

For thou art but a form & organ of life & of thyself
 Art nothing being created continually by Mercy & Love divine
 Thy fancies answer. Speeches horrible thy words astound my ears
 With unrelenting conviction I feel I am not one of those
 Who when convinced can still resist. thy fancies controlled
 By Reason's power. Even I already feel a world within
 Opening its gates & on it all the real substance



Blake

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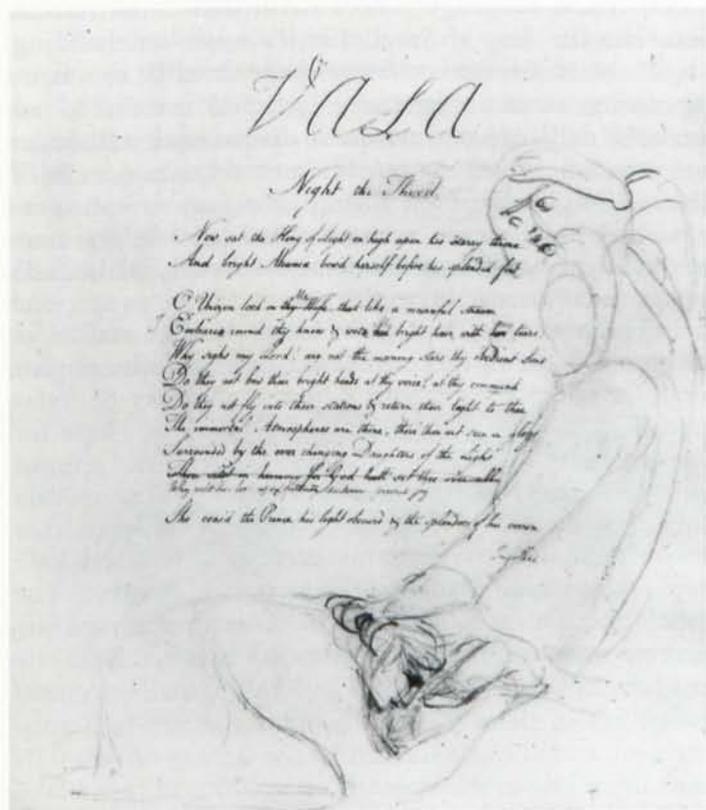
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Vala's Garden in Night the Ninth: Paradise Regained or Woman Bound?

BY CATHERINE HAIGNEY

The "pastoral" dream in the last pages of William Blake's *Four Zoas* lies at the center of Night the Ninth, whether you count lines or Blake's own pages.¹ The fact that this apocalyptic *pastorale* occurs at the Night's exact middle, dividing one half of Blake's upheaval of the universe from its tortured other half, makes it seem very much the hurricane's calm eye, and so most scholars tend to take it. Blake's reapers, resting "upon the Couches of Beulah," are "entertained" (131:558; E 400) by his vision of Vala's Garden, a kind of Beucolic dream. (Note the useful neologism: "Beulah" + "bucolic" = "Beucolic.") Yet the "dews of death" in this dream, its "impressions of Despair" (126:389, 377; E 395), convey a subtle uneasiness, a disturbance especially noticeable when the visionary imagery condenses around Blake's female figures. For the Emanations undergo curious sufferings. Male Zoas seem to encircle them with doubt, fear, and anxiety—the very atmosphere they move in disconcerts our expectations of pastoral. A reader who pays close attention to Blake's females will find it hard to accept the traditional interpretation, put forth by Northrop Frye, Harold Bloom, and others, that this Ninth Night vision is a joyful celebration of innocence amid the throes of final universal regeneration.² By questioning the gender conflicts in Vala's Garden, this reader will also question critics' attempts to inflict "closure" on the *Four Zoas* as a whole. How can there be universal regeneration when male and female remain at war?

This paper will argue (against a number of scholars) that through its female figures the dream subverts rather than celebrates pastoral as usually defined, and that this subversion compromises the rest of Blake's Ninth Night. With a bizarre repetitive effect, near-identical episodes of sexual conflict disperse throughout the poem. Blake's females seem doomed to a cyclical, not a linear narrative, and in reenacting failures, they set a pattern that detracts from the finality of apparently apocalyptic events in Night the Ninth. For too long we have viewed the poem as somehow forward-directed in time: the recurring events of Blake's recycling poetry overthrow that tendency and along with it the tendency to view male Zoas and their female Emanations as finally reconciled at the end.

It is not at all easy to see exactly how Blake's Beucolic vision fits in with the rest of Night the Ninth. The dream begins with Luvah and Vala's descent to the "Gates of Dark Urthona," a descent which: "those upon the Couches viewd . . . in the dreams of Beulah / As they reposed from the terrible wide universal harvest" (126:375, 383–84; E 395). It fades away with a tense union between Tharmas and Enion as "shadows . . . in Valas world"; "the sleepers who rested from their harvest work" still watching "entertained upon the Couches of Beulah" (131:556–58; E 400). The narrative dream sequence in between these lines seems at first entirely at odds with the rest of Blake's cataclysmic Ninth Night: pervading imagery comes from traditional pastoral, and a rich lyrical language echoes Latin myth, the lore of paradise, the *Song of Songs*. Critics intent on bending Night the Ninth into coherent shape describe this Beulah dream as an interruptive "pastoral interlude," an innocent dalliance or "masque"³ dished up by Blake as welcome relief from the terrifying earthquake tumult of his final Night. Yet even when his language recalls pastoral and hymn, even as he soothes us, like the harvesters, into a reverie of fantastic loveliness, Blake lulls us into a false sense of security.

The poet's description of Vala's Garden strikes at its outset a jarring note unheard in conventional pastoral, however melancholy: "in the shadows of Valas garden / . . . the impressions of Despair & Hope for ever vegetate" (126:376–77; E 395). Such lines remind us, before we succumb to the roseate vision of Vala frolicking with her docile flock, that only fourteen lines before their descent into this garden, Luvah and Vala were "the flaming Demon & Demoness of Smoke." The transformation, as so often in Blake, has been from one extreme to another, but one wonders in what sense the pair have changed. For Luvah and Vala actually preserve something of their smoky, demonic natures in a subterranean world quite foreign to the setting of pastoral, normally a hill in the open air. It seems odd that Blake should bury his fields—his "garden"—beneath the ground, and beyond the dark hellish gates of Urthona. As for the "earthly paradise" generic pastoral regains, do we

get it in uncorrupted form? Alicia Ostriker can call this "pastoral episode" an "idyllic evocation of a new Golden Age" only by overlooking Enion's fear of Tharmas and Vala's subservient relationship to Luvah, her distant "Lord" (129:501; E 398). The half-submerged anxiety of male/female encounters flattens whatever sounds like Golden Age harmony.⁴

Like Ostriker, Wilkie and Johnson note a "redeemed view of physical nature,"⁵ but they fail to recognize that this "redeemed view" seems more the result of a claustrophobic *denial* of the senses than a true renewal: "They [Luvah and Vala] heard not saw not felt not all the terrible confusion / For in their orb'd senses within clos'd up they wanderd at will" (126:381-82; E 395; emphasis added). Here, at the very beginning of the Beucolic vision, Blake gives us a scenario of withdrawal and deprivation. Moreover, the relationship between Luvah and Vala also changes radically, and one can hardly say for the better. Whereas before they had walked together, Luvah now rises "over Valas head" (126:385; E 395) and starts playing the role of a God-lover. His elevation makes him invisible to her (again denying the senses), but increases his control, for his voice now has the power of deity. In this "land of doubts & shadows sweet delusions unform'd hopes" (126:379; E 395), the apotheosis of Vala's mate means that she loses him. The next question is, what place has deprivation, what mean these forms of despair in a place so sheltered and ideal?

Overlooking such pitfalls in the text, Bloom contends that "Blake's imagery of Innocence" in this "Garden of Innocence" is "expressed with a new confidence, a firmness based upon definite organization." Whereas "Blake's pastoral vision" was a "deliberate failure . . . in the *Songs of Innocence*," here it is a "triumph." Granted, those *ignes fatui* of Innocence that so caught Bloom's eye do flash fitfully throughout the pastoral sequence. Yet since one *enters* this garden through Urthona's dark gates, with "orb'd senses . . . clos'd up," as in death, the garden imagery could just as well be Elysian as Edenic. In

another poem, *Jerusalem*, Blake associates "The Veil of Vala" with the creation of "the beautiful Mundane Shell, / The Habitation of the Spectres of the Dead." Perhaps in *The Four Zoas*, too, Vala's Garden, veiled in darkness, belongs more to the shadowy dead than to living lovers. Elysian Fields are beautiful, but for all that in Hades. When at the end of the sequence Blake again tells us that "Luvah & Vala were clos'd up in their world of shadowy forms" (131:559; E 400), we might follow Kathleen Raine's interpretation and think those "forms" Platonic. Yet they could just as well be the "sweet delusions" of a deprived, spectral underworld, where even the deified male shares his subjected mate's imprisonment.⁶

It needs pointing out that while Vala's Garden may or may not be Elysian, it *is* remarkably feminine. In fact, because this dream incubates in the female domain of Beulah, we should hesitate before we label its "sweet delusions" wholly harmless. Beulah is, after all, a quintessentially womanish realm: "There is from Great Eternity a mild & pleasant rest / Nam'd Beulah a Soft Moony Universe feminine lovely" (5:93-94; E 303). And such an origin implies negative opposition to the poem's predominantly masculine universe. Both Susan Fox and Anne Mellor have argued that, for whatever reason, Blake associates a kind of threatening "weakness" with the female principle: whenever his masculine and feminine figures come together, the female will either submit or menace. Whether Blake opposes male/female domains to make social comment or "pure" symbolic organization (or both) is another matter, but the very landscape of Vala's Garden, as a creation of womanish Beulah, inevitably suggests a sexuality issue. And since in Blake the feminine principle must either give battle or bow to its parent masculine principle, it need not surprise us that this apparently "idyllic" Garden makes an occult forum for male/female conflict. The reader who looks for it will find that both pairs, Luvah and Vala, Tharmas and Enion, spark (on contact) with a dangerous electricity that is not at all as "playful" as Wilkie and Johnson would have us believe.⁷

Bloom finds the nature of this Beucolic sexual drama more complex than playful, but he insists on its redeemed "innocence": "Luvah and Vala, Tharmas and Enion, are reborn into Beulah, to the accompaniment of Blake's most rapturous hymns of innocence; nervous, intense and vivid . . . effective projections of paradise." Nervous and intense these "projections" certainly are, but in what way are they paradisaical? In my reading, the paradisaical quality of this dream arises from the traditional association with Eden that almost every remarkably beautiful garden in Western literature has, and fragments of the traditional language to describe such a garden do scatter through Blake's lines. It is the subliminal sexuality of garden myths, however, here more persistent than the Edenic images, that gives this "rap-



turous hymn" its discordant notes. "Shadows" and "doubts" haunt the landscape, and sensitivity to them allows room for readings more compatible with what Bloom recognizes as "nervous." Ostriker, for instance, opens up a number of possibilities when she anatomizes Blake's Garden as "the body of a woman" desired yet forbidding, shadowed and mysterious.⁸

Such symbolism illuminates Blake's use of erotic language from the Song of Solomon, a poem which, like Vala's Garden, links feminine enclosure with male ownership: "A garden inclosed is my sister, my spouse . . . Let my beloved come into his garden" (SS 4:12, 16).⁹ Like Vala, the woman of the Song searches for her lost lover: "I sought him, but I could not find him" (SS 5:6). Yet, while Blake's lines echo the Old Testament love poem out of what sounds like sheer elation ("dost thou hide in clefts of the rock" [129:101; E 398]; "O my dove, that art in the clefts of the rock" [SS 2:14]), the Beucolic drama invokes more than familiar biblical language. Vala and her Garden are an icon of the kept female—both associated with a garden and enclosed by it. The closer one looks, the more complex this garden interlude becomes.

First of all, the whole sequence begins with an outright command to *regress*, delivered by none other than Blake's "Immortal": "Luvah & Vala . . . / You shall forget your former state return . . . Into your place the place of seed . . ." (126:363-65; E 395). This "place of seed," presumably the visionary Garden, has a womb-like character; partly because the dream itself gestates in the feminine realm of Beulah, partly because Blake uses womb images. When Luvah and Vala "entered the Gates of Dark Urthona" (126:375; E 395), for example, they actually seem to have passed into that ever-desirable place of origin where fetal "unformd hopes" lie in a "shadows" state of embryonic Becoming. The two "closed up" images noted earlier ("their orb'd senses within clod up" [126:382; E 395]; "clod up in their world of shadowy forms" [131:559; E 400]) could serve this reading as suggestions of the *hortus conclusus* ("closed garden"), in medieval works symbolic of the Virgin Mary's womb. At its very beginning, then, the Beucolic dream returns to that prenatal oblivion in which the unborn "heard not saw not felt not all the terrible confusion" (126:381; E 395); it plays out, in other words, something like primal wish-fulfillment.

Even when the dream emerges from this womb-like regressive stage and becomes instead a forum for erotic exchange between Luvah and Vala, Tharmas and Enion, the wish-fulfillment continues. Only now Blake works it out with a marked difference. Luvah and Vala, male and female, shared their return to the womb; in the later fantasy sequences, male desire alone holds sway.

For the Zoa Tharmas, family romance in Vala's Garden seems virtually ideal. Luvah, potentially a father-

figure, remains "Invisible" (126:385; E 395) throughout the dream and thus never competes for the maternal Vala's attention. (In this respect, Vala's Garden scenes recall the *Songs of Innocence*, where that masculine "authoritarian figure," as Donald Dike calls him, also remains largely absent, although in the more troubled *Songs of Experience* he is conspicuously and significantly present.¹⁰) Tharmas's Oedipal attachment to his sensual, cossetting Vala—she is no longer the dangerous *femme fatale* of other Nights—never becomes a problem; he can enjoy both her maternal attention *and* the pursuit of Enion, his reluctant but pliant object of desire. "Open" as Tharmas's infant sexuality may be, however, the Beulah vision itself is hardly frank—or benevolent. Even Tharmas sheds copious tears, tears that threaten to flood this Garden of "infant doubts" and "sorrow" (131:552-54; E 399-400). It is the strangely disturbed relationship between Enion and her "child" pursuer, however, that most clearly defies justification.

Herbert Marcuse observes that "phantasy," by indulging the pleasure principle, tends to oppose "normal sexuality" as "organized and controlled by the reality principle." Certainly, parts of this Beulah dream qualify as pleasurable phantasy—and its sexual drama indeed unfolds on the dark side of "normality." Its most striking characteristic is a teasing inconclusiveness: the two couples, Luvah and Vala, Tharmas and Enion, go through the first phases of seduction, but their troubled courting leaves phantasy lingering, so to speak, on the brink of fulfillment. George Harper writes that Blake achieves ultimate "regeneration" of our "whole fallen world" through Night the Ninth's "great pastoral vision . . . begin[ning] with Luvah's symbolic call to his stricken mate for a return to 'their ancient golden age' . . . when man and nature were not separate." The odd fact that Luvah and Vala, that is man and *woman*, remain separated throughout the vision does not trouble Harper. Yet it seems crucial; Luvah's invisibility, the fact that he even stops talking to Vala after the dream's first forty-seven lines, makes those readings that insist on perfect union (of any sort) highly dubious.¹¹

Attempts to redeem the Beulah vision have taken ingenious turns, particularly by way of digging up literary sources: if not biblical, then classical. Granted, Blake's dream does look notably similar to Apuleius's version of the Cupid and Psyche myth, and Vala's experience does resemble Psyche's in a number of interesting ways.¹² But what those who see Luvah and Vala as Blake's Cupid and Psyche fail to recognize is that the sexual union of god and woman, not to mention their marriage in heaven, never occurs in Blake's own Beucolic dream. Instead, Luvah's god-like power over Vala remains a barrier: their desire for each other deflects, and the working-out of that repression happens in an eccentric, even perverse way.

If the first hundred lines of the dream recall classical myth, they do not prepare us for what happens later. Only the beginning conforms: Luvah, as Kathleen Raine tells us, plays the part of Apuleius's Cupid, invisibly courting his Psyche/Vala and building her a splendid house. There is even a hint that Blake's "Lord of Vala" follows the medieval interpretation of Cupid and Psyche as Christ and Soul, for Vala thinks of him as her creator and seeks him with great longing. (The same kind of interpretation saw Christ as Lover in the Song of Solomon and his beloved as Soul or the Church.) Acknowledging all this, we may now ask the crucial question: what does Blake *do* with such associations? Had he ended the dream on his manuscript page 128, Raine's analysis of sources might have had the last word. But here we lose sight of the Cupid and Psyche myth: Vala does not find Luvah. She even stops looking for him. Leading her flock in song, stroking their backs while they lick her feet, she eventually lies down with "a curld Ram who stretchd himself in sleep beside his mistress." Sleeping, she dreams of her "bright house": when she awakes she sees that house materialized and calls it her "bodily house" (128:456,466,470; E 397). After exploring this dwelling, she bathes in a river, and not long after her immersion, two children, a boy and a girl, appear on the scene. This bizarre series of events seems a distorted enactment of what might naturally have happened between Luvah and Vala after their lyrical courtship, for when Tharmas and Enion appear, one suspects that Vala has in some dream-like way given birth to them, even that her sleeping with the Ram (a substitute for Luvah) had something to do with finding these children for her "bodily house." If this part of *Night the Ninth* is indeed Blake's prophecy of regeneration, his vision of perfection and freedom, why does it follow the usual dream pattern of *repressed* wish-fulfillment? Is repression the inevitable outcome of Luvah's exaltation over Vala? And why does the ensuing scene between Tharmas and Enion remain so disturbingly uneasy?¹³

Critics have tried to ameliorate the Tharmas/Enion seduction scene. Michael Ackland writes that the two children represent "instinctual passions [which] have to relearn their innocence under the guidance of a morally regenerated Vala." Wilkie and Johnson go even further: "The terrible quarrel between [Tharmas] and Enion which had opened *Night I* is now playfully repeated in the courtship spats between those children, easily settled by the now-motherly Vala." Blake's purpose as they see it is: "To show the psychic redemption of passion as innocence . . . passion has now become . . . identified with [the] instinctual innocence [of children]." The problem with such readings of the *Beucolic* sequence is that they ignore Vala's sinister or "shadowy" quality, Tharmas's oddly excessive lament, and Enion's stubborn resistance to him. Vala does act in a "motherly" way

when she embraces the children, puts them to bed, etc. Evidence for her "moral regeneration," however, is missing, especially when one considers how she helps Tharmas gain what sounds very much like *control* over Enion. The dream's treatment of "instinctual" infantile sexuality exemplifies what Morris Dickstein calls Blake's "reading of Freud," but what happens between Tharmas and Enion no more qualifies as a "courtship spat" than the cataclysmic rape in *Night I* qualifies as a "quarrel." In fact, traces of that rape darken its childhood version in Vala's Garden. For however "healthy" Tharmas may be in expressing his infantile passion (and I am not at all sure he makes a convincing child), Enion does not give a "healthy" response. As in *Night the First*, she plays the victim, always turning away from Tharmas and avoiding his eyes. Even at the dream's end uncomfortably prone to "infant doubts," she makes her own psychic correspondence to the Garden's "shadows" and "despair." Why, we may well ask, must she remain so painfully mute—throughout the entire dream?¹⁴

Together, Vala and Tharmas manage to corner Tharmas's object of desire, the prize of his anguished obsession. Notions of disturbance and menace do not arise in the readings by Ackland, Wilkie, and Johnson, but Tharmas's "childish" complaint should give us pause:

O Vala I am sick & all this garden of Pleasure
Swims like a dream before my eyes but the sweet
smelling fruit
Revives me to new deaths I fade even like a water
lilly
In the suns heat till in the night on the couch of
Enion
I drink new life & feel the breath of sleeping Enion
But in the morning she arises to avoid my Eyes
Then my loins fade & in the house I sit me down
& weep.
(131:538-44; E 399)

Along with its surprising maturity, this boy-lover's complaint with all its watery images ("swims," "water lilly," "drink," "weep") sounds very much like his other lament voiced earlier "beside the wavy sea":

O Enion my weary head is in the bed of death
For weeds of death have wrapd around my
limbs in the hoary deeps
I sit in the place of shells & mourn & thou
art closd in clouds
When will the time of Clouds be past & the
dismal night of Tharmas
Arise O Enion Arise & smile upon my head
. . . .
When wilt thou smile on Tharmas O thou
bringer of golden day.
(129:487-91,493; E 398)

During the "O Enion" plaint, Tharmas is a bearded adult; for the "O Vala" song, he has become a child again, a "little Boy" to whom Vala exclaims: "How are

ye thus renewd" (130:510-11; E 398). Yet what real change has occurred in what he *says*? What kind of regeneration can the critic read into repetition?

Tharmas and Enion, pursuer and pursued both, remain ambivalent figures. Perhaps Vala's rapt exclamation on Tharmas's "renewal" does not, after all, mean inner renewal. And as for Vala herself, the role she takes on as mediator between the two children is solely played out for Tharmas's sake. She saves her "motherly" chiding for Enion, and sternly commands the silenced little girl, however, "reluctant," to follow Tharmas into "the shadows of her garden" (131:552,546; E 399). Whatever these "shadows" are, they seem to cause Enion her "infant doubts," and thus when one reads "In infant sorrow & joy alternate Enion & Tharmas played," one wonders if that "sorrow" belongs solely to a subject Enion, the "joy" to a triumphant Tharmas. (Blake suggests this matching by switching the usual order of their names.) Dickstein calls "a conception of infant sexuality . . . both source and metaphor for the undistorted erotic life of the adult."¹⁵ What, then, does it mean if infant sexuality is itself distorted?

What Frye sees as a "recovery of innocence" in Vala's Garden is surely not complete. Even if one insists that the triangular relationship between Vala, Tharmas and Enion is innocent, one must admit that Luvah remains oddly distant. Fox observes along with Dike that "Male adults act as constructive powers in the *Songs of Innocence* only from outside its boundaries." If Vala's Garden is likewise "innocent," it remains so by virtue of the fact that Luvah keeps his distance, and such innocence is one of *absence*, not recovery. Like Bloom, Harper sees "pastoral vision" as Blake's attempt to recover a golden age of "organized" and "radical innocence," which, he says, quoting the poet himself, "dwells with Wisdom, but never with Ignorance." If we may apply Blake's words to Night the Ninth: ignorance of Luvah (Vala never finds him) *prevents* this Beulah dream from being radically innocent in the Blakean sense of wise.¹⁶

Because Night the Ninth fails its own expectations, it ultimately fails as a "regeneration" of male and female. Beneath its inspired odes to joy, there lies a sexuality darkened by repression and at odds with the usual analysis of this dream as Blake's vision of perfection. His deferral of consummation, of closure or certainty, demands subtle readjustments in the reader's anticipations, while the odd repetitive patterns diagrammed below prolong suspense. Can anything claim autonomy within such a structure? One half mirrors another, and, as we shall see, this mirroring pattern is but a microcosmic repetition of the macrocosmic mirroring in Night the Ninth as a whole. Peter Brooks in his analysis of the Freudian "masterplot" observes that the "compulsion to repeat" (a symptom of repression) "can override the pleasure principle" and create a sense "of the demonic" or the

NIGHT THE NINTH: A DIAGRAM OF
MIRROR STRUCTURE IN THE VISION OF BEULAH

BEULAH

DREAM: "And those upon the Couches viewd them in the dreams of Beulah" (126:383; E 395)

SHADOWS/DOUBT: "For in their orb'd senses within clos'd up"
(ENCLOSURE) "The land of doubts & shadows"
(126:382,379; E 395)

LUVAH AND VALA

(SLEEP): "the spirit of the morning awaking the Soul from its grassy bed (126:394; E 396)

HOUSE AND RAM

(128:456-67; E 397)

VALA IMMERS'D/ARISES FROM RIVER

(129:481-83; E 398)

HOUSE AND THARMAS

(129-30:484,506; E 398)

THARMAS AND ENION

(SLEEP): "Vala awoke & call'd the children from their gentle slumbers"
(130:518; E 399)

SHADOWS/DOUBT

(ENCLOSURE): "in the shadows of her garden" "she follow'd in infant doubts"
"Luvah & Vala were clos'd up in their world of shadowy forms"
(131:546,552,559; E 399-400)

BEULAH

DREAM: "And the sleepers who rested from their harvest work beheld these visions
Thus were the sleepers entertain'd upon the couches of Beulah"
(131:557-58; E 400)

"involuntary." Blake's Beucolic dream defers our pleasure in "end" or "meaning" in two ways: within its own boundaries it thwarts or threatens male/female relationships, and as a narrative interruption, it unsteadies the momentous drive of Blake's cosmic collapse and renewal. For the resting harvesters this dream serves as recreation, but for the reader it can intrude with real incongruity. Frye explains this "long . . . interlude in pastoral symbolism" as the "last spring [which] has now gone through the last summer and is waiting for the harvest of the last autumn" before the fallen world stabilizes into one immutable and redeemed season of joy. His reading sounds compelling, but Blake himself gives us no good reason to think changing seasons will pass away into "one immutable" time. If anything, the *Four Zoas* lets time go loose in a structural hall of mirrors: definite units of past, present, and future narrative elude us in a disorienting poetic fun-house.¹⁷

The dream not only fragments into mirror images within its own boundaries, there are strange reflections of its images and events in Blake's framing Night as well. Individual "outside" lines correspond to events "inside" the Beulah vision itself. For example, when the Eternal Man declares, Lazarus-like: "I thro him awake

from deaths dark vale" (122:207; E 391), he anticipates (four pages before the dream) Luvah's Christ-like command that Vala waken: "Come forth O Vala from the grass & from the silent Dew / Rise from the dews of death . . . (126:388-89; E 395). These puzzling echoes can even give us a new perspective on the ambiguous nature of Vala's Garden:

Man is a Worm wearied with joy he seeks the *caves*
of sleep
 Among the *Flowers of Beulah* in his Selfish cold
 repose . . .
 In *walls of Gold* we cast him like a Seed into the
 Earth
 Till times & spaces have passed over him duly every
 morn
 We visit him covering with a *Veil* the immortal seed
 With windows from the inclement sky *we cover him*
& with walls
 And hearths *protect the Selfish terror till divided all*
In families we see our shadow born . . .
We fall on one anothers necks more closely we embrace.
 (133:627-28,632-37,639; E 401-02; emphasis
 added)

This "outside" or framing passage (from a later speech by one of the Eternals) evokes the dream sequence not only with the word "Veil," which suggests "Vala," but with a number of other, even closer associations: Vala, like the Worm-Man, sleeps a cold sleep linked with "death" among the flowers of the Beulah dream (126:389; E 395). Luvah builds her a house equal in splendor to the Eternal's "walls of Gold" (128:461-63; E 397). And that odd phrase "divided all in families" recalls the sudden appearance, after Vala's sleep with the Ram, of Tharmas and Enion as children or "shadows," upon whose necks Vala also falls with embraces. The fantastic way in which elements of the dream appear and reappear in Night the Ninth discourages one's efforts to piece together a rationale, especially since other reflections turn up again and again throughout *The Four Zoas*.

