

POETRY AND WAR

Dark Satanic Mills: William Blake and the Critique of War

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A “Colony of the Arts” Goes to War

Some time ago I learned that Woodstock, the town in upstate New York I called home for almost three decades, occupies a small but very definite and enduring place in the satanic structure known as the “military-industrial-complex,” or MIC. Yes, Woodstock, self-proclaimed Colony of the Arts, the hippie capital of the world, the town of love, Rock and Roll, all-around mellowness, and also, of PEACE, with a fine-looking Peace Monument on its Village Green to prove the fact.

We have a firm in Woodstock called Rotron, which was founded in the 1950s by a Dutch gentleman named Constant van Rijn for the purpose of manufacturing fans. Rotron has grown to employ some 380 people, making it the largest employer in the area, no small thing in this time of economic woe. It sits at the end of a long driveway off a main road, and rather few people have actually seen it. People in the hundreds of cars that go by the entrance each day see the sign, and if they think about it at all, think according to the vague notion that there is good old Rotron, making fans and keeping local folk employed. As for the product, fans, well, they are useful devices. Everybody needs a fan now and then to cool down, and so do many machines. The whole automobile industry would not exist were there no fans. The same could be said for computers and much else in a world where industry, having extracted heat from nature, has to face the problem of disposing of heat when it becomes excessive. Weapons are machines, too, and every weapon larger than a rifle needs a fan to cool off sometime or other. Multiple rocket launchers need fans; so do tanks, helicopters, fighter-bombers, destroyers, and heavy artillery all the way up to the heaviest; thus thermonuclear-tipped missiles like the Minuteman, with its guidance systems and launching apparatus served by fancy computers, also needs fans.

It turns out that Rotron has been making fans for these weapon systems for more than a half-century.¹ This has taken place in plain view, as a small group to which I belong discovered in an archive in the local library chock full of press clippings about the firm’s contribution to America’s Defense Effort, including its work on the Minuteman.²

¹ For details, see <http://www.woodstockpeaceeconomy.org>. A recent contract, from mid-October, 2009, calls for 50 fans for the Israeli air force, paid for by the Pentagon and shipped directly to America’s Number One Ally, for \$27,712.50. In 1998, Rotron was absorbed by a multinational firm, Ametek, for which it now serves as a flagship unit for Aerospace and Defense production. See: <http://www.ametekaerodefense.com/about/overview.cfm>.

² There was also a well-made “industrial” film, from 1964, which omits the military connections and concentrates instead on an idyllic image of perfect integration between Rotron and the town, the camera moving between verdant scenes of the mountain village, the nicely turned out technical staff, all certifiably Caucasian, even Teutonic, busily working at their benches, and at play at family events such as picnics. This is accompanied by a soundtrack serenade of tastefully bucolic and relaxing orchestral accompaniment.

Notwithstanding this and other polluting activities,³ the firm remains an esteemed member of the community, one essentially immune from criticism, as we discovered when we tried to call attention to its wrongdoings. This generated the expected outcry that we were threatening the most reliable employer in the area in hard times, despite our repeated assertion that we were talking about converting Rotron to production of fans that served peaceable ends, for example, wind turbines, rather than destroying the factory. We also heard what may be called the “widget” defense: after all, Rotron does not produce the actual death-dealing unit, but only a harmless component that keeps it cool. Then there was the patriotic line taken by middle management when we confronted them, that what kept them going was the challenge of making fans worthy of keeping our troops safe, not to mention cool and comfortable. Other members of the community went further to the right, to attack the critics of Rotron with accusations of communist sympathies, affections for terrorists, disloyalty, etc. But most of all there was the sense that in challenging the War Machine, we had entered a zone into which the great majority of the town would not go. They didn’t so much disagree with us; they simply turned away, into a space of indifference.

How is this to be explained?

Woodstock is a place with certifiably left credentials dating back even before the 1960s, especially in the cultural sphere. As it made parts for weapons of supreme death, the town was poised to become a center of what came to be called the “counterculture.” Yet the same Woodstock where musicians like Bob Dylan (he of “Masters of War” and “A Hard Rain’s Gonna Fall”) and Jimi Hendrix (remember his performance of “The Star Spangled Banner” at the 1969 festival) tore the assumptions of bourgeois society into shreds was the Woodstock that made fans for the Minuteman. Through it all, Rotron went about its business and Woodstock slept even as it celebrated its iconic artists. Today their images and replicas of their guitars delight the strollers who patronize the boutiques both trendy and funky where consumerism thrives on the manure spread by the counterculture. And Rotron keeps on making fans for weapons of mass and local destruction.

Consuming the sixties stands alongside weapon-making as the chief enterprise of the town. To this we can add the Healing and Wellness industries, and even, so it would seem, that religion much favored by the New Age enterprises, Buddhism, along with its numerous Eastern brethren. The largest center for Tibetan Buddhism outside of Asia sits atop a small mountain to the North of Woodstock; a major community of Zen Buddhism occupies what used to be a Dominican monastery in the forest to the West; and a shop on the Village Green promotes the Auroville Community in South India. Did I mention that Mynheer van Rijn, founder of Rotron, was a Buddhist? No contradiction, there, any more than between the facts that Alfred Nobel gave the world dynamite and the Peace Prize. To put it another way, the contradiction is purely logical, not existential, which is to say, not a vital confronting of different portions of being. These tend, rather, to be split apart from each other, remaining mutually incommunicado in the classical way that a man spends his day

³ A scandal broke out in the mid-80s concerning Rotron’s contamination of the local water supply. Complex machines need to be cleaned as well as cooled. The cleaning agents often include toxins like trichloroethylene, and the exigencies of profit cause capitalist firms to not dispose of spent cleaning fluid properly. As a result the poisons accumulate in steel drums which eventually rust, spring leaks, and discharge into the ground. Such happened to Woodstock’s water from Rotron. The town has not fully recovered, but the corporation remains inviolate.

programming drones to blow up an Afghani village, then comes home, plays with his kids, tucks them into bed, and sings them a lullaby.

