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The Boils and Potsherds: Radical Materiality in William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*❖

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ABSTRACT

William Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job* is widely recognized as the *magnum opus* of his final years. Generally, the preceding studies see the *Illustrations* as either an inner mental drama or a coherent part of Blake's theological framework of a more enlightened form of Christian belief. But I argue that certain plates of the *Illustrations* foreground radical materiality as a disruptive force that ceaselessly resists spiritual elevation. By engaging with Georges Bataille's conception of "base materialism," I propose that Blake's fusion of imagery and text is artistically heterogeneous, intensifying the presence of the material to disclose the fact that theodicean idealization is dependent on and even outperformed by the "base matter." With radical materiality, Blake's Job designs convey that human beings can will their moral actions based on the intrinsic qualities of such actions—"the use-value of uselessness"—rather than dictated by the exchange value that points to external ends. Also, religious experience consists of materialistic exploration, manipulation, and consumption of the body, challenging the conventional understanding of religion as inherently spiritual and idealistic.

KEYWORDS: William Blake, The Book of Job, materialism, Georges Bataille

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毒瘡與瓦片：威廉・布雷克《約伯記插畫》中的激進物質性❖

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摘　要

威廉・布雷克為舊約聖經《約伯記》所繪製的一系列插畫乃是其晚年的一大巨作。根據目前學界的共識，這組插畫體現了布雷克思想中獨特的基督教神學架構，同時也是一齣內在的人性心理劇場。本文另闢蹊徑，納入法國哲學家喬治・巴代伊的「低賤物質主義」概念，嘗試論證《約伯記插畫》中的激進物質性，如何劇烈地抗拒唯心式的昇華。本文指出，布雷克巧妙地融合了圖像和文字，以高度異質性的美學手法強化了物質與身體的存在，揭露出基督教中的神義論觀點與神聖性，其實很弔詭地奠基於巴代伊所言之「低賤物質」之上。透過激進物質性，布雷克的《約伯記插畫》強調了人類的道德決斷與行為並非受外在宗教權威與交換關係的制約，反映出巴代伊哲學中的「無用的價值」。另一方面，布雷克的圖像設計與聖經文本的非線性挪用，也確立了身體在宗教經驗中的重要位置，挑戰了傳統觀念中基督教的純粹精神性與唯心本質。

關鍵詞： 威廉・布雷克、《約伯記》、物質主義、喬治・巴代伊

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I. Introduction

Blake's idea of recreating the biblical story of Job started with separate drawings in the 1780s that depict specific scenes such as the arrival of Job's three friends and Job surrounded by his daughters. These then led to a series of nineteen watercolor paintings commissioned by Thomas Butt. Based on them, Blake worked with John Linnell and produced a complete set of twenty-one images in watercolor and engraving. The complete version of *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, printed in 1826, has been widely recognized as the *magnum opus* of Blake's final years.[1] Alexander Gilchrist, Blake's biographer, praises the set as "loftier in theme, nobler in achievement; most original and characteristic of all his productions" (328). John Ruskin also lauds it as "of the highest rank in certain characters of imagination and expression" (194).

That Blake concentrated his utmost artistic power years before his death on this biblical narrative accentuates its special status in the poet's ideal of revisionist Christianity. The Book of Job is not only a primary text that addresses the theological issue of theodicy; poetically it is "a sustained manifestation of the sublime" (Greenberg 301). Dealing particularly with divine law, transgression, punishment, and suffering, the story of Job proved to be fertile ground on which Blake could critically engage with orthodox Christianity. The significance of the *Illustrations* lies not only in the compelling visualization of biblical verses.[2] As the title plate shows, the *Illustrations* were "*Invented* & Engraved by William Blake" (my emphasis), which evinces that Blake's work goes beyond mere graphic representation of the Bible. The set showcases Blake's recreation of biblical meanings, his radical reformulation of the book's theological ideas, and most importantly, his dialectical combination of images and textual references that are not limited to the Book of Job but which incorporate other verses from the Old and the New Testaments.

[1] This essay examines the engraved version of the *Illustrations of the Book of Job*, which was composed between 1823 and 1826. I focus on the engravings because they include Blake's unique marginal designs (absent in the watercolor version) which, as I will argue, significantly epitomize Blake's radical materiality. This version is currently in the collection of Robert N. Essick and digitally displayed on *The William Blake Archive* (edited by Morris Eaves et al.). The permission to reproduce the images of the seven plates in this article has been requested.

[2] The set will hereafter be referred to as the *Illustrations*.

The *Illustrations* has drawn a considerable body of scholarly discussion.[3] From the perspective of biblical typology, Northrop Frye proposes that Blake sees Job as "a microcosm of the whole biblical story" moving through primal innocence, degeneration, and restoration ("Blake's Reading" 221). Other earlier Blake scholars consider the entire story an internal drama in Job's psyche. Joseph Wicksteed, in his earlier book, remarks that the "inward life of Job is the real theme of the book" and that "Jehovah and Satan must be conceived as representing aspects of Job's own soul contending for victory" (51). In *Blake's Job* (1982), S. Foster Damon similarly argues that "the whole drama is enacted in Job's soul" (3); that is, all characters including God are part of his Self. Such an approach initiated a branch of criticism that delves into the *Illustrations* with the tools of psychoanalysis and even clinical therapy.[4] This implies that Blake endowed the biblical story with a psychological depth that is relevant to modern disciplines beside religious and literary studies.

Later critics generally consider the *Illustrations* within the Christian context and regard the set as a coherent element of Blake's alternative Christian ideal. Jeanne Moskal's 1990 essay examines Blake's depiction of Job's three friends, arguing that he challenges the typological interpretation of Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar as Jesus's mockers in the New Testament. According to Moskal,

> Blake's treatment of the three friends can fruitfully be seen in the light of his lifelong concern with mutual forgiveness . . . he ethical problem of human beings forgiving each other, as contrasted with the theological problem of God forgiving human beings. (16-17)

On the other hand, Emma Mason analyzes the *Illustrations* through the theoretical lens of the reader's affective reaction. She proposes that Blake establishes emotional connections that "re-emotionalizes readers by teaching them how to read the Bible, and thus how to read the world" with "their spirit and sensation, rather than their letter or system" (461). More recently,

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[3] In addition to the more interpretive approaches reviewed here, scholars such as Mei-Ying Sung focus on the technical aspects of Blake's engraving in the *Illustrations* and reexamine Blake's working procedure with copper plates, arguing that Blake's Job designs embody the Romantic ideal of "the unity of conception and execution" (42). See her monograph *William Blake and the Art of Engraving* (Routledge, 2009).

[4] For example, see Edward F. Edinger's Jungian discussion and Jason Wright's adoption of the *Illustrations* as an exploration of memory and trauma in psychotherapy.

Christopher Rowland treats the *Illustrations* as Blake's biblical exegesis that moves away from orthodox theodicy to liberate Christians from "the simplistic theological nostrum that if one acts justly and accepts received wisdom one will be rewarded" (15). In Rowland's view, Blake's Job reiterates his overarching religious ideal that espouses internal divinity in human nature and rejects an external and transcendent deity (16).

Generally, the preceding studies either see the *Illustrations* as an inner mental drama or a final affirmation of Blake's theological framework of a more enlightened form of Christian belief, which leaned toward spirituality over corporeality in his later years.[5] Departing from them, I argue that despite the set's apparent adherence to the Christian orthodoxy of divine harmony, on certain plates of the *Illustrations* Blake foregrounds a sort of radical materiality as a disruptive force that ceaselessly resists spiritual elevation, deviating from the widely recognized tendency for spiritualism in his late years. In the Book of Job, the debate over God's divine justice and human suffering is interwoven with materialistic imagery and language, showcasing a dynamic between a metaphysical high order and a material low order embodied by somatic, animalistic and naturalistic images. Blake's *Illustrations* compellingly display this dynamic between the high and the low. By excessively emphasizing the radically material, Blake shifts his focus from reiterating teleological and free-will arguments in traditional theodicean discourse. Rather, Blake's Job images attest to such a disruptive force of the material, empowered by the base, repulsive, and abject matters, as an ineluctable component in the experience of the sacred.

