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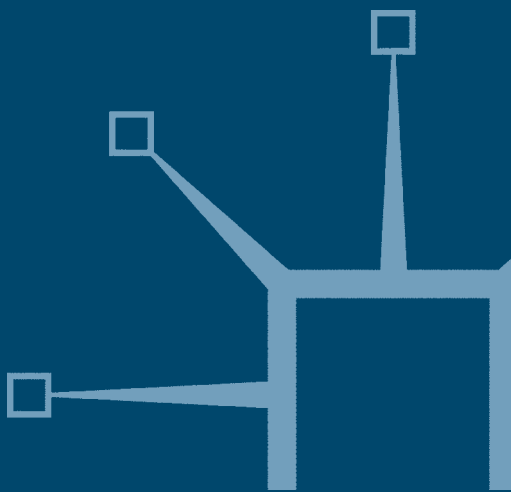
## Myth and the Historical Moment in Blake, Shelley, and Byron

Peter A. Schock



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*To my mother and father*

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# Contents

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# Introduction

## I.

Appended to the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice* (1793) is a discussion, pitched almost entirely on William Godwin's customary plane of abstraction, of the co-existence of 'eminent talents' and virtue, not only in great men but in great bad men as well. Acknowledging that the highly talented often do pursue 'other objects,' Godwin yet insists that such men, 'even when they are erroneous, are not destitute of virtue' and that therefore 'there is a fullness of guilt of which they are incapable.' Their apparent evil is actually misdirected nobility, which Godwin explains by appealing to environment. A man may possess a powerful intellectual grasp of social and political justice, he points out, and yet, from 'an unfortunate concurrence of circumstances,' that person 'may, with all his great qualities, be the instrument of a very small portion of benefit.'[1] Midway through this barren set of propositions, Godwin suddenly shifts register to offer a startling illustration of circumstantially thwarted greatness:

> It has no doubt resulted from a train of speculation similar to this, that poetical readers have commonly remarked Milton's devil to be a being of considerable virtue. It must be admitted that his energies centered too much in personal regards. But why did he rebel against his maker? It was, as he himself informs us, because he saw no sufficient reason, for that extreme inequality of rank and power, which the creator assumed. It was because prescription and precedent form no adequate ground for implicit faith. After his fall, why did he still cherish the spirit of opposition? From a persuasion that he was hardly and injuriously treated. He was not discouraged by the apparent inequality of the contest: because a sense of reason and justice was stronger in his mind, than a sense of brute force; because he had much of the feelings of an Epictetus or a Cato, and little of those of a slave. He bore his torments with fortitude, because he disdained to be subdued by despotic power.

> He sought revenge, because he could not think with tameness of the unexpostulating authority that assumed to dispose of him. How beneficial and illustrious might the temper from which these qualities flowed, have been found, with a small diversity of situation![2]

A reader familiar with the eighteenth-century vogue for Milton's Satan might still be struck by Godwin's overreading and idealization of this figure, seemingly so uncharacteristic of this writer's notoriously ratiocinative sensibility. But this is no mere display of rhetorical colors: by the end of this passage, Godwin has transformed Milton's Satan into a vehicle of the values to which the anarchist philosopher was most committed. He conceives of Satan as an embodiment of the fully autonomous intellect that discerns and rejects the radical injustice of a 'despotic' and 'assumed' power analogous to the arbitrary authority of prescription and precedent that governed England in the 1790s and that Godwin believed would wither away in time.

What is most striking about this passage is its assured tone: Godwin seems to see nothing extraordinary or controversial in his own remarks. To conceive Satan as he does involves putting considerable interpretative pressure on *Paradise Lost*, but it would be an overstatement to call Godwin's remarks his own 'appropriation' of Milton's Satan, since his point of departure is a view of this figure he assumes most readers share. Although Godwin's conception of Milton's Satan is transgressive, in that it expresses political values palatable to few readers of the day, it rests unselfconsciously on an anterior appropriation, one performed by his surrounding culture.

This is a book about Romantic Satanism, the literary phenomenon produced by the convergence of that larger appropriation and the transforming consciousness of the individual writer. The chapters that follow study the flowering of various forms of Satanism in the writing of Blake, Shelley, and Byron, viewing them in the context of their social and cultural origins. By the early 1790s, the sublime and humanized figure of Milton's epic antagonist, which had already gained heroic stature earlier in the eighteenth century, was further reshaped by Romantic writers into a vehicle of artistic and ideological freight, much of it iconoclastic or at best only marginally acceptable to polite readers. Romantic Satanism so defined is found in a relatively narrow literary stratum, but it is embedded in the broad interest in the demonic shown by the era. By the end of the eighteenth century, among the literate classes in England, belief in the existence of the Devil had all but vanished. Yet if in one sense this supernatural figure was killed off, then in another it is resurrected in the form of a modern myth.[3] For the Romantic age exhibits a resurgent fascination with the Satanic, visible in the quests of comparative mythographers and in the revisionary criticism and illustration of *Paradise Lost*. Both endeavors encouraged the employment of a form of demonic iconography in political

writing of all kinds. Across this spectrum, representations of Satan appear in response to an emergent, collectively felt need. Jacobinism, Millenarian antinomianism, the imperial ambitions of Napoleon, plebeian blasphemy, the threat of civil insurrection during the Regency – these portentous forces and events demanded answerable mythic embodiments to render them intelligible and to shape public opinion.

The more popular and politicized forms of discourse invoked Satanic myth propagandistically, as a tactic of demonizing adversaries. In their writing, Blake, Shelley, and Byron turned Milton's fallen angel into a different kind of mythic anchor for ideological identification. A figure projecting the oppositional values of their social groups as well as the ambivalence generated by these commitments, Satan served as a rhetorical instrument in controversial or speculative writing. Such a character could be readily adapted to these purposes because Romantic writers found him trapped, as John Carey explains, 'within an alien fiction.'[4] As if misplaced in the ideological structure of Milton's epic, the figure of the fallen angel invited his own excision and insertion into different contexts. For all of these reasons, Milton's Satan assumes in the Romantic era a prominence seen never before or since, nearly rivaling Prometheus as the most characteristic mythic figure of the age. A more active and ambiguous mythic agent than the bound, suffering forethinker and benefactor of humanity, the reimagined figure of Milton's Satan embodied for the age the apotheosis of human desire and power.

## II.

The presence of various forms of 'Satanism' in Romantic writing has been widely acknowledged. By now a familiar phrase in literary history, 'Romantic Satanism' conveys to many readers the sense of moral transgressiveness exhibited by figures like Byron's protagonists. This conception of 'diabolism' gained wide currency in the twentieth century through Mario Praz's monumental study, *The Romantic Agony*.[5] Critics after Praz have redefined the concept by tying it closely to allusions to Milton that evoke Romantic subjectivity. Peter Thorslev identifies the following speech as the *locus classicus* of the Satanic stance in Romantic writing:

> The mind is its own place, and in itself
> Can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.
> What matter where, if I be still the same,
> And what I should be, all but less than he
> Whom thunder hath made greater?[6]

Satan's defiant assertion of autonomy, delivered on the burning plain of hell, was so broadly influential, Thorslev notes, that it is possible to

distinguish four kinds of thematic adaptations of this stance in Romantic writing: psychological, Stoic, epistemological, and proto-existentialist.[7] All of these senses of Satanism have been extended to cover a range of Romantic attitudes or stances – typically individualism, rebellious or defiant self-assertion, and daemonic sublimity.[8] To other (disapproving) readers, Satanism is a rubric for misreadings of *Paradise Lost* in Romantic criticism and literary allusion, founded on an uncritical idealization of Milton's fallen archangel.[9]

Conceived and applied in these ways, Romantic Satanism has acquired, for better or worse, the facile explanatory value of a commonplace literary term.[10] It is surprising that this has taken place without significant incorporation of the concept of Satanism into either the leading theoretical constructions of Romanticism or the more comprehensive critical explorations of the writing of the era. Its absence is particularly glaring in those influential studies that have emphasized the Romantic revision of traditional myth. Romantic Satanism is essentially alien, for example, to the 'natural theodicy' M.H. Abrams expounds in *Natural Supernaturalism* (1971), the secularized versions of Fall, Redemption, and Apocalypse traced through the major writers. Elements of myth involving metaphysical rebellion, defiance, revenge, and other forms of aggression cannot be grouped under Abrams' central rubric, 'the Romantic theme of the justification of evil and suffering.'[11] This example illustrates, of course, the kind of 'gerrymandering' of the literary map Jerome McGann has noticed, when reigning critical paradigms include certain kinds of writing while excluding others. But even in the heyday of myth criticism, the more comprehensive taxonomy of Northrop Frye's *Anatomy of Criticism* (1957) found room only for brief comments on what he called 'demonic modulation.'[12]

Still less has been said on the subject since the later 1970s, when critical study of Romantic writing turned away from its mythic features. Historical inquiry during the last two decades has largely bypassed Romantic myth, rejecting the essentialist and formalist assumptions on which archetypal criticism had operated. Perhaps many critics have avoided Romantic myth for another reason – because it is so readily associated with the capacity of poets to enwrap themselves in an ideology of literary production that invites critical idealism: the poet as mythmaker, the oracle of a private religious vision that transcends history. In any case, the relative silence about Romantic myth in the last two decades suggests that Roland Barthes' assertion – that 'Myth deprives the object of which it speaks of all history' – is taken as axiomatic.[13]

This view is untenable, as attention to the historical and cultural contexts surrounding literary treatments of myth in the era reveals. Marilyn Butler has argued for a shift of critical orientation to replace the ahistorical archetypalism and 'idealist bias' in the work of Frye, Abrams, and the early Harold Bloom, who assume 'the ultimately religious intentions' of the

mythmaking poet. Butler examines instead what moors Romantic myth to the historical moment: the social and political milieu of the oppositional poet during the Regency, for example. That situation, she demonstrates in a study of 'Romantic Manichaeism,' drove Byron and Shelley into anti-Christian, iconoclastic treatments of myth.[14] In another study that rejects essentialist approaches to Romantic myth, Anthony Harding explores the historically contingent use of myth in the era. Legitimate critical inquiry, Harding asserts in *The Reception of Myth in English Romanticism* (1995), must first 'address the question of how the writers in a given period understood and received myth; what they understood "the mythic" to be.'[15]

Romantic Satanism is one such historically embedded phenomenon, the transformation of a received myth that is rendered intelligible largely by reading the cultural and political circumstances shaping that revision. The diverse forms of Satanism in English Romantic writing arose out of a set of cultural acts and forces converging in the historical moment: anti-Christian or 'infidel' polemics and histories of religious myth, political and propagandistic uses of the figure of Satan, and the widespread fascination with Milton's sublime archangel, propelled by the revisionist criticism and illustration of *Paradise Lost*. Collectively these constitute the cultural matrix out of which Romantic Satanism emerged, the subject of the first chapter of this book. The attenuation of belief in the existence of the Devil, along with the rise of comparative or syncretic mythography, established Satan as a purely mythic figure. These forces at the same time freed the myth for artistic and political treatments. The latter proliferated in the decade of the French revolution and continued through the Regency: throughout the era British conservatives and radicals alike seized the myth of Satan to demonize the political 'other,' using it propagandistically, branding and castigating the opposition by satanizing it. Finally, during the Romantic age, critics and illustrators of Milton's epic intensified the sublime, human, and heroic aspects of the conception of Satan that had emerged in the eighteenth century. Collectively the three dimensions of this matrix drained much of the traditional authority and force from the religious myth of the adversary, and a different fiction took its place, flexible, radically ambiguous, and open to artistic and ideologically charged adaptation.

The many versions of this Romantic fiction are constructed out of figures and episodes – Miltonic 'mythemes,' as it were – drawn from *Paradise Lost* involving cosmogony and origins, rebellion, resistance, defiance, temptation, and tyranny. Incorporating this Miltonic material, Romantic writing adapts its stances of Satanic autonomy and anti-authoritarianism into various contexts – political, religious, metaphysical, moral, and psychological. In key works of Blake and Shelley, Milton's Satan is constructed as an idealized antagonist of an Omnipotence embodying the dominant political and religious values of the era. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–93),

the Lambeth Prophecies (1793–95), *The Revolt of Islam* (1818) and the essay 'On the Devil, and Devils' (ca. 1819–20; 1880) all contain a primary form of Romantic Satanism, a Gnostic countermyth that idealizes revolution and free thought. Yet Satanism is not monolithic or univocal in its rhetorical function, and it serves equally well as a mouthpiece for satire and irony. For example, in *The Vision of Judgment* (1821), the Satanic persona articulates Byron's ironic view of political change; in the *The Deformed Transformed* (1824) the demonic figure punctures various idealizations of eros, the soul, and military heroism. And in other contexts the fallen angel is a deeply ambiguous figure, portraying social violence, aggression, and even tyranny. Shelley's *Prometheus Unbound* (1820) syncretically blends the Titan with the vengeful fallen angel, thereby mingling the 'beautiful idealism' of Promethean unbinding with the specter of the bloody insurrection this writer anticipated. With Blake's major prophecies the figure of Satan reverts to the traditional role of the adversary, embodying the forces that block apocalyptic liberation: state religion and imperial war.

In her study of mythmaking in the Shelley circle, Marilyn Butler contends that 'Critics often claim that myth is a significant element in Romantic poetry: it would be more exact to say that English poets of one persuasion, the radical, were disposed to use myth, but with different emphasis at different times.'[16] Each of the different employments of myth Butler identifies – antiquarian polemic, controversialism, and the conveying of belief – has ideological value, especially in its expression of the identity of a group. By invoking Malinowski's conception of the pragmatic or functional value myth holds for societies, Butler thus reinterprets the provenance and employment of myth in Romantic writing. Reading Romantic Satanism in compatible terms means examining how it intricately displays the social roles and rhetorical purposes carried out by authors. Its various forms adaptable to a range of thematic situations, Satanism helped Romantic writers interpret their tempestuous day: it provided them with a mythic medium for articulating the hopes and fears their age aroused, for prophesying and inducing change. Romantic Satanism, then, is not merely 'individualism' or authorial subjectivity mythologized, 'the mind is its own place' invoked in a social vacuum; it exhibits the response of writers to their milieu.

## III.

Viewing each of the forms of Romantic Satanism constructed by Blake, Shelley, and Byron as the response to milieu and as an expression of group identity reveals the performative or functional value of this kind of writing. Blake, whose developing monomyth exemplifies both the prophetic function of Satanism – and its remarkable instability – is the first major figure explored in this book. Blake's Satanism expresses primarily his relationship

with the liberal and radical culture of the 1790s. In its two phases, Blake's myth of Satan embodies and then critiques the rationalistic and revolutionary milieu from which it arose, assimilating it to the larger body of Satan that subtends all forms of worldly tyranny. Transgressive adaptations of Milton's Satan in Blake's early work become the central vehicle for celebrating the revolutionary, apocalyptic capabilities of humanity, while the more conventionally conceived Satanic figure later introduced into the major prophecies looms as the central force blocking human liberation. Both mythic forms thus carry out, though in contrasting ways, a primary function of Romantic Satanism: imagining the elements of a vast social transformation. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake's revolutionary Satanism emerges in an iconoclastic revision of the myth colored by the values and the social identity of the implied audience of this work, the circle of writers and artists surrounding Joseph Johnson, the London publisher and bookseller. Here Blake develops the voice of the Devil, the 'son of fire,' and the other infernal figures of this work into personae embodying the desire and energy that trigger apocalypse. This agenda continues with the myth of Orc found in the Lambeth prophecies. But in *The Book of Urizen* (1794), Blake reverses direction in his treatment of the myth of Satan, re-establishing its traditional role in the titular figure, a conflation of the rebel angel and God the Father. The culminating work in the 'Bible of Hell' thus clarifies the mythic foundation of tyranny in the present age, and in doing so marks the increasing distance between Blake and his ideological center in the early 1790s. In the major prophecies that followed, *The Four Zoas* (1797–1805?), *Milton: A Poem* (ca. 1804), and *Jerusalem* (ca. 1820), the Satan who embodies material vision and the war-making alliance of church and state progressively displaces the figure of Urizen. In these works, moreover, Satan occupies roles – the tyrant, tempter, destroyer, and enemy of humanity – that seem to revert to tradition, yet Blake's iconoclasm only appears to reach its limit here. Though it no longer celebrates a liberating energy, Blakean Satanism retains its defamiliarizing function. In the titanic Satan of the major prophecies, Blake unmasks and renames the psychological and world-historical forces that inhibit apocalypse.

The next three chapters explore the modes of Satanism embodying the oppositional stance assumed by the Byron–Shelley circle in response to the repressive social and political climate of the late Regency. Read in this context, the central works reveal Shelley – not Byron – to be the driving force in the development of the Satanist writing of this group. While Byron early on cultivated through his writing and behavior a diabolical aura, it was not until his reputation began to sink that the social meaning of his Satanic identity – and its power – became clear to him. This awakening followed the hostile reception of Byron's satire, especially the first two cantos of *Don Juan* (1819), so deeply offensive to reviewers that they seemed to

have been written by a fiend. Byron's later works feature Satanic personae, vehicles of his counterattack on the defenders of Tory oppression, the voices of the *Quarterly Review*. The mature form of Byronic Satanism, then, is rhetorically reflexive and socially defensive, antagonistically assuming the demonic group identity fastened to the Byron–Shelley circle by their adversaries. In adopting the stance of the diabolical provocateur, Byron was led by the precedent of Shelley. Responding to the critical assault and the suppression of anti-Christian writing, both of which intensified in 1819, Shelley encouraged Byron to counterattack while developing new forms of Satanic writing on his own, designed to subvert and reconstruct traditional myth. Through these methods Shelley sought to hasten the transformation of religious and political opinion in the various strata of the British readership.

The third chapter takes up the works that exemplify the so-called 'Satanic school,' exploring the efforts of Byron and Shelley to develop mythic vehicles of religious controversialism. Shelley's begin with an iconoclastic Satanism similar to Blake's early inversion of the figure of Milton's fallen archangel. His practices here are strategic, designed to disable traditional myth and infuse it with a core of oppositional values and attitudes. In *Queen Mab* (1813) Shelley transforms the legendary figure of Ahasuerus into an idealized avatar of Milton's Satan who personifies the infidel cause itself. Shelley's satanized Wandering Jew mythicizes resistance to oppression, creating the means to outface the humiliation of the radical publisher Daniel Isaac Eaton, tried in 1812 for blasphemous libel, then imprisoned and pilloried. This programmatic form of diabolism continues in Shelley's later essay, 'On the Devil, and Devils,' composed during the height of the government's campaign to suppress blasphemy. Yet in this essay and *The Cenci* (1820), the tragic play written during this period, Shelley's Satanism modulates into less polemical and more indirect, literary forms. All of these works anticipate and undoubtedly influenced the construction of Byron's *Cain: A Mystery* (1821). In this dramatic revision of the story of the first murder, Byron introduces the figure of Lucifer, who functions as an ironized mouthpiece for free thought. Lucifer's attacks on divine authority and the response they provoked in the first readers of *Cain* confirm that a major purpose of Byronic Satanism was to press against the limits of what could be published and tolerated in the last years of the Regency.

The fourth chapter concentrates on Shelley, examining the Satanic agents of political and social change featured in his major poems and dramas. These figures embody not only Shelley's interest in idealizing revolution but also the ambivalence emerging in his mature works over the retaliatory aggression he feared would accompany a popular insurrection in post-Waterloo England. The allegorical introductory canto of *The Revolt of Islam*, like *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, offers a Gnostic myth of the benevolent spirit animating revolution, a story involving a rival or

suppressed account of origins wherein a traditionally demonized agent is identified with the struggle to liberate humanity. A more difficult and unstable form of Satanism appears in *Prometheus Unbound*. In the syncretic construction of the Titan, Shelley attempts to harmonize images of insurrection and passive resistance, but the mythic stance thus created embodies an unbending resistance to tyranny that just barely succeeds in refusing the revenge impulse. The Luciferean figure who awakens the mind of the multitude and bloodlessly installs a new social order in 'The Mask of Anarchy' (1819; 1832) constitutes Shelley's final idealization of the Satanic agent of change. In the fragmentary prologue to *Hellas* (1821), Shelley at last reverts to traditional mythic form, introducing a Satanic figure who embodies a vast power subtending the tyranny of the Holy Alliance itself. Here Shelley invokes a theologically orthodox conception of Satan to prophesy, warning of a future shaped by the violence and re-enslavement that might overtake the Greek war for independence.

The final chapter of this book explores the ironized forms of Satanism Byron and Shelley developed, through which these writers recoiled from the world of the late Regency. In Shelley's 'Julian and Maddalo' (1819; 1824), Satanic troping provides the mythic lens not for heroic resistance to oppression but the implosion of Shelleyan meliorism. From this ironic form of Satanism Shelley turns to the tactics of straight demonizing in his major satire, *Peter Bell the Third* (1819;1839). In the character of the 'Devil,' Peter's gentleman patron, Shelley ridicules the dull and deadening influence of the nouveau riche, thereby attacking one element of the social and political crisis he saw in the England of 1819. Byron develops a more ambiguous and ironic form of Satanic satire in *The Vision of Judgment*. Here the rhetoric of the 'President' of hell, Byron's diabolical spokesman for the political opposition, is unstable, alternating between impassioned denunciation of George III and the dismissive air of the disaffected aristocrat. The functional ambiguity of the Satanic figure is intensified in Byron's late unfinished drama, *The Deformed Transformed*, where 'the Stranger,' the play's enigmatic Devil, tempts Arnold, the hunchbacked protagonist, with the means to transcend his physical state. This dramatic subject offers Byron scope for developing a totalizing ironic perspective, as the Stranger progressively deflates Arnold's hollow idealism and voices, as a corrective view, Byronic materialism, elevating the claims of the body over those of the soul.

Conceived in traditional as well as unconventional terms, the forms of Romantic Satanism range as widely as the literary contexts to which Milton's fallen archangel is adapted. The complex appeal of this character to those who invoked and rhetorically harnessed him is captured in William Hazlitt's 1818 lecture, 'On Shakespeare and Milton.' Here Hazlitt evokes the ambiguous grandeur of the fallen angel, whom he calls a figure 'gigantic, irregular, portentous, uneasy, and disturbed – but dazzling in its

faded splendour, the clouded ruins of a god.'[17] Imagined in these nearly paradoxical terms, Satan served for many writers as a mythic model for the events and figures of the era, from the early 1790s to the looming social crisis of the final years of the Regency. For Hazlitt, the inveterate Napoleonist, the figure of the overthrown archangel evokes and defensively elevates the image of the French emperor himself, while also imaging his failed promise, fall, and imprisonment. The Satanic figures that are prominent in Romantic writing function similarly, deepening and at the same time destabilizing its argument. This book explores both of these effects, examining the integrative function as well as the disruptive power of Romantic Satanism, how it both builds up and undercuts what Tilottama Rajan has called 'the Romantic rhetoric of affirmation.'[18]

# 1
# The Cultural Matrix of Romantic Satanism

Literary history has been conventionally conceived and written in terms of the linear generation of great books, a process that transmits influence between authors inhabiting a tradition. Marilyn Butler notes that this model is vulnerable on several grounds: the *post hoc* fallacy that is potential in the logic of temporal succession, the idealism or reified thinking involved in the assumption that books influence or 'cause' other books to be, and the artificial, constructed nature of traditions. Yet what is most implausible and what most distorts our understanding of the past is the picture conveyed of the process of influence itself: as an exchange between the mental compartments of authors, sealed to everything except the impress of their literary forebears. No one would ever assert, Butler acknowledges, that 'writers acquire their views by a uniquely rational and unsocial method, in a laboratory inhabited only by other writers.' And yet much literary history overstates the debts of authors to tradition, while ignoring the writing, thought, and culture of the contemporary world, 'the intellectual ambience which is the actual seedbed of intellectual discussion.' In that culture, moreover, ideas and attitudes are not transmitted privately, but over a social ground, 'as the individual becomes aware of membership of a group with its own group interests.'[1]

Butler's remarks are especially pertinent to Romantic Satanism. Typically it has been represented as purely literary material, passing directly from Milton to the Romantic author through the medium of discrete poetic allusions to various incandescent portrayals of Satan in *Paradise Lost*. While Miltonic matter does constitute the central literary vehicle of Satanism in the Romantic era, describing its use as 'allusion' finally seems inadequate because the relationship between source and derivation is complicated in several ways. The Miltonic Satan who figures so prominently in Romantic writing is several degrees removed from the character who appears in Milton's epic. By the 1790s, the fallen angel had been reconstructed through a century of revisionist criticism and illustration. At the end of the eighteenth century, this figure is once again radically transformed by

various groups of writers and artists who adapt it to the needs of a new era. Even before Romantic writers take up the Miltonic Devil, in fact, this character is already embedded in and mediated by various discourses of the day – those concerned with scriptural myth, religious and secular authority, and with the political and social instability of two decades. Thus, though its presence is always signaled by some Miltonic feature or echo, the Satanic figure which emerges in Romantic writing is reshaped by the new ideological and rhetorical contexts in which it operates. In many cases, the new contexts so alter the function of the Miltonic character that only a trace remains of the allusive model.

Thus the refashionings of Milton's fallen archangel are, arguably, more deeply informed by the cultural forces that produced the modern myth of Satan received by the Romantic artist than by the allusive interchange of literary source and derivation. To explore the emergence of this modern myth in its milieu is to reveal not only what it broadly meant to the era, but how it became adaptable as ideological and artistic raw material, taking on specific functions and values in the writing of Blake, Shelley, and Byron.

## I. The death of the devil and the desacralized myth

In the later eighteenth century, the religious mythology surrounding Satan and hell provided a central topic in the assault that anti-Christian or 'infidel' writers mounted on religious orthodoxy. Before it could acquire such a rhetorical purpose, though, this body of material had to lose its status as myth upheld by literal belief among the educated classes. The sense of the reality of the demonic world seems to have waned fairly rapidly in the later seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries.[2] Literary treatments of Satanic subjects and their reception bear abundant traces of the attenuation of belief. Once pacts with the Devil began to appear fabulous, for example, the tragic import in the story of Faust was drained away. Marlowe's *Doctor Faustus* (1604) dropped out of sight in the later seventeenth century and was eventually replaced by works like William Mountfourt's *The Life and Death of Doctor Faustus, Made into a Farce* (1684) and John Thurmon's pantomime, *Harlequin Doctor Faustus* (1724).

These comic treatments of damnation are striking illustrations of the demythologizing of hell in literature and popular culture in the eighteenth century, but its central event was clearly the killing off of the figure of the Devil himself. Polite literature in this era records an almost ritualized ridicule of the obsolescence of Satanic mythology. The demonic enters the fictional world of *Tom Jones* (1749) only through the credulous mind of Partridge, who becomes convinced that he and Jones have been beset by evil spirits when they lose their way en route to Coventry.[3] The illusion of the marvelous is punctured when the distant, flickering lights which Partridge firmly believes to be a '*Jack with a lantern*' (an *ignis fatuus*) turn

out to be only gypsies at a wedding party in a barn. This revelation is set off by the narrator's mockery of the relics of demonology:

> Had this History been writ in the Days of Superstition, I should have had too much Compassion for the Reader to have left him so long in Suspence, whether *Beelzebub* or *Satan* was about actually to appear in Person, with all his Hellish Retinue; but as these Doctrines are at present very unfortunate, and have but few if any Believers, I have not been much aware of conveying any such Terrors. To say Truth, the whole Furniture of the infernal Regions hath long been appropriated by the Managers of Playhouses, who seem lately to have lain them by as Rubbish, capable only of affecting the Upper Gallery, a Place in which few of our Readers ever sit.
>
> (Book 12, Chapter 12, Fielding, p. 511)

The less educated classes – those occupying the upper gallery – alone appear to have retained belief in these decades. Later in the century, forms of popular demonic belief are deflated in the comic treatments found in Burns's poems and songs: his 'Address to the Deil' (1786) stands out as a mock-sublime apostrophe to the figure at the center of local demonic superstition. Attached to the poem as an epigraph are the first two lines of Beelzebub's grand speech to Satan: 'O prince, O chief of many throned powers, / That led the embattled seraphim to war' (*Paradise Lost* I, 128–9; p. 52). But the first lines of the poem immediately descend to a parody of the elevated tone and titles in the Miltonic motto: 'O Thou, whatever title suit thee! / Auld Hornie, Satan, Nick, or Clootie.'[4] The poem goes on to construct an encomium of Satan's supernatural might, its content compounded from the folklore of Burns's 'rev'rend *Graunie*' (l. 25; Burns, p. 136).

Thus an entirely fabulous demonology is playfully invoked and mocked by Burns, but the Devil's fortunes do not truly reach bottom until he appears in the puppet shows of Covent Garden in the 1780s. On this diminutive comic stage, he is slain by Punch:

> The Devil with his pitch-fork fought,
> While Punch had but a stick, Sir,
> But kill'd the Devil, as he ought.
> Huzza! there's no Old Nick, Sir.[5]

The Devil's death in fiction, poetry, and popular drama and entertainment accompanies the atrophy of theological doctrines concerning Satan and Hell and the abandonment of regular preaching on these subjects. Since those who upheld the literal truth of scripture were already fighting a rear-guard action against deism and skepticism, doctrines concerning Satan, themselves only extrapolations from various passages of the Bible, were

seldom invoked as foundations of faith.[6] Neither of the classic apologies for the faith – Butler's *Analogy of Religion* (1736) and Paley's *Evidences of Christianity* (1784) – even mentions the Devil. Among the Evangelical sects, only the Methodists retained an interest in Satan, whom Wesley made an instrumental figure in the drama of conversion.[7]

As early as the later seventeenth century, the literal meaning of demonic myth had been challenged by radical sectarians in Britain. Lodowick Muggleton said devils had no bodily existence, but were manifest only as evil thoughts, while the Ranters denied the personal existence of the Devil, interpreting him symbolically – as the embodiment of suppressed desires. In a compatible interpretative shift, seventeenth-century latitudinarians (the so-called 'Cambridge Platonists') reinterpreted hell as a state of mind: '*Hell* is *rather a Nature* then [*sic*] *a Place*,' John Smith asserted.[8] Of those who continued to profess belief in the reality of hell, many challenged the idea of eternal damnation.[9] In *The Eternity of Hell Torments Considered* (1740), William Whiston asserted – in a surprising, almost metaphysically rebellious tone – that the eternal punishment of sinners signifies chiefly the 'absolute and supreme power and dominion of the cruel and inexorable author of their being.'[10] Others speculated boldly in an effort to reconcile divine omnipotence and benevolence. Joseph Glanvill, for example, flirted with Origen's heretical doctrines substituting for eternal punishment a system of soul-cleansing through metempsychosis.[11] This early Church Father's revived heresies – which themselves countenanced the salvation of Satan – were echoed and developed by the German and English Philadelphians of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Millenarians who believed in universal redemption. Jane Lead, one of the prominent English Philadelphians, enjoyed visions in which Christ explained that Satan and his fallen angels would be redeemed.[12]

A period of reaction did set in early in the next century, in which the authority of the Bible is reasserted by 'a more intransigent conception of its divine inspiration.'[13] One manifestation of this effort was the republication of the most popular glossed Bibles of the eighteenth century. Those of Matthew Henry and William Dodd both carried commentaries upholding the traditional assumption that the tempting serpent of Genesis and Satan are one and the same.[14] Yet the English Church did little more to shore up belief in the Devil; by now the demythologizing of the concept of evil set in motion during the Enlightenment was almost complete, and religious minds either quietly restated traditional doctrine or fell silent. The more voluble opposition carried on polemical warfare, typically through the treatise in comparative mythography, a form of inquiry that was rarely carried out in a disinterested antiquarian spirit. Voltaire led the attack on the fabulous character of Christian diabology with his influential critique of the historical authority of the Bible. Although he was not the first to argue it, in Voltaire's writing the eighteenth-century reversal of the key assumption

of Christian *allegoresis* – that pagan myths descend from and distort biblical stories – arrives with a vengeance.[15] This thesis is prominent in the work of his late, rabidly anti-Christian period. In the *Philosophical Dictionary* (1764), Voltaire insists that the account of the war in heaven and the fall of the rebel angels has no biblical foundation, but was derived from a myth originating in India and circulating through various cultures in the Middle East: Greek, Egyptian, and Chaldean (i.e., Persian). Satan is mentioned nowhere in the Pentateuch, Voltaire points out, nor does Genesis even hint that Satan inhabits the serpent.[16]

In Voltaire's infidel successors, Holbach, Volney, and Dupuis, the mythographical polemic characteristically traces the myth of Satan to its putative origin in the dualistic eastern structure of the 'Two Principles.' The myth of Satan originated, Holbach asserts in *The System of Nature* (1770), in the perception that good does not always triumph in this world, and we consequently project onto the world an illusory antagonism between good and malevolent cosmic powers.[17] Holbach assimilates the Christian myth of Satan to this universal dualistic pattern by conflating the story of the fall of the rebel angels with that of the Titans. In *Ruins of Empires* (1791), Volney claims that the 'worship of two Principles' was created from our observation of the seasonal alternation of powers of creation and destruction in nature. 'Astronomical priests' in the ancient Middle East projected these struggling powers onto the heavens in the forms of the summer and winter constellations, the homes of the gods and demons battling to govern the universe. Among these is Scorpio, first apprehended as the serpent form of Ahrimanes, 'the basis of the system of Zoroaster' and later seen as 'the emblem of Satan, the enemy and great adversary of the Ancient of Days, sung by Daniel.'[18] In *The Origin of All Religious Worship* (1795), Charles Dupuis offered perhaps the most comprehensive of all syncretic arguments, incorporating the story of Satan's struggle with God into the totalizing pattern of the solar myth, which comprehends all dualistic religions that allegorize the opposition of light and darkness.[19] Whatever the specific line of argument, the rhetorical objective of the infidel mythographer never varies: undermining the authority and prestige of Christian orthodoxy by leveling the distinctions between one of its fundamental stories and its counterparts found in other mythologies.

The last decade of the eighteenth century saw the publication of Thomas Paine's violent assault on revealed religion, *The Age of Reason* (1794), a work containing an ambitious deconstruction of the myth of Satan. Paine, the redactor of the English Deists and the French infidels, not only ridicules the Christian story of the origin of evil by the hand of Satan; he systematically reduces the narratives of the war in heaven, the Fall of man, and the Redemption to the level of mere fable – 'the Christian mythology,' as he derisively calls it. Following Voltaire, Paine redefines Christian diabology as myth and annexes it to pagan tradition: the war in heaven, he claims,

derives from the Greek myth of the Titanomachia. In his attack on scripture, Paine undertakes to destroy the political power of the Christian mythology. Drawing from Volney's assertion that religion is 'nothing more than a political engine to conduct the credulous vulgar,' Paine insists that the whole fable of Creation and Fall functions as an arm of the state, serving 'the purposes of power and revenue.' Because of its unique capacity to compel religious and political obedience, Paine takes up Christian diabology first in *The Age of Reason*, attacking the power of priestcraft at its mythic source. The Church mythologists, he argues, have adapted the spuriously sublime story of God's supernatural antagonist – the 'deification of Satan' – to mystify and reinforce the key doctrines of Original Sin, Atonement, and Redemption used by state religion to 'terrify and enslave mankind.' This body of dogma, which Paine reviles as legitimized murder and 'indiscriminate revenge,' requires the mythic foundation of an adversary of God powerful enough to compel him to sacrifice his Son.[20]

Although less inflammatory in their overall aims, other controversialists in England during the 1790s discredited Satanic myth almost as openly as Paine did. A believer in the historical truth of the Bible, Joseph Priestley attacked the myth on precisely these grounds, characterizing it as a priestly imposition, a doctrinal corruption akin to Original Sin and the Atonement. Priestley's reply to *The Age of Reason* summarily dismisses Satanic myth – with a swipe at Paine's little learning – as a figurative misconstruction of the root meaning of the word satan ('adversary'): 'The history of *Satan*, though found at full length in *Milton*, where Mr. Paine probably learned it, is not found in the writings of *Moses*, who does not so much as mention Satan, or the devil … it is most probable that the sacred writers meant only an allegorical, not a real person. Our Saviour calls Judas a "devil."'[21] A compatible critique emerges in the biblical scholarship of Alexander Geddes, published extensively by Joseph Johnson from 1781 to 1797. Geddes alienated the Catholic hierarchy with the historical assumptions he brought to the study of the Old Testament, particularly his 'fragment hypothesis' about the composition of Genesis. This not only undermined the traditional idea of scriptural integrity; it called into question the biblical authority for Christian mythology and diabology. In the critical preface that accompanies the first volume of his unfinished translation of the Bible (1792), Geddes concludes a survey of the exegetical tradition surrounding Genesis 3 by pronouncing the narrative a 'mythology.' He refuses to identify the serpent with Satan.[22]

The assault on 'the Christian mythology' has several implications for ideologues, writers, and artists in the Romantic era. To begin with, it defamiliarized the figure of Satan: undermining Satanic agency in the origin of evil obscured the Devil's traditional identity and role. This made it possible to reconceive his figure in a range of ways, from representing Satan as a psychological projection to elevating him in Gnostic fashion to the

position of a rival God, whose identity has been obscured by the 'official' myth of Christian tradition.[23] The foundation for these Romantic transformations is laid by the French infidels, who hammered away generally at the theme of the 'Two Principles' or directly declared the psychological origins of religious myth, as Volney did: '*it is not God who hath made man after the image of God*; but man hath made God after the image of man; he hath given him his own mind, clothing him with his own propensities; ascribed to him his own judgments.'[24]

Premises like these are rapidly assimilated and modified by the young Shelley, who is sharply dismissive of 'the miserable tale of the Devil,' while also aware of the adaptability of myth, its potential to project human psychology in symbolic shape: 'Every man,' he observes, 'forms his god as it were from his own character.' Shelley applies this thesis to Satanic myth in his later essay 'On the Devil, and Devils', where he describes the Manichean dualism as a 'personification of the struggle which we experience within ourselves.'[25] But *Queen Mab* had already concretely embodied the same premise in the figure of Ahasuerus, a syncretic blend of Satan and the Wandering Jew that presents an apotheosis of human resistance to oppression. The bending of Satanic myth toward psychology is widely displayed in Romantic writing, from Coleridge's assertion in *The Statesman's Manual* (1816) that Satan embodies the abstracted and isolated will to James Hogg's use of a demonic doppelgänger in his novel, *The Private Confessions of a Justified Sinner* (1824).

The legacy of the infidel polemic extends further. Anti-Christian mythography revealed not only the fabulous character of the myth of Satan, but more significantly its constructed nature – how it was created by appropriating and reconfiguring myths from other cultures. As Shelley observes in his essay 'On the Devil, and Devils,' 'Among the Greeks the Serpent was considered as an auspicious and favorable being … In Egypt the Serpent was an hieroglyphic of eternity.' But the Christians 'have turned this Serpent into their Devil,' he concludes, and 'accommodated the whole story to their new scheme of sin and propitiation' (Julian, VII, 104). By calling attention to the very act of seizing the myth, the infidel mythographer authorized the iconoclastic dismantling or reappropriation of what Christian culture had assembled.

By the early 1790s, then, the theological and mythographic foundation for various forms of Romantic Satanism is well established. On this basis the story of Satan takes on the aspect of a modern myth, wherein the conventional explanatory power of primary myth is displaced by other social functions. Destroyed as a pattern of traditional belief, the story of Satan becomes a desacralized and flexible form, its structure and meaning receptive to ideological manipulation and more radical transformation. These uses of the resurrected myth emerge in the 1790s, when the figure of Satan is incorporated into the political symbolism of the Romantic era.

## II. The first Jacobin: Satanic myth and political iconography

In his famous and provocative attack on the 'Satanic school' in the preface to *A Vision of Judgment* (1821), Robert Southey represented its lewdness, violence, and above all its irreligion as emanations of Milton's principal fallen angels:

> though their productions breathe the spirit of Belial in their lascivious parts, and the spirit of Moloch in those loathsome images of atrocities and horror which they delight to represent, they are more especially characterized by a Satanic spirit of pride and audacious impiety.[26]

The poet laureate's myth-charged assault on Byron and Shelley, the unnamed but unmistakable targets, may seem ludicrous to our view, a lurid and bizarre prologue to Southey's awkward assumption of the prophetic stance in his poem. Seen against a backdrop of political writing spanning two generations, however, Southey's sober assertion that these oppositional writers are the avatars of Milton's fallen angels stands out as a familiar trope. It draws on associations between radicalism and Satanism that had been building up since the early years of the French revolution. In its purpose, moreover, Southey's jeremiad confirms Paine's thesis in *The Age of Reason* – that Christian diabology has historically reinforced the power of state religion, compelling obedience through fear. Secularizing Satanic myth, Southey seeks to tighten social control by demonizing the opposition and transforming it into an object of popular anxiety.

Southey's preface is one of dozens of ideological employments of Satanic myth in the Romantic era, appropriations that began to appear in the 1790s, when the desacralized myth of the Devil entered the political symbolism of this decade. As Ronald Paulson has demonstrated, the unprecedented and often incomprehensible events of the revolutionary years demanded from English writers and artists images and myths as paradigms, models, and frames of reference.[27] Among the many images – cannibalism, parricide, natural cataclysm, vernal regeneration – the figure of Satan was widely employed to represent and interpret the events of the revolution. The use of these framing images and myths may be in part purely epistemological – to render bewildering events coherent. More often, though, myth takes on the rhetorical function of reflecting or shaping public opinion. In such instances an ideological symbol or propagandistic icon emerges, functioning as a vehicle of the polarized political discourse of the revolutionary decade.

These ideological employments of myth rarely transvalued the figure of Satan. On both sides of the political divide, those invoking the myth did so almost without exception in a conventional sense – Satan personified the evil of the opposition, whether revolutionary or reactionary. For example,

Alexander Pirie called the revolution the 'beast rising out of the *bottomless pit*, or vast abyss, as its politics are mischievous and deep as hell, and its actions works of the Devil.'[28] The British government itself began propagandizing in this vein as early as 1791, disseminating through newspapers and pamphlets apocalyptic prophecies casting revolutionary France in the role of the Beast of Revelation. On the radical side, those who hailed the revolution as the prophesied Millennium saw the thrones of Europe as Satanic. In 1794 Joseph Priestley declared that the ten horns of the Beast of Revelation were the ten monarchies of Europe, that the pope was Antichrist, and that both thrones and pope would fall. Richard Brothers, the most celebrated Millenarian prophet of the 1790s, himself beheld a vision politically compatible with Priestley's prophecy: in 1791 he saw 'Satan walking leisurely into London ... dressed in White and Scarlet Robes.' Not long after this vision of Satan in full regalia, Brothers became intensely interested in politics and tried to warn the House of Commons not to oppose the French revolution, which he declared was God's judgment against monarchy. In a letter of 1795, Robert Southey mentions another mythic prophecy of revolutionary crisis: inspired by Brothers, a Charles Cotter announced that the French would invade England and that Satan would appear as 'a wolf in sheep's clothing' three days before London's fall.[29]

If the referent of Satan in the prophecies of Brothers and Cotter seems somewhat ambiguous (both obscurely evoke a power that dooms monarchy), the diabology constructed for the Tory cause is decidedly more stable and univocal. In the satiric prints and political writing of the early 1790s, the Satanic became one of the central mythic frames through which conservatives viewed not only revolution abroad but political dissent at home. Here a demonizing iconography develops, displaying complicated references. William Dent's 'A Word of Comfort' (22 March 1790; Figure 1) identifies Satan's pawns in the third attempt to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts during March 1790: Priestley and Charles James Fox, the leader of the liberal Whig faction. Here Priestley preaches from a tub labeled 'Fanaticism' (i.e., rational dissent), denying the Devil's existence to Fox, while Old Nick lurks behind and mocks Priestley. Dent's print comments directly on Priestley's theological position and its political implications: the Unitarian leader's attacks on the dogmas of the Fall and Original Sin arise out of a naive obliviousness to the radical evil in human nature. Hence Priestley cannot see or is ambitious to conceal the affinity between the campaign against religious tests and the atheism of the French revolution. The link was clear enough to English conservatives, who feared that the dissenters who sympathized with the revolution wished to pull down the church – a process already underway in France.[30] Dent's print implies that Priestley's comforting word from the tub-pulpit inspired Fox's speech of March in the House of Commons supporting the dissenters and praising

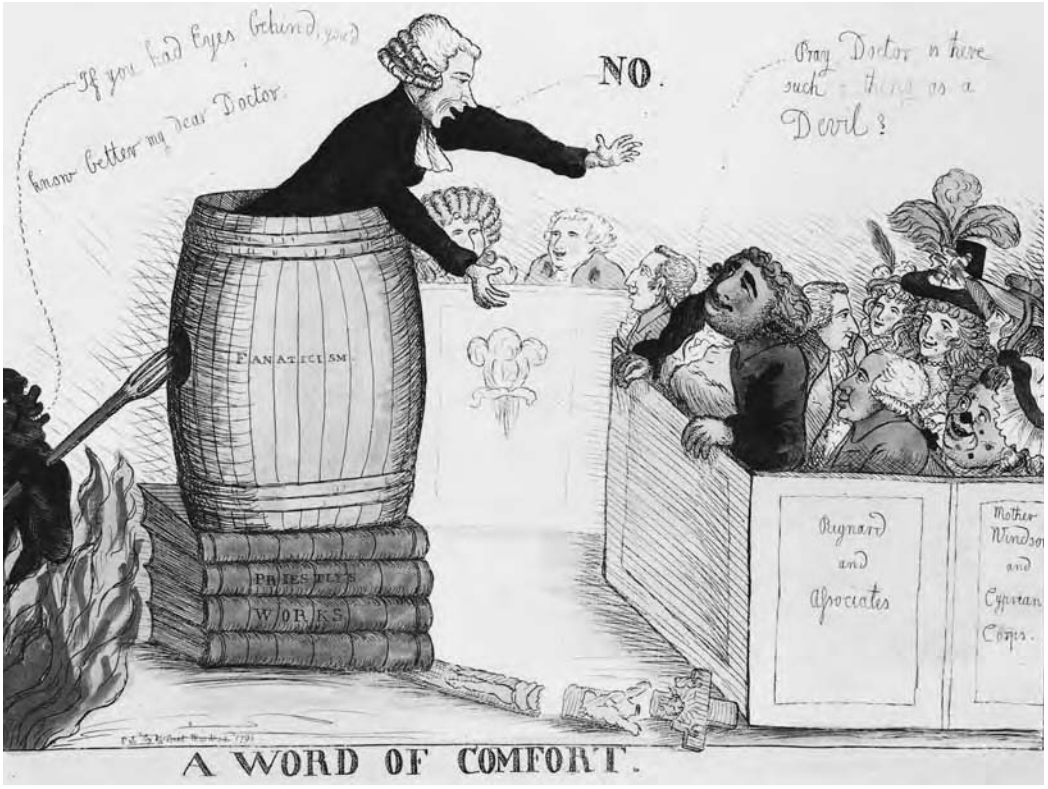


*Figure 1* William Dent, 'A Word of Comfort' (1790)

the revolution. Thus the image represents the theology of Priestley and the politics of both men as dangerous, connected delusions: the two men are blind to the existence of the Devil, who invisibly animates both their reformist ideology and the revolution.[31]

The most influential exercise in political demonizing of the early 1790s appears in Burke's *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790), where Southey found demonstrated the technique of turning the opposition into objects of quasi-religious horror. Echoing Milton's foreseeing God (*Paradise Lost* V, ll. 600–15; pp. 295–6) with his own sonorous phrases, Burke prophesies that the French revolutionaries share the destiny of Satan: to be 'cast forth, and exiled, from this world of reason, and order, and peace, and virtue, and fruitful penitence, into the antagonist world of madness, discord, vice, confusion, and unavailing sorrow.' Impressively evocative in itself, this passage mythologizing the revolution is not an isolated instance, but a motif running through the work.[32] The influence of Burke's Miltonic typing is apparent in one of Cruikshank's prints, 'A Picture of Great Britain in the Year 1793' (1794; Figure 2). Here the forces of good and evil – that is, God and William Pitt versus Satan, Fox, and Richard Sheridan – struggle over the temple of the British Constitution. The Devil leads a group of London radicals, seeking to blow up the temple; applying his pitchfork (labeled 'Reform') to its foundation, Satan cries 'Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.' Underlying the forces of good, a caption to the left presents God the Father's first speech in *Paradise Lost* III, in which He confidently foresees both the initial success and final downfall of Satan; thus God looks down on the temporarily dangerous but ultimately ineffectual English Jacobins. Cruikshank dedicated the print to the Association for Preserving Liberty and Property Against Republicans and Levellers, a prominent anti-Jacobin group. The work may therefore have been commissioned; whether or not this print is propagandistic, it is every bit as conventional as the other ideological deployments of the myth of Satan in this age.

The only exception to this pattern – and even here the context is ironic – appears in *Politics for the People* (1793), the journal of the radical printer, Daniel Isaac Eaton. In it, a series of pronouncements titled 'The History of Jacobinism' begins with the assertion that 'The Devil was the first Jacobin, for which he was hurled neck and heels out of heaven.'[33] Deriving from the earlier Tory maxim, 'The First Whig was the Devil,' the slogan becomes approving rather than castigating in the context of Eaton's radical journalism. But in all other cases, 'Satanic' becomes the abusive label affixed to the opposition, the means by which the many human figures and chaotic events making up a complex social movement are reduced to typological clarity of meaning – a single, diabolical agency. To satanize is rhetorically powerful: it strips away all complexity, ambiguity, and humanity to brand the political adversary. Propaganda worked precisely this way in the case of Paine, repeatedly represented as the emissary of Satan. William Jones's


*Figure 2* Isaac Cruikshank, 'A Picture of Great Britain in the Year 1793' (1794)

pamphlet of 1792, 'One Pennyworth More,' represents Paine as the Devil's agent, sent to teach John Bull to eat cannibalistic '*Revolution Soup*.'[34] 'Paine, Sin, and the Devil,' a broadside of 1793, functions similarly: adapting Gillray's parody of Hogarth's 'Satan, Sin and Death' (1764), the picture accompanies 'Intercepted Correspondence from Satan to Citizen Paine.'[35]

Blake, who had affinities with the views of Paine and Priestley, would also extensively employ Satanic myth in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In striking contrast to all of these deployments, however, this work inverts and reconstructs the political use of the figure of Satan rather than merely applying it in conventional terms. The Satanism of *The Marriage* takes this unique shape because of Blake's perception of the demonic group identity of Paine and Priestley, prominent figures in the circle surrounding Joseph Johnson. That is, the ubiquitous demonizing of this group – approximately Blake's ideological center in the early 1790s – must have spurred him to transform the conventional political symbolism. The phrase 'the Devil's

party' thus acquires thematic complexity from its ideological resonance, and Blake's Satanic mythmaking in *The Marriage* reflects a partisan stance.

As Southey's attack on the 'Satanic school' reveals, the tactics of demonizing retained their currency long after the 1790s had passed. In response to political developments, the targets shifted over the years, first passing from the earlier Jacobins and their English sympathizers to Napoleon, then returning to English plebeian radicalism after Waterloo. After the coup d'état of 1799, Bonaparte was increasingly identified with the Devil and Antichrist: Hester Thrale Piozzi noted in her diary that many said the Corsican was 'the Devil Incarnate, the Appolyon mentioned in Scripture.'[36] She herself believed that his Corsican name was N'Apollione, 'the Destroyer,' and said that 'he does come forwards followed by a Cloud of Locusts from ye bottomless Pit.'[37] Evidently this Satanic conceit circulated extensively, for it was echoed years later, in an 1806 sermon preached in London, calling Napoleon 'the fiend of the bottomless pit, the Hebrew Abbadon.' As in the 1790s, this demonizing rhetoric had its visual counterpart in the satiric print. In 1804, C. Ansell executed 'The Corsican Usurper's New Imperial French Arms'; in this heraldic image, the Devil appears above a Janus-headed Napoleon who surmounts the coat of arms. The broadside ballads usually attached to these prints also carried the theme of the confederacy of Satan and Napoleon.[38]

The popular demonizing of Napoleon permeated the writing of the Lake poets as well. By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century, the ambivalence they felt over the French emperor – who had seemed a savior ten years before – had hardened into opposition. As Simon Bainbridge has shown, each writer sought to articulate his antagonism toward Napoleon through narrative and mythic models. What emerged in Wordsworth's *The Convention of Cintra* (1809), Southey's *The Curse of Kehama* (1810), and Coleridge's journalism of these years is a kind of Satanic typology, used in each case to galvanize resistance to Napoleon. The essential goal was to destroy Napoleon's glory and thus his hold on the imaginations of men; to achieve this aim, each of the Lake poets represented the historical situation as a Manichean battle. Identifying Napoleon with the supernatural and mythic figure of Satan, Bainbridge explains, was a means of demystifying and dehistoricizing Bonaparte, while also predicting his ultimate fall.[39]

Coleridge frequently used Milton's Satan as a lens for isolating and magnifying the evil of Napoleon: in his iron determination to abandon all moral restraints, he noted, the French emperor rises to the level of Satan and his motto, 'Evil, be thou my Good' (*Paradise Lost* IV, l. 110; p. 196). In his articles for *The Friend* of late December 1809, Coleridge elaborates a moralized mythic view of Bonaparte from this motto, emphasizing that his 'main power' lies in

> the abandonment of all *Principle* of Right, [which] enables the Soul to chuse and act upon a *Principle* of wrong, and to subordinate to this one

> Principle all the various Vices of Human nature … . [He] who has once said with his whole heart, Evil be thou my Good! has removed a world of Obstacles by the very decision, that he will have no Obstacles but those of force and brute matter.[40]

In the final years of the empire, satirical prints continued this attack on the Satanic Napoleon, often in a mock-sublime mode invoked to ridicule his fallen fortunes. The most impressive of all of these prints, probably by George Cruikshank, is 'Boney's meditations on the Island of St. Helena or – The Devil addressing the Sun.' Straddling the rocks of his island, surrounded by storm-clouds, the gigantic figure of Napoleon, horned, winged, and goat-legged, gazes at the sun, where the Prince Regent's face looks out on his dominion. A scroll of flame issues from Napoleon's mouth, carrying the opening lines of Satan's apostrophe to the sun: 'to thee I call, / But with no friendly voice' (*Paradise Lost* IV, ll. 35–6, pp. 192–3).'[41]

After the emperor's disappearance from the European scene, the Satanic trope was used in England to shape public opinion over the domestic unrest that followed Waterloo. In his first lay sermon, *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), Coleridge links the present instability – especially the agitation for Parliamentary reform – to the diabolic French influence. Tracing popular disaffection to its roots in the ideology of the 1790s, Coleridge attacks and demonizes French rationalism and revolutionary thought. The cultivation of the mere understanding by the philosophes turned that faculty into an Antichrist rising up against the moral powers of the soul, while the deifying of reason and atheism during the revolution manifested the Tempter's promise that 'ye shall be as gods.'[42] This latter allegorization invites considerable parsing: Coleridge not only revises the traditional exegesis of the psychic disorder that constituted the Fall (here it involves the triumph of reason, not its subjection), he also mythicizes the inversion of the French social order as the primal transgression, the abortive apotheosis of Eve inspired by the voice of the Tempter. In the state cult of Reason, Coleridge suggests, the Satanic force motivating all of the social and political innovations of the French is enshrined. In his concluding discussion of the catastrophic consequences for the present age of psychic disintegration (here schematized as the splitting of reason, religion, and the will), Coleridge develops his conception of the Satanic Napoleon into a pyschological allegory. Coleridge explains that the French emperor, the final product of the revolution, had embodied the 'satanic pride and rebellious self-idolatry' which arise when the will abstracts itself from reason and religion and enables the self to choose evil as its good.[43] This same Satanic hypertrophy of the will, Coleridge argues elsewhere, now threatens the social and political order in England after Waterloo. In a series of letters in *The Courier*, Coleridge warns prophetically of the current social danger latent in the Drury Lane production of Maturin's Byronic drama, *Bertram*

(1816). Coleridge's involved critique defines the features of a 'modern jacobinical drama' – that is, art that revels in a neo-revolutionary 'confusion and subversion of the nature of things.' The dramatic locus of this displaced Jacobinism, which renders rebels against 'law, reason, and religion' sympathetic, is Maturin's protagonist, 'the sublimity of whose angel-sin rivals the star-bright apostate.'[44]

The most stridently propagandistic use of Satanic political iconography in the era appears in the final years of the Regency, when Henry Hunt, Richard Carlile, William Hone, and others were demonized in an attack on the intertwined threats of blasphemous and seditious utterance. Passed after the Peterloo Massacre of late 1819, the Six Acts were partly engineered to suppress just these forms of dissent. The Parliamentary speeches on this legislation and their reception – exemplified by Robert Grant's article in the *Quarterly Review* – display the enduring power of the Satanic trope: W. C. Plunket identifies Hunt and Carlile as 'enemies of God and Man' and goes on to describe them as 'fiends in human shape endeavouring to rob their unhappy victims of all their consolations here, and of all their hopes hereafter.' Sharing the hysteria of the Parliamentary speakers, Grant paints the struggle with blaspheming and seditious radicalism as a Manichean battle with earthly embodiments of 'the Malignant Principle himself.'[45] These figures, Grant claims, perform the Satanic role of tempting the disenfranchised poor to abandon the restraints of morality and religion and rise up against their betters.

This latest wave of demonizing rhetoric helped give rise to a new form of literary Satanism, generating in Byron and Shelley something like the group-consciousness fostered in Blake by the attacks on the Johnson circle in the 1790s. The satanizing of the second-generation poets began after the *Quarterly Review* classed Byron with plebeian blasphemers, a development that followed the hostile reception his new satires received after 1818.[46] Southey's attack on the Satanic school openly called for the suppression of its writing. Byron could hardly avoid responding to this kind of rhetoric, and consequently a reflexive form of literary Satanism like that found in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* arrives in 1821, a structural element of *Cain: A Mystery* (1821). Byron almost certainly was urged in this direction by Shelley, who suggested a counterattack on the *Quarterly Review*. Within their circle, Shelley whimsically bore the identity of a Satanic adversary of the religious and political order – hence the persistence of his nickname in that group, 'the Snake' (which Byron derived from *Faust*, according to Trelawny).[47] And Shelley understood the tactics of demonizing well: he had already employed them in a partisan spirit in *Queen Mab*, *The Revolt of Islam*, and the essay 'On the Devil, and Devils,' all of which dismantle and transform the traditional myth of Satan. All three were partial models for Byron's *Cain*; directly and indirectly, then, Shelley encouraged Byron to counter perceived attacks on their circle. The initial reception of *Cain*

discerned a hard ideological edge, especially in Lucifer's inflammatory speeches attacking divine authority. This reading of the Satanism of the play, which has been deprecated by critics in the last half-century as a distortion of Byron's view of scripture, was not so reductive after all.[48]

## III. The rise of Milton's Satan

In Milton's fallen archangel, Byron and Shelley found an adequate vehicle for their ideological backlash. The centrality of Milton's Satan was partly a consequence of the monumental cultural authority *Paradise Lost*, the most widely published long poem in the eighteenth century, enjoyed in the Romantic era.[49] The only demonic figure of comparable stature was Goethe's Mephistopheles; because of the relative cultural isolation of Britain during the era and the late publication of *Faust: Eine Tragedie* (1808), however, Goethe's Devil did not influence English Romanticism until late in the second generation; and even when Goethe's Mephistopheles entered British culture through partial translations and commentaries, he was seen through the lens of Milton's Satan.[50] It was this figure, not Goethe's urbane spirit of negation, that answered the artistic and ideological demands of English writers. In particular, the stance Satan assumes – that of an autogenous rival to Milton's God – offered them a mythic base for the attitudes and values they embodied in their replicas of the fallen angel. Before Satan's defiant autonomy could serve the programmatic aims of Blake, Shelley, Byron, and others, however, his figure had to undergo a century-long metamorphosis in the reception of *Paradise Lost*. This was not merely a matter of declaring Satan the hero of Milton's epic – that occurred before the end of the seventeenth century. In a profound shift in interpretative response to *Paradise Lost*, the fallen archangel gradually assumed heroic, sublime, and human aspects in the criticism and illustration of Milton. By the end of the eighteenth century, Satan's form contained all of these qualities, emerging as the apotheosis of human will and consciousness.[51]

Transforming the conception of Milton's Satan involved a succession of shifts in political, moral, and religious responses to his character and role. Satan's heroic status became problematic early in the eighteenth century, when Dryden observed that the fallen archangel occupied the role of hero in a formal but not an ethical sense, a contradiction disabling the moral of *Paradise Lost*. Yet in the decades after, few critics directly engaged this question; until the 1790s, the moral heroism of Satan is not considered, much less openly asserted, nor is he defended as a victim of heavenly tyranny. For much of the eighteenth century, Satan-idolatry meant eliding the moral response to this character through the irrationalism of sublimity. During the last decade of the century, though, conventional moral and religious responses to Satan were almost entirely overturned; his traditional

roles – the adversary of God, the enemy of mankind, the rebel angel, tempter, and emperor of hell – were all displaced or radically transformed.

