blake the obligation of testing his myth against our experience of truth, which is no more than doing what he constantly begs us to do'.[13] Whatever one makes of Damrosch's claim, it is certainly true that in expounding what he regards as the 'potent contradictions…at the heart of Blake's system' with such perspicuity and expansive philosophical learning he has done Blake scholarship a service by consolidating the case for Blake's 'dualism', first made by Robinson a century and a half earlier. Even if we believe that he has only succeeded in 'Giving a body to Falshood [so] that it may be cast off for ever' (J12:13, E155), Damrosch's argument in *Symbol and Truth* is a leading example of that general interpretation which must be effectively rebutted by any scholar wishing to defend the essential consistency, and anti-dualistic character, of Blake's thought.

Paley: 'a monist who found his mythology entrapping him in a dualistic position'

Another notable example, dealing more explicitly with the contrasting depictions of the divine that are my primary concern, is Morton Paley's study of Blake's last works, *The Traveller in the Evening*, which, like Damrosch's monograph, makes a resolute case for

[13] Ibid. 168, 173, 175, 238, 243, 239.

Blake's ultimate, if reluctant, dualism. While Paley's main interest lies not with Blake's indebtedness to Gnosticism, his examination of the great works produced in the twilight of Blake's career does advance the view, first articulated by Robinson, that 'Blake had a temperamental affinity for Gnosticism' which 'increased in his very late works'. The thesis at the heart of Paley's book is that, in his final decade, Blake oscillated between 'opposed tendencies to divide and to reconcile God the Father and God the Son', so that Blake's late creations range from the 'highly individual Christianity' of the *Illustrations of the Book of Job* and *The Ghost of Abel*, where 'a major theme is the unity of Jehovah and Jesus', to the full-blown 'Manichaeism' of *The Everlasting Gospel*, *Laocoön*, and Thornton annotations.[14] Despite the element of gradation in Paley's account, it is clear that, like Robinson and Damrosch, he believes Blake's leading tendency to be to divide, not reconcile, such 'antithetical' realities as Father and Son, Satan and Christ, body and soul, matter and spirit, very much to the detriment of the first constituent of these binary 'oppositions'. As Paley observes in relation to Blake's hostile response to Thornton's version of Matthew 6:11 ('Grant unto *me, and the whole world*…an abundant supply of *spiritual* and *corporeal* bread'), 'Blake characteristically opposes [the] "corporeal" and "spiritual" rather than linking them'.[15]

That when Paley refers to the contrast between the 'corporeal' and 'spiritual' he has in mind the distinction between material and immaterial realities is indicated by his interpretation of emblem 6 of 'The Keys of the Gates' (the fifty line poem which Blake included in his revised version of *The Gates of Paradise*). In the light of the poem's allegedly 'pessimistic view of material existence', Paley argues that the danger Blake is seeking to draw attention to is the possibility that the human soul, clothed by the divine mercy in 'garments of flesh', might mistake these physical ('gendered') robes for their

[14] Manichaeism is a dualistic religion of Persian origin closely associated with Gnosticism.
[15] Morton D. Paley, *The Traveller in the Evening: The Last Works of William Blake* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 7, 178, 219, 291.

'true identities'.[16] Again, in his account of Blake's criticism of Joseph Priestley in *The Everlasting Gospel* ([k]37-8, E519), Paley claims: 'the Unitarian is condemned, despite his opposition to arbitrary government, presumably because he taught the identity of matter and spirit—a view that might have been congenial to the Blake of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* but decidedly not to the Blake of *The Everlasting Gospel*'.[17] Blake, in other words, being 'freed...from his own "System"' and 'like many of us…capable of holding contradictory attitudes at different times or even at the same time', had changed his mind about the relationship of body to soul to such a great extent between 1790 and (about) 1818 that Priestley's assumed political affinity to Blake became less important to him than Priestley's abolition of the dividing line between the material and spiritual. For Paley, then, *The Everlasting Gospel* is a poem in which 'physical existence is viewed as entirely negative' and 'Jesus' triumph…is achieved at the cost of Blake's completely separating matter and spirit', with the 'Body of Clay' being linked directly to Christ's 'material body'.[18] So, when Blake alludes to Isaiah's 'millennial prophecy', 'dust shall be the serpent's meat' (65:25), in line 95 ([f], E523), his eschatological vision departs from his prophetic forebear's, which envisages 'a reborn world populated by joyful human beings', in being 'so dissociated from the mortal [i.e. physical] body that he leaves it to the Serpent'—a position which Paley, unsurprisingly, regards as 'very close to the Gnostic's view of a complete separation of matter and spirit'.[19]

So far as Blake's identification of the Father or 'god of this world' with Satan in the Epilogue to 'The Keys of the Gates' (E269) is concerned, while Paley is fully aware that the concept 'need not' be Manichean, given its Pauline derivation (2 Cor. 4:4), he still insists that Blake's version, because it equates this satanic deity with the *Christian*

[16] Ibid., 13.
[17] Ibid. 185.
[18] Ibid., 219, 195.
[19] Ibid., 195.

God, is 'entirely congruent' with the beliefs of the Gnostics.[20] Blake's alleged 'affinity for Gnosticism' reaches its pinnacle, for Paley, in the final line of his own version of the Lord's Prayer—'For thine is the Kingdom & the Power & the Glory & not Caesars or Satan's' (E669)—which is described as being 'unabashedly Gnostic and Manichaean' in perspective, 'which is not to say that he had been reading books on those subjects but rather that…those attitudes came to life again in him'.[21] So, while there are exceptions, the visionary universe of Blake's late creations is, in Paley's eyes, a radically *dualistic* one, in which 'Law, Serpent, Hell, and bodily existence are all negative and only the Spiritual breath Divine is positive'.[22] In this case, works like the *Laocoön* and Thornton annotations are much more representative of the senior Blake in their uncompromising display of 'gnostic' attitudes than ones like the *Job* series and *The Ghost of Abel*, where there remains an 'urge to reconcile seemingly opposed aspects of the divine'.[23] In terms of its ontological understanding of the contrasts we find in Blake, Paley's *The Traveller in the Evening* is congruent with the views of Robinson and Damrosch, sketched above. While it is clearly Blake's 'dualism' which emerges triumphant in this study of Blake's last works, Paley never repudiates his claim, stated in an essay thirty years earlier, that 'Blake was a monist who found his mythology entrapping him in a dualistic position'.[24]

The dualistic interpretations of Blake put forward by Robinson, Damrosch, and Paley are in many ways admirable attempts to make sense of the various contrasting, and at times (apparently) conflicting, entities we find in his texts and images. One set of such tensions, relating to Blake's distinction between the divine and the satanic, will be explored at length in the third and fourth sections of this chapter. In so far as they draw

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[20] Ibid., 18.
[21] Ibid., 295.
[22] Ibid., 192.
[23] Ibid., 201.
[24] Morton D. Paley, 'The Figure of the Garment in *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*', in Stuart Curran and Joseph Wittreich (eds.), *Blake's Sublime Allegory: Essays on 'The Four Zoas', 'Milton', and 'Jerusalem'* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 123.

attention to, and clarify, these tensions, the accounts we have studied above are valuable contributions to the elucidation of Blake's intellectual system. To the extent that they explain these 'oppositions' in ontological terms, however, they are severely detrimental to our understanding of Blake's thought. What undermines their plausibility more than anything else is their incompatibility with *the* defining feature of Blake's entire project: its persistent celebration of 'contraries' and critique of negation, to which we now turn.

2. *Blake's doctrine of contraries*

If one were asked to describe in one word the quality which gives Blake's poetry and art its distinctive flavour, it would be difficult to think of a more fitting one than 'contraries'. While it is the case that all writers and artists are concerned, to some extent, with the essential dualities inherent in existence—birth and death, love and hate, truth and falsehood, happiness and sadness, beauty and deformity—Blake is exceptional for the thoroughness with which he probes these contrasts, making them the centrepiece of his life's work. As Jonathan Roberts recognises, the 'dynamic relationship between contraries is one of the structuring themes in Blake's art'.[25]

What sets Blake's approach apart, as we have already seen, is the manner in which he treats antitheses (particularly those of Christian discourse, such as Heaven and Hell, time and eternity, body and soul, divinity and humanity, infinite and finite) not as binary opposites, one of which overshadows the other, but *necessary counterparts* or 'contraries', the creative interplay between which is the animating principle of his entire system.[26] One could say that Blake harnesses the momentum generated by the vigorous interaction—or dialectic—between polarities to propel his visionary universe 'forward

[25] Jonathan Roberts, *William Blake's Poetry: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2007), 39.
[26] Hazard Adams, *Thinking Through Blake: Essays in Literary Contrariety* (Jefferson: McFarland, 2014), 8.

irresistible from Eternity to Eternity' (J98:27, E257), just as the potency between the positive and negative poles of a magnet can be exploited to drive a motor.

This 'dialectical' strategy can be discerned at every level of Blake's work. It is evident in the production of his illuminated prophecies, forged through a pioneering process of relief-etching which not only enabled Blake to reconcile the spontaneous art of drawing with the deliberate craft of engraving, but also to overcome the division of labour between the printing of words and images—a longstanding feature of the publishing industry—in a single turn of his star-wheel rolling press.[27] Once a complete work had been fashioned using this method, Blake might create an entirely new piece to act as a counterbalance, as in the case of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, thereby establishing a lively contrariety between divergent parts of a single creation. By binding *Innocence* and *Experience* together, Blake illustrates how far from being discordant the 'Two Contrary States of the Human Soul' (E7) can productively sit side by side. As he expresses in 'Auguries of Innocence', 'Man was made for Joy & Woe/ And when this we rightly know/ Thro the World we safely go/ Joy & Woe are woven fine/ A Clothing for the soul divine' (56-60, E491). The more elaborately mythological books dramatise this tension between contraries as the struggle between antagonistic, but ultimately mutually interdependent, characters, like Los and Urizen, Jerusalem and Vala, Jehovah and Elohim. As we saw in the previous chapter, Milton, Shakespeare, and Chaucer are joined by Bacon, Newton, and Locke at the climax of *Jerusalem*, showing how Blake always strived for the integration, but not amalgamation, of contrary human impulses.

It seems entirely likely that Blake's early experience as an apprentice engraver, during which time the reversal of images and mirror writing would have become second nature, left an indelible mark on his intellectual constitution, leading him to think

[27] Joseph Viscomi, 'Illuminated Printing', in Morris Eaves (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to William Blake* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 41.

intuitively in terms of inversions, reflections, antitheses, and symmetries. As Peter Ackroyd proposes, 'It is perhaps not unreasonable that a man who can write fluently in both directions might be intrigued by the concepts of "opposition" and "contraries"'.[28] While it is entirely possible that Blake had been reflecting on, and experimenting with, contraries since his teens, it took him until his thirties to distil his dialectical principle in a succinct 'thesis statement'. This declaration, quoted in Chapter 1, is presented in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*; a work whose title perfectly encapsulates its core theme: the joining, but not merging, of formerly isolated entities in a reciprocal 'union'. In the first prose section, we find the definitive expression of the principle which can be seen as the 'golden string' promising to lead the one who winds it 'into a ball…in at Heavens gate' (J77, E231): 'Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Existence' (3, E34). It is evident from this statement that Blake does not regard contraries as mutually exclusive entities, but coinherent polarities within *one* reality, namely existence itself. 'Life', as George Digby expounds Blake's doctrine of contraries, 'springs into being between the play of opposites, the opposites are both real and must eternally endure. But life, reality, lies in neither contrary. It is the ever-living youthful third which springs from them'.[29]

Blake's devotion to this principle leads him to contest the tendency to bifurcate reality along the lines of 'good' and 'evil', 'pure' and 'polluted', which consecrates one side of existence while demonising its necessary contrary. This process of splitting the contraries, whether morally or qualitatively, and demanding the total subjugation of one contrary by another, which Blake would later designate 'negation', is identified in *The Marriage* as a deep-seated component of the 'religious' (by which he means primarily Christian) mindset: 'From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil.

[28] Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (1995; London: Folio Society, 2008), 48.
[29] George Wingfield Digby, *Symbol and Image in William Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1957), 39.

Good is the passive that obeys Reason[.] Evil is the active springing from Energy. Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell' (3, E34). In this passage, Blake contends that 'one of the basic errors of orthodox religious rhetoric is to conceive good as *passive*, or…purely reactive and thus dependent on evil'.[30] By associating the divine life exclusively with stasis and the infernal with activity, the 'religious' effectively divorce the contraries of reason and energy, denying the latter. In so doing, they not only write half of life (not to mention God!) out of the equation, but also reduce the remaining half by conceiving it as wholly reactionary. This insight, as we have seen, is at the heart of Blake's critique of Miltonic divinity. Blake realised that to tether indispensible contraries like restraint (reason) and desire (energy) to universal ethical norms is to detach them from the concrete reality of particular situations.[31] This point is expanded upon in *Jerusalem*:

> And this is the manner of the Sons of Albion in their strength
> They take the Two Contraries which are calld Qualities, with which
> Every Substance is clothed, they name them Good & Evil
> From them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation
> Not only of the Substance from which it is derived
> A murderer of its own Body: but also a murderer
> Of every Divine Member: it is the Reasoning Power
> An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing
> This is the Spectre of Man: the Holy Reasoning Power
> And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation
> (J10:7-16, E152-3)

Put more simply, what Blake is suggesting here is that to move 'from Particulars to Generals' (M4:37, E97) is to lose sight of, even murder, the complexity of the world. In the case of reason and energy, to divide and reify these contraries by affirming the first as invariably 'right' and denouncing the second as universally 'wrong' is to refute the

[30] Rowan Williams, '"The human form divine": Radicalism and Orthodoxy in William Blake', in Zoë Bennett and David B. Gowler (eds.), *Radical Christian Voices and Practice: Essays in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 154. Italics Williams'.

[31] The normative status of such a strategy in contemporary theological ethics is suggested by Nigel Biggar's introductory comment to his apologia for military action, *In Defence of War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 4: 'Much of the discussion that follows is abstract, as thinking must be. Thinking seeks to make sense of things, to order them; and this requires standing back—abstracting—from the immediate experience of concrete particulars'.

possibility of a passive evil, like turning a blind eye to the theft of a bicycle, or for that matter an active good, such as jumping into the sea to save someone's life; actions which are themselves not inevitably despicable or commendable regardless of context.

Hazard Adams suggests that Blake developed his doctrine of contraries in two stages, the first represented by *The Marriage* and the second by *Milton* and *Jerusalem* (if this is what he means by 'the later works'). In the first phase, Blake stressed the need to resist the tyranny of abstractions such as 'good' and 'evil', 'sacred' and 'profane'. In the second, he introduced the idea of 'negation', applying it to such dualistic categories, combatting them with what Adams calls 'true contraries'. Such an authentic contrary 'would not seek tyrannic victory and annihilation of its "cloven" opposite, but would exist in a state of intellectual war or dialectical conversation with it' and thus counter the 'dominance of either side, even its own'.[32] Thus, to take the example of war, Blake opposes two kinds of conflict: military combat and intellectual contention or 'Mental Fight' (M1, E95). The first is a negation, as it seeks to subjugate the enemy; the second a true contrary, which strives to engage the 'opponent' in a constructive conversation.[33] The second stage in the development of Blake's doctrine of contraries is exemplified by statements which *spell out* this distinction; for instance, 'Contraries are Positives/ A Negation is not a Contrary' (M30, E129) and 'Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist:/ But Negations Exist Not' (J17:33-4, E162). These articulate that while negations are diametrically opposed, and therefore purely negative, contraries coexist in a state of perpetual 'strife', which is never settled by the repression of one party by the other. To give another example, this time based on *The Marriage*, a passive 'love' that thrives only in the absence of hatred is a negation, whereas an active love that contends with the potential for enmity in any relationship is a true contrary.

[32] Hazard Adams, '*Jerusalem*'s Didactic and Mimetic-Narrative Experiment', *Studies in Romanticism*, 32/4 (Winter 1993), 631.
[33] Hazard Adams, *The Offense of Poetry* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007), 15.

While it is the case that the *explicit* distinction between contraries and negations is a later development, it would be misleading to assume that it is not already present *implicitly* in *The Marriage*. Indeed, the tactic of counteracting negations with contraries can already be discerned in *There is No Natural Religion*, created a year or two earlier. The first part of this work (a) presents six propositions arising from empiricism, the philosophical principle that knowledge is derived entirely through sensory data, which Blake considered to neglect the role of imagination in discernment. The second part (b) opposes these axioms with seven counter assertions in favour of Blake's dialectical view that experiment and intuition *both* have an essential part to play in the concurrent perception/production of reality: 'If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character. the Philosophic & experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again' (NNR[b], E3). Already at this early stage of his career, then, Blake's instinct was not to annihilate the 'cloven'—dualistic—opposite to his contrary, but to incorporate it into his dialectical synthesis.

The same method of opposing negative dichotomies with positive contraries can also be seen on plate 4 of *The Marriage*. Here the 'Devil' voices three dualistic 'Errors' before offsetting, but not suppressing, them with three productive 'Contraries':

> All Bibles or sacred codes. have been the causes of the following Errors.
> 1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul.
> 2 That Energy. calld Evil. is alone from the Body. & that Reason. calld Good. is alone from the Soul.
> 3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.
> But the following Contraries to these are True
> 1 Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that calld Body is a portion of Soul discernd by the five Senses. the chief inlets of Soul in this age
> 2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.
> 3 Energy is Eternal Delight
>
> (E34)

The first group of maxims relate to negations stemming from the improper use of holy books as 'sacred codes'—that is as definitive handbooks of dogma and morality, rather than anthologies of 'Sentiments & Examples' (Ann. Wat. 22, E618): that human beings are composed of two separate parts, usually referred to as 'body' and 'soul'; that vitality ('energy'), which is evil, relates only to the body, whereas restraint ('reason'), which is good, pertains exclusively to the soul; and that everlasting torment awaits those who pursue their bodily desires, with the implication that those who restrain their passions in this life can look forward to eternal pleasure in the next. The following set of aphorisms present the Blakean contraries or 'friendly opposites' ('Opposition is true Friendship', MHH20, E42) to these negations: that those realities habitually designated 'body' and 'soul' are in fact two aspects of the same person; that dynamism and regulation, neither of which ought to be equated wholly with good or evil, are complementary; and that the exercise of desire brings no consequence other than perpetual joy.

Two things should be made clear at this stage. The first is that although Blake deliberately sides with the 'Devils party' (MHH6, E35) this does *not* mean he is intent on abolishing all restraint whatsoever. R. D. Stock reminds us that 'Blake's "Satanism" is ironic, his language satirical, sedulously hyperbolic. He is out to shock, and he sides with the tigers because the tigers are the underdogs'.[34] Blake's 'diabolical' or 'infernal method' (MHH14, E39) is not intended to eliminate rational constraint outright but to replace what the 'religious' habitually classify 'good' and 'evil', 'sacred' and 'profane', by a *dialectic* between contraries. The strategy Blake adopts for achieving this end of redressing the imbalance that has historically existed between the rational and energetic aspects of existence is to take the opposite extreme for polemical effect. Jacob Taubes' account of apocalypticism offers an illuminating commentary on the nature of Blake's

[34] R. D. Stock, *The Holy and the Daemonic from Sir Thomas Browne to William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), 353.

aim in *The Marriage* and doctrine of contraries in general: 'Depending on the situation and the task, only one of the two components emerges, but neither can be absent. If the demonic, destructive element is missing, the petrified order, the prevailing positivity of the world cannot be overcome. But if the "new covenant" fails to shine through in this destructive element, the revolution inevitably sinks into empty nothingness'.[35] It is because of the situation Blake confronted, the supremacy of constraint over desire in the mainstream Christianity of his day, that he foregrounded the latter; but in reality both are vital to each other. Blake's stated position, after all, is that energy ('the demonic, destructive element') *and* reason (what Taubes refers to here as the 'new covenant' and elsewhere as the 'telos of revolution') are essential to human existence. This is not to deny that Blake's personal preference is for liberty ('Damn. braces: Bless relaxes', MHH9, E37), but to say that his doctrine of contraries dictates that his ultimate goal is not to reverse the dominance of reason over energy but to set up a dynamic equilibrium between the two. This object is nowhere better achieved than in his illuminated books, which channel 'the infinite drive of energy into clearly defined, sometimes tiny, images and words, which can together communicate the Poetic Genius'.[36]

In order to give a rounded picture of Blake's position it would thus be necessary to balance his contention that 'If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character. the Philosophic & experimental would soon be the ratio of all things & stand still' with his claim that 'the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea received the excess of his delights' (MHH16, E40). In this case, while Blake would likely have endorsed John Bowker's proposal that 'the point of the protected or even closed circle' which those in power see 'as their responsibility to monitor and maintain' is to 'make it

[35] Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, tr. David Ratmoko (1947; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 10.
[36] Christopher Rowland, 'Blake: Text and Image', in Stephen Prickett (ed.), *The Edinburgh Companion to the Bible and the Arts* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014), 320.

possible for people to transcend it', he would not have wanted to deny the importance of the 'boundary of the circle' so long as its conservation does not become '*an end in itself*'.[37] On the contrary, as plate 16 of *The Marriage* makes clear, Blake is a champion of the circle's boundary; nowhere more so than in *A Descriptive Catalogue*, where he delineates his 'golden rule': 'The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art…Leave out this [line] and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist' (64-5, E550). So, no matter how much Blake's works are concerned with exceeding the boundedness of the 'closed circle', his own inclination is certainly not towards formlessness, but the circumscription of energy by that 'Lineament [which] is not formed by Chance [but] is a Line in its Minutest Subdivision[s] Straight or Crooked…[and is] Not Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else' ([To] George Cumberland, 12 April 1827, E783).

It is also the case that Blake is not denying the utility of a distinction such as body/soul, so long as it is used as a heuristic device for making sense of the inherent complexity of reality. As I have argued, Blake's corpus is positively saturated with, and derives a great deal of its impetus from, contraries, whether these are Heaven and Hell, text and image, or infinity and boundedness. It is typical of Blake's approach that he does not abandon the body/soul contrast, but converts it from a dualistic opposition to a dialectical distinction (as is also true of the reason/energy antithesis; see MHH5-6, E34-5). It seems likely that the reason Blake chooses to reconfigure 'dualistic' language and imagery, rather than abandoning it entirely, is because of his enduring commitment to the Bible as the 'Great Code of Art' (L, E274). As Rowland explains,

[37] John Bowker, *Why Religions Matter* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 162. Italics Bowker's.

> Blake inveighed against dualism, but inspired as he was by the Bible, he could not get a form of dualism, namely, that way of seeing things by way of contrasts, out of his intellectual system…Indeed, it became central to his thought. He did, however, reject the way in which in the Bible contrasts were used to negate—holiness over profanity, clean and unclean, God over idols, and elect over reprobate—for these tended to negation rather than embracing contraries.[38]

So, although Blake fully endorses the use of contraries as an essential aid to reflection, he challenges the fiction that they have an existence *independent* of each other; a fallacy which invariably leads to a situation in which one side has complete supremacy over the other on account of its supposed monopoly on truth and virtue, providing a mandate to quash or even destroy its opposite number.[39] In *There is No Natural Religion*, the target of Blake's critique is the splitting of reality into subject and object, inner self and outer world, in Enlightenment thought, which he thinks leads to the deprecation of subjective experience. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, it is Christianity's customary division of the person into incorporeal soul and corporeal body, which Blake holds responsible for the denigration of the physical. A classic example would be Augustine's philosophy of mind, which influentially (if not originally: the idea derives from Plato's *Phaedrus*) taught that 'it is the function of the rational soul to control irrational powers…and that this controlling power defines the soul's proper relation to the body'.[40]

Blake's challenge to the concept of holiness, which Christian theology inherited from the New Testament no less than the Old, is a central component of his advocacy of contraries.[41] As well as reducing Christianity to a religion of conventional morality and restraint, the tendency to bifurcate reality along ethical or qualitative lines obscures the truth, stated in the 'Chorus' with which *The Marriage* ends, that 'everything that lives is

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[38] Rowland, 'Blake: Text and Image', in Prickett (ed.), *Edinburgh Companion*, 319.
[39] Hazard Adams, 'The Dizziness of Freedom: Or, Why I Read William Blake', *College English*, 48/5 (September 1986), 433.
[40] Gerard O'Daly, *Augustine's Philosophy of Mind* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 13.
[41] Christopher Rowland, *Radical Prophet: The Mystics, Subversives and Visionaries who Strove for Heaven on Earth* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 119.

Holy' (27, E45; cf. VDA8:10, E51; A8:13, E54; FZ[Nt.2]34:80, E324). By artificially designating certain times, places, buildings, objects, words, and actions as 'sacred' and others as 'profane', Blake believes that Christian orthodoxy hinders the discernment of 'the Infinite in *all* things' (NNR[b], E3; my italics). This requires engagement with, not condemnation of, 'the "contraries" in the human person, and also the wider world', as well as close attention to the 'minute particulars' (e.g. J38:23, E185) of each situation.[42] What is needed is not the kind of prescriptive, exclusive, religion described in 'The Garden of Love', where 'Thou shalt not' is written 'over the door' and 'Priests in black gowns' bind one's 'joys & desires' (E26), but that presented on plate 69 of *Jerusalem*, where holiness is not confined to the 'Inner Sanctuary' but is to be found in 'the Camp: in the Outline,/ In the Circumference: & every Minute Particular is Holy' (40-2, E223).

In the light of Blake's espousal of contraries and explicit repudiation of dualism, it is doubtful that he posits the existence of two separate, mutually opposed, principles, as Damrosch and Paley (following in Robinson's footsteps) maintain. If Blake did, then his thought would certainly be riddled with logical inconsistencies between his monism and dualism. Indeed, for a thinker like Blake, who devoted enormous energy, creativity, and technical skill to the promotion of a dialectical approach to life's contrasts, to be an advocate of a metaphysical brand of dualism, in which Christ and Satan, soul and body, are conceived as completely independent entities, would be contradictory to the point of perversity. It seems altogether more likely that scholars like Damrosch and Paley have misinterpreted Blake by supposing the binary terms and images he uses have the same meaning in his corpus as they do within mainstream Christian theology. That Damrosch recognises Boehme and Nicholas of Cusa as intellectual precursors to Blake, but refuses to take their dialectical approach seriously, suggests that he remains in thrall to the

[42] Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 215.

hegemonic stance of orthodox Christianity, which has been predominantly dualistic in orientation. This is all the more unfortunate given that Damrosch is aware that these figures 'wrestled with the problems that troubled [Blake]' and thus have the potential to 'shed light on his attempted solutions'.[43] If Damrosch had followed up this suggestion, he might have found the solution to the problem of Blake's 'dualism' right under his nose. Recognising that Damrosch and Paley are probably mistaken in their dualistic readings of Blake only takes us so far, however, leaving us with the pressing question: how *should* we interpret the polarisation of (seemingly) independent entities in his corpus which led them to this conclusion in the first place? To answer this question, it will be necessary to examine a prominent 'opposition' in Blake's corpus more closely. I have selected the contrast between the divine and satanic as a case study not only due to its centrality and theological significance, but because it encompasses such a wide range of the antitheses we find in Blake's texts and images. The next two sections seek to provide a thorough exposition of Blake's divine and satanic 'principles' respectively, with a view to building a richly detailed picture of their divergent features against which the correspondences and variances with Sterry can be ascertained in Chapter 3.

3. *The Divine Body*

Given that this section is concerned with providing an overview of Blake's divine principle, it is perhaps not surprising that a considerable amount of ground will need to be covered. A summary of the key points made, as well as the rationale behind their ordering, is therefore in order. As the word most closely associated with the divine in Blake, an investigation of the lexical scope of, and counterparts to, 'imagination' offers an appropriate way into the subject. The divinity of the Blakean Imagination, which is

[43] Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 6.

its most remarkable feature, is then illustrated with reference to its identification with the 'Divine Body'. This is not only the immortal element of every human being, but the cosmic Christ, whom Blake portrays as a communal reality, with epistemological and ethical aspects. Epistemologically, Christ is the highest mode of human discernment, which simultaneously perceives the unity of all things through the expansion of vision and their multiplicity through the contraction of the senses. Ethically, Christ is the ideal mode of human interaction, typified by forgiveness and brotherhood. I suggest that the two aspects of the Divine Body, which Blake invites his audience to enter, are integral to each other, being two sides of the same coin. Having outlined the central features of the Divine Body, I turn to its background in Paul's notion of the Body of Christ and the related Johannine concept of mutual indwelling. I deal with the Pauline context first for the reason that this probably informed Blake's general vision of the Divine Body, as the cosmic environment in which all things live, move, and have their being, whereas John provided him with a specific metaphor for expressing some of the Divine Body's more distinctive features, such as its 'idealism'. By investigating Blake's reception, in word and image, of the Johannine metaphor of Christ as the True Vine, I show how Blake equates the Imagination with the world of Forms, which is not a transcendent realm but the human mind itself, as well as illustrate the presence of the Divine Body in Blake's visual art, with special reference to one of his *Night Thoughts* illustrations.

'The Imagination which Liveth for Ever'

If there is one word in Blake's vocabulary that is more directly evocative of the divine than any other it is surely 'Imagination', which ordinarily refers to the capacity to form (and combine) images in the mind, particularly when the objects these images represent

are not present to the senses.[44] Although largely absent from the early illuminated books (with the exception of MHH12, E38-9, where the prophet Isaiah refers to the 'ages of imagination' when a poet's firm conviction was capable of moving mountains), continental prophecies, and Urizen books, the word begins to appear regularly from *The Four Zoas* onwards, featuring in all of Blake's subsequent writings: it occurs nine times in *Milton,* sixteen in *Jerusalem,* four in the *Laocoön,* and eleven in *A Vision of the Last Judgment,* as well as ten times in the letters and fifteen in the annotations. This suggests that the Imagination became ever more central to Blake's thought; which is not to say that the reality to which the term points is absent from his earlier writings. Here we are more likely to find analogous designations like 'Poetic Genius' (identified with the 'true Man' or 'Spirit of Prophecy', ARAO, E1, and, later, 'the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity', M14:1-2, E108) and 'Divine Image' (SIE, E12-13; Ann. Berk. 205, E663). Even in Blake's later works 'Imagination' is virtually synonymous with 'Inspiration' (DC5, E531) and 'Vision' (VLJ68, E554), both of which refer to that 'mystical'—that is surpassing reason and convention—mode of discernment epitomised by Hutchinson's 'immediate revelation', discussed in Chapter 1. Neither is it the case that the innate human power denoted by 'Imagination' is restricted to Blake's texts. As we shall see, it could well be argued that it is in Blake's pictorial art that the 'All Glorious Imagination' (J49:14, E198) comes most affectively to life.

What is most extraordinary about the Imagination in Blake, as I have already indicated, is the way in which it is accorded divine status, being presented both as the locus of the divine-in-human and the 'heavenly' world itself. By piecing together isolated statements from Blake's two great epics, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*; annotations to Berkley, Reynolds, and Wordsworth; infamous letter to Dr Trusler; the *Laocoön*; and *A*

[44] OED definition of 'imagination'.

Vision of the Last Judgment, it is possible to build a picture of how Blake developed an intricate, if largely suggestive, *theology* of the Imagination. What becomes clear is that Blake did not only consider Imagination to be the 'mind's capacity to generate objects, states, or actions that have not been felt or experienced by the senses': it was for him the ultimate creative reality, at once human and divine, individual and universal.[45] As the Seven Angels of the Presence declare in *Milton*, 'The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence itself' (32:32, E132). That Imagination is identified with *human* existence should not be taken to violate its divinity, for in Blake the human is inherently divine. Thus, when Rahab hatches 'Abstract Philosophy' on plate 70 of *Jerusalem*, her intention is to 'destroy Imagination, the *Divine*-/ Humanity' (19-20, E224; italics mine). Elsewhere, Blake equates the Imagination, present in '*all* men as the original, universal, and the highest phase of…human consciousness', with the 'Divine Image' (as noted above), 'Divine Vision' (M32:19, E132; Ann. Words., *Poems*, viii, E665; 375, E666), 'Holy Ghost' (Inscription, Illustrations to Dante: Design 7, 'Hell Canto 4', E689; see also Ann. Berk. 212, E663), and 'Real Man' (Ann. Berk. 212, E663; 241, E664).[46]

By far the most common association, however, is with the Divine Body, Blake's name for the Body of Christ. On plate 3 of *Milton*, for example, the bard proclaims that the 'Human Imagination' is 'the Divine Body of the Lord Jesus. blessed for ever' (3-4, E96); a line repeated verbatim on plate 5 of *Jerusalem* (59, E148). Later in *Jerusalem*, Albion laments, 'O Human Imagination O Divine Body I have Crucified [thee]', when he realises how he has been wandering in the 'Wastes of Moral Law' (24:23-4, E169). Again, on plate 60, Jerusalem bemoans how 'Babel mocks saying, there is no God nor Son of God/ That thou O Human Imagination, O Divine Body art all/ A delusion' (56-8,

[45] Chris Baldick, 'Imagination', in *The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms* (3rd edn., Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 165.
[46] Thomas R. Frosch, *The Awakening of Albion: The Renovation of the Body in the Poetry of William Blake* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1974), 153. Italics mine.

E211). In his annotations to Berkeley, Blake also calls Imagination the 'Human Eternal Body in Every Man' (203, E663), thus revealing how he considers the creative faculty to be universally present as the 'Soul or Spiritual Body' (Ann. Berk. 218, E664; 1 Cor. 15:44). This is one's 'Angel' (Ann. Berk. 212, E663), which survives the passing of the 'vegetated body' (FZ[Nt.8]104:37-8, E378; VLJ69, E555). As we shall see in the next section, the 'vegetated body' is not a person's *material form* but their *satanic Selfhood*. The immortality of the Imagination is also stated in Blake's address 'To the Christians' in *Jerusalem*, where Blake tells his audience about the 'Imaginative Bodies' in which they shall live after their 'Vegetable Mortal Bodies' have been removed (77, E231). It is this conviction which informs Blake's moving statement (his last on the Imagination), contained in a letter written just a few months before his death, that 'I have been very near the Gates of Death & have returned very weak & an Old Man feeble & tottering, but not in Spirit & Life not in The Real Man The Imagination which Liveth for Ever' ([To] George Cumberland, 12 April 1827, E783). This letter shows that Blake's faith in the divinity of Imagination remained steadfast to the end. But what exactly *is* the Divine Body with which the Imagination is identical?

'The Saviours kingdom'

As well as being the 'Spiritual Body' of each person, the Divine Body is also presented by Blake as a communal reality, in which all human beings participate, whether they realise it or not. Thus, in the *Laocoön*, Blake writes: 'The Eternal Body of Man is The IMAGINATION./ God himself/ that is/ the Divine body…Jesus we are his Members' (E273). This statement coincides with Blake's claim, recorded in Robinson's diary, that 'We are all coexistent with God—members of the Divine body—We are all partakers of

the divine nature'.[47] In both cases, we find that the Imagination is not only the 'Eternal Body' of every individual, as in the various texts cited above, but the corporate divinity itself. In making this claim, Blake goes well beyond Wordsworth and Coleridge in their respective attempts to define Imagination as 'reason in her most exalted mood' and the 'living Power and prime Agent of all human Perception…a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM'. For Blake, Imagination is not just a *repetition* in finite minds of an exalted or 'Supreme Reason': it *is* the 'infinite I AM'.[48] As he states in another annotation to Berkeley: 'Man is All Imagination God is Man & Exists in us & we in him' (219, E664). The divinity who *is* humanity, indwelling every person just as they inhabit him, is none other than the cosmic Christ, in whose universal Body all 'individuals' are incorporated without losing their distinctiveness.

It is this state of differentiated unity, identical with Blake's Eden or Eternity (the highest level of his 'fourfold vision'[49]), which is described in *The Four Zoas*:

> Then those in Great Eternity met in the Council of God
> As one Man for contracting their Exalted Senses
> They behold Multitude or Expanding they behold as one
> As One Man all the Universal family & that one Man
> They call Jesus the Christ & they in him & he in them
> Live in Perfect harmony in Eden the land of life
> Consulting as One Man above the Mountain of Snowdon Sublime
> ([Nt.1]21:1-7, E311)

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[47] BR 421.

[48] William Wordsworth, *The Thirteen-Book 'Prelude'*, ed. Mark L. Reed, 2 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), ii, 225; *The Collected Works of Samuel Taylor Coleridge*, vii: *Biographia Literaria*, ed. James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, 2 vols. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), i, 304; iv: *The Friend*, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, 2 vols. (1969), i, 156. I would thus dispute the claim of James Engell, *The Creative Imagination: Enlightenment to Romanticism* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1981), 244-56, that Blake's view of Imagination is congruent with the wider context of Romanticism.

[49] This is outlined in [To] Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, E722. According to Susanne Sklar, *Blake's 'Jerusalem' as Visionary Theatre: Entering the Divine Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 6-7, the four levels of perception correspond to Ulro, Generation, Beulah, and Eden/Eternity. An insightful account of Blake's fourfold vision is offered by Philip Pullman in his article, 'William Blake and me', *The Guardian* (28 November 2014): <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2014/nov/28/philip-pullman-william-blake-and-me> accessed 13 November 2017: 'Fourfold vision is a state of ecstatic or mystical bliss. Threefold vision arises naturally from Beulah, which, in Blake's mythology, is the place of poetic inspiration and dreams…Twofold vision is seeing not only with the eye, but through it, seeing contexts, associations, emotional meanings, connections. Single vision is the literal, rational, dissociated, uninflected view of the world characteristic, apparently, of the left hemisphere of the brain when the contextualising, empathetic, imaginative, emotionally involved right brain is disengaged or ignored'.

This passage, which recalls the descriptions of divine councils or assemblies in the Old Testament (e.g., Gen. 1:26-7, Ps. 82:1, and especially Job 1-2) is repeated with subtle but significant alterations on plate 34 of *Jerusalem*. This time it is Jesus himself, not the 'narrator', who addresses Albion directly in the first person plural:

> Mutual in one anothers love and wrath all renewing
> *We* live as One Man; for contracting *our* infinite senses
> *We* behold multitude; or expanding: *we* behold as one,
> As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
> *We* call Jesus the Christ: and he in *us*, and *we* in him,
> Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life,
> Giving, receiving, and forgiving each others trespasses.
> (16-22, E180; italics mine)

Apart from replacing the explicit reference to a divine council, variation in grammatical case (which is presumably intended to convey how what is true for the Eternals is also available to *all* human beings) and addition of punctuation, Blake substitutes 'infinite' for 'Exalted' as the term he uses to describe the collective senses of the Divine Body and changes the last line to emphasise the importance of mutual forgiveness (Mt. 6:14; Lk. 11:4). What remains constant, however, is how in a contracted state of discernment the divine members perceive *multiplicity*, whereas in an expanded mode of vision they view all things as an essential *unity*, seeing and living as a 'perfect harmony'. Through deliberate ambiguity, Blake indicates that vision and existence are identical: he moves from the divine members' act of perception ('We *behold* multitude') to their existential state ('we behold *as* one') without differentiating between the two.