II. Materialism in Romantic Literature: A Critical Overview

In a traditional view, the term materiality/materialism seems incongruous with British Romanticism. Philosophically, materialism can be summed up as a belief that "[r]eality consists of material things and things that are wholly dependent for their existence on material things" and "the vital psychological phenomena of our human and animal existence are wholly dependent on the material nature of our bodies" (Brown and Ladyman 9). Poetically, major

[5] This transition is marked by the contrast between his rejection of body-soul dichotomy before the turn of the century (in works such as *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, and the continental prophecies *America* and *Europe*) and his dualist declaration in the final epic *Jerusalem*: "Corporeal Friends are Spiritual Enemies" (Blake 98).

Romantics such as Wordsworth valued spontaneous expression of feelings free from external circumstances, which constitutes a form of spiritual depth, "the depth of human souls" (573). Keats also denounced the materialist notion that human perception and aesthetic imagination can be unpacked by biological explanation and reduced to mere bodily reaction, as he laments in *Lamia* that materialist "[p]hilosophy will clip an Angel's wings, / Conquer all mysteries with rule and line" and "[u]nweave a rainbow" (427). On the levels of religious and political ideologies, Romantic poets have been traditionally regarded as advocates of the existence of divinity in human nature rather than of outward worship materialized through extravagant rituals, a sure sign of religious corruption often allied with political oppression. In short, materialism appears to be at odds with everything that the British Romantics espoused. However, recent scholarship in Romantic studies has started to reconsider and identify the materialistic aspects in Romantic literature.

In *Literature and Medicine in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (2000), Janis McLaren Caldwell coins the term "Romantic materialism" (1). As Caldwell states, Romantic materialists combined the perspectives of natural philosophy and Christianity to resolve the conflict between "physical evidence and inner, imaginative understanding" (1). Accordingly, she investigates how literary works such as *Frankenstein* (1818) and *Wuthering Heights* (1847) incorporate contemporary medical discourse, juxtapose "the natural and the spiritual," and disarray "the conventional dualist hierarchy of spirit over flesh" (1). Onno Oerlemans's *Romanticism and the Materiality of Nature* (2002) focuses on the Romantic perception of nature to define the "material sublime" as the great, unfathomable aspects of the physical world that are beyond the human subject's knowledge and abilities of linguistic representation (4-5). In sum, the material in Romantic poetry pertains to the human body, particularly the bodily reaction to disease and medical treatment, which "reinvigorates religious mystery by refiguring it anew in explicitly material terms" (Caldwell 4). The Romantic material is also anchored in the perception of the external world, whose natural grandeur strikes fear and awe into the human consciousness and disturbs its self-identification in relation to the metaphysical truth.

In addition, several scholars have paid specific attention to the material in Blake's works. Tristanne Connolly traces the complex nature of the human body in Blake's works. By drawing on modern anthropological accounts, contemporary anatomy treatises, and sociological concepts, Connolly argues

that Blake uses bodily imagery to explore the protean nature of identity, critique empiricist understanding of human sensibility, and evaluate irregular sexualities unrelated to procreation. In his 2005 monograph, Matthew Green applies the term "visionary materialism" to bring forth the "spiritually charged materialism" (3) in Blake's synthesis of natural philosophy, social observation, and prophetic vision. Green challenges the assumption that Blake utterly rejects the Enlightenment empiricism proposed by Locke and Newton. On the contrary, Blake's engagement with them solidifies the poet's "belief in the messianic capacity of human beings and the redemptive potential of his own art" (Green 4). Joseph Fletcher, in line with Green, highlights Blake's self-identification as a philosopher and evidences this identification by exploring the connection between Blake's early metaphysics and eighteenth-century philosophies of vitalism and pantheism. Fletcher argues that Blake perceives the inherent divinity in the external world, "the infinitude of all corporeal beings . . . not limited to sensory organs" (15). Fletcher then delves into the philosophical resonances between Blake and Leibniz, confirming Blake's panpsychism which acknowledges material matter, including objects and living things, as self-active and self-growing, propelled by God's creative power. With natural philosophies, Blake strengthens his theological conviction in an immanent God, rather than a remote deity alienated from the material world.

The aforementioned studies by Connolly, Green, and Fletcher contribute majorly to Blake's participation in contemporary natural philosophies and shed light upon the materialistic aspects of Blake's works. Connolly has rightfully acknowledged the Blakean body's transgressive nature, which could have led to a fruitful scrutiny of the *Illustrations*. But her discussion mainly focuses on the biblical story itself with a brief comment that "Blake interpreted Satan and God as aspects of the same personality" (165), agreeing with Wicksteed's and Damon's early views. While Green and Fletcher persuasively position Blake as a natural philosopher, refuting the conventional understanding of the poet as anti-empiricist, the scope of their investigation is limited to Blake's early works before 1800. Moreover, their designation of Blake as a materialist, though apparently subversive, yields conclusions that are confined to the established reading that Blake validates sensual perception, sees the inherent divinity of the external world, and promotes visionary imagination that transcends their limitation. That is, what Green terms as Blake's "visionary materialism" still

adheres to the conventional understanding of the Romantic aesthetic as the idealistic elevation of the physical world.

However, what I identify in Blake's *Illustrations of the Book Job*, a pivotal work in his late years traditionally marked as a period in which he leaned toward spiritualism against corporeality, is another aspect of the material that constantly rejects sublimation and with no less power disturbs human consciousness and identification. This anti-sublimation materialism is strikingly prominent in Blake's refiguration of the biblical narrative of Job, which attempts to reestablish the spiritual relationship between humanity and God. The materiality in the *Illustrations* cannot be sufficiently accounted for by only engaging with eighteenth-century natural philosophies, because, as I have argued previously, the set contains images and biblical texts that are arranged to generate a sense of disruption and revolt. The radical materialism that resists spiritualization goes beyond the panpsychism and pantheism proposed by natural philosophers. Therefore, to better illustrate the material in my analysis of the *Illustrations*, I turn to Georges Bataille's conception of "base materialism," which drastically departs from other materialisms that "may have wanted to do away with all spiritual entities, ended up positioning an order of things whose hierarchical relations mark it as specifically idealist" ("Materialism" 15). And as this essay will demonstrate, such radical reformulation of materialism is anticipated by Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*.

III. Defining Radical Materiality: Georges Bataille's "Base Materialism"

In *Literature and Evil* (1957), Bataille commends Blake for epitomizing the *sovereign* power of literature: its heterogeneous qualities that do not conform to any moral system. While this is the only literal connection between them, the French philosopher and the English poet share similar understandings of the symbiosis between religious experience and literature. Bataille proclaims that

> Poetry alone, which denies and destroys the limitations of things, can return us to this absence of limitations—in short, the world is given to us when the image which we have within us is sacred,

> because all that is sacred is poetry and all that is poetic is sacred. (*Literature* 69)

The equation in the last line corresponds to Blake's belief in the inner divinity of humanity accomplished through poetic creation: "God becomes as we are, that we may be as he is" (3).[6]

Bataille's idea that poetry signifies the sacred experience emancipated from this "order of things" (*Theory* 52) certainly finds resonances in Blake's works, as the above example shows. Yet intriguingly, in Bataille's philosophical thinking delineated in works such as *The Theory of Religion* (1992) and *Erotism* (1957), sacredness is intrinsically bound with expenditure; that is, the violent consumption of material resource and life energy, in contrast to the secular order of work and the accumulation of properties. As Michèle Richman notes, for Bataille, artistic and poetic creation enables sacredness because it "removes an object from the realm of *things*" and exemplifies *sovereignty*, a state that is "free from an exclusive subordination to work, production, and accumulation" (148). Conceptually, therefore, art and poetry, whose creation are irrelevant to sustaining secular order, are equivalent to other heterogeneous experiences that similarly emancipate humans from the secular realm such as eroticism (sexual activities unrelated to procreation) and human sacrifice (ritualistic violence that grants access to the sacred with the destruction of the body). Only in these experiences of expenditure, Bataille asserts, are humans not fettered by "real ties of subordination" to "the world of utility" (*Theory* 43), the unimaginative daily routine conditioned by work and production. With this formulation, art and poetry are grounded in an unconventional materialist understanding of humanity that first calls for the often-*abjected* presence of the material/bodily and then violently consumes it through sacred experience enabled by activities such as artistic and literary creation. This alternative reasoning can be further explicated with Bataille's conception of "base materialism."

