

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

**NCLC**

**173**



Volume 173

# Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism

Criticism of the  
Works of Novelists, Philosophers, and Other  
Creative Writers Who Died between 1800  
and 1899, from the First Published Critical  
Appraisals to Current Evaluations

江苏工业学院图书馆

Jessie Bonarito  
Russel Whitaker

Project Editors

THOMSON  
★  
GALE





## Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism, Vol. 173

### Project Editors

Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker

### Editorial

Kathy D. Darrow, Jeffrey W. Hunter, Jelena O. Krstović, Michelle Lee, Thomas J. Schoenberg, Noah Schusterbauer, Lawrence J. Trudeau

### Data Capture

Frances Monroe, Gwen Tucker

### Indexing Services

Factiva®, a Dow Jones and Reuters Company

### Rights and Acquisitions

Margaret Abendroth, Emma Hull, Jackie Jones

### Imaging and Multimedia

Dean Dauphinais, Robert Duncan, Leitha Etheridge-Sims, Lezlie Light, Michael Logusz, Dan Newell, Kelly A. Quin, Denay Wilding

### Composition and Electronic Capture

Tracey L. Matthews

### Manufacturing

Rhonda Dover

### Associate Product Manager

Marc Cormier

© 2007 Thomson Gale, a part of The Thomson Corporation. Thomson and Star Logo are trademarks and Gale is a registered trademark used herein under license.

### For more information, contact

Thomson Gale  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535  
Or you can visit our internet site at  
<http://www.gale.com>

### ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

No part of this work covered by the copyright herein may be reproduced or used in any form or by any means—graphic, electronic, or mechanical, including photocopying, recording, taping, Web distribution, or information storage retrieval systems—without the written permission of the publisher.

This publication is a creative work fully protected by all applicable copyright laws, as well as by misappropriation, trade secret, unfair competition, and other applicable laws. The authors and editors of this work have added value to the underlying factual material herein through one or more of the following: unique and original selection, coordination, expression, arrangement, and classification of the information.

For permission to use material from the product, submit your request via the Web at <http://www.gale-edit.com/permissions>, or you may download our Permissions Request form and submit your request by fax or mail to:

### Permissions Department

Thomson Gale  
27500 Drake Rd.  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535  
Permissions Hotline:  
248-699-8006 or 800-877-4253, ext. 8006  
Fax 248-699-8074 or 800-762-4058

Since this page cannot legibly accommodate all copyright notices, the acknowledgments constitute an extension of the copyright notice.

While every effort has been made to secure permission to reprint material and to ensure the reliability of the information presented in this publication, Thomson Gale neither guarantees the accuracy of the data contained herein nor assumes any responsibility for errors, omissions or discrepancies. Thomson Gale accepts no payment for listing; and inclusion in the publication of any organization, agency, institution, publication, service, or individual does not imply endorsement of the editors or publisher. Errors brought to the attention of the publisher and verified to the satisfaction of the publisher will be corrected in future editions.

### LIBRARY OF CONGRESS CATALOG CARD NUMBER 84-643008

ISBN-13: 978-0-7876-8657-4  
ISBN-10: 0-7876-8657-3  
ISSN 0732-1864

Printed in the United States of America  
10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



## Preface

Since its inception in 1981, *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism* (NCLC) has been a valuable resource for students and librarians seeking critical commentary on writers of this transitional period in world history. Designated an “Outstanding Reference Source” by the American Library Association with the publication of its first volume, NCLC has since been purchased by over 6,000 school, public, and university libraries. The series has covered more than 450 authors representing 33 nationalities and over 17,000 titles. No other reference source has surveyed the critical reaction to nineteenth-century authors and literature as thoroughly as NCLC.

### Scope of the Series

NCLC is designed to introduce students and advanced readers to the authors of the nineteenth century and to the most significant interpretations of these authors’ works. The great poets, novelists, short story writers, playwrights, and philosophers of this period are frequently studied in high school and college literature courses. By organizing and reprinting commentary written on these authors, NCLC helps students develop valuable insight into literary history, promotes a better understanding of the texts, and sparks ideas for papers and assignments. Each entry in NCLC presents a comprehensive survey of an author’s career or an individual work of literature and provides the user with a multiplicity of interpretations and assessments. Such variety allows students to pursue their own interests; furthermore, it fosters an awareness that literature is dynamic and responsive to many different opinions.

Every fourth volume of NCLC is devoted to literary topics that cannot be covered under the author approach used in the rest of the series. Such topics include literary movements, prominent themes in nineteenth-century literature, literary reaction to political and historical events, significant eras in literary history, prominent literary anniversaries, and the literatures of cultures that are often overlooked by English-speaking readers.

NCLC continues the survey of criticism of world literature begun by Thomson Gale’s *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (CLC) and *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (TCLC).

### Organization of the Book

An NCLC entry consists of the following elements:

- The **Author Heading** cites the name under which the author most commonly wrote, followed by birth and death dates. Also located here are any name variations under which an author wrote, including transliterated forms for authors whose native languages use nonroman alphabets. If the author wrote consistently under a pseudonym, the pseudonym will be listed in the author heading and the author’s actual name given in parenthesis on the first line of the biographical and critical information. Uncertain birth or death dates are indicated by question marks. Single-work entries are preceded by a heading that consists of the most common form of the title in English translation (if applicable) and the original date of composition.
- The **Introduction** contains background information that introduces the reader to the author, work, or topic that is the subject of the entry.
- The list of **Principal Works** is ordered chronologically by date of first publication and lists the most important works by the author. The genre and publication date of each work is given. In the case of foreign authors whose works have been translated into English, the list will focus primarily on twentieth-century translations, selecting those works most commonly considered the best by critics. Unless otherwise indicated, dramas are dated by first performance, not first publication. Lists of **Representative Works** by different authors appear with topic entries.



- Reprinted **Criticism** is arranged chronologically in each entry to provide a useful perspective on changes in critical evaluation over time. The critic's name and the date of composition or publication of the critical work are given at the beginning of each piece of criticism. Unsigned criticism is preceded by the title of the source in which it appeared. All titles by the author featured in the text are printed in boldface type. Footnotes are reprinted at the end of each essay or excerpt. In the case of excerpted criticism, only those footnotes that pertain to the excerpted texts are included. Criticism in topic entries is arranged chronologically under a variety of subheadings to facilitate the study of different aspects of the topic.
- A complete **Bibliographical Citation** of the original essay or book precedes each piece of criticism.
- Critical essays are prefaced by brief **Annotations** explicating each piece.
- An annotated bibliography of **Further Reading** appears at the end of each entry and suggests resources for additional study. In some cases, significant essays for which the editors could not obtain reprint rights are included here. Boxed material following the further reading list provides references to other biographical and critical sources on the author in series published by Thomson Gale.