The inclusion of a reference to the forgiveness of sins in the *Jerusalem* version is highly significant, for it suggests how coming to an awareness of one's membership of the Divine Body, which is for Blake the key to salvation, necessitates not only an epistemological but also an ethical change. Indeed, the two can be seen as necessary contraries without which there can be no progress. So, the realisation of differentiated

unity—the fourfold vision of Eden/Eternity—involves a particular *way of life*, in which the sort of unconditional, selfless, love usually reserved for relations and friends is also shown to strangers and even enemies, so that the whole of humanity becomes in effect one's extended family, 'brothers, sisters, sons, fathers, and friends' (J34:12, E180). As Blake expresses in *The Four Zoas*:

> In families we see our shadows born. & thence we know
> That Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love
> We fall on one anothers necks more closely we embrace
> Not for ourselves but for the Eternal family we live
> Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brothers face
> Each shall behold the Eternal father & love & joy abound[.]
> ([Nt.9]133:21-6, E402)

This is why the Divine Body is variously referred to as the 'Divine', 'Universal', and 'Eternal Family' (for the first see, for example, J33:1, E179; 36:45, E182; 91:19, E251; for the second FZ[Nt.1]21:4, E311; J34:19, E180), with another closely related term being 'Brotherhood' (J29:52, E176; 57:10, E207; 96:28, E256). The life of the Divine Body is not about personal illumination so much as the practice of charity; not because this is 'the moral thing to do', but because it is through compassionate acts, like praying for one's 'enemies' (Mt. 5:44; Job 42:10, illustrated in Engraving 18 of the *Job* series), that the Divine Image in humanity is made manifest: 'Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell, There God is dwelling too' ('The Divine Image', 19-20, E13). There is, therefore, a sense in which Blake seeks to do more than inform his audience *about* the Imagination: he hopes his readers/spectators will be inspired to step into the 'Saviours kingdom, the Divine Body', like the person about to walk into a dark doorway with a disk of light on the frontispiece of *Jerusalem*, so that they might be, with him, 'wholly One in Jesus our Lord' (3, 'To the Public, E145).

The New Testament background

Blake's vision of the Divine Body, outlined above, is probably informed by the Pauline concept of the Body of Christ, particularly as this is developed in Ephesians and Colossians, where we find a universal or 'cosmic' Christology, in which Christ is the all-encompassing and all-sustaining reality.[50] As Rowland suggests, 'Blake espouses an understanding of Christ which resembles Paul's, in which the historical Jesus of the gospels takes a second place to the Christ "in whom we live and move and have our being" (cf. Acts 17:28)'.[51] This cosmic element of the Divine Body can be seen in *The Four Zoas*, where Beulah's inhabitants behold Christ all around them ([Nt.8]100:14-16, E372), and *Jerusalem*, where the three spatial dimensions are brought into line with the Saviour (32:55-6, E179; compare Eph. 3:18). At the heart of Paul's vision of Christ, as C. F. D. Moule points out, is an insistence 'on his being an inclusive personality—one in whom believers find themselves incorporate'. In other words, Paul considers Christ to be 'more than individual: a plurality of persons can find themselves "in" Christ, as limbs are in a body'.[52] This corporeal figure emerges in texts like 1 Corinthians 6:15, 10:16-17, 12:12-31, and Romans 12:4-8, where the Christian community is identified with the Body of Christ and its individual constituents with his members. The emphasis here is on how the church's diversity does not preclude its oneness but, on the contrary, constitutes it, just as the many limbs of a body contribute to its integrated functioning. In this case, every believer has an essential, if distinctive, role to play in the church, so that the pain and joy of every 'single' believer becomes that of the corporate body as a whole. What binds that body, composed of countless individuals, together is love (Eph. 4:16). Whereas the focus in these passages is on the universal church, in other texts, for example Ephesians 1:22-3 and 2:15-22, the Body of Christ is equated not only with the

[50] It is, however, worth observing that Blake rejects the exclusivism of the cosmic Christ in these epistles.
[51] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 210.
[52] C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 49, 65.

Christian community but with a larger, universal, location, depicted as a holy temple or building, 'wherein the divine glory dwells'.[53] It is in this cosmic space, pervaded by the divine presence, that Christians reside, living, moving, and having their being, having been seated 'together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus' (Eph. 2:6). Blake's call to enter into the Divine Body, which is 'above; beneath: on all sides' (J13:54, E157) and 'remains Every-where For ever' (M22:2, E116), suggests that it was this cosmic aspect of the Pauline concept, particularly well exemplified by Colossians 1:15-20, that Blake found most conducive to his own theological vision.

Alongside the Pauline influence on Blake's theology of the Imagination, there is also indebtedness to John's Gospel which, as Grant Macaskill observes, 'contains some of the richest participatory language found in the New Testament'.[54] The Johannine theme of mutual indwelling, already encountered in Blake's note to Berkeley ('God is Man & Exists in us & we in him') and the passage on the 'One Man' in *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem* ('Jesus the Christ & they in him & he in them'/'Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him'), is absolutely central to Blake's notion of the Divine Body, as we shall see in our discussion of Engraving 17 of the *Job* series in the final chapter. For the moment, however, I want to consider a specific Johannine participatory metaphor—that of Christ as the True Vine (15:1)—which will allow us to explore a feature of Blake's presentation of the divine that has so far been neglected, its 'idealism', as well as study one of the hidden gems of Blake's *Night Thoughts* illustrations.

The Human Imagination as the World of Forms

It makes sense to begin by acquainting ourselves with the crucial text from *A Vision of the Last Judgment* where the image of Christ as the True Vine is deployed:

[53] Grant Macaskill, *Union with Christ in the New Testament* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 147.
[54] Ibid., 251.

> This world of Imagination is the World of Eternity it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body This World of Imagination is Infinite & Eternal whereas the world of Generation or Vegetation is Finite & Temporal There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see are reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the Divine body of the Saviour the True Vine of Eternity The Human Imagination[.]
>
> (69-70, E555)

There is a great deal in this statement that will already be familiar: the identification of the Imagination with the 'heavenly' world, the Divine Body which every person enters when their 'Vegetable Body' (Selfhood) passes away, has already been encountered in *Jerusalem*, the annotations to Berkeley, and Blake's letter to Cumberland. What is new is the claim that the 'Permanent Realities' of all things are present *in* the Divine Body, identified here with John's True Vine. Although Blake does not state so explicitly, the implication seems to be that the eternal Forms *are* the distinct branches of this cosmic plant, the members of the Body of Christ. This would be consistent with Los' assertion in *Jerusalem* that 'General Forms have their vitality in Particulars: & every/ Particular is a Man; a Divine Member of the Divine Jesus' (91:29-30, E251; see also M35:5-6, E135: 'Ideas…are/ The Divine Members'). But how are we to understand the 'Eternal Realities' (VLJ90, E562) that collectively constitute the Divine Body of Imagination?

The most important point to make is that Blake's eternal Forms or Ideas are *not* the same as Plato's, whatever George Mills Harper and Kathleen Raine have written on the subject.[55] As A. H. Armstrong reminds us, 'Plato's eternal Forms…are realities existing "themselves by themselves", independently of the minds which know them or the things which "participate" in them', being 'the unchanging realities which our mind perceives when it arrives at a true universal definition'.[56] Such a transcendentalist view would have been entirely unacceptable to Blake, who saw 'Swelld & bloated General

[55] George Mills Harper, *The Neoplatonism of William Blake* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1961), 80; Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, 2 vols. (1969; London: Routledge, 2002), ii, 195.
[56] A. H. Armstrong, *An Introduction to Ancient Philosophy* (2nd edn., London: Methuen, 1949), 37.

Forms' as 'repugnant to the Divine-/ Humanity, who is the Only General and Universal Form' (J38:19-20, E185) and baulked at the idea that anything can exist *outside* of the mind: 'Mental Things are alone Real…Where is the Existence Out of Mind…Where is it but in the Mind of a Fool' (VLJ94, E565). Although Blake's Forms are no less eternal than Plato's—'Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot/ The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife/ But their Forms Eternal Exist, For-ever' (M32:36-38, E132)—they definitely do not exist 'independently of the minds which know them or the things which "participate" in them'. On the contrary, Blake's eternal Forms are the innate essences that circumscribe the unique characteristics of every discrete entity, differentiating one creature from another. Blake's 'Imaginative Image' (VLJ69, E555) is, in other words, that 'line of the almighty' which, as we saw in the last section, is 'Not Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else'.

As the 'unique, determinate, and unchanging [specificities]' of all beings, the Blakean Forms, unlike the Platonic, are concrete and specific, not ethereal and abstract.[57] As he puts it in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 'the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce but Its Eternal Image & *Individuality* never dies' (69, E555; italics mine). It is this principle which leads Blake to assert the permanence of particulars, no matter how minute and (apparently) insignificant. When Los views Golganooza in *Jerusalem*, for instance, he surveys 'all that has existed in the space of six thousand years:/ Permanent, & not lost not lost nor vanishd, & every little act,/ Word, work, & wish, that has existed, all remaining still/…For every thing exists & not one sigh nor smile nor tear,/ One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away' (J13:59-14.1, E157-8). So, when Blake writes about the death of oaks, lambs, and lettuces, he is not describing their *biological* demise and regeneration, but their continual passing into non-existence and

[57] Ann Kostelanetz Mellor, *Blake's Human Form Divine* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974), 327.

return into being in each moment of time, as a perishable set of relations is sustained by a principle which is enduring. This insight is one which Blake develops in relation to sight in the *Laocoön*: 'All that we See is VISION from Generated Organs gone as soon as come Permanent in The Imagination' (E273). It is for this reason that Blake is convinced 'Man [must bring] All that he has or Can have Into the World with him'. If human beings were not 'Born Like a Garden ready Planted & Sown', they would inhabit that formless abyss described in Genesis 1:2 ('the earth was without form, and void'), for 'This World is too poor to produce one Seed' (Ann. Reyn. 157, E656). As Blake informs Lord Byron, 'Nature has no Outline: but Imagination has…Imagination is Eternity' (GA, E270).

There is no question in Blake, then, of the Forms coming from without, whether through the mind's participation in transcendent truths, as in Plato, or the purely passive reception of sensory impressions, as in Locke: they are directly discerned by the 'Eye of Imagination' (Ann. Berk. 219, E664). Like an improvising jazz musician, the creative faculty generates reality at the same time as experiencing it by drawing the 'bounding outline'.[58] 'It is not', as Damrosch elucidates, 'that our finite minds dimly perceive the universe that God thinks, but that God-in-us [the Imagination/Divine Body] both thinks and perceives the universe in a single…act'.[59] It is because Christ is the innate power which sows, cultivates, and ultimately is, the paradisiacal garden of the human intellect (M2:7-8, E96), planting it with the eternal Forms of all things, that he alone is the 'all in all,/ In Eden: in the garden of God: and in heavenly Jerusalem' (J34:24-5, E180). This vision of the Imagination as the ultimate creative reality, present in all human beings, is the reason Blake considers the 'Worship of God' to be the 'honouring [of] his gifts/ In other men: & loving the greatest men best, each according/ To his Genius: which is the

[58] Saree Makdisi, 'The Political Aesthetics of Blake's Images', in Eaves (ed.), *Cambridge Companion*, 117.
[59] Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth*, 24.

Holy Ghost in Man', there being 'no other/ God than that God who is the intellectual fountain of Humanity' (J91:7-10, E251). Nurturing one's Imagination and celebrating the Poetic Genius in others is, for Blake, an essential part of what it means to be human.

The Divine Body in Blake's visual art: an example

Returning now to the Johannine image of Christ as the True Vine, it is somewhat surprising, given the ubiquity of vines in Blake's art, that there is only one picture of Christ as the 'True Vine of Eternity' in his entire oeuvre: the watercolour illustration for Night IX of *Night Thoughts* (Figure 3).[60] This piece warrants consideration because it is one of the few depictions in Blake's corpus of Jesus as the Divine Body, constituted by his individual members. I will first describe the image before offering my interpretation.

The image itself surrounds a box, slightly off centre, containing lines 1928-47 of Young's poem (composed 1742-46). In spite of being marginally off balance, Blake has introduced a degree of symmetry into the composition by having each side of the design mirror the other, with two groups of figures visible in the lower left and right segments, two sets of bodies arching out from Christ's legs towards his outstretched arms, and a circle of light, composed of angelic figures, surrounding his head like a nimbus on both sides. The text-filled box covers all of Christ's body, apart from his limbs and head, as if it were his body. The figures at the bottom left of the piece are a pair of lovers, locked in an embrace, possibly kissing or touching faces, who mirror each other's poses, with arms overlapping and bent knees pointing to the left. Three enormous clusters of grapes surround them, as do the leaves and branches of the vine. On the lower right-hand side is a mother who seems to be breastfeeding an infant (the garment she wears is lowered

[60] *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's 'Night Thoughts'*, ed. David V. Erdman et al., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), ii, no. 512. On the ubiquity of vines in Blake's images see Rodney M. Baine, *The Scattered Portions: William Blake's Biological Symbolism* (Rodney M. Baine: University of Georgia, 1986), 155-8.

over her left shoulder), with an older child standing just over her right shoulder gazing outside of the scene. Only one massive bunch of grapes hangs in this section, nearly the size of the older child's body. Both groupings are rendered with expressive freedom and minimal outline, giving an impression of the fleeting states of human existence, perhaps innocence and experience. Immediately above the lovers, two figures emerge out of the side of Christ, one prominent and the other receding into the background. While it is not possible to be sure, it is likely that these are the same lovers, given that the treatment of the hair coincides: one being curly and the other straight. To the right of the box there is only one figure, who mirrors the curving contour of the figures on the left, reaching up to Jesus. Although the shape of their movement is reversed, these arching bodies recall the angelic figures in 'The Ascension' (*c*. 1803-5, B505 [Pl. 574]); the difference being that there Christ seems to be casting off his human robes rather than putting them on. As one moves further up the piece, the human forms become ever less distinct as they merge more fully into Christ or, more precisely, the light and vine he emanates. This is particularly evident in the angelic bodies which surround his head like a halo, recalling the infants that encircle the divine throne in 'The Vision of the Last Judgment' (1808, B642 [Pl. 870]). The way in which these figures blend into the rudimentary leaves and clusters of fruit suggests that the Divine Body is constituted by its individual members, with each person being a distinctive branch of the cosmic Christ.

What this extraordinary image conveys so effectively, perhaps more so than the texts we have examined, is how life in the Divine Body is about much more than simply comprehending a theological scheme in the abstract: it is about the lived experience of an ongoing quest for a unity-in-diversity held together by 'Fibres of love' (J4:8, E146), whether erotic, maternal, or all-embracing. Blake's Divine Body is not, in Cudworth's

words, 'merely a *Letter* without us, but a *quickening Spirit* within us'.[61] Detached study and critical exposition of the Divine Body is not enough on its own to gain redemptive insight, which addresses itself directly to the 'Imagination which is Spiritual Sensation' but only 'mediately to the Understanding or Reason' ([To] Rev. Dr. Trusler, 23 August 1799, E703). As Blake expresses in one of his Berkeley annotations, 'Knowledge is not by deduction but Immediate by Perception or Sense at once Christ addresses himself to the Man not his Reason' (214, E664). It would therefore be fatally reductive to consider this depiction of Christ as the True Vine, or indeed any of Blake's images of divinity, as a diagram of 'mental relationships' (J. G. Davies' description of Blake's mythological characters).[62] Instead, we would do well to approach it as an artistic representation of an *experience*, open to every human being, which the 'Spectator' is invited to enter 'on the Fiery Chariot of [their] Contemplative Thought' so as to undergo an epistemological and ethical conversion that will enable them to 'meet the Lord in the Air &…be happy' (VLJ82, E560; 1 Thess. 4:17). This unmediated vision of Christ is only available in the context of human relationships: the adoring couple and mother and child represent love in its various forms, while the painting as a whole exemplifies the intimacy that exists between the Divine Body and its members. It is, in short, a fitting visual counterpart to Los' instruction, with which I close this section, that 'He who would see the Divinity must see him in his Children/ One first, in friendship & love; then a Divine Family, & in the midst/ Jesus will appear' (J91:18-20, E251).

[61] Ralph Cudworth, *A Sermon Preached before the Honourable House of Commons* (Cambridge, 1647), 5.
[62] J. G. Davies, *The Theology of William Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 83.

4. *The Satanic Body*

Having expounded Blake's divinity, we must now do the same for his satanic principle, paying particular attention to the divergences between the two. My account of Satan in Blake's texts and images will broadly follow the contours of the preceding section, with one key difference: I will focus primarily on the ethical dimension (the Selfhood) while paying significantly less attention to the epistemological (the Spectre). Given that Blake uses the term 'Selfhood' in a technical, theological, sense which is incompatible with the modern understanding of the 'self', I start by outlining its etymology. Attention to the word's original setting reveals how the Selfhood, in contrast to the modern self, is an entirely negative entity: the human tendency towards isolation, attended by a desire to subject others in the cause of self-preservation. Once the basic meaning of 'Selfhood' has been established, I turn to its lexical scope, pointing out how the term is only found in three of Blake's later works. This does not mean, however, that Satan has a less vital role to play in Blake's theology than Christ, or that the harmful state of self-absorption which 'Selfhood' denotes is restricted to the word itself. Next, I argue that the Selfhood is presented, in contrast to the Divine Body, as the locus of the satanic in human beings, indeed Satan himself. In the course of presenting the evidence for the satanic nature of the Selfhood, its epistemological counterpart—the 'Spectre'—is briefly discussed. It is suggested that both aspects of Blake's Satan are represented on the cosmic stage by the transcendent, patriarchal, divinity, who demands absolute obedience. The argument for the Selfhood's identity with 'Satan', which is a state rather than a person, is reinforced through a consideration of Blake's serpentine imagery. Finally, it is proposed that what is most distinctive about the satanic Selfhood in Blake is the way in which it is depicted as a false body. This fabricated corpus, similar to Paul's 'body of the sins of the flesh',

is not the physical body but that egoistic (i.e. selfish) existence Christ puts off through his exemplary act of self-annihilation on the Cross.

Introducing the Selfhood

Quite unusually for a central Blakean term, the etymology of 'Selfhood' can be traced to a specific seventeenth-century work: Ellistone's translation of Boehme's *Epistles,* where it renders the German 'Selbheit'.[63] In the passage where it first occurs, Boehme's subject is the death to self. Enlarging on Galatians 2:20 ('I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me'), Boehme sets up a correlation between the demise of one's 'own will' and the birth of Christ in the soul, with the divine agency permeating the 'space' vacated by the Selfhood like air flowing into a vacuum:

> I can do nothing, I am dead to my selfe, but Christ doth it in me; when he ariseth in me, then I am dead to my selfe, in respect of the true man, & he is my life, and in that I live, I live to him & not to my selfehood; for grace mortifieth my own will, and setteth it self up for a Lord in the place of my selfeness, that so I may be an instrument of God, who doth therewith what he pleaseth.[64]

At first sight, this passage may strike the modern reader, who is accustomed to think of the self as something positive, to be cultivated rather than deprecated, as rather strange. It is, therefore, important to spell out immediately that Boehme does not have in mind that view of the self, as 'that particular being any person is, whatever it is about each of us that distinguishes you or me from others, draws the parts of our existence together, persists through changes, or opens the way to becoming who we might or should be',

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[63] Jacques Roos, *Aspects Littéraires du Mysticisme Philosophique et l'influence de Boehme et de Swedenborg au Début du Romantisme: William Blake, Novalis, Ballanche* (Strasbourg: P. H. Heitz, [1951]); Morton D. Paley, *Energy and the Imagination: A Study in the Development of Blake's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 154; Bryan Aubrey, *Watchmen of Eternity: Blake's Debt to Jacob Boehme* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 126; Sklar, *Visionary Theatre*, 32; OED.
[64] *The Epistles of Jacob Behmen* (1649), I, xxiii, 6.

which gained ascendancy in Western Europe from the seventeenth century onwards.[65] In fact, Boehme's Selfhood, which Blake adopts and develops, has little in common with that elusive, but generally cherished, 'self' which now tends to designate *personal identity*. That Boehme is not advocating the abolition of one's distinctiveness is implied by his assertion, in the statement above, that 'I am dead to my selfe', which replicates, while also inverting, Paul's paradoxical 'I live; yet not I'. In both cases, the expiration or continuation of the self ('my selfe'/'I') presents no impediment to the persistence of one's personhood ('I am'/'I live'). What this indicates is that 'Boehme believed that the Christian could possess an "Own-hood" which was not false, but which acted as the perfect embodiment of, or reflection of, the universal self'.[66] But what precisely is the difference between this 'Own-hood' and the Selfhood which must be mortified?

The distinction between Boehme's 'Own-hood', which is equivalent to Blake's Divine Body and the modern self, and the Selfhood is elucidated in *The Signature of All Things*, where Boehme describes the latter as being unaware of the divine life which the former presently enjoys: 'I live in God, and my Self-hood does not know it, for it lives not in God, but in itself (God is indeed in it, but it does not apprehend him) and hides the Pearl which I am in Christ'.[67] What this passage reveals is how it is possible for an individual to live at the same time *in Christ* and *in themselves*: in so far as they dwell in Christ they realise their 'true man' (an expression Blake borrowed from Boehme) or 'Own-hood'; to the extent that they reside in themselves they exhibit their Selfhood.[68] In the language of the previous section, Boehme's Selfhood is an individual branch of the True Vine or member of the Body of Christ *as it holds itself in isolation from the*

[65] Jerrold E. Seigel, *The Idea of the Self: Thought and Experience in Western Europe Since the Seventeenth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 3.
[66] Aubrey, *Watchmen of Eternity*, 129.
[67] Jacob Boehme, *The Signature of All Things* 12:17, WJB, iv, 99.
[68] Robert Rix, *William Blake and the Cultures of Radical Christianity* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2007), 15; Boehme, *The Signature of All Things* 15:36, WJB, iv, 129.

differentiated unity to which it belongs. It is this basic idea of Selfhood, as a 'tendency to separateness…with the consequent need to manipulate, oppose, and control others in the cause of self-preservation', which we find in Blake, who would never have denied the infinite value of personal identity, believing, with Boehme, that 'the multiplicity of real particulars is a necessary condition for the individuation of the divine'.[69]

Blake first introduces the vocabulary of 'Selfhood' in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, where spiritual autobiographies of Milton and Albion respectively furnish him with an opportunity to probe the concept. Apart from a cameo in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (92, E563), the word is found nowhere else in Blake's writings.[70] The closely related expression 'Self-annihilation', which ultimately stems from Boehme but may have been picked up by Blake via David Hartley's *Observations on Man* (1749), is similarly restricted to *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, with only two occurrences outside these works: one in *The Four Zoas* ([Nt.7]95:34, E368) and the other in *The Ghost of Abel* (2:19-20, E272).[71] So far as the terminology of Selfhood is concerned, then, the idea has a fairly limited range in Blake's corpus, albeit playing a central role in his two greatest epics. It would, however, be unfortunate to draw the conclusion from this that the satanic has a less important place in Blake's theological vision than the divine. This is because, when one factors in related (and in some cases analogous) entities like 'Adam', the 'Spectre', 'Rational Power', 'Natural Man', 'Body of Death', and 'Angel of the Divine Presence', all of which we shall encounter below, Satan's range is at least as extensive as Christ's. Neither should it be assumed that the adverse *condition* which the word 'Selfhood'

[69] Aubrey, *Watchmen of Eternity*, 127; Cyril O'Regan, *Gnostic Apocalypse: Jacob Boehme's Haunted Narrative* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002), 245n21.
[70] As Elisabeth Engell Jessen, 'Conversion as a Narrative, Visual, and Stylistic Mode in William Blake's Works', DPhil thesis, University of Oxford, 2013, 190-91, points out.
[71] Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 284.

designates, as well as the call for its extinction, is absent from the rest of Blake's work, not least his graphic art, where the Selfhood attains some of its most potent expressions.

The triumphant ego or 'I' in *Urizen* and *Genesis*

That the state of self-confinement to which the term 'Selfhood' points is present in contexts where the word itself is absent can perhaps best be illustrated with reference to two works, created over three decades apart, which accord a central role to the 'I' self in their respective verbal and visual renditions of the Fall: *The [First] Book of Urizen* (1794) and the *Genesis* manuscript (*c*. 1826-7, B828:1-11 [Pls. 974-5, 1084-92]). In the first creation, which, like 'The Clod & the Pebble' (E19), attests to the presence of the Selfhood in Blake's texts long before the term itself appeared, Urizen, who exemplifies the perils of Selfhood better than most of Blake's mythological characters, is presented as an abjectly lonely being, 'Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary' (2:4, E70). Like Lucifer in Isaiah 14:3, Urizen's abode is 'in the north' (2:3, E70). He is described as a 'shadow of horror', 'Self-closd, all repelling', existing as a 'self-contemplating shadow' (3:1, 3, 21, E70-1). Rowland observes how the 'isolation of Urizen, and the terrible coldness and self-absorption of a life turned in on itself…represents one of the key aspects of Blake's hermeneutic'.[72] This 'life turned in on itself', which is precisely what Selfhood is, is pathetically depicted in the opening chapters of *Urizen*, which recount how Urizen 'falls because he individuates, separating himself out from Eternity'.[73] Urizen's fallen life, if that word can be properly applied to such a painfully isolated existence, is one of self-centredness quite opposed to the reciprocity—'Giving, receiving, and forgiving'—characteristic of existence in the Divine Body. When Urizen narrates his 'heroic' deeds, the first person singular pronoun is continually on his icy lips, forming a doleful refrain:

[72] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 100.
[73] Laura Quinney, *William Blake on Self and Soul* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 52.

> First *I* fought with fire; consum'd
> Inwards, into a deep world within…
>
> And self balanc'd stretch'd o'er the void
> *I* alone, even *I*!...
>
> Here alone *I* in books formd of metals
> Have written the secrets of wisdom…
>
> Lo! *I* unfold my darkness…
> (4:14-31, E72; italics mine)

Blake's attribution of Urizen's fall to his act of detachment from the 'perfect harmony' of Eternity, through the foundation of his sovereign self or 'I', is mirrored in the depiction of Adam's fall in his illuminated *Genesis*, commissioned by John Linnell and left unfinished at Blake's death. This composite work combines the text of the King James Version (up to 4:15), including a 'generous sprinkling of minor changes', with Blake's own drawings and chapter headings, which offer 'some interesting indications concerning his interpretation of Genesis'.[74] What is significant about this manuscript from our perspective is how Blake presents Adam in the two versions of the title page (Figures 4 and 5), both of which set out the three radicals of the title—GE/NE/SIS—in a descending column. In their commentary, Mark Crosby and Robert Essick provide the following expedient description of the figure of Adam in the respective versions:

> [*Title page 1*]
> [Adam's] figure anchors the lower textual unit of the title, with the garment-like "I" covering his loins, literally clothing the representative of humanity with the Word of God.
>
> [*Title page 2*]
> Adam stands on the arc of a light green and yellow earth against a blue sky. The garment-like "I" both covers his loins and, as in lead I, serves as a rebus to identify Adam as the literal embodiment of humanity: Adam as the "I" of human identity.

[74] Robert R. Wark, 'Blake's Illuminated Manuscript of Genesis', in *Genesis: William Blake's Last Illuminated Work*, ed. Mark Crosby and Robert N. Essick (San Marino: Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, 2012), 18.

That it is the letter 'I' which covers Adam's loins is indeed significant, but perhaps not quite in the way Crosby and Essick imagine, for this focus on the ego is probably meant to evoke Selfhood.[75] There is, therefore, good reason to question their positive construal of the capital which hides Adam's 'Human Form Divine' ('The Divine Image', 11, 15, E13; M32:13, E131; FZ[Nt.9]126:10, E395; EG[f]66, E522) as the 'Word of God' or 'human identity'. A more credible suggestion is that the 'garment-like' character Adam wears is in fact his isolated self, which, as we shall see, Blake presents as a vestment or false body that conceals one's 'Real Self' (J77, E233). In this case, Blake is concerned from the very outset with singling out Adam's sequestered self or 'I' as the axis around which the story of division and alienation played out on the subsequent pages revolves. This reading is certainly more consistent with Blake's presentation of the Fall elsewhere as 'the rearing of [Man's] energies, isolated from vision, into an autonomous Selfhood which governs all his actions'.[76] The fact that *Urizen* and *Genesis*, produced at the start and end of Blake's career, exhibit such a similar concern with the threat posed by the triumphant ego suggests that the condition to which 'Selfhood' refers was an enduring concern, present even in settings where the word itself cannot be found.

'I in my Selfhood am that Satan'

One of the most distinctive features of the Selfhood, as I have already indicated, is the way in which Blake identifies it, in contrast to the Divine Body, with the satanic aspect of human nature, even Satan himself. This association is already evident on plate 14 of *Milton*, where 'Selfhood' makes its debut on the stage of Blake's dramatic poetry. Blake introduces the Selfhood as a distinct entity in a passage where Milton declares his intention to return to earth to annihilate his Selfhood and reunite with his Emanation in

[75] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 96.
[76] John Beer, *Blake's Humanism* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1968), 192.

anticipation of the Last Judgement. At the end of his speech, Milton proclaims: 'I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One! He is my Spectre!' (30-1, E108). It should be explained that the 'Spectre' with which Satan is equated *is* the Selfhood, as 'it begins to assume a life of its own, appropriating to its own use the energies of the individual'.[77] In particular, the Spectre is linked with the misappropriation of reason as an instrument for justifying, and realising, the Selfhood's desire for universal domination. The Spectre can therefore be seen as the Selfhood's epistemological counterpart, serving its interests with ruthless efficiency. This explains why the Spectre is presented elsewhere as the 'Reasoning' or 'Rational Power' (M40:34, E142; J10:15, E153; 54:7, E203; 74:10, E229; 54:15-16, E203; 64:5, E215) in human beings, by which Blake means reason *cut off from Imagination*. As the 'Reasoning Power', the Spectre is responsible for framing 'Laws & Moralities/ To destroy Imagination! the Divine Body' (J74:12-13, E229). It is therefore imperative that the Spectre be cast into the Lake of Fire (e.g. Rev. 19:20), not as a punishment, but a way of annihilating its *division* from the Imagination and thereby restoring the proper functioning of the creative faculty which has been eclipsed. Thus, on plate 39 of *Milton*, Albion is told to subdue his 'Reasoning Spectre' by casting him 'down into the Lake…that ever burneth with fire' (10-12, E140). Similarly, in the scroll visible on plate 37 of *Jerusalem*, the following lines are printed backwards: 'Each Man is in his Spectre's power/ Untill the arrival of that hour,/ When his Humanity awake/ And cast his Spectre into the Lake' (E184). It should also be noted that, on the cosmic stage, the epistemological (Spectre) and ethical (Selfhood) dimensions of the satanic are reflected in Blake's depiction of the transcendent divinity, who is the 'Great Selfhood/ Satan: Worshipd as God by the Mighty Ones of the Earth' (J29:17-18, E175). This side of Blake's satanic principle will be explored further in Chapter 4.

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[77] John Beer, *Blake's Visionary Universe* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969), 39.

Returning to *Milton*, plate 14, what the poem's eponymous hero realises here is that the Satan he has to defeat is not an extrinsic adversary, a Satan outside of himself, but rather *himself,* at least insofar as he exists in his Selfhood; that is as a constituent of the Divine Body alienated from its other members. Milton's decisive insight that the Selfhood (or Spectre) is one's personal Satan is echoed in 'The fields of Islington to Marybone', a poem which appears after Blake's address 'To the Jews' in *Jerusalem*: 'I here reclaim thee as my own/ My Selfhood! Satan! armed in gold' (27:75-6, E173). It is once again clear from this passage that the Selfhood—that 'tendency to separateness' which is at odds with the communal life of the Divine Body—*is* Satan. This equation is elaborated on in the address 'To the Deists', which opens the next chapter: '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, E201). What this text reveals is how the Selfhood is an entirely inadequate mode of existence into which individuals are born; a condition so transitory that it requires renovation in each moment. As Bath tells Albion, 'In Selfhood we are nothing: but fade away in mornings breath' (J40:13, E187). The reason the Selfhood is so fleeting is because, in contrast to the Imagination (which, as we have seen, is 'Human Existence itself'), the hegemony of the 'I' is not an inherent feature of humanity but a situation through which people pass on their way to Eternity. 'Satan', as Blake repeatedly insists is not a *personal agent* but a *state* which 'must be put off Eternally' (J90:36, E250). As Los states in *The Four Zoas*, 'There is a State namd Satan learn distinct to know…The Difference between States & Individuals of those States' ([Nt.8]107:23-4, E380; cf. M32:22-35, E132; J25:12-13, E170; 31:13-14, E177; 49:65-71, E199; VLJ76, E556-7).

The identification of the Selfhood, which is in eternal 'conflict' with the Divine Body, is also evident in Blake's visual art, where the Selfhood is often depicted in the

form of a serpent coiled around naked human figures. While E. P. Thompson is wise to urge caution when handling Blake's serpentine imagery, which (like all of his symbols) do not 'stand for one thing or two things' but are 'constantly shifting in emphasis', there is good reason to suppose that we have a reasonably secure grip of this particular emblem so long as the Selfhood is understood to be one of its primary connotations.[78] This interpretation is reinforced not only by the traditional association of the serpent in Genesis 3 with the Devil (based on the identification of Satan with 'that old serpent' in Revelation 12:9 and 20:2), and Blake's explicit connection of Satan with the Selfhood, but also a crucial passage on plate 96 of *Jerusalem*. As Albion comes to a realisation of his own treachery, he sees visions of his 'deadly Sleep of Six Thousand Years' creeping around Jesus 'like a Serpent of precious stones & gold' and immediately recognises this snake as his Selfhood: 'I know it is my Self' (11-13, E255). In the light of this passage, John Beer's proposal that Blake uses the serpent as 'an emblem of energy rising into selfhood' attains a great deal of credibility, even if I might question the implication that energy *has to* end up in Selfhood.[79] One might even agree with Frye that the serpent is 'a perfect emblem of the Selfhood: an earth-bound, cold-blooded and often venomous form of life'.[80] If we are to associate Blake's serpentine imagery with the Selfhood, as I have suggested, then this satanic entity can be spotted throughout Blake's graphic art.[81]

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[78] E. P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 99.
[79] Beer, *Blake's Humanism*, 195.
[80] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 135.
[81] See, for example, the title page of *Europe*; plate 6 of *Urizen*; the large colour prints, 'Satan Exulting over Eve' (*c*. 1795, B291 [Pl. 384]; B292 [Pl. 389]) and 'Elohim Creating Adam' (1795, B289 [Pl. 388]); tempera of 'Eve Tempted by the Serpent' (*c*. 1799-1800, B379 [Pl. 402]); *Paradise Lost* design, 'Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve' (1807, B529.5 [Pl. 636]; 1808, B536.4 [Pl. 648]; 1822, B537.1 [Pl. 657]); 'Adam Naming the Beasts' (1810, B667 [Pl. 890]; Dante illustration, 'The Six-Footed Serpent Attacking Agnolo Brunelleschi' (1824-7, B812.51 [Pl. 1055]); and *Laocoön* engraving (*c*. 1826).

‘The Serpent Bulk of Natures dross’

The final feature of the satanic Selfhood to which I would like to draw attention is its bodily nature. What I mean by this is that Blake presents the Selfhood as a kind of contrived corpus (or garment) which obscures the ‘Human Eternal Body in Every Man’. Thus, on plate 40 of *Milton*, the ‘Spectre’ or ‘Reasoning Power in Man’ (the intellectual aspect of the satanic) is described as ‘a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal/ Spirit; a Selfhood which must be put off & annihilated’ (35-6, E142). This notion of an artificial corpus that must be removed in order to reveal the Divine Image in humanity is one which Blake seems to have developed at a relatively early stage of his career. In ‘To Tirzah’, a poem from *Songs of Experience* (mid-1790s), we already find the claim that the ‘Mortal part’ of each person—which Blake would later refer to as one’s ‘Adam’ or ‘Natural Man’ (L, E273)—has been fabricated and that ‘Whate’er is Born of Mortal Birth,/ Must be consumed with the Earth’ (1-2, E30). The formation of this ‘false Body’ or ‘Mortal part’ is described in a couplet from *The Everlasting Gospel*, ‘Thou Angel of the Presence Divine/ That didst create this Body of Mine’ ([f]29-30, E521), which finds a pictorial analogue in Blake’s 1803 watercolour of the same subject, ‘The Angel of the Divine Presence Clothing Adam and Eve with Coats of Skins’ (B436 [Pl. 513]). The ‘body’ or ‘coat of skins’ created by the Angel of the Divine Presence corresponds to the ‘Body of Death’ which, in *Jerusalem*, is expelled in ‘an Eternal Death & Resurrection’ as Albion’s ‘excrementitious/ Husk & Covering’ dissolves to expose the ‘lineaments of Man’ (98:18-20, E257), that is the Divine Body. It is evident that the ‘Body of Death’, also occasionally called the ‘Vegetated’ or ‘Vegetable Body’ (FZ[Nt.8]104:37, E378; 109:13, E378; VLJ69, E555; M42:27, E143), ‘Spectrous body’ (M20:20, E114), ‘Body of Doubt’ (J93:20, E253), and ‘Body of Clay’ (EG[f]94, E253), is closely related to the Pauline ‘body of the sins of the flesh’ or ‘body of sin’; that ‘old man’ or ‘body of this

death' which Christians must 'put off' by being circumcised and crucified with Christ (Col. 2:11; Rom. 6:6; Col. 3:9; Rom. 7:24).[82] Following Paul, but identifying the 'body of sin' with the satanic Selfhood, Blake presents the 'false Body' as the corpus Jesus puts on at the Incarnation and divests at the Crucifixion. Thus, in *The Four Zoas*, Night the Eighth, the Sons of Eden entreat the Lamb of God to 'Assume the dark Satanic body in the Virgins womb' and sing his praises when he 'beginneth to put off the dark Satanic body' (104:13, E377; 104:7, E376; cf. J90:35-8, E250).

Perhaps the clearest expression of the Selfhood as the satanic body which Jesus takes on at his birth and sheds at his death can be found in *The Everlasting Gospel*:

> [Jesus] in his Body tight does bind
> Satan & all his Hellish Crew
> And thus with wrath he did subdue
> The Serpent Bulk of Natures dross
> Till he had naild it to the Cross
> He took on Sin in the Virgins Womb
> And put it off on the Cross & Tomb
> ([i]50-56, E524)

Like the couplet describing the creation of the mortal 'body' by the Angel of the Divine Presence, this section of verse has a precise pictorial counterpart: the three versions of 'Michael Foretells the Crucifixion' contained in the Thomas, Butts, and Linnell sets of Blake's illustrations to *Paradise Lost*, produced in 1807, 1808, and 1822 respectively (B529.11 [Pl. 642]; B536.11 [Pl. 655]; B537.3 [Pl. 659]). While there are considerable variations between the versions in terms of colouring and detail, they all share the same basic composition. Christ hangs on the Cross at the centre of the design, with Michael on the left and Adam on the right. At the bottom of the Cross are slumped the figures of Death and Sin. Most arrestingly, the large nail which pierces Christ's feet also impales the head of a scaly serpent, whose body coils around the Cross. If the interpretation of

[82] It is worth pointing out that the KJV version of Col. 2:11 differs from modern translations, which tend to have 'body of the flesh' (NRSV) or simply 'flesh' (NIV) rather than 'body of the *sins of the* flesh'.