Perceptions of Milton's Satan first shifted in the initial reception history of *Paradise Lost*, when the poem was drained of much of its ideological power. Some early readers of the epic saw its mythic narrative as a screen thrown over an allegory about the English Civil War, while others in the eighteenth century appropriated the figure of Satan as a political symbol. The latter group constructed propagandistic readings of the epic (anticipating those of the 1790s), in which Satan's rebellion figures the evil either of the Tory or Whig causes. But relatively few such interpretations appeared, and as Milton became a cultural symbol, his reputation as a prophet, biblical poet, and spiritual guide eclipsed that of the pamphleteering ideologue and republican, and the political meaning of *Paradise Lost* was largely suppressed. As a result, depoliticized conventions of reading the epic became established, thereby 'aestheticizing potentially subversive material,' as Lucy Newlyn puts it.[52]

With the political significance of *Paradise Lost* thus obscured, contradictory responses to Satan's character and role emerged. Critical perceptions became conflicted when recognition of his heroic traits collided with moral and theological values. The first critic to pronounce Satan the hero of *Paradise Lost*, Dryden registered his unease with the archangel's role by implying that Milton perverted the instructive function of the epic when he made Satan the protagonist. In the preface to his translation of Virgil, Dryden asserts that Milton's epic would have been superior 'if the Devil had not been his hero, instead of Adam; if the giant had not foiled the knight, and driven him out of his stronghold … .'[53] Dryden's cryptic *obiter dictum* identifies Satan as the hero for merely formal reasons: he carries and completes the action, triumphing over Adam. Acknowledging no virtue in Satan, Dryden's laconic assessment implies that Satanic heroism is not only transgressive but morally incomprehensible.

The illustrations of *Paradise Lost* circulating at this time visually amplify Dryden's split conception of the Devil miscast as hero; these convey Satan's heroic stature, while at the same time mingling into the portrayal the features of a grotesque demon. This trend begins with the first illustrated version of the epic, Jacob Tonson's edition of 1688.[54] Until 1720, when Tonson issued a newly illustrated edition, these designs were the only illustrations of *Paradise Lost* available in England, reissued in several printings. The pictures in Tonson's influential edition of 1688 fixed the mode of representing Satan in monstrous form, produced by combining the traditional or medieval Devil with the Italianate satyr. Henry Aldritch's design for *Paradise Lost* I (Figure 3) is representative. While the fallen angels welter in the burning lake, the large, martial figure of Satan rises up, wearing a Roman tunic and grasping a spear. But this otherwise heroic representation is contradicted by the bestially demonic features of Satan – small bat-wings, horns, elongated ass's ears, and

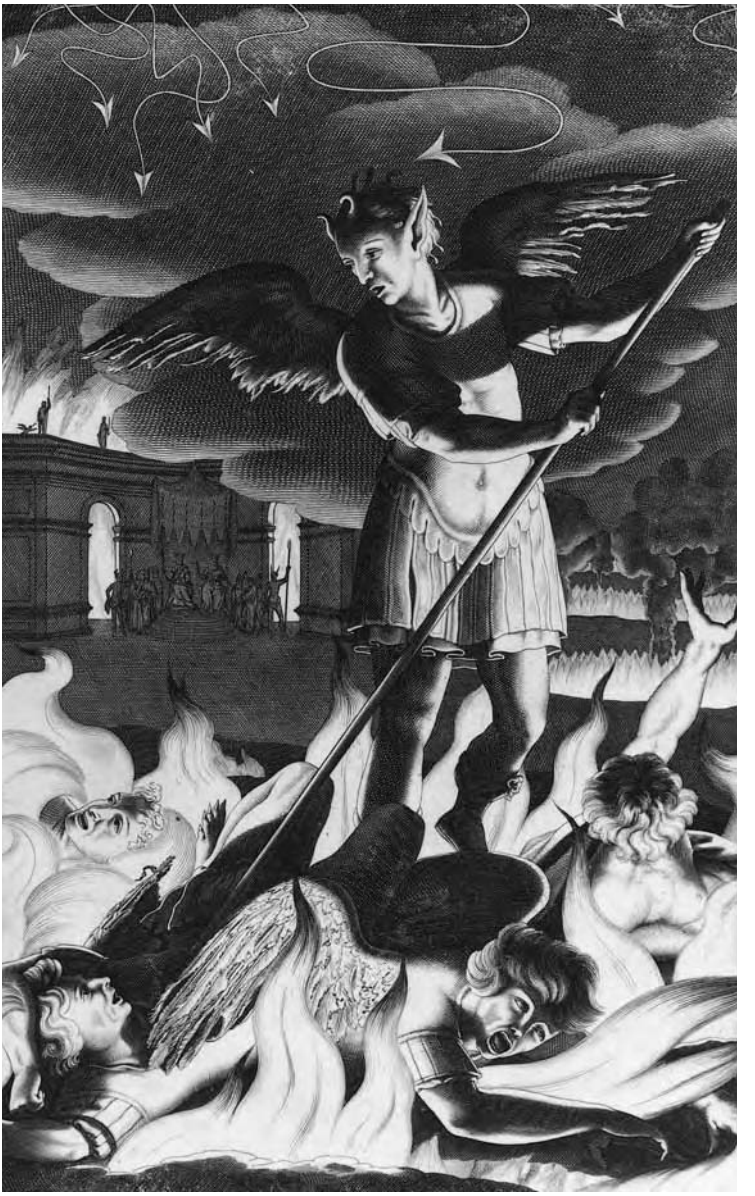

*Figure 3* Henry Aldritch, 'Satan Rising from the Flood' (1688)

medusa-like locks. Despite the supervention of French neo-classical values in the illustrations produced for Tonson's edition of 1720, the new designs by Louis Cheron and Sir James Thornhill left this heroic-demonic portrayal of Satan essentially undisturbed.[55] For more than half a century after Tonson's edition of 1688, the conventions for depicting Satan would not change.

Once the category of the sublime was established in the criticism of *Paradise Lost*, however, the image of Satan altered. The esthetic and moral-theological responses to Satan were gradually uncoupled as a new conception arrived: Milton's fallen archangel as an embodiment of sublimity. This shift becomes discernible in Addison's *Spectator* papers on *Paradise Lost* (1712). Addison declines to assign Satan the role of hero, emphasizing the effect of the *felix culpa*, Satan's ultimate defeat in the Redemption that elevates the fallen Adam. Yet Addison ranks the heroic stature of Satan above that of Homer's Odysseus, while also emphasizing the sublimity of Milton's description of the fallen archangel, which he pronounces 'very apt to raise and terrify the Reader's Imagination.'[56] Addison's tentatively secular response to Satan is crystallized in his ambivalent comment on the passage that was to exert a magnetic force on Romantic readers: he equivocally praises the strident impiety of the speech, 'the mind is its own place', describing its sentiments as 'suitable to a created Being of the most exalted and most depraved Nature.'[57]

By mid-century, interest in the human and sublimely heroic dimensions of Satan increasingly displaced moral and theological responses. The humanized Satan is first discernible in Francis Hayman's designs of 1749, which abandon the representational conventions of earlier illustrators. In 'Satan Calling His Legions,' the fallen archangel stands in the center, a robed, angel-winged, but otherwise human figure, grasping his spear, his shield slung over his shoulder. Satan's only demonic features are his disheveled hair and the glaring expression he wears as he harangues the rebel host on the burning lake. One odd detail underscores how vastly the conception of Milton's Satan has changed by now – the pair of knee-breeches Hayman's fallen angel wears. Thus, in these popular illustrations, which were republished through 1818, Satan is almost fully humanized.[58] The preoccupation with sublimity and its delightful terror or confusion encouraged a selective reading of *Paradise Lost* in Edmund Burke and his followers, who focused their attention on those books where Satan is the central figure. In his *Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful* (1757), Burke singles out the 'Archangel ruin'd' passage of Book I as an instance of the sublime, a poetical picture mingling

> images of a tower, an archangel, the sun rising through mists, or in an eclipse, the ruin of monarchs, and the revolutions of kingdoms. The mind is hurried out of itself, by a croud of great and confused images; which affect because they are crouded and confused.[59]

Daniel Webb invoked Burke's sensationist reading of Satan to bury the moral response to the fallen angel. Of the apparition of Satan in Pandemonium (*Paradise Lost* X, ll. 441–50; pp. 530–1), Webb observes that the subject of 'fallen greatness' here gives rise to such a train of fluctuating images' that the reader's senses are perforce 'hurried away' beyond the reach of sober moral reflection about the 'obnoxious' figure of Satan.[60]

This trend accelerates in the next few decades, as the fascination with Satan's grandeur and fictional personality grows. In his *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (1783), James Beattie's attempt at moral equivocation founders:

> though there are no qualities that can be called good in a moral view; nay, though the very purpose of that wicked spirit is bent to evil and to that only; yet there is a grandeur of a ruined archangel; there is force able to contend with the most boisterous elements; and there is boldness which no power but what is Almighty can intimidate. These qualities are astonishing; and although we always detest this malignity, we are often compelled to admire that very greatness by which we are confounded and terrified.[61]

Then Beattie goes on explicitly to dismiss the religious response, asserting that we regard Milton's Satan not 'As the great enemy of our souls but as a fictitious being and a mere poetical hero.'[62] In his *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (1783), Hugh Blair comments on the same description of the ruined archangel analyzed by Burke, defining the 'principal object' of its sublimity: the revelation of the personality of Satan. Blair's sympathetic interest in a 'high superior nature, fallen indeed but erecting itself against distress' filters out any reminders of the depraved nature and final degradation of Satan, qualities that an earlier writer like Addison kept in view.[63] Finally Blair humanizes Satan:

> He is brave and faithful to his troops. In the midst of his impiety, he is not without remorse. He is even touched with pity for our first parents; and justifies himself in his design against them, from the necessity of his situation. He is actuated by ambition and resentment, rather than by pure malice. In short, Milton's Satan is no worse than many a conspirator or factious chief, that makes a figure in history.[64]

The very reticence of Samuel Johnson's commentary attests to the gathering momentum of Satan-idolatry in the eighteenth century. In the *Life of Milton* (1779), Johnson justifies the intensity of Satan's libertarian rhetoric by simply observing that 'the language of rebellion cannot be the same with that of obedience' and concludes that his 'expressions are commonly general, and no otherwise offensive than as they are wicked.'[65] And this is all, as if to suggest that even Johnson's firm moralism all but yielded to the

vogue for Satan's sublimity, by his day so widespread and intense. Displacements of Milton's Satan into human characters in more or less realistic contexts had already begun with the figure of Lovelace in Richardson's *Clarissa* (1747–48). Fiction of the marvelous produced stock fallen angels replicating one after the other the same features. The sublime, throned Eblis (the eastern Satan) found in William Beckford's *Vathek* (1786) is so wedded to the Miltonic model that this figure is only nominally Islamic: the eastern Devil, conventionally represented as an old man with a bestial, disfigured body, is replaced by a youthful fallen angel. Beckford's Eblis was faithfully reproduced in turn by Matthew Gregory Lewis a decade later in *The Monk* (1796). The fascination with Satan's sublimity penetrated even the genteel popular culture of the era, inspiring one of the subjects displayed by Philip de Loutherbourg's proto-cinematic machine of the 1780s, the Eidophusikon. The culminating scene in this device, which illuminated moving pasteboard models with colored lights and used elaborate sound effects, was titled 'Satan arraying his Troops on the Banks of the Fiery Lake, with the Raising of Pandemonium, from Milton.' Edward Francis Burney's drawing of this scene reveals that de Loutherbourg's aim was to essay the Satanic sublime: the gigantic, winged figure of the fallen archangel stands in the foreground, addressing the angelic host from a dais between the massive pillars of Pandemonium.[66]

By the 1790s, then, the sublime human form of Satan had displaced all other renderings of this figure. Yet this was ideologically unthreatening sublimity. Milton's Satan and his latter-day replicas were sensational but not particularly controversial. The easternized fallen angel of Beckford is a conventionally conceived emperor of hell; Johnson's odd defense of Milton renders the definitive judgment that Milton's Satan could not morally subvert the reader, or even 'give pain to the pious ear.'[67] In the final decade of the century, however, new adaptations of this figure began to appear in the writing of Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Blake, and others, transforming Satan into the mythic vehicle of more transgressive values. This shift is accompanied by the aggressively heroic rendering of this figure in the illustrations of *Paradise Lost* produced in the early 1790s. By this time, English illustrators of Milton had discarded not merely the demonic Satan but the all too human figure of Francis Hayman as well, depicting the fallen archangel for the first time in a heightened, idealized manner. The prototype here is almost certainly James Barry's 'Satan and his Legions Hurling Defiance toward the Vault of Heaven' (ca. 1792–95; Figure 4).[68] Blake, who knew Barry, very likely saw this picture, for he later developed an uncannily similar figure in a notebook sketch; this he transformed into the emblem-image of 'Fire,' his model for Orc. On the edge of a precipice before the burning lake, Barry's wingless, muscular Satan leans back, brandishing shield and spear and gazing aloft or exulting. His crowned figure and those of his comrades are lit from the lower left by the flames of the

*Figure 4* James Barry, 'Satan and His Legions Hurling Defiance toward the Vault of Heaven' (1792–95)

burning lake; the angels' heads and spears fade into a dark and obscure background. The revisionary power of Barry is rivaled by Henry Fuseli's designs for two abortive projects of the 1790s, the illustrated edition of Milton and his own Milton Gallery. Fuseli's most impressive depiction of Satan was engraved in 1802; he probably sketched and executed it in the early 1790s, in anticipation of the Boydell project.[69] A powerful, helmeted, and wingless human figure filling the right foreground, Satan stands in left profile with arms raised, his shield resting behind, pointing upward with both index fingers, gesturing as if to emphasize the famous peroration, 'Awake, arise, or be for ever fallen.' In the left middle ground one fallen angel is already rising in response, holding up his shield.

Fuseli's other images of Satan – 'Satan, encount'ring Death, Sin Interposing,' 'Satan starting at the Touch of Ithuriel's Spear,' 'Uriel Observing Satan,' and 'Battle of the Angels' – all preserve the muscular, heroic, and entirely human image: wings are added in only the last of these. This change in the conception of Satan was pervasive: Richard Westall's illustrations for the 1794 Boydell edition of Milton's *Poetical Works* feature the same heroic representation, as does the work of George Romney and Thomas Stothard. Even an artist like Stothard, not regarded as an inspired illustrator of Milton, nevertheless achieved an heroic conception of Satan. In Stothard's design of 1792–93 for Book I, Satan is proud, stern-visaged, and crowned, his muscular figure reclining on the burning lake in the manner of the Sistine Chapel Adam.[70] From this time, few artists chose to depict Satan's progressive degeneration in *Paradise Lost*, and none reverted to the earlier manner of representing him as a bestial figure. When the illustrators of the 1790s overrode Milton's verbal representations, they pursued effects precisely the opposite of earlier artists. Illustrating Book III of *Paradise Lost* some 70 years before, Cheron suppressed Milton's description of the stripling cherub's form donned by Satan to deceive Uriel; in its place, Cheron substituted a dog-faced demon in conversation with the angel of the sun. Fuseli's design for the same episode also overrides Milton's account, but it does so to maintain the sublime human form of Satan.

Wordsworth's annotations to *Paradise Lost* (ca. 1798) seem informed by similar revisionary assumptions, for they exhibit frustration with the contradictory portrayal of Satan that undermines his heroic stature. His intense reverence for Milton notwithstanding, Wordsworth rejects the poet's compulsive deflating of Satan's sublimity. Wordsworth finds incredible, for example, his reluctance to confront Adam's physical strength and courage, since Satan is 'gifted with powers to subvert systems, of whom <the poet tells us that> God & his son except created things naught valued nor *shunned*.' He objects to the metamorphosis-scene in Pandemonium (Book X) because it humiliates Satan: 'Here we bid farewell to the first character perhaps ever exhibited in Poetry. And it is not a little to be lamented that, he leaves us in a situation so degraded in comparison with the grandeur of

his introduction.' A punishment 'more noble[,] more consonant to the dignity of the beings' should have been devised instead.[71] In these illustrators and readers of Milton, a tension thus emerges between Milton's thematic purposes and the needs, interests, and expectations of a Romantic audience disposed to reconceive the figure of Satan.

This tension is magnified in two figures in the circle of Joseph Johnson, William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft, who refashion Milton's Satan into a mythic vehicle for controversial writing. In the *Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, Godwin seizes on the figure of the fallen archangel to illustrate the 'sense of justice' which rejects arbitrary authority: Satan rebelled against his maker because 'he saw no sufficient reason, for that extreme inequality of rank and power, which the creator assumed … because prescription and precedent form no adequate ground for implicit faith.' Satan's quest for revenge is motivated mainly by his opposition to 'the unexpostulating authority that assumed to dispose of him.' In Godwin, the image of Milton's Satan emerges through an ideological filter, for this extraordinary interpretation of his rebellion screens out practically all of the archangel's negative features – significantly, his authoritarianism – and reshapes his role in the epic. The host of fallen angels, Godwin insists, are not merely the tools and victims of Satan's quest for vengeance; the benevolent rebel 'felt real compassion and sympathy for his partners in misfortune.' Mildly conceding that Satan's 'energies centered too much in personal regards,' Godwin faults him only for his deficiency in rational disinterestedness. Instead Godwin twice notes Satan's virtuous refusal to accede to God's 'assumed' power and rank.[72]

The filtering out of various elements of the Miltonic portrayal enables Godwin to read his own values into the figure of Satan. Because Satan's integrity as a rebel derives from his independent perception of God's radical injustice, he exemplifies the intellectual and moral autonomy that grounds the anarchism of *Political Justice*. Godwin saw all government and law as 'an usurpation upon the private judgment and individual conscience of mankind,' and Satan's speech declaring that 'The mind is its own place' consequently read back to him his own assumptions about authority.[73] Thus Satan's opposition to celestial oppression embodies resistance to coercive, unequal institutions, and Godwin's fallen archangel emerges as a figure who perceives truth independently and struggles benevolently for a just order.

Godwin's interpretation of Milton's Satan opens onto a larger ideological ground, where it overlaps the revolutionary rhetoric of Paine, Mary Wollstonecraft, and all who attacked hereditary power that governs arbitrarily by 'prescription and precedent.' In a confessional note attached to the second chapter of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), Mary Wollstonecraft assumes the stance of Milton's Satan to justify her aversion to Edenic scenes of 'humble mutual love'; instead, she exults, 'I have, with

conscious dignity, or Satanic pride, turned to hell for sublimer objects.'[74] Wollstonecraft then satanizes in turn these objects, pointing to 'the grandest of all human sights,' the 'outcast of fortune, rising superior to passion and discontent.' This last expression rhetorically amplifies her point in the main text – that 'the noblest struggles of suffering merit' alone deserve admiration. In both evocations, a single purpose drives Wollstonecraft's appropriation of the heroic image of the fallen archangel struggling against adversity: to exalt subjected humanity, whether represented by the fallen woman or the widow striving to bear a single life with dignity. In a manifesto which everywhere else cautiously urges that women be educated so as to become more capable wives and mothers, the rhetorical force of this Satanic idealization of the victim of class-based and gendered oppression is striking. It recalls the effect of other passages wherein the author's pragmatically patient and reasonable tone either slips or is temporarily suspended – moments like the peroration concluding chapter one, the assault on 'brutal force' which 'has hitherto governed the world.'[75] In Wollstonecraft, then, Satanism is rhetorically disruptive, breaking up the texture of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* to reveal this writer's deeper commitments and conflicts.

It should be apparent that the transformations of Milton's Satan in Godwin, Wollstonecraft, Wordsworth, and the illustrators of the 1790s imply if not an indifference to authorial intentions, then an eagerness to supplement them. Romantic recastings of Satan seem to reveal a revisionary process that goes beyond what Lucy Newlyn describes as allusion that 'reproduces, amplifies, and prolongs the ambiguities of *Paradise Lost*.' Milton's representation of Satan is indeed ambivalent, even theologically transgressive when it compares the fallen archangel to Odysseus and Jacob; and Romantic treatments of Satan may be said to assimilate this technique of ambivalent representation. 'Allusion' thus conceived, however, does not really encompass the reach of Romantic adaptations of Milton's Satan. Their effects depend in large part on another feature – what Newlyn describes as resisting or refusing Milton's semi-divine epic narrator, the voice moralizing on the action and characters.[76] Moreover, the Romantic treatments of Satan noticed thus far seem to proceed from an independent set of assumptions about his character, as if Romantic readers of *Paradise Lost* did indeed see Satan as a figure misplaced and confined, as John Carey phrases it, in 'an alien fiction.' At certain points in Milton's narrative, Satan is manipulated, his behavior pulled in different ways to serve the ideological aims of the poet. In the pivotal apostrophe to the sun in *Paradise Lost*, Book IV, Satan considers repentance – and then abruptly rejects it, on less than credible grounds, a gesture revealing the authorial hand. Milton must make him seal his own fate, Carey notes; his theological scheme demands this, or God, who is perfectly capable of offering Satan redemption, would be responsible. Satan is granted autonomy in that he sees a way out of his

doom; then Milton forces him to dismiss that option. Hence, as Carey observes, 'The illusion is created that he [Satan] is independent of the fiction that contains him,' yet when the reader perceives that his behavior is driven by thematic demands, one cannot help but see that the fallen angel is 'unfairly manipulated by that fiction.'[77]

Romantic responses to Satan, from marginal annotations to poetic recreations of Milton's character, seem to share an awareness of this containing effect, for they break the fallen archangel out of this confining fiction, assimilating him to other fictive identities and giving him different roles in the process. Not only is the figure of Satan excised and transplanted from its original narrative and rhetorical context; the recreated fallen angel emerges as it were through an interpretative screen that imposes an extreme selectiveness of response. These assumptions underlie a central mode of transforming Milton's Satan, the fusing of his mythic identity with that of other figures. Especially among second-generation Romantic writers, replicas of Milton's Satan are often removed from the narrative context of *Paradise Lost* to take on something of the identity and role of the Prometheus of Aeschylus. In these cases, Satan becomes the surrogate for the figure recreated in Romantic writing to mythicize the human struggle against various forms of oppression and limitation. In assuming this function, the aggressively active figure of Satan nearly displaces Prometheus as an image of the apotheosis of human desire.

Largely as a consequence of what Stuart Curran has described as the 'Aeschylus revival,' Prometheus acquired broad social significance in the Romantic era. In the many iconographic representations of the myth of the Titan in revolutionary art and writing, Curran demonstrates, Prometheus typically stood for 'a humanity bound to an undeserved state and no longer acquiescent in its degradation ... .'[78] In her book on Romantic Prometheanism, Linda Lewis observes that Romantic writers used the myth to imagine a range of responses to oppression: submission, passive and active resistance, and the mental reconstitution of authority.[79] In broad terms, the Romantic Prometheus embodies potential or frustrated power, desire confronting limitation. Whether the goal of this striving is understood as political, psychological, or metaphysical transformation, the mythic forethinker is emblematic of that aspiration toward heightened existence that informs the perfectibilitarian ideology of the Romantic era, the various modes of idealism found in Shelley, and Byron's tragic vision.

Yet the capacity of Prometheus to embody this struggle is limited, confined by the terms of the received myth which reduce his power of action to passive endurance. This becomes problematic in Shelley's revision of Aeschylus, where the self-purgation of the Titan in the opening act of *Prometheus Unbound* – the only 'action' performed by the Titan – remains an obscure link in the causal chain leading to the violent overthrow of Jupiter and the liberation of humanity. In Shelley, then, Promethean agency is in-

determinate – an effect that is unbalanced by the syncretic fusion of the Titan with the aggression of Satan. For Byron, the perpetually bound condition of Prometheus itself becomes the central mythic datum, grounding the conception of tragic Titanism that emerges in 'Prometheus' and the third canto of *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*. In the ode of 1816, the Titan's infinite mind and desire coexist with his subjection to the Thunderer, imaging the aspiring consciousness of humanity, confined by physical limitation. The suffering Prometheus is a 'symbol and a sign' of the hopeless duality of human existence, the division experienced between our 'fate and force.'[80]

By contrast, it was the energetic qualities of Satan that received emphasis in Romantic adaptations of this figure. In his lecture, 'On Shakespeare and Milton' (1818), Hazlitt idealizes Satan precisely because of these traits, virtually exhausting his rhetoric in a catalogue of the fallen archangel's 'power of action' and the 'vastness of his designs.' Leigh Hunt's chief complaint about *The Excursion* was that unlike *Paradise Lost*,

> There is no eagle-flight … no sustainment of a mighty action; no enormous hero, bearing on his wings the weight of a lost eternity, and holding on, nevertheless, undismayed, – firm-visaged through faltering chaos, – the combatant of all chance and all power, – a vision that, if he could be seen now, would be seen in the sky like a comet, remaining, though speeding, – visible for long nights, though rapidly voyaging, – a sight for a universe, an actor on the stage of infinity.[81]

Colored with Byronic overtones, Hunt's grand evocation is matched by other recreations of Milton's Satan that emphasize a different fundamental trait, one which further explains why his appeal equalled that of Prometheus: the assertion of the autonomy of consciousness. Amounting to a Satanist manifesto for Romantic readers, the fallen angel's declaration of subjective independence, 'The mind is its own place,' is founded on his claim of autogeny – that he is 'self-rais'd, self-begot,' metaphysically free of God. Whatever twentieth-century critics have made of Satan's pretensions, Romantic readers of Milton found the Manichean postulate of Satanic self-assertion compelling. They consistently adapted his premise of autonomy – and sometimes outright autogeny – when they reshaped Miltonic myth for a variety of rhetorical purposes. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, the ontological gap between the human and the divine is closed in the notorious infernal reading of *Paradise Lost*. This concludes by identifying Jehovah as the figure 'who dwells in flaming fire,' whose infernal creative energy is subsequently embodied in a demonic human agent – the Son of Fire, the prototype of Orc.[82] Byron's writing similarly exhibits the typological appeal of Satanic autonomy, if not the outright autogeny found in Blake. 'The mind is its own place' is concisely evoked by the 'concentred recompense' Prometheus enjoys (and which lends mortals their 'force').

This adaptation of Satan's *prise de conscience* underpins the conception of the Titan Byron developed in the ode of 1816. It is expanded as well in Manfred's death-speech, 'the mind which is immortal,' and in *Cain: A Mystery* it forms the core of Lucifer's exhortation to Cain that the human mind is the 'centre of surrounding things.' This maxim is delivered by a figure who openly doubts that he is Jehovah's creature and insists that he shared equally in the creation of the physical universe.[83]

Thus one central mode of Romantic Satanism contains a reconception of Milton's fallen archangel that is patently an image of apotheosis, an emblem of an aspiring, rebelling, rising human god who insists that he is self-created. This transformation of the mythic character may be seen as one element of the larger process Northrop Frye described as the Romantic recovery of the projection of divinity from the sky god and its reconstitution in a human form.[84] Mythmaking with pretensions of this magnitude had a social function during the era, as Emmet Kennedy explains in *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (1989). The worship of the heroes of the French revolution established by ritual the new belief that authority, rather than descending from a transcendent God, ascended from the people:

> The deities in the Panthéon remain purely human – the revolutionaries were no modern polytheists. But at the same time these men were thought to have so far superseded ordinary mortality that they became like gods … . The Hébertist de-Christianizer Antoine-François Momoro explained the fragile boundary between ordinary humanity and divinity in 1793 when he insisted that 'liberty, reason, truth are only abstract beings. They are not gods, for properly speaking, they are part of ourselves.' It was that part of themselves that the revolutionaries worshiped in the Cult of Reason in November 1793.[85]

Affinities exist between the hero-worship of the French revolution and various forms of Satanism in English writing. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, a Satanic voice proclaims this credo: 'The worship of God is. Honouring his gifts in other men each according to his genius and loving the greatest men best, those who envy or calumniate great men hate God, for there is no other God' (22–3; Erdman, p. 43).

Yet in English Romanticism the Satanic apotheosis and its rhetorical functions are often more complicated than this: recreations of Milton's Satan assimilate not only his heroic qualities, but his more conventionally evil traits as well. Criticism since the 1960s has been more attentive here, correcting the earlier misapprehension that Romantic readings of Milton's Satan flatly idealized the figure. Prometheus, whose Romantic conception involves far less moral ambiguity, is relatively more susceptible to pure idealization; Hazlitt's acknowledgment that the Titan is a paradigm of 'crime' is nearly anomalous.[86] The Promethean transgression is rarely

apprehended as an evil act – and even when it is, as in *Frankenstein* (1818), the image of the modern Prometheus blurs with the features of Milton's Satan which Mary Shelley grafted onto the figure of Victor Frankenstein.

Adaptations like these exploit the paradigmatic potential in Satan's cult of himself; it is recognized that his self-assertion compromises his rebellion against God and the attempt to set up an independent system of moral values. While Godwin maintained that Satan rebels out of just notions about political authority and rights, he nevertheless acknowledged the fallen archangel's excessive self-regard.[87] Shelley was more ambivalent, declaring that his partial prototype for Prometheus embodied, on the one hand, 'courage and majesty and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force' and, on the other, the 'taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement.'[88] This side of the Romantic response to Milton – which seems generally more respectful of his intentions, even as it softens Satanic evil to selfishness – gives rise to the ambiguity of Romantic recreations of the fallen archangel. While Satan is re-envisioned as the image of expanding human consciousness and desire, rebelling against oppression and limitation, he also comes into view as a fallen figure who loses Paradise in an attempt to locate the divine source within, whose rebelliousness may turn tyrannical and revengeful in his authoritarian reign in hell. This aspect of the Satanic figure is especially prominent in the mythic representations of oppression and insurrection in Blake and Shelley.

Thus, in Romantic writing Milton's Satan emerges as an unstable figure: in many contexts, he appears as an heroic apotheosis of human consciousness and libertarian desire, while in others he constitutes the dark double or shadow of Prometheus. The next three chapters of this book will develop the uses Blake, Shelley, and Byron found for both forms of Satanism. Their conflicted treatment of the myth is illustrated in brief by William Hazlitt's ambiguous satanizing of Napoleon. In a post-Waterloo context recalling the ideologically focused adaptations of Satan found earlier in Godwin and Wollstonecraft, Hazlitt invokes the fallen angel to challenge post-Waterloo conservative propaganda. Hazlitt's Satanic rhetoric in his lecture of 1818 'On Shakespeare and Milton' is even more historically specific and more partisan than the writers of the 1790s, however, for he uses the figure of Satan to refute the continuing and widespread demonizing of Napoleon. This intention is signaled to the reader with a seemingly offhand reference to 'a noted political writer' who has turned Milton's 'whole account' of Satan into a Napoleonic allegory designed to reveal the emperor as the 'greatest enemy' of humankind.[89] Hazlitt attempts to vindicate the fallen Napoleon through a panegyric on the ambition and martial glory of his Miltonic surrogate:

> Satan is the most heroic subject that was ever chosen for a poem.... His ambition was the greatest, and his punishment was the greatest; but not so his despair, for his fortitude was as great as his sufferings. His strength

> of mind was matchless as his strength of body; the vastness of his designs did not surpass the firm, inflexible determination with which he submitted to his irreversible doom, and final loss of all good. His power of action and of suffering was equal. He was the greatest power that was ever overthrown, with the strongest will left to resist or to endure. He was baffled, not confounded … He was still surrounded with hosts of rebel angels, armed warriors, who own him as their sovereign leader, and with whose fate he sympathizes as he views them round, far as the eye can reach; though he keeps aloof from them in his own mind, and holds supreme counsel only with his own breast.
>
> (*Works*, V, 63)

Under the mythic cover of Satan, the figure of Napoleon is exalted: the insistent evocations of 'the greatest power' and the greatest ambition apply as much to Bonaparte as to Satan. And clearly Hazlitt's audience was meant to connect the Satan who 'keeps aloof' with the legendary solitude and self-separation of Bonaparte, the subject of the fascinated speculation of even ambivalent admirers like Byron.[90]

The propaganda of the era demonizing Napoleon and the cultural force of Miltonic Satanism converge here, enabling Hazlitt to build a structure of image and belief that upheld him in the years after Waterloo, while also laying a mythic foundation for his defiant counterattack on monarchic legitimacy in his monumental four-volume biography of Napleon, published in 1825. And yet this later polemic is hobbled, as Simon Bainbridge has shown, by its own conflicted rhetoric about Napoleon's hunger for power, which blurs the very distinctions he wants to draw between legitimate monarchy and the man he thought was born to destroy it.[91] Significantly, the source of this ambiguous portrayal lies in Hazlitt's lecture of 1818, where the idealization of Satan falters in the concession that he is 'the abstract love of power, of pride, of self-will personified, to which last principle all other good and evil, and even his own, are subordinate' (*Works*, V, 64). Once he acknowledges all of these qualities in the figure of Satan, Hazlitt can no longer contest – and this illustrates again the interplay of the historical situation and the Miltonic medium – Coleridge's claim that Napoleon is most clearly seen in the hardened selfishness of Satan. In Hazlitt's portrait of flawed greatness, then, the darkened figure of Milton's Satan – 'the clouded ruins of a god' – is transformed into the mythic vehicle of an abortive apotheosis of the French emperor.

# 2
# Blake, the Son of Fire, and the God of this World

> I have been commanded from Hell not to print this as it is what our Enemies wish
>
> Blake, Annotations to Richard Watson's *An Apology for the Bible* (1797) (Erdman, p. 611)

Blake's contemporaries were familiar with his wild talk on theological and moral subjects. He once perplexed Crabb Robinson, for example, by asserting that 'he had committed many murders, that reason is the only evil or sin.' On another occasion he remarked that Christ 'was wrong in suffering himself to be crucified.'[1] This resort to paradox and exaggeration, which is part of the Blake legend, was a performance meant to shock the literal-minded and pious. The mythic self-portrayal inscribed in Watson's vindication of state religion is private, however, and therefore cannot be explained in this way. Testifying to group consciousness, Blake's cryptic profession of allegiance to hell points toward the ideological and artistic platform from which his experiments with Satanic myth were launched in the early 1790s. In a broad sense, these words evoke the revolutionary culture of this era, where Blake found the stimulus for the iconoclastic and oppositional mythmaking animating *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and the Lambeth books. Yet the inscription seems anachronistic: it dates from the years of counter-revolutionary repression, when Blake began to fall into obscurity and his monomyth to develop the Christocentric focus of the major prophecies. For Blake to articulate a partisan response to Watson in these words at this time – when his art was acquiring a more orthodox mythic structure – is therefore a gesture that demands attention. The infernal afterglow in the inscription suggests that ironized readings of Blake's 'Satanism' leave something unexplained, and it invites inquiry into the conditions under which his Satanic mythmaking emerged and then shifted its center of gravity later in the decade.[2]

Blake's artistic involvement in Satanic myth is extensive, stretching from the 'Bible of Hell' he conceived in the 1790s to his last illuminated book, while also providing the central subjects for countless visual works, including his sets of illustrations of Milton and the Bible. Blakean Satanism originates in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–93), the prolegomenon to the infernal Bible. The rhetorical vehicle of intellectual argument in this work is primarily an idealizing, celebratory version of the mythology surrounding Satan. In *The Marriage*, the infernal world has been re-envisioned: from the infernally partisan narrator to the oracular 'voice of the Devil' and the 'son of fire,' at each level the entire fiction is constructed in such a way as to present Blake's leading ideas as if they come from a hell imagined in startlingly unconventional terms. This renovated myth conveys a programmatic expression of much of Blake's interconnected political, moral, and metaphysical thought in the early 1790s: the conviction that Apocalypse, manifest in the French revolution, is imminent or already underway, the idea of expanded sense perception, the dual principles Blake calls the 'Contraries,' and an ethical theory based on energy and infinite desire. This transformation of mythic structures and their meaning is carried over into the revolutionary prophecies of the early 1790s – *America* (1793), *Europe* (1794), and *The Song of Los* (1795). In these works, Blake replaces the Devil and the son of fire with the infernal figure of Orc as the mythological vehicle of desire and energy, embodying a moral and political rebelliousness identified with Apocalypse. In subsequent works Blake continues to transform the myth of Satan, shifting its function from idealizing to demonizing. In *The Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Four Zoas* (1797–1805?), *Milton: A Poem* (ca. 1804), and *Jerusalem* (ca. 1820), Blake turns this figure into a personification of multiple forms of tyranny – not only the worldly powers of state religion and imperial war, but their psychosocial foundations: the Limit of Opacity and the Selfhood. In these works, Satan performs the traditional role of the adversary, yet in each case he personifies an obstacle to human redemption that is profoundly unconventional in conception. In these successive transformations of Christian diabology, which end by collapsing together the figures of the Devil and the God of this World, Blake seems to exhaust the myth of Satan.

The revision of Satanic myth thus spans Blake's career, and yet this central element of his work does not appear significantly before 1790, when it suddenly erupts in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Its emergence at this time is a function of the milieu, which in this case includes not only the larger cultural environment discussed in the previous chapter, but also the more specific formative influence of the circle surrounding Joseph Johnson. For many years Blake had received engraving work from Johnson, and by the early 1790s Blake was at least an occasional guest at his weekly dinners, where a coterie consisting of William Godwin, Mary Wollstonecraft, Henry Fuseli, Joseph Priestley, and Thomas Paine met. Here Blake encountered the

radical and rationalistic ideology of the Johnson circle; since Johnson published or sold the work of many of these figures, Blake's visits to his bookshop alone would have made him familiar with the thought of this group.[3] Of special significance for Blake's Satanic mythmaking was the religious writing of this circle, which along with the skeptical and syncretist French ideas underlying it attacked the authority of the biblical myth of Satan. In addition, the rehabilitation of Milton's Satan in criticism and illustration registered strong responses in the Johnson circle, especially in Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Fuseli. And it was precisely at this time, as we have seen, that members of the same group – Paine and Priestley – were demonized in the visual rhetoric of the satirical print, an attack Blake could not have missed. All of these elements of this circle's ideology and its social aura enter into Blake's revision of Satanic myth, from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* through his subsequent work of the mid-1790s.[4]

By the beginning of the decade of revolution, Blake was already disposed to regard myth not as a pattern of traditional belief, but as a desacralized form open to radical reshaping. His conception of religous myth reflects familiarity with infidel mythography; Voltaire, Holbach, and Dupuis were all available to him in popular translations, although he could also read French. Nor were their polemics entirely repugnant. It is useful to recall that Blake's response to Voltaire is not defined entirely by the anti-materialist strictures of 'Mock on Mock on Voltaire Rousseau': he also said that the French writer was sent by God to expose the 'natural sense' of the Bible.[5] The treatment of myth in *The Marriage* concretely embodies the assumptions of the infidel writers, especially their interest in leveling the distinctions between Christianity and other religions. Blake had already assimilated and transformed these views by 1788, as the pronouncements of *All Religions are One* make clear: 'The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations reception of the Poetic Genius … the Jewish & Christian Testaments are An original derivation from the Poetic Genius' (Erdman, p. 1). The superhuman forms of various religious myths – which Blake, with the syncretist's indifference to distinctions, catalogues as 'Angel & Spirit & Demon' – are projections of the transindividual creative power of the Poetic Genius. This premise Blake retains as late as 1809: in 'A Descriptive Catalogue' (composed for the exhibition of that year), he theorizes the existence of mythic forms that subtend all religious expression, the 'stupendous originals' copied in the 'Apotheoses of Persian, Hindoo, and Egyptian Antiquity' (Erdman, p. 530). By invoking the original forms 'called in the Sacred Scriptures the Cherubim,' Blake de-centers Christianity, just as Dupuis and Holbach adduced a range of dualistic myths in order to subvert the hegemonizing power of Christian monotheism (Erdman, p. 531).

With this difference: Blake's syncretic assumptions ultimately diverge from those of the infidels, while his aims in revising myth exceed their mere iconoclasm. Blake's Satanism consequently yields a radical remaking

of this material. With Paine, for example, Blake affirms that myth informs the 'sacred codes' structuring religious tradition, the priestly imposition used to oppress humanity with fear. While *The Age of Reason* undertakes simply to destroy the power of this mythology by declaring, for example, that Satan's authorship of evil is fabulous, Blake reshapes the myth, suggesting along Gnostic lines that the Devil's potential identity has been suppressed or distorted by Christian tradition, or that a new identity may be fashioned for him. These transformations rest on a conception of the origin of myth that only partly resembles the theories of Holbach and Volney. They proclaim the psychologically projective origins of religious myth in order to destroy its prestige, while the 'stupendous originals' are conceived by Blake to be apotheoses of human powers. His mythic art of the 1790s treats the Devil as a displaced image of one of these powers, and thus the figure represented in Christian culture as the antagonist of God is reconceived, converted into the emblem of liberating values, the embodiment of energy and desire. Blake's Satanic mythmaking thus displays his attempt to reconstruct the identity and role of a Satan freed of the distortions inherent in scriptural derivations from the Poetic Genius, the 'forms of worship' chosen from 'poetic tales' (11; Erdman, p. 38).

This, then, is the theological and mythographic basis on which Satanic myth was transformed in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Here the share of the Johnson circle in the contemporary reception of *Paradise Lost* figured prominently as well. In 1790 Blake expected considerable employment as an engraver for the Johnson and Edwards Milton project, in which paintings by Blake's friend Henry Fuseli were to be engraved as illustrations in the planned edition of Milton to be printed by Joseph Johnson. Although the endeavor failed, Fuseli began sketching his Miltonic subjects in 1790; Blake undoubtedly saw these sublime portrayals of Satan in progress. The Satanic mythmaking of *The Marriage* not only reflects Blake's identification with this project and the impress of Fuseli's rendering of Milton; it bears the influence of the talk of the Johnson circle as well – particularly about *Paradise Lost*. This conversation would have been colored not only by the Romantic biases toward Satan that had been building in English criticism for decades, but also by the way members of this group interpreted the Christian mythology presented in *Paradise Lost*. William Godwin and Mary Wollstonecraft merged the heroic and humanized image of Satan fostered by earlier critics and illustrators with their own revolutionary values. In both, Satan emerges as the embodiment of opposition to the power wielded by monarchy and patriarchy.[6]

Thus transformed Miltonic myth proved ideologically powerful in the early 1790s, and this enabled Blake to assume the role of a partisan mythmaker – 'of the Devil's party' in a socially specific sense. This effect was enhanced by the strengthening of Blake's ties to the Johnson circle, coincident with his disaffection from the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church;

his polarized view of these groups contributes to the structure of Satanic myth in *The Marriage*. Blake's interest in the New Jerusalem Church declined in 1789–90, when the latter declared its opposition to political revolution, began to emphasize the centrality of the decalogue, institutionalized its priesthood, and entered into a theological controversy with the Johnson circle. Since November 1789, the *Analytical Review*, Johnson's journal, had been attacking Swedenborgian positions; Joseph Priestley later went on the offensive with his *Letters to the Members of the New Jerusalem Church* (1791).[7] That the Birmingham New Church minister all but dispatched the mob to Priestley's home in the Loyalist riots of 1791 would have struck Blake as an action which drew the party lines with unmistakable clarity. Already bearing the Satanic stigmata, Priestley now became the scapegoat, while Paine, the other principal demonic figure in the circle, was indicted for sedition and left England in 1792.

It was in this political atmosphere that Blake undertook the reshaping of the trope by which ideological foes were given the brand of 'Satanic.' The idealized forms of Miltonic myth in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* embody Blake's discovery and celebration of a demonic group identity in Johnson's circle.[8] While projecting the values of this group through infernal personae, Satanic myth functions antagonistically as well. Blake uses it to develop a stance of opposition, attacking the Swedenborgian version of the Christian mythology from the skeptical and syncretic perspective of his circle. The parodic foundation for *The Marriage* is Swedenborg's visionary writing, especially *Heaven and Hell* (1784), which perpetuates the conventional conception of hell and the traditional identification of the demonic with evil. These conceptions of the myth must have appeared to Blake as the props of the priestly oppressiveness and increasing conservatism, both theological and political, of the New Jerusalem Church. But the objective of Blake's critique extends further, of course: whether employed by the Swedenborgian New Church or by the Old Church, the mythology surrounding Satan forms part of the same sacred code. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* converts this traditional or 'official' story in the service of state religion into a myth embracing revolution, moral revisionism, and Apocalypse.

## I. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

The prose conclusion to the verse 'Argument' which opens *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* immediately reveals the ideological scope of Blake's transformation of official Christian diabology. This moment of Millenarian prophecy identifies Christ, revolution, and Apocalypse, while satanizing all three in a manner distinct from all other political appropriations of the myth:

> As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting

> at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into Paradise; see Isaiah XXXIV & XXXV Chap: (3; Erdman, p. 34)

These pronouncements align the revival of the Eternal Hell with the fulfillment of Christ's mission; to identify the latter event with the regeneration of hell in 1790 (the date Blake pencilled on this page of one of the copies of *The Marriage*) is to assert that a Satanic reprise of the resurrection of Christ is manifest in the present age. This prophecy sharpens its political focus when the narrator proclaims the 'dominion of Edom' and superimposes the geography of the biblical lands onto the map of Europe. In the same way that Isaiah 63 prophesies vengeance on Israel from the land to the southeast (associated by Christian exegetes with Antichrist), the narrator envisions the northward flow of revolution from France. And the second sense of Edom – Esau, the disinherited older brother of Jacob and eponymous founder of the nation of Edom – intensifies the Satanic portent of the prophecy: descending typologically from Cain and ultimately from Satan, the red man of Genesis 25:30 and 27:40 now breaks his yoke amid the upsurge of hell.[9]

These declarations seem reminiscent of the apocalyptic prophecy delivered by Richard Brothers, who beheld Satan entering London during the early period of hostilities with France. Yet they are much more oblique in their typing of history. Aside from the reference to Swedenborg, Blake's prophecy avoids the direct equation of specific events and figures with scriptural meanings. Priestley, we recall, went so far as to identify all of the heads on the Beast with the crowns of Europe. If Blake's Satanic prophecy does not assume this referential power, its content is nevertheless more fully transgressive. Millenarian prophecies surrounding the French revolution were commonplace, entertained by the minds of rationalists like Priestley and Paine as well as enthusiasts like Brothers. Nor was invoking Christ to justify revolution unusual: in his sermon of 14 July 1791, Mark Wilks declared that 'Jesus Christ was a Revolutionist.'[10] But no other prophecy of this time enthusiastically satanized either Christ the revolutionary or the vision of Apocalypse by revolution. Blake alone envisions the joint action of the reviving hell, the Satanic risen Christ, and Edom, the land of Antichrist, as triggering an Apocalypse: 'now … is the return of Adam into Paradise.' Nor is the infernal Christ a casual identification: it reappears in the last Memorable Fancy of *The Marriage*, where a characteristically outspoken Devil implies the infernal origin of the impulse-obeying, rule-breaking Christ (21; Erdman, p. 43). Indeed, the prophecy itself of a demonically driven Apocalypse, the reader discovers later, is represented as a portion of an infernal Book of Revelation: 'The ancient tradition that the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years is true, as I have heard from Hell' (14; Erdman, p. 39). In this fusion – an infernal Revelation, a Satanic Messiah, a divinely sanctioned revolution out of hell –

all traditional dualisms are seemingly overwhelmed. Instead of the Manichean heightening common to demonizing rhetoric in the era, this prophecy joins what both state religion and Millenarian prophecy have divided. This monistic merging of opposed forces produces the ontological critical mass that brings on Apocalypse.

This fusion occurs when the Satanic risen Christ casts off the linen clothes, and with them, the Swedenborgian world view. In the mythic machinery of *Heaven and Hell*, Blake discovered the means of subverting the metaphysical underpinnings of the conservatism and ritualism of the New Church: transforming the meanings Swedenborg attaches to the divine and infernal worlds. Swedenborg's treatise carves up reality into opposed worlds of good and evil ruled by God; heaven and hell reflect each other symmetrically in all features and are balanced by an equilibrium which only God can regulate.[11] Blake transforms this dualism by inverting it, then identifying hell not only with the body but with an inner world of spiritual energy as well, heaven with the sterile outward bound of reason. *The Marriage* also overturns the hierarchical relationship of Swedenborg's spiritual worlds. Its concern with 'equilibrium' notwithstanding, *Heaven and Hell* is a revelation of celestial ascendancy over hell: 'restraining and subduing evil and … keeping the infernal crew in bonds' justify a regime of eternal punishment. While Swedenborg's angelic police 'restrain insanities and disturbances' in hell, *The Marriage* disables their authority.[12] The narrator represents angels as merely bemused onlookers when he describes himself 'walking among the fires of hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity' (6; Erdman, p. 35).

The final sentences of the Argument entirely replace the dualism and authoritarianism of the Swedenborgian world view with an infernal ontology. The latter reveals what actually constructs the world: not the standstill of equilibrium but the unregulated struggle of Contraries:

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

Thus Blake projects his version of the metaphysics of the Johnson circle, articulated by the 'voice of the Devil,' whose contrary principles announce that the conventional dualism of body and soul is a delusion.[13] The Devil's elusive third assertion concludes that we possess not a soul and body but a spiritual body, from which both energy and reason emanate: 'Energy is the

only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy' (4; Erdman, p. 34).

The monistic merging of body and soul expresses Blake's conception of the ideology of the 'Devil's party' by assimilating and transforming materialist ideas from Priestley's *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* (1777) and Holbach's *System of Nature* (1770). Both describe not just the behavior of physical bodies but the emotions of love and hate in terms of the energies of 'attraction and repulsion.'[14] Transvaluing this materialism, Blake builds it into the Devil's evocation of infinite forces and energies abstracted by the religious into the dualisms of soul and body, good and evil. Thus, in an early instance of Blake's practice of visionary correction, the complex response through which he engaged figures like Dante and Milton, the thesis of *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit* becomes the instrument for refuting the attenuated spirituality and dualistic nature of both Swedenborgianism and traditional Christianity. The Devil's assertions both echo and revise those of Priestley, who announces in his opening pages that 'the principal object, is to prove the uniform composition of man, or that what we call *mind*, or the principle of perception and thought, is not a substance distinct from the body.'[15] Priestley reduces mind to matter, yet his assumption that matter itself possesses 'powers' and his belief that every atom will be resurrected in the Last Judgment both suggest that Blake formed the Devil's infernal monism from Priestleyan materialism.[16]

The well-known infernal reading of *Paradise Lost* which follows has affinities with the ideologically driven interpretation of Milton's Satan that appears in the tendentious writing of the Johnson circle. Like Godwin and Wollstonecraft, Blake uses Satan to argue and establish the primacy of a given value or attitude; specifically, he makes him the vehicle for a refinement of infernal ethics. To establish the principle of desire, the narrator presents *Paradise Lost* as an exemplum, construed through the infernal interpretative principle of unconscious intentions: Milton was 'of the Devils party without knowing it' (6; Erdman, p. 35). Read in these terms, Milton's epic does not justify the ways of God to man, nor does it chronicle the struggle of good and evil: *Paradise Lost* narrates the usurpation of authority by reason and the consequent expulsion of desire.

Blake's reinterpretation of Milton's Satan, while akin to those of Godwin and Wollstonecraft, seems more rhetorically ambitious. This is not merely a function of the relative textual centrality of the critique of *Paradise Lost* (Godwin and Wollstonecraft marginalize their interpretations of the epic in appendices and footnotes). The scope of Blake's idealization of Satan exceeds theirs because it declares in Gnostic fashion that Milton's epic has co-opted and perverted the most fundamental story of western culture, burying its meaning. For Blake's Devil reads Satan's story as a version of his own, garbled by Milton's conscious allegiances to God's party. These distortions are clarified by Blake's narrator, who assigns to Satan 'the command

of the heavenly host' – which Milton does not – to insist on the primacy of Desire/the Devil, 'the original archangel.' And this humanized and heroic figure is made to carry heavier ideological freight than in Godwin and Wollstonecraft: Blake's Satan embodies a form of desire which can be construed on several levels, subsuming the social and political ideals the other two writers discover in the fallen archangel. The desire which Satan personifies has not only the antinomian significance developed at length in the Proverbs of Hell, but the implicitly political drift as well; Desire is, after all, the platform of the 'Devil's party,' which numbers the revolutionist Milton among its sympathizers. And enclosing these dimensions of meaning is the metaphysical: Satan incarnates the infinite desire of humanity that possesses an infinite reality, the same principle articulated in the unqualified Idealism of *There is No Natural Religion* (1788).

In subsequent passages, Blake's reworking of Christian diabology in *Paradise Lost* and the Bible becomes directly iconoclastic, producing shock effects reminiscent of the handling of biblical myth in *The Age of Reason*. As if encouraged by Paine's example, Blake plays irreverently with suspect official stories. His infernal narrator bluntly asserts that in the erroneous sacred code of the Bible, mythological names are assigned incorrectly: 'But in the Book of Job Miltons Messiah is call'd Satan.' That is, the true name of the figure who torments Job is not Satan but Milton's Son of God, the reasoning Governor. 'For this history has been adopted by both parties' (5; Erdman, p. 34), the narrator notes, implying that Job is merely the version of the story told by the Angels. To clarify the Devil's history that has been distorted by Milton, a new version of the original expulsion is introduced next, representing the fall of desire in terms analogous to the Gnostic myth of the Creation by a fallen demiurge:

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

The infernal version of *Paradise Lost* thus presents the Governor falling from the Abyss after an unsuccessful attempt to usurp the place of the Devil, the original Archangel. The Messiah's subsequent seizure of the essence of hell inverts both the Promethean theft of fire and Milton's conception of hell as an imitative counterpart of heaven. This infernal myth of origins deepens in the radical reshaping of the New Testament that follows. Through a literal appropriation of the 'cloven tongues like as of fire' (Acts 2:3) in which the Holy Ghost descends upon the disciples, the Comforter Christ promised his

disciples 'will teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance' (John 14:26) becomes the infernal Holy Spirit of Desire which furnishes mere Reason with 'Ideas to build on.' The passage completes the inversion of the official story with a shocking association of the 'Jehovah of the Bible' with the Devil. (Blake's first thoughts actually fused the two, for the original version on the copper plate apparently read not 'he, who dwells,' but 'the Devil who dwells in flaming fire.'[17]) To conclude the scriptural demonstration that the Devil is the ground of all Being, Blake revises the proto-Arian heresy of Adoptionism to envision a demonic apotheosis which redeems the Messiah. After death, Christ becomes the infernal father, the Jehovah who dwells in fire.

Taken as a whole, the reversal of Milton's narrative and the inversions of scripture appear to enact Paine's suggestion that the orthodox account should have been told 'the contrary way,' reversing the positions of God and Satan.[18] Yet here, as in other instances, Blake's revision of biblical myth overshoots Paine's. The latter's fundamental assumption is that the official story of Satan – the war in heaven, the temptation of Eve, and the Fall of man – appears in a new light when rationally analyzed. Absurd, profane, and hopelessly inconsistent with the power and wisdom of God, it is nothing more than a 'strange fable.' Yet the myth of Satan – like the rest of the Christian mythology – holds the power 'to terrify and enslave mankind,' Paine affirms. Blake reveals a similar awareness of the force of institutionally appropriated myths, the 'system' of 'Priesthood' formed from 'poetic tales,' 'which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar' (11; Erdman, p. 38). While both Paine and Blake aim to take these oppressive myths out of the hands of the church mythologists, Blake perceives – as Paine did not – that these myths contain another form of power. Instead of shredding the myths, Blake reshapes them into a Bible of Hell, a set of fictions expressing liberating, revolutionary values.

The final such fiction, which introduces the 'son of fire' is contained in the tailpiece added to *The Marriage* in 1792 or 1793, 'A Song of Liberty.' Its narrative takes up again the apocalyptic political prophecy of plate three and its oblique identification of the French revolution with the revival of hell. Expanding into a global panorama of revolution taking in America, Spain, and Italy, 'A Song of Liberty' envisions the universal conflict through a Satanic mytheme, in which the 'new born fire' acts as the efficient cause of political revolution ending with the Millennium.[19] In an extremely compressed mythic narrative, the unnamed fiery 'terror' – the prototype of the Orc-figure introduced in the subsequent political prophecies – is no sooner born than he rebelliously confronts the 'starry king,' a figure which conflates Milton's God the Father with the archetypal monarch:

> 8. On those infinite mountains of light now barr'd out by the atlantic sea, the new born fire stood before the starry king!
> 9. Flag'd with grey brow'd snows and thunderous visages the

jealous wings wav'd over the deep.
10. The speary hand burned aloft, unbuckled was the shield; forth went the hand of jealousy among the flaming hair, and hurl'd the new born wonder thro' the starry night.

(25–6; Erdman, p. 44)

The Miltonic mytheme of confrontation so condenses the rebellion in heaven and the expulsion of Satan that the demonic figure does not fall into a region of fire, but is born in the element and rises like Milton's Satan, armed with spear and shield to battle the king. That Blake here imagines revolutionary energy in terms of precisely this Satanic figure, collectively developed by English artists, is confirmed by the related sketch, dating from 1792–93, in Blake's notebook, for *The Gates of Paradise*, plate 5 (Figure 5). A mirror-image of James Barry's Satan, Blake's 'Fire' stands amid swirling flames with arms outstretched, holding spear and shield like the new born fire of 'A Song of Liberty.' Quoting Milton's epic ('Forthwith upright he rears from off the Pool'), a partially deleted caption on the notebook page ties the image of Orc's prototype directly to Satan's ascent from the burning lake (*Paradise Lost* I, l. 221; p. 57).

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

the son of fire in his eastern cloud, while the morning plumes her golden breast,
20. Spurning the clouds written with curses, stamps the stony law to dust, loosing the eternal horses from the dens of night, crying

Empire is no more! and now the lion & wolf shall cease.

(27; Erdman, p. 45)

*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* thus concludes with a Satanic vision of world-wide political revolution, with an infernal figure occupying the role of Liberty leading the people. This final episode, like the others in *The Marriage* – the Satanic Millenarian prophecies, the infernal refutations of Christian and Swedenborgian constructs, and the appropriations of Milton's Satan and biblical myth – exhibits a fascination and freedom with Christian diabology which was encouraged if not made possible by the climate of thought in the 1790s, especially in the Johnson circle. Blake's conception of the authority of the Bible – as an 'original derivation' of Genius – has affinities with the attitude toward scripture held by this group. However off-putting the visionary enthusiasm of *The Marriage* might have been to these rationalistic figures, its irreverence toward 'all Bibles or

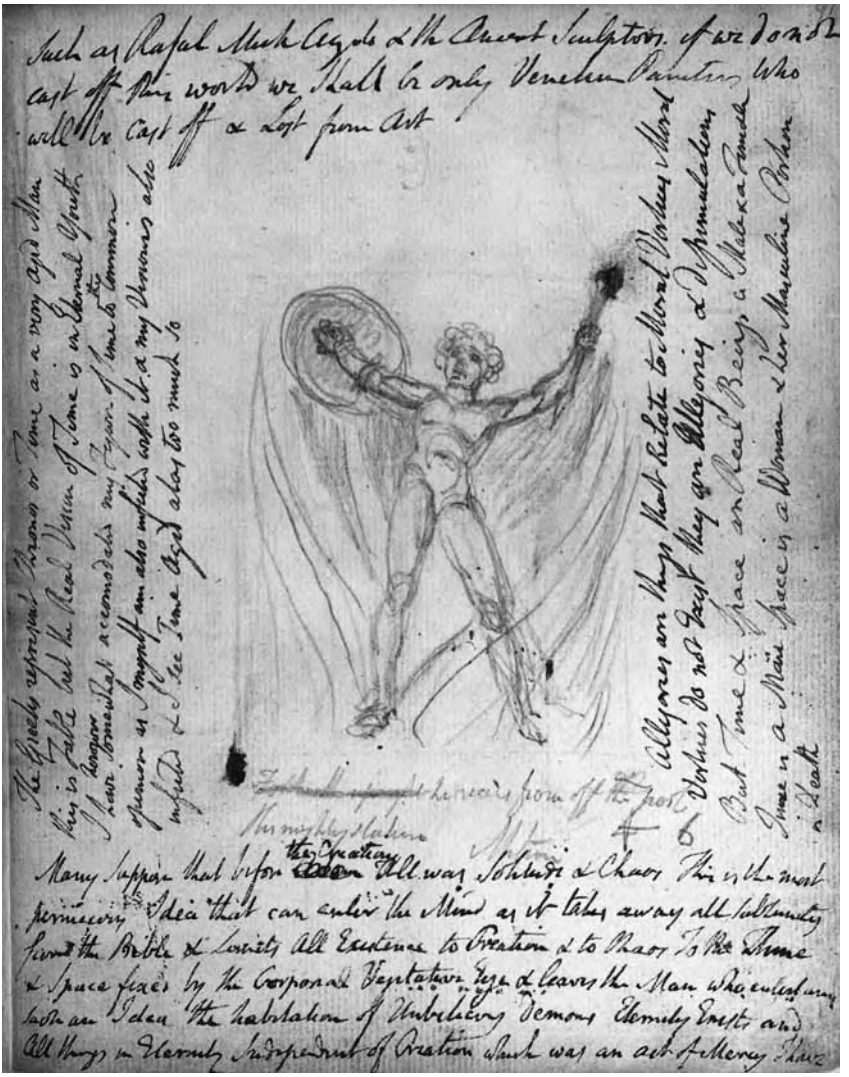

*Figure 5* William Blake, Preliminary Sketch for 'Fire' (Notebook, ca. 1792–93)

sacred codes' was congenial; the skeptical tone of this phrase differs little from that of Mary Wollstonecraft's dismissal, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, of the creation of Eve as 'Moses' poetical story.'[20] Such a shared attitude toward biblical myth licenses the boldest transformations of Satanic material in *The Marriage*. As Robert Essick's study of the affinities between Paine and Blake notes, however, in *The Marriage* we are constantly

aware of a tension between Blake and the corporate author, in the syntheses Blake attempts between his own visionary outlook and the perspective of the Johnson circle.[21] So too with Blake's appropriation of Satanic myth in *The Marriage*, which consistently subsumes and transforms the intellectual positions of various members of the Johnson circle. In each case Blake enters into and simultaneously separates himself from the ideology of this group, refashioning it in the process.