## Indexes

Each volume of *NCLC* contains a **Cumulative Author Index** listing all authors who have appeared in a wide variety of reference sources published by Thomson Gale, including *NCLC*. A complete list of these sources is found facing the first page of the Author Index. The index also includes birth and death dates and cross references between pseudonyms and actual names.

A **Cumulative Nationality Index** lists all authors featured in *NCLC* by nationality, followed by the number of the *NCLC* volume in which their entry appears.

A **Cumulative Topic Index** lists the literary themes and topics treated in the series as well as in *Classical and Medieval Literature Criticism*, *Literature Criticism from 1400 to 1800*, *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism*, and the *Contemporary Literary Criticism Yearbook*, which was discontinued in 1998.

An alphabetical **Title Index** accompanies each volume of *NCLC*, with the exception of the Topics volumes. Listings of titles by authors covered in the given volume are followed by the author's name and the corresponding page numbers where the titles are discussed. English translations of foreign titles and variations of titles are cross-referenced to the title under which a work was originally published. Titles of novels, dramas, nonfiction books, and poetry, short story, or essay collections are printed in italics, while individual poems, short stories, and essays are printed in roman type within quotation marks.

In response to numerous suggestions from librarians, Thomson Gale also produces an annual paperbound edition of the *NCLC* cumulative title index. This annual cumulation, which alphabetically lists all titles reviewed in the series, is available to all customers. Additional copies of this index are available upon request. Librarians and patrons will welcome this separate index; it saves shelf space, is easy to use, and is recyclable upon receipt of the next edition.

## *Citing Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*

When citing criticism reprinted in the Literary Criticism Series, students should provide complete bibliographic information so that the cited essay can be located in the original print or electronic source. Students who quote directly from reprinted criticism may use any accepted bibliographic format, such as University of Chicago Press style or Modern Language Association style.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a bibliography set forth in *The Chicago Manual of Style*, 14th ed. (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:



Franklin, J. Jeffrey. "The Victorian Discourse of Gambling: Speculations on *Middlemarch* and *The Duke's Children*." *ELH* 61, no. 4 (winter 1994): 899-921. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Vol. 168, edited by Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker, 39-51. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006.

Frank, Joseph. "The Gambler: A Study in Ethnopsychology." In *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*, edited by Elizabeth Cheresch Allen and Gary Saul Morson, 69-85. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Vol. 168, edited by Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker, 75-84. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006.

The examples below follow recommendations for preparing a works cited list set forth in the *MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers*, 6th ed. (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2003); the first example pertains to material drawn from periodicals, the second to material reprinted from books:

Franklin, J. Jeffrey. "The Victorian Discourse of Gambling: Speculations on *Middlemarch* and *The Duke's Children*." *ELH* 61.4 (Winter 1994): 899-921. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Eds. Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker. Vol. 168. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006. 39-51.

Frank, Joseph. "The Gambler: A Study in Ethnopsychology." *Freedom and Responsibility in Russian Literature: Essays in Honor of Robert Louis Jackson*. Eds. Elizabeth Cheresch Allen and Gary Saul Morson. Evanston, Ill.: Northwestern University Press, 1995. 69-85. Reprinted in *Nineteenth-Century Literature Criticism*. Eds. Jessica Bomarito and Russel Whitaker. Vol. 168. Detroit: Thomson Gale, 2006. 75-84.

### **Suggestions are Welcome**

Readers who wish to suggest new features, topics, or authors to appear in future volumes, or who have other suggestions or comments are cordially invited to call, write, or fax the Associate Product Manager:

Associate Product Manager, Literary Criticism Series  
Thomson Gale  
27500 Drake Road  
Farmington Hills, MI 48331-3535  
1-800-347-4253 (GALE)  
Fax: 248-699-8054



## Acknowledgments

The editors wish to thank the copyright holders of the criticism included in this volume and the permissions managers of many book and magazine publishing companies for assisting us in securing reproduction rights. Following is a list of the copyright holders who have granted us permission to reproduce material in this volume of *NCLC*. Every effort has been made to trace copyright, but if omissions have been made, please let us know.

### COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *NCLC*, VOLUME 173, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING PERIODICALS:

*Blake Studies*, v. 1, 1968-69. Copyright © 1968, Kay Long and Roger R. Easson. Reproduced by permission.—*Colby Library Quarterly*, v. 13, June, 1977. Reprinted by permission of the publisher.—*College English*, v. 66, May, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by the National Council of Teachers of English. Reproduced by permission of the publisher.—*European Romantic Review*, v. 8, summer, 1997 for “Locating the Satanic: Blake’s *Milton* and the Poetics of ‘Self-Examination’” by Kevin D. Hutchings. Copyright © 1997 by Logos Press. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis, Ltd., <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>, and the author.—*Folk Music Journal*, v. 4, 1981; v. 7, 1996. Copyright © The English Folk Dance and Song Society 1981, 1996. All rights reserved. Both reproduced by permission.—*Forum for Modern Language Studies*, v. 5, January, 1969 for “N. M. Karamzin’s *Messenger of Europe* (*Vestnik Yevropy*), 1802-03” by A. G. Cross. Copyright © 1969 Oxford University Press. Reproduced by permission of Oxford University Press and the author.—*Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, v. 81, January, 1982 for “Typology, History, and Blake’s *Milton*” by Albert J. Rivero. Copyright © 1982 by the Board of Trustees of the University of Illinois. Used with permission of the University of Illinois Press and the author.—*Journal of Folklore Research*, v. 31, January-December, 1994. Copyright © Indiana University Press. Reproduced by permission.—*Milton Studies*, v. 11, 1978. Copyright © 1978, University of Pittsburgh Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—*Nineteenth-Century Contexts*, v. 19, 1995 for “Blake’s *Milton*: The Metaphysics of Gender” by Marc Kaplan. Copyright © 1995 O. P. A. (Overseas Publishers Association). Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis, Ltd., <http://www.tandf.co.uk/journals>, and the author.—*Religion and Literature*, v. 25, spring, 1993. Copyright © 1993 by the University of Notre Dame English Department. Reprint permission granted by the University of Notre Dame.—*Romantic Russia*, v. 1, 1997. Reproduced by permission.—*Scando-Slavica*, v. 27, 1981 for “Metafiction in Russian 18th Century Prose: Karamzin’s *Rycar’ nasego vremeni* or *Novyj Akteon, vnuk Kadma i Garmonii*” by Gitta Hammarberg. Reproduced by permission of Taylor & Francis AS, <http://www.tandf.no/scandoslavica>, and the author.—*SEL: Studies in English Literature, 1500-1900*, v. 30, autumn, 1990. Copyright © 1990 The Johns Hopkins University Press. Reproduced by permission.—*Slavic and East European Journal*, v. 29, summer, 1985. Copyright © 1985 by AATSEEL of the U.S., Inc. Reproduced by permission.—*South Central Bulletin*, v. 31, winter, 1971. Copyright © 1971 *South Central Bulletin*. Reprinted with permission of The John Hopkins University Press.—*Studies in Romanticism*, v. 20, spring, 1981; v. 36, spring, 1997. Copyright © 1981, 1997 by the Trustees of Boston University. Both reproduced by permission.—*Studies on Voltaire and the Eighteenth Century*, v. 151, 1976 for “Nicholas Karamzin and the Dilemma of Luxury in 18th Century Russia” by J. L. Black. Copyright © Theodore Besterman 1976. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and author.—*Western Folklore*, v. 47, October, 1988. Copyright © 1988 by the Western States Folklore Society. Reproduced by permission.