Blake's serpentine imagery I put forward earlier is on the mark, then it would be wrong to identify the snake Christ nails to the Cross as a symbol for his *physical form* (cf. Col. 2:14-15). On the contrary, the 'body' which Christ discards is his *satanic Selfhood*, that 'selfish clay' (FZ[Nt.9]133:13, E401) or 'Garment' (GP, Epilogue, 2, E269) emblematic of the self-interest which would obstruct him from laying 'down his life for his friends' (Jn. 15:13). It is only through this act of 'Mysterious/ Offering of Self for Another' that Jesus can defeat 'Satan & all his Hellish Crew' and restore the 'Universal Brotherhood of Eden' (J96:20-1, E256; FZ[Nt.1]3:5, E300). As he proclaims to Albion, 'if God dieth not for Man & giveth not himself/ Eternally for Man Man could not exist. for Man is Love:/ As God is Love: every kindness to another is a little Death/ In the Divine Image nor can Man exist but by Brotherhood' (J96:25-28, E256).

A final point to make about the Selfhood, which brings us back full-circle to the starting point of this chapter, is that while it is almost always identified with 'Satan', the name 'Devil'—which tends to have a positive application but can be synonymous with 'Satan' (e.g. MHH5, E24)—is used by Blake in relation to the Selfhood on at least one occasion: his last meeting with Henry Crabb Robinson on 18 February 1826. As we saw earlier, Blake allegedly informed Robinson that 'Every man has a Devil in him and the conflict is eternal between a man's Self and God'. If the 'Devil' inside every person is identified with the Selfhood (self-in-isolation) and 'God' with the Divine Body (self-in-community), then this statement is an accurate synopsis of Blake's theology. As I have tried to show in the last two sections, one does indeed find in his texts and images what appears to be an ongoing struggle between divine and satanic principles, the features of which are highly polarised. On one side we have the Divine Body, a community defined by selfless love, manifest in forgiveness and human brotherhood, as well as a visionary and imaginative mode of perception. On the other we have the Satanic Body, a fleeting

condition in which the 'I' takes centre stage, seeking to manipulate, oppose, and control others, as intuitive apprehension gives way to the dictates of reason and tradition. This interminable antagonism between the divine and satanic in Blake's theology is distilled in *Jerusalem*, where Los informs Albion that 'Thy Selfhood is for ever accursed from the Divine presence' (42:45, E190), and a marginal note to Wordsworth, where Blake insists that 'the Natural Man is at Enmity with God' (*Poems*, 1, 3, E665). In the light of such statements, which seem to present God and Satan, the spiritual and the natural, as diametrically opposed *realities*, it is perhaps not surprising that scholars like Damrosch and Paley have followed Robinson in viewing Blake as an ontological dualist. As I have suggested in this chapter, however, such an interpretation flies in the face of the central feature of Blake's thought: his doctrine of contraries. The challenge facing us, then, is to devise a credible alternative to the metaphysical explanation of the 'conflict' between the divine and satanic in Blake's work, detailed above. This is the problem of 'dualism' in Blake's theology in a nutshell. It is a central contention of this thesis that Sterry's divinity, in particular its dialectical distinction between Christ and the Devil (outlined in the next chapter), can make a significant contribution to the elucidation of this problem.

Conclusion

This chapter has been concerned with delineating the problem of 'dualism' in Blake's theology that, I propose, Sterry's writings can be of assistance in resolving. I started by expounding the position which I seek to contest: that Blake advocates the existence of two ultimate principles and should thus be regarded as a dualist in an ontological sense. It was suggested that this view goes back to Blake's lifetime, as illustrated by the diary of Robinson, which anticipates the arguments of Damrosch and Paley. Like them, Robinson picked up on the centrality of contrasts like God and Satan, spirit and nature,

to Blake's thought. Robinson also detected what he perceived to be a fatal contradiction in Blake's exposition of the 'two principles' theme: the claim that one of the principles, the Devil or nature, does not exist. This 'discrepancy' is also recognised by Damrosch, who claims that Blake's thought is riddled with stark, if fruitful, logical inconsistencies between his monism and dualism. If Damrosch advances the case for Blake's 'dualistic monism', Paley develops the argument, also first made by Robinson, that this feature of Blake's thought is related to Gnosticism. My reason for rejecting the dualistic accounts of Robinson, Damrosch, and Paley, was then presented in the second section, dedicated to the exposition of Blake's doctrine of contraries. An engraver by trade, Blake was accustomed to working with mirror images, which meant that inverses, oppositions, and symmetries remained an instinctive part of his intellectual makeup and artistic practice. Blake's principle that contrasts like soul and body, Heaven and Hell, time and eternity, are not mutually exclusive realities, led him to contest the dualistic 'errors' of orthodox Christianity by, quite literally, playing Devil's advocate. As well as violating the minute particularity of each situation, Blake believed that the negation of energy by reason had reduced the vibrant Christian faith to a sterile, prescriptive, and judgemental religion, more concerned with sin and holiness than with love.

While this firm commitment to a dialectical approach to life's contraries makes it highly unlikely that Blake ever endorsed the existence of two separate divinities or realities, I submitted that this still leaves us with the problem of how to account for the contrasting, even conflicting, entities we find in Blake's corpus. In order to get a better handle on this problem, the last two sections took what is perhaps the most prominent 'opposition' in Blake's texts and images—that between the 'Divine Body' and 'Satanic Body'—and subjected it to closer scrutiny. This detailed investigation of Blake's divine and satanic 'principles', which illustrated not only their individual characteristics but

also the significant divergences between them, revealed how one does indeed find the kind of ongoing struggle between (apparently) autonomous powers that could lead one to suppose that Blake is a reluctant dualist, *pace* Damrosch, or failed monist, *pace* Paley. I concluded with the assertion that Sterry's dialectical divinity has a contribution to make to the development of a convincing alternative to such dualistic accounts of the tension between the divine and satanic in Blake. Precisely what this contribution is will become clear in Chapter 4, where Sterry's dialectical divinity is used as a hermeneutical framework through which to clarify Blake's 'dualism'. Before this interpretation can be conducted, however, we must first establish the analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles, and expound the concept in Sterry that promises to shed light on the problem of 'dualism' in Blake's theology.

3

The analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles

Introduction

So far in this thesis we have vindicated Sterry's selection as a candidate for comparative study (Chapter 1) and set out the problem of Blake's apparent dualism (Chapter 2) that, I contend, Sterry can help to resolve. The aim of the present chapter is twofold: firstly, to determine the precise nature and extent of the theological correspondences between Blake and Sterry, and, secondly, to provide a thorough exposition of Sterry's contrast between Christ and the Devil. My study of the convergences and divergences between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles in the first and second sections, which confirms that a wide range of affinities do exist, is conducted against the background of my discussions of the 'Divine Body' and 'Satanic Body' in the last chapter. I have not, however, followed exactly the same ordering, as I felt that too rigid an approach would risk distorting Sterry's thought by shoe-horning it into the structure of Blake's. Still, I have tried to ensure that the most important points from the preceding accounts receive attention, even if it has been necessary to strike a delicate balance between a point-by-point correlation and faithful delineation of Sterry's ideas. After all, the point of this exercise is not to create a neat 'balance sheet' of the similarities and differences between Blake and Sterry, but to build up a detailed and credible picture of their congeniality with a view to reinforcing the appropriateness of using Sterry's ideas as a lens through which to interpret Blake's. In particular, the contribution of sections 1 and

2 to the argument as a whole will be to build a case for their analogical resemblance strong enough to enable me to posit a *further* correspondence between them: that Blake (implicitly) shares Sterry's dialectical contrast between Christ and the Devil. It is this crucial distinction, expounded in section 3, which will provide the hermeneutical and illustrative framework for my explication of Blake's alleged dualism in Chapter 4.

1. *The analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine principles*

This section examines the correlation between Blake's Divine Body, as presented in the third section of Chapter 2, and Sterry's divinity. It contends that while Sterry does have his own theory of imagination, this is not where the most promising parallels between their divine principles are to be found. This is because Sterry never explicitly identifies the imagination with God, although he does recognise the essential continuity between divine and human creativity on which Blake's theology of the Imagination is founded. What we do find in Sterry, however, is the conviction that there is an innate structure or ground within the human being which, like Blake's Imagination, is that part of a person which survives the demise of their 'false Body'. Similarly to Blake, Sterry conceives of this in corporeal terms as the 'essential Body' of every individual, which is coextensive with the deity. This association of the authentic Self with God, I suggest, does not entail the replacement of humanity by divinity but their mutual indwelling. Sterry can thus be seen to share Blake's distinctive emphasis on the divine-in-human, the rediscovery of which is central to the redemptive process. Sterry also places great weight on a divine 'neighbourhood', which, like Blake's Divine Body, is a universal network of beings in which God, self, and other live in perfect harmony, loving each other as themselves and displaying that love through acts of reciprocal self-sacrifice. As well as sharing the 'ethical' aspect of Blake's divine principle, Sterry also anticipates its 'epistemological'

component, advocating the cultivation of one's spiritual discernment, through which earth will be changed into Heaven. Finally, I propose that Sterry shares Blake's vision of the divinity as a differentiated unity, whose integrity is based on diversity rather than homogeneity. This concept is exemplified by Sterry's 'idealist' account of Christ as the 'universal Idea', comprehending the eternal Ideas of all things, which, I submit, comes very close to Blake's description of the Divine Body in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*.

'The true and essential Body'

In the light of Blake's elevation of the Imagination to divine status, it is of great interest to note that Sterry has what Mary Nevins describes as 'a fully articulated theory of what imagination *is* and what it *does*'.[1] Anyone hoping to find significant intersections between Sterry's creative faculty and Blake's will soon be disappointed, however, particularly when it comes to the imagination's divinity. As Nevins' investigation reveals, while Sterry does have a relatively exalted view of the imagination as 'the highest part of man's sensitive soul', its position in his hierarchy of faculties is an intermediary one, being superior to the starlight of sense but inferior to the moonlight of reason and the sunlight of spiritual perception.[2] It is clear, then, that Sterry's theory of imagination is unlikely to furnish us with compelling analogues to Blake's divine principle. Even if Sterry's idea of imagination as the power which '*espouses* in it self the *spiritual* and *corporeal world* to each other' (DFW 4) may be seen as 'Coleridgean', as Douglas Bush has suggested, it is doubtful that it can be considered truly 'Blakean'.[3] This is not only because Sterry's imagination, however lofty, does not appear at the

[1] Mary Nevins, 'Peter Sterry, a Platonic Independent', PhD thesis, Columbia University, 1954, 359. Italics Nevins'.
[2] Ibid., 363.
[3] Douglas Bush, *English Literature in the Earlier Seventeenth Century, 1600-1660* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1945), 341.

apex of his epistemological pyramid, but because it remains a faculty responsible for *processing* rather than *creating* reality.

It is worth observing, however, that when it comes to the primary connotation of 'Imagination' in Blake—that of artistic creativity—Sterry is far closer to Blake in terms of his insistence on the divine Source of human inspiration. As Pinto recognises, Sterry shares with Blake 'a very high opinion of Art' in which 'the great poets and artists are divinely inspired in the fullest sense of the word'.[4] What is also striking is the frequency with which Sterry uses metaphors drawn from the arts—including poetry (DFW 179), painting (DFW 23; [To] 'Dearest Sylvander', EC MS 292, 201), engraving ('The Palace of the Sun', EC MS 294, 161), music (DFW 22-3), and drama (DFW 179)—to describe the divine activity. This tendency is particularly prominent in *A Discourse*, where we find 'numerous allusions' to authors and painters, who are 'spoken of in glowing terms and even said to be directly inspired by the Holy Spirit'.[5] For example, in drawing an analogy between epic poetry and God's work in creation, Sterry describes '*Homer*, *Virgil*, *Tasso*, our English *Spencer*, with some few others like to these', as 'Divine Spirits' whose literary creations 'were imitations drawn from those Original Poems, the Divine works and contrivances of the eternal Spirit' (DFW 179). So, even if he does not identify the imagination with God, Sterry *does* recognise the fundamental continuity between divine and human creativity which Blake's equation of Imagination with the 'Divine Body of the Lord Jesus' entails. Still, it is only when we shift our attention from the word 'Imagination' to the theology Blake builds around it that the most credible, and significant, parallels between his and Sterry's divine principles begin to emerge.

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[4] Vivian de Sola Pinto, 'Peter Sterry: Puritan, Platonist, and Mystic', in *Speculum Religionis: Being Essays and Studies in Religion and Literature from Plato to Von Hügel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 191-2.

[5] Vivian de Sola Pinto, 'Peter Sterry and his Unpublished Writings', *Review of English Studies*, 6/24 (October 1930), 394.

According to Pinto, the closest analogue in Sterry to Blake's Imagination can be found in his pneumatology: '[the] superrational faculty that he calls "Spirit"…seems to be practically identical with Blake's "Imagination" or "Inspiration"'. As Pinto explains, 'Sterry's "Spirit", like Blake's "Imagination"', is the 'quality through the possession of which the Saints become part of the body of Christ'.[6] Although I would want to resist Pinto's restriction of the analogy between Blake's Imagination and Sterry's divinity to the 'Spirit' on the grounds that Sterry, like Blake, uses a range of designations to refer to the divine part of human beings, he does put his finger on something important. This is Sterry's postulation of an innate structure within the human person which, similarly to the Blakean Imagination, is both the vehicle of participation in 'heavenly' existence and locus of the divine-in-human. As Sterry articulates in *The Rise, Race, and Royalty*, 'It is the Opinion of some very learned men, that the Supream part of the Soul which is above sensible Things, ever living in the midst of Invisible Things, the Head, and Spirit of the Soul; that this is each Mans Angel' (173). In this particular, Sterry's theological anthropology closely anticipates Blake's presentation of the Imagination as a divine faculty, universally present as the 'Soul', 'Spiritual Body', or 'Angel'; that part of every person which, as we saw in the previous chapter, survives the expiration of the 'vegetated body'. That Sterry, like Blake, considers one's 'Angel' to be *bodily* in nature can be seen from the letter to 'Dear Scipio', quoted in Chapter 1, where the eternal truth or essence of each individual person or being, which is their 'first principle, and proper habitation, their own idea in Eternity', is described as their 'true', 'Ideall', or 'glorified body' (EC MS 289, 116, 112). Elsewhere, Sterry insists that 'The Truth…and Essence of a Saint's Body, and of Christ's, the true and essential Body, is a Spirit in the Eternal Spirit. It is not Living, but Life it self' (RRR 262).

[6] Pinto, 'Peter Sterry', in *Speculum Religionis*, 188, 190.

Sterry's identification of the 'Heavenly Body', 'true Body', or 'Body of Life' (RRR 260) with the divinity ('Life it self') highlights a crucial intersection between his divine principle and Blake's Imagination/Divine Body: its continuity with the ultimate reality or 'truth' of the human being. Just as in Blake 'The Kingdom of God' is that of the 'God-humanity, in which God is finally in man and man in God', so in Sterry there is not so much a complete incorporation or displacement of the human by the divine as a mutual indwelling in which both are disclosed through the other.[7] 'Every Discovery of Christ', as Sterry declares in *The Appearance*, 'discovers [i.e. reveals] our Spiritual and Glorious Humanity to us in Conjunction with the Divinity. The Gospel is the unveiling of the Face of Christ, and of our true Face' (19). The foundation of this 'mutual Union' for Sterry, as for Blake (see J96:25-8, E256, quoted below), is love. As Sterry expounds the maxim 'God is love' (1 Jn. 4) in his manuscript treatise, 'An Eternity of Duration', 'a saint, through his Love-Union, & by ye infiniteness, & Eternity of God…becomes an habitation for God in the Infinitenes, & Eternity of his Godhead with all its Glories, which the Heavens of Heavens cannot receive' (EC MS 291, 139). The centrality of the divine-in-human to Sterry's divinity can also be observed in an unpublished letter to his daughter, in which he encourages her to find God by retreating into herself:

> withdraw your selfe by faith into the secret chamber of your King, in your Spirit, there see your selfe in this Glasse of your spiritual man, your Head. What shall you see in this glass, you shall see your selfe, your owne face, with the face of God, appearing in it with such an endles breaking forth of Divine Beautys, as will ravish you, will cast you into a deepe sleepe of Delights, & like excellent wine, suffer you to remember the Darkness of this world no more[.]
>
> (EC MS 289, 17)

The 'spiritual man' or 'Head' is depicted here as a glass or mirror in which the Image of God is reflected. It is interesting to observe that Sterry is less concerned with describing his daughter's 'secret chamber' than with rousing her to enter into it, just as Blake seeks

[7] J. G. Davies, *The Theology of William Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), 91.

to inspire his audience to enter the Divine Body. Even more enticingly, however, Sterry envisages the divine countenance as appearing in her face, suggesting that the *Imago Dei* is *already* present in human nature. The 'conversion' outlined in 2 Corinthians 3:18 ('But we all, with open face beholding as in a glasse the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image'), which would seem to inform this passage, is therefore conceived of by Sterry as an internal event, involving the unveiling of God's visage in our own; an apocalypse (i.e. revelation) which opens up a vision of the deity within that is clear and radiant. As we shall see in Chapter 4, it is precisely such a revelation of the divinity in humanity that is shown by Blake in Engraving 17 of the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*.

So, just as Blake believes that in perceiving the 'Infinite in all things', not least ourselves, 'God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is' (NNR[b], E3), Sterry considers the divine vision he seeks to elicit in his daughter as one which transforms her into that which she beholds.[8] But this transformation does not involve any change in her essential being, only a growing *awareness* of the Divine Image that was there all along.[9] As he explains in another letter, 'As we see God, we are Changed into ye Pure Nature, and Glory of God For wee are fil'd with ye Essential Image of God' (EC MS 289, 27-8). The reason human beings are pervaded with God's 'Essential Image' when they discern him is because he is revealed as the 'all in all' (1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:23) in them, being concurrently the subject and object of perception: 'Our Lord Jesus is become the *Image*, and the *Light*: The *Image*, in which Each Thing is seen: The *Light*, by which that Image appears. So He is both the *Testimony* and the *Witness*' (CCC 6). There is no suggestion

[8] Blake's statement closely resembles Athanasius' exchange formula, 'he became human that we might become divine' (*De Incarnatione* 54), which is a restatement of Irenaeus' earlier aphorism, 'he became what we are in order to make us what he is himself' (*Adversus Haereses* 5). See Norman Russell, *The Doctrine of Deification in the Greek Patristic Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 169.
[9] On this point see also John Everard, *The Gospel-Treasury Opened* (1657), 33: '[God] cannot *fill you* more then he hath *filled you already*…for he is *ONE* [entire] *ACT of Being, filling all things with his infinity*…And yet *David* bids us [Ps. 24:7], *Open our gates that the King of Glory may come in*…but *the meaning* must needs be set open the *eyes* and *doors* of your *knowledge* and *understanding*. Beloved, take knowledge of this, *that the King of glory* is *within you* already'.

in Sterry, then, that the intrinsic capacity of human nature to reflect the divine is in any way impaired by Original Sin. In positing the presence of an innate structure—recalling the *synteresis voluntatis* or 'spark of the will' of medieval mysticism—which remains continually in the divine presence, Sterry, like Blake, repudiates the doctrine of total depravity (further undermining Wallace's attempt to categorise Sterry as a '*Calvinist* Mystic').[10] What is impaired in 'fallen' existence is not human beings' inherent divinity but their ability to *recognise* the divine in themselves and others, and, more importantly, respond appropriately—that is with love—to that perception.

'Blessed Neighbourhood'

While it might be objected that the path of mystical introversion Sterry promotes is a profoundly solitary one, and therefore incompatible with the communal character of Blake's Divine Body, nothing could be further from the truth. The 'spiritual man' or 'Head' to which Sterry directs his daughter is no secluded individuality, cut off from others, but, like Blake's 'Eternal Body', very much part of a wider, indeed universal, network of beings, most often referred to by Sterry as a 'Neighbourhood'. This can be seen in the extended discussion of the Great Commandment to love God with all one's being and one's neighbour as oneself (Mt. 22:37-40; Mk. 12:28-34) in *The Appearance*. Sterry begins by asking: 'What Self have I left to Love, when I have lov'd God with all my Heart, all my Mind, all my Soul, all my Strength[?]', to which he responds: '*thy truest, thy best Self, thy only Self, which thou lookest upon, lovest in the Loveliness of God*', and of which 'Every other Self is either the Shadow or the Counterfeit'. Having

[10] On the *synteresis voluntatis* see Steven E. Ozment, *Mysticism and Dissent: Religious Ideology and Social Protest in the Sixteenth Century* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1973), 5. For Blake's rejection of Original Sin see Christopher Rowland, *Radical Prophet: The Mystics, Subversives and Visionaries who Strove for Heaven on Earth* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 123. The phrase 'Calvinist Mystic' is taken from the subtitle of Wallace's chapter on Sterry in *Shapers of English Calvinism, 1660-1714: Variety, Persistence, and Transformation* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011). Italics mine.

established that 'the best, the truest, the only Self-Love' is that in which 'Love of myself is comprehended in the Love of God', Sterry proceeds to expound the third suitable object of one's love: '*thy Neighbour*'. One's 'neighbour' is then identified, in a manner entirely congenial to Blake's universalist vision of the Divine Body, as 'All Mankind, all Creatures'. The 'blessed Neighbourhood' Sterry celebrates is thus one which, like Blake's 'Universal Brotherhood of Eden', can only be realised when 'God, thyself and thy Neighbour [i.e. every living being] dwell altogether in one Divine loveliness and Love' (AGM 338-9). This principle is in keeping with Sterry's view that, at its heart, Christianity is about bringing people closer together through the exercise of 'neighbourly' love: 'The Gospel discovers such a Nearness between Men, as makes every Man my Neighbour; and such a Neighbourhood, as makes every other Man to me, as myself to myself' (290). In the light of Sterry's emphasis on human mutuality, it seems most unlikely that he is commending a secluded form of spiritual practice to his daughter. Indeed, as we shall see in the next section, the love of self as a detached being is considered by Sterry to be the defining characteristic of the Devil. The only 'Self-Love' Sterry endorses is that which renounces the self-in-isolation (Blake's Selfhood) and embraces the self-in-community (Blake's Divine Body).

It is also worth remembering that Sterry not only preached a 'Divine Love' in which '*every* Person *or* Spirit *lives not in* it self *as a* part, *but in the life of the* whole' (DFW, 'Preface', 13), but, in contrast to Blake—who never had children or presided over any group, with the possible exception of 'The Ancients'—did so in the setting of a thriving community: the 'Lovely Society', based at West Sheen near Richmond, under the patronage of Viscount Lisle. Wallace makes the point well:

> It is clear in Sterry that Puritan mysticism was not solitary and withdrawn, but was lived out in family and community and in this way it differed from Christian mysticism that was solitary and celibate. The community of spiritual experience for Sterry was neither

> a parish church nor a dissenting congregation (though had the times allowed it, it might have been that) but a fellowship consisting of his family, his pupils, and the other members of the 'Lovely Society', and it also radiated outward to persons with whom he corresponded.[11]

It seems highly likely that Sterry's position at the centre of this intimate community of family members, friends, and students during the Restoration served to clarify, perhaps even shape, his vision of a 'Neighbourhood *of Divine Love*', coextensive with '*the God of Love himself*', in which '*every* other *Person*' is '*thy* Neighbour, *thy* Brother, another self, *as* thy self *to* thy self; *the Object to thee of an heavenly and incorruptible Love*'. One wonders, for instance, whether Sterry's emphasis on self-sacrifice, which parallels Blake's 'Self-annihilation', may have been shaped by his first-hand experience of what it takes to sustain a small non-conformist society in which each individual 'seeketh not its own things, *breaketh not the Harmony of the whole, dividing it self from the whole, by a particular* self-love', so that the entire group can share in '*one Beauty and Joy together*'. The subject of self-sacrifice receives extended attention in the Preface to *A Discourse*, from which the previous quotations have been taken, in which Sterry begs his 'gentle Reader' to '*love every other person, as thy Neighbour, thy Friend, thy self, with that Divine Love, in whose flame thou sacrificest thy self, and all things to receive thy self again, and all things together with thy self in a more excellent and durable form*'. That the relinquishing of the false, egocentric, self, described here is just as central to Sterry's soteriology as it is to Blake's can be seen from his subsequent claim, that the 'Divine Love' which surrenders itself for the benefit of others is not just '*all that is* true *in Religion*', but '*all that is* good *in* Man, *all that is* acceptable *with* God, *all the* hope *of* future Glory, *and of* blessed immortality' (DFW, 'Preface', 3, 12).

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[11] Wallace, *English Calvinism*, 68. The Preface to DFW is unpaginated, but I have numbered its pages for convenience. The Ancients were a group of young English artists, including Samuel Palmer (1805-1881), George Richmond (1809-1896), and Edward Calvert (1799-1883), who gathered around Blake from around 1824 onwards, remaining active for a few years after his death. See Morton D. Paley, 'The Art of "The Ancients"', *Huntington Library Quarterly*, 52/1 (Winter 1989), 97-124.

Like Blake, Sterry believes salvation can only be attained if every 'individual' follows the pattern of Christ, whose death is the epitome of mutual self-sacrificial love. Reflecting on the perversity of killing one's fellow human beings in *The Appearance*, Sterry asks: 'Shall we not rather love after the Example of our Beloved, and be ready to Die one for another, seeing it is now manifest, that we live one in another?' (291). One would be hard pushed to find a closer analogue to Albion's announcement on plate 96 of *Jerusalem*, quoted in the last chapter, that 'if God dieth not for Man & giveth not himself/ Eternally for Man Man could not exist. for Man is Love:/ As God is Love: every kindness to another is a little Death/ In the Divine Image nor can Man exist but by Brotherhood', than Sterry's concluding statement on the topic of 'Neighbourhood':

> Jesus founded his Love upon this Principle, all our Loves lay wrapt up in his Person; He loves over again in every one of us; therefore he died for us: and his Joy is fulfill'd in us, if we live happily [i.e. in harmony with one another]. The same Principle should produce the same Proportion in us. We lie mutually wrapt up in one another: We should so love, as Living one to another, Dying one in another.
>
> (291)

It is in the light of this call to mutual self-sacrifice that Sterry's advice to his son (stated in a letter)—'Baptize your self through ye Spirit into ye death of Christ. Rise through y^{t} into newnesse of ye glory of ye Father. Put of ye earthly, put on ye heavenly image' (EC MS 292, 183)—should be read. That Sterry, like Blake, does not consider baptism into Christ's death (Rom. 6:3-4) to be 'an isolated act performed once and for all', as Davies puts it, but one involving, in Rowland's words, 'being crucified and rising on a regular basis', is strongly implied by his claim in *The Rise, Race, and Royalty* that 'The Way of a Saint is a Continued Resurrection…[and] every Resurrection supposeth a Death' (412).[12] Where Sterry finally departs from Blake on this point is in his neglect of mutual *forgiveness* as an integral part of what self-sacrifice involves, although this omission is

[12] Davies, *Theology of William Blake*, 63; Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 212.

somewhat mitigated by the fact that, as Pinto points out, 'Sterry's prose is never so impassioned as when teaching the same lesson…Both Sterry and Blake would seem to regard forgiveness as a reuniting of the different parts of the Divine Image (the term is common to both) just as selfishness is a dissolution of its unity'.[13]

'A Divine Principle or Faculty of seeing Things'

As well as sharing Blake's devotion to the inherent divinity of humanity, community as the basis of a divine life on earth, and the necessity of mutual self-sacrifice, which we may designate the 'ethical' aspect of Blake's theology, Sterry's divinity also displays significant resemblances to its 'epistemological' dimension, by which I refer to Blake's conviction that the Imagination enables one to discern the infinite in each point of space and the eternal in each moment of time. There is perhaps no better example of this than the famous lines from 'Auguries of Innocence': 'To see a World in a Grain of Sand/ And Heaven in a Wild Flower/ Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand/ And Eternity in an hour' (1-4, E490). Like Blake, Sterry believes that in order to rediscover the 'Divine Image in thee', which is one's 'proper Person' or 'Divine self' (RRR 315), it is necessary to move from a predominantly rational mode of vision—analogous to the 'single vision' of Blake's Ulro—to one directed by what Sterry calls the 'Spiritual Eye' (see, for example, TCS, 19; CFC, 24; ED, 38; TWU, 16; DFW, 166; RRR, 240; AGM, 341; [To] 'My Dearest Daughter', EC MS 289, 25; 'An Eternity of Duration', EC MS 291, 148). This 'Spiritual Eye'—equivalent to the 'fourfold vision' of Blake's Eden or Eternity—is identical with that 'Inward' or 'Divine Eye' which Sterry defined in 1648 as 'a *Divine Principle or Faculty* of seeing Things; the *Supreame Power* of Knowing, as God Knows and is Known' (CCC 25)—a description which could be applied directly

[13] Pinto, 'Peter Sterry', in *Speculum Religionis*, 187.

to Blake's Imagination. So, like Blake, Sterry calls for a transformation of perception, akin to the cleansing of the 'doors of perception', through which human beings will be restored to the 'Divinity, out of which They fell' (15). If Damrosch is right to suggest that 'Blake's epistemology becomes a soteriology', then Sterry's divinity certainly shares this distinctive feature in common with Blake's theology of the Imagination.[14]

The transformative effect of nurturing one's 'Divine Eye', often described using luminous imagery, is conveyed by Sterry in another letter to his daughter, to which we shall return shortly, in which he asks: 'Doo you not know, y^{t} while wee are thus awake wee have an Eye open in us, which is an Eternall Sun, in w^{ch} [the] Palace & Kingdome of Light stands, having here its Foundation & proper Seat[?] With what Beams doth this bright Eye shine thorrow this outward Image, the Flesh, & overspread it, making our whole Body Light'. To be clear: this overspreading of the 'Flesh'—which, as we saw in the last chapter, is not the physical body but that which eclipses the divine—by the light of the inward eye (Mt. 6:22; Lk. 11:34) does not involve the *replacement* of material reality. On the contrary, the advent of Christ's radiant Kingdom is explicitly presented by Sterry as a *transfiguration* of the present world: 'Let us bee then, & live as Children of this Light, as Light in this Light, so shall ye Earth of this flesh bee a Palace of Silver' (EC MS 289, 24, 25). That Sterry's Heaven, like Blake's 'World of Eternity', is very much a place that can be touched, smelled, heard, tasted, and seen, is revealed in his prose masterpiece, 'The Palace of the Sun', where Christ's residence is described as being 'filled with the softest, & most Delicate Touches of the most Agreable Objects; the liveliest Smells of the Richest Ointments and perfumes; the most melting, and Transporting sounds of the Highest, & Fullest Musicke; the most Delicious Tastes of the Divinest Meates, & Drinks; the Clearest sightes, & most Emediate views of

[14] Leopold Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 30.

Celestial, & Universall Beautys' (EC MS 294, 120). This account is entirely consistent with Blake's claim in *The Marriage* that the fiery consummation of creation 'will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment' (14, E39).[15] It is thus the case that in Sterry, as in Blake, the 'spiritual' is emphatically *not* the opposite of the physical but a mode of vision unrestricted by any circumscribed perspective; not because it transcends finite points of view but because it holds them all in one, thereby enhancing them. What sets this 'waking sight of Things' ([To] 'My Dearest Daughter', EC MS 289, 28) apart from that which has passed away like a dream, in other words, is that it simultaneously 'beholdeth all Particulars in their Universals [and] all Universals in their Particulars', so that that the 'night of materiality and corporeity…shineth with a determinate Beauty [redolent of Blake's 'golden rule'?], with a bright Transparency, as the day of spiritual substances' and the 'contracted shades and darknesses of Individuals and Particulars are as the ample and full sight of Universals' (DFW 29-30).

Considering Sterry's insistence on the renovation of *this* world rather than its replacement by some other, it is hardly surprising that when he takes his readers on a tour of Christ's solar palace, the pillars supporting its magnificent structure—symbolic of the 'Ideas in the Divine Mind' (124)—are described in terms that are uncannily close to Los' vision of Golganooza, where the permanence of 'minute particulars' is asserted:

> All the Different Formes, Degrees, & Motions of Things from the Supreame Heights of the most Glorious Heavens above to the lowest point of the darkest, & Deepest Hell are here so exactly described, & figured on according to their universall, & particular state, in their mutual relations, in the various Orders of these Pillars, that all in the distinctest, & exactest discovery of every atome, & moment, of every single dust, & minute, appear not as Representations; but the things themselves; not as in Glorious Originals only; but in all the most perfect Distinctions of Originalls, & Copys from the Highest Light of

[15] On which see Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 279; Christopher Burdon, 'William Blake', in Andrew Hass, David Jasper, and Elisabeth Jay (eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of English Literature and Theology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 451-2.

> the purest, & truest Life, to the remotest, & most disappearing Shadow.
>
> ('The Palace of the Sun', EC MS 294, 118-19)

Every act and particle of dust, in all their tangible reality, including their 'mutual relations', is comprehended in an unfathomably intricate pattern, which weaves all that has existed (or will exist) in time into the rich fabric of eternity. We are not dealing here with universal archetypes, of which the particular is a shadowy imitation: the pillars in Sterry's palace, like Blake's 'Eternal Forms', are not *abstractions* but *actual beings*, not mere 'Representations; but the things themselves'. Sterry thinks of the eternal world, to borrow a phrase from Thomas Traherne (*c.* 1637-1674), as 'an Eternal Day', in which all the things of time abide forever, without succession, but arranged according to their sequence in time.[16] Like the scenes Job shows to his daughters in Engraving 20 of the *Job* series and the statues in Los' halls (J16:61-7, E161), Sterry's divine Ideas are not dead pictures but living scenes, the 'Pure Originalls, & Eternal Truths' (124) of all things. As he makes clear in a letter to 'Sylvander', eternity contains 'all things past with all their distinctions, and diversities without ye losse of one hair, one dust or sand, one single atome, or ye most imperceptible Notion of any Spirit' (EC MS 292, 199). Sterry's belief that the universal is present in the particular, and *vice versa*, is articulated in an untitled discourse from Emmanuel College manuscript 293, which bears a close resemblance to Blake's account of 'Jesus breaking thro' the Central Zones of Death & Hell/ [Opening] Eternity in Time & Space' in *Jerusalem* (75:21-2, E231):

> Place & Time are the chains of the darknes of this world; Eternity is present wth thee in Every moment of time, Heaven is present wth thee in Every point or place, Eternity & Heaven at once in the glorify'd Person of Christ scatter Time & Place, and open themselves and [break] up Every moment of time, and [put] off place, and [draw] all into themselves, and [change] all into one heavenly & Eternal form like themselves[.]
>
> ('Some Discourses of P.S. Drawne into Paragraphs', 156-7)

[16] Thomas Traherne, *Select Meditations*, ed. Julia Smith (Manchester: Carcanet, 1997), 12.

The object of spiritual discernment (which is not some extraordinary power beyond the grasp of ordinary men and women but an innate human potential), then, is nothing less than to break the 'chains of the darknes of this world' by seeing things 'as God seeth them' (AGM 13); that is, exactly as in 'Auguries of Innocence', perceiving 'Heaven in a Wild Flower' and 'Eternity in an hour'. In Sterry's words, 'Didst thou ever yet descry a glorious *Eternity* in each winged *Moment* of Time; a Bright *Infiniteness* in the narrow *points* of every dark Object? Then thou knowest what the *Spirit* means' (RRR 24).

In this illumined state of being and seeing—Sterry, like Blake, considers life and vision to coincide—the 'single Eye' (RRR 460) shines through all things, forming an infinite circle of light: '[God] is a Light that shines thro' all Things, makes them transparent, clear quite thro' from Beginning to End, quite round in a Circle, that you may see to the furthest Distance, to Heaven and Eternity' (AGM 7).[17] Just as in Blake's eternity 'every particular Form gives forth or Emanates/ Its own peculiar Light, & the Form is the Divine Vision' (J54:1-2, E203), so in Sterry's divinised universe 'a Light of Glory, Forms of Glory, Immortal Spirits full of a Divine Beauty, and Majesty appear every where', as all things become 'one Vision of Divine Glory' (RRR 297). Reflecting on Ecclesiastes 11:7 ('Truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun'), Sterry invites his readers to consider how even the humblest objects will become divine sights to one who has attained the beatific vision: 'How will every Bush of Thorns shine in this Light? How will every heap of Dust sparkle, as a heap of Diamonds, as knots of Angels, yea a Constellation, a Combination, a shining and singing Harmony of Divine Attributes, Divine Excellencies? What a Heavenly Heat or Flame, rather of Divine Love and Joy will each thing thus seen, raise in thee?' (AGM

[17] See also [Nicholas of Cusa], *Ophthalmos Aplois or The Single Eye: Entitled the Vision of God* (1646); [Laurence Clarkson], *A Single Eye: All Light, no Darkness; or Light and Darkness One* (1650).

341). It is interesting to note, from a Blakean perspective, how Sterry singles out Job as a prime example of this heightened perceptual state, which Sterry calls the 'Evangelical State': 'Job was a figure of the seed of God in an Evangelical state' (EC MS 293, 50).

As is true of the 'Human Existence' with which Blake equates the Imagination, the divine life of which Sterry writes is not only a future but also a present reality: 'The Time will be, and already is', he writes of the 'Evangelical State' (AGM 14). The ever-availability of the heavenly life on earth is also expressed in the opening passage of the letter to his daughter from which I quoted earlier in relation to the 'Divine Eye', which conveys both the 'realised' and multifaceted character of the eternal world:

> This is y^{t} One Spirit, ye Truth, ye Comforter, ye Holy One. This is the Living Temple, & Palace of Light, composed of pretious, & Living Stones, Rubyes, & Diamonds taken out of ye Rock of Eternity. This is a Building prepared in Heaven, & come downe from thence wth all ye glorious Inhabitants, & Joys of Heaven in it. In this you, & I dwell together as a part of this Blessed Company. This is in you, & mee, tho same in Each. This is you, & mee, our True Person, and Appearance in ye Light. This is our Jesus, in whom all Fulnes dwells; where every thing y^{t} is seene, is seene in a full, & Compleate Glory, in whom wee also are Compleate in all ye Fullnesses of Divine Love, Beauty, & Delights.
>
> ([To] 'My Dearest Daughter', EC MS 289, 24)

While the influence of the Pauline concept of the Body of Christ as a cosmic space, as developed in Ephesians and Colossians, is more 'on the surface' here than it is in Blake, being reflected in the imagery of temple and building, this passage conveniently draws together several of the correspondences between Blake's and Sterry's divine principles we have uncovered so far. Sterry's 'heavenly' world, like the Divine Body in Blake, is presented as both particular ('in you, & mee') and universal ('same in Each'); a divine-human community ('Blessed Company'); and one's real Self ('True Person'), identified with the cosmic Christ, who is the all-encompassing and penetrating reality ('in whom all fulness dwells'). It even exhibits the 'epistemological' aspect of Blake's theology of the Imagination, being an 'Appearance in the Light' where everything is seen 'in a full,

& Compleate Glory'. Indeed, Sterry's account of the 'Palace of Light' could be applied verbatim to Blake's Divine Body without distortion.