This is not to say that chance alone or even aesthetic patterning explains the mirror effects in Blake's poem. In one striking instance, the repetitions actually do rebound thematic meaning. In Night the First, Tharmas declares that "Males immortal live renewed by female deaths" (5:67; E 302). His vampire law of domination seems born out at the very beginning of the Beucolic dream in Night the Ninth: while Vala lies in "the dews of death" (126:389; E 395), Luvah becomes a kind of God and therefore immortal. Even more remarkable is the fact that *other* Emanations reenact Vala's experience before, during, and after the dream. To find the correspondence, one simply reduces the Luvah/Vala dream to a blueprint of male action resulting in female death and resurrection: Luvah hovers, speaks, creates, builds; Vala sleeps in death, awakes to life, is crushed by the idea of another death, and then, reassured by Luvah, finds joy (life) again. Compare that schema (126-

27:385,429; E 395-96) to the following distillation of what happens to the other three Zoa pairs:

Male action: Los tears down the sun and moon: Day of Judgment begins (117; E 386).

Female reaction:

The Spectre of Enitharmon let loose on the troubled
 deep
 Waild shrill in the confusion & the Spectre of Urthona
 Recievd her in the darkning South their bodies lost . . .
joy mixd with despair & grief . . .
 Who shall call them from the *Grave*.
 (117-18:24-26,29-31; E 386-87; emphasis added)

Male action: Urizen repents and changes shape (121; E 390-91).

Female reaction:

Ahania rose in joy
Excess of Joy is worse than grief—her heart
 beat high . . .
 She fell down *dead* at the feet of Urizen . . .
 they buried her in a *silent cave*.
 (121:196-99; E 391)

Later Ahania is resurrected, "her *death clothes*":

cast off, [she] . . . took
 her seat by Urizen in songs & *joy*.
 (125:344,353; E 394-95; emphasis added)

Male action: Tharmas calls Enion into the "shadows" of Vala's Garden (131:546; E 399).

Female reaction:

And when Morning began to dawn upon the distant
 hills
 a whirlwind rose up in the Center & in the
 Whirlwind a shriek
 And in the Shriek a rattling of bones & in the
 rattling of bones
 A dolorous groan & from the dolorous *groan in tears*
 Rose Enion like a gentle light . . . saying

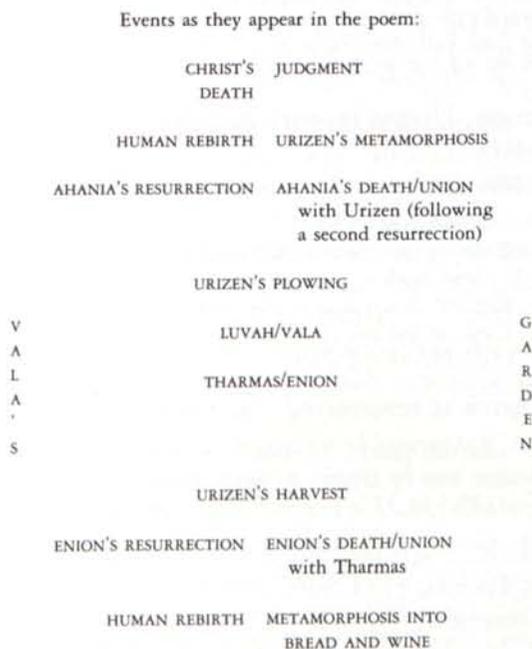
O Dreams of Death . . . & despair . . .
 I shall *cast off my death clothes* & Embrace Tharmas
 again . . .

Joy thrilld thro all the Furious form of Tharmas . . .
 Mild he Embracd her whom he sought he raisd her
 thro the heavens.
 (132:590-96,599,613-14; E 400-01; emphasis
 added)

Matching male/female scenes are thus repeated four times, and within the larger frame of general resemblance, there are almost exact repetitions: All four female Emanations vacillate between extremes of "joy" and "grief." Ahania and Enion *both* "cast off" "death clothes" after rising from a cave or something like a grave. Conversely, Enitharmon seems to *return* to the "Grave," and Vala, as we have seen, *descends* into a cave-like garden full of death images. Why the Emanations go through such contortions has something to do with Tharmas's decree that "Males immortal live by female deaths," but the fact

that the same *kind of thing* happens over and over again suggests a relentlessly turning wheel of rise and fall for the females, rather than final reconciliation. Blake's dark vision of male/female dynamic is, like Ahania's, a "Self renewing Vision" (122:211; E 391).

DIAGRAM OF MIRRORED DEATH/REBIRTH, METAMORPHOSIS, AND COUPLING IN NIGHT THE NINTH



"ALL THINGS ARE CHANGED EVEN AS IN ANCIENT TIMES"
(138:845; E 407. This line implies ongoing change in past and present rather than final return to a golden age.)

Because vision in *The Four Zoas* is so implacably "Self renewing," it is also, despite the apocalyptic character of Night the Ninth, in a radical sense never-ending. Horror and joy alternate too often; the pattern of death and resurrection (Ahania ascends to Urizen twice) keeps surprising us. In rhythm, Night the Ninth resembles *scherzo* more than *crescendo*. It is difficult to say that the dream has "ended," or that Night the Ninth has "ended," when the same things keep happening over and over again in freakish permutations, distorted yet similar. And since these permutations appear all through other Nights in *The Four Zoas*, how can Night the Ninth convincingly stage a concluding climax? We have already noted the parallel between Tharmas's domination of Enion in Vala's Garden to her rape in Night the First. Critics have dealt with it as a redeemed, "innocent" parallel. But since Blake tells us that the children are only "shadows of Tharmas & of Enion in Valas world" (131:556; E 400), one could just as well view their insubstantially childish forms as mere *aspects* of their whole selves. "Little" Tharmas, after all, pursues his

silenced Enion with rather adult persistence. More evidence that what happens between them in Vala's Garden is not necessarily a *final* reconciliation (or resolution) lies in Night the Seventh (B), when Vala questions Tharmas much the same way as she does in Night the Ninth: "And She said Tharmas I am Vala bless thy innocent face / Doth Enion avoid the sight of thy blue watry eyes . . ." (93:229-30; E 366; cf. 130:530-31; E 399). A reader determined to make an ending of the Beulah dream, and with it Night the Ninth, could argue that the Seventh Night version merely "foreshadows" the final Ninth Night version. But can we be sure that the Ninth Night version is not, on the contrary, a repeated irre- solution?

Other repetitions subvert our perception that an earlier event is "over" and that a "later" event supplants it in time, thus resolving whatever issue is (was) at hand. In Night the Second, Luvah creates a garden for Vala as fertile as its Ninth Night double: "I hid her in soft gardens & in secret bowers of Summer / Weaving mazes of delight along the sunny Paradise . . . / She bore me sons & daughters" (27:95-97; E 317). And it is not *only* Beulah dream images that weave through *The Four Zoas* as a whole. Compare what Night the Ninth does with Ahania and Vala to this passage from Night the Third: "Into the Caverns of the Grave & places of Human Seed / Where the impressions of Despair & Hope enroot forever / A world of Darkness. Ahania fell far into Non Entity" (44:142-44; E 329). The earlier event, because it is later repeated, keeps us from labeling any similar event, even one in Night the Ninth, as the "last" in an apocalyptic sense.

This subversion of temporal and structural expectations can embarrass scholars who want to make of Night the Ninth the final apocalypse much of Blake's language seems to herald. Bloom agrees with Frye that the Human Harvest effects an ultimate redemption (i.e., freezing) of time: "After the harvest festival," he writes, "the vintage begins," and with it "the new birth of a nature that will cease to be cyclic."¹⁸ This reading loses ground in the face of Night the Ninth's astonishing ending, an ending so gigantically "cyclic" that it repeats the very beginning of *The Four Zoas*:

. . . Urthona rises from the ruinous
walls
In all his ancient strength to form the
golden armour of science
For intellectual War The war of swords
departed now
The dark Religions are departed & sweet
Science reigns.
(139:852-55; E 407)

The words after "intellectual War" do proclaim a new order at the "End of The Dream" (139; E 407), but since "intellectual War" began Night the First, as well,

might we not suspect that Blake's "Fall" (the separation of the Zoas) will happen again as it did before? The very beginning of his vision and Night the First—"The Song of the Aged Mother which shook the heavens with wrath / Hearing the march of long resounding strong heroic Verse / Marshall'd in order for the day of Intellectual Battle" (3:3-5; E 300)—sounds too much like its end in Night the Ninth for us to say with certainty that the "end" really *is* an end—or that the "beginning" really is a beginning.

Bloom reveals an especially hasty anxiety to impose linearity on Night the Ninth when he asserts that "In this passage [117; E 387] the political vision of Blake reaches its wished-for climax and passes away, to be absorbed into the more strenuous themes of human integration."¹⁹ Since the *same* revenge on "political" human oppressors (former victims rise up against kings, warriors, etc.) happens over and over again—not just in Bloom's citation, but on *FZ* pp. 119, 123, 125 (E 388, 392-94)—one wonders how Bloom's particular passage can really be the climax that "passes away" to stay away. A more accurate description would admit to a *series* of climaxes, none of which is obviously more climactic than another.

In effect, what Bloom calls Blake's "political vision" seems just as "Self renewing" as the poet's vision of male/female interaction. Can this be a coincidence? Political turmoil and gender conflict both pit the "weak" against the "strong" in a struggle for power. This is why, in my reading, *The Four Zoas* defies resolution: the troubled dynamic between male and female will not allow Blake's apocalypse to play itself out into the eternal stasis Frye wants. As long as Vala, trapped in her Garden, remains subject to a god-like Luvah, and as long as Tharmas victimizes Enion, what Bloom sees as mankind's ultimate redemption will not last. *The Four Zoas* cannot achieve the wise innocence of Blakean prophesy when male Zoa and female Emanation remain unreconciled.

Night the Ninth's recurring exchange of feast and destruction, violence and euphoria, prevents us from seizing on any one moment as superseding the others. Like other contrasts in the poem, such eruptions and subsidings compose so relentless a rhythm of alternation that one loses all ordered sense of narrative past/future timing. Blake's sub-title "*Being the Last Judgment*" (emphasis added) gives us some warning that his poem reveals not what *was* or *will be* the Last Judgment, but what it *is*: something cataclysmic that rolls on and on in a never-ending present. If the Beulah dream disturbs us because it interrupts what seems to be a headlong rush into the final Universal End (Frye and Bloom's Apocalypse), so be it. The sooner one admits the disruptive and repetitive nature of Blake's visionary series (the dream of Vala's garden being just one model), the sooner one can cease trying to make one's peace with

The Four Zoas and its false peace of male supremacy in the Beucolic idyll. Blake's vision through all the Nights, including the Ninth, is a "Self renewing Vision," and such a vision will not let us put it to rest.

REPEATED THEMES AND EVENTS:

- Jerusalem/Christ (117, E 386; 122, E 391)
- The terror of "Non Existence" (117:5, E 386; 136:739, E 404)
- Spirit/body dichotomy (117:4-6, E 386; 125:355-57, E 395)
- "Start forth the trembling millions into flames of mental fire" (118:44, E 387; 119:88, E 388)
- "Mental fires" burn (125:335, E 394)
- Sun destroyed (117, E 386; reappears 127, E 396)
- Earth destroyed (117, E 387; 122, E 392)
- Trumpet sounds to wake the dead (122:239, E 392; 132:615, E 401)
- Oppressors overthrown (118, E 387; 119, E 388; 123, E 392; 134, E 402)
- Animals flee (118, E 338); "every species" gathers together (122:238, E 392; 132, E 401)
- Insects and plants rejoice (132, E 401; 136, E 404)
- Mystery destroyed (119, E 388; 120, E 389; 134, E 403; 135, E 404)
- "the Eternal Man Darkend with sorrow" (121:200, E 391; 132:578, E 400; 137:772, E 405)

¹ "You answer not then am I set your mistress in this garden" is line 429 in a Night containing 855 lines; the manuscript at Night Nine's center (ms. page 128) contains Vala's "new song," her slumber with the Ram, etc. See *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1982), pp. 396-97. All further references to this work appear in the text in the following format: (*Four Zoas* page: line; Erdman page).

² This article began as a seminar paper for Professor Donald Ault of Vanderbilt University and reflects his general approach to Blake. See Northrop Frye, "The Nightmare with Her Ninefold," in *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947), pp. 305-08; and Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell Univ. Press, 1963), pp. 266-72.

³ Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson, *Blake's Four Zoas: The Design of a Dream* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), p. 223.

⁴ Frye puts Urthona underground; the word "descended" (126:375; E 395) helps confirm this placement. See Frye, p. 278; and Alicia Ostriker, "Desire Gratified and Ungratified: William Blake and Sexuality," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 16 (1982-83), 160.

⁵ Wilkie and Johnson, p. 225.

⁶ Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, pp. 274-75; Blake, *Jerusalem*, pl. 59, lines 5-8, E 208; Kathleen Raine, "Blake's Debt to Antiquity," *Sewanee Review*, 71 (summer 1963), 373.

⁷ Susan Fox, "The Female as Metaphor in William Blake's Poetry," *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1977), 516; Anne K. Mellor, "Blake's Portrayal of Women," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 16 (1982-83), 148; and Wilkie and Johnson, p. 227.

⁸ Harold Bloom, "States of Being: The Four Zoas," in *Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Northrop Frye (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1966), p. 118; and Ostriker, p. 156.

⁹ Biblical quotations are from the King James version.

¹⁰ Donald A. Dike, "The Difficult Innocence: Blake's Songs and Pastoral," *ELH*, 28 (Dec. 1961), 354.

¹¹ Herbert Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization: A Philosophical Inquiry into Freud* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1966), p. 146; and George Mills Harper, "Apocalyptic Vision and Pastoral Dream in Blake's *Four Zoas*," *South Atlantic Quarterly*, 64 (winter 1965), 121.

¹² See Book V, *The Golden Ass of Lucius Apuleius*, trans. William Adlington, ed. F.J. Harvey Darton (New York: Hogarth Press, n.d.), pp. 161-62.

¹³ Raine, "Blake's 'Cupid and Psyche,'" *The Listener*, 58 (1957), 832-35. See also Jean H. Hagstrum, "Eros and Psyche: Some Versions of Romantic Love and Delicacy," *Critical Inquiry*, 3 (1977), 523.

¹⁴ Michael Ackland, "The Embattled Sexes: Blake's Debt to Wollstonecraft in *The Four Zoas*," *Blake/An Illustrated Quarterly*, 16 (1982-83), 180; Wilkie and Johnson, p. 227; and Morris Dickstein, "The Price of Experience: Blake's Reading of Freud," in *The Literary Freud: Mechanisms of Defense and the Poetic Will*, ed. Joseph H. Smith, M.D. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale Univ. Press, 1980), pp. 67, 100.

¹⁵ Dickstein, p. 83.

¹⁶ Frye, p. 307; Fox, p. 509; and Harper, pp. 113, 121. The Blake quotation is from "Notes Written on the Pages of the Four Zoas," in *The Complete Writings of William Blake*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (New York: Random House, 1957), p. 380.

¹⁷ Peter Brooks, "Freud's Masterplot," in *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Knopf, 1984), p. 99; and Frye, p. 307.

¹⁸ Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse*, pp. 276, 280-81.

¹⁹ Bloom, p. 268.

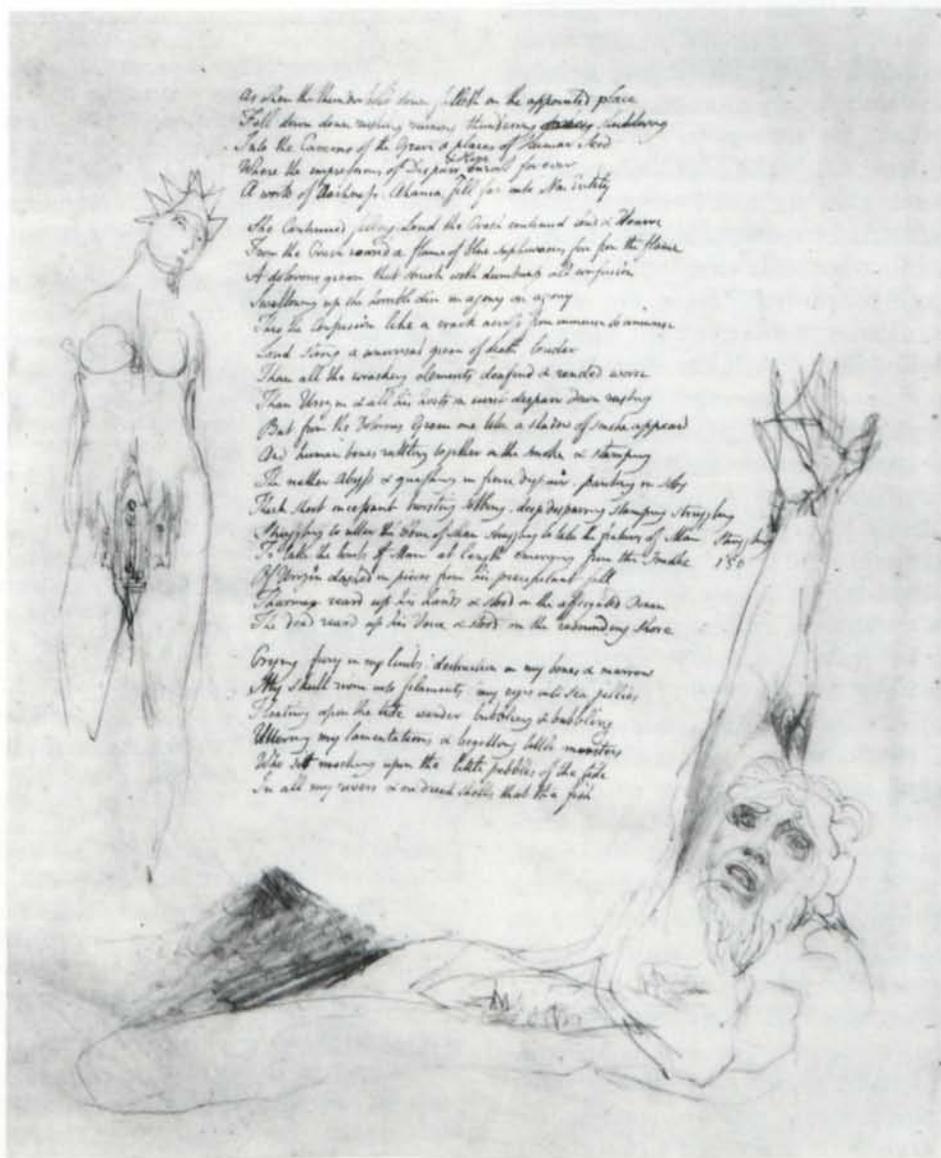


Image Patterns and the Structure of William Blake's *The Four Zoas*

BY NANCY M. IDE

To date, structural descriptions of *The Four Zoas* have invariably treated narrative events as the unit of analysis—that is, the textual feature or features whose location in the text itself is examined, in relation to other similar or identical textual features, to identify an architectural plan. On this basis, both Northrop Frye and Harold Bloom divide the poem into three parts, corresponding to the fall, existence in the fallen state, and return to unfallen existence, although they disagree on where the divisions occur.¹ Subsequent studies have generally accepted one or the other of these schemes.²

Several critics have noted the reflections of Night I in Night IX, which are usually taken to indicate that Night I represents an inversion of the events of the apocalypse,³ or that the apocalypse is a completion of the fall.⁴ All of these studies regard structure as a function of a linear progression of narrative events, and most rely on Blake's full myth, constructed from details scattered throughout the corpus, to provide associative links missing from the fragmentary narrative as well as a framework for the analysis itself. This implies that the reader must be familiar with Blake's mythic system to fully understand the poem. However, the experience of even novice readers, who comprehend fully the poem's general or thematic statements and are capable of understanding in some depth the meaning of specific episodes, belies this assumption. More importantly, it indicates that details of narrative, while perhaps providing a loose structural base, cannot alone account for the text's internal coherence and cohesion, nor for the poem's powerful effect on readers unfamiliar with the myth.

In view of this, I have attempted to identify and examine a feature or set of features other than the narrative that may contribute significantly to the structure of *The Four Zoas*. In particular, I have looked at Blake's use of images as a vehicle for conveying broad, thematic statements within the poem and hence defining the di-

mensions of meaning that provide the basic framework for the structure of the work. The nature of Blake's images and symbols has been studied extensively, and while initially Blake's use of invented and borrowed names and symbols prompted critics to assert that his images are personal creations inaccessible to the reader without familiarity with Blake's mythic system, several critics—notably, Northrop Frye in *Fearful Symmetry*—have shown that Blake's symbols abound in general and archetypal qualities. The terms in which his myth is expressed—such as fire and ice, youth and age, light and darkness—are among those universal images that possess the greatest constancy and efficiency, and so their connotations are strikingly familiar and clear. Thus, as the reader proceeds through the text of the *Zoas*, a large part of his impression of the fictive world is created by these images, which, because of their overwhelming abundance as well as the accessibility of their connotations, stand in bold relief against the obscurity of the narrative. Without the usual narrative context to supply at least superficial meaning for an image, its effect depends, first, upon its habitual and/or traditional connotations and associations for the reader. So, individual images in the *Zoas* can be seen as isolatable conceptual elements with identifiable connotations for most readers; their substantial role in determining the reader's impression of the work suggests that they may contribute significantly to the structure of ideas underlying the text.

My effort to get at the ways in which imagery contributes to structure and meaning in *The Four Zoas* involved, first, an attempt to identify and locate the important images within the poem—specifically, visual images whose connotations are, for the most part, fixed for the majority of readers. To do this I utilized a multi-purpose computer program for text analysis,⁵ which, from a modified version of the machine-readable text of the *Zoas* prepared by Cornell University for the purpose

Abyss	Air	Animals	Armor
Arrow	Ashes	Autumn	Beast
Bed	Bee	Bellows	Bird
Birds of prey	Black	Blood	Body parts
Bonds	Bone	Bow	Boy
Branch	Brass	Bread	Breath
Breeze	Briars	Brook (spring)	Bud
Bulls	Bush (leaf)	Cave	Celestial bodies
Chariot	Chain	Children	City
Clay	Cliff	Cloud	Cold
Cows (goats)	Crystal	Cup	Dark
Day	Death	Den	Desert
Dew	Door	Dove	Dry
Eagle	Ear	Earth (ground)	Earth (element)
Earth (planet)	Elephant	Evening	Eye
Face	Feast	Fire	Fish
Flood	Floor	Flower	Foot
Forest	Forehead	Fountain	Fruit
Furnace	Garden	Garment	Gem
Geometric objs.	Girl	Gloom	Gold
Grass	Grave	Hammer (anvil)	Hair
Hand	Hard	Harvest	Head
Heart	Heat	Horse	House
Ice (snow)	Infant	Insect	Iron
Knife	Lake	Lead	Light
Lily	Limb	Lion	Loin
Loom	Machinery	Maze	Measurement
Metal	Mill	Moon	Morning
Mountain	Music	Neck	Net
Night	Nose	Oak tree	Palace
Pastoral	Plague	Plow	Poison
Prison	Raven	Red	Religion
Reptile (bat)	River	Ruin	Rock
Roof (ceiling)	Roor	Rose (flower)	Royalty
Sea	Sea creatures	Seed	Serpent
Shadow	Sheep	Shepherd	Shore
Silver	Skull	Sky	Slavery
Slime	Smoke	Social groups	Soft
Sow	Spear	Spring	Star
Steel	Storm	Structures	Summer
Sun	Sword	Tears	Tent
Tiger	Tongue	Tools	Torture
Tree	Trumpet	Valley	Veil
Vine	Vintage	Void	Wall
War	Waste	Water	Weapon
Web	Weed	Wet	Wheat
Wheel	White	Wild animals	Wilderness
Wind	Window	Wine	Winepress
Winter	Wolf	Womb	Worm

List of the image categories

of generating the concordance to Blake's writings,⁶ generated a dictionary of the words in the text as well as a full concordance. Using the dictionary, I identified by hand 196 "image categories" in the text, each of which consists of either single words or a group of words that are felt to constitute textual variations of a single image.⁷ In many cases the categories consist of syntactic variants of a particular image word, such as "lion" and "lions"; in other cases a variety of words are included in a category, as in the category for "fire," which includes "fire," "fires," "fiery," "fired," "fird" (Blake's variant spelling of

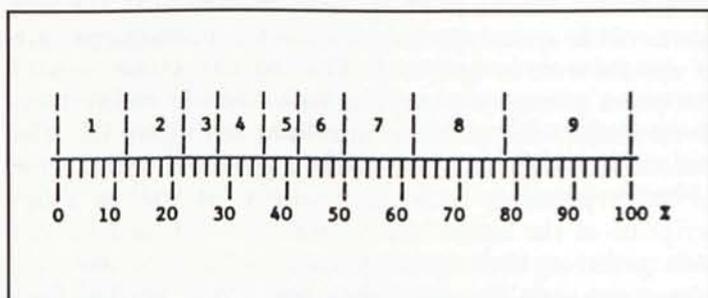
"fired"), "blazed," "burn," "burnd," "burning," "burnt," "flamd," "flame," "flames," "flaming," and "inflamm."

