

Paratextual Transactions:
text and off text in William Blake's
Milton and Jerusalem

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We see in order to move;
we move in order to see.

William Gibson

Introduction

This article focuses on the textual movement implied in William Blake's use of paratext in his last prophetic books *Milton* (1804-1811?) and *Jerusalem* (1820). According to Genette, «paratext» may be defined as «a zone between text and off-text, a zone not only of transition but also of transaction» (Genette 1997: 2). Indeed, this compelling interplay between textual transition/transaction becomes instrumental in the hermeneutics of Blake's works. His highly ambivalent attitude towards text and paratext, centre and margin (especially in the relation between word and image) suggests that there can never be a real primacy of one over the other. On the contrary, Blake seems to tend towards a convergence between the two; accordingly, his plates can be regarded as an 'integrated work of art' ¹, whereby the interpretation of both image (illuminations) and word (poetry/prose) results from a negotiation between different textual components.

¹ See Blunt 1959 and Hagstrum 1964.



The illuminated plates contain elements in the designs that can be clearly associated with a paratextual apparatus, in keeping with Genette's definition. Remarkably, however, even some textual elements can be considered paratextual as well, for instance Blake's addressing to a specific kind of reader in *Jerusalem*. Such a complex and sometimes undecidable dynamic between text and paratext reaches extremes with the passage from *Milton* to *Jerusalem*. To some extent *Milton* can be treated as a paratextual supplement of John Milton's *Paradise Lost*. By contrast, with its permeable interchange between primary/secondary, verbal/visual production, *Jerusalem* puts the very nature of paratext into question, calling for the reader's continuous reassessment of this notion.

Undoubtedly, Blake's most remarkable use of paratextual apparatus both in *Milton* and in *Jerusalem* concerns peritext, which Genette defines as follows:

Within the same volume are such elements as the title or the preface and sometimes elements inserted into the interstices of the text, such as chapter titles or certain notes. I will give the name of *peritext* to this first spatial category. (Genette 1997: 5)

This article considers the communicative and structuring function of four particular peritextual elements: 'cover', 'title', 'preface' and 'visual insertions'. The way they insinuate into the interstices of the text deeply influences narrative and the reader's response to it; rather than being a mere accessory, these components play a crucial role in the semantics of the text. Particular attention is laid on the closing plates of these poems, in which Blake seems to employ paratext as a device to leave his works open, by consciously manipulating and deferring textual closure.

Cover and Title

Milton's Plate 1 presents a peculiar combination of word and image, in its double role of cover and title page². In Blake's plates, designs often

² *Milton's* plates numbers refer to Copy A, c.1811 (British Museum).

function as a frame/border around the text, or as a visual synthesis of a momentous turning point in narration. They usually fill the space on the top or the bottom of the plate itself. *Milton's* title plate is based upon a reverse dynamic: here, it is the textual section that works as a frame around the design, baffling the reader's expectations about a supposed textual primacy.

Such a structural choice suggests that the relationship of continuity Blake intends to establish with John Milton (both as a man and a poet) and his works is *visual* in the first place, with the verbal component employed primarily as an ekphrastic supplement of the poet's mental representations³. After all, Blake's prose and poetry may be regarded as a textual translation of his visions, of a reality primarily experienced through images and spiritual apparitions.

Notably, before considering the idea of 'creating' a poem on John Milton, Blake was already working on the two sets of water colour illustrations to *Paradise Lost* to be completed in 1808⁴. In this respect, his pictures are not mere visual counterparts of Milton's poetry; rather, they symbolically represent Blake's unique understanding and interpretation of *Paradise Lost*.

Plate 1 describes the eponymous hero in the act of returning to earth and entering a vortex. The scene proleptically anticipates what is later described in Plate 14:

The nature of infinity is this! That every thing, has its
Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro Eternity,
Has passed that Vortex, he perceives it roll backward behind
His path, into a globe itself infolding: like a sun:
Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty.
While he keeps onwards on his wondrous journey on the earth,
Or like a human form, a friend with whom he liv'd benevolent

³ In the prophetic book Blake considers himself as an 'evolution' of Milton's spirit from both a personal and a poetic point of view.

⁴ The Blake Archive,

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/work.xq?workid=but529&java=no> ,
accessed 17 March 2016. See also Werner 1986.

(M 14.22-26).

Milton is a traveller ready to begin his «wondrous journey on the earth» (M 15.21); in the design, his passage to Generation is symbolised by the vortex he seems to be pointing to⁵. In his human form, he shall confront Satan, no longer as the fallen angel of his poem or as the incarnation of pure evil, but as a limitation of the mind (Error) that every individual must overcome. In this perspective, Satan turns into the principle of selfishness and of sterile reasoning, being the obstacle to the ever expanding vision. Only when Milton is ready to recognise evil as a perversion of his own mind, and as a contraction of his soul, may his redemption really begin.

