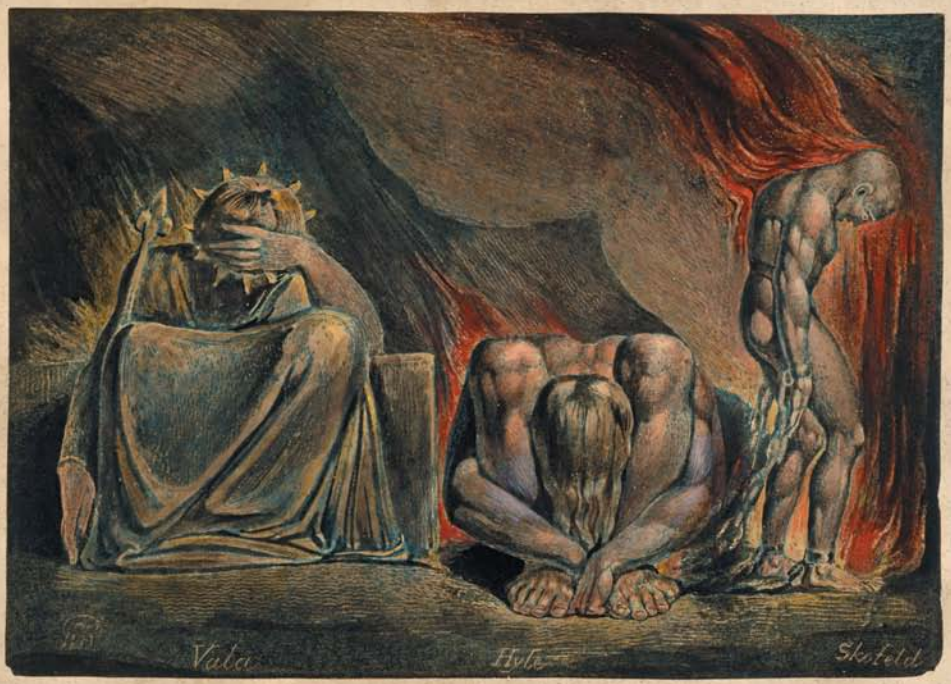
WILLIAM BLAKE

ON HIS POETRY AND PAINTING



A Study of *A Descriptive Catalogue*, Other Prose Writings and *Jerusalem*

HAZARD ADAMS

William Blake on His Poetry and Painting

Also by Hazard Adams
and from McFarland

Blake's Margins: An Interpretive Study of the Annotations (2009)

Academic Child: A Memoir (2008)

William Blake on His Poetry and Painting

A Study of A Descriptive Catalogue, *Other Prose Writings and* Jerusalem

Hazard Adams

McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers
Jefferson, North Carolina, and London

Library of Congress Cataloguing-in-Publication Data

Adams, Hazard, 1926–
William Blake on his poetry and painting : a study of A descriptive catalogue, other prose writings and Jerusalem / Hazard Adams.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-7864-4986-6
softcover : 50# alkaline paper ∞

1. Blake, William, 1757–1827. 2. Art and literature—England—History—19th century. I. Blake, William, 1757–1827. II. Title.
PR4142.A75 2011
821'.7—dc22 2010040905

British Library cataloguing data are available

Front cover: William Blake, "Vala, Hyle and Skofeld," from *Jerusalem: The Emanation of the Giant Albion*, black carbon ink and watercolor 6"×8½", 1804–1818, Fitzwilliam Museum. Background © 2011 Shutterstock

Manufactured in the United States of America

McFarland & Company, Inc., Publishers
Box 611, Jefferson, North Carolina 28640
www.mcfarlandpub.com

With thanks, this book is for
Brian Culhane,
Michael Mays,
Susan Sailer
and
the late Murray Krieger

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Preface

This book continues the study of William Blake's prose writings begun with *Blake's Margins: An Interpretive Study of the Annotations* (McFarland, 2009).

Part I presents studies of Blake's writings in which there is emphasis on his art and art generally, especially painting, engraving, and poetry. The chapter on Blake's letters limits itself to these subjects and does not attempt to treat them as of biographical interest. The chapters in this part are presented chronologically with the exception of the last one on the tractates *All Religions Are One* and *There Is No Natural Religion*, which Blake composed earlier than any of the other works studied. The chapter is retrospective and considers the extent to which certain of Blake's views later developed, changed, or remained the same. Scholars of Blake have often had recourse to and quoted from the writings I discuss, but there has been no separate extended study devoted to the writings themselves.

In Part II, I do not limit myself to study of one work but consider Blake's attitudes toward certain other poets and to poetry in general. I then pass to Blake's long poems *Milton* and *Jerusalem* to see how Blake's prose writings inform and are informed by those works. Part II ends with a movement from Blake to Yeats and Joyce, two major twentieth-century writers whose quite different works display interesting affinity to and differences from Blake's thought. There is deliberately from time to time some repetition, for the book is designed so that readers, particularly students beginning study of Blake and readers more casually interested in his thought, may conveniently consult a particular chapter on a particular work.

I have followed David V. Erdman's *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, revised edition, New York: Anchor Books, 1988, referred to hereafter as E, which faithfully presents Blake's eccentric punctuation, capitalization, and spelling. With respect to the letters, I have consulted Geoffrey Keynes's *The Letters of William Blake, with Related Documents*, third edition, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980, referred to hereafter as K. Keynes does not print all of Blake's eccentric spelling, punctuation, and capitalization. In quoting, I have always quoted from Erdman's text, but I have also cited the page numbers in Keynes's volume. Quotations from *The Four Zoas*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem* are identified by Night or Chapter and page or plate.

In what follows, I am particularly in the debt of many predecessors, but particularly the writings on Blake of Morton D. Paley, Morris Eaves, and, of course, Northrop Frye, whose influential writings on Blake are well-known, but whose wonderful essays on Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* are less so. Fragments of three of my previously published essays, in revised states, have found their ways into this text: an essay on *Jerusalem*, which appeared in *Studies in Romanticism*; one on Yeats in *Blake and the Moderns*; and one on Joyce in the *James Joyce Quarterly.* From time to time, I have referred the reader to other of my books that enlarge on some of the matters taken up here.

Lake Forest Park, Washington • Fall 2010

Introduction

In his prose writings on the arts, Blake expressed definite opinions, often vociferously, not sparing those of whom he was critical. These included most of the visual artists since Michelangelo and virtually all of his contemporaries except Fuseli, Barry, and in some moods his friend Flaxman. He came to consider virtually all of the poets since Chaucer's time contaminated by the classical Greeks and Romans, even Shakespeare and Milton, whom he deeply admired. He taught himself Italian in his old age in preparation for illustrating Dante's *Commedia*, but he also thought that Dante was a political fool, a Caesar's man. As a result, his illustrations provide what he thought of as corrections. His views on the visual arts and poetry are spread through his prose writings, some of the most important of which remained unfinished, unrevised, and unpublished in a notebook long called the Rossetti Manuscript and had to be pieced together by editors.* Others were published in his day only by himself in etched plates, and few copies have survived. Only *A Descriptive Catalogue* was conventionally printed, and that for his one public exhibition in 1809–10.

This and the so-called *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, which describes a large painting unfortunately lost, are Blake's longest and most important critical prose writings. The sequence of passages in the latter is to some extent uncertain, as is the sequence of the somewhat later *Public Address*, also from the notebook. *A Public Address* seems to have been planned as

**The notebook may be consulted in a facsimile edition:* The Notebook of William Blake, *edited by David V. Erdman with the assistance of Donald K. Moore, revised edition, Readex Books, 1977.*

a speech to the Chalcographic Society, but it was never delivered, and the Society soon ceased to exist. It is just as well, since the members would have been deeply offended by it. *A Descriptive Catalogue* and *A Vision of the Last Judgment* describe certain of Blake's paintings, but go beyond to express intentions and the grounds for them. *A Public Address* is an often bitter polemic about his treatment by critics and by what he viewed as the art establishment of his day. It also sets forth many of his principal likes and dislikes, both of artists and methods of production. *On Homers Poetry* and *On Virgil* reflect his turning away from classical models toward his own "primitive & original ways," as he called them in a letter (K47, E724), and his strong belief that the arts stand against war and empire. The aphoristic *Laocoön* offers a grab-bag collection of Blake's views on many subjects, all related to his arts. I have not included full treatment here of the much discussed *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, which is a collection of prose narratives, aphorisms, and poems, but have chosen to discuss only the parts in which Blake speaks in his own voice about language and the arts.

Morris Eaves has rightly observed the difficulty a critic has writing about art without recourse to a form-content division, which Blake strongly resists.* Eaves also reminds us of another difficulty: that Blake's critical language is "conservative Enlightenment" and his position "radical romantic" (82, 158). For years, those who taught Blake's work could not decide in what literature course his works should be taught, though this indecision was often the tacit expression of a desire not to teach them at all, a fear of his difficulty and his apparent refusal to be categorized.† Most of us have grown beyond this fear, and even the longer poems are now addressed by critics and scholars.

Blake's ideas about visual art have been difficult to understand, partly because of what Eaves has observed about his critical language and partly because of the rhetoric in which he chose to express them. Again, in academic art history it was difficult to place him.

As Blake grew older, his writings became increasingly forthright about the arts in general and the value of his own work. A few people in his lifetime understood his value, but for the many he remained little

**Morris Eaves,* William Blake's Theory of Art, *Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, 130.*

†Northrop Frye was the first to try to solve the problem of what to call the poetry of generation of the late eighteenth century. See his "Towards Defining an Age of Sensibility," Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology, *New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963, 130–7.*

known, and his long composite works of relief etching and poetry were read by very few and understood by even fewer. His one exhibition of his lifetime was savaged by the critic Robert Hunt.

Still, an impressive group of artists showed high regard for what they knew of his work. Among these were Coleridge and Wordsworth, who admired his songs, Lamb and Fuseli, his visual art, and the young painters called "The Ancients," who knew him in his old age: Linnell, Richmond, Calvert, Tatham, and Samuel Palmer, who wrote in a letter to Alexander Gilchrist, Blake's biographer,

> He was a man without a mask; his aim single, his path straightforwards, and his wants few; so he was free, noble, and happy….
>
> He had great powers of argument, and on general subjects was a very patient and good-tempered disputant; but materialism was his abhorrence; and if some unhappy man called in question the world of spirits, he would answer him "according to his folly," by putting forth his own views in their most extravagant and startling aspect. This might amuse those who were in the secret, but it left his opponent angry and bewildered.
>
> Such was Blake, as I remember him. He was one of the few to be met with in our passage through life, who are not, in some way or other, "double minded" and inconsistent with themselves; one of the very few who cannot be depressed by neglect, and to whose name rank and station could add no luster. Moving apart, in a sphere above the attraction of worldly honours, he did not accept greatness, but confer it. He ennobled poverty, and, by his conversation and the influence of his genius, made two small rooms in Fountain Court more attractive than the threshold of princes.*

For us today, Blake remains an example of unusual intellectual and artistic freedom, which is not at all to say that his work has no relation to artistic tradition or that he saw himself as deliberately isolated. Indeed, as his reputation has increased both as visual and verbal artist, he has come for many to seem one of the most important people of his time, and our time. His work continually "rouzes the faculties to act," as he wrote in a letter (E702) admonishing someone who had rejected his work and, indeed, was roused, but to complain.

In an earlier book,† I have written about *Jerusalem*, a discussion of which comes here in Chapter 9, that it cannot be referred to ontological or epistemological formulations, that it opposes by contrariety both a differential linguistic philosophy and its mystical negation, that it is neither

**From a letter to Alexander Gilchrist (1855), reprinted in* Critical Essays on William Blake, *ed. Hazard Adams, Boston: G. K. Hall, 1991, 35–6. The whole letter is on pp. 33–6.*

†The Offense of Poetry, *Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007, 175.*

materialistic nor idealistic, that the consciousness it projects cannot be adequately described as either an autonomous or a culturally generated subject. It is as near to a "complete corpus of poetic reference" (the phrase is Robert Graves's) as we have. Once thought to be on the margin of poetry, it is, we now find, at the center,* where with *Finnegans Wake* it surveys the world. Resistant to ideological criticism of all kinds, it forces us to work from the inside out rather than inwards from some fixed position outside. As such, it is a lesson for critics.

Though not what Blake calls a center. In Blake's terms, it is a circumference where, with Joyce's Finnegans Wake, *it contains in its encyclopedic nature the world that poetry can project.*

Part I

1

A Descriptive Catalogue

Blake's only exhibition of work in his lifetime took place in 1809 and was extended into 1810. The site was the haberdashery of his brother in Broad Street, London. Blake was the author of the exhibition's catalogue and the advertisements for it. Peter Ackroyd has remarked that the exhibition and the catalogue were a "reaffirmation of his art and of his genius through all the years of neglect. It was a way of establishing or maintaining his identity when it was close to being hidden from all…."* Many years before, Northrop Frye was more specific, listing six reasons for Blake's deciding to exhibit on his own†: (1) To introduce his invention of what he called fresco painting. (Blake writes that such paintings would be in tempera on plaster applied to a wood or canvas base; this, he thought, would enable a work to be moved at will. However, none of the paintings in the exhibition that have survived followed this plan.) (2) To describe the method's possible uses. (His advertisement for the exhibition said, "I could divide the Westminster Hall, or the walls of any other great Building, into compartments and ornament them with Frescos, which would be removable at pleasure" [E527].) (3) To point out the disadvantages of oil painting. (Also, in the advertisement he remarks, "Oil will not drink or absorb Colour enough to stand the test of very little Time and of the Air; it grows yellow, and at length brown" [E527].) (4) To express how a visionary looks at his time. (This occurs at once for the reader of *A*

Peter Ackroyd, Blake *(1995), London: Minerva, 1996, 303.*

†*Northrop Frye,* Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947, 409.*

Descriptive Catalogue with the allegorical paintings representing Nelson and Pitt.) (5) To set forth the outline of a British mythology going back to Adam and the Druids. (In his notebook, Blake made a list of twenty subjects for a series of paintings on the history of England [E672]), some of which, at least the first six, illustrate what might more properly be called a *mythological* history. A proposed work, "The Ancient Britons, according to Julius Caesar," may refer to number five in the catalogue and "The Penance of Jane Shore" is probably number sixteen. As far we know, none of the others was executed.) (6) To present in the catalogue his admiring criticism of Chaucer.

There are, I think, further reasons. As Blake wrote in the advertisement, water-colors were barred from exhibit at both the Royal Academy and the British Institution. Thus he had little choice but to exhibit them himself. Further, he claimed that people "have been told that [his] Works are but an unscientific and irregular Eccentricity, a Madman's Scrawls" (E527-8). He demanded that people "do [him] the justice to examine before they decide" (E528). This outburst was almost certainly the result of some of the critical responses to his illustrations to Robert Blair's poem *The Grave*, especially that of Robert Hunt in *The Examiner* for July 31, 1808. Hunt objected vociferously to Blake's representation of the soul as if it were but a mortal body.* *The Anti-Jacobin Review*, in November 1808, made a similar complaint: "Though occasionally invigorated by an imagination chastened by good taste, we regard them in general as the offspring of morbid fancy; and we think, that this attempt to 'connect the visible with the invisible world, by a familiar and domestic atmosphere,' has totally failed."† Finally, by showing a few paintings that he admitted were failures, he dramatized the problem of trying to overcome the dominant artistic influences of the time.

Blake was already profoundly irritated at the behavior of the publisher Robert Cromek. He had provided Cromek with the illustrations for Blair's poem *The Grave* and was apparently led to expect that he would do the engravings of them. However, Cromek hired Louis Schiavonetti for that job. Blake's relations with Cromek went from tense to very bad from this moment; he already thought that Cromek had not properly paid him for the illustrations.

**The review is reprinted in G. E. Bentley, Jr.,* Blake Records, *second edition, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2004, 258–61.*

†Blake Records, *273. Favorable reviews appeared in* The Scots Magazine *(November 1808) and* The Monthly Magazine *(December 1808). See* Blake Records, *274, 276.*

The next phase of the collapse of the relationship was over the painting and engraving of Blake's *Canterbury Pilgrims* and Thomas Stothard's design on the same subject. The story is compactly told by G. E. Bentley, Jr., who describes Cromek's, Stothard's, and Blake's versions of what had transpired.* Blake thought that Stothard, by way of Cromek, had stolen his idea. Bentley has sifted through the complicated evidence, which is not conclusive, and has summarized as follows:

> The evidence that has survived from consistently credible witnesses indicates that Cromek went to Blake in the late autumn of 1806 with a proposal for a picture of Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims and discovered that Blake was already happily embarked on such a subject. Cromek offered to buy in for 21 pounds and to commission Blake to engrave it, but Blake declined to part with his design until he had a more binding commission for the engraving than Cromek had given him for his Blair designs.
>
> Cromek then went to Stothard with a similar proposal, apparently even specifying the dimensions and the treatment of the design....†

I recount these events briefly to suggest that Blake had still another motive for his exhibition and catalogue. It was to respond to what he regarded as a betrayal and to provide harsh criticism of Stothard's picture, which had been very well received by the many who came to view it when it was exhibited in Cromek's home and later put on tour. (I shall return to this matter when I come to Blake's discussion of his own painting and his criticism of Stothard's.)

There are claims that Blake's painting and engraving were plagiarisms of Stothard's work, but I am inclined to think that Blake was consciously answering and correcting Stothard's. This would be characteristic of Blake, who, for example, disagreed in his illustrations with parts of Blair's poem.‡ Few, if any, caught the criticism.

The complaints about Blake's *Grave* illustrations were nothing compared to some of those leveled against his exhibition and catalogue. The

G. E. Bentley, Jr., The Stranger from Paradise: A Biography of William Blake, *New Haven, CT and London: Yale University Press, 2001, 291–304. Much has been written about Blake's quarrel with Cromek. Among several articles and chapters, see Bentley, "Blake and Cromek: The Wheat and the Tares,"* Modern Philology *71 (1974), 367–9; J. B. Mertz, "Blake and Cromek: A Contemporary Ruling,"* Modern Philology *89 (1989), 66–77, which compares the relative authenticity of the medieval costumes in the paintings by Blake and Stothard; Aileen Ward, "Canterbury Revisited: The Blake-Cromek Controversy,"* Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly *22, 3 (Winter 1988–9), 80–92.*

†The Stranger from Paradise, *299.*

‡*For a discussion of the illustrations, see Blake's Grave, With a Commentary by S. Foster Damon, Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1963, unnumbered, 5–10.*

principal tormenter was again Robert Hunt in *The Examiner* for September 17, 1809, who wrote the exhibition's only known review. In it, Blake is described as "an unfortunate lunatic, whose personal inoffensiveness secures him from confinement." Blake's catalogue is described as a "farrago of nonsense, unintelligibleness, and egregious vanity, the wild effusions of a distempered brain." Hunt says very little about the paintings themselves.*

Of the sixteen works shown in the exhibition, eleven are known to have survived, five having disappeared. Five of the sixteen are described by Martin Butlin as tempera on canvas and six as pen and water color.† Three of the lost works are known to have been in tempera. The lost *Ancient Britons* was said to be in tempera and possibly on canvas. The lost *Bramins* is described in the catalogue as a "drawing," but it was probably a watercolor. Clearly Blake's aim in his choice of works to exhibit was to demonstrate the efficacy of his fresco or, rather, tempera works. These are not frescos in the usual sense. In true fresco, the colors are applied to a wet lime plaster wall which when dried has been penetrated by the colors. Blake's frescos were tempera that employed carpenter's glue rather than the usual egg yolk or some other material with similar colloidal characteristics. In all the works, Blake avoided the use of oil.

Advertisement of the Exhibition

In his advertisement, Blake mentions four of the pictures: *The Ancient Britons,* the "grand Apotheoses of NELSON and PITT," given different titles in the catalogue itself, and *The Canterbury Pilgrims*. The paintings are described as "*in Fresco*, Poetical and Historical Inventions" (E526). In the advertisement, *The Ancient Britons* takes the first place, suggesting that Blake intended some of the works to represent important moments in the history of Britain. It was probably the largest work Blake ever executed, thought to have been about ten by fourteen feet in size. This is particularly interesting because it reflects Blake's own interest in the *mythological* history of ancient Britain. In the advertisement, he makes what S. Foster Damon calls a quotation and David Erdman (E880), more

**The complete review may be found in* Blake Records, *282–5.*

†*Martin Butlin,* The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake. *New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1981. There are two volumes: "Plates" and "Text." I refer here to Butlin's discussion in "Text." Hereafter this work will be referred to as "Butlin," the first number cited referring to "Text" and the second (if the painting still exists) to "Plates."*

properly, calls a "free adaptation" from the "Welsh Triads" plus an "original addition" (the second stanza).* (I shall discuss this later.) In Blake's mind, Chaucer's work was a major event in British history, and Nelson and Pitt had become symbols of British warlike behavior in modern times.

Advertisement of the Catalogue

This production briefly asserts Blake's choice of what he called fresco as the grand style of art restored and his radical judgments of artists preceding him: the "real Art" of Raphael, Dürer, Michelangelo, and Romano; the "Ignorances" of Rubens, Rembrandt, Titian, and Correggio (E528).

As far as we know, the advertisement attracted few viewers. There are no sales on record, although *The Ancient Britons* had been commissioned prior to the exhibition.

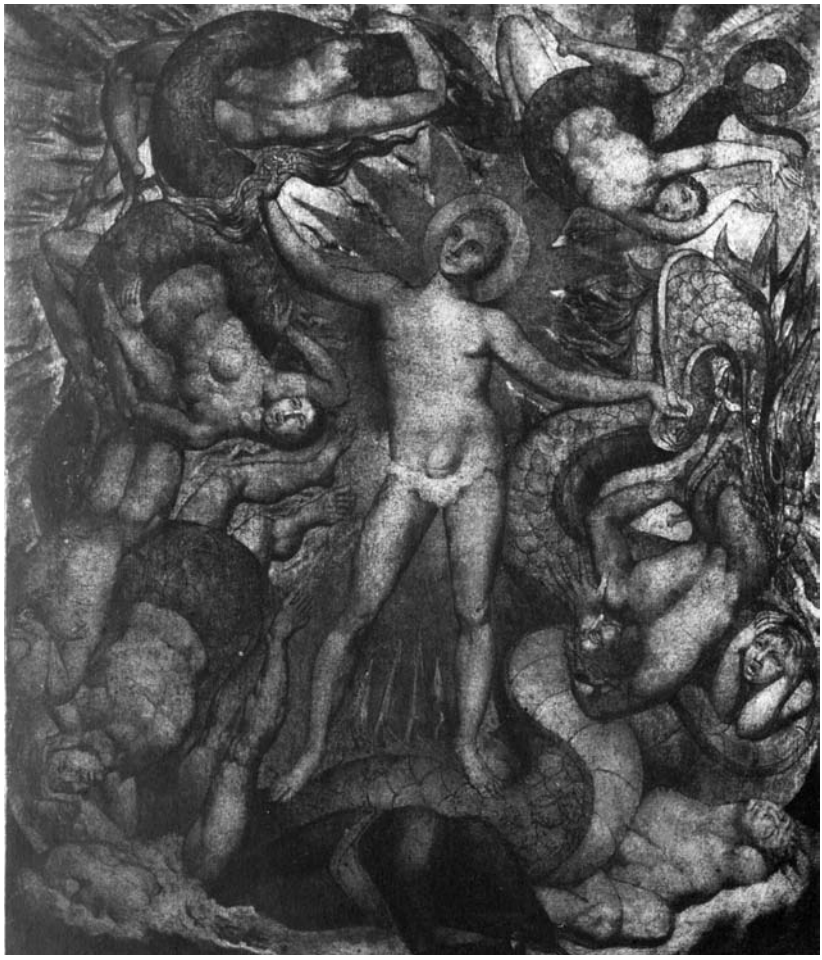
Spiritual Forms

In 1 Corinthians 15:44, Paul says, "It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body." In Blake's plate (E30) for the poem "To Tirzah," a late addition to *Songs of Experience*, there is engraved "It is Raised a Spiritual Body." The engraving shows a dead man presumably being revived in spirit. In an annotation to Berkeley's *Siris*, Blake writes, "The Natural Body is an Obstruction to the Soul or Spiritual Body" (E664). The spiritual body is, he says, an "Angel." It is the "Divine Body" (E663).

Blake goes beyond what seems to be Paul's thought. Everything has what Blake calls an "Imaginative Form" (E664). This form is the true person. In addition, this form, or "Spiritual Body" (E664), free of natural illusion, can be seen "in vision" by those who have adequate imaginative power.

Pictures 1 and 2 of *A Descriptive Catalogue*, with the full titles Blake gave to them, are *The spiritual form of Nelson guiding Leviathan, in whose wreathings are infolded the Nations of the Earth* and *The spiritual form of*

S. Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary: The Ideas and Symbols of William Blake, *Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1965, 443.*



The spiritual form of Nelson guiding Leviathan, in whose wreathings are infolded the Nations of the Earth" (tempera on canvas, c. 1805–09).

Pitt guiding Behemoth; *he is the Angel who, pleased to perform the Almighty's orders, rides on the whirlwind, directing the storms of war: He is ordering the Reaper to reap the Vine of the Earth, and the Plowman to plow up the Cities and Towers* (E530). The depictions of Nelson and Pitt are not of their natural bodies but of what Blake saw their true spiritual bodies to be. The intention was to reveal to the British people these spiritual bodies, their real natures, with their commitment to war and empire. It was not to glorify Nelson that he is shown to possess both of his arms and eyes.

"The spiritual form of Pitt guiding Behemoth…" (tempera with gold on canvas (c. 1805).

Blake's paintings are, as he says, efforts "to emulate the grandeur" of lost ancient Asian works of art on heroic subjects, seen "in vision," and to apply that grandeur "to modern Heroes, on a smaller scale" (E531). Blake's use of "Heroes" here is ironic, and the irony is deeply hidden. He writes that his paintings are "compositions of a mythological cast" (E530). He implies that, like the ancient works he wishes to emulate, they contain "mythological and recondite meaning, where more is meant than meets

the eye" (E531). Blake's meanings are politically heretical and they are hidden because he thought it dangerous to utter them. After all, in 1803, Blake had been accused of sedition and had to stand trial, though he was acquitted.

There is, however, no hint in the catalogue that the paintings are what they really are: satirical attacks on the popular notions of heroism in war and the making of empire. Indeed, from Blake's prose one would think it quite otherwise. The reason is not only that he was protecting himself, he also had other things in mind.

One was to present and defend his rejection of oil as a medium. With these two paintings as evidence, his argument appears unsuccessful. Today both are badly darkened. Both have had to be thoroughly restored (the Pitt twice), and the lower part of the Nelson was badly damaged by a flood in 1928 and had to be repaired. These restorations have not brought light into the pictures. Some of the photographic reproductions of them, because bright lights were employed, are easier to "read" than the dark originals. In short, the "CLEARNESS and precision" Blake sought—colors "unmudded by oil" (E530)—are not evident, if they ever were.

Blake's severe criticisms which follow, particularly of Rubens, are not convincing on these grounds, and he makes a demonstrably false assertion: "…before Vandyke's time, and in his time all the genuine Pictures are on Plaster or Whiting grounds and none since" (E530).

Blake's further aim was to promote the creation on a massive scale of public, patriotic, monumental, heroic art. The surprising aspect of his proposal is his assertion that the great surviving Greek statues are copies of works executed in "the ancient republics, monarchies, and patriarchates of Asia" (E531). For some time, this statement and some others in his discussion of *The Ancient Britons* (to follow) were thought to be singular expressions of Blake's wild and eccentric imagination, but we now know that in the eighteenth century similar ideas were held by other writers. As Andrew Wright wrote in 1972, "Blake's mythology, as more and more readers have come to realize, is neither chaotic—or mainly private—piecework of a madman (although that tradition has died hard), nor the idiosyncratic construction of an autodidact whose impatience with earlier formulations caused him to jettison them altogether."*

The clarifications have come in a series of books that explored the work of late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century mythologists and anti-

*Andrew Wright, Blake's Job: A Commentary, *Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1972, xvii.*

quarians who were forerunners of anthropologists as we know them now. The English antiquarians were particularly interested in the Druids.* The belief that the Greeks had invented nothing that the Egyptians had not invented before them was held, for example, by Sir William Chambers, the professor of architecture in the Royal Academy.† The idea is in the same vein as Blake's assertion that virtually everything of early artistic importance was the work of "Asiatic Patriarchs," whom the Greeks copied. That idea is connected to one held by many, that the Druids came to Britain from Phoenicia and were descendants of Ashkenaz (sometimes spelled Askenaz), son of Gomer, who was grandson of Noah. In some writers, the source of British civilization was traced all the way back to Adam.‡ Jacob Bryant and Edward Davies, whose books Blake read (though perhaps cursorily), have in common this notion.** Davies presumed that the religion of the Druids of England was derived from the patriarchal religion of Abraham. His impulse, in part patriotic, was to show that the Druids were the earliest inhabitants of Britain, who brought the most ancient learning to the Islands:

> Their studies embraced those elevated objects which had engaged the attention of the world in its primitive age—The nature of the Deity—of the human Soul—of the future State—of the heavenly bodies—of the terrestrial globe, and of its various productions. Their conceptions were great and sublime, their speculations comprehensive in their sphere, pervading most of the arts and sciences which had interested the earliest periods. Perhaps there was no order of men amongst the heathens, who preserved the history and the opinions of mankind, in its early state, with more simplicity, and with more integrity [119].

**Among these books are Edward Hungerford,* Shores of Darkness, *New York: Columbia University Press, 1941, esp. 35–61 on Blake; Ruthven Todd,* Tracks in the Snow: Studies in English Science and Art, *London: Grey Walls Press, 1946, esp. 29–60 on Blake; A. L. Owen,* The Famous Druids: A Survey of Three Centuries of English Literature on the Druids, *Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962, esp. 224–236 on Blake. Also of interest are two books by Stuart Piggott,* William Stukeley: An Eighteenth-Century Antiquary, *Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1950, and* The Druids, *London: Thames and Hudson, 1968, and Penguin Books, 1974. For a recent discussion of modern druidism, see Ronald Hutton,* Blood and Mistletoe: The History of the Druids in England, *New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2009.*

†William Chambers, A Treatise on the Decorative Part of Civil Architecture, *third edition, London, 1791. See Todd above, 33.*

‡For example, John Snow, Annals *(1631); Nathaniel Bacon,* An Historical and Political Discourse of the Laws and Government of England *(1689), based on notes by John Selden; Aylitt Sammes,* Britannia Antiqua Illustrata *(1676); Matthew Tindal,* Christianity as Old as the Creation *(1730); William Stukeley,* Stonehenge; a Temple Restor'd to the British Druids *(1740).*

***Jacob Bryant,* A New System*; or,* An Analysis of Ancient Mythology, wherein an Attempt Is Made to Divest Tradition of Fable; and to Reduce the Truth to Its original Purity, *6 volumes, London, 1774–6; Edward Davies,* Celtic Researches, on the Origin, Traditions, and Language of the Ancient Britons, with some introductory sketches, on Primitive Society, *London, 1804.*

Davies held that their ideas "could not have originated in those fugitives who had been driven out from society, or have reached their Western destination, in the character of unconnected and unprincipled savages" (122). The traditions of the Celtic Druids had come directly from Noah and Ashkenaz without corruption.

Bryant presumed that all languages originated in what we now call the Near East. The one original language was Amonian, and Greek mythology was a corruption of Amonian history, otherwise lost in allegory and mystery. The Amonians, the name of whom Bryant derives from Ham, the second son of Noah, were the one people who survived the flood. They were sun-worshipers (1, xlii), and all later pagan deities were derivations of their god (1, 56). The first king of every country was Noah. Bryant remarks, "…the Grecians [and presumably other people] often attributed to one person, what belonged to a people…. Many and great achievements have been attributed to heroes of the first ages, which it was not possible for them to have performed" (2, 323). This is very like Blake's notion that Biblical names of individuals stood for tribes or classes of men and jibes with Blake's remark, "Every Class is Individual" (E648). It is clear from Blake's early tractate *All Religions Are One* (1788) that he had at that time assumed a single spiritual identity for all people, a common "Poetic Genius" (E1). Later, in his discussion of *The Ancient Britons*, he declared, "All had originally one language, and one religion" (E543). Though Blake read Bryant, he had probably before that expressed similar thoughts. Bryant could have been a useful corroboration inspiring him to go even further and agree with Davies about the lineage of the Druids.

Bryant's aim was to show that since the flood everything human had a common source, and it took him six volumes to set forth his conclusions, which, he argued, confuted much accepted history, particularly everything derived from mythologies like that of the Greeks. But Bryant, whether Blake recognized it or not, is reminiscent of his own Urizen and reflects one of Urizen's important actions in Night 6 of *The Four Zoas*, where he finally "fixes [his] foot" to try to rebuild the fallen world. The result is a disaster of egotism:

> So he began to dig form[ing] of gold silver & iron
> And brass vast instruments to measure out the immense & fix
> The whole into another world better suited to obey
> His will where none should dare oppose his will himself being
> King
> Of all & all futurity be bound in his vast chain [6:73; E350].

The difference, of course, is that Urizen is attempting to control the future; Bryant wanted to control the past. He thought he had found the place to stand:

> … We must look upon ancient mythology as being yet in a chaotic state, where the mind of man has been wearied with roaming over the crude consistence without ever finding out one spot where it could repose in safety.… It is my hope, and my presumption, that such a place of appulse may be found, where we may take our stand, and from whence we may have a full view of the mighty expanse before us; from whence also we may descry the original design, and order, of all objects, which by length of time, and their own remoteness, have been rendered so confused and uncertain [1, xlvi].

Through an amateurish attempt at etymology, and the idea that if you can find an origin you can explain everything since, he declared that all had originally one language immediately or soon after the flood. Certainly the important cultural role for language implied by Bryant would have appealed to Blake, but his method, which he shared with Davies, shouldn't have.

Anthony Blunt adds to what we have learned the likelihood that Blake, who called on Biblical history, knew of works on Solomon's Temple that would have supported his view of patriarchal culture having invented much copied by the Greeks:

> … certain writers argued that the true proportions for architecture were to be found in the directions given by God to Solomon for the construction of the Temple and in the description of the New Jerusalem, recorded by Ezekiel on the basis of divinely inspired vision. This idea is hinted at by Francesco Giorgi, developed by Philibert de l'Orme, and given its fullest and most extended exposition by the two Jesuits Pradu and Villapandus in their commentary upon Ezekiel, published in 1596-1605. Blake almost certainly knew this work.…*

The authors provided plates that showed their reconstruction of the Temple. A later work by John Wood, *The Origin of Building, or the Plagiarism of the Heathen Detected* (1741), presents the argument that "the principles of architecture were dictated by God to the Jews and were carried to the rest of the world by the scattering of the tribes of Israel."† These designs would be in the tradition of what Blake called "stupendous originals now lost or perhaps buried till some happier time" (E530-1).

Blake's imagination had shown him in vision,

**Anthony Blunt,* The Art of William Blake, *New York: Columbia University Press, 1959, 18.*
†Ibid.

> those wonderful originals called in the Sacred Scriptures the Cherubim, which were sculptured and painted on walls of Temples, Towers, Cities, Palaces, and erected in the highly cultivated states of Egypt, Moab, Edom, Aram, among the Rivers of Paradise, being originals from which the Greeks and Hetrurians copied Hercules, Farnese, Venus of Medicis, Apollo Belvidere, and all the grand works of ancient art [E531].

Blake's cherubim are those of Genesis 3:24 and Exodus 25:20, Solomon's Temple (Kings 6:23-27), and Ezekiel's vision (1:4-27). They are not the sentimental winged children of Renaissance and later art. They are among Blake's "stupendous originals" (E530).* It is clear that Blake was working in a popular tradition of mythography and antiquarianism, inaccurate and fantastic as it seems today.

Blake's aim to introduce what he thought of as huge, traditional, sublime works of art shows that he regarded himself as a true patriot. However, he was a patriot who thought otherwise, for, of course, he opposed, for England's sake, he thought, the government's militarism and drive toward empire. Thus, Blake's catalogue description of the Nelson and Pitt paintings pulls the wool over the reader's eyes. His "recondite" meaning is a critique of what Clyde R. Taylor has aptly seen in the paintings as "power's fantasy image of itself."† Blake could have borrowed some additional words from Paul to describe his critique: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Ephesians 6:12). The darkening of Blake's paintings is perhaps more appropriate than he knew.

Blake's attack on such powers actually began with his lost painting *The Spiritual Form of Napoleon.* Morton D. Paley quotes at length H. H. Statham, who saw the painting: "Blake's Napoleon is a strong energetic figure grasping at the sun and moon with his hands … with a pavement of dead bodies … in the foreground."‡ Napoleon is a "hero," that is to

S. Foster Damon in A Blake Dictionary, *80, identifies Blake's four Zoas, the "cherubim of man and the cherubim of the heathen," as "human qualities personified." This would connect Blake's description of the Canterbury Pilgrims with cherubim.*

†*Clyde R. Taylor, "Iconographical Themes in William Blake,"* Blake Studies *1, 1 (Fall 1968), 77.*

‡*Morton D. Paley,* Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought, *Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970, 182. Paley is quoting from* MacMillan's, *34, 61. Paley's fine discussion of the three paintings is on 182–97. See also Taylor, 72–8; Mark Schorer,* William Blake: The Politics of Vision, *New York: Henry Holt, 1946, 174–5; David V, Erdman,* Blake: Prophet Against Empire, *Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954, 408–9, 415–20, and 521–2; Blunt, 97–103, but this last is marred by a rather facile reading, connecting them with Blake's long poems.*

say, in Blake's ironic vision, "a monster of energy," a personification of the "will-to-power" and reminds us of part of a line in *The Four Zoas*, "War is energy Enslaved" (spoken by a renewed Albion in Night 9:120, E390). The principles of the three paintings together constitute for Paley "a political complement to Blake's other unholy trinities—Bacon, Newton, and Locke; Hume, Gibbon, and Voltaire; the brothers Hunt, the accusers of Socrates" (182-3). Paley also reminds us of Blake's annotation to Bacon's "Of Envy," where he refers to war's "Heroic Villains" (E623).

In the Book of Job, Behemoth is called "the chief of the ways of God" (40:19) and Leviathan "a king over the children of pride" (41:34). Damon sees them as two "terrible forces" that "exist in man" (40). God displays them to Job as proof of his universal power. Of Leviathan, God, speaking out of the whirlwind, says, "None is so fierce that dare stir him up: who then is able to stand before me?" (Job 42:10). Yet in Blake's picture, a serene, commanding Nelson holds Leviathan on a leash. A somewhat more severe Pitt guides a similarly tethered Behemoth.

In *Jerusalem* (4:91; E251), Blake calls Leviathan and Behemoth respectively "the War by Sea enormous & the War/By Land astounding: erecting pillars in the deepest Hell," which are destroyed by Los. In the paintings, both beasts do the masters' will, which is calmly defiant of God's words to Job. The "Almighty" (E530), whose "orders" Pitt is pleased to follow is not the true God, but rather the maker of the natural world. Nelson's famous statement that England expects every man to do his duty comes into play here. Blake is answering it in his commentary on Picture 14 in *A Descriptive Catalogue*, "The times require that every one should speak out boldly; England expects that every man should do his duty, in Arts, as well as in Arms, or in the Senate" (E549). Blake thought that the duty of art was always to speak antithetically to power.*

But political and military power are not the only objects against which Blake commits offense, for his discussion of the Pitt painting ends with a defense of fresco and more attacks on the use of oil and white lead. Blake is well aware of how radical and offensive these views are: "This is an awful thing to say to oil Painters; they may call it madness, but it is true" (E531).

**The concept of the antithetical role of poetry is appropriated as a Blakean notion in my* The Offense of Poetry, *Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007, esp. 13–20.*

Chaucer's Canterbury Pilgrims

The full title Blake gives to Picture 3, his depiction of the Canterbury Pilgrims, is *Sir Jeffery Chaucer and the nine and twenty Pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury.* Blake's commentary on Picture 3 has a special importance because, in addition to its being a description of the painting and an attack on Thomas Stothard's painting on the same subject, it has taken a significant place in the history of Chaucer criticism. It is arguably the most important criticism of Chaucer between that of John Dryden, who in his *Fables Ancient and Modern* (1700) revived Chaucer's reputation, which had fallen in the seventeenth century, and Matthew Arnold's essay in *The Study of Poetry* (1880). There Arnold expresses the opinion that Chaucer's work, though great, lacked "high seriousness" and was thus not among the very greatest.

For quite some time, not much was said about Blake's criticism, though Charles Lamb had early reported to Henry Crabb Robinson that he found Blake's painting better than Stothard's and that "Blake's description was the finest criticism he had ever read of Chaucer's poem."* Also in a letter to Bernard Barton of May 5, 1824, Lamb praised Blake's description as a "most spirited criticism on Chaucer, but mystical and full of Vision."†

Nevertheless, Blake's remarks about some of the pilgrims have been challenging enough to impel efforts to square what he said with what his painting of them seems to say. The conclusion has been, for some, that Blake's combination of commentary and picture is sometimes ironic or ambivalent. Betsy Bowden, for example, concludes, referring to the squire, "A reader familiar with Chaucerian interpretation of the time would wonder at Blake's abstracted one-sided praise for Chaucer's ironically portrayed complex character, and would thereby look to the picture to see what Blake means."‡ She concludes that in Blake's treatment of the knight

**Henry Crabb Robinson,* Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence, *ed. Thomas Sadler, Macmillan: London, 1869, 2, 380.*

†Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion 1357–1900 *(1925), ed. Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, New York: Russell & Russell, 1960, 2, 151.*

‡*Betsy Bowden, "The Artistic and Interpretive Context of Blake's 'Canterbury Pilgrims',"* Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly *13, 4 (Spring 1980), 180. But with the phrases she quotes, Blake is describing not the squire but his dress and horse. It is the same with the knight.*

Opposite page: **"Sir Jeffery Chaucer and the nine and twenty Pilgrims on their journey to Canterbury" (pen and tempera on canvas, c. 1808).**

there is considerable discrepancy between "visually suggested spiritual ambivalence and abstract verbal praise" (180). Both knight and squire are "spiritually ambivalent, neither clearly good nor clearly evil" (181). She finds a deliberate contradiction to Blake's commentary in the nets and crosses in his picture. One implication is that Blake secretly injects into his picture symbols from his long poems. Indeed, recourse is had by most commentators to characters from Blake's own poems as explanatory of certain pilgrims. Damon identifies the Wife of Bath with Blake's Rahab and the Abbess with Tirzah (407-8). Karl Kiralis does the same, and Bowden echoes him.* Blake had already provided connections between some of the pilgrims and Greek mythological figures: the Franklin with Bacchus, the Doctor of Physic with Esculapius, the Host with Silenus, the Squire with Apollo, and Hercules with the Miller (bad) and the Plowman (good). The grounds for this, as Blake says, are that "Every Age is a Canterbury Pilgrimage" (E536) and that Chaucer's characters are "eternal Principles that exist in all ages" (E536). They existed before the Greeks and the Greek gods appeared. After these remarks, he offers a view based on the story he tells elsewhere that the Greek gods were originally internal or "mental" deities but became externalized as distant idols of worship in a false material universe:

> Visions of these eternal principles or characters of human life appear to poets, in all ages; the Grecian gods were the ancient Cherubim of Phoenicia; but the Greeks, and since them the Moderns, have neglected to subdue the gods of Priam. These Gods are visions of the eternal attributes, or divine names, which, when erected into gods, become destructive to humanity. They ought to be the servants, and not the masters of man, or of society [E536].

We shall see more of the Phoenicians in Blake's discussion of *The Ancient Britons*.

