

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY
BLAKE

R E V I E W

Czesław Miłosz, *The Land of Ulro*

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 21, Issue 4, Spring 1988, pp. 160-165



"symbolism" is presented as a variation of platonic thinking. This is certainly true of all "symbolic" languages in European philosophy, but this very fact makes precise distinctions more important. Even if Raine is of the same opinion, she has put almost all emphasis on Swedenborg's rather arbitrary methods for interpreting Holy Writ. The most fascinating elements of Swedenborg's thinking are not given their due attention, e.g., that the doctrine of correspondence represents a substitute for the mathematically conceived universal language of which some of his greatest predecessors in the seventeenth century had been dreaming. Swedenborg's visions bear the stamp of decades of scientific work and daring speculations within the framework of contemporary science about the hidden structure of nature. In Raine's view "there is no literary value in Swedenborg's symbolism, and nothing could be less poetic than the 'visions' of that sage," but she has presented most unsatisfactory reasons for her evaluation. On the contrary, Swedenborg's works as a whole display deep intellectual and emotional qualities resulting in a personal combination of enlightened rationality and romantic forebodings. Blake must have felt the intensity behind Swedenborg's systematic rigidity, and he reacted in the same manner as so many other artists and poets: sometimes he found these qualities attractive and inspiring; on other occasions he was repelled by the master's conventionalities in concepts and style.

The second contribution to the anthology by Kathleen Raine is a lecture held in Paris in 1985 called "The Human Face of God." Her subject here is the concept of God in Swedenborg's and Blake's works in comparison with Jung's *Answer to Job*. From a literary point of view this lecture is interesting as an attempt to prove that the influence of Swedenborg appears to have been stronger in Blake's later works than in those from the 1790's. Since this is a hypothesis contradictory to the mainstream of Blake scholarship it should be considered. But the argumentation here can hardly be regarded as well founded. In order to prove the hypothesis a much more penetrating analysis of Swedenborg's and Blake's use of the concept "the Divine Human" will be necessary. Still, Raine's edifying discourse contains many valuable impulses for future research.

The second section of the anthology, "Historical contexts," includes the report of the London conference in 1989 mentioned above and a study by Raymond H. Deck, Jr. of Charles Augustus Tulk (originally published in *Studies in Romanticism* 1977). This is a solid historical account of one of Blake's nineteenth-century patrons, who probably had some importance for the artist's later opinions of Swedenborg. Tulk's parents took part at the London conference in 1789, but their son preferred to remain outside Swedenborgian sectarianism. Still, he

was well read in the master's writings, and he was also one of the founders of a society for printing and publishing these works in 1810. As the Swedenborg Society, this association has done great work in promoting information about them and is still doing so.

Tulk was a gentleman of independent means, who devoted his time to politics and his reading of Swedenborg. He also supported William Blake in different ways. It was probably their common friend John Flaxman who enticed Tulk to buy some of Blake's works around 1815. In February 1818 he lent Coleridge a copy of the poet's *Songs*, and the learned critic immediately identified some essential Swedenborg influences in them. On a later occasion he also arranged a meeting between Coleridge and Blake. The author has also given convincing reasons for the attribution of an article in 1830 to Tulk, which describes this encounter: "Blake and Coleridge, when in company, seemed like congenial beings of another sphere, breathing for a while on our earth; which may easily be perceived from the similarity of thought pervading their works."