## II. *America*, *Europe*, and *The Song of Los*

The tensions that are discernible in *The Marriage* reappear in *America: a Prophecy* (1793), Blake's mythic tableau of the American war for independence. The conclusion of the work, which depicts revolution sweeping eastward to Europe a decade after the British surrender at Yorktown, reveals the latent political content of the work: events in France and the ideological struggle to interpret them. Recent criticism has identified partisan rhetoric in *America* that responds to the counter-revolutionary propaganda that, with increasing intensity after 1792, portrayed France as the Antichrist and antagonist in the Armageddon to come.[22] While it accepts the propagandistic donné of revolution as an apocalyptic portent, *America* offers an opposing vision, in which Orc, a mythic embodiment of revolutionary energy, brings the world to the brink of Millennium. Although these features of *America* show its continuity with the iconoclastic diabolism of *The Marriage*, the portrayal of this new manifestation of desire constitutes a point of departure. The Satanism of *The Marriage* recedes in *America*, eclipsed by the syncretically conceived figure of Orc. This reversion to a form of primitive myth within the frame of apocalyptic narrative might have seemed outlandish to the skeptically-minded Johnson circle. Their libertarian outlook notwithstanding, this group might have been perplexed as well by the strong emphasis placed on Orc's freeing of sexuality from religious and legal constraint. Thus *America* pulls away from the mythic controversialism of *The Marriage*, and distance opens between Blake and his earlier ideological center.

Apocalyptic symbolism, as we have seen, was politically over-determined in the 1790s, with radicals and loyalists both reading revolution in the same typological terms, mirroring each other's appropriations of the mythic struggle of Christ against Antichrist. Much of the action and structure of *America* seems deliberately to reproduce this reflexive pattern. While 'Albion's Prince,' the mythic surrogate for George III, is represented as a 'dragon form clashing his scales at midnight' (3:15; Erdman, p. 52), the very same figure castigates Orc, naming him 'Antichrist' and 'Blasphemous Demon' (7:5; Erdman, p. 53). With the satanizing of Orc, however, Blake discards this template and introduces the pattern familiar from *The Marriage*: the antagonism of Britain and revolutionary America parallels the inversion of heaven and hell found

in the earlier work. For Albion's Prince is interchangeably titled 'Albion's Angel,' the emissary of celestial oppression, while Blake's narrator envisions Orc in human yet infernal guise. He rises up between America and Britain to embody the colonial opposition to empire:

> a Human fire fierce glowing, as the wedge
> Of iron heated in the furnace; his terrible limbs were fire
> With myriads of cloudy terrors banners dark & towers
> Surrounded; heat but not light went thro' the murky atmosphere.
>
> (4:8–11; Erdman, p. 53)

These lines look back to the rise of the son of fire in 'A Song of Liberty': the panoply of heavenly war and the visible darkness of hell inevitably associate Orc with the Miltonic context of the final plates of *The Marriage*. The satanizing of Orc intensifies after his first speech, the apocalyptic oration that shakes the druid temple with its evocation of the reviving 'bones of death' (6:3, Erdman, p. 53). Thus Orc announces the end of oppression by conflating the general resurrection with that of Christ. Yet in this speech Albion's Angel hears only the voice of the 'rebel form that rent the ancient / Heavens,' while prophesying that the 'Eternal Viper self-renew'd' (9:14–15; Erdman, p. 54) will be overthrown again: 'now the times are return'd upon thee … now thy unutterable torment renews' (9:19–20; Erdman, p. 54). To angelic eyes, Orc is both Satan and Antichrist, and his inevitable defeat awaits only the Second Coming.

Thus far the mythic typing in the narrative would appear to be an iconoclastic exercise recognizable to the Johnson circle, carried out to disable the loyalist rhetoric of demonizing and to replace it with an idealized image of revolution. Indeed, Blake's representation of Orc seems to intensify the Satanic political rhetoric we have seen employed by writers in the libertarian group. As a personification of resistance to arbitrary authority displaced into the setting of the American war, Orc has more affinity with William Godwin's Satan than do any of the infernal figures in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. The fires of Orc evoke as well the imagery that ornaments Richard Price's 'Discourse on the Love of Our Country,' portraying the transmission of the revolutionary 'light' from America to France, where it is 'kindled to a blaze that lays despotism in ashes and warms and illuminates Europe.'[23]

But Blake presses further with his reconstruction of revolutionary, apocalyptic figuration. The 'Preludium,' the cryptic preamble to the work, seems calculated to subvert the division of Satanic and angelic identities established in the narrative proper. A backdrop of primary myth to the historical narrative of *America*, the Preludium frames that action in nearly abstract, atemporal terms. This foreshortened account of the hairy youth who breaks

his bonds and copulates violently with the shadowy daughter of Urthona does not much accommodate the liberal reader, or even anticipate the transformed Christian diabology prominent in the narrative of *America*. The names of these characters further distance and mystify the action and its agents (though Blake surely meant the learned among his immediate audience to recognize the derivation of Orc from 'Orcus,' the Latin word for hell), unsettling at the outset the reader's reception of the principal mythic figure. In an elliptical narrative that seems to take place outside of history, Orc embodies, in syncretic fashion, the 'original' of human energy, undisplaced into any of the forms presented by the world's mythologies.[24] Blake's representation of Orc defamiliarizes the spirit of revolution, then, separating this figure from the field of politicized imagery. Clearly, Orc is not to be taken as a trope for revolutionary cannibalism; instead, the action of the Preludium links him with sexual violence. To what end?[25]

Orc's ambiguous portrayal clarifies when he proclaims his Satanic identity – 'I am Orc, wreath'd round the accursed tree' – and then transforms the iconic role of the tempter. He announces the apocalyptic sunrise that accompanies his crushing of the 'stony law' of the 'ten commands,'

> to renew the fiery joy, and burst the stony roof.
> That pale religious letchery, seeking Virginity,
> May find it in a harlot, and in coarse-clad honesty
> The undefil'd tho' ravish'd in her cradle night and morn:
> For every thing that lives is holy, life delights in life;
> Because the soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd.
> Fires inwrap the earthly globe, yet man is not consumd;
>
> (8:1,5,9–15; Erdman, p. 54)

As Jon Mee remarks, the female sexual awakenings typically envisioned by Blake do not reflect the form of liberation Mary Wollstonecraft urges in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* – the access to the power of reason.[26] Social aims like hers are swept away in a speech which focuses the Millenarian argument of *America*. Encircling the tree, which in the major prophecies Blake would identify with fallen, repressive ideas of good and evil, Orc defines himself as the infernal agent of the transgressive liberation of sexual energy that will trigger Apocalypse. This, perhaps the most distinctive form of Satanism in all of Blake's work, adapts the temptation of Eve in *Paradise Lost*, recreated as an exhortation to the improvement of sensual enjoyment. As such, this form of eroticized Satanism is almost anomalous in Romantic literature (the only analogues are the mesmerizing protagonists of Byron's verse tales). In this context, its function is to carry what Blake surely recognized was deeply controversial matter, the sexual substratum in all religion unearthed by Richard Payne Knight and brought

to wider attention in the popularized versions produced by Erasmus Darwin. The latter writer used the thesis of the universal sexual cult to decenter Genesis; Blake aims at a larger rhetorical effect by envisioning erotic energy as the source of change and by establishing Orc as its herald and efficient cause.[27] The celebration of the sexual violence done to 'coarse-clad honesty' in her cradle is consistent with the shock value of the Preludium.

In the final action of *America*, the sexualized Apocalypse begins as the advancing fires of Orc in England open the 'doors of marriage.' Portending the arrival of Millennium, women regenerate: released from sexual restraint, 'they feel the nerves of youth renew, and desires of ancient times' (15:11,25; Erdman, p. 57). At this moment, however, the transition into a new heaven and new earth halts, and Blake represents this rupture in apocalyptic narrative by once again distancing his mythic material from conventional patterns. He introduces the antagonism of Urizen and Orc, distilled from the opposition of the starry king and the son of fire. Thus, with the world on the edge of a fiery consummation, Urizen descends from his 'holy shrine' 'Above all heavens' to extinguish the flames of Orc (16:4, 3; Erdman, p. 57). Yet Urizen can only temporarily contain Orc, who again propels events back into Apocalypse, if not the Millennium of absolute freedom he envisions.[28] The denouement of *America* views the events of the 1790s through the mythic frame of a demonically driven liberation of the European world. The Urizenic anti-Millennium following Yorktown lasts only until 1793, 'when France received the Demon's / Light,' and the fire of revolution threatens the 'heav'nly thrones' of Spain and Italy as well:

> They slow advance to shut the five gates of their law-built heaven
> Filled with blasting fancies and with mildews of despair
> With fierce disease and lust, unable to stem the fires of Orc;
> But the five gates were consum'd, & their bolts and hinges melted
> And the fierce flames burnt round the heavens, & round the abodes of men.
>
> (16:19–23; Erdman, p. 58)

In *America*, the representation of Orc shuttles back and forth between inverted Christian symbolism and a syncretic conception of myth, the latter existing in tension with the free, irreverent handling of Christian diabology characteristic of the writing of the Johnson circle. How might this group – or any other potential audience – have received this treatment of myth and history? The Socinian biases of many figures in the Johnson circle might have led them to admire a mythic structure that is anything but Christocentric: *America* actually aligns Christ with revolution less prominently than does *The Marriage*. Yet the invention of Orc would have impressed this group as an odd piece of primitive mythmaking, and the

portent of the 'Human fire' might have seemed too redolent of the 'man-ism' Paine found so repugnant in orthodox Christianity.[29] But if this aspect of the work indicates the distance Blake had moved away from the Johnson circle, toward what new ideological center was he gravitating? It has been argued in the last ten years that Blake's world view was more compatible with the Millenarian groups of the 1790s, that his affinity with the Johnson circle has been overstated. Blake's approach to prophecy, Jon Mee claims, has more in common with the religious 'enthusiasm' of figures like Richard Brothers, who supplemented scriptural revelation to build his vision of Apocalypse and Millennium.[30] We should not assume, though, that the Millenarian fervor of *America* would have alienated all members of the Johnson circle. As W.H. Oliver has shown, Priestley was deeply interested in Millenarian prophecy, especially when it took the form of a cataclysm destroying the forces of worldly oppression. Moreover, while *America* reflects the hunger for immediate and violent change expressed by radical Millenarians, its mythic structure does not show Blake closing ranks with these prophets – even if its narrative does rehearse their central apocalyptic plot. Their 'pre-Millennial' interpretations of Apocalypse (which stress the violence that ushers in the Millennium) do not ultimately turn on human agency. And Orc is above all an apotheosis of human energy, a more fully human embodiment than any of the reconceived Satanic personae of *The Marriage*. Thus, while the relatively attenuated Satanism of *America* may exhibit less of the impulse to deconstruct scriptural myth that animates *The Marriage*, the new work little resembles the more pious treatments of apocalyptic myth produced by the Millenarian prophets of the era. Even the remarkably compatible Jacobin Millenarian, Richard 'Citizen' Lee, nevertheless saw the impending Apocalypse within a traditional mythic frame of reference. His poem 'Babylon's Fall' (1795) prophesies the Great Whore's overthrow by the 'Wrath of GOD,' executed by angelic 'Principalities and Powers.'[31] The aggressive syncretism through which Blake constructs an agent of Apocalypse produces different effects, and it is difficult to see how his presentation of Orc could be ideologically acceptable even to Lee. The figure of Orc subtends all traditional embodiments of rebellious human energy; he is the stupendous original partly disclosed by Satan and Christ. The readers implied by such a treatment of myth, in *America* and the subsequent political prophecies, cannot be not much wider than the Johnson circle. But this is to say that beyond this group we cannot identify an audience for Blake's increasingly defamiliarized handling of sacred myth.

Through 1795, Blake's work continued to interpret – to an unknown audience – revolution as the liberation of Orc. On the title page of *Europe: A Prophecy* (1794), the image of the coiled serpent anticipates Orc's primary role in *Europe* – that of the tempter who incites the insurrectionary violence with which the prophecy concludes.[32] Here Orc enters the action like the son of fire, appearing at dawn in the east: 'And in the vineyards of red France

appear'd the light of his fury. / The sun glow'd fiery red!' (15:2–3; Erdman, p. 66). And the arrival of Orc draws Los – who calls all his sons to the 'strife of blood' – into the metahistorical conflict that figures revolutionary bloodletting (15:11; Erdman, p. 66).[33] At this moment, Los becomes a type of the apocalyptic angel standing in the sun (Revelation 19:17–18), the voice proclaiming destruction to the kings of the earth and the Beast just prior to the binding of the Great Dragon for 1000 years.[34] Thus Los is transformed by the influence of Orc into a prophet of Millennium, thereby anticipating his role as the Eternal Prophet in Blake's later work. In 'Asia,' the final section of *The Song of Los* (1795), annihilation overtakes the kings of the east when the fires of Orc sweep toward them from revolutionary Europe. Although Urizen again joins the monarchs in opposing Orc, he cannot extinguish his apocalyptic fires, which melt the brass books containing his laws. The final image of Orc – 'like a pillar of fire above the Alps, / Like a serpent of fiery flame!' – once again mingles the divine and the demonic in the mythic complex, and the prophecy concludes with a general resurrection and a joyous Apocalypse (7:27–8, 35–40; Erdman, pp. 69–70).

It is often suggested that because the fires of Orc emit 'heat but not light,' he is compromised as a liberator, and the violence he fosters embodies the decline of the French revolution into the Jacobin dictatorship. Yet this received opinion misconceives his role in most of the action of the Lambeth prophecies.[35] In *America*, Orc's putative violence is declamatory; Blake does not use Satanic myth here as Shelley later would – as a paradigm of insurrection. Orc is rather a herald of revolution and Apocalypse. In the *The Song of Los*, the fires of Orc are said to be 'thought-creating'; that is, Orc embodies the energy and desire anterior to a libertarian mental awakening. But he embodies the awakening itself as well. Orc's temple-shaking speech in *America* resembles, as David Erdman has noted, an adaptation of the Declaration of Independence; his reply to the harangue of Albion's angel is a manifesto that elaborates the ethics of energy first announced in *The Marriage*.[36] Far from exhibiting a progressive darkening of Blake's vision of Apocalypse by revolution, then, *America*, *Europe*, and *The Song of Los* sustain and even intensify Blake's Millenarian myth, and the role of the demonic liberator, Orc, remains consistent through these three works. It is in the subsequent works, the Genesis and Exodus of the 'Bible of Hell,' that Blake suddenly reverses the function of Satanic myth, turning it into an instrument for analyzing the forms of power inhabiting church and state.

## III. *The Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Ahania*

In *The Book of Urizen* (1794), Blake turns from the fusion of historical matter and religious myth to a revision of the biblical story of origins and its Miltonic redaction. In doing so, he leaves off heralding the apocalyptic destruction of tyranny to expose its origins in the traditional account of

primordial events. With this shift, Blake reverts to some of the transgressive methods of *The Marriage*. In its opening chapters, *The Book of Urizen* freely reconfigures Christian diabology in a manner that recalls the blasphemous inversions of the earlier work. Miltonic Satanism remains the instrument of iconoclasm in the Genesis of the 'Bible of Hell,' yet Blake now abandons its primary form, the celebration of world-transforming energy in the form of the fallen archangel. That inversion is itself inverted in *The Book of Urizen*, where Blake turns from idealizing the Devil to demonizing the Godhead. This he achieves by transforming two episodes from *Paradise Lost:* the war in heaven of Book VI and the Creation in Book VII. By reshaping these narratives, Blake blends Milton's God and Satan to construct the composite figure of Urizen, thereby collapsing into a single agent the roles of rebel, usurper, creator, and oppressor. Separating himself from a society of 'Eternals,' Blake's demiurge opens a void in Eternity and effects a material creation there; when he attempts to impose its order on the Eternals, he is cast out along with his world. In this Gnostic transformation of the Miltonic narrative of beginnings, Urizen emerges as the stupendous original of all forms of human tyranny, his image obscurely present in state power and religion.[37]

In the demonizing of Urizen, a permanent change in Blake's myth of Satan sets in: after 1794, the idealization of the fallen archangel never returns in Blake's verbal or visual art. In the major prophecies, Blake instead develops the figure of Satan into ever more comprehensive personifications of tyranny. The mutation of Satanic myth commencing with *The Book of Urizen* marks another fundamental shift, moreover, in which Blake moves into a critical relationship with his former ideological center. It is ironic, therefore, that this transition begins on a point of congruity with Paine. The central iconoclastic gesture of *The Book of Urizen*, the demonizing of the Godhead displays affinity with what is clearly the harshest attack on the God of the Old Testament in *The Age of Reason*. Here Paine suggests that the cruelty inspired by this God forces us to reconsider the provenance of scripture:

> Whenever we read the obscene stories, the voluptuous debaucheries, the cruel and torturous executions, the unrelenting vindictiveness, with which more than half the Bible is filled, it would be more consistent that we called it the word of a demon than the word of God. It is a history of wickedness that has served to corrupt and brutalize mankind.[38]

As Paine views it, the demonic God functions as a superhuman emanation of the evil passions of humankind, as fabulous as the conventional myth of Satan and as socially destructive: the latter enslaves humankind through fear, while the figure of God has authorized cruelty through the ages.

Yet Paine leaves this polemic aside when he assesses the story of Creation in Genesis. This he is content to dismiss as simply 'harmless,' a 'traditionary' narrative so primitive as to be meaningless even to the ancient culture that preserved it. The author of *The Age of Reason* is concerned with demystifying the divinely sanctioned oppression that is woven into sacred history after the Fall, while Blake traces this to its source in a mythic prehistory.[39] In his effort to penetrate and disrupt the mythic foundations of state religion in Genesis, Blake literalizes Paine's suggestion that the Old Testament is the word of a demon, then infuses this mythic figure with new, disruptive content. For Paine the mythic datum of the demonic God is intelligible in terms of the conventional infidel psychologism: the Godhead projects cruelty. Blake places more pressure on the myth: the 'Urizenic' complex expounded by critics since Frye contains a cluster of epistemological and social assumptions that converges disturbingly with the liberal, secular ideology of the Johnson circle. The new form of Satanism, then, functions as one of the vehicles of Blake's emerging critique of his intellectual milieu in the early 1790s.

The intertextual relationship of *Paradise Lost* and *The Book of Urizen* has been noticed, but its centerpiece, the satanizing of Urizen, merits renewed attention.[40] Its prominence in the work is announced in a Preludium that echoes the rhetoric and cadences of Milton's exordium while conflating the figures of God and Satan:

> Of the primeval Priests assum'd power,
> When Eternals spurn'd back his religion;
> And gave him a place in the north,
> Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary.
>
> (2:1–4; p. 70)

Presenting Urizen as the demonic founder of state religion, Blake's statement of the epic theme is plainly iconoclastic, and its rhetorical effects come in successive jolts. The opening line is immediately provocative, implying that Urizen is the 'primeval Priest' in the sense that he is the transcendent projection grounding the power of the Priesthood. The end of the line delivers another shock when the ascendancy of Urizen is aligned with the forms of arbitrary, 'assumed' power that Paine, Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and others attacked.[41] The third line is somewhat less volatile, but only because it satanizes the primeval Priest obliquely, through an allusion to *Paradise Lost* evoking Raphael's account of the war in heaven. Here the Preludium associates Satan's stronghold in the north of heaven with the portion of Eternity given to Urizen, where he has fashioned a world prior to the action of the poem. Thus Urizen's assumption of power is modeled on Satan's resentful removal from the presence of God after the exaltation of the Son.

The narratives of *Paradise Lost* and *The Book of Urizen* begin from the same point, then, but Blake reverses the events which follow the withdrawal of the Satanic figure, placing the Creation before the war in heaven. In Milton's epic, God undertakes a manifestly perfect Creation after the expulsion of Satan but before the Fall of man; Blake's story displaces the Fall backward and chronicles it through successive events – Urizen's remove to the north, the fashioning of a world in the void there, and his subsequent attempt to usurp power. In these episodes, the salient features and roles of the Miltonic Godhead and Satan are fused in the actions of Urizen, starting with Blake's recasting of *Paradise Lost* VII. There, a God works his will upon Chaos, drawing an ordered world out of it. Urizen's triumphant account of his struggle with the elements – 'self balanc'd stretch'd o'er the void' – shadows the cosmogony achieved by Milton's winged 'spirit of God outspread' over the abyss (3:44; Erdman, p. 71; *Paradise Lost* VII, l. 235, p. 370).

Embedded in the next section of Blake's narrative, the Miltonic war in heaven structures Urizen's attempt to impose his new order on the Eternals and his violent expulsion from Eternity. Satan's secret preparations for war are evoked in Urizen's labors at the close of Chapter One:

> His cold horrors silent, dark Urizen
> Prepar'd: his ten thousands of thunders
> Rang'd in gloom'd array stretch out across
> The dread world, & the rolling of wheels
> As of swelling seas, sound in his clouds
>
> (3:27–31; Erdman, p. 71)

But the imagery of Chapters Two and Three associates Urizen's military preparations with those of the Miltonic heavenly host. The mustering of 'myriads of Eternity,' the sounding trumpet, the clouds and darkness which envelop Urizen's mountains – nearly every detail replicates the image of the Mount of God preparing for the war waged to expel the rebel angels (*Paradise Lost* VI, ll. 56–62, pp. 314–15).

Overriding the distinctions between divine and demonic that the voice of the Devil preserved in his account of the Son's usurpation, then, this recasting of *Paradise Lost* mediates and transforms the scriptural 'word of a demon' to provide the prehistory of his rise. Urizen's military preparations and law-giving echo the Father's exaltation of the Son and his vow to expel all who refuse to bend their knees to him. Thus the order Urizen seeks to impose under the tyrannic 'one God, one Law' intensifies and parodies the Miltonic Father's will that heaven become a spiritual body 'united as one individual soul / For ever happy.'[42] These and several other mythic double images in *The Book of Urizen* point to Blake's effort to clarify the image of God put forth in the discourse of religion and state power. By filtering

Genesis through the Miltonic story of origins, Blake not only reformulated a narrative with authority nearly equal to that enjoyed by scripture; he defamiliarized the story that had been used to defend social order in the 1790s. Burke's evocation of the revolutionary French cast out into chaos and darkness, Cruikshank's representation of God surveying the Satanic English Jacobins in their struggle with the loyalists – all such adaptations of the Miltonic war in heaven are broken up in the opening of *The Book of Urizen*, where the Creation of the world and the celestial insurrection are run together. In this new form of Satanism, all of the features Blake idealized in *The Marriage* and *America: A Prophecy* are deformed: Satanic autonomy and rebellion are now the mythic focus for the will to tyrannize that is projected onto the selfish and withdrawn figure of the primeval Priest visible in the Christian mythology.

Blake's immediate aim in *The Book of Urizen* is congruent with Paine's: to undermine the authority of the Bible and thereby diminish its power to 'terrify and enslave mankind.' But the revelation of Urizen in the infernal Bible functions as well to express Blake's growing alienation from the Johnson circle.[43] As the embodiment of an abstract reasoning power, Robert Essick notes, Urizen is inevitably associated with the foundational values upheld by Paine, Godwin, and Wollstonecraft, the standards of nature and reason that constitute an order independent of the mind.[44] In the myth of Urizen, Blake critiques the materialist ideology that harmonized natural, rational, and political orders, an analysis extending to Urizen's 'creative' labor, the process that eventually produces the human body. Equipped with his scales, massy weights, and brazen quadrant, Blake's demiurge becomes the progenitor of all the mechanist paradigms ascendant in the late eighteenth century – whether psychological or social – that applied mathematical models to human behavior. The figure of Urizen may even parody the biblical hermeneutics of the Johnson circle. That is, the demonic form not only mirrors the image of God produced by state religion; it may suggest as well that the mind that views the Bible through a skeptical lens – reading scripture in its 'natural sense' – can envision nothing different.[45]

Thus the Satanic demiurge constitutes the vehicle for a broad critique of enlightenment reason and the materialist ideologies it generated, as applicable to the radical political set in England as it was to state power there. In *The Book of Ahania*, this mythic analysis changes its thematic focus when it is turned on the French Jacobin dictatorship, widely demonized in the writing of the era. In the 1805 version of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth represented the Reign of Terror that commenced in the fall of 1793 through Satanic typology: 'Tyrants, strong before / In devilish pleas, were ten times stronger now.' Offering external and internal threats to the Revolution – 'beset with foes on every side' – as an apology for slaughter, the Jacobins stand in place of the Satan who justifies the destruction of the unfallen world of Adam and Eve with 'necessity,/The tyrant's plea' (*Paradise Lost* IV, ll. 393–4, p. 218).[46]

Such was Wordsworth's retrospective view from early in the next decade; *The Book of Ahania* (1795) anticipates his mythic treatment, while satanizing the revolutionary French from a different direction. Fuzon, cast as Moses in the final chapter of *The Book of Urizen*, leads an exodus from the slavery of Urizen's laws and religion. If, as Christopher Hobson points out, during the French revolution, Mount Sinai was typologically identified with Jacobinism ('the Mountain'), then the role of Fuzon shifts profoundly in the opening chapters of *The Book of Ahania*. The figure who liberated the children of Urizen from a form of tyranny associated with the *ancien régime* now becomes a Luciferean figure, whose visage and hair 'gave light to the mornings of heaven' (3:42; Erdman, p. 86). Fuzon leads an insurrection against Urizen, riding an iron-winged chariot rising upon 'spiked flames'(2:2; Erdman p. 84) that recalls the 'The apostate in his sun-bright chariot' entering the scene of Milton's war in heaven (*Paradise Lost* VI, l. 100; p. 316). But Fuzon's rebellion only parodies Orc's war with Urizen in *America*: the goal of bursting the stony roof of restraint is remote from this new figure, whose only cause is contesting the metaphysical authority of the demonic Creator. After landing the blow that temporarily defeats Urizen, Fuzon declares 'I am God … eldest of things!' (3:38; Erdman, p. 86), but this merely caricatures the Satanic assertion of autogeny. While Orc is a genuinely revolutionary figure, whose violence is transformative, Fuzon, the 'Son of Urizens silent burnings' (2:9; Erdman, p. 84), is only a potential tyrant interchangeable with his father. This myth of succession in reverse, in which Fuzon is overthrown by Urizen and crucified, embodies the transformation of the Jacobin dictatorship into a tyrannizing elite – graphically emphasized by the pile of corpses and the severed head in the final plate of *The Book of Ahania*. Thus, whereas Wordsworth's satanizing of the Jacobins has a moral edge – he deplores their deluded plea for the necessity of the Terror – Blake introduces a parodic form of Satanism into a broad analysis of the downward trajectory of revolutionary France. It is not the Orc–Urizen antagonism, then, but Fuzon's displacement of Orc (who is chained throughout the action of *Urizen* and *Ahania*) that darkens Blake's myth of revolution.[47]

## IV. *The Four Zoas, Milton,* and *Jerusalem*

As the 1790s ended, Blake's Satanic mythmaking preserved the ideological focus achieved in *The Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Ahania*, while its representational scope enlarged. In the major prophecies, Blake incorporates the figure of Satan into the so-called 'monomyth,' the story of the fall and regeneration of Albion, the universal man. Blake's conception of Satan's role in this narrative is encapsulated in his remarks on the 'stupendous originals,' the mythic deities invoked in 'A Descriptive Catalogue': 'These Gods are visions of the eternal attributes, or divine names, which, when erected into

gods, become destructive to humanity. They ought to be the servants, and not the masters of man, or of society' (Erdman, p. 536). Blake portrays both the destructive elevation and final subordination of the 'eternal attributes' on the larger canvas of the major prophecies, where Urizen is transformed into the Satanic God of this World. *Milton* and *Jerusalem* present (ambiguously) the apocalyptic annihilation of this God, by which he is once again made subservient to humanity; *The Four Zoas* reveals how he became the master of man and society. This manuscript epic, on which Blake worked for perhaps a decade without engraving the poem in any final form, contains his experimental efforts to fit the Satanic myth developed in *The Book of Urizen* to the paradigm of universal history unfolding in the new poem. In various sections of *The Four Zoas*, a series of mythic fragments appears, figuring Satan as material opacity, the spectacle of warfare and its victims, and the Antichrist of state religion. Collectively these overlapping mythemes construct a multiform symbol of tyranny and negation so large that the narrative structure of *The Four Zoas* barely contains this figure.

Accounting for the emergence of the figure of Satan is complicated by the apparent changes in Blake's religious position as they are reflected in the layered, accretive structure of *The Four Zoas*. In the poem, the larger narrative of the monomyth begins to precipitate out of the Bible of Hell Blake had constructed piecemeal in *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania*, and *The Book of Los*. The reconstructed early stages of composition reveal a narrative of the nightmare of Fall, Creation, Titanic prehistory, and human history terminating in Apocalypse, with the zoas and their emanations as its principal mythic agents. Locked in fratricidal warfare characterized by constantly shifting alliances, these personifications of conflicting human powers are mythic vehicles for analyzing the fallen condition and envisioning its transformation. Blake's later revisions introduce a redemptive agency overarching this epic action, the 'Council of God,' which acts as one in the person of Christ. In Night the Eighth, the chief antagonist of this body emerges as the figure of Satan. Nearly all of the episodes featuring Satan are marginally interpolated passages conjectured to be among the late revisions to the manuscript, when Blake Christianized his original, more secular narrative.

The providential revisions appear to have involved Blake in difficulties, for the supervening agents of the Council of God would seem to have no place in the early form of the larger narrative. Since in the mid- to late 1790s Blake's myth does not include a godhead separate from humanity, the identity and significance of the saving remnant – and its Satanic opposition – are unclear; the sudden appearance of these figures in the interpolated passages seems to require explanation from outside the borders of the poem. Some have suggested that this new superstructure of Christian myth reflects a sudden access of more conventional belief. Blake's letter of 22 November 1802 to Thomas Butts, announcing his remergence 'into the light of Day'

and his determination to 'Embrace Christianity,' has been cited to explain the apparent swerve to orthodoxy in the later work of Blake.[48]

Although it is generally agreed that the Christian interpolations probably were not transcribed before 1802, as David Erdman reminds us, that date may be much later than that of the original conception and composition of these passages. Determining which of Blake's three major prophecies contains the first version of his later myth of Satan is therefore nearly impossible.[49] Whether the fragmented forms of Satanic myth in *The Four Zoas* constitute the preliminary sketch for the final version found in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* or a version condensed from these works, the narratives developed in the manuscript epic and the two engraved prophecies are thematically divergent. In *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, the myth of Satan contracts into the Gnostic psychologism of the tyrannic Selfhood, while Satanic mythmaking acquires broader, complicated social meaning in *The Four Zoas*. The Council of God may imply a transcendent Providence, but the Satan who assumes prominence in this poem is decidedly a God of this World, an immanent figure visible in historical process. Despite its unfinished texture, the form of Satanic myth emerging in *The Four Zoas* is more fully bound up in the historical moment, and its elaborate patterns of reference repay intensive critical attention. For the mythology of Satan in *The Four Zoas* expands to embody both the collapse of political and social radicalism after 1794 and the rise of the war-making British state that repressed its opposition and battled France. Satan personifies a power pervading not only church and state, but the intellectual milieu of radicalism as well, containing the latter by undermining its metaphysical foundations and legitimacy. This mythic analysis of the fall of British radicalism begins with the establishment of Satanic Opacity in the cosmos of *The Four Zoas* and ends with the image of the victims – named Satan 'in the Aggregate' – of the wars of Urizen, while the Synagogue of Satan creates the phoenix of resurgent deism (9:15; Erdman p. 367). All these portions of the body of Satan ultimately form the Antichrist of church and state, a power exceeding the capacity of the redemptive labor of Los and Enitharmon. In the final episode of *The Four Zoas*, it is the retaliatory violence of the oppressed classes that initiates Apocalypse.

The form of Satan developed in *The Four Zoas* has a counterpart in Blake's visual art: the figure of the fallen archangel in the two sets of illustrations to *Paradise Lost* completed a few years after *The Four Zoas* was abandoned in manuscript. Like other illustrators of Milton, Blake places Satan in the foreground, yet these designs communicate a critical conception of this figure – an anti-sublime portrayal.[50] This is conveyed by the first design, 'Satan Calling His Legions,' where he stands on a rock above his followers, his arms raised as he addresses them.While the muscular, wingless nude figure appears to owe much to Fuseli's illustration to Book I, the idealization of Satan is absent here. Fuseli's Satan points decisively with the index fingers

of both hands; Blake's figure merely holds up his hands in a gesture difficult to read – he appears to be asking for silence, yet this does not occur in *Paradise Lost* I. But the most radically innovative feature of this portrayal is the frozen gaze of Satan. Persisting through the series of designs, it fixes Satan's face in what appears to be an expression of dismay or doubt and thus fully overrides the conventions of Romantic Satanism established by the illustrators of Milton during the 1790s. Contrasting with the sublime, heroic representations produced by Barry and Fuseli, Blake's diminished and despairing Satan, whose metaphysical rebellion has seemingly imploded, displays affinity with the figure who functions in the manuscript epic as the barrier to human regeneration.

The fallen Satan embodies such a limit early in *The Four Zoas*, in the disintegrative action of Night the Fourth. Here Satan is the name of an epistemological threshold that arrests the Fall: the Limit of Opacity, the point below which matter is impenetrable to spiritual vision – spiritually deadened and 'Satanic.' At this point in the narrative, Los succeeds in halting the further disintegration of Albion by building the body of the fallen Urizen and thus confining the eternal mind. Once this work is completed, the hand of Jesus enters: 'first he found the Limit of Opacity & namd it Satan/In Albions bosom for in every human bosom these limits stand' (56:19–21; Erdman, p. 338). In this enigmatic moment, the Fall reaches bottom when the figure who embodies the fullness of human consciousness discovers an absolute limit, beyond which matter can attain no further ascendancy over mind. As a consequence of the establishment of the dual boundaries of Opacity and Contraction, a third limit is established: 'Limit/ Was put to Eternal Death,' thereby preventing fallen exist-ence, the Sleep of Albion, from lapsing into an absolute (56:24; Erdman p. 338).[51] It is unusual that the figure of Satan functions at this pivotal moment not as a mythic agent in the Fall, nor even as an allegorical being, but as a sort of ideogram. Yet this eccentric method underscores the distance between Blake's earlier Satanism and this form, in which he repudiates, as if by a deliberate inversion of the mythic mode, the infernal monism of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and its affirmation that matter is charged with divine energy. In this radical reversal in value from the prophecies of the earlier 1790s, the myth now functions to demonize materialism.

With the Satanic Limit Blake critiques Newtonian optical theory, focusing on the light-reflecting effect of the voids between particles in solid objects. Thus Newton theorized the unknowable and alien nature of matter, Blake concluded; it follows that a mind fallen below the Limit of Opacity beholds only a world of impenetrable physical objects which consciousness has no power to affect or transform. Since the fallen mind apprehends the social and political order as similarly unyielding, the opacity of material vision constitutes the epistemological ground of all forms of tyranny. Materialist ideologies reduce human subjects to physical

bodies of uniform nature, as Blake was to observe many years later regarding the influence of the French system of weights and measures: 'since the French Revolution Englishmen are all Intermeasurable One by Another.'[52] Thus the figure of Satanic Opacity intensifies the critique of materialism – whether in the service of reactionary or revolutionary ideology – begun in *The Book of Urizen*. As subsequent episodes in *The Four Zoas* reveal, human subjects who have fallen below the Limit are made slaves or victims of tyranny, and the central expression of their existence in the later Nights of *The Four Zoas* is warfare, where their bodies are aggregated in the larger form of Satan.

Opacity, submission to natural, political, and religious forms of oppression, and warfare: these themes interlock in *The Four Zoas*, fused in the figure of Satan. In the widening social vision of the last three Nights, Satanic Opacity gauges the damage done by the intensifying warfare between the zoas as the power of Urizen and Vala increases and the revolutionary force of Orc declines. Both versions of Night the Seventh introduce an inverted Apocalypse, in which 'the Dead,' beheld by the Daughters of Beulah, descend from their tombs:

> Then myriads of the Dead burst thro the bottoms of their tombs
> Descending on the shadowy females clouds in Spectrous terror
> Beyond the Limit of Translucence on the Lake of Udan Adan
> These they namd Satans & in the Aggregate they namd them Satan
>
> (95:11–15; Erdman, p. 367)

The 'Dead' (or the 'spectres of the dead' as they are named in Night the Seventh a) are the combatants and, in an oblique sense, the victims of the war that Urizen, allied with Vala and in control of Orc, wages against Los and Enitharmon. Although the suprahistorical conflict of the zoas does reflect the Napoleonic wars (as David Erdman's vivid commentary first revealed), it seems likely that the spectrous 'dead' are not the victims of actual slaughter but are ideological casualties. Metaphorically slain and entombed in a form of false consciousness, the dead fall to the Satanic Limit of Opacity. Their trajectory describes the human response to the ascendancy of Urizen and Vala and the suppression of Orc's rebellious energy.[53]

The subjugation of Orc and his power to resist is part of the web of events that draws the spectrous dead from their tombs down to the Satanic Limit. Another cause of their descent is the growing power of the figure Blake named the 'Shadowy Female' in Nights the Seventh and Eighth. A precursor of Vala who is generated in Night the Seventh b in a reprise of the Edenic temptation, the Female pulls the dead from their tombs down to the Satanic Limit. In the context of Night the Seventh b, it seems clear that the Shadowy Female is a

goddess of imperial war, inspiring and presiding over the struggle between England and France. As the celebratory war song of the 'Elemental Gods' (which is partly an apostrophe to the Female) proclaims: 'The dragons of the North put on their armour/Upon the Eastern sea direct they take their course' (91:27–8; Erdman, p. 364).[54] In response to her presence, a host of the dead, evoked as Miltonic 'myriads,' fall to the Satanic Limit, 'drawn by the lovely shadow' (85:21; Erdman, p. 360). At this point, then, the motif of the expulsion of the rebel angels from heaven figures the subjection of the individual to the state. Imprisonment in the hell of Opacity represents the transformation of men into slaves of warring empires.

Thus the mythicized social processes in Night the Seventh construct a picture of the imaginative collapse of the human into the spectral dead, as the revolutionary struggle of the 1790s gave way to the guarding of empires in the next decade.[55] However, in the 'spectrous embrace,' the pivotal episode which concludes Night the Seventh, the myriads of Satanic spectres become the focus of the redemptive labor of Los, Enitharmon, and the Spectre of Urthona.[56] Their purpose, as Los elliptically defines it, is 'to fabricate embodied semblances in which the dead/May live before us in our palaces & in our gardens of labour' (98:9–10; Erdman, p. 370). This pledge seems to emphasize esthetic values, but the motive of Los is to 'comfort Orc in his dire sufferings' (98:13; Erdman, p. 370), and so their work must be the ideological liberation of the dead from the power of Urizen and Vala and their restoration to social agency as the insurrectionary Last Judgment of Night the Ninth approaches.

The myriads of spectres cannot all be redeemed, however, and the war of Urizen continues in the eighth Night, where new forms of Satan arise to direct the opposition to Los and the Council of God. The first of these figures emerges from the 'Spectre of Urizen' and appears in various interpolated passages charged with the same Miltonic martial imagery seen in *The Book of Urizen*.[57] Here Urizen steps into the role of the Satan who commands the artillery barrage that surprises the loyal angelic host: 'His hurtling hand gave the dire signal thunderous Clarions blow/And all the hollow deep rebellowd with the wonderous war' (101:28–9; Erdman, p. 373). In a curious reversal, however, Urizen is displaced in the combat by the figure of Satan:

> Terrified & Astonishd Urizen beheld the battle take a form
> Which he intended not a Shadowy hermaphrodite black & opake
> The Soldiers namd it Satan but he was yet unformd & vast
> Hermaphroditic it at length became hiding the Male
> Within as in a Tabernacle Abominable Deadly
>
> (101:33–7; Erdman, p. 374)

Urizen's design has been to 'draw all human forms / Into submission to his will' (81:5–6; Erdman, p. 356); convinced that 'the time of Prophecy is now

revolvd' to establish his supreme authority, he has launched a siege of Golgonooza, 'to undermine the World of Los' (95:18; Erdman, p. 360; 100:34; Erdman, p. 374). But the unintended result is the sudden revelation, in the form of the hermaphroditic Satan, of the social and political machinery driving the war effort.

Blake's hermaphroditic compounds have been variously glossed, but this figure is fully illuminated by its counterpart in *Milton*, 'the Dragon red & hidden Harlot' which is 'Religion hid in War' (37:43; Erdman, p. 138). An epiphany of the Antichrist of the war-making alliance of church and state is implicit at this moment in *The Four Zoas*, then, and its meaning is amplified by Blake's interpretation in 1798 of the war with France, found in his annotations to Watson's reply to *The Age of Reason*. Here he mixes political and religious categories, characterizing the struggle as 'the English Crusade against France' (Erdman, p. 613). Accordingly the body of the martial Satan in *The Four Zoas* is itself the 'tabernacle' of state religion, hiding 'the Male within,' redirecting sexual energy toward the sanctified end of the crusade. The same mythic complex is reflected in the prophetic assessment Blake inscribed on the first page of Watson: 'The Beast & the Whore rule without controls' (Erdman, p. 611).

This mythic typing of the power of state religion gestures not only toward Watson's attempt to crush Paine but the imprisonment of Joseph Johnson in 1798 for selling Gilbert Wakefield's reply to Watson's *Address to the People of Great Britain*. These actions as well as the profound restriction of the freedom of the press under the Treasonable Practices Act of 1795 help explain Blake's turn in *The Four Zoas* toward the larger form of Satan as the mythic ground of the current repression.[58] The expansion of tyranny throughout the decade demanded a more comprehensive mythic embodiment than Urizen, and Blake's illustrations to the Bible after 1803 display compatible versions of this Antichrist. The six designs for the Book of Revelation emphasize the figures of the Dragon, Beast, and Whore, each equipped with the symbols of worldly power: crowns, swords, and trefoil sceptre. In 'The Whore of Babylon' (ca. 1809), the affinities with the martial hermaphrodite of *The Four Zoas* are strongest: with the Whore astride him, the Beast crouches to devour soldiers.[59]

On the battlefield scene of Night the Eighth, the hermaphroditic form reveals the nature of the 'English Crusade against France' to all, even the soldiers, for it is they who name the battle Satan. Their perception of disguised truth seems comparable to the unmasking Blake heralds in his annotations to Watson: 'That the Bible is all a State Trick,' a deception 'thro which tho' the People at all times could see they never had. the power to throw off [*sic*]'(Erdman, p. 616). Satanizing the war in this episode aims at throwing off this deception, for it subverts the propagandistic equations of Napoleon and the French state with Antichrist. Blake continues to disable this political trope in the second appearance of the martial Satan in Night the Eighth, where the war itself is revealed as Antichrist:

> Seen in the aggregate a Vast Hermaphroditic form
> Heavd like an Earthquake labring with convulsive groans
> Intolerable at length an awful wonder burst
> From the Hermaphroditic bosom Satan he was namd
> Son of Perdition terrible his form dishumanizd monstrous
>
> (104:20–4; Erdman, p. 377)

The 'Son of Perdition' is the epithet Paul applies to Antichrist in II Thessalonians 2:3–4, the figure 'whose coming is after the working of Satan' (2:9) and who 'opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God … so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God' (2:3–4). Blake's Satan–Antichrist complex is the collective form of the 'multitudes of tyrant Men' in church and state, who command the spectrous dead while sharing their dishumanized, spectrous existence (104:29; Erdman, p. 378). Like them, Satan lacks the counterparts Los and Enitharmon create.

In Night the Eighth, this compound Satanic figure supplants Urizen as the chief opponent of the redemptive Council of God and Christ. Immediately after the epiphany of the Satanic hermaphrodite, Blake introduces the figure of Jesus and the two confront each other: 'The Lamb of God stood before Satan' (109:1; Erdman, p. 378). In the loose manuscript page from which Blake copied out this passage, 'Satan' is pencilled over 'Urizen,' which is consistent with the mythic substitutions that have been accumulating since Night the Seventh, blending the demonic with the Urizenic.[60] In Night the Eighth, the infernal temple of Urizen houses the nightmarish 'Assembly,' the 'Cold dark opake' body called the 'Synagogue of Satan'; its 'Twelve rocky unshapd forms terrific … of torture & woe' replace the twelve sons of Urizen (108: 8–9; Erdman, p. 378). Derived from Revelation 2:9 and 3:9, where the phrase refers to the blaspheming impostors who say 'they are Jews, and are not,' the image of the synagogue can be glossed as Blake's name for orthodox Christianity, which pretends to worship God while serving the God of this World, Satan.[61] The Synagogue, however, is connected more closely with Blake's strictures on Judaism in the Annotations to Watson, where he borrows the rhetoric of Paine's attack on the divinely authorized massacres chronicled in the Old Testament to distinguish true from false Christianity.[62] Moreover, this is not an abstract assault on the spiritual errors of Judaism. In the narrative context of Night the Eighth, the synagogue assimilates Napoleon to the growing body of Satan, exposing the apocalyptic mirage created by the emperor's exploits after the Egyptian campaign. Urizen's summoning of 'the Synagogue of Satan in dire Sanhedrim' to judge Christ evokes Napoleon's call of the Jewish Notables to Paris in 1806 and the Great Sanhedrin the following year (the first in 1700 years).[63]

In this allusion we find Blake's reading of a chain of events stretching back to 1798. After the conquest of Egypt in that year, Napoleon appealed to the

Jews of Africa and Asia to join his march on Syria and rebuild the Temple at Jerusalem. English Millenarians took this to be yet another sign that both the conversion of the Jews and the Second Coming were at hand.[64] When the French emperor eight years later called the meeting of the Notables and the Sanhedrin, his aim was first to harmonize Jewish law with the Code Napoleon and then to promulgate the revised legal system to assimilate Jews into the empire. Though many regarded these recent actions as a stunt, others again interpreted the events apocalyptically. Concluding that a secret Jewish government had been unveiled with the calling of the Sanhedrin, Napoleon's enemies identified him as the Antichrist who would appear in the last days as the Messiah of the Jews. According to *L'Ambigu*, the British journal of French émigrés, 'It remains for us only to watch this Antichrist fight against the eternal decrees of God; that must be the last act of his diabolic existence.'[65] A heightened response like this seems understandable in the light of the imperial public relations efforts at this time that projected the apotheosis of Napoleon. A coin was issued showing the emperor himself handing the Ten Commandments to Moses; the Jewish notables were also prevailed upon to place the names of Napoleon and Josephine alongside that of Jehovah in the synagogue and to raise the imperial eagle over the Holy Ark.[66] That Blake both satanizes the Synagogue and traces the hand of Satan/Urizen in these events suggests that he regarded them as part of the process of the pre-apocalyptic consolidation of error, in which a Satanic synthesis of empire and the moral law is formed.[67]

In the final events before the Apocalypse, the Satanic Synagogue looms even larger, judging Christ, creating the crucifier of Christ in Rahab, and then burning her. In this climactic appearance, the harlot of Jericho (Joshua 2:6) assumes the identity of Blake's Whore of Babylon. Generated 'from Fruit of Urizens tree' and housed in the bosom of Satan, this female hypostasis of the cruel morality and oppressive mystery of the modern church leads all who crucify Christ on the tree. Dismayed by the song of Enion heralding Apocalypse, Rahab flees the Synagogue and aids Orc. In response, the Synagogue burns Rahab: 'The Synagogue of Satan therefore uniting against Mystery/Satan divided against Satan resolvd in open Sanhedrim/To burn Mystery with fire & form another from her ashes' (111:18–20; Erdman, p. 386). The destruction and rebirth of Rahab encapsulate the violence of the period that Emmet Kennedy calls the 'de-Christianizing' phase of the Revolution, when the cult of Reason was established in early 1793, then overthrown for the Deism of Robespierre little more than a year later: 'The Ashes of Mystery began to animate they calld it Deism/And Natural Religion as of old so now anew began' (111:22–3; Erdman, p. 386).[68]

The thematic scope of this, the last Satanic mytheme of *The Four Zoas*, is broad: Blake uses the figure of the Synagogue to demonize the cultural force that is deism. Thus the final epiphany rounds back to the discovery of the Limit of Opacity, the epistemological basis of the vision of physical reality and

fallen morality implied by deism. Thus Blake's critique of the ideology of his circle in the early 1790s is amplified, focusing on Paine's own faith. This attack is reinforced by the preface to Chapter Three of *Jerusalem*, 'To the Deists,' which declaims against those who practice 'the Religion of Satan … [in] the Synagogue of Satan. calling the Prince of this World, God; and destroying all who do not worship Satan under the name of God.' In deism Blake here attacks its 'Natural Morality or Self-Righteousness, the Selfish Virtues of the Natural Heart.' Satan is 'the God of this World,' enforcing a fallen morality 'which teaches that Man is Righteous in his Vegetated Spectre' (Erdman, pp. 200–1). Blake found this position codified in Paine, who contends 'that in truth there is no such thing as redemption – that it is fabulous, and that man stands in the same relative condition with his Maker as he ever did stand since man existed, and that it is his greatest consolation to think so.'[69] Thus the self-sufficient fallen archangel becomes the image of the barrier to human renovation, the voice that affirms that the human self does not need regenerating, as Paine maintains. Deism not only cuts the individual off from the rest of the human community which struggles in error, it ultimately grounds all codes of self-righteous faith and morality that require the accusation of sin – Paine's denials notwithstanding – and its punishment. In *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, this aggressive accuser of others, the Satanic 'Selfhood,' becomes the primary impediment to Apocalypse.

In the climactic synthesis of deism and Opacity, Blake's Satanic mythmaking in *The Four Zoas* achieves as much esthetic completeness as its experimental texture can be expected to display. Elsewhere in Night the Eighth Blake bursts the frame of his narrative – and the myth of Satan – to insert what is either the seed or the synopsis of the story of Satan's origin and fall which makes up the 'Bard's Song' in *Milton*.[70] The structural difficulty arising from the introduction of this story just before the advent of Apocalypse in Night the Ninth is eclipsed by another problem, however. In the great conflagration of the final Night, the anticipated overthrow of Satan and Antichrist does not enter the narrative; neither figure even appears in this episode. It may be argued that Satanic agency is implicit in the retaliatory violence graphically depicted in the last Night, when scores are settled with the oppressors of the earth. This slaughter may be the work of the Satanic spectres Los and Enitharmon are unable to withdraw from the Limit of Opacity in Night the Seventh, but these figures do not consolidate into a mythic body of error that is cast out at last when the Creation is consumed. It is in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* that the embodiments of Satanic opposition re-enter Blake's apocalyptic narrative and are annihilated at the advent of Millennium.

In the final plates of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake condenses the various demonic mythemes found in *The Four Zoas* into an eschatological narra-

tive, a confrontation with the Satanic figure wherein the last barrier to Apocalypse is removed. This climactic episode radically contracts the broad, panoptic form of Satanic myth in *The Four Zoas* into the psychologism of the Selfhood. In this way the literal, social violence of Apocalypse in *The Four Zoas* is displaced by a *psychomachia*, staging an ambiguous struggle with a character signifying the subjective foundation of worldly hierarchy and tyranny.

*Milton* chronicles the origins of the Satanic Selfhood in its opening section, the 'Bard's Song', an oblique redaction of the middle books of *Paradise Lost* sung to the dwellers in Eternity, among them Milton. The Bard's Song distorts the story of Satan's rebellion and expulsion from heaven to reveal the underlying form projected by Milton's writing, the embodiment of tyranny, negation, and restraint which rules as the God of this World. The demonic apotheosis of this figure occurs when he mutates into the Covering Cherub, derived from the figure in Ezekiel, the Prince of Tyre who will be destroyed 'from the midst of the stones of fire' (28:16). In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, this being bars the way to the Tree of Life; in *Milton* he manifests the forms of worldly power thwarting the recovery of Eden. The Cherub is aligned with the church–state composite: the Bard reveals that the 'place of the Covering Cherub' is in the sites of empire, Rome, Babylon, and Tyre (9:51; Erdman, p. 104). A visual counterpart to the Satanic Cherub is found in one of Blake's illustrations to the Bible, 'Satan in His Original Glory: "Thou Wast Perfect Till Iniquity was Found in Thee"' (Figure 6; ca. 1805). Inscribed on the picture, a subtitle quoting Ezekiel 28:14–15 refers directly to the Prince of Tyre, thus fusing the identities of the Cherub and Satan. In the picture, the hovering figure of the Satanic Cherub accordingly embodies empire: he holds a royal orb and trefoil-crowned sceptre and wears a sort of regal cape, suggested by the belt running diagonally from his right shoulder across his chest.[71]

The 'Bard's Song' and the epiphany of the Covering Cherub move Milton to undertake a journey to redeem his emanation, Ololon. But this quest turns away from confronting the Cherub as an embodiment of state power; it takes instead an inward route – recovering the Satanic self-projection in Milton's writing, God the Father and Satan. These figures are now revealed as the twin hypostases of the Selfhood, a development anticipated in *The Book of Urizen*, as we have seen. For the Bard's Song satanizes the Father's request of blood payment for man's transgression, thus tracing this demand to its source in the Selfhood, whose primitive morality constructs the Atonement to gratify its compulsion to judge, punish, and sacrifice. In response, Milton vows 'self annihilation,' which will destroy the cruel legalism of the Father (14:22; Erdman, p. 108). Thus Blake's Satanic myth now acquires a new psychological and ethical focus, in which human regeneration is achieved in the transactions of self and other. The redemptive action bears on Satan ambiguously, however, and the indeterminacy

*Figure 6* William Blake, 'Satan in His Original Glory: "Thou Wast Perfect Till Iniquity was Found in Thee"' (ca. 1805)

centers on Milton's final resolution 'to loose him from my Hells' – that is, from his places of creative or prophetic work that have been in the service of the Selfhood (14:31; Erdman, p. 108). Does 'to loose' Satan from Milton's hells mean to expel and destroy or to liberate and recreate?

In his subsequent confrontation with the 'Spectre of Satan,' a 'Twenty-seven-fold mighty Demon/Gorgeous & beautiful' (38:9–12;

Erdman, p. 139), Milton refuses to destroy him.[72] Vengefully annihilating Satan would only reinstate him and his iron law of retribution; embracing instead the 'Laws of Eternity' which ask for mutual 'Self Annihilation,' Milton vows to 'put off Self,' to destroy 'Self righteousness/In all its Hypocritic turpitude,' sacrificing himself instead for Satan (38:35,43–4, 49; Erdman, p. 139). Despite this pledge, the ambiguity of Satan's fate remains unresolved. While self-annihilation presumably spells the destruction of the Satanic Selfhood, after this point the poem is curiously silent about this prospect. Indeed Milton's final exhortation suggests that the putting off of self will redeem Satan: 'Awake Albion awake! reclaim thy Reasoning Spectre. Subdue/Him to the Divine Mercy, Cast him down into the Lake/Of Los, that ever burneth with fire, ever & ever Amen!' (39:10–12; Erdman, p. 140). Here the first and last falls of the archangel are transvalued, for the infernal lake does not represent eternal punishment, but the fuel of prophecy and art; in this fire, perhaps, Satan is to be reformed and restored. For the 'Bard's Song' presents Satan not only as the Selfhood and implicitly as the agent of the Fall but as the youngest Son of Los, with his own productive role in the economy of Eden: 'The Miller of Eternity made subservient to the Great Harvest/That he may go to his own Place Prince of the Starry Wheels' (3:42–3; Erdman, p. 97).

Thus the final epiphany of Satan in *Milton* equivocates concerning his fate; concluding on the brink of Apocalypse, the work presents neither the redemption nor the annihilation of Satan. This indeterminate confrontation with the Satanic enemy is repeated in *Jerusalem*, where the redemptive path lies again through self-annihilation, performed here by Jesus and Albion. When the cloud of Antichrist overshadows Albion, he casts himself into the furnaces of affliction, the apocalyptic fires burning up the natural world. This act seems to complete the process forecast in the lyric from Chapter Two with its redemptive apostrophe: 'I here reclaim thee as my own/My Selfhood! Satan! armd in gold.' (ll. 75–6; Erdman, p. 173). While this pronouncement echoes the self-regenerative vow of Milton's final speech, at the same time the Satanic figure is reduced to a mental impediment – a 'Body of Doubt that Seems but is Not,' as Los proclaims him – that is removed from the threshold of Eternity in one stroke (93:20; Erdman, p. 253). Resurrected before Jesus, Albion seizes his bow and destroys the Covering Cherub with the 'Arrows of Intellect': 'The Druid Spectre was Annihilate loud thundring rejoicing terrific vanishing/Fourfold Annihilation' (98:6–7; Erdman p. 257).

Both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* end, then, with an ambiguous victory over the Satanic adversary in the self. Because these works develop a conception of Satan as a nonhuman barrier to the life of the Great Humanity Divine – Satan as the 'Selfhood' or the 'Reasoning Spectre' – their narratives move toward the conventional destruction of Satan and Antichrist. On the other hand, insofar as Blake tends to represent Satan as a projection of human powers – that is, an apotheosis analogous to Urizen – he is pulled toward the

mythic gesture of the final redemption of Satan. These opposing directions taken in Blake's later work reveal a tension, then, between his tendency to project evil onto a mythic form in order to destroy it and his impulse to include and regenerate all that is human in the total form of Albion. One may read the equivocal conclusions of *Milton* and *Jerusalem* as epiphanies in which social and political forms of tyranny are overcome only by internalizing them, then reducing them to mental error or unregenerate selfishness that is driven out or redeemed. Such a reading lends support to the 'fracture thesis,' the critical paradigm that emphasizes Blake's apparent shift to an apolitical stance after the 1790s ended.[73] But it is possible to read the ambiguous final combat as the completion of one of the coded political narratives David Erdman believes an increasingly fearful, self-censoring Blake produced.[74] The later forms of Satanism conceal his seditious views: the internalizing of the Satanic enemy and his end deflect attention by displacing direct portrayals of the outward destruction of church and state. That subject is fully represented only in a work that Blake never published, *The Four Zoas*, where 'The Kings & Princes of the Earth cry with a feeble cry' in the apocalyptic final Night (125:10; Erdman, p. 394).

The rhetorical function of the displaced apocalyptic struggle may also be viewed as a late example of the kind of 'bricolage' or heteroglossia invoked by recent critics to explain the mediation of multiple cultural voices in Blake's art.[75] These voices reveal the marginal social and ideological position of Blake, who lived on the borders of various groups – Swedenborgians, Muggletonians, Millenarian enthusiasts, and the Johnson circle. Blake's polyphonic art blends the traces of these different, often overlapping social subgroups, extending from rational dissent at one end of the spectrum to radical Millenarian enthusiasm at the other. *Milton* and *Jerusalem* both end in a manner that struggles to reconcile the disparate apocalyptic expectations of different forms of religion. On the one hand, the final episodes of both works seem to be designed to meet the conventions of pre-Millennial narrative, where the defeat of Satan and Antichrist is obligatory. Yet these conclusions rest uneasily in that scenario. In Priestley's prophetic commentaries on the times, it is a violent overthrow of worldly power that is anticipated.[76] The gap that opens between these expectations and Blake's contraction of focus into the confrontation with the Satanic Selfhood might seem to reflect the pull of another group, the followers of more pious forms of Millenarian enthusiasm appearing at this time. These were epitomized by the prophecies of Joanna Southcott, who superceded Richard Brothers as a central figure not long after the war with France resumed in 1803. The long-awaited 'revolution' evoked in her verse refers to the conquest of Satan by the defeat not of France, Britain, or empire generally, but sin itself. But only if we revise Southcott's destruction of sin into Blake's transvalued goal – driving out the idea of sin or moral accusation – can the overthrow of the Selfhood be at all aligned with Southcott's chiliasm.[77] Blake actually appears more inclined to import

Muggletonian theology into the narrative of apocalyptic overthrow: the Muggletonian equation of Satan with Reason may be an element of the adversary Blake constructs in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, the Selfhood, who in various contexts is identified as the 'Reasoning Spectre' (*Milton* 39:10; Erdman, p. 140).[78] And insofar as Blake's representation of last things gestures toward the redemption of the evil principle, it matches the vision embraced by the Philadelphians and other 'Universalists' who looked forward to the regeneration of all created beings, including Satan.

