

# Blake, Young, and the Poetics of the Composite Page

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**ABSTRACT** This essay analyzes William Blake’s “composite art,” a practice that staged the separation of text and illustration, tracing his successive experiments with Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts*, from the extra-illustrated volumes of 537 watercolors to the illustrated edition published by Richard Edwards in 1797 and the recycling of proofs in *Vala or The Four Zoas*. The shifting relationship between letterpress and illustration in the extra-illustrated volume and the 1797 edition, and the function of proofs as units of composition, shed light on the archaeology of bookmaking and its impact on the composition of the manuscript. **KEYWORDS:** Blake and extra-illustration; Blake’s practices of composition and revision; Blake’s mythic poems; Christ as Man of Sorrows; non-sequential composition

when he revivd the clothes  
Were rotted by the winds the books remaind still unconsumd  
Still to be written & interleavd with brass & iron & gold  
William Blake, *Vala or The Four Zoas*, 71<sup>1</sup>

☞ **IN HIS PROSPECTUS OF 1793**, Blake advocated “a method of Printing both Letter-press and Engraving in a style more ornamental, uniform, and grand, than any

1. Transcribed in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, with commentary by Harold Bloom, newly rev. ed. (Berkeley, Calif., 1982), 348–49. Hereafter cited as E. References to the *Vala* manuscript will hereafter be given as *Vala* followed by the night number and the page number, using the page numbering established by the British Museum. The manuscript is now at the British Library, Add. MS 39764, catalogued under the revised title *The Four Zoas*. For a description of the manuscript, see G. E. Bentley Jr., *Vala; or, The Four Zoas: A Facsimile of the Manuscript, a Transcript of the Poem, and a Study of Its Growth and Significance* (Oxford, 1963), 193–96. Erdman follows an alternative pagination of the manuscript; see E, 818 and “*The Four Zoas*” by William Blake: *A Photographic Facsimile of the Manuscript with Commentary on the Illuminations*, ed. Cettina Tramontano Magno and David V. Erdman (Lewisburg, Pa., 1987), 16.

before discovered [...] a method of Printing which combines the Painter and the Poet” (E, 692). The perplexing form of Blake’s books comes through in critics’ repeated attempts to understand how his art “intertwined” painting and poetry “so closely in his compositions, that they cannot well be separated,” as Allan Cunningham argues. Northrop Frye discusses his “radical form of mixed art,” Jean Hagstrum calls it “composite art,” and W. J. T. Mitchell thinks it was “not . . . an indissoluble unity, but an interaction between two vigorously independent modes of expression.”<sup>2</sup> Although Blake saw his illuminated books as expressing a “uniform” material practice and aesthetic, critics, by positing a “composite art,” attempt to recompose Blake’s relief-etched books after they have been dissected and refracted through divisions of knowledge defined by a disciplining and separation of the senses. What Mike Goode has termed their “pragmatics of fragmentation” depends on the historical configuration of disciplines and aesthetic domains that have held text and image apart in different domains of practice.<sup>3</sup> Yet taking “composite art” literally helps us understand a book-making practice that brings together on the same page letterpress and engraving pulled in different printing sessions, unlike Blake’s adoption of relief etching as an attempt to unify writing and designs using the same medium and mode of production. In the mid-1790s Blake worked on two book projects that emphasized the separation of painter from poet, customizing copies of Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* and Thomas Gray’s *Poems* through the practice of extra-illustration, which takes a published work and augments it with extraneous materials, in this case by disbinding the book’s gatherings and mounting the letterpress onto wider pages to allow room for illustrating them in the expanded margins. This subversion of the bibliographic codes of commercially printed books sheds light on Blake’s work as a “composite artist.”<sup>4</sup> Blake’s *Night Thoughts* laboratory explores the potential of letterpress printing and the changing possibilities of the book and the composite page. In this essay, I will rematerialize the notion of Blake’s “composite art,” paying attention to the materials and practices involved in his engagement with *Night Thoughts* and in that “radical form of mixed art,” the manuscript of *Vala or The Four Zoas*.

Blake’s three experiments with Edward Young’s *Night Thoughts* involved an act of extra-illustration that expanded the book from quarto to folio; the subsequent selection of forty-three designs, and the compression and remediation of the extra-illustrated page in the illustrated edition published in 1797; and finally, the recycling

2. Allan Cunningham, *The Lives of the Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*, 2nd ed., 6 vols. (London, 1830–33), 1:148; Northrop Frye, “Poetry and Design in William Blake,” *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 10 (1951): 35–42 at 38; Jean Hagstrum, *William Blake, Poet and Painter: An Introduction to the Illuminated Verse* (Chicago, 1964), 23–71; W. J. T. Mitchell, *Blake’s Composite Art* (Chicago, 1978), 9.

3. Simon Shaw-Miller makes a similar point about the separation of music from art in “Disciplining the Senses,” in *Art, History and the Senses*, ed. Patrizia di Bello and Gabriel Koureas (Farnham, U.K., 2010), xvii; Mike Goode, “The Joy of Looking: What Blake’s Pictures Want,” *Representations* 119, no. 1 (Summer 2012): 1–36 at 5.

4. Hagstrum, *William Blake, Poet and Painter*, 71.

of proofs in the manuscript of *Vala or The Four Zoas*. In these three experiments, the composite page functions as a layered surface of inscription. Each experiment explores how different materials from different sources, processes of composition, and modes of production come together in a form that tests the quality, expressive possibilities, and limits of paper. In the extra-illustrated book, the text is made visible through a hole cut into the surface of the page; the engraved edition opens volumetric illusions on the surface of the page; and the proof page used for the *Vala* manuscript obstructs the illustration's three-dimensional illusions with a blank rectangle that reminds us that paper is a flat medium.<sup>5</sup>

The first experiment consists of an act of extra-illustration prompted by a commission to illustrate Edward Young's *Night Thoughts* for the publisher Richard Edwards. Assembling the extra-illustrated book involved disbinding or cutting out the pages of text from first and second editions of *Night Thoughts* (1742–45).<sup>6</sup> In June 1796 Joseph Farington entered a conversation about Blake's work in his diary:

Blake has undertaken to make designs to encircle the letterpress of each page of "Youngs night thoughts." Edwards, the Bookseller of Bond Street employs him, and has had the letter press of each page laid down on a large half sheet of paper. There are abt. 900 pages [. . .] Fuseli understands that Edwards proposes to select abt. 200 from the whole and to have that number engraved as decorations for a new edition.<sup>7</sup>

5. Donald Ault notes that "Blake invokes the conventions of non-perspectival flatness to preclude the possibility of the figures escaping from the surface of the page." He explains that page 107 "celebrates the containment of the page and invites us to read the miniaturized figures in some kind of a sequence," and contrasts this with page 109, where the figure's attempt to break free of the page ends up confirming its dimensions, "yet the way her arms point so decisively upward, conforming to the vertical edges that enclose them, reaffirms the figure's imprisonment within the two-dimensional space of the page." "A Postscript on *The Four Zoas* as a Visual Text," afterword to *Narrative Unbound: Re-visioning William Blake's "The Four Zoas"* (Barrytown, N.Y., 1987), 471–72.

6. 1929,0713.1-270, Department of Prints and Drawings, British Museum (hereafter BM); digital copies of the watercolors are available through [https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection\\_online/search.aspx](https://www.britishmuseum.org/research/collection_online/search.aspx). The watercolors are catalogued in *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's "Night Thoughts,"* ed. John E. Grant, Edward J. Rose, Michael J. Tolley, and David V. Erdman, 2 vols. (Oxford, 1980), 1:10 and 88nn29–30, on the use of "atlas sized" Whatman paper. Blake used first editions of *Night Thoughts* for the first and third nights, for which he also had second editions; see Thomas Helmstadter, "Blake's *Night Thoughts*: Interpretations of Edward Young," *Texas Studies in Language and Literature* 12 (1970): 27–54; and Henry Pettit, *A Bibliography of Young's "Night Thoughts"* (Boulder, Colo., 1954), 16, 22 (copies 1b and 3c).

7. Entry for June 24, 1796, *The Diary of Joseph Farington*, ed. Kenneth Garlick and Angus Macintyre, 17 vols. (New Haven, Conn., 1978–98), 2:589; see also *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's Night Thoughts*, ed. Grant et al., 4; G. E. Bentley Jr., *Blake Records*, 2nd ed. (New Haven, Conn., 2004), 69–71.

Having “inserted the letterpress close cut [. . .] into Large Margins making a folio size,”<sup>8</sup> as Ann Flaxman documented, the publisher altered the bibliographical codes of the book. The resulting composite pages enabled Blake to read the text through both sides of the new host page and produce 537 watercolor illustrations in the newly expanded margins.