### COPYRIGHTED MATERIAL IN *NCLC*, VOLUME 173, WAS REPRODUCED FROM THE FOLLOWING BOOKS:

Bradford, Gamaliel. From *As God Made Them: Portraits of Some Nineteenth-Century Americans*. Houghton Mifflin Company, 1929. Copyright © 1929 by Gamaliel Bradford. Renewed 1956 by Sarah Bradford Ross. All rights reserved. Reprinted by permission of Houghton Mifflin Company.—Emerson, Caryl. From *Boris Godunov: Transpositions of a Russian Theme*. Indiana University Press, 1986. Copyright © 1986 by Caryl Emerson. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Howard, John. From *Blake’s Milton: A Study in the Selfhood*. Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1976. Copyright © 1976 by Associated University Presses, Inc. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.—Kisljagina, L. G. From “The Question of the Development of N. M. Karamzin’s Social Political Views in the Nineties of the Eighteenth Century: N. M. Karamzin and the Great French Bourgeois Revolution,” in *Essays on Karamzin: Russian Man-of-Letters, Political Thinker, Historian, 1766-1826*. Edited by J. L. Black. Mouton, 1975. Copyright © 1975 in the Netherlands by



Mouton & Co, N. V., Publishers, The Hague. Reproduced by permission of Mouton de Gruyter, a division of Walter de Gruyter & Co.—Mazour, Anatole G. From *Modern Russian Historiography*. D. Van Nostrand Co., Inc., 1958. Copyright © 1958, by D. Van Nostrand Company, Inc. Renewed 1986 by Alexander L. Mazour. Reproduced by permission of the Literary Estate of Anatole G. Mazour.—McMurtry, Jo. From *English Language, English Literature: The Creation of an Academic Discipline*. Archon Book, 1985. Copyright © 1985 by Jo McMurtry. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Nebel, Henry M., Jr. From *N. M. Karamzin: A Russian Sentimentalist*. Mouton & Co., 1967. Copyright © 1967 in the Netherlands by Mouton & Co, N. V., Publishers, The Hague. Reproduced by permission of the author.—Offord, Derek. From “Karamzin’s Gothic Tale: ‘The Island of Bornholm,’” in *The Gothic-Fantastic in Nineteenth-Century Russian Literature*. Edited by Neil Cornwell. Rodopi, 1999. Copyright © 1999 Editions Rodopi B. V. Reproduced by permission.—Riede, David. From “Blake’s *Milton*: On Membership in the Church Paul,” in *Re-Membering Milton: Essays on the Texts and Traditions*. Edited by Mary Nyquist and Margaret W. Ferguson. Methuen, 1988. Copyright © 1988 by David Riede. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission of the publisher and the author.—Wilgus, D. K. From *Anglo-American Folksong Scholarship since 1898*. Rutgers University Press, 1959. Copyright © 1959 by Rutgers, The State University. Renewed 1987 by Donald K. Wilgus. Reproduced by permission of Rutgers, The State University.—Wright, Julia M. From *Blake, Nationalism, and the Politics of Alienation*. Ohio University Press, 2004. Copyright © 2004 by Ohio University Press. All rights reserved. Reproduced by permission.



# Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board

The members of the Thomson Gale Literature Product Advisory Board—reference librarians from public and academic library systems—represent a cross-section of our customer base and offer a variety of informed perspectives on both the presentation and content of our literature products. Advisory board members assess and define such quality issues as the relevance, currency, and usefulness of the author coverage, critical content, and literary topics included in our series; evaluate the layout, presentation, and general quality of our printed volumes; provide feedback on the criteria used for selecting authors and topics covered in our series; provide suggestions for potential enhancements to our series; identify any gaps in our coverage of authors or literary topics, recommending authors or topics for inclusion; analyze the appropriateness of our content and presentation for various user audiences, such as high school students, undergraduates, graduate students, librarians, and educators; and offer feedback on any proposed changes/enhancements to our series. We wish to thank the following advisors for their advice throughout the year.

**Barbara M. Bibel**

Librarian  
Oakland Public Library  
Oakland, California

**Dr. Toby Burrows**

Principal Librarian  
The Scholars' Centre  
University of Western Australia Library  
Nedlands, Western Australia

**Celia C. Daniel**

Associate Reference Librarian  
Howard University Libraries  
Washington, D.C.