Individuals stepped forth from the Woodstock community to support our anti-Rotron campaign—for example, the proprietor of the Auroville store was sympathetic—but they did so as essentially deviations from a social type, in this case, one of profound inertia.

Meanwhile the True North of the United States remains aligned with the growth of militarism. Thus the “good” people who enjoy the benefits of a “high level of civilization” acquiesce in atrocity done in their name. The problem has been cited innumerable over the years since mass murder by states and the possible destruction of civilization itself by its own instruments of death emerged. It has appeared with increasing urgency since the Second World War exposed the “Good Germans” who went along with Nazi crimes, along with their mirrored brethren in the allied democracies, who acquiesced in mass murder of civilians up to and including the launching of nuclear weapons on Japan in August, 1945. The latter event signaled the emergence of the United States as the hegemon of global society, and the number one perpetrator of state violence and terror, responsible—to take just the instances of its major wars in Korea, Vietnam, and Iraq—for a violent end to perhaps 8-10,000,000 human lives and the laying waste of whole societies.⁴

The emergence of the Geneva Conventions concerning war crimes and crimes against humanity has been a salutary development in relation to augmented state violence. Notwithstanding, the epoch known as the “American century” has shown no diminution of state-engineered destruction. The dreadful record is rooted in the ever-growing militarization of many aspects of society, enabled by the gelatinous indifference we encountered when trying to confront Woodstock with its participation in the military-industrial complex. The growth of militarization depends in part, then, on the lack of traction in the popular mind of the anti-militarization message. Antiwar sensibility has risen impressively over the last century. Yet it has really achieved very little. Except for an ambivalent shift away from direct engagement by masses of troops and toward sophisticated and increasingly remote means of destruction, the overall rate of mayhem has remained roughly the same, while the cancer of military production continues to metastasize.⁵ The people, then, are perfectly capable of “putting an end to war”⁶ but have not wanted to do so strongly enough, despite all the death, suffering, waste, ecological devastation, corruption of society, and economic ruination that

⁴ The exact number will always be uncertain. For an internet summary of the innumerable, hopelessly confused, biased and contentious accounts, see Matthew White, *Atlas of the Twentieth Century*, online at: <http://users.erols.com/mwhite28/warstat0.htm - 20worst>. Needless to say, one needs to add to these the wreckage of conflicts, massacres, etc., in which the United States post-WWII has played an indirect role (e.g., Central America, Indonesia, Iran, many others; see William Blum, *Killing Hope: U.S. Military and CIA Interventions Since World War II*, 2nd Edition (Monroe, ME: Common Courage Press, 2003); or where states with which it has been deeply complicit (e.g., Israel) have wreaked havoc in cahoots with it; or more generally, the undoubtedly greater though also more diffuse worldwide ecological devastation—in terms both of humanity and nature—brought about by the normal workings of the capitalist system over which it has presided.

⁵ Ambivalent is putting it too mildly. Iraq was scarcely carpet bombed compared to Vietnam (this kind of bombing being itself a way of sparing the direct intervention of infantry). Yet the destruction of society and nature, as well as the loss of life, has been of quite the same order of magnitude.

⁶ As the song sung plaintively at peace rallies puts it: “Last night I had the strangest dream I never dreamed before/ I dreamt the world had all joined hands and put an end to war.” Whenever I hear this I feel a deep melancholy from realizing that this essential struggle has been relegated to the dream world.

war brings about. There is, in short, a kind of mentality produced by militaristic society and reproducing militarism in turn. It is, one might say, a *state of being*, subjective, but not “psychological,” that is, not internally generated by thoughts, fantasies, images, etc., and not really “in the head” at all. It is rather a kind of structure that represents and organizes the collectively lived life of a people over historical time. So let us set aside much of the vastness of war—its geostrategic aspect, its politics, the logic of combat and its psychology, the economics of the MIC, etc.—to focus on this territory both obscure and utterly familiar.

Dark Satanic Mills Revisited

...
And was Jerusalem builded here
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

William Blake, *Milton*, 1804, Plate 1

The “military-industrial-complex” is identified as “satanic” in the opening sentence of this essay, perhaps jarring the reader unused to figures of speech that seem archaic to the contemporary mind. But surely the MIC is more than the sum of weapons, contracts, factories, military bases, political deals and propagandistic manipulations of which it is ordinarily said to be composed. It must also be anchored subjectively, as part of the consent necessary for hegemony. For Mind, whether individual or collective, is fed by deep and archaic springs. These comprise that nightmare in which Marx recognized the tradition of all the dead generations weighing on the brain of the living. It is this context that frames an inquiry into the notion of the Satanic as developed by William Blake (1757-1827), poet and artist but also philosopher and student of war, and a unique interpreter of what it is to be a human being.

