

THE APOCALYPTIC TONE OF IRONY IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S *THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL*

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“... the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than [the Devil *del.*]
he who dwells in flaming fire.”
(William Blake)

ABSTRACT. “(T)he (Devil) who dwells in flaming fire”—being the only and quite spectacular correction in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, it *reveals* (cf. *apokalypsis*) the truth of the tone of the work, Blake’s way of thinking and also of his working process. This correction can be regarded as a visible—or, being engraved, a tactile—expression of Blake’s irony, an ironic undercut *expressis verbis*. The present paper is concerned with the possible interpretations of the ironical-satirical context of the apocalyptic work and, while paying attention to the figures of the text, it will basically focus on two facets of the tone—the apocalyptic and the ironic. I can promise that by the end of my paper we can learn more about him “dwelling in flaming fire”—*toning* with the Blakean irony. Although the Blakean vision operates with a disturbing multiplicity of voices—namely, Rintrah, the Devil, the *I* persona, Ezekiel, Isaiah, the Angel, and the illustrator—the first striking impression is the assured clear-sightedness which characterises all of them. On the one hand, while an apocalyptic writing always keeps some mystery in the core, the clear tone desired for revelation deconstructs the speculative and visionary discourse itself. On the other hand, this polytonality and the sudden change of tone seems to *reveal*, as Derrida argues, “the disorder or the delirium of destination”. However, in an apocalyptic discourse the destination, the end is (its) truth itself, and the text becomes—and actually every text is always already—apocalyptic.

KEY WORDS: apocalyptic, ironic, tone, polytonality, truth

In his *Doubt and Identity in Romantic Poetry*, in the chapter titled “Irony and False Consciousness”, Andrew Cooper emphasises the overwhelming ironic tonality of William Blake’s *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. In the repetition of self-creation and self-destruction, due to the persona’s masks used in his works, the ironist is able to free himself from the limitations of self-

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consciousness. Besides referring to the famous “doors of perception” as revolving doors, Cooper also claims that Blake’s irony is aimed at “[the] anti-nomian striving to transcend ‘the Body’ and identify the indeterminacy of rhetorical self-consciousness with the unshackled energies of a genuinely world-consuming apocalypse” (Cooper, 1988: 46).

The motto of my paper comes from Blake’s early prophecy, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793), and it refers to a “corrected” mistake in the text. On plate 6, Blake truncated the expression, “the Devil”, leaving only the personal pronoun, “he”, in the sentence (Blake, 1976: 150, hereafter as MHH). As Geoffrey Keynes remarks, Blake changed the expression as in its own context he had “found it redundant to name him again, the description, ‘he who dwells in flaming fire’, being all that was needed” (Keynes in MHH, xxii). What’s more—as Keynes goes on—(t)his error could easily be corrected on the copperplate by deleting the letter “t” of the article, “the”, and the word “Devil”. Later the gap is “filled with a flame touched with gold” (MHH, xxii). Closely regarding the expression, with this deletion Blake eliminated half of this striking alliteration-complex, destroying the sounds of “the devil who dwells” while leaving (him) “in flaming fire”. Otherwise, due to this alteration, His/his living-space is emphatically damned to be fire and now the expression can be compared with the Biblical phrase when the Lord, our God, is named “consuming fire” (cf. Deuteronomy 4:24 and Hebrews 12:29).

I suppose that being the only and quite spectacular correction in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, it does not only *reveal* (cf. *apokalypsis*) the “true” tone of the work but also the artist’s way of thinking together with his working process. This correction can be regarded as a visible—or, being engraved, a tactile—expression of Blake’s irony, an ironic undercut *expressis verbis*. The present paper is concerned with the possible interpretations of the ironical-satirical context of the apocalyptic work and, while paying attention to the figures of the text, it will basically focus on two facets of the tone—the apocalyptic and the ironic. I can promise that by the end of my paper we can learn more about him “dwelling in flaming fire”—*toning* with the Blakean irony.

