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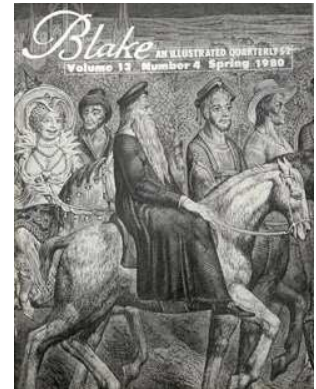
# BLAKE

A R T I C L E

## Milton and the Pangs of Repentance

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# MILTON AND THE PANGS OF REPENTANCE

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In several pronouncements on the subject of imagination, Blake expresses a ringing disdain for memory as a visionary resource. Blake's confrontation with memory begins with the issue of artistic influence, and what he considers a slavish dependance on neoclassical forms; but once it has entered his vocabulary of ideas, the problem of retrospection comes to assume a more general significance. In *Milton*, *Jerusalem*, and various pieces of prose, Blake makes it clear that memory combines with reason and nature to form an unholy trinity of fallen mentality. Interpreters of Blake have defined memory as the unsuccessful appropriation of the past--that is, when some gap remains between time past and time present, some distortion or fragmentation of knowledge, or anxiety of unfulfilled desire. "Memory records and recalls unredeemable time; that is, memory *is* unredeemable time--time past."<sup>1</sup>

Blake announces in *Milton* that the poet's time is "a Moment," the period in which "all the Great / Events of Time start forth & are conceivd" (29:1-2).<sup>2</sup> Readers of *Milton*, informed by Blake's concept of momentary time, and by the folded, simultaneous structure of the epic, have described this poem's great event as a triumph over time. Susan Fox defines a central event in *Milton*, and observes: "All perspectives focus on a single instant, the instant of the purgation and union of Milton and Ololon, the instant in which past and future are joined in the abolition of time."<sup>3</sup> The abolition of time would mean the end of temporal dislocation, and in particular, of a separation between past and

present. *Milton* would thus achieve a victory over memory.

If *Milton* can be described as an attempt to overcome the separation between past and present, it does not succeed merely by rejecting memory. Nor does it offer any simple solution to the problems that memory brings. *Milton* must really be called a memory poem--an epic about what it means, in several different ways, to appropriate the past. On a basic level, after all, this is Blake's attempt to remember Milton; or from another perspective, his effort to recollect three years of experience at Felpham. The most telling aspect of memory in *Milton* has to do with repentance, the retrospective effort to cope with transgression and guilt. Ololon, a key figure in such a discussion, provides the appropriate descriptive phrase: resolving to descend, she tentatively refers to the turmoil of the lower world as "the pangs of repentance" (21: 50).

Repentance occupies *Milton* in several ways. At the simplest level, Milton comes back to repent of his misapprehensions and correct the harmful consequences of his poetry. Milton is only one of several characters who recognize past errors and try to undo their effects. By the middle of the first book, Leutha, Los, and Ololon have all made significant admissions of guilt. *Milton* as a whole could be taken as a complicated act of repentance on the part of Blake: he corrects the simple and rather slighting treatment he had earlier given Milton; through Los, he regrets the revolutionary



impatience of a younger prophetic voice; binding "all this vegetable world" to his left foot as a scandal, he converts previously alien or destructive natural images into vehicles of imagination. In his explicit comments on the subject, Blake scorns memory as a passive and defeated faculty. Repentance constitutes a form of memory with real power, since it manages to lift the oppressive burden of a regretted past. But repentance includes both an active and a passive element--appropriately enough, in this poem so concerned with the relations between masculine and feminine. In its passive aspect, repentance takes on the burden of the past. An act of recognition and appropriation must precede anything else, as an individual chooses to be responsible for something which has come before. The active power of repentance attempts to annul the past, to obliterate the effects of what now appear harmful decisions. If dominated by the passive appropriation, repentance stagnates as insuperable guilt; if by the active power to annul, it imposes a strict moral judgment on a situation which cannot be so easily controlled.