**David M. Durant**

Reference Librarian  
Joyner Library  
East Carolina University  
Greenville, North Carolina

**Nancy T. Guidry**

Librarian  
Bakersfield Community College  
Bakersfield, California

**Heather Martin**

Arts & Humanities Librarian  
University of Alabama at Birmingham, Sterne Library  
Birmingham, Alabama

**Susan Mikula**

Librarian  
Indiana Free Library  
Indiana, Pennsylvania

**Thomas Nixon**

Humanities Reference Librarian  
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Davis  
Library  
Chapel Hill, North Carolina

**Mark Schumacher**

Jackson Library  
University of North Carolina at Greensboro  
Greensboro, North Carolina

**Gwen Scott-Miller**

Assistant Director  
Sno-Isle Regional Library System  
Marysville, Washington



# Contents

Preface vii

Acknowledgments xi

Literary Criticism Series Advisory Board xiii

<b>William Blake 1757-1827</b> .....	1
<i>English poet and essayist</i>	
<i>Entry devoted to the poem Milton (1804?)</i>	
<b>Francis James Child 1825-1896</b> .....	164
<i>American editor, critic, and librettist</i>	
<b>Nikolai Mikhailovich Karamzin 1766-1826</b> .....	248
<i>Russian historian, short story writer, poet, essayist, editor, and translator</i>	

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Author Index 363

Literary Criticism Series Cumulative Topic Index 469

NCLC Cumulative Nationality Index 483

NCLC-173 Title Index 487



# Milton

## William Blake

English poet and essayist.

The following entry presents criticism of Blake's poem *Milton* (1804?). For criticism devoted to *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul* (1794), see *NCLC*, Volume 37; for criticism devoted to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793), see *NCLC*, Volume 57; for criticism devoted to *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (1820), see *NCLC*, Volume 127; for information on Blake's complete career, see *NCLC*, Volume 13.

### INTRODUCTION

Most scholars recognize Blake's *Milton* as one of the poet's most imaginative, and challenging, literary works. First published circa 1804, the poem captures Blake's besieged mental state during the years 1800 to 1803, when he worked as an engraver for the poet William Hayley in the quiet coastal town of Felpham. At first Blake welcomed the slower pace of life in the countryside, after years of struggling to survive as an artist in London. Eventually, however, Blake became frustrated by the drudgery of his labor, as well as by Hayley's failure to appreciate his unique genius, and in 1803 he returned to the capital. Although Blake wrote much of *Milton* at Felpham, he completed it in London, while also executing a series of illuminated plates to accompany the long poem. Along with *The Four Zoas* (composed between 1796 and 1807; published in 1963 as *Vala, or The Four Zoas*) and *Jerusalem* (1820), *Milton* is one of Blake's three Prophetic Books, longer poems that seek to create a new mythology of human history, while exploring themes of apocalypse and renewal in the face of the corrosive spiritual effects of the Enlightenment age. The poem's complex structure, its use of arcane symbolism and obscure terminology, and its intensely vivid imagery make it one of the strangest and most difficult to interpret works of the Romantic era. On one level, *Milton* offers an allegorical retelling of Blake's difficult years in Felpham; it contains numerous references to his work, his living arrangements, and his troubled relationship with Hayley. In a broader sense, however, the poem dramatizes the plight of the artist in a society dominated by industrialization and science, and it calls on the heroic figure of the poet, personified

by the resurrected John Milton, to deliver humanity to the heavenly kingdom of Jerusalem. Interpreted in this light, Blake's portrayal of Milton's redemption symbolizes the triumph of inspiration over the cold logic of reason, as well as the ascendancy of a true Christian spirituality (one that is rooted in self-sacrifice and the courage to confront evil) over the selfish material worldview of natural religion, or faith rooted in empirical knowledge.

### PLOT AND MAJOR CHARACTERS

*Milton* is comprised of two books, a preface, and a series of illustrations. In the preface, Blake calls upon all artists to join together in establishing a "New Age," one in which poetic inspiration will supplant scientific inquiry as the dominant intellectual and creative force in human society. In Blake's view, the artist must repudiate the "Stolen and Perverved Writings" of Greek and Roman antiquity, works founded on the artificial precepts of human ingenuity, and instead embrace the purely inspiring texts of the Bible as a means of reaching "those Worlds of Eternity in which we shall live forever in Jesus our Lord." Book One of the poem opens with the "Bard's Song," an apocalyptic retelling of the Fall of Man and the subsequent creation of the universe. This section of the poem recapitulates portions of Blake's earlier work, *The First Book of Urizen* (1794)—even reprinting several lines verbatim—while recasting the figure of Urizen as Satan, whose primary purpose is to thwart the poet Milton's return to earth. After establishing the mythological context of the work, the Bard recounts the ongoing struggle between Satan and Palamabron, a humble artisan representing Blake himself. As an unwitting minion of Satan, Palamabron finds his creativity stifled in the service of fruitless ends, a circumstance that provokes sympathy among the deities of Eternity. Among these deities are Los, a prophet who helps guide mortals in their creative acts; Los's female incarnation, Enitharmon; and Rintrah, a god of political and social upheaval. In order to liberate Palamabron from Satan's charge and in the process restore positive creative energy to the universe, the deities call forth the figure of John Milton. Dead for more than a hundred years, Milton returns to earth to support Palamabron in his battle with Satan. As Milton enters the consciousness of Palamabron in the form of a prophetic vision,



Satan gathers his earthly forces, among them commerce and industry, in order to oppose him. The remainder of Book One chronicles the warlike awakening of Albion, which symbolizes both England and industrial society in general, in anticipation of Milton's arrival; Blake's description of the mounting conflict is replete with images of destruction and chaos. These events all occur within a single moment of poetic vision and reveal the divide between spiritual power, emblematic of humanity's ideal state, and natural power, which embodies the man-made laws of the earth and "continually seeks & tends to Destruction / Ending in death."

Book Two, which is roughly half the length of Book One, opens with the descent to earth of Milton's poetic emanation, the female spirit Ololon. Ololon reveals to Palamabron the inherently corrupt and self-destructive nature of human society, while instructing him in the ways of seeing the world as a true poet. While Ololon embodies many of the virtues necessary for prophecy, she is also tainted, a product of Milton's earthly transgressions. For Blake, Milton's sins lay in his faith in the power of human reason rather than the power of inspiration and in his dogmatic repudiation of human sexuality, something Blake regarded as a healthy manifestation of spirituality. At this point the poem's central drama, in which the heroic figure of the poet must annihilate himself in order to destroy the selfish and false ways of the world, begins to take shape. Milton descends into himself so that he can come to terms with his erroneous thinking; Ololon, fearing her own destruction, transforms herself into Rahab, a virgin deity embodying the selfish, power-lusting attributes of the material world. As Milton experiences his revelation, recognizing the inherent falseness of his earlier convictions, Ololon becomes penitent and is restored to her previously selfless form. This annihilation of the self, far from representing the destruction of human consciousness, in fact represents the liberation of the creative individual from the repressive forces of society, opening the imagination to the healing power of "Jesus the Savior." Milton's act of self-annihilation has saved the earth from chaos and destruction; at the same time, he has effected his own reformation as a poet.