At the outset of "Base Materialism and Gnosticism," an essay written between 1927 and 1930, Bataille observes that an object consists of "two verbal entities": the object itself as "base matter" and "the idea" that points to "an

[6] Blake's texts are quoted from *The Complete Poetry & Prose of William Blake* edited by David V. Erdman, and the text here comes from Blake's 1788 philosophical aphorisms *There is No Natural Religion*.

abstract God" ("Base Materialism" 45). In human civilization, the idea has surpassed the base matter, thus forming the idealism that constitutes the conventional division between the high and the low, the spiritual and the physical/corporeal. Base matter becomes something to be expelled for the sake of idealization: "Base matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and it refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations" (51). As the title of this essay suggests, Bataille refers to Gnosticism, an ancient school of Christian philosophy denounced as heretic by the Church Fathers, as the base matter of orthodox Christianity, because it,

> in an almost bestial way, no matter what were its metaphysical developments, . . . borrowed from everywhere, from the Egyptian tradition, from Persian dualism, from Eastern Jewish heterodoxy, elements that conformed the least to the established intellectual order; it added its own dreams, heedlessly expressing a few monstruous obsessions. (46)[7]

As Bataille postulates,

> It is possible to see as a *leitmotiv* of Gnosticism the conception of matter as an *active* principle having its own eternal autonomous existence as darkness (which would not be simply the absence of light, but the monstrous *archontes* revealed by this absence), and as evil (which would not be the absence of good, but a creative action). (47)

Here Bataille emphasizes the heterogeneity of Gnosticism, which absorbed multiple elements of the base matter excluded from orthodox Christianity. In the essay, Bataille reproduces several images of *archontes*, the Gnostic deities worshipped in sexual rituals. These deities all feature animalized figures (the heads of a cock or a duck and the body of a snake), one of them being a

[7] In the essay, Bataille does not provide a comprehensive definition of Gnosticism, mainly using the term to illustrate his conception of base matter as an opposite of the more spiritualized form of worship in orthodox Christianity. His understanding of Gnosticism is somewhat at odds with the scholarly consensus in religious studies. For a general introduction to the Gnostic worldview and doctrines, see Birger Pearson and Nicola Denzey Lewis.

decapitalized god ("*Acephalic* god") beneath the heads of two beasts. These animalistic images represent the Bataillean base materialism that resists spiritual elevation of the base matter and defies religious idealism, the key phenomenon that can be explored in Blake's Job designs empowered by similar bestiality and abjectness.

What is paradoxical in Bataille's base materialism, as Benjamin Noys points out, lies in the "logic . . . that whatever is elevated or ideal is actually dependent on base matter, and that this dependence means that the purity of the ideal is contaminated" (500). Such dependence and contamination are "systematically denied by the ideal, which splits off base matter as whatever is disgusting, vile, sub-human" (500). Gustav Strandberg also notes that for Bataille, base matter "constitute[s] the seamy underside of human existence which, although often hidden from view, makes up the material reality that undergirds all idealist thought, however much idealist thinkers try to ignore [it]" (247). Here we can observe the double meaning of "base." On the one hand, it denotes something that is low and repulsive. But on the other hand, it ascertains its necessary existence despite being constantly ejected in the process of idealization: its status as the "base" of the ideal. For Bataille, it is "the process whereby the high or ideal denies its dependence on base matter by constructing it as disgusting and vile" (Noys 501). In Blake's *Illustrations*, as the next section will show, certain images of somatic violence are constructed as "disgusting and vile," but in a way that simultaneously exposes such dependence and thus resists being incorporated into the orthodox scheme of spiritualization.

Apart from the ideal's paradoxical dependence on the material, critics perceive certain resonances between base materialism and Marxism, a correlation that yields important perspectives to approach Blake's Job designs. First, base matter confirms the inevitable existence of negativity. As Bataille writes:

> Base matter is external and foreign to ideal human aspirations, and it refuses to allow itself to be reduced to the great ontological machines resulting from these aspirations . . . it was a question of disconcerting the human spirit and idealism before something base, to the extent that one recognized the helplessness of superior principles. ("Base Materialism" 51)

The "aspirations" and "superior principle" can be extended to the fetishization of commodities and the bourgeois values in capitalist society. Base materialism brings them down to "raw phenomena" (Bataille, "Materialism" 15) that on the contrary stress "an affirmation of the use-value of uselessness" (Strandberg 250). Moreover, this negates the capitalist sanctification of exchange value and disables "a utilitarian logic in which everything and everyone is useful for something else" (Hollier 7). Base matter's power to expose "the inexchangeable heterogeneity of the real, an irreducible kernel of resistance to any kind of transposition, of substitution, a real which does not yield to a metaphor" (Hollier 11) offers a Bataillean reading of Blake's radical materialism in the *Illustrations* that negates the exchange value of Christian virtues, which will be further discussed in later sections.

Second, Strandberg suggests that Bataillean base materialism "contradicts the elevated forms of bourgeois thought and practice," and he pays specific attention to Bataille's designating such contradictions as a "psychological process" that is crucially "psycho-social, or affective" (249). This emphasizes the base matter's capability to disrupt conventional perceptions of morality, piety, and aesthetics, and evoke strong somatic reactions. Blake scholars such as Susan Matthews have identified Blake's tendency to critique the bourgeois culture of politeness and gender propriety in eighteenth-century England. My analysis will demonstrate that Blake's Job designs indeed defy what is considered pious and proper, with the Bataillean sense of radical materiality that intensively impacts the eighteenth-century sensibility of his time.

By engaging with Bataille's formulation of base materialism, the following sections examine the radical materiality of selected plates in the engraved version of Blake's *Illustrations of the Book of Job*. On these plates, Blake interweaves material and somatic images that are repulsive with Christian motifs represented and reinterpreted by biblical verses rearranged in the margins. The fusion of imagery and text generates artistic heterogeneity, recalling the "base matter" that is expelled in order to accomplish orthodox theodicean tasks. Paradoxically, Blake intensifies the presence of the material to disclose the fact that theodicean idealization is dependent on and even outperformed by base matter. To achieve this, Blake first dismantles Job's presupposed uprightness, which is established by the frame narratives in the prologue and the epilogue, and exposes the latent exchange value in conventional Christian piety. Second, with the multilayered construction of

Satan's character, Blake disturbs the moral dichotomy between God and the Devil and confronts the contemporary sensibility towards the afflicted body. Finally, in the two plates that feature an alternative kind of theophany, Blake materializes God's image with anti-Christian elements of bestiality and restructures the God-human relationship as a homosexual violation. The combination of religious impurity and gender taboo attests to the radical materiality in Blake's artistic interpretations of the Book of Job.

IV. "Thus did Job continually": Blake's Materialistic De-framing of Job's Uprightness

Structurally, the Book of Job can be divided into three main parts: a prose prologue (chapters 1 and 2), a series of poetic monologues and dialogues (chapters 3-41, including Job's laments, his exchanges with the three friends, Elihu's speech, God's words, and Job's reply), and finally a prose epilogue (chapter 42). Scholars who approach Job as a literary work as a whole have generally agreed that the prologue and the epilogue serve as frame narratives, which construct the main story by establishing its key prerequisites.[8] In other words, the prologue's description of Job as "perfect and upright, and one that feared God, and eschewed Evil" (Job 1.1) presents an indisputable fact in the biblical context: Job's character as a just man is unquestionable. According to Carol A. Newsom, the prose tale traditionally features "strong didacticism . . . in which the ethical quality of the main character is critical" (40). Newsom further points out that the subsequent description of Job's family, properties, and reputation "suggests that the story intends to recommend and reconfirm the cultural assumption that virtue finds a reward in prosperity" (53).

However, Blake's engravings complicate Job's premised uprightness and such an assumption about rewarding virtues. Plate 1 "Job and his Family" (Fig.

[8] In biblical studies, the authorship of the Book of Job has long been subject to scholarly disputation. The generic disparity between prose and poetry and the conflicting characters of Job (the "patient Job" in the prologue and the epilogue and the "impatient Job" in the middle chapters) have led to a hypothesis of multiple authors or a single author who wrote the prologue and the epilogue by adopting materials from ancient folktales to frame his poetic representation of the theological issues of suffering and retribution (Pinker 1; Newsom 36). But reading the Book of Job as a whole in literary and religious terms, other scholars in biblical studies have proposed to see both the prologue and the epilogue as integral parts of the book, emphasizing "the importance of reading the prose tale in relation to the dialogues and vice versa" (Newsom 37), a view that should also be upheld by Blake, since he reveres the Bible as a unified work of art from a single source of divine inspiration. The possibility of multiple authorship of Job could hardly occur to him.

