

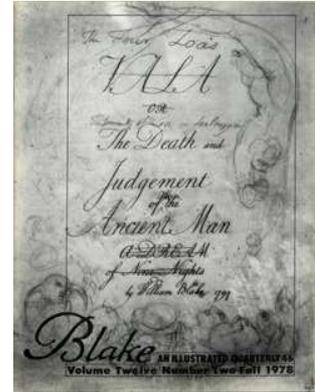
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The strongest evidence that VIIb is an essential part of the poem, and of "Night the Seventh," is the way its incidents fulfill structural patterns established in the preceding Nights. The fall from oneness is initiated in "Night the First," the imprisonment of the Eternal Man in "Night the Fourth," and the rise toward salvation in "Night the Seventh." The central problem of the poem, Urthona's division, is emphasized in these three Nights in the repeated motif of Urthona suddenly alone beside his anvil (compare I, 22:16-18; IV, 50:6-10; VIIa, 84:16-17), and in the evolving relationships among Tharmas, Los, and Enitharmon. Without VIIb there would be serious gaps in the development; yet the continuities are broken if we read VIIa and VIIb either in simple sequence or in reverse order.

The arrangement I propose requires inserting VIIb (with its two parts reversed, as Blake's instructions require) between the original and added parts of VIIa (i.e. between VIIa1 and VIIa2). In this sequence "Night the Seventh" can function coherently as the crucial Night of the poem. It begins with the successful machinations of Urizen to dominate the world. In VIIa1 he lays his plot, hoping to overcome Los through Orc and Enitharmon; in VIIb2 he routs Orc in a terrific battle; in VIIb1 his agent deceives Tharmas and the nadir of the Fall is reached. In VIIa2 the poem makes the crucial upswing toward salvation, and Los is the zoa in control.

This rearrangement changes the complexion of VIIb. It no longer serves to initiate the harmony which is achieved in "Night the Ninth." It now serves to emphasize the action in "Night the Seventh." Placed after VIIa1 it interrupts the action at a critical point and holds the reader in suspense over the outcome of the birth of the "wonder horrible." During this short interval the rest of the main characters are deployed in their appropriate positions for the climactic events of VIIb1 (the battle) and VIIa2 (the ascendance of Los). VIIb2 serves this purpose well because it contains

a short account of each character's situation at the time of Vala's birth, thus enabling Blake to orchestrate the final movement of the poem.

A further indication that this arrangement (VIIa1, VIIb2, VIIb1, VIIa2) is the most sensible reading is the way each section fits into those next to it and the rest of the poem. VIIa1 takes up the narrative at the end of "Night the Sixth" so smoothly that this order has never been interrupted in any editions of the poem. VIIb2 does not follow VIIa1 as nicely, but Urizen's opening response ("Urizen saw & triumphed": 95:17) could easily be to Vala's birth at the end of VIIa1 (85:7,22). Urizen would certainly have cause to exult, since he believes the birth to be the successful result of his plot.

The two parts of VIIb do not mesh as well as before Blake reversed them, but there is some textual evidence that Blake made the reversal precisely for the purpose of placing VIIb2 as the sequel to VIIa1, namely the substitution of "his warriors" for "the Shadowy Female" in 95:17 and the erasure of the original 95:25, "The shadowy voice answered O Urizen Prince of Light." In the original order this was intended as Vala's reply to Urizen.

Stronger support for keeping the revised sequence of VIIb2,1 can be found in the way VIIb1 leads into the events of VIIa2. In 95:4-7 the daughters of Beulah invoke the Eternal Promise: "If ye will believe your Brother shall rise again." The first words of the spectre to Los at the beginning of VIIa2 recognize that promise (85:43-86:3). The final transition, from VIIa2 to "Night the Eighth," is smooth enough, although there is little to indicate that VIIa2 must directly precede it. The opening lines of VIII could follow just about anything, since they open a new scene. It is appropriate, however, that the scene opens after Los has reinstated love and unity in the world. If we agree that the transitions from section to section from VI to VIIa2 make the most sense, then the absence of a signaled transition to VIII should not trouble us.