Title: Illustration 4 to Milton's "Paradise Lost": Satan Spying on Adam and Eve and Raphael's Descent into Paradise

Date: 1807
Primary Maker: William Blake
Medium: pen and watercolor

Description: The design is a composite of three separate events in the poem: Satan, "undelighted," watching Adam and Eve walking in the garden (4:285-324); God's instructions to Raphael (5:224-45); and the Seraph's descent to Eden (5:266-85). The temporal division of these episodes between two Books of the text is given pictorial expression by the dramatic, V-shaped cloud band separating Raphael and God from the terrestrial scene. On the left, Satan gestures in surprise or consternation, his face "dimm'd" (4:114) and brow knotted as he "falls into many doubts with himself, and many passions, fear, envy, and despair" ("The Argument" to Book 4). Blake captures this sense of self-division and degeneration into a lesser form of being by entwining Satan's winged body with the serpent he will become and placing the serpent's head in ascendency over Satan's residually angelic countenance. This motif, nowhere indicated in the text, also visualizes Milton's description of the hell "within" Satan "and round about him" (4:20-21) wherever he goes. The perverse and restrictive embrace of Satan and serpent contrasts with the gentle companionship of Adam and Eve-as they walk "hand in hand" and gaze into each other's eyes as a prelude to "love's imbraces" (4:321-22) and with the vines and clusters of "purple Grape" (4:259) twining around the two tree trunks behind the couple. This last motif suggests the traditional elm and vine topos, an emblem of ideal marriage, corporeal or spiritual, expressive of Adam and Eve's Edenic relationship. [1] The fruitful vegetation also contrasts with the barren tree left of Satan. Adam is pictured with "Hyacinthine Locks" (4:301) and Eve with the "golden tresses" which Milton compares to a vine with curling tendrils (4:305-307). Raphael, partly "veil'd with his gorgeous wings" (5:250), intercedes like a spear point between Satan and his intended victims. The angel looks above to "th' Eternal Father" (5:246) as though he were still receiving His instructions. The portrayal of God, with wings and arms "outspread" (1:20 and 7:235), is generally similar to His appearance in the sketch of "Christ Offers to Redeem Man" on page 104 of Blake's Notebook (see the third design, above) and to the rain god in Henry Fuseli's "Fertilization of Egypt," engraved by Blake in 1791 for Erasmus Darwin's The Botanic Garden. A common source of this image for both Fuseli and Blake may be an engraving of Jupiter Pluvius from the Antonine Pillar in Montfaucon's Antiquity Explained. [2] Variations on this figure type appear in many of Blake's designs, including the title page to Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793), the 1795 color printed drawing "The House of Death" (Butlin 1981, Nos. 320-22), and "Christ's Troubled Dream" in his illustrations to Milton's Paradise Regained of ca. 1816-20 (Fitzwilliam Museum: Butlin 1981, No. 544.8). In the Butts/Boston group, the design is replaced by "Adam..."
and Eve Asleep" (4:771-809; Butlin 1981, No. 536.5). Ithuriel and Zepho
over the couple who recline on a bed of flowers while Satan, in the form of a
sat "close at the ear of Eve" (5:800). Notes 1. For a study of this topos and its
explicit appearance in Paradise Lost 5:215-19, see Peter Demetz, "The Elm and the
Blake makes extensive use of intertwined trees and vines in Songs of Innocence
(Paris, 1719) of this important work in William Hayley's library; see the auction
catalogue of Hayley's books, Mr. Evans, 13-25 February 1821, lot 1854. Morton
Paley has pointed to this same design in Montfaucon as a source for plate 46 of
Blake's Jerusalem; see "'Wonderful Originals' - Blake and Ancient Sculpture," in
Blake in His Time 1978, 175. The association between Hecate and a serpent-drawn
chariot is traditional; see Ovid, Metamorphoses Bk. 7 lines 290-92 of the Arthur
Golding translation. Blake also pictures a moon goddess drawn by two serpents on
plate 14 of his Job illustrations, first executed as a watercolor ca. 1805-1806
(Pierpoint Morgan Library; Butlin 1981, No. 550.14).
Dimensions: 9 7/8 x 8 1/4 in. (25.1 x 20.9 cm.)