Jacques Derrida thematises the problem of the textual complexity of the apocalyptic tone relying on the original meaning of the Greek word *apokalypsis* as “disclosure, uncovering, unveiling” (Derrida, 1999: 119). Consequently, he basically tries to reveal the meaning, the truth of the tone, accepting the definition of the Greek *tonos* (viz. “pitch”, “tension”) as “first signified the tight ligament, cord, rope when it is woven or braided, cable, strap—briefly, the privileged figure of everything to stricture” (Derrida, 1999: 127). Moving away from the obvious musical associations of strict tonality, Derrida claims that the analysis of the tone in a writing should be

done “in terms of contents, manners of speaking, connotations, rhetorical staging, and pose taken in semantic, pragmatic, scenographic terms” (Derrida, 1999: 127). In the complex *truth-revealing* tone, the writer makes the voice of the other (in us) audible—and in Blake’s case also visible—which inevitably results in *delirium*, that is derangement, or rather out-of-tune-ness (*désaccordement*).

Although the Blakean vision operates with a disturbing multiplicity of voices—namely, Rintrah, the Devil, the *I* persona, Ezekiel, Isaiah, the Angel, and the illustrator—the first striking impression is the assured clear-sightedness which characterises all of them. On the one hand, while an apocalyptic writing always keeps some mystery in the core, the clear tone desired for revelation deconstructs the speculative and visionary discourse itself (Derrida, 1999: 148). Edward J. Ahearn in his *Visionary Fictions* also calls the attention to the rhetorical confidence of such writings displayed “to make us experience what we think to be impossible” (Ahearn, 1996: 11). On the other hand, this polytonality and the sudden change of tone seems to *reveal* “the disorder or the delirium of destination” (Derrida, 1999: 150). But in an apocalyptic discourse the destination, the end is (its) truth itself, and the text becomes—and actually every text is always already—apocalyptic: “[...] if the apocalypse reveals, it is first of all the revelation of the apocalypse, the self-presentation of the apocalyptic structure of language, of writing, of the experience of presence, in other words, of the text or the mark in general: *that is, of the divisible envoi for which there is no self-presentation nor assured destination*” (Derrida, 1999: 157, italics in the original).

In his essay Derrida mainly discusses the characteristics of the “apocalyptic discourse”, not dealing with the problems of the genre, and he refers to such a work as a conservative and apocryphally coded mixed form of writing. He also claims that “among the numerous traits characterising an apocalyptic type of writing, let us provisionally isolate prediction and eschatological preaching, the fact of telling, foretelling, or preaching the end, the extreme limit, the imminence of the last” (Derrida, 1999: 144). Tracing the sources of apocalyptic literature, attention is paid to its links with eschatology, millennium and with a possible holy utopia (Paley, 1999: 3), or the utopian myths of the lost Golden Age, Atlantis; moreover, with some gnostic, hermetic or esoteric ideas (Ahearn, 1996: 2-7). Certainly, the prototype—and also the namegiver—of the genre is John’s Book of Revelation, but in the New Testament other descriptions of the so-called little apocalypse of Matthew, Peter, Daniel and Isaiah should also be mentioned (Paley, 1999: 8).

In his book, *Apocalypse and Millennium in English Romantic Poetry*, Paley collects and analyses the possible apocalyptic writings in English literature

elaborating on their political, scientific and social connections. At the end of the 18th century the radical thinkers of the age were greatly influenced by the ideas of the Swedish visionary, Emanuel Swedenborg, and joined the Swedenborgian New Jerusalem Church. The Church was “a gathering-ground for a miscellany of seekers after mystic experiences” from Behmenists and Rosicrucians, through masons to enthusiasts for mesmerism and magnetism (Thompson, 1994: 135). Blake and his wife were sympathisers of the New Church in 1790, when he started to compose *The Marriage* and Swedenborg’s figure, or rather “Swedenborgianism”, is presented in the work (on Plates 3 and 21-22). Blake did not only read but also annotated the English translations of Swedenborg’s apocalyptic and millennial prophecies titled “Wisdom of Angels concerning Divine Love and Divine Wisdom”, “The Wisdom of Angels concerning Divine Providence” and “Heaven and Hell” (Blake, 1976: 89-96, 131-133, and 929), in which the mystic published his conversations with angels. In his remarks Blake welcomed the visionary’s expressive language and his way of differentiating between man’s natural, or rational understanding and spiritual understanding, or wisdom, which were originally joined by Love, or the Will (Blake, 1976: 93-95).