After the trial of Palamabron in the Bard's Song, Satan's emanation, Leutha, comes forward to give a lengthy speech of repentance. The narrator introduces her as a Christ-like figure of self-sacrifice: "She down descended into the midst of the Great Solemn Assembly / Offering herself a Ransom for Satan, taking on her, his Sin" (11:29-30). Leutha begins by declaring, "I am the Author of this Sin; by my suggestion / My Parent power Satan has committed this transgression" (11:35-36). The question of responsibility has been thrown into some confusion. Blake refers to "his Sin," as if the primary fault belonged to Satan. Leutha attests to Satan's authority by calling him her "Parent power." But Leutha then claims priority in the origination of this sin. Perhaps a third possibility remains unstated--that part of Satan/Leutha is trying to keep the rest of Satan/Leutha innocent. This raises an important question. If we assume that the third explanation best describes the situation, responsibility has been deflected by dividing the self into a guilty fragment and an innocent essence. The female tendencies in Satan can be singled out for punishment. In this manner a sinner may be kept separate from his sin: the transgressing act, because it proceeds from accident instead of essence, does not represent a radical infection. Innocence holds indisputable priority over guilt, both as an origin and an end of human spirit. No sin can truly be called original unless it is fundamentally constitutive of identity. The nature of repentance depends on whether or to what extent these conclusions may be upheld.

Leutha confesses to sole responsibility for Satan's usurpation of Palamabron's harrow. This is a disaster for which Los has already accepted full blame: "Mine is the fault! I should have remember'd that pity divides the soul / And man, unman" (8:19-20). Los's confession emanates from a more sensitive, cerebral conscience than Leutha's; he assumes a more remote guilt, based on a misinterpretation rather than a sin of desire. As elsewhere, Los considers his power to "circumscribe this dark Satanic death" of paramount importance, and he

believes his error to be primary. Los has had particular trouble with this case. His first judgment--"Henceforth Palamabron, let each his own station / Keep" (7:42-43)--sounds suspiciously like Satan's detested "principles of moral individuality" (9:26), and accomplishes little except to aggravate the emotional violence of the scene. When he afterwards takes the blame, Los again makes little or no progress toward a resolution of the conflict. Enitharmon creates moony spaces to protect the combatants, and the Eternal Assembly must be called in to straighten things out. The Eternals judge against Rintrah and his rage--or, as they later make clear, against the Rintrah in Satan. Like Leutha, whose confession follows the Eternal judgment as if to correct it, the Eternals propose a division of Satan into separate parts. So far the guilt for Satan's sin has been assigned to Los, Rintrah, and Leutha. In attempting to probe more deeply than *Paradise Lost* into the origins of Satanic transgression, *Milton* finds an abundance of guilt, but cannot establish an alternative central responsibility.

Leutha's speech of repentance begins with a forthright admission of guilt, but as she continues, the nature of her sin and the quality of her repentance come to seem much more problematic. Confessing to love and jealousy, she opens with a definitive analysis of her motives:

I loved Palamabron & I sought to approach his  
Tent,  
But beautiful Elynittria with her silver arrows  
repell'd me.  
For her light is terrible to me. I fade before  
her immortal beauty.  
O wherefore doth a Dragon-form forth issue from  
my limbs  
To sieze her new born son? Ah me! the wretched  
Leutha!  
This to prevent, entering the doors of Satans  
brain night after night  
Like sweet perfumes I stupified the masculine  
perceptions  
And kept only the feminine awake. hence rose  
his soft  
Delusory love to Palamabron: admiration join'd  
with envy  
Cupidity unconquerable!

(11:37-13:8)

Leutha's first emotion is love of Palamabron, and a desire to reveal herself to him. Elynittria obstructs her approach. Leutha's awareness of this blocking is a measure of her jealousy. Friendship or love intend a mutual exchange of essences, and jealousy recognizes a threat to the necessary act of appropriation. Leutha senses that Palamabron will save himself for Elynittria, who in her brightness must constitute a more appropriate lover. In order to cope with this obstruction, Leutha infects Satan with her jealousy; at this point Leutha and Satan come together as a single personality, although they will divide again by the end of her speech. Part of the difficulty of Leutha's confession stems from the fact that she and Satan at times seem united, at times distinct, and waver between priority and subordination in the control of their behavior.



The attachment to Palamabron takes the form of "admiration join'd with envy." Leutha's phrase reveals two aspects of friendship, difficult or impossible to keep separate, and always a source of severe contention: to what extent is friendship a matter of benevolent and generous influence, and to what extent does it consist of jealous restriction designed to keep the friend close? Admiration describes the positive emotion, the desire to share someone's life; envy suggests a darker side, the possibility that this can be accomplished only by restricting someone's choices, reducing him to controllable proportions. Satan/Leutha wishes to share in Palamabron's creativity, and takes over the harrow. As Palamabron's horses rebel against the alien control, Satan, now beginning to separate from Leutha, responds with acts of suppressive power:

Satan astonished, and with power above his own  
controll  
Compall'd the Gnomes to curb the horses, & to  
throw banks of sand  
Around the fiery flaming Harrow in labyrinthine  
forms.  
And brooks between to intersect the meadows in  
their course.