1) shows Job in his earthly happiness. Job and his wife look piously upwards, books laying open on their laps. Damon and Morton D. Paley have noticed the unused instruments on the tree behind as a sign of alienation from true faith in God, which is aggravated by Job's adherence to the book of Law and his distance from the Gothic cathedral in the background (Damon, *Blake Dictionary* 217; Paley 232). Generally, critics regard Job's earthly happiness as problematic, merely an appearance of an erroneous understanding of God, what Damon calls "his tragic flaw in that very innocence" (*Blake Dictionary* 217) and what Paley terms his "religious anxiety" (233). Similarly, Rowland sees Job's bliss as the result of "the habitual religion" of "vain repetition" that worships a transcendent "divinity located in heaven above requiring sacrifice for sin" (22). The subsequent destruction of Job's properties, flocks, and children indicates an abstraction of their physical beings; even though his sons and daughters are human individuals, under the overall theodicean scheme, as their existence is dehumanized and utterly insubstantial. This implies the very danger in the process of religious idealization that sanctions violent obliteration of human individuality. In this case, the children killed in chapter 1 can be conveniently replaced by another seven sons and three daughters in the final restoration as a compensation, a disturbing ending of "the metaphysical absurd," in Frye's words ("Blake's Reading" 225).

Based on this premise, I would argue that Blake identifies the mechanism of idealization that relies on the expulsion and even annihilation of the material. Furthermore, he observes that in the Book of Job, human individuals can be objectified as base matter like flocks and lifeless properties to be consumed in theodicean process. Blake insinuates this with the marginal designs. On the top, we see two lines from the Lord's Prayer: "Our Father which art in Heaven / hallowed be thy Name" (Matt. 6.9), a message of spiritual elevation from the New Testament arranged in an arched shape that seems to dominate the physical world beneath. But it is crucial to note that the lines are within the smoke that comes from the burning altar at the bottom of the plate. The four wretched animalistic images refer to Job's sacrificial ritual for his children described in verse 5 of chapter 1: Job "offered burnt sacrifices according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts" (1.5). Job is uncertain about whether his children committed any offence against God, but he makes a sacrifice as a precaution, a preemptive measure to prevent a breach of the God-human relationship, "a breach of the

wholeness of the world" (Newsom 55). Preceded by the narrator's emphasis on Job's material wealth, the burnt sacrifice can generate the conventional piety of unenlightened optimism. That is, as long as one does not "sin and curse God," his welfare is secured. This reflects a mechanism of expiation and propitiation that exposes the nature of exchange value in what are considered "good deeds," as a result of later ecclesiastical conceptions of Christian virtues. Blake exposes and deconstructs the religious error by only presenting the concluding line of this verse in an enlarged form: "Thus did Job continually" (1.5). The violent consumption of the material is not expressed by words but embodied by images composed of raw and unrefined lines. The rough and uncouth delineation of the fire, the altar, the sacrificed animals, and the smoke confound the conventional perception of beauty in high culture. Yet the two lines from the Lord's Prayer, which supposedly belong to a higher, more spiritual domain, are contained and embodied by the sacrificial smoke—the "low" and "base" image. This design discloses the former's dependence upon the latter, the paradoxical propensity of base matter in Bataille's thought.

A more intriguing design in the margins of this plate is the other two lines from the New Testament engraved on the altar: "The Letter Killeth / The Spirit giveth Life" (2 Cor. 3.6) and "It is Spiritually Discerned" (1 Cor. 2.14). These two lines can be regarded as both the division and the reconciliation between the Old and the New Testaments. Traditionally, the "Letter" refers to the Law in the Old-Testament tradition, grounded on a system of retributive justice that deals punishment in accordance with sins committed. The violent deprivation of life is absolved in the New Testament with an affirmation of life endorsed by the power of the Spirit. Frye, from a literary perspective, points out that Paul is promoting a metaphorical reading of Scripture that can be "spiritually discerned" rather than literally grasped (*Great Code* 74). Paley also writes that Blake aims to "reconcile our ideas of the Father and the Son" and that "the [biblical] quotations often interact with and resonate against each other" (231). Therefore, the location of these two lines right on the altar image is meant to address Job's problematic practice of burnt sacrifices as a calculating precaution against God's punishment for his children's possible, unknown sins. However, the curious juxtaposition of the phrase "The Letter Killeth" and the burning altar with two severed animal heads complicates this "appropriate" reading. The decapitation images disturbingly literalize the metaphysical killing by "The Letter." The divine decree that sanctions religious violence in the New

Testament is not "Spiritually Discerned," but sensually experienced with the sacrificial images of bodily violence. Blake's design here reverses the spiritual progression from the Old Testament to the New Testament and covertly annuls the metaphorical reading proposed by Frye, by putting emphasis on the viler and lower imagery and its paradoxical status as the "base" of idealization. This unsettles the boundaries between the high and the low, the spiritual and the material, and problematizes the typological connection between the Old and the New Testaments held by critics such as Frye and Paley.

V. "Skin for skin": Blake's Embodying of Satanic Persecution

After Job's uprightness is de-framed, we see the divine court of God on Plate 2 "Satan Before the Throne of God" that illustrates verses 6 to 10 of chapter 1 (Fig. 2). The pictorial structure of this design synchronizes Job's current condition in the material world and Satan's challenge to God in the divine realm. The plate is framed by two pillars of interwoven vines, decorated by sacrificial images of smoke (on the left) and fire (on the right). On the bottom we see two shepherds on both sides and fences that keep the sheep. On the top margin, the two pillars form a canopy, containing scriptural verses arranged in a symmetrical manner. The verses are not only from the Book of Job but the Psalms and other prophetic books that point to future redemption, signifying again the typological linkage between the two Testaments. In his commentary, Paley has identified the sources of these verses and offers an initial analysis of Plate 2's marginal images. He recognizes the ambiguity of Blake's textual arrangement that combines "both positive and negative views of the divine" (235). This is an accurate observation, but I take this ambiguity further. I propose that, similar to the previous plate, the verses are arranged more as somatic images that intimately interact with the main images of the plate, especially Satan in the center, in a way that exemplifies Blake's radical materialism.

It is crucial to notice that the entire heavenly assembly is juxtaposed with two pillars of smoke and that Satan's body is surrounded by flames, corresponding to the smoke and fire in the marginal designs, whose source is possibly the sheep in the fences beneath the main picture. The animals are seemingly under the protection of the two shepherds, potential Christ-figures. But, echoing the previous plate, they are latently the materials of the burnt

sacrifice, generating fire and smoke that contain the spiritual realm. Blake visualizes God's presence at the upper center of the plate, but such divine existence is framed by sacrificial images. The smoke in the main picture is extended to the upper margin in which Blake inscribes "I shall see God" on the left and "Thou art our Father" on the right. Paley traces the sources of the two lines to chapter 19 of Job and chapter 63 of Isaiah, suggesting that they accentuate "redemption, resurrection, and millennial Judgment" (235). But Blake's heterogeneous arrangement of the text and the framing image again disrupts the more conventional readings, accentuating the materialistic and violent aspects of religious practice.

Moreover, the sacrificial image of fire accompanies the entrance of Satan into the divine court of God.[9] Here we have to first consider Satan's identity and the nature of his apparently defiant inquisition. In biblical studies, it has long been acknowledged that Satan in the Book of Job is not the Devil of later ecclesiastical doctrines and Christian literature. This is confirmed by scholars of Near Eastern languages such as Marvin H. Pope and Peggy L. Day. The original Hebrew appellation *haśśāṭān*, "the satan," which etymologically means "accuser," is less a name than the title of a heavenly position which is in charge of inspecting the human world (Newsom 55). In other words, Satan is no more than an angel in God's court; thus, he is morally neutral, not the evil enemy of God and humanity. On this plate, Blake complies with this understanding, as he depicts Satan in a human form not different from other angelic beings in the assembly.[10] In the Book of Job, Satan responds to God's declaration—"Hast thou considered my Servant Job"—inscribed above the main picture of Plate 2, casting doubt upon the real motivation for Job's uprightness. Biblical scholars such as Day and Newsom hold that the interaction between Satan and God cannot be seen as betting, an act of making a wager on whether Job will curse God in adversity or not, as many readers of the Bible would perceive. According to Newsom, Satan's role is "of the maintenance of its [the world's] good order,

[9] God's physical resemblance to Job has drawn scholarly attention. Both Damon and Paley affirm that Job has created God in his own image (Damon, *Blake Dictionary* 218; Paley 234). The similarity in terms of Job's and God's physical appearance corresponds to Blake's understanding of both divinity and degeneration as internal phenomena in the human mind and reinforces the conventional interpretation that Blake presents Job's story as an inner psychic drama.