The kernel of Blake’s worldview is this: that the fully realized imagination is the destiny of human existence. This was to him how we aspire toward God—not the God of traditional religion Blake dismissed as “Nobodaddy” (nobody’s daddy), but the reaching toward infinity and eternity that is our supreme faculty. It is a potential never fully attained, and only approximated through intensive inner discipline and struggle, what Blake called “mental fight.” We struggle, then, not merely against external evil, but a myriad of fallen states of being; these exist within the self and are organized externally. Blake invests them with mythological import and tracks them through his works, especially the so-called Prophetic books, which he also called his “Bible of Hell. These are dramas on a cosmic scale in which the protagonists are not persons as such but organizations of states of being within and across human existence and represented in personal form. They entail immemorially human themes—gender, passion, intellect, creativity, mental paralysis, belief, doubt, rage, rebellion, etc., and they are given names by Blake and made into the players in his cosmic drama. Thus emerge figures such as Los, Vala, Urizen (“your reason”), Orc, Tharmas, Rahab, etc., and, to be sure, Satan. They are at the same time recognizably human and utterly strange: they alter shape and identity, interpenetrate each other, are mutually constitutive; they converse with each other and have diverse sexual relations; they absorb, destroy and renew each other, form alliances, weep tears of blood, go to and return from “eternal death” i.e., the falling away from eternity into ordinary life. They are hard to make sense of, but no harder than human existence in its splendor and misery is to the engaged mind. Thus anyone who is willing to recognize just what fantastic creatures we are and who has the patience to

put up with a great deal of subtlety and complexity is advised to read and study Blake—who also, you may recall, wrote gorgeous poetry and painted or engraved gorgeous images.⁷

Blake was continually occupied as an engraver and water colorist, such being how he made his meager living. As a creator of poetic texts (some combined with his unique technique of engraving and coloring the plates individually, hence “Illuminated,” while others appear in various notebooks and drafts), his activity tended to be phasic. One furious outburst occurred in context of the French Revolution and mainly dates from the early 1790s; another, more extended, began toward the close of that decade and continued for roughly 20 years. During this period he composed three large Prophetic works: *Vala, or the Four Zoas* (uncompleted and unengraved), *Milton* [1804], and *Jerusalem* [1814-1820] (finished and illuminated). They made practically no impact on the world, which dismissed their creator as a lunatic. They are to my eyes the most underappreciated and misunderstood writings in English literature. They also are unparalleled as a study of war.

The notion of “dark Satanic Mills” appears in the second verse of the famous opening hymn of *Milton*,⁸ which has become the best known of all Blake’s work, thanks to its endorsement by the British socialists as an alternative national anthem for Britain. “Satanic Mills” have as consequently become symbolic of a critique of industrialism as a whole. This is a perfectly reasonable usage. It is, however, an abstraction from what Blake actually had in mind, and indeed, moved him to write *Milton* and his other prophetic works. For this account we are indebted to David Erdman, a superb researcher as well as editor of Blake’s collected work.⁹

Blake spent his entire life in London except for two miserable years at Felpham on Britain’s Southern coast as the kept artist of his patron, William Hayley. He was appalled upon his return from exile in 1803 to see what had become of his native city. To convey the sense of this, he used the image of “dark Satanic Mills.” Erdman observes that London had neither factories nor mills in any traditional sense at the beginning of the 19th century. There was, however, one exception: military production. For London “was a war arsenal and the hub of the machinery of war, and Blake uses the symbol [of dark Satanic Mills] in that sense.” [E, p. 396.] A transformation in Blake’s thought was underway; for he had not simply

⁷ The definitive edition of Blake’s poetry and prose is that of David V. Erdman (ed.), *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (New York: Random House, Anchor Books, various editions from 1965); henceforth “B,” as the source of quotes from Blake (the reader is advised to obtain the hardcover edition, as the paperback swiftly falls apart with use). Erdman also produced an essential study of Blake that demolishes the ignorant view of the great visionary artist as a mad and other-worldly crank and reveals him instead as an astute student of the politics of his time and one of the most ardent champions of freedom to have ever walked the earth: *Blake: Prophet against Empire*, 3rd edition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977; republished in 1991 by Dover Books), henceforth “E.” Of the massive literature on Blake as thinker and poet, the most elegant and grounded in faith traditions is Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1958); henceforth “F.” See also the highly useful guide to the labyrinth of Blake’s thought: S. Foster Damon, *A Blake Dictionary* (Providence: Brown University Press, 1965; henceforth “D.”)

⁸ Beginning with “And did those feet in ancient time . . . and concluding with “Till we have built Jerusalem/ In England’s green & pleasant Land.” The project requires ceaseless “mental fight,” as noted above, the essential praxis for human transformation; and we must fight to overcome what is signified by the “dark Satanic Mills.”

⁹ Erdman was originally a trade unionist and became an official of the United Auto Workers. As the UAW under the leadership of Walter and Victor Reuther became anticommunist in the 1950s, Erdman spoke out against the betrayal of class solidarity. Purged because of this, he changed careers and became a great Blake scholar. His was one of the few narratives from the anticommunist era with a happy ending.

encountered war production, but the first instance of *modern war production*, the industrial systematization of death and the death-dealing of industry: “mills that produce dark metal, iron and steel, for diabolic [that is, Satanic] purposes.” [E, p. 396.] The London of 1803, writes Erdman, had become “fortified against French invasion, the Thames [was] filling with captured French ships . . . the Tower and numerous workshops [were] busy turning out small arms night and day. . . . Blake did observe this daily cast of brazen cannon and hear ambassador and king call for war before the drying of their signatures for peace. These woes are in his prophecies.” [E, p. 395.]