After establishing the image categories, I once again utilized the computer program to generate frequency distributions across the text for each of them. These distributions were then examined to identify patterns within and among them that might provide insight into the structure of the poem. I approached the distributions with two underlying assumptions: first, that meaning in the poem is determined in part by relationships among images in terms of proximity, where distance between two images defines the degree of relatedness between them, and relative predominance, which is determined by relative frequency among images at a particular location in the text; and, second, that patterns in the appearance and reappearance of particular images or clusters of images and ebb and flow in image density and variety yield insight into the structure of the poem. Therefore, I looked at places in the text where occurrences of specific images tend to be concentrated, assuming that a significant increase in the number of times an image appears in a given passage indicates that it plays a primary role in determining the meaning of that passage. I also examined configurations in the distribution of both individual image categories and groups of related categories across the text, to identify an architectural plan. A detailed analysis of image patterns and of the semantic effects of imagery for each individual passage in *The Four Zoas* appears elsewhere;⁸ this paper provides a compressed and selective report of these findings.

All of the image categories involved in the analysis represent images that are listed in Juan Eduardo Cirlot's *Dictionary of Symbols*, which treats only those images and symbols that have persisted in time and bear some "intrinsic relation" to whatever it is they represent.⁹ Blake's invented and borrowed names, which serve as complex symbols representing a wide-ranging series of concepts, have not been included because their connotations are not immediately accessible to all readers, and because I feel their meanings are largely defined by relationships established within the text itself. Images such as "drown" and "smile" have also been omitted from the analysis, for while they satisfy the definition of an image by calling up a sensory representation in the reader's mind, these images participate in meaning primarily at the narrative level, and therefore do not contribute as significantly to meaning at the general or thematic level with which the analysis is concerned; in addition, their connotations are less consistent for a cross-section of readers.¹⁰ While some of the decisions I make concerning which images to include and exclude may well be questioned, I feel that the images I have chosen represent most words that could be considered images in the poem. And, finally, I recall Caroline Spurgeon's argument in which she dismisses objections to her definition of im-

agery "because, however much one might discuss it, few would agree as to what constitutes an image, and still fewer as to what constitutes a poetic image."¹¹

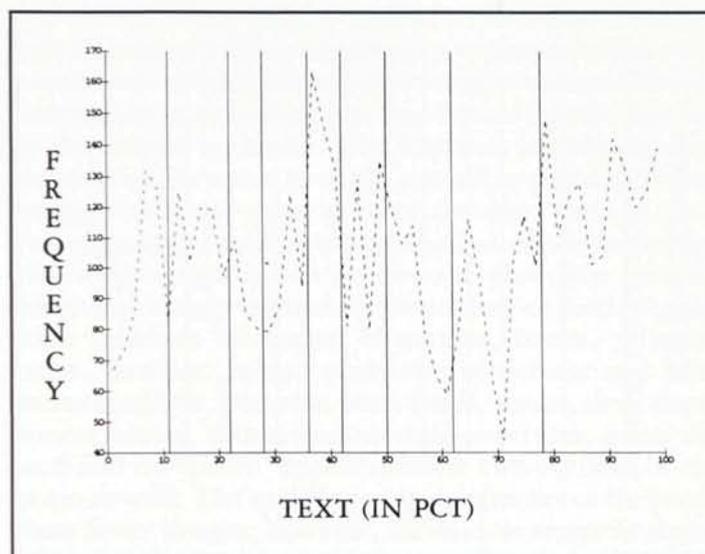
Patterns of image distribution across the text will be discussed here with reference to the nine Nights of the poem, but before doing so it is necessary to clarify the positioning of the Nights along a linear axis representing the text.¹² The Nights vary considerably in length, and many of the distributions reveal patterns related to a position along the axis rather than to the Nights themselves. The positioning of the Nights along an axis representing the entire text is as follows:



Notice that although Night V is numerically the central Night of the nine, the first half of the poem in terms of its total length includes Nights I through VI. In fact, the number of words in Nights I through VI differs by only about fifty from the number in Nights VII, VIII, and IX.

Patterns of image distribution across the text of *The Four Zoas* show several kinds of structuring at work in the poem. First of all, in terms of general mood, tone, and atmosphere conveyed through imagery, the poem divides neatly into two sections of equal length, the first including Nights I through VI and the second including Nights VII, VIII, and IX. The imagery of Night VI is the most relentlessly dismal of the poem, dominated by images of fire, deserts and sand, mountains, rocks, lightning and thunder, slime and mold, serpents, monsters, and the abyss. Night VI represents the lowest point in the story of the fall of man, with which the text of the *Zoas* is concerned; the nights that precede and follow Night VI relate the descent into the depths of fallen existence and the return to the unfallen state, and so it is not surprising that the imagery of both sections becomes more positive as the distance from Night VI increases.

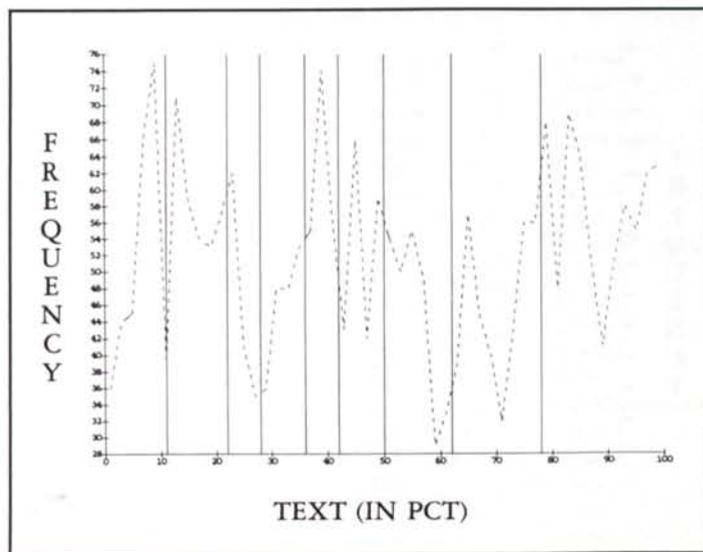
In addition to this rather simple pattern, four other significant configurations were revealed. The first is based on the flux in image density across the text; imagery is concentrated in three areas of the text, which are separated by two text segments containing relatively low numbers of images. Patterns indicate a repetition of many of the same images in the three areas of high image density, and a marked shift in the character of



Distribution of image density across the text of *The Four Zoas*.

images between areas of high and low image density. Second, although in several areas of the text images from an earlier Night or Nights are repeated, the symmetric reflection of images from the first two Nights of the poem in the scenes of the apocalypse in Night IX is by far the strongest pattern of repetition—this, we must assume, is at least partly responsible for critical assertions of similarities between the poem's beginning and end. Third, the flux in image density is characterized by a rhythmic alternation that is mimicked in the more rapid alternation of concentrations of images of labor and rest across the text. Finally, the scenes of the apocalypse contain almost every image that appears in the first eight Nights of the poem. This suggests that the apocalypse represents a holistic vision of the events and environment depicted in the earlier sections of the poem.

The most dramatic pattern of image distribution in the text, and the one that dominates the imagistic structure of the poem, involves all of the 196 images considered in the analysis. The distributions show that both the number and variety of images increase significantly in three general areas of the text. Based on this flux in image density, the text of *The Four Zoas* can be roughly divided into five segments. The first segment spans Nights I and II, the second covers Nights III and IV, the third includes Nights V and VI and the first ninety lines of Night VII, the fourth segment spans the remainder of Night VII and most of Night VIII, and the last segment includes the last third of Night VIII and all of Night IX. The first, middle, and last segments contain the highest concentrations of imagery in the poem; in the two intervening segments, both the number and variety of images are considerably lower.¹³ These divisions represent *generalized* fluctuations in image va-



Distribution of image variety across the text of *The Four Zoas*.

riety and density, and within each of the segments, variations on these patterns appear. Notably, in each of the areas of high image density, secondary patterns indicating an ebb and flow of image variety and density are evident, especially in the final segment; and in the fourth segment, which contains some of the lowest concentrations of imagery in the entire text, a sudden increase in image levels occurs in Night VIII where Orc's serpent form and Urizen's military hardware are described. However, the level achieved in this segment reaches only that of the lowest levels in areas where images are greatest in number and variety.

The overall pattern of alternation between areas of high and low image density, in itself, affects the reader's perception of the poem. An increase in image levels will increase the dimensions of meaning and emphasis in a passage, which creates the impression of a broadening of scene amid an expansion of perspective. A decrease in imagery creates the opposite impression; the reader senses that the breadth of his view is constricted, and therefore that his perspective on the events and scenes within the narrative is more limited. In addition, a reduction in imagistic connotations places more emphasis on narrative meaning. Thus, the effect of the fluctuations in image density in the text is a sense of steady alternation between expansion and contraction of view, and between emphasis on the broadened scene and on the action within the narrative itself.

This sense is evident within the narrative of the *Zoas*. Each of the segments of the text characterized by high levels of imagery contains a substantial number of scenes in which the reader is provided with an expanded view of existence from the perspective of the stage of the fall or regeneration of man in which the account appears. The song at the feast and Enion's first lament

in Night I provide a vision of the world of experience, and in Night II, although the scene is less expansive than the one in the song at the marriage feast, the reader is given a full view of Urizen's Mundane Shell. Enion's second lament at the end of Night II provides another vision of the world of experience. Nights V and VI include enlarged views in the description of the bound Orc, Urizen's memory of Eternity in his lament at the end of Night V, and the extended view of Urizen's dens, in which the horrifying vision of existence under Urizen's tyranny appears. Early in Night VII, the reader is provided with a view of Orc's caverns. Ahania's lament at the end of Night VIII puts forth yet another vision of existence, and in the early lines of Night IX, the first scenes of the apocalypse provide an encompassing picture of the universe in upheaval. The last thirty-one lines of the poem present a sweeping vision of life in Eternity. Even within the pastoral interlude in Night IX, the panorama is enlarged; the reader is provided with a view of Vala's pastures, hills, and valleys, as well as a description of the house Luvah builds for her, and he sees Vala gathering fruit in her lap and walking to the river where she sees Tharmas. Very few scenes in *The Four Zoas* provide such details of spatial organization among elements of landscape.

The intervening segments of the poem contain far fewer scenes embodying a broadened perspective, and the reader's viewpoint is instead that of one or more of the Zoas, who are intimately involved in the action and events of the poem. In Night III, where image levels drop dramatically, the narrative focuses on an argument between Urizen and Ahania; Ahania's lament broadens the scene somewhat, but her focus is on the individuals involved in the events leading to the fall and provides no expansive vision. The subsequent scene of the destruction of the Mundane Shell is limited in scope and meaning by its proliferation of only images of chaos and fragmentation, which continue to dominate into the early lines of Night IV. In the later lines of Night IV, we see Los binding Urizen; the description of the body he forges for Urizen focuses on an individual entity and is, again, limited in scope and meaning by the relatively few images involved. Night VII focuses first on Urizen, Orc, and Urizen's daughters, and then on the activities of Los, Enitharmon, and the Spectre of Urthona. Los's lament provides a brief broadening of scene, but not the variety of imagery or scope of the scenes in Nights I, V, and IX. The later lines of Night VII depict the embraces of Enitharmon and the Spectre and Los and the Spectre, and the birth of the Shadowy Female—the reader is given a close view of these events, and no larger view is provided. In the first two-thirds of Night VIII, several scenes involving Urizen's war efforts and Los's and Enitharmon's weaving are presented, but the imagery is generally unvaried and provides no substantial

broadening of perspective. Imagery in the scene of the crucifixion, where image levels reach their lowest point in the entire poem, is so sparse that the lack of imagistic meaning heightens the significance of the act itself.

The text segments characterized by low image density are, for the most part, more plot oriented than the sections of the poem containing the densest concentrations of imagery. Therefore, the reader's perception of events is very similar to that of the individuals involved in them. In areas of high image density, plot is interwoven with set pieces providing inclusive visions of existence from the perspective of the current stage of the fall. Thus the reader's experience of the poem is one of alternation between involvement in the action and stepping outside it to obtain a larger view. These variations contribute significantly to the poem's meaning—one of Blake's fundamental tenets concerns the necessity for variation in perspective and the need for alternation between involvement and rest. Here, Blake makes his point, not by exposition, but rather by directly involving the reader in the experience itself.

The links established by image density among the first, middle, and last segments of the poem are strengthened by shared images—that is, images that appear in significant concentrations in these three areas of the text, but appear only rarely, if at all, in the segments of the poem characterized by low image density. This symmetrical, three-part pattern is particularly evident in distributions for images of wine, blood, children or youth, the feast, mountains, valleys, and gold; it also shows up in distributions for images of the garden, ivory, insects, the lion, and stars. The most important of these images—in terms of the extent to which they define meaning and atmosphere in the passages in which they appear—are images of wine, blood, youth, and the feast; and each of these images appears in the first two segments only in specific scenes: in Night I at the scene of the marriage feast (including the song at the feast and Enion's lament), and in Night V in the scenes of Orc's birth and binding or in Urizen's lament. Of these, the most significant is the wine image, whose occurrences are concentrated in the scene at the marriage feast, Urizen's lament, and in Night IX at the feast and in the scene where "Human Wine" is made in Luvah's winepress. Similarly, the blood image is concentrated in the song at the feast, the description of Orc's birth and the Demon's account of the fall that immediately follows, and in the first scenes of the apocalypse in Night IX; and images of children or youth appear significantly in the song at the feast, descriptions of the young Orc in Night V, and in the pastoral interlude in Night IX. The image of the feast appears, of course, in the scenes of feasts in Nights I and IX, and in Urizen's lament in Night V. None of these images appears in substantial numbers in any other part of the poem.

While these images exhibit a three-part distribution in areas of high image density, others exhibit a two-part distributional pattern, appearing in substantial concentrations in either the first and last or middle and last of these three segments. The first and last segments of the text are far more strongly related in terms of shared imagery than any other areas of the text. Each of these two segments contains concentrations of the major agricultural images in the poem—the plow, the harvest, corn, and images related to the sowing of seed. Significant numbers of images of nations, towns, villages, cities, families, ashes, sand, the wilderness and wild animals, the ox, autumn, bees, birds, moon, dew, dove, winter, slaves, thorns and nettles, structures, girls, the sun, and the Earth¹⁴ appear in these two portions of the poem as well. The middle and last segments of the poem share fewer images; however, the middle segment shares with the opening scenes of the apocalypse a sudden and dramatic increase in the number of images of fire, whose explosion into these scenes is so overwhelming that their character is almost wholly defined by it. The effect in both scenes is so pronounced that the allusion is obvious when the reader encounters the opening lines of Night IX. Elsewhere in the last segment, images of music, castle, palace, crow, and crystal appear, whose only other substantial concentrations occur in the middle segment.

The imagery of the first and middle segments of the poem indicates something about the character of the passages themselves, and the reintroduction of some of the most important images from the first segment in the scenes of Nights V and VI, and of images from both of these segments in Night IX, shows Blake at work again manipulating the reader's perception to make a fundamental point—in this case, that perspective defines meaning, and that moving among a variety of perspectives ultimately enables the holistic vision that characterizes Blake's idea of imaginative apprehension. In the earliest segment, the major images are of nature, the social order, and agricultural labor, which is basically an integration of society and nature; the general impression is of man existing in the physical world, the world of ordinary experience, which corresponds to Blake's *Generation*. In the scene at the marriage feast, images of blood, wine, and youth are introduced, introducing further connotations of human suffering and sacrifice, especially the sacrifice of youth and energy to toil in the physical world. In the middle segment, the images of wine, blood, and youth again appear, but here they are coupled with images of fire, primarily, which draws out connotations of the violent and passionate energy of youth. Later, more images of nature, including the mountain and valley images that appear significantly in the first segment of high image density, appear, but again, their coupling with images of fire, rocks, deserts, serpents, monsters, slime and mold, lightnings and

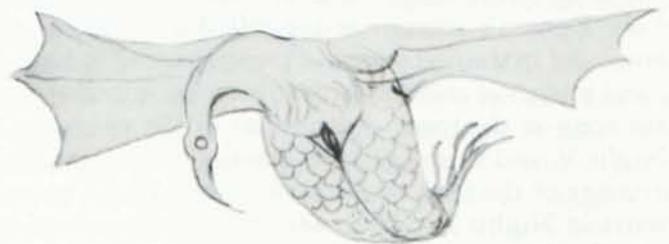
thunder, and the abyss shows nature in a different aspect. The imagistic and narrative allusions in the middle segment of the poem, as well as the increase in numbers and variety of images itself, remind the reader of the earlier scene; but the character of the new images substantially alters the meaning of the whole. Thus the reader is forced to reconsider his earlier perception, and by recognizing a second perspective, moves beyond the viewpoint defined by one or the other of these perspectives and subsumes the two. In the final segment of the poem, where images from both the first and middle segments appear along with other images drawn from everywhere in the first eight Nights of the poem, the effect is similar; while the meaning in the scenes of the apocalypse is defined substantially by the images within it and the relationships among them, the appearance of images from earlier portions of the text invokes alternative connotations, and in comparing them the reader moves to a higher level of abstraction and recognizes not only that alternative meanings exist, but also that meaning is substantially defined by context.

The particular evocation through both shared imagery and narrative allusion of the earliest Nights of the poem in the scenes of the apocalypse creates the further impression of returning to the beginnings of the poem, but again, the differences in context as well as the experience of the intervening segments of the poem clearly demonstrate how perspective shapes what we see. Obviously, the possibilities for allusion to previous appearances of an image or images are far greater in the final segment than they are at any previous point in the poem, and this basic fact is essential to our understanding of the way the poem works. For it implies that it would be difficult, if not impossible, for the reader to perceive the apocalyptic vision if he had not progressed through the more limited perspectives of the preceding Nights. This demonstrates a fundamental Blakean principle: that progression is necessary to achieve imaginative vision, and that "Without Contraries is no progression."¹⁵ It further demonstrates that much of the connotative power of Night IX is achieved through narrative and imagistic allusion—by referring to the connotations of an image in earlier contexts, meaning can be layered upon meaning, and the whole enhanced by recognition of the way in which meaning is conveyed. Thus the two expanded views take on added importance in the scheme of the poem, for they provide the raw material for Blake's superlative achievement in the poem's final movement.

Images in the two areas of lower image saturation are not only fewer in number and variety, but also fundamentally different from those in the other three segments of the poem. Furthermore, unlike the three segments characterized by high image saturation, the two share very few images, and, as a result, the character of each differs significantly. Among those images they

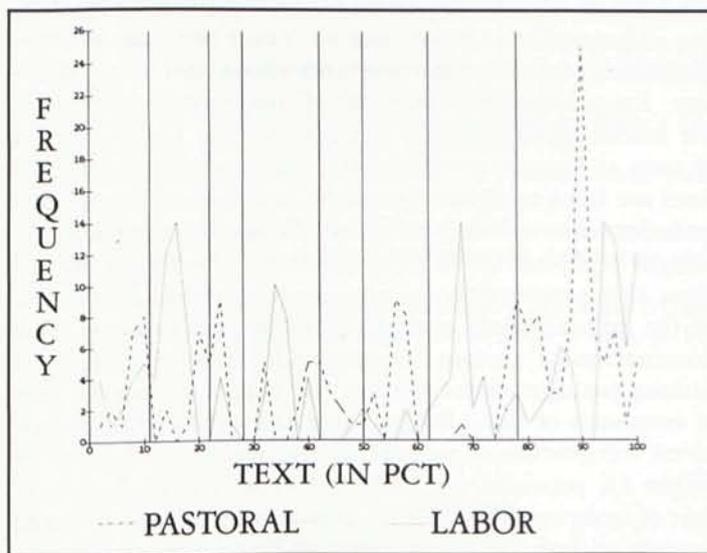
do share, the shadow image pervades both segments, as does the eye image,¹⁶ and concentrations of the image of tears appear at the end of Night III and the beginning of Night IV, and in Night VIII.¹⁷ Otherwise, the imagery of the two segments differs entirely. The first area of low image saturation contains substantial concentrations of images of clouds, the sea, storms, water, bones, chains, ice and snow, clearly suggesting the chaos and fragmentation that result from the breaking up of the Mundane Shell. In the second of these segments, images of tree, fruit, pastoral landscape, flower, worm, war, implements of torture, veil, and garment dominate. In both segments, the imagery is fundamentally negative in its connotations; the positive implications of pastoral imagery and images of vegetation in the second segment are undermined by extremely heavy concentrations of images of worm and shadow in Night VII, and the overall impression is of nature that is visually appealing but debased and spoiled. Concealment plays a major role in the thematic implications of both segments, but in the first, concealment is conveyed through images of nature (primarily, the cloud image), whereas in the second it is conveyed more predominantly through images related to that which is specifically human (veil, garment). The imagery of both segments shows a connotative shift at roughly a halfway point: in the first, imagery shifts from formless objects (cloud, water, sea) to forbiddingly solid forms (ice, bone, chain, iron); in the second, imagery moves from the natural and organic to the manmade (war, veil, garment, gem).¹⁸ These marked shifts are indicative of the advances in plot that are evident in these two areas of the text.

Several images appear in only one significant concentration, and notably, almost all of these appear in one of the two areas of low image saturation.¹⁹ The sea image occurs in only one primary concentration, at the end of Night III and in the first third of Night IV, where it is used to characterize the onslaught of chaos that accompanies the destruction of the Mundane Shell. The tree image appears primarily in Nights VII and VIII, in passages dealing with the Tree of Mystery, and the gem image is concentrated in the description of Orc's serpent form in Night VIII. Again, in areas of high saturation, the variety of images broadens scene and



meaning; by contrast, the dominance of individual images in areas of low saturation limits the possible connotations and, consequently, the viewpoint.

Distributions for groups of images that fall into a broad conceptual category were also generated during the course of the analysis, and certain clearly defined patterns were revealed. In particular, clusters of images that can be collectively regarded as images of the pastoral—birds, flowers, sheep, shepherd, cattle, hills, pastures, and so on—are distributed symmetrically around the middle point of the poem, and, more importantly, their appearance tends to alternate regularly throughout the text with images of labor, including the loom, furnace and hammer, the winepress, the harvest, the vintage, breadmaking, and the plow.²⁰ This alternation is more rapid than the flux in image density, but the two patterns complement one another. The rapid alternation of images of the pastoral and labor, which are more closely tied to events of the narrative than patterns of image saturation, model the daily alternation of activity and rest in the physical world, while the slower and more dramatic pulsation of image saturation more closely reflects yearly rhythms and the cycle of death and renewal.



Distribution of images of the pastoral and labor across the text of *The Four Zoas*.

The effect of these rhythms on the reader, however subtle it may be, should not be underestimated. Blake's use of rhythm for effect in individual passages has often been noted by critics, and it is not unreasonable to assume that such rhythms may operate on a larger scale within the *Zoas*. Anyone familiar with the poem is aware of its power—power that cannot be accounted for in the narrative alone. Some of this may be attributed to the

almost subconscious appeal of rhythms revealed in image patterns. In Nights V and VI, which constitute the imagistic center of the poem, such rhythms are brought into the narrative when Urizen searches for the source of the pulsation that "shakes [his] caverns with strong shudders" (V, 65:239; E 344). The pulsation is introduced in Night V at the height of image saturation in the description of the bound Orc, continues through Night VI during Urizen's search, and finally explodes in fire imagery at the opening of Night VII. The intensity of the reader's experience of this part of the text may derive in large part from the introduction into the narrative of an element conveyed through image patterns in the earlier Nights of the poem.