As it is recorded, in 1790 the master first taught the doctrine of concubinage, namely that the Swedenborgian married man can engage in adulterous relationships in case of the wife’s disease, insanity, or difference of faith (Thompson, 1994: 129-145). It cannot exactly be said that Blake rejected the idea of free love and sexual liberation but in his eyes such disputable doctrines made Swedenborg the figure “barring the way to the millennium by blocking the improvement of sensual enjoyment” (Paley, 1999: 37). As Foster Damon summarises, Blake was inspired by his “divine teacher” but he found that “Swedenborg’s greatest error lay in his not understanding the real nature of ‘evil’, and therefore accepting conventional morality” (Damon, 1988: 392-394). Thus, opposed to Swedenborg’s *Heaven and Hell* prophesying the start of the New Heaven in 1757, Blake in his *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, due to his birth in the same year and now with his reaching the age of thirty-three, claims that new Hell has arrived pronouncing Swedenborg’s heaven to be his own hell.

After this shockingly and negatively positive—let us say, ironic—introduction it becomes obvious that Blake represents the true (Christian) wisdom contrasted with Swedenborg’s New Church and its “old falsehoods” (MHH, 157). Here referring to the apocalyptic prophecy of Isaiah about the fall of Babylon, Blake - like John in “his” Book of Revelation—reverses the pattern of the prophecy as *The Marriage* starts with the announcement of Swedenborg’s false new heaven and ends with the portrayal of Nebuchadnezzar displaying the logical consequence of false reasoning (Wittreich,

1975: 192-193). The chosen ironic title of the work criticises not only Swedenborg's inability of vision but also attacks his ideas on marriage as Blake's *Marriage* displays a sexually active spiritual union. Moreover, he does it engraving and illustrating his work on his own, that is, protesting against the "mass produced", printed doctrines of Swedenborgianism by refusing to have his work printed.

In the work the apocalyptic tone is introduced by Rintrah's voice who "roars & shakes his fires in the burden'd air" (MHH, 148). The very first voice introduces his apocalyptic vision of the topsy-turvy world where the true prophet, "the just man rages in the wilds" while the false prophet as "the sneaking serpent walks in mild humility" (Wittreich, 1975: 194). "The Argument" can be taken as "a miniature emblem of human history" (Ahearn, 1996: 27) showing up the continuous fight between the villain and the just; that is, right in the introduction the primary rhetorical force of the work is displayed in the dialectic of opposites. Here the villain as a mild Angel usurps the just man's place, so, Rintrah, "the wrathful spirit of prophecy" is forced to become the Devil (Bloom, 1963: 75). Thus, the narrator uncovers the truth (of apocalypse) in an ironic mock-argument referring to the danger of reasoning, which also becomes a characteristic feature of *The Marriage*.

Consequently, the first voice after introducing the irony of mock-reasoning logically goes on heralding the ironic Eternal Hell instead of the promised new heaven on plate 3, where Swedenborg is the "mild villainous" Angel and the speaker—together with Isaiah—takes the role of the "devilish" just man. In his *Angel of Apocalypse*, Wittreich, who reads the work as a true prophecy and the formation of the prophetic character, claims that the real dialectic of *The Marriage* can be found "in the antagonism Blake establishes between it and its prospective audience" (Wittreich, 1975: 195). It is true that the text wants to inspire its readers and wants their active response—whether its writer is a prophet or not. Reading the text, its dialectic is "figured by Rintrah and the *I* persona, who identifies so closely with the voice of the Devil" (Wittreich, 1975: 196); that is, in "The Argument" besides the roaring true prophet, the devilish *I* persona is introduced—"he who dwells" in irony.