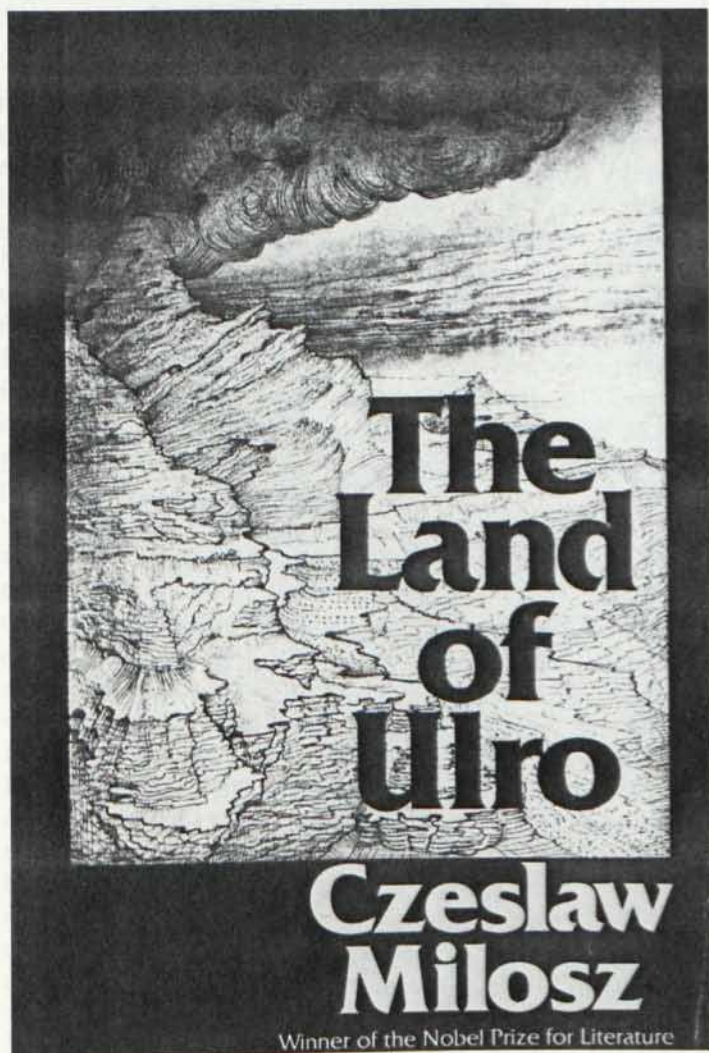
The concluding section of the anthology is called "Swedenborgian Postscripts." It consists of two articles and one lecture by New Church men, who illustrate different attempts at explaining Blake's complicated relations to Swedenborg from their particular point of view. In that respect they outline a reception history, to which this beautiful anthology itself is the latest contribution. The question marks in its margins should not discourage anyone interested in William Blake's art from reading this book. It certainly deserves many readers both within and outside of the New Church tradition, where the artist has caused many sorrows but also great pride.

Czeslaw Milosz. *The Land of Ulro*. Trans. Louis Iribarne. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1984. vii + 287 pp. Hard cover \$17.95/paper \$9.95.

Reviewed by Tadeusz Ślawek

This book, whose title must unfailingly attract attention of all Blakeans, opens in a series of familiar, almost Derridean, hesitations. The reader learns from the first sentence of the preface that he is no more than an intruder in the world of the book, and if he wishes to indulge in the act of reading it is only at his risk: "Dear

Reader, this book was not intended for you, and I feel you should be forewarned before you enter its bizarre tangle" (v)—even Sterne and Derrida would have spared remarks like that till the moment when they had already let the reader well into their mazes.



The speaking voice, however, which announces the book in a highly assertive manner ("My decision to write *The Land of Ulro* was an act of perfect freedom . . .," v) is not exempt from general indecision: what was started as a probing of personal, "maverick" pleasure turns out to be a disquieting search for identity. The assertive tone has been only a brief romance with the tradition of the preface where one knows, announces, and establishes relationships with past epochs and works; the mode of Milosz's book itself is interrogative ("Who was I? Who am I now, years later, here on Grizzly Peak, in my study overlooking the Pacific?" 3). "Dear Reader" who will take up *The Land of Ulro*: you are in an alien territory that is a labyrinth (*Lasciate*

ogni speranza), and the voice that leads you is that of a ventriloquist.

The task of the (dear) Reader is, however, more Romantic than Dantean: it is less to study the philosophical pattern of existence and more to penetrate the principle of one's identity. The book then is in part Wordsworthian in its attempt to trace the "Growth of a Poet's Mind" so that we shall finally see that the identity of the voice questioned in the first sentence is secured again on the last page by a reference to a Romantic concept of memory: "By recalling that the boy and the poet — 'catastrophist' and the old professor in Berkeley are the same man . . ." (275). If it is true that the book is a "tangle," then it is equally true that it has its own "principle" (275), which saves it from chaos and which is conterminous with a continuity of the human self. In the same way as the young boy from Lithuania and the old professor in Berkeley are one person (despite the meanders of life defying understanding: "I do not understand my life . . ." 4), the book is — like Blake's *Songs* — both "childish and adult, both ethereal and earth-bound" (275) (despite its "chimerical kingdoms" of allusions and digressions).