In this plate, Milton is portrayed from the back, his muscular naked figure stands out from the clouds and flames that fill the scene. On the top, the word 'Milton' is split after the third letter and continued vertically in the right margin. As G. E. Bentley Jr. observes, Milton's divided name written in three different directions symbolises his correspondent 'divided' mental status; it may suggest that not only is the poet going to start a journey through ages, but also, and more significantly, through the dark recesses of his own mind, like the 'mental traveller' of Blake's homonymous poem. He is compelled to break the endless repetition of his own cycle to finally accomplish his poetic task⁶.

Besides the vertical portion of the title ('Ton'), Blake etched the generic indication «A poem in 12 Books». Successively, he changed it with «A poem in 2 Books», abandoning the original project of producing an epic of twelve books to rival Milton's *Paradise Lost*. The lines «The Author & Printer W. Blake» are etched vertically in the left margin. At the bottom the Miltonic quotation «To Justify the Ways of God to Men» is etched horizontally; although not placed at the head of the plate, it functions as an epigraph, because it comments and justifies the poem's title.

In his analysis of the titular apparatus, Genette considers the co-presence of title, subtitle, and generic indication as the most complete, even

⁵ Generation represents the act of true love and the simplest way to Eternity (Damon 2013: 150).

⁶ See Bentley Jr. 2001 and 2014.

though sometimes it is not possible to make a clear distinction between subtitle and generic indication (Genette 1997: 57). Accordingly, Blake's prophetic book is composed by a thematic title (which reveals the 'subject matter'), and a formal subtitle (or generic indication), which clearly associates the text with a specific genre: the epic poem. Moreover, the page contains the name of the author/printer (Blake performs both roles) and the year in which the author began to work on the poem⁷.

Discussing the peculiarity of Blake's title, Mary Lynn Johnson contends that:

Blake's *Milton* is the only extended literary work in English, or perhaps in any language, that features a poet as protagonist and title character. [...] Blake alone transforms a revered poet of an earlier time into a kind of epic hero who embarks upon an inward-questing adventure, the outcome of which depends in part on the author's composition of this very poem. *Milton*, the only illuminated book Blake named after a publicly recognizable human being, has the further distinction of being his only overtly autobiographical work: not only does he interrupt the narrative to make first person observations as scribe and witness [...] he depicts himself as "WILLIAM" (pl. [32]) and becomes fully engaged in the plot (Johnson 2003: 231-250, 231-233).

The combination title/subtitle is instrumental to Milton's future reincarnation in Blake: the title refers to a real author, whose works are metonymically called into question by this mentioning, while the subtitle refers to a brand new epic poem. Peritext, then, not only reveals the poem's subject matter, but it also anticipates its autobiographical nature. In this perspective, *Milton* represents Blake's way of coping with his own 'anxiety of influence': to accomplish his poetic task, he needs to confront his artistic father, assimilate his lesson and proceed. Accordingly, there could have been no better title for his poem than *Milton*: the great poet of Christian redemption becomes a character in the prophetic book, until he incarnates

⁷ For further studies on the relation between texts and plates in Blake's engravings see Viscomi 1993 and Sung 2016.

in Blake himself, ideally leaving his legacy to him. Precisely when Milton becomes Blake, the poem turns into a metatextual reflection on its apocalyptic and eschatological fundamentals (Rix 2007).

In *Milton*, cover and title conflate into a single plate, by contrast in *Jerusalem* they occupy respectively Plate 1 and Plate 2⁸. Plate 1 shows a long-haired male figure at the threshold of an arched, slightly ajar door leading to a dark space⁹. He is holding a globed lantern, a possible reference to Los, who in Plate 85 carries a «red globe of fire»; his right foot has disappeared across the threshold, while his left foot shows that he is wearing sandals, which is again reminiscent of Los. The scene portrays a transitional dimension, an in-between space that at the same time places the beholder inside and outside the picture/poem¹⁰.

Whereas Los is about to start his metaphysical journey, the reader is ready to enter the text and experience Blake's vision. Materialising the very concept of paratext, in his cover page, Blake employs the image of the threshold to convey a sense of liminality and indeterminacy. In doing so, he anticipates Genette's notion of *les seuils* that metaphorically describe the peripheral textual elements of a book¹¹.

⁸ *Jerusalem's* plates numbers refer to Copy E, c.1821 (Yale Center for British Art).

⁹ With his coat and wide-brimmed hat, he echoes the wandering traveller who is at the door of the aged man in the already mentioned poem 'The Mental Traveller' (1804): «He feeds the Beggar & the Poor/And the wayfaring Traveller:/ For ever open is his door.» (ll. 38-40 in Erdmann 1988).