As a working copy prepared by the publisher, the extra-illustrated *Night Thoughts* is a transitional object, a book extended to add materials for the production of another. The printed text becomes a support for manuscript intervention. Unlike a copy of a work used by a textual editor, whose interleaved annotations work toward establishing the text *ne varietur*, the extra-illustrated *Night Thoughts* registers Blake’s dynamic relationship with letterpress composition. As an annotator, Blake “challenge[d] the formal configurations of the books he was reading” and “coopt[ed] the blank spaces left in conventionally printed books,” argues Jason Snart.<sup>9</sup> Extra-illustration expands the limits of the book, enhances the space of readerly intervention, and enshrines readers’ transgressions in the material form of the book. Crosses and asterisks mark the specific lines illustrated in the extra-illustrated edition of *Night Thoughts*, following the discipline of annotation recommended in Johann Caspar Lavater’s *Aphorisms on Man*, the first book Blake is known to have annotated.<sup>10</sup> Yet the annotator’s marks can express tensions at the heart of the altered book. Asterisks invert the process of amplification of the illustrated page, interrupt the reading, and reduce the text to a series of aphorisms or captions, as each asterisk singles out a specific portion of letterpress as a part standing for the whole. This act of reading reflects the practice of commonplacing and anthologization captured by the publication of *The Beauties of Dr Young’s Night Thoughts* (1769),<sup>11</sup> and satirized in Blake’s manuscript *An Island on the Moon* (E, 456), rather than the expansive reading advocated by Samuel Johnson, who argued that “particular lines are not to be regarded; the power is in the whole.”<sup>12</sup> As the annotator’s mark interrupts the textual continuum, it calls attention to the instability of the text on the page. While the asterisk

8. Ann Flaxman, March 16, 1796, Flaxman Papers, Add. MS 39780, fol. 212r–v, British Library.

9. Jason Snart, *The Torn Book: UnReading William Blake’s Marginalia* (Selinsgrove, Pa., 2006), 21, 143.

10. In the extra-illustrated book, the page marking became a consistent practice beginning with Night II.

11. *The Beauties of Dr Young’s Night Thoughts* (London, 1769). See also *A Collection of Moral and Sacred Poems, publish’d by John Wesley*, vol. 2 (Bristol, U.K., 1770); and *The Beauties of Milton, Thomson, Young* (London, 1783). Morton Paley argues that Young offered “a storehouse of familiar sentiments, expressions, and attitudes which suited Blake’s purposes”; “Blake’s *Night Thoughts*: An Exploration of the Fallen World,” in *William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon*, ed. Alvin H. Rosenfeld (Providence, R.I., 1969), 131–57 at 135.

12. Samuel Johnson, “Young,” *Prefaces, Biographical and Critical, to the Works of the English Poets*, 10 vols. (London, 1779–81), 10:108.

anchors the letterpress to its surround illustration, it also emphasizes a break in the material continuum of the original page, cut off from its gathering of leaves.

Paper was crucial to Blake's artistic practice: in his prospectus to the public he proudly claimed that his illuminated books were printed "on the most beautiful wove paper that could be procured" (E, 693). Blake's extra-illustrated page combines two different kinds of paper. A red ink rectangle traced around the text marks the meeting point of letterpress and surrounding illustration, calling attention to their different paper supports. Mounting the thin laid paper used for the letterpress on Whatman's wove paper exhibits the process of artistic appropriation as a tension between the original book and its altered margin. With its more precious type of paper, the new margin comes across as the more precious part of the book, a mechanically reproduced commercial object available in identical multiples now embellished by the unique intervention of the hand of the artist. The text windows are cut in the same place on each page, a repetitive feature that should stabilize the book. Yet their off-center position subtly subverts the symmetry of the page layout. Turning the page emphasizes the instability of the text, for the letterpress bleeds through the paper, showing the characters printed on the other side and emphasizing the thinner quality of the inlaid paper and the hole cut through the wider page surrounding it. Seeing the letterpress pasted on the wider folio, leafing through the book, constantly reminds the reader of its material properties as an altered form and therefore calls into question the stability and homogeneity associated with the codex.

The disruption of the layout is emphasized by the visual field generated by the composite page. In some cases, the composition frames the page of text, suggesting the volume of the inlaid page, as when figures sleep on its upper margin,<sup>13</sup> or when their strides through the page invite the reader to follow their elongated steps into the margin of the text.<sup>14</sup> However, many designs refuse to function as docile margins. Instead of framing the letterpress or emphasizing the book form, bodies seem to vie with the text for the center of the page, subverting its function as a support for reading. A different kind of emphasis is produced in pages where Blake's design seems to continue behind the overlaid letterpress, suggesting that it is superimposed on the scene that it partially hides from view, an illusion that enhances the impression of the three-dimensional quality of the page. By contrast, when such interrupted compositions materialize on the versos, they create a fictional account of their origin that

13. See Blake's watercolor illustrations to *Night I*, pp. 3 and 9 (BM, 1929,0713.5 and 1929,0713.8). All references to the watercolors will identify the pages of this copy as NT followed by the night and page number, followed in parentheses by BM and folio numbers. For the corresponding engravings, see *The Complaint, and the Consolation; or, Night Thoughts, by Edward Young* (London, 1797), 1, 4, hereafter abbreviated as NT 1797, available at <http://blakearchive.org/work/bb515>.

14. On the metaleptic effects of Blake's designs, see Irene Chayes, "Picture and Page, Reader and Viewer in Blake's *Night Thoughts* Illustrations," *Studies in Romanticism* 30 (Fall 1991): 439–71.

inverts the order of composition, suggesting the priority of the design over the composition of the page and the defacement of the image, as if a window had been cut through it to make space for the letterpress pasted to the other side of the page. The indocility at the center of the page suggests the conflict between centering the design and the page of letterpress within the wider extra-illustrated page. This conflict between the composition of the watercolor and the letterpress calls attention to the page as a material composite and to the different conventions governing page layout in different paper arts.

In the second experiment, the extra-illustrated page is remediated in the illustrated edition of *Night Thoughts* published by Richard Edwards in 1797, which includes the first four nights with forty-three engravings chosen from Blake's watercolor extra-illustrations.<sup>15</sup> The choice of a tighter leading for the letterpress made it possible to fit more lines of text on the page. This new typographical layout broke the connection made between asterisked lines and their surrounding illustration in the extra-illustrated edition, because some of the illustrations lost their anchors as the corresponding lines of text moved to the previous page, no longer next to the illustration designed to refer to them.<sup>16</sup> This referential shift is part of the work's rearticulation of text and image in the material production of the printed page. Traces of the disanchoring of the letterpress from the illustration can be perceived at the level of the layout of the page. In the 1797 edition, the composite page was produced in two separate printing sessions, which required two acts of registration to align the text within the text frame and the illustration, one on each side of the sheet.<sup>17</sup> Traces of irregularities in the registration of the engraving,<sup>18</sup> in the alignment of the text with the text frame,<sup>19</sup> and in the size and positioning of the text on the page<sup>20</sup> document the delicate operations involved in combining the two printing processes, and the

15. G. E. Bentley Jr., *Blake Books* (Oxford, 1977), 636–47.

16. Discrepancies in the use of asterisks in the extra-illustrated and published edition are noted in Roger R. Easson and Robert N. Essick, *William Blake, Book Illustrator: A Bibliography and Catalogue of the Commercial Engravings*, 2 vols. (Normal, Ill., 1972–79), 1:13–28.

17. Easson and Essick argue that the text was printed first; *William Blake, Book Illustrator*, 1:13–14. See also Joseph Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (Princeton, N.J., 1993), 13–14. For evidence of an unillustrated state, see G. E. Bentley Jr., “Young's *Night Thoughts* (London: R. Edwards, 1797): A New Unillustrated State,” *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 14, no. 1 (Summer 1980): 34–35; see also Wayne C. Ripley, “New *Night Thoughts* Sightings,” *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (Winter 2013–14).

18. Compare the borders in the following openings in a Huntington Library copy (132916) of Edward Young, *The Complaint, and the Consolation; or, Night Thoughts* (London, 1797), 40–41, 54–55, 72–73, 86–87, available at *William Blake Archive*, <http://www.blakearchive.org/copy/bb515.2>.

19. Edward Young, *The Complaint, and the Consolation; or, Night Thoughts* (London, 1797), p. 86 in 431729, Huntington Library; and pp. 88, 90 in Hope XVI.K.6, Ashmolean Museum, Oxford.

20. Easson and Essick, *William Blake, Book Illustrator*, 1:13–14; *William Blake's Designs for Edward Young's "Night Thoughts"*, ed. Grant et al., 1:13–14: “it was sensible to print more lines per page to raise the proportion of illustrated to unillustrated pages, but the consequent



varying degree of success in the juxtaposition of the letterpress and the engraved surround during the final printing session. Despite these variants, the continuous flat surface of its paper support hides the seams of the composite page. Gone is the impression, produced by the extra-illustrated page, that reading involves looking through the page at an inner area of text. In the flat world of the printed page, the illusion of depth is reinstated by perspective, which emphasizes the illusionistic world made visible in the expanded margin of paper. In the case of versos, the architecture of the extra-illustrated page is inverted: instead of seeing the text through a window, the relationship between layers is transposed, suggesting imaginary worlds extending behind and beyond the page.

The third experiment involves the recycling of proofs of the illustrated edition of *Night Thoughts* in the *Vala* manuscript. These proofs represent an interim stage of printing in which the engraved framing illustration surrounds the rectangle left blank for the printed poem. This off-center blank subverts the usual layout of engravings, which places the image at the center and the text as a caption at the bottom of the page. As a new surface of inscription for the manuscript, the blank also inverts the usual typographical layout of the page, which positions the letterpress in the center and leaves space for manuscript annotations in the margins. With their off-center blank rectangles, the proofs act as the book's negative space. Blake's repurposing involves an act of "demediation."<sup>21</sup> Abstracted from the printing process, the proofs stop being a material support for the letterpress and thus lose their functionality; in this sense, their role as a medium is neutralized. Blake's final interaction with *Night Thoughts*, then, is the culmination of a series of subversions of the letterpress as a support for reading. First, the letterpress of the 1740s *Night Thoughts* lost its anchoring as it was detached from its original gatherings to be inlaid in the extra-illustrated book. In turn, this precarious composite art of letterpress and illustrated surround shifted in the new typographical layout of 1797. Finally, reclaiming the remainders of the printing process, *Vala* challenged the teleology of printing, staged the separation of illustration from letterpress, and inverted the relationship between print and manuscript production. Proofs became surfaces of inscription, a support for handwriting, a site of composition. The absence of text and page numbers freed the illustrations from the text and the pages from the order of the book.

necessity of allowing more room for the text in the centre of each picture must at first have been miscalculated." See NT, I, 9; III, 33; IV, 39 (NT 1797, 37, 63, 90).