Whatever claims are made about the largely esthetic implications of the work of Los and the subordination of Orc's revolutionary energy, Blake's transactions with Satanic myth in the major prophecies confirm that Blake never abandoned his strong pre-Millennial interest in sudden change. It is only the roles of the demonic agents that shift, passing from the celebration of energy in the myths of the Devil, the son of fire, and Orc to the revelation of the God of this World – the apotheosis of those 'eternal attributes' that become destructive to humanity when worshiped. If the late emphasis on the Selfhood as the subjective ground of change seems to pull Blake's Satanic myth toward the forms of transcendence offered by Millenarian groups, this does not obscure the social function of the polyphony of voices that blend in the final combat. That function is not merely to illustrate Blake's borderline position between various social groups in his era. It is a rhetorical and a regenerative purpose: to restore, as Jackie DiSalvo phrases it, 'the voice of the oppressed' many drowned out by 'the Beast and Whore of State-Religion, the hegemonic discourse of the dominant classes … to articulate the resistance of the collective that has thereby been silenced, scattered, reduced to inarticulate rage, or lulled to sleep.'[79]

# 3

# Base and Aristocratic Artificers of Ruin: Plebeian Blasphemy and the Satanic School

In December 1821, the publication of *Cain: A Mystery* provoked an uproar: readers called for the suppression of Byron's play when they found that it contained a violent assault on the authority of the Bible. Reviewers took the dramatic character Lucifer, the first murderer's mentor, to be the author's iconoclastic mouthpiece. This response to Byron's supremely notorious performance as a Satanist is revealing, because it ties the diabolical elements of the play to the 'blasphemy crisis,' the surge of plebeian anti-Christian writing in the late Regency and the broad effort to suppress it.[1] Involving state trials of offending publishers and booksellers and new, repressive legislation, the crusade required the reinforcement of opinion through partisan writing. In the *Quarterly Review* the methods and motives of blasphemous writers and publishers – attacking religion in order to undermine political authority – were demonized. Here the mythic brand was applied to 'men, who, like the Malignant Principle himself, can knowingly take advantage of the distresses of mankind, to blast their virtues, – base artificers of ruin, who drive the trade of destruction.'[2] To many of the first readers of *Cain*, it appeared that an aristocrat had made common cause with these diabolical vulgarians.

The attack on bibliolatry in *Cain* is embedded in the forms of controversialism that emerged in these years, but less directly than the contemporary reception of this play suggests. Byron's biblical drama was not published until after the blasphemy crisis had begun to recede, and *Cain* thus constitutes his response to this period of social reaction and to attacks on his own assumption of the stance of the literary provocateur in *Don Juan* Cantos I–II. In its critique of biblical myth, moreover, *Cain* reflects the plebeian form of blasphemy less than the more literary version developed in Shelley's writing, through which the influence of contemporary attacks on Christianity was mediated to Byron. The latter's mythic practice in *Cain* is illuminated by the precedent of Shelleyan Satanism, ranging from his first experiments with Christian demonology to the later essay 'On the Devil, and Devils' and *The Cenci*. Thus, while these two works and *Cain* are the

central blasphemous productions of the 'Satanic school,' the treatment of Christian myth in Byron and Shelley diverges in significant ways from what these writers found in the work of plebeian infidels. Shelley and Byron both enter into and remove themselves from the discourse of contemporary anti-Christian writing. They assimilate its iconoclastic rhetorical function; while thus ratifying the plebeian voice, however, the writing of Shelley and Byron transforms it, approaching blasphemous matter from a more oblique, literary – and, in the case of Byron – ironic angle. This shift seems partly motivated by an awareness of the limit of what would be tolerated by a conservative audience in Britain, but the gesture succeeded only in antagonizing readers further.

## I. 'I annihilate God; you destroy the Devil': Shelley and the Christian mythology

To reshape the figure of Satan, Shelley discovered early on, was to challenge the large codes of fraud and woe underwritten by Christianity. Thus his handling of Satanic myth resurrects the spirit of Blakean Satanism in the early 1790s and its effort to disable traditional myth and infuse it with a core of oppositional values. In these maneuvers, Shelley was in advance of Byron, establishing modes of blaspheming Satanism which the other poet went on to adapt (despite the remarks of both men that deprecate the influence of Shelley's irreligion on Byron).[3] It is ironic, therefore, that Shelley's inflammatory writing was only just becoming visible as the Regency ended. Moreover, this occurred only through the association made in conservative polemic between plebeian infidels and the two poets. As Marilyn Butler has shown, the intensely hostile reviewing that began to focus on Byron and Shelley in the later years of the Regency transferred an ongoing assault on unrespectable blasphemers like William Hone to aristocratic writers.[4] Culminating in Southey's Tory diatribe against the leaders of the 'Satanic school,' these attacks branded both writers rebels against church and state. But these accusations fell earlier and heavier on the more prominent and intellectually accessible Byron; the demonizing of Shelley does not begin to spread until 1820–22, when it appears in the reviews of *Prometheus Unbound*, *The Cenci*, and finally the pirated edition of *Queen Mab* that appeared in 1821.[5] Most of these reviewers, moreover, were content to pursue the 'diabolical' features of Shelley's personal behavior and the moral code projected in his writing. Only one critic identified the very myth-structures of Shelley's large-scale works – their cosmic belligerence featuring a 'wicked supreme deity' and 'the good and evil principle fighting like furies on all occasions' – as the site of the poet's transgressiveness. In 1821, the *Monthly Review* thus acknowledged an ideological adversary who sought not only to subvert but to restructure the fundamental Christian myth of the antagonism between God and Satan.[6]

This, the most striking nineteenth-century accusation of Shelleyan Satanism, reveals a late-dawning awareness of the poet's iconoclastic handling of Christian myth and its rhetorical aims. Since 1810, Shelley had repeatedly dismantled and reconstructed a myth he regarded as a chief support of church and state, harnessing the figure of the Devil to a programmatic assault on opinion and institutions. In poems like 'The Devil's Walk' (1812), Shelley's treatment of the figure of Satan disables the conventional myth, while still retaining its demonizing and abjecting function. In a more characteristic maneuver, though, Shelley enters the myth to hollow it out and infuse it with a set of values and attitudes alien to the traditional Christian myth of Satan. Either subversive practice may remind us of his penchant for hoaxes and deceptions: assuming in correspondence with an Anglican bishop the persona of an earnest but naive inquirer after religious truth, or choosing a name from an innocuous fable for the title of *Queen Mab*, to 'catch the aristocrats.'[7] But Shelley's iconoclastic treatment of Satanic myth in his early writing seems related also to the social aggression of the outsider, to which Steven E. Jones has called attention in his exploration of the compositional matrix of Shelley's satire.[8] It is significant that the first target of Shelley's sublimated aggression was institutional Christianity and that his self-identification with the Satanic stance emerged as its channel.

Shelley's expulsion from Oxford, brought about by his refusal to deny co-authorship of 'The Necessity of Atheism' (1810), was perhaps the first occasion on which he felt the power of state religion. Even before this traumatic episode, he had developed a fantasy of theomachic combat, a struggle to exact Satanic vengeance from institutional Christianity. Writing to Thomas Jefferson Hogg in January of 1811, he laments the loss of Harriet Grove – which he attributed to her pious horror of his atheism – in a self-dramatizing adaptation of Voltaire's slogan: 'Oh how I wish I *were* the Antichrist, that it were *mine* to crush the Demon, to hurl him back to his native Hell never to rise again – I expect to gratify some of this insatiable feeling in Poetry' (*Letters*, I, 35). Both the demonizing of the God of Christianity and the heightened, mythic self-representation are characteristic of Shelley's letters at this time. Even where a Satanic identity is not explicitly assumed, he habitually throws himself into the role to express a defiant hatred of Christianity and its God: 'Did I now see him seated in gorgeous & tyrannic majesty as described, upon the throne of infinitude – if I bowed before him, what would virtue say?' (*Letters*, I, 101). These mythic projections, with their curiously reflexive structure – an idealized Satanic antagonist opposed to a demonic God – leave traces in Shelley's early poems. Here their aggression is harnessed to breaking the power of the institutions that used the Christian mythology to achieve social control. In this writing Shelley attacks this source of power by attempting to destroy the authority of myth, a maneuver he learned by assimilating the infidel critique of Christianity he found in Voltaire, Volney, Holbach, and Paine.

As Shelley confidently summarized to Elizabeth Hitchener the infidel agenda and his idealized conception of its aims, 'I annihilate God; you destroy the Devil and then we make a Heaven entirely to our own mind' (*Letters*, I, 195).

Shelley's intellectual debt to this body of writing, especially *The Age of Reason*, is substantial. It is discernible in his echoes of Paine's mocking redactions of biblical narratives, but Shelley was perhaps more influenced by the larger rhetorical purpose of *The Age of Reason* – destroying the political power of 'the Christian mythology' by attacking the fabulous character of scripture. The prestige of its mythology, Shelley asserted in Painesque phrases, made faith the 'strongest ally and bulwark of that system of successful force and fraud,' autocracy.[9] In Paine and other infidel writers, Shelley found that attacks on the myth of Satan constituted a strategic element of the general effort to crush Christianity. From these writers he learned various polemical techniques and topics – for example, de-centering Christianity by locating the source of the mythic antagonism of God and Satan in the dualistic eastern structure of the 'Two Principles.' Such a claim, Shelley saw, directly challenged the authority of the Christian mythology, as did Volney's conviction that religious myths function primarily as psychological and social projections.

The infidel attacks on Christianity showed Shelley the vulnerability of the myth of the Devil, while also suggesting that the mental liberation that accompanies its destruction threatens established power. When 'a person once begins to think that perhaps there is no Devil,' Shelley ironically observes, 'he is in a dangerous way.'[10] In the infidel critique of the Christian mythology, then, Shelley's demonic mythmaking found an early ideological focus and an iconoclastic agenda. This discovery is reflected in his broadside ballad, 'The Devil's Walk,' which reveals Shelley's understanding of the rhetorical value of demonizing as well as his determination to destroy the traditional myth of the Devil. Here church and state are themselves allied with Satan, whose 'death' the poem confidently prophesies.

Begun one month before Shelley's sojourn in Ireland in 1812, 'The Devil's Walk' was conceived at a pivotal point in his life, when he exchanged mentors. At this time, Shelley announced his exasperation with Robert Southey's transformation into an apologist for oppression, denouncing 'the prostituted exertions of his Pen' and declaring allegiance to William Godwin (*Letters*, I, 208). Soon thereafter, the first version of the poem exhibiting his rejection of Southey appears in a letter to Elizabeth Hitchener of 16 January 1812; Shelley expanded it in the next few weeks and had it printed in Dublin as a broadside. Shelley modeled this poem on the collaborative ballad by Southey and Coleridge, 'The Devil's Thoughts,' which he must have seen when he visited Southey at Keswick in late 1811. The narrative donné of Southey's ballad – the Devil's tour of his earthly

kingdom – offered the vehicle for satiric imitation. But the differences Shelley perceived between his political views and those of Southey provided an even greater stimulus for writing. Taking over and transforming many of the topics engaged by its model, Shelley's poem pushes past the often politically neutral satire of the older ballad, using its conventional demonizing rhetoric and imagery to attack the representatives of state power – the mad King, the Prince Regent, Castlereagh, and the Anglican clergy. Shelley adapts the deliberately crude idioms of his model to a new and radical purpose: he constructs a panoptic survey of the suffering and oppression of the last decade superintended by Satan, depicting the bloody subjugation of Ireland in 1798 and the Spanish slaughter in the recent Peninsular War as the feeding and fattening of the Devil's 'Cattle.' In a mode of invective that looks ahead to 'Sonnet: England in 1819,' the poem derides the 'brainless King' attended by imps of Hell and the 'addled' Prince Regent.[11]

On this level of utterance, Shelley is accommodating the popular audience, showing it a diabolical agency behind these figures and events. But the ballad challenges the same readers to achieve a more advanced insight when it represents the figure of Satan as a psychological projection. 'The Devil's Walk' consistently humanizes the image of Satan, whose familiar and fashionable attire conceals his hoof, horns, and claw and renders him indistinguishable from every gentleman on the street. The merging of the Devil's identity with humanity is also stressed by his physical proximity and likeness: he sits at the elbow of the Priest during prayer, and he is analogized to the wealthy yeoman counting his cattle and singing contentedly.[12] Once the projective origin of the myth has been shown, the poem then unmasks its political value : 'The Devil (who sometimes is called Nature), / For men of power provides thus well' (ll. 80–1; Hutchinson, p. 879). Satan provides in the sense that a mythic author of the evil in human and physical nature is indispensable to earth's oppressors, because only such a device enables them to disguise their responsibility for suffering and to deflect it to 'their great original' and the depravity of fallen humanity (l. 83; Hutchinson, p. 879). The church depends on the Devil's assistance to forestall the uprising of the starving poor, deprived even of the 'bread of penury' (l. 97; Hutchinson, p. 879). As the Devil reminds a priest who affects to shun him: 'without the Devil, O favorite of Evil, / In your carriage you would not ride' (ll. 38–9; Hutchinson, p. 878).

This exposure of the origin and social function of Satanic myth addresses not only the popular reader but Southey as well. During his visit to Keswick, Shelley was shocked to discover that Southey, who accepted the Christian mythology no more than he did, nevertheless upheld it, undoubtedly on the ground of 'expediency,' Southey's cardinal political virtue (*Letters*, I, 223). As Shelley had bitterly noted, 'The Church of England it's [*sic*] Hell and all has become the subject of his panegyric'

(*Letters*, I, 208). Thus the rhetorical strategy of 'The Devil's Walk' involves confronting Southey with the implications of his hypocritical posture, and the poem concludes by forcing him to contemplate the inevitable collapse of hell and all. Envisioned in a triumphant return to Hell, the Devil is blind to the event foreseen by 'the sons of Reason,' the Millennial day of reckoning that looms 'ere fate consume the Pole.' On that day, rational unbelief will destroy the delusory projection, and with it, its political power, draining the blood from the 'false Tyrant's cheek' (ll. 140–2; Hutchinson, p. 880).

In the final stanzas of 'The Devil's Walk,' then, Shelley prophesies the implosion of the myth and the fall of the 'men of power' it supports, essaying the utopian *Götterdämmerung* vision he would soon amplify in the final cantos of *Queen Mab* and subsequently in the fourth act of *Prometheus Unbound*. Although the concluding prophecy of the ballad thus establishes a central theme in Shelley's writing, it also demonstrates that the infidel tradition furnished him with the implements only to demolish the myth of Satan – not to remake it. Other than rendering the myth artistic raw material by desacralizing it, the method of anti-Christian polemic did not open the way to reshaping the mythic figure of Satan and adapting it to new thematic roles. Shelley's efforts to idealize the Devil and harness this figure as an ideological vehicle were also guided by the revisionist readings of *Paradise Lost* Godwin advanced in *Political Justice* and his later essay, 'Of Choice in Reading' (*The Enquirer,* 1797). In both works, Godwin achieved an ideological demonstration, breaking the story of Satan out of the Christian mythology in order to empty the myth and project new values into it. Shelley's readiness after 1812 to construct new roles for Milton's Satan – chief among them, that of a militant figure in the struggle against the oppressive power of opinion and institutions – points to the precedent of Godwin's reading of the war in heaven.[13]

As we have already noticed, Godwin entirely reconceives Satan's role in the epic, arguing that his rebellion is inspired by autonomy of mind, his capacity to perceive the injustice of God's despotic rule. Satan's motives encompass benevolence as well, which explains, Godwin says, the compassion and sympathy Milton's hero felt for his partners in misfortune. He is a virtuous rebel. The interpretative method underlying this moral inversion of God and Satan – perhaps even more influential on Shelley than Godwin's conception of Milton's Satan – is set forth in the essay, 'Of Choice in Reading.' Constructing a prototypic reader-response heuristic, Godwin elevates the 'tendency' or actual impression made on the reader over the consciously intended moral; one prominent test case turns out to be *Paradise Lost*, in which the tendency, the tyranny of God, overrides the moral of the epic, the justification of God's ways.[14] In *Political Justice*, then, Godwin makes Satan the vehicle of a reading that destroys the moral and seizes on the tendency of *Paradise Lost*; the archangel's attacks on divine

authority enable Godwin to dismantle the epic from within, by discrediting its superstructure of values at its mythic foundation. Shelley transforms Godwin's interpretative assumption about tendency versus moral into a theory of poetic subversion, claiming in 'A Defence of Poetry' that Milton's strategy involved undermining the moral of *Paradise Lost*. In his 'bold neglect of a direct moral purpose,' Milton idealized Satan; by morally elevating him above the tormenting God, he ended up refuting the 'popular creed' of Christianity (Julian, VII, 129–30).

The anti-Christian tradition and the influence of Godwin's reading of *Paradise Lost* blend, then, in the intellectual structure of Shelley's Satanism. The combination of these two patterns of thought produces eccentric results, however, when the contradictory impulses to demolish and idealize the myth collide. Despite Shelley's ideological identification with the Satanic stance, the infidel critique of myth inhibited Shelley's transformation of Christian diabology. By inspiring his contempt for the myth – which he summarily dismisses in a note to *Queen Mab* as 'that miserable tale of the Devil' – the anti-Christian posture precluded idealizing the actual figure of Satan, even for the purpose of attacking church and state.[15] To rehabilitate the figure of Satan, or merely to represent it in a literal, undisplaced form, would be to risk rearming the Christian mythology. Therefore, when Shelley moved from the comic-grotesque mode of 'The Devil's Walk' to an heroic form of Satanism, he blurred the archangel's identity by creating a hybrid mythic character. In *Queen Mab* and *Prometheus Unbound*, Satan appears only in a displaced form, in the guises of the Wandering Jew and the Titan; Shelley syncretically grafts the fallen angel onto these figures by giving them the voice of Milton's Satan. A related form of mythic substitution can be seen in the allegorical opening canto of *The Revolt of Islam*, where the 'Great Spirit of Good,' a defamiliarized Lucifer, appears in the place of Satan. In each of these works, a characteristic tension emerges in Shelley's mythmaking, which invokes and idealizes the stance of Satan while discarding or suppressing his mythic identity.

This unusual strategy Shelley began to carry out in his writing soon after his formative early reading of Godwin, hollowing out the 'official myth' of the Devil by idealizing Milton's Satan and fusing him with Ahasuerus, the immortal Wandering Jew.[16] Thus Miltonic theomachy becomes a principal ideological vehicle in *Queen Mab*, where the impulse to demonize gravitates toward the tyrant in heaven, the reified form of political and religious power, while Ahasuerus emerges as His sublime Satanic antagonist.[17] In this work, the heroic figure created is cast into the thematic role of embodying the oppositional stance: Satanic myth idealizes the infidel cause in its struggle against state religion. In the seventh canto of the poem Shelley wrote to subvert religion among the children of the aristocracy, the daemon Mab summons Ahasuerus, 'a wondrous phantom, from the dreams / Of human

error's dense and purblind faith' to question him about the existence of God (7.64–5; Reiman, p. 53). The Wandering Jew's massive reply transforms the mythic basis of Christianity into an anti-theodicy involving a providence devoted to damning all but the slaves of Jehovah. This account of the Jew's divine persecution acquires Satanic resonance in a series of allusions to the first book of *Paradise Lost*, blending the voice of the fallen archangel with that of Ahasuerus, who

> had long learned to prefer
> Hell's freedom to the servitude of heaven.
> Therefore I rose, and dauntlessly began
> My lonely and unending pilgrimage,
> Resolved to wage unweariable war
> With my almighty tyrant, and to hurl
> Defiance at his impotence to harm
> Beyond the curse I bore.
>
> (7.194–201; Reiman, p. 56)

Suppressing the archangel's tyrannic vow to reign in hell and adapting instead his libertarian assertion, 'Here at least / We shall be free,' this speech idealizes both Satan's disdain for serving in heaven and his resolution to wage 'eternal War / Irreconcilable, to our grand Foe' (*Paradise Lost* I, ll. 258–9, p. 59; I, ll. 121–2; p. 51). The Miltonic echoes are pervasive. Concluding his self-portrait, Ahasuerus proclaims that he has opposed Jehovah for centuries, standing

> With stubborn and unalterable will,
> Even as a giant oak, which heaven's fierce flame
> Had scathed in the wilderness, to stand
> A monument of fadeless ruin there;
>
> (7.258–61; Reiman, p. 57)

Voicing the 'fixed mind' and 'unconquerable will' of Milton's Satan, the speech of the solitary Ahasuerus concentrates in it the resilience of the entire host of fallen angels, singed by divine wrath yet enduring, 'As when heaven's Fire / Hath scath'd the forest oaks' (*Paradise Lost* I, ll. 97, 106, p. 50; I, ll. 612–13, p. 80).

An avatar of Milton's fallen archangel, the figure of Ahasuerus functions as the Satanic antagonist of the Christian mythology, and it does so with specific reference. Transformed into the mouthpiece of the infidel tradition, Ahasuerus quotes Volney's ridicule of the God who awakens 'from an eternity of idleness' (7.106; Reiman, p. 54) to effect the Creation, instigate the Fall, and then introduce the Savior, 'Veiling his horrible Godhead in

the shape / Of man' (7.164–5; Reiman, p. 55).[18] In this demolition of the Incarnation and Atonement, the speech of Ahasuerus actually intensifies the blasphemy of Volney, making God confess that he maliciously 'planted the tree of evil so that he [man] / Might eat and perish' (7.110–11; Reiman, p. 54). Shelley's rhetorical motive for ventriloquizing the French atheist's irreligion is clear: the Satanic Ahasuerus delivers a counterblast to the conviction in May 1812 of Daniel Isaac Eaton for blasphemous libel, which Shelley had protested in 'A Letter to Lord Ellenborough,' written just as he was beginning to compose *Queen Mab*. In the letter Shelley calls the movement to suppress blasphemy a 'new birth' of religious oppression, an assertion echoed in the Wandering Jew's railing against the persecution of 'unoffending infidels' by Jehovah's slaves (7.209; Reiman, p. 56).[19] Hence the Wandering Jew's glorification of 'Hell's freedom' (i.e., unbelief) and his contempt for the 'servitude of heaven' (7.195; Reiman, p. 56): Shelley turns the immortal Ahasuerus into a combatant personifying the contemporary struggle of free thought with established opinion.

The speech of Ahasuerus is designed, then, to destroy the mythology which Eaton had gone to jail for opposing.[20] This aim Shelley pursues by heightening the sense of injustice and persecution the immortal infidel suffers at the hands of God. The legend is made to correspond with the contemporary situation, wherein the Christian mythology sanctioned the oppression of non-believers. As Shelley insisted in 'A Letter to Lord Ellenborough,' belief is involuntary, not at all a function of the will; therefore the conformity demanded of Eaton and others was tyrannical.[21] Satanic myth in *Queen Mab* is thus a displacement of the conflict between reason and force in England which Shelley saw manifest in Eaton's ordeal. But this struggle will soon cease, Shelley's Satanic blasphemer prophetically declares, for Reason is now establishing the 'throne/Of truth' (7.246–7; Reiman, p. 57), whose rule will finally eclipse that of the Christian mythology.

## II. 1819–21: Shelley, Byron, and the war against blasphemy

The confident utopian prophecy that concludes the speech of Ahasuerus – remarkably immediate considering Shelley's habitual 'futurism,' the defensive rhetorical gesture by which he imagines liberation only in an indefinite future – was premature.[22] As social unrest grew during the post-Waterloo era, the Tory ministry reacted by stepping up efforts to suppress anti-religious utterance. In these years, a wave of blasphemy prosecutions swept through England, with hundreds carried out before the Regency ended. These state trials were undertaken in response to what conservative prophets portentously called 'the revival of infidelity' – the emergence of skeptical, anti-clerical, and anti-Christian writing which resurrected the infidel spirit of early 1790s Jacobinism. The iconoclasm of Paine seemed

reborn in two men: William Hone, whose parodies of the litany, the catechism, and the Athanasian Creed earned him three trials and acquittals for blasphemy in 1817, and the most celebrated martyr for the cause of free thought, Richard Carlile, who was convicted on a dozen counts of blasphemous libel in October 1819 for republishing Paine. Sentenced to three years in prison and fined £1500, Carlile remained in Dorchester Gaol until 1825 because he would not pay the fines and sureties against future offenses. Byron and Shelley were aware of the prosecution of Hone and of other plebeian blasphemers, and Carlile's trial and incarceration particularly drew their attention.

The events of these years constitute the generative matrix out of which arise the most ambitious efforts of Shelley and Byron to dismantle Satanic myth and remake it into an instrument of controversial writing: Shelley's essay 'On the Devil, and Devils,' *The Cenci*, and Byron's *Cain: A Mystery*. Shelley's essay reconceives the figure of Satan in order to force the Christian mythology to implode; undoubtedly written in direct response to the mounting prosecutions of anti-Christian publishers, it brought Byron into contact with both the infidel program and the movement to suppress blasphemous writing. Thus the writing that both Shelley and Byron produced at this time displays filiations with a set of events wherein power in all its forms – church, state and their propagandistic voices – operated so extensively that neither writer, though living abroad at this time, could manage to ignore it. Yet the relations between the writing of Byron and Shelley and this milieu are complicated. Shelley's treatment of Satanic myth in *Queen Mab* already shows a gap opening between mere polemic and the use of myth to idealize the infidel stance. This distance widens in the essay 'On the Devil, and Devils,' where Shelley's iconoclastic interpretation of Milton's Satan produces a mythic pattern for his two dramatic protagonists in *Prometheus Unbound* and *The Cenci*. Here the literary remolding of myth exceeds the controversial purpose, metamorphosing iconoclasm in both works. Byron's treatment of myth in *Cain: A Mystery* produces an entirely different set of rhetorical effects, complicating the controversialism of the work. While *Cain* incorporates the anti-Christian writing of the era and Shelley's literary techniques, the cryptic characterization of Lucifer brings a mobile Byronic persona into the drama. This figure embodies the ironic stance through which Byron both met and frustrated the expectations of his hostile audience.

The alienation of this readership was ensured by more than two decades of conservative reaction to anti-Christian writing. During the Regency, the suppression of blasphemy was justified by resurrecting the 'conspiracy theory' of the late 1790s – that the French revolution had been an infidel plot hatched by the Illuminati, Freemasons, and philosophes to overthrow government by destroying religion first.[23] The spectre of a revolution engineered by undermining religion offered a potent propagandistic argument

in the years of unrest after Waterloo. It provoked the alarm of the Tory Ministry, whose anxiety peaked in late 1819 with the Peterloo massacre. In November the ministers recalled Parliament to introduce the Six Acts, three of which dealt harshly with the blasphemous press.[24] In these acts the ministers and their allies specifically invoked the prosecution of 'blasphemous libel' as an instrument of social control because it addressed the widespread fear that attacks on Christianity subverted belief in postmortal sanctions, thus dissolving the social bonds and encouraging the unrest of the lower classes.[25] In speech after speech, the assumption that blasphemy leads inevitably to sedition is axiomatic. Declaiming before the House of Commons, W.C. Plunket described the 'revolutionary project' of radical reformers like Henry Hunt as a plan to seize the property of the upper classes and to distribute it among a 'rabble … previously debauched by the unremitting dissemination of blasphemous libels, and freed from the restraints of moral or religious feeling.'[26]

The Six Acts were the climax of a long and broad movement to suppress blasphemy, a campaign which enlisted the support of the English Church and other religious groups. By 1819, as Robert Hole observes, most Anglican clergymen were already preaching on themes of social control, all in response to post-Waterloo disturbances and infidelism.[27] Richard Watson, the Bishop of Llandaff and the polemical opponent of Paine's *The Age of Reason*, warned that the 'anti-Christian writings of the nineteenth-century were too unreasonable to be suppressed by anything less than the terrors of the law.'[28] Politically aligned with the Tories, Evangelical groups shared this widespread concern over the connection between blasphemy and civil unrest. William Wilberforce and other Evangelical leaders were consequently committed to working with the Tory Ministry to suppress blasphemy.[29] Evangelical and other religious groups, such as the Society for Enforcing the King's Proclamation (founded in 1787 by Wilberforce) and the Society for the Suppression of Vice, collaborated with the government to secure convictions of offending publishers. Superintending the government's role in these proceedings was the Home Office, and thus a prominent member of the Tory Ministry was involved in this aspect of the crusade: Lord Sidmouth, the Home Secretary, approved each prosecution for blasphemy.[30] Given the political and legal power available and the motives driving the campaign to wipe out the blasphemous press, it is hardly surprising that these actions were carried out with ferocity and broad scope. Between 1819 and 1823 the Vice Society alone initiated about 200 prosecutions.[31] Twenty-five ex officio informations (which authorized holding an individual for up to eighteen weeks without trial if bail could not be met) were laid against ten London booksellers in 1819. In the same year many provincial radicals were also punished for selling the *Black Dwarf*, Carlile's publications, and Hone's parodies; half of the 75 prosecutions for blasphemous libel in 1819 were outside London.[32]

The fear motivating the new legislation and the subsequent prosecutions seems understandable if one examines the work of Carlile, the *bête noire* of the Tory ministers. Before his trial for blasphemous libel in 1819, Carlile began a new venture, *The Republican*. In the voluminous writing he contributed to each issue of this radical journal, Carlile attacked the mythology of Christianity and its political power. With increasing stridency after Peterloo, Carlile began to unfold in *The Republican* an infidel version of universal history explaining the function of Christian myth in this fashion: 'as soon as tyrants had slaves to govern, they must have felt the necessity of employing the specious and captivating engines of ignorance and superstition.'[33] Beginning in early 1820 Carlile wrote his most sustained piece of anti-Christian writing, a serial reply to the Reverend Thomas Horne's pamphlet, 'Deism Refuted'; Carlile goes systematically through the Bible, beginning with a sentence-by-sentence refutation of the Creation myth of Genesis in the light of modern science.[34] (*The Republican*, 2, No. 9, 17 March 1820, 299–ff.). Carlile's hostile readers rightly saw that he derived his central argument from his mentor, Paine: that Christianity was falsehood and superstition in the service of state power, using its mind-imprisoning mythology to legitimize autocracy, retard the advancement of the human mind, and thus obscure the rights of man.

Despite the class bias that complicated their opinion of plebeian radicals and reformers, Shelley and Byron viewed Carlile as a victim of oppression. At one time Byron found Carlile practically beneath his notice, remarking only in letters of November and December 1819 to Douglas Kinnaird and John Murray that trying 'the fool Carlile and his trash' would only make a martyr of him (*BLJ*, VI, 240, 256). By August 1822, however, Byron's dim view of Carlile had altered: the preface to Cantos 6–8 of *Don Juan* passionately defends the imprisoned radical publisher from the Tory 'hirelings' of the *Quarterly Review*. Aligning the transgressive behavior of this 'wretched Infidel, as he is called,' with that of Christ and Socrates, Byron predicts that Carlile's martyrdom will produce countless converts to deism. The clearest signal of Byron's identification with Carlile is the Promethean serenity of mind that he envisions Carlile enjoying in prison. Observing that 'persecution is not refutation, nor even triumph,' Byron declares that Carlile is 'happier in his prison than the proudest of his Assailants' (*Works*, V, 297). By this time, of course, Byron had been himself attacked as a blasphemer, but this cannot account fully for his altered opinion of Carlile. It was undoubtedly Shelley's writing, especially his essay 'On the Devil, and Devils' which influenced Byron's views.

### 'On the Devil, and Devils'

In a long and indignant letter to *The Examiner* of 3 November 1819, Shelley protested Carlile's conviction, defending the publisher with the central polemic of the infidel tradition:

> the prosecutors care little for religion, or care for it only as it is the mask & the garment by which they are invested with the symbols of worldly power. In prosecuting Carlile they have used the superstition of the Jury as their instrument for crushing a political enemy, or rather they strike in his person at all their political enemies. They know that the Established Church is based upon the belief in certain events of a supernatural character having occurred in Judea eighteen centuries ago; that but for this belief the farmer would refuse to pay the tenth of the produce of his labours to maintain its numbers in idleness; that this class of persons if not maintained in idleness would have something else to do than to divert the attention of the people from obtaining a Reform in their oppressive government.
>
> (*Letters*, II, 143)

This replicates the argument with which Carlile and Paine attacked the political power of biblical myth. It is therefore highly significant that we find Shelley, at about the same time he denounced the conviction of Carlile, writing his enigmatic essay 'On the Devil, and Devils,' which attacks the theological ideas of Satan and hell, the 'vulnerable belly' of – Shelley adopts Paine's very phrase – 'the Christian mythology' (Julian, VII, 87, 97). Without this 'outwork of the Christian faith,' which reconciles God's benevolence and omnipotence with the existence of evil, the Christian system collapses. Hence Shelley, ironically deploring the growing skepticism about the Devil, urges the bishops of England to combat this 'dangerous latitude' by reinforcing dogma (Julian, VII, 92). For the Christian mythology, once exploded, can no longer 'divert the attention of the people' and obscure the sources of oppression.

The occasion and date of Shelley's essay have never been precisely established, but it seems certain that he wrote it in late 1819 in response to Carlile's conviction, intending to add his voice to Carlile's – as if Shelley meant to pick up where the radical publisher left off in his blaspheming demolition of state religion.[35] There is evidence, moreover, that Shelley was at this time marshaling his materials for such an effort. In the notebook he used at the end of 1819, the draft of the essay follows Shelley's reading notes on the Gospel of Luke, where he translates the mythological matter of scripture into political categories. Shelley reads, for example, the egalitarianism of the Sermon on the Mount as 'Magnificent Jacobinism.' Even more significantly, Shelley's attention repeatedly fixes on New Testament demonology – the account of Christ's temptation in the wilderness and the many narratives of demoniac possession and exorcism through Christ's power, culminating in the story of the host of devils driven out of the Gadarene and into a herd of swine.[36] A satiric redaction of this last narrative appears in the essay 'On the Devil, and Devils' to illustrate the vulgarity of the mythic basis of the popular religion. Left in draft form in the note-

book, Shelley's essay was clearly unpublishable, yet it seems unlikely that he would have invested effort in such a highly wrought composition if he had no intention of seeing it into print. The letter on Carlile's conviction, moreover, suggests his wish to improve on Paine's *The Age of Reason*. Shelley refers respectfully to the treatise, but notes 'its defects as a piece of argument'; it does not compare well with other works that are 'learned & systematically complete' (*Letters*, II, 143). More than a year later Shelley placed his attack on the mythology of the Devil under a decidedly literary rubric, describing it as a 'Lucianic essay' designed to demonstrate how the 'popular faith is destroyed – first the Devil, then the Holy Ghost, then God the Father' (*Letters*, II, 258). It is probable, then, that the essay 'On the Devil, and Devils' was conceived as a polished, urbane piece of infidel writing, executed in a high style, its immediate rhetorical objective somewhat effaced by the satire and the other more purely literary modes in the essay. But recasting the anti-Christian polemic into less controversial, more learned idioms transformed its aims: Shelley's refashioning of Milton's Satan exceeds in scope and purpose the more narrowly conceived purposes of Paine and Carlile. In his effort to elevate the argument of Paine, then, Shelley produced writing that bypassed the blasphemer's agenda.

In the opening paragraphs of the essay, Shelley shows the programmatic directness of the infidel writer, moving promptly to the strategic point that the evaporation of belief in Satan points to the 'approaching extinction' of Christianity: the myth of the Devil is the dead fiction of a dying religion (Julian, VII, 93). Shelley drives home this thesis with arguments that parallel those used by Paine and Carlile. He emphasizes the absurdity of Satanic myth in the light of the discoveries of astronomy, pursuing facetious speculation on the location of hell, the nature of Satan, and the number and operations of his devils. Would Satan, in a universe filled with populated planets, bother with tempting Eve, since a huge planet like Jupiter would yield many more damnable souls? Thus far Shelley the Painesque infidel; but the scientific critique is intersected by a more abstract plane of argument, engaging the problems Christian theodicy attempted to solve through the device of the Devil. Assuming the voice of the cultural comparativist, Shelley reviews the range of philosophical and theological accounts of the origin of evil. The Platonic intractability of matter he finds a respectable idea: because it did not posit the omnipotence of the demiurge, Greek thought avoided assigning ultimate responsibility for evil to the Creator. The Christian mythology compares less favorably: it is headed for oblivion because it cannot explain evil without representing God as a tyrant. To illustrate this point, Shelley winds into a mocking account of the angelic insurrection led by Lucifer, that contrivance offered by the Christian mythologists, who 'relate, gravely, that one fine Morning, a chief of these spirits took it into his head to rebel against God' (Julian, VII, 90).

Shelley's précis of the war in heaven initially affects the jauntily dismissive voice of Paine, but as this derisive capsule of the Christian myth of origins moves onto Miltonic ground, the critique grows more thematically complicated and tonally unstable. In an extraordinary shift, satire drops out in the panegyric on Milton's Satan Shelley later transferred to 'A Defence of Poetry':

> Nothing can exceed the grandeur and the energy of the character of the Devil as expressed in Paradise Lost. … Milton's Devil as a moral being is as far superior to his God, as one who perseveres in some purpose which he has conceived to be excellent, in spite of adversity and torture, is to one who in the cold security of undoubted triumph inflicts the most horrible revenge upon his enemy, – not from any mistaken notion of bringing him to repent of a perseverance in enmity, but with the open and alleged design of exasperating him to deserve new torments.
>
> (Julian, VII, 90–1)

Shelley's immediate aim in reinterpreting the mythic core of *Paradise Lost* is to prevent the epic from ever again functioning as a reinforcement of Christianity. Doubtful that Milton was even a Christian, Shelley suggests that he was unable to declare his skepticism openly in a country 'where the most enormous sanctions of opinion and law are attached to a direct avowal of certain speculative notions.' Only the 'shelter' of the 'dramatic order' Milton used to shape the received myth saved him from persecution. Shelley makes it clear that while the extent of Milton's iconoclastic intentions remains unknown, he means to kill off a myth exalting 'victorious and vindictive omnipotence,' to drain its power to terrify and enslave (Julian, VII, 91). But this immediate purpose is shunted aside as Shelley constructs a conception of Satan's rebelliousness in the face of oppression founded partly on Godwin, partly on Volney's theory that myth has a projective function.

*Paradise Lost* is a monument in cultural history because it 'idealized' or clarified the inherited Christian mythology and its 'distorted notions of invisible things,' as Shelley later defined Milton's treatment of myth in 'A Defence of Poetry' (Julian, VII, 129). These invisible realities, the essay 'On the Devil, and Devils' implies, are psychological and moral, and thus Milton subverted the Christian mythology by revealing that its grand antagonists, God and Satan, are projections. To construct the figures of God and Satan, Milton utilized the 'elements of human nature,' which he mingled like 'colours upon a single pallet [*sic*].' God the Father embodies primarily the obsessive desire to punish and exact revenge; while acknowledging that vengefulness co-exists among Satan's faults, Shelley insists that Milton subordinated all of them to Satan's virtues, stressing that his vices are 'redeemed by much that ennobles' (Julian, VII, 91). And in any case 'it is a mistake to suppose that he was intended for an idealism of 'implacable

hate, cunning, and refinement of device to inflict the utmost anguish on an enemy' (Julian, VII, 90).

What Satan projects, in contrast to the divine revenge-compulsion, is the set of traits Godwin saw: an absolute cognitive and moral autonomy inspiring a principled rebellion, his perseverance in a 'purpose which he has conceived to be excellent.' This stance is the source of the 'grandeur and the energy' of Satan, who contests God's authority furnished with 'all imaginable advantage' – that is, with arguments exposing the injustice and moral impotence of God. In the essay's second, less frequently noticed idealization of the archangel, this conception of Milton's Satan as a benevolent rebel is heightened. Here Shelley represents Satan as a would-be Promethean benefactor, perverted into playing the role of the tempter of Adam and Eve by God's design. Only this can explain the 'sublimest pathos' of Satan's 'compassion and affection' for the human pair, expressed in his soliloquy deflecting responsibility to God, 'who puts me loath to this revenge' (Julian, VII, 96; *Paradise Lost* IV, ll. 358–92; pp. 216–18). To construct this conception of Satan, Shelley extrapolates freely from Miltonic material, envisioning a figure whose virtue is all but invulnerable to the power of God: 'the inflexible grandeur of his spirit, mailed and nourished by the consciousness of the purest and loftiest designs,' baffled God's efforts to punish Satan for his rebellion until he succeeded in corrupting his 'benevolent and amiable disposition' (Julian, VII, 95–6).

Shelley implicitly justifies this mode of transforming the figure of Satan as the practice of the post-Christian mythographic artist. He points to the large-scale appropriation of pagan material by the Christian mythologists, who inverted the moral and theological meaning of the fabulous figures they took over. The 'horns, hoofs, tail, and ears' were fastened to the medieval Devil when Christian theologians demonized pagan myth – an ironic and lamentable development, since 'the Sylvans and Fauns, with their leader the great Pan, were most poetical personages, and were connected in the imagination of the Pagans with all that could enliven and delight. They were supposed to be innocent beings.' Similarly with the image of the serpent: 'an auspicious and favourable being' among the ancient Greeks and 'an hieroglyphic of eternity' in Egyptian culture, this figure has been 'accommodated' by the Christian mythologists to their 'new scheme of sin and propitiation' (Julian, VII, 103–4). Shelley is only reversing this process, then, in an act of ideological retribution: what has been seized and inverted can be reappropriated and restored, idealizing once more the notions of invisible things distorted in the Christian mythology.

In the two interpretations of Satan found in this essay, the fallen archangel's principled struggle against oppression, his torment, and his final corruption produce the mythic mold for Shelley's two major plays of 1819. Both accounts of Satan first blur syncretically with the representation of the hero of *Prometheus Unbound*: the evocation of Satan's high virtue and

lofty 'designs,' for example, is practically interchangeable with the language describing Prometheus as 'impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends' (Reiman, p. 133). Shelley's revision of Milton's Satan into the virtuous, persecuted archangel grounds his conception of Promethean rebellion, then, while the second idealization, emphasizing the resistance and ultimate fall of the benevolent Satan provides the tragic paradigm for Beatrice Cenci, destroyed by her father.

### *The Cenci*

To idealize the 'distorted' elements of Christianity that inform the world of *The Cenci* means revealing the social power of its demonic mythology. The antagonism of God and Satan is integral to the play, framing the reciprocal violence of father and daughter. Beatrice performs a Satanic role before a Gnostic backdrop: behind the Rome of 1599 appears the dark cosmos contested by an evil demiurge and his Luciferean antagonist, whose earthly avatars are Count Cenci and his daughter. Shelley implicitly aligns Beatrice and Satan in the preface, where he prescribes the audience's ambivalent yet ultimately exculpatory response to his tragic heroine in the same language he applies to Milton's Satan in *Prometheus Unbound*. In the preface to his lyrical drama, Shelley notes that the reader is compelled to employ a 'pernicious casuistry' that excuses Satan's vengefulness because the persecution he suffers 'exceed[s] all measure' (Reiman, p. 133). The preface to *The Cenci* similarly observes that any audience confronting Beatrice and the moral ambiguity of 'her wrongs and their revenge' is forced to fall back on the same 'restless and anatomizing casuistry' in order to grasp what Beatrice, who is both a victim of oppression and an agent of revenge, 'did and suffered' (Reiman, p. 240). The overlapping rhetoric in the prefaces implies that both father and daughter are formed from a Miltonic template, and the drama develops the ethical and social power of the mythic roles both play.[37]

The most fully realistic work Shelley conceived in any genre, then, is paradoxically housed in a mythic structure, the unique function of which is to embody a form of power that contains all opposition. In the world of *The Cenci*, 'power is as a beast which grasps / And loosens not' (IV.iv.178–9; Reiman, p. 286), and its stranglehold is maintained through the dramatic force in religion, that is, by the power circulating among human agents performing the mythic roles that act out their faith. Shelley clearly assumed that his culturally specific treatment of this subject would play to the religious prejudices of a British audience, who would see in the bizarre behavior of the characters the influence of Italian Catholicism. As the preface explains, Count Cenci exists in a world where religion functions not as a 'rule for moral conduct,' but as a mythic medium for the passions. Catholicism is 'interwoven with the whole fabric of life' (Reiman, p. 241); in one sense, this means that the Church mythology enables one to live out roles, thereby giving authority to that potential evil within which the principal characters of the play discover through introspective 'self-anatomy.'[38]

Count Cenci's behavior constitutes a central example of this process. The figure Shelley found in his source, the 'Relation of the Death of the Family of Cenci,' is an atheist; in the play he is a perversely devout religionist who identifies himself with God. By assuming the mythic role of the earthly representative of his dark God, Count Cenci enacts the evil he found through self-anatomy: pure egoism and hedonism unfettered by any moral scruples. The role moreover establishes him as the play's central embodiment of the patriarchal power that governs the world of 'the oppressor and the oppressed' (V.ii.75; Reiman, p. 295). *The Cenci* thus contains a humanized and domesticated version of the Shelleyan malicious deity, and Count Cenci's role as the avatar of this God – 'omnipotent / On Earth, and ever present' – structures the antagonism he unleashes on his daughter. Precisely because Beatrice's 'bright loveliness / Was kindled to illumine this dark world' (V.iv. 68–9; IV.i.121–2; Reiman, pp. 298, 276), Count Cenci attempts to force a new role on the Luciferean female. He imitates the God of the Christian mythology by proclaiming his disobedient daughter a Satanic insurrectionary, who 'shall die unshrived and unforgiven, / A rebel to her father and her God' (IV.i.89–90; Reiman, p. 275). These evocations are neither casual nor isolated: at the conclusion of the curse scene, Count Cenci contemplates repeating the rape of Beatrice, casting her degradation in the same terms:

> O, multitudinous Hell, the fiends will shake
> Thine arches with the laughter of their joy!
> There shall be lamentation heard in Heaven
> As o'er an angel fallen;
>
> (IV.i.183–6; Reiman, p. 278)

The aggression of Count Cenci is a displacement of God's malice and his resentment over Lucifer's rebellion explored in the essay 'On the Devil, and Devils.' The rape of Beatrice thus constitutes an analogous punishment triggered by resistance and meted out to a rebel against authority. Yet Count Cenci desires not only to punish Beatrice but to 'poison and corrupt her soul,' and his designs are realized (IV.i.45; Reiman, p. 274). 'Violently thwarted from her nature,' in the final act Beatrice abandons Marzio, her father's murderer, with ruthless alacrity and harshly denounces her stepmother and brother for confessing under torture (Reiman, p. 238).

Yet Beatrice's Satanic role remains obscure to her: she occupies it unconsciously, her understanding of the oppression she endures and its sources occluded by her Christian belief. Shelley could have portrayed Beatrice self-consciously emulating Milton's Satan taking up arms against an intolerable oppressor: a model for such a stance was available in the satanized abject female of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Perhaps he avoided this direction partly because, as he acknowledged to Thomas Love

Peacock, he did not intend to write over the heads of the popular audience he sought: 'there is nothing beyond what the multitude are contented to believe that they can understand, either in imagery opinion or sentiment' (*Letters*, II, 102). Shelley assumed a play-going audience incapable of responding to Miltonic Satanism free of the biases of Christian superstition. But it is primarily the faith of Beatrice that precludes dramatizing her tragic fall through a conscious assumption of the Satanic stance. For Beatrice could never see herself in the role of the rebel against the moral order of the universe. She can justify her part in the murder of her father only by imagining herself a passive recipient of divine justice, whose human agents are the hired assassins.

It is essential to the tragic predicament of Beatrice that all recourse is withdrawn, that the avenues of justice or escape are closed off one after another. That Beatrice cannot discern her Satanic role completes this process of imprisonment, for the invisibility of the mythic part she plays prevents her from grasping the true relationship between her and the power that oppresses her. Beatrice's vision seems to clear when she receives her death sentence and finally realizes that her God will not save her; it dawns on her that she has all along defended a non-existent Providence. In the tragic *anagnorisis* that arises in this speech, her Christian belief seems to implode. But this utterance, which develops from her bewildered surmise that her father is identical with the God who rules the afterlife – 'If all things then should be … my father's spirit' – hardly frees her mind (V.iv.60; Reiman, p. 298). Rather, it exemplifies what Shelley regarded as the worst form of Christian superstition, into which the believing, oppressed, and despairing mind falls at last when evil appears omnipotent.

Such a mind can but dimly perceive the mental foundations of patriarchal power – the 'tyranny and impious hate' that Beatrice sees 'sheltered by a father's hoary hair' (I.iii.100–1; Reiman, p. 251). Her *anagnorisis* arrives too little, too late for her to articulate a legitimate form of rebellion; no structure of liberating values or belief exists in her culture, only a Catholicism that enshrines revenge and finally collapses into a nihilistic Gnosticism. In 'A Philosophical View of Reform,' the intellectual stasis of Beatrice's world is viewed as an historical constant, produced in every age by state power and contained by the grip of religion over the human mind: 'It is in vain to hope to enlighten them [the lower classes] whilst their tyrants employ the utmost artifices of all their complicated engine to perpetuate the infection of every species of fanaticism and error from generation to generation' (Julian, VII, 50).

Yet *The Cenci* does not offer merely a portrayal of tyranny perpetually reconsolidating its power. The preface to the play not only satanizes but idealizes Beatrice, noting her quest for revenge, retaliation, and atonement, her 'pernicious mistakes,' and then exalting her: 'The crimes and miseries in which she was an actor and a sufferer are as the mask and the mantle in which circumstances clothed her for her impersonation on the scene of the world' (Reiman, pp. 240, 242). These words have been construed as Shelley's

affirmation of Beatrice Cenci's innocence – her fundamental innocence, as Earl Wasserman sees it, or something more qualified: given the patriarchal values out of which she constructs that innocence, 'she is as "innocent" as she can be,' Michael Scrivener suggests.[39] But the 'mask and the mantle' look ahead to the distinctive phraseology of the discussion of Milton in 'A Defence of Poetry'; the words evoke Shelley's conception of the inherited Christian mythology that obscures the ideal forms *Paradise Lost* reveals. Milton's Satan is part of the idealism refined from Christian myth because he alone resists, however imperfectly and vengefully, the tyrannical government of God; Beatrice Cenci is an analogous figure, the only one in her world who discerns that oppression is enshrined in fatherhood. Beatrice is not only as innocent but as enlightened as she can be, and her poetic function is to expose the mythic foundations of the power that rules her world and to embody resistance as purely as possible within the religious and moral horizon of her own era.

**Byron the provocateur: the construction of Lucifer in *Cain: A Mystery***

In *Cain: A Mystery*, Byron produces a form of Satanic controversialism that, like Shelley's writing of 1819, is interwoven with the milieu. This drama marks a shift in Byron's handling of Satanic myth. Earlier he had constructed a series of heroes – the Giaour, Conrad, Lara, and Manfred – whose alien nature and transgressive behavior are aligned through allusion with the defiance and autonomy of Milton's fallen archangel.[40] These works project a more private and ideologically unthreatening form of Satanism, which culminates in Manfred's death-speech. In the final scene of *Manfred*, the hero's Miltonic speech to his infernal 'genius' declares the autonomy of 'the mind which is immortal' – that is, the mind of Manfred alone (III.iv.129; *Works*, IV, 101), whose consciousness

> Is its own origin of ill and end –
> And its own place and time – its innate sense,
> When stripp'd of this mortality, derives
> No colour from the fleeting things without,
> But is absorb'd in sufferance or in joy,
> Born from the knowledge of its own desert.
>
> (III.iv.131–6; *Works*, IV, 101–2)

Thus, in language colored by the speech of Milton's Satan on the burning plain of hell, Manfred announces his solitary apotheosis, his entrance into an afterlife created by his own mind and will. Manfred's irreligion might have provoked critical condemnation, but his words are disarmed by the pious dramatic context of the revised third act. Manfred is respectful to the abbot of St Maurice, who is given a privileged role as the hero's ally in the final

struggle with the demons who summon the transgressing hero. It is the abbot, moreover, who has the last word on Manfred's postmortal destiny, and his speculation ends the dramatic poem on a note of metaphysical dread.

These gestures suggest that Byron had little interest in controversialism at this time: the Satanism of *Manfred* seems privately motivated, embodying the 'war with the world' that he felt began when he left England in 1816 after the breakup of his marriage. *Manfred* thus brings to its fullest form a personal myth that originated in Byron's self-dramatizing behavior: to Annabella Millbanke and others he professed to believe himself the avatar of a fallen angel.[41] Byron clearly cultivated the aura of the fallen angel, but as the attacks on his writing mounted – in the reviews of *Beppo* and the first two cantos of *Don Juan*, and in Robert Southey's denunciation of the 'Satanic school' – he lost control of his self-referring myth. An anonymous cartoon of 1823, portraying Byron with an infernal muse, illustrates the new image imprinted on the popular mind: Lord Byron the diabolical provocateur (Figure 7). When a form of Satanic myth re-enters Byron's writing in *Cain: A Mystery*, four years after the publication of *Manfred*, it acquires a more strongly ideological and public function, constituting Byron's effort to take back the myth he had constructed and redirect it to controversial purposes. Thus the Satanism of *Cain* displays affinities with Shelley's forms of sublimated iconoclasm; Byron's method, however, is not to reforge Christian material into an idealization of Satan and the values he incarnates, but to amplify the internal ambiguities in a Satanic figure so as to echo infidel positions obliquely.

These effects are produced by the enigmatic characterization of Lucifer, who initially seems conceived as a conventional if unusually haughty and aloof tempter. Introduced into Byron's revision of Genesis 4, Lucifer appears to repeat the seduction practiced on Eve. Because Cain yearns to recover his 'just inheritance,' the Eden his parents briefly knew, or at least to learn 'the mystery of my being,' Lucifer breaks him down, first promising Cain metaphysical knowledge, then revealing to him and ridiculing the hopelessness of mortal existence (I.i.87, I.i.322, *Works*, VI, 235, 243). Yet from the outset Lucifer is presented to the reader as a defamiliarized Devil: the preface to the play implies that Lucifer is not to be identified with the serpent who tempted Eve. This reconceived Satanic figure does not merely seduce Cain; he instructs him in the values of autonomy, defiance, and metaphysical rebellion. At the end of Act II, Lucifer leaves Cain with the Satanic credo, 'the mind is its own place': he urges Cain to resist Jehovah's 'tyrannous threats' enforcing his religious belief and to form instead

> an inner world
> In your own bosom – where the outward fails;
> So shall you nearer be the spiritual
> Nature, and war triumphant with your own.
>
> (II.ii.461, 463–6; *Works*, VI, 275)


*Figure 7* 'A noble poet scratching up his ideas' (Anonymous;1823)

Lucifer's exhortations are embedded in a critique of scripture and bibliolatry, moreover: his voice subverts Christian theodicy and the authoritarian myth of origins which reinforces it – 'the politics of Paradise,' as Byron derisively termed the foundations of religious and political authority found in Genesis (*BLJ*, VIII, 216).

To a significant degree, of course, the speeches of Lucifer serve his dramatic function – laying bare those aspects of Cain's nature that make the first murder possible. Although interpreting *Cain* as tragic drama involves subordinating Lucifer's iconoclasm to the conflict within the protagonist, the role of Byron's tempter does not seem to be entirely a function of genre.[42] The character of Lucifer is also shaped by the social circumstances surrounding the composition of *Cain* – not only the blasphemy crisis but the pressure on Byron to respond to ideologically charged accusations of Satanism and 'Manicheism' coming from conservative voices. All of this figures prominently after 1820, when the rhetorical assault on aristocratic anti-Christian writing intensified. Thus the blasphemy controversy, the extent to which Byron was implicated in it, and his response to it, all bear on the problematic characterization of Lucifer. Collectively these forces shape and complicate the mythic vehicle Byron used to enter the lists in 1821 as a guarded controversialist.

Although he lived at this time in Italy, Byron would have found it impossible to remain unaffected by the war against blasphemy back in England, and his knowledge would have been specific. He undoubtedly knew, for example, about the first prominent figure in the controversy, William Hone. Byron would not only have become acquainted with Hone's reputation through newspaper accounts of the trials of 1817, in which Hone successfully defended himself three times; for years Hone had been an irritant to Byron's publisher, John Murray, pirating and forging Byron's works.[43] More important, it is possible that Byron was influenced by the Satanic, infidel aura surrounding Hone's renewed 'blasphemy,' his publication of the *Apocryphal Gospels* in 1820. A hostile article on this book appeared in the *Quarterly Review* in late 1821, probably after Byron had finished *Cain*.[44] Through his acquaintances in the House of Murray, Byron may have heard of the book earlier, and the review as well, which rabidly demonizes Hone, describing his attempt to 'destroy the credit of the New Testament' as a 'diabolical task.' Echoing the Parliamentary speeches on the Six Acts, the reviewer strikes out at what he interchangeably calls the 'infidel' or 'deistical' party – 'men, who for their own evil purposes, are anxious to destroy every principle and feeling which binds the citizen to his country.'[45]

Byron would have regarded this diatribe as a provocation; if it did not reach him in time to influence the composition of *Cain*, it is nevertheless represent ative of the kind of attacks he did encounter in 1820 and 1821, rhetoric which at first had classed plebeian infidels under the 'Satanic' rubric and now grouped him there as well. Robert Grant's article in the *Quarterly Review* summarizing the debates over the Six Acts quotes W.C. Plunket's description of

Henry Hunt and Richard Carlile as 'fiends in human shape endeavouring to rob their unhappy victims of all their consolations here, and of all their hopes hereafter.' Echoing the mythological discourse of the Parliamentary speakers, Grant portrays the struggle with blaspheming and seditious figures as a Manichean battle with earthly avatars of Satan himself. Though fortified by the passage of the Six Acts, Grant invokes Miltonic rhetoric to urge a vigilant watch over a foe as formidable as the archangel fallen from heaven: 'The calm may cease; the enemy may start up from "The oblivious pool" on which he lies or affects to lie astonished: and the war, which appeared to have been extinguished, may prove to be only in its beginning.'[46]

By 1820 Byron's Satanic aura had lost its glamour and was now almost exclusively the channel through which conservative voices expressed opprobrium. In 1820, writing in the *Quarterly Review*, Reginald Heber added a new dimension to the attacks on Byron: 'by a strange predilection for the worser half of manicheism, one of the mightiest spirits of the age has, apparently, devoted himself and his genius to the adornment and extension of evil.'[47] This is saying in elegant terms that Byron is a Satanist, which was in fact precisely how he interpreted it.[48] In *A Vision of Judgment* (1821), Robert Southey went further, crystallizing the new legend of Byron the Satanic blasphemer. Branding Byron as the pre-eminent foe of moral, religious, and political order, Southey called for the suppression of his writing. Southey's poem conjures up the demon of civil unrest as a visionary portent, a hubbub of Whig and radical voices issuing from the monstrous Accuser of George.[49] In the preface to the poem, the laureate focuses his attack on the guiding spirit of this popular menace – the bad eminence of the Satanic school, Byron. In Southey's diatribe, the 'audacious impiety' of Byron's school, enacted in its rebellion 'against the holiest ordinances of society' receives concluding emphasis. This makes clear Southey's aim in calling the attention of 'the rulers of the state.' He acts as a one-man Vice Society, suggesting an indictment of Byron's Satanic blasphemy.[50]

Thus two prominent writers for the journal regarded as the organ of the Tory Ministry applied to Byron the brand of 'Satanic,' grouping him with the infidels. It should come as no surprise, then, that a blaspheming Satanic figure looms so large in *Cain*. Unleashing such a character in a religious drama must have seemed especially opportune as a counterstrike, the fulfillment of Byron's threat to 'give Mr. Milman – Mr. Southey – & others of the crew something that shall occupy their dreams!' (*BLJ*, VIII, 193). Shelley probably encouraged Byron to do just this when he visited him in August of 1821, only three weeks after he had begun writing *Cain*. At this time Shelley was urging Byron to counterattack the *Quarterly Review* (and Southey in particular).[51] Conversation during their visit was likely to have sharpened the ideological edge of *Cain*, leading Byron to heighten the Satanism of the work by shaping Lucifer into the adversary of the Christian mythology of Creation and Fall. Yet Shelley's more highly sublimated

forms of Satanism influenced Byron as well, by suggesting the more oblique, ironic angle Byron would take. The essay 'On the Devil, and Devils' may have encouraged the very tactic of incorporating blasphemous matter into 'dramatic order' as a shield from 'persecution.'

