BLAKE'S PRINTING HOUSE IN HELL:
METAPHORS OF ILLUMINATED PRINTING IN THE
POETIC WORKS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

by

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ABSTRACT

William Blake was an artist and a craftsman as well as a poet, and he literally made as well as wrote his books of poetry. It is easy to see that, as an artist, Blake was fundamentally concerned with the physical production of his books of poetry, since for him, the physical form of his works was as much a part of their meaning as the content of the verse. But this primarily artistic interest in the production of his illuminated books also finds expression in the literary aspect of his work. There it takes the form of a carefully veiled, yet surprisingly consistent and detailed metaphoric discussion of the actual stages of production by which he created his famous illuminated books.

By looking first at the metaphors in their most mature, most fully-developed expression, this thesis attempts to accomplish two things. The first goal is to clearly identify the vocabulary, imagery, and rhetorical patterns which characterize Blake's handling of the metaphors. Once this is accomplished, the aim of the thesis is to look back into Blake's early poetry in an attempt to plot the early emergence and development of these metaphors, and then to look forward to his later work to trace the metaphors as they evolve in conjunction with his myth and with his technical experimentation.

In the early work "The Tyger," Blake is clearly infusing
his developing myth with the elements of his process of production, but at this early stage, Blake is not yet tapping the metaphoric potential available to him. It is in the course of writing *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that Blake begins to make full use of the metaphors, and in the subsequent work of *America*, *Europe*, *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania*, and *The Book of Los* the metaphors of illuminated printing steadily increase in coherence, detail, and frequency. But before Blake ended his poetic career, the metaphors *per se* seemed to lose part of their interest for him and in the later poem *Milton*, the relative frequency with which they occur drops markedly. Nevertheless, the general patterns of Blake's process of book reproduction remain as important structural elements of the poem—a testament of the fact that Blake's physical techniques of production exerted a fundamental influence on his poetic vision.
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NOTE ON CITATIONS

All quotations of Blake's works are from The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman, 4th printing rev. (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970). On a few occasions I have changed Erdman's square brackets [thus] to angle brackets ⟨thus⟩ to avoid confusion with my own square brackets. The quote from the Notebook on page 79 is verbatim as in Erdman's text, except for ellipsis. The following abbreviations have been used:

A  America: A Prophecy
Ah The Book of Ahania
E  The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David Erdman
E  Europe: A Prophecy
IM An Island in the Moon
BL The Book of Los
M  Milton
MIH The Marriage of Heaven and Hell
SI Songs of Innocence
U  The Book of Urizen
VLJ A Vision of the Last Judgement
...I am under the direction of Messengers from Heaven Daily & Nigh'tly but the nature of such things is not as some suppose, without trouble or care. Temptations are on the right hand & left behind the sea of time & space roars & follows swiftly he who keeps not right onward is lost & if our footsteps slide in clay how can we do otherwise than fear & tremble.

--William Blake in a letter to Thomas Butts, January 10, 1802 (E 688)
CHAPTER I
INTRODUCTION

William Blake — artist, poet, prophet — was a craftsman by trade. For Blake, the creation of his poetry did not stop with the successful transfer of his mental conception from thought to paper. At the point where most poets leave their creative work Blake as artist took it up again, for unlike any other major poet, Blake physically created his books of poetry, turning the poet's bare written work into a vision of interwoven text and design. As well as being his own advertiser and bookseller, Blake was personally responsible for every aspect of his books' physical production except the manufacture of the paper. After writing the verse and composing the designs, Blake prepared and etched the copperplates with which his books were printed, printed the poems himself with a watercolour ink he had ground and mixed, and then coloured the printed plate with paints of his own manufacture before having his wife bind them by hand. The fact of Blake's life as a craftsman and of his experience of physically producing his illuminated books of poetry was a major influence on the ultimate form, structure, and content of those poems.

In discussing the way in which Blake's techniques of production influenced his poetry, let us not be afraid to take note of the obvious: their physical form as painted page including both text and design was a direct result of the technique of
production that Blake himself innovated. Such an elementary, physical observation is not inappropriate because, as a technical craftsman, Blake was minutely involved in the physical form of his books and very interested in them as physical manifestations of imaginative visions. Indeed, this primarily technical interest in his books as an evolving art form becomes an increasingly important element of his poetry itself, and part of its manifest subject matter concerns the process by which Blake's inspired songs achieve physical form. Even as early as "Samson" in Poetical Sketches, Blake's vision of his own role as poet/prophet is involved with the physical production and, by extension, dissemination of his poetic word: "O white-robed Angel, guide my timorous hand to write as on a lofty rock with iron pens the words of truth, that all who pass may read ("Samson," E 434). Characteristically, the discussion of the physical creation of the poem is presented as a prelude to the poem proper, such as a preludium or introduction, and often takes the form of Blake sitting down to write in response to the directions or dictation of a spiritual friend or fairy. For example, the introductory plate to Europe describes Blake catching a fairy, symbol of his poetic imagination, who promises to "write a book on leaves of flowers" (E iii:14, E 59) and ends:

when I came
Into my parlour and sat down, and took my pen to write:
My Fairy sat upon the table, and dictated EUROPE.
(E iii:22-24, E 59)

This passage follows a pattern established earlier in Songs of
Innocence. In what is significantly the first poem of his first true book of illuminated printing, Blake self-consciously focuses the reader's attention on the process of the physical production of the poem as he carefully outlines his response to the dictate of another spiritual friend, this time a fairy-like child:

Piper sit thee down and write
In a book that all may read-
So he vanish'd from my sight.
And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

And I made a rural pen,
And I stain'd the water clear,
And I wrote my happy songs
Every child may joy to hear ("Introduction," 11. 13-20, E 7)

This motif of Blake's process of production is reinforced graphically in the associated design which shows a figure operating a printing press (left hand side, third panel from the top, copies I & V). This design and the poem's quaint, idealized account of Blake's process of production are the precursors of a more fully articulated description of Blake's printing methods. The purpose of this thesis is to show that this early and fundamental concern with the physical production of his books is sustained and developed throughout the length of his entire illuminated canon, and that the design and text of those books embody a coherent and detailed metaphorical account of his process of illuminated printing.

Before discussing the details of Blake's techniques of
printing, and before explicating the metaphorical accounts of that process, it must be emphasized from the start that Blake did not look upon the techniques of production as a strictly technical or neutral means to an end. Blake's integrated vision of the unified role of the artist denied him such a comfortable, abstracted position. By assuming complete responsibility for the physical production and distribution of his poetical texts, Blake realized his vision of total artistic expression, and the techniques that he used in producing his books are as much a part of their meaning as the imagery, symbols, and subject matter contained within them, for as Robert Essick observes:

> When dealing with visual images we usually assume that meaning is a function of representation. That is, the artist represents a lion, and then we begin to determine what a lion signifies in this or that iconic language. But meaning can also be a function of style or technique.

Essick is referring specifically to Blake's visual images, but the point is as applicable to the text as to the designs of his books. Blake's unique method of etching away most of the surface of his copperplates and his method of inking resulting in thick lines with heavy, reticulated ink surfaces is a very real part of the meaning behind his illuminated books.

In opposition to Blake's integrated system of producing the entire book and printing the text and design from the surface of a single relief plate was the specialized and therefore fragmented commercial method of production of the day. This system of production depends on the forced union of distinct entities
in the Guttenbergian coupling of conventional type set in flat forms with the occasional intaglio engraving inserted when the book was bound. In Blake's eyes, perhaps the most pernicious result of this specialized method of production was the gradual lowering of engravers from their original role as creative artists to the position of mere reproductive hacks, the cogs in the wheels of a mechanized, assembly-line process of production. Blake's own experience of a seven-year apprenticeship in the methods of Italian reproductive engraving drove the point home, and in time the very techniques of that style of engraving came to represent in Blake's eyes all that he as an artist was reacting against. These "doctrinal" reasons were at least as important as aesthetic and economic concerns in providing the impetus behind Blake's experimentation and technical innovation that produced a method that is technically the opposite of intaglio engraving and in its very techniques and stages of production embodies many of Blake's ideas of art and vision.

Given that the physical techniques of production were so important to Blake, it is not surprising to find that in much of his poetry he discusses the details and explores the ramifications of his unique process of book reproduction. However, before this metaphoric discussion can be intelligibly explicated, a basic knowledge of Blake's etching, painting, and colouring techniques is required. All of the following details of his techniques are important in recognizing and "translating" the
metaphorical language that Blake uses to discuss his process of illuminated printing.

Blake experimented with most forms of etching and engraving, and early on was interested in using his training as a reproductive engraver to develop an economically viable method of reproducing his own books. An Island in the Moon, a prose satire written when Blake was twenty-seven, contains a fragmentary reference to a scheme of reproducing books from etched copperplates. Part of the manuscript is lost, and this passage begins abruptly:

them Illuminating the Manuscript....Then said he I would have all the writing Engraved instead of Printed & at every other leaf a high finishd print all in three Volumes folio, & sell them a hundred pounds a piece. they would Print off two thousand... (IMx, E 456)

This technique still treats text and design separately, but Blake continued to wrestle with the problem over the next several years. In 1787, three years after An Island in the Moon was written, Blake's brother Robert died. Blake said that Robert's spirit—probably the original of the dictating child-spirit of the "Introduction" to Songs of Innocence—appeared to Blake and instructed him in the technique of printing design and text that is today recognized as a true innovation and Blake's contribution to the art of print making.

One of Blake's relief plates prints in basically the same way as the common rubber stamp. The words or design to be printed appear in reverse on the raised surface of a copperplate and the spaces which are to appear white on the finished print
are recessed so that only the surface of the plate receives the ink. When pressed onto the paper, the ink is transferred from the plate and the letters and design appear on the page right side around. (In Blake's metaphoric language this copperplate is commonly referred to as a cave or a rock.) In the Eighteenth Century, and even into the Twentieth Century, engraver's copperplates were beaten or hammered into the required thickness rather than rolled to a certain gauge as they are today. Beaten copper is preferred by engravers because it is hardened by the beating and becomes uniformly resistant in all directions, whereas rolled copper is softer in one direction and an engraving tool tends to run away from the artist when he is cutting a curve. This fact is significant since Blake occasionally identifies the copperplate in his metaphors as a "beaten mass," as in Chapter I of The Book of Ahania.

Although the finish is more crucial in intaglio printing, the surface of a copperplate is prepared for relief etching or intaglio engraving by polishing it to a fine, mirror-like finish. Then, using some form of acid-resistant medium such as stopping-out varnish, Blake would write his text on a specially treated sheet of paper, perhaps one that had been soaked in gum arabic. The copperplate was then heated, the paper with the text laid on top of the copperplate, and both were sent through the press. When the paper was soaked off in water, the text in the acid resist appeared on the plate, written in reverse. Blake then brushed on the design around the text in the same resist and the
plate was then ready to be etched.

The actual etching was perhaps the most tedious and laborious stage in Blake's method of production. Once properly prepared, the copperplate was submerged in a bath of what is generally assumed to have been *aqua fortis* (nitric acid). Blake's most common metaphorical description of this consuming liquid which dissolves the surface of the plate is, appropriately, fire: fire water, rivers of fire, and fires which produce heat but no light (the acid becomes quite warm in the chemical reaction with the plate). Nitric acid is, of course, colourless in its pure state, but as it reacts with a plate it assumes a faint bluish green tinge and after it has etched numerous plates and its corrosive properties are exhausted, it will be a dark muddy blue/green. In fact, for all intents and purposes the acid will always have this bluish colour since a little copper is always left in solution, for without it the acid will not bite properly. When etching with *aqua fortis*, nitric dioxide, a noxious gas, is produced. This appears first as a line of small bubbles which form around the etching surface and will retard the action of the acid if not brushed away; Blake refers to them metaphorically as "Eggs of unnatural production" in *The Book of Ahania* (3:10, E 84). In his helpful book *William Blake: The Artist*, Ruthven Todd estimates that "according to the temperature of the room in which the biting was being done, it would take from about six
to eight hours" to etch a single plate — "the labours of eternity." Although the plate would not require constant attention, the bubbles would have to be brushed away every few minutes and according to John Wright's experiments and examination of *The Songs of Innocence and of Experience* electrotypes and the *America* fragment, Blake apparently removed the plate from the bath periodically and touched up the resist, so that someone had to be on hand at all times.

Before the plate was inked and printed, the acid resist was removed from the plate and Blake would occasionally refine the work of the acid with an engraving tool. (This touching up is most evident on some of *The Songs of Innocence* plates.) In Blake's poetry, the etched copperplate is often called the book of iron, or alternatively, in the landscape created by Blake's metaphoric images, the recessed areas bitten in by the acid are called furrows or valleys, while the surface of the relief plate becomes a hill or cliff. These surfaces of the copperplate were then inked in an ingenious manner. Rollers for inking were not in use until the Nineteenth Century, and the depth of biting was not great enough to allow the ink to be applied by the usual method of a dauber or printer's ball without smearing the recessed surfaces. Blake apparently solved the problem by applying a thin coat of ink to a blank plate, placing the relief plate on top, then passing them through a press adjusted to reduce the pressure. The plates were then...
separated, with the relief plate being cleanly inked and the act of separation producing the reticulated surface characteristic of Blake's inked lines.

After inking, Blake was ready to pull an impression and the plate was laid in the bed of the plate press. Although most of Blake's illuminated books are printed from relief plates, Blake did the actual printing with a rolling press or plate press which is designed for intaglio, not relief, plates. The essential difference is the pressure exerted on the plate, since a relief impression taken from the surface of the plate requires very little pressure, while a great deal of pressure is required to print an intaglio plate since the paper must be forced into the fissures in the surface of the copper. Two main elements characterize a rolling press: a flat metal bed on which paper and plate are laid, and two large horizontal rollers between which the plate bed runs when an impression is being pulled. The operation is therefore very similar to a common household mangle. In Blake's metaphoric landscape, the process of printing is often associated with a loud rumble of rolling thunder as black winds of perturbation (the print) suddenly sweep over a pale desert (the page).

The printed page is then separated by pulling it away from its mirror image on the copperplate. Blake generally printed monochromes, and at this stage the paper would contain only the text and the outline of the design. In the penultimate stage of the process of production, Blake "fleshed out" the
design and text by hand-painting the page with watercolours, sometimes heightened with gold washes. Blake's metaphoric description of the later stages in the production of an illuminated book is often embedded in an account of a human body gradually taking shape as stark and linear human bones and nerves (print and outline of design) are gradually filled out and brought to life as living and colourful flesh grows over them. Alternatively, in Blake's landscape imagery, the painting of a page is sometimes described as intense and colourful flames sweeping through and bringing life to a pale desert. Finally, as the creative fires subsided and the book achieved its final physical form, Blake occasionally had his wife complete its physical production by binding the pages by hand.
Although the metaphors of illuminated printing emerge quite early in Blake's poetic career, the first full metaphorical treatment of the process of illuminated printing which includes all the stages of production occurs in *The Book of Urizen*. We shall see that in the poems before *Urizen*, the metaphors generally occur in discrete, often isolated units of the poem such as a "Memorable Fancy" or a preludium, and treat only individual stages of the process of production, or at best, only incomplete combinations of them. It is not until the central poetry of *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania*, and, to a lesser extent, *The Book of Los* that fully developed treatments of the metaphors occur. Yet in spite of the fact that it contains the first fully-developed presentation of the metaphors, there is a problem in discussing the metaphors in *Urizen*, and it is a problem that the structure and narrative strategy of the poem will enforce on any interpretation that involves a causally-linked sequence of events, such as a printing process.

*The Book of Urizen* transmits Blake's vision of the Fall—it is the Genesis of his proposed "Bible of Hell." But for Blake, the Fall was not a unique primordial incident. It is at once a process and a condition as present in the birth of one man today as in the birth of the universe eons ago. It is,
if you will, Blake's vision of the archetypal Fall, or the "idea" of the Fall, that is presented in Urizen, and the poem's so-called narrative simply recounts the ramifications of this fall as seen from a variety of perspectives. The revolt of Urizen, his binding by Los, the separation of Enitharmon, and the birth of Orc are not four different narratives, but are actually a series of modulations of the same event. These four versions of the Fall are like four sheets of a colour key, each imprinted with one colour. Each sheet is interesting when viewed alone, but only when all are carefully overlapped and viewed simultaneously does the spirit of Blake's vision of the Fall—and its implications—emerge.

Bound by the format of the printed page, Blake found it necessary to weave the four accounts of the Fall into a coherent narrative sequence, thus making the subject of the poem resemble four separate events. But he left stylistic clues to indicate that the four are really one. The real unity of The Book of Urizen lies in its metaphoric structure and the abundance of stylistic and thematic echoes that link the major episodes. Most notable among these are two recurring elements of the poem: the tearing apart of eternals that is present in each of the four accounts of the Fall, and the repeated image of the red, beating globe or heart that punctuates the first three versions. It is this type of striking repeated imagery that provides the reference points or co-ordinates with which we can line up the various sheets of the colour key and simultaneously view the four
versions of the Fall with something approaching Blakean four-fold vision.

Viewed this way, it is easy to see the variations that each modulation plays on the central theme. In Chapters I-III Blake sets forth the basic image of the Fall: the disruption of the primal unity and the creation of the physical world by Urizen, which, seen from another perspective is the manifestation of an objective reality caused by the disruption of the human psyche when the rational faculty gains dominance. In Chapter IV (a & b) the struggles of Urizen are seen from yet another perspective. Los appears and binds Urizen, adding the concept of duality, of polar opposites or Blakean contraries, to the theme of the Fall. Although the introduction of new characters and incidents gives the impression of a narrative progression within the poem, Los has been latently present throughout all of Urizen's activity and his binding of Urizen is the same "Fall" as described in Chapter III. In Chapter V the separation of Enitharmon parallels the separations depicted in the earlier two versions, and Blake pursues the concept of duality by introducing the added dimension of sexuality. The final version of the Fall, the birth and binding of Orc in Chapters VI and VII, is also a modulation of the basic account described in the first three chapters. Orc's birth parallels the creation of the universe by Urizen, for just as Urizen creates a universe of "beast, bird, fish, serpent & element" (U3:16, E 69), Enitharmon brings forth "Many forms of fish, bird & beast
The parallel structure and abundant shared imagery of these passages supersedes their relationship as a narrative sequence.

