

AN ILLUSTRATED QUARTERLY BLAKE

A R T I C L E

“The Mental Traveller”: Man’s Eternal Journey

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Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly, Volume 12, Issue 3, Winter 1978-79, pp. 184-192



"THE MENTAL TRAVELLER": MAN'S ETERNAL JOURNEY

The spiritual States of the Soul are all Eternal
Distinguish between the man, & his present State
(Jerusalem 52, E198, K681)¹

IZAK BOUWER & PAUL McNALLY

The Mental Traveller" describes a cycle in which two figures, one male and one female, grow from infancy to old age and back to infancy again. Each grows younger as the other grows older, so that each is oldest when the other is at the point of birth. This curious round of change becomes understandable when we realize that the figures personify two complementary principles. However, the interpretation of these principles and of their cycle of change has proved to be puzzling and controversial. Of two main critical traditions, the earlier represents the cycle as essentially prototypical of cyclic process, and in particular of historical cycles.² Such a generalizing approach is out of character for Blake, and the cyclic processes of history are certainly within the grasp of "cold Earth wanderers," while this cycle is explicitly said to go beyond their knowledge. However, this tradition incorporates, in a simple and natural way, the fact that each principle develops to its fullest manifestation and then diminishes in the face of the growing opposing principle. The later tradition involves interpretations in terms of the so-called "Orc cycle": the Male Babe personifies revolt (Orc) and ages into a personification of oppression (Urizen).³ Such a cycle is complete half way through the poem, and in spite of various attempts to interpret the Female Babe, the second half of Blake's cycle remains logically impertinent.⁴ In both traditions, the cycle is seen as repeating.

The reading we give in this paper follows the earlier tradition to the extent that each principle is seen as aging into a mature form of itself. However, our reading differs from that of the earlier tradition in that the cycle is specifically seen as the theological cycle of Man's fall from and return to Eden. It is our aim to show that "The Mental

Traveller" portrays the successive states through which Man passes on his eternal journey, as determined by the complementary interplay of two principles in him: the Spiritual, expressed through his imaginative faculty, and the Natural, expressed through his earthly nature.⁵ This theme of Man's eternal journey was of profound importance to Blake, and inspires his entire mythology, so that the poem emerges as a compact counterpart to his major work, and a summary of his spiritual vision.

It was Blake's conviction that "Mental Things are alone Real" (*VLJ*, E555, K617), and he considered it his great task to "open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal Eyes / Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought: into Eternity . . ." (*Jerusalem* 5:18-19, E146, K623). Whether we see the traveler as the poet in his exploration of eternal reality, or as Man on his eternal journey, the title of the poem indicates that the business of the poem is with eternal things: "What are the Treasures of Heaven which we are to lay up for ourselves, are they any other than Mental Studies & Performances? What are all the Gifts of the Gospel, are they not all Mental Gifts?" (*Jerusalem* 77, E229, K717). It was also Blake's conviction that Man's eternal states are determined by a simple two-fold process in which truth is discovered as error is destroyed: "All Life consists of these Two Throwing off Error & Knaves from our company > continually & recieving Truth <or Wise Men into our Company> Continually" (*VLJ*, E551, K612-13).⁶ This two-fold process extends logically to encompass the entire myth of Man's fall and redemption: in the period when error, or the Natural principle, is dominant, the states of Man are those associated with the fall and Man's subsequent history in the dimensions of time and space; in the period when truth, or the Spiritual principle,