Orphea Jane Allen locates the pilgrims in relation to both Blake's Zoas and Greek archetypes as follows†:

Blake	*Greek Myth*	*Canterbury Pilgrims*
Urizen	Apollo	Squire, Knight, Summoner Pardoner, Man of Law, Yeoman, Reeve, Monk, Friar
Tharmas	Bacchus	Franklin, Physician, Haberdasher, Dyer
	Hercules	Miller/Plowman

**Karl Kiralis, "William Blake as an Intellectual and Spiritual Guide to Chaucer's* Canterbury Pilgrims*,"* Blake Studies *1, 2 (Spring 1969), 153–8.*

†*Orphea Jane Allen, "Blake's Archetypal Criticism,"* Genre *11, 2 (summer 1978), 173–89.*

Blake	*Greek Myth*	*Canterbury Pilgrims*
Urthona (Los)		Parson, Clerk, Host, Chaucer
Luvah (Orc)		Plowman, Wife of Bath, Nun, Nun's Priest

In some cases, Allen relates to Blake's Zoas characters in the stories that the pilgrims tell, and occasionally a pilgrim represents more than one Zoa or Greek figure. Bowden argues,

> [Blake] describes the Plowman as "Hercules in his supreme eternal state, divested of his spectrous shadow; which is the Miller…. Chaucer has divided the ancient character of Hercules between his Miller and his Plowman" [E527]. Here is perhaps Blake's clearest statement of just how he sees different mythologies interrelate: not as one-to-one relabelings of one another's deities, but as once-inspired attempts to divide the continuous spectrum of human psyche into discrete but interacting bundles of characteristics [186].

Further, "the procession is a universe made up of active and passive halves, of characters who express or who repress energies" (188).

Kiralis, preceding Bowden, emphasizes the placement of the pilgrims in the picture to show their spiritual roles. For example, he notes that Blake placed the Man of Law between the Parson and the Plowman to show allegorically that "the rather mechanical law is in need of humanization and Christian principles and practice" (145).

These critics have interesting things to say, and have made strenuous scholarly efforts to interpret. However, they are dogged by scholarly anxiety to explain *everything*, and they end up reminding one of Urizen traveling through the universe of his own making in *The Four Zoas*, trying to find a place to stand. Their temptation is toward diagrammatic neatness. It threatens an overpowering complexity, as for example when Bowden writes, "It is beyond my scope in this paper to try to label the dynamic binary relationship of every figure to every other one" (188), as if that could actually be done, given time and space.

Still, it is not surprising, given Blake's hidden irony in the Nelson and Pitt paintings, that critics have looked for more. Is the Squire's Yeoman really "a great character, a man perfectly knowing in his profession" (E533)? Is he a "mighty man"? The description seems hyperbolic. Are the Prioress's "certain peculiarities and little delicate affectations" accompanied by "what is truly grand and really polite" (E533)? Must we accept "truly" and "really" here? Is the Monk a "leader of the age" (E534)? Is the Host also (E535)?

Perhaps we have misunderstood Blake's intent. Does he mean that

these Chaucerian figures greatly embody what certain classes of people are in that age, each embodying the full nature of the type. If one compares them to the spiritual forms of Nelson and Pitt, one notes that Blake ironically calls these men heroes, but Chaucer admits no such heroes to his group. Politicians, war leaders, and royalty are absent. Blake seems to connect greatness with Chaucer's common people, poor or affluent. They are greatly exemplary of the real life of the times.

In connection with all of this, one must ask what Blake means when he writes, "Chaucer makes every one of his characters perfect in his kind" (E536). I think he means not only that they are appropriate images of a class, but also that they are perfect as drawn, not morally or spiritually perfect. Blake's occasionally hyperbolic and, I think, deliberately excessive language is designed to call attention to Chaucer's (and Blake's) ability to get at the image of a class by imaginative power. In this sense, they are in Blake's view "perfect" (E536), but they remain people with the usual human foibles and occasionally appalling characteristics.

What is the status of an image of a class? Blake makes important statements about this that have been of interest to many readers puzzled by his words. I present them here:

> The characters of Chaucer's Pilgrims are the characters which compose all ages and nations: as one age falls, another rises, different to mortal sight, but to immortals only the same; for we see the same characters repeated again and again, in animals, vegetables, minerals, and in men; nothing new occurs in identical existence; Accident ever varies, Substance can never suffer change nor decay.
>
> Of Chaucer's characters, as described in his Canterbury Tales, some of the names or titles are altered by time, but the characters themselves for ever remain unaltered, and consequently they are the physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life, beyond which Nature never steps. Names alter, things never alter. I have known multitudes of those who would have been monks in the age of monkery, who in this deistical age are deists [E532-3].

And:

> Every age is a Canterbury Pilgrimage…. Chaucer makes every one of his characters perfect in his kind, every one is an Antique Statue; the image of a class, and not of an imperfect individual [E536].

One scholar puzzled by all of this was Kiralis, troubled by the thought that Blake generalized in his descriptions of Chaucer's characters:

> Blake's idea of contrasting the Franklin with the Physician has to be on their differing personal characteristics. But since this contrast is between individuals

> rather than between classes, Blake, despite himself, denies his own principle against generalizing when he asserts, after describing the physician as perfect professionally, that "Chaucer makes every one of his characters perfect in his kind; … the image of a class, and not of an imperfect individual." Perhaps I am reading Blake wrong here but I cannot understand how or believe that he would think all physicians then or now to be just like Chaucer's anymore than he would think Chaucer's Pardoner to be "the image of a class" of all pardoners then, or now of all confidence men. Certainly, not all plowmen or parsons were then or now poor and good [146].

Allen has sought to answer Kiralis by describing Blake as giving attention to traditional, archetypal figures and "humours":

> … what Blake sees, I believe, is what Chaucer saw before him, and that is that there were and are certain basic classes of men, different classes in whom reason is the paramount principle, or the emotions, or spiritual intuition, or classes of men like the Physician and the Franklin of Chaucer's pilgrimage, in whom the sensory faculties are paramount. And Blake, in contrasting the Franklin and the Physician, is representing two variations of men in whom the Tharmas principle, or "humour" as Ben Jonson would have called it, is uppermost. To bring up Blake's principle against generalizing here is, I think, inappropriate. Blake's system deals with the general principles that govern the human soul, principles which are in turn manifest in the idiosyncrasies of individual personality [180].

Bowden reminds us that the notion of the pilgrims as eternal types was a "standard interpretation in the eighteenth century" (165). She offers, as an example, Dryden in the preface to his *Fables: Ancient and Modern* (1700), where he asserts,

> We have our Fore-fathers and Great Grandames all before us, as they were in *Chaucer's* Days; their general Characters are still remaining in Mankind, and even in *England*, though they are called by other Names than those of *Monks* and *Fryars*, and *Chanons*, and *Lady Abbesses*, and *Nuns*: for Mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of Nature, though every thing is alter'd.*

There is, however, more to be said in order to deal with Kiralis's problem. I begin by observing Blake's remark in his annotations to Reynolds: "Every Class is Individual" (E648). Reynolds has been struggling with the abstract idea of beauty, noting that the Hercules, the Gladiator, and the Apollo each represents a different idea of it. He proceeds,

> It is true, indeed, that these figures are each perfect in their kind, though of different characters and proportions; but still none of them is the representation of an individual, but of a class. And as there is one general form, which, as I

*The Poems of John Dryden, *ed. John Sargeaunt, London: Oxford University Press, 1945, 274.*

> have said, belongs to the human kind at large, so in each of these classes there is one common idea and central form, which is the abstract of the various individual forms belonging to that class.*

Reynolds's view mixes the notion of Platonic idea with that of empirical generalization from sense impressions and applies this mixture to visual art.† Blake rejects both the Platonic idea and the generalization because they both belittle visionary experience. The former in its purity is a presumed reality without image. All particulars are supposed to be imitations of it, but it can't be imitated because it has no shape. The latter lifts from a series of particulars what is common to all of them; but this also cannot be presented as an image, that is, a visionary experience, since it is a monster of abstraction. Blake thinks neither the Platonic idea nor the generalization has any reality, let alone any place in art. If one is to imagine a class it must be an image, that is something actually seen through the eye by the mind, or, as in Blake's thought, projected through the eye from the imagination, a word Blake takes literally as the maker of images. As a result, the images that are Chaucer's people cannot, if they represent a class, be based on a Platonic idea or generalization. For neither can be seen. An attempt to construct an image building *from* either must result in an arbitrary choice, or what Blake calls "allegory," when he uses that term in a derogatory sense. (When he mentions "Allegory addressed to the Intellectual powers" [E730], he means vision.) For Blake, the imagination of the artist must generate the image as the product of intense vision, not a blank thought.

Further, this intensity, to our usual way of speaking, looks *into* the particular image to see the universal in it: "a World in a Grain of Sand" (E490), a Franklin of all Franklins. One could also say that Blake ultimately reverses the notion of the infinite by making the infinitesimal contain it. The principle here can be named synecdoche, but one open at both ends.‡ Blake's Franklin is both individual and class; he doesn't stand allegorically for the abstract idea of a Franklin.

But every visionary artistic production of a Franklin or, say, a Hercules has its own particular image, and each will be different though

Sir Joshua Reynolds, Discourses, *ed. Pat Rogers, London: Penguin Books, 1992, 108. The passage is from the third discourse.*

†*On this matter, see my* Blake's Margins: A Critical Study of the Annotations, *Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2009, 118–25.*

‡*I discuss this in "Synecdoche and Method,"* Antithetical Essays in Literary Criticism and Liberal Education, *Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1990, 21–51.*

metaphorically related, as for Blake everything ultimately is. As Blake writes of his painting in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, "…its Vision is seen by the [*Imaginative Eye*]* of Every one according to the situation he holds" [E554]. Every artistic vision is particular yet literally related by metaphor to every other one. This is the reason that Blake thinks one cannot with any success at all contrast works critically, that is to say, judge one work of art over and against another. There is more to be said about this, but it must wait until I discuss his criticism of Stothard's painting of the pilgrims and his treatment of his own painting in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*.

So the answer to Kiralis's problem is that, strictly speaking, as an artist Blake is not generalizing, though as viewers and readers we are inclined to use the language of generalization, being not quite able to overcome what is called in *Jerusalem* "the stubborn structure of the Language" (2:36; E183). Instead Blake peers into his image to see the universe both in and as it.

In any age, the artist has only the experience and images of his time and of the art of the past that is still available to him. When Blake says that accident varies and that substance does not, he seems to be using Aristotle's terms. Substance, for Aristotle, is the quality of something that needs nothing else for its existence. Accident is something that belongs to a thing that a thing does not require in order to be what it is. When Blake says that monks and Deists are the same except for living in different ages, he recognizes both sameness and difference, which is what a metaphor does. However, his use of Aristotelian terms risks privileging sameness at the expense of difference, especially when he asserts, "nothing new occurs in identical existence" (E532). "Identical" indicates that everything—a particular monk—is what it is, but identity also combines sameness and difference. The monk is thus "identical" to a Deist. Indeed, each age has a character identical in its particularity to every other: "Every age is a Canterbury Pilgrimage" (E536), but each is still unique and different. The important point here is that Blake thinks metaphorically, and a metaphor always contains both sameness and difference. The term "identity," to this way of thinking, unites sameness and difference, as we do when we refer to twins as identical.

There is also in Blake's remarks a distinction between names and things. In Blake's use of Aristotelian terms, names are accidental; things

**These two words are deleted by Blake in his notebook (p. 70), but they seem appropriate.*

are substantial even without them. Yet Blake says that every class is individual, and this must apply to words, which when referring to objects should in his view always properly be images. For our purposes, we have to consider that Blake is talking about words for classes and words applied to individuals and that for him both must either be images or, though he never says this, refer to nothing. Thus Blake calls Chaucer's figures "physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life" (E533). Blake knew "physiognomies" from the theory of Johann Caspar Lavater, which held that character could be judged by observation of a person's appearance. He later became familiar with phrenology, the application of the same idea to the skull, and he read a work on insanity by one of its principal promulgators J. C. Spurzheim.* The word "lineaments" reflects Blake's notion of the supreme importance of outline in painting and all other arts.

Blake finds Chaucer's characters to have been clearly delineated. They appealed to people in Chaucer's time as well as to people in his own. He proceeds to connect them in a line that goes back before the Greeks to the very earliest ages. He has already alluded in his discussion of the Nelson and Pitt pictures to the relationship of his own work to that of the most ancient visionaries, who, he thought, were copied by the Greeks. He will discuss this matter in greater detail in his comment on *The Ancient Britons*. When Blake says, "Chaucer makes every one of his characters perfect in his kind, every one is an Antique Statue; the image of a class, and not of an imperfect individual" (E536), he is declaring that there is no specific person being copied from nature, but rather there is an imaginative projection, perfectly drawn to be what it is.

Reynolds, discussing the Hercules, Gladiator, and Apollo, says, "none of them is the representation of an individual but of a class" (E648). Blake sees in the denial of individuality the Platonic idea and generalization rearing their double heads. Reynolds turns these statues into what can be only arbitrary allegorical images of abstract ideas. Blake would have the class in the individual and the individual in the class.

Blake's commentary and the whole idea of having an exhibition was generated in part by his anger at Cromek and Stothard, whose painting Blake subjects to withering critique. Implying that Stothard is one of those who sells out to popular demand and to an employer's wishes, Blake claims faithfulness to Chaucer's poem and points out numerous errors in

**See E583–601 for Blake's annotations to Lavater and E662–3 to those to Spurzheim. I discuss these in* Blake's Margin*, 7–27, 139–49.*

Stothard's work. Stothard misplaces people in the procession: The Reeve does not come last, though Chaucer says he did. The Wife of Bath is not a "beautiful blooming damsel" as the prospectus says. The Plowman is not an old man. Stothard depicts three Monks, though Chaucer puts only one into his poem. He inserts a Goldsmith, not mentioned by Chaucer. The Shipman is not a sea captain. The Dulwich Hills are not en route to Canterbury. A sarcastic Blake has some fun here: "perhaps the painter thought he would give them a ride round about, because they were a burlesque set of scare-crows, not worth any man's respect or care" (E540).

Blake claims that Stothard's painting is all "misconceived, and its mis-execution is equal to its misconception" (E540). He expresses here his long-held view that conception and execution cannot be separated. We may do so for the purpose of discussion, but it implies, if we think rigorously about it, a misunderstanding of the creative act. Blake also expresses another characteristic complaint, which he often makes against Rubens and the Venetians: Stothard's painting has "broken lines, broken masses, and broken colours" that cannot "keep" form (E538). The complaint is the familiar one: "Where there are no lineaments there can be no character" (E540).

One can see in comparing the two paintings that Blake has made every effort to catch the medieval spirit of Chaucer's poem. This is most easily observed not only in the dress but also in the treatment of the horses. Stothard's are in the contemporary style of historical painting in the heroic mode. Blake's are, as one critic has remarked, "stiff." The medieval mode was what he sought to work in.

The Bard, from Gray

Blake returns us to the British historical and mythological tradition with his tempera (with gold) treatment of Thomas Gray's poem *The Bard*. (The full title of Blake's illustration is *The Bard, from Gray*, Picture 4*)*. This painting, very much darkened, was probably executed in 1809 or slightly before. It followed Blake's treatment of the poem (fifteen watercolors) in his collection of illustrations to the poems of Gray, done in approximately 1797-9.* Gray wrote in his commonplace book of his plans for the poem:

**See Irene Taylor,* Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray, *Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1971. Taylor's excellent commentary is followed by facsimiles of all of the plates. Blake's painting is not shown, but there is a valuable commentary on the poem and Blake's response to it, pp 94–110.*

> The army of Edward I. as they march through a deep valley, are suddenly stopped by the appearance of a venerable figure seated on the summit of an inaccessible rock, who, with a voice more than human, reproaches the King with all the misery and desolation which he had brought on his country; foretells the misfortunes of the Norman race, and with prophetic spirit declares, that all his cruelty shall never extinguish the noble ardour of poetic genius in this island; and that men shall never be wanting to celebrate true virtue and valour in immortal strains, to expose vice and infamous pleasure, and boldly censure tyranny and oppression. His song ended, he precipitates himself from the mountain, and is swallowed up by the river that rolls at its foot.*

In the poem, a chorus of dead Bards makes the prophecy of the end of the Plantagenet line, to which Edward's reign (1272-1307) belonged, and the revival of Welsh power with the accession of Henry IV and the House of Tudor. Blake's painting shows three forms weaving "the winding sheet of Edward's race" (E541). However, this may actually be one Bard in three moments, beginning with the bard being tossed up by the waves. Irene Taylor identifies the three figures in Blake's second illustration in the series for "The Bard" as "forebears of Blake's 'Ancient Britons,' the Strong, Ugly, and Beautiful men" (95), the British survivors of Arthur's last battle. The connection she makes, however, is only suggestive. The three Bards are "more like punishing furies" (109). In the sixth illustration, the Bards cling to a cliff side which "on closer inspection, proves to be a mass of thick bloody ropes that are clustered strings of a gigantic harp—and hence the threads that will be woven into the 'tissue' of Edward's winding sheet" (99), actually the winding sheet of the whole Plantagenet line and of tyranny itself.

Blake's description is as follows:

> King Edward and his Queen Elenor are prostrated, with their horses, at the foot of a rock on which the Bard stands; prostrated by the terrors of his harp on the margin of the river Conway, whose waves bear up a corse of a slaughtered bard at the foot of the rock. The armies of Edward are seen winding among the mountains.
>
> "He wound with toilsome march his long array."

Mortimer and Gloucester lie spellbound behind their king [E542]. The three (or one) bards are weaving the winding sheet from the strings of their broken harps, seen also in the second of Blake's illustrations.

The impulse for Gray's poem is expressed in its "Advertisement": "The following Ode is founded on a Tradition current in Wales that

*The Complete Poems of Thomas Gray, *eds. H. W. Starr and J. R. Hendrickson, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1966, 208.*

EDWARD THE FIRST, when he completed the Conquest of that country, ordered all the Bards, that fell into his hands, to be put to death" (*Poems*, 18). There were actually five Welsh rebellions during Edward's reign—in 1277,* 1294, and 1301, when Edward made his son Prince of Wales.

The three important classes in Welsh tribal life were the Druids, the Bards, and the Vates (or seers). Gray combines the latter two into one figure, as does Blake, implying that the bards who speak the prophecy are also soothsayers.

Blake's reading of Gray is a political one as well as a statement about the importance of art. Erdman observes, "The effect of the bard's words, as Blake portrays it, is like the effect achieved by Tom Paine, that 'worker of Miracles' whom Blake admired for being able 'to overthrow all the armies of Europe with a small pamphlet.'"†

In Blake's reading, *The Bard* becomes a powerful antithetical response to tyrannical power. That power is implied in Blake's initial comment on his painting: "Weaving the winding sheet of Edward's race by means of sounds of spiritual music and its accompanying expressions of articulate speech is a bold, and daring, and most masterly conception" (E541). He proceeds to complain about the insistence of critics on "facsimile representations": "…shall Painting be confined to the sordid drudgery of facsimile representations of merely mortal and perishing substances, and not be as poetry and music are, elevated into its own proper sphere of invention and visionary conception?" (E541). Blake remembers the recent criticism of his designs for Blair's *Grave*, namely Robert Hunt's attack in *The Examiner* (July 31, 1808): "How '*the visible and the invisible world*' can be *connected* by the aid of the pencil without '*provoking probability*,' nay even without enraging it, none but such a visionary as MR. BLAKE or such a frantic as MR. FUSELI, could possibly fancy."‡ *The Anti-Jacobin Review* (November 1808) joined in, attacking Blake on the same grounds, adding remarks about Blake's "mediocrity" as an engraver (*Blake Records*, 265-74). Blake reminds the reader that the greatly admired Greek statues are embodied forms of "spiritual existences" and goes on in a statement much quoted by scholars,

**In 1277, Edward surrounded the Snowden area and starved the Welsh hero Llewelyn's troop into surrender. This may well be the campaign to which Gray refers.*

†*David V. Erdman,* Blake: Prophet Against Empire, *Princeton, NJ, Princeton University Press, 1954, 46. The passage Erdman quotes is from Blake's annotations to Watson's* Apology for the Bible *(E617).*

‡Blake Records, *259.*

> The Prophets describe what they saw in Vision as real and existing men whom they saw with their imaginative and immortal organs; the Apostles the same; the clearer the organ the more distinct the object. A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing; they are organized and minutely articulated beyond all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce. He who does not imagine in stronger and better lineaments, and in stronger and better light than his perishing mortal eye can see does not imagine at all [E541].

The last sentence contains two Blakean requirements for art: determinate lines and strong colors. He considers his spiritual beings proper products of that art. The key word is "organized," which means being brought together and contained by a firm outline: "…all his [Blake's] imaginations appear to him infinitely more perfect and more minutely organized than any thing seen by his mortal eye. Spirits are organized men" (E541-2). His argument is based on the idea that the whole of reality is a human projection of the imagination.

The Ancient Britons

Blake's *The Ancient Britons*, Picture 5, has not been seen, as far as anyone knows, since shortly after Blake's exhibition of 1809-10. Presumably it went to the home of the antiquarian William Owen Pughe, who had commissioned it. Seymour Kirkup, who as a young man was a student at the Royal Academy of Art, had seen the painting and wrote in 1870,

> I thought it his best work, a battle, from the Welsh Triads—The three last men who remained of Arthur's army & who defeated the enemy; the strongest man, the handsomest man & the ugliest man…. It must have been about 14 ft. by 10—In texture it was rather mealy (as we call it) & was too red, The sun seemed setting in blood. It was not Greek in character, though the figures reminded one of Hercules, Apollo & Pan—They were naked Britons—If you should ever hear of it is worth seeking. There is more power of drawing in it than in any of his works that I have known….*

Kirkup made a sketch of the painting, but that too is lost. This was without doubt the largest work Blake accomplished, and it was grandiose in both subject matter and content. Blake's own description of it in the catalogue tells us much about it:

> The Painter has given in his beautiful man, his own idea of intellectual Beauty.

*Blake Records, *294–5. Kirkup wrote other interesting letters mentioning Blake, reproduced by Bentley, 288–95. Kirkup called the painting* The Battle of Camlan.

> The face and limbs that deviates or alters least, from infancy to old age, is the face and limbs of greatest Beauty and perfection.
>
> The Ugly likewise, when accompanied and annexed to imbecility and disease, is a subject for burlesque and not for historical grandeur; the Artist has imagined his Ugly man; one approaching to the beast in features and form, his forehead small, without frontals; his jaws large; his nose high on the ridge, and narrow; his chest and the stamina of his make, comparatively little, and his joints and his extremities large; his eyes with scarce any whites, narrow and cunning, and every thing tending toward what is truly Ugly; the incapability of intellect.
>
> The Artist has considered his strong Man as a receptacle of Wisdom, a sublime energizer; his features and limbs do not spindle out into length, without strength, nor are they too large and unwieldy for his brain and bosom. Strength consists in accumulation of power to the principal seat, and from thence a regular gradation and subordination; strength is compactness, not extent nor bulk [E544-5].

Each has different qualities: the strong "conscious superiority," the beautiful dutifulness and "anxious solicitude for the fates of those for whom he combats," the ugly "love of carnage" (E545).

The scene is certainly one of carnage, and the excessive redness that Kirkup complained about was surely deliberate. Blake writes,

> The Roman Soldiers rolled together in a heap before them: "Like the rolling thing before the whirlwind;" each shew a different character, and a different expression of fear, or revenge, or envy, or blank horror, or amazement, or devout wonder and unresisting awe.
>
> The dead and dying, Britons naked, mingled with armed Romans, strew the field beneath. Among these, the last of the Bards who were capable of attending warlike deeds, is seen falling, outstretched among the dead and the dying; singing to his harp in the pains of death [E545].

Blake also offers an interpretation of his painting, but of that later.

The painting is based, as Kirkup remarked, on one of the Welsh Triads. Damon informs us (443) that it is number 85 in the *Myvyrian Archaiology* (London, 1801-7), which was put together mainly by Pughe. It appears also as number 83 in *The Triads of Britain* as follows:

> The three men who escaped from the battle of Camlan: Morvran son of Tegid who, being so ugly, every one thought he was the devil from hell and fled before him; Sandde Angel-aspect, who having so fine a shape, so beautiful, and so lovely, that no one raised an arm, against him, thinking that he was an angel from heaven; and Glewlwyd with the mighty grasp, for so large was his size and mighty his strength, that no one could stand before him, and every one fled at his approach. These are the three men who escaped from the battle of Camlan.*

* The Triads of Britain, *compiled by Iolo Morganwg [Edward Williams], translated by W. Probert, London: Wildwood House, Ltd., 1977.*

This triad does not appear in *Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads*, and the editor and translator writes, "It seems most likely that this triad is to be regarded as a burlesque invention by the narrator of the story. A parody of TYP whose spirit is entirely in keeping with the jocular treatment given throughout to the list of company at Arthur's court."* It is also possible that Morganwg simply composed it himself, as it was suspected he did with others in his collection. As Erdman points out (E880), Blake makes an adaptation and then an addition in his introduction to *The Ancient Britons*:

> *In the last Battle of King Arthur only Three Britons escaped, these were the Strongest Man, the Beautifullest Man, and the Ugliest Man; these three marched through the field unsubdued, as Gods, and the Sun of Britain s[e]t, but shall arise again with tenfold splendour when Arthur shall awake from sleep, and resume his dominion over earth and ocean* [E542].

According to some traditions, there were seven survivors.

Camlan was the battle in which Arthur slew his enemy Mordred, but later, having been removed to Avalon, died of his wounds.† Blake either confused or deliberately conflated Arthur's triumph over the treacherous Mordred and his usurping forces with a previous defeat of the Romans. Geoffrey of Monmouth, whose mythological *History of the English Kings* Blake surely had read, has Arthur return to Britain from his victory in Gaul, having abandoned a decision to advance on Rome. According to Geoffrey, Britain under Arthur became the leading nation of the world.

Blake's commentary on *The Ancient Britons* combines Arthurian and other British mythological traditions with some of the archeological speculations of Jacob Bryant, Edward Davies, and others. Then, in his major long poems he subsumes all of this under his own expansive story of Albion.

Blake works almost always by synecdoche, so that everything seen in vision—the three survivors of the Battle of Camlan, for example—are microcosmic forms of classes of men. He never gives up his insistence on "minute particulars." "Every Class is Individual" (E648). Generalizations from sense data are abstract and without body and image, but real universals are visible to the imagination. Blake's three survivors represent,

*Trioedd Ynys Prydein: The Welsh Triads, *ed. and tr. Rachel Bromwich, Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 1961, xcii.*

†*On the various supposed locations of the battle, see Kenneth Jackson, "Once Again Arthur's Battles,"* Modern Philology *43, 1 (August 1945), 44–57.*

he says, "three general classes of men," who are, so to speak, the surviving spirits of the Britons "unsubdued, age after age" (E542). This is an unusual usage of "general" for Blake. It doesn't refer to generalization from sense data, which would be abstract and imageless.

Blake next declares that the "British Antiquities" are in his hands, including the story of Arthur, his conquest of the whole world, his round table, and, of course, the prophecy of his return. Included are the Druids and the history fabricated for them by the eighteenth-century antiquarians. He also includes, for good measure, the old Roman road from Dover to St. Albans, Watling Street, first mentioned in 1230, and London Stone, now moved a short distance from its original location to a position opposite Cannon Street Station. Possibly a Roman milestone, it may have marked the spot from which measurements to places elsewhere were taken. On the other hand, it may be only a stone surviving from a Roman building.

Blake adds to his list caverns in which Druids were said to meet. One of these, Okeyhole, is described by John Wood in his *Choir Guare* (1747), as "that dreadful DEN" and "initiating CAVE" (Owen, 11). Blake mentions also giants, presumably those said by Geoffrey of Monmouth to have brought huge stones from Africa in order to build the stone circles in England and Ireland. Blake must surely have known of the claim made by Aylett Sammes in *Britannia Antiqua Illustrata* (1676) that "the Druids had made their huge wicker figures [in which people were said to have been burned alive] in commemoration of the Phoenicians, who, themselves large men, became the giants of later legends" (Owen, 158).

Blake proceeds to make an astonishing statement:

> Adam was a Druid, and Noah; also Abraham was called to succeed the Druidical age, which began to turn allegoric and mental signification into corporeal command, whereby human sacrifice would have depopulated the earth [E542-3].

Several scholars have managed to make sense of this, and I shall attempt to bring together their explanations.* We shall see that Blake's statement is a radical extension of views offered by writers who invented a primitive form of archeology. A similar view was at least hinted at by others, including John Milton. Owen observes, "Blake may well have assumed that his

**Among them, Owen, 224–236, Piggott,* William Stukeley, *1285–8 and* The Druids *140–50, Todd, 29–60, Hungerford, 35–61, Peter F. Fisher, "Blake and the Druids,"* JEGP *58, 4 (October 1959), 589–612, and his* The Valley of Vision: Blake as Prophet and Revolutionary, *Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1961, 32–41.*

reference would be sufficiently understood" (234); Owen cites two works on the subject of the relation of Druids to "patriarchal religion" (234).*

The British history known to Blake and constructed in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries by the antiquarians does not question Biblical history; rather, it is hopelessly tied to it and built on it. With some variations here and there, it reports that the sons of Ashkenaz, who was son of Gomer, who was son of Japhet, who was son of Noah, who himself was a Druid, came to Britain. In some versions, the Britons were the spiritual and cultural heirs of the Biblical patriarchs, specifically Abraham. They came to Britain during his lifetime or shortly thereafter. Certain accounts (Samuel Bochart's and Stukeley's) say that the Druids came to Britain with the Phoenicians; others say the Druids replaced the Phoenician bards. Edward Davies, whom Blake mentions, went so far as to conclude in *Celtic Researches* that the Druids were descendents of the Titans, who were descended from Ashkenaz and mixed with the earlier inhabitants of Britain, the Hyperboreans.

Indeed, it was assumed by some that the Druids were, as Piggott remarks, "proleptically Christian" (*The Druids*, 122). Commenting on Davies, Hungerford remarks,

> Davies, finding evidence of high theosophy among the Druids and supposing the Druids to have inherited patriarchal culture, expressed the opinion that long before Christ, and long before the Mosaic revelations, God had instructed the patriarchs in such matters of doctrine as the immortality of the soul, the resurrection, and the future judgment, obscure traditions of which he found preserved both by Jews and Gentiles [39].

It was an easy step from this history to identify erroneously the stone circles in Ireland and Britain and the structures of Avebury and Stonehenge as creations of the Druids. The theory was set forth by John Aubrey, John Toland, and William Stukeley and generally accepted. Stukeley asserted that he had proof:

> I must prepare the reader for a right understanding of our Druid edifices, by informing him, that Stonehenge, and all other works of this nature in our island, are erected by the most ancient measure call'd a cubit, which we read of in the holy scripture and in ancient profane authors. I mean the same individual measure, call'd the Hebrew, Egyptian, Phoenician cubit; most probably deriv'd from Noah and Adam. 'Tis the same that the pyramids of Egypt and other of their works are projected upon; the same as that of Moses's tabernacle,

**They are William Cooke,* An Enquiry into the Patriarchal and Druidical Religion *(1754) and Anon.,* Complete History of the Druids … with an Inquiry into their Religion and its Coincidence with the Patriarchal *(1810).*

> Solomon's temple, &c., and we may reasonably pride ourselves in possessing these visible monuments of the old measure of the world.*

Today we know that these supposed Druid monuments preceded the Druids by centuries.

Blake appropriated much of this antiquarian lore and went even further to identify Druidic religion with Adam, to locate the source of patriarchal culture in England, and to put it into *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*. In short, Britain was the original holy land. He had some predecessors even in the notion that Druidism spread originally from England. The hapless Francis Wilford, for example, wrote that England was the source of the earliest events before the flood, and he seems to have thought that England had been connected to an Atlantic continent that sank into the sea, the fabulous Atlantis.† Related to this was Jean Sylvain Baille's notion, set forth in *Lettres sur l'Atlantide de Platon et sur l'ancienne histoire de l'Asie* (1799), that the Atlanteans came originally from Scandinavia via the Caucuses.‡ Even Milton came close to the idea in *Areopagitica*: "writers of good antiquity and ablest judgment have been persuaded that even the school of Pythagoras and the Persian wisdom took beginning from the old philosophy of this island."**

Blake's claim to ownership of the "British Antiquities" is thus based on an antiquarian tradition of about 150 years, which produced many books, some of which Blake had read and some of which he at least knew about.

Blake encompasses the stories of Arthur in his thought by identifying him with his own character Albion and both of them with Atlas, Arcturus, and Boötes. Hungerford finds the principal source of this amalgamation in Charles François Dupuis's "Memoire sur l'origine des constellations et sur l'explication de la fable par la moyen de l'astronomie":‡

> That Blake was able to connect Atlas with Boötes rests upon the statement of Dupuis that Boötes was the Atlas of the ancients, because of the nearness of

William Stukeley, Stonehenge, *6.*

†*Wilford's "An Essay on the Sacred Isles in the West" appeared sporadically in various issues of* Asiatic Researches, *published by the Asiatic Society of Bengal. Unfortunately he was hoodwinked by some Hindus who produced false documents that hinted at the connection between Indian and British history. The story is told by Hungerford, pp. 29–33.*

‡*On Baille see Hungerford, pp. 23–5.*

**John Milton, "Areopagitica,"* Complete Poems and Major Prose, *ed. Merritt Y. Hughes, New York: Odyssey Press, 1957, 742.*

††*According to Hungerford, this is to be found in Joseph Jérôme,* Le Français de Lalande, Astronomie, *third edition, vol. 4, Paris, 1781–92.*

> the constellation to the Pole, or axis of the world, which, Dupuis declared, it thus appeared to sustain. The constellation Boötes takes the form of an immense giant, of which the star Arcturus forms a part and which may be conceived as resembling Atlas [49].

Hungerford proceeds to connect Arcturus with Arthur through Pughe's *The Cambrian Biography: or, Historical Notices of Celebrated Men among the Ancient Britons* (1803). It is not just that England was the original holy land. It is the source of all language and civilization. Following Jacob Bryant's *New System*, Blake asserts that there was one original language and one original religion. He adds another notion, held by some, that in all its details the religion was an early form of Christianity before Christ and practiced by the Druids. But Druidism, Blake thought, became corrupted into nature-worship. The Druids apparently took up human sacrifice at this time, and they built huge wicker human effigies and burned people in them. Blake transfers this practice to Scandinavia or assumes that it came from there (see *Milton*, 2:37 [E137]; *Jerusalem*, 2:47 [E196]). Most of all, Blake came to see Druidism as corrupted eventually into modern Deism, with its abstracting mode of thought, turning "allegoric and mental signification into corporeal command" (E543), vision abstracted into law. Blake sees the acts of Arthur as "the acts of Albion, applied to a Prince of the fifth century, who conquered Europe, and held the Empire of the world in the dark age" (E543).

How are we to take all of this? Is it, in Blake's hands, a mélange or a poetical synthesis that gives the "historical fact in its poetical vigour" (E543)? And if the latter, is there any historical fact at all as its basis? Blake's remarks on the writing of history seem to accept, as he thought Milton accepted, "the ancient British History" (E543), presumably as told by Geoffrey of Monmouth and the Welsh Triads. But he also insists on the introduction of "miracle or prodigy" instead of historians nursing "probabilities and possibilities" (E543), and "Reasons and opinions" (E544). For him, everything should be actions:

> Acts themselves alone are history, and these are neither the exclusive property of Hume, Gibbon, nor Voltaire, Echard, Rapin, Plutarch, nor Herodotus. Tell me the Acts, O historian, and leave me to reason upon them as I please; away with your reasoning and your rubbish. All that is not action is not worth reading [E544].

Further:

> His opinions, who does not see spiritual agency, is not worth any man's reading; he who rejects a fact because it is improbable, must reject all History and retain doubts only [E544].

The remark extends Blake's attack on the excesses of reason and Deism.

There have been two kinds of reaction to Blake's discussion. Hungerford sees a mélange of preposterous assumptions that require the reader of *A Descriptive Catalogue* and the long poems to be "plunged into the maddest sort of mythological jumble, in which Blake imposed no limit to his imagination" (56). Though Hungerford has offered a clear account of some of the sources of Blake's ideas and images and an especially interesting treatment of Blake's use of the constellation Boötes in the long poems, he expresses little patience with the result. It is for him a farrago, a hodgepodge.

The other reaction is perhaps best expressed by W. B. Yeats in a marginal annotation to page 83 of Denis Saurat's *Blake and Modern Thought*:*

> To sum. Blake does not think England the place of primitive humanity, or of the original wisdom because they were before the flood of time and space—the historical druids he thought degenerate man—"rocky druidism." He spoke of England and its past because he lived there. In the same way the folklore of the Echte hills in Galway says that the last judgment will be among those hills. Blake seeks the near and particular always.†

The principle, as I have argued elsewhere, is that of microcosm and macrocosm, or synecdoche, fundamental to poetry.‡ Everything begins for Blake with the minute particular of a vision and expands to contain everything. You may call this, with Ernst Cassirer, mythical thinking or, with Giambattista Vico, poetic logic.** Blake's treatment of beauty, strength, and ugliness implies that he does not consider these as abstract ideas but always inherent in and as particular things. From Yeats's point of view, Blake has made a true poem from his imaginative reading of what are to us now quite strange texts expressing a rudimentary fiction.

Blake makes large claims for *The Ancient Britons*. He identifies it with the "grandest Antiques" (E544), and he offers his view that works of art cannot be evaluated by comparison to other works. There are cer-

Denis Saurat, Blake and Modern Thought, Lincoln McVeagh: Dial Press, 1929. Saurat's chapter "Celts and Druids" is a helpful discussion pertinent to The Ancient Britons.

†*Quoted from my* Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision, *Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1955, 123.*

‡*In* Blake and Yeats, *124, and at greater length in* The Offense of Poetry, *mainly on 150–5, 179–82.*

**Ernst Cassirer, The Philosophy of Symbolic Forms *(1925) 2, tr. Ralph Manheim, New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1955.* The New Science of Giambattista Vico *(1744), trs. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, rev. tr., Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968.*

tainly times when he thinks that the ability to experience vision "Thro the Eye" (E492) has been lost to most people. As we have seen, Kirkup thought Blake's painting too red. Blake ends his discussion with remarks on coloring. He identifies what he has tried to do with the coloring of Raphael and Michelangelo. His visionary painting had the sun sinking in blood and the bodies of men revealing the blood circulating in their veins. The pervasive redness was part of a deliberate expression of hatred for all that was not *intellectual* warfare, and the blood in the veins expressed life.

Perhaps the main question to ask about Blake's vision of British history as gleaned from the antiquarians, synthesized, enlarged, and contained in his story of Albion, the patriarch of the Atlantic, is whether he actually believed in those parts of it that he appropriated. He certainly made some forthright statements that suggested he did. But belief is a stranger matter than we usually think, and, in a poem or a persuasive description of a painting, assertion of belief may be only the defense of a poem or painting as what it is, an imaginative act, the expression of which is truth, while nature is error.

One thing is certain. In painting *The Ancient Britons* and writing and etching *Jerusalem*, Blake was producing what he thought was patriotic art, a mythological history of Britain as a microcosm of the world's history, antithetical to that of reasoning historians and politicians, and as true in its own terms as another visionary fictive construct, the Bible.

Experiments

In his comments on most of the remaining pictures, Blake discusses mainly technique and rarely content. He had certain intentions. He defends his decision to paint in tempera, or what he calls "fresco," rather than in oils. Several of the pictures he describes as experimental. He actually exhibits some paintings that he considers unsuccessful, or nearly so, and with respect to them he describes his difficulties in overcoming the baneful influence on contemporary art of those who painted in oils. He refers to "blotting and blurring"(E528), specifically the work of Rubens, who is "a most outrageous demon" (E547), meaning that Blake had continually to fight off his influence. Correggio is "a soft and effeminate and consequently a most cruel demon" (E548). Morris Eaves sees Blake using the experiment pictures in his exhibition as parodies: "Blake … includes

his three experiment pictures to concoct by experiment the antidote to the poisonous thesis of Reynolds' seventh discourse."* Blake goes so far as to declare these pictures "bruised and knocked about, without mercy, to try all experiments" (E548). Titian and the Venetians and Flemish are also demonic (E547). These influences also intruded when he painted. It is a pity that Pictures 6, 7, and 8 are lost, so we cannot see them as a record of the struggles of which Blake dramatically speaks.

Chiaroscuro comes in for special contempt. H. W. Janson's description of the technique shows clearly why Blake disliked it: "…the forms no longer stand abruptly side by side but partake of a new pictorial unity, the barriers between them having been partially broken down."† "Chiaro Oscuro," as Blake spelled it, is an "infernal machine" (E547) invented by the Venetians and the Flemish. It is a machine because by Blake's time it had become, in his view, a technique merely learned and copied, deadening to the imaginative powers. When he attempted to paint Picture 11, *Satan Calling Up His Legions*,‡ now in the Victoria and Albert Museum, it was Titian's spirit that particularly troubled him. The result was a struggle against a series of demonic forces:

> They cause that the execution shall be all blocked up with brown shadows. They put the original Artist in fear and doubt of his own original conception. The spirit of Titian was particularly active, in raising doubts concerning the possibility of executing without a model, and when once he had raised the doubt, it became easy for him to snatch away the vision time after time, for when the Artist took his pencil, to execute his ideas, his power of imagination weakened so much, and darkened, that memory of nature and of Pictures of the various Schools possessed his mind, instead of appropriate execution, resulting from the inventions; like walking in another man's style, or speaking or looking in another man's style and manner, unappropriate and repugnant to your own individual character; tormenting the true Artist, till he leaves the Florentine, and adopts the Venetian practice, or does as Mr. B. has done, has the courage to suffer poverty and disgrace, till he ultimately conquers [E547].

The trouble with the tormenting spirits was that they would have "shut the doors of the mind and of thought by placing Learning above Inspi-

**Morris Eaves,* William Blake's Theory of Art*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1982, 113.*

†H. W. Janson, History of Art*, revised and enlarged edition, Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1969, 349.*

‡The full descriptive title is Satan calling up his Legions from Paradise Lost, a composition for a more perfect Picture, afterward executed for a Lady of high rank. An experiment Picture. *The lady was the Countess of Egremont, and the painting later executed is today still in Petworth House, Sussex (Butlin 661, 888). The painting refers to* Paradise Lost *2, 314–30.*

"Satan calling up his Legions, from Milton's Paradise Lost; a composition for a more perfect Picture, afterward executed for a Lady of high rank. An experiment Picture" (tempera on canvas, c. 1795–1800). ***Paradise Lost*** **1, 300–34.**

ration" (E546). The picture Blake is discussing here is number 8, now lost, *The Spiritual Preceptor, an experiment Picture* (Butlin, 660). It was based on the following passage in Emanuel Swedenborg's *The True Christian Religion*:

> I was once permitted to see three hundred of the clergy and laity together, all learned and erudite in that they learned how to confirm faith alone even to

justification thereby, and some still further. And because they were in the belief that heaven is a mere matter of admission from grace, they were given leave to ascend into a heavenly society, which however was not among the higher ones. And when they ascended they appeared at a distance like calves. When they entered heaven they were received by the angels civilly, but while they were talking a trembling seized them, afterward a horror, and finally torture like that of death; then they cast themselves down headlong, and in their fall they appeared like dead horses. In their ascent they had appeared like calves, because a vigorous natural affection for seeing and knowing appears, on account of its correspondence, like a calf; but in their fall they appeared like dead horses because the understanding of truth appears, on account of its correspondence, like a horse, and a lack of understanding of truth pertaining to the church appears like a dead horse.

There were boys below who saw them descending, and in their descent looking like dead horses; and they then turned their faces away and asked their teacher who was with them, "What monstrosity is this? We saw men, and now, instead of them we see dead horses; and not being able to look at them we turned away our faces. O teacher, let us not stay in this place, let us go away." And they went away.

Then the teacher taught them on the way the meaning of a dead horse, saying, "A horse signifies the understanding of truth from the Word. This is the signification of all the horses you have seen; for when a man goes along meditating upon the Word, his meditation appears at a distance like a horse, noble and lively in proportion as he meditates spiritually, but on the other hand poor and lifeless as he meditates materially.*

This passage may have had something to do with Blake's phrase "horses of instruction" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (E37), where Blake's "Memorable Fancies" parody Swedenborg's "Memorable Relations."

