13. Milton a Poem in 2 Books
London: The Trianon Press for the William Blake Trust, 1967

Blake expresses the great respect he has for Milton many times in many of his works, including several series of watercolor drawings to illustrate Milton's finest poems: *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso, Comus, Paradise Lost,* and *Paradise Regained.* But Blake's admiration is fullest and most complex in *Milton a Poem in 2 Books,* which is mirrored in this brilliant reproduction by the Trianon Press, one of only four hundred and twenty-six copies produced. The extravagant leather binding and slipcase, the Arches pure rag paper with Blake's personal watermark, and the prints produced using the collotype and stencil process accented with gold and silver demonstrate the extreme effort and attention to detail expended by the Press when they recreated this most magnificent work.

The enigmatic, challenging title page with its nude portrait of Milton presents a problem of interpretation that sets the tone for the poem. When we examine the title very closely, we see that the '2 Books' Blake declares to have written was originally '12.' In this copy, Blake attempted to disguise the '1' in the circular patterns of smoke but did not obscure it completely. In other copies, the '12' is both more visible and less visible than it is here. It is not clear what Blake's original intentions were when he etched the '12.' Did he plan a much larger work with more books, or was the existing text, perhaps, going to be divided up into smaller books? Such ambiguity and mystification mildly mimics religion, which Milton found as his motivation for creating *Paradise Lost.* Milton wished to "Justify the ways of God to men," which is the quotation Blake appropriately selects to adorn his own title page. But in this book, Blake is not interested in justifying the ways of God to men; his main struggle is to justify the ways of Milton to himself, an equally difficult, often mystifying task.

--- *Charles Kreuter '04*