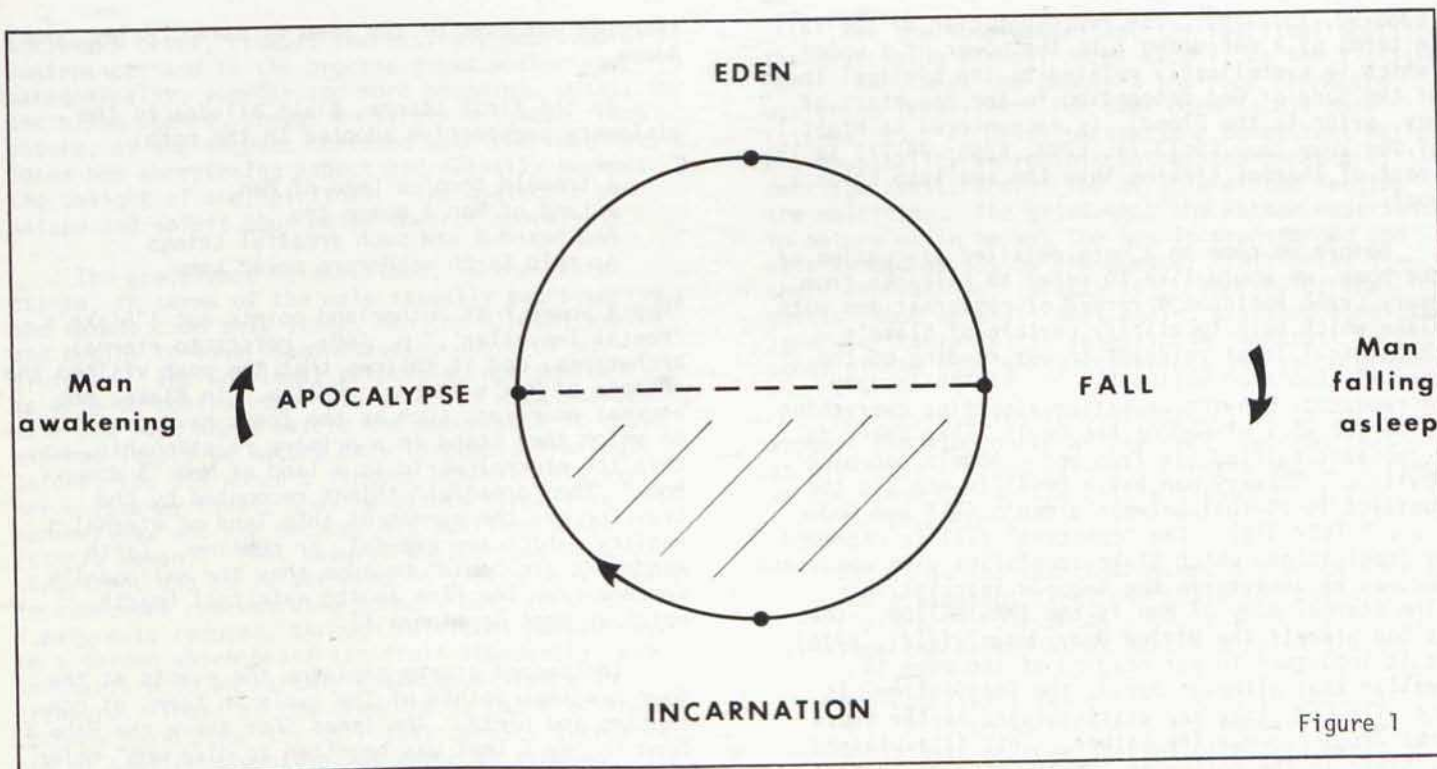


Figure 1

is dominant, the states of Man are those associated with the apocalypse and Man's sojourn in paradise.⁷ There is one state where there is no error, and in this state Man is wholly divine and coincident with God.⁸ This state, the state of Eden, closes the biblical narrative into a circle.⁹

We contend that "The Mental Traveller" describes this same circle. Because Blake shows the continuity of states, the circle appears to be a repetitive cycle, but is in fact merely complete. The poem is anti-Aristotelian and, like eternity, has no beginning, middle, or end. In Blake's vision in the poem, Man, composed of contrary but complementary principles, is seen as a continuous progression of states which in themselves form a unity, the perfect form of the circle. The two principles in Man, the Spiritual and the Natural, are personified, respectively, by the principal male and female figures of the poem, the age of each representing the extent to which the corresponding principle manifests in the being of Man. The cycle of the poem may be graphically represented as in Figure 1.

The poem begins at the point, shown at the bottom of the circle in Figure 1, where the Natural principle is in its fullest manifestation, and the incarnation of the Divine into the world of the Natural takes place. This incarnation is represented by the birth of the Male Babe, who is most naturally associated with Jesus. As the Spiritual gains in strength, the Natural principle becomes correspondingly less dominant until, at the left-most point of the circle, it is overpowered by the Spiritual principle. In the life-cycle of Man, this overpowering of the Natural by the Divine corresponds to the spiritual awakening of Man at the apocalypse. In the continuing process of the Last Judgment, the

errors of the natural world are progressively destroyed as eternal truths are recognized. This process reaches its completion only when the natural delusion has decreased to vanishing point and all creation is consumed. Here, at the topmost point of the circle, Man finds himself in the state of Eden, where he is coincident with God, the "Heavenly Father."¹⁰ When the Natural principle reappears as the Female Babe, it is in a growing phase, and increases in strength until, at the right-most point of the circle, the Spiritual is drawn into its power. This overpowering of the Divine by the Natural corresponds to the fall, where Man sinks into a spiritual sleep.¹¹ The Natural principle continues to gain in strength, while the Spiritual principle grows correspondingly weaker, until Humanity identifies itself with purely natural Man, who lives in the state of the earthly paradise, or lower garden. Thus we arrive again at the point where the incarnation of the Spiritual principle is to take place.

The images that Blake uses in the poem to express the varying relationships of the two principles, especially at the cardinal points of the cycle, have their parallels in the biblical narrative and are used in similar contexts elsewhere in Blake's work.¹² The torture of the Male Babe is fairly closely paralleled in *Jerusalem* (66:17-33, E216, K702; 68:57-58, E220, K706-07). The sexual act as metaphoric portrayal of the apocalypse (implicit in the biblical image of the Bride and Bridegroom) is found as part of a prophetic vision in the "Preludium" to *America* (2:3-4, E50-51, K196). The banquet encountered towards the end of the quarter cycle leading to the state of Eden (corresponding to the "supper of the great God" at the Last Harvest and Vintage, in Rev. 19:17) is the golden feast of the Eternals described in Night 9 of *The Four Zoas*

(E385-90, K372-78). The representation of the fall in terms of a man drawn into the power of a woman (which is symbolically related to the biblical theme of the Sons of God descending to the daughters of men, prior to the Flood), is encountered in Night 1 of *The Four Zoas* (5:13-14, E298, K266: 76-77) in the image of Tharmas sinking into the sea into Enion's woof.

Before we come to a more detailed discussion of the poem, we would like to refer to passages from Henry Crabb Robinson's record of conversations with Blake which help to clarify certain of Blake's theological ideas relevant to our reading of the poem.¹⁴ Robinson writes: "... his philosophy he repeated--Denying Causation asserting everything to be the work of God or the Devil, That there is a constant falling off from God-- Angels becoming Devils . . . Every man has a Devil in him and the conflict is eternal between a man's Self and God . . . " (BBR 318). The "constant" fall is redeemed by Imagination, which Blake identifies with Jesus and God, as he asserts in the *Laocoön* inscription: "The Eternal Body of Man is the IMAGINATION. that is God himself The Divine Body Jesus" (E271, K776). It is important to our reading of the poem to realize that although Jesus, the Imagination, is one with God, they are distinguished in the sense that Jesus *becomes* the Father. This is explained by Blake in the following conversation delightfully recorded by Robinson:

. . . I had suggested . . . the impossibility of supposing an immortal being created--An eternity a parte post--without an eternity a parte ante . . . His eye brightened on my saying this And he eagerly concurred--'To be sure it is impossible--We are all coexistent with God--Members of the Divine body--We are all partakers of the divine nature' . . . on my asking in what light he viewed the great question concerning the Divinity of Jesus Christ He said--'He is the only God.'--But then he added--'And so am I and so are you'--Now he had just before . . . been speaking of the errors of Jesus Christ: 'he was wrong in suffering himself to be crucified. He should not have attacked the government; he had no business with such matters.' On my enquiring how he reconciled this with the Sanctity & divine qualities of Jesus--he said 'He was not then become the father.' (BBR 310-11)

Jesus, therefore, personifies to Blake the Spiritual principle in its early stages, when it is still weak and at the mercy of the Natural. The Father is the Spiritual principle when it is dominant and nature is subjugated.