The Sternian/Derridean attitude of the preface resolves in the Platonic Care which saturates the whole book. This Care is Platonic, not Heideggerian, because unlike the Care in *Sein und Zeit* it is not destined to be a mode of man's rootedness in Being, but as in *The Laws* it is animated by the sense of the moral duty which one has in the face of culture and in the name of culture. The (dear) reader from his ostracized position of a total stranger and intruder in Milosz's world passes through a more sympathetic territory where the author, the reader, and humanity are purged by the waters of understanding. "Reader, be tolerant of me. And of yourself. And of the singular aspirations of our human race" (275). Reader (notice, how Care eliminates a formulaic "dear"), it is true, we have studied my idiosyncratic tastes and family relations, but we have done so in order to see how our Care enables us to participate in something larger than a mere individual self.

This "something larger," which goes beyond narcissistic introspection, Care bodies forth in culture. In Milosz's philosophy, which is predominantly a philosophy of culture, Nature plays the role of a gothic villain: it is either invisible but subtly pulls the strings, or manifest and then cataclysmic and indifferent in its destructive force ("Nature's reckless indifference . . .," 37). Thus a series of readings of particular authors that Milosz offers in his book is organized by two principles: that a human freedom is a freedom of intellectual growth in a library, and that this library necessarily has to define itself against the external world of Nature. We should be careful not to confound Milosz's and Borges's

versions of the library: the latter is so extensive that, in effect, it offers no choice and no freedom, the former is a library of masterpieces ("basic texts") where the choice may seem haphazard or even absurd, but it is never meaningless.

"I insist on the freedom, on my right to browse at will among the basic texts that are the inheritance of centuries . . ." (159). Although unlike Borges's Library of Babel Milosz's shelves always shelter meaning, the path of the reader is no less labyrinthine: Gombrowicz, Dostoyevsky, Mickiewicz, Oscar Milosz, Stanislaw Brzozowski, Swedenborg, Simon Weil, Shestov, Blake. Also unlike the Library of Babel Milosz's maze of books has a thread, a sparkle of hope which turns the archives of pure *écriture* into the memoirs of human mind. As Milosz confesses: "That thread is my anthropocentrism and my bias against Nature" (159).

We begin to see the first reason why Blake became a haunting presence in Milosz's book: the critique of Nature (spelled characteristically to emphasize, through capitalization, its Manichaean power) is inevitably aimed at a certain version of the Romantic philosophy represented by Rousseau, one of the three chief villains of Blake's philosophical mythology, who "prescribed it [Nature] as the cure for a corrupted civilization" (160). Culture, Milosz seems to be saying, will always benefit more from the drugs of Plato's rather than Nature's Pharmacy. The way to a recovery from the crisis does not lead to a nostalgic look backward towards the Golden Age but to a bold analysis of the future. A diatribe against Nature must necessarily open a discussion of the sense of human time.

There seem to exist two types of literature, one which is easier to detect and name and which, almost diabolically corrupted, still turns out to be its own caricature when one faces the unfathomable abysses of human history. Milosz calls this tradition "dark" and quickly defines his response to it as "hostile" (38). No names are mentioned, but a few pages later Milosz hints at Kafka, Beckett, Sartre, and Ionesco (42) as if unwilling to leave us in the dark. Milosz's unfavorable response to this literature is grounded in his disbelief and mistrust of Nature: "dark" literature probes the nature of man and pretends to achieve shattering effects whereas its "naturalness" thus obtained is but a parody of, as Blake would put it, "Real Existence." To deal with Nature in this manner inescapably winds up in certain cheapness of effect, ". . . its [dark literature's] mockery, sarcasm, and profanations have seemed cheap to me when compared to the power of Evil that is within every man's experience" (38).