¹⁰ The plate's design recalls the engravings of *The Gates of Paradise* (1793/1818), later re-titled *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*. Following the engravings numbers of the final version, Plate 15 portrays the «Deaths Door». This design is very similar to *Jerusalem's* title plate: it represents an old man holding a crutch with his left hand, he is entering the death's door (as reads the caption); his right foot has already crossed the threshold and has disappeared into the dark chamber, probably his tomb.

See The Blake Archive,

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/illusdesc.xq?objectid=jerusalem.e.illbk.01&objectdbi=jerusalem.e.p1> , accessed 21 March 2016.

¹¹ Blake's threshold is also evocative of Derrida's notion of liminality and of his considerations about what is inside and what is out of a text, what can be represented as peripheral and what as preliminary. See for instance Derrida's paradox of the Hegelian preface in 'Hors Livre - Préfaces of *Dissemination*, whereby «a preface to philosophy is

The doorway Los enters was originally decorated with the following three inscriptions obliterated in the finished copy¹²:

[Above the archway:]

There is a void outside of Existence, which if entered into
Englobes itself and becomes a Womb; such was Albion's Couch
A pleasant Shadow of Repose call'd Albion's lovely land.

His Sublime & Pathos become Two Rocks fixed in the Earth;
His Reason, his Spectrous Power, covers them above;
Jerusalem his Emanation is a stone laying beneath.
O behold the Vision of Albion!

[On right side of archway:]

"Half Friendship is the bitterest Enmity", said Los
As he entered the Door of Death for Albion's sake Inspired.
The Long sufferings of God are not for ever; there is a Judgement
(J 1.1-10)

[On left side, in reversed writing:]

Every Thing has its Vermin, O Spectre of the Sleeping Death! (J 1.11).

The first inscription refers to Albion, whose fall has caused division and sufferance in the world human beings transitorily inhabit. He needs to awake and reject the evil power of Reason to regain the Divine Vision. The second tells about Los' sacrifice for Albion who, in order to save the Father of all Mankind, enters the Door of Death. In the last inscription, the reference to the «Spectre of Sleeping Death», as a symbol of the fall, might be addressed to either Albion and Los, since in the poem they both need to regain unity and win their divided selves. The centre of the title plate reads «Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion». The title is surrounded by five winged female figures, which may be «fairies acting in parallel to the main action of the poem» or «perhaps the lower three are actually

peripheral and pre-liminary, a mere *hors d'oeuvre* outside the meal whose central course is the guts of the book» (Llewelyn 1986: xi).

¹² See Johnson and Grant 2007.

Jerusalem («Wingd with Six Wings» according to Los) sleeping the Sleep of Ulro»¹³. As I will show further on, at the passage from *Milton* to *Jerusalem*, the relation between image and word becomes more and more complex: the poetic word reaches its utmost level of echoicity and tension, whereby the images resist literal or normative interpretation.

Preface

Both prophetic books' prefaces correspond to Genette's «authentic authorial preface» (Genette 1997: 196), which has the «chief function to ensure that the text is read properly» (Genette 1997: 197). Moreover, they present an introductory location that can be considered *monitory*, because it explains why and how we should read that particular book. Blake's major prophetic concern is to ensure that the reader properly understands and receives his poems' redemptive function. For this reason, rather than being supplementary and accessory paratextual elements, these prefaces prove to be essential for a full comprehension of the plates.

In *Milton's* preface, Blake appeals to his fellow artists (painters, sculptors, and architects) to be just and true to their own imagination. This preface, which in the poem's later editions is expunged, shows Blake's resolution to win his mental fight and build (the new) Jerusalem («I will not cease from Mental Fight,/Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:/Till we have built Jerusalem,/In England's green & pleasant land» M I.13-16). Besides Blake wishes to make the reading experience not merely convincing, but also *salvific*. In this perspective, it is not only out of a rhetorical device that the Bard says: «Mark well my words! They are of your eternal salvation» (M 2.25). As Mary Lynn Johnson argues, part of the Bard's function is to «refute W.H. Auden's dictum that poetry makes nothing happen» (Johnson 2003: 241), and a few lines later she observes that what the listeners are about to hear «is not to be judged by its entertainment value» (Johnson 2003: 241). Blake is willing to establish a

¹³ See The Blake Archive

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/illusdesc.xq?objectid=jerusalem.e.illbk.02&objectdbi=jerusalem.e.p2> , accessed 29 March 2016.

serious relationship with his readers who, through the very act of reading, become actively involved in the Vision.

According to Genette, the preface also performs the function of «inform[ing] the reader about the origin of the work, the circumstances in which it was written, the stages of its creation» (Genette 1997: 210). *Milton's* preface partially responds to these requirements. Although it does not inform the reader about the origin of the poem, or its stages – since most of the circumstances of his revisions and changes remain obscure –, it gives a hint on the reason *why* the poet has decided to delve into such a difficult subject:

But when the New Age is at leisure to Pronounce, all will be set right: & those Grand Works of the more ancient & consciously & professedly inspired Men will hold their proper rank, & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration (M I).