II

No short reading of "The Mental Traveller" (E475-77, K424-27) can do justice to its rich and varied allusions. We wish primarily to associate the narrative in the poem with the biblical narrative, indicating parallels in Blake's other works where these appear helpful, in order to show that the cycle of the poem is that of Man's eternal journey. Where we pass over details, we may be understood to accept the excellent and generally

thorough exegeses of the poem by Raine, Paley, and Adams.

In the first stanza, Blake alludes to the visionary perspective adopted in the poem:

I travel'd thro' a Land of Men
A Land of Men & Women too
And heard & saw such dreadful things
As cold Earth wanderers never knew.

"Men & Women," as Sutherland points out ("Blake's 'Mental Traveller'," p. 140), refers to eternal archetypes, and it follows that the poet visited the regions of Man's eternal reality. In Blake, the eternal energies, such as the Zoas, have emanations, to which they stand in a primary relationship, so that the eternal world is a land of Men "& Women too." The "dreadful" things recounted by the traveler are the events of this land of eternal reality, which are awe-ful, or sublime. Earth wanderers are "cold" because they are antipodally removed from the fire in the spiritual hearth, which we meet in stanza 11.

The second stanza explains the events at the four cardinal points of the cycle in terms of conception and birth. The lines "For there the Babe is born in joy / That was begotten in dire woe" refer to both of the births in the poem, that of the Boy, and that of the Female Babe. The "joy" is experienced by the principle that is born anew, for it is in a growing and assertive phase, and will triumph over the opposing principle a quarter-cycle later. At the sexual encounter a quarter-cycle earlier, the diminishing principle entered the "womb" of the other, which to it is a "dire woe." The Boy is conceived at the fall, and the implication is simply that Jesus is born of the flesh. Hence, in "To Tirzah" Blake's narrator can ask, "Thou Mother of my Mortal part / . . . what have I to do with thee?" (E30, K220), and in *The Everlasting Gospel* Blake writes of the "Serpent Bulk of Natures dross" (E515, K749) which is to be nailed to the cross. In the case of the Female Babe, the sexual encounter is the "dire woe" of the apocalypse, when nature is subjugated to the Eternal Imagination.

The first line of the third stanza, "And if the Babe is born a Boy," identifies the point at which Blake chooses to begin his description of the traversal of the cycle, that of the incarnation of the spirit into the natural world. Evidently, Blake is interested in charting the "dreadful" events of the spirit, following it in its cycle of evolution, from its birth, through subsequent growth, to its decline. The diverse images of torture that follow evoke associations with Prometheus, Orc, and as Raine suggests, with Dionysus (who was lacerated, and who like Christ had a heavenly father and an earthly mother). However, the most sustained reference is to the suffering of Christ (as is the case in the parallel description in *Jerusalem* 66). Incarnated in the natural world, the spirit has to undergo the excruciating tensions of the contraries operating in this world: The Old Woman cuts the Boy's heart out "To make it feel both cold & heat." As the Boy grows older, thus stronger, his sufferings become less intense. Since she lives "upon his

shrieks & cries," she is increasingly deprived of sustenance, and in the process grows weaker and, paradoxically, younger and more becoming, until, in the sixth stanza, she is a "Virgin bright." Thus nature, as she becomes suffused with the imaginative, loses her threatening aspect and actually becomes the delight of the Spiritual. The dialectic of nature and spirit thus moves towards apocalypse.

The apocalypse is described, in the sixth stanza, in terms of the male sexually overpowering the female. In this state, Man (or Albion) awakes and begins to live imaginatively, aware of his divinity. The Spiritual principle, now dominant, is able to control the natural world with increasing ease and joy, where before the apocalypse it could express itself in nature only through suffering. Before, the Old Woman's fingers numbered his every nerve (stanza five); now, he plants himself in all her nerves, and she becomes his dwelling place (stanza seven). This natural world, however, is shrinking, and as it shrinks, it yields up a harvest in ever more concentrated form. Thus, in stanza 7 nature is reduced, through spiritual husbandry, to a garden which bears its fruit abundantly, and in stanza 8 to an earthly cottage, filled with treasure. Thus, as the treasure is gathered in, it becomes purer, for its spiritual density increases, and of smaller dimension, as error is removed. The nature of this treasure is explained in stanza 9. It is the "gems of the Human Soul," described in images of suffering, drawn from courtly-love poetry: "a lovesick eye," "the lovers sigh," "the akeing heart" and "The martyrs groan." The treasure which nature delivers up is therefore that of the spiritual loves and sufferings of Man on this earth. These have been preserved, and are now brought forth, in ever purer form, to serve as food for the Spiritual: ". . . the gems of the Human Soul / . . . / . . . are his meat . . . are his drink" (ninth and tenth stanzas).

The meaning of the first two lines of stanza eight is crucial, for divergent interpretations of the poem hinge on it: "An aged Shadow soon he fades / Wandring round an Earthly Cot." In the tradition of Rossetti--Ellis & Yeats--Raine, the "aged Shadow," fading, is seen as effete, and in the Orc cycle tradition, as restrictive. We suggest that "aged" merely indicates that the Spiritual principle is nearing full manifestation and greatest potency, just as the Female was most powerful when most old. To the natural eye, however, the Spiritual when most manifest is paradoxically least visible, thus becoming a "Shadow" that fades, as it wanders around the last vestiges of the natural in a world that has become nearly completely spiritual. Although eternal substance appears shadowy to mortal man, the poet, the visionary traveler, knows that the world of the Father is the "Imagination the real & eternal World . . . in which we shall live in our Eternal or Imaginative Bodies, when these Vegetable Mortal Bodies are no more" (*Jerusalem* 77, E229, K717). In this world, the "Land of Men," the ". . . Inhabitants [are] walking up & down in Conversations concerning Mental Delights . . . Here they are . . . Conversing with Eternal Realities as they Exist in the Human Imagination . . ." (*VLJ*, E552, K613). Paradise is therefore populated with eternal forms.

