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DRAMATIC FORMS AND IDENTITY-FORMATION IN THE WORKS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

Diane Piccitto

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DRAMATIC FORMS AND IDENTITY-FORMATION
IN THE WORKS OF WILLIAM BLAKE

(Spine title: Dramatic Forms and Identity-Formation in the Works of Blake)

(Thesis Format: Monograph)

by

Diane Piccitto

Graduate Program in English

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

The School of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies
The University of Western Ontario
London, Ontario, Canada

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WESTERN ONTARIO
SCHOOL OF GRADUATE AND POSTDOCTORAL STUDIES

CERTIFICATE OF EXAMINATION

<u>Supervisor</u> _____ Dr. Angela Esterhammer	<u>Examiners</u> _____ Dr. Angela Borchert
<u>Supervisory Committee</u> _____ Dr. Margaret Jane Kidnie	 _____ Dr. Steven Bruhm
 _____	 _____ Dr. Joel Faflak
	 _____ Dr. Mark Lussier

The thesis by

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entitled:

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requirements for the degree of
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Date _____

Chair of the Thesis Examination Board

Abstract

This study investigates the dramatic nature of William Blake's multimedia art (poetry, painting, engraving) and the resulting implications for identity. Although he wrote little conventional drama, his illuminated works resonate with theatre and performance. The recent surge of Romantic scholarship devoted to theatricality and dramatic stagings offers new perspectives for understanding Blake's art form and his conception of identity and identity-formation. The initial chapters of this project explore the way the dynamism between word and image in his works not only creates a distinctly dramatic genre but also encourages a specifically theatrical audience, one which is called on to act. Chapter one situates Blake in the theatre discourses of his time and interprets the illuminated works as a dramatic form that unsettles the binaries of mind/body, interior/exterior, reading/performance. The second chapter examines the opposing tendencies toward immersion and distancing in his works by drawing on contemporary media theory, Brecht's alienation-effect, and medieval presence; Blake provokes a twofold process of alienation that leads to a self-conscious entrance into his works. Subsequent chapters examine individual and communal identity in light of Blake's dramatic elements and contemporary theories of performativity, subjectivity, and identity-construction. Chapter three rereads *The Book of Urizen* as a melodrama—a major dramatic form in the Romantic period—that locates the source of the fall in a kind of Althusserian interpellation, wherein individuals misrecognize themselves and are misrecognized as independent and isolated identities rather than as interrelated and dependent ones. The final chapter explores *Milton* and its depiction of inspiration and self-annihilation and the emerging tension between essentialist and constructivist notions of identity through the lens of theories of performativity, action, and performance. By viewing the illuminated works as dramatic performances and by analyzing them in relation to theatre and performativity, this study shows how Blake fits an alternative view of Romanticism, one that foregrounds vision, exteriority, and community. Moreover, it argues that Blake's works uphold a model of identity based on action and an integration of mind and body, the imagination and the senses, and singularity and multiplicity.

Keywords: William Blake, illuminated works, drama, performance, performativity, theatricality, audience, identity, identity-formation, action.

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List of Abbreviations

MHH *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*

Songs *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*

VLJ *A Vision of the Last Judgment*

All citations from Blake's works refer to David V. Erdman's standard edition *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*, noted with the letter E followed by the page number. Textual references are noted by plate number followed by the line number (i.e., plate 3, line 4 = 3.4). Designs are noted by plate (pl.) number, which follow Erdman's enumeration unless otherwise noted. Object (obj.) numbers are also provided in cases where the number engraved on the plate does not correspond to the sequence of plates established by *The Blake Archive* for a particular copy. All references to the Bible are from the King James Version.

Introduction

Drama and identity form the two intersecting lines of inquiry into the illuminated works of William Blake. My use of the term drama encompasses its multi-faceted nature: dramatic composition, theatre, performance, performativity, theatricality, the stage, acting, embodiment, exteriority, the body, the senses, spectacle, and visuality. I argue that situating Blake's works within the discussions of theatre and performance of his day provides an alternative understanding of his composite art—one that leads to viewing these works as part of the dramatic genre. In addition, the aspects of performance and performativity that this context raises show that his conception of identity is relevant to our current attempts to think through identity.

While Blake's obviously dramatic pieces, such as the unfinished (or barely begun) history plays of *Poetical Sketches*¹—*King Edward the Third*,² *Prologue to King Edward the Fourth*, and *Prologue to King John*—may appear to be more likely texts for an exploration of Blake and drama, I argue that Blake's illuminated works provide a much more layered and significant contribution to discussions of drama and theatre. These early compositions have garnered some attention, but, in most cases, critics tend to mark these youthful forays into the dramatic as separate from his later works: "Otherwise Blake seems to have had no direct interest either in drama or in the theatre" (Webb 13). Thus, these dramatic fragments are viewed merely as early experiments in the dramatic form, clearly isolated from his later works, rather than as the beginning of a larger body of works that are, in fact, dramatic performances. For critics, Blake remains very much on the periphery of these issues. However, rethinking the image-text relationship of Blake's engravings in terms of the dramatic and its associations provides a space to

¹ F. R. Leavis suggests that this whole work, not just the few dramatic pieces, have a dramatic quality. Specifically, he refers to poems entitled "Song" and argues that they adapt and allude to Shakespeare's plays in tone and topic (73-76).

² Despite its incompleteness, this work encouraged John Egerton to list *Poetical Sketches*, Blake's early poetry and only work to be published by conventional channels, in the 1788 volume of Egerton's "chronicle of the drama" (Bentley, *Blake Records* 49).

revision his relationship to his cultural moment as well as new insights into his composite art and his conception of identity and identity-formation.

“Dramatic” and “performance” are not particularly strange terms to use when describing Blake’s illuminated works—critics have long employed them. More than half a century ago, Northrop Frye, in *Fearful Symmetry: A Study of William Blake* (1947), saw Blake in relation to drama. Tracing the evolution of Blake’s artistic output with respect to form, Frye explains that, after writing epics, Blake still had time for “a crowning period of dramatic art” (405). Frye implies that turning to drama would have been the natural end of Blake’s career. But Blake did not write dramas; rather, he turned toward fresco-painting. Addressing this fact, Frye asserts:

drama proper demands a public support of a kind Blake was not very likely to receive [...] the stage and he could never have been friends, and in any case the silent unity of vision in painting makes painting at least equally good as a dramatic medium, and a medium that Blake had already mastered. And of all forms of painting, fresco-painting on walls of public buildings is the most obviously dramatic. (405-06)

Although Frye explains that Blake’s lack of an audience impeded the natural progression of his career toward drama, it is significant that Frye sees Blake in relation to both drama and performance, even if only in his frescoes.

Scholars also apply the terms dramatic and performance to Blake in terms of content. W. J. T. Mitchell says of the figures in Blake’s designs, “His characters [...] are [...] busy acting out a visionary dumb show in a realm of sensuous [...] immediacy” (*Blake’s Composite Art* 29), thus granting the designs a theatrical dynamism. Regarding Blake’s grand vision of humanity at the end of his last epic, Tristanne Connolly argues,

Eternal communication in *Jerusalem* has its own special medium: the ‘Visionary forms dramatic’ [...] are akin to Blake’s illuminated works, yet they go further. For one thing, they are dramatic. Blake’s graphic and poetic bodies come as close to movement as is possible in their static medium, through the energy of the figures. [...] Visionary forms dramatic overcome the restrictions on movement imposed by two-dimensional prints. (208)

Connolly acknowledges the explicit dramatic quality of Blake's visions and draws a parallel between them and his composite art, though she ultimately denies the illuminated works the kind of theatricality present in "Eternal communication" because, as she says, they exist in a "static medium"; Eternity's dramatic forms escape this limitation by "[s]urpassing the limitations of earthly media."

Nelson Hilton refers to "Blake's plates and pages as a theater of text where he staged his multimedia 'Visionary forms dramatic'" ("[Blake] & the Play of 'Textuality'" 86). Here, theatre is employed at the service of the word; textuality, not dramatic performance, is Hilton's concern. His discussion centres on the problem of transcribing into print the words Blake etched on his plates. However, focusing on the medium of Blake's composite art, G. E. Bentley, Jr. and, later, John H. Jones claim that the illuminated works and their various copies are each one a performance. Nevertheless, while Blake scholars occasionally refer to the dramatic quality of his works, or categorize his works as performances, rarely do these references or categorizations go further to assess how the performative quality of Blake's works influences the audience's experience of them or how the works relate to actual dramatic performance—something I do in this study.

Despite the hinted parallels between the illuminated works and drama, Blake, unlike many other major Romantic poets, is still excluded from most analyses of Romantic drama and performance. This is somewhat surprising considering that criticism of Romantic drama has steadily progressed over the past two decades, moving from analyses that attended strictly to textual dimensions of plays by many of the so-called "major" Romantic writers to analyses that broaden their scope to include performative and theatrical aspects of canonical as well as non-canonical writers and dramatists of the period. In addition, much of the scholarship has been concerned with how issues of identity are shaped and constructed by theatre and performance, as well as social theatricality in general. For instance, David Worrall's recent book *Theatrical Revolution: Drama, Censorship and Romantic Period Subcultures 1773-1832* (2006) goes beyond the specifics of play-texts, addressing the marginal spaces of performance and spotlighting the pervasiveness of the theatrical in Romantic society: "Theatricality was a mode of public being, a representation of self which was not confined to dramas performed in the

playhouses” (2). Where once critics avoided Romantic theatre culture, except for examining the so-called closet drama of the major Romantic poets, now many wholeheartedly embrace Romantic performances of all kinds.

Facing a far different critical climate more than two decades ago, Jeffrey Cox challenged critics who had been “hedged in their evaluation of [Romantic drama]” (xi) and dramatists. In his book *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England, and France* (1987), Cox explored what many viewed as the Romantic “failure” to produce tragedy as compared to Elizabethan success. He dispels the notion of “failure,” showing how Romantic literature attempted to revive tragedy and produced some important works. Cox concludes, “[R]omantic tragic drama was a doomed attempt to preserve a vision that life no longer supports,” thereby locating the root of the problem not in Romantic writers but in historical circumstances and in the loss of faith in an ultimately ordered and heroic world (254). By focusing on history, Cox provides a positive analysis of Romantic drama. In part, Alan Richardson follows this positive attitude, providing a strong argument for reading closet drama—so-called unstageable drama or drama intended to be read rather than performed—as “the invention of a fundamentally new poetic form,” rather than as the evidence of a poet’s “‘retreat’ from the theater” (3). Richardson discusses the drama of the period in terms of success or failure under his own criteria: a successful drama offers “a dynamic conception of character as inherently unstable, changing, formed and reformed through dramatic confrontation” (5). Julie A. Carlson, while appreciating Richardson’s efforts to re-evaluate Romantic drama, rightly criticizes him for “[doing] so at the expense of theatre” (14), as he embraces only the act of private reading, thereby subordinating and excluding performance. Aligning myself with critics such as Carlson, I hope to show how Blake’s connection to drama undermines the hierarchy of text over performance.

Like Carlson, Catherine B. Burroughs pays particular attention to the gendered politics of theatre and performance. She explores Joanna Baillie’s particular role in theatre history and identity-formation in *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (1997). Burroughs broadens the definition of the closet to include private spaces of performance such as the home—a domestic space traditionally in the power of women—and she considers it as a theatrical space in which

people, often the upper-class, produced plays for private entertainment. By opening the category of closet theatre to more than just private reading, Burroughs destabilizes conventional assumptions about the closet and the stage, assumptions I examine more closely. Burroughs argues that these kinds of performances have the effect of “encouraging a serious self-consciousness about the performative features of social acting” (144) and identity. This specifically dramatic and performance-based notion of a flexible identity, of room to change one’s place in the social system, is significant to how I see Blake’s dramatic characterizations correlating to Romantic drama.

Unlike J. L. Austin’s use of the term performative, Burroughs’s use of the term relates primarily to acting and performance, both onstage and in actual life. Austin initially outlined the performative in his speech-act theory in a series of lectures published as *How to Do Things with Words* (1962). In opposition to fictional texts, he focuses on the effects of language and how an utterance does what it says it does—how it makes itself happen. For example, the words “I now pronounce you husband and wife” in a marriage ceremony actualize the state of matrimony but only when spoken by someone invested with the proper authority (a minister for instance). Despite the fact that he excluded the realm of art and literature from his discussions of the performative, critics have fruitfully used the Austinian performative for analyzing fiction, including Blake’s works.

Centralizing Austin’s discussion of the (perlocutionary) effects of the performative on literature, Leopold Damrosch Jr. refers to the relation between Blake and the performative in *Symbol and Truth in Blake’s Myth* (1980). Damrosch builds on Frye’s work by focusing on the symbol as Blake’s central creative force and by emphasizing Frye’s point that “there can be no ‘key’ and no open-sesame formula and no patented system of translation” (7) by which to interpret Blake (though Frye proceeds to provide a cohesive way to engage with Blake’s complicated symbology). Damrosch argues, “[Blake’s] symbols are mental constructs which create, rather than mirror, the reality they claim to represent” (11); they are dynamic tools that explore imaginative territories and spaces, not “simple, univalent counters chosen arbitrarily to illustrate predetermined truth” (95). Damrosch concludes his study by linking Blake’s use of language to the Austinian performative, arguing that Blake’s works “exemplify Austin’s perlocutionary

acts [...] they invade the reader's mind and attempt to transform his world" (358). His brief engagement with the performative ends by defining Blake's works "not [as] printed documents but [as] living acts" (363). The creative and transformative aspects that Damrosch articulates raise the issue not only of Blake's expectations of his audience but also his views on the nature of identity—issues I will address.

The performative is also the basis for Angela Esterhammer's *Creating States: Studies in the Performative Language of John Milton and William Blake* (1994). She explores the performative in Blake more extensively than Damrosch does, establishing the relationship between prophetic language in poetry and the performative. Esterhammer makes the useful distinction between sociopolitical performatives, which relate to institutional power, and phenomenological performatives, which relate to linguistic power. She analyzes the ways in which Milton and Blake approach visionary language, subjectivity, and authority through these kinds of performative speech acts. Her investigation of "the effectiveness of [Blake's] words" (163) and the performative's relationship to "the act of creating states," such as "the name of a city, a community of people, an individual [...] a state of consciousness, and a poem" (177), all in a social and political context, provides a valuable point of reference for my engagement with Blake and performativity. Esterhammer illuminates the way Blake constitutes himself as prophet and how he uses language to create states of being. Her arguments prompt my engagement with issues of identity and performance in terms of the capability of Blake's works to effect changes—visionary and socio-political—in his characters and audience.

While Austin's performative theory is rooted in linguistic analysis, theatrical performativity encompasses acting, physical action, artificiality, spatial relations, and spectatorship and offers insights into past and current conceptions of identity and identity-formation. Like Burroughs, many drama and theatre critics, both implicitly and explicitly, take up this notion of the performative with respect to identity. For instance, Jonas Barish and Erika Fischer-Lichte more generally raise issues of identity in relation to drama as a form. Barish provides a comprehensive history of antitheatrical sentiment in the Western world in *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981). He traces the various reasons for the negative response to theatre and dramatic performance over the centuries, but the one reason that appears repeatedly is the anxiety provoked by the actor's self and

the ability of the actor to take up different roles or identities. He links the actor to Proteus, the shape-shifting god of the sea,³ an image that resonates in almost every chapter and epoch. Barish's central protean metaphor is especially useful in linking Blake with drama because his characters and works are continually exhibiting mutability. His characterizations undermine all certainty, such as those that arise in *Milton* where the Bard, Milton, Los, Albion, Blake, and his brother Robert all share and merge identities. Barish's protean image of actors establishes Blake's connection to acting and to performance, a key focus of my final chapter.

Fischer-Lichte's *History of European Drama and Theatre* (2002) has interesting parallels to and resonances with Barish's study. She makes the formation of identity the cornerstone of Western drama and attempts to "write a history of European theatre as a history of identity" (4). Fischer-Lichte begins with Rousseau's condemnation of an actor, which stems from the fact that he "has no identity of his own" (1) and then proceeds to show the ways in which various plays have shaped (and continue to shape) social identities in their given historical periods. She argues, "[T]heatre creates highly unusual situations for the spectators which allow them to experience wholly new things. If the spectators are able to adopt these experiences consciously [...] the performance can lead them to shed the old identity, and take on a new one" (69). This interchange between performance and audience, and between imaginative realms and socio-political ones, constitutes one of my central interests in Blake and his conception of identity.

Romantic theatre scholarship has used the relationship between theatrical performance and identity productively. While Burroughs and Carlson investigate Romantic theatre's potential as an imaginative space where identity can be transferred and then translated into social and political spaces, Judith Pascoe focuses on the way theatrical performance confuses "actual" identity. In *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (1997), she highlights the central role that women have played in the Romantic world of drama, both literary and theatrical. Pascoe argues that the notion of the sincere, authentic, and original (and often male) Romantic writer is a false construct given "the performative aspects of early romantic literary culture as a whole" (1). Even the courts, she recounts, were not exempt from these aspects. In the 1794

³ See chapter four, "Puritans and Proteans," in particular (80-131).

treason trials in particular, lawyers' "performances were pitched to ensure wide public support," showing how lawyers treated the courtroom as a theatre and the audience as spectators (57). Their performances changed to suit a female or male audience. In addition, Pascoe claims that Wordsworth, like many of the writers of the time, performed a role that the literary marketplace created by way of celebrity and even that he consciously played up this persona. For instance, there are several depictions of Wordsworth reading to Dorothy, as Milton had done with his daughters, a representation of Wordsworth that suggests "he was fashioning himself as a poet at a time when the art world was enamored of Milton that highlighted his relationship to a female audience" (202). Celebrity, then, creates an ambiguous relationship between people's "authentic" identities and their audience/media-generated ones. But where is the line? Pascoe's argument challenges stable notions of identity and suggests the absurdity of absolute labeling or classifications. These explorations of identity and performance in the Romantic period offer new ways to examine Blake's conception of identity, provoking questions about its nature and the implications for a larger social context.

Romantic scholarship has re-evaluated Romantic-period drama and theatricality not only by recovering forgotten or ignored works and dramatists but also by placing a greater emphasis on Romantic performances. However, in large part, these dialogues have remained silent about Blake's relation to drama and the stage. This reticence has not prevented Blake from appearing on the modern stage. People have been staging Blake's works since the 1920s. Sir Geoffrey Keynes, a major proponent of reigniting interest in the poet-painter in the twentieth century, conceived of a Job Ballet based on Blake's illustrations for the Book of Job. After some failed attempts to get it staged, Keynes finally succeeded in 1931, when it was performed in London under the title *Job: A Masque for Dancing*, with the score composed by Ralph Vaughan Williams, the set design by Gwen Raverat, and the scenario by Keynes. In an interview, Keynes explained his motivation for the project: "it seemed to be that the pictures were asking for the chance to be put into motion. In all the engravings, Blake's attitude was so characteristic and so striking; they seemed to want to move from the page and on to the stage" (Ries 19). Keynes spots an energy in Blake's designs, one that seems suited for enactment. With *Job*, the focus is on Blake's images rather than his text.

More recently, Blake scholar Joseph Viscomi adapted *An Island in the Moon*, one of Blake's own texts, for the stage in 1983 at Cornell University, a production which included original music and added songs from other works by Blake. This text lends itself to dramatic performance thanks to the inclusion of dialogue among characters and a number of songs. There have also been productions that put Blake the man on stage, such as in Adrian Mitchell's *Tyger* (1982) and Thomas Kilroy's *Blake* (completed in 2001, but unpublished), focusing on the relationship between Blake and his wife, Catherine. As the tradition of staging Blake and his work continues into the new millennium, some contemporary productions turn to Blake's illuminated works. Richard Ramsbotham's company Amador, based in the UK, produced a one-man performance called "William Blake's 'Milton'" (Swansea and London 2007 and 2008). Ramsbotham adapts Blake's *Milton*, turning the epic into a theatrical experience by performing solo as he interacts with large-scale projections of Blake's engravings, mostly from the epic, that appear on the back wall of the stage while a live orchestra accompanies the spectacle.

By contrast, the Theatre of Eternal Values (TEV), a production company founded in 1996 in Gent, staged a large ensemble piece called *William Blake's Divine Humanity: A Dramatisation of the Visionary Artist's Life and Work* for the Blake250 Festival in London in 2007. As their website states, "Visual images of Blake's work and the stories of Job and Jerusalem interweave with the unfolding drama of Blake's life to enact the inner drama within Blake's soul." Their online video clip shows them acting out illustrations and poems such as "Infant Joy." The performance also includes dance and music and large ensemble pieces, as they make Blake the star of his own works. TEV's most recent Blake project is *Eternity in an Hour* (first performed in 2008 in Helsinki and currently lined up for New York in August 2010). The show "interweaves scenes from William Blake's life with his poems, paintings and imagery, incorporating live music, physical theatre and contemporary dance" (2-3). Focusing primarily on the *Songs*, *Milton*, and *Jerusalem* and eyewitness accounts found in Alexander Gilchrist's biography of Blake, it delineates Blake's life from childhood to adulthood, where he becomes "a revolutionary hero, rousing up the artistic youth of London" (6-7).

One significant offshoot of this theatrical enterprise is the accompanying workshop that the group offers, primarily to students. The purpose of the workshop is

“exploring the vast world of Blake and his major themes through one’s own body, music and poetry. The aim is to enhance the participants’ knowledge of William Blake (artist, engraver and visionary poet) through direct experience, led by a theatrical process” (40-41). Drawing on reason, imagination, emotion, and the body—the four Blakean Zoas—as well as some of Blake’s poetry, members of the theatre company take the participants through exercises of bodily movement and improvisation (42-43). The composition and goals of this workshop most explicitly show how modern theatre can productively combine Blake’s works and the theatre. Thus, contemporary theatrical productions show the suitability of translating the illuminated works to the stage.

The contemporary examples of stage performances of Blake suggest that there is something about his works that people find theatrical and appropriate for the stage. But what were Blake’s thoughts about drama and performance? It is revealing that his works include a number of performances and dramatic moments. In many of his designs, characters are often in the middle of an action, whether it is walking, playing, dancing, falling, flying, or crawling, not to mention those whose arms are thrusting apart or whose bodies are gripped in the throes of pain. Besides a work such as *Songs*, in which the performance aspect is stressed by virtue of being named songs and by being a metrical arrangement that invites public performances in the form of reading or singing out loud, Blake’s other more satiric or prophetic books maintain the performance aspect, albeit without the mellifluous metrical arrangement in many cases. For example, in the pastiche form of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake incorporates sections entitled “The Voice of the Devil,” “A Song of Liberty,” and the “Chorus,” all of which put an emphasis on the dramatic (as opposed to the sections entitled “The Argument,” the “Proverbs of Hell” and the “Memorable Fancies”). In addition, Blake chooses dramatic scenes to delineate, where an ensemble performs, rather than using the lyrical method to convey his ideas. The majority of his works centre on the interactions and dialogues of several characters. Rather than employing a narrator to speak for the characters, Blake allows them to express themselves directly in the text and designs. In fact, unlike lyrical poetry, his own position in the works is often that of character—not a conventional speaker—so that the audience remains excluded from his (and the other characters’) interiority. Thus, the form and content of his illuminated works suggest performance.

Furthermore, in the 1780s, Blake attended the literary salon of Mrs. Mathew, where he is said to have sung his poetry in front of the gathered guests (Bentley, *Blake Records* 120). John Thomas Smith states, “Blake wrote many [...] songs, to which he [...] composed tunes. These he would occasionally sing to his friends; and [...] his ear was so good, that his tunes were sometimes most singularly beautiful, and were noted down by musical professors” (500). The fact that he sung his works out loud and in front of an audience suggests that he was open to performance and did not see his works as part of only the mental sphere (as I will discuss in chapter one). Perhaps the most famous performance Blake gave was the private one he gave with his wife, when the two of them read Milton’s *Paradise Lost* out loud to each other as they sat naked in their garden. This anecdote has been discredited in light of refutations by Thomas Butts’s grandson, John Linnell, and Samuel Palmer. Bentley adds, “There is *no* contemporary evidence to support the story” (xxvi-xxvii). Despite its dubious authenticity, the anecdote does fit nicely with an image of Blake who was not confined to his intellectual life, as well as with the performance aspects so central to the illuminated works. His performance of *Paradise Lost* resonates with his earlier performances of his own poems as well as with his tendency toward dramatic expression in his art.

Blake’s references to and experiences with the theatre world of London are few and far between, but even these few examples suggest that he was not completely severed from it. He does offer comments pertaining directly to stage performance. In his *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809), he considers the difference between the page and the stage. Blake offers his rationale for the way he depicts various literary and dramatic characters with the example of what, by his estimation, is a mistaken interpretation of the witches in *Macbeth*. He argues, “Those who dress them for the stage, consider them as wretched old women, and not as Shakespeare intended” (E 535). In this case, Blake implies that some performances get the text wrong, but, more significantly, his criticism shows his familiarity with stagings of Shakespeare, whose plays Blake illustrated.⁴

⁴ For instance, he illustrated scenes from *Macbeth*, *Henry IV*, and *As You Like It*, as well as engraving a plate after John Opie’s painting of a scene from *Romeo and Juliet* for the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery (Burwick, “Introduction: Gallery, Artists, and Engravers” 19).

Another comment about the theatre negates a general dismissal of performance. In an 1805 letter to his patron William Hayley, Blake dabbles in a bit of mainstream gossip and celebrity, offering his two cents on the current rage in London for a boy actor: “The Town is Mad Young Roscius like all Prodigies is the talk of Every Body I have not seen him & perhaps never may. I have no Curiosity to see him as I well know what is within the compass of a boy of 14. & as to Real Acting it is Like Historical Painting No Boys Work” (E 764). The boy in question was William Henry West Betty, known as Master Betty or Young Roscius. He performed at Covent Garden Theatre for a short time in the early nineteenth century. Blake does not preclude the possibility of seeing the boy perform and does not express disdain for the stage itself. Rather, the boy’s youthfulness and inexperience form the foundation of Blake’s criticism. Moreover, Blake’s comment implies respect for the profession of acting as an art form, equating it with painting, thereby elevating theatrical performance. According to him, it takes someone properly trained and skilled in the profession of acting or painting in order to produce something of true value. This one brief digression in the letter indicates that Blake was acquainted enough with the acting of his day to feel himself a fair judge of a boy he had not seen perform, and he implies that the theatre is not an unusual place for him to visit.

Alongside textual references to the theatre, Blake also makes pictorial ones. Specifically, he depicts a performance space in one of his most well-known paintings: in *The Ghost of a Flea* (c. 1819-20), Blake chooses a stage-like setting with wooden floorboards and half-drawn curtains for a grotesque-looking creature—a flea, representing men who were in their human lives blood-thirsty conquerors. According to John Varley, Blake based this work on one of his visions. In an article about *The Flea* in *The Guardian*, Jonathan Jones says, “Blake’s flea is evil, gothic, grotesque, stalking through a starry realm between stage curtains—walking the boards, in fact, as if the artist had ensnared this creature to appear in a spectacle at Drury Lane Theatre.” Jones talks of Blake making a spectacle of the flea and envisions a performance at one of the Theatres Royal. Caught in mid stride, the flea holds his bowl for the blood of the victims he drinks, making a spectacle of himself and performing for an audience, the spectators who sit in front of the curtain in a darkened auditorium.

The only evidence that Bentley offers for Blake’s actual visits to the theatre

comes late in Blake's life. John Linnell, an artist and friend of Blake in his later years, often took Blake out. And Aileen Ward notes, Linnell, John Constable, and Blake "attended exhibitions and occasionally the theater and opera" (32). Bentley describes at least one of these theatrical outings: "Besides artistic exhibitions, Linnell took Blake to see plays, which Blake is not known to have done much previously. 'Tuesday 27 [March] [...] to the Theatre Drury Lane with M^r Blake' to see Sheridan's *Pizarro* [...]" (*Blake Records* 377). Here, Bentley quotes from Linnell's journal entry from 1821, a mere six years before Blake's death. Another entry suggests that Linnell took Blake to see John Dryden's *Oedipus* in November of the same year and they "were much entertained" (380). Although historical records of his play-going days pertain only to the late stages of his life, this does not preclude the possibility of his attending the theatre earlier or of the theatre's impact on his ideas of art, acting, and identity. Indeed, Blake's response to the boy actor at the beginning of the nineteenth century—around the time he was working on *Milton* and *Jerusalem*—suggests otherwise. His later documented excursions to playhouses, then, just reaffirm that he was no stranger to being a spectator, nor did he shy away from the theatre.

More general associations or possible associations with theatre people include a potential meeting with playwright Thomas Holcroft sometime in the 1780s when Blake was very near publisher Joseph Johnson's circle (which also included Fuseli—with whom Blake was friends—Godwin, Wollstonecraft, and Paine) (Bentley, *Blake Records* 55); a confrontation (in Lambeth, where Blake lived for a time) with Philip Astley, who built and ran Astley's Theatre, known for large-scale productions (Tatham 507); a possible connection to well-known scene designer and painter Philippe de Loutherbourg⁵ through Mrs. Mathew who patronized his assistant as well as Blake (Bentley 30); and a link to Sarah Siddons, who—at the end of the eighteenth century—lived near Blake's friend and patron Thomas Butts, while Blake himself lived a short distance away from them (90). Recently, Worrall has made the case that Blake and his wife were inevitably influenced by their theatrical and radical environment when they lived at 3 Fountain

⁵ As Peter Thomson explains, de Loutherbourg was known for his "innovatory lighting techniques" and as "an inventive machinist" for grand spectacles and special effects, and "he had a vision to translate landscape from canvas to stage" (155).

Court, Strand in 1821, near the end of Blake's life: "far from entering a London area suitable for a quiet semi-retirement, they found themselves relocated to the very centre of the capital's theatreland and radical press industries" ("Blake in Theatreland" 26).

Worrall argues that popular culture as it manifested itself in the theatres and the presses near Blake's final home made an impression on and elicited responses from Blake that can be traced in his engravings of that time, specifically the illustrations for the Book of Job. As Worrall suggests, the Blakes could not ignore the "networks of a commercially oriented sociability" (28) and "the intricate continuities [...] between Fountain Court, Regency pressmen, the acting profession and a vigorous local popular culture" (31). What all these possible encounters and references to theatre reveal is that Blake certainly was not isolated from the theatre of his day.

This historical contextualizing of Blake finds its initial articulation in *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* (1954) by David V. Erdman, who analyzes his works in light of the political struggles and events taking place at the time. Erdman describes Blake's understanding of the world as tied to "the flux of current history" (294) and argues that for Blake "prophecy and history" are inextricably linked (431). David Worrall and Jon Mee continue this kind of scholarship, specifically positioning much of Blake's thinking in the radicalism of the end of the eighteenth century. For instance, Mee argues that Blake's rhetorical strategies and the texts he produced in this period "are profoundly involved with the ideas and images of the culture of the 1790s" (*Dangerous Enthusiasm* 18). Although my project will be less concerned with the "historical minutiae" that Erdman locates in Blake's texts (473) to clarify certain allusions by situating them in the concrete details of the past, this historicizing process shows that he was a poet engaged not with the arcane but with the socio-political.

Yet, nearly half a century after Erdman's study, Saree Makdisi, in *William Blake and the Impossible History of the 1790s* (2003), contends,

Too often in Blake scholarship, issues and questions of Blake's work that seem, according to modern political idiom, not to be readily identifiable as political in nature—his understanding of being, his views of art, his sense of love, his conception of the imagination—are assumed to mark a departure into some other realm: the mythic, the cosmic, the universal, the

spiritual—all of which are assumed to be somehow opposed to or irreconcilable with the historical, the political, and the real. (2)

Makdisi's analysis suggests that much of Blake's thinking, not just that which is obviously connected to current affairs, is heavily invested in and consciously part of the political and economic goings-on of his day. Placing Blake and his art in a direct relationship with his time is, therefore, crucial to understanding the meaning of his works and his participation in his cultural moment.

In this study, I will show how dramatic performance offers new ways of understanding Blake's chosen medium and the role of his audience that lead to new interpretations of his notions of individual identity and larger communal relations, as well as the relationship between the imagination and the physical body. Similar to Makdisi, Mee, and Worrall, I position Blake directly in his historical moment by examining the theatre world as well as the debates involving mind and body, identity and action, stage and reading of his time. Furthermore, in order to show Blake's relevance for the present, I also explore his work in relation to contemporary theories of theatrical performance, media, performativity, and identity-construction. My interpretations of Blake's thinking and his works follow a more holistic view, much as Frye's, which argued for the "consistency of Blake's mind" (178) throughout his life and artistic production. I do not argue for an evolution of ideas from the first work to the last one, as do critics such as Anne K. Mellor who states, "I believe that Blake's thought and symbols changed, developed, and even contradicted themselves in the course of his sixty-nine years" (*Blake's Human Form Divine* xix)—though such approaches are insightful. However, I do acknowledge the contradictions and paradoxes that arise (often within the same work) but without the aim of resolving them even if only for a particular moment in time. In fact, this dissertation engages directly with many of the paradoxes without attempting to solidify a final solution. I have found that living with the contradictions has proven much more fruitful.

In chapter one, I examine the relevance of the media Blake chose for his illuminated works within the context of Romantic-period discussions of performance. I explore how Blake's composite art implicitly participates in the theoretical debates surrounding Romantic drama and theatre, debates between interior and exterior, spectacle

and contemplation, embodiment and idealization, performable and unperformable, and stage and page. Moreover, I address the way that he combines textual and pictorial space to create a dramatic space and a spectatorship rather than a simple readership or viewership. In doing so, he challenges conventional notions of a reading audience, the form of drama, and even what it means to be performable, questioning the relationship between the mind and embodiment. Focusing on *America: A Prophecy*, I argue that Blake's illuminated works not only demonstrate a movement toward staging, toward spectacle, and toward embodiment but also function as dramatic performances, suggesting that he has a place in current discussions of Romantic drama and performance.

In the second chapter, I build on the dramatic quality of the illuminated works by exploring issues of representation and the specific demands placed on the audience in relation to Brechtian theatre theory, medieval spectacle, and contemporary media theory. Through the use of (metatheatrical) self-reflexive techniques, Blake challenges conventional notions of human identity and our relationship to imaginative spaces. He also prompts two seemingly contradictory experiences: alienation and immediacy. I claim that the tension between the distancing and immersive effects creates a specifically Blakean spectatorship that is provoked to both stand apart from the world of the imagination and enter into it—as he asks us to do in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*—both of which are necessary in order to see the interpenetration of the physical world and the eternal one.

Having established Blake's relationship to theatre and performance, I turn to two particular works that explicitly address issues of identity and identity-formation in the context of theatre and performance. Chapter three explores Blake's revision of Genesis in *The Book of Urizen*, which turns the creation and the fall into the primordial scene of identity-formation. This revision makes use of the melodramatic form, emphasizing the visual, the body, sensory perception, affect, excess, and the external. Furthermore, Blake locates the origin of the fall in a kind of Althusserian interpellation, wherein Urizen and the rest of the Eternals misrecognize the true nature of identity by perceiving themselves to be independent and isolated selves rather than a community of interrelated ones. Reading Blake in light of Romantic melodramatic tendencies and Althusser's theory

places him and his work in an alternative vision of Romanticism that celebrates community, the physical body, the senses, and the visual image.

Finally, turning to Blake's epic poem *Milton*, the fourth chapter ties the various threads of the dissertation together: stage performance, exteriority, visuality, entrances, audience engagement, community, and identity. Focusing on the repeated moment of inspiration in the context of Judith Butler's performative theory of identity-construction, I explore the relationship between doer and deed and the implications for Blake's depiction of identity in the poem. As characters inspire one another, they open up unconventional and nontraditional possibilities for inspiration, suggesting that the power and authority to inspire is available not to a chosen few but to everyone. Moreover, the merging of various identities and the seemingly contradictory action of self-annihilation provide a vision of identity that upholds both individuality and interdependence, one that exists somewhere between essentialism and constructionism—a vision that offers an alternative to the either/or of the identity-formation debate.

“Visionary forms dramatic”: Blake’s Illuminated Works

William Blake demonstrates his uniqueness as an artist in two important ways: his mode of production and his mixing of media. He uses a special means of reaching his audience, resisting the conventional print modes and methods of commercial print publication by completely circumventing them. Blake’s distinct process gave him total control over the production phase of his artistic creations. With few exceptions,¹ his works were not published conventionally, nor did they come in the form of a conventional medium. The medium Blake chooses for his artistic expression and his method of uniting art forms such as poetry, painting, and engraving make him unlike any of the artists (literary and pictorial) of his day. Although combining texts (poems and narratives) and images (paintings and engravings) was not new—one has only to consider the commissioning of illustrated literary text or the proliferation of prints of satirical caricatures—nothing quite like Blake’s illuminated works was produced.² The works, which Blake called “Illuminated Books,” employing several media (engraving, painting, and poetry) using a process he called “Illuminated Printing” (Prospectus of 1793, E 693). Blake’s name for these works directly points to the illuminated manuscripts of the Middle Ages, in which written texts were adorned with decorations and illustrations.³ Blake constructs works that make use of both the literary and the visual, integrating words with pictures in order to articulate his particular vision.

Since their initial production, Blake’s illuminated works have raised critical questions for readers/viewers: How do we define them? Clearly, they relate to the medium of visual art as well as literature, so how do we take both into account? The

¹ His youthful collection of poems *Poetical Sketches* (1783) was printed thanks to fellow artist John Flaxman and the Mathews, who had a salon that Blake sometimes visited early in his career. Also, the first part of Blake’s poem *The French Revolution* made it to the proof stage, but the poem does not seem to have been completed, nor was it ever published. In all other cases, Blake chose his method of illuminated printing.

² Also, there was the even older tradition of emblems and, near the end of Blake’s life, the circulation of the annual (e.g., the 1820s publication *The Keepsake*, in which texts were solicited for pre-existing graphic art).

³ See, for instance, Hagstrum 30-33 for conjectures on direct sources of influence.

question may not have been a central one in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; however, for contemporary academic scholars, defining the illuminated book as a genre has generated varied responses. What precisely is an illuminated work? What is its generic identity? How are we to engage with it? As an art form, how is it relevant to Blake's historical period? What is at stake in these questions is a more precise understanding of the composite nature of illuminated works, one of Blake's primary modes of artistic production, as well as a revisioning of Blake's relationship to his time. These are questions I will explore in relation to his era, to audience response, and to the word-image dynamic in his works within the context of theatrical performance. The recent surge of interest in and corresponding research on Romantic-era theatre⁴—unexpectedly—generates new insights into Blake's multimedia form by making this a viable context for analyzing his works. The current rediscovery of Romantic theatricality makes it possible to view his illuminated works—in the specific tension between the linguistic and visual realms—as producing a particular experience of them: as dynamic dramatic performances. By reexamining Blake's works in light of the dominant discourses of drama and the theatre of his day, namely the theatrical and antitheatrical debate, a new understanding of these works emerges.

Critics interested in Blake's designs, as well as his writings, have asked the questions about genre I pose above. In *William Blake: Poet and Painter* (1964), an early study of Blake's use of text and design, Jean Hagstrum states, "Blake can be regarded as the classical embodiment of those venerable conventions of Western art, pictorial poetry and poetic painting—in fact, of the entire tradition that for centuries had united the visual

⁴ For an extended discussion of recent scholarship on Romantic-period drama and culture that focuses on the theatrical aspects of both, see the introduction. A few examples of the prevalence of theatricality in current Romantic-period research are as follows: Jeffrey N. Cox's *In the Shadows of Romance: Romantic Tragic Drama in Germany, England, and France* (1987); Julie A. Carlson's *In the Theater of Romanticism: Coleridge, Nationalism, Women* (1994); Catherine B. Burroughs's *Closet Stages: Joanna Baillie and the Theater Theory of British Romantic Women Writers* (1997); Judith Pascoe's *Romantic Theatricality: Gender, Poetry, and Spectatorship* (1997); Jane Moody's *Illegitimate Theatre in London, 1170-1840* (2000); David Worrall's *Theatric Revolution: Drama, Censorship and Romantic Period Subcultures 1773-1832* (2006); and Celestine Woo's *Romantic Actors and Bardolatry: Performing Shakespeare from Garrick to Kean* (2008).

and verbal arts” (8). Blake’s unification of the sister arts, “the long tradition of *ut pictura poesis* (as is painting, so is poetry),” aligns the two modes of representation, showing that, “despite their different media, painting and poetry are assumed to be mimetic arts, similar in that they both aim to represent nature, whether visible or ideal” (Otto, “Blake’s Composite Art” 43). However, W. J. T. Mitchell counters Hagstrum’s view in *Blake’s Composite Art: A Study of the Illuminated Poetry* (1978)—a title that highlights Mitchell’s response to Hagstrum, who first applies the term “composite art” to Blake’s illuminated works (10). In taking up Hagstrum’s term but revising its application, Mitchell stresses the distinct natures of writing and pictorial art. Nevertheless, Mitchell does not dismiss the unity implicit in Hagstrum’s argument. Mitchell says, “Almost everyone would now agree with Northrop Frye’s remark that Blake perfected a ‘radical form of mixed art,’ a ‘composite art’ which must be read as a unity. It is not superfluous, however, to ask in what precise sense Blake’s poems ‘need’ their illustrations, and vice versa” (3).

What Mitchell takes issue with in the *ut pictura poesis* view is the relationship between the forms of expression: “In general, however, neither the graphic nor the poetic aspect of Blake’s composite art assumes consistent predominance: their relationship is more like an energetic rivalry, a dialogue or dialectic between vigorously independent modes of expression” (4). Mitchell resists relegating the images to mere translations of the text (and vice versa). He states, “In the absence of explicit textual associations we are forced [...] to concentrate on the picture *as a picture in the world of pictures*, rather than seeing it as a visual translation of matters already dealt with in words” (5). For him, what follows from Hagstrum’s interpretation of Blake’s works as a combination of the sister arts is a subjection of one art form to the other.⁵ Blake’s designs do not function merely

⁵ Otto’s “Blake’s Composite Art” succinctly summarizes the varying attitudes toward Blake’s illuminated texts, using the Hagstrum-Mitchell debate as the major point of departure for the attitudes that have followed. Also, see Mitchell’s “Poetic and Pictorial Imagination.” In reference to Hagstrum’s reading of Blake’s illuminated works, Mitchell states, “The most thorough investigation of the relationship between Blake’s poetry and painting places his ‘composite art’ in the tradition and context of *ut pictura poesis*, the system of analogies between the ‘sister arts’ which was dogmatized by many early eighteenth-century critics, and debunked by Lessing in the second half of the century” (337). Since the crucial debate between Hagstrum and Mitchell, scholars have paid attention to the materiality of Blake’s engravings and his

as illustrations or translations of the text. His illuminated works “are not texts-with-illustrations” (Behrendt, ““Something in My Eye”” 80). In an early volume of *Blake Studies*, John E. Grant takes Clyde R. Taylor to task for reading Blake’s designs solely through the text and submitting them finally to the authority of the word (194).

Admittedly, I find analyzing Blake’s texts in light of the designs and vice versa extremely fruitful, and Grant does not foreclose this possibility. Rather, he warns us not to see the two modes as mere reflections of one another because the interrelations between the two provoke us to go further than simply focusing on the way the designs illustrate the narrative of the text.

It is in this vein that I will engage with the questions I put forward in my introduction and examine the dynamic of Blake’s composite art. He does not prioritize his poetry, and, in fact, some argue that only once he engraved and illuminated his poetic works did he consider them complete and published in the same way conventional poets might have considered their works complete once printed by a press. As early as Northrop Frye, critics aligned the illuminated works with Blake’s categorization of particular works as finished or published or distinct: “And when these poems were once engraved Blake seldom altered anything more fundamental than the color-scheme [...]. The inference is clear: the engraved poems were intended to form an exclusive and definitive canon” (6). While I disagree with Frye’s dismissal of the importance of changes from copy to copy (from colour scheme to additions to deletions to order), the point is still significant: the form of the illuminated works plays a large role in our understanding of them, and so does the fact that this form necessarily includes the designs. As a result, the designs deserve attention.

Despite the progress scholars have made in illuminating the significance of the pictorial element of Blake’s works, Stephen C. Behrendt finds that a “logocentric bias” lurks behind some definitions still in use to describe the illuminated works (““Something in My Eye”” 80). In reference to the phrase “combining text and design,” he states,

production methods (see the scholarship of Essick and Viscomi), which yield unique artifacts despite the repetition of a work into ‘copies’, thereby criticizing mass reproduction, or commodification of art (see Makdisi), and the hierarchy between original and copy (see Carr).

this dichotomous and apparently mutually exclusive terminology recurs with surprising frequency in much of recent poststructuralist commentary on Blake's work. Language of this sort implies that only a literary text can be a real 'text' and that the visual text is at best the weak and subservient sister art whose function is not *textually* significant and whose nature *as art* is only minimally and marginally important in the generation of meaning. (79)

Finding a term that satisfies the many points of view involved in this discussion may be next to impossible. However, Behrendt makes a valid point. How can we discuss Blake's medium, or even genre, in a way that does not reduce the poetry or the pictorial art? This problem inevitably leads to questions of what the nature of the illuminated works is and how we respond to and engage with them—after all, what a thing is suggests how one can use it. Such questions highlight the crucial role of the audience in an understanding of the form. As Behrendt points out, “the crux of the matter lies [...] in what the responding mind is asked to do in dealing with the two arts” (83).