Thus when any narrative sequence that demands a linear extension is woven into this fourfold vision of the Fall, it will encounter problems unless it observes the limitations imposed on it by the narrative strategy of the poem. That is, since the four versions of the Fall are not, in fact, causally linked episodes, but really renditions of the same event, we can expect that Blake will avoid introducing a narrative on any level of the poem that would transcend the boundaries of any one version, since this would enforce a narrative where he does not want one. However, if any narrative element of the poem, such as a metaphorical account of the printing process, is to be present throughout the entire poem, yet cannot extend its narrative beyond the boundaries of any one version, we can expect a repetition of essentially the same narrative sequence again and again and again. This is in fact exactly what occurs in Urizen.

There is in addition another structural principle which governs the handling of the metaphors in The Book of Urizen: the poem embodies an image of the Fall within its own structural development. It is clear that Blake presents his basic account of the Fall in Urizen's struggles of Chapters I-III. This first account, in a sense, embodies the other three in potential form within the implications of the archetypal action presented in it.
But in the same sense that the first account of the Fall embodies the other three, within that first version itself, Chapters II and III are basically elaborations of the original account set forth in Chapter I. At the beginning of Chapter II, we are back to the same point in time at which the poem began, and in this chapter, Blake is simply exploring different aspects and a different vision of the initial account of Chapter I. The compact language and archetypally significant action that begins *The Book of Urizen* thus functions as a primordial mass which explodes into the universe of a poem that rehearses and repeats in ever-expanding and elaborating episodes the image of the primal Fall that brought it into being. It is within this structural context and with this anticipation of densely compacted meaning expanding into repetitions and elaborations of the primal action that Blake's handling of the metaphors of illuminated printing must be understood.

*The Book of Urizen* opens with the apparition of a "shadow of horror," "an abstracted...dark power," that has ostensibly "form'd [an] abominable void" [italics mine]:

Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
In Eternity...
...what Demon
Hath form'd this abominable void
This soul-shudd'ring vacuum?--Some said
"It is Urizen", But unknown, abstracted
Brooding secret, the dark power hid. (U3:1-7, E 69)

It is clear from the intentional ambiguity of the antecedent of "it" in line 6 that both creator and creation are participating in the appellation "Urizen." This is Blake's dramatization of the fact that the function and identity of the perspective
which Urizen represents is inseparably interwoven with the equally Urizenic objective reality that it creates: it is equally true to say that "he became what he beheld" (M3:29, E 96) as to say that "the Eye altering alters all" ("The Mental Traveller," 1.62, E 476). It is important to note that Blake identifies both the creative Eternal and his creation as "Urizen" because in the metaphors of the creative process that follow in Chapters I to III, "Urizen," is both Blake the craftsman who brings the poem into physical form and the dark void of the copperplate on which he is working.³

A familiarity with the typical vocabulary of Blake's handling of the process of illuminated printing reveals that the dark, abstract shadow which appears at the start of Chapter I is the plate, and the poem therefore begins at the initial stage of the process of production with the appearance of a copperplate before the artist William Blake. A close reading of the dense passage of verse that follows will show that in this account, as elsewhere, Blake conflates the distinct styles of intaglio engraving and relief etching, and Blake as intaglio engraver bends over the dark void of the copperplate to divide and measure its surface with his engraving tools, just as Urizen bends over the void to limit its expanse with the compasses as pictured in the frontispiece to Europe (figure 1):⁴

Times on times he divided, & measur'd Space by space in his ninefold darkness Unseen, unknown! (U3:8-10, E 69)
The division and measurement of the copperplate before the actual "cutting in" can also be taken to represent the preparation of a plate in the process of reproductive engraving in which Blake would sometimes "square" the plate with a series of parallel horizontal and vertical lines in order to accurately transfer the design to be reproduced on it.\(^5\)

In the very condensed handling of the metaphors which characterizes Chapter I, the account of the process of production next suddenly leaps from the preparation of the plate to an account of a page being printed from a plate that has already been etched:

... changes appeard
In his desolate mountains rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation (U3:10-12, E 69)

The "desolate mountains" which are "rifted furious" in this section of the poem represent sheets of paper, for "mountains" is used several times in *The Book of Urizen* as a metaphor for the stacks of paper that surrounded Blake in his workshop, either in the form of fresh, unbroken bundles or of newly printed sheets.\(^6\) The term "desolate mountains" reinforces the identification since in Blake's vocabulary, the page is represented through any number of forms that are white, pale, or blank. Given this identification, "the black winds of perturbation" that rift the desolate mountains is clearly a metaphor for ink, and the entire sequence is therefore a representation of the printing of a plate in Blake's process of production.

On the level of the surface narrative, Urizen continues
his battle to give form to his universe in verse 3, while on this metaphorical level we move on to the next step in the process of illuminated printing: the painting of the plates. This intensely creative aspect of the physical production of the books is described here as it usually is, as an intense struggle or conflict in which Blake/Urizen battles with the elements to give birth to images of living physical forms:

For he strove in battles dire
In unseen confictions with shapes
Bred from his forsaken wilderness,
Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element
Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud. (U3:13-17, E 69)

With this zoological population now inhabiting this newly-formed world, Blake/Urizen's creative activities are essentially completed, and this brief and condensed metaphorical account of the process of illuminated printing ends. 7

Nevertheless, in keeping with the pattern of repetition and elaboration which is a product of the narrative strategy of the entire poem, Chapter I contains yet another account of the process of production. Although it is shorter than the earlier account, it has much greater metaphorical density and displays the vocabulary, conflated images, and paradigmatic transitions typical of Blake's presentation of the metaphors of book reproduction:

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
In his hills of stor'd snows, in his mountains
Of hail & ice; voices of terror,
Are heard, like thunders of autumn,
When the cloud blazes over the harvests (U3:27-35, E 70)

First of all, I would note what I have called the paradigmatic transitions that Blake typically uses in his handling of the metaphors. This account opens with the sense of a pause; the elements of production are presented for us to inspect before they proceed to do battle in the metaphorical landscape/battlefield of Blake's workshop. Urizen is "Prepar'd," his ten thousands of thunders are ready and "Rang'd in gloom'd array," but as yet there is no activity—only a pause and the promise of action until line 30 when the wheels of the printing press dispel the momentary calm and roll into motion. A similar pattern that Blake repeats again and again is a corresponding movement from initial silence to the sound of human cries or articulate speech. Dark Urizen (the plate) is not only physically still at the opening of the passage, he is silent. His ten thousands of thunders (which I take to be the lines of the text) are ranged and stretched out across the world that we saw created earlier, but as yet, they are not auditory. They are presented as a visual image and are not meant to be heard—it is as if they are still in a state of potentiality. The silence is not broken until the wheels of the plate press roll like thunder and swelling seas. It is only after this activity, after the lines of text have been transferred to the paper right side around that human voices are "heard" in the mountains of hail and ice.
Another characteristic pattern which is present here and which Blake repeats elsewhere is the confusion of the order of the stages of production. In the union of visual and auditory images which closes this account of the process of production, Blake alludes to both the printing of a page near the end of the printing process and to the etching of a copperplate near the beginning. Clearly the entire metaphorical passage represents the printing process, and the "voices of terror" which are heard in the mountains and hills of ice and snow represent the newly printed text on stacks of white paper. The identification of this passage as a metaphoric representation of the printing process is supported by the harvest imagery developed in it: the voices are likened to "thunders of autumn, / When the cloud blazes over the harvests" (U3:34&35, E 70) [italics mine]. This association of the printing process with harvest imagery runs throughout Blake's poetry and finds its fulfilment in the later Milton in which the union of paper and ink metamorphoses into the union of wheat and grapes/ bread and wine in the apocalyptic "Great Harvest and Vintage" at the end of the poem. Thus the imagery of the passage sets it firmly within Blake's typical handling of the harvest of his eternal forms at the moment of printing them. But these are thunders of autumn, and there is a cloud blazing over the harvest. As I will go on to show, the image of the thunderstorm, of the flash of lightning in dark clouds, is used repeatedly in Blake's landscape of the creative process to represent not only the moment of Apocalypse as in Milton, but
also the etching of a plate: the fiery action of the acid being represented by a fiery flash of lightning and the plate being represented alternatively by a dark cloud or a large cliff which the lightning strikes. Thus, the order of the stages of production is confused in this passage for just as we reach the end of this account, the images unexpectedly cast us back to the beginning of the process of production. (This pattern in fact parallels Blake's own experience of etching and printing which moved him continually from engraving table to acid bath to printing press and back again as plate after plate was first etched and then trial-proofed in an endless cycle of activity.)

This confusion or shifting of the proper sequence of the stages of production is actually better understood as the conflation of distinct stages in the process of illuminated printing, and in fact proves to be one of the hallmarks of this level of Blake's poetry. This conflation is a function of the condensing and overlapping tendency of the narrative strategy of the poem and it is not until the primordial mass of Chapter I explodes into the rest of the poem that this densely compacted group of metaphors is unravelled and the stages of production become more individually distinct and more fully developed. However, once we appreciate its position as an integral part of Blake's handling of the metaphors, and once we are familiar with the typical vocabulary and imagery associated with these metaphors, the recognition of this pattern becomes an aid in unscrambling some of the more difficult metaphoric passages.
Chapter I ends, then, with the imagery pointing the reader back to the beginning of the cycle of production, and in fulfilment of the narrative strategy involving repeated and increasingly elaborate renditions of the primal Fall, the beginning of Chapter II does in fact move us back in time to the initial moments of Chapter I. However, since the poem is gravitating towards a more historic (i.e., temporal and generative) vision of the Fall, this account is less abstract from the outset and projects a much clearer sense of a physical locale as a stage for its events. In terms of these metaphors, this results in a more extended and elaborate account of the process of production that is therefore more coherent and more easily recognized. In addition, Blake takes the opportunity of expanding on several themes that he will develop in conjunction with his metaphors.

One of these is his consistent identification of the process of production with the Apocalypse. For reasons that we will explore in detail later, Blake variously identifies either the etching of the plate or the impressing of the paper by the plate with the moment of Apocalypse since these actions both lead to and are metaphors of the improvement of the spiritual perception of the reader that effectively consumes the surface appearance of objective reality for that perceiver—hence the "end of the world." And hence the "sound of the trumpet" at the start of this metaphorical account of illuminated printing that on the surface narrative paradoxically announces the creation
of the material world by Urizen, the creation of objective reality by the point of view that Urizen represents:

Earth was not: nor globes of attraction
Death was not, but eternal life sprung

The sound of a trumpet the heavens
Awoke & vast clouds of blood roll'd
Round the dim rocks of Urizen... (U3:36-42, E 70)

We enter this account at the moment of the inking of a plate. The "rocks of Urizen," of course, represent the copperplate. (We will later see this craggy group of images grow to include caves, cliffs, and the sides of cliffs or "steeps.") "Blood" joins wine, mud, and essentially any liquid that flows over the "rocks" that will answer for ink. Therefore the "vast clouds of blood [that roll] / Round the dim rocks of Urizen" represents the inking of a plate in anticipation of the printing of a page that occurs in the following verse.11

At the start of verse 3, once again the trumpet blasts and words suddenly appear on the blank sheets of paper:

Shrill the trumpet: & myriads of Eternity,
Muster around the bleak desarts
Now fill'd with clouds, darkness & waters
That roll'd perplex'd labring & utter'd
Words articulate, bursting in thunders
That roll'd on the tops of his mountains (U3:44-45, E 70)

In this tumultuous confusion of sound and action, there is the characteristic association of the workings of the rolling press with the rumble of rolling thunder and the same movement towards human words that suddenly sound in a familiar metaphorical landscape of dark and stormy clouds rolling through a bleak expanse
of white and formless land. The characteristic conflation of distinct stages of production is also present since no distinction is made between the inking process and the process of printing a plate: in verse 2 the plate is inked and immediately afterwards in verse 3 we discover that "the bleak deserts" have already been "fill'd with clouds, darkness and waters." It is essentially the same pattern, the same landscape, and the same event as in Chapter I, told--this time with greater coherence and a greater sense of physical reality.

This account opens with the eerie silence that precedes creation and although it is punctuated by the shrill blast of the trumpet, it adheres to the paradigmatic transition from silence through the rolling of thunder and into articulate human utterance. But now, for the first time in the poem, we are allowed to hear the content of that speech; the primordial mass has expanded sufficiently to present in detail what previously was only mentioned in passing. It is Urizen's voice we hear, and as he speaks he interrupts the narrative line of the poem and takes us back in time into the depths of pre-existence to relate his earliest creative activities. He tells us of his initial battle with the elements that ultimately led to the slow formation of the universe that we have been observing in the poem:

First I fought with the fire; consum'd
Inwards, into a deep world within:
A void immense, wild dark & deep,
Where nothing was; Natures wide womb<.>
(U4:14-17, E 70)
Again, Blake is intentionally obscure, for the antecedent of the "I" that fights with the fire is both Urizen as Blake who, at a very early stage must work with acid as he produces his books, and Urizen as the copperplate itself which must do battle with the fiery acid or be completely consumed. Urizen's battle is, then, the etching of the copperplate which is recounted in retrospect because, according to the fiction of the poem, Urizen was not yet articulate and could not tell us of these events until after the dark waters burst into articulate thunder over the deserts and hills of snow.\(^{12}\)

The interesting aspect of this account is that, in a typical Blakean inversion of the inner world and the outer, the movement into the plate as it is consumed by the acid becomes a movement into a vast expanse: "a deep world within:/ A void immense..." (U4:15-16, E 70). This "void" that is reached in the process of etching recurs again and again in virtually every metaphorical account of the etching process. Properly speaking, the copperplate itself is not the void and neither is the acid bath. The void seems to be a metaphor for, specifically, the interior of the copperplate, the infinite spaces within it that are reached through the consuming action of the acid.\(^{13}\) In terms of the appearance of the printed page, this void can be understood as the white formless spaces that open into infinity between the finite and defining lines printed from the surface of the copperplate. Such an interpretation of this recurring metaphor is supported in the continuation of our almost
microscopic voyage into the elemental world of an etching
copperplate as Urizen, probably with the help of an acid resist,
is saved from the void, repels the vast waves of acid, and rises
on a wide world of solid obstruction (i.e. the surface of the
copperplate):

And self balanc'd stretch'd o'er the void
I alone, even I! the winds merciless
Bound... [an allusion to "the black winds of
perturbation" of Chapter I?]
...strong I repell'd
The vast waves, & arose on the waters
A wide world of solid obstruction (U4:18-23, E 71)

Urizen's account of the etching process ends here, and looking
back at the last stanza of Chapter I, we notice another pattern
of parallel development; in fact, Chapter I, verse 6 adumbrates
Chapter II in little. Verse 6 moves through an account of the
printing process and ends with a reference to the etching of a
plate, and Chapter II, following the same pattern of development,
recounts the identical processes of production, although the
metaphorical landscape has been reworked completely.

At this point, the metaphorical depths of the poem rise
to the surface as Blake/Urizen addresses the reader from his
Printing House in Hell and states quite openly:

Here alone I in books formd of metals
Have written the secrets of wisdom
The secrets of dark contemplation
By fightings and conflicts dire (U4:24-27, E 71)

After this deceptively obvious revelation of his "secrets of
wisdom," Blake/Urizen continues his retrospective account of
the stages of production that preceded the printing of the plate
that opened the chapter:

Lo! I unfold my darkness: and on
This rock, place with strong hand the Book
Of eternal brass, written in my solitude. (U4:31-33, E 71)

This passage, which is at the end of Urizen's description of his earliest creative activity, recounts the last act before an impression is pulled: the laying of the fully etched copper-plate ("the Book/ Of eternal brass") on the bed of the plate press (represented here as a rock). Thus, by the end of Chapter II Urizen's retrospective account of his earliest creative activities has brought us to the point at which the chapter began and we are ready to resume the narrative of production that had been interrupted by his speech.

Urizen had begun to speak just at the point when the plate had been inked and sent through the press; at that point the text came into being and provided Urizen with a medium for recounting his initial creative activity. Once his speech has ended, the narrative returns to the point of interruption and describes Blake/Urizen at the other end of the plate press lifting up the copperplate that had been inked and sent through the press at the start of Chapter II:

The voice ended, they saw his pale visage
Emerge from the darkness; his hand
On the rock of eternity unclasping
The Book of brass.... (U4:41-44, E 71)

In typical Blakean fashion, this passage operates in several ways at once. It is a description of Blake/Urizen as craftsman lifting the copperplate from the bed of the plate press, but it
is also a description of Urizen as a pale, freshly printed page of The Book of Urizen emerging into view as it is lifted off of the dark copperplate before the plate is removed from the press. But this is not the printing of just any page, for the above line is the textual referent for the design on the facing page (see figure 2).¹⁶ Thus we realize that the "pale visage/ [Emerging] from the darkness; his hand...unclasping/
The Book of brass" is a description of Urizen's face on plate 5 as it is lifted off of the copper, and it has been this plate that we have followed through the etching, inking, and printing stages. (Urizen's face here is pale because inked only and not yet coloured.) Furthermore, as a pictorial reinforcement of the metaphors we have been discussing, the position of Urizen's book and the echo of its pages by the columns of Blake's text surely asks us to identify Urizen's book that is being created in the poem with The Book of Urizen that contains the story of that creation. This type of close interrelationship between the events in the text and the design on the page reveals Blake's very self-conscious handling of this theme, in which the book in the reader's hand is frequently presented as the product of the metaphoric printing process recounted in the text. Indeed, it is a general truth, although not a hard-bound rule, that Blake usually describes in the metaphors the specific techniques of production that were used in producing the particular poem that transmits those metaphors.

By the end of the first verse of Chapter III, then, the
printed page has emerged from the press, been separated from the plate, and is now ready for the next stage in the process of production. At this point, the tone of the poem shifts dramatically as, in "Rage, fury, [and] intense indignation... cataracts of fire blood & gall [and] whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke" (U4:45-47, E 71) sweep over the stark landscape of the poem. On the surface narrative, this is the start of Urizen's tumultuous creative activity which gives final form to the landscape of his newly-created world. On the metaphoric level of book production that we have been exploring, logic demands that this sudden burst of colour into the metaphoric landscape represents the next stage in the process of production: the painting of the plates. And indeed, the fury and intense indignation which dominate this passage can be seen as an effective dramatization of the tremendous upsurge of creative activity as Blake/Urizen brings his eternal forms to life and final creation by adding colour and tone to the printed page:

...Rage siez'd the strong

Rage, fury, intense indignation
In cataracts of fire blood & gall
In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke:
And enormous forms of energy;

In living creations appear'd
In the flames of eternal fury. (U4:44-5:2, E 71)

Again, ten lines later, flames and blood pour through Urizen's stark landscape of dark deserts (paper now darkened by ink) as another page is painted:

The roaring fires ran o'er the heav'ns
In whirlwinds & cataracts of blood
And o'er the dark desarts of Urizen
Fires pour thro' the void on all sides
On Urizen's self-begotten armies. (U5:12-16, E 72)17

Urizen's self-begotten armies (the multitude of impressions which can be pulled from a single copperplate, i.e. Urizen), are thus brought to life by the colourful, pouring flames/paint, and, taken in itself, this reading produces a demonstrably coherent extension of the process of production which we have followed from the original etching of the plate.