Like the Good Samaritan, the Spiritual nourishes the developing eternal forms as well as the visiting poet: "He feeds the Beggar & the Poor / And the wayfaring Traveller / For ever open is his door" (stanza 10). As Jesus becomes the beneficent Father, his hospitality is reminiscent of the parable of the marriage feast, and of the miracle of the feeding of the multitude. The grief that the Father experienced in nature while he was the Son is transformed and experienced as joy by the guests: "His grief is their eternal joy" (stanza 11). The joy of the guests (whom we shall meet again "scatterd thro' the land" in stanza 16) is in antipodal contrast to the agony of the Boy, whose sufferings fed the Old Woman.

As the last vestiges of nature, or error, disappear, the atmosphere at the feast becomes that of an ale-house: "They make the roofs & walls to ring." We are reminded of "The Little Vagabond" in *The Songs of Experience*:

But if at the Church they would give us some Ale.
And a pleasant fire, our souls to regale;
.
Then the Parson might preach & drink & sing.
.
And God like a father rejoicing to see,
His children as pleasant and happy as he:
Would have no more quarrel with the Devil . . .

(E26, K216)

In the description of the golden feast, in *The Four Zoas*, Night 9, we find a similar allusion to intoxication:

Attempting to be more than Man We become less
said Luvah
As he arose from the bright feast drunk with
the wine of ages
His crown of thorns fell from his head . . .

(135:21-23, E388, K376:709-11)

This recurring emphasis on drunken revels in sacred context is explained by Blake's remark to Henry Crabb Robinson that "What are called the vices in the natural world, are the highest sublimities in the spiritual world" (BBR 316).

Stanzas 10 and 11, then, describe the state of Eden. Here, there are no more traces of the natural (thus, "no more quarrel with the Devil"). The treasure has shrunk to its vanishing point, and the eternal forms appear fully assembled as the "Family Divine." This family is the "Council of God" which, omnipresent, watches over the "Body / Of Man" (*The Four Zoas*, Night 4, 55:10-11, E330, K304: 247-48). The divine family is not visible to mortal eyes. Here, in the state of Eden, the dominant Zoa in Man is Urthona. S. Foster Damon (*A Blake Dictionary*, 1965; rpt. New York: Dutton, 1971, p. 426) mentions that Urthona never manifests in his own person, and is frequently called "dark."

In the process of the Last Judgment, "Error or Creation" is "Burned Up" (*VLJ*, E555, K617). In stanza 11 we find fire in the hearth, the center of the divine dwelling. Nature's last vestiges have

disappeared into this fire, from which nature is reborn, phoenix-like, as "A little Female Babe." In stanza 12, she is said to be "all of solid fire/ And gems & gold." Solidity, alien to fire, and characteristic of the natural, already indicates the beginning of the fall. The "gems & gold" which filled the cottage in stanza 8 were associated there with the last transfigured residue of the Natural. Now we encounter the same image once again. It is one that Blake uses elsewhere in his work to describe the adornment of the serpent form (for instance, *VDA* 8:7, E49, K195), and here it gives a fleeting glimpse of the serpent's presence in Eden.¹⁵

The Natural principle, in its growing phase, is not susceptible to control: " . . . none his hand / Dares stretch to touch her Baby form / Or wrap her in his swaddling-band" (stanza 12). By contrast, Jesus submitted to swaddling clothes. In the previous quarter-cycle, approaching Eden, nature was pleased to serve the Divine, as in *Jerusalem*:

The Female searches sea & land for gratifications
to the
Male Genius: who in return clothes her in gems
& gold
And feeds her with the food of Eden . . .

(69:16-18, E221, K707)

But now the situation corresponds to that described in *The Four Zoas*, Night 9:

And Many Eternal Men sat at the golden feast
to see
The female form now separate They shudderd at
the horrible thing
Not born for the sport and amusement of Man but
born to drink up all his powers
They wept to see their shadows they said to one
another this is Sin
This is the Generative world they rememberd the
Days of old.

(133:5-9, E386, K373:621-25)

In Robinson's diary we read: "On my inquiring whether the Devil would not be destroyed by God as being of less power--he denied that God has any power--Asserted that the Devil is eternally created not by God--but by God's permission" (BBR 318). In view of this lack of power on the part of the Divine principle, the birth of the Female Babe is thematically associated with the creation of Adam and Eve, who will disobey the Father. Adam and Eve are to be seen as united in forming the natural component. This tallies with Blake's *Laocon* inscription: "Adam is only The Natural Man & not the Soul or Imagination" (E271, K776), and with the Chapter titles of his Genesis manuscript: "Chapter 1 The Creation of the Natural Man / Chapter 11 The Natural Man divided into Male & Female" (E667, K933).

The growing Natural principle organizes whatever mental forms prove susceptible to her influence: "But She comes to the Man she loves / If young or old or rich or poor" (stanza 13). In this process the "aged Host" is driven out, and he is now a beggar

"at another's door," rather than the earlier benevolent host. He develops a need for companionship and turns to the maiden. Coming at the stage just before the fall, this action is reminiscent of the Genesis account of the Lord walking in the Garden in the cool of the evening and calling out to Adam and Eve. The Divine--"freezing," since it has wandered far from the spiritual hearth--now succumbs to the attraction of the Natural, and the fall takes place: "The Cottage fades before his sight / The Garden & its lovely Charms" (stanza 15). With the fall, Man's perceptions undergo a radical change. His senses conglobate and perceive everything in distorted fashion, round and bounded: "For the Eye altering alters all / The Senses roll themselves in fear / And the flat Earth becomes a Ball" (stanza 16). Blake states elsewhere that "Reality was Forgot & the Vanities of Time & Space only Rememberd & call'd Reality" (*VLA*, E545, K605). Thus it is that Man begins to live in the fallen world of time and space: Albion has fallen asleep.

The living forms of the "Stars Sun Moon" now shrink away (stanza 17), leaving an imaginative desert in which the heavenly bodies are experienced only through Man's fallen senses. There is no more sustenance for the former guests (eternal forms), and they are "scatterd thro' the land" (stanza 16). There is, however, mention of another banquet in stanza 18:

The honey of her Infant lips
The bread & wine of her sweet smile
The wild game of her roving Eye
Does him to Infancy beguile.