Byron's motives surely went beyond partisan antagonism, moreover. Whatever his actual religious position was in 1821, Byron's skeptical conception of biblical myth overlapped sufficiently with Shelley's views to draw him into controversy.[52] Like Shelley and other infidels, Byron held that belief was involuntary, not a function of the will; hence the repressing of anti-religious utterance embodied in the Six Acts would have struck him as particularly absurd and outrageous.[53] That his nemesis, Castlereagh, was regarded as their chief architect, and that the Whigs failed utterly to oppose the legislation, was not likely to have escaped his notice.[54] Byron's encounter with these multiple provocations, combined with the charges of Satanism leveled at him, appear to have generated the inflammatory, blasphemous speeches of Lucifer. Through his drama, Byron struck at the 'tyrants who are attempting to trample upon all thought' – and this target extends beyond his assailants in the *Quarterly Review*, encompassing all who contributed to the assault on free thought at this time, from the Tory ministers who authored repressive legislation to the Crown lawyers who prosecuted infidels (*BLJ*, IX, 152). In 1822, the *Eclectic Review* speculated that Byron, encouraged by the examples of Hone and Carlile, wrote *Cain* to test for himself the limits of the freedom of the press. If so, then Byron was enacting in a tangible way his wish to add through his writing 'a dreadful impulse to each loud meander / Of murmuring Liberty's wide waves' (*Don Juan*, Canto VI, ll. 741–2; *Works*, V, 327).[55]

Thus, in producing a Satanic voice that deconstructs sacred myth, Byron had to know that he was adopting tactics resembling those of the lower-class radicals he professed to despise. He therefore must have assumed that his play would become part of the controversy – and that he would be perceived as an aristocratic provocateur in the struggle over the authority of the Bible. It is not likely, though, that Byron wished to present an easy target for the *Quarterly Review*. To idealize the myth of Satan – what Byron's readers surely expected from him – would simply invite more attacks and charges of Satanism; an ironic treatment in a dramatic context would merely perplex this audience. Moreover, there was even more at stake than confusing his conservative opponents: there were the legal implications to consider. Not only were the radical penny-press publishers affected by the political climate; as Donald Thomas notes, it was in these years that high-toned authors and publishers first ran into trouble because of the blasphemy laws.[56] A peer, whether living in England or Italy, probably had little reason to fear prosecution. Publishers, not writers, were most at risk, and the specific danger they faced was not fine or imprisonment but the failure to have their copyright protected, resulting in income lost to cheap pirated editions. This happened to Murray in Chancery court when Lord Eldon refused to protect the copyright of *Cain* because he

found its content blasphemous.[57] Yet well before writing *Cain*, Byron had worried frequently about the consequences of publishing irreligion. In 1817 Shelley had lost the custody of his children in Chancery court over the anti-Christian diatribes uttered by Ahasuerus in *Queen Mab*. Byron repeatedly reminded Murray, Douglas Kinnaird, and John Cam Hobhouse of this in 1819 and 1820 after the publisher sought an injunction in Chancery court to stop the piracy of *Don Juan*: Byron warned that he did not want to lose his parental rights over his daughter Ada (*BLJ*, VI, 252, 256; VII, 121, 196). This chronic anxiety about a Chancery court judgment warrants the inference that Byron took some care in writing his play – especially in the construction of its superhuman infidel – to avoid the charges.

Thus, because biblical myth was contested in the blasphemy controversy, because the brand of 'Satanic' had been fixed to all transgressive writers, and because publishing blasphemy carried consequences, merely to write a biblical drama involving Satanic myth was to enter an ideological conflict. The characterization of Lucifer in *Cain* bears the traces of this conflict. Reappropriating a mythic figure from a field of propagandistic discourse, Byron transforms its meaning and function. He first destabilizes the traditional role of Satan as the author of evil. With this accomplished, Byron introduces Lucifer into the biblical drama as a skeptical commentator who unsettles Christian myth – as if, in the reflexive irony of this work, he were speaking on the yet unwritten text of Genesis. Yet Lucifer retains the role of the tempter, and this reversion to traditional diabolism intensifies the ironic effect of the work. By alternately emphasizing Lucifer's heroic iconoclasm and deflating him through forms of irony, Byron preserved an ambiguous perspective on his biblical subject and an elusive stance as a 'Satanist.' His remark in a letter of 19 September 1821 to Thomas Moore suggests that his intentions had in fact included this form of mystification: he subtitled it a 'Mystery,' he says, to correspond with what it 'will remain to the reader' (*BLJ*, VIII, 216).

Byron's complicated approach to his mythological subject first announces itself in the preface to *Cain*. In a series of mingled assertions, disclaimers, and challenges, he first attempts to deflect charges of blasphemy while unsettling the reader by puncturing the conventional myth of Satan. After emphasizing the fidelity of the language of his play to scripture, Byron abruptly focuses this mock-apology for his modest literalism on a specific case:

> The reader will recollect that the book of Genesis does not state that Eve was tempted by a demon, but by 'the Serpent;' and that only because he was 'the most subtil of all the beasts of the field.' Whatever interpretation the Rabbins and the Fathers may have put upon this, I must take the words as I find them, and reply with Bishop Watson upon similar occasions, when the Fathers were quoted to him, as Moderator in the Schools of Cambridge, 'Behold the Book!' – holding up the Scripture.
>
> (*Works*, VI, 228)

While the action of *Cain* does not involve the temptation of Eve, the question of the serpent's identity is among the first subjects in the preface. Byron goes out of his way to pick up an inflammatory subject, yet he downplays the role of provocateur. The tone is temperate – for Byron; he affects to take the Bible seriously, almost submerging his irony. These gestures, along with the effort to line up authorities (he later adds Warburton to Watson), indicate that Byron not only expected trouble but anticipated it would center around the figure of Satan.[58]

Yet Byron's somewhat mild tone does not disarm the first imaginative premise of his play. Challenging the standard interpretation of Genesis 3, he removes the traditional Author of Evil from these events, and despite his adduced 'authorities,' Byron knew that this was bound to offend. The Bible commentaries of the day maintained that the serpent housed Satan.[59] Uncoupling Satan and the serpent has this obvious yet explosive implication: by calling into question the existence of the Devil, Byron suggests that the character Lucifer cannot be understood in terms of his traditional role. This defamiliarizing effect is compounded by the use of the angelic name derived from Isaiah, distancing Lucifer from the New Testament tradition of demonology.

Byron's abandonment of the dramatist's objectivity in the preface grounds his reconception of the myth of Satan. As the prelude to the entrance of Lucifer into a drama which purports to take scripture for truth and to realize it, Byron's skeptical denial forces the pious reader to shift uncomfortably between the Bible and the play in response to this character. More important, the rhetoric of the preface authorizes Lucifer to unsettle the Christian mythology. By undermining Lucifer's traditional identity and role, Byron in a sense exonerates him, thus rendering him a credible commentator on scriptural matters. This device also provides Lucifer with a foundation for attacking the Fall and the Expulsion, for removing the figure of Satan from the temptation of Eve implicitly causes the whole machinery of Fall, Atonement, and Redemption to collapse; Byron recognized with Shelley that the identity of Satan and the serpent is necessary to the Christian 'scheme of sin and propitiation' (Julian, VII, 104). The preface therefore opens the way for Lucifer's blasphemous counter-myth, which explains the Expulsion and everything else back to the extinction of the pre-Adamite beings in terms of Jehovah's caprice and tyranny.

Byron's ironic controversialism contrasts with that of infidels like Carlile, who approach the Fall and the role of Satan more directly and aggressively, with the blunt weapons borrowed from Paine:

> If it can be shewn that this chapter is a fiction, away goes the Christian religion; for unless we admit the doctrine of the fall of man, we can find no need of a Redeemer. … of all animals to be endowed with human speech, the serpent is the least adapted. Divines, … in order to get over

> this difficulty, have asserted, that this omnipotent and omnipresent gentleman, the devil, or satan, either changed himself into a serpent, or entered spiritually into one. … I, who believe that the common course of nature has never been changed in any one instance, can only look on this account of the talking serpent as a fable, or the fiction of the human imagination… .[60]

Through his maneuvers in the preface, Byron similarly implies that Genesis 3 is merely a fable, incapable of supporting the exegetical weight that has been placed upon it. Yet the rhetorical aims of Byron and Carlile differ radically. Following Paine, Carlile simply seeks to destroy Genesis 3 by declaring it fabulous, and the central absurdity is the figure of Satan; what he dismisses Byron seizes and transforms into the vehicle of his ironic treatment of biblical myth.

Byron was sufficiently confident that in the figure of Lucifer he would reconceive the myth of Satan, subvert Genesis, confound the orthodox, and get away with it that he even paused at one point in the preface to jeer at Heber, his accuser in the *Quarterly Review*:

> I am prepared to be accused of Manicheism – or some other hard name ending in '*ism*' which make[s] a formidable figure and awful sound in the eyes and ears of those who would be as much puzzled to explain the terms so bandied about as the liberal and pious Indulgers in such epithets.
>
> (*Works*, VI, 229)

These defiant sentences were prudently suppressed by Murray, but their presence in the manuscript establishes that Byron was utterly disingenuous when he claimed that he never expected the furor which greeted the publication of this play. On the contrary, the deleted paragraph reveals that in defamiliarizing the figure of Satan into a Manichean 'Principle' who comments on scripture from an infidel perspective, Byron courted controversy.[61]

The figure who appears in response to Cain's opening soliloquy immediately shocks the reader by indignantly denying that he tempted Eve. This disengages him from the infernal serpent, a deflection which enraged contemporary readers who saw that, unlike Milton's Satan, Lucifer neither acknowledges that he misrepresents God nor soliloquizes remorsefully like Satan on Mount Niphates.[62] In a subtler way, as well, by assuming the role of commentator on the yet unwritten Bible, this character has already moved further from the Miltonic model. Quoting Genesis, Lucifer holds forth to Cain, who, as an original recipient of Revelation, is in the position of a reader of scripture:

> LUCIFER. … and even He who thrust ye forth, so thrust ye
> Because 'ye should not eat the fruits of life,

> And become gods as we.' Were those his words?
> CAIN. They were, as I have heard from those who heard them,
> In thunder.
>
> (I.i.203–7; *Works*, VI, 238)

Lucifer deconstructs sacred writ with special insight, for he knows the heavenly record and is thus prepared to refute Genesis in advance; when Cain suggests that 'the serpent was a spirit,' Lucifer retorts that

> It is not written so on high:
> The proud One will not so far falsify,
> Though man's vast fears and little vanity
> Would make him cast upon the spiritual nature
> His own low failing. The snake was the snake –
> No more
>
> (I.i.219–24; *Works*, VI, 239)

When a mythic character comments on the story he inhabits, 'it undercuts the myth by making it self-conscious,' as David Eggenschwiler has observed of the irony in this speech.[63] Moreover, because Lucifer's reflexive commentary on Genesis emphasizes his awareness that he is dealing with mere myth, this device enables him to go on to deny both the truth and divine inspiration of Genesis, dismissing it with the blasphemer's catchword – 'fable':

> When thousand ages
> Have roll'd o'er your dead ashes, and your seed's,
> The seed of the then world may thus array
> Their earliest fault in fable, and attribute
> To me a shape I scorn.
>
> (I.i.233–7; *Works*, VI, 239–40)

Lucifer's assertion – that only 'man's vast fears' and 'vanity' have produced the preposterous supernaturalism of Satan seducing Eve – aligns his utterance with the anti-Christian tradition. His dismissal replicates not only the views of genteel infidels like Volney, Holbach, or Shelley (in his essay 'On the Devil, and Devils'), but that of the vulgarian Paine as well, who regards the 'strange fable' of the Fall and Redemption as a monument to nothing but 'the gloomy pride of man.'[64] Thus Byron deflates Genesis 3 through structural irony, as Lucifer steps out of the traditional story to deflate it in infidel terms.

The mystification of Lucifer's identity, achieved by obscuring his traditional role in this dialogue and in the preface, is an effect Byron compounds in the first two hundred lines of the first act by blurring Lucifer

with Prometheus. It is the Promethean Lucifer who trumpets the most controversial matter in Act I, starting with the attack on the silence of Genesis about immortality. At the core of Cain's metaphysical rebelliousness is his bewildered resentment over the death sentence pronounced on humanity, aggravated by his ignorance of the immortality of the soul. Seizing this opening, Lucifer immediately dons the role of the Promethean benefactor, professing his sympathy with the 'thoughts/Of dust' (I.i.100–1; *Works*, VI, 235). In addressing Cain's confusion about death, Lucifer here also takes on the stance of the commentator, an effect again amplified by the preface. Here Byron justifies his dramatic inquiry into the absence of a future state in Genesis through the precedent of the ingenious explanation offered by Warburton.[65] Neither affirming nor denying Warburton's heterodox argument, Byron merely says it is the best we can do to explain this 'extraordinary omission' (*Works*, VI, 229), thus calling attention to the gap in scripture, which Lucifer goes on to exploit. His exposure of this defect in Revelation replicates a central maneuver in infidel writing, one which Paine had popularized and Carlile had carried on: exposing the discrepancies and contradictions in scripture, then pointing out how they reflect on God. This technique is dramatized in Lucifer's Promethean delivery of the secret to Cain; the fire-bringer astonishes Cain by telling him:

> They have deceived thee; thou shalt live.
> … … … … … … …
> … think not
> The earth, which is thine outward cov'ring, is
> Existence – it will cease, and thou wilt be
> No less than thou art now.
>
> (I.i.109–19; *Works*, VI, 235–6)

In revealing this truth, Lucifer casts a sinister light on the divine guardian of the secret, an effect resembling that produced by a reading of Genesis 4 printed in *The Republican*: God provokes the jealous murder of Abel, 'and then, like a designing assassin, inquires after Abel as if he knew nothing about it.'[66] Byron's compatibly blasphemous handling of Genesis is undertaken entirely by Lucifer, while Byron coolly withdraws, ironically summing up his treatment of this episode as follows: 'I have therefore supposed it [the idea of immortality] new to Cain, without, I hope, any perversion of Holy Writ' (*Works*, VI, 229).

The most inflammatory material of the first act emerges in Lucifer's Promethean tirade against the 'Omnipotent tyrant.' As Lucifer excoriates Jehovah for disguising evil as good, it becomes clear that Byron is using his character in specific ways – most obviously, to taunt Heber again. For this speech rearranges the Manichean dualism, through which Lucifer portrays the creating God of Genesis as an evil demiurge:

> Goodness would not make
> Evil; and what else hath he made? But let him
> Sit on his vast and solitary throne,
> Creating worlds, to make eternity
> Less burthensome to his immense existence
> And unparticipated solitude …
>
> (I.i.146–51; *Works*, VI, 237)

More than any other, this speech drew hostile responses from contemporary reviewers, because Byron impudently transvalues the 'worser' and 'better' halves of Manicheism by inverting the moral hierarchy of Jehovah and Lucifer.[67] Even more outrageously, he follows Shelley closely in doing this. From the allegorical opening canto of *The Revolt of Islam*, Byron borrowed the morally inverted dualistic myth with its central supernatural figure, the Luciferean 'Great Spirit of Good,' who inspires the human struggle for liberty. To construct the content of Lucifer's Manichean blasphemy, Byron drew from *Queen Mab*, closely modeling Lucifer on Shelley's Ahasuerus.[68] But it is not only the echoes of Milton's Satan in this speech that link Byron's Lucifer with the Wandering Jew. The defiance hurled by Ahasuerus at the 'almighty tyrant,' which resembles Lucifer's tirade, is constructed, as we have seen, from a discourse of blasphemy. Byron imported many of the details of the speech of Shelley's Wandering Jew, but more important, he understood and used its general strategy. Even more starkly than the outpouring of Ahasuerus, Lucifer's outburst is designed to reveal the mythic projection of a bloodthirsty and tyrannical God. Moreover, the prophecy of the Wandering Jew – that Reason will establish the triumphant throne of Truth – is carried over in Lucifer's parting words to Cain, which encourage him to oppose the tyranny of compelled belief with the 'one good gift' arising from the Fall, the force of reason. Thus, although Pierre Bayle is often cited as a source of Byron's controversial Manicheism, it is the approach of Shelley which generated the inflammatory power of this speech.[69]

The coda to Lucifer's Manichean tirade would have amounted to blasphemous overkill had Murray not suppressed it; the last four lines blast the Atonement in advance:

> perhaps he'll make
> One day a Son unto himself – as he
> Gave you a father – and if he so doth
> Mark me! – that Son will be a Sacrifice!
>
> (I.i.163–6; *Works*,VI, 237).

The indignant tone not only communicates Byron's Socinian biases; it melds Lucifer once again with the infidel tradition, which found the

Atonement a morally repugnant element of the Christian mythology. By echoing the attacks on the Atonement by Shelley's Ahasuerus and Paine (who said the doctrine made God a vengeful murderer), Lucifer's speech thus squares with those infidel polemics that ridicule the cornerstone dogmas derived from Genesis 3.[70]

In these speeches, Lucifer's authority to undermine scripture is unchallenged; as so many of the reviewers noticed, Byron refused to create even one character capable of refuting the attacks on the divine prohibition, the Fall, and the Expulsion. Lucifer retains this authority well into the second act. In his opening speech, Lucifer begins by naming himself the Prince of the Air, then cancels his demand that Cain worship him (II.i.3; *Works*, VI, 253). Undoubtedly designed to confound the pious reader, Lucifer's reversal – '*I* will not say, / Believe in *me*, as a conditional creed / To save thee' – expresses an offensively irreligious position of Byron's day (II.i.20–3; *Works*, VI, 252). Since infidels held that religious belief is not subject to the will, it follows that faith cannot be meritorious or constitute the source of morality or salvation. Indeed, as Ursula Henriques explains, the doctrine of salvation by faith 'was felt to point to an unjust God,' which Lucifer himself proclaims when he scorns the 'edict of the other God' (II.i.6; *Works*, VI, 252), which requires faith for salvation.[71]

In the tour of Hades, Lucifer further undermines the authority of the Christian mythology. Here Byron turns Lucifer into the oracle of the cataclysm-theory of Cuvier, using the latter's work to shake up biblical cosmogony. Once again, Byron's Satanic controversialism is at first glance disarming, but finally proves explosive. Had Byron used the ideas of James Hutton, the 'infidel' Plutonist, the attack on scripture would have been transparent. Hutton's theories of a cyclic uplifting and erosion of land over a vast span of time dispensed with the idea of beginnings and ends; the attempt to square the geological record with Mosaic history is not even made. But to invoke the name of Cuvier in the preface to *Cain* probably would not unsettle the theologically conservative reader in 1821. Cuvier's work had been taken over by diluvian geologists who found his catastrophism compatible with Genesis where Hutton's Plutonism was not, chiefly because Cuvier upheld the account of the Flood.[72] What Lucifer does with Cuvier is another matter, however. In his 'poetic fiction,' as Byron ironically termed it, Lucifer de-centers the Creation, extending Cain's vision backward into deep time to reveal that Jehovah has been creating and destroying worlds for ages. Thus the explanatory power of the biblical myth is immediately compromised, for Lucifer implies that Jehovah's labors and the account of the mighty race of pre-Adamites and its fate did not get written into Genesis – all of this is, as it were, lopped off from its beginning. Asked to account for the extinction of these colossal beings, Lucifer merely replies in Cuvier's terms – that it arrived 'By a most crushing and inexorable / Destruction and disorder of the elements, / Which struck a world to chaos'

(II.ii.80–2; *Works*, VI, 262). Like the interpretation Lucifer derives from the silence of Genesis on immortality, the counter-cosmogony also represents scripture as a defective revelation.

As the second act draws to a close, Lucifer's manner toward Cain shifts again, and he increasingly bears out the role Byron assigns him in his explanatory letter to Murray. He depresses Cain by showing him 'infinite things – & his own abasement' (*BLJ*, IX, 53), especially his humiliating inferiority to the pre-Adamites:

> I show thee what thy predecessors are,
> And what they *were* thou feelest, in degree
> Inferior as thy petty feelings and
> Thy pettier portion of the immortal part
> Of high intelligence and earthly strength.
>
> (II.ii.89–93; *Works*, VI, 262)

In response Cain gradually comes to realize that Lucifer is a loveless being, capable of caring only for 'some vast and general purpose, / To which particular things must melt like snows' (II.ii.314–15; *Works*, VI, 270). Lucifer's attitude toward Cain hardens into scorn for his metaphysical aspirations, and when he finally confesses indifference to the human condition, the Promethean figure of Act I dissolves. It has been argued persuasively that in these exchanges the central ethical theme of the play emerges, displacing Cain's quarrel with Jehovah. The murder of Abel is the inevitable result of Cain's abandonment of his own humanity and his bond with Adah for the intellectualized hatred of Jehovah Lucifer has fostered in him.[73] As convincing as this reading is, it tends to disconnect the two principal thrusts of the play: its critique of biblical authority (Acts I–II) and its dramatization of an archetypal tragic event, the first murder (Act III). That is, the critique loses its impetus when Lucifer leaves the action, at which point Byron submits to the authority of the biblical model and proceeds with the fratricide and the vindication of Jehovah.[74]

To perceive what this reading obscures – how the Satanic critique of bibliolatry reverberates through the final act – involves reading Lucifer's final speech reflexively once again, as if his words were directed at Cain as a reader of the Bible. This speech enacts yet another shift in Lucifer's role, the most extreme in the play: with a climactic challenge to Jehovah, Lucifer returns once more to the blaspheming Prometheanism of Act I:

> *One good* gift has the fatal apple given –
> Your *reason*: – let it not be over-sway'd
> By tyrannous threats to force you into faith
> 'Gainst all external sense and inward feeling:

> Think and endure, – and form an inner world
> In your own bosom – where the outward fails;
> So shall you nearer be the spiritual
> Nature, and war triumphant with your own.
>
> (II.ii.459–66; *Works*, VI, 275)

Lucifer thus voices the Satanic credo, 'the mind is its own place.' In both obvious and subtle ways, of course, this speech can be regarded as inciting the rebellious murder of Abel. Few critics who view Lucifer as a purely demonic figure, however, take up this speech. It seems that most sense that this panegyric on the defiantly autonomous mind has a different thematic register – that it defends intellectual freedom. This very effect of the speech is heightened, moreover, when it is read in terms of the historical differential. Lucifer's denunciation of 'tyrannous threats to force you into faith' resonated strongly in an age when unbelief was punished harshly. Lucifer's speech is the final, culminating appeal made to Cain to resist with his mind the authority of the received word of God, to continue his skeptical refusal to 'Reconcile what I saw with what I heard' (I.i.169; *Works*, VI, 237). Yet Cain fails to achieve the intellectual liberation Lucifer sets before him, and in the third act, driven into a rage by Jehovah's theophany displaying arbitrary power, he becomes the murdering Cain of biblical myth.

Soon after the publication of *Cain*, Carlile's *Republican* increasingly began to attack Christian demonology, spurred on by Byron to mount the offensive.[75] From Dorchester Gaol Carlile wrote that this 'Atheistical poem' deals

> the Bible and its supporters … some terrible and irrecoverable blows; and the cause of Lord Byron's putting his name to such a poem, or publishing it at such a moment, cannot be doubted or misunderstood. It is a ponderous blow at superstition from his pen.[76]

Carlile's reaction to *Cain* went overboard, of course – Byron's iconoclasm is much more indirect: he never insists that Genesis is merely fabulous, as the programmatic infidel would. Yet Carlile rightly saw in the speeches of Lucifer Byron's refusal to approach the Bible as an instrument of faith and to accept its authority. But why did Byron turn to such an oblique mode of controversialism? As Marilyn Butler has observed, oppositional writing at this time was characteristically elliptical and elusive, for writers like Shelley and Peacock avoided the direct presentation of extreme positions on domestic issues not only because of their ambivalence about popular disaffection and violence, but because so few sympathetic readers existed among the literate classes. By embodying the voice of contemporary blasphemy in the figure of Lucifer, Byron actually stepped out of this mode of

'self-censorship' described by Butler, engaging matters more directly.[77] Thus, while there were real limits to what was tolerable and publishable, clearly one of Byron's aims in *Cain* was to probe them.

Examining the figure of Lucifer in the context of the blasphemy controversy identifies these functions and suggests that Byron's abrupt return to Satanic myth in 1821 was an exercise in agitational writing, guarded though it is by his ironic techniques. Through this experiment, Byron moved toward the even more combative cantos of *Don Juan* VI–IX on the Siege of Ismail and their bellicose and partisan preface. But the reception of *Cain: A Mystery* inaugurated other changes in Byron's writing as well. When he presented John Murray with the manuscript of another potentially inflammatory biblical drama, *Heaven and Earth*, the publisher objected to its content and delayed publication for nearly a year – this despite the marginal roles of fallen angels in the new drama and its relatively attenuated irreligion. During this time Byron sought publication of *Heaven and Earth* in *The Liberal*, the new journal he had launched with Shelley and Leigh Hunt. Although in the process Byron found a more receptive publisher in John Hunt, it is significant that he produced no more writing that blended religious and political controversialism. He would introduce only one more Satanic mentor into his writing – in the late unfinished play, *The Deformed Transformed*, where the role of 'the Stranger' is even more cryptically ironic than that of Lucifer. And while this work signals an ideological retreat from more confrontational writing, Byron's hostile readers appeared not to notice, for reviewers once again lobbed the charge of blasphemy at this new drama.[78] Shelley's writing fared no differently: reviews of *The Cenci* reflexively attacked its Satanic irreligion. Not only did Shelley, like Byron, decline to attack religion in his published writing after this time; both 'Adonais' and *Hellas* actually treat Christianity respectfully. If it is true, then, as Marilyn Butler asserts, that both writers were propelled into mythic forms of controversialism by the conservative political climate, it is also the case that the historical moment drove them out of this mode of writing.

# 4

# Savior and Avenger: Shelleyan Satanism and the Face of Change

> Who hesitates to destroy a venomous serpent that has crept near his sleeping friend, except the man who selfishly dreads lest the malignant reptile should turn his fury on himself? And if the poisoner has assumed a human shape, if the bane be distinguished only from the viper's venom by the excess and extent of its devastation, will the saviour and avenger here retract and pause entrenched behind the superstition of the indefeasible divinity of man?
>
> (Shelley, *The Assassins*; Julian, VI, 163)

On the walls of Sir Timothy Shelley's study at Field Place hung two pictures, an Italian print of Vesuvius erupting and a version of Christ crucified.[1] No doubt imprinted early on his son's mind, these twin images became associated at some point with opposed responses to oppression, and thus they prefigure central mythic polarities in Shelley's mature poetry and drama. The paired pictures are the earliest visual correlative for the tension generated in his writing by portrayals of forbearance and nonviolence set against explosive embodiments of overthrow and retaliation. Ideologically inflected with a divided view of social and political change, these images shape Shelley's fictional representations of passive resistance and gradualism on the one hand and the volcanic force of popular insurrection on the other. In the years through 1819, Shelley's writing embodies and advocates change in elusive ways, alternately emphasizing one or the other mode, but increasingly creating ambiguous compounds of the two. This instability is resolved only under great pressure, as a poem like 'Sonnet: England in 1819' reveals. Here Shelley suddenly transmutes the portent of a revolution – all but inevitable as the poem surveys the hopeless present – into the 'glorious Phantom' desperately envisioned in the final couplet (Reiman, p. 311).

When Shelley invokes Satanism to delineate political transformation, the different mythic figures he uses project not only his polarized conception of change, but also – as the key works of 1819 reveal – its more ambiguous forms. His early works seem less burdened with ideological conflict and reservations about violence: in *The Assassins* (1814) the Satanic Wandering Jew introduced in *Queen Mab* reappears as the apostle of tyrannicide. Here the evocation of the 'saviour and avenger,' the practitioner of philanthropic bloodshed, strangely conveys little sense of contradiction, in contrast with Shelley's subsequent attempts to portray agents of change. With *The Revolt of Islam* (1818), Shelley idealizes revolution in the figure of the Luciferean angel of the Morning Star, a Manichean God of Liberty whose redemptive agency transcends and all but excludes violence. In *Prometheus Unbound* (1820), the construction of a mythic protagonist who resembles Milton's Satan reveals Shelley's struggle for an even more delicate balance between ideological extremes. Blended into the syncretic amalgam of the Titan's portrayal, the Satanic courage never to submit or yield that inheres in Shelley's hero also contains the impulse to revenge. This latter feature of Prometheus is exhibited only to be repressed through the *psychomachia* of the opening act, a dramatic gesture that reveals Shelley's effort to purify the ethos of contemporary reformist rhetoric. Yet the results seem uncertain: in *Prometheus Unbound*, Satanic myth strains to represent change, its residual antagonism nearly overwhelming the 'beautiful idealisms of moral excellence' that animate the play (Reiman, p. 135). Shelley's lyrical drama presents first the paradoxically forbearing yet defiant Prometheus and then the *deus ex machina*, Demogorgon, whose insurrectionary violence succeeds the Titan's internal struggle.

Such an ambiguous representation of change is invoked once more in 'The Mask of Anarchy' (1819; 1832), where the diaphanous Luciferean 'Shape' ushers in a new social order, mysteriously slaying Anarchy by inspiring an awakening of the popular mind. Whereas Shelley's ballad elsewhere employs the almost belligerent rhetoric of 'ye are many,' violence is paradoxically elided in the obscure combat that overthrows Anarchy. The precarious mythic balance struck in this ballad would be the last: in the fragmentary prologue to Shelley's final published drama, *Hellas* (1821), Satanic myth again images revolution, but in a mode that reverts to traditional diabolism. Here Shelley abandons his demonic agents of change, casting Satan instead as the nemesis of the spirit of liberty in Greece.

In its representation of social and political agency, then, Shelley's Satanic mythmaking probes the enigmatic dualism pondered by his visionary persona in 'The Triumph of Life': 'why God made irreconcilable / Good and the means of good' (ll. 230–1; Reiman, p. 461). The conflicted views Shelley held of the means of achieving the social and political good emerged, of course, out of the divergent forms of political doctrine assimilated in his early years. If, as P.M.S Dawson suggests, the opposition between Godwinian gradualism and Painite revolutionary theory constitutes the

fundamental division in Shelley's early political thought, then that tension not only gives rise to the Satanic mythmaking of this period but reflects the disproportionate influence of Paine.[2] Shelley's adaptation of the martial figure of Milton's Satan, the emblem of revolution, clearly reveals the ascendancy of Paine, but this legacy is manifested in less obvious ways as well. Despite the inevitable association of the angelic light-bearer with Godwinian intellectual illumination, Shelley's Luciferean figures always function as the agents of sudden, not gradual change.

That Shelley's Satanic agents typically override Godwinian values is a striking development, yet understandable, since it was the idealization of Satan in *Political Justice* that first established this mythic figure as an icon of insurrection. Godwin's remarkably strong approbation of Satan's rebellion carried him beyond his own reading of the political situation of the 1790s and into an implicit rejection of gradualism itself. By elevating the impatient rebel who refuses to wait for the slow change in opinion to drain authority from institutions, Godwin's interpretation of Milton's Satan bypasses the central value of *Political Justice*. Thus Godwin opened the way to Shelley's representation of the fallen archangel as the spirit of revolution defiantly confronting oppressive power. It is nevertheless ironic that Godwin, the quietist, lent this impulse to Shelley's writing; he too, it seems, was of the Devil's party without knowing it.

Shelley's paradoxical use of a Godwinian Satan to jettison the theory of his mentor can be immediately discerned in his broadside, 'A Declaration of Rights' (1812), the last of the three pieces of agitational writing he produced during his brief campaign for Irish political reform in early 1812. In this republican credo deriving from two French revolutionary declarations and Paine's *Rights of Man*, the peroration shifts register, first evoking Satan's proud review of the assembled infernal host, then quoting his call to the fallen angels weltering on the burning lake (*Paradise Lost* II, ll. 571–2; p. 77; I, l. 330; p. 64):

> Man! thou whose rights are here declared, be no longer forgetful of the loftiness of thy destination. Think of thy rights; of those possessions which will give thee virtue and wisdom, by which thou mayest arrive at happiness and freedom. They are declared to thee by one who knows thy dignity, for every hour does his heart swell with honourable pride in the contemplation of what thou mayest attain, by one who is not forgetful of thy degeneracy, for every moment brings home to him the bitter conviction of what thou art.
>
> 'Awake! – arise! – or be for ever fallen.' (Julian, V, 275)

Shelley's first interventionist effort in Dublin, 'An Address to the Irish People,' had struggled to adhere to the Godwinian precepts of 'thinking, inquiring, reading, and talking' as a means of changing opinion (Julian, V,

235). But the conclusion of 'A Declaration of Rights' implicitly abandons this method and abruptly associates the subjected state of Ireland with the stupor of the fallen angels. The response demanded by this final apostrophe imbues the prospect of the Irish demanding their political rights with the image of the rebel angels rising from the burning lake to challenge heaven. The Satanic rhetoric reveals Shelley's frustrated conclusion that Godwinian gradualism is irrelevant to the political conditions in Ireland. It thus calls attention to an ideological shift, idealizing with its mythic elevation the republicanism of Shelley's second piece of political writing produced during these months, his 'Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists.'[3]

Through the Satanic apostrophe, Shelley concludes his running argument with Godwin over the practical means of reform with a gesture of self-justification, reversing the apologetic tone of his letter of 8 March 1812. Here he confesses to Godwin that his 'Address' utterly miscalculated the level of literacy of its lower-class audience, whose present intellectual capacity leaves them 'unfitted for the high destination of their nature' (*Letters*, I, 267). At the same time, the letter all but rejects as impracticable Godwin's advocacy of a process extending gradually downward through the social order to prepare the mind for institutional change. The first step toward reforming the Irish lower classes, he has discovered, involves transforming the political order itself. While responding respectfully to Godwin's warning that exhorting intellectual resistance would 'light again the flames of rebellion and war,' he is already thinking of the next stage of activism (*Letters,* I, 261).[4]

This, then, is the political and rhetorical context for the conclusion of the 'Declaration of Rights,' which focuses on the 'degeneracy' of the Irish. The Satanic rhetoric functions with historically specific reference: the collapsed Irish rebellions of 1798 and 1803 are analogized to the rout of the rebel angels in Milton's celestial war, while Shelley assumes the voice of Milton's Satan hectoring the fallen angels on the burning lake. Thus Shelley performs the role of the Satanic awakener, whose scornful harangue to his fallen companions dramatizes his sense that the Irish were supine in their political subjection. This stance is more than a means of venting his frustration with Godwin and the Irish or of reassuring himself of his own rectitude. Seven years later, in 'A Philosophical View of Reform' (1819; 1920), Shelley would at last advocate the right of a last recourse to revolution 'when all other means shall have failed.'[5] In 1812, the assumption of the mythic role of the orating Satan anticipates Shelley's acceptance, in direct argumentative prose, of this later political position.

## I. *The Assassins*, *The Revolt of Islam*, and the Luciferean 'Better Genius'

Written two years after 'A Declaration of Rights,' *The Assassins* amplifies its effects, for this fragmentary oriental romance displays not only insurrection

but political violence through Satanic myth. Blending myth and history, Shelley once again invokes the figure of the Wandering Jew, here introducing him into a narrative set in the remote past. As in *Queen Mab*, Shelley satanizes Ahasuerus, who attacks established power by hurling defiance at heaven. In that poem, Miltonic Satanism is the vehicle of an assault on the Christian mythology and state religion; in *The Assassins*, an avatar of the fallen archangel functions to intensify the critique of gradualism that began during Shelley's sojourn in Ireland. Shelley transforms the Wandering Jew into a charismatic mentor of political violence, fusing Ahasuerus with Hasan e-Sabah, leader in Islamic legend of the splinter group of the eleventh and twelfth centuries that relied for its survival on strategic political murders. When he abandoned the work, Shelley was at the point of making Ahasuerus an apologist for philanthropic violence, preparing to put into his mouth an apologia for the murder of tyrants. The impending conflict between an uninhibited treatment of tyrannicide and Shelley's ideal of passive resistance was the fundamental reason this work was never completed.

In Shelley's narrative, a group of heretical Christian Arabs leave Jerusalem under the threat of persecution, escaping the fall of the city in 70 A.D. to establish a paradisal community in a valley hidden in the mountains of Lebanon. Either out of mistake or in a deliberate blurring of historical information, Shelley named his primitive Christians after the Islamic sect that flourished in Persia during the Crusades.[6] He perplexes matters further by aligning the group's version of Christianity with Gnosticism and by representing the Assassins' mode of *gnosis* as Godwinian anarchism. The group's identity is formed by its 'intrepid spirit of inquiry' and its 'contempt for human institutions,' and it is this radical intellectual autonomy that has led the Assassins to the truths of benevolence and justice taught by Christ (Julian, VI, 155–6). It is not by embracing the passive ethic of forbearance and forgiveness, however, that Assassins will earn martyrdom. When the greatest social good is desired, the rigorous Utilitarianism of the group allows no scruples about violence. Consequently their acts are misunderstood by the 'slavish multitude,' who would rank an Assassin 'among the vilest and most atrocious criminals' (Julian, VI, 163). Thus, as if Shelley's narrator were to take on the voice of Rivers in Wordsworth's *The Borderers* (1796–97), an apology for political violence as the instrument of the sect's crusade against tyranny enters the tale. It begins with a reproach to Godwin, deploring the willingness of 'the subject of regular governments' to obey authority:

> the religion of an Assassin imposes other virtues than endurance, when his fellow-men groan under tyranny, or have become so bestial and abject that they cannot feel their chains. … The perverse, and vile, and vicious – what were they? Shapes of some unholy vision, moulded by the spirit of Evil, which the sword of the merciful destroyer should

> sweep from this beautiful world. Dreamy nothings; phantasms of misery and mischief, that hold their death-like state on glittering thrones. … No Assassin would submissively temporize with vice, and in cold charity become a pander to falsehood and desolation. His path through the wilderness of civilized society would be marked with the blood of the oppressor and the ruiner. (Julian, VI, 164)

The phantasmal lives of individual tyrants are inconsequential; to think otherwise is to fall prey to the superstition of the 'indefeasible divinity of man' that prevents the 'saviour and avenger' from demonstrating to the multitude that the human form is in certain cases only a badge for the 'prerogative' of power (Julian, VI, 163–4). This is strangely reinforced by the only conventionally Gnostic premise in the narrative – that human tyrants and by implication presumably all bodily existence are illusory material shapes molded by the Spirit of Evil. The work of this demiurge is to be destroyed by the saving avenger who enacts the will of the God beyond this world.

The fragmentary tale contains no episodes that enact this turbulent political and religious agenda; the acts of tyrannicide are projected into the remote future, while Shelley's narrative hovers over the centuries of isolation, during which the 'active virtue' of the Christian inhabitants of Bethzatanai lies dormant (Julian, VI, 164). The chapters Shelley completed are the prologue, then, to the arrival, some 600 years after the fall of Jerusalem, of the figure who will actualize the potential violence of the hidden valley, catalyzing the explosive reaction between the Assassins and the outside world ruled by the spirit of Evil.[7] In this way, apparently, Shelley was preparing to resolve the conflict between two diverging mythic figures: after Christ recedes in the religion of the Assassins as the centuries pass, he is eclipsed by a Satanic apostle of libertarian violence.

The Wandering Jew enters the narrative when a young Assassin named Albedir overhears him declaiming against 'the great tyrant.' Impaled on the branches of a cedar, menaced by a vulture, and orating to his grand foe, Ahasuerus prefigures in this portrayal the suffering Prometheus in Shelley's lyrical drama of 1819. In his charismatic appeal that magically inspires the love and mercy of Albedir, moreover, the Wandering Jew anticipates that association between the Titan and moral regeneration Shelley would later develop. But these qualities are overridden by the vengeful passion and aggression that dominate the speech of Shelley's Wandering Jew – emotions that would be muted in Prometheus are only intensified here. As Ahasuerus associates himself with the serpent ('Triumph to the worm whom he tramples'), his self-portrayal seems increasingly formed from a demonic template. In *Queen Mab*, the Wandering Jew laments the curse of eternal life, but in this new context, his complaint is replaced by the exultant boast that God cannot destroy him. His gaze expressing 'the serenity of an immortal power, the collected energy of a deathless mind,' Ahasuerus

all but claims the autogeny voiced by Milton's Satan. The Wandering Jew professes himself the rival of God, whom he pledges to overthrow in a second celestial war: 'Thou createst – 'tis mine to ruin and destroy. – I was thy slave – I am thine equal, and thy foe. – Thousands tremble before thy throne, who, at my voice, shall dare to pluck the golden crown from thine unholy head' (Julian, VI, 165–6).

In the unfinished fourth chapter, the narrative breaks off in an episode that embellishes the Assassins' Gnostic faith with a Satanist aura. When the daughter of Albedir summons a snake by singing to it, 'it leaped into her bosom, and she crossed her fair hands over it, as if to cherish it there' (Julian, VI, 171). The Assassins are thus revealed as ophite Gnostics, whose veneration of the serpent was a feature of their inverted dualist theology; hence the name of the valley of the Assassins, Bethzatanai – the 'house of Satan.'[8] The truncated narrative of this work thus shows the beginnings of Shelley's mature syncretic method: the ophite cultists are predisposed by their practices to revere the demonic immortal who comes to them. Under his tutelage and worshiping the Luciferean God beyond the world, they will wage a holy war against his evil antagonist. Shelley seems to have meant to fuse Ahasuerus with the Old Man of the Mountain, the legendary name of several Assassin leaders; these charismatic figures (one of whom possessed a supernatural aura) engineered the murders of enemies of the sect.[9] The objectives of Shelley's Assassins are more expansive, involving world-wide revolution. The invective aimed at the 'great tyrant' is meant to inspire the struggle of the Assassins with the earthly avatars of the spirit of Evil, waging war to liberate all men who 'groan under tyranny.'

This new structure of myth enables Shelley to begin to explore the ethical basis of tyrannicide, thus anticipating the position he takes in the 'Essay on Christianity' (1817; 1859). In this essay, written perhaps three years later, Shelley defends the murderers of Julius Caesar, justifying the act on the grounds of social utility (Julian, VII, 101). From a similar ethical basis Shelley may have wished to idealize in his romance of 1814 the most notable assassin of his day: John Bellingham, who murdered Prime Minister Spencer Perceval on 12 May 1812.[10] If so, Shelley was not the only one disposed to mythicize Bellingham. Because he displayed dignity at his trial and execution and maintained that he acted to defend the poor against their oppressors, Bellingham acquired legendary stature, awing even Southey. Whether or not Shelley had this latter-day Assassin in mind, through the portrayal of his violent idealists he appears to have set out to refute Godwin's view that the practice of tyrannicide morally infects the community of reformers: 'in the midst of plots and conspiracies, there is neither truth, nor confidence, nor love, nor humanity.'[11]

In *The Assassins*, Shelley's resistance to Godwinian gradualism comes to a head. His flurry of activity in Ireland in 1812 as propagandist, orator, and organizer of reformist associations had been suspended abruptly. Godwin

responded by accusing Shelley of perverting the principles of *Political Justice* and potentially setting reform back – sowing the seeds of violence by forcing change through the instrument of the mob. In his replies to Godwin's letters, Shelley not only pointed to the stupefying poverty of the Irish; he also confessed his doubts about the 'Omnipotence of Truth' itself, suggesting a deepening disagreement about the sufficient means of social change (*Letters*, I, 277).[12] In the fictional mode of *The Assassins*, the gap opens further. Displaced into the voice of Shelley's Satanic avenger is a reply to the threat, implicit in Godwin's letters, to disown his disciple.

The Gnostic dualism emerging in *The Assassins* is amplified in *The Revolt of Islam*, but in this new mythic narrative of change, political violence is almost entirely suppressed. Instead, in response to the troubling political circumstances of the first two years after Waterloo, Satanism is incorporated into a larger dualistic structure that idealizes revolution. In her study of mythmaking in the Shelley–Peacock circle, Marilyn Butler explains the attraction dualistic religions held for second-generation Romantic writers. Two decades after the French revolution, the linear paradigm of perfectibility no longer seemed to correspond to historical developments or answer to the collective experience of this group. The cyclical structure of Zoroastrianism could be more readily adapted, allowing the writer to prophesy the end of an era of oppression: 'in the fullness of time, by historical Necessity, Ahriman must give way to Ormusd again.'[13] The appeal of this form of myth only intensified with Waterloo and the subsequent unrest in Britain – the bleak years of 1816–17, which saw the Spa Fields riot, the suspension of habeas corpus, and the Seditious Meetings bill.

Composed during this period, *The Revolt of Islam* exhibits Shelley's interest in adapting the Two Principles to an 'age of despair': the mythic narrative introduced in the first canto and completed in the last constructs a dualistic frame for his story of the failed revolution in the Golden City. Yet Shelley's poem does not employ this myth merely to take the long view, displacing the triumph of liberty into the remote future. The preface to *The Revolt of Islam* assumes that its readers already understand and accept this futurist premise, and Shelley's rhetorical efforts in the first and final cantos of the poem involve using that acceptance to mold opinion about the present. Precisely when revolutionary poetry would be least palatable to middle-class readers, Shelley fashions a personification of the struggle for liberty and installs the principle as one of two rival 'Gods' – the Luciferean 'Spirit of Good.' He employs this defamiliarized myth of Satan not so much to prophesy the Fall of the Evil Principle – about which event the poem is actually reticent – as to allay the anxieties of liberal readers who saw in the turmoil of 1816–17 the portent of calamitous social upheaval. The myth Shelley fashions gives revolution a benign face, by dismantling and remaking the conservative Satanic iconography of the post-Waterloo era. In place of the collective menace evoked in Robert Southey's

prophetic cry that popular agitators are 'the Devil, whose name is Legion,' the mythic frame for *The Revolt of Islam* unveils the spirit behind that unrest, the Luciferean 'better Genius of this world's estate.'[14]

This ambitious revision of the myth is mediated to the reader through one of Shelley's more oblique symbolic narratives. In despair over the collapse of the French revolution, Shelley's narrator ascends a mountain overlooking the sea. Here he witnesses, on the heels of a thunderstorm, an emblematic aerial combat, an 'Eagle and a Serpent wreathed in fight' (l. 193; Hutchinson, p. 42). After a day-long struggle, the eagle drops the serpent into the sea and wings away. Descending to the shore, the narrator finds a solitary woman, who has watched the combat in tears. In this episode, which reinvokes the ophidian mythology introduced in *The Assassins*, the serpent answers the woman's summons and leaves the water for the haven of her bosom. To the baffled narrator, the woman offers to explain the significance of the struggle if he will undertake with them a voyage to the other-worldly Temple of the Spirit.

During their journey, the woman relates a mythological history of the world, elaborating Volney's view, first taken up in *Queen Mab*, that the gods exist as psychological projections. In that earlier context Jehovah appears as an externalization of cruel passions; Shelley's new narrative expands the projective typology by matching the 'Spirit of Evil' with its Luciferean antagonist, the Morning Star. Objectified as a 'blood-red Comet and the Morning Star / Mingling their beams in combat' (ll. 356–7; Hutchinson, p. 46), the Two Principles originate as psychological forces, coeval with the birth of human consciousness. 'When life and thought / Sprang forth, they burst the womb of inessential Nought,' struggling for dominion in the realms of human dreams, thought, language, and poetry (ll. 350–1; Hutchinson, p. 46).[15] Already ascendant in prehistory, the Comet gains power through the ages by transforming 'the starry shape, beauteous and mild' of his adversary,

> And the great Spirit of Good did creep among
> The nations of mankind, and every tongue
> Cursed and blasphemed him as he passed; for none
> Knew good from evil, though their names were hung
> In mockery o'er the fane where many a groan,
> As King, and Lord, and God, the conquering Fiend did own, –
>
> (ll. 368, 373–8; Hutchinson, p. 46)

It is difficult to understand how this offensive inversion of God and the Satanic serpent escaped the fate of the 63 lines Shelley was forced to soften or cancel before Charles Ollier republished the poem. The explosive passage is a Gnostic revision of Satan's forced metamorphosis into a serpent in *Paradise Lost* 10.504–84 and the episode in Genesis 3:14 from which Milton's image is derived.[16]

Thus far the opening canto resembles the familiar Shelleyan exercise in blaspheming myth-deconstruction discussed in Chapter 3 – an inverted treatment of the Two Principles designed to unmask the process by which sacred myth is manipulated to reinforce established power. Through the iconoclastic maneuver that strips the demonic guise from the serpent, though, the dualistic myth assumes a new rhetorical function. It is used to present history in terms of the broad, universalizing paradigms Shelley would later invoke in 'A Defence of Poetry,' 'A Philosophical View of Reform,' and *Hellas*. As the woman's story surveys the cycles of history, it portrays the opposition of the Two Principles as the perpetual struggle of Liberty against Tyranny.[17] The first illustration is the historical matrix of Athenian democracy, embodied in the serpent, rising like Milton's Satan from the fiery gulf to resume the dubious battle with the powers of heaven. In a mythic portrayal of what Shelley regarded as the first surge of the libertarian spirit in history, the snake

> Sprang from the billows of the formless flood,
> Which shrank and fled; and with that Fiend of blood
> Renewed the doubtful war … Thrones then first shook,
> And earth's immense and trampled multitude,
> In hope on their own powers began to look

(ll. 399–404; Hutchinson, p. 47)

Their hearts inflamed by the fiery breath of this 'Power of holiest name,' the 'bards and sages' of Greece were inspired by the first uprising of the serpent (ll. 406, 410; Hutchinson, p. 47). Repeated 'oft in cycles since,' the struggle of eagle and serpent has forced history to assume a dialectical pattern, sufficiently progressive that Waterloo can be declared a pyrrhic triumph for the 'victor Fiend,' 'an impulse swift and sure to his approaching end' (ll. 411, 429, 432; Hutchinson, pp. 47–8).

Shelley completes his radical reconception of the Luciferean Spirit by eroticizing this figure. The woman recollects her conversion to the cause of Liberty and its inception in a dream-vision, wherein the Morning Star assumed an angelic 'shape of speechless beauty':

> It stood like light on a careering stream
> Of golden clouds which shook the atmosphere;
> A wingèd youth, his radiant brow did wear
> The Morning Star.

(ll. 497–501; Hutchinson, p. 49)

Like the poet of *Alastor*, Shelley's woman projects in dream her form of human perfection, 'the ideal prototype of every thing excellent or lovely that

we are capable of conceiving as belonging to the nature of man' (Julian, VI, 202). In contrast to the inward focus of the erotic quest in the earlier poem, desire turns outward, for the love inspired by the angelic figure is entirely philanthropic, bound up with the ideal prototype of freedom.[18] Inspired by her 'demon lover' (as Shelley glossed the apparition on the manuscript page), the woman commits herself to the cause of the French revolution, where she has 'braved death for liberty and truth' (l. 519; Hutchinson, p. 50).[19]

Shelley's mythic conception of the Morning Star, which enables him to associate the unfallen angelic light-bearer with social and political transformation, has received less critical attention than his Promethean typology. Yet the trope of the Luciferean awakener may be more persistent in Shelley's writing than the presence of the Titan. It appears remarkably early: one of the poems of *The Esdaile Notebook* (1813), 'The Crisis' terminates in a vision of the change that must arise in the 'consummating hour,' which shall occur, paradoxically, just when Tyranny consolidates its power: only then will the 'votaries of virtue' behold 'the renovating day-star / Gild the horizon.'[20] Shelley's allegorical narrative anticipates this moment by reconfiguring the current political mythology, emphatically cancelling the equation made in post-Waterloo writing between popular unrest and Satanic evil. The tactic of Southey and Coleridge was consistently to alarm readers by holding up the still fearsomely demonic figure of Napoleon and remind them that he was after all the final product of the Jacobin 1790s. Coleridge added the warning that current popular agitation was reviving the very culture that produced Napoleon. The typology of *The Statesman's Manual* (1816), as we have seen, interprets Napoleon as the abstracted, amoral will, the Satanic consciousness born of the rational selfishness and atheism of Jacobin France. Quoting the conclusion of Satan's soliloquy on Mount Niphates ('evil, be thou my good'), Coleridge turns this phrase into the motto of the human self produced by French revolutionary culture.[21]

Coleridge's lay sermon was published in December 1816; Southey's 'Parliamentary Reform,' which appeared in the *Quarterly Review* just as Shelley was beginning to draft the first canto of *The Revolt of Islam*, used the Satanic trope in similar fashion. Deploring the English assimilation of French influence, Southey assails both the Whigs and the radical reformers for their adulation of the French 'Lucifer of the age risen above the horizon.' Both groups, Southey notes, had apologized for the atrocities of Napoleon while opposing Britain's war with France. In the conclusion of this article, Southey attacks the reformers' apotheosis of the popular will: '*Vox Populi, Vox Dei.*' 'But it is the Devil whose name is Legion', the poet laureate responds, cataloguing the recurrent manifestations of evil in the mob – those who did the Devil's work in the Gordon Riots and the Reign of Terror, or who demanded the death of Socrates and the crucifixion of Christ.[22]

The influence of this demonic trope was extensive: even a liberal poet like Thomas Moore, whose *Lalla Rookh* (1817) also appeared just before

Shelley began his poem, linked popular rebellion with a monstrous Satanic avatar.[23] Moore's first narrative, 'The Veiled Prophet of Khorassan,' offers few internal clues to identify Mokanna, the leader of a failed rebellion. But the suicide of Mokanna seems meant to recall the fate of Wolfe Tone, who took his life in prison after the collapse of the Irish rebellion of 1798. Whatever specific associations this episode forms, Mokanna's demonic portrayal generally operates in tandem with the prophetic mythmaking of Southey and Coleridge, and it has, like theirs, an admonitory function. In this case, Moore's emblematic narrative specifically warns those Irish readers yet attracted to the French revolutionary ideology that pulled them under in 1798 and again in 1803. The prophet poisons his followers and then unveils himself, in an 'allegorical exposé,' Nigel Leask suggests, of 'the true face of Jacobinism.'[24] Shelley's beautiful angel of the morning is meant to eclipse Moore's hideous Mokanna and the entire typology constructed by the other two writers. It is not *vox populi* that incarnates the ubiquitous Spirit of Evil, but 'The Fiend, whose name was Legion,' among whose servants are 'Fear, Hatred, Faith, and Tyranny' (ll. 379, 386; Hutchinson, p. 46). Countering this myth of social and political evil, Shelley's Luciferean Spirit of Good embodies 'in each bosom of the multitude / Justice and truth' warring with 'Custom's hydra brood,' armed by 'free thoughts' and the 'host of hopes' that arise 'when mankind doth strive / With its oppressors in a strife of blood' (ll. 415–22; Hutchinson, p. 47).

Only at this point does Shelley's mythic narrative incorporate revolutionary violence instead of displacing it. And as the narrative proceeds, the rhetorical emphasis falls increasingly on the idealization of the Great Spirit, by proclaiming its transcendent existence. Canto I ends with the spectacular Temple scene of the polar paradise and the theophany of the Luciferean Genius, who enters to preside over 'the mighty Senate' of 'The Great, who had departed from mankind' (ll. 605–6; Hutchinson, p. 52). In his review of *The Revolt of Islam*, Leigh Hunt recognized Shelley's revision of the central infernal episode of *Paradise Lost* X (ll. 441–52; pp. 530–1), the apparition of the enthroned figure,

> Fairer than tongue can speak or thought may frame,
> The radiance of whose limbs rose-like and warm
> Flowed forth, and did with softest light inform
> The shadowy dome, the sculptures, and the state
> Of those assembled shapes – with clinging charm
> Sinking upon their hearts and mine. He sate
> Majestic, yet most mild – calm yet compassionate.
>
> (ll. 633–9; Hutchinson, p. 53)[25]

In this adaptation of the return to hell of Milton's archangel and his luminous materialization in Pandemonium, Shelley's androgynous president of

the immortals finally appears as a composite figure, Satan blended with the radiant Lucifer to fashion the image of the benevolent libertarian power.

Shelley's intended audience, Michael Scrivener suggests, was the readers of *The Examiner* and other liberal journals; they constituted the intellectual elite Shelley meant to recruit as leaders of the revolution that he saw as inevitable at this time.[26] What were these readers meant to find in the narrative proper of *The Revolt of Islam*, however, where the revolution is overthrown and a reinstalled tyranny poisons society and nature? When the narrative reaches its nadir – the martyrdom of the revolutionary leaders, delivered up by the people and burned at the stake – Shelley's '*beau ideal* as it were of the French Revolution' seems barely discernible (*Letters*, I, 564). Whatever complex rhetorical practices of self-interrogation we may find in this denouement, his first readers were likely to see in the counter-revolution in the Golden City a dystopic double vision blending the repression of the post-Waterloo years in England with the atrocities of the 1790s.[27] In *The Revolt of Islam*, Shelley's allegedly weak grasp on the actual seems too strong: the episodes of famine and imprisonment and the arming of the rebels with pikes (reportedly born in the Spa Fields riots as well as in the Pentridge uprising of June 1817) fully embed his story in the disturbing social and economic realities of 1816–17. As if documenting those conditions, Shelley's narrative turns the power of Othman, tyrant of the Golden City, into an image of the success of the state in suppressing unrest in 1817.

That the revolutionary leadership of both Laon and Cythna seems to lead to the re-establishment of tyranny does not suggest, though, that Shelley's poem amounts to a critique of his own poetic interventionism.[28] The latter is reinforced by the mythic narrative of the last canto, which extends and develops the theophany in the temple that began in Canto I. Drafted in September 1817, between Pentridge and the treason trials and executions of Brandreth, Ludlam, and Turner, the final episode only heightens Shelley's oppositional myth. Amid these events, the concluding symbolism of *The Revolt of Islam* exceeds in loftiness even the gesture of resistance he would soon offer in 'An Address to the Nation on the Death of Princess Charlotte' (1817), where the Princess is transmuted into the dead and resurrected form of Liberty herself. Mythically associating popular unrest with a divine source, the revelation of the Great Spirit places the tragic events in the Golden City in a larger cosmological context. In the final canto, the newly martyred Laon and Cythna arrive at the Temple of the Spirit, described as

> the seat
> Of that star-shining spirit, whence is wrought,
> The strength of its dominion, good and great,
> The better Genius of this world's estate.
>
> (ll. 4721–4; Hutchinson, p. 153)

Shelley's angel of the morning, it is true, is not *vox populi*; he is the genius of the elite leadership that acts in history, the unacknowledged legislators now enthroned in the Temple. Yet this distinction, like the other aspects of the remade myth, seems intended to place the Spirit of Good on a plane above the reach of conservative myth-wielding propaganda. Anticipating the Plotinian apotheosis of 'Adonais' and its socially defensive function, these lines proclaim that Laon, Cythna, and all who are so martyred make their way back to Lucifer because he is the Power from which every struggle for liberation emanates and to which it returns.

The idealized framing episode places the narrative of the Revolution in the Golden City under the aegis of a mythic figure who functions much like the voice of the Devil in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Both works use demonic myth to present history as the record of the massive subjugation of libertarian desire, its identity disguised by forms of opinion manipulated to uphold institutions. To produce this effect Shelley twice inverts the Miltonic episode of the metamorphosis of Satan, incorporating it into his larger dualistic structure.[29] By radically altering a central mythic figure, the allegorical frame of *The Revolt of Islam* seeks to reform opinion and deflect the fear of readers that the rioting and repression of 1816–17 heralded a return to the worst of the 1790s. In Shelley's defamiliarizing portrayal, the aggressive image of Milton's Satan is displaced by that of the majestically calm and mild Lucifer. This substitution reverses the function of the myth seen in 'A Declaration of Rights' and *The Assassins*, where it embodied an ethos of belligerent resistance. Satanic myth now serves, paradoxically enough, to reassure by removing the threatening aspect of revolution.

## II. *Prometheus Unbound*, 'The Mask of Anarchy,' and the Shape of 'unimagined change'

Shelley sustains this effort in *Prometheus Unbound*, incorporating Satanic myth into the political vision he raises to the level of 'beautiful idealisms' offered to the 'highly refined imaginations of the more select classes of poetical readers' (Reiman, p. 135). Yet the emblematic function of Prometheus is more complicated than that of the Great Spirit of Good: the figure of the Titan is an image mediating the increasing ambivalence with which Shelley envisioned the means of political and social change after 1817. The center of this concern is found in the syncretic construction of the Titan, where Shelley merges Prometheus with Milton's Satan through allusions that emphasize the violent rhetoric of the latter. By satanizing Prometheus, Shelley produces an unstable mythic compound displaying his dual efforts – to incorporate into the hero the portent of insurrectionary vengeance while refining it into the shape of 'some unimagined change,' as the preface phrases it, in social conditions (Reiman, p. 134).

In the preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, Shelley seems determined to head off a Satanist reading of his drama, thereby signaling his awareness that the Miltonic aspect of his protagonist is rhetorically too volatile. Distinguishing sharply between the moral qualities of Milton's Satan and Prometheus, he appears to separate the elements composing the figure of his protagonist. To justify his free handling of the mythic subject matter, Shelley explains that he chose not to restore Aeschylus's lost play, 'because in truth I was averse from a catastrophe so feeble as that of reconciling the Champion with the Oppressor of mankind.' This defect in the received story would have moved him to rewrite *Paradise Lost* instead and substitute a superior embodiment of heroic resistance to authority, Satan. But Shelley goes on to imply that the 'taints of ambition, envy, revenge, and a desire for personal aggrandisement' in 'the only imaginary being resembling Prometheus' moved him to abandon this choice. These liabilities in the 'Hero of *Paradise Lost*' led him back to the Greek myth – or rather its possible representational power once stripped of the Aeschylean reconciliation. In these well-known phrases, Shelley describes the figure he refined by transforming Aeschylus: 'Prometheus is, as it were, the type of the highest perfection of moral and intellectual nature, impelled by the purest and truest motives to the best and noblest ends' (Reiman, p. 133).

Shelley's description of the essence he extracted from the myth of Prometheus appears uncomplex and flatly superlative when compared with the complicated figure he presents in his lyrical drama, who presents no such monolithic moral identity. Moreover, the distinctions he draws do not succeed in separating, after the fact, the two mythic figures fused in the drama largely completed by mid-April of 1819, when he began drafting this section of the preface.[30] The Titan's aggression and defiance, the Satanic features Shelley grafted onto the figure of Prometheus in a dense texture of allusions to *Paradise Lost*, are too firmly embedded in his portrayal. Masking over this blasphemous synthesis, the rhetoric of the preface tries to defang the play in order to insure its publication – a concern heightened in the author after *Laon and Cythna* was suppressed and he was forced to revise the poem.