There is, nevertheless, the manifest problem that Blake has apparently shifted the representational value of one of his metaphors: flames elsewhere consistently represent the etching acid, whereas here the roaring fires represent the intensely creative act of painting a printed page. But by identifying flames as acid, it also makes sense to say that "living creations appear'd/ In the flames of eternal fury" (U5:1&2, E 71) because, just as the designs on the page are given depth and life by the action of the paint/flames, the design emerges and is literally given depth on the copperplate by the action of the acid/flames. In other words, acid is to copperplate as paint is to page and here, as almost everywhere in Blake's poetry, it is a mistake to demand an exclusive reading of a passage, for elements of both processes of production are in fact present in this section of verse.18 And the combination is not accidental or inspired simply by the narrative strategy of the poem, for Blake consistently identifies the etching of a plate and the painting of a page; these are his most frequently conflated stages of production,
a fact which points to an important element of Blake's artistic vision—the essential unity of conception with which he regarded both copperplate and printed page. ¹⁹

Consequently, much of the imagery and vocabulary of verses 4 and 5 demands that we see a description of the etching of a copper-plate as well as the painting of a printed plate:

And o'er the dark desarts of Urizen
Fires pour thro' the void on all sides
On Urizens self-begotten armies.

But no light from the fires. all was darkness
In the flames of Eternal fury (U5:12-18, E 72)

Although all modern commentators assume out of hand that Blake etched his plates in an acid bath, there is in fact strong evidence to suggest that Blake edged the plates with a wall of wax and poured the acid onto the copper. ²⁰ This identification is coupled with the presence of another mysterious "void," which occurs in almost every other account of the etching process.

Furthermore, as the fires and void combine to create a metaphoric account of the etching of a plate, Urizen's armies suddenly appear. As we shall see, the lines of text on the plate are frequently alluded to as Urizen's armies or thunderous warriors, often complete with chariots, elephants, banners, and even castles as in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell plate 26, this latter conglomeration of images representing the design as opposed to the more regimented and linear files of text. (Cf. Urizen's "ten thousands of thunders/ Rang'd in gloom'd array" and stretched out as for battle in Chapter I.) Significantly,
Urizen's armies most frequently march through Blake's figurative landscape at just the point when the plate is exposed to the acid and the "thunderous warriors" begin to be etched into its surface and thus "appear" to our view. But perhaps the most characteristic reference to etching acid in this passage lies in Blake's adaptation of Milton's dark flames. Blake obviously enjoyed the symbolic potential of the paradoxically clear and watery, yet consuming and heat-generating acid, and his most prominent metaphor for the acid is liquid flame that produces heat but no light.

Blake goes on in verse 5 to make the conflation of processes yet more explicit:

In fierce anguish & quenchless flames
To the deserts and rocks He ran raging
To hide, but He could not: combining
He dug mountains & hills in vast strength
He piled them in incessant labour (U5:19-23, E 72)[italics mine]

Thus, in the fury of creative activity Blake/Urizen applies the polysemous flames to both printed page and copperplate. As acid, the quenchless flames attack the rock/copperplate and by rifting its surface create the hills and valleys of the relief plate landscape that will become more familiar as we examine other poems. As paint, the same quenchless flames are applied to the deserts/pages, bringing the designs to life and the book nearer to completion. As page after page is painted, they are piled by Blake/Urizen back into the mountains and hills that now constitute the completed book.

As we reach the end of this extended account of the process
of production, the fires of Urizen's creative activity gradually subside until he is left "hoary, and age-broke, and aged," In despair and the shadows of death" (U5:26&27, E 72) Urizen as poem undergoes a similar transformation as the "Eternal Form" of the poem that once existed only in Blake's imagination begins to petrify into its final physical form as the limit of its "fall" into materiality is reached. This point is analogous to the final act in the physical production of a book, the enclosing of the pages by a hard cover, appropriately described by Blake as the petrifaction of a rock-like shell or roof around the newly-created world of Urizen.

And a roof, vast petrific around,
On all sides He fram'd: like a womb;
Where thousands of rivers...
...pour down the mountains to cool
The eternal fires beating without
...& like a black globe

The vast world of Urizen appear'd (U5:28-37, E 72)

The world of Urizen which Urizen has created, which is also The Book of Urizen which Blake has created, thus appears in finished form and this account of illuminated printing which began at the start of Chapter II now ends.

This initial pattern of the Fall recounted in Chapter I-III is rehearsed and repeated in varying forms in the remaining chapters of The Book of Urizen. But as the poem expands outward from the primordial mass with which it began, the initial creation myth is obscured and almost submerged by the details of the variations that are superimposed upon it. So, too, the metaphors of illuminated printing which so dominated the opening chapters are
essentially lost in the rest of the poem, although the basic imagery and general patterns of Blake's process of production are still discernible as the underlying informing principles of much of the remaining "narrative."

In the first reworking of the primal Fall sequence from another perspective, Los appears and the concept of duality, of distinct subject and object, precipitates into the poem. This solves the methodological problem Blake had faced in weaving the account of a creation into the intensely introspective subjectivity of the opening chapters. "Urizen" is no longer required to represent both creator and creature, and, accordingly, when Los appears in the poem he subsumes under his identity Blake's role as creative artist, leaving Urizen free to represent only *The Book of Urizen* in its various stages of physical evolution. Thus, when Los appears, Urizen's recent creation of a world apart suddenly becomes the rending of Urizen away from Los and Los is now the creator who gives form to the "obscure separation." As the representative of Blake the poet, Los is the "Eternal Prophet"; as the representative of Blake the craftsman, he is a Vulcan figure who gives form to Urizen by binding him with "fetters of iron" and "sodors of brass" just as Blake gives form to *Urizen* by binding its imaginative form into the copperplate and, ultimately, leaves of paper.

The binding of Urizen which follows the appearance of Los at the end of Chapter III is the same event, the same fall into materiality that is recounted in Chapters I-III. As a less
distinct manifestation of the metaphors of production, the binding of Urizen is superimposed on the general pattern of the progressive stages of the etching of a copperplate. Whereas in the opening chapters, the process of illuminated printing was metaphorically presented through imagery of the creation of the material universe, here, as in some later poems we will examine, the metaphors are realized in an account of the formation of a human body.

Although the formation of Urizen's image on a copperplate in Chapter IV(b) can be understood in terms of relief etching, it is more effective if seen as an extension of the metaphors of intaglio etching present at the start of Chapter I. Significantly, in verses 2 and 3 we are told that as Urizen's binding begins, he is obscured by a "surgeing/Sulphureous liquid" (U10: 13&14, E 74) which settles into a sulphurous, foaming lake. This is the man-made lake of acid which covers the plate during the etching process. When an intaglio design is etched, the most prominent, darkest, and heaviest lines start biting first and the detail of the design is then gradually filled out as the finer lines of the plate begin to bite. This pattern can be compared to the early emergence of Urizen's spine and ribs which are later "fleshed out" by the addition of organs, limbs, and flesh in the course of Chapter IV. Thus, although it functions now primarily as an organizing principle for the narrative, the presence of Blake's techniques of illuminated printing can still be recognized as an important element in this later part of the poem.
As The Book of Urizen continues to move further from its mythic source and closer to the linear extension of history with which it ends, these echoes of Blake's technique become more sporadic. They do emerge once again, however, at the crucial point of the next version of the Fall in Chapter V. It is not surprising that in Blake's treatment of them, the physical aspects of book reproduction become informed with sexual symbolism. In the printing of a page, the plate is seen as the active male principle who fecundates the passive female paper as they momentarily become one in the consummation of the creative process that takes place in the dark and mysterious bed of the plate press. Again, these identifications are more fully explored in other poems, but the recurrent image of the white female page at the climactic moment of separation from the plate does figure importantly in Blake's presentation of Enitharmon's separation from Los:

A female form trembling and pale
Waves before his deathy face

All Eternity shuddered at sight
Of the first female now separate
Pale as a cloud of snow
Waving before the face of Los (U18:7-12, E 77)

The imagery and handling of the metaphors is typical of Blake's other accounts of the process of illuminated printing. Although I am not suggesting that this passage is part of a coherent account of book reproduction, it is true that the elements of Blake's printing techniques have strongly influenced Blake in his presentation of this event. In fact, the patterns of
illuminated printing form part of the foundation on which the later events of *The Book of Urizen* are set.

A study of *The Book of Urizen* in terms of the metaphors of illuminated printing is particularly revealing because that poem contains most of the vocabulary, imagery, and paradigmatic transitions characteristic of this aspect of Blake's work. Since Blake is quite consistent in his handling of this level of his poetry, the trick of reading the metaphors is largely a matter of identifying the repeated vocabulary and imagery, and recognizing recurrent patterns such as the typical conflation and reordering of the stages of production and the repeated movement from silence to speech and from pause to activity. An awareness of these elements of the poetry sets the foundation of the next chapter as we trace the development of Blake's use of these metaphors from his earlier poetry up to the mature period of *The Book of Urizen*.
CHAPTER III
THE POETRY BEFORE URIZEN

One advantage of recognizing the vocabulary and rhetorical patterns which Blake typically uses when handling the metaphors of illuminated printing is that with this basic familiarity, one can then proceed to identify and interpret the metaphors in passages where they might otherwise remain unrecognized because not fully developed. This ability is especially useful when examining the poetry of two widely separated stages in Blake's poetic career. On the one hand, in the poetry produced around 1792-93, the presence of these metaphors is just beginning to surface as an element in Blake's poetry. From our vantage point and with our educated awareness of the form that the metaphors will ultimately take, it is possible to look back at this poetry, detect the metaphors in embryonic form, and in effect watch as Blake first recognizes and then consciously develops the metaphorical potential emerging organically from out of his artistic experience. On the other hand, in the later poetry produced after 1804, these metaphors lose their distinct identity and sink back into the substrata of Blake's poetry. In other words, Blake fully develops the metaphors in his middle years, and after that point, the metaphors become fused with the fabric of his thought and myth, and cease to assert themselves as distinctive elements of the poetry. Once again, our knowledge of Blake's characteristic handling of the metaphors will help us to recognize their presence and influence in the poetry even when they are no
longer presented in the context of an extended, coherent narrative of the process of book reproduction.

Of course, this progression of Blake's use of the metaphors of illuminated printing is not divorced from the other elements of his verse. In fact, the metaphors were profoundly affected by and even reflect within their own form the concurrent experimentation and development which Blake was pursuing in other aspects of his art and poetry. Thus the development of his use of the metaphors can be viewed within a framework of artistic evolution that includes as its other two components his developing myth and his technical experimentation. The initial development of the metaphors spans the years from 1790/91 to 1793 and early 1794, a period which includes *The Songs of Experience*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *America*, and *Europe*. In this relatively early stage of his poetic career, Blake was evidently quite satisfied to limit his book reproduction to the techniques which he had recently perfected and there is little experimentation. Meanwhile Blake's myth was actively evolving and changing, and the metaphors of the process of illuminated printing were also going through a corresponding evolution and were, in effect, emerging from out of his physical techniques. In the crucial years of 1794-95, Blake's myth had begun to stabilize, and perhaps even solidify, in the mature work of *The Book of Urizen*, *The Book of Ahania*, and *The Book of Los*. At this point, the metaphors of his process of production had also fully emerged and stabilized, and yet were still flexible enough to
encompass and reflect the intense technical experimentation which Blake was pursuing in these years. (The "arrival" of the metaphors at this point in his poetic career may also be a reflection of the fact that Blake's metaphors of the creative process seem to work better within a purely mythic rather than a partly historic context, for the metaphors are more prominent and more fully integrated in the *Urizen* - *Ahania* - *Book of Los* sequence than in the more historical "continent" poems of *America*, *Europe*, and *The Song of Los*.) Nine or ten years later when Blake began to produce his next illuminated poem, *Milton*, the configuration had changed again: Blake's myth was obviously fully mature and he had returned to the original method of relief etching, but at this point his interest in and use of the metaphors changes and they dissolve as distinct entities and are completely assimilated into what has become the foundation of his thought. This evolving dialogue between myth, metaphor, and technical experimentation serves to remind us of the fundamental unity of Blake's artistic expression. It is important to note that these metaphors emerge directly out of Blake's artistic experience, and even at their inception in an early poem like "The Tyger," both metaphors and the actual techniques that they embody are entirely compatable with the fundamentals of Blake's thought.

Although an early work, "The Tyger" is clearly a great poem which easily outstrips its companion poems of *The Songs of Innocence* and *of Experience* as well as most of the short poems
of the English language. And this is largely because of the great power bound within the frame of a little lyric, a power which is generated because the poem is the distillation of a much greater conception into a small space. Unlike any of the other Songs, a correct interpretation of "The Tyger" requires a grasp of the larger mythological world Blake has created, and this is my most important concern in discussing "The Tyger" here: to see the ways in which the large outlines of Blake's thought are manifest within the six stanzas of this poem. We are primarily interested in "The Tyger" as an early example of Blake's pervading concern with the nature of the creative process and, specifically, as an early example of the presentation of that discussion through the medium of the metaphors of the physical act of creation.

Even a cursory reading of "The Tyger" reveals that something or someone is being created in the course of the poem. A more attentive reading will reveal that it is the tiger itself, the subject and namesake of the poem, which comes into being as the poem progresses. There has been much speculation on the true nature of the beast: whether he is inherently good or inherently evil; a creation of a devil, a Urizenic God, or a true God. But it seems to me that this is, if not an unnecessary question, at least a misdirected one for Blake supplies abundant clues as to the nature of the tiger of the poem. He is a fearsome, ferocious, awe-inspiring animal which belongs in the forests of the night.
Morton Paley's account of the tiger as a manifestation of the sublime wrath of the Godhead is apt, but I would balk at any attempt to mitigate and create a vision of the tiger as a pre-dominantly good or positive figure because derived from the energetic creation of an imaginative God. The tiger is essentially beyond good and evil and must remain an unqualified and primordially fearsome and ferocious figure untouched by baser matter if it is to fulfil the imaginative role Blake set for it.

At least on the surface level, it is the identity of the creator, the one that can actually manifest and control the fearsome energy of the tiger, that is brought into question:

Tyger Tyger, burning bright,
In the forests of the night;
What immortal hand or eye,
Could frame thy fearful symmetry?
("The Tyger," 11.1-4, E 24)

But ultimately, this question is a rhetorical one because, as Blake scholars are becoming increasingly aware, Blake himself is the creator that is figured in the poem. "The Tyger" is a reflexive comment on its own creation, and at least on one level the speaker knows very well that he had created "The Tyger" and that he who had made "The Tyger" had also made "The Lamb" a few years earlier. But resolving the question in this way does not reduce its power because the impact and focus of the question remains after Blake himself is identified as the creator.

The real question posed by "The Tyger" is focused not on creature or creator, but on the nature of the creative process
itself. Any true artist attempts to capture and manifest many forms of imaginative energy, all of which are in fact facets of his own being. He may strive to create a benign lamb or he may give form to the terrific tiger, but if his object is to frame the violent and ferocious energy of the universe, as creator he will take satisfaction and joy in the degree to which he successfully captures a terrifying form. This is one aspect of the paradoxical and disturbingly amoral creative process that Blake explores in "The Tyger," and indeed, the powerful and compelling energy of the creative process which allows Blake to bind the terrific form of the tiger finally participates in the fearsome and awe-inspiring elemental nature of its product, for in stanza 4 when the speaker asks "what dread grasp,/ Dare its deadly terrors clasp," [italics mine] he is referring directly to the deadly terrors of the hammer and anvil, tools of the creative process, and only secondarily to the tiger.

If Blake is describing the creation of "The Tyger" as poem as well as the tiger as animal, then the creation myth presented in the poem can be seen as a precursor of the more sustained and elaborate accounts of the process of illuminated printing which follow as his myth matures. Many of the elements associated with Blake's handling of the metaphors are present: there is the emphasis on fire as an important element of creative activity; the creator of the tiger obviously anticipates Blake's Los figure; and the actual locale of the creation, the smithy, is cluttered with the tools that Blake/Los typically uses to shape his copper-
plate/hard steel: hammer, anvil, fire, and forge. But more importantly, the poem can be identified with Blake's later accounts of the creative process because it presents a narrative of progressive creation which entails a movement from fierce, untamed elemental energy to energy bound. This is the other aspect of the paradoxical nature of the creative process that is explored in "The Tyger." It is implicit in the activity described in The Book of Urizen, and is the central problem of all artistic activity: in Blake's eyes, the process of "creating" a work of art is really the process of giving physical form to something which already exists as an eternal form in the imagination, for the "World of Imagination is the World of Eternity...[and] There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature" (VLJ, E 545). Part of the artist's role is to embody that eternal form in physical substance. This is, in the imagery of the later Milton, the putting on of the clothes of generation, but this is also to freeze the imaginative form into the static bonds of space and time—and this is an essentially Urizenic activity.

There is a close parallel between the free, primal energy that is given form in the poem and the creative energy itself that effects this formation: one is the fire burning in the tiger's eyes, and the other is the fire which the creator seizes to give form to his creation. Both involve "deadly terrors" and both are, by implication, portions of eternity too great for the
eyes of man. It is the artist's heroic and yet satanic job to fight fire with fire and freeze these portions of eternity into perceptible form. As a fulfilment of the theme of the binding of eternal energy into fixed form, "The Tyger" displays a general movement from pure and essentially formless energy that is gradually restricted and pacified as it is bound into physical form. This is the pattern of movement which the tiger in the poem undergoes, and it is a pattern which Blake's conception of "The Tyger" mirrors as it "falls" into the physical, objectified poem on printed page.