At the passage from memory to inspiration Blake calls for a kind of poetry that is no longer subdued to the stagnant imitative formula of the Daughters of Memory. Indeed, his poetry has to be coeternal and consubstantial with that kind of vision, beheld by the Daughters of Inspiration (here performing the role of the muses in traditional epics), which only the Poetic Genius can surmise: «nor vain my types shall be» he later affirms in *Jerusalem* (J 3.9), because «every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place» (J 3). Those words and letters are not merely Blake's, in fact they result from a negotiation between the poet and Imagination, which is surrounded by the Daughters of Inspiration (Damon 2013: 17)¹⁴. Muses, poet and eventually the reader, who becomes an instrument of Eternity, belong to the same Vision: they all participate in the creative process. Such a mutual commitment provides an explanation for the biblical epigraph placed at the bottom: «Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets» (M 1). In this regard, *Milton* is a poem on the consecration of a poet, William Blake, and an allegory on the appointment of a new prophet, the reader. Two roles that in Blake obviously conflate

¹⁴ See also Vine, Mandell 1993 and Damon 2013: 17.

into one. In its epigrammatic concision the epigraph subsumes the book's major themes, providing a powerful interpretative key.

Unlike *Milton*, in *Jerusalem* Blake chooses three particular addressees for his poem. Whereas in chapter one he involves a general kind of reader that he calls «Public», in the remnant three chapters he becomes more specific by focusing respectively on «the Jews», «the Deists», and «the Christians». The four stages into which the text is structured represent a journey towards the Fourfold Vision¹⁵.

The preface to each chapter allows the reader to rest and reflect on the task he has undertaken and the nature of his vision. Chapter by chapter, Blake selects his reader, until he comes back to the Christians to whom he significantly addresses his final lines. Eventually, those who have been able to overcome the obstacles Reason has placed in the way are led to the last step towards the Fourfold Vision.

The first preface informs the reader about the circumstances of the poem's genesis: it happened after «three years slumber» (*J 3*) in the poet's life. This is a reference to Blake's Felpham period (1800-1803) and the dramatic trial experience against Private Schofield¹⁶.

In describing the function of the preface, Genette maintains that:

Among the numerous prefaces I had occasion to read when preparing for this study, none of them elaborated on either of these two themes: "Admire my style" or "Admire my craftsmanship". More generally, the word *talent* is a taboo. (Genette 1997: 198)

By contrast, in his preface to the public Blake declares that:

Dear Reader, forgive what you do not approve, & love me for this energetic exertion of my *talent* (*J 3*, my italics).

¹⁵ In Blake's cosmogony the Fourfold Vision describes the highest form of mystical ecstasy. See Damon 2013: 437.

¹⁶ In 1803, Blake had to undergo a sedition trial, caused by the expulsion of a Private Schofield from his garden in Felpham. See Bentley Jr. 2001.

Such a statement immediately marks a difference between traditional prefaces and Blake's. He uses the preface not only as a form of *captatio benevolentiae* (for example when he defines the reader a «lover of books», *J* 3.1), but also to explain his formidable task. As I have already remarked, he believes he is an instrument of the Divine Vision, therefore his words and designs are a faithful transcription of his spiritual conversations («every thing is conducted by spirits», *J* 3). A few lines earlier, Blake asked the reader not to mistake the enthusiasm for his poem (and consequently of the poet himself) with a form of «presumptuousness and arrogance»; it is the natural effect of a work in which every word has been revealed through spiritual dictation («When this Verse was first dictated to me»)¹⁷.

Whereas in the proem of *Paradise Lost* Milton invokes the muse to assist him in his great task («I thence/Invoke thy aid to my advent'rous song», *PL* 1.12-14), in *Jerusalem* Blake already *embodies* the divine inspiration. Consequently, when he mentions his talent, it is not due to an excess of self-pride or self-esteem, rather it is because through Imagination he is one with the Divine Vision. In the perfect correspondence between *res* and *signum*, Blake's words and images are not mere shadowy forecasts of the essence of things (Dante's *umbriferi prefazi*), but signs of their own truth to be shared with the reader¹⁸.

The poet structures these four prefaces following a prose-verse schema. Accordingly, he begins with a prose piece that is followed by a poem. Whereas the first preface is referred to a general kind of addressee, the other three are more specific about their implied reader. In particular, the second preface refers to the Jews and Judaism which, as Damon contends, to Blake represents

an essential step in the spiritual development of man. In *Jerusalem* [...] it is the state of the childhood of the nations and of every individual

¹⁷ See Vine, Mandell 1993.