The introduction of the prophetic voice opens up its whirlwind and its "overlordly tone detones" (Derrida, 1999: 133). As Wittreich remarks: "The voice of indignation (Rintrah's voice) is a complement, a prologue, to the voice of the Devil, *critical* of Milton, and to the *I* persona, *derisive* of Swedenborg" (Wittreich, 1975: 198, italics are mine). However, the first person singular speaker is really close to the Devil in his ideas, the two voices have different butts: the Devil's voice ironises Milton while the *I* persona satirises Swedenborg—and later the Devil's voice. Opposed to this, according to

Bloom, the overwhelming tone of *The Marriage* is “devilishly” ironic as right from the very beginning, the Devil’s voice can be heard (Bloom, 1963: 78–79). Although the Devil’s voice is put in the centre not much is known about his figure. In the work the names of the Devil and Satan are used together and regarded as synonymous on plate 5 (cf. “call’d the Devil or Satan”), but they are not identified. The word devil comes from the Greek *diabolos* meaning “accuser” or “slanderer”, while the word *satan* is of Hebrew origin meaning “adversary” (Frye, 1972: 65). In Blake’s later prophetic works instead of the word, devil (or devils) Satan is used to name the selfish “Evil One” (*Milton*) and he is also called the God of Men, Jehovah, who arrives with flaming fire.

But in this early prophecy it is emphasised that the two words, Devil and Satan, with their quite close meaning both signify that they differ, criticise or rebel against something. As having negative power, they cannot exist in themselves: their contrary force is needed. For Blake the devils—often in plural—present a more universal force, a principle of creative energy, which is related not only to the soul/spirit but also to the body: “Energy is [...] from the Body; and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy” (MHH, 149). It is usually understood that the Devil stands for bodily and sexual energy, or the id, while the Angel represents the reasonable soul, or the superego. But it provocatively also means that the devil stands for the union of the body and the soul; more exactly, questioning and criticising the usual categories, the Devil wants the reader to redefine these contraries. That is, the Devil, re-valuating the conventionally accepted assumptions, deconstructs the apparent contradictions and reveals the primordial unity of the mind. Consequently, opposed to the usual meaning of the body, for the visionary “it is a portion of Soul discern’d by the five senses, the chief inlets of Soul in this age” (MHH, 149).

Thus, it is not by chance that the Devil is introduced as a great rhetorician using here the argumentative tone of his voice and relying on the reader’s common sense. As on Plate 3 it is stated: “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” (MHH, 149). Although here the opposition of good and evil is given religious denotation, their sign(ification) is not obvious. In his *Annotations to Lavater’s “Aphorisms on Man”* Blake remarks on aphorism 409 that “Active Evil is better than Passive Good” (Blake, 1976: 77). On the basis of the Blakean conception, hypothetically, the angelic restraining minus can be corrected by the devilish revolutionary minus—so, the double negation results in affirmation.

Actually, such a “reasonable” reading of the Devil’s logic shows the Angel’s viewpoint as well. Whereas the Devil’s voice is fully developed through his own statements, his antinomian proverbs and the *I* persona having been converted to his party, the Angel who stands for the reader’s ideas is less described. Blake putting on the Devil’s mask, aims at the devaluation of reason, where the reader is offered to “apprehend truth discursively, *reasonably*, like the Angel”, or “intuitively, *energetically*, like the Devil” (Wittreich, 1975: 206, italics in the original). Nevertheless, heaven vs. hell and angels vs. devils only exist separately from the angelic point of view. Let me mention a great example of the “black or white” typed angelic thinking. In the fourth “apocalyptic” “Memorable Fancy” the angel wants to show Blake his “eternal lot” saying that it is “between the black & white spiders” (MHH, 156). It can refer to Blake’s and the Devil’s obsession with contraries and to the fact that the “normal” way of thinking in black or white terms can obstruct the understanding of the work. This fancy ends in quite a postmodern fashion stating that all of us (readers, critics, angels or devils) impose upon each other our own “phantasy” “owing to our metaphysics” (MHH, 156-7). But the devils at least can reflect on it: they represent an intellectually higher level as they are able to see things in greater contexts and in more universal connections—due to their ironic ability of shifting points of view. As Derrida says about the apocalyptic tone, it “leaps and rises when the voice of the oracle, uncovering your ear, jumbling, covering, or parasitizing the voice of reason equally speaking in each and using the same language with everyone, takes you aside, speaks to you in a private code, and whispers secrets to you” (Derrida, 1999: 132). However, I would like to emphasise that in *The Marriage* the devilish needs the angelic so as to function, and the truth is being formed in their (ironic) “mental fight”.