Blake describes his experiments as overly labored. Picture 6, now lost, was left unfinished after much struggle with "blotting and blurring demons" (E546).† Picture 7 was an experiment with color, but it was "laboured to a superabundant blackness" (E546). This was *The Goats, an experiment Picture*, also lost (Butlin, 659). It was based on a passage in *A Missionary Voyage to the Southern Pacific Region performed in the years 1796, 1797, 1798 in the Ship Duff.* It goes as follows:

**The full title of Swedenborg's book is* The True Christian Religion containing the Universal Theology of the New Church foretold by the Lord in Daniel vii. 13, 14; and in Revelation xxi. 1, 2 *(1771). Blake simply calls it* Universal Theology. *The passage is in volume 2, 154–5, section 623, the Third Memorable Relation. The translation is the first English one, republished by the Swedenborg Foundation, 1963.*

†*This was* A Spirit vaulting from a cloud to turn and wind a fiery Pegasus—Shakespeare. The Horse of Intellect is leaping from the cliffs of Memory and Reasoning; it is a barren Rock: it is also called the Barren Waste of Locke and Newton *(Butlin, 658). The passage to which Blake alludes is from* Henry IV, Part One, *iv, 1.*

"Ruth—A Drawing," also titled by others "Ruth the Dutiful Daughter-in-law," (pencil and watercolor, 1803). From Ruth 1:16.

> Our Otaheitean girl … was ashamed to see a woman upon the deck quite naked, and supplied her with a complete dress of new Otaheitean cloth, which set her off to great advantage, and encouraged those in the water, whose numbers were now greatly increased, to importune for admission; and out of pity to them, as we saw they would not return, we took them on board; but they were in a measure disappointed, for they could not all succeed so well as the first in getting clothed; nor did our mischievous goats even suffer them to keep their green leaves, but as they turned to avoid them they were attacked in each side alternately, and completely stripped naked.*

**Written by several hands, London 1799, chapter 11, 130.*

In his commentary on *Ruth—A Drawing*,* Picture 15, based on Ruth 1:16, Blake returns to an argument he never tires of making, defense of the "distinct, sharp, and wirey … bounding line" (E550). Lack of it is evidence of "weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling," also "want of idea in the artist's mind" (E550). The argument follows his claim that there is no fundamental difference between drawing and painting; both depend on the bounding line. Indeed, he identifies that line as a sign of the artist's "rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions" (E550), that is to say, honesty.

Jane Shore

The last picture discussed in the catalogue (Picture 16) is *The Penance of Jane Shore in St. Paul's Church—A Drawing.* Jane Shore, married to a goldsmith, became mistress to Edward IV, later Thomas Gray (not the poet, of course), and then Lord Hastings. She was accused of sorcery by Richard III, sent to the Tower, forced to do public penance as a harlot, and died in poverty. Nicholas Rowe's *The Tragedy of Jane Shore* was produced in London in 1714.

There are three versions of this subject (Butlin, 67, 59; 68, 60; and 69, 61). It is not certain which of these Blake exhibited. In the catalogue, it is described as a drawing, and of the three versions only number 68 is strictly a drawing; although number 67 is described by Butlin as "pen and watercolour over pencil, irregular." Number 69, the last executed, is done in "pen and watercolour sized," and it has been thought by several to be the one Blake exhibited. Butlin believes 68, which is just a sketch, very unlikely. Number 69 is by far the most finished, but seems years later than number 67, and Blake describes the painting in his exhibition as having been done more than thirty years before the exhibition. Still, number 69 seems the best candidate. In any case, he uses it to show that "the productions of our youth and of our maturer age are equal in all essential points" (E550).

Blake's bitterness at those who have ignored him comes out at the end of his discussion:

> If a man is master of his profession, he cannot be ignorant that he is so; and if he is not employed by those who pretend to encourage art, he will employ

**Now in the Southampton Art Gallery (BUTLIN 456, 537).*

"The Penance of Jane Shore in St. Paul's Church" (pen and watercolor, c. 1793) being the last of three, including a sketch, that Blake executed.

> himself, and laugh in secret at the pretences of the ignorant, while he has every night dropped into his shoe, as soon as he puts it off, and puts out the candle, and gets into bed, a reward for the labours of the day, such as the world cannot give, and patience and time await to give him all that the world can give [E550].

It is a saddening assertion, and Blake was yet to read Robert Hunt's blistering review of the exhibition.

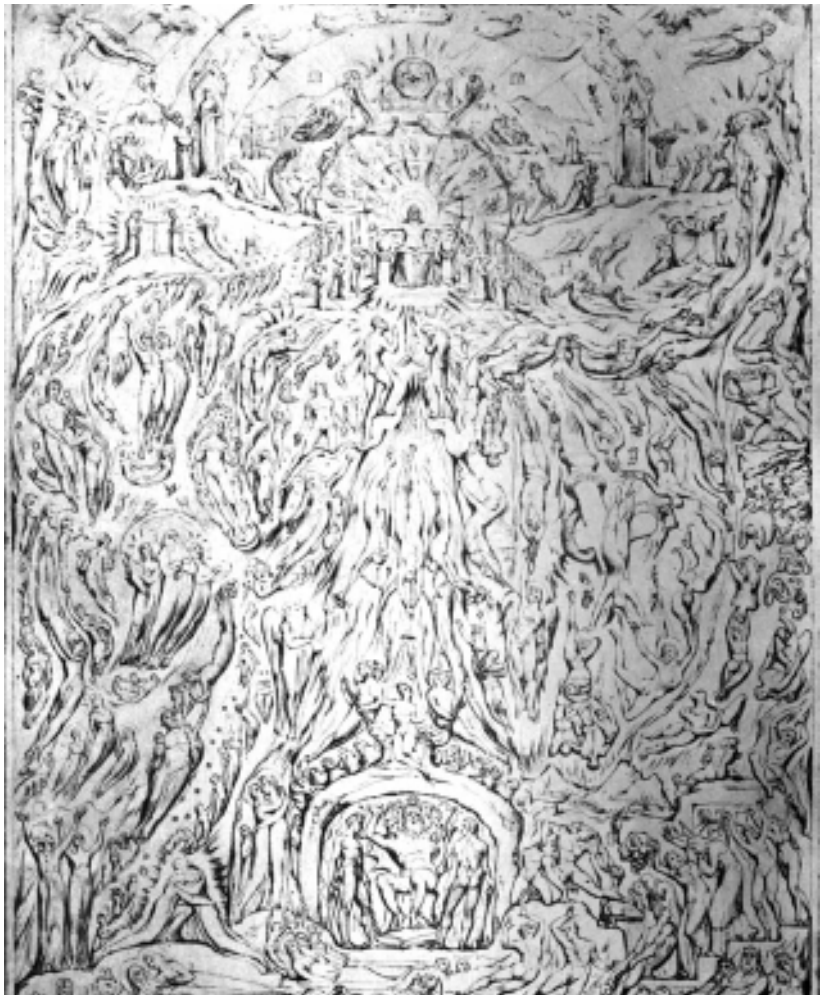
2

A Vision of the Last Judgment

A Vision of the Last Judgment (c. 1809-10) is perhaps the most far-reaching statement Blake made about his visual arts and the thought on which the words were grounded. It appears that Blake intended it to be an addition to *A Descriptive Catalogue*, planned to be republished in 1810; but that publication never occurred (see E554). The title of the essay has been supplied by scholars, not Blake. The essay was never published and remains only pieces scattered through his notebook. The intended order of the pieces is not known for certain. Erdman followed the order decided on by Keynes. My recourse to the facsimile of the notebook did not tell me that any changes would make improvements. Even in Keynes's version the text is curiously organized, if one can say even that much. Still, Blake at least mentions most of the views that pervade his other works and frequently makes important statements of them. The following, after some preliminary remarks, is organized around the most important of those views.

The Paintings and Drawings

Blake is known to have done at least nine last judgments. Three are lost, one of these a pencil tracing. Unfortunately the painting Blake discusses is a lost one. Clearly Blake regarded it as among his most important works. According to some of those who saw it, the painting was about



The Last Judgment that Blake describes in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* is lost. This one (c. 1809) in the National Gallery of Art, Washington (pen and wash over pencil) has many similarities to it.

six by five feet in size. That could make it one of the two largest Blake is known to have executed, second only to *The Ancient Britons.* It is said to have been done in tempera with gold, and it might have contained, by one person's estimate, as many as a thousand figures, though this must have been an exaggeration. Study of the notebook reveals that another of Blake's last judgments, now in the National Gallery, Washington, has

This Last Judgment (pencil, pen, and wash, 1808), described by Blake in his letter to Ozias Humphries, is interesting for comparison.

many details in common with it. However, that work is much smaller, being only 17½ inches by 13⁵⁄₁₆. Martin Butlin thinks it might be a preliminary drawing for the one Blake discusses.

Among the others, the one executed for the Countess of Egremont and now in Petworth House is the largest. In a letter to Ozias Humphrey

(K131; E552-4),* Blake describes this work, which he calls *The Design of the Last Judgment*. The letter is devoted entirely to identifying and describing the figures in the work, which was done with pen over pencil.

What Is a Last Judgment?

Traditionally in Christian doctrine the Last Judgment will occur when the world comes to an end and Jesus sends all the living and the dead to heaven or hell. In *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, Blake makes nine mentions of the Last Judgment, none of which follows the Christian tradition. Some of these refer to a coming event that will presumably affect all people. Some refer only to the individual.† One and perhaps more refer to the painting itself, and others may be interpreted as falling into more than one of these categories.

In Keynes's ordering of the text, the first and longest description refers to an event that will occur when culture has reached a nadir with error consolidated into a world of fixed materiality and mental violence so that it can be seen for what it is:

> The Last Judgment when all those are Cast away who trouble Religion with Questions concerning Good & Evil or Eating of the Tree of those Knowledges or Reasonings which hinder the Vision of God turning all into a Consuming fire When Imaginative Art & Science & all Intellectual Gifts all the Gifts of the Holy Ghost are lookd upon as of no use & only Contention remains to Man then the Last Judgment begins & its Vision is seen by the [*Imaginative Eye*]‡ of Every one according to the situation he holds [E554].

In this universal climax, the ones who are "cast out" are "All Those who having no Passions of their own because No Intellect. Have spent their lives in Curbing & Governing other Peoples by the Various arts of Poverty & Cruelty of all kinds" (E564). The passage puts passion and intellect together rather than separate as they are in most philosophies.

Among those villains to whom Blake refers are surely some members of the Royal Academy as well as all kings and makers of empire. In Blake's

**Not included by Erdman among the letters, but rather in a section called "Descriptions of the Last Judgment."*

†Blake's "Last Judgment" prophesies "the New Heaven and the New Earth" (E561), a phrase reminiscent of Swedenborg's prophecies. However, in Blake the event can be a personal one.

‡Deleted by Blake, I suspect, because he thought some see it only with the corporeal or material eye.

vision, "A Last Judgment is not for the purpose of making Bad Men better but for the Purpose of hindering them from opressing the Good with Poverty & Pain by means of Such Vile Arguments & Insinuations" (E561). The arguments to which Blake refers are those that pompously assert Blake would have been less successful if he had been "properly Encouraged" (E561) and affluent.

Blake's statements refer not only to a universal event but also to the potential effect of his painting on a viewer with the requisite mental gifts:

> If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought if he could Enter into Noahs Rainbow* or into his bosom or could make a friend & Companion of one of these Images of wonder which always intreats him to leave mortal things as he must know then would he arise from his Grave then would he meet the Lord in the Air & then he would be happy [E560].

This would be a Last Judgment not for the world but for and also by an individual: "whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual" (E562).

Synecdoche

The idea of a synecdochic relationship pervades the whole of Blake's essay, to say nothing of his work as a whole. The individual's Last Judgment is a microcosm of the world's. The power of art, in its largest sense as an emanation of the imagination, is both spiritual and political and is capable of bringing about a Last Judgment when finally "Men of Real Art Govern & Pretenders Fall" (E561) not only in the realm of artists and in the realm of politics (including the politics of the artistic world). When Blake talks of "Real Art," he does not include only the fine arts and literature but also all genuine acts of imagination, including what at the very end of *The Four Zoas* he calls "sweet Science" (E4-7). A Last Judgment, Blake also says, "is Necessary because fools flourish" (E561). To counteract this, artists must speak out, and there can be no halfway measures. The Last Judgment, both the universal one and Blake's painting, is an "overwhelming of Bad Art & Science" (E565): "Some People flatter themselves that there will be No Last Judgment & that Bad Art will be adopted & mixed with Good Art That Error or Experiment will

**In Blake's painting Noah is "Canopied by a Rainbow" (E559).*

make a Part of Truth" (E565). When men stop beholding the world as if it were a material world, which is an error of perception, and instead see that world *as* an error of perception, it will be burned up and the world projected by imagination will remain. Each person will imagine a different version of this event. Blake's painting is his individual vision: "I have represented it as I saw it to different People it appears differently" (E555). Though his vision is particular and is seen as such, it is metaphorically related to all individual visions.

The principle of synecdoche expresses for Blake the identity of particular and universal. There is a distinction between a universal and a generalization. A generalization is an abstraction based on sense data. For Blake, "Every class is Individual," and there is no such thing as "General Knowledge" (E648) or "General Nature" (E648). The individuality of a class means that it can be visualized, while a general idea can have no image and is purely an idea: "The Combats of Good & Evil [for example] is Eating of the Tree of Knowledge. The Combats of Truth & Error is Eating of the Tree of Life these are not only Universal but Particular. Each are Personified There is not an Error but it has a Man for its Agent that is it is a Man." (E563). When Blake speaks of personification here he does not mean personification of an abstract idea, as in the type of allegory he despised, but rather an image of a specific actor acting. A proper synecdoche is therefore visual both as a part and as a whole, that is, on both sides, while a generalization has at best only an image arbitrarily applied to it if one seeks to objectify it.

Biblical history has sometimes been interpreted in such a way as to identify, for example, Abraham synecdochically with a whole tribe. Likewise, Blakean synecdoche identifies what he calls "states," which are states of mind. People are in states and the states are in them. These states are always potential: "Man Passes on but States remain for Ever" (E556). Blake remarks that some of the figures in his painting are "states." The Biblical patriarchs before and after the flood are "states."* Elijah is all the prophetic characters, Seth (and his wife) all the antediluvian fathers.

**Blake makes a curious statement about the world before the flood: "Abel kneels on a bloody Cloud descriptive of those Churches before the flood that they were filld with blood & fire & vapour of smoke even till Abrahams time the vapour & heat was not Extinguishd" (E556). These churches are, in Blake's language, the various eras of antediluvian time. But I do not know where Blake got the idea for blood, fire, etc. It may be he is indicating that the antediluvian churches practiced a violence that only began to be abated with Abraham and Isaac. It is clear that Blake thought the idea that all was "Solitude & Chaos" before the creation was false, since eternity or the visionary world existed then and will exist "Independent of Creation" (E563).*

In his painting, Blake sends some of the figures representing states upward to heaven and some downward to hell. But those sent to hell are already there, since hell is a state of mind that they have been inhabiting (or is inside them). Among the falling are Cain, Satan, the serpent, Sin, Death, Time, Og, the Pharisees, cruel laws and cruel churches, the inquisition, Caiaphas, Pilate, Judas, and clergymen who from the pulpit scourge sin. Among the rising are Noah, Shem, Japhet, who represent poetry, painting, and music, and survived the flood (and survive continually), Seth, Elijah, and "three Female Figures crownd with Garlands [who] Represent Learning & Science" (E561).

The work of drawing down is done by "demons" and "fiends" that remind us of the devils of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Two of the fiends are named from the Old Testament, Eliakim and Hazael. In Isaiah, Eliakim is given "the key to the house of David" (22:22). Here he drags down Satan. In 2 Kings (10:32), Hazael, as the Lord willed and Elisha predicted (8:12), led the Syrians in a punishing attack on the Israelites. Here Hazael "drives abroad all those who rebel against the Saviour." (Down is also outward or abroad.)

Of great importance in the painting is the fate of the "Harlot named mystery in the Revelations" (Rev 17:3-6):

> She is bound and is seized by Two Beings each with three heads they Represent Vegetative Existence as it is written in Revelations they strip her naked & burn her with fire it represents the Eternal Consummation of Vegetable Life & Death with its Lusts [E558].

In this one figure Blake combined mystery as a cloak for religious and priestly power and the connection of nature with the creation of the false external world of Bacon, Newton, and Locke. The consummation is the burning up of these errors at the point where they reach a clarification that makes it possible to see them for what they are. The painting is a consolidation of error for the viewer to see, thus a Last Judgment.

Time and space as imagined by Blake are a man and a woman, and so on: "these various States I have seen in my Imagination when distant they appear as One Man but as you approach they appear Multitudes of Nations" (E556-7).

Fable and Allegory

There are false visions, in which material perception blocks the power of the mind to see into things. Abstract allegory, the personified

abstraction, does this, causing the reader to have to search *behind* the image for its reality, an imageless idea. Blake's statements implying the superiority of vision over fable or allegory are not all in semantic agreement. A letter to Thomas Butts of July 6, 1803, goes as follows: "Allegory address'd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry" (K58; E730). In 1809, *A Vision of the Last Judgment* makes a strict opposition between allegory and fable on the one hand and vision on the other:

> The Last Judgment is not Fable or Allegory but Vision Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct & inferior kind of Poetry. Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really and Unchangeably. Fable or Allegory is Formd by the Daughters of Memory. Imagination is Surrounded by the daughters of Inspiration who in the aggregate are calld Jerusalem Fable is Allegory but what Critics call The Fable is Vision itself The Hebrew Bible & the Gospel of Jesus are not Allegory but Eternal Vision or Imagination of All that Exists Note here that Fable or Allegory is Seldom without some Vision Pilgrims Progress is full of it the Greek Poets the same but Allegory & Vision ought to be known as Two Distinct Things & so calld for the Sake of Eternal Life [E554].

Blake uses "fable" in two senses. The first stands for the attempt to assign an image to a moral abstraction: "allegoric fable" (E555).* Most fables express a moral like "a sting in the tail" (E269), and "Allegories are things that Relate to Moral Virtues" (E563); but moral virtues have no real existence since true morality can only be inherent in acts, not in abstract ideas. At the same time, Blake, who called himself a "liberty boy," declares, "You cannot have Liberty in this World without what you call Moral Virtue" (E564). The point here is that in the condition of the Fall there is inevitably the opposition between these two. One generates the other. Liberty is a negation of moral virtue and vice versa. In the imagination's world, it wouldn't have to have a name. Blake associates fable and allegory with decay of memory as in the philosophy of Thomas Hobbes, characteristic of the Greek muses: "Reality was Forgot & the Vanities of Time & Space only Rememberd & calld Reality Such is the Mighty difference between Allegoric Fable & Spiritual Mystery Let it here be Noted that the Greek Fables originated in Spiritual Mystery & Real Vision" (E555). The passage is reminiscent of *A Descriptive Catalogue*, where Blake refers to a falling away in early human history from

**Blake opposes "Allegoric Fable" to "Spiritual Mystery." He sometimes identifies mystery with church ritual, which he opposes. Here he identifies spiritual mystery with "Real Vision," which is mystery only to those who identify reality as material (E555).*

the original visionary religion of imagination. Blake doesn't allow Greek art and literature to have much originality, but he does allow the Greek poets, Apulius and Ovid, even if their works are "Fable," a "Sublime degree" of vision having been "derived from real Vision in More Ancient Writings" (E556).

The second meaning Blake gives to "fable" is honorific. This fable would not necessarily be one teaching moral abstractions in the guise of arbitrary images. It would be a fiction simply in the earlier sense of something made, a visionary image that is an avenue into eternity. Eternity is for Blake the present moment, a synecdoche of all time. Thus, time is always a youth.

In discussing this Blake makes an ironic admission:

> The Greeks represent Chronos or Time as a very Aged Man this is Fable [in the first sense above] but the Real Vision of Time is an Eternal Youth I have however somewhat accomodated my Figure of Time to the Common opinion as I myself am also infected with it & my Vision is also infected & I see Time Aged alas too much so [E563].

This is an unusual admission by Blake, but it, with some humor, deliberately connects him with all the poets of England since Chaucer, including Shakespeare and Milton, who, despite their greatness "were curbd by the general malady & infection from the silly Greek & Latin slaves of the Sword" (*Milton*, E95).

Moral Virtue and Accusation

"Moral virtue" is, as we see, an ironic phrase in Blake. The fundamental problem with abstraction and fable, in the first sense, is their lack of humanity and their tendency toward accusation that an abstract idea, usually some moral law, has been violated. But for Blake the moral law is abstraction manipulated by power. Everything real is an event, and an event cannot be caught in the net of an abstract idea, which drains all the character out of it: "General Knowledge is Remote Knowledge it is in Particulars that Wisdom consists & Happiness too" (E560). Thus allegories of abstract ideas are related to moral virtue (E563). Blake calls them "dissimulations," choosing the literal sense of the term: false copies (E563).

Blake's Satan is the archetypal accuser, the epitome of accusation, "drawing Man into Sin that he may accuse him" (E564). In Blake's paint-

ing, Satan is cast down, not because he sins but because of his unbelief and the torments resulting from his accusations of sin. Sin, treated in the painting as a female figure, is cast out (E556) because sin is an abstraction that can be employed by accusers in order to control others. It is interesting, however, that Blake has to give this abstraction a body in order to cast her out. He makes sin female because Eve was the first to be accused. Preachers scourging sin are also cast out (E557). In upholding an abstract moral law, "The Modern Church Crucifies Christ with the Head Downwards" (E564). The statement recalls the crucifixion of St. Peter, standing here for the modern church's perversion of its primitive beginnings, which Blake associates with true belief before the tyranny of the moral law set in. A Last Judgment would free people from accusation (E564).*

Too often the moral law generates acts of revenge and leads to enslavement of the mind. Moral virtues embedded in codes do not exist. Blake identifies them with allegory in its negative sense. The truth is that every so-called combat of good with evil is a particular act that has become classified under an abstract idea. In order to know an act one must *see*. Every so-called evil was an act before being so named. When power has the capacity to accuse, it will do so in its own self-interest: "Christ's Crucifix shall be made an excuse for Executing Criminals" (E697).

Visionary Art

In *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, particularity dominates Blake's idea of true art. To see *into* the particular thing is ultimately to see the world, and that world is eternal. Such vision is an imaginative act that captures and holds the moment. The moment is by synecdoche the whole, the eternal. However,

> The Nature of Visionary Fancy or Imagination is very little Known & the Eternal nature & permanence of its ever Existent Images is considerd as less permanent than the things of Vegetative & Generative Nature yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies but renews by its seed. just so the Imaginative Image returns by the seed of Contemplative Thought [E555].

**Blake distinguishes in his writings between the "churches," which are historical eras (the modern church being one of increasing error) and the "Church Universal" (E559), which is the church of Jesus's true message of forgiveness. This church "appears like a Female crownd with Stars," but has been driven into the wilderness (559).*

This passage provides a way to construe the following well-known lines from *Jerusalem*, which I have had occasion to quote before:

> All things acted on Earth are seen in the bright Sculptures of Los's Halls
> & every Age renews its powers from these Works
> With every pathetic story possible to happen from Hate or
> Wayward Love & every sorrow & distress is carved here … [1:16; E161].

Blake identifies strength of vision with the earliest ages before allegory (in its negative sense) took hold as the principal form of thought. As in *A Descriptive Catalogue*, here he sees Greek art as degraded forms of earlier visionary works. The key passage is on page 71 of the notebook. Unfortunately, some of it is cut away and lost. What remains (E555) identifies the Bible with true visionary fancy and imagination and reduces the Greek muses to allegorical interpreters of the finite, vegetative, temporal, material, abstracted world. The story of Jupiter's usurpation of Saturn's throne is a visionary fancy of the beginning of gradual decline. Blake asserts, "The Nature of my Work is Visionary or Imaginative it is an Endeavour to Restore what the Ancients calld the Golden Age" (E555). However, the golden age is not, for Blake, really part of external history. Rather, it is the visionary image of the eternal. Blake identifies such visionary art in all ages as "Gothic" and unfashionable. Gothic, for Blake, exhibited clarity of shape and outline: "Art Calld Gothic in All Ages by those who follow the Fashion as that is calld which is without Shape or Fashion" (E559). Blake's desire to restore the "Gothic" is also a desire to emulate the work of the Biblical prophets, by which words he means poets. The problem with allegory is, as we have seen, its false particularity. Blake's treatment of art begins and ends with the particular, minute discrimination. Sublimity can be characteristic not only of the very large, but also of the very small.

> I intreat then that the Spectator will attend to the Hands & Feet to the Lineaments of the Countenances they are all descriptive of Character & not a line is drawn without intention & that most discriminate & particular as Poetry admits not a Letter that is Insignificant so Painting admits not a Grain of Sand or a Blade of Grass Insignificant much less an Insignificant Blur or Mark [E560].

To accept Blake's views is to begin to cast off the world of generation and turn back to Raphael, Michelangelo, and the ancient sculptors who had not been corrupted by the Greek daughters of memory.

Reality According to Blake

It has been said that Blake's world is an entirely internal and subjective one—internal to the mind: "Mental Things are alone Real what is Calld Corporeal Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place" [E565]. To use "internal" to interpret what Blake is saying here would be to distort, for "internal" implies externality, as subject implies object. Blake's visionary world has neither interior nor exterior, subject nor object except as illusions of thought. One's own corporeality or materiality is an illusion. The corporeal eye is but an organ of sense. One sees with the mind: "I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it" (E566). One might remind oneself that a window circumscribes the view.

Objectivity Blake treats in what seem to be two conflicting ways. In one respect, its creation was an "act of Mercy" (E563), since its materiality, even as illusion, limited what would otherwise have been an endless Fall. In one of his songs Blake calls this "the starry floor" (E18). In another respect, its maker was a "very Cruel Being" (E565), the part of one's mind that creates the fiction of matter, which offers the illusion of permanence but the fact of impermanence. As a fiction it may have its uses, but only if one views it as a tool for use. When Blake refers to the creator and creation he often means a lesser deity, or demiurge in the human mind, not God, and the material world.

All of this emerges not only here in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* but also in Blake's story of Albion in *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*. Blake includes Albion in his painting:

> An Aged patriarch is awakd by his aged wife He is Albion our Ancestor patriarch of the Atlantic Continent whose History Preceded that of the Hebrews & in whose Sleep or Chaos Creation began [E558].

Albion's sleep is history, a nightmare in which the world has become an externality of matter. Albion is a particular who is also a universal. He is himself, he is England, he is the world. As Yeats said in his marginal note to Denis Saurat's *Blake and Modern Thought*, he is England because that is where Blake lived and Blake, who thinks by synecdoche, "seeks the near and particular always."

3

A Public Address

On page 58 of the notebook Blake refers to what he has written as "this Public Address" (E574), written in 1808–9. The phrase has been adopted by his editors as the title of the loosely scattered paragraphs that Geoffrey Keynes ordered into the essay reprinted with a few minor changes by Erdman. There are, however, two other possible titles. The first is written out by Blake on page 65 (E571): "Chaucers Canterbury Pilgrims/Being a Complete Index of Human Characters/ as they appear Age after Age." This seems to be the title of a proposed advertisement for Blake's engraving of the painting that was exhibited in 1809. Perhaps the discourse was to be added to what he had already written about the painting in *A Descriptive Catalogue*. On page 51 (E572), Blake refers to "this plate," presumably the engraved version of "The Canterbury Pilgrims."

A third possible title may be taken from the statement "I account it a Public Duty respectfully to address myself to the Chalcographic Society…" (11, E571). Chalcographers were engravers on copper. When in 1810 funds were to be raised for an ambitious project, the society was referred to as the "Society for the Encouragement of the Art of Engraving."* Blake's nemesis Robert Cromek was secretary of the society and the major mover of an effort to commission from members twenty engravings to be sold in support of the society's activities. This eventually came to nothing.†

**This title was shortened by Blake in* A Public Address *to "Society for Encouragement of Arts" (23, E581).*

†*In connection with this, see Dennis M. Read's excellent essay, "The Context of Blake's 'Public Address': Cromek and the Chalcographic Society,"* Philological Quarterly *60 (1981), 69–86.*

Blake had not been invited to membership and was excluded from the project. It was but another rebuff from Cromek, who Blake thought had duped him when he assigned to Louis Schiavonetti the engraving of Blake's designs for Blair's *The Grave* and had conspired against Blake in the matter of Stothard's *Canterbury Pilgrims.* Further, Blake knew Cromek had said disparaging things about him as an engraver and a painter. As Dennis M. Read has pointed out, Blake's intention in the essay was certainly to answer the despised Cromek. Even his discussion of the commercialization of art seems to have been aimed at Cromek. At the same time, Blake did not need his anger at Cromek as an inspiration in order to make his assertions, because they expressed some of the views that he held to be fundamental principles upon which he had worked.

Imagination, Invention, Execution

In *A Public Address*, Blake identifies invention and execution in art, as he does just as emphatically in his annotation to Reynolds's *Discourses*, where he writes, "Invention depends Altogether upon Execution or Organization" (E637). This identification is of supreme importance to his theory, for his notion of invention is closely tied to what he means by imagination. The imagination contains vision, invention, and execution, which are really one and the same. Indeed, the execution is the establishment of the act, the formation of it, which is inchoate until given form. The vision is shaped by the execution.* Poetry and painting are identical in this respect:

> I have heard many People say Give me the Ideas. It is no matter what Words you put them into & others say Give me the Design it is no matter for the Execution. These people know Enough of Artifice but Nothing of Art. Ideas cannot be Given but in their minutely Appropriate Words nor Can a Design be made without its minutely Appropriate Execution [E576].

When Blake also says, "Execution is only the result of Invention" (E576), he is not implying a temporal movement but rather an identity based on the imaginative power implicit in an invention.

Blake is particularly sensitive, even indignant, about this matter

**Blake is more radical than Benedetto Croce some 90 years later, who in his* Aesthetic *declared the identity of intuition and expression but separated those off from externalization, the work of art, itself (Blake's "execution"). Some have thought Blake inconsistent here because he overlooked revision. For Croce, every revision is a new intuition, and I think Blake would have thought so, too.*

because he considered that he had been thought lacking in artistic technique. Cromek had said, "he can conceive but he cannot Execute this absurd assertion has done me & may still do me the greatest mischief I call for Public protection against these Villains I am like others Just Equal in Invention & in Execution" (E582). His point is not that in some inferior artists there is a gap between invention and execution; it is that some have weak imagination and inventive power. Their executions reveal this. In *A Descriptive Catalogue*, he asserts that every eye sees differently and all imaginative executions, though different, are identical, that is, metaphorically related. At the same time, each is original. Artists who copy nature or some earlier contemporary artist "servilly copy" (E578). A copy from nature is a work of "no mind" (E578). Copying from originals is the same. In what appears to be a postscript to *A Public Address*, Blake rejects the common opinion not only that there is a difference between invention and execution but also that a copy can be better than an original. These views he thought to be of recent origin. His closing remark (in Keynes's arrangement) expresses suspicion and deep resentment:

> P.S. I do not believe that this Absurd opinion [that he can invent but not execute] ever was set on foot till in my Outset into life it was artfully publishd both in whispers & in print by Certain persons whose robberies from me made it necessary to them that I should be hid in a corner it never was supposed that a Copy Could be better than an original or near so Good till a few Years ago it became the interest of certain envious Knaves [E582].

Blake identifies these practices with machinery and the practitioners with machines: "A Machine is not a Man nor a Work of Art. It is Destructive of Humanity & of Art" (E575). The passage continues, introducing "Machination," but Blake does not complete the sentence. It is not too much to think that he identified these practices with the machinations of those who he thought had thwarted him. He had good reason to believe that Cromek's remarks to others had done great harm to his career as an engraver. In any case, he infers something dishonorable about copying, though in the annotations to Reynolds he does say that artists *should* copy in order to learn the language of art and to keep in practice (E636, E638).

Drawing and Coloring

In *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, particularity dominates in Blake's idea of the practice of art. In *A Public Address* it is color and the importance

of drawing. In both cases, these matters are connected with Blake's emphasis on firm clear outline, as opposed to the "Blots & Blurs of Rubens" (576).

Blake's view has its source in his training and career as an engraver. Drawing is supremely important because it delineates the form of objects. He claims that his strokes are "unlike those of Artists who are Unacquainted with Drawing" (E571), and sometimes this seems for him to be almost everyone in England since the time of Van Dyke. Engraving, Blake says, is simply "Drawing on Copper" (E574). He manages to criticize Stothard, claiming that Stothard's "blundering blurs" could not be "delineated by any engraver" (E572).

Coloring as it appears in Rubens and others, he argues, goes along with lack of firm outline, the two together producing vagueness and insipidity. Indeed, he faults Rubens for his coloring, not his bad drawing (575). He wants color contained by the bounding line. He also finds in Rubens and Rembrandt a monotony of color: "their Effects in Every Picture the same Mine are in Every Picture different" (E579). In the same way the point of light is a cliché; to make too much use of it is like making too many witticisms and epigrams, "destructive of all Art" (E579).

Blake recognizes that his differences from other artists on these matters is a problem for him, because viewers do not know how to look at his work. As he says, "Commerce cannot endure Individual Merit" (E573), and this is a disaster not just for art but also for the nation as a whole, because it is "Empire that attends upon & follows the Arts" (E577). Art is the principal civilizing cultural force, upon which political science, "the science of sciences," must stand. Under proper conditions, the arts encourage empire, but not to war and conquest.

Blake argues that his "individual Merit," his originality, is not simply an eccentricity of technique, which Cromek thought to be a failure. This technique is the exact emanation of his vision, inimical to the idea that a line can be drawn between invention and execution and to the clichés demanded by commerce.

Commerce, Empire, Politics

Blake further attacks the assumption that a copy can be the equal of or even better than an original by identifying it with the "well known Saying Englishmen Improve what others Invent" (E576). He treats the

statement as not only false but also unpatriotic. Copies, that is, reproductions, are produced entirely for commercial purposes, and commercial power over art, in which art is "Subservient to the interest of the Monopolizing Trader" (E576), is beneficial neither to the artist nor to empire. Indeed, "Empires flourish till they become Commercial & then they are scatterd abroad to the four winds" (E574). This attitude is again expressed in *On Homers Poetry* and *On Virgil*, both attacks on conquest and empire. Every empire has eventually failed, and that failure was a direct result of the failure to encourage the arts and thereby life of the spirit (E577).

Blake sees in the "Contempt for Art" (E577) held by most Englishmen subservience of the arts to empire. Even English connoisseurs, he claims, are unable to look intelligently at a picture (E577).

The result in Blake's view is a "wretched state of the Arts" (E580) in England, brought about by the wretched state of politics. He even declares that he resists politics:

> I am really sorry to see my Countrymen trouble themselves about Politics. If Men were Wise the Most arbitrary Princes could not hurt them If they are not wise the Freest Government is compelld to be a Tyranny Princes appear to me to be Fools Houses of Commons & Houses of Lords appear to me to be fools they seem to me to be something Else besides Human Life [E580].

These remarks seem to step back from Blake's obvious political interest, expressed in his long poems, though the distrust of and contempt for politicians and royalty are part of that interest. Beneath the remarks and probably generating them is his resentment against Cromek's commercialism, the Chalcographic Society's grandiose plan (really Cromek's), and Blake's deeply held view that the arts are a cultural power for good when not suppressed by ignorance. As for Blake's patriotism, throughout his work we recognize it to be antithetical to the clichés of governmental power.

Against Some Painters and Poets

In writing *A Public Address*, Blake does not tire of attacking Rubens, Rembrandt, and Titian for their coloring: "Fine Tints without Fine Forms" (E571), in other words "unorganized Blots and Blurs" (E576), with an absence of the bounding line that makes for minute discriminations and clarity. The argument is consistent with Blake's claim that drawing is fundamental to all visual art and that a "Certain Portrait Painter"

was in grievous error to say, "since I have Practised Painting I have lost all idea of Drawing" (E573). This, Blake thinks, is an "artfully propagated opinion" (E572) that has also been applied, with dire results, to engraving.

Blake complains that Correggio and Titian were "Ignorant Journeymen Suited to the Purposes of Commerce no doubt for Commerce" (E573). All of this is familiar from *A Descriptive Catalogue*; here, however, certain engravers and etchers also come in for harsh criticism. Certainly Robert Strange (1721–1792) and William Wollett (1735–1785), the latter an engraver of landscapes and of Benjamin West's famous "Death of Wolfe," were among the most distinguished engravers of their time. Blake, however, attacks them as inferior to his own master James Basire (1730–1802), and he later adds to the list of the inferior Francesco Bartollozzi (1727–1815) and John Hall (1739–1797). Dürer and the "old Engravers" (E572), who *drew* on copper, have his undying respect. The painters he praises are, of course, Raphael, Michelangelo, Julio Romano, the eminent engraver Marcantonio Raimondi (c1480–c1534), and Blake's own contemporaries Fuseli and Barry.

Blake also criticizes the poets Pope and Dryden, particularly for their translations, which like copies of paintings fall into the class of what he calls elsewhere "machines." Blake sees parallels between drawing and verse, the latter of which Pope and Dryden do not "understand" (E575). Pope's "Metaphysical Jargon of Rhyming" (E576)) is like the "unorganized Blots & Blurs of Rubens and Titian," which cannot "express Ideas or Imaginations" (E576). Dryden is castigated for his "translation" of Milton, and a parallel to the practice of some engravers is mentioned:

> Now let Drydens Fall & Miltons Paradise be read & I will assert that every Body of Understanding must cry out Shame on such Niggling & Poco Piu.* As Dryden has degraded Milton with But at the same time I will allow that stupidity will Prefer Dryden because it is in Rhyme & Monotonous Sing Song Sing Song from beginning to end Such are Bartollozi Woolett & Strange [E581].

The passage echoes Blake's attack in the introduction to *Jerusalem* (E145–6) on "the modern bondage of Rhyming," in turn echoing Milton's preface to *Paradise Lost* and going a step further to condemn the confining monot-

**"Poco piu" was a phrase misunderstood for some time. It is now identified as having belonged to the art criticism of the time and is translated by Erdman (E882) "the little more or little less."*

ony of blank verse. Another parallel is made between the "Vulgar Epigram" in poetry and the point of light in Rembrandt. Both produce "System & Monotony" (579), characteristic of machines. This is particularly interesting because of Blake's identification of his own poetry with oratory in his introduction to *Jerusalem* (145–6). His poems avoid both blank verse and rhyme, as an orator normally would.

Resentment and Creativity

It is difficult to imagine the members of the Chalcographic Society, or any group of artists, for that matter, sitting quietly in response to those many parts of *A Public Address* that are diatribes against the most prominent recent engravers, the great Venetian and Flemish painters, and two of England's most respected poets. Nor is it likely that the audience would have taken seriously Blake's claim to have "routed out the nest of Villains [the press] … in a Poem concern[in]g my Three years Herculean Labours at Felpham which I will soon Publish" (E572).* Blake also expresses his bitterness against an old friend, John Flaxman, who he thinks stole ideas from him. In the preface to *Jerusalem*, Blake was aware that the "Enthusiasm" (E145) of his poem might bother some readers, though he erased part of the sentence that describes the poem as enthusiastic, perhaps having second thoughts about apology. Enthusiasm in more than the religious sense is attractive in Blake's work when it is characterized, as it often is, by hyperbole and good feeling. It expresses comic sublimity that draws the reader into his work. But this quality, when full of bitter feelings in *A Public Address*, has an entirely different effect that borders on paranoia, or at least deep resentment. In the postscript I have quoted, Blake expresses suspicions that seem to be directed even at his old friend Flaxman.† The charge of madness was leveled at Blake by some who did not know him and a few, perhaps, who misunderstood things he said. In *A Public Address* he, himself, in his usual forthright way, brings the whole matter to a head:

**The poem is almost certainly* Milton. *One villain routed out is William Hayley (in the allegory Satan). Others are all the artists who practiced in the way that Blake criticizes.*

†*Earlier he writes harshly (E572), "Flaxman cannot deny that one of the very first Monuments he did I gratuitously designed for him at the same time he was blasting my character as an Artist to Macklin my Employer as Macklin told me at the time…." In a letter of 1800, he was addressing Flaxman as "My Dearest Friend" (707), and in one to Butts of 1803 he mentions Flaxman as "my friend" (E723).*

> It is very true what you have said for these thirty two Years I am Mad or Else you are so both of us cannot be in our right senses Posterity will judge by our Works [E573].

Blake is more successful with his reader when he makes positive proposals, even though he may begin with a complaint, as he does in the following:

> The Painters of England are unemployd in Public Works. While the Sculptors have continual & superabundant employment Our Churches & Abbeys are treasures of their producing for ages back while Painting is excluded Painting the Principal Art has no place [E581].

Blake goes on to offer a plan of public art to compete with Cromek's. It is similar to that proposed in *A Descriptive Catalogue* (E531): "Monuments to the dead Painted by Historical & Poetical artists like Barry and Mortimer" (E581). England would then come to equal Italy in "Intellectual Riches" (E581). He might have added that not a shot would have been fired nor an inch of earth or a life taken.

4

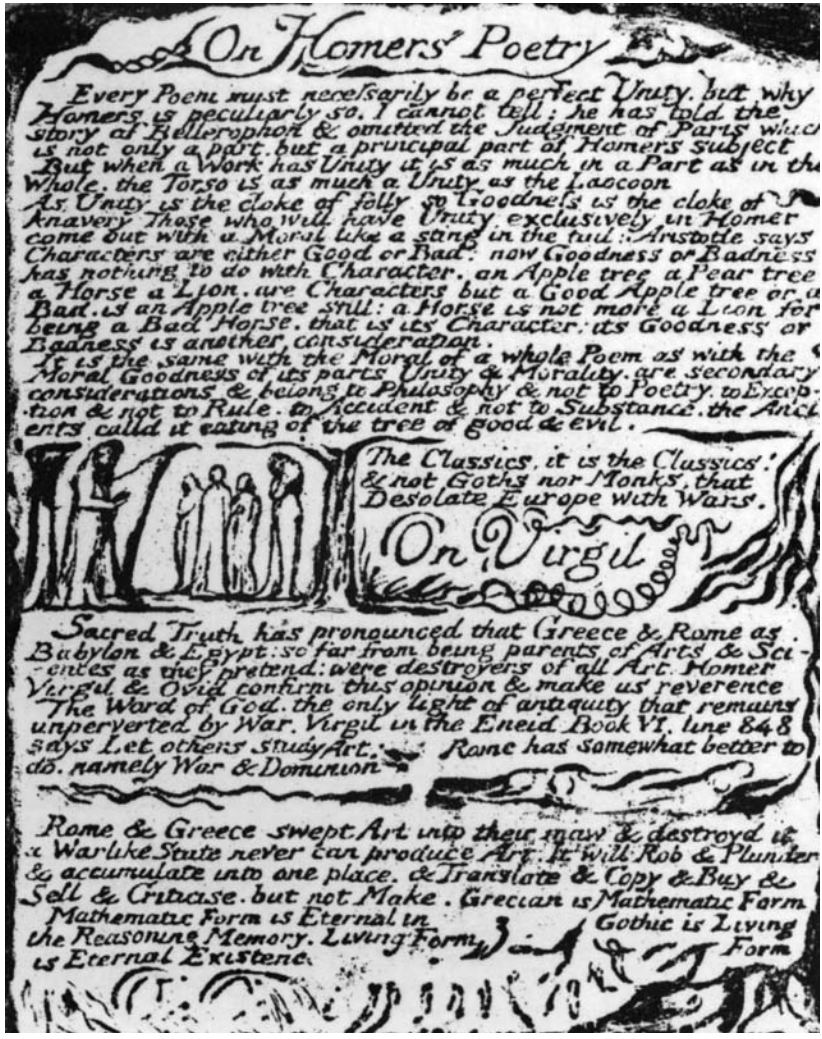
On Homers Poetry and *On Virgil*

For two reasons, new readers of Blake may be puzzled by Blake's curious engraved works *On Homers Poetry* and *On Virgil* (c. 1820).* First, many of the statements, including the concluding ones of both, seem eccentric and their grounds are not immediately apprehensible. Second, the process of argument, if that is what it is, in *On Homers Poetry* is confusing, and steps in both arguments are omitted.

