

**LIBERTY AS PRO-GRESSION:**  
**A STUDY OF THE REVOLUTIONS IDEALIZED IN *AREOPAGITICA*,  
*THE MARRIAGE OF HEAVEN AND HELL* AND *THE MATRIX***

by

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## Abstract

Impressions of truth and liberty are time and space specific. Historically, works of art stand as material manifestations of the physical conversions required by ideologies in their “hailings” of individuals and reminders of those individuals’ statuses as always-already subjects. Hence, delving into distant texts as sites of expression for these ideologies allows the reader to contrastively study the different formulations that may be made for truth and liberty. In my thesis, I will *address* the assumptions of *Areopagitica*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *The Matrix* as well as provoke their ideals in order to expose the status of their liberty and pro-gression<sup>1</sup> towards Truth as one that is in no sense absolute, but time and space specific.

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<sup>1</sup> Progression comes from Latin “pro” meaning to go forward, and “gradi” meaning to step, to walk, to go. Since the main objective of my work is to question this movement as representative of *advancement*, *betterment*, I decided to separate “pro” from “gression”. The desired effect is to make the reader more aware of this “pro”, of this problematic going *forward* every time I use the word. In brief, the hyphenated word pro-gression in the title, in the abstract and throughout the thesis makes explicit that to the initial movement a direction was added, and to the direction a judgment of values was added. This last “dissemination” will be treated as a “parodic” idealization and as an “ironic” revolution.

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With all this extra stressing...  
The question I wonder is after death,  
After my last breath...  
When will I finally get to rest through this oppression?  
They punish the people that's askin' questions  
And those that possess,  
Steal from the ones without possessions,  
The message I stress:  
To make it stop study your lessons,  
Don't settle for less,  
Even the genius is askin' questions  
Be grateful for blessings...  
Don't ever change, keep your essence,  
The power is in the people and politics we address.  
Always do your best, don't let the pressure make you panic  
And when you get stranded  
And things don't go the way you planned it...  
Dream of the riches, of a position of makin a difference...  
Politicians and hypocrites, they don't wanna listen.  
If I'm insane, it's the fame made a brother change.  
It wasn't nuttin' like the game,  
It's just me against the world!

Tupac Shakur, 1995

## 1 – Introduction

Of all reasons one may present for engaging in a study such as the one I here propose, I suppose if not most important, then a most crucial one lies in fondness towards the object of study. I have been working with John Milton and William Blake's texts for a little while now. Every time I sit down before any one of their texts two outcomes have always been a confirmed certainty: hard work and gratification. Reading the works of these two men and putting them face-to-face has always been stimulating. Undoubtedly, this consideration was not overlooked as I met with my task of choosing the texts for my master's thesis. While I was dealing with another choice of texts, this time for the final paper of a class I took as part of the graduate program, I discovered another field of study: film adaptation. I had always enjoyed films but had never considered how interesting it would be to work with one alongside literature. By taking this class I had the opportunity of venturing into a whole new field of study and in addition, I made another discovery: *The Matrix*. My studies on this film have renovated my views on films in general. It has been greatly contributive to the work I here propose in bringing a whole new dimension to my thesis. Any second thoughts on working with this diverse order of texts have been promptly undermined by my personal inclinations towards each one of them. So, while it may be questionable whether or not propensities serve as proper justification for my work, I believe I should at least start by mentioning them. If not for justification purposes, then simply for the crucial role these inclinations have represented in my choice and my perseverance.

For my master's thesis, I will be working with John Milton's *Areopagitica* (1658), William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1793) and the Wachowski brothers' *The Matrix* (1999). According to the reading I make, these three works idealize liberties and call for revolutions exalting a pro-gression towards conditions that are portrayed as superior. Each text urges its reader to perceive ideological standards in which people once were or still are immersed. They urge their readers not to be

subjected to these standards imposed by their times or not to submit to them. Though a less informed reader may presume otherwise, this aspiration certainly does not produce texts unsusceptible to other ideological standards. I here propose that these texts strive for an evasion from the dominant ideology of their times, and that in aspiring for their revolutions, each work presents the reader with its own set of ideological standards. I will here address the assumptions of *Areopagitica*, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and *The Matrix* as well as provoke their ideals in order to expose the status of their liberty and pro-gression towards Truth as one that is no sense absolute, but time and space specific.

First, I will be *addressing* Milton's *Areopagitica* in relation to its historical context. In questioning its notions of liberty and of pro-gression, I could not have refrained from laying down some initial groundwork. This is crucial so the reader may become aware of some of the presumptions that presented themselves as informative to Milton's pamphlet. After a second moment where I will disclose the overall reading I make of *Areopagitica*, I will proceed to discuss how the concept of liberty as pro-gression towards Truth may be read and subsequently questioned in it. The last moment of my approach to *Areopagitica* is employed to evaluate how Milton's text on censorship may be informative to our 21<sup>st</sup> century.

On a second moment I will approach Blake's intellectual tradition in order to elucidate the reader on how originality may be ascribed to Blake's works. Contrary to what more simplistic outlooks may presume, Blake's work is well situated within its location in time and space. This moment will be fundamental to the development of my analysis, in that it serves to expose how Blake is only as original as any artist may prove to be. After presenting my analysis of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1993), I will discuss how liberty and pro-gression towards Truth may be read in it. I will ultimately expose how his work does not imply liberty from the ideological standards of its location.

Once this is done I will move on to study *The Matrix* (1999). After explaining how the film may be read as allegorical to *The Marriage*, I will discuss how liberty as pro-gression towards Truth may be



read in *The Matrix*. On this first approach to the film, I hope to show points of contact that may be read between the film and *The Marriage*.

My next chapter will consider the manner in which each text relates to the other. First I will analyze how *The Marriage* may be a parody/adaptation for *Areopagitica* in the ways Linda Hutcheon sees and defines postmodern parody. Here I will discuss the ironical bouncing that is produced once complicity and difference are read between the works of Milton and Blake. The second moment of this chapter will simply point to my last chapter where I will complement and conclude some of the analysis of the relationship between *The Marriage* and *The Matrix* that will have already been anticipated.

In approaching *The Matrix* as allegorical for *The Marriage* the former had been depicted as a work that, similar to its predecessor, presents itself as assertive, confident, uncritical, unhesitating, believing and overall entirely devoted to its revolutionary and pro-gressive ideals. However, as a product of postmodern culture, the film has a great deal to comment on the ideals expressed in *The Marriage*. Therefore, on this last moment I will approach *The Matrix* as a work of art that is itself informative on the concepts of liberty, pro-gression and of Truth. I will once again refer to Linda Hutcheon as she has helped me articulate in what sense *The Matrix* may be read as a postmodern cultural work in its own right.

## 2 – Legitimizing censorship in England

Milton's *Areopagitica* (1644) is a political pamphlet addressed to the Parliament of England in 1644 in response to the censorship that had been initiated through the act known as the Licensing Order of 1643. To a varying degree of subtlety and sophistication, censorship had undoubtedly always been a reality in England and in fact, the 1643 proceeding is not the first form of considerably organized literary censorship that Englishmen witnessed. As Donald Thomas informs us in his book *A Long Time Burning* (1969), evidence of literary censorship in England can be traced to 1485 - nine years after printing technology had been introduced there. When Henry VII rose to the throne in 1485 one of his first acts was to appoint a man named Peter Actors as stationer so as to warrant authority over the press. This initial and more organized form of literary censorship did not yet focus on whether or not it was safe for a mass readership to have access to a work. Censorship had two main concerns then: suppress both political opposition and religious dissension (Thomas, 1969: 8).

The site of the next major step into legitimizing censorship in England was the reign of Henry VIII, but it did not occur without the assistance of the Star Chamber. This English court of law had acquired considerable power ever since the reign of Henry VII. The court had operated rather overtly in the interest of the king – one of the reasons why Milton, author of *The Tenure of Kings and Magistrates* (1657) would always be radically against the Star Chamber. In 1538 the king's Privy Councillors, then a significant constituent portion of the Star Chamber that was complemented only by a few judges, established a decree stating that books in English could not be issued by printers "Onles vpon examination made by some of his gravis privie counsayle, or other suche as his highnes shall appoynte, they shall have lycenses so to do" (qtd. in Thomas, 1969: 9). This decree meant that the establishment of a licensing system had been effected. Englishmen would then be one step more distant from the time when, in the words of *Areopagitica*, "no envious Juno sat cross-legged over the nativity of any man's

intellectual offspring . . .” (1958: 154)<sup>2</sup>. While historical conditions changed and needs shifted, a great succession of decrees, proclamations and abuses would still take place before Milton and his English contemporaries could usufruct, albeit briefly, of Juno in a different stance.

Near the end of Queen Mary’s regime in 1557, the existing Stationers’ Company was granted a royal charter<sup>3</sup>. According to Thomas, “The Masters and the Wardens of the Stationers’ Company were empowered to search for and destroy unlicensed books and unlicensed presses, as well as inflicting fines and short prison sentences on the culprits” (1969: 9). Needless to say, this did not mean that the Stationers would then be indifferent to their government’s needs or that royal interests would not be acknowledged in their proceedings. On the contrary, the granting of the royal charter stands as one political act that institutionalizes already existent government command over printing. The reader would have to be naïve to not suspect politics to be an intrinsic companion to the concession of the royal charter. Evidence of sovereign command on the proceedings can be seen, for instance, by the fact that the monarch would still enact imposition of the heavier penalties (Thomas, 1969: 9).

Queen Mary’s court stands out as a religious intermittence. During her reign the main religious dispute ceased to be between the High Anglicans and the dissenters as Catholicism had once again taken center stage. In court, the main rivalry would be between Catholicism and Protestantism. With the ascendance of Queen Elizabeth I in 1558, the charter that had just recently been granted to the Stationers’ Company in Queen Mary’s tenure readily began serving the purposes of the High Anglican monarchs instead of attending Catholic prerogatives. There is no sign of any kind of contention from the constituent body of the Stationers’ Company neither when Mary imposed Catholicism upon her ascendance nor in a second moment when Elizabeth I had them catering to the needs of the Protestants

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<sup>2</sup> All citations to *Areopagitica* will be made to this 1958 edition whose full references are found in the Works Cited section of this thesis. Any other of Milton’s works will be cited to the more complete 1957 volume also found in the Works Cited section.

<sup>3</sup> The Stationer’s Company held monopolized printing so that no one could print anything for sale without authorization by special privilege or patent. All the members were “required to enter in the register of the Company the name of any book that he desired to print . . .” (Oxford Companion, 1967: 779).

again. This becomes especially significant considering few historians would disagree that the choice between Catholicism and Protestantism was especially cardinal to 17<sup>th</sup> century Englishmen. Especially after the reformation effected by Martin Luther people had very strong feelings on this matter and siding with one or the other entailed a world of difference. This stands out as the most central issue of this specific historical moment. Nonetheless, the apparently protestant members of the Stationers' Company who had tended to Catholic values when Mary became Queen of England simply switched back to Protestantism in its High Anglican form only five years later. The shift of ruler instantly produced an uneventful shift of values on the proceedings of the Stationers' Company and this should not be taken for granted. It exposes how politicized the Stationers' Company seems to have been and it is also suggestive to the subject of censorship. The values of the country's licensing system were not absolute, instead, they submitted to the established power and politics. This illustrates how censorship is subservient to the ideology of those in power. Where politics and power are involved, such things as freedom and truth are just not pertinent, or better yet, they may take different forms.

Milton's lack of regard for this makes *Areopagitica* idealistic. Vincent Blasi in "Areopagitica and the Modern First Amendment" informs us that it does seem as though Milton's tract could not make the secular case of freedom of speech in the 21<sup>st</sup> century (2006: 11). But I am of the opinion that it stood as a powerful expression of freedom of speech in its 17<sup>th</sup> century context. Whether in its arguments or its proposals, *Areopagitica* is a work greatly in tune with its location in time and space, as all works are. By considering the text in light of the ideology of its location, the reader realizes that it would present very strong arguments. In my point of view, the factor that can account for Parliament's disregard for *Areopagitica* and for the maintenance of the Licensing Order of 1643 is none other than politics. But readers should be grateful that Milton underestimated the force of politics, had he not, *Areopagitica* might not have existed.

The monarchs were not the only ones working through the Star Chamber. William Laud, after ascending to the post of Archbishop of Canterbury in 1633, also counted on the Privy Councillors as he ruthlessly persecuted the dissenters of England's national church. This created a fundamental association between the crown and High Anglicans and also led to a rivaling association between Puritans and parliamentarians. Ultimately, the abusive assistance granted by the court of Star Chamber to the royalists would lead to its dissolution as well as be a cardinal contributor to the developments of the nation's upcoming Civil Wars.

According to Thomas's *A Long Time Burning* (1969), from the granting of the royal charter made to the Stationers' Company in 1557 to the abolition of the Star Chamber in 1641 a series of proclamations and decrees would take place as the licensing system responded to the increasingly overwhelming number of books appearing as well as to the developments of the English book trade in general. On June 5, 1558 one such royal proclamation was made. It stated that unlicensed books were a dishonor to God and led people to disobey governors. Anyone whom upon access to such material, read or refrained from burning it would be considered a rebel who would be executed. The next measure came on November 10 of the following year during Queen Elizabeth's tenure. For the most part, only the Archbishop of Canterbury and York; the Bishop of London; and the Vice-Chancellors of Oxford and Cambridge would be able to license the publication of books. Once a book was licensed it then had to enter a Stationers' Register and a fee had to be paid to the Company. Only then could it be legally published. On March 1, 1569 a proclamation was made against books published elsewhere that had been brought to England. The owner had twenty-eight days to place such material in the hands of bishops or ordinaries. Despite death having long been one common form of punishment to those who illegally produced or distributed unlicensed books, on July 1570 one other proclamation regarding this measure was made. This proclamation stated that the authors of such material were to be hanged, drawn and quartered. As the threat of illegal publication increased and printing became more difficult to

control, in 1586 the Star Chamber established that printing could only take place in London, Oxford and Cambridge. The Star Chamber made one last major pronouncement on the issue of censorship on July 11, 1637. According to Thomas, “In addition to the existing licensers, this decree conceded that law books might be licensed by Lords Chief Justice, histories by Principal Secretaries of State, and books on heraldry by the Earl Marshal” (1969: 12). Thomas further observes that in no way does this decree represent any kind of liberal act on the part of the government. It instead stands as evidence that “the growing numbers of books called for an increase in the number of licensers and that the whole licensing system was bound to get more and more unwieldy as the trade in books developed” (1969: 12). This decree was a necessity and not a liberal act.

The next event that had an effect over the licensing system occurred after Charles I lost the war against Scotland. He was then forced to submit to the humiliating Treaty of Ripon in 1640. In need of money in order to fulfill the Scottish demands of the treaty, Charles I was forced to summon the Long Parliament. Among the many aspects of the king’s administration then questioned by the Long Parliament was the Court of Star Chamber, which in the words of Vincent Blasi: “had served as the principal forum for calling to account political opponents, religious dissenters and those who defied crown-granted monopolies of the printing trade” (2006: 2). Since the Court had long ceased to be the practical and efficient means of solving matters and had simply become a form of tending to royal demand, the Parliament had no trouble in finding both justification and interest in its dissolution. The abolishment of the Court of Star Chamber implied an end to its licensing system. As Blasi informs us, this “regulatory hiatus . . . was more a byproduct of the attack on royal prerogative than a deliberate policy in favor of a free press” (2006: 2). Nonetheless, the end of the licensing system granted Milton’s contemporaries an unprecedented privilege: freedom of the press. This “freedom” spurred the writing and circulation of a huge profusion of texts. Pamphleteers lavished themselves as the publication of pamphlets proliferated from a number of 22 in 1640 to 1,966 only two years later (Blasi, 2006: 2). As

the Civil Wars broke out between the army of the king and that of Parliament, a parallel pamphleteering war broke out between those that sided with the former and those that sided with the latter.

While pinpointing the determinants of the English Civil War would prove to be a challenging enterprise especially for historians, few would disagree with Isabel Rivers that politics and religion were the central issues (1973: 42). In terms of politics, the issue was who would hold power. From the onset of the war, Englishmen in general were not inclined at all to the idea of an English government without a monarch. According to Rivers, “The Presbyterians in Parliament had limited objectives and wanted reconciliation with the king. The army Independents under Cromwell wanted religious toleration and more extreme constitutional changes, though still under monarchy . . . The Levellers, army radicals opposed by Cromwell, wanted the abolition of the monarchy . . .” (1973: 42-43). The king’s strongest adversaries, namely the Presbyterians and later on Cromwell himself, did not wish to see the king deposed – much less executed. The reader may only begin to imagine how much abuse must have taken place during these nine years of the Civil Wars in order to take the minds of these powerful Englishmen from this scenario over to regicide. Charles I had long abused of his prerogatives as king and what most of his adversaries first wanted was to simply contain or regulate his power in order to avoid the tyranny of absolutism. They were, once again, looking for more liberty.

The only power Parliament had had in England at the time was to levy taxes. The king had the power to do everything else. In fact, even the reunion and dissolution of Parliament was subjected to his will. Previous monarchs, notably Elizabeth I, dealt fairly well with this political organization and were able to maneuver their designs in through this system. But Charles I did not see condescending diplomacy towards Parliament as a necessary expediency for a king. This was because he was an advocate of the theory of the divine right of kings that had found expression in a previous Stuart, namely James I. Some of the precepts of this theory had become well known by the beginning of the Civil War. Under the theory of divine right of kings, a monarch was an extension of God here on earth.

His power was absolute and his views were to remain unquestioned by common men (Rivers, 1973: 42). Unfortunately for Charles I, well known does not imply well accepted. I see the main political cause of the Civil War as an ideological clash concerning the prerogatives of a monarch. Instances of Charles' abusive conduct of government can be found in his eleven-year personal rule as well as in his promotion of new taxes without resort to Parliament, thereby raising taxes illegally (Bush, 1965: 79). Proceedings such as these led his opponents to gradually become more inclined towards the notion that they were entitled rights as well as towards the notion that in government, there ought to be some sort of contract between ruler and ruled to safeguard those rights (Rivers, 1973: 42). Thus, Charles I played a fundamental role in the increasingly promising alternative of a constitutional monarchy.

The more religious issues also entered the Civil War in hope of freedom. But unlike in the more political sphere, religion remained unresolved by the end of the war and would only find some sort of settlement in the Restoration (Rivers, 1973: 47). Within the Church of England, there were the high Anglicans (or Laudians), moderate Anglicans, and Puritans (or Presbyterians). High Anglicans were those that were entirely agreeable with the church. The more Puritan faction of the national church wanted the most changes, while moderate Anglicans were in between. Puritans in general were opposed to the high Anglican Arminianism because it conflicted with their views on predestination. They also wanted to make church government and ritual more pure by the substitution of bishops for presbyters (Rivers, 1973: 46). Milton himself had been a Puritan at the onset of the Civil War. According to Rivers:

When a group of Presbyterian ministers writing under the name Smectymnuus (made from their initials) engaged in pamphlet warfare with Bishop Hall Milton came to their help in five pamphlets published in 1641-1642: *Of reformation touching church discipline in England, Of prelatial Episcopacy, Animadversions upon the remonstrant's defence against Smectymnuus,*



*The reason of church government urged against prelaty, and An apology against a pamphlet called 'A modest confutation'.* (1973: 47)

Milton's later break from Presbyterianism reveals his disappointment towards its ministers. Interestingly, when these ministers arrived in power, it seemed that Milton would no longer be able to differentiate them from the bishops that they had all criticized so fervently.

In Milton's constant search for religious freedom the one figure that had been playing the central antagonistic role during this time was the Archbishop of Canterbury - William Laud. He and Charles I were the most powerful advocates and enforcers of high Anglicanism. But Laud accomplished the feat of being despised by all other religious factions in and outside the Church of England mainly because of the brutality displayed in his complete lack of religious toleration. In the words of Douglas Bush, the

1633 elevation of Bishop Laud to archbishopric of Canterbury inaugurated a program of much sterner repression. Since the very survival of the national church was in danger, Laud, with worthy motives, but with unimaginative, inflexible, and sometimes brutal severity, used every means to subdue nonconformity and promote unity . . . (1965: 78)

Laud's proceedings became rapidly associated with tyranny, especially by his abusive use of the courts of Star Chamber in order to prosecute his religious adversaries. No one could possibly question Laud's proceedings during the years of Charles' personal rule. The courts of the Star Chamber and High Commission worked for him while the king favored his maneuvers. Not even when the Long Parliament first sat in 1640 could they have dealt with the Archbishop of Canterbury. Laud's forceful imposition of high Anglicanism was the principal religious reason for the war. The brutality of Laud's measures would only amount to consequences for him when Parliament had consolidated a significant amount of power during the Civil War. In 1645 Laud was eventually beheaded. This took place only four years before the King himself was beheaded.

It is not difficult to see how at the beginning of the Civil War the common objective of Parliament, Cromwell, Milton and Englishmen in general was freedom. People did not have a tradition that would provide a basis for the ideology of the divine right of kings. Therefore, they felt dissatisfaction in the king's abusive measures and lack of acknowledgement for ruling with Parliament. Furthermore, English society was highly divided in terms of religion. Most people still had a strong aversion to Roman Catholicism and the fact that high Anglicanism was being commonly associated with it certainly was a problem. Not only was Laud not willing to negotiate aspects of the national church, but he was also highly oppressive in submitting the English to his views by force, when necessary. When the Civil War broke out people who defended Parliament saw it as a force that opposed tyranny and had been fighting for freedom. Parliament was supposedly fighting all the oppression that had been present through the figures of Charles I and William Laud. This was the view that Milton and those in favor of Parliament had held. But when the Long Parliament was in power and granted the Westminster Assembly protection to organize the Church of England according to Presbyterianism it seemed that liberty was not to take part in their agenda either. According to Bush:

Five sober ministers, who had held pastorates abroad and had some special prestige as exiles, asked permission to continue with independent, but non-separating congregations. Failing to soften Presbyterian rigidity in the Assembly, they carried debate into the parliamentary and public domain by publishing *An Apologetical Narration* (January, 1644). (1965: 94)

Bush then proceeds to list a series of texts that appeared at the time in favor of religious toleration and other types of freedom. The need Parliament felt to control the material being circulated is what set forth the Licensing Order of 1643. This Order was immediately associated with the licensing that had been in effect only a few years earlier through the Star Chamber. Milton went further and associated it with "papal decrees and the Council of Trent and the Spanish Inquisition" (Bush, 1965: 95). According to Thomas, "In place of the licensers named in the decree of 1637, the Order of 1643 substituted no

fewer than twenty-seven licensers, chosen from schoolmasters, ministers of religion, doctors and others” (1969: 12). This number immediately had to be augmented. It seems licensing, once again, proved just as difficult to manage as it had been for the members of the Star Chamber previously. I will refer to Blasi as a source of how the Order worked:

Specialized licensers were appointed to examine writings in specified categories. Four censors were named, for example, to scrutinize law books, three for books of philosophy and history, one for “mathematics, almanacks, and prognostications.” Parliament served as the enforcement agency, usually through its committees. Not only miscreant authors and printers but also licensers who had been too permissive were subject to imprisonment. (2006: 3)

As Blasi informs us even the licensers were subject to imprisonment in case they were found too lenient. It seemed that the Parliament that had so fervently defended liberties did not become all too different from its predecessors once it gained power just a few years later.

In addition to informing the reader as to aspects of the tradition where *Areopagitica* would be produced, it also discloses how censorship has historically always been related to the maintenance of power. This historical background is a first step in becoming acquainted with some of the assumptions of Milton’s location to then ultimately expose the status of the liberty and pro-gression that *Areopagitica* will propose as it responds to the Licensing Order of 1643.

## Chapter 2.1 – Milton's response

November 23, 1644 marks the date John Milton delivered his response to the Licensing Order of 1643 under the name *Areopagitica*. His response seems to have been given a little later than one would expect. It is generally accepted that he was busy with his tract *On Education* (1644) as well as with his divorce pamphlets written after his unsuccessful marriage to his first wife Mary Powell. I suppose the first source of perplexity for a modern reader in contact with *Areopagitica* lies in its title. For a more simple explanation, here is part of the introduction for *Areopagitica* in *Milton's Prose Writings*:

Milton called the pamphlet *Areopagitica* because he was comparing the Parliament of England, to whom he was appealing, with the democratically elected supreme court of Athens in ancient Greece. This court was named after the hill Areopagus, on which it assembled. The 'sage and severe judges' of Athens were much admired in seventeenth-century Europe. Milton thought the English Parliament was made up of worthy representatives of the 'noble and puissant nation' whom they served. (Burton, 1958: 145-46)

This choice of title for the tract should not be taken for face value, and this work does not. This choice is significant in that the title anticipates the esteem Milton will manifest for the men in Parliament throughout his tract. The moment when *Areopagitica* is written is one where Milton still had a great deal of faith in Parliament. This manifest esteem serves as grounds for my assertion that in writing *Areopagitica* Milton was not simply articulating philosophical notions or trying to assert himself prominence on the topic of freedom of speech, but he was earnestly attempting to convince Parliament to abolish the Licensing Order of 1643. In the beginning of *Areopagitica* Milton takes the time to distinguish his many praises to members of Parliament from mere flattery. While some may not be persuaded, taking these praises as rhetorically strategic flattery would only help accentuate my proposal that Milton is trying to effect a political change. Regardless whether his praising is regarded as flattery

or not, what is important in his choice of title for now is that it is one indicative aspect of Milton's aim to effect a political change.

Milton himself subdivides *Areopagitica* into four parts. On a first moment, Milton traces licensing to its inventors. He reminds Parliament of the effects of censorship under the command of the Roman Catholic Church. The aim of this first part seems to be to discredit the licensing act by showing how historically it has only been a hindrance to Truth and to the nation's development<sup>4</sup>. On the next moment, the tract discusses the need for Englishmen to have access to all sorts of reading. Books are depicted as just one medium for promoting evil among many others and reading is one of the safest ways of confronting it. Reading all sorts of texts will not weaken England, but fortify it. According to the tract, access to all kinds of knowledge will strengthen their minds and make them judicious. The third point is that there are too many practical complications to accomplish the ends for which the Licensing Order has been assigned. Here the pamphlet raises arguments involving aspects such as the working reality of the licensers. On the final moment the text discusses how the licensing system will be detrimental to England. It will silence voices that would otherwise assist them in their quest for Truth and reform.

It is not unlikely that if the reader reads *Areopagitica*, without any prior knowledge on it, s/he will put it down convinced of having read a political pamphlet entirely devoted to the cause of freedom of speech, idealized as the essential path towards Truth. Many are the libraries and public institutions that display plaques with one of *Areopagitica's* many aphorisms celebrating Truth and falsehood grappling in a free and open encounter (181), or Truth as strong next to the Almighty in need of no policies and stratagems to make her victorious, needing only room (181), or books as works that are

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<sup>4</sup> Whenever truth is capitalized throughout this thesis it is to emphasize the conception of one single Truth as it may be expressed by each of the three texts that constitute my object of study. In the case of Milton, he believed in a monist Truth whose pieces were scattered. Men gradually joined the pieces but they will only be fully brought together again by Christ with his second coming (175). Therefore, he believed in this concept of *the* Truth as well as in its eventual recovery.

“not absolutely dead things, but do contain a potency of life in them to be as active as that soul was whose progeny they are . . . ” (149) or asserting “as good almost kill a man as kill a good book . . . the image of God as it were in the eye” (149-50). But these heroic images should not elude the reader into thinking Milton idealized an absolute freedom of speech – absolute in the sense that his proposition is that everyone’s opinion be made accessible and acknowledged. In other words, exemptions are made in *Areopagitica*. In fact, Milton is as straightforward about the limitations placed on his freedom of speech as words allow anyone to be. Take these lines from the beginning of the pamphlet for instance, “I deny not, but that it is of greatest concernment in the Church and Commonwealth, to have a vigilant eye how books demean themselves as well as men; and thereafter to confine, imprison, and do sharpest justice on them as malefactors” (149). Here Milton equates books to men. He makes it clear that books and men may be found to “demean themselves” and therefore there is a need to keep a “vigilant eye”. If the book is found demeaning, Milton does defend the need to “do sharpest justice” on these as “malefactors”. A key word in this citation is “thereafter”. A crucial element the reader should never forget about *Areopagitica* is that it is never entirely against censorship *per se*, but against prepublication censorship. This implies a world of a difference. While it does mean that books should be accessible on a first moment, it also means that if any are found unwelcome in the proceeding moment, censorship *should* be effected. So what leads readers to overlook such apparently explicit moments where Milton expresses the limitations that constitute his ideal on freedom of speech? Could Milton have understated his exceptions? Was Milton trying to avoid being censored himself? Was he being strategic in trying to win the favor of his addressed audience? Or have some of his readers simply misinterpreted him over the years?

What I here propose is that the passionate images Milton employed in arguing against licensing suffuse the mind of the reader so thoroughly it becomes very unlikely that any first-time reader would perceive this text as one not entirely impartial in its expostulation of freedom of speech. The heroic

manner in which Milton speaks of Truth and books is so powerful that it simply blinds the readers to the possible presence of constraints to its freedom. These very strong images seem to make the reader numb to the possibility of any limitation in Milton's ideal freedom. Impressively, the (mis)reading that *Areopagitica* defends an absolute and unrestrained liberty has, at least historically, not been articulated only by uninformed first-time readers as I have pointed out up to this point.

In his ambitious and provocative book called *How Milton Works* (2001) renowned Milton scholar Stanley Fish has gone as far as asserting that "almost the whole body of Milton scholars" have misread *Areopagitica* (188). The misreading lies precisely in interpreting it as a pamphlet that urges absolute freedom<sup>5</sup>. Fish proceeded to assert that only John Illo, Willmoore Kendall, Ernest Sirluck, prior Dean of St. Paul's W.R. Mathews, and he himself have been able to see the limitations present in Milton's idealization of freedom of speech. These constitute the select few who have escaped the common misreading directed towards *Areopagitica*. In this sense, Fish is arguing that not only first-time readers, but most scholars, *have* historically misread it as an advocate for absolute, unrestrained freedom of speech. The small circle of names he presents would circumscribe the few who have been able to see the limitations present in Milton's plea. It seems that the very possibility articulated by Fish grants a greater pertinence to the questions I am proposing. Would Milton not have been clear on his restrictions? Could he have been reluctant in explicitly stating the exemptions to his freedom?

