

William Blake: A Beginning

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Readers first approaching Blake must confront formidable obstacles. Blake enthusiasts, on the other hand, find themselves happily engaging in the Blakean idiom in ways that seem perplexedly like speaking in tongues, or exercising the gifts of prophesy and interpretation. This talk will suggest a pathway into the works of Blake for those unfamiliar with his poetry and begin to uncover some of the more important issues and questions that absorbed Blake throughout his life. I believe it is worth doing this because these works, that often were and sometimes still are considered the rantings of a madman, continue to stimulate my own exploration of the larger questions of our human existence, our relation to the external world, and our access to the divine.

William Blake was born in London in 1757. He lived and worked in and about London as an engraver and poet until his death in 1827. He served an apprenticeship to the engraver James Basire beginning at age fourteen. He briefly and unhappily attended the Royal Academy.

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He read voraciously and was almost entirely self-taught. Coleridge and Wordsworth claimed in the well known Preface to their Lyrical Ballads of 1802 that they were departing in serious ways from the eighteenth-century traditions in English poetry, and they surely did set new standards with respect to diction and poetic form. But their innovations seem mild compared to Blake's bold untutored steps. He showed little interest in venerating or even building from traditional forms in poetry and was much more concerned that his poetic forms be true to his own poetic vision as he says in the introduction to the prophetic book Jerusalem:

When this Verse was first dictated to me I consider'd a Monotonous Cadence like that used by Milton & Shakspeare & all writers of English Blank Verse, derived from the modern bondage of Rhyming; to be a necessary and indispensable part of Verse. But I soon found that in the mouth of a true Orator such monotony was not only awkward, but as much a bondage as rhyme itself. I therefore have produced a variety in every line, both of cadences & number of syllables. Every word and every letter is studied and put into its fit place: the terrific numbers are reserved for the terrific parts--the mild & gentle, for the mild & gentle parts, and the prosaic, for inferior parts; all are necessary to each other. Poetry Fetter'd, Fetters the Human Race!
(144)¹

As a result his works show angular, unpolished surfaces, alternately refreshing and frustrating that often mask the depth and subtlety of his insights. He was a tireless editor and revisor of his own works, returning even after decades to bring texts into conformity with his current views.

Critics have skirmished a good deal over the issue of whether Blake's writings taken together should be considered a unified whole or whether his views underwent significant radical change during the span of his working life.² This is an important issue that we must take a position on since how we view the whole bears directly on how we understand the individual

¹ References to Blake's works are from The Poetry and Prose of William Blake, ed. David V. Erdman (New York: Doubleday, 1970).

² For a good systematic account see Northrup Frye. Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1947). A developmental account is given by E.D. Hirsh, Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1975).

poems. The first approach allows a reader to range freely through the Blakean corpus in the effort to build a consistent view. This approach leaves perhaps too much latitude for a reader to find what he wants to find among Blake's many and varied claims.

The developmental approach, on the other hand, brings problems of its own. Though a good deal of sophisticated work has been done on dating the manuscripts and Blake's revisions, much remains uncertain in this area. Critics are left to rely on internal evidence that is not always conclusive. There is also uncertainty about whether we can know Blake's final intentions with respect to the revisions. Finally, we must face the more radical question of whether to assume that he had final intentions at all. Consider for example the fact that in even the late printings of the Songs of Innocence and Experience Blake repeatedly changed the arrangement of the poems: Some critics argue that the last printed text represents Blake's final intentions;³ others urge that Blake would have wanted his readers themselves to experiment with various arrangements of the songs.⁴ Blake published his poems in extremely limited editions by anyone's standards. Individual copies were often tailored in detail for specific patrons. Only twenty-one copies of Songs of Innocence, twenty-seven copies of Innocence and Experience, and four copies of Milton are known to exist.⁵

That these books were not intended for a mass audience but conceived as a more intimate communication to a small group of patrons well known to Blake has some bearing on how they are to be received. Blake was not writing for the popular press nor was he writing for an academic audience. And since he wrote, edited and etched his own works all himself, he avoided the smoothing, leveling effects of dialogue with editors, critics and a reading public. It surely

³ Hirsh, 169.

⁴ Erdman, 714.

⁵ Erdman, 713 and Easson, 59.

would have amazed Blake to know that after two hundred years his works would be of interest to such a large audience and that the editing of his texts and speculation about these matters would become an academic industry.

On the question of the unity of Blake's view, I find myself somewhere inconsistently in the middle. I do not believe that Blake's prophetic vision occurred whole to him at an early age or that the rest of his life was spent merely reporting it; the works won't support this view. On the other hand, the works do not stand up simply by themselves: The Songs of Innocence read much differently in the light of the later works than when taken alone. The best approach, it seems to me, is to consider each work as much as possible on its own, while reserving the right to bring in passages from the rest of the corpus when necessary. Of course, we must be aware that the key words and images introduced in the earlier poems often will have acquired deepened significance in the later works.