In stanza 1, the primal energy that is to be shaped into the tiger and the imaginative conception that is to be shaped into "The Tyger" are both formless: they are pure light, pure energy burning in an elemental state. As the blacksmith/poet performs the paradoxical act of creation, the energy begins to progressively freeze into a physical form: what was once pure energy which existed independent of the taint of materiality becomes, in stanza 2, a light which is emanating out of two physical eyes. In stanza 3, the creator seizes fire, hammer, and tongs and twists the formless energy into the shape of a confining physical heart which then starts to beat. In the next stanza, a physical brain is fashioned to enclose the once-free energy, and in the condensation of the poem's syntax, the tiger seems to emerge from its physical creation complete with hands and feet.

By the end of stanza 4, the fury of creative activity has
peaked and we can assume that the tiger as animal and as poem has been formed. Although this progressive emergence of the tiger into physical form is not designed as a metaphorical representation of Blake's entire process of production, it is clear from the image of a blacksmith applying fire to metals and hammering them into form that the stage of Blake's process alluded to is the etching of a copperplate. Thus the creation of the tiger on one level adumbrates the etching of one of Blake's copperplates and the emergence of the image of the tiger on another, metaphoric level.

In stanza 5, the crucial stanza of the poem, Blake presents an implicit comment on the creative activity that has bound the Orcic, free energy of stanza 1 into physical form. The image is that of Blake gazing down at the copperplate into which he has just frozen the eternal form of the tiger:

When the stars threw down their spears
And water'd heaven with their tears:
Did he smile his work to see? ("The Tyger," 11.17-19, E 25)

The "stars" of line 17 which throw down both spears (shafts of light which are lines of sight) and tears are a natural metaphor for eyes, in this case the eyes of the creator Blake as he looks at his creation and sees what he has done. The implications of the image are clear for "stars' in Blake's symbolism are always associated with Urizen and materialism." This passage thus anticipates the unexpected identification of Blake as creative artist with Urizen the demon of materiality that is implicit in his handling of the metaphors in The Book of Urizen. The
creation of the tiger may be a sublime creative act in which a Promethean figure dares to capture a portion of the divine fire for mortal eyes, but in the process of transition from flame to physical form, the tiger is tamed. Thus Blake as a member of the devil's party certainly may have smiled at his "capture" of a terrific form of energy in stanza 1 and 2, but his response must be quite different and the question more complex when he views the ultimate emergence of the bound energy as the veritable stuffed animal perched like a show dog beneath the text.

Here, as in many other metaphorical accounts of the creative process (Urizen, plate 5 for example), the design functions as the visual fulfilment or product of the narrative of production that is presented in the text. Thus the tame cat which appears to the eyes of man as the image on the plate is the final stage of the progressive binding of the eternal form of energy that is recounted in the poem. The design that is the product of Blake's craftsmanship is the limit of the tiger's fall and is therefore only a domesticated shadow of what was once burning too brightly for the eyes of man.

Thus I would see "The Tyger" not as an examination of the tiger, and not primarily as an examination of the creator, but most truly as an examination of the mysterious creative process in which both creator and tiger can meet in the fearful symmetry of joy and fear. As a discussion of the paradoxical nature of the creative process, "The Tyger" represents the start of a long
and continuing concern of Blake's poetry that is generally presented through the vehicle of his metaphors of the creative process. As an embodiment of those metaphors, the poem clearly represents an early stage in Blake's development. The paradigmatic movement is present, but there is little sense of a narrative of production realized in metaphor. Some of the characteristic vocabulary and setting is present, but it is sketchy and not part of a developed, step by step sequence. Although the parallels between the creation of the tiger and the creation of the illuminated plate of "The Tyger" are strong enough for us to say that they are deliberate, they are not fully developed. It is as though at this point Blake had recognized his own techniques of production to be an available and effective instance of the creative process that could be used to dramatize some of his discussions of aesthetics and the creative process, but he had not yet realized the depth to which he could pursue the analogy. As yet the metaphors are still more potential than actual, still emerging from out of Blake's artistic experience, but the essential visionary leap has been made, and in the next few years Blake develops the vocabulary and structural principles which allow him to turn these metaphors into one of the guiding principles of his work.

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell is a crucial work in plotting the development of Blake's use of the metaphors of illuminated printing. In the course of this single work, begun in 1790 and probably completed (certainly first published) in
1793, the metaphors develop from an untapped potentiality that predates "The Tyger" to fully-developed elements of the poetry that bear an increasingly heavy portion of the poetic burden. When the poem was first begun in 1790, Blake had only very recently developed and mastered his difficult technique of relief etching (the first true illuminated books had been printed the year before), and it is not surprising that the implications of this newly developed technique had not yet found their permanent place in the vocabulary of his poetic vision. But by the time "The Song of Liberty" had been completed and etched in 1793, Blake had been working with the process of relief etching for five years, its ramifications were fully incorporated into his growing myth, and he had begun to handle the metaphors of illuminated printing in a manner characteristic of his later work.

The Marriage is a crucial work in this regard not only because the development of the metaphors can be traced in it, but also simply because the metaphors often emerge onto the surface of The Marriage, such as in the third "Memorable Fancy," which begins pointedly: "I was in a Printing house in Hell & saw the method in which knowledge is transmitted..." (MHH 15, E 39). In addition, Blake points the way to these metaphorical treatments of his work with explicit references to his printing technique, as when he announces to the reader that he will "[expunge] the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul...by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal..." (MHH 14, E 38). As a result of
this overt handling of the metaphors in *The Marriage*, they are more accessible than in most other works, and Blake scholars have been quick to recognize and explicate the metaphors in several sections of *The Marriage.*

The first emergence of the metaphors of illuminated printing in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* occurs in the first "Memorable Fancy," beginning "As I was walking among the fires of hell..." (*MHH* 6, E 35). Here, as throughout *The Marriage*, the inverted satiric perspective of the poem assigns the creative activity of illuminated printing to the realm of the devils. In doing so, Blake develops and exploits the acid-as-fire metaphor implicit in "The Tyger" and the process of illuminated printing—especially the etching stage—becomes the fiery activity of the devil/artist as he burns in Hell to his eternal delight.

This "Memorable Fancy," which immediately precedes the "Proverbs of Hell," conforms to one of Blake's typical methods of handling the metaphors in that it serves as a prelude or introduction that recounts the physical production of the passage that it precedes. Interestingly, Blake again develops "fire" into a polysemous symbol and introduces a parallel similar to that in "The Tyger" in that both the imaginative realm in which the eternal forms of his poetry exist and the technical process by which they emerge onto the physical plane are identified with fire. That is, the fires of Hell in which the devil Blake is walking at the beginning of the passage represent the
fires of his imagination from which he must return to the material world, "the abyss of the five senses," and work with a different set of "corroding fires" in the etching process if he is to transmit his knowledge for the benefit of man.

Indeed, we are told that it is, specifically, the "Proverbs of Hell" which Blake as devil has been collecting in his infernal walk, and as he comes home to the "real world" he paradoxically discovers himself etching them on a copperplate:

When I came home; on the abyss of the five senses, where a flat sided steep frowns over the present world. I saw a mighty Devil folded in black clouds, hovering on the sides of the rock, with corroding fires he wrote the following sentence now perceived by the minds of men, & read by them on earth.

How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way,
Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five? (MHH 6&7, E 35)

Erdman correctly notes that "the flat sided steep [which] frowns over the present world" is the surface of the copperplate as it appears to the returning devil, and goes on to add that "[the] Devil Blake sees in its clouds is himself at work on the printing surface or 'sides of the rock.'" Since the devil is writing a sentence in corroding fires, the identification with Blake is fairly easy. The real value of Erdman's comments here lies in his observation of the design, for he points out that the bolt of lightning which darts from clouds to cliff at the bottom of the plate (fig.3) is actually inscribing the word "How"--the first word of the sentence on plate 7 beginning "How do you know...."

This design is in fact the graphic representation of the recurring
lightning metaphor of the etching process that we have already met in *Urizen* (3:35, E 70), and thus we can see the design on Blake's plate functioning again as the visual analogue of the process of production recounted in the text.

Eight pages further on in *The Marriage* occurs another metaphorical account of Blake's printing process: the "Memorable Fancy" beginning "I was in a Printing house in Hell..." (*MHH* 15, E 39). Erdman has already offered a substantially correct explication of this passage as an account of illuminated printing, so rather than repeat material already available, I will very briefly summarize his observations, expanding on them where necessary, and in the process test this independent interpretation for correspondences with what I have suggested is Blake's typical use of the metaphors as they emerge in other poems.

The cave which appears in the first chamber, or stage of the process of production, is, of course, a modulation of the craggy rock-cliff metaphors of the plate with which we are already familiar, the three-dimensional cave as opposed to the "flat sided steep" more pointedly representing the added depth of an etched copperplate. Erdman identifies the Dragon-Man "clearing away the rubbish from a caves mouth" (*MHH* 15, E 39) as an engraver, and sees the "number of Dragons" that are "hollowing the cave" as the various engraving tools. Since this account goes on to describe the etching of the "cave," Blake has either conflated the distinct processes of intaglio...
and relief printing as in Chapter I of Urizen, or at least reordered the stages of his relief technique as he does in Urizen, since relief plates were occasionally touched up with a graver only after having been etched.

In the second chamber, the imagery associated with the viper folding round the rock reinforces the identification of paper and plate in Blake's vision that is implicit in Blake's handling of the "quenchless flames" that run over the "desarts" and "rocks" in Chapter III of Urizen. Erdman notes that "Metonymously the flat sheet of paper upon which these inscriptions and adornments and infinities are reproduced by impression is also that cave; we refer variously to copper or paper as a plate."13 Erdman also notes that the viper "adorning [the cave] with gold silver and precious stones" (MHH 15, E 39) is a representation of the painting process. It is, more specifically, Blake's rendition of his phallic paintbrush adorning the page with colour, but, as we shall see in America, the snake as a modulation of the fiery Orc is also a metaphor of the consuming acid. Therefore we have another version of the parallel indicating that acid is to plate as paint is to paper, this time developed through the phallic symbol of the snake.14

With an overview of Erdman's commentary together with what I have added here, we can see that in fact the same activity is taking place in the second, third, and fourth chambers of the "Printing house": Viper, Eagle, and Lion are all functioning as representatives of the fiery, consuming acid that causes the
illuminations to appear in the cliff-rock-copperplate.\textsuperscript{15}

(Even the first chamber can be included in this grouping since the dragons hollowing the cave are an easy modulation of the vipers folding round it.) This is one of the simplest and clearest examples of a fundamental tendency that runs throughout Blake's poetry. Like any great poet, Blake has the ability to create a fully realized image or scene with a very small expenditure of words, such as in each of the "chambers" of the printing house. But in the fluidity of Blake's artistic vision, the imaginary landscape—i.e. the surface texture of the poem and the imaginative construct it presents—may shift radically with the introduction of a new element or a new point of view, although the same event or process is still being described.

Blake's bold dramatization of this principle is the shift from the fiery abyss to the pleasant bank that takes place in the fourth "Memorable Fancy" when Blake's companion Angel and his metaphysics are frightened out of the "picture" by the vision of Leviathan. But the same principle operates throughout Blake's poetry and in a metaphorical account of the inking process, what was once a vision of a mudslide rolling over mountains and valleys can suddenly turn into a snake staining a rock with its blood when the idea of a phallic inking dauber is introduced into the account.\textsuperscript{16} In the "Memorable Fancy" in question, then, an informed reading will see the first three or four chambers as the same event, and we must look to the different aspects, implica-
tions, and metaphorical conflations of the process of production that Blake is developing in each in order to account for the modulation of Viper-Eagle-Lion and cave-palace-cliff. This offers us another way of looking at the narrative strategy of Urizen and is always an important principle to keep in mind when attempting to understand Blake's handling of the metaphors. Indeed, it is basic to an understanding of Blake.

Morris Eaves, in his reading of the fourth "Memorable Fancy" in which Blake and an Angel show one another their eternal lots, offers the only fully-developed reading of Blake's metaphors of illuminated printing to have been published. Eaves correctly interprets the fiery abyss over which Blake and the Angel hang as a vision of an etching bath, and he goes on to explain many of the details of the passage as representations of Blake's actual techniques. As a verification of my observations of Blake's typical handling of the metaphors, perhaps Eaves's most important observation is the pronounced conflation that he sees in the processes of production presented in this section of the poem. He notes that in the "artistic allegory," the black tempest that erupts on plate 18 "represents two stages of the etching process combined dramatically but illogically into one" and goes on to interpret the resulting emergence of Leviathan as "[representing] all that happens in the process of illuminated printing after the plate is taken from its acid bath...[and the] processes of inking, printing, and coloring are not shown in a stage-by-stage process." In addition,
when he observes that "the major contribution of Leviathan to the abyss is color," Eaves is pointing out another instance of Blake's curious union of etching and painting, for this colourful, phallic serpent which emerges from the acid bath as a *fiery* crest with two globes of crimson *fire* is also clearly another manifestation of the serpentine genius of the acid that we have met with before. The emergence of Leviathan from the fiery abyss *is* the painting process; it *is* a representation of the genius of the acid; but, as Eaves recognizes and ingeniously explains (pp. 109-110), it *is* also a dramatization of plate 20 emerging from out of the acid bath. Thus the reader discovers that it is plate 20 that he has followed through the etching process, and once again the design on a plate doubles as the analogue or visual fulfilment of the narrative of production that is presented in the text.21

By now Blake's characteristic handling of the metaphors of illuminated printing has been clearly established, and I would like to look at some of the ways that the metaphors function as the fulfilment or dramatization of some of the ideas basic to Blake's art. This is in fact tantamount to looking at how Blake's actual techniques of production fit into his myth and artistic vision. For one thing, it has long been recognized that Blake closely identified his work with corrosive acids and metal plates with that of the alchemist and his "Great Work," and a close examination of Blake's use of the metaphors will strengthen this observation.22
The basic importance of alchemy in shaping Blake's vision of the processes and purpose of both his actual physical techniques and his metaphoric representation of them cannot be overestimated, especially in the early, formative work of The Marriage.23 In fact, Blake includes mention of Paracelsus, the preeminent figure in alchemy, on plate 22 of The Marriage itself where he states that "Any man of mechanical talents may from the writings of Paracelsus or Jacob Behman, produce ten thousand volumes of equal value with Swedenborg's" (MHH 22, E 42). And more significantly, in a letter to John Flaxman about eight years later Blake mentions Paracelsus in a brief poem that includes only his most important influences:

Now my lot in the Heavens is this, Milton lov'd me in childhood & shew'd me his face.
Ezra came with Isaiah the Prophet, but Shakespeare in riper years gave me his hand;
Paracelsus & Behmen appear'd to me, terrors appear'd in the Heavens above
And in Hell beneath, & a mighty & awful change threatened the Earth.
The American War began...(To John Flaxman, September 12, 1800, E 680)

If Paracelsus did influence Blake strongly, that influence found its clearest expression in Blake's vision and use of the physical details of his process of production.

The action of Blake's "medicinal" corrosives which melt away the apparent surface of the copperplate to reveal the infinite which was hid is, of course, analogous to the purifying fire of the alchemist which melts the base metal so that its dross may be removed and the "hidden" gold revealed.24 Indeed,
the balanced dance in Blake's technique of production between the acid/fire which consumes and the water which washes the acid away and stops the etching process can be seen as a reflection of the elemental contraries that give rise to all progression in the alchemical process: "...fire, of which sulphur is the principle...[and] water, of which mercury is the principle...compose the famous Hermetic androgyne, the twofold principle of all metals."\(^2^5\) It is through the interaction of these two principles and their various manifestations as male and female, active and passive, hot and cold that the alchemist progresses in his "Great Work" from lead to gold.

In Paracelsus' words, "...alchemy is nothing but the art which makes the impure into the pure through fire....and Vulcan is its artist."\(^2^6\) Thus it is in the fiery forge of Vulcan's smithy that the alchemical transformation from pure to impure, dross to gold, physical to spiritual takes place. Again, the parallels with Blake's handling of the metaphors are obvious: Vulcan's forge is Los's forge is Blake's acid bath, and as the metaphors are pursued the parallels are reinforced. The first action which takes place in the alchemist's crucible is essentially one of regression: the action of fire and the addition of other catalysts first breaks down the impure metal into its elemental form before its component parts are built back up in order to produce gold. This return to \textit{prima materia}, to "still undifferentiated primal substance"\(^2^7\) in the alchemist's forge is analogous to the activity which takes place in Blake's
etching bath and accounts for the frequent allusions to an etching plate as an elemental void, the equivalent of the alchemical matrix, the "Primal womb, primal mother, the still formless receptacle of form."  

Although the affinity of alchemy with his own techniques was always before Blake's eyes, perhaps nowhere are the lines of analogy more clearly drawn than in the previously discussed passage of Urizen, Chapter II. In this passage, the etching of a copperplate is described as a return to the alchemical prima materia in the alchemist's crucible, which is the creation of "The philosopher's egg...an artificial replica of the womb of nature." And in this return to elemental chaos which is also the figurative etching of a copperplate, Urizen battles with and overcomes the four primary elements of Paracelsus' world view as the etching of the plate progresses:

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First I fought with the fire; consum'd [fire]
Inwards, into a deep world within:
A void immense, wild dark & deep,
Where nothing was; Natures wide womb<>
And self balanc'd stretch'd o'er the void
I alone, even I! the winds merciless [air]
Bound; but condensing, in torrents
They fall & fall; strong I repell'd
The vast waves,& arose on the waters [water]
A wide world of solid obstruction [earth]
(U4:14-23, E 70-71)
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There are several other ways in which Blake's handling of the metaphors make his techniques figuratively analogous with alchemy, such as the fact that the symbolic systems of both processes present fire as a paradoxically liquid element in the form of water, but it is also wise to remember the simple fact
that the two processes are literally analogous in several ways: for example, *aqua fortis* is used in both processes, and the etching of a copperplate simply *is* a chemical reaction which causes a solid metal to dissolve and change its physical properties. But Blake's development of the analogies between alchemy and his own process of illuminated printing do not stop at the similarity of physical techniques or even at the similarity of their respective symbolic and metaphoric vocabularies. Blake, in fact, pursues the analogies to a much deeper point that identifies the ultimate goal of alchemy with his own purpose in producing his illuminated books. The true goal of alchemy is not to turn lead into gold—that is only its ostensible purpose, the symbolic garment and external reflection of its true goal, which is the inner, spiritual transformation of the alchemist. In the alchemical process, the alchemist's psyche is first broken down—in effect melted and dissolved in the purifying flames of his forge, to be later regenerated and slowly rebuilt into a perfect, harmonious, "golden" form free of the taint of the fallen world. Blake's corresponding technique is similarly ambitious for the ultimate aim of his etching process is not simply the formation of illuminated books, but is the cleansing of man's perception so that the infinite may be revealed. In the same way that the destructive fires of the alchemist's forge are ultimately positive, Blake claims that his dissolving corrosives are in fact "salutary and medicinal" in that they cleanse
the perceptions and melt apparent surfaces away in order to display the infinite which was hid.