¹⁸ Notably, in his marginalia to William Wordsworth's *Poems: Including Lyrical Ballads, Vol. 1* (1815), Blake observes that: «One Power alone make a Poet--Imagination, The Divine Vision. [...] Imagination is the Divine Vision not of The World, or of Man, nor from Man as he is a Natural Man, but only as he is a Spiritual Man. Imagination has nothing to do with Memory» (Erdman 1988: 665).

as well. It is followed by the Deism of the youth who rejects the Angry God but preserves the morality, and carries on though the errors of official Christianity to the Truth. (Damon 2013: 215)

The poet's primary urge is to affirm the truthfulness of both his statements and vision. Notably, in the first five lines of the preface the words 'Truth' and 'true' occur four times (one time 'truth' and three times 'true'). Blake invites the Jews to recognise Jesus' truth and follow him through the final redemption. As I have already mentioned, the third preface addresses the Deists who, being enemies of Christianity, profess Natural Religion, which Blake considers a remnant of Druidism. The last preface is devoted to Christians and somehow it ratifies Blake's reconciliation with Christianity. Here the poet asks himself and the reader about the meaning of talent. The same talent he mentions in the first preface to praise his work, which one should consider as a direct expression of Imagination. He then calls for the reader's help and autonomy in dealing with the issues he has raised («Answer this to yourselves», J 77). So devised, the preface is not to be taken as a mere 'statement of intents', but as a serious appeal to the reader's responsibility and self-consciousness regarding what he is about to experience.

Such an appeal may be consistent with a further distinction for his reader, whereby in the upper corners of the first preface two words are inscribed: «SHEEP» on the left and «GOATS» on the right. According to Fred Dortort, they are a sign of the dynamic interaction that the poet intends to establish with his readers:

After rejecting the easy reduction of «SHEEP» and «GOATS» to a univocal allusion, readers may instead infer that the unlikely placements of these words, at once deflecting and demanding attention itself constitutes an implicit lesson on how to read *Jerusalem*. (Dortort 1998: 8)

Dortort maintains that the obscure inscriptions on the top of the plate might be taken as instructions for a possible reading of the prophetic book, which is consistent with Genette's description of what function 'the

original preface' should have. As a matter of fact, these inscriptions represent two different reading approaches, one more author-oriented («SHEEP»), in which the reader passively accepts the author's perspective; and the other more open («GOATS»), in which the reader is put at the centre of the creative process, whereby he is urged to make critical choices and to explore alternative hermeneutic patterns. It goes without saying that it is more with the latter typology of reader, whom Blake is prone to interact with.

«SHEEP» and «GOATS» are replaced in the third and fourth prefaces with longer inscriptions/epigraphs in prose and verses, while no inscription appears in the second preface. The sheep and goats refer to Matthew's Gospel 25:31-46, in which he recounts Jesus' parousia and the Day of Judgement, when Jesus will separate the blessed people from the cursed, as «a shepherd the sheep from the goats»¹⁹.

Although Blake insists on an interpretation of the poem as a prefiguration of the Last Judgement, and of the Eternal state of the Divine Vision, *Jerusalem* presents a significant difference from Matthew's Gospel. Whereas the evangelist declares that Jesus «will put the sheep at his right hand and the goats at the left», Blake places the two inscriptions in a reverse position, so that the writing «SHEEP» is on the left and the writing «GOATS» on the right²⁰. Unlike the Gospel's account, Blake gives the goats a chance of redemption; paradoxically, it seems that only those who identify themselves as goats can finally reach the city of Jerusalem. This could be the reason why the inscriptions on the 'goats side' are reserved to those who will be saved and blessed. Such a dynamic between sheep and goats is analogous to that expressed by Blake in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, when he presented the contrast between 'angels' and 'devils'. Further, echoing the Palamabron-Rintrah myth, sheep and goats correspond to the

¹⁹ In his pioneer study on William Blake (Fry 1969), Northrop Fry has extensively shown how the Bible plays a crucial role in *Jerusalem*, being one of its major hypotexts.

²⁰ Perhaps this could also be a consequence of the very act of etching, whereby when Blake etched the plate, he was putting the word on the 'correct' side, and the opposite was reversed only at the moment of printing.

redeem and reprobate²¹. For the poet, in their rejection of the truth as the result of the 'Reasoning Negative', the goats-reprobate prepare the path to redemption.

In the third preface, «SHEEP» is replaced by the following inscription: «Rahab is an eternal state», while, in the place in which «GOATS» should be, one reads: «The Spiritual States of the Soul are all Eternal/Distinguish between the Man & his present State». The reference to Rahab, related to a more passive reader, is the expression of a dogmatic kind of religion, aligned with a perceptive and rational vision of reality. Rahab might be identified with the biblical harlot from Jericho, and with the whore of Babylon. For Blake she is Jerusalem's antagonist, representing the false church. She denotes an Eternal State because her «animating ashes become Natural Religion», that is the Deists' religion (Damon 2013: 339). In this epigraph, Blake mentions her to remind the Deist reader of the risk he is running in professing a faith that is solely based on reason and science.