One additional preliminary matter needs to be set out before going to the poems themselves. Blake published his own works in singular editions etched and printed from copper plates. With the help of his wife, he hand colored each individual copy. Color facsimiles are now available for all of Blake's major works. One might wonder if it is ever appropriate to study the poems without, at the same time, considering the illustrations. Since I have no slides to show you, you may guess rightly that I believe much can be gained by considering the poems by themselves, though surely the illustrations provide important additional insights. I have chosen to dwell on the poetic images in this introductory talk, hoping that it will spur on at least some listeners to encounter Blake's works in the unique form in which he presented them. Blake himself never claimed that the poetry could not read profitably on its own. He saw his form of

self-publication at least partly as a way of getting his works in front of the public at a low cost, though at great labor.⁶

With that bit of scaffolding in place, the rest of this talk will focus on two of Blake's most important works: The Songs of Innocence and Experience is perhaps his most accessible work and one that can be shown to contain the seeds of the later prophetic vision. His long later poem Milton is one of the two works that provide full-blown versions of his apocalyptic myth. The account will not be complete. I do hope to show with this beginning that, while there are dark passages that continue to elude even his most devoted students, Blake's works provide an alluring approach to deep and important questions that well compensates an adventurous reader.

The Songs of Innocence were first published in 1789, without the companion poems of Experience. Many of the Songs appeared in Blake's notebooks of the 1780s. The first combined version was produced in 1794. Blake was willing to publish the Songs of Innocence alone, but The Songs of Experience never appeared as a separate volume.

The state of innocence in Blake has always been for me much harder to appreciate or take seriously than its contrary, experience. Yet appreciating the importance of the state of innocence is a necessary foundation for virtually everything else in Blake. To ignore innocence and let oneself be absorbed by the more exciting Songs of Experience would comment negatively on the reader's limited response to his own state of experience. Innocence is simplicity itself. It is the proper state of infants and children. It allows for spontaneous joy. It is not analytic or self-examining. Innocence in its simplicity can be seen clearly in "The Shepherd," placed early in Songs of Innocence:

⁶ For a discussion of this point, see Hirsh, 169-70.

How sweet is the Shepherds sweet lot,
 From the morn to the evening he strays:
 He shall follow his sheep all the day
 And his tongue shall be filled with praise. (7)

The Christian imagery is left implicit here. Blake avoids in this poem the sacrificial dimension of the Christian image emphasizing instead the comforting and peaceful.

As adults our access to innocence is necessarily from the standpoint of experience. If we are able to behold innocence at all, it is only by reaching back through memory to our own early childhood, where mother means comfort, warmth, and sustenance; and father means shelter and protection. Religion in the state of innocence is also approached through the images of father and mother as in "The Little Boy Found":

The little boy lost in the lonely fen,
 Led by the wand'ring light,
 Began to cry, but God ever nigh,
 Appeard like his father in white.

He kissed the child & by the hand led
 And to his mother brought,
 Who in sorrow pale, thro' the lonely dale
 Her little boy weeping sought. (11)

The predominant Christian images in innocence are the lamb and the father, but it is not the vengeful or just father. Through dreams the child finds affirmation of a transcendent protective god-father, even if earthly parents fall considerably short of the mark, as is the case with "The Chimney Sweeper":

When my mother died I was very young,
 And my father sold me while yet my tongue,
 Could scarcely cry weep weep weep weep.
 So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep.

Theres little Tom Dacre, who cried when his head
 That curl'd like a lambs back, was shav'd, so I said.
 Hush Tom never mind it, for when your head's bare,
 You know that the soot cannot spoil your white hair.

And so he was quiet, & that very night,
 As Tom was a sleeping he had such a sight,
 That thousands of sweepers Dick, Joe Ned & Jack

Were all of them lock'd up in coffins of black

And by came an Angel who had a bright key,
And he open'd the coffins & set them all free.
Then down a green plain leaping laughing they run
And wash in a river and shine in the Sun.

Then naked & white, all their bags left behind,
They rise upon clouds, and sport in the wind.
And the Angel told Tom if he'd be a good boy,
He'd have God for his father & never want joy.

And so Tom awoke and we rose in the dark
And got with our bags & our brushes to work.
Tho' the morning was cold, Tom was happy & warm,
So if all do their duty, they need not fear harm. (10)

With "The Chimney Sweeper" it is important to be clear about the target of Blake's social criticism. We may be tempted to think, from the advantaged viewpoint of experience, that the sweeper is simply a fool to conclude as he does "so if all do their duty they need not fear harm." In fact, the sweeper demonstrates how powerful the state of innocence really is. The mainstays of innocence sustain the sweeper through a kind of hell on earth.