[10] Blake seems to retract Satan's moral neutrality on the later plate "The Fall of Satan" (Plate 16). In this design, Satan is cast out from the heavenly assembly and falls downwards to hellish flames, accompanied by Elihu's line from chapter 36 of Job: "Thou has fulfilled the Judgment of the Wicked" (Job 36.17). Satan's demise is not mentioned in Job, so Blake's invention of this plot invites further discussion of Satan's nature in the poet's final phase of Christian revisionism.

its wholeness," and he "embodies a profoundly destabilizing force as the narrative embodiment of a hermeneutics of suspicion" (55). Therefore, what happens between God and Satan in the Book of Job is not a contest between good and evil, but a dialectic examination of evidence of the invalidity of a certain moral order misconceived by many believers; that is, the belief that one can secure his earthly prosperity with good deeds. God accepts Satan's challenge not only because he has confidence in Job's uprightness and fidelity, but because, as Day insightfully observes, he allows (or even wishes) Satan to "sever the link between piety and reward" (81), to expose the exchange value of Christian virtues falsely upheld and spiritualized in the name of divine intimacy. Satan's authorized mission is, as Newsom further observes, reinforced by the phrase "Skin for skin," a metaphor that derives from trading in the marketplace to indicate "the implicit calculations that underlie what appears as piety (56).

Blake's depiction of Satan on Plate 2 of the *Illustrations* amplifies this critique of false idealism with his radical materialism. In this design, Satan's verbal exchange with God is embodied as a somatic performance that intrudes into the spiritual sphere, with Satan raising his hands and spreading his legs, his naked body twisted in a choreographed, Dionysian manner. Satan's muscular trunk and outstretching posture conveys the Blakean aesthetic of the male body that signifies intense life energy and feelings, as well as radical argumentation.[11] On Plate 2, in the fire surrounding Satan's dancing body, we see the faces of Job and his wife with a trancelike expression that borders on erotic ecstasy. The composite imagery of the executioner's and the victims' bodies and the sacrificial fire that engulfs the two parties corresponds to the Bataillean sacredness that is accessed through the violent consumption of the body in practices such as human sacrifice and eroticism which disregard production and resource accumulation. Blake's design here anticipates Bataille's unique understanding of religious experience that violently repulses the underlying exchange value in traditional Christian piety represented by Job's problematic bliss on Plate 1. With such an emphasis on the corporeal/material, Blake intensifies the dialectic posed by *haśśāṭān* to

[11] This is also exemplified by Orc emerging in flames in *America: A Prophecy*, the colored painting "Albion rose" in *A Large Book of Designs* (1796), and the title page of *Milton: A Poem* on which the naked Milton raises his right hand to gesture a religious contention.

challenge the moral order that relies on the transaction of good deeds and earthly rewards under the appearance of spiritualization.

Blake's somatic actualization of the satanic dialectic is presented with full force on Plate 3 "Job's Sons and Daughters Overwhelmed by Satan" (Fig. 3) and Plate 6 "Satan Smiting Job with Boils" (Fig. 5). In the Book of Job, the first phase of catastrophe progresses with separate incidents, gradually heightening the level of severity: the Sabeans' robbery of Job's oxen, the burning of his sheep by "The Fire of God," the Chaldeans' robbery of his camels (each loss of properties is accompanied by the murder of his servants), and finally the destruction his house and the deaths of his children by a storm (Job 1.14-19). Blake leaves out the deprivation of flocks and directly displays the most horrible event on Plate 3, where Blake accentuates the somatic aspects of this destruction, making it a choreographed spectacle with Job's children twisting their bodies as they are consumed by flames. This is a major deviation from the biblical text, in which they are killed by the collapsing house brought down by a storm.

Blake constantly utilizes the sacrificial imagery of fire and smoke to accentuate the violent aspects of religion. The fire consuming Job's sons and daughters who writhe in pain resonates with the marginal images of two pillars of smoke on both sides that rise to the upper margin, in which the biblical line "The Fire of God is fallen from Heaven" (Job 1.16) is written. But what "The Fire of God" destroys in the Book of Job are not Job's children, but his sheep and servants. The verses that describe the four messengers relaying the disasters to Job are presented in the bottom margin of Plate 4 "The Messengers Tell Job of His Misfortunes," but Blake revises the text by grafting "The Fire of God" from verse 16 onto the deaths of Job's children ("the young men") in verse 19. The deliberate mismatch of the text and the image and the substitution of God's fire for "the great wind from Wildness" (Job 1.19, though engraved in the margin beneath the main picture) strengthens the inherent allegiance between God and *haśśāṭān*; the line "And the Lord said unto Satan, Behold all that he hath is in thy Power" hovers over Satan, who issues flames from his hands in yet another posture of bodily performance. Satan's action against Job's children is not "permitted" by God as a wager; he is actively fulfilling the divine will to rectify a certain religious falsity. Blake refutes the conventional reading of the Book of Job as a dualistic contest between God and the Devil, good and evil, piety and blasphemy. To underscore this, Blake departs from the Scripture by

rearranging its lines to reinforce the somatic nature of his Job images. Such radically materialistic aesthetics will continue to intensify when Satan directs his power onto Job himself.

Plate 5 is another Blakean deviation from the Bible and serves as a further critique of optimistic piety, the belief in the causal relation between good work and divine blessing. Blake appropriates verse 25 of chapter 30 ("Did I not weep for him who was in trouble? was not my soul grieved for the poor?") and places it in the top margin. Job's poetic evocation of his empathy in a later chapter is materialized as an act of charity in the lower part of the picture, as Blake portrays Job and his wife giving bread to an aged pauper leaning on a staff.[12] Blake problematizes Job's action on this plate. In the biblical text, despite a series of lamentation gestures—rending his clothes, shaving his head, and falling down to the ground—Job nonetheless receives the disaster subserviently with a final act of worshipping and delivers the famed line: "Naked came I out of my mother's womb, and naked shall I return thither: the LORD gave and the LORD hath taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD" (Job 1.21). With the combination of verse 25 of chapter 30 and the depiction of Job's charity, Blake destabilizes the firm characterization of the "patient Job" in the frame narrative of the prose prologue. Job on this plate is raising an argument against God, questioning the justification of his loss, for he has demonstrated his empathy and put it into practice with charity work. The virtue of compassion is deconstructed, brought down to the materialistic level of a transaction for divine blessing.

Blake's materialization of Job's argumentation in verse 25 with narrative anachronism, combined with the sacrificial images on the previous plates, corresponds to Bataille's understanding that base materialism challenges the exchange value of human works. As the exchange value of an object precedes its use-value, pointing to an external end of being commodified, the exchange value of Job's piety embodied as charity work also points to an external purpose of securing God's favor. When Blake exposes and dismantles this mechanism in the *Illustrations*, the "use value" of human action lies in the disinterested adherence to its intrinsic qualities regardless of the results. This again echoes

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[12] Critics have highlighted Blake's negative view of charity work as hypocrisy. Sarah Haggarty discerns that Job's good deed on this plate "seem[s] to be motivated not by genuine compassion but by a self-conscious wish to be *seen* to give charitably" (84). Wicksteed refers to the symbolic dichotomy between the left (the material) and the right (the spiritual), arguing that because Job gives the bread with his left hand, his good work is grounded on "a false conception of material value" (117).

with what Bataille emphasizes as the sovereign power of art and literature (which, in his understanding, share with religion the fundamental nature of expenditure), the "use-value of the useless" that points to no external ends (Strandberg 25).