21. Drawing on Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin's *Remediation: Understanding New Media* (Cambridge, 1999), which explores the ways a medium represents another medium, Garrett Stewart coins the concept of "demediation" to refer to practices that modify an object by depriving it of the functionality that defines it as a medium, such as altered books whose function as reading tools has been neutralized: "Demediation names, in short, the process by which a transmissible text or image is blocked by the obtruded fact of its own neutralized medium"; Garrett Stewart, "Bookwork as Demediation," *Critical Inquiry* 36, no. 3 (2010): 410–57 at 413.

The recycling of the *Night Thoughts* proofs in the *Vala* manuscript opens up questions about the alternative possibilities of the page, the changing book architecture of *Night Thoughts*, and their impact on the dynamics of composition. The manuscript was written on the same Whatman wove paper employed for the 1797 edition, which suggests Blake might have used the paper remaining from Edwards's commission. Differences between the first nights of *Vala* and the proof-page inscriptions include the transition from a fair-copy copperplate hand and the use of catchwords in the first grouping to more hurried handwriting and a greater number of lines per page once Blake turned to the proof pages. While David Erdman thought of *Vala* as an illuminated manuscript degenerating into a working manuscript (E, 816–17), for Paul Mann the *Night Thoughts* proofs functioned as Blake's "main production model," "either testing the possibility of using the *Night Thoughts* designs directly to frame his own letterpress text, or using those designs as a general model while planning to replace them with new designs." Robert Essick identifies in the changing hand changing ideas of the book, from an intaglio format in the style of *The Book of Ahania* to "a manuscript and production mockup for a poem (*The Four Zoas*?) intended for publication as letterpress text accompanied by intaglio etched and/or engraved designs surrounding selected pages of text."<sup>22</sup> What follows seeks to investigate the inscription of the proofs in the manuscript in relation to the horizon of the book. As units and building blocks of the book, the proofs have a synecdochic function. As parts of the whole, they bear the material memory of their book archaeology. Their inscription in the manuscript enables *Vala* to engage with their book structure in the laboratory of the work to come. Breaking up the juxtapositions of pages in *Night Thoughts*, the new order of the manuscript opens up intervals between originally contiguous pages and creates new juxtapositions in the process of composition.

When it was first published in 1893, the manuscript was described by W. B. Yeats and E. J. Ellis as "unpaged and unsorted."<sup>23</sup> Evidence of stitching suggests that early versions of Nights I, II, and the first pages of Night III were once bound together, and that another grouping starts with the introduction of proof pages, from pages 43 to 84, which include Night VIIa.<sup>24</sup> The unbound pages that follow this grouping are hard to sort out. In the composition of Nights VII and VIII, the unit of the page as a

22. Paul Mann, "The Final State of *The Four Zoas*," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 18 (1985): 204–15 at 204; Robert Essick, "The *Four Zoas*: Intention and Production," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 18 (Spring 1985): 216–19; Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, 316–18.

23. *The Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*, ed. Edwin John Ellis and W. B. Yeats, 3 vols. (London, 1893), 2:300. For a description of the manuscript, BL, Add. MS 39764, see Bentley, *Vala*, 193–96. For a discussion of the editorial history of the manuscript, see Justin Van Kleeck, "Editioning William Blake's *VALA/The Four Zoas*," in *Editing and Reading Blake*, ed. Justin Van Kleeck and Wayne C. Ripley, Romantic Circles Praxis Series (September 2010), [http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/editing\\_blake/vankleeck/vankleeck.html](http://www.rc.umd.edu/praxis/editing_blake/vankleeck/vankleeck.html).

24. Bentley, *Vala*, 193–94; David V. Erdman, "The Binding (et cetera) of *Vala*," *The Library*, 5th ser., 19 (1964): 112–29 at 121; John B. Pierce, *Flexible Design: Revisionary Poetics in Blake's "Vala" or "The Four Zoas"* (Montreal, 1998), 4–8.



site of revision is disrupted by different layers of writing and directions to move sections back and forth. Editors' attempt to stabilize the text by arranging the layers of revision in a linear sequence have extracted an ideal version disembodied from the continuum of writing and the archaeology of the page.<sup>25</sup> Confronted with the disordered sequence of the *Night Thoughts* proofs in the *Vala* manuscript, Bentley concluded that "probably these sheets were simply lying around, in no particular order, and Blake, in need of a lot of paper at once, used them as they came to hand."<sup>26</sup> Yet disordering the sequence of *Night Thoughts* is part of Blake's practice of invention. Following the permutations of the book within the manuscript helps us to understand his relationship to *Night Thoughts*. For Morton Paley, Blake assimilated the designs into his own system. John Grant suggested that they "were, after all, Blake's pictures, not Young's; perhaps he wished to liberate some of them."<sup>27</sup> Donald Ault opened up the question of whether, "in experimenting with these designs as places where his *Four Zoas* text could materialize, Blake was creating a scenario of possible reading, where page layout becomes instruction rather than representation."<sup>28</sup> The proofs' function extends beyond the limits of the individual designs to encompass the relationship of part to whole. As remainders of the book-making process, the proofs bring the memory of the partitions of the book into the composition of the manuscript.

Disordering the sequence of *Night Thoughts* is a stage in the poetics of composition. Disanchored from their original material and textual format, unbound, and unnumbered, the proof pages can articulate alternative or competing orders for the book. Writing about the non-sequential composition of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Joseph Viscomi argues that "we are witnessing in the bibliographical code the material birth of an idea, the point at which the poet changed his mind, the point at which execution and invention intersect." In illuminated printing, composition can happen directly on the copperplate without a previously completed manuscript and a

25. For the debate on Nights VIIa and b, see John Kilgore's "The Order of Nights VIIa and VIIb in Blake's *The Four Zoas*," Andrew Lincoln's "The Revision of the Seventh and Eighth Nights of *The Four Zoas*," Mark Lefebvre's "A Note on the Structural Necessity of Night VIIb," and David V. Erdman's "Night the Seventh: The Editorial Problem," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (Fall 1978): 107–14, 115–33, 134, 135–39.

26. Bentley, *Vala*, 194.

27. Morton Paley, "Blake's *Night Thoughts*: An Exploration of the Fallen World," 136; John Grant, "Visions in *Vala*: A Consideration of Some Pictures in the Manuscript," in *Blake's Sublime Allegory: Essays on "The Four Zoas," "Milton," "Jerusalem,"* ed. Stuart Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich Jr. (Madison, Wisc., 1973), 141–202 at 161; Christopher Heppner argues for more sustained focus on Blake's literal engagement with Young's text and against the "assumption that Blake's work as an illustrator is continuous with his work in the illuminated poems"; see "Blake and Young's *Night Thoughts*," chap. 6 in *Reading Blake's Designs* (Cambridge, 1995), 152–53.

28. Ault, *Narrative Unbound*, 469. See also "The Four Zoas": *A Photographic Facsimile*, ed. Magno and Erdman, 15.

page mock-up on paper. Compared to this “marriage of invention and execution,”<sup>29</sup> Blake’s work on *Night Thoughts* experiments with the separation of letterpress and illustration, as well as of invention and execution, since the illustrations were produced through transfer techniques from drawings on paper;<sup>30</sup> as Viscomi notes, “whether an original image generates a print . . . or the need for a print generates the drawing, as in commissioned book illustrations . . . , the causal relationship between original and print is the same.”<sup>31</sup> In this case “the material birth” can be traced to the point when the bibliographic codes of the book are disaggregated and repurposed as manuscript writing-matter.

The remainders from the production of the book offer an alternative model of composition. Drawing on classical divisions of rhetoric, we can say that recycling *Night Thoughts* combines the identification and retrieval of proofs (*inventio*), with their arrangement in a sequence (*dispositio*). Applying this technique of classical rhetoric to the relationship between the *Night Thoughts* proofs and the *Vala* manuscript, we can imagine how experimenting with alternative arrangements of the *Night Thoughts* proofs might function as part of a process of actively layered composition, in which the proof prints can reverse the causal relationship between idea and execution, becoming prompts for the composition of the text, or *elocutio*. Disordering the sequence multiplies the visionary dialogue between the two works. Engravings from the first four nights of *Night Thoughts* are rearranged in a new sequence and extended to host the text for Nights III to IX of the *Vala* manuscript. The first proof that Blake inscribes in the *Vala* manuscript produces an initial shift in the relation between the two works, moving the concluding proof of Night III to the middle of the third night of the *Vala* manuscript, but subsequent acts of inscription shuffle the order of the proofs and subvert the structure of *Night Thoughts*. Instead of a simple equivalence between nights, the dissemination of *Night Thoughts* in *Vala* can be interpreted as a series of two-part inventions.

Blake’s inscription of the *Vala* manuscript on *Night Thoughts* proofs disarticulates the paratext of *Night Thoughts*. In the logic of the manuscript, the bibliographic codes of the book are sometimes obscured, as when illustrations that had signaled the partitions of the book are absorbed in the new textual continuum of the manuscript, rearticulating the thresholds, pauses, and rhythms of Young’s poem in Blake’s extra-illustrated copy and in the 1797 edition. The title-page proofs of the first two nights do not reappear in the manuscript; the third loses its paratextual role to become part of a new continuum of writing in the middle of Night VI (*Vala*, Night VI, 73). Conversely,

29. Joseph Viscomi, “The Evolution of ‘The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,’” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 58, nos. 3 and 4 (1995): 281–344 at 336, 292.

30. “Twelve of these designs were printed in reverse, which means the originals were calked onto the plate; the other thirty-one were printed in the *same* direction and thus counter-proofed . . . hence the outlines of the forty-three designs must have been traced on transparent paper so that they could be either calked or calked-counterproofed”; Viscomi, *Blake and the Idea of the Book*, 13.