War was building against Napoleonic France, and like all large-scale war it had large-scale effects, mostly very bad. Great numbers of British youth were being gang-pressed into wretched service with a high risk of death; public hangings took place at Tyburn, near Blake’s home;¹⁰ intense political repression and jingoism prevailed everywhere. For Blake, this sorely tried the revolutionary hopes which had propelled the first wave of his Prophetic Books, and culminated in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* of 1793 [MHH], a kind of supernova stirred by the French Revolution and manifesting the radical imagination. We read MHH today amazed at its audacity and fervor. Blake felt then, as did the countercultural radicals who took heart from him late in the 20th century,¹¹ that Revolution was imminent and could take place, as it were, automatically, by the eruption of imaginative energy. He had not given serious thought to revolution as a process entailing not simply the release of energy but having to overcome dialectically the negative figurations of energy; nor had he appreciated that the release from the prison-house of repressive society ran great risks of violence and opened onto a difficult process of self- and social transformation. There was much to remind him of these defects a decade later when he encountered both the degeneration of revolutionary France into Empire and the “dark Satanic Mills” of militaristic London. Through this dismal gloom he felt the decay of revolutionary hope with the rise of the war machine and its enabling henchman, the Police State. He must have felt then how naïve he had been, of how he had underestimated the repressive and murderous side within us, and of how much he needed to further radicalize his vision. The triad of late works, whose obscurity was as much based upon a well-founded fear of the authorities¹² as it was the product of a radical refusal to go along with ordinary reason and religion, was primarily

¹⁰ Peter Linebaugh, *The London Hanged* (London: Verso, 2006). The pace of execution was barbarous in the extreme; and the prime inciting influences were evolving capitalist notions of property. There are fourteen references to Tyburn in Blake, all from the three Prophetic works.

¹¹ Aldous Huxley took MHH’s famous line that “if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite,” as the source, and title, of his seminal work on mind-altering mescaline; see below, Note 24. Jim Morrison latched onto the notion of “Doors” as the name of his ensemble; Allen Ginsberg hallucinated the exquisite poem from *Songs of Experience*, “The Sunflower,” set many other *Songs of Innocence and Experience* to music, sang them at anti-war rallies, and placed MHH at the center of his world-view. All of this has considerable relevance to the story of Woodstock as the fount of the counterculture, which locally featured Beat Poet and Blakean Ed Sanders, who moved to the town early in the 1970s. You may hear Blake Songs on recordings by Sanders and the group he co-founded with Tuli Kupferberg, The Fugs. Ginsberg’s renderings are also available in collections of his work. In a famous Woodstock Moment of the 80s, Ginsberg sang the Nurse’s Song [B: 15] from *Songs of Innocence* with the Fugs.

¹² While in Felpham Blake tossed a drunken soldier out of his garden after the latter refused to leave when asked politely. The soldier accused him of saying, in the process, “The King be damned!,” which was enough to trigger a trial for sedition. Blake defended himself and won the case. Had he lost he would have been ruined. Such were the pressures that framed his late works. It deserves mention that they also affected the fledgling United States in, among other measures, the Alien and Sedition Acts, and the persecution of Blake’s friend Tom Paine. Reaction to the French Revolution is still a staple of right-wing thought.

then, the rethinking of his earlier vision, not to abandon its goals but to advance them through a more profound understanding.

The reader will appreciate the parallels with our present circumstances, especially for those of us who acquired a similarly naïve hope during the 1960s, a time when it could seem that the system was ready to topple from the sheer force of countercultural imagination. Can we learn from Blake in re-visioning a better alternative?

Enter Satan

The Marriage of Heaven and Hell was grounded in the notion that what is commonly ascribed to the Devil and the fires of Hell is as essential to human existence as the notion of Angels and the reward of Heaven. What we call Evil, in other words, is not necessarily so, and the same holds for Good. Blake used the figure of John Milton, whom he revered, for some sharp criticism in MHH to make the point:

Note: The reason Milton wrote in fetters when 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. [B, p. 35.]

But then, of whose party was Milton when he was fettered? And what were the fetters? For this Blake chose to differentiate a figure capable of representing the Devil so that the “evil” side could be brought forth to be seen as distinct from the energetic and vital aspect while yet remaining connected to it. Such was Satan, an unimportant entity in MHH and scarcely appearing at all before it, who grows to enormous proportion in the larger work named after the great Puritan poet.¹³ Satan became the instrument Blake used to comprehend the rise of the War Party, the militarization of society, and the shadow cast over revolutionary hope.