I begin with *On Homers Poetry*, reproduced here in full:

> [1] Every poem must necessarily be a perfect Unity, but why Homers is peculiarly so, I cannot tell: he has told the story of Bellerophon & omitted the Judgment of Paris which is not only a part, but a principal part of Homers subject
>
> [2] But when a Work has Unity it is as much in a Part as in the Whole. the Torso is as much a Unity as the Laocoon
>
> [3] As Unity is the cloke of folly so Goodness is the cloke of knavery Those who will have Unity exclusively in Homer come out with a Moral like a sting in the tail: Aristotle says Characters are either Good or Bad: now Goodness or Badness has nothing to do with Character. an Apple tree a Pear tree a Horse a Lion, are Characters but a Good Apple tree or a Bad, is an Apple tree still: a Horse is not more a Lion for being a Bad Horse. that is its Character; its Goodness or Badness is another consideration.
>
> [4] It is the same with the Moral of a whole Poem as with the Moral Goodness of its parts Unity & Morality, are secondary considerations & belong to

**The most complete and valuable treatment of this work is in* Milton A Poem and the Final Illuminated Works*, eds Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993, 240–3, 264–67. This is volume 5 of the William Blake Trust/Princeton edition.*



The plate of "On Homer's Poetry" and "On Virgil."

Philosophy & not to Poetry, to Exception & not to Rule, to Accident & not to Substance. The Ancients calld it eating of the tree of good & evil.

[5] The Classics, it is the Classics! & not Goths nor Monks, that Desolate Europe with Wars [E269–70].

In paragraph 1, Blake begins by apparently accepting a classical notion of formal unity as, for example, offered by Aristotle's concept of

the unity of plot. I assume he is saying that to be a good poem *Iliad* must be a "perfect Unity," and it is so regarded. I shall call this idea of formal unity "Unity A." In *Poetics*, Aristotle observes,

> The Unity of a Plot does not consist, as some suppose, in its having one man as its subject. An infinity of things befall that one man, some of which it is impossible to reduce to unity; and in like manner there are many actions of one man which cannot be made to form one action…. Homer … evidently understood this point quite well, whether by art or instinct, just in the same way as he excels the rest in every other respect. In writing an *Odyssey*, he did not make the poem cover all that ever befell his hero—it befell him, for instance, to get wounded on Parnassus and also to feign madness at the time of the call to arms, but the two incidents had no necessary or probable connexion with one another—instead of doing that, he took as the subject of the *Odyssey*, as also of the *Iliad*, an action with a Unity of the kind we are describing.*

Blake's "must be" seems to mean "ought to be," that is, it is a received critical dogma. This raises the question for Blake of whether *Iliad* is indeed unified. It seems to him, at this stage of his argument, not to be, because of the omission of one of the events that guides the plot. This is the judgment of Paris, which brought about the enmity of Athena against him and against Troy. Athena's motivation, the source of which never is mentioned, is nevertheless present in some way, stretching through those events that *are* told. It is, as Blake says a "principal part" of the story. But somehow it is a principal part of the poem, even in its absence.

The Bellerophon story seems unnecessary. It is, nevertheless, told at modest length in Book 6 of *Iliad* by Glaucos to his enemy in the field Diomedes, and it causes Diomedes to recognize an ancient family friendship. They agree to avoid fighting each other. The story explains why they do not fight and puts forth an example of morality characteristic of the time Homer evokes. Blake does not mention this, which could be used to explain its presence, but that explanation would not be relevant to the matter of unity of plot, which is the meaning of unity at least at the beginning of Blake's tractate.

Two issues have arisen. First is the question of whether there may be another kind of unity. Second is the question of whether an action can be present even when absent, and for Blake that involves the relation of parts to wholes. Is *Iliad* a fragment because a principal part of the story is missing? Or does it somehow include that part after all? In paragraph

*"*Poetics," tr. Ingram Bywater,* Critical Theory Since Plato, *eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, Boston MA: Thomson Wadsworth, 2005, 56–7.*

2, Blake implies that it does: The Belvedere Torso of Apollo, a fragment, is as much a unity as the complete Laocoön. One might think of the charming story told by Lodovico Castelvetro* of Michelangelo's restoration of the lost part of a river god's statue as a result of his quick study of the surviving fragment. Blake thinks that the judgment of Paris is implied in the *Iliad*, but apparently at this stage of his argument he thinks it ought actually to be there. What he has done in his tractate is to restore the missing part and make it by the poetic logic of synecdoche a whole. It is well-known that the romantic age produced a number of fragments thought to be successful poems, and the lurking presence of the missing part may help to account for the success of some of these. Synecdoche is fundamental in Blake's work, and it should not be a surprise to see this unusual appearance of it surreptitiously present in the argument.

Is another notion of unity lurking in Blake's essay? From a reading of paragraph 3, one must conclude that there is. Now, unity is, we are startled to learn, "the cloke of folly." This I shall call "Unity B." It is apparently employed to cover over a foolishness of some kind. It must be the imposition of a moral allegory ruling all parts of the text. Everything is reduced by this idea of unity to questions of good and evil. The imposition requires moral judgment of the characters and their acts. Readers who demand or read to discover Unity B will presume a moral standard against which to measure the work. Blake calls it "a sting in the tail." He thinks Aristotle falls into a similar difficulty with his theory of character. Aristotle regards character as second in importance to plot, but it, too, should exhibit unity. When Aristotle says (59) that the character should be good, he may mean, as Blake thinks he does, that the character should be morally virtuous. This is not entirely clear in Aristotle. He may mean that the tragic hero (for tragedy is what he is talking about) should have greatness (and thus at least some goodness) and that in the tragedy we should be brought to sympathy for him.

In spite of the fact that Aristotle is difficult to read on this point, it is clear that he wants consistency of character, even if it is, as he allows, consistent inconsistency. Blake, of course, doesn't like the good-evil distinction that he thinks Aristotle accepts. It leads to the notion of Unity B. His argument is that character has nothing to do with goodness or badness, but he is not defining character as Aristotle does. For Blake,

**Lodovico Castelvetro, "The* Poetics *of Aristotle Translated and Explained," tr. Robert L. Montgomery,* Critical Theory Since Plato, *182.*

character is not the quality of something in someone; it defines someone's whole nature. Therefore, "a horse is not more a lion for being a bad horse."

Blake's argument has not been entirely clear about Unity A, but it certainly rejects Unity B. There is, however, a question whether "Unity and Morality" are synonymous here. Does Blake identify as accident, not substance, only Unity B (morality), which clearly he rejects, as he does in his annotations to Boyd's translation of *Inferno*? (E663) For Aristotle, a substantial part is something that must be present for an object to be what it is. Accident, in this case moral allegory, is a part on which an object does not depend for its nature.

Unity A, based on the meaning given it in Blake's paragraph 1, may also be called in question if it disallows the missing substantial part that is present only by implication. Whether this is so or not and whether Blake also rejects Unity A, the ideas of both forms of unity are classical in source, and Blake concludes with an attack on the classics as having desolated Europe with wars. This may come as a surprise if one does not know that Blake came to attack classic art elsewhere as a corruption of earlier visionary works. It also seems a surprise because it is not immediately clear how paragraph 5 follows from the argument above it. The key is certainly in part Blake's rejection of what he thinks is Aristotle's abstract notion of good and evil, which he then identifies with the classical poets' apparent endorsement of war and empire. This is Unity B, not the Unity A with which Blake and Aristotle both began. Some years before in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (E34, 38), Blake treated good and evil as words invented and employed by the politically and religiously powerful to establish and maintain power under the guise (in *On Homers Poetry* "cloke") of morality. Unity B is a tool of "knavery."

The companion piece, *On Virgil*, helps to clarify this matter because it overtly identifies Virgil's *Aeneid* as an expression of oppressive Roman power, defined, of course, by the oppressor as good. Virgil's poem is thus corrupted by a dangerous abstraction. Blake revives here Plato's distinction between poetry and philosophy, between which Plato says there has been an ancient quarrel.* Here is *On Virgil* in its entirety:

> Sacred Truth has pronounced that Greece & Rome as Babylon & Egypt: so far from being parents of Arts & Sciences as they pretend: were destroyers of all Art. Homer Virgil & Ovid confirm this opinion & make us reverence The Word of God, the only light of antiquity that remains unperverted by war.

*"*Republic," tr. Benjamin Jowett,* Critical Theory Since Plato, *36.*

Virgil in the Eneid Book VI. Line 848 says Let others study Art: Rome has somewhat better to do, namely War & Dominion*

Rome & Greece swept Art into their maw & destroyd it a Warlike State never can produce Art. It will Rob & Plunder & accumulate into one place, & Translate & Copy & Buy & Sell & Criticise, but not Make.

Mathematic form is Eternal in the Reasoning Memory. Living Form is Eternal Existence.

Grecian is Mathematic Form

Gothic is Living Form [E270].

On Virgil seems to lack the full progression of its argument. The last four sentences, beginning with the introduction of "Mathematic Form," come as something of a surprise. The missing passages, I think, would go something like this: A warlike state has the power and will always use it to declare to its own advantage what is good and what is evil. "Good" is abstract, as is mathematics, and both are products of reason. Memory, like reason, is a product of decay from an original vision. Greek art is a decayed, abstracted, copied form of vision, a "Mathematic" form. "Gothic" form is visionary, immediate, beyond good and evil, or, rather, prior to it, both temporally and imaginatively. Blake probably also has in mind the classical connections between beauty and mathematical or geometrical forms. Homer, Virgil, and Ovid are seen here ironically as complicit in the "destroying" of art, unintentionally confirming Blake's opinion.

In both *On Homers Poetry* and *On Virgil* the mode of argument is enthymemic, that is, with parts left out, but implied by the fragment that remains. It also appears that the two conclusions of the tractates are interchangeable. I believe that both tractates have dramatic shapes and are deliberate efforts to go beyond the boundaries of abstract argumentation. It is as if they have plot structures. The form is one of search. We are to be carried along with the author toward discovery. In *On Homers Poetry* the writer is searching for an answer to a problem set forth in paragraph 1 and which eventuates in a mental struggle between two notions of unity. He reaches a conclusion that is an enthusiastic *eureka*. The enthusiasm is muted in *On Virgil*, and the whole process has a more meditative tone,

*In Robert Fitzgerald's free translation of VI, 848ff., the ghost of Anchises says to Aeneas,

Roman, remember your strength to rule
Earth's people—for your arts are to be these;
To pacify, to impose the rule of law,
To spare the conquered, battle down the proud.

The Aeneid Virgil, New York: Vintage Books, 1983, 190.

as if *On Homers Poetry* had succeeded in laying the groundwork for the second tractate. Enthymemic omission plays a major role, contributing to, indeed making, the drama.

It would be a mistake to think that Blake thought nothing of Homer or of Ovid. He came to assume that Greek culture was corrupted, even as every later culture, including England, was. Thus Homer, Virgil, and Ovid are placed alongside Shakespeare and Milton, great poets both of whom were "curbd by the general malady & infection from the silly Greek & Latin slaves of the Sword" (E95), though Blake never seems to have admired Virgil. In Blake's later writings, Homer is treated badly by Blake. In the notes on his illustrations to Dante, Blake places him with Satan at the base of Hell; and in the illustrations he is made to carry a sword upright. He is "the Center of All" (E680). When Blake speaks of Homer, he speaks of the fault of his poetry: its glorification of war and empire. Homer's poetry, because he was the greatest of the classical poets, stands, by synecdoche, for all "the Poetry of the Heathen Stolen & Perverted from the Bible not by Chance but by design by the Kings of Persia and their Generals The Greek Heroes & lastly by the Romans" (E689). In his annotations to Henry Boyd's translation of *Inferno*, Blake does better by Dante, defending him against charges of immorality: "nobody considers these things when they read Homer or Shakespeare or Dante" (E633).

5

Laocoön

Blake thought that the statue of the unfortunate Laocoön and his two sons, all three of whom were destroyed by two huge sea serpents after the father warned the Trojans not to touch the Greeks' wooden horse, was a typical Hellenic copy of a far earlier work or works in Solomon's temple. Damon notes Pliny's statement that it was the work of three Rhodeans—Agesander, Polydorus, and Athenodorus.* Blake made a drawing of the Laocoön based on a cast made in 1815. He engraved a first version for Abraham Rees's *Encyclopedia*. Later he made another engraving, and it was in this version that he surrounded the three figures and the serpents with aphorisms. It could be said, then, that Blake's work is a copy of his own copy of what he thought to be a copy (now in the Vatican) of a lost work or works earlier than those of ancient Greek culture. But, of course, Blake did not think of his own work as a copy. It was an engraved composite work given a new (or rather restored, he thought) meaning and elaborated with words he considered related to the ancient story implicit in the original work. It is the story of the creation of the illusion of the natural world and its consequences as Blake saw them late in his life.†

Blake presents his engraving as "[Jehovah] & his two Sons Satan & Adam as they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to natural fact or History of Ilium" (E273).

**S. Foster Damon,* A Blake Dictionary, *Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1965, 234.*

†*A helpful introduction and thorough notes may be found in* Milton a Poem and the Final Illuminated Works, *eds. Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993, 237–9, 268–77. This is volume 5 of the William Blake Trust/Princeton edition.*

The so-called "Laocoön" (1815), expressing much of Blake's later thought, appeared without the prose aphorisms in Abraham Rees's *Cyclopedia; or, Universal Dictionary of Arts Sciences, and Literature* (1820).

Smith's Bible Dictionary describes the only known cherubim of the temple as follows: "Above the sacred ark, which was placed, as of old, in the Most Holy Place, were made new cherubim, one pair of whose wings met above the ark, and other pair reached to the walls behind them."*

**William Smith,* Smith's Bible Dictionary *(1884), New York: Pyramid Publications, 1967, 682.*

The cherubim Blake mentions were products of his own visionary imagination. He says, "The Gods of Priam are the Cherubim of Moses & Solomon The Hosts of Heaven" (E274), by which he means that Hellenic culture marked a decline that had begun with the creation of Satan and Adam at the beginning of the natural world. The decline continued from Moses and Solomon to Priam and eventually into the modern age of Deism. What was the character of this decline?

Creation and History

There are several versions of and allusions to the creation in Blake's work, all presumably related by metaphor. They were produced from ideas generated mainly by Blake's meditation on the Bible. The story to be garnered from *Laocoön* goes something like this: We assume from our reading elsewhere in Blake that Albion, the archetypal human being who is the world, preceded Adam and that what goes on in the Biblical tale along with everything else happens inside Albion. This is particularly important because every individual being is synecdochically related to Albion. In *Laocoön*, the Angel of Jehovah, often in Blake identified with Satan as the Angel of the Divine Presence, is said to have "repented that he had made Adam" (E273). Since in Blake's treatment of *Laocoön* Satan is one of Jehovah's sons, we can assume that Blake is making a new story around creation of the natural world. The creator being called "Angel of Jehovah" (in Hebrew in Blake's text) suggests that the creator of the natural world is a lesser deity, a demiurge or Elohim. In any case, it is an aspect of Albion's mind. This creator's regret is that he made Adam from the earth (Adamah), which Blake identifies as female and as nature. Adam is the "natural man." He is already fallen into the illusion that is nature or earth. He is bereft of imagination, which Blake equates with the soul (E273).

Blake gives Satan a wife, Lilith, usually interpreted as Adam's first wife, and calls her "The Goddess Nature" (E273), that is, the natural world that becomes in Deism an object of worship. For Blake, she is an illusion, and to worship her would be to worship a mystery. Satan and Adam are caught in the coils of two serpents, which are respectively in Blake's reading "good" and "evil." The line of thought here is that Adam and Satan were created in and as part of a false nature that is the abstract unreality of objectivity. This creation leads to ever more abstractions, signified by good and evil, one implying the necessity of the other, and

one no better than the other. As history ravels out, caught in these abstractions, good becomes identified with riches and power, and evil with poverty. The rich rule and are able to designate what is good and what is evil.

By a similar reasoning, the creation of a lifeless or inhuman objectivity or nature, independent of a subject, generates an attitude of alienation, suspicion, and violence against anything other than the self. Thus, this creation is also creation of what Blake elsewhere calls "selfhood." What must have begun before Adam's fall as empathy became corrupted into a state of warfare: "Satans Wife the Goddess Nature is War & Misery & Heroism a Miser" (E273). The suspicion of heroism in war is that it is generated by desire for ownership of what is external; it is among other things a desire for empire.

Originally the Grecian deities were aspects of God internal to Albion, who when unfallen is his imagination, which is the indwelling God. But those deities were driven out into abstract nature and became what Blake elsewhere calls "allegories," that is, images standing arbitrarily for abstract ideas that are regarded as reality, as, for example, in Plato's theory of forms or ideas. They became in time, along with the gods of Egypt "Mathematical Diagrams" (E274). Blake seems to allude here to Plato's advice to youths to study mathematics in order to get at the truth.

Money

In *Laocoön*, money is identified with Satan, reason, riches, poverty, good and evil, the accusation of sin, Caesar, empire, and natural religion. How is all this collected under one word? Money is abstract; it has no body. It is a construct of reason, which creates the bodiless fiction of external nature. Accumulation of it brings riches, lack of it poverty, the former of which is regarded by the powerful as good, and the latter evil. Those who are poor are accused of this evil. The rich assume themselves good. The creation of a separate objective nature presumes a separate subjective consciousness. This consciousness becomes alienated from all else, which is regarded as lifeless and present only for manipulation by the powerful and their tools of war and empire. Natural religion, which is the mindless worship of this condition, is identified elsewhere by Blake with Deism. In connection with this, he invites the reader to look at Jesus's instruction to his disciples in Matthew 10:9–10, which reads, "Pro-

vide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, [10] Nor scrip for *your* journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat." As Blake remarks, "Christianity is Art & not Money Money is its Curse" (E274).

Art

The aphorisms of *Laocoön* appear collectively to be Blake's ultimate statement about art. His idea of art is extremely broad, encompassing not just what we think of as fine art, but rather all activity of the creative imagination. Blake identifies imagination as the eternal and divine body of Jesus. We are his members, but he is also in us as the visionary power itself. The Jesus of Blake is not the historical Jesus but the Jesus of the Bible, a creation of human imagination, which

> manifests itself in his Works of Art (In Eternity All is Vision) All that we see is VISION from Generated Organs gone as soon as come Permanent in The Imagination; considered as Nothing by the NATURAL MAN [E273].

The identity of the act of imagination, vision, and art is confirmed in the Old and New Testaments, which comprise "the Great Code of Art" (E274), though the "Seven Angels of the Seven Churches in Asia," addressed by St. John the Divine in Revelation 1:4, destroyed the works of Jesus and his disciples (presumably by capturing what they stood for and imprisoning them in churches and in mystery). Their work was art in its fullest sense: "Christianity is Art & not Money" (E274). Modern Life and perhaps no past life could recognize Blake's form of Christianity, certainly no church, nor Blake's definition of art.

Part of the destruction wrought by the seven angels was the turning of the visionary moments of the Bible into what Blake calls "outward Ceremony," which he designates the Antichrist (E274), the ecclesiastic codification into ritual and law of what was originally inspired art. Outward ceremony is parallel to secular empire and domination, specifically of the spirit, when in a nation art is degraded and the power of imagination denied. Morality based on law is abstract. It is like outward ceremony in that it seems to hide something behind its words. That something turns out to be nothing. Such morality has nothing to do with Christianity: "If Morality was Christianity Socrates was the Saviour" (E275). There is no mystery in art, no secrecy: "Art can never exist without Naked Beauty displayed" (E275). The statement defends, among

other things, Blake's drawings and engravings of naked human forms. In the matter especially of secrecy, of which Blake is always suspicious, these statements take us toward his assertion that the Bible describes openly "every Vice possible to Man" (E275).

The alienation present in natural religion leads to attempts to dominate the illusory external world, and this is the source ultimately of war and empire: "Art Degraded Imagination Denied War Governed the Nations" (E274). This process began with the creation of Satan and Adam, was restrained by Jesus, but again flourished beginning with the seven angels of Asia and the making of churches. (It is not surprising, given all this, that in the long poems Blake connects each cycle of history with what he calls a church.)

Blake is adamant about connecting everything of spiritual value with art as imaginative act:

> Prayer is the Study of Art
> Praise is the Practise of Art
> Fasting &c. all relate to Art [E274]

These are inward ceremonies, the only appropriate kinds. Blake could well have reversed the first two: The Study of Art is Prayer; the Practise of Art is Praise. In any case, those who have not had the imaginative impulse, if only in the act of seeing or hearing, is not really a Christian in Blake's sense: "A Poet a Painter a Musician an Architect: The Man or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian You must leave Fathers & Mothers & Houses & lands if they stand in the way of ART" (E274). The passage echoes in some respects Jesus's call to his disciples; it is not as extreme as it seems when we realize Blake is connecting art to all imaginative productivity: "The unproductive Man is not a Christian much less the Destroyer" (E274). The syntax is a little odd: Lack of productivity indicates lack of Christian practice; the destroyer is worse. Furthermore, "Practise is Art If you leave off you are Lost" (E274). It is the activity of the imagination, which is the whole human being. In a letter of September 11, 1801, written in Felpham to Thomas Butts, who had commissioned some work, Blake seems to admit on one occasion to a failure to persist, but in fact he is implying there that his work for Butts is not work of the imagination, and his imagination draws him away even as he attempts to complete what he had committed himself to doing. The failure to practice the true art of imagination is to lose "Immediate Communion with God" (E274), which is communion with indwelling imaginative power.

Blake attacks those who question the acts of the Biblical Jesus; he identifies such people, as they themselves do, with the works of Egypt and Babylon:

> The Spoilers say Where are his Works That he did in the Wilderness Lo what are these Whence came they These are not the Works of Egypt nor Babylon Whose Gods are the Powers of this World. Goddess, Nature [E274].

Jesus's works have no *external* existence. They exist in the imaginative reading of the Bible, unlike works of Egypt and Babylon, now in ruins. Blake adds sarcastically that those gods "first spoil & then destroy Imaginative Art For their Glory is War and Dominion" (E274).

Science

A view held by many for some time was that Blake was a resolute foe of science, but recent scholarship has changed that conception.* Blake disliked what was called natural philosophy and the assumptions of Deism, but his mind was far too active to reject inquiry into the world. In *Laocoön*, it is the philosophical assumptions of Deistic science that he vehemently opposes. The argument centers on what he regarded as the Deistic denial of imaginative power to the Old Testament. However, what the Deists challenged was its historical accuracy. Blake overstates when he declares, "HEBREW ART is called SIN by the Deist SCIENCE" (E273). In any case, the Deists are in error because they identify history with truth and the Bible, an imaginative fiction to which historical accuracy is ultimately irrelevant, with a false fiction of objectivity. It is this Deistical science that Blake rejects as the "Tree of DEATH" (E274). In the early tractates, it is "natural religion." This is a science that assumes the outer world to be without life because it can be reduced to mathematical principles. The beginnings of this illusion Blake attributes to the creation of the Egyptian and Grecian gods, who are (the example is Plato's work) "Mathematical Diagrams," the ultimately desirable knowledge in Plato being mathematics. None of this is the "sweet Science" that "reigns" (E407) after the departure of the "dark Religions" in Blake's apocalypse of imagination (*The Four Zoas*, E407). That science, it seems to me, would be one that creates fictions of objectivity that are known to be fictions—

*See especially Harry White, "Blake's Resolution to the War Between Science and Philosophy," Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly *39, 3 (Winter 2005–6), 108–125.*

fictions of use that require no obeisance to the world they create *as if* it were itself the creation of some clock-maker god.

Blake's Christianity

Blake's Christianity is one of actions, that is, of imagination, man's "Eternal Body" (E273). This means that man and the Jesus of the Bible are united in imagination, which is "God himself" (E273). Art is simply the act of imagination, any such act. "Jesus and his Apostles & Disciples were all Artists" (E274), and the Bible, which tells of his acts is "the Great Code of Art" (E274). It follows that "the unproductive Man is not a Christian." "The whole Business of Man Is The Arts & All Things Common" (E273). "Common" here has perhaps two meanings, both with political and spiritual implications: The first is "all things in common." The second speaks of common people, not the rich, not tyrants, not kings. It is money that fuels war, conquest, empire, and natural religion. Money would suppress Blake's visionary Christianity. Probably it would declare it heresy. Blake knows well that "there are States in which all Visionary Men are accounted Mad" (E274). States are political entities, but they are also states of mind. One of the latter is the state called Satan, the mind of accusation.

6

On His Arts: In the Letters

This chapter is limited to discussion of remarks Blake made in his surviving letters about his art, art in general, and his travails as an artist. I have tried to give attention to the rhetorical situation generated by the relation of recipient to sender. The discussion groups the letters chronologically according to recipients. They are George Cumberland, John Trusler, William Hayley, and Thomas Butts. For my purpose Geoffrey Keynes's edition of the letters is the best source, since Keynes includes some letters written to Blake as well as other relevant material. However, I follow Erdman's editing in the quotations. The earliest surviving letter by Blake is dated October 18, 1791, when he was 37; the last July 3, 1827, just over a month before his death at age 69.

To George Cumberland

Blake's letters to the artist George Cumberland (1754–1848), of which six survive, reveal a long friendship and are untroubled by past or present irritations and resentments. Nevertheless, Blake's letter of August 23, 1799, to John Trusler, which seems to have been sent on to Cumberland by Trusler, has Cumberland's note on it: "Blake dim'd with superstition" (K8n). Blake's letters to him, however, reveal little or no ground for him to make such a charge. They do display several interesting views that would have been startling to a man like Trusler, the clergyman who

was known for works titled *The Way to Be Rich and Respectable*, *Hogarth Moralized*, and *Principles of Politeness*, plus many published sermons.

In a letter of December 6, 1795, Blake, writing about Cumberland's recent designs, expresses an idea that appears elsewhere in his writings: the unity of invention and execution. Here he surprisingly cites in his support John Locke:

> I congratulate you, not on any achievement. because I know. that the Genius that produces. these Designs can execute them in any manner. notwithstanding the pretended Philosophy which teaches that Execution is the power of One & Invention of Another—Locke says it i[s the] same faculty that Invents Judges, & I say he who can Invent can Execute [K5, E699].

Blake later had personal reasons for taking this position, given Cromek's treatment of him over the Blair illustrations. Cromek complained that Blake's execution was beneath his inventive powers. Blake's statements in *A Public Address* and in his annotations to Reynolds's *Discourses* will not, however, be simply the result of resentment, for the letter to Cumberland antedates these writings. They express a position he had held for some time and to his death. As late as 1821, he was criticized by Robert John Thornton for his woodcuts for Virgil's pastorals: "They display less art than genius." We don't have Blake's reply, but we can easily guess what it would have been.

It was Cumberland who arranged with Trusler for Blake to execute "Malignity" for him. On August 26, 1799, after his failure to please Trusler, Blake wrote his thanks to Cumberland as well as a defense of his work, "…as I cannot paint Dirty rags & old Shoes where I ought to place Naked Beauty or simple ornament. I despair of Ever pleasing one Class of Men" (K10, E703). He encouraged Cumberland: "Do not throw aside for any long time the honour intended you by Nature to revive the Greek workmanship" (K11, E704). Later (July 2, 1800), he complimented Cumberland for his efforts to establish a national gallery (not achieved until 1824). In that letter, he speaks favorably of the "immense flood of Grecian light & glory which is coming on Europe" (K16, E706). These remarks are in contrast to his later attacks on Grecian and Roman art and culture, which became more strident as he aged. His enthusiastic support for Cumberland arose certainly from his patriotic desire for England to become a great nation. Indeed, he went so far as to claim that Cumberland's plan must be put into action "if England continues a Nation" (K17, E706). This expresses a view of great nations that he continued to hold in *A Public Address* (E577). He saw signs of improvement all around him:

> It is very Extraordinary that London in so few years from a City of meer Necessaries or at l[e]ast a commerce of the lowest order of luxuries should have become a City of Elegance in some degree & that its once stupid inhabitants should enter into an Emulation of Grecian manners [K17, E706].

By about 1820, Blake could say little that was good about the Greeks.

In his last surviving letter to Cumberland four months before his death on August 12, 1827, there is no word about the Greeks; there remains his insistence on the folly of what he now calls intermeasurability, that is, evaluative comparisons between artists, and dividing and then comparing invention and execution. Here his remarks include insistence on the bounding line and an attack on indefiniteness:

> I know too well that a great majority of Englishmen are fond of The Indefinite which they measure by Newtons Doctrine of the Fluxions of an Atom. A Thing that does not Exist. These are Politicians & think that Republican Art is Inimical to their Atom. For a Line or Lineament is not formed by Chance a Line is a Line in its Minutest Subdivision[s] Strait or Crooked It is Itself & Not Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else [K168, E783].

Blake is said to have died singing, but he approached his death complaining that abstract ideas of measurement had no real existence.

To the Reverend Dr. John Trusler

Blake's two letters to Trusler (1735–1820) are among his best known, and the second letter, in which he aggressively defends himself against Trusler's rejection of his depiction of malevolence, is surely *the* best known.

The letters express several ideas that he held to the end of his life and some that he abandoned. The abandoned ones occur in the letter of August 16, 1799, where, with mention of Cumberland, he states again that he, too, wishes to renew the lost art of the Greeks. It would not be long before he turned against Greek art and what he called "Grecian Worship." Both Greek art and the Greek gods were, he came to think, copies, mostly inferior (as he usually thought all copies were) from works of earlier culture. In the letter, Blake seems to have declared respect for Rembrandt and Teniers, the former in particular being later a major object of his criticism. However, this may have been part of an effort to please Trusler, a new client whom he did not know well. He also declares, possibly again to please, that he would "rather Paint Pictures in oil of the

same dimensions [as the picture he has sent] than make Drawings. & on the same terms" (K7–8, E701). A decade later, he strongly criticized painting in oils.

At the same time, in this first letter, Blake introduced two of his most important ideas about his own art. First, its originality: "I find more & more that my Style of Designing is a Species by itself" (K6, E701). In later writings he, inveighs against servile copying of the style of others. Second, the value of particularity; the usual phrase is "minute particulars," but here Blake, for the only time in his extant writings, speaks of "Infinite Particulars" (E701), a phrase that introduces the notion of synecdoche, indeed a radical one in which the small thing is identical with the largest imaginable thing.*

Blake's second letter (August 23, 1799), is not only a defense but also a vigorous attack. The first sentence to the clergyman begins, "I really am sorry that you are falln out with the Spiritual World" (K8, E702), and another declares, "I have therefore proved your Reasonings Ill proportioned which you can never prove my figures to be" (K9, E702). Blake could hardly have expected that Trusler would again commission him to do anything, though writing later to Cumberland he held out the hope that Trusler might.

Blake makes several positive points that have been quoted often by scholars. They express views Blake held throughout his career. He begins by mentioning what he regards as fundamental to art: "Visions of Eternity" (E702). The argument he has made elsewhere is that every insight into a moment is a vision of the eternal, the moment being expansive to contain everything that to our corporeal perceptions is stretched out in linear, measurable time. The obscurity of which Trusler accuses him is deliberate, and it is, he thinks, not obscure at all to an imaginative response:

> You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients considerd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act [K8, E702].

Blake cites Moses, Solomon, Aesop, and Plato here as examples, the last

**For a discussion of the variety of synecdoche in Blake's writings, see my "Synecdoche and Method,"* Antithetical Essays in Literary Criticism and Liberal Education, *Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 1990, 21–51, esp. 26–48.*

two not yet subject to his later criticism of the Greeks. The passage seems to imply that interpretation can be, indeed is distortion.

In this letter, nature has not become the word of derision identified with Locke's primary qualities of perception and, more generally, with a false external world. Here it refers to what someone with a strong imagination can make of it, for nature is imagination itself:

> I know that This World is a World of Imagination & Vision I see Every thing I paint In This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes. The tree which moves some to tears of joy is in the Eyes of others only a Green thing that stands in the way. Some See Nature all Ridicule & Deformity & by these I shall not regulate my proportions, & Some Scarce see Nature at all But to the Eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination Itself. As a man is So he Sees. As the Eye is formed such are its Powers You certainly Mistake when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One Continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination [K9, E702].

The whole passage, which, if it is not deliberately insulting, is naïve in tone. In content, it is an important statement, though with a meaning for nature different from Blake's later thought. It shows the ways a weak imagination lives in illusion and in some cases obsession. As he did later, Blake thought of imagination and fancy as synonymous, in contrast to Coleridge, who connected fancy with what Blake later thought of as the product of that passive act of perception he attributed to Locke's philosophy.

Perhaps the deepest cut intended for Trusler is Blake's statement that children particularly are able to "elucidate" his visions, though it is also true, he adds, that some children, like some adults, are fools (K9, E703). It is not really surprising that Trusler sent this letter on to Cumberland. It is his tacit explanation for not employing Blake any longer, sent to the man who had introduced and recommended him. It also exhibits arrogance and spite, though motivated by a spiteful letter.

Blake seems to have vented his spleen adequately before penning his last paragraph, which has no invective in it and contains the assumption that Trusler would employ him further. Blake even asserts that he is willing to engrave the work of someone else. He ends by declaring himself Trusler's "very obedient servant" (K10, E703).

To William Hayley

More of Blake's letters of substance survive to Hayley than to any other correspondent.* The first of these is dated February 18, 1800, and the last December 11, 1805. They are gathered around Blake's three-year stay at Felpham from 1800 to 1803. If we consider how deeply Blake resented Hayley's attempts to influence the nature of his work, it is perhaps surprising to find that Blake, often forthright to his own disadvantage, always wrote to Hayley with respect and even affection. There are two reasons for this. First, Hayley was a genial patron, and second, Hayley played an important role in Blake's defense at his trial for sedition in January of 1804. Blake remained grateful for the rest of his life, even though in the allegory of *Milton* Hayley is Satan.

Blake's response to Hayley's criticism of his efforts to produce an engraving of John Flaxman's medallion portrait of Hayley's son Thomas Alphonso was quite different from that which he made to Trusler. One reason may have been that Blake was not producing an original work and that it was a portrait, which required accuracy of representation. Another reason may be that Hayley was polite in his criticism and even included for Blake's perusal some lines of poetry addressed to his son. On the death of Thomas Alphonso, Blake wrote to Hayley with sympathy, penning his well-known line "The Ruins of Time builds Mansions in Eternity" (K16, E705).

Further, Blake, always respectful, on occasion wrote openly about himself as a working artist. On November 26, 1800, from Felpham, he confessed, "I sometimes try to be miserable that I may do more work, but find it is a foolish experiment. Happinesses have wings and wheels; miseries are leaden legged and their whole employment is to clip the wings and to take off the wheels of our chariots" (K31, E714).

When he returned to London, he found that he had no engraving work:

> … Art in London flourishes. Engravers in particular are wanted. Every engraver turns away work that he cannot Execute from his superabundant Employment. Yet no one brings work to me. I am content that it shall be so as long as God pleases. I know that many works of a lucrative nature are in want of hands other Engravers are courted. I suppose that I must go a Courting … [K68, E736].

**There are more letters to Butts, but many of these are merely signed receipts.*

Blake's self-forced contentment here suggests that he was trying to follow a belief he later stated in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*: "…works of Art can only be produced in Perfection where the Man is either in Affluence or is Above the care of it" (E561). He was not affluent, so it must have been the latter, a state he was attempting to achieve.

His whole feeling toward engraving, he wrote, on March 12, 1804, was ambivalent: "I curse & bless Engraving alternately because it takes so much time & is so untractable. tho capable of such beauty & perfection" (K83, E743). On September 28, 1804, he eschewed being employed as a painter "in the drudgery of fashionable dawbing for a poor pittance of money in return for the sacrifice of Art & Genius" (K99, E755).

On October 23, 1804, he declared himself liberated and now felt in Felpham that he had been restored, at least so he says to Hayley:

> I have entirely reduced that spectrous Fiend to his station, whose annoyance has been the ruin of my labours for the last passed twenty years of my life. He is the enemy of conjugal love and is the Jupiter of the Greeks, an iron-hearted tyrant, the ruiner of ancient Greece. I speak with perfect confidence and certainty of the fact which has passed upon me.… I was a slave bound in a mill among beasts and devils; these beasts and devils are now, together with myself, become children of light and liberty [K101, E756].

Indeed, Blake has "forgotten" the unhappiness and anger that he felt there and the "mill" in which Hayley as Satan had tried to confine him: "O lovely Felpham, parent of Immortal Friendship, to thee I am eternally indebted for my three years' rest from perturbation and the strength I now enjoy" (K101, E756). Blake's recent visit to the Truchsessian Gallery was the impetus for this declaration, though Joseph Count Truchsess's collection was mostly copies of European masters and was judged inferior by some who visited it.* However, Blake's visit probably hastened his rejection of the art of Greece and Rome, though the change was not as sudden as implied here and was begun earlier. The words above are followed by, "Dear Sir, excuse my enthusiasm or rather madness, for I am really drunk with intellectual vision whenever I take a pencil or graver into my hand, even as I used to be in my youth" (K101, E757). Certainly Blake was inspired to return to work on his long poems.

By December 11, 1805, in the last letter to Hayley that we have, Blake wrote with thanks for Hayley's "kind Reception" of the projected

*See Morton D. Paley, "The Truchsessian Gallery Revisited," Studies in Romanticism 16 (1977), 165–77; David Wells, A Study of the Letters of William Blake, Tübingen: Stauffenburg Verlag, 1987, 105–9.

illustrations for Hayley's *Ballads*, and again for his support during the Felpham years (K120–1, E766–7). This is a far cry from the notebook verse of that time:

> On Ha——ys Friendship
> When H——finds out what you cannot do
> That is the Very thing hell set you to
> [E506]
>
> On H——the Pick thank
> Thy Friendship oft has made my heart to ake
> Do be my Enemy for Friendships Sake
> [E506]

One of the epigrams of that time describes wryly what seemed still to be going on:

> I write the Rascal Thanks till he & I
> With Thanks & Compliments are quite drawn dry
> [E506]

But Blake's thanks in the December 11th letter were sincere and heartfelt: "I *know* that if I had not been with You I must have Perish'd" (K120, E767). Hayley, of course, was one of those friends who enabled him to achieve "Spiritual Victories" (K120, E767). His feelings about "that faint Shadow Calld natural Life" (K120, E767) were now clear, and he would happily devote himself to "Spiritual Labours" (K120, E767). He complimented Hayley on his ballads, which had little popular success and, indeed, had been mocked, but he knew that the mockers of art are "Most Severely Punishd in Eternity"(K120, E767), for the mockers of art are also the mockers of Jesus. Hayley has been mainly a figure of fun for scholars and critics, but he may be forgiven his bad poetry for his help and friendship to Blake when Blake badly needed it.*

To Thomas Butts

Thomas Butts (c.1757-c.1845) was chief clerk in the office of the Commissary General of Musters. It is likely from our knowledge of his generous treatment of Blake over many years that he had a separate income of some substance, though it may have been, as G. E. Bentley, Jr., observes, that he was merely a shrewd investor or in his job a manip-

**On Hayley's career and his relation to Blake, see Morchard Bishop,* Blake's Hayley: The Life, Works and Friendships of William Hayley, *London: Victor Gollancz, 1951.*

ulator of money into his own pocket.* Bentley describes Butts's relation to Blake as "one of close mutual friendship and cordiality,"† dating from before the first surviving letter of Sept 23, 1800. For years, Butts was Blake's principal and sometimes only patron. He amassed a large collection of Blake's works.

Much of what survives of the correspondence of Blake and Butts were receipts and records of accounts. Still, there are several letters in which Blake speaks of his art and offers his opinions. In contrast to his vociferous complaints about Reynolds in his annotations, he actually quotes favorably Reynolds's remark that "picturesque" is applicable to "the excellencies of the inferior Schools" and not to Michelangelo and Raphael (K41, E718). Blake goes on to assert that he has again rethought his ideas of art and "put myself back as if I was a learner" (K41, E719). The statement anticipates his later remark that he had returned to his "primitive & original ways" (K47, E724).

These letters reveal an openness that indicates a genuine friendship. Yet in a letter from Felpham on September 11, 1801, Blake writes about his work with expressions quite opposite to what are usual with him. In an instance already mentioned, he apologizes for the slowness of his executing designs Butts has ordered:

> Time flies faster (as seems to me), here than in London I labour incessantly & accomplish not one half of what I intend because my Abstract folly hurries me often away while I am at work, carrying me over Mountains & Valleys which are not Real in a Land of Abstraction where Spectres of the Dead wander. This I endeavour to prevent & with my whole might chain my feet to the world of Duty & Reality. But in vain! [K34, E716].

Blake apologizes, yes. He confesses that he has been improperly pulled away from his work for Butts; but the truth is that he is recognizing that what really calls to him is his truly imaginative work. The ironic connection here between abstraction and imagination, no doubt eluding Butts, is unique in Blake's writing. The world he says he is drawn to he describes as very much like the world of poor Urizen in *The Four Zoas*, a world of abstract matter and one of Blake's most powerful descriptions, but here it refers ironically to the world of what he thought his true work should be. The world Blake was really "bound down" to was the world of "Duty & Reality" (both words also ironically employed), which he identifies

*On Butts, see G. E. Bentley, Jr., "Thomas Butts: White Collar Maecenas," PMLA 71, 5 (December, 1956, 1052–1066, and The Stranger from Paradise, esp. 186–195.

†"White Collar Maecenas," 1055.

with that of Bacon, Newton, and Pitt. So Blake's apology is a covert defense.

In a postscript, Blake writes of his intention to execute a portrait of Butts, but he declares that he cannot do it from memory. For him, memory is attached to the material world and decays as that world decays. He must have Butts before him to do a portrait, a form of painting that Blake, in any case, did not care for. The materially present subject, however, threatened to stifle the imagination. At Felpham, from which he wrote this letter, Blake was being encouraged by Hayley to do miniature portraiture. Both the encouragement and the task he quickly came to reject. By 1803, he was writing to his brother James about Hayley, "The truth is As a Poet he is frightened at me & as Painter his views & mine are opposite he thinks to turn me into a Portrait Painter as he did poor Romney, but this he nor all the devils in hell will never do" (E725). To Butts, Blake regretted that he was incapable of doing the portrait, but in fact he was coming to think that nature itself was the culprit. Historical painting, on the other hand, allowed for the imagination's creative activity, as the event was not materially and temporally present but had to be reinvented. At this point, Blake thought these two arts were distinct, but he imagined that some artist might be able to combine them, though he doubted it:

> I am determined to paint another Portrait of you from Life in my best manner for Memory will not do in such minute operations. for I have discovered that without Nature before the painters Eye he can never produce any thing in the walks of Natural Painting Historical Designing is one thing & Portrait Painting another & they are as Distinct as any two Arts can be Happy would that man be who could unite them [K35, E717].

I think this final thought, and the whole passage, was a rhetorical flourish, based on friendship and an at least momentary desire to make some money. Blake kept open the possibility of drawing his friend's likeness, even though we know of his contempt for the nature that he said escaped his imagination or from which his imagination would escape.

In a letter of January 10, 1803, Blake declared that his time at Felpham was valuable in spite of his wife's ill health and the pressure put upon him by "Spiritual Enemies of such formidable magnitude" (K47, E723):

> I have recollected all my scatterd thoughts on Art & resumed my primitive & original ways of Execution in both painting & Engraving. which in the confusion of London I had very much lost & obliterated from my mind [K47, E724].

Apparently Hayley's behavior had been a good thing after all, for it caused Blake to rise up and declare for his own genius: "I cannot live without doing my duty to lay up treasures in heaven" (K48, E724). The situation at Felpham with Hayley remained, nevertheless, fraught with spiritual danger, as the last sentence above indicates. But to keep on there would have been to enter the state of hell, which Blake thought was a state of mind, not some place to which unfortunates were confined after death: "…if we fear to do the dictates of our Angels & tremble at the Tasks set before us. If we refuse to do Spiritual Acts. because of Natural Fears or Natural Desires! Who can describe the dismal torments of such a state!" (K48, E724).

On April 25, 1803, Blake wrote to Butts about the poem he succeeded in writing at Felpham despite his travails with Hayley (or perhaps because of them). The poem was probably *Milton*, where, in Book the First, Hayley is allegorically Satan, and Los warns Satan:

> If you account it Wisdom when you are angry to be silent, and
> Not to shew it: I do not account that wisdom but Folly [1:4; E98].