While I do not pretend to have definitive answers to the aforementioned questions, I do put forward the thesis that the illuminated works occupy a space in the realm of the dramatic, the performative, and the theatrical without appearing to be drama, performance, or theatre *per se*. They do so by exhibiting performative aspects in their multimedia form, their content, and in the audience interaction that they encourage. In calling Blake's works performative (or defining them as such), I suggest something about them as an artistic form and also about how one can and might work with them. Blake's relation to dramatic performances has been overlooked to a large extent, other than to say that his works are dramatic or that each copy is a performance.⁶ As noted in the introduction to this study, both Frye and Mitchell (*Blake's Composite Art*) make passing references to Blake's works and various forms of drama. G. E. Bentley, Jr. claims, “Blake's coloured works in Illuminated Printing are all performances” (“Blake's Works

⁶ In Blake's time, the word “performance” regularly referred to creative productions, such as poems and paintings, as well as theatrical performances—a meaning that, though not common today, had a history as far back as 1665 according to the *OED*. In his letters, Blake uses the term to refer to his own and other artists' paintings (see, for example, E 745, 748, and 759).

as Performances” 334); however, Bentley’s use of the word “performance” stresses the “uniqueness” rather than the theatricality of each copy of a given work (335). Similarly, John H. Jones talks of the multiple performances that result from the variations arising from copy to copy versus “a single performance through exact copies” of the same work (“Printed Performance” 88). And Jerome McGann calls *Jerusalem* “a public performance” (“William Blake Illuminates the Truth” 9), but his argument centres on the way Blake highlights “the limits of knowledge” and “the limits of his work” (36) in “the mutilated plate 3 of *Jerusalem*” (37); it does not contextualize the comparison within a theatrical frame. As these kinds of critical descriptions of them suggest, Blake’s illuminated works have an undeniable theatrical or performative energy both in their content and in the way an audience responds to them. I aim to broaden these observations into a more sustained analysis of the implication of such labeling of and engagement with Blake’s work. My focus will be to examine Blake’s medium in relation to the dramatic and pictorial criticism of the mid-to-late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Approaching Blake’s illuminated works through the lens of drama and dramatic performance results in a new understanding of the genre of Blake’s art, the interplay between words and designs, and his relation to his time.

Any discussion of the relation between the word and image, particularly one that involves questions of genre and genre borders, inevitably leads to Gotthold Ephraim Lessing’s *Laocoön, or The Limits of Painting and Poetry* (1766)—a foundational eighteenth-century work comparing (and contrasting) the two modes of expression. Lessing’s essay stresses the adherence to strict generic boundaries, in which, as Mitchell describes, “the borders are closed and a separate peace is declared” (*Iconology* 43). In the essay, Lessing hypothesizes that Virgil’s recounting of the myth of Laocoön and his sons was the first that showed the group being killed and devoured by the serpent-creature, not the sculpture by Hagesandrus, Polydorus, and Athenodorus of Rhodes (*The Visual Arts* 203-04), as was formerly believed. This revision of origins (i.e, who was the first to depict the group) already betrays Lessing’s bias. His argument about these two renditions leads him to posit many “truisms” regarding poetry and visual art. At times, Lessing seems to give a balanced account of the nature of the art forms; however, in many cases, he ultimately allows poetry a greater scope, ability, and overall effect, arguing, at one

point, that “poetry is the more comprehensive art, that beauties are at her command which painting can never attain” (36). As Mitchell rightly observes, “The aim of Lessing’s laws of genre, then, is clearly not to make the spatial and temporal arts separate but equal, but to segregate them in what he regards as their natural inequality” (107).

Lessing’s initial argument centres on the fact that, while Laocoön screams and is able to vent his extreme emotions in Virgil’s poem, in the sculpture, Laocoön is depicted with a mouth opened only slightly as he is crushed in the serpent’s painful grasp (6). Lessing states that because “with the ancients beauty was the supreme law of the plastic arts” (11), the sculpture’s emotional range is limited in a way the poetic representation is not. Although he says that this law is no longer in effect with the moderns, he does imply a certain disdain for modern art, which does not heed these laws, thereby placing a greater value on ancient art (14) and its clear border divisions between art forms. According to Lessing, poetry has fewer limitations than sculpture, which, though beautiful, falls short because it does not (and cannot, given the medium) depict the full range and temporal process of Laocoön’s pain. Whereas Virgil’s version does not suffer distortion in its use of the extreme shriek, any attempt to depict that level of pain in a sculpture would render it ugly. Lessing’s assessment here suggests that the physical and visual externalization of this moment cannot compete with language, which depends upon the imagination for the envisioning process and is, therefore, not limited by what the artist has created. According to Lessing, extreme and violent emotion would only “disfigure the face in an unpleasing manner [...]. The mere wide opening of the mouth [...] is a blot in painting and a fault in sculpture” (13).

His claims regarding visual art’s limitations stem primarily from visual art as a static form. Poetry, on the other hand, has characters that “live and act” (38). More precisely, the fundamental difference lies in the fact that the “plastic arts” are spatial while literary modes are temporal. In comparing epic and dramatic poetry to sculpture and painting, Lessing argues that the former has the ability, due to the nature of its medium, to depict “continuous action” (54) and works within time, while the latter can depict only a static moment and works within space (55). The problem, according to Lessing, is the “unintermitting aspect in the material imitations of Art” (15). In the visual arts, the moment is frozen and the extreme emotional state remains permanent. In nature

and poetry, eventually this state subsides and vanishes. Ironically, the affective qualities of the sculpture or painting are diminished because of its fixed nature in spite of being immediate to the sense of sight.⁷

Mitchell critiques Lessing's distinction between the arts on the basis of space and time, and he suggests that the use of space and time in this way merely serves to create a hierarchical relation between literature and the visual arts. He asserts that "the whole notion of 'spatial' and 'temporal' arts is misconceived insofar as it is employed to sustain an *essential* differentiation of or within the arts"; "the categories of space and time are never innocent, [...] they always carry an ideological freight, and never more so than in that great source of wisdom on this issue, Lessing's *Laocoon*" (*Iconology* 98). For Mitchell, all art (linguistic or otherwise) exists within space and time and cannot be divided absolutely from one or the other. He discusses the definitions and broader ramifications of the divide between the graphic art and the written word, or *image* and *text*, explaining that these terms are by no means self-evident or free from contradictions and ambiguity. He explores the following questions at length: "What is an image? What is the difference between images and words? [...] Why does it matter what an image is? What is at stake in marking off or erasing the differences between images and words?" (1) Taking into account ideology and cultural impositions and biases, Mitchell shows how complex the relationship between pictures and words is and argues that there is no essential difference between them: "there is no *essential* difference between poetry and painting, no difference, that is, that is given for all time by the inherent natures of the media, the objects they represent, or the laws of the human mind" (49). I find his argument persuasive and important to keep in mind as one attempts to engage with Blake's composite art, but I also find that, even if we understand the constructed nature of the terms poetry and painting, we as an audience still relate and respond differently to

⁷ Contemporary critics, such as Mitchell and Frederick Burwick, have noted that there is no inherent problem with the "plastic arts" that nullifies the possibility of showing the passing of time. Rather, the problem lies in ideology and the way we come to perceive and shape notions about various art forms: "The aesthetic judgment, endorsed and upheld by Lessing, is more obedient to tradition and cultural conventions than to any deficiency in temporal dynamism which he seeks to grant to language and deny to art" (Burwick, "Ekphrasis and the Mimetic Crisis of Romanticism" 88).

the forms (as Mitchell seems to concede throughout the book). As a result, I maintain the difference in my chapter.

Lessing clearly does see an “essential difference” between the two media, but, more significantly, he imbues one with greater capabilities, thereby privileging one over the other. His implicit hierarchical distinction between what he calls “the plastic arts” and poetic writing functions by way of the imagination. First, he assigns to the individual imagination of the audience a greater ability to envision a scene than the sculptor or painter is capable of producing materially. Then he suggests that poetry

permits the imagination to enlarge the stage [figuratively speaking], and leaves it free play to conceive [for instance] the persons of the gods and their actions as great, and elevated as far above common humanity as ever it pleases. But painting must assume a visible stage the various necessary parts of which become the scale for the persons acting on it, a scale which the eye has immediately before it. (47-48)

In other words, poetry more effectively provokes the imagination to think beyond material constraints and to envision giant and superhuman gods alongside humans. In our mind’s eye, seeing the difference in stature and power is possible, but the visual or material artist, who appeals more to our physical eye, is bound to the confines of his art—namely, the size of the canvas or the block of marble. The limits of the painter’s “stage” inhibit the power of the visual work to provoke our imagination beyond what we physically see. The problem with painting or sculpture, then, is that the relational size between god and human must be concretely demonstrated to the eye and all aspects of the image pinned down; the power of the gods must be shown clearly, rather than hinted at using the figurative techniques of the poet. As a result, what the painter or sculptor creates inhibits the imagination’s powers to create. More than this, Lessing’s argument, with its implications regarding the image and the word, uses similar rhetoric as the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century supporters of closet drama, who championed private experiences with a text over performances on the stage. Thus, his attitude toward the word and the image suggests a kind of closet thinking.

In fact, talking of Sophocles’ *Philoctetes*, Lessing briefly assesses drama, a textual genre meant to be enacted physically on stage. Lessing says,

Can the dramatic poet be included with him in this justification? It is a different impression which is made by the narration of any man's cries from that which is made by the cries themselves. The drama, which is intended for the living artistry of the actor, might on this very ground be held more strictly to the laws of material painting. In him we do not merely suppose that we see and hear a shrieking Philoctetes; we hear and see him actually shriek. The closer the actor comes to Nature in this, the more sensibly must our eyes and ears be offended [...]. Besides, physical pain does not generally excite that degree of sympathy which other evils awaken [...]. They will appear to us spectators comparatively cold. (17-18)

Here Lessing aligns performed drama with sculpture and painting through the sensory element present in reception. Elsewhere, he assesses drama as a written form and seems to align it with epic poetry, suggesting a relation between Philoctetes' suffering and cries and those of Virgil's Laocoön. However, as a form that is intended for performance rather than private reading, drama suffers from similar limitations as the other "visual" arts. What Lessing focuses on is the "seeing" aspect of drama. By seeing the actor in the throes of extreme emotion, Lessing argues that an audience would recoil at its reality, or, as in the above case, an audience would not even be moved one way or the other by the actor's expression of pain. This implies that poetry (and the activity of reading) has the ability to successfully relay these kinds of moments because they are enacted only in the mind's eye: the private and individual imagination can better represent scenes than the physical arts can. "[T]he boundless field of our imagination" (30), as Lessing calls it, inevitably weakens the power and scope of visual and performance art. This attitude privileges the word above all other modes of expression and even insinuates that the imagination is constrained by all other modes. Lessing's essay houses many sentiments that the antitheatricalists would later use; in fact, Coleridge, Hazlitt and Lamb would continue this line of thinking far into the Romantic period (as I will explore further).

In relating Blake to Lessing's ideas, Yvonne M. Carothers states, "Blake could not accept an aesthetic, typified in Lessing's *Laocoön*, which assigns to painting and poetry distinct provinces on the basis of their affinities with empirical space and time. He

then formulated a new aesthetic [...]” (116). With his illuminated works, Blake breaks Lessing’s rules of aestheticism (at least how he idealizes them and envisions them working in the ancient world) and provides a counterpoint to this closeted mentality. Mitchell uses Blake as an example of an artist “who set[s] out deliberately to violate those laws, [...] [and] insist[s] on blurring the genres in a mixed art of poetry and painting” (112). I would argue that he does not just mix genres—he creates a new one.

Blake creates a genre that blatantly stands in two modes of expression at once: written word and visual art. For example, both Blake and Lessing consider the *Laocoön* as a visual and poetic work. However, where Blake reconceptualizes it as a word-image art form, Lessing uses it to assert the power of the word over the image. Blake’s *Laocoön* takes a sculpture, turns it into an engraving—a graphic image—and includes written text, thereby crossing and adapting three genres of art (fig. 1). This work can be reproduced simply as a text, but as soon as one tries to remove the image from the words to allow the words to take priority, the question of how to arrange them arises. The phrases and words are scattered along the work, horizontally, vertically, diagonally; some seem connected to others, while others appear to have no connections. David V. Erdman chooses to arrange the textual components of the work thematically. Finding a connection between certain words, Erdman takes the free-floating phrases and arranges them in typescript for his edition. This is a compromise at best. In the end, how to read or represent Blake’s *Laocoön* poses a challenge that has no easy answers. Erdman’s answer is one of many, but none seems quite right.

Putting aside the editorial problems that go along with any of Blake’s works (if one takes into account the number of copies of each work, variants of certain plates, the cost of reproducing colour designs, what is lost in the reproduction of art, etc.), there are a number of challenges that arise with the *Laocoön* specifically. Where does one begin with this work? Which direction does one take to navigate the text? In which direction should the eye move, given that it cannot move in a consistent direction because Blake uses Hebrew (read from right to left) and English (read from left to right)? How does one connect the image with the text, which consists of numerous statements that range from maxims about art to intertextual references? How does one link each item of text with



Fig. 1. *Laocoön*, copy B, c. 1826-27, Collection of Robert N. Essick. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

another? And how does the image of the ancient sculpture affect the way one reads each textual item?

This work raises questions that apply to all of Blake's illuminated works. By refusing to play by generic rules, Blake's composite art creates fissures in the supposed walls between them. His mythic figures are not confined to the realms of an interior and mental space; rather, they are visually represented, suggesting a bridge between the inner and the outer. For a poet that invests so much in "imagination" as a visionary force, it seems odd that he would base his work in part on physical vision and the externalization of his characters and their circumstances. Yet, he does precisely this, reinforcing the idea that perhaps there is more to visionary experience for Blake than the interior spaces of the mind. With Blake's works, our own imagination is not allowed complete "free play," as Lessing puts it. We do have moments that remain closeted in the sphere of the written word and private reading, yet Blake also offers us moments that step into the sphere of visual art and external representation visible to the physical eye, thus allowing his art form to take on a performative identity.

As several scholars have noted (e.g., Mitchell, Behrendt, and Morris Eaves) when one picks up a work by William Blake, one does not simply "read" the work. Eaves emphasizes that the term "'reader' is a grossly inadequate term for Blake's audience" ("Introduction: To Paradise" 2). In fact, the question of audience is as thorny as the question of genre. In *The Making of English Reading Audiences, 1790-1832*, Jon Klancher argues that we cannot simply dismiss the way various authors and media target and construct a particular kind of audience. Although he suggests that "audience-making" is a product of periodicals because they were (and still are) geared toward particular audiences (4), the idea of audience-making is also relevant to Blake: the way he creates his art suggests a specific kind of "audience-making," one that necessarily involves both reading and looking—and something more. For example, Bentley emphasizes the "seeing" aspect of Blake's works, not just the "reading" aspect ("Blake's Works as Performances" 321). Seeing, and not only the vision of the imagination, plays an important role in Blake's works. The designs are not components that can be ignored if one is to fully engage with Blake's texts; they do not simply illustrate the action defined in the poem. They both support and destabilize the narrative; they both tell the story with

the poem and tell their own story at the same time. As a result, they cannot (as Grant and Mitchell point out) be relegated to a subordinate position in the interpretive act.

Given the complex process involved in engaging with one of Blake's illuminated works, what kind of audience is suggested by his chosen medium? Hagstrum assesses this multimedia form as one geared to multiple senses, particularly "ear and eye" (139). He states,

Blake wanted his message to attack the whole man—all at once. He must have thought it served his purpose as a prophet to invade man's soul by the venues of more than one sense, and he makes his psychological assault frontal, the better to accomplish his purpose. If under Urizen man's senses have been starved, the art that fed more than one was likelier than poetry alone to bring nourishment to the soul and to arouse the dormant faculties. (139)

Poetry alone does not accomplish what poetry and painting (and engraving) do together, primarily because separately each one does not offer as expansive a mode of engagement as they do in combination. On the one hand, as readers, we read the linguistic signifiers and focus on the narrative, diction, figurative language, and literary conventions. On the other hand, as viewers, we look at the pictorial depictions and focus on colour, size, composition, and visual art conventions. Surely though these are not two completely separate and mutually exclusive processes we force together to form an interpretation. Mitchell argues that "text and design in Blake's books do not have univocal functions regulated by the predictable binary oppositions we associate with visual and verbal communication" ("Image and Text in *Songs*" 44). With Blake, we cannot clearly separate the linguistic level from the pictorial level because he presents the two at once. The words themselves are woven into the designs and vice versa. Behrendt asserts that a "meta-text [...] emerges from Blake's illuminated pages" ("Something in My Eye" 94). He explains:

Blake's illuminated poems generate what is essentially a 'third text', a meta-text that partakes of both the verbal and the visual texts, but that is neither the sum of, nor identical with either of, those two texts. The verbal and visual texts stimulate different varieties of aesthetic, intellectual and

affective responses which are firmly grounded in the disciplinary natures of the two media and in the tradition and ‘vocabulary’ (or reference-systems) particular to each. (81)

Behrendt makes a persuasive argument. He does not set up an opposition between the two media. Rather, he acknowledges the different responses that each medium can and does elicit from an audience, while stating that somehow these various responses overlap. I dislike Behrendt’s use of the terms “meta-text” and “third text” because they betray a kind of logocentrism; however, I agree that Blake’s illuminated works do achieve this third, or extra, level, while maintaining literary and pictorial levels. My response to Behrendt’s “meta-text” is to envision a dramatic space that the literary and pictorial elements work together to produce.⁸

Indeed, Blake’s illuminated works not only exhibit a performative or theatrical energy, but they also function as kinds of dramatic performances, particularly in the way they present word and image together rather than clearly separating them. Throughout this chapter, I will use *America: A Prophecy*⁹ as my main example for analysis as I progress through my points. This work has a balanced design-to-text ratio, having no full-page text plates (as we find in many of the other works) and no full-page design plates

⁸ Makdisi offers an alternative definition of Blake’s illuminated works. He states, “It may be useful to think of the illuminated books not as finite texts, contained within a closed circuit of interpretation as defined by some cage of mutually illustrative (and hence reinforcing) words and images, but rather as *virtual* texts, constituted by, even suspended in, the indefinite and expansive gap between words and images – a gap kept resolutely alive by the open nature of Blake’s work” (“The Political Aesthetic of Blake’s Images” 111). Makdisi’s aim is to keep interpretation flowing and unlimited, to keep it from being a way to assert absolute claims about Blake’s art. The “gap” allows us to constantly renegotiate our views and ideas about the illuminated works, foreclosing the possibility of ossification. However, like Behrendt, Makdisi too uses a term, “virtual text,” that emphasizes the linguistic over the pictorial.

⁹ There are more than a dozen copies of *America*, first printed in 1793, followed by further printings in 1795, 1807, and 1821 (and perhaps even a final posthumous printing). Some copies are richly coloured as is the case with copy A (part of the second printing of the work in 1795), while others remain uncoloured as is the case with copy E (from the first printing).

(except for the frontispiece).¹⁰ *America* makes a fitting case study because it has all the elements I highlight in this chapter. At the level of textual content, it includes a number of dramatic or spectacular moments and a number of performing bodies, such the description of “the fierce rushing of th’inhabitants together” who “all rush together in the night in wrath and raging fire” (14.12, 19, E 56). In terms of the spectacle of the designs, Blake depicts many amazing scenes: a dragon chasing an old man through the air (pl. 4), Orc emerging from flames (pl. 10; fig. 2), a young man riding an enormous bird in flight, while children ride a huge serpent below (pl. 11), a woman amidst the waves having her liver eaten by an eagle, while beneath her lies a chained man about to be devoured by various aquatic creatures (pl. 13; fig. 3). Furthermore, the pictorial art in *America* depicts a number of bodies in motion (though Lessing would disagree about the ability of visual art to show moving bodies) in addition to bodies at rest. For example, plate 5 depicts contorted bodies wrestling with serpents, bodies hunched over in pain, and bodies dancing through the air (fig. 4). These bodies display an energy that is not surprising given Orc’s display of revolutionary energy throughout the poetry and designs. In the text of two copies of *America*, Blake also includes a Bard whom he identifies as a singer and musician—a performer—at the end of the Preludium. Typically equated with a poet, the Bard here does not use writing as his medium of choice; instead, he employs the aural-oral one of song and music.

In addition to these performing bodies and spectacles, the plates integrate word and design to an almost seamless degree, particularly those from copy A thanks to the vivid colouring. The words become part of the image and the image becomes part of the words. In most cases, the strong and deep colours of the plates cover the whole plate, not just the design areas (as opposed to the text spaces), further uniting word and image. There is, thus, no visual or implied division between word and design in the majority of the plates of *America* (e.g., title page, pl. 3-5, 7-15). For instance, on plate 8, Urizen sits

¹⁰ Where I see a more equal relation between word and image, D. W. Dörrbecker finds a more hierarchical relation: “In general, the text on the *America* plates has been compositionally subordinated to the pictorial elements, which here regulate the entire layout of the pages”; for the most part, “the figures tend visually to dominate the text, so that the poet-artist’s description of the book as a series of ‘designs’ does not seem too far off the mark” (74).



Fig. 2. *America a Prophecy*, copy E, plate 10, object 12, 1793, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

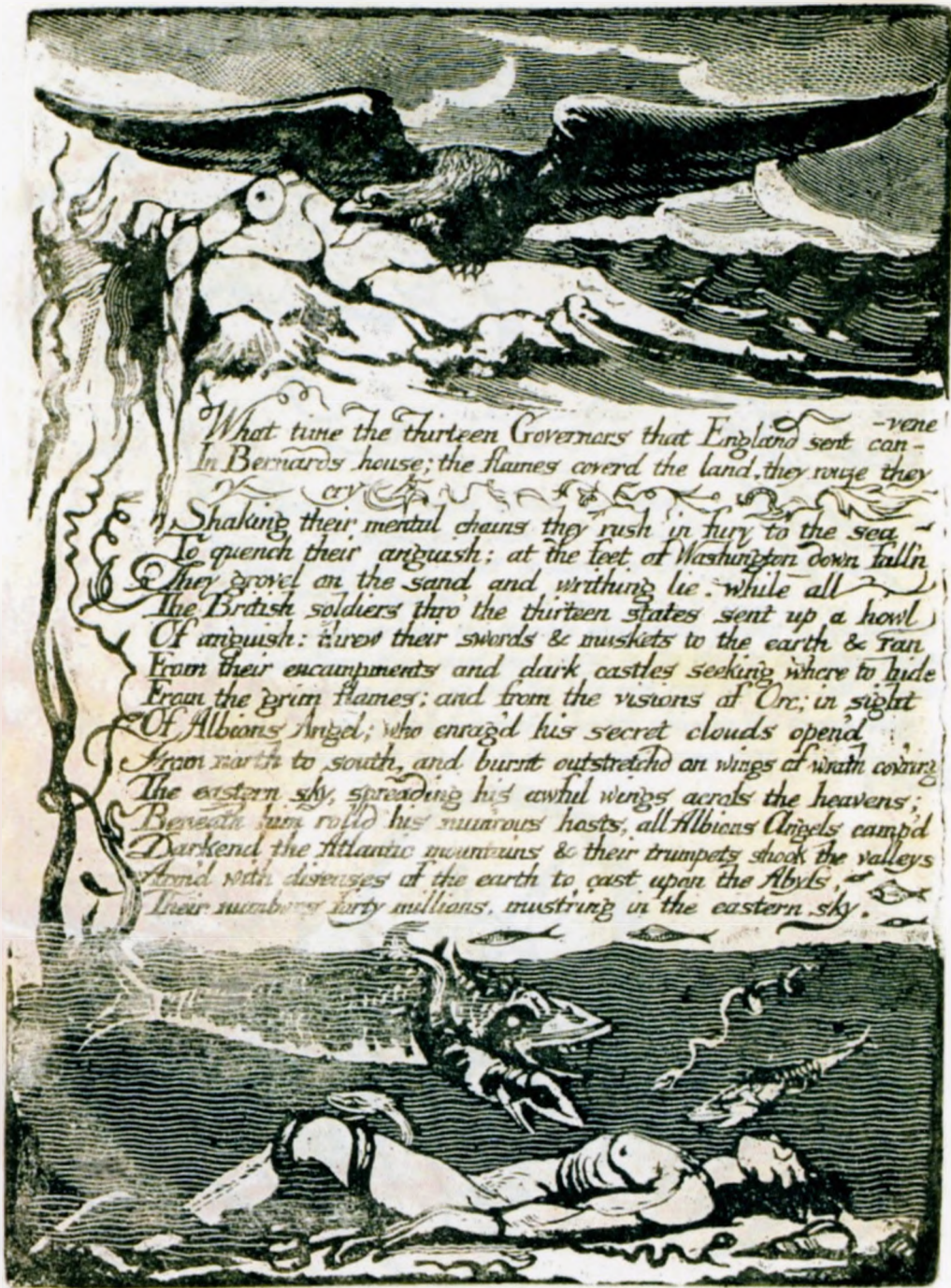


Fig. 3. *America a Prophecy*, copy E, plate 13, object 15, 1793, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.



Fig. 4. *America a Prophecy*, copy E, plate 5, object 7, 1793, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

above the words on a cloud and they in turn press upon the waves so that the use of blue throughout unites the words to sky and sea; on plate 13, the text occupies the underwater space in between the woman above who is having her liver pecked out and the man below who is being consumed by various sea creatures; and plates 10 and 15 show flames rising through the text.

Besides many of the usual swirls and squiggles that Blake adds to some of the letters, he depicts words and images transitioning into one another. The Preludium depicts a number of integrations of word and image (mostly of the garden variety) (pl. 1-2; figs. 5 & 6). On plate 3, which begins with large letters spelling *A Prophecy*, the “‘A’ begins in a lily [...] and ends in ripe wheat” (Erdman, *The Illuminated Blake* 141), and the letters of “Prophecy” sprout or twist into lilies as well as vines and bud-like objects, as if the words have the power to generate nature and as if, conversely, the natural images have the power to generate language (fig. 7). The words and images also act on one another in other ways. For example, on plates 2 and 9, a ray of light shines onto the words, highlighting certain parts of the text while leaving other parts in shadow. On plate 16, Urizen’s hair blends with his tears to form a waterfall, which cascades over the text (fig. 8). He sits upon the text bent over in a supplicant position as the water pours forth from him and runs over and along the words—as if the words form a barrier like rock through which the graphic streams of water cannot penetrate. All of these examples serve to show the various ways that Blake forces us to see word and image together, acting on one another, rather than as separate spheres of engagement.

Besides the spectacles, the bodies in motion, and the lack of clear separation between word and image in *America*, the element of unrepeatability also connect the work (and all the illuminated works) to performance, especially theatrical performance. Saree Makdisi states,

the illuminated books can perhaps be thought of, even heuristically, as a performance to be repeatedly recreated without the intervention of a controlling principle designed to guarantee its outcome or meaning—or at least without *absolute* principles, since what we encounter in Blake’s work is not really sheer dissemination but rather a series of repetitions through preexisting channels of reiteration. (*William Blake* 175)

Preludium



Fig. 5. *America a Prophecy*, copy E, plate 1, object 3, 1793, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.



Fig. 6. *America a Prophecy*, copy E, plate 2, object 4, 1793, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.



Fig. 7. *America a Prophecy*, copy E, plate 3, object 5, 1793, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

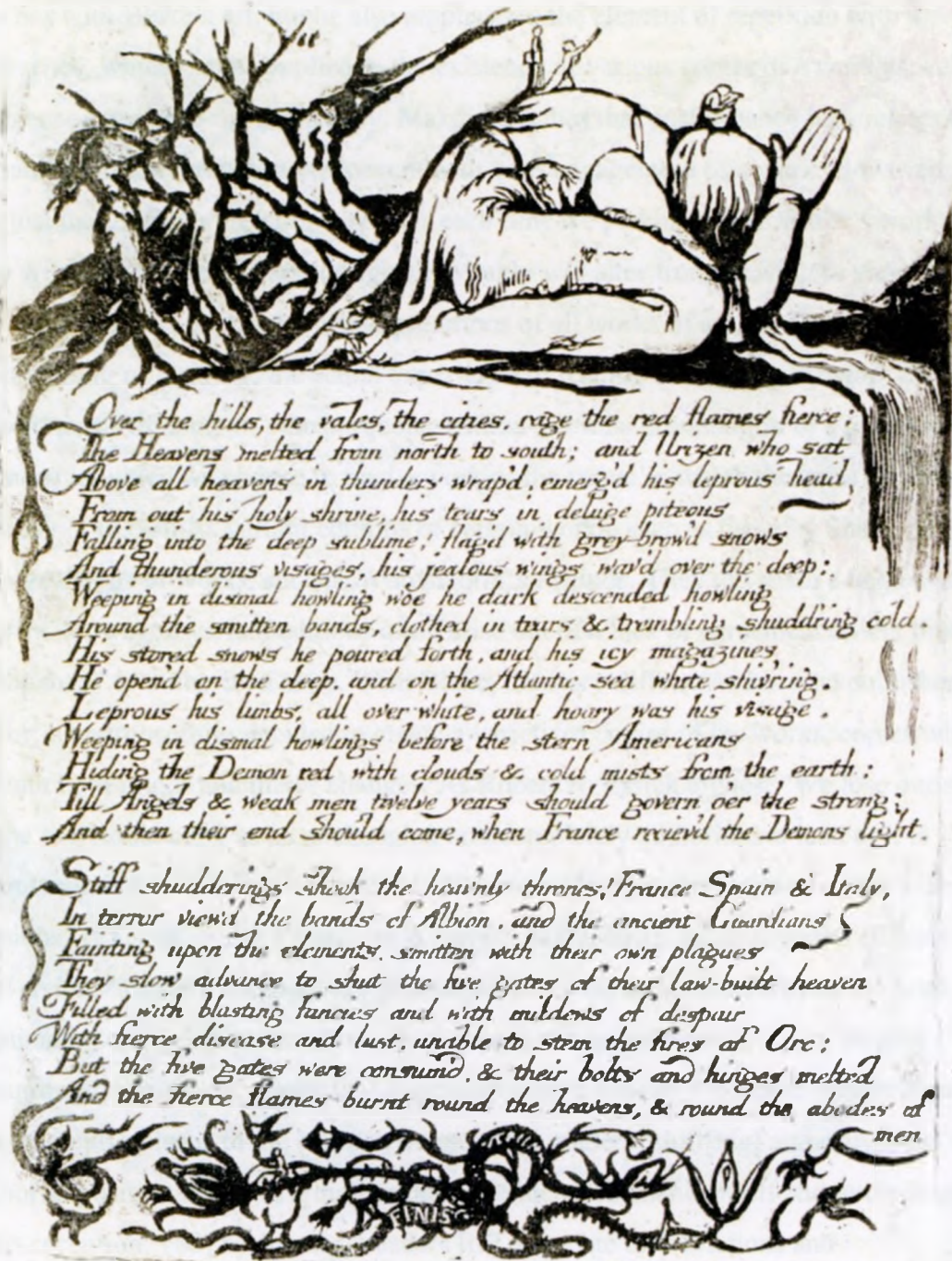


Fig. 8. *America a Prophecy*, copy E, plate 16, object 18, 1793, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

Makdisi not only emphasizes the experiential, or in-the-momentness, of the interaction one has with Blake's art, but he also emphasizes the element of repetition with a difference, which can be applied to the existence of various copies of a work as well as to each encounter with the same copy. Makdisi implies that performance here relates to the variability in interpretation that occurs with each engagement of a work. However, it is not just that our interpretation *can* alter each time we pick up one of Blake's works; the way we navigate the text and designs inevitably *will* alter from viewing to viewing.

While it is true that our interpretations of all works of art can and do change with each reading or viewing, the actual experience of reading or viewing the work changes only in terms of context—the particular edition (with its presentation of a particular version) in which we choose to read a work or the venue in which the art is exhibited. This is not to dismiss variant editions of certain works, such as those by Shakespeare, or even revisions of works, such as Wordsworth's *Prelude*. They too share a degree of alterity. However, variant editions often arise out of a lack of agreement on the final "published" or authorized copy. With Blake, the story differs. As his own publisher and editor, he purposefully decided to create a variety of copies of his works, copies which contain both minor and major changes. As Robert N. Essick argues, "We lose our sense of the individual copy as an unchanging and completely authoritative icon as it is recontextualized back into its material and temporal origins and seen as one of many versions" ("Teaching the Variations in *Songs*" 93). John H. Jones reasserts Blake's subversion: "Blake's bookmaking process removes the stasis and fixity of the book by eliminating exact duplication from the mechanical reproduction of a text, thereby disrupting the authorial power that exact duplication fosters" ("Printed Performance" 79). This disruption leads to the empowerment of the reader, "shift[ing] authority away from authorial position and return[ing] emphasis to the performance itself and to the moment of its reception" (88) by forcing "readers [to] negotiate the variations and inconsistencies" and giving "readers [...] the ability to create the story as they interpret it" (74).

While agreeing with the central claims of these scholars—specifically the experiential moment of reception—I reposition Blake away from the context of print

culture toward the theatrical culture of the time. As Susan Bennett points out in her analysis of theatre audiences,

The literary, as well as the filmic, text is a fixed and finished product which cannot be directly affected by its audiences. [...] In the theatre every reader is involved in the making of the play. Indeed, the audience of even the most 'culinary' theatre is involved in a reciprocal relationship which can change the quality and success of a performance. No two theatrical performances can ever be the same precisely because of this audience involvement. (20-21)

With Blake's illuminated works, a comparable kind of audience interaction occurs. As Tristanne Connolly recognizes, "[T]he rearrangements of the texts, and subtle changes such as colour from copy to copy, provide a kind of movement, parallel to the variations which accompany repeated, live dramatic performances" (208). She takes Bentley's and Jones's applications of performance to Blake's copies further by placing the experience of them squarely in a theatrical context. These changes from performance to performance (or copy to copy) also help to create a multi-layered idea of what the particular work is. Each copy calls attention to every other copy and every change Blake made to it, perhaps as the sum of performances in a show's run creates the idea of the show itself.

Moreover, performance has the following qualities: it is unique, evanescent, experiential, and unrepeatable. These qualities also describe an interaction with Blake's works. An audience member can attend all the performances of a play staged by a particular theatre-company, and each of those performances can even involve the same actors for the whole run, but each and every performance will be different due to the response of the audience at any given moment, the delivery of lines and the execution of the action, and the way the audience focuses and refocuses its attention as the show unfolds before them. Similarly, with Blake's illuminated works, each encounter changes, depending not only on which copy we happen to hold but also on the way in which we set the design-text interplay in motion. On the one hand, like Connolly, we can consider copies—with all their differences and changes—as separate performances of the same work, like the various performances that make up a show's run. On the other hand, we can also consider each and every engagement with the same copy as separate

performances because Blake forces us to navigate a more fluid pictorial and linguistic space, each time tracing a trajectory that cannot be repeated from experience to experience.

Inevitably, our eyes do not make the same journey over the text and designs with each encounter. We look and read in different combinations and with a different degree of overlap. Even with plates that seem to draw fairly distinct divisions between graphic and verbal spaces, our eyes still go back and forth between text and image differently each time. Our focus can change from time to time, and we can correlate or contrast or juxtapose the text and designs in any number of ways. Referring to Blake's illuminated books, Mitchell asks, "How do we get from Blake's images to his texts? What are the routes [...] of references between visual and verbal signs?" ("Image and Text in *Songs*" 43). There are no simple answers to these questions.

The navigation becomes particularly complex when Blake includes several graphic images on various parts of a plate, creating a fundamentally experiential mode of reception for his works, one akin to theatrical spectatorship. They raise (as with the *Laocoön* engraving) a critical question: Where do I begin? For instance, the Preludium can be viewed in parts, as one single plate followed by a second separate plate or as a diptych (figs. 5 & 6). The design, which boxes in three sides of the text (in the shape of a "C") on the first plate, depicts a number of moments that may or may not be connected to each other or to the text. When we look at this plate, we must choose which direction we allow our eyes to travel around the image. Do we begin with the worm at the bottom, leading to a hunched over male figure, then to what appear to be body parts morphing into the roots of the tree along the side of the plate, then to a prostrate and chained figure at the top, and finally to a couple who seem to flee in sadness and terror? Or do we begin with the fleeing couple and make our way down to the worm? Are these different scenes sequential or simultaneous? If we take in the two plates at once, do we associate the figure emerging from the ground on the second plate with any of the figures on plate 1, or is he separate and isolated?

Furthermore, the visual images that Blake grafts to the words place different degrees of emphasis on certain words and also lead our eyes in different directions, confounding them by leading them up and down as well as left and right. For instance, on

the second plate, the words “I know thee,” which begin the shadowy daughter’s speech, have a prominent vine swooping around the “I” that leads downwards to the final line of the speech: “This is eternal death [...]” (2.7, 2.17, E 52). However, the vine also implicitly leads us down toward the image of a young man emerging from the ground, suggesting a juxtaposition between eternal death and resurrection to eternal life.

Because of the nature of the illustrated works, we do not merely read the lines on the page from left to right; rather, we skip ahead and go back, depending on which way the words and images push and pull us. Building on Bentley’s view of each copy of Blake’s works as unique, I argue that each encounter with, for example, *America* leads to a unique experience, wherein what we experience is a different performance every time, a performance in the sense of staged dramatic performance. As an art, theatre gives the audience the greatest degree of visual choice. When you look at the *mise en scène*, you can direct your attention toward any one of its elements at a given moment: lighting, setting/props, costume/make-up, or the actors’ performances on stage. Which character do you focus on—the one speaking or the one reacting? Do you zoom in (metaphorically) on an expression of a particular actor? Or, do you take in the larger interaction of all the characters at once? These decisions will not only be different for each member of the audience, but also for each time that member watches a performance. No one viewing experience can mimic another. Similarly, each encounter with *America* will provide a different experience than the time before, unlike reading a conventional text. In this respect, our relation to the work is constantly shifting, mirroring a theatre audience’s engagement with the spectacle on the stage.

This performative unrepeatability also applies to the characters’ dialogue, another important aspect of the illuminated works that functions in a performative manner in the context of pictorial space. For example, plate 8 of *America* is particularly dramatic (fig. 9). It graphically depicts Urizen among the clouds on the top half of the plate, while the bottom half of it verbally depicts Orc’s speech in which he first identifies himself. The plate’s design suggests an “ironic juxtaposition” of these two characters (K. Easson 44). Urizen, with arms wide open, appears to unfold Orc’s speech in the space below, confusing the dynamic between the two characters. Not only does the plate succeed in creating ambiguity concerning the distinct identities of two antithetical characters—



Fig. 9. *America a Prophecy*, copy E, plate 8, object 10, 1793, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

Urizen and Orc, reason and energy—it also succeeds in showing us the dramatic side of Blake. In seeing an image of Urizen and “hearing” Orc’s voice simultaneously, we can take the next imaginative or visionary leap: just as the two characters engage in the poem, we engage image and text in a performative reading. In some sense, we enact the drama’s tension of opposites as we try to reconcile text and image. That Blake uses text and image to play out a drama of opposites is especially probable when we consider the complementary plate 10 (fig. 2), where Orc emerges from flames in a pose that echoes Urizen’s emerging from the clouds, implying rival forces challenging each other.

Dialogue and its related idea of exchange also create further disjunctions and tensions, and performative resonances. For example, the previous speech (pl. 7), which provokes Orc’s response, belongs not to Urizen but to Albion’s Angel; the design of Orc emerging from the flames (pl. 10) occurs two plates after the Urizen plate (pl. 8) where Orc speaks; and plate 10 verbally describes Albion’s Angel who has just spoken on the previous plate (pl. 9). The textual speaker and the character graphically depicted do not correspond in these cases. These odd juxtapositions and tensions not only show the dynamic energy of the plates, but they also suggest that the performance of the scene that we construct can take several shapes—with varying meanings produced as a result of image and text interaction. This kind of dialogue reinforces Jon Mee’s assessment of Blake’s attitude toward the exchange of ideas. Mee finds that Blake offers a “more conflictual model of conversation” (“A Little Less Conversation” 139), which encompasses “the utopian possibilities of conversation, and its capacities to facilitate ‘contraries’ that could be productive of progress” (135). Mee adds, “[T]here may not always be the sympathetic answering call imagined by the sentimentalized discourse of conversation. Blake’s sense of conversation as a bumpy ride is predicated on the idea of risk organized around the pause between utterances out of which may emerge contradiction or even silence” (138). Urizen and Orc participate in a verbal and visual exchange, in which they push each other and their ideas, continuously evolving but not submitting. The vigorous energy that emerges from Blake’s illuminated works, thanks in part to the exertion of the audience with each engagement, provokes difference and change, not sameness and stasis.

In their articles in *Unnam'd Forms: Blake and Textuality*, Robert N. Essick and Stephen Carr assess the relationship between the various copies of one of Blake's works. Essick counters Carr's claims that in Blake "each 'copy' of a work differs from all others. This radical variability is embedded in the material processes of producing illuminated prints, and thus always enters into the verbal-visual exchanges generated within each page" (182). Carr's point is that an interpretation of Blake's work often cannot reside in an overall and consistent reading, as he states much criticism attempts to do. Essick counters the idea of "radical variability" in Blake's process; he explains that Blake's method is not quite as unique in terms of the variation produced as Carr makes it out to be. Conventional printing methods also yield important variations. Rather, he explains, "Our attention should focus on neither identity nor difference alone, nor on them as absolute opposites, but on their unfolding relationship in the production and perception of images" ("How Blake's Body Means" 205).

While Essick does provide a convincing counter-argument to Carr's point, I disagree with a related point that Essick makes in trying to show that differences do not necessarily force the kind of changes of meaning that some of us want to invest in them. He argues,

Blake's hand and eye (or his wife's) directed each stroke of pen or brush, but individual differences between one copy and another, coloured and sold years before, cannot be attributed to the artist's intentions unless we invent a 'Blake' whose art is based on memory. All we can say is that Blake selected a mode of production and handled it in a way that allowed differences among finished impressions to be invented, executed, and proliferated by the medium itself. (207-08)

Here, I disagree with Essick; of course Blake would not necessarily remember every detail of a work, nor would he be able to recreate an exact replica given his hand-painting technique, but there are many changes, even in colour, that alter the tone and mood of a work (not to mention the more obvious changes of order and of deletion or addition regarding plates or parts of plates). Significantly, Blake chose a mode of production that would inevitably result in change, and the fact that he did not produce a template for all his works as a kind of original to follow every time seems to suggest that the changes

from copy to copy are important and part of his overall project. The result is that Blake intentionally broadens the range of possible interpretations through his method of producing his art.

Because colour impacts the tone of a plate, and even the work as a whole, while also having a bearing on interpretation, changes in colour from copy to copy cannot be ignored as secondary or unimportant, and it too functions to produce a varied experience of the works. Some copies remain uncoloured, while others are thoroughly saturated with colour. The addition of colour incorporates another level of meaning that is not present in the sepia copies. One can trace moods and character associations based solely on colour. For instance, some plates in copies of *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* include bright sunny colours (see, for instance, copies B, C, and R), while others are coloured using a rather dark and ominous palette (see, for instance, copies L, Z, and AA). Beginning the section of *Songs of Innocence* with colours that elicit happiness and warmth versus fear and coldness is, in my opinion, a big change. In fact, this kind of change provokes a shift in the meaning the work produces or in how the audience performs the works. Likewise, in the title page to *America*, Blake makes similar palette changes. The title page shifts from being dominated by blues in copy M to mostly red and pink and yellow hues in copy O (fig. 10) to a mixture of the two in copy A. Because Blake associates Urizen with the sky and sea and Orc with fire, blue would seem to represent Urizen and his repressive elements, while red (and yellow to some degree) would seem to represent Orc and his revolutionary elements (as pl. 8 and 10 clearly suggest in copy A). If this is the case, then copy M offers an *America* that seems to have Urizen as its ruling principle, while copy O offers one that has Orc as its ruling principle—and copy A offers a combination of the two. Each copy shapes our initial encounter with the work in a different way, changing the lens through which we view the remaining pages. By means of colour and texture, the designs take on a complex affective quality, while at the same time attaching symbolic meaning to plates by way of character association.