Unimportant as he may have been in Blake’s writings before *Milton*, Satan looms very large in the Judeo-Christian tradition; while the class of “*spirit-beings*” to which he belongs is a transhistorical potential of human nature, ubiquitous throughout history.¹⁴ This stems from the fact that it is evidently impossible for the human Self to remain undivided. A primal ambivalence seems to afflict our species, present in an enormous number of circumstances, refracted through notions of goodness, badness, and the like, and variously located within or without the Self. Bad aspects are experienced in a way that persecutes, misleads, torments, or leads to madness; from the other shore of ambivalence arises the source of creative activity—since agency of spirit-being is experienced as coming from beyond the self; thus a great artist like Blake would write that his work was like taking dictation from another source. Certain typologies can be sifted out of the great mass of these forms:

¹³ There are three off-handed references to Satan in MHH: that he is an alternative form taken by the devil; that he appears as a false Messiah in the *Book of Job*; and that he is an Antedeluvian equivalent to the Messiah or the Tempter. By contrast, in *Milton*, a work roughly six times as long, the figure appears no fewer than 118 times and is a principle agent within the text. See the Concordance to Blake:

<http://web.english.uga.edu/~nhilton/ee/home.html>. There are 254 references overall to Satan in Blake’s writings, which after *Milton* occur mostly in *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*. In Foster Damon’s *Blake Dictionary*, the entry for Satan runs six columns. D, pp. 355-358.

¹⁴ For a discussion, see Joel Kovel, *History and Spirit* 2d ed. (Warner, NH: Glad Day Books, 1999 [Boston: Beacon Press, 1991]).

- notions of the Self as inherently plastic and polymorphous, going back to the aboriginal “Trickster,” ancient Hindu representations such as Shiva, or the Greek deity, Hermes;
- internal divisions within the Self that do not rise to the level of an externalized being but are represented as indwelling part-selves with various functions, generally speaking, malign. The Greek word for this may be transliterated as *daimone*, from which the term “demon” enters our language and spreads out from there into a great plenum of occurrences. Notably, the technocratic “psy” industries have despiritualized this notion and turned it into numerous complicated constructions, for example, “introjects,” “subject-objects,” and the like. To be de-spiritualized in this sense means to not reach beyond the socially defined boundaries of the self;
- certain figures that, so to speak, condense from the inward/outward motion and represent more or less solidified beings, sometimes monstrous and bestial, sometimes in human form, who enter the *Agora* of events. Satan is perhaps the leading member of this class, appearing throughout the Bible and as a major figure in the major works of England’s two greatest exponents of freedom, John Milton and William Blake, and ubiquitously in popular culture.

Originally a minor functionary,¹⁵ Satan becomes throughout Christian writings the prime antagonist to Christ and God’s project. He appears in this guise as Lucifer, the superhuman Fallen Angel of *Paradise Lost*. Blake’s notion, however, is subtler and more radical, for his Satan’s monstrosity is dressed in ordinary human form. The Satan who wanders through *Milton* shows none of the grandeur of Lucifer; he is rather a mild-mannered conniver modeled upon Blake’s erstwhile patron, Hayley, a guilt-tripping conformist who *accuses* the artist—bearer of the divine vision—of irresponsibility; and who *deceives* him and *tempts* him with careerist distractions and what Northrop Frye calls “the solid body of organized taste.” [F, p. 328.]

Blake’s Satan specializes in accusation, while other functions, like deception and temptation, are ancillary. It is through the Satanic complex drawn by Blake that the bureaucratic, pettifogging Satan succeeds where Milton’s Lucifer, consumed by rebellion, is hurled downward. Blake makes Satan a functional member of society, but also elevates him to Godlike status. Here Blake follows Paul (2 Cor, 4.4) in seeing this Confidence Man as “the god of this world [who] has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.” Accusation is Satan’s definitive intervention, but can only achieve Satanic power when supported by material factors, that is, as long as it is the surface of Authority. And this in turn implies institutionalization, of Church or State. A Foucauldian ensemble, accusation-as-power

¹⁵ See Elaine Pagels, *The Origins of Satan* (New York: Vintage, 1995). Originally, writes Pagels, Satan appears as a minor instrument of God used to confound human plans on behalf of the Almighty. Pagels observes that the writers of the Old Testament took a twofold path to deal with enemies of the Israelites, and indeed the whole problem of Otherness. For those outside tribal limits, subhuman figures were drawn, chiefly animal in character, and devolve onto the notion of the *Beast*. For enemies within, on the other hand, human figures were introduced, who gradually grew in power and independence of the deity. It was at this level that Milton, introduces Satan as the Fallen Angel, Lucifer.

devolves from these heights down to the numberless mediations of everyday life in family, workplace, and community. Without a dense, reinforcing network of codes, the Satanic complex would be no more prepossessing than a sand castle waiting for the next tide. With it—and above all, with the policing functions, the gendarmerie, courts, prisons; and standing behind them, the ranks of the soldiers and their hierarchical command structure, sergeants barking; and alongside that as well, the “Mills” with their manuals and codes, the impersonal weapon systems (yes, requiring fans, which require manuals and all), and the procedures of the technical elites, it becomes awe-inspiring. Through all this is the regime established, moving to a drumbeat of accusation. It is this structure that Blake subtends with the figure of “dark Satanic mills,” in our lingo, the “Military-Industrial Complex” as it goes to War.