This banquet is the antipodal counterpart to the divine banquet and corresponds to the feast of Los and Enitharmon, described in *The Four Zoas*, Night 1:

The Earth spread forth her table wide. the
Night a silver cup
Fill'd with the wine of anguish . . .
They eat the fleshly bread, they drank the
nervous wine.

(12:36-37, 44, E303, K273:347-48, 274:355)

In stanzas 20-22 the word "Love," or a derivative, occurs four times: the food of the banquet is that of natural love.

Nature continues to be alluring and is pursued by the spirit:

Like the wild Stag she flees away
Her fear plants many a thicket wild
While he pursues her night & day
By various arts of Love beguile. (stanza 20)

Both principles are in a state of dislocation: they wander "in terror & dismay" (stanza 19). Her flight from him is not to entice; she actually fears him. Her resistance causes thickets to grow in the desert. The thickets and "Labyrinths" (stanza 21) describe the state that is created when the Spiritual principle is led into the pursuit of the riddle of matter. We thus arrive at the stage where, of his four faces, Man presents that of reason, the Zoa

Urizen.¹⁶ In this labyrinthine state roam the enemies of the spirit: the "Lion Wolf & Boar" (stanza 21), those animals that will flee howling at the incarnation, in stanza 25. In the Book of Enoch, in a dream-vision of Enoch, in which the history of the world is related with animal characters, these animals, among others, appear in the role of enemies of Israel: the boars are the Edomites, the lions the Babylonians, and the wolves the Egyptians.¹⁷

As the Natural principle increases to full maturity, we move towards the construction of the earthly paradise (stanzas 22,23):

Then many a Lover wanders here
The Sun & Stars are nearer roll'd
The trees bring forth sweet Extacy.

This state is called, in *Thel*, "the vales of Har" (4:10, E5, K129), and, in *Tiriel*, "the pleasant gardens of Har" (2:10, E274, K100) and "the lower garden" (8:1, E281, K109). In this state, Man is infatuated with physical forms, well expressed in the senile preoccupations of Har and Heva in *Tiriel* (2, E274-75, K100-02).¹⁸ Like the Romans at the time of the birth of Christ, Man wants to create "the good life," independent of his eternal destiny. Thus, in the desert "many a City . . . is Built / And many a pleasant Shepherds home" (stanza 23). Man tries to establish "a joy without pain, / . . . a solid without fluctuation" (BU 4:10-11, E70, K224).

The references to "Stars . . . nearer roll'd" and "Shepherds" serve to remind us of the circumstances preceding Christ's birth. When the birth of the Babe is discovered, it strikes terror "thro the region wide" (stanza 25). The Spiritual prin-

ciple is now emerging from its sojourn in the "womb" of nature, where an integument has been woven for it, enabling it to exist in this world and declare its own nature. The spirit is no longer available to serve in the pursuit of earthly love and happiness. It will of course be tortured in this world. Thel, brooding over the self-contained processes of the womb of nature, innocently anticipates that she will once again "gentle hear the voice / Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time" (*Thel* 1:13-14, E3, K127), the state of the spirit before the fall. However, allowed to view the incarnated state, she witnesses instead the suffering of the Boy, and flees back in horror to the safety of the vales of Har.

With the birth and torture of the Male Babe, we arrive at the same event described at the start of the ballad. The last two lines, "She nails him down upon the Rock / And all is done as I have told" (stanza 26), suggest that the process continues in the way described in the poem. However, as we argued above, the cycle is merely a representation of the various states in which Man may find himself, and the apparent sequentiality is part of the metaphor used to represent contiguous states.

The history of Man as a cycle from eternity to eternity is also recounted in Blake's epic, *The Four Zoas*.¹⁹ We conjecture that there is a basic correspondence between "The Mental Traveller" narrative and *The Four Zoas* narrative. A sketch of the alternation of the Zoas, as we understand them to reach prominence as we traverse the Mental Traveller's cycle, might serve to suggest an alignment between the two narratives, as indicated in Figure 2.

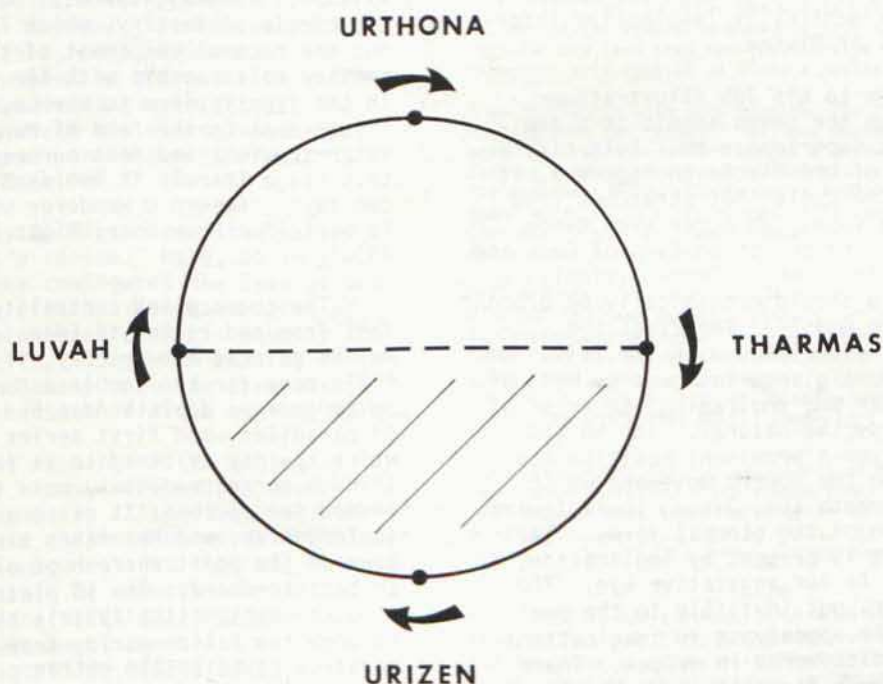


Figure 2

It seems natural to assume, with Roe, that all four Zoas, together with their Emanations, are present at every stage of Blake's cycle, and that the pre-dominance of any one depends upon the state of the cycle in which the Divine Humanity finds itself.²⁰ In eternity, the Emanations are absorbed in their respective Zoas, but at the fall they separate and progressively reject eternity until the limit of opacity is reached and the incarnation takes place.