The relationship between design and audience interaction also emerges in terms of additions and deletions between copies. In *America*, the most significant change textually speaking concerns the four lines about the Bard. In all but two copies of

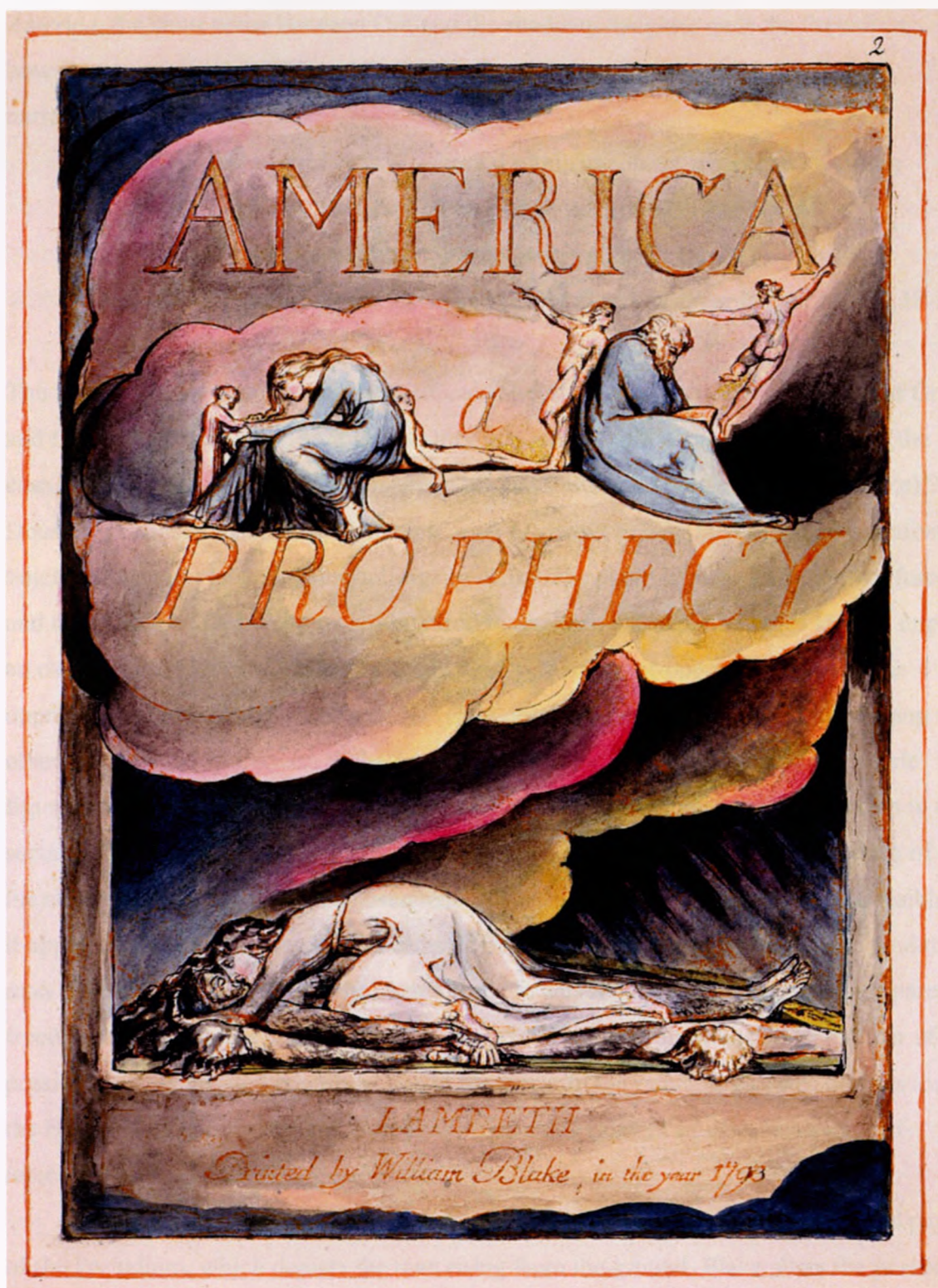


Fig. 10. *America a Prophecy*, copy O, title page, object 2, 1821, Fitzwilliam Museum. Reproduction by permission of the Syndics of The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

America, the short scene between Orc and the shadowy daughter ends the Preludium; however, in copies A (1795) and O (1821), it ends with a curious moment of meta-narrative and self-reflexivity:

The stern Bard ceas'd, asham'd of his own song; enraged he swung
 His harp aloft sounding, then dash'd its shining frame against
 A ruin'd pillar in glittering fragments; silent he turn'd away,
 And wanderd down the vales of Kent in sick & drear lamentings. (2.18-21,
 E 52)

The framing of the Bard's outburst seems to suggest that he has just been singing of Orc and the shadowy daughter, so it is this story that shames and enrages him. If this is the case, though, then what are we to make of all that follows his self-exile from the work? Does the prophecy that follows belong to him, or does it belong to yet another narrative voice? How many layers of storytelling are there? The poem depicts revolutionary forces and the freeing of Orc: Why would this lead to the Bard's shame and rage? Does it imply an overall failure of the Urizen-Orc cycle, the cycle of tyrant-oppressor in which the oppressor fights back and overturns the tyrant only to become one himself, oppressing others in his turn? Moreover, Blake engraves these four lines beneath the young male figure pulling himself up from the ground. As he rises from the ground, he looks up to the section of the Preludium that relates Orc's breaking free from his prison, his seizing of the shadowy daughter, and her subsequent epiphany. When the four lines remain visible, it appears as if the young man pulls himself from the Bard's words. Are the Bard and this man (potentially Orc) one and the same? How do we reconcile the young man's apparent freedom and the Bard's destruction of his harp? All of these questions add a number of possible dimensions and complications to the work. In the remaining copies of *America*, the Bard's lines are masked or deleted, nullifying this element of dissatisfaction and rejection.

Blake makes significant changes to the graphic space as well. On the second page of the Preludium, which depicts the man rising from the ground, Blake alters the position of the sun. In copy A, the sun rises and offers its rays on the right side of the page along its borders and just behind the rocky ground from which Orc emerges (here, the lines of the Bard are present). In copy M, the sun sits just behind Orc's head as he pulls himself

up, and it offers no beaming rays (the lines of the Bard are masked). And in copy O, the sun, composed of clear and firm strokes, rises just behind Orc, creating a halo around his head, just as he emerges from grassy ground (the Bard's lines are visible) (fig. 11). The addition of a halo-like sun behind Orc here is especially interesting given the fact that, in the same copy, Urizen also has an obvious halo around his head on plate 10. What does Blake suggest about the symbolism of the halo by applying it equally to Orc and Urizen? What does this equation suggest about the two characters, and how we are to view them?

Blake makes changes to the expression of his characters as well. Copy O presents us with an Orc who appears resolute and almost defiant as he looks up toward the sky (presumably where Urizen resides). His eyebrows curve in half moons, while his eyes narrow somewhat. However, copy M depicts Orc with a somewhat more fearful expression: his eyebrows are straighter, with a slight bend in the middle, and he does not squint. His eyes are open and appear to express a sort of plea—certainly a much less combative and less dominant expression than the one in Copy O.

My final example of a variation from copy to copy pertains to the final plate of the work (fig. 8), and, like the preceding examples, it highlights the experiential basis of audience engagement at the heart of the illuminated works. The image of a serpent, a creature that signifies Orc, entwined in a bunch of vines runs along the bottom of the page. The text above the serpent heralds the coming of Orc and the fires of revolution to Europe after a twelve-year repression by Urizen (the time between the American and French Revolutions). In copy E, F, and A, the word "FINIS" is imprinted on the serpent, signaling the end of the work. However, in copies O and M, no such signal appears on the serpent. In the other three copies, the declaration of the end could signify the end of the Urizen-Orc (tyrant-oppressor) struggle, with Orc emerging as the clear victor. In this case, the work may be heralding the French Revolution as an event that not only ends this historical moment, but also begins a completely new story or order of things. In the other two copies, however, the missing declaration suggests a more open-ended reading in which the cycle may very well continue: here, the French Revolution signals an uncertain future. In either case, the inclusion or exclusion of this one little word generates a significant change in the way we view the impact of the prophecy and points to its performativity.



Fig. 11. *America a Prophecy*, copy O, plate 2, object 4, 1821, Fitzwilliam Museum.
 Reproduction by permission of the Syndics of The Fitzwilliam Museum, Cambridge.

Demonstrating the variation of Blake's illuminated works shows how they construct a spectatorship like that of the theatre, which has a significantly different engagement with a performance from night to night, rather than readers of print or viewers of painting. Omissions and additions also sometimes relate to sequence, the order of the plates in the work. Many copies of *America*, including all of those on *The William Blake Archive*, do not include changes of this nature; however, many other works do. For instance, *The First Book of Urizen*, as John H. Jones explains, consists of "eight copies [...], yet none of the copies are identical. Not only are the full-page illustrations placed in different orders in the different copies, but the plates of text also appear in different positions in all but two copies" ("Printed Performance" 79). Examining the sequence of plates in copy A and copy D, one notices many differences. Limiting examples to those that relate first and foremost to sequence (rather than deletions or additions), but keeping in mind that changes of colour and specific design inevitably arise, I focus on three examples. In copy A, the title page and Preludium are followed by two full-page designs (with no text), while in copy D the textual narrative commences right after the Preludium. In copy A, the audience is faced with an image of Urizen that differs significantly from his depiction on the title page, where he is writing or drawing or transcribing. On the third plate of the work, he sits facing us with his knees up and hands hanging down by his feet in chains (pl. 22, obj. 3). At this point, Blake gives us very little verbal or visual information for deciphering this plate. However, he inserts the same image much later in the work in copy D (obj. 20), where it comes after Los has attempted to bind Urizen. By placing the image well before the audience has even heard of Los's actions, copy A gives the audience more freedom in creating meaning for this specific plate. Forestalling the narrative with two full-page designs has the effect of giving these plates, as well as the visual field, added emphasis, as if they function as a key to what follows.

The second of these shifting plates depicts the birth of Urizen's four children, who emerge from the elements (pl. 24). In copy A, the audience has no text to draw on to help create meaning (obj. 4). As in a kind of pantomime or dumb show, we must make do without words. In copy D, however, Blake places this plate (obj. 22) after the textual description of the birth, making a direct connection between verbal and visual realms (albeit the design lacks two of the four figures in this copy, creating some confusion). In

copy A, we are encouraged to connect the chained Urizen image to the four figures emerging from land, sea, sky and flames/sun through juxtaposition, but without a sense of how these figures relate. Likewise, the end of the work also significantly alters between these copies, but this time the sequence differs only very slightly: the final two plates are reversed. In copy D, the final plate includes both text and design. The narrative ends with Urizen's children abandoning the world, and we see Urizen trapped in a net. In copy A, this plate is the penultimate plate, while the final plate is a full-page design of Urizen, whose back is to us as he looks in the opposite direction with his hands by his head. He does not find himself trapped; rather, he is free as he moves away from us, indicating that somehow liberation is possible, even in a text that has been all about the binding and restricting of others (though his turn away from the audience does complicate an absolute reading). In copy D, Urizen ends the work caught in a net, facing us, suggesting a hopeless situation.

I argue that copy A emphasizes the visual realm by deferring the narrative with two full-page designs that have little or no immediate textual context and by concluding the work with a full-page design. The visual guides the audience's initial and final engagement with the work in copy A, unlike copy D, where the verbal does. Jones rightly states, "Rather than one book in eight copies, there seem to be, rather, eight different books of *Urizen*, each with its own, somewhat different version of the Urizen story" (79). Experiencing each copy of the book parallels the theatrical experience of both an adaptation of a known text and a staging that changes either by choice or by chance from performance to performance, resulting in a different entity each time. The theatrical or performance-based elements of the illuminated works position Blake not only in the context of the stage more generally, but also within his own historical moment more specifically. I argue that Blake's designs externalize the private and interior space that opens up during a reading of his texts. They give shape to the characters and events, and rather than restricting, they help us go beyond what we imagine. In the end, we (the audience) alone are not responsible for envisioning these elements.

Blake's brand of generic formulation—intertwining word and image—utilizes both the interior sphere of the reading imagination and the exterior sphere of materialization and sight. As Erdman says of the illuminated work or the "poem-picture,"

“The artifact only opens the sensory doors to the mental theater” (“*America: New Expanses*” 93). He does not expound on the relevance of this performative quality except to refer to the “visualizable drama” (95) of the designs. His analysis of the illuminated works does not concern itself with the nature of their dramatic performance, but rather with the “new expanses” (111) or apocalyptic vision that the interplay of text and design yields. Nevertheless, this single brief reference to the opening up of the mental theater to the senses encapsulates well the way the interior space is transformed into the exterior and suggests an implicit connection to debates of reading versus performance in the Romantic period. With respect to Blake’s illuminated works, on the one hand, we envision the spaces of the text, and, on the other, we are presented with a vision of the text. In the designs, we behold Urizen, Los, Enitharmon, and Orc and see them with our physical eye, not just our mind’s eye. In this respect, Blake differs from other poets, whose work is restricted to language and the written text (excluding those editions that are illustrated by other people), and from other visual artists, whose work is restricted to the pictorial image. He unites the two spheres in one medium—the illuminated works.

I argue that this distinctively Blakean genre finds itself between reading and the stage in a time—late eighteenth and early nineteenth century—when the value of performance versus reading was hotly debated. Drama, very much at the heart of the debate between the closet and the stage, at first sight seems alien to the Blakean method mainly because Blake did not write much that can be classified technically as drama and because his designs seem less dynamic than actors on a stage (given the fundamental differences between the painted image and the performing body). However, his images gesture toward performance (a combination of the corporeal/material and the aural and oral) by over-stepping the boundary enclosing silent reading. His images sometimes perform parts of the text and sometimes things not contained in the text, suggesting a connection not only to such performance-based media as tableaux, mime, and attitudes, but also to staged drama. This connection situates Blake in a dialogue from which he is generally thought to be far removed. He breaks down the opposition between reading/interiority and performance/exteriority by embedding his work in both.

Morris Eaves takes up this question of interiority-exteriority and frames it in the context of the imagination (mental activity) and engraving (physical activity). Basing his

claims on what Blake has written in his treatises, Eaves interrogates the terms “conception” and “execution” to argue that Blake, despite his material productions, was first and foremost concerned with the powers of the mind. With regard to “the correlation of the mental and material phases of production” (*The Counter-Arts Conspiracy* 177), Eaves argues, “Blake’s value system is strongly at work orienting the items in the series toward conception and away from execution, toward the ‘Mental’ and away from the ‘Corporeal’ [...]. His investment in the bifurcation of mind from nature is simply too powerful to allow mental invention to be made interchangeable with physical expression” (179). Eaves views Blake as an artist who values interior processes much more than exterior manifestations. Eaves explicitly positions himself in opposition to Robert Essick and Joseph Viscomi, who, to varying degrees, find Blake’s views about mental concepts and material artistic production more equivalent than hierarchical. Eaves counters, “As attractive as these transactional models of creativity are to [...] the romantic spirit, they risk sentimentality and anachronism. They tend to sentimentalize ‘the medium’ [...]” (184).

Essick questions how Eaves’s perspective measures up against the pictorial element of Blake’s works:

But what about pictures? Do they begin as mental concepts, images ‘of’ something else, or do they evolve only within material acts? Viscomi opts for the latter – what he calls ‘an idea of invention grounded in execution’ [...] – and refers to Blake’s practices more than his writings for authorization. That practice typically takes the form of ‘drawing’ – either on paper or on a copper plate – in which, as Viscomi puts it, ‘invention and execution are organically intertwined’ [...]. From this perspective, ‘form and meaning evolve from the continual interactive relationship between ... invention and execution’ [...] – an interaction that finally takes on a ‘sense of oneness between subject and object’ [...]. (“Blake and the Production of Meaning” 8-9)

Implicitly aligning himself with Viscomi, Essick suggests that one cannot so easily align Blake with the mental over the material as Eaves does, particularly with respect to the graphic image. While it is true that many of Blake’s written statements seem to suggest a

preference for the interior space of the mind and spirit, I find Essick's and Viscomi's viewpoints much more compelling when considering the illuminated works and Blake's artistic productions. For Viscomi, execution (or material production) occupies an equal role in the creation of Blake's mythology as the thoughts housed in his imagination. The fact that Blake painstakingly engraved, painted, and provided graphic images for many of his texts indicates that he was highly invested in the material production and visualization, not just the expression and dissemination, of his ideas. Moreover, Makdisi goes a step further to argue that Blake is engaging with the material and industrial culture of his time.

The visual representation of characters such as Orc and Urizen provides Blake's audience with a concrete way of engaging with these esoteric mythological figures, however obscure the intricacies of allusion and signification, thereby placing these figures in a less arcane realm. The move is similar to a director expressing his/her vision of a play-text on stage. Like a director, Blake visually renders his vision of his characters; he shows us as well as tells us, rarely leaving it wholly up to a reader's mental imaginings. Blake's designs seem to help better situate the audience as he or she encounters unfamiliar names. It may seem odd to say this about Blake. After all, this is the same man who, in one of his letters, said, "That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care" (E 702). However, it is important to note that Blake's claim that only those who can understand the implicit are of concern to him is in large part due to his frustration with friends and critics who dismissed his work. Also, Blake articulated a strong desire for the consumption and acceptance of his work. In the "Public Address," he calls on his contemporary audience to defend him against the critics of his day: "I call for Public protection against these Villains" (E 582).¹¹ However, he also calls out to posterity because he wants his work to endure and because he does not completely trust

¹¹ Blake aims the "Public Address" at the "Chalcographic Society" (E 571), chalcographers being "engravers on copper" as Erdman explains (E 882). This document functions as a defence provoked by attacks such as that of Robert Hunt in *The Examiner*. Blake also expresses his faith in the English to distinguish true art and true artists from false ones that proliferate "[i]n a Commercial Nation," and he defends the English public against opinions that suggest otherwise.

that he will be appreciated in his own day, as his experience proved.¹² His use of the word “Public”—a general term—suggests that he appears quite open as to who will form his audience. His effort to write public addresses, including his reiteration of the phrase “Mark well my words” in *Milton* (e.g., 2.25, E 96), the addresses attached to each chapter of *Jerusalem*, and his reference to the Parable of the Talents in the letters,¹³ reaffirm his desire to reach people with his calling, even if the attempt failed. These examples indicate that he wanted to be given the benefit of the doubt and have people engage with his work; he did not want his work dismissed as “a Madman’s Scrawls” (E 528). In his “Exhibition of *Paintings in Fresco, Poetical and Historical Inventions*,” he remarks, “if Genius and Inspiration are the great Origin and Bond of Society, the distinction my Works have obtained from those who best understand such things, calls for my Exhibition as the greatest of Duties to my Country” (E 528). Both of these examples clearly demonstrate that reaching other people, forming relations with others—the “Bond of Society”—through his art was something he wanted, despite the small audience for his works that he had during his lifetime.

Blake’s inclusion of designs embodies his visions; it makes the audience’s interaction with the work less mental, less like a closet reading and more like a performance. Blake’s visions do not merely exist in our minds as we read; we can see them—we can put faces to the names. Thus, he creates a kind of spectatorship, in addition to a readership. Blake’s art creates an audience that is closer to a theatrical audience than most traditional literary texts or visual art. The images ensure a certain sense of community and bond because we *all* think of, for example, the same Urizen—an old man with long white hair and beard. Of course, words alone can describe the look of Urizen, but only the visual image ensures that we think of the same Urizen. Mitchell questions the validity of the possibility of this shared experience in the context of graphic

¹² Referring to his future audience, Blake says, “the Public will know & Posterity will know”; “Posterity will judge by our Works” (E 572, 573).

¹³ Blake alludes to the Parable of the Talents when he reveals his anger at his patron William Hayley for attempting to divert Blake away from following his calling, that of prophet-bard, and towards becoming a commercial engraver who reproduces the works of other original talents (E 724, 728). See chapter four of my dissertation for an extended analysis of this allusion and its role in Blake’s art.

images. He says, “contrary to common belief, images ‘proper’ are not stable, static, or permanent in any metaphysical sense; they are not perceived in the same way by viewers any more than are dream images [...]” (*Iconology* 13-14). I agree with his assessment regarding the fixity of images; we should not oversimplify the process of how we respond to visual images or what each of us sees when we look at them. However, I also cannot dismiss the fact that there seems to be an indisputable difference between what we conjure in our minds when we read about a character versus what we experience when we see a character performed, whether in pictorial space or on the stage. While I would not go so far as to say that each of our engagements with a pictorial representation of Urizen corresponds precisely to all others, there do seem to be more points of similarity and intersection in seeing Urizen than we could possibly expect from reading about Urizen. Imagining what a character looks like based on words, I believe, produces fewer overlapping features than seeing a visual depiction of a character. By taking his characters and representing them graphically, Blake places them in, to borrow a phrase from Mitchell, a “publicly shareable space” (13), something which words alone cannot accomplish to the same degree. This is comparable to a Romantic audience (or any dramatic or visual audience for that matter) who can all recall the same image of, for instance, Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth or Edmund Kean as Richard III. Here we see particular incarnations of Shakespeare’s characters, specific to Siddons’s and Kean’s bodily and visual performance of them. By recalling shared images of this nature, a dramatic community of a specific performance or production is formed. Blake creates various copies of the same plate, but, in the end, we still picture Blake’s Urizen and not our own, creating a similar kind of communal experience through spectatorship.¹⁴

¹⁴ Critics have commented on the way the illuminated works seem to construct a particular kind of audience. For instance, Essick argues, “The author and his readers ideally meet and converse together in and through a text which thereby becomes the motivation for a hermeneutic community whose members share a common language” (*William Blake and the Language of Adam* 223; see also Behrendt, “‘Something in My Eye’” 85). My own point picks up on the way a community forms based on “shar[ing] a common language,” albeit one of visual, not linguistic signifiers. Essick focuses on reader and text, where the community is based on “linguistic activity” (224) and the interpretation of “Adamic sign[s]” (223).

In light of the closet-stage debate of the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Blake's works take on an intriguing significance. His production of an art form that is dramatic on more than one level—particularly its emphasis on vision and embodiment—places him on the side of the theatricalists rather than the antitheatricalists. Drama itself was an important literary form of the period, making the dramatic nature of Blake's composite art all the more relevant given his cultural context. Many viewed drama as directly related to society's level of greatness. More broadly, Blake associated a "Poor state of the Arts" with a "Poor state of Politics" ("Public Address" E 580), indicating that art can directly affect and be affected by its social-historical-political environment. Also, he commands, "let it no more be said that Empires Encourage Arts for it is Arts that Encourage Empires" (E 577). As far as Blake is concerned, art is the driving force behind the advance of civilizations, not the other way around. Whereas Blake credits art in general for the progress of society, other writers of the period make similar claims for drama specifically. For instance, both P. B. Shelley and Joanna Baillie, in separate decades and for different reasons, name drama—performed rather than closet drama—as a key marker of advanced civilizations. My point is not to mount an argument for valuing one literary form over another; rather, it is to show the place drama held in the thinking of Romantic-era writers. In *A Defence of Poetry*, Shelley argues, "[T]he highest perfection of human society has ever corresponded with the highest dramatic excellence" (492), linking the capacity of humanity with their dramatic output. In her "Introductory Discourse," Baillie, too, takes a similar attitude when she says, if drama did not already exist, "[t]he progress of society would soon have brought it forth" (*Plays on the Passions* 83), implying that drama as a form is inevitable given the evolution of society.

In particular, writers on the side of the theatricalists valued embodied performance for the effect it could have on an audience, an effect not possible in reading the play. As Peter Duthie points out, the "new collision of word and image" occurring in the late eighteenth to the early nineteenth centuries (42) gave rise to Baillie's main point in her "Introductory Discourse": "in examining others we know ourselves" (74). An "exhibition of passion" (102) on the stage provides us with the chance to "observe the behaviour of others" (90), the implication being that the act of looking allows for critical analysis in a way that reading the same passage in a play-text does not. Similarly, Shelley

claims that “drama [...] teaches [...] self-knowledge” (491). He also says, “The tragedies of the Athenian poets are as mirrors in which the spectator beholds himself” (490). Given Shelley’s application of the word “spectator” rather than “reader,” the quotation implies that seeing our likeness in actors on the stage, not the reading of drama, produces “self-knowledge.” Dramatic performance allows this kind of illumination.

For Baillie, the physical construction of a theatre was also important to drama’s special ability to elicit self-knowledge. In her dramatic theory, she raises concerns over the enlargement of theatre houses in her day. According to Baillie, the larger size of the house made it quite difficult for audience members to see the facial expressions of the actors (Duthie 43). For her, a crucial component of performing a play is the relationship between actor and audience; the self-knowledge she hoped her audience would take away from her plays rested on the ability of the audience to see the actors as they expressed emotions and words and performed actions. Like Shelley and Baillie, Elizabeth Inchbald found a potential in the stage that the mind alone could not always match (though she does not necessarily choose one over the other). In her *Remarks to A Winter’s Tale*, she argues that the statue scene is “far more grand in exhibition than the reader will possibly behold in idea” (6)—seeing it unfold onstage surpasses the mental construction, contrary to Lessing’s viewpoint. Moreover, as Jane Moody points out, the period was filled with writings on topics of chironomia (the study of gesture), physiognomy, and the passions (83), indicating a preoccupation with vision, with the internal becoming external, and with seeing.¹⁵ Blake’s designs, which focus predominantly on human beings, and many of which depict an emotional state, create a kind of tableau vivant, suggesting that his works participate in the period’s fascination with visual and dramatic manifestations of human character.

Blake’s outing of his symbolic and mythological characters from a private mental space (or closet) into the external space of the visual image is reminiscent of dramatists who championed the value of embodiment over private and individual textual readings. Donald H. Reiman and Sharon B. Powers explain in their edition of *Shelley’s Poetry and Prose* that Shelley first attempted to have *The Cenci* staged. In fact, he waited until it was clear that there would be no performance before he published the play:

¹⁵ I more fully explore this aspect of Blake’s relationship to his historical moment in chapter three.

Shelley had mailed to Thomas Love Peacock a single printed copy [...] with which he was to submit the play anonymously to the Theatre Royal, Covent Garden—where *Beatrice* would be played, Shelley hoped, by Eliza O'Neill [...], the leading female tragedian of the day. [...] Thomas Harris—who had managed Covent Garden since 1774 and was not noted for his theatrical innovations—refused even to consider producing the play because of its emphasis on incest. His opinion was echoed by theatrical censors in Britain through the nineteenth century [...] When it became clear to Shelley that the play would not be staged, he secured its publication [...]. (236-37)

With even a leading lady in mind, Shelley clearly wished to have this particular play staged, a wish that the play's taboo topic thwarted. Due to censorship, then, not to Shelley's intentions, this play became a closet drama, one only for the reading public. Nevertheless, his Preface to the play references potential stagings, repeatedly discussing future "exhibitions" of the play and giving directions for the enactments. One such directive was to ensure that "nothing [was] attempted to make the exhibition subservient to what is vulgarly termed a moral purpose"; for Shelley, "drama" was not a "fit place for the enforcement" of "dogmas" (240). Here, Shelley implicitly assigns a power to the staging of dramas by suggesting that these embodiments can affect the way an audience receives, for better or worse, the scripted words of the playwright, and that such performances can offer something that a mere reading cannot.

Baillie also clearly expressed her intention to have her plays performed, but, unlike Shelley, she wanted her entire collection of plays staged, not just an individual text: "It may, perhaps, be supposed from my publishing these plays, that I have written them for the closet rather than the stage. If upon perusing them with attention, the reader is disposed to think they are better calculated for the first than the last, let him impute it to want of skill in the authour [sic], and not to any previous design" (108-09). Baillie's plays share with Blake's chosen mode of expression an appeal to the visual, an implicit indication that there is something different (and useful) about the audience seeing and not just reading a work. That Blake uses designs even in aphoristic, non-character and non-action based works such as *All Religions are One* and *There is No Natural Religion*

(thereby making philosophical and spiritual principles and maxims less abstract by including images of human figures) indicates that the image expresses something more than words and that a (pictorial or live) performance of ideas or words with bodies does something that language or reading alone cannot. For example, in Baillie's *De Monfort* from *Plays on the Passions*, consider the end of Act 4, scene 3 when De Monfort is alone with the corpse of Rezenvelt, the man he has just murdered. De Monfort's monologue of about a page is emotionally intense, but the intensity of performance is only hinted at by a number of stage cues, including De Monfort "*Run[ning] to the corps [sic] and tear[ing] off the cloth in despair*" and "*Shrink[ing] back in horror [sic].*" The visual effect cannot be underestimated. Reading a stage cue lasts a few seconds at best, but on stage the performer can add to the space of the scene what a stage cue can only ever gloss over. Performance more fully realizes and creates the action, dialogue and emotion in a text by giving flesh to the characters who drive these three elements. The result is that these elements are externalized from the play-text (and our minds) right before our eyes.

Another significant example of the power of stage performance over closeted reading is that of the death, or suicide, of De Monfort, particularly as compared with that of Byron's Manfred. The final act of rebellion each hero enacts is his own death. Both make an attempt at suicide before their passion finally destroys their physical beings. The phantom of Astarte tells Manfred that "To-morrow ends [his] earthly ills" (*Manfred* 2.4.152), but his death is not caused by any obvious external phenomenon. Instead, it is as if Manfred himself, through the intensity of his passions, causes his own end. Before the appearance of Astarte's ghost, Manfred is doomed to live a tortured life, but it is as if once her apparition visits him he takes hold of his own destiny and controls the flow of his life, no longer finding it necessary to resort to a physical means of suicide. He tells the Abbot as he "*expires*," "Old man! 'tis not so difficult to die" (3.4.151), implying that he has had the power all along. Marjean Purinton asserts, "Liberation occurs only when the mental chains holding humankind to institutions perpetuating that enslaving ideology are broken [...] In the end, it is not so difficult for Manfred to die, because his mind is no longer held in bondage" (91-92). It is only when he allows himself to break free of social constraint completely that he is successful in releasing himself from torment.

Where Manfred's death functions more on the level of the mental sphere, both in the way he causes his death and in the way his death is delineated, De Monfort's attempted suicide, due to the overwhelming nature of his passions, takes on a more external and spectacular form. He says, "Come, madness! come unto me senseless death! / I cannot suffer this! Here, rocky wall, / Scatter these brains, or dull them"; this exclamation is followed by the stage directions: "*Runs furiously, and, dashing his head against the wall, falls upon the floor*" (5.3.89-91). While his actual death is attributed to an overflow of his passions rather than directly to his actions, in all likelihood, smashing his head against a wall sealed his fate. Father Bernard describes the scene of De Monfort's death as unlike one he has ever seen:

many a bed of death,
 With all its pangs and horror I have seen,
 But never ought like this [...] death is dealing with him.
 From violent agitation of the mind,
 Some stream of life within his breast has burst. (5.3.20-25)

Despite focusing on the passions gripping his soul in his final moments (which occur off-stage), we are not denied the spectacle of De Monfort bashing his brains. In *Manfred*, we have no such sight—we have only an abstract expiration, not a spectacular death. The main difference is that Manfred's death is not caused by any obvious external or physical phenomenon—indeed, such early attempts fail. Instead, it is as if Manfred himself, through the overwhelming intensity of his passions and will, causes his own end. Baillie creates a scene begging for performance, while Byron constructs a scene that seems to be meant for the closet, which aligns with his own description of the play as "mental theatre," or closet drama.

The spectacle of the body went hand-in-hand with mechanical spectacles in Romantic-period theatre, which was highly indebted to theatre crews for staging elaborate special effects that thrilled audiences. In the advertisement to *The Lady of the Rock* (1805), Thomas Holcroft thanks a theatre crew member for enabling so fantastically the storm sequence at the heart of his play: "Enough can scarcely be said in praise of Mr. Johnston, the Machinist of Drury-Lane Theatre, by whose invention such apparent reality

and distress are given to the Rock Scene” (vi). And William Moncrieff thanks the spectacles themselves for the play’s lure in the *Cataract of the Ganges!* (1823): “To the Cataract, itself, for the effective manner in which it has contributed to cause an overflow, and create a long run to the Piece. To the horses, for the powerful way in which they have combined [to enhance the play] during its career, the Author’s best thanks are also due, and are gratefully offered” (Advertisement iv). Both Holcroft and Moncrieff acknowledge their debt to the aspects of their texts that can come to their full fruition only on the stage, not in the private reading space. The thrill of the live performance of the storm, cataract, or army of horses satisfies the audience in a way that reading a dramatic text cannot. Consider the impressive coiled serpent that reappears throughout Blake’s corpus, including *America*. I can imagine the thrill and anxiety of theatre personnel trying to construct a giant mechanical serpent—if explosions, falling bridges, and cataracts have been done, why not a huge snake? Often, dramas, melodramas in particular, relied heavily on mime or gesture for effect, thereby suggesting that performance was not secondary to the written word. The elaborate stage directions cannot possibly replace the sight of these spectacles on stage. In the absence of the stage, Blake gives us his designs, emphasizing the role of seeing in an engagement with his works.

Baillie uses the term “sympathetick [sic] curiosity” in her “Introductory Discourse” to describe the desire to look and the pleasure of seeing (*Plays on the Passions* 69). Her use of the word “sympathetick” is not quite the same as that of Adam Smith, who defines sympathy as “our fellow-feeling with any passion” (10), arguing that upon seeing “our brother [...] upon the rack,” “[b]y the imagination we place ourselves in his situation, we conceive ourselves enduring all the same torments” (9). For Baillie, sympathetic curiosity does not correspond to feeling what another feels; rather, the emphasis is more on curiosity than sympathy. The sympathetic aspect seems to lie in the fact that as humans we are all capable of passions, but not specifically in feeling what another feels. She emphasizes the desire to watch, “mak[ing] us press forward to behold [even] what we shrink from” (69). Using the example of the public execution, she explains that most look on in spite of a competing desire to turn away. It is as if we become lost or seduced by the visual image of someone under the sway of emotions. Baillie states, “Every person [...] is more or less occupied in tracing, amongst the

individuals he converses with, the varieties of understanding and temper which constitute the characters of men; and receives great pleasure from every stroke of nature that points out to him those varieties” (68). If “in examining others we know ourselves,” then our interest in viewing the manifestation of the passions allows for a certain degree of self-analysis and future prevention. In Blake’s illuminated works, sight also plays a significant role, much as it does in Baillie’s “Introductory Discourse,” where seeing an actor perform the part of a character significantly affects the ability of the audience to gain self-awareness.

Baillie’s drive to show and delineate character, especially onstage, is similar to Blake’s attempt to show the correlation between past and present events in order to shape the future. For Blake, prophecy does not entail being able to see flashes of an unavoidable or predetermined future. In his *Annotations to An Apology for the Bible* by Bishop Watson, Blake explains, “Prophets in the modern sense of the word have never existed [...] Every honest man is a Prophet he utters his opinion both of private & public matters Thus If you go on So the result is So He never says such a thing shall happen let you do what you will. A Prophet is a Seer not an Arbitrary Dictator” (E 617). By “Seer” Blake means an astute interpreter of history and not a prognosticator. For instance, in *America: A Prophecy*, he shows the connection between the American and French Revolutions and hints at possible consequences for the future. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant explain,

As the first of Blake’s works to be subtitled ‘A Prophecy’ (the other is *Europe*), *America* proclaims itself the utterance of a prophet, but its subject is recent history, not the future. Prophecy of this sort makes connections between past and present, provides insights into underlying motives, raises alarms about likely consequences, and envisions fresh possibilities, but it does not predict an inevitable future. (Introduction to *America* 83)

Prophecy entails the ability to analyze—to see what is right before one (the current state of affairs) and what is behind one (prior events) and assess them, piecing together the probable outcome of a particular course of action.

The title page of *America* (fig. 10) includes two people, a man and a woman, sitting below the word “America” and above the word “Prophecy”; they appear to be reading what may, in fact, be the work that we hold in our very hands. Both figures are flanked by children. However, the male figure is flanked by two children who try to get his attention away from the book before him; they point toward different directions, trying to get the reading figure to lift his eyes and look to where they point. The implication is that reading is not enough. The figure must also see what these children are trying to show him. The *Preludium* continues this emphasis on seeing. An imprisoned Orc, who speaks first, expresses his frustration at not being able to see “the shadowy daughter of Urthona,” the daughter of his captor. At the end of his speech, he admits, “when thou bringest food / I howl my joy: and my red eyes seek to behold thy face / In vain! These clouds roll to & fro, & hide thee from my sight” (1.18-20, E 51). Immediately following this admission, Orc breaks free of his chains and “siez[es]” her, beginning the (violent) act that sets the rest of the events of the poem in motion. His need to see her finally forces or enables him to destroy his own shackles. Until now, “the shadowy daughter of Urthona” has been silent, unable or unwilling to speak. However, the sight of Orc finally breaks the spell, and she speaks for the first time: “Soon as she saw the terrible boy then burst the virgin cry” (2.6, E 52). In the speech that follows, she articulates her understanding of who Orc is, a kind of saviour figure, but also of the pain and violence that will accompany his coming. Seeing Orc directly precipitates her revelation or (self-)knowledge of Orc, herself, and the revolutionary events of the world. This scene of self-knowledge and the role of sight are reminiscent of Baillie’s argument that an audience gains this kind of awareness by seeing performers on a stage.

In the same cultural moment when seeing and performance were seen as significant, there were also those opposed to them, either in part or in whole. The result was a debate between the relative merits of the closet and the stage.¹⁶ Many Romantic

¹⁶ Catherine B. Burroughs reminds us that there is a “tendency to associate the closet with reading only, to oppose it to theatricality, and to forget that, during the early nineteenth century, not only did the phrase serve as a metaphor for privacy and intense intellectual engagement, but it also identified a literal space in which a variety of theatrical activities—many particular to women—took place” (8). The literal

writers, such as Charles Lamb, William Hazlitt, Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Leigh Hunt, preferred the mental theatre to staged theatre, particularly when it came to Shakespeare, the national poet. These writers felt that the stage denigrated in some way the nobility of his characters. As Lamb says, “The greatness of Lear is not in the corporal dimension, but in the intellectual” (qtd. in Hazlitt 4: 271; also qtd. in Burroughs 9); Hazlitt states, “[T]he reader of the plays of Shakespear [sic] is almost always disappointed in seeing them acted; and, for our own parts, we should never go to see them acted, if we could help it” (5: 222); Coleridge is reported in the *Bristol Gazette* as saying that “he never saw any of Shakespear’s plays performed, but with a degree of pain, disgust, and indignation” and that Shakespeare should be “drive[n] [...] from the stage, to find his proper place, in the heart and in the closet” (5, 1: 563); and Hunt nostalgically looks back at the moment of original performance and explains that the nature of the theatre has altered too much for Lear to be acted without repelling the audience:

In Shakespeare’s time, the scenery, dresses, &c. were so unlike any thing real, and the public came so much more to hear the *writing* of the thing than to see the acting of it, that it was comparatively another matter; but now that the real bodily old man is before us, with his white beard, and the storm howling about him, we ought not to be able to endure the sight, any more than that of a mad old father in the public street. (251)

Hunt’s comment suggests a contradiction in that stagecraft and acting have become almost too good; now, audiences cannot help but be absorbed in the reality of the performance, rather than keeping a distance, which he claims was possible in earlier centuries. In addition, Hunt’s assertion is that, in Shakespeare’s day, people went to the theatre to hear the words of the playwright, thereby subordinating the spectacle and embodiment to the text.

The exaggerated acting style, due to the cavernous size of the theatres, as well as the emphasis on spectacle were at the heart of much of this abuse according to Timothy Webb, who has compiled many of these kinds of theatrically antagonistic remarks from

space of the closet that Burroughs mentions was often in the domestic setting of the home, such as a drawing-room.

Coleridge, Lamb, Hazlitt and Hunt (35-39). However, Celestine Woo makes a good case for shades of grey when it comes to classifying these critics as antitheatricalists. On the one hand, some critics and writers, such as Lamb, were uncomfortable with seeing emotion expressed because “the more comprehensive and overtly visual embodiment of the affective character” led, they believed, to “audience passivity” (56). In other words, “being given all the details visually by the players” made the audience less active in the interpretive process. On the other hand, “seemingly antitheatricalist critics” displayed an “evident relishing of the productions and actors they witnessed” in their dramatic criticism (63).¹⁷ For instance, “despite his notorious rantings about preferring to read Shakespeare rather than see him acted, when it came to actual Shakespeare performances, Lamb wanted the actor to act emotively.” Even Byron, who coined the term “mental theatre” (*Byron's Letters and Journals* 8: 186-87) and appeared to completely reject the idea of staging his dramas, sat on the selection committee at Drury Lane and tried vigorously to get Baillie’s plays staged. His own reluctance to stage his plays seems to have had little to do with issues of performability and the value of the stage:

I cannot conceive any man of irritable feeling putting himself at the mercies of an audience:—the sneering reader, and the loud critic, and the tart review, are scattered and distant calamities; but the trampling of an intelligent or of an ignorant audience on a production which, be it good or

¹⁷ Antitheatricalism encompasses more than just issues of the closet and the stage. Since the Early Modern period, actors and playhouses have been consistently associated with the seedier elements of society. In Shakespeare’s day, the theatres were located near taverns and brothels, making connections among the three inevitable. The stigma of immoral conduct dogged the theatre world into the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Society often viewed “players” as having “suspiciously immoral identities” (Hadley 21). While John Philip Kemble and Sarah Siddons subverted the typical view of their profession by projecting ideals of domestic virtue, “theatrical respectability [and] social mores” (Woo 138), Edmund Kean’s “dissolute lifestyle” (133) reinforced the conventional attitude toward the theatre. For an account of the history of antitheatricalism from ancient Greece to modern times, see Barish’s *The Antitheatrical Prejudice*. Barish consistently identifies an anxiety of role-playing, or acting, as a recurrent rationale for opposing theatrical productions. Many found the deception, or pretending, and the fluidity of identity that marked performance threatening. I explore this aspect of antitheatricalism in more detail in chapter four.

bad, has been a mental labour to the writer, is a palpable and immediate grievance [...]. (Preface, *Marino Faliero* 305)

Knowing his own temperament and ego, Byron rejected the stage out of fear of being rejected by the audience, a rejection far worse than written attacks or private criticisms of his plays and poems.

The value of *seeing* something is the crux of the debate between the closet and the stage, where the closet involves the private, individual reading of a text and the stage involves a communal experience of seeing a text physically manifested based on someone else's interpretation or vision of a text that does not generally equate with that of the audience members. The former entails a personal and ideal vision and the latter the externalized vision of another. Antitheatrical comments, such as Lamb's infamous criticism of seeing an old Lear doddering about the stage versus the noble image he had conjured in his mind while reading the play, function to elevate the status of mental renderings while deriding the potential of the theatre. A large part of their antitheatrical sentiment has to do with the extreme veneration of Shakespeare as the nation's poet and the sense that the written text was sacred and should not be translated into other media.¹⁸ Ironically, the instability of Shakespeare's written texts, as well as his own involvement in the theatre, does not dissuade these kinds of critics. Neither does the simple fact that, even in reading a text, we personalize it; in effect, we stage the events of the text in our minds as we envision characters and interpret speeches and actions. Writers such as Lamb, Hazlitt, and Coleridge all strongly contested an equivalent value between mental constructions and physical embodiment, placing the word above the image in many cases.

Performance is not the only victim of these critics. They also heaped disdain on representations of Shakespeare in the medium of visual art for similar reasons. Hazlitt, though he labels performances of Shakespeare as the worst, ranks paintings of scenes from Shakespeare—such as those in Boydell's gallery—a close second. He says, “Even

¹⁸ As Woo observes, “Dramatic criticism in the late-Romantic era weighed deeply the question of whether these increasingly prominent theatrical stars overshadowed the text: evidence of the shift in ethos to privilege the playwright and his work, in contrast to the eighteenth century when the author and playwright were rarely mentioned or analyzed” (156).

those daubs of pictures, formerly exhibited under the title of the Shakespear Gallery, had a less evident tendency to disturb and distort all the previous notions we had imbibed from reading Shakespear” (5: 234). The Boydell Shakespeare Gallery’s “overall effect was to shift attention from the word to the picture,” at least in the eyes of the aforementioned critics (Webb 36). Blake himself engraved a plate of John Opie’s painting *Romeo and Juliet* for the gallery (Burwick, “Introduction: Gallery, Artists, and Engravers” 19). To argue, the way antitheatricalists do, that the performance of a play closes down or limits the possible interpretations of the text creates a hierarchy between performance and text, similar to the one that exists between the visual image and the word. Mitchell suggests that the idolatry of the imagination on the part of many Romantic writers stands behind this hierarchy:

Under the aegis of ‘imagination,’ in other words, the notion of imagery is split in two, and a distinction is made between the pictorial or graphic image which is a lower form—external, mechanical, dead, and often associated with the empiricist model of perception—and a ‘higher’ image which is internal, organic, and living. (*Iconology* 25)

This idea that the powers of the mind are superior to the powers of material pictorial space extends to the view that the powers of corporeal theatrical stagings are also inferior. However, performance opens up interpretation in many ways, most notably by showing us a reading that we may never have envisioned. With respect to design and text in Blake, those who argue that the image closes down our numerous possible mental interpretations align themselves with those who see pictorial space at the service of the word. Cannot the same be said of the word, though: that it closes down how we interpret or respond to a design? Blake does not shy away from creating designs for his own words, nor does he for those of the most revered poets of the time—Shakespeare, Milton, and Dante. For Blake, then, visual representation offers interpretive potential that does not take away from the mental image; nor does it limit the text. In fact, in many cases, it augments it.

Through the dramatic performance of the illuminated works, Blake provides a counterpoint to a closeted mentality generally and to antitheatricity specifically. His marriage of words and visual images, treating them as equal partners in his art, distances

him from the antitheatricalists. Although the idealization of private, inner worlds of reflection and imagination in the Romantic period functioned in opposition to the public, outer world of action and performance, Blake's verbal-visual art form, a genre that exhibits a theatrical identity, outs the text from the closet. Indeed, his composite art makes a significant contribution to the image and word dialectic of his time, destabilizing conventional notions of genre as well as toward exploding the boundary between the inner world of the mind and the outer world of the body. While we can enact Urizen's story in our minds as we read the text, the designs necessarily externalize that mental activity by presenting us with a visual representation that interacts with our private vision of Urizen; thus, the inner is bridged to the outer. The images give the characters a voice, so to speak, in spite of being mute, the way that actors on a stage give characters in a text a voice that does not come from the reader's own mind. The characters are not bound to mental idealizations. In Blake, the characters are stretched beyond our own individual limits. Thus, even in private, in our "closet," the theatrical nature of Blake's illuminated works emerges.