In the final one thousand lines of the text, from the crucifixion of Christ in Night VIII onwards, the vision of the apocalypse explodes in a sustained concentration of imagery whose variety is unequalled in any other area of the poem. The final vision of the apocalypse is the imaginative view that sees all elements of existence integrated into an inclusive and harmonious whole. Consequently, the images in this segment of the text are drawn from every one of the previous Nights; in fact, among the 196 images examined in this study, only four—cliff, bellows, maze, and sparks—do not appear at least once in the final segment.²¹ Bloom describes Night IX as "Blake's most exuberant and inventive poetry, probably the most energetic and awesome in the language,"²² and Frye offers a similarly superlative comment—"There is nothing like the colossal explosion of creative power in the ninth Night of *The Four Zoas* anywhere else in English poetry."²³ This exuberance and energy are achieved, in large part, through Blake's imagistic elaboration that literally overwhelms the reader with its visual and connotative richness. Frye adds that "The poet works with physical images, and hence every successful vision of a state of existence beyond the physical must be an immense triumph of technical skill."²⁴ One of the prime elements of Blake's achievement is his integration of a multitude of diverse images into a composite vision of Eternity—like Blake's well-known drawings of the Last Judgment, the final Night of *The Four Zoas* derives its power as much from the proliferation of images as from their connotations.

The rhythmic alternation of images of labor and the pastoral, and the slower and more dramatic rhythm of the flux in image density throughout the poem, are reflected in the image patterns of Night IX. The pastoral interlude appears at the midpoint of the last Night, and interrupts the furious activity of the apocalypse. The restful scenes of the interlude are characterized by a reduction in the variety of images, although the number of images remains relatively high, and so in Night IX we see a grand enactment of the rhythmic pulsations that occur throughout the first eight Nights. The in-

terlude also invokes the perspective of the areas of low image density earlier in the poem: although the scene is broadened and elements of landscape are well defined, the pastoral interlude presents a close view of Vala, Tharmas, and Enion. The reader's involvement with their activities and perspective is far greater than in the surrounding scenes of apocalyptic fury, and because the variety of images is lower, the connotations are also limited in relation to adjacent passages. Once again, the final lines of the poem both double back to repeat earlier patterns and enlarge upon them, thus providing a substantially enhanced version of both forms of rhythmic pulsation that pervade the earlier Nights of the poem.

Image patterns across the text of *The Four Zoas* reveal that the basic structure of the poem is composed of three parts defined by the flux in image density. The reader is provided with three expansive views of existence from three perspectives, the last of which subsumes the first two. Thus, the structure of the poem is based on multiple views which can be regarded as simultaneous because they present many of the same images in varying contexts. The poem's structure, then, can be described as "layered." The structure is also fundamentally symmetrical, since many of the poem's images are distributed symmetrically around its midpoint. However, the integration of imagery from the first eight Nights into the final vision of the last movement suggests a linear organization, where images are accumulated across the text for their combined presentation in the last lines of the poem.

The structural configuration of *The Four Zoas* revealed by image patterns differs from descriptions based on narrative—such as those of Frye and Bloom—in three respects. First, linearity assumes a secondary role in the overall structure; even if the first eight Nights are regarded as a sequence of viewpoints leading to apocalypse, the notion of linearity is destroyed in the last thousand lines, which in subsuming images from the previous Nights double back and reflect earlier patterns. Second, while the pattern of image density across the text indicates a fundamentally three-part configuration, these three parts coincide only partially with structural divisions outlined by Frye and Bloom. Both critics see a structural division that falls somewhere between the first and second segments characterized by high image density, but Frye puts the division following Night IV, and Bloom puts it after Night III. Frye's second division occurs at the end of Night VIII, with the third area of maximum density, while Bloom's second division at the end of Night VI falls within the second segment of dense imagery. Neither Frye nor Bloom recognizes any subdivision within the sections he outlines, whereas my interpretation sees an alternation between expansion and contraction of view in the first eight Nights of the poem.

Finally, the flux in image density suggests an or-

ganizational scheme that in most instances violates the divisions among the nine Nights. Until now, critics have regarded the individual Nights as inviolable units of the poem's structure. It is impossible to argue that the division into Nights is insignificant, since Blake himself imposed the scheme on the poem, but this does not mean that the poem's organization, at least on some level, is not based on an alternative scheme—perhaps one that is superimposed on the more intricate division into Nights, and which complements the poem's narrative structure. Even within the poem, the divisions between Nights rarely indicate a break in the action or a thematic shift; in fact, in most cases Blake seems to have made an effort to obscure these divisions.²⁵ Even if the narrative is used as a guide for determining the poem's structural components, we do not find nine clearly delineated segments defined by the nine Nights; and, because of the confusion of narrative chronology in the poem, even Frye and Bloom cannot agree on a scheme for grouping the Nights. Whatever the significance of Blake's divisions, they have not yet yielded a clear structural scheme, except in very general terms. Based on the evidence provided by patterns of image distribution across the text, it seems necessary to consider that in its broader dimensions, the poem's organization may not have its basis in the divisions among the nine Nights.

The reader's experience of *The Four Zoas* is fundamentally one of variation and expansion of perspective. Repetitions and variations of image patterns provide the reader with different perspectives on the condition of man at various points in the fall, and these perspectives are later integrated into the larger vision that both includes and evolves from them. When he sees the same images repeated in varying contexts, the reader recognizes that perspective defines meaning—and this is one of the fundamental tenets of Blake's philosophy. The domination of certain images and types of images in various passages demonstrates the effects on perspective of emphasis of one element over the other; the harmonious integration of images in the scenes at the end of Night IX provides the balanced view that is characteristic of imaginative vision. Alternating patterns of image density and of images of labor and rest almost subconsciously establish a heightened appreciation of rhythmic alternation that is most dramatically apparent in the interposition of the pastoral interlude amid the furious activity of Night IX, and which, again, is a fundamental aspect of Blake's vision of life in Eternity. Thus, meaning and method in the poem overlap, for the underlying theme is certainly that the separation of the four Zoas, and the resulting fragmentation of vision, created the fall, and that the imaginative act of reintegration re-established Edenic bliss. The reader not only finds this meaning in the narrative, but also participates in a similar imaginative act in his apprehension of the poem's images and their dramatic patterning across the text.

¹ Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947), p. 278; and Harold Bloom, *Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument* (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1963), headings on pp. 193, 229, and 244.

² See, for instance, Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson, *Blake's "Four Zoas": The Design of a Dream* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard Univ. Press, 1978), p. 4.

³ See Wilkie and Johnson, p. 11.

⁴ Susan Fox, *Poetic Form in Blake's "Milton"* (Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1976), p. 13.

⁵ The computer programs used in my study include Random Accessible Text System (RATS) and Archive Retrieval and Analysis System (ARRAS), both written by John B. Smith and distributed through Computer Textual Services, Inc., Chapel Hill, North Carolina. See John B. Smith, "RATS: A Middle-Level Text Utility System," *Computers and the Humanities*, 6 (1972), 277-83, for a description of the RATS program.

⁶ David V. Erdman, ed., *A Concordance to the Writings of William Blake*, 2 vols. (Ithaca: Cornell Univ. Press, 1967). The text was edited to conform to the primary text of *The Four Zoas*—including Night VIIa only—in the fourth printing of *The Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, commentary by Harold Bloom (Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1970). In Erdman's 1982 edition of *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, the arrangement of Night VII within the text of *The Four Zoas* is substantially different from that in the earlier edition. However, my work predates the publication of the 1982 edition and is therefore based on Erdman's earlier arrangement. Although it would be interesting to replicate this study using Erdman's later text (as well as Night VIIb), I do not believe that the broad patterns of image distribution with which I am concerned here would differ significantly. In any case, the arrangement of Night VII is conjectural, and no clearly superior version of the text has yet been identified.

⁷ For a list of the 196 categories, see chart 1.

⁸ Nancy M. Ide, "Patterns of Imagery in William Blake's *The Four Zoas*," diss., Pennsylvania State University, 1982.

⁹ Juan Eduardo Cirlot, *A Dictionary of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. xxx.

¹⁰ Complete listings of the contents of the image categories and connotations for each category appear in my dissertation (see note 8, above).

¹¹ Caroline Spurgeon, *Shakespeare's Imagery and What It Tells Us* (1935; rpt. Cambridge: Cambridge Univ. Press, 1965), p. 8.

¹² For the purpose of generating the frequency distributions for images within the text, the *Zoas* was treated as a seamless whole, without regard for Blake's division of the poem into nine Nights. I will argue below that there are several good reasons to ignore these divisions, at least when attempting to get at the poem's structure.

¹³ See charts 2 and 3.

¹⁴ For the purposes of image categorization, a distinction was made between occurrences of the word "earth" referring to the ground or soil, and of the Earth as a planet or location, as in "the Earth, the sun, and the stars" or "all men on Earth." References to the Earth as a planet were found to occur primarily in the first and last Nights of the poem.

¹⁵ *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, plate 3 (E 34).

¹⁶ The most significant concentration of the eye image occurs in the pastoral interlude of Night IX.

¹⁷ Lesser concentrations of the tear image appear in the early lines of Night I and in the pastoral interlude in Night IX. Thus its distribution is roughly symmetrical around the poem's midpoint.

¹⁸ While gems are from nature, their meaning derives from the value man has attributed to them. Also, human intervention is usually required to produce gems that are used for ornamentation, as are the gems in the description of Orc's serpent form in Night VIII.

¹⁹ Exceptions to this are images of houses, grass, and sheep, each of which appears in a single significant concentration in the pastoral interlude of Night IX.

²⁰ See chart 4.

²¹ This statistic does not take into account incidental images that were grouped in more inclusive categories for the purposes of the distribution analysis. For example, the snail, which occurs only at one location in the poem in Night II, was grouped with other creatures of the sea.

²² Bloom, p. 266.

²³ Frye, p. 305.

²⁴ Frye, p. 306.

²⁵ Five Nights begin with conjunctions or conjunctive adverbs that link the opening lines with the ending of the previous Night: Night IV begins with "But," Night VI with "So," Nights VII and VIII with "Then," and Night IX with "And." In the opening lines of Night V, the dance of Los begun at the end of Night IV is continued.



Blake and Providence: The Theodicy of *The Four Zoas*

P.M.S. DAWSON

On the face of it, no poet could have been more hostile than was Blake to the accepted theodicies of his age, with their facile justifications of human suffering in terms of the will of God or the greater good. He had no belief in "the benevolent avuncular God who explains away all suffering and injustice at the Last Judgment and proves himself to have had the best intentions all along."¹ When in annotating Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible* he came across the title of another of the Bishop's works, *The Wisdom and Goodness of God, in Having Made Both Rich and Poor*, he reacted vigorously and trenchantly to what he saw could only be an attempt to justify inequitable property relations under the pretence of religion: "God made Man happy & Rich but the Subtil made the innocent Poor This must be a most wicked & blasphemous book."² The lament of Enion at the end of Night the Second of *The Four Zoas* satirizes such appeals to "The Wisdom and Goodness of God" as the complacent response of the prosperous to the misery of others:

It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted . . .
To see a god on every wind & a blessing on every blast
To hear sounds of love in the thunder storm that
destroys our enemies house
To rejoice in the blight that covers his field, & the
sickness that cuts off his children
While our olive & vine sing & laugh round our door &
our children bring fruits & flowers
(35:18, 36:5-8, E 325)

In such hypocritical celebrations of divine providence Blake can always hear the smug accents of Job's comforters, or the self-satisfied moralism of the ant lecturing the grasshopper on "the laws of prudence." Such are the "soft mild arts" for keeping the poor in their place that Urizen recommends from his book of brass (*FZ* 80:1-21, E 355). These arts depend on the belief in a God whose providential decrees are both ineluctable and inscrutable. In *Milton* this God is Satan, the "Miller of Eternity," who wields "the Harrow of Shaddai / A scheme of Human conduct invisible & incomprehensible" (4:12-13, E 98). Some of Blake's most poignant utterances are

directed against the belief in this remote and inscrutable deity:

Seek not thy heavenly father then beyond the skies:
There Chaos dwells & ancient Night & Og & Anak
old . . .

(*Milton* 20:32-33, E 114)

At the beginning of *Jerusalem* the Saviour calls to Albion,

I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and friend;
Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me:
Lo! we are One; forgiving all Evil; Not seeking
recompense!
Ye are my members O ye sleepers of Beulah, land of
shades!

(*Jerusalem* 4:18-21, E 146)

"Is the body diseas'd when the members are healthful?" Orleans had demanded of the assembly of nobles in *The French Revolution* (line 182, E 294), and the converse equally applies. If all men are "members" of the Divine Humanity (and hence, as St. Paul says, "members one of another," Ephesians 4.25) then it is inconceivable that the good of the whole can be served by the suffering of any part.

Nevertheless Blake's rejection of the concepts of theodicy and providence was not and could not be final. For a theodicy serves not only to legitimize injustice (as Blake saw very clearly), but also to provide a necessary explanation for the existence of evil, which continues to exist whether explained or not. Blake was at vigorous issue with the established Christianity of his day over its definition of sin, and he correctly identified the repressive nature of most of its ethical doctrines; but he never doubted that man as he existed in the world was fallen, and that any attempt to reverse that fall depended on understanding it—which implied, on justifying it. The trajectory from paradise lost to paradise regained passes through some notion of the fall as *felix culpa*. As a corollary, the whole process is seen as under the control of a superintending providence, conceived as extrahuman. Both fall and redemption are stages in a divine plan,

which is carried out by human agents of course, but agents who are in necessary ignorance of the nature of what they are doing. Despite Blake's insistent attempts to identify God with humanity, one always arrives back at a sense that human redemption depends on the action of a saviour outside man. I wish in the present paper to explore Blake's treatment of the theme of providence in *The Four Zoas*, which Kenneth Johnston has aptly called "the great battleground of Blake's imaginative development."³

This issue has been somewhat evaded in the central tradition of modern Blake criticism. S. Foster Damon expresses the consensus view in describing what he terms Blake's "heresy," the claim that "God is Man's highest powers." At the same time he hedges his bets by claiming that Blake "practically says" this, and by noting that for Blake "Even Deity himself is only of parallel importance" to man, which concedes that they are not simply to be identified.⁴ As J. G. Davies has shown, Blake is often more orthodox than we are willing to allow, so that "while emphasizing the immanence of God, he did not lose the transcendence."⁵ According to Davies, Blake's God "By His Providence . . . directs mankind" (p. 85). In his commentary on *The Four Zoas* Damon refers frequently to the agency of "the Good Shepherd," "the Council of God," "the Lamb," "the gods," "the Saviour," "Jesus," "the Divine Mercy," without elucidating the question of their immanent or transcendent status (*William Blake*, pp. 156, 157, 162, 366, 368, 375). The strong humanist reading of Northrop Frye is more successful in eliminating awkward elements from consideration, so that even an important concept like the Council of God does not warrant an index entry in *Fearful Symmetry*.⁶ David Erdman is more willing to recognize providential elements in *The Four Zoas*, but he insists that "in a consistently Blakean view the appearance of an external or intervening providence is really a projection or an illusion," and when it appears in Blake's text he is quick to find "strong indications that this meek resignation to God as fate goes against the grain and is not likely to endure."⁷ But it is difficult to find a "consistently Blakean view" outside the systematizations provided by his commentators. Wilkie and Johnson, in their useful commentary on *The Four Zoas*, cannot argue away the providential elements, but they speak rather evasively of "an elusive-to-define providence, an economy of preservation for man, that operates almost independent of his will."⁸

Blake criticism does not really know what to make of these providential references, since they suggest a transcendent conception of God which Blake is not supposed to have any truck with. The accepted consensus has been challenged by Leopold Damrosch, in a tenaciously critical account of Blake's myth and of modern critical interpretations of it. Damrosch argues that



"Blake's system, for all its humanism, cannot get along without the divine."⁹ He points to "the increasingly soteriological nature of Blake's myth: through Los, and ultimately through Jesus who works in Los, we are not so much regenerated as rescued from ourselves" (p. 155). In terms of the orthodoxy of Blake studies (a most unblakean thing, be it said) Damrosch is advocating heresy when he claims that "everywhere in Blake's myth the divine is invoked because it is the only agent that can reverse the Fall" (p. 248). In this paper I shall adopt a similarly heretical view, with particular reference to *The Four Zoas*. In the course of this work's composition I believe that we can see Blake being forced to shift his ground, and to invoke an extrahuman agency of salvation to do what he no longer believes can be done by human agency in history. In particular I shall examine the significance of Blake's introduction of the concept of the "Council of God" in his revisions of the poem, the providential framework within which certain actions of Urizen and later of Los and Enitharmon are described, and finally the way in which their actions are seen as contributing to the resolution of the poem. In the course of this examination we shall see that such things as man's willful self-alienation from the human community, the creation of the fallen universe, sin (and the sense of sin), and error are not unequivocally negative; they are also essential moments in a providential scheme.

The concept of the Council of God is not to be found in the earliest surviving portion of Blake's manuscript, the fair copy in his copperplate and modified-copperplate hands of pp. 1-18 and 23-42, which he probably transcribed in 1797, the date on the title-page.¹⁰ Morton Paley includes it in his list of names and concepts which only appear in the last two Nights or in additions to earlier Nights.¹¹ The most substantial of these additions is a long passage on separate leaves (pp. 21-22, 19) whose place in the text was not clearly indicated or perhaps even decided on by Blake, though his editors have agreed in making it the Conclusion to Night the First. In doing so they greatly assist Blake in the revision of his myth, since by allowing what may have been "the last complete pages added to the poem" (*Wil-*

liam Blake's Writings, 2: 1724–25) to stand so early in the text they give them considerable authority. What then is the effect (and presumably the purpose) of the major conceptual change implied in the introduction of the Council of God?

At issue is a radical revisioning of the nature and status of the fallen Man. Originally he is "Universal," with the implication that there is nothing outside or beyond him; all the other "characters" of the poem are produced by a continuing process of fission occurring within him. The way to redemption lies through his reintegration, but he cannot look to any outside help in achieving this, because outside himself there is nothing (his perception of the scattered portions of himself as external is part of his problem). Once the concept of the Council of God has been introduced we must see the Man, not as universal, but as one among a number of equals. While the Man has fallen, his peers in the Council have not, and they are thus in a position to initiate redemptive action. Before we go on to consider the implications of such providential intervention we must pause to note that the Council of God does allow Blake to develop a number of points of increasingly crucial importance to him which could not be accommodated within the original Zoas myth.

In one sense the Council of God merely refines certain implications present in Blake's original conception of the Universal Man, if we see this as an attempt to reconcile an awareness of human diversity with a conviction of human unity. The "Four Mighty Ones" who are "in every Man" (FZ 3:4, E 300) are the Zoas, the primal human forces or faculties which are in constant conflict in the fallen world, where (as with the old theory of the humors) their balance or imbalance can be used to explain differences among individual men. But in the unfallen world these forces are in harmony and constitute "a Perfect Unity" (3:4, E 300), a state imagined as existing before the fall and again after its divisions have been healed. This state of harmony, Blake insists, can only exist "from the Universal Brotherhood of Eden / The Universal Man" (3:5–6, E 300–1); so that, even as he prepares to develop his myth in terms of a single Universal Man, he acknowledges the central importance of "Brotherhood." Blake was impressively sensitive to the relative status of apparently absolute values.¹² It could hardly have failed to occur to him that the "Brotherhood" he invokes must remain an empty concept if there is only one true individual, the somewhat abstract Universal Man.¹³ As he progressed with the poem he recognized that he must treat man not as individual but as member of a community. In order to do this he returned to the framework of *The Book of Urizen* (1794), where Urizen's fall is seen as a deliberate cutting off of himself from the community of "Eternals," who then put him into quarantine under the guardianship of Los (chaps. 1–5, E 70–8).¹⁴

In envisaging how each Immortal relates to the collective Council of God Blake is able to define with more precision than the Zoa myth allowed his sense of positive human potential:

Then those in Great Eternity met in the Council of God
As one Man for contracting their Exalted Senses
They behold Multitude or Expanding they behold as
one
As One Man all the Universal family & that one Man
They call Jesus the Christ & they in him & he in them
Live in Perfect harmony in Eden the land of life
Consulting as One Man above the Mountain of
Snowdon Sublime

(FZ 21:1–7, E 310–11)

Where the Universal Man would have to be envisaged as either an abstract individual or as a clumsy aggregate of all men, the Council of God allows Blake to suggest how man — any man — can shift between a sense of personal individuality and one of human community.¹⁵ (The Eternals apparently find it as useful to be able to contract as to expand.) The point of what Bernard Blackstone calls Blake's "characteristic doctrine of expansion and contraction" is that by it "he safeguards at the same time the unity and the variety of Eternity;"¹⁶ and also makes both at least partially available to fallen men. As fallen beings we exist characteristically at the limit of Contraction, habitually viewing ourselves and others as a mere crowd of atomistic individuals external to each other. If we could learn to expand our senses, using them as human instruments rather than as passive receptors, we would see all men as one — "but that One," as Blackstone notes, "is a Family, not a Solitude" (p. 86). In terms of the myth of *Jerusalem*, Christ is "Man's consciousness of his unity" while Albion is "Man unconscious of his unity" (p. 63). Albion as he appears in *Jerusalem* seems to be another version of the Universal Man, but in his willful separation from Eternity he is very like one of the Zoas, and Blackstone actually argues that in *Jerusalem* the role previously assigned to Urizen is now played by Albion.¹⁷ It is the community of Eternals, represented by Jesus, which is now the true Eternal Man, or original condition of human (comm)unity, away from which Albion has fallen. By shifting his attention from the problem of division within the self to that of alienation from the true human community Blake has sought to ensure that his solution will not be merely some form of solipsism.¹⁸

At one level the Council of God is an image of a properly human community, as it might exist on earth, composed of empirical human individuals. But within Blake's myth it is also an eternal community from which all human beings, in the form of the Man, have (or are) fallen. Now whereas the fall of any of the Zoas is the fall of the Universal Man, the fall of the Man is not the fall of the Council of God; it is diminished by his fall, but not ruined. It thus remains able to work for the redemp-

tion of the Man, offering a useful solution to the problem of how the fall is to be reversed, but constituting a problem itself in that such a conception obliges Blake to adopt a providential reading of events in which man is dependent at every stage on extrahuman guidance and assistance. This goes against the grain of Blake's humanism, and perhaps not all commentators would accept the notion that "the continued existence of an unfallen reality is represented in the council of God" (Paley, *Energy and the Imagination*, p. 156). But the providential role of the eternal community is stressed along with the centrality of brotherhood in the words spoken by "One of the Eternals" at the feast in Night the Ninth of *The Four Zoas*:

Man is a Worm wearied with joy he seeks the caves of
sleep
Among the Flowers of Beulah in his Selfish cold repose
Forsaking Brotherhood & Universal love in selfish clay
Folding the pure wings of his mind seeking the places
dark
Abstracted from the roots of Science then inclosed
around
In walls of Gold we cast him like a Seed into the Earth
Till times & spaces have passed over him duly every
morn
We visit him covering with a Veil the immortal seed
With windows from the inclement sky we cover him &
with walls
And hearths protect the Selfish terror till divided all
In families we see our shadows born. & thence we know
That Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love
We fall on one another's necks more closely we embrace
Not for ourselves but for the Eternal family we live
Man liveth not by Self alone but in his brothers face
Each shall behold the Eternal Father & love & joy
around

(133:10-26, E 401-02)

New Testament echoes abound here.¹⁹ The most striking allusion is to St. Paul's image of the seed to explain the resurrection of the body: "Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened except it die . . . It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body" (1 Corinthians 15:36, 44).²⁰ Also present is an allusion to the parable of the Prodigal Son. Both allusions present a negative (the death of the natural body, the departure and degradation of the prodigal) which is essential to a following positive moment. If man's sin is to close himself off "in selfish clay" (the mortal body), the Eternals respond by helping him to persist in his folly: "we cast him like a Seed into the Earth." Without the original "selfish" secession of man from his fellows the true nature of community could not be expressed or known: it is "thence we know / That Man subsists by Brotherhood & Universal Love" (emphasis added). Similarly when Blake in his later epics defines the essence of brotherhood as the forgiveness of sins, this is to make the commission of sins an essential condition for the full expression of brotherhood. Man's fall is happy, since as a result "more closely

we embrace" as we learn that "Man liveth not by Self alone." To be sure, Blake stresses that the issue is *human* community; the "Eternal Father" and the Lamb of God are only present at the feast in so far as brotherhood prevails: "in his brothers face / Each shall behold the Eternal Father," and, perhaps, *only* there. But that is not to say that the divine as extrahuman agency working for human redemption is not inescapably present in the body of the poem. In what follows I shall try to show that we cannot discount the providential intervention of the Eternals, and of the "One Man . . . Jesus the Christ" whom they compose when fully expanded. This intervention occurs both in the form of actual entry into the world of the poem, and of the superintendence of the actions of other characters, particularly of Urizen and of Los.