First of all, I defend the view that he certainly does not, in any way, understate his beliefs. The reader may accuse Milton of a number of things but few would disagree that, especially in his writing, he was a man of courage. His divorce pamphlets, on one instance, show how he was not at all inclined to fear in speaking his mind. Milton would eventually be incarcerated at the restoration for having defended regicide during the Civil War. In fact, Milton was explicit even in many of the very images

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<sup>5</sup> Here I am reproducing Fish's opinion and therefore I have used the term misreading in the manner he sees it (2001: 188). A misreading in Fish's terms implies one reading that is the correct one, the one with authority.

people have selected, quoted and cited in arguing that *Areopagitica* advocates absolute freedom. Realizing just how explicit he was in voicing the limits that should constitute his ideal liberty helps us better appreciate the power of the images he produced – even if these images do ultimately render interpretations not worthy of appreciation, especially to our 21<sup>st</sup> century. Better appreciating these images for their strength should confer the reader acknowledgement that the images have compromised readings. Take one of Milton’s images from *Areopagitica* for instance:

. . . while the temple of the Lord was building, some cutting, some squaring the marble, others hewing the cedars, there should be a sort of irrational men who could not consider there must be many schisms and many dissections made in the quarry and in the timber, ere the house of God can be built. And when every stone is laid artfully together, it cannot be united into a continuity, it can but be contiguous in this world; neither can every piece of the building be of one form; nay rather the perfection consists in this, that, out of many moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional, arises the goodly and the graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure. Let us therefore be more considerate builders, more wise in spiritual architecture, when great reformation is expected. (178)

Here, Milton associates the construction of Truth with an imagery of the building of God’s temple. In this construction, Milton does acknowledge that “there must be many schisms and many dissections . . . ere the house of God can be built”. The pieces of the building cannot be “of one form”. For Milton, these would be the objectives of a tyrant. In light of my initial historical analysis I could here point out Charles I, William Laud and Queen Mary as examples of what Milton regarded as tyrants. To Milton, they are the ones guilty of attempting a construction with pieces “of one form”. Consequently, it does seem as though Milton really is arguing in favor of absolute freedom, disinterested inquiry in pursuit of Truth as he does in his more famous lines: “Where there is much desire to learn, there of necessity will be much arguing, much writing, many opinions; for opinion in good men is but knowledge in the



making” (177). While it seems toleration is the ideal, it is not quite absolute toleration. Milton is very conscious in his wording. His qualifications are very telling. The opinion of “*good men*” [my italics] being “but knowledge in the making” grants room for the existence of opinions of bad men – hence bad, unwanted opinions. Note that the “graceful symmetry that commends the whole pile and structure” is a product of “*moderate varieties and brotherly dissimilitudes that are not vastly disproportional*” [my italics]. So apparently there are some opinions under the qualification of being unwelcome.

In no way are the hindrances Milton places on liberty voiced only once or twice, or in a roundabout sort of manner. His pamphlet significantly ends by their repeated reassertion. As he finishes his tract, Milton tells us:

And as for regulating the press, let no man think to have the honour of advising ye better than yourselves have done in that Order published next before this, "that no book be printed, unless the printer's and the author's name, or at least the printer's, be registered." Those which otherwise come forth, if they be found mischievous and libellous, the fire and the executioner will be the timeliest and the most effectual remedy that man's prevention can use. (184)

Here Milton is clear that some books may be labeled as “mischievous”. This labeling would then justify its extirpation. Once again, I am of the opinion that the strength of the aphorisms and images is a central aspect of *Areopagitica* accountable for the reader’s attenuation of the entirely explicit limitations constituent of its ideal liberty.

The reader may be inclined to question whether Milton’s aphoristic language and powerful images are tactful in the sense that he was purposefully attempting to hide the limitations he urges on freedom of speech. I would entirely disagree and here I am not aspiring to declare Milton’s intentions. As my citations indicate, Milton made himself sufficiently explicit on the extent of his liberty. I believe any reading that states otherwise is more an indication of misinterpretation on the part of the reader than any sort of lack or understatement on the accomplishments of the writer. Significantly, there was

apparently no reason for understatements or concealments in Milton's articulations of his ideals on freedom of speech. This is so because in his exceptions regarding freedom of speech Milton lies on common ground with his addressed audience. I suppose I should now better explain these exceptions. In this longer segment of *Areopagitica*, Milton further elucidates them. Additionally, his tone is of one who speaks on common grounds with his addressed audience:

Not that I can think well of every light separation, or that all in a Church is to be expected *gold and silver and precious stones*: it is not possible for man to sever the wheat from the tares, the good fish from the other fry; that must be the Angels' ministry at the end of mortal things. Yet if all cannot be of one mind--as who looks they should be? -- this doubtless is more wholesome, more prudent, and more Christian, that many be tolerated, rather than all compelled. I mean not tolerated popery, and open superstition, which, as it extirpates all religions and civil supremacies, so itself should be extirpate, provided first that all charitable and compassionate means be used to win and regain the weak and the misled: that also which is impious or evil absolutely either against faith or manners no law can possibly permit, that intends not to unlaw itself: but those neighbouring differences, or rather indifferences, are what I speak of, whether in some point of doctrine or of discipline, which, though they may be many, yet need not interrupt *the unity of Spirit*, if we could but find among us *the bond of peace*. (182)

Milton is very unambiguous in voicing and explaining his exceptions once again. Popery and open superstition should be extirpated, essentially *because* "it extirpates all religions and civil supremacies". They are taken as "impious or evil *absolutely*" [my italics]. Milton asserts clearly the reason for this exception: the only law that would permit something absolutely impious or evil is that law which intends to "unlaw itself". One reason Milton was explicit about his exceptions and even explains them is because they were not conceived as hindrances at all – neither to him nor his addressed audience. We see his exceptions today as hindrances because our 21<sup>st</sup> century views do not regard Catholicism under

the same light Milton and Parliament did. Catholicism had been the main rivaling voice for Protestants since the Reformation and the search for the liberty sprung by it. As I have discussed on my historical account, Queen Mary, also known as Bloody Mary for the amount of blood she shed in her fight for Catholicism, had been in power less than 100 years before the writing of *Areopagitica*. The Spanish Inquisition had been silencing people for years. So the word Catholicism had different connotations to Milton and his addressed audience. To them, Roman Catholicism was synonymous to tyranny - impediments to liberty. To him, not extending freedom of speech to Catholics led to a better liberty because Catholicism was tyrannical. Not including popes within his “neighboring differences” involved a pro-gression in the liberty of Englishmen. So neither Milton nor his addressed audience saw hindrances in *their* exceptions to freedom of speech. Here, if Milton is guilty of anything it is of being in tune with his time – in tune with the ideology of a great deal of the most educated people of England. Since in his exemptions Milton was speaking in an ideological common ground, there really was neither the need to understate his restrictions nor to overemphasize them. Milton’s freedom of speech is to be effected towards “those neighboring differences, or rather indifferences”. Liberty is to be made legitimate in relation to those differences that “need not interrupt *unity of Spirit*”. All of which is attainable as long as “*the bond of peace*” can be established between them. Certainly the Lords and Commons of Parliament would have had no objection at all to Milton’s exceptions, though, once having risen to power, they certainly had overwhelming reasons to object to Milton’s proposal of freedom of speech.

Milton’s conception of Roman Catholicism as a destructive force is still made more explicit in one other moment of the tract. Take this last segment as an illustration, “the Popes of Rome, *engrossing* [my italics] what they pleased of political rule into their own hands, extended their dominion over men's eyes, as they had before over their judgments, burning and prohibiting to be read what they fancied not . . . ” (152). If despite all these citations and considerations the reader would still insist in

seeing Milton as tactful in verbalizing his restrictions, at least one question could not be denied pertinence: Why would he? This work stands as evidence that there is no reason whatsoever.

Something about Milton that deserves attention for seeming contradictory to his writing of *Areopagitica* lies in one of his functions as a Commonwealth public servant in 1649. Isabel Rivers informs us that: “the council of state hired Milton as a secretary of foreign tongues, a post which combined letter-writing with propaganda and censorship (an ironical position for the author of *Areopagitica*)” (1973: 51). It is not surprising that Rivers mentions Milton’s censorship days, since she is writing a biographical account, but that she considers them ironical is worthy of attention. Bush on discussing Milton’s adaptations to his increasing blindness tells us that:

Milton was continued in his secretarial post, though his work had to be lessened. One minor task which he performed from March, 1651, through January, 1652, was the licensing of the newspaper *Mercurius Politicus*. . . . Some writers, eager to find flaws in Milton, have seen a betrayal of *Areopagitica* in his serving as “censor”; but he was apparently only doing what is done by any editor-in-chief of a periodical or any government official who supervises a departmental publication. He could not remove the control ordered by parliament, and the required job might have been done worse by someone else. (1965: 111)

Though Bush acknowledges that there is no betrayal in Milton’s public post, to me, it seems as though he sees no betrayal for the wrong reasons. Milton was neither an editor-in-chief, nor a government official, nor a supervisor, nor a “censor”. Milton was secretary of foreign tongues, as Rivers has informed us, and as such one of his functions was to censor. I feel as though arguing that Milton took the job because he could not remove parliament’s control and because the job “might have been done worse by someone else” is just not convincing enough.

Another scholar who has contributed with his commentaries on Milton’s public employment in the mid 17<sup>th</sup> century is David Norbrook. In his “*Areopagitica*, Censorship and the Modern Public

Sphere” he states, “Given the polemical thrust behind his attack on Presbyterian licensing, Milton’s later role as a licenser was less radically inconsistent than it may seem, though it undoubtedly did represent a retreat” (1999: 28). Unfortunately, Norbrook did not proceed to comment on what sense Milton’s position “undoubtedly did represent a retreat”. Either way, it seems that his comment is more in consonance with the way I see the matter. In acknowledging that the polemical thrust behind *Areopagitica* is what enables us to see Milton as “less radically inconsistent” his positioning seems to be consonant with my reading. It really depends on what he refers to as “the polemical thrust behind” *Areopagitica*. Nevertheless, allow me to explain how I see this biographical information in relation to the reading I am proposing.

Under the misinformed reading that *Areopagitica* defends unrestrained freedom; if not contradiction, irony or even hypocrisy would be directed towards Milton. But when one reads Milton’s tract attentive to the considerations I have been making there really is no contradiction at all in this biographical account. To Milton, some things were to be subjected to censorship and in this he could not have started any revolutions in England during the 17<sup>th</sup> century. Concepts of Truth and Liberty vary according to time and place. As faulty as Milton’s conception of Truth and Liberty may seem to us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, it did not seem so obviously faulty at all in the 17<sup>th</sup>. At the time Milton wrote *Areopagitica* there was no polemical thrust behind it. The English Parliament simply ignored it, and this is because in his notion of Liberty Milton was in common ground with the English Parliament. It should be observed that historical changes in the concepts of what Truth and Liberty are do not imply a progression. That no irony at all is to be found in Milton’s public post invigorates the more critical reading I have been making and helps illustrate my thesis statement on how Truth and Liberty are not pro-gressive, but time and place specific. I may now move on to the next subchapter in order to develop further how the notion of liberty as pro-gression towards Truth in *Areopagitica* may be exposed and problematized.

## Chapter 2.2 - Liberty as Pro-gression in *Areopagitica*

In urging Parliament to bring the Licensing Order of 1643 to an end, *Areopagitica* asserts its ideals on the topic of freedom of speech. On this subchapter, I would like to further provoke Milton's 17<sup>th</sup> century conception of liberty as well as his notion of pro-gression. The problem with his conception of liberty has already been anticipated in my last subchapter. There is no absolute liberty as is often presumed if readers are to have access to all opinions except one, or two, or except three. As much as it is understandable why Milton would make these exemptions once we take his ambience into consideration, we cannot accept his proposal *as* liberty. It is the silencing of voices – even if these voices are in fact of the most tyrannical intentions. It is the imposition of one's ideals onto others – protestant, puritan ideals. Liberty implies having the choice to listen to Catholicism if someone sees fit to. Never mind the objections that may be directed towards *Areopagitica's* conception of Catholicism as tyrannical. Liberty also implies having the right to listen to the tyrants. Considering the 17<sup>th</sup> century, the distancing of the Church of England from Roman Catholicism is and was at the time highly questionable. As I have discussed, this is one of the chief matters that led to the English Civil War. If there is liberty, High Anglicans should not be the only ones privileged with freedom of speech. *Areopagitica's* freedom implies that Protestants were somewhat better than Catholics. Regardless of the abuses, Protestant or Puritan ideals should not be privileged with the freedom of speech. Liberty here is compromised. If we try to employ Milton's concept of liberty in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the vulnerability of Milton's ideal becomes entirely evident. Additionally, I should note that here I am certainly not advocating any sort of absolute freedom of speech in society nor defending any sort of libertinism. This is not the case. The aim is to expose the concept of "liberty" as it is articulated in *Areopagitica*. As beautiful, inspiring, invigorating and idealistic as Milton's imagery and aphorisms are

in his defense of liberty, I do not read them as expressive of any sort of absolute liberty. There is no freedom involved – there is censorship. And the more we approach his ideal critically as I have attempted to do here, the more we realize that that ideal belongs entirely to him – as much as to his location in time and in space.

The next notion that I would like to question is that of a pro-gression as it is expressed in *Areopagitica*. As Vincent Blasi has discussed on his “Areopagitica and the Modern First Amendment” (2006), one of the reasons Milton’s pamphlet could not make the secular case for freedom of speech is that it is so much a product of its religious underpinnings. According to *Areopagitica*:

There be who perpetually complain of schisms and sects, and make it such a calamity that any man dissents from their maxims. 'Tis their own pride and ignorance which causes the disturbing, who neither will hear with meekness, nor can convince; yet all must be suppressed which is not found in their Syntagma. They are the troublers, they are the dividers of unity, who neglect and permit not others to unite those dissevered pieces which are yet wanting to the body of Truth. To be still searching what we know not by what we know, still closing up truth to truth as we find it (for all her body is homogeneal and proportional). . . . (175-176)

So Milton’s pamphlet expresses this notion of “closing up truth to truth”. The ideal here is to “unite those dissevered pieces which are yet wanting to the body of truth.” Milton believed that with the liberty he proposes in *Areopagitica*, Englishmen could come closer to the union of the scattered body of Truth. The religious underpinnings become even more explicit in one other moment. Take this longer citation as an example:

Truth indeed came once into the world with her divine Master, and was a perfect shape most glorious to look on: but when he ascended, and his Apostles after him were laid asleep, then straight arose a wicked race of deceivers, who, as that story goes of the Egyptian Typhon with his conspirators, how they dealt with the good Osiris, took the virgin Truth, hewed her lovely

form into a thousand pieces, and scattered them to the four winds. From that time ever since, the sad friends of Truth, such as durst appear, imitating the careful search that Isis made for the mangled body of Osiris, went up and down gathering up limb by limb, still as they could find them. We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming; he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection. Suffer not these licensing prohibitions to stand at every place of opportunity, forbidding and disturbing them that continue seeking, that continue to do our obsequies to the torn body of our martyred saint. (175)

The pro-gressive aspect of gathering the scattered pieces is also expressed here when Milton tells us that “the sad friends of Truth . . . went up and down gathering up limb by limb”. Furthermore, Milton’s confidence in an ultimate arrival in Truth, in “her Master’s second coming” when “he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection” makes it clear how the structure of *Areopagitica* is entirely determined by Milton’s religious beliefs. Milton’s idealization of a pro-gression manifests an affinity to the ideals of positivism. The prejudiced enlightenment notion that humanity is pro-gressing historically, really in the sense of gradually becoming better; experiencing an improvement, movement, or dislocation to a place that is superior, seems to have been foreshadowed through Milton’s religious convictions in the writing of *Areopagitica*.

One other setback in this notion of liberty as pro-gression that I have been discussing in relation to *Areopagitica* lies in Milton’s view of England and Englishmen. I would prefer to start with his words:

Yet that which is above all this, the favour and the love of Heaven, we have great argument to think in a peculiar manner propitious and propending towards us. Why else was this nation



chosen before any other, that out of her, as out of Sion, should be proclaimed and sounded forth the first tidings and trumpet of Reformation to all Europe? (176)

From these lines we can see how Milton not only believes his “Liberty” will pro-gressively bring humanity closer to Truth, but he also believes that Englishmen are the ones “chosen before any other . . . as out of Sion” to gather the pieces. Englishmen are favored by Heaven who in its turn is “propitious and propending” towards them. The following lines illustrate these notions further:

Now once again by all concurrence of signs, and by the general instinct of holy and devout men, as they daily and solemnly express their thoughts, God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, even to the reforming of Reformation itself: what does he then but reveal himself to his servants, and as his manner is, first to his Englishmen? I say, as his manner is, first to us, though we mark not the method of his counsels, and are unworthy. Behold now this vast city: a city of refuge, the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; . . . (177)

There is a tone of revolution when Milton tells us that God decrees “to begin some new and great period”. But here Milton goes as far as to declare God’s manner of revealing himself first to his Englishmen. England is depicted as a “vast City”, the mansion house of liberty. There are a series of passages where this English supremacy notion is voiced. The presence of this prejudiced 17<sup>th</sup> century conception helps us see how the whole notion of pro-gression suggested by Milton’s text is problematic and biased. Consequently, so is his conception of liberty. In this sense, *Areopagitica* has been greatly criticized historically and this has restricted its range over the years. These predispositions presented in Milton’s pamphlet compromise its idealizations. For instance, it is not easy for a 21<sup>st</sup> century Brazilian reader to submit to his views on censorship in light of his suggestions towards God’s propensities. Few would easily accept that censorship should be informed by the argument that Heaven has been “propitious” towards Englishmen. In this reasoning, Brazil, for example, is devoid of this divine

privilege because Reformation did not arise in the New World. Leaving aside the already exposed vulnerability of Milton's plea in urging for an end to the Licensing Order of 1643 in favor of prepublication censorship, the question is: What advancement, what pro-gression is there in making this dislocation if I have to submit to the view that Englishmen have some sort of divine privilege? There is none, these are *Areopagitica's* dated predispositions.

The last moment where we might question his ideal on liberty as pro-gression takes us to the model citizens Milton idealizes in order for his society to be healthy. Noble as his idealism may be, at least in my opinion; still it should not be confused with liberty, nor pro-gression – as I, by my own predispositions, confess to have caught myself doing previously. I believe the following segment of *Areopagitica* is illustrative to my case here:

Well knows he who uses to consider, that our faith and knowledge thrives by exercise, as well as our limbs and complexion. Truth is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetual *progression*, [my italics] they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. A man may be a heretic in the truth; and if he believe things only because his pastor says so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy. (172)

Accepting Milton's liberty implies accepting his ideal on model citizens. As model citizens, all would have to share Milton's ideal as expressed in this citation and not everyone does. We would even go to the extreme point of granting total value to the individual enterprise in the search for Truth over the value of Truth itself. Freedom of speech is important because the cornerstone of a virtuous nation is not the coming to Truth *per se*, but that that nation's citizens become entirely devoted to that search. But once again, this conception of his does not imply liberty. Not everyone shares Milton's ideal of a devoted search for Truth. There is no liberty in having to share Milton's view that such a Truth even exists. Being "free" in Milton's terms, could not involve a pro-gression if in being "free" I would have

to submit to the imposition of a search to a Truth – one I may not even necessarily acknowledge as such.

Milton also does have excessively optimistic confidence, or better yet Faith, in the ultimate arrival of Truth. In *Areopagitica*, it is very inspirational and compelling to read of “pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement” (177). But I still defend the view that this should not be mistaken for liberty. Blasi conveys Milton’s ideal well in commenting some of the passages of the latter:

What we can say, and this seems to me the crux of *Areopagitica*, is that without a robust commitment to free-wheeling disputation, without a public culture permeated by the clash of opinions, it is impossible to sustain a vigorous, adaptive, resilient society, capable when occasion demands of acting on high purpose. Like Machiavelli before him, Milton was preoccupied with the question of political energy. He saw individual character as the key to collective energy. He valued strength of will, acuteness of perception, ingenuity, self-discipline, engagement, breadth of vision, perseverance; he detested rigidity, stasis, withdrawal, timidity, small-mindedness, indecision, laziness, deference to authority. (2006: 13)

Here, citizens would then be more demanding to their government leaders, more conscious of their rights, and less susceptible in general to manipulation. But these ideals should not be seen as liberty, and furthermore, not at all as pro-gressive. It is difficult to assert that that “streaming fountain” cited before from *Areopagitica*, as compelling as it may be, represents what is best for everyone, for all society (172). What Blasi calls a “free-wheeling disputation” does not imply liberty. Once again, I am not suggesting any sort of libertinism nor offering an apology for absolute freedom, if such a thing may even be conceivable of. In no way do I here make an attempt to conclude the polemic discussion on

freedom of speech. As I hope to have illustrated, once we read *Areopagitica* carefully neither Milton, nor Blasi for that matter, state that they are advocating absolute, entirely unrestrained freedom of speech. So, if the reader comes to that conclusion after having read Milton's tract, it seems that a more attentive reading would suggest otherwise.

### Chapter 2.3 - Milton as informative to our 21<sup>st</sup> century

I have chosen to approach the question on whether or not *Areopagitica* can be informative to our 21<sup>st</sup> century on the topic of freedom of speech by examining the extent to which it can be taken as revolutionary. Since granting any work the status of being entirely revolutionary would very likely imply disregard to particulars, I prefer to scrutinize the ideals of revolution in *Areopagitica* under two specific axes. First, I will assess how *Areopagitica* is revolutionary in its central point of urging the abolishment of the Licensing Order of 1643 and calling for prepublication censorship. Then, I will direct my attention to its views on the usefulness of books considered bad. I have chosen to restrict my discussion to the more revolutionary aspects that present themselves as informative. The questions of how *Areopagitica* is revolutionary and, on a second moment, how informative it presents itself to contemporary readers will be addressed through my focus on these two points.

On the previous subchapters I have already exposed some of the biases in Milton's notion of liberty and of pro-gression. A better understanding of his exceptions illustrates how he is by no means in favor of an absolute freedom of speech. As I have exposed, *Areopagitica's* call for prepublication censorship is greatly compromised since it does not signify much of a liberty. In "Gathering the Scattered body of Milton's *Areopagitica*," James Rovira warns Milton's readers to consider the historical context in which Milton wrote (2005: 87). For us to better understand the force of what Milton proposed, accomplished, and attempted to accomplish we must acknowledge history and more specifically the history of censorship in England. As I have discussed, though most of England despised the censorship used by the Roman Catholic Church of the biblical text, the introduction of more or less organized forms of censorship had been concomitant to the introduction of printing technology. By Milton's time, more or less organized censorship had presented itself as an intricate enterprise common to all administrations. As I have shown in my first subchapter, the problem was

always in organizing the licensing system so that it became the effective instrument of control that was intended for it. It is in urging for an end to prepublication censorship in this context that Milton's pamphlet is to be taken as one that is calling for a revolution.

Thus, historical considerations are important in order for Milton readers to appreciate the text's accomplishments. An agreeable symbiotic relationship may then be established between understanding and sympathizing with Milton. But that still does not make Milton an advocate of absolute freedom of speech as he may be, and according to Fish he has been, regarded (2001: 187-88). So in urging the end of prepublication censorship how would Milton be calling for a revolution? Since the term revolution may have different implications, it is best I provide the definition for the purpose of clarification. By revolution I here mean "a great change in conditions, ways of working, beliefs, etc. that affects large numbers of people: *a cultural / social / scientific revolution...*" (Oxford Advanced 1142). I have concluded that Milton's plea does imply a revolution – albeit, naturally, not an impartial one. *Areopagitica* calls for a revolution in the sense that it is one among many voices of the time, taking part in the wider English and Puritan Revolutions. It would be more precise to say that, in the exemptions he makes to freedom of speech – biased as they may be – Milton is participating, contributing to these revolutions. Significantly, these are the revolutions that led to the English Civil War. As I have cited on pages 21 through 22, Milton was clear to list two exceptions to his privileged freedom of speech: popery and open superstition. While the popery exception is related to the more religious conflicts of the Puritan and English Revolutions and consequently to the more religious determinants of the English Civil War; the open superstition exception implies more political conflicts and determinants. I read his exception to open superstition as a reference to 17<sup>th</sup> century ideologies such as the one expressed in the theory of the divine right of kings discussed on page 10. Milton does not see the theory, or at least the notion articulated by it that no one can interfere with the king's command because the monarch is the extension of God here on earth, as worthy of his freedom of speech. According to Milton, censorship

should be effected in relation to these open superstitions because they serve tyrannical ends. As justifiable as this Miltonic censorship may or may not be, it nonetheless impedes the reader from asserting, as the anti-Catholic sentiments of *Areopagitica* discussed previously have impeded, that Milton be regarded as an advocate of unrestrained freedom. The exceptions situate Milton's *Areopagitica* alongside the many voices of the English and Puritan Revolution urging for reform – for change. Considering the Civil War that sprung from these revolutions I believe the definition I have proposed finds pertinence. In writing *Areopagitica* Milton is actively participating in this “great change in conditions . . . that affects large numbers of people” (Oxford Advanced 1142). It is also pertinent to provide my definition of revolutionary here, since I have also been using it to refer to Milton and his tract. Additionally, as I hope to illustrate on the following paragraph, the definition of revolutionary is crucial in addressing some possible objections that may be made to my assertions.

According to *The Compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary*, revolutionary is “One who instigates or favours revolutions; one who takes part in a revolution” (2533). This definition becomes especially appropriate considering that to be revolutionary does not imply effecting change. According to this definition, instigating or favoring revolutions suffices and I have been illustrating this instigating and favouring of Milton's since my first considerations on the very title of the tract. So arguing, for instance, that because *Areopagitica* did not receive much attention and therefore was not in any way crucial to the Civil War or the Revolutions of its day, does not affect its status of being revolutionary. The two definitions and their explanations must be seen as complementary since revolutionary implies the aim of revolution. Therefore, under the complementary definitions I have provided I do assert that *Areopagitica*, regardless of how prejudiced its idealizations may be, can be interpreted as revolutionary.

The second axis involves discussing the view Milton discloses of books considered bad. While the discussion on whether Milton's tract may be considered revolutionary in its main political objective

of ending prepublication censorship is somewhat questionable and therefore more demanding, I do not believe this is the case of its arguments and views concerning the utility of negative books. Here, *Areopagitica* is more readily acknowledged as revolutionary. But first let me expose Milton's arguments and views. *Areopagitica* argues that England would improve and develop through contact with books considered good as well as with those considered bad or evil. Furthermore, as I have mentioned, *Areopagitica* not only defends people's right to read all sorts of books, but also in fact even goes as far as showing the usefulness of books regarded as bad. According to Milton's pamphlet:

To the pure, all things are pure; not only meats and drinks, but all kinds of knowledge whether of good or of evil; the knowledge cannot defile, nor consequently the books, if the will and conscious be not defiled. For books are as meats and viands are; some of good, some of evil substance . . . Wholesome meats to a vitiated stomach differ little or nothing from unwholesome; and best books to a naughty mind are not inapplicable to occasions of evil. Bad meats will scarce bring good nourishment in the healthiest concoction; but herein the difference is of bad books, that they to a discreet and judicious reader serve in many respects to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate. (156-57)

The unorthodoxy of the ideal of bad books as quite useful is so great that this may be regarded as revolutionary even for our 21<sup>st</sup> century. This is one moment of a revolutionary Milton. Here, I have opted for a definition of revolutionary that is different from the previous one. Milton's inclusive view on books that are useful is revolutionary in the sense of "involving a great or complete change: *a revolutionary idea*" (Oxford Advanced 1142). In its arguments on the usefulness of bad books *Areopagitica* is revolutionary for presenting a conception or an "idea" that involves a "great or complete change" (Oxford Advanced 1142). In this axis of usefulness of bad books, I reassert that Milton's tract also calls for a revolution. As I have cited on page 34, it calls for a revolution in the sense that it calls for "a great change . . . in beliefs . . . that affects large numbers of people" (Oxford



Advanced 1142). Having explained Milton's views on books considered bad I may now go on to discuss how the revolutionary aspects may be informative to the contemporary topic of freedom of speech.

What Milton does when he discloses his views on books is he undermines a dichotomy of good books versus bad books. Since he is a monist this is expected. In some of his arguments he illustrates how books should not receive absolute judgments. He problematizes the notion implicit in the Licensing Order that every book should or can be categorized as either absolutely good or absolutely bad. One instance when he does this is in the end of my last citation of *Areopagitica*. Milton tells Parliament that bad books are useful to judicious and discreet readers in that they help "to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate" (156-57). If Milton acknowledges the premise that a book, considered bad is useful, then it is not possible that a bad book is inherently bad. If, as Milton tells us, it may serve good purposes than how can it be bad? Furthermore, this is not a matter of the means justifying the ends. Milton is not arguing against the licensing system because there are some good readers who can benefit from bad books and that therefore bad books should be tolerated. This is not the case in Milton because Truth is scattered and may potentially be everywhere. He is a monist who believes that each man must pursue the scattered bits of Truth. Each man is responsible for his own discoveries. The Truth will only be united and revealed with Christ's return and until then, each man should not be restrained in his search. God should be the ultimate and only judge of Truth.

Here the dichotomy good versus bad receives a serious setback. When Milton grants purposes to books considered bad by telling Parliament that they serve "to discover, to confute, to forewarn, and to illustrate" he makes an important qualification. This usefulness of a bad book is conditioned to the reading of a "discreet and judicious reader". Here Milton shows how relative good and bad are under the consideration of subjectivity. This view expressed in *Areopagitica* reveals sensibility and anticipates the effects of the manipulative power that means of communication have worldwide

nowadays. The difference being that nowadays the term communication has references to things far beyond anything Milton could have imagined. Taking Brazil as an example, not many of us can call themselves “discreet and judicious readers” of “Rede Globo de Televisão” in its various programs ranging from cartoons and soap operas to Fantástico and Big Brother Brasil. It is customary for the more educated to sub-scribe to a magazine such as *Veja* or *Época*.<sup>6</sup> No one can evade being influenced by music, newspapers, internet sites, cable television, cinema, globalization and even by other people who have themselves been influenced by the values prioritized by these means of communication. It seems that by Milton’s criticism of absolute good and absolute evil he makes a crucial point – more applicable to us today than ever before. Absolute values do not exist. Values are entirely subservient to how “discreet” and how “judicious” we are as readers. As visionary as Milton was in his thoughts, not even he could have possibly imagined just how prophetic he was being in conditioning values to our critical perceptions as readers.