In freeing his work from the strict confines of the reading closet and from generic conventions, Blake indirectly offers his voice to the discourses of Romantic drama and performance. The theatricality of the illuminated works suggests a challenge not only to conventional notions of the reading audience and the form of drama but also to notions about what it means to be performable and unperformable. Analyzing Blake's works as dramatic performances offers a different historical and generic context and it offers a new way of understanding the interplay between text and design central to his art, providing one answer to the generic identity of his art, to his "Visionary forms dramatic" (*Jerusalem* 98.28, E 257).

“Enter into these Images”: Journey to the Centre of the Illuminated Works

In the previous chapter, I argued that Blake’s illuminated works function as dramatic performances, creating an audience more akin to a theatrical audience than a conventional reading or viewing one (i.e., of books or paintings). I will build on these theatrical identifications—particularly with respect to audience engagement—by examining Blake’s conception of art, imagination, perception, identity, and, of course, his own illuminated works. Significantly, Blake signals the audience repeatedly throughout his works, both in visual and textual spaces. Even though his visionary poetry conveys a concern for the welfare of humanity, focalized as it is through the voice of a prophet figure, Blake’s relationship with his audience goes further than simply revealing human ills and sketching out possible solutions. In fact, he creates an art form that makes direct demands on the audience, constructing a specifically Blakean spectatorship.

Blake articulates his most radical idea about the nature of the illuminated books, about the relation between his artistic media and his audience, in *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (1810), his prose remarks on his large-scale painting by the same name. This commentary from his Notebook explores vision, reality, perception, artistic representation, and mediation. Blake writes, “If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought [...] then would he meet the Lord in the Air & then he would be happy” (E 560). For Blake, visionary art is a transformative medium, but the transformation is sensory and physical as much as it is mental. His use of the verb “enter” to describe the audience’s interaction with his work suggests not only an intellectual participation in his universe, but also, as I will show, a literal step into that world. Although he situates this particular (indirect) call to the audience to “Enter into these Images” in the context of his painting, I argue that this statement, in fact, applies more aptly to his multimedia illuminated works. As a combination of engraving, poetry and painting, they provide a fuller and more immediate experience of Blake’s world of the imagination than any medium could provide alone. In this chapter, I will analyze the spectator’s activity of entering Blake’s works not as a metaphor for art appreciation, but as an imaginative and physical experience of his “composite art” (W. J. T. Mitchell).

Stephen C. Behrendt asserts, “Blake continually emphasizes the mediatorial function of art, which serves as catalyst in a transformation of mental state[s]” (*Reading William Blake* 22). Using *A Vision of the Last Judgment* as a theoretical reflection on mediation, I will examine how Blake manipulates the tension between alienation and immersion in order to provoke a transformative experience in his spectator, leading to an altered perception of one’s potential and the nature of the world and to a specifically Blakean spectatorship. With the illuminated works, which tend toward theatrical performance in content and presentation style, Blake constructs two seemingly contradictory experiences of spectatorship by exploiting this tension: one, a Brechtian alienation that jars us out of our complacency—our uncritical acceptance of the supposed relationship between art and reality—and two, a kind of immediate “medieval experience of spectacle” in which we perceive the representation as an actual “presence” (Egginton 43). Blake does not seek erasure of the medium or of mediation. Rather, he emphasizes the illuminated works as a medium through various self-reflexive techniques, such as references to his process of artistic creation, depictions of characters entering doorways, and direct addresses to the audience. For Blake, creating a sense of distancing is necessary in order for the audience to consciously answer his call to enter into the works by altering their perception of reality to the level of presence. Such an alteration offers a fundamental re-conceptualization of the way we understand reality, spectatorship, and the visionary medium. By paying close attention to his self-reflexive strategies, which I align with metatheatricality, and to his language of “spectatorship” and “entering” in conjunction with theories of media and mediation, I argue that Blake uses the opposing effects of distance and immediacy in his works in order to catalyze a self-conscious participation in the audience and a recognition of the interrelated nature of reality and the imagination.

Much critical attention has been paid to the way media function in the world as well as to the relationship we have to media. Lisa Gitelman asks, “If media are sites for experiences of meaning—critics have pondered—to what degree are meaning and its experience determined or circumscribed by technological conditions?” (8). The answer is significant in terms of the degree to which human will participate in the creation of meaning in the world. Gitelman states, “At stake are two different versions of agency.

Either media audiences lack agency or they possess it. Hardly anyone would say the truth can't lie somewhere in between these two extremely reductive positions [...]” (9). This middle position regarding media and human agency seems to be encapsulated by John Bunyan's address to his readers in “The Author's Apology for His Book” in *Pilgrim's Progress*:

This Book will make a Traveller of thee,
If by its Counsel thou wilt ruled be;
It will direct thee to the Holy Land,
If thou wilt its Directions understand[.] (p. 6)

The Book, it would seem, acts on the reader, and the reader of the work seems to take on an active role by becoming a “Traveller” journeying to “the Holy Land.” However, this dual agency is negated through Bunyan's language of control and domination. It undermines the agency of the reader because he/she does not choose to become a traveller; rather, the book will “make a Traveller of [him/her].” The agency lies with Bunyan's text, then, and not the reader. *Pilgrim's Progress*, according to the author, offers “Counsel” and “directions,” but the reader must submit and be “ruled” by the words on the page. Arguably, there is a certain agency in the choice to be “ruled,” but one that hinges on passivity. In contrast, Blake, though also figuring his audience as a kind of traveller, does not assign agency to the medium while denying agency to the audience. Instead, Blake emphasizes the agency of his audience; he does not use passive language or the language of control, as Bunyan does. Blake's spectator is not ruled by the work, but, on the contrary, he/she actively “approach[es]” it and then “meet[s] the Lord in the Air” (*VLJ E 560*)—as does the spectator who enters Blake's painting of the last judgment—thus affirming the spectator's agency and power in the reception process. Although he gives his spectator agency, the power of the work itself does not diminish because the art object helps to instigate an epiphanic moment by materializing imagination. For Blake, the construction of meaning depends on a specific kind of interaction between the media and the audience, one in which an audience's active participation necessarily creates meaning.

This view of artistic reception coincides with reader-response theory, which refigures readers of texts as active producers of meaning rather than as passive receivers of authorial textual productions:

Thanks to the work of theorists like Wolfgang Iser, Stanley Fish, and Michael Riffaterre, readers are no longer considered passive recipients of textual meaning but active contributors to the aesthetic process, working with the text to decode signs and then to create meaning. [...] for them, *all* readers are engaged in the active making of textual meaning. (Hutcheon 134, original emphasis)

For instance, Iser foregrounds the role of the reader in “caus[ing] the text to reveal its potential multiplicity of connections” (“The Reading Process” 1222), as the reader participates in “the process of anticipation and retrospection” (1223) and fills in “the gaps left by the text.” The reader actively creates meaning through these kinds of activities, unveiling the connections within the text, connections which “are the product of the reader’s mind working on the raw material of the text” (1222). Fish advances the view that literary criticism should focus more energy on the experience of reading rather than on the text as the ultimate source of meaning: “the reader’s response is not *to* the meaning; it *is* the meaning, or at least the medium in which what I wanted to call the meaning comes into being” (3; original emphasis). Fish undermines the authority of the text as a stable object that houses meaning and that cannot be altered by external forces: “The objectivity of the text is an illusion and, moreover, a dangerous illusion, because it is so physically convincing. The illusion is one of self-sufficiency and completeness” (43). Similarly, Blake’s implicit plea for his spectator to go into his art suggests that his works are not complete or sufficient; they are dependent on an audience.

Giving the audience of visual media the same power to create meaning, Linda Hutcheon argues that seeing visual images, whether on a canvas, onstage or on a screen, entails as much activity on the part of the audience as reading words on a page does: “both are imaginatively, cognitively, and emotionally active” (23). By demanding an active audience who must navigate verbal and visual spaces at once and create meaning from an arcane mythological universe, Blake’s work functions as an ideal object of reader-response criticism, as Behrendt suggests when he discusses Blake in relation to

Iser (*Reading William Blake* 30). Critics often discuss the way Blake provokes his audience into a kind of co-creation of his work, a co-creation that is even more explicit and active than in Iser's theory. For instance, Roger R. Easson says specifically of *Jerusalem*, "[I]t is a poem that enjoins the reader to participate with its writer in the creative process" (311). Tilottama Rajan argues, "As 'visionary forms dramatic,' to use Blake's own phrase, the prophecies seem to require the participation and faith of the reader if vision is to be dramatized, made empirical and concrete" ("The Supplement of Reading" 574). She continues, "The point is not that the elements of a completed meaning are absent from the text, but that the reader must participate in the process of actualizing them" (581).¹ For Rajan, the reader faces gaps, or "aporias," in the text and must set about an "imaginative participation" in order to realize meaning. Behrendt shares a similar viewpoint: "for Blake demands that his readers serve as co-creators [...] participating fully in this shared activity of making. The reader is expected to respond to implied queries and challenges, to embedded puzzles and enigmas, and to an often daunting array of apparent inconsistencies" (1). Blake "brings the audience into the drama as participant, obligated to get involved, to perceive and to judge" (9). Nelson Hilton's assessment of *The Book of Urizen's* relation to its audience also aligns the audience and Blake as co-artists. Hilton states, "*Urizen* helps us, finally, to appreciate the power and will of an Original Poetic Genius that went into its creation and that goes into our creating of it" ("Blakean Zen" 197). Similarly, Morris Eaves says that Blake's (and Wordsworth's) ideal audience "is someone with a fully developed mind and heart whose powers of intellect and passion are equal to those of the poet. The reader is not a passive receptacle or an impassive judge [...]. To judge a poem, the reader must enter into an intimate relationship with it" (*William Blake's Theory of Art* 191). For all these critics, Blake (either as a unique figure or as part of a larger spirit of the age) forces those who engage with his works to take on an active role and share in the creative process.

¹ Rajan makes a more wide-ranging argument by applying this idea of co-creation to Romantic poets in general: "What we witness in Romanticism is the development of a literature in which the text is a heuristic stimulus rather than a finished product" (587).

While I agree with those scholars who argue that Blake demands a higher level of engagement and a higher level of creation through interpretation than most other writers and artists, I also make the case that the implications of what Blake demands from his audience go even further and are even more radical. We are expected to do more than help resolve or grapple with inconsistencies and gaps in the text, to do more than negotiate between verbal and visual levels of depiction, and to do more than participate actively in the production of textual and visual meaning. All of these actions hold great importance, but Blake urges us beyond intellectual activity. His call to have us “enter” his work not only functions on the figurative level, comparing mental engagement to walking into a work, but also reflects the literal level: we enter his imaginative space in mind and body through altered perception. Being a member of Blakean spectatorship is about reading, viewing, receiving, creating and participating in alternative spaces and worlds all at once. An ideal Blakean spectator has the will and the ability to shift his/her ordinary perception about the nature of art and of human identity—its potential and limitation. For Blake, his art is more than entertaining an audience or making them flex critical and interpretive muscles; entering his works leads to the Eternal, to other modes of thinking and being, to expanded perception, and to an actual immersion in the imagination.

Alongside figuring audience interaction with his work as an entrance, Blake sets out some important first principles in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*. In a series of digressions, he articulates his understanding of the nature of vision, representation, art, reality, and perception. He begins by juxtaposing generic modes or media of artistic expression: “The Last Judgment is not Fable or Allegory but Vision Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct & inferior kind of Poetry” (E 554). Here, Blake subordinates “fable” or “allegory” to “vision” or “imagination,” a term he equates with “vision,” sometimes using them interchangeably. His reasons for doing so lie in the association he makes between fable or allegory and memory on the one hand and between vision and inspiration on the other. This opposition between memory and inspiration appears repeatedly throughout his works, for instance, in *Milton* (pl. 1 and 2), where negative connotations are heaped on memory.

For Blake, the problem with memory is that it functions in a static manner; inspiration, however, functions dynamically and creatively. The former can only repeat,

but the latter can produce new things. Rooted in memory, fable or allegory can offer only copies or reflections of things—not things in themselves. Blake explains that while “Fable or Allegory is Seldom without some Vision [for instance] *Pilgrims Progress* is full of it” (E 554), fable or allegory still differs from the visionary mode because the former offers only a distanced experience, while the latter ultimately offers an immediate one. Fable or allegory is a genre that uses one thing to stand for or point to another thing; it is a kind of fiction that does not itself embody a truth or reality. Vision, then, surpasses fable or allegory because it “is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really & Unchangeably,” implying that what fable or allegory represents is impermanent and false because it does not “Really” exist. Vision’s foundation in inspiration, however, leads to the production of the Eternal, of the truth, and of what “Really” or actually exists.

As productive of reality, vision or imagination does not function only on an intellectual or spiritual level. Blake also adds a sensory quality to imagination by referring to it as the “Imaginative Eye” that sees, an addition that builds on his statements in *All Religions are One* and *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that mind and body are not divided. Blake’s understanding of vision and imagination and the engagement with artistic objects go against a more conventional understanding in which the reality seen or created can only ever be virtual, not concrete or real like the physical world. Iser asserts,

The literary text activates our own faculties, enabling us to recreate the world it presents. The product of this creative activity is what we might call the virtual dimension of the text, which endows it with its reality. This virtual dimension is not the text itself, nor is it the imagination of the reader: it is the coming together of text and imagination. (“The Reading Process” 1222)

Despite using words such as “recreate” and “reality,” Iser’s notion of the way a reader interacts with a text remains at the level of mental play. Tellingly, he uses the phrase “virtual dimension” to denote what “endows” the text with “its reality”—virtual, of course, is opposed to actual (virtual reality, after all, is not quite reality) and connotes simulation, artificiality, and imitation. For Blake, however, vision and the imagination do not produce virtual or make-believe things, and they do not produce a mere version of the

real; instead, vision and the imagination lead to an actual recreation of the world the text presents—one that really, and not virtually, exists.

At first, the language Blake employs to talk about works of imagination seems to cause complications and even undermine this aspect of the actual. In fact, he seems to subvert his own hierarchy between vision and fable or allegory by aligning vision with the very thing that makes fable or allegory inferior. When Blake states, “Vision or Imagination is a *Representation* of what Eternally Exists. Really & Unchangeably” (E 554, my emphasis), the word “representation” gives one pause. If Blake intended the meaning of the word in the conventional way, then how does vision differ from fable or allegory? To *represent* the Eternal suggests a stand-in for, an imitation or a distanced copy of the Eternal and not the Eternal itself. Yet, I argue that Blake uses the word representation in a way that does not equate it with imitation or depiction. At the end of his letter to artist Ozias Humphry about his painting *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (fig. 12), Blake writes, “Such is the Design which you my Dear Sir have been the cause of my producing & which but for you might have slept till the Last Judgment” (E 554). Blake describes his work as a kind of awakening as opposed to the sleep the work would have been prone to without Humphry’s rousing encouragement. This particular phrasing indicates that Blake’s painting *is* in some sense *the* Last Judgment and not an imitation or fanciful construction; after all, he claims, “The Last Judgment is one of these Stupendous Visions[.] I have represented it as I saw it” (E 555). This vision does not exist in the mind’s eye; rather, it is a literal vision and sensory experience, much in the same way that the Last Judgment is presented to St. John the Divine as an event actually unfolding before him.²

Moreover, Blake indicates that his painting is a representation of the event in the sense that it re-presents the event. As a re-presentation, the work is not a stand-in for the

² Quoting E. S. Shaffer, Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. says of the visionary, “[He] ‘is actually seeing the events played out in the heavens.’ The heavens are therefore a stage from which the visionary *sees* some of the time—and *hears* some of the time—a drama unfold” (“Painted Prophecies” 107). Although Wittreich equates the visionary experience with that of a spectator of embodied performance, he maintains, “[Blake’s] illuminated books are [...] picture-prophecies” (108), which “contain both pictures and words” (107) as did “the book given to [John of Patmos] by Christ,” thus emphasizing their pictorial and verbal qualities but stopping short of equating these works with embodied performance.



Fig. 12. *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, 1808, pen and watercolour, Petworth House, Sussex. © National Trust. Used with permission.

event, but the event itself—a “production of presence” to borrow a phrase from Egginton (43). To *re-present* means to do again, but not in a way that is imitation; it takes part in the original moment. The painting, then, participates in the actual event as it presents it. Referring to the specific figures in his work, Blake explains, “[I]t ought to be understood that the Persons Moses & Abraham are not here meant but the States Signified by those Names the Individuals being representatives or Visions of those States as they were revealed to Mortal Man in the Series of Divine Revelations” (E 556). The word “representatives” functions in a way that supports the argument that Blake uses representation in an unconventional way. Here, he equates representatives with visions, indicating that Moses and Abraham, as representatives of specific States—abstract states of being, which are temporarily occupied by people as they pass from one state to another—are incarnations or concretizations of those States. A representative or vision in this case means an embodiment.

We are used to thinking of art objects, and indeed all media, as a way to imitate reality or to project a stand-in for the real experience. As Iser states, “Western tradition has repeated time and again” that artistic representation in general, and literary in particular, is “an act of mimesis” (*Prospecting* 243). Going against the grain, he argues that representation is not mimetic at all; rather, it is a performance, and he emphasizes “the performative qualities through which the act of representation brings about something that hitherto did not exist as a given object” (236). In this way, artistic representation does not imitate the world—it creates one. However, as my earlier discussion of Iser pointed out, his idea of this created world characterizes the world of the imagination as a virtual rather than an actual space.

In seeking to imitate reality as closely as possible, contemporary media aim toward those conventional mimetic ends for which Iser critiqued the Western tradition. As Gitelman notes, “[M]edia represent and delimit representing, so that new media provide new sites for the ongoing and vernacular experience of representation as such” (4), suggesting that media and audience interactions shape “popular ontologies of representation” (7). She explains, “Media are so integral to a sense of what representation itself *is*, and what counts as adequate—and thereby commodifiable—representation, that they share some of the conventional attributes of both art historical objects and scientific

ones" (4). The value of media (such as film, music media, videogames, and communication devices) is contingent on the extent to which they present stand-ins for reality as well as their ability to offer an authentic experience of the actual world. For instance, new videogames replace older ones in part because the graphics today seem to offer more life-like images, thereby making the audience feel as if the experience is truer to reality. Gitelman indicates that our judgment of "what counts as adequate [...] representation" is shaped in part by the way media depict the world and our experience of it. As a medium, or multimedia form, Blake's illuminated works also participate in notions of representation and reality. However, unlike some modern media, Blake's works do not aim for conventional mimesis in order to approach the real world as closely as possible. Instead, his works offer us the world of the imagination, but this world is not less real than the everyday world in which we live. Through the media of the illuminated works, he attempts to reshape our understanding of art and representation.

The man who writes, "[T]he notion that man has a body distinct from his soul, is to be expunged" and calls for "an improvement of sensual enjoyment" (*MHH*, pl. 14, E 39) seems at odds with the man who says, "Mental Things are alone Real what is Calld Corporeal Nobody Knows of its Dwelling Place" (*VLJ* E 565) and declares, "I assert for My self that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is hindrance & not Action it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me" (E 565), a biblical echo from the gospels that functions as a sign of leaving behind that which is not worthy.³ The first statement unifies flesh and spirit, body and mind, and implicitly reaffirms the physical and sensory part of life. In contrast, the latter statements seem to dismiss or reject the physical world, a sentiment that runs throughout *A Vision of the Last Judgment*:

³ Jesus tells His disciples to treat as dirt on their feet those that reject Him as the disciples spread His word. See Luke 9.1-5: "Then he called his twelve disciples together, and gave them power and authority over all devils, and to cure diseases. / And he sent them to preach the kingdom of God, and to heal the sick. / And he said unto them, [...] whatsoever house ye enter into, there abide, and thence depart. / And whosoever will not receive you, when ye go out of that city, shake off the very dust from your feet for a testimony against them." See also Mark 6.6-11, and Matthew 10.1-15. If the physical world stands for the dirt on Blake's feet, then it is somehow unworthy of being accepted and must be left behind.

This world of Imagination is the World of Eternity it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body This World <of Imagination> is Infinite & Eternal whereas the world of Generation or Vegetation is Finite & [for a small moment] Temporal There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Every Thing which we see are reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature. (E 555)

Here, Blake seems to separate the imagination from the material world and subordinate the latter. How can we reconcile the contradiction between a Blake who can say that body and soul are not separate and a Blake who suggests that the physical or vegetative part of being is less than the spiritual or eternal part? The way he characterizes the world of the imagination and the everyday world resonates with Plato's Myth of the Cave. Blake writes, "tho on Earth things seem Permanent they are less permanent than a Shadow as we all know too well." Blake implies that our world, the perceived world, the natural world is a shadow, like the shadows cast on the wall of Plato's cave that merely reflect the silhouettes of the reality outside of the cave, whereas the world of the imagination (like Plato's ideal forms) signifies "Permanent Realities."

However, the Platonic parallels are ruptured in other parts of the text and, indeed, in other works by Blake. The physical world in itself exhibits and houses the divine and the Eternal. In "Auguries of Innocence," Blake shows how the world exists on two planes—one of a surface image and the other of a deeper reality:

To see a 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. (1-4, E 490)

For Blake, the world around us is so much more than our limited perception allows us to see. However, seeing the deeper structure of the physical world is possible. The reason many of us cannot see "a World in a Grain of Sand"—a tiny part of the earth that is, in fact, big and glorious and divine—has to do with faulty perception. Blake looks at the sun and sees not a "Disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea," but "an Innumerable company of the Heavenly host crying Holy Holy Holy is the Lord God Almighty" (E 566). While Blake often describes the senses as closing up and limiting the potential of imagination,

he also uses them to experience the infinite. Like St. John seeing the revelation, this kind of experience hinges on the use of expanded perception over limited perception. It would seem that without the senses, the Eternal would be beyond our reach, or, put another way, the senses are a way (or the way) to the Eternal. The mind alone is not capable of achieving this.

Indeed, despite the seeming antipathy to the physical body when he calls the natural world the dirt upon his feet, in the *Marriage*, both Ezekiel and Isaiah acknowledge the senses or perception as components in the visionary process. Isaiah claims, “I saw no God, nor heard any, in a finite organical perception; but my senses discover’d the infinite in every thing” (pl. 12, E 38), while Ezekiel explains his “desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite” (E 39). Isaiah recognizes the limitation of “organical perception” or sensory perception, but he explains that his senses are still able to perceive the infinite in the world. Sensory perception has two levels: one organic and one visionary. Similarly, Ezekiel suggests that humans can achieve a vision of the Eternal through perception. Through the imagination, Isaiah and Ezekiel are able to use their senses in a way that transgresses their conventional limitations.

What change occurs to the senses in order for them to fulfill this potential? Soon after these exchanges with the prophets, Blake explains, “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” (pl. 14, E 39). Thus, the natural world expresses or is imbued with the Eternal, and the senses, which are part of the corporeal body, can do more than see in a mundane sense—they can lead humans to Blake’s notion of vision. Janet Warner’s explanation of the eternal and fallen form disentangles the paradox at play in Blake’s idea of the body and the senses. She states, “in Blake, Eternal Form and Fallen Form (or vegetative form) are essentially the same – they exist in one and the same body, and they exist *in the flesh*. It is not that there is a physical body *and* a spiritual body; they are rather two aspects of one” (23), and “it is only our perception of them that differs” (29). Our perception needs correcting so that we can see the infinite and divine in a world that from a mortal perspective seems finite and impure. The physical world itself, then, is not the “Dirt upon [his] feet” that he shakes off; rather, the dirt is a mistaken idea of the world—it is the world seen with faulty

perception. Conventional perceptions of reality and mistaken interpretations of the nature of the world, then, lead to a limited understanding that masks the true nature of existence.

The world of our misperception is a world of mortality and impermanence. The fact that this world has an end and is not eternal makes it something odious to Blake. For him, “Eternal Identity is one thing & Corporeal Vegetation is another thing” (E 556). He declares, “We are in a World of Generation & death & this world we must cast off” (E 562). The impermanent “Shadows” of this world come about thanks to our belief in the mortality of the natural body and world. A shadow is something impermanent, something that comes about due to shifts in light and positions of objects. In the Bible, the phrase “the shadow of death” appears repeatedly (especially in the Book of Job). Blake also explicitly ties shadows to death in works such as *The Book of Urizen* and *The Book of Ahania*, where Urizen is said to have a “deathful shadow” (*Urizen* 20.26, E 80) and to be “a death-shadow” (*Ahania* 2.41, E 85). In a letter to Thomas Butts, Blake includes a poem in which he writes, “We like Infants descend / In our Shadows on Earth / Like a weak mortal birth” (E 713). However, the true nature of this world is not death but eternal renewal:

The Nature of Visionary Fancy or Imagination is very little Known & the Eternal nature & permanence of its ever Existent Images is considered as less permanent than the things of Vegetative & Generative Nature yet the Oak dies as well as the Lettuce but Its Eternal Image & Individuality never dies. but renews by its seed. just [as] <so> the Imaginative Image returns [according to] <by> the seed of Contemplative Thought[.] (E 555)

According to Blake, this world does not house mere copies of eternal counterparts as Plato claims. In fact, Blake’s sense of renewal and regeneration is thoroughly un-Platonic. The view that this world and the things in it die and end is one that provides a false understanding of reality. Flawed perception, based in rational and empirical science rather than imagination, is the cause of this mistake. When perception is freed from its imposed limitations, it can reveal the true nature of reality, which is eternal. The oak does not die in the sense that it is no longer a part of this world or no longer exists, but renews itself and thus reflects the eternal oak. Such a vision of the world, where things are not

finite and renew themselves, suggests a parallel to the re-presentation of visionary art, demonstrating the eternal presence of this world—the eternal immanence in all things.

This renewal or repetition would seem to be inferior to Blake's fondness for originality. Edward Larrissy addresses this apparent contradiction in Blake's thinking. In discussing the difference between Blake's chosen method of relief-etching, rooted in inspiration, and the more traditional intaglio engraving, Larrissy says, "Since printing is permitted by the possibility of repetition, what we have is two types of repetition, a positive and a negative, each the reversal of the other" (68). For Blake, "[t]he former is a repetition that is always new, the latter the repetition of weariness and despair" (69). I interpret his discussion of the oak tree as a view of a physical world that is made up of continual renewal, where each rebirth from a seed signifies neither a copy nor "mechanical" repetition, but a "redeemed repetition" to borrow terms from Larrissy (71).

With his art, "The Nature of [which] is Visionary or Imaginative," Blake seeks to "Restore <what the Ancients calld> the Golden Age," to restore the "Reality [which] was Forgot," while "the Vanities of Time & Space only Rememberd & calld Reality" (*VLJ E* 555). The illuminated works allow us to move beyond the limited, conventional view of the world that we take to be concrete reality and travel into that "Reality [which] was Forgot," which is, in fact, concrete and real, not virtual or merely mimetic, and which has a full-bodied presence. Blake entreats us to enter his painting in the crux of the *Last Judgment*:

If the Spectator could Enter into these Images in his Imagination
 approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought if he
 could Enter into Noahs Rainbow or into his bosom or could make a Friend
 & Companion of one of these Images of wonder which always intreats
 him to leave mortal things as he must know then would he arise from his
 Grave then would he meet the Lord in the Air & then he would be happy
 General Knowledge is Remote Knowledge it is in Particulars that Wisdom
 consists & Happiness too. (E 560)

Precisely what "entering" entails Blake does not make clear, but his language suggests, on the surface, that this entrance is an intellectual one, as the spectator would enter "in his

Imagination approaching [the images] on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought.” Indeed, Behrendt’s analysis of this passage focuses on the mental activity:

An act of perception of this sort sets up a different dynamic than does the standard gallery picture [...] for it requires that the viewer be both participant and co-creator. It also dictates that the communication that is the object of *both* parties (artist and viewer) is of a sort that transcends the limitations of the physical medium and approaches a sort of telepathic communication that transpires ‘in the air’, where the viewer leaves the ‘grave’ of vegetable, human [...]. (“‘Something in My Eye’” 85)

Behrendt emphasizes the role of the audience as active participant and co-creator rather than as passive observer. He rightly points out the elevated level of perception that this kind of audience engagement entails. However, Behrendt’s idea of a Blakean audience remains at the level of mental interaction, even if it is a direct interaction with the artist himself.⁴

Yet, I argue that Blake’s call to “enter” his works goes further than the telepathic or mental connection that Behrendt describes. Blake’s images and allusions point to an entrance as a full-bodied, sensory act, as well as a mental one, that occurs when the spectator shifts his/her conventional understanding and use of perception and sees Blake’s world as something present that he/she can enter into and inhabit fully. The result of this entrance, as Blake states, is a union with the divine and a blissful state. This idea of entering a work of art is taken up by Iser in his reader-response theory:

Literature simulates life, not in order to portray it, but in order to allow the reader to share in it. He can step out of his own world and enter another, where he can experience extremes of pleasure and pain without being involved in any consequences whatsoever. It is this lack of consequence that enables him to experience things that would otherwise be inaccessible owing to the pressing demands of everyday reality. And precisely because

⁴ According to Behrendt, Blake’s goal with his art in terms of audience reception is by no means unique: “This is the sort of telepathic communication that is everywhere the aim of Romantic art, be it visual or verbal” (170). I would argue that the kind of full-bodied entrance of the audience that I see as key to the nature of the illuminated works does, in fact, separate Blake from other artists.

the literary text makes no objectively real demand on its readers, it opens up a freedom that everyone can interpret in his own way. (*Prospecting* 29)

Like Blake, Iser uses the word “enter” in describing the interaction between a reader and a text. However, Iser’s qualification of the experience as without “consequences” for the reader indicates the opposite implication in Blake’s understanding of a spectator’s entrance into a work. For Iser, a sharp divide exists between the solid reality of the everyday and the ephemeral intellectual space of the imagination. Blake destabilizes this binary opposition that equates reality with the actual and imagination with the virtual. The imagination and Blake’s art do, in fact, make “objectively real demand[s] on its [audience],” and herein lies the radicalism of Blake’s hail to the spectator.

Addressing the audience of his painting *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, Blake uses the term “Spectator” rather than viewer to indicate someone who, by seeing, involves himself or herself in the spectacle. The connotations of the term suit Blake’s construction of a particular kind of audience interaction for his work. According to the *OED*, the word was first used in the late sixteenth century to describe members of a theatrical audience. Thus, Blake implies that his audience interacts with his work the way a spectator does with a live event or performance. On top of the original use of the word, we also have Joseph Addison and Richard Steele’s sense of spectator (based on their early eighteenth-century publication *The Spectator*) as a person who engages in the political and the cultural arenas. Blake’s spectator, then, is someone who not only watches an event unfold but also participates in a wider social context. In fact, Adam Smith uses the term in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1759) in a way that fuses the dramatic and the social connotations. He posits an “ideal man within the breast” (147) or “the great demi-god within the breast” (245) as a sort of moral centre and “tribunal of [our] own consciences” (130) who “prescribes and approves” (245). Smith views this ideal man as an “impartial and well-informed spectator” (130), an “impartial spectator of [our] own conduct” (148), thus implying both a witness who sees live events in the sense of a dramatic or live performance and a judge who evaluates and guides behaviour toward other human beings in the social sense of the wider human community.

Furthermore, action necessarily depends on sight. In explaining the way sympathy works, Smith highlights the power of physical sight:

Grief and joy, for example, strongly expressed in the look and gestures of any one, at once affect the spectator with some degree of a like painful or agreeable emotion. A smiling face is, to every body that sees it, a cheerful object; as a sorrowful countenance, on the other hand, is a melancholy one. (11)

Smith explicitly links a feeling of sympathy for another, or being able to identify with another, to physical sight. By seeing someone in pleasure or pain, we are moved to feel a similar sensation. For both Smith and Blake, then, to be a spectator is to be both mentally (or emotionally) and physically involved and includes the dramatic and social implications, though Blake avoids Smith's emphasis on morality.

In addition to the term spectator, the biblical allusions in Blake's hailing of the spectator reaffirm the dual aspect of this entrance as mental *and* physical. In the first part of the quotation Blake speaks of the Spectator "Enter[ing] into these Images in his Imagination approaching them on the Fiery Chariot of his Contemplative Thought" (E 560). The fiery chariot alludes to 2 Kings where God takes the prophet Elijah to heaven in "a chariot of fire," leaving his student Elisha behind:

And it came to pass, when the LORD would take up Elijah into heaven by a whirlwind, that Elijah went with Elisha from Gilgal.

[.....]

And it came to pass, when they were gone over, that Elijah said unto Elisha, Ask what I shall do for thee, before I be taken away from thee.

And Elisha said, I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me.

And he said, Thou hast asked a hard thing: nevertheless, if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so.

And it came to pass, as they still went on, and talked, that, behold, there appeared a chariot of fire, and horses of fire, and parted them both asunder; and Elijah went up by a whirlwind into heaven.

And Elisha saw it, and he cried, My father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof. And he saw him no more: and he took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces.

He took up also the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and went back, and stood by the bank of Jordan; And he took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him, and smote the waters, and said, Where is the LORD God of Elijah? and when he also had smitten the waters, they parted hither and thither: and Elisha went over. And when the sons of the prophets which were to view at Jericho saw him, they said, The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha. And they came to meet him, and bowed themselves to the ground before him. (2 Kings 2.1-15)

Here, the chariot that comes to take Elijah does not signify a dream or dream state; it is not simply the vehicle of a metaphor. Rather, an actual chariot comes for him in a waking state. The concrete object coincides with the spiritual moment of Elijah's return to God. Like many events in the Bible (and indeed myths in general), this event demonstrates the fact that the spiritual and the physical are mutually present and seamlessly interfused. Similarly, Blake's writing continually identifies the concrete with the abstract—the body with the mind—the physical with the spiritual. These kinds of identifications do not merely highlight similar characteristics between two objects as conventional metaphors do; rather, they point to a literal transformation of objects, as well as showing the interconnection of the concrete and the abstract.⁵

Moreover, on an interpersonal level, Elijah and Elisha's relationship shows how an entrance can be both concrete and abstract. Elijah grants Elisha one final request before Elijah must go to heaven. Elisha asks for "a double portion of [Elijah's] spirit [to] be upon [Elisha]." Elijah acquiesces to the entreaty only after he acknowledges that it is "a hard thing" Elisha asks. Elijah explains, "[I]f thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be so." So the wish will be granted only if Elisha sees the moment God takes Elijah. The condition Elijah imposes reaffirms the

⁵ For instance, in Isaiah, the prophet explains how God "hath made [his] mouth like a sharp sword; [...] and made [him] a polished shaft" (49.2). The first part of the line functions metaphorically with the use of a simile, as God makes Isaiah's mouth *like* a sword, but then the metaphoric level shifts into the literal level, as God makes Isaiah into "a polished shaft"—not like "a polished shaft" but an actual shining blade. And, in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, the Last Judgment also stands for different signifieds at once: an event foretold in the Bible, Blake's painting, and a kind of enlightenment within an individual.

importance of vision and seeing something firsthand. Elisha must be a witness, a spectator, to Elijah's encounter with God, a fact Blake picks up on when he calls for his "spectators" to approach his art on the "Fiery Chariot" of their thought.

What is more, throughout the passage, images of doubling and splitting abound. For example, Elisha asks Elijah to become a part of him, for Elijah to incorporate himself into Elisha somehow. He requests "a double portion of [Elijah's] spirit," the chariot "parted them both asunder," Elisha "took hold of his own clothes, and rent them in two pieces," and Elisha "smote the waters" and "they parted hither and thither." These images emphasize the union and division of two individuals and suggest that, by taking on "a double portion of [Elijah's] spirit," Elisha both becomes Elijah yet retains his own self. The transfer of Elijah's spirit manifests itself in a material object: Elisha "took the mantle of Elijah that fell from him." While functioning as a concrete token or sign that Elisha will become the next prophet in Elijah's place, the mantle also functions as an external manifestation of Elijah's entrance into Elisha, of the fact that "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha," a fact proclaimed by "the sons of the prophets" when they *see* Elisha. The garment is external to Elisha, but it is also intrinsically important as a material sign of the transference of visionary power. Much like Elisha's viewing of the fiery chariot functions as a performative moment—by seeing the chariot, Elisha performs the ability to see visions—the viewing of Elisha with Elijah's mantle functions in the same way—when the people see Elijah's mantle upon Elisha, he becomes Elijah for the people. By inheriting Elijah's mantle, Elisha ceases to be only Elisha—now, he is both Elisha and Elijah. Blake's use of this allusion, then, refers both to the performative impact of spectating and to the dual aspect of entering and vision as both physical and spiritual. By the same token, when the spectator sees the painting *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, a last judgment potentially enacts itself in him/her in the very act of spectating (fig. 12).⁶

The second allusion in Blake's key passage also draws on this idea of entrances. He shifts from the idea of the spectator entering the images to one of the spectator "Enter[ing] into Noahs Rainbow or into his bosom" (E 560). Noah's rainbow refers to

⁶ Blake's original painting *A Vision of the Last Judgment* is lost. The corresponding image provided is an earlier pen and watercolour version of the work (1808).

Genesis 9.8-17, where God promises Noah that he will never again bring on a flood and destroy his creation. As a sign of this covenant, a rainbow appears. Again, we have the concrete and the abstract intertwined—the physical phenomenon of the rainbow with the abstract promise it signifies. Noah’s bosom, like Blake’s earlier reference to the “Divine bosom” (E 555), more directly points to the entrance of one human being into another. While the Bible does not include a reference to Noah’s bosom specifically, it does mention Abraham’s bosom in the story of Lazarus. In one of the parables, Jesus tells the story of a rich man and Lazarus, a sick and dying beggar who “was laid at [the rich man’s] gate, full of sores” (Luke 16.20). Presumably, the rich man denies aid to Lazarus, who dies shortly after “desiring to be fed with the crumbs which fell from the rich man’s table” (16.21). Jesus says, “And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham’s bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried; / And in hell he lift up his eyes, being in torments, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom” (16.22-23). Abraham explains to the rich man that each man finds himself in the place he belongs thanks to his earthly deeds.

The relevance of the parable to a reading of Blake’s implicit call on us to enter his works rests on the rich man finding Lazarus in Abraham’s bosom. On the one hand, Lazarus has died and gone to heaven; on the other hand, he is being embraced by Abraham. The parable concretizes the spiritual idea of heaven with Abraham’s gesture of embracing Lazarus, where the latter finds himself literally within the arms of the former.⁷ To enter Blake’s work has a similar meaning, but he takes this idea a step further by revising the entrance from an embrace (though this still includes physically touching) to incorporation. We are affected not only intellectually and spiritually in an engagement with Blake’s works, but also physically as we literally enter them, occupying the physical space of the world of the imagination they hold, the world of the imagination that they are—thus experiencing a “perceptual immediacy” (to borrow a phrase from Bolter and Grusin (22)).

⁷ This duality also arises in the physical and spiritual entrance that occurs in the process of inspiration, particularly in Blake’s *Milton* where people enter into each other’s bosoms and Milton enters into Blake as a star. In chapter four, I focus on this kind of inspiration and the greater implications for identity.

Biblical entrances encompass people entering city gates or structures, wisdom or curses entering the hearts of people, spirits or demons entering people, and the possibility of entering God or heaven. Perhaps the most significant example of an entrance is Jesus himself. In the parable of the Good Shepherd, Jesus says, "I am the door of the sheep. [...] I am the door: by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture" (John 10.7-9). Jesus figures himself as an entrance, as a door to be passed through, but He is also the goal on the other side of the threshold. Blake implicitly takes up this figuration in both the *Last Judgment* when he says, "it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body" (E 555) and also in the address "To the Public" at the beginning of *Jerusalem*, where he writes about "enter[ing] into the Saviours kingdom, the Divine body" (pl. 3, E 145). By appealing to his audience, the spectator, to "Enter into these Images," Blake suggests that his work functions as a divine revelation, as a means of salvation. His work is the medium through which the spectator accesses the Eternal, through which he/she can enter the world of the imagination, but his work is also an incarnation of the imagination itself.

Blake aligns the act of entering his images not only with entering Noah's rainbow or Noah's bosom but also, significantly, with friendship. Blake asks us to "make a Friend & Companion of one of these Images of wonder which always intreats him [the spectator] to leave mortal things as he must" (E 560). The relevance of friendship can be found later in the *Last Judgment*, when Blake explains, "for a Man Can only Reject Error by the Advice of a Friend or by the Immediate Inspiration of God" (E 563). This quotation has two possible meanings: either "the Advice of a Friend" stands in contrast to "the Immediate Inspiration of God," where the former provides a distanced relationship to enlightenment (the rejection of error) and the latter an immediate one, or the two are equivalent so that they both offer immediacy. Given the context of the *Last Judgment* as a whole, I argue for the latter meaning. If vision or imagination is superior to fable or allegory because the latter is somehow distanced from reality, then vision or imagination must signify an immediate apprehension of the thing one sees. Immediacy marks the actions of spectating, entering, and making a friend of Blake's images. This immediate experience must be one that lacks objectivity in the sense of a distanced perspective of the thing under consideration. Blake emphasizes the details of the experience, not the

overall view: “General Knowledge is Remote Knowledge it is in Particulars that Wisdom consists & Happiness too” (E 560). The particulars are key; the spectator needs to enter into the works in order to be amidst the details, needs to “enter[] into & discriminate[] most minutely” the world of the imagination. An external viewpoint cannot provide this experience. A subjective position is needed, a position akin to Lazarus within Abraham’s bosom, or Elisha who incorporates Elijah’s spirit, or those who must enter the Divine door, which is Jesus. The works, then, have to become real to us in a physical sense in order to accomplish this dual physical and spiritual entrance.

In this specific case, Blake uses his painting of the Last Judgment as the image to enter. However, throughout the *Last Judgment*, he uses the term Last Judgment to mean several different things, but the most important meaning is enlightenment. Blake uses the term to refer to the event in scripture, to a “Stupendous Vision[]” that he sees (E 555), to his painting, and to poetry. The Last Judgment prophesied in the Bible will occur when Jesus comes to judge and divide the righteous from the wicked, the good from the evil; it is also the time when flesh and spirit will be united.⁸ Blake dismisses the moral aspects of the Last Judgment when he argues, “Men are admitted into Heaven not because they have <curbed &> governd their Passions or have No Passions but because they have Cultivated their Understandings” (E 564). For Blake, questions of right and wrong do not factor into one’s entrance into heaven. Rather, the nurturing and development of one’s way of thinking and perceiving, the process of enlightenment, determines it. Furthermore, enlightenment conquers death. Blake writes, “for in Paradise they have no Corporeal <& Mortal> Body that originated with the Fall & was calld Death & cannot be removed but by a Last judgment. While we are in the world of Mortality we Must Suffer” (E 564). Here Blake implicitly identifies the Last Judgment with enlightenment, where death equals ignorance. He does not explicitly reject the physical body; rather, he rejects the

⁸ In 1 Corinthians, Paul explains “the resurrection of the dead” that will come at the end of time (15.42). He says, “Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, / In a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed. / For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality” (15.51-53).

associations of mortality that arose with the fall of humankind. Significantly, Blake refers to *a* Last Judgment, not *the* Last Judgment, suggesting that one can undergo a Last Judgment at any time, not only at the end of the world, though *a* Last Judgment, an event tied to an individual at any point in time, will inevitably participate in *the* Last Judgment, a communal moment at the end of history. Discrete or individual acts can lead to this apocalyptic event within a person: “whenever any Individual Rejects Error & Embraces Truth a Last Judgment passes upon that Individual” (E 562). Therefore, Blake’s works have the potential to enact a Last Judgment on their spectators by helping them reject error.

Blake explains, “Truth is Eternal[.] Error [...] will be Burned Up & then & not till then Truth or Eternity will appear[.] [Error] is Burnt up the Moment Men cease to behold it” (E 565). Again, Blake points to perception, and, significantly, to the implicit choice involved in seeing truth. Paradoxically, if ceasing to behold error burns error up, then, by the same token, simply beholding or seeing truth creates it. Specifically, by entering Blake’s images, his works of art, the spectator can “arise from his Grave [...] [and] meet the Lord in the Air” (E 560). Viewing, then, has the potential corresponding consequence of entering, and to enter the works enacts a last judgment upon the audience; seeing makes it happen (much like Elisha becomes a visionary by seeing the vision of the fiery chariot). Blake’s painting of the Last Judgment, then, functions self-reflexively because the spectator experiences a last judgment by looking at the work about the Last Judgment. Ideally, the subject of what you see in the painting is what is happening to you as you see it.

This visionary or life-altering event is precisely what is at stake in Blake’s illuminated works. While the subject of the illuminated works differs from the painting’s subject of the Last Judgment, their purposes are the same. In its fullest manifestation, an engagement with the illuminated works leads the audience to undergo a last judgment. A Blakean construction of spectatorship involves active choices, not passive reception. Seeing in a way that leads to an entrance or a last judgment (or becoming a visionary like Elisha—he chooses to tear his clothes and become the new Elijah, and, thus, a new Elisha made up of both men), then, necessarily depends on a particular kind of sight—a consciously active one where the spectator chooses how he/she will see, and,

consequently, chooses to remake notions of human potential and the nature of reality. The media of the illuminated works physicalize the imagination, but the spectator must choose to see this reality unfold. How does Blake attempt to accomplish this particular feat in the illuminated works? He does so by including an explicit meta-level through the use of verbal and visual self-reflexive episodes or moments.