The preface also reveals Shelley's growing interest in predetermining the reception of the work among the select classes of readers he wanted to reach. The implied audience is the same small subset of the British reading public which *The Revolt of Islam* addressed – the liberal readers Shelley saw as an elite capable of effecting reform. To this audience Shelley again presented a mythic vision of renewal, defamiliarizing and idealizing the face of change.[31] Amid the post-Waterloo demonizing of revolution and reform, however, the Satanic lineaments of Prometheus – more prominent than those of the Great Spirit of Good – could hardly be declared openly without subverting his function as an auspicious emblem of political transformation. Hence the distinctions of the preface, which disclose the affinities between Prometheus and Satan while denying their identity: the preface

suggests that the dramatic treatment of the protagonist subordinates his Satanic features to his Promethean 'perfection.'

What elements of the political scene required a mythic representation that emphasized such careful distinctions? Shelley's adaptations of dualistic myth, as we have seen, competed with other forms of political writing that embodied change in order to influence or resist the process. But after 1817 this field was growing more crowded. Although the mythic rhetoric in *The Revolt of Islam* is calibrated to counterbalance the conservative prophets of the post-Waterloo political scene, Shelley at this time was already under pressure to respond as well to the radical reformers, whose influence on the lower classes alarmed him. Writing to Byron on 20 November 1816, he notes 'the importance which the violence of demagogues has assumed' and dreads the prospect of a revolution because it would put these 'illiterate' men in power (*Letters*, I, 513). While the revolution presented in *The Revolt of Islam*, with its aristocratic leadership, may be a response to that dread, Shelley is forced after 1817 to contend more directly with the rising power of plebeian radicalism. 'A Proposal for Putting Reform to the Vote' (1817) was written as a first effort to outflank this group. From this time forward, the 'demagogue' who most complicates Shelley's political vision is William Cobbett, whose influential journalism Shelley both detested and admired.

While the stances of both writers show convergence on some of the central political and economic issues of the day, Shelley saw in Cobbett an opportunist whose rhetoric relied heavily on class antagonism – threatening the aristocracy with the revenge of the disenfranchised classes, especially the laboring poor.[32] Although Shelley's reaction is distorted, he does not seriously misrepresent Cobbett, who responded to the suspension of habeas corpus in 1817 by railing at the unreformed Parliament: 'Let them stop while yet there is time; or, let them not expect a tear of pity for them or for their children, in that day when even-handed justice shall give them back measure for measure.'[33] In the issues of the *Political Register* Shelley received in Italy after early 1818, Cobbett regularly catalogued the wounds borne by the unrepresented poor. He just as frequently exhorted his readers to anticipate the moment when 'their perseverance and valour' would be 'rewarded by a recovery of their rights and by the power of inflicting deep marks of just vengeance on their base and cruel oppressors.'[34]

In 1812 Shelley was comfortable simply denouncing Cobbett as a 'dastard & a time server' with 'no humanity' (*Letters*, I, 318), but by the time he was writing *Prometheus Unbound*, his view of the man was less fixed. In January 1819 he describes Cobbett as a powerful 'genius … combined with the most odious moral qualities'; by June of that year, Shelley's conflicted view has grown more positive: writing again to Peacock, he exclaims that 'Cobbet [*sic*] still more & more delights me, with all my horror at the sanguinary commonplaces of his creed' (*Letters*, II, 75, 99). Shelley could not dismiss Cobbett by simply demonizing him; perhaps

more than any single feature on the political landscape of the late Regency, Cobbett's journalism illuminates the thematic and rhetorical shifts in Shelley's political writing after 1817. Inevitably Shelley found himself pulled toward the aggression of Cobbett, as the tonal instability of 'A Philosophical View of Reform' indicates.[35] But from 1818 to late 1819, he also responded by advocating, with increasing urgency, passive resistance and the repression of 'Revenge, retaliation, atonement' (Reiman, p. 240). For Shelley's rhetorical aims grew to include containing Cobbett by assimilating the spirit of resistance he exhibited, while imaginatively countering his habitual appeal to the vengeance of the oppressed classes.

*Prometheus Unbound* reflects these ideological pressures, however much the abstractness of this drama resists and even repels contextualizing commentary. Notwithstanding Carl Woodring's dry observation, 'We do not like to meet Castlereagh in *Prometheus Unbound*,' we may encounter there at least the shadow cast by William Cobbett.[36] To do so requires seeing more representational scope in the central idealism of *Prometheus Unbound*, the transformative suffering of the bound Titan, who renounces vengeance while maintaining his defiance of Jupiter. Kenneth Neill Cameron's equation of Prometheus with the intellectual vanguard of the reformers – the same liberal elite Shelley addressed in his esoteric poems and political essays – seems too narrow a reading of Shelley's political myth, at least in terms of its reference to social class.[37] The idea of that group undergoing the purgation of Prometheus is incongruous: did Shelley really believe that they were a danger to the cause of political reform, beset with the compulsion to take revenge on their oppressors? Shelley's inflection of Satanic antagonism into the voice of Prometheus appears rather to introduce the discordant element of radical reform, in order to make the emblematic Titan embody a broader spectrum of the social will to change.

Thus Shelley's lyrical drama mythically incorporates Cobbett, transforming the sanguinary commonplaces of his creed into an idealism of political resistance, paradoxically antagonistic and forbearing, freed of the impulse to revenge. The Satanic features infused into the Titan establish him as an embodiment of opposition that contains the benevolent antagonist derived from Godwin and developed in the essay 'On the Devil, and Devils.' At the same time, Shelley's drama brings to the foreground and modifies the vengeful, declamatory voice of the Wandering Jew of *Queen Mab* and *The Assassins*. This process is dramatically initiated when Prometheus, after 3000 years of torture, suddenly recoils from his imagined satisfaction of triumph in Jupiter's eventual overthrow.

To emphasize this affective change in the Titan is consistent with the widely-held critical view that the first act of *Prometheus Unbound* is a mythic *psychomachia*. In the internalized conflict, Jupiter exists as a projection of the consciousness of Prometheus; when the Titan retracts the ancient curse and pities Jupiter, he achieves a moral self-purification that removes the tyrant's

source of power. However, this view needs to incorporate one important distinction. According to many readings of the play that apply psychodramatic premises to Shelley's handling of myth, the inner conflict of Act I is viewed as the complete purgation of the antagonistic Satanic element from the hero, replacing it with the redemptive, Christ-like qualities of pity and forgiveness.[38] Yet not only before but after the retraction of the curse, Shelley's champion of humanity is more than a figure who merely pledges forbearance to a shadow projected by his mind. Throughout the opening act, he embodies the Satanic powers of 'courage and majesty and firm and patient opposition to omnipotent force' – those values which the Prometheus of Aeschylus ultimately abandoned (Reiman, p. 133). These stand out in the Titan's speeches throughout the first act, repeatedly inflected with the rebellious, scornful anger that is one of the self-proclaimed virtues of Milton's Satan. This latter quality, unattractive to many readers of the play, is mingled with the sense of justice and benevolence that inspires the Titan's defense of humankind.[39]

In the unregenerate Prometheus, these Satanic features unbalance his utterance – for example, his bitter yet self-exulting apostrophe to Jupiter, uttered as he surveys his own 'empire,'

> More glorious far than that which thou surveyest
> From thine unenvied throne, O Mighty God!
> Almighty, had I deigned to share the shame
> Of thine ill tyranny, and hung not here
> Nailed to this wall of eagle-baffling mountain
>
> (I. 16–20; Reiman, p. 136)

This stance, which blends in an echo of Satan's rejection of external authority ('Better to reign in Hell') may be said to carry appropriate denunciatory force. Yet a similar note of scorn, drawn from Satan's retort to the angelic guard, sounds almost misplaced when it enters Prometheus' complaint to the Earth that his plea to repeat the curse is ignored: 'Know ye not me, / The Titan? he who made his agony / The barrier to your else all-conquering foe' (I. 117–19; Reiman, p. 139)?[40] Embedded in these lines as well is the posture of the self-sacrificing sole defender assumed by Milton's Satan, who asks rhetorically in the Council of Hell who will envy him, exposed 'Foremost to stand against the thunderer's aim / Your bulwark.' (*Paradise Lost* II, ll. 28–9, p. 92).

Satanic allusion here is the medium of an accusatory rhetoric, voicing the myopic, despair-induced rage of the victim who is 'eyeless in hate' (I.9; Reiman, p. 36). And this is not an exclusively aristocratic or elitist anger; it seems to evoke equally the 'ferocity and thoughtlessness' that Shelley found in the lower classes of revolutionary France (Hutchinson, p. 33). The vengeful anger of Prometheus rises to its highest point as he contemplates the ima-

gined satisfaction of Jupiter's subjection, dragged before him 'to kiss the blood / From these pale feet, which then might trample thee / If they disdained not such a prostrate slave' (I. 50–2; Reiman, p. 137). At this pivotal point, the visions of the future beheld by Cobbett and Prometheus converge: both focus on the moment when tyrannical power becomes vulnerable to retaliatory violence. In the Titan's speech, though, the anticipated 'power of inflicting deep marks of just vengeance' is refused when Prometheus voices pity.

The soliloquy seems designed, then, to recast the terms of Cobbett's promise that the (Promethean) perseverance of the poor is to be rewarded on the day when scores will be settled. Yet in the drama that follows the retraction of the curse, the Titan's language continues with its blend of forbearance and antagonism. Refusing the terms of reconciliation with Jupiter offered by Mercury, Prometheus unselfishly affirms his devotion to his 'beloved race,' but this is coupled once more with intransigent opposition to Jupiter:

> Submission, thou dost know, I cannot try:
> For what submission but that fatal word,
> The death-seal of mankind's captivity –
> Like the Sicilian's hair-suspended sword
> Which trembles o'er his crown – would he accept
> Or could I yield? – Which yet I will not yield.
>
> (I. 395–400; Reiman, p. 147)

The hero's 'courage never to submit or yield' fuses Prometheus again with the figure of Milton's Satan who, at a corresponding point of crisis, ponders his chances of pardon from God but concludes that it is only possible 'by submission; and that word / Disdain forbids me' (*Paradise Lost* I, l. 108, IV, ll. 81–2, pp. 50, 195).

If the drama of Act I is taken to be 'purificatory,' then, it can hardly be said to succeed in expelling from the Titan these Satanic qualities. They persist long after the opening soliloquy, and thus the allusive texture of the first act presents discordant ethical stances in the hero, carrying an ambiguous political charge. That Prometheus pities Jupiter does not turn him aside from his confident expectation of the 'retributive hour':

> This is defeat, fierce King, not victory.
> The sights with which thou torturest gird my soul
> With new endurance, till the hour arrives
> When they shall be no types of things which are.
>
> (I. 642–5; Reiman, p. 155)

By the end of the Titan's ordeal, the antagonism which defines his relationship with Jupiter remains, and the mind of Prometheus foresees no middle

way of reconciliation, only the defeat of the fierce king. As such, his voice sustains the hostility of Cobbett's rhetoric. Because of the emphasis Shelley consistently places on abandoning revenge, one might infer that the only politically significant action Prometheus performs is pitying the tyrant of the world. And when he reiterates his compassion for Jupiter, Prometheus sounds like a preceptor correcting Cobbett's merciless contempt for the doomed oligarchy ruling England. 'Justice when Triumphant will weep down / Pity not punishment' concludes the Titan's anticipatory vision of the overthrown tyrant (I. 403–4, Reiman, p. 147). But it is equally the enduring defiance of the hero, which Stuart Sperry has emphasized in his discussion of the play, that destroys Jupiter's authority.[41] This view is confirmed at the end of Act IV by the voice of Demogorgon, whose prescription for defeating a reascendant Jupiter includes a cluster of values that all but crowds out pity: 'Neither to change nor falter nor repent,' but 'To defy Power which seems Omnipotent' (IV. 575, 572; Reiman, p. 210).

Whether the pity or the hostility of the Titan seems more prominent, the role of the *psychomachia* in bringing about social change remains obscure. Prometheus refuses revenge only to suffer the psychic torment inflicted on him by the Furies, whose panorama of the nightmare of history tempts him to abandon hope. After sustaining through this episode his precarious moral balance, in near despair Prometheus disappears from the action, replaced as protagonist by Asia. Her *anagnorisis* in the Cave of Demogorgon displays a moral transformation that seems to replicate and advance the Titan's struggle: at first she aggressively declares that curses shall drag down the tyrant of the world, but by the end of her revelationary dialogue with Demogorgon, she has discovered a different mode of resisting tyranny: eros, which outlasts all forms of evil, social as well as natural. Transformed into the luminous, reborn Venus, Asia resembles a female successor to the radiant Lucifer of *The Revolt of Islam*.

In her quest to overcome evil, then, Asia begins to look like the proximate cause of the human liberation that the third act dramatizes. Despite her transfiguration, however, Jupiter remains in power; eros alone cannot overthrow tyranny. This act must be accomplished by the violent power of Demogorgon, whose dark ascent to the throne of Jupiter actually precedes the arrival of Asia. Moreover, Prometheus and his struggle seem disconnected from these climactic events; he is removed from the spectacular, truncated violence of Act III, scene 1. This disjunction – between the forbearing Prometheus and the merciless deus ex machina, Demogorgon – even strikes one reader as duplicitous dramaturgy.[42] The agency of these two figures appears linked on another level of conception, however. With his cryptic remark that 'there is no such person as Demogorgon,' George Bernard Shaw was the first to suggest a deep-structural identity between the Titan and the overthrower of Jupiter.[43] Shaw's observation calls attention to the dramatic process by which the repressed violence and Satanic agency

in Prometheus are displaced onto his surrogate, Demogorgon, who rises up and overthrows his father in a celestial insurrection.

Shelley could have removed Jupiter, of course, in any number of ways; he might have chosen not to dramatize his overthrow at all. But recognizing that tyrants neither 'now, nor ever, left or leave a path to freedom but through their own blood' (Julian, VII, 6), Shelley overrode the reconciliation of Jupiter and Prometheus in Aeschylus. In place of the 'feeble catastrophe' in the lost ancient play, he substituted the combat, described by Apollo as 'the strife … which made dim / The orb I rule, and shook the solid stars' (III. ii. 2–3; Reiman p. 183). These events constitute an inverted reprise of the Miltonic war in heaven; even so, the insurrectionary violence is remarkably muted, the episode foreshortened and stylized. The brief combat, unaccompanied by stage directions, is embellished only by Apollo's report of the sublime turmoil of Jupiter's fall, filling 'Heaven / With sanguine light' (III. ii. 4–5; Reiman p. 183).

The overthrow of Jupiter constitutes a softened and idealized version of another war in heaven imagined by Shelley, embodied in 'Satan Broken Loose,' which he composed at some point in 1817–19. Envisioning the devastating ascent of infernal powers into Heaven, this fragment reveals an intermediate conception between what Shelley found in Milton and the idealism he later presented in the third act of *Prometheus Unbound:*

> A GOLDEN-WINGÈD Angel stood
> Before the Eternal Judgment-seat:
> His looks were wild, and Devils' blood
> Stained his dainty hands and feet.
> The Father and the Son
> Knew that strife was now begun.
> They knew that Satan had broken his chain,
> And with millions of daemons in his train,
> Was ranging over the world again.
> Before the Angel had told his tale,
> A sweet and a creeping sound
> Like the rushing of wings was heard around;
> And suddenly the lamps grew pale –
> The lamps, before the Archangels seven,
> That burn continually in Heaven.
>
> (Hutchinson, pp. 548–9)[44]

The uninhibited tone of this writing – freed from any scruples about violence – calls attention to itself. The lyric not only idealizes the demonic invaders and their mellifluous flight, it delights in the spectacle of the terror-stricken angelic messenger. The fragment breaks off with the portent

of an overthrow, as the lamps dim in Heaven. It is a striking vision, a piece of triumphant Satanism created from the unlikely source of the hopeless fantasies of revenge voiced by Milton's fallen Moloch, eager to force his way 'Armed with hell flames and fury … / O'er heaven's high towers' (*Paradise Lost* II, ll. 61–2; p. 93).

In dramatizing the overthrow of Jupiter, Shelley largely suppressed the violence generated in this lyric fragment. Yet the sublimated aggression that is Demogorgon restores the sense of a Satanic revolutionary force all but drained away from the immobilized and solitary Titan. And the various political associations suggested by the name of Shelley's revolutionary efficient cause – 'terror of the people' and the Regency radical journal titled *Gorgon* – remind us that the beautiful idealisms of *Prometheus Unbound* function comprehensively, imaging popular insurrection as well as reform. These mythic forms embody as much of the political spectrum as possible, nearly to the point that they undermine the rhetorical effect of this drama – reassuring readers about the shape of impending social transformation.

Embodying such an unimagined form of resistance – unyielding yet free of vengeance – grew even more difficult late in 1819. As Shelley was to observe in 'A Philosophical View of Reform': 'Two years ago it might still have been possible to have commenced a system of gradual reform… . Now they [the people] are more miserable, more hopeless, more impatient of their misery… . It is possible that the period of conciliation is past … ' (*Works*, VII, 45–6). Thus Shelley articulates his grim conjectures about the crisis that seemed imminent in the months after the Peterloo massacre. Written after the events in Manchester, 'The Mask of Anarchy' attempts to help avert the catastrophe he anticipated. To achieve this effect, Shelley drew on a body of ideologically coded material: political mythology, satires, and cartoons described by Steven E. Jones as 'a shared context, a symbolic language, that places Shelley's satire in the public realm of the conflicted discourse of reform.'[45] Constructed from this common language, the ballad emerged from a field of competing responses to Peterloo designed to influence the course political reform would take thereafter.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of Shelley's effort is the highly sublimated mythologizing of popular resistance he builds into his poem. In the climactic moment of the processional masque, a nameless 'Shape' rises up when Hope, an idealism of self-sacrifice fashioned by Shelley from iconographic materials, lies down in the street before Anarchy, Murder, Hypocrisy, and Fraud. Intervening in this allegorized historical crisis, the mysterious Shape destroys Hope's foes in an unseen combat that elides the reciprocal bloodshed Shelley feared would be the immediate response to Peterloo. As the Shape ushers in a new order, violence is so entirely submerged in the representation of social and political change that Leigh Hunt could comfortably identify Shelley's mythic agent merely as 'the rise and growth of the Public Enlightenment.'[46] Recent critics are more uneasy with

Shelley's handling of the sublime combat and Hope's distance from the violence, and thus the Shape is read as a trope displaying Shelley's contradictory attitudes toward revolutionary action.[47]

In many ways the Shape does seem to function like an esoterically conceived daemon imported from *Prometheus Unbound* to manage Shelley's anxieties about popular violence. In its initial amorphous appearance as 'a light, a mist, an image,' the antagonist of Anarchy recalls the formless deus ex machina of Shelley's lyrical drama. And like Demogorgon, the Shape is released by a fugitive cause: while Hope's champion is presumably generated by her self-sacrificing act, this connection is never made explicit. As Shelley develops this figure, though, the conqueror of Anarchy acquires more definite mythic outlines: bearing the emblem of the Morning Star, the Shape emerges as a throwback to the Luciferean genius of *The Revolt of Islam*. (A cancelled passage in the draft version of Shelley's ballad had actually drawn the connection more explicitly, likening the figure to the 'Angel of Dawn.')[48] But if the Shape resurrects the Great Spirit of Good, this Lucifer also incorporates some of the mythologized aggression of *Prometheus Unbound*. The enigmatic figure assumes the martial aspect of Shelley's Satan, transmuting the Luciferean Spirit of Good into a helmeted angelic warrior, clad in mail associated with the serpent:

> a Shape arrayed in mail
> Brighter than the Viper's scale,
> And upborne on wings whose grain
> Was as the light of sunny rain.
>
> On its helm, seen far away,
> A planet, like the Morning's, lay;
> And those plumes its light rained through
> Like a shower of crimson dew.
>
> (ll. 110–17; Reiman, p. 304)

Like the other rhetorical features of the poem – the grotesque procession and its emblematic figures, for example – the Shape is embedded in the popular culture of the age, from which Shelley draws his thematic effects.[49] Yet there is a significant difference: the nuanced sublimity of the Shape stands apart from the cartoon-like quality of the figures that project the abstract identities of Murder, Fraud, Hypocrisy, and Anarchy. While throughout the combat-episode Shelley continues to speak through the persona of the naive balladeer, who uncomprehendingly relates his phantasmagoric dream-vision, in this elusive, stylistically different moment, the poem does not address the popular reader at all. Here the ballad ceases to be an exoteric work and prophesies to the more literate segment of Shelley's audience.

The 'violence' enacted by the Shape is obscurely represented in order to evoke a form of social agency hitherto unperceived. The giant passes over the heads of men and vanishes, leaving Anarchy slain on the earth, and yet the only discernible action performed by the Shape is to awaken the minds of the 'prostrate multitude' in its passage: 'Thoughts sprung where'er that step did fall' (l. 125). Here as elsewhere in the poem, causal connections between events are obscured by the generative syntax of the popular ballad, and this external blurriness enhances the interiorizing of social action embodied by the Shape. For at this juncture Hope is resurrected by the emanation of her passive resistance, the Luciferean figure. The Shape is an apotheosis of the mind, then, figuring a transformation resembling Asia's mental triumph in the Cave of Demogorgon and her subsequent rebirth. In the ballad this epiphany is located entirely in popular consciousness, embodied by the armored – though not armed – angelic Shape. The invulnerable Shape embodies, as Stephen C. Behrendt suggests, the awakened mind that in the second section of the poem declaims on slavery, freedom, and the means of gaining liberty – the new assembly to succeed Peterloo and its government-toppling policy of passive resistance.[50]

Thus the last in Shelley's succession of idealized demonic figures returns to the ground of Romantic Satanism, where the fallen angel represents an expansion of consciousness. With this innovation: here the subjective triumph consists of practical political knowledge converted to action. Does this galvanizing movement of mind indicate a late rapprochement with Godwinian gradualism? Because the action is obscure – even more cryptic and internalized than the overthrow of Jupiter – the episode conveys Godwinian overtones. The multitude have no part in the fall of Anarchy: they merely witness it, much as in *Prometheus Unbound*, where the changes in the human world by which 'man grows wise and kind' (III. iii. 61, Reiman, p. 185) are observed as opinion develops and institutions change or are dissolved. And yet the near-simultaneity of the popular epiphany and the slaying of Anarchy allows no time for the slow diffusion of thought prescribed by Godwin.

Whether or not Godwinian theory is invoked to explain the eccentric pivot point of the narrative in 'The Mask of Anarchy,' Shelley's resort to the giant form of Lucifer to embody an immediate transformation of mind among the lower classes pushes his representation of change past paradox. It may appear symptomatic of the blocked social vision of a writer who desperately wished for change but could not see its emergence on the horizon in late 1819. But the urgency with which Shelley introduces the Luciferean figure may have little to do with his idea of the likelihood of such an immediate awakening. Rather, the rhetorical function of the Shape reflects the same social determinant Shelley engaged in *Prometheus Unbound*: because radical reformers offered prescriptions for political change that looked steadily more threatening, he was again compelled to present an

alternative path. Cobbett had already dismissed passive resistance, asserting that it 'places those who subscribe to it below the brute and even below the worm.'[51] The imperative of responding alone motivates the intervention of the armored Shape, inverting Cobbett's rhetoric by presenting the sublime embodiment of a different method of effecting change.

## III. *Hellas* and Shelley's strategic accommodation with Christianity

In his last published play, *Hellas*, Shelley's efforts to influence readers with renovated forms of Satanic myth are suspended. Written as propaganda for the Greek war for independence, the lyrical drama swerves toward an apparent acceptance of the Christian mythology, particularly in the canceled prologue, where the figure of Satan plays a conventional role – that of the antagonist of Greek liberty. Modeled on the 'Prologue in Heaven' of Goethe's *Faust*, *Paradise Lost* III, and the Book of Job, Shelley's fragmentary prologue initiates the dramatic action on a supernatural plane.[52] In a celestial 'senate-house,' the 'sons of God' meet to debate the 'unaccomplished destiny' of Greece; the principal speakers are the 'giant Powers' – Christ, Mahomet, and Satan (ll. 1–2, 51, 69; Hutchinson pp. 448–50). The first two of these figures are hypostases of Christian and Islamic thought and culture, figures for those cycles of history. But Satan, who appears unrelated to a discrete cultural era, reifies some larger force. For reasons he never articulated, Shelley chose not to complete the mythic prelude and sent the manuscript of the play to Ollier for publication without this section.

It seems likely that it was precisely the role devised for Satan and its attendant complications that led Shelley to abandon this portion of the manuscript. Insofar as the prologue reflects the initial conception of the play, the function assigned to Satan implies a recrudescence of the Manicheism Shelley's earlier writing had displayed, albeit through a reversion to traditional terms. For Shelley's intentions seem to have involved exploiting the prejudices of pious readers, who are invited to see Satan as the supernatural foe whose agency subtends the immediate political crisis. This figure is not merely the antagonist of Greek liberty, but a collective embodiment of the 'enemies of … Christianity and civilization' (Reiman, p. 409).[53] At the same time, we become aware that Shelley is also addressing once again the select classes of readers, presenting Satan as a mental force inhibiting liberty. Thus exoteric and esoteric forms of Shelley's Satanism co-exist in an unstable union here, pulling the mythic structure of the prologue in two directions at once. The aim of converting the reader – whether pious or free-thinking – to philhellenism would not be advanced by a dramatic prelude that mythicized history in this fractured manner.

These tensions are built into the structure of the celestial debate. On the one hand, for Shelley to invoke literary and scriptural models (especially

Job) to establish Satan as a familiar figure in heaven is clearly a gesture meant to accommodate conventional values. But to put Satan on a level with the other sons of God, all of them competing to influence the will of the deity regarding the Greek cause, takes the prologue in a less acceptable direction. Here Shelley seems to revert to infidel tactics – demoting Christ while elevating Satan. At the same time Shelley seeks a different response from the free-thinking liberal reader, by tilting the providential structure of the prologue toward the idealism of 'A Defence of Poetry' and its celebration of the social and political ideals produced by the mind in each cycle of history – the Greek, Roman, and Christian eras. In the prologue, the sons of God are represented as emanations of human thought, a host of 'Hierarchs and kings' assembled in the transmundane senate house (l. 7; Hutchinson, p. 448). While the image of this assembly recalls *The Revolt of Islam*, the drama reveals a shift in conception from the earlier poem, where the Temple of the Spirit is filled exclusively with the martyrs who died to free the world. The kings and hierarchs of the senate house in the prologue exist as the spectrum of projected ideas of authority, divine and human, that have persisted in the human mind throughout history. They inhabit the eternity of mind celebrated in the play: 'pinnacled on the past,' they sit 'Pavilioned on the radiance or the gloom / Of mortal thought' and 'Sway the reluctant present' (ll. 8–10, Hutchinson, p. 448).

That the present moment accepts only reluctantly the sway of these senators emphasizes that they embody ideas of order that at best only begin to approximate liberty. The mortal thought influenced by these gods conceals heaven – that is, it obscures knowledge of the irresistible Power beyond the human mind, the 'decrees' by which the God of the Prologue manifests himself in the mutable world (l. 12, Hutchinson, p. 449). By invoking this Power and its decrees, then, Shelley was on his way toward establishing, as Donald Reiman and Michael J. Neth suggest, a Necessitarian world view in the mythic frame around the action of *Hellas*.[54] The esoteric plane of meaning emerging here suggests that historical necessity has retarded the liberation of Greece. Until this point in history, the 'fiery incarnation' of the unknown God has acted more as the Destroyer than the Preserver of Greece: the three previous 'stern decrees' of God have produced only 'Ruin and degradation and despair,' the conquests by Macedon, Rome, and Islam (ll. 15, 46–7; Hutchinson, p. 449). The Necessitarian premise does not imply an iron-clad determinism, however. Like Demogorgon, this power is susceptible to human influence: God has withheld the fourth decree, the Herald of Eternity proclaims, pending a decision by this senate. Thus the sons of God who speak in this council represent human attempts to influence the necessary historical process now arriving at its crisis in 1821.

Christ and Mahomet figure prominently in the debate because Shelley, attempting to appeal broadly, casts the struggle for Greece as nothing less than a holy war against the enemies of Christianity. The two figures, then,

are the giant forms of rebellious Christian Greece and the Moslem Ottoman empire. The first to speak, Christ pleads with the Almighty Father to 'Send forth Fate / Thy irrevocable child' (ll. 100–1; Hutchinson, p. 450). He envisions the victorious rise of a liberated Greece, which will in turn ignite the world's struggle for freedom.[55]

Breaking in on Christ's appeal to the Father, Satan ridicules his idealism and selfishly claims the world as part of his cosmic domain:

> seest thou not beneath this crystal floor
> The innumerable worlds of golden light
> Which are my empire, and the least of them
> which thou wouldst redeem from me?
> Know'st thou not them my portion?
>
> (ll. 125–9; Hutchinson, p. 451)

In an effort to usurp divine authority, Satan dispatches Fate, assuming the voice of Milton's God the Father commanding his Son: 'Go, thou Vicegerent of my will, no less / Than of the Father's' (ll. 142–3; Hutchinson, p. 451). Thus Satan initially takes on the traditional Miltonic roles of the metaphysical rebel and emperor of hell to parody the Father. To Satan the victory or defeat of Greece is a matter of indifference, for he apprehends history as a closed circle of tyranny, rebellion, and re-enslavement: if Greece is victorious, it will only provide the entire earth with the 'strength/To suffer' (ll. 139–40; Hutchinson, p. 451). To consolidate his power, Satan summons a host of horrors in a roll-call reminiscent of the historical pageant of evil displayed by the Furies in *Prometheus Unbound*, Act I: the winged hounds Famine and Pestilence, the snake 'Insatiate Superstition,' War, Fraud, and Change (ll. 144–8; Hutchinson, p. 451). The catalogue breaks off as Satan is invoking Anarchy, Tyranny, and Custom, the 'three vials of the tears which demons weep' when 'virtuous spirits' pass triumphant through the gate of Death (ll. 151–2; Hutchinson, p. 451). The tears will gather to a deluge, overwhelming not only the world's cities but the celestial house of the senators. 'My slaves shall have their thrones,' Satan triumphantly declares.[56]

The demonic insurrection evoked at the end of this speech indicates that Shelley was on the way to a towering mythic conception of Satan that comprehends multiple forms of oppression, including not only the social and political evil (tyranny, anarchy, custom, fraud) personified by Jupiter, but the forces of natural evil as well (change and pestilence). A conception of Satan that overshoots the historically delimited identities of Christ and Mahomet, it transcends not only the power Shelley attacks in his preface, the Holy Alliance, but the large abstractions, Tyranny and Fraud, named in the opening of 'A Philosophical View of Reform.' The Satan of the canceled

Prologue thus approximates the magnitude of the Manichean antagonist of the Great Spirit of Good, the fiend whose name is Legion. This application of Satanic myth, then, which attempts to lift *Hellas* beyond partisan rhetoric, reinforces Shelley's effort at reaching the widest audience possible. He achieves the ultimate demonization, naming Satan the grand enemy, not only of universal liberty but of life itself.

Yet the intricacy with which Shelley has fashioned his last Devil suggests that as composition advanced he increasingly bore in mind the more select classes of poetical readers: in the final section of the prologue, Satanic myth builds a mental foundation for political hope as well. To the extent that the sons of God are modifications of mind, Satan constitutes a distortion of thought – the surrender to an historical determinism in which the future is condemned to repeat the past in cyclical fashion. As Christ puts it when rebuking the 'Obdurate spirit' in the last lines of the truncated debate: 'Thou seest but the Past in the To-come' (ll. 160–1; Hutchinson, p. 452). In part, then, Shelley seems to have conceived Satan as a proleptic figure, who subsumes in his voice the doubt and negation that darken the climax of *Hellas*: the promise that an imperial Islam will rise again in the distant future, overshadowed by the prophecy of its impending fall delivered by the phantom of Mahomet II, or the last choric sections of the play, where the failure of the Greek cause is repeatedly envisaged. In the final lyric, the chorus concedes that the new Athens not only may be mortal, but may suffer the repetition-compulsion of its history, involving the return of 'hate and death.' In the prologue, the presentation of the all-negating mind of Satan anticipates these human expressions of despair: Satan is the self-defeating mental force that will withdraw when the 'fourth decree' of God renews the world's great age, displacing him and all the other sons of God who tyrannically sway the reluctant present from the past. Bursting out of their long repose, the final chorus proclaims, Saturn and Love will supercede Jesus Christ, and with him the mythology that constructs evil as a necessary portion of human existence.

Yet these subtler effects sit uneasily in the traditional mythic structure that houses them. That is, to evoke the Satanic enemy in conventional terms, as Shelley does elsewhere in the prologue excessively reinforces the Christian mythology and overwhelms the esoteric meaning of the prologue. This Shelley had discovered several years earlier, when he constructed the demonic God of *Queen Mab*, who grows more real and oppressive as the Wandering Jew's denunciatory portrayal of him intensifies, thus undermining the atheist thesis of the poem. Similarly, the exoteric treatment of Satan in the prologue to *Hellas* overrides its mentalistic conception of Providence. Although the last songs of *Hellas* 'suggest the final triumph of the Greek cause as a portion of the cause of civilization and social improvement,' nevertheless the repressed contents of history return in the final chorus and are visible on the 'the curtain of futurity

which falls upon the unfinished scene': 'The world is weary of the past, / O might it die or rest at last' (Reiman, p. 408; II. 1100–1; p. 440). To reinforce this internal, disrupting voice with the mythic frame of the prologue and the supernatural figure of Satan would have propelled the play toward a despairing perspective on history, one that anticipates 'The Triumph of Life.' All of this, Shelley may have judged, burdened the prologue, adding too much to the mythic tensions displayed elsewhere in the celestial debate.

In recent critical studies, the 'abnormal violence of retaliation' Kenneth Neill Cameron first identified in the psychosocial foundations of Shelley's writing is receiving renewed attention. Here Shelley's literary efforts to refine this impulse have been aptly summed up as the 'rhetorical deferral of personal rage,' which displaces that anger into sublimated forms – the violence of satire, for example.[57] Shelley's blaspheming Satanism had its inception, as the third chapter of this book has shown, in the violent hatred of Christianity that emerged even before his expulsion from Oxford and then burst out in the iconoclasm of *Queen Mab*. Although the form of Satanism in the early works discussed in this chapter ultimately acquires a different function, it seems to spring from a similar source. To an unsettling degree, at this stage Shelley seems to have found good and the means of good fairly simple to reconcile under the rubric of violence that purifies society. Indeed, the presentation of the Satanic avenger in *The Assassins* reflects the 'hard rhetoric' of the ideologue Marilyn Butler finds in Shelley. When he writes in this fashion, Butler notes, Shelley is the heir of Volney, whose polemic deprived the French ruling classes and priesthood of the reader's sympathy in order to justify their extermination.[58] The Satanism of *The Assassins* constitutes a similar exercise – an ideological displacement of rage expressing a coldly intellectualized hatred. But *The Revolt of Islam* registers something different, Shelley's growing unease with violent rhetoric and action. This work exhibits a heightened sense of rhetorical awareness and social responsibility, reflected in his appeal to the ideal mythic form of the Luciferean angel of revolution. Shelley's blaspheming Satanism, as we have seen, at last produced its idealized forms as well – Beatrice Cenci and the fallen angel evoked in the essay 'On the Devil, and Devils.' In constructing all of these figures, Shelley saw himself completing Milton's effort to idealize the 'distorted notions of invisible things' – that is, to refine the forms of religious myth (Julian, VII, 129).

In *Prometheus Unbound*, however, the figure Shelley reshapes into an embodiment of benevolent, enduring egalitarianism bends away from this idealization, as Satanism again portrays political change involving retaliatory violence. A shift in the rhetorical use of Satanic myth appears to set in

as well. Constituting less a vehicle of belief and value, and still less an instrument of iconoclasm, the figure of Satan in 1819 begins to function as a lens for viewing the calamitous social and political upheaval Shelley believed to be imminent. During these months, as events pull ahead of his abstract formulations about the struggle between Liberty and Tyranny, the myth of Satan serves to clarify the shape of things, giving mythic form to the troubled reflections about popular violence he articulates in 'A Philosophical View of Reform.' This social force is barely contained by the idealism of change presented in Shelley's lyrical drama. Similarly, when the Luciferean Shape triumphs in 'The Mask of Anarchy,' it can only do so through an urgent mythic rhetoric of immediate social transformation.

In the emperor of Hell who claims Greece, the myth of Satan is bent even further from the Luciferean Spirit of Good, reverting to traditional function. With the prologue to *Hellas*, where Satan claims the world and superintends all tyranny, anarchy, war, and superstition, Shelley's political form of Satanic mythmaking exhausts itself, collapsing its infernal protagonist together with the demonic God of *Queen Mab*. This maneuver, an abandonment of one expression of Shelleyan idealism, perhaps cannot be explained entirely by his new-found concern for the prejudices of the pious reader. The final merging of demonic figures seems uncannily like the implied identity, in 'The Triumph of Life,' of the two females who polarize the symbolic structure of Shelley's poem – the transcendent 'Shape all light' and the deformed rider of the unguided chariot of Life.[59] The final work displaying Shelley's myth of Satanic revolution has affinities, then, with the skeptical and ironic perspective that informs his last poem: in both the structure of idealism implodes. Thus, in Shelleyan Satanic myth the end of idealism points directly to the ironic and satiric forms of Satanism this writer began to develop in tandem with Byron in late 1819, the subject of the final chapter of this study.

# 5
# Ironic Modes of Satanism in Byron and Shelley

A protean conception, 'Romantic Irony' has been invoked in various forms to interpret the writing of the age excluded by the central paradigms of theory and criticism. One kind is based in ontological and epistemological skepticism: Romantic irony as defined by Anne Mellor refers to the artist's recognition and embrace of the fictiveness of ideas of order. The art of the Romantic ironist embodies an 'enthusiastic response to process and change,' and thus this form of ironic vision is celebratory in function. It does not encompass writing wherein 'the perception of a chaotic universe arouses either guilt or fear.'[1] Where the celebratory mode of Romantic irony leaves off, another begins, described by Stuart Sperry as a variable, but often perplexed and angst-ridden response to 'indeterminacy.' Sperry finds a representative moment of Keatsian irony in the visionary speaker's awakening within the domed sanctuary of *The Fall of Hyperion*, where its mysterious interior impresses on him 'a blinding sense of unfathomability.' Sperry locates Shelleyan irony in his radically contrasting perspectives on the human condition, emphasizing Shelley's habitual swerving between representations of high idealism (*Prometheus Unbound*) and reality (*The Cenci*). Works like *The Witch of Atlas* seem composed as a deliberate effort to escape the latter in a realm of supernatural play.[2]

This impulse to seek distance from the conditions of existence seems to constitute a distinct form of irony in Shelley and Byron, and in several works the introduction of a Satanic persona enables the desired ironic detachment. In Shelley's 'Julian and Maddalo,' Satanic allusion dramatizes Julian's withdrawal from a 'cold world' that meliorism cannot alter (l. 617, Reiman, p. 127). Julian himself is a victim of the irony of this poem, but a different form – in which a Satanic character controls the ironic effects – enters Byron's late, unfinished drama, *The Deformed Transformed*. In this play a Mephistophelean tempter, the 'Stranger,' offers the protagonist the means to escape his deformed body, then makes his quest for transcendence the dramatic vehicle for sustained ironic commentary playing delus-ory spiritual aspirations off against physical reality.

A self-conscious quest for distance from oppressive social and political, as opposed to metaphysical conditions arguably constitutes yet another form of ironized Satanism in Byron and Shelley. This emerges in two formal satires, *Peter Bell the Third* and *The Vision of Judgment*. Through the recent work of Steven E. Jones we are now acquiring a culturally informed understanding of Romantic satire and its social dimensions. Romantic 'prophecy and satire share a position of authority grounded in moral indignation,' Jones contends, further noting that prophecy and satire both voice the outsider's denunciation of the community. It is the violence with which the satirist attacks the social group that distinguishes this from Romantic prophecy.[3] While Jones interprets Shelley's attraction to demonizing as an instrument of satiric aggression and denunciatory violence, Satanic myth also encodes another socially significant gesture in Shelleyan (and Byronic) satire – the impulse to withdraw in contempt, frustration, or bewilderment from a culture that seems to repel all reforming influences. The resultant rhetoric, which seems motivated less by the will to seek change through condemnation than by the outsider's wish to disengage and exclude, is embodied in the Satanism of *Peter Bell the Third* and *The Vision of Judgment*. In these poems, the Satanic figure registers the tension between social commitment and withdrawal from the hopeless political climate of the post-Waterloo world and the final years of the Regency.

## I. 'Julian and Maddalo'

'Julian and Maddalo,' on which Shelley worked intermittently during the period in which he composed *Prometheus Unbound*, is one of his 'problem' poems. The apparent relationship of its content to Shelley's estrangement from Mary, the identity of the nameless Maniac (for many years the focus of biographical criticism) whose soliloquy occupies the center of the poem, the unusual formal joining of his inchoate speech with the conversation of the titular figures – all of these features combine to render it one of Shelley's more perplexing works. One of its significant elements is the incompleteness of the debate of Julian and Maddalo concerning the possibility of human perfectibility: the rhetorical contest is never explicitly resolved – it is 'quite forgot,' displaced by the pathos of the Maniac's soliloquy (l. 520; Reiman, p. 125). This structural ambiguity is amplified through a series of Miltonic allusions that negate the intellectual struggle between the meliorism and optimism advocated by Julian and the pessimism of Maddalo. In this poem, Satanism dismisses the value of their debate by aligning it with the talk of Milton's fallen angels during and after the Council in Hell of *Paradise Lost* II – their deluded effort to grapple with their imprisonment in hell and to understand universal order. Inverting the typical values and attitudes of Romantic Satanism, the allusions woven into 'Julian and Maddalo' construct a mythic image of frustrated will and impaired rather than expanded consciousness. The ironic form of Satanism in the poem portrays primarily the doubt and despair into which Julian has

passed, from which perspective he has come to regard not only his meliorism but the speculative enterprise he has shared with Maddalo as pointless.

The Satanic material inflected into the debate of Julian and Maddalo is not drawn from the usual sources – the first book of *Paradise Lost*, for example, which held a magnetic attraction for Romantic writers – but from less prominent areas in the second book. Returning home from their evening ride on the Lido, Julian and Maddalo fall into philosophic conversation, which Julian likens to the conversation

> The devils held within the dales of Hell,
> Concerning God, freewill and destiny;
> Of all that earth has been or yet may be,
> All that vain men imagine or believe,
> Or hope can paint or suffering may atchieve,
> We descanted
>
> (ll. 41–6; Reiman, p. 114)

Their discourse is mythically framed by the talk of the fallen angels, the intellectual recreation that follows the Council in Hell. The conversation of Julian and Maddalo about human aspiration is thus modeled on the attempts of Milton's Devils, who 'reasoned high' about 'providence, foreknowledge, will, and fate' in an effort to sort out intellectually their fallen, dispossessed, and imprisoned state, to settle on either hope or despair (*Paradise Lost* II, ll. 557–65; pp. 115–16). Through allusions displaying unusually close verbal parallels, the dialogue of Julian and Maddalo is transformed into an expansive debate on the possibilities and limitations inherent in the human condition, where the two men assume the voice of fallen angels discoursing in their fiery dungeon. It may seem strange that Julian should view this remembered dialogue through the lens of the confused utterance of these Miltonic figures, whose speculation goes astray – 'in wandr'ing mazes lost' – because they have lost the ability to reason rightly through their self-separation from God. 'Passionately attached to those philosophical notions which assert the power of man over his own mind,' Julian should gravitate instead toward Satanic models of subjective autonomy or even autogeny that would validate his own belief in the ability of the human mind and will to alter inner and outer realities (Reiman, p.113). Even more oddly, Julian, the self-professed meliorist, characterizes the theme of their conversation as 'all that vain men imagine or believe,' echoing the Miltonic narrator's dismissal of the fallen angels' 'vain wisdom.' While the intrusion of this attitude might be explained by the immediate influence of Maddalo, Julian's pessimism does not fully emerge in their dialogue. Rather, this tone is an element of Julian's retrospective account some 20 years afterward. The Miltonic overlay discloses the profound alteration in Julian's views in the years that followed this conversation.

Both men agree that the human condition is degraded, but Maddalo asserts our powerlessness to transcend or transform limitation. To enforce his view, Maddalo points to the bell tower on the island madhouse near Venice, naming it 'the emblem and the sign / Of what should be eternal and divine!' The human soul, 'Hung in a heaven-illumined tower,' struggles to apprehend a higher reality and summons 'our thoughts and our desires' to pray around the 'rent heart.' But this striving to heighten human existence is dismissed by Maddalo as a quest for a transcendent realm that is cognitively inaccessible, perhaps nonexistent. The frustration of desire necessarily pervades human life, he insists, 'till the night of death … severeth / Our memory from itself, and us from all / We sought and yet were baffled' (ll. 121–30; Reiman, p. 116).

Temporarily silenced by this evocation of the impotence of human desire, Julian challenges Maddalo the following morning, insisting that human nature is capable of transforming or at least bearing any form of oppression:

> those who try may find
> How strong the chains are which our spirit bind;
> Brittle perchance as straw … We are assured
> Much may be conquered, much may be endured
> Of what degrades and crushes us. We know
> That we have power over ourselves to do
> And suffer – what, we know not till we try;
>
> (ll. 180–6; Reiman, p. 117)

By rhetorically asking, 'Where is the love, beauty and truth we seek / But in our mind?,' Julian affirms what Maddalo denies – our access to ideals – and goes on to declare the strength of the will to act or endure anything with nobility (ll. 174–5; Reiman, p. 117). Both formulations anticipate, of course, the high idealism of *Prometheus Unbound*. But Julian's final assertion gives pause, for it virtually repeats Belial's 'to suffer, as to do, / Our strength is equal' (*Paradise Lost* II, ll. 199–200, p. 99). Out of context, these lines appear an apt vehicle of Julian's meliorism, suited to one convinced of the power of man over his own mind and of our capacity to achieve those 'immense improvements of which, … human society may yet be susceptible' (Reiman, p. 113). But Julian's credo, reformulated years after, echoes Milton's self-deceived Belial. Why is Julian voicing this Satanic figure and not some other?

Read in its dramatic context, Julian's assumption of the stance of Belial does not seem to follow the common transgressive precedent, wherein the Romantic author overrides the warning of the Miltonic narrator that all forms of Satanic rhetoric are 'false and hollow' *(Paradise Lost* II, l. 112; p. 95). Julian's voice cannot turn around the impression left by Belial's delusions – that the fallen angels will grow accustomed to their new element, that lying low will allow them to grow strong in hell after a quiescent period during which God will not mind them not offending. Since Julian has already

represented the entire debate with Maddalo as vain and deluded, the incorporated stoicism of 'to suffer, as to do' must be doubly subverted – by his changed outlook and by the voice of Belial, which mediates that altered perspective, implicitly renouncing meliorism. For Belial is an optimist and a meliorist in hell, dismissing gloomy assessments of the fallen angels' plight, preferring to point instead to signs of progress. 'Thus sitting, thus consulting, thus in arms' is doing considerably better, he notes, than lying chained to the burning lake (*Paradise Lost* II, l. 164; p. 97).

In the rhetoric of 'Julian and Maddalo,' all of the clustered allusions function proleptically, anticipating the unacknowledged epiphany that breaks on Julian after the overheard soliloquy of the maniac ceases: enduring and suffering cannot be redemptive. If they were, the Maniac would not conclude by wishing for death after steadfastly upholding a 'creed' that is essentially identical with Julian's. The Maniac, who proclaims the 'one road' of truth, has borne his suffering without surrendering to vengefulness (l. 347; Reiman, p. 127). His soliloquy closes by expressing a forgiving moral stance, an inner purification exceeding the achievement of Shelley's Prometheus:

> when thou speakest of me, never say,
> 'He could forgive not.' Here I cast away
> All human passions, all revenge, all pride;
> I think, speak, act no ill.
>
> (ll. 500–3; Reiman, p. 125)

Yet moral perfection has left him imprisoned in his own tormented consciousness. To what extent Julian comprehends the implications of the soliloquy at this moment is uncertain; in the aftermath, both men respond by weeping and merely agreeing that the Maniac is a suffering victim of betrayed love. But Julian's later disillusionment must be at least prefigured in his disinclination to debate Maddalo any further, and in his acceptance of his friend's modest rationalization of the maniac's suffering as the necessary stimulus to artistic creation: 'Most wretched men / Are cradled into poetry by wrong' (ll. 544–5; Reiman, p. 125).

Julian leaves Venice and abandons his intention of caring for the maniac, perhaps because he vaguely fears that his 'true theory' will fail when he faces the experiential version of his theorizing self (l. 203; Reiman, p. 118). But 20 years later he has made full sense of his meliorism as it applied to the task of perfecting one human being, the Maniac:

> this was all
> Accomplished not; such dreams of baseless good
> Oft come and go in crowds or solitude
> And leave no trace
>
> (ll. 577–80; Reiman, p. 126)

This dream left an enduring trace, Julian insists, while at the same time he confesses that its very objective was without ground – a good without a base. Nothing in human nature or human institutions will support such a dream. While he once was 'for ever speculating how good may be made superior' to evil, he has now concluded that such aspiration is all false, and all hollow (Reiman, p. 113). To justify his surrender, Julian dismisses the unredeemable human world at the end. Although Maddalo's daughter finally tells him the tale of the Maniac's reunion with the lady who had cast him off, their subsequent separation, and their deaths, he will not share it with an audience beyond hope: 'the cold world shall not know' (l. 617; Reiman, p. 127).

Implicit in the unsettling conclusion of Shelley's poem is Julian's self-contempt, for he silently acknowledges that he has surrendered the creed to which the Maniac clung as he descended into madness. Shelley adapts the rhetoric of Belial, then, to express Julian's half-conscious recognition that he made his accommodation long ago. With this difference: beneath its rhetorical pretense of affirming the dignity of the fallen angels, the speech of Belial essentially expresses resignation:

> Shall we then live thus vile, the race of heaven
> Thus trampled, thus expelled to suffer here
> Chains and these torments? Better these than worse
> By my advice; since fate inevitable
> Subdues us
>
> (*Paradise Lost* II, ll. 194–8; p. 99)

Although full self-awareness is beyond Julian, both in the past and present of the narrative, he expresses not Belial's acceptance, but a despairing skepticism. Filtered through the voices of Milton's fallen angels, the negating irony of 'Julian and Maddalo' corresponds to the unsettling subtext latent in the celebratory vision of *Prometheus Unbound*, Act IV: the vestiges of oppression that remain buried within the sphere of the Earth and Demogorgon's acknowledgment that the wheel of time may bring Jupiter back to power. These tokens of ironic awareness at most qualify the rhetoric of affirmation that otherwise pervades Shelley's lyrical drama; in 'Julian and Maddalo,' this irony occupies the rhetorical foreground, disabling the utopian elements of the poem.

## II. *Peter Bell the Third*

The ironic stance of withdrawal is further developed in *Peter Bell the Third*, which chronicles the extinction of Wordsworth's revolutionary vision and his conversion to the Tory cause. While Shelley's poem pursues the older

poet as its principal target, it successively acquires other topics as well and broadens its satiric focus to encompass the social and political conditions of England in 1819. When *The Examiner* attacked Wordsworth in May 1819, Leigh Hunt offered Shelley a mythic premise on which to found this larger portrayal. Deploring the grim Methodism of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell* and the evil psychological, social, and political effects this 'didactic little horror' was likely to produce, Hunt expressed his revulsion in these terms: 'You might be made to worship a devil by the process of Mr. Wordsworth's philosophy.'[4] Shelley's satire takes up this suggestion, tracing Wordsworth's philosophy to its diabolical source. At the center of Shelley's satiric vision is Peter Bell's demonic gentleman-patron, not only the mentor of the poet's deadening conservatism but the presiding figure in a scene of universal 'damnation.' This condition defines the hopeless present, where change is blocked by an emergent economic and social force, the oppressive 'new aristocracy' personified by Shelley's anti-sublime Devil.

The satire of *Peter Bell the Third* is bound up with the partisan reviewing and writing of 1819, along with the political crisis of that year. Shelley did not write in direct response to the publication of Wordsworth's *Peter Bell* or Hunt's reviews of Wordsworth: he began work on his poem only after reading the poem and these pieces months later. The immediate stimulus was apparently provided by the Tory attacks in the reviews of *The Revolt of Islam* and Hunt's *Foliage*. The article on Shelley's epic was particularly provocative: it not only attacked Shelley's private morality and irreligion, it declared his oppositional writing to be ineffectual, comparing the poet to Ramses drowned with his host in the Red Sea. By linking Wordsworth, Methodism, and political tyranny, Hunt's review all but created the target for Shelley's counterattack. Richard Cronin has argued that the Peterloo massacre was yet another stimulus for Shelley, because it completely polarized the political situation and demanded a direct response, a choosing of sides in the intensifying class antagonisms.[5]

Yet choosing might not matter, as Cronin's discussion suggests. 'The Mask of Anarchy' and the political songs Shelley meant to publish with it were written for the unrepresented laboring poor. This new political poetry displays Shelley's interest in significantly broadening his audience, but *Peter Bell the Third* reveals the formidable obstacles Shelley saw before these rhetorical aims. One is William Cobbett, but the fashioning of his stance into an idealism of Satanic resistance, essayed in *Prometheus Unbound*, is not attempted again. This refusal implies that *Peter Bell the Third* dismisses the prospect of reaching the multitude, whose specific form of 'damnation' is their compulsion to take 'Cobbett's snuff, revenge' (l. 239; Reiman, p. 333). On the other side of the political divide, Wordsworth's new poem posed another threat. Wordsworth's severely plain style – Shelley calls him 'a versified Cobbett,' significantly collapsing together his two antagonists of the moment – offered him a wider audience than Shelley could hope to reach. And the apparently

approving treatment, in *Peter Bell*, of a form of Christian superstition Shelley despised suggested that Wordsworth's voice might further reinforce established power.[6] Hence Shelley's reference to *Peter Bell the Third* as a 'party squib' suggests an aggressively satiric aim: Wordsworth was to be confronted, the demonic mythology of Christian superstition in his poem ('White Obi,' as Shelley derisively calls it, referring to magical practices in the West Indies) blown up with satire (Reiman, p. 324). And yet this satiric performance, by using the machinery of the Devil, damnation, and hell to open a window onto the despair-inducing conditions in the England of 1819, finally communicates the futility of oppositional writing.

Shelley's satire begins with Peter Bell's death-bed conversion and presentiment of damnation. The Devil who arrives in a storm to carry off Peter's soul has nothing in common with the idealizations of Satan – even those which are morally complicated – found elsewhere in Shelley's major writing. This ironic figure reverts to the demonic Everyman portrayed in 'The Devil's Walk':

> The Devil, I safely can aver,
> Has neither hoof, nor tail, nor sting;
> Nor is he, as some sages swear,
> A spirit, neither here nor there,
> In nothing – yet in everything.
> He is – what we are; for sometimes
> The Devil is a gentleman;
> At others a bard bartering rhymes
> For sack; a statesman spinning crimes,
> A swindler, living as he can;
>
> A thief, who cometh in the night …
>
> (ll. 76–86; Reiman, pp. 328–9)

As Shelley soberly observes in the preface, 'it is not necessary to consider Hell and the Devil as supernatural machinery' (Reiman, p. 324). This premise is borne out by the demythologizing catalogue of the Devil's various identities, which illustrates Shelley's assumption that supernatural figures are psychological projections, gods that we make and follow. The Devil is what we are, existing only as a name for human evil. Yet in a comic gesture the poem also re-establishes the traditional figure of the Devil, creating a single personal identity for the Author of Evil: 'in this case he did appear / Like a slop-merchant from Wapping' (ll. 91–2; Reiman, p. 329). Calling Peter's soul out of the body, the Devil offers him a position, promising to 'bring him to the world of fashion' (l. 139; Reiman, p. 330). By attaching the identity of a nouveau riche tradesman to his Devil, Shelley anchors the satiric survey of Peter Bell's career to an economic and social stratum within the Regency world.

Radiating lifelessness, Shelley's Devil acquires a metaphysical aura reminiscent of Goethe's spirit of negation.[7] This parody of Mephistopheles, however, does not work frantically to uncreate what God makes; he merely presides over vacuity and inertia:

> The Devil was no uncommon creature;
> A leaden-witted thief – just huddled
> Out of the dross and scum of nature;
> A toadlike lump of limb and feature,
> With mind, and heart, and fancy muddled.
>
> He was the heavy, dull, cold thing
> The spirit of evil well may be;
> A drone too base to have a sting;
> Who gluts, and grimes his lazy wing
> And calls lust, luxury.
>
> (ll. 338–47; Reiman, pp. 335–6)

The metaphysical conception of the Devil, however, is subordinated to the social satire of the poem: he embodies negation because he is a member of the newly rich class. Shelley, who had first attacked this group in 1817 and renewed the assault in 'A Philosophical View of Reform,' expressed unreserved contempt for what he called the 'new aristocracy,' whose riches are gained by 'fraud' and thievery (Julian, VII, 29). The disreputable Devil-merchant appears to have made his fortune in similar way, selling cheap sailors' clothing. Although he does not ply precisely the same parasitic trade as those Shelley elsewhere specifies – 'attornies and excisemen and directors and government pensioners, usurers, stock jobbers' – he is classed with them anyway, part of a group distinguished from the original aristocracy, which may at least display some creativity and ethical integrity and thus some social usefulness (Julian, VII, 28). The new aristocracy lives exclusively on the increased trade and financial speculation made possible by an inflated paper currency. In 'A Philosophical View of Reform,' Shelley reinvokes the same metaphor applied to the Devil here, using it to vilify the entire 'order of drones,' who exist merely to 'eat and drink and sleep and, in the intervals of those things performed with most ridiculous ceremony and accompaniments … they cringe and lie' (Julian, VII, 28–9).

The Devil and his fellow drones are not merely useless; they are a social and political danger, Shelley goes on to argue. For the capital they use in trade and speculation is created entirely by labor, and therefore the existence of the new aristocracy is directly supported by the working poor. Formerly the poor had to labor eight hours a day to support themselves and the original aristocrats; but in recent years, their labor has necessarily doubled to offset the declining value of an inflated paper currency and the new burden of the order of drones

they must support. Shelley concludes that it is precisely this hardship which is driving the poor to the point of insurrection, but he warns also of the entropic cultural influence of the new aristocracy, their subjugation of art and social existence to their philistine, material values:

> They poison the literature of the age in which they live by requiring either the antitype of their own mediocrity in books, or such stupid and distorted and inharmonious idealisms as alone have the power to stir their torpid imaginations. Their hopes and fears are of the narrowest description. Their domestic affections are feeble, and they have no others. They think of any commerce with their species but as a means, never as an end, and as a means to the basest forms of personal advantage.
>
> (Julian, VII, 29)

In *Peter Bell the Third*, this catalogue is transposed into a narrative embodiment – the Devil's 'petit soupers,' where he patronizes and controls 'men of science, wit and learning,' damned by their acceptance of his hospitality (ll. 374, 368; Reiman, p. 336). Hence Shelley's interest in satirically demonizing the power of the new aristocracy as a deadening force, a toxic presence in the social body.

The pessimistic social thesis of Shelley's essay and *Peter Bell the Third* deepens when the figure of the Devil is incorporated into a tableau of hell and the damned, surveyed in a manner consistent with Shelley's demythologizing portrait of the Devil. The observation that 'Hell is a city much like London' introduces a picture of this world in its infernal aspect, displacing the 'supernatural machinery' of hell:

> There is a Chancery Court, a King,
> A manufacturing mob; a set
> Of thieves who by themselves are sent
> Similar thieves to represent;
> An Army; and a public debt.
> … … … … … … …
> There is a great talk of Revolution –
> And a great deal of despotism –
> German soldiers – camps – confusion –
> Tumults – lotteries – rage – delusion –
> Gin – suicide and methodism.
>
> (ll. 147, 162–6, 172–6; Reiman, p. 331)

Hell is 'much like' London only in an ironic sense, for this is not a Swedenborgian spiritual world corresponding to the material realm: hell is our world in the same way that the Devil is what we are, damnation the

universal human state. Moreover, the sense of 'damned' here gravitates increasingly toward 'deluded,' and the catalogue of the lost thus begins to delineate an absurdist vision of this world, a panoramic version of the 'painted veil which those who live / Call life.'[8] As the conclusion of Part III reveals,

> All are damned – they breathe an air,
> Thick, infected, joy-dispelling:
> Each pursues what seems most fair,
> Mining like moles, through mind, and there
> Scoop palace-caverns vast, where Care
> In throned state is ever dwelling.
>
> (ll. 257–62; Reiman, p. 333)

This climactic stanza anticipates the serious folly of the shadow-chasers encountered by Shelley's visionary persona in 'The Triumph of Life'. 'Damnation' in *Peter Bell the Third* similarly evokes a universal pursuit of illusory goods: selfishness and greed are the forms of damnation reserved for the oppressors of the poor, while the oppressed are damned by other delusions, among them their recourse to 'Cobbett's snuff.'