Milton’s thought finds further contemporary pertinence in other moments. In defense of “bad” books Milton tells Parliament:

I know nothing of the licenser, but that I have his own hand here for his arrogance; who shall warrant me his judgment? The State, sir, replies the stationer, but has a quick return: The State shall be my governors, but not my critics; they may be mistaken in the choice of a licenser, as easily as this licenser may be mistaken in an author; this is some common stuff; and he might add from Sir Francis Bacon, *That such authorized books are but the language of the times*. For though a licenser should happen to be judicious more than ordinary, which will be a great

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<sup>6</sup> I have separated the word subscribe in order to make the reader aware of its etymological root. Sub and scribe come from the Latin *sub* and *scribere* respectively - the former meaning under and the latter meaning to write. Etymologically, sub-scribe is to be understood as “to write underneath, to sign one’s name to” (Etymological Dictionary 612). In other words, to sub-scribe is to agree with something, attest to its veracity.

jeopardy of the next succession, yet his very office and his commission enjoins him to let pass nothing but what is vulgarly received already. (167-68)

These lines challenge those that approach Milton only anachronistically. By reproducing Bacon's phrase, Milton reminds Parliament of how categorizations of books into either good or bad may well fall apart under historical considerations. As the man who produced the most ambitious account of the history of England of the time, he was certainly aware of this as well as anyone. Undoubtedly, the limitations he manifested in relation to freedom of speech would not be separated from this more modern Miltonic thought. There were books that Milton would have considered bad for being tyrannical. While in some regards Milton exposes how he is immersed in some of the biases of his location, in others, as I have shown, he manifests great capacity for vision. By displaying sensibilities to our contemporary views and views of contemporary pertinence Milton presents himself as a man greatly capable of seeing beyond the ideologies of his time. Disliking Milton – the person, or worse his works for being anti-catholic is like disliking William Blake for consuming opium, or not appreciating the Wachowsky brothers because of all the special effects of their movies. Disliking Milton for his moments of immersion is similar to disliking a friend, for instance, for having capitalist inclinations in our (post-)modern 21<sup>st</sup> century capitalist society. Taking a metaphor Milton often employed in *Areopagitica*, it seems that people, as well as books, should not be categorized as absolutely “good” or absolutely “bad” either. I think we, as readers, would do better by learning to appreciate Milton and his texts for those moments where he discloses his visionary, revolutionary self. Meanwhile, those that tend to expect more tolerance from Milton should themselves exercise tolerance towards those aspects of his work more in tune with his location. 21<sup>st</sup> century readers would do better by not attempting to dehistoricize Milton. We should not lose sight of the ambience in which he wrote from, while we admire the many moments where he does remarkably break out.

Initially approaching *Areopagitica* through historical considerations and then delving into the text's assumptions and ideals has allowed me to expose its biases and reveal its inclinations. Liberty is not the case Milton's pamphlet has defended. It is difficult to accept liberty's pro-gression if I have to submit to his views of God's propensities towards Englishmen. Its Truth cannot be sustained in our 21<sup>st</sup> Century. These points have exposed the limitations in Milton's assumptions and restricted its range. I will now approach my next object of study in order to show how its Truth, pro-gression and liberty are then time and place specific as well.

### Chapter 3 - Approaching Blake and *The Marriage*

*It is, in some indescribable way, the total phenomenon of William Blake, the vision behind the poems, the engravings, the aphorisms and the life of that obscure and saintly man, that somehow conveys a whole imaginative world whose dimensions seem almost boundless. It is a question of human stature; Blake was one of those spiritual presences that are felt in the world. . . . (Raine, 1951: 8)*

While obscure seems appropriate enough, reference to the author of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1993) as saintly may seem odd. This is because in approaching William Blake, it is not difficult to initially regard him as a Satanist. By simply skimming through the pages of *The Marriage* the reader finds the voice of the devil, proverbs of Hell, and the famous reference to Milton as “a true Poet and / of the Devil’s party without knowing it” (1993: 150). Though very few scholars would now agree that Blake and his work involve diabolical teachings, historically, this conception had been more generally accepted. English poet Algernon Swinburne (1837-1909) may be mentioned as one of the most famous partakers of this sort of reading (Nurmi, 1972: 25). But whether Satanist or not, if there is one thing about Blake that would not likely be denied is that his “spiritual presence” is felt. By spiritual presence I mean that Blake has been present historically because of his works. He has been read, he has survived and my own work here further discusses how. Moreover, Blake’s presence has not only been felt by students of English literature who will probably continue to make his acquaintance through early works such as the heavily anthologized *The Tyger*. Neither does his presence apply only to students of painting or to people of western cultural background. To some extent and whether directly or not, Blake presents himself to audiences worldwide. As my work here will ultimately illustrate, viewers of *The Matrix* (1999) for instance have been exposed to Blakean thought to some extent even if they are not aware of it. Blakean thought here simply refers to those expressed in his work. It involves the elements that may be read within his system – the more original ones as well as the less.

Consequently, a Biblical symbol or wording that Blake may have borrowed is also a part of what I call Blakean thought. To a limited extent, reading these symbols in the Bible also brings the reader to some sort of common ground with Blake. It is in this broad sense that I propose Blake makes himself present. The indirect route is common especially because Blake has been influenced as well as influential in areas other than the specific literary one. And when the reader approaches Blake through a plethora of poems, engravings, illustrations, aphorisms, films, novels, or even through studying what we have for the life of William Blake, it may seem as though a whole imaginative world is conveyed. The “total phenomenon of William Blake” seems to render expression to a whole imaginative outlook on life - almost boundless. Nevertheless, after having attempted to write about it here, and I suppose by reading about it the reader would agree with me on this, Raine has a point: It does seem as though this whole imaginative world, this imaginative outlook on existence is best left conveyed by that total phenomenon that is William Blake. To us, this will always be done in some indescribable way. But in addressing *The Marriage* in the terms I have proposed, namely liberty as pro-gression, I will study his education and probe into his relationship to tradition in aspects other than the stylistic. Addressing his intellectual and philosophical tradition and his informal education as an approach to *The Marriage* will also help the reader undermine the myth that Blake was an entirely original and impermeable author. On this chapter, I will be showing where Blake’s thoughts come from in terms of liberty and progression. I hope to expose how the Truth he proposes, like Milton’s is a reflection of the ideologies circulating during his own lifetime. *The Marriage* is the material existence that is indicative of Blake’s conversion, Blake’s subjectivity. Questioning Blake’s originality allows me to expose the manner in which his formulations on Liberty, pro-gression and Truth are, like Milton’s, time and place specific.

Perhaps ironically, in his own lifetime William Blake did not make much of a presence for himself – not through his work, that is. It is true that the accounts of his life are consistent in describing the impressions he caused on those he met, but at least outside of London he was far from notorious or

influential. Having lived there and having had the fortune of befriending some influential people, he met important artists of his time: Fuseli, Flaxman, Varley, Linnel, Samuel Palmer, Sir Joshua Reynolds, and Coleridge. As Raine has mentioned, the neglect Blake had experienced as an artist during his life even led Alexander Gilchrist to make a justification for his writing of Blake's biography in 1863 – main source for most of what we know about him today (1951: 7). Blake was born on November 28, 1757 and lived his entire life in London except for two or three years spent in the country. The innovations of the industrial revolution, and the green fields that were then part of the scenery around London had a great impact on his work. According to Raine, “Blake, from his very childhood, knew two worlds, city and country: the innocence of green fields, and the experience of industrial revolution; a pastoral heaven, and a hell of ‘dark satanic mills’. It is characteristic of his whole philosophy that he took both into account” (1951: 10). We can see how these experiences may have helped frame his mind and his writing when we consider *Songs of Innocence* (1948), *Songs of Experience* (1948) and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1948), for example.

But one thing that did not frame his mind or writing was the traditional formal 18<sup>th</sup> century classroom education. Raine has reported how at his own request to his father, Blake never attended school (1951: 11). As a child, he spent many hours in print-shops using whatever small amount of money he could obtain to buy engravings made by Italians. When he became old enough to start a career, he chose to be apprenticed as an engraver to a man named Basire. No matter how sophisticated, exuberant, imaginative, free or complex one may consider Blake's poetry, the poet himself lived a very modest material life. In Raine's words, “Blake never lost his link with the common people, or the men who work with their hands; and however high the flights of his imagination, he remained, all his life, a humble engraver working for his bread, with the skill of his hands” (1951: 11-12). It really seems as though Blake was usually too far off in his imagination to worry about material things, even the more essential. Catherine Blake, always described as an entirely devoted wife and arguably Blake's

staunchest admirer, would be responsible for reminding him of the household's most basic necessities when time came. Ever since they got married in 1782 and went to live at 23 Green Street his wife would serve as his link to everyday life. As Raine informs us, "when no money remained to pay their simple household expenses, Mrs. Blake used to set an empty plate before her husband at dinner-time and that he would then turn . . . from his prophecies and visions of other worlds, and take up his graver to work on some humble task" (1951: 12). So it seems as though records of Blake's life as well as his works challenge simplistic dichotomies towards people such as simple innocence versus complex experience. In terms of material things he and his wife lived what someone would call a simple or modest life. But his works are indicative of how his thoughts would easily refrain from such classifications.

Just because Blake had no classroom education it does not mean that he was uneducated or not influenced by tradition in other terms – there are many. As Northrop Frye has mentioned in his book *Fearful Symmetry*, "even a self-made thinker is not necessarily an untraditional one" (1947: 147). A careful analysis of an artist's production may be informed by a critical approach to biographical and historical considerations, and benefit from it. For instance, Basire had Blake make drawings of many monuments in Westminster Abbey and, as Raine has stated, their Gothic style deeply influenced him, more explicitly in his painting (1951: 13). The fact that his pictorial work indicates and therefore supports this assertion enables the student of Blake to make fairly unproblematic points – especially points related to an artist's influences. This is how I have chosen to approach this introduction to *The Marriage and to Blake*.

As my analysis here will ultimately show, Blake may very well be regarded as an original author, but there are some considerations to be made concerning what is meant by original. Blake is certainly not original in the sense that he was entirely innovative and wrote entirely free from influence. Actually, he was greatly influenced by a plethora of thoughts and I hope by the end of this



chapter it will be clearer in what sense originality may be attributed to his works. As Edward P. Thompson has informed us, some probing into Blake's relationship to his tradition in terms of a more political context has been done. Thompson mentions David Erdman's 1954 book called *Blake: Prophet against Empire* as a work that takes such an investigative approach (1993: xvii). My concern here is not so much the political context at which Blake wrote *The Marriage*, though politics is undeniably much a part of it. My approach addresses the intellectual context more directly. This choice finds pertinence in my view that in his entire oeuvre Blake has always been informative more so intellectually than politically. When he calls for a revolution in *The Marriage* for instance, he is certainly aiming for political changes, but only in a more indirect way. This happens more explicitly only in the last segment called "A Song for Liberty." The primary change he is calling for through the rest of the text is in the way man sees himself within society and its impositions. Therefore, I have been most indebted to E. P. Thompson and his book, *Witness against the Beast: William Blake and the Moral Law* (1993) since he is a scholar who has approached Blake within the 18<sup>th</sup> century intellectual context. But Thompson is not the only one to have taken this approach. In *Witness against the Beast* (1993) he lists A.L. Morton and Christopher Hill as his own predecessors in this line of approach (1993: xvii).

William Blake did not live in complete isolation on some deserted island: he lived nearly all of his life at the heart of London during the turn-of-the 18<sup>th</sup> century. Considering what and how he studied the reader further realizes how influence is part of his work. Moreover, as I have mentioned, simply because he never went to school it does not mean that he was uneducated. As Thompson informs us:

Despite every precaution, we have a continuing difficulty in our approach to Blake, which derives from our tendency to make overly academic assumptions as to his learning and mode of thought. It takes a large effort to rid ourselves of these assumptions, because they lie at an accessible level within our own intellectual culture – indeed, they belong to the very institutions and disciplines with which we construct that culture. (1993: xvii)

Certain types of knowledge are prioritized in academia. Being educated or not, or being more educated or less seems to depend on how much of this prioritized knowledge we are familiar with. “Disciplines” in and out of the academia are imbued with hierarchical positions institutionally and we tend to acknowledge these hierarchies. Blake’s intellectual tradition was that of an autodidact. This does not necessarily mean that he exposed himself to the same disciplines being ministered at Oxford and Cambridge or to the “doctrinal orthodoxy of the Church of England” (Thompson, 1993: xviii). Being autodidact here does not just refer to learning outside the classroom. It also implies, always to a somewhat limited extent, the choice of a person’s own objects of study. In Thompson’s own words:

Alternative intellectual traditions existed also . . . at the level of family traditions, and obscure intellectual currents surfacing, submerging and then surfacing again in little periodicals, or in chapels which fractured into several petty chapels, which invited new ministers or gathered around new voices, which knit up ideas and unraveled them and knit them up again throughout the eighteenth century. (1993: xix)

Blake is to be placed within this “alternative” sort of tradition such as Franklin, Paine, Wollstonecraft, Bewick, Cobbett, Thomas Spence and Robert Owen are.

One next step in order to understand Blake’s intellectual context is in discovering what he read. This is difficult to assert biographically since no scholar has found any proof of Blake’s subscription to any library, or any remains of a personal library either. But considering his works and the material circulating London during his lifetime, someone may list a series of works that Blake is very likely to have had contact with, be it directly or indirectly. The scope of inquiring into what Blake may have read becomes especially larger considering evidence of the languages he was familiar with. In this regard, Thompson has cited a man named Fredrick Tathan who had been a friend to the Blakes and is an early biographer. Tathan affirmed having possessed books “well thumbed and dirtied by his graving hands, in Latin, Greek, Hebrew, French and Italian, besides a large collection of works of the mystical

writers, Jacob Behmen, Swedenborg, and others” (qtd in Thompson, 1993: xx). So, as Thompson proceeds to tell us, it seems as though Blake’s “reading was extensive; nothing should astonish us; and whatever library he used, he entered some odd and unfamiliar corners” (1993: xx-xxi). But stating that as an artist he simply reproduced a heterogeneous mixture of the mystical thoughts circulating during his time seems just as unsound as acknowledging that he was an entirely original author. Questioning the former statement will be illustrative to the matter of originality in Blake. As I will show, he seems to have been familiar with a larger variety of material than he may usually have been given credit for. Additionally, understanding the way he approached the reading activity, as well as the writing and drawing, may also help us better understand both in what sense he is original as well as help us realize that what Blake wrote about, he did so by choice. But this does not imply liberty. Resembling the manner in which *Areopagitica*’s freedom of speech was compromised as absolute by the exemptions Milton makes, Blake’s liberty and overall ideals are compromised by the fact that his propositions are a product of his historical context.

In the dissenting inclinations of London there was a strong sense of self-confidence and an urge for each individual to build his/her own “system” especially from the 1780s through the 1790s. There was a yearning for individuals to openly inquire the many dissenting groups and appropriate the points that were more worthy of appropriation. Not only did people join religious sects but they argued within them and, in Thompson’s wording, “fractured” them (1993: xix). Dissenters, such as Blake, “conceived their own heresies and all the time struggled to build their own system” (Thompson, 1993: xix). The manner in which dissenters built their systems corresponds to the manner in which Blake approached the reading activity – and hence, built “his own” system. The reader cannot deny Blake this construction of his. His whole mythology attests to the fact that within the diverse order of influences for a person living in London in the 18<sup>th</sup> century he did build “his” system. Blake expressed his artistic manner of perceiving existence. Furthermore, he also set forth his particular way of expressing this

system through his illuminated material. In discussing Blake's approach to reading, Thompson has informed us that:

He would look into a book with a directness which we might find to be naïve or unbearable, challenging each one of its arguments against his own experience. . . . He took each author (even the Old Testament prophets) as his equal, or as something less. And he acknowledged as between them, no received judgments as to their worth, no hierarchy of accepted 'reputability'. For Blake, a neighbour, or a fellow-reader of a periodical, or his friend and patron Thomas Butts, were quite as likely to hold opinions of central importance as was any man of recognised learning. (1993: xx-xxi)

So, anything he had belabored over was taken as a potential influence from the onset. It seems that Blake was quite a voracious reader, though not likely to the length of Milton, for instance. But as Thompson has also discussed, it is very probable that Blake was not reading material from original sources (1993: 41-43). This possibility will be better addressed briefly. Before doing so, I believe it is better for the reader to understand the traditions that Blake mostly borrowed from. Delineating the vocabulary, symbols, tenets and elements that structure his thought should help us see the dynamics of the creative appropriation that ultimately built his tradition, his system.

As I have mentioned, Blake did not write exclusively from the academic position or from that of the elite. Actually, his childhood hostility to school was extended throughout his life against the entire academia. But this does not mean that he was not somehow exposed to the privileged learning of his time alongside the more obscure. His openness was exercised onto privileged, unprivileged and, as I have mentioned, onto all sorts of texts. Considering this openness, we should not attempt to assign Blake strictly to one doctrine or another. His works reveal to some degree influence to points of many doctrines that were circulating in the 18<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. The questions are, from what points and from what traditions did William Blake write? What were his major influences? Thompson has argued

that the one major influence for Blake was the Bible – whose reading was influenced by Milton and by radical Dissenters (1993: 33). According to Thompson, not only did Blake read the Bible from an antinomian position, but his writing also contains the “most lucid and most persuasive statements that issued from that tradition in any voice and at any time” (1993: 9). In general, antinomianism is the doctrine that faith alone is enough for salvation and that there is no use or obligation to moral laws. It is “The doctrine or practice of antinomians; avowed rejection of the moral law” (OED). Antinomians find biblical justification for this belief in the books of Romans and Galatians. The basic notion is that Christ has redeemed man from the curse of the Mosaic Moral Law. The Moral Law was taken as a sort of schoolmaster for which mankind no longer had any use because it was driven out by the Gospel of Love. Mankind is in a state of grace by faith (Thompson, 1993: 10-11). According to this Gospel of Love, which is traced back to Joachim of Fiore in the 12<sup>th</sup> century, there are three successive Ages. Thompson’s enumerates them:

The Age of Fear and Servitude, which ended with the birth of Christ, and which followers might see as the Age of the Old Testament and the Moral Law; the Age of faith and Filial Obedience (the Age of the New Testament and the apostolic succession); and the Age of Spiritual Liberty for the Children of God, in which the scriptures would appear in a wholly new light – a New Age, now imminent and perhaps to be announced by the new prophets or Commissions of the Spirit. (1993: 23-24)

Within this antinomian division, historically, humans should act according to the demands of the age where they live.

Naturally, the Age where the Moral Law was necessary was the Age of Fear. In Blake’s time, mankind finds itself in the Age of Faith – where, since Christ sacrificed himself redeeming us from our sins, Faith is enough for salvation. This is the Age referred to in *The Marriage* when it says that the Body is a portion of the Soul “discernd / by the five Senses, the chief inlets of soul in this / age” (Blake,

1993: 146). What Blake is announcing in *The Marriage* is the coming of the Third Age – The Age of Spiritual Liberty. He is calling for a change in the way man perceives life. This change in perception is what will bring us to this New Age. The change that mankind must experience in the transition of the second age to the third is expressed in the following segment of *The Marriage*:

But first the notion that man has a body / distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this / I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by / corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and / displaying the infinite which was hid, / If the doors of perception were cleansed / every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite—  
(1993: 166)

Mankind then has to undergo a cleansing of the doors of perception, the senses, in order for things to appear as they are – infinite. Then mankind will find itself in the third age – The Age of Spiritual Liberty.

But the books of Romans and Galatians where justification of antinomianism is expressed leave room to interpretations and consequently there may be different positions within this doctrine, depending on a person's interpretation. In the late 18<sup>th</sup> century there were basically three positions. First, there were those who had inclinations towards Calvinist principles of predestination. Simply, Grace was free and salvation was a certainty, but only to the elect. Secondly, there were those who had a great deal of confidence in the notion of saved by Grace. These would commit the orthodox sins light-heartedly and consequently they would be greatly frowned on and criticized by the more orthodox Christians. And the third position within antinomianism not only disregards Moral Law such as in the second position, but also in fact despises it. This is the position within antinomianism most closely associated with Blake and the one very much a part of the ideal expressed in *The Marriage*. Furthermore, this is the interpretation mostly attributed to antinomianism in the 1790s. On this third position, the Moral Law is perceived as a direct antagonist to what Christ expects from us in our new

regenerate state. Moral Law is about repression and prohibition while the Gospel of Jesus is about forgiveness and love (Thompson, 1993: 13-14). The former requires submission while the latter requires imagination, activeness. On a last note concerning antinomianism, I should observe that it was not a religion or a sect. It was a doctrine based on some books of the Bible. As such, different sects appropriated antinomianism interpretatively adjusting it into its system. This is precisely what Blake did and the antagonist position of antinomianism is the one most closely associated with *The Marriage*.

One other culture that seems to have anticipated Blake intellectually is the cosmopolitan humanist one. Northrop Frye lists a series of names that share Blake's emphasis on the importance of the Poetic Genius, in other words, the centrality of imagination. Erasmus, Rabelais, Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, Reuchlin, Thomas More, Ficino, and Pico della Mirandola all seem to have "emerged into a kind of visionary Christianity . . ." (1947: 150). Blake seems to have inherited their preference for Plato's visions and the imaginative interpretation in religion and literature as well as a dislike for the logics of Aristotle. With the beginning of the Reformation, this aspect of the humanist culture experienced a historical hiatus only to be retained in the sect of the Anabaptists. Here, an intellectual association to Blake is made quite explicit. Frye describes Anabaptists as:

political anarchists because they regarded all social systems and established churches without exceptions as tyrannies . . . they denied natural religion to the point of insisting that the whole physical world was a doomed illusion. They acknowledged no authority but that of the Scriptures and their own 'inner light', a conception very close to Blake's theory of imagination. (1947: 151-52)

Considering the obvious associations between Blake's works and these traditions, we see how he seems to have had a great deal to build on. Realizing how Blake was in tune with his time and place helps the reader to see how his assumptions as to liberty and truth are not entirely "his". Blake himself is not manifesting impermeability, but immersion. Consequently, like Milton in the writing of *Areopagitica*,

Blake's ideals in the writing of *The Marriage* do not imply liberty – they are somewhat immersed in the ideological mindset of the late 18<sup>th</sup> century Englishmen. In considering the intellectual relationship between the works of Blake alongside Jacob Boehme (1575-1624) I will show the latter's historical anticipation of Blake's works. Additionally, in light of the associations between Blake and Boehme, I will illustrate how the former's appropriations do not enter his system unchanged.

The works of Boehme stand as one major influence for Blake. But there are some considerations that must be made in relation to this influence. The central question here is Thompson's: "But is it an influence central to Blake's stance?" (1993: 44). Thompson has found French scholar and Behmenist expert M. Serge Hutin informative in this questioning. Hutin has listed three notions found on Boehme's works that are recurrent in Blake, namely: correspondence, the Grand Man, and the notion of the primordial unity of God and the universe. But none of these notions are Behmenist. They are all found in occultism and theosophy. Blake was influenced by Boehme's concept of contraries, for instance, but in Thompson's words, ". . . Blake translates the operation of the dialectic from metaphysical machinery to values: he has appropriated it and metamorphosed it into a 'decided antinomianism', a sort of 'gnostic antinomianism', original to Blake, pushed to extremes from which Jacob Boehme would have recoiled in horror" (1993: 45). Here, Hutin's studies help us see under what sense Blake may be regarded as an original artist. Thompson then looks to Martin K. Nurmi. The latter, a more Blakean scholar, also informs us that Blake was no Behmenist because though *The Marriage* borrows some of Boehme's ideas, they always undergo a change. Nurmi tells us:

Boehme is undoubtedly the source for Blake's general conception of the contraries, though Blake's use of this conception is his own. And Boehme supplied Blake with - or supported – many other conceptions, including the important idea of spiritual sensation. But no ideas enter Blake's thought unchanged. The idea of contraries, used by Boehme to support a Trinitarian cosmogony, serves Blake as a support for a Human cosmos. And Blake's application of the idea



of spiritual perception replaces, as the source of all perception, Boehme's eternal will of God with the 'Poetic Genius'. Blake, thus could be said to draw upon Boehme for support of the very doctrines that constitute the chief points of difference between the ideas of the two men. (1972: 34)

Boehme does share some concepts key to Blakean thought, but referring to the latter as a Behmenist is problematical if he does so in a different stance. Any similarity between their works seems to be site to a beginning of divergences. Nurmi further explains how not only the notion of contraries such as attraction and repulsion are used in different stances in each thinker's works, but also the notion of progression. For Boehme, to progress is to follow "the order of creation, from God to outward substance" (1972: 33). Whereas for Blake, progression is not to proceed from ". . . God to creation or even from God to man, but the other way around: from a given state of man's life to a higher one in which he realizes more fully the divine life of the imagination" (1972: 33). This is precisely the notion of pro-gression I will be questioning in subchapters 3.1 and 3.2 – a notion central to my thesis.

In considering *Comus* (1957) for instance, a reader would not unlikely regard Milton as an inimical influence to Blake. On some aspects it may seem as though the puritan abstaining poet is quite distant in thought and in ideals from the poet of "For everything that lives is Holy" (1993: 192). But Blake's admiration for Milton's work is undeniable and so is the respect the former had for the latter. These are indicative of possible influences between their works. No other work than *Areopagitica*, my first object of study here, is more explicit in illustrating what there was in Milton that fascinated Blake so much. Northrop Frye asserts that, "Milton's 'liberty' is practically the same thing as Blake's imagination, and whenever Milton talks about reason he means it in the sense of the 'bound or outward circumference of Energy' which liberty supplies" (1947: 159). Frye goes on to assert that *Areopagitica* is the site where Milton "is nearest to Blake" and he even reaches the point of stating that "*Areopagitica* supplies for the student of Blake not only a guide to most of Blake's leading ideas but an

illustration of many of his symbols” (1947: 159). Here, Frye’s view on the points of contact between Milton and Blake’s works exposes *how* it is very difficult for the reader to accept Blake as an absolutely original artist. If his “leading ideas” and even symbols are a result of influence, absolute originality seems quite easily contested.

The concept of Truth articulated by Milton and Blake may be cited as an illustration of the intellectual proximity in their works. As I have discussed in the second chapter, *Areopagitica* informs us that the pieces of Truth have been scattered into the four winds. Truth will only attain its integral form on the second coming of Christ. Therefore, in this fallen age, “Truth exists only in the total form which the mind makes of reality, hence no doctrine which a man assents to because he is told to do so can be true for him” (Frye, 1947: 159). So, Truth exists, but we will never have access to it in our present fallen condition. Pro-gression is a consequence of the continuing pursuit of Truth. It implies active participation. Pro-gression is creating one’s own system, or living and writing according to what one believes to be the Truth. Both Milton and Blake defend the view that humanity in general only progress when this stance towards our existence is taken. Consider the following segment from *Areopagitica*:

Truth is compared in Scripture to a streaming fountain; if her waters flow not in a perpetual progression, they sicken into a muddy pool of conformity and tradition. A man may be a heretic in the truth; and if he believe things only because his pastor says so, or the Assembly so determines, without knowing other reason, though his belief be true, yet the very truth he holds becomes his heresy. (172)

This need to live according to one’s own beliefs or system is expressed again somewhat humorously in *Areopagitica*. In explaining the process of ascribing another with one’s own task of thinking, Milton tells us:

To him he adheres, resigns the whole warehouse of his religion, with all the locks and keys, into his custody; and indeed makes the very person of that man his religion; esteems his associating with him a sufficient evidence and commendatory of his own piety. So that a man may say his religion is now no more within himself, but is become a dividual movable, and goes and comes near him, according as that good man frequents the house. He entertains him, gives him gifts, feasts him, lodges him; his religion comes home at night, prays, is liberally supped, and sumptuously laid to sleep; rises, is saluted, and after the malmsey, or some well-spiced brewage, and better breakfasted than he whose morning appetite would have gladly fed on green figs between Bethany and Jerusalem, his religion walks abroad at eight, and leaves his kind entertainer in the shop trading all day without his religion. (172)

On plate 10 of *Jerusalem*, Blake has articulated this ideal. He says, “I must create a system or be enslaved by another man’s; I will not reason and compare: my business is to create.” (1948: 442) So works of both poets express this individual responsibility of man to pursue Truth. Logically enough, the more we create, the more we are approximated to God.

Northrop Frye also adds two more points in which Milton is crucially informative to Blake. First, “in forming Blake’s doctrine that the Christian Church cannot exist outside the arts because the secondary Word of God which unites us to the primary Word or Person of Christ is a book and not a ceremony” (1947: 159). And the second crucial point is made in showing “that the impulse to destroy art by censorship makes general morality a criterion which the creative imagination must meet” (1947: 159). So, this “general morality” is not something that should simply be acknowledged and accepted. We must approach it creatively, actively, Blake would probably emphasize imaginatively. It must be questioned, checked and problematized. This “criterion” of moral virtue is based on man’s fallen state and to pursue it does not lead a person to the pursuit of Truth, but death. Frye tells us how general morality such as church doctrine “detests everything that has any exuberance; and its ultimate aim is

the legalized 'blank virtue' of the Pharisee, which Jesus saw for what it was, the 'excremental whiteness' of the outside of a tomb (1947:159)." For both artists, a creative or imaginative approach is the only means for humanity to pro-gress in the pursuit of Truth.

There is also great consonance between Milton and Blake in the creative or imaginative power behind this approach. Frye asserts that *Areopagitica* is a "demand for the release of creative power and a vision of an imaginative culture in which the genius is not an intellectual as much as a prophet and seer" (1947: 159-60). Not only does the release of this power in man draw us closer to God, it draws us closer to God in man. As *Areopagitica* argues, this creative power in man is the good book, an image of God "as it were in the eye" (1958: 150). Censorship, morality, tyranny does nothing other than kill God in man - hence the lines where Milton tells us that "as good almost kill a man as kill a good book. Who kills a man kills a reasonable creature, God's image; but he who destroys a good book, kills reason itself, kills the image of God, as it were in the eye" (1958: 149-50). These notions lead the reader to view God or Jesus in a specific manner. God is certainly not viewed as the tyrant, vengeful, merciless figure he is generally described as being in the Old Testament. He is not a God concerned with our morality here on our fallen state. He is a "joyous God for whom too much is enough and exuberance beauty, a God who gave every Israelite in the desert three times as much manna as he could possibly eat" (Frye, 1947: 160). Jesus is the loving, forgiving figure Blake esteems so much. But he is also the figure who rebelled against the merchants profiting from the Church. In expressing this view of Jesus in *The Marriage*, Blake asks:

now hear how he / has given his sanction to the law of ten command- / ments: did he not mock  
at the sabbath, and so / mock the sabbaths God? murder those who were / murderd because of  
him? turn away the law / from the woman taken in adultery? steal the labor of / others to  
support him? bear false witness when / he omitted making a defence before Pilate? covet / when  
he pray'd for his disciples, and when he bid / them shake off the dust of their feet against such /

as refused to lodge them? I tell you, no virtue / can exist without breaking these ten command- /  
ments; Jesus was all virtue, and acted from im- / -pulse / -pulse. not from rules. (1993: 185-86)

This view of Jesus as an active and creative figure stands as the model we should strive to approach. These last citations of *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage* have been indicative of the points of contact between the works and views of these two men. Their views on Liberty, Truth, Pro-gression, the role of the creative imagination, and God are illustrative, as I have discovered, of the fact that reading Milton and Blake comparatively does not necessarily always represent a task of only contrasting differences as works such as *Comus* (1957) may initially suggest. In light of the ways Milton has been informative to Blake's production, there is no reason to doubt that certain elements the reader would be attracted to in reading Milton may also attract a reader of Blake.

Nevertheless, as I have mentioned, any similarities must be understood for what they are. The similarities, the points where Milton's influences seem more explicit, are sites of the beginning of divergences. Milton is not an exception among those Blakean influences that are appropriated but do not go unchanged. The great number of Blakean illustrations to Milton's works attests the former's affinity to the latter. But the illustrations are still Blakean. He never refrained from addressing Milton creatively. It is always a conflictive appropriation of Milton's text – an appropriation into a system<sup>7</sup>.