These observations have been made several times before, as when Morton Paley notes that "the imaginative activity of the poet-prophet in raising the perceptions of mankind is, metaphorically, the Great Work of turning base metals into gold." But what has not been sufficiently appreciated before is the literal spirit in which Blake applied the analogy and the important place that Blake's actual techniques—and his metaphorical representations of them—hold in the development and coherence of his thought. Plate 14 is certainly the most important plate in *The Marriage* in this regard, and it is important enough to quote in full:

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.

For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at tree of life, and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite, and holy whereas it now appears finite & corrupt.

This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.

But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this 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.

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing 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 14, E 38-39)

In Blake's hands, then, the etching of a plate becomes analogous to the freeing of the perceptions in man, but it is much more
than simple analogy. It is essential to remember that Blake saw the fundamental purpose of his art as the improvement of the spiritual perception of the reader. It follows, then, that the processes of producing that art are literally as well as symbolically the agents of a potential spiritual transformation, and Blake's analogy of his fiery acid with the purifying forge of the alchemist does more than highlight an interesting parallel, for the cleansing of perception is literally the ultimate aim of both.

It is but a short jump from here to another of Blake's fundamental ideas that is also frequently expressed through analogy with his techniques of production, and this is the idea of the Apocalypse. For Blake, the Apocalypse is not simply, or primarily, the climactic event that will end the world at a discrete, future point in time, just as the Fall was not a distinct primordial incident. Although in this early poem Blake also presents the traditional view that "the world will be consumed in fire at the end of six thousand years," the subsequent passages of plate 14 provide the links to his radical view of the true Apocalypse as an individual apocalypse effected through art and through the improvement of the spiritual perception of the individual—an event that may occur at any given moment: "whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgement passes upon that Individual" (VLJ, E 551). It is the apparent causal link that is important in seeing how Blake exploits the metaphors here; the improvement of spiritual
perception causes the Apocalypse for when Blake says that "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite" he is obviously speaking of his vision of the Apocalypse: "...Creation will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear It is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it" (VLJ, E 555). But for all intents and purposes the improvement of spiritual perception is the Apocalypse; a point that is brought home by his use of the same imagery for both, obviously in the use of the fire imagery, but also in the rock imagery since the rock whose surface the flames as acid dissolve is also the Stone of Night, emblem of the Newtonian universe, that the flames as God's judgement dissolve in the Apocalypse. By identifying the plate with the rock --the limit of opacity beyond which the Fall cannot go--Blake also inherently associates with it the perception that would apprehend the rock as a solid, physical form, and the liberating acid/flames that expand the narrow "chinks" in the cavern (i.e. both copper-plate and human skull) herald the dissolution of both the stone and the limited perception that accepts it as "real." (Blake's figuratively fiery etching process which "[melts] apparent surfaces away...displaying the infinite which was hid" is a particularly apt vehicle for presenting the consummation of Creation in literal flames at the Apocalypse, but we must remember that since it is the entire finished product as illuminated book that effects the improvement of spiritual perception in the reader, any one of its stages of production can participate in the
apocalyptic imagery, as the printing process—trumpets association of Urizen Chapter II reminds us.)

We can follow Blake's use of the metaphors of illuminated printing through yet another application of the apocalyptic theme by reading them as the vehicle through which the Apocalypse in its specifically political manifestation is presented in "A Song of Liberty." In this late addition to The Marriage, the metaphors are not as clearly defined as in some of the other passages of the poem—they seem to be less the deeper subject of the passage than simply something which provides the narrative pattern through which the political allegory is presented—but many of the patterns in which they are developed suggest a style more in keeping with Blake's mature use of the metaphors than with the earlier poems we have been discussing. In terms of the metaphors, then, "A Song of Liberty" can be seen as somewhat of an early dividing point between the earlier work and the minor prophecies, as the presence of the precursors of Orc and Urizen, and the strong affinities with America would suggest.

Northrop Frye reminds us that "Revolution is the sign of apocalyptic yearnings...a convulsive lunge forward of the imagination" and if we extend the parallel established on plate 14 of The Marriage, a connection is easily seen between the fiery Orc, the spirit of revolution, who cleans away dross on the political plane, and the corrosive acid of the process of production which cleans the concealing surface of the copperplate.
to reveal the infinite. The identification of acid with Orc is made explicit in his first true appearance in the Preludium of America, but this nameless "new born terror" of "A Song of Liberty" functions as essentially the same entity. His foe in this battlefield variation of Blake's metaphoric landscape imagery is, of course, specifically the copperplate, but as a dramatization of the elements of creative activity, it is perhaps more effective to visualize the confrontation in more general terms: the youthful, fiery, creative Orc principle in conflict with the aging, cold, and repressive principle elsewhere identified as Urizen. Seen from this perspective, the metaphors are more coherent because, as in The Book of Urizen, Blake again emphasizes the negative aspect of the creative process as the freezing of "Eternal Forms," and as in Urizen, the "grey brow'd" "gloomy king" can be identified as both the artist Blake and the plate on which he is working.

Once these identifications are established, the narrative of the process of production, in this case the etching of a plate, becomes quite clear. There is, if not the sense of a pronounced pause, certainly a brief version of the familiar formalized introduction of the static opponents before the action starts: "the new born fire stood before the starry king!" (MHH 25, verse 8, E 43). This is the acid "standing" in front of both the plate and Blake, just before the artist as starry king begins the battle of the creative process. Blake/Urizen grasps both shield (metaphor for the copperplate in Ahania, Chapter I)
and acid, and pours the acid onto the plate:

...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.
The fire, the fire, is falling! (MHH 25 & 26, verse 10 & 11, E 43)

The moment of etching the plate is expanded into apocalyptic significance as it is on plate 14 of The Marriage, and after that brief interruption, the narrative of the etching process is continued with a description of the acid actually coming into contact with the plate and the design and text appearing on its surface as the lengthy etching process extends into the night:

Wak'd from his eternal sleep, the hoary element roaring fled away:
Down rush'd beating his wings in vain the jealous king; his grey brow'd counsellors, thunderous warriors, curl'd veterans [the text], among helms, and shields, and chariots; horses, elephants: banners, castles, slings and rocks,
Falling, rushing, ruining! buried in the ruins, on Urthona's dens.
All night beneath the ruins, then their sullen flames faded emerge round the gloomy king, (MHH 26, verses 14-17, E 43)

As well as being the Atlantic ocean on one level, "the hoary element [which] roaring fled away" is an image of the dramatic chemical reaction which occurs as the acid hits the surface of the copperplate, immediately heats up in the ensuing reaction, and begins to evaporate, forming a white foam that is pushed in front of the flowing acid. As soon as the acid begins to etch the design and text into the copperplate, the gloomy king and his armies literally "fall" into vegetative existence as
they take shape on the surface of the copperplate. Thus the starry king who began this account very much the active Blake/Urizen undergoes a transition that makes him end as the etching copperplate covered by the once active copper salts in the acid/flames which gradually fade, i.e. lose their corrosive property the longer the plate is etched.

Blake's unmistakable description of pouring the acid in this account is notable because, as I have mentioned earlier, modern commentators have universally assumed that Blake etched his plates exclusively in an acid bath. However this and other similar metaphoric representations of falling and pouring acid/flames suggest a combination of etching methods. Blake undoubtedly did use an acid bath, but I would argue that he also walled the plates (common beeswax is used today) and etched individual plates in this way.

This is the most economical method of etching, which would have appealed to Blake, and would most commonly have been used for larger plates. Of course, this technique would leave a heavy border around the outside edge of the plate and it is interesting that G. E. Bentley notes that in America, which was printed on the largest size of copperplate Blake used for his illuminated books, "[Blake] wiped the ink off the heavy borders so that only the integral design shows; these borders are visible only in copies printed after his death, e.g. copy P watermarked 1832, five years after Blake died." Although it is possible that a border may have been retained to provide stability in inking or
printing, I would argue that America possesses a border that Blake invariably wiped away but did not remove because it was the portion under the beeswax edging. Interestingly, the method of etching suggested by the metaphors is corroborated by an obscure and perhaps unreliable book on woodcutting published twelve years after Blake's death: "When the substance in which the drawing is made becomes set...the plate is surrounded with a wall, as it is technically termed, and aquafortis being poured upon it, all the unprotected parts are corroded, and the drawing left in relief. This was the method generally adopted by William Blake, an artist of great but eccentric genius...."

At any rate, as "A Song of Liberty" continues towards daybreak and its apocalyptic climax, it leaves behind the narrative of the etching of a plate which was, after all, more part of the structural pattern than the real subject of the passage. But this in no way denies the importance of the metaphors in "A Song of Liberty," for they emerge here, as throughout The Marriage, as one of the most important unifying elements of the poem that not only provide important structural elements but also provide the vehicle through which Blake links and develops some of his most important thematic concerns.

America: A Prophecy is essentially contemporary with The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and in fact displays a similar development of the metaphors as present in the earlier poem in that they are most clearly and successfully developed in the
portion of the poem written last and added late, in this case, the Preludium. The poem proper functions along much the same lines as "A Song of Liberty" and participates in the same general analogies that identified the etching of a plate with the Apocalypse in The Marriage. But if the apocalyptic "fires of Orc" that consume Creation in a general conflagration, and free man's senses by consuming the "five gates" and melting their bolts and hinges at the end of the poem are in any but the most distant way analogous to Blake's etching process, the lines of analogy have receded so far into the texture of the poem as to be almost indistinct. In fact, there is no coherent development of the metaphors of illuminated printing in the poem proper, although the general outlines of battle with fire falling from the sky are clearly present. It appears, then, that the metaphors are essentially unrealized in the body of America, as in some of the earlier poetry, and the very clear development of the metaphors in the later Preludium argues again for us to envision a discrete point in time, probably in 1793, when Blake "realized" his mature development of the metaphors and went back to rework already written passages by revising and adding sections which display a more coherent, controlled, and self-conscious handling of these metaphors.

As a fully-realized metaphoric treatment of the process of illuminated printing, the Preludium is consistent throughout with what we have recognized as the typical vocabulary, imagery, and paradigmatic transitions that characterize Blake's handling
of the metaphors. The account begins with a formalized pause as the elements of the process of production, in this case specifically the etching process, are presented to each other and to the reader:

The shadowy daughter of Urthona stood before red Orc.

His food she brought in iron baskets, his drink in cups of iron;
Crown'd with a helmet & dark hair the nameless female stood;  (A 1:1-4, E 50)

Orc, of course, represents the fiery principle of the acid, and the metallic and war-like woman who stands before him (she is armed, is crowned with a metal helmet, has an iron tongue [1.9], and carries iron utensils) is the personification of Blake's copperplate which, once etched, is also called the book of iron. She is herself the food she brings to Orc as the devouring, sexual attack that follows makes clear. And, although she is identified as the daughter of Urthona, eternal aspect of Los, she is metaphorically first cousin to Urizen, the shadowy, nameless, dark female manifestation of the unknown, abstracted, dark shadow of horror that emerges before the etcher Blake at the beginning of The Book of Urizen.41 But most significantly, at the opening of the Preludium she is silent, and she will remain silent until the acid embraces her in the acid bath and makes her articulate by etching words into her naked form:

...silent she stood as night;
For never from her iron tongue could voice or sound arise;
But dumb till that dread day when Orc assay'd his fierce embrace.  (A 1:8-10, E 51)

Orc, though bound, is already articulate and tells us of
his corrosive power in his various manifestations as serpent, screaming eagle, stalking lion, and whale lashing the "raging, fathomless abyss" (a recurrent metaphor for the etching copper-plate). The image of the chained Orc/acid can be seen as a paradoxically positive, though repressive, aspect of the creative process. The nature of acid is to devour all indiscriminately—"The 'real' Orc is desire unrestrained" and through limiting and controlling his fierce energy with acid resist and timed bitings, Blake/Los successfully performs his function as creative artist.

After this formal introduction and address by the static opponents, the creative activity begins as the fiery, male acid principle is released and allowed to attack the loins of the passive female plate in a climactic passage that displays several of Blake's typical methods of handling the metaphors:

Silent as despairing love, and strong as jealousy,  
The hairy shoulders rend the links, free are the wrists of fire;  
Round the terrific loins he siez'd the panting struggling womb;  
It joy'd: she put aside her clouds & smiled her first-born smile;  
As when a black cloud shews its light'nings to the silent deep.  
(A 2:1-5, E 50-51)

This womb/plate imagery is a variation of the "womb of Nature" we have already encountered in Urizen and Paracelsus, and the etching-as-lightning imagery of the last line is perhaps the clearest example of a metaphor that we have already traced through both design and text. The most interesting element here is the introduction of yet another paradigmatic transition
that occurs between lines 3 and 4. Blake often describes the preparation and prelude to creative activity in very violent terms such as war or, in this case, rape, which suddenly revert to positive images when told from the point of view of the "victim." Thus the violence of Orc's rape of the plate in line 3 ("Round the terrific loins he siez'd the panting struggling womb") is completely reversed in the next line with the female's unexpected accommodating response to his fierce embrace: "It joy'd: she put aside her clouds & smiled her first-born smile...." But after all, "Opposition is true Friendship" (MHH 20, E 41) and to an imaginative eye these are the delights of the fires of Hell as they are celebrated by Blake and the devils in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.

In fulfilment of Blake's paradigmatic transition from silence to speech, as soon as the acid begins to etch the plate words appear and the shadowy female becomes articulate: "Soon as she saw the terrible boy then burst the virgin cry" (A 2:6, E 51). In diction highly reminiscent of the dire conflictions and rendings of Urizen, the shadowy female recounts how her American plains (literally the plates of America) are rent in furrows by the lightning/acid as a Whale/Leviathan/serpent/acid drinks her soul away in the South-sea of the acid bath. What is taking form in this creative activity is, of course, a plate from the poem America, or, more correctly, the plates of America as seen collectively etched in one mythic, archetypal action. The Preludium, although written last, after the metaphors had jelled,
functions as an account of the creation of the poem *America*, just as *The Book of Urizen* is itself what is taking shape in the course of that poem. In terms of the metaphors, then, Orc's rape of the shadowy female literally causes her to give birth to the poem that follows since that process is, specifically, the etching of the plates of *America*.  

This tendency of the metaphors to represent the physical creation of the poem that follows can be traced, though in very indistinct form, in the Preludium to *Europe*. Dennis Douglas' brief article "Blake's *Europe*: A Note on the Preludium," opens with a clear summary of the theme of this prefatory passage:

> The prelude of Blake's *Europe* concerns the procreative force of nature which it treats in terms of a myth involving two symbolic figures, the 'nameless shadowy female', who...produces fiery beings, a myriad of living forms, and Enitharmon, who stamps 'this vigorous progeny' with the seal of material form. The nameless shadowy female pleads with Enitharmon not to continue inflicting on her the task of propagation. She protests that the stars 'rain down prolific pains' upon her, and that she and her offspring suffer anguish and torment.

In terms of the metaphors, we can read the first symbolic figure as the plate which produces a myriad of living forms and the second as, perhaps, Catherine Blake who inflicts the task of propagation on the plate by stamping its "vigorous progeny" with the seal of material form. (It has long been recognized that Catherine played Enitharmon to Blake's Los.)

This passage picks up the narrative where it was left off in the Preludium to *America*, with the emergence of the same shadowy female/plate from out of the acid bath: "The nameless
shadowy female rose from out the breast of Orc...And thus her voice arose" (E 1:1-3, E 59). Significantly, she is immediately articulate, since she enters the poem this time as a fully-etched plate. And as a reworked and overworked plate, she emerges from out of the acid bath with apparent foreknowledge of the trial in the plate press that is to come, and expresses fears that Enitharmon will release more Orc-like sons upon her and etch her identity away completely:

O mother Enitharmon wilt thou bring forth other sons? To cause my name to vanish, that my place may not be found. For I am faint with travel! Like the dark cloud disburden'd in the day of dismal thunder. [Blake's typical imagery for the printing process] (E 1:4-7, E 59)

This passage also displays a growing theme of this level of Blake's poetry: the negative aspect of artistic creation as the binding of imaginative forms into material form. The plate characterizes her role in the cyclic production of physical forms as painful, both for herself and for her offspring who are ushered into generation: "all the overflowing stars [Neoplatonic symbols of generative nature] rain down prolific pains" (E 1:15, E 59). Accordingly, the plate asks that Enitharmon "Stamp not with solid form this vig'rous progeny of fires" (E 2:8, E 60), but, of course, Catherine does not heed and the Preludium ends with the plate disappearing between the rollers of the plate press, giving form to more vigorous progeny: "She ceast & rolld her shady clouds/ Into the secret place" (E 2:17-18, E 60).

This level is clearly of secondary importance in the Prelude, but the general outlines of the narrative and the fact
that it is a coherent extension of the metaphors developed in the Preludium to America argue that this myth of the pro-creative force of nature derives a large part of its own pattern of development from the patterns of Blake's creative activity. In that sense, it is leagued with the other poems we have examined in this chapter, all of which have presented metaphoric discussions of Blake's process of illuminated printing. The general rise in the articulateness and self-consciousness with which Blake handles these metaphors points to the fact that they are approaching the mature development that they achieve in The Book of Urizen, which we have already discussed, and The Book of Ahania, which we will discuss in the next chapter.
CHAPTER IV
THE POETRY AFTER URIZEN

The year 1795, which ends the period that saw the completion of, among other works, \textit{The Songs of Innocence and of Experience}, \textit{The Marriage of Heaven and Hell}, and \textit{America} in 1793 and the publication of \textit{Europe} and \textit{The Book of Urizen} in 1794, represents the peak of one of Blake's two great creative phases.\(^1\) Blake continued this period of prolific poetic output in 1795 by producing \textit{The Song of Los}, \textit{The Book of Ahania}, and \textit{The Book of Los}, but the most striking element of this year is the tremendous upsurge of technical and artistic experimentation that apparently rechannelled his energies away from completing or etching any literary work for almost ten years.