## MAJOR THEMES

*Milton* explores the rift between two facets of human existence: the material world, represented by manufacturing, commerce, and government; and the spiritual world, embodied in the inspired works of great artists. Blake announces his central theme in the poem's preface: he invokes a day in the future when "the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration"—in other words, when the kingdom of heaven will reign on earth, history will end, and humanity will

be restored to a state of eternal bliss. On one level, the idea of redemption had deep personal meaning for Blake as he struggled to extricate himself from an unfulfilling professional situation and reassert his literary talents. Blake also viewed the redemptive act as a means of reforming John Milton, whose great poetic works had been corrupted, in Blake's view, by his failure to recognize the inherent evils of rationalism and natural religion. Blake dramatized these individual struggles within the larger allegorical framework of the world, where a more protracted and menacing battle between the forces of reason and inspiration takes place. By making Milton the protagonist of his poem, Blake established a connection between his own personal redemption, the redemption of his hero-poet, and the redemption of society in general. Milton's central role in the poem also invests the work with a certain literary authority; in *Milton*, as in his other poems, Blake acknowledged Milton's primacy among English poets, even as he leveled scathing critiques at Milton's intellectual beliefs.

While the poem is rich in symbolism and metaphoric language, Blake intended it to be read literally, as a work of prophecy akin to the Book of Revelations. Blake's personal correspondence from this period attests to the visionary aspects of the poem's composition; in a letter to Thomas Butts dated April 25, 1803, Blake claims to have written *Milton* "from immediate dictation . . . without premeditation, and even against my will." In this sense, the poem's ideal of artistic creation, unmediated by rational thought, finds an echo in Blake's own writing methods.

## CRITICAL RECEPTION

Like most of Blake's writings, *Milton* failed to attract much attention at the time of its original publication. Even as interest in Blake's work increased toward the end of the nineteenth century, readers remained perplexed by the convoluted symbolism and unusual diction found in *Milton* and his other prophetic works. For years, scholars puzzled over the poem's complex structure and meaning. Alfred T. Story, in his 1893 study *William Blake*, provides an early examination of the visionary elements in Blake's poetry. While Story had great admiration for Blake's *Milton*, he nevertheless admitted to understanding very little of it and described Blake's later poetry in general as containing a "vast overplus of words utterly without meaning." With the rise of Freudian psychology in the early twentieth century, some commentators began to interpret the poem's visionary imagery and unorthodox language within the context of Blake's mental state during the work's composition. Algernon Charles Swinburne asserted in his *William Blake*, published in 1906, that *Milton* bore "the stamp of an over-heated brain, and of nerves too in-



tensely strung." Even Blake's defenders conceded that the poem was the product of a difficult period for the poet; Edwin J. Ellis, author of *The Real Blake*, which appeared in 1907, referred to Blake's "jarred nerves" and "distracted mind," while Hubert J. Norman, writing in the *Journal of Mental Science* in 1915, associated the poem's "wild welter of verbiage" with Blake's high level of emotional stress. With the rise of Blake scholarship in the years after World War I, however, more meaningful critical interpretations of *Milton* began to emerge. Renowned Blake scholar Samuel Foster Damon, in his 1924 study *William Blake*, was among the first to provide an in-depth reading of *Milton*, while Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, published in 1947, explores the poem's symbolic framework. Harold Bloom offered a thorough analysis of the poem's narrative structure in his 1963 study *Blake's Apocalypse*, praising *Milton* as "a poem worthy of a place beside the Book of Job and *Paradise Regained*." The essay collection *Blake's Sublime Allegory*, edited by Stuart Curran and published in 1973, contains a range of critical interpretations of the work, while John Howard's 1976 study, *Blake's Milton: A Study in the Selfhood*, provides an exhaustive examination of the poem's philosophical, psychological, and symbolic underpinnings. More recently, scholars have begun to explore the poem outside of conventional interpretative models, reading the work as an expression of what Paul Youngquist called the "drama of Blake's poetic empowerment." Other, more specialized readings of the poem have emerged since the 1990s, examining such issues as Blake's representations of gender, his attitude toward nature, and the relationship between his vision of the world and the rise of Great Britain in the early nineteenth century.

## PRINCIPAL WORKS

- Poetical Sketches* (poetry) 1783  
 \**All Religions Are One* (poetry) 1788  
 \**There Is No Natural Religion* (poetry) 1788  
*The Book of Thel* (poetry) 1789  
*Songs of Innocence* (poetry) 1789; revised and enlarged as *Songs of Innocence and of Experience: Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul*, 1794  
*America: A Prophecy* (poetry) 1793  
*For Children: The Gates of Paradise* (poetry) 1793; revised as *For the Sexes: The Gates of Paradise*, 1818?  
 \**The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (poetry and prose) 1793  
*Visions of the Daughters of Albion: The Eye Sees More than the Heart Knows* (poetry) 1793  
*Europe: A Prophecy* (poetry) 1794  
*The First Book of Urizen* (poetry) 1794  
*The Book of Ahania* (poetry) 1795

- The Book of Los* (poetry) 1795  
*The Song of Los* (poetry) 1795  
 \**Milton* (poetry) 1804?  
*A Descriptive Catalogue of Pictures, Poetical and Historical Inventions, Painted by William Blake in Water Colours, being the Ancient Method of Fresco Painting Restored: and Drawings for Public Inspection, etc.* (prose and criticism) 1809  
 †*Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion* (poetry) 1820  
*The Poetical Works of William Blake, Lyrical and Miscellaneous* (essays, poetry, and prose) 1874  
 ‡*The Works of William Blake, Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*. 3 vols. (essays, poetry, and prose) 1893  
*The Letters of William Blake* (letters) 1906  
*The Writings of William Blake* (poetry, essays, criticism, prose, journals, and letters) 1925; revised as *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, 1957; revised, 1966  
 #*The Note-Book of William Blake* (journal) 1935  
*The Portable Blake* (essays, poetry, and prose) 1946  
*Selected Poetry and Prose* (poetry and prose) 1953  
*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (poetry and prose) 1965; revised, 1982  
 ||*Tiriel* (poetry) 1967

\*Dating the original publication of many of Blake's works is difficult, for he alternately printed and revised some of his individual writings over a long period of time and left few plates and copies of books for bibliographers to examine as evidence.