31. *Ibid.*, 11.

other proofs acquire poignant paratextual functions as they are abstracted from the letterpress of the 1797 edition, from the partitions of Young's poem, and repurposed to mark the manuscript's alternative division into nights. The most noticeable interventions occur in the production of new beginnings and endings.

The strides of Time provide a striking example of Blake's mode of composition by disaggregation because they exemplify how the *Vala* manuscript breaks up the continuities and the cinematic effects produced by page sequences in the extra-illustrated and engraved *Night Thoughts*. In the extra-illustrated copy of *Night Thoughts*, the strides of Time take up five pages, alternating faster and slower tempos (NT, II, 12–16 [BM, fols. 23v–25v]); their rhythm is accelerated in the 1797 edition, which compresses five pages into three, eliminating the more static attitudes, and makes the strides coincide with the act of turning the pages (NT 1797, 24–26). Going against the temporal compression of 1797, Time's strides are elongated across the distending manuscript of *Vala* to mark key turns of the action. The first movement of Time is abstracted from the sequence and used as a title page for Night VIII to mark the apocalyptic turn of the manuscript (NT 1797, 24; *Vala*, VIII, 99 [fig. 1]), while the subsequent two movements are shifted to Night IX to punctuate the action and suggest the impending end in the final scenes of the poem (NT 1797, 25–26; *Vala*, IX, 127, 135).

This sequence is interwoven with a representation of the transition from death to rebirth. The beginning of “Night the Ninth Being The Last Judgement” is inscribed on an illustration of “Angels conveying the spirit of the good man to heaven,”<sup>32</sup> another image from Young's Night II, which represents the second of two representations of the deathbed of the Just. The extra-illustrated copy and the 1797 edition play with the expressive possibilities of the codex, as the six pages illustrating the turns of the final hour of the Just in the extra-illustrated copy are shrunk to two in 1797. The decision to reproduce the first and last image from the original sequence on facing pages emphasizes the horizontal format of the book opening and the movement of the eye from left to right to follow the action scanned into two subsequent moments in time (NT, II, 38–43 [BM, fols. 36v–39r]; NT 1797, 40–41). In *Vala* the deathbed sequence is inverted: the last moment is placed first, repurposed as a title page for Night IX to offer a proleptic promise of life after death at the beginning of the last night (NT 1797, 41; *Vala*, IX, 117 [fig. 2]), while the previous deathbed scene is repeated twice later in the same night (NT 1797, 40; *Vala*, IX, 121, 131).<sup>33</sup> Between the two iterations of the first deathbed scene, Blake interleaves the second engraving of the strides of Time (*Vala*, IX, 127), followed by the third (*Vala*, IX, 135), inscribed with text focused on the theme of seasonal change—the fleeing steps of Luvah in the garden of *Vala* (*Vala*, IX, 127) and the moment when “the Eternal man said Luvah the

32. This description of the plate is provided in the “Explanation of the Engravings,” attributed to Henry Fuseli, in Edward Young, *The Complaint, and the Consolation; or, Night Thoughts* (London, 1797).

33. The first two pages of Night IX were composed in a later revision; see Andrew Lincoln, “The Revisions of the Seventh and Eighth Nights of *The Four Zoas*,” *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 12 (Fall 1978): 115–33.



FIGURE 1. Vala, VIII, 99. ©British Library Board, Add. MS 39764, fol. 50r.

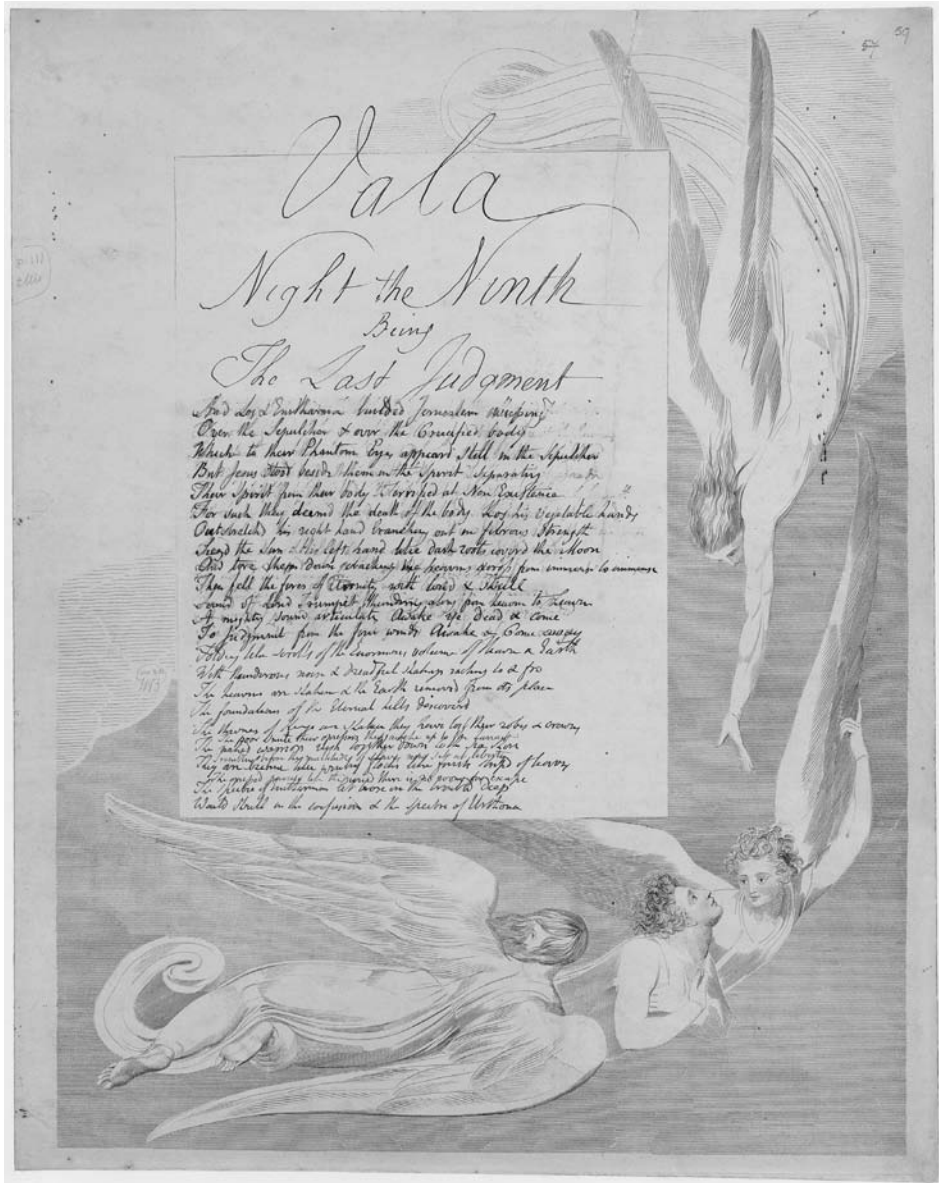


FIGURE 2. Vala, IX, 117. © British Library Board, Add. MS 39764, fol. 59r.



Vintage is ripe arise / The sons of Urizen shall gather the vintage with sharp hooks” (Vala, IX, 135). Taken together, the iterations of the deathbed scenes are interleaved between the three strides of Time, whose alternative rhythms—distended, accelerated, broken up, and disseminated—illustrate the material possibilities of the book in Blake’s visual archaeology of composition. Separated from their original sequence, placed at varying intervals in the manuscript, the proof pages inscribe in the manuscript the memory and alternative possibilities of their earlier book articulations, from the extra-illustrated book to the ordering of the 1797 *Night Thoughts*. Recycled and rearranged in the manuscript, the proofs function as units of invention: they offer a structure of composition, identifying the cinematic turns and the rhythm that will shape the trajectory of human time into a piece of writing endowed with an ending.

The inscription of *Night Thoughts* proofs in the *Vala* manuscript starts *in medias res*, two-thirds of the way into Night III.<sup>34</sup> The abrupt turn is confirmed by traces of stitching, which suggest that pages 23 to 42 were originally bound together and that the inscription of proof pages beginning with page 43 marks a turning point in the composition of the manuscript.<sup>35</sup> The text, however, mitigates the transition between these page groupings, as page 42 ends with Urizen’s claim:

Am I not God said Urizen. Who is Equal to me  
Do I not stretch the heavens abroad or fold them up like a garment  
He spoke mustering his heavy clouds around him black opaque  
(Vala, III, 42)

Urizen’s imposition marks the transition to the first grafting of *Night Thoughts* into the manuscript. The proof used for the page that follows his claim to power illustrates the arresting asterisked line, “This KING OF TERRORS is the PRINCE OF PEACE” (NT 1797, 63; Vala, III, 43). This line mediates the page’s relationship to the new text, encouraging us to consider Urizen as an embodiment of Young’s “King of Terrors.” In the extra-illustrated copy, this design is in penultimate position in Night III and the page has a different asterisked line—“*Death*, the great Counsellor, who Man inspires, / with every nobler Thought, and fairer Deed!” (NT, III, 33). The shift in the verbal associations of the designs is partly owing to the textual shift occurring with the more tightly leaded letterpress of 1797, which moves the asterisked line to the previous page (NT 1797, 62), disabling the possibility of reading the image of Death as a “great Counsellor” and compressing Blake’s final designs for the night from two watercolor illustrations

34. For Andrew Lincoln, the abrupt turn from the copperplate hand of pages 1 through 42 to the proof text corresponds to “a major transition in the narrative,” from “an account of progress from a primitive condition to civil order, and it ends at the point where this order begins to collapse”; see *Spiritual History: A Reading of William Blake’s “Vala, or the Four Zoas”* (Oxford, 1995), 32.