In or about 1795, Blake expanded his technical horizons in several ways. First, he began experimenting in earnest with colour printing, the method of production used for the first six copies of \textit{Urizen}, and for \textit{The Song of Los}, \textit{Ahania}, and \textit{The Book of Los} as well as for the reissue of several earlier works.\(^2\) In the process, Blake progressed from colour printing designs from etched plates (\textit{Urizen}) to colour printing with blank plates (even the lettering on the title page of \textit{The Song of Los} is colour printed on a blank plate). This interest in colour printing as purely artistic expression led to the reproduction of several of the designs of his illuminated books divorced from the text in \textit{A Large Book of Designs} and \textit{A Small Book of Designs}, and culminated in the same year with the production of his famous large
colour prints of 1795. At about this time Blake also started the Vala manuscript (Keynes dates it from 1795, Erdman from 1796) and, as G. E. Bentley suggests, the elegant copperplate hand in which it was written indicates that Blake was contemplating a conventional intaglio reproduction of both text and design. Blake never completed that project, but he did succeed in uniting intaglio text with colour-printed designs in Ahania and The Book of Los. Blake may have had several reasons for changing the style of his book reproduction, but it is clear that all three of the books first printed in 1795 display within their form the signs of Blake's rising interest in technical experimentation.

But the influence of this rich experimentation is not limited simply to the physical form of the books. Because the books are printed differently, different metaphors are used and it is necessary to become acquainted with a new variety of techniques in order to successfully interpret the metaphorical accounts of the printing process presented in the text. Primary among these are, predictably, the techniques involved in intaglio etching, since the text of both The Book of Ahania and The Book of Los was printed in the intaglio method and the metaphors, as usual, tend to recount the specific techniques used to produce the book that contains them.

Another closely related new technique that is introduced in the metaphors of The Book of Ahania is the technique that Blake called "woodcut on copper," first used in reproducing
America in 1793 and described in his Notebook ca. 1794: 6

To Woodcut on Copper Lay a Ground as for Etching, trace &c. & instead of Etching the blacks Etch the whites & bite it in (E 672)

This is really a variation of a technique Blake called "woodcut on pewter," which he described in more detail in the Notebook:

To Woodcut on Pewter, lay a ground on the Plate & smoke it as for Etching, then trace your outline & draw them in with a needle, and beginning with the spots of light on each object with an oval pointed needle scrape off the ground...as a direction for your graver then proceed to graving... (E 672)

In other words, to woodcut on copper, the ground was first applied to the copperplate and then smoked, and once hard was scraped off in lines with an etching needle or echoppe before being etched. (A ground is simply an acid resistant substance with which the plate is covered. Once the ground is hard, an artist can control the etching of the plate by exposing parts of it to the acid simply by scratching lines through the ground.) The term "woodcut on copper" is used because, although fine lines were etched into the copperplate as in intaglio printing, the plate was actually printed like a woodcut, i.e. as a relief plate, the thin recessed lines thus appearing white against a solid dark background as in the frontispiece to Europe and Milton plate 1 (figs. 1 and 5). The initial preparation for etching a design in the "woodcut on copper" technique is thus identical with the preparation of a plate for printing the text in intaglio, as in The Book of
Ahania: an etching ground is first applied and then smoked in each case. The only difference is in the inking and printing of the plates—one is in relief and the other in intaglio.

Ground may be added to a plate either as a solid or as a liquid. Blake obviously used a liquid ground for the text and design of his standard relief plates, but for intaglio work and especially for "woodcut on copper" with its abundance of crosshatched lines he would have used a solid ground since a liquid ground "will...tend to crack off in the acid especially where a number of lines cross each other." To lay this hard or "ball" ground, the copperplate is held in a hand-vice and heated until very hot. When it is hot enough, a ball of ground is dabbed onto the plate, each dab being about an inch apart. These smoking spots of ground are then smeared across the surface of the plate until it is covered more or less evenly.

Immediately afterwards, while the plate is still hot, the ground is smoked to darken it and to ensure that its surface is perfectly smooth. A handful of candles are held in one hand and the plate, still in the hand-vice, in the other. The plate is then passed slowly over the edge of the flames, with the grounded side down, so that the carbon mixes with the still wet ground. "The soot will blend entirely with the ground, leaving a brilliant black surface which becomes dull black on cooling." Occasionally, before it is cooled and immediately after the ground has been smoked, the plate is heated as hot as possible, till the ground itself smokes. It is then left to cool and harden.
As one might expect, Blake saw a wealth of metaphoric potential in the hot, fiery business of laying a ground and smoking a plate, and this potential is realized in *The Book of Ahania*—a poem in which Blake's development of the metaphors is at its peak. In this stage of his career, just after *Urizen* was written, Blake's use of the metaphors is detailed and sophisticated enough to present his old techniques clearly and to incorporate new ones, and yet is recently evolved and newly mature so that the metaphors are still holding their form firm before fading back somewhat into the texture of Blake's thought as they do in the later poems. In the very complex and dense group of metaphors that opens *The Book of Ahania*, Blake's experience of working an inflexible and dark sheet of metal with flame, etching needle, and acid is developed into a myth of a youthful, fiery, phallic Orc figure attacking an aged, inflexible, and impotent representative of the old order. In Chapter I, Fuzon is clearly a stand-in for Orc; in terms of the metaphors, he specifically assumes Orc's role as the spirit of the fiery acid and is associated with the same phallic imagery, but in a more general sense represents the energetic principle of fire in its various manifestations as flame, acid, or beam of light. In this sense Fuzon can be seen as an embodiment of the creative role of Blake himself for the spear and arrow images with which he, as Orc principle, is closely identified "are quasi-phallic symbols of the release of imaginative power." But in this
respect they also function as the metaphoric representations of the various quasi-phallic elements of Blake's process of production: literal flames, graver, échoppe, and acid itself; and Fuzon's attack can therefore also be read as a dramatization of Blake's literal creative activity. Fuzon's opponent is, predictably, Urizen, who functions as the passive, though resistant medium upon which the informing creative energy is released. In this context, that medium would be, of course, the copperplate, and we do indeed find that the "Disk of Urizen" (metonymy for Urizen himself) is effectively described as a copperplate, a "beaten mass" which "was forg'd in mills where the winter/Beats incessant; [for] ten winters the disk/Unremitting endur'd the cold hammer" (Ah 2:23-25, E 83). (The emphasis on the hammering identifies it as the etcher's beaten, as opposed to rolled, copperplate.)

Chapter I of Ahania embodies what is probably the densest conflation of the processes of illuminated printing in Blake's poetry, but given the relatively clear metaphoric identification of the two major opponents, it is possible to trace out coherent descriptions of laying the ground, and smoking and etching the copperplate. Pictured as a Christ-like warrior (i.e. the active aspect of the creative principle), Fuzon first emerges as the fire principle in its literal form, the flaming and smoking group of candles which confront the darkening copperplate early in the process of production:

Fuzon, on a chariot iron-wing'd
On spiked flames rose; his hot visage
Flam'd furious! sparkles his hair & beard

On clouds of smoke rages his chariot
And his right hand burns red in its cloud

Son of Urizen's silent burnings  (Ah 2:1-9, E 83)\textsuperscript{10}

In moving on to verse two, we observe again the by now almost
formulaic paradigmatic transitions last observed in America:
the two opponents are first pictured simply confronting one
another, then the active principle delivers a somewhat for­
malized speech before the two elements of the creative process
proceed to battle. Fuzon's taunting challenge to Urizen is
full of the imagery we would expect to associate with a copper­
plate, especially one that has just been darkened by smoking:

Shall we worship this Demon of smoke,
Said Fuzon, this abstract non-entity
This cloudy God seated on waters
Now seen, now obscur'd...  (Ah 2:10-13, E 83)\textsuperscript{11}

After this introduction of the opponents and caustic
speech that is itself a fiery flame, the fiery, creative prin­
ciple attacks the copperplate in what is the start of the true
creative activity of the poem:

The Globe of wrath shaking on high
Roaring with fury, he threw
The howling Globe: burning it flew
Lengthning into a hungry beam. Swiftly

Oppos'd to the exulting flam'd beam
The broad Disk of Urizen upheav'd  (Ah 2:16-21, E 83)

In this conflation of various stages of production, Fuzon's
attack of Urizen takes the form of a lengthening fiery beam for
several reasons that can be explained if we retain a clear sense
of what is being described on the physical level of Blake's techniques. First, Fuzon's lengthening fiery beam attacking Urizen is an image of the échoppe scratching a line through the ground and exposing the surface of the copperplate which figuratively upheaves as a solid substance in opposition to the edge of the needle. But when the fire principle Fuzon attacks as acid, the same line becomes quite literally a burning, hungry beam that "[tears] through/ That beaten mass: keeping its direction/ The cold loins of Urizen dividing (Ah 2:27-29, E 83). (It is interesting to note that Fuzon's hungry beam is directed at Urizen's loins just as the fiery Orc specifically attacks the shadowy female's loins in the Preludium to America.) But the same fiery track that cuts a path through the smoke/ground of the plate is also a beam of light, for when executing "woodcut on copper," Blake "[begins] with the spots of light on each object [and] with an oval pointed needle [scrapes] off the ground" (E 672). In other words, when the plate is printed, Fuzon's "exulting flam'd beam" will appear as a white shaft of light against a dark background as do the sun's beams on the frontispiece to Europe (fig. 1). This dramatization of Blake's techniques thus develops into what is, if not a description of the design on the plate, at least the embodiment of a portion of that design since Fuzon's spear/beam essentially is the collective defining lines of that design.12

Thus in one blow, as it were, we have seen the ground applied, the design scraped into it, the plate etched, and have
caught a glimpse of the printed design. But, with the exception of the beam of light in the design, the same metaphors accurately describe the formation of text in intaglio plates such as those actually used for The Book of Ahania, and this first section of the chapter can therefore be read as a metaphorical account of the physical production of the actual book that contains those metaphors—a characteristic feature of Blake's handling of the metaphors. Furthermore, Fuzon's fiery attack as the acid which divides Urizen's cold loins also causes Ahania to be manifested as Urizen's parted soul, although she remains in a strangely potential form, "Unseen, unbodied, unknown" (Ah 2:42, E 84). In other words, the Ahania in the narrative logically functions as the representative of the poem Ahania itself as distinct from the copperplate which, in a sense, embodies it. Thus "Ahania" manifests as soon as the plate is etched, although she remains "[hidden]...in silence" (Ah 2:36, E 84) until the void of the copperplate is filled with ink and stamped on paper.13

The narrative of this level of the poem continues throughout Ahania, leading through the progressive stages of the process of production to the point where the book is finally completed and Ahania becomes articulate, delivering her lament in Chapter V. Although there is some conflation of distinct stages of Blake's techniques of production, the general development of Chapter II picks up the process where the plate has been etched, follows it through its inking and ends with the pulling of an
impression. As is common, the metaphoric identifications shift between chapters that represent different stages of the process of production and Urizen assumes Fuzon's role as the representative of Blake the artist—a reflection of the fact that with the printing process the plate shifts its role from a passive to an active principle which fecundates the paper. Thus Urizen's activity of preparing a bow and placing in it a rock (familiar metaphor for the copperplate) is Blake's activity of arranging the platepress and laying the plate in the bed before pulling an impression, and is associated with the same emphasis on silence that we have come to expect in this stage of production:

Then [Urizen] a Bow black prepar'd: on this Bow,
A poisoned rock plac'd in silence:
...the Rock
Poisonous source! plac'd with art, lifting difficult

This is the same rock/copperplate that makes another appearance in Chapter III as the "rock" which Blake/Urizen himself is responsible for shaping with his own imagination: "...he sat on a rock/ Barren; a rock which himself/ From redounding fancies had petrified" (Ah 3:56-58, E 85).

Before being laid in the press, the copperplate/rock is, of course, inked, a process that was recounted in two alternate versions at the start of the chapter. First, the inking is described in quite accessible imagery as torrents of mud rushing down from Urizen's mountains to settle thick in the valleys of
the intaglio plate, but this account modulates into a vision
of a poisonous serpent which approaches and "[pushes] furious"
(Ah 3:17, E 84) at Urizen:

Great the conflict & great the jealousy
In cold poisons: but Urizen smote him

First he poison'd the rocks with his blood
Then polish'd his ribs...

Then a Bow black prepar'd: on this Bow,
A poisoned rock plac'd in silence... (Ah 3:18-24, E 84)

This struggle and smearing of the rock with the blood of a
snake I take to be a metaphorical account of Blake smearing
the ink on the copperplate with a similarly phallic and snake-
like dauber or printer's ball. The distinct parallel with
intaglio techniques is continued with Urizen's polishing of the
ribs, which can be read as the next step in intaglio printing:
the careful wiping of the ink around the fine, rib-like lines
of the copperplate.

Once the plate is inked, wiped, and laid in the press,
Blake moves on to describe the printing process. In an extension
of the battle imagery that has consistently been applied to this
stage of production, the pulling of an impression is dramatized
as a violent act that, logically, reproduces in reverse the
flight of Fuzon's beam in Chapter I. As a representation of the
printing process, Urizen's attack on Fuzon (who here represents
the page) is presented in imagery that is very reminiscent of
the black winds that darken the pale, white landscape of The Book
of Urizen:
Sudden sings the rock, swift & invisible
On Fuzon flew...
His beautiful visage, his tresses,
That gave light to the mornings of heaven
Were smitten with darkness... (Ah 3:39-43, E 85)

Urizen's retaliatory attack thus at once depicts the printing process, and dramatizes the manifestation of the print as the reverse impression of the design on the copperplate.

The completion of this stage of production actually occurs in the next chapter with Urizen/Blake nailing Fuzon's newly-smitten "pale...Corse" (Ah 4:10, E 86) [italics mine] to the Tree of Mystery just as an etcher often hangs a freshly printed leaf of paper to dry. The only remaining stage of production is the fleshing out and enlivening of the corpse in the painting process that is recounted in Chapter IV. As in The Book of Urizen, the formation of the book is likened to the formation of a human body, although in Ahania, the addition of paint is described not as quenchless fires, but as clouds of pestilence swirling about the corpse. At any rate, these clouds produce living forms and the covering of the skeletal outline and text with colour and shape is presented as the gradual covering of bare bones with living flesh:

The clouds of disease hover'd wide
Perching around the hurtling bones
Disease on disease, shape on shape,
Winged screaming in blood & torment.

The shapes screaming flutter'd vain
Some combin'd into muscles & glands
Some organs for craving and lust (Ah 4:22-33, E 86-87)

This final emergence of living, substantial form into the poem
heralds its emergence as a completed physical entity, and the account of its physical production, which is really the story of its vegetation from eternal into physical form, ends with the conclusion of Chapter IV.

With the completion of the physical book in Chapter IV, Ahania becomes articulate and we hear her extended lament throughout the next chapter. This is in fact the fulfilment of the most important general pattern present in the poem. As in so many other poems we have looked at, the account of its physical production precedes the poem proper, although in this case, the formation of the physical book dominates the poem completely, and what might be called the true book of Ahania—the lament itself—is reduced to a single chapter added at the end. This transition that occurs with Chapter V is also in keeping with another typical pattern that we first observed in the Preludium to America: the dramatic shift in tone that occurs with the shift in point of view.

The "lamenting" voice of Ahania actually raises the poem to one of the highest lyric pitches of Blake's minor prophecies and this account of her experience of the creative process is in direct contrast to the always awesome and occasionally grotesque and surrealistic account that is transmitted to us in the first four chapters of the poem. In general terms, Ahania's lament can be read as the grief of an Eternal Form at being cast into generation:
Why didst thou despise Ahania
To cast me from thy bright presence
Into the World of Loneness (Ah 4:62-64, E 87)

And this sorrow is compounded by her longing for the sexual bliss she had experienced with the masculine, impregnating Urizen at the moment of union between paper and plate:

To arise to the mountain sport,
To the bliss of eternal valleys:

To embrace Ahania's joy
On the breadth of his open bosom:
From my soft cloud of dew to fall
In showers of life on his harvests. (Ah 5:8-14, E 88)

This exulting passage is charged with imagery characteristic of Blake's presentation of the printing process, but its reality as a lament over lost joys and its position between an intensely bitter introduction and conclusion cannot be overlooked as an essentially negative comment on the nature of the process of production itself.

In fact, the whole of The Book of Ahania can be seen as an exercise in the creation of a predominantly negative vision. Thematically, Morton Paley sees it as "a work very important in the development of Blake's thought" which is "The first poem in which Blake [takes] an entirely ironical and pessimistic view of the fate of Energy." This dark thematic development in Blake's myth which sees the energy principle as the son of Urizen, bound to its father in a recurring cyclic pattern is borne out by the highly "Urizenic" nature of the poem as a physical entity. Which is simply to say that when dealing with so self-conscious an artist as William Blake, one cannot ignore
the thematic implications of the strikingly different appearance of The Book of Ahania or The Book of Los, or simply dismiss the differences as only experimentation.