†The date on the title page of this work is 1804, but it was not distributed in its modern form until 1820. A few of the plates from *Jerusalem* may have been exhibited in 1812.

‡This work contains the first published version of *The Four Zoas: The Torments of Love and Jealousy in the Death and Judgment of Albion the Ancient Man*, originally created between 1796-1807. It was published under the title *Vala* in this edition.

#The *Note-Book* is also referred to as the *Rossetti Manuscript*. It contains *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, composed around 1810, which is thought to have been intended to form part of a second *Descriptive Catalogue*.

||*Tiriel*, written c. 1789, was not printed during Blake's lifetime.

## CRITICISM

### William Blake (letter date 25 April 1803)

SOURCE: Blake, William. "To Thomas Butts." In *The Letters of William Blake*, edited by Archibald G. B. Russell, pp. 113-16. London: Methuen & Co., 1906.

[In the following excerpt from a letter dated April 25, 1803, Blake describes his spiritual and psychological state during the composition of *Milton*. The letter is regarded by scholars as the earliest known reference to the poem.]



And now, my dear sir, congratulate me on my return to London, with the full approbation of Mr. Hayley and with promise. But, alas! now I may say to you—what perhaps I should not dare to say to anyone else: that I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoyed, and that I may converse with my friends in eternity, see visions, dream dreams, and prophesy and speak parables unobserved, and at liberty from the doubts of other mortals; perhaps doubts proceeding from kindness; but doubts are always pernicious, especially when we doubt our friends. Christ is very decided on this point: “He who is not with Me is against Me.” There is no medium or middle state; and if a man is the enemy of my spiritual life while he pretends to be the friend of my corporeal, he is a real enemy<sup>1</sup>; but the man may be the friend of my spiritual life while he seems the enemy of my corporeal, though not *vice versa*.

What is very pleasant, every one who hears of my going to London again applauds it as the only course for the interest of all concerned in my works; observing that I ought not to be away from the opportunities London affords of seeing fine pictures, and the various improvements in works of art going on in London.

But none can know the spiritual acts of my three years’ slumber on the banks of ocean, unless he has seen them in the spirit, or unless he should read my long poem [*Milton*]<sup>2</sup> descriptive of those acts; for I have in these years composed an immense number of verses on one grand theme, similar to Homer’s *Iliad* or Milton’s *Paradise Lost*; the persons and machinery entirely new to the inhabitants of earth (some of the persons excepted). I have written this poem from immediate dictation, twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time, without premeditation, and even against my will. The time it has taken in writing was thus rendered nonexistent, and an immense poem exists which seems to be the labour of a long life, all produced without labour or study. I mention this to show you what I think the grand reason of my being brought down here.

#### Notes

1. cp. *Milton*, p. 3\*, l. 26: “Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies.”
2. The *Milton* (dated 1804, but not given to the world until about 1808) deals especially with the acts at Felpham: cp. *Public Address* (Gilchrist, 1880, vol. ii. p. 175), “The manner in which I have rooted out the nest of villains will be seen in a poem concerning my three years’ herculean labours at Felpham, which I shall soon publish”—(he is speaking of the attack made upon him in *The Examiner*). From the title-page we learn that Blake’s original intention was to publish twelve books of this poem. Two only, however, were engraved; and a good deal of the material seems to

have been transferred to *Jerusalem*. The latter is also dated 1804, but seems not to have been ready for publication until about 1818 (see note 1, p. 223).

#### Alfred T. Story (essay date 1893)

SOURCE: Story, Alfred T. *William Blake: His Life Character and Genius*, pp. 127-37. London: Swan Sonnenschein & Co., 1893.

[In the following excerpt, Story offers a close reading of Milton, examining some of the work’s central themes.]

The two remaining Prophetic Books, which we shall examine, are separated from what we may term the Cycle of the Four Continents by a broad space of years. During that time Blake’s ideas developed, or else, to use his own form of speech, the visions became more angry, and made greater demands upon him. It may be that the change of air, and scene—the one quickening the blood in his veins, the other kindling to renewed vigour the fiery vehemence of his brain—gave a fresh impetus to his creative and prophetic powers, and was thus largely instrumental in the production of the *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, which, in their way, form as marvellous a piece of writing as is to be met with in our literature. I do not know that we have any precise information as to which of these books was first in point of time. Both were issued in 1804. But from internal evidence, I should judge that *Milton* was the earlier of the two, and that it was completed before the author left Felpham. . . .

There is another reason for thinking that the *Milton* was composed first, namely, that it is the less obscure of the two. This is perhaps not saying a great deal when there is so much that is dark and enigmatic in both; but taking them bulk for bulk, one finds more in the *Milton* that rewards the unaided intellect than in the *Jerusalem*. There are not wanting indications, that the poet was inspired to this effort by a renewed perusal of *Paradise Lost*. In the following lines, for instance, we find several Miltonic echoes:

Say first, what moved Milton, who walked about in  
Eternity  
One hundred years, pondering the intricate mazes of  
Providence?  
Unhappy tho’ in heaven, he obeyed, he murmured  
not, he was silent,  
Viewing his six-fold Emanation scattered through the  
deep  
In torment. To go into the deep her to redeem and  
himself to perish?  
What cause at length moved Milton to this unex-  
ampled deed?  
A Bard’s prophetic song: for sitting at eternal tables,



Terrific among the Sons of Albion in chorus solemn  
and loud,  
A Bard broke forth; all sat attentive to the awful man.

But we ought not to pass amid the shadows and mist of the poem with its Titanic forms and thunderous reverberations, without first giving something more than a glance at the preface, which is worth quoting in full.