It will be useful to visualize the Zoas, the "Four Faces" of Man (*Jerusalem* 98:26, E255, K745), round the four sides of a head, as in Blake's drawing *Ezekiel's Vision* (*William Blake: water-color drawings*, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1957, n. pag.). When one face is fronting us, the two faces on either side are seen in profile, and the one at the back is not visible. Luvah is the Zoa who presides over the apocalypse. However, his face already begins to show (as Orc) with the birth of the Spiritual at the incarnation. Similarly, the face of Urthona starts to take shape at the apocalypse, but will only be fully exposed as the heavenly Father when the eternal company is gathered for the divine feast in Eden. In Eden, the face of Tharmas, the Zoa in terms of whom the fall is described, is already appearing. And at the fall, the face of Urizen comes into view, but will only manifest frontally when reason is dominant and trying to establish the earthly paradise.²¹

III

We turn now to possible equivalents of the cycle of "The Mental Traveller" in Blake's pictorial art. Like many of Blake's works, the designs discussed below demonstrate Blake's belief in the co-presence of the Natural and Spiritual principles in Man. Also, like "The Mental Traveller," these designs are apocalyptic visions which not only describe Man's destiny in and through the Natural, but also complete his destiny by imaginative inference of the Spiritual or Divine.

In the title-page to his Job illustrations, Blake chose to arrange the seven angels in a semi-circular form. If we superimpose this half-circle onto the bottom half of the circle in Figure 1, it covers that part of the cycle that stretches from the fall to the apocalypse. We agree with Damon that the seven angels are the seven Eyes of God, and that they are seven states which "were divinely instituted so that man should mechanically be brought back to communion with God."²² The first Eye, Lucifer, is the angel associated with the fall. He looks out of the page, a glance followed by most of the angels coming after and indicating the error of turning outward towards the natural. The bottom angel, Shaddai, is given a prominent position and provides the pivot for the upward movement which is to follow. The seventh Eye, Jesus, looks inward toward the recognition of the eternal forms. The top half of the circle is present by implication, for it is not visible to our vegetative eye. The eighth Eye is, however, not invisible to the poet who has experienced the apocalypse in imagination: appropriately, it is discovered in *Milton*. There it is the "Eighth / Image Divine tho' darken'd" (15:5-6, E108, K496) that accompanies the "Spirits

of the Seven Angels of the Presence," and the "Shadowy Eighth" (20:47, E114, K502). It is called "Shadowy" and "darken'd" since it is entering the region wrapped in darkness from the understanding of natural Man.

Plate 15, *Behold now Behemoth*, of the Job series may be an attempt to depict the same cycle as "The Mental Traveller." Behemoth ("the chief of the ways of God") is positioned where the Spiritual principle is dominant, its head at the point of the apocalypse, its tail at the fall. Leviathan ("King over all the Children of Pride") rears its head at the fall and tails off towards the apocalypse. Significantly, water fills the lower half of the disk. Both in this design and in the frontispiece to *Europe, The Ancient of Days*, an apparently divine figure is situated above and extends his arm towards the actual or implied circle. In the frontispiece to *Europe*, this figure, shown with compasses, is frequently identified with Urizen, in the act of creation. It may, however, also be seen as the figure of Tharmas, at the moment prior to his fall:

Tharmas groand among his Clouds
Weeping, then bending from his Clouds he stoopd
his innocent head
And stretching out his holy hand in the vast
Deep sublime
Turnd round the circle of Destiny . . .

(*The Four Zoas*, Night 1, 5:8-11, E298, K266: 71-74)

Some critics incline to view the circle of destiny as a purely natural cycle, one which Man can traverse repeatedly until escape is possible through a process of rebirth.²³ The implication is that the circle of destiny is attached to a separate supernal cycle. It is our contention that the supernal cycle is not separate from the circle of destiny, but intertwined with it. That is, there is but a single cycle, and the circle of destiny, which Tharmas turns round, is but the natural component of the cycle, in complementary relationship with the supernal component.²⁴ In the frontispiece to *Europe*, then, the divine figure depicts the face of Man at the stage when we enter the fall and meet our earthly destiny. At this stage Tharmas is dominant, and it is he who can say: "Return O Wanderer when the Day of Clouds is oer" (*The Four Zoas*, Night 1, 5:12, E298, K266: 75).

The cogency and centrality of the theme of Man's fall from and return to Eden in other work of Blake may be pointed out briefly, if superficially. The title-page for the combined *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* depicts Adam and Eve being turned out of paradise: the first series consists of songs in which the joy of paradise is remembered and expressed through correspondent symbols in this world; the second series consists of songs in which eternity is forgotten, and Man makes his bitter progress towards the point where hope of regeneration has to be introduced. The 16 plates of *The Gates of Paradise* emblematically tell the tale of travel through the fallen world, from the exit gate of paradise round to the entrance gate. The early prophetic books describe various portions of the journey. The myth of *The Four Zoas* spans the entire

cycle; this myth is condensed and re-worked in *Jerusalem*. Milton focuses on the apocalyptic event within the poet. Even in his incidental illustrations, Blake frequently chose material related to the cycle, for instance, *The Pilgrim's Progress*, and *Paradise Lost* and *Paradise Regained*. Judith Rhodes has shown that the 12 illustrations to *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso* may be arranged in a circular form with striking correspondences to the cycle we argue for "The Mental Traveller."²⁵