35. Bentley, *Vala*, 193–94.



(NT, III, 33–34) to only one engraving. As a result of this page compression, Death is darkened. The shift emphasizes the impact of the *mise en page*, which breaks up the continuum of the text into discrete sections, changing the inflection of the passage. In the extra-illustrated page, the original page layout illuminates the joyful associations announced in the first line of the stanza, “And feel I, *Death!* No joy from thought of thee?,” which is followed by the asterisked line announcing Death as a Counsellor, and confirmed by the page’s ending with the line “Joy’s *Source*, and *Subject*, still subsists unhurt.” The liberating agency of Death is underscored in the concluding page of the extra-illustrated Night III with an asterisked line that invites us to “Spring from our Fetters; fasten in the Skies” (NT, III, 34 [BM, fol. 55r–v]) and projects positive connotations on the question with which Night III ends: “When shall I die?—When shall I live for ever?” In the serial publication, the answer is deferred by the three months intervening between the appearance of Night III in December 1742 and Night IV in March 1743.<sup>36</sup> By contrast, the interval is shrunk to the turning of a page in the edition of the 1797, which publishes the first four nights in one volume. The new typographical layout emphasizes the poem’s sepulchral tones as the last page of Night III starts with the line “To dust when drop proud nature’s proudest spheres.” The darkness of the first line is emphasized by the new asterisked line, which establishes Death’s role as King of Terrors, and by the Hebrew script added to the scroll he holds in his hands in the engraving.<sup>37</sup> The new asterisked line stands out from the rest of the letterpress because of its capital letters and acts as a cue to announce what lies beyond Death and the pause introduced by the night’s ending. The transition between Night III and Night IV is marked by the promise that “This KING OF TERRORS is the PRINCE OF PEACE” and fulfilled by the new title page of Night IV: when the page is turned, the Old Testamentarian image of Death gives way to a vision of the Resurrection that announces “THE CHRISTIAN TRIUMPH.”

The shift from Great Counsellor to King of Terrors enables the design’s Urizenic inscription in the *Vala* manuscript. Its pivotal function changes in the transition from book proof to manuscript. Visualizing the King of Terrors (*Vala*, III, 43) no longer marks the end of a night; the text frame is filled with writing that flows onto the next page. The new inscription breaks the connection between the King of Terrors and the Prince of Peace announced in the asterisked line. Instead, the manuscript inscribes the engraving with the story of the fall of Urizen, which precipitates a scene of general destruction. When page 43 of the manuscript is turned and the text edges toward a diluvian catastrophe, the expected disintegration of the page, disbound from its sequence, is averted by the institution of a new visual continuity between the proof’s verso and its facing page. The visual layout of the next page opening conveys a symmetrical composition: the *Night Thoughts* proof illustrating

36. Pettit, *A Bibliography of Young’s “Night Thoughts,”* 16 and 25.

37. For the text inscribed in mirror writing as an innovation of the engraving, which reads, “Lord You are Death, YHVH the fire was with the fire / You . . . Dust,” see Grant, “Visions in *Vala*,” 162; *“The Four Zoas”*: *A Photographic Facsimile*, ed. Magno and Erdman, 49.

the raised arm about to receive the Savior's healing touch on the right is echoed, in the manuscript's design facing it, by the raised arm of Tharmas from the waves (Vala, III, 44–45; NT 1797, 90). The proof grafted into the account of Urizen's deluge offers a typological promise, in which the visual juxtaposition of the designs softens the harshness of the text. Another proof of the healing touch is used, again as a visual counterpoint, to mark Tharmas's later and deeper moment of despair toward the end of Night VII.<sup>38</sup> Peter Otto argues that "rather than bringing life to a standstill," Young's Death confronts man and rescues him from the continuum of experience: "in a remarkable paradox, the agent of separation is found to be a vehicle that ferries us back to those it had taken away."<sup>39</sup> Blake's Urizenic inscription, however, rejects the continuum offered by the identification of the King of Terrors with the Prince of Peace. Rewriting the text of the King of Terrors, denouncing its agency as a Urizenic imposition, refusing the Old Testamentarian figure of God the Father, Blake breaks up the genealogy of sovereignty invoked in joining Old Testament terror with New Testament peace. "That stony law I stamp to dust: and scatter religion abroad" says Orc in *America*; of the "torn book," "none shall gather the leaves" (E, 54). The transition from terror to peace announced by the asterisked line is forestalled, the identification of the two figures refused, and the promise postponed.

The "Christian Triumph" is a pivotal image in Blake's three experiments with the composite page. Its changing position shows the negotiation of Christian matter in the fabric of *Night Thoughts* and its changing possibilities in the *Vala* manuscript. John Grant has noted that the proliferation of images of Christ in Blake's extra-illustrations "refocus[es] the divine vision" on a "fraternal center in Jesus."<sup>40</sup> The watercolor design of the Christian Triumph is bound as a frontispiece to the first volume of the extra-illustrated copy of *Night Thoughts*. Both frontispieces to the two volumes of extra-illustration are celebrated for being "entirely filled with *design, unbroken by text*" in the "Descriptive Notes" published in the second edition of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake* in 1880.<sup>41</sup> Since both frontispieces represent images of the Resurrection (BM, fols. 1, 133), describing the frontispiece design as "unbroken by text" suggests, by implication, that the holes created to host the text on the other pages deface the work,

38. See Vala, VII, 97; and "*The Four Zoas*": *A Photographic Facsimile*, ed. Magno and Erdman, 50.

39. Peter Otto, "From the Religious to the Psychological Sublime: The Fate of Young's *Night Thoughts* in Blake's *The Four Zoas*," in *Prophetic Character: Essays on William Blake in Honor of John E. Grant*, ed. Alexander Gourlay (West Cornwall, Conn., 2002), 225–62 at 228–29; see also Otto, *Blake's Critique of Transcendence: Love, Jealousy, and the Sublime in "The Four Zoas"* (Oxford, 2000), 23–26.

40. John E. Grant, "Jesus and the Powers That Be in Blake's Design for Young's *Night Thoughts*," in *Blake and His Bibles*, ed. David Erdman (West Cornwall, Conn., 1990), 71–116, esp. 75, 84, 111–12.

41. Frederic James Shields, "Descriptive Notes of the Designs to Young's 'Night Thoughts,'" in Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake* (London, 1880), 2:289–307 at 289, my emphasis.

leaving the book as the negative remainder of an act of profanation. In the 1797 edition, the Christian Triumph was used for the title page of Night IV. The *Vala* manuscript breaks up the transition from the King of Terrors to the Christian Triumph (Vala, VIII, 114), thus interrupting the drive toward a conclusion in the 1797 *Night Thoughts*. Four nights are interleaved between the two designs, and the Christian Triumph is moved to illustrate the climax of Night VIII and placed opposite an alternative, “broken text” version of Christ, the only design to be repurposed in three places in the manuscript, which suggests its role as a structural element in the composition of *Vala*. The “broken text” version of Christ first appears in *Night Thoughts* in “Night the Fourth. The Christian Triumph,” but its proofs are inserted in Night V and Night VIII of the manuscript (Vala, V, 59; VIII, 111, 115), showing how the turn from Night III to Night IV of Young’s poem offers Blake a model for thinking about how to structure the Christian promise and resolution in the manuscript. In what follows, I will explore this design’s inscription in *Night Thoughts* and *Vala*.

In the extra-illustrated book, Blake draws the “broken text” version of Christ on a verso, taking advantage of the bibliographic effect of turning the page to produce the impression of an unveiling or revelation. The previous design shows a figure looking out toward the horizon, harking too late to “*Death’s Admonitions*” “too long [. . .] set at nought” (NT, IV, 11 [BM, fol. 61r]). When the page is turned, the first line on the verso reads, “With Joy,---with Grief, that *healing Hand* I see” (NT, IV, 12 [BM, fol. 61v]; fig. 3). The asterisked line produces a further close-up on the instrument of the Passion: “draw the dire Steel---Ah no!--- the dreadful Blessing / What Heart, or can sustain? or dares forego?” Blake’s visual response fleshes out Young’s synecdoche, integrating the part into a whole, moving from the text’s close-up on the hand to the body traced around the text window. Pierced through hands and feet, the nails of the crucifixion identify the figure of Christ advancing sideways across the page, surrounded by flames produced in yellow, orange, and watery red watercolors. Blake’s design conflates different moments in the liturgy of the Passion. The “healing Hand,” the “dire Steel,” and the wounds in Young’s text work as signs of Christ’s mediation and intercession, activating the typological function of the Passion, which Blake’s design conflates with the episode of the Harrowing of Hell and the apparition of Christ as Man of Sorrows.<sup>42</sup> This latter scene draws on the miracle of St. Gregory the Great, where an apparition of the Man of Sorrows intervened to respond to a believer

42. Blake uses the expression “man of sorrows” in *The Song of Los* (1795), plate 3: “Then Oothon hoverd over Judah & Jerusalem / And Jesus heard her voice (a man of sorrows) he recievd / A Gospel from wretched Theotormon. / The human race began to wither” (E, 67). For the identification with the Man of Sorrows, see Grant, “Visions in *Vala*,” 168; and Robin Hamlyn in “*Night Thoughts*: The Poem by Edward Young; Illustrated with Watercolours by William Blake; Commentary by Robin Hamlyn (London, 2005), 78.

taking Communion, who had asked whether the bread of the Eucharist truly was the body of Christ.<sup>43</sup>

Blake's composition turns the materiality of the page into a symbolic form. Christ is drawn around the text rectangle in such a way that the page of letterpress comes to occupy the place of his body, activating the metaphor of the body as parchment, flesh made word.<sup>44</sup> Since the illustration is on the page's verso, the text is pasted from beneath into the window cut through the body of Christ drawn on the wider page. The thin layer of text hosted by the hole in the page acts as a substitute or a representation of the absent body of Christ, and in so doing exhibits the problematic nature of the Eucharist. The body signified holds the promise of an incarnation that anchors the word to its promised reference in the form of the word made flesh. A transcendental signifier is figured by a cut through the surface of the page. The identification of body and text is emphasized by the red ink traced around the text. In itself the red outline is not a novelty, given that it frames the text on each page and thus imparts continuity to the sequence in the extra-illustrated book. Here, however, this mark connects the text to the holes opened up by the nails pierced through Christ's hands and foot. The use of red ink turns the space of the text into a wound on the page. The wounded page as a representation of the body of Christ alludes to the medieval genre of the Charter of Christ, in which the text spells out the incarnation of the word, identifying the page with Christ's body as a charter.<sup>45</sup> Standing for the broken body of Christ, the text in the hole becomes the evidence of the Passion offered to the inquiry of a doubting Thomas, an image used on the title page of the second volume of the extra-illustrated *Night Thoughts* (BM, fol. 134).<sup>46</sup>

43. On the iconography of the Man of Sorrows, see Erwin Panofsky, "Imago Pietatis," *Festschrift für Max Friedländer* (Leipzig, 1927); Carl O. Schniewind, "The Man of Sorrows," *Bulletin of the Art Institute of Chicago* 42, no. 5 (1948): 69–71; and Hans Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages: Form and Function of Early Paintings of the Passion*, trans. Mark Bartusis and Raymond Meyer (New Rochelle, N.Y., 1990).