In the midst of the satiric survey of the damned, the Shelley circle (and others of the reformist group) appear,

> … some few, like we know who,
> Damned – but God alone knows why –
> To believe their minds are given
> To make this ugly Hell a Heaven;
> In which faith they live and die.
>
> (ll. 242–6; Reiman, p. 333)

Here the rhetoric at first appears to class this group with the rest of the damned, but the tone of this passage is unstable, its imagery incongruous with the catalogue of universal damnation. On the one hand, the expressions 'We know who' and 'God alone knows why' are plainly self-mocking. However ennobling it may be, reformist idealism is ranked as a damning delusion, and its prestige is further undermined by its status as a 'faith' (deprecatory in tone, even though Shelley's usual hostility to faith is not in force here). On the other hand, the surprisingly serious Miltonic allusion to Satan's elevation of mind over circumstances dignifies the group's damnation: the motto exalting the mind as center and circumference of reality defends the idealism of 'we know who' in opposition to the pursuit of false goods by the other inhabitants of hell. Incorporating the Miltonic sublime, then, the Satanism of this stanza distinguishes this group from all who are

damned to be lorded over by the fat and vapid Devil; at the same time, the allusion calls attention to the hopeless political isolation of the reformist group. Thus 'damnation' shifts significantly several times in this context, finally evoking frustrated and despairing idealism.

The most elaborate portrayal of the fall into damning illusion is the account of Peter Bell's decline into conservatism. In Part Five, 'Grace,' Peter discovers his calling as an egalitarian poet under the influence of one of the guests at the Devil's dinners. This satiric surrogate for Coleridge, with his metaphysical conversation, becomes the agency of grace for the Devil's butler. While listening rapt, Peter Bell conceives 'obscure remembrances' (l. 418; Reiman, p. 337) from his former existence, made up of the scenes and incidents from common life celebrated in *Lyrical Ballads*: 'pedlars tramping on their rounds, / Milkpans and pails, and odd collections / Of saws, and proverbs' (ll. 429–30; Reiman, p. 338). But this dismissive survey of Peter's 'dim recollections' is merely incidental to the clarity of prophetic vision Shelley's poem honors in the Wordsworth of the 1790s, who possessed imaginative power, the extinction of which is a social loss:

> … Peter's voice was clear, and came
> Announcing from the frozen hearth
> Of a cold age, that none might tame
> The soul of diviner flame
> It augured to the Earth:
>
> (ll. 433–7; Reiman, p. 338)

This prophetic power is destroyed by the Devil. Flushed with the success of his new poetic vein, Peter gives the Devil notice, who thereupon vows to humble him for his insubordination and bribes the reviewers to savage Peter's verse. Driven half-mad by the reviews, Peter withdraws into a nihilistic numbness, abandoning all concern with oppression:

> So in his Country's dying face
> He looked – and, lovely as she lay,
> Seeking in vain his last embrace,
> Wailing her own abandoned case,
> With hardened sneer he turned away;
>
> (ll. 589–93; Reiman, p. 342)

Peter's damnation deepens once he turns to orthodox faith, 'for now he raved enormous folly / Of Baptisms, Sunday-schools, and Graves' (ll. 614–15; Reiman, p. 343). When he discovers, however, that this brand of poetry meets with the reviewers' approval, Peter sets to work writing 'odes to the Devil' (l. 634; Reiman, p. 343). In the sample from these verses, a parody of the notorious lines on 'Carnage, God's Daughter'

in Wordsworth's poem on Waterloo ('Ode, 1815') is blended with an encomium on the Peterloo massacre (ll. 636–52; Reiman, pp. 343–4). The Devil completes his taming of Peter by purchasing him the sinecure that mirrors Wordsworth's position of Distributor of Stamps. Peter's 'promotion' is accompanied by 'double damnation,' the 'strange and horrid curse' of dullness, which drives away his readers, reviewers, and even his family (l. 698; Reiman, p. 345).

No sooner has the conversion of Peter Bell into an instrument of tyranny been completed than the Devil mysteriously dies: he 'Took to his bed; he had no cough, / No doctor, – meat and drink enough, – / Yet that same night he died' (ll. 675–7; Reiman, p. 345). Shelley's eccentric account of the Devil's demise echoes the popular traditions surrounding the death of old Nick, inflected here into a flippant reprise of the infidel polemic against Satanic myth. To deflate the Devil by fusing him with the figure of a nouveau riche merchant and then to kill him off is to bring the myth to the point of closure, to destroy superstition. But even this ideologically motivated stroke is overridden. Insofar as Shelley's demonic drone represents the oppressive power of the class that is driving England to the brink of revolution, his death is an economic and social nonevent. Once he is buried, his money simply changes hands: 'The Devil's corpse was leaded down. / His decent heirs enjoyed his pelf' (ll. 678–9; Reiman, p. 345).

Cronin contends that *Peter Bell the Third* embodies an ambivalent, almost paralyzed response to the political crisis of 1819: while Shelley recognized that events were forcing him to choose sides, he recognized that he could neither fully accept nor reject either of the extremes, Tory reaction and radical reform.[9] Heightening this sense of paralysis is the portrayal of the new aristocracy and its demonic figurehead. It is the damnation of Peter Bell at the hands of the nouveau riche Devil that receives final satiric emphasis, dramatizing Wordsworth's submission to that form of power. Because it can reduce imagination to dullness, the Satanic order of drones has as much force to impede social change as 'opinion' has to advance it. In *Peter Bell the Third*, the only means of denying or escaping the influence of the new aristocracy is discovered in the defensive mockery of Shelley's satire. Therefore the ironic form of Satanism developed in this poem is offered to its audience – 'we know who,' the *cognoscenti* of the Shelley circle – as a self-protective social gesture. While Wordsworth is the target of the oppositional aggression animating Shelley's poem, the gentleman-Devil is the other pole of the satiric vision, a figure focusing the shared contempt of the author's circle and justifying its withdrawal from the world ruled by Peter Bell's patron.

## III. *The Vision of Judgment*

At approximately the same time Byron was at work on *Cain: A Mystery*, he wrote *The Vision of Judgment*, using the materials of Christian diabology to construct his parody of Southey's fulsome apotheosis of George III. His

ironic handling of this material constructs a defensive rhetoric similar to Shelley's, though more flexible. In *The Vision of Judgment*, Byron develops a Satanic persona to mock Tory reaction and its paid prophet. Yet Byron's Satan is not only the voice of satiric aggression; he is a victim of irony as well, virtually constituting a satiric target himself. This mobile satiric method enables the poet both to engage his ideological opponents and withdraw, deflecting through irony a sense of political frustration similar to that pervading *Peter Bell the Third*.

In the most authoritative recent study of Byron's politics, Malcolm Kelsall represents Byron as a trapped figure, occupying the collapsed middle ground between Tory reaction and the 'blackguard' radical reformers Byron professed to despise.[10] This does not differ from the position in which Cronin places Shelley; thus the Satanism of *The Vision of Judgment* reveals an ironic response akin to Shelley's view of his predicament. If the ludicrous conduct of the heavenly tribunal in the poem is the manifest content of Byron's sense of his own political paralysis, then its oppositional mythic rhetoric displays the only freedom of movement available: an ironic diabolism that is calibrated to the occasion, offering an oblique and dismissive reply to Southey's frontal assault on the Satanic school.

The Satanism of *The Vision of Judgment* may be seen as a response to political events that seemed to declare the futility of any engagement with them. Developments in England and Italy drew conflicting reactions from Byron in the year preceding the composition of *The Vision of Judgment*. In February 1820, the Cato Street Conspirators were arrested, thwarting the attempt of Arthur Thistlewood and others to assassinate the entire Tory Cabinet in revenge for Peterloo. Although Byron had often said he would have liked to see Castlereagh's head on a pike, the designs of the conspirators horrified him (he saw members of his own class menaced by vulgarians). Indeed Byron must have thought that the beheading of the Foreign Secretary a likely prospect, for during these years he repeatedly prophesied that revolution in England was approaching. As early as 1818, he remarked to Thomas Cam Hobhouse that 'assuredly till a great blow be struck – the present System will only conduct Castlereagh to his object' (*BLJ*, VI, 89).[11] The abortive uprising in the Romagna in 1820–21 moved Byron in conflicting ways as well, initially inspiring yet ultimately frustrating him. Eagerly anticipating the prospect of all Italy uniting with revolutionary Naples to throw off the Austrian yoke, Byron joined the secret society of the Carbonari, buying their members guns. But the revolutionary movement imploded in February 1821, even before the Austrians crushed the Neapolitan revolution; disillusioned, Byron noted in his journal that its leaders went on a hunting expedition on the eve of their intended insurgency. The rebellion was doomed by external forces as well, as Byron knew, because British complicity – a policy which Castlereagh had constructed – reinforced Austrian oppression in Italy.[12]

When he completed *Cain* and *The Vision of Judgment*, Byron announced once more that he might return home to play a role in the coming revolution:

> Your infamous Government will drive all honest men into the necessity of reversing it – I see nothing left for it – but a republic *now* … I should take a *decided* part in politics – with pen and person – & (if I could revive my English) in the house. (*BLJ*, VIII, 240)

Byron's posturing as revolutionary leader has of course received its share of attention; less has been said about the other assertion here – that he would promote the cause as a political writer and orator.[13] This hypothetical half-pledge was not fulfilled; Byron never returned home to perform the imagined role of confronting the dual opponent he envisioned, the 'abominable tyrants' of the Tory Ministry and their paid propagandists (chiefly Southey). Yet Byron had already found a channel for his defiance of the 'hireling' writers and 'all the corruption, and infamy, and patronage of their master rogues and slave renegadoes' (*BLJ*, VIII, 250). Noting contentiously that Southey's political stance 'necessarily begets opposition,' the preface to *The Vision of Judgment* all but promises that a backlash will be found in the poem (*Works*, VI, 310). Opposition assumes a different form there, however, as aggression is displaced by a comic, dismissive – and finally disengaged – treatment of the masters and their slaves.

Because it accepts the conservative political appropriation of Christian diabology, the opening of *The Vision of Judgment* appears to concede a great deal – though in facetious terms – to Southey. Historical process is represented as an eternal tug-of-war between heaven and hell; in this brisk chronicle of recent years, the period between the onset of the French revolution and Waterloo amounts to 'a pull altogether' yanking most souls toward hell (ll. 5–7; *Works*, VI, 312). Satan recoils from the 'crowning carnage' of Waterloo, but only because the slaughter 'almost quenched his innate thirst of evil' (ll. 38–46; *Works*, VI, 314). Yet if Byron's initial handling of the figure of Satan seems tamely to endorse the traditional equations Blake sets up in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* ('Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell'), the ironic treatment of the mythology of heaven cancels out this impression. heaven is depicted as morally enervated, governed by arbitrary prescription and precedent. Saint Peter dozes by the gate, the angels are idle, and, as a cherub explains to Peter, George's soul has been delivered to the gates of heaven only because of the devolution of commands. Thus there is little surprise contained in the narrator's baldly ironic acknowledgment that 'by many stories, / And true, we learn the angels all are Tories' (ll. 207–8; *Works*, VI, 320).

Byronic mobility acquires a rhetorical function, then, in the narrator's ironic acceptance of the Christian mythology in its political amplitude.

This ironic pretense is sustained in the ensuing mock-serious reflections on the fate of George's soul and the prospect of eternal punishment:

> 'God save the king!' It is a large economy
> In God to save the like; but if he will
> Be saving, all the better; for not one am I
> Of those who think damnation better still …
>
> I know this is unpopular; I know
> 'Tis blasphemous; I know one may be damn'd
> For hoping no one else may e'er be so

(ll. 97–107; *Works*, VI, 316)

These facetious observations about doctrinal matters are calculated to respond indirectly to Southey's charge of the 'audacious impiety' of the Satanic school. Insofar as Byron's meditation on the fate of George's soul involves an ironized repudiation of the doctrine of eternal damnation (he modestly wishes for 'some slight restriction' of its eternally 'hot jurisdiction'), he does not contest the charge of irreligion. The sleeve of verbal irony enclosing these stanzas makes it plain that Byron does not regard Southey's church mythology and doctrine or his claim that Byronic impiety subverts the political order as sufficiently serious to require a direct reply. Instead, Byron counters Southey's canting line of argument by implicitly asking: how does wishing no one to suffer eternal torment endanger the state?

The most openly contemptuous gesture in the first section of the poem appears when Byron engages Southey's political mythography, in an aside that dismisses the years of hollow peace from Waterloo to 1821:

> – they form the tyrant's lease
> With nothing but new names subscribed upon't;
> 'Twill one day finish: meantime they increase,
> 'With seven heads and ten horns,' and all in front,
> Like Saint John's foretold beast; but ours are born
> Less formidable in the head than horn.

(ll. 51–6, *Works*, VI, 314)

The joke at the expense of the strong libido and weak mind of George IV delivers the final ottava rima punch, and the comic effect almost cancels out the ideologically pointed image of the apocalyptic Beast. This piece of Millenarian iconography revived from the 1790s, a monstrous image of the reinstalled thrones of Europe, overrides the conventionally moralized diabology of the opening stanzas. It is displayed to counter the political symbolism of the demonic Fiend that appears in Southey's *A Vision of Judgment*. As we

have seen, his earlier article on Parliamentary Reform in the *Quarterly Review* showed that the poet laureate was no stranger to the tactics of demonizing. The general satanizing of *vox populi* ('it is the Devil whose name is Legion!') in that piece develops into the more specific attack on sedition in *A Vision of Judgment*, featuring the Accuser of George, the 'Spirit by which his righteous reign had been troubled.'[14] From this figure, which conflates the Beast of Revelation 13 and Spenser's Blatant Beast, issues a stream of Whig and radical voices:

> Many-headed and monstrous the Fiend; with numberless faces,
> Numberless bestial ears erect to all rumors, and restless,
> And with numberless mouths which were fill'd with lies as with arrows:
> Clamours arose as he came, a confusion of turbulent voices,
> Maledictions, and blatant tongues, and viperous hisses;
> And in the hubbub of senseless sounds the watchwords of faction,
> Freedom, Invaded Rights, Corruption, and War, and Oppression,
> Loudly enounced were heard.[15]

Southey's Fiend of sedition embodies the vast, amorphous threat to the state he had prophetically denounced for years: the unrestricted press. Since his article on social unrest, published in 1812 in the *Quarterly Review*, Southey had repeatedly warned that the government must restrain incendiary journalists (such as Cobbett), or the press will otherwise 'effect a revolution.'[16] Hence the emphasis in Southey's image of the Fiend is solely on its utterances, its 'watchwords' – like Cobbett's standard theme, 'Corruption.' The Fiend embodies the seditious journalists and publishers who would eventually pull down the state if tolerated. In his preface to *A Vision of Judgment*, Southey aligns the Fiends of sedition with the Satanic school, citing the 'loathsome images of atrocities and horror' in their writing that embody the violent spirit of the insurrectionary Moloch.

Byron introduces the monarchic Beast to mirror and travesty Southey's icon of sedition, yet he envisions no counterbalancing menace here, ending the stanza only with the absurd figure of the oversexed, brainless new king. Rather than offer an aggressively oppositional gesture, then, Byron responds in an offhand manner to Southey's demonizing tactics, and this effect is sustained by the portrayal of Satan in much of the narrative of *The Vision of Judgment*. Satan continues to occupy the role assigned him in the opening of the poem – in fact, he reassumes other traditional functions, playing the Accuser and the Emperor of hell, who claims the soul of the late king because he 'reigned o'er millions to serve me alone' (l. 312; *Works*, VI, 324).

By retaining these traditional features in his portrayal of Satan, however, Byron constructs a rhetorical Trojan horse: a conventionally conceived Satanic figure that contains transgressive features. These ambiguities are

signaled by the appearance of Byron's sublime fallen archangel, the grandeur of whose initial portrayal nearly disrupts the satiric tone:

> His brow was like the deep when tempest-tost;
> Fierce and unfathomable thoughts engraved
> Eternal wrath on his immortal face,
> And *where* he gazed a gloom pervaded space.
>
> (ll. 189–92; *Works*, VI, 320)

This portrait inverts the poet laureate's grotesque representation of the Fiend of sedition, 'late called "multifaced" / By multo-scribbling Southey' (ll. 513–14; *Works*, VI, 332). In the subsequent tribunal, Byron's portrayal of Satan continues to erase Southey's personification of social and political evil. Whereas Southey's demon falls into stupefied silence when confronted by the Divine Presence, Byron's voluble Satan declaims – in a voice conspicuously devoid of irony – against the offenses of George III against liberty:

> The new world shook him off; the old yet groans
> Beneath what he and his prepared, if not
> Completed: he leaves heirs on many thrones
> To all his vices, without what begot
> Compassion for him – his tame virtues; drones
> Who sleep, or despots who have now forgot
> A lesson which shall be re-taught them, wake
> Upon the thrones of Earth; but let them quake!
>
> (ll. 369–76; *Works*, VI, 326–7)

The reader recalls, of course, Satan's primary object – securing his property, the soul of George – and remembers that the king-damning harangue is therefore not disinterestedly libertarian. And yet the intensity of this denunciation exceeds its immediate occasion, as does the prophetic warning to the sleeping drones and forgetful despots. When Satan picks up the theme of Catholic Emancipation to defend the liberty of 'five millions of the primitive,' the Accuser modulates into a Byronic surrogate, an oppositional persona who voices the same cause the poet supported in the House of Lords in 1813 (l. 377; *Works*, VI, 327). The only strong verbal irony in these stanzas is used to intensify the attack, when Satan mockingly lauds George's 'neutral virtues' – 'All this is much, and most upon a throne' – in order to emphasize the irrelevance of upright private conduct in the context of tyrannical policy (ll. 360, 363; *Works*, VI, 326). As these features of Satan's oration accumulate, he begins to resemble Shelley's Luciferean Spirit of Good, the Satanic genius of revolution. This impression is deepened, if ironically, by the transformation of

hell into a democratic republic. 'Jonathan,' the American voice heard last in the host of infernal witnesses ascending to the heavenly tribunal, assures his damned companions that the commotion can only mean that '*Our* President is going to war' (l. 472; *Works*, VI, 330).

Yet the revolutionary prestige of the President of hell is subverted by Satan's own acknowledgment that he pursues the damnation of kings only 'as a kind of quit-rent, to / Assert my right as lord' of the earth (ll. 321–2; *Works*, IV, 325). He even confesses indifference to the prospect of losing his claim to the soul of George, which he confesses he argues merely as 'a point of form' (l. 511; *Works*, VI, 332). Satan's attitude reflects Byron's dismissal of the futile formalities he called 'Parliamentary mummeries,' and the aristocratic negligence of Satan contributes to the mood of cynical withdrawal in the poem. The political world of 1821 is as inconsequential to Byron as the heavenly tribunal is to Satan. Thus the variability of the Satanic persona in *The Vision of Judgment* matches Byron's outlook, enabling him both to critique and dismiss the reign of George, caricaturing Southey's propagandistic piece of mythmaking and puncturing his apotheosis of the king.

As an attack on the 'master rogues' behind the 'slave renegadoes,' Byron's parody of Southey hit home: this can be measured by the prosecution for defamatory libel it brought on its publisher, the first ever to be based on a poem.[17] Given its gestures of disaffection and disengagement, the social impact of *The Vision of Judgment* was more direct than intended, then, and this situational irony was compounded by the changing complexion of Byron's audience in the 1820s. William St. Clair has demonstrated that the poet's audience expanded enormously in the years after his death; abandoned by the middle and upper class readers he had alienated, Byron became accessible to the working class through cheap, pirated editions.[18] In his satire Byron sought to control the relationship with his ideological foes, writing for a relatively narrow group of readers who constituted the fit audience for his ambivalent, ironized skirmishing.[19] But he clearly lost control of this endeavor, receiving at last a new readership – *faute de mieux*, as he would have regarded it, had he lived to see this turn of events: the 'British Blackguard reader,' a vulgar audience Byron did not desire because it 'understands nothing' (*BLJ*, VII, 58).

## IV. *The Deformed Transformed*

The disaffected view of the political situation in *The Vision of Judgment* gives way to a more comprehensive ironic vision in Byron's late unfinished drama, *The Deformed Transformed*. Here a demonic figure voicing a rhetoric of acerbic dismissal interprets the Byronic quest to transcend the limitations of mortal existence. This aspiration is embodied in the emblematic character of Arnold, the hunchback, whose deformity thwarts his yearning for beauty and love. In the protagonist's enigmatic Satanic mentor and

Doppelgänger, 'the Stranger,' Byron introduces a Mephistopheles to Arnold's Faust, who aids him in his quest while at each step deflating the hunchback's idealism with his persistently mocking commentary. An ironic gap thereby opens between Arnold's dreams and the response of the demonic Stranger, through whose voice Byron returns to the satiric mode of *Don Juan* to proclaim the 'Nothingness of life' (Canto VI, l. 48; *Works*, V, 339).

Both the Mephistophelean persona and its function as a Doppelgänger reveal the influence of Goethe on Byron at this time, reflecting specific features of the reception of the German poet by the Byron–Shelley circle. The analytical introduction accompanying an illustrated partial translation of *Faust* circulating in this group in early 1822 encouraged Byron's creation of a demonic double. Here Faust and Mephistopheles are interpreted 'as *one* person, represented symbolically, only in a two-fold shape.'[20] While Byron clearly drew on this conception of Mephistopheles to fashion his demonic figure, however, in the ironic voice of the Stranger he develops an even more comprehensively negating perspective. Here Byron was surely influenced by the conception of Mephistopheles and Goethe himself established by Madame de Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (1810–13). In this influential work, she proclaims Mephistopheles not only the hero of *Faust: Eine Tragedie* (1808) but the agent of 'an infernal irony … which extends itself to the whole creation. … it seems as if the government of the world were, for a moment, entrusted to the hands of the demon.' Mephistopheles embodies a sublime power to question and negate – 'a diabolical revelation of incredulity.'[21] These features are apparently what Byron took to be 'Mephistophelean,' and by embodying a comprehensive incredulity in the voice of the Stranger, he critiques an entire complex of human pretensions – the idealizing of eros, the thirst for glory – while pressing the claims of the body. Through this voice, Byron incorporates into dramatic form not only the attack on military glory developed in *Don Juan* Cantos 7–8 but the materialism of the first two cantos as well, where Byron's satiric persona enforces the view that the bodily, the physical, the material, the sensual, are primary realities, spirit an epiphenomenon.

Restrained by 'stepdame Nature's avarice' (I.i.320; *Works*, VI, 531), Arnold possesses a soul which he professes is 'an aspiring one, whatever the tenement / In which it is mislodged' (I.i.145–6; *Works*, VI, 524). His quest is forced upon him in the abrupt opening of the play, when his mother violently rejects him. Arnold's despairing recognition that his hunchbacked, dwarfish body will perpetually deny him the love he craves compels his abortive attempt at suicide and his subsequent, wishful invocation of the Devil:

> that the devil, to whom they liken me,
> Would aid his likeness! If I must partake
> His form, why not his power? Is it because
> I have not his will too?
>
> (I.i.40–3; *Works*, VI, 520)[22]

Emerging from the mist over a nearby fountain, the demonic apparition who offers Arnold a new body diverges significantly from Byron's sources and from traditional diabolism.[23] From his first appearance, this Satanic figure seems fully defamiliarized, opaquely named 'the Stranger' and described simply as a 'tall black man' (*Works*, VI, 522). He offers no recognizable demonic contract; it is left to Arnold to project a conventional Satanic identity onto the Stranger by suggesting that they bargain for his soul.[24]

In this unusual temptation scene, the figure of the Stranger is distanced from its literary models. Affinities with Goethe's Mephistopheles, particularly the latter's habitual mockery of human pretensions, are largely absent in this scene; as in *Cain*, the cynicism of the Satanic mentor emerges and intensifies only later in the dramatic action. Nor do the Stranger's actions fit the Mephistophelean role: he abandons the formal contract signed in blood, on which Goethe's Devil insists. After the hunchback's repeated questions about the conditions attached to his offer, the Stranger assures him that 'You shall have no bond / But your own will, no contract save your deeds' (I.i.151–2; *Works*, VI, 524). While this might imply that Arnold will be compelled to damn himself with or without a contract, the play does not project anything like the potent determinism the reader finds in the opening of *Manfred*, and the Stranger's words express a liberality absent in Goethe's Mephistopheles. The Stranger's enigmatically open-ended terms suggest that Arnold is left free to damn or save himself by his own action.

This dramatic gesture suggests that Byron planned action in which Arnold would struggle to overcome the limitations that remain after the transcendence of his physically deformed state. This conjecture seems confirmed by the remaining scenes of the unfinished play, in which Arnold fights in the sixteenth-century siege of Rome and strives to win the love of Olimpia, a Roman noblewoman whom he rescues during the sack of the city. Precisely what change in Arnold Byron intended to dramatize must remain a matter of speculation, of course, but the truncated action of the play largely consists of scenes which display the naivety of Arnold's erotic idealism, against which is set a correcting view, the materialism expounded by the Stranger. This becomes explicit when Arnold longs for an end to the destructiveness of war. To explain that neither peace nor stasis exists in the universe, the Stranger invokes a cosmology of colliding material bodies, all driven by the 'rule / Of fixed Necessity':

> From the star
> To the winding worm, all life is motion; and
> In life *commotion* is the extremest point
> Of life. The planet wheels till it becomes
> A comet, and destroying as it sweeps
> The stars, goes out.
>
> (I.ii.30–1, 22–7; *Works*, VI, 541)

The Mephistophelean tinge to his materialism is fully unveiled in soliloquy. Goethe's spirit of negation, resentful of the usurpation of the 'supercilious light' of Creation on 'Mother Night,' is committed to reducing order to chaos. Byron's Stranger is not militant in the cause of uncreation, but he does echo the mocking reproach Mephistopheles offers God for the primal error of mixing matter and spirit: man 'might be living somewhat better, / Had you not given him of Heaven's light a glitter.'[25] The Stranger draws similar conclusions about the effects:

> these are men, forsooth!
> Heroes and chiefs, the flower of Adam's bastards!
> This is the consequence of giving Matter
> The power of Thought. It is a stubborn substance,
> And thinks chaotically, as it acts,
> Ever relapsing into its first elements.
>
> (I.ii.314–19; *Works*, VI, 551)

These assertions are consistent with the idea of Nature constructed in the second canto of *Don Juan*, where Byron mounts a satiric attack on Wordsworthian values. Here a conception of Nature as a field of ineluctable physical forces emerges graphically in the cannibalism practiced by the survivors in the long boat, where all pretensions to moral and religious virtue – not to mention the existence of 'spirit' – are stripped away by the power of hunger. 'Twas nature gnaw'd them to this resolution,' the narrator explains, placing those in the boat on the same level with the shark passing in the water (l. 598, *Works*, V, 112). The mutual hostility of spirit and flesh is of course a recurring subject of Byronic meditation; in the narrative of the shipwreck, spirit is entirely subordinated to matter, however, and the Stranger voices a similar perspective.

The Stranger's materialism first surfaces during his bizarre negotiations with Arnold over the transformation that permits the hunchback to jettison his natural body and take the form of Achilles. When Arnold acquires his new physical shape, the Stranger prevents him from entirely abandoning his former bodily existence. Arnold springs up wearing the body of Achilles, exulting, 'I love, and I shall be beloved!' (I.i.420; *Works*, VI, 534), but the Stranger solemnly holds him back:

> Stop!
> What shall become of your abandoned garment,
> Yon hump, and lump, and clod of ugliness,
> Which late you wore, or were?
>
> (I.i.421–4; *Works*, VI, 534)

When Arnold expresses indifference over the fate of his body, the Stranger rebukes him: 'That's ungracious; / If not ungrateful. Whatso'er it be, / It hath sustained your soul full many a day' (I.i.429–31; *Works*, VI, 535). By calling attention to the pathos of the discarded body, the Stranger voices an attitude at odds with the familiar Byronic hostility to 'clay.' Even more oddly, Byron's Devil goes on to insist that 'Some one must now be found' to take on Arnold's discarded body, then volunteers to do so, as if assuming a necessary and unavoidable burden (I.i.441; *Works*, VI, 535). The gesture is enigmatic but suggests a parodic Incarnation and Atonement, an effect amplified by the Stranger's incantatory apostrophe to Arnold's body:

> Clay, not dead, but soul-less!
> Though no man would choose thee,
> An immortal no less
> Deigns not to refuse thee.
> Clay thou art; and unto spirit
> All clay is of equal merit.
>
> (I.i.452–7; *Works*, VI, 535–6)

Arnold's ironic 'redemption' is to be attempted, then, by a Devil who deigns to assume the deformed clay embodying Arnold's limitations. The Stranger will reflect them back to Arnold as well, thereby compelling his perpetual awareness of only seemingly cast-off imperfections. By forbidding an easy transcendence of Arnold's former state, the Satanic figure inhibits the desire of the protagonist, intensifying and heightening the conflict between spirit and matter.

In the remaining action of *The Deformed Transformed*, Arnold sets out with the Stranger (now named 'Caesar') on his 'pilgrimage.' Yet Arnold's spiritualized conception of the quest – informed by his erotic idealism – seems to recede in his mind once he has received the body of Achilles. His desire now resembles the headlong rush into sensual, worldly experience embraced by Goethe's Faust after he completes his pact with Mephistopheles: Arnold chooses to go 'Where the world / Is thickest, that I may behold it in/Its workings' (I.i.493–5; *Works*, VI, 537). His first destination is Rome, during the great siege of 1527, an historical moment Byron selected from Sismondi's *History of the Italian Republics* (1807–18) – no doubt because it would serve as a vehicle for the satiric deflation of martial glory. At the opening of the second scene, 'Count Arnold' has already established himself as the 'chosen knight / And free companion' (I.ii.4–5; *Works*, VI, 540) of 'the Constable Bourbon,' Charles, Duc de Bourbon, the siege-commander who served the Emperor Charles V. The historical backdrop provided by Sismondi is entirely resistant to idealization. According to his book, which chronicles the rise and fall of Italian

freedom in the Middle Ages and Renaissance, the Constable besieged Rome because his gigantic army had been abandoned by Charles V, who would not pay the troops who occupied much of Italy at this time. The Constable's army was compelled to support itself by pillaging, and Rome fell victim to a sacking 'unparalleled in the most calamitous period – that of the first triumph of barbarism over civilization: neither Alaric the Goth nor Genseric the Vandal had treated it with like ferocity.'[26]

Byron's Constable is high-minded, that is, entirely self-deceived; provoked by the cynical sneers of Caesar, he affirms the nobility of his cause and declares that his victory will regenerate Rome, restoring its ancient greatness. His hollow idealism is systematically attacked by Caesar, whose satiric banter reveals the selfish ambition concealed by the Bourbon's grandiloquence: when the latter belittles the 'full meal, / And wine, and sleep' which constitute the slave's riches, Caesar replies: 'It would be well / If the Earth's princes asked no more' (I.ii.259–62; *Works*, VI, 549). Nothing glorious or new invests the current struggle, he explains to the Bourbon: Rome has merely been 'the never-ceasing scene of slaughter / For ages' (I.ii.89–90; *Works*, VI, 543). Yet the Bourbon remains impervious to these barbs: mortally wounded just as the assault on the city commences, he insists that his spirit shall lead the men over the walls. Arnold is similarly unimproved by Caesar's cynical wisdom, and his behavior consistently displays ideals contradicted by action. Praised by the Bourbon as 'the beauty of our host, and brave as beauteous, / And generous as lovely' (I.ii.220–1; *Works*, VI, 547), Arnold sulks when he is denied the glory of leading the assault on Rome's walls. He professes his weariness of bloodshed and accuses Caesar of luring him 'Through scenes of blood and lust,' yet the latter accurately observes that Arnold is (like Juan on the battlefield in Cantos 7–8), a human being transformed into a killing machine merely because 'his blood's up' (I.ii.20; II.ii.27, *Works*, VI, 540; 560).

Caesar's satiric perspective reveals, then, that Arnold's conduct as a warrior exhibits the subjection of ideals to overpowering physical drives. In these scenes, the Satanic character does not function as a psychological double, but instead as a free-wheeling Byronic mouthpiece, whose wisdom has no discernible effect on Arnold, at least until the final scenes, wherein the plot returns to the erotic quest. Here Arnold rescues Olimpia from rape by the soldiers pillaging the city. When Arnold subsequently falls in love, Caesar begins to function as a tutelary spirit or an anti-Diotima, instructing him in the material basis of love. When Arnold complains that his love for Olimpia goes unrequited despite saving her life and her father's, Caesar distinguishes between the tangibly founded emotion of gratitude and the abstract unreality of the love he seeks:

> you would be *loved* – what you call loved –
> *Self-loved* – loved for *yourself* – for neither health

> Nor wealth – nor youth – nor power – nor rank nor beauty –
> For these you may be stript of – but *beloved*
> As an Abstraction – for – you know not what
>
> (III.61–5; *Works*, VI, 576)

At one stroke, Shelleyan eros, with its discovery of the 'soul within our soul' and the quest for its antitype, is dismissed ('On Love,' Julian, VI, 202). In *Manfred*, the failure of that quest for self-perfection is obscurely bound up in the hero's tragic development, part of the 'fatality' or psychological drive that impels Manfred to his final, solitary embrace of autonomy. Here the very pursuit of the antitype is rejected on skeptical grounds. Stripped of each material ground – wealth, power, beauty – the self is like an onion, its layers peeled away until nothing remains. There is no immaterial soul within that experiences love, only the 'you know not what' evoked by Caesar, who echoes the narrator of *Don Juan* confronting a comparable abyss of unknowing: 'when / The goal is gain'd, we die, you know – and then – / What then? – I do not know, no more do you –' (Canto I, ll. 1063–5; *Works*, V, 51).

Were Olimpia to appear to return Arnold's love, he would not accept but doubt it, Caesar continues, out of 'self-jealousy.' That is, Arnold would conclude that her feeling could only be attached to an aspect of his external self – to his wealth, power, or beauty – from which his self would jealously recoil. Once raised to the level of an immaterial absolute, Caesar's provocative banter implies, eros is withdrawn from tangible human reality. To assert this is to isolate and heighten the tension between spiritual and physical found in the poetry of the Romantic love-quest – the pursuit in *Alastor*, for example, of the veiled maid, whom the protagonist fatally follows as the transcendent goal of his desire. The illusory notion of the soul itself, Caesar implies, is a form of tyranny, imprisoning the self. Yet Caesar's erotic psychology, it is interesting to note, does acknowledge that love can open the self to larger experience, unless this process is thwarted by illusion:

> Nothing can blind a Mortal like to light –
> Now Love in you – is as the Sun – a thing
> Beyond you – and your Jealousy's of earth –
> A Cloud of your own raising –
>
> (III.79–82; *Works*, VI, 576)

In terms of Caesar's materialist psychology, the cloud of self-jealousy obscures the great Sun of love; that is, Caesar does not deny the existence of love, but his corresponding claim – that the self can entirely obscure it from view – reinforces his skeptical view.

In his study of *The Deformed Transformed*, Charles Robinson suggests that Byron intended to conclude the play with the suicide of Arnold, achieved inadvertently by his jealous murder of Caesar.[27] If this represents Byron's intentions, then the conclusion he projected would have involved an ironic reprise of the death-scene of *Manfred*, wherein the protagonist shakes off all forms of human limitation. In Byron's last drama, the same conflict between the spiritual and the physical would have ended in a fatal attempt to subordinate the body – by eliminating its reminding presence in Caesar. Arnold indeed seems headed for this form of self-destruction: impelled by his unaccommodating 'immortal' aspirations, he appears oblivious to Caesar's correcting instruction. But we cannot be sure that Byron meant to draw the plot toward such a catastrophe. Byron's notes containing the prototypic plot borrowed from Calderon contain little action and no mention of the siege of Rome, which suggests that between sketching a plot and actually drafting the play Byron changed his conception of the work – from a tightly-knit structure to a more open-ended epic-drama, composed, as Washington Irving suggested, 'in the genuine spirit of Goethe.'[28] As such, it is likely that he meant to craft a more prolonged and involved conflict of 'dust and deity.' The fragment projects more than Arnold's eventual (if inevitable) self-disintegration, and the action that Byron did complete has already constructed a more active and complex role for the Stranger than merely embodying the protagonist's defects. In fact, the siege-episode begins to dramatize something like a transformation of the quest in Goethe's *Faust*: Arnold's participation in the siege of Rome and his courtship of Olimpia enact an ironized struggle toward self-integration; in this quest, the Devil is his skeptical, materialist mentor.

Yet neither the end of this process nor Caesar's motivation can be gleaned from Byron's unfinished drama. By the end of the last extant scene, the actions of Arnold's Satanic mentor appear increasingly gratuitous and even more detached than the diabolism Byron constructed in *Cain* and *The Vision of Judgment*. This attitude is prefigured in Caesar's soliloquy that closes the first act:

> Well! I must play with these poor puppets: 'tis
> The Spirit's pastime in his idler hours.
> When I grow weary of it, I have business
> Amongst the stars, which these poor creatures deem
> Were made for them to look at. 'Twere a jest now
> To bring one down amongst them, and set fire
> Unto their ant hill: how the pismires then
> Would scamper o'er the scalding soil, and, ceasing
> From tearing down each other's nests, pipe forth
> One universal orison! Ha! ha!
>
> (I.ii.320–9; *Works*, VI, 551)

This speech negates both of the Satanic roles already explored by Byron, the tempter and the Promethean mentor, substituting for them the leisurely play that staves off the boredom of an immortal. Even with this confession, though, a fundamental instability remains in Byron's conception of Caesar's role. In his song at the beginning of Part three, Caesar looks back to an earlier, titanic era, the first age of the world. His disgust with 'these poor puppets,' 'the flower of Adam's bastards' is coupled in this song with a nostalgic recollection of the first age of the world,

> While man was in stature
> As towers in our time,
> The first born of nature,
> And, like her, sublime!
>
> (III.i.58–61; *Works*, VI, 573)

Hence the earlier soliloquy that dramatizes Caesar's boredom with playing the mentor to Arnold: this song classes him with the rest of the present human race – as unpromising raw material. In these words, Caesar voices that theme diffused throughout Byron's writing – in Manfred's evocation of the first age of 'undiseased mankind, the giant sons / Of the embrace of angels,' Cain's vision of the mighty race of pre-Adamites, or the poet's own ruminations on the subject of human degeneration from an unfallen order: 'I sometimes think that *Man* may be the relic of some higher material being wrecked in a former world.'[29] Caesar's song recalls other contexts as well – the primitivist celebration in *Don Juan*, Canto II, for example, of the natural love of Haidee. This idealized state is distant not in time, but space – removed from the European world where women's love yields only their suffering. Like each of these Byronic voices, Caesar's song expresses distaste not merely for the immediate social and political scene, the horizon of the Satanic satire of *Peter Bell the Third* and *The Vision of Judgment*. Caesar voices loathing for the very ground of present human existence: a Satanic consciousness judges human reality from an eternal and universalizing perspective and rejects it.

# Epilogue: *The Ghost of Abel*

In the miniature drama of *The Ghost of Abel*, Blake's last illuminated book, the forms of Satanism produced by two generations of Romantic writers converge. Here Blake rewrites the denouement of Byron's *Cain: A Mystery* to envision the overthrow of the Satanic worship of retribution. Executed in 1822, the work belongs to the years when Blake was beginning to emerge from obscurity, some four years after he met his friend and last patron, John Linnell, but well before Samuel Palmer and the other 'Ancients' discovered him. The biographical record of these years reveals nothing about Blake's view of the blasphemy crisis or of the downward arc of Byron's reputation. These events passed without a single remark or poetic allusion from Blake, until the publication of *Cain* in December 1821. But the dedication of *The Ghost of Abel* 'To LORD BYRON in the Wilderness,' which recognizes him as a type of John the Baptist, is a gesture that communicates Blake's awareness of the force of Byron's dramatic intervention in the historical moment (1; Erdman, p. 270). Blake places Byron in the stance he occupied in *All Religions are One*: in that work 'the Voice of one crying in the Wilderness' proclaims the coming of Christ in a new and unfamiliar revelation – the infinite creative power of God that 'becomes as we are,' incarnate in the Poetic Genius (Erdman, pp.1–3). Thus Blake's estimate of *Cain* approximates that of Shelley, who declared Byron's play 'apocalyptic … a revelation not before communicated to man.'[1]

The revelation Blake found in *Cain* lies partly in its iconoclastic assault on the God of state religion, and he must have noted approvingly its use of a Satanic persona as the vehicle of this critique, so uncannily similar to his own diabolical deconstructions of the Miltonic God, the cosmic government of Swedenborg, and all authoritarian Gods reified out of poetic tales. Byron's Luciferean demolition of the idea of original sin and the punishment for transgression echoes the attack in the major prophecies on the idea of sin itself and the selfish and vengeful demand for the sacrifice of the sinner, whose ultimate source is the God of this world. Lucifer's socratic method – regarding the injustice of the Expulsion, he asks 'then who was

the demon'? – unveils the demonic God progressively revealed in *The Book of Urizen*, *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem*. These shared, compatible features suggest that Blake's response to Byron's treatment of Genesis was fundamentally approving; hence the narrow focus of Blake's revision of Byron's play. The foreshortened action of *The Ghost of Abel* skips over the first two acts of *Cain*; Blake offers no visionary reprise of the temptation of Cain and his education in metaphysical rebelliousness under the tutelage of Lucifer – because nothing there demanded prophetic correction. This implicit endorsement of the content of *Cain* says much about Blake's attitude toward the blasphemy crisis and the motives of plebeian blasphemers. Blake must have seen their motives as essentially identical with those of Paine: exposing the Bible as a 'State Trick,' an instrument of social control both during and after the years of war with France.

Yet Blake's response to Byron – and by extension all contemporary efforts to expose the 'natural sense' of the Bible – is also corrective. His dedication not only pays tribute to Byron's prophetic power but also asks, 'What doest thou here Elijah?,' thus aligning Byron with the figure in I Kings 19:9–13 who laid prophecy aside in fear (1; Erdman, p. 270). Blake appears to associate this suspension of prophetic vision with Byron's inability to move imaginatively beyond iconoclasm and religious skepticism: 'Can a Poet doubt the Visions of Jehovah?,' the dedication asks. In his selective revision of Byron's drama, Blake addresses this form of skepticism: *The Ghost of Abel* rewrites only the aftermath of the first murder, re-envisioning the moral responses of Adam and Eve as they are guided by divine vision. What emerges is a twofold dramatic moment: the conversion of Adam and Eve from despair to hope, and the theophany and triumph of the forgiving Jehovah over the Satanic God of this World, the Accuser who demands 'Life for Life' (1:14; Erdman, p. 271).

The opening of Blake's playlet, in which Adam and Eve are shown convulsed with grief over the dead body of Abel, transforms the role of Jehovah, turning Byron's hidden deity into the loving presence who calls his children to console them. Convinced that the first murder has revealed the 'vain delusion' of the redemptive promises that accompanied the judgment on the serpent, Adam rejects Jehovah: 'It is in vain: I will not hear thee / Henceforth! Is this thy Promise that the Womans Seed / Should bruise the Serpents head' (1:6, 2–4; p. 271). Once Eve has echoed Adam, the ghost of Abel responds, calling out 'O Earth cover not thou my Blood' (1:8; p. 271). Yet the mind of Eve then initiates the redemptive process that forces the Accuser to reveal himself progressively. Rejecting the 'visionary Phantasm' of vengeance, she denies that the spectral form is the 'real Abel' (1:9; Erdman, p. 271). In response to Eve's challenge, Satan identifies himself, ventriloquizing through the ghost of Abel:

> Abel – Among the Elohim a Human Victim I wander I am their House
> Prince of the Air & our dimensions compass Zenith & Nadir

> Vain is thy Covenant O Jehovah I am the Accuser & Avenger
> Of Blood O Earth Cover not thou the Blood of Abel
>
> (1:10–13); Erdman, p. 271)

The assimilation of Abel's ghost to the vengeful Elohim is conveyed by his confession that they control him – 'compelled I cry,' he says – and are housed in him. Collectively the Elohim are the 'Prince of the Air,' the God of this World, whose empire extends from Zenith to Nadir.[2] A Satanic complex unprecedented in Blake's mythic practice, the 'Elohim of the Heathen' is a mythic image constructed from the anti-Newtonian polemics of John Hutchinson. His physico-theology, derived from an eccentric reading of the Hebrew Old Testament, still commanded attention nearly a century after the publication of his central treatise, *Moses' Principia* (1724–27). Hutchinson identified the Elohim (or the 'Aleim,' as he rendered the word) as the triune God, manifest in the elements of fire, light, and air. Blake's response to this form of Christian Materialism – which he probably encountered in William Hayley's library at Felpham – is not difficult to interpret.[3] Hutchinson has mixed up God and Satan, with whom 'the Elements are filld … the Prince of Evil' (Annotations to Watson, Erdman, p. 614). In this late instance of his characteristic 'bricolage,' Blake fuses Byron's iconoclastic treatment of the Bible with the materialism of Hutchinson to reveal their common shortcomings. That is, Hutchinsonian materialism and Byronic skepticism both arise from a fully naturalized vision ultimately set against Imagination; as the dedication to *The Ghost of Abel* proclaims, 'Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves: Imagination is Eternity' (Erdman, p. 270).

Blake's synthesis of Byron's art and the thought of Hutchinson creates in the Elohim of the Heathen a mythic counterpart to the mind that reads the Bible in the natural sense. Thus in *The Ghost of Abel* he forges once more, in the manner of *The Four Zoas*, a comprehensive image of Satanic materialism that registers his response to the anti-religious rhetoric of these years and its social meaning. Blake must have known of Richard Carlile, whose shop on Fleet Street was not far from his apartment on Fountain Court.[4] It is also likely that he was aware of the conjoining of Byron and Carlile in the public mind. Blake possibly also noted the affinities of *Cain: A Mystery* with other voices in the anti-religious discourse of the radical London subculture of the Regency – a rhetoric he would have found disturbing. In his deeply informed study, *Radical Underworld*, Iain McCalman reveals the existence of 'blasphemous chapels,' where figures like Robert Wedderburn, a black, semi-literate former Royal navy sailor, and Samuel Waddington, a shoemaker, spouted 'crude plebeian blasphemy,' a 'rhetoric designed to arouse emotion, to debunk authority through shock, pathos, or humour, and to impel action.'[5] This impromptu blasphemous oratory and biblical exegesis, which frequently charged God with having ignored the misery of the poor, may have been a

means of casting off the religious fear that inhibited men from political violence. In this way, McCalman suggests, a figure like Arthur Thistlewood, the chief of the Cato Street conspirators, nerved himself up for his attempt to assassinate the Tory Ministry. Byron was aware of Thistlewood, of course, but neither he nor Shelley could possibly know anything of figures like Wedderburn or Waddington. Blake's class position in Regency London would have brought him closer to this social sphere; both before and after he moved from South Molton Street, he lived not far from the Soho hayloft that was the 'chapel' where Wedderburn preached. Thus Blake was in a unique position not only to witness these comic, demotic forms of blasphemy but to recognize that they shared one social function with Byronic iconoclasm: intellectually and emotionally justifying rage against established power. These forms of satanized blasphemy could not provide, however, the form of agency that mattered most to Blake at this time: redemption through the imaginative act of forgiveness.

Hence the exhortations of Byron's Lucifer to war with one's nature, armed with the power of reason, which identifies and attacks all that is unacceptable, give way to those of Blake's Jehovah. Once Adam and Eve listen and raise their eyes to the apparition of the 'Father of Mercies,' they can envision an immortal Abel, a recognition that renders vengeance irrelevant (1:21; Erdman, p. 271). But the Satanic voice that demands vengeance has yet to be confronted and overcome. The ghost continues to reject the new morality of Adam and Eve, deriding the 'Sacrifices of Eternity O Jehovah, a Broken Spirit / And a Contrite Heart' (2:4–5; Erdman, p. 272). Demanding blood for blood, the ghost is countered by Jehovah, who refuses to sacrifice Cain in place of the Lamb, whom he has offered as an atonement. At this point the figural entrance of the Lamb into the struggle between accusation and forgiveness forces the climactic epiphany of Satan, dramatically managed by these stage directions: '*Abel sinks down into the Grave. from which arises Satan / Armed in glittering scales with a Crown & a Spear*' (2; Erdman, p. 272). Invoking the crowned and armed figure familiar from Blake's art and its precedents in the 1790s, this form of Satan recalls the host of sublime martial figures depicted by the earlier artists of the Romantic era, especially those of Barry, Fuseli, and Westall. Yet here, in his last major embodiment in Blake's work, the heroic figure of Satan is embellished with the reptilian scales that exhibit the degeneration of the fallen archangel in Blake's designs for *Paradise Lost*, the same features displayed by the God–Satan amalgam in the illustrations to the Book of Job.[6]

Declaiming to Jehovah, Satan now takes on the identity Blake and Milton associated with Moloch, the god presiding over all human sacrifices, from the first murder to the culture of the druids:

> Satan – 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 & Thorn
> 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; Erdman, p. 272)

As in the Bard's Song in *Milton*, Satan assumes the role of the usurper and God of this World, but his assertion of supremacy is deflected by the familiar edict of self-annihilation:

> Jehovah – 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 torment arises for ever & ever.
>
> (2:19–22; Erdman, p. 272)

Like *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, *The Ghost of Abel* concludes with a complicated epiphany of Satan, gesturing ambiguously in the direction of his redemption through the annihilation of his identity as the Accuser. Jehovah commands Satan to go to eternal death, annihilate self, and as the almost opaquely reflexive expression has it, 'put off Satan.' This act recalls the redemptive moment in the final plates of *Milton*, when the eternal form of Satan is separated from the Spectre of Satan. *The Ghost of Abel* ends with a similar splitting of the figure of Satan: the oath of vengeance for sin sworn by the 'Elohim of the Heathen' is cast into eternal fire, and the triple Godhead trembles and separates over the mercy seat, the covering of the ark of the covenant described in Exodus 25:20. Blake's final Satan-figure then rises in regenerated form, incorporated into the new divine body, 'Elohim Jehovah' (2:22–3; Erdman, p. 272).

The depth of Blake's response to Byron can be seen, then, in his realignment of the supernatural agents in *Cain*. In his revisionary effort, Blake separates the figure beheld in the 'Visions of Jehovah' from Byron's hidden celestial tyrant, whom he satanizes (1; Erdman, p. 270). The renaming of Byron's Jehovah recalls the equally forceful inversion in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where the voice of the Devil explains that Milton's Son of God is misnamed, for 'in the Book of Job Miltons Messiah is call'd Satan' (5; Erdman, p. 34). Yet Blake does not reject or transform Byron's Lucifer, moreover, but assimilates him to the schema of the Seven Eyes of God, where he takes his place as the initial – and therefore undeveloped and incomplete – embodiment of God. This is in keeping with Blake's assessment of the limitations of Byronic skepticism and rebellion voiced by Lucifer. It is fitting, then, that by interweaving his mythic structure with Byron's, Blake also destroys the mythic embodiment of Romantic Satanism

itself, the grand martial figure who rises up one last time to brandish his spear. The fusion of Satan with the 'God of men' resembles the demonic agent in the abortive prologue to *Hellas*, which Shelley had recently drafted: here Satan usurps the role of God to perpetuate the oppression of the Greeks. Among Romantic writers, Shelley and Blake exhibit the most sustained interest in transforming and renovating the roles of Milton's Satan. In both writers, this effort finally produces what Hans Blumenberg, in his study of the reception of myth, would call 'the most extreme deformation,' yielding a 'final myth' that 'fully exploits and exhausts the form.'[7] By collapsing the figure of the fallen archangel together with that of the Godhead, then, Shelley and Blake bring the modern myth of Romantic Satanism to its end.

# Notes

## Introduction

1. William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, ed. F.E.L. Priestley, 3 vols. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1946), I, 322–3.
2. *Ibid.*, I, 323–4.
3. For a discussion of the qualities of modern myths, as distinguished from the primary myths of oral cultures, see Fiona J. Stafford, *The Last of the Race: The Growth of a Myth from Milton to Darwin* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994), pp. 1–11. See also Chris Baldick, *In Frankenstein's Shadow: Myth, Monstrosity, and Nineteenth-Century Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), pp. 1–9.
4. Carey observes that Satan is trapped not only 'within his own inevitably and repeatedly fall-prone nature' but within Milton's religious vision as well, which demands Satan's self-destruction. Hence the paradox of Satan's portrayal: 'The illusion is created that he is independent of the fiction that contains him, and unfairly manipulated by that fiction' ('Milton's Satan,' in *The Cambridge Companion to Milton*, ed. Dennis Danielson, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989, p. 135).
5. In 'The Metamorphoses of Satan,' Mario Praz traces the genealogy of the fatally attractive, destructive character from Milton's Satan through the Byronic hero, with emphasis on the psychologically perverse and proto-decadent aspects of Romanticism (*The Romantic Agony*, 1933; 2nd ed. 1951; rpt., New York: Meridian Books, 1956, pp. 53–91).
6. Milton, *Paradise Lost*, ed. Alastair Fowler (London: Longman, 1968). I, ll. 254–8; p. 59. Cited parenthetically hereafter.
7. Peter Thorslev, 'The Romantic Mind is its Own Place,' *Comparative Literature*, 15 (1963), 252–5. Lucy Newlyn's *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993) sees a wider range of reference for Satanic allusion – including politics, theology, and morality – and argues that these allusions are not primarily celebratory, but often register the Romantic writer's ambivalence (see pp. 63–89).
8. Frederick Garber is representative, associating 'romantic Satanism' with the 'self-sufficient mind in conflict with aggressive tyranny' (*The Autonomy of the Self from Richardson to Huysmans*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982, pp. 88–9).
9. John S. Diekhoff, for example, describes Shelley's reading of *Paradise Lost* as 'eloquent nonsense,' springing from his misperception that Satan is 'a thoroughly admirable moral agent' (*Milton's Paradise Lost: A Commentary on the Argument*, New York: The Humanities Press, 1958, pp. 29–30). Carey lists the chief 'anti-Satanist' critics of the twentieth century: Charles Williams, C.S. Lewis, S. Musgrove, and Stanley Fish ('Milton's Satan,' p. 132). Efforts to correct misapprehensions about Romantic idealizations of Milton's Satan have yielded their own form of overstatement. The claim of Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr., for example, that the early work of Blake and Shelley reveals only a temporary 'confusion' of moral and esthetic admiration of Satan seems to explain away what is challenging and potentially disturbing in both writers ('The "Satanism" of Blake and Shelley Reconsidered,' *Studies in Philology*, 65 (1968), 817).

10. In his book on Shelley, for example, Richard Cronin characterizes the stances of the titular figures in 'Julian and Maddalo' by briefly noting what would appear to be self evident: that 'an exuberant Shelleyan satanism contrasts with a Byronic Calvinistic satanism' (*Shelley's Poetic Thoughts*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981, p. 116). The concept of Romantic Satanism has somehow remained current, appearing in anthologies of British Literature for college undergraduates. See, for example, 'Romantic-Era Writers and Milton's Satan,' in *The Longman Anthology of British Literature*, ed. David Damrosch, *et al*., New York; Longman, 1999), II, p. 940.
11. M.H. Abrams, *Natural Supernaturalism* (New York: Norton, 1971), p. 123. Abrams' brief discussion of 'The Satanic and Romantic Hero' in *The Norton Anthology of English Literature* (ed. M.H. Abrams, *et al*., 2 vols, 3rd ed. New York: Norton, 1974, II, 854–61) was deleted from subsequent editions. Attempts to create 'unified field' theories like that of Abrams have not significantly incorporated Satanic myth, though Morse Peckham's Carlylean model involving positive and negative phases of Romanticism implies a Satanic mode in the latter phase ('Toward A Theory of Romanticism,' *PMLA*, 66, 1951, 5–23).
12. Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology: A Critical Investigation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), p. 24. Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 156–7.
13. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (New York: Hill and Wang, 1972), p. 151.
14. 'Romantic Manichaeism: Shelley's "On the Devil, and Devils" and Byron's Mythological Dramas,' in *The Sun is God: Painting, Literature and Mythology in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. J.B. Bullen (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1989), p. 13n. This assertion is grounded in the argument of 'Myth and mythmaking in the Shelley circle,' in *Shelley Revalued: Essays from the Gregynog Conference*, ed. Kelvin Everest (Totowa, N.J.: Barnes and Noble, 1983), pp. 1–19.
15. *The Reception of Myth in English Romanticism* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1995), p. 7. Harding's argument validates the claim of Hans Blumenberg (*Work on Myth*, 1985), that 'mythmaking' and 'mythic consciousness' lie in an irretrievable past; in modern culture there is only the ongoing reception and transformation of myth – it is always already 'work on myth.' Another study of the social contexts informing Romantic myth is *History and Myth: Essays on English Romantic Literature*, ed. Stephen C. Behrendt (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1990). Behrendt's introductory essay (pp. 13–32) is a particularly useful discussion of the synthesis in Romantic art of myth and historical awareness.
16. 'Myth and mythmaking in the Shelley Circle,' pp. 2, 6. In *Myth in Primitive Psychology* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1926), Malinowski describes myth as 'a pragmatic charter of primitive faith and moral wisdom' (p. 19).
17. William Hazlitt, 'On Shakespeare and Milton,' in *Lectures on the English Poets* (1818), *Complete Works*, ed. P.P. Howe, 21 vols. (London: J.M. Dent, 1930–34), V, 64. Cited parenthetically hereafter.
18. *Dark Interpreter: The Discourse of Romanticism* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1980), p. 15.

## 1 The Cultural Matrix of Romantic Satanism

1. Marilyn Butler, 'Against Tradition: The Case for a Particularized Historical Method,' in *Historical Studies and Literary Criticism*, ed. Jerome J. McGann (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), pp. 28–9.

2. For an account of the fading of these forms of belief, see Keith Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic* (London: Penguin, 1973) pp. 681–98.
3. Henry Fielding, *Tom Jones* (New York: Norton, 1973), p. 509. Cited parenthetically hereafter.
4. Burns, *Poems and Songs*, ed. James Kinsley (London: Oxford University Press, 1969) ll. 1–2, p. 135. Cited parenthetically hereafter.
5. E.M. Butler, *The Fortunes of Faust* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1952), p. 65.
6. For a survey of this subject, see 'Satan Expiring,' Chapter 4 of Jeffrey Burton Russell's *Mephistopheles: The Devil in the Modern World* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986), pp. 128-67.
7. *Ibid*., pp. 131–2. On the absence of Christian diabology in the broad spectrum of the Evangelical Revival, see Gordon Rupp, *Religion in England 1688–1791* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986). In *Reasonable Enthusiast: John Wesley and the Rise of Methodism* (Philadelphia: Trinity Press International, 1989), p. 387, Henry D. Rack explains that Wesley exploited popular belief in demoniac possession, interpreting the violent 'convulsions' and transports that seized participants at Methodist revivals as the work of the Devil (pp. 195–7).
8. On Muggleton and the Ranters, see Thomas, *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, p. 683. On Smith, see Isabel Rivers, *Reason, Grace, and Sentiment: A Study of the Language of Religion and Ethics in England, 1660–1780* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), p. 84.
9. The classic study of this form of skepticism is D.P. Walker, *The Decline of Hell: Seventeenth-Century Discussions of Eternal Torment* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1964).
10. *The Eternity of Hell Torments Considered*, pp. 18–19 (quoted in Philip Almond's *Heaven and Hell in Enlightenment England,* Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994, p. 152).
11. Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, pp. 134–7.
12. Walker, *The Decline of Hell*, pp. 224–5, 228.
13. W. Neil, 'The Criticism and Theological Use of the Bible 1700–1950,' in *The Cambridge History of the Bible: The West from the Reformation to the Present Day*, ed. S.L. Greenslade, F.B.A. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1963), p. 254.
14. Of Genesis 3, Henry writes: 'We have here an account of the temptation with which Satan assaulted our first parents . . . It is certain it was the devil that beguiled Eve' (*Commentary on the Whole Bible*, 6 vols, New York: H. Revell, n. d., I, 21). Dodd reads the passage similarly, insisting that the New Testament scheme of Redemption depends on this interpretation (*A Commentary on the Books of the Old and New Testaments*, London: R. Davis, 1770), signature 'E').
15. See Bertram Eugene Schwarzbach, *Voltaire's Old Testament Criticism* (Genève: Librarie Droz, 1971), pp. 179–230.
16. See *Oeuvres Complétes*, 92 vols (n.p.: Imprimerie de la Société Littéraire-Typographique, 1785), XLVII, 441–51 on the circulation of the myth. See also the entries for 'Ange' and 'Genese' (XLVII, 454 and LII, 28–9).
17. See Holbach, *The System of Nature*, trans. Samuel Wilkinson (1821; rpt. New York: Garland, 1984), II, 134, 140–6, 161–2.
18. Volney, *Ruins of Empires*, trans. Thomas Jefferson and Joel Barlow (1802; rpt. New York: Garland, 1979), II, 113, 115, 120–1.
19. Charles Dupuis, *The Origin of All Religious Worship*, trans. anon. (1872; rpt. New York: Garland, 1984), pp. 73–8.