The warning is also appropriate for Blake. The poem was Blake's covert speaking out. Satan makes his primitive tyrannical attempts on Los, the spirit of imagination, with "incomparable mildness" (1:6;E100). Palamabron, who stands for Blake, is "blamable" because he,

> … fear'd to be angry lest Satan should accuse him of
> Ingratitude [1:6;E100].

So in spite of and because of Hayley, Blake by his own reckoning had been amazingly productive.

On July 6, 1803, Blake wrote to Butts of his distinction between types of allegory, different from what appeared later in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*: "Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers while it is altogether hidden from the Corporeal Understanding is My Definition of the Most Sublime Poetry" (K58, E730). Blake must have been confident that Hayley, if he read the poem, would find the allegory hidden. The despised form of allegory, implied as addressed to the corporeal understanding, is really a mode of thought that attempts to give reality to abstract ideas by inventing arbitrary images for them. It creates "nature" as nothing but illusion and is the opposite of fancy or imagination, fancy, for Blake, being synonymous with imagination. It worships a false god: "Nature & Fancy are Two Things & can Never be joined neither ought any one to attempt it for it is Idolatry & destroys the Soul" (K57, E730).

The language is different from that of the letter to Trusler, where nature *is* imagination, but the meaning is the same. Blake's "Allegory addressd to the Intellectual powers" challenges the reader to grasp his message, which requires us to see Satan in Hayley, or rather Hayley in Satan, since Satan is a state of mind. Blake's letter ends with a declaration of independence after a compressed account of his three years at Felpham, soon to end. He writes of his "Just Right as an Artist & as a Man. & if any attempt should be made to refuse me this I am inflexible & will relinquish Any engagement of Designing at all unless altogether left to my own Judgment. As you My dear Friend have always left me for which I shall never cease to honour & respect you" (K59, E 731).

The friendship with Butts gave rise in the letters to two important, visionary, personal poems by Blake (K27–29, E712–13; K43–46, E721–22), both written from Felpham. The first letter's poem recounts a marvelous regenerating vision by the sea shore that ends with Blake taken back to childhood: "All I ever had known/Before me bright Shone." The second ends in a tone of defiance of the forces obstructing the path of his imagination and declares its freedom. A third letter, written nine months later, expresses some soul searching: "It is certain! that a too passive manner. Inconsistent with my active physiognomy had done me much mischief I must now express to you my conviction that all is come from the spiritual World for Good & not for Evil" (K65, E733). Blake's decision at Felpham led to poverty, but also to some of his greatest works.

7

Retrospective: The Early Tractates

Some time in 1788 or slightly before, Blake executed a group of twenty-seven paragraphs (one is lost), each on a separate plate, that set forth his argument against natural religion and Deism.* These plates constitute the three tractates *All Religions Are One* and the other two, both titled *There Is No Natural Religion* (hereafter A and B respectively). I have left these for discussion, along with some passages from the *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (1790–93), here at the end of Part I in order to look back at his earlier thoughts on matters bearing on his arts in the light of our experience of his later statements. The first tractate discussed here is thought to be the earliest written†:

The Tractates

ALL RELIGIONS are ONE
The Voice of one crying in the Wilderness
The argument As the true method of knowledge is experiment the true fac-

**The three most helpful discussions of these tractates with their compressed and sometimes obscure statements are those of J. Middleton Murry,* William Blake *(1933), London: Jonathan Cape, 1936, 19–29; Harold Bloom,* Blake's Apocalypse, A Study in Poetic Argument, *Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1963, 24–29;* The Early Illuminated Books, *eds. Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1993, 21–33. This is Volume 3 of the William Blake Trust/Princeton edition.*

†*The arrangement of the plates of these tractates is that employed by Erdman, following Keynes's for the Blake Trust edition of 1971.*

ulty of knowing must be the faculty which experiences. This faculty I treat of.

Principle 1st That the Poetic Genius is the true Man. and that the body or outward form of man is derived from the Poetic Genius. Likewise that the forms of all things are derived from their Genius. Which by the Ancients was call'd an Angel & Spirit & Demon.

Principle 2d As all men are alike in outward form, So (and with the same infinite variety) all are alike in the Poetic Genius

Principle 3d No man can think write or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth. Thus all sects of Philosophy are from the Poetic Genius and adapted to the weaknesses of every individual

Principle 4 As none by traveling over known lands can find out the unknown. So from already acquired knowledge Man could not acquire more. therefore an universal Poetic Genius exists

Principle 5. The Religions of all Nations are derived from each Nations different reception of the Poetic Genius which is every where call'd the Spirit of Prophecy.

Principle 6 The Jewish & Christian Testaments are An original derivation from the Poetic Genius. this is necessary from the confined nature of bodily sensation.

Principle 7th As all men are alike (tho' infinitely various) So all Religions & as all similars have one source The true Man is the source he being the Poetic Genius [E1–2].

The two principal points here are that all religions are derived from something fundamental and eternal and that all men are alike in outward form and Poetic Genius. This latter term Blake later abandons in favor of "imagination." There are some verbal stumbling blocks in the argument's movement. Are all religions one religion, or are all religions *derived* from one religion? The title claims they are all one, but "derived" and "derivation" are ambiguous. They can imply substantive change from an origin, possibly change for the worse. On the other hand, it seems that Blake thinks the Poetic Genius dwelling in human beings is constant.

In Principle 2d, Blake, plays on two of Johann Caspar Lavater's aphorisms. They are as follows:

1. Know, in the first place, that mankind agree in essence, as they do in their limbs and senses.
2. Mankind differ as much in essence as they do in form, limbs, and senses—and only so and not more [E583].

Blake annotated these: "This is true Christian philosophy far above all abstraction" (E584). I take it that Blake is praising Lavater's attention to individuality as well as similarity. (The two aphorisms reflect Lavater's

interest in physiognomy and its notion that the character of people can be determined by study of their outward appearance, particularly the head.) It is difficult, nevertheless, to see the aphorisms as "far above all abstraction." Blake must have seen in them an argument on the model of metaphorical identity of the same and the different. This allows for Blake's infinite variety and absolute oneness at the same time.

Blake's statement is more radical than that offered by the editors of *The Early Illuminated Books*, who say, "…the 'Poetic Genius' must have an equivalent degree of similarity within 'infinite variety.'" I think "alike" means "identical" and "a degree of similarity" would be something of a falling away from that condition.

Principle 3d identifies truth with what is spoken not by reasoning but by intuition, immediate apprehension, or what Blake later calls simply "vision." Sects of philosophy are derived from the poetic genius, but it is clear that here they represent a falling away from that origin into abstract thought, which cannot contain poetic genius except in a debased form. Elsewhere later, Blake makes a clear contrast between poetry and philosophy, in *On Homers Poetry*, for example (E270), the germ of which is in Principle 3d.

Principle 4 asserts that to think things already known can produce no new knowledge. Harold Bloom, writing about the third tractate, describes well what is said here: "The Philosophic and Experimental, left to themselves, would stand still or be trapped in cycle, with reason fed only by weakening memories of natural experience" (27). Blake goes on to declare that because we *do* learn more there must be a human power beyond or prior to ratiocination that enables this: the Poetic Genius.

Blake, then (in Principle 5), identifies the Poetic Genius with the spirit of prophecy and goes on to distinguish between "original derivation" and mere similarity that could presumably allow error to creep in. Thus we can assume it possible, even probable, that some religions have gone astray. The Bible, a work of poetic genius, however, contains an "original," that is, uncorrupted "derivation" that separates it from religions of a derivation corrupted over time. This condition of corruption infected both Judaism and Christianity when they strayed from pure intuition of the Bible. As *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (E38) indicates, this occurred when a "priesthood" of interpreters intervened between the Bible and the reader. The Bible allows a window of vision for human beings otherwise confined to "bodily sensation."

Blake came later to identify the Poetic Genius, imagination, with

Jesus. Jesus is not, however, and need not be anything more than the human imagination itself. He is not any longer simply a past historical figure, and it makes no difference if he never existed in the material world. He is a figure the Bible imagines and its readers can imagine. For Blake, at least later, it is enough that the Bible is a supreme work of fiction, that is, something made by the human imagination, encyclopedic in scope, for which history is an irrelevance.

Principle 7th makes two assertions, the second of which "all similars have one source" is a false syllogistic conclusion. It is not, however, necessary to Blake's declaration that all religions are derived from a single source, which he believes is not a historical source but an eternal ever-present one.

THERE is NO NATURAL RELIGION [A]

The Argument Man has no notion of moral fitness but from Education. Naturally he is only a natural organ subject to Sense.

I. Man cannot naturally Percieve. But through his natural or bodily organs

II. Man by his reasoning power. Can only compare & judge of what he has already perciev'd.

III. From a perception of only 3 senses or 3 elements none could deduce a fourth or fifth

IV. None could have other than natural or organic thoughts if he had none but organic perceptions

V. Mans desires are limited by his perceptions. None can desire what he has not perciev'd

VI. The desires & perceptions of man untaught by any thing but organs of sense, must be limited to objects of sense.

This tractate is designed to show ironically the limitations of a philosophy of nature by allowing that philosophy to make its own argument. All philosophers are corrupted by their diminishing into abstraction all that we can know. Philosophy must conclude that there is nothing beyond what may be perceived by impressions on the natural senses, that is, nature, what is left of the world when it is reduced to Locke's primary qualities of experience, or objectivity. It is a position Blake attributes elsewhere also to Bacon and Burke, among others. Burke writes in his *Philosophical Enquiry*, "…this power of the imagination is incapable of producing anything absolutely new; it can only vary the disposition of those ideas which it has received from the senses."* The result is a picture

*A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and the Beautiful *(1757), ed. J. T. Boulton, New York: Columbia University Press, 1958, 17.*

of man entirely enclosed in a world into which nothing new can enter or even be thought. The logical conclusion would have to be that religion is either an impossibility or, within the argument's terms, an aberration. Blake's emphasis is on desire and how in such philosophy it is limited to combinations of sense impressions. "Imagination" does not appear here, but clearly imagination ceases to exist in this kind of confinement of desire, since desire cannot go beyond natural sensation, the passive reception of sense data. Its only activity would be the arranging and rearranging of sense impressions. Morality, for this point of view, would be something learned entirely from nature, nothing indwelling.

The third tractate (E2–3) means to correct the confining errors of these thoughts. Blake's argument begins with a statement that directly opposes statement I of the previous tractate:

> I Mans perceptions are not bounded by organs of perception, he percieves more than sense (tho' ever so acute) can discover.

The distinction implied here is between what mind (or spirit) can imagine and what sense impressions of externality can allow one to perceive. Later, Blake makes the same distinction by contrasting the mental act of seeing *through* the eye and seeing merely *with* it . This he does in two places: the poem "Auguries of Innocence" (E492) and *A Descriptive Catalogue* (E566). "Tho' ever so acute" should, I think, be read "even if very acute,"

In statement II, Blake introduces the word "ratio," which points to the product of a world projected only by the powers of reason:

> II Reason or the ratio of all we have already known. is not the same that it shall be when we know more

Bloom, following Murry, remarks rightly that in Blake's view, "The ratio of all things would be a mental abstract of all experience, and grossly inferior to the immediacy of the things themselves" (27). In addition, it would be purely imageless and grounded on measurement. Such a world would allow no knowledge beyond what is implicit in the methods and system of reason.

Unfortunately statement III is missing, but it must have referred to the ratio as an enclosure limiting the freedom of intellect. This enclosure is the topic of statement IV

> IV The bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round even of a univer[s]e would soon become a mill with complicated wheels.

The first sentence seems meant to be an aphorism with universal appli-

cation, suggesting contempt by the powerful for the lesser. It also refers to the person bounded, who hates his condition. The first meaning would certainly express Blake's view of the psychology of the political tyrant. It would also apply to Blake's later view of the creator god or demiurge of the natural world, who is really an aspect of man's intellect fallen into the enclosure of reason. Here the second meaning comes in, since it is man who has bound himself with reason. This god-man, creator of the dominating power, would have contempt for his own creation. It is this god who builds the ratio, which is his possession; but it also possesses him, and he finds his own situation intolerable. Readers familiar with *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* will recognize this world as the world of the mill through which Blake's narrator and an angel descend into a cavern and then out into the ultimate enclosure of reason: paradoxically a "void boundless as a nether sky" (E41), a spatially infinite abyss. The terrified angel climbs back up into the mill, which in statement IV is the mechanical projection of a mathematical universe bounded by boundlessness.

Statement V is cryptic, but it does clearly proceed from the notion of the bounded being loathed by its possessor:

> V If the many become the same as the few, when possessed, More! More! is the cry of a mistaken soul, less than All cannot satisfy Man.

If one assumes the bounded world of the ratio to be the real one, desire would be blocked from achieving anything beyond it. Anything "more" would be only more of the infinitely same. The spatially infinite nature of this world would paradoxically become the boundary to intellectual power, the void that terrifies the angel. Such a world, however, is less than all; it is an abstraction from imaginative experience, and only the world of the imagination has the potential for satisfaction. At this stage of Blake's career the Poetic Genius stands in for the imagination.

Blake delays revelation of the nature of the "All" to which he refers in statement V. Statement VI extends the discussion of desire:

> VI If any could desire what he is incapable of possessing, despair must be his eternal lot.

For Blake, it is inconceivable that this is man's fate, for man is really already capable of desiring what is beyond the world of the ratio. There is, then, a kind of infinity other than the spatial infinity constructed by reason:

> VII The desire of Man being Infinite the possession is Infinite & himself Infinite.

Blake declares that this infinite can be possessed and yet remain unbounded because it is the infinity of imaginative possibility. One is also in possession of self, not possessed by self and isolated in it. Therefore, one is free to achieve identity with other things. There follows from this the identity of God and man, a notion Blake does not later abandon. Indeed, he grows stronger in his commitment to it. The somewhat literal-minded Henry Crabb Robinson was more than usually puzzled by Blake's remark in conversation: "He [Jesus] is the only God"—but then he added "And so am I and So are you."*

The conclusion to this tractate brings it together with *All Religions Are One*:

> Conclusion: If it were not for the Poetic or Prophetic character, the Philosophic & Experimental would soon be at the ratio of all things & stand still, unable to do other than repeat the same dull round over again.

There is what seems to be a final statement:

> Application. He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only.

This "himself" is what Blake later calls "selfhood," an imprisonment of man in the error of thinking that reason is the key to all reality.

But there is a further conclusion:

> Therefore
> God becomes as we are,
> that we may be as he
> is

This is the role of the Jesus of the Bible, which Blake later calls "the Great Code of Art" (E274), a demonstration of the godliness of the human imagination and the humanity of God. The later identity of God, Jesus, imagination, and unfallen man is not yet explicit but implicit in the notion of the poetic genius.

**Henry Crabb Robinson,* Diary, Reminiscences, and Correspondence, *ed. Thomas Sadler, London: Macmillan, 1869, 2, 303.*

Part II

8

On Poetry, His Poetry, and Other Poets

Blake's prose writings contain a lot about visual art, less about poetry, and little specifically about his own. In order to observe his views of his own work and what he was attempting to do, a few ventures into *Milton* and *Jerusalem* will be necessary in this chapter. Nevertheless, we find Blake's fundamental idea of poetry in his first engraved work, where he identifies the "true Man" with the "Poetic Genius," which is the source of "all Religions" (E1–2). Later, Blake identifies man with imagination and poetry with naming, implying language itself is in its nature poetic.

Los and Language

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* the "ancient poets" are the original namers of things (E38), and in *Jerusalem* Los, Blake's figure of imagination,

> … built the stubborn structure of the Language acting against
> Albions melancholy, who must else have been a Dumb despair [2:36; E183].

This is an interesting passage, which suggests that the creation of language was a merciful act that built a bulwark against despair by rendering Albion capable of speech and this speech was formed by the imagination. Language in its origin was fundamentally poetic. The closest thinker I know to Blake on this matter is Giambattista Vico, who in his *New Sci-*

*ence** described what he called "poetic logic," which was the primitive logic of all languages—a logic of metaphorical relations that created what he called "imaginative universals." Primitive people, Vico concluded, were incapable of thinking abstractly. Their universals were imagistic words, not imageless abstractions. His description of the universals of primitive thought anticipates Blake's notion that abstract universals have no reality because they have no apprehensible image. We thus proceed to the idea that poetry maintains commitment to the image and operates on its own logic, with its own structure, or (despite Blake's use of the term above) anti–structure, since structure alone is too easily identified with rationality, or what Blake early called the abstracting "ratio" (E2). Los's act in the quotation above identifies language as a redeeming power that Los must use to respond to Albion's collapse into the nightmare of fallen history, which is the subject of *Jerusalem.* Los's act makes expression possible and thus identification between self and others rather than isolation in mute selfhood. The "ratio" alone cannot accomplish this. Indeed, in its very nature it works to prevent it.

What Los creates is stubborn because it must stand against the force of the ratio, but that stubbornness can face two ways. Los works in a fallen world, and language is a part of it, corruptible by it. Despite its poetic roots it will, in history, fall into the expression of supposedly fixed religious, political, and scientific laws. It must stubbornly maintain flexibility and be able to change, continually by opposition find ways to redeem itself if it falls away from its poetic origin.

Early in *Jerusalem*, Blake goes to some lengths to describe this anti– or antithetical structure. It is the great city of Golgonooza and the contrary surrounding territories, a complete map of the poetic world projected by the imagination (1:12–16; E155–61). It is in microcosm London, continually building and decaying. It is the antithetical system Los mentions prior to the description of the great city:

> I Must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans
> I will not Reason & Compare: my business is to Create [1:10; E153]

It is seen a few pages later [in] the metaphorically related passage quoted

*The New Science of Giambattista Vico, *Revised Translation of the Third Edition (1744), eds. Thomas Goddard Bergin and Max Harold Fisch, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1968. On Blake and Vico, see my* The Offense of Poetry, *Seattle, WA: University of Washington Press, 2007, 161–77, and my* Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic, *Tallahassee, FL: Florida State University Press, 1983, 5–12.*

earlier that gives the form of the imagination's projection in terms of redeemed time:

> All things acted on Earth are seen in the bright Sculptures of
> Los's Halls & every Age renews its powers from these Works
> With every pathetic story possible to happen from Hate or
> Wayward Love & every sorrow & distress is carved here
> Every Affinity of Parents marriages & Friendships are here
> In all their various combinations wrought with wondrous Art
> All that can happen to Man in his pilgrimage of seventy years [1:16; E161].

These bright sculptures are then related to the Bible, the "Great Code of Art" (E274), identifying poetry and prophecy.

Poetry is prophecy, not prediction. It is insight into things; its role is to reshape the fallen world, which is a congeries of human error, into an image so clear that error will be seen for what it is and thus annihilated. Los speaks:

> Yet why despair! I saw the finger of God go forth
> Upon my Furnaces, from within the Wheels of Albions Sons:
> Fixing their Systems, permanent; by mathematic power
> Giving a body to Falsehood that it may be cast off for ever [1:12; E155].

God functions from within the imaginations of people, not from without. The systems become fixed by the very mathematic power that brought about error: "Demonstrative Science piercing Apollyon with his own bow"(1:12; E155).* This is the aim of all imaginative activity, which is poetry in its largest sense.

Blake distinguishes between poetry and morality, the latter being work of the "ratio," imageless abstraction from the real. This Blake identifies with philosophy: "Cunning & Morality are not Poetry but Philosophy the Poet is Independent & [in philosophy's eyes] Wicked the Philosopher Dependent & Good" (E634).† Indeed, the Bible itself, which is the most complete encyclopedic poem, is full of immorality: "Is not every Vice possible to Man described in the Bible openly?" (E275).

On Poetry in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Blake gives attention to poetry in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* specifically in Plate 5 (E34–5) and Plate 11 (E38). Both contain important

*"*Apollyon" is a rendering of the Hebrew "Abaddon," the destroyer.*

†*Blake is responding here to, among others, Plato.*

statements, the first being about Milton's *Paradise Lost. The Marriage* is a complex body that includes verse, proverbs, passages spoken by the devil and others apparently by the author. It is not certain whether Plate 5 is a continuation of the devil's speech in Plate 4 or whether the narrative voice of the author is speaking, as he was in Plate 3. I am going to treat it as spoken by the author on the ground that the text does not attribute it to the devil (as it does with respect to Plate 4). There is some ground for this in the fact that the devil numbers his statements in plate 4 and Blake does not in Plate 5. Plate 11 is also not titled and follows the "Proverbs of Hell," which Blake says are those of Hell's angels. They end with "Enough! or Too much" (E38), and Blake appears to speak the rest of the work up to the closing "Song of Liberty." I mention this because more than one commentator has assumed that the devil's views are not necessarily Blake's, though in certain ways close to them. One of these, Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr., has written at length and thoroughly on Blake's relation to Milton.* Wittreich assigns Plate 5 to the devil and thus the remarks about Milton. He regards them as mistaken. The misunderstanding is the devil's, not Blake's, though Blake's views in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* are generally close to the devil's. The whole of Plate 5 follows here:

> Those who restrain desire, do so because theirs is weak enough to be restrained; and the restrainer or reason usurps its place & governs the unwilling.
>
> And being restraind it by degrees becomes passive till it is only the shadow of desire.
>
> The history of this is written in Paradise Lost. & the Governor or Reason is call'd Messiah.
>
> And the original Archangel or possessor of the command of the heavenly host, is call'd the Devil or Satan and his children are call'd Sin & Death.
>
> But in the Book of Job Miltons Messiah is call'd Satan.
>
> For this history has been adopted by both parties
>
> It indeed appear'd to Reason as if Desire was cast out. But the Devils account is, that the Messiah fell. & formed a heaven of what he stole from the Abyss
>
> This is shewn in the Gospel, where he prays to the Father to send the comforter or Desire that Reason may have ideas to build on, the Jehovah of the Bible being no other than he, who dwells in flaming fire.
>
> Know that after Christs death, he became Jehovah.
>
> But in Milton; the Father is Destiny, the Son, a Ratio of the five senses. & the Holy Ghost a Vacuum!
>
> Note. The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God,

**Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr.,* Angel of Apocalypse: Blake's Idea of Milton*, Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975, 208.*

On those who restrain desire and the dire results, from ***The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.***

> and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devil's party without knowing it [E34–5].

The passage is first about desire, and Milton is employed as an example of suppression of it. The plate begins with a penetrating remark about desire and restraint. Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi make the following comment in their notes:

> Blake here draws on the familiar strain of anti–clericalism that issues in jokes about priests who stop others from doing what they themselves cannot do. See also plate 11, which targets the priesthood for blame, and plate 27, which ends with a denunciation of priests.*

This is true, but I think the passage is also generally about the exertion of power. It is about the psychology of oppressors, who Blake asserts are really followers, that is followers of a fixed idea that is tied up with fear of the loss of authority. Thus the remark refers to the perverse motivation of tyrants as well as the tyranny of the rational mind. Desire is restrained by reactionary behavior, which objectifies and dehumanizes everything in the name of reason. In such people, desire becomes but a ghost of itself. The Christian trinity is corrupted into determinism in the Father, reason in the son, and imageless idea in the Holy Ghost. Blake says the history of this is written in *Paradise Lost*, though he doesn't think that was its intention, and it must be read diabolically to properly understand it. The true history is written straightforwardly in *The Four Zoas*, particularly, for example, in the treatment of Tharmas early in the poem, where he suffers a nervous collapse. It is present in the story of poor Urizen, alienated by an objectivity of his own making. Blake's discussion of *Paradise Lost* is about the suppression of desire and the danger of the suppression of poetry, itself. When a culture suppresses something, the suppressed rises up in revolt, often in perverse ways.

Wittreich points out that Blake's criticism

> involves the aesthetics of Milton's poem. Reason and its bedfellow theology, in *Paradise Lost*, repress energy and depress vision, with the result that the early books are a triumph of imagination, while the last ones represent a failure of it [210].

This criticism, Wittreich observes, was not Blake's alone but rather a commonplace in the eighteenth century. But, Wittreich points out, Blake

*The Early Illuminated Books, *eds. Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press 21–23. This is volume 3 of the William Blake Trust/Princeton edition.*

also "attacks the theology of Milton's poem" (211). On this matter, the issue is complex. Blake argues in Plate 5 that the Messiah of the later books of *Paradise Lost*, whom he identifies with reason, is really the Satan of the Book of Job. Both are emissaries of God, and both, as Wittreich says, "inflict punishment." In the Fall of Satan in Book 6 of *Paradise Lost*, the part of God that was energy, the archangel Satan, is separated from heaven and only reason remains. Thus God is divided, and each part has a different interpretation of the result. The view of the reasoning portion was that irrational desire was properly cast out. The creative aspect of man went about its work with what could be carried away and created a new heaven or hell, desire being identified with the imagination. Both parties agree on what happened, but not on what it meant.

Blake then declares that the Messiah, Jesus, prayed for the return of desire, since without it there could be no new ideas. The passage in John to which Blake refers is as follows: "And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you forever. Even the Spirit of truth; whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not, neither knoweth him: but you know him; for he dwelleth with you, and shall be in you" (14:16–7). Blake must have interpreted the coming of "another Comforter" as the return of desire into a once-again integrated humanity. Unfortunately, in human history, after Jesus's death he was turned into an object of worship, codified in the religion of the churches; and Milton actually perpetuated this in his poem, where Jesus, like Satan in Job is "a Ratio of the five senses," an accuser and punisher. But Blake concludes, nevertheless, that *Paradise Lost* was a true poem even though Milton's imagination was fettered by the religious culture in which he lived when he wrote the later books. Blake does not say that Satan is the hero of *Paradise Lost.* Northrop Frye correctly declared that for Blake the poem has no hero.* The reason is that in *Paradise Lost* the human consciousness is divided between Satan and the Son, so that both lack a necessary part. What Blake does say is that in the characters and action of the later books the fettering of Milton was the suppression of desire and its perversion in the acts of Satan. Milton, even as a poet of powerful imagination, even perhaps because of that power, could not bring off the later books of the poem as an expression of poetic energy, which had nothing to represent it.

**Northrop Frye,* Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947, 219.*

As for the question of whether, as Blake says, Milton was unaware that he was a member of the party of desire, I think that Blake must be saying that Milton's imagination never really left him, but was gradually suppressed by the story he was compelled to tell, that Milton was unaware of the implications of that story—the division of desire from reason; but he told it anyway.

In Plate 11, Blake's discussion of the "Ancient Poets" and subsequent history is perhaps his most important and far reaching statement about poetry in its largest sense and how the inspiration of the poets became corrupted:

> The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & numerous senses could percieve.
>
> And particularly they studied the genius of each city & country. placing it under its mental deity.
>
> Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood.
>
> Choosing forms of worship from poetic tales.
>
> And at length they pronounced that the Gods had orderd such things.
>
> Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast [E38].

The ancient poets assume here the same role later played in *Jerusalem* by Los, who builds the "stubborn structure of the Language" (2:36; E183). There language is to be a bulwark against muteness and despair. Here naming is fundamental, the source of culture. In its source it is poetic, that is, it is metaphorical and relates the gods not only to nature but also to human culture. The gods emerge from human experience of the world, not the other way around. Language, which is thought, made the gods, and the world was poetically perceived, the product of prophecy, in Blake's sense, which is insight into the infinite hearts of things, not mere prediction of the future.

But then came decline into system in which sensible objects were separated from their interior deities. This involved the degradation of language from its poetic origin, which implied relation, indeed metaphorical identity of all things, to the distancing of the gods into abstract ideas without image, or at best the arbitrary image of allegorical representation.

When this occurred, deity became virtually unknowable without a priesthood of interpreters, whose power came from their claim to mys-

On the ancient poets and the later development of "system" in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell.*

terious wisdom. The result was a pattern of moral law declared to have been delivered from one god, as in the tables of the law given to Moses. Language, no longer grounded in a metaphorically charged vision, became the province of the powerful. This debasement, as we see elsewhere in Blake's work, invaded all of the arts. Thus Blake would return his own art to his "primitive & original ways of Execution" (E724). He would regard Dante as one of Caesar's men and Shakespeare and Milton as "curbd by the general malady" (E95), which gained momentum with the Greeks and Romans and is later exemplified by Pope's "Metaphysical Jargon of Rhyming" (E576) and Dryden's "Niggling & Poco Piu" (E581), to say nothing of the "rattle traps of Mythology" (E580) in Rubens and others.

On His Own Poetry and Its Making

Blake revises the notion of inspiration by the muses, making clear that they do not affect the poet or poem from without but instead from within. He identifies them as the "Daughters of Inspiration" (E95) and the "Daughters of Beulah," whom he petitions in the first line of *Milton* to inspire him. They are opposed to the "Daughters of Memory," who are the false muses presiding over a Hobbesian and Lockean decayed power. This gives rise to the very few mentions Blake makes of his own poems, long or short. The most important, other than those in the prefaces to *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, to be discussed in Chapter 9, occur in his letter from Felpham of April 25, 1803, to Thomas Butts:

> But none can know the Spiritual Acts of my three years Slumber on the banks of the Ocean unless he has seen them in the Spirit or unless he should read My long Poem descriptive of those Acts for I have in these three years composed an immense number of verses on One Grand Theme Similar to Homers Iliad or Miltons Paradise Lost the Persons & Machinery intirely new to the Inhabitants of Earth (some of the Persons Excepted) I have written this Poem from immediate Dictation twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time without Premeditation & even against my Will. the Time it has taken in writing was thus renderd Non Existent. & an immense Poem Exists which seems to be the Labour of a long Life all produced without Labour or Study [E728].

The passage requires some thought. Blake seems to be referring to *Milton*, though it could involve parts of *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*. The daughters of inspiration must have dictated the poem to him: "The authors," he says to Butts in another letter (July 3, 1803), "are in Eternity" (E730).

Arthur Symons reported in 1907, however, that R. L. Smith in his *Nativity of Mr. Blake* claimed that Blake told him the poem was dictated to him by the spirit of John Milton himself.* But the Daughters of Beulah are invoked in the first line of *Milton*, and this corresponds with Blake's mention of his three-year sleep at Felpham. It is in sleep that the daughters inspire, not necessarily a literal sleep, I think, but one in which the mind, free of the constraints of materiality, can bring visionary power to the artist's hand:

> Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song
> Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' your Realms
> Of terror & mild mooney luster, in soft sexual delusions
> Of varied beauty, to delight the wanderer and repose
> His burning thirst & Freezing hunger! Come into my hand
> By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm
> From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry
> The Eternal Great Humanity Divine. planted his Paradise, [1:2; E96]

The daughters reside in the mind. The condition of vision is one of a sort of trance induced by the imaginative power. It is the realm Blake calls Beulah. Linear time is rendered non–existent, and the time remaining is that of the unmeasurable creative moment. This condition of creativity is opposed to the will, which Blake identifies with desire when it has been corrupted by the powers devoted to reason.

In the later letter of July 3, 1803, Blake refers to his poem as completed; it cannot have been the never finished *Four Zoas*. It is a "Sublime Allegory" (E730). This suggests that it is *Milton*, which clearly has an allegory of Blake's relations to Hayley at Felpham, only thinly veiled in Book the First.

A passage in *A Descriptive Catalogue* seems to refer to *Jerusalem*. Blake has been discussing the "British Antiquities," as he calls them, and he asserts,

> All these things are written in Eden. The artist is an inhabitant of that happy country; and if every thing goes on as it has begun, the world of vegetation and generation may expect to be opened again to Heaven, through Eden, as it was in the beginning [543].

Obviously Blake thought highly of what he had accomplished or would accomplish.

For Blake's other remarks about his work, referring mainly to matters

*See S. Foster Damon, A Blake Dictionary, *Providence, RI: Brown University Press, 1965, 276.*

of technique, we must consult the prose prefaces to *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. These are made somewhat problematic because Blake did not include the preface to *Milton* in all of the extant copies and because he deleted some words and most of a sentence from the first preface to *Jerusalem*. In the latter, Blake begins to speak of the "enthusiasm" of his poem, but he cuts the sentence short by obliterating what follows. This, however, does not erase the commitment to enthusiasm, for the erased material indicates that he had meant to address the reader, hoping only that the reader would not think the poem's enthusiasm presumptuous or arrogant (E145).

Blake's important statement about verse technique comes in the same preface. He rejects, as did Milton the "modern bondage of Rhyming" (E145). He deliberately recalls the preface to *Paradise Lost*, where Milton writes,

> This neglect then of Rime so little is to be taken for a defect, though it may seem so to vulgar Readers, that it rather is to be esteem'd an example set, the first in *English* of ancient liberty recover'd to heroic Poem from the troublesome and modern bondage of Riming.*

But Blake goes farther and rejects as well the "monotonous cadence" of blank verse and identifies poetry with oratory:

> … in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts—the mild & gentle, for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for inferior parts: all are necessary to each other [E146].

Blake thought he was completing Milton's project of liberating poetry, which act would by analogy liberate nations:

> Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race! Nations are Destroy'd, or Flourish, in proportion as Their Poetry Painting and Music, are Destroy'd or Flourish! [E146]

The result is an elastic line of varied syllables, designed to return to the oratory of the ancient British bards, who recited their poems; and to provide a symbolic model of freedom.

Blake also identified poetry with song. *Songs of Experience* is spoken by a bard. *Songs of Innocence* are piped by someone the child calls "Piper." *Jerusalem* is said by a character in the poem to be "The Poet's Song" (4:92;

**John Milton,* Complete Poems and Major Prose, *ed. Merritt Y. Hughes, New York: The Odyssey Press, 1957, 210.*

E252). In a number of places in *Jerusalem*, Blake makes clear that Los's acts and statements are those of a poet in the largest sense of the word. The relationship can be seen on Plates 74, 83, and 86, where without Blake's statements about who is speaking it would be impossible to decide whether it is the author or Los. Further, Los expresses Blake's views on art, declaring the importance of outline (86:15; E244) and of particulars (4:91; E251). In addition, Los's expression of his activity and its aims is, of course, the same as Blake's:

> I have innocence to defend and ignorance to instruct:
> I have no time for seeming; and little arts of compliment,
> In morality and virtue: in self–glorying and pride [2:42; E189].

Shakespeare

Blake admired Shakespeare, whose work he illustrated and who clearly influenced his earliest writings.* In his later work, his refusal to use blank verse separates him stylistically from Shakespeare, but Shakespeare remains a source of interest and inspiration to him: "Shakespeare in riper years gave me his hand" (E707).

The most interesting of Blake's mentions of Shakespeare occurs in *Milton*, where some of the sons of Los,

> … surround the Passions with porches of iron & silver
> Creating form & beauty around the dark regions of sorrow,
> Giving to airy nothing a name and a habitation
> With bounds to the infinite putting off the Indefinite
> Into most holy forms of Thought: (such is the power of inspiration)
> [1:27; E 125].

This passage is more problematic than it may first appear in that one might interpret the Shakespearean "airy nothing" (*A Midsummer Night's Dream*, 5:1) as the pure abstraction Blake hated and the "name and a habitation" an allegorization.† This would be a mistake. Bloom, in his commentary in the Erdman edition, correctly remarks, "The work of the Sons of Los … is to save the Human Abstract by making it into a Divine Image, to redeem nature into human particulars." The acts of "strong

**See David Wells,* A Study of William Blake's Letters, *Tübingen: Stoffenberg Verlag, 1987, 65–6; John Holloway,* Blake: The Lyric Poetry, *London: Edward Arnold, 1968, 18–20; Alicia Ostriker,* Vision and Verse in William Blake, *Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965, esp. 32–5.*

†Blake doesn't make an accurate quotation and may not mean to. Theseus says, "…and gives to Aery nothing/ A local habitation and a name." Bloom refers here to two Blake poems: "A Divine Image" (E32) and "The Human Abstract" (E27), both from Songs of Experience.

imagination" Theseus calls "tricks." That is hardly what Blake thinks. But it is of no matter, though Blake did think that Shakespeare was, with Milton and presumably just about everyone else since the time of Chaucer, "curbd by the general malady" of the classics (1:1; E95). In any case, Theseus spoke the words, not Shakespeare.

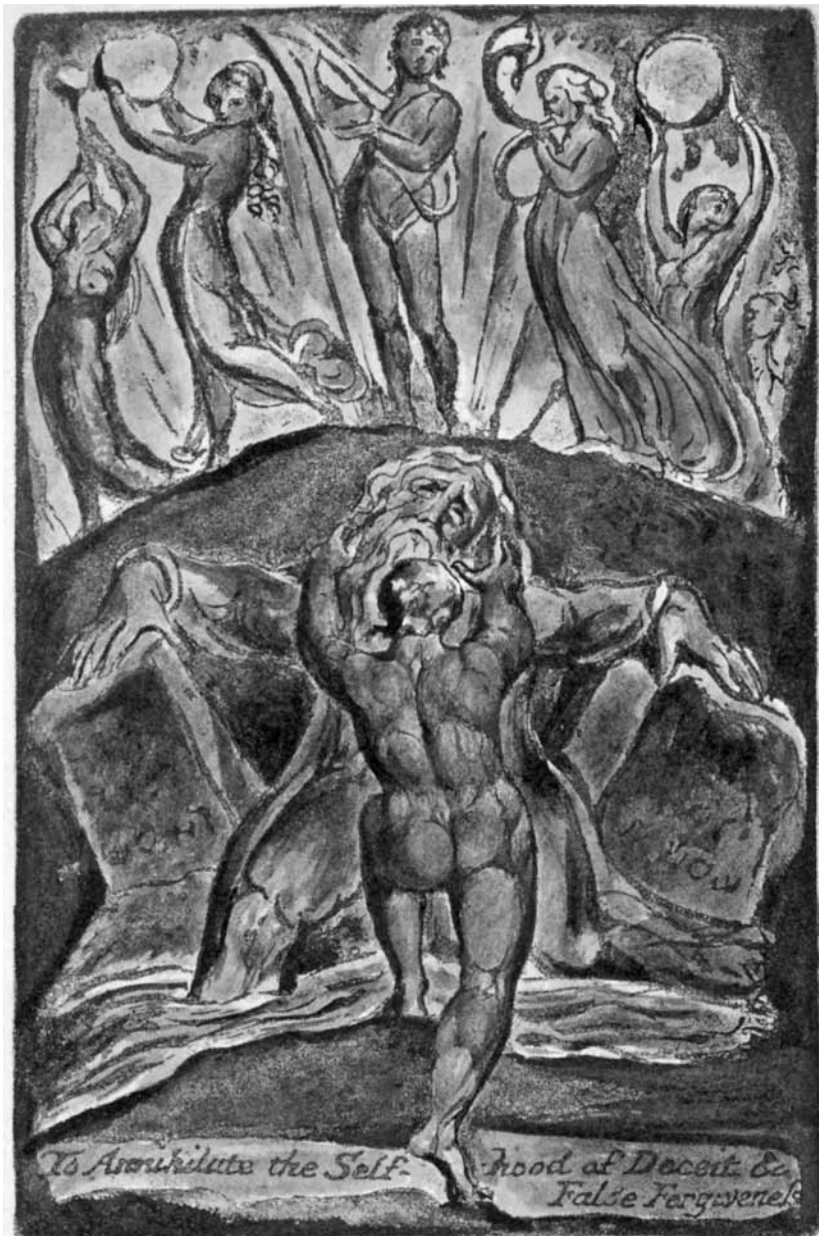
More on Milton

When young, Blake was certainly absorbed by Shakespeare, and this is reflected in the *Poetical Sketches*, *King Edward the Third*, and the prologue for the never written *King Edward the Fourth*. However, it was Milton, among all poets, who most challenged his imagination. Many commentators have written of Blake's attitude toward Milton, some in error. The fullest account is that of Wittreich. He has shown particularly well how Blake was sensitive to the development of Milton's thought from *Paradise Lost* into *Paradise Regained* and the prose tracts. He shows that Blake's criticisms of Milton are limited to those on *Paradise Lost*, which we know Blake nevertheless regarded as a very great poem. This is despite his remark that Milton and Shakespeare were both "curbd by the general malady" (1:1; E95), part of a passage deleted from some copies of *Milton*).

In Blake's poem, the difference between the early and late Milton is expressed in the struggle between Milton and Urizen, the latter of whom is the state of mind that Milton must overcome by humanizing his own Urizenic reasoning. Here is the scene of their confrontation:

> Silent they met, and silent strove among the streams, of Arnon
> Even to Mahanaim, when with cold hand Urizen stoop'd down
> And took up water from the river Jordan: pouring on
> To Miltons brain the icy fluid from his broad cold palm.
> But Milton took the red clay of Succoth, moulding it with care
> Between his palms: and filling up the furrows of many years
> Beginning at the feet of Urizen, and on the bones
> Creating new flesh on the Demon cold, and building him,
> As with new clay a Human form in the Valley of Beth Peor [1:19; E112].

Beth Peor here connects the building of Urizen's body with both the making of Adam from red clay and Jehovah's building of the body of Moses, which Blake mentions in *Jerusalem* as the "Body of Divine Analogy" (2:49; E199), the principle of typological interpretation of the Bible, and specifi-



Milton Sculpting Urizen's body in Blake's *Milton (Book the First)*.

cally Blake's own reading, which would give Moses the spiritual body he lost in abstract law. This is the spiritual body that Urizen once had and lost in materiality. Urizen's act is a parody of baptism; Milton's is creative of a new body. The act, associated with the art of sculpture (*Milton*, 1:19; E112), is a giving of a body to error and thus transforming it into error's annihilation.

Blake's poem is about Milton's redemption from his errors. In it, Blake has Milton repudiate the "detestable Gods of Priam" (1:14; E108), in other words, the classical influence on his flawed *Paradise Lost*. Milton's descent into the world of mortality is an effort to annihilate the false selfhood responsible for his intellectual errors. This is accomplished by entering the spiritual body of William Blake, who has been conveyed by Los to Felpham "that in three years I might write all these Visions" (2:36; E137). Los is, among other things, the maker of wine in Blake's Eden. His wine press is on earth called war (1:27; E124) but its Edenic form is a printing press, a vehicle of intellectual battle, "and here he lays his words in order above the mortal brain" (1:27; E124).

Milton's redemption is complete in the great speech of Plate 41, which gathers together all that must be cast off. Part of it follows here:

> I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration
> To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour
> To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration
> To cast off Bacon, Locke & Newton from Albions covering
> To take off his filthy garments, & clothe him with Imagination
> To cast aside from Poetry, all that is not Inspiration [2:41; E142].

The voice here is not simply Milton's; it is also Blake's, his intellectual heir who completes his work, unfinished in that Milton wandered into error. The speech contains reference to aspersions of madness to Blake and reflects Blake's own complaints about certain fashions in art and poetry: "paltry Blots/Indefinite, or paltry Rhymes; or paltry Harmonies" (2:41; E142).

Milton is restored to posterity as a great prophetic writer, who in redeemed form expresses himself through the power of Los through Blake. At first, Blake did not know it was Milton who had entered his foot (1:21; E115),* but quickly he is inspired. Los appears to him to bind on his sandals: "And I became One Man with him arising in my strength"

**The foot in Blake is at the base of the spiritual body, the area of Los, the imaginative power. It is at the bottom because it is fundamental and everything must be built and stand on it.*

(1:22; E117) to write the poem we read. Milton's redemption is Blake's inspiration. The reverse is also true: Blake's inspiration is Milton's redemption.

On Dante

In Henry Boyd's translation of Dante's *Inferno*, there are two essays, the first titled "A Comparative View of *Inferno*, with some other Poems relative to the Original Principles of Human Nature." When Blake annotated this essay, he was interested in expressing opposition to the moralistic approach Boyd took to poetry. When he says, "the grandest Poetry is Immoral the Grandest characters Wicked" (E634), he is referring to events as well as characters. He draws a distinction between poetry and philosophy and identifies "Cunning & Morality" with philosophy. Because the poet, "Independent" of morality, introduces wicked people and events in his poem, he, too, is erroneously regarded as "wicked": "Poetry is to excuse Vice & shew its reason & necessary purgation" (E634). This allows, in its way, for both tragedy and comedy, and it accounts for poems like *Inferno*, the subject of almost all of which is vice.