'The perfection of Harmony is the Unity in Variety'

As well as helping to recapitulate several of the key points that have been made so far, the above passage also serves to bring to our attention a further significant intersection between Blake's and Sterry's theologies: their shared insistence on the presence of variety in God, who is clearly not a simple but a complex unity. The critical importance of unity-in-diversity to Blake's account of the Divine Body, outlined in the last chapter, has also been recognised by Saree Makdisi, who points out how Blake's idea of 'being in common' as the creative ontological power that immanently constitutes the Divine Body is anticipated in different ways by seventeenth-century 'radicals' such as Bauthumley, Coppe, and Winstanley. As Makdisi shows, these writers challenged the view that divine existence involves a 'homogeneous integration of multiplicity into one smooth undifferentiated body', advancing instead a 'sense of common participation in a unity made up of infinite heterogeneity'.[18] It is my contention that the same sense of differentiated unity can also be found in Sterry, who arguably explicates this principle with even greater theological acumen than the figures Makdisi mentions, although it must be admitted that he does not develop the political ramifications anywhere near as comprehensively. Pinto was the first to recognise how Sterry's vision of reality as a unified whole did not lead him to consider God as a *singular* unity. On the contrary, Sterry repeatedly stresses that the divine Being comprehends infinite *multiplicity*, in all its concrete particularity: 'Sterry's God is not…a mere abstract unity which on the last analysis turns out to be equal to Not-Being or Zero. He insists again and again in his

[18] Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 289, 293.

writings that the Unity of God included Multiplicity and Variety in the highest degree'. Anyone who has studied Sterry's writings in depth will likely concur with Pinto's claim that 'Unity in Diversity' is the 'great principle that pervades the whole of Sterry's theology'.[19] So ubiquitous is this theme that it is hard to choose a single, definitive, 'proof text'; but, if I were put on the spot, I probably would go for one Pinto himself selects, which has the advantage of both representativeness and concision: '*God is not a solitary Unity, without Society or Solace*; *but a Unity richly Replenish'd, and Eternally entertain'd, with a Variety, as true and boundless as the Unity itself*' (AGM 433).

The rationale behind Sterry's principle of unity-in-diversity is illuminated by a crucial passage from *A Discourse*:

> The perfection of Harmony is the Unity in Variety. The Harmony is perfect, when the Unity is entire, and the Variety full. A full Variety is that, in which nothing of Variety is wanting. A principal part in the Variety, extending it to a greater amplitude, is the *Contrariety*. This then is the Divine pleasure and glory in the Harmony; when the Unity by its Divine fruitfulness and force brings forth it self through all degrees of Variety, into the *remotest forms*, the most opposite Contrarieties and *Extreams*: When it brings forth it self through these into it self again, and reigns triumphantly at once, as over the whole, so over each part of the Variety; residing on the whole, as *one Throne*, one Kingdom, and on each part, as a distinct Throne, a distinct Kingdom, equal with the whole.
>
> (126)

Sterry's point here is that far from the divine unity precluding multiplicity it actually depends on it, with the most extreme contrasts and diversities forming an indispensible part of God's perfect harmony. It is, in other words, not *uniformity* but *heterogeneity* which constitutes genuine unity, which is only complete when the infinite creativity of the divine Being is actualised in the fullest possible variety of particular forms, each of which contributes to the integrity of the whole. Mindful of how difficult this idea is to grasp in abstract philosophical terms, Sterry uses a rich palate of metaphors—palatial

[19] Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Peter Sterry: Platonist and Puritan, 1613-1672: A Biographical and Critical Study with Passages Selected from his Writings* (1934; New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 90, 90-1.

(RRR 254), bodily (DFW 225), arboreal (RRR 254-5), musical (DFW 22-3), poetic (DFW 179), and artistic (DFW 23)—to convey the differentiated unity of the divine. Each one of these figures is developed by Sterry at considerable length and deserves more extended study for the light it can throw on his 'great principle' than is possible here (Thomas Dixon has devoted an entire dissertation to Sterry's use of musical metaphors alone![20]) What they all indicate, however, is that Sterry's divine principle, like Blake's, is not a transcendent singularity beyond being, which Sterry calls 'a Dark, Dead, Melancholy, Barren, or Solitary Unity' (AGM 426), but, as in Nicholas of Cusa and Boehme, the dynamic *coincidentia oppositorum*, in which all times and places are gathered into one infinite centre which is at the same time an unbounded circumference. In Sterry's own words, 'All Distinctions, Diversities, Distances, Divisions, Contrarieties meet…without distance, diversity, or division in the supream Unity' (DFW 224). In the light of Sterry's repeated insistence on the presence of diversity in God, it is hard to understand how Alison Teply could possibly interpret Sterry's eschatological vision as one in which 'all individuality will be subsumed into one large unity and thus erased'.[21]

Sterry's harmonising principle, as I have already suggested, is no abstract unity but a divine Person: the cosmic Christ who, like Blake's Divine Body, is understood to be an 'inclusive personality…in whom believers find themselves incorporate', to adopt Moule's formulation (quoted in chapter 2). As Pinto elucidates, 'Sterry calls his God or Absolute a person, and even the only real Person, but he speaks often as if he were a Unity comprehending a multitude of separate spirits, a community rather than a single Person'.[22] Having already explored the ethical dimension of this community, in which God, self, and other are held together by what Blake calls 'Fibres of Love', I would like

[20] Thomas Dixon, '"Spirituall Musick": The Model of Divine Harmony in the Work of Peter Sterry (1613-1672)', PhD thesis, University of Manchester, 2005.
[21] Alison J. Teply, 'The Mystical Theology of Peter Sterry: A Study in Neoplatonist Puritanism', PhD thesis, University of Cambridge, 2004, 181.
[22] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 101.

to conclude this section by briefly exploring one final epistemological correspondence: Sterry's presentation of the cosmic Christ as the 'universal Idea' (he prefers the English term 'Idea' to 'Form'), whose body contains the eternal truths or essences of all things.

This scheme, which D. P. Walker helpfully classifies as an 'amalgam of Pauline christology and Neoplatonic emanationism', is delineated in the letter to 'Scipio' from which I quoted earlier.[23] Having established that the 'true body of each thing in its most proper, and primitive sense' is its eternal Idea, Sterry proceeds to relate how 'I have heard Jesus Christ thus represented [unfortunately he does not say where!]. In his divine nature he is ye first, ye supream, ye universall Idea, all other Ideas are comprehended in him, as heavenly, and divine members of this heavenly and divine body, all heavenly, divine, and eternall spirits in this divine body of heavenly spirits, and of Eternity' (EC MS 289, 116-17). The claim that Christ is the Idea of Ideas, which is highly reminiscent of Blake's description of Christ as the 'True Vine' in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, can also be found in *A Discourse*, where the 'Lord Jesus' is described as 'the Universal Image, the Image of Images, the *Idea of Ideas*' (128), and 'An Eternity of Duration', where Jesus is identified as 'the Universall Idea, comprehending the Ideas of all things in himself' (EC MS 291, 132). While the equation of the eternal essences with God's thoughts, echoed in Sterry's statement that 'Angels, and all other Creatures, have their distinct Ideas in the *Divine Mind*' (DFW 81), has a venerable pedigree in Christian (and indeed pre-Christian) thought, even finding its way into Coleridge, what is arresting about Sterry's version is how it prefigures Blake's identification of the Forms with the *members* of Christ's body; an association which, so far as I am aware, is unparalleled in the history of Christian Platonism.[24] What is also particularly 'Blakean' about Sterry's

[23] D. P. Walker, 'Eternity and the Afterlife', *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes*, 27 (1964), 248.
[24] On the intellectual history of the Divine Ideas see, for example, Audrey N. M. Rich, 'The Platonic Ideas as the Thoughts of God', *Mnemosyne*, 7/2 (1954), 123-33; Harry A. Wolfson, 'Extradeical and

account is how the 'Universal Image' is presented as the Idea of the *human mind* itself, furnishing it with the eternal truths of all the objects it perceives, thereby humanising and universalising the ancient doctrine of divine Ideas. Just as Blake regards the 'Divine Humanity' as the 'Only General and Universal Form', so Sterry considers Christ to be the 'Idea of the Intellectual Soul, or Man', which, as it unfolds itself 'in this Soul', also 'formeth all things in it, that man comes forth from the bosome of his Idea, *replenished* with the Ideas of all things' (DFW 131). It is precisely because Sterry believes Christ to be the 'proper Idea of the Humane Soul' (DFW 101) that he regards the 'Soule of every man'—that 'Fountain within' from which flow 'all those Forms, & Images wch it seeth, heareth, smelleth, tasteth, feeleth, imagineth, or understandeth'—as, quite literally, 'the whole world to Him' ('Of a Spirit', EC MS 292, 500-498). This is surely a remarkable coincidence in thought and expression which serves to underline the strength of the analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine principles.

2. *The analogy between Blake's and Sterry's satanic principles*

Having set out the correspondences between Blake's Divine Body and Sterry's divinity, we must now turn our attention to the parallels between Blake's Satanic Body, treated in the fourth section of the previous chapter, and Sterry's Devil. In this section, I will make the case that while Sterry does not utilise the distinctive vocabulary of Selfhood, his theology does display an analogous concern with the harmful condition to which the term points, which Sterry entitles the '*Self-Principle*'. Like the Blakean Selfhood, this is

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Intradeical Interpretations of Platonic Ideas', *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 22/1 (January-March, 1961), 3-32; Mark D. Jordan, 'The Intelligibility of the World and the Divine Ideas in Aquinas', *Review of Metaphysics*, 38/1 (September 1984), 17-32; Vivian Boland, *Ideas in God According to Saint Thomas Aquinas: Sources and Synthesis* (Leiden: Brill, 1996); Joseph W. Koterski, *An Introduction to Medieval Philosophy: Basic Concepts* (Malden: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 61-86; Mark McIntosh, 'The Maker's Meaning: Divine Ideas and Salvation', *Modern Theology*, 28/3 (July 2012), 365-84. For Coleridge's reception of this tradition of thought see Murray J. Evans, *Sublime Coleridge: The 'Opus Maximum'* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 31-61.

responsible for holding human beings captive, preventing them from participating in the divine life. Where Sterry's theology intersects most directly with Blake's account of the satanic, however, is in its explicit identification of the Devil as the epitome of self-love, illustrated with reference to Sterry's 'portrait' of the Devil in one of his posthumous works. In this character sketch, Sterry, like Blake, locates the Devil's essence in a single one-letter word: 'I'. Rather than being a personal agent, I propose that Sterry's Devil resembles Blake's Satan in being a temporary state humans enter as soon as they divide themselves from others, breaking up the differentiated harmony of the Divine Body in the process. This 'diabolical' state of self-centredness, which eclipses the Divine Image in every person, is presented by Sterry as a devilish corpus, anticipating Blake's view of the satanic Selfhood as a 'false Body'. As in Blake, the '*Devils Body*' is not the material body, but a state of ethical (and epistemological) constriction, the elimination of which is every bit as pivotal to Sterry's soteriology as the casting off of the 'Vegetable Body' is to Blake's. As I indicated in the last chapter, the affinities between Blake and Sterry on the epistemological side of the satanic are altogether less prominent, although (as we shall see) not entirely absent from Sterry's treatment of the 'Body of Death'.

The 'Self-Principle'

The fact that, as already indicated, Sterry does not employ the specific vocabulary of Selfhood, which he might have appropriated as he did other Behmenist phrases like tincture and genetrix (EC MS 295, 60-1; for tincture see also RRR 395), should not be taken as an ill omen so far as his affinity with Blake on the satanic is concerned.[25] On the contrary, as his writings reveal, Sterry was no less preoccupied with the pitfalls inherent in the kind of self-enclosed life which 'Selfhood' denotes in Blake, as well as

[25] On Sterry's appropriation of Boehme's language and imagery see N. I. Matar, 'Peter Sterry and Jacob Boehme', *Notes and Queries*, 33/1 (March 1986), 35; Wallace, *English Calvinism*, 79-80.

Boehme. Thus, in *The Appearance*, Sterry presents what he calls the '*Self-Principle*' as that string which tethers a person to the earth, preventing them from ascending to God:

> *A Carnal Temper fixeth a Man in a Self-Principle*. What Peace or Pleasure can the Soul have in Prayer, while her Whoredoms are so many with this great Deceiver and Adulterer, *Self*? That Spirit, that will *Pray* after a Spiritual manner, must divorce herself from this *Self-Principle*; she must *espouse* herself to the Will of God, her true *Husband*, and live chast to him. A little Bird ty'd by the Leg with a String, often flutters and strives to raise itself; but still is pull'd down to the Earth again: Thus a Soul fixt in a *Self-Principle*, may make attempts to Pray and Offer at the Bosom of God; but be snatch'd down by that String of *Self*, which ties it to the Ground.
>
> (160)

To be espoused to the '*Self-Principle*', Sterry suggests, inhibits a person from praying 'in the Spirit' (Eph. 6:18), which, as we have seen, is by no means the solitary exercise it might appear to be, but one requiring the cultivation of 'neighbourly' love. In order to do so effectively, one must be divorced from this deceptive and unfaithful principle and be wedded to the divine will, which for Sterry is distilled in the Great Commandment. If the marital imagery is not typical of Blake, the idea that attachment to one's egoistic self is what hinders divine-human flourishing certainly is, as is the implicit association of this 'life turned in on itself' (Rowland's phrase, quoted in Chapter 2) with the Devil.

The congruence between Blake and Sterry on the disadvantages of attachment to the self-in-isolation and consequent need to relinquish one's inclination to 'manipulate, oppose, and control others in the cause of self-preservation' (Aubrey's definition of Selfhood, which I have adopted), can perhaps best be illustrated by using Job's story, as interpreted by Blake, to illuminate Sterry's account of the '*Self-Principle*'.[26] One might venture to suggest that the unredeemed Job of the *Illustrations*, who has been led astray

[26] Bryan Aubrey, *Watchmen of Eternity: Blake's Debt to Jacob Boehme* (Lanham: University Press of America, 1986), 127. While this thesis is primarily concerned with using Sterry's thought as a heuristic device through which to shed light on Blake's, there are places, including this paragraph, where I have found it helpful to take the opposite approach. The fact that Blake's work can also facilitate a better understanding of Sterry's illustrates the dialectical nature of the analogical method, in which interpretation is a two-way process.

by the conventional 'wisdom' he has received second-hand ('with the hearing of the Ear'), is exemplary of that individual who has no satisfaction or delight ('Peace or Pleasure'), being concerned with their own salvation to the exclusion of others. In this case, as Job comes to recognise the inadequacy of his habitual worship of a vengeful and patriarchal deity through his own experience ('now my Eye seeth thee', Engraving 17; Job 42:5), becoming aware of the divine presence *in* humanity in the process, he begins to cut the string of self-centredness. It is, however, only when Job learns to '*Pray* after a Spiritual manner', that is by putting into effect Jesus' words from the Sermon on the Mount (Mt. 5:44; visible in Engraving 18), 'Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you', that his liberation from the '*Self-Principle*' is complete, although not once and for all: 'Thus did Job continually' (Job 1:5; Engraving 1). The difference between Job's former life, fastened to the '*Self-Principle*', and his redeemed existence, unconstrained by it, is summed up perfectly by Sterry's words, which reinforce the case that he was more than aware of the pernicious effects of self-absorption: 'If thy Sorrows be for Self, and from Self-love: they will be like *Brine*, they will have a *Gnawing*, *Burning* Saltiness in them. But if they be for thy Saviour, and from his Love, they will be *Fresh*, and *Sweet* on thy Spirit, as the *Dew* of Heaven on the tender Grass' (RRR 186).

'The Devil is Self-love'

What is most reminiscent of Blake's account of the satanic Selfhood is the way in which Sterry identifies the Devil as the principle of self-love. The fullest exposition of this point can be found in two crucial sections of *The Rise, Race, and Royalty*, which together form Sterry's 'portrait' of the Devil. As I will refer to these sections, which for

our purposes can be considered an integrated account of the Devil's nature, throughout the rest of this chapter, it makes sense to provide a brief outline of their structure before resuming our investigation of the correspondences between Blake's and Sterry's satanic principles. The first section (9-12) is entirely devoted to the elucidation of the '*Image of the Devil*', the second of three 'Images' in which 'Man [lives] before his *Conversion*' (the first being the '*Image of Nature*' and the third the '*Image of Divine Wrath*', 2). The second section (13-15), which constitutes the first part of Sterry's 'Application' of his tripartite scheme, is concerned with further illuminating '*The Nature of the Devil*' (the second part deals with '*The Nature of Sin*'). Sterry begins his discussion of the Devil's Image by reflecting on the difficulty of his task: 'what can we see or say of this; Who can draw a *Picture* of, or describe *Darkness*, and *Confusion*?' Like an artist who starts a new piece by drawing a faint outline on a blank page before commencing to fill in the detail, Sterry sets out on his 'diabolical' portrayal by delineating the two distinguishing features within which the rest of the Devil's features fall. 'If you will pourtray a *Devil*', Sterry proclaims, '*Darkness* must be the *Ground*, *Division*, the *Work* upon it. There are then *two Powers, as two Parts* in this *Image*'. The first part of the Devil's Image, which will be explored in more detail in the next section, is dealt with fairly succinctly through the citation of two verses from the New Testament in which '*Darkness*' is employed as the Devil's 'Princely Title' (9). The second part is set out at far greater length, with the '*Power of Division*' itself being divided, quite appropriately, into seven powers: '1. *Self-love*. 2. *Lust*. 3. *Covetousness*. 4. *Pride*. 5. *Envy*. 6. *Passion*. 7. *Enmity, or Despair*', each of which is discussed in considerable detail (9-10). The number seven is likely to be determined by a dialectical theological consideration: to provide a counterpart to the multifarious divinity who is described elsewhere as a 'Seven-fold Spirit' (CCC 5; Rev. 5:6). Sterry's explication of '*The Nature of the Devil*', which follows his account of the

'*Image of Divine Wrath*', presents '*Four* unlovely *Spectacles*' that can be discovered in the Devil: '1. *Solitude*. 2. *Horrour*. 3. *Torture*. 4. *Ugliness*.' (13-15), each of which is examined in similar detail to the individual elements of the '*Power of Division*', adding both depth and clarity to Sterry's absorbing character sketch of the Prince of Darkness.

Sterry's identification of the Devil with self-love is explicitly enunciated in his discussion of the Devil's first power. Using a strategy that will be replicated at several points in his 'diabological' account, Sterry approaches the Devil simply not as the adversary but the direct inversion of the divinity. Accordingly, he paints the Devil as a 'love' that is diametrically opposed to the love which God is (1 Jn. 4:8): '*God is Love: Love* in the *Abstract*; *Love Absolute, Unlimited, Infinite*, a Universal Sweetness. The Devil is *Self-love*; a particular Being cutting off itself from the rest of things; from Him, who is the Great, *I am* [Ex. 3:14; Isa. 43-4]; in whom all things have their Being' (10). Given that the word 'abstract' is likely to set alarm bells ringing in the minds of Blake scholars, who will be all too aware of Blake's antipathy to all things abstract and belief that 'true Christian philosophy is far above all abstraction' (Ann. Lav. 1, E584), it is important to stress that what Sterry proposes here is not that God is love in some universal *rather than* particular sense, which would be entirely out of keeping with his 'great principle' of differentiated unity, but that God is that perfect love which is unconstrained by particular attachments. To put it slightly differently, the love which God is, which is not different in kind from human love at its height, is, in Winstanley's phrase, 'without respect of persons', showing no partiality towards itself or any other individual.[27] To be something in the 'abstract', for Sterry, means being that thing in its most extensive, universal, absolute, and perfect form. Thus, when Sterry discusses the Kingdom of God as 'Glory in the Abstract', he explains how this simply indicates

[27] Gerrard Winstanley, 'A Declaration from the Poor oppressed People of England', in CWGW, ii, 32.

'Glory in its utmost extent'. In another location, Sterry states: 'The sense and savour of the Spirit is itself Life and Peace universall, absolutely, in the abstract, in perfection'. Such 'abstraction' does not, however, preclude the Spirit from being present in the life of the individual saint, who 'comprehendest all things in an uncorruptible Beauty, Love, and Joy in thy self, as in Heaven' (RRR 244, 445). In Sterry's dialectical divinity, then, being 'abstract' does not involve existing in some transcendent realm removed from the individual, but to be universal and particular, one and many, at the same time, without either getting the upper hand. What Sterry intends by 'abstract' love, therefore, is a love that preserves distinctiveness without yielding to division and preserves unity without succumbing to monolithism. This is the essence of that authentic '*Self-love*' which, as we saw earlier, Sterry considers to be '*a Root, which spreadeth its Branches into both these Commands* [to love God with all one's being and one's neighbour as oneself], which contain the whole Law in them, that of Mount *Sinai*, and of Mount *Sion*' (AGM 340). Sterry's legitimate self-love equates to the first kind of love about which Blake's pebble sings, which 'seeketh not Itself to please,/ Nor for itself hath any care;/ But for another gives its ease,/ And builds a Heaven in Hells despair' ('The Clod & the Pebble', 1-4, E19). In Sterry's own words, quoted above, this genuine self-love 'seeketh not its own things, *breaketh not the Harmony of the whole, dividing it self from the whole, by a particular* self-love'. These two senses of 'self-love' in Sterry can be a little confusing, but ultimately the difference between them is clear.

Whereas Sterry's divinity is that inclusive and impartial love which respects all beings as equal, but not identical, members of the Divine Body, his Devil is the reverse of all this: 'love' as it seeks its own things, breaking the harmony of the whole, and dividing itself from the wider community to which it belongs, being a '*particular* [that is partial, in the sense of both 'partisan' and 'incomplete'] self-love'. Like the Selfhood

in Blake, Sterry's Devil, who is not so much a personal agent as an embodiment of an inadequate mode of existence, is responsible for creating 'A World in which Man is by Nature the Enemy of Man' (J49:69, E199) by promoting selfishness over altruism. The Devil in Sterry is, in other words, that detrimental self-love *in human beings* which, to quote Blake's wise little pebble again, 'seeketh only Self to please,/ To bind another to Its delight:/ Joys in anothers loss of ease,/ And builds a Hell in Heavens despite' (9-12, E19). That these words were probably composed in the mid-1790s should reminds us that the toxic state designated by the word 'Selfhood' is anything but missing in Blake's early works. Blake's pebble's words provide a penetrating psychological assessment of that harmful condition as one in which people are so concerned with their own pleasure and aggrandisement that they devise all manner of strategies for investing others in their happiness, while deriving great satisfaction from the plight of others, and in so doing live in a nightmare of their own creation, rather like Job's 'evil' dream (Figure 1). It is this constricted self-love, centred in and bounded by the ego, which differentiates Sterry's Devil, who is 'a particular Being cutting off itself from the rest of things', from the collective Being in whom all things 'live, and move, and have [their] being' (Acts 17:28). Like Boehme's Adam, Sterry's Devil 'was formed into a creatural Being' when he 'broke himself off from the *Universal* Being, and entered into a Selfishness'.[28] It is also by 'Turning his Eyes outward to Self' that Blake's Albion loses the Divine Vision (FZ[Nt.2]23:1-2, E313), which could also be said of Urizen or indeed any of the Zoas.

Sterry's explicit equation of the Devil with self-love is reinforced and clarified as his exposition of the first element of the Devil's second power proceeds. In order to spell out the point that the Prince of Darkness' definitive trait is his attachment to and love of himself in isolation from the harmonious coexistence of all things in God, Sterry

[28] Jacob Boehme, *Mysterium Magnum* 17:42, WJB, iii, 73.

offers a short commentary on Isaiah 14:14 ('I will be like the most High') in which he approaches the verse as a distillation of the Devil's quite literally self-centred nature:

> The first word in this aspiring speech is that, which first made him a *Devil* of an *Angel*: *I*: The establishing of a *Proper Interest* divided from the *general Interest* of things in the God-head. This *Self-Love* is the *Horned head*; into which he then sprouted forth; the *Cloven Foot*, in which he ended; when he first with-drew himself from the all-comprehending Unity, into a Circle, and Center of his own.

The focal point of the Devil's address, to which Sterry alludes throughout his discussion of the seven components of division, is located in a single one-letter word: 'I', which, as we observed in Chapter 2, is also at the heart of Blake's depiction of Adam's fall in the illuminated *Genesis* manuscript, not to mention his account of Urizen's laborious acts of individuation. Like Blake, Sterry finds the first person singular pronoun an effective linguistic emblem for the solitary attribute which sets the Devil himself apart from an angel: the establishment of a concern ('*Interest*'), in the sense of both an emotional and proprietary investment in something, that is exclusively particular ('*Proper*') rather than inclusively universal ('*general*'). Put more simply, what constitutes the Devil *as* Devil is his propensity to esteem his own 'propriety', security, and prosperity above that of others, pursuing that limited 'good' which is in his personal interest without concern for the welfare of the wider community. What defines the Devil, then, is his constitutional failure to live by that tenet which can be seen as Sterry's 'golden rule': '*the submitting that of the Creature in thyself, to that of God in every Creature*' (AGM 340), which also encapsulates Blake's ethics. Even more significantly, however, Sterry puts his finger on the very existential condition that makes such partiality possible in the first place. This is one in which the individual exists, at least in their own estimation, in their own right, possessing their own being, not by virtue of the Being of beings, who alone can be said to exist in any absolute sense. 'The Creature', as Sterry insists, 'is nothing of it self, or by it self, but a *momentary emanation* from God, sent forth from him, sustained by

Him, comprehended by him, filled with him' (DFW 11). So, like Blake's Selfhood, Sterry's creature is nothing *on its own* but fades 'away in mornings breath'. In this case, for the creature to claim a possessive stake in itself, a portion of being, in detachment from the Whole which sustains, comprehends, and fills it, is to do precisely what Los warns against: 'No Individual ought to appropriate to Himself/ Or to his Emanation, any of the Universal Characteristics/…Those who dare appropriate to themselves Universal Attributes/ Are Blasphemous Selfhoods & must be broken asunder' (J90:28-33, E250).

To draw an instructive comparison with a writer to whom reference has already been made, the contrast between '*Proper Interest*' and '*general Interest*' recalls Sterry's contemporary, Gerrard Winstanley's, more overtly political notion of 'Civill Propriety' or 'peculiar Interest', which denotes private property ownership as the 'Curse' holding the 'Creation under bondage'.[29] Just as Winstanley regards the enclosure and tenure of land as the primary obstacle to the restoration of Paradise on earth, so Sterry considers the partitioning and appropriation of Being itself—that all too human tendency of which the Devil is the embodiment—as 'the first and blackest ground of all Discord, Division, Darkness, Enmity, Death, of all the evils of sin and sufferings'. This is not because he is critical of particularity *per se*, which as we have seen is far from the case, but because Sterry recognises the danger inherent in a particular creature being *separated* from the universal Being. As he explains in the same passage from which the previous quotation has been taken, the

> nothingness, in the nature of the Creature [i.e. its insubstantiality in its own right], is not to be understood [as] a meer simple nothing; for this hath no existence, no expression, no attribute, no effect...This nothingness, of which we speak, or Not-Being, is a contrariety to Being; so to all the Beauty, the Blessedness of Being. This is the Contrariety it self, which is a part of the Variety of things in the Unity of the whole. This taken *apart* in it self, is the *breach* of the Unity and the Harmony[.]

[29] Gerrard Winstanley, 'A Declaration to the Powers of England', in CWGW, ii, 11.

(DWF 118)

It is, in other words, not the individuality of the creature that is the problem, for this is an essential component of the infinite variety that makes up the divine harmony, acting as a counterbalance to unity ('a contrariety to Being'). What is problematic, indeed the root of all conflict and suffering, is when the distinctiveness of the creature is asserted *against* the unity of all things. As soon as the creature claims absolute, self-sufficient, sovereignty, it becomes a 'meer simple nothing', just like Blake's Tharmas, who feels like 'an atom/ A Nothing' (FZ[Nt.1]4:43-4, E302). This declaration of ontological (and ethical) independence on the part of an individual is what Sterry, like Blake, considers to be the root cause of all alienation, 'the *breach* of the Unity and the Harmony'.

'A Sinner makes himself a Devil'

That Sterry's Devil, like Blake's Satan, is more of a state or process of division than a personal agent of fragmentation is implied by Sterry's claim that '*A Sinner makes himself a Devil*' by detaching themselves from the Divine Image and setting themselves up in the Devil's 'Image'—that is as an autonomous being—just as Blake's characters become Satan by entering their Selfhoods. This state of isolation in which the 'I' self becomes an idol by usurping the Divine Image, which Sterry identifies with the Devil, is in fact Sterry's definition of sin: '*The Divided enjoyment of any particular Image apart from the Image of God*; is *Sin*' (RRR 16). That Sterry's 'Images', including the '*Image of the Devil*', are analogous to Blake's 'States' can be seen in *The Appearance*. Here Sterry expounds how 'the Person of a Saint', that is their enduring identity, remains the same whether they display the 'Earthly' or 'Heavenly Image', offering an allegorical reading of the Exodus in which the Israelites' journey represents 'The Progress of a Saint thro' several Images'. Egypt symbolises the '*Natural Image*', the

wilderness the '*Image of Death*', and Canaan the '*Heavenly Image*'. It seems entirely reasonable to suggest that the 'Person of a Saint' parallels Blake's 'Real Man' or 'Eternal Human' (J49:72, E199), which is identical with the Imagination or Divine Body, the 'Earthly or '*Natural Image*' the Selfhood or Spectre, the '*Image of Death*' the process of 'Self-annihilation', and the '*Heavenly Image*' the restored 'Human Form Divine'. While the Devil is not mentioned here, he would equate to the first Image, which the saint continues to exhibit 'till it fall and be consum'd in [the] Wilderness'; an interpretation reinforced by Sterry's depiction of the '*Natural*' or 'Earthly' as an 'Image of Darkness and Desolation' (401).

What Sterry means by the 'Heavenly Image' is more or less the same, if perhaps not quite as overtly humanistic, as what Blake intends by the 'Divine Image', which (as we saw in the previous chapter) is the 'Imagination' or one of its associated terms. 'The *Image* of God', in Sterry's words, 'is that, in which all things are *United*' (RRR 16). Like Winstanley, who identifies 'Reason' as the 'indweller of the five Sences', Sterry equates the 'Heavenly' or 'Divine Image' with the very power of intellectual comprehension.[30] As he puts it in *A Discourse*, 'the Divine Image…is the only Light of all Truth springing and shining in the Understanding, or the Understanding it self. The *reasonings* of man in his *primitive state,* were the *several Parts*, the *several Truths* in this Image, calling to, and answering one another by virtue of the Sympathy and Unity, *comparing* themselves in that Unity with each other' (112). Sterry's account of the Divine Image recalls Blake's description of 'The Four Living Creatures' walking 'To & fro in Eternity as One Man reflecting in each & clearly seen/ And seeing: according to fitness & order' at the end of *Jerusalem* (98:39-40). The harmony of Sterry's 'Divine Image' and Blake's 'One Man' is no static singularity, like a dot on a page, but a

[30] Ibid., 4.

synchronised multiplicity, like an orchestra. It is this vibrant state of unity-in-diversity which every person who 'makes himself a Devil' breaks up when they establish themselves as a discrete, self-contained, being, playing their own discordant tune, as it were. Like the satanic Selfhood in Blake, then, the Devil in Sterry is that state of self-absorption which eclipses the Divine Image by fragmenting it, distorting (and creating conflict within) reality in the process: 'This Image in the Fall vanisheth into a *counterfeit Image*, breaking it self into innumerable false Images full of disorder, confusion, and contradictions, ever fighting with each other' (DFW 112). This means that Pinto is absolutely right to suggest that in Sterry 'The Fall is the work of the Devil', who is not a person but the very 'principle of disunion, division, and selfishness, breaking up the unity of the world', even if we might question Pinto's identification of Sterry's Devil exclusively with Blake's Urizen, who is no more *inherently* satanic than any of the other Zoas, as we shall now see.[31]

Sterry's version of the Fall, in which the Devil or '*Self-Principle*' fragments the diversified harmony of creation, bringing discord and division, is highly reminiscent of what happens to the Zoas as they pursue their own Selfhoods and vie for supremacy on the pages of Blake's illuminated prophecies. The 'torments of Love and Jealousy' in the subtitle to *The Four Zoas* (1, E300), as John Howard suggests, points to the 'dramatized effects of selfhood in the personalities of *each* zoa'.[32] To be clear, the Zoas of Blake's mythology—based on the 'four living creatures' (*zoa* is already a plural in Greek, but is treated by Blake as an English singular) of Ezekiel's vision of the divine throne-chariot or *merkabah*, as refracted through John's Apocalypse—are the elemental parts of the

[31] Pinto, *Platonist and Puritan*, 98.
[32] John Howard, *Infernal Poetics: Poetic Structures in Blake's Lambeth Prophecies* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984), 213. Italics mine.

human character.[33] Urthona, who tends to appear in his fallen form of Los, is the Zoa of imagination; Luvah represents the emotions; Urizen symbolises reason; Tharmas, the physical body and its primal instincts. The interaction of these 'personalities' is shown in schematic form on plate 32 of *Milton* (Figure 6), where we see a Venn diagram-like image of the Zoas as intersecting circles, set against a typically fiery background. As is evident from this illustration, each of the Zoas has its own compass point, with Urthona facing north, Luvah east, Urizen south, and Tharmas west (M19:15-18, E112; M34:32-7, E134). Contrary to Pinto, it should be made clear that *all* of the Zoas are susceptible to Selfhood, and thus to a satanic career of division and domination, even if it is Urizen whose chronic isolation perhaps best exemplifies the estranging power of the 'I'. Just as Albion—like each of his four Zoas—crucifies the Divine Body by chasing his Selfhood (J24:23, E169), so Sterry's Devil, who is the exclusive self-love of each person, injures Christ by removing the individual from his communal Being: 'He that takes any Piece out of this *Image*, he breaks the *Unity*, he makes a *Wound*, to let in Death, and Ruine' (RRR 16). But how does Sterry conceive of the '*counterfeit Image*' that emerges out of the ruins of the Divine Image?

The Devil's Body

Closely anticipating Blake's concept that the satanic Selfhood is a 'false Body', Sterry presents the 'earthly and shadowy Image' (DFW 163) as a devilish corpus which must be ruined if Paradise is to be restored. Like Blake, Sterry links the '*Devils Body*' (RRR 175)—also called the 'Fleshly Body' (RRR 125), 'Contrary Body' (RRR 126), 'Earthly Man' (RRR 446), 'earthly Image' ([To] 'L. L.', EC MS 289, 53; AGM 86), 'Earthly House' or 'Tabernacle' (RRR 298; AGM 16-17), and 'Carnal Principle' (RRR 460)—

[33] The influence of Ezekiel's image on Blake's concept of the Zoas is discussed by Christopher Rowland, 'William Blake and Ezekiel's *Merkabah*', in Paul M. Joyce and Andrew Mein (eds.), *After Ezekiel: Essays on the Reception of a Difficult Prophet* (New York: T & T Clark, 2011), 237.

with such Pauline anthropological entities as the 'body of the sins of the flesh' (Col. 2:11; cf. Rom 6:6), 'body of this death' (Rom. 7:24), 'natural man' (1 Cor. 2:14), 'outward man' (2 Cor. 4:16), and 'old man' (Rom. 6:6; Eph. 4:22; Col. 3:9). In his discussion of '*The Life of the Earthly Principle in itself*', Sterry writes: 'This is the *Wild Ass* that runs, and snuffs up the Wind [Jer. 2:24]. This is the *Seat* of *Sorrows* and the pit of *Pollutions*. St. *Paul, Colos*. 2. 11 calls this the *Body of the Sins of the Flesh*' (RRR 175). In the same way that Blake addresses Tirzah as 'Mother of my Mortal part' ('To Tirzah', 9, E30) and Vala as 'Mother of the Body of death' (J62:13, E213), so Sterry calls the '*Flesh*, as it is in its own Principle…the Womb, and Mother of all Evil' (RRR 175). Again, it must be underlined that Sterry's '*Flesh*' is not the material aspect of a person—their physical body—but their self-centred life, which (temporarily) obscures the Divine Image within them. What is especially redolent of Blake's 'Satanic body' is the way in which Sterry depicts the Devil's Body as a shadowy outer coating, covering the real Person. As we saw in the last chapter, Blake describes the Selfhood as 'a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal Spirit', using a range of names like 'Vegetable Body', 'Spectrous Body', 'Body of Doubt', 'Body of Clay', 'Garment', and 'Flesh', to refer to this erroneous corpus. Another synonymous designation can be found in *The Everlasting Gospel*, where 'the shadowy Man' rolls away 'From the Limbs of Jesus' at his crucifixion ([f]81-2, E522). Although there is no direct equation with the Selfhood, Rowland has suggested that the 'shadowy Man' is 'probably that part of the human person…akin to what Blake elsewhere calls "selfhood"'.[34] Similarly, Sterry presents the '*Body of Flesh*' as a '*Vail* upon [the] *True Body*, which is an Immortal Spirit', just as in the passage from Blake above, even using the precise phrase 'shadowy Man' to denote the 'faln, lost Man' (RRR 262, 263). Like the satanic Selfhood in Blake, then, Sterry's

[34] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible,* 188.

'*Body of Flesh*' is an 'outer shadowy Surface superadded to the real Surface;/ Which is unchangeable for ever & ever' (J83:47-8, E242).