Emmanuel Swedenborg (1688 - 1772) is a figure that the student of Blake cannot ignore when discussing influences, especially if the object of study is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* as is my case here. The direct association between the two is one of the few entirely undeniable ones. Three of Swedenborg's works have been found annotated by Blake, namely: *Heaven and Hell* from 1784 – and here the relationship is made evident from the very title, *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* from 1788,

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<sup>7</sup> Here I will not grant room to an analysis of these differences. My objective at this moment is to highlight the points of contact in order to problematize conceptions of Blake as an isolated, original, impermeable artist as I have been doing in relation to all his other influences.

and *Divine Providence* from 1790 (Thompson, 1993: 131). In annotating the latter Blake already distanced himself intellectually from Swedenborg in the latter's affinity towards predestination. Such a belief was inconceivable of in Blake's revolutionary ideal. Aspiration to cleanse the doors of perception, or to progress, does not make sense if predestination is a reality. But the matter in which Blake distances himself from Swedenborg the most, and this is clear in *The Marriage*, is the fact that the latter tried to put his notions into an entirely rationalized framework (Thompson, 1993: 133).

There is one other clear evidence of the direct association between Blake and Swedenborgianism. Signatures of William and Catherine Blake found on a document that had circulated in a General Conference of Swedenborgians in Easter of 1789 stands as proof of this direct influence. The ninety-five signatures come from those who agreed upon the thirty-two Swedenborgian resolutions expressed in the document (Thompson, 1993: 133). Jon Mee has been informative on Blake's early interest in Swedenborgianism. According to Mee, "Blake had probably been interested in Swedenborg's writings from the early 1780s, most likely drawn by its millenarian proclamation of a New Age, its hostility to priest-craft, its positive view of human sexuality, and its visionary reading of the material world in terms of spiritual correspondences" (2003: 137). But this affinity soon turned into disillusionment on account of Swedenborg's institutionalization of a New Church. To Blake it seems that church implied rituals and further implied one thing Blake despised entirely: Laws. Mee tells us the way Blake likely regarded this: "The process would have seemed to him only the latest in a long history of the priest usurping the role of the poet-prophet" (2003: 137). The intellectual disillusionment with Swedenborgian thought and this institutionalization of doctrines into the New Church were the two central factors for Blake's break and revolt directed towards the Swedish theologian.

While Blake's relationship to Swedenborg's works experienced some initial affinity before becoming counter to it, one "system" Blake had always had unsympathetic sentiments towards was what is known as the Augustan Age. The briefest introduction to some of its main poets such as Dryden

and Pope; philosophers such as Locke and Voltaire; historians such as Hume and Gibbon; or painters such as Reynolds and Gainsborough would suffice in acknowledging Blake's enmity towards their precepts. But Blake's aversion towards the Augustan Age does not imply that it was not influential to him. In fact, it may very well be argued that Blake's productions may be more indebted to aversions than affinities. One point that would help us recognize Blake's distaste for the Augustan Age is the latter's view on the relationship between man and nature. As Frye tells us, "The Augustan conception of 'nature' begins with a physical world outside the mind . . . Hence the relation between individual man and nature is uncomplicated by the presence within man of a divine power visualizing eternity" (1947: 161-62). As I have discussed previously, not only does Blake advocate the primacy of the mind in perceiving nature, but he also idealizes a cleansing of the doors of perception. His very notion of pro-gression and the entire revolution he is calling for in *The Marriage* concerns this emphasis on the centrality of the mind in the act of perception. To Blake, the Augustan man is a creature limited by his five senses, insensitive to the power of perception attributed to those who pursue the central element he calls the Poetic Genius. The Augustan is the man who has "closed himself up, till he sees / all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern" (Blake, 1993: 166). Blake believes that, "The eye does not see: the eye is a lens for the mind to look through: Perception, then, is not something we do with our senses; it is a mental act" (Frye, 1947: 19). The more we have cleansed our senses the more imaginatively we perceive nature since "there is no 'general nature,' therefore nothing is real beyond the imaginative patterns men make of reality, and hence there are exactly as many kinds of reality as there are men" (Frye, 1947: 19). This is so because each person makes his/her own reality through the particulars of his/her own perception. *The Marriage* is all about enhancing the power of this perceptive faculty.

A Good way to understand Blake's distinguishing of perception is through the following segment of *A Vision of the Last Judgment*: "What, it will be Question'd, 'When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?' O no, no, I see an innumerable company of the

Heavenly host crying, ‘Holy, holy, holy is the Lord God Almighty’” (1948: 652) Here Blake presents two ways of perceiving the sun. A person may perceive it as a “round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea.” This would be the Augustan way of perception. In describing Blake’s point of view, Frye asserts: “The Hallelujah-Chorus perception of the sun makes it a far more real sun than the guinea-sun, because more imagination has gone in perceiving it” (1947: 21). Whenever Blake wants to see the guinea-sun he can, but in seeing the angels he is seeing more of the sun (Frye, 1947: 21). It seems clear that Blake could not appreciate the commonplace relationship between man and nature in the Augustan Age. Frye summarizes how Blake’s distinction helps us understand his ideal in the following:

In Blake the criterion or standard of reality is the genius; in Locke it is the mediocrity. If Locke can get a majority vote on the sun, a consensus of normal minds, based on the lower limit of normality he can eliminate the idiot who goes below this and the visionary who rises above it as equally irrelevant. This leaves him with a communal perception of the sun in which the individual units are identical, all reassuring one another that they see the same thing; that their minds are uniform and their eyes interchangeable. The individual mind thus becomes an indivisible but invariable unit: that is, it is the subjective equivalent of the “atom.” Blake calls the sum of experiences common to normal minds the “ratio,” and whenever the word “reason” appears in an unfavorable context in Blake, it always means “ratiocination”, or reflection on the ratio. (1947: 21-22)

The term ratio is present in *The Marriage* (1993: 150) when Blake tells us that in Milton the Son, Jesus, is a ratio of the five senses and it makes reference to this “sum of experiences” Blake disdains so much. A few paragraphs later, Frye proceeds to tell us:

We see the guinea-sun automatically: seeing the Hallelujah-Chorus demands a voluntary and conscious imaginative effort; or rather, it demands an exuberantly active mind which will not be quiescent blank slate. The imaginative mind, therefore, is the one which has realized its own



freedom and understood that *perception is self-development* [my italics]. The unimaginative is paralyzed by its own doubt, its desire to cut parts of the mind off from perception and parts of perception out of the mind, and by the dread of going beyond the least common denominator of the 'normal'. (1947: 22-23)

I suppose these two quotations anticipate the ideal of Liberty as Pro-gression I will be questioning in the next subchapter.

Until this moment, I have mainly been presenting some of the intellectual positions related to my thesis topic that may have been informative to Blake's works. With parallels to a small amount of biographical information, I have tried to show how Blake is likely to have had access to these views either directly or indirectly. I have been moving somewhat historically and will now comment on how Blake's work met its tradition. In anthologies, Blake is usually sited as a romantic or pre-romantic. In literary or art history some may view his position as a transitory or an in-between one. But referring to Blake as a pre-romantic or just as an in-between figure does a great deal of injustice to his accomplishments since he could not even have dreamed of a Romanticism that did not exist to him. Romanticism in the ways it is generally viewed today was not an influence to his works – neither as a starting point nor as an aimed objective. Frye proposes scholars approach Blake's achievements not just as a simple reaction to Pope or anticipation of Wordsworth (1947: 167). It is also inappropriate to regard his works only as potential Romanticism. Blake's oeuvre would be better approached as a movement that attempted an initial reaction to the Augustan Age and as a movement that attempted to "get English poetry back on Renaissance rails" (Frye, 1947: 168). On a more critical level, every poet would need to have his/her own age. But what Blake does is make this need more evident. With this in mind, Frye has argued in favor of an "age of Blake" (1947: 167). According to him, it is one of "Collins, Percy, Gray, Cowper, Smart, Chatterton, Burns, Ossian and the Wartons. It is a cultural movement with ramifications in philosophy, religion, painting and politics. . . . Its chief philosopher is

Berkeley and its chief prose writer is Stern” (1947: 167). The central characteristic of this age is the focus on what Frye has called the archetypal myth. The proper study of mankind is not man, but always fallen man. In other words, terms such as fall, redemption, judgment and immortality are made present. Thought is no longer to be directed only by sense experience. Vision and imagination are given prominent roles in the art creating process (Frye, 1947: 168).

Understanding the precedence attributed to elements such as vision and imagination in Blake and his age is important when approaching his works. Not only would this understanding help us move past those moments of Blake’s works when he seems to evade sense, but it would also help us better appreciate his achievements as a poet and as an artist. It is not that Blake enjoyed being obscure or irrational. One of the things that most troubled him as an artist was to never have been understood in his own time. He wanted to be heard and when he was not he went ahead and held his own exhibition at his Broad Street home in 1809 (Ward, 2003: 30-31). Blake found no particular pleasure in being illogical or incomprehensible to others, but he believed that the only way to Truth was to push imagination to its limits. The role of the artist is that of a prophet or seer. The reader should not expect the unity of a philosophical structure in his works, but the unity of a work of art (Nurmi, 1972:14). Blake was not a “part time poet and part time philosopher, but a full time philosophical poet” (Nurmi, 1972: 13-14). If he fails to be logical in his works it is because he was dealing as imaginatively as he could with philosophical matters. To him, the artist must create, must construct his/her own system and his guide is none other than the Poetic Genius. Perhaps the recurring emphasis in his works of this need is part of the reason why he is constantly labeled as an original artist. I do not disagree. But what I hope this first subchapter of my approach to Blake and his works has shown is that he did not create from nothing. By the time of his death, as all writers do, Blake had appropriated a great deal from a diverse order of traditions. He was not afraid to confront his system with each one he read. Originality may be attributed to him but in the sense that he never simply borrowed a symbol, a term, a notion, or a

thought. Whenever he used something he did so actively, changing it to fit his purposes and making it meaningful within his system. Milton certainly served as a role model in this regard. Part of the reason Blake admired Milton so much is because of the latter's commitment. Regardless of Blake's philosophical disagreements with Milton, Blake highly esteemed him all his life and there is something invigorating in reading both of their works. In *An Apology for Smectymnuus* (1958), Milton wrote:

that he who would not be frustrate of his hope to write well hereafter in laudable things ought himself to be a true poem; that is, a composition and pattern of the best and honorablest things: not presuming to sing high praises of heroic men or famous cities, unless he have in himself the experience and the practice of all that which is praiseworthy. (1958: 69)<sup>8</sup>

What is praiseworthy to Milton may not be so to Blake and vice-versa. But each, according to his beliefs, committed himself to being this "composition and pattern of the best and honorablest things." Each, in his right, was "a true poem." I suppose this is what would lead readers to acknowledge Raine in her assertion that it is the total phenomenon, the human stature that convey whole imaginative worlds. It is my opinion that this is as pertinent to Blake as it is to Milton. In this, both of them are as original and true as an artist can be.

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<sup>8</sup> As observed in my second chapter, all citations to *Areopagitica* are taken from a 1958 volume and the ones from his other works are made from a more complete 1957 volume. This citation of *An Apology* is the only exception because it was not found complete in the 1957 volume. This is why it has been cited from the 1958 publication.

### Chapter 3.1 - Liberty as pro-gression in *The Marriage*

If a reader is interested in seriously reading William Blake, most scholars would agree that *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1993) should be the starting point. Not only is *The Marriage* the site where Blake anticipates the bulk of his most central thoughts, but it is also where he is most comprehensible. Readers do not need to be familiarized with his extensive mythological system in order to respond to *The Marriage*. It is as good an introduction to Blake's main conceptions as a reader can get from the source himself. But while a response is to be expected, by no means should someone expect *The Marriage* to allow for a simple or self-evident reading. Determining its genre for instance, something that on a less critical level may be done in relation to many literary works, would be challenging to the reader of *The Marriage*. It is a mixture of prose, poetry, satire, apocalyptic and philosophical doctrine. Its twenty-seven plates express Blake's revolutionary and prophetic beliefs. He organized it into subdivisions called: The Argument, The Voice of the Devil, A Memorable Fancy, Proverbs of Hell, four more subdivisions all called A Memorable Fancy, and ends with A Song of Liberty. *The Marriage* is so unconventional that even what the reader understands by the term "text" may have to be reconsidered before it is applied to Blake's book. This is because *The Marriage* is part of what Blake has called his illuminated books.

The process of producing this illuminated material involved drawing pictures and letters on a copperplate using an acid-resistant varnish with a brush or pen. After having surrounded the plate with a wall of wax he would pour acid onto the plate corroding the exposed metal. Scraping the varnish of entire relief areas could be easily done before or after etching. Blake is not known to have attempted the addition of new relief surfaces except for very small lines or dots. The copperplate designs could then be inked with a dabber and then printed many times with low pressure in Blake's rolling press. In the early copies of *The Marriage* two plates would go through the rolling press at a time and then the

two more plates would go again to print on the other side of the same two leaves. Blake would then count on his wife Catherine to help him hand color and, as was usually necessary, outline (Bindman, introduction, 1998: 9-11). The result is a combination of words and pictures on a single page that call for this broader meaning of the word text.

The relationship between the words and pictures may be interpreted as being of various natures. These two elements of Blake's text can be read as direct, literal, different, complementary, illustrative and metaphoric, among other possibilities. In *The Marriage*, for instance, the designs of the title plate serve as a complex epitome of the thematic content read in the book. Possibilities multiply by the fact that at times a picture found in one plate of a book is meaningful to the words of another plate. But regardless of the relationship the reader may establish between any given set of pictorial and worded text, readings that do not approach the pictures alongside the writing will likely be lacking. Each element is a part of the reader's work and after approaching images-as-texts, the reader may then proceed to construct a reading. Though both words and pictures must be pursued as potentially significant, in some works the words ultimately present themselves as more primary than in others. In the specific case of *The Marriage*, aside from the title page, the pictures have not really been read as meaningfully as pictures found in other illuminated books prove to be (Nurmi, preface, 1972: iv). Consider the more detailed description of the pictures in *The Marriage*:

It is not a lavishly pictorial work, even in the most elaborately finished copies, nor does it seem to aim at beauty, though it does not lack handsome or even striking features. The proportion of illustration is relatively low: it has one full-page design (the title page), no frontispiece, twelve plates that combine designs and texts, and fourteen plates – more than half the total – with no designs other than small interlinear and marginal ones. (Bindman, 1998: 129)

Therefore, while a considerable amount of space will be allotted for analysis of the designs of the title page, not much will be allotted for analysis of the pictures found on the rest of the book. They have been considered and whenever they are found informative to my reading they will be mentioned.

One other production-related matter of *The Marriage* that should be commented is its dating. The exact date has been inconclusively argued over, and depending on the criteria, the dating falls between the years 1790 and 1793. The most cited parameters have been c. 1790-3. In one copy, plate three carries the date 1790. The aspects in which the criteria for the dating vary are the following:

Blake's intellectual evolution, the course of the French Revolution, Blake's differences with the Swedenborgian community in London, his relations with the circle of radicals around bookseller-publisher (and Blake's sometime employer) Joseph Johnson, various literary influences that were only possible after certain dates, the presumably time-consuming requirements of illuminated printing, and so on. (Bindman, 1998: 113)

To these criteria still others may be added such as historical allusions, artistic style, and changes in lettering among others (Bindman, 1998: 113-14). Furthermore, Blake often used different coloring in each printing so the copies of *The Marriage* display these variations. It has also been argued whether or not the last segment of *The Marriage* called 'A Song of Liberty' should constitute the book. This last segment presents a "pseudo-musical genre, mythic characters, elemental setting, and diurnal plot . . . unprecedented in *The Marriage*, and the slightly enlarged script and numbered elements of poetic prose set these plates apart from previous ones" (Bindman, 1998: 114). But all copies of the Song are included with *The Marriage* with the exception of two proof copies of the 'Song' in black ink (Bindman, 1998: 115). Near the end of this subchapter I will better discuss how the 'Song' may be read in relation to the rest of the book.

As I have mentioned, the title page design works as an epitomical anticipation of the rest of the book and I will refer to it to start discussing *The Marriage*<sup>9</sup>. The first thing the reader should observe when looking at the title page is that s/he is looking at a human face. The reduction that takes place in the size of the words in going from “Marriage” to “Heaven”, and then to the word “Hell” corresponds to the reduction in going from a person’s forehead to the cheeks, and then to the chin. The word “of” seems to be between two cavities that would suggest the place of the eyes while the word “and”, encircled, is suggestive of a mouth. The arching trees at the top of the plate would then encapsulate the human head and resemble hair (Bindman, 1998: 131). Across almost the middle of the plate there is a line creating the ground on earth that seems to separate the surface events from the ones below the surface. The human head then would occupy both places – the eyes and mind being above the surface while the cheeks, mouth and chin would be below. The below-surface area is significantly larger, suggestive of how it may be more eventful than the above-surface area.

There are three different kinds of writing employed in the title of the book. One type is used for the words “The”, “Heaven” and “Hell”. The letters are all capitalized and the words are written in a way that seems fixed, like blocks. It reminds me of the functions of a person’s bone structure in the sense that it sustains the form of the head. These words do not seem to accompany the rest of the plate in a fluctuating movement or appearance. Regardless of what is happening anywhere in the plate, Heaven is Heaven and Hell is Hell – each is fixed in its own place. They also occupy the space of the face well by covering the areas of top, middle and bottom. Since the three words have the same font type we are inclined to read them together: “The Heaven Hell.” Considering these three words pervasively cover the area of the head, it seems suggestive of how the human being is “The Heaven Hell.” In other words, we have both within us. Both are an integral part to our being and as such have integral functions in our existence. The word “Marriage” is also capitalized, but in a much embellished

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<sup>9</sup> The title plate of *The Marriage* has been provided at the end of this thesis as Fig. 1.

manner. It is interesting to note that the words “Heaven” and “Hell” are below the surface, suggesting things we have no control over or are less conscious of as influences to us. Meanwhile the word “Marriage” occupies the place where the forehead, or the mind is, above the surface – something that takes place on a more conscious level. The letters are written in a more creative and wavy manner for “Marriage” while the letters in “Heaven” and “Hell” lay fixed, unmixed. This is illustrative of Blake’s conception regarding these two states. Blake calls for a marriage of contraries: Heaven and Hell. But the reader is led to ask what kind of marriage this is. It is certainly not one where, in marrying Hell, Heaven would cease to have and display its characteristics as Heaven. The opposite is also true. In its marriage, Hell does not become less like Hell in any degree. Marriage does not imply a homogeneous union. It is not an instance of Hegelian dialectic where thesis combines with antithesis to form a synthesis. Heaven and Hell are two polarities, two absolute conditions and the human mind is the place where they must be perceived as a whole. Hence the wavy written “Marriage” constitutes the mind. The marriage requires a conscious effort and takes place in our mind.

There are also two figures below the human head. The one on the right has clouds as its supernatural bedding while the one on the left seems to have flames. As representative figures of Heaven and Hell they may be regarded as an angel and a devil though they have no indicative ornaments such as pitchforks, tails, harps, wings and halos. They are entirely unclothed. The feet of each figure remain fixedly grounded on each figure’s distinctive supernatural bedding while their embrace approximates their minds. It is important to note that it is not an embrace, or a marriage, where one figure is trying to eliminate the other. Neither is one trying to pull the other to its own supernatural bedding - it is a loving embrace where each figure is respectful of the other’s opposing identity. Below the surface, each polarity surrounds or influences the human head in its own domain. The flames reach out to the head from the left while the clouds do so from the right. The link between the two realms, below and above the surface, is made in the trees. The flames seem to reach out to the



roots of the trees on the left whose branches make up the mind. On the right, clouds cover the roots of the trees whose branches also give form to the mind above.

On a last note concerning the title page, Blake's work with depth should also be observed. If the reader follows the flames and the clouds from the roots down over to the figures they seem to move closer to the viewer. If the reader continues to follow the flames and the clouds they then seem to come out of the plate towards the viewer. This effect becomes even more suggestive once we realize how we look at the head. When someone looks at a photograph or a painting of a person's face, s/he tends to look at the eyes. The eyes of the viewer usually align with the eyes of the person in the image. We may move our eyes around the image to see the details better, but when we look at the picture of the face as a whole we look eye to eye. Once we see that the plate is actually a face we tend to look at it the same way. When looking at it as a whole, we align our eyes with the picture's "eyes." Consequently our noses become aligned, foreheads, chins, etc. Once we realize that the flames and clouds are coming out of the picture, we may get the feeling that they are expanding out and around our own head, that is, the viewers'. Heaven and Hell move out of the design and seem to spread around the viewer – around us.

For the structure of *The Marriage*, I would like to take the thematic organization proposed by Nurmi as a starting point. According to him: "the work divides into three main sections, the first dealing with the idea of contraries (to plate 6), the second with expanded sense-perception (from plate 6 through 14), and a third returning to the contraries again in light of thematic development of the idea of sense-perception (from plate 15 through 24)" (1975: 76). Nurmi's structuring is convenient because the themes of contraries and sense-perception he proposes are not only central to *The Marriage*, but to my thesis. In discussing Blake's concept of contraries, I believe the last words of the opening section called "The Argument" are helpful. Blake tells us:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction / and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and / Hate, are necessary to Human existence. / From these contraries spring what the religious call /

Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason / Evil is the active springing from Energy /  
Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell, (1993: 144)

Of the contraries cited by this section of *The Marriage* the most significant one would be Reason and Energy (Nurmi, 1972: 31). Moral designations such as good and evil should not be applied to reason and energy, for instance. They are contraries and as such, they are both a part of existence. Again, Blake's contraries do not synthesize, progress, alternate or change in any way. They are cosmic forces that polarize human life (Nurmi, 1972: 20). The conflict generated by these two essential sides of man is not a conflict of good versus evil, and certainly not one of good in detriment of evil. It is a positive, wholesome, creative and imaginative conflict that should be encouraged in everyone. What the religious leaders have done is infuse these contraries with their concept of morality. Hence, what they call good and evil has been assigned to these fundamental human contraries. Nurmi tells us about the significance of marrying the contraries in the following:

In order that man can be truly happy in this world and realize to the fullest his divine potentialities for joy and wisdom, he must learn to see creation as a Human unity in Christ. And he must reject the divisive moral categories which now pit one half of creation against the other half in destructive conflict. Conflict there must be, but it must be the creative conflict of the contraries in "intellectual war". (1972: 22)

So here the reader finds evidence of Nurmi's reading that Blake is not a Satanist. Blake simply diverges from the orthodox religious in terms of what is to be considered evil. Blake believes the religious try to destroy the "evil" side of the conflict in their exaltation of the good. Religion imposes laws for all, indiscriminately. Everyone should passively obey these laws and exalt reason regardless of their individuality. The religious impose their polarity onto all human beings. Blake abhors these laws disseminated by the religious because they are not imposed by God, but by men. According to Blake's reading of the Bible, and as I have discussed especially according to his reading of the figure of Jesus

Christ, God does not want people to be restricted or limited. God wants people to be like Him – to be imaginative, to act according to impulse. God does not want us to simply reason and compare, he wants us to create. So for Blake, no act can possibly be evil if it is done according to a person's beliefs, according to his/her own system.

A great number of citations can be made showing how it does seem as though Swinburne (1837-1909), among other romantics, had a point in reading Blake as a Satanist. But the evil of *The Marriage* that Blake sides with is not really evil, not to him. Therefore, he is not really a Satanist. As I mentioned, evil in *The Marriage* is always only what the religious call evil. Nurmi further explains what happens in *The Marriage* in relation to the contraries and the religious evil:

For *The Marriage* does not teach diabolism. Blake merely adopts the term “Heaven” and “Hell” and uses them ironically to show that they are meaningless as the orthodox intend them and they actually do not designate real moral qualities at all but the contraries “necessary to human existence.” He wants to free the creative vitality of life from the thralldom imposed upon it by the restrictive moral codes imposed by the orthodox “religious,” and restore life to the original unity it had before the disjunctive categories of the abstract reasoners split it into destructive orders of “good” and “evil”. (1972: 25)

So Blake is using the terms evil and hell ironically throughout *The Marriage*. After this irony is perceived within the context of the entire book the reader would understand how interpretations such as Swinburne's are contested. In discussing Blake's overall accomplishment in *The Marriage*, Nurmi informs us:

the main theme of *The Marriage* and the theoretical foundation of its ideas is the doctrine that both angels and devils are necessary, indeed, that they must be “married” within the larger unity of Human life. Where Blake does in fact present the case for Hell alone, he does so

dramatically, employing the device of the partisan spokesmen in a debate, especially in the sections called “The Voice of the Devil” and the “Proverbs of Hell.” (1972: 26)

Blake demands an attentive reading. Imagination or energy has a central role for men not because they are inherently more important than reason. They are so only in the current state in which existence finds itself. By themselves they would be useless since reason is what gives thought the form they lack. Imagination, energy, creativity, vision, exuberance, indulgence are necessary for humans to see beyond the impositions made by churches. They are necessary for people to see beyond the blinded condition in which they find themselves. People need to see all acts as they are: holy. As in the title page I have discussed previously, in the marriage between Heaven and Hell one figure does not attempt to destroy the other, or to reduce the individuality of the other. Heaven and hell exist in creative conflict. Not understanding this aspect of Blake’s *Marriage* is what leads readers to perceive it as Satanist. Consideration of his other works and philosophy should help the reader better appreciate his accomplishments in *The Marriage*.

In *The Marriage*, the key to marrying the contraries lies in the expansion of sense perception. In discussing the contraries and introducing some of the more basic Blakean thoughts I have anticipated much of what needs to be exposed on the enhancement of sense perception. Progression is never to be applied to the contraries themselves. They do not change; their polarities are never altered in any way. Pro-gression is only to be applied to the human capacity of sense perception. This is Blake’s ideal; this is the principal point *The Marriage* makes. The revolution it is calling for concerns the enhancement of spiritual perception. What this enhancement does is it imaginatively transforms objects. This transformation of objects in perception has been discussed when the guinea-sun and the Hallelujah-Chorus sun were distinguished. No transformation occurs in seeing the sun through the lens of a telescope, for instance. But seeing the sun through the Hallelujah-Chorus perception involves seeing

more of the sun. It gives the sun a symbolic form that reveals its significance to the life of man, thus showing its real form (Nurmi, 1972: 18).

The centrality of the notion of expansion of sense perception is made evident by the pervasive presence of this theme throughout Blake's text. What Blake does first is establish the revolutionary environment through the section called "The Argument." He presents Rintrah roaring and shaking his fires in the burdened air (1993: 142). According to Foster Damon's dictionary of Blake's ideas and symbols Rintrah is "the just wrath of the Prophet" (1988: 349). Once the revolutionary ambience is set, the limitations of the five senses are mentioned in the next section called "The Voice of the Devil." Here *The Marriage* informs us on how "that called Body is a portion of the Soul discerned by the five Senses, the chief inlets of the Soul in this age" (1993: 146). Then, on the first "Memorable Fancy" the reader is asked, "How do you know but ev'ry Bird that cuts the airy way, Is an immense world of delight, clos'd by your senses five?" (1993: 152). The theme of enhancement of sense perception is then developed more or less directly throughout the rest of *The Marriage*. Among the "Proverbs from Hell," for instance we have:

The road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom. . . . A fool sees not the same tree that a wise man sees. . . . The cistern contains, the fountain overflows. . . . Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of the truth. . . . You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough. . . . Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse unacted desires. . . .  
Truth can never be told so as to be understood, and not be believ'd. (1993: 152-58)

What these proverbs do is emphasize vision, excess, truth and desire - the basic elements related to sense perception.

One of the most important moments of Blake's expositions on sense perception lies in the next section, which is the second "Memorable Fancy." Here a dinner conversation takes place between Blake and the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. Near the end, after having spoken about the power of

perception and the Poetic Genius, the reader is told: “For the cherub with his flaming sword is / hereby commanded to leave his guard at the tree of / life, and when he does, the whole creation will / be consumed, and appear infinite. and holy / whereas it now appears finite & corrupt” (1993: 166). This moment where everything will appear “infinite. and holy” is Blake’s apocalypse. It is the final change in man, the salvation, the ultimate step in pro-gression. The way to reach this apocalypse in sense perception is then stated, “This will come to pass by an improvement of / sensual enjoyment” (1993: 166). So there can be no restriction, no external morality or religious impositions. It is no wonder Nurmi has stated that “Blake is probably the most extreme humanist of all time. . . . Man is not only capable of divinity, but he is divine in essence. . . . ‘human’ and ‘divine’ are in fact interchangeable” (1972: 14). To Blake it makes no sense that man be restricted in the name of God. God makes no restrictions. Man’s salvation will come precisely by an improvement of sensual enjoyment – here lies the road of excess that, according to Blake’s proverb, leads to the palace of wisdom (1993: 152). An allusion to Plato is used to express the current, undesirable condition of most of mankind, “For man has closed himself up, till he sees / all things thro’ narrow chinks of his cavern” (1993: 166). And if there is one statement from Blake that best summarizes the whole notion of advancement in sense perception it is: “If the doors of perception were cleansed / every thing would appear to man as it is, in- / -finite—” (1993: 166). This is where pro-gression is to be applied - in the search for vision, salvation, and apocalypse.

The last section called “A Song of Liberty” introduces characters such as Orc – the spirit of liberty and revolt – and presents events that are further dealt with in *America* (1948). The “Song” is regarded as a little political prophecy attached to Blake’s philosophical credo (Nurmi, 1972: 63). It distinguishes itself from the rest of *The Marriage* in that it seems to emphasize how the revolutions of Blake’s time such as the American and French are symptomatic of the greater revolution that is to come in man – the revolution that will lead to apocalypse in man. Nurmi suggests that the whole

section adds a more concrete basis to the abstractness of the rest of *The Marriage* (1972: 63). It is the final moment, one where Blake reads the occurrences of his time as signs. He then cries out “Empire is no more!” (1993: 192). Priests will no longer “curse the sons of joy. . . . nor lay the / bound or build the roof” (1993: 192). The cleansing of the doors of perception is imminent. The apocalypse where things will appear as infinite is coming and mankind will realize that “every thing that lives is Holy” (1993: 162). These are all ideals of the third age.

Having discussed how liberty and pro-gression are to be understood within Blake’s *The Marriage*, I may now go on to the next subchapter. This is where I will finally make explicit how Blake’s ideals may be provoked. Chapter 3.2 is where I will refer to what has been previously exposed in order to show how the assumptions articulated on Blake’s Truth is time and place specific.