As the creator of the material universe Urizen is often considered the villain of the piece. But Blake views this creation ambivalently, or rather sees it dialectically, as part of the whole scheme of fall and resurrection. Creation is a fall, but it also sets a limit to the fall, and hence prepares for its reversal. To the account in Night the Second of Urizen's creation of the Mundane Shell Blake later added a passage to assure us that: "the Divine Lamb Even Jesus who is the Divine Vision / Permitted all lest Man should fall into Eternal Death" (33:11-12, E 321). The later accounts of Urizen's activities are even more explicit in putting them within a providential framework. When at the end of Night the Fifth Urizen sets out in search of Orc, his odyssey through his own ruined world is explicitly presented as being dependent on divine guidance. Urizen seems half to suspect the providential irony within which he is placed: "When Thought is closed in Caves. Then love shall shew its root in deepest Hell" (65:12, E 344). The Divine Vision will indeed bring about man's salvation at least partly by means of Urizen's aggressive and destructive quest for Orc, twisting his purposes to fulfill its own plan.²¹ Urizen is deluded if he thinks that he acts by his own power or to his own ends; like the heroes of another great Protestant epic, *The Faerie Queene*, he will find that the true end of his quest is a discovery of his own limitations and his dependence upon the divine:

. . . now he finds in vain
That not of his own power he bore the human form
erect
Nor of his own will gave his Laws in times of Everlasting
(107: 12-14, E 382. Cf., e.g., *The Faerie Queene*, I.x.1)

The horrors he encounters as he journeys through his ruined universe constitute an appalling comment on his attempts to impose his own will. This journey recalls Satan's voyage through Chaos in books 2 and 3 of *Paradise Lost*, but Urizen's journey is not merely permitted but actually made possible only by divine power:²²

The ever pitying one who seeth all things saw his fall
 And in the dark vacuity created a bosom of clay
 When wearied dead he fell his limbs reposed in the
 bosom of slime
 As the seed falls from the sowers hand so Urizen fell &
 death
 Shut up his powers in oblivion.

(71:25-29, E 348)²³

As Blake stresses, "Endless had been his travel but the Divine hand him led" (72.2; E 349). Blake is careful to point out that the Divine Hand does not *compel* Urizen to fulfill its purposes, but brings them about precisely by helping him to reach what he sees as his own goal.

And now he came into the Abhorred world of Dark
 Urthona
 By Providence divine conducted not bent from his own
 will
 Least death Eternal should be the result for the Will
 cannot be violated

(74:30-32, E 351)

Blake never conceives of man merely as the passive instrument of the divine, and he was to insist in *Jerusalem* on the inviolability of the will. There, when the friends of Albion attempt "with kindest violence to bear him back / Against his will thro Los's Gate to Eden," their premature attempt fails, "as the Will must not be bended but in the day of Divine / Power," and "The Family Divine" does not second it, remaining "silent calm & motionless" (*Jerusalem* 39[44]:2-3, 18-20, E 186).²⁴ Nevertheless it is clear that the human will alone is ineffectual without divine aid, and that the relation between human intention and divine purpose is characteristically an ironic one.

This is particularly so in the case of Urizen, whose awareness of his own dependence on divine aid is hazy and typically retrospective. Los and Enitharmon, through whom most of the positively redemptive action is channeled, have a more explicit awareness of the situation, though they are not exempt from error. Indeed it is by their errors that they participate in the divine plan, errors that take a triple form: sin, the conviction of sin, attempts to redeem sin. Now Blake's attitude to the question of sin is complex and possibly ambivalent, and divides his commentators.²⁵ During the early 1790s he often seems to reject the whole concept of sin as a Urizenic mystification used by priests and kings to repress humanity. But when he later identifies the forgiveness of

sins as central to true Christianity his position is more complex. Just as brotherhood is meaningless without some sense of a community to which the individual might belong, so the forgiveness of sins is an empty notion if there is no such thing as sin:

... O Mercy O Divine Humanity!
 O Forgiveness & Pity & Compassion! If I were Pure I
 should never
 Have known thee; If I were Unpolluted I should never
 have
 Glorified thy Holiness, or rejoiced in thy great
 Salvation.

(*Jerusalem* 61:43-46, E 212)

To complicate matters further, if there is no such thing as sin, then the conviction that one has sinned (or that others have) is itself a sin, or at any rate an error that calls for forgiveness. When the Divine Voice comforts Jerusalem by showing her Joseph forgiving Mary (*Jerusalem* 61:1-52, E 211-12), the whole point would seem to be lost unless we accept the idea that Mary has in fact committed adultery, and that adultery is a sin, though, like all sins, it can be wiped out by forgiveness. The early Blake probably followed the antinomian sects in identifying the forgiveness of sin with its abolition: "Unto the pure all things are pure: but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure; but even their mind and conscience is defiled" (Titus 1.15). But the later Blake would have appreciated the full force of Jesus's words to the woman taken in adultery—"go, and sin no more" (John 8.11). Blake moves in effect from the defiant antinomian assertion that "every thing that lives is Holy"²⁶ to the more orthodox recognition that "There is none that liveth & Sinneth not!" (*Jerusalem* 61:24, E 212).²⁷ The forgiveness of sins is predicated on the awareness that man cannot fulfill the demands of the moral law. This is certainly a point against the moral law and its creator, Urizen, who finds to his cost, as Blake sardonically puts it, "That no flesh nor spirit could keep / His iron laws one moment" (*The Book of Urizen*, 23:25-26, E 81). But Blake is not simply calling for the abolition of the moral law, since without the realization that its impossible demands cannot be met man could never recognize the necessity for the forgiveness of sins. These complex issues will perhaps become a little clearer if we examine the situation of Los and Enitharmon in Night the Seventh of *The Four Zoas*.

When Enitharmon, like a second Eve, eats of "the fruit / Of Urizens Mysterious tree" (87:13-14, E 369) it prompts in her an awareness of her own sinfulness. As John Sutherland points out, Blake is deliberately parodying "the fall of man, tempted by Satanic falsehood, with an account of the fall of Los (and himself), tempted by the doctrines of conventional Urizenic religion."²⁸ Enitharmon's real "sin," that is, is to acquiesce in the Urizenic (or as Blake himself would later say, Satanic) accusation that she has sinned. As if to prove how difficult



it is to refrain from accusation of sin, Blackstone denounces Enitharmon's error with vigor, arguing that "it is Enitharmon's conviction of sin, her belief that the Son of God can only descend to condemn and not to forgive, that postpones the resurrection into unity" (p. 294). But Enitharmon's error is actually an essential moment in the process that will lead to resurrection.²⁹ As Sutherland comments, "The irony of this particular 'happy fall' is that Blake / Los finds that compassionate love between himself and his wife grows out of a sharing of spectrous depressions and fears" (p. 253). Enitharmon's first response to her conviction of sin is to appeal to Los (as Milton's Eve appealed to Adam) to eat also in order to redeem her.

When In the Deeps beneath I gatherd of this ruddy
fruit
It was by that I knew that I had Sinnd & then I knew
That without a ransom I could not be savd from Eternal
death
That Life lives upon Death & by devouring appetite
All things subsist on one another thenceforth in Despair
I spend my glowing time but thou art strong & mighty
To bear this Self conviction take then Eat thou also of
The fruit & give me proof of life Eternal or I die
(87:15-22, E 369)

The turning to Los is a positive movement, though Enitharmon's view of the situation is still fallen.³⁰ She invokes Los's sacrifice as the vicarious payment of a debt that she cannot meet; and the Spectre likewise talks in terms of a "scapegoat" religion:

The Spectre of Urthona wept before Los Saying I am the
cause
That this dire state commences I began the dreadful
state
Of Separation & on my dark head the curse &
punishment
Must fall unless a way be found to Ransom & Redeem
(87:31-34, E 369)

The error in all this points the way to a truth. The conviction that *someone* must pay the debt of sin leads to misguided demands for human sacrifice, but, as Blake was later to state with exemplary clarity, the forgiveness of sins *is* a sacrifice, though of self rather than of others:

Jesus said. Wouldest thou love one who never died
For thee or ever die for one who had not died for thee
And if God dieth not for Man & giveth not himself
Eternally for Man Man could not exist. for Man is Love:
As God is Love: every kindness to another is a little
Death
In the Divine Image nor can Man exist but by
Brotherhood
(Jerusalem 96:23-28, E 256)³¹

Los understands the situation better, and he recognizes that the "ransom" must be a divine rather than a human sacrifice, "a little Death / In the Divine Image;" while the human capacity to put off self in repentance, in the

forgiveness of sins, or in offering oneself as ransom for another, is a pledge of the possibility of such redemption.³²

Los trembling answerd Now I feel the weight of stern
repentance
.....
Turn inwardly thine Eyes & there behold the Lamb of
God
Clothed in Luvahs robes of blood descending to redeem
O Spectre of Urthona take comfort O Enitharmon
Couldst thou but cease from terror & trembling &
affright
When I appear before thee in forgiveness of ancient
injuries
Why shouldst thou remember & be afraid. I surely have
died in pain
Often enough to convince thy jealousy & fear & terror
Come hither be patient let us converse together because
I also tremble at myself & at all my former life
(87:39, 43-51, E 369)

Enitharmon is not persuaded, for her "Self conviction" of sin leads her to expect the Lamb as judge rather than redeemer; herself less forgiving than Los, she finds it hard to accept the forgiveness of sins:

Enitharmon answerd I behold the Lamb of God
descending
To Meet these Spectres of the Dead I therefore fear that
he
Will give us to Eternal Death fit punishment for such
Hideous offenders Uttermost extinction in eternal pain
An ever dying life of stifling & obstruction shut out
Of existence to be a sign & terror to all who behold
Lest any should in futurity do as we have done in
heaven
Such is our state nor will the Son of God redeem us but
destroy
(87:52-59, E 369-70)

This self-abasement and despair are essential moments in the account of spiritual progress offered by Protestantism, a religion which stresses (as did Blake) man's utter inability to fulfill the demands of the moral law and his consequent need for divine Grace (which Blake rewrites as the forgiveness of sins). It is particularly prominent in Calvinism, where it may prove a dead end out of which the believer cannot escape. Blake certainly knew of the case of Cowper, who believed that he had been singled out by God as "a sign & terror to all who behold."³³ From this situation Enitharmon seeks escape by what any Protestant would recognize as an error—the reliance on good works. She hopes that she and Los can escape punishment for their sins by offering the product of their labors as "sacrificial offerings, ransoms for their sins,"³⁴ and begs him to make

..... forms sublime
Such as the piteous spectres may assimilate themselves
into
They shall be ransoms for our Souls that we may live
(90:22-24, E 370)

An error, to be sure, but a necessary one, for the work they undertake is part of the divine plan to redeem man which they, like Urizen, are in fact working to fulfill, though they cannot recognize it until after the event.³⁵

It is the Divine Hand who directs their labors, whose full significance can only be seen from the perspective of Eternity:

... Then Enitharmon erected Looms
in Lubans Gate
And call'd the Looms Cathedron in these Looms She
wove the Spectres
Bodies of Vegetation Singing lulling Cadences to drive
away
Despair from the poor wandering spectres and Los loved
them
With a parental love for the Divine hand was upon him
And upon Enitharmon & the Divine Countenance
shone
In Golgonooza Looking down the Daughters of Beulah
saw
With joy the bright Light & in it a Human form
And knew he was the Saviour Even Jesus & they
worshipped

(100:2-10, E 372)

From one point of view the creation of this world of Generation is, like Urizen's creation of the material universe, a disastrous consequence of the fall; but both are equally part of the divine plan to redeem that fall. The labors of Los and Enitharmon provide the medium for incarnation, forming "a Vast family wondrous in beauty & love" which appears as "a Universal female form" (103:37-38, E 376):

And Enitharmon nam'd the Female Jerusa[le]m the holy
Wondring she saw the Lamb of God within Jerusalem's
Veil
The divine Vision seen within the inmost deep recess
Of fair Jerusalem's bosom in a gently beaming fire
(104:1-4, E 376)

As the choric sons of Eden recognize, viewing events from the perspective of Eternity, with this incarnation the process of redemption has begun in earnest:

We now behold the Ends of Beulah & we now behold
Where Death Eternal is put off Eternally
Assume the dark Satanic body in the Virgins womb
O Lamb divin[e] it cannot thee annoy O pitying one
Thy pity is from the foundation of the World & thy
Redemption
Begun already in Eternity Come then O Lamb of God
Come Lord Jesus come quickly

(104:11-17, E 377)

Their recognition prompts an extreme expression of submission to the workings of providence:

Now we know that life Eternal
Depends alone upon the Universal hand & not in us
Is aught but death In individual weakness sorrow &
pain

(104:8-10, E 376)

From this point on Blake is in effect retelling the Christian story of the incarnation and the passion in his own way, having already retold the temptation and fall. For Blake, of course, the true sacrifice of Christ is the Incarnation itself, the taking on of "the dark Satanic body;" Christ dies an eternal death for man precisely by entering into mortal life.³⁶ But Blake also offers a version of the crucifixion, and to understand it we must consider how the divine is able to enter the world of the Zoas.

A number of additions in the early part of the manuscript concern the role of Jesus in assuming the garments of Luvah. The long "Council of God" passage explains that when "those in Great Eternity . . . behold as one . . . that one Man / They call Jesus the Christ" (21:1, 3-5, E 310-11). Jesus is produced as a historical agent when "The Family Divine" elect

the Seven Eyes of God & the Seven lamps of the
Almighty
The Seven are one within the other the Seventh is
named Jesus
The Lamb of God blessed for ever

(19:7, 9-12, E 312-13)

To redeem the Man Jesus must enter into him, and here the role of Luvah is crucial. We may reasonably speculate that in Blake's original scheme Urizen was the aggressor and Luvah the victim who, in the form of Orc, was to resist and defeat Urizen. The experience of the late 1790s and 1800s could not but have called such a resolution into question for Blake. On the political plane Urizen is England and Luvah is revolutionary France; by 1800 Blake's myth must have seemed all too prophetic as the revolutionary Luvah was revealed as the Orc of Napoleon, "the child and champion of Jacobinism."³⁷ In the war between Urizen and Orc it was no longer possible to see a clear confrontation of good and evil; instead there emerged "a Shadowy hermaphrodite black & opaque" (100:34, E 374), a deadly hybrid of revolutionary energy and imperialist ambition that terrifies Urizen, though its production is in fact his real victory over Luvah. When Blake interpolates his "standard narrative of the Man's first fall"³⁸ at a late stage in the composition, he presents Urizen and Luvah as jointly responsible, conspiring to usurp power from the Man and wield it themselves, while each plans to doublecross the other (21:19-22:39, E 311-12).³⁹ In this game it is Urizen rather than Luvah who wins, in that by Night the Eighth Urizen has fixed his fallen rival in the serpent form of Orc entwined around the Tree of Mystery, placing him firmly within his religion of sin and retribution. But actually everyone has lost, in that having left his rightful place Luvah has effectively been destroyed.

Blake solves his dilemma here by recourse to the doctrine of "states," so important in the later prophecies. Los assures Rahab that "when Luvah in Orc became a Serpent he des[c]ended into / That State call'd Satan" (115:26-27, E 380). Luvah can only be redeemed by the

intervention of the Lamb who acts as Luvah's *locum tenens*, so to speak, preserving the "state" of Luvah vacated by Luvah's descent. The appearance of Luvah in two places at once causes Urizen understandable perplexity:

When Urizen saw the Lamb of God clothed in Luvahs robes
Perplex'd & terrif'd he Stood tho well he knew that Orc
Was Luvah But he now beheld a new Luvah. Or One
Who assum'd Luvahs form & stood before him opposite
But he saw Orc a Serpent form augmenting times on
times
In the fierce battle. . . .

(101:1-6, E 373)

Having assumed Luvah's robes of blood the Lamb must now die in Luvah's place. There are potent ironies in the assault on the Lamb by his enemies. Luvah's own emanation, Vala, identifies him as Luvah's murderer by the evidence of the bloody robes, and the Synagogue of Satan is prepared to condemn him either for being Luvah or for being an impostor indifferently. The Synagogue of course includes the Christian church, which Blake regards as perpetuating the crucifixion. Urizen and his allies are quite right to recognize the Lamb as their real enemy, however inconsistent their rationalizations, though by sacrificing him on the Tree of Mystery they are in fact carrying out his plan and bringing about their own destruction. If mortal life is death to the Lamb, mortal death is life eternal, and by taking on and then putting off "the dark Satanic body" the Lamb has given that "proof of life Eternal" that Enitharmon had demanded of Los (87:22, E 369).

This is not quite how Los and Jerusalem see it, for they (the Joseph of Arimathea and Mary of Blake's version of the passion) believe that the Lamb is dead and bury him in a sepulcher:

And Los & Enitharmon took the Body of the Lamb
Down from the Cross & plac'd it in a Sepulcher which
Los had hewn
For himself in the Rock of Eternity trembling & in
despair
Jerusalem wept over the Sepulcher two thousand Years

(110:30-33, E 385)

The "two thousand Years" are the period of the Christian Church which has actually made the dead body of Christ its object of worship. In so doing it has been worshipping its own death; the Lamb is buried in the very tomb that Los had prepared for himself. The resurrection of Christ should free men from the fear of death, but Los and the others, like the Church, fail to recognize the living saviour:

And Los & Enitharmon builded Jerusalem weeping
Over the Sepulcher & over the Crucified body
Which to their Phantom Eyes appear'd still in the
Sepulcher
But Jesus stood beside them in the Spirit Separating
Their Spirit from their body. Terrified at Non Existence
For such they deem'd the death of the body.

(117:1-6, E 386)

This is in fact their final redemptive error, for in his terror and panic Los seizes the sun and moon and thus initiates the "Last Judgment" of Night the Ninth, which will lead to the restoration of all things. "Los appears for the moment as the Angel of Death destroying the universe. . . . In his agony he tears down the visible symbols of the Spirit and the Passions, not knowing that by destroying the symbols he is opening the way to their eternal reality," remarks Damon, adding: "But Jesus is the real Angel of Death" (*William Blake*, p. 391), the agent of a process of which Los is only the instrument.

There is certainly a difficulty in seeing how Los's actions bring about the apocalypse of Night the Ninth. The narrative structure of *The Four Zoas* encourages us to argue in terms of cause and effect, no doubt one reason why Blake eschews narrative structure in his later epics. A polemical motif in his marginalia and other writings concerns his rejection of a philosophy of cause and effect, and an insistence on the "spiritual causes" of actions.⁴⁰ If we accept this, we can hardly agree with Leonard Deen's assurance that Los and Enitharmon "make choices that decide the history and end of this struggle in the birth of Jesus and in the final apocalyptic renewal of heaven and earth."⁴¹ It is easier to accept Frye's claim that "The Last Judgment . . . is not really the work of Los, though the opening action is ascribed to him" (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 308).

When a writer like William Cowper rejects explanations in terms of second causes, it is in order to refer all events directly to the will of God, "the genuine cause of all."⁴² Cowper's intention is clearly to subordinate human agency absolutely to an extrahuman providential scheme. Is this the point of Blake's attack on causation? I have been arguing that Blake does see human agency as dependent on the divine, but I would not go so far as to align him with Cowper. The notion of "spiritual agency" is hard to grasp, but it may be helpful to suggest that by it Blake is not so much asserting a divine compulsion over all events as insisting that we judge the nature of an act rather than its (supposed) consequences. Returning to *The Four Zoas*, we should therefore ask ourselves what it is that Los really does rather than how his act (or any comparable act performed by anyone else) is supposed to alter the "real" world outside him. To accept an absolute division between an agent and the "real" world outside him is to beg the question by denying "spiritual" agency

from the beginning.⁴³ Los is his world. I would propose that we read the Last Judgment of Night the Ninth (and the same would go for the climax of *Milton*, and possibly for that of *Jerusalem*) in the light of Blake's famous remark: "whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual" (*A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 84, E 562). Like the island of Pincher Martin, the apparently solid universe in which Los exists is his own creation, and it serves both to preserve his existence and to lock him out of Eternity. With the death of Jesus the last hope of salvation within that world has vanished, and although Los's seizing of the sun and moon may be an act of despair, it is also a recognition that that world is created and can be destroyed by his own strength whenever he chooses to exert it, and it is thus an embracing of truth.

But, as we have seen, Los's embracing of the truth is not easily to be separated from his repeated acceptance of error: "to be an Error & to be Cast out is a part of Gods Design" (*A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 84, E 562). As for the heroes of *The Faerie Queene* (whose chivalric fiction plays on the root meaning of "error"), so in Blake error both separates man from the truth and leads him to it.⁴⁴ It is in this sense that *The Four Zoas* embodies a theodicy. Critics who resist this conclusion do so because they are reluctant to see Blake as embracing such an orthodox view of the relationship between the human and the divine. But the shifting of gravity within the poem as it progresses undeniably moves it in the direction of Christian (more specifically Protestant) orthodoxy, as the generous use of Miltonic material suggests. Blake's relation to Milton here is one of dependence more than critique, and the result pastiche as much as parody. I have argued that the move to orthodoxy is imposed on Blake by the need to avoid the renunciation of community exacted in his original conception. When in his next prophetic work he turns his attention explicitly to his great predecessor and his version of the orthodox myth, he changes the rules of the game by making Milton one of the Eternals. Thus elected as it were to the Council of God, Milton causes as much disruption in Eternity as the incarnated Lamb did in the world of *The Four Zoas*. But the question of the relation between human and divine in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* is matter for another study.

¹Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947; Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), pp. 34-35.

²*The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, ed. David V. Erdman, newly revised edition (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982), p. 612. References to this edition will be identified by E plus page number(s); references to *The Four Zoas* by page and line number(s).

³"Blake's Cities: Romantic Forms of Urban Renewal," in *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, ed. David V. Erdman and John T. Grant (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 415.

⁴*William Blake: His Philosophy and Symbols* (London: Constable, 1924), p. 146.

⁵*The Theology of William Blake* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1948), p. 87.

⁶Frye seems to be attempting to accommodate the concept in his argument to the effect that a "prehuman God" is meaningless, that "if always human, God must have been plural," so that "Our present human society . . . has evolved out of a seed of life dropped in a dead world from a preceding eternal human society . . ." concerning whose origins we are not to enquire (*Fearful Symmetry*, p. 256). Frye's intention is to establish man firmly at the origin, and to make the Council of God nothing but a human community (which in one sense it is, as we shall see). He says and wishes to say nothing concerning divine providence except that "we find ourselves unable to conceive of anything superhuman in the direction of either design or power" (p. 36).

⁷*Blake: Prophet against Empire* (1954; rev. ed., New York: Doubleday, 1969), pp. 377, 379.

⁸Brian Wilkie and Mary Lynn Johnson, *Blake's Four Zoas: The Design of a Dream* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1970), p. 29.

⁹*Symbol and Truth in Blake's Myth* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980), p. 19.

¹⁰See *William Blake's Writings*, ed. G. E. Bentley, Jr. (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978), 2: 1722-23.

¹¹*Energy and the Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), p. 143.

¹²Cf. "Pity would be no more, / If we did not make somebody Poor: / And Mercy no more could be, / If all were as happy as we" ("The Human Abstract," E 27)

¹³John Beer points out that in the "original structure" of Blake's myth "the Eternal Man, as ultimate containing figure, would, on his awakening into unity, become isolated," appearing "as a super-urizen, without context and therefore without possibilities of brotherhood" (*Blake's Visionary Universe* [Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1969], p. 158). Beer argues that it was to meet such difficulties that Blake "introduced the idea of a council 'of God,' in Great Eternity, presiding over the whole scene," and he notes that in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* "Blake was able to learn from his experience here, and to include the 'Eternals' from the beginning as an essential ordering force" (pp. 158-59). (Beer however does not consider the problems that this conception itself presents.)

¹⁴Andrew Lincoln sees the Eternals of Night IX as "clearly closer to the Eternals of *Urizen* than to the providential Council of God" ("The Revision of the Seventh and Eighth Nights of *The Four Zoas*," *Blake*, 12 [summer 1978], 120). The distinction brings out the diversity of roles Blake requires his Eternals to play in *The Four Zoas*.

¹⁵E. B. Murray has observed to me that the passage quoted, in likening the Council to "one Man," "seems to put the genie back into the bottle—the Eternals into the Man." But the original Ancient Man is a member of the community of Eternals in a sense which goes beyond that in which the Zoas are his members; the "one Man" formed by the Eternals is a different bottle from the one Blake began the poem with.

¹⁶*English Blake* (1949; Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1966), p. 18.

¹⁷Morton D. Paley notes that "In his divided condition, Albion takes on many of the characteristics assigned to Urizen-figures in Blake's earlier works" (*The Continuing City: William Blake's Jerusalem* [Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1983], p. 198).

¹⁸Michael Ferber has discussed "the central importance of brotherhood" for Blake as "a correlate or 'contrary' of liberty that keeps liberty from veering off into individualistic megalomania and even tyranny or into atomistic withdrawal and solipsism" ("Blake's Idea of Brotherhood," *PMLA*, 93 [1978], 438).

¹⁹A marginal reference directs us to Ephesians 3.10: "To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God," a text whose relevance here is problematic. I would hazard that Blake means us to note that the "wisdom of God" is here described as "manifold," i.e., a unity formed of many, and that it is revealed "by

the church" (δια της ἐκκλησίας literally by means of the church), the collectivity of believers who compose this manifold unity.

²⁰Blake used the last six words on the design for "To Tirzah" in *Songs of Experience* (E 30). The image had already been used by Enion in *The Four Zoas*: "As the seed waits Eagerly watching for its flower & fruit . . . So Man looks out in tree & herb & fish & bird & beast" (110:3, 6, E 385) The principle of the seed is teleological, directed towards the end that will transcend its present being.