(12:16-19)

Satan's sin begins as admiration and expansion, and ends as jealousy and restriction. His astonishment must be genuine. What he intended to be a friendly exchange of influence has become a power struggle.

Now that Satan seems primarily responsible for the actions of Satan/Leutha, Leutha begins to separate as a dissenting fragment. When Palamabron's gnomes retaliate against Satan for making them follow his direction, Leutha "weeping hid in Satan's inmost brain" (12:36). Leutha's original desire was to approach Palamabron and reveal her love, but now she withdraws into Satan and hides in fear. The reflex fear suggests that guilt now dominates her emotions. Satan/Leutha has divided into a suppressive masculine part trying to shape Palamabron according to its own will, and a guilt-plagued feminine part retreating for protection into the masculine brain. In a moment of crucial influence, when Elynittria meets Satan, this separation becomes permanent:

For Elynittria met Satan with all her singing  
women.  
Terrific in their joy & pouring wine of wildest  
power  
They gave Satan their wine: indignant at the  
burning wrath.  
Wild with prophetic fury his former life  
became like a dream  
Cloth'd in the Serpents folds, in selfish  
holiness demanding purity  
Being most impure, self-condemn'd to eternal  
tears, he drove  
Me from his inmost Brain & the doors clos'd  
with thunders sound.

(12:42-48)

The incident is difficult to interpret, partly due to confusing syntax, partly because Leutha narrates rather elliptically. Elynittria and her women,

indignant at Satan's wrath, give him a heady dose of prophetic enthusiasm.<sup>4</sup> Newly inspired and brash with Palamabron's own sense of self-importance, Satan's urge to control Palamabron becomes stronger than ever. He banishes Leutha and the lingering guilt she represents.

As a dismembered sense of guilt, Leutha has come before the Eternals to repent. She considers Satan's refusal to do likewise the chief problem now facing them: "I humbly bow in all my Sin before the Throne Divine. / Not so the Sick-one; Alas what shall be done him to restore?" (13:3-4). But the value of Leutha's repentance is open to serious question. She concludes with a recollection of *The Four Zoas*:

All is my fault! We are the Spectre of Luvah  
the murderer  
Of Albion: O Vala! O Luvah! O Albion! O  
lovely Jerusalem  
The Sin was begun in Eternity, and will not  
rest to Eternity  
Till two Eternitys meet together, Ah! Lost!  
lost! lost! for ever!  
(13:7-10)

As Blake joins his second epic to his first, Leutha recognizes the archetypal pattern of her crime. Although she begins by reaffirming her guilt, her statement modulates into the passive voice--"The Sin was begun in Eternity": fading into the distance, the sin becomes less personal, less accessible. Accordingly, Leutha's guilt does not appear quite so crucial, nor does her repentance seem very effective. As she remembers the supposed key to the fall as presented in *The Four Zoas*, she manages only to repeat the helpless cry of Tharmas at the beginning of that poem--"Ah! lost! lost! lost!"

Leutha expects no relief "till two Eternitys meet together." Like many other "till" clauses in *Milton*, this one points forward and backward, describing a moment yet to come in which something that has already happened will be accounted for. Leutha knows that redemption must wait until origin is continuous with purpose, until memory coincides with imagination. In her helpless state she suggests that these eternities can never meet. Since the transgression dates from eternity, it would appear to be radically constitutive of human identity; if this is the case, men do indeed suffer under the burden of original sin. Leutha traced the origin of her sin back to a desire, her love for Palamabron, and its accompanying jealousy. Her speech of repentance attempts to annul this origin. Judging from her concluding despair, the project has not succeeded. The final incident related in the Bard's Song supports this pessimistic view: invited into Palamabron's bed, Leutha pursues her original desire, with most unfortunate results--"In moments new created for delusion" (13:39), she gives birth to Death and Rahab. Repentant Leutha has managed only to describe and commiserate over the disruptive desire which remains central to her identity.