Blake seems fully aware of the difficulty of holding on to innocence for those in the state of experience and of the evanescent quality of innocence. In the "Introduction" to innocence, the "songs of pleasant glee" are most "innocent" when spontaneous and when the piper responds directly to the child:

Piping down the valleys wild
Piping songs of pleasant glee
On a cloud I saw a child.
And he laughing said to me.

Pipe a song about a Lamb;
So I piped with merry cheer,
Piper pipe that song again--
So I piped, he wept to hear. (7)

The third stanza makes it clear the child is weeping with joy, but there is a definite motion from "laughing" in the first stanza:

Drop thy pipe thy happy pipe
 Sing thy songs of happy cheer,
 So I sung the same again
 While he wept with joy to hear

Even the act of writing down the songs requires that the piper "stain" the water:

And I made a rural pen,
 And I stain'd the water clear,
 And I wrote my happy songs
 Every child may joy to hear

The state of innocence from the very beginning moves inexorably toward the state of experience.

The peace of children in the state of innocence is counterpoised with the weeping of mothers as in "The Little Boy Found," cited above and with the sad empathy of a father-god, as for example in these lines from "On Another's Sorrow":

He doth give his joy to all.
 He becomes an infant small.
 He becomes a man of woe
 He doth feel the sorrow too.

Think not, thou canst sigh a sigh,
 And thy maker is not by.
 Think not, thou canst weep a tear,
 And thy maker is not near.

O! he gives to us his joy,
 That our grief he may destroy
 Till our grief is fled & gone
 He doth sit by us and moan (17)

This poem, by the way, illustrates what some critics of Blake find unsatisfactory in his poetry, that he seems not in control of his poetic material. This poem promises to be a simple, Christian pastoral exercise. It uses simple trochaic couplets and conventional Christian images, God becoming an infant small and the nearness of the deity in time of sorrow. The final line undercuts all of this. God, instead of offering comfort, himself moans. It is one thing for the deity to empathize with another's sorrow, but his continuing to moan in the last line suggests a disturbing incapacity that is not explained. The incongruity of this moaning is reinforced by the imperfect rhyme of "moan" with "gone." Of course, the reader is prepared for this effect by the

imperfect rhyme in the first stanza of "woe" and "too." But the poem does not produce a unified effect. In fact, the more carefully one looks the more disturbing the effect becomes. The beautiful controlled effects one finds say in Shelly's "Ode to the West Wind," or Keats' "To Autumn" are not to be found here. I do not believe that this is a fault of this poem, or of the many other instances in Blake's poems where it occurs since his purpose in writing does not at all conform to the model of the poetic craftsman whose works are designed to produce a singular, unified effect. Blake consciously produces the effect of disturbing incongruity in much of what he writes.

In the Songs of Innocence even the landscape moves from images of innocence to portending experience. The echoing green in the poem of that title is changed in the last line to "the darkening green." (8) The hopeful images of sun, running water, grasshoppers and green meadows that characterize many of the poems are punctuated with frightening emblems of experience as in the "Little Boy Lost":

The night was dark no father was there
 The child was wet with dew.
 The mire was deep, & the child did weep
 And away the vapour flew. (11)

Experience

The dark images of experience sown implicitly in the Songs of Innocence come to life in the Songs of Experience. Much can be grasped quickly about the issues of experience by looking at the "Introduction" to the set. In contrast to the mild piper of innocence, the host to the world of experience is the prophetic bard:

Hear the voice of the Bard!
 Who Present, Past, & Future sees
 Whose ears have heard,
 The Holy Word,
 That walk'd among the ancient trees.

Calling the lapsed Soul
 And weeping in the evening dew;
 That might control,
 The starry pole;
 And fallen fallen light renew!

O Earth O Earth return!
 Arise from out the dewy grass;
 Night is worn,
 And the morn
 Rises from the slumberous mass.

Turn away no more:
 Why wilt thou turn away
 The starry floor
 The watry shore
 Is giv'n thee till the break of day. (18)

Since arriving in the state of experience is inevitable, much depends on how one chooses to face it. Turning away, denying the world of experience in fear, is perhaps the worst response. The bard speaks from a deep and grounded view of experience that is not reached by any of the other voices in the poems of experience. The bard's introduction hints at the possibility of something more, another way, in these poems. How is it possible that the lapsed soul might control the starry pole? What might that mean? The rising moon too promises something only hinted at here. It does not become clear here how one might appropriately enter this state.