In the work, as Wittreich points out, the devilish-angelic contraries are historically represented by Milton, the true, and Swedenborg, the false prophet. Accordingly, in the argumentation the work operates with a double strategy in order “to expose the false prophets, eliminating the negation they represent; and to accomplish through prophecy the struggle of contraries by which the organs of perception are cleansed and the apocalypse finally achieved” (Wittreich, 1975: 199). We should admit that Blake’s work was greatly influenced and liberated by Milton’s radical ideas. On the whole, the direction of Milton’s and Swedenborg’s thinking and oeuvre can be contrasted since in his writings Milton moved away from orthodoxy whereas Swedenborg starting from a radical view, reached orthodoxy. More exactly, referring to Bloom’s remark, in *The Marriage* Swedenborg is shown as the ex-prophet, a priest, but he originally was a reasoner (a scientist) who could become a visionary and sect-founder (Bloom, 1963: 70); that is, in his career Swedenborg displays the rise and the fall of the visionary.

While the *I* persona mainly mocks Swedenborg's ideas, the Devil ironises Milton as Blake puts his Milton-criticism into the Devil's mouth. On the one hand, the Devil's voice criticises *Paradise Lost* aesthetically, on the other hand, it ironically attacks his theology. In *The Marriage* the Miltonic Satan, the unironic hero of rebellion, is put in the centre and ironised by/in Blake's Devil. But, as Wittreich calls the attention, the Devil "never exhibits the same largeness of mind as the figure with whom he is identified" (Wittreich, 1975: 215). Likewise, the Devil's idea that in Milton "the Father is Destiny, the Son a Ration [cf. Reason] of the five senses, & the Holy-ghost Vacuum" (MHH, 150) is true only in the ironic context of the work.

We cannot forget that besides criticising Milton, the Devil's main task is to ironise reasoning by expressing distorted views and by the sudden changing of perspectives. The ironic shifting of viewpoints culminates in the complicated sentence, where the Devil's name is deleted as in the work *his name* equals the evasive tone itself. Opening up the vortex of contraries, *he* would rather let the reader find out that the devilish Jehovah of imagination, or the Biblical creator "dwells in flaming fire". Finally, the Devil, or the "converted" *I* persona in his ironic awareness notes on Plate 5 that "The *reason* Milton wrote fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at *liberty* when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a *true* Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it" (MHH, 150, italics are mine). In this statement we should pay attention to the opening word of "reason" associated with the angelic principle which is opposed to the energy of the devilish irony expressed here; due to the ironic tone, reason is put in antinomy with freedom and truth in the rhetoric.

On Plate 16 another "portion of being" and its (ironic) opposite is revealed: the Prolific and the Devouring. According to Bloom, "if ever Blake speaks straight, forgoing all irony, in *The Marriage*, it is here" (Bloom, 1963: 90). I think that without using the ironic tone, the statement—"to the devourer it *seems* as if the producer was in chains; but it is *not so*, he only takes portions of existence and *fancies* that the whole" (MHH, 155, italics are mine)—cannot be uttered. More exactly, only from an evasive (betwixt and between) viewpoint and in an atonal/atoned voice can such a statement be uttered. These two classes—the imaginative, creative artists and the Reasoners, the ones of limited knowledge—should be enemies because following the main principle, their opposition and fight means the essence of human existence. As David Erdman sees: "Blake rejects [Swedenborg's] "spiritual equilibrium" between good and evil for a theory of spiralling "Contraries" that will account for progress" (Erdman, 1991: 178). Though the interaction of contraries regarded eternal their unique "union", their marriage—promised and illustrated in the work—can be achieved.