Two of these differences which are immediately obvious is their style of lettering and the complete lack of physical interrelationship between the text of the poetry and the designs, and both of these characteristics reinforce the identification of these poems as essentially negative, or at least ambiguous, statements. Once the prefatory material, titles, and chapter headings of both poems are passed and the poem proper begins, there is, without exception, no design in either poem until after the text of the poem comes to an end. This complete lack of even interlinear designs flies in the face of one of Blake's primary aims in the production of his illuminated books: the dynamic marriage of text and design as an integrated unit. Regarding the different style of lettering, since physical appearance here is a function of technique, Blake is confronting the reader with the fact that the poems were produced in intaglio printing. Robert Essick has, I think correctly, argued that Blake saw this technique as intrinsically limiting and "Urizenic"—i.e. closely tied to the Eighteenth Century's assembly-line commercial processes that stifled true art and degraded etchers and engravers. Again, Essick is referring to Blake's designs, but the point can be extended to the text of Ahania and The Book of Los because the very processes of intaglio etching are seen as the symbolic antithesis of the "true" art of Blake's relief
This point comes through quite clearly in Blake's metaphorical account of the etching of intaglio plates in *The Book of Los*, which should be compared to the demonic celebration of the etching process as the liberating and salutary fires of Hell in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. *The Book of Los* intersects the action of *The Book of Urizen* with the binding of Urizen, but the later poem is told from Los's perspective. However, the metaphorical constructs of both poems are very similar and the fierce and flaming activity of *The Book of Los*, Chapter I is another metaphorical account of the etching of a plate. In an identical pattern with *Urizen*, Chapter II, verse 5, the flames as acid eat into the plate and emerge into an abyss, Nature's wide womb: "mounting on high/ Into vacuum: into non-entity./ Where nothing was!" (BL 3:36-38, E 90). But unlike the earlier poem, *The Book of Los* strongly emphasizes the dominant position of the copperplate in intaglio etching, for the shape of the etched word is completely defined by the obstructing metal, and in contrast to the powerfully leagued flames of *The Marriage*, the rivers of liquid flame in intaglio etching are in fact divided and weakened as each group of flames is allowed to bite only a single word, or even a single letter, into the plate:

...the eternal fierce-raging
Rivers of wide flame; they roll round
And round on all sides making their way
Into darkness and shadowy obscurity

Wide apart stood the fires... (BL 3:39-43, E 90)

At the end of this account, instead of the triumph of the acid/
flame principle in cleansing the perceptions and heralding the Apocalypse as in *The Marriage*, the weakened flames subside and Los (personification of the creative principle and representation of the artist Blake) finds himself and his perceptions defeated and bound in by the domineering "Stone of Night":

The gigantic flames trembled and hid

... a Solid
Without fluctuation, hard as adamant
Black as marble of Egypt; impenetrable
Bound in the fierce raging Immortal.
And the seperated fires froze in
A vast solid without fluctuation,
Bound in his expanding clear senses (BL 4:3-10, E 90)\(^{21}\)

This defeat of the energetic flames by the stone—the limit of opacity—is, in part, Blake's comment on the intaglio technique; identifying it as an unacceptable and limiting substitute for his own relief method. But the negative comment on these two poems as limiting forms that ultimately betray their energetic potential is also the logical extension of a theme that has been running throughout all of Blake's poetry.

This is the theme of the paradoxical nature of the creative process, in which Blake's books of poetry themselves are seen as the product of a Urizenic process that binds Eternal Forms into the hard bonds of vegetative existence. As I have demonstrated, this theme is generally projected through the medium of the metaphors of illuminated printing. It is one of the central points behind Blake's presentation of the binding of the tiger into physical form, is implicit in the metaphoric parallel of his own
creation of The Book of Urizen with the creation of the material universe by Urizen, and is explicit in his handling of the creation theme in Ahania and The Book of Los. It is also the central theme of Blake's application of the metaphors of illuminated printing in the later poem Milton.

Blake's handling of the metaphors in Milton is unlike anything we have seen in the previous poetry, although if any parallels can be drawn, it is most reminiscent of the way the metaphors figured in the early poetry when they were just emerging from out of Blake's artistic experience and merging into his poetic vocabulary. There is no extended narrative of the process of book reproduction, and this is not simply a reflection of the general disregard of narrative as a unifying element of the poem, for neither are there any more than two or three indistinct discussions of individual stages of the process of production. What does emerge, though, is a strong sense of the broad outlines of the poem being structured around the general patterns of movement of the stages of Blake's process of production. This mature use of the metaphors is related to developments in other aspects of his art, for with Milton, Blake returns solidly to his basic relief etching techniques and is no longer experimenting (no copies of either Milton or Jerusalem are colour printed). Therefore this metaphoric level is not called upon to incorporate new techniques, and part of the interest of developing the metaphors into coherent patterns is obviated. And just as in Milton, Blake "[is] no longer concerned
with the mere exposition of his myth, because its distinctive features [are] by now second nature to him, "so too, he is no longer concerned with the mere exposition of his metaphors of illuminated printing for the same reason, and he seems decidedly more interested in using them as vehicles to develop the themes of the poem than in focusing the poem on the metaphors and developing them for their own interest.

Nevertheless, there are a few passages in the poem in which the presence of the metaphors becomes quite distinct, and of the several accounts of Milton's descent, one of the most important is clearly charged with the metaphors of Blake's illuminated printing. This is the fully-developed account of Milton's descent from Eden into Albion's bosom and Generation on plate 15 of the poem. As Edward J. Rose has pointed out in his article "Blake's Milton: The Poet as Poem," the figure Milton who exists in the poem is also the poem Milton; the poem is an embodiment of the state which that individual represents. But this poem which appears in the world of generation is actually a "glorious spiritual/vegetation" (M 25:60-61, E 121); it is only a shadow of the true poem Milton which exists as a state in the eternal realm of the imagination. Milton's descent into generation is thus an image of the descent of the true poem Milton into generation. If these analogies are applied in the literal spirit which frequently characterizes Blake's symbolic relationships, we can see that Milton's descent into generation is literally Blake's creation of the physical poem, which is
why the account of Milton's descent on plate 15 is informed with Blake's metaphors of illuminated printing.

Our familiarity with Blake's typical handling of the metaphors will establish clearly that it is specifically the printing of a page that is represented on this plate of Milton, but Blake makes an important innovation in this later presentation of the metaphors. Unlike in "The Tyger" where the tiger being created figuratively is the physical poem itself, and unlike in The Book of Urizen in which Urizen figuratively is the poem that is taking shape, in Milton, Blake draws a distinction between the true poem, the idea of Milton which exists only as an imaginative form, and the vegetative Milton which appears as printed page. Thus the true Milton retains its identity, remains in Eden, and is present at its own creation, so to speak, for only its shadow descends into vegetation with the formation of the physical book:

As when a man dreams, he reflects not that his body sleeps, Else he would wake; so seem'd he entering his Shadow: but With him the Spirits of the Seven Angels of the Presence Entering; they gave him still perceptions of his Sleeping Body; Which now arose and walk'd with them in Eden...

They saw his Shadow vegetated underneath the Couch Of death... (M 15: 1-10, E 108)

This is why, as Milton's shadow descends, he sees the paper and plate as objectified forms with which he fuses at the moment of the pulling of an impression.

Once this slight refinement in Blake's method of presenting the metaphors is incorporated into our vision, the passage be-
comes quite clear, for the other metaphors (copperplate as rock; page as pale form, outstretched and snowy cold upon the rock) are already familiar to us:

First Milton saw Albion upon the Rock of Ages,
Deadly pale outstretched and snowy cold, storm covered;

...the Sea of Time & Space thundered aloud
Against the rock... in its vortex Milton bent down
To the bosom of death, what was underneath soon seemed above.

...so Milton's shadow fell,
Precipitant loud thundering into the Sea of Time & Space.

(M 15:36-46, E 109)

Thus, at the moment when the ink below is transferred to the paper above, the poem Milton "enters" Albion's bosom and becomes "fixed into a frozen bulk subject to decay & death" (M 34:54, E 134) in the world of generation.

From the minute particulars of this type of metaphoric passage which is very much the exception in Milton (there are only a handful in this poem of fifty plates), we can expand our vision and see the larger themes of the entire poem as patterned after Blake's reproductive techniques. Central to this interpretation is a problem which permeates the poem as a whole on every level. This is the double perspective maintained in Milton, which forces us to see a series of sequential events from both a temporal perspective and from an eternal perspective in which they are reduced to a single moment, a "pulsation of the artery," the "Period [in which] the Poets Work is Done" (M 29:1, E 126). From the eternal perspective of this pulsation of an artery, the entire sequential creative process from the etching of the copper
to the printing and painting of the plates is reduced to a single, symbolic action in which all the plates of Milton are manifested simultaneously. In terms of the metaphors, this instantaneous symbolic act which paradoxically takes the length of the poem to transpire, is represented in a conflation of the two major stages of production: the etching of the plate (Milton casting off Satan) and the printing of the paper (Milton's union with Ololon).

On the title page of Milton (fig.5) we see the poet striding forward, his hand upraised to cut through the smoke of the errors and false doctrines which he must annihilate. In at least two copies he is striding into fire (in C Milton's feet are licked by very pronounced flames and in D he is completely enveloped in fire), and in his recent book devoted to Blake's vision of Milton, J. A. Wittreich, Jr. interprets these as flames of purification. In other words, the design represents Milton as he goes forward to cast off his Selfhood, "the unregenerate ego whose 'Opacity'...screens off from the isolated individual the knowledge that he belongs to a human community."25

In terms of the metaphors, this act is analogous to the etching of the plate. This is why Milton's pledge at the end of the poem to "wholly purge [error] away with Fire" (M 41:27, E.141) and defeat the Negation which is "an Incrustation over [his] Immortal/Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated alway/ To cleanse the Face of [his] Spirit" (M 40:35-37, E 141), is so strikingly reminiscent of Blake's salutary and
medicinal acids that will expunge man's false concepts and cleanse his perceptions in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Thus on plate 1, Milton as the archetypal plate of the poem *Milton* begins his movement towards the final Harvest and Vintage at the end of the poem by stepping into the purging and corrosive fires of the acid bath.

The "Great Harvest & Vintage of the Nations" at the end of the poem is the symbolic union of grapes and wheat, wine and bread, ink and paper that heralds the creation of *Milton* itself. The identification of harvest imagery with the printing process runs throughout Blake's work, but a specific identification of the Harvest & Vintage with printing occurs earlier in *Milton* where we are told that this activity takes place in Los's wine-press, *i.e.* Blake's plate press:

- The Wine-press on the Rhine groans loud...
  - Where Human Thought is crush'd beneath the iron hand of Power.
  - There Los puts all into the Press, the Opressor & the Oppressed [*i.e.* plate and paper]
  - Together, ripe for the Harvest & Vintage... (*M* 25:3-7, *E* 120)

Two plates later, we are told explicitly that "This Wine-press *is* the Printing-Press/ Of Los; and here he lays his words... above the mortal brain/ As cogs are formd in a wheel to turn the cogs of the adverse wheel" (*M* 27:8-10, *E* 123).

This Harvest and Vintage which *is* the printing of the plates of *Milton* is dramatized pictorially by the very positioning of the plates of the poem. On plate 1 we see Milton as copperplate simultaneously stepping into the acid bath and toward the final
harvest of his union with Ololon as paper. The counterpart to this design is plate 50 (fig. 6), the final plate in the poem, where we see Ololon as the passive, receptive paper flanked by her emblems of wheat, arms ready to receive the ink/wine of the plate Milton as he moves toward her. Blake underlines the sexual symbolism in this fulfilment of the creative process in that Ololon and her outstretched arms form the female pudendum between the thighs of the stalks of wheat, the sexual counterpart to the erect phallus represented by Milton on plate 1. This sexual union of male plate and female paper that spans the length of the entire poem reproduces pictorially the same general outlines of Blake's creative process around which the events of the text are structured. Clearly, in this mature period, Blake's use of the metaphors has evolved into a basic structural principle of his poetry, and when Milton and Ololon up ascend from Felpham's Vale as the final fulfilment and creation of the poem Milton, they are also the fulfilment of the metaphors of illuminated printing that had been slowly developing throughout the course of Blake's career.

These metaphors of illuminated printing are, of course, only one level of Blake's poetry, and in so far as this is true, this thesis offers a rather limited perspective of Blake's work. But it is not limiting, for this reading of these metaphors in no way denies the various political and psychological interpretations of what is obviously a very rich and complex poetic texture. In relating the metaphors to the larger outlines of Blake's
thought, what is interesting in the poem *Milton* is that even when the metaphors have largely dropped out of Blake's work, the general patterns of his process of production remain as an important structural principle in the poem. And this tendency can be observed throughout his poetic career in the development of his ideas on the Apocalypse and on perception, in the patterns of interaction between the Orc and Urizen figures, in the abundance of separating forms, and, indeed, in the conspicuous emphasis on contraries and reversals throughout Blake's poetry. So many aspects of his poetry, so many elements of his thought are expressed in terms of, or are either derived from or analogous to the basic experience of an etcher and printer that this process clearly establishes itself as one of the fundamental governing and organizing principles of Blake's poetic vision.
1. Frontispiece to Europe, Copy L.
This is shown 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 Christ's death, he became Jehovah.

But in Milton, the Father is Destiny, the Son, a ratio of the five senses, the Holy Ghost, Vision.

Note. The reason Milton wrote in letters was he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it.

A Memorable Fancy.

As I was walking among the fires of Hell, delighted with the enjoyments of Genius, which to Angels look like torment and insanity. I collected some of their Proverbs, thinking that as the saying used in a nation, mark its character, so the Proverbs of Hell show the nature of Infernal Wisdom better than any description of buildings or garments.

When I came home, or the abyss of the five senses, where a flat sided steep brown over the present world. I saw a mighty Devil folded in black clouds, hovering on the sides of the rock, with cur
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.

For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at tree of life, and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed and appear infinite and holy whereas it now appears finite and corrupt.

This will come to pass by an improvement of sensual enjoyment.

But first the notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; thus I shall do by printing in the internal method, by excreta, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid.

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 clumps of his cavern.
5. Plate 1 of Milton, Copy B.
To go forth to the Great Harvest & Vintage
of the Nations

Finis

6. Plate 45 of Milton, Copy B [Plate 50 in Copy D].
Chapter I: Introduction

Although Bloom (E 889) identifies the iron pens as derived from Job 19:24 and Jeremiah 17:1, this reference anticipates Blake's later very common metaphor of a rock for a copperplate, and an iron pen is a natural metaphor for a burin or graver. The passage may therefore provide us with an early glimmer of Blake's ambition of using his craft as a method of disseminating his "words of truth." (This poem was almost certainly written during the years of Blake's apprenticeship to an engraver.)

Erdman notes that the "Introduction" is "possibly of late composition" (E 714), which may suggest that it was written in retrospect after the experience of producing several poems had impressed the importance of his techniques upon Blake. We will see that Blake's metaphorical discussion of his printing techniques is often presented in an introductory passage that was written after the poem proper.


In Blake's method of relief printing, the ink is transferred to the paper from the raised surfaces of the copperplate. In intaglio printing, however, furrows are cut or etched into the plate, the ink is deposited in these cut lines, and in printing, the paper is forced into the furrow and receives the ink.
Notes to Pages 7-15

6 S. W. Hayter, *New Ways of Gravure* (1949; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1966), p.33. Hayter was the technical genius behind Ruthven Todd's 1948 re-discovery of Blake's etching methods, and this is certainly the most helpful technical book in my bibliography.


9 See Keynes, *Blake Studies*, p.125.

10 Blake was probably using the press he had retained from the dissolution of his print-selling business with James Parker, as G. E. Bentley suggests in *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p.29, n.3.


Chapter II: The Book of Urizen


2 By paralleling the birth of a vegetative man with the creation of the universe and the disruption of the human psyche, Blake dramatizes in *Urizen* one of his fundamental concepts: the creation and fall of a man is the creation and fall of the universe. For more on this theme, see Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, p.41.
Notes to Pages 17-19

3This engraver's copperplate is dark because the plates are commonly "smoked" (i.e. heated and covered with a film of carbon) to darken and smooth the ground. The copperplate is a void for several reasons, some of which we will get to later. First, it is a void because a fresh copperplate is an expanse of unformed, unorganized matter untouched by the hand of the creator. It is also true that before being engraved, a plate was polished to a fine finish and looking into it, Blake may have imagined himself looking into a vast expanse that would, moreover, become infinite and have palaces built in its cliffs in the etching process (see MHH: 15). In the course of this thesis, it will also become clear that terms such as "shadow" and "abstracted" are also commonly applied to the copperplate for similar reasons.

4In his annotations in The Illuminated Blake (Garden City: Anchor, 1974), p.156, David Erdman has also noted that The Ancient of Days is a comment on Blake's own engraving technique: "Yet we can see that art transcending time has fixed this vision, that beneath the shifting color masses of the clouds an engraver with tools as pointed as the compasses has fixed their shapes with infinite labor of cross-hatching." Urizen is also distinctly an intaglio etcher on the title page of Urizen where he is holding an échoppe (etching needle) in his right hand.

5Keynes, Blake Studies, p.146.

6"Mountains" occasionally identifies the raised surface of the copperplate (as in Ah 3), but this is rare and is always in the context of mountains or hills and valleys (valleys representing the etched depressions of the plate).

7Although a "self contemplating shadow" is a fairly apt description of Urizen as a copperplate that is always confronted by its own reverse image, the appropriately Urizenic perspective of this entire book produces a decidedly glum if not bitter self-portrait of the obscure and neglected poet/prophet performing the labours of Eternity for the benefit of futurity: "Unseen in tormenting passions;/ An activity unknown and horrible;/ A self-contemplating shadow,/ In enormous labours occupied" (U 3:18-22, E 69).
The thunder of the rolling press in operation is likened to the roar of swelling seas because Blake's workshop is situated on the shores of the Sea of Time and Space. It is with the rolling of the plate press that the eternal form of Blake's poems vegetates into physical existence, so Blake finds himself working knee deep in brine with the roar of the waves in his ears.

See, for example, A 2:5 (E 51), and the bottom design on MHH: 6 (fig.3) discussed on pp.52-53.


Many of the precise details of Blake's techniques remain obscure, but occasionally the metaphors of these techniques in the poetry may be useful in illuminating them. It is interesting to note that this description of the inking of a plate is identified as a rolling process: "... clouds of blood roll'd/ Round the dim rocks...." Todd has maintained that Blake inked his copper not with a roller, but with another inked plate, and notes that rollers were not used in inking until about 1813 ("The Techniques of William Blake's Illuminated Printing" [1948], in The Visionary Hand, p.40). John Wright has challenged this on technical grounds and suggests that the innovative Blake "used a wooden roller, perhaps a large press cylinder, both to ink plates directly and to distribute the ink on an inking plate" (Blake Newsletter, 26 [1973], 39). The evidence here in support of Wright's claim is slim, but we will find that Blake's handling of the metaphors can be remarkably precise.

The design on this plate (U 4) shows the plate as Urizen submerged in the acid bath, surrounded by liquid flames of acid which also seem to pour down upon him.

Blake's representation of an etched copperplate as a cavern also emphasizes the depth that the etching process adds to the otherwise two-dimensional surface of the copper-plate.
Notes to Pages 28-32

14 Blake seems to have done his best to make this passage more obscure. This rock, identified in Chapter III as the "rock of eternity" should not be confused with the copperplate. In addition, although the logical order of the stages of production clearly requires that this action precedes the printing of the plate at the opening of the chapter, Blake intentionally confuses the issue by shifting the tense into the present, thus rearranging the stages of production. This is a favourite ploy—see Erdman's article in Essays for S. Foster Damon, p. 411.

15 The mysterious and transforming passageway between the rollers of the plate press is often described as a dark or secret place, as in E 2:18, E 60.