The "Nurses Song," a companion poem to "the Echoing green" of innocence, shows the fearful, repressive approach to experience. A loss of the confidence inspired by innocence, repression of the sexual instincts, and fear of the natural world, the world of generation, are the marks of this response that Blake works out more fully in a longer poem of this period, "The Book of Thel." But listen to the nurse:

When the voices of children, are heard on the green
 And whisprings are in the dale:
 The days of my youth rise fresh in my mind,
 My face turns green and pale.

Then come home my children, the sun is gone down
 And the dews of night arise
 Your spring & your day, are wasted in play
 And your winter and night in disguise. (23)

The tendency to fearful response is made systematic and capitalized upon by organized religion and the conventions of society it supports. In the state of experience, it is rules and legal complexities that characterize religion in place of assurance and protection in the state of innocence.

In The Songs of Innocence and Experience, Blake gives, in its simplest terms, the story that most interested him, the fall from an Edenic state, and progress through a lapsed world with the possibility of regaining a blessed state. It is probably too much to call this a story, considering the many different ways it is understood and realized in Blake's works. It is more appropriate to think of it as the fundamental story shape that lies behind virtually all his works. In The Songs we do not see much--beyond the vague hope of the ancient bard--about the terms of the ultimate return. The "watry shore" suggests the fears and ordeals of the developing world of generation; the "starry floor" is ambiguous at this point, suggesting either the distant hope of a happier world or the austerity of a removed god who is inaccessible to the cares of men. The images of mother and father, of lions and lambs, of the vegetative world, of the starry sky, the watery shore and corrupt social structures will become the terms of the greater myth that Blake works out in his prophetic books.

Before leaving the Songs, it may be worth noting that the poems of experience in many cases parody those of innocence. The state of innocence itself as seen from this standpoint seems inadequate. It is typical for Blake to look back at an earlier stage in the development of his poetic consciousness with scorn. He often makes fun of his former beliefs in subsequent poems. Later still, he manages to find a way of saving some transformed version of the scorned insight. Something like the state of innocence, pathetically naive from the standpoint of

experience, turns out to be very much like the goal of the whole progression dramatized in the prophetic books, but it cannot be achieved by moving backwards, by refusing to engage the world of experience. Thus innocence of the inexperienced sort that is celebrated in the songs cannot be the goal of the development.

Before moving to consideration of the prophetic work Milton, I would like to digress for a moment and consider what Blake intends by the word prophet. We may also wonder if Blake had a sense of humor and, if so, how it affected his work. These two questions are actually related. In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake undertakes a parody of the theological tenets of Emanuel Swedenborg, which only a short time before he held to be truths of the highest order. Oddly enough, it is Swedenborg who provides much of the language for Blake's own version of the genesis of the cosmos and his emphasis in choosing biblical images. Of course, by this time the language and images are brought into the service of Blake's highly personal account of Christianity. Blake would claim that his view really is Christian, moreover, Christian in the highest and purest sense. These lines from "The Everlasting Gospel" show this clearly:

The Vision of Christ that thou dost see
Is my Visions Greatest Enemy...

Socrates taught what Melitus
Loathd as a Nations bitterest Curse
And Caiaphas was in his own Mind
A benefactor to Mankind
Both read the Bible day & night
But thou readst black where I read white (516)

More will be said about Blake's Christianity when we take up the book of Milton.

The Book of Urizen is thought to be primarily a satire. Its playfulness, not particularly apparent to a casual reader, often turns on internal ironies in the cosmogony Blake builds and its contrast with The Book of Genesis and Greek cosmogonies. Blake takes up the theme of

founding a universe again quite seriously and incorporates much of the apparently ironic material of Urizen in his poems Milton and Jerusalem. He is also fond of playfully casting his enemies in unflattering roles in his prophetic works. Many of the more obscure passages in Milton and Jerusalem are instances of this sort of thing. So the answer to the question seems to be yes, Blake does show a sense of humor in his works, but detecting it and assessing its effects are not to be undertaken lightly.

As Blake dons his prophetic mantle, it is important that we not lose sight of his playfulness. His characters are intentionally exaggerated; their names, Fuzon, Urizen, Urthona, Tirza, Palamabron, Rintrah, Oothoon, are often punning and onomatopoeic. While the whole account in Milton is to be taken as a serious work of art, it is to be embraced and completed by the reader's imagination.