War is the health of the state, in Randolph Bourne’s memorable phrase, and accusation is its plasma. To the degree that a state plans and executes aggression, so must it justify itself. Else the body politic, needing to be made robust for the task, would fall to pieces. To justify itself, the warrior state must incriminate others, and to do this requires signifiers of the Enemy—from the early 20th century Communist to today’s Satan-in-Chief, the Terrorist. Equally important, however, the state requires a malleable populace made ready to accept the order of things. This happens in part through the low-grade yet incessant application of accusation pumped through the system of the warrior state, from its main vessels to its capillaries. Its instrument is surveillance. At one end, then, the great Spy and Terror cases and the spectacular violations of the Constitution; at the other, numberless reminders of Danger, each with its implicit subtext: *What are you, miserable citizen, doing to stanch the tide of Terror? Why are you not working hard enough? Just whose side are you on? Do you not remember the words of Bush the Second: Either you are with us or the terrorists?*

“If you see something, say something,” says the sign in the Subway car; and each rider feels, at some complicit corner of being, insufficiently militant in the common defense: for she *has seen something*, has she not; why, then, has she not spoken to the Authority about it? Then of course, there are the “Heightened security needs,” intoned by the manufactured voice over the airport speaker; these require that the loyal traveler, “report all unattended luggage to the proper Authority.” What, then, about that black object over there? Who is near it? A miasma of fear supervenes, bonding the State and citizens eager to prove their fidelity, and opening onto an abyss for those who hold back. Ostensibly free, we become a society of snitches in a gigantic compound that is at the same time a prison and a zone of protection against a terroristic, terrifying outside.

Bear in mind:

First, that these occurrences are generally speaking, minor in themselves, hence do not rise to the level of emergency, nor do they require full attention. Like the rituals at the airport security lines, each chipping away seems readily assimilable into the ranks of the ordinary and forgettable and is remembered, if at all, as a nuisance. But this adaptation is a danger, for by the same token these incidents become a kind of firmament and setting for the Satanic.

Second, that they bleed into a pattern highly familiar from normal life, spreading out spatially into everyday moments of domination and surveillance, and temporally into patterns inculcated from early childhood. Multiply every disembodied airport voice into

scores of messages from the humanoid ritually asserting on the mechanized phone tree: “This call may be monitored for quality assurance . . .” So somebody is snooping on your phone call—as on every bar code you enter into the supermarket checkout process. Add to these the surveillance cameras, prefigured by Blake as “Satan’s Watch-Fiends.”¹⁶ Thus surveillance, the inescapable accoutrement of accusation, springs up like toadstools in the advanced centers of the world: New York, London, Tel Aviv. There is an entire economy of accusation in the regime of Satanic Mills, watching, nagging, hemming in the mass, extracting power for the aggrandizement of the state. War is its matrix. And the system prepares for war in all its Mills, bringing the Satanic arts of surveillance to bear on the workers in advanced, monopoly capital, where *productivity* is the mode, and a century-old process of controlling and invading the bodies of workers are the norm: “quality control” is the fine structure of domination, the quiet, everyday humiliation of the worker, the control that does not speak its own name.¹⁷

Third, how they radiate into patterns of domination set going by the empire of capital, political-economic as well as ecological. The regime of fear and accusation is endemic to capital, with its spectral economy that divides and isolates people, making them playthings of a global Market more remote and arbitrary than any figuration of god. John Milton wanted to “justify the ways of God to Man”; but the ideologues of capital seek to bind people through confusion. Much has been made since the middle of the last century of the so-called end of ideology, in other words, how no one interpretation can encompass the endless variety of life. No Pattern at all, say the ruling classes, as though their reign, aside from being disinterestedly benign, is random as well. This is standard bourgeois ideology, like adverts for HSBC (The Hong Kong and Shanghai Banking Corporation Ltd., the “World’s Local Bank,” headquarters, London) which will typically show a triptych of the same image appended to various points of view, all presumed equivalent, viz, an automobile shown thrice and captioned “freedom,” “status symbol,” and “polluter.” Anything goes under capitalism; or as National Public Radio calls their news program: “All Things Considered.” “Things,” by definition, have no qualities and no internal relationship with each other; and to string them out this way dissolves everything into the Sea of Exchange Value, opening new paths of commodification and leading to that deterritorialization at the heart of capital’s regime, that transiently exhilarating, soulless emptying out, the “all that is solid melting into air” that unmoors the self and leaves it empty and confused, a plaything of Satanic forces. Add to this the systematic destruction of the category of truth inherent in the late capitalist society of the commodity where huckstering, public relations and advertising are dominant modalities, and we get a sense of how the transition from Satan as a coherently diabolic being to a “regular fellow” is achieved—and also of Blake’s extraordinary vision, for he wrote well in advance of the emergence, much less maturation, of these tendencies.

Here I think we arrive at a partial answer to the question posed earlier, as to why the “good citizen” presents a gelatinous surface to the challenge of “putting an end to war.” We

¹⁶ *Milton* 29: 50 [B, p. 128]; *Jerusalem* 35: 1 [B, p. 181]. He meant the gaze of people like Hayley, forever on the prowl, from which the artist had to find little spaces of refuge. Needless to add, the technology of surveillance was then rudimentary, Foucault’s Panopticon notwithstanding.