Because Leutha finds her sin to be original, she faces an infinite and apparently impossible task of repentance. Repentance in its passive,



feminine aspect overwhelms the active power to change, and Leutha earns for her awareness of responsibility an oppressive guilt which she cannot remove. Kierkegaard describes the futility of repentance by suggesting that it creates a space impossible to fill. Repentance is the highest form of Kierkegaard's ethical stage, but at best this can only be a transitional sphere between the aesthetic and the religious. "The aesthetic sphere is that of immediacy, the ethical is that of requirement (and this requirement is so infinite that the individual always goes bankrupt), the religious sphere is that of fulfillment, but note, not such a fulfillment as when one fills a cave or a bag with gold, for repentance has made infinite room."<sup>5</sup> Blake would call this a female space: "The nature of a Female Space is this: it shrinks the Organs / Of Life till they become Finite & Itself seems Infinite" (10:6-7). *Milton*, preoccupied with the question of what it means to appropriate the past, wavers between two possibilities for the spaces created by repentance. On the one hand, they convince men of original guilt and subject them to hopeless struggles for exoneration; Satan's watch-fiends preside over this process, always vigilant "to condemn the accused: who at Satans Bar / Tremble in Spectrous Bodies continually day and night / While on the Earth they live in sorrowful Vegetations" (23:42-44). The other possibility is best articulated by Los, preaching patience to his sons:

We were plac'd here by the Universal Brotherhood  
& Mercy  
With powers fitted to circumscribe this dark  
Satanic death  
And that the Seven Eyes of God may have space  
for Redemption,  
(23:50-52)

Los creates redemptive space by retaining and guarding every moment of time: in the place of Satan's watch-fiends, the daughters of Beulah attend his work. Like Satanic guilt, Los's redemptive conservation is a product of retrospective vigilance. The daughters of memory can appear in the guise of watch-fiends or muses, depending on the prospects of repentance.

Drawing on Blake's fourfold cosmology,<sup>6</sup> we might describe four levels of repentance in *Milton*--or more precisely, four kinds of fault-finding, four ways of assigning guilt. Leutha's confession is the prototype of the second or Generation level. It differs from the first or Ulro type because Leutha acknowledges her own guilt: at the Ulro stage, an individual refuses any complicity in a violation and punishes someone else as the sole transgressor. Satan, the only bona fide representative of the Elect class in *Milton*, provides the model for this lowest level of repentance. Accusing Palamabron of ingratitude and malice, he thunders his judgment in a voice that parodies Jehovah's:

I am God alone  
There is no other! let all obey my principles  
of moral individuality  
I have brought them from the uppermost innermost  
recesses

Of my Eternal Mind, transgressors I will rend  
off for ever,  
As now I rend this accursed Family from my  
covering.

(9:25-29)

Los's sons present another version of the Ulro state, less exaggerated and more sympathetic, but fully representative of the type. They insist that Milton's arrival will aggravate the evils of war and religion, and urge violent counteraction:

Let us descend & bring him chained  
To Bowlahoola O father most beloved! O mild  
Parent!  
Cruel in thy mildness, pitying and permitting  
evil  
Tho strong and mighty to destroy, O Los our  
beloved Father!

(23:17-20)

Los claims to "have embraced the falling death," and counsels patience. But Los's first, instinctive reaction to Milton's descent was identical to his sons': "In fibrous strength / His limbs shot forth like roots of trees against the forward path / Of Miltons journey" (17:34-6). This image of obstruction contrasts with important images of communication or influence later in the poem. Los receives Milton as a star falling into his left foot; when messenger larks meet at the crystal gate, "back to back / They touch their pinions tip tip" (36:2-3).

Leutha best illustrates the second level of repentance. She takes full responsibility for the violation, but her admission leads to a double complication. First of all, Satan, as Leutha's complement, steadfastly resists her assumption of guilt. Taken as co-parts of a single personality, Leutha and Satan represent two competing attitudes toward repentance: Leutha, tormented by guilt and fear, willingly submits to self-accusation for the purgation she expects it to bring; Satan, reluctant to make himself an object of pity, and entirely sympathetic with his past actions, rejects her confessional self-punishment. Secondly, after Leutha has taken the blame, infinite guilt encloses her in a female space. Unable to get relief from this burden, she finds it convenient to forget the repentance and pursue her transgressing desire. Leutha repents in order to heal herself of the crime's effects, but when this brings only despair, she returns to her original mode of self-fulfillment. On the Generation level of repentance, an individual begins by admitting guilt; finding that this creates a divided self, partly relieved and partly rebelling against the self-degradation, he finds some way to suppress or eliminate his repentant sense of responsibility.