44. Cf. John 1:1 and 1:14 (King James Bible). On the play on the materiality of the page as parchment identified with the body of Christ in the medieval genre of the Charter of Christ, see Sarah Kay, "Original Skin: Flaying, Reading and Thinking in the Legend of Saint Bartholomew and Other Works," *Journal of Medieval and Early Modern Studies* 36 (2006): 35–73 at 45–46: "Christ represents his crucified body as the original legal charter confirming man's redemption, and his eucharistic body as the certified copy held by man."

45. Emily Steiner, *Documentary Culture and the Making of Middle English Literature* (Cambridge, 2003), 51: "The *Fasciculus morum* (ca 1325) . . . further depicts Christ's charter as a material record of the Passion inscribed on Christ's crucified body: 'just such a charter did Christ write for us on the cross when . . . he stretched out his blessed body, as a parchment-maker can be seen to spread a hide in the sun.'"

46. Blake's mother and her husband engaged in Moravian acts of devotion relating to the wounds of the bleeding Christ; see Keri Davies and Marsha Keith Schuchard, "Recovering the Lost Moravian History of William Blake's Family," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly* 38, no. 1 (Summer 2004): 36–43 at 40–41.

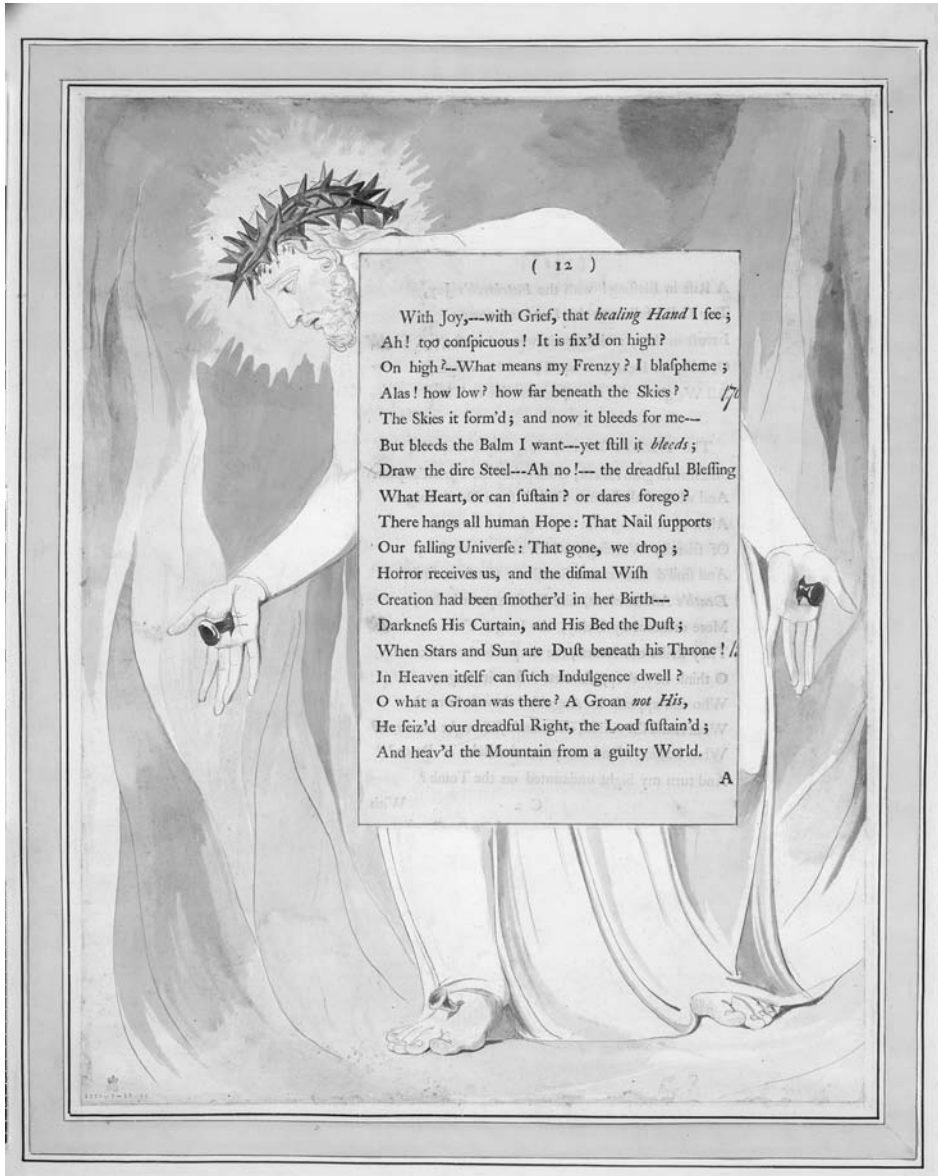


FIGURE 3. William Blake, illustration to *Night Thoughts*, Night IV, page 12. Pen and gray ink, gray wash, and watercolor, over graphite. © The Trustees of the British Museum, 1929,0713, fol. 61v.

In the 1797 edition, Christ as Man of Sorrows appears on a recto facing an illustration in which “sense and reason shew the door” (NT 1797, 72–73), in which each figure points one hand toward the darkness beyond a gothic arched door, while the diagonal of their stretched arms redirects the eye to a crouching figure trying to make an escape in the bottom right margin, as if to step out of the page. Despite the shifts in the typographical layout of the page, the same question and answer mediate the transition between pages as in the extra-illustrated volume. At the bottom of the “sense and reason” page, the reader finds the lines: “What healing hand can pour the balm of peace, / And turn my sight undaunted on the tomb?” At the top of the facing page, the reader is greeted by the same first line found upon turning the page of the extra-illustrated copy: “With joy—with grief, that healing hand I see.”<sup>47</sup> Compared to the sculptural feel of the composite extra-illustrated page, where the letterpress is inlaid in a hole that seems cut through the body of Christ, the flat surface of the page heals the breaks between different kinds of paper. Unifying the page of text and the page of design as one continuous surface, the flat surface of the printed page paradoxically produces a volumetric effect, which makes us perceive the flat page of text as in front of—rather than cut through—the body of Christ.

Of the thirty-five depictions of Christ in the extra-illustrated book, five were engraved in the 1797 edition, all of which are recycled in the *Vala* manuscript,<sup>48</sup> but Christ as Man of Sorrows is the only one used three times.<sup>49</sup> Against the suggestion that the repetition of the same proof might constitute evidence of its irrelevance, as scrap paper, the fact that this is the only plate used three times seems quite significant. Grant formulates the hypothesis that “repeating the same design” might achieve an effect “comparable to the refrains in the poem.”<sup>50</sup> In *Vala*, Blake used three different states of the engraving. This variation emphasizes the repeated acts of attention and the symbolic implications of the successive stages in which Christ’s wounds are traced on the copperplate. The first state shows traces of blood below the crown of thorns, which are less visible in the second and third state; but the most significant change is the turn from the profile of the watercolor and the first state of the engraving to the three-quarters profile in the second and third states.<sup>51</sup> Each inscription of the proof prompts a different act of *inventio*, *dispositio*, and *elocutio*. The recognition

47. Fuseli, “Explanation of the Engravings,” NT 1797: “Page 73. The Saviour represented in the furnace of affliction, and agonized with torture for the sins of the human race.”

48. Grant, “Jesus and the Powers That Be,” 75, 111–12 (a list of depictions of Christ).

49. For a synopsis of the place of *Night Thoughts* proofs in *Vala*, see Bentley, *Vala*, 209; Easson and Essick, *William Blake, Book Illustrator*, 13–28; and *William Blake’s Designs for Edward Young’s “Night Thoughts,”* ed. Grant et al., 17–35.

50. Grant, “Visions in *Vala*,” 161.

51. The first state is closer to the watercolor version, but harsher because of the black lines of the print compared with the gentle washes of watercolor. Blake used the second state of the engraved plate for page 59. In the British Museum pagination, the first state appears on page 111 and the third state on page 115. Blake’s reuse of the proof and the alternative sequence of the Night VIII proofs are discussed in *William Blake’s Designs for Edward Young’s “Night Thoughts,”*



of the repeated design, its variant states, its different textual inscriptions, and the different book formats associated with the proof pages disseminated in the manuscript produce effects of difference in repetition. The return of the same proof emphasizes the turning points of the poem, prompting writing that responds to different phases or variations of the action.