On the other side of the plate, reserved for goats, Blake refers to another eternal state, that of the soul. He invites the reader to make a choice and distinguish between two different forms of eternity: that represented by Rahab and that of the soul. Rahab's is an eternity based on an achieved condition, a balance between individual will power and the energies that govern the natural world; by contrast, the soul's is a continuous movement from a state to another, whereby redemption can only be achieved through the incessant interplay between contraries²². The first kind of eternity, leads to damnation: in Blake's view only sin and selfhood remain always the same. Therefore, the eternity human beings should tend to and can reach is indeed *dynamic*, because in its proteiform manifestation and continuous recomposition, it eventually discloses the Divine Vision mankind is endowed with. To the Deists the poet is offering a possibility of

²¹ The 'mild and piteous' Palamabron is often described in opposition to his brother Rintrah, who embodies 'the just wrath of the prophet'. As sons of Los and Enitharmon, they respectively represent the redeemed and the reprobate. See Damon 2013: 321, 349-350.

²² In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790-1793), Blake states that «Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence» (*MHH* 3), in Erdman 1988: 34.

redemption. This is *their* chapter, it is here, in the words and images they are about to read and behold, that they will have to fight their personal struggle against Rahab in favour of the Divine Vision.

In the last preface, instead of the words 'sheep' and 'goats' one finds an inscription: «Devils are/False Religions/ 'Saul, Saul'/ 'Why persecutest thou me?'», and a short poem «I give you the end of a golden string,/ Only wind it into a ball/It will lead you at Heaven's gate,/Built in Jerusalem's wall». The first paratextual element is again a reference to Mathew's Gospel 9:4, which describes St. Paul's conversion on the road to Damasco: «And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?»²³. By quoting St. Paul's story, Blake suggests a precise reading of *Jerusalem's* last chapter. Like St. Paul, who has been inspired by Jesus' (not God's) vision on the road to Damasco, the reader, on his journey to Jerusalem (the city *and* the book), will be inspired by the poet's vision, which will gradually lead him to salvation.

Placed in a slightly different position if compared with the inscription «GOATS», the short poem establishes a further (and perhaps stronger) relation between the reader, the author, and the book, metaphorically represented by the «golden string» that binds the reader to the author in a single destiny: the vision of Jerusalem. The speaker of the poem employs reassuring words, as if all the major difficulties should have been overcome at this stage. As the final chapter is about to begin, the reader knows that his journey is almost complete and his redemption has gradually been taking place. Both the inscription and the short poem can be regarded as a message to a specific kind of reader, one who is aware of the sacred, divine nature of the poem and enthusiastic enough to feel the power of its prophecy.

²³ Notice that 'Saul' and 'soul' are homophones. Not only Saul, but also the soul can persecute the individual (as a pang of conscience), when he does not follow the path towards the Divine Vision.

Visual insertions

Another peritextual element that marks the style of both *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, to the point of influencing their meaning and possible comprehension, is represented by those visual insertions that give the plate a physiognomy of its own. This paragraph discusses Plate 4 of *Milton* and Plate 23 of *Jerusalem*, which are particularly interesting from a visual point of view.

In *Milton's* Plate 4, curving lines that may be interpreted as vines, veins, or sinews divide the text into six sections²⁴. The first section (1-6) can be considered as a kind of prologue to Los' rebuke to Satan. He reprimands Satan because he neglects his duties, while his other sons, Rintrah and Palamabron, are working hard. Satan would like to reply to Los' accusations but he is prevented from speaking.

Whereas delicate vegetative inserts, which insinuate smoothly between the lines, separate the first section from the second (7-15), a design interrupts the second and third sections (line 15 from line 16). The narrative flux is suspended exactly at the moment in which Satan attempts to reply to Los. Undoubtedly, the effect is more powerful than that conveyed by the minute running decorations between lines, here the reader is invited to shift the plate's fruition from a textual to a visual modality. The illustration silences the reader, as well as Satan, and can be regarded as a visual anticipation of Los' speech.

By observing the design from left to right, one notices a trilithon with a large tree behind it, some standing or sitting figures, a large stone, and what may be some side views of other trilithons²⁵. The abundance of stones and rocks in this design, as well as in the larger one at the bottom of the

²⁴ See The Blake Archive

<http://www.blakearchive.org/exist/blake/archive/illusdesc.xq?objectid=milton.c.illbk.04&objectdbi=milton.c.p4-a>, accessed 26 March 2016.