"The stolen and perverted writings of Homer and Ovid, of Plato and Cicero, which all men ought to condemn, are set up by artifice against the sublime of the Bible; but when the New Age is at leisure to pronounce, all will be set right, and those grand works of the more ancient and consciously and professedly inspired men will hold their proper rank; and the daughters of memory shall become the daughters of inspiration. Shakespeare and Milton were both curbed by the general malady and infection from the silly Greek and Latin slaves of the sword. Rouse up, O young men of the New Age! Set your foreheads against the ignorant hirelings! For we have hirelings in the camp, the court, and the university; who would, if they could, for ever prolong corporeal war. Painters! on you I call! Sculptors! Architects! suffer not the fashionable fools to depress some powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works, or the expensive advertising boasts that they make of such works: believe Christ and His Apostles, that there is a class of men whose whole delight is in destroying. We do not want either Greek or Roman models if we are but just and true to our own imaginations, those words of eternity in which we shall live for ever, in Jesus our Lord."

And did those feet in ancient time  
Walk over England's mountains green,  
And was the holy hand of God  
On England's pleasant pastures seen?

And did the Countenance Divine  
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?  
And was Jerusalem builded here,  
Among these dark Satanic mills?

"Bring me my bow of burning gold;  
Bring me my arrows of desire;  
Bring me my spear: O clouds, unfold  
Bring me my chariot of fire.

"I will not cease from mental fight,  
Nor shall my sword sleep in my hand,  
Till we have built Jerusalem  
In England's green and pleasant land."

This striking prelude is closed with the words from Numbers (xi. 29): "Would to God that all the Lord's people were prophets," from which we may gather something of the sense in which Blake uses the word "prophet." At first sight it would seem as though not much meaning were to be got out of the poet's appeal from the "artifice" of the old classical writers to the

pure and fresher spirit of the New Age. But there is both sense and truth in what he says, though, like all that the poet advances, it is touched with the vagueness, if not with the delirium, of the oracular or prophetic utterance.

After this strange preface, the poem opens with characteristic Blakeian splendour of diction and quaintness of mysticism:—

Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poet's  
Song!  
Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' your  
realms  
Of terror and mild moony lustre, in soft sexual delu-  
sions  
Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer, and repose  
His burning thirst and freezing hunger!

Of the poem itself let it suffice to say that it purports to tell of the incarnation and descent into hell of Milton, his task being that of redemption through inspiration, which cannot be effected in less than six thousand years. But to state this is to give but the scantiest possible description of the Prophecy, in which, what with his wondrous cosmogony, his gigantic myths, and his theology, we soon find ourselves travelling through regions of inchoate darkness and dim moony mist, amid giant shadows and forms for ever fluid and changing; perplexed, too, by—even though often admiring—his heterodox views and striking imaginations. We find here thoughts and ideas repeated that are never far to seek in Blake's works; but we also encounter new ones, or the reinstatement of old ones in more startling guise. After the "**Song of the Bard**," in which we have the magnificent but almost formless myth of Palamabron's harrow and horses, Milton states his purpose in these words:—

I go to Eternal Death! The nations still  
Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam; in pomp  
Of warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming.  
When will the Resurrection come, to deliver the sleep-  
ing body  
From contemptibility? O when, Lord Jesus, wilt Thou  
come?  
Tarry no longer, for my soul lies at the gates of death.  
I will arise and look forth for the morning of the grave;  
I will go down to the sepulchre and see if morning  
breaks;  
I will go down to self-annihilation and eternal death,  
Lest the Last Judgment come and find me unannihil-  
ate,  
And I be seized and given into the hands of my own  
Selfhood.  
The Lamb of God is seen through mists and shadows,  
hovering  
Over the sepulchres in clouds of Jehovah and winds  
of Elohim,  
A disk of blood distant; and heavens and earths roll  
dark between.  
What do I here before the Judgment without my Ema-  
nation?



With the daughters of memory, and not with the  
daughters of inspiration?  
I in my Selfhood am that Satan; I am that Evil One!  
He is my Spectre! in my obedience to loose him from  
my Hells,  
To claim the Hells, my Furnaces, I go to Eternal  
Death.

The poet then describes how, "on the verge of Beulah, he saw his own shadow," and "entered into it." The accompanying illustration, depicting Milton entering his shadow, is one of the grandest to be found in the whole of these Prophetic Books. Space will not permit us to follow the shadow as it "kept its course among the spectres in a trail of light as of a comet," till it came to the "Mundane Shell," in the account of which we have a piece of Blake's strange cosmogony; nor to describe the enormous strife between Milton and Urizen, the one typifying inspiration, the other reason, which, as we have seen, always stands for error and wrong in Blake's mystical philosophy. As little can we tarry to take note of the temptation by the sons and daughters of Rahab and Tirzah, when

The Two-fold form Hermaphroditic, and the Double-  
sexed,—  
The Female-male, and the Male-female, self-dividing  
stood  
Before him in their beauty, and in the cruelties of ho-  
liness,  
Shining in darkness, glorious upon the deeps of Entu-  
thon.

Very beautiful is the self-sacrifice of Ololon for Milton, as again setting forth one of Blake's greatest and most characteristic thoughts, the necessity of eternal self-sacrifice, by way of redemption from eternal selfishness.

And Ololon said, 'Let us descend also, and let us give  
Ourselves to death in Ulro among the Transgressors.'

But the myth—for it is more myth than allegory—is so involved and obscure that it were vain to attempt explanation here; nor will there be found many with patience enough to toil through the remainder of the poem, brilliant and scintillating with gems though much of it is. It is interesting to know, albeit we do not obtain much by the knowledge, that "Bowlahoola is named Law by mortals," that "Golgonooza is named Art and Manufactures" (though elsewhere Golgonooza is London), and that "in Bowlahoola Los's Anvils stand and his Furnaces rage."

Thundering the Hammers beat and the Bellows blow  
loud.  
.....  
The Bellows are the Animal Lungs, the Hammers the  
Anvil Heart,  
The Furnaces the Stomach for digestion.

It would help us, too, in our attempts to understand Blake's gigantic mythology or demonology if he gave

us an insight into the meaning of his vast and too often enigmatic forms, as here into those of Los and Enitharmon.

Los is by mortals named Time; Enitharmon is named  
Space;  
But they depict him bald and aged who is in eternal  
youth  
All-powerful, and his locks flourish like the brows of  
morning;  
He is the Spirit of Prophecy, the ever-apparent Elias.  
Time is the mercy of Eternity; without Time's swift-  
ness,  
Which is the swiftness of all things, all were eternal  
torment.