The interaction is figured by the dynamic vortex as in Blake's visions it symbolises the essence of imaginative activity and "serves as an image of the gateway into a new level of perception"—quoting Professor Mitchell (Mitchell, 1978: 73). Here this whirlwind is created by the devil and his attribute, his ironic attitude—his "flaming fire". In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* fire is the main, the first principle: it is clearly associated with (devilish) desire, consummation and sexuality as "the word 'consummation' [...] refers both to the burning world and the sacred marriage" (Frye, 1972: 196). It is not only the means of the "devouring" purification (apocalypse) and prohibition (the cherub's flaming sword), but also of the "prolific" creation and artistic imagination (see Plate 14). Moreover, fire symbolises inspiration as Northrop Frye says "imagination cannot be consumed by fire, for it is fire" (Frye, 1972: 196). In the first "Memorable Fancy" a mighty devil writes the infernal "Proverbs of Hell" using "corroding fires" and later the "devilish artist" calls his own working method infernal: "[...] I shall do by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid" (MHH, 154).

Practically, with his "corrosive method" Blake invented a new technique of engraving. After drawing the outlines in varnish on the copper plate he put it into the acid bath. As a result, quoting Anthony Blunt, "the unprotected parts were bitten away, leaving the parts painted out in a varnish in relief. This is roughly an inverted form of the ordinary process of etching, or a transference of the process of wood engraving to a copper plate" (Blunt, 1966: 128). That is, this process does not only imply the use of the corrosive and purifying acid bath but also the working out of the design backwards while the text has to be written in black surrounded by a thin white line in the overall darkness of the space. It can be said that in this way Blake made darkness visible as the process of engraving produces such a visual paradox. It is another ironic game with the contrary-complementary points of view in our perception, meaning another challenge for our senses. As the apocalyptic and Platonic conclusion states on Plate 14: "If the doors of perception were cleansed everything would appear to man as it is, infinite. / For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" (MHH, 154).

Blake thinks that the divine (or diabolical) imagination is locked in the Platonic cave of the human skull or body which is lit by the sensory organs: nostrils, ears, eyes, tongue and skin, or genitals. The purifying and energetic flames of imagination used by Blake, metaphorically and literally, can free our perception and open the way towards infinity. In *The Marriage*, the other prophetic figures, Isaiah and Ezekiel, also want to raise men into "a perception of the infinite" with their strange "corroding" behaviour (MHH,

154). Similarly, Blake tries to show the power of the “Poetic Genius” in his “fire of intellect and art, which must begin ‘by an improvement of sensual enjoyment’” (Bloom, 1963: 88). According to Wittreich, “the true prophets” should rely on satire and irony (Wittreich, 1975: 207)—that is, following the devilish ironic logic, they can pretend to be false prophets. Rather thinking in the *infernal*, or *poetical-artistic* meaning of the work, I agree with Harold Bloom that the creative Devil is the artist Blake’s ironic mask and “the corroding fires refer metaphorically both to his engraving technique and the satiric function of the *Marriage*” (Bloom, 1963: 83).

While the Devil’s irony seems to be controlled—as he is still a reasoner though a false one—the *I* persona is likely to be taken away by his irony. In the last “Memorable Fancy”, in the description of the parallel visions of the orthodox Angel and the heretic, with the abundance of figures the same story is told from two opposite viewpoints—with understanding shamefully “imposed upon” each other (MHH, 157). First, the Angel shows his fantasy about eternity with the symbols of Christ’s life (the stable, the church, the vault), of the institutionalised Church (mill, cave), and finally with the apocalyptic pictures of the black tempest, the fiery cataract of blood and Leviathan in the black sea (Summerfield, 1998: 382-3). Afterwards the *I* persona displays “his” visionary story of Christianity flying with the Angel towards the Sun reversing Satan’s journey through chaos described in *Paradise Lost*. Then descending into the abyss of the Bible, they reach the seven houses of the Church where monkeys live quarrelling, copulating and devouring each other “by plucking off first one limb and then the another, till the body was left a helpless trunk; [...] one savourily picking the flesh off his own tail” (MHH, 157).