Another version of Generation repentance takes place when Los accepts blame for the conflict between Satan and Palamabron: "Mine is the fault! I should have remember'd that pity divides the soul / And man, unman" (8:19-20). Los does not realize that repentance can also divide the soul. Although the self-division caused by his confession is not nearly as pronounced as in the case of Satan and Leutha, it helps account for Los's self-doubt and



moments of despair. Los instinctively considers himself responsible for the chaos at the mills, but his repentance is premature and ineffective. At this moment of confession, Los doesn't really know what he is repenting of. He blames himself for forgetting the pernicious effects of pity, in effect apologizing to Palamabron for having sympathized with Satan's pity. But Los will later defend pity as he argues with his sons about the value of restraint. Los's instinct for repentance generates an internal conflict of considerable importance.

The third method of assigning guilt, the Beulah level, reacts against the division and conflict of Generation. At the Ulro state, someone else is guilty; in Generation, I myself am guilty; in Beulah, no one is guilty.

There is a place where Contrarieties are  
equally True  
This place is called Beulah, It is a pleasant  
lovely Shadow  
Where no dispute can come. Because of those  
who Sleep.

(30:1-3)

Beulah subdues the severe contentions of violation and guilt by granting a general amnesty. Beulah encircles its inhabitants with "arms of love & pity & sweet compassion" (30:12). At this third level of repentance, all sinners have their guilt removed or at least suspended, as if by an eternally forgiving mother. Many popular methods of psychological therapy depend on some sort of Beulah solution--either by dismissing the whole notion of a guilty act, or equalizing and hence neutralizing the guilt in any given conflict; or perhaps by training people to forget past debts and begin each new experience with a clean record. The inhabitants of Beulah, "who are but for a time" (30:26), cannot tolerate the rigors of permanent contention.

Beulah moments usually come after a violent conflict, when some female manages to lull both parties into temporary peace. At its best, Beulah preserves men from the dangerous effects of fault-finding--in particular, from the constricting network of defenses that an individual can build. Los recognizes the value of such repose in counter-acting Satanic accusation:

These lovely Females form sweet night and  
silence and secret  
Obscurities to hide from Satans Watch-Fiends.  
Human loves.  
And graces; lest they write them in their Books,  
& in the Scroll  
Of mortal life, to condemn the accused: who  
at Satans Bar  
Tremble in Spectrous Bodies continually day  
and night  
While on the Earth they live in sorrowful  
Vegetations.

(23:39-44)

Enitharmon, one of "these lovely females," interposes a Beulah recess in the middle of the conflict between Satan and Palamabron: "She wept: she trembled! she kissed Satan; she wept over Michael / She form'd

a Space for Satan & Michael & for the poor infected" (8:42-43). The effect of such deferral is difficult to estimate, but it may help prevent outright destruction. Enitharmon's intervention cannot postpone the conflict indefinitely. At its worst, Beulah amnesty may perpetuate or aggravate transgression by overlooking a fundamental disorder. Elynittria's generosity to Leutha has quite unfortunate results:

But Elynittria met Leutha in the place where  
she was hidden.  
And threw aside her arrows, and laid down her  
sounding Bow;  
She sooth'd her with soft words & brought her  
to Palamabron's bed  
In moments new created for delusion, interwoven  
round about,  
In dreams she bore the shadowy Spectre of Sleep,  
& namd him Death.  
In dreams she bore Rahab the mother of Tirzah  
& her sisters.

(13:36-41)

At the Beulah stage, Elynittria abandons her arrows and bow, the very weapons demanded by the narrator in the prefatory hymn--"Bring me my Bow of burning gold / Bring me my Arrows of desire." Beulah subdues the eternal wars of desire by displacing guilt. The highest level of repentance, Eden, returns to the severe contentions of friendship and the pangs of repentance. As in the Generation phase, a subject accepts guilt, but somehow the process becomes redemptive. Generation and Eden repentance resemble each other so closely that it is dangerous to attempt a schematic analysis of the difference. The best way to approach Eden is to follow Ololon on her journey of recognition and repentance.

Ololon makes three speeches during the poem in which she tries to describe or account for the fallen world. Fox remarks that Ololon "has always asked the same thing," and finds her final speech simply the temporal manifestation of the first.<sup>7</sup> Although Ololon's speeches address the same question, and to some extent even repeat the same answer, they show a gradual progression of understanding. The first occurs in Book One, after Milton has descended. Ololon has been lamenting his loss, and resolves to follow him:

And Ololon said, Let us descend also, and let  
us give  
Ourselves to death in Ulro among the  
Transgressors.  
Is Virtue a Punisher? O no! how is this  
wondrous thing:  
This World beneath, unseen before: this refuge  
from the wars  
Of Great Eternity! unnatural refuge! unknown  
by us till now!  
Or are these the pangs of repentance? let us  
enter into them.