²¹In "The Formal Art of *The Four Zoas*," Helen McNeil tries to see a rather different irony here, arguing that "Urizen's character has created his fate, and the Divine hand is an externalization of his impulse to continue to create, whatever the price. . . . Even if the Divine hand were considered a separate power, it would make a sardonic commentary on Christian determinism, since it would have led Urizen on a spiraling descent which created, among other horrors, the ironclad world which Blake designates as our own" (*Visionary Forms Dramatic*, ed. Erdman and Grant, p. 381). McNeil's argument ignores the fact that Urizen's creation was unironically providential in setting a limit to the fall (cf. p. 137 above).

²²Wilkie and Johnson note the similarity between Urizen's journey and Satan's, which is said to be by the permission of Heaven (*Paradise Lost*, I. 211-15), and rightly note the difference of intention behind the permission in the two cases (p. 138).

²³The saviour here watches over Urizen's sleep as earlier he had over that of the Man (18:13-15, E 310). That the saviour's action here parallels that of the Eternals as described above (p. 137) suggests that Urizen has become a synecdoche for the Man, a matter which is clarified by the Urizenic characterization of Albion in the later epics. The "seed" imagery here carries an extra charge of irony in that in Eternity Urizen is himself the sower, who casts souls into the earth in Night the Ninth in preparation for the universal harvest (125:3-14, E 394).

²⁴I take "bended" here as equivalent to "violated" (cf. 74:31, E 351), though some commentators seem to read it as equivalent to "exerted" (see Michael G. Cooke, *The Romantic Will* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976], p. 129).

²⁵Thomas J. Altizer argues that "A faith that recognizes itself as existing in opposition to the state of sin must give itself both to a negation of guilt and the Law and to a continual process of abolishing the consciousness of sin . . ." (*The New Apocalypse: The Radical Christian Vision of William Blake* [East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1967], pp. 202-03). Blackstone on the other hand argues that in *Jerusalem* Blake wished to explore "the sense of sin which is so deep within Man that we have to regard it as an integral part of his innermost nature," though he does stress that Blake's concern was with "error that was understood as error and cast off" rather than with sin as Wesley or Whitefield might have understood it (p. 163, 185 n.). Michael Cooke points out that "Blake's version of the Joseph-Mary relationship [to be considered presently] builds on the idea of the *felix culpa*," but goes on to argue that "The passage further uses Jehovah's message to imply, beyond the forgiveness of sins, the unreality or delusiveness of sins . . ." (pp. 137-38).

²⁶*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* 27, E 45. See also *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* 8.10 (E 51) and *America* 8.13 (E 54). The phrase is used ironically in Enitharmon's song of triumph over Los, *FZ* 34.80 (E 324); see Michael J. Tolley, "Europe: 'to those ychain'd in sleep,'" in Erdman and Grant, eds., *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, p. 123 n. 5.

²⁷Blake's position on the question of sin might be clearer if we take it that he means not transgression against some absolute divine authority, but trespass or offense against other human beings, which is inevitable since one individual cannot live by the laws appropriate to another. Such offenses may be real infringements of their rights or simply affronts to their sense of moral values; in either case true brotherhood consists in forgiving others their trespasses.

²⁸"Blake and Urizen," in Erdman and Grant, eds., *Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic*, p. 253.

²⁹As Mary Lynn Johnson and Brian Wilkie note, the Spectre's seeing of a providential purpose in the Tree of Mystery is not entirely erroneous; it is "very close to the Christian interpretation of the 'Law,' the old dispensation, as a divinely-appointed stopgap" ("The Spectrous Embrace in *The Four Zoas*, VIIa," *Blake*, 12 [summer 1978], 102).

³⁰As John Beer notes, she is expounding "the Doctrine of the Atonement (a dogma abhorrent to Blake)" (p. 135). It should be noted that while Blake opposes such dogmas he also recuperates them by seeing them as historically necessary errors, implying a kind of theodicy of the development of human religious conceptions.

³¹John Kilgore claims that it is in Night VIIa of *The Four Zoas* "that we hear, for the very first time in all Blake's works, of the necessity of 'Self-Annihilation'" ("The Order of Nights VIIa and VIIb in Blake's *The Four Zoas*," *Blake*, 12 [summer 1978], 109). The passage in question may, however, be a late addition, posterior to parallel passages in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.

³²It is however going too far to claim, as do Johnson and Wilkie, that "If this husband and wife could forgive each other, they wouldn't need a Redeemer" ("The Spectrous Embrace," p. 104).

³³It has been suggested that the Spectre of Los, who has a similar despairing conviction of sin in *Jerusalem* 10:37-59 (E 153-54), is at least in part a portrait of Cowper. See Morton D. Paley, "Cowper as Blake's Spectre," *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 1 [1968], 236-52; and also his *The Continuing City*, pp. 246-50.

³⁴Johnson and Wilkie, "The Spectrous Embrace," p. 103.

³⁵Both Erdman (*Prophet against Empire*, pp. 381-82) and Paley (*Energy and the Imagination*, pp. 159-61) are rightly skeptical of the efficacy of these labors, and tend to see the error involved as Blake's (encouraged by the well-known autobiographical allusions in the passage). But in the context of the poem any human attempts to achieve salvation are seen as inefficacious, except in ways unforeseen at the time, and Blake is well aware of his characters' errors.

³⁶For "Eternal Death" as Blake's term for incarnation, see Damon, *William Blake*, p. 141.

³⁷This phrase was used by Pitt in 1800; see S. T. Coleridge, *Essays on His Times in The Morning Post and The Courier*, ed. David V. Erdman (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1978), i. 185 and n. 8.

³⁸*The Poems of William Blake*, ed. W. H. Stevenson (London: Longman, 1971), p. 291.

³⁹Urizen and Orc are "corporeal enemies but spiritually leagued in the state called Satan" (Paley, *Energy and the Imagination*, p. 166).

⁴⁰See annotations to Lavater (E 601), to Bacon (E 626), and to Reynolds (E 656); *Descriptive Catalogue* (E 543-44); *Jerusalem* 26:44-46 (E 124).

⁴¹*Conversing in Paradise: Poetic Genius and Identity-as-Community in Blake's Los* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1983), p. 130. Wilkie and Johnson also wish to see Los as "an agent," though they note that he acts out of "reflex desperation," and concede that "His terrified struggle for life could be misunderstood as a sign that he has not absorbed the Blakean meaning of the Crucifixion as the ultimate act of the annihilation of the self"; the most they can finally say for Los is that "His resistance here to physical death is not an absolute error" (p. 211). But by now we should be able to see that for Blake no error is absolute.

⁴²*The Task* (1785), 2: 205 (*Cowper: Poetical Works*, ed. H. S. Milford, 4th ed., rev., ed. Norma Russell [London: Oxford University Press, 1967], p. 150).

⁴³Cf. "True causes for Blake are spiritual, though their consequences are to be read in the natural world. . . . Blake's poetry . . . insists on placing the full burden of consequence on every mental affect. . . . The whole history of consciousness seems at stake in every conscious moment" (Leslie Brisman, *Romantic Origins* [Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1978], p. 226).

⁴⁴"The way to truth in a fallen world is through error" (Deen, *Conversing in Paradise*, p. 217).

DISCUSSION

with intellectual spears & long winged arrows of thought

Final States, Finished Forms, and *The Four Zoas*

Peter Otto

In last spring's issue of *Blake*, Paul Mann and Robert N. Essick raised once again the question of the form in which Blake intended to produce *The Four Zoas*. The former suggests that at some stage in the development of *The Four Zoas* Blake intended to print the text in letterpress.¹ The latter, enlarging on Mann's hypothesis, argues that we should adopt a three part schedule for the development of the manuscript: from "a manuscript and production mockup for a poem (*Vala?*) intended for publication of text and designs as intaglio etchings/engravings" to "a manuscript and production mockup for a poem (*The Four Zoas?*) intended for publication as a letterpress text accompanied by intaglio etched and/or engraved designs," and then to "a working manuscript unrelated to any specific publication intentions."² I have no quarrel with the major part of these suggestions; they seem genuinely to illuminate at least part of Blake's intentions for the poem. It is with the status that we ascribe to *The Four Zoas* in the third and final stage of its development that I am concerned.

Discussion of *The Four Zoas* has been dominated by a strong desire to retrieve the outlines of a poem (*Vala*), or potential poem, that lies somewhere behind its pages. This approach assumes that the present poem represents a "major cultural disaster," "a tantalizing and tragic failure," and that it would be irresponsible to suggest "a reversion to 'the poem itself.'" ³ This position is supported by the belief that poems should be unified, coherent, and formally complete. It also draws on the trope that couples incompleteness in the present with completion in some other realm. As a result, the wealth of hypotheses about the possible form of *The Four Zoas* in the "first" and "second" stages of the poem's development is coupled with a relative unanimity of response to the third.

It seems to me that there are cogent thematic and contextual reasons to entertain the possibility at least that when Blake finally stopped working on the manuscript he believed that the form taken by the work was the only one that the subject matter could assume. Or, to phrase this in a less intentionalist idiom: the (unfinished) form of the work embodies the poem's insights

about the nature of the fallen world and of fallen perception. Simply to call the poem incomplete, chaotic, and a "failure" is therefore to be quite misleading. *The Four Zoas* resists and criticizes the attempt to arrive at a closure. The manuscript could not have been completed in any traditional sense without altering what the poem has to say about fallen perception. To adopt the terminology used by Rajan in *The Form of the Unfinished*, *The Four Zoas* is an "unfinished" rather than an "incomplete" poem:

Incomplete poems are poems which ought to be completed. Unfinished poems are poems which ask not to be finished, which carry within themselves the reasons for arresting or effacing themselves as they do. If an unfinished poem were to be finished it would ideally erase its own significance.⁴

The Four Zoas does differ in certain respects from the poems discussed by Rajan. *The Faerie Queene* or *Don Juan*, for example, are "unfinished" because they lack an ending. By contrast, *The Four Zoas* has a remarkable ending (even though, as I shall argue, the closure effected by this ending is rather ambiguous). Moreover, a large portion of *The Faerie Queene* and *Don Juan* were "completed" and published by their respective authors, whereas Blake left *The Four Zoas* in manuscript form. Blake seems unwilling to impose a final form on any part of this particular poem. Nevertheless, *The Four Zoas* is "unfinished" rather than "incomplete" because the poem is arrested by forces which are intrinsic to its subject matter. Now is not the occasion to put forward my argument in detail; however, I will briefly outline some of the points that could be mustered in its defense.

The Four Zoas begins by announcing that it will provide an account of the "fall into Division" and "Resurrection to Unity" (4:4, E 301) of Los; yet this program is announced in a context which suggests that this is a task which must remain unfinished. Blake warns that "a Perfect Unity / Cannot Exist. but from the Universal Brotherhood of Eden / The Universal Man" and, in a late addition, that the "Natures" of "The Four Mighty Ones," one of whom is of course the hero of the poem, "no Individual Knoweth nor Can know in all Eternity." Here, in the opening page of the poem, the narrator suggests both a drive towards clarity and completion (telling the *whole* story) and a residue or excess which must leave this drive short of its goal.

The major force working against completion is, however, not the nature of the Zoas or the impossibility of creating a "Perfect Unity" within the fallen world, but the curious fact that the narrator is himself an "effect" of the story that he recounts. The narrator's Muse may be to some extent above the cycles of the fallen world, but the narrator himself exists within it. As a prophet/poet and therefore himself a manifestation of Los, his identity and activity can be located within the history that he recounts. Like Urizen in plate 23 of *The Book of Urizen*,

the narrator is therefore contained within his own poem. This suggests that *The Four Zoas* is a kind of Möbius strip that denies the possibility of reaching an End. As Urizen complains in a passage that suggests more than one reader's experience of the poem:

Can I not leave this world of Cumbrous
wheels
Circle oer Circle nor on high attain a void
Where self sustaining I may view all things
beneath my feet
Or sinking thro these Elemental wonders
swift to fall
I thought perhaps to find an End a world
beneath of voidness
Whence I might travel round the outside of
this Dark confusion . . .

(72:22-27, E 349)

If the poem were completed in any conventional sense this would suggest that the narrator had reached the "void" outside of the poem/world that eludes Urizen.

Blake's characterization of apocalypse introduces a similar conflict between the forces of completion and those of incompleteness. The Fall described by *The Four Zoas* is in essence a fragmentation or dis-membering. In order to "complete" the poem by bringing it successfully to apocalypse, the narrator must enumerate as many fragments of the Fall as possible so that, in the course of the Ninth Night, these can be re-membered. However, to the extent that this enumeration of the fragments and perspectives of the fallen world is accomplished, a tension is introduced between the poem's form and the disorganized, proliferating entities and perspectives of the fallen world. If the poet were able to order the disorder of the fallen world, this would suggest an order (similar in kind to the "false" or fallen unity propounded by Newton) which would vie with the Unity offered by "The Universal Man." Moreover, this order, because it is produced by a fallen self, could only be founded on the repression or masking of a more fundamental disorder.

One of the obvious manifestations of this tension can be seen in the existence of two seventh Nights. Formally there can, of course, be only one seventh Night in a Dream of Nine Nights. However, in the fallen world the conflict between flesh and spirit fragments what the ordering mind hopes to master.⁵ It is perhaps not too fanciful to suggest that the presence in the poem of Blake's proofs for Young's *Night Thoughts* also suggests an influence, an other, that cannot be completely assimilated to the poet's design. Similarly, the possibly successive "layers" of the poem, written in copperplate, modified copperplate, and "usual" hand, imply a history which cannot be contained within the "timeless" artifact of a "complete" poem. *The Four Zoas* is haunted by its doubles; and these proliferating images could only be erased if the poet were to adopt the position out of time and space which he denies to his characters.

The narrator's struggle with his subject matter is mirrored by Urizen's attempt to order the fallen world. In Night the Third, Urizen constructs a "Golden World": "The seas & lakes, they reard the mountains & the rocks & hills / On broad pavilions, on pillard roofs & porches & high towers / In beauteous order . . ." (32:8, 33:1-3, E 321). But this ordered form frames a world of chaos: "For many a window ornamented with sweet ornaments / Lookd out into the World of Tharmas, where in ceaseless torrents / His billows roll where monsters wander in the foamy paths" (33:5-7, E 321). In framing the "World of Tharmas," this "beauteous order" excludes disorder (at least from the perspective of Urizen). However, this exclusion (because it frames the world of Tharmas) paradoxically provides a ground against which disorder can be drawn into existence. It is ironical that what appears to the inhabitants of the "Golden World" as chaos in fact contains Tharmas, the "Parent Power" (4:6, E 301) who, in the prelapsarian world, has an important role in the task of giving form to life. For the poet/narrator to complete *The Four Zoas* would be to create a structure which was isomorphic with Urizen's "beauteous order."⁶

Perhaps the most remarkable instance of this conflict between the forces of completion and incompleteness can be seen in the vision of regenerate humanity with which the poem closes and begins again. The "Unity" achieved by the Zoas on pages 138 and 139, a "Unity" which promises to reintegrate the fragments of the fallen world and offers a ground for the individual Zoas in the "whole Man," provides an ending for the poem; yet it does not "complete" the poem. The rising Sun and "fresher morning" described on these pages place regenerate humanity both before and after the slumber of Nine Nights. "Unity" exists *outside* of the poem. In other words, the poem glimpses and yet fails to incorporate within itself its own completion. Unity is achieved by waking from sleep, by moving from night into day, and by transforming Los (loss) into the Sun. The end of the poem therefore lies outside its own boundaries; paradoxically, *The Four Zoas* can only be completed by affirming its necessary incompleteness.

It is of course true that the glimpse of regenerated humanity offered in these pages does exist within the boundaries of *The Four Zoas* and that in terms of narrative form it suggests a possible closure or completion of fallen history. But even in this sense the end of the poem is contested by the forces of incompleteness. Within the framework of a dream of Nine Nights, regeneration can occur only at the very end of history, at the end of the Book. But the reordering of fallen humanity that is described in Night the Ninth suggests that this kind of end may be quite misleading. The temporal and spatial order which is established by Los and Enitharmon in the course of the poem is, in fact, destroyed at the beginning of the Ninth Night. As a result, the "volume of Heaven

& Earth," with its linear organization (from beginning to middle to end) is folded into a scroll. End and beginning are now in the center of the text rather than at its perimeter. This is what Urizen discovers on page 121 when he says:

Then Go O dark futurity I will cast thee
 forth from these
 Heavens of my brain nor will I look upon
 futurity more
 I cast futurity away & turn my back upon
 that void
 Which I have made for lo futurity is in this
 moment . . .

(19-22, E 390)

It is perhaps to underline the change of orientation demanded by the Ninth Night that the vision of regenerated humanity is written on a proof of the first page of Young's *Night Thoughts*. To complete this poem (to look for an End which could give it a final shape) is to see the vision of awakening slip beyond our grasp and to be drawn back into another dream of nine Nights.

Rather than arguing that before Blake "abandoned" *The Four Zoas* he tried "to gather the new and old threads of his Prophecy, and to strengthen the whole with new patches"⁷ in the hope of creating a formally complete and unified poem, it is possible to argue that Blake left his creation myth in an unfinished condition because this was the only form which is appropriate for the effort of a fallen self to recount the origins, history, and regeneration of the world. Moreover, in this poem it is the tension between completion and incompleteness, affirmation and irony, which ensures that the history of Los, which is the history of the fallen world, remains open to the possibility of regeneration. The path from *Vala* to *The Four Zoas* does not lead to a "major cultural disaster"; it leads to a remarkable instance of what Rajan calls an unfinished (rather than an incomplete) poem.

¹Paul Mann, "The Final State of *The Four Zoas*," *Blake* 18 (1986): 204-09.

²Robert N. Essick, "The Four Zoas: Intention and Production," *Blake* 18 (1986): 219.

³Northrop Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton Univ. Press, 1947), p. 269; G. E. Bentley, Jr., ed. "Vala": or "The Four Zoas" (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), p. 165; Mann, p. 208.

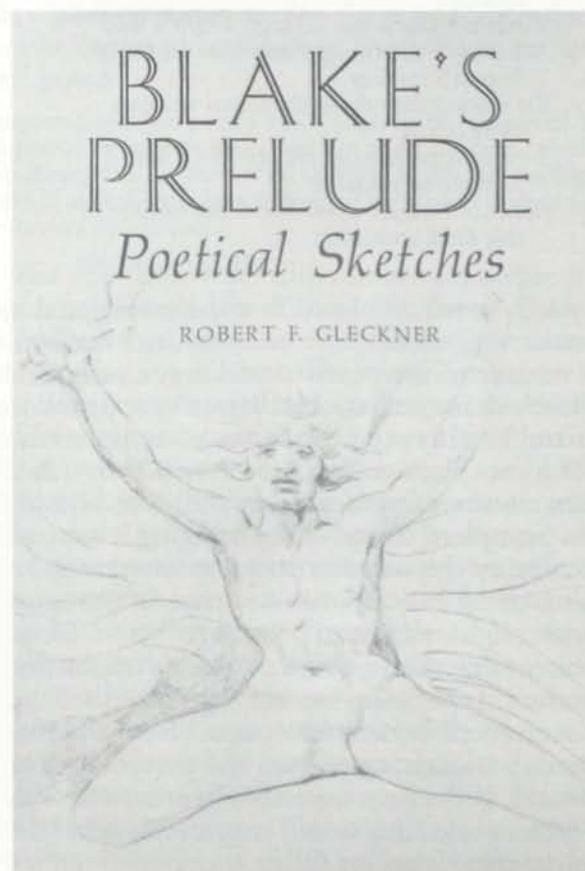
⁴Balachandra Rajan, *The Form of the Unfinished: English Poetics from Spenser to Pound* (Princeton, NJ: Univ. Princeton Press, 1985), p. 14.

⁵I describe this conflict and view of the relationship between the two seventh nights in an article entitled "Those Two Seventh Nights Once Again" (forthcoming).

⁶Blake did of course, complete *Milton* and *Jerusalem* after he stopped working on *The Four Zoas*; but these poems are no longer attempts to give a history of the fallen world; they are "Visionary forms dramatic."

⁷Bentley, p. 165.

REVIEWS



Robert F. Gleckner. *Blake's Prelude: Poetical Sketches*. Baltimore and London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982. xii + 202 pp. \$15.00.

Reviewed by Michael J. Tolley

Still the wonder grows. What Hewlett in 1876 condemned as the plagiarism of an "Imperfect Genius," has become, with successive refinements and extensions of the pioneering work in 1940 of Margaret Lowery, a swelling tribute of praise to an original (not merely "untutored") genius. Gleckner's researches, the most

extensive ever undertaken into the sources of the *Poetical Sketches*, and his critical examination, the most thorough ever given to the book as a whole, must increase our astonishment, not only that one young head could carry all Blake knew, but that he could have worked at such a sophisticated level, even in the examples Gleckner finds least successful, as rightful heir to the Bible, Milton and Spenser. Could the youthful Blake have known that he was already producing a book that is an antibook, of sketches that are not sketchy, but "finished sketches" in the manner of Michelangelo, who "did never sketch," according to Blake, for "Every line of his has Meaning" ("Florentine Ingratitude")? So, with due allowance, Gleckner concludes (p. 152): Blake in 1783 set out to emulate the masters, even if it is doubtless "too much to credit" him "with then regarding every line of his own poetical 'sketches' as imbued with meaning." Gleckner, thus, agrees with John Ehrstine against T.S. Eliot, that these poems are not "quite mature and successful attempts to do something small" but are rather the sketching out of "something very large." We may infer that critical attention has shifted from the superficial form to the grand inferred program: this penciled figure will be used in *The School of Athens*, that brief lyric in *Jerusalem*.

At this point I should make two things clear. Firstly, I am aware, Gleckner perhaps insufficiently so here, that it is dangerous to make analogies between Blake's practice as a poet and his work as a graphic artist. Gleckner loves striking phrases but he is sometimes seduced by them (and accordingly we still have to try to resist his "Higher Innocence"). The idea of the "finished sketch" is Gleckner's, not Blake's, because the idea of finishing was to Blake relative not absolute. Secondly, Gleckner is very careful not to fall into the trap of supposing that Blake's early poems should be read in the light of his later ones; the problem he raises rather is whether we should read the early poems with the same degree of attention as we do the later ones and with similar expectations regarding their functions or strategies.

I have great sympathy for Gleckner's style of scholarship and for his critical approach in this instructive book, which is far better than those of several critics to whom inexplicably he defers. That the book is not magisterial but still exploratory in tone as in effect may be related to the more widespread critical uncertainties of our times; it is hard to imagine that any one will soon write a better book on *Poetical Sketches*, and yet such a study is at once rendered obligatory by the critical problems *Blake's Prelude* engenders.

The problem that looms largest to me is one of over-reading. Blake is, as we all know, a highly allusive poet, but was he always so allusive, everywhere in his work?

Gleckner distinguishes persuasively between poems (he thinks they are to be dated earlier) in which words and phrases are snatched out of context like gems prized from a brooch and those in which there is a kind of resonant dialogue with the sources (these are perhaps the later and better poems). Gleckner writes with authority on these matters, having conducted the kind of thorough search we associate with Roger Lonsdale; he is also genuinely interested to discover the truth about Blake's relationship with his sources. Sometimes, inevitably, he has found too much; occasionally he makes mistakes or finds too little; but he always tries to present the evidence fairly and scrupulously and he has the great virtue of being willing to trust what at first sight may seem an unlikely association sufficiently to press further for supporting evidence which may force a skeptical reader to consider it equally closely. It is also good that Gleckner usually, though not everywhere, seeks to enhance rather than diminish the reputation of particular poems. The effects vary: Gleckner is in my view wrong so to undervalue "Fair Elenor" as to miss some of its allusions and be blind to its few virtues; he amply confirms the satirical qualities attributed to "King Edward the Third" by Erdman and others through finding in it ironical references to Milton; he deepens our appreciation of the celebrated seasons poems (though not of each equally); he fails to convince me that "Samson" is such "an extraordinary achievement" as his reading of the sources suggests because too many details in the reading are unpersuasive.

Perhaps the most instructive of such discussions is that of "To Morning," where he brings massive scholarship to the close analysis of a poem which, I suppose, most of us like but none of us finds quite satisfying, the cumulative effect of which is to demonstrate just why we are unsatisfied, even if we may not, as I do not, agree with every step in the analysis. I like the reluctance with which Gleckner concedes that this relatively weak lyric does not work: "The final success of the resultant melange, it seems to me, however delicately lovely the poem as a whole, must be called into question." Gleckner's critical procedure here is to assume that every word, phrase or image employed by Blake in "To Morning" must be redolent of its source, whether Spenserian epithalamic (but curiously reversed) at the opening, or ominously Miltonic as it proceeds, or inexplicably vernerian (celebratory of hunting, in the classical manner) at the close. The effect, though impressive, makes one wonder whether one should not rather assume, in order to rescue the poem, that Blake did not mean us to associate his lovely phrases with their highly significant origins at all, so that it is well to remind ourselves that Blake's "Evening Star" and "Morning" companions have

a place in a homelier tradition, that of the children's songs or hymns by such writers as Smart, Wesley and Watts—as John Holloway points out in *Blake: The Lyric Poetry*, pp. 38f. (a book which Gleckner seems, unfortunately, to have missed).

Gleckner affirms that his book "is dedicated to proving" that Blake's labors at *Poetical Sketches* were not merely an escape from the laborious tasks of an apprentice engraver but "constituted a serious enterprise in its own right" (p. 151). I agree with him, but submit that "serious" does not always have to mean "solemn"; it is surprising to read this ponderous judgment on "Blind-Man's Buff" (p. 25):

if it confutes the idyllicism of Thomson's snug cottages, it advances an equally specious history of mankind and "sweet society." The ethic espoused is one of self-restraint, playing one's part, regimentation, and eye-for-eye justice so totally foreign to Blake even in *Poetical Sketches* that one may be justifiably puzzled why he saved this piece from the "hearth so red" with which it begins.