16 Actually Blake gives us two alternative passages which may describe this design: U 4:31-33, E 71 and U 4:41-44, E 71. The second passage is more likely because, speaking technically, at the time of the earlier passage, The Book of Urizen has not yet been manifested as a printed book and thus some of the potential power of Blake's metaphor would be lacking.

17 These two passages describing the painting of the pages are separated by lines which describe in dramatic language the climactic separation or rending of paper and plate which precipitates the emergence of Urizen's world/book on the physical plane. This is the first of several such accounts of separating forms in Urizen, several of which seem to participate in the same general analogy with Blake's techniques. In this case, the interjected narrative of separation suggests the alternating pulling and painting of the many plates that make up The Book of Urizen.

18 The shift in the representational value of the fire is simply another example of the well-recognized polysemous nature of Blake's symbolism in which a snake may be the serpent of materialism or a modulation of the liberating Orc figure, depending on context, or a tiger may symbolize the demonic or divine forces of the world, depending on our perspective.

19 Erdman comments on the often interchangeable metaphoric representation of copperplate and printed plate on p. 411 of his article in Essays for S. Foster Damon.

20 This technique, which is discussed on pp. 68-69 below, helps to explain the abundant imagery of fire falling from out of the sky in Blake's poetry. Compare also the design on U 4 which shows an Eternal--Urizen I suspect--tormented in a downpour of raining fire.
Notes to Pages 35-39

21 Interestingly, there is a distinct concomitant shift in the moral implications of each creation. Urizen's essentially negative creative act (it is the physical expression of the catastrophic disruption of the primal unity) modulates into the more positive creative act of Chapter IV. Los's binding of Urizen is the same event, but now we look at it from a different perspective and see the positive aspect of what remains an inherently negative activity. Los's binding of Urizen is desirable because necessary; he is essentially giving form to error so that it can be cast out.

22 The design on this plate (U 10) presents this etching of a plate pictorially by dramatizing Los as the representative of the acid that is his tool "going at the rock [i.e. the copperplate] with his hands, causing gaps to open between the rocks" (Erdman, The Illuminated Blake, p.192).

23 This progressive fleshing out of Urizen's physical form in the sulphurous lake of fire can also be traced through the designs on plates 8, 11, and 12. See also Erdman's comments on these designs in The Illuminated Blake for his awareness that Blake is presenting aspects of his etching process in the designs of The Book of Urizen.

Chapter II: The Poetry Before Urizen

1 I am thinking here of "The Tyger" and The Marriage of Heaven and Hell. The chronology of these two poems, and of America: A Prophecy which I will also discuss in this chapter, is a difficult point: the actual composition of The Marriage and America extended over several years and as a result there is considerable overlapping. Martin Nurmi cites 1792, or at the latest 1793, as the date of composition of the Notebook drafts of "The Tyger" ("Blake's Revisions of 'The Tyger,'" PMLA 71 (1956), rpt. in The Tyger, ed. Winston Weathers (Columbus, Ohio: Merrill, 1969), p.36, and Erdman narrows this further, setting late 1792 as the limiting date (E 714). The composition of The Marriage extended from 1790-93, but since all of the passages I am concerned with (excepting plate 6) are identified by Erdman as late additions to the poem (E 723), I take 1793 to be the operative date. America was written 1792-94 (E 724) and since I deal with the Preludium, which was composed after the rest of the poem was completed, I take late 1793 or 1794 as its period of composition. For the passages which I discuss in this chapter, the likely order of composition is therefore "The Tyger," The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and America.
Notes to Pages 40-50

2 Blake does introduce the technique of woodcut on copper around 1793 (see E 672).

3 See pp. 77-78.


5 Adams, in The Tyger, p. 59. Also, although the tears can be read as a symbol of the creator's contrition, "the watering" of heaven at this point in the creative process also suggests the washing of the copperplate, which must be done immediately to stop the action of the acid.

6 See Warren Stevenson, Divine Analogy, Salzburg Studies in English Literature, No. 25 (Salzburg: Institut Für Englische Sprache und Literatur, Universität Salzburg, 1972), pp. 287-90 for a discussion of the analogies between the creation myth presented in "The Tyger" and The Book of Urizen, although he sees the creation as an unambiguous "victory over the primordial powers of darkness."

7 It is possible to plot the development of Blake's use of the metaphors in The Marriage to some extent by applying David Erdman's dating of Blake's style of lettering. According to the direction of the serif on the letter "g," Erdman concludes that plates 4, 7-10, 14-20, 25-27 have a later style of lettering than the rest of The Marriage (see E 723). Blake's overt and metaphoric references to his etching processes occur on plates 6-7, 14-20, 25-27 (perhaps excluding plate 16). The incidence of correspondence is striking and may even suggest part of Blake's reason for rewriting the sections he did. Assuming that late etching means late composition, we can envision a version of The Marriage with only limited reference to Blake's techniques of production emerging around 1790-91 and being extensively reworked (perhaps after the stage of realization represented by the manuscript of "The Tyger" ca. 1792) to include the metaphors of illuminated printing that so dominate the passages which were added late.
Notes to Pages 51-55

In fact, all of the published scholarship which discusses the metaphors of illuminated printing in Blake's text has been limited to The Marriage: on pp.410-13 of Essays for S. Foster Damon, David Erdman applies Blake's actual techniques to a discussion of the third "Memorable Fancy;" on pp.81-116 of Blake Studies 4 (1972), Morris Eaves offers a reading of the fourth "Memorable Fancy" as an allegory of Blake's printing techniques as seen from the devils' perspective; and in "Reading the Illuminations of Blake's of Heaven and Hell" in William Blake: Essays in honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973), pp.162-207 Erdman presents "a reading of the entire Marriage as a printed and illuminated account of Blake's 'method' of transmitting knowledge through print and illumination" (p.163).

In addition to these three articles, Erdman's annotations in The Illuminated Blake display an awareness that Blake's dramatization of his method of printing extends throughout his illuminated canon. (These notes are, however, limited to the designs.)

The illogicality of Blake "discovering himself" etching a copperplate must simply be understood in the context of the "dream logic" that informs the entire Marriage.


Ibid., p.412.

Ibid., p.411.

There is a special logic in this union as developed through the snake/paintbrush, since in the common technique of "spit-biting," acid is applied to small portions of the plate by a paintbrush. This image of the viper/paintbrush that spits out poison/acid is developed further in The Book of Ahania where the etching plate is a rock poisoned with the blood or venom of a serpent (E 84&85).

See the modulation of the Orc/acid figure into eagle, lion, whale (picture Blake's serpentine Leviathan, not Moby-Dick), and serpent proper in the Preludium to America, E 50 for another rendition of the same metaphor cluster.

See Ahania, Ch.II: 2-5 (E 84). We have also noticed this principle dramatized in the different metaphoric landscapes for the printing process in Urizen Ch.I: 6 and Ch.II: 3 (E 70).
Notes to Pages 56-60

17. In addition, we can note in passing that this account is typical of Blake's handling of the metaphors since Erdman also sees Blake as presenting the steps of the process of production in "scrambled sequence" and observes that "there is a conflation of processes throughout the account" (Essays for S. Foster Damon, p.413).

19. Ibid., p.108.
20. Ibid., p.108.

21. Although I would disagree with some of his minute identifications, I generally agree with Eave's explication. Any errors he makes are generally errors of omission, as in his failure to note the printing imagery present on plate 18 in which the rolling of blackening clouds is followed immediately by the appearance of Leviathan, i.e. the painting of the plate. The only serious flaw of Eaves's interpretation is his persistent confusion of intaglio and relief etching techniques, as on p.107 where he would have Blake smoking a relief plate, or in the last sentence of the article where he describes a line of text as etched into the plate as in intaglio etching: "Leviathan is the genius of the acid in which he swims as it flows at the bottom of an etched line, a canyon in the fiery landscape of the copper plate" (p.116).


23. In spite of the fact that Bloom asserts that Paracelsus' "writings were probably of small interest to Blake" (E 812).

24. Percival sees the fire symbolism in Blake as "undoubtedly alchemical" (William Blake's Circle of Destiny, p.214).

25. Ibid., p.201.


27. Ibid., p.330.
28. Ibid., p.328.

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30 For fire as water in alchemical symbolism, see ibid., p.213.


32 Blake's use of the metaphors of illuminated printing as vehicles for representing the Apocalypse is also carried over into the designs as an examination of plate 14 (fig.4) will show. The design can be effectively read as a pictorial rendering of Blake's most common conflation: etching and painting. The dead and stony-cold male figure is an easy representation of many of Blake's verbal images for a copper-plate; the significance of this figure being enveloped in flames is obvious in view of the handling of the metaphors in the text of this plate. The female figure outstretched above the recumbent figure would be the paper. (For variations of this central visual rendering of plate and paper, see the recurring images of a billowy and very much alive female figure stretched over a recumbent, dead male figure that is frequently associated with metal or armour, as in the title page of *America*.) In the conflation of the processes, then, the consuming flames of acid would double as the living flames of paint that rage across the paper. Blake makes the same analogy with the Apocalypse as in his text in that, as Essick points out in "The Art of William Blake's Early Illuminated Books," Diss. U. of Calif., San Diego 1969, p.153, this design is evidently intended as an image of the Apocalypse, the pictorial rendering of the lines "For the cherub with his flaming sword is hereby commanded to leave his guard at tree of life, and when he does, the whole creation will be consumed, and appear infinite..." (MH 14, E 38), since when the design was printed separately in *A Small Book of Designs*, it was printed with the caption "a Flaming Sword/Revolving every way" (E 662).

33 It has generally been assumed that this portion of the poem was composed last, and Erdman's dating of the lettering identifies it as a late section.

34 In *Blake: Prophet Against Empire*, 2nd ed. (1954: rpt. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1969), p.193, Erdman sees "A Song of Liberty" as a preliminary sketch of *America*, and it is clear that the political apocalypse present in the "Song" finds its fullest expression in *America*, which was published later in the same year. Since the development of its metaphors as well as its symbolism tends to prefigure that of *America*, it is helpful to keep one eye on the Preludium of the later poem while reading this final section of *The Marriage*. 
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36 Hayter, *New Ways of Gravure*, p. 11.


38 I would suggest that Blake's other books of large size that underwent posthumous printings, *Europe* and *Jerusalem*, may also display a similarly erased heavy border, although bibliographical descriptions of sufficient detail are as yet unavailable. The American Blake Foundation's planned facsimile of *Europe* (which should be published later this year) may help to resolve the question.


40 Erdman describes the Preludium as "added after the first etched state of [America]" in *The Illuminated Blake*, p. 139.

41 Blake is always very careful with the sexual identifications of the elements of his process of production. In the etching process, it is most appropriate that the active acid be male (e.g. Orc) and the passive plate female (e.g. the daughter of Urthona), whereas in the printing process, the plate is active and male (e.g. Milton) and the paper passive and female (e.g. Ololon). This higher call for symbolic consistency often supersedes literal consistency and partly explains Blake's habit of shifting names and sexual roles of the elements of production at will (i.e. the plate may be male or female in the same poem, or Fuzon may be acid at one time and paper in a later stage of production). Occasionally, Blake will stick with one identification through several stages, as with the male etching and printing plate of Urizen—which accounts for some of the hermaphroditic figures in Blake's poetry.

42 Cf. the Dragon-Viper-Eagle-Lion modulation of the acid in *MHH* 15, E 39.

43 Edward J. Rose, "Good-bye to Orc and All That," *Blake Studies*, 4 (1972), 144.
44 This transition from violence to joy and the laudatory tone of the shadowy female's utterance in celebration of the creative principle that gave her speech and essentially brought her to life should be compared to the transitional tone of Ahania's speech at the end of *The Book of Ahania* where she as painted page celebrates her creator in the form of Urizen, the plate.

45 The fiery embrace of the etching process is presented graphically on A8 and A10, with Orc and Urizen confronting one another as the opposing elements of the process of production: Orc is the acid and Urizen is, of course, the plate (plate 8 has appropriately been dubbed "The Stone of Night"). The mirrored gestures surely invite us to make a comparison (see Janet Warner, "Blake's Use of Gesture," in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, ed. David Erdman and John Grant [Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1970], pp. 174-95), and when these clearly complementary mirror-images are re-aligned, the Stone of Night is engulfed in the fierce flames of the acid bath.

46 This metaphoric function of the Preludium parallels its role on other thematic levels as George Quasha points out in his difficult, though valuable article "Orc as a Fiery Paradigm of Poetic Torsion" in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, pp. 263-84. Although he is not reading the metaphors of illuminated printing, Quasha sees the Preludium as "a mythical regression to a time 'earlier' than [America proper]" (p. 270) and adds that "the Preludium appears to produce the Prophecy, the primal rape generating...the symbolic drama of apocalypse" (p. 276).


48 In addition, we know that Blake "taught Mrs. Blake to take off the impressions [from his relief copperplates] with care and delicacy" (Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake*, I, 70).

49 It is particularly appropriate that the figure of the same shadowy female represents the plate in both poems, since *Europe* was etched on the reverse of the plates for America (see *America, Materials for the Study of William Blake*, Volume I, p. 5).

50 Douglas, p. 114.
Chapter IV: The Poetry After Urizen

1. The other great period centers on the year 1804 in which Blake began etching both Milton and Jerusalem.

2. The earliest colour-printed illuminated book is There is No Natural Religion (1788).

3. For the details of this development in Blake's colour printing technique, see Martin Butlin, "The Evolution of Blake's Large Colour Prints of 1795," in Essays for S. Foster Damon, pp.109-16. For the range of Blake's technical experimentation, see Laurence Binyon, The Engraved Designs of William Blake (London: Ernest Benn, and New York: Scribner's, 1926).


5. Keynes suggests that "The manner of their [i.e. The Book of Ahania and The Book of Los] execution suggests that Blake was wearying with the effort of making the splendid books that preceded them, and was seeking for a less laborious method of production. He accordingly experimented in these two smaller books with texts etched on copper in the conventional way and printed in intaglio plates" (Geoffrey Keynes, ed., William Blake, The Book of Ahania [Paris: Trianon Press, 1973], p.1). Keynes's conjecture of Blake's motives here is almost certainly wrong; it is precisely the ease of printing design and text from a single relief plate that is the beauty of Blake's method from a technical standpoint. Granted that the etching of a relief plate takes longer than an intaglio plate, but once the plates are etched, the subsequent production of any number of copies from relief plates is much easier for several reasons: the paper does not have to be wet, or stretched to dry; polishing and inking of the plate is much quicker; and printing is physically and technically easier and more reliable. Also, since the designs on these intaglio books were colour printed separately from the text, the procedure for producing a single page of design and text became quite involved. A craftsman of Blake's experience would have known these things in advance, and we would be wise to look for reasons other than ease of production to explain Blake's experimentation.


As the fiery flames licking across the copperplate, Fuzon is the sun as well as the son of Urizen's silent burnings. The pun is clinched at the bottom of the plate where Fuzon's fiery beam becomes physically one with the body of the sun. This metaphorical account of the smoking of a plate should be compared with that on plate 18 of *The Marriage* discussed by Eaves in his article in *Blake Studies* 4 (1972), 107.

Urizen (the copperplate) is an abstracted, shadowy demon and an abominable void in Chapter I of *Urizen*, and in the Preludium to *America*, the plate is repeatedly associated with clouds (there possibly representing the acid resist since they seem to partially thwart Orc's embrace).

Another possible reading of this passage would see Blake applying the ground to the plate before it is smoked. In this reading, the "Globe of wrath" which Fuzon/Blake throws at the plate/Urizen would be the ball of ground which lengthens into a fiery beam as the dabs of smoking ground are then smeared across the surface of the plate.

The identification of Ahania with the poem itself which is embodied in the copperplate is also present in the frontispiece to *The Book of Ahania* which shows an awakened, expressive, and apparently articulate Ahania completely enclosed by the hulking, introspective, brute form that is Urizen.

Although the inking dauber or printer's ball was the standard method of applying ink in Blake's day, Blake himself would have used this technique only in inking an intaglio plate, thus the metaphors are again consistent with the specific techniques associated with the books that embody them. It is interesting that a snake-like or phallic instrument is associated with the inking process only in this intaglio-printed poem. The serpent can also be read as another manifestation of the serpentine genius of the acid, born of the bubbles/eggs of the etching bath and attacking the plate with its poison, or acid. In this respect, this account may also modulate into a representation of the spit-biting technique in which a snake-like paintbrush spits its corrosive venom on the copperplate.
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15 If it is indeed the production of The Book of Ahania itself that is being described, it is interesting that Fuzon's corpse is hung like a leaf "On the topmost stem of this Tree" (Ah 4:7, E 86) just as his corpse appears at the bottom of the last plate of the poem.

16 In this case, this body would most appropriately be identified as Ahania's, although even in the final chapter, we are told that "no form/ Had she" (Ah 4:49-50, E 87).

17 The very close affinity of this portion of Ahania with the story of Urizen's binding by Los in Chapter IV (b) of Urizen is the key that indicates that the painting of the plates here is again typically conflated with the etching process. The "noxious clouds; [that hover] thick/ Over the disorganiz'd Immortal" (Ah 4:18-19, E 86) represent the various literally noxious gases that are produced as a by-product of the etching process, depending on the type of acid used. (Etching should always be done near an open window or with a fume extractor.) Robert Wilson, a professional etcher, engraver, and print-maker, tells me that when etching copper with ferric chloride, a dark yellowish chlorine gas that is heavier than air will collect over the surface of the etching bath and spill onto the floor: another identification for "The clouds of disease [that] hover'd wide/ Around the Immortal in torment" (Ah 4:22-23, E 86)?


19 Paley, Energy and the Imagination, p.81.

20 There is, of course, no technical impediment in producing designs in an intaglio plate, as proved by some of Blake's other intaglio work such as The Gates of Paradise.

21 The title page of The Book of Los, which shows Los bound in by the rock/intaglio copperplate, should be compared to Urizen plate 10 which shows Los energetically breaking his way through the "rock" of the relief plate.


26 Erdman surely confuses the sexual symbolism of the poem in his commentary on plate 2 (The Illuminated Blake, p.218) in which he identifies the female embracing the grapes on the right as the personification of the female grapes/wine, and the male embracing the wheat on the left as the personification of the male wheat/bread. I would suggest that this plate, too, dramatizes the Harvest & Vintage theme and each figure is in fact embracing its opposite. The true sexual identity of these emblems is gleaned from the small shaft of wheat that springs from the female's thigh and the small vine tendril that circles towards the male's thigh.
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