The other type of literature is more difficult to name but can be described as "anthropocentric," i.e., based not so much on the idea of man as the measure

of all things, but on man as a possible hope for all things. The difference between these two statements measures the gap separating the old version of Greek and Roman humanism (no longer possible in the light of human past), and a new mutation of humanist lore grounded in a careful and tending attitude towards human future. This millenarian thread in the weave of culture is what links all the diverse writers Milosz presents in *The Land of Ulro*. Of Gombrowicz he says that he staked his future "on the next spin of the wheel, on mankind's future course" (23). The reading of Dostoyevsky hinges upon a note from his journals maintaining that "All depends on the next century" and a powerful eschatological belief in a perfect, final harmony "after civilization" (54). Oscar Milosz, a hermetic "French poet born a subject of the tsarist Empire, one-quarter Italian on his grandmother's side . . . half Jewish on his mother's . . ." (75), shared with Dostoyevsky and Gombrowicz a profound rebellion against the ages of "wholesale trivialization" (206) and was right, according to his nephew writing *The Land of Ulro*, "not to expect anything of his contemporaries or of their sons" (206), and to look in his cabalistic meditations, in the last decade of his life, for the regenerated man of the future. It is this hope that is the mode of the future because the anthropocentric vision of philosophy that pumps the blood into Milosz's book is dominated by the Swedenborgian principle "that Heaven, the sum of myriads of personal heaven-projections, is Man-shaped" (145), and the evolution of man's religious sentiments seems to coincide with that of Dostoyevsky's: from man-God to God-man (54).

Still the adjective "Manichaean" makes its appearance far too frequently in this book to be incidental. Man is not only a domain of hope but also of despair torn schizophrenically between his angelic and satanic elements. It is at that moment when Nature creeps back into Milosz's literary and philosophical readings: his argument against the "dark" writing is founded not only upon the "cheapness" of its effects but, first of all, upon the fact that "it comes *naturally*, in a way, to a part of the human spirit I regard as inferior" (my emphasis, 244). Despair and blasphemy are then cheap, easy, and natural while hope and future, the future of the new man, are "artificial," difficult, and painstaking, in a word — aesthetic. We can see now that in Milosz's universe, as in Blake's, there is an immediate link between future, hope, and art on the one hand, and the chance for overcoming the crisis which started some time in the eighteenth century on the other.

What is at stake in Milosz's interpretation of the crisis is precisely the future of man. To the humble question of the amazed and depressed reader, "What does it all mean?" the last chapter of the book offers this straightforward answer:

This much can be said: that Blake's land of Ulro is not a fantasy if we ourselves have been there; that since the eighteenth century something, call it by whatever name one will, has been gaining ground, gathering force. And all who have sought exit from the 'wasteland' . . . have been, in my opinion, justified in their endeavor, more, are worthy of admiration, even if their efforts ended in failure and were bought at the price of various 'abnormalities.' (269)

This long quotation shows that, for Milosz, Blake matters less as a master of words and more as a poet-thinker who codes in his writings some basic existential elements which must be rediscovered by those who are in search of exit from the predicament in which humanity has been locked for two centuries. Hence Milosz reads Blake and his longer poems as a work of the author who "engaged the 'scientific world-view' in a fundamental dialogue" (158). From Newton to Jacques Monod, one of whom Milosz quotes as the founding father and the other as a prodigy of the land of Ulro, the crisis can be defined by two processes: one, a growing gap between religion and science; two, a reflection of this situation in the inner structure of the human being whose ability to believe and to know splits to form two separate channels of cognition. In Milosz's philosophy the crisis is summarily represented as a more and more thorough invasion of culture by Nature, as the intrusion of what is easy and cheap upon what is difficult and aesthetic, of a sudden surfacing of the base and inferior which unexpectedly masters the language of symbols. In this diagnosis there are hidden skirmishes with Freudianism ("how could I make pretensions to 'sincerity,' I who go around in a corset, all self-discipline on the inside?" 12), Beckett ("Man has been mired in Ulro by the successes of science . . . but the ultimate proof of the crippling power of Ulro . . . lies in the passivity of those vegeto-animals, those pale Elysian shades that are its literary 'figures'" 244-45), but the main war is waged against Nature. Hence it is Swedenborg and Blake who determine the main front line of the battle: "Swedenborg was well aware that Nature, perceived as a system of mathematical relations, had begun to usurp God in the minds of the educated" (140). Similarly, Blake "did not approve of Nature" (160), working towards the future transfiguration of man who would be in a position to save Nature from suffering. Blake fits then the Manichaean pattern of Milosz's philosophy in that in his own thinking Blake emphasized the antagonisms of double nature (the Outward and the Inward Eye), and good God and the monstrous miscreator of the universe (Urizen as Blake's reading of the Valentinian Achemoth, the monstrous offspring who, expelled from the pleroma, became the ultimate origin of the created world).