The rest of the first book is mainly taken up with a description of Nature, the like of which was never before conceived by mortal man, in which is included a vision of the gathering of the harvest of Time and of the treading of the winepress of War, when all are put "into the press, the oppressor and the oppressed." Not much is there in the whole of Blake's writings wherein such splendour of thought and thorough earnestness of conviction cause each line, as it were, to palpitate with vital energy like those that follow.

How red the sons and daughters of Luvah! Here they  
tread the grapes,  
Laughing and shouting, drunk with odours; many fall  
o'erwearied;  
Drowned in the wine is many a youth and maiden;  
those around  
Lay them on skins of Tigers and of the spotted Leop-  
ard and the Wild Ass  
Till they revive, or bury them in cool grots, making  
lamentation.  
This Winepress is called War on Earth; it is the  
Printing-Press  
Of Los: there he lays his words in order above the  
mortal brain,  
As cogs are formed in a wheel to turn the cogs of the  
adverse wheel.

Every living thing takes part in the vintage, "the earwig armed, the tender maggot—emblem of immortality—the flea, louse, bug, the tapeworm, all the armies of disease, visible or invisible." These and all living things else "throw off their gorgeous raiment," and "rejoice with loud jubilee around the winepresses of Luvah, naked and drunk with wine." But it is different with man:

... in the Winepresses, the Human grapes sing not  
nor dance;  
They howl and writhe in shoals of torment, in fierce  
flames consuming,  
In chains of iron and in dungeons circled with cease-  
less fires,  
In pits and dens and shades of death, in shapes of tor-  
ment and woe.  
.....  
They dance around the dying, and they drink the howl  
and groan;



They catch the shrieks in cups of gold; they hand  
 them to one another;  
 These are the sports of love, and these the sweet de-  
 lights of amorous play,  
 Tears of the grape, the death-sweat of the cluster, the  
 last sigh  
 Of the mild youth who listens to the luring songs of  
 Luvah.

One might go on quoting gem after gem; but only one more selection shall be given here, and that from the second book, which, taken as a whole, is much more obscure and difficult of comprehension than the first. The following, however, considering the poet's symbolical style, is plain enough, and needs little by way of gloss or explanation.

In the Eastern porch of Satan's Universe Milton stood  
 and said:  
 "Satan, my Spectre! I know my power thee to annihi-  
 late  
 And be a greater in thy place, and be thy Tabernacle,  
 A covering for thee to do thy will, till one greater  
 comes  
 And smites me as I smote thee, and becomes my cov-  
 ering.  
 Such are the Laws of thy false Heavens; but Laws of  
 Eternity  
 Are not such. Know thou that I come to Self-  
 Annihilation:  
 Such are the Laws of Eternity, that each shall mutu-  
 ally  
 Annihilate himself for others' good, as I for thee.  
 Thy purpose, and the purposes of the Priests and of  
 thy Churches,  
 Is to impress on men the fear of death, to teach  
 Trembling and fear, terrors, constriction, abject self-  
 ishness;  
 Mine is to teach men to despise death and to go on  
 In fearless majesty annihilating Self, laughing to scorn  
 Thy Laws and terrors, shaking down thy Synagogues  
 as webs.  
 I come to discover before Heaven and Hell self-  
 righteousness  
 In all its hypocritic turpitude, opening to every eye  
 These wonders of Satan's holiness, shewing to the  
 earth  
 The Idol Virtues of the Natural Heart, and Satan's  
 Seat  
 Explore in all its Selfish Natural Virtue, and put off  
 In Self-annihilation all that is not of God alone:  
 To put off Self and all I have ever and ever. Amen."

One needs not to insist upon the splendour and noble quality of the thought here presented; it is evident to all, notwithstanding Blake's peculiar method of expressing himself. He seems to hold in especial disdain the particularly Christian virtue of thinking for ever of self and of the safety of self, setting the consideration of personal salvation above everything else, in it forgetting or neglecting the higher duty of thinking of and doing for others. This to him is "self-righteousness in all its hypocritic turpitude," and constitutes "Satan's Seat," which can only be conquered by the mutual an-

nihilation of self for others' good. The thought is essentially heretical, but therein lies Blake's peculiar characteristic and strength, that he cannot hypocritically pretend to believe in a thing that is alien to his thought.

One would like, before finally finishing with the *Milton*, to quote the almost unapproachable lines, commencing—

Thou hearest the nightingale begin the song of spring;  
 The lark, sitting upon his earthly bed, just as the morn  
 Appears, listens silent; then, springing from the wav-  
 ing cornfield, loud  
 He leads the choir of day;

but the temptation must be resisted, else we might be led on to quote gem after gem from these incomparable compositions that, like the world, are full of dark and inscrutable things, though illumined here and there with beauties that redeem and, as it were, sanctify the whole.

#### E. R. D. MacLagan and A. G. B. Russell (essay date 1907)

SOURCE: MacLagan, E. R. D., and A. G. B. Russell. "Introduction." In *The Prophetic Books of William Blake: Milton*, edited by E. R. D. MacLagan and A. G. B. Russell, pp. v-xvi. London: A. H. Bullen, 1907.

[In the following excerpt, MacLagan and Russell examine the central thematic and stylistic concerns of Milton, discussing the poem within the context of Blake's life circumstances during its composition.]

When, in the autumn of the year 1800, Blake withdrew from London into the country, he seemed to see the dawn of another life, in which he was to emerge at last from the confusion and unrest of his past existence into a state of freedom and spiritual felicity. He believed that the generosity of his new patron would for ever redeem him from that servile necessity of soul-destroying drudgery which had hitherto been imposed upon him by the fear of starvation, and that he would be able to pursue the arts of imagination, unfettered and uninterrupted. The atmosphere of Felpham appeared to his liberated perceptions to be a "more spiritual" one than that of London. "Heaven," he wrote, on arriving, to Flaxman, "opens here on all sides her golden gates; . . . voices of celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, and their forms more distinctly seen." He dreamed of becoming the prophet of a new era of visionary creation when men should again "converse in heaven and walk with angels," upon earth. But he was quickly to be disillusioned. It was soon clear that his patron was not at all disposed to bestow, with his benevolence, a free hand. Besides this, he was wholly out of sympathy with the visionary character of Blake's inventions, both in