Blake's posture as a prophet can be one of the off-putting features of his work since it suggests that he is speaking from direct access to the mind of God. When Blake says that Ezekiel and Isaiah as well as his dead brother Robert are frequent visitors, even a devoted reader must pause to wonder how literally these claims are intended. At the same time it is important not to be too quick to rationalize these claims. In general, considering Blake's special adoption of Numbers XI, Ch 29.5: in Milton "Would to God that all the Lord's people were Prophets." (95), and in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell that "...All deities reside in the human breast." (37), and finally the identification of Christ with the human form divine, his posture as a prophet seems less far fetched. Prophecy for Blake is an activity available to us all. It is not too much to say even that we must practice prophecy if we mean to live up to our human potential. What prophets see is there to be seen by us all if only we will look and prepare by overcoming the obstacles of perception:

If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern. (9)

By "cleansing the doors of perception" I do not believe Blake was urging us to experiment with peyote or mescal, as Aldous Huxley suggested. A 1960's rock group even borrowed its name from this often cited passage, though it is hard to envision Blake advocating drugs as a shortcut to the infinite. (There seem to have been times, however, when he thought sex might be the way.) Rather, he was thinking of the limits of apprehension that come along with our physical and mental makeup and with the conditioning we receive. In these lines from "Auguries of Innocence" he speaks of our ordinarily unawakened ability: "To see the World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour...." (481)

Overcoming these limitations is to be undertaken in "experience" when fully embraced. It is the necessary preliminary step to entering the realm of imagination which can happen only in the condition of heightened awareness.

The first grade of narrowness has to do with the limitations of the five senses themselves, our inability to grasp anything but a small band of medium sized sights, sounds and impressions. The reach of imagination is thwarted further by the limitations imposed by received opinions and mental habits. As Blake writes with some reluctance to a benefactor John Trusler in 1799:

I see Every thing I paint in This World, but Every body does not see alike. To the Eyes of a Miser a Guinea is more beautiful than the Sun & a bag worn with the use of Money has more beautiful proportions than a Vine filled with Grapes." (677)

His reluctance springs from his sense that his works of art speak for themselves and require no elucidation by someone else as he says in the same letter:

You say that I want somebody to Elucidate my Ideas. But you ought to know that What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. (676)

Awareness of the world's immensity is of only limited importance compared to the apocalyptic awareness Blake strives for in his full-blown prophetic books.

Milton

In the few remaining minutes it is impossible to give a very satisfying account of Blake's monumental poem, Milton.⁷ But it is most important to provide at least a glimpse of how it fills out some of the issues hinted at in The Songs of Innocence and Experience.

The basic story is quite fantastic. On one level it is an account of how the poet John Milton (1608-74), dead now these hundred years and more in 1804, returns from death to set right some matters that were left at odds when he died and to correct serious mistakes in his views. Blake greatly admired Milton, but saw him as imprisoned by an oppressive form of religion. Blake claims in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell:

The reason Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God, and at liberty when of Devils & Hell, is because he was a true Poet and of the Devils party without knowing it (35)

The story of Milton is set against Blake's own cosmology inhabited by his own cast of mythological characters. This is a cosmos that came into being as a result of the collapse of a primal unity or universal man (Albion). Albion awake may be thought of as the four human dimensions existing in harmony. Albion asleep is an image of the fallen condition. In Blake's mythic account virtually every element of the world is included--compass points, primal elements, continents, oceans, and specific locations in England. This cosmology is developed in several earlier, shorter works including among others the Book of Urizen and The Book of Los. It is presupposed, partly reconceived in the later Prophetic books. To appreciate its complexity

⁷ The facsimile edition by Kay Parkhurst Easson and Roger R. Easson (New York: Random House, 1978) is particularly useful and provides a good commentary.

and insights, it is necessary to work out a genealogy and atlas that show the relationships of the characters and places Blake describes. It is important to keep this enterprise in perspective, though, since it is only of value to the extent that it helps one to entertain the vision.

Blake himself is a character in the poem, but in several important senses he is also the locus of the action as well. For most authors who cast themselves into their works as characters, it is possible and appropriate to separate the author from the constructed character--consider Chaucer, for example, who casts himself as the worst story teller of all the pilgrims. In Milton it is difficult and probably inappropriate to insist on such a separation. The story really is about the development of Blake's poetic awareness, given in mythic terms. It is a development that, on the cosmic level, requires the universe and the traditional six thousand years from the moment of creation to the time of the apocalypse; on the personal level, it can occur in a lifetime or even in a moment:

There is a Moment in each Day that Satan cannot find
 Nor can his Watch Fiends find it, but the Industrious find
 This Moment & it multiply. & when it once is found
 It renovates every Moment of the Day if rightly placed[.] (135)

A passage that echoes this from Jerusalem puts the image, rather than temporally, in terms of extension:

There is a Grain of Sand in Lambeth that Satan cannot find
 Nor can his Watch Fiends find it: tis translucent & has many
 Angles
 But he who finds it will find Oothoos palace.... (181)

To say that this apocalyptic renewal may occur either in six thousand years or in a moment, though good to know, does not help us much to understand what it might be about. The account of the fall, both the parts expressed in the poem and those implied, and of Milton's reunification of his poetic vision, of himself, and consequently of the whole cosmos helps us see what is possible in that moment, in that grain of sand.