The illuminated works explicitly provoke the audience's awareness of the spectating process itself, a process the audience participates in as they reflect on it. This formal and integrated use of self-reflexivity self-consciously shows the constructedness of Blake's works by highlighting not only who created them and how they were created but also the audience's activity of interaction, in this case a combination of reading, viewing, and spectating. This self-reflexivity distances the audience from a simple escapist interaction by forcing a more aware engagement. However, Blake pointedly continues his call for his audience to enter his works, thus becoming a part of the world of the imagination—an action that on the surface seems to stand in contradiction to the meta-techniques of forcing the audience to reflect on his artistic media as such. As in the example of naming Himself the door, in the "Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass," Jesus parallels twentieth-century media theory. After all, "he sent and signified *it* [the revelation] by his angel unto his servant John" (Revelation 1.1). On the one hand, the Angel brings the Book of Revelation with him to give to John, but, on the other hand, he also seems to *be* the message of Revelation, just as Jesus brings salvation and is salvation, recalling Marshall McLuhan's well-known statement that "the medium is the message" (7). McLuhan specifically refers to a new understanding of human identity and media with his example of the machine, which "altered our relations to one another and to ourselves" (8). With respect to these relationships and this new awareness, he provocatively claims that the content does not matter—"it mattered not in the least whether [the machine] turned out cornflakes or Cadillacs"—but the nature of the new medium of machine technology itself does matter. While the content does matter with respect of the Book of Revelation, it is important to note that Jesus equates the centrality of the message with its medium. Blake, too, explicitly takes up this position with respect to his illuminated works, wherein the last judgment enacted upon the audience depends

upon the medium that conveys the content and upon the active participation of the audience. Both elements matter in provoking a fundamental shift in the way the spectator conceives of human identity and the world.

Gitelman explains that one aspect of media is the way they shape our “modes and habits of perception” (1). A particular medium cannot help but influence the way we engage with it and the activity it facilitates: “As much as people may converse through a telephone and forget the telephone itself, the context of telephoning makes all kinds of difference to the things they say and the way they say them” (7). Similarly, Blake viewed the multimedia form of the illuminated works as having the power to mold our perceptions. Besides believing these “Illuminated Books” produced in “Illuminated Printing” (Prospectus of 1793, E 693) to be a new form of production, he also attached a visionary quality to the form in large part due to its origins. According to John Thomas Smith, a friend of Blake’s brother Robert, Blake had “one of his visionary imaginations,” where the dead Robert visited Blake and imparted this new engraving method to him (501). The link to the dead imbues this form with a visionary and spiritual quality, associating Blake with prophet-poets such as Milton, who draw on the heavenly muse, and biblical prophets inspired by God.

Generally, in traditional modes of production, engravers would etch into an actual copper plate (known as the intaglio method). In Blake’s method for most of the illuminated works (known as relief-etching), he used small brushes to draw and write on a plate with “an impervious liquid,” and then placed it in an acid bath, “eating the plain parts [...] away” to allow the words and designs to stand in relief (John Thomas Smith 501). The actual process involved in creating the works assigns a double importance to them. In the *Marriage*, Blake writes,

this [i.e., correcting misconceptions] I shall do, by printing in the infernal method, by corrosives, which in Hell are salutary and medicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and displaying the infinite which was hid. 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. (pl. 14, E 39)

As a prophet-poet, Blake constructs himself as the figure who will rectify human notions about the nature of the world and humanity's relation to it. The power to do so lies in the medium (as much as the message), specifically Blake's illuminated printing. As Edward Larrissy notes, "we must read Blake's intention of 'melting apparent surfaces away' (including its figurative aspect) as referring not to any type of engraving, but specifically to his own method of relief etching" (65). Metaphorically, this method signifies the road to proper vision, the cleansing process that the senses—"the doors of perception"—undergo that allows humans to see the infinite and divine in what, from a mortal earthly perspective, seems finite and impure. In a more literal sense, Blake foregrounds the material processes and labour involved in his art-making practice, his "infernal method" of engraving. As Joseph Viscomi states, "The 'infinite' can thus be said to be 'displayed' in the printing sense of being made prominent, as it literally would be when the design was etched into relief" (81; also qtd. in Larrissy 66). The waste, or error, gets burnt away, leaving the infinite or Eternal in full view. By underlining the duality of this art form, he reaffirms mind and body and the spiritual and the physical.⁹

The example above exemplifies one of many kinds of self-reflexive strategies that Blake uses in the illuminated works, strategies that appear to be at cross-purposes with his implicit plea to his spectators to enter his images in the *Last Judgment*. On the one hand, he uses these self-reflexive techniques, which have the effect of preventing an unthinking, and only temporary, escape into his works, but, on the other hand, he implicitly requests his audience to immerse themselves in his art. The immediacy attached to such entrances and the distance provoked by the works' self-reflexivity resonate with the way media theorists Jay David Bolter and Richard Grusin conceptualize new media, such as virtual reality simulators, and much older media, such as perspective

⁹ Larrissy bolsters this duality present in Blake's method by referring to another new medium that arose in Blake's time. Larrissy says, "[I]t seems eminently probable that Blake is specifically relating touch and sight by reference to a precisely contemporary phenomenon [1784]: the invention of relief printing for the blind" (66). He continues, "It seems likely, then, that Blake is providing an analogue of relief printing for the blind, one that exploits the figurative senses of blindness and vision, in that it makes relief etching a means of access to imaginative vision among those who require their 'doors of perception' to be cleansed."

painting. Bolter and Grusin address “our culture’s contradictory imperatives for immediacy and hypermediacy” (5). Immediacy signifies a desire for “transparency” (19), “the real” (21), the “authentic” (53), and “a sense of presence” (22), in short, an “experience without mediation” (22-23). Bolter and Grusin define immediacy as “[a] style of visual representation whose goal is to make the viewer forget the presence of the medium (canvas, photographic film, cinema, and so on) and believe that he is in the presence of the objects of representation” (272-73). By no means is this kind of representation a modern invention: “At least since the Renaissance, [the desire for immediacy] has been a defining feature of Western visual (and for that matter verbal) representation” (24). This “logic of immediacy dictates that the medium itself should disappear and leave us in the presence of the thing represented: sitting in the race car or standing on a mountaintop” (5-6), and, I would add, walking in the world of, for example, Urizen and Orc after we have answered Blake’s call to enter his works. Conversely, the imperative for hypermediacy leads to “opacity” (19) and signifies “a fascination with media” (12). Bolter and Grusin define hypermediacy as “[a] style of visual representation whose goal is to remind the viewer of the medium” (272). They also categorize “medieval illuminated manuscript[s]” as hypermedia, along with many computer-related media, such as “a buttoned and windowed multimedia application” (12). Blake’s illuminated works also fit under this category of hypermediacy due to their multimedia format and self-conscious unveiling of their construction.

However, the correspondence between the illuminated works and Bolter and Grusin’s media theory breaks down in two important ways: one, the logic of immediacy fails to correspond precisely to the illuminated works when one considers the fact that they do not try “to erase all traces of mediation” (5), but, rather, they highlight the media employed; and, two, even though “[h]ypermedia and transparent media are opposite manifestations of the same desire: the desire to get past the limits of representation and to achieve the real” (53), there remains an underlying awareness that the experience achieved in either case can only ever be less than everyday reality or never fully equated with reality. Blake argues for the reality of the imagination in the *Last Judgment*, as I have discussed. And the imagination can help us to more fully perceive the Eternal in the everyday world. Contrary to Blake, Bolter and Grusin argue that “immediacy” or “the

self [...] becom[ing] one with the objects of mediations” remains a “utopian state,” not (currently) fully realizable (236).

Despite the inexact correspondence between the logic of Blake’s art and “the twin logics of immediacy and hypermediacy” (5), they are useful terms in describing the seemingly dual impulses present in Blake’s works, so I will continue to employ them in the remainder of my chapter as Bolter and Grusin define them. However, a more suitable parallel can be found in theatrical models because the illuminated works function so much like dramatic performance, as I argue in chapter one. The theatrical correlations here are medieval spectacle and Brechtian epic theatre. Where the former works on the logic of immediacy, the latter works on the logic of hypermediacy in that it refuses a transparent interaction with the representation. I argue that these two opposing modes of engagement do not, in fact, reflect cross-purposes in Blake; rather, they serve the same purpose: to catalyze an experience of the world of the imagination. First, I will examine the implicit Brechtian associations within the illuminated works. These self-reflexive episodes take the shape of scenes of engraving, writing, painting, reading, viewing, and performing, as well as direct addresses, entrances, intertextual allusions, and adaptations. A Brechtian alienation-effect is necessary to prevent simple absorption, but the alienation is not permanent; it has the potential to lead the audience to a place where they can choose to make a fundamental shift in perception, thereby choosing to experience the illuminated works like a medieval performance, where what we experience is continuous with, not separate from, our perceived world. I argue, then, that the self-reflexive moments in Blake’s works provoke a two-stage process in the act of spectatorship: alienation followed by deep immersion (not mere escapist absorption).

In order to facilitate an entrance into the alternate but real and material space of the imagination, Blake forces us to question the barrier between our reality and the reality depicted in his works in both stages of the two-stage process explained above, a process that creates a Blakean spectatorship. The first stage requires a solidification and reaffirmation of this barrier, while the second stage demands its destabilization and disintegration—yet both stages rely on a number of self-reflexive techniques. First, I will focus on the reaffirmation or revealing of this boundary. In art, such as literature, film, visual arts, and theatre, self-reflexive moments tend to undermine an escapist aesthetics

and the naturalness of the medium's representation. They remind the audience that someone has constructed the object within a medium that contains particular conventions, liberties, and limitations. These elements, then, force a critical and active rather than passive response to the work. For instance, self-reflexivity can call into question the artist's sincerity, the veracity of the story or of the image, the ideology presented in the work and the artist's rationale for making the work. The result is that a distancing or alienating effect occurs.

Turning specifically to theatre, self-reflexive moments or self-reflexive drama, known as metatheatres (a term coined by Lionel Abel) or metadrama, can consist of stage-design or story elements and, perhaps the most jolting for the audience, a breaking of the fourth wall. When an actor turns to the audience and shows an obvious awareness of their presence, or even speaks directly to them, the audience is ejected from their safe position as voyeurs. Such a method of performance opposes more traditional methods, such as the construction and maintenance of "stage illusion," where the audience, according to Samuel Taylor Coleridge, provides a willing suspension of disbelief and a "temporary Faith which we [the audience] encourage by our own will" (5, 1: 130). Of their own volition, the audience succumbs to the illusion before them as reality rather than merely a representation of it.

As Richard Hornby explains in his study addressing the gaps in Lionel Abel's definition of metatheatres, "there is much more to metadrama than the simple technical definition of 'drama about drama.' The metadramatic experience for the audience is one of unease, a dislocation of perception" (32). Metadrama has the potential to cause "estrangement" or "alienation" in an audience. Bertolt Brecht, arguably the most famous proponent of alienation and the breaking of stage illusion, refused to allow a night at the theatre to become a simple pleasure of escapist entertainment. Instead, he articulated and implemented what he named *der Verfremdungseffekt* or the alienation-effect. In a discussion on Chinese theatre, Brecht states,

the Chinese artist never acts as if there were a fourth wall besides the three surrounding him. He expresses his awareness of being watched. This immediately removes one of the European stage's characteristic illusions.

The audience can no longer have the illusion of being the unseen spectator at an event which is really taking place. (91-92)

Brecht redefines the theatrical medium from “the means of pleasure” into “an object of instruction” so that what he does is “convert [...] [theatrical] institutions from places of entertainment into organs of mass communication” (40). For Brecht, alienating the audience from what they see onstage allows them to better learn and act. Thus, “the technique which produces an A-effect [Alienation-effect] is the exact opposite of that which aims at empathy” (136). Using various kinds of alienating or self-reflexive techniques, Brecht’s “theatre was to be *nonempathetic*, *nonillusionistic*, *nonAristotelian*” (Hornby 16) so that theatre could serve as a call to action and encourage the audience to take responsibility in the actions occurring onstage. Brecht’s alienation-effect makes it difficult for the audience to subscribe to the Coleridgean suspension of disbelief, much less to feel as if they are participants in the dramatic action. In part, Blake also uses metadramatical self-reflexive strategies to alienate his spectators and to disrupt the “temporary Faith” into which the conventional “stage illusion” allows the audience to fall. After all, Blake does not seek a merely superficial and temporary state; he seeks a fundamental alteration.

Hornby outlines five key elements of metadrama—the play within the play, the inclusion of ceremonies or performances, role-playing or acting, the reference to real or literary figures and events, and self-reference (32)—all of which are present in Blake’s illuminated works. The second element needs little explanation: the works depict a proliferation of performances, including dancing, singing, playing musical instruments, playing games, processions, grandiose spectacles, praying, and marriages or unions. Likewise, the other four metadramatical elements find expression in Blake’s works. For instance, the play within a play takes various forms in Blake’s works, forms which signal a *mise en abyme* of different kinds. One kind comes by way of a song within a song, where bards sing their poetry in Blake’s book of poetry (as does the Bard in *Milton*); another arises in repeated scenes of writing and engraving (and inverse writing and engraving, which is in itself an alienation from a process that should be familiar, namely, reading; see *Milton* pl. 30 and *Jerusalem* pl. 41 for example). In a Brechtian sense, Blake makes his audience aware of his role in the creation of his art and of art’s status as a

constructed object through these repeated scenes, which become regular motifs in his works. A familiar example is the scene in the *Marriage* discussed earlier, where Blake describes the infernal printing presses of hell, which employ a method corresponding to his own method of creation as an engraver who uses acid baths to burn away the untreated surfaces of copper plates. In addition, a resonant image can be found in “The Tyger” where the poet alludes to the blacksmith who beats metals and works in furnaces—another hellish scene of creation—producing the creative force responsible for the tyger. In fact, there are several instances, spanning all his works, of this kind of self-reflexive construction of the scene of creation: in *The Book of Urizen*, the eponymous figure holds a book open overtop of Blake’s own two-panelled text, implying a connection between the words we see in the two panels and the words within the two pages Urizen holds open for us (pl. 5); on the title page, Urizen writes with one hand and illustrates with another, creating a kind of “self-portrait” of Blake as poet and visual artist according to David V. Erdman (*The Illuminated Blake* 183)—a tree arced like a tablet grows behind two stone tablets that sit behind Urizen, creating a visual *mise en abyme* effect of a book within a book within a book (fig. 13); in “The Lamb,” trees form an archway encasing the text of the poem, where the archway doubles as a reading tablet and once again functions as a *mise en abyme*; in the *Marriage*, devils appear to be writing on scrolls (pl. 10); in *Jerusalem*, Albion sleeps on a book and sits beside an open scroll with a miniature figure—Blake according to Erdman (316)—who appears to have written it (pl. 41); and Urizen lies beneath Blake’s poetic text and holds his place in a book as he looks up through the text above to the top portion of the plate where someone lies overtop a scroll, a scene which more generally references books and reading (pl. 64). Each of these textual and visual references forces the audience to contemplate the act of creation and the act of reception, and they indicate an art form that reflects on itself. They do not allow the spectator to forget that the objects before him/her are constructed; as a result, they distance him/her from what is being presented (though the works’ non-linear narrative qualities and complex mythic universe also go a long way to discourage us from simply escaping this world).

As plays within plays exhibit a theatre contemplating itself, Blake’s multimedia art works exhibit media contemplating themselves as media within media. The



Fig. 13. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, title page, object 1, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

multimedia aspect of the illuminated works functions to produce an awareness of mediation in similar way as Bolter and Grusin's hypermediacy:

[H]ypermediacy expresses itself as multiplicity. If the logic of immediacy leads one either to erase or to render automatic the act of representation, the logic of hypermediacy acknowledges multiple acts of representation and makes them visible. Where immediacy suggests a unified visual space, contemporary hypermediacy offers a heterogeneous space, in which representation is conceived of not as a window on to the world, but rather as 'windowed' itself—with windows that open on to other representations or other media. The logic of hypermediacy multiplies the signs of mediation and in this way tries to reproduce the rich sensorium of human experience. [...] In every manifestation, hypermediacy makes us aware of the medium or media [...]. (33-34)

As media that operate at least partly on the logic of hypermediacy, the illuminated works offer "a heterogeneous space" rather than "a unified visual space": not only do they integrate verbal and visual aspects, but these two fields also help express the processes of engraving, drawing, painting, and writing both implicitly, due to the way Blake formed the works, and explicitly in the way the verbal and visual spaces depict those processes. In this way, the illuminated works offer "windows that open on to other representations or other media." Blake presents us with words as designs, designs as words, plates divided into colour and non-colour, various frames encapsulating the images and words, and a collision of word and image as figures and designs move within the words and vice versa. For example, the title page to the *Songs of Innocence* includes the letters of the title turning into tree leaves and, at the same time, a tree whose branches and leaves turn into the words (fig. 14); a scene of reading as a woman helps her two charges; tiny figures—seemingly not part of the same "window" as the reading scene—reclining, standing and performing on the letters of the title; a box at the bottom of the plate separated from the design by a line—this box houses words that identify authorship and publication details; and a firm rectangular line that demarcates the entire design, a line that is then in turn surrounded by yet another layer of design in the non-coloured space that holds the page number. Each of these elements not only functions as a separate "window" but also as

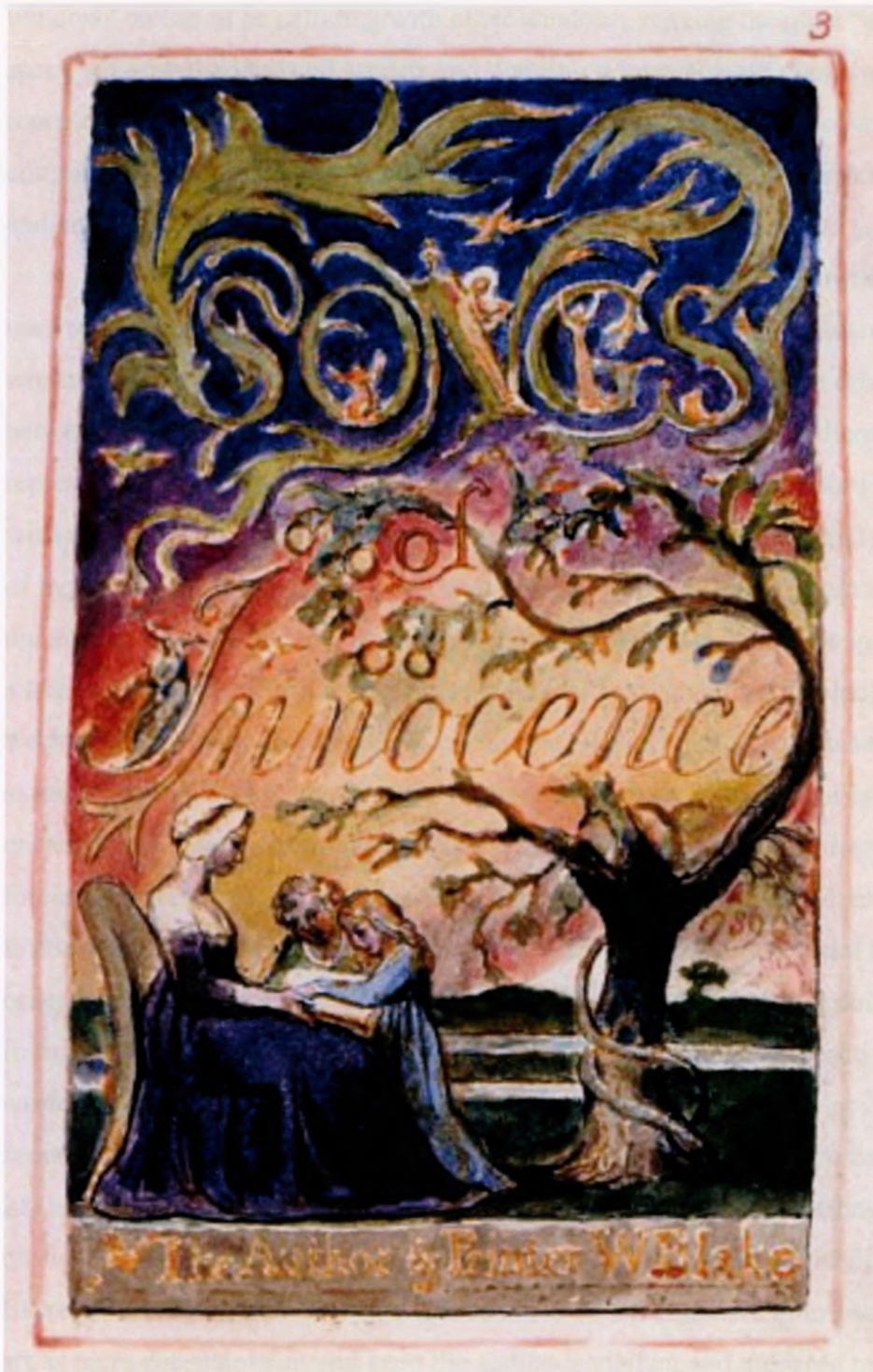


Fig. 14. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, copy Z, Title Page for *Songs of Innocence*, plate 3, object 3, 1826, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

windows on top of or colliding with other windows, making the plate “a heterogeneous space” of verbal and visual aspects and dividing it into separate planes or acts of representation. All of this leads, on one level, to an inundation of media forms and a conscious awareness of the process of mediation that occurs between art objects and the audience, and, on another level, to media thinking about media.

While Bolter and Grusin argue that hypermediacy, despite revealing the media used to the user, strives for the real as much as immediacy does, I contend that in Blake’s works the logic of hypermediacy necessarily strives for the opposite effect: an alienation between the audience and what is represented. By distancing the audience from the thing represented, Blake does much more than demonstrate a simple pleasure in or “fascination with media,” as Bolter and Grusin say of the logic of hypermediacy (12). While the logic of hypermediacy strives for the real as it reveals its media and does not seek to distance the audience, Blake’s self-reflexive techniques first initiate alienation in order to provoke a later self-conscious immersion in the works, along with an acknowledgement of the world of the imagination as real. According to Brecht, “The aim of this technique, known as the alienation effect, was to make the spectator adopt an attitude of inquiry and criticism in his approach to the incident” (136). He claims, “[O]nce the spectator [...] is forced as it were to cast his vote; then a change has been launched which goes far beyond formal matters and begins for the first time to affect the theatre’s social function” (39). In order to incite social change, “everything must be seen from a social point of view” (98). In this light, art functions as a tool to be used in catalyzing the audience to engage in the world, not escape from it. Brecht and “his idea for a theatre with the power to provoke social change, along with his attempts to reactivate stage-audience exchange” (Bennett 21), resonate with Blake and his view of the illuminated works as having this power for change and for revitalizing the relationship between art and the audience. Like Brecht, Blake calls his audience to action. These kinds of self-reflexive moments, then, demystify art as mere entertainment and keep the audience vigilant and prepared to answer this call.

Another way the illuminated works manifest the distancing impulse is through adaptive strategies, which correspond to Hornby’s metadramatic element of real-life or literary allusion. Blake’s works often revise or respond to an earlier source text, thereby adapting it subtly or overtly. As “a form of intertextuality” (Hutcheon 8), adaptation

points to itself as a text directly in relation to other texts, another self-reflexive move that reveals the work as a text among texts. Blake shows a propensity to adapt not only his own works, but also those of other texts and artists. Julie Sanders explains that “[a]daptation can be a transpositional practice,” traversing genres and media; “[i]t can parallel editorial practices” by deleting and omitting; “[i]t can also be an amplificatory procedure” that expands upon the text in some manner (18); it can “offer[] commentary on a sourcetext” by critically revising the original (19); and, finally, it can be “a simpler attempt to make texts ‘relevant’” by updating them and their themes for contemporary audiences.¹⁰ Blake’s adaptations do all of the above to varying degrees. He, arguably, adapts his own work by producing multiple copies of the same work, specifically when they include significant changes; he also adapts, where the meaning highlights intertextuality, by continuously returning to and reworking the same events throughout his corpus, such as scenes of creation, conflict, and redemption involving Urizen, Los, and Orc. In this kind of adaptation, we “grapple with the complex intertextuality [and intratextuality] of his illuminated poems” (Behrendt, *Reading William Blake* 34) and think about one rendering of an event or character in light of an earlier or later one.

Blake purposefully adapts other art objects and texts as well. He adapts the statue known as the *Laocoön* (also an episode from Virgil’s *Aeneid*) by engraving it and adding various words and phrases referring to Christianity, art, and ideology, thereby giving the statue, and the epic episode, a new context (fig. 1). Likewise, in *Visions of the Daughters*

¹⁰ In *Shakespeare and the Problem of Adaptation*, Margaret Jane Kidnie interrogates the term adaptation. Her study focuses mainly on plays and the question of text and performance. She questions how we come to label something as an adaptation and how we know an adaptation when we see it. Many people differ in opinion when it comes to recognizing a particular articulation of a work as an adaptation or simply a production or performance. Some critics argue that any articulation of a pre-existing text (in any medium) is an adaptation. Kidnie points out that such a move leads to the “danger of emptying the term of meaning” (5). Her answer is to “treat[] adaptation as a necessarily provisional category of study.” She makes the astute argument “that adaptation as an evolving category is closely tied to how the work modifies over time and from one reception space to another. [...] an understanding of the work as an ongoing process rather than a fixed object makes alternative critical practices potentially available to adaptation studies since the ‘work as process’ reshapes in significant ways the politics of reception” (5-6).

of *Albion* (to which I will return later), Blake reworks James Macpherson's Ossianic work *Oithona: A Poem* by omitting some episodes, changing names, and "updating" the thematic concerns of this supposedly ancient bardic song to include issues of slavery and sexual liberation. In *The Book of Urizen*, Blake revises the story of creation and the fall as they are set down in the Bible. In *Milton*, Blake takes on John Milton's *Paradise Lost* and explicitly sets out to do what Milton set out to do—"Justify the ways of God to man" (pl. 1)—but this time through a process of rewriting and correcting. And Blake directly responds to Byron's mystery play *Cain* with *The Ghost of Abel*, a brief drama revising the conclusions regarding murder and forgiveness implicit in Byron's drama. Seen in light of Hornby's metadramatic category of references to literature and reality, these direct adaptations make visible the constructed nature of the work of art.

Blake's elisions between characters as well as between character and author fit under Hornby's category of role-playing. In works where Blake specifically addresses other poets, it is difficult not to conflate Blake with the speakers of his prophetic works, particularly when he includes himself or his personal history within the framework of the visual and verbal narrative. By adapting and revising other authors, Blake gets to perform a little role-playing of his own. In *The Ghost of Abel*, he addresses a fellow poet, calling Byron "a voice in the wilderness" (pl. 1)—a reference to John the Baptist—thus aligning Byron with himself as a fellow prophet-bard. In the work, both Byron and Blake might be said to perform the role of visionary; furthermore, Blake might be said to reenact what he thinks is the better Byronic identity by revising Byron's play *Cain*. A similar argument applies to Blake's reworking of *Paradise Lost* and his relationship to Milton.

Moreover, Blake fashions himself into a dramatic character when he explicitly presents himself as one of the many characters in *Milton*. In fact, we find images of Blake that include his name as if to eliminate any doubt of his identity (pl. 29 and 36). He adds to the construction of this dramatic persona by including personal details such as a reference to his brother Robert (pl. 33) and by setting the climax of the work in his garden at his cottage in Felpham (pl. 36), where he lived for a few years at the beginning of the nineteenth century. In the *Marriage*, he references his birth year as the beginning of a revolution: "As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives" (pl. 3, E 34). Thirty-three years signals Blake's current

age and aligns him with Christ, who is said to have been thirty-three when he was crucified. In addition, *Europe* begins with the speaker having a discussion with a fairy, whom he brings home. The speaker tells us that the fairy proceeded to “dictate[] EUROPE,” referencing the title of the work and making us question if Blake intends his audience to take him for the speaker.

Blake’s characters role-play or act, in the stage sense, when they repeat each other’s actions, thereby enacting a part that has already been played, so to speak, by another character earlier in the work or in another work altogether. One way to view characters entering one another in *Milton* is through the lens of performance. When Milton enters Blake, the latter in effect plays the former as much as the former plays the latter by joining identities (I discuss the relationship between performance and these kinds of entrances more fully in the final chapter). The elisions between Blake and the speaker/character or between character and character in his illuminated works serve to distance the audience from the work and function self-reflexively to point to themselves as a construction.

This alienation-effect seems to contradict Blake’s call to enter his works. One way to negotiate this apparent contradiction is to see the distance Blake places between his art and his audience as enabling a more engaged audience, an audience that can choose to walk into and become part of the world of the imagination, instead of becoming passively absorbed at a superficial level. Nevertheless, it differs from the “paradox” at the heart of Brecht’s alienation-effect: it “seems virtually to exclude the audience” by distancing them but seeks “an interactive relationship at the same time” (Bennett 29). Blake does distance with the goal of creating an active spectatorship, but he also understands artistic representation differently than Brecht does. For Blake, the world of the imagination—the performance of the illuminated works—is not virtual or severed from material reality, thus an eventual entrance is both desired and possible. Blake facilitates the entrance into his works, the second stage in the two-stage process of Blakean spectatorship, by subverting the boundary between art and reality, the opposite impulse to reaffirming it. With “the modern political drama of the epic theatre of Brecht [...], there is still a feeling that a ‘true’ reality is possible, a better society that will come when capitalism is swept away” (Hornby 47), but, for Blake, the imagination, what others

see as merely *depicted* in art, is reality. Blake's call to action is not about creating a better future world; it is about seeing the infinite world, the world of the imagination that exists in our world. Moreover, this world interpenetrates the everyday world—it is not just influential, as Brecht sees dramatic performance. Despite “propos[ing] a more immediate and interactive theatre” (Bennett 22), Brechtian theatre does not include this interpenetrative vision of performance and reality.

In non-Brechtian fashion, Blake also draws the audience into his imaginative space with self-reflexive moments, especially in plates that show the interpenetration of the two spheres, a kind of breaking of the fourth wall. However, the effect of these kinds of self-reflexive moments should not be aligned with that of comedies, for instance, that use the broken fourth wall as a way to incorporate the audience and make them feel as if they are part of the joys and romances unfolding on stage. This comedic inclusion does not rely on a self-conscious choice of the spectator, but on a reaffirmation of escapist entertainment. In her analysis of the Hollywood film musical genre, Jane Feuer explains how these ends, namely a remystification of the medium, can be attained using self-reflexive techniques. Rather than striving to effect some sort of revolutionary change or awareness in the audience with self-reflexive moments, this genre simply reinscribes the ideology of mass entertainment by drawing the audience back in after an initial (temporary) demystification of the genre and film production in general. Feuer states, “[W]e tend to associate reflexivity with the notion of deconstruction within film-making practices. The MGM musical, however, uses reflexivity to perpetuate rather than to deconstruct the codes of the genres” (173). For instance, *Singin' in the Rain* depicts the backstage workings of film production, thereby demystifying cinema, but, ultimately, the revealing of these workings functions to celebrate cinema's power of entertainment, thereby foreclosing critical thinking and allowing an escapist absorption into the film. Conversely, Blake's self-reflexive strategies lead to an alienation followed by an immersion, not to demystification for the sake of remystification.

Blake encourages this process by softening the border between the real world and the imaginative space of the created world. The best example of this encouraged incorporation manifests itself in the form of self-referentiality, the final category from Hornby's elements of metadrama. He defines self-reference as a kind of direct or indirect

address within the play to the audience—a moment with explicit self-reflexive aims (as opposed to the general employment of the convention of the aside or soliloquy)—where “[t]he play stops[] [and] [t]he audience is made to examine the play as a play, an artificial construction” (103). Although self-reference reveals the medium’s construction, I claim that, in Blake’s works, it also challenges the boundary between imaginative and real space. The result is a unification of the two worlds. In fact, in some images in the illuminated works, the characters appear aware of the division between their imaginative reality and our reality. I categorize this acknowledgement under Hornby’s self-reference.

Indeed, Blake’s art has many examples of indirect addresses to the audiences, addresses that reveal the constructed nature of the medium: characters sometimes push upon the frame of the design as if they are aware that they are enclosed by such an artificial border, forcing the audience to reflect on this fact. For instance, Urizen carries a spiked globe as he attempts to move forward on the picture plane by pressing upon the frame of the picture itself (*Urizen* pl. 23; fig. 15). Likewise, in *Jerusalem*, Albion directs his hand and arm out into the corner of the frame almost touching the number of the plate (pl. 95). And in *Europe*, a chained figure looks up while holding his hands flat out in front of him, as if pressing on the fourth wall, the boundary that is meant to separate him from reality (pl. 13; fig. 16). In these instances, it is as if the characters are attempting to pass beyond the divide between the story world that the author has created and the actual world that the audience occupies. Conversely, at times, the frame seems to push back and shape the movements of the figures within the design, implying that the world of the audience, which is apparently distinct from the space of the characters, impinges on the world of the imagination. For example, trees bend and grow in a distorted manner along the shape of the frame as if the frame forces this particular growth—in “The Fly” the two trees that stand on either side of the frame strangely unite at the top of the frame, forming an arch (or upside-down U; fig. 17); and on plate 7 of *Urizen* where Urizen’s skeleton takes mortal form, the skeleton hunches in a ball as if being pressed upon by the left, right and bottom sides of the frame, as well as from above with the words pressing down to form a top frame.

Another form of destabilizing self-reference occurs when characters directly address the audience, when they violate the boundary between worlds. The repeated

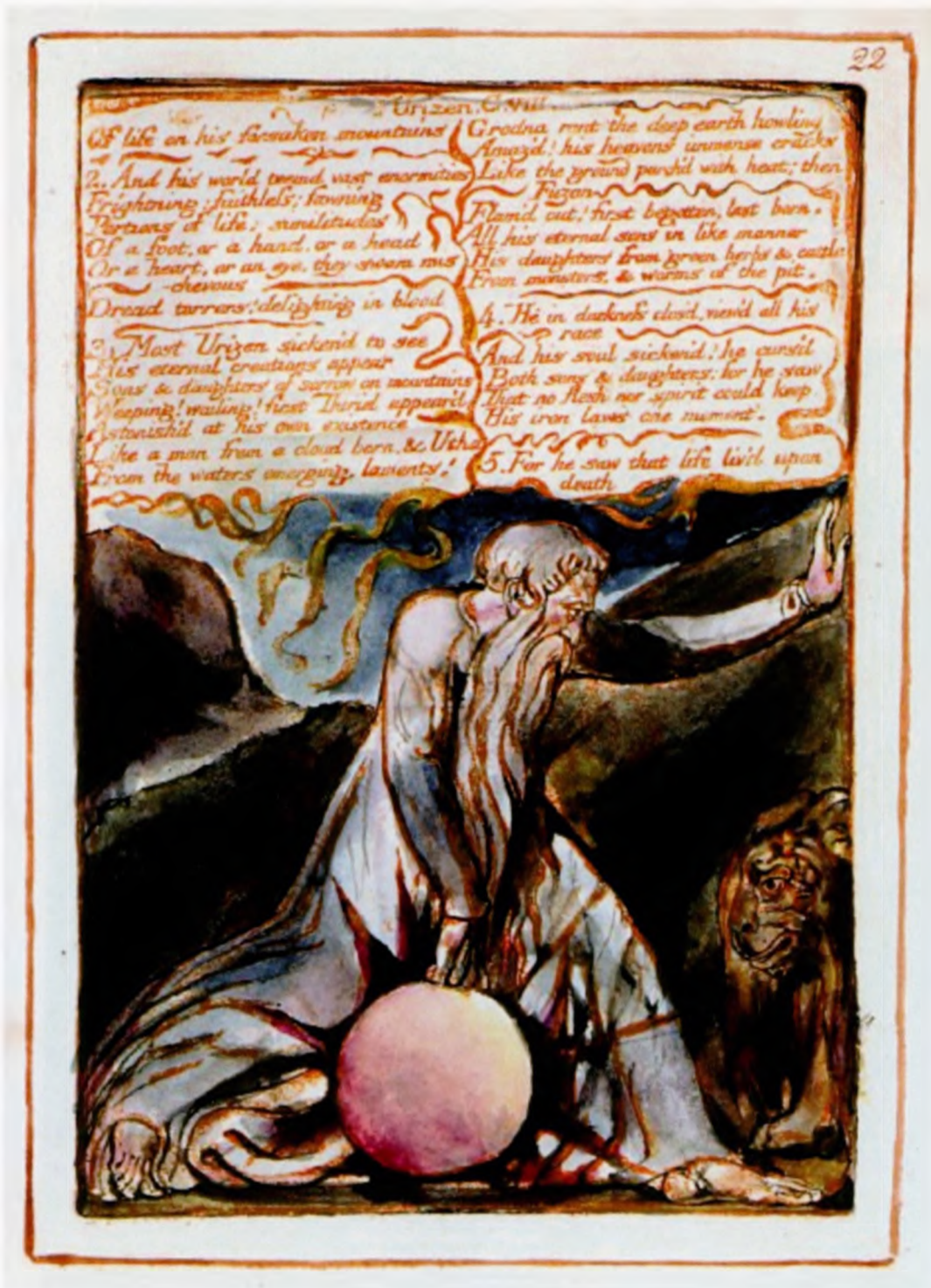


Fig. 15. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, plate 23, object 22, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

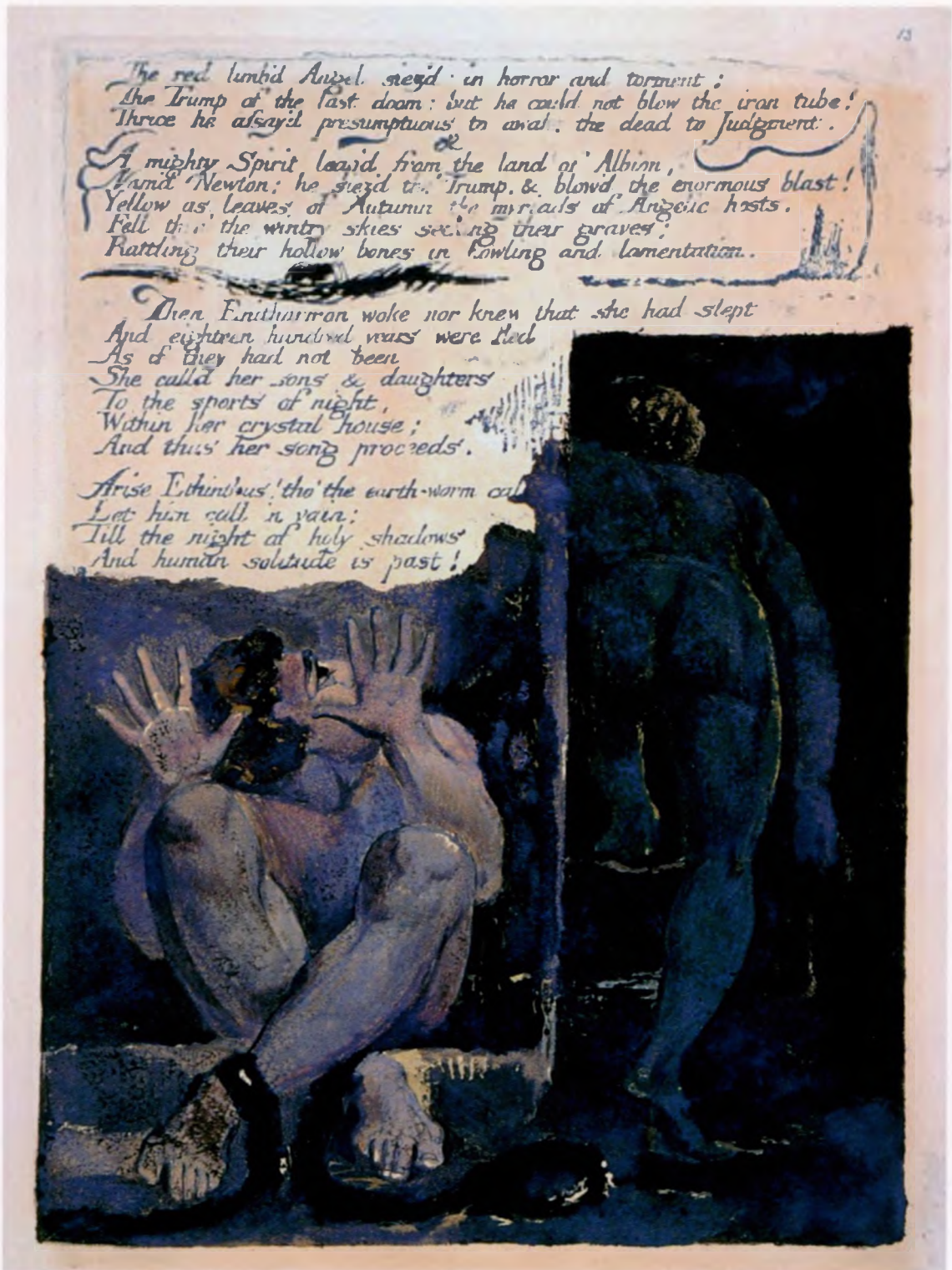


Fig. 16. *Europe a Prophecy*, copy B, plate 13, object 15, 1794, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Department of Special Collections.



Fig. 17. "The Fly," *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, copy Z, plate 40, object 40, 1826, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

phrase “Mark well my words. they are of your eternal salvation” in *Milton* (for example, 3.5, E 96) seems to reach out from the narrative into the spectator’s world. Also, Blake’s figures often address us by staring directly at us. Los, who grips himself in pain, stares at the spectator wide-eyed and open-mouthed (*Urizen* pl. 7), and King Nebuchadnezzar looks at the spectator as he crawls over top the words “One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression” (*MHH* pl. 24). Urizen holds his book of brass open (*Urizen* pl. 5), as if he were presenting it to the spectator, commanding him/her to follow his rigid laws, especially in those copies where his eyes are clearly open and directed straight ahead (as in copies C, F, B, and G). The ambiguous figures of Blake’s arcane mythology become a little more immediate and a little less distant as they breach our world. An interesting example of this direct address is the frontispiece to *Songs of Experience* in which the Bard and winged child stare straight ahead (fig. 18). The corresponding design from *Songs of Innocence* does not achieve the same effect, as the figure of the piper and winged child look only at each other. The frontispiece to *Experience* seems to indicate a shift between the two works, which is not surprising given the contradictory tone of the two works in that the world of experience exhibits speakers who are much more self-aware and who are most aware of the horrors of their reality.

The direct addresses that exist in the visual realm rely on seeing—the audience looking at the character looking back at them. In the image mentioned above, Los is looking directly at the spectator, looking at him/her as he/she looks at Los. In fact, Mitchell argues that most of the images in *Urizen*, whether explicitly engaging the spectator’s gaze or not, work in a self-reflexive manner. He says,

the necessary frontality of symmetrical forms poses an almost threatening address to the viewer. The pictures in *Urizen* ‘come at us’ directly. We are not allowed to view them as detached voyeurs who spy on a scene which betrays no awareness of our presence. The isolation of the figures, their frontal arrangement, and the fact that many of them look directly out of the picture make it clear that their primary relationship is not with a larger world or landscape in which they exist but with us, their viewers. The ultimate effect of Blake’s symmetry, in other words, is to draw the reader



Fig. 18. *Songs of Innocence and of Experience*, copy Z, Frontispiece to *Songs of Experience*, plate 28, object 28, 1826, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

into it, or what is the same thing, invite the reader to incorporate the pictures into himself. (*Blake's Composite Art* 139-40)

The spectator of *Urizen* cannot simply look passively; he/she is called into the world of the work.¹¹ Here, the important element is vision. As Julia Thomas argues, “the very conditions of visibility” include “the fact that, as we see, we are also positioned as objects, [and] spectacles” (2).

The audience's role as audience alters in moments like these. As Rajan says of the effect of the preludia that precede the “continental prophecies” (*America* and *Europe*), these moments of indirect and direct self-reference provoke a particular kind of reception: “Rather than read these works mimetically or dramatically, as adumbrating or performing [...] [their stories], we are therefore called on to read them reflexively, as texts that are configured within the scene of their own writing” (“(Dis)figuring the System” 384) or the scene of their own construction. Similarly, Brecht speaks of the necessity for actors “to drop the assumption that there is a fourth wall cutting the audience off from the stage and the consequent illusion that the stage action is taking place in reality and without an audience. That being so, it is possible for the actor in principle to address the audience direct[ly]” (136). What Brecht uses (and views) as solely an alienating move, Blake uses to alienate and immerse.

Furthermore, in distinguishing dramatic theatre from epic theatre, Brecht makes the following distinctions: whereas dramatic theatre “wears down [the spectator's] capacity for action” and reaffirms the fact that “he is unalterable,” epic theatre “arouses [the spectator's] capacity for action” and shows him “he is alterable and able to alter” (37). Like Brecht's epic theatre, Blake's illuminated works use techniques to provoke action and to encourage us to alter our conventional views of ourselves and of our relation to the world but without causing a permanent alienation. By making the spectator a spectacle through the direct gaze of the figures in the visual images, Blake forces him/her into the realm of performance and out of the safety of mind, or the reading closet. Viewing, then, becomes an active event. It also brings the spectator into the world of

¹¹ Similarly, Rajan points out that the designs “draw us irresistibly into this space, because the body is pushed into the foreground and represented frontally, so as to deny us any distance from what we see” (“(Dis)figuring the System” 404).