In the first part of his diagnosis of the modern crisis of thought Milosz retraces familiar Eliotic paths: T. S. Eliot's "dissociation of sensibility" located in the seventeenth century is moved a hundred years later and redressed as a conflict of science and faith. But the remedy offered by Milosz does not come from Eliot's Pharmacy; it is a result of his life-long studies of philosophy and literature as well as his "leftist" sympathies. Milosz needs the tradition of Swedenborg, Blake, and Oscar Milosz to demonstrate that the way out of the dilemma is in a reformed notion of science, in making the scientific compatible with the poetic. It is not a coincidence that the 60s, the most promising and most ungratified of all the decades of the twentieth century, also appear in Milosz's book. The remedy that he prescribes for man, the dweller of the wasteland, is first of all the cure of vision by metaphor and symbol; Milosz, the old professor from Berkeley, knows "that the battle was decided not by discourses and disquisitions, not by faith or heresy, but by visions of the universe . . ." (224). Thus, one may repeat after Blake that "if the doors of perception were cleansed . . .," but one should not stop short of going to the next stage of Blake's thought and say that the way towards this cleansing must involve imagination. The science which at one moment in his meditation Milosz ascribes to Copernicus and Newton (226), evokes a vision of a static and immovable universe where man is a homeless being. The sense of unification Swedenborg was talking about is achieved at the price of man's alienation, which is measured by man's inability to situate himself. The drama of the wasteland is a story of space that cannot shelter and protect, in the same way as the time of Ulro is that of the archivistic past bereft of the future. Milosz's Ulro is the land of Newtonian space which, as Alexandre Koyré describes it, "broke down the barriers that separated the heavens and the earth . . . and unified the universe. . . . It did this by substituting for our world of quality . . . the world of quantity, of reified geometry, a world in which . . . there is no place for man."¹

It is to the "visionary reformers of science, whether it be Goethe, Blake, or [Oscar] Milosz" (240) that Milosz's philosophy turns to in search of the exit. Characteristically enough, so that the spirit of the 60s would never slip away from our reach, Einsteinian physics is also included among the poetic and philosophical groping for the Way. Fritjof Capra has already shown that the Tao of physics is an important path to get us out of the maze of the wasteland; hence Milosz is fully justified not only in reporting to us Oscar Milosz's enthusiasm for the physics of relativity but also in musing on how "humbly respectful" he had been when he met Ein-

stein at Princeton (226). Einstein liberates imagination, i.e., man is able again to think a meaningful topography, a topography where the symbolic dimension gathers divers areas to form a significant image. This gathering, itself symbolic in its etymology (*symboleîn* means "to grow together")—let us note parenthetically that here we have one of very infrequent moments in Milosz's thought where it gets close to the philosophy of Martin Heidegger—brings about a true unification. Not the one when Nature usurps the place of the sacred, but the unification which is actualized in response to the most basic human need: the compulsion to situate all things. This argumentation points at two facts: first, that the land of Ulro is a territory that cannot be mapped and where things are scattered in a chaotic way (very much like the map of the world from Lewis Carroll's *The Hunting of the Snark* which consists of "a perfect and absolute blank"); if so, then there can be no more pressing task than organizing space, not in the static manner of science but in the active way of imagination. Both in Oscar Milosz and in Blake, the author of *The Land of Ulro* is looking for the indications that would bring us closer to imagination, i.e., to reshaping and restructuring the paradigm of our thinking, since imagination is treated not "as something incidental to sensory perception but as its prime condition" (200).