## Chapter 3.2 - Blake in chains

Liberty has a central role in the themes of contraries and sense perception addressed in *The Marriage*. Having liberty implies a state where someone has achieved the expanded sense perception, the spiritual perception. In this state, man realizes his divine nature and sees that “All deities reside / in the human breast” (Blake, 1993: 160). He perceives how “every thing that lives is Holy” and is then able to marry contraries (Blake, 1993: 192). He does not see only the guinea-sun, but can see more of the sun as suggested by Blake in *The Last Judgment* (1948: 652). His doors of perception have been fully cleansed and everything appears to him as they are: infinite (Blake, 1993: 166). He can see past the morality that the religious have attributed to life and their views on what is good and evil no longer make any sense to him. In this state, man would reach an apocalypse where he would revel in liberty from the ideological values and priorities of society. This is the ideal of *The Marriage* for mankind. This is where revolution would take place. To Blake, the American and French revolutions signal the coming of the third of three successive ages. As I have mentioned, this is the age Thompson has referred to as the “Age of Spiritual Liberty for the Children of God” (1993: 24). This is what *The Marriage* is announcing and what the following prophecies of Blake further address through his mythological system.

Man who is not in this state of liberty is commonly described by Blake as being in chains, or as he says in his poem *London* being in “mind-forged manacles” (1948: 75). These chains or manacles are the restraints society places on man in various fields. They are the tyranny in religion through the Ten Commandments, the priests, popes and Pharisees. In philosophy for instance, exclusive submission to one system by not clashing it to others also engenders chains and tyranny. And for more of a contemporary example, capitalist values impose its chains as well. Basically, any external system that asserts absolute preeminence or presents itself as a site of values directed to all men re-presents



tyranny. Blake's wording in *The Marriage* is simpler: "One Law for the Ox and Lion is Oppression" (1993: 186). Throughout *The Marriage*, Blake refers to these chains more or less explicitly. Consider the following segment of one of his "Memorable fancies": "The Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence and now seem to live in it in chains, are in truth. the causes of its life & the sources of all activity, but the chains are, the cunning of weak and tame minds, which have the power to resist energy" (1993: 170). Here Blake is quite explicit in his views on submission and his conceptions regarding these chains. He tells us that while the Giants of sensual existence, the causes of the world's life and activity, *seem* to live in chains, the chains really are the cunning of weak and tame minds. Chains lie on those that resist energy. In the illustration of plate 16, five giants are depicted sitting on the floor crowded into a dark chamber<sup>10</sup>. Each figure has its feet one over the other. Though they are in a position that indicates they are in chains, there are no chains on their feet or on their hands. So the notion that the Giants of sensual existence only *seem* to live in chains has further evidence in the illustration.

As I have discussed, in *The Marriage* pro-gression takes place not in the contraries because the contraries are polarities that never alter. Pro-gression refers to the improvement of sense perception brought forth by the improvement of sensual enjoyment. Advancement is a consequence of the cleansing of senses. I believe the reader may now understand how liberty as pro-gression presents itself in *The Marriage*. The apocalypse in man where he attains liberty is the ultimate step in a series of advancements that are consequence of an improvement of sensual enjoyment. Liberty is presented as a pro-gression in *The Marriage* because the state of liberty is the last stage of detachment from ideological restraints. A person arrives at this ultimate point of spiritual perception by gradually progressing, improving oneself in terms of sense perception.

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<sup>10</sup> This plate has been provided at the end of my thesis as fig. 2.

Having discussed how I approach the concept of liberty as pro-gression in *The Marriage*, I may now go on to question this ideal articulated by Blake's text. Especially in the first subchapter I have shown how *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is a text that is informed by tradition just as any other text may prove to be. By exposing the diverse order of influences that served as starting points for Blake I believe I have illustrated how viewing him as an isolated artist, an artist free from the ideology current in his time is a misconception. *The Marriage*, as any other of Blake's texts, cannot escape the fact that it was written by a man living in London, for instance - an English, dissenting, Christian, Goddister, turn-of-the 18<sup>th</sup> century man. Absolute originality cannot be applied to an artist regardless of how imaginative or creative s/he may be regarded. Consider Frye's notion of "an age of Blake" - whose expression involves names such as Collins, Percy, Gray, Cowper, Smart, Chatterton, Burns, Ossian, the Warton, Berkeley and Stern. This would be enough to undermine any notion of Blake as an impermeable artist (1947: 167). The very concept of an age of Blake is indicative of how he was not alone intellectually or artistically. But there is no need for a critic to assign an artist a whole age under his/her name to certify that he was working within ideology. The fact that a person reads whatever is circulating during his time would suffice, and Blake read extensively. On a more critical level, Louis Althusser would state that just the acknowledgement of a person's subjectivity imbues ideology. But the more theoretical approach to my questioning will be further elaborated in chapters 4 and 5. Having shown how Blake is not an isolated figure here helps expose how the notion of liberty he is calling for is problematic.

If liberty as pro-gression involves a process of gradual detachment to the diverse orders of ideological chains then *The Marriage* serves as an example of how absolute liberty is not possible. The ideal of Blake's text involves a liberty that can be contested within the text itself. As original, creative, and imaginative as he may be considered to be, as expected, Blake does fall back into ideology. It is not that Blake does not have these qualities - he may so, but always only to a certain extent. It is not that

Blake is not revolutionary, but he, as well as any artist, can only be so within the ideological framework of his milieu. Revolution is otherwise something entirely unconceivable of. In exposing his views on contraries and sense perception he articulates a notion of liberty as pro-gression. A study of his influences problematizes the possibility of liberty, pro-gression and of liberty as pro-gression as well.

The most obvious of Blake's influences in writing *The Marriage* will here be briefly discussed in order to illustrate how his notion of liberty as pro-gression is problematic. The very title of Blake's text is indicative of how influential Swedenborg presents himself to Blake. As I have mentioned, Nurmi tells us that Blake: "had read the *Divine Love* (translated 1788), and his annotations show that he liked it. But in 1790 when he read the *Divine Providence* (translated 1790), he was moved to criticize Swedenborg sharply . . ." (Nurmi, 1972: 26). Furthermore, Blake's "Memorable Fancies" parody Swedenborg's "Memorable Relations"<sup>11</sup>. Both present "matter of fact accounts of adventures in the spiritual worlds" (Nurmi, 1972: 27). The relationship between the two works is undeniable. According to Nurmi, in *Heaven and Hell*, Swedenborg articulates the notion that God keeps spiritual equilibrium between good and evil in the world. Whereas Blake urges for a superabundance of what the religious and Swedenborg call evil, other elements, such as order, repose, and balance, are valued by Swedenborg. These elements are commonly associated to the reasoners that Blake abhors. Swedenborg defends that God maintains the balance between Heaven and Hell, and Blake argues that Heaven has created chains and tamed minds. In this condition of mankind there is a demand for a superabundance of what the religious call evil. Nurmi proceeds to discuss the relationship between the two texts:

Thus, where Swedenborg writes in *Heaven and Hell*, "Without equilibrium, there is neither action nor reaction" (sec. 589 p. 332), Blake replies in *The Marriage*, "Without contraries is no

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<sup>11</sup> Nurmi's use of parody here is the more conventional one. It is not related to Hutcheon's use, which I will be referring to on subsequent chapters.

progression,” exalting the very action and reaction, as well as the progression they give rise to, which Swedenborg took pains to keep in check. Again, whereas Swedenborg’s god had tried to keep Heaven and Hell separated in a static balance, Blake “marries” them, reversing satirically Swedenborg’s atomistic doctrine that married love is not “given between two who are of different religions, since the truth of one does not agree with the good of the other, and the two dissimilar discordant things cannot make one mind out of two (sec. 378 p. 188). (1972: 27)

So despite the fact that *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* urges for liberty and criticizes Milton, for instance, for writing in fetters, it also displays its fetters. *The Marriage* is not so free if great part of what it does is reply to another text, exalt precisely what has been debased, marry what has been separated, reverse doctrines and satirize texts. It is then clear that in writing *The Marriage* Blake presents himself greatly indebted to Swedenborg. Consequently, while Milton for instance may be criticized for submitting to the fetters of morality, Blake is guilty of submitting to the fetters of Swedenborg’s works. It is true, as I have said, that nothing goes into Blake’s system unchanged. The relationship between these two texts is exemplary of this. But my main point here is: critical and imaginative appropriation of texts should not be equated with liberty - especially not to the kind of liberty articulated in *The Marriage* and certainly not liberty as a pro-gression.

All the influences discussed in the first subchapter naturally would serve to question Blake’s liberty. But in the specific case of *The Marriage*, some of those influences besides Swedenborg’s such as the influence of antinomianism stand out. As I have explained, depending on a person’s interpretation of the Bible antinomianism has three possible positions. The third one despises submission to the Moral Law and is the closest to Blake. The fact that this third position was the most current one in the 1790s helps us see how Blake really was immersed in the inclinations of his time. It may not be regarded as plain coincidence that of the three positions within antinomianism, Blake sides with the one that is most current in his time. Additionally, Boehme’s concept of contraries was

appropriated and changed by Blake and is essential to *The Marriage*. The cosmopolitan humanist culture as expressed by the Anabaptists for instance would certainly have had plenty to identify with in *The Marriage*. Philosophers of the Augustan Age would have read many reversals of their precepts in Blake's texts. And as I have also mentioned, Milton would certainly have sympathized with Blake's dynamics. Here, as I have cited in the first subchapter, Frye has been informative. He proposes Milton's liberty be associated with Blake's imagination. Here *Areopagitica* is very likely to have been a source for Blake. Moreover, Milton's view of reason is similar to Blake's bound or outward circumference that gives form to the productions of the imagination (Frye, 1947:159). One last influence to Blake's writing of *The Marriage* that may be mentioned would be the political events of the time he lived. Revolutions were much a part of the mindset of the man living in the transition between the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Therefore, the revolutionary ambience of *The Marriage*, especially in its opening and ending segments, certainly had a lot to build on from its historical context.

So far along my thesis I have referred to particular facets of the historical contexts of Milton and Blake in order to show *how Areopagitica* and *The Marriage*, as the reader may expect, do not propose absolute freedom of speech and liberty respectively. I have addressed their texts to show that they articulate or manifest ideological presumptions that were customary within their location in time and space. Consequently their formulations on liberty as pro-gression are time and place specific. This diachronic approach exposes the credibility of their Truth as the Truth – some sort of absolute one. On chapter 4, I will open the scope to our 21<sup>st</sup> century by addressing *The Matrix* in order to show that, as a product of postmodern culture, it will also ultimately manifest its tendencies, its formulations regarding liberty as pro-gression and regarding Truth.



## Chapter 4 - Introducing *The Matrix*

It is not unlikely that viewers of *The Matrix* shared a feeling of bewilderment and wonderment after watching it for the first time. One of the reasons for this is that viewers could not avoid sharing the same response to an aspect of the film: most could not refrain from being impressed by its special effects. Even those who do not appreciate this aspect of films or do not favor films that grant prominence to special effects cannot deny that *The Matrix* represents a great leap in terms of what a film may achieve. Its four Oscars for special effects at The Academy of Motion Picture Arts & Sciences attest to the view that in this regard it “boldly goes where no man has gone before.” Approaching *The Matrix* through the lens of technical accomplishments, few viewers would refrain from acknowledging that its achievements are impressive. But while its technical success may remain undisputable some other aspects of the film certainly have not. One of these is what has been referred to as its “substance” (Fontana, 2003: 160). *The Matrix* was not even nominated for any of the Oscars in categories traditionally viewed as of more substance such as Best Picture, for instance. Furthermore, the Academy’s opinion seems to be supported by critics as well as by the comments of writers and directors Andrew and Laurence Wachowski. So at the same time that the film stands out for the technological innovations it has brought forth to the film industry, its critics and even those involved in the movie’s production have not been helpful in attributing this “substance” to it. It is commonly taken as merely a cluster of influences loosely tied together into a plot whose sole purpose seems to be to intrigue the viewer. It appears that by explicitly leaving room for an overwhelming number of possible readings the film loses depth and credibility. It is true that lenses of diverse areas such as religion, literature, physics, philosophy and chemistry may be granted prominence as someone attempts to construct his/her reading - not to mention the “isms” the film suggests such as Marxism, existentialism,

postmodernism, nihilism, and feminism. But the existence of these diverse orders of potentials in the film is only being explicitly consonant to more recent scientific developments.

In the literary field, critical theory is informative on how there are no limits to the possible lenses that may be employed in a person's reading of a work of art. The difference that seems to have bothered viewers mistakenly pursuing depth in *The Matrix* is that the film makes these potentials more explicit. Apparently, this has been done to a point that makes it difficult for viewers to grant it credibility. So it seems that to some, all these potentials made explicit in one work of art indicate a lack of consistence. But contrary to what is assumed by those that partake with this position *The Matrix* may be approached as a product of postmodernism that presents itself as artistically meaningful. This exposes the misconception implied in the view that the film does not have substance. This analysis is corroborative to critical theory in that: Though the statements of the Academy, critics and even of the writers and directors themselves seem to depict the film as a randomly patched quilt, it may be scrutinized for intellectual purposes. Moreover, *The Matrix* is certainly not the first work of pop culture to be approached intellectually. Films such as *Star Wars*, *Lord of the Rings*, *Harry Potter* and even the works of musicians such as Tupac Shakur (1971-1996) have been addressed academically through books, papers, and college courses in the literary field<sup>12</sup>.

My analysis of the film should illustrate how its disparate allusions do not automatically imply a lack of depth or consistence<sup>13</sup>. Many potential lenses are a part of any work of art and *The Matrix* is a film that makes this noise more explicit. In the case of *The Matrix* I will confirm how, contrary to what some may expect, its apparently random allusions and references do raise important questions and address matters as consistently as any other work of art may prove to do. Beyond that, my work will

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<sup>12</sup> Evidence that the works of Tupac Shakur have been approached academically through college courses may be found in his documentary film: *Tupac Resurrection* (2003) whose full references are made on the bibliography section.

<sup>13</sup> Viewers may regard these disparate allusions present in *The Matrix* as a characteristic that accounts for its lack of depth or consistence and thereby establish a binary opposition between depth and noise: allusions, references. But as any pursuit of depth in artistic works is surely mistaken, I will provoke this dichotomy in subchapter 4.2.



also show how the very special effects may be interpreted as meaningful. In the reading I will here propose they are actually essential to the development of one of the film's more intellectual matters. This even helps expose the fragility of one of the dichotomies such as the one generally applied to the film: special effects versus substance. My approach to the film in this chapter where I read it as an adaptation for William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* undermines some of the criticism that has been made towards it. But first, I should introduce the film a bit further so that I may then present my Blakean reading of it<sup>14</sup>.

*The Matrix* is quite different from *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage* in one significant way. It is a story. Humans are in a historical moment where they have lost their place as the dominant species of earth. Practically the entire human race is in a state where they are grown and harvested as energy supply for machines with artificial intelligence. They are physically encapsulated somewhere around 2199 while mentally they live in a simulation of life as it actually was around the year 1999. Mr. Anderson, one of these encapsulated men, is awakened by a group of citizens aboard a hover craft called the Nebuchadnezzar. This ship belongs to Zion, the last real human city located underground, near the center of the earth. Supposedly Mr. Anderson, played by Keanu Reeves, is the one who will free the rest of the world. He is the protagonist of the story who will lead the human race in seeing beyond the world that has been pulled over their eyes to blind them from the truth. *The Matrix* (1999) is about Mr. Anderson's process of fully accepting and becoming Neo – the hero. Once he accepts his role as the hero and fulfills his potential of vision in this first film, he may then in the following sequels, save the world from the domination of the machines<sup>15</sup>. This process of acceptance and becoming represents his break from his own mental incarceration into a full vision of the truth concerning what is real.

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<sup>14</sup> From here on, by Blakean, I will be meaning Blakean as articulated in *The Marriage*.

<sup>15</sup> For my master's thesis I will only be analyzing the 1999 film – the first of the trilogy. *Matrix Reloaded* (2003) and *Matrix Revolutions* (2003) are not read as film adaptations and will not be commented as such.

As Mr. Anderson becomes Neo he undergoes a true transformation. Taking the red pill is simply the first step. What his mind had always thought was real is in fact only a computer program designed to control and exploit him. The rules and controls of that world are no more real than that world itself. His mind has to now accept and believe what it sees and what it is being told is the real. This notion that he is only having contact with what is real now implies an equal disbelief that everything else he has ever thought real before actually is not. This disbelief is the ideal and it is not something that comes easily. There is a need for adaptation which involves opening his eyes for the first time, understanding his transition, reconstructing his muscles, fainting and even vomiting. As Neo's mind develops its disbelief and lets go more and more, he gradually manifests less regard towards rules such as those of physics.

While it is true that everyone has to develop this disbelief, it is also true that some people have a capacity for greater development than others. It is in this sense that Neo *is* the one since the beginning of the narrative. The film touches on Buddhist conceptions in explaining the greater potential Mr. Anderson has in terms of perception. He is the reincarnation of the man who first discovered the existence of the Matrix. Having a distinguished soul, not only was that man able to discover the existence of the Matrix but he was also the first to free himself from it. He was the founder of Zion; he was a sort of Adam or Noah. Neo is the reincarnation of this same soul and this is the reason why he has the capacity of saving humanity - which he achieves in the third film of the series. This soul once reincarnated in that Adam-like figure and now reincarnated in Neo is more sensitive to the problem of the world than others. Therefore, it has the most potential for disbelief. The more profound the disbelief in the Matrix as being the real world, the more things a person can do while s/he is in the Matrix because consequently the greater disbelief this person will also have towards its impositions. As he starts to gradually let go more he starts to become faster, hit harder and jump higher. Mr. Anderson will ultimately *become* Neo - the one - in part because he has the potential to have the greatest disbelief in

the Matrix as the real world. He is the one who can ultimately see furthest beyond the supposed rules of physics that govern what is the apparently real. Therefore, Neo can ultimately do things no one else can do but not only because his soul is more sensitive. He ultimately achieves this because he accepts his role as the hero and he pursues the cleansing of his senses. They ultimately become enhanced to the point where he can see things as they supposedly really are in the Matrix: computer codes. I believe the parallel to Blake may now be established.

## Chapter 4.1 - *The Marriage*: a lens for *The Matrix*

When a student approaches a film such as *The Matrix* and proposes it be read through the “lens” of a specific text as I do here, s/he cannot abstain from pinpointing at least one specific moment of the film that grants voice to that text’s author. Considering the numerous influences and references present in *The Matrix*, this need only becomes all the more evident. My questions would then be: Where is Blake in *The Matrix*? In what moment does the film allude to Blake in particular? Considering my object of study here, how does *The Matrix* indicate Blake as he is articulated specifically in *The Marriage*? And lastly, how can this Blakean text be suggestive for *The Matrix*?

I learned about the Matrix’s allusion when reading Paul Di Filippo’s *Building a Better Simulacrum: Literary influences on ‘The Matrix’* (2003). On his text, Filippo tells us that one of Blake’s most famous aphorisms is alluded to in *The Matrix*. According to him, this aphorism is “seminal to the film” and represents a “visual homage” paid to Blake. Filippo raises the question: “What more compact statement of the movie’s theme could there be (2003: 82)?” This visual homage to *The Marriage* grants voice to Blake’s: “If the doors of perception were cleansed / every thing would appear to man as it is, in- / -finite—” (1993: 166). This line is not just any line from Blake’s text, but one that is widespread and emblematic - more significantly, it is emblematic for *The Marriage*. Perhaps this line would be as effective as someone could be if s/he wanted to refer to William Blake or *The Marriage*. Furthermore, not only is it one of the most famous but it is also a key one in the sense that, as I have discussed in the previous chapter, it underscores one of the central elements of *The Marriage* as well as the central one of my thesis, namely: liberty as pro-gression.

I will attempt to depict here the scene where Blake makes his presence, or better yet, *The Marriage* makes its presence. It occurs roughly twelve minutes into the film. It starts by showing the Metacortex skyscraper where Mr. Anderson works. When the camera takes us inside the building, Mr.

Anderson is standing in front of his boss, Mr. Rhineheart, and he is being reprimanded for having arrived late. As Mr. Anderson is obsequiously listening to his boss, the camera and Mr. Anderson pay extraordinary attention to the apparently superfluous actions of two men on a scaffold washing the windows of the office. As his boss speaks to him, the viewer continuously hears the squeegeeing sounds of the wipers over the windows. It is the typical sound someone hears when s/he cleans glass surfaces with objects made of rubber or when rubs his/her finger over clean glass surfaces. There is clearly an excessive amount of attention paid to what would otherwise be gratuitous sounds and images. The loudness of the cleansing sound as well as the camera's repeated focus on the two men wiping the windows would seem strange until the reader takes Blake's aphorism into consideration. The notion of cleansing one's senses is easily associated to these squeegeeing sounds. Dino Felluga has informed us how originally it was intended for the Wachowskis to play the role of the two men wiping the windows, which would have had significant implications and would also support my reading even further. But as Felluga stated they did not take part in the scene for safety concerns (2003: 82-83). Once the reader makes these associations, it is difficult to watch this scene without relating it to Blake.

What Mr. Rhineheart tells Mr. Anderson at this moment of the film is prophetic for the revelations that will lead the latter to become Neo. Significantly, Mr. Anderson's becoming Neo requires him to cleanse his senses more and more. I suppose here it would be better if I present the lines from the film:

You have a problem with authority, Mr. Anderson. You believe that you are special, that somehow the rules do not apply to you. Obviously you are mistaken. This company is one of the top software companies in the world because every single employee understands that they are part of a whole. Thus if an employee has a problem, the company has a problem. The time has come to make a choice, Mr. Anderson. Either you choose to be at your desk on time from this day forward or you choose to find yourself another job. Do I make myself clear?

After this, Neo immediately responds: “Yes, Mr. Rhineheart, perfectly clear.”<sup>16</sup> If the reader does not associate this scene with Blake, Mr. Rhineheart is simply referring to the punctuality rules of the workplace and Mr. Anderson’s choice is of arriving on time and keeping his job or not. Within the lens of *The Marriage*, this is prophetic in my reading, since the entire movie is about Mr. Anderson’s process of fully becoming Neo. It is about his acceptance of his role as a hero. In a few minutes, there will be a choice for him of taking either the blue pill or the red pill. In other words, he will be confronted with the choice of living the rest of his life in oblivion as he has done or of engaging in the adventure of pursuing Truth and vision as Blake suggests. My more attentive reader may raise the point that in Blake’s aphorism the portals of the senses are doors and not windows. In this case, it is important to note that the windows of the office will actually serve as doors in a few shots as Mr. Anderson goes through them under Morpheus’s instructions (Filippo, 2003: 82-83). Before commenting further on this scene and on its significance within my thesis, I should refer to theoretical support. This is because my reading of this scene has been informed by the specific definitions of Gérard Genette.

On *Palimpsests*, Genette discusses five types of transtextual relationships: intertextuality, paratextuality, metatextuality, architextuality, and hypertextuality. The moment of the film referred to previously can be taken as one that establishes an intertextual relationship with *The Marriage*. Intertextuality is defined, “as a relationship of co-presence between two texts or among several texts: that is to say, eidetically and typically as the actual presence of one text within another” (1997: 1-2). The images, sounds, words and actions of this scene depicted on chapter 4.1 certainly establish a relationship of co-presence as Genette describes it. Furthermore, “eidetically” is also pertinent because the film uses visual images to express the images articulated on Blake’s aphorism. Then Genette goes

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<sup>16</sup> All reference to lines of the film will not be made to any transcript since a reliable one was not available. All quotations will be made directly to the film whose complete reference is provided in the works cited section.

on to state that intertextualities occur through three possible practices: quoting, plagiarism, and allusion. The definition of allusion was very helpful in understanding what happened between the film and the text. In Genette's own words, allusion is when "an enunciation whose full meaning presupposes the perception of a relationship between it and another text, to which it necessarily refers by some inflections that would otherwise remain unintelligible" (1997: 2). It is very likely that the reader who has not had access to Blake or at least does not know the Blakean aphorism would find the emphasis on the squeegeeing sounds and on the two men on top of the scaffold meaningless. The scene definitely presupposes the perception of a relationship between the texts. Hence Genette's definitions are helpful to the reading I have been making of this relationship. Not only his view of allusion but his view of allusion as a type of intertextual relationship as it is defined by him helps understand what I have read between these works.<sup>17</sup>

This first allusion to Blake that establishes intertextuality between *The Marriage* and *The Matrix* is significant for two reasons: The first reason why it is significant is that it is very clearly Blakean. The notion of cleansing the doors of perception expressed in *The Marriage* is easily associated with the squeegeeing sounds made by the men on the scaffold washing the windows in the film. This direct association invigorates any Blakean reading someone might attempt to make of *The Matrix*. The second reason that makes this allusion especially significant is that it takes place at the beginning of the film. By pinpointing *The Marriage* as an influence from the onset the movie seems to suggest it be kept in mind as the viewer proceeds to watch the film. The reference would not be in the

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<sup>17</sup> I am aware of the lurking inconsistencies that might emerge from working with the tenets of structuralism and post-structuralism within the same thesis. This possibility was not taken for granted. Here, consideration has been given to it, and in the specific appropriations I have made of Genette, no apparent contradiction or inconsistency has presented itself. My thesis is clearly more indebted to post-structuralist assumptions. I will only be referring to Genette on this specific moment – subchapter 4.1. I have chosen to refer to Genette in spite of the possible inconsistencies that might arise because the specific terms he uses to define allusion and to define intertextuality have helped me understand and characterize this Blakean presence in *The Matrix*. In this borrowing I have made of Genette's definitions I have found theoretical support that is very much in tune with the reading I had been making of this Blakean presence.

beginning incidentally, but strategically. It would not be as logical to propose a Blakean reading of the entire film if the allusion were to have taken place two hours into it. Being at the beginning of the film makes it more appropriate for someone to read the remainder of the film under the lens of *The Marriage* in the allegorical manner I will do here.

I propose *The Matrix* is a narrative that allegorically accomplishes the idealization of liberty as pro-gression that I have also read in *The Marriage* and that is also the backbone of my thesis<sup>18</sup>. In becoming Neo, the protagonist allegorically fulfills Blake's ideal for mankind – the ideal of liberty as pro-gression I have read in *The Marriage*. But before I further discuss how I see *The Matrix* as allegorical for *The Marriage* I should first define my use of the term allegory. I take allegory as a “narrative in which the agents and action, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived not only to make sense in themselves, but also to signify a second, correlated order of persons, things, concepts or events” (Abrams, 1971: 4). So what I propose is that aspects of *The Matrix* narrative are contrived to signify concepts of *The Marriage*. Blake urges his reader to develop a disbelief in the rules of morality imposed on man. Because they are not established by God, they are not real. They are a construct of religious people – a human construct. In the film, this is precisely what Morpheus - a sort of mentor for the protagonist as well as the captain of the Nebuchadnezzar – urges Neo to realize. Because the Matrix is a simulation, its rules of physics are to be perceived in the same way Blake sees rules of morality - not real. They are all constructs that create the illusion that they are real. They are a simulation of the real. In the case of *The Marriage* the religious leaders construct the rules of morality, while in the film the rules of physics that govern the world are a machine construct. Consequently, I read the rules of physics in the story of *The Matrix* as a symbolic representation of Blake's rules of morality in society.

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<sup>18</sup> This first approach to the film will be a crucial constituent element for chapters 5 and 6 where I will discuss my proposition that *The Matrix* be regarded, not as an allegory of *The Marriage*, but as a parody/adaptation of it. Allegory is approached as a figure of speech, a smaller unit in relation to parody. The latter on the other hand has a broader scope in that it involves language games that establish and develop relationships read between texts.



The machines signify the religious leaders that impose false dogmas. In my reading, Neo's breaking the rules of physics in the Matrix because they are not real would then signify the concept of breaking the rules of morality of *The Marriage* – hence the allegory. This is how I have come to the reading that Neo allegorically accomplishes Blake's ideal as expressed in *The Marriage*. The ideal of liberty from these rules as consequent of a pro-gression is expressed in both. While Neo is the protagonist that fulfills these ideals in the story of *The Matrix*, Blake's protagonist is Jesus Christ. I read both these figures as those that fulfill Blake's ideal within the reading of liberty as pro-gression.

There is simply an overwhelming number of ways in which Biblical references are made in *The Matrix*, and as I will show, they are suggestive for the Blakean reading I have been constructing. As Paul Fontana has informed us, the central characters of Jesus' stories all somehow have allegorical associations in *The Matrix*, though these relationships do not take place univocally (2003: 160-61). But of all the associations to *The Marriage*, if there is one that can be more fittingly pursued, it is the one between Blake's Jesus and Neo. I have discussed in chapter three how Blake depicted Jesus as an active and creative figure that should serve as a model for humanity. Blake regards Jesus to be a man of all virtue, but not because he succumbed to the Law – to the Ten Commandments - but because he questioned the Law. Blake's Jesus exposed the Pharisees and disclosed what was really evil. According to *The Marriage* "Jesus was all virtue, and acted from impulse, not from rules" (1993: 186). Therefore Jesus embodies the ideal expressed in Blake's text. He is the hero, the one who accomplishes the most disbelief, the greatest level of perception. He is the one who challenges the system and in these regards, he is a great deal similar to Neo. In this Blakean reading of the film I propose Neo be read as Blake's Jesus Christ. The parallel between Jesus and Neo is unambiguous. Significantly, in Neo's first scene, the viewer is explicitly informed of this parallel. Mr. Anderson illegally sells what looks like computer programs from his house. After Mr. Anderson hands one of these illegal programs to a client named Choi, the latter states: "Hallelujah. You're my savior, man. My own personal Jesus Christ." The viewer

is then immediately led to associate Neo as a Christ-like figure – quite significantly this indication occurs at the beginning of the film, as I have mentioned, precisely in the first scene where we see Neo.

Along most of the film it is dramatized whether or not Neo really is the one, consequently so is his association with Christ – the savior. But near the end of the film the viewer begins to confirm what Choi stated in Neo’s first scene. The film establishes a parallel of Neo and Jesus by the similarity between one of its scenes and the well-know narrative of the miracle of the raising of Lazarus. As Fontana has explained, at one point in the film, the three agents take Morpheus into custody. He is kept in what is arguably a “long, narrow room much like the cave in which Lazarus was buried” (2003: 163). Neo then sacrifices his own life in what is described as a suicide attempt by Tank, one of the members of Morpheus’s crew. He enters the Matrix and risks having to confront no less than three agents holding Morpheus imprisoned. He and Trinity fly in a helicopter alongside the building where Morpheus is being kept. In the words of Fontana, “Neo swoops down in a helicopter to rescue a nearly comatose Morpheus. Neo’s command ‘Morpheus, get up! Get up!’ echoes Jesus’ command, ‘Lazarus, come out!’ In both these instances it is the power that emanates from the agents of salvation (Neo and Jesus) that raises the men in their tombs . . .” (2003: 163). Furthermore, Fontana tells us how, “From a theological standpoint, both these instances mark a turning point in the careers of Jesus and Neo” (2003: 163). This is the moment where Jesus becomes a public threat to the authorities of his time by attracting large enough crowd. In terms of the film, this is where the agents turn their attention from Morpheus over to Neo since the rescue mission the latter accomplished is in fact “nothing short of a miracle” (Fontana, 2003: 163).