In his *Marriage* the rational “either-or” typed point of view is attacked: if devils and angels separately exist in our world the persona deliberately acts for the devil’s party. In this (ironic) sense he can be said to be the devil’s advocate who puts not only the “case of reason” but also the reasonable (Swiftian) satire to the acid test. As Relihan remarks, “the anatomy of folly can only be ironically performed” (Relihan, 1993: 30); that is, irony is used upon irony, or the technique of betrayal with a false persona. The ending is not satiric but ironic and can be taken as an imaginative poetic ending, not a reasonable one where the “fiery polemic uttered for its fire and not its light” (Bloom, 1963: 94). But after the promise of “The Bible of Hell” another shock awaits the reader: the warning of the “devilish” illustrator who shows us the repressive and degenerate state of Nebuchadnezzar. That is, the final “word” is uttered by the illustrator putting up the Devil’s/*his* complex ironic mask.

As a starting point, Paley also emphasises that “the apocalyptic mode, both in the Bible and in secular literature, involves a seer who communi-

cates *his visions*, and these apocalyptic truths are conveyed not as pure spiritual transmission, but through images and words" (Paley, 1999: 2-3, italics are mine). Actually, regarding the different and intertwined voices of the work, the very first and very last voice—before and after Rintrah, the *I* persona, the Devil and the Angel—is the voice of the illustrator. From the starting plate of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, from the title and its first "illumination" of the title-page, the reader is contrasted with a Blakean twofold or more exactly "threefold vision": the union of two contrary forces. If we want to understand, or rather imagine its meaning, we should go beyond and accept the challenge that the whirlwind of these apparent "contraries" indicates. Having analysed the work, I should realise that even from the very beginning in the satirical-ironical context Blake acts as the devil's advocate, the *advocatus diaboli* representing a higher state of imaginative vision. If the reader can accept the illogical though imaginative marriage of good and evil, then (s)he can see the contraries already united—in its double negative, assertive way. We have an artist who works with "flaming fire", what's more, uses its power in the creation of the "great synaesthesia" of his art. As Professor Mitchell sees, "Blake's pictorial style, like his poetic form and the total form of his composite art, is organised as a dramatic, dialectical interaction between contrary elements" (Mitchell, 1978: 74). In his "illuminated" works, in his artistic threefold vision, words and pictures—and the sculpture-like letters, motifs of the relief etchings - are composed to show the synaesthetic presentation of sensory elements, so as to open the dynamic vortex of imagination. In this sense his illustrated/illuminated prints do also function as windows, as sensory openings, and through his pictures the spectator's sensual enjoyment can be improved by "designing visual illusions which continually demand and imply [all] the other senses in their structures" (Mitchell, 1978: 74).

I cannot agree with Erdman that the usage of the word 'marriage' in the title of the work—on the basis of Blake's aversion of this institution—can only be taken as a "half-jest". In Blake's poetic and prophetic works marriage has different meanings, from the burdensome bondage of loveless and forced marriages, through the happy sexual union, to the spiritual wedding between God and Man. According to Wittreich, "[i]f Milton thought that the marriage of truth would not occur until the Apocalypse, Blake thought the Apocalypse would not occur until such a marriage had been accomplished" (Wittreich, 1975: 203). However, the argumentation of the work fails to show up the promised "marriage" as the Devil's voice is fully developed through his utterances, proverbs and the *I* persona having been converted to his party, but the Angel's figure is less described. That is, the *text* of the Blakean *Marriage* presents the weak and unbalanced union between the fully described figure of the Devil and the flat reasoning character of the

Angel—consequently, the true expression of marriage should be looked for in the illustrations.

The title of the prophecy—written to the experienced living in division—clearly refers to the world of “threefold vision” and sexual unity. In the work it is visualised in the title-page, in its illustration and typography, and verbalised in the last “Memorable Fancy”. The title-page can be taken as an illustration to the section where all the voices are present: the *I* persona records the conversation between an Angel and a Devil which is finally/originally depicted by the illustrator on the title-page. In the textual vision, the devil in flaming fire addresses an angel sitting on a cloud and questions the ancient traditions of orthodox Christianity, while putting emphasis on Christ’s humanity instead of his divinity. As the angel fails to defend his own ideas he “stretched out his arms, embracing the flame of fire, & he was consumed and arose as Elijah [viz. the prophet, or John the Baptist]” (MHH, 158).