Urizen and Los because these characters look at the spectator as an object. Together, the staring figures and direct verbal calls to the audience suggest that in the very moment of looking or reading, the spectator is being redefined. While Blake's works distinguish themselves as constructed art objects through these self-reflexive moments, they also undermine the binary relation between subject and object, actor and observer, audience and art object/performance through this very self-reflexivity. Blake's world impinges on our own, inviting us to inhabit an alternate reality, calling us to enter the world of the imagination.

Blake's verbal call to cross the threshold of the imagination finds its pictorial equivalent in the illuminated works. The fact that many of these works begin with a visual entrance indicates the great importance that Blake places on a particular engagement between his audience and his multimedia art. Less explicitly, plates that include scenes of reading and the *mise en abyme* effect of the book within a book (discussed earlier as examples akin to self-reflexive metatheatricality) dismantle the boundary between life and art as plays within plays do in the theatre. For example, in the title pages to *Thel* and *The Book of Urizen*, trees (life) mimic reading tablets (art)—a common visual motif, especially in *Urizen*—by forming archways around the title of the poems (fig. 13). Whereas a theatre audience is made to question where theatrical performance ends and life begins when presented with a play within a play, Blake's audience is made to question where the world of the illuminated works ends and the everyday world begins.

Blake's works also merge or confuse the roles of character and spectator. In *America*, Blake blatantly plays with the verbal-visual divide. On the title page, he embeds two separate scenes of reading amidst the words of the title and depicts youthful figures pointing to the words "America" and "Prophecy," as they try to draw the older figures away from the books upon their laps and toward the title of Blake's poem (fig. 10). This self-reflexive gesture signals that Blake's poem, not the books that currently capture their attention, should be the focus of the older figures, and it is Blake's poem "America: a Prophecy" that we, his audience members, are currently reading. If the figures acknowledge the work Blake's audience holds in their hands, then the divide between the characters and the audience does not signify an impenetrable barrier. Likewise, Blake

also uses direct address in the frontispiece for *All Religions are One* where a figure, who seems to represent “the voice of one crying in the wilderness” as the image’s caption indicates, looks straight ahead into the audience’s world and points off to the right toward something just beyond the frame (fig. 19). The figure seems to be asking the audience to follow him into his space and explore what we cannot see beyond the frame, what will become visible only if we choose to participate and enter the work.

The illuminated works also contain more explicit visual depictions of entryways in various guises, but the ones that begin the works function most clearly as self-reflexive strategies pertaining to the audience’s stepping into an alternate reality. Blake uses gothic arches in both the frontispiece (in the 1795 copy) and title page of *There is No Natural Religion*. In the frontispiece, two figures enact their little scene before two arches, while on the title page one arch fills the entire composition of the plate, encasing the words of the title as if the words stood on the very threshold of the entryway (fig. 20). In the title page especially, the work manifests itself as an entrance, an entrance Blake’s audience inevitably passes through with a simple turning of the page but which takes a much more fundamental shift of perception in order to pass through in the way described in the *Last Judgment*. In addition, on the title page of *Milton* (a work that has no frontispiece so that the title page is the first plate we see and acts as a frontispiece), the eponymous hero stands with his hand on the vortex, apparently about to enter it, performing the same action we inevitably perform when we pick up *Milton* (fig. 21). As Mitchell has argued, the “vortex serves as an image of the gateway into a new level of perception” (*Blake’s Composite Art* 73), and his analysis of the “vortex of a book,” which draws on Frye, suggests that Blake’s works themselves become such vortices. Frye points out that books are not the only objects that have vortices. He explains:

Blake says that everything in eternity has what he calls a ‘vortex’ [...] a spiral or cone of existence. When we focus both eyes on one object, say a book, we create an angle of vision opening into our minds with the apex pointing away from us. The book therefore has a vortex of existence opening into its mental reality within our minds. When Milton descends from eternity to time he finds that he has to pass through the apex of this cone of eternal vision, which is like trying to see a book from the book’s

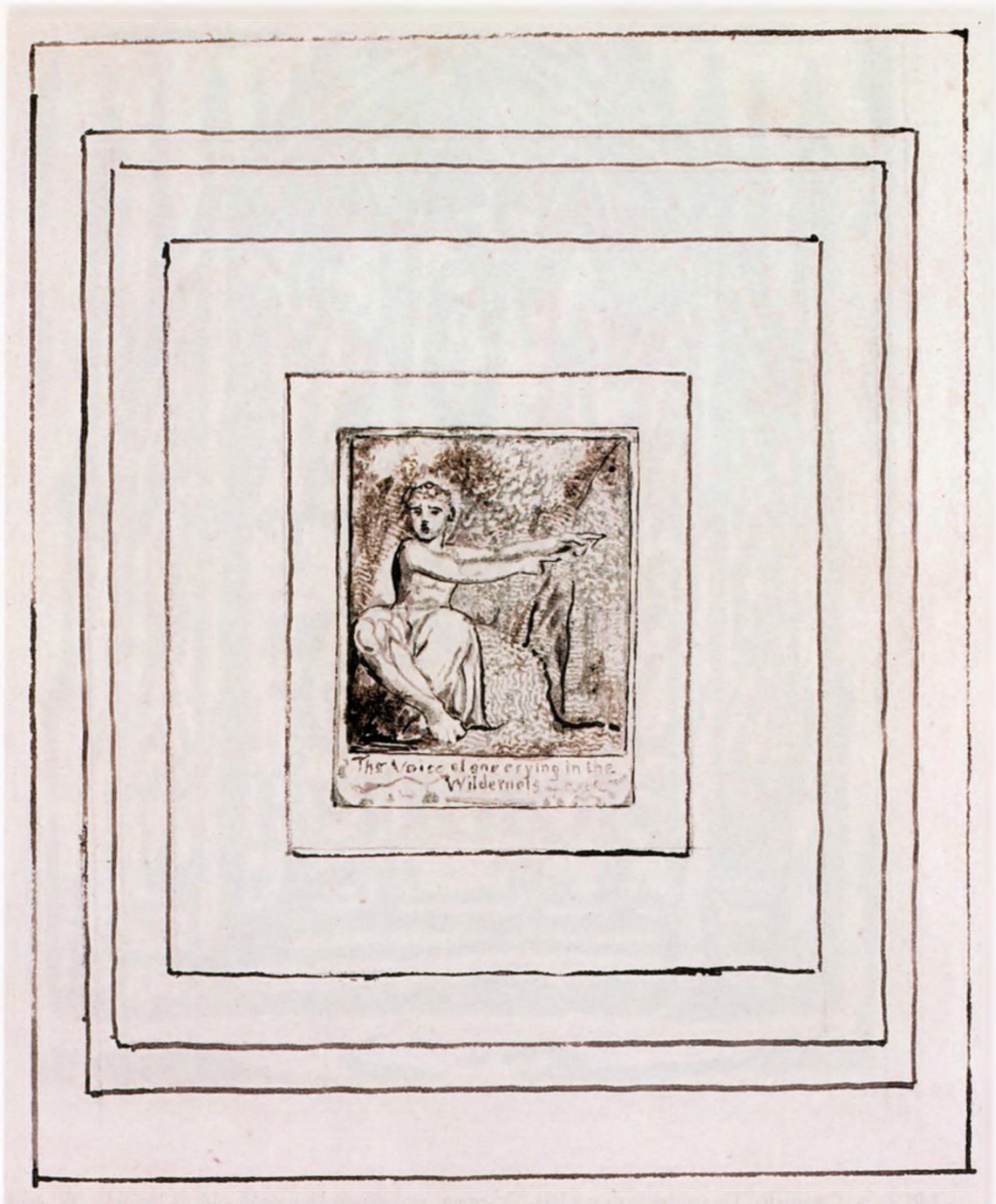


Fig. 19. *All Religions are One*, copy A, frontispiece, object 1, 1795, Huntington Library, San Marino, California. Used with permission.

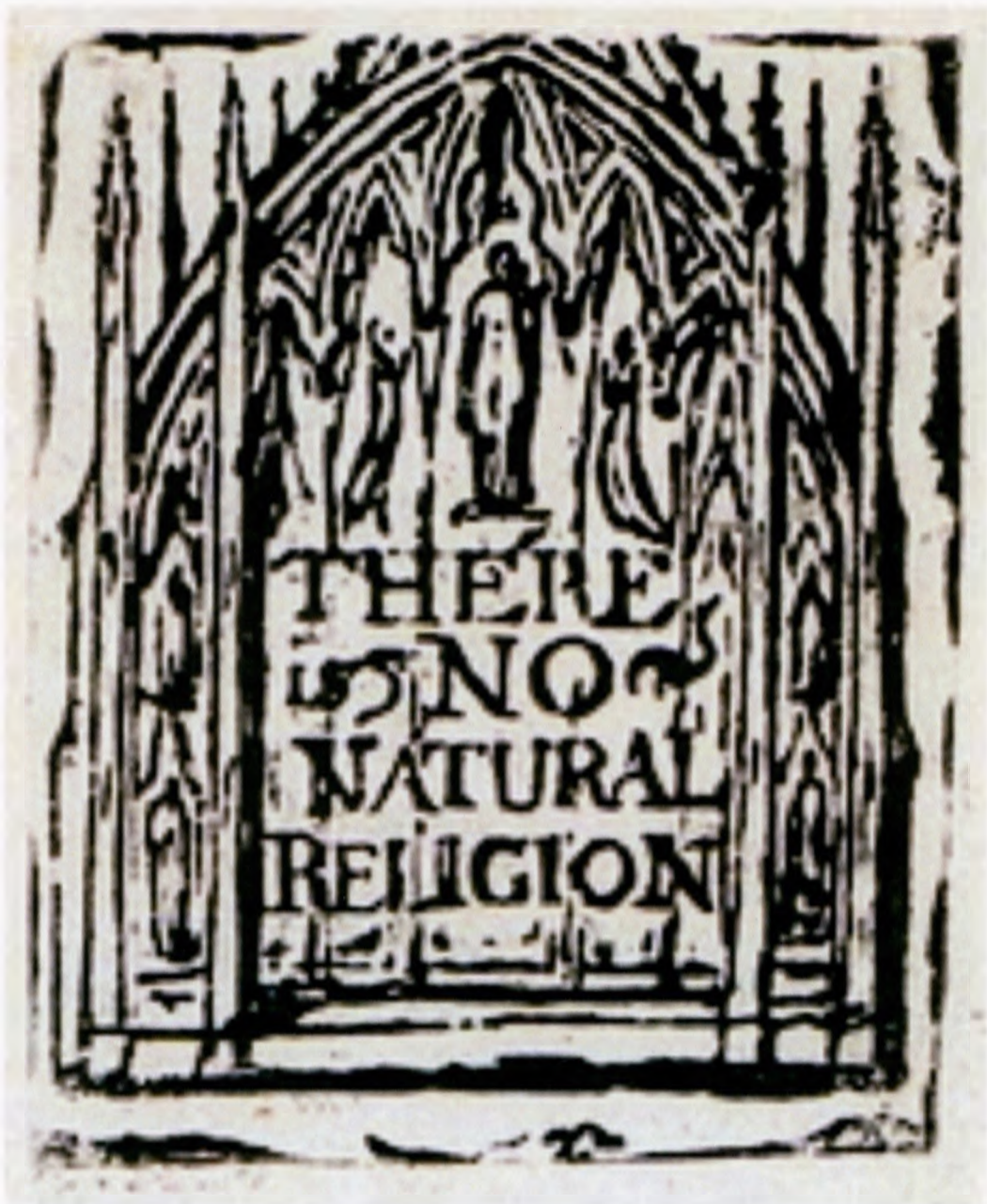


Fig. 20. *There is No Natural Religion*, copy C, title page, plate a2, object 2, c. 1794, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.



Fig. 21. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate i [1], object 1, 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

point of view; the Lockian conception of the real book as outside the mind on which the vision of the fallen world is based. [...]. But in eternity the perceiving mind or body is omnipresent, and hence these globes in eternity are inside that body. (350)

Engaging or entering the vortex of another object equals entering the object itself, a kind of identification without a loss of identity. The difference between Eternity and our world hinges on the perceived relation between subject and object and the ability to enter the vortices of other things. In Eternity, subject and object have a more fluid relation, which, therefore, makes it possible to be a subject that becomes/enters an object. In the world of Generation, our flawed perception sees the mind as a thing unto itself completely separate from everything that surrounds it, making entrances into other things or crossing into their vortices impossible. However, in Eternity, the relation among things functions differently, or is perceived differently, so that objects and their corresponding vortices exist within us and within each other, making vortical entrances possible and easy. Mitchell extends Frye's discussion of objects to human beings: "'passing the vortex' of a thing, whether a stone, a flower, or a person, involves an entry into the interior life of that object" (71). Thus, entrances involve individuals entering things as well as other individuals.

Milton's right hand not only presses upon the vortex, suggesting his own forward momentum (as do his feet as one moves forward), but it also beckons the spectator to follow. By depicting him in profile, Blake makes the connection stronger: Milton is still in part turned toward the audience as he is turning away into the world of the work. He functions as a kind of bridge uniting the spectator to the world that sits before Milton waiting to be entered, waiting to be explored. The frontispiece to *Jerusalem* is similarly constructed: with his face in profile, Los moves forward into a darkened doorway with his right foot already positioned ahead and past the threshold. His left hand is raised and seems to press against the door while at the same time to beckon the audience to follow. In his right hand, Los holds a circular lantern, which throws off light and implies that he can guide us into this unknown and untravelled territory. On one level, both Milton and Los fulfill a literal narrative function of entering a vortex to begin a quest of redemption and of entering a doorway to begin a self-sacrificing journey to save another. But, on a

meta-narrative and self-reflexive level, both characters represent the spectator's entrance into Blake's universe, into visionary space, and both characters encourage the spectator to make his/her own entrance. Mark Lussier maintains, "The physical concept that facilitates Milton's passage from eternity to generation, the vortex, provides [...] two-way transportation, becoming the vehicle by which matters eternal descend to the limit of contraction and matters generational ascend to the eternal realms of thought" ("Blake and Science Studies" 195). I would add that the vortex found in *Milton* is emblematic of the illuminated works as media that allow a "two-way transportation." Blake's emphasis on entrances seems to be symptomatic of the fact that, in his illuminated works, he constructs his multimedia art objects as gateways, implying an audience relationship to media that heads toward immediacy and participation. However, such an experience of immediacy cannot be easily purchased as escapist engagements with various forms of entertainment; rather, it requires a Brechtian alienation before the goal can be reached. Blake's self-reflexive techniques, such as these prefatory depictions of entrances, distance the audience from a false sense of temporarily falling into a fictional mental space so that they can consciously choose to see the two worlds as interpenetrable and move through them in order for a fundamental alteration in perception or last judgment to occur.

The implications of Blake's self-reflexive strategies become more complex when viewing *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, which constructs a more layered understanding of what it means to "enter" his works. In *Visions*, a more aggressive form of these strategies leaves little doubt that the spectator cannot simply remain passive. The prophecy reflects the socio-political situation of late-eighteenth-century England—but it also resonates with that of our times. This reflection, along with the more assertive call on the spectator, suggests that only when we enter the illuminated works can we then effect change in our own world.

Blake's *Visions* begins with a frontispiece (fig. 22) that differs in composition from the title page of *Milton* and the frontispiece of *Jerusalem*. The plate in question depicts the entryway of a cave housing Bromion and Oothoon sitting back-to-back and chained to one another next to a despairing Theotormon; Bromion, wide-eyed and open-mouthed with hair standing on end in a look of shock or terror, stares beyond the picture

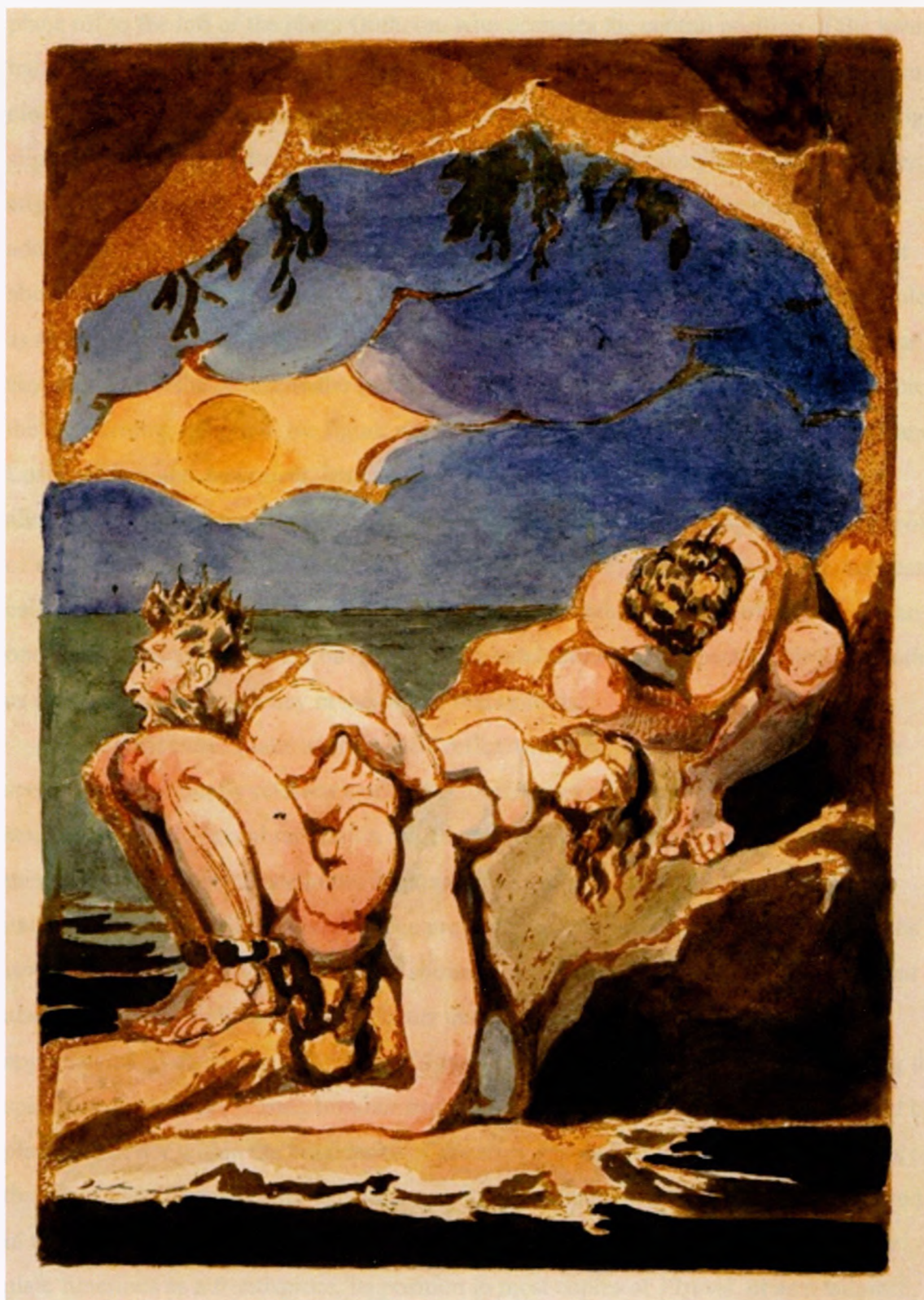


Fig. 22. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, copy C, frontispiece, plate i, object 1, 1793, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Department of Special Collections.

plane off to the left of the plate; Oothoon, who occupies the central position of the lower half of the plate, kneels and hangs her head either in defeat or in sorrow; and Theotormon clutches his head with his arm so that we cannot see his face, while he sits off to the right, slightly elevated from Bromion and Oothoon. The top half of the plate shows the outer edge of a cave mouth, where the trio sits as water laps around them on the shore. In addition to the cave, Blake delineates a cloudy sky and a horizon. To the left side, just above Bromion's head, we can see one little clearing in the sky so that the sun is visible as a plain disc. The lines distinguishing the clouds from one another and from the clear sky, along with the semi-circular outer edge of the cave, form the shape of an eye, with the sun forming the pupil. No figure waves the spectator into the work, as do Milton and Los in *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. Instead, the eye seems to stare directly at the spectator, almost angrily or menacingly. Much like the figures who stare directly ahead that I spoke of earlier, here this disembodied eye (perhaps Blake's eye) functions as a direct address, calling attention to the fact that the spectator is an audience of a work of art and, on the one hand, alienating him/her, but on the other hand, drawing the spectator into the work as if he/she has some agency in the drama that unfolds.

Significantly, Blake uses this self-reflexive technique to begin one of his most socially and politically relevant works. *Visions* focuses on themes relating to female sexual repression, sexual repression in general, moral conventions, and physical and mental slavery. In reference to the frontispiece in general, Behrendt states, "its very nature as a single, striking visual image presented for perusal and processing *before the verbal text is read or digested* lends it special power not only to *epitomize* the work but also significantly to influence the manner and mind-set in which that text will be apprehended by its reader" (*Reading William Blake* 89, original emphasis). By jarring the spectator, thereby preventing him/her from using the work as a form of escapism, and by placing him/her within the boundaries of the story space, Blake makes the social aims of this work clear: the spectator is called to act, to participate in the dilemmas encountered in the work and to create change in a social context. This effect is similar whether the plate functions as a frontispiece, its position in most copies of *Visions*, or as a tailpiece, its position in copy A.

However, difference arises in the vision of Oothoon at the end of the work. When the plate functions as a tailpiece, it signals a call to do something about these social problems, so the work ends with an imprisoned image of Oothoon. This final image suggests that even the world of the imagination needs altering, needs intervention. When the plate functions as the frontispiece, it signals the spectator's entrance into the work and concludes with a freed (visual) image of Oothoon (fig. 23), indicating that our entrance into the work at the beginning has played a part in her liberation. In this case, *Visions* ends with the words "Thus every morning wails Oothoon, but Theotormon sits / Upon the margind ocean conversing with shadows dire. / The Daughters of Albion hear her woes, & eccho back her sighs" (8.11-13, E 51). The verbal portion of the plate ends about halfway down the plate. Just beneath, Oothoon bursts forth from flaming clouds, occupying the centre part of the plate. Below her, on the bottom-right side of the plate, we see three women (presumably the Daughters of Albion) huddled together on a plot of land in the middle of the ocean; two of them stare up at Oothoon as the third buries her head into herself. This plate, too, exhibits self-reflexivity. The Daughters of Albion look to Oothoon—she looks at the spectator—and the spectator looks back to the Daughters as representatives of the spectator's social world, of women who need to fight their social enslavement. A circuitous relation exists: the direct gaze of Oothoon breaches our space and pulls us into her world at the same time she enters ours. In the picture space, she exists as a revolutionary figure who has freed herself from society's chains and beckons us and the Daughters to do the same. However, David Aers questions the delineation of Oothoon that Blake seems to provide:

Blake presents Oothoon as able to transcend the consciousness of her fellow women *absolutely*: but how this can be so, how she has attained so clear a revolutionary critique of sexual and social exploitation, and of their interaction, how she has reached so full an understanding of the psychological effects and perverted indulgences of repressed sexuality [...], this remains a mystery. For no one, not the most "revolutionary" figure, stands clearly outside alienated society, beyond alienation. (505)

Aers explains that completely rising above the ideologies of one's social environment is quite impossible. However, he argues that Blake qualifies this seeming transcendence by



Fig. 23. *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, copy C, plate 8, object 11, 1793, by permission of University of Glasgow Library, Department of Special Collections.

having Oothoon exhibit behaviour that simply reinscribes the dominant misogynistic and patriarchal ideology (i.e., offering to catch maidens for Theotormon's sexual pleasure) and by "leav[ing] Oothoon lamenting and bound to Bromion" (506), as the final words of the poem and frontispiece indicate.

Anne K. Mellor makes a similar argument. She highlights Oothoon's resistance to a Wollstonecraftian "rational modesty" that, according to Blake, represses "both British women *and* British men" ("Sex, Violence, and Slavery" 366, original emphasis), while at the same time showing how Oothoon finds herself in no better a position than the two men in the work: "the frontispiece [...] implies that *all three* characters remain trapped within Bromion's caves" (368, original emphasis). Even though Oothoon seems to be the most progressive or visionary character in the poem, her idea of free love fails from a feminist perspective, as only Theotormon gets to enjoy a freer sexual lifestyle.¹² Mellor states that the Motto to the work hints at another possible state of affairs:

But if the Motto urges the reader to imagine an alternative to the slavery of modesty other than free love, the poem does not suggest what that alternative could be. As the creator of this poem and its designs, Blake must take responsibility for what the work does not say as well as for what it does say.

Mellor makes a valid point, especially in light of Aers's claim that no one stands outside his/her social relations and contexts. However, I argue that, though Blake does not give us a concrete and precise alternate view of the way the world could work, he does something equally important. He encourages a collective revolution—even without offering us an alternative vision to the problematic male-centred vision of free love Oothoon gives us in the poem. As Aers points out, Blake refuses to allow Oothoon to rise

¹² It is important to note that this so-called male fantasy is not accepted by Theotormon, perhaps suggesting that this liberal alternative is as flawed as the current repressive state of affairs. Also, Helen Bruder offers a counter-perspective to Mellor's critique of Blake, praising Blake for giving Oothoon power over her own desires (89), despite her failed attempt at liberation. In trying to "better understand Blake's limitations [...], as well as appreciate his achievements" (94), Bruder sees this failure within the larger picture of women's rights at the time, holding women themselves partially responsible for the lack of success in the progress of their cause (115).

completely above her social environment: “This counteracts the over-optimistic tendencies and represents the poet’s unflinching realism, his final rejection of any too easy idealism about human consciousness endemic to so many self-styled ‘revolutionary’ organisations” (506). On the one hand, the tailpiece, along with the image on the frontispiece, shows us how Oothoon is trapped in her ideological environment in the verbal text. On the other hand, the tailpiece visually offers us a freed vision of Oothoon, albeit one that is linked to the still seemingly chained Daughters below her and to us, as we all gaze at each other, creating a circle of interconnectivity. In the text, the Daughters can only echo Oothoon’s laments and sighs, showing that complete change can occur only as a community. The spectator’s individual engagement with and entrance into the work, then, does not signify a futile event. Rather, this engagement is a necessary step toward change on a larger scale. Through the image of the disembodied eye, the work calls on the spectator to enter the world of the poem, an entrance that will empower him/her, facilitating the fight to tear down rigid and repressive social values and conventions in both worlds.

Furthermore, the work’s self-reflexivity has explicitly theatrical dimensions. With *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Blake adapts James Macpherson’s *Oithóna: A Poem*, one of the tales supposedly composed by the ancient highland bard Ossian. Sanders claims, “[I]t is usually at the very point of infidelity that the most creative acts of adaptation and appropriation take place” (20), as is the case with Blake’s adaptation (what Hornby would regard as real-life or literary allusion)—one of his numerous self-reflexive strategies that initiate a distancing followed by an incorporation of the audience. Blake not only transposes the medium by making it an illuminated work, but he also alters many of the plot points of Macpherson’s tale. Nevertheless, the story still contains many recognizable features of *Oithóna* (the emphasis on sight, the rape, the resulting implications for female virtue and reputation, the cave, the violent rapist, the name of the heroine, etc.). In fact, a couple of the alterations are reminiscent of François-Hippolyte Barthélémon’s adaptation of Macpherson’s *Oithóna* for the stage (Haymarket Theatre, 1768). In Barthélémon’s operetta *Oithóna: A Dramatic Poem Taken from the Prose*

Translation of the Celebrated Ossian,¹³ the poem was set to music and dramatized.¹⁴ It included the addition of several speaking and singing choruses, including a lone voice, as well as a group of men and a group of women, groups which sometimes create a tension as they sing about the various attributes of the sexes. The operetta received some public attention in a poor review in (at least) one London periodical. *The Monthly Review* of April 1768 reviewed the performance of *Oithona*: “From the character of this Composer, we have no doubt but the music of this piece has great merit; but as a literary composition, it appears to be an absurd mixture of the majestic and the familiar, the sublime and the silly, the heroic and the nonsensical” (335). Blake may not have actually seen Barthélémon’s performance, which did not have a successful or long run,¹⁵ and he may not have read the printed version of the text, but some interesting similarities and, perhaps merely coincidental, intertextual relations exist nonetheless. For instance, both the operetta and Blake’s poem add an explicit layer of sexual and gender politics that Macpherson’s poem does not explore. Dafydd Moore also makes a loose connection between the operetta and *Visions* when he explains that the former includes “a number of added passages about the battles of the sexes and the nature of women,” while describing the latter as “another meditation on relations between the sexes and sexual morality” (35).

Another similarity between the two works is the addition of a chorus, something Macpherson’s poem lacks. Although Blake does not identify or label the Daughters as a chorus, and despite their lack of dialogue (they never speak), they certainly are choral. As a group that watches the drama from the vantage point of the stage (or story space) and reiterates Oothoon’s sighs four times throughout the text, most notably at the beginning and at the end (thereby shaping the focalization of the work), the Daughters do display choral attributes. Although a chorus seems to function as a kind of “self-reference,” Hornby does not classify choruses under his various categories of metadrama. Instead, he

¹³ I am indebted to David Worrall who drew my attention to this version of Macpherson’s tale and suggested a possible connection to Blake.

¹⁴ Corinna Laughlin briefly discusses the adaptive strategies in Barthélémon’s retelling of Macpherson’s *Oithona*. She says that Barthélémon “transforms it subtly into [a] Gothic-Shakespearean” version at the level of language and story (520).

¹⁵ Dafydd Moore notes, “The opera *Oithona* opened in a two-act version promising all three acts the following night, only to disappear without trace and never be performed again” (36).

insists that they are a “mere acknowledgment of the audience,” “merely conventions of a presentation style,” and “they do not destroy the world of the play, but instead enlarge it to include the audience” (104). In the case of the operetta, I concur; however, in the case of *Visions*, I believe the choral effect is entirely different and does, in fact, destabilize the boundary between work and audience. Through these allegorical figures, Blake includes the women of England (and perhaps even all women) on the stage of his drama, but this chorus does not reveal more awareness than the protagonist Oothoon, as one might expect with a Greek chorus, or as Barthélémon provides with his chorus (see, for example, p. 7, where the chorus philosophizes on the nature of humanity).¹⁶ Instead, Blake’s chorus mirrors Oothoon in echoing her. Like the menacing eye, Blake critically challenges one main component of his audience—all the women of England—to end the cycle of non-action and to effect change by putting them “on stage” with the action of the performance. This particular adaptation of the chorus moves in the direction of Aers’s idea of interactive and collective acts toward social change.

Blake makes two other significant changes to his version of Macpherson’s *Oithóna* (and, implicitly, to Barthélémon’s, which does not veer from the original plot points much): Oothoon does not (nor does she want to) kill herself as a result of the stain the rape places on her female reputation or “fame” (Macpherson 186). In fact, Oothoon quickly realizes, unlike *Oithóna*, that she is still pure and not stained. Secondly, her beloved does not seek (or want) vengeance. Theotormon is the one who cannot deal with the negative implications of the rape, while Oothoon frees herself from them almost immediately. In Macpherson’s poem, *Oithóna*’s lover pursues her (rather than the other way around, which is what happens in Blake’s poem), wanting her back and challenging her rapist to a battle to the death (which the beloved wins). By removing these aspects of the beloved, Blake complicates male responsibility in female oppression. Theotormon represents one aspect of the patriarchal ideology, an aspect that praises female virtue and

¹⁶ Laughlin explains how Barthélémon, like other adapters, tries to give Macpherson’s tale a coherence that is simply not present: “Macpherson’s work is carefully [...] fragmentary; adapters of the poems tend to fill in those gaps, thus changing the effect of the poems substantially” (521). Laughlin points out that one of the ways Barthélémon fills in the gaps is to give the chorus insights into motivation and explain what the original never does explain (521-22).

modesty, while Bromion represents the aspect that believes men own women and that they exist for male pleasure. Besides the more general intertextual and self-reflexive implications, Blake's adaptation of Macpherson's and Barthélémon's *Oithóna* into *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* more specifically enacts, first, a Brechtian distancing by startling the audience out of any possible complacent and escapist attitudes toward the work of art *and*, second, an incorporation by drawing the audience into the story space and bending the fabric between its world and our own.

Incorporation stands for an "immersion" into the work (a word Linda Hutcheon uses in her book *A Theory of Adaptation*) as well as for the experience of immediacy, which Bolter and Grusin explain as "being immersed" (232). With respect to narrative representation, Hutcheon categorizes "three modes of engagement—telling, showing, and interacting with stories" (27). In the first chapter and in this one, I have discussed how Blake uses two of these three modes of storytelling at once: telling, through the verbal text, and showing, through the visual text. What I have attempted to show specifically in this chapter is that Blake also fulfills the interactive kind of storytelling, Hutcheon's third category. Hutcheon's main illustration of the interactive type of storytelling is the videogame: "[T]he move to participatory modes in which we also engage physically with the story and its world—whether it be in a violent action game or a role-playing or puzzle/skill testing one—is not more active [than the telling and showing modes] but certainly active in a different way" (23). She points out, "[I]n a game adaptation [...] players can inhabit a known fictional, often striking, visual world of digital animation" (13). The level of activity in this mode includes the physical and not just the mental aspect of engagement (or the basic physical aspect of holding a book or standing before a work of art).

While it is anachronistic to compare Blake's illuminated works to videogames (adaptations or not), it is useful to consider this kind of participatory mode in relation to Blake's statement about his audience entering his works. As I have argued, Blake constructs a two-stage level of audience engagement with the media of his illuminated works: a level of Brechtian alienation in which we are made aware of the art object as a construction and are called on to make change as well as a level of incorporation that allows us to cross the divide between our space and the imaginative space. Blake's

illuminated works ask us to imagine a way of interacting with art objects that is atypical. He asks us not only to mentally participate in his universe and ideas, but also to literally step into that other world, to live it. The videogame allows a participant to navigate and effect change in that virtual space. I would argue that one of the main differences between the videogame and Blake's illuminated works, then, is that the world Blake presents us with is not virtual. Bolter and Grusin affirm the failure of even virtual reality simulators: "Virtual reality is immersive, which means that it is a medium whose purpose is to disappear. This disappearing act, however, is made difficult by the apparatus that virtual reality requires" (21-22). More than the cumbersome presence of the device or interface, the fact that the users, no matter how amazing the experience is, will acknowledge virtual reality as just that—virtual, not reality, and fake—forecloses the possibility of a truly immersive experience. As Bolter and Grusin acknowledge, "The user of virtual reality is constantly aware of the discrepancies between the virtual scene and the real world, and that awareness is an important part of her experience" (253). Blake's illuminated works, however, strive toward the collision of reality and imagination so that the audience may see the world of imagination as a reality.

What Blake's illuminated works offer is an immersive experience. Hutcheon does not dismiss the immersive aspect of any of the three modes of storytelling. She says, "all three modes of engagement can be considered immersive: the act of reading a print text immerses us through imagination in another world, seeing a play or film immerses us visually and aurally, and interacting with a story in a videogame or in a theme park adds a physical, enacted dimension. In each there is a sense of being 'transported' [...], in psychological and emotional terms. (133)

However, Hutcheon explains that the main difference between telling and showing when compared with the interactive mode of storytelling is that the latter allows a "more immediate kind of immersion" (25); "in the showing mode we do not physically enter that world and proceed to act within it," unlike the interactive mode. While I agree with Hutcheon's claim that the interactive mode of the videogame includes the body in a way that showing and telling stories do not, I also have some reservations about the level of physical interaction possible. Despite the use of bodies to manipulate the game world by

pressing buttons on controllers or running on a mat, bodies do not cross the barrier of the television to find themselves in another world, even if bodies do control the movements of the avatar that exists in that space. I have been arguing that the illuminated works encourage an actual entrance. Unlike videogames, Blake encourages the spectator to radically alter his/her perception and understanding of the way he/she relates to other individuals and objects so that mind and body make the leap together—even if such a leap is difficult to imagine. Nevertheless, associating Hutcheon's category of the immersive mode with Blake's illuminated works makes sense given Blake's understanding of fourfold vision, Generation, and Eternity. By entering his works in a visceral way, the spectator alters the way he/she engages with the world on a fundamental level. Of course, unlike the videogame, Blake's works do not offer a clear path for the journey through the story space. By entering his works, the spectator does not set out on a goal to destroy the enemy, nor does he/she take on an avatar and act within that boundary. Rather, the spectator's entrance marks a key paradigm shift in his/her engagement with the world at large. The point is not some tangible goal, like saving the princess, but what happens to the identity of audience when they choose to enter the imaginative space in a physical way, leading to profound ramifications for their understanding of human existence.

In Hutcheon's schema, live theatrical performance tells a story by way of showing (versus the telling of the written word or the interacting of the videogame). However, in a medieval understanding of spectacle, theatrical performance fits more closely with the interactive model than either the telling or showing models. In the context of Blake's illuminated works, Hutcheon's category of immersion finds a less anachronistic model in medieval theatre. Indeed, in trying to understand Blake's self-reflexive layers in the context of the performative and theatrical elements of his work, I find William Egginton's *How the World Became a Stage: Presence, Theatricality, and the Question of Modernity* a particularly fruitful source to help theorize this aspect of the illuminated works. Egginton isolates the theatre as a crucial space for a discussion of the changing relations between a subject and the world, "tracing the development of the theatrical experience of space out of the experience of presence characteristic of medieval spectacle" (121). He contrasts two major ways humans have related to the world and

space, at least in the Western world: the medieval magical worldview and the modern worldview of causal relations, or “two modes of spatiality: presence and theatricality” (124). In the medieval world, people interacted with spectacle in a way now foreign to us, or in a way that we might find naïve. The significant role of religion and ritual, specifically Catholicism, led to the easy acceptance of divine presence in the world and to the belief that all could “share in the essence of a thing.” Egginton explains:

at its core, Catholic doctrine, and particularly those aspects of it that will become the heart of the liturgical drama in the Middle Ages, operates according to the logic of sympathetic magic. Certainly anthropologists and sociologists of magic and religion since Frazer have remarked upon the magical elements of the sacrament of the Eucharist. As Gregory Dix points out, the sacrament is, practically speaking, a magical ceremony whose performance is ‘neither a memorial nor a representation, but an actual *representation* of the sacrifice of Christ.’ In other words, the sacrament of the Eucharist is the prototypical instance of that motion of mimesis as production of presence that characterizes both the magical worldview and the medieval experience of spectacle. (43)

Sympathetic magic entails a world in which humans wield power: if I perform this particular ritual, then this phenomenon will occur. This magical worldview, then, does not displace human agency for a supernatural one; rather, it puts humans even more in control and in touch with what goes on in the universe. Having this view implies a belief in the possibility of “*representation*” as Egginton explains it. Significantly, the main types of theatrical performance in this time were based on biblical stories, such as Noah and the Flood, and known as mystery plays. Such a view is not a “leap of faith” on the part of social members; it is the simple “reality” of what it meant to live in the divine presence of things (44).

The belief in and acceptance of church ritual and medieval spectacle as a reality—rather than as a Brechtian distanced representation—align themselves with the second of the two moves involved in our engagement with Blake’s illuminated works. The self-reflexive aspects provide the initial distance that allows us to form a critical stance from which to effect social change; then they draw us in and disturb the boundaries between

our space and the space of the imagination so that these two spheres exist within one another. What I am suggesting here is that the mode of understanding reality that Blake constructs in his illuminated works parallels that of medieval spectacle. The crucial point of comparison rests on a definition of representation, specifically as a “production of presence”; I argue that Blake uses the term representation in a similar way in the *Last Judgment*. Bolter and Grusin’s contemporary understanding of media that function on a logic of immediacy comes close to the idea of presence at the heart of medieval spectacle. These kind of media attempt to mask mediation, while attempting to make the user feel as if what is represented achieves an authenticity or reality. However, this logic of immediacy, as I have already noted, fails to mesh with Blake’s idea of immediacy for the simple reason that representation remains a kind of fiction: “It is important to note that the logic of transparent immediacy does not necessarily commit the viewer to an utterly naive or magical conviction that the representation is the same thing as what it represents” (Bolter and Grusin 30). My argument about the illuminated works rests on the fact that they encourage precisely the experience that the logic of transparent immediacy does not, where what is represented is reality in the medieval sense of spectacle and the magical worldview. Far from being a naïve understanding of the world, sympathetic magic highlights the potential power humans have to affect the space they occupy. Through a Brechtian distance, which allows a critical awareness and prevents simple absorption into art, Blake’s illuminated works move us toward reclaiming this power and this view of the world.

The understanding of performance with respect to actors playing a part differed as well in medieval times. Egginton distinguishes between what he calls “dramatization” and what we might call “acting”:

Dramatization, I want to suggest, marks a different relation to reality than does the modern term ‘acting.’ Whereas an actor takes part in the production of an imaginary reality that coexists or momentarily replaces social reality, dramatization makes present, adds a bodily dimension to, a narration that is already in some sense real. (50)

When Egginton uses the term “imaginary reality,” he seems to connote the not-real rather than the real, Eternal, and divine, which is how Blake uses the term. To this end, Blake’s

illuminated works correspond to Egginton's definition of dramatization. The world that includes Los, Orc, and Urizen is not imaginary, if we take imaginary to mean not real, and it is not virtual compared to our own world; Blake's universe is of the imagination and of Eternity. Blake resists the more modern and scientific view of the universe, with its principle of cause and effect and singular focus on abstract reasoning and experimentation and proofs. For him, reason needs imagination. He vehemently opposed Deism and its vision of a clockmaker God who distanced Himself after the creation of the world and he fully embraced the presence of the divine in this world, the reality of miracles, and the truth of revelation.¹⁷ For example, in the poem "Mock on Mock on Voltaire Rousseau," Blake critiques the philosophies of natural morality and religion of both men, telling them that their ideas are "vain" because the world contains more than merely the natural and physical; it contains the spirit of Jesus and the imagination. Blake writes, "And every sand becomes a Gem / Reflected in the beams divine / Blown back they blind the mocking Eye" (2, 5-7, E 477; see also the address "To the Deists" in *Jerusalem* pl. 52, E 200-01). Faulty perception and reason's usurpation of the imagination chains us to a vision of the world as merely physical and impermanent. If we break these mental chains, we can reach a higher level of perception to find the divine and the Eternal in the world. The world of Generation and the objects produced in it (such as art), however, offer immersion into the divine presence. The imagination exists in itself and comes to transgress our perceived mundane reality. The illuminated works (as art objects), then, do not function as a gateway leading us out of one world and into another; rather they collapse the boundary between worlds, showing us that this world is suffused with the Eternal.

Blake embodies the medieval idea of presence specifically in his painting *Angel of the Revelation*. He places St. John the Divine (the small figure) in the foreground, watching the spectacle before him and transcribing his visions, while the Angel (the large

¹⁷ As V. A. De Luca argues, "For Blake Presence is available, and [...] [it is] in fact [one of] the cornerstones of his faith" (240-41). De Luca's essay leads up to an analysis of writing as revelation in *Milton*: the fact that the letters are "both read and seen" turns words into images, something that Blake's illuminated works also do with their "wall of words" (238). The notion of presence is a fundamental aspect of Blake's understanding of the world and the various levels of perception and modes of being in the world.

figure) holds the script or text of the revelation in his hand in the middle ground and the procession of horses and riders passes in the background. This depiction makes it clear that what John sees is not a mere representation, not an action in a separate sphere, but one that crosses into his reality. Blake accomplishes this by having the Angel breach the implicit divide between spaces: one foot is on the ocean in the middle ground while the other is beside John on the earth he occupies in the foreground.¹⁸ Thus, John does not merely witness a spectacle before him; he exists in the same reality as the performance—in this way, he is immersed in it. This painting epitomizes the nature of Blake's illuminated works and their relation to our reality. The vision is physical, not confined to the mental, just as Elijah's and Elisha's vision of the fiery chariot manifests itself both spiritually and physically. Blake's works function as live performances, but performances in a world of presence. Jesus tells John, "What thou seest, write in a book" (Revelation 1.11), justifying Blake's inclusion of both pictorial and linguistic spaces, but also the performative dimension of the works since John also watches the dramatic action unfold.

The medieval magical worldview that Egginton describes was eventually replaced with the modern view due to a change in the structure of relations between audience and spectacle, leading away from presence and toward theatricality. Tracy C. Davis's assessment of the "distinction between the *theatrical* and *theatricality*" (128) demonstrates that the magical worldview is necessarily opposed to theatricality rather than merely the theatrical. She attempts to disentangle the two terms because she finds that they tend to be used interchangeably: "The difference hinges on the audience. Theatricality is not likely to be present when a performance is so absorbing that the audience forgets that it is spectating." The key difference is that, in a relation to performance described as theatrical, one is absorbed in the presentation before one; however, in a relation to performance described as theatricality, one is "aware of the condition of spectating" (129). Davis links theatricality with the kind of "disengaged viewing" that Brecht promotes. In an experience that can be defined in terms of

¹⁸ The painting echoes the positioning of Milton in the frontispiece to *Milton* and of Los in the frontispiece of *Jerusalem*. Both Milton and Los leave one foot behind in the space closest to the viewer, arguably the space of the viewer—our world—while the other foot steps forward into an unknown space of the vortex or the darkened doorway—an alternate world, possibly the world of imagination.

theatricality, “a person must decide to be a spectator, not merely a witness, engaged and conscious of the transaction of display and reception.” For Davis, “theatricality is a condition of being” (131), as Egginton claims. Her analysis draws on Thomas Carlyle’s understanding of the term theatricality: “For Carlyle, theatricality is not mimetic but reflects the Habermasian concern for the public sphere, involving volitional spectatorship.” She concludes by saying, “I am, therefore, arguing for enabling effects of active dissociation, or alienation, or self-reflexivity in standing aside from the suffering of the righteous to name and thus bring into being the self-possession of a critical stance. And, like Carlyle, I call this ‘theatricality’” (153). Davis draws together Brechtian alienation, self-reflexivity, theatricality and “volitional spectatorship,” elements that are key in the kind of audience Blake constructs for his illuminated works, while Egginton’s focus on presence adds the remaining crucial element.