Rather than making overmuch of Thomson as a source (Holloway refers rather to *A Midsummer Night's Dream* II.i.42–57) and berating Blake for his severe ethics and false history, Gleckner might have wondered how it was that Blake, who I am sure hated horseplay, cheating and injustice from his youth up, could write with such genial humor about them "even in *Poetical Sketches*." The morality of the piece seems to me to hit off the thoughts of children on these serious issues admirably, just as Blake enters so well into the comedy (to an outsider) of a child's partial sense of fair play in Tilly Lally's song, "I say, you Joe." No, I like "Blind-Man's Buff" and I don't think one should have to feel apologetic about it.

"Blind-Man's Buff" is one of three "variously inept" poems, characterized by Gleckner as "early" and dealt with in a chapter called "The Muses of Memory," all lamely imitative rather than imaginatively engaged with their sources in the true Blakean style. The other two are "An Imitation of Spenser" and "Fair Elenor." The Spenserian stanzas, "all different and all wrong," need not detain us here, but "Fair Elenor," weak as it is, trips up its critic. Gleckner finds it comic that Elenor, despite Spenser's example in *The Faerie Queene* IV.viii.62, shrieks "aloud"; "how else?" he asks. Spenser and Blake meant that the shriek was loud; I understand that it is possible to shriek faintly, too. Gleckner is so busy laughing at Blake's silly Gothic ballad that he misses his real achievement in the form (which is the reason why, I suppose, some people admire the Gothic mode), which is to evoke rather skillfully the sensation of being trapped in a nightmare. Some of Blake's startling rhythmic effects, the staccato phrasing and dislocations of syntax, can work on us a little if we can suspend our scornful spirit of disbelief for a moment; line 16, especially, seems magical to me. Gleckner misses the "sublime" biblical rhythms in lines 49–51, although he castigates Blake for the inertness of his allusion to Psalm 91.5–6

in lines 33–36 and, more interestingly, proposes a not very apt allusion to Song of Solomon 5 for lines 41–48 on the grounds, it seems, of a supposed similarity between this chapter and the plot of the poem (pp. 18f.). He goes on to assert that "The inappropriateness of the allusion is, curiously, instructive, for it is perhaps Blake's first effort to make 'use' of a source, to bend the allusion to his own context or to qualify his context through allusionary 'punctuation.'" Although I think that the ineptness attributed to the allusion by Gleckner is a consequence of his having picked the wrong biblical text, passages closer to the rhetoric of Elenor's lament for her dead lord tend to support his case that some arbitrary "bending" of an allusion to an inappropriate context has been attempted by the poet (I refuse to comment on the question of chronological priority). I think of such admired passages as Judges 5.27, for the staccato incremental repetition, and of the lament for fallen Lucifer in Isaiah 14.12: "How art thou fallen from heaven, O Lucifer, son of the morning! how art thou cut down . . ." (compare Blake's "But he is darken'd; like the summer's noon, / Clouded; fall'n like the stately tree, cut down" and recall the account of the death of Fuzon in *The Book of Ahania* 3:41–44). However, the allusion's failure to work here is not owing to "the excessiveness of the Gothic-balladic frame and language," as Gleckner would have it, because borrowing from biblical rhetoric in order to achieve a sublime excess goes with the genre, but simply because Elenor's lord is not related to Elenor as Lucifer is to Isaiah or as Sisera is to Jael.

I don't think I'm ever going to be much interested in the critical problem of dating the poems in *Poetical Sketches*; Gleckner's speculations on the issue are sensibly based but cannot in the nature of things be wholly convincing. A more interesting issue is that of how and whether the poems should be grouped; some groupings are clear, such as the seasonal and diurnal poems and the pair of songs beginning "When early morn" and "Fresh from the dewy hill," but the interrelationships of the poems within these groups may be problematical. In a chapter labeled "Antithetical Structure," Gleckner discusses mainly the seven lyrics titled "Song" along with the "Mad Song." He does not have interesting things to say about all of these lyrics and sometimes he is hampered by his program. For instance, I think it is a mistake to find an "antithetical perspective" in the fifth stanza of "Fresh from the Dewy Hill," signaled "by its initial 'But'": as I read the poem the "But" is intensive not antithetical. I also think it is reaching too far to find a "marvelously apt" allusion to Spenser's story of Malbecco and Hellenore and then to lament that it is too weakly triggered in the third line of this "Song." As Gleckner more safely proposes, "it is certainly possible that Blake simply drew the laurel-shade locution from his ample store of other stock phrases" (pp. 46f.).

Similarly, in "Mad Song" Gleckner (p. 49) finds "a marvelous allusion if indeed it is creditable" to the Amavia episode in *The Faerie Queene* II.i.46. Unfortunately, the phrase concerned in "Mad Song," "And my griefs unfold," was most likely a misprint for the quite different idea of "my griefs infold." I suspect that Gleckner is attracted to the remote Spenserian echo partly because he doesn't quite understand the metaphorical force of "infold": as I read the text, the speaker of "Mad Song" desires Sleep to gather his griefs into a fold as the shepherd does his flock on a stormy night. This is so much stronger a reading than the printed (but not always uncorrected) text, "unfold," that it is hard to believe it was not Blake's first thought. A simpler error, the supposition that Adam and Eve turned their backs to the East when they departed from Eden, somewhat mars Gleckner's reading (p. 51) of the closing lines of the poem, where also a consideration of Hewlett's reference to *2 Henry IV* II.iii.19 for Blake's "vault / Of paved heaven" might have distracted him from depending overmuch on Milton; the phrase was of course simply a cliché by Blake's time (cf. also Gleckner's note on "King Edward the Third" 5. 19-20 on p. 182). Perhaps I should repeat here that I am not sorry that Gleckner tries on such tentative allusions for size; he is quite right to present the case for them as fully and fairly as he perceives it. If my final impression is that Gleckner relies too much on a search for allusions in his readings, and particularly for allusions to Spenser and Milton, this should not weaken my awareness that we do wrong to neglect them.

Sometimes, nevertheless, it might appear that if Gleckner could not find a way to read a poem through various perceived allusions, he would be left somewhat at a loss. Such a criticism would be unjust; with "When Early Morn," for instance, "one of the least allusive poems in all of the *Sketches*," Gleckner is able to show that Blake's establishment of "the experiential violence of real jealousy" is achieved without "significant allusion" (p. 45). On the other hand, it is hard not to feel that his tepid response to one of the best pieces, "How Sweet I Roam'd" (of which nonetheless he gives largely a just account) is an effect both of his inability to find an interesting source for it and of his failure to fit it within a larger group: he remarks indeed that "its demonstrably simple derivativeness [from Spenserian Petrarchan love poetry] and passive relationship to other songs serve . . . to validate Malkin's statement about its adolescent inception" (pp. 55f.). Is this the same poem as the one I find almost as chilling as "The Erl King"? (Teaching it as a song, I suggest to students that they try going back to the first stanza after the final one to appreciate its formal mimicry of entrapment.) To me it serves as a splendid introduction to the other love songs in *Poetical Sketches*, as well as a useful corrective to uninformed statements about the chronology of Blake's

understanding of Innocence and Experience as contrary states; it casts a long shadow through, say, "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Experience* to "The Golden Net" and "The Crystal Cabinet" and the desperate lovers in *Jerusalem*.

For his chapter on the poems addressed to each of the four seasons, Gleckner seems somewhat cramped for space in building on his valuable 1965 article. Some of the more interesting source material is packed into a few footnotes and his presentation is blurry in places. This must be partly an effect of the variety and quantity of possible sources that are here to be sorted; it is hard to distinguish trees from woods. To deal adequately with these matters would require me to write a long study of Blake's Seasons complementary to my essay on "Blake's Songs of Spring," so I will content myself here with only a few observations. The thrust of Gleckner's chapter title, "Cycle and Anticycle," is to propose that "To Winter" offers a kind of "anti-myth" (Adams's term) or "spectrous parody" of the Spring-Summer-Autumn progression. This is a sound reading of a sequence in which the welcome seasons are invited to "come in, sit down, put your feet up and we'll have a song; please stay awhile," and the bad one to "keep out!" In "To Winter," the iceman cometh perforce, disdaining communication with his human victims, until heaven intercedes and drives him back to Iceland. More seriously, Gleckner shows (perhaps not as forcefully as he might have done) that all the good seasons are associated with Christ, but Winter with Antichrist Satan. The outline is blurred somewhat by a need to discuss the place these lyrics have in the classical tradition initiated by Virgil, Ovid and others and regenerated by Spenser as an English topos, to descend to Blake through Milton, Thomson, Pope, Collins and others; somewhat more by occasionally careless handling and less than optimal integration of these sources both with each other and with the (oriental) Christian scheme which subsumes them. Gleckner has advanced our knowledge so far in these matters that it must seem churlish to say that we can proceed yet further and more securely at every stage, with Virgil, Spenser, Milton, Pope, Collins, Scripture, yet it must be said nevertheless and I doubt whether Gleckner will be surprised by it. (I have, too, to say that Gleckner has generously acknowledged in his book my own work as a fellow toiler in this particular vineyard; all I can do in return is a little pruning and tendriling.) I'll try to be brief here.

In Virgil's *Georgics* IV.62-63, Winter is put to rout by the golden sun and chased beneath the earth. Gleckner's association of Winter with Spenser's wild boar will not pass; he proposes it first on p. 63 (cf. 73f.) in connection with the vision of stasis at the end of the Mutability Cantos, one with which I think Blake would be less comfortable than Gleckner supposes; unfortunately, he completely mangles his quotation from Spenser's *Nature*. Gleckner has demonstrated Blake's debt

to the stanzas on Summer and Autumn in *The Faerie Queene* VII.vii.29, 30, although he makes nothing of Blake's pointed departure from stanza 28 in "To Spring" and does not notice that Spenser's Spring is recollected in the "lustly song of fruits and flowers" in "To Autumn." (Gleckner's suggestion on p. 62 that Spenser's Spring, "all dight in leaves of flowres" parallels Blake's "perfumed garments" is unconvincing in the light of the preferable reference to Song of Solomon 4.11, first noted by Miner.) Gleckner is, I think, the first to propose biblical references for "To Summer," but he makes an awful mess of his quotation from Psalm 84.5-6 as background for the first lines (p. 66). This is a difficult text for translators and commentators, but one would expect that, if he had meant us to recollect it, Blake would have brought the idea of wells or of rain in close context with it. The idea that the Summer's "ruddy limbs and flourishing hair" are also those of the beloved in the Song of Solomon 5.10-11 is attractive but tenuous; if it were meant, how did Blake miss the "gold head" image?

Gleckner is on stronger ground when he claims (pp. 66f.) that Blake "thoroughly Miltonizes his [Summer] into Christ and Creation by equipping him with a 'fervid car' and having him ride 'o'er the deep of heaven,'" quoting *Paradise Lost* VII.214-25 and V.300-01 (mis-cited as to Book X); both should be taken together, but he misses two clinching ideas, one that the voice of the car rider was heard in both poems, the other that the noonday sun in Milton is described as, like Blake's Summer, "mounted." We may notice here that when in "To Autumn" "clust'ring Summer breaks forth into singing" it is making a classic biblical response to the redemptive initiative of God, as in Isaiah 14.7; 44.23; 49.13; 54.1 and 55.12. It is a pity that Gleckner hides in a footnote (p. 174) his proposal that the language and details of Milton's whole passage on the third day of Creation in *Paradise Lost* "are at the center" of "To Autumn," because the idea is clearly of some importance. Only one word-borrowing, "clust'ring," is adduced from the Miltonic passage, and this could have come from elsewhere, for instance from Pope's Autumn Pastoral, where there are several images and phrases suggestive of "To Autumn" besides that, noted by Gleckner, which might lie behind Blake's "golden load." (Gleckner has not in the past been very receptive to my suggestions that Blake was indebted to Pope; another one is that the phrase "and rush into the stream" in "To Summer" echoes "and rush into the sea" in Pope's *Odyssey* IV.786.)

For some reason obscure to me, Gleckner finds that what he calls the "clichéed salvation" at the end of "To Winter" has been sabotaged, because, earlier in the last stanza, the mariner cries "in vain." On the contrary, I take it that the salvation is real, that the wretched mariner only cries "till" rescue comes; Winter won't listen to him but, in due time, heaven will. Blake's realistic assessment of life in a wintry world here is of

a piece with that in "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Songs of Innocence*, which instructs us, not that harm will not be experienced by those doing their duty, but that they need not fear it. You'd have to be mad, as in "Mad Song," to turn your back on hope and Blake nowhere allows despair to overwhelm him. In noting that Blake is portraying Winter as Satan, Gleckner doesn't go on to see how much he is caricaturing him as the Gothic monster Satan is (though I do not think that he meant us to recall either Satan's metamorphosis into a monstrous serpent or Sin's yelling hounds, *pace* Gleckner, pp. 69, 73: the "yelling" surely comes from Collins, *Ode to Evening* 46, as Hewlett proposed; Chatterton also followed Collins, *pace* note 56, p. 174). I find very intriguing Gleckner's suggestion that Winter's pillars refer to those of Satan's gun-carriage in *Paradise Lost* VI.572-73; the suggestion is helped by the wording in one of the sources for Winter's "iron car," Collins's "Ode to Peace"⁵: "To Britain bent his iron car" (Blake has "Nor bend thy pillars with thine iron car"). Against this idea is the "more natural" one of a demon bursting from the adamantine doors of hell across such a pillared way as that constructed by Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost* X: Winter "rides heavy."

I have already encouraged the reader to profit from Gleckner's discussion of "To Morning" in his chapter "Mornings and Evenings." My own reading of "To the Evening Star" would not be quite so somber as that with which Gleckner disturbs himself (p.93) but the force one concedes to the supposed "influence" of the star and its "sacred dew" may well vary from reader to reader. Gleckner is over-suspicious of Blakean stars, but there is no reason to supply a negative reading here (and he should know that Blake is not against stars as such, only against misreadings and systematic orderings of them). A relevant text in Milton, *Paradise Lost* IX.106-07, missed by him here, might help Gleckner towards a more positive response than that in note 33, pp. 177f. Also regarding this note, I should point out that a reference to *Lycidas* 26-31 for "flocks covered with the dew of heaven" is irrelevant, since Milton refers there to the sheep's eating of dew-covered grass. This is an interesting chapter and I'll spare the author from more of my nitpicking.

In "Worldly Wars and Mental Fight," Gleckner focuses on "King Edward the Third" and the three short "political" poems in a valuable discussion. His search in the play for sources from *Paradise Lost* is too thorough to be always convincing, but this should not mean that his general thesis that Milton's poem provides several ironic counterparts to Edward's militaristic ideals may therefore be impugned.

"Prophetic Forms," Gleckner's last chapter before broad conclusions are drawn in the "Epilogue," gives the critic space to discuss in some detail the prose poems. "The Couch of Death" and "Contemplation" are read

against *Paradise Lost* XI and "Il Penseroso" according to a program partly derived, regrettably, from Wagenknecht. Gleckner complains of "an Ossianic flaccidness," especially in the most allusive passages in the poems, but they are less Ossianic in effect than one would expect and the allusions are directly imitative of biblical rhetoric (Gleckner correctly recalls Ecclesiastes for "Contemplation"). His reference to Milton's Nativity Ode for the radiance and angelic visitation of the dying youth in "The Couch of Death" seems unjustified, and his comparison of the pair's Calvinistical self-condemnation to the monsters of *Comus* is unwarranted, but his account of Blake's movement towards a definition of sin is noteworthy. His description of the unclosed structure of "Contemplation" is yet more valuable, suggesting a model for the confrontations of Innocence and Experience and particularly for "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience* and "Earth's Answer." The poem-by-poem discussion is concluded by a serious engagement with "Samson" and particularly the problems of how far the poet is critical of the hero's character and how the fragment is to be set within or against the narratives in Judges 13-16 and *Samson Agonistes*. As with "King Edward the Third," "Samson" seems to me more like a sample of what the young poet could do, given the right encouragement, than the sketch of a work that might easily be finished; it certainly does not fulfill the promise of its beginning, even (I would submit) ironically. Blake had a curious liking for the foiled deliverer, whose warfare, insofar as it is mental, he rightly locates in the dialogues with Dalila. In his attempt to grapple with the puzzle of his annunciation, Samson seems to be measuring the "truth" of the angel's promise against his own knowledge that, in spite of "matchless might," wisdom and talent, he is merely human. Gleckner is a bit hard on Samson in relating (p. 146) this "matchless might" to that of Sin and Death in *Paradise Lost* X.404, but whether the hint is to be taken or not this does not mean that the angel's prophecy is necessarily false, only that it remains oracular (and, perhaps, too difficult for the young Blake). Gleckner might be encouraged to take a more positive view of the angel if, in noting that the name "wonderful" derives from Isaiah 9.6, he were to go on to find a reference to angelic mental warfare (which he will not allow Wittreich to claim) in Isaiah 9.5.

There are errors in this book, there are misprints (not all noted here), there are stylistic infelicities; nevertheless this is an invaluable study, containing many fine perceptions and discoveries, which I recommend highly to all scholars and teachers of Blake.

James King and Charles Ryskamp, eds.
The Letters and Prose Writings of William Cowper. Vol. IV: Letters, 1792-1799. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1984. xxxiv + 498 pp. \$91.00

Reviewed by Donald H. Reiman

This volume, in which William Cowper's life draws to its sad close, reveals among its final texts one of the most pathetic tales in the annals of British poetry. The record of Cowper's last years offers few moments of hope or gleams of good spirits from Cowper himself; its shadows are relieved only by the loyalty of his friends, old and new, and by the poet's own courageous fight to maintain before others his civility and decency. He struggled to live as a man, while feeling (as he revealed in private outcries) "like a poor Fly entangled in a thousand webs" or "the hunted hare" (pp. 468-69). By 1795, when he wrote those and even darker words, he believed that God had cast him utterly away because he had failed to commit suicide in his youth, as he retrospectively imagined that God had ordained. In the face of such overwhelming mental anguish and the physical ravages of age, Cowper's attempts to pretend to keep up his spirits in his letters and even to comfort and commiserate with the misfortunes of his friends become a kind of domestic heroism.

Up to a point, Cowper maintained a nearly normal correspondence with most of his friends, not allowing into it the feelings of damnation that poisoned his life. But he could not do so till the very end. Of the 466 pages devoted to the letters of eight years nominally covered in this volume, the letters of 1792 occupy 269 pages, and those for 1793 take 173 pages. No letters at all survive between 14 January 1794 and 27 August 1795, and all of those thereafter repeat the theme voiced in the first words he wrote to his beloved cousin Lady Hesketh on the latter date: "Hopeless as ever . . ." (p. 450). Filling in part of the transitional gap is his brief "spiritual diary" of June-July 1795, which includes the words of despair quoted at the opening of this review. Before 1794, Cowper reserved most of his expressions of spiritual aridity and despair for his letters to the Olney schoolmaster Samuel Teedon, who—as the editors' notes on correspondents make clear—was someone whom Cowper distinctly did not *like* in their early acquaintance, but whom he later found useful as a confessor to hear reports of his strange and usually terrifying dreams. (With characteristic tact and sensitivity, Cowper prepaid at least four out of the five letters he sent to Teedon

from Hayley's house in Sussex, to spare Teedon the high postage costs then current for letters sent the usual way, in which the recipient paid the postage.) Teedon, a chin-up do-gooder, spent much time praying God to reveal His mercies to Cowper and asking the poet whether he was receiving any of the blessings requested. His willingness to listen to Cowper's outcries gave the poet a safe outlet for his feelings, and thereby both enabled Cowper to remain relatively cheerful with Mary Unwin, Hayley, William Rose, Johnny Johnson, and other close friends and provided posterity with a much clearer picture than we could otherwise have of Cowper's long, courageous struggle against the Giant Despair.

Another major aspect of this volume concerns Cowper's proposed work on Milton for Joseph Johnson. Cowper had finished his translations of Milton's Latin and Italian poems and had now to write an introductory "Life" and critique à la Dr. Johnson. From the start of the period covered in these letters, he found himself unable to continue this work, and after Mary Unwin's second stroke, he used her condition and his need to attend to her as a strong reason not to complete the project. That Mrs. Unwin in this case provided an excuse, rather than the chief *cause* of his inability, appears in the alacrity with which he undertook major revisions and annotations of his translations of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* while under the same external constraints. It is unclear whether Cowper found Milton more difficult to approach than Homer because, reverencing Milton as he did, he paled at the thought that his own poetry would be directly compared with Milton's; or because Milton's theological bias kept bringing his own sense of damnation to the fore; or because he was convinced that his scholarly work would not be up to the high standards he set for himself in all areas. He was aware and thankful for the mitigations of his plight through his possession of a small private income, as appears in remarks about "poor Mrs. [Charlotte] Smith. . . Chain'd to her desk like a slave to his oar, with no other means of subsistence for herself and her numerous children" (p. 280). Nevertheless, he felt his failure to fulfill his commitment to Joseph Johnson more sharply because of the publisher's generosity in voluntarily paying Cowper for later editions of poems to which Johnson already held the copyright. Cowper no longer required busywork to keep his psyche occupied, but, having received a monetary advance for the work on Milton, he found himself with some of the internal pressures of an "author-for-hire."

Readers of *Blake* may be most interested in his important new friendship with William Hayley, his "brother poet" (as Cowper often characterizes him to other correspondents). After reading in a newspaper that he and Cowper were rival biographers of Milton, Hayley, exercising his Boswellian penchant for seeking out and ingratiating himself to great men, wrote to Cowper on

7 February 1792, sending with his letter a complimentary sonnet that contained these lines:

Poet! to whom I feel my heart incline
As to a friend endear'd by virtue's ties;
Ne'er shall my name in pride's contentious line
With hostile emulation cope with thine.
No, let us meet with kind fraternal aim,
Where Milton's shrine invites a votive throng.

(p. 84; the text Cowper quotes here differs in significant details from that in Hayley's *Memoirs* [1823], I, 427–28). Hayley sent this in care of a friend, who gave it to Joseph Johnson, Cowper's publisher, but his letter did not reach Cowper until 17 March. Cowper immediately responded warmly, and Hayley replied with an invitation for Cowper to visit him. Cowper (beginning his second letter to Hayley, 24 March 1792, "My dear friend—") told the stranger about his phobia against traveling and invited Hayley to visit *him*; the next day Cowper wrote to Lady Hesketh that Hayley's "candour, liberality, generosity, have won my heart, and I account him the chief acquisition that my own verse has ever procured me" (p. 39). In his third letter to Hayley, on 6 April, Cowper told him his whole life story, including his mental illness and his association with the Unwins. After Hayley arrived at Weston on 15 May, the friendship was cemented by Hayley's support and helpfulness during and after Mary Unwin's second paralytic stroke (22 May). Hayley helped to care for her, gathered advice from his physician friends, and procured a static electricity machine that, though not restoring all of her functions, at least gave therapeutic activity and hope to both her and Cowper, thereby preventing him from falling into immediate despair about this world as well as the next.

As time passed, Cowper recognized in Hayley the same kind of possessiveness that was to alienate Blake. But though psychologically dependent on his friends, Cowper was able to speak up early and put Hayley in his place before Hayley's demands could permanently damage their relationship. Indeed, it seems to have taken only a single riposte from Cowper to curb Hayley's annoying habit of talking of their friendship as though it were the center of Cowper's life. On 7 June 1792, Cowper wrote to him:

Love you? Yes to be sure I do. Do you take me for a stock or a stone that you make a question of it? . . . But you must permit me nevertheless to be melancholy now and then, or if you will not, I must be so without your permission . . . I tell you my man, I was occasionally sad even in the days when I believed that God himself lov'd me, and who are you, that I should not be so now?

(p. 101)

Such frankness, when the situation warranted it, Cowper combined with a modicum of tactful flattery of Hayley's little vanities to preserve their friendship as long as Cowper's own sanity remained—and longer, for Hayley

became Cowper's official biographer and, after Hayley's death in 1820, John Johnson, Cowper's younger cousin who had cared for him in his last years, became the editor of Hayley's *Memoirs* for Henry Colburn. The strongest testimonial to Cowper's affection for Hayley is the fact that, in spite of his phobia against traveling that had kept him at home for the past twenty years, on 1 August 1792 he packed up Mrs. Unwin in a hired carriage and made the three-day journey to Hayley's home in Sussex, where they stayed for seven weeks, returning home with only the ordinary wear and tear that long journeys and extended visits would normally inflict on sexagenarians.