The second essay is on Florence in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, and there Blake declares that Dante's poem violates everything Boyd says in his first essay. But Blake also says that Dante was politically "an Emperors a Caesars Man" (E634). So Dante's great poem, like Milton's was flawed, in this case when it expressed a moralistic attitude or political views. Dante "gives too much to Caesar" (E634) in his political life and sometimes in his poem; but he did not fail to present wickedness, though in Blake's view the idea of eternal punishment in a place called Hell was anathema.

Blake worked on his illustrations to Dante's *Commedia* between the autumn of 1824 and his death on August 12, 1827. The drawings number 102 in various states of completion. Seven engravings, not all finished, were made from the drawings. One of the illustrations, number 101, is a diagram of Dante's Hell with considerable writing by Blake on it. Design 7, also diagrammatic, but with several human figures, has also much writing. Both of these are clearly rough preliminary sketches, and the writing is interpretive commentary. Whether the writing was to have appeared in the completed drawings is not known. It would probably not have been placed quite as it is. Blake wrote on other drawings, but usually to identify

figures depicted. Only on Design 3 does one of Blake's brief descriptions refer less to something in Dante's poem than to his own imagined figures.

I take up for discussion Blake's writings on these three drawings:

Design 3: Inscribed "HELL canto 2," the illustration, like several others, does not have much to do with that canto. Blake describes the Urizenic figure at the top of the picture in writing that is now partially obscured: "The Angry God of This World." Erdman (E688) adds "& his [?]Porch in Purgatory." Albert S. Roe points out* that the depiction resembles that of Jehovah in Blake's eleventh illustration to the Book of Job. In both cases, a false god is depicted, a projection of the rationalist mind, which also projects the fallen creation as his.

Design 7: Designated "HELL canto 4," this rough drawing depicts Homer bearing a large sword upright. Roe tentatively identifies the figures in the upper left-hand corner as Virgil and Dante, but he thinks Blake turns them into Enitharmon and the sleeping Albion (57). The other figures, some very lightly drawn, may be, as Roe claims, the "daughters of memory" (59). Homer is identified by name, and he is also identified with Satan, who occupies in Dante the deepest circle of Hell, where Homer stands. We look down on the circles with Homer-Satan at the center of earth. The names of planets are ranged in the firmament above. Homer, for Blake, is a representative of Grecian and Roman classical culture, which Blake blames for starting the decline that glorified war and conquest, eventuating in Deism in Blake's time:

> Every thing in Dantes Comedia shews That for Tyrannical Purposes he has made This World the Foundation of All & the Goddess Nature & not the Holy Ghost as Poor Churchill said Nature thou art my Goddess† [E689]

Ironically, this, with Satan at the vortex in the center, is the "Foundation of All," and Blake has put Homer in Satan's place. The goddess who presides over all of this is the "Nature" of the Deists, and Blake thinks that a philosophy that creates this world also creates a false notion of memory, which makes "general knowledge" by combining pieces of sense data into greater and greater abstractions. For Blake, this cultural decline is the result of deliberate acts of the powerful to subdue and control religions and debase imagination.

**Albert S. Roe,* Blake's Illustrations to the Divine Comedy, *Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1953, 51.*

†*Keynes transcribed "Shakespeare" instead of "Churchill." Roe realized that this was wrong, but he could not decipher the word. Erdman supplies "Churchill," Charles Churchill (1731–64), English poet.*

"The angry god of this world" as Blake describes him in this illustration for Canto 2 of Dante's *Inferno*.

Inscribed "Hell Canto 4," a drawing for Design 7 in the Dante illustrations. Homer bears a sword.

Dante's poem should be read as a delineation of monstrous error, in which Dante the man is complicit. In that world,

> Round Purgatory is Paradise & round Paradise is Vacuum or Limbo. so that Homer is the Center of All I mean the Poetry of the Heathan Stolen & Perverted from the Bible not by Chance but by design by the Kings of Persia and their Generals The Greek Heroes & lastly by The Romans
>
> Swedenborg does the same in saying that in this World is the Ultimate of Heaven
>
> This is the most damnable Falshood of Satan & his Antichrist [E689]

The Bible is the great encyclopedic poem, the visions of which, were assimilated metaphorically into the classical works but perverted in the process. Where Blake draws the view that he attributes to Swedenborg is not clear to me, unless he means that Swedenborg's heaven is too much like earth.

Design 101: This is a very sketchy diagram of Hell's circles that Blake may have drawn more for clarification to himself than as a sketch for a drawing. It includes a large amount of writing. Satan, here called Lucifer, is at the top with the circles of Hell below him.

In the *Commedia*, when Virgil and Dante reach Satan and the nadir

of Hell, they find Satan's huge body to be shaggy like an animal's. He has three faces, and the mouths chew on the shades of Judas, Brutus, and Cassius. Virgil and Dante crawl down the side of the hairy body, emerging finally from Hell into a tunnel that will lead them to the mount of Purgatory.

Blake notes of his diagram, "This is Upside Down When viewd from Hells Gate" (E690). Erdman notes that "which ought to be at top" has been added by somebody other than Blake (E891), but it is an accurate statement if it is meant to describe the vision of Hell before descent into the circles. One would be looking down. Blake goes on to say, "But right When Viewed from Purgatory after they have passed the Center" (E690). This is correct. Past Satan, one looks down and observes Satan upside down, which is symbolic of his error. However, Blake draws Satan (Lucifer) with head up, whereas in the diagram he should be upside down. Blake's further remark is, "In Equivocal Worlds Up & Down are Equivocal," meaning, I presume, that they are subject to two or more interpretations depending on the perspective. In Dante's poem, the matter is clear enough. As Roe remarks, "Dante and Virgil have to turn upside down to right themselves" (199); but, of course, they are really turning themselves right side up. Blake has erred rendering Satan right side up. His head should be pointing toward the abyss of what is now a nether sky.

Blake's mistake is all the more surprising because Blake used the idea of an upside down man Albion in his long poems, not only symbolizing Albion's fall into error but also including the confusion into which the Zoas who constitute him fall.*

In the lower left-hand corner of the design, Blake writes,

> It seems as if Dantes supreme Good was something Superior to the Father Or Jesus for if he gives his rain to the Evil & the Good & his Sun to the Just & the Unjust He could never have Builded Dantes Hell nor the Hell of the Bible neither in the way our Parsons explain it it must have been originally Formed by the Devil Him self & So I understand it to have been [E690]

His remark garbles Matthew 5:45: "for he maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust." In the Sermon on the Mount, from which this passage comes, Jesus is urging the love of enemies. Blake's commitment to forgiveness as the ground of Jesus's gospel leads him to cite this passage as an expression of God's

**See my* William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems, *Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963, 39, for a schematic diagram of the upright and fallen Albion and the location of his Zoas.*

equal treatment of the good, the evil, the just, and the unjust. These things were for Blake inventions of fallen culture. The true God could not have created a Hell of eternal punishment or the Hell of the Bible as preachers interpret it. The maker of *this* world, the angry god of Design 3, or Satan himself, is a state of mind.

Blake's statement in the lower right-hand corner is a summary one:

> Whatever Book is for Vengeance for Sin & whatever Book is Against the Forgiveneness of Sins is not of the Father but of Satan the Accuser & Father of Hell [E690].

The statement stands at the base of Blake's beliefs in his late years. Nothing was more fundamental to his view of Jesus's gospel.

I think it possible to say that Blake's poetic commitment to what Vico called poetic logic and to the literality of metaphor committed him also to forgiveness. Both express identity and relation among all things even as all thing have their own uniqueness.

Blake regarded Dante as a great poet but something of a political idiot. In his notes on the first essay of Boyd's translation of *Inferno*, Blake responds to Boyd's moralistic treatment of *Iliad* by complaining, "nobody considers these things when they read Homer or Shakespear or Dante" (E633). Where Boyd writes, "When a man, where no interest is concerned, no provocation given, lays a whole nation in blood merely for his glory; we, to whom his glory is indifferent, cannot enter into his resentment," Blake responds, "false All poetry gives the lie to this" (E633). In his view, we read Dante *as readers of poetry* without reference to morality; we read him with reference to his imaginative power, exercising our own. Blake's illustrations of Dante are efforts to interpret the true poetry present there, not the flawed theology and morality.

9

From the Prose to *Jerusalem*

This chapter has a threefold aim: first, to show how the principles, attitudes, and desires Blake expresses in his critical prose are present, often explicitly stated, in *Jerusalem*, and always implicit; second, to offer a reading that takes these matters into account and shows them operating as principles of what I call the text's anti–system; and third, to provide an introduction to this difficult and complex work. I mention here by way of summary some of those principles that have appeared in the previous chapters.

Blake claimed in *A Descriptive Catalogue* that the British antiquities, that is, a British mythology, were in his hands. He wanted to write in *Jerusalem* a British epic, or rather an anti–epic, because the classical epics were, virtually by definition, paeans to war, conquest, and domination. Those British luminaries who preceded him, Shakespeare and Milton, he thought were "curbd" (E95) by the epic tradition that emerged from classical writers. He did not include Spenser with them, but he must have thought that Spenser's mythic treatment of Arthur and Elizabeth (in the guise of the Faerie Queene) had also been "curbd." In any case, Blake thought that war and conquest had eventually brought down previous empires. Blake saw his task to be a truly patriotic poet, which meant being antithetical to the whole project of conquest.

He needed to invent a new way of etching and writing that would be free of the fettering of rhyme and of blank verse, for "Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race" (E146). This required, among other things, a turn to the inspiration of the earliest poets, sculptors, and painters Blake

imagined as prior to the ancient Greeks, not just to ancient techniques but to the literality of what had come in poetry to be mere decoration: tropes of identity, mainly metaphor and synecdoche. Blake practiced a poetic logic based on the literality of those tropes, and he was deeply suspicious of the claim to reality of abstractions and the assignment of images to them, creating a false particularity, in a word allegory in its negative sense.

In his work, he would hold together conception and execution, insist on clarity of outline, even in the smallest of things; and he would carry into his work a notion of the identity of the poetic and visual arts. All of these ideas are either explicit or implicitly expressed in his major works of composite art along with related notions of contraries, prolifics, devourers, centers, and circumferences. We see them referred to in what follows.

Preliminaries

In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake proclaimed revival of the "Eternal Hell" (E34), which meant the return of the archangel embodying imaginative energy from his banishment and designation as evil by a thence divided deity. With this event Blake proclaimed a "new heaven." This was neither a prediction nor a prophecy. The event had taken place thirty-three years before in 1757, the year of William Blake's birth, and was to be secured in his prophetic writings, of which the *Marriage* was the first. The ground of this new heaven, which was really to be a revolution in the human mind, was the principle of contrariety:

> Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.
>
> From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason Evil is the active springing from Energy.
>
> Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell [E34].

The revolution is first spoken forth by the Devil, with additional commentary by Blake. It is, it turns out, really a counter-revolution, a *return* to the vision of the earliest prophetic poets. About 14 years later, in the prose preface to *Milton*, Blake declared that there is a "New Age," in which eventually the great works of inspiration, written prior to the corrupted works of the Greeks and Romans, will be restored to their deserved place. Some of these works are presumably lost, but the Bible, written by "Inspired Men" remains as "original" vision:

> The Stolen and Perverted Writings of Homer & Ovid: of Plato & Cicero. which all Men ought to contemn: are set up by artifice against the Sublime of the Bible. But when the New Age is at leisure to Pronounce; all will be set right: & those Grand Works of the more ancient & consciously & professedly Inspired Men, will hold their proper rank, & the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration [1:1; E95].

But we know that Blake thought the Bible had been misinterpreted time and time again to the material advantage of those who held either religious or political power or both. What Blake called the "churches" were products of this corruption.

When the "New Age" gets around to it, there will be a return to the rule of inspiration, which is a synonym for imagination. At the same time, there will be a decline of the rule of memory, which Blake here most probably identifies with so-called historical knowledge, corrupted and written by the victors in war and conquest. Memory, of course, was reduced by Hobbes to a process of decay and by Locke to the growth of the power of abstract ideas. The infection invaded the work of even the greatest artists. Blake's prophetic aim in *Milton* was to arouse the young and the artists to engage in spiritual warfare, of which corporeal war is the fallen, corrupt version:

> Rouze up O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court, & the University: who would if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War. Painters! On you I call! Sculptors! Architects! Suffer not the fash[i]onable Fools to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works or the expensive advertizing boasts that they make of such works; believe Christ & his Apostles that there is a Class of Men whose whole delight is in Destroying. We do not want either Greek or Roman Models if we are but just & true to our own Imaginations… [1:1; E95].

The preface to *Milton* ends with the poem that became well-known in England as an anthem of the labor movement. It asks rhetorically whether Jesus actually walked in England. Behind the question is the idea we see in *A Descriptive Catalogue* that everything began in England, and implicit in the poem is the notion that the true history of every place is a microcosm of the world's. The vision of a truly heroic past is available to imaginations everywhere:

> And did those feet in ancient time,
> Walk upon Englands mountains green:
> And was the holy Lamb of God,
> On Englands pleasant pastures seen!

And did the Countenance Divine,
Shine forth upon our clouded hills?
And was Jerusalem builded here,
Among these dark Satanic Mills?

Bring me my Bow of burning gold:
Bring me my Arrows of desire:
Bring me my Spear: O clouds unfold!
Bring me my Chariot of fire!

The poem not only introduces *Milton* but also as it ends it predicts the writing of *Jerusalem*, the great prophetic anti–epic of the New Age:

I will not cease from Mental Fight,
Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand:
Till we have built Jerusalem,
In Englands green & pleasant Land [1:1; E95–6].

Jerusalem will find its inspiration in Biblical literature. Vigorous commitment to the ideas Blake expressed in his prose writings contributed to the originality, power, and complexity of his poem.

From *The Four Zoas* to *Jerusalem*

I begin with remarks about a poem that in one sense failed and in another did not. *The Four Zoas* was a failure in the sense that Blake left it unfinished and parts of it in a chaotic state. Embedded in it would seem to be a history, though a history we have much trouble recovering, of Blake's struggle to write a new kind of poem. But in another sense it did not fail. Even during the composition of *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, Blake seems never to have abandoned *The Four Zoas*, though he mined it for passages in those works. It became a source of sorts for the two finished works, and in some ways it is indispensable as a prelude to them.

It appears that the effort to establish a central narrative line in the early versions of *The Four Zoas*, then titled *Vala*, stood in the way of the inventive developments that *Jerusalem* displays.* Within *Vala*'s bounds, Blake couldn't completely free himself to do something quite different with the shape of his text, namely to develop a contrary to conventional narrative. Nevertheless, almost everyone who has studied these poems

See H. M. Margoliouth's attempt to restore an early version of Vala *in* William Blake's Vala: Blake's Numbered Text, *Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1956.*

agrees that a grasp of *Jerusalem* comes with less difficulty if one is familiar with *The Four Zoas* as it was left to us. We thus have an unusual situation, in which a major poem is dependent in some sense on one that was never completed and existed only in manuscript form for nearly a century before being published.*

On the other hand, this dependence may not have been apparent to Blake. Or he may have deliberately ignored it as irrelevant to his aims. Even *The Four Zoas* makes numerous gestures implying that the reader comes to it belatedly. The reader gains the impression that there is some prior poem to have known about or at least some set of stories with which the poet has worked, perhaps a congeries of stories like those collected in the Bible. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake declares the existence of "The Bible of Hell: which the world shall have whether they will or no" (E44).

There is, of course, a group of such stories—Blake's shorter early works, which he no doubt thought of, along with the longer ones, as a microcosm of the whole body of visionary literature. We shall see that *Jerusalem* adds to this a reading of the mythological history of ancient Britain. Blake's collection could seem to be based on some prior ur-myth, but that myth never existed as such. Neither *Milton* nor *Jerusalem* present as their central thread a conventional narrative with beginning, middle, and end, and no archetypal mythic narrative is easily lifted from Blake's body of work. Nor can we gaze *through* either poem for a Platonic idea as a generating principle that it would allegorically present. If one tries to discover the ur-myth or the idea, or create a generalization, one replays the pathetic behavior of Urizen in Night Six of *The Four Zoas*. There he wanders through a world that is a projection of his own abstracting intellect, seeking unsuccessfully to discover its center or principle of order, from which he can dominate it. He is a naïve Archimedes:

> For when he came to where a Vortex ceasd to operate
> Nor down nor up remaind then if he turnd & lookd back
> From whence he came twas upward all. & if he turnd and viewd
> The unpassed void upward was still his mighty wandring [6:72; E349]

Though he does not know it, he is precisely at the nadir of Hell, the ulti-

**The manuscript, though known to William and Dante Rossetti, was found by Edwin J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats in the possession of William and John Linnell, Jr., sons of the painter John Linnell, who had helped to support Blake in his late years and after Blake's death his wife. Ellis and Yeats subsequently published an inaccurate version of the poem in their* Works of William Blake: Poetic, Symbolic, and Critical*, three volumes, London: Bernard Quaritch, 1893.*

mate center of materiality described by Dante in *Inferno* at the point where Dante and Virgil leave Hell and begin to climb toward the mount of Purgatory. At this point in his travels, Urizen declares he will

> … fix my foot & here rebuild
> Here Mountains of Brass promise much riches in their dreadful bosoms
>
> So he began to dig form[ing] of gold silver & iron
> And brass vast instruments to measure out the immense & fix
> The whole into another world better suited to obey
> His will where none should dare oppose his will himself being King
> Of All & futurity be bound in his vast chain
>
> And the Sciences were fixd & the Vortexes began to operate
> On all the sons of men & every human soul terrified [6:73; E350]

Urizen's decision to stop at his chosen place to stand is based on his hope for riches and power. In reality he has no adequate place to stand, and there is no such place. In Blake, there is no monomyth, no hero with a thousand faces,* if there ever has been one, nor even a perennial philosophy submitted to allegorization.

Even in its unfinished state, *The Four Zoas* manages to tell us this. If, for example, we seek for what really happened back there as a cause of the Fall, we discover we are being passed from one story to another, some of which are told twice removed. There is no way to determine whose account should be privileged, not even the story that emanates from Beulah, which would seem to have more authority. It is not possible to resolve the conflicting versions ourselves or to pick out the common elements and produce authority. Did Urizen give the horses of light to Luvah? Did Luvah seize them? Did he refuse to do Urizen's will? Was Urizen drunk or sober when whatever happened happened? Even in *The Four Zoas* the stories threaten to proliferate rather than circle around a central abstracted monomyth, which at best is a drawing of only common elements from the available sources, the very sort of generalization Blake mistrusted. Rather, in Blake what we have is an infinite chain of relations in which things are individual but are metaphorically identical to other things.

Much of what I have described in *The Four Zoas* involves the nostalgic lamentations of Zoas and Emanations for a better time before what seems to have been a Fall, but is better described as a disintegration of a

**Over centuries there have been efforts to abstract from the worlds of mythologies a monomyth, one of the more recent being the very popular Joseph Campbell's* The Hero with a Thousand Faces, *New York: The Bollingen Foundation, 1956.*

world held metaphorically together. That *The Four Zoas* plunges us *in medias res* is not here a sign of the traditional epic method. It signals insistence on inclusion of a perspective in which only the present exists and in which what went before is imaginatively projected from what is here and now. Thus each character tells a story that emanates backward from the present. There *is* a disintegration, but in the strictest sense there *wasn't* one. This creates a variety of searching conjectures by the characters, who think there *was* a was or at least *is* a was, and are disoriented by its elusiveness. But even visionary statements such as Los's account in Night Eight (107–8; E380–1), which introduces a whole new cast of characters, is *his* vision, told from where *he* stands, which is not the usual sort of where. In *Jerusalem*, the constructions of a Fall in the form of externalized myths told by characters are largely absent, replaced by remembrances of an unfallen condition, which one begins to see is potentially present, to the side, or alienated from inside to outside. This is part of a more concentrated emphasis on a continuous present and the minimal implication of an external past. It is an important part of Blake's rigorous refusal to allow the dominance of linear, measurable time and thus of a conventional narrative line that would represent it. But, true to the principle of contrariety that I shall soon discuss, Blake introduces the opposite in, for example, the ballad included in the preface to Chapter 2, "To the Jews" (2:27; E171–3), where the story of a Fall that is alleged to have occurred near Paddington is recounted. I shall return briefly to this interesting poem when I discuss the prefaces. Here it reminds us that Blake seems to have worked by a process of accretion, not only of characters but also of techniques.

Perhaps more important than the stories as such, the confusions they engender, and the growing obscurity of *Jerusalem* as the stories recede from us (and with them the hope of establishing an objectivized historical beginning) are these accretions of technique. The problems of reading from *The Four Zoas* through to *Jerusalem* are not just those of rethinking the characters (though this is to some extent necessary), recognizing the independence of narrative versions from some single source, and relinquishing the hope of a system that will determine interpretation. They also include observing an accretion of mimetic and narrative devices that require our awareness of someone in the text creating and envisioning the very poem of which that person is a part, even as his action is the containing mimetic structure. I contrast mimesis to narration here in the old Platonic way. Mimesis is drama in which characters speak without nar-

rative mediation. (Mimesis does *not* here mean copying.) Narrative is the told story. *Jerusalem* converts the teller into an active character in a dramatic scene of poetic visionary creation. It is a scene of a particularly Blakean sort, which means, as we know by now, that there is no distinction to be made between the visionary experience and the technical act of externalization, a view Blake insists on in his prose writings. This action, or mimesis, is the circumference of all that is in turn contained in the form of narrative or the various utterances by characters in the narrative.

It turns out that this is also, after all, the case with *The Four Zoas*, though there is only one explicit indication in the poem that someone is writing it. This occurs in Night 5 (63; E343), where what I shall provisionally call the author says, "I write not here but all their after life was lamentation," implying his dramatic presence in composing his poem and also, incidentally, implying still another story potential in the telling of this one and his decision to withhold, or perhaps never to create it. In addition to this, near the end of *The Four Zoas* there are two implicit indications, where the narrator asks questions of a rhetorical nature (9:118; E387 and 9:139; E407), the answers being implied by the poem's conclusion. I shall return to how this dramatic mimesis of visionary creation is continuous and far more obvious in *Jerusalem*. Here I shall consider for a moment the dramatic circumference or what some would call the metapoetic level of Blake's poem. If we are to call it metapoetic, however, we should recognize that *this* metapoesis is mimetic and circumferential and not just an abstract or allegorical commentary within the poem on the poem's nature. This action insistently identifies what Benedetto Croce separated with the terms "intuition-expression" and "externalization."* Everything at the lower levels at or within the circumference of the mimesis is actually being envisioned by the narrator even as he writes and etches. What the narrator sees is also what he makes, the poem's making ends with its last line and plate, and the poet is both inside and surrounding his poem at the same time. Some qualification, however, will have to be made to this when we consider that the circumference of narration has a certain ambiguity about it, generated late in the text by an internal character's apparent acknowledgment that she knows she is in a poem, thus transgressing the boundary between the author's mimetic action and

**Benedetto Croce,* Aesthetic: As Science of Expression and General Linguistic *(1909), tr. Douglas Ainslie, New York: Macmillan, 1922.*

the event he envisions and creates. The poem thus expresses Blake's resistance to the fettering or curbing that he mentions in the preface to *Jerusalem* (1:3; E146).

Four Blakean Principles

Before proceeding with the matter of the figure of the poet in and around his poem, I intend to set forth some Blakean principles that can be said to govern the way in which *Jerusalem* is constructed and some of which we have seen expressed in his prose writings.

First, the concept of contraries. Blake seems to have developed it in two phases, the first represented by the remarks made in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* and the second implicit in the later longer works. In *The Marriage*, Blake emphasizes the need to provide oppositions to tyrannizing abstractions like "soul" and "good," both of which he regarded as manipulated in any age to the advantage of the dominating religious and secular authorities. Thus Blake sides with the opposite words "body" and "evil," which he makes to represent imaginative energy. Later, however, he seems to enlarge his concept of contrariety and considers the oppositions soul/body, good/evil, and object/subject to be negations, that is, words standing for situations in which one side dominates at the other's expense and would annihilate the other if it could. True contraries would be the production of oppositions to those opposites. This kind of contrary would not seek tyrannical victory and domination of its "cloven" opposite, but would exist in a state of intellectual warfare or dialectical conversation with it, thereby opposing the domination of either side, even its own side. In *Milton*, Milton declares to Ololon,

> There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
> The Negation must be destroyd to redeem the Contraries
> The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man [2:40; E142]

The whole idea of, for example, good/evil has to be annihilated as a Spectre so that it can become part of a new contrariety, which would be, in the terms of *The Marriage* good/evil//energy. In *Jerusalem*, Los says,

> Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist:
> But Negations Exist Not [1:17; E162]

The declaration is that negations are fictions. Fictions can have use and the act of making certain of them may be necessary. The danger is belief

in them as the only reality. Scientific fictions can have use, whether metaphysically "true" or not.* But fictions should not become objects of obeisance and belief, to which moral codes and the like become attached.

The effect of the notion of contrariety on *Jerusalem* is profound and manifold. It can be briefly described as the necessary production of opposites without the victory of one over the other or any resulting dominating synthesis. The poem seems to be a scene of the opposition of a narrative principle to a didactic one, a visual art to a verbal art, writing to speech (or at least a representation of speech), and in terms of movement the continual appearance of new perspectives and new figures antithetical to the drift toward system.

This last aspect leads to the second principle, which is expressed in the opposed words "prolific" and "devouring." In *The Marriage*, prolific/devouring is a true and necessary contrary, the former representing, among other things, the imaginatively creative and the latter the analytically divisive:

> … one portion of being, is the Prolific. the other, the Devouring: to the devourer it seems as if the producer was in his chains, but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and fancies that the whole.
>
> But the Prolific would cease to be Prolific unless the Devourer as a sea recieved the excess of his delights [E40]

The devourer is the abstract reasoner, drawing from experience generalizations that include only what is common to a number of perceptions. The devourer can be said to eat up language in the way that Shelley describes in his *Defense of Poetry* (1821, pub. 1840), in which the poet is clearly a Blakean prolific. The poet's language is

> vitally metaphorical; that is, it marks the before unapprehended relations of things and perpetuates their apprehension, until the words which represent them become, through time, signs for portions or classes of thoughts instead of pictures of integral thoughts; and then if no new poets should arise to create afresh the associations which have been thus disorganized, language will be dead to all the noble purposes of human intercourse.†

The contrariety of prolific and devourer is expressed in *Jerusalem* in several ways, as in the opposition of Urthona (Los) to Urizen in their unfallen states, and in the presence of both mythical and didactic elements.

**On fictions of this sort, see my* The Offense of Poetry, *Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2007, 129–40.*

†*Percy Bysshe Shelley, "A Defense of Poetry,"* Critical Theory Since Plato, *third edition, eds. Hazard Adams and Leroy Searle, Thomson Wadsworth, 2005, 539.*

The third principle is that illustrated frequently in Blake by the figure of center and circumference, contraction and expansion. A center represents a shrinking of imaginative containment of one's experience to a situation in which experience is entirely outside oneself in the form of an epistemological object. This situation generates the concept of a passive perceiving subject and the negation called object/subject, in which the object dominates in the form of an alien, imprisoning (even though infinite, indeed because infinite) external nature over a passive recipient. A circumferential position signifies the imaginative containment of one's experience and opposes the negation just described, breaking down the alienation of self and other. All of this is connected with the principal Blakean trope of synecdoche. In this manifestation of it, the part or center can become the whole or circumference if one is able to expand it, that is, see into it. The Blakean narrator, on this principle, both surrounds and inhabits the poem at the same time. The ultimate center is at the vortex of the earth, Satan in Dante's *Commedia.*

Fourth, there is the notion of language as originally and fundamentally poetic, constantly producing new possibilities (prolific), which are then taken up and used (devoured) by the culture. The challenge here is to maintain prolific power in opposition to the culture's drive to use up linguistic formulations, eventually stultifying intuitions into abstractions that lead to fixities of law and cessation of intellectual movement. This is why Blake resists allegory in its negative sense of images for abstract ideas, which tends to reduce particulars to a single abstract meaning or law of the text, thus shutting off the prolific in the work. *Jerusalem*'s tendency toward continuous production, the introduction of something new that unsettles what one may have thought was the law of the text, expresses Blake's commitment to the notion of poetic renewal. Thus what is obscure in his work would seem to be deliberate, as his remark to Dr. Trusler about rousing the faculties to act (E702) indicates.

An important vehicle of renewal is the trope or figure, and Blake is as faithful to the trope as any poet who ever lived. John Crowe Ransom once wrote of poems that had the "courage of their metaphors."* Blake's always do. By this, I mean that Blake took his tropes literally. The devouring view of metaphor is one based on the negation difference/indifference with the former usually privileged. That negation tends to presume that a metaphor declares indifference even as everyone knows that the poet

**John Crowe Ransom, "Poetry: A Note in Ontology,"* Critical Theory Since Plato, *962.*

acknowledges difference as the reality. Thus, in this view, a metaphor is either a decoration or a comparison with respect to a few common, abstracted characteristics or part of an untrue fiction or *phantastic* imitation.

For Blake, a metaphor (also a synecdoche or a metonymy) is a contrary to this negation, that is, it claims neither the absolute indifference insisted on in the idea of mystical unification nor the difference insisted on by hard-headed realism. Rather, it claims identity in the sense offered by Northrop Frye:

> The metaphor, in its radical form, is a statement of identification: the hero is a lion; this is that; A is B. When the hero is metaphorically a lion he remains a hero and the lion remains a lion. Hence a world where everything is identical with everything else is not a world of monotonous uniformity, as a world where everything was *like* everything else would be. In the imaginative world everything is one in essence.*

The metaphor includes both difference and indifference. This is not so in nature, which, for Blake, would be the product of a theory of difference. But in a world of ethical concerns it is so.

The Blake of the Poem

In *Jerusalem*, in addition to and surrounding the dream and activity of Albion, those who observe him, and those who are outside him, there is, as I have indicated, a circumferential mimesis, the activity of the envisioner-creator of the whole scene or process. For Blake, the notion of linear time that we are all inside on a chronological line, has its contrary in the imaginative act. Under inspiration, that kind of time is opposed and momentarily disappears; and time, if measured at all, is measured by work and accomplishment. In 1803, Blake wrote to Thomas Butts the following about *Milton*: "…the Time it has taken in writing was … renderd Non Existent. & an immense Poem Exists" (E729).

I shall continue to call the envisioner-creator Blake, a creature of the poem, not of external historical or biographical projection. He is thus similar in his fictive nature to the Jesus of the Bible, whom Blake strips of his historical being as irrelevant. *Jerusalem* is a process of envisioning and etching (including writing), to be regarded, as I have indicated, as

*Northrop Frye, "Notes for a Commentary on Milton," The Divine Vision, Studies in the Poetry and Art of William Blake, ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto, London: Gollancz, 1957, 107.

one action. Blake describes his vision in Plate 2 of *Milton* as coming "into my hand/ … descending down the Nerves of my right arm/ From out the Portals of my Brain" (E96).

In each of the four prefatory sections of *Jerusalem*, Blake refers explicitly to himself. In "To the Public" (3; E145), he acknowledges that the characters of his poem belong to him. After we have read a certain distance into the work, we recognize that since he is himself a microcosm of Albion, the Zoas are his creation in more than one sense. They constitute and are constituted by him as they constitute and are constituted by Albion. The preface, it is implied, is written after composition of the rest of the work, for Blake describes there the technique that he claims to have employed. In "To the Jews," the second preface, Blake refers to himself only in the balladic poem, where toward its close he conflates himself with Albion, addressing Albion's Spectre as his own. Elsewhere in "To the Jews" (2:27; E171–4) his presence is signaled by the manner of his address to his chosen audience. In 'To the Deists" (3:52; E200–2) and "To the Christians" (4:77; E231–3), references to himself occur both in the prose sections, which are not narrational but highly rhetorical, didactic, argumentative, persuasive texts, and in the included verses. The prose references are in the present tense, and a specific audience to be instructed is assumed.

More complicated are the references to himself that occur in the mimetic-narrative body of *Jerusalem*. Here Blake makes his presence known in a number of ways. At the outset, he describes himself as in a visionary state receiving at the very moment dictation from the Saviour. We must remember that the Saviour is his own imagination. The description in *Milton* of imaginative power descending from the mind to his hand still holds. Blake writes in "To the Public" of being dictated to (by his imagination), but he also implies his own deliberate production of a certain verse technique. We know that he rejected any form-content distinction: "I have heard many People say Give me the Ideas. It is no matter what Words you put them into & other say Give me the Design it is no matter for the Execution. These People know Enough of Artifice but Nothing of Art" (E576).

In Plate 5 (E147), he continues his account of his present activities and invokes the Saviour's inspiration for the great task ahead. The invocation works, for immediately he has a vision of the sons of Albion, but it is strenuous and finally overwhelming: he weeps as he acts, and what he sees moves him to a question (5; E148). He questions what he sees

again on Plate 12 (E155). He addresses Lambeth (E155) and encourages the builders of Golgonooza (E156), which he proceeds to describe in a paradoxical detail (12–3; E156) that prevents us from objectifying it in map. At Plate 15 (E159), he refers to his own "awful vision" and goes on to declare that he can see "the Past, Present & Future, existing all at once/Before me" (1:15; E159). The passage typically brings in the contrary to linear, measurable time and expresses Blake's painterly emphasis on literal vision. He again asks for aid from, this time, the "Divine Vision," quite clearly an imaginative faculty, thus Jesus himself. There appear immediately a vision of the "Schools and Universities of Europe" and, in rapid succession, "wheels without wheels," Los at work in London, his four sons, Reuben, and Abraham, at which point Blake seems to realize that the visions are coming too rapidly and that he has rushed ahead of himself. He must pay attention to the making of the events: "but first Albion must sleep" (1:15; E159); and at once he turns his attention to Albion on his rock.

Thus, through Chapter 1 we see an extended invocation to the Divine Vision, muse of the poem, sometimes called by Blake the Daughters of Imagination or Inspiration, not merely uttered formally at the beginning and dispensed with but given a sort of continuousness as if it were the constant presence of the imaginative act. We also see an emphasis on Blake's envisioning things *now* as he reports them, and finally we see Blake reminding himself of his responsibility for his poem. This last moment lends force to the implication that the poem is to be made by contrary forms, the didactic and the mimetic-narrative. Neither must dominate.

We are not far into Chapter 2 before Blake again speaks of his own present activities. This is a particularly interesting moment. He declares that he "beholds London" (2:34; E180), and London speaks in the present. But when the speech concludes, he announces that London *spoke*, suggesting that from the present moment of announcement the speech, now completed, is in the past, though of course while it was going on it was in the present. It will be again when again we read it. Further, he says that he *heard* the speech in Lambeth, that he subsequently "heard and saw" visions of Albion in Felpham, and that now he writes in South Moulton Street, indicating that in this poem's fiction he has moved his residence twice since London spoke and that the eternal present of vision occurs everywhere. Reference to a present-tense speech when completed as in the past tense occurs more than once in *Jerusalem*.

In Chapter 3, specific indications of Blake's continuous acting are present in the forms already mentioned: oratorical assertions in the preface (3:52; E200–1), indications of his presence as a listener (3:61; E212) and viewer (3:74; E230), and invocation of the Holy Spirit, which immediately provides personal vision (3:74; E229). This last passage describes Blake's activity as follows: "I walk up and down in Six Thousand Years: their/Events are present before me." We recall that he has already described past, present, and future as "all at once/Before me" (1:15; E159) as if he encompassed them. Here the situation is given in its typical contrariety. Blake enters time, but time is also a space. I say "a space" because Blake thinks of Newtonian space as abstract. For Blake, every vision of space is immediate as *a* space, and he is able to go where he chooses in it and see all of it. Further, in his doing this it is both outside and inside him.

It is best here to remind ourselves of a few things about the two kinds of time in *Jerusalem*. In Blake's work generally they are contraries. One alone would be a dangerous negation of the other. On the one hand, there is the time that everything including us is inside, a spatialized, abstract, time, defined by measurement into units, a linear extension from past to future or creation to apocalypse that everything is moving along, locatable somewhere on it at any moment. On the other hand, there is a contrary time that is in the characters and emanates forth as acts, unmeasurable and eternal in the sense that their ethical implications, part of their ultimate reality, do not go away. In this latter time, there is no past in the sense of an abstract alien distance measured in hours, days, and years. The past is constantly being created as that by human imaginations in the present moment. Even in the former case, the past is not externally *back there*. Rather, backthereness is a category of an historical projection going on in the present, always going on. It is a fiction, a making.* The double notion of time explains much about *Jerusalem*'s care to keep reminding the reader of the present of writing-telling-envisioning-etching even as the curious play of tense structures constructs an imagined past. Blake's presence in the text is made apparent not only by rhetorical questions that must be attributed to him but also by statements made to Albion himself and to listeners-readers, who in England are part of Albion (3:72; E227). In conflating Albion with the poem's audience, Blake identifies

**This accounts for Blake's desire that historians not reason on acts but tell a story: "Reasons and opinions concerning acts, are not history. Acts themselves alone are history" (E544).*

himself, its maker, with the Divine Vision. In Chapter 2, both Albion and readers are addressed: "O search & see; turn your eyes inward: Open O thou World/Of Love & Harmony in man: expand thy ever lovely Gates" (2:39; E187). Blake's use of "inward" and "outward" must be taken as describing the fallen condition. His use is an example of how vision must struggle with the "stubborn structure of the Language" (2:37; E183), since no proper word exists consistent with Blake's opposition to the whole idea of outwardness and inwardness, terms suggesting object and subject. Blake's solution is the notion of expansion inwards, that is, eventual containment of all (object and subject in epistemological terms), in a universal circumference. Blake narrates action he sees in the present, action he envisions as past, and action indicated as present but when completed referred to as in the past. He also offers at certain moments statements that describe a condition that is a perpetual present.

Perspectives and Circumferences

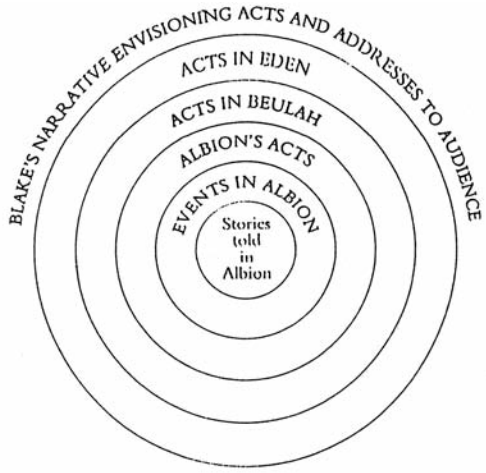
Blake's narrative acts represent various perspectives. There are also various perspectives in the world that Albion inhabits and that inhabits Albion. These can be described, when they are regarded as fallen, in the imagery of outsideness and insideness: "From every-one of the Four Regions of Human Majesty,/There is an Outside spread Without, & an Outside spread Within" (1:18; E162). The meeting of these two results in "An orbed Void of doubt." This cryptic passage is a rejection not only of the object-subject division but also of what follows, the objectification of subjectivity, making it an "outside." The result is a void of abstraction, Locke's primary and secondary qualities of perception.

Another perspective is the perpetual present described by the narrator as permanently the case. This includes the unfallen state of things: the description of Golgonooza (1:12–3; E156–7), which is sometimes a process but here an encyclopedia of the imagination built in the world of Generation; the "bright Sculptures of Los's Halls" (1:16; E161); and the "Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find" (2:37; E183), a figure, among other things, of liberated sexuality and the Blakean sublime. For Blake, the smallest as well as the largest things can be sublime. There are also visions of the fallen condition, always outsides "spread without": the Ulro of caves, rocks, and the Lake of Udan Adan (1:13; E157); negations that the Sons of Albion perpetuate (1:10; E152–3); the selfhood that is

the true Satan (2:29; E175), not to be confused with Blake's earlier devils of energy; and the terrible sisters of Tirzah (1:5; E148).

There are also the events that occur or occurred in those upper or, rather, circumferential mental states called Eden and Beulah. What characteristically *is* in these states is described as *above*, but there is also what *happened* when characters in Eden or Beulah look into the fallen body of Albion. What *happened* there is an eternal present and past into which the text moves when those in Eden must act to affect events in the fallen world. These acts are identical to the appearances of Jesus as Luvah in the fallen world; that is, they are of both states at the same time and place—both past and present, both here and there.

Thus we have a complex temporality (if that is what it can be called) that includes the Eternals of Eden acting in both past and present simultaneously, the inhabitants of Beulah acting in both past and present, Albion acting in both past and present, the events that go on and went on in Albion, the Divine Vision or Saviour acting in Eden and both inside and outside the present and past of Albion. All of this is surrounded by Blake's present visionary activity, which is also inside his inspiration, which is actively received and projected from within himself. Thus he is both within and without at the same time. Indeed, this whole paragraph is fallen in the sense that inside and outside are fictions we seem forced to employ. The complexity is also a spatial one. Just as we cannot make a simple location of events in a continuum from past to future, we cannot make a simple series of concentric circles like the one below. We of necessity begin with it, but we must eventually abandon it:



There are several reasons why a simple set of discrete concentric circles, workable for most narrations, is not adequate here, only valuable heuristically for a while before its contrary must be brought in. Blake's narration introduces inside and outside in order to oppose it. In contrast to the situation of *The Four Zoas*, where Albion has little give and take with the Zoas, in *Jerusalem* Los is quite aware of Albion as another character, and Vala appears to Albion as the alienated form of Jerusalem. Finally, as the poem comes to an end, Enitharmon appears to know that she is in a poem and declares that it is about to end (4:92; E252). The anti–system turns our neat concentric circles inside out, for she, at this moment, is at the circumference of narration. Los's shout in Chapter 1 of *Jerusalem*, "I must Create a System, or be enslav'd by another Mans" (1:10; 153) has to be read either as referring to an anti–system or as an error he finally overcomes when he realizes that refusal to "Reason & Compare" (E153) is to construct something antithetical to, contrary to system. The poem eludes any final interpretive commentary of the sort one of its characters, Urizen, would try to make of the world he is inside.*

Enitharmon's act shows us that the chart of concentric circles can turn inside out even as it remains outside out. Anti-system needs system within its vision so that there is something to oppose. Otherwise it can have no meaning. It is for this reason that we can identify anti–system with Blake's tropes of identity, while system would rationalize all tropes into either difference or indifference.

Contrary Structures

In *Jerusalem*, everything seems to happen at once, though there is also a linear structure. By comparison to *The Four Zoas*, *Jerusalem*, however, is less committed to a linear notion of story while at the same time it is more committed to a linear argument. In *The Four Zoas*, there is still the tempting notion of an ur-story, if we could find it, but the characters don't find it. Rather, without realizing it, they make stories, each of which reflects either a fallen or unfallen mental state. *Jerusalem* goes farther.

**Many years ago, my teacher E. E. Bostetter, having just read Northrop Frye's* Fearful Symmetry, *laughingly said to me, "He is Urizen!" The truth is that all literary interpretation is inevitably Urizenic and should ironically recognize its situation as part of a history of error that nevertheless has a certain cultural necessity. R. P. Blackmur said once that criticism was an unfortunate necessity.*

The stories of the Fall are nearly gone, and in their place there seem to be four different actions, represented by four different chapters, directed to four different audiences, all four actions being versions of each other. At the same time, the whole poem is directed to all of the audiences.

Blake does not abandon, however, the idea of a beginning and an end, though both are far more spare than in *The Four Zoas*. Indeed, the beginning of the poem proper is but two lines long:

> Of the Sleep of Ulro! And of the passage through
> Eternal Death! and of the Awakening to Eternal Life [1:4; E146]

We are then thrust into the activity of the poem's Blake:

> This theme calls to me in sleep night after night, & ev'ry morn
> Awakes me at sun-rise, then I see the Saviour over me
> Spreading his beams of love, & dictating the words of this mild song.

Inside Blake's narration, we are thrust into an action that seems already to have begun. The ending is abrupt and describes a continuing unfallen action, though it is so full of tension that the threat of repetition looms over it.