²⁵ A trilithon is a structure consisting of two large vertical stones (posts) supporting a third stone set horizontally across the top (lintel). It is commonly used in the context of megalithic monuments. The most famous trilithons are those of Stonehenge in England, which are usually associated to forms of Druidism. See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trilithon>, accessed 10 May 2016.

plate, represents the persistence in Blake's times of a false religion that petrifies human feelings²⁶.

Such a scene contributes to the gloomy atmosphere of the plate. The first section of the poem describes the hopeless condition to which men risk being condemned, because of Satan's presence (and consequently of Error's) in the Mundane Shell, the crust of Matter that encloses humanity. Men are rejecting the supreme perfection, i.e. their own fourfold dimension, in favour of division and separation. The result is a violent anatomisation of man's physical and mental components, which ends with a separation of the sexes and the consequent loss of the Eternal State: «Thou canst not have eternal life», thunders Los against Satan, who is here described as one of the principal causes of Man's desperate conditions.

In his final dialogic intervention (22-26), Los evokes the evil of Druidic sacrifices as a symbol of man's unjustified use of violence and bestiality, which in Blake's London correspond to the public executions traditionally held in Tyburn²⁷. To the poet this is the modern Stonehenge, another paradigm of Druidic rituals and tortures.

The remaining sections are separated by short curving lines on the plate's left hand side, only between section four (16-19) and five (20-21) the line goes from right to left, to underline a more meaningful transition from line 21 to line 22. Such a 'pause' allows the reader to meditate on what is perhaps the most evocative line, not only of the plate, but of the poem as a whole: «Mark well my words, they are of your eternal Salvation!». I have already argued that this line gives the poem a salvific function, it is worth adding that it also inscribes it into a well-established biblical prophetic tradition.

At the bottom of the plate another Druidic landscape fills the space. Four probably female figures occupy the scene. In the lower left corner a gowned figure kneels, to the right a standing figure holds a distaff, in the centre a gowned figure facing left kneels on the top of a stone. Near the right margin, the fourth figure holds a distaff and a spindle. Behind these

²⁶ See Damon 2013: 109.

²⁷ A small village in the county of Middlesex close to the current location of Marble Arch.

human forms one sees a cliff above which there are three Druid trilithons. Those female figures hold tools for weaving and spinning: maybe the object of their work is Vala's veil²⁸, in that case they certainly embody the effects of man's fallen condition. The landscape is made of rocks and stones, which convey a sense of sterility and barrenness: the human forms presented in the plate are isolated in their loneliness and selfhood.

What Genette defines as «elements inserted into the interstices of the text» here exert quite a crucial function: they literally dictate the rhythm of the plate, and provide some hermeneutical suggestions, whose value the reader is compelled to negotiate each time anew. If the curving lines, insinuating their way into the text, make it easy to decide what is central and what is marginal, such a choice can be difficult when the text is interrupted by a design. In that case, what is text and what is peritext? What is marginal and what is central? Blake does not comfort the reader with a univocal answer, on the contrary he seems to suggest that centre and margin are transitory values that can be variously attributed according to the specific context described in the plate. In doing so, he deconstructs any hierarchical relation between text and paratext at the very root.

Plate 23 of *Jerusalem* recounts the dramatic meeting between Albion and Jerusalem. The giant man is in an acute confused state; he is torn between the need to annihilate Jerusalem («I came here with intention to annihilate thee», *J* 23.3) and to pay for his sins and cruelty («I have erred. I am ashamed, and will never return more», *J* 23.16). Jerusalem's desperate cries (she replies to Albion's threats «like a voice heard from a sepulcher», *J* 23.7) make him briefly recollect his role as Father of all Mankind, even though he is still a victim of Error.

The plate is composed of three textual sections into which as many design panels are interpolated. They can be considered a kind of 'intertitle' which, in accordance with Genette's description, perform the same functions of the title. The sole exception is that they are addressed to an actual reader, someone who has already decided to read the whole poem.

²⁸ Vala's veil is the film of matter, which covers reality and impedes the Divine Vision. It echoes Plato's allegory of the cave.

In Blake's plates, the relation between intertitle and text is a complex one, because it varies with the perspective that the reader decides to take. If he interprets the design panels as intertitles, then the relation they establish with the text has an explicative nature: they make what is verbally described more vivid and immediate. By contrast, if the text is treated as an intertitle, then its role becomes introductory or ekphrastic. Despite the possible objection that both the visual and textual elements of the plate are far too extended to be treated as subtitles, I retain that Blake's peculiar usage of paratext allows for a less restrictive approach.

In the first section of Plate 23 the design panel presents Jerusalem as an angel-winged woman draped with a veil (probably Vala's), reclining against a mountain with an ecstatic expression on her face. The Jerusalem of the design is very different from that of the text. There she appears frightened and discouraged about her future («Why hast thou hidden me», *J* 23.11, she asks Albion), whereas her face's expression in the vignette seems to forecast the imminent victory of the Divine Vision on Error.