The first grafting of the Man of Sorrows page onto the *Vala* manuscript occurs in the nativity scene of Night V, where the Enormous Demons are gathered to celebrate the birth of Orc in what seems a peculiar reenactment of the Adoration of the Magi (fig. 4). On the previous page of the manuscript, the Song of the Enormous Demons starts with a line that announces the complex typological association of text to illustration: “Luvah King of Love thou art the Key of rage & death” (*Vala*, V, 58).<sup>52</sup> Following the typological tradition established in biblical exegesis and in painting—where the Annunciation, the Nativity, or the Adoration of the Magi are placed against the Crucifixion—the account of the birth is entered into the text frame presented by the suffering body of Christ.

The other two inscriptions of Christ as Man of Sorrows occur in Night VIII. On the top of the text frame on page 115, Blake inscribes, “These are the Sons of Los & Enitharmon,” followed by an impressive list of names inspired by the genealogy of the “children of Israel” in Numbers (1:5–16), ending with “Then Jesus Came & Died willing beneath Tirzah & Rahab.” The text holds up the promise of Christ’s intervention and mediation, and the crucified body behind it testifies to its fulfilment. Turning the page reveals on its verso a drawing of the resurrected Christ walking the earth (116). The British Museum pagination places this page at the end of Night VIII, facing the title page of “*Vala* Night the Ninth Being The Last Judgment.” In this order, Christ is inscribed in an arresting sequence of three pages (114–16). Christ resurrected in “The Christian Triumph”—used as a frontispiece for volume 1 of the extra-illustrations, then moved to be the title page for Night IV in the 1797 edition—is here placed just before Christ the Man of Sorrows, eliminating the pages intervening between these images in Night IV of *Night Thoughts* (NT 1797, 67–72). The sequence encircles the Passion with images of the Resurrection. However, since the manuscript was unbound when Yeats and Ellis first rearranged it for publication in 1893, this placement at the end of Night VIII is open to question. David Erdman and Cettina Tramontano Magno suggested putting the two appearances of the Man of Sorrows in this night in a different order, moving eight plates of text after the tripartite articulation of Resurrection and Passion on British Museum pages 114–16 to allow the Zoas to express their response to

ed. Grant et al., 31–32; “*The Four Zoas*”: *A Photographic Facsimile*, ed. Magno and Erdman, 58, 81–82, 106, esp. 82n1. See also Grant, “Visions in *Vala*,” 168–69 (about *Vala*, V, 59).

52. My transcription; Erdman reads the line differently: “Luvah King of Love thou art the King of rage & death” (*Complete Poetry and Prose*, 339). For the Nativity and Immaculate Conception overtones of page 58, see “*The Four Zoas*”: *A Photographic Facsimile*, ed. Magno and Erdman, 57–58.

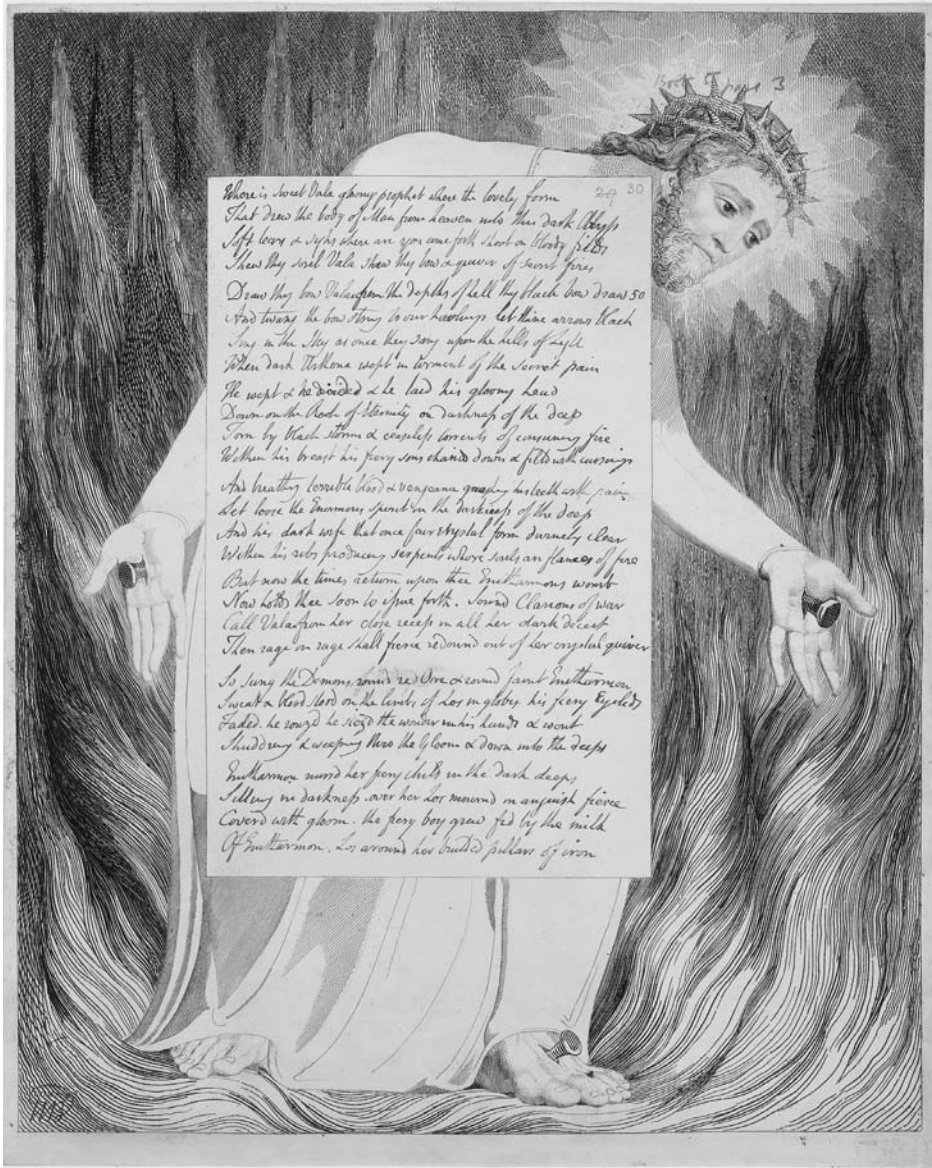


FIGURE 4. Vala, V, 59. ©British Library Board, Add. MS 39764, fol. 30r.

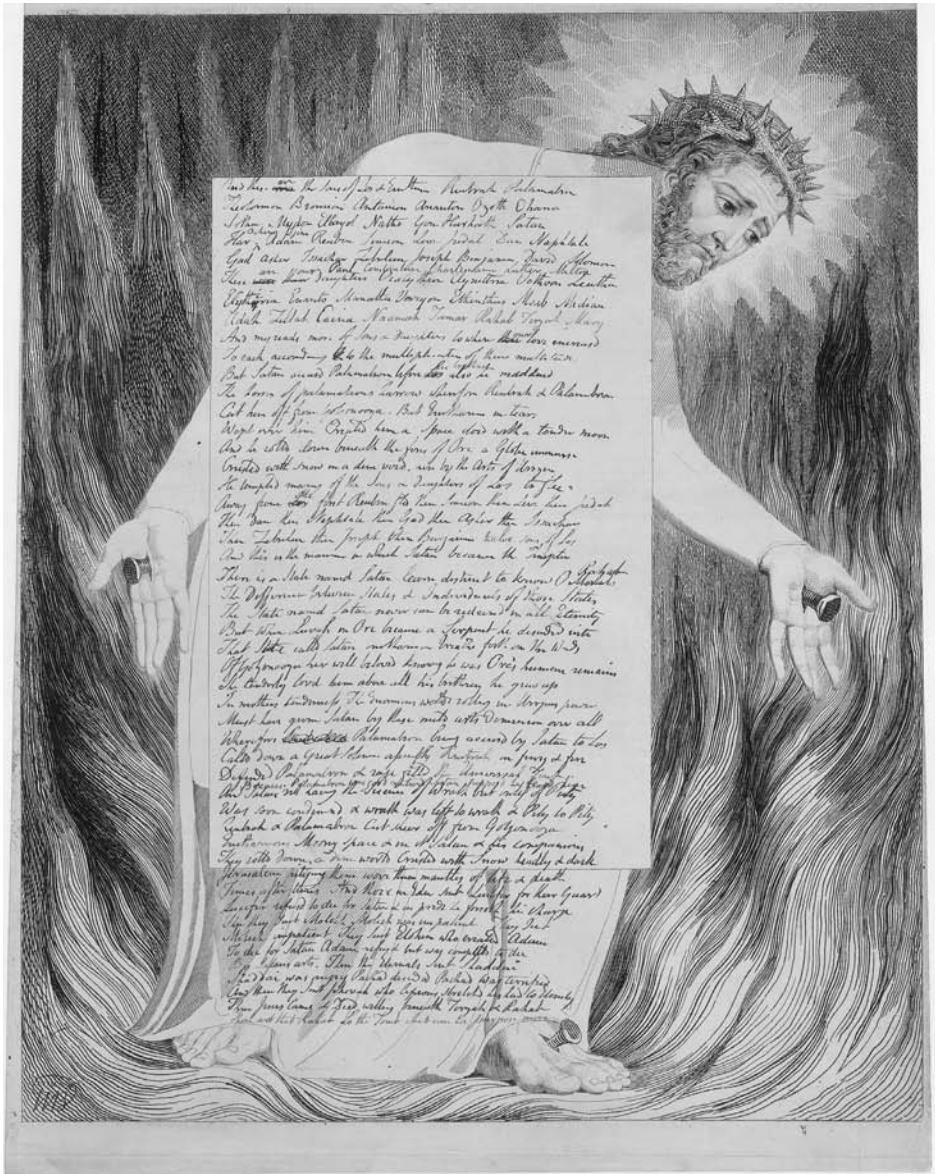


FIGURE 5. Vala, VIII, 115. ©British Library Board, Add. MS 39764, fol. 58r.



the apparition of the Man of Sorrows.<sup>53</sup> In their reconstruction, Night VIII concludes with the other proof of Christ Man of Sorrows (the first state of the engraving, numbered 111 in the British Museum sequence; fig. 6), which is ominously written over with text that suggests its inscription into a religion of mystery, marked by the demonic power of Rahab and the birth of deism and natural religion.