(21:45-50)

Ololon makes this decision upon realizing that she has misunderstood Milton--or rather, that she has understood him too late: "for now they knew too



late / That it was Milton the Awakener" (21:32-33). Ololon acknowledges that she has lost her immediate opportunity, and faces a crisis of belatedness. Her only hope is to undertake a descent similar to Milton's. Milton has descended in "self-annihilation," attempting to correct the harmful effects of his life. Repentance always means a self-annihilation: in order to annul the past, a person must turn against himself, and give up some means of protection that had previously sustained his identity. Milton, who assumes that his act does not come too late, makes his descent confidently and with considerable knowledge of what he is doing. Ololon worries about a past that may be irreparable, and approaches her journey with very tentative notions of what it means.

She begins by positing the general purpose of her descent--"Let us descend also, and let us give / Ourselves to death in Ulro among the Transgressors." These basic terms of the journey will not change; her final speech will again announce a descent into death. But the tone and significance of the passages differ substantially. Here Ololon makes her proposal rather naively, with obvious curiosity but little knowledge about the world below. She treats "the Transgressors" as an alien, pitiful group for whom her sympathy has been aroused. Her intention to join them sounds a little like someone going to visit a prison. She feels a substantial but still quite vague sense of guilt: realizing that the lower world suffers, she wonders whether her higher, virtuous world can be the cause, and cringes at the thought of punishment. Ololon has yet to comprehend that repentance amounts to a form of self-punishment. Only at the end of this first speech does she speculate about "the pangs of repentance" and her venture into them. Interestingly, Ololon seems to mistake Ulro for Beulah as she stares beneath her. Looking at transgression in Ulro, she first describes it in language more customary for Beulah--"How is this wondrous thing: . . . this refuge from the wars of Great Eternity!"--before sliding into "unnatural refuge," a more appropriate term for Ulro. In her innocence, Ololon only gradually comes to acknowledge the pain of the lower world. Her intention to descend, prompted by guilt but still unsupported by knowledge, indicates a desire to explore her origins, to retrieve from her past the secret of a protected but empty present. Her movement from higher to lower and present to past itself represents a transgression, in the sense that every transgression is a crossing over from safety into danger.

Her second analysis of Ulro takes place much further along, in a speech delivered by Ololon "in reminiscence astonished":

How are the Wars of man which in Great  
Eternity  
Appear around, in the External Spheres of  
Visionary Life  
Here render Deadly within the Life & Interior  
Vision  
How are the Beasts & Birds & Fishes, & Plants  
& Minerals  
Here fix'd into a frozen bulk subject to decay  
& death

Those Visions of Human Life & Shadows of Wisdom  
& Knowledge  
Are here frozen to unexpansive deadly destroying  
terrors.

(34:50-35:1)

Still gazing downward on Ulro, Ololon's wondering curiosity has turned into fearful alarm. She distinguishes between external and internal wars--the former eternal and desirable, the later fallen and deadly. *Milton* contains several images of inside and outside. Although they do not conform to a single pattern, these images clearly supplement the contrast between permanence and perishability or identity and state that so preoccupies this poem. Ololon is terrified to find that in Ulro the wars of man appear to belong within the radical center of human existence; belligerent contention and destruction no longer seems a temporary, purgative state, but the very essence of life. In her very first words, Ololon resolved to give herself to death, but this second speech finds her obsessively fearful of death and decay. As she repeats "death" over and over again (six times in the first fifteen lines), it becomes less the one death, and more a general term for the violence and loss underlying everyday life.

Ololon, as the narrator afterwards warns us, has not yet "passed the Polypus" when she makes these judgments. Since "Golgonooza cannot be seen till having passed the Polypus," it comes as no surprise that she describes Golgonooza activities without recognizing any hint of redemptive potential. War and hunting, once "the Two Fountains of the River of Life" (35:2), now bring only death; but Luvah's winepress of war constitutes an essential part of Golgonooza. Weaving also belongs to the deadly world Ololon sees: "O dreadful Loom of Death! O piteous Female forms compell'd / To weave the Woof of Death" (35:7-8). But in Golgonooza, the magnificence of "every generated body" is built by Los,

And the herbs & flowers & furniture & beds &  
chambers  
Continually woven in the Looms of Enitharmons  
Daughters  
In bright Cathedrals golden Dome with care &  
love & tears.