We have seen so far that in the perspective of Milosz's book Blake matters as one of a few visionary scientists who dared to undermine the dominating image of the world, a philosopher of the future transfiguration of man and an organizer of symbolic space. We ought not to forget, however, that Blake is not the main figure of the book; this place having been reserved for Milosz's uncle and Parisian mentor Oscar Milosz. We are justified then in our asking about the role of Blake in a carefully cast drama of the two centuries of Western intellect that Milosz sketches in *The Land of Ulro*. For Milosz, Blake is one of the key figures of European culture not so much for what his poetry can offer as it calls for an ultimate effort of interpretation and undivided attention ("... what sort of poet is Blake if not even a five-hundred page glossary of his symbols ... is adequate to elucidate the esoterica in his *Prophetic Books*, paintings and engravings?" 32), but for what Blake's reading can contribute to the understanding of other texts and other writers. Blake's texts seem to be, for Milosz, one of the few master texts of culture indispensable to anyone who wishes to respond to the primal urge to "situate things." Blake's defense of "Minute Particulars" against violent assaults of the Universal comes to Milosz's assistance during his wrestling with Gombrowicz. The problem of Gombrowicz's writing—to what extent a human individual can be saved or made compatible with the ever growing pressure of the

general—seems to refer not only to this Polish émigré writer. Throughout *The Land of Ulro* Milosz repeatedly asserts that he wants "to ensure that his words correspond to reality" (245), to say "something about matters I regard as urgent" (187), thus combining the aesthetic with the ontological bias. Common mistakes, the tyrannies of words, are as a matter of fact only failed ontologies. If Gombrowicz overcomes the restraints of traditional humanism and philosophical subject-object division by questioning the independence of the individual, by removing the ego to the conceptual background and placing in the foreground the undefinable and untraceable pattern of relationships between individuals and groups, if Gombrowicz—like so many other modern writers—was advising humanity not to say "I assume" but rather "it is assumed by/for me" (42), if then we live—as Heidegger puts it concisely—in the epoch of the end of humanism, it is Blake who brings back, through his defense of the "Minute Particular," ethical security according to which an individual can still be made responsible for his deeds.

To protect "Minute Particulars" against the assaults of the Universal is to defend man who situates things in the space of symbols. As in Gombrowicz's space of endless reproductions of ritualistic gestures, so in the cosmic abysses of the longer poems a complicated system of mythology is woven to make a protective veil against the brutality of the non-symbolic mass. "First there was Homo sapiens, later Homo faber and above all, in our time, Homo ritualis" (44)—in this somewhat Yeatsian passage Milosz reveals another Blake who looks for the way out from the wasteland through symbols and rituals of mythology no longer cheap and easy but difficult, dramatic, and individual.

At this point there seems to lie the existentialist connection of Blake's thought which Milosz, however, does not pursue—a decision hardly surprising in the light of his hostility towards "dark" literature. The paradox of faith, as described by Søren Kierkegaard in *Fear and Trembling*, is anchored precisely in the act of resignation through which the individual becomes larger than the universal but which defies even the aesthetic and expressive potential of tragedy by the power of difficulty, distress, and dread. Blake's taking up philosophical arms in defense of "Minute Particulars" is then an act of viewing religion not as an institutionalized way of "saying things" but as a passion where man needs a power larger than himself but through which man reasserts his individuality that dooms him to loneliness. What Kierkegaard says of the man of faith can very well describe Blake's position: "A man can become a tragic hero by his own powers—but not a knight of faith. When a man enters upon a way ... of the tragic

hero, many will be able to give him counsel; to him who follows the narrow way of faith no one can give counsel, him no one can understand. Faith is a miracle . . . for that in which all human life is unified is passion, and religion is a passion."²