While Blake's use of the 'Incrustation' image to describe the 'individual's outer coating of error' has no precedent in Sterry's writings, we do find two other figures of concealment—those of 'skin' and 'garment'—which Blake also applies to the contrived corpus of Selfhood.[35] The dermatological metaphor, which parallels Blake's 'mantle of skin' (J68:2, E221), can be seen in the following passage, concerned with expounding the nature of the 'flesh' to which Paul refers as 'weak' in Romans 8:3:

> The *Flesh* is the Shadow, the Vail, *Hebr.* 10.20. Whatever evil is the *Object* of thy Grief, so grieve, as knowing it to be in the *Shadowy* part, in the *Out-side* of Things only. 'Tis but a *Leprosie in the Skin. Job* calls the Fleshly State of Things in themselves, and not in the Spirit, but *Skin*, *Job* 19.26. So doth the Devil in the *Proverb: Skin for Skin* [Job. 2:4]. The Inside, the Substance, the Spiritual; and Life-part of those Things, over which thou so sadly breakest thy heart is Peace.
> (RRR 176)

It is interesting that Sterry derives his image from the very section of the Book of Job which Blake includes underneath his illustration of Job's nocturnal torment (Figure 1). As well as the rather obscure reference to 'skin' in Job 19:26, it should be pointed out that Sterry's dermatological figure for the Devil's Body is also shaped by the accounts of the tabernacle in the Old Testament, which is frequently described as being covered with badgers' skins (Ex. 26:14). Thus, in *The Rise, Race, and Royalty*, Sterry likens the 'true Body of a Saint' to the interior of the tabernacle, 'composed of the most precious materials', and the 'Body of Death' or 'carnal Image' to the 'Tent of Badgers Skins' hiding it (RRR 452-3). The '*Flesh*' or '*Skin*' in Sterry's exegesis of Romans 8:3, which stands synecdochically for the whole of the Devil's Body, is an appropriate symbol for a mode of existence in which human beings live cocooned in themselves rather than being open and responsive to '*that of God in every Creature*'. In another place, Sterry

[35] Davies, *Theology of William Blake*, 62.

describes the Devil's '*vile Body*' as a 'coarse Form, with which our Souls, and Bodies are cloathed', making clear how this 'body' encloses a person's *whole* being, just as the 'Tent of Badgers Skins' encloses the Holy of Holies, inside of which is the shrine of the 'spiritual body': 'there is a natural body of men, and Angels, which is flesh; There is a spiritual body, which is within ye holy of holies, between wings of ye golden Cherubims upon ye golden mercy seat, in ye seat of ye most high' ([To] 'Dear Scipio', EC MS 289, 118). This account of the 'glorified body', based on the description of the mercy seat in Exodus 25:17-22, is very close in conception to Blake's watercolour of 'Christ in the Sepulchre, Guarded by Angels' (*c*. 1805, B500 [Pl. 603]), inscribed with 'Exod: Cxxv. v20', where Christ's prostrate body appears below the touching wings of two cherubs. Rowland observes how the 'reference to Exodus 25 gives us the one clue that is needed to enable the viewer to see that the body of Jesus is the space where one can meet with God. Here is the Human Form Divine inherent in, and embracing, all people, being given pictorial articulation'.[36]

Like Blake, who calls Satan the 'State of Death' (J49:67, E199), Sterry links the Devil's Body of skin with mortality—not in the literal sense of being 'subject to death', but in the figurative sense of being oblivious to the divine life of 'being in common'—identifying it with Paul's 'body of this death':

> *Rom.* 7. 24. St *Paul* calls the Natural Man, *this body of Death*, or *the body of this Death…Thy Outward Man is the shadow of Death cast upon thy Spirit*. It is the Valley of the Shadow of Death thorow which thou walkest here below. Thou art in the Body sunk down to the borders of Death, being already come within the shadow of it. The whole face of things upon thy Person, and round about thee, is a dead Image, and the Image of Death[.]
>
> (RRR 180-1)

[36] Christopher Rowland, '"Intimations of Apocalyptic": The Perspective of the History of Interpretation', in Catrin H. Williams and Christopher Rowland (eds.), *John's Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 141.

Again, the reason that the 'Natural Man', '*body of Death*', or '*Outward Man*' is dead is not because it has ceased to live in a biological sense, but because it has been set up in the Devil's Image. That which is hidden by the 'Tent of Badgers Skins'—differentiated unity—is the internal, substantial, and spiritual aspect of reality in which there can be no discord or sorrow. 'The *Greek* Word for *Peace* [*eirene*]', as Sterry notes, 'signifieth the *Band* of all Perfections, the Circle of Eternity; All things within and without, linked together in the Golden Chain of a Blessed and Divine Harmony' (RRR 261).

The closely related figure of the 'garment'—as well as 'veil' and, occasionally, 'robe'—which is also widely used by Blake in relation to the 'Satanic body', can be detected throughout Sterry's corpus.[37] In one of his earliest published sermons, Sterry instructs the House of Lords that 'Man is but the *Garment*, and God…the *Person*, that comes cloth'd with this garment' (TCS 4). Likewise, in *A Discourse,* we are told that all 'created forms', including those of human beings, 'are Garments with which their eternal Truth and Substance cloathes it self' (64). The association of the garment or veil with the 'Natural Man'—a person as they have been set up in the Devil's Image (i.e. as an independent being)—and the 'Spiritual Man'—the same person as they have realised in thought and action their participation in the Divine Body—with the 'Person' beneath that vestment is explicitly stated in *The Appearance*. Sterry explains how the 'Fleshly, or Natural Man, is the Veil: The Spiritual Man, the Face, the Glory under this Veil', in which case the 'Spiritual Man is the Person, the Natural Man a Clothing only' (3, 18).

Just as Blake presents Albion's 'filthy garments' (M41:6, E142) not only as his ethical self-centredness, but also the condition of perceptual constriction which attends it, so Sterry portrays the garment of the 'Natural' or 'Old Man'—a state of sleep as well as death ('the Natural Man, is the Old Man: His Flesh is a Cloud of Darkness; his Life

[37] See Morton D. Paley, 'The Figure of the Garment in *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*', in Stuart Curran and Joseph Wittreich (eds.), *Blake's Sublime Allegory: Essays on 'The Four Zoas', 'Milton', and 'Jerusalem'* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973), 119-39.

in the Flesh, a Sleep', AGM 28)—as an impediment to the discernment of the infinite in the finite and the eternal in the temporal. Thus, in a passage which closely anticipates Blake's account of the 'cavern'd Man' who has 'closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern' (Eur., iii, 1, E60; MHH14, E39), Sterry explains how the difference between the 'Natural Flesh' and the 'Spiritual Flesh' is that the former is *opaque* to the light of God whereas the latter is perfectly *translucent* to it:

> The Spiritual Flesh is all, as Windows of Crystal towards Heaven: We build up the Wall of Natural Flesh against these Windows; and so suffer not the sweet Light of the Godhead to shine in upon us. The Spiritual Flesh is a Channel: We stop up this Channel by the Mud and Rubbish of our Natural Flesh. So the *Rivers of Pleasures from the Right-hand of God* no more flow in upon us.
>
> (AGM 30)

Sterry's idea that the real Person or 'Spiritual Man' is 'the Eye, that Part' of the person which 'takes in…Sight' and the garment or 'Natural Man' the 'Organ' which 'receives only the Impression' but 'beholds not the Glory' (AGM 43) parallels Blake's view that 'This Lifes dim Windows of the Soul/ Distorts the Heavens from Pole to Pole/ And leads you to Believe a Lie/ When you see with not thro the Eye' (EG[k]97-100, E520), which leads him to assert that 'I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning Sight I look thro & not with it' (VLJ95, E566). The 'Black Robe of Natural Flesh' (AGM 28), which Sterry claims Jesus put off on the Cross in order to remove 'ye Outside of things from us' ('Sermon on Ecclesiastes 7:16', EC MS 291, 255), is therefore not the body as we know it but, like the 'Corporeal & Mortal Body' in Blake (VLJ92, E564), a human being *as they have cut themselves off from others and narrowed their vision by erecting the five senses into a terminus rather than gateway to perception*. As Blake expresses, 'The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions,/ Are become weak Visions of Time & Space' (J49:21-2, E198).

It is little wonder, then, that Sterry, like Blake, fervently advocates the removal of the Devil's Body as the key to salvation. While Sterry does not use the mystical vocabulary of 'Self-annihilation', the elimination of the 'skin' or 'garment' which veils the true Self is as central to his soteriology as the obliteration of the 'dark Satanic body' is to Blake's. This point is well illustrated by a fascinating passage from *The Rise, Race, and Royalty* where Sterry offers an account of the process of fall and redemption as the putting on and putting off of the Devil's Body:

> The Body by one Death hath brought it self out of the Divine Life into the Power of Darkness, into a Hellish Root. Now by another Death it must be broken off from this Root, and brought back again into an Eternal Stock...The Devil cast us out of our Innocency, and from the face of God; he set up himself, by setting up the Natural Man in it self. We were turn'd out of *Paradise*, when we came into *this Body*, which is now the *Beast's skin*. *Again*, By the Ruine of the Natural Man, we must raise the Building of God, cast down by the Devil. By putting off the Beast's skin, by the dissolution of the Tabernacle of Beasts skins in Death, we return into *Paradise*.
>
> (181)

Sterry begins by describing the foundation of the 'Body of Death' and the need for its abolition using his much-loved botanical image of the root. Through 'one Death', Sterry suggests, the person has been detached from Christ, who is described elsewhere as 'the Root, Rule, the Actor of all, who virtually, eminently comprehends all [beings] in their distinct Ideal Forms within himself, as so many eternal Beauties in his own eternal Beauty, who bringeth them forth from himself, beareth them in himself, as Flowers in their Garden-beds' (DFW 129; see also RRR 262: 'The true, and Spiritual Body…is an Immortal Plant in the Heavenly Paradise'). Having been cut off from the root of Christ, the person has been grafted into the 'Hellish Root' of the Devil. This 'diabolical' radix, as we have seen, is the creature's self-absorbed way of life and clogged discernment or, as Sterry puts it, 'the Natural Man in it self'. It is this entirely inadequate state of being and perceiving—represented by the '*Beast's skin*' and analogous to Blake's Selfhood or

Spectre—which is to blame for human beings' exclusion from the 'flourishing Garden of Eden, in the Paradise of the Divine Nature' (RRR 278). To reverse this birth into the Devil's Image, individuals must be severed from the 'Power of Darkness' (i.e. '*Proper Interest*') and reattached to the divine Root ('*general Interest*') through 'another Death', which, as we saw in the previous section, involves following the pattern of Christ, who 'died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves' (2 Cor. 5:15). This is a 'radical'—'pertaining to the roots'—theology indeed! Moreover, it is one which shares Blake's distinctive understanding of the satanic as that 'dark body of corruptible death' (FZ[Nt.8]112:21, E383) which must be 'put off Eternally'.

3. *Sterry's distinction between Christ and the Devil*

In the previous two sections we have seen how Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles have much in common. In summary, like Blake's Divine Body, Sterry's divinity is that 'in which all things are *United*' (RRR 16), which most certainly does not involve 'all individuality [being] subsumed into one large unity and thus erased', as Teply suggests, but rather the 'common participation' of all creatures in 'a unity made up of infinite heterogeneity', as Makdisi puts it.[38] This 'common participation' means the recognition of the divine in the Other and exercise of reciprocal self-sacrificial love. Sterry's Devil, on the other hand, resembles Blake's Satan in being that inclination to selfishness in human beings which, by causing individuals to pursue their own interests at the expense of others, breaks up the perfect harmony of all things in God. Salvation, for both Blake and Sterry, can only be achieved if this breach in the Divine Image is counteracted through the putting off of the devilish body, which is a symbol of ethical and perceptual constriction. While their respective theological visions are similar in

[38] Teply, 'Mystical Theology', 181; Makdisi, *Impossible History*, 293.

many respects, what sets them apart more than the variations in vocabulary and emphasis is the fact that Blake never provides his audience with a 'key' to his presentation of the conflict between the divine and satanic, explaining how it is that they are related to each other, which has no doubt contributed to what I consider to be the profound *misunderstanding* of this point by scholars such as Damrosch and Paley. This is not to suggest that Blake offers his viewers and readers no clues whatsoever but to submit that these remain tantalising hints rather than definitive explanations. Blake's ultimate purpose, after all, is to inspire the creative (and ethical) engagement through which 'the doors of perception [are] cleansed'. Sterry, on the other hand, does provide an explicit commentary on the discrepancy between the divine and satanic which, I believe, can help to illuminate Blake's contrasting depictions of Christ (Divine Body) and Satan (Selfhood) by way of analogy. My contention, in other words, is that the correlation between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles, set out above, is strong enough to enable us to posit a further similarity, namely that Blake *also* shares Sterry's dialectical distinction between the two, even if this is not made explicit in his texts and images. The purpose of this section is to prepare the ground for the testing of this hypothesis by carefully examining Sterry's contrast between Christ and the Devil, which receives its fullest treatment in his 'portrait' of the Prince of Darkness.

Returning, then, to Sterry's character sketch of the Devil in *The Rise, Race, and Royalty*, introduced at the start of the last section, it will be recalled how Sterry divides the Devil's Image into two parts: darkness and division. The '*Power of Darkness*' (9) is illustrated by two Pauline texts: '*Who hath delivered us out of the Power of Darkness, into the Kingdom of the Son of his Love*' (Col. 1:13) and '*We fight against the Rulers of the Darkness of this World*' (Eph. 6:12). Together, these verses evoke a struggle against the forces of darkness which presently control the world and can only be overcome by

the translation of humanity from that dominion into the Kingdom of Christ. That Blake selects the second text, quoted in both Greek and English, as the epigraph to *The Four Zoas* (E300), indicates that he too recognises the strife or 'Mental Fight' (M1:13, E95) involved in passing over from what he, in a revealing conjunction, describes as 'Satans Kingdom…the Natural Man…or Jobs Kingdom' to 'the Saviours kingdom, the Divine Body' (Ann. Thorn. 3, E669; cf. Ann. Bac. Title Page, E620; J3, 'To the Public', E145). Sterry seizes on the Colossians passage as an opportunity to present his essential vision of the discrepancy between Christ and the Devil: 'The *Devil*, as the Prince of *Darkness*, which implies *Division*, is opposed to *Jesus Christ*, the King of *Love*, which is *unity*, and lives only in *Light*' (9). The glossing of darkness as '*Division*' and light as '*unity*' illustrates how Sterry considers Satan's principality to be a *discordant* state and Christ's Kingdom a *harmonious* one. But why does Sterry identify the Devil with division?

The answer to this question can be found in the introduction to the second part of the '*Image of the Devil*'—the '*Power of Division*'—where Sterry points out that 'The Name, *Devil*, comes from the Greek Word [*diabolos*], which signifies most properly one, that casts in Principles, or Seeds of *Division*' (9). The notion that the Devil's definitive trait, reflected in his very name, is divisiveness is picked up again by Sterry in his account of the third '*Spectacle*' visible in the diabolical nature: '*Torture*. Every wound is a *Division*. What are *Fears*, *Pains*, *Griefs*, *Death*? *Separations* of *Desires* from their *Delights*, *Faculties* from their *Objects*, *Principles* from their *Acts*, *End*, *Perfection*; in a word, *Things* from *Themselves*. All Deaths and Tortures then are in the Devil, at their heighth, in their fullest Power. For he is the *Principle*, and *Power* of Division'. As the '*Principle*, and *Power* of Division', the Devil, who is the left hand of God, is involved in all the sufferings human beings experience. Given that the Devil's defining characteristic is his divisiveness, Sterry finds the 'flaming sword' of Genesis

3:24—also used by Blake on two occasions (MHH14, E39; 'The Keys of the Gates', 17, E268)—as a fitting symbol for his activity: 'The Life of this Mighty Creature is a *Two-edged, Flaming Sword* in the midst of itself. Each Act, and Motion of life is the *Brandishing* of this Sword, Cutting and Burning in every Part, and point of life with ten thousand Anguishes' (14).[39] Like some cauterising medical instrument, the Devil cuts reality in two while sealing both sides with scorching heat to hinder their reintegration, thus barring the way to the Tree of Life. The piercing agony caused by this diabolical state of division is nowhere more powerfully conveyed than in Sterry's conclusion to his account of the Devil's dual Image, which alludes to the Legion incident (Mk. 5:1-13; cf. Mt. 8:28-32; Lk. 8:26-33): 'The Man in the *Gospel* possess'd by the Devil was a shadow of the Devil in this *Twofold Shape* of *Darkness* and *Division*. *He was ever among the Tombs, tearing and rending his own flesh*. So this Distracted *Spirit* dwels in himself, as in a *Living Tomb*, into which he labours to draw all other things. He is perpetually dividing, and Tearing all things, but most of all himself' (12).

At first sight, Sterry's equation of the Prince of Darkness with division and the King of Light with unity might seem to involve a binary, dualistic, opposition between singularity and multiplicity, in which case he would be merely reflecting the privileging of the One over the many which has been typical of much Christian theology down the centuries. Such an impression appears to be reinforced by Sterry's statement later in *The Rise, Race, and Royalty*, which also refers to the Legion incident, that '*God is One, Gal*. 3.20. But the name of the Devil is *Legion*: For he is many'. That Sterry does *not* have such a dualistic contrast in mind, however, is clear from his ensuing elaboration of *how* God is one: 'God [is one] by *Beholding* all things in One *Light*: by *Possessing* all things in One *Life*; by *Enjoying* all things in One *Love*'. The 'unity' of divinity, in other

[39] The fact that in Genesis the flaming sword is placed at the entrance to Eden *by God* suggests that Sterry ultimately regards the state of division which the Devil represents as part of the divine economy.

words, is not about being strictly single (i.e. 'unitary'), but, as we saw in greater detail in section 1, holding all individual beings together in harmony, community, and love. It follows, then, that the Devil's 'division' does not consist in his being multiple, which in itself is no different from God, but in his tendency to sow discord, isolation, and enmity between distinctive creatures, bringing them to ruin: 'The *Devil* by *Dividing* becomes a *Destroyer*, the Principle, and Seat of Destruction'. So, whereas Christ is the '*Mediator*' in whom contraries meet without opposition, '*Reconciling* divers *Appearances* of God' in that '*Band of Unity*' which is his Spirit (Eph. 4:3), the Devil is the divider who 'first [breaks] off…*Parcels* of Truth, and *Properties* of Grace, then [opposes] them' to each other (167). That Sterry does not link diabolical 'division' exclusively with multiplicity and divine 'unity' with unicity, but with two *ways* of being singular and multiple at the same time, is confirmed by his gloss on Ephesians 6:12: 'As God is *One and Many*, by a *grateful Distinction in the Unity*, so is the *Devil*, *One and Many* by a *grating Division without Unity*: many Powers of Darkness in one Power' (9). The key point Sterry makes here is that the 'unity' of God is a varied one, in which the whole is diversified without being divided and the parts integrated without losing their distinctiveness. This diverse unity is 'grateful' because it realises a delightful balance between the one and the many. The Devil's 'division', by contrast, is a riven one, in which the whole is differentiated by being divided and the parts unified by being merged. This disintegrated multiplicity is 'grating' because it establishes a dreadful disjunction between unity and diversity.

The most lucid formulation of this principle to be found anywhere in Sterry's writings is contained in his account of the Devil's seventh power, enmity or despair:

> Jesus Christ is a *Brasen Serpent*, lifted up; a Glorious, Eternal Principle of *Distinction*, dividing between the nearest Forms, bringing each one forth to a naked Discovery in its own Property; and all in his own Divine Light. The Devil is a *Fiery Serpent* below the Earth; a Dark, Furious Principle of *Division*, separating all Forms of things setting each apart in its full Power, in the midst of his Hellish Flames.

(12)

Like the 'serpent of brass' which Moses fashioned and fixed on a pole (Num. 21:9), Christ, the 'Glorious, Eternal Principle of *Distinction*', is the antidote to the earthbound serpent (Gen. 3:14) who is the Devil, a 'Dark, Furious Principle of *Division*'. Whereas Christ discriminates forms from each other, thereby enabling them to fully realise their particularity, in harmony with the many, without breaking the integrity of the whole, the Devil cuts discrete forms off from each other, setting them up in reciprocal antagonism as entirely independent 'beings'. The difference between Christ (light/unity) and the Devil (darkness/division) is therefore not one between *antithetical realities*, but *incompatible approaches to the polarities inherent in a single reality*, one which unites them dialectically and one which divides them dualistically. It is this crucial dichotomy, anticipating Blake's contrast between contraries and negations, which promises to shed light on the problem of 'dualism' in Blake. Like Blake's contrast, Sterry's distinction is not a purely theoretical construct, but an idea with major ethical implications, as can be seen from the passage which immediately precedes his extrication of the two serpents. This presents the antithesis between the '*Brasen Serpent*' (Christ) and '*Fiery Serpent*' (the Devil) as an opposition between community and individualism, associated, as they are in Blake, with vitality and mortality respectively: 'God is *Eternal Life*: The Devil is *Eternal Death* and Ruine: *Apollyon*, *Abaddon*: Revel. 9.11. The Mystery of God is a *Fellowship*, Ephes. 3.9. The Mystery of the Devil is *a Desolation*' (12). So, whereas the divine mystery is a neighbourhood ('*Fellowship*'), corresponding to the Divine Body in Blake, the diabolical mystery is a condition of isolation ('*Desolation*'), equivalent to the satanic Selfhood. It is crucial to recognise how the Devil's solitude can consist in *either* the hegemony of unity over diversity or diversity over unity, just as Christ's solidarity (as we saw earlier in this chapter) is founded on the balancing of the one by the many

and the many by the one. Both kinds of '*Desolation*', as we shall now see, are vividly represented in Sterry's engrossing profile of the Devil.

The negation of multiplicity in the quest for an undifferentiated unity is treated in two places: the discussion of the Devil's fourth power, pride, and the account of the first '*Spectacle*' visible in the diabolical nature, solitude. In the first place, Sterry starts by linking verses from Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Hebrews to establish that the Devil's conceit is his desire to usurp Christ's proper place at the summit of Mount Zion as the head of the general assembly:

> The Devil under this *property* is call'd Is. 14.12. Lucifer, *the Son of the Morning*. He saith, *v.* 13. *I will exalt my Throne above the Stars of God*. His ambition is to shine *alone*; and as he riseth to put out all other Lights by the Malignity of his appearance. He goes on: v. 13. *I will sit upon the Mount of the Congregation, in the sides of the North*. The appearance of our Lord Jesus in the double flame of Terror and Triumph: Consuming, and Crowing; is from the *North*: Ezek. 1. 4. *The Mount of the Congregation* is Mount *Sion*, where the *General Assembly, and Church or Congregation of the First-borne are*, Hebr, 12.22, 23. This is the Mount lifted up above every Mountain: The Spirit exalted above every Spirit.
>
> (10-11)

Having demonstrated that the Devil's intention is to displace Christ at the zenith of life, Sterry specifies how the primacy coveted by the Devil departs from that represented by Christ:

> The Devil would seat himself upon this Mount in the place of Jesus Christ; to be, as he is, the *Onely One*. Yet he would have it with this difference; to be the top of the Mount, while the great Congregation sit, as the Clouds, under his Feet: to be a consuming Fire to all others; a Crowning Glory, only to himself. God is the Heavenly *Hierusalem*, where all things are *Fellow-citizens*. The Devil is that *Babel*, which saith; *I sit alone as a Queen*, Revel. 18. She thinks her self never Great, till she have swallowed up all her Companions; never Great enough, till she be Great alone.
>
> (11)

So, while the true unity of Christ is so fruitful that all multiplicity is equitably contained within it, the false unity of the Devil is so arrogant (but ultimately impoverished) that it

can only be achieved by elevating itself in isolation. The Devil's unity, in other words, is predicated not on brotherhood, but an overriding individualism which seeks to quash diversity. Even if Sterry seems to present Christ and the Devil as personal agents, rather than universal states, I would suggest that we are *not* dealing with two figures sitting on thrones in places of lordship over their subjects. On the contrary, Sterry's Devil is the self-love of every person, which does indeed aspire to rise above others, dominate them, and arrogate all their honour and possessions exclusively to itself. Sterry's God, on the other hand, is not a singular being but an environment in which human beings exist in fellowship one with another, as can be seen from the description of the divinity as the heavenly Jerusalem *where* 'all things are *Fellow-citizens*'. We are not dealing here with an individual but a setting or, better, society characterised by equality and communion as opposed to hierarchy and selfishness. This is Sterry's vision of 'the Mount lifted up above every Mountain: The Spirit exalted above every Spirit'.

In the second location, Sterry employs the Devil's words in Isaiah 14:14 and the image of a steep rock face overlooking a precarious coastline to drive home the point that the supremacy of the Devil is built on the subordination of others:

> As a high and dreadful Cliff upon some dangerous Shoar: such a *Solitude* is the Devil. I, *saith he will be like the most High*: as high as he; but with this difference: God is above all, and *in* all: The Devil would be *above* all, and *without* all: God is such a *Height*, as is *all in all*: The Devil would be *all alone*: God is *alone*, but so, as that he is *One* with *all* Things: The Devil would be *alone*, but as a *Precipice* broken off *from* all things.

What is even clearer in this statement is how the oneness of divinity consists in God's *continuity* with all things as the 'all in all' (1 Cor. 12:6; 1 Cor. 15:28; Eph. 1:23), that is as the Being of all beings, whereas the Devil's unity is based on his *discontinuity* with all things, an insight which is so pointedly conveyed in the shape of a precipitous crag jutting out from the wider landscape in which it is located. The Devil's rapacious desire

for devouring the variety that surrounds him to sustain his singular unity is brilliantly evoked using two further images, the first another geological one of protrusion and the second a mythological one of voracity:

> As the Mouth of a Burning Mountain, which [wastes] all things round about it, and makes the neighbouring Circuit a wide Desolation: such a *Solitude* is the Devil, Revel. 12. He is represented, as a *Dragon ready to devour the Manchild, so soon, as he is born*. As a Dragon in his lonely Den, the Country a Wilderness all about: So is this Fiery Spirit eager to consume all apearances of Life, and God upon their first discovery.
>
> (13)

Like a violently erupting volcano or a dragon secreted in its lair, the Devil's wish to be 'Great alone' lays waste to the irreducible multiplicity of existence. In Blakean terms, this diabolical pursuit of unity without diversity means the hegemony of the 'Devourer' over the 'Prolific'.

The negation of unity in the search for an unbridled multiplicity is discussed by Sterry in his exposition of the Devil's second power, lust, as well as his account of the second '*Spectacle*' visible in the diabolical nature, horror. In his sketch of the Devil's dissolute desire—'a praegnancy to multiply *himself*; to bring forth *himself* in strange, and diverse forms; upon strange and diverse Images'—Sterry focuses on how this wild propagation diverges from the measured fecundity of God. The latter is defined as a proclivity to produce a rich variety that is *bounded* by the unity of Christ: '*God is One, Gal*. 3.20. God brings forth himself *in One Image*, Jesus Christ is his *Only-begotten Son*: *Joh*. 1.14. God brings forth all things *by* this One Image, and *in* it: *Coloss*. 1.16. *In him were all things Created*'. The former is presented as a tendency to spawn a variety that is deeply disjointed, lacking any cohesion whatsoever. Sterry turns to the legend of the Sons of God impregnating the daughters of men (mentioned briefly in Gen. 6:4 and enlarged upon in 1 Enoch 7:1-7) to illustrate the Devil's licentious productivity, which is 'contrary to God in all this': 'He is that *Son of God*, which broken, and deform'd by

his Fall from the First Unity; goes full of monstrous Lust after the *Daughters of Men*, dark, divided fleshly Images of the Creature'. Through this abandoned intercourse with individual forms, the Devil 'brings forth himself and them into *Gyantly shapes*, and in a Brood of Gyants'. The grotesque progeny of the Devil's liaison with solitary images are lifeless, disturbed, and unnatural beings, for '*Gyants*, in *Hebrew* [*nephilim*], signifie, *Dead*, *Distracted*; *Prodigious* Forms'. On the basis that the Devil breeds with multiple images in 'base, spurious, and various Shapes', Sterry proposes that it is this spirit of dissipated variegation to which Jesus refers when he describes the Devil as '*The Father of Lyes*' in John 8:44. He also suggests that '*Solomon* represents the Image of the Devil in Flesh, and this World, by a *Whorish Woman* [Prov. 6:26]; because he lusts after and wanders thorow all the diversity of divided forms' (10). No less than a unity built on the repression of diversity, a variety based on the negation of unity is a deeply lonely state. Like a person with numerous lovers but not a single companion, the Devil experiences an isolation, evocative of Urizen's, that is only compounded by the throng of lascivious figures which surround him, as the following extract from Sterry's account of the first '*Spectacle*' visible in the diabolical nature makes clear: 'As the *Night*, which entombs all things in it self, and makes the richest variety of Shapes, but one Lonely shade: such a *Solitude* is the Devil' (14).

Sterry's evocation of the second '*Spectacle*' visible in the Devil's character lives up to its title, horror. The gruesome picture Sterry paints of a world in which diversity increases exponentially is fully of harrowing sights and sounds. He invites his reader to

> Imagine a *world*, where *over your head* instead of a *Sky*, black, pitchy Clouds perpetually roul, not suffering any Glimpse of Light, or Day ever to appear: *under your feet*, instead of Land, or Sea, a vast, amazing depth, which no where by nothing bounds your sight, or thought: *round about you*, a Desolate Darkness, presenting near, and at further distance, all those Forms, which are bred in the womb of darkness, and carry an astonishing darkness with them to the Senses, and Spirits of Men; like apparitions, Lightnings, Shrieks, dying

> Groans, roaring Tempests, Howling of wild Beasts; to a man alone in a Forrest at Midnight.

The scene described here is a truly terrifying one in which all the features which usually frame human experience have been eradicated, giving an impression of what a world of unrestricted multiplicity—the 'chaos' Blake insists would result if the 'bounding line' were omitted—would be like. Where the canopy of the firmament ordinarily bounds the distance overhead, there are only charcoal clouds billowing continuously. By blocking out the daylight these swarthy plumes ensure that night is everlasting. Where the solid earth or surface of the sea normally stands, marking the lower limit of the environment, there is only a bottomless void. In this never-ending environment there are no markers, spatial or temporal, to offer orientation or perspective. The eyes and mind have nothing to focus on other than the barren blackness, which exposes the senses to an interminable parade of disconnected images, the contiguity or remoteness of which is indeterminate. These fragmented forms elicit an intense disquiet, likened to a person being subjected to spectral visions, lightning flashes, and distressing sounds while on their own in a wood at the dead of night. Having impressed on his reader the terror of a world devoid of unity, Sterry informs them that 'Such a world of Horrours is this *Evil Spirit*'. As the Devil is identical with that condition in which the darkness of diversity proliferates without the light of unity to bound it, it is appropriate that he is 'set forth by the *Outward Darkness* [Mt. 8:12; 22:13; 25:30], *where the Worm dies not* [Mk. 9:44-8; Isa. 66:24]: a Darkness without *Light* or *Limit*, in which all gnawing Forms of Horrour live' (14). In Blakean terms, the Devil's lust for a limitless diversity corresponds to the predominance of the 'Prolific' over the 'Devourer'; neither of which are intrinsically satanic, but become so when they seek to suppress their opposite number.

To recapitulate the argument so far: the 'division' which distinguishes the Devil from Christ is not diversity itself, but the *divorce* of diversity from unity, either through

a solitary supremacy or a lonely and chaotic variegation. In his exposition of the Devil's third power, covetousness, Sterry employs two images of voraciousness derived from Proverbs 30:16—the grave and the barren womb—to depict the twin modes of solitude that the Devil embodies. The first is applied to the creation of multiplicity without unity and the second to the imposition of unity without diversity. The Devil, Sterry claims, is 'the *Invisible Grave*, which draws all things into it. But then it crumbles them into *Dust*; it divides them from themselves. So the Principle of *Division* is sharpned, not satisfied: fretted to a greater wideness, not fill'd'. With no unity to bound diversity, the process of variegation is an endless one in which reality is broken up into ever smaller pieces *ad infinitum*. Conversely, without the generation of multiplicity, the imposition of unity is an entirely unproductive task, for there is no difference to circumscribe and assimilate: 'This Invisible Power is a *Womb* of Darkness, which takes in all things; but brings forth nothing. So the Darkness is never enlightned, but ever increas'd, made deeper and more devouring'. In Blake's terms, desire, 'the indeterminate productive energy at the source of things', needs reason, 'the principle of separation or…existence within bounds' to create a variety that is not utterly chaotic (MHH16, E40). At the same time, being blind to 'the *excess* of being which surrounds every boundary' and devoid of its own 'Ideas' (MHH6, E35), reason could only repeat the 'same dull round' if left to its own devices (NNR[b], E3).[40] The former situation—the negation of unity—is identified by Sterry with the '*Bottomless Pit*' (Rev. 9:11); the latter—the negation of variety—with the 'Serpent *feeding upon the Dust*' (Gen. 3:14) (10). But why does Sterry consider the divorce of the one from the many to be so adverse?

The answer to this question lies in Sterry's principle that the beauty of existence resides in the energetic interplay of opposites. No less than Blake's, Sterry's theological

[40] Rowan Williams, '"The Human Form Divine": Radicalism and Orthodoxy in William Blake', in Zoë Bennett and David B. Gowler (eds.), *Radical Christian Voices and Practice: Essays in Honour of Christopher Rowland* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 155. Italics Williams'.

universe is brimming with contraries. To give just a few examples, God and the creature are like light and darkness in a picture, 'interwoven, and [shining] mutually', forming 'One Kingdom'; time and eternity are coinherent, for 'The Dispensation of the Fulnesse of Time, is the Discovery of *Eternity*'; the finite and infinite interpenetrate each other, 'Heaven [being] present wth thee in Every point or place'; '*Heaven* and *Hell* meet upon this our *Earth*, in the Mid-way'; 'All things in Heaven above, and Earth beneath, meet in the constitution of each individual'; the Spirit and Letter of Scripture are like a sword and a scabbard; and the Trinity itself is a dialectic of thesis, antithesis, and synthesis, with the Father being unity, the Son variety, and the Spirit the coincidence of the two (CCC 4; 14; EC MS 293, 156, cited above; CFC 40; DFW 29; TCS 31; 'The Palace of the Son', EC MS 294, 164-5). All of these 'antitheses'—God and the creature, time and eternity, finite and infinite, Heaven and Hell, above and below, Spirit and Letter, unity and diversity—are approached by Sterry as '*Opposites* and *Contraries* one to another', which means that 'they illustrate each other, and are to be interpreted by *one Principle*, as respecting *one Thing*' (AGM 147). Sterry's account of the fourth '*Spectacle*' visible in the Devil's nature, ugliness, contains a particularly charming expression of this idea: 'Darkness in harmony with Light makes a Beauty. So the Evening and the Morning make a Day. So the Night, and sleep are the shade of an Angel's wing, dropping sweet sleep, and rest on Men'. The state of dynamic, yet finely balanced, interaction between contraries which Sterry so tenderly conveys in this text—evocative of Genesis 1, where creation is presented as the institution of order and distinction in harmony which brings an end to chaos——is precisely what Sterry intends by the 'unity' of Christ, defined by *proportionality*: '*Proportion* is a *Kind*, and *Image of Unity*' (14).

If the beauty of life consists in the dialectic between contraries, then it follows that its disfigurement is the product of a dualistic imbalance between them. '*Deformity*',

Sterry insists, 'is *Darkness* with a *Disproportion*', which (as we have seen) can consist in either the superfluity or dearth of darkness in relation to light. This *disproportionality* is just what Sterry means by the Devil's 'division': '*Disproportion* is a *Division* without any form of *Unity*'. In the same way that it would disturb the harmony of a day for the balance between evening and morning to be thrown off, so it is injurious to the Divine Body for the lively equipoise between unity and variety to be destabilised. It is Sterry's conviction that all the 'ugliness' of existence can be ascribed to this kind of imbalance, which Blake designates 'negation'. The defacement of reality caused by this diabolical severance of contraries is atmospherically conjured by Sterry using a series of deeply discordant images, which contrast starkly with his soothing metaphor of sleep as 'the shade of an Angel's wing': 'Where this Division, and Darkness first meet, there is the *Center* of Ugliness, the Fountain of ugly things. This is the *Babel*, where *Ziim* and *Ijim* dwell, *Unclean Birds*; Forms dry without any beautiful Water; desolate, no pleasant plant of Life, putting forth it self there; irksome, and hateful, being surrounded with a rude Darkness, like rocky, uncouth Islands in a Tempestuous Sea; or *Screech-Owles* in a Melancholy Night' (14). In view of the havoc which the 'dark and dividing Principle' (11) which Sterry calls the Devil creates, it is something of a relief to discover that this state of affairs, by its very nature, cannot endure. As Sterry states in his introduction to the '*Power of Division*', 'Our Lord with a Divine depth defines this Spirit [the Devil] in those words: *A Kingdom divided against it self cannot stand*. Whatever stands, must be founded upon a *Unity*. The Devil is a *divided Kingdom*, a *Duality*, a *Ruinous Thing*' (9). The use of the term 'duality' here makes explicit Sterry's association of the Devil with the bifurcation of reality which we have been investigating in this section, alongside its necessary corollary: Christ's identification with the measured discrimination between life's polarities. Having set out Sterry's contrast between Christ and the Devil, we must

now briefly retrace the steps of this chapter's argument, before setting out on the final leg of this thesis, which will consider how Sterry's distinction between the divine and satanic can help to shed light on the problem of 'dualism' in Blake's theology.

Conclusion

The first objective of this chapter was to establish the resemblance between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles. In the first section, it was argued that the most compelling correspondences between Blake's Divine Body and Sterry's God are not to be found in Sterry's theory of imagination, but in his notion that there is an element of divinity in *every* person: the 'spiritual body', which goes by a variety of names. I then proposed that Sterry shares Blake's belief that the rediscovery of the divine-in-human is not a solitary exercise but one which takes place in the context of community, through the exercise of neighbourly love. As well as this concern with an ethical transformation, Sterry's theology resembles Blake's in promoting an epistemological change, in which the cultivation of the 'Spiritual Eye' transforms earth into Heaven. These themes were encapsulated in a letter from Sterry to his daughter, which brought to our attention a further significant intersection between Blake and Sterry on the divine: their common emphasis on unity-in-diversity. Sterry's unifying principle, like Blake's, is no singular One but (in Moule's expression) an 'inclusive personality' in whom unity and diversity coinhere.[41] Finally, I suggested that Sterry's unusual 'amalgam of Pauline christology and Neoplatonic emanationism' not only anticipates Blake's account of Christ as the 'True Vine' in *A Vision*, but also heralds his presentation of the Divine Body elsewhere as the eternal Form of the Human Imagination itself. In the second section, I proposed that, despite not using the term 'Selfhood', Sterry is no less concerned than Blake with

[41] C. F. D. Moule, *The Origin of Christology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1977), 49.

the drawbacks of what he calls the 'Self-Principle' or 'Self-Love'. This can be seen in the way Sterry identifies this love of self in isolation with the Devil, just as Blake links the Selfhood with Satan. In a manner highly reminiscent of Blake's *Genesis*, Sterry uses the 'I' as a fitting linguistic emblem for such a diabolical life 'turned in on itself', which he links with such Pauline anthropological entities as the 'body of the sins of the flesh', 'body of this death', 'natural man', 'outward man', and 'old man'. In the same way that Blake presents the Selfhood as a 'false Body' or 'Incrustation' concealing the 'Immortal Spirit', Sterry paints the Devil's Body as a shadowy outer 'skin' or 'garment', eclipsing the true Self. This diabolical corpus, I maintained, is not the material body but a state of ethical and perceptual constriction, the removal of which is every bit as vital to Sterry's soteriological vision as the putting off of the 'dark Satanic body' is to Blake's.