The naked body metaphor in verse 21 of chapter 1 directs our attention to the body, especially the body in extreme physical pain, and "highlight[s] the intimate relationship between body and meaning" (Newsom 59). But the theological meanings are outweighed by the bodily persecution on this plate, empowered by the materialistic and animalistic images in the margins. Blake's arrangement of the victimized body forms a fourfold structure of perception: the victim (Job), the persecutor (Satan), the onlooker (Job's wife), and the viewer (as the reader of the Bible as well). This evokes a strong affect that blends pleasure and repulsion, crowding out the spiritual messages that are supposed to be delivered by the biblical text and disturbing the viewer/reader's self-identification.

First, we see the reappropriation of verse 21 of chapter 1, Job's declaration of his piety despite the current disaster. It is a body metaphor confirming God's absolute authority that both "gave" and "taketh away." But Blake shifts the verse to accompany the depiction of Satan smiting Job's body in chapter 2. The metaphor that conveys spiritual adherence to God is embodied with Blake's nonlinear juxtaposition of the text and the image; the naked body in Job's words is reified as "base matter" that is deprived of subjectivity, manipulated, and maimed in an abject manner. On Plate 6, Job is lying on the ground with his loins covered by a piece of rag, while Satan anchors his feet on Job's abdomen and one of his feet. Job's uplifted face shows a trancelike expression, and his open palms signal a gesture of powerless resistance. This is Blake's typical depiction of victimization that usually combines pain and ecstasy, insinuating a problematic idea that the victim takes pleasure in being violated in an erotic sense, sexual dynamic also presented in the rape incident in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793).

Satan, on the other hand, outstretches his arms and legs; his right hand seems to summon four arrows from the sky and the left hand holds a vial,

pouring an unknown liquid onto Job.[13] Blake attends keenly to the materialistic and somatic aspect of the conversation between God and Satan: "And Satan answered the LORD, and said, Skin for skin, yea, all that a man hath will he give for his life. But put for the thine hand now, and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse thee to thy face. And the LORD said unto Satan, Behold, he is in thine hand; but save his life" (Job 2.4-6). The metaphorical language of "skin" and "hand" is reified in a highly tangible and tactile sense, with Satan actually "touching" Job's "bone and flesh." And Job's bodily condition of boils is caused by Satan's drug poured from the vial, an image germane to medical science, a particularly materialistic discourse in opposition to religious spiritualism. Satan's facial expression can be described as sinister or even sadistic, apparently relishing Job's physical affliction, but his head is in an angelic halo, an emphasis on the fact that his action as "the satan" is authorized by God.

This combination of cruelty and holiness on the figure of Satan blurs the boundaries between the material and the spiritual and affects the viewer's visual perception and potential identification. Christian readers might identify with Job, who traditionally stands for perseverance and unwavering faith, but Job's body, which blends pain with wretchedness, obstructs this route of identification. From another angle, an eighteenth-century viewer of the bourgeois culture of politeness and sensibility, in Susan Matthews's words, might intend to cast himself in the role of a sympathizing onlooker, represented by Job's weeping wife in the left corner, who covers her face with her hands because she is repulsed by the base suffering of another human being. However, Satan's centralized figure that dominates the entire plate, with the aforementioned mixture of sadism and sacredness, entices the viewer to identify with the victimizer, overlapping their gazes onto Job's victimized body.

In short, Plate 6 concretizes what Ian Haywood terms "hyperbolic realism" (7); the literary and artistic representations of spectacular violence in Romantic-period print culture manipulate the viewer's sentimental reactions and evoke their voyeuristic desire. Blake's fourfold structure of viewership further complicates voyeurism with a heightened sense of bodily wretchedness,

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[13] Paley and Rowland both discern the similarity between Satan's posture and Blake's colored painting "Albion rose," which represents the Blakean "human form divine" free from religious repression and rationalism. Paley sees Satan on this plate as a parody of Albion, as the latter sacrifices himself—Blake's concept of "self-annihilation" as a process of purging the human mind of the Satanic elements—for humankind while the former sacrifices it for himself (239).

generating both pleasure and repulsion. This sense of repulsion is heightened by the marginal images of "base matter": spiders, a locust, a frog, and a shattered pot, which corresponds to Job's abject act of scraping himself with a potsherd (Job 2.8). Jeremy Davies defines bodily pain as "an experience that calls attention to our background sense of embodied existence, and hence as a reflexive feeling of our capacity for feeling" (2). Valuing pain as "the feeling of feeling" (18), Davies regards the perception of it as fundamental to the human sense of existence. Such "a complex perception within which affects, interpretations, and self-images play a necessary part" (10) holds a prominent position in Romanticism because "[p]ain transforms our sense of identity" and "illuminate[s] our primordially embodied condition" (18). Blake's design of this plate engages with the Romantic aesthetics of bodily pain with a radically materialistic epitomization of Satan's victimizing body and Job's victimized body, an almost erotic presentation of a power dynamic that unsettles the process of identification in conventional spiritualized readings of the Book of Job.

VI. "The hair of my flesh stood up": Blake's Materialistic Representation of Theophany

The radical materiality in the *Illustrations* is not only embodied by Satan's persecution of Job, but intriguingly by God himself. In the prose prologue, God does not manifest himself from the characters' perspective. However, moving into the middle section, Blake portrays God in dream visions from the sensual viewpoint of the characters on two designs: Plate 9 "The Vision of Eliphaz" and Plate 11 "Job's Evil Dreams." My discussion in this section focuses on these two plates to propose that Blake represents the Christian theme of theophany by radically materializing God's image—an artistic approach that exceptionally departs from traditional Christian art—and rendering it as "base matter" in Bataille's terms.

In chapter 4, Eliphaz, one of the three friends who attempt to comfort Job by providing logical explanation of his suffering, refers to God's retributive justice: "Remember, I pray thee, who ever perished, being innocent? … they that plow iniquity, and sow wickedness, reap the same. By the blast of God they perish, and by the breath of his nostrils are they consumed" (Job 4.7-9). Eliphaz then illustrates the punitive propensity of God by relating his dream vision, in

which “a spirit passed before my face” (4.15). On Plate 9 (Fig. 6), Blake materializes this spirit and the intense sensations it triggers on Eliphaz: “Fear came upon me, and trembling, which made all my bones to shake . . . the hair of my flesh stood up” (4.14-15). God is depicted in an upright posture folding his arms and glaring at Eliphaz. The air of threat and intimidation is heightened by the shooting lines that radiate centrifugally. Pierced by the arrowlike lines, Eliphaz’s hairs stand up as described in verse 15 (engraved beneath as the base of this plate), with an open palm gesturing powerless resistance.

With this arrangement, Blake understates Eliphaz’s theodicean argument that aims to offer “a sense of narratability” (Newsom 101) to Job’s suffering, which is built on a causal analysis of evil and retribution. Instead, Blake channels his artistic prowess onto the terror evoked by God and the involuntary bodily reactions it entices. Such terror is escalated by Eliphaz’s lines carved in the upper margin that encircle his vision: “Shall mortal Man be more just than God? Shall a Man be more Pure than his Maker? Behold he putteth no trust in his Saints & his Angels he charged with folly” (Job 4.17-18). The two questions posed here anticipate God’s inquisition against Job out of the whirlwind in chapter 38, announcing God’s omnipotence that annuls all logical reasoning. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that Blake replaces “his servants” in the Authorized Version with “his Saints.” This subtle lexical change deepens God’s detachment from any moral institutions; even a “Saint” with unquestionable piety and an “Angel” who obeys God unconditionally can face his ire without justification.

The juxtaposition of the revised verse and the image conveys a sense of arbitrary power that is beyond epistemological and ethical orders, generating the aesthetic sensation of the Romantic sublime that is constituted by the human “inability to grasp wholly the object as a symbol of the mind’s relation to a transcendent order” (Weiskel 23). On this plate, Blake achieves this by materializing God as an amoral and unknowable divinity to underline the base bodily reactions out of the mind’s control while encountering such alternative experience of the sacred. The cause-and-effect explanation Eliphaz attempts to offer as a theodicean defense is thus annulled, and the underlying mechanism of exchange is dismantled by Blake’s materialistic arrangement of the original text and its visualization.