The reason why the success of this rescue mission seems to be a miracle lies in the supremacy of these agents in relation to humans. This supremacy discloses how Neo’s choice to face three agents in his successful attempt to rescue Morpheus is regarded by Tank as suicidal. Agents monitor the Matrix all the time. They are conventionally considered to be a personification of the antagonists, the

machines with artificial intelligence. They can assume the human form of any person anywhere in the Matrix. Their job is to roam the Matrix and contain the awakenings. In this first film of the trilogy there are only three agents: Agent Brown (Paul Goddard), Agent Jones (Robert Taylor) and Agent Smith, (Hugo Weaving). The commonness of their names is suggestive of their pervasiveness in society under the Blakean reading I have discussed. They operate as a sort of government force such as the FBI or CIA and therefore have the collaboration of the police among other institutions of authority. They refer to Morpheus as a known terrorist who must be brought to justice, for instance. They are always trying to catch “the rebels” - Morpheus and his crew - in order to stop them from waking any more people into consciousness. It is logical that the agents be incredibly strong and fast. Since the machines created them in order to protect the Matrix it is only natural for them not to be influenced by its impositions or rules. Consequently, it would take a great deal of disbelief to become fast enough to beat an agent. Precisely as it is with Blake, in order to beat “agents” a person must reach a deep sense of disbelief. Every person who has attempted to fight an agent has been killed. Therefore, the common reaction for any member of Morpheus’s crew when they see an agent is to run. No one has ever had a profound enough disbelief to be faster and stronger than an agent. Here we see the importance of Neo. He is what the film refers to as The One. He has the potential to become far faster and stronger than any agent. He would lead “the rebels” in battles as well as into the greater war between the machines and humans. In the film, we follow the development of his disbelief as we watch him become faster and stronger.

Reading the film as a narrative that allegorizes *The Marriage* as I have presented in this subchapter is only my initial approach to the film. Thus far, I have only proposed that *The Marriage* be read as a lens for *The Matrix*. Only in chapters 4 and 5 will I consider *The Matrix* entirely as well as its relationship to Blake’s text. As a result, the reader should not as yet expect to fully understand the role the film has within the framework of my thesis nor perceive how it is informative to my thesis

statement. Further groundwork must be laid down before this can be done. Part of this groundwork lies in understanding how liberty as pro-gression may be read in *The Matrix* with this Blakean lens.

## Chapter 4.2 - “A world without you”

NEO: *What are you trying to tell me, that I can dodge bullets?*

MORPHEUS: *No Neo. I'm trying to tell you that when you're ready, you won't have to.*

Here is where my work exposes the fragility of the dichotomy between substance and special effects. Some may regard the fight scenes of the film as moments where Hollywood is simply catering to public taste. Having Neo run up a wall to then somersault over Morpheus is perceived as a sample of the film's many far-fetching moments where people's thirst for Hollywood-type special effects is simply being quenched. But the fact that this aspect of the film undoubtedly did sell tickets does not automatically implicate that this aspect may not be read as meaningful. Here again it seems this apparent “lack of depth” is more associated to one's reading. As we watch Neo do more acrobatic movements and accomplish impossible feats we are actually watching him increase his disbelief in the false rules and impositions of the Matrix. Allegorically, I should say we are watching him approximate Blake's ideal of a pro-gressive movement towards freedom. Neo is fulfilling Blake's ideal of disbelief in the false moral codes created by the orthodox religions, for instance, in order to control a human being. The special effects are crucial to the development of the film's more intellectual matters since they serve these intellectual purposes. The reader should approach these moments where Neo is flying around in the same manner we approach a character in a video game fly around: it is not reality, it is rather, virtual reality. Humans are in a simulation of reality. Morpheus gives Neo a good explanation of why people accomplish these incredible moves while in the Matrix when he tells him: “This is a sparring program, similar to the programmed reality of the Matrix. It has the same basic rules, rules like gravity. What you must learn is that these rules are no different from the rules of a computer system. Some of them can be bent. Others can be broken. Understand? Then hit me, if you can.” What critics,

the Academies and apparently even the Wachowskis themselves have failed to realize is that as Neo is developing his acrobatics in order to hit Morpheus he may also be catering to our more intellectual tastes. Applying lack of depth or substance and thus refraining to grant *The Matrix* credibility because of its special effects is as preposterous as criticizing children's literature for depicting a place like Neverland – a place where children are allowed to never grow up, just always have fun and adventure, for instance. Within the consideration that this is a Hollywood production, this sort of appeal should be expected. It is part of the genre of the film. What should not be overlooked here is that meaningfulness may be read in this appeal.

Once Neo takes the red pill he undergoes an apparent pro-gression in terms of vision and disbelief. He is undergoing the transformation I have discussed from Mr. Anderson to Neo. Since describing this process from the beginning of the film to the end would require an extensive analysis, I have decided to focus on the last scenes of the film. His development is made clear enough on the last segments where Mr. Anderson eventually becomes Neo – the hero and savior-like figure. I will be describing the scenes that occur roughly one hour and fifty-three minutes into the film, near the end. After rescuing Morpheus from the custody of the agents, Neo and Trinity are trying to get out of the Matrix and back to Nebuchadnezzar. They have to find a telephone that serves as a place to connect the real world with the Matrix. They eventually get to the platform of a subway station. Morpheus is the first to answer the phone in order to leave the Matrix. The phone starts ringing again. Trinity answers and as she is leaving, she sees agent Smith approaching them. But it is too late. Agent Smith shoots and destroys the phone just as Trinity awakens in the ship. Neo is finally alone with an agent. To his right, there is Agent Smith. To his left, there is a stairway leading to the streets. Normally, anyone would not even consider any other option but to run away from the agent as fast as s/he could. Neo does consider this possibility for a moment looking towards the stairway, but then he turns to face Agent Smith, confidently.

As the agent walks towards him he refers to him by his “real” name and calls out: Mr. Anderson. Here Neo is standing his ground or as Morpheus puts it when he is asked about what Neo is doing, “he is beginning to believe”. In other words, he is beginning to believe he is the one. Neo and Agent Smith run towards each other shooting their guns meeting in the air as the camera moves around them. They fall on the ground, each having his gun to the other’s head. Realizing they are empty they get up and throw their guns down. The two men then engage in their exchange of blows. Neo lands a good kick across agent Smith’s face throwing him back onto a suggestive plaque with the number three placed on the wall. The agent seems to get angry. He throws down his sunglasses and, as if trying to intimidate Neo into thinking he is not the one, he says: “I’m going to enjoy watching you die, Mr. Anderson.” The two resume their exchange of blows. Neo lands a few hits but he is never quick enough to strike the agent hard again at this point. As the agent and Neo take turns driving the other one back through their punching or kicking sequences they do so across the plaque on the wall with the number three. Agent Smith sends Neo into the wall of the subway station and then on the next moment hurts him considerably again by giving him a punch that sends him flying back to a distance of what seems to be 12 to 15 yards. Neo is clearly hurt here and spits out a good amount of blood. When he does so we are shown Trinity at the Nebuchadnezzar as she comments, “Jesus, he is killing him.” Once again the film keeps us questioning whether or not Neo is the one. In the case of my reading, whether or not Neo does fulfill Blake’s ideal expressed in the *Marriage* as Blake’s Jesus does. Though Neo is getting hurt, reference to Jesus is constantly being made. Every time Neo stands up his confidence of being the one seems to only get more unwavering and he persists in approaching the agent determined to hit him hard, regardless how hurt he is getting. Here, he stands up and assumes a fighting position. He then makes a gesture with his hand signaling for Agent Smith to approach him. The agent’s facial expression goes from shocked to angry as he starts to walk towards Neo. The latter is then able to land a good sequence of hits, but none hard enough to hurt agent Smith considerably. In one particular hit

the agent picks Neo up and throws him against the wall again. Cornered, Neo receives an uncountable amount of punches to the ribs and is then thrown about ten yards by one. As Neo falls again, the agent hears a subway approaching and he throws Neo to the wall and onto the tracks. The agent jumps from the platform to the tracks and leans over Neo holding him in a headlock. He tells Neo: “Do you hear that, Mr. Anderson? That is the sound of inevitability. That is the sound of your death. Goodbye, Mr. Anderson.” Neo then responds: “My name, is Neo”. This moment is crucial because the agent insists on calling him Mr. Anderson. It is the agent’s way of reminding him that he is a Mr. Anderson. It is his way of making him believe in the Matrix, the simulation, and in his place within it.

In terms of *The Marriage*, he is allegorically telling Neo he has to adhere to the rules of morality. Agent Smith is trying to imbue Neo with the notion that the simulation is real – that the standards of morality the agent allegorically proposes in the Matrix are not a construct. He is telling Neo there is nothing special about him; he is not the one. The protagonist’s assertion that he is Neo represents his acceptance of the hero’s role and the greater self-conviction that he is the one. Once again, allegorically, Neo is asserting that he does not believe in the standards of morality constructed by the religious leaders – tyrants. By now the subway is nearly hitting both men and just as he responds back his conviction, he jumps all the way to the ceiling hitting Agent Smith against it very hard. As the two fall, Agent Smith is still recovering from his impact while Neo falls on his feet. Neo then does a back somersault from the tracks to the platform just as the subway passes and runs over agent Smith. Believing the agent to be finally dead, Neo heads towards the stairway in order to find a way to contact Tank and leave the Matrix. Just as he is about to start up the steps he hears the subway stop. He then turns around to see Agent Smith walking out of the subway. It seems that here Neo realizes that he still cannot destroy the agent – at least not now. Considering the agents have the power to see through the eyes of any civilian as well as become anyone of them in the Matrix, the viewer may infer that Smith simply incorporated one of the passengers inside the subway and was back to fight Neo. Not only has



the latter failed to kill the former, but he has also suffered a strong beating from him. Fontana associates the suffering Neo receives by the time the subway scene is over to the suffering of Christ in the Passion narrative of the Bible (2003: 163-64). Realizing that he cannot kill Agent Smith though he somewhat beat him, Neo runs out of the subway.

Neo then races up the steps and is chased around the city streets by Agent Smith and two other agents in and out of buildings. Neo gets a cell phone and calls Tank. He needs the location of the next telephone that can be used to get him out of the Matrix. Everywhere Neo goes there is a civilian being incorporated by an agent who tries to kill him. Eventually he enters the right building. He can now hear the telephone ringing as he is running through the halls past a few doors. He then finally sees the right door, significantly apartment 303. He slams the door open only to find that Agent Smith is waiting for him in front of the phone with a gun pointing right at him only inches away. The agent then unloads the gun shooting Neo several times. Members of the crew who are all in the Nebuchadnezzar watching everything through a computer screen become dumbfounded to hear the machines of the ship indicate that Neo's heart has stopped. The confirmation is clear once one of the agents checks and sees that Neo has no pulse. In the words of the agent: "He's gone". Agent Smith then says "Good bye Mr. Anderson" as if to confirm what he had always said – he was not the one. He was just a common person. Here, as Morpheus had told Neo, if you die in the Matrix you die in real life. Neo's mind believed he was dead and the body cannot live without the mind. For a moment, we are all led to believe that Neo was never really the one. In Cypher's words earlier on in the film, "How can he be the one, if he's dead?" Then, back at the ship, Trinity approaches Neo's body, which is still plugged to the Matrix. She approaches him and says: "Neo, I'm not afraid anymore. The Oracle told me that I would fall in love, and that man, the man who I loved would be the one. And so you see, you can't be dead. You can't be, because I love you. You hear me? I love you." She then kisses him. When Trinity says to Neo that the Oracle told her she would fall in love with the one and kisses him, Neo became entirely convinced that he was in fact

the one. His conviction of Trinity's love for him makes it impossible that he is not the one. Being convinced of this, his mind realizes that he is not really dead. He fully differentiates this simulation from reality.

Considering *The Marriage* as the lens I proposed it to be, he fully realizes the difference between the morality standards, the impositions of the tyrants and what is supposed to be real. He now realizes the Truth concerning what is real. His heart begins to pump again before he suffers brain damage and he is reanimated. So in a way, Neo resurrects fulfilling the Oracle's prophecy that Neo was not the one because he was waiting for something – perhaps in the next life. The one has the potential of never dying while in the Matrix because his disbelief in it as real is so strong that his mind would distinguish clearly what happens in the Matrix from what happens in reality. The one would be so conscious that none of that is in fact real that his mind would differentiate to the point that the person would not really die if he were hurt in the Matrix. The number 303 of the room where Neo is shot is suggestive here. It may be read as a reference to the three days Jesus was dead before resurrecting. It may also refer to Jesus' age when he died and resurrected. Either way, Neo's room number foreshadows his resurrection. He can no longer suffer the imposition of the rules he thought existed. Because that world is not real, they are not real. Neo understands that what he thought was real is only a *mere* simulation – unlike Baudrillard proposes in *Simulacra and Simulation* (1994). It is not an all powerful, distanced from reality, and impossible to escape sort of simulation. With the kiss Neo opens his eyes entirely for the first time. Then Trinity tells him, “Now get up.” In the Matrix, Neo stands up just as the agents were leaving. Then, for a moment, we see things inside the Matrix as Neo now sees them: computer codes. Neo has finally come to the ultimate state of vision where he sees things as what they really are. The Matrix is nothing but codes to him. He no longer sees doors and walls, only these codes as in a computer program.

This is the climatic moment of the film in general as well as of the Blakean reading I have been constructing. It is the moment when Neo comes to the ultimate state of vision, when he allegorically accomplishes the ideal articulated in *The Marriage*. That world can exert no more control over what he can or cannot do. Sensing he is up, the agents turn around. All three agents unload their guns at Neo across the hallway. As the shots start to fire out Neo stretches his right hand in front of him and says: "No". It is as if he were refusing to submit to the rules of that world, that simulation. We are reminded of a moment in the beginning of the film when Neo asks if he will actually be able to dodge bullets and is told by Morpheus that when he is ready, he would not have to. He no longer has to dodge their bullets. He no longer needs to lean, or curve to what the agents are sending his way. Needless to say, this movement of not curving to what is directed towards him is especially suggestive within the Blakean reading. Once again the emblematic special effects used to dodge the bullets throughout the film are employed meaningfully. Now Neo simply stops the bullets in thin air, takes one in his hand and lets the rest drop to the ground at his feet. The agents are dumbfounded. Agent Smith gets furious and runs towards Neo. He delivers a sequence of punches and Neo blocks each one displaying no trouble at all. During the middle of the sequence Neo literally puts one hand around his back as he defends himself. He then holds one of the Agent Smith's arms and turns it. Having done this he then effortlessly kicks the agent and sends him flying about twenty-five yards across the hallway.

Agent Smith gets up, now clearly taken aback by Neo's strength and speed. As Neo starts running towards him he gets himself together to stand his ground. But as Agent Smith draws his hand back to throw a punch Neo literally dives into him. Inside his body Neo moves up to Smith's brain and the agent's body explodes to pieces that fly in all directions. Agent Smith is destroyed, finally. Neo seems invigorated by this and when he turns his eyes towards the other two agents, they run. Neo subsequently gets back to the phone, answers it and goes back to the Nebuchadnezzar.

As previously mentioned, chapter 4 stands as a first approach to my overall analysis of *The Matrix*. The exposition of this longer plotline is fundamental to the development of my thesis statement. It shows Neo's final moments of pro-gression and arrival in the ultimate state of vision, disbelief. In seeing the simulation for what it is, computer codes, he comes to Blake's apocalypse where he sees that the morality standards are a construct. Consequently, he comes to the final state of the cleansing process. Everything appears to him as it is, infinite (Blake, 1993: 166) This last moment shows Neo's allegorical accomplishment of Blake's ideal. Neo has fully realized that everything that lives is holy (Blake, 1993: 172). He is free from "what the religious call / Good & Evil" (Blake, 1993: 144). It has been important to disclose this entire last moment of the film because it is emblematic for the notion of liberty as pro-gression. It is fundamental to my proposal that *The Marriage* be read as a lens for *The Matrix* – specifically in terms of liberty as pro-gression. Once again this is only part of my first approach to the film.

Then we move on to the last scene. Neo is in the Matrix on a regular city street using a public phone. The film ends here with him addressing the machines – the creators of the Matrix and its rules and impositions. Neo's last words are so in touch with Blake's text that they might as well have been taken directly from the pages of *The Marriage*. It is as if Blake himself, through the voice of visionary Neo, is directly telling the priests or other imposing world figures his ideal for mankind. Neo's last words are:

I know you're out there. I can feel you now. I know that you're afraid. You're afraid of us. You're afraid of change. I don't know the future. I didn't come here to tell you how this is going to end. I came here, to tell you how it's going to begin. I'm going to hang up this phone and then I'm going to show these people what you don't want them to see. I'm going to show them a world without you, a world without rules and control, without borders or boundaries - a world, where anything is possible. Where we go from there, is a choice I leave to you.

The revolutionary tone and dimension of *The Matrix* that I have mentioned is made quite explicit here<sup>19</sup>. It produces the sensation of an imminent change – similarly to the Song of Liberty segment at the end of *The Marriage*. Moreover the ideal of freedom from rules or from worldly impositions is also made present. Rock and roll music comes on. Neo hangs up the phone, walks out of the booth and stands in front of the camera.

He looks around at the many people walking on the street in different directions. Here we should remember that Neo no longer sees the Matrix the way we, the viewer sees it. As he is looking around he does not see people walking in different directions. All he sees is codes, and his expression of wonderment reveals how he seems amused by this novelty. As he is turning his face to the right and left the camera moves closer to him going from left to right. In these movements his eyes pass the line of the camera a few times, but they move in a way that does not make eye contact with those watching the film. The camera seems to want to make eye contact and therefore we have the impression that Neo is avoiding this. Neo then puts on his sunglasses and faces the camera directly. The viewer seems to get the feeling Neo is looking right at him/her. His facial expression then changes subtly to a slight smile as he is looking at us. The same amusement he had just expressed because he saw only codes while looking around at the people walking in all directions is now expressed in his subtle smile as he is looking at us. In other words, Neo is still amused. He is still seeing only codes when he is looking out at the audience. This is obviously suggestive. Needless to say, here I am not trying to endorse the possibility of whether or not we live in a computer program. My point is not to propose this is suggestive that our physical forms are somewhere encapsulated and being used as an energy source for machines – at least not literally that is. But allegorically the film suggests we are all in a Matrix. We are all surrounded by codes; we are all imprisoned. The ideal of liberty as pro-gression is then to be

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<sup>19</sup> Revolutionary here is to be understood as it is defined in Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary page 1142 which is found on the works cited section of this thesis.

perceived as an ideal for us all. When Neo tells the machines that: “I’m going to show these people what you don’t want them to see,” he is not referring only to the people around him in the film, but to us watching the film. So it is not just a movie. The real and the fictitious intermingle. Somewhat similarly to the discussed cover piece for *The Marriage*, the fictitious narrative the viewer has just watched has real implications within the allegorical reading I have proposed for *The Matrix*.

Within the allegorical reading I here propose of *The Matrix* I believe the fight scenes are cardinal for us to understand Neo’s pro-gression. He achieves liberty as pro-gression in the way Blake’s text articulates it. This fourth chapter is only a partial approach to *The Matrix* since here I have not *fully* addressed the film. I have not disclosed its comments on the ideals of liberty or of pro-gression. Because my reading of the film here is allegorical for *The Marriage*, its liberty as pro-gression may here be questioned the same way I have questioned *The Marriage*’s. But as an allegorical text in its own right, *The Matrix* does comment on my subject matter. My objective this far has been to discuss the points of contact in order to show how the film may be read as allegorical to *The Marriage*, but I will focus on the film’s own comments on my last chapter. Considerations will then be made on how the film, as postmodern cultural work, is informative to problematizations towards the ideal of liberty as pro-gression I have read in it. I will then be able to properly discuss how *The Matrix*, as a whole, is informative to my thesis statement.

## Chapter 5 - *The Marriage: a parody/adaptation for Areopagitica*

When approaching works of art comparatively as I do here, the student cannot refrain from pursuing a more elaborate understanding of the relationship that may be established between his/her objects of study. The comparative reading s/he proposes benefits a great deal from considering how one text relates to the other and here my work presents no exception. Moreover, acknowledgment of critical theory is crucial. It has been a greatly informative to this comparative study. It is under these considerations that this fifth chapter has been employed in my thesis. While on a first moment I will be proposing my reading of the relationship between *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* on a second moment I will refer to *The Marriage* and *The Matrix*. What this fifth chapter hopes to explore is the way critical theory may be employed in helping understand the relationships between these texts. Critical theory has helped me further appreciate what happens in going from one text to the other considering the topic of liberty as pro-gression. It is precisely under this scope that I will be discussing their relationships. Though the reader of Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* may never be reminded of *Areopagitica* in the same explicit manner s/he is reminded of *Paradise Lost* (1957) I here propose Milton's tract is very much a presence. Addressing their relationships with the assistance of theoretical support contributes to an understanding of what I have read between them.

When first introduced to Milton's and Blake's works in general the reader is likely to feel there is not much consonance taking place and here *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage* may at times be exemplary. It seems that the poet of "Dip him in the river who loves water," "The lust of a goat is the bounty of God," and "You never know what is enough unless you know what is more than enough," would not have much in common with Milton (1993: 152-56). In *Areopagitica*, where Milton's call for freedom is at its summit, he tells us: "He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and *seeming pleasures*, and *yet abstain*, and *yet distinguish*, and *yet prefer* [my italics] that which is truly

better, he is the true wayfaring Christian” (158). For *Areopagitica*, there is utility to vice. But the only usefulness of vice lies in that virtue is constituted by abstinence from the former’s “seeming pleasures<sup>20</sup>.” So here Milton’s ideal of freedom is quite distant from the poet of “For every thing that lives is Holy,” to some even opposed (Blake, 1993: 192). But pursuing this to the point where the reader regarded their works as simply antithetical and established dichotomies such as abstinence versus indulgence would only stand as an impetuous and unsuccessful attempt to disentangle their relationship. This simplistic outlook would not, for instance, answer for the fact that on all accounts we have of Blake never does he regard Milton’s work without displaying great esteem. The distance between them is reduced when we realize how Blake has always manifested respect for Milton’s views. His regards can be noted from the numerous amounts of references made to the 17<sup>th</sup> poet. True, Blake believed Milton made mistakes in his work regarding what God expects of men and women. But never is Milton portrayed with anything near the hostility Swedenborg is attributed to on *The Marriage* for his theological or philosophical “mistakes.” As I hope to substantiate, the impression the reader has is that Blake feels Milton made an honest mistake and high regard is always made prominent. So while Blake’s apparent personal esteem for Milton and for the latter’s achievements do not attest to points of contact between their works it is at least indexical to them.

On chapter 3, I have referred to Northrop Frye’s breakthrough critical study of Blake in his book *Fearful Symmetry* (1947). There I have already exposed some of the points of contact between Milton and Blake’s texts while purposely postponing considerations on their divergences. My aim then was simply to disclose some affinities between them in order to corroborate how Milton presented himself as an influence to Blake. Here in attempting to address the relationship between *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage* I will be making no further postponements. In general when comparatively

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<sup>20</sup> I should mention that while for Milton vice involves not submitting to laws such as the Ten Commandments for instance, Blake regards vice precisely as submitting.



analyzing Milton and Blake's works in terms of their distance, results vary just as they may vary in responding to the specific case of *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage*. As I have pointed out, while to one reader their works may seem entirely antithetical, another may find them concordant. So it seems there is some ambiguity as to their relationship. This ambiguity as to their distance makes a comparative study between their works especially called for. What I propose is that in any one of Blake's many illustrations of Milton's texts or in his own literary production Blake had something to comment on Milton's writings, something to add or even correct. In Blake's *Milton* (1948) he tells us how Milton realized he had made a mistake during his lifetime here on Earth. Milton would then have symbolically returned in order to correct his past mistakes through Blake and "redeem his emanation" (Frye, 1947: 316). The latter would then have set himself on the mission to correct the former in justifying the ways of God to men. Therefore, it seems Blake's other works as well as the biographical information we have of him supports this stance he takes to Milton's accomplishments. Blake made Milton's path his own to a great extent. But Blake felt Milton stopped and did not go far enough in the direction he had started. Milton's outlook did not extend as far as it should to what Blake considers to be the Truth. Realizing how their relationship is ambiguous in terms of their distance from each other anticipates my aim for the first moment of this chapter. It is not unusual for readings of relationships between works of art to be far from simple. Here I hope to disclose *how* this is the case of these works of Milton and Blake and I have found theoretical support in dealing with this apparent ambiguity and complexity in Linda Hutcheon's conception of the term parody.

On *A Theory of Parody: The Teachings of Twentieth Century Art Forms* (1985) Linda Hutcheon redefines parody and one of the ways she chooses to do this is by referring to the etymology of the term. According to her, theorists usually return to the "Greek noun *parodia* meaning 'counter-song,' and stop there" (1985: 32). Reference to this meaning inclines the reader to view parody *only* as an act of writing against, counter to the parodied text. Hence the prefix *para* signals only opposition and has

ultimately left room for associations of parody with ridicule. The problem Hutcheon sees in this restrictive view is that it neglects *para* within its other meaning of “beside.” The neglected meaning of the prefix *para* on the other hand suggests “accord and intimacy instead of a contrast” (1985: 32). Also taking *para* as “beside” into account, as was done in ancient times, allows the reader to make a few propositions for the term parody. In Hutcheon’s words, “It is this second, neglected meaning of the prefix that broadens the pragmatic scope of parody . . . the doubleness of the root suggests the need for more neutral terms of discussion” (1985: 32). By suggesting we use more neutral terms, Hutcheon wishes to undermine the element of ridicule since, as she points out, there is nothing in the root of the word that makes this element immediate as is the case of the prefix *burla* in the term burlesque for example (1985: 32). Within this doubleness, ridicule is not a prerequisite for parody.

Taking this combination of “counter” and “beside” in the prefix *para* into account, she concludes that: “Parody, then, in its ironic ‘trans-contextualization’ and inversion, is repetition with difference. A critical distance is implied between the backgrounded text being parodied and the new incorporating work, a distance usually signaled by irony” (1985: 32). Because of this distance, irony would be more appropriately regarded as fundamental to parody, but ridicule would not. She then adds that “This irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive. The pleasure in parody’s irony comes not from humor in particular, but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual ‘bouncing’ . . . between complicity and distance” (1985: 32). Complicity and distance, then, seem to be the crucial elements pertaining to parody for Hutcheon, displacing the ridicule dimension of the term as a necessary one. The irony within this notion of bouncing in doubleness is crucial to the apparently ambiguous relationship I have introduced and will here address in Milton and Blake’s texts.

In the specific case of *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage*, complicity can be read in more aspects than one. But Frye makes a claim to the similarity between Milton’s liberty and Blake’s imagination

and when he does so he touches on the central aspect that approximates these two works (1947: 159). Every man is responsible for confronting his own society and its diverse systems in order to construct Truth. Both works express the need of man: to work within his fallen state towards the discovery of Paradise. Truth is just as central to *Areopagitica* as liberty. Truth is the very *raison d'être* of liberty. It is always the ideal implicit in the various moments where, Milton exclaims: "Give me the liberty to know, to utter, and to argue freely according to conscience, above all liberties" (180). Liberty is also always connected to God, to this movement towards Truth; and to Milton the Reformation is a sign of this movement. Consider the following citation for instance:

But now, as our obdurate clergy have with violence demeaned the matter, we are become hitherto the latest and the backwardest scholars, of whom God offered to have made us the teachers. Now once again by all concurrence of signs, and by the general instinct of holy and devout men, as they daily and solemnly express their thoughts, God is decreeing to begin some new and great period in his Church, even to the reforming of Reformation itself . . . Behold now this vast city: a city of refuge, the mansion house of liberty, encompassed and surrounded with his protection; the shop of war hath not there more anvils and hammers waking, to fashion out the plates and instruments of armed justice in defence of beleaguered truth, than there be pens and heads there, sitting by their studious lamps, musing, searching, revolving new notions and ideas wherewith to present, as with their homage and their fealty, the approaching Reformation: others as fast reading, trying all things, assenting to the force of reason and convincement. What could a man require more from a nation so pliant and so prone to seek after knowledge? What wants there to such a towardly and pregnant soil, but wise and faithful labourers, to make a knowing people, a nation of prophets, of sages, and of worthies? (176-77)

Here Milton expresses his concern with the responsibility of man to God as he does in *Sonnet XIX* (1957). Pens and heads, sitting by studious lamps, musing, searching and revolving new notions echo *Il*

*Penseroso* (1957) in expressing the need of contributing to the Reformation as with homage and fealty. Milton's ideal nation is one of wise and faithful laborers, of prophets, sages and worthies. These are the ones who will serve God best and to this Blake would have no objections. This is one of the elements in Milton that Blake was most fascinated by and this influence on the latter's work is patent.

*The Marriage* expresses this responsibility of each man to move and bring humanity towards Paradise along with the conception of poetry as prophecy that is interwoven in Blake's imagination, in Milton's liberty, and consequently also in *Areopagitica*. Frye explains this role of the poet as prophet and states that in Milton and Blake: "it is the business of the visionary to proclaim the Word of God to a society under the domination of Satan; and that the visionary's social position is typically that of an isolated voice crying in the wilderness against the injustice and hypocrisy of the society from which he has sprung" (1947: 336). In Blake there is a distinction between the artist and the ordinary man. He distinguishes: "to the ordinary man, developing the imagination means bringing out the divinity in himself which all men have. To the artist it also means bringing out the genius in himself which most men have not" (Frye, 1947: 332). Even though not all men are capable of genius, all are capable of developing the imagination: bringing out the divinity within themselves. Not all men are artists but each is responsible for his movement towards Truth in order to reach Paradise and approximate the divine.<sup>21</sup> This distinction made by Blake is also present in Milton. Considering the end of the segment I have cited on *Areopagitica* previously, we see that Milton does not idealize a nation constituted of prophets only. The distinction Blake makes is also present in Milton in that the latter calls for "a nation of prophets, of sages, and of worthies." It is in these regards that I see the complicity side of Hutcheon's definition for parody as one that is pertinent to the relationship between *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage*. These texts share this ideal of a search and an approximation towards the divine.

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<sup>21</sup> The distinction made in the previous chapter is allegorical to this one in that Neo is the one who has the most potential of disbelief. In *The Matrix* all are capable of moving towards Truth, but Neo is more so. Allegorically, Neo is an artist – not simply a man who is capable of developing his imagination, but a man of Genius.

Complicity between them lies in their conceptions of the poet as prophet and in the pro-gression they idealize for each man and for humanity. For Milton, liberty is what allows mankind to engage in this pro-gression while Blake grants imagination this role of leading mankind to pro-gress. This is what underlies Frye's assertion that Milton's liberty is "practically the same thing as Blake's imagination" (1947: 159)<sup>22</sup>. They are both assigned the similar role within each artist's system. Understanding this allows the reader to realize the complicity between the works of Milton and Blake. Understanding this initial point of contact, or in other words this complicity, is a first step in realizing how Hutcheon's definition of parody may be employed meaningfully to this relationship between *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage*. Liberty, Truth, Pro-gression, the role of the creative imagination, and God are the sites of complicity between the works of Milton and Blake.