The four chapters are not only stories told, or rather contain stories told and stories within stories; they are also orations addressed to the four audiences. This is particularly important because Blake identifies poet and orator in the first preface (3; E146) and no doubt identifies bards with orators. Each chapter has a preface indicating the oration's principal theme. Thus one senses that Blake sees a valuable contrariety between didactic utterance and mythic narrative, an opposition possibly describable as system that might end in law and story that eludes law. The chapters are in a chronological order, but they are also independent and parallel. They are chronological in that Chapter 1 begins with Albion falling away from the Saviour and Chapter 4 ends with the Zoas integrated with him and he integrated with the Saviour; and the chapters, read consecutively, roughly parallel human history. This parallel, however, is more suggestive than systematic. Finally, they are independent in that each presents its own action and emphasizes a particular theme, as in the chart below:

Chapter	*Audience*	*Begins With*	*Ends With*	*Theme*
1	Public	Falling	Call to Lamb from Beulah	Alienation
2	Jews	Albion as Judge	Call to Lamb from Beulah	Patriarchal Law

Chapter	*Audience*	*Begins With*	*Ends With*	*Theme*
3	Deists	Los building Golgonooza	Revelation of Rahab	War
4	Christians	Crowning of Vala as Rehab	Apocalyptic Conversation	Female Worship

But the four narratives are like a chain of identities in that the four themes become metaphors for each other and each figures by synecdoche in all the others, as in the following table, which indicates the form in which each theme inhabits the others:

Chapter	*Theme*	*alienation*	*patriarchal law*	*war*	*female worship*
1	alienation		accuser and accused	ego and enemy	male and female
2	patriarchal law	accuser and accused		conquest	religion of chastity
3	war	ego and enemy	conquest		sexual repression
4	female worship	male and female	religion of chastity	sexual repression	

So there is one progression that is the whole poem, and four identical (in the sense in which I have been using the term) narratives. Each of these is an emanation of a prefatory oration on one of the four subjects, directed to one of the four audiences, and containing the three other subjects, all of which are related to each other in a circle of causality.

In *The Four Zoas*, all of the main characters remember a story of the Fall. The stories remain somewhat alienated from each other because of the selfhoods of the characters. In an unfallen state they would form a metaphorical chain of identities. Toward the end of Night Eight, we are given a redeemed Los's vision of history. It is not the only possible vision, but potentially a part of a chain of identities. In *Jerusalem*, the perspectivism is one of synecdoche rather than metaphor gone wrong in search of an ur-myth. Each part strives to be by synecdoche the whole, and in the unfallen perspectives of Eden and the narrator's capacious vision the parts *are* the whole even as they are themselves. This is one reason that there seems to be so much thematic repetition: The theme of each chapter grows within it the themes and events of the others.

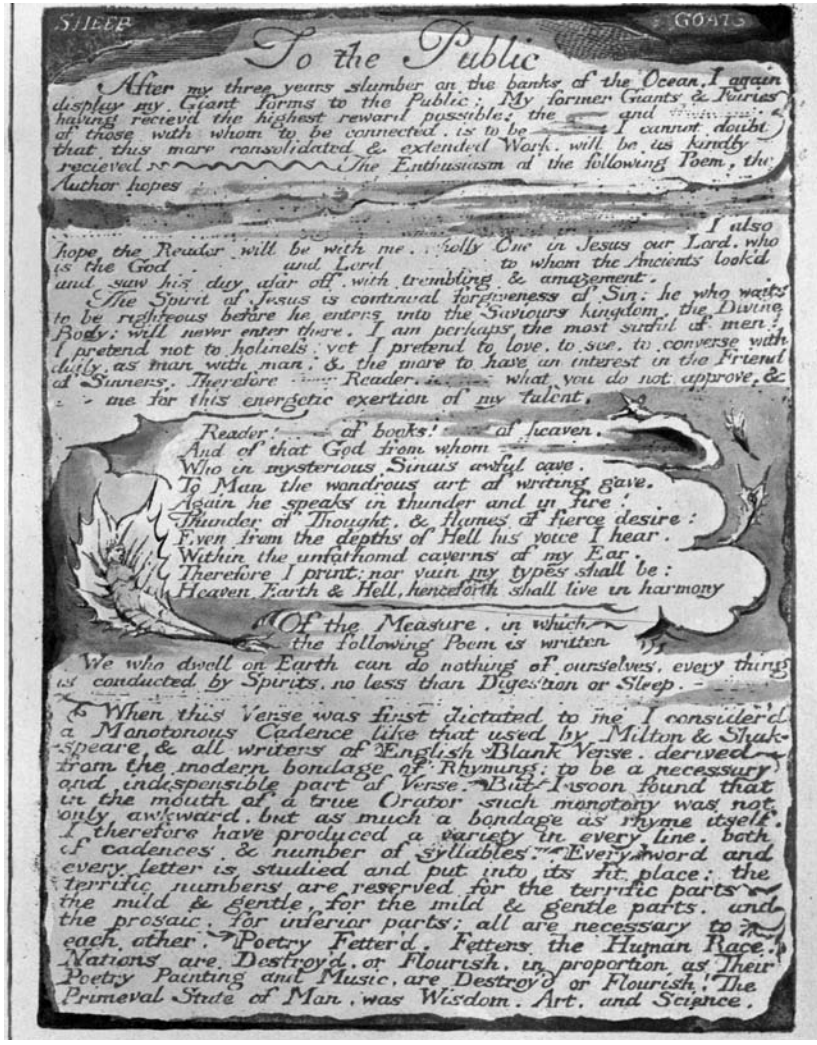
Four Prefaces

I come now to the prose parts of *Jerusalem*. Each chapter's preface emphasizes, sometimes obliquely, one of the four themes, all relevant to

Blake's notion of the prophetic nature of his arts. The first preface "To the Public" (3; E145–6) serves double duty as an introduction to the whole as well as to the part. It brings before the public a poem described as having "enthusiasm" and operating according to a verse technique that goes beyond John Milton's blank verse. The first preface declares the fettering of poetry identical to the fettering of human beings. Why is this? Because poetry is the ultimate verbal expression of the imagination, which is fundamental to human life. Blake's poetic enthusiasm, for which he asks the reader's forgiveness, is like that of the religious enthusiasts in that it presumes an expansion of spirit from within rather than a revelation from without. The theme of alienation is introduced by opposition when Blake refers quite abruptly to the notion of forgiveness of sins, mutual forgiveness being the means to overcome the alienation represented by spectre and emanation in the poem. The reader is asked to "[forgive] what you do not approve" and "[love]" the author "for this energetic exertion of my talent" (3, E145). This would be different, it is implied, from the earlier reception of his writings, described ironically and with a certain wit as follows:

> After my three years slumber on the banks of the Ocean, I again display my Giant forms to the Public: My former Giants & fairies having reciev'd the highest reward possible: the [love] and [friendship] of those with whom to be connected, is to be [blessed]: I cannot doubt that this more consolidated & extended Work, will be as kindly received [3; E145].

The words in brackets in the quotations above were erased from the plate and recovered by photographic process. Of these deletions we might have asked ourselves, had we not known the words, what those deleted words were, and who deleted them. The Blake of the poem? Some other person at a greater circumference who censors the text? We would have had an urge to see the blanks filled, and we might have thought that we had been challenged to do so. The public turned away from Blake much as Albion turns away from the Saviour in the narrative of Chapter 1. As the Saviour calls to Albion, Blake calls to his readers, trying to make them understand his inspiration and the technique of presentation. But sadly, the erasures suggest that Blake had in the past been sorely disappointed, as we know he was. The three-years' slumber is, of course, Blake's time at Felpham. His letters to Thomas Butts from Felpham express ambivalence about that stay. It was both a slumber of Beulah, in which visionary poetry was written, and a period of indecision and resentment, principally against William Hayley's attempt to turn Blake's artistic direction.



A page plate of the preface to *Jerusalem* showing erasures made by Blake on the plate.

Blake eliminated also the bracketed material below:

The Enthusiasm of the following Poem, the Author hopes [no reader will think presumptuousness or arroganc[e] when he is reminded that the Ancients acknowledge their love to their Deities, to the full as Enthusiastically as I have who Acknowledge mine for my Saviour and Lord, for they were wholly absorb'd in their Gods] [3; E145].

I suspect that the deletions immediately above reflect Blake's growing intellectual distrust of the ancient Greeks and Romans and their gods, who, he came to think, were corruptions of early religious visions that expressed a Christianity preceding Jesus.

Blake's emphasis on Jesus's message to forgive so-called sin plays a major role here. It includes Blake's idea that righteousness alone will not be qualification for entrance into "the Saviour's kingdom." He adds, "I am perhaps the most sinful of men!" (3; E45). The point is that sin itself is a word manipulated by power, and pretense to holiness reveals selfhood.

In the poem that forms part of the preface, again critical words are erased. The lines are corrupted by this, but it is clear that there is a declaration that writing is a power given by God to man. God speaks through bards, and that voice issues forth not just from heaven but "even from the depths of Hell" (3; E145), denying the negation that identifies Hell with evil.

In the last long paragraph of the preface, Blake speaks against both rhyme and blank verse and importantly identifies his poetry with oratory:

> When this Verse was first dictated to me I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakespeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming; to be a necessary and indispensible part of Verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables* [145–6].

The second preface, "To the Jews" (2:127; E171–4) introduces two stories, the first derived from the fantastic speculations of some eighteenth-century comparative mythologists that declared Britain the primitive seat of all religion (above, Chapter 1, pp. 36-7). The second story is that in the Fall of Albion there occurred a diaspora symbolized by the alienation and banishment eastward of his emanation Jerusalem. In this story, the great patriarchal figures of the Bible are remembrances of the even earlier Druids of England before their decline:

Your Ancestors derived their origin from Abraham, Heber, Shem, and Noah,

**On Blake's versification, see Alicia Ostriker,* Vision and Verse in William Blake, *Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1965, esp. 55–78, 120–44. On formal matters in Jerusalem, see Morton D. Paley,* The Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem, *Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, esp. 33–56, 294–314.*

> who were Druids: as the Druid Temples (which are the Patriarchal Pillars & Oak Groves) over the whole Earth witness to this day [2:27; E171].

Jewish Kabbalistic tradition preserves the myth of Albion in the figure of Adam Kadmon, who also contained everything in his own body: "You have a tradition that Man anciently containd in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven & Earth: this you recieved from the Druids" (2:27; E171). The error embodied in Jerusalem's alienation is the humility derived from obeisance to the law of an externalized patriarchal god who demands human sacrifice. The Jews alienated all animals from Albion through animal sacrifice. This led to other alienations and sacrifices, including the eventual sacrifice of male desire and the creation of a "feminine tabernacle" in the "loins of Abraham and David" (E174), or the original grounds for what eventually became virgin worship among the Christians. The parallel among the Deists is nature worship, that is, the projection outside and deification of virtually everything external to man—in short, nature. The result is sexual repression and war. Thus the themes of all four chapters are included in Chapter 2. The preface can be summarized by two quotations Blake makes from his own work: "All things Begin & End in Albions Ancient Druid Rocky Shore" (2:27; E171), declaring the history of Albion and England a microcosm of all history; and, "But now the Starry Heavens are fled from the mighty limbs of Albion." Thus it is not Jerusalem alone who has fled. The whole world has fled into, become nature.

A third story in the preface is expressed in a ballad that includes Blake's major synecdoche. He locates his personal vision of the Fall near Paddington, presumably at Tyburn (now Marble Arch), where executions took place. This, it is declared, is the place where Satan won his first victory, disrupting an idyllic world known personally to Blake. In that world, Jerusalem lived and flourished. But while Albion slept, his Spectre was torn from his loins, and Jerusalem fell down the Thames across Europe. Blake conflates himself with Albion by synecdoche and declares his-Albion's desire to unite with his Spectre, recognizing the alien Spectre as his selfhood or ravening ego. The source of this alienation is patriarchal law.

The Deists are addressed in the preface to Chapter 3 (52; E200–2). They represent the ultimate degradation of religion into nature worship, and they are thus identified with the Druids in their decline. This nature is the abstracted nature of Locke and natural philosophy, and a chain is

established which is spread through the poem: natural religion, natural morality, natural philosophy, the laws of Babylon, Rahab, the vegetated Spectre, experimental theory, Satan, selfish virtues of the natural heart (*laissez-faire)*, pharisaical religion, war, destruction, empire, hypocrisy, Deism. The villains here are Voltaire, Rousseau, Gibbon, and Hume. Spiritual, intellectual warfare is opposed to natural warfare. A ballad dramatizing all of this in miniature, so to speak, describes a medieval monk crucified for condemning war and ends with an implied criticism of conquest and empire.

In the prose part of the preface, Blake contrasts Deism with true religion. Deism, to his mind, "declares that Man is Righteous in his Vegetated Spectre" (3:52; E200). Blake traces this error from late Druidism, the original form of which he believed preceded the ancient Greeks, to Greek philosophy and thence to Deism itself. It is a tradition of error that culminates in identification of man with his materiality, which is an abstraction from his true spiritual body into what is really no more than a vapor or a nothing. Blake seems to reach back to Swedenborg for the following: "Man is born a Spectre or Satan & is altogether an Evil & requires a New Selfhood continually and must be continually changed into his direct Contrary" (3:52; E200). The passage deviates semantically from Blake's characteristic usages, and it seems to describe a harsher world and far worse human nature. Evil is introduced here as fundamental to man, as in Swedenborg, though since *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* Blake has considered evil a product of human error. Still, one could read this as simply a statement that the world everyone is born into is the creation of a cultural error so dominant that it surrounds even the new-born babe. Thus the child must eventually be reborn into the real world. This event Blake surprisingly describes as a "New Selfhood," departing from his use of "selfhood" elsewhere always to mean the mind contracted to a selfish center.

The use of "contrary" here is also difficult, but, I think, explainable. Man's new being would have to be one opposed to the cultural negations into which he has been born. These (good/evil, etc.) must be opposed. Still, the language is harsher and reflects if not a more pessimistic at least a more embattled sense of the "nature" from which man must free himself.

Blake also turns around the word "religious" from his usual ironic meaning that designated it as tied to the churches, their intolerance, and false belief. Here he means the "Spiritually Religious," not those who

practice natural religion. Again Blake emphasizes forgiveness, and he criticizes both Voltaire and Rousseau, even though they came to despise each other, for hypocrisy:

> You cannot escape my charge that you are Pharisees & Hypocrites, for you are constantly talking of the Virtues of the Human Heart, and particularly of your own, that you may accuse others & especially the Religious, whose errors, you by this display of pretended Virtue, chiefly design to expose [3:52; E201].

The poem already mentioned, two stanzas of which also appear in "The Grey Monk," in the so-called "Pickering Manuscript" (E489–90), provides the conclusion to the preface:

> For a tear is an Intellectual thing;
> And a Sigh is the Sword of an Angel King
> And the bitter groan of a Martyrs woe
> Is an Arrow from the Almighties Bow! [3:52; E202]

Blake rejects the distinction between feeling and thought. A major error of modern philosophy is this negation: that feeling is irrational and thought rational. The arrow is one of intellectual warfare.

Blake appeals to the Christians of the fourth preface to return to the true primitive Christianity based on forgiveness of sins and the life of intellect rather than the life of the natural man. The former involves the building up of Jerusalem, exercise of the "Divine Arts of Imagination" (4:77; E231), and pursuit of "Art and Science" in their largest senses of productive metal activities (4:77; E232). The poem following the didactic oration is a recounting of an Ezekiel-like vision that describes in microcosm the Fall and shrinking of man to a center, the sun and moon rolling out from him into abstract space. This Fall is identified with the history of religion's misinterpretation of Jesus, resulting in "Natural Religion" (4:77; E232). Implicit is identification of the natural body as an error of perception (fallen vision) complicit with a religion of chastity, in which the natural body is projected forth and named evil.

The preface ends with a second poem that appears to be the completion of the ballad of Chapter 2. It is a call from Jerusalem to England (Albion) to awaken and receive the Lamb of God, that is, to restore the condition described in the early stanzas of that ballad.

The preface had begun with the well-known lines,

> I give you the end of a golden string,
> Only wind it into a ball:

> It will lead you in at Heavens gate,
> Built in Jerusalems wall [77; E231].

Blake plays on the story of Theseus and Ariadne's thread: In his vision, the reader he addresses is already inside the labyrinth of nature and is given a string to guide one's escape. The figure of the ball is not meant to negate linearity any more than Blake's shifting of plates in copies D and E of *Jerusalem*'s second chapter is. It is meant to destabilize interpretation, which inevitably drifts toward allegory. I am quite aware of the drift of my own reading, which I acknowledge as inevitably linear and ultimately to be discarded by the reader after it has done what it can.

Narrative Contrariety

The narrative parts of *Jerusalem* stand formally contrary to the prefaces, though the prefaces contain stories in the poems that belong to them. The narrative parts in the body of the text contain moments of didactic utterance by Blake and by Los. Although the four principally narrative chapters appear in the order they do for chronological reasons, there is a contrary pressure to consider each chapter not only thematically but also temporally analogous. Early in both chapters 1 and 2 Albion turns his back on the Saviour. At the beginning of Chapter 3, Los weeps over the body of Albion. At the beginning of Chapter 4, we find him walking around the body. The Daughters of Beulah speak at the ends of chapters 1 and 2. There is a sense then that each chapter presents an identical action directed toward a different audience (except, of course, that the whole poem is directed to everybody), just as the prefaces have presented separate didactic exhortations that have implied each other. One can go further and note that *Jerusalem* insists on identity of acts. It isn't just that one event occurs and then the next event, or that one event occurs because of another. There is a figural (poetic) logic rather than a causal one, all acts identified in the double sense in which identity is offered in the poem's conclusion:

> All Human Form identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone. all
> Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied [4:99; E258]

All things named, all things identical.

In *Jerusalem*, there are references to an unfallen condition on the one hand and a narrative of events in the fallen world on the other. These are

seen both as in a temporal relation to each other and as two contrasted mental conditions always potentially present. In the narrative, these two states are continually at odds, beginning in Chapter 1 with the struggles between Los and his Spectre, the contrast of Golgonooza with the land external to it, and the effort of Los to contain the Holy Land in England in opposition to the tendency toward infinite disintegration. In Chapter 2, there are the struggles of Los with Reuben and the efforts of the twenty-four cathedral cities and the four Zoas to bring Albion back from nonentity. This is one of the most amusing passages in *Jerusalem*, an excellent example of Blakean exuberance, reminding us that despite its darkness the poem is a divine comedy. The twenty-eight in effect try to give Albion a gentle bum's rush:

> … Pale they stood around the House of Death:
> In the midst of temptations & despair: among the rooted Oaks:
> Among reared Rocks of Albions Sons, at length they rose
> With one accord in love sublime, & as on Cherubs wings
> They Albion surround with kindest violence to bear him back
> Against his will thro Los's Gate to Eden: Four-fold; loud!
> Their Wings waving over the bottomless Immense: to bear
> Their awful charge back to his native home: but Albion, dark,
> Repugnant; rolld his Wheels backward into Non-Entity [2:38–9; E186]

It is no matter that this is a spectacular failure. In the end, all of Albion will again be organized.

In Chapter 3, we observe Los's building of Golgonooza and Urizen's building of the temple, and the contrasted sets of weavers. Throughout there is the struggle between the effort to give form and the tendency to disintegration into vagueness or mystery. Many critics have remarked that in both *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem* things have to get worse before they can get better and that in *Jerusalem* the getting better is quite sudden. This is because the struggle is actually to give shape to error, so that the display and naming of Rahab, for example, though certainly a nadir on one sense, is a triumph of visionary shaping in another, in which a horrible vagueness suddenly becomes revelation by turning outside in. Actually, both inside and outside as subject and object respectively, are eliminated.

Process of Accretion

Jerusalem is an expression of both a didactic and a mimetic-narrative process and also a creative process. This process, going on at the level of

Blake's activity of composing, seems to operate on the principle of continuous accretion and invention. It has its parallel, or rather synecdoche, inside it in the activities of Los. In *The Four Zoas*, there was continuous invention of new characters. The presumption we conveniently make about characters is that they were somehow fictively existent before they came on the stage of the poem, and it is fair to say this provisionally (with certain qualifications) about the Zoas in both *The Four Zoas* and *Jerusalem*. But at the level of the poet's activity we experience a process of invention, including a stream of new names. In *Jerusalem*, this process is explicit, as we have seen, in Blake's presence in the poem, making it. A new twist is included from time to time, requiring us to rethink something we thought we had successfully fixed. At 2:49:47 (E199), we are unsettled by the introduction of "Shiloh the Masculine Emanation" when we had thought all emanations feminine. Indeed, already in *The Four Zoas* (9:117; E387) we had discovered that Enitharmon has a Spectre of her own (masculine or feminine?) who is not the Spectre of Urthona (Los). Late in *Jerusalem*, England is named Brittannia (Blake's spelling, 4:95; E255), and she is Albion's wife, when we had thought Jerusalem played that role. Jerusalem in the fallen state is his daughter, or rather daughters, which is the reason she is sometimes referred to as "they," that is, she is scattered abroad. When Reuben appears, he is declared the natural man (generated from Luvah), and he promptly divides into Hand, his Spectre, and Merlin, his imagination. But by this time Hand has already been mentioned as one of the terrible sons of Albion, and Reuben has been named a tribe of Israel. He is further identified with Carmarthenshire in Wales, Norfolk, Sussex, and Essex in England, and Kincard, Haddntn, and Farfar in Scotland. A whole world about which we knew nothing is developing by accretion as we read and Blake sees (creates).

Both temporal and spatial superimpositions are involved. Israel's tribes are located, when unfallen, in the British Isles as above. Characters from British mythological history act in the present of vision. Los can see his seventh furnace (we thought there was but one) from the Tower of London (4:82; E240) and causes a blast from one of the furnaces to emanate from or toward "fishy Billingsgate" (the fish market, moved in 1982, after centuries) (82:59; E240). Perspective shifts from one circumference to another, and, as I have indicated, the principle of discrete circumferences is violated by Enitharmon's statement about the poem. Our faculties must continue to act, not in order to fit these new elements into a plan but continually to revise a plan we have wanted to construct in

order to give us a place to stand. We are being forced to reject the attitude of Urizen, who, like a critic with a fixed idea would choose a place to stand based arbitrarily on perceived self-interest.

Still another dimension of accretion is that of perspectives. New characters, of course, can create new perspectives, and these are complicated enough in *The Four Zoas*. There we had to be ready to consider that any character's appearance may be as he or she appears to himself or herself or to someone else. In *Jerusalem*, there is the addition of Blake's present position, more use of Albion's awareness of his Zoas, and theirs of Albion. There are also comments in the text that concern its way of treating time, space, and memory: the "grain of sand" passage, the moment of time passage, introduction of the Gate of Los, the idea of events either collected in or emerging from "the Bright Sculptures of Los's Halls," the contraction and expansion of spatial relations, the spatial paradoxes in the description of Golgonooza, where inside and outside trade places and the directions of the compass are also places with insides containing other directions and places.

Finally, there is our own situation *vis à vis* the text. We seem to have come too late to *Jerusalem*, as if it had already been going on. I have observed that Blake does not seem to have thought *The Four Zoas* necessary to the intelligibility of *Jerusalem*. In *The Four Zoas*, the Zoas are somewhat more systematically presented. *Jerusalem* presumes its world and focuses more on Los; if we are unfamiliar with *The Four Zoas*, we must construct the relations of the Zoas and Emanations from far less information. *Jerusalem* demands more of us in part because it is a dramatization of Blake producing and working his materials. Only at the conclusion, with the Zoas at their proper activities and in conversation, do we discover what we would have liked to know at the outset about Albion's interior. And at that time, we also come to suspect that all of the events of the poem could happen again, for we are shown that they are potential in what Blake regards as the permanent state he calls Satan. They *can* happen again and perhaps have already happened more than once, at least in microcosm. Perhaps they are always happening. The apocalyptic state is one of possibility and activity; it is one of intellectual tension:

> And they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright
> Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions
> In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect
> Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine
> Of Human Imagination [98:28–32; E 257–8].

It appears from this remarkable passage that the conversation is verbal, of course, but also artistic as in painting or sculpture. Further, this composite conversation joins together what has been separated: memory and intellect. Time, along with memory, is now redeemed, having been debased by the definition given it by associationist psychology. The rejoining creates "exemplars"—models, examples, archetypes. They are makings in the specific sense of fictions.

I now hope the reader will forgive me for taking the liberty of speculating fancifully about the Zoas' conversation: Urizen is talking about his journey through the fictive Cartesian world where he met Orc. Tharmas is describing his attack of schizophrenia and his wanderings on the ocean. Luvah offers a grisly account of his cyclical fate at the hands of Albion's terrible daughters. He could also recount the cyclical event of sacrifice and rebirth as his wild ride with the sun from rise to set and back again. Urthona's contribution is a visual form, perhaps the sculpture of a triple-formed female riding an enormous dragon. No matter what the subjects, the exemplars will be "according to fitness and order," which is the antithetical order of true art.

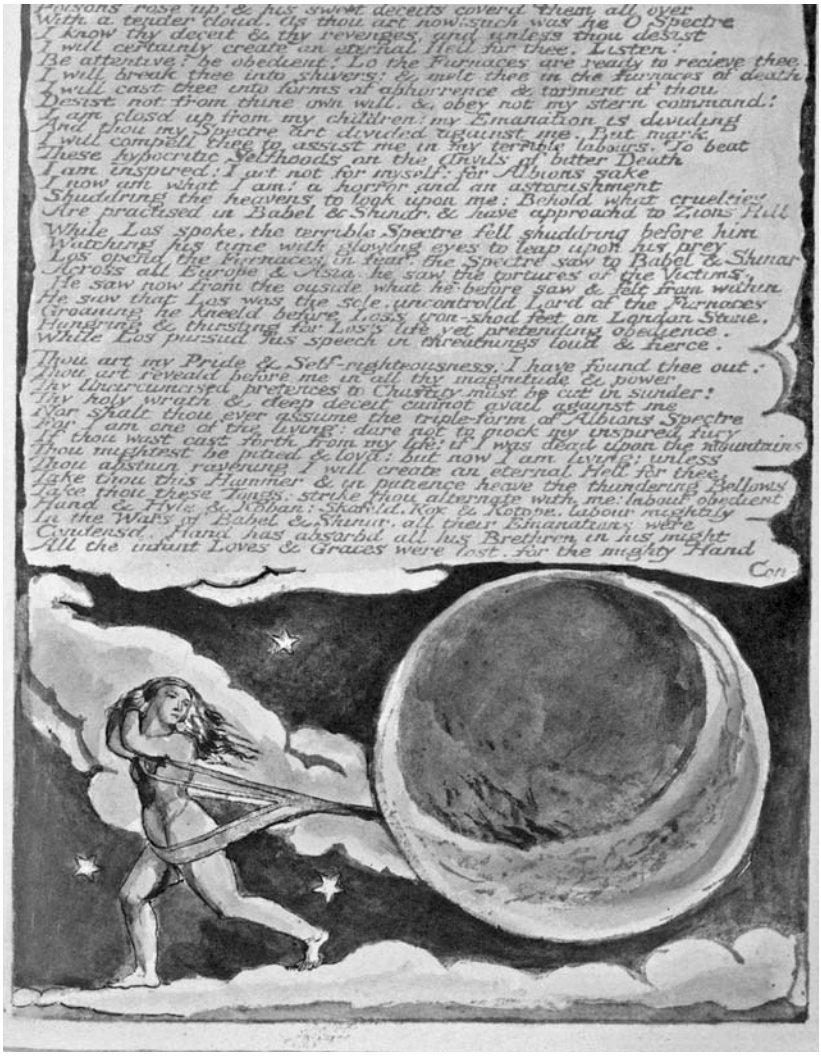
Composite Contrariety

Although my subject in this book has been Blake's words, we must remember that *Jerusalem* is a composite work of words and designs requiring us to put these opposing forms into relation. But the appearance of every design is an occasion for determining anew the nature of the relation. Plate 6 seems more like a conventional illustration than most. There is Los at his forge. But the Spectre hovers above him; it is not standing over him and panting like a wolf as the text tells us. Rather, it is an enormous bat. The illustration extends a metaphorical chain. Plate 8, with its naked woman harnessed to a new moon has no apparent relation to the text. Instead, it seems to offer another dimension of the world of Generation, where woman is enslaved to the phases of the moon and the menstrual cycle. Frequently designs illustrate or metaphorically extend words located on distant plates, indicating to us that what seems spatial distance is also one imaginative plane to be rolled into a ball. Furthermore, if we take the description of Golgonooza as an example, we can see that the text is contrary to any notion of *ut pictura poesis* that the presence of illustrations might have suggested. Blake seems to be asserting that his lan-

Los with his spectre in the shape of a bat looming above him, *Jerusalem*, plate 6.

guage can, if it wishes, go beyond that classical formulation to confound the possibility of a picture produced simply by imitation of the text.

This is not the place to offer a discussion of Blake's designs for *Jerusalem*, which have been treated, often in considerable detail, by other commentators. The point here is that Blake's accretive processes extend into the contrary relation of design to text. There is also implicit here an



Woman enslaved to the moon, *Jerusalem*, plate 8.

opposition of sight to sound and space to time in that Blake indicates the oral dimension of his text in his first preface and declares at the end of the poem that *Jerusalem* is a song, even as it is a visual form. If in Blake's time there was much talk about the "sister arts" as well as efforts like Lessing's to distinguish them, he put them together in a way that by joining them in contrariety would recognize no art as negating another.

Accretion means revision by addition. One might expect the process to include also, by contrariety, deletion, and reordering. These possibilities are exploited by Blake in his visible erasures and the differences in the order of the plates in certain extant copies. The implication is one of constant activity of creation on Blake's part and the addition of still another dimension when the reader takes up another copy of the book.

We can speculate on the unwillingness or inability of Blake to complete his work, as if completion was to be regarded as a betrayal of the artistic impulse. It would be a view not unique to Blake in his time, given the number of fragmentary works. He seems to have arrived at a solution to this problem in *Jerusalem*. *The Four Zoas* is what we might call externally unfinished. *Jerusalem* is both finished and unfinished within itself, a contrariety. Blake's poem has a beginning and an end, though it includes much repetition and threatens total cyclicity. It requires its reader to go on and on with it, following out chains of metaphor, calling in question any systematizations one would make of it. We recognize the Urizen in ourselves, not to negate that Zoa in us, but to oppose him creatively with Los, who persists in activity.

The Title

The full title, *Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion* stands synecdochically for the text to which it belongs.* As a poem *Jerusalem* comes out of England. In the poem, Jerusalem is the daughter of Albion and Brittannia, belonging to them, emanating from them, which is the situation Blake dramatizes in his insistence that the city of Jerusalem, like the tribes of Israel, is eternally *in* England, produced by Albion-England. Blake implies that his poem is an English poem, but at the same time universal. What kind of nation is implied by the ema-nation Jerusalem? Not the nation of empire that Blake continually attacked. An emanation in its unfallen form as poem, it must express identity with others—both same and different.

Story After All

What I have said may seem to suggest that there isn't really any story in *Jerusalem*. But we can infer a story at each circumference. At the

For a discussion of titles as synecdoches, see my "Titles, Titling, and Entitlement To," in Antithetical Essays in Literary Criticism and Liberal Education: *Tallahassee, Florida State University Press, 1990, 111–43.*

outer circumference there is Blake making his poem. In this story, as he writes, Blake is by turns inspired, astounded, worried, transported, and pleased. At the next smaller circumference, there is Albion sleeping and dreaming with his wife England, who is also named Brittannia, asleep on his bosom. In the dream, his daughter Jerusalem is alienated from him in the East. Having dreamed himself down through Beulah into the mental state called Ulro, and having witnessed in dream his synecdochic parts declaring their apartness, he is reduced to a situation in which one reprobate part of him named Los tries to restore his intellect, working up from Ulro into Generation and eventually through Beulah to awakening in Eden.

This restoration would return the daughter to Albion-England and Albion's parts to their proper functioning. The problem has been that Albion cannot see Jerusalem clearly and confuses her with external nature, a domineering mother, and a sadistic priestess, who appears to him as Vala or Rahab. While Jerusalem wanders in the alienation that this attitude creates, Los works in the realms of external nature, really inside Albion, to restore his intellect to himself. Los does this in spite of many difficulties, including the alienation of his own wife-daughter named Enitharmon and the unruliness and deceit of his own generated selfhood called the Spectre of Urthona, upon which he must depend for action in the realm of Generation. Eventually Los's reshaping of this spectral form, cloven in Generation into a soul-body negation, to make an imaginative or spiritual body has its effect on Albion, who awakens as his four principle parts engage in conversations of the spirit rather than natural warfare. That Enitharmon knows that she is in a poem turns these concentric circles inside out, and the activities of Los are synecdochic of Blake's activities on the outer circumference.

An Encyclopedia for Critics

It was said decades ago by Northrop Frye, the great reader of Blake, that *Jerusalem* is an encyclopedic poem. It is encyclopedic by its capacity to contain so much, by its power of accretion, and by its ability to offer itself for devouring to a panoply of critical orientations. It is mimetic in the Platonic sense of dramatic at the circumference of Blake's creative activity. It is also mimetic in the Horatian way in its emulation, often by contrariety, of the work of predecessors. It offers itself as a didactic, ora-

torical performance. It is declared to be a song. It dramatizes itself as the expressive emanation of William Blake. It objectifies itself as a book that *as a book* is a work of art in the tradition of the illuminated book. At the same time, it stands contrary to works that can easily be offered up to ontological, epistemological, linguistic, or (old or new) historical emphasis. Against a criticism that would emphasize its ontological statement, it presents a purely mental, ethical world that has nothing to do with ontological truths as they are usually projected. Against an epistemological interest it offers a contrary to any notion of subject and object. Against a purely linguistic orientation it offers its own composite art. It also opposes both a linguistic philosophy of difference and a philosophy of mystical indifference. It offers a contrary to a purely historical treatment: as its title suggests, it carries itself out of early nineteenth-century England even to this place and time where we read it, but it carries us back to Albion, too, even to South Moulton Street, where Blake is seeing, writing, etching it.

A Bibliographical Note on the Reading of *Jerusalem*

I begin with Northrop Frye's groundbreaking *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1947), which lines out a movement in the poem from fall to apocalypse and an ongoing antithesis between a "phase of imaginative vision simultaneously with a body of error which it clarifies." This principle of the gradual "consolidation of error" into vision was first made apparent in S. Foster Damon's pioneering *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin, 1924). David V. Erdman's *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1954) is concerned with political allegory in the poem and Blake's response to his time, but not with its formal nature.

A series of articles followed. Karl Kiralis's "The Theme and Structure of *Jerusalem*," in *The Divine Vision* (ed. Vivian de Sola Pinto, London: Gollancz, 1957, 141–62), sees a threefold movement from childhood, through manhood to old age that is parallel to the movement from Judaism to Deism to Christianity. W. H. Stevenson's "Blake's *Jerusalem*," *Essays in Criticism* 9 (1959), 254–64, expresses a common view of the time that *Jerusalem* has a number of incidents but no real purpose: "the

round is endless and a *deus ex machina* is required to stop it." In "The Structure of Blake's *Jerusalem*," *Bucknell Review* 11 (1963), 35–54, E. J. Rose reverses Kiralis, claiming that the poem begins in old age, and identifies each chapter with a Zoa and with other fourfold divisions. Harold Bloom in his *Blake's Apocalypse* (New York: Doubleday, 1963), sees the structure as developing as it goes along an "antithesis between two contrary forces." In his commentary in *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (ed. David V. Erdman, New York: Doubleday, 1982, revised [originally 1965], Bloom identifies the prophetic aspect of the poem, though not the structural, with the Book of Ezekiel. He develops this view further in his "Blake's *Jerusalem*: The Bond of Sensibility and the Form of Prophecy" in *The Ringers in the Tower* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1971, 65–9). Henry Lesnick's "Narrative Structure and the Antithetical Vision of *Jerusalem*," in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic* (eds. David V. Erdman and John E. Grant, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1970, 391–412), offers his vision of antitheses—temporal and eternal—in a reading of the designs. Joan Witke's "*Jerusalem*: A Synoptic Poem," *Comparative Literature* 32 (1970) 165–78, argues for a parallel between *Jerusalem's* four chapters and the four gospels. Anne K. Mellor's "The Human Form Divine and the Structure of Blake's *Jerusalem*," *Studies in English Literature* 11 (1971), 595–620, lines the chapters up with Albion's rejection of the human form divine, the body, the mind, and the imagination in that order.

Three essays in *Blake's Sublime Allegory* (eds. Stuart Curran and Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1973) mark a new strenuousness. Curran's "The Structures of *Jerusalem*" (329–46) sees the poem as "generally resistant" to previous discussions of its structure and offers a complex set of seven "intertranspicious" (a term borrowed from Shelley) structures: a primary structure of four dimensions, a two-part structure whose "pivots are climactic representations of the fallen state," a three-four division reflecting the Blakean principle enunciated by Frye that three and four are opposed in Blake, implying a dialectical relationship, a sixfold division emphasizing the continuity of major events, a second threefold division in which the 6000 years of Los's work are framed by Plates 1–17, where the basic conflicts are presented, and 84–100, where they are resolved, and an eschatological pattern based on the Book of Revelation. Curran rejects the notion that narrative is fundamental to the poem and returns to the idea of the gradual "consolidation of error" and enlargement of comprehension. Karl Kroe-

ber's "Delivering *Jerusalem*" (347–67), attacks an archetypal reading of the poem and regards it as "a forward exposition of a religious vision." Roger R. Easson's "William Blake and His Reader in *Jerusalem*" (309–27) argues that the narrative is composed of four elements—authorial intrusion, dramatic narration, visionary narration, and visionary definition.

W. J. T. Mitchell's "Living Form: Poetic and Pictorial Design in *Jerusalem*" in his *Blake's Composite Art* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1978, 165–218) is one of the best treatments of the work, partly because of its attention to the designs as well as the text. For Mitchell, *Jerusalem* is an anti–form with respect to temporal structure. It nevertheless has certain obvious formal characteristics. It is an "anatomy" in Frye's sense, with an oratorical and rhetorical structure of four addresses to four audiences, all with the same message. It doesn't "disclose a narrative or dramatic structure." The reader has to see everything simultaneously, the whole poem "crystallized in the individual moment." Mitchell believes Blake designed the poem to allow "only an approximate sense of structural orientation" in order to draw attention to minute particulars. An essay of the same year by James Ferguson, "Prefaces to *Jerusalem*," in *Interpreting Blake*, (ed. Michael Phillips, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978, 164–95) emphasizes "recurring themes and parallelistic organization," but works mainly from the theme of each preface to illustrations of it in each chapter.

Full length studies of value are Minna Doskow's *William Blake's "*Jerusalem": *Structure and Meaning in Poetry and Picture* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickenson University Press, 1982) and Morton D. Paley's *The Continuing City: William Blake's "*Jerusalem" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983). Of these the former is a quite helpful critical introduction, made particularly valuable because it includes a facsimile of the poem. The latter is continually interesting.

Two volumes appeared in 1991 and are of special interest: Vincent Arthur De Luca's section on *Jerusalem* in his *Words of Eternity: Blake and the Poetics of the Sublime* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1991, 124–42) sees the poem as more spatial than *The Four Zoas* and nonsequential, each chapter a "medley of the entire set of motifs." Further, "the same process of shuffling and distribution that homogenizes the whole fragmentizes the parts." He notes the tendency to squeeze epic cycles into condensed synopses and to create narrative sequences with their own self-sufficiencies. In De Luca's view none of the models for

Jerusalem yet offered, except Paley's of Handel's *Messiah*, has the qualities of discontinuity and repetition characteristic of it. For him, the poem is best regarded as a "gathering of texts out of a cycle … a never fully stated prior body of cyclic myth." As such it has affinity with compilations of bardic materials in Blake's time or shortly before, and De Luca argues for them as a model.

Finally, in 1991, Volume 1 of the William Blake Trust/ Princeton University Press series of the illuminated books was published under the editorship of Morton D. Paley. It has a valuable introduction, a colored facsimile of *Jerusalem* (copy E), a faithful transcription, and valuable notes.

10

From *Jerusalem* and the Prose to Yeats and Joyce

There has been much discussion of the relation of twentieth-century writers to Blake.* Of all these writers, those most interesting when we compare Blake's work to theirs are Yeats and Joyce. For both, *The Four Zoas* may have loomed larger than *Jerusalem.* Yeats and Edwin J. Ellis were the first to publish that poem, the manuscript of which Mrs. Blake had given to the painter John Linnell. Yeats and Ellis located it in the possession of Linnell's two sons, and transcribed it rather inaccurately while "improving" some of its lines for their three-volume edition of Blake's works, published in 1893.† Two of these volumes are composed of commentary and running interpretive notes. The third contains Blake's texts and lithographic facsimiles of the etched plates. Eighteen copies of pages of *The Four Zoas* are included, but some are extremely difficult or even impossible to read. We know that Yeats read all of Blake's work with care and refers to much of his prose, particularly in two essays published in his *Ideas of Good and Evil.*‡

We are not so certain about Joyce. As Robert F. Gleckner has shown, Joyce got his material for his lecture in Trieste of 1912 mainly and perhaps entirely (often verbatim) from Ellis's *The Real Blake*, which contained an

See, as an example, William Blake and the Moderns, *eds. Robert J. Bertholf and Annette S. Leavitt, Albany: State University of New York Press, 1982, This volume contains my essay "The Seven Eyes of Yeats," parts of which appear, revised, in this chapter.*

†The Works of William Blake, *eds. Edwin J. Ellis and William Butler Yeats, three volumes, London: Bernard Quaritch, 1893.*

‡Ideas of Good and Evil, *London and Stratford-Upon-Avon, 1903.*

unfortunately fanciful account of Blake's life.* The lecture is mainly about Blake's life, which interested Joyce, as Gleckner says, by parallels he saw to his own. In what survives of the lecture, Blake's long poems are not mentioned. Gleckner doubts whether Joyce had read *Jerusalem* carefully or at all and thinks Joyce got his knowledge of Blake from Yeats and Ellis, most probably in their separate selections of Blake's work, and from Yeats's essays on Blake. I am inclined to think Joyce had read *Jerusalem*, and I am given some support by Richard Ellmann's reports that in 1920 there was a conversation between Philipe Soupault and Joyce about *Jerusalem*.† In any case, the allusions to Blake in Joyce's work are many, and clearly some of them indicate his reading of the longer poems. In Joyce's case, the similarities to Blake's work are not often identifiable as related to a specific poem but rather to Blake's so-called mythology.

Yeats

Yeats refers to Blake frequently throughout his career, though more often in the earlier part of it. In addition to the Ellis-Yeats edition and Yeats's two essays on Blake, there is his classification of Blake's personality in his strange work *A Vision*, 1925, 1937.

Yeats was immersed in Blake from the age of fifteen or sixteen when his father gave him Blake's poems to read. The Ellis-Yeats edition came out when Yeats was 28 years old. It was, according to him, a true collaboration. This required that both read and form interpretive opinions of their own, which they then talked over. Yeats wrote that Ellis was mainly responsible for all except the section called "The Symbolic System," though he also wrote that Ellis worked over "short accounts of the books by me, except in the case of 'the literary period,' the account of the minor poems, and the account of Blake's art theories, which are all his own except in so far as we discussed everything together."‡ "The Symbolic System" is unquestionably the most interesting part of the volumes. Of

**Robert F. Gleckner, "Joyce's Blake: Patterns of Influence,"* Blake and the Moderns, *135–63. James Joyce, "William Blake,"* The Critical Writings of James Joyce, *eds. Ellsworth Mason and Richard Ellmann, London: Faber an d Faber, 1959, 214–22. The full text of the lecture has not survived. Edwin J. Ellis,* The Real Blake, *London: Chatto and Windus, 1907.*

†*Richard Ellmann,* James Joyce, *New York: Oxford University Press, 1959. Soupault was translating Blake at the time.*

‡*Quoted from Yeats's notes on the flyleaf of his copy in my* Blake and Yeats: The Contrary Vision, *Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1955, 47–8, which contains a discussion of the volumes, 44–56.*

the genesis of the volumes Yeats, quoting some lines from the poem in the preface to Chapter 2 of *Jerusalem,* wrote in his autobiography,

> The four quarters of London represented Blake's four great mythological personages, the Zoas, and also the four elements. These few sentences were the foundation of all study of the philosophy of William Blake that requires an exact knowledge for its pursuit and that traces the connection between his system and that of Swedenborg or of Boehme. I recognized certain attributions, from what is called the Christian Cabbala, of which Ellis had never heard, and with this proof that his interpretation was more than fantasy he and I began our four years' work upon the Prophetic Books of William Blake.*

Although *The Four Zoas*, which Ellis and Yeats called by its earlier name *Vala*, was their important discovery, and a major discovery for understanding Blake's work, *Jerusalem* plays at least as great a role in their commentary, both the parts written by Yeats and those by Ellis.