Blake's various versions of his picture *A Vision of the Last Judgment* make a radical connection between the eternal journey as a cycle of fall and return, and the eternal journey as the form of Divine Humanity.²⁶ At the top of the picture Jesus is shown seated on his throne in paradise. The fall takes place on the right, in the form of figures falling downward. At the bottom, beneath the "dragon's cavern," lies Albion, who is awakened by his wife. The resurrection into paradise is shown on the left, in the form of figures moving upwards towards the throne of Jesus. We are fortunate to have Blake's description of a version of the picture (E542-55, K442-44, 604-17), in which he emphasizes the mental nature of his vision. For instance, the falling and rising figures, with biblical names, are meant to represent "the States Signified by those Names the Individuals being representatives or Visions of those States as they were revealed to Mortal Man in the Series of Divine Revelations. as they are written in the Bible 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" (VLJ, E546, K607). In the version of the picture which is in the Rosenwald collection, the details of the picture do dissolve into the outline of this "One Man."²⁷ Blake writes: "All Things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the Divine body of the Saviour . . . The Human Imagination who appeared to Me as Coming to Judgment . . . throwing off the Temporal that the Eternal might be Established" (VLJ, E545, K605-06). The Last Judgment is thus viewed as a process in which the divine spirit in Man leads him to discard the states of error and to reach his eternal state, which forms his true home, the place "Where the travellers journey is done."²⁸

A final design may be mentioned: the watercolor picture, *Ezekiel's Vision*. Here, as in the title-page to *Job*, Blake configures the Eyes of God in the lower part of a circle. As in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, the eternal cycle is equally the human form. These motifs, along with that of the four faces of Man, combine to make the Ezekiel design a comprehensive vision of Man's eternal form.

It is a symbolical reading of the Bible, as Blake's own commentary on *A Vision of the Last Judgment* suggests, that makes it possible to interpret cohesively his most challenging works. Robinson reports that Blake "warmly declared that all he knew was in the Bible; but then he understands by the Bible the Spiritual Sense" (BBR 322). Blake held that "The Old & New Testaments are the Great Code of Art" (*Laocoön*, E271, K777). The biblical narrative, seized as a whole and transfigured into a ballad, is complete and cohesive in "The Mental

Traveller." Any more restricted reading entails internal contradictions or indicates interpretations contrary to Blake's distinct theological ideas. Because "The Mental Traveller" is a radically compressed version of Blake's most important theme, that of Man's fall from and return to Eden, and an audacious announcement of reality's mental nature, a mastery of its form and its visionary conceit is, in microcosm, a mastery of Blake.

¹ Our main reference for Blake's work is D. V. Erdman, ed., *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1965), hereafter referred to parenthetically in the text as "E" followed by a page number. "K" followed by a page number indicates the location of a passage in G. Keynes, ed., *Blake: Complete Writings* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).

² This tradition had its starting point with W. M. Rossetti in Alexander Gilchrist, *Life of William Blake* (1880: rpt. New York: Phaeton Press, 1969), II, 112-13, and with E. J. Ellis and W. B. Yeats, *The Works of William Blake* (1893; rpt. New York: AMS Press, 1973), II, 34-36. It was further developed, indirectly, by W. B. Yeats, *A Vision* (London: Macmillan, 1937), and, directly, by Kathleen Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, I, 302-25.

³ The "Orc cycle" tradition was initiated by Northrop Frye in *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947), p. 229, and has been taken up by a number of scholars, including John H. Sutherland, "Blake's 'Mental Traveller'," *ELH*, 22 (1955), 136-47, reprinted in Judith O'Neill, ed., *Critics on Blake* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1970), pp. 69-78; Morton D. Paley, "The Female Babe and 'The Mental Traveller'," *SIR*, 1 (1962), 97-104, incorporated, in somewhat altered form, in Chapter 5 of Paley's *Energy and the Imagination* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), pp. 122-41; and Hazard Adams, *William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1963), pp. 77-100. In *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), pp. 322-23, Frye expresses a view more akin to the earlier tradition.

⁴ Frye (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 444, n. 7) expressed dissatisfaction with his own reading of the Female Babe as "imaginative achievements," a reading followed by Sutherland and Adams, and later (*Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 322) he identifies the female figure with "the natural environment." Paley ("Blake's 'The Mental Traveller'," pp. 100-01), who points out the significance of the concept of the Female Babe, finds Frye's later reading also unsatisfactory, and sees her instead as a united form of the "numerous evil females of Blake's pantheon."

⁵ We thus agree with John Sampson, *The Poetical Works of William Blake* (1905; rpt. Boston: Milford House, 1973), p. 273: "The poem . . . must be understood as a picture of man's spirit, passing through successive mental states, and at last returning, 'in endless circle,' to the point from which he started. In other words it is a restatement of Blake's favourite doctrine of constant generation and regeneration." However, Sampson does not elaborate his view.

⁶ "The Mental Traveller" and *A Vision of the Last Judgment* are of about the same period. Blake's letter to Ozias Humphrey, explaining his design of the Last Judgment, is dated 1808 (E544, K442), and the Notebook descriptions are "For the Year 1810" (E544, K604). G. E. Bentley, Jr., (cited in Paley, *Energy and the Imagination*, p. 122, n. 1) dates the entire Pickering manuscript, in which "The Mental Traveller" appears, as no earlier than 1805.

⁷ In identifying the two components of Man as "Spiritual" and "Natural," we follow Blake's occasional usage. For instance: "The Natural Body is an Obstruction to the Soul or Spiritual Body" (*Anno. Berkeley*, E653, K775). Error is identified with Nature: "Error or Creation will be Burned Up . . ." (VLJ, E555, K617).

⁸ Cf. "God is Man & exists in us & we in him" (*Anno. Berkeley*, E654, K775). For Blake's theology, we refer the reader to Frye, *Fearful Symmetry*, especially Chapter 2, "The Rising God," pp. 30-54. Another useful account is contained in Albert S. Roe, *Blake's Illustrations to the Divine Comedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp. 8-29.

⁹ We differ here from Frye (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 386). He rejects the idea of "pulling the Bible around in a circle" on the grounds that that would imply unending time, which would pervert the biblical meaning of the word "eternity." However, the gap between the two ends of the biblical narrative is included in Blake's cycle and transcends time.