Through Hayley, who was a political liberal by the standards of Cowper's circle of friends, he met Charlotte Smith and was induced to read some of her fiction and poetry. Lady Hesketh and her circle were, at the same time, turning more and more reactionary through fear of the growing power of the French Revolution and sympathetic upsurges in British society. Though Cowper himself gave up on the French, he refused to become an English reactionary. In the postscript of a letter to Hayley of 13 October 1792, Cowper first urges Hayley in his life of Milton "to censure and expose the cruelty of that literary cossack's strictures" (perhaps an unindexed allusion to Dr. Johnson?) and then moves on to comment on Dumouriez's capture of Verdun: "I do sincerely rejoice that Prussia and Austria seem baffled. If they ever depart from France, they will return no more" (p. 213). When Louis XVI was executed, however, Cowper wrote (again to Hayley) that the revolutionaries had "made me weep for a King of France, which I never thought to do, and they have made me sick of the very name of liberty, which I never thought to be" (p. 282). Yet, in March 1793, he wrote to Lady Hesketh, "you are a Whig in principle, and a Tory in practise only. . . . You approve all the measures of the Court, or of the Minister, and I am pleased with every struggle that is made against them when they infringe the birth-right of the Commons. . . . We equally rejoice, I dare say, in the repulse of Dumourier from the frontiers of Holland, and in every repulse which that most inhuman race the French have met or shall hereafter meet with" (p. 312). On 7 May he again wrote to her: "There is no true Whig who wishes all the power in the hands of his own party. The division of it which lawyers call tripartite is exactly what he desires, and he would have neither King, Lords nor Commons unequally trusted, or in the smallest degree predominant. Such a Whig am I, and such Whigs are the real friends of the Constitution" (p. 332). In these sentiments, Cowper was probably representative of many of the older Whigs, who had grown up during George III's early struggles with the parliament.

If he distrusted the concentration and predominance of political or military power, following the Whig

wisdom of Robert Walpole and the framers of the American Constitution that it is best to maintain a balance of power both within and among nations, he also feared the concentration of power in his own psyche. Having pulled back from his temporary religious fanaticism, which lasted from about the time he met the Unwins till after his brother's death, Cowper sought moderation in all things—including his moral judgments and his commitment to his own writing. Whenever one or another activity, idea, or enthusiasm threatened to overbalance his life in one direction or another, he pulled back in a kind of quiet, decorous terror. Whether this need to avoid extremes resulted from conscious or subconscious feelings of guilt about his self-righteous treatment of Morley Unwin and his own brother John on their deathbeds, as I speculated in my review of volume I of his *Letters* (Blake, 15 [winter 1981–82], 149–51), or whether he simply felt psychic giddiness whenever he inclined one way or another, Cowper was almost a human gyroscope and—as the behavioral opposite of Burns—provides the literature of the later eighteenth century with a life and an art symbolic of an important aspect of the thought of the century.

In an essay entitled "Byron, Shelley, Keats and Lamb," Lytton Strachey writes:

The reader who passes suddenly from the letters of Walpole, Gray, and Cowper to those of Byron, Shelley, and Keats experiences a strange and violent shock. His sensations resemble those of a rower who has been meandering for many days down a broad and quiet river, among fields and spacious villas, and who, in a moment, finds himself upon the sea. He has left behind him the elegance, the seclusion, the leisure of the eighteenth century; he has embarked upon the untrammelled ocean of a new age, where he will be refreshed, astonished, and delighted, but where he will find no rest. The contrast is so complete that one is tempted to believe that an intelligent reader from another planet might almost, by the aid of these letters alone, infer the French Revolution. (*Characters and Commentaries* [1933], p. 53)

Some teacher-scholars of eighteenth-century literature do not like this characterization of differences between their period and the Romantic age, objecting to the whole line of thought characterized in George Saintsbury's title *The Peace of the Augustans*. But after Bonnie Prince Charlie's uprising in "the '45" (which did not leave a personal mark on most writers south of the Tweed greater than that evinced in Fielding's use of it as a momentary plot device in *Tom Jones*), there were few foreign or domestic political threats of enough consequence to stir deep fears of impending chaos in leading British authors.

The situation had been different during the reign of Queen Anne. Then the writers not only recalled the bloody civil wars of the seventeenth century, fueled by deeply felt religious, ideological, and social-class conflicts, but also faced—as the late Elizabethans did—the uncertainties of the impending transfer of power from the Stuarts to another house from abroad. (That parallel

enabled both Scott and Thackeray to go back to this period—as Dumas went back to the ages of Richelieu and Henri IV—to find historical analogues for the upheavals of the early nineteenth century.) When, as a graduate student at Illinois, I heard Murray Krieger deliver his powerful paper, “*The Rape of the Lock and The Dunciad: The ‘Frail China Jar’ and the Rude Hand of Chaos*,” I was quite convinced that he was right to find in Pope’s later poetry an almost modern vision of the breakdown of civilization and a return to barbarism. Nor could I quite accept Robert W. Rogers’ question to Krieger, “Don’t you think that Pope was simply exaggerating the danger for rhetorical effect?” In Swift and Pope, at least, there *is* both the sense of the fragility of human civilization and the qualified faith in the possibility of human enlightenment and progress that leavens the political and social thinking of all the Romantics. But by the Age of Johnson, the demons that threatened the writers came from inside, not from without. That the political world was corrupt and inefficient was, in itself, a protection against any domestic ideological fanaticism. England’s Continental rivals were divided and just as corrupt and weak as Great Britain itself, so that even a united onslaught by several of them toward the end of a long and unpopular war against the revolt in her strongest colonies could not wrest Gibraltar or any other significant overseas possession from her, except the United States themselves.

The course of Cowper’s letters illustrates clearly how little fear the most timid of men had, even when the London “Gordon” rioters destroyed the home of Chief Justice Mansfield in June 1780, or when in 1783 Scottish Highland troops mutinied against their officers and were discharged to make their way home through England, or when the French and Dutch first overthrew their old regimes in the name of liberty. Even those acts that Cowper disapproved of met with the censure of a calm and superior schoolmaster—not outraged vituperation such as one finds in Southey’s and Hazlitt’s political prose. What Johnson, Goldsmith, and Cowper had learned to fear (and what Savage, Smart, and Burns never learned to fear in time) was the danger posed by the breakdown of the balance of power between their inner desires and their repressions.

Elsewhere I have differentiated between “Gothic” and “pastoral” imaginations—the first fearfully concerned with outer, the second with inner weather. The Gothic poet—Shelley or Yeats—fears the madness of the wind and snow of the outside world; the pastoral poet—Wordsworth or Frost—fears far more his own desert places. Cowper exhibits the pastoral imagination, but he could not believe that the Good Shepherd cared enough to protect him from his inner demons. And historical events, which can influence the individual either to accentuate or control his natural temperament, conspired to destroy the social nexus that had provided his pastoral

guidance and security. The arrival of the French Revolution, with its threats to the unity and stability of English society, set Cowper’s friends against one another, while he strove to maintain a decorous *via media*; his growing awareness of this change must have weakened his outward supports just at the time when the infirmities of aging required them most. Johnson and Goldsmith, also pastoral natures, maintained their faith during days that were not quite so trying. But to lack inner assurance during a time when the world outside is also collapsing can upset any mind. Cowper, like Virginia Woolf, was ultimately caught between the storm outside and the whirlwind within. I cannot see him as merely an individual, because the record of the other men and women of talent and genius who in parallel historical circumstances have gone mad, or committed suicide, or withdrawn into circumscribed and virtually useless lives (such as Wordsworth portrayed more than once as a warning to himself) gives us reason to think that the times, as well as the individual temperament, have their contribution to make to human destiny. It is, perhaps, time that we stopped thinking of William Cowper as some kind of sickly aberration, unconnected with other literary figures before and after him. The fine editions of Cowper’s *Poems* and *Letters and Prose Writings* now in progress will provide us with the opportunity to carry out this study in depth.

Thomas J. J. Altizer. *History as Apocalypse*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1985. 263 pp. \$34.50.

Reviewed by Steven Goldsmith

Having admired the passion and intensity of *History as Apocalypse*, I find myself brought back to the book’s title, a title that points to a central problem of Altizer’s exceptionally ambitious study of not merely the Christian epic tradition but the history of consciousness itself. If that scope already suggests the dangers of reification implicit in organizing such a vast array of particular and historical phenomena, the title reflects the principle that imposes unity upon diversity. History and apocalypse are antithetical terms; the apocalypse puts an end to history, substituting a closed and meaningful structure for the merely temporal and often terrifying progression of events that seems without origin and destination. The biblical model of such substitution is the Book of Revelation, where John of Patmos imagines the displacement of history by the transcendental order of the

New Jerusalem. As M. H. Abrams has argued, the literary tradition that leads to romanticism preserves this model by internalizing it, transforming the literal millennial kingdom at the end of time into a mental and imaginative reality accessible through visionary experience at any time. Whether imminent or immanent, the apocalypse always poses as an alternative to history; its enabling premise is that the conditions of material reality, the conditions of history, can be displaced. One might call this the first principle of an apocalyptic ideology, and Altizer reproduces that ideology at a fundamental level. Although *History as Apocalypse* suggests a unity, even an identity, between its governing terms, it too enacts an apocalyptic substitution, replacing history with a visionary structure enclosed within beginning and end, a formal whole that represents a non-contingent mental teleology. History in this book is the neatly constructed narrative of the progress of consciousness, and in that substitution of mind for material circumstance any sense of actual history is largely effaced. Altizer's book, to some extent modeled upon Hegel, is a condensed phenomenology of consciousness. In other words, despite the book's title, apocalypse appears at the expense of history.

No undertaking of this astonishing scope could be managed without the conviction that one held the key to the deep structure that unifies three thousand years of culture. Altizer believes that the evolution of Western consciousness forms an organic whole and that the epic tradition represents the fullest manifestation of the total structure. This tradition develops "from a real and actual beginning to an actual and apocalyptic ending. The organic evolution of Western epic is not only the record of the deeper history of a uniquely Western humanity; it is also a vision of an interior, cosmic, and eternal voyage of a universal humanity" (p. 16). Starting from this premise, Altizer details the progression of consciousness from its birth in Homeric epic to its internalization as self-consciousness in Christianity through the end of self-consciousness in *Finnegans Wake*. This "deeper," "interior" history charts the evolution of a universal human identity, an inner self that transcends the contingency of time and place, demonstrating the "ultimate harmony or coinherence between Athens and Jerusalem" (p. 11). The narrative progresses by a series of apocalyptic ruptures, moments in history when consciousness breaks with its past so essentially that the fissure can only be expressed by revolution in the social realm and a new epic vision in the literary realm. Each epic corresponds to an utterly changed society, and in the four chapters that form the main substance of his book, Altizer links the fully mature Christian epics of Dante, Milton, Blake, and Joyce to the Gothic, English, French, and Modernist revolutions.

The story, however, begins well before Dante, and in his early chapters Altizer considers an array of subjects

from Greek drama to Hebrew scripture, from Paul to Augustine. The first chapter, "The Birth of Vision," enacts the book's recurring pattern in its description of Greek sculpture. As the fifth-century unity and wholeness of the body evolves into the fourth-century emphasis upon unique and individual faces (the advent of portraiture), an external presence becomes internal and increasingly human. The progress of Western consciousness is the steady humanization of presence, a movement inward that renders transcendence immanent. Accompanying this movement is the gradual, kenotic emptying of God that eventually leads to the death of God—a death that liberates existence as it is, freeing it from any dependence upon supernatural authority. Thus, in his treatment of Christian epic, Altizer's emphasis always lies upon the evolving interpretation of Christ and the crucifixion that secures his humanity as it drains him of divinity. In the chapter on Blake, where this thesis is especially pertinent, Altizer contends that history records "an alien and transcendent God ever struggling to become incarnate, until He comes and freely dies in Jesus. Accordingly, the Crucifixion is the culmination and fulfillment of a long and revelatory incarnate movement of God. For Jesus dies the death that has always been God's destiny . . . , but it is precisely this death that is the source of apocalypse" (p. 201). This focus engenders a multitude of insights that provide coherence across the Christian epic tradition. Dante embodies Christ as love in Beatrice; Milton insists that the Son exists independently of the transcendental Father and, even more importantly, that the Son dies an actual and human death upon the cross—both of which ideas Altizer applies to his interpretation of *Paradise Lost* by way of an illuminating discussion of *De Doctrina Christiana*; Blake universalizes Christ in his conception of self-annihilation, internalizing the deist death of God that enabled the French Revolution; Joyce provides Christ with his ultimate human identity in Leopold Bloom. "This epic evolution ever moves forward toward the finality of history and the world, finally realizing an apocalyptic finality wherein cosmos and history are the very eschatological fullness of Christ"—in other words, "the fullness and the finality of concrete and actual time and space" (pp. 225–26). Altizer's history is one where God gradually forfeits his transcendence to become "the pure actuality . . . of existence itself" (p. 250).

Vassily Rozanov, in a subversive interpretation of the Apocalypse, once argued that the inadequacy of Christianity is its failure "to organize human life—to give us an 'earthly life,' precisely one that is earthly, difficult, and sad."¹ Altizer is often at his best, it seems to me, in his persistent attention to the difficulty of this process of humanization. At the end of chapter 4, he favors the "original and radical and apocalyptic" (p. 78) Paul tormented by self-consciousness over the Paul easily assimilated by the Patristic Church—the Paul whose

Christ was only glorious, only transcendental, only a Christ of the resurrection. Resisting easy solutions, Altizer argues that the resurrection is meaningless without its negative, the crucifixion, and the entire book describes an increasing immersion in the negative that is the only route to dialectical ascension. The world of Urizen must be fully identified, fully experienced, before it is annihilated in an apocalyptic liberation. Apocalypse results from a painful passage through nihilism, and Altizer announces a fundamental premise in his preface: "nihilism is an essential ground of our epic tradition, perhaps of all epic as such, for epic can enact itself only by way of a voyage through darkness and chaos, a chaos and darkness that is cosmos and light in pure nihilism" (p. 3). The rhetoric of this mystery is not difficult to identify. Despite the book's radical humanization of Christianity and despite the difficult progress of that humanization, Altizer frequently has recourse to the familiar conventions of Christian paradox: one loses oneself to find oneself; one falls to rise; one dies to live. Altizer's Western consciousness progresses through the trials of self-division, negativity and nihilism, but on the other side of nihilism there always shines, perhaps too automatically, "cosmos and light."

History as Apocalypse, then, becomes to some extent a testimony of faith, an affirmation that attempts to address the author's fear that Western consciousness currently dwindles to its end—and not with a bang but a whimper. "No greater danger lies before us," the opening sentence of the prologue warns, "than that of the loss of our deeper or primal identity, an identity that has always been the center of mythical and ritual traditions throughout the world, just as it has been the center of our imaginative and intellectual creations" (p. 7). According to the preface, we live in the apocalyptic age of postmodern nihilism, an era in which American philosophy, theology and literary criticism have all but died. The unstated mission of *History as Apocalypse* is to help remedy our current state of "intellectual poverty" (p. 3) by restoring the forgotten life of the inner self. At a time when the human sciences generate such excitement precisely in their effort to relinquish outworn and overidealized conceptions of humanity—"to pass beyond man and humanism"²—Altizer declares their poverty, warns of "the ever increasing loss of our historical consciousness" (p. 7), and seeks to restore humanistic faith in our shared inner identity by retracing its universal history. Apocalyptic texts such as the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation express the conviction that the crisis of their historical moment is unprecedented, that the end must be at hand because the times approach their worst. Altizer's text, even with its postmodern bent, differs very little from its ancient models.

It is this sense of urgency, and the passion and conviction that accompany it, that provides *History as Apocalypse* with its particular strengths and weaknesses.

Most importantly, it fuels the commanding sweep of this study, for Altizer feels compelled to provide a complete picture, a total vision adequate to the organic wholeness he perceives in Western consciousness. Much of the book's excitement results from wondering what Altizer, with such extensive learning, will introduce next. The chapter on "Dante and Gothic Revolution" is typical; Altizer begins by discussing Charlemagne and late medieval history, moves on to interpret the innovations of Gothic painting, and before he even gets to Dante presents analyses of Aquinas, the Franciscan movement, and Meister Eckhart—in each case arguing that "the Gothic world as a historical world . . . fully conjoins and unites time and eternity" (p. 123). Along the way, one encounters the steady stream of provocative insights that result from a probing mind deeply engaged in its subject. Altizer's analysis of the visual arts is often penetrating, and here he captures what he sees as the essence of Gothic culture (the unity of the eternal and the temporal) in his homage to Giotto. Not only did the painter provide his Christ with the physical presence of a real body, but, reversing an iconographic tradition that represented Christ only in isolation, he portrayed his earthly interaction with humanity in the narrative frescoes of the Arena Chapel. As Giotto can now represent Christ among the people, so Dante can be the first to represent himself in a Christian epic narrative, for the human and the divine inevitably gravitate toward each other. The *Divine Comedy* becomes the fullest expression of the immanent and organic totality that is the Gothic revolution. At its best, *History as Apocalypse* incorporates a rich variety of subjects and approaches into its wide-arching design.

Such a comprehensive sweep, however, while it is as exhilarating as many of Altizer's minute particulars, inevitably leads to generalization, simplification, and hyperbole. Within the first ten pages of the same chapter we learn that:

"no other major ruler [in the history of the West] was so continually occupied with war as was Charlemagne" (p. 98)

"the Carolingian Empire was followed by the greatest chaos in the history of the West" (p. 99)

"Aristotle was surely the purest and most profound secular thinker who ever lived" (p. 103)

Aquinas was "the first truly and comprehensively systematic thinker since Aristotle, and the last before Hegel" (p. 103)

"Giotto is the most revolutionary artist in the history of art" (p. 108)

Everyone Altizer discusses must be the first or best or worst at something, for the book is obsessed with superlatives and origins. The prevalence of such exaggerated claims undermines the book's credibility and foregrounds its tendency to recreate history as an abstract and artificial construct inadequate to material complexity. This "deeper" history, the wholeness and unity of Western consciousness that should restore faith, is not the deep truth that Altizer implies. The book's indul-

gence in unqualified assertions like those above can only increase the reader's skepticism, causing one to question the absolute order it imposes upon history.

The gap between this apocalyptic structure and the actual complexity of the material history it displaces becomes most evident in Altizer's understanding of revolution. In *The German Ideology* Marx and Engels argued that German metaphysics turned the world upside down, postulating the mind's priority over historical conditions. Associating himself with Hegel, Altizer joins the idealists in allowing consciousness to determine life, not life the forms of consciousness. Revolutions in politics and art manifest a deeper revolution in the universal mind that determines them. What exactly is the Gothic revolution? In Altizer's representation it appears as a radical change in *Zeitgeist* that seems unrelated to radical change in politics. An apocalyptic upheaval of ideas suddenly reveals the glory of "a unitary and organic world" (p. 136), and Altizer can end his chapter with a moving, if nostalgic, lament: "Yet having been once, though only once, having been once on earth, can it ever be cancelled?" (p. 136). But to whom did this magnificent *Zeitgeist* belong?—the great minds of the period, Dante, Giotto, Aquinas—as Altizer interprets them, but perhaps not the vast majority of feudal workers who may or may not have perceived the immanence of eternity in time, but who might have benefited more from even a minor social reform than a metaphysical apocalypse.

A similar idealization characterizes Altizer's interpretation of Blake and revolution, leading to a particularly extravagant claim: the "true epic is the most revolutionary, and the most comprehensively revolutionary, political document or text that has arisen or been given us from its own revolutionary world. Already it is becoming apparent that the prophetic and epic poetry of Blake is more politically revolutionary than the texts of Marx, and is so precisely because of its universal horizon" (p. 13). To date there have been no Blakean revolutions in the political world, so this assertion can only mean that Blake's poetry enacts an alteration of consciousness transcending any particular, historical revolution bound to a single time and place. Mental reality once again displaces historical reality, and because Blake imagines "the final ending of all distinctions and divisions between human beings" (p. 13) his texts are more revolutionary than those that subjected class division to rigorous and particular analysis. It is in the context of such rhetoric that we most need to remember Blake's shortcomings as a revolutionary: his fear of publishing his most immediately radical material (the Bishop Watson annotations, for instance) and the extraordinary difficulty of the prophecies that, despite their egalitarian vision, severed them from all but a few sympathizers in Blake's time and all but the smallest academic circles in our own. To see the prophecies as successful radical poetry is to declare one's allegiance to a world of imagination di-

vorced from material history, politics, and society.

Throughout *History as Apocalypse* Altizer seeks to initiate us into that world, restoring our contact with the buried and universal consciousness that expresses itself in the visions of Christian epic. If this book resembles earlier apocalyptic endeavors motivated by the belief that the end was imminent, it also shares their imposition of a visionary authority—the sense that the author is in touch with the mystery. "Nothing," Altizer declares, "is more baffling in epic language than its intrinsic authority, an authority immediately confronting its hearer or reader" (p. 209). And yet the same is true of Altizer's own text. The preface announces that in *History as Apocalypse*, "documentation is absent, both to avoid the appearance of a false authority, and to seek a postmodern style" (pp. 3–4), but the absence of any notes in such a sweeping study produces just the opposite effect: the appearance of non-contingent, unmediated truth. Style adds to this effect; even at its most effective the writing here is rhythmic, hypnotic and incantatory, disguising impressionistic and subjective interpretation as universal and absolute experience. Of a *Head of Apollo*, Altizer writes,

This face and these eyes release a new vision, a vision which simply and purely sees, for it sees in a dawn in which a primeval darkness is ending. With the ending of that darkness, even if it is only in the moment before us, we can open our eyes without awe or dread, and see without terror or fear. Then we are awake, as if resurrected from the dead, and can see a new world of light, a light in which darkness is absent, and a light releasing a vision in which the seer is the center of its world. In this moment the eyes of Apollo are our eyes. (p. 21)

I am reminded of Poulet experiencing the presence of Tintoretto at the Scuola de San Rocco, described at the end of a famous essay, but Poulet never universalized that essentially private revelation.³ He never obliged his readers to share it. I cannot help but resist the first person plurals by which Altizer coerces the shared presence of our deeper and common humanity. At times, *History as Apocalypse* becomes a rhetoric of mystification, its incantation verging upon the redundant, its prose approaching the mystery of tautology: "So it is that the impotent will cannot will even to be itself, for it cannot actually will so as to enact what it wills, and thus cannot fully will" (pp. 91–92). Perhaps such writing lies closest to the mystery, expressing the tortuous path to the deepest truths of our deepest and immaterial selves. If so, Altizer has given us history as apocalypse—history as the revelation of universal consciousness. If not, we might resist the temptations of mystery by seeking to understand apocalypse as history.

¹Vassily Rozanov, "The Apocalypse of Our Times," in *Four Faces of Rozanov*, trans. and ed. Stephen E. Roberts (New York: Philosophical Library, 1978), pp. 212–13.

²Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign, and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1978), p. 292.

³Georges Poulet, "Phenomenology of Reading," *New Literary History*, 1 (Oct. 1969), 53–68.

NEWSLETTER

BLAKE EXHIBITION AND CONFERENCE AT THE HUNTINGTON

From November 1987 through February 1988, the Huntington Art Gallery will exhibit works by Blake and his circle selected from the collection of Robert N. Essick. In addition to drawings by Blake and pages from his illuminated books, the sixty-four items in the show will include works by Fuseli, Romney, Flaxman, Palmer, Linnell, and other artists among Blake's contemporaries and followers. The Huntington will publish an illustrated catalogue of the exhibition authored by the collector. On 29-30 January 1988, the Huntington will host a conference on Blake, jointly sponsored by the Huntington, the Berkeley, Los Angeles, and Riverside campuses of the University of California, and the California Institute of Technology. The speakers will be Martin Butlin, Detlef Dörrbecker, Morris Eaves, Morton Paley, and Aileen Ward. The *Huntington Library Quarterly* plans to publish the conference papers in a special issue of the journal. For further information about the exhibition and conference, contact Dr. Shelley Bennett, Associate Curator of British and Continental Art, Henry E. Huntington Library and Art Gallery, 1151 Oxford Road, San Marino CA 91108.

COLLABORATORS INVITED

Collaborators are invited to join a small British-American *ad hoc* group to produce a "Reader's Guide" to Abraham Rees's *Cyclopaedia*. The guide will probably include biographical notes on the contributors to this multi-volume nineteenth century work; a concordance to the major articles; an analytical subject index; and chapters on the printing and publishing history of both

the English and the American editions. Because the *Cyclopaedia* is so inclusive, collaborators from many fields, including all the humanities, the sciences, medicine, the arts, and technology can be accommodated in areas coinciding with their scholarly interests. For further details contact Prof. J. Z. Fullmer, Department of History, Dulles Hall, Ohio State University, Columbus OH 43210.

BLAKE IN BUFFALO

The Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, mounted a small exhibition of fourteen of Blake's engravings from Job and Dante series. These engravings were acquired by Albright-Knox in 1943. *The Engraved Illustrations of William Blake* was exhibited from 26 September 1986 to 25 January 1987.

A "MUSICAL ILLUMINATION" OF BLAKE'S SONGS

On the weekend of 9-11 January 1987, the New Wave Festival at the Brooklyn Academy of Music sponsored composer William Bolcom's musical tribute to Blake. The 2½ hour performance of "Songs of Innocence and of Experience, A Musical Illumination of the Poems of William Blake" involved an eclectic combination of musical styles, performers, and media including classical (with a full symphony orchestra), chorus, children's chorus, jazz, folk, reggae, operatic solos, rock, and country ("The Sheperd"). The Brooklyn Academy performance was reviewed by the *New York Times*, *Newsweek*, and *The New Yorker*, among others. Bolcom's "Songs" will also be reviewed in a forthcoming *Blake*. A tape of the University of Michigan production of "Songs" is available for about \$24 from Roger Arnett, Electronic Services, School of Music, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor MI 48109.



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LIBRARY, ART COLLECTIONS, AND BOTANICAL GARDENS



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