Egginton discusses the change in worldview as “the shift from presence to theatricality” (66), a shift that occurred once “the conventions of spectacle changed during the sixteenth century to produce a theater based on metatheatrical staging practices” (121). As the theatre became more self-reflexive and transparent in staging techniques, accepting the spectacle as a seamless part of everyday reality became difficult. Egginton marks this change as one of separable spheres. He says, “This telescoping of separable spaces requires audiences to negotiate different levels of reality, which they do by means of characters or avatars [...]” (121). Rather than existing within the framework of presence, without separable spheres, the world now existed as one with various bounded spaces that became the “appropriate” sites of certain kinds of spectacle and performance. Judd D. Hubert, for instance, takes it for granted that plays do not exist in the same sphere as reality. He asserts,

Magritte’s famous painting *This Is Not a Pipe* has relevance to theatrical representation in the sense that a play may venture so far in the direction of realism as to represent a ‘true’ event but will never come close to coinciding with it. At the other extreme, a play dealing with pure fantasy can do no less than generate its own referent, while pretending all along to reproduce it. But art has no greater foe than reality, taken in the sense of everyday existence. (11)

Contemporary theatre scholarship has questioned the belief that theatrical performance does, in fact, exist in a separate hermetic sphere and can offer no reality. Aleksandra Wolska challenges the conventional view of theatrical performance, namely as an ephemeral form that does not come to bear on reality:

In the criticism of performance, we have lost our theoretical hold on the rather obvious fact that theatre engages forces of becoming as well as those of vanishing. Contemporary critics privilege performance's structure of disappearance. The analysis of theatrical events remains dominated by metaphors of loss, framed by categories of repetition and transience. (85)

Performance does not vanish and disappear. She says, "[T]he premise that time is a continuum inseparable from spatial extension allows us to see that a performance does not stop with the fall of the curtain, but continues in the body and mind of the viewer" (88); "performance subsists in the seams of reality as the ur-drama that goes on when we try to do anything at all" (93). In light of Egginton's juxtaposition of presence with theatricality, Wolska's claims suggest that, even in this modern world, performance offers a kind of presence by continuing into life, rather than dying away on the stage. Viewing a performance somehow forges an unbreakable bond to us so that it lives and continues through us and permeates reality as we continue to act and exist in the world.

The fundamental reconstruction of the relation between us and the world (and to performance specifically) from medieval to modern times inevitably led to changing ideas about the individual and about human subjectivity. Egginton defines subjectivity as "a set of ideas about how the human individual relates to the world and, more specifically, has knowledge about the world" (125). He goes on to explain the "fundamentally misconceived set of ideas about the human individual and its relation to the world," beginning with Descartes and

the modern philosophical tradition [that] has described the grammatical, first-person subject as the foundation of all possible knowledge, thereby making the world in which the subject and all other thinking and perceiving beings dwell a secondary object, a 'standing reserve' of resources in which the subject moves about, picking and choosing at will and constructing his or her own surroundings, and a 'world picture'

(*Weltbild*): a screen of representations constituted and compared by the subject for their relative accuracy in depicting the real.

In this understanding of our relation to the world, presence cannot exist because the 'I' is part of a separable sphere, the subject to all other objects. In a world of presence, the relations among things are less rigid. The 'I' is not the firm ground from which all knowledge stems. Egginton continues, "Theatricality is the historically-specific description (i.e., mine [Egginton's]) of the historically-specific form of mediation that structures the spatiality of [our] experience in the modern world." Such a form of mediation allowed for a revised conception of our relation to the world. This revised understanding "was an intellectual invention made possible only by a theatrical experience of spatiality, one in which viewers had learned to become disembodied spectators of an action that only involved them as characters, as virtual rather than actual participants" (138). Thus, the world of presence transitioned into the modern world of theatricality.

Blake's illuminated works provoke both kinds of modes of being in the world. On the one hand, they function on a level of theatricality, as they jar the spectator out of being uncritically absorbed into the story space and enact a kind of Brechtian alienation. On the other, they function on a level of presence: the same "jarring" techniques simultaneously beckon the spectator to become a participant in the world of the works. A modern-day cinematic example illustrates what I argue Blake's call for us to enter his works achieves as well as how the self-reflexive techniques operate. In the 1984 film *The NeverEnding Story* (based on Michael Ende's German novel *Die unendliche Geschichte*, 1979), the crucial act of Bastian (the boy protagonist) is one of recognition.

In the attic of his school, Bastian reads a tale about the land of Fantasia, a land on the verge of destruction due to the overwhelming power of a negative force—the Nothing. Fantasia functions as the space of the imagination, while the Nothing functions as a lack of action or a rejection of agency, a rejection that arguably rests on disbelief and misperception of the nature of this world. As Bastian approaches the end of the tale, with Fantasia in its final moments of existence, Atreyu the Warrior, who believes he has failed in his mission to save his world, arrives at the palace and stands before the Empress. She explains that it has not been a failure; he has brought their salvation with him: "The

earthling child, the one who can save us all.” Atreyu, who sees no evidence of the child in Fantasia, can only doubt what the Empress says, questioning the futility of his own mission. In response, the Empress makes a sort of plea for escapist fiction and the need for Bastian to have become enthralled in their story before he could take action: “It was the only way to get in touch with an earthling. [...] He has suffered with you. He went through everything you went through and now he has come here.” For the final sentence of her explanation, the film cuts to Bastian reading the book and her words are echoed in his space, as we watch him slowly raise his head with a look of disbelief. And for the last two words, we cut back to the Empress. Here the cuts and sound begin to destabilize the boundary between the two spaces. She continues, “He is very close, listening to every word we say.” We cut back to Bastian who exclaims “What!” Until now, the conversation between the Empress and Atreyu has been quiet and their surroundings still. With Bastian’s exclamation, their world begins to break apart again as if his refusal to accept what she says, that he can enter their world, provokes the destruction of the final part of Fantasia. Bastian’s view of reality and fiction continues to be dismantled, as he continues to be alienated from a simple absorption in the tale he reads, an absorption that has no material consequences.

The self-reflexivity of this sequence is heightened as the Empress explains that Bastian is “part of the NeverEnding Story,” a fact he does not “realize.” She points out to Atreyu, “Just as he is sharing all of your adventures, others are sharing his,” creating a *mise en abyme* and implying that we, the audience of the film, take part in Bastian’s tale, just as he takes part in Atreyu’s. At this, Bastian again declares his disbelief, shouting “But that’s impossible!” as he slams his fists on the book, a sign that he is becoming involved in the story in a different way than his earlier absorption throughout the majority of the film. When she refers to the book Bastian has before him “in which he’s reading his own story right now,” the camera cuts to the continued destruction of Fantasia and then to Bastian running away from the book to another part of the attic. The explicit self-reflexivity of the Empress’s words startles Bastian so that he now physically reacts to what she suggests is the true nature of his relationship to the book and to Fantasia. Although he continues to question the veracity of what she says, he also begins to question the potency of his actions. His literal distancing from the book suggests he is no

longer enthralled with the story as he once was; he can no longer escape and believe it is just a story, though his words continue in the vein of doubt:

Bastian: I can't believe it. They can't be talking about me.

Atreyu: What will happen if he [Bastian] doesn't appear?

Empress: Then our world will disappear, and so will I.

Atreyu: How could he let that happen?

Empress: He doesn't understand that he's the one who has the power to stop it. He simply can't imagine that one little boy could be that important.

[At this point, we cut to Bastian who returns to the book and begins reading again.]

Bastian: Is it really me?

Atreyu: Maybe he doesn't know what he has to do?

Bastian: [Finally, speaking directly to the characters of Fantasia] What do I have to do?

Empress: He has to give me a new name. He's already chosen it. He just has to call it out.

Bastian: But it's only a story. It's not real. It's only a story. [The palace continues to crumble and Atreyu is thrown to the floor] Atreyu no!

Empress: Atreyu! [Speaking directly from her world to Bastian's] Bastian, why don't you do what you've dreamed, Bastian?

Bastian: But I can't. I have to keep my feet on the ground!

Empress: Call my name! Bastian, please, save us!

Bastian: Alright, I'll do it! I'll save you! I will do what I dreamed! [Shouts out a window] Moonchild!

Throughout the above scene, we have continuous cutting between scenes of Fantasia and Bastian's world. Shots of Fantasia being pulled apart and exploding parallel shots of Bastian sitting in the attic, surrounded by a progressively worsening thunderstorm. This sequence exemplifies the importance of film editing and its relationship to the audience, which Lev Kuleshov examined in the early days of cinema—the early twentieth century—as part of his now canonical theory of editing and

reception. The Kuleshov effect suggests that an audience will form a correlation between two shots, even if they depict a different place or time and have no necessary or inherent connections; such a theory advocates an active spectatorship. Kuleshov's theory acknowledges editing's potential to create meaning in a film and convey ideas, as well as the spectator's role in this process. The same principle works in this scene: the juxtaposition of Fantasia's destruction with the inclement weather of Bastian's world encourages us to see that one space affects the other, as in sympathetic magic. As the one worsens, so does the other. Here, we have a visual link to the two worlds, a link that the Empress has been trying to explicate throughout the scene. This link functions in a similar manner to the symbol of the oracle that Atreyu wears around his neck and the symbol on the front cover of the book that Bastian reads. The Empress explains to Atreyu, and implicitly to Bastian, that, without Bastian's intervention, Fantasia will cease to be. If he does not appear, if he does not enter Fantasia (and the book he is reading), both she and Fantasia will disappear. She explains that only Bastian has the power to stop the Nothing from destroying Fantasia, a power he has had all along without being aware of it. When the Empress finally says Bastian's name (rather than referring more generally to an earthling child), she looks directly at the camera and at us, the real-life audience. By looking at us directly, she calls on us too, thereby distancing us and incorporating us into Fantasia at the same time, as Blake's self-reflexive moments do. When the film cuts to Bastian's response to the Empress, he too looks at the camera and at us, which has a similar effect to the Empress's gaze. A *mise en abyme* similar to the Empress's reference to the NeverEnding story occurs thanks to the visual images. This sequence implies that entering Fantasia gives one agency and power in the earthly world, as Bastian shows.

Although Bastian initially questions the possibility of characters in a book calling on him and knowing his name, he stops being absorbed in the story he reads, and, thus, he stops forgetting his full potential as a human being, which includes the active power to effect change and to transgress the conventional borders between the physical world and the imagination. His reply that he cannot help because he has "to keep [his] feet on the ground" comes from the conditioning his father and society have instilled in him about maintaining a grip on reality and pushing the imagination aside. Breaking free of those mental chains, he moves from being an "emotionally punch-drunk spectator" (Brecht 28)

caught up in an escapist fiction to being a self-aware participant, leading him to a magical view of the world in the medieval sense. Bastian chooses to acknowledge the call of the Empress by realizing that he is an agent rather than a mere observer, an agent who can choose to bridge the gap between worlds, his own and that of Fantasia; finally, his self-awareness leads him to enter the text at the same time as the text bleeds out into his world so that the separate spaces collapse and become one—as in medieval presence. Once he calls out the name, the Empress stands before him as the two worlds come together. The bestowing of a new name functions in a revelatory way. In Revelation, Jesus declares, “Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name” (3.12). As Bastian accepts the nature of reality as infinite, his renaming of the Empress signals the fact that a last judgment, an apocalypse, is occurring as the two worlds become one or their as their interpenetrability is revealed.

As Bastian calls out the new name, the lights flicker on and off until we have a blackout. Then we see a tiny light, revealing the Empress and Bastian standing face-to-face. As the light becomes more intense, we realize that the source of it is a tiny grain of sand, the only remaining piece of Fantasia, which the Empress holds in her hand. The two characters are neither in Fantasia, nor in the school attic. Though they are fully lighted, their background is not. This nondescript space of solid blackness allows us, for the first time, to be neither in one realm or the other, but in both at the same time as the two characters come together from their respective worlds. The Empress reveals to a crestfallen Bastian, who mourns the passing of Fantasia, that all is not lost: “Fantasia can arise in you, in your dreams and wishes, Bastian.” Unclear of what this means, Bastian asks, “How?” In response, she gives him the light she holds in her hand and explains, “[T]he more wishes you make, the more magnificent Fantasia will become.” I read the wish as an act of the imagination. Bastian’s entrance into the world of the imagination is visually signified in a physical moment of connection: the Empress passes him the grain of sand as their hands touch. Despite the fact that only one grain of sand remains of Fantasia, the Empress tells Bastian that this grain of sand—perhaps like Blake’s world in a grain of sand—means Fantasia’s continued existence. Fantasia will always be a part of

Bastian, as long as he acts imaginatively. His first wish takes him on a ride on Fantasia's luck-dragon, Falkor, who takes Bastian through the lands of Fantasia seeing the world and people who had been destroyed by the Nothing. Bastian's wish has revived it, indicating that he *can* intervene and make a difference, in this case redeeming the world of the imagination. As Bastian says, "It's like the Nothing never was!" Still riding Falkor, Bastian's next wish brings him to his own world, enabling him to stand up for himself and face the bullies who tormented him at the beginning of the film. Shouting out the Princess's new name results in Bastian's newfound sense of agency, and it precipitates actual change in both worlds. Bastian is no longer a distanced viewer; he is a performer in what was once a mere story, distinct from reality. He experiences a kind of epiphany that re-aligns his view of himself, of the world, and of the possible, allowing him to effect change in Fantasia and by extension in his own world.

It is this process that the illuminated works encourage for their audience. When spectators, like Bastian, climb aboard the fiery chariot of contemplative thought, they take a ride into the illuminated works. By entering Blake's works, we do not leave behind our world; instead, we realize that our perception of it has been faulty until now so that the entering is really a resituating of our context, a revision of what we understand the world to be and what we understand our position in the world to be. The context of medieval and Brechtian theatrical spectatorship, as well as current media reception theory, offers a new view of Blake's works to arise, one that includes an alternative understanding of how he intended his works to be experienced. Wittreich rightly asserts, "Blake, who begins his version of the fall with the story of the closing off of the senses, would repair the ruins of the fall by opening them up again. The effect of Blake's multimedia art is to open the eye and, opening it, to guide the mind through spaces it has not traveled before" ("Painted Prophecies" 108). Part of being able to engage with space and objects in the magical worldview depends on consciously thinking outside the box. In this way we embody both perspectives—medieval presence and modern theatricality—at once. Unlike the medieval perspective, as modern subjects, we live in a world that has lost its magic—we have to actively reassert it. We have to remove the spectacles (or eyeglasses) of Generation and see with a fourfold vision. The performativity of all the illuminated works, which create the world of the imagination as they *re-present* it,

succeeds in a “production of presence” only if audience uptake occurs. Herein lies the importance of Brechtian alienation, which facilitates this experience and prevents the audience from being uncritically wrapped up in a fictional tale. Without this, the works will only ever be representations. These images do not exist as virtual imitations of reality; rather, they signify the space defined by “the magical worldview and the medieval experience of spectacle” (Egginton 43). We make our entrance without being entranced (in the sense of bewitched). As Brecht’s ideal spectators, Blakean spectators must choose to take up the challenge of actively effecting change in the human community, but they, unlike Brecht’s ideal spectators, must do so without dismissing what they see before them as separate from them and their world. This is the acceptance of presence, but from the viewpoint of an aware spectator who willingly chooses to cross the space of theatricality and move into that of presence. When the audience heeds Blake’s call and enters his works, they take to the stage so to speak, unsettling the distinct roles of actor and audience—and all the world becomes a stage. In this way, the illuminated works provoke their spectators to reexamine their relation to the world, to art, to the possible. They force them to question their potential, and, thus, human perception, identity, and existence, aspects that will be explored in greater detail in the chapters that follow.

The Theatrics of *Urizen*: Performance, Interpellation, and Sensory Perception

The verbal-visual art form of Blake's illuminated works signals not only dramatic performance, as I showed in chapter one, but also a specific type of dramatic technique. Several decades ago, Northrop Frye wrote, "Blake's engraved poems [...] present, ideally, a unified vision of the three major arts to the individual as the musical drama, with its combination of speech, sound and setting, presents it to the audience" (186). By uniting painting, poetry, and music through design and text, Blake's works inevitably tend towards performance: "While painting solicits the eye, poetry addresses the ear through the medium of an actual or implied voice (rhythm, rhyme, sequence, and so on)" (Otto, "Blake's Composite Art" 42). Extending Frye's observation paralleling the illuminated works with musical drama, W. J. T. Mitchell states, "If we meditate a little further on the dramatic unity of Blake's design we notice that this is not the unity of a realistic theatrical scene, but more like the visual presentation of melodrama, mime, or dance, forms which depend upon exaggerated bodily and facial gestures to make up for their lack of verbalization" (*Blake's Composite Art* 29). Interestingly, Mitchell associates one of Blake's plates with primarily "illegitimate" forms of drama. It is precisely Mitchell's brief comparison of Blake's design to illegitimate forms that I will examine in greater detail but with specific attention to the illuminated works.

During the Romantic period, legitimate theatre distinguished itself from illegitimate theatre, a distinction that arose due to the Stage Licensing Act of 1737, which gave the Theatres Royal—Drury Lane and Covent Garden—a monopoly on traditional tragedy and comedy thanks to the "restriction of the spoken drama to those theatres holding patents granted by the monarch" (Russell 108). The censorship of the spoken word that followed paved the way for the proliferation of illegitimate (i.e., non-licensed) theatrical forms at the end of the 1700s (Moody 10, 16-17). The minor playhouses turned to hybrid forms, such as pantomime, harlequinade, burletta, and melodrama, in order to circumvent the Licensing Act. As Jane Moody explains, this hybridity led to a crossing of the boundaries between various genres, highlighted in the fact that "the language of theatrical nomenclature [...] is often vague, indistinct and gloriously arbitrary [...]. In production too, illegitimate forms frequently overlapped" (80). The legitimate

performances at the two royal theatres had an exclusive claim on traditional dramatic speech, while illegitimate performances were forced to turn toward the unspoken in the form of spectacle, music, mime, and dance.

Blake's illuminated works do not discard the spoken, but they employ both the verbal and the visual in a way that gives the works a dramatic shape. For this reason, I argue that many of Blake's works make use of the melodramatic genre specifically. Melodrama includes the spoken word, but, more importantly, it also incorporates affective strategies and visual excess. In addition, melodrama straddled both the patent and non-patent theatres of the Romantic period, while retaining its associations with illegitimacy. By associating Blake with the melodramatic, I will show how viewing his works as theatricalized situates him in an alternative vision of Romanticism, one that concerns itself with the body, the senses, the image, the external, the communal, and the social as opposed to the more conventional Wordsworthian Romanticism that concerns itself with the interiority of the individual. I will focus on *The First Book of Urizen*, which delineates the separation between the self and community, as the best example of how these melodramatic tendencies and concerns tie in both formally and thematically with the illuminated works. Alongside the melodramatic, I will use Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation, which he dramatizes as brief scenes of interpersonal exchange, to examine the fall of Urizen, thereby offering a reading of the poem that diverges from critics' usual interpretations, which emphasize the book, writing, and textuality.

Blake produced *The First Book of Urizen* in 1794, shortly after the French Revolution and its horrifying aftermath. The work implicitly examines the revolutionary ideals of brotherhood and equality by dramatizing the rupture of an ideal community at the same time that it explicitly examines social relations. In addition, the poem draws heavily on elements of performance and theatricality. In this chapter, I will explore how Blake engages with these elements, primarily in his representation of the senses and sensory experience as well as his use of language and images. While other works seem more dramatic because they include more direct dialogue between characters, I will, instead, focus on *Urizen*, in which characters do not, for the most part, speak for themselves. I do so for three important reasons: 1) it is the illuminated work with the highest ratio of full-page designs (as opposed to plates that intertwine both text and

image) to words—a fact that forces us to engage with the designs themselves and interpret their relevance as visual images to the work as a whole; 2) the low level, or even absence, of spoken dialogue¹ resonates nicely with illegitimate dramatic forms and places a greater emphasis on the body, the senses, and the visual aspect of the characters for conveying psychological and emotional insights; and 3) Blake configures the action of the poem as an on-stage drama or spectacle. The visual element and the representation of the body and senses in the poem help to create a theatricalized form by way of the illuminated book. Blake makes the senses, particularly sight and sound, powerfully creative forces and potential gateways to eternity, not unavoidable impediments. Approaching Blake's *Urizen* through the lens of drama and dramatic performance results not only in a new understanding of the genre of Blake's illuminated books and their relation to his time but also in a new context for interpreting human identity and potential in a fallen world.

Interpretations of the poem often rely on biblical readings, whether they are archetypal such as Frye's, politically radical such as David Worrall's, or subversive such as Jerome McGann's.² Throughout this chapter, I will interpret *Urizen* not in a biblical context (though this is relevant to my argument as well) but in a dramatic one. Blake's relation to dramatic genres goes beyond brief similes and comparisons; it contains a more involved response (both implicit and explicit) to the broader discussions of the period, discussions of gestures and the expression of the passions, the word and the image, the internal and the external, the mind and the body, and art and aesthetics. Blake's privileging of the mental realm is not a foregone conclusion when one considers the depiction of the body and the senses in the poem as well as what is at stake in the multimedia form he uses for his artistic production, given the ideas circulating in his

¹ Only copies A, B, and C contain *Urizen*'s soliloquy (pl. 4, E 72)—the single utterance of the entire work (John H. Jones, "Printed Performance" 80-83).

² Worrall contextualizes *Urizen* firmly in Blake's times, in "his contemporary radical culture" (Introduction 15) where religion was political and dangerous (as the case of Tom Paine indicated), not just the "private idiosyncrasies of one man," thus placing Blake in "a wider world of artisan print culture" (14); McGann assesses the satiric elements of the *Urizen* books and demonstrates that "they are part of a deliberate effort to critique the received Bible and its traditional exegetes from the point of view of the latest research findings of the new historical philology" ("The Idea of an Indeterminate Text" 324).

time. My reading counters post-structuralist readings, such as that of Paul Mann in “*The Book of Urizen* and the Horizon of the Book” in which Mann argues that the poem is fundamentally “a book about books” where “Blake examines the ontology of books” (49).³ Mann asserts that “*Urizen* itself seems rather to enforce enclosure, to insist that all attempts to find a way out of the text-world will only deposit one inside another imprisoning horizon” (62). By contrast, I see *Urizen* as a work that, while showing enclosure, is concerned with the social, suggesting ways to move from the inside to the outside. Mann’s argument relies heavily on the text of the poem, ignoring the role of the visual image. If the work is a book about books, and *Urizen* is primarily a text, then how are we to locate the meaning of the images? I would argue that Mann’s argument implicitly suggests that the image merely illustrates visually what the text states linguistically. In contrast, I interpret the illuminated works as composite art (in Mitchell’s sense) dependent on performance, the body, the senses, and excess, thereby positioning *Urizen* within the melodramatic theatre of the Romantic period.

Melodrama began as a French import and was, at various stages in its evolution, associated with the gothic, the domestic (a Victorian development), moral absolutes, spectacle, excess, the unspoken, and illegitimate forms such as pantomime or harlequinade. Gillian Russell outlines English melodrama’s origins:

melodrama [...] was inaugurated at Covent Garden in 1802 by Thomas Holcroft’s *The Tale of Mystery*, an adaptation of a *mélo-drame* by the French dramatist [Charles Guilbert de] Pixérécourt. As it developed in the nineteenth century, melodrama’s most notable aspect was its confounding of orthodox distinctions – between genres of tragedy and comedy, between literary and non-literary performance styles (particularly the relationship between the spoken word and the expressiveness of the body)

³ More recently, Tilottama Rajan, in her trauma-centred reading, notes that “the scene of writing extends throughout the entire text,” while interpreting the *Urizen* trilogy as one which grapples with the “difficulty of writing” ((Dis)figuring the System” 385). And John H. Jones argues that Blake undermines the authority of the author and the fixity of texts by producing a number of different sequences for the plates of *Urizen*, thereby privileging the reader in the creation of meaning: “More than any other of the illuminated books, William Blake’s *The [First] Book of Urizen* is concerned with the process of bookmaking and its effect on readers” (“Printed Performance” 74).

and between culture hierarchies and media [...]. (103)

Interestingly, the Theatres Royal—the sites of legitimacy—first imported and, indeed, continued to stage the controversial form of melodrama, which so clearly became aligned with the illegitimate. Explicating the ideological implications of the so-called legitimate in opposition to the illegitimate, Jeffrey Cox and Michael Gamer state,

Within the tightly controlled world of the London stage, legitimacy gestured towards patent or ‘major’ theaters (as opposed to ‘minor’ upstart ones), towards conventional tragedy and comedy (as opposed to innovative genres such as the melodrama and the burletta), and towards notions of traditional political authority (as opposed to the principles associated with revolutionary France and the ‘pretender’ Napoleon). (xxiii)

Illegitimate forms represented not only lowbrow entertainment that aimed at visceral pleasures rather than intellectual but also larger notions of illegitimacy, suggesting their potential to embody a radical and threatening politics. The kind of cross-fertilization of genres that arose from the Licensing Act (melodrama is a prime example) endured its fair share of attacks. For example, *The Satirist*'s infamous picture of 1807 targeting illegitimate forms, “[c]ommonly dubbed ‘The Monster Melodrama’,” illustrates a four-legged and four-headed creature dressed in a clown costume while “a host of playwrights and shareholders suckle” its teats (Cox and Gamer x).⁴ The print attacks both illegitimate and legitimate theatre-managers, actors and playwrights, satirizing the contamination of the legitimate stage by the illegitimate and the degradation of the stage in general. The appeal of the minor theatres forced Drury Lane and Covent Garden not only to add melodrama and pantomime to their repertoire but also to alter their legitimate performances to include more illegitimate elements in order to keep up in terms of profit

⁴ Cox and Gamer explain, “The head of Sheridan, key playwright and proprietor of Drury Lane, laughs as the great actor Kemble cries out, having received a knife to the neck; Grimaldi, great pantomime clown, repeats one of his infrequent lines, ‘Nice Moon,’ while the head of Harlequin crufts from the back of the beast. The beast’s tail is labeled ‘A Tail of Mystery,’ punning obviously on Thomas Holcroft’s adaptation of Pixérécourt, *A Tale of Mystery* [...] The beast, while suckling these authors of pantomimes and melodramas, tramples upon the works of Shakespeare and a scroll bearing the names of the ‘legitimate’ playwrights” (x-xi).

with the popular performances in the illegitimate playhouses (Thomson 183). Cox states, “[T]he melodrama [in particular] offered Covent Garden and Drury Lane a new form of serious drama, capable of importing the tactics of their rivals onto their legitimate stages” (“The Death of Tragedy; or, the Birth of Melodrama” 166). As a result, even legitimate drama was accused of becoming closer and closer to illegitimate forms and practices. The “monster melodrama” print also emphasizes the negative attitude many critics had toward types of drama that relied on non-spoken forms, precisely because these dramatic modes *were* popular with audiences.

Cox argues that the form of melodrama initiated such fervent attacks because of its three main components: “what is specifically disturbing [...] is the introduction of instrumental music, extensive pantomime and powerful spectacle into what was in the first instance a form of patent house serious *spoken* drama” (168). Due, in part, to these integral non-verbal aspects, melodrama became associated with the unspoken quality of illegitimate performances. Simon Shepherd addresses the antagonism between illegitimate and legitimate dramatic forms, an antagonism that rests partly on the use of (or lack of) speech. Speaking more specifically about the melodrama, he states,

the binary opposition between the spoken and the unspoken [...] dogs melodrama’s history. To accept that opposition is to take on board an assumption about melodrama’s status. For the split between the spoken and the unspoken is assumed to originate in the institutional place of melodrama, staged in unauthorized theatres, using music to replace dialogue. Thought of thus, melodrama is positioned as the illicit, striving to be spoken drama, but remaining an inadequate substitute. (145)

Like Moody, Shepherd attempts to displace the hierarchy between legitimate and illegitimate forms and dislodge the notion that only legitimate forms have something substantial to offer an analysis of Romantic theatre and Romanticism in general. The perceived inadequacy or illegitimacy of melodrama rests on the importance assigned to the verbal aspects of drama as opposed to the embodied theatrical ones. However, recent recovery ventures, such as The Jane Scott Project, emphasize the importance of these more ephemeral and experiential aspects of the genre in the same way as performance scholarship does, shifting the focus from the page to the stage, thereby refusing to give

the text absolute dominance. Shepherd's alignment of the unspoken with melodrama indicates the form's dependence on the visual and on the body.⁵ Similarly, Martin Meisel asserts, with respect to "the activity of seeing," that "melodrama and the melodramatic are specially tuned to its pleasures and capacities" (65). To make the point, he examines spectacles as well as lighting and other stage effects. Melodrama's (and, indeed, much illegitimate theatre's) special emphasis on seeing and the visual is one it shares with Blake's illuminated works.

In particular, *The First Book of Urizen* signals performance and theatricality through its emphasis on the external, the bodily, the unspoken visual aspects, aurality and orality, affect, expression, and excess in both the text and designs. I argue that Blake stages his own brand of (illegitimate) drama in this illuminated work (his vision of creation and the fall) by paying particular attention to expression as it relates to the body, affect, spectacle, and excess. As Michael Booth explains, "the melodrama of the nineteenth century, the most popular dramatic form of its age, [was] a form that depended more on visual excitement and the thrill of the moment" (13). However, etymologically, the term melodrama refers in part to music: "The word itself, meaning 'song-drama' or 'music-drama,' is Greek" (44). My use of the term does not rely on this definition of melodrama, or on the conventional melodramatic elements that provoke its abuse, such as "concentration on plot at the expense of characterization [...] the character stereotypes, the rewarding of virtue, and punishment of vice" (13-14).⁶ Rather, I use the term in a

⁵ Despite not having any records, besides written accounts, of the actual performances of various Romantic dramatic spectacles, scholars have utilized inventive ways of shedding light on this ephemeral aspect of the dramatic texts that survive. For instance, Jacky Bratton and Gilli Bush-Bailey's Jane Scott Project revitalized the plays of Jane Scott during a workshop, incorporating as many aspects from the original context as possible, such as melodramatic acting and gestures, music, body movement, and dance. Bush-Bailey calls their endeavour "an actively engaged theatre-archaeology" (13), "attempt[ing] to realise something of Scott's work beyond the texts submitted to the Licensor" (8).

⁶ While early criticism of melodrama dismissed its content as escapist, as does Booth, more recent criticism, such as that of Jim Davis and Kornelia Tancheva some thirty years later, argues that the content of melodrama had a value that applied to the social and political realms. In a defence of melodrama that takes the audience into account, Davis defines melodrama "as a crucial rather than peripheral phenomenon of cultural history" (21). Also, Tancheva claims, "[M]ost of the moral premises in melodrama are directly contingent upon a play's participation in the debates proper to its specific cultural context. Thus,

similar manner to more recent critics of the genre. In their Introduction to *Melodrama: Stage, Picture, Screen* (1994), Jacky Bratton, Jim Cook, and Christine Gledhill theorize melodrama as follows:

Rather than displacing the political by the personal, melodrama produces the body and the interpersonal domain as the sites in which the socio-political stakes its struggles [...] the notions of excess, sensation, spectacle and affect by which melodrama is most commonly characterized become key terms in a debate about how the form engages with and processes the complexity of modernity and the politics of cultural change. (1)

My analysis of *Urizen* does not assess the ways in which characterization, plot-devices, and the moral implications parallel those of melodrama; rather, it focuses on the melodramatic “notions of excess, sensation, spectacle and affect” that Blake exploits in order to retell the story of the fall. Blake’s emphasis on the body and the senses also prompts my use of the melodramatic. Cox maintains, “[I]t was the sensational nature of these plays [melodramas] that was the key, as in Douglas Jerrold’s attempt to distinguish between the legitimate and the illegitimate drama by considering the nature of their dramatic appeal: ‘I describe the legitimate drama to be where the interest of the piece is mental; where the situation of the piece is rather mental than physical’” (167). The body was a key characteristic underlying the core qualities of the melodramatic, which positioned this genre in opposition to the conventionally Romantic tendencies toward mental and interior explorations. Blake’s emphasis on these various elements reifies the dramatic nature, rather than simply linguistic-pictorial nature, of the illuminated works. Moreover, addressing these melodramatic features of Blake’s art form opens up not only a previously unrecognized cultural and social significance of his works in the domain of theatre and performance but also a new context for interpreting *Urizen* and its explorations of identity and community.

discussions of ‘melodrama’ should necessarily take into account not only the specifics of the genre and the way in which it elaborates a ‘melodramatic’ world-view, but its reception and interpretation, and the ways in which it is used to express specific ideological formations” (62). Both critics argue for the relevance of reception and audience engagement in discussing the significance of the melodramatic form.

The study of the body's expressiveness (whether through the face, limbs, or voice) has a history that connects Blake to the various artistic, scientific, and dramatic theories of his time. Discussions of expression in the fields of physiognomy, chironomia, gestures, and passions formed the basis of many theories of art and science in the eighteenth century. Drawing books, acting manuals, rhetoric and eloquence guides, as well as scientific treatises categorized and classified various bodily expressions and gestures.⁷ As Janet Warner has shown, Blake draws on the iconography of past masters such as Michelangelo and Giulio Romano as well as on "the tradition of the language of gesture used by orators, actors, and artists" (5), having encountered these theories either directly through Johann Caspar Lavater or indirectly through the sheer proliferation of these discourses and ideas during the period.⁸ Blake annotated Lavater's *Aphorisms on Man* and engraved some plates for one of the English translations of *Essays on Physiognomy* in 1789. Sibylle Erle points out, "Lavater argued [...] that engravings were crucial to understanding his physiognomical doctrines – they literally embodied his argument" (356).

Blake's interest in Lavater is not difficult to explain; his illuminated works exhibit a drive to express various interior states not only verbally but also visually, embodying them in the contours of the design. While Lavater believed the engravings helped to show "how character manifests itself on the body" (Erle 359), Blake used them to delineate psychological and emotional states. Looking at a number of examples from Blake's

⁷ For instance, Charles Le Brun's *Expressions des Passions* (1698, translated by John Williams as *A Method to Learn to Design the Passions* in 1734), Gerard de Lairettes's *The Art of Painting in All Its Branches* (English translation 1738), Johann Caspar Lavater's *Essays on Physiognomy* (English translation 1789-98), Gilbert Austin's *Chironomia; or, A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery* (1806); Henry Siddons's *Practical Illustrations of Rhetorical Gesture and Action Adapted to the English Drama* (1807; adapted from Johann Jacob Engel's treatise *Ideen zu einer Mimik*, 1785-86).

⁸ For instance, in *William Blake: His Art and Times*, David Bindman discusses James Gillray's print *Doublures of Characters* (1798) in this context: "Here, in a reference to Lavater's book on physiognomy, Fox and his Whig friends are represented by their 'real' countenances and by their 'doubles', which reveal their underlying nature" (25). Each man has two faces placed side by side, but each face differs in expression, thereby showing the difference between their "normal" and more "wicked" characteristics as well as the role of facial gestures in relaying the information.

Visionary Heads series, Anne K. Mellor examines the influence of Lavater and Johann Caspar Spurzheim, a well-known phrenologist, explaining, “Blake was conversant with physiognomical and phrenological concepts and vocabularies, but he used them with a light touch, to communicate his ideas jocosely to a circle that understood this visual language” (“Physiognomy” 71-72). In addition, Warner postulates that Blake’s education at Henry Pars’s drawing school would have surely included some study of the theories of gesture and expression: “The language of art is the language of the Passions cast in familiar types and attitudes, and to become familiar with this language was the aim of every student. It was a language of facial expressions, of hand and body gestures, and of pantomimic attitudes” (35). Warner explicitly positions Blake within a context that aligns theories of art with acting practices: “the conventions of theatrical gesture were closely related to the language of gesture used by painters, who in turn were constantly turning to antique sculpture for inspiration” (60). She goes even further and claims, “The attempt to express feelings through a position of the body allies Blake’s activity with similar attempts of a play director or a ballet master” (60).

While Warner aligns Blake with theories of gesture and expression as they relate to acting, Moody relates illegitimate theatrical forms to such theories. She says:

the iconography of illegitimacy participated in a broader cultural and scientific transformation in which the human body began to be understood as an eloquent compendium of visible signs. [...] In their emphasis on the physiological basis of gesture (tears of grief, the paleness of fear) and the silent copiousness of the human hands, these treatises [on chironomia] defined theatrical performance as the laboratory of gestural expression. According to Gilbert Austin, those who wished to learn the power of gesture to communicate thoughts independently of language should study the silent art of pantomime. The idea of a wordless language of signs which might constitute ‘the exterior and visible signs of our bodies’ thus underpinned contemporary definitions about the art of modern eloquence; the most dynamic expression of that eloquence could be found in the production of illegitimate theatre. (83)

The language of expression dominated illegitimate forms.⁹ Far from being superficial displays of histrionics, illegitimate dramas embodied the theories of gesture and expression circulating at the time, and through this embodiment, they provided audiences the chance to contemplate the relation between internal psychology and external manifestations. As a result, in the context of the more academic treatises, illegitimate forms “stimulated public interest in the external, non-verbal expression of human emotion.” Moody adds, “The realisation of pictures on stage, for example, was one of melodrama’s most characteristic devices,” which was executed in the form of tableaux, using “the momentary stillness of human bodies, which pervade illegitimate theatre” (82). At the same time, we also see the rise of Lady Emma Hamilton and her tableaux vivants: a collection of her poses was published in 1797 as *Lady Hamilton’s Attitudes* (Warner 61). Even in the 1820s, the fascination with the expressiveness of the motionless human body continued with the sensational Andrew Ducrow, who performed his *poses plastiques équestres* at Astley’s Amphitheatre: “the performer struck attitudes on horseback,” posing as figures from Greek and Roman myth or heroic figures (Moody 85). According to Moody, these various forms of expressive theatricality “all confirm that pervasive fascination in late Georgian culture with the wordless depiction of dramatic character,” thereby situating Blake’s own interest in the visual realization of his characters and their emotional states.

⁹ The legitimate also exhibited some of these tendencies. Playwright Joanna Baillie, who wrote for the legitimate stage though her works are often labeled melodramatic, makes the expression and delineation of the passions the foundation of her *Plays on the Passions*, thereby signaling her “transference to literature of a psychological theory that originated in acting” (Thomson 196). Even legitimate stage actors such as David Garrick drew on physiognomy and painting treatises; Stuart Sillars points out that they “were very influential in the theatre, Garrick himself following many of the suggested postures and expressions” (14). However, Moody argues that the most blatant tendencies emerge on the illegitimate stage and in illegitimate forms: “Though such descriptions [from treatises on gesture] also influenced the writing and performance of tragedy and comedy (see for example Joanna Baillie’s striking discussion of ‘those feelings, whose irregular bursts, abrupt transitions, sudden pauses, and half-uttered suggestions, scorn all harmony of measured verse’), it was illegitimate genres – and especially the violent gestures of melodrama – which gave this hyperbolic iconography its most spectacular expression” (84).

The eighteenth century also saw a proliferation of paintings of Shakespearean drama, some of which depicted actors of the time performing a scene.¹⁰ Michael S. Wilson explains how audiences could align an experience of watching still bodies on a stage with one of viewing paintings in a gallery: “The very absence of a text, however, authorized so complete a dissociation of stage picture from dramatic action that [...] visually literate patrons [...] could regard a pantomime almost as if it were a gallery exhibition” (197). Blake himself makes a curious remark linking acting with painting. In an 1805 letter in which he dismisses the current obsession with a boy actor, Blake says, “as to Real Acting it is Like Historical Painting. No Boys Work” (E 764). For Blake, these two professions can be taken up only by grown men, suggesting that each requires a certain maturity and mastery. It is interesting, however, that he aligns these two vocations and makes a direct parallel between them. Warner points out that Thomas Wilkes’s *A General View of the Stage* (1759) “recommended the aspiring actor to study historical paintings for character, dress and manner” (63), and David Garrick used this genre of painting for tableaux purposes (Thomson 154). In this light, Blake’s quotation implies more than just a connection in terms of mastery between “Real Acting” and “Historical Painting”; it also implies a link in terms of the difficulty of staging human expression in both media, thus raising dramatic performance to the level of painting, specifically historical painting, the most exalted of genres.

What becomes clear is that images and paintings had a deep connection to theatrical performance in this time, so much so that it is impossible to disregard the implications for Blake’s illuminated books. Seen in the context of tableaux and dramatic paintings, Blake’s designs of, for example, Urizen, Los, and Orc add a specifically theatrical element to his works. Moreover, Blake extols the virtues of expression and gesture, especially in art. In his marginalia, he opposes Sir Joshua Reynolds who believes that the depiction of the passions—even by an artist such as Michelangelo—distorts and

¹⁰ For instance, Fuseli’s *Garrick and Mrs Pritchard as Macbeth and Lady Macbeth after the Murder of Duncan* (1768), Reynolds’s *Garrick between Tragedy and Comedy* (1762), and Thomas Lawrence’s *John Philip Kemble as Coriolanus before the Hearth of Aufidius* (1788), and the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery (1788-1805), which solicited painters to delineate scenes from Shakespeare in order to exhibit them in one location.

deforms rather than beautifies the human form and painting itself (Connolly 28). Blake writes, “What Nonsense. Passion & Expression is Beauty Itself—The Face that is Incapable of Passion & Expression is Deformity Itself” (E 653). Reynolds argues that “[n]o one can deny, that violent passions will naturally emit harsh and disagreeable tones [...],” while Blake counters: “Violent Passions Emit the Real Good & Perfect Tones” (E 660). Evidently, Blake endorsed not only the delineation of passions but also the excessive or extreme passions specifically. Such an endorsement explains the violence of many of the designs in his illuminated works. The violence is not confined to the passions either; it arises in spectacles of nature and in the way individuals act on each other. Steven Bidlake attempts to reinforce “the dynamic violence at work in the rhetoric and imagery of Blake’s prophecies” (1) and “its affective intensity” (2) rather than downplay its horror “as the unqualified triumph of apocalyptic imagination” (15). Bidlake views the violence in terms of revolutionary ideology, taking it on its own terms without purifying its horrors. While the violence on display can certainly be seen as the language of revolution and apocalypse, I read it as the language of melodramatic excess.

Like Booth’s description of melodrama, Blake’s works also have “an incredible amount of violence, physical disaster, and emotional agony” (14). This “emotional agony” reflects various theories of the passions as well as gestures and is evident in Blake’s characters when they express their emotions in word and image. Even guides for “legitimate” stage performance draw on the unrestrained language of melodrama as well as theories of expression and gesture. For instance, *The Thespian Preceptor* (1807, and rpt. in 1810, 1811, and 1818), which was “[p]erhaps the most widely used acting manual of the early nineteenth century” (Zunshine 217), uses exaggerated and excessive descriptions of the body under the influence of particular passions. Booth highlights the similarity of the manual’s language and the melodramatic as he summarizes the main directives for enacting the passions:

The stage passion of Grief, for example, which is ‘sudden and violent, expresses itself by beating the head or forehead, tearing the hair, and catching the breath, as if choking—also by screaming, weeping, stamping with the feet, lifting the eyes from time to time to heaven, and hurrying backwards and forwards.’ Despair ‘rolls the eyes, and sometimes bites the

lips, and gnashes with the teeth.' The whole body must be 'strained and violently agitated. Groans expressive of inward torture, accompany the words.' Significantly, the extremes of despair 'can seldom or ever be over-acted.' For Jealousy the fists are 'violently clenched, the rolling eyes darting fury.' As the actor 'must frequently fall upon the ground, he should previously raise both hands clasped together, in order to denote anguish.' (205)

Urizen takes up this excessive language in its textual articulation of emotion and its affective aims. Phrases such as "Lo, a shadow of horror is risen" (3.1) and "what Demon / Hath form'd this abominable void" (3.3-4) play on melodramatic gothic horror images meant to arouse fear and anxiety. In his invocation, Blake points to the intensity of that which we are about to read through his diction when he says to the Eternals, "fear not / To unfold your dark visions of torment" (2.6-7), alluding to the painful and ominous nature of the story about to be told. Indeed, in *Urizen*, "The dread world" (3.30) is one of "tormenting passions" (2.19) where "voices of terror" (3.33), "howlings & pangs & fierce madness" (5.24) and "Dread terrors! delighting in blood" (23.7) abound. Blake's diction is both visceral ("renting" and "wrenching" and "hurtling bones" and "furious limbs") and intensely passionate ("anguish," "groaning," "gnashing," "mad raging," and "ghastly Sick torment"). Los, one of the characters in this grand drama, "wept, obscur'd with mourning: / His bosom earthquak'd with sighs" (13.48-49), and the binding of Urizen "Struck horror into his soul" (13.47). The acute sway of the passions resembles the melodramatic performances that appeared on both the illegitimate and legitimate stage.