The powerful repetition of the Man of Sorrows, its mobility as an unbound page that can be tried out in different sequences, and its ideological possibilities open up questions about the use of multiples of the same print. The apparition of the living dead Christ was a popular iconographical form in the liturgy of the Passion. Against the collective identification activated by painting, printed reproductions functioned as instruments of devotion in spiritual practices enabled by technical reproducibility.<sup>54</sup> The strategic repetition of multiples of the same print pasted in missals and manuscripts punctuated transitions in devotional practice, encouraging states of contemplation.<sup>55</sup> The repeated encounter with the print can not only break up narrative but also function as a prompt for composition and act as a structuring element.<sup>56</sup> Blake's inflections of the image's multiple comings highlight the proofs' mobile affiliations and their subversive potential as a critique of the religious uses of images.

Seeing the *Night Thoughts* proofs repurposed as surfaces of inscription in the *Vala* manuscript emphasizes the centrality of the composite page in Blake's poetics of composition, which unifies the poet and the artist with the compositor and revitalizes technical senses of the word, which were otherwise separated into different functions by a mode of production predicated on the division of labor. Blake's creative methods stand in stark contrast to the legal approach adopted by William Blackstone in his defense of authors against publishers, which dissociated literary invention from the materiality of the page: "Style and sentiment are the essentials of a literary composition. These alone constitute its identity. The paper and print are merely accidents, which serve as vehicles to convey that style and sentiment to a distance."<sup>57</sup> Yet

53. Magno and Erdman justify their alternative sequencing of the two Man of Sorrows plates, saying that "there is room, in eight more pages, for Blake and his mythic persons to interpret and respond to the momentous presence of the Lamb of God and to approach Night the Ninth from a more desperate and more human—but therefore more humanly promising—perspective." See "Walking with the Saviour," in *The Four Zoas: A Photographic Facsimile*, ed. Magno and Erdman, 81–82.

54. See Bernhard Ridderbos, "The Man of Sorrows: Pictorial Images and Metaphorical Statements," and Michael Camille, "Mimetic Identification and Passion Devotion in the Later Middle Ages: A Double-Sided Panel by Meister Francke," in *The Broken Body: Passion Devotion in Late-Medieval Culture*, ed. Alasdair A. MacDonald et al. (Groningen, Netherlands, 1998), 145–81 and 183–210.

55. David S. Areford, *The Viewer and the Printed Image in Late Medieval Europe* (Burlington, Vt., 2010).

56. Belting, *The Image and Its Public in the Middle Ages*, 48.

57. William Blackstone, *Tonson v. Collins* (1762), *English Reports* 96:169–74, 189, quoted in Mark Rose, "The Author as Proprietor: *Donaldson v. Becket* and the Genealogy of Modern Authorship," *Representations* 23 (1988): 51–85 at 63.

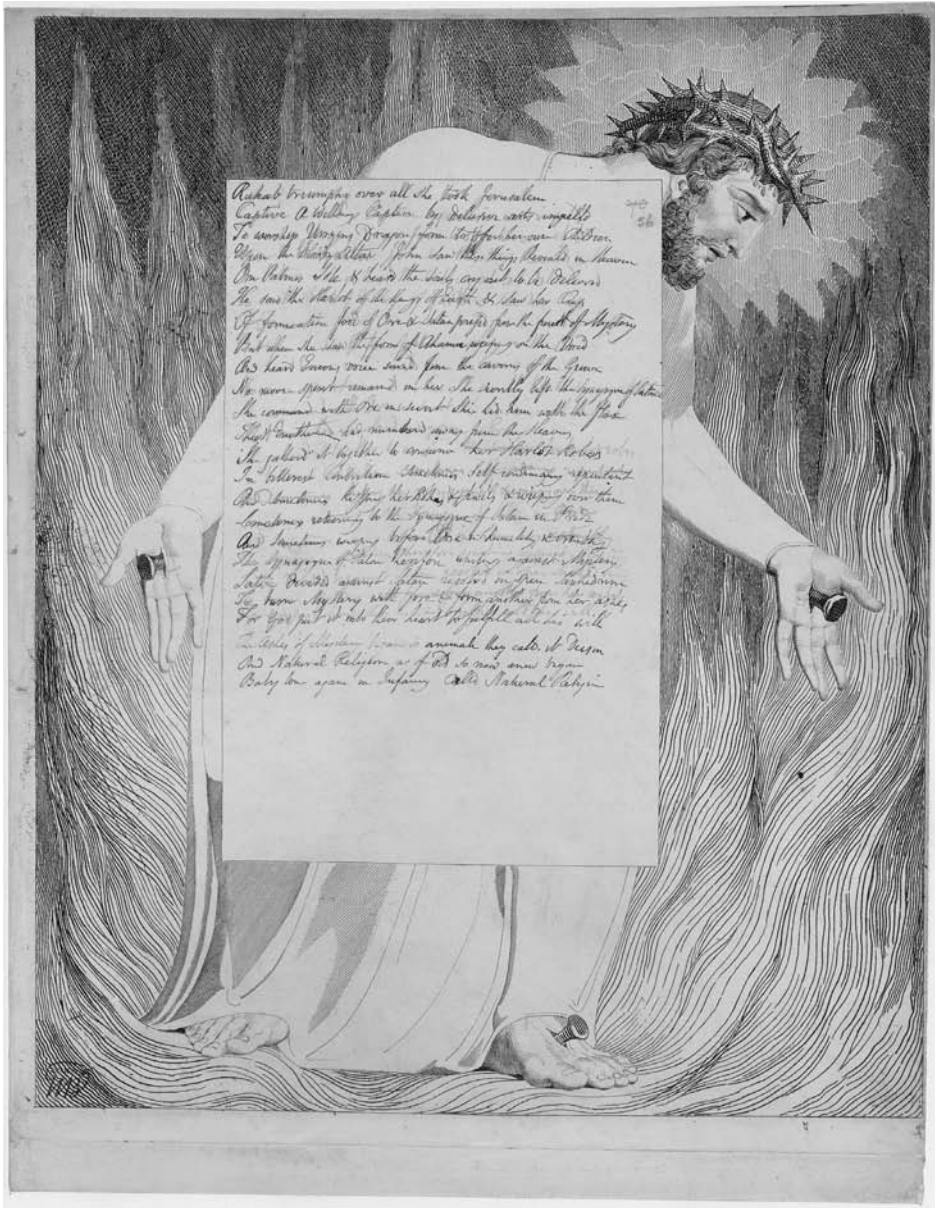


FIGURE 6. Vala, VIII, 111. ©British Library Board, Add. MS 39764, fol. 56r.

literary invention is not a disembodied activity separated from the materiality of writing and the conditions of its technical reproducibility. The Whatman paper provided by the publisher connects the phases of Blake's experimentations with *Night Thoughts*, from the extra-illustrated copy to the *Vala* manuscript. It mediates the interpolation of book pages mounted in the windows of Blake's designs and provides continuity to the miscellaneity of the printed material reclaimed from the fabric of book production and inserted in the manuscript. Its materiality shows the constraints and conditions of possibility of Blake's composition.

Whether writing happened on copperplate or paper, Blake's habit as an engraver involved an acute awareness of the parameters of the page as a unit of composition. Using *Night Thoughts* proofs meant breaking up the continuum of handwriting into textual units defined by the layout of the page. Attention to the materiality of the page reveals the intersecting partitions of the book and the manuscript in a dynamic engagement with the letterpress paradigm, which operates on the separation of idea and execution in a concept of invention in which authorial composition precedes page layout and the work of the compositor.<sup>58</sup> Reclaiming proofs and writing frames from a mode of production predicated on the compositor's layout of the words of another poet, Blake brought his creative practice as an engraver to bear on the composition of the manuscript. While the blank frames of the proofs indicate the divorce of the engraver from the compositor and from the poet, the composition of the manuscript shows the inextricable connection between page dimensions, design, and writing. Thinking about the material practices involved in the disbinding, mounting, and rebinding at the heart of the *Night Thoughts* laboratory sheds light on the archaeology of bookmaking as a practice of composition and the impact of the book form on the archaeology of the manuscript. Extra-illustration shows the dynamic possibilities of the book extended to include extraneous materials between its pages, and thus provides a model for thinking about the composition of *Vala* as a creative process of hybridization and interpolation of *Night Thoughts*.<sup>59</sup>

58. My discussion of the letterpress paradigm is inspired by Viscomi's argument about relief-etching as a distinct practice of composition: "One still imagines Blake working as a poet in the manuscript tradition and using illuminated printing subsequently as a mode of reproduction. It is exceedingly difficult to think outside the letterpress paradigm, to conceive of a mode of printing that did not require a finished text or fair copy before execution began; or of a mode of execution in which aesthetic decisions regarding page designs could have an immediate effect on the text, shaping and directing it. In the letterpress paradigm, one simply assumes that a text is written on paper and then set in type, that is produced and completed before being reproduced, with labor moving determinately—and unidirectionally—from author to compositor. Indeed, authors and compositors were not collaborators, and endings were not set before beginnings"; Viscomi, "The Evolution of 'The Marriage of Heaven and Hell,'" 286.

59. Attention to the materiality of the page enhances Vincent De Luca's suggestion to read *Vala* in terms of "interpolation or the text as palimpsest," as opposed to *Jerusalem*, which he reads as a "Medley or the Text as Compilation"; *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton, N.J., 1991), 113–24, 124–42.



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