The principal defect of the volumes, in addition to the inaccuracy of the text and the editors' decision to "improve" some of Blake's lines, is their excessive recourse to occult tradition in their interpretations. It is interesting that in the section of his autobiography from which the quotation above is taken ("Four Years: 1887–1891") Yeats discusses his meetings with Helen P. Blavatsky, author of *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*, and his friendship with Macgregor Mathers (Liddle Mathers) author of *The Kabbala Unveiled*. However, as Morton D. Paley has pointed out, Ellis and Yeats correctly stressed the importance of Boehme and Swedenborg to Blake, but they overstressed the occult generally and allegorized everything.†

At the same time, it is important to recognize that Ellis and Yeats had taken on a defense of Blake against ignorance of his work and prejudice. Ellis writes:

> That Blake was, before all things, what men agree to call a "Genius," is so universally admitted that the glamour of the word has hitherto been sufficient to excuse both students and connoisseurs from the task of looking for any secondary merits in his art. In fact, there is a generally received opinion that apart from its "genius," his art is either actually bad, or good in an erratic way, which it would ill become our modesty to attempt to follow. As for Blake's artistic *opinions*, these are supposed to be mere nonsense, the result of ignorance and irritability.‡

*The Autobiography of William Butler Yeats, *New York: Macmillan, 1953, 99.*

†*Morton D. Paley,* The Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem, *Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983, 20–1.*

‡The Works of William Blake, *II, 308.*

But though Ellis and Yeats may have been overly zealous in their occultist readings, in the experience Yeats became fully acquainted with Blake's longer and most difficult works.

Yeats's two essays on Blake in *Ideas of Good and Evil* are about as far from Blake in prose style as it is possible to be. Nevertheless, they concentrate on fundamental ideas Blake had: the importance of the imagination, the forgiveness of sins, the limitations of reason, and identification of the imaginative arts with true religion:

> [Blake] had learned from Jacob Boehme and from old alchemist writers that imagination was the first emanation of divinity, "the body of God," "the Divine members," and he drew the deduction, which they did not draw, that the imaginative arts were therefore the greatest of Divine revelations, and that the sympathy with all living things, sinful and righteous alike, which the imaginative arts awaken, is that forgiveness of sins commanded by Christ. The reason, and by the reason he meant deductions from observations of the senses, binds us to mortality because it binds us to the senses, and divides us from each other by showing us our clashing interests [118–9].

Yeats deviates from Blake when he asserts that the symbol in Blake and in the symbolist movement generally was "the only possible expression of some invisible essence" (123), Blake being convinced that everything can be seen in "vision." Yeats's view that Blake was "a symbolist who had to invent his symbols" (120), later, for somewhat different reasons, shared by T. S. Eliot,* seems out of date now after so much writing that has brought Blake into the poetic tradition.

In his essay on Blake's Dante illustrations, in which Yeats doesn't really say very much about the illustrations as such, Yeats quotes at great length a passage from the preface to Chapter 4 of *Jerusalem* beginning with "I know of no other Christianity and no other Gospel than the liberty both of body & mind to exercise the Divine Arts of Imagination" (4:77; E231). He calls the passage "the very keystone of [Blake's] thought" (147), and that is a fair observation.

Yeats's devotion to Blake had little effect on his poetic style, that is to say, what is roughly called the formal aspects of his poems. There are, of course, echoes of Blake here and there, though perhaps not so many as one might expect from a man who apparently knew much of Blake by heart. One may be tempted to discover the genesis of "Byzantium" in the

*"*What his genius required, and what it sadly lacked, was a framework of accepted and traditional ideas which would have prevented him from indulging in a philosophy of his own." T. S. Eliot, "William Blake,"* Selected Essays, 1917–32, *New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1932, 279.*

following lines from *The Four Zoas*, particularly since we know that Yeats was the work's first editor and one of its earliest readers:

> The flames rolling intense thro the wide Universe
> Began to Enter the Holy City Entring the dismal clouds
> In furrowed lightnings break their way the wild flames li[c]king up
> The Bloody Deluge living flames winged with intellect
> And Reason round the Earth they march in order flame by flame
> [9:119; E388]

Still it is quite a distance from the intent of this passage to "Byzantium."

A more obvious echo is the following from "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes":

> For what but eye and ear silence the mind
> With the minute particulars of mankind?*

These are not among Yeats's best lines. "Mankind" seems to be chosen for the rhyme. For that matter, "mind" isn't quite right. I take it that Yeats means something more materialistic than "mind," "brain" perhaps. But the whole idea seems to depart from Blake, in spite of the Blakean term "minute particulars." Blake thought that mind worked *through* eye and ear, which don't silence it. Mind is intellect, which is both thought and emotion, two things divided when only reason is in control. Yeats sharply distinguishes thought and emotion, and he mixes the Blakean idea of minute particulars with the Keatsian notion of being teased out of thought. If one is interested in the sources of Yeats's poetic techniques one would be better advised to look in Spenser, Shakespeare, Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, and even Rossetti.

The situation is different when one looks into Yeats's prose—especially the early prose, where Blake is frequently echoed, alluded to, or directly quoted. But here again Yeats's tone, as I have noted, is more like Walter Pater's—hardly Blakean—and frequently smothers or subtly changes the Blakean thought. The reason for this—if it requires a reason in a poet of great and unmistakable voice—is that Blake's influence was initially mixed and filtered through Pre–Raphaelitism, his father, and occult thought.

John Butler Yeats, himself heavily influenced by the Pre–Raphaelites in his son's formative years, appreciated the wild free side of Blake—the happy thoughtlessness that he attributed to Blake and to artists gener-

W. B. Yeats, Collected Poems, *New York: Macmillan, 1973, 168.*

ally*—and was prone to reducing Blake's complex ideas to simple distinctions. One of these was that between thought and emotion. The emphasis on emotion the son took into his own work and then, as Harold Bloom has pointed out, foisted it on Blake, who never used "emotion" and was suspicious of the divisions it implies.† Blake's "intellect" means an exercise of the whole mind, nor pure abstract thought or wild free irrational feeling.

The Pre–Raphaelite connection with Blake is a curious one and a means by which Blake came to Yeats in somewhat distorted form. There can hardly be a greater contrast between Blake once out of his *Poetical Sketches* stage, and Rossetti, particularly with respect to poetic tone. The principal Pre–Raphaelite distortion of Blake, it seems to me, lies in their interpretation of the "minute particular" to mean an imitative minuteness of accurate detail. Blake would certainly not have accepted W. M. Rossetti's remark that a painter must base his personal vision on a "direct study of Nature." Yeats did not accept Rossetti's distortion of Blake's thought, but his taste was formed in part on Pre–Raphaelite nostalgia for things medieval and the languid emotion of D. G. Rossetti's and Burne-Jones's paintings—a quality Blake very rarely exhibits.

The later Yeats of *A Vision* was, like Joyce in his lecture on Blake, interested in Blake as a man and artist. In his discussion of personality, Yeats placed Blake in Phase 16 of his complex, quasi-astrological 28 phases of the moon. Blake appears there along with Rabelais, Aretino, Paracelsus, and "some beautiful women." Of the "will" of people of that phase, Yeats writes,

> It … hates that which opposes desire. Capable of nothing but an incapable idealism (for it has no thought but in myth, or in defence of myth), it must, because it sees one side as all white, see the other side all black; what but a dragon could dream of thwarting a St. George? In men of the phase there will commonly be both natures, for to be true to phase is a ceaseless struggle. At one moment they are full of hate—Blake writes of "Flemish and Venetian demons" and of some picture of his own destroyed "by some vile spell of Stoddart's [sic]—and their hate is always close to madness; and at the next they produce the comedy of Aretino and of Rabelais or the mythology of Blake, and discover symbolism to express the overflowing and bursting of the mind. There is always an element of frenzy, and almost always a delight in certain glowing or shining images of concentrated force; in the smith's forge; in the

See W. B. Yeats, Memoirs, *New York: Macmillan, 1973, 158. "Feb 3 [1909]. Blake talking to Crabb Robinson said once that he preferred to any man of intellect a happy thoughtless person, or some such phrase."*

†*Harold Bloom,* Yeats, *New York: Oxford University Press, 1970, 70–1.*

> heart; in the human form in its most vigorous development; in the solar disc; in some symbolical representation of the sexual organs; for the being must brag of its triumph over its own incoherence.*

The last sentence here clearly refers to Blake's work, principally the figure of the blacksmith Los in *Jerusalem*. Indeed, the passage is full of reference to Blake.

It is in *Jerusalem* that one finds ideas fundamental to both poets that Yeats develops in his own way. I offer eight examples:

Contraries and Negations. In *A Vision*, Yeats states that his idea of conflict came, at least in part, from Blake's notion of contraries: "I had never read Hegel, but my mind had been full of Blake from boyhood up and I saw the world as a conflict—Spectre and Emanation—and could distinguish between a contrary and a negation" (72). Both Blake and Yeats seek a way out of the object-subject problem. In that opposition the object negates the subject, as in the soul-body opposition the soul negates the body. In both cases, one side of the opposition claims a superior reality for itself: the objective world over the subjective, the soul over the body. A true contrary would be one in which these oppositions are themselves opposed by a principle of radical identity, as in a metaphor. Yeats's opposition of "primary" and "antithetical," though sometimes referred to by him as the opposition of subjectivity to objectivity, is really a true contrary. In the antithetical mode of thought the opposition of object to subject is opposed; in the primary mode it is affirmed. In the primary mode, the objective world (Locke's primary qualities of experience) dominates the subjective (Locke's secondary qualities). In this case, the subjective is regarded as unreal, therefore negated. Blake claimed that the same thing occurs historically with the negation soul-body. The theology of the Blakean "churches" created the soul-body distinction and negated the body in favor of the greater reality of the soul. From this, there followed sexual repression, the "religion of chastity," and the warfare of spectre and emanation. The true contrary, for Blake, was reason and energy, as Blake said in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (E34).

Yeats's difference from Blake on this point comes when Yeats tries to imagine a state in which proper contraries are resolved and blend into the so-called thirteenth cone or sphere, which is introduced in the second,

W. B. Yeats, A Vision *(1937 version), New York: Macmillan, 1938, 138–9. On Yeats's phases of the moon, see my* The Book of Yeats's Vision, *Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1998, 67–93.*

1937, much revised and augmented version of *A Vision*. The sphere is a symbol of ultimate reality that we can trace back into pre–Socratic thought and connect with the traditional Greek aesthetics of harmony. Blake might well have called Yeats's recourse to the sphere "Grecian worship"; he does not allow contraries to blend into a harmonious sphere. For him, blending would be a covert domination of one side over the other. Blake maintains the principle of contrariety right into apocalypse. The intellectual war and hunting, conversation and dialectic, that goes on in heaven, which is, of course, a mental state in Blake, not a place beyond in the sky, is the proper contrary form of those dreadful negations known in nature as war and hunting. Yeats thinks of that which is symbolized by him as the sphere as things-in-themselves, which cannot be known and fall into antinomies in experience. Blake's heaven is the life of intellect itself.

Profound difference in tone between Blake and Yeats accompanies this philosophical difference, and the two tones express quite opposite temperaments—Blake's open, Yeats's ironic and masked. I shall return to this point, noting here only that this difference leads Yeats to an ironic welcoming of violence, while Blake was always horrified by war and violence, which he regarded as the result of the perversion of true intellectual contrariety.

The Dangers of Triumph. In Blake's longer poems, the heroic Los must avoid triumph over those whom he opposes because that would repeat the error of negation and destroy contrariety. In *Milton*, John Milton becomes a Los figure and rather than annihilating the material enemy Urizen, sculpts a new body for him. The problem here is to find the proper form of those things arrayed against him. In two of his greatest poems, "The Tower" and "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen" Yeats also abjures triumph. If the primary is annihilated, the result would be madness. In the following lines from "The Tower," the moon represents the antithetical and the sun the primary:

> O may the moon and sunlight seem
> One inextricable beam,
> For if I triumph I must make men mad [193–4].

Yeats is referring to the blind Raftery's poem about a beautiful woman that drove a man to drowning. Yeats recognizes that his poem might do the same unless he brings in the opposite. In "Nineteen Hundred and Nineteen," triumph is again rejected, for in death triumph "can but mar

our solitude."* Yeats's muses in both poems on the dangers of an antitheticality that would negate the primary. In the passage above, he would have moonlight and sunlight blend together. This might seem to differ from Blake, but it is only *beams* of both that come together, so that sun and moon remain themselves, while the result is a unity.

Center and Circumference. Yeats wrote in "Discoveries,"

> If it be true that God is a circle whose centre is everywhere, the saint goes to the centre, the poet and artist to the ring where everything comes round again. The poet must not seek for what is still and fixed, for that has no life for him; and if he did, his style would become cold and monotonous, and his sense of beauty faint and sickly, … but be content to find his pleasure in all that is forever passing away.†

There are, of course, traditional sources for this paradoxical description of God, similar to those for Eliot's still point of the turning world, and they are in play here, but connected to an idea gotten from Blake and changed to suit Yeats's purpose. Blake's idea is that opening or expansion of a center brings the world inside one's imaginative range and allows for sympathetic identification (which for Blake means forgiveness but not always loving one's enemy). In Blake's closed center, the mind finds itself isolated, surrounded by an alien objective nature, an infinite expanse of matter. It is an entirely selfish mind or what Blake calls selfhood. The center Blake also calls the "limit of contraction." Blake sees the expansion of centers as the whole aim of life. At the very beginning of *Jerusalem*, the Saviour calls to Blake and Albion,

> Awake! awake O sleeper of the land of shadows, wake! expand!
> I am in you and you in me [1:4; E146].

Albion has retreated to a center, thrusting all, including his emanation Jerusalem, beyond himself into the area of the objective or what Yeats would call the "primary" world.

Yeats posits a necessary conflict between poet and saint. The poet is the radical creator who, for Blake, is every man. Yeats's poet goes to the circumference, which is the world of flux, experience, and particulars; and he tries to make everything into his own forms. The saint, on the other hand, gives himself up to external authority and imagines that

**For discussion of the these poems and the matter of triumph, see my* The Book of Yeats's Poems, *Tallahassee: Florida State University Press, 152–168.*

†*"Discoveries" (1906), "The Cutting of an Agate,"* Essays and Introductions, *London: Macmillan, 1961, 287.*

authority to be beyond or surrounding him and himself at a center. The Blaekean notion has undergone a considerable change here. All human imaginative activity is not assimilated to a quest for circumferential vantage. (There is, of course, a sense in which the saint's imagining himself at the center is itself a sort of circumference, being a devotional imaginative act.) For Yeats, human beings divide into contrary types in each of whom opposites struggle.

In the end, for Yeats, the centrist condition triumphs over the antithetical circumferential one, and Yeats's circumference is cyclical rather than apocalyptic. Antithetical man suffers the same fate as primary man. Both are gathered up into the great darkness, poet a defeated and thus tragic rebel. The poet's antithetical role is therefore ironic. Yeats carries the irony in his very late poems to the notion that antithetical man must "hate" God in order to bring his soul to God (284). Yeats claims that as poet he plays a predestined part (247). It is the *idea* of God that must be hated; this is Blake's external false deity, but it is filtered through an embattled attitude foreign to Blake, and it comes out in a way that Blake would have objected to. In Blake, what Yeats separates off as the tragic but culturally necessary antithetical role has apocalyptic possibilities: Indeed, it is the true source of all culture, upon which reason builds its edifice. Saintliness, on the other hand, is a virtue for which Blake had little respect; for him, all truly visionary behavior, rather than acceptance (passive, in his eyes) of an external deity is artistic circumference-making. Jesus and the apostles were artists in the larger sense, and

> Prayer is the Study of Art
> Praise is the Practise of Art
> Fasting &c. all relate to Art
> The outward ceremony is Antichrist [E274].
>
> The Eternal Body of Man is The IMAGINATION [E273].

Blake's opposition of prolific to devouring in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* has its intellectual and fallen forms, whereas in Yeats the only opposition is the one before him in the world of conflict itself. A cleansing of perceptions to see the intellectual form would result in annihilation of the contrary.

This whole matter points to a fundamental difference between the two poets. Blake is radically humanistic and is totally devoted to a vision of *this* world as potentially apocalyptic through an improvement in mental power and cleansing of error. Yeats is also humanistic, and his antithetical

man opts for such a vision. But at the same time Yeats concludes that a humanistic apocalypse is, if not impossible, at most only momentary and mysterious:

> Where got I that truth? [211]

> What motion of the sun or stream
> Or eyelid shot the gleam
> That pierced my body through?
> What made me live like these that seem
> Self-born, born anew? [250]

For Yeats, the ultimate condition is beyond all who are bound to the antinomies—and all are. His struggle is always against a superior (primary) force that in time brings around the ruin of antithetical endeavor:

> … day brings round the night, … before dawn
> His glory and his monuments are gone [287].

> No handiwork of Callimachus,
> Who handled marble as if it were bronze,
> Made draperies that seemed to rise
> When sea-wind swept the corner, stands;
> His long lamp-chimney shaped like the stem
> Of a slender palm, stood but a day;
> All things fall and are built again, … [292].

Like Blake's, Yeats's view is cyclical, but for Blake Yeats's vision is only of the fallen cycle.

There is a quite conscious irony in Yeats's choice of the term "antithetical" for the humanistic visionary. He cannot fully succeed but instead provides an antithesis that prevents a fall into the chaos of a completely abstract primary world. That chaos would seem to be beneath even the world Blake called Ulro. It would be beneath the mathematic "starry floor" that Blake tells us is a base to the Fall.

Center and circumference in Blake can be imagined as what Blake calls a vortex (parody of Descartes) observed from above or below, so to speak, as it is in Dante's *Commedia*. They also constitute the cone that Yeats adopts in *A Vision*, not entirely from Blake, as his central symbol. Blakean closed vortexes are the Cartesian ones that Urizen creates but which give him no visionary aid. They are selfish centers, from which one looks into a void. In Blake's visionary sense, vortexes can be made to open out into a circumference like that achieved by the farmer in *Milton*:

> … the eye of man views both the east & west encompassing
> Its vortex; and the north & south with all their starry host;

> Also the rising sun & setting moon he views surrounding
> His corn-fields and his valleys of five hundred acres square.
> Thus is the earth one infinite plane, and not as apparent
> To the weak traveller confin'd beneath the moony shade.
> Thus is the heaven a vortex passd already, and the earth
> A vortex not yet pass'd by the traveller thro' Eternity [1:15; E109].

Vortexes or cones (gyres) in Yeats are ironic. The vortex of "The Second Coming" represents a situation out of hand. Expansion from such a vortex is not visionary but a movement toward chaos and violence. Yeats complicates Blake's vortex with his double gyres and ironic theory of history, in which the gyres turn each other inside out, the circumference of one being the center of the other, endlessly antinomial.

The Religious. Yeats appears to be influenced by Blake's concept of the "religious," a word he usually used, not always, in a derogatory sense. Blake's influence probably came through Yeats's father, who tended to oversimplify Blake's contraries. For Blake, "religious" usually means those who unthinkingly give themselves to an external moral code and to abstractions. For Blake, Jesus came to oppose the moral law and substitute for it the single principle of the forgiveness of sins. John Butler Yeats speaks of the matter in a letter to his son. It is here that we see the Blakean concept of the religious that foresees the son's the opposition of poet and saint.

> There are two kinds of belief; the poetical and the religious. That of the poet comes when the man within has found some method or manner of thinking or arrangement of fact (such as is only possible in dreams) by which to express and embody an absolute freedom, such that his whole inner and outer self can expand in full satisfaction.
>
> In religious belief there is absent the consciousness of liberty. Religion is the denial of liberty. An enforced peace is set up among the warring feelings. By the help of something quite external, as for instance the fear of hell, some feelings are chained up and thrust into dungeons that some other feelings may hold sway; and all the ethical systems yet invented are a similar denial of liberty, that is why the true poet is neither moral nor religious.*

The passage is replete with Blakean attitudes, but the son does not himself quite adopt this stance. For John Butler Yeats there is nothing admirable to be associated with the religious. For the son, in his earlier years, there is an effort to create his own religion through poetry and, later, to make a prolific contrariety of religion and poetry, saint and poet:

*Further Letters of John Butler Yeats, *ed. Lennox Robinson, Dundrum, Ireland: Cuala Press, 1920, 22–3.*

… I—though heart might find relief
Did I become a Christian man and choose for my belief
What seems most welcome in the tomb—play a predestined part.
Homer is my example and his unchristened heart.
The lion and the honeycomb, what has Scripture said?
So get you gone Von Hügel, though with blessings on your head* [247].

Yeats's saint is not unthinking and is, contrary to his father's view of the religious, conscious of liberty. He freely chooses against it. Blake's Jesus is an antithetical man, an artist, subsuming what is good in religion under an expanded definition of art. Jesus is a prolific to be devoured by his followers, just as a work of art is to be devoured by society and its interpreters. The "religious" are those caught in the snare of a fixed interpretation and thus chained. Yeats's religious man does not necessarily choose law, but he does choose a myth opposite to that of the artist—one of external supernatural authority.

Forgiveness of Sins. Early in his essay in *Ideas of Good and Evil*, Yeats wrote of "the sympathy with all living things, sinful and righteous alike, which the imaginative arts awaken" and identifies this with "that forgiveness of sins commanded by Christ" (118–9). Blake thought of Jesus as the supreme image of human imagination. His idea was that sympathy and identity (through taking the so-called sinner into one's circumference) was in fact forgiveness. In Yeats, the antithetical man does not find the tendency to forgiveness to be an attribute of his primary opposite. He must forgive himself. In Blake, acts of forgiveness are apocalyptic. In Yeats, they are a defiance of the prevailing external or primary authority, which is ultimately victorious. Meanwhile the antithetical man insists on antithetical blessedness:

I am content to follow to its source
Every event in action or in thought;
Measure the lot; forgive myself the lot!
When such as I cast out remorse
So great a sweetness flows into the breast
We must laugh and we must sing,
We are blest by everything,
Everything we look upon is blest [232].

This condition must be rewon constantly and carries with it a tension greater than that in Blake's remark: "whenever any Individual Rejects

**Baron Friedrich Von Hügel (1852–1925) was a Roman Catholic theologian, known for his work* The Mystic Element of Religion. *On the lion and the honeycomb, see Judges 14:8–9.*

Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual" (E562). Blake believed in the apocalyptic power of the imagination. Yeats believed in the imagination's power to prevent Fall beneath the starry floor into the void.

Every thing possible to be believ'd is an image of truth. This, in the "Proverbs of Hell" (E37), is a Blakean exuberance and seems to have influenced Yeats toward what Richard Ellmann aptly called a stance of "affirmative capability."* It is, of course, an assertion that the imagination has the power, working at a circumference, to prophesy a human world. The idea takes a different form in Yeats. In *A Vision*, he discusses whether he actually believes in what he has described there. He then calls his wheels and gyres "stylistic arrangements of experience" (25). He abandons the term "belief," which to him implies alienation and doctrine and is thus inappropriate to an antithetical stance. He opposes primary imitation to antithetical creation. The question is no longer what to believe but what can be imagined. Antithetical reality is emanation, primary reality is imposition.

Minute Particulars. We have seen that in "The Double Vision of Michael Robartes" only the eye and ear can silence the mind because they are the senses through which art plays in antithesis to abstract thought, represented by mind, and to the dominant forms of modern culture: "Art bids us touch and taste and hear and see the world, and shrinks from what Blake calls mathematic form, from every abstract thing, from all that is of the brain only, from all that is not a fountain jetting from entire hopes, memories, and sensations of the body."† This is a relatively early statement and employs "brain," indicating materiality, rather than "mind." However, it actually applies more to the work of the later Yeats than to that of the early. Minute particulars are defended by Blake against Reynolds, who complained about excessive attention to trivial detail in certain kinds of paintings. Reynolds didn't really mean what Blake thought he meant. Blake was defending the bounding line in painting, the clarity of the outline of the image. He thought that the particular embodies universality if clearly enough expressed. All else is in the "mind of a fool." The minute particular is also connected to Blake's championing the body as a spiritual form against the power of the soul to negate it,

**Richard Ellmann,* The Identity of Yeats, *New York: Oxford University Press, 238–45.*

†W. B. Yeats, "Discoveries" (1906), Essays and Introductions, *London: Macmillan, 1961, 292–3.*

the body being always a particular, but not a material object. Material objects in Blake's view are fictions of the system of Locke, immaterial in any solid or minute sense, since Locke's system reduces them to measurement or "mathematic form."

But the early occultist Yeats did not really hold the position expressed in the quotation above. Rather, the following seems to have been his stance: "Everything that can be seen, touched, measured, explained, understood, argued over, is to the imaginative artist nothing more than a means, for he belongs to the invisible life…."* This interpretation of the poet as occultist mystic Yeats later abandoned when he came to see that on his own terms he had confused the matter. Later he opposes touch to measurement and recognizes that they are not really qualities of things but of human intercourse with things. Only then does he come to understand Blake's complaint about "mathematic form." When he does, however, he does not attack it, as Blake does, but claims it as a formative element, an expression of human creative power, parallel but also opposite to art:

"Measurement began our might," he asserts in his epitaph poem "Under Ben Bulben" (342), having in mind art of the Ancient Greeks based on mathematical proportion, an art Blake came to dislike. For Yeats, abstract thought, the creator of external objective form, gave humankind primary cultural power. Yeats's reading of philosophy later than the prose quotations I have offered here—particularly the works of Berkeley and Kant—helps account for the development of a stance that took him past Blake yet back to him, too—to an idea of parallel cultural forms.

The Bright Sculptures of Los's Halls. The idea in Blake of the eternal forms of human imaginative activity and of every moment as a plenitude affected Yeats, but he tended to read the idea through the occultist one of "pictures in the astral light," which he identified with Blake's bright sculptures. Either he hardens Los's forms into ideas, spirits, or whatever lurks in the *anima mundi*, or he interprets Los's halls to be that eternity into which everything goes, there to be preserved in the form of archetypes. Our "daimon" is the condition of seeing all things as present. We ourselves do not achieve that condition:

> All things are present as an eternal instant to our *Daimon* (or *Ghostly Self* as it is called when it inhabits the sphere), but that instant is of necessity unintelligible to all bound to the antinomies. My instructors have therefore followed

*W. B. Yeats, *"The Moods" (1895),* Essays and Introductions, *195.*

> tradition by substituting for it a *Record* where the images of all past events remain for ever "thinking the thought and doing the deed."*

Blake insists on the importance of the present as all that there is and the equation of the present moment to eternity. Los's bright sculptures are the totality of imaginative power in the moment—the power, for example, to create an historic past. There is for Blake no *beyond* that we cannot potentially apprehend or penetrate. What is beyond is only that which we have yet failed to contain because we have not sufficiently "enlarged" or exercised our imaginative powers. But for Yeats antithetical containment is never complete, or at least, when it is, the moment passes and decay sets in. This moment, in Yeats, is always finally a mystery: "Where got I that truth?" he asks (211). Truth breaks violently in upon the antinomies, but, captured by them, can never maintain its purity. For Blake, the moment is not a mystery but a visionary *now* that contains past, present, and future. The bright sculptures are radically created over and over by man. Yeats as antithetical man claims in a poem on the death of Kevin O'Higgens that we even create death (230):

> A great man in his pride
> Confronting murderous men
> Casts derision upon
> Supersession of breath;
> He knows death to the bone—
> Man has created death [230].

But the primary truth remains: Death is something that happens *to* us. The antithetical statement, in Yeats, is one of heroic bravado meant to describe here the stance of O'Higgins facing his assassins. But O'Higgins was, I think, a primary man.

Yeats's relation to Blake reflects his intense early reading of Blake, especially in the long poems, an early period in which Yeats was very nearly a disciple, and a later period in which Yeats appropriated Blakean ideas and similar ones from others, but changed them to his own ends. Often the early Yeats misinterpreted Blake for many of the same reasons that most of the nineteenth century and much of the twentieth did. Blake

*A Vision, *193. "Antinomies" Yeats picked up from Kant: "If Kant is right the antinomy is in our method of reasoning; but if the Platonists are right may one not think that the antinomy is itself 'constitutive,' that the consciousness by which we know ourselves and exist is itself irrational? I do not put this forward as certainly the thought of my instructors, but at present it seems the natural interpretation of their symbols."* W. B. Yeats and T. Sturge Moore: Their Correspondence, 1901–1937*, ed. Ursula Bridge, London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1953, 131.*

was a difficult poet to understand for those who saw things differently. Beyond this Yeats did what any good poet tends to do, steal and create, all one's experience being material for one's art.

The overall effect of these two poets, Blake and Yeats, with so much in common, is quite different. Both are poets of exuberance, but of entirely different sorts. Blake's exuberance is open. His humor, of which there is quite a lot in the prophecies, is hyperbolic. Samuel Palmer's remark that he was a man without a mask is definitive. Blake's form of joy is enthusiastic. Yeats, at least in his later work, expressed tragic gaiety. Blake believed he was what he was. Yeats believed his true being to be the mask he sought, more real than his self. He took much from Blake but adapted it to the dominating theme of the mask. Some of Yeats's work, including parts of *A Vision*, belongs with that of the ironic humorists of the Anglo-Irish tradition. As Seumus Shields says in Sean O'Casey's The Shadow of a Gunman, "That's right, that's right—make a joke about it. That's the Irish people all over—they treat a joke as a serious thing and a serious thing as a joke."* That tradition, and not Blake, must have contributed heavily to his masked manner as surely must have the growing murderousness, the terrible twentieth century, as Nietzsche called it.

Joyce

Just as Blake's long poems now seem not detached from literary tradition, as they once were thought to be, so does Joyce's *Finnegans Wake* begin to appear to belong, after all. Indeed, it is now possible to think that *Jerusalem* and *Finnegans Wake* are about as close (perhaps closer) to the center of the literary as any works have been. Northrop Frye called these works encyclopedic epics and connected them in two powerful essays.† They also belong to a tradition of experiment with longer forms characteristic of both romanticism and modernism and often crossing the boundaries between poetry and prose, poem and novel, epic and novel, satire and whatever we might call its opposite.

One senses in *Finnegans Wake*, as many have pointed out, the pres-

Sean O'Casey, Three Plays, *London: Macmillan, 1962, 84.*

†*Northrop Frye, "Quest and Cycle in* Finnegans Wake*" in* Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology, *New York: Harcourt, Brace & World: 1963, 256–64; "Cycle and Apocalypse in* Finnegans Wake*" in* Myth and Metaphor: Selected Essays *1974–1988, ed. Robert D. Denham, Charlottesville: University Press of Virginia, 1990, 356–74.*

ence of Giambattista Vico and particularly his notion of historical cyclicity. Joyce certainly recognized here an idea common with Blake's. It is on another point not so often noticed, however, that Vico and Blake come together in Joyce, and that is in an attitude toward language. Vico treated the movement of history from the primitive condition of giants who created poetic universals but were incapable of thinking abstractly to the sophistication possible with the capacity to create words representing abstract ideas. Benedetto Croce argued that Vico had discovered the universal poetic principle transcending his historical phases and that it could never be annihilated by abstraction in human society.* (Perhaps the nostalgia for Finn in the dream of *Finnegans Wake* is a latent desire for the revival of the power of the poetic principle). Vico saw his primitive giants creating poetic universals that were part of what he called a poetic logic. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake takes the view that the ancient poets "animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses" (E38). Implied in both views is that the earliest language was a language of metaphor and imaginative universals. For Blake, this language became systematized, and abstraction then held sway, as it has ever since. Blake refers to his primordial beings as giants, and Joyce does the same in his creation of the giant Finn, whose body stretches on the earth of Dublin west from Howth, where his head lies (Howth Head).

The reason that Finn does not appear as Finn but briefly as Finnegan in what in some sense is his own dream is that his dream is Vichean history, as Albions' dream is Blakean history (and nightmare, as Yeats called it) and he is the poetic universal. As such he must appear as a particular concrete figure if he is to appear at all, abstractions having no body. The ubiquitous HCE of *Finnegans Wake*, who is the cyclical and "fallen" form of Finn, is the most elusive figure in the text, very near to an abstract universal, the best synecdoche available for the new Finn in a history where the abstract takes over but not without cost. As Blake says, "a system was formed." It is by design that HCE's full name is never uttered in the text. At best he is an acronym. His clothes are described, but his body is constituted pretty much by our inferences. Nor is HCE's guilty act presented as a particular. Rather it is a tissue of rumors endlessly repeated and varied, as if the dreamer were trying to recover the event (or perhaps evading recovery of it) as a poetic universal, dreaming back

**Benedetto Croce,* The Philosophy of Giambattista Vico*, tr. R. G. Collingwood, New York: Macmillan, 1913.*

to it, much as Yeats's dead spirits dream back their lives in order to achieve purgation (an act parodied in *Finnegans Wake*). But the dreamer can never quite constitute the original particular. It escapes into a chain of linguistic relations where the concrete image gives way to the capriciousness of the pun and homonym and to gossip, which is what fallen history is in *Finnegans Wake*.

The Blakean vision is of a Fall into abstract reasoning, which is most fully exhibited in the activities of Urizen in Nights 6 and 7 of *The Four Zoas* and simply assumed from the beginning in *Jerusalem*. In *The Four Zoas*, Urizen explores the externalized and alien world of his own intellectual creation, the world of Lockean matter. He is terrified by it and attempts to impose his own law on it. These laws are principally the laws of measurement and "mathematic form," as Blake puts it in *On Virgil* (E270). His act is a centering of authority in an arbitrarily chosen place and in the tables of his law, his own books, which he ranges around him as a defense against the rebellious Orc. In the process, he alienates his own daughters.

There is a parodic conflation in the "Mookse and Gripes" episode of *Finnegans Wake* of the scenes in *The Four Zoas* of Urizen with his daughters and with Orc. The first scene in Blake ends with Urizen raising his spear against the shrieking daughters. After he confronts them,

> They reared up a wall of rocks and Urizen raisd his spear.
> They gave a scream, they knew their father Urizen knew his daughters
> They shrunk into their channels. Dry the rocky strand beneath his feet
> Hiding themselves in rocky forms from the Eyes of Urizen [6:68; E345].

The second scene shows Urizen arranging his books, prisoner in a world of matter:

> Amazd started Urizen when he found himself compassd round
> And high roofed over with trees. he arose but the stems
> Stood so thick he with difficulty & great pain brought
> His books out of the dismal shade. all but the book of iron
> Again he took his seat & ranged his Books around
> On a rock of iron frowning over the foaming fires of Orc [E353]

These scenes appear, appropriately garbled, in *Finnegans Wake* in the lecture on the dime-cash (or time-space) problem of Chapter 6.* The lecturer, a Professor Jones, who is a kind of Shaun figure, describes the actions of the Mookse, also a Shaun figure:

**James Joyce,* Finnegans Wake *(1939), New York: Penguin Books, 1976, 155–68.*

> Elevating, to give peint to his blick, his jewelled pederect to the allmysty cielung, he luckystruck blueild out of a few shouldbe santillants, a cloister of starabouts over Maples, a lucciolys in Teresa street and a stopsign before Sophy Barratt's, he gaddered togodder the odds docence of his vellums, gresk, letton and russicruxian, onto the lapse of his prolegs, into umfullth onescuppered, and sat about his widerproof [155].

The Gripes is not Orc here; he is far too mild and forgiving for Orc. He is a little more like Blake's Los, who, like Joyce's Shem, is the artist and is identified with Blake as Shem is with Joyce.

The Joycean synecdoche is characterized by the failure of the dreamer, any dreamer, to recreate the original imaginative universal as such. Finn is but a vague memory, and Finnegan, who was a specific person, is dead and prevented from rising by the insistent wakers. HCE, Joyce's elusive figure for the usurping abstract universal who is everybody and thus seems to have no particular body, is a signal of the cyclical movement that is the reality of a world presided over by a nature goddess associated with time (in contrast to Blake's Enitharmon, who is space) and threefold in time (as is Blake's alienated emanation figure). HCE has a family that includes two sons, who are together going to be a new version of the father. Finn isn't going to return as such, but in the *Wake* this is not cause for alarm or sadness. With every morning, with every erection encouraged by ALP, with every fall of every Finnegan, he will arrive, the usurper, the guilty one. HCE is played in the strife of his sons.

In the Blakean cycle, Orc overthrows Urizen and takes his place as the new Urizen. There is no "progression" (E34) here, only an endless cyclicity in which tyranny subdues tyranny. What is needed is a contrary to this repetition, a contrary that will not merge with its opposite (as opposites merge in one of Joyce's other heroes Giordano Bruno), for Blake sees merger as inevitably an eventual negation of one side. He seeks conversation. The creature in Blake who presses on through his own errors to advocate this situation is the blacksmith-artist Los, the representative of creative time, who together with Enitharmon (space) ought to form the Zoa named Urthona, Blake's creative force.

Temporal cyclicity in Blake is associated with a state of neurotic repetition and theories of determinism. Blake posits his creative force as a potential contrary to fallen Urizen-Orc. Blake's notion of time is that, unfallen, it is simply the creative act, not in itself measurable but valuable in what it makes or in its act of making. Time is always the now in or of space.

By an opposition to Blake that he may well have understood, Joyce projects a female time, investing value in the cycle as such, and investing spirituality in the life of the ordinary or, perhaps better, the ordinary life of birth, marriage, procreation, parenthood, and death, over which ALP presides as a sort of muse-deity and whose turning she endlessly encourages. In Blake, the Fall is a disintegration in which the four Zoas who constitute Albion become alienated from him. This Fall is thus less vertical than horizontal. Albion falls into the dream of subjectivity. The solution must be a renewal of conversation among Albion's parts. This is finally brought about by the shaping and clarification of an error that becomes so clear that it can be seen only for what it is. The true contrariety is, as Blake says, "war and hunting in heaven," not material war on earth. It is engagement, dialectic, conversation.

There has been some thought that Blake's four Zoas and the garrulous four old codgers in *Finnegans Wake* are in some way related. Frye thinks not, and Gleckner writes of "Joyce's inability or disinclination to incorporate into his 'tradition' or myth Blake's four Zoas, who are at the core of his 'system.'"* Frye's comment is helpful:

> … the parallel sometimes suggested between Blake's four Zoas and Joyce's four old men is not a genuine one. The Zoas in Blake are his major figures Los [Urthona], Orc [Luvah], Urizen, and Tharmas, and are fully individualized: the four old men in Joyce are always a chorus, and seem unintegrated into the rest of the symbolism. These four men are inorganic tradition, or, more accurately, the conscious memory [260].

This is true up to a point. The old men are connected through their names to the four evangelists—Matt Gregory, Mark Lyons, Luke Tarpey, and Johnny MacDougal. They are also the four chroniclers of Irish history. But they are also parodies of Blake's four, appropriate to the dream world of Finn. Blake speaks of the apocalyptic conversation of the four as *Jerusalem* ends. In *The Four Zoas* each had a different story to tell, but not to each other. In *Jerusalem,*

> … they conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright
> Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions
> In new Expanses … [E257–8].

Frye is right. The four old codgers, whose history-making is gossip, are far different from Blake's four. But they are not merely different, they are opposite; and in Joyce and Bruno, opposites join.

**Frye, "Quest and Cycle," 260; Gleckner, 150.*

In the same way, Joyce's cycle is different from Blake's, and he invests everything in it, while Blake thinks of it as fallen and subject ultimately to redemption by the human imagination. Gleckner accurately observes that Joyce finally departed from Blake, thinking that Blake's work finally was blind to "the grubby realities of this world, to an 'idealism' so absolute that there was no room for the Blooms and Mollys, the Finnegans and the Earwickers" (159). I think, if Gleckner is right, Joyce was wrong about this, for Blake was never that kind of idealist and his reality was not an elsewhere. I think also that in Blake and Joyce on the matter of cyclicity we have a trace of their respective upbringings and religious and intellectual orientations: Blake was a Protestant in temperament if not exactly in belief, committed to leave a place in the story for some version of straight-line progress, though not the progress of bourgeois *laissez-faire* optimism. In Blake, things get worse until they are suddenly better. Joyce, a Catholic in temperament if not exactly in belief, found a deep truth on the surface of his observation of the cyclic events of nature, around which the rituals of the Church are built. Frye thought of modern cyclic works as ironic. There is a sense in which this is true, and it is one of his many important insights, but from the *Wake*'s point of view, the cycle is not ironic but life-giving. Frye was a Blakean with a Protestant background. He saw it the way Blake saw it, not the way that Joyce did.

Yeats and Joyce

Yeats and Joyce agreed in their common respect for Blake. "The most enlightened of English poets," Joyce is said by his brother Stanislaus to have remarked (Gleckner, 137). "More simply a poet than any poet of his time," said Yeats (*Ideas of Good and* Evil, 119). The relation of the younger Joyce to the older Yeats, nevertheless, had a certain tension, at least from Joyce's point of view, more than their common devotion to Blake would imply. For Yeats, Joyce was "the most remarkable new talent in Ireland today,"* and he took steps to be of help to Joyce's career, for which Joyce was grateful. But Yeats never finished reading *Ulysses.* Elsewhere he wrote that Joyce had "a cruel playful mind like a great soft tiger cat" (*Letters*, 679), meaning to be complimentary, but with some reservation. Ellmann writes, "When Yeats died on January 28, 1939, Joyce was much moved.

*The Letters of W. B. Yeats, *ed. Allan Wade, New York: Macmillan, 1955, 599.*

He sent a wreath to the funeral, and conceded to a friend that Yeats was a greater writer than he, a tribute he paid to no other contemporary" (743n).

Yeats recognized in Joyce and others of his time "a hatred of the abstract" (610n). This hatred could certainly be described as Blakean if Yeats's idea of Blake as a mystic did not somewhat garble his perception. In his lecture, Joyce also saw Blake as a mystical idealist. He remarked that Blake looked "not *with* the eye, but *beyond* the eye" (222). In this, he almost got it right, but not quite: *through*, not beyond the eye. Blake was saying that you look with the mind. Joyce and Yeats were alike in their thinking about Blake—the early Joyce and the early Yeats, at least. For Joyce, Blake's imagination was not of the earth. For Yeats, he was a mystical poet. Yeats thought Joyce too earthy. Ellmann writes, "To Yeats, Joyce was too concerned with the commonplace, and unable to effect an adequate union between new material and a heroic mythical background" (608n). One wonders what Yeats might have thought of *Finnegans Wake* had he lived to (try to) read it. What would an imaginary contemporary Blake have thought of Yeats's *A Vision*? Maybe, with his reading of the antiquarian mythologists of the eighteenth century behind him, he would not have thought it odd. Because he had written the satirical *An Island in the Moon*, he might have liked the comedy of the stories of Michael Robartes and his friends. What would he have thought of *Finnegans Wake*? He would have laughed and laughed.

Postscript

One way of understanding the movement of Blake's thought in his prose writings is to follow the development of his theory of imagination. Early in his career, he wrote of the "poetic genius" as a fundamental human power. That became connected to the idea of visionary power, which implied, particularly, for the visual artist, the importance of sight, the literality of the image in "imagination." Eventually, imagination became for Blake the substance of the human, for only mental things were real.

The Bible became the ultimate visionary, imaginative, encyclopedic work of art. As projections of human imagination, its characters were free of external history, which had come to be based on a false belief that the only truth was in externalized abstractions, which were, for Blake only fictions of limited vision. Free of history and measurable time, the Bible's Jesus, whatever he may have been to history, became a product of the imagination and a figure for it. Blake was a literalist of the imagination. No church could contain him, and no philosophy.

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