The chapter's second objective was to provide a thorough exposition of Sterry's distinction between Christ and the Devil. In the third section, which focused on Sterry's 'portrait' of the Devil, I outlined how Christ is identified with light and the Devil with darkness, glossed as unity and division respectively. Contrary to first impressions, this contrast is not a binary one between singularity and multiplicity, but a dialectical one between two modes of being simultaneously one and many. Whereas Christ holds unity and diversity together in creative tension, the Devil sets them up in mutual antagonism, so that one can only be achieved at the expense of the other. In Sterry, then, Christ and the Devil are not *two* distinct realities but divergent approaches to the polarities inherent in *one* reality. The 'division' which the Devil embodies can result in either the negation of diversity in the quest for a false (homogeneous) unity or the negation of unity in the search for a hegemonic (unbridled) variety. As I demonstrated, both kinds of negation are represented in Sterry's colourful character sketch of the Prince of Darkness. Finally, I argued that the reason Sterry considers the divorce of the one from the many to be so

disastrous is because it disturbs the dynamic equipoise between contraries in which the beauty of existence consists. With the analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles established, and Sterry's contrast between the two elucidated, we are now in a position to offer a (hopefully) credible alternative to the dualistic explanation of the tension between Christ and Satan in Blake's theology.

4

An interpretation of Blake's 'dualism' in the light of Sterry's distinction between Christ and the Devil

Introduction

In this final chapter, I seek to elucidate the precise nature of the relationship between Blake's divine and satanic 'principles', as well as the significance of the latter's eclipse, using Sterry's contrast between Christ and the Devil as a hermeneutical lens. To focus my interpretation, I concentrate on the *Job* series, where Engraving 11 exemplifies the satanic, Engraving 17 the divine, and Engraving 16 the transition between them through the fall of Satan. I have chosen this work as a case study not only because it represents the 'acme of [Blake's] theological thinking', but because it is in the *Illustrations* that the complex interaction between the 'Two Contrary States' (SIE, E7) of divinity is most searchingly probed.[1] My contention is that by approaching Blake's contrasting (and at times conflicting) depictions of the divine and satanic from the perspective of Sterry's distinction between the two, we can discern how Blake's 'dualism' is not metaphysical but ethical and epistemological in nature. In other words, the antipathy between Christ and Satan, which takes so many different forms in Blake's texts and images, should not be construed as a cosmic battle between two distinct *divinities*, one 'good' and the other 'evil', but a conflict between two divergent *theologies* or conceptions of the same God, associated with antithetical modes of conduct. This insight challenges Damrosch's and Paley's arguments that Blake's stance is ultimately dualistic, and therefore inconsistent,

[1] Christopher Rowland, *Blake and the Bible* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 13.

as well as Altizer's use of Blake in his own theological exploration, according to which (as we shall see) the fall of Satan involves an ontological change on the part of divinity.

While the analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles, outlined in the previous chapter, provides a basis for the proposal that Blake also shares Sterry's understanding of the distinction between the two, it might still be objected that this suggestion remains speculative, having no basis in Blake's work itself. To alleviate this concern, the first section of the chapter illustrates how both kinds of 'fellowship' and 'desolation' that Sterry associates with Christ and the Devil respectively can readily be detected in situations in Blake's work where either the Divine Body or Satanic Body are to the fore. This suggests that, far from distorting Blake's theology, the application of Sterry's scheme to it actually serves to bring into sharper focus something already *implicit* in Blake's work: that the divine and satanic are not so much discrete entities but competing approaches to the vital contraries of existence. That this is indeed the case is verified by two passages (M40:32-6, E142; J10:7-16, E152-3) which make *explicit* the identification of the satanic with the 'Negation' and the divine with the 'Contrary'. It is, therefore, the case that Sterry's lucid contrast between Christ and the Devil corresponds closely to Blake's perhaps more ambiguous distinction between the Imagination/Divine Body and Spectre/Selfhood, sharing its distinctive premise that the divine is a state of creative engagement with life's polarities and the satanic one in which they are divided and rendered mutually exclusive.

Having established that Blake's divine and satanic 'principles', like Sterry's, are not conflicting beings but contrasting ways of looking at—and responding to—the same divine reality, the second section brings this insight to bear on the relationship between Job's 'persecutor' (Engraving 11) and his saviour (Engraving 17). The rationale behind the selection of these scenes is that the contrast between their respective presentations

of divinity encapsulates, in vivid pictorial form, the incongruity between the divine and satanic in Blake's theology. I begin by examining each scene, including their marginal texts, in detail before setting out the key variances between the Christ figure in the later engraving and the Satan character in the earlier one. The case is then made that Job's 'persecutor' and saviour are not antagonistic gods, one malicious and the other benign, but opposing *visions* of the same God, in which different features are in the ascendancy. Engraving 11 is thus an illustration of Job's false theological consciousness, in which the delicate balance between contraries has been completely destabilised by his habitual devotion to an inherited faith in which mercy is overshadowed by justice. Engraving 17, by contrast, is an illustration of Job's reformed theology, in which the differentiated unity of contraries has been set right in his epistemology as a result of Job having seen the divine with his *own* eyes. Finally, it is argued that this reading of engravings 11 and 17 is consistent with Blake's celebrations of contraries in divinity, exemplified by his recourse to the Book of Job and presentation of Christ not only as a gentle saviour but also an enthusiastic and erotic rebel, who 'died as an Unbeliever' (Ann. Wat. 5, E614).

The third section studies one of Blake's most theologically challenging images, 'The Fall of Satan' (Engraving 16). The reason I deal with this scene last is because it is only once the nature of the relationship between the contrasting 'deities' in engravings 11 and 17 has been established that it is possible to grasp the significance of the 'event' it portrays. After carefully inspecting the image, and its attendant biblical quotations, I introduce Altizer's treatment of Satan's fall, which is arguably the most sustained effort to make sense of this important theme in Blake's theology to date. I turn to Altizer not only because of his stature as a theological interpreter of Blake, but because his analysis of this incident is incompatible with the ethical and epistemological nature of Blake's 'dualism', for which I argue in this chapter. For Altizer, Satan's expulsion from Heaven

does not represent a transformation in Job's theological outlook: it is the culmination of a kenotic process whereby the transcendent divinity dies by emptying himself out into the world. While Altizer's account is at first sight a plausible one, it fails to appreciate how Satan is not a malevolent *being* but a harmful *illusion* projected by Job as God. So, while Altizer is right to see the fall of Satan as a divine triumph, his presentation of this victory in ontological terms is misleading. This is because Engraving 16 is not a graphic depiction of the 'death of God' but a snapshot of the eternal moment when Job's theological vision is transformed through his repudiation of that negating mentality which raises one principle over another, thus bringing about a rebalancing of the divine economy in his mind. It is this transition from a mental picture of God as remote and punitive to one in which love, forgiveness, and humanity prevail which clears the way for Job's salvific act of self-annihilation (Engraving 18). The section ends by pondering Satan's fate once he enters the inferno. Although my suggestion—that Satan, the divine Selfhood, is purged of his imperfections—remains conjectural, I submit that reflection on the fire in Engraving 16 in the light of the universalist soteriology of Sterry and his friend, Jeremiah White, reveals something significant about Blake's material practice. What is exposed is how Blake's illuminated books, produced through a revolutionary method of 'relief etching', participate in the very apocalyptic process they describe, so that there is a perfect alignment of form and content in Blake's extraordinary creations, which, quite literally, dissolve 'apparent surfaces' to reveal 'the infinite which was hid'.

1. *Blake's divine and satanic 'principles' as contrasting approaches to the contraries of existence*

In the third section of the last chapter, we saw how Sterry discriminates between Christ as the principle of distinction and the Devil as the principle of division. What sets the

'unity' of Christ apart from the 'division' of the Devil is that, like Blake's Divine Body, it holds the one and the many together in productive tension. The harmony of Christ, as Sterry explicates in *A Discourse*, is one in which the 'most perfect Unity, comprehends all Variety in it self', just as the 'most perfect *Variety* comprehend the *Unity* in it self', which means that unity and diversity are 'every way equal, equally all, most perfectly one, most perfectly distinct, by being both the character of each, the first and highest Unity, the first and fullest Distinction or Variety' (12). This state of differentiated unity is described by Sterry as the 'fellowship' of Christ. The division of the Devil, on the other hand, splits the one and the many, setting them up in mutual antagonism, creating two kinds of negation: a 'Unity without distinction or variety, [which] is a *barrenness*, a melancholy, a solitude, a blackness of Darkness, a death beyond any thing existent, or imaginable in the nature of things' and a 'distinction or variety without unity, [which] is a *confusion*, a wilderness beyond the wildest fancy, a distraction beyond all madness' (11). Sterry designates this twofold bifurcation of the one and the many, which finds a close parallel in the 'Ranter' Joseph Salmon, the 'desolation' of the Devil.[2]

With Sterry's dialectical contrast between Christ and the Devil at our disposal, we are finally in a position to present an alternative to the metaphysical interpretation of the contention between Blake's divine and satanic 'principles'. So, what happens if we apply Sterry's distinction, most concisely expressed in his account of the Devil's power of enmity, to the tension between the Imagination/Divine Body and Spectre/Selfhood in Blake? What emerges is a picture of the 'Eternal Body' as 'a Glorious, Eternal Principle of *Distinction*', and the 'dark Satanic body' as 'a Dark, Furious Principle of *Division*'. According to Sterry's definition of 'distinction' and 'division', Blake's divine principle

[2] Joseph Salmon, *Heights in Depths and Depths in Heights* (1651), 53-4: 'Unity without variety, is like the man in the Garden, solitarily slumbering in its owne profound retires; having nothing to delight in but it self…But then again to contemplate variety without Unity, is to bee over-much expensive upon the weakness, and to set up the woman without the man, which are not indeed two, but one in Christ'.

corresponds to that which discriminates life's contraries, 'bringing each forth to a naked Discovery in its own Property; and all in [its] own Divine Light', and his satanic to that which splits them, 'setting each apart in its full Power, in the midst of Hellish Flames' (RRR 12). This account accords well with what we learnt about the difference between Blake's divine and satanic 'principles' in Chapter 2. To be confident that this exposition is true to the spirit of Blake's theology, rather than superimposing the structure of Sterry's upon it, it will however be necessary to show in greater detail how it coincides with what we actually find in his work. What I propose to do in this section, therefore, is to document the presence of both sorts of 'fellowship' and 'desolation' that Sterry equates with Christ and the Devil respectively in situations in Blake where either the divine or satanic are in the lead, with a view to bolstering my case that our two central theological figures are reading from the same page when it comes to this critical issue.

The first variety of 'fellowship' that Sterry associates with Christ—unity with diversity—is a major theme of Blake's work, which (as we have seen in Chapters 2 and 3) promotes a concept of harmony based on difference rather than uniformity. This idea of unity as 'being in common' as opposed to 'being in identity' can be detected as early as *All Religions are One* (1788). As the title implies, this tract seeks to establish that the oneness of all religions is not only consistent with, but constituted by, their *diversity*. To put it in slightly different terms, what all religions share is their distinctiveness, which, according to Blake, stems from 'each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius' (Principle 5, E1). Blake's model here is the differentiated unity of the human race itself: 'As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various) So all Religions' (Principle 2, E1). Given that Blake does not ground the oneness of humanity in identity, that which distinguishes one nation from another, but the human qualities all peoples share in different ways, he considers it to be fortified, not undermined, by ethnic and cultural diversity. This point

is eloquently made in 'A Divine Image', from *Songs of Innocence*: 'And all must love the human form,/ In heathen, turk or jew./ Where Mercy, Love & Pity dwell,/ There God is dwelling too' (17-20, E13). It is thus axiomatic for Blake that there is a fundamental difference between the *essence* of the 'human form', which is singular, and the multiple *identities* which arise from it. As he responds to Swedenborg's question, 'is not one and the same Essence but one and the same identity?': 'Essence is not Identity but…from one Essence may proceed many Identities'. If essence and identity *were* identical, then 'there could be but one Identity'—a principle Blake considers to be 'false' (Ann. Swed., DLDW, 27, E604). Just as it would be absurd to argue that the harmony of a sculpture depends on all its parts being exactly the same, so it would be false, in Blake's view, to suggest that humanity's integrity is contingent upon every person being identical: the wholeness of humanity, like that of a sculpture, is present at the 'individual' as well as 'corporate' level, for 'when a Work has Unity it is as much in a part as in the Whole. the torso is as much a Unity as the Laocoon' ('On Homers Poetry', E270). As Sterry expresses in *A Discourse*, 'such is the spirituality, the heavenliness of this *Divine Body*, this *Divine Person*, that…the *Unity* of the *Person*, and of the *heavenly Body*; the *Person* in its full Amplitude, in the greatness of its Majesty, the *whole Body* in all its glorious Variety, is most completely the *same*, and *distinct* in every member' (225).

It has been proposed by M. H. Abrams that all of Blake's epics revolve, in one way or another, around the attainment of this unity *with* diversity, which is 'as much in a part as in the Whole': 'The recurrent plot of Blake's prophetic poems, as he describes it at the opening of *The Four Zoas*, concerns "a Perfect Unity…of Eden" [Nt.1, E300], figured as a single Primal Man, followed by his "Fall into Division & His Resurrection to Unity" [Nt.1, 4:4, E301]. This course of events, as Blake describes it elsewhere, is a

spiral progress from simple innocence up and back to an "organised innocence"'. In this case, Blake's myth can be seen as a prime example of the 'distinctive Romantic figure of development…as a spiral: all process departs from an undifferentiated unity into a sequential self-division, to close in an organized unity which has a much higher status than the original unity because it incorporates all the intervening divisions and oppositions'.[3] This description could equally be applied to Sterry's theodicy, according to which human beings submit themselves to the Fall with 'an *unwilling willingness*', having been shown in eternity how their passage through a state of 'monstrous Defilements, Shames, Confusions, Troubles, Darknesses, Tempests, Horrors, Enmities, [and] Deaths', will transform their '*shadowy happiness*' into a '*substantial* one', with the harmony of the Godhead being realised through the actualisation of 'this Variety in its proper place' (DFW 123, 122, 119, 123). Regardless of Blake's purported affinity to the Romantic movement in general, Abrams offers a persuasive explanation of why the highest level of Blake's 'fourfold vision', Eden or Eternity, should be one in which differentiated unity prevails. The 'Perfect Unity' towards which all of Blake's prophetic poems strive, in an ascending spiral encompassing four visionary states, is of course the Divine Body, which, as Michael Farrell aptly defines it, is 'a collective body of peoples; a unity or oneness that is, paradoxically, characterised by plurality and difference'.[4]

The second kind of 'fellowship' that Sterry equates with Christ—diversity with unity—is no less prevalent in Blake's corpus, as can be seen in one of his annotations to Lavater. Responding to aphorism 383, 'Beauty we Call the…MOST UNITED VARIETY', Blake writes appreciatively: 'this is our Lord' (E592). The insight that the 'beauty' which Christ embodies is a perfectly cohesive multiplicity, which parallels

[3] M. H. Abrams, 'Apocalypse: Theme and Variations', in C. A. Patrides and Joseph Wittreich (eds.), *The Apocalypse in English Renaissance Thought and Literature: Patterns, Antecedents and Repercussions* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 347-8.
[4] Michael Farrell, *Blake and the Methodists* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 183.

Sterry's principle that 'All the Excellencies of God [exist] in one' (DFW 127), is clearly one which remained with Blake throughout his life. The diversity he sought was never a disjointed one, made up of isolated particulars, but a unified one in which difference is reconciled without being negated. This is particularly evident in Blake's presentation of the ideal divine-human community, the Divine Body, as a collection of 'individuals' who live and perceive 'As One Man', discussed in Chapter 2. The integrated diversity Blake extols is reflected in *Milton*, where the 'Divine Family', represented by a quartet of solar disks, comes together to mourn over Ololon, grieving not as a group of separate beings but one differentiated person:

> But all the Family Divine collected as Four Suns
> In the Four Points of heaven East, West & North & South
> Enlarging till their Disks approachd each other;
> And when they touch'd closed together Southward in One Sun
> Over Ololon: and as One Man, who weeps over his brother,
> In a dark tomb, so all the Family Divine. wept over Ololon.
> (M21:37-42, E116)

This moving depiction of the unified diversity of the 'Universal Family' in its sorrow over the downfall of Ololon (Milton's 'Sixfold Emanation', M2:19, E96, constituted by his three wives and three daughters), which parallels the solidarity of the 'Twenty-four' in their sadness at Albion's sickness in *Jerusalem* (36:44-7, E182), is exemplary of the 'most united variety' Blake identifies with Christ, the Divine Humanity. In this respect, Eileen Sanzo has likened Blake to the French philosopher and Jesuit Priest, Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), who rejected the 'individualistic tendencies of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and [saw] the future in terms of collective man, but not in terms of totalitarian force'. Sanzo proposes that 'the eighteenth-century revolutionary discussion of the fraternal one and the many', in which Teilhard was also invested, 'is given ultimate expression in Blake's image of the millennial unity of the many through love,

with no loss of individuality'.[5] This account is a perfect summary of Blake's illustration of Christ as the True Vine (Figure 3) as well as its verbal analogue: 'He who would see the Divinity must see him in his Children/ One first, in friendship & love; then a Divine Family, & in the midst Jesus will appear'. It could also be applied to the Zoas, the 'Four Eternal Senses of Man' (J32:31, E178), which are supposed to function as a fraternity whose diversified, yet harmonious, interaction, constitutes the 'collective man', whom Blake calls 'Albion'. Thus, in the passage from the opening of *The Four Zoas*, quoted by Abrams, we are told: 'Four Mighty Ones are in every Man; a Perfect Unity Cannot Exist. but from the Universal Brotherhood of Eden/ The Universal Man' ([Nt.1]3:4-6, E300-1). The 'Perfect Unity' of Albion is precisely one in which Los, Luvah, Urizen, and Tharmas are one 'through love, with no loss of individuality'. The 'Universal Man' falls apart as the 'Four Mighty Ones' inside him turn their 'Eyes outward to Selfhood', thereby disrupting his 'most united variety'. In *Jerusalem*, the restoration of Albion's unified multiplicity is preceded by a complex passage in which the four Zoas engage in intellectual archery, initially as individuals and then as a single fourfold person (J97:6-98:3, E256-7). As Tristanne Connolly notes, 'The progression from "Arrows" to "each an Arrow" to "Arrow fourfold" suggests a movement from simple plurality to plurality within unity'.[6] It is through this transition from a state of diversity *without* unity to one of diversity *with* unity, which distils a central theme in Blake, that Albion is redeemed and his four Zoas enabled to '[converse] in Visionary forms dramatic' (J98:28, E257).

The first sort of 'desolation' that Sterry identifies with the Devil—unity without diversity—is perhaps the easiest to document in Blake's corpus, which challenges the equation of unity with homogeneity from first to last. Blake's commitment to variety as an indispensible component of life is evident from 1790, when Blake declared that 'One

[5] Eileen Sanzo, 'Blake, Teilhard, and the Idea of the Future Man', in Robert J. Bertholf and Annette S. Levitt (eds.), *William Blake and the Moderns* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1982), 246.
[6] Tristanne Connolly, *William Blake and the Body* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002), 212.

Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression' (MHH24, E44; cf. VDA4.22, E48; T8.9, E285), right through to 1827 (the year of his death), in which he wrote a letter to Cumberland lamenting that 'since the French Revolution Englishmen are all Intermeasurable One by Another…a happy state of Agreement to which I for one do not Agree' (E783). Blake's unwavering refusal to sacrifice diversity on the altar of consistency is also evident in his material practice, which (probably reflecting the pioneering work of Alexander Geddes on Genesis) deliberately produced heterogeneous iterations of the 'same' illuminated books, thereby subverting the hegemony of a single authoritative text—Urizen's 'Book of brass' that 'Kings & Priests had copied on Earth' (BU4:44, E72; cf. FZ[Nt.7]80:1, E355; Eur., 11, E64).[7] Of all Blake's characters, it is Urizen who is closest to Sterry's Devil in his desire for a 'unity' that is uncontaminated by diversity. Blake's depiction of Urizen as the 'Demon of heaven' (VDA5:3, E48), seated 'Above all heavens' (A16:3, E57), who declares that 'I alone am God & I alone in Heaven & Earth' (M38.56, E140) bears an uncanny resemblance to Sterry's portrayal of the Devil as a voracious 'being' whose ultimate 'ambition is to shine *alone*; and as he riseth to put out all other Lights by the Malignity of his appearance' (RRR 11). It should be stated in Urizen's defence that, even though he acts like a megalomaniacal dictator, his quest for supremacy 'is motivated by his highest ideals'.[8] Indeed, the rules engraved in Urizen's book advocate qualities which, when inspired by internal impulse rather than external compulsion, are also Blake's most cherished principles: peace, love, unity, pity, compassion, and even forgiveness (BU4.34-5, E72). It is not the *ends* towards which Urizen strives that Blake objects to but the *means* by which he tries to realise them. Urizen's legislation of values which ought to be implemented autonomously can be ascribed to his misconception of

[7] Mark Goldie, 'Alexander Geddes at the Limits of the Catholic Enlightenment', *Historical Journal*, 53/1 (March 2010), 69; Jerome J. McGann, 'The Idea of an Indeterminate Text: Blake's Bible of Hell and Dr. Alexander Geddes', *Studies in Romanticism*, 25/3 (Fall 1986), 303-24.
[8] Jonathan Roberts, *William Blake's Poetry: A Reader's Guide* (London: Continuum, 2007), 43.

unity in particular. As Jeanne Moskal observes, this item stands out in the list given that all the other items clearly 'presuppose a relationship between two or more persons'. So, 'If *unity* is to belong in this series, it must be the kind of unity-in-diversity that respects the otherness of the other'.[9] In Sterry's terms, it must be '*a Unity richly Replenish'd, and Eternally entertain'd, with a Variety, as true and boundless as the Unity itself*'. The problem with Urizen's brand of unity is that it is not the diverse kind Blake desires, but the standardised one he abhors, which Sterry calls '*a Solitary Unity, without Society or Solace*' (AGM 433). Consequently, the only way Urizen can see to achieve his goals is to enforce unitary versions of them, as is clear from the following extract, which comes directly after Urizen's listing of his 'ethical' principles: 'Let each chuse one habitation:/ His ancient infinite mansion:/ One command, one joy, one desire,/ One curse, one weight, one measure/ One King, one God, one Law' (BU43:6-40, E72). However well-intentioned Urizen's pursuit of 'a solid without fluctuation' (BU4:11, E71) may be, therefore, it is not directed towards true unity, which includes infinite multiplicity, but rather the false unity of uniformity, which excludes difference. Urizen's imposition of a unity without diversity is perhaps *the* classic example of the satanic Selfhood at work.

If the first type of 'desolation' that Sterry links with the Devil is epitomised by Urizen at his most self-absorbed, the second kind—diversity without unity—is typified by Orc, Urizen's revolutionary counterpart. Orc's antipathy to Urizen's excessive regulation of energy can be observed on plate 8 of *America*: 'I am Orc, wreath'd round the accursed tree…The fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands…That stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter religion abroad/ To the four winds as a torn book, & none shall gather the leaves' (1-6, E54). The antagonism between Orc, the archetypal law-breaker, and Urizen, the quintessential law-maker, dramatises the elemental tension

[9] Jeanne Moskal, *Blake, Ethics, and Forgiveness* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 27.

between freedom and limitation, desire and reason, the 'Prolific' and the 'Devourer', which runs throughout Blake's work. Orc embodies that creative but disordered energy from which existence flows; Urizen the structured but sterile boundary which limits that energy, diverting it into discrete forms. In political terms, Orc corresponds to the radical and Urizen the reactionary impulse. Just as Urizen wreaks havoc by endlessly dividing, circumscribing, and categorising the universe until it becomes 'a mill with complicated wheels' (NNR[b], E2), so Orc left to his own devices produces an anarchic proliferation that is every bit as deformed as Sterry's diabolical 'Darkness without *Light* or *Limit*, in which all gnawing Forms of Horrour live' (RRR 14). It is clear that Orc's iconoclastic smashing of Urizen's 'iron laws' (BU23:26, E81) is an entirely destructive enterprise that denies the possibility of reconstruction: 'none shall gather the leaves'. The violence Orc perpetrates elsewhere, for example in his frenzied violation of Urthona's daughter (A, 'Preludium', E51), highlights the danger inherent in the rampant exercise of desire, undermining a reading of Orc as 'a completely positive impulse to freedom'.[10] Lorraine Clarke is right to observe that 'passion without the bounds of reason is as tyrannical as reason without passion. Orc has triumphed, but to the destruction of the very life he was supposed to embody'.[11] To the extent that Orc succumbs to his Selfhood, that is seeks to usurp Urizen rather than exist in cordial opposition with him, he is no less despotic than his nemesis. Whether Frye is correct to identify an 'Orc cycle' in Blake's early works, in which Orc *becomes* Urizen as revolution inevitably declines into another tyranny to be overthrown, is less important than the critical insight this theory captures:

[10] John Howard, *Infernal Poetics: Poetic Structures in Blake's Lambeth Prophecies* (Rutherford: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1984), 110. On this point see Helen P. Bruder, *William Blake and the Daughters of Albion* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997), 123-28.
[11] Lorraine Clarke, *Blake, Kierkegaard, and the Spectre of Dialectic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 38.

that the superabundance of energy can itself become a form of (satanic) hegemony.[12] In the words of Taubes, 'If the revolution points to nothing beyond itself, it will end in a movement, dynamic in nature but leading into the abyss'.[13] Blake's celebration of 'Energy [as] Eternal Delight' (MHH4, E34) makes it easy to overlook the fact that his prophecies, as Makdisi insists, 'do not claim to lead to chaos or formless anarchy'.[14] On the contrary, their intention, as I argued in Chapter 2, is to restore the proper balance between liberty and restraint. It is therefore imperative that we never lose sight of Blake's 'golden rule', which insists on the necessity of the 'bounding outline' in art and life. In the absence of this line, all returns to that diabolical chaos described by Sterry as 'a wilderness beyond the wildest fancy, a distraction beyond all madness' (DFW 11).

It is thus abundantly clear that both kinds of 'fellowship' that Sterry identifies with Christ and both sorts of 'desolation' he associates with the Devil can be found in contexts in Blake's work where either the Divine Body or Satanic Body predominate. In this case, we can be confident that the application of Sterry's Christ/Devil distinction to Blake's divine/satanic contrast does not distort his theology, but brings to light a feature already implicit in Blake's texts and images: their presentation of the 'Human Eternal' and 'Spectrous' bodies as contrasting perspectives on, and responses to, the polarities of life. The first is defined by what Sterry calls 'harmonious Contrariety' (DFW 163), the dialectical discrimination between contraries in which neither side seeks to suppress its opposite number; the second by what Blake labels 'negation', the dualistic division of opposites along supposedly moral or qualitative lines, in which one side is valued over the other. Further support for this interpretation can be found in *Milton*, plate 40, where

[12] Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), 207-35.
[13] Jacob Taubes, *Occidental Eschatology*, tr. David Ratmoko (1947; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2009), 11.
[14] Saree Makdisi, *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 262.

we find one of the most revealing statements on the discrepancy between the divine and satanic in Blake's entire corpus (spoken by Milton to Ololon):

> There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
> The Negation must be destroyd to redeem the Contraries
> The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man
> This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
> Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated alway
> (M40.32-6, E142)

The reason these words are so significant is because they make *explicit* the equation of the Spectre/Selfhood with the 'Negation' and the Imagination/Divine Body ('Immortal Spirit'), by implication, with the 'Contrary'; which, as we have observed, is *implicit* throughout Blake's corpus. The association of the Divine Body with the 'Contrary' is confirmed by the passage on plate 10 of *Jerusalem* (7-16, E152-3), quoted in Chapter 2, where the 'Negation' is presented not only as 'A murderer of its own Body: *but also a murderer/ of every Divine Member*' (italics mine).

What Milton's words to Ololon underline, therefore, is that Sterry's unequivocal contrast between the King of Light and Prince of Darkness closely anticipates Blake's arguably less transparent distinction between the 'Soul or Imagination' and 'Adam' or the 'Natural Man' (L, E273), sharing its distinctive premise that the 'divine' aspect of human beings is their tendency to engage creatively with the contraries of existence and the 'satanic' their inclination to split and oppose them. These two sides of human nature are the 'Angel' and 'Devil' with which Blake told Robinson every person is born.[15] As well as reinforcing the appropriateness of employing Sterry's Christ/Devil distinction as a lens through which to expound Blake's 'dualism', this finding also lends weight to Jon Mee's contention that Blake's use of the terms 'spiritual' and 'vegetable' does *not* 'map on to a conventional distinction between the body and soul as distinct essences'.[16]

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[15] BR 705.
[16] Jon Mee, *Romanticism, Enthusiasm, and Regulation: Poetics and the Policing of Culture in the Romantic Period* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 260.

Having shown that Blake's divine and satanic 'principles' are not discrete entities, but divergent orderings of characteristics in which certain highly polarised ways of being and seeing are lived out, I will now apply this insight to the *Illustrations of the Book of Job* (1825), which shows Blake at the height of his artistic—and theological—powers.

2. *The ethical and epistemological nature of Blake's contrast between Christ and Satan: a case study of engravings 11 and 17 of the* Job *series*

If there are two images which epitomise the disparity between the divine and the satanic in Blake's theology they are surely engravings 11 and 17 of the *Job* series, in which we find depictions of divinity that could hardly be more contrasting. This section seeks to further illuminate the nature of the 'opposition' between Christ and Satan in Blake by considering the divergence between these engravings from the perspective of Sterry's distinction between Christ and the Devil. Let us begin by examining each engraving in turn, paying close attention to their graphic and textual details.

Engraving 11: 'Job's Nightmare'

In the first engraving (Figure 1) we are confronted with a hair-raising depiction of nocturnal visionary torment, which presents Blake's interpretation of Job 7:14: 'With Dreams upon my bed thou scarest me & affrightest me with Visions' (Blake's version of the KJV). Job can be seen lying rigidly on a bed with his eyes wide open and arms raised in a gesture that could be either petitionary or self-defensive. Hovering above the prostrate patriarch is a terrifying character with pointed hair, flowing beard, and cloven hooves, around which coils an enormous scaly snake, complete with slithering tongue. This disturbing figure points upwards with his right hand to the stony tablets of the Law (in the 'Butts Set', the text is clearly part of the Decalogue in Hebrew) and downwards

with his left hand to the flames of Hell, which engulf three sinister figures whose scaly skin resembles that of the serpent. These may represent Job's 'friends', who can be seen reproaching him for his supposed failure to maintain the 'law of ten commandments' (MHH23, E43) in the previous engraving. If so, the demonic nature of their 'Accusation of Sin' (L, E275) is pointedly exposed by Blake in this design. The unbearable anguish Job endures is reinforced by the two texts from Job 30 which can be seen in the top left and right-hand corners of the margin: 'My bones are pierced in me in the night season & my sinews take no rest' (17) and 'My skin is black upon me & my bones are burned with heat' (30). But who exactly is Job's 'divine' accuser supposed to be?

The most plausible suggestion is that the hybrid figure who oppresses Job—part God, part Devil—is the exclusively transcendent divinity invoked by the words of the Lord's Prayer', 'Our Father which art in Heaven', which Blake includes (appropriately within a cloud, suggesting obscurity) at the top of Engraving 1. This is a conception of a *heavenly* Father who, as the name implies, inhabits an otherworldly realm '*at a distance from men*' (to quote Winstanley), ruling the cosmos and society through authoritarian laws, deviation from which is harshly punished.[17] The way this remote and tyrannical god chooses to communicate his will is through sacred texts which codify his decrees, requiring a clerical elite to decode them, like the 'Blots & Blurs' (PA59, E575) shown in the open book on plate 5 of *Urizen*. He appears in a wide range of guises in Blake's writings: as the 'aged father' in *Tiriel* (6:42, E283); the Miltonic 'Governor' in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (5, E34); the 'Mistaken Demon of heaven' in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (5:3, E48); the 'Selfish father of men' in *Songs of Experience* ('Earth's Answer', 12, E18); the 'Demon of smoke' in *Ahania* (2:10, E84); the 'father of worms & clay' in *The Four Zoas* ([Nt.4]48:16, E332); the 'heavenly father…beyond

[17] Gerrard Winstanley, *Truth Lifting up his Head above Scandals*, CWGW, i, 412. Italics original.

the skies' in *Milton* (20:32, E114); the 'Patriarch Druid' in *Jerusalem* (98:48, E258); the 'Angel of the Presence Divine' in *The Everlasting Gospel* ([f]30, E521); and the 'Elohim of the Heaven' in *The Ghost of Abel* (22, E272). The most famous evocation of this familiar figure, however, can be found in 'To Nobodaddy', a short poem addressed directly to the distant and vengeful god—who is nobody's daddy—himself:

> Why art thou silent & invisible
> Father of jealousy
> Why dost thou hide thyself in clouds
> From every searching Eye
>
> Why darkness & obscurity
> In all thy words & laws
> That none dare eat the fruit but from
> The wily serpents jaws
> Or is it because Secresy
> gains females loud applause
>
> (E471)

This diabolical divinity, who sits enthroned in majesty—combining the roles of primeval priest, legislator, and monarch—also appears frequently in Blake's visual art, including, 'God Judging Adam', of which three versions exist (*c*. 1795, B294 [Pl. 390]; B295 [Pl.385]; B296 [Pl.386]); 'Mercy and Truth are Met Together, Righteousness and Peace have Kissed Each Other' (*c*.1803, B463 [Pl. 553]); and 'Ezekiel's Wheels' (*c*.1803-5, B468 [Pl. 542]); not to mention Engraving 2 of the *Job* series itself. In this engraving, 'Nobodaddy' can be seen as the 'Ancient of Days' or 'Angel of the Divine Presence', enveloped in clouds as he colludes with his agent, Satan, to bring about Job's downfall—a plot which, ironically, turns out to precipitate his own dramatic decline, presented in Engraving 16 (discussed below). The closest visual analogue to the satanic character in Engraving 11 is not, however, to be found in the *Illustrations* but the large colour print, 'Elohim Creating Adam' (1795, B289 [Pl. 388]). This portrays an ancient deity hovering over a sun-like disc as he forms or pulls Adam, whose legs are enfolded by a large worm or snake, out of an upsurge of vegetation resembling a wave. Whereas

'Elohim Creating Adam' defies 'mainstream Christian theological tradition by having the snake entwined with Adam's legs', thereby indicating that 'Adam has the "satanic" aspect of his character built into his nature from the beginning', the illustration of Job's nightmare 'goes a step further' by unmasking the transcendent deity himself *as* Satan.[18]

In short, Job's vision of his 'persecutor' is the aloof god who seeks to 'Create a Heaven in which all shall be pure & holy' (J49:27, E198) by imposing a rigorous Moral Law 'no flesh [or] spirit' (BU24:25, E81) can possibly hope to keep. The duplicitous nature of this figure is implied by the two New Testament texts visible in the margin (2 Thess. 2:4 and 2 Cor. 11:14-15), which describe his strategy of impersonating a benign being when he is in fact 'an agent of tribulation', indeed Satan himself.[19] The similarity between the facial features of the distressed Job and his 'accuser' suggest that 'Job now recognizes the terrifying fact that in making God in his own image he has created the selfhood that is Satan'.[20] In other words, the demonic god is Job's projection of his own Selfhood on to the cosmic stage; that is, the 'Great Selfhood/ Satan: Worshipd as God by the Mighty Ones of the Earth' (J29:17-18, E175). If this image seems to be entirely disheartening, there is a faint glimmer of hope to be found in the two central texts above and below the central picture frame, both taken from the Book of Job: 'The triumphing of the wicked is short, the joy of the hypocrite is but for a moment' (20:5) and 'For I know that my Redeemer liveth & that he shall stand in the latter days upon the Earth' (19:25). It should also be noted that, however agonising it may be, Job's vision of Satan in Engraving 11 actually *helps* him see the wholly inadequate, and destructive, nature of his inherited theology, preoccupied with the 'Selfish Virtues of the Natural Heart' (J52, 'To the Deists', E201). In true apocalyptic fashion, it is Job's visionary experience, which comes in a dream, not resort to the study of books and tradition, which enables

[18] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 46.
[19] Ibid., 44.
[20] Andrew Wright, *Blake's Job: A Commentary* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), 31.

him to see the satanic character of his 'wrought Image' (Blake's rendering of 'my reins' in Job 19:27) of the divinity.

Engraving 17: 'The Vision of Christ'

In the second engraving (Figure 2), which portrays the realisation of Job's hope to see God with his own eyes (19:27), we meet a divine person who could hardly be less like the despotic deity in Engraving 11, who, as Blake remarks in another context, is 'just such a Tyrant as Augustus' (Ann. Thorn. 6, E669). The central caption, 'I have heard thee with the hearing of the Ear but now my Eye seeth thee' (Job. 42:5), already signals a major divergence. Unlike Job's 'tormentor', about whom Job has learnt ('heard') from others, his redeemer is a divine Being whom Job has experienced ('seen') first-hand. Exploiting the Book of Job's silence on exactly *what* Job sees, Blake utilises the picture space to 'fill in the blanks', as it were, of the biblical text, thus enabling his audience to participate in Job's divine vision. What we see in this space is a muscular figure with an exceptionally long beard, reaching down to his feet, which (like his hair) merges into his translucent robe. Surrounding his upper body is an oval-shaped halo, similar to the circle of light which appears at the top of the following engraving, from which emanate beams of light. Kneeling before this divinity, who raises his hands in what appears to be a gesture of blessing, are the long-suffering couple of Job and his wife, who 'undergoes the imaginative transformation with Job'.[21] Job, whose expression is serenely focused, clasps his hands on his lap, while his wife smiles tenderly, lifting her hands in prayer. Their bearing is less one of humble obeisance than loving adoration. Behind the couple, and very much in their shadow, are Job's 'friends', who recoil from the divine presence, shielding their faces as if to protect them from the (to them) blinding light, although the

[21] Katherine Low, *The Bible, Gender, and Reception History: The Case of Job's Wife* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 185.

middle figure does cast a sly glance over his right shoulder. The six figures are arranged in an ascending composition from right to left, with the three 'friends' leading up to the entranced couple and the One they worship, whose widely assumed identity is reflected in the engraving's customary title: 'The Vision of Christ'.

Even if the ancient and long-bearded figure who stands before Job and his wife marks quite a departure from Blake's typical depictions of Jesus, which are surprisingly 'traditional' in their iconography (perhaps a concession to the taste of Thomas Butts?), the credibility of this identification is reinforced by the luminosity of his gown and the shafts of light streaming from his upper body. The first feature is reminiscent of Jesus' clothing in the Synoptic accounts of the Transfiguration (Mt. 17:2; Mk. 9:3; Lk. 9:29), in which case Blake may have wanted to suggest that the glorified Christ—whom he equates with Jehovah (MHH6, E35)—appeared to Job and his wife *before* Peter, James, and John. The second element brings to mind several places in Blake's writings where Jesus is described as beaming (J4:4-5, E146; VLJ84, E562; 85, E562; 'My First Vision of Light', E712-13), as well as at least four of his undisputed images of Christ in which similar rays of light appear (*c*. 1799, 'The Last Supper', B424 [Pl. 508]; *c*. 1805, 'The Resurrection', B502 [Pl. 573]; *c*. 1800, 'The Conversion of Saul', B506 [Pl. 575]; and the full-page illustration on plate 76 of *Jerusalem*). The most decisive evidence for this identification, however, can be found in the selection of biblical texts contained in the lower margin; all of which, with one exception (Jn. 10:30, visible just above the central scroll), are taken from John 14, which forms part of the Farewell Discourses (14-17). As these verses—which Blake selects, divides, and revises for his own purposes—are all concerned with delineating the relationship of the Son, who is the 'image of the invisible God' (Col. 1:15), to the disciples through the Spirit, the dazzling character Job and his spouse see can surely only be Christ, God's 'only begotten Son' (Jn. 3:16).