In the unfallen state the four Zoas, Blake's version of the four primary human attributes, exist in harmony. They are antecedent to time and the extended world. These Zoas come with an impressive literary pedigree: They are the same four beasts that surround the lamb of God in the Book of Revelation.⁸ As a place to start it is useful to think of them in the following way: Urthona is imagination, Luvah passion, Urizen reason and Tharmas body. Their significance is considerably more complex than this, and they should not be thought of as mere abstractions of human things with odd punning names. The Zoas, on the cosmic level, originally constituted four apparently spherical universes that were somehow tangential to one another. Here is an account of the fall:

They are the Four Zoa's that stood around the Throne Divine!
But when Luvah assum'd the World of Urizen to the South:
And Albion was slain upon his mountains, & in his tent;
All fell towards the Center in dire ruin, sinking down.
And in the South remains a burning fire; in the East a void.
In the West, a world of raging waters; in the North a solid,
Unfathomable! without end. But in the midst of these,
Is built eternally the Universe of Los and Enitharmon: (112)

As these universes begin to collapse toward one another, Los and Enitharmon, out of pity, build the world of time and space. In Blake's version of the fall or loss of primal unity, one of the main features is the cleaving of characters along sexual lines. The primal characters are originally masculine, but adequately masculine, unlike men in the fallen state. Each has a feminine aspect that can become a new character. The feminine characters are called emanations. Likewise, the masculine aspect can become a separate character and these are called spectres. Los is the name of Urthona in the world of time and space. He is not a spectre as that would imply an impairment. Enitharmon is Los's emanation:

Los is by mortals nam'd Time Enitharmon is nam'd Space
But they depict him as bald & aged who is in eternal youth
All powerful and his locks flourish like the brows of
morning
He is the Spirit of Prophecy the ever apparent Elias

⁸ S. Foster Damon. A Blake Dictionary (Providence-Brown University Press) 458.

Time is the mercy of Eternity; without Times swiftness
 Which is the swiftest of all things: all were eternal
 torment: (120)

Blake's cosmos consists of what we might think of as four large geographical divisions: Eden, Beulah, generation, and the Ulros. At the same time they are much larger than geographical divisions; moreover, from another point of view, they are not areas at all but rather states of being that Blake describes through a geographical-cosmological metaphor. Eden is the home of the gods and eternity; Beulah, the state of organized innocence: "a pleasant lovely shadow," "where Contraries are equally true. Beulah is the realm of sexual delusion and pleasant rest. Beneath Beulah is the world of generation, the physical world of vegetable and animal life where the contraries are at odds. Beneath the world of generation are the Ulros, the various grades of hell, which are seen by Blake as states of error or delusion in which we can find ourselves.

These divisions are created to contain the universe in its fallen condition. As one might expect from Blake, they are mirrored in the human body. Some readers of Blake even find the whole thing contained microcosmically in the human eyeball, and nanocosmically in the lens of the eyeball.⁹ From the standpoint of the individual, the divisions allow for the various grades of error to which we are prone. They can be "annihilated" as one is able to recognize the error that characterizes them.

As was the case with space, time also is part of the structure of containment of the fallen world. It would be wrong to call it creation if that implies a creator who stands outside of the human imagination. Time as the mercy of eternity--not just a moving image of it--allows for a working through states of being that can result in apocalyptic return to unity.

⁹ Easson, 145 ff.

Blake's Satan, like Dante's, lives at the very bottom of the Ulro. The character Milton and the character Blake recognize that Satan is really the Zoa Urizen in his fallen condition, who has tried to establish himself as the only deity. Ironically, he is also the God of Genesis, who measures and contains the cosmos and demands a system of laws and retribution:

And the Mills of Satan were separated into a moony Space
 Among the rocks of Albions Temples, and Satans Druid sons
 Offer the Human Victims throughout all the Earth, and
 Albions
 Dread Tomb immortal on his Rock, overshadowd the whole
 Earth:
 Where Satan making to himself Laws from his own identity.
 Compell'd others to serve him in moral gratitude &
 submission
 Being call'd God: setting himself above all that is called
 God.
 And all the Spectres of the Dead calling themselves Sons of
 God
 In his Synagogues worship Satan under the Unutterable Name
 (104)

The illustration for Europe A Prophecy shows Urizen at his best, reaching out into unorganized space with a pair of dividers. The Illustrations to The Book of Urizen show him at a later stage, wearied and saddened by his work (Plate 4) and finally shackled hand and foot, eyes closed, tears flowing from both. In Plate 18A of Milton, Satan-Urizen is pictured as a stooped old man with a flowing white robe, seemingly supported by two stone tablets, presumably the tablets of Moses bearing the law.