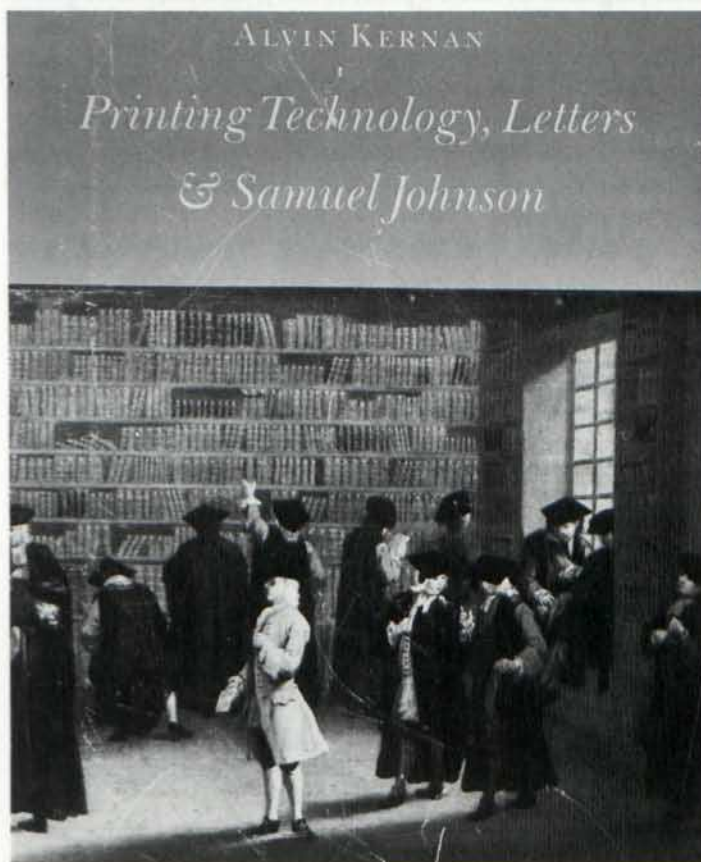
Through the effort towards mythological ritualization Blake becomes a particularly important buffer zone against chaos in the time of the gradual fading of Christian symbols in the West. It is this revitalization of Christianity that allows for a comparison between Blake and Dostoyevsky. What is at stake here is something much more fundamental than a reading of *The Brothers Karamazov* through the Blake tetrad (Fyodor—Tharmas, carnality; Dmitri—Luvah, passion; Ivan—Urizen, suffering intellect; Alyosha—Urthona, imagination). For Milosz, *The Brothers Karamazov* is a part of the same strategy with which intellect tries to replace the eighteenth-century God, Deus absconditus, the perfect Clockmaker, by the God-man, God who is not "a mathematical diagram." At one moment in his analysis Milosz even risks a sociological hypothesis: the withdrawal of Christian myths leaves space for bizarre cults ("The California of Far Eastern and satanic cults is an illustration of what happens when Christianity 'abstains'" 186). The guess may be wrong, but it again opens the same "urgent" question about the exit from the land of Ulro. If the exit is possible at all, it must be unconcealed through symbols and imagination and not through the literalist vision of science. Through what Theodore Roszak calls the "Rhapsodic Intellect" which is nothing else but the ability, to a large extent lost or to say the least threatened through the withdrawal of Christian mythology, to view the world as a reflection of a higher reality, a collection of symbols that tell us their drama which is, the sooner we realize it the better, the drama of human condition. Blake is so precious to Milosz because nowhere else in the recent history of culture do we find a more strenuous and heroic effort to bring home to man the truth of humanity as homo symbolicus.

¹Alexandre Koyré, *Newtonian Studies* (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1965) 23.

²Sören Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling and the Sickness unto Death*, trans. W. Lowrie (Garden City: Doubleday/Anchor Books, 1954) 77.

Alvin Kernan. *Printing Technology, Letters & Samuel Johnson*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987. xvi + 357 pp., 5 illus., bibliography. \$29.50.

Reviewed by Nelson Hilton



Though it mentions Blake only twice in passing, this stimulating book brings a welcome base to our evolving consideration of the most distinguishing aspect of Blake's project, his self-published "Illuminated Printing." "Even Milton and Shakespeare could not publish