Although in the text the two figures are masculine (referred as “he”) or can be taken as androgynous, in the title-page below the level of the ground or consciousness we can see an embracing love-couple: the devil is characterised with flames of fire and a nice feminine bottom, and the angel’s masculine nude is shown reclining on a bluish cloud. The harmonious moment of their kissing is made dynamic by the moving fiery flames and the other embracing couples flying above the central one. The whole picture shows the whirlwind of ecstasy rooted in and raised by the union of the two main principles. That is, the main schematic form dominating the entire space of the design is the vortex, which can be “the configuration of [the Blakean] ‘progression’” and “the focus of the encounter between conflicting forces” (Mitchell, 1978: 70). Besides the vision of the whirlpool there is another little vortex coiling around the uniting conjunction, “and”, which looks like going *into* the space of the drawing. Above the ground in accordance, or *toning*, with the visionary scene we can notice that the branches of the trees move towards each other in the wind (of passion) and as if the word, “marriage”, had united “the abstraction of typography [of HEAVEN and HELL] with the flowing, organic forms of Blake’s pictorial style” (Mitchell, 1978: 75).

Finally, we should pay attention to the illustrator’s attitude and the Blakean irony. Being taken not as “anti-ironic” but a complementary counter-vision, this *anironic* vision accompanies irony and the absolute ironist is capable of the intertwining of the ironic and the anironic. I think, opposed to the hovering of modern irony, in Blake’s irony the anironic apocalyptic vision about the realm of fantasy ironises the Devil’s ironic tone. It means that the Devil’s irony is “Blake’s vehicle for carrying reason to excess, making it undermine itself and become energy” (Cooper, 1988: 48), which is

displayed in the illustrator's (an)irony. In this sense, marriage can refer to the intertwined unity of the different tones which are tensed then braided. Thus, *The Marriage* does not only mean the Devil's and the Angel's spiritual union but also the marriage of satire and irony in a prophetic/apocalyptic ending-beginning. According to Wittreich, the work's final irony

[l]ies in the fact that what is true from the human perspective is not true from a demonic one, just as what the Devil says in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* may be true from the perspective of history, but it is not true from the perspective of eternity that the prophet enjoys. The irony [...] [of] Blake's Devil lies in the fact that Blake [is] in possession of a larger consciousness and thus aware of subtleties that his devil does not perceive... (Wittreich, 1975: 215).

I agree with Wittreich's calling Blake a "supreme ironist" but "the irony lies in the fact" that while in the final irony he sees "the formation of the prophetic character". I would rather *see* the illustrator and the engraver's perspective here. I think, supreme irony is expressed in the annihilation of the tones in the fiery ending and also in the illustrations where the artist represents his (an)ironic vision of prophecy. The illustrator's "spiritual eye" is truly meant to be "the eye through which the rest of the world might see" (Wittreich, 1975: 218) and in this sense ironically the cover-page is rather an uncovering, *apocalyptic* page.

In his essay on the apocalyptic tone, Derrida refers to a flower of rhetoric, the eucalyptus, which, as the ironic flower of revelation, after flowering remains closed, "well hidden [cf. the Greek word, *eu-kaluptos*] under the avowed desire for revelation" (Derrida, 1999: 149). In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, besides the puzzling multitonality, the author's "true" voice remains concealed—like the Derridean apocalyptic flower of rhetoric, the eucalyptus. Moreover, the eucalyptus is also remarkable for its cleansing and healing oil, which can be associated with the corroding acid of Blake's irony. In his writing Blake "argues" against all restraints, limitations and bondage, and he is capable of loosening the strict tension of the *tonos*, due to the elasticity of his ironic tonality. In spite of my first satirical remark on Professor Keynes's explanation, I should accept that instead of "the devil" this "he" is "all that was needed". The apocalyptic work ironically marks not the ending but the beginning of Blake's prophetic and artistic career where heaven and hell, angels and devils do not exist—there is *no reason* for their existence. Regarding the conception, context and tonality of *The Marriage*, the "pronoun" and, what's more, its hiatus/gap, is definitely enough. As He in his mask/incognito says in the "Proverbs of Hell": it is "more than enough", or "too much" (MHH, 152).

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