20. Volney, *Ruins of Empires*, II, 159. Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, in *Complete Writings*, ed. Moncure Daniel Conway, 4 vols (New York: AMS Press, 1967), IV, 29, 25, 30, 22, 43.
21. Joseph Priestley, *Letters to a Philosophical Unbeliever*, in *Theological and Miscellaneous Works*, ed. John T. Rutt (London: G. Smithfield, 1817–32), IV, 161.
22. Alexander Geddes, *The Holy Bible* (London: R.J. Davis. 1792), I, vii–xi. For information about Geddes, see Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), pp. 165–71, 174–8.
23. The 'Gnosticism' invoked in this book refers not to actual beliefs entertained by the Romantic writers – of which there is little evidence – but to their interpretive practices and strategic use of Gnostic premises. For information on the sources of knowledge about Gnostic tradition available to Romantic writers, see Stuart Peterfreund, 'Blake, Priestley, and the Gnostic Moment,' in *Literature and Science: Theory and Practice*, ed. Stuart Peterfreund (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1985), pp. 139–66 and Stuart Curran, 'Blake and the Gnostic Hyle: A Double Negative,' *Blake Studies*, 4 (1972), 117–33.
24. Volney, *Ruins*, I, 102–3 (emphasis in original).
25. Notes to *Queen Mab* and 'On the Devil, and Devils,' *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, eds Roger Ingpen and Walter E. Peck, 10 vols (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1930), I, 135; VII, 87. All quotations of Shelley's prose (except the following title) are from this edition, cited parenthetically hereafter as 'Julian.' 'A Vindication of Natural Diet,' *Complete Prose Works*, ed. E.B. Murray, (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), I, 87.
26. Robert Southey, *Poetical Works* (London: Brown, Green and Longmans, 1847), X, 206.
27. Ronald Paulson, *Representations of Revolution (1789–1820)* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1983), pp. 1–36.
28. Alexander Pirie, *The French Revolution Exhibited in the Light of the Sacred Oracles* (Perth, 1795), pp. 49, 63.
29. Quoted in Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly: Millenarians and the French Revolution in France and England* (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1975), pp. 167, 130–6, 181, 203–4.
30. On the expropriation of church property in France and subsequent measures of 'de-Christianization,' see Emmet Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1989), pp. 145–67 and 338–53.
31. For an account of the movement to repeal the Test and Corporation Acts, see Albert Goodwin, *The Friends of Liberty* (London: Hutchinson and Co., 1979), pp. 65–98.
32. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, ed. Conor Cruise O'Brien (Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin, 1968), p. 195. Burke consistently satanizes the revolutionary French: see pp. 161, 165, 187.
33. Daniel Isaac Eaton, *Politics for the People*, 1, No. 12 (1793), 173.
34. Robert Hole, 'British Counter-Revolutionary Popular Propaganda in the 1790s,' in *Britain and Revolutionary France: Conflict, Subversion and Propaganda*, ed. Colin Jones, Exeter Studies in History No. 5 (Exeter: University of Exeter, 1983), p. 57.
35. Alfred Owen Aldrige: *Man of Reason: The Life of Thomas Paine* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1959), p. 183.

36. Hester Thrale Piozzi, *Thraliana: The Diary of Mrs. Hester Lynch Thrale, 1776–1809*, ed. Katherine C. Balderston, 2nd ed., 2 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951), II, 1003.
37. Hester Thrale Piozzi, *Retrospection: or, A Review of the Most Important Events, Characters, Situations, and their Consequences . . . Mankind*, 2 vols (London, 1801), II, 523.
38. For the sermon, see F.J. Maccunn, *The Contemporary English View of Napoleon* (London: G. Bell, 1914), p. 302. For other heraldic satires that represented Napoleon in Satanic guise, see A.M. Bradley, *Napoleon in Caricature 1795–1821* 2 vols (London: John Lane, 1911), I, 234–9. For an example of a related ballad, see Maccunn, p. 150.
39. Simon Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 95–133, esp. pp. 111–13.
40. Coleridge, *The Friend*, No. 6, Sept. 21, 1809, in *The Friend*, 2 vols, ed. Barbara E. Rooke, No. 4 of *Collected Works* (Princeton: Princeton University. Press, 1969), II, 84.
41. This print is reproduced in Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism*, p. 184.
42. *The Statesman's Manual*, in *Lay Sermons*, ed. R.J. White, No. 6 of *Collected Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1972), p. 61. Among the philosophes joining the banners of Antichrist are Voltaire, d'Alembert, and Diderot.
43. *Ibid*., p. 65.
44. 'To the Editor of the Courier' (9–10 September 1816), in 'Appendix B,' *Biographia Literaria*, eds James Engell and W. Jackson Bate, No. 7 of *Collected Works* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983), II, 269, 274. The review of *Bertram* was subsequently digested for *Biographia Literaria*, Chapter 23.
45. 'State of Public Affairs,' *Quarterly Review*, 22 (1820), 511, 502. Grant's authorship is identified by Hill Shine and Helen Chadwick Shine, *The Quarterly Review Under Gifford: Identification of Contributors, 1809–24* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1949), p. 68.
46. See Marilyn Butler, 'Romantic Manichaeism,' pp. 19–23.
47. Edward John Trelawny, *Records of Shelley, Byron, and the Author*, ed. David Wright (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1973), p. 103.
48. See, for example, Wolf Z. Hirst, 'Byron's Lapse into Orthodoxy: An Unorthodox Reading of *Cain*,' *Keats–Shelley Journal*, 29 (1980), 151–72.
49. Milton's epic was published over 100 times between 1705 and 1800, Lucy Newlyn notes in *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, p. 19.
50. See, for example, the commentary on *Faust* in Madame De Staël's *De l'Allemagne* (1810–13) (Madame the Baroness de Stael-Holstein, *Germany, with Notes and Appendices*, by O.W. Wight, A.M. rpt. Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1859; anon. trans; London: John Murray, 1814, pp. 361–2).
51. This discussion of the shifting response to Milton's Satan is generally indebted to two earlier studies: Marlies K. Danziger, 'Heroic Villains in Eighteenth-Century Criticism,' *Comparative Literature*, 11 (1959), 35–46, and Arthur Barker, '"And on His Crest Sat Horror": Eighteenth-Century Interpretations of Milton's Sublimity and His Satan,' *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 11 (1942), 421–36.
52. Newlyn summarizes this early interpretative shift (*Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, pp. 32–5).
53. 'Dedication of the Aeneis,' (1697), *Essays of John Dryden*, ed. W.P. Ker (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1900), II, 165.

54. For information on the three artists who illustrated Tonson's edition, see Suzanne Boorsch, 'The 1688 *Paradise Lost* and Dr. Aldritch,' *Metropolitan Museum Journal*, 6 (1972), 133–50.
55. For reproductions of these illustrations and commentary, see Marcia Pointon, *Milton and English Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1970), pp. 17–34.
56. Addison, Paper No. 297; quoted in *Milton: The Critical Heritage*, ed. John T. Shawcross (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1970), p. 170.
57. *Ibid*., p. 171.
58. For a reproduction of Hayman's Satan and commentary, see Pointon, *Milton and English Art*, pp. 51–2.
59. *Milton: 1732–1801,* ed. John T. Shawcross (New York: Barnes and Noble, 1972, p. 235).
60. *Ibid*., pp. 255–6.
61. James Beattie, *Dissertations Moral and Critical* (London, 1783), pp. 612–13.
62. *Ibid*., p. 613.
63. Hugh Blair, *Lectures on Rhetoric and Belles Lettres* (London, 1783), I, 69.
64. *Ibid*., II, 472–3.
65. *Milton 1732–1801*, p. 299.
66. Richard Altick, *The Shows of London* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard/Belknap Press, 1978), pp. 121–7.
67. William Beckford, *Vathek* (London: Oxford University. Press, 1970), p. 111; Shawcross, *Milton 1732–1801*, p. 299.
68. See William L. Pressly, *The Life and Art of James Barry* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981), pp. 152–3 on the dating of Barry's illustrations.
69. For the dating of Fuseli's oil version of the picture (and information on the edition of Milton and Fuseli's Milton Gallery), see Marcia Pointon, *Milton and English Art*, pp. 106–15.
70. For reproductions of Westall, Romney, and Stothard and commentary, see Pointon, *Milton and English Art*, pp. 75–6, 82, 119, 121–7.
71. *The Romantics on Milton*, ed. Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. (Cleveland: Case Western Reserve University, 1970), p. 106.
72. William Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, I, 323–5.
73. *Ibid*., II, 2.
74. Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman,* ed. Carol Poston (New York: Norton, 1988), p. 25.
75. Wollstonecraft, *Vindication*, p. 37. See Ronald Paulson, who comments that 'a wronged woman . . . in relation to men is a Satan to whom active evil is to be preferred to passive good. As widow – as mother in relation to her children – woman is a self-sufficent Satan who has no need for man at all' (*Representations of Revolution*, p. 86).
76. Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, pp. 6, 121.
77. John Carey, 'Milton's Satan,' p. 135.
78. Stuart Curran, 'The Political Prometheus,' *Studies in Romanticism*, 25 (1986), 455.
79. Linda M. Lewis, *The Promethean Politics of Milton, Blake, and Shelley* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 1992), pp. 11, 7.
80. Byron, 'Prometheus,' ll. 45–6, in *Poetical Works*, eds Jerome J. McGann and Barry Weller, 6 vols (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980–93), IV, 32. All quotations from Byron's poems and plays are from this edition, cited parenthetically *'Works'* hereafter.

81. Leigh Hunt, 'Wordsworth and Milton,' in Wittreich, ed., *The Romantics on Milton*, p. 442.
82. *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 5, in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Anchor/Doubleday, 1988), p. 35. All quotations from Blake's poems and prose (including annotations in books) are from this edition, cited parenthetically hereafter as 'Erdman,' with plate and page numbers.
83. Byron, *Manfred*, III, iv.129–46 (*Works*, IV, 101–2; *Cain*, I, i.215, I, i.140–2, I, i, 531 (*Works*, VI, 239, 237, 250).
84. Northrop Frye, *A Study of English Romanticism* (New York: Random House, 1968), p. 14.
85. Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*, p. xxvi.
86. Hazlitt, *Works*, V, 64.
87. Godwin, *Enquiry*, III, 323–4.
88. Shelley, Preface to *Prometheus Unbound*, in *Shelley's Poetry and Prose*, eds Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers (New York: Norton, 1977), p. 133. Unless noted otherwise, all quotations from Shelley's poems and plays are from this edition, cited parenthetically hereafter as 'Reiman.'
89. Hazlitt, *Works*, V, 66. Simon Bainbridge speculates about the identity of the 'certain' writer but notes that the question is irrelevant, since so many writers mined Milton's epic for correspondences between Satan and Napoleon (*Napoleon and English Romanticism*, pp. 235–6).
90. In a note at the end of his portrait of the fallen emperor in *Childe Harold's Pilgrimage*, Canto III, Byron equivocally remarks that Napoleon's 'want of all community of feeling for or with' humanity was 'perhaps more offensive to human vanity than the active cruelty of more trembling and suspicious tyranny' (*Works*, II, 304).
91. Bainbridge, *Napoleon and English Romanticism*, pp. 205–7.

## 2 Blake, the Son of Fire, and the God of this World

1. G.E. Bentley, *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), pp. 332, 311.
2. Northrop Frye was the first to define the 'hell' of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in ironic terms, in order to lay to rest the conception of Blake as a diabolist who inverted good and evil, which was suggested by his contemporaries, Thomas Butts and Frederick Tatham, and subsequently developed in Sadesque directions by Swinburne and by Mario Praz. See *The Letters of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1968), p. 43; G.E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records*, pp. 417–18); Algernon Charles Swinburne, *William Blake: A Critical Essay* (London, 1868; New York: Benjamin Blom, 1967), p. 158; Praz, *The Romantic Agony* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1951), pp. 223, 278. Frye's view of Blake's diabolism (*Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947, pp. 197–8) has authorized excessively ironized and skeptical interpretations. In *Blake's Apocalypse* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1970), for example, Harold Bloom claims that only in the fable of the devouring and the prolific (plate 16) does Blake abandon irony (p. 90). A recent discussion that does not try to explain away Blake's Satanism, viewing it instead in its social and political context, is found in John Hutton's essay, '"Lovers of Wild Rebellion": The Image of Satan in British Art of the Revolutionary Era' (in *Blake, Politics, and History*, eds Jackie DiSalvo, G.A. Rosso, and Christopher Z. Hobson, New York: Garland, 1999, pp. 149–68).

3. I recognize that Blake's social position in the Johnson circle was marginal, but I remain convinced that this group more closely approximated Blake's ideological center in the early 1790s than plebeian radicalism and Millenarianism. But see Jon Mee's contrasting view in '"The Doom of Tyrants": William Blake, Richard "Citizen Lee" and the Millenarian Public Sphere,' in *Blake, Politics, and History*, pp. 97–114.
4. For recent accounts of Blake's milieu, see Robert N. Essick, 'William Blake, Thomas Paine, and Biblical Revolution,' *Studies in Romanticism*, 30 (1991), 189–212, Jerome J. McGann, 'The Idea of an Indeterminate Text: Blake's Bible of Hell and Dr. Alexander Geddes,' *Social Values and Poetic Acts: The Historical Judgment of Literary Work* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), pp. 152–72, and Marilyn Butler, *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981), pp. 39–53.
5. Bentley, *Blake Records*, p. 322.
6. Godwin, *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, I, 315–24. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 25.
7. *Analytical Review*, 5 (1789), 61–4, 352–3; 6 (1790), 80.
8. Arguing that the specific audience of *The Marriage* was the Johnson circle, John Howard was the first to imply that 'the Devil's party' refers to this group ('An Audience for *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,' *Blake Studies*, 3, 1970, 19–52).
9. For a discussion of this bibical typology and geography, see Leslie Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 109–33.
10. Mark Wilks, *The Origin and Stability of the French Revolution; A Sermon Preached at St. Paul's Chapel, Norwich, July 14, 1791*. Quoted in Mark Schorer, *William Blake: The Politics of Vision* (New York: Henry Holt, 1946), p. 205.
11. On the Swedenborgian principle of equilibrium, see Martin Nurmi, *Blake's Marriage of Heaven and Hell: A Critical Study;* Research Series III of the *Kent State University Bulletin*, 45 (1957), pp. 19–23.
12. Emanuel Swedenborg, *Heaven and its Wonders and Hell* (New York: Swedenborg Foundation, 1946), pp. 379, 352.
13. The most searching discussion of Blake's ambiguous rhetoric surrounding the contraries is Dan Miller, 'Contrary Revelation: *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*,' *Studies in Romanticism*, 24 (1985), 491–509, which finds Blake's conception of the contraries to be neither monistic nor dualistic (496).
14. Of matter, Priestley asserts that '*powers of attraction* or *repulsion* are necessary to its very being' (*Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*, *Theological and Miscellaneous Works*, ed. John T. Rutt, 25 vols, London: G. Smithfield, 1817–32, III, ii). For compatible statements by Holbach, see Terence Hoagwood, 'Holbach and Blake's Philosophical Statement in "The Voice of the Devil,"' *English Language Notes*, (March 1978), 183.
15. Priestley, *Disquisitions Relating to Matter and Spirit*, *Works*, III, iv.
16. On Priestley's ambiguous materialism, see Robert E. Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism: British Natural Philosophy in an Age of Reason* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 263–4.
17. In all but two of the eleven copies of the *The Marriage*, a large and awkward blank space is the only vestige of 'Devil'; in copies D and I this space is filled by a flame and a red blot and a gold blot respectively (see David Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake,* Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor, 1974, p. 103).
18. Thomas Paine, *The Age of Reason*, in *Complete Writings*, IV, 31. Essick ('Blake, Paine, and Biblical Revolution,' 196–7) suggests that Paine provided the hermeneutic of reversal informing Blake's counter-narrative.

19. David Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), p. 192.
20. Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, p. 26.
21. Essick, 'Blake, Paine, and Biblical Revolution,'194.
22. See William Richey, '"The Lion & Wolf shall cease": Blake's *America* as a Critique of Counter-Revolutionary Violence,' in *Blake, Politics, and History*, pp. 196–211.
23. Richard Price, *A Discourse on the Love of Our Country*, *Political Writings*. ed. D.O. Thomas (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), pp. 195–6.
24. For a contrasting view, see Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm: William Blake and the Culture of Radicalism in the 1790s,* pp. 184–5.
25. William Keach assumes that this violence is authorially affirmed, part of a disturbing rhetorical pattern in Blake: the 'worship of energy as a divinely retributive, ultimately self-validating absolute' ('Blake, Violence, and Visionary Politics,' *Representing the French Revolution: Literature, Historiography, and Art*, ed. James A.W. Heffernan, Hanover: University Press of New England, 1992, p. 37.) Since the Bard's final lament (2:18–21; Erdman, p. 52) has uncertain textual status, we cannot determine whether Orc's sexual violence is presented as the cause of apocalyptic sexual liberation or as an act that reinforces tyranny.
26. Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, p. 145.
27. *Ibid*., pp. 147–60.
28. Regarding this ambiguous conclusion, Morton D. Paley observes that 'Orc's millennial assertions have been so imbued with millenarian urgency that their unfulfillment opens a deep gap between apocalypse and millennium' (*Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999, p. 62).
29. In *The Age of Reason*, Paine asserts that the 'Christian system' is actually atheism, because 'It professes to believe in a man rather than in God. It is a compound made up chiefly of man-ism . . .' (*Complete Writings*, IV, 50).
30. Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, pp. 20–74.
31. Quoted in Jon Mee, '"The Doom of Tyrants,"' p. 107.
32. This icon draws also on associations between serpent imagery and revolution built up since the American war – for example, the 'Don't Tread on Me' emblem. See William Blake, *The Continental Prophecies*, ed. D.W. Dörrbecker (London: Tate Gallery Publications, 1995), p. 171.
33. The climactic call of Los to 'all his sons' to the strife of blood must mean 'all the sons of France and Britain,' who are now 'settling accounts with their rulers' (Christopher Z. Hobson, *The Chained Boy: Orc and Blake's Idea of Revolution*, Lewisburg: Bucknell University Press, 1999, p. 150).
34. Michael Tolley has identified this allusion in '*Europe*: "To those ychained in sleep,"' in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, eds David V. Erdman and John E. Grant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 144.
35. See, for example, Tannenbaum, *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies*, p. 134. For a recent discussion arguing that *America: A Prophecy* reads the historical present pessimistically, see James McCord, 'West of Atlantis: William Blake's Unromantic View of the American War,' *Centennial Review*, 30 (1996), 383–99. In 'The Myth of Blake's "Orc Cycle"' (*Blake, Politics, and History*, pp. 5–36) Christopher Hobson argues that Orc, as an embodiment of revoluton, does not exhibit either a 'cyclically recurrent existence' or the transformation into the figure of Urizen (p. 6).

36. Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, p. 24.
37. On the Gnostic aspects of *The Book of Urizen*, see Paul Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), p. 30.
38. Paine, *Complete Writings*, IV, 34.
39. *Ibid*., IV, 30.
40. See Lucy Newlyn, *Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, pp. 142–4, and W.J.T. Mitchell, *Blake's Composite Art* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), pp. 114–21.
41. See Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, p. 173.
42. *Paradise Lost* V, ll. 610–11; p. 296. As W.J.T. Mitchell notes, Urizen's laws of peace, love, and unity, which culminate in 'One King, one God, one Law' (4:40; Erdman, p. 73) darkly echo the decree of the Father exalting the Son (*Blake's Composite Art*, pp. 124–5).
43. Of the God of the Old Testament, Alexander Geddes merely notes his 'irascible and avenging' nature (*The Holy Bible*, I, xii). Volney describes a deity who awakens from 'an eternity of idleness' to effect the Creation (*Ruins*, II, 17). This figure, who projects the privileged world of the priestly and governing classes, approximates Blake's pointed critique of the primeval Priest.
44. 'Blake, Paine, and Biblical Revolution,' 201.
45. 'The fragmented, repetitious, and imbricated structure of *Urizen* (and Urizen) realizes in extreme form what the Bible's new critics claimed that book and its God to be (Essick, 'Blake, Paine, and Biblical Revolution,' 209).
46. William Wordsworth, *The Prelude 1799, 1805, 1850*, eds Jonathan Wordsworth, M.H. Abrams, and Stephen Gill (New York and London: Norton, 1979) X, ll. 309–14, pp. 374–6.
47. Hobson reads this episode as an allegory of the stratification of two revolutionary groups, one rising and oppressing the other, the underclass on whose energies the revolution was founded in 'the strife of blood' (*The Chained Boy*, pp. 140–4).
48. Erdman, p. 720; see H.M. Margoliouth on Blake's 'new acceptance of Christianity' (*William Blake*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1951, p. 124).
49. Erdman, p. 817. Erdman's textual introduction to *The Four Zoas* (pp. 816–18) conveys the problems involved in attempting to date the stages of composition, but his contextualized reading of the poem (pp. 203–96 of *Prophet Against Empire*) suggests that the final stages of revision followed the resumption of Britain's war with France in 1803. These events probably underlie the late additions of Christian (including Satanic) mythemes in Nights VII–VIII of *The Four Zoas*, when Blake felt compelled to develop a new, larger myth of suprahistorical warfare. On dating, see also Andrew Lincoln, *Spiritual History: a Reading of William Blake's Vala, or the Four Zoas* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1995), pp. 223–4
50. Blake's two sets of illustrations to *Paradise Lost* were executed for the Reverend Joseph Thomas in 1807 and Thomas Butts in 1808. For reproductions of the designs and commentary, see Stephen C. Behrendt, *The Moment of Explosion; Blake and the Illustration of Milton* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1983), pp. 128–85.
51. For a discussion of opacity, see Donald Ault, *Visionary Physics: Blake's Response to Newton* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1974), pp. 80–4.
52. Letter to George Cumberland, 12 April 1827 (Erdman, p. 783).

53. As Christopher Hobson has shown, the splitting of Orc into serpent and human forms, as well as the disappearance of Orc's human shape from the action of the poem, dramatizes the repression of revolutionary agency (*The Chained Boy*, pp. 66–72).
54. Andrew Lincoln interprets the Shadowy Female as an ambiguous force in the development of human civilization, 'the emotional force that allows fallen reason to develop commerce and industry, to control religion, to channel energy and skills into the arts of war; and she is the power that eventually undermines these activities' (*Spiritual History*, p. 167).
55. Erdman's reading of the topical allusions, which documents the social, economic, and political dimensions of these years, has enduring value (see *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, pp. 329–31, 338–40, 374–6, and 397–402).
56. For an influential discussion of the 'spectrous embrace,' see Mary Lynn Johnson and Brian Wilkie, *Blake's Four Zoas: The Design of a Dream* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1978), pp. 159–65.
57. Johnson and Wilkie first suggested that the unredeemed portion of the spectres form the Universal Spectre, Satan, whose epiphany occurs in Night the Eighth (*Blake's Four Zoas:* , pp. 174–5).
58. On Wakefield and Johnson, see G. Ingli James, *Annotations to Richard Watson*, ed. G. Ingli James (Cardiff: University College Cardiff Press, 1984), unpaginated appendix; on the Treasonable Practices Act, see William B. Wilcox, *The Age of Aristocracy: 1688–1802*, 3rd ed. (Lexington, MA: Heath, 1976), p. 201.
59. See Martin Butlin, *The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake*, 2 vols, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1981), catalog no. 523 (p. 370); plate 584. See also catalog nos 519–22; (pp. 368–70); plates 580–3.
60. See the textual notes for Blake's manuscript p. 102 (and p. 145):1; Erdman, p. 842.
61. In Night the Seventh b, Urizen's temple is named 'Pandemonium,' but the word is deleted (96:18; Erdman, p. 838); a deleted line identifies 'Urizens temple / Which is the Synagogue of Satan' (99:24; Erdman, p. 840).
62. Blake draws on the associations attached to the phrase 'synagogue of Satan,' one of the epithets used in the propaganda surrounding the Jew Bill of 1753 (see Todd M. Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England 1713–1830: Tradition and Change in a Liberal Society*, Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1979), p. 89; see also Karen Shabetai, 'The Question of Blake's Hostility Toward the Jews,' *ELH*, 62 (1995), 141–3.
63. See Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, pp. 419, 516.
64. See Priestley's comments, quoted in Endelman, *The Jews of Georgian England*, p. 67.
65. Quoted in Norman Cohn, *Warrant for Genocide: The Myth of the Jewish World Conspiracy and the Protocols of the Elders of Zion* (New York: Harper and Row, 1969), p. 90.
66. See Richard H. Popkin, 'La Peyrère, the Abbé Grégoire, and the Jewish Question in the Eighteenth Century,' in Harold E. Pagliaro, ed. *Studies in Eighteenth-Century Culture* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, V, 1975), p. 215.
67. The 'consolidation of error' is the phrase coined by Frye to refer to the progressive but nondialectical process by which imaginative vision 'consolidates a body of error into a comprehensible form, and makes it obviously erroneous' (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 357).
68. Kennedy, *A Cultural History of the French Revolution*, pp. 145–67, 338–53. See also Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, pp. 418–19.
69. Paine, *Complete Writings*, IV, 23.

70. In Night the Eighth (115:12–51; Erdman, p. 380), the story of Satan's origins begins with the catalogue of the Sons of Los (of which Satan is one) and the birth of Satan in Eternity, suggesting that it generates the story; in *Milton*, the catalogue is abbreviated, which implies a later abridgment of the material.
71. In *Jerusalem*, the Cherub is also a colossal image of worldly power: the six kinds of priestcraft – a twelve-fold hermaphroditic form of 'selfish holiness' and the Antichrist – a 'Human Dragon terrible / And bright, stretchd over Europe & Asia gorgeous' (89:5, 11–12; Erdman, p. 248).
72. In the concluding episode of *Milton*, Blake seems to use the names 'Satan' and 'Spectre of Satan' interchangeably. Peter Butter explores the apparent inconsistency, along with other interpretative problems in the conclusion of *Milton* ('*Milton*: The Final Plates,' *Interpreting Blake*, ed. Michael Phillips, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, pp. 145–63).
73. See Steve Clark and David Worrall, 'Introduction,' *Historicizing Blake*, eds Steve Clark and David Worrall (New York: St Martin's Press, 1994), p.10.
74. Erdman: *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, p. 420.
75. On Blake's bricolage, see Jon Mee, *Dangerous Enthusiasm*, pp. 13–39; on Blake's heteroglossia, see Jackie DiSalvo, 'Introduction,' *Blake, Politics, and History*, p. xxiv.
76. See Clarke Garrett, *Respectable Folly*, pp. 126–43.
77. For the classic discussion of Southcott and the 'chiliasm of despair,' see E.P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage Books, 1966), pp. 382–90.
78. See E.P. Thompson, *Witness Against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (New York: The New Press, 1993), p. 94.
79. Jackie DiSalvo, 'Introduction,' *Blake, Politics, and History*, p. xxvi.

## 3 Base and Aristocratic Artificers of Ruin: Plebeian Blasphemy and the Satanic School

1. In the *Edinburgh Review*, Francis Jeffrey seized immediately on the play's links with contemporary anti-Christian writing, its air of 'argumentative blasphemy' (see *The Romantics Reviewed*, ed. Donald H. Reiman, 9 vols, New York: Garland, 1972, Part B, II, 930).
2. Robert Grant, 'State of Public Affairs,' *Quarterly Review*, 22 (1820), 511.
3. For their denials see Shelley's letter to Horace Smith, 11 April 1822 (*The Letters of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, ed. Frederick L. Jones, 2 vols, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1964, II, 412) and Byron's letter to Thomas Moore, 4 March 1822 (*Byron's Letters and Journals*, ed. Leslie A. Marchand, 12 vols, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1973-82, IX, 119); both editions cited parenthetically hereafter (*Letters*, *BLJ*).
4. Butler, 'Romantic Manichaeism,' pp. 19–20.
5. See Reiman, *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part C, I, 39, 185, 517, 527, 737, 785.
6. *Monthly Review* (February 1821) in *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part C, II, 724.
7. *Letters*, I, 361. On Shelley's epistolary hoaxes, see Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (New York: Penguin, 1974), p. 26.
8. Steven E. Jones, *Shelley's Satire: Violence, Exhortation, and Authority* (Dekalb: Northern Illinois University Press, 1994), pp. 36–7.
9. Shelley, 'The Moral Teaching of Jesus Christ,' (Julian, VI, 255). See also 'A Refutation of Deism,' (Julian, VI, 32–5).
10. 'On the Devil, and Devils' (Julian, VII, 92).

11. 'The Devil's Walk,' *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson (1905; rpt. London: Oxford University Press, 1970), ll. 40, 46, 68; pp. 878–9. For convenience I quote 'The Devil's Walk' from this edition, cited parenthetically hereafter as 'Hutchinson.'
12. In this way the poem collapses, as Steven E. Jones observes, 'the comfortable distance between humankind and its projected accuser' (*Shelley's Satire*, p. 46).
13. *An Enquiry Concerning Political Justice*, I, 323–4.
14. Milton's God is 'so merciless and tyrannical a despot' that in an unprejudiced reader this characterization 'could inspire nothing but hatred' (*The Enquirer*, London: n.p., 1797; rpt. Garland, 1971, p. 135).
15. Notes to *Queen Mab* (Julian, I, 135).
16. Cameron asserts that Shelley's decisive encounter with Godwin occurred not long before 1810, while the former was still at Eton (*The Young Shelley: Genesis of a Radical*, New York: Macmillan, 1950, p. 78). Shelley had read *The Enquirer* by 1812 at least, when he recommended it to Elizabeth Hitchener (*Letters*, I, 195).
17. Prototypes of the Wandering Jew first appear in Shelley's poetry in 'Ghasta, or the Avenging Demon!!!', *The Wandering Jew*, and 'The Wandering Jew's Soliloquy.' Shelley derived his version of the legendary figure of Ahasuerus from two principal sources: M.G. Lewis's *The Monk* (1796) and a prose translation of Schubart's *Der Ewige Jude*.
18. 'In the beginning, God (after having passed an eternity in idleness) took the resolution (without any known cause) of making the world out of nothing ... , (Volney, *Ruins*, II, 17).
19. Shelley, 'A Letter to Lord Ellenborough,' (Julian, V, 292).
20. Shelley consistently dismisses literal Gnostic belief and the demonic God it posits, with one exception. In his 'Essay on Christianity,' he observes that 'According to Jesus Christ, and according to the indisputable facts of the case, some evil Spirit has dominion in this imperfect world' (Julian, VI, 235).
21. Shelley's conviction about the nature of belief, expressed in 'A Letter to Lord Ellenborough' (Julian, V, 285) and reiterated in several other essays and the Notes to *Queen Mab*, was an assumption broadly shared among infidels, as Ursula Henriques notes (*Religious Toleration in England, 1787–1833*, Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961, p. 241).
22. Jerome J. McGann, *The Romantic Ideology*, p. 123.
23. See *Robert Hole, Pulpits, Politics, and Public Order 1760–1832* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), pp. 152–5.
24. See Elie Halévy, *The Liberal Awakening 1815–1830*, vol. II of *A History of the English People in the Nineteenth Century*, trans. E.I. Watkin (London: Ernest Benn, 1926; rev. 1949), pp. 70–2.
25. The crime of blasphemous libel was construed more as an offense against the state ('the peace of our Lord the King, his crown and dignity') than against God; this transference was achieved by arguing from the 1676 precedent of Sir William Hale that Christianity was the law of the land – that it was part and parcel of the common law – and that infidelity therefore represented an attack on the Constitution. See W.H. Wickwar, *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press, 1819–1832* (London: Allen and Unwin, 1928), pp. 20–5.
26. Grant, 'The State of Public Affairs,' 510, 511. See also the speech of Lord Grenville, which prophesied that tolerating a blasphemous and seditious press would invite an English reprise of the French Revolution (506–7).
27. *Pulpits, Politics, and Public Order*, pp. 178–9.

28. Wickwar, *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press, 1819–1832*, p. 136.
29. For an account of the Evangelical position on blasphemy, see Henriques, *Religious Toleration in England, 1787–1833*, pp. 206–59.
30. The Home Secretary's Circular of 1817 stepped up the efforts to control blasphemy by authorizing local magistrates to arrest publishers and booksellers on the mere suspicion of libel. The Home Office offered financial support for the trials of blasphemers as well, and upon hearing of the publication in 1818 of *Christianity Unveiled* (a translation of Holbach), Sidmouth offered to disburse funds from the Treasury to pay for the prosecution (see Wickwar, pp. 56, 113).
31. Joel H. Wiener, *Radicalism and Freethought in Nineteenth-Century Britain: The Life of Richard Carlile* (Westport, Conn: Greenwood Press, 1983), p. 34.
32. Edward Royle, *Radical Politics 1790–1900: Religion and Unbelief* (London: Longman, 1971), p. 30; Wickwar, p. 102; Wiener, pp. 457–8.
33. *The Republican*, 1, No. 7 (8 October 1819), 107.
34. *Ibid*., 2, No. 9 (17 March 1820), 299–ff.
35. P.M.S. Dawson and Timothy Webb review the evidence and settle on 'a date between the last months of late 1819 and the middle of June 1820' (see *Shelley's 'Devils' Notebook: Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e.9*, eds P.M.S. Dawson and Timothy Webb, New York: Garland, 1993, Vol. XIV of *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, p. xvii.
36. *Ibid*., pp. 7–9.
37. The crucial paragraphs in the preface to *Prometheus Unbound* were almost certainly drafted either shortly before or not long before he began *The Cenci*. See *The Prometheus Unbound Notebooks: A Facsimile of Bodleian MSS. Shelley e.1., e.2, and e.3*, ed. Neil Fraistat, (New York: Garland, 1991), vol. IX of *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, vol. IX, p. lxxiii.
38. For a discussion of the self-dramatizing behavior of the characters in *The Cenci* and their practice of 'self-anatomy,' see Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley: The Philosophical Anarchism and Utopian Thought of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 191–6.
39. *Ibid*., p. 196; Earl R. Wasserman, *Shelley: A Critical Reading* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1971), p. 122.
40. For an account of the early Byronic myth of Satan, see Jerome J. McGann, *Don Juan in Context* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1976), pp. 23–34.
41. 'He had a fancy for some Oriental legends of pre-existence, and in his conversation and poetry took up the part of a fallen or exiled being, expelled from heaven, or sentenced to a new Avatar on earth for some crime ... at times this dramatic imagination resembled a delusion' (Lord Lovelace, *Astarte*, London: Christophers, 1921, p. 117).
42. Interpretations that emphasize Lucifer's traditionally diabolical qualities find support in Byron's letter to John Murray of 3 November 1821, in which he writes that 'the object of the demon is to depress him [Cain] still further in his own estimation than he was before – by showing him infinite things – & his own abasement – till he falls into the frame of mind that leads to the Catastrophe ...' (*BLJ*, IX, 53). We must remember, however, that Byron is addressing his conservative publisher, attempting to persuade him that the presentation of Lucifer is not impious and that *Cain* should be published without suppressing any lines.
43. In 1819 Murray brought Hone's forgery, *Don Juan, Canto the Third* to Byron's attention: Byron's reference to the 'false Don Juans' in a letter to Murray

(29 October 1819) indicates that the latter had informed him about Hone's publication of a forgery (*BLJ*, VI, 236).

44. Dated July 1821, the issue appeared in October; Byron finished *Cain* 10 September See Hill Shine and Helen Chadwick Shine, *The Quarterly Review Under Gifford*, p. 74.
45. *Quarterly Review*, 25 (1821), 348, 362, 363.
46. *Quarterly Review*, 22 (1820), 502, 511, 557.
47. *Quarterly Review*, 23 (1820), 225.
48. Byron said that the accusation, 'being interpreted, means that I worship the devil' (*The Works of Lord Byron: Letters and Journals*, ed. Rowland E. Prothero, 6 vols, London: John Murray, 1898–1901, V, 563).
49. See V, 'The Accusers,' ll. 8–20 (*Poetical Works*, X, p. 223).
50. *Ibid*., X, p. 206.
51. See Charles Robinson, *Shelley and Byron: The Snake and Eagle Wreathed in Fight* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), pp. 192–3.
52. To the Evangelical, James Kennedy, Byron asserted that 'the history of the creation and the fall is, by many doctors of the Church, believed to be a mythos, or at least an allegory' (*Conversations on Religion, with Lord Byron and Others Held in Cephalonia, a Short Time Previous to his Lordship's Death*, London, John Murray, 1830, p. 140).
53. 'It is useless to tell one *not* to *reason* but to *believe* – you might as well tell a man not to wake but *sleep* – and then to *bully* with torments!' ('Detached Thoughts,' *BLJ*, IX, 45).
54. Wickwar discusses the Whig response to the Six Acts (pp. 141–52).
55. Reiman, *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part B, II, 770. Byron may also have wished to test the Trinity Act of 1813, a flawed attempt to provide toleration for Unitarians: in 1817 John Wright was prosecuted for blasphemy because he denied the Trinity and the Atonement (Henriques, *Religious Toleration in England*, p. 209). Wickwar suggests that Carlile republished Paine to test the Act (p. 73).
56. Donald Thomas, *A Long Time Burning: A History of Literary Censorship in England* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1969), p. 207.
57. See Truman Guy Steffan, *Lord Byron's Cain* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1968), pp. 13–18.
58. Invoking the authority of Watson is not only meant to be provocative (the irreligious Lord Byron allying himself with the Bishop of Llandaff) but ironic as well, since Byron suspected that Watson read the Bible skeptically (see Kennedy, *Conversations on Religion*, p. 140).
59. William Dodd, who is representative, holds that the New Testament vision of Redemption depends on the identity of Satan and the serpent (*A Commentary on the Books of the Old and New Testament*, signature 'E'). Even Pierre Bayle, supposed by many to be Byron's mentor in skeptical exegesis, cites several 'Fathers' who deny the identity of Satan and the serpent, only to condemn this 'absurd' distinction. He then explicitly sides with 'the most true Opinion, that *viz*. *Eve* was seduced by the Devil concealed under the Body of a Serpent' (*The Dictionary Historical and Critical of Mr. Peter Bayle*, tr. anon., 6 vols, London: J.J. and P. Knapton, 1734–38; rpt. Garland, 1984, II, 851–2).
60. *The Republican*, 2, No. 12 (7 April 1820), 410.
61. See his letters to Murray of 3 November 1821 (*BLJ*, IX, 53–5) and 8 February 1822 (*BLJ*, IX, 103–5) and those to Moore of 4 March 1822 (*BLJ*, IX, 118–19) and 8 March 1822 (*BLJ*, IX, 122–3).
62. See the *Evangelical Magazine* (Reiman, *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part B, II, 999) and *Literary Gazette* (Part B, IV, 1190).

63. David Eggenschwiler, 'Byron's *Cain* and the Antimythological Myth,' *Modern Language Quarterly*, 37 (1976), 329.
64. Paine, *The Age of Reason* (*Complete Writings*, IV, 31).
65. Warburton asserts that the Old Testament contains no doctrine of immortality, but he goes on to argue that Moses was not ignorant of the idea. That he declined to teach postmortal rewards and punishments proves that the Jews were under a special Providence. See *The Divine Legation of Moses*, 4 vols, 1738–65; rpt. (New York: Garland, 1978), IV, 316–62.
66. *The Republican*, 1, No. 7 (8 October 1819), 102.
67. See the *Investigator* (*The Romantics Reviewed*, Part B, III, 1189), *Literary Gazette*, (Part B, IV, 1431), *Manchester Iris* (Part B, IV, 1635).
68. See William D. Brewer, *The Shelley-Byron Conversation* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1994), pp. 103–4.
69. Byron's principal debt to Bayle is his skeptical demonstration that rationalistic theology cannot reconcile the co-existence of evil with an omnipotent and benevolent God. This problem can only be resolved through faith and revelation; otherwise, Bayle says, the Manichean objection to monotheism is unanswerable. See 'Paulicians,' in *Dictionary*, IV, 512–28. Byron drew upon this argument to ground Lucifer's refutation of Christian theodicy in the tradition of respectable irreligion extending from Bayle through Voltaire and Gibbon, probably as an alternative to the vulgarian mode of Carlile. See Howard Robinson, *Bayle the Skeptic* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1931), pp. 253–65).
70. In *The Age of Reason*, Paine recalls hearing at the age of seven a sermon on the Atonement, noting that the doctrine made 'God Almighty act like a passionate man, that killed his son, when he could not revenge himself any other way (*Complete Writings*, IV, 64–5).
71. *Religious Toleration in England*, p. 241.
72. These thinkers were willing to extend backward in time and expand into ages the first 'days' of Creation, so long as the Creation of man remained a very recent event. Thus men like William Buckland sanitized the implications of Cuvier's research. See Charles Gillispie, *Genesis and Geology* (New York: Harper, 1951), pp. 101–15 and Francis C. Haber, *The Age of the World: Moses to Darwin* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1959), pp. 191–203.
73. See Paul Cantor, *Creature and Creator: Myth-making and English Romanticism*, pp. 148–55 and Jerome J. McGann, *Fiery Dust: Byron's Poetic Development* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968), pp. 255–62.
74. See Wolf Z. Hirst, 'Byron's Revisionary Struggle with the Bible,' in *Byron, the Bible, and Religion*, ed. Wolf. Z. Hirst (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 1991), pp. 89–95.
75. See Carlile's article asserting that the destruction of the myth of Satan spells the end of the myth of God (*The Republican*, 6, No. 16, 13 September 1822, 489–90) and Joseph Swann's blasphemous remarks (which earned him a conviction) on Genesis 3 – that the Devil defeated God by telling Eve the truth (*The Republican*, 6, No. 21, 8 October, 1822, 654).
76. *The Republican*, 5, No. 6 (8 February 1822), 192.
77. *Romantics, Rebels, and Reactionaries*, p. 146.
78. Reviewing Byron's last play, the *La Belle Assemblée* regretted that he 'should by sending forth into the world a crude mass of absurdity, pollution, and blasphemy, thus court disgrace, and cover himself with infamy' (Reiman, *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part B, I, 115).

## 4 Savior and Avenger: Shelleyan Satanism and the Face of Change

1. Richard Holmes, *Shelley: The Pursuit* (London: Penguin, 1974), p. 2.
2. P.M.S. Dawson, *The Unacknowledged Legislator: Shelley and Politics* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), pp. 8, 54–75.
3. *Letters*, I, 280. Cited parenthetically hereafter. 'Proposals for an Association of Philanthropists' is first mentioned in Shelley's letter of 14 February (*Letters*, I, 255), about the time of its publication; printed 18 March 1812, 'A Declaration of Rights' was probably written a few weeks earlier.
4. For discussions of this phase in the development of Shelley's political thought, see Harry White, 'Relative Means and Ends in Shelley's Social-Political Thought,' *Studies in English Literature 1500–1900*, 22 (1982), 629–30; and Pamela Clemit, 'Shelley's Godwin,' *Durham University Journal*, 85 (1993), 193–5.
5. 'A Philosophical View of Reform,' (Julian, VII, 49).
6. Shelley's odd temporal and cultural blurring is unexplained by his sources: chapter 64 of Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776–88) and the Abbé Barruel's *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (1797–98). Neither of these authors describes the Assassins as Gnostic or Christian; in a third possible source, *Le vieux de la Montagne* (1799), the anonymous author (Delisle de Sales) situates the group in Lebanon. The last title is adduced by Jean Fuller (*Shelley: A Biography*, London: Jonathan Cape, 1968) and must constitute the main source for the narrative. Although Mary Shelley's journal does not indicate that she read the work until 1816, clearly Shelley must have read it earlier (Fuller, pp. 158–61, demonstrates parallels in the narratives, among them the Lebanese location and the arrival of a stranger from the world outside).
7. In her note to *The Assassins*, Mary Shelley revealed that the nameless stranger is 'Shelley's old favorite, the Wandering Jew' (Julian, VI, 358).
8. See Rieger, *The Mutiny Within: The Heresies of Percy Bysshe Shelley* (New York: George Braziller, 1967), pp. 133–4, who suggests that Shelley's Assassins are a snake-worshipping sect, the Ophite Gnostics, which Shelley might have known about from Saint Irenaeus' *Adversus Haereses*. Bryan Shelley mentions another Gnostic group, the Peratae, who conflated the Christian Logos with the wisdom of the tempting serpent (*Shelley and Scripture: The Interpreting Angel*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994, pp. 5–6).
9. Shelley had some knowledge about this legendary figure from *Le Vieux de la Montagne*. For information on him, see Edward Burman, *The Assassins: Holy Killers of Islam* (Wellingborough: Crucible, 1987), pp. 110–30.
10. See Geoffrey Carnall, 'DeQuincey on the Knocking at the Gate,' *Review of English Literature*, 2 (1969), 54–5.
11. Godwin, *Enquiry*, I, 302–3.
12. See Godwin's reply to Shelley's letter of 8 March 1812 (*Letters*, I, 269–70).
13. 'Myth and mythmaking in the Shelley Circle,' p. 8. On the influence of Peacock's abortive epic, *Ahrimanes*, on the Manichean structure of *The Revolt of Islam*, see Butler pp. 8–10 and Cameron, 'Shelley and *Ahrimanes*,' *Modern Language Quarterly*, 3 (1942), 287–95.
14. Shelley, *The Revolt of Islam*, in *Poetical Works*, ed. Thomas Hutchinson, l. 4724, p. 153. For convenience I quote *The Revolt of Islam* from this edition, cited parenthetically hereafter.

15. There is critical consensus that the 'Two Powers' have a subjective origin; see James Ruff, who provides a useful summary of critical efforts to explicate the Manichean powers (*Shelley's The Revolt of Islam*, Salzburg: Institut für Englische Sprache und Literatur, 1972, pp. 17–26).
16. For an account of the complicated publication history of the poem, see Donald H. Reiman, 'The Composition and Publication of "The Revolt of Islam,"' in *Shelley and His Circle* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1973), V, 141–69. Bryan Shelley comments on the Gnostic dimensions of this inversion (*Shelley and Scripture*, pp. 63–7).
17. Shelley's mythic construction of the serpentine Spirit of Good is grounded in the infidel mythography of *Ruins of Empires*, II, 120–1). To this mythic cluster Shelley added contemporary political associations: the identification of the serpent shedding its skin with the French Revolution, found in the Abbé Barruel's *Memoires pour servir à l'histoire du Jacobinisme* (1798–99) (see Gerald MacNiece, *Shelley and the Revolutionary Idea*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1969, p. 196) and the American revolutionary emblem ('Don't Tread on Me').
18. This association is formed by Shelley's characteristic fusion of Venus and Lucifer in the figure of the woman's demon lover. Prompted by the conventional conflation of the planet Venus and Lucifer in classical writers, Shelley consistently renames the Morning Star Lucifer.
19. The phrase is inserted above stanza 21 (the printed version) in manuscript adds. e.19, which contains various draft stanzas for *The Revolt of Islam* (see *Drafts for Laon and Cythna: Facsimiles of Bodleian MSS. Shelley adds. e.14 and adds. e.19*, ed. Tatsuo Tokoo, Vol. XIII of *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, New York: Garland, 1992, p. 67).
20. *The Esdaile Notebook*, ed. Kenneth Neill Cameron (London: Faber and Faber, 1964), p. 40.
21. *The Statesman's Manual*, in *Lay Sermons*, p. 75.
22. *Quarterly Review*, 16 (1816–17), 232, 276. Southey's authorship is identified by Hill Shine and Helen Chadwick Shine, *The Quarterly Review Under Gifford*, p. 54.
23. Moore's poem appeared in May 1817 (see Miriam Allen DeFord, *Thomas Moore*, New York: Twayne, 1967, p. 48). Shelley began *Laon and Cythna* in mid-May and finished in September (see Reiman, 'The Composition and Publication of "The Revolt of Islam,"' p. 144).
24. *British Romantic Writers and the East* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 112. Moore's Mokanna, Leask argues, is an emblematic warning to the Irish against adopting French revolutionary principles again. Leask describes Moore as a 'Whig orientalist' of the school of Jones, endorsing an 'organic nationalism' as against 'Jacobin cosmopolitanism and French atheism,' positions more congenial to Shelley (p.113).
25. For Hunt's reading of the episode in his review in *The Examiner*, 1 February 1818, see Reiman, *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part C, I, 433.
26. Michael Scrivener, *Radical Shelley*, pp. 124–5.
27. Documented by Scrivener, p. 132.
28. For this view, see Kyle Grimes, 'Censorship, Violence, and Political Rhetoric: *The Revolt of Islam* in its Time,' *Keats–Shelley Journal*, 43 (1994), 100–1.
29. Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts*, 1981, p. 9.
30. On the dating of composition, see *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, Neil Fraistat, ed., p. lxxiii.

31. Shelley's defense of his purpose 'hitherto,' the representation of 'beautiful idealisms of moral excellence' (Reiman, p. 135) replies to the *Quarterly Review* and its attack on the *The Revolt of Islam*, disclaiming an agenda of iconoclastic didacticism. The final section was almost certainly written in late 1819, immediately after Shelley read the hostile review of his poem.
32. On the affinities between Cobbett and Shelley, see Cameron, *Shelley: The Golden Years* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1974), pp. 137–49.
33. *Political Register* 18 October 1817, 866.
34. *Political Register* 18 April 1817, 458.
35. Richard Cronin notes the influence of Cobbett on the rhetoric of Shelley's essay, which swings between appeals for moderation and bellicose, epigrammatic utterance (*'Peter Bell*, Peterloo, and The Politics of Cockney Poetry' *Essays and Studies*, 45 (*Percy Bysshe Shelley: Bicentenary Essays*, ed. Kelvin Everest, Cambridge: The English Association/D.S. Brewer, 1992), 80–1).
36. *Politics in English Romantic Poetry* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 230.
37. Cameron suggests that Prometheus embodies a 'new generation of intellectuals and liberals' and is a 'composite' of this social subgroup (*Shelley: The Golden Years*, p. 488).
38. Lucy Newlyn holds that Prometheus rejects 'a Satanic solution' to his struggle with Jupiter and moves instead 'toward the redemptive compassion which Shelley is offering as the only valid alternative' (*Paradise Lost and the Romantic Reader*, p. 146). See also Stuart Curran, who maintains that the 'resistance Prometheus has ostentatiously undertaken for the liberation of man has, like that of Milton's Satan, simply insured man's damnation' (*Shelley's Annus Mirabilis*, San Marino: Huntington Library, 1975, p. 58).
39. Andrew M. Stauffer describes the anger of Prometheus as 'a fundamentally aristocratic emotion that has its source in spirited pride and jealous concern for one's place in a hierarchy' ('Celestial Temper: Shelley and the Masks of Anger,' *Keats–Shelley Journal*, 49, 2000, 146).
40. Satan replies to the arresting angels: 'Know ye not me? ye knew me once no mate / For you' (*Paradise Lost* IV, ll. 828–9; p. 245).
41. In 'Necessity and the Role of the Hero in *Prometheus Unbound*,' *PMLA*, 96 (1981), 244–54, Sperry argues that the critical emphasis on the obscurely motivated conversion of Prometheus and its causal role is misplaced; Promethean constancy, not the ambiguous change, is thematically central.
42. See Harry White's comments on the divorce of Prometheus from the violence, which protects the Shelleyan 'morality' of passive resistance ('Relative Means and Ends,' 628).
43. George Bernard Shaw, 'The Perfect Wagnerite,' in *Works*, 30 vols (New York: Wm. H. Wise & Company, 1931), XIX, 233.
44. Neville Rogers conjecturally dates it between 1817 and 1819 (*Poetical Works*, 2 vols, ed. Neville Rogers, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972), II, 410. No holograph survives; Mary Shelley's transcript contains some minor differences from the version in Hutchinson. See *Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. d.7*, Vol. II of *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, Irving Massey, ed. (New York: Garland, 1987), p. 169.
45. *Shelley's Satire*, p. 99.
46. Leigh Hunt, Preface, *The Masque of Anarchy* (1832; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1975), p. ix.

47. Cronin, *Shelley's Poetic Thoughts*, p. 49.
48. Mary A. Quinn, ed., *The Mask of Anarchy Draft Notebook: a Facsimile of Huntington MS. HM 2177*, Vol. IV of *The Manuscripts of the Younger Romantics* (New York and London: Garland, 1990), pp. 54–5.
49. Jones links the diaphanous aspect of the Shape with the vogue for transparencies, the optical-illusion devices that projected images through illuminated transparent overlays (*Shelley's Satire*, pp. 112–13).
50. *Shelley and His Audiences* (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1989), pp. 198–9.
51. *Political Register*, 4 April 1818, 398.
52. On the manuscript of the fragmentary prologue and the problems of editing and interpretation, see *The Hellas Notebook: Bodleian MS. Shelley adds. e.7*, Vol. XVI of *The Bodleian Shelley Manuscripts*, Donald H. Reiman and Michael J. Neth (New York and London: Garland, 1994), pp. xxxiii–ix. Since the passages I discuss do not involve any textual variants (except for the conclusion of Satan's speech), for convenience I quote Hutchinson.
53. Shelley's audience probably extended beyond the small group of *cognoscenti* Behrendt sees (*Shelley and His Audiences*, p. 230).
54. Reiman and Neth suggest that Shelley abandoned the prologue as he moved from an apparently epic design toward Aeschylean drama; in this shift, the Necessitarian and supernatural causal structure emerging in the prologue gave way to an emphasis on human agency (*The Hellas Notebook*, p. xxxvii).
55. In 'A Defence of Poetry,' Shelley asserts that Christianity assimilated the 'eternal truths' of Greek philosophy, among them the principle of equality 'discovered and applied by Plato in his Republic' (Julian, VII, 127).
56. This line and a surrounding passage concluding Satan's speech are recovered by Reiman and Neth; see *The Hellas Notebook*, p. 37.
57. Cameron, *The Young Shelley*, pp. 8–9. Andrew M. Stauffer, 'Celestial Temper: Shelley and the Masks of Anger,' 144n.
58. Marilyn Butler, 'Shelley and the Empire in the East' in *Shelley: Poet and Legislator of the World*, eds Betty T. Bennett and Stuart Curran (Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), pp. 160, 168.
59. Stuart Sperry observes that the figure of Life is 'simply the spent and diminished replica' of the Shape all light (*Shelley's Major Verse: The Narrative and Dramatic Poetry*, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1988, p. 189).

## 5 Ironic Modes of Satanism in Byron and Shelley

1. *English Romantic Irony* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1980), pp. vii, 5.
2. 'Towards a Definition of Romantic Irony in English Literature,' in *Romantic and Modern*, ed. George Bornstein (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1977), pp. 5, 8, 12–17.
3. *Shelley's Satire*, pp. 9–12.
4. Leigh Hunt, *The Examiner*, 2 May 1819, p. 282, and 9 May 1819, p. 303.
5. '*Peter Bell*, Peterloo, and the Politics of Cockney Poetry,' p. 65.
6. While the extent to which Methodism strengthened or subverted autocracy during the Regency remains a subject of debate among contemporary historians, there is no doubt that Shelley and his circle saw the Evangelical groups as the

allies of political repression (see Cronin, '*Peter Bell*, Peterloo, and the Politics of Cockney Poetry,' pp. 73–4).

7. Although Shelley did not begin writing translations of scenes from *Faust* until early 1822, he was at least familiar with it by 1816, when the circle at Geneva shared it in oral translation.
8. 'Sonnet: "Lift not the Painted Veil"' (ll. 1–2; Reiman, p. 312).
9. Cronin observes that the poem 'affects an even-handed distaste' for both extremes of the political spectrum ('*Peter Bell*, Peterloo, and the Politics of Cockney Poetry,' p. 82).
10. Kelsall portrays Byron as an unreconstructed Whig, opposed to the power of the monarchy yet unable to embrace radical reform as embodied in figures like Orator Hunt and William Cobbett. In his introductory chapter, which explores the disintegration of the Whig party, Kelsall asserts that 'Byron's commitment to Whig principle was to be an ultimate guarantee of failure and frustration' (*Byron's Politics*, Brighton: Harvester Press, 1987, p. 17).
11. On Byron's doubts about reform, see Erdman, 'Byron and "the New Force of the People"' *Keats–Shelley Journal*, 11 (1962), 59–61.
12. For a study of Byron's involvement with the Italian revolutionaries, see Richard Lansdown, 'Byron and the Carbonari,' *History Today*, 41 (1981), 18–25.
13. See Erdman, 'Byron and Revolt in England, *Science and Society*, 11 (1947), 246–7.
14. *Quarterly Review*, 16 (1816–17), 276. *A Vision of Judgment*, V, l. 9 in *Poetical Works*, X, p. 223.
15. *A Vision of Judgment*, V, ll. 8–20, *Poetical Works*, X, p. 223.
16. Robert Southey, *Life and Correspondence*, ed. Rev. Charles Cuthbert Southey, 6 vols (London: Longman, 1850), IV, 298–9.
17. Wickwar, *The Struggle for the Freedom of the Press*, p. 271.
18. William St. Clair, 'The Impact of Byron's Writings: An Evaluative Approach,' in *Byron: Augustan and Romantic*, ed. Andrew Rutherford (Basingstoke: Macmillan [now Palgrave Macmillan], 1990), 14–19.
19. Byron's relationship with his audience after 1818 is not well understood. According to E.D.H. Johnson, the license of the first two cantos of *Don Juan* proceeded from misapprehensions about what would be tolerated by an increasingly conservative English middle-class audience: Byron no longer understood his reader ('*Don Juan* in England,' *English Literary History*, 11, 1944, 149–53). To Ian Jack, the mass audience is less significant, for Byron wrote primarily for an English coterie – his literary friends and the associates of the 'House of Murray' (*The Poet and His Audience*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984, pp. 72–4).
20. Quoted in Charles E. Robinson, 'The Devil as *Doppelgänger* in *The Deformed Transformed*: The Sources and Meaning of Byron's Unfinished Drama,' *Bulletin of the New York Public Library*, 74 (1970), 187.
21. Madame de Staël, *Germany*, pp. 361–3, 178. Critics in Byron's day noticed the influence of Goethe: the *Universal Review* described the Stranger as 'the same dry sneerer as Goethe's Mephistopheles, but higher bred and more melancholy than Faust's familiar' (Reiman, *The Romantics Reviewed*, Part B, I, 140). Byron could not read German but still managed to become well acquainted with *Faust*, through Madame de Staël's book, oral translations by Matthew Gregory Lewis and Shelley in 1816, and the series of designs by August Moritz Retzsch which Murray sent to the Pisan circle in 1822. These designs are reproduced in William Vaughan, *German Romanticism and English Art* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 128–9, 132, 141, 151–2.

22. Arnold regards himself as the Devil's likeness because he has a cloven foot. Byron explained that he added the congenital deformity to develop the character's autobiograpical meaning (see *Lady Blessington's Conversations of Lord Byron*, ed. Ernest J. Lovell, Jr., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969, pp. 80–1). Byron carried the comparison further, noting elsewhere his affinities with the deformed devil in Le Sage's novel, *Le Diable Boiteux*: 'I am *Le Diable Boiteux*, – a soubriquet, which I marvel that, amongst their various *nominis umbrae*, the Orthodox have not hit upon' (*BLJ*, X, 136).
23. Byron's partial source, Joshua Pickersgill's novel *The Three Brothers* (1803), presents a conventionally named 'Devil,' a stock Miltonic fallen angel. Introduced only to establish the compact by which the protagonist exchanges his soul for a new body, his role is perfunctory.
24. Daniel P. Watkins observes that 'It is Arnold ... who labels the Stranger a devil ... and it is Arnold who introduces the issue of soul-selling ... .' ('The Ideological Dimensions of Byron's *The Deformed Transformed*,' *Criticism*, 25, 1983, 32).
25. Goethe, *Faust*, trans. Walter Arndt (New York: Norton, 1976), 11. 283–4; p. 7.
26. J.C.L. Sismondi, *A History of the Italian Republics* (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1966), p. 329.
27. 'The Devil as *Doppelgänger*,' 194–8.
28. Robinson, *ibid.*, quotes Irving's transcription of the plot summary, p. 191.
29. Byron, *Manfred* (III.ii.5–6, *Works*, IV, 94); *BLJ*, IX, 46.

## Epilogue

1. Shelley, letter to John Gisborne, 26 January 1822 (*Letters*, II, 388).
2. Blake's 1795 color print, 'The Elohim Creating Adam' associates this plural Godhead with the creation of the fallen body. In the catalogue of the Seven Eyes of God found in *Milton*, the Satanic Limit of Opacity is found just before the third stage of divine revelation, the 'Elohim' (13:20–2, Erdman, p. 107). These works merely associate the Elohim with the Satanic; *The Ghost of Abel* is unprecedented in its unmasking of the Elohim as the Accuser.
3. See Schofield, *Mechanism and Materialism: British Natural Philosophy in an Age of Reason*, pp. 122–4.
4. Leslie Tannenbaum, 'Lord Byron in the Wilderness: Biblical Tradition in Byron's *Cain* and Blake's *The Ghost of Abel*,' *Modern Philology*, 72 (1975), 352.
5. Iain McCalman, *Radical Underworld: Radicals, Revolutionaries and Pornographers in London 1795–1840* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), pp. 140, 146.
6. On the transformation of God into the scaly Satan in these designs, see Bo Lindberg, *William Blake's Illustrations to the Book of Job* (Abo, Finland: Abo Akedimo, 1973), pp. 10–54.
7. Hans Blumenberg, *Work on Myth*, p. 266.

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