¹⁷ The classic text within political economy is Harry Braverman, *Labor and Monopoly Capital* (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1974). Studies by the Frankfurt School, notably Herbert Marcuse, became influential in the 1960s to spur countercultural revolt. I never forgot his phrase, from *Eros and Civilization* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966 [1955]): “Administration is the pure form of domination.”

might refer to Yeats' amazingly prescient poem of 1918, "The Second Coming," in which he calls attention to the epoch looming when "the best lack all conviction, while the worst are full of passionate intensity."¹⁸ The lack of conviction is different from not caring—though we see this as well, just as we see plenty of folk, not at all the "worst," by the way, shouting with foolish or deluded intensity at their Tea Party meetings. It is more a function of parts kept apart, of people who lack the means of connection—to each other, to the knowing that can give coherence, to the deeper parts of themselves, to the universe of which they form a part—people beaten down by the steady beat of low-grade surveillance and accusation, made fearful by living powerless, alone and separated, in the entrails of a monster whose laws grind on irrespective of life, a world where the great sweep of capital means that life can no longer be actively lived, but must be endured, rather, within the functioning of the System. No, it is not that the inert ones do not care. It is that they really do lack conviction, because their life is the life of the isolated Ego, produced by capital and reproducing capital. Ego: the product of Satan, the instrument of Satan, Satan himself.

Satan Goes to War

And the Mills of Satan were separated into a moony Space
Among the rocks of Albions Temples and Satans Druid Sons
Offer the Human Victims throughout all the Earth, and Albions
Dread Tomb immortal on his Rock, overshadowd the whole Earth:
Where Satan making to himself Laws from his own identity,
Compell'd others to serve him in moral gratitude & submission
Being call'd God: setting himself above all that is called God.
And all the Spectres of the Dead calling themselves Sons of God
In his Synagogues worship Satan under the Unutterable Name.¹⁹

Who, finally, is Satan? The question is improper, as "who," implies some-body and Satan is nobody—though you would have a hard time convincing a lot of people in the backwater that is the United States of the fact.²⁰ Better to ask, "what" or "how." As for the former, Satan is an epithet, to be hurled at anyone who brings forward the organized degree of evil-doing suggested by the ancient notion of the devil. Here, it is safe to say, we run into a great deal of variation depending upon one's moral universe. The United States freely uses this device (as in Bush's "Axis of Evil" or Reagan's "Evil Empire"), while being the Great Satan to a lot of its victims. Among recent politicians, snarling Dick Cheney perhaps takes

¹⁸ "The Second Coming," concluding with the great, foreboding line: "... what rough beast, its hour come round at last,/ Slouches towards Bethlehem to be born." Originally from *Michael Robartes and the Dancer*, (Churchtown, Dundrum, Ireland: The Chuala Press, 1920), and cited as one of the 100 most anthologized poems in the English language. I would take Yeats' use of "worst" and "best" ironically and self-reflectively, as a snooty judgment passed upon common folk by a member of the elite lacking all conviction.

¹⁹ *Milton* 11: 6-14 [B, p. 104]. Albion means variously England or humanity; the Druids were, for Blake, the prehistoric savage races of England, or the archaic forms taken by the Devil; by the Unutterable Name Blake means here YHWH (Yahweh), the name for the Hebrew deity not to be spoken in the rabbinical tradition. Then, of course, the Pauline insight of being called God. For additional meanings, see text.

²⁰ Astounding numbers of folk in the United States continue to believe in the existence of the Devil as an actual flesh and blood person. I have heard scholarly estimates in the neighborhood of 40 percent. This grim fact tells us a lot about the sociology of this country, and plays into the tremendous success that diabolization by demagogues and propagandists enjoys, most consequentially through their construction of the Communist and the Terrorist.

the Satanic laurel for many, though Barack Obama, the mild-mannered deceiver, is perhaps the more perfect representative from Blake's perspective. (No wonder they quarrel so!)

Blake's perspective, however, resists any kind of narrow personification of Satan. For him, the "How," to be more exact, the way Satan is, becomes the leading question. Satan is not outside us and takes no particular form. He, or it, is rather a manifestation of our fallen being, and exists strictly because the fallibility of human being is as great as is its potential. This latter, the core of our being, is a gift of nature, for it is the birthright of every human creature as she or he enters the world: it is the universality of the imagination. As such, we are set up for a fall—and fallen, create patterns to perpetuate the fall, which collectively take the name of Satan. Call it Original Sin, if you like, but if you think of original Sin as a kind of badness or essential evil to the human being, you are, in Blake's worldview, perpetuating the sin yourself. You have then become Satanic, you have become the Accuser, now of humanity *in toto*. For Blake, original sin is error, and the path of redemption has a twofold aspect: awakening the creative imagination (which is in itself critical and truth-telling) and pursuing the way of forgiveness. This latter path is that of Jesus, and explored in *Jerusalem*—which we need to set aside for present purpose.

Blake makes much of an enigmatic usage in which he asserts that Satan represents the "limit of opacity."²¹ An odd construction. Where have the red suit and pitchfork gone? Or the serpent in the garden, or Lucifer his rage, or Mephistopheles making the deal with Faust? Satan instead is something blocking the passage of light, something within the sphere of visualization, or perception. He is a defect within us, internalized from humdrum existence and, one should think, a follow-on to the famous passage of MHH: "if the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite."²² [B, p. 39.] Satan is the grime covering the doors of perception.²³

As that which blocks our reaching for ultimate being, the Satanic complex installs various barricades within the Self, and these, in their twistings, comprise the internal regime of war, as a realm of delusive desire and alienated morality, "[w]here Satan making to himself Laws from his own identity,/Compell'd others to serve him in moral gratitude & submission/ Being call'd God: setting himself above all that is called God." War and aggression stem not from any particular biological instinct, but from what my mentor, Stanley Diamond, called "unlived life." We can add that this unlived life breeds what is Satanic and points toward war-making, which under a Satanic regime takes on a special value precisely because within it, life seems more authentic than under the conditions of "quiet desperation" lived under ordinary circumstances—even if Satanic life requires unliving, that is, sacrificing of the lives of innumerable others. Under Satan war appears as the higher truth and the more fully achieved existence. Unlike the miasma of everyday life under capital, it has clarity, focus, and purpose: and "Human Victims throughout all the Earth" testify to its power.