Plate 11 “Job’s Evil Dreams” (Fig. 7) illustrates Job’s account of his plight and his charge of God’s possible injustice in chapter 7: “When I say, My bed

shall comfort me, my couch shall ease my complaint; Then thou scarest me with dreams, and terrifiest me through visions" (Job 7.13-14). Blake presents a highly heterogeneous reimagination of theophany, portraying God in a demonic form with animalistic traits hovering over Job in bed. We see God's naked body with cloven hoofs entwined with a gigantic serpent—"the Serpent of materialism," in Damon's words (*Blake Dictionary* 219)—his right hand pointing to the stony Ten Commandments surrounded by lightning, and his threatening face imposed onto Job's. Beneath Job's bed are hellish flames from which emerge three demons in chains, seizing Job by his loins and ankles.

The composition of this plate, as Paley and Rowland have noticed, bears similarities with Blake's other designs such as *Elohim Creating Adam* and *Satan Watching the Endearments of Adam and Eve*. Paley does not offer a definite interpretation of Blake's large-scale deviation from the Bible on this plate, only noting that "this is the nadir of Job's afflictions" (244). Rowland compares Blake's revised version of verses 22-27 of chapter 19 engraved in the lower margin with the original text of the Authorized Version and takes heed of God's right hand that points to the Ten Commandments, which, according to his observation of the watercolor version of this plate, also points to the specific Hebrew phrase meaning "your God gives" (46). Thus, Rowland argues that this seemingly demonic portrayal of God in fact foreshadows future redemption: "The terrible divinity who seems to demand obedience to the code of law actually points to the words that stress gift rather than obligation" (46). The encounter with this merging of the Devil and God signifies a recognition of the "fearful symmetry" in divinity and an initiation of terrible enlightenment ultimately leading to salvation. Rowland's reading is insightful and valid in the context of the overall theological tenet of Blake's *Illustrations*. In departure from Paley and Rowland, I contend that Blake's radical materialism garners its full force on Plate 11, and as proposed previously, God is materialized as "base matter" in a Bataillean sense that resists spiritualization. This time, such radical materiality lies in the homoeroticized body that confronts contemporary gender propriety to provoke strong repulsion from the Christian reader.

The composition of "Job's Evil Dream" reminds the viewer of Henry Fuseli's 1782 painting *The Nightmare*, in which a sleeping woman is sexually disturbed by an incubus, also in an "evil dream." Fuseli's potential influence on Blake can be attested to by the latter's unique compliment to the former in a four-line rhyme: "The only Man that e'er I knew / Who did not make me almost

spew / Was Fuseli" (507). Susan Matthews recognizes that for both Blake and Fuseli, artistic culture "offers a route to understanding the political health of the culture that produces it" (32). In other words, artistic representation engages with the specific social milieu that dictates cultural propriety, especially concerning proper gender roles. In this way, Fuseli's *The Nightmare* challenges the contemporary viewer by visualizing the monstrous effect of female sexuality repressed by the eighteenth-century culture of the polite. As Matthews further argues, "[i]t is not the existence of female desire but its privatization that is seen by Fuseli as threatening to public culture (37). Here Matthews interprets the female dream in Fuseli's painting as an act of masturbation, an unnatural resolution of female sexual desire in the private realm, without the regulation of masculine, public discourses, thus affronting the contemporary viewer's understanding of proper gender roles. In addition to compositional similarities—the parallels between God and the incubus, Job and the sleeping woman—Blake's "Job's Evil Dream" works in a similar mechanism of impacting the viewer's sensibility on the level of gender propriety, by homoeroticizing the God-human relationship. In this case, homoeroticism becomes a sort of base matter, especially in the discourse of eighteenth-century gender propriety, whose presence disrupts the traditional process of spiritualization.

Homosexuality in Blake's time was generally considered obscene and criminalized as sodomy, an offense punishable by death. But the social perception of homosexual relationships is more nuanced than being outright scandalous. According to Randolph Trumbach, the popular image of the libertine prevalent in seventeenth-century literature is partly inspired by the Renaissance Humanist tradition of self-sufficiency and erudition, and a typical libertine is often depicted as bisexual: "with a whore on one arm and a boy on the other" (111). That is, a man who seduced adolescents was considered depraved but in a charismatic way, because he still played the conventional role as a masculine man dominating his prepubescent, more passive and effeminate partner, whose sexual innocence and gender ambiguity constitute a sense of refined taste. Therefore, the active man in a homosexual relationship was not morally condemned as severely as "the effeminate sodomite," an "adult man who was effeminate in speech, gesture, and dress, and who was really half man, half woman" (Trumbach 106). The gender dichotomy was also embedded in political ideologies that distinguished the masculine Englishman from the

effeminate image of foreigners, especially the French.[14] Gender propriety and national identity are combined to construct an affective discourse that sustains a stable process of identification by violently ejecting the abnormal/foreign "Other."

The power dynamic between God and Job on Plate 11 "Job's Evil Dream" bears highly erotic undertones. Blake's eroticization of Job's protest against God not only diverts the biblical message of spiritualism into a more sensational display of the body, but also affronts the eighteenth-century view of homosexuality and gender propriety delineated above. God imposes his face upon Job's, as if he is forcing a kiss, while Job, in the victimized position that we have already witnessed on Plate 6, raises his arms powerlessly to show futile resistance and turns his head sideways. The composition not only resonates with Blake's other drawings as highlighted by Paley, but as previously mentioned, resembles *The Nightmare* by Fuseli, in which the woman's dream is also erotically intruded on by a ghost-like horse and a viciously lecherous incubus. Blake casts Job, a Christian hero of religious pertinacity, in the feminine role in this homosexual encounter, and the vileness of such a portrayal is aggravated by Job's manly physique consisting of his bearded face and muscular forearm. Combining Job's masculine bodily form and his effeminate posture, Blake further undermines Job's subjectivity with his trancelike facial expression that insinuates perverse pleasure. As discussed previously, this design suggests Blake's problematic understanding of sexual assault (which is particularly manifested in Oothoon's rape by Bromion in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*) that the victim somehow relishes being violated. In "Job's Evil Dreams," the implication that Job potentially welcomes God's action can perhaps indicate Blake's critique of unenlightened piety with which Christians conform to religious authority in an abject, even masochistic manner.

On the other hand, as the active violator, the bestial form of God's body—the curling serpent and his hooved feet—is charged with libidinal potency and reminds us of the animalistic Gnostic deities described in Bataille's essay on base materialism that "manifest above all a sinister love of darkness, a monstruous taste for obscene and lawless *archontes*" whose sexual rituals embody the "demand for a baseness that would not be reducible" ("Base Materialism" 48). Blake's artistic rendering of theophany in Job's dream vision

[14] For the sexualized rhetoric of politics in eighteenth-century England, see Matthew McCormack's *The Independent Man*, pp. 104-39.

materializes God in a manner that recalls the base elements orthodox Christianity has striven to exclude by means of spiritualization. And in this heterogenous representation of theophany, the God-human relationship is restructured as a homosexual violation performed by an animalized entity and a feminized victim. The twofold transgression of religious and gender boundaries between purity and impurity, masculinity and femininity, unsettles Christian viewers' perception and their religious identification with both God and Job. Once again, Blake's illustration is energized by the materialistic and the somatic imagery and outweighs the spiritual messages conveyed by the biblical text.

VII. Conclusion: Blake's Alternative "Sublime of the Bible"

To conclude my discussion of Blake's radical materiality in the *Illustrations*, I briefly turn to the Preface to *Milton* (1804), where he dismisses the "Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid: of Plato & Cicero" which are the adversary of "the Sublime of the Bible" (95). Blake then calls upon the "Young Men of the New Age" to fight against the fallen institutions that "for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War" (95). This is followed by Blake's well-known declaration that "I will not cease from Mental fight" until a new Jerusalem is built in England's "green & pleasant Land" (96). Different from his earlier works that value bodily sensation and desire, in *Milton* Blake has made it clear that the corporeal hinders divine vision, while the spiritual is the key to final redemption, which is achieved through the artistic representation of the Bible's sublimity. Therefore, for Blake, the aesthetic of the sublime is intrinsically a spiritual phenomenon, which reflects his rejection of Edmund Burke's conception of the sublime in *A Philosophical Enquiry* (1757), a treatise he read with "Contempt & Abhorrence" for mocking "Inspiration & Vision" (Blake 660). Blake disapproves of the Burkean sublime because it is dependent on empirical experience by means of the sensual faculties. To counter this, Blake redefines the sublime in a letter to Thomas Butts: "Allegory addressed to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry" (730). Again, we see the lucid division between the spiritual and the corporeal and the former's undoubtable superiority over the latter in the operation of the sublime.