Nevertheless, complicity is only one facet of Hutcheon's views of parody. Likewise, the reader should certainly not be eluded into thinking there are no divergences in the ideals of Milton and Blake. The former was highly esteemed by the latter for his achievements, but as I have mentioned, Blake felt Milton's aesthetics lacked something. In the introduction to this chapter I mentioned that some readers may regard their works as entirely antithetical or simply not see much consonance at all between the poet that praised knowing and abstaining and the one of "Dip in the river he who loves water" (1993: 152). This entirely antithetical reading has been undermined here. But in mentioning this possibility I have in part anticipated lacks Blake saw in Milton. Though their works are not simply antithetical, as no works ever are, there are substantial differences that rise from the initial common ground I have exposed so far.

In Blake's point of view, Milton's monist conception does not acknowledge the notion that Satan changed the nature of the world when he became the prince of it. To Milton the world is

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<sup>22</sup> I should note that this distinction, as well as their shared ideal of this search for the divine, is only made towards man during his existence on earth. As I will soon better explain, when man is restored, Frye has shown how to both Milton and Blake "all the Lord's people will become prophets" (1947: 340).

essentially divine and the figure of Satan is/acts simply within the less divine part of the divinity spectrum of life. Frye is helpful in this regard. According to his reading of Blake, “Satan, on the other hand, is the prince of this world: he is the spirit of inertia which incarnates itself in compromise. The worshippers of Satan accept established religions, philosophies and social conditions because they are established; they observe all the commandments of the law . . .” (1947: 333). This is what Milton’s prospect lacked. Moses is a figure that stands as emblematic of this divergence in the two poets. Milton did not realize the truly and entirely satanic element behind the law. Blake then calls for two changes in Milton’s outlook of life on earth. Here is where Blake’s aesthetics gain distance from Milton’s, as parodies must, according to Hutcheon. First, he needs to change his monist conception of the physical world from divine to satanic. He needs to realize all the traps Satan lays in society so as to keep ordinary men from developing their imagination or poets from developing their genius. He must observe all the traps that try to keep men under the law, in chains. This first change in his perspective will “enable him as a result to see his ‘emanation,’ or totality of the things he loves, as part of himself and not as a remote and objective ‘female will’” (Frye 1947: 336). *The Marriage* points in this direction when it tells us that:

Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs / is weak enough to be restrained; and the  
restrainer or / reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling. / And being restrained it by  
degrees becomes passive / till it is only the shadow of desire. / The history of this is written in  
Paradise Lost. & the / Governor or Reason is call’d Messiah. / And the original Archangel or  
possessor of the com- / -mand of the heavenly host, is call’d the Devil or Satan / and his  
children are call’d Sin & Death. (1993: 148)

This moment of *The Marriage* exposes how Blake believed Milton’s view of life and mankind was limited or how Milton committed an honest mis-take. The text cites *Paradise Lost* but *Areopagitica* is

also a site where this “misconception” is expressed through its already commented pervasive ideal of temperance.

The reader should observe that this segment is cited from the “Voice of the Devil” moment of *The Marriage*. As such, the Satan referred to here is not the negative Satan of Blake’s system whom he refers to as the Nobodaddy. Here Satan is the figure that personifies the false evil in the morality of those who adhere to the Mosaic Law. To Blake this figure is not the real Satan and it is far from evil. It is one side of humanity that is essential for humans to develop their imagination and gain a whole new outlook on life – ultimately reach Paradise and become prophets. Blake’s choice of assigning to imagination as opposed to liberty the task of leading man to Truth is indexical of the misconception he saw in Milton. Undoubtedly, Blake also idealizes liberty, but it can only be reached through imagination. As I have mentioned in chapter 3, Blake does not see imagination as a superior faculty in itself. But he does in the current state of humanity where man is in chains and imbued with a false, man-constructed morality. Here is where imagination is given preeminence. But within the state of redemption; reason, energy and all the contraries in man are equals – as my prior analysis of the title plate of *The Marriage* depicts. All contraries are a part of man and they should be put on equal grounds in the life of both ordinary man and poet. The “children of Satan” in this ironic context are certainly not “Sin and Death” as Milton depicted in *Paradise Lost*, but life. The children of this Satan are imagination and energy – the essential elements that must be developed in all man in order to reach Paradise. The choice of working with *The Marriage* here is quite a fortunate one. The considerable amount of verses addressing Milton in “The Voice of the Devil” segment indicates how this text regards the divergences between the poet of knowing and yet abstaining and the poet for whom “every thing that lives is Holy.”

For Blake, there was a second limitation to Milton’s outlook of life that is commented on *The Marriage*. It is also a site of the divergences between the works and overall systems of these two poets

where Hutcheon's parody is informative. *The Marriage* criticizes: "But in Milton; the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five senses. & the Holy-ghost, Vacuum!" (1993: 150). For Frye, this critique of *Paradise Lost* substantiates the problem in Milton's prospect of existence here on earth. Blake believes that in Milton's epic poem:

The descendants of Adam, apparently, suffer for a length of time arbitrarily set by God and terminated by him at his pleasure for inscrutable reasons . . . . The poem would come to a far richer and more suggestive conclusion if some shape in time could be portrayed, a *process* [my italics] which goes on in time but can last only a certain length of time, producing first Jesus and then the apocalypse as its simmer and boil, so to speak, so that history itself becomes the gradual recovery of Paradise by God awakening in Man. (Frye, 1947: 338-39)

This is how in Milton, the Holy Spirit, Los, or the imaginative form of time is a vacuum. By not having portrayed some shape in time Milton exposed his lack of a complete view on the shape of time in life. But this lack of form in time is not only in relation to *Paradise Lost*. If it were, it would not be as significant to my view of *The Marriage* as a parody of *Areopagitica*. This divergent point in the system of these two poets is also expressed in *Areopagitica* and therefore it is a difference in outlook that has direct implications to the relationship between *The Marriage* and *Areopagitica* specifically. In discussing the need of man to gather the scattered pieces of Truth, Milton asserts in *Areopagitica*:

We have not yet found them all, Lords and Commons, nor ever shall do, till her Master's second coming; he shall bring together every joint and member, and shall mould them into an immortal feature of loveliness and perfection. (175)

In Milton's works, though men should strive to gather all the pieces of Truth we will never accomplish this. Only in the Master's second coming shall every joint and member be brought together by man's awakening. This is where Blake's vision of man diverges from Milton's.



The former believed in the individual man's self-development brought on by an enhancement of the senses where *he himself* would ultimately recover Paradise – attain restoration by God awakening in man. Having been influenced by the disillusionments of his own historical context, history in Milton is simply the continuing substitution of one tyranny for another where humanity as a whole does not undergo a process in time. It is the accumulation of usurpation after usurpation, as the events exposed on chapter 2 related to England's licensing system, Court of Star Chamber and crown suggest. Salvation in Milton is then achieved only when God decides to terminate time arbitrarily and then decides who has obeyed the Law, who has abstained properly. The main problem with Milton in Blake's view is that he reads the Bible literally, as events related to real, historical people and past traditions. One of the main problems of reading the Bible in such a way is that it will lead someone to obey the Law of Moses. So this Miltonic view creates a union of history and law. This union is "the clasping of dead hands over a legal contract in a vanished past" (Frye, 1947: 341). Reading the Bible as dead history is the reason why priests preserve traditions. This manner of reading the Scriptures places man in chains – chains we have already been freed from through the figure of Jesus. Blake seems to concur that the figure of "Jesus himself suggests . . . *a process* [my italics] when he speaks of the Holy Spirit as continuing his work until the last day" (Frye, 1947: 339). Understanding the Holy Spirit as the imaginative form of time in the history of man as Blake does helps us see this point of his. Shape in time, reading historical narratives whether in epic poems or the Scripture, differs from lack of shape in that the former implies a process in man and in the history of humanity.

*The Marriage* allegorically exposes this difference in form of reading on plate 24. After an episode involving a discussion between an Angel and a Devil where the former becomes the latter we are told of the change that takes place in this Angel/Devil's form or reading. The poetic persona informs us: "Note. This Angel, who has now become a Devil, is my particular friend: we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense which the world shall have if they behave well" (1993:

186). Again this is the voice of the ironic Blakean Devil. The Angel's becoming a Devil or becoming diabolical within Blake's system is to be understood in the positive sense. Consequently this is the positive evil, the energy that needs to be developed for man to pro-gress. It is what Milton argues against in idealizing abstinence in *Areopagitica*. So Blake's reading leads to a process in time and this stands as a divergence<sup>23</sup>. It is this distance between Blake's vision of mankind and that of Milton's that has led me to see Hutcheon's definition of parody as helpful. In this distance lies one of the most crucial comments Blake had to make towards Milton – as expressed specifically between *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage*.

Reading history as simply accomplished facts is uninteresting, not at all significant and informative to us and to the ongoing present. The Bible, as well as epic poems, “shows the evolution of history as past time into history as present vision not only as an accomplished fact but as a process” (Frye, 1947: 341). To Blake, teaching traditions means “recreating dead facts into living truths, the vanished specters of tradition into the imagination's eternal and infinite present” (Frye, 1947: 340-41). In Blake's view, men of genius have to fight against the moral bondage the Miltonic reading suggests. Once Jesus *frees* us in the Gospels we may proceed to read the Old Testament freely or as Blake would say, mentally instead of corporeally. Like epics, the Bible is not to be taken as a text of barbarians that articulates historical superstitions, but the allegorical poem of a great civilization. We should not despise it but read with active and intelligent mind, spiritually. The Bible teaches us to see “in the records of all past time not a chaos of tyrannies, but the eternal and eventually emerging form of human

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<sup>23</sup> The reader should not confuse pro-gression in Milton, with Blake's critique that the former's works do not suggest a process. As discussed in chapter 2, pro-gression is present in Milton's works in the sense of gradually gathering the pieces of the scattered body of Truth (175). A process is not acknowledged in Milton's works in the sense that man did not undergo a cleansing, a change in perception. Man did not undergo a process where he would reach apocalypse. Man moved towards Truth but in Milton's system it would never be reached by man, in his lifetime. Truth would only be accomplished when God decided to terminate time. The process in Blake, which is not acknowledged in Milton, is in relation to man's gradual development where he would see everything as holy – as part of himself. He would see the Truth behind the morality of society's imposing religious figures. Milton never reached this stage – never underwent this process. The difference is that in Milton's terms he pro-gressed, but in Blake's he never reached this ultimate state of vision – the one Neo allegorically reached at the end of the film where he saw things as they were: computer codes.

life, a form which is the larger body of Man and of God” (Frye, 1947: 342). So this is how the Holy Ghost is a vacuum in Milton. This is how the father is everyone’s destiny – he is at the end of everyone’s destiny as the judge.

In Milton, Jesus Christ is thereby only a ratio of the five senses. Frye tells us that, “Blake calls the sum of experiences common to normal minds the ‘ratio,’ and whenever the word ‘reason’ appears in an unfavorable context in Blake, it always means ‘ratiocination’ or reflection on the ratio” (1947: 22). Jesus is not the liberating figure who once read spiritually, mentally or imaginatively followed his impulses and suggests we readers do the same. Jesus in Milton is a historical man who should be read only as something concrete, just as something we can all touch, taste, smell, see or hear – a quotient of experience we could all share. To Blake, in Milton Jesus is like a historically famous, but dead guinea sun, a ratio of the five senses. Blake would be one who makes Jesus a far more living figure, a reference through the entire life of man. Jesus has delivered us from the Law by recreating history and bringing it to the eternally present archetypes of the fall and redemption of man (Frye, 1947: 341). Rintrah in Blake’s symbolism, the figure that opens *The Marriage*, brings revolution. Rintrah is the redemption of the moral virtue of Moses by its prophetic power that will ultimately lead to restoration, in other words, Paradise. Within Blake’s system, this is where Man develops a larger human brain. This is when we will reach the Golden Age of Atlantis. (Frye, 1947: 340). For Milton this Golden Age of Atlantis, in other words salvation and restoration, would only take place at the moment Jesus decides to return. Blake takes a great distance from Milton in proposing the Bible not be read literally. Blake’s reading of the Bible leads him to see salvation and Truth as goals to be pursued and ultimately reached by man during his existence here on earth. While the ideal of reaching Truth and pro-gressing is present in the works of both men, Blake distances himself a great deal from Milton in his views of the restoration of man. Hutcheon’s view of parody as repetition with difference finds substance here.

In Blake, for man to reach this Golden Age the whole of human life will be seen and understood as a single mental form. “This single mental form is a drama of creation, struggle, redemption and restoration in the fallen life of a divine Man. This drama is the archetype of all prophecy and art, the universal form which art reveals in pieces, and it is also the Word of God, the end of the journey for our intellectual powers” (Frye, 1947: 340). Religion will be the religion of Jesus which by no means implies one uniform set of doctrines to be accepted by all men, but “the attainment of civilized *liberty* [my italics] and the common vision of the divinity and unity of man which is life in Jesus” (Frye, 1947: 340). Note that here Frye no longer asserts that Blake would idealize imagination as a needed faculty for man to see or escape. Here man has been restored and imagination is no longer preeminent. Liberty would have been attained. Quoting the Bible and repeating Milton in *Areopagitica*, Frye comments that all the Lord’s people will become prophets (1947: 340). But imagination will be part of the scheme of things in that as prophets, the language of all men will be the language of imagination. The type of perception that sees the sun in the company of angels will be shared and not the type of perception that experiences the guinea sun – an experience resulting from a ratio of the five senses.

Thus, the doubleness of complicity and distance between *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage* that is basic for Hutcheon’s proposal for the term parody may be read as I have proposed. Milton’s and Blake’s works manifest the ideal of liberty as a pro-gression for man to approximate himself to God. Here lies the complicity between their works. Blake takes critical distance from Milton in two points. First, because Blake sees the world as satanic, and not as divine. This is why imagination is so central in Blake’s system within the fallen state of man. Imagination must be developed in order for man to see beyond the morality standards that have been imposed onto him. Satan, the prince of this world has changed its nature. The second point where Blake diverges from Milton lies in the latter’s view that salvation and Truth will only take place with the Jesus’ second coming. This is how no shape in time is

present in Milton's works. In man's lifetime or in history of humanity, man does not reach the Golden Age of Atlantis as in Blake's system.

I will on a last note show how parody's irony is also a significant part of this relationship. Once the fundamental role that irony plays in constructing a reading of *The Marriage* that is both consistent and informative towards Blake's works is realized; dissociating or disregarding this irony from *The Marriage* becomes quite difficult. This helps us realize how much irony is fundamental, if not to *The Marriage* at least to the more critically accepted readings that have been made of it. But within Hutcheon's definition of parody, irony has quite a specific role. Here I believe it is worth citing Hutcheon once again. According to her, "The pleasure in parody's irony comes not from humor in particular, but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual 'bouncing' . . . between complicity and distance" (1985: 32). It seems that irony should produce the effect of an intertextual "bouncing" between the complicity side of the relationship and the distant one. In other words, the relationship should be ironical in the reader's process of going back and forth from the complicity side of the parody and then to the critique or comment being made by the parody.

The ironical bouncing pertinent to Hutcheon's definition is pervasive in *The Marriage*. It is made present whenever Blake uses terms such as evil or Devil ironically, which is nearly always. But I feel the moment where it is most emblematic and direct lies on plate 6. I have already cited it in discussing liberty on chapter 3. It is commonly regarded as a well-known segment of *The Marriage* and one who has been referred to historically in labeling Blake as a Satanist. At the end of the 'Voice of the Devil' segment of *The Marriage* the reader is told: "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" (1993: 150). So Blake exposes the limitations of Milton's outlook on the life of man throughout plate 6. But he ends this plate by stating that the latter was someone who was able to manifest liberty. This manifestation of liberty occasioned when he wrote of Devils and

Hell. Because of this, Milton was a true Poet, which in Blake as well as in Milton means being a prophet, a visionary, a seer. But the specific moment of the ironical bouncing pertinent to the complicity versus critical distance lies in the last words. As I have discussed, words such as Devil, evil, Satan and Hell are frequently employed ironically in Blake under his positive light rather than a negative one. In the segment where the reader is told that Milton was “of the Devils party without knowing it” Blake seems to play with the double meaning of Devil. He does this in order to show how Milton’s view of man’s role in his redemption and ultimate salvation was in the right direction, though lacking. Milton was of the party of the Devil in the positive sense in that he did urge his fellowmen to search for Truth and develop their liberty. He did write of the need for men to become prophets. Blake proposes Milton is of the Devil’s party for all the reasons I have read complicity in *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage*.

But, as discussed previously, in Milton man would not reach truth during his time here on earth. This is how Milton manifested no shape in time. Milton made the mistake of reading the Bible as history, as an accumulation of accomplished facts that inevitably leads man to observe the Law. He did not read the Bible in the way Blake suggests. The Bible was not approached mentally or as the allegorical poem of a great civilization. Milton believed in the commitment each man should have to the pursuit of Truth, but did not believe Man could accomplish Truth. God could not be awakened in man while he was here on earth. Milton urged for liberty but observed the Ten Commandments. This doubleness is what had led Blake to be ambiguous towards Milton. When the former says Milton is of the Devil’s party, this Devil should be understood ironically. This crucial irony sends the reader bouncing between the complicity and distance in Milton and Blake. Milton’s works are then associated both with two Devils: the figure that the Mosaic morality refers to as evil as well as with the figure Blake refers to as the Nobodaddy. The latter is what Blake considers true evil.

This Nobodaddy is described in a small poem where Blake addresses him directly. The poem is called *To Nobodaddy*. In it, Blake refers to this figure as the “Father of Jealousy” who is “silent & invisible” and who hides himself “in clouds / From every searching Eye” (1948: 93). Damon’s *A Blake Dictionary* defines Nobodaddy as a reference to nobody’s daddy. According to the dictionary it was “Blake’s name for the false God of this World” (1988: 301). So Milton was associated with this Nobodaddy since the former did not realize the satanic element of the world under the domination of the latter. Understanding the Devil within this doubleness produces irony. Understanding Devil in both ways when Blake asserts that Milton was of the devil’s party leads one to this bouncing movement. This bouncing is fundamental to Hutcheon’s definition of parody. The effect of this bouncing is none other than irony. Had Milton rewritten dead facts into living truths, recreated vanished specters of tradition into the imagination’s eternal and infinite present Blake would not have seen any faults in his outlook. Then, to Blake Milton would not be regarded as one that is also on the side of the negative Devil – the Nobodaddy. The possibility of reading Milton’s being of the Devil’s party within this doubleness is because of the complicity and distance Blake saw in him. Milton was of the Devil’s party, but the reader must not forget that, depending on how the word Devil is read, in Blake this may actually refer to two parties: that of a human contrary and that of the adherents of the Mosaic law - ironically and alternately.

I should note that this bouncing that helps define parody is not only to be read here where Blake makes reference to the ideals of *Areopagitica* more explicit. As chapter 3 has discussed, *The Marriage* is entirely about the distinction of Devil, Hell, Satan and evil. *The Marriage* is parodying *Areopagitica* wherever Blake uses any of these terms ironically in order to contrast one form of evil to the other in society since, as I have exposed, the articulations of the complicity and critical distance substantiated by both. Whenever Blake is exalting the need for man to become prophets and confront society in *The Marriage* he is manifesting complicity towards the ideals of *Areopagitica* and whenever he is

criticizing the abstinences of the religious in *The Marriage* he is criticizing the ideals of *Areopagitica*. This pervasive doubleness, expressed by Blake's ironic use of words associated with evil, is what ultimately leads me to the view that *The Marriage* is a parody of *Areopagitica*.

Reading the relationships between these two texts through the support of theory is fundamental to the development of my thesis statement. By discussing how *The Marriage* is a parody of *Areopagitica* in Hutcheon's terms I have here been able to make considerations that would not have been possible otherwise. Reading Hutcheon's complicity, critical distance and an ironical bouncing between texts as a trait of parody, has directed my contrastive reading of these two works. Studying *The Marriage* as a parody in Hutcheon's terms has not only supported, but also enlightened my reading of key notions such as that of liberty as pro-gression within each text. Therefore, my addressing their assumptions, provoking their ideals, and finally exposing the status of their liberty and pro-gression towards Truth as something that is time and place specific is greatly benefited from this more informed analysis I have presented thus far. I will now move on to the second moment of this chapter where, under this same mindset towards theory, I will discuss the relationship between *The Marriage* and *The Matrix*.



## Chapter 5.1 - *The Matrix*: a parody/adaptation for *The Marriage*

So far along my thesis I have introduced *The Matrix* on subchapter 4. On subchapter 4.1 I have discussed the Blakean presence as an intertextual allusion specifically to *The Marriage* that takes place about 12 minutes into the film. Furthermore, I have proposed this allusion be suggestive for a Blakean reading of the entire plot of the film. Neo may thereon be read as the one who allegorically accomplishes the ideals of liberty from false moralities and the ideal of Truth as expressed by *The Marriage*. Subchapter 4.2 then exposes how liberty as pro-gression is allegorically present in *The Matrix*. Had I stopped here, my work would not have been presenting itself as informative to those readers who might associate the process of making a film adaptation with producing filmic versions for stories previously presented in novels. To this reader, words such as faithfulness, originality and inferiority are given prominent roles in determining the achievements of a film adaptation. My work here calls for a broader view of what it means *to adapt*. The thesis statement I will be working with is that *The Matrix* (1999) be read as a parody/adaptation of William Blake's *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in the manner Linda Hutcheon defines it.

As I have discussed in the previous subchapter, the two most basic elements of Hutcheon's definition of parody are complicity and critical distance (1985: 32). Complicity between *The Marriage* and *The Matrix* is evident in the reading I have disclosed throughout chapter 4. In other words, by reading the film as a "narrative in which the *agents* and *action*, and sometimes *the setting* as well, are contrived to signify a second, correlated order . . ." [my italics] I have been substantiating the complicity side of Hutcheon's definition of parody (Abrams, 1971: 4)<sup>24</sup>. Nevertheless, only

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<sup>24</sup> I have placed these terms in italics so as to make the reader aware of the pertinence of Abrams's specific wording to my allegorical reading of *The Matrix* here. On chapter 4 I have disclosed how the agents should be read as tyrants, the action should be read as indicative of Neo's disbelief in the rules of these tyrants, and the setting should be read as a simulation – something that is not real, does not represent the Truth.

complicity would not suffice in reading *The Matrix* as a parody/adaptation of *The Marriage* in Hutcheon's terms. By no means does my approach of the film imply only repetition. In concordance with the manner Hutcheon defines parody, I read *The Matrix* as a work of art that brings repetition with difference – critical difference that is. There is a need to discuss how the film addresses Blake's text. As a 21<sup>st</sup> century production, the reader should expect *The Matrix* to expose its own tendencies. The space I have assigned to analyze this side of Hutcheon's definition is chapter 6. While the complicity side of Hutcheon's definition has been substantiated by my reading of *The Matrix* as allegorical, this last chapter will complement the manner in which the film may be read as a parody/adaptation in light of the critiques and the ironical bouncing present in the film in relation to Blake's text.

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<sup>25</sup> Abrams's definition of allegory and its support to my reading of *The Matrix* have a specific role in my overall approach to the film. It is similar to Genette's role in understanding Blake's presence as commented earlier. Abrams supports this complicit side of my reading that is fundamental for Hutcheon's definition. Abrams's specific wording in defining allegory describes well the manner in which Neo, the agents and the simulation *signify* Blake's *order* as one that is *correlated*.

## Chapter 6 - *The Matrix*: a postmodern parody/adaptation

One element has been constantly recurrent in the way I have approached the three texts this far along my thesis: The pursuit of Truth. *Areopagitica* urges Parliament to end prepublication censorship so that Englishmen may better lead the way in the task of gathering the scattered body of a martyred saint (175). *The Marriage* provokes man to come to the full realization that all deities lie in the human breast (1993: 160). Blake's text exhorts that everything that lives is holy and that man must realize the Truth concerning what is evil (1993: 192). Within the allegorical reading I have until here proposed for *The Matrix*, those awakened, in order to show the rest of the human race the Truth, engage on the mission of defeating the machines that have constructed the Matrix. Hence in all three texts, liberty as pro-gression is directly related to this pursuit of Truth. Nevertheless, what will be addressed here on this sixth chapter is my view that while *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage* present themselves as assertive, confident, uncritical, unhesitating, believing and overall entirely devoted to their revolutionary and pro-gressive ideals, *The Matrix* does not. I will be once again addressing the film, but as some sort of complement to chapters 3 and 4. Being postmodern, *The Matrix* does not present itself entirely devoted to the pursuit of Truth. Here, I will discuss how *The Matrix* is idiosyncratic in relation to the other two texts in terms of its own apparent ideals. In choosing the simulation over the Truth, Cypher presents himself as a character in the film that does not submit to the ideals set forth by *The Matrix*. I will here propose how the reader may understand *The Matrix* as a postmodern parody/adaptation in Hutcheon's terms. I will here discuss how the film distances itself from *The Marriage* critically as well as how irony produces a movement between the complicity side of the relationship and the distant one.

One scholar who has been helpful to my study of the ideals in each of these three texts is Louis Althusser through his *Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses* (1998). Of all the assertions made by

Althusser, what he introduces as the central one has been the most informative: “Ideology interpellates individuals as subjects” (1998: 299). As I have discussed on chapter 2, on *Areopagitica* Milton exposes how he is interpellated by a series of ideologies circulating during his time such as those of the English Revolution, puritanism, anti-catholicism and patriotism. In calling for Truth and liberty *Areopagitica* expresses its historicized ideals as well as its biases and is in tandem with Althusser’s view that “there is no practice except by and in ideology” (1998: 299). Milton’s ideology interpellates him, revealing his status of “always-already” subject (Althusser, 1998: 302). His ideology hails him into the writing of *Areopagitica* and he, once again, makes the “one-hundred-and-eighty degree physical conversion” (Althusser, 1998: 301). The same applies to *The Marriage* and Blake. As visionary and original as Blake is commonly considered to have been, on chapter 3 I have disclosed how he is so, but not in any sort of absolute manner as a less informed reader might presume. Blake is as original as an artist can be, and that certainly does not mean his work is not imbued with ideology. As has been presented, ideologies expressed by the Bible, Boheme, Swedenborg, Milton, dissenters, the Augustan Age, the French and Industrial Revolution, and especially antinomianism all influenced his works. It does not matter if Blake adhered entirely or partially, or simply despised any one of their notions. His works nonetheless re-present his interpellation as a subject. The same may be said about *The Matrix* within the allegorical reading I have discussed on chapter 4. In interpellation, individuals turn into subjects. This becoming a subject, which always implies ideological charging, takes place throughout the entire film through the character of Neo. Agent Smith always tries to imbue ideological principles by referring to him as Mr. Anderson. Morpheus and the other crewmembers are, on the other hand, always inculcating him with the notion that he is the hero by calling him Neo. This constant tug-of-war of hailings may be illustrated by the fight scene, described on chapter 4, between Neo and Agent Smith on the subway station. The moment when Neo assumes his role as the hero, his role as the one, is when he refuses to be called Mr. Anderson. He then refuses to be that subject, to be a constituent of the ideology

that tells him that he is no one who is special. He on the other hand accepts Morpheus's interpellation along with all the ideology implied by it in asserting to Agent Smith: "My name, is Neo" – an anagram for the One.

Since *The Matrix* allegorizes *The Marriage*, the ideologies informative to Blake's text may be read allegorically in the film<sup>26</sup>. Neo would then be interpreted as a figure that accomplishes the historicized ideal of vision and of cleansing one's doors of perception as expressed on *The Marriage*. Althusser's notions of ideology, interpellation and subjectivity are cardinal to my understanding of the relationships of these three texts in terms of their ideals, their pursuit of Truth. They provide my thesis with a sort of reference so as to support my reading and my analysis of the existing ideological "hailings" and interpellations that take place in all three texts<sup>27</sup>. But taking one step further from this allegorical reading, I will now refer to the film as a postmodern parody. To do so, I will be providing some textual evidence. As anticipated in the introduction to this final chapter, I will turn my attention to *The Matrix* through the analysis of Cypher.

Well-played by long-time actor Joe Pantoliano, Cypher is a character that only made his appearance in this first film of *The Matrix* trilogy and is a key component for this fifth chapter. Within the biblical parallel exposed on chapter 4 he would be a Judas-like figure. Cypher becomes crucial to my analysis in that there is only one thing the agents and the machines are more interested in than containing the awakenings: the access codes to the Zion mainframe computer. If the machines and agents get this access to the mainframe computer they will be able to destroy Zion, ending the possibility of future awakenings. It would mean the doom of the last remaining human city after the

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<sup>26</sup> I should observe that allegorize here is in Abrams's sense as cited in chapter 4: "... the agents and action, and sometimes the setting as well, are contrived not only to make sense in themselves, but also to signify a second, correlated order of persons, things, concepts or events" (Abrams, 1971: 4).

<sup>27</sup> Althusser is not central to this sixth chapter. But I should note that without his support, I would not have been able to read the ideals of my three objects of study. Without terms such as ideology, interpellation, and subjectivity, in the specific manner he sees them, I would not have been able to lay this initial groundwork fundamental to the fulfillment of my objective for this sixth chapter. I should also note that these terms have in no way stood as contradictory within the theoretical arsenal I have chosen to support my readings throughout this thesis.

domination of the machines. Cypher does not know the codes; the only ones who have them are the captains of each ship. What Cypher does is betray Neo and all the other members of Morpheus's crew by making a deal with Agent Smith. He purposefully sabotages one of their missions in order to hand Morpheus to the agents. The latter would then be able to force the codes out of him. But what is especially significant to my analysis here is what Cypher wants in exchange for handing in Morpheus. At a restaurant within the Matrix simulation, Cypher and Agent Smith negotiate:

AGENT SMITH. Do we have a deal, Mr. Reagan?

CYPHER. You know, I know this steak doesn't exist. I know that when I put it in my mouth, the Matrix is telling my brain that it is juicy and delicious. After nine years, you know what I realize? Ignorance is bliss.

AGENT SMITH. Then we have a deal?

CYPHER. I don't want to remember nothing. Nothing. You understand? And I want to be rich. You know, someone important, like an actor.

AGENT SMITH. Whatever you want, Mr. Reagan.

CYPHER. Okay. I get my body back into a power plant, you insert me into the Matrix, I'll get you what you want.

AGENT SMITH. Access codes to the Zion mainframe.

CYPHER. No, I told you, I don't know them. I can get you the man who does.

AGENT SMITH. Morpheus.

Significantly, he wants to be an actor when he returns to the Matrix, in other words, someone who works within fiction. Here, Cypher not only wants, but also actually seems desperate to return to the simulation. He does not want to remember anything. He would be glad to have his body go back to being plugged and once again be an energy source for the machines. He could not care less about liberty, pro-gression or Truth – the ideals of *The Matrix* as discussed on chapter 4. Here, it is not yet a

matter of not believing in the Truth. As his comments on the steak shows, he knows that the Matrix is a simulation, but he simply chooses oblivion. He prefers the simulated life of an important actor instead of the harsh reality of the Nebuchadnezzar and Zion. The reader can realize just how desperately Cypher wants the simulation as well as how selfish he is once we realize that the price he is paying to return to the Matrix is very high. He is exchanging the end of the last human civilization for his oblivion towards reality.