The contrast between Job's visions of Christ and Satan

There are two key features which set the Christ figure in Engraving 17 apart from the Satan character in Engraving 11. The first, which we have already noted, is that he is a God Job has seen *for himself* rather than heard about from the testimony of others, as is the case with his 'persecutor'. This epistemological distinction is encapsulated by Blake's contrast between 'Memory' and 'Inspiration' (M1, 'Preface', E95; 14:29, E108; VLJ68, E554), which is analogous to Paul's Letter/Spirit opposition cited on the altar in Engraving 1: 'The Letter Killeth [but] The Spirit giveth Life' (2. Cor. 3:6). 'Memory' or 'The Letter' refers to received 'wisdom' as it has stagnated due to habitual repetition and uncritical acceptance, bereft of creative reflection informed by the circumstances of the present. 'Inspiration' or 'The Spirit', by contrast, designates the revitalisation—and, wherever necessary, replacement—of the petrified 'truths' enshrined in time-honoured prescriptions by original insights arising from lived experience. So, in contrast to Job's inscrutable 'oppressor', Christ is an eminently visible God; a point driven home by the verses from John stating the implication of the Son's oneness with the Father (10:3; 14:11): that to set eyes on Jesus is to behold all there is to be seen of the divinity (14:9; 7). As the Johannine Prologue expresses, 'No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him' (1:18; cf. 6:46). Blake's 'christomonism', reflected in such statements as 'God is Jesus' (L, 274) and 'Jesus our Father who art in thy Heavens calld by thy Name the Holy Ghost' (Ann. Thorn. 3, E668), pervades his interpretation of the Book of Job as a whole.[22] The One Job 'sees' with his own eyes is thus the 'Express image of God' ([To] Thomas Butts, 22 November 1802, E720), even if this vision should not be construed as a literal sight *with* the eyes but an internal apprehension of the 'Infinite in all things', much like Isaiah

[22] Christopher Rowland, '"Intimations of Apocalyptic": The Perspective of the History of Interpretation', in Catrin H. Williams and Christopher Rowland (eds.), *John's Gospel and Intimations of Apocalyptic* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013), 134.

describes his vision in *The Marriage*: 'I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover'd the infinite in every thing' (12, E38).

The second discrepancy is that, in contrast to the wholly transcendent deity who looks down at Job from a menacing height, Christ is a Being who is intimately present or *immanent* in the world. The notion that Jesus is 'God descending according to the weakness of man' (Ann. Lav. 690, E599) is conveyed pictorially by Blake's ingenious placement of the cloud on which Christ stands not above Job but down at his ground level. By eliminating the distance between heaven and earth, Blake creates a sense of divine propinquity, heightened by the portrait format of the engraving, which serves to underline that there is no 'vertical' partition between God and the world. The location of the divine presence in the world is human nature itself—a truth exemplified by that *locus classicus* of mutual indwelling, 'I am in my Father & you in me & I in you' (Jn. 14:20), given pride of place in the central scroll of Engraving 17. As we saw in Chapter 2, this coinherence of the divine and human is a prominent feature of Blake's theology of the Imagination. 'I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine', the saviour sings at the beginning of *Jerusalem* (4:7, E146). The Person standing before Job and his wife can thus be seen as an externalisation of their inner discernment of the Divine Body, or the actuality of Christ's presence in them and theirs in Christ. As Rowland explains, 'It is not that [Job] sees something other than himself but his true self, as part of the Divine Body that God is, and has always been within, though it is from without, so that he can come to know the glory that is within'.[23] This common life 'in Christ', in which internal and external aspects of reality coincide, is not just an intellectual matter but primarily a mode of existence realised through acts of selfless love, like the one we witness in the next engraving, where Job prays for his accusers. By forgiving others and annihilating

[23] Ibid., 136.

his Selfhood in the process, Job puts into action the very principle which animates the Divine Body, articulated by Jesus in *Jerusalem*: 'if I die I shall arise again & thou with me/ This is Friendship & Brotherhood without it Man Is Not' (96:15-16, E255).

The contrast between Job's 'persecutor' and redeemer, set out above, makes it easy to see how one could arrive at the conclusion that Blake posits the existence of *two* gods. As we have seen, however, the application of Sterry's contrast between Christ and the Devil to Blake's theology reveals how his divine and satanic 'principles' are in fact contrasting perspectives on, and responses to, the antitheses inherent in a single reality; an insight I shall now develop in relation to each of the engravings in turn.

An interpretation of engravings 11 and 17 in the light of Sterry

If we examine Engraving 11 (Figure 1) through the lens of Sterry's 'portrait' of the Devil, it can be seen how Job's 'oppressor' is not an independent opponent of Christ but an embodiment of Job's false theological consciousness, in which the harmony between the contraries of reason and desire, the one and the many, has been completely thrown off balance, largely as a result of Job's blind dedication to 'the faith which was once delivered unto the saints' (Jude 1:3). Rather than having to think for himself, Job resorts to a moribund, derivative, religion, which convinces him that righteousness is simply a matter of 'going through the motions', of being 'perfect & upright' (Job 1:1; Engraving 1) according to the Law. Thus, even when Job engages in charity (Engraving 5), his act is perfunctory, executed out of concern with his own salvation through a public display of 'virtue', devoid of genuine, heartfelt, compassion for and solidarity with the poor and needy. Job's sense of external compulsion—the theological basis of which he begins to question as a result of the suffering he experiences *despite* his fear of God and eschewal of evil—is of a piece with his asymmetrical conception of the divinity as an exclusively

transcendent being whose desire, in Sterry's words, is 'to be the top of the Mount, while the great Congregation sit, as the Clouds under his Feet: to be a consuming Fire to all others; a Crowning Glory, only to himself' (RRR 11). This satanic 'being' behaves like a secular monarch, rewarding those who submit to his will with riches in the afterlife, but condemning those who have the temerity to defy him to the sort of punitive hell described by Father Arnall in James Joyce's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* as an 'abode of the damned which the justice of an offended God has called into existence for the eternal punishment of sinners'.[24]

What Blake would have made of this Almighty, whose dignity can only be upheld by brutally afflicting his creatures for exercising their 'Staminal Virtues' (Ann. Lav. 226, E601), is clear from his declaration 'To the Deists' in *Jerusalem*:

> Man must & will have Some Religion; if he has not the Religion of Jesus, he will have the Religion of Satan, & will erect the Synagogue of Satan. calling the Prince of this World, God; and destroying all who do not worship Satan under the Name of God. Will any one say: Where are those who worship Satan under the Name of God! Where are they? Listen! Every Religion that Preaches Vengeance for Sins [is] the Religion of the Enemy & Avenger; and not the Forgiver of Sin, and their God is Satan, Named by the Divine Name[.]
>
> (52, E201)

Blake's position is clear: by whatever name he is known, the divinity who demands satisfaction for the 'sins' of humanity is Satan. By the same token, any text that values justice over mercy is inspired not by God but Satan: 'Whatever Book is for Vengeance for Sin & whatever Book is Against the Forgiveness of Sins is not of the Father but of Satan the Accuser & Father of Hell' (Ann. Dante, E690). Although he is 'Worshipd by the Names Divine/ of Jesus & Jehovah' (GP, Epilogue, 5-6, E269), this vindictive and judgemental 'being' can only be 'the Deus/ Of the Heathen, The God of This World, & the Goddess Nature/ Mystery Babylon the Great, The Druid Dragon & hidden Harlot'

[24] James Joyce, *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, ed. Jeri Johnson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 100.

(J93:23-5, E254). It is this composite pagan deity, constitutionally opposed to the possibility of reconciliation, who chillingly demands human instead of animal sacrifices in *The Ghost of Abel* (where Jehovah takes on a positive role):

> I will have Human Blood & not the blood of Bulls or Goats
> And no Atonement O Jehovah the Elohim live on Sacrifice
> of Men: hence I am God of Men: thou Human O Jehovah.
> By the Rock & Oak of the Druid creeping Mistletoe & Thon
> Cains City built with Human Blood, not Blood of Bulls & Goats
> Thou shalt Thyself be Sacrificed to Me thy God on Calvary
> (2:13-18, E272)

The prevalence of druidic symbols such as geometric masonry and oak trees ('Rock & Oak') in the *Illustrations* indicates that Job had himself been a devoted servant of this diabolical divinity, who thrives on the 'Sacrifice of Men', prior to his 'conversion'. This satanic figure, so vividly depicted in Engraving 11, should not, however, be regarded as an existent being: he is merely Job's dreadfully distorted 'wrought Image' of God, in which the 'fellowship' of Christ has given way to the 'desolation' of the Devil. In the words of Sterry's friend, Jeremiah White, 'Men have painted God in their own Minds, and represented him to the World as a cruel Being, as one extending himself to a larger Capacity in Severity and Wrath, than Sweetness and Loves…This is but a false Image, an Idol which…Man hath set up within it self in the place of God'.[25] But, even as an illusion with no reality outside of the 'Temple of his Mind' (EG[i]49, E524), the 'Druid Dragon', whom Sterry describes as 'a Fiery Spirit eager to consume all appearances of Life, and God' (RRR 13), devastates Job's life in ways which are only too real.

Turning now to Engraving 17 (Figure 2), if we examine this illustration from the viewpoint of Sterry's account of Christ as the 'Eternal Principle of *Distinction*', we can discern how Job's redeemer is the embodiment of his reformed theology, in which the equilibrium or 'proportion' between the divine attributes has been restored as a result of

[25] Jeremiah White, *The Restoration of All Things* (1712), 186.

Job having recognised God's true nature for himself. This authentic vision of divinity is one in which the contraries of unity and diversity, divinity and humanity, subject and object, are not opposed to each other but reconciled without losing their distinctiveness, existing in dialectical tension. The Christ figure who blesses Job and his wife represents the innate human capacity to behold 'all things in One *Light*', possess 'all things in One *Life*', and enjoy 'all things in One *Love*' (RRR 167). He is, in other words, that 'blessed Neighbourhood' (AGM 339) in which God, self, and other coexist in perfect harmony. The salvific truth revealed to Job in this moment of visionary insight is that 'God is the Heavenly *Hierusalem*, where all things are *Fellow-citizens*' (RRR 11) or, as Margaret Bottrall puts it, 'When love becomes the regulative principle of life, then there will be true freedom, individual and collective'.[26] Job's saviour is no heavenly Father who will 'render to every man according to his deeds' (Rom. 2:6), but a divinity who exists in all human beings as their 'truest', 'best', and 'only' Self (AGM 338). So, when Job comes to pray for his 'comforters' (Engraving 18), he does not do so out of a sense of external compulsion, based on a lopsided vision of God as an autocratic legislator and judge, but out of a rediscovered awareness of the Divine Body as that 'space' in which '*every* other *Person*' is '*thy* Neighbour, *thy* Brother, another self, *as* thy self *to* thy self' (DFW, Preface, 3). The incarnational theology of which Engraving 17 is a particularly luminous expression is distilled by Harold Fisch: 'God and Man are consubstantial and co-eternal…Incarnation signifies nothing less than the abolishing of all distinction between Man and God; God dissolves in Man and no otherness is left to command us, to question us, or to affright us'.[27] Even if I might replace 'distinction' with 'division', Fisch's statement captures how the discovery of the divine-in-human frees 'individuals'

[26] Margaret Bottrall, *The Divine Image: A Study of Blake's Interpretation of Christianity* (Rome: Edizioni di Storia e Letteratura, 1950), 119.
[27] Harold Fisch, *The Biblical Presence in Shakespeare, Milton, and Blake: A Comparative Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), 310.

like Job from their fearful subservience to the heathen Deus, who, despite only seeming 'to Be: Is: To those to whom/ [he] seems to Be…productive of the most dreadful/ Consequences…even of/ Torments, Despair, [and] Eternal Death' (J33:51-4, E179).

By using Sterry's distinction between Christ and the Devil as a heuristic device, it has been possible to show how Blake considers Job's 'persecutor' and redeemer to be two visions of the same God who, like the humans who dwell in him, has a multifaceted personality with the potential to become unbalanced. What Sterry offers is the explicit commentary on how 'dualistic' terminology and imagery is being used ethically and epistemologically, not ontologically, which is lacking in Blake. In this case, how can we be reasonably sure that Blake *is* operating with the same basic assumption as Sterry: that the contraries of human experience reflect the complex nature of a single divinity?

Blake's celebration of contraries in divinity

My initial response would be to point to Blake's selection of the Book of Job, the only biblical book Blake ever illustrated in its entirety, as the subject of his most penetrating theological exploration. The reason I believe this choice speaks volumes about Blake's stance is because Job stands out in the Bible for the candour with which it presents God as the one who presides over life's, in Job's case extreme, polarities. So, although it is Satan who is directly responsible for inflicting intolerable suffering on Job, it is clear from the prologue that it is *the Lord* who grants Satan permission to first ruin Job's possessions (1:12) and then his person (2:6). This is consistent with the dominant view of Satan in the Old Testament where, with the possible exception of 1 Chronicles 21:1, he is not a power opposed to God, as he becomes in the New Testament, but an agent of the divinity.[28] 'The universal cause', as Sterry declares in an unpublished discourse, 'is

[28] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 79.

more intimate than every particular cause, the Divine Power is the more intimate & immediate cause, as when Job was under his trail, the Lord Jesus gives, the Lord takes, there was the Devil…ye chief Taker, and there was the Sabeans, they were takers under the Devil, yet Job takes no notice of this, he saw what power they had, it must be given them of God' ('Some Discourses of P.S Drawn into Paragraphs', EC MS 293, 55). Job 42:11, partially quoted in Engraving 19, speaks frankly of 'all the evil that *the Lord* had brought upon him'. Blake stresses the divine involvement in the horrendous affliction of his faithful servant by including Job's indignant reply to his wife's plea, 'curse God, and die', above the image in Engraving 7: 'What! shall we receive Good at the hand of God & shall we not also receive Evil[?]' (2:9-10). The subtle changes to the King James Version—the substitution of an exclamation for a question mark after 'what' and the inclusion of 'also' between 'not' and 'receive'—serve to underline what is already clear in the text: 'good' and 'evil', which are so closely interconnected that one cannot be had without the other, both derive from the hand(s) of God. There is perhaps no more vivid illustration of the divine authorship of the 'dreadful' (in a non-pejorative sense) as well as 'lovely' aspects of existence than the fact he proclaims his creation of the monstrous Behemoth (40:15) and, presumably, Leviathan (41:1). Engraving 15 shows the divinity pointing proudly towards the twin beasts of land and sea (2 Es. 6:49-52), whose 'fearful symmetry' *he* has framed. The impact of these fearsome terrestrial and aquatic creatures is well captured by the words of Rudolph Otto, which pertain to the biblical text but provide an equally fitting comment on Blake's illustration: 'they…express in masterly fashion the downright stupendous, the wellnigh daemonic and wholly incomprehensible character of the eternal power', which 'mocks at all conceiving but can yet stir the mind to its depths, fascinate and overbrim the heart'.[29] There are, of course, other parts of the

[29] Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy: An Inquiry into the Non-Rational Factor in the Idea of the Divine*

Bible to which Blake could have turned which proclaim, or strongly intimate, the divine establishment of 'good' *and* 'evil' (e.g. Ex. 4:10-11; Ps. 139:12; Isa. 45:7; Am. 3:6), but nowhere else do we find the kind of extended, head-on, meditation on the way in which contraries are part and parcel of human (and divine) existence that we find in Job.

Another compelling indicator that Blake, like Sterry, considers Christ and Satan to be two faces of the same God is the way in which he foregrounds the 'satanic' side of divinity. Thus, in spite of his playful opposition of the Father and Son in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* ('Thinking as I do that the Creator of this World is a very Cruel Being & being a Worshipper of Christ I cannot help saying the Son O how unlike the Father', 94, E565), which Nuttall takes rather literally as evidence of Blake's Gnosticism, Blake has no hesitation whatsoever in identifying Christ with the jealous divinity who is a 'consuming fire' (Deut. 4:24; 9:3; Heb. 12:29).[30] This can be observed on plate 6 of *The Marriage*, where Blake proclaims that 'the Jehovah of the Bible [who, as we have seen, Jesus will *become* after his death] is no other than he, who dwells in flaming fire', and the painting, 'Epitome of James Hervey's "Meditations among the Tombs"' (*c*. 1820, B770 [Pl. 967]), where the words 'God out of Christ is a Consuming Fire' can be made out to the right of the bearded divinity who sits in a sphere overseeing the panorama of salvation history unfolding below him. If one looks carefully, 'mercy' and 'wrath' can also be seen at the top left and right-hand corners of the image, signalling the contrary states of divinity. That Blake's God comprehends not only the gentle but also the fierce and vigorous dimensions of existence is evident from a set of four defiant maxims to be found among the 'Proverbs of Hell': 'The pride of the peacock is the glory of God./ The lust of the goat is the bounty of God./ The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God./ The nakedness of woman is the work of God' (MHH8:22-5, E36). Below these aphorisms is

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and Its Relation to the Rational, tr. John W. Harvey (London: Oxford University Press, 1923), 82.

[30] A. D. Nuttall, *The Alternative Trinity: Gnostic Heresy in Marlowe, Milton, and Blake* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 7.

a slightly longer statement, which echoes the sentiment that even the most primal and disquieting phenomena are expressions of *one* divine reality: 'The roaring of lions, the howling of wolves, the raging of the stormy sea, and the destructive sword. are portions of eternity too great for the eye of man' (8:27, E36).

It is also worth noting that, when it comes to Blake's presentation of Jesus, those qualities usually associated with the Devil—like pride, lust, wrath, and nakedness— are reclaimed for the Messiah. Pride is apparent in *The Everlasting Gospel*, where Jesus is described as being 'Humble to God' but 'Haughty to Man/ Cursing the Rulers before the People' ([k]64-5, E520), which is quite different from the rather placid depiction of Christ in many of the biblical watercolours commissioned by Butts. Lust is manifest on plate 79 of *Jerusalem*, where the Lamb and his bride 'have a grand time making love' on a heavenly couch (40-5, E235).[31] Wrath can be observed in the ferocity with which, as we saw in Chapter 2, Christ subdues the Selfhood by nailing it to the Cross (EG[i]52-3, E524). Nakedness, as Joseph Viscomi points out, is indicated by the image of unused clothing ('the linen clothes folded up') on plate 3 of *The Marriage* (E34) and may also be shown on plate 21 where a naked youth, possibly representing Christ, squats over the text.[32] It is certainly Jesus who can be seen 'rising naked above a crouching figure' in one of Blake's *Night Thoughts* illustrations.[33] It is therefore one of the most noticeable features of Blake's Jesus that he is not only a 'Saviour mild & gentle' (FZ[Nt.4]56:17, E337), which is how he tends to appear in Blake's images, but *also* a fervent and erotic rebel who displays what the pious might regard as 'diabolical' virtues. So, consistently does Blake ascribe qualities habitually associated with Satan to Christ that even Nuttall

[31] Susanne Sklar, 'Erotic Spirituality in Blake's *Last Judgement*', in Helen P. Bruder and Tristanne Connolly (eds.), *Sexy Blake* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 127.
[32] Joseph Viscomi, 'Lessons of Swedenborg: or the Origin of Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in Thomas Pfau and Robert F. Gleckner (eds.), *Lessons of Romanticism: A Critical Companion* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1998), 184.
[33] Susanne Sklar, *Blake's 'Jerusalem' as Visionary Theatre: Entering the Divine Body* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 99.

is compelled to admit that 'The answer to the final question…"Did he who made the Lamb make thee?" ['The Tyger', 20, E25] is probably "Yes. He who made the lamb *did* make the tiger'.[34] It is this commitment to contraries in divinity which accounts for the uncharacteristically elderly and muscular appearance of Christ in Engraving 17: having descended into the abyss, he has recovered those 'spiritual gifts' (1 Cor. 14:1) that have been domesticated, or even proscribed, in mainstream Christianity. In the final section, we will explore the revolution in Job's theological perspective by which Christ becomes identified with the one 'who dwells in flaming fire' through a consideration of 'The Fall of Satan' (Engraving 16), informed by Sterry's contrast between Christ and the Devil.

3. *'The Fall of Satan': Engraving 16 as an illustration of a revolution in Job's theological perspective*

In the last section, we saw how the contrasting representations of divinity in engravings 11 and 17 of the *Job* series are not to be explained in terms of a battle between two *gods* but a struggle between two *theological visions* and *ways of life*, the first defined by the dualistic division of contraries and the second by their dialectical integration. So, when David Bindman claims that the *Illustrations* deal with Job's evolving 'relationship with Jehovah and with Christ, who are in essence different conceptions of the Godhead', he is more or less right, even if one might remove 'in essence' and add that whereas Job's 'oppressor' is a one-sided vision of God his saviour is a holistic one.[35] I would argue that the same principle applies not only to the *Job* series but Blake's corpus as a whole, which probes contraries in divinity, not contrary divinities. Blake might have resisted the notion that 'there is but one Infinite', but he never disputed that 'there is but one Omnipotent Uncreate & God' (Ann. Swed., DLDW, 27, E604). When studying Blake,

[34] Nuttall, *Alternative Trinity*, 259. Italics Nuttall's.
[35] David Bindman, *Blake as an Artist* (Oxford: Phaidon, 1977), 210.

it is therefore crucial to remember that 'the contrasting, and conflicting descriptions and actions of the divinity are not to be understood as some kind of metaphysical battle in which the outcome is the negation of one power by another', as we find, for example, in the Book of Revelation. Instead, they should be seen as depictions of 'differing kinds of divine activity, both of which are needed in some kind of dialectical relationship, to achieve spiritual maturity and any kind of change, political included'.[36] Like 'wrathful deities' in early Buddhist art—which function as 'visual expressions of the *coincidentia oppositorum*' in which 'an outer expression of malevolence [is fused] with an inner valency of compassion'—Job's ultimately benevolent assailant 'paralyzes or transcends [his] dichotomizing cognition', causing his theological dualism to be 'subverted'.[37] In this case, Job's encounter with this unidimensional divinity, who is a terribly deformed impression of his saviour, actually facilitates the cleansing of his 'doors of perception', through which he is enabled to see God, the 'Infinite in all things'. Having clarified the relationship between Job's 'persecutor' and saviour, it is now time to apply this insight to one of Blake's most theologically challenging images, 'The Fall of Satan' (Figure 7).

Engraving 16: 'The Fall of Satan'

Like Engraving 17, Engraving 16 shows an incident only alluded to in the Book of Job itself: 'the Judgment of the Wicked' (36:17). Blake uses this verse as an occasion to return to an 'event' he had first discussed over thirty years earlier (MHH5-6, E34-5). In the central picture frame we are faced, for the last time, with the kind of hierarchical delineation of the relation between heaven and earth which we also find in engravings 2 and 5. Sitting at the top of the scene, enthroned above a flight of steps, is the patriarchal god who has colluded with Satan. He is surrounded by an oval-shaped halo containing

[36] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 84-5.
[37] Robert N. Linrothe, *Wrathful Compassion: Wrathful Deities in Early Indo-Tibetan Esoteric Buddhist Art* (London: Serindia Publications, 1999), 8.

six cherubs, three to his right, one to his left, and two hovering over his shoulders, holding their heads in their hands. The Almighty, who has a weighty tome open on his lap, is enveloped in rolling clouds flowing from two larger angels, resembling those in Blake's painting of 'Christ in the Sepulchre, Guarded by Angels' (*c*. 1805, B500 [Pl. 603]), which flank him. His right hand is raised, apparently bidding farewell to a figure (presumably Satan), who hurtles down head-first from the divine throne in an elongated ball of fire. Falling with Satan are two smaller figures, bracing their heads, who look a lot like Job and his wife, suggesting that it is not only the defective divinity but also the dumbfounded couple who are undergoing a Last Judgement: 'whenever an Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual' (VLJ84, E562). This image is a snapshot of the moment before Satan, who is suspended in mid-air, plunges into the infernal crevasse, from which protrude three flames; one each for him and his two companions. To the right of the chasm are Job's 'friends', whose faces are etched with fear as they recoil from the falling figures. On the other side are Job and his wife, looking on with relief and wonder as Satan (alongside their personal Spectres) passes before their very eyes. As with Engraving 17, the identity of the central character can be deduced from the selection of biblical texts contained in the margins, several of which refer to the defeat of Satan, variously referred to as the 'Prince of this World' or the 'Accuser': below the central frame is the first part of Job 36:17, the second part of Luke 10:17 leading on to verse 18, and 1 Corinthians 1:27; above the image Job 26:6; on the left Job 11:7 and the second part of Revelation 12:10; and on the right Job 11:8 and the end of John 12:31. The extracts from Revelation ('The Accuser of our Brethren is Cast down') and John ('The Prince of this World shall be cast out') show how Blake reads Job 36:17 as an allusion to the casting out of Satan. The fact that Blake reverts to a preponderance of New Testament texts, which have a very different understanding of

the relationship between God and Satan from the Book of Job, could be taken to suggest that he has unwittingly fallen into the trap of accepting an ontological dualism between the two principles. As we shall see, however, the Satan who is ejected from heaven is 'not some errant, autonomous operator who works against the divine purposes' but the Selfhood of which God himself must be purged.[38]

A critique of Altizer's interpretation of the fall of Satan

One of the most sustained and thoughtful reflections on the significance of the fall of Satan in Blake's theology can be found in the writings of Thomas Altizer, whose own radical 'death of God' theology (which made the cover of *Time* magazine in 1966) enlists Blake in its cause as 'the first Christian atheist…who chose the kenotic or self-emptying path of immersing himself in the profane reality of experience as the way to the God who is all in all in Jesus'.[39] Altizer's exposition of this 'event' is a complex and occasionally opaque one, informed by Mircea Eliade's adaptation of the *coincidentia oppositorum* and expressed in the theoretical idiom of Hegelian dialectic.[40] Essentially, Altizer sees the fall of Satan as the culmination of 'a kenotic and historical process of the Godhead becoming incarnate in the concrete contingency of time and space'.[41] This kenotic or 'self-emptying' process, Altizer claims, is fundamental to the 'triumph of the Kingdom of God', which requires a 'final cosmic reversal' involving the death of God:

> A genuine dialectical metamorphosis or kenotic transformation of the sacred into the profane can only occur by means of a passage through death: God must eternally die for man, a primal Totality must pass through Self-annihilation, Christ must become Antichrist before He can be resurrected as Jerusalem. Accordingly, an apocalyptic or dialectical regeneration must transpose every opposite into its own

[38] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 58.
[39] 'Is God Dead?', *Time*, 87/14 (8 April 1966); Thomas J. J. Altizer, *The New Apocalypse: The Radical Christian Vision of William Blake* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967), xi.
[40] On Altizer's appropriation of Eliade see John Valk, 'The Concept of the Coincidentia Oppositorum in the Thought of Mircea Eliade', *Religious Studies*, 28/1 (March 1992), 33-4.
[41] Altizer, *New Apocalypse*, 193.

> other. When the opposites move through the finality of death they will be resurrected in reverse form: Spirit will die as Spirit and become fully incarnate in flesh, Eternity will wholly dissolve its transcendent form and become solely present in the immediate moment[.][42]

Altizer's view of universal history might helpfully be likened to an hourglass, with the upper bulb signifying 'heaven' (the transcendent/sacred), the lower bulb 'earth' (the immanent/profane), and the sand passing between them being itself. In Altizer's version of Blake's 'apocalypse'—a term he uses in a predominantly eschatological sense—the transcendent divinity passes through death, the neck of the hourglass, and empties itself entirely into the 'earthly' container. The need for this transposition of opposites arises due to the fact that 'the Christian God, or God of all dominant and established expressions of Christianity, is unveiled as being a Blakean Satan or an Hegelian "Bad Infinite", a dark and repressive body of God who is negated and reversed by the forward and apocalyptic movement of Incarnation'.[43] Blake's Satan, in other words, 'is that Godhead which expires or is "Self-Annihilated" in Christ'.[44] For Altizer, then, the 'Self-Annihilation of God' is the 'centre of Blake's most revolutionary vision'.[45] From this perspective, Engraving 16 is a still frame of the moment when 'the distant and omnipotent God, whom Blake names Satan [ceases] to exist in His transcendent solitude and [becomes] all in all in the new Eden of the "Human Imagination"'—the moment, that is, when the sacred passes dialectically into the profane.[46]

There is much to admire in Altizer's daring interpretation of the fall of Satan. It is certainly true that Blake rejects the 'God of all dominant and established expressions of Christianity', presenting him as a satanic 'being' whose *raison d'être* is to subjugate

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[42] Ibid., 193, 217-18.
[43] Thomas J. J. Altizer, 'Altizer on Altizer', *Literature & Theology*, 15/2 (June 2001), 189.
[44] Thomas J. J. Altizer, *Genesis and Apocalypse: A Theological Voyage Toward Authentic Christianity* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1990), 169.
[45] Thomas J. J. Altizer, 'The Revolutionary Vision of William Blake', *Journal of Religious Ethics*, 37/1 (March 2009), 35.
[46] Altizer, *New Apocalypse*, 199.

'the vulgar' (MHH11, E38) by providing an ideological support for political monarchy and the priesthood which maintains it. Most insightfully, Altizer recognises that Satan's fall involves the 'Self-Annihilation of God', whereby the 'dark and repressive body' of the wholly transcendent divinity gives way to the incarnate Christ. There is, however, a significant flaw in his understanding of what this 'Self-Annihilation of God' entails: it ironically takes for granted the reality of the 'distant and omnipotent' deity, when Blake presents him as no more than a 'Phantom of the overheated brain' (J4:24, E146). If we study Engraving 16 not through the lens of Hegel's philosophy but Sterry's dialectical divinity, it becomes apparent that the god of 'establishment Christianity' is not in fact a being at all, but a menacing *illusion* projected as God.[47] In this case, the god that 'dies', as Thomas Merton suggests, is 'the Negation set up in solitary and absolute authority as an idol and Spectre…endowed with life in proportion as men invest him with (earthly) power and adore him in his separateness and isolation'.[48] In Blake's language, this 'idol and Spectre' is 'The Son of Morn in weary Nights decline/ The lost Travellers Dream under the Hill' (GP, Epilogue, 7-8, E269). It is this illusory, but nevertheless extremely dangerous, conception of divinity which, in John Robinson's words, 'must go' before Job can see God 'as He Is' (1 Jn. 3:2; Engraving 17).[49] That Sterry also recognises Satan's delusive nature is clear from his words in *The Spirit Convincing of Sinne*, which provide an apt gloss on Engraving 16: 'Jesus Christ…by his death [has] cast downe that old Magician from his Throne and power; and now the whole enchantment, the fashion or show of this world [is] dissolving and vanishing, till it should appear no more' (7)

What Job and his wife see passing before their eyes, then, is not a reality as such but their 'wrought Image' of God in which the dynamic balance between contraries has

[47] Ronald Paulson, *Book and Painting: Shakespeare, Milton, and the Bible: Literary Texts and the Emergence of English Painting* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1982), 116.
[48] Thomas Merton, 'Blake and the New Theology', review of Altizer, *The New Apocalypse* (1967), *Sewanee Review*, 76/4 (Autumn 1968), 677.
[49] John Robinson, 'Our Image of God Must Go', *The Observer* (17 March 1963).

been disturbed. One might go even further and suggest that the Michelangelesque Satan who descends in Engraving 16 represents the principle of negation itself, that dualistic mindset which raises one principle over another, which is what Job's inherited theology was all about. So, while Altizer is right to present the casting out of Satan as a 'cosmic reversal', he fails to appreciate how this revolution is ethical and epistemological rather than ontological in nature. Engraving 16 does not show the 'Self-Annihilation of God', if by this we mean that the transcendent god empties his *being* 'into the Sea of Time & Space' (M15:46, E110). What it does show, however, is the kind of 'Self-annihilation' which Milton performs on plate 16 of the poem named after him, where he can be seen simultaneously throttling and embracing a patriarchal god who holds the stone tablets of the Law in his hands, blocking the way to 'Freedom from all Law' ([To] Cumberland, 12 April 1827, E784). This involves the repudiation of that false, dualistic, religion in which mercy is eclipsed by justice in favour of an authentic, and rounded, faith which embraces that side of life demonised by the conventionally pious, celebrating contraries as an integral part of existence. Like 'Job's Nightmare' and 'The Vision of Christ', 'The Fall of Satan' is a visual depiction of a radical change in Job's theological perspective, through which he is able to see those 'diabolical' qualities previously maligned as 'evil' as expressions of the '*Left Hand* of God' (WGP 11). It is through this transformation in discernment and behaviour that Job's 'wrought Image' of the divine is cleansed of its satanic component, bringing about an expansion of the divine economy *in Job's mind*.

In view of Blake's belief that 'All deities reside in the human breast' (MHH11, E38), it is to be expected that this 'conversion' corresponds to the 'Self-annihilation' of the transcendent divinity, who puts off his 'Spectrous body' (M20:20, E114) to emerge as the incarnate Christ. It is not that some part of the divinity is removed, but that the proper balance between the contraries in the divine nature is restored.

As well as misconstruing the nature of the 'cosmic reversal' which Satan's fall represents, Altizer is probably also wrong to suggest that this revolution is 'final', if by this he means that the descent into Hell is a one-off eschatological event which serves no purpose other than extinction. Having elucidated the significance of the incident we witness in Engraving 16, the rest of this section will offer an account of what happens to Satan—the divine Spectre/Selfhood—*after* he enters the inferno, drawing on Sterry's and White's universalist soteriology. While this marks something of a departure from the preceding argument, in which Sterry's distinction between Christ and the Devil has been the primary interpretative lens, a consideration of Satan's fate does relate directly to the subject matter of this chapter. This is because it reveals how Blake is not only not a dualist in a metaphysical sense but a thinker whose entire creative and hermeneutical enterprise is directed, both intellectually and artistically, towards the *expurgation* of the dividing line between contraries, making Damrosch's and Paley's characterisations of Blake as a reluctant dualist and 'failed' monist all the more distorting of his theological vision. As Blake offers no illustration of what happens in the inferno, the reader/viewer must draw their own conclusion, based on their overall construal of 'The Fall of Satan'. While it might be objected that the reason Blake does not show what happens to Satan is because he is uninterested in his fate, I would submit that even if this were the case (which *The Ghost of Abel* appears to confute), entering into Blake's pictures—and even going *beyond* what they show 'on the surface'—is entirely in keeping with the spirit of Blake's invitation for the viewer to 'Enter into these Images in his Imagination approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought' (VLJ82, E560). I suspect this was the sort of interpretative approach Northrop Frye had in mind when he wrote about having to 'crawl through the narrow gap between the end of Revelation and

the beginning of Genesis' to find the 'Jesus of the resurrection'.[50] What I intend to do in the following discussion, then, is to 'crawl through the narrow gap' between engravings 16 and 17, in order to gain a deeper insight into *how* the revolution in Job's outlook is effected; an exercise which I believe will also shed light on the theological significance of Blake's original technique of 'Illuminated Printing' (E693) or 'relief etching'.

'Refining the Gold by fire': a reflection on Satan's fate in the light of Sterry's and White's universalist soteriology

In his *Blake Dictionary*, Foster S. Damon argues that because he is 'the State of Error, there is no possible salvation for Satan: at the revelation of truth, he is cast into the fires of annihilation and is burnt up'.[51] A similar conclusion has been reached more recently by Susanne Sklar, for whom 'Blake is not quite as radical as Origen, who was anathematized for suggesting that God's inexorable forgiveness might transform even Satan'.[52] The inference that Blake renounces the possibility of Satan's redemption is an understandable one to draw from those statements where he seems to categorically deny it. In *The Four Zoas*, for example, Blake declares that 'The State namd Satan never can be redeemed in all Eternity' ([Nt.8]107:25, E380). Again, in *A Vision*, Blake insists that Jesus 'Comes to Deliver Man the…Accused…not Satan the Accuser' (90, E564). These two isolated texts should, however, be approached with caution. As we saw in Chapter 2, Blake is at pains to distinguish the state called 'Satan' from the person who fleetingly inhabits it. The Satan who 'never can be redeemed in all Eternity' should not, therefore, be thought of as an *individual* but a *condition* through which individuals travel on their 'pilgrimage of seventy years' (J16:67, E161). Like Origen's 'orders', Blake's states are

[50] Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, 389.
[51] Foster S. Damon, 'Satan', in *A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake* (1965; rev ed., Hanover: University Press of New England, 1988), 358.
[52] Sklar, *Visionary Theatre*, 15.

circumstances through which every 'traveller thro' Eternity' (M15:35, E109) passes on their journey.[53] So, even if the satanic state of Selfhood is beyond redemption, the one who briefly inhabits it is certainly not. While this might be taken to suggest that Blake is no universalist, the very reason 'Evil is Created into a State' is so that all 'Men/ May be deliverd time after time evermore' (J49:70-1, E199). As a situation through which human beings pass, Satan is not a personal being in need of liberation, but a traditional Christian dualistic *frame of mind* which prevents individuals from realising their calling as members of the Divine Body and, as a result, 'relating well to others around them'.[54]

That Blake does indeed hold a universalist soteriology is indicated by the fact that, on the few occasions that Satan *is* referred to in personal terms, it seems that even he is capable of being delivered from the diabolical state he embodies. In his version of the Lord's Prayer, for instance, Blake writes of Satan: '*Let his Judgment be Forgiveness that he may be consumed in his own Shame*' (Ann. Thorn. 3, E668). Similarly, in *The Ghost of Abel*, Jehovah announces to Satan: 'Such is My Will…that Thou Thyself go to Eternal Death/ In self Annihilation even till Satan Self-subdud Put off Satan/ Into the Bottomless Abyss whose torments arise for ever & ever' (2:19-21, E272). It would thus seem to be the case that even Satan may be saved, being in 'his Spectre's power/ Untill the arrival/ of that hour,/ When his Humanity/ awake/ And cast his Spectre/ into the Lake' (J37, E184). On balance, then, Ferber is probably right to suggest that the 'pitch of [Blake's] work is towards universal salvation…the doctrine of the…salvation of all intelligent beings, including Satan, the fallen angels, and the worst of sinners'.[55] As we have found throughout this study, what Blake implies Sterry asserts unequivocally: the 'Reconciliation' achieved by Christ 'is confirmed to be most universall', encompassing

[53] Michael Ferber, *The Social Vision of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), 189.
[54] Christopher Rowland, *Radical Prophet: The Mystics, Subversives and Visionaries who Strove for Heaven on Earth* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2017), 102.
[55] Ferber, *Social Vision*, 187.