As for the other two design panels, they seem to be a visual materialisation of Albion's fears and sins. In both cases, Blake evokes a Druidic landscape in which troglodytes are portrayed in various contracted positions. They represent humanity's involution, its complete surrender to Error, Jealousy, and Natural Religion. Albion, who in some respect *is* humanity, has fallen into a desperate crisis, at the end of which he will never be the same. He has passed the point of no return, now he must decide whether he wants to abandon his selfhood or proceed with Jerusalem's annihilation. The design panels show one of the possible scenarios.

I conclude my analysis of the Blakean peritext by focusing on *Milton* and *Jerusalem's* closing plates, respectively Plate 46 and Plate 99. In the poems the end is sealed by the inscription «Finis» in the case of *Milton*, and by the inscription «The End of The Song/of Jerusalem» in the case of *Jerusalem*. Despite the peremptoriness of such an unequivocal declaration, Blake goes on illuminating the remaining space of the plate, right under the inscriptions «Finis» or «The End»: the narration proceeds through the design, exceeding the texts' supposed closure, and *de facto* re-opening the poem.

In *Milton*, the illustration reveals a standing female figure, probably Ololon²⁹. She is portrayed with her arms spread, evoking Christ's crucifixion. Her body shape recalls a chalice, maybe the Holy Grail. Here Ololon is the symbol of vicarious atonement, a theme that is extensively explored in the book. She is the paradigm of a sacrifice and of a consequent redemption that still needs to be realised, although the verbal text closes announcing the imminent Last Judgement that Blake defines as «the Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations».

In Plate 42 Jesus enters Albion's bosom, so that God and Men are reunited in mystical ecstasy, but *Milton* indicates a way that has not reached the end yet. Milton's annihilation of his selfhood represents only a first step, because the Divine Vision is still not accessible to anyone. Hence, the inscription «Finis» closes Milton's story and not *Milton*, the final illustration prepares the reader for *Jerusalem*, in which the Divine Vision unites Humanity in One Man.

Like *Milton*, in *Jerusalem* what should officially state the end of the work ratifies only the end of the textual section. Under this inscription the plate is filled with the image of an elderly male who is locking a young female in a close embrace. They probably represent Albion and Jerusalem united in the Divine Vision. Regardless of the inscription «The End», narration continues, though differently from *Milton*. In that case, the illustration showed the limits of Milton's redemption, it was not Humanity's redemption but only the poet's. Here, Milton has been replaced by Albion, the Father of all Mankind, therefore his redemption gains a universal meaning. Accordingly, the final vignette, in the reunification of Albion and Jerusalem, replicates and reinforces the textual closure. In both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* the word-image relation of the last plate reveals an inner conflict-between the need of closing the text and the awareness that Blake's task as poet and prophet had not been fulfilled yet.

Plate 100 of *Jerusalem* is a full page coloured illustration, which describes three of the major characters of the poem: Los, his Spectre holding a globe and Enitharmon, Los' Emanation. Blake represents his

²⁹ «She is the spiritual form of Milton's Sixfold Emanation; she is the truth underlying his errors about woman» (Damon 2013: 307).

protagonists in a fallen condition (Los is divided into Spectre and Emanation), which is very similar to that recounted at the beginning of the poem, as if Plate 100 invited one to re-start the reading of the text. Such a resistance to closure recalls the final line of 'The Mental Traveller', where at the dawn of a new cycle, the speaker says: «And all is done as I have told» (104 in Erdmann 1988). By suggesting a recursive reading of the text, the poet allows the reader to enhance his vision and become closer to his final Redemption.

In conclusion, Blake's treatment of paratext discloses on going dynamics in which centre and margin are always under negotiation. The continuous manipulation of the plates and the consequent impossibility of their yielding to a definite version complicates the issue further³⁰. Even when Blake writes the most conclusive words one can conceive of, i.e. 'the end', some textual elements elude such a statement, calling for 'the and' instead.

Finally, Blake's paratext does not parasitise the text, on the contrary it contributes to making it alive. Exactly like the 'minute particulars' that are «the outward expression in this world of the eternal individualities of all things» (Damon 2013: 280), the apparently meaningless paratextual elements Blake avails himself of are glimpses of the Divine Vision, fragments of the eternal world the reader is asked to recompose.

³⁰ In this respect Jon Mee speaks of a «poetics of distraction» and observes that: «Rather than a product of recollection in tranquillity, Joseph Viscomi has shown that the poem seems to have been composed and printed in spates as inspiration came to Blake. Not that the text was unrevised, rather Blake chose to dispense with the appearance of unified form through the revisions he made. The result is a lack of continuity, a continual annihilation of determinate identity in the self and the text, that would have been the sign of enthusiasm to most readers of Blake's time» (Mee 2003: 283).

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