²¹ All but one of the 32 usages occur in the Prophetic books. Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, has an extensive discussion.

²² See note 11. It is quite unlikely that Blake would have approved of Aldous Huxley's reading of this passage, or Jim Morrison's. Each of these offered something of a "quick fix," whether from chemical inputs or the release afforded by performance. My intention however is not to denounce (accuse), but to keep the question open.

²³ Blake puts it differently in the next line: "For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern," that is, of the Self.

Satan's triumph is that of the isolated Ego, a form of the self in which the visionary dimension is closed off by a system of internal barriers and external manipulations, specific in this instance to the capitalist system.²⁴ Egoic being emerges from that original "fallen" state when the human becomes split-off from its original matrix, i.e., when the capacity for visionary imagination loses its way. Capital exploits this just as much as it does the surplus value produced by the worker; its realm may be seen from the triple perspective of generalized commodity production, generalized egoic splitting, and generalized warfare under the aegis of the MIC. It is this Satanic Trinity that generates the ecological crisis, and blocks an aroused awareness of how to overcome it—a subject we cannot follow further at present, except to say that this approach converges with David Schwartzman's insight that a "solar communism" beyond the ecological crisis cannot take place without thoroughgoing demilitarization. To heal the ecological crisis, we do need "to put an end to war": nothing less will do.²⁵

Release from bondage to Satan is release from the Ego's power, and the resumption of the visionary imagination. It is essential to the struggle against war. Is this ever achievable? Not in any absolute sense, as neither the infinite, the eternal nor the notion of god can be an object of knowing. These terms are, we might say, *naturally* opaque, in that no word can encompass the "is-ness" of the infinite—or of the eternal, or of god.²⁶ Just so, all religions, and all spiritual practices however they may grasp at this truth, can go no further than to illuminate the lower reaches of the journey. But respecting these limits is necessary as a check to dogmatism, sectarianism, fanaticism, a host of bad "isms"—including militarism. More to the present point, the journey, however imperfect, releases us toward a goal illuminated by the recapture of a lost perspective. We do not reach the infinite, or god, but by seeking it, can achieve a matchless critique of the given war machine, its capitalist roots, and the alienated Satanic being worshipped under the name of common sense. We generate, in other words, that kind of existentially alive engagement in which portions of being come into fruitful contact, in contrast to the pallid existence of those "best [who] lack all conviction,"—the mass of citizenry who cannot see beyond the Satanic Mills.

There is a contemporary instance, unforeseeable by Blake and the society of his time, but entirely consistent with his vision. He concludes the extract quoted above from *Milton* with mention of the "Unutterable Name" directed toward Satan as he becomes the God of this world. It is clear that Blake means by this the Lord of the Israelites, YHWH. But the unutterable name has been recast in the age of modern war by the great Christian contemplative, Thomas Merton, and elaborated by his worthy successor, James Douglass: it becomes the "unspeakable."²⁷

The unspeakable, as Merton and Douglass conceive it, is a kind of shock produced in us by the overwhelmingness of modern-day militarism, from world-ending nuclear weaponry down to the white phosphorus launched by Israel on Gaza. Douglass sees it as the

²⁴ For discussion, cf. *History and Spirit*, for a summary, pp. 84-85.

²⁵ David Schwartzman, "Ecosocialism or Ecocatastrophe?" *Capitalism Nature Socialism*, Vol. 20, No. 1, March 2009, pp. 6-33.

²⁶ Cf. *History and Spirit*, Chapter 5, pp. 173-196.

²⁷ Thomas Merton, *Raids on the Unspeakable* (New York: New Directions, 1966); James Douglass, *JFK and the Unspeakable: Why He Died and Why it Matters* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2008).

Satanic congerie that converged on the lonely and brave figure of John F. Kennedy and eliminated him before he could reverse the war machine. It is, writes Merton, “the void that contradicts everything that is spoken even before the words are said, the void that gets into the language of public and official declarations at the very moment they are announced and makes them ring dead with the hollowness of the abyss. It is the void out of which Eichmann drew the punctilious exactitude of his obedience . . .”²⁸

It is the void prepared by Satan, where the immortal vision is not to go, but must go.

Blake had the last word for our adversary:

To The Accuser who is
The God of This World

Truly My Satan thou art but a Dunce
And dost not know the Garment from the man.
Every Harlot was a Virgin once,
Nor canst thou ever change Kate into Nan.

Tho thou are Worshipd by the Names Divine
Of Jesus & Jehovah: thou art still
The Son of Morn in weary Night's decline
The lost Travellers Dream under the Hill.²⁹

²⁸ Merton, *Raids*, p. 4.

²⁹ Conclusion of a short illustrated work, with line engravings: *For the Sexes/THE GATES OF PARADISE*. Date uncertain, though likely late, probably post-1820. B, p. 269.