(26:34-36)

Greatly afraid of death, Ololon shrinks from the lower world in revulsion. While his emanation is struggling in her descent, Milton appears to have mastered the intellectual principles of repentance--or as he calls it, "self-annihilation." Here he addresses Satan, his Spectre:

Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall  
mutually  
Annihilate himself for others good, as I for  
thee  
Thy purpose & the purpose of thy Priests & of  
thy Churches  
Is to impress on men the fear of death; to  
teach  
Trembling & fear, terror, constriction; abject  
selfishness  
Mine is to teach Men to despise death & to go on



In fearless majesty annihilating Self, laughing  
to scorn  
Thy Laws & terrors, shaking down thy Synagogues  
as webs.

(38:35-42)

Milton helps interpret Ololon's fears. In fear of death, men constrict themselves in protective selfishness. Death thus suggests the risks of self-exposure and influence; "life" in this restricted, pejorative sense would mean the maintenance of careful defenses to guard against the pain and loss of intersubjective contention. Milton in his principle of self-annihilation asks men to overcome their natural inclination to englobe themselves. The Satanic world presents a contest of separate, hostile wills, with men continually seeking to make themselves invulnerable. Each man strives to "become the covering" for the other. Milton proposes that men continually annihilate these protective wills, and reorient their interests according to a fuller, more responsible version of the self. He hopes that heightened sensitivity to the fine networks of human interdependence will help men discover rather than cover each other.

Such intimacy and mutual responsibility will increasingly subject men to the pains of guilt and the pangs of repentance. It is not clear how Milton's version of self-annihilation can solve the problems experienced by Leutha in her attempts to repent for Satan. Milton's speech has a revealingly inconsistent tone. He begins with a calm reflection on the necessity of self-sacrifice--"Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall mutually / Annihilate himself for others good, as I for thee." But right away this selfless equanimity turns into an aggressive, scornful challenge, as Milton readopts his customary adversative vigor. Milton, like Leutha's Satan, does not seem comfortable in a self-effacing role. Ololon, like Leutha, attempts to take on guilt, in an effort to restore her relationship with Milton to eternal perfection. Ololon has been inclined to confess from the start, and sustains a repentant mood while making her descent. But she does not yet know what she is repenting of; in this journey to retrieve her origins, she has not yet accomplished the crucial passage.

Ololon's final moment of insight, the last dramatic speech in the poem, comes in response to Milton's long denunciation of crimes against the imagination. Milton concludes by announcing that Jesus will cast away all these obstructions, "Till Generation is swallow up in Regeneration" (41:28). This final "till" passage, for once, seems to point simply forward or upward--rather than forward and backward, as do so many "till" clauses in *Milton*. Milton's Jesus will "wholly purge away with fire" (41:27) the "rotten rags of memory" (41:4). Fire, as Harold Bloom has suggested, is a preeminent Romantic figure for the power of apocalyptic presence.<sup>8</sup> But once again the "till" points forward only to look backward; as Ololon responds to Milton's call for regeneration, remembrance returns upon her:

Is this our Feminine Portion of the Six-fold  
Miltonic Female

Terribly this Portion trembles before thee O  
awful Man  
Altho' our Human Power can sustain the severe  
contentions  
Of Friendship, our Sexual cannot: but flies  
into the Ulro.  
Hence arose all our terrors in Eternity! & now  
remembrance  
Returns upon us! are we Contraries O Milton,  
Thou & I  
O Immortal! how were we led to War the Wars of  
Death  
Is this the Void Outside of Existence, which if  
enter'd into  
Becomes a Womb? & is this the Death Couch of  
Albion  
Thou goest to Eternal Death & all must go with  
thee.

(41:30-42:2)

Ololon's concluding decision repeats what she has resolved from the beginning, to join Milton by giving herself to eternal death. But something in between has finally prepared her to make the statement; after she speaks, *Milton* comes to a rapid end. Ololon's descent has been a retrospective search for the key to repentance. As she suddenly understands the severe contentions of friendship to be the source of division, Ololon seems to be remembering not only her past life with Milton, but the poem *Milton* as well. Her final analysis of the lower world and eternal death represents a definitive interpretation of conflicts described in the Bard's Song and sustained throughout the poem. She now recognizes the Ulro as a very familiar state--most intimately her own--instead of an alien world, as she first saw it. In that first speech she gazed curiously at Ulro, "unknown by us till now"; now Ololon remembers that Ulro has been part of her all along: "Hence arose all our terrors in Eternity! & now remembrance / Returns upon us!" Ololon discovers Ulro to be an uncanny phenomenon, an intimate and original secret which hides as something strange and unknown.