Examples of such extreme passions and language can be found in a number of melodramatic plays. For instance, in Holcroft's *A Tale of Mystery*, during one of the final climactic encounters, the stage directions explain that one character "*shrieks*" and another "*[f]alls back and covers his eyes, with agony,*" while "*[m]usic of terror*" plays (Act 2, scene 3). Predating Holcroft's play, the first official melodrama of the English stage, George Colman the Younger's popular *Blue-Beard; or, Female Curiosity!* (Drury Lane 1798), already showed the way melodramatic tendencies had begun to invade even the legitimate stage. As Cox and Gamer explain, Colman was "a creator of the new theatrical hybrid that would come to be known as melodrama" (76). The play included "music [...],

provided stirring action,” “spectacular sets of pantomime,” and a “huge animated panorama [...] complete with moving skeleton and bleeding walls.” Compare the following excerpt with those above from Blake:

Monsters of Hell, and Noxious Night,
Howl your Songs of wild delight!
To your gloomy Caves descending,
His career of Murder ending,
Now the Tyrant's Spirit flies:

Bathed in a flood
Of guilty Blood,
He dies! He dies! (Colman 2.8.49-56)

One can see that similar images and terms are at play in Colman's language and in Blake's. We have gloominess and howling, talk of flames or hell, and an overall melodramatic sense with the “shrieking” and “shadows” in one and “wild delight” and “monsters” in the other.

Similarly, another popular show of the time and an explicit melodrama, Matthew Lewis's *Timour the Tartar; A Grand Romantic Melo-drama in Two Acts* (Covent Garden 1811), utilizes the language of excess but also numerous dashes and exclamation marks to express textually what the actor would do in performance. Here, the tyrant Timour reacts to the unmasking of an imposter, who happens to be his bride-to-be:

Tim. Scarce can I believe my senses!—Bewildered
—Confused—Rage, Love, Disappointment,
all at once contend within my bosom!—Her
charms—Yet to resign all hopes of Georgia's
Heiress—I must to solitude, and consult—
Bermeddin! Guards! Bear her to the Fortress! Away!

Zor. (Kneeling). Oh! hear me, Timour! Show but one
spark of mercy! Listen to the sobs of a breaking
heart, of a distracted desperate Mother! Yon Tower
confines my Boy: Send me to a dungeon, send me
to death; But till I die, let me share the prison of

my Child.

Tim. Slaves obey me!—

(*They drag her toward the Fortress.*)

Zor. Barbarian! Tyrant!—My Boy!—My Darling!—

Let my shrieks rend your dungeon-walls! Let my
anguish, my despair.... (1.3.36-51)

The dialogue shows signs of breaks or pauses in the flow of speech, signaling spaces where the actor could gesticulate and reinforce the emotions underlying the scene. In particular, Zorilda's final words in this exchange exemplify the outpouring of her passionate desperation, even if we do not actually hear her "shrieks": her speech is not only marked with breaks and exclamations but also with the words "anguish" and "despair."

Even Joanna Baillie's "legitimate" dramas take up the language of excess typical of melodrama. In *Orra* (1812), the stage directions in final scene of the play state that Hughobert, after being informed of his son's death, "*Beat[s] his breast and groan[s] deeply,*" while the protagonist "*gives a loud shriek, and shrinks [back] with horror,*" exhibiting "*all the wild strength of frantic horror,*" in her final action. In *De Monfort* (Drury Lane 1800) from the *Plays on the Passions*, after the eponymous hero has committed murder, "*his face is seen in all the strengthened horror of despair, with his hands and cloaths bloody*"; he is described as being "*[i]n great anguish,*" and he "*[s]hrinks back with horror*" when he sees the murdered corpse (4.3). His sister Jane "*burst[s] into tears*" and "*faints*" upon learning of his deed (5.1). As De Monfort looks at the corpse, he declaims:

What fated end, what darkly gath'ring cloud

Will close on all this horror?

O that dire madness would unloose my thoughts,

And fill my mind with wildest fantasies,

Dark, restless, terrible! ought, ought but this! (4.3.73-77)

De Monfort's murderous action merely intensifies what he has felt for much of the play. Now, having transgressed a law as well as society's moral code, he is trapped by the terrors of his mind and crippled by the fear of what repercussions he will now face.

Others hear “such piteous groans!” (5.2.7) emerge from his room where he awaits judgment. They explain, “Remorse and dark despair o’erwhelm’d his soul” (5.2.16). Finally, death takes him: “From violent agitation of the mind, / Some stream of life within his breast has burst” (5.2.26-27). All the despair, horror, terror, and violence resemble the language Blake uses to describe the action of *Urizen*. Like melodramas and dramas that exhibit melodramatic tendencies, Blake’s work suggests an emotionally charged spectacle, placing the passions and their extreme expression front and centre.

Distinguishing the melodramatic from the tragic in terms of excess, Peter Brooks explains, “Melodrama is similar to tragedy in asking us to endure the extremes of pain and anguish. It differs in constantly reaching toward the ‘too much,’ and in the passivity of response to anguish, so that we accede to the experience of nightmare” (*The Melodramatic Imagination* 35).¹¹ I would argue that the level of pain and anguish in Blake’s work tends toward the melodramatic, for there seems to be no relief from the physical and psychological agonies that the characters endure, and their reactions to such pain are futile. In addition to the extreme passionate effusions, the spectacular setting, the extreme weather, and the excessively violent action are also melodramatic. The world itself is described as “[r]age, fury, intense indignation / In cataracts of fire, blood & gall, / In whirlwinds of sulphurous smoke” (4.45-47), while life is “[s]und’ring, dark’ning, thund’ring! / Rent away with a terrible crash, / [as] Eternity roll’d wide apart” (5.3-5). Scenes of fire and blood proliferate throughout the work. For instance, a bloody orb pours forth from Los’s spine and head (pl. 17); Los spectacularly bursts out of an inferno with his arms wide open and his untamed wild hair waving in the air (pl. 18); three inverted figures fall through flames as giant serpents coil themselves around the falling bodies (pl. 6); several other figures also find themselves amidst raging infernos (e.g., pl. 3, 7, 11, 16, and 20); two creatures, a mixture of human, serpent, and bat, emerge from green leafy

¹¹ Brooks elaborates further on this distinction by claiming that melodrama had displaced tragedy because the tragic was no longer possible after the French Revolution: “Melodrama does not simply represent a ‘fall’ from tragedy, but a response to the loss of the tragic vision. It comes into being in a world where the traditional imperatives of truth and ethics have been violently thrown into question, yet where the promulgation of truth and ethics, their instauration as a way of life, is of immediate, daily, political concern” (15).

terrain (pl. 25); and Urizen's offspring fantastically come into being—Fuzon explodes flaming out of the sky, Thiriël emerges from the clouds, Grodna pulls himself out of earth, while Utha bursts forth from the water (pl. 24; fig. 24). Many of the events of the poem, textual and visual, demonstrate Blake's "use of palpably violent action and imagery" (Bidlake 2), and his penchant for excess and grandiose spectacle aligns his work with illegitimate forms of theatre.

Urizen demonstrates the convergence of illegitimate theatrical expression with theories of the passions and gestures by focusing on the body's ability to convey the interior states of characters through melodramatic modes of expression. Brooks explains how melodrama, specifically the French variety emerging shortly after the French Revolution, brings with it a (re-)new(ed) appreciation for the body. In a discussion of the silent film genre, he states: "silent cinema revives a certain semiotics of the body which first made its appearance in melodrama – or proto-melodrama, since the name was not then coined – at the moment of the French Revolution, which itself calls into being a new valorization of and attention to meanings inscribed on the individual body" ("Melodrama, Body, Revolution" 11). While Blake diverges from the moral order that melodrama attempts to create, he does latch on to a similar "aesthetics of embodiment" that comes out of the revolution (17). Brooks argues, "The body in early Romantic literature, and thereafter, assumes a new centrality as a site of meaning; during the Revolution, in the popular genre of melodrama, we have a kind of literalistic realization of this new importance of the body as the site of signification" (18). Blake, then, uses the visual image of the body in ways that speak to the internal and external divide associated with the closet and performance.

In addition, Brooks analyzes silent moments in a way relevant to Blake's designs. Blake's engravings are silent, but they express a deeper layer of meaning beyond a simple illustration of the text. Brooks says, "It is in the context of melodrama's constant recourse to acting out, to the body as the most important signifier of meanings, that we can understand the genre's frequent recourse to moments of pantomime, which are not simply decorative, which in fact often convey crucial messages" (19). Brooks invests silent bodies with significance, and so does Blake. For instance, he describes Urizen as "Dark revolving in silent activity" (3.18) and his actions as "cold horrors silent" (3.27).



Fig. 24. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, plate 24, object 24, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

Urizen's actions have the quality of mimed performance. The soundlessness of Urizen's actions aligns him with the mime of illegitimate drama and evokes an eeriness that accompanies his labour. Similarly, Blake's designs, which rarely appear to "speak" (though they sometimes appear to release groans or screams), seem closer to mime, tableaux, and attitudes.

The visual bodies function as sites for individual struggles and for exploring the wider social and ideological implications of the separation of self—the fall from a cohesive collective to an isolated selfhood—that constitutes the heart of the poem. When Blake "depicts bodies *in extremis* and bodies surpassing their mortal capabilities" (Connolly 32), he reflects in the outward and physical not only an internal conflict but also a more social one concerning the relation between individual and community. On plate 16 of *Urizen*, a figure, his knees raised tight to his chest, sits amidst flames with his hands behind his head so that his elbows point outward (fig. 25). The youthfulness of the figure, his wavy hair, and the surrounding flames indicate that the figure is Los; however, in copy A, Blake adds long white facial hair, undermining an easy identification (copy A is the only copy in which the youthful figure is conflated with the old one). The image seems to unite Los with Urizen, an old man with long white hair. Blake, then, visually presents Los and Urizen as physically fused together. This verbally unarticulated moment suggests that the separation and division that each figure undergoes and enacts makes them alike, despite their opposing characteristics and actions. Another example of how outer components convey inner ones occurs on plate 19: Enitharmon stands awkwardly and almost perpendicularly, as if her body's misshapen contortion expresses an internal one (fig. 26); she also grabs or pulls at her hair with both hands. Her irregular pose, with "the emphatic forward movement of her legs and the contrary movement of her torso, and elongation of the body" (Bindman 37), expresses the contortions and pain involved in the act of separation from Los, whose hunched-over figure she stands beside, indicating how unnatural the activity of disjoining individuals is.

Through Blake's iconography, these personal conflicts of separation reveal themselves to be widespread and social. Specifically, the image of a body wrapped tightly within itself—its knees pulled in towards its chest—suggests a deeper meaning through its numerous repetitions. For example, Urizen is depicted on his hands and knees,

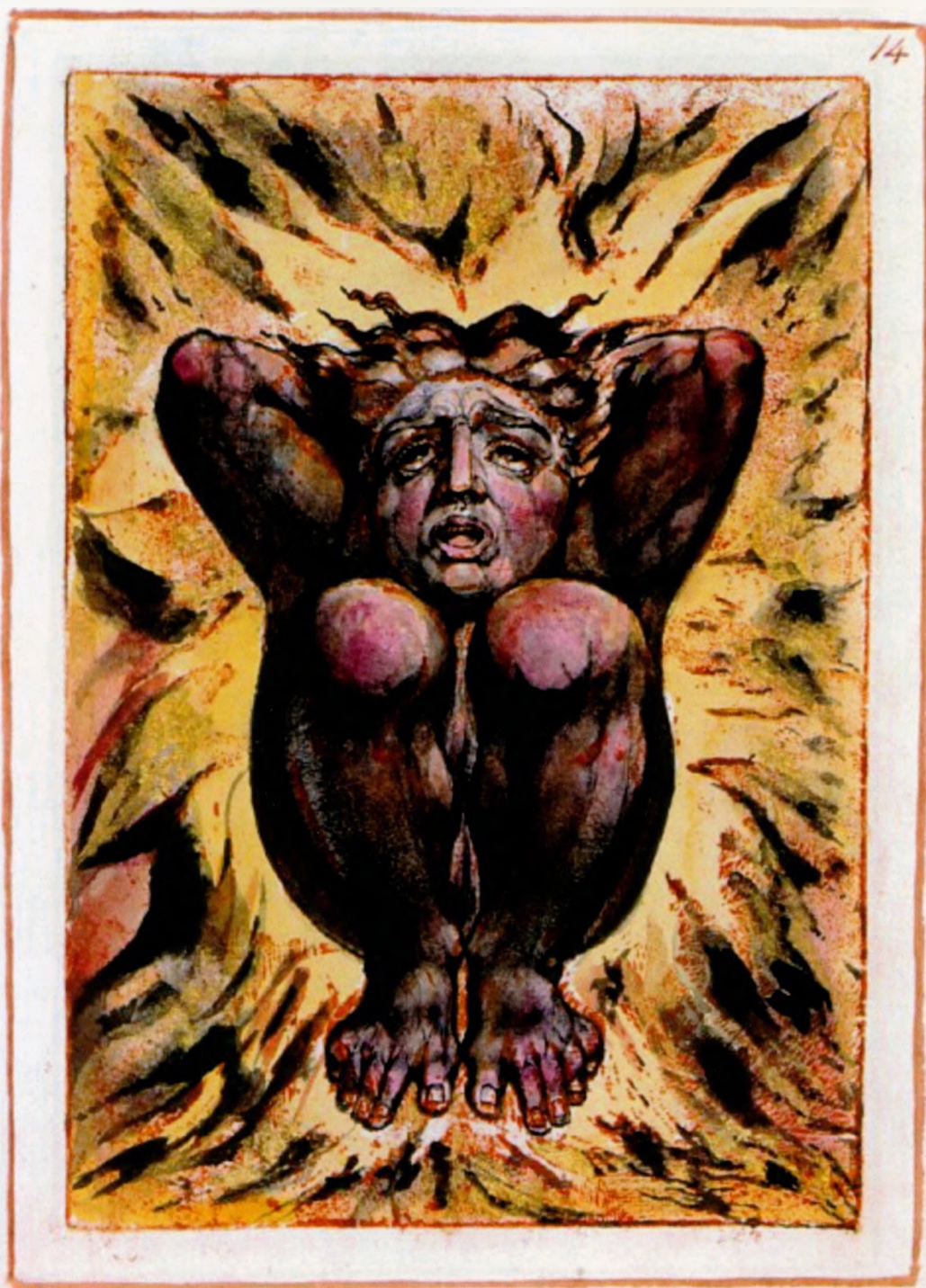


Fig. 25. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, plate 16, object 14, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.



Fig. 26. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, plate 19, object 19, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

with his arms pulled tight alongside his body and one knee raised up to his face, as the surrounding rock oppressively presses down on his frame by some unseen force (his facial features are pursed together, paralleling the compression of his body) (pl. 9). On plate 8, Blake depicts a hunched-over skeleton with its knees up on either side of its shoulders. Its hands are wrapped around its head, pulling in tight to its chest, highlighting the extreme curvature of the spine. Also, Los is presented in a series of these positions throughout the work: on his knees with his face directed out, howling in agony, gripping his head with crisscrossed arms while his hair sticks out in all directions (pl. 7; fig. 27); open-mouthed with his eyes looking upward in distress, sitting with his knees tight to his chest beside a similarly positioned skeletal figure (pl. 11); and huddled in a ball on his knees with his head in his arms and his elbows resting on his thighs (pl. 19; fig. 26). Plate 4, which also depicts a young male figure grabbing his head while sitting on the ground (or perhaps at the bottom of a body of water) behind what appears to be a screen of rain (or seaweed), offers a way to read all the iterations of this pose: the act of declaring a separate selfhood, what Urizen takes to be a liberating act of independence, is in reality a restrictive act, something the prison-like bars or rain in the design suggest.

This repeated image of restriction, which highlights the oppressive confinement that the separation of self causes, contrasts visually and ideologically with Los's liberating pose of bursting forth from flames with arms wide open. These images show how the visual sphere of the illuminated works offer something in excess of the linguistic sphere. Brooks makes a similar point about the power of the visual aspect in melodrama: "Words, however unrepressed and pure, however transparent as vehicles for the expression of basic relations and verities, appear to be not wholly adequate to the representation of meanings, and the melodramatic message must be formulated through other registers of the sign" (*The Melodramatic Imagination* 56). Many of the designs of *Urizen* depict excessive poses that could function as illustrations for how to act out "grief" or "despair" according to the *Thespian Preceptor*, the acting manual to which Booth refers. The designs also reveal how bodies "convey crucial messages," as Brooks explains.



Fig. 27. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, plate 7, object 9, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

In a defence of the significance of the non-spoken parts of melodrama, Simon Shepherd discusses what he calls “*a dramaturgy of the unspoken*” (150), re-evaluating melodrama on its own terms rather than as an “illegitimate” form that uses silent action or spectacle as a replacement for language: “[The] dramatic effect is not, clearly, a trivial, entertaining substitute for dialogue, not struggling, always inadequately, to speak. Rather than being stupid it is more like stupefying, in that it unsettles its subjects, transports them beyond their narrow prejudices” (150). Shepherd focuses on the non-spoken moments of a play in order to legitimize what is considered to be an illegitimate form; he wants to undermine the binary of spoken and non-spoken in order to undermine the implications that each term has. Indeed, he makes a case for why the word does not hold more sway than the image. For him, the silent “illegitimate” parts of theatre do not exist as mere compensation for a lack of speech; rather, non-verbal moments must be understood on their own terms. And Moody points out, “The primacy of rhetoric and the spoken word in legitimate drama gave way in melodrama and pantomime to a corporeal dramaturgy which privileges the galvanic, affective capacity of the human body as a vehicle for dramatic expression” (86). Brooks, Shepherd, and Moody assign a relevance to the silent bodies and other on-stage sights that antitheatricalists would often criticize as degrading the stage.

Likewise, in *Urizen*, Blake uses the visual sphere to draw out the characters’ various psychological and emotional states, primarily through facial expressions and body positioning. For instance, several images of Los express his emotional states (grief, despair, terror, pain, etc.) through facial expressions, such as a slanting of the eyes and furrow of the brow to indicate the pain or sorrow he feels, and an open mouth to suggest that he gives voice to his inner turmoil by way of a howl or a shriek—all of which are gestures revealing his body’s connection to its interior. Another more specific example is Blake’s depiction of a chained Urizen, sitting with his knees up tight to his chest and his arms, dangling beside them so that his hands rest by his feet. His long white beard flows between his knees, and his head is tilted up. His eyes are closed. A halo-type crown of light beams appears behind his head, presumably an effect of the sun in the background. Compositionally, Urizen takes up the entire space of the frame and is depicted frontally. In copy G, Urizen is pictured crying, tears streaming down his face, and his eyebrows

furrow to express sadness. Unlike the final image of the work—Urizen trapped beneath a net—which evokes a sense of ironical humour at the image of a self-proclaimed god figure trapped with a flimsy rope, this image evokes pity and sympathy for Urizen and conveys a sense of grandeur, depending on the intensity of the halo effect (pl. 22; fig. 28). This image complicates an absolute negative response from the audience toward him and his actions. Not only do the textual descriptions of Urizen's character and his actions shape our response to him, but also the designs depicting his body do as well. The body forms part of the acting theory of twentieth-century dramatist Antonin Artaud. His discussion of the actor emphasizes his/her body: "An actor is like a physical athlete [...] his affective organism is similar to the athlete's" (139) in that the body functions as a site of expression in both cases. He explains that an actor should "use his emotions in the same way as a boxer uses his muscles" (140), making the most of the "affective musculature" he possesses (139). The designs of Los and Urizen in particular demonstrate the way Blake utilizes the "corporeal dramaturgy of the human body" in order to provoke varied affective responses from the audience in a way that the text either does not or does only partially.

Blake uses the body and visual depictions of the body not only to elicit affective responses and articulate characters' various internal states but also to celebrate the self as a set of social relations rather than as a solitary individuality. *Urizen* participates in a socially-based Romanticism through its depiction of the body and bodily sensation and functions: characters and things "appear" and are "seen" or go "unseen," and "voices" speak out or are "silenced." These aspects have a key significance in the meaning of the text. Sight and sound, particularly the act of watching and speaking, combine to make the poem visually, orally, and aurally performative.

In order to explore Blake's incorporation of the senses and his dramatic form, I begin with an analysis of Wordsworth's nearly contemporaneous "Lines written a few miles above Tintern Abbey" (1798) as a contrastive point of reference. Like *Urizen*, it focuses on the perceiving self and can be considered a depiction of the fall in the way M. H. Abrams reads Wordsworthian Romanticism as a vision of innocence-fall-redemption, which relies on "Wordsworth's chief model, *Paradise Lost*" (65). Abrams explains the fall from innocence to experience that colours human existence for Wordsworth: "*Tintern*



Fig. 28. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, plate 22, object 11, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

Abbey [...] [is a] poem[] of what it means to grow to maturity [...]. Life is growth, but growth means loss, and the loss deeply matters,” despite “find[ing] in the attributes of maturity ‘abundant recompense’” (444-45). The difference between Wordsworth’s view of fall and redemption and Blake’s expresses itself in part through their contradictory depictions of sensory perception, specifically sight and hearing. By creating a form that connects to theatre and performance and that suggests the subversion of the interior-exterior binary, Blake stands apart from a Wordsworthian Romanticism, especially as it is constructed in the canonical “Tintern Abbey.” My comparison between Wordsworth and Blake will show that Wordsworth’s poetry reveals interiority as its main concern. Similarly, Timothy Webb, in his analysis of Romantic drama, states that Wordsworth, along with Coleridge, Shelley, Byron, and Keats, focuses on the “complexities of self” rather than “the external world” in his drama (13). However, Blake depicts the eye, mouth, and ear in a way that directly calls forth aspects of performance and embodiment. His representation of the senses and sensory experiences erodes the distinction between reading and performance, between interiority and exteriority, and between memory and direct perception. In “Tintern Abbey,” the eye and ear dominate the sensory images, much as they do in Blake’s *Urizen*, yet Wordsworth’s poem does not intimate performance and embodiment the way that Blake’s work does. Rather, Wordsworth includes a subject who sees and hears nature in order to reflect the affective relations between the subject and nature and to relay private visual and aural enjoyments of natural landscapes.

In light of my claim that Blake’s art form aligns itself with melodramatic forms of drama in contrast to a Wordsworthian poetics, I find Elaine Hadley’s distinction between the “melodramatic mode” and the “romantic mode” of responding to the society of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries useful. She places Wordsworth in the latter mode as its exemplar. Hadley writes a recuperative history of melodrama by showing how it figures crucially as a mode of response, one worth examining and situating against the more familiar romantic mode. Leaving aside her examination of the two modes in relation to society’s hierarchical structures and capitalist markets, I draw on the opposing constructions of identity that Hadley finds in the two modes. She states, “the melodramatic mode played a constitutive, if agonistic, role, especially for romantic

conceptions of subjectivity and community. [...] The melodramatic mode [...], in its always public and theatrical response to the classification of English society, also resisted romantic poetry's interiorization of the subject" (11). Whereas Hadley aligns the melodramatic mode's conception of identity with the social sphere, where "one's subjectivity [takes] shape in a public and interactive space" (15) and "people are socially constituted" (31), she associates the romantic mode's conception of identity with the "private space" (16) of the lone individual.

Hadley argues that, with "The Old Cumberland Beggar," Wordsworth "translat[es] the scene of [social] exchange to a 'mental theatre,' which is [...] pointedly untheatrical in some crucial ways, for it is neither public nor strictly visible, neither performed nor spoken. [...] Wordsworth's poem evacuates the public sphere and recreates an imaginative version of it" (29).¹² Moreover, any effects of social exchange emerge only during solitary reflection, not during actual face-to-face contact. Making note of Marjorie Levinson's and Alan Liu's critiques of "Wordsworth's aggressive effacement of the material impact of market culture on the English countryside" (29-30), Hadley asserts that Wordsworth distances himself and removes himself from the reality of the everyday and from society.

Encapsulating the romantic view of identity, Hadley states, "[T]he romantic subject's internalization of feeling and virtue still results in a form of identity that is seen to be private and essential, the exclusive possession of the individual" (33). While this comment applies to Wordsworth, it does not apply to Blake. The lyrical, subjective form Wordsworth (and, indeed, many of the Romantics) often uses is not a form Blake often uses; even when he does use the lyrical form, such as in the *Songs*, he often frames the speaking voice with another narrative position or includes a dialogue between two or

¹² Interestingly, in Book 7 of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth makes a reference to his visit to the non-patent theatre Sadler's Wells and describes the spectacles of London life. He explains that, in his youth, "theatres [...] were his delight," but qualifies it by noting that "[I]f then was new, / The senses easily pleased" by "all the antics and buffoonery" (7.438, 440-41, 464). He also moves from more moderate scenes of the city to more grotesque ones, such as his depiction of Saint Bartholomew's Fair: "[W]hat a hell / For eyes and ears! what anarchy and din / Barbarian and infernal! 'tis a dream, / Monstrous in colour, motion, shape, sight, sound" (7.659-62). David Francis Taylor points out the ambiguity of Wordsworth's view of theatrical spectacle, one that "delights and disturbs him in equal measure" (91).

more characters. In Blake's works, characters often speak for themselves and their inner states are expressed in a more immediate form in the designs. And Blake rarely lyricizes his own subject position. When Blake does include himself in his works, he does so by including himself as one among several characters, refusing to give absolute priority to his own inner processes. By creating a dramatic form with his illuminated works, Blake avoids the "interiorization of the subject," as well as "the suppression of the social," which Levinson sees as "the primary poetic action" of "Tintern Abbey" (37).

In "Tintern Abbey," Wordsworth designs a scene that gives rise to the tension between actual perception in the moment and remembered perception. He recounts his feelings upon seeing the impressive landscape around the ruins five years after his initial visit. Upon his return he says,

again I hear
 These waters, rolling from their mountain-springs
 With a sweet inland murmur.—Once again
 Do I behold these steep and lofty cliffs,
 Which on a wild secluded scene impress
 Thoughts of more deep seclusion; and connect
 The landscape with the quiet of the sky. (2-8)

Wordsworth configures the senses as conduits through which Nature passes in order to reach or affect humans, in this case Wordsworth himself. He sees and hears the natural world before him, a different kind of seeing and hearing than the kind that occurs when he is in the city. He refers to the image before him as "a wild secluded scene," potentially hinting at theatrical connotations, but any gesture toward the theatrical is cut short by the fact that the "scene impress[es] / Thoughts of more deep seclusion"—this experience is very much a private and isolated one that draws the only human agent further into himself. The poet finds himself alone without any other witnesses or participants (that is, we are led to believe so until the end of the poem when Dorothy unexpectedly appears). Unlike *Urizen*, which focuses on the social interactions of characters who impact each other in significant ways, "Tintern Abbey" records the asocial: the solitary Wordsworth and his seemingly passive reception of an unpopulated landscape.

Much of the poem excludes references to people. The only sign of other human beings in the first half of the poem arises in the following lines:

these pastoral farms
 Green to the very door; and wreathes of smoke
 Sent up, in silence, from among the trees,
 With some uncertain notice, as might seem,
 Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
 Or of some hermit's cave, where by his fire
 The hermit sits alone. (17-23)

The “farms” and “wreathes of smoke” suggest human activity and life. However, except for an idealized imagining of some “hermit [who] sits alone” (23) in his cave, Wordsworth does not acknowledge the presence of human beings specifically. As Levinson argues, Wordsworth makes “a sort of metonymic slide toward the hermit/poet” by “idealiz[ing] vagrants” (43), redirecting attention from the external world back to himself. Demonstrating “a selective blindness” (Levinson 24) and “acts of exclusion” (32), Wordsworth distances the landscape from other human beings and their suffering; any human sign is aestheticized or idealized as “pastoral farms.” What he fails to note is the reality of human labour and the struggle for sustenance. His “wreathes of smoke” and “hermit’s cave” are merely aesthetic images, not emblems of human poverty and the struggle for survival. Sight and sound serve a private and isolated connection with the natural world. Indeed, later in the poem, Wordsworth makes the ironic claim that he is in tune with humanity:

For I have learned
 To look on nature, not as in the hour
 Of thoughtless youth, but hearing oftentimes
 The still, sad music of humanity. (89-92)

Seemingly, nature has joined him to the rest of humanity and enabled an external connection, yet earlier he glosses over the presence of human beings and specifically does not depict them. Levinson notes, “the ‘still, sad music of humanity’ drowns out the noise produced by real people in real distress” (45). He neither sees nor hears real human suffering. Not only does Wordsworth keep himself separate and distanced from others,

enjoying isolation, but he also aestheticizes general human ills as musical art, avoiding their material impact.

Memory makes what is absent appear, functioning as a compensation for the loss of the original experience. However, appearance is confined to the mental and silent realm in the context of this poetic scene, with the recollection of the landscape “passing even into [the poet’s] purer mind” (30). Moreover, many of the sounds are barely audible or non-existent (i.e., silent): “sweet inland murmur” (4), “the quiet of the sky” (8), “wreathes of smoke / Sent up, in silence” (18-19), “tranquil restoration” (31), “serene and blessed mood” (42), “an eye made quiet” (48), and “quietness and beauty” (128). Conversely, Wordsworth associates sound or louder activity—“fretful stir” (53), “fever of the world” (54), and “[t]he dreary intercourse of daily life” (132)—with the repellent noise of the city. This kind of representation of sound diminishes the role or force of this sense in the poem. Similarly, the sense of sight, though important on one level in order to see nature in the first place, becomes secondary to the mind’s eye. The physical eye is “made quiet,” its natural dynamism and active looking stilled, as if too distracting for the inner eye to achieve its serenity. Actual vision is subordinated to mental images that the memory summons. Here, salvation or redemption or restored paradise exists only after an evacuation of dynamism, unlike Blake’s Eternity, where strife and activity distinguish it from the rest and inactivity (and tempting delusions) of Beulah.

Wordsworth structures the poem around the power of memory instead of the present moment, and nature’s impact on an individual seems dependent on recollection.

Wordsworth writes of the past encounter with the natural world as producing

a feeling and a love,
That had no need of a remoter charm,
By thought supplied, or any interest
Unborrowed from the eye.—That time is past. (81-84)

These days, he no longer needs the physical eye; the child’s ability to experience nature in such an affective and sensory way is past. A more mature Wordsworth relies on the recollection to provide pleasure. Now “thought” is primary, not the senses. In his remembrance of things past, he seems to forget that the senses are, in fact, directly responsible for stimulating the memory to think on Nature, which gives him so much

pleasure. Instead, as an adult, he can only feel with his mind, not his senses. Since his youth (and his past sensory capabilities with nature) is gone, the current Wordsworth can rely only on recollected thoughts to move him, as “The picture of the mind revives again” (62). For Blake, the withering of the physical senses leads to despair and a disconnection from Eternity—the loss of sight and sound is crippling. It is not so in Wordsworth thanks to the power of memory, a power Blake eschews in favour of the more dynamic imagination.

At the end of the poem, Wordsworth unexpectedly turns to his sister, Dorothy, who has presumably been his companion all along but whom he has not bothered to introduce until now. Her presence exacerbates, rather than mitigates, the isolation of the speaker. In fact, he and his sister never talk, and he does not allow her a voice. Instead, he sees her as a version of himself:

My dear, dear Friend [...] in thy voice I catch
 The language of my former heart, and read
 My former pleasures in the shooting lights
 Of thy wild eyes. (117-20)

As the poet looks into her eyes, the act of seeing does not reinforce the multiplicity of the world. Rather, he sees only himself and recalls his past. This solipsistic viewpoint has a narrowing effect. Dorothy’s presence does not allow for an expansion and a drama to unfold between people. She merely reflects Wordsworth’s interior, thereby closing down any breach between internal and external that this encounter could have intimated:

“Dorothy functions in the poem as a final surface, the condition for the poet’s ongoing reflective life” (Levinson 45). He explains to Dorothy what her relationship to nature will develop into as she matures, the same development he himself has experienced.

According to Wordsworth, the external world will lose its affectiveness on the individual, and only memories will remain. “[W]ild ecstasies” (139) will be followed by “sober pleasures” (140) of age, pleasures confined to the mind. He erases the potential of eye and ear, “lovely forms” (141) and “sweet sounds” (143), in the physical realm; only the individual’s closet rendering of past sensations remains, clearly a form of compensation for him.

“Tintern Abbey,” then, becomes an elegiac exploration of the decreasing intensity of physical sensation and the concomitant development of the memory’s ability to capture those past experiences—a loss or fall followed by a compensation or redemption. The marvels of Nature, its sights and sounds, are solitary pleasures that each individual can enjoy, but they do not seem to exist in any kind of public space or have any kind of social bearing. Even when it seems as if their shared experience of the landscape might have the potential for a kind of opening (in contrast to the inward motion carried on in the majority of the poem), Wordsworth curtails this potential by making it clear that Dorothy’s role is merely to reinforce his own interiority. Both her voice and her eyes reflect what he wants out of the landscape, not her unique experience. This moment of union is in many ways even more solitary and individual than the majority of the poem in which Dorothy’s presence is not acknowledged. They stand “on the banks of this delightful stream [...] together” (151-52) at the end of the poem, but Wordsworth points this out only to ensure Dorothy will memorialize him when she recalls her visit to Tintern Abbey once he is gone. Seeing and hearing for Wordsworth, then, do not offer the basis of human relation. Moreover, the conception of identity that emerges from the poem is one that constructs the self as the private and interior affair of the lone individual.

Wordsworth’s delineation of the fall consists of a solitary individual’s loss, which is followed by a recuperation of what was lost through the power of memory. By contrast, Blake’s depiction of the fall pays greater attention to the role of bodily and external factors and to the relations among individuals; it does not concentrate on one figure. Wordsworth celebrates the redemptive powers of the static faculty of recollection as a solitary venture; Blake, however, prizes the creative force of the imagination and the energy of public action to recreate the paradise that was lost as a lived (rather than remembered) experience and as a communal endeavour.

Blake revises the separate accounts of the creation of the physical world and the fall of humanity from the Book of Genesis. Unlike Genesis, Blake ties together these two separate events, uniting them into what Sibyl C. Jacobson calls a “simultaneous creation-fall” (61). While William Dennis Horn argues that Urizen’s actions and perceptions cause this dual event—“Urizen divides from the other immortals and supposes that he is self-sufficient” (272)—I argue that the blame for the fall does not rest with one individual or

couple; we have no tempting serpent, no Adam and Eve. Rather, the fall occurs as a result of a shift in the mode of perception and consciousness of a specific social group, which Blake calls the Eternals. Urizen's actions do help precipitate the fall but only in relation to the corresponding actions of the Eternals. Precisely what or who these Eternals are is never explicated with absolute clarity. However, they appear to be a community of individuals wherein distinct identities reside without any tension within the unified whole. Tristanne Connolly argues that the eternal community is a "unified human existence free from identity loss" (221), while Warner states, "the Eternal Man [...], even though mingling with other forms, is always aware of his own identity" (31). The Eternals reside in a social environment in which neither the individual nor the whole surpasses or overwhelms the other.

A pre-fallen state, then, consists, somewhat paradoxically from a fallen perspective, of distinct identities, which always assert and maintain their inevitable connection to the unified whole—for instance, through intermingling at a fundamental and literal level. Thus, holding to the notion of a self—an "I"—is not in itself a signal of fallenness. As Horn argues persuasively, "The mere postulating of a self as an independent entity results in a mistaken view of the world, a view in which self-subsistent egos are alienated from self-subsistent external objects. Thus it is not the concept of 'I' as a principle of unity which Blake names the original sin; rather it is the mistake of seeing the self as an independent entity" (268). The fall, then, lies in the belief that the "I" is independent rather than relational. My reading of the fallen state expands on Horn's assessment to include a view of the "I" as alienated from other selves.

The poem begins with a crucial shift in this eternal space, as Urizen, one of the Eternals, seems to break off from the community by declaring his independence. The poem tends to be read as an allegory of the division between reason, often a negative faculty in Blake when it acts on its own, and imagination, a typically positive faculty, where Urizen stands for reason and Los stands for imagination. For instance, Mark Lussier states, "Urizen separates from other elements of thought [...] in pursuit of a sovereign self, as the rational faculty strives for dominance" ("Blake and Science Studies" 191; see also Paananen 31). While these readings continue to be fruitful, my own interpretation focuses more on the relationship between Urizen and Los as

individuals within a community and less on their symbolic significance. Blake presents the loss of this particular social dynamic through a retelling of the story of creation and of the fall. I argue that, in addition to equating these two events, he also depicts them in terms of identity-creation, as an event to be witnessed and heard—a melodramatic performance or spectacle of self and an Althusserian scene of interpellation.

Significantly, Blake delineates his story of the fall and of the separation of the self theatrically both through the melodramatic and through scenes of identity-formation, which I read as Althusserian interpellative scenes of hailing. These two means of delineation emphasize the social over the solitary self. At the beginning of the poem, Blake asks the Eternals to relate their tale of this cosmic event. According to the tale, Urizen appears to cause the fall by separating himself from the rest of the Eternals and by creating the physical universe as we know it. Blake refers to Urizen as “Self-closed, all-repelling” (3.3, E 70); he is a circumscribed and separate consciousness, rejecting all others, disavowing his bond to the whole, and displacing himself from the “immediate co-presence with the other Eternals” (Essick, “William Blake, Thomas Paine, and Biblical Revolution” 201). Indeed, Urizen creates the ‘I’ in some respect as he continually repeats the pronoun in the only direct speech of the entire work. Retelling his version of the events, he proclaims, “I alone, even I!” “Here alone I” (4.19, 4.24, E 72), as if his individual selfhood were an absolute certainty. In the span of thirty-five lines, he uses the pronoun “I” seven times, thereby reifying his perception of himself as a distinct identity. Through his language, he creates a subject who speaks and addresses an-Other; Urizen names himself ‘I’ in one breath and names the Eternals ‘you’ in the next: “I have sought for a joy without pain [...] Why will *you* die O Eternals?” (4.10-12, E 71, emphasis added). Such a statement constitutes one of the fundamental structures of grammar as well as of interpersonal relations: the first-person ‘I’ and the second-person ‘you’. Yet, Urizen’s act of identification and classification comes in chapter two, second in a chain of events, second to the Eternals’ act of naming him Urizen in chapter one. Upon seeing “a shadow of horror [...] rise[.]” (3.1, E 70), Blake tells us that “Some said / ‘It is Urizen’” (3.5-6, E 70). On the one hand, the Eternals name the shadowy figure that emerges into their sight and, thus, help bring Urizen into existence. On the other hand, the act of seeing has already implicitly completed the act of the linguistic performative.

By seeing Urizen, the Eternals create him as an object to be beheld, as if seeing Urizen were equivalent to creating him.

In his book about the nature of seeing, art historian James Elkins argues, “[V]ision reaches outward and *creates* the objects themselves” (*The Object Stares Back* 29; original emphasis). The Eternals’ act of seeing Urizen functions in much the same manner. The poem begins with the following lines:

Of the primeval Priests assum’d power,
When Eternals spurn’d back his religion;
And gave him a place in the north,
Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary. (2.1-4, E 70)

The “primeval Priest[],” Urizen, has somehow asserted his power, perhaps through a declaration of independence, and the Eternals, in trying to quell his uprising, only seem to make matters worse by banishing him into isolation. Mitchell asks,

When, for instance, did the ‘primeval Priest’ assume power? Was it before or after his spurning by the Eternals? The construction of the first two lines makes these questions unanswerable. The rebellion took place ‘when’ the reaction occurred. (“Poetic and Pictorial Imagination” 343)

Mitchell settles the question of who is blameworthy by viewing the acts of both the Eternals and Urizen as irrevocably tied together; consequently, he holds both parties responsible for the events that unfold in the poem. However, this scene of expulsion, as well as the poem as a whole, provides us with several conundrums. Who falls? Urizen, the Eternals, or both? Who initiates the chain of events that leads to Urizen’s separation? Does Urizen identify himself or do the Eternals identify him? Does Urizen separate himself from the community, or does the community reject him?

The confusion does not confine itself to the verbal dimension of the poem. Plate 22 depicts Urizen bound in chains, eyes closed, seated with his knees pulled tight to his chest (fig. 28). In many copies, Blake inserts the plate later in the poem so that the chains could signify the confinement of self that Urizen’s act of independence ironically causes.¹³ However, in copy A, Blake arranges this plate as the third one in the work,

¹³ When positioned later in the work, the plate could represent the literal binding of Urizen by Los, who forges the chains when he attempts to control the catastrophe of Urizen’s division from the Eternals.

positioning it immediately after the Preludium. At this point, the only information we have is that Urizen “assum’d power” and, for that, the Eternals “gave him a place in the north.” By viewing this plate prior to the story proper, the audience is left with little guidance about how to respond. Most of Urizen’s explicit actions are yet to be told. Indeed, the position of the plate raises the question of Urizen’s metaphoric imprisonment: does he chain himself by assuming power, or do the chains signify his expulsion from the eternal community? Whose act leads to oppression?

The ambiguity of this chicken-and-egg scenario suggests that the problem goes beyond the act of one individual. The problem is embedded in the social network of the immortal community. In arguing that a Urizenic mode prevails in the poem, Mitchell states, “Urizen thinks he has created a real world within his mind, and since the universe of the poem is totally mental, it *is* a real world. The Eternals and Los confirm the substantiality of his creation by treating it as if it were real, and their behavior toward it repeats the pattern of Urizen’s initial activity” (“Poetic and Pictorial Imagination” 350). I agree with Mitchell’s assessment but would go further and say that Urizen himself, as a disconnected individual selfhood, comes into being thanks in part to the other characters in the poem confirming him as such. In fact, the cast of characters continues to expand—at first slowly and then more rapidly. Los, another Eternal, appears after Urizen’s rebellion and his expulsion; Los’s sudden appearance and the fact that he bears a unique name indicate that he, like Urizen, is divided from the Eternals. Soon after, Los divides even further, producing a female counterpart, Enitharmon, and then they divide further by producing a child, Orc. After this, Urizen produces his own children, and the number of individual selfhoods rapidly increases. These births are also constructed on the basis of sight: Enitharmon appears directly in front of Los’s eyes, and Urizen’s children emerge from the elements. Rather than a natural biological birth, one individual brings life into existence through the act of seeing. Los sees Enitharmon “[w]aving before [his] face” (E 78), while Urizen “sicken’d to see / His eternal creations appear / Sons & daughters of sorrow on mountains” (23.8-10, E 81). Connolly argues,

There is a momentum or domino-effect in this series of growths out of growths. It continues when Urizen’s embodiment causes Los’s embodiment, which in turn causes Enitharmon to come into separate

being, giving birth to Orc. Following this, the children of Urizen are embodied. Like a cancer or a weed, the material body propagates uncontrollably. Like a black hole, its weight and gravity pulls all around it into its darkness. (90)

Connolly targets the physical body and its material creation in her discussion of cancerous propagation in *The Book of Urizen*. She notes that Blake's works exhibit a genuine repulsion but also a genuine ecstasy when it comes to the body: "he at once reviles and glorifies the human body" (vii). How are we to negotiate between these two extremes? Some critics note the necessary limitations of the physical body, but qualify the limitation. Acknowledging the deficiencies of the material body, Jacobson attributes the production of social relations to its capacities: "The parts of the body are an imposed limitation" (70), a kind of enclosure. "Yet the brain and the senses make possible relationships beyond the self, albeit limited" (71). Connolly also pursues this argument when she claims, "Through his illustration of fibres, which can be identified with nerves, Blake calls attention to the usually hidden organ of sensitivity, the nervous system which links body and mind, and in turn links people with each other, keeping the individual from being a prisoner in his own body" (64). For both critics, Blake emerges as an opponent of Cartesian dualism—the body has an undeniable connection to the mind. In fact, the body and the senses make social bonds possible.¹⁴ I would add that any limitation the body demonstrates results from fallen perception and restrained imagination. The cancerous propagation in *Urizen* results not from the creation of material bodies but from the construction of singular, separate identities. Corporeality does not enter the text until after Urizen declares his independence and he is expelled from the eternal community. The primary signal for the fall is not the body but the

¹⁴ Frye explains Blake's anti-dualistic sentiments regarding mind and body: "The prophecies resound with bitter complaints of the inadequacy of the body, of the impotence of the eye to see and of the nose to smell, but the moral in Blake is that the body is weak enough already without trying to split it in two [...] it is a change of worlds that is necessary, the lifting of the whole body to a fully imaginative plane by getting rid of the natural man" (194). I take Frye's point that dualism is not what Blake wants, but Blake does more than just tolerate the body. As Jacobson and Connolly imply, the body plays a crucial role in the formation of community.

limiting of perception—perception of oneself and one’s identity in relation to a social unit.

The physical body functions as a representation of the material consequences that the eternal community suffers through faulty perception and the power of ideology. Louis Althusser’s theory of interpellation offers a way to understand the ruptured social dynamic presented in *The Book of Urizen* as the emergence of ideology, specifically what I call the ideology of the self. An ideological reading of the separation of self in *Urizen* resonates with a melodramatic one in terms of the social and the theatrical, particularly with respect to the constitution of the self in a social space and the emphasis on the senses and the external. In “Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses,” Althusser’s analysis of ideology includes the key concept of interpellation. Two of his examples of the way interpellation functions feature the meeting of two friends:

To take a highly ‘concrete’ example, we all have friends who, when they knock on our door