However, as this essay has showed, in spite of Blake's proclaimed spiritual elevation of "the sublime of the Bible," in the process of recreating the Book of Job in the *Illustrations*, he nevertheless reveals the alternative aspects of religious experience that are paradoxically based on Bataillean "base matter." Particularly in the plates analyzed in this essay, the materialistic and the corporeal that are supposed to be *abjected* from spiritual elevation are recalled to affront not only orthodox theodicy but also eighteenth-century sensibility. His often anachronic rearrangement of biblical inscriptions renders them more somatic than textual, reinforcing the radical materiality of each design with the repulsive imagery of animal sacrifice and bodily affliction. And by incorporating homosexual violence and erotic ecstasy, Blake's alternative representation of theophany obscures the borderline between the proper and improper, purity and impurity.

But Blake's radical materialism does not suggest a kind of religious nihilism that deprives art and poetry of their meanings. Rather, with such radical materiality, Blake foregrounds a religious view that critiques conventional optimistic piety sustained by the mechanism of exchange value, and confronts the error of designating God as the absolute moral indicator. This is positively portrayed in the final plate of the *Illustrations*, when Job's earthly happiness is restored after the misconception of the causal relationship between virtue and reward, evil and punishment, primarily epitomized by the "prophylactic sacrifice" (Newsom 54) that Job "did continually" in chapter 1 verse 5, is rectified. The transported verse from Hebrews written on the altar in the lower margin—"In burnt Offerings for Sin thou hast had no Pleasure" (10.6)—certifies that causality plays no part in the process of making ethical decisions.

What Blake's Job designs convey with radical materiality, I would further conclude, is the separation between religious authority and morality. Human beings can will their moral actions based on the intrinsic qualities of such actions—"the use-value of uselessness," in Bataille's terms—rather than having them dictated by the exchange value that points to external ends, such as appeasing God's wrath and securing divine blessings. On the other hand, authentic religious experience ineluctably consists of the materialistic exploration, manipulation, and consumption of the body, challenging the conventional understanding of religion as inherently spiritual and idealistic. Blake's *Illustrations* of the Book of Job, while ultimately in alignment with its narrative and theodicean ideal, nevertheless visualize an alternative

representation of "the sublime of the Bible" that offers an insightful perspective from which to approach the correlation between religion, morality, and art in future studies.

Figure 1. Blake, *The Illustration of the Book of Job* copy 1 (composed 1823-1826), Plate 1. "Job and His Family." 18.3 x 15.0 cm. Collection of Robert N. Essick. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

Figure SEQ Figure * ARABIC 2. Blake, *The Illustration of the Book of Job* copy 1 (composed 1823-1826), Plate 2. "Satan Before the Throne of God." 19.9 x 15.2 cm. Collection of Robert N. Essick. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

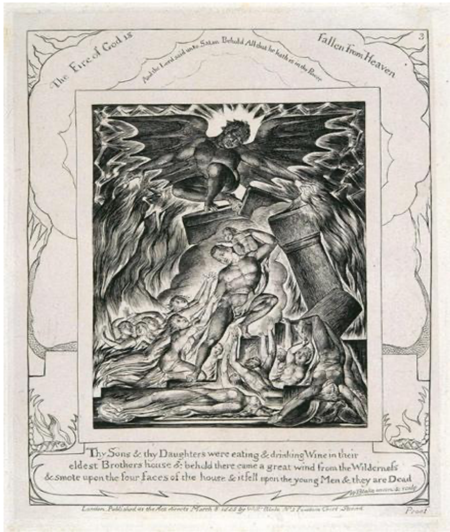

Figure 3. Blake, *The Illustration of the Book of Job* copy 1 (composed 1823-1826), Plate 3. "Job's Sons and Daughters Overwhelmed by Satan." 20.5 x 15.4 cm. Collection of Robert N. Essick. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

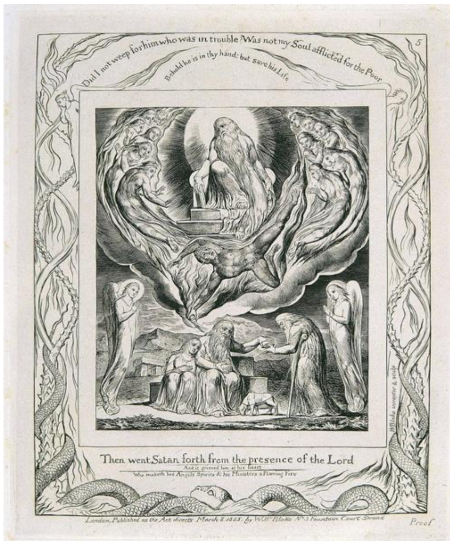

Figure 2. Blake, *The Illustration of the Book of Job* copy 1 (composed 1823-1826), Plate 5. "Satan Going Forth from the Presence of the Lord and Job's Charity." 19.9 x 15.1 cm. Collection of Robert N. Essick. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

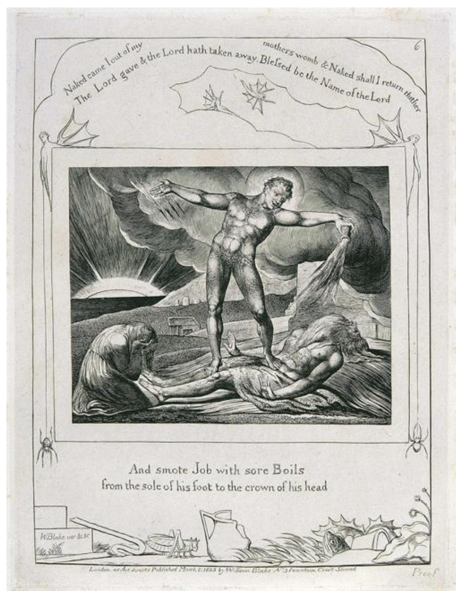

Figure 3. Blake, *The Illustration of the Book of Job* copy 1 (composed 1823-1826), Plate 6. "Satan Smiting Job with Boils." 20.0 x 15.3 cm. Collection of Robert N. Essick. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

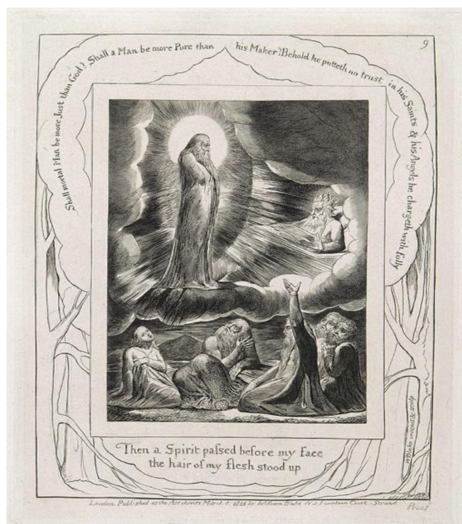

Figure 4. Blake, *The Illustration of the Book of Job* copy 1 (composed 1823-1826), Plate 9. "The Vision of Eliphaz." 19.9 x 15.1 cm. Collection of Robert N. Essick. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

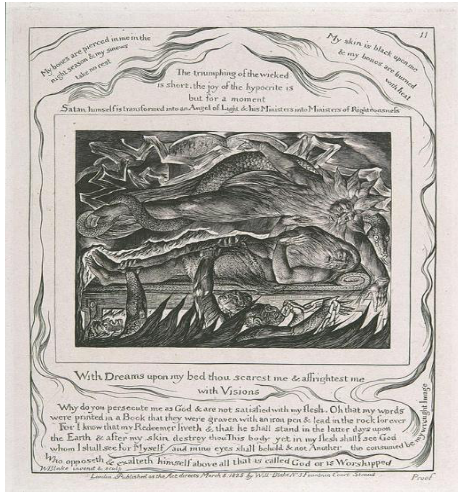

Figure 5. Blake, *The Illustration of the Book of Job* copy 1 (composed 1823-1826), Plate 11. “Job’s Evil Dreams.” 19.8 x 15.1 cm. Collection of Robert N. Essick. Image courtesy of the *William Blake Archive*.

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