'the falne Angells as well, as the elect Ones' ('An Eternity of Duration', EC MS 291, 150). While it might be objected that Blake's allusions to Satan as a personal being, no matter how rare, point in a dualistic direction, I would suggest that Blake is trying to make a point about the ultimacy of divine love: such is the gratuitousness and scope of 'Jehovahs Salvation' (J61:21, E212) that insofar as Satan is *conceived* as an individual even he is not excluded from it. The bottom line, in any case, is that, personal being or not, Satan is not a being opposed to God but an agent of the divine will.

If Blake is an advocate of *apocatastasis*, as I have argued, then the inferno into which Satan falls is likely to be a place of purgation not retribution, in which case Blake shares another key theological principle in common with Sterry, as well as White, who like other seventeenth-century universalists present divine 'wrath' as a refining fire. Louise Hickman observes how the roots of Sterry's and White's universalism can be traced to their 'shared insistence that…love should know no limits, and embrace all. Both thinkers recognized the fact that any debate about the eternity (or not) of hell is more fundamentally a debate about the extent of God's love'.[56] In contrast to those who defended the doctrine of eternal damnation, preserving 'a conflict between competing divine attributes, justice on the one hand and mercy or love on the other', D. P. Walker suggests that Sterry and White (very much like Blake) removed 'the possibility of any such conflict by making love the supreme attribute, out of which all the others grow and to which they must conform'.[57] It is this emphasis on the priority of divine love which accounts for their conception of Hell as 'a place not of damnation but of education and

[56] Louise Hickman, 'Love Is All and God Is Love: Universalism in Peter Sterry (1613-1672) and Jeremiah White (1630-1707)', in Gregory Macdonald (ed.), *'All Shall be Well': Explorations in Universalism and Christian Theology from Origen to Moltmann* (Cambridge: James Clarke, 2011), 98.
[57] D. P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1964), 110.

regeneration'.[58] As White explains, 'if Sin and Punishment be but Instrumental in God's Design, and subordinate to an higher and more ultimate Project and End, then it must be bounded and circumscribed within a certain Space and Limit of Time'.[59] Hickman's suggestion that the God who subjects his creatures to hellfire for a finite period, so that they can ultimately be saved, 'seems only marginally less vindictive than the God who condemns to eternal hell' does not take into account the fact that there is a great, indeed infinite, disparity between a long time and forever![60] This is not to claim, however, that passing through purgation is a pleasant process. On the contrary, it is one involving terrible suffering, as Sterry's and White's use of the 'metaphor of a purifying or healing fire' to convey how divine 'punishment has its positive reformative effect' indicates.[61]

The roots of this kind of imagery may lie in a text like Malachi 3:2-3: 'But who may abide the day of his coming? and who shall stand when he appeareth? for he is like a refiner's fire, and like a fullers' soup: And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver: and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering of righteousness'. White turns to these very verses in his exposition of the baptism by fire discussed in Matthew 3:11 and Luke 3:16 (cf. Mark 1:8):

> There is, I say, nothing so severe, so searching as Love, it is compared in Scripture to Fire, so the Baptism of the Holy Ghost, the Spirit of the Gospel, the Spirit of Grace and Love, the Spirit whose Name is *Love*…is called a *Baptism with Fire*; Divine Love wherever it comes, it is a Refiners Fire…burning up the Dross and bringing forth the pure Gold to shine more beautifully, transforming every thing into one Glorious, Heavenly Immortal Nature within it self, melting and uniting the Gold until it all run into one undivided Mass.[62]

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[58] Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Peter Sterry Platonist and Puritan, 1613-1672: A Biographical and Critical Study with Passages Selected from his Writings* (1934; New York: Greenwood Press, 1968), 104.
[59] White, *The Restoration*, 6.
[60] Hickman, 'Love is All and God is Love', 109.
[61] Morwenna Ludlow, 'Universal Salvation and a Soteriology of Divine Punishment', *Scottish Journal of Theology*, 53/4 (November 2000), 454.
[62] White, *The Restoration*, 181.

The idea that God's love is like an intense purifying fire is taken up by Sterry in relation to two New Testament verses, Mark 9:49 ('every one shall be salted with fire') and 1 Corinthians 3:13 ('the fire shall try every man's work'), in *The Rise, Race, and Royalty*:

> *God* among the Creatures [is] as a *Fire* Salting every man's Person, trying every man's Work. If he meet with any holy work, he rests upon it in the Secret of his Glory, as a Fountain of Beauty, and Blessings[.] If he meet with any pure, and sweet Spirit, like himself; he closeth with it, in all manner of gentleness, and softness, as *Two Flames* embrace one another. But where he meets with opposition he rageth. He burns upon dark, unclean, intractable Hearts, as *Fire* in the *Iron-works*; till he hath poured them forth into the Temper, and Mold of his Spirit, and Image.
>
> (52)

The twofold nature of God's incendiary love is also nicely captured in the passage from *The Clouds* quoted in Chapter 1 in relation to Blake's 'redemption' of Milton from his orthodoxy. Here Sterry describes the flames in which Christ will appear at his *Parousia* (Second Coming), which dissolve all things 'in their own shapes…resolving and raising them into Angelicall Forms', as the 'Heavenly Flames of Glory, in which Saints are Blessed; the Fire of Hell, in which Evill men are tormented' (23). Elsewhere, Sterry prefers glass making to metal work as a figure for the fiery Spirit's refinement of reality into a material of crystalline purity. Explicating 2 Peter 3:12-13, which describes the heavens as 'being on fire' and the elements melting away with 'fervent heat' to reveal a 'new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness', Sterry writes:

> There is an Art by Fire to make Glass of Ashes. The Holy Ghost is that Fire, which first reduceth this Creation, as into Ashes; then out of these Ashes raiseth a new Heaven and Earth: The same in a new Form of Gold for Glory, pouring forth Divine Beams; of Crystal for Transparency, taking in the Divine Light. Then shall the glorify'd Person of him, who is the Righteousness of God; then shall the Person of the Spirit, with all his Riches and Beauties, dwell unveil'd in this Natural Image thus Spiritualiz'd; as the Sun-Beams dwell in every Part and Point of clear Crystal.
>
> (AGM 406)

If a person must be melted like ore or reduced to ashes in order to be transmuted into a being whose purity is akin to that of precious metal or glass, then regeneration is evidently a highly distressing process. In his unpublished discourse, 'That the State of wicked men after this Life is mixt of evill, & good things', Sterry refers to those human beings subject to the cleansing fire of God—in terms which could be directly applied to Blake's Job—as 'empty, deformed shades, shadows only of themselves', haunted by their overwhelming sense of 'losse, restlesse desires, & pursuits, perpetuall frustrations, & disappointments with the feares, cares, anguishes, & torments that accompany these'. Even if these adversities are psychological rather than physical, the '*Left Hand* of God' is clearly an excruciating place to be. Nevertheless, Sterry, like White, considers the sufferings of Hell to be fleeting and instrumental to redemption, being 'as the worke of a gold smith trying, & refining the Gold by fire, until the drosse be entirely consumed, that it may come forth pure, shining, & incorruptible' (EC MS 291, 95, 100). To avoid any confusion, it should once again be stated that when Sterry refers to 'dross' he does not mean *matter*, but *that which obscures the divine in all things*. The 'pure, shining, & incorruptible' being which emerges out of the fire is no disembodied spirit but a whole human being. 'The New-Man', as Boehme insists, 'is not only a *Spirit*: He is even Flesh and Blood, as the Gold in the *stone* is not only Spirit, it hath a Body, but not such a one as the rude drossy stone is; but a Body, which *subsisteth*…in the Fire'.[63]

In the light of Sterry's and White's universalist soteriology, in which the fire of divine judgement is cathartic not punitive, it seems reasonable to propose that the fiery chasm Satan is about to enter in Engraving 16 is not a final destination, *pace* Altizer, but a visual metaphor for the refining process of 'Self-annihilation' which God himself must pass through to be revealed as 'All in every Eye, All in every Object' (AGM 309).

[63] Jacob Boehme, *The Fifth Book of the Authour* (1659), 116.

Blake's apocalyptic method: 'melting apparent surfaces away'

This interpretation is consistent with Blake's own presentation of fire as cathartic, for example, at the very end of *The Four Zoas*, where human beings walk through 'fires & yet are not consumed' ([Nt.9]138:39, E407), and *Jerusalem*, where, in an echo of Isaiah 43:2, the 'Furnaces of Affliction' become 'Fountains of Living Water' (96:35-7, E256). It is also congruent with Blake's apocalyptic vision, in which the burning up or melting away of creation is not conceived of as the end of the world but a continuing process of refinement. In *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, for example, Blake asserts that 'Error is Created Truth is Eternal Error or Creation will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it'. It is not the reality itself ('Truth') which has to be eradicated but that dualistic perspective on it which creates an illusory world of alienation, division, and violence ('Error'). So, when Blake claims that he does not 'behold the Outward Creation' which is 'Dirt upon [his] feet', it is not the physical world he is referring to, but that bifurcated image of it which has no existence 'Out of Mind or Thought' (94-5, E565). 'Eternity', on the other hand, is the world as it will appear when the 'doors of perception' have been cleansed, so that they are no longer obstacles to vision, blocked up with 'the Mud and Rubbish of our Natural Flesh', but what Sterry describes as 'Windows of Crystal towards Heaven', through which 'the sweet Light of the Godhead [shines directly] in upon us' (AGM 30).

The most illuminating account of Blake's apocalypse can be found on plate 14 of *The Marriage*, where Blake states satirically that 'The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true. as I have heard from Hell'. After seeming to back the conventional view of apocalypse as an eschatological event, Blake immediately challenges it by proclaiming that the consumption of creation does not involve the annihilation of the world but the transformation of our discernment

of it: 'For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at the tree of life, and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt'. The idea that the burning up of 'creation' will leave the world looking 'infinite and holy' is very similar to Sterry's conviction that the Holy Spirit will reduce 'this Creation, as into Ashes', and raise out of it a 'new Heaven and Earth' in which the deity will 'dwell unveil'd'. Equally, when Blake declares that 'If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is: infinite' (E39), it seems that he means exactly what Sterry does when he speaks of the 'Natural image' being 'Spiritualiz'd': the Godhead will 'dwell' (that is be *visible*) in every part of the world, just as 'Sun-Beams dwell in every Part and Point of clear Crystal'. But—and this is perhaps the most significant difference between Blake and Sterry—whereas Sterry only writes about this apocalyptic renovation of the world, Blake actually seeks to *precipitate* it, explicitly so in *The Marriage*, not just through the contents of his illuminated prophecies but their very mode of production. Because the melting away of 'all *Forms*, appearances, *Types*, *Signes*, *Shadows*, *Flesh*…into *power*, reallity, *Truth*, *the thing signified*, *Substance*, *Spirit*' (to quote Abiezer Coppe), will 'come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment', the view that 'man has a body distinct from his soul' must be 'expunged'.[64] Blake proposes to do this 'by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid' (MHH14, E39).

Two things stand out: the first is Blake's careful choice of words: 'salutary' and 'medicinal' confirm that Blake's Hell, like Sterry's and White's, is constructive rather than destructive and retributive, healing rather than harmful. The second is the way in which Blake consciously presents his material practice—which involves writing words

[64] Abiezer Coppe, *Some Sweet Sips, of Some Spirituall Wine* (1649), 60.

and drawing images on copper plates using acid-resistant varnish before submerging them in nitric acid so that the exposed metal dissolves to reveal the design in printable relief—as an enactment of the very apocalyptic transformation outlined on plate 14 of *The Marriage*, itself created using the 'relief etching' method. There is, therefore, a remarkable coincidence of medium and message in Blake's 'composite art': just as the dissolving of the 'outside shadowy Surface' of the copper to uncover the 'real Surface' of Blake's design (J83:47-8, E242) does not obliterate the plate but transforms it into a window on eternity, so the incineration of creation does not bring an end to the world but changes it into 'a Glass, in which Life and Immortality are discover'd' (AGM 7).[65] Sterry's account of Christ's refining action in the world is directly applicable to Blake's highly innovative engraving method: 'He takes away the dark Grosness from it, works it to a Spirituality, a Transparency, like Crystal Glass, that the Beams of God may fill every Point of it, and the Person of God be seen thro' every Part' (AGM 309).

Considering the 'apo-, or rather ana-calyptic' nature of Blake's 'Illuminated Printing' technique, in which the melting away of false surfaces is not destructive but purgative and revelatory, it seems likely that the blistering expanses of perdition Satan is about to enter in Engraving 16 are, in Jane Lead's words, 'Refining, and Calcining Regions…prepared for [his] Purifying'.[66] What we are observing in this pivotal scene, then, is not strictly the end of Satan's story, but the beginning of the redemptive process shown in full in Blake's painting of 'The Last Judgment' (1808, B642 [Pl. 870]), where 'the fall into the abyss is a prelude to catharsis and the rising up to glory rather than final punishment'.[67] What this means is that Job's 'wrought Image' of God—and with it

[65] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).
[66] S. T. Coleridge, *Collected Letters*, ed. E. L. Griggs (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1959), iv, 834; Rowland, *Blake and the Bible*, 240-1; Michael Ferber, 'Coleridge's "Anacalyptic" Blake: An Exegesis', *Modern Philology*, 76/2 (November 1978), 189-93; Jane Lead, *The Enochian Walks with God* (1694), 17.
[67] Rowland, *Blake and the Bible,* 57.

the divine Selfhood—must be subjected to the fire of divine 'wrath' in order to have its imperfections removed, leaving the pristine vision of divinity of which Engraving 17 is a radiant illustration. Given that Job's theological dualism *is* that 'dark Grosness' which is removed through his sufferings and visions, bringing him to a perception of 'the God who is all in all in Jesus', it is all the more regrettable that Damrosch and Paley have so influentially presented Blake's thought as ultimately dualistic, which, as I hope I have shown, is the direct opposite of the truth. Where both go wrong is to assume that the dividing line in Blake runs through *the world* when it actually runs through *the mind*; ironically, between the very sort of dualistic approach to the polarities of existence they take for granted and the dialectical one Blake champions. This situation is encapsulated by the final stanza of 'The Human Abstract': 'The Gods of the earth and sea,/ Sought thro' Nature to find this Tree/ But their search was all in vain:/ There grows one in the Human Brain' (21-4, E27). It might also be argued that Damrosch and Paley are misled by their premise that monism and dualism are 'negations'—that is mutually exclusive perspectives on the nature of reality—when they are actually 'contraries' or coinherent points of view, having no meaning in isolation from each other. The incisive point Hazard Adams makes in his review of *Symbol and Truth* could, I believe, also fairly be applied to Paley: 'Having completed the reading of this book, one understands that for Damrosch there is only dualism; it is what Blake would call the negation of monism'.[68]

It is precisely because they fail to appreciate that monism and dualism are in fact the two poles of Blake's *dialectic,* in which reality (singular) is twofold (double), that both scholars, in their own way, arrive at the conclusion that 'potent contradictions lie at the heart of Blake's system and that the never-ending struggle to reconcile them gives

[68] Hazard Adams, review of Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (1980), *Modern Philology*, 80/3 (February 1983), 316.

his work its peculiar energy'.[69] If I had to pick between Damrosch's characterisation of Blake as 'a dualist who wishes he were a monist' and Paley's contention that 'Blake was a monist who found his mythology entrapping him in a dualistic position', I would however have to go with Paley. This is because, while Blake is neither entirely a monist or a dualist but *both* simultaneously, to describe him as a dualist in an ontological sense is a far greater distortion than designating him a monist, albeit an apparently failed one, given that the latter is an accurate, if partial, summary of his position, while the former runs counter to the ethos of his entire literary and artistic project. Fortunately, there is no need to choose. Sterry's theological writings have provided us with an illuminating lens through which it has been possible to demonstrate how Blake's 'dualism' does not relate to the realm of being but that of vision and action, thus enabling us to challenge the prevalent view that, in spite of his best efforts, Blake cannot free himself from 'two real existing principles'—a misconception which, as the youth informs the angel in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, 'was owing to your metaphysics' (4, E34; 19, E42).

Conclusion

My aim in this chapter was to shed light on the relationship between Blake's divine and satanic 'principles', as well as the significance of the latter's eclipse, using Sterry's theology as an interpretive lens. In the first section, it was shown how both kinds of 'fellowship' and 'desolation' identified by Sterry with Christ and the Devil respectively can readily be discovered in situations in Blake's work where either the Divine Body or Satanic Body are ascendant. This indicated that, far from distorting Blake's thought, the application of Sterry's Christ/Satan contrast to it actually serves to highlight something already implicit in it: that the divine and satanic are not incompatible ultimate principles

[69] Leopold Damrosch, *Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), 3.

but conflicting approaches to life's polarities. The second section brought this insight to bear on the relationship between the contrasting depictions of divinity in engravings 11 and 17 of the Job *Illustrations*. In the light of Sterry's dialectical divinity, I argued that the satanic character in Engraving 11 can be seen as a hideously distorted mental picture of the Christ figure in Engraving 17, in whom the vigorous equilibrium between contraries has been thrown off balance by Job's habitual devotion to a second-hand faith. 'The Vision of Christ', by contrast, is an image of Job's reformed theology, in which the 'proportion' between contraries has been restored as a result of Job having seen the divine for (and in!) himself. The section ended by considering how Blake's selection of the Book of Job as a subject for an extended project, as well as depiction of Christ as not only gentle but also erotic, imaginative, and 'Prolific' lends weight to the claim that Blake is firmly committed to the presence of contraries in divinity.

In the last section, it was Engraving 16 ('The Fall of Satan') which occupied our attention. After a detailed examination of the scene and its marginal texts, I introduced one of the most sustained reflections on the meaning of this incident: that proffered by the radical 'death of God' theologian, Thomas Altizer. The case was made that while Altizer is right to see Satan's expulsion from the divine throne as a 'cosmic reversal' in which the divine Selfhood is annihilated, he is wrong to conceive of this revolution in ontological terms. This is because the deity who 'dies' is not in fact a being at all, but a toxic illusion set up as 'an idol and Spectre' in God's place. What Engraving 16 shows, then, is a shift in Job's theological perspective, whereby he moves from a vision of God as a despotic heavenly Father (Engraving 11) to one in which he is intimately present in humanity (Engraving 17). As well as misconstruing the nature of the 'cosmic reversal' taking place, Altizer also fails to see how this is not a one-off eschatological 'event' but an ongoing cathartic process. Accepting Blake's invitation imaginatively to enter into

his pictures, I embarked on a speculative account of what happens to Satan *in* the abyss, drawing on the universalist soteriology of Sterry and White. It was my suggestion that, rather than being destroyed or punished, Satan is cleansed of his flaws, which is to say that Job's 'wrought Image' of God has its dualistic component removed. This finding, I submitted, is consistent with Blake's apocalyptic engraving method, revealing the extent to which the sort of metaphysical approach to Blake's 'dualism' exemplified by Damrosch and Paley distorts the true nature of his work, bringing my interpretation of Blake's theology through the lens of Sterry's to a close.

Conclusion

Sterry as a theological precursor to Blake

As I explained in the Introduction, this project originated in the suggestion of my MA dissertation supervisor that a passage in one of Blake's works was highly reminiscent of the writing of Peter Sterry, a figure entirely unknown to me at the time. This thesis can be seen as my attempt to pursue that single comment by exploring the various questions to which it gave rise. Once the initial questions concerning Sterry's identity, place in the historical landscape of seventeenth-century England, and extant writings as well as their location had been answered, the discovery of Pinto's 1929 essay, 'Peter Sterry: Puritan, Platonist, and Mystic', proposed a whole new set of questions to me.[1]

The first significant question to emerge out of the limitations of Pinto's account was that of the wider significance of his 'discovery' for our understanding of Blake's intellectual antecedents in the seventeenth century. Pinto paid no attention whatsoever to the apparent 'randomness' of his find, by which I mean he did not seek to provide an explanation as to why Sterry might be considered a plausible theological precursor to Blake in the first place, given the existing picture of his intellectual context, or how that picture might need to be modified in the light of Sterry. To be fair to Pinto, his essay was published some thirty years before Morton's seminal little book on the antecedents to Blake's ideas in Civil War antinomianism, followed by the studies of Ferber, Mee, Thompson, Makdisi, and Rowland, all of which in their own way seek to locate Blake's intellectual background in that unparalleled explosion of theological (and political)

[1] Vivian de Sola Pinto, *Speculum Religionis: Being Essays and Studies in Religion and Literature from Plato to Von Hügel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1929), 161-193.

creativity which I have referred to using Hill's apt words as 'the world turned upside down'.[2] If Pinto's hostile reference to Blake's 'violent antinomianism' is anything to go by, however, one suspects that he would not have been very keen to associate Sterry with the likes of the Ranters and Fifth Monarchists, whose 'extremism' he might have felt to be at odds with Sterry's characteristically moderate and irenic temperament.[3]

The second, and perhaps even more important, question to which Pinto gave no attention was that of the purpose which the investigation of the parallels between Blake and Sterry is intended to serve. That is, other than the potential light Sterry may be able to shed on Blake's intellectual antecedents, how else might he be able to contribute to a better understanding of Blake's work? It was my suggestion that the primary purpose of comparison is a hermeneutical one; that is the reason one usually seeks to juxtapose two writers, artists, or composers is to shed light on one by means of the other.[4] In this case, the rationale for comparing the work of Blake and Sterry would be to clarify the former using the latter as a heuristic device. Precisely *how* this interpretation of Blake through the lens of Sterry might be conducted and *what* it might reveal has been the hardest, but also most rewarding, question this dissertation has sought to explicate. It should also be pointed out how the 'two' questions to which Pinto's account gave rise—the contextual and interpretative—are in fact two sides of a single question: the first concerns the selection (and focusing) of the hermeneutical lens; the second its application to the exposition of Blake's theology. So, how did I approach this twofold research problem?

In relation to the first issue, the significance of Sterry for our understanding of Blake's intellectual antecedents in the seventeenth century, what I tried to do was to situate Sterry in relation to the regnant view of this milieu in Blake studies. This

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[2] A. L. Morton, *The Everlasting Gospel: A Study in the Sources of William Blake* (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1958).
[3] Pinto, 'Peter Sterry', in *Speculum Religionis*, 189.
[4] George Steiner, *What is Comparative Literature?* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), 1.

involved returning to the work of Hill, Morton, and Thompson; historians whose recovery of English radicalism 'from below' has had such a significant impact on the quest for Blake's intellectual predecessors. The extensive documentation of the four central features of 'the world turned upside down', as presented by them, has not made it into the final version of this dissertation, but it was nonetheless invaluable in providing me with a set of criteria against which Sterry's qualifications as a plausible precursor to Blake could be tested. By measuring Sterry against each criterion in turn, I sought to determine how closely he fitted the 'suspect description' of an Interregnum radical likely to anticipate Blake's ideas, based on the established picture of the radical religious environment. At the same time, I sought to challenge the appropriateness of some of these criteria in the light of Sterry. In particular, I contested the premises that radicalism is an exclusively lower-class entity and that it is predominantly 'political' as opposed to 'religious' in orientation. To substantiate my critique, and confirm Sterry's credibility as a potential Blakean precursor, I went on to illustrate his radical credentials through an investigation of his theological affinities with a range of 'radical' groups and figures, including Vane and Hutchinson, the Ranters, and the Fifth Monarchists.

In relation to the second issue, how to conduct an interpretation of Blake using Sterry's writings as a hermeneutical lens and what insight this might provide into Blake's theology, my initial strategy was to put the correspondences between Blake and Sterry down on paper in the form of an expository narrative. That is to say, I took ideas from Sterry that I considered had the potential to illuminate Blake's poems and pictures and tried to apply them, in a variety of ways, to see what insights they might produce. What I found was that there was no 'off-the-rack' template for the kind of analogical interpretation I was attempting, so it would be necessary to formulate my own method for elucidating Sterry's unique contribution to the theological interpretation of Blake. In

retrospect, I can now describe the analogical method as one which seeks, heuristically, to use the similarities between the ideas of two writers—in my case Blake and Sterry—to shed light on that which is obscure in one of them by means of that which is more transparent in the other. The value of the analogical method, then, is that it enables one to understand a system of thought better than would be possible if it were examined in isolation. Its limitation is its dependence on the proficiency, and critical inventiveness, of the one who uses it, as well as the possibility that it will not yield the results one had hoped for. In my case, this is reflected in the two full chapters—'Christ and the Eternal Forms' and 'The Divine Body as a "heavenly" community'—which did not make the final cut. The analogical method can, therefore, be a slow and (at times) frustrating one, although I can now see that my early efforts *were* essential to the discovery of an idea in Sterry with the potential to clarify a significant problem in Blake. Once this idea had been identified, I realised it would make sense to break the comparative-interpretative task into its three constituent parts—problem, analogy, and exposition—and devote a chapter to each. So, the second chapter delineated the problem of 'dualism' in Blake's theology, the third expounded the analogy between Blake's and Sterry's divine and satanic principles, and the fourth presented an interpretation of Blake's 'dualism' in the light of Sterry's distinction between Christ and the Devil. It is hoped that this approach has resulted in a cogently methodical investigation of the efficacy of Sterry's writings as a lens through which to interpret Blake's theology.

The answers which have emerged to the question(s) outlined above, and their wider implications for Blake studies, may be summarised as follows. The consideration of Sterry's writings underlines the indispensability of an analogical approach to the excavation of Blake's intellectual antecedents in the radical religious hinterland of the English Revolution. As Blake's divergent responses to Milton and Boehme illustrate,

evidence of reception does not guarantee that a writer will necessarily shed as much light on Blake's thought as one might hope. At the same time, the absence of evidence for direct influence should not automatically exclude a figure from consideration as a prospective Blakean precursor. On the contrary, the fact that Sterry shares Blake's firm commitment to contraries in divinity means that he, at the very least, deserves to be included in the discussion of Blake's intellectual, and particularly his theological, background, whether Blake read him or not. I would suggest that the same principle of demonstrable affinity in thought should be the overriding criterion by which writers are selected as potential counterparts to Blake. In seeking to situate Sterry in relation to the prevailing picture of 'the world turned upside down', with a view to substantiating his selection as a figure for comparative study, it has emerged that aspects of this picture may require some adjustment. In particular, the assumption that radical ideas were the preserve of 'uneducated' plebeians and artisans, whose concerns were not religious but political has been shown to be entirely misguided: Commonwealth radicalism was not a function of culture, but a set of attitudes that were present at all levels of society and were inspired by deeply held *theological* convictions. Thus, to focus on radicalism's lower-class manifestations and socio-economic concerns to the exclusion of its presence in more socially elevated contexts, as well as its theological underpinnings, is to restrict both its scope and, arguably, most distinctive feature: the inextricable intertwinement of the political and the religious. In Blake's words, 'Are not Religion & politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion' (J57:10, E207). Through an investigation of Sterry's radical links, it became evident that, despite not initially seeming to fit the conventional view of the sectarian milieu, Sterry's theological tenets are surprisingly close to those held by the 'most extreme of the radically religious'.[5] In this case, it is inappropriate for

[5] Nigel Smith, *Perfection Proclaimed: Language and Literature in English Radical Religion, 1640-1660*

Sterry—or indeed any other individual—to be excluded from the radical sphere simply because he went to university and tended not to address recognisably 'modern' political themes, like private property ownership, in his writings. To do so would be to overlook a thinker who may have less to offer than Winstanley when it comes to the explication of Blake's critique of divine monarchy and its attendant social ills, but, as we have seen, facilitates the elucidation of a pivotal issue in the interpretation of Blake's theology, and his thought more broadly.

On this point, by using Sterry's writings as a hermeneutical lens through which to expound Blake's texts and images, it has been possible to shed light on the nature of Blake's 'dualism', a perennial problem for Blake scholarship. Through a process of trial and error, out of which emerged an analogical method characterised by what Jonathan Z. Smith defines as 'a disciplined exaggeration in the service of knowledge', this thesis has shown how the dualistic interpretations of Blake propounded by Leopold Damrosch and Morton D. Paley fail to grasp how Blake's binary terms do not relate to the nature of reality itself, but the way it is perceived, and responded to, with the transformation of vision and action being the key to soteriology. [6] Thus, when it comes to Blake's contrast between the Divine Body and Satanic Body, this should *not* be interpreted ontologically as a cosmic battle being two ultimate principles but ethically and epistemologically as a struggle between contrasting ways of being and perceiving. So, whereas Blake's satanic principle represents a way of looking at the world directed by abstract reason and habit, which reinforces the valuation of the specious (isolated) self above the Other, his divine principle embodies a perspective on reality driven by imagination and vision, inspiring the discovery of the true (collective) Self through acts of forgiveness and the cultivation of human brotherhood. This insight enabled me to contest Thomas Altizer's reading of

(Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), 10.

[6] Jonathan Z. Smith, *Drudgery Divine: On the Comparison of Early Christianities and the Religions of Late Antiquity* (London: SOAS, 1990), 52.

the fall of Satan by revealing how Engraving 16 of the *Job* series is not a representation of the 'death of God' but a 'snapshot' of the eternal moment when Job's *vision* of God is transformed through his rejection of that negating mindset which raises one principle over another, effecting a rebalancing of the divine economy in Job's mind. What Sterry has brought to the table is the explicit commentary on how 'dualistic' terms and images are being used *dialectically* which Blake fails, or choses, not to provide.

The ways in which consideration of Sterry has enabled a better understanding of Blake's theology, and its antecedents in earlier English thought, outlined above, support the central claim of this thesis that Sterry is a theological precursor to Blake. In making this case, I hope I have succeeded not only in corroborating Pinto's claim, made nearly ninety years ago and neglected ever since, but also demonstrated its wider significance for Blake scholarship. At the same time, I hope that this investigation of the similarities between Blake and Sterry has also managed to shed some light on Sterry's theological vision, which surely deserves more attention than it has hitherto received. In particular, the dialectical relationship inherent in the analogical method, in which interpretation is a two-way process, has, I think, enabled a better understanding not only of the details of Sterry's thought but its decidedly radical character, which Nabil Matar in particular has been keen to underplay. It is my suspicion that further investigation of Sterry's theology and its context would only serve to reinforce this impression.

I would like to conclude by posing two questions which, for me, arise out of this dissertation, to which I will offer only the most tentative of answers. The first question could, I believe, provide a serious agenda for future research; the second, however, is a more whimsical one, which would not lend itself to scholarly exploration, but has often occurred to me as I have worked on this project. The precedent Sterry's writings offer for Blake's dialectical use of conventionally dualistic language, as well as the strength

of their theological resemblance, begs the question of how widespread such usage was in the radical religious scene of the Commonwealth and whether there *was* a process by which these ideas were transmitted down to Blake's day and even beyond. So, who else in the seventeenth century shared Sterry's dialectical understanding of the relation between Christ and the Devil and, even if Blake did not read Sterry, could he have read or spoken to others who *were* familiar with his writings or those espousing very similar views? I suspect that in order to answer this question one would need to examine more closely the influence of Jacob Boehme's theology on English thought; for example, on Jane Lead and John Pordage and the members of the Philadelphian Society.[7] It may also be worth pointing out that, in addition to the small collection of prayers printed in 1785, a cursory search reveals that, though rare, Sterry's works, including all three of his large collections and even his parliamentary sermons, *were* available for purchase in the late-eighteenth century, in the very print and book shops Blake frequented—which is not to insinuate that he *must* have picked up a copy of Sterry![8] None of this, however, should be construed as undermining the primacy of analogues. Even if evidence for intellectual transmission were to be found, the priority of the analogical method stands, as the value of those sources, as Pierce recognised as early as 1924, would still have to be judged on the basis of the light they may be able to throw on 'Blake's attitude and meaning'; or, as Natoli puts it, the value of a text 'derives from the fact we have treated the suggested source not as a source but as an analogue'.[9]

The second question is this: what would Blake have made of Sterry *if*—and this is an entirely hypothetical question—he had ever read his work? My sense is this: Blake

[7] See Ariel Hessayon and Sarah Apetrei (eds.), *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception* (New York: Routledge, 2014).
[8] Peter Ackroyd, *Blake* (1995; London: Folio Society, 2008), 27.
[9] Frederick E. Pierce, 'Blake and Seventeenth Century Authors', *Modern Language Notes*, 39/3 (March 1924), 150; Joseph P. Natoli, *Twentieth-Century Blake Criticism: Northrop Frye to the Present* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1982), 176.

might have been put off by much in Sterry, including his retention of holiness, sin, and the atonement (although Sterry's view on this matter is a highly complex one which on further inspection might turn out to be closer to a Blakean position that it first appears). I suspect he might also have found Sterry's systematic and hierarchical divinity, with its endless division and subdivision of points (a feature of theological writing at the time) a little Urizenic for his taste. However, I do believe Blake would have also found a great deal that was to his liking, especially Sterry's cosmic Christology, in which Christ is 'ye universall Idea' comprehending all other Ideas 'as heavenly, and divine members of this heavenly and divine body, all heavenly, divine, and eternall spirits in this divine body of heavenly spirits, and of Eternity' (EC MS 289, 116-17). Blake would certainly have approved of Sterry's numerous statements on the interdependence of love and wrath as the right and left hands of God. What may have surprised Blake, however, is the fact that these declarations were made not at the margins of society, to which he himself was confined, but at the political heart of the nation, before Parliament no less, in Fast Sermons intended to 'galvanise Members into action and steer them towards particular policies' and published 'with official authority' so as to broadcast 'parliamentary priorities to a national audience'.[10] Sterry thus enjoyed the very public platform Blake always desired (see, for example, DC, Preface, E529-30; J3, 'To the Public', E145-6). This might well have brought home to Blake just how far the political and theological landscape had shifted between 1650, when Sterry's watchword, 'God *bringeth forth his* Works *in* contraries', was published, and 1790, when he engraved the analogous motto, 'Without Contraries is no progression', at 13 Hercules Buildings, Lambeth, just across the river from St. Margaret's, Westminster, where Sterry had once preached.

[10] Vivienne Larminie, 'Fast Sermons', *The History of Parliament: British Political, Social & Local History* [website] <http://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/themes/religion/fast-sermons/> accessed 10 October 2016.

Appendix: Illustrations



Figure 1: Engraving 11, *Illustrations of the Book of Job*

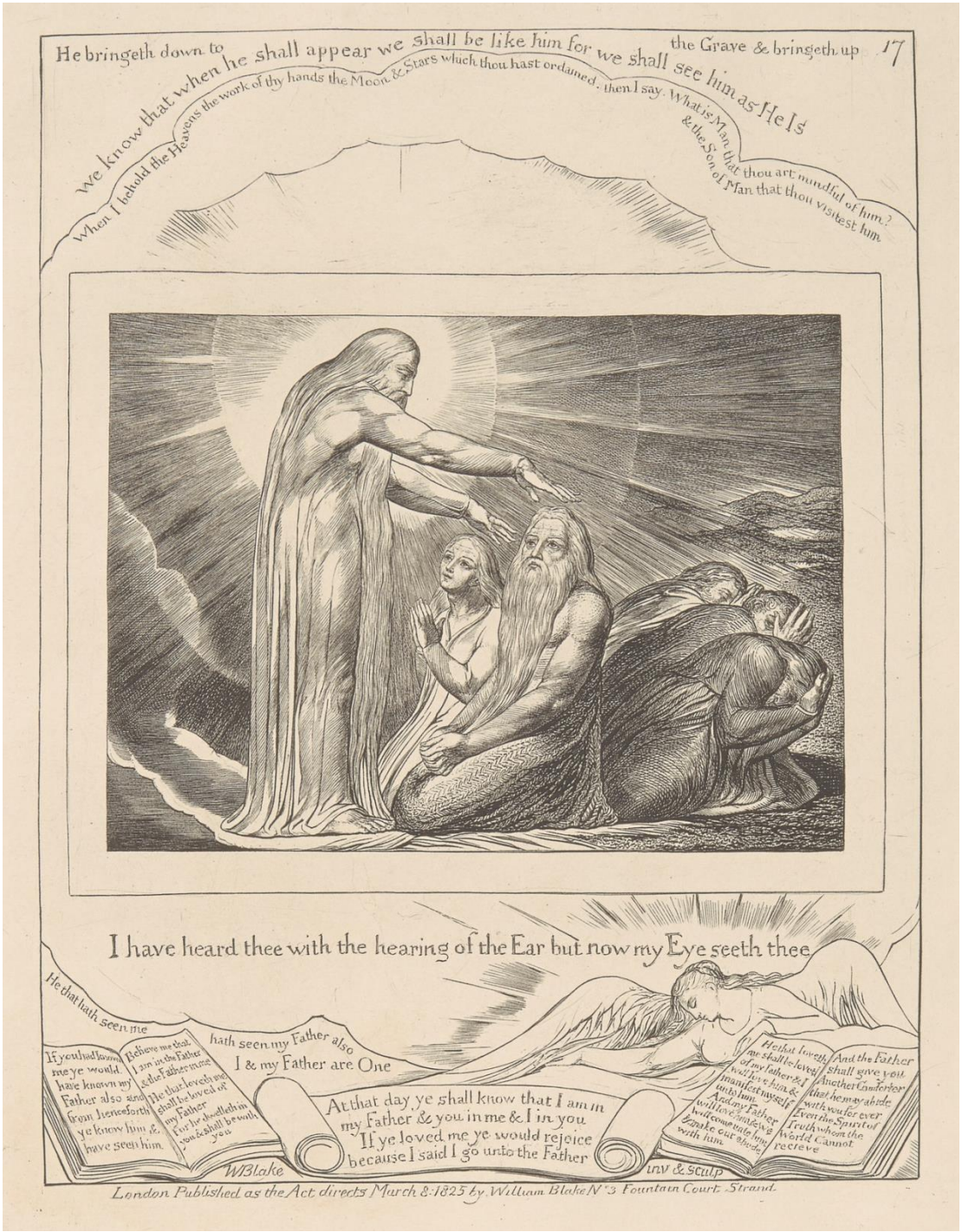


Figure 2: Engraving 17, *Illustrations of the Book of Job*

Note: the image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. It can be found in *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's 'Night Thoughts'*, ed. David V. Erdman et al., 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), and is also available to view online through the British Museum collection.

Figure 3: Christ as the True Vine, *Night Thoughts* design

Note: the image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. It can be found in *Genesis: William Blake's Last Illuminated Work*, ed. Mark Crosby and Robert N. Essick (San Marino: Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, 2012), and is also available to view online through the William Blake archive.

Figure 4: Title page 1, *Illuminated Genesis Manuscript*

Note: the image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. It can be found in *Genesis: William Blake's Last Illuminated Work*, ed. Mark Crosby and Robert N. Essick (San Marino: Huntington Library, Art Collections, and Botanical Gardens, 2012), and is also available to view online through the William Blake archive.

Figure 5: Title page 2, *Illuminated Genesis Manuscript*

Note: the image originally presented here cannot be made freely available via ORA because of copyright. It can be viewed online through the William Blake archive.

Figure 6: *Milton a Poem*, plate 32, Copy A



Figure 7: Engraving 17, *Illustrations of the Book of Job*

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