He does not subject himself to this pursuit of Truth that most other characters of the film cherish so much. Within the reading I have been making of the film, he is someone who does not want to progress. He even goes to the point of asserting that ignorance is bliss. This line expresses a notion that is, to say the least, nearly inconceivable within the works of Milton or Blake. Tyrants – that which is most abhorred within the universe of each work as exemplified by Catholicism and the religious leaders – may be against the ideals of Truth and progression within each work, but not even they go to the extreme of asserting that ignorance is their ideal. Cypher is a voice who simply disagrees with the most basic assumption that is made by *Areopagitica*, *The Marriage*, and, in the case of *The Matrix*, the rest of Morpheus's crew: that Truth and liberty are the ideal and that they pre-suppose progression. By having a character in the film that prefers the simulation in spite of "knowing the real," the film problematizes its own apparent ideal. It distinguishes itself in questioning the very notion of progression through liberty that the other two texts idealize.

The reader may not agree with this notion that Cypher represents a problematization of the film's ideals under the simple argument that he is the antagonist of the film. Having the "villain" counter the ideals of the "heroes" would only comply and serve to reinforce the conventional reading I have made. It is undeniable that Cypher is treated as an antagonist. Many elements of the narrative make it very difficult for the audience to sympathize with him - the selfishness implied in his exchange mentioned previously being one element. Therefore, under this argument, it might seem as though the

viewer would have a point in questioning the effectiveness of Cypher's role. It may be argued that his ideals would then always be portrayed as the counter ideals within the film. His power for problematization would be compromised under the perspective that he is the antagonist within the more conventional reading of the film. But the film itself is unambiguous in undermining its conventional reading. As I will discuss near the end of this fifth chapter, the film eventually goes to the point of questioning even what Good is and what Evil is. This would be informative because the very label of Cypher as *the* antagonist would be put in risk. But I will not be going into the destabilizations of Good versus Evil for now. Consequently, for the time being, Cypher may still be regarded as the antagonist along the more conventional reading of the film.

While the viewer may regard Cypher as the antagonist for now, there is something the film does for the character who chooses the simulation that is not done by the other texts' "antagonists": It lets him speak<sup>28</sup>. And when Cypher speaks he problematizes the ideals of *The Matrix* as has been exposed on chapter 4. And because he is logical, the whole matter of whether he is a hero or a villain is undermined. We automatically disregard the view that he may be considered the antagonist. The viewer accepts his point simply because when he speaks, he has a point. Though Neo's fulfillment of the Blakean ideal of vision, liberty and pro-gression does lead the reader to a specific interpretation, the audience is given access to Cypher's perspective. Here, Cypher represents more explicitly something that is very much related to Lyotard's conception of metanarratives as articulated in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1984).

Jean-François Lyotard's notion of metanarratives has helped me further understand and expose what Cypher represents within my reading of *The Matrix*. Morpheus is the captain of a ship whose

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<sup>28</sup> The "antagonists" of the other texts here may be the tyrants of each one: In *Areopagitica* it would be Catholicism and popes, for instance. Meanwhile in *The Marriage*, as I have discussed in chapter 3, it would be any imposing figure. In general, it would be those that read the Bible as historical facts and impinge on mankind restrictions that, according to Blake, God does not.



mission is to find the One and the latter is crucial in that he will lead the wars against the machines. Consequently, Morpheus is the personification of the forces that impress upon the citizens of Zion and more specifically his crewmembers the metanarrative that the simulation is not the ideal, they have to be free and that as a result, they have to fight. Morpheus embodies the imposing force behind the metanarrative that tells people what is best, what their fight is. Hence Cypher is someone who stands for postmodernism's tendency to incredulity towards metanarratives (Lyotard, 1984: introduction xxiv). Simply by choosing the simulation Cypher threatens the status of what is best. Here, Cypher has articulated to the audience how he is not agreeing to Morpheus's values.

While Lyotard's notion of metanarrative has helped me understand what Cypher represents within the story, I will not be considering his works on a deeper level. He is not the theoretician whose works have been central to my reading of *The Matrix* as a postmodern parody. His views on metanarratives and postmodernism's tendency to incredulity towards metanarratives are referred to here only tangentially as a support for my reading of Morpheus's role and Cypher's. Referring to Lyotard here simply helps me explain my reading of what these two characters represent within the story's scheme. Thus, because his role within my thesis is very specific and momentary, his greater divergences from Genette, Hutcheon and Althusser are not worth discussing. I should note that here Lyotard's terms complement Althusser's in my thesis. The tug-of-war of the "hailings" mentioned previously when Althusser was discussed is one between metanarratives: Cypher's and Morpheus's<sup>29</sup>.

Not only does Cypher choose the simulation, but he is given voice. Cypher more openly presents problematizations by revealing the inconsistencies of the idealized metanarrative imposed on the other characters throughout the film. While the Matrix is taken by most as an imposition, Cypher shows us how Morpheus's real also has its impositions and therefore questions his promise of freedom.

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<sup>29</sup> When I present Hutcheon I will briefly refer to how Lyotard's notion of metanarrative complements Hutcheon's formulations within the theoretical framework I am constructing.

Cypher certainly would not see Neo's path towards the real as a pro-gression. During a conversation between Neo and Cypher we first realize this assessment he makes of Neo's role as the hero Morpheus keeps inculcating him to be:

CYPHER. You know humm, I know what you're thinking, because right now, I'm thinking the same thing. Actually I, I've been thinking it ever since I got here. Why oh why didn't I take the blue pill? . . . So uh, can I ask you something? Did he tell you why he did it? [Here "he" refers to Morpheus] Why you're here? [Neo nods signaling Morpheus has told him why] Je-sus! What a mind job! So you're here to save the world. What do you say to something like that? A little piece of advice. You see an agent, you do what we do. Run. You run your ass off.

NEO. Thanks for the drink.

CYPHER. Sweet dreams.

These lines support my view that Cypher is highly critical of this real. This is especially clear during the part where he refers to Morpheus's metanarrative as a "mind job". To Cypher, it is as if the illusion is not only the Matrix, but also this real or reality that has been promised. Neo is there "to save the world." Whenever Morpheus or anyone tells Neo he is the one, they are inculcating the ideology that the machines are the villains, that the real of Zion is better, it represents a progression, and that he is the one who is obligated to save the world. Freedom is not the case in Cypher's point of view since the awakened ones are assigned the task of finding the One and obligated to take part of the war that is to come. This role Neo has to fulfill is a metanarrative that has been put before him so that he may do as Morpheus, as the entire Zion society, Hollywood and even the audience expects him to do. Cypher's last words to Neo here are telling: "Sweet dreams." This is ironic since according to Morpheus, Neo is on the real world now. But to Cypher, Neo is embarking in dreams. He is setting out into this fiction that Morpheus is creating for him. Hence Cypher wishes Neo sweet dreams and the film continues on with its ideals, its illusions of a real. It continues with its metanarrative. Cypher knows Neo had not

been convinced and that the latter would continue under this illusion, this dream world of unfulfilled liberty.

One other more moment where Cypher's problematizing point of view is more explicitly expressed and somewhat undeniable even, happens just as he is almost accomplishing what would be his triumph. So far, his sabotage of one of the crew's mission has been successful since Morpheus was under the custody of the agents who were after the access codes. At this point, Trinity, Apoc, Switch and Neo had been ordered by Morpheus to go back to the ship and leave him behind since there were three agents guarding him – one agent would have been enough to kill all of them at this point. Cypher, who had strayed from the group, returns to the Nabuchadnezzar from the Matrix before Trinity, Apoc, Switch, and Neo. When he arrives he shoots and presumably kills the only two members of Morpheus's crew that were on the ship at that time – Dozer and Tank. The bodies of Apoc, Switch, Trinity and Neo are on the Nebuchadnezzar while mentally they are on a simulation of a television repair shop waiting for Tank to establish what they refer to as a hard line onto a telephone so they can return. When Trinity calls the ship to see what is taking Tank so long, Cypher answers. He then discloses his views to Trinity over a cell phone – the means of communication between the simulation and the real – while he starts pulling the plugs of those inserted in the Matrix one by one. Pulling the plugs kills those in the Matrix and it seems his plan was to pull the plug on all the members left: Neo, Trinity, Apoc and Switch. Morpheus would be the only one to still be kept alive since the agents are trying to get the access codes out of him. This is when the audience is informed on Cypher's perspectives.

Cypher opens up to Trinity and starts: "I'm tired, Trinity. I'm tired of this war. I'm tired of fighting. I'm tired of this ship; being cold; eating the same Goddamn goop everyday. But most of all, I'm tired of that jack-off and all of his bullshit." Here Cypher is referring to Morpheus. He is telling Trinity how tired he is of having to deal with the impositions of the real that Morpheus promised him when he was given the choice of which pill to take. Cypher then jumps onto Morpheus who is lying

plugged and starts addressing him mockingly: “Surprise asshole! I bet you never saw this coming, did you? God, I wish I could be there when they break you. I wish I could walk in just when it happens. So right then, you'd know it was me.” As I mentioned, Morpheus is physically on the Nebuchadnezzar with Cypher, as are all the other crewmembers. But within the simulation he is under the custody of the agents since Cypher’s sabotage of the crew’s mission is working out at this point. When Cypher says he wishes he could walk in when the agents break him he is referring to the moment when the agents get the access codes to Zion’s mainframe out of Morpheus in the Matrix. Trinity now realizes what Cypher has done and responds accusingly: “You gave them Morpheus.” Cypher then seems to get angry and defends himself, “He lied to us Trinity. He tricked us.” Speaking to Morpheus again while Trinity listens over the cell phone, he says: “If you'd have told us the truth, we would've told you to shove that red pill right up your ass.” Trinity then tries to justify Morpheus and her wording is very appropriate here, “That's not *true*, Cypher, he set us *free* [my italics].” Then the moment comes when Cypher is able to express himself explicitly as to how he feels about the metanarrative that has been impressed onto him. With a depressing tone he exposes the inconsistencies within Morpheus’s metanarrative. He asks Trinity: “Free? You call this free? All I do is what he tells me to do. If I got to choose between that, and the Matrix, I choose the Matrix.” Here Cypher effectively questions the notion of freedom promised to him when he was to choose between the blue pill and the red one.

As this moment shows, a deeper relationship between Cypher and Lyotard’s theory may be pursued. Within his theoretical arsenal, Lyotard suggests the substitution of metanarratives for petit narratives. But in doing so, he creates a metanarrative under which all is explained or must somehow answer to. That is what Cypher does. He substitutes Morpheus’s metanarrative, morality and hierarchy for the machines’ where he is not a sort of soldier that must answer to a captain as in Zion, but he is a battery that must serve as energy supply within the hierarchy and the morality standards of the machines. Allegorically, his character substitutes one metanarrative for another. This substitution is

implied in Lyotard's work. The reason why I have not pursued this further is simply because it would not be in any way contributive to the reading I make of *The Matrix* as the postmodern parody I see it to be. Nonetheless this possibility should not pass unnoted.

In choosing the Matrix simulation, Cypher shows how he could not care less about the war between the machines and humans; nonetheless within Morpheus's metanarrative he would be forced to fight in it. He would have to submit to a hierarchy where he does what Morpheus, as the captain, literally orders him to do. After Cypher problematizes Trinity's statement that Morpheus has set them free, she continues trying to argue: "The Matrix isn't real." In a sense Trinity has a point. The Matrix is a construct, a simulation. But Cypher once again problematizes the dichotomy, real versus simulation by referring to it in another sense. He questions how real her real is by telling her: "I disagree, Trinity. I think the Matrix could be more real than this world. All I do is pull the plug here. But there, you have to watch Apoc die." He then pulls the plug and Trinity in fact watches Apoc die. So it does seem as though, in relation to the event of Apoc's death for example, this simulation program called the Matrix has been more real than the so-called reality of the Nebuchadnezzar. Since she had to "watch Apoc die," his death was more real to Trinity within the "simulation" program than it was to Cypher who merely pulled the plug without actually witnessing the event of Apoc's demise. Apoc's plugged body on the ship did not even move as he died – it just continued as it was when Apoc was alive: motionless with his eyes shut. After this, Cypher explains to Trinity over the cell phone how he has made a deal with the agents where they are going to reinsert his body back into the simulation. As he is explaining this to Trinity he then kills Switch in the same manner he just killed Apoc. The conversation between Trinity and Cypher over the cell phone continues as he then approaches Neo. Just as Cypher is going to pull the plug and kill Neo, Tank, the member of Morpheus's crew aboard the Nebuchadnezzar who had been shot, is trying to stand up. He had not quite been killed by Cypher and as he struggles to get up, he

shoots and kills Cypher before the latter is able to pull the plug on Neo. Tank then reestablishes a hard line between the Matrix and the ship bringing Trinity and Neo back mentally.

Since *The Matrix* allegorizes *The Marriage*, the ideologies informative to Blake's text may be attributed to the film. Neo has here been read as a figure that allegorically accomplishes the historicized ideal of vision expressed on *The Marriage*. But being allegorical certainly does not *necessarily* imply being univocal in relation to its influences. Moreover, *The Matrix* could not be referred to as "just" an allegory. As I have been mentioning since my opening paragraph, in reading *The Matrix* I could not refrain from approaching it as more than "just" an allegory, and will propose it be read as a *postmodern* parody. This is the ultimate goal of this fifth chapter.

According to Hutcheon, postmodernism always implies a paradox of "complicity and critique, of reflexivity and historicity, that at once inscribes and subverts the conventions and ideologies of the dominant cultural and social forces of the twentieth-century western world" (1989: 11). *The Matrix* is postmodern because it inscribes ideology through the allegorical reading of Neo as the one who accomplishes the Blakean ideal; and subverts it through the character of Cypher who questions it or exposes the ideological inconsistencies behind it. Cypher problematizes the notion that Neo is free once he is out of the Matrix, just as I have questioned the liberty Blake proposes on chapter 3. The difference between *Areopagitica*, *The Marriage* and *The Matrix* is that the latter manifests this questioning. The film subverts the ideology it itself inscribes within the reading I have been proposing. As I have mentioned earlier in this chapter, the viewer may consider Cypher the antagonist and by that reasoning undermine his problematization. But even if he is considered the antagonist, the sound point he makes undermines his antagonism. Cypher's logic is undeniable and the viewer's inability to disregard it makes the "fact" that this logic comes from the antagonist of the narrative a negligible one. Moreover, postmodernism is a "questioning of commonly accepted values of our culture (closure, teleology, and subjectivity), a questioning that is totally dependent upon that which it interrogates" (Hutcheon 1988:

42). Cypher's questioning of the liberty Morpheus proposes is "totally dependent" on that liberty. In addition, Cypher's questioning of Neo's *subjectivity* and his interpellation as the One relies on Morpheus's ideological inculcations. The subtle frailty of the closure of Morpheus's metanarrative allows Cypher to find and express inconsistencies within it.

In characterizing the postmodern further, Hutcheon continues to describe what I have read in *The Matrix*. She tells us: "However, I would argue not only that postmodernism, like modernism, also retains its own contradictions, but also that it foregrounds them to such an extent that they become the very defining characteristics of the entire cultural phenomenon we label with that name" (1988: 43). This is how the film is idiosyncratic in relation to *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage*. The explicit foregrounding of the inconsistencies that is made by Cypher is what considerably accounts for the reading of *The Matrix* as postmodern. Hutcheon proceeds, "The postmodern is in no way absolutist . . . What it does say is that there are all kinds of orders and systems in our world – *and* that we create them all . . . They do not exist 'out there', fixed, given, universal, eternal; they are human constructs in history" (1988: 43). *The Matrix* in no way manifests the notion that Cypher has expressed the Truth. What it does is destabilize the notion that Morpheus has. The film presents the possibilities of different truths and different perspectives. The perspectives of the film as a whole are not absolutist they are all "created" – they are "human constructs in history." Then, in discussing this vulnerability of the orders and systems in our world, Hutcheon asserts: "This does not make them any less necessary or desirable. It does, however, as we have seen, condition their 'truth' value. The local, the limited, the temporary, the provisional are what define postmodern 'truth' . . . The point is not exactly that the world is meaningless . . . but that any meaning that exists is of our own creation" (1988: 43). Thus, where and when there is meaning, there will be construction. What there is not in postmodernism is the conception

of one, single, exclusive, and all-encompassing Truth<sup>30</sup>. Readings are always already (mis)readings. While Milton's and Blake's texts do not voice this, *The Matrix*, within Hutcheon's conception of the postmodern, does so through Cypher. So while the narrative does comply with the ideology it inscribes of freedom, True, real, better and pro-gression, it also paradoxically criticizes it through the character of Cypher and the truth he foregrounds. This doubleness within postmodernism as proposed by Hutcheon is what I have found to be most consistent with my reading of *The Matrix* not only as postmodern, but as a postmodern parody/adaptation of *The Marriage*.

In relation to postmodernism and its theoreticians, anyone who has watched the film may be wondering why Jean Baudrillard has not been mentioned in this thesis until here; especially since I have been discussing the film with the aid of postmodernist assumptions. Because the film presents a direct allusion to this theoretician, and to his work, I feel as though I could not refrain from responding to what extent he might have been contributive to my reading of the film. Baudrillard is referred to when we see that Neo keeps one of his programs in a hollowed-out copy of his *Simulation and Simulacra* (1994). Moreover, the chapter called "On Nihilism" is displaced from the back of the book over to the middle, where Neo keeps the program. Jean Baudrillard has not been a reference because he is very radical in his view of life in postmodernity as hyperreality, simulation and simulacra. To him, the map entirely precedes the territory (1994: 1). There is a precession of simulacra and it engenders the territory and, significantly here, there is no room for critique on postmodern works. I feel as though Baudrillard's conception is related to the power of the Matrix, the power of the illusion. His view of the precedence of the map is illustrative to the precedence of the simulation in the lives of those in the Matrix. Nonetheless, the readings I have been proposing with Hutcheon's theoretical conceptions

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<sup>30</sup> Here, in citing Hutcheon's view that the local, the limited, the temporary, the provisional are what define postmodern 'truth' I realize that Hutcheon is approximating to Lyotard's petit narratives. Hutcheon is in tandem with Lyotard to the point where any meaning is a local creation and construction.



actually question the power of the simulation - the absolute preeminence of the map. I read the film as a postmodern cultural construct, more in the lines Hutcheon defines it.

In referring to Hutcheon's notion of parody in order to support my reading of the relationship between *Areopagitica* and *The Marriage* I have already articulated some of her formulations. Her first comment that is significant here regards the consonance between postmodern and parody. According to Hutcheon, "Parody is a perfect postmodern form, in some senses, for it paradoxically both incorporates and challenges that which it parodies" (1988: 11). So the doubleness of complicity and critique or repetition with difference is fundamental to the proposition that *The Matrix* is a postmodern parody/adaptation for *The Marriage*. Though I have asserted how the allegorical reading implies complicity and that Cypher implies critique in the narrative, I have not discussed the manner in which irony is significant here. As discussed in chapter 4, irony has a very specific role in the relationship between a text and its parody. I should cite Hutcheon again. In discussing the fundamental role played by irony in a parodic relationship, she asserts, "This irony can be playful as well as belittling; it can be critically constructive as well as destructive. The pleasure in parody's irony comes not from humor in particular, but from the degree of engagement of the reader in the intertextual 'bouncing' . . . between complicity and distance" (1985: 32). So as discussed previously, the irony in a parodic relationship must suggest a movement between the more complicit and the more critical facets of the established relationship. While in *The Marriage* irony was suggested by the use Blake makes of words such as Devil and hell, in *The Matrix* irony is suggested in Neo's accomplishment of the ideal implicated in the movie. The ideal is for Neo to cleanse his senses, develop his disbelief to the point where the rules do not apply to him. In this ultimate cleansing state, his disbelief in the simulation would be so strong that he would not die in the real world if he died in the Matrix – as Neo's resurrection scene shows him do. Once this ideal is accomplished he would see the Truth; he would see things as they really are in the Matrix – computer codes.

Again, the reading that is complicit to Blake's text is the allegorical one. Critical distance is produced when one considers Cypher's comments on what best is. Neo's accomplishment of the ideal that is allegorically read in *The Marriage* and that is also criticized by Cypher implies a pro-gression, a movement. Here Hutcheon's terms in defining postmodernism are helpful. According to her, postmodernism "takes the form of self conscious, self contradictory, selfundermining statement. It is rather like saying something whilst at the same time putting inverted commas around what is being said. The effect is to highlight, or 'highlight,' and to subvert, or to 'subvert,' and the mode is therefore a 'knowing' and an ironic - or even 'ironic' - one" (1989: 1). Then, the movement or pro-gression that Neo makes can be said to be ironic in that it implies a pro-gression at the same time that it implies a "pro-gression". Every time Neo manifests a development in his disbelief, irony is produced because at the same time that this movement implies a pro-gression in one sense, in another it implies a "pro-gression". Neo's accomplishment would only be viewed as the ideal within the allegorical reading of *The Matrix*. Within Cypher's metanarrative, the event of Neo's accomplishment is actually the counter-ideal<sup>31</sup>.

But Cypher is not the only character in the film to problematize the ideologies imposed by Morpheus's metanarrative. Consequently, the film is postmodern in Hutcheon's terms, in more ways than one. I have anticipated but not yet discussed that the very view of Cypher as an antagonist may be destabilized. The character that articulates this is Agent Smith. In chapter 4, I have described the scene where Trinity and Neo rescued a nearly comatose Morpheus in a miraculous manner, echoing the resurrection on the Biblical story of Lazarus. In this fifth chapter, this moment of the film has also been referred to when I mentioned that Morpheus was under the custody of the agents because they wanted to get the access codes to Zion's mainframe computer. Before Trinity and Neo ignored Morpheus's

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<sup>31</sup> Progression unhyphenated is not a possibility here because even the allegorical Blakean reading does not simply imply a progression, an improvement. Pro-gression occurs in the allegorical reading and it refers to the reading of Neo's **movement** under Cypher's metanarrative.

orders by plugging back into the Matrix to save him in their suicide mission, Agent Smith asked to be alone with Morpheus. This is the moment pertaining to my analysis here. This is when Agent Smith has the opportunity to disclose to Morpheus and the audience his views, his perspective on things. In doing so, he denaturalizes the cultural dichotomy of Good versus Evil, corroborating the view of the film as postmodern – as Hutcheon defines it. Morpheus has been beaten up severely under Agent Smith's custody. As Morpheus is sitting down chained and just barely conscious, Agent Smith opens up:

I'd like to share a revelation that I've had, during my time here. It came to me, when I tried to classify your species. I realized that you're not actually mammals. Every mammal on this planet instinctively develops a natural equilibrium with the surrounding environment but you humans do not. You move to an area and you multiply and multiply until every natural resource is consumed. The only way you can survive is to spread to another area. There is another organism on this planet that follows the same pattern. Do you know what it is? A virus. Human beings are a disease, a cancer of this planet. You're a plague and we, are the cure.

While it is true here that Agent Smith never uses the term good and evil in relation to his own species (the machines) and to Morpheus's (the humans); it is also true he might as well have. Agent Smith makes a very good point of how the common ground naturalized on the film's metanarrative that humans represent good while the machines stand for evil is something entirely relative. Because of a behavior trait, it is logical that we be perceived as a virus within his rationale. If so, the machines, which are trying to destroy or control the humans, would consequently be the cure. In other words, humans would be evil while the machines good.

Biologically speaking, considering our other traits as species, whether or not humans are in fact more similar to viruses in contrast to mammals is not the case. What is important is that the film grants

voice to a different perspective. The film replaces our naturalized metanarrative in favor of another's.<sup>32</sup> Who is to say what trait is the determining one? The film brings light to the viewpoint of the machines and articulates a logic under which we humans are taken as the evil whereas the machines are good. If this perspective were to orient the reading of the entire film, a whole new interpretation of *The Matrix* would effectively present itself. In it, Cypher would be the heroic figure. He would be the one who tried to destroy humans, the virus. He would be the visionary who was able to see and express the inconsistencies of the metanarrative. But within this point of view, good would fail and evil would ultimately win on *The Matrix*. It then might even be interpreted as tragic, for humans. Earlier, I mentioned that my reading of Cypher as a problematizing figure may be compromised by the "fact" that he is the antagonist. By opposing the protagonists, the antagonist's view would then only serve to reinforce the ideals of the latter. Though I proceeded to discuss without the need to question Cypher's role as this antagonist, here Agent Smith's arguments within the film denaturalize the very notion of Cypher as such. Hence, the denaturalization Cypher articulates is supported and corroborated by another one made by Agent Smith. The latter denaturalizes a most basic cultural assumption in the human versus machine dichotomy: that the former is good while the latter is evil. Once again, postmodernism here is not to suggest one Truth over another. The film articulates these perspectives through the characters of Cypher and Agent Smith, but this is not to be pursued to the point of affirming that *The Matrix* is in fact tragic, closed. This would mean the substitution of one "martyred saint" for another (175). *The Matrix* is postmodern along the lines of Hutcheon's work in

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<sup>32</sup> Here we come to a point where Lyotard's concepts of metanarratives and incredulity towards metanarratives complement Hutcheon's in my thesis. The concept of metanarratives helps the reader understand what I am referring to when I assert that Cypher presents inconsistencies. This complements Hutcheon's system and is concordant to it because the latter also acknowledges the postmodern tendency to question its own notions, its own assumptions and cultural values (1988: 42). Lyotard is important because he gives this set of notions or assumptions a name: metanarrative. By referring to it as metanarrative and consequently including Lyotard in my work, I have the benefit of working with his support that serves as a reference for my readings.

foregrounding inconsistencies, in destabilizing ideologies and revealing how that which seems natural is in fact cultural.

This binary opposition between good and evil is especially appropriate for my purposes here in that all three works address it creatively. As I have discussed in chapter 2, *Areopagitica* articulates how good or virtue are only possible through the very prospect of evil. He who can abstain is “the true wayfaring Christian” (158). What Milton does is attribute a purpose to Evil. Blake on *The Marriage* makes a radical statement as to what evil is. Because of the reading he makes of the Bible and notably of Jesus, he is led to argue that all those that impose on man are evil - especially the religious leaders who maintain an alliance to the outdated Mosaic Law. Good are those that pursue their energies and rebel against orthodoxy. In their creative approaches to this binary opposition, each of these two texts suggests metanarratives. *The Matrix* does the same, but it distinguishes itself in its problematizing of its own metanarrative, as it is articulated by the characters of Cypher and Agent Smith. Here lies the difference that has led me to consider it postmodern as Hutcheon defines it.

7 – Figures

Fig. 1

*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: title plate

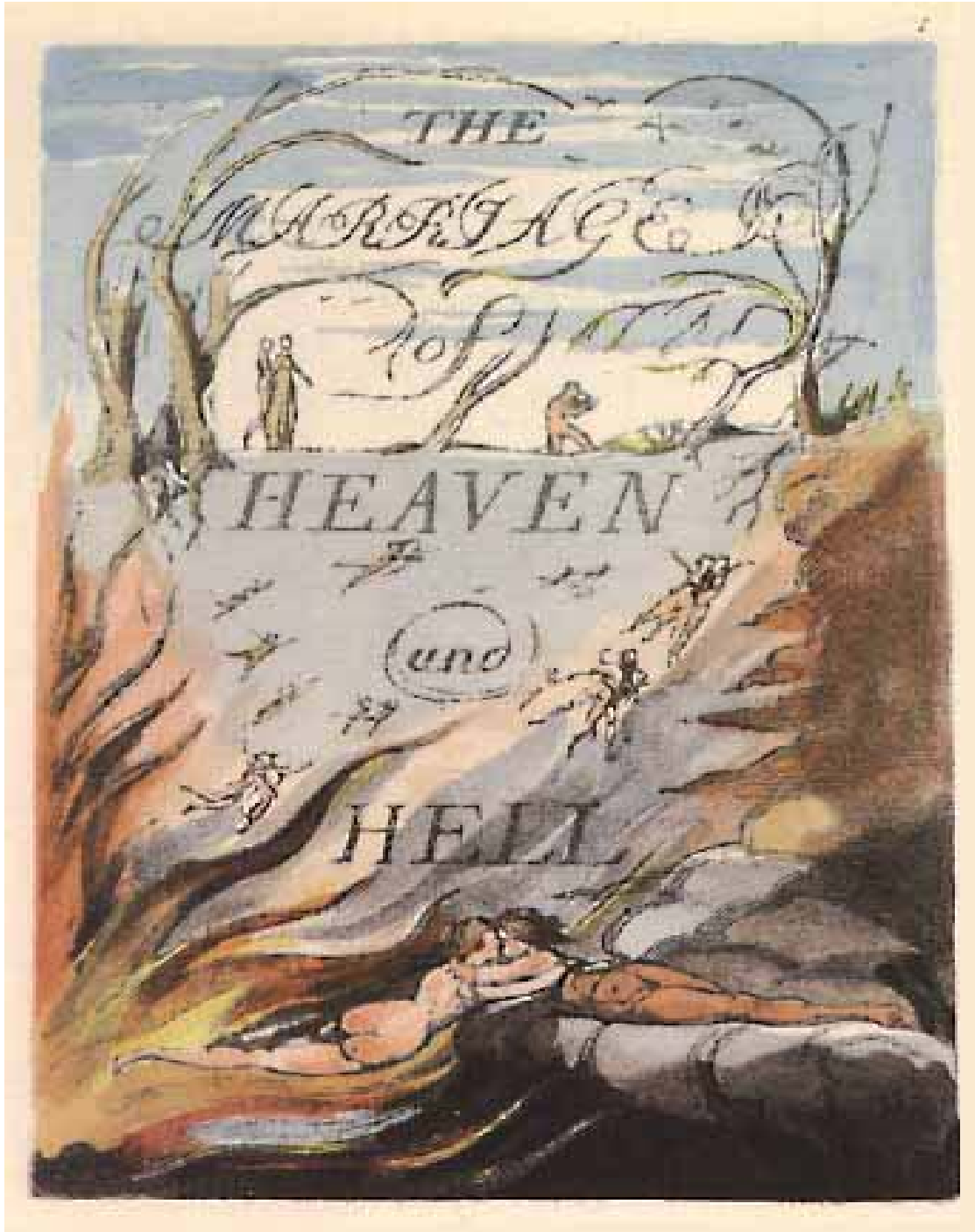


Fig. II  
The Giants of sensual existence who seem to live in chains



The Giants who formed this world into its sensual existence and now seem to live in it in chains are in truth, the causes of its life & the sources of all activity, but the chains are, the cunning of weak and tame minds, which have power to resist energy, according to the proverb, the weak in courage is strong in cunning. Thus one portion of being, is the Prolific, the other, the Devouring; to the devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains, but it is not so he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole.

But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea received the excess of his delights.

Some will say, Is not God alone the Prolific? I answer, God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men.

These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries

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