Ololon is both a plural and a singular entity. When she uses the pronoun "us" in this speech, it could designate either Ololon alone or Ololon and Milton. For the first five lines, it seems that she might be referring to herself as a plural being. But in line 35 she uses the singular--"Are we Contraries, O Milton, Thou & I." It would thus appear likely that when "remembrance returns upon us," it is returning upon both Milton and Ololon. This scene of repentance has taken a turn away from Leutha's, in that the principal antagonists now tend to converge in mutual responsibility. Leutha took the blame entirely on herself, and she and Satan remained separate throughout. Ololon has traced back to the beginning of her problems with Milton, and confidently proclaims her discovery--"Hence arose all our terrors in Eternity!" But she continues in a slightly different tone: "O Immortal! how were we led to War the Wars of Death." Ololon defers the issue of original cause. Asking an unanswerable question, she seems to dismiss any inquiry which would try to determine unilateral and unequivocal fault. Leutha in her confession claimed to know a definite initial cause of the Satan-



Palamabron incident, her own jealous acts. Satan, her complement, reacts violently against this self-punishing repentance. Ololon's rhetorical question tends to push into the margin such matters of who first did what to whom, and directs attention to the general nature of human fault.

Ololon concludes with an intriguing set of metaphors. "Is this the Void Outside of Existence, which if enter'd into / Becomes a Womb? & is this the Death Couch of Albion." This represents her ultimate figuration of the lower world, and should be considered directly apposite to her first description: "Or are these the pangs of repentance?" Ololon has finally reached the world beneath by remembering the secrets of her past. In order to make this memory journey, she had to commit an act of temporal transgression; crossing over from present to past, she risks becoming dislocated in time, removed from fulfilling presence. The image of "a Void Outside of Existence" reflects her fears about what she may have discovered: Ololon's repentant memory traces back to an origin, but finds a kind of void there, an original lack. She now knows that severe contention and eternal wars of contrariety belong to her essence. Human souls aspire to, or think they remember, some sort of

harmony or perfection, but all men find themselves coming after an original sin.

Given such a world, repentance becomes a crucial aspect of consciousness. If "the pangs of repentance" are really a "Void Outside of Existence," repentance does indeed create a female space. Repentance would seem to be an illimitable task, a boundless void. This void outside of existence, if entered into, becomes a womb. Once again Ololon distinguishes between inside and outside. Seen from the inside rather than the outside, the void becomes a different kind of female space. Confinement in a womb suggests some of Blake's greatest fears: as a place of protective exclusion and vegetative enslavement, it represents the lowest form of life, even "death-couch." But this is where Ololon knows she must go, into this void which becomes a womb--"Thou goest to Eternal Death & all must go with thee." With Ololon's clouds of blood wrapped around him, "Jesus wept & walked forth / From Felphams Vale clothed in Clouds of Blood, to enter into / Albions Bosom, the bosom of death" (42:19-21). As the preeminent model for taking on a burden of original sin, Jesus makes his descent into the pangs of repentance; confronting a void, he will enter a womb--the place where all the great events of time start forth and are conceived.

<sup>1</sup> Edward J. Rose, "Los, the Pilgrim of Eternity," in *Blake's Sublime Allegory*, ed. Curran and Wittreich (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1973), p. 99.

<sup>2</sup> This and all subsequent quotations from *Milton* are taken from *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (1965; rpt. Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday and Co., 1970).

<sup>3</sup> *Poetic Form in Blake's "Milton"* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), p. 6.

<sup>4</sup> W. H. Stevenson, in *The Poems of William Blake* (London: Longmans, 1971), punctuates so as to make Satan the indignant one; since Satan has been wrathful and Elynittria joyful, it makes better sense to take Elynittria as the antecedent of "Indignant at the burning wrath." This reading also conforms to Blake's own punctuation.

<sup>5</sup> Soren Kierkegaard, *Stages on Life's Way*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1940), p. 430.

<sup>6</sup> Although in *Milton* Blake has not yet settled on his scheme of Ulro, Generation, Beulah, and Eden, all the elements are present for what will become in *Jerusalem* an orderly cosmology. Beulah receives its most elaborate description in *Milton*; Eden is mentioned several times as the highest state; Ulro is subdivided into two states, Al-Ulro and Or-Ulro, which later become the separate realms of Generation and Ulro.

<sup>7</sup> *Poetic Form*, p. 180.

<sup>8</sup> Bloom remarks: "Fire is the prime perspectivizing metaphor of Romanticism, and to burn through context, the context of precursors and of nature, is the revisionary aim of that metaphor." (*Poetry and Repression* [New Haven: Yale Univ. Press, 1976]), p. 105.