Milton, persuaded by the Bard's song in the early part of the poem, returns down through the divisions of Beulah, generation and the Ulros to redeem his six-fold emanation, variously understood as his wives and daughters or his six major works. For Milton to redeem his emanation, he must acknowledge the Satan in himself, or the usurpation of what Blake sees as a stagnant domination by reason that is not in the service of imagination. When Milton finally confronts Satan, their struggle is presented in unexpected terms; Satan is bent on baptizing

Milton, but Milton's efforts are all to build up or reintegrate Urizen. Reason is not to be destroyed but rather brought back into harmony with the other "Zoas":

...with cold hand Urizen stoop'd down
 And took up water from the river Jordan: pouring on
 To Miltons brain the icy fluid from his broad cold palm.
 But Milton took of the red clay of Succoth, moulding it with
 care
 Between his palms; and filling up the furrows of many years
 Beginning at the feet of Urizen, and on the bones
 Creating new flesh on the Demon cold, and building him,
 As with new clay a Human form (111)

The sadness of the father-god in Songs of Innocence becomes the brooding of Urizen that arises from his immense labors to measure, divide and contain the world in nets of religion and the mills of Newtonian and Lockean reduction. His deep sadness seems to grow not only from his knowledge that his project is bound to fail but also from the dismal results of its success, as far as it goes. The success of Urizen brings with it an icy stillness; man is separated from imagination. Urizen turns out to be like Dante's Satan, frozen and almost immobile at the bottom of the deepest hell. Unlike Dante, however, Blake has Milton rescue his Satan and strives to make him whole. This treatment of Urizen shows that banishment, punishment, and separation play no constructive part in Blake's doctrine of reunification.

The state of being that is Satan is annihilated for Milton. Urizen, not being a state, is not annihilated, but set free for Milton, and by extension for Blake. Blake becomes a fellow traveller with Milton, or ambiguously Blake's very person becomes the locus of the whole epic:

Then first I saw him [Milton] in the Zenith as a falling
 star,
 Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow or swift;
 And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enterd there;
 (109)

and

But Milton entering my Foot; I saw in the nether
 Regions of the Imagination; also all men on Earth,
 And all in Heaven, saw in the nether regions of the
 Imagination

In Ulro beneath Beulah, the vast breach of Miltons descent.
 But I knew not that it was Milton, for man cannot know
 What passes in his members till periods of Space & Time
 Reveal the secrets of Eternity (114)

The cosmic error that Milton must correct is given in the Bard's song, that occupies several hundred lines early in the poem. Satan has usurped the place of the poet Palamabron by taking over his harrow, his tool of imagination. Poetry has been captured by the calculating rationality of Urizen in his satanic form. This, of course, is the error of Milton's poetry writ large: His poetic genius was enslaved and forced into the service of a puritanical, error-ridden Christianity. Milton says: "I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!" Having confronted Satan and the Satan within, Milton and Blake, returning through the world of generation, can appreciate Golgonooza, or the city of art and industry as it appears in the infinite scheme of things: It is a place where through art and industry man works toward reunification. "Infinite" here, as elsewhere in Blake, suggests not so much the sense of going on for ever, but rather the bountifulness that can be overlooked when one has not overcome the limiting effects of the senses and of reason itself. Redemption occurs when one realizes that the world of generation is the work of Los, and that it does not belong to Urizen. This recognition requires an acknowledgment that

...every Space larger than a red Globule of Mans blood.
 Is visionary: and is created by the Hammer of Los
 And every Space smaller than a Globule of Mans blood. opens
 Into Eternity of which this vegetable Earth is but a shadow:
 The red Globule is the unwearied Sun by Los created
 to measure Time and Space to mortal Men. (126)

To appreciate these things, the "doors of perception" must be unblocked and work as instruments to the power of imagination. Early in Book I the Bard rehearses the limitations of man's perceptions:

The Eye of Man a little narrow orb closd up & dark
 Scarcely beholding the great light conversing with the Void
 The Ear, a little shell in small volutions shutting out
 All melodies & comprehending only Discord and Harmony
 The Tongue a little moisture fills, a little food it cloys
 A little sound it utters & its cries are faintly heard...
 Can such an Eye judge of the stars? & looking thro its tubes
 Measure the sunny rays that point their spears on Udanadan
 Can such an Ear filld with the vapours of the yawning pit.
 Judge of the pure melodious harp struck by a hand divine?
 (98)

The second and final book of Milton takes up Beulah, which forms a ring around Eden. If renewed understanding of the world of generation redeems the masculine principle, then the movement through Beulah redeems the feminine. Getting beyond Beulah requires prodigious acts of imagination:

The Imagination is not a State: it is the Human Existence
 itself
 Affection or Love becomes a State, when divided from
 Imagination
 The Memory is a State always, & the Reason is a State
 Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created.
 Whatever can be Created can be Annihilated Forms cannot
 (131)

Movement from states that can be annihilated to the realm of the imagination itself is surely the most difficult work for the reader. For Blake himself the movement is a highly personal moment of epiphany. After Blake has learned from Milton's journey and engaged in his own purification by annihilating selfhood, he achieves the highest vision: "Terror struck in the Vale I stood at that immortal sound / My bones trembled. I fell outstretched upon the path".(142) Instrumental in this moment of epiphany are the song of the Lark and the smell and look of the wild thyme that surrounded Blake's cottage in the southern English village of Felpham:

Immediately the Lark mounted with a loud trill from Felphams
 Vale
 And the Wild Thyme from Wimbletons green & impurpled Hills
 And Los & Enitharmon rose over the Hills of Surrey (142)

In the final lines of the poem, the images of the harvest and the wine press predominate. They are emblems of the last vintage, the day of apocalypse. They also hint at the major obstacle that one must overcome to experience the "final judgment," the annihilation of the selfhood. The harvest and the wine press are preconditions for Blake's version of the Christian eucharist. Grapes and kernels of wheat have given up their individual selfhood and are ground and pressed in preparation for being made into bread and wine. Blake does not carry us as far as bread and wine; the final verses of Milton bring us only as far as the penultimate moment:

Rintrah & Palamabron view the Human Harvest beneath
 Their Wine-presses & Barns stand open; the Ovens are
 prepar'd (142)

How this can be a proper conclusion is problematic if a reader expects finality. The apocalypse oddly enough seems to function as a preparation; the ending of the poem Milton is really a commencement, a new beginning. The reintegration of the primal elements has been dramatized for the characters Milton and Blake; and it is accessible to the reader who is able to participate through imagination in Milton's journey.

When one first encounters the mythic characters in Blake and the detailed account of the fall, it is natural to want to organize these elements, to work out the genealogy of each of these characters, to show which state develops from which, to wonder how the Zoas coordinate with the elements, with the points of the compass, with all the other symbolic aspects that enter into the account. But it is important to realize that organizing this complexity is only valuable if it is done in the service of participating in the internal apocalypse that Blake unfolds in Milton. I say "participating" for lack of a better term to describe a process that goes beyond understanding or mental grasping of principles and what flows from them. Much in the way that

Blake by the power of his imagination "becomes" Milton, "becomes" Palamabron, and "becomes" Los, we as readers and participants must also and in order "become" all of these. What seems to free one for all of this becoming is the annihilation of selfhood and the willingness to open oneself to being the universal man. This universal man is man without the particularity of envy or ambition, man for whom there is not strife between his various aspects (as might be represented by the four Zoas). For this universal man the infinite can be apprehended in all things; time and space are seen as merely the limitations of the constricted physical condition; for him the inner man and the outward world can be grasped as one.

This attitude cannot hold, and as one may note at the end of Milton, Blake finds himself once again almost immediately in the state of "mental war," war in which imagination fights against the complacency and cobwebs of convention that quickly form over even the most profound philosophic and poetic insights.

In the end, that is at the end of each of the prophetic works, one is left again at a beginning place where resting on the glory of accomplished insights will not do. For Blake, the poet, this seems to require beginning through the whole problem again in a poetic work. For us as readers it means, among other things, returning to the beginnings of his poetic corpus and rereading the earlier works in light of those that come later. The states of innocence and experience, the tension between the contraries, the infinity in all things--all of these insights, that in their place in the order of unfolding seemed as far as one might reach, gain new meaning when rethought and reimagined as they might be envisioned from the standpoint of larger more all encompassing versions of the myth.

Epilogue:

The preceding sections provides a sketch of how a reader might begin to approach Blake's work. It seems necessary to step back for a moment from the intoxication of Blake's ringing hexameters and wonder what a reader should make of all this. Reading Milton is meant largely to serve as a calisthenic for the imagination. This imagination, that is finally all in all to Blake, in my more skeptical moods seems a deus ex machina available to make every thing possible. Blake would argue that it is worse than pointless to attack imagination in the Urizenic mode, and that it is folly to claim we must understand what the imagination is before we can make progress with its workings.

Blake depends on the power of the reader's imagination to complete and validate his efforts as a prophet-poet. That Milton offers only a thin linear thread in its narration, that it often moves out of temporal and spatial sequence, and that its characters are fantastic and move in and out of identity with one another--these all place heavy demands on the reader's imagination, but they also serve to strengthen the imagination that may have grown feeble. Unlike many of his contemporaries, Blake sets study of the mind looking at itself and its own faculties and categories below the more encompassing project he undertakes, the human form divine in rediscovery of itself.

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