¹⁰ "... the Spiritual Body or Angel . . . always behold the Face of the Heavenly Father" (Anno. Berkeley, E653, K774).

¹¹ Just as the Last Judgment is seen as a process lasting a full half-cycle (from the incarnation to the state of Eden), so the fall is seen as a process lasting the remaining half-cycle (from the state of Eden to the state where the incarnation takes place). However, we use the word "fall" to denote the specific stage of the process where the Natural principle attains dominance over the Spiritual.

¹² The parallels for imagery at the points of the fall, incarnation, and apocalypse have been pointed out by various writers. Of these writers, Raine (*Blake and Tradition*, I, 306-25) offers the most comprehensive identifications. Raine has also been most successful in tracing Blake's imagery for the fall. In his earlier work, Blake, possibly inspired by Thomas Taylor's account of the Persephone myth (see Raine, I, 67, 133), concentrates on the theme of the descent of the soul, personified by a female figure (Lyca, Thel, Oothoon, the early Vala).

¹³ Our quotations from Crabb Robinson's records are taken from G. E. Bentley, Jr., *Blake Records* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), hereafter referred to as "BBR." We silently incorporate Bentley's emendations of the punctuation, and write abbreviations out in full.

¹⁴ While these two principles function as though autonomous, the Spiritual is superior. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, in the "Devil's" voice, Blake states as an error the notion "That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body & a Soul," and that, on the contrary, "that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses" (MHH 4, E34, K149). The Devil only exists "by God's permission" (BBR 318). Kathleen Raine therefore rightly states that "There is only one agent" (*Blake and Tradition*, I, 313). It follows that an apt visual image for representing the two components in Man is provided by the complementary bright and dark parts of the moon's disk in its cycle of phases. The lunar symbolism has been elaborated upon by Yeats in the construction of his theory of the double gyres in *A Vision*, and Raine applies this theory in her reading of the poem.

¹⁵ Viewing the infant Natural principle as a serpent coiled around the "tree" of the fully manifested spirit, we would, antipodally, view the infant Spiritual principle as a serpent coiled around the "tree" of fully manifested nature. This is supported in *The Four Zoas*, Night 7 (a), where Orc is described as organizing a serpent body and stretching up Urizen's tree of mystery (80: 44, 81: 3-5, E349, K324: 152, 162-64). The first tree is the tree of life, and the second tree is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

¹⁶ S. Foster Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (1924; rpt. London: Dawsons, 1969), p. 297, and Raine, *Blake and Tradition*, I, 319-20. Also, Raine (I, 320) calls the activity of stanza 23 the building of "rational Rome," an identification which we adopt.

¹⁷ R. H. Charles, *The Book of Enoch* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1912), p. 191: footnote to verse 9, p. 195: footnote to verse

42, and p. 199: footnote to verse 55. Blake made drawings for the Book of Enoch, first translated into English in 1821.

¹⁸ One sees in Har and Heva an aged form of Adam and Eve, watched over by the "now aged" Mnetha (*Tiriel* 2: 6, E274, K100), their nurse, or Mother Nature. All three of these figures are of course associated with the Natural principle: we recall that Adam (with Eve) is natural Man, while "Goddess Nature" is "Satan's Wife" (*Laocoön*, E270, K777). In the second illustration to *Tiriel*, reproduced in G. E. Bentley, Jr., *William Blake: Tiriel* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), plate II, Mnetha is drawn in an elongated form, inexplicably so unless we take her to suggest the serpent. This illustration shows the advanced state, deep in the fall, of the *Paradise Lost* illustration, *Satan Watching Adam and Eve* (reproduced in *William Blake: water-color drawings*, Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1957), where Satan is shown with the serpent, his wife, coiled about him.

¹⁹ See, for instance, James Evans, "Epistemology, Aesthetics, and 'Divine Analogy': A Study of the Poetics of William Blake," Diss. Queen's University at Kingston 1974, p. 147.

²⁰ For interpretations of the Zoas and their Emanations, see, for instance, Roe, *Blake's Illustrations to the Divine Comedy*, pp. 23-29, 165-71, and Milton O. Percival, *William Blake's Circle of Destiny* (1938; rpt. New York: Octagon Press, 1964), pp. 18-46. In *The Four Zoas*, Night 9, seven Zoas and Emanations are named as they arise from the feast, while Urizen is in the vicinity (E385, 388, 390; K372, 376, 377).

²¹ Blake's diagram, "Miltons Track" (E132, K523) in *Milton* 36, depicts the Zoas in a cyclic order which is the mirror image of that shown in Figure 2. His fourteenth Job illustration, *When the morning Stars*, shows the regions of the Zoas arranged around the central figure in accordance with the order shown in Figure 2.

²² Damon, *William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols*, p. 224.

²³ For instance, Percival, p. 12, and Roe, p. 21. Paley (*Energy and the Imagination*, pp. 122-23) similarly indicates that Man, to be regenerated, must break "a bound circle."

²⁴ Blake talks of "the vast form of Nature like a serpent . . ." (*Jerusalem* 43: 76, E190, K655). The natural component of the cycle is thus aptly represented in versions of the Uroboros in which the serpent's body is thick in its middle and thins out towards its ends (see, for instance, Carl Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, *Collected Works*, 2nd ed., Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970, XII, p. 103). The implied complementary serpent, thickest where the serpent of nature is thinnest, and vice versa, represents the spirit.

²⁵ Judith Rhodes, "Blake's Designs for *L'Allegro* and *Il Penseroso*: Thematic Relationships in Diagram", *Blake Newsletter*, 4 (1971), 135-36, reprinted in Robert N. Essick, ed., *The Visionary Hand* (Los Angeles: Hennessey & Ingalls, 1973), pp. 449-51.

²⁶ See "Blake's Visions of the Last Judgment," a pamphlet issued by *Blake Newsletter*, An Illustrated Quarterly for the MLA Blake Seminar, 1975.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ "Ah! Sun-flower" (E25, K215), another poem with a "curious circular movement" (Rosemary Freeman, *English Emblem Books*, London: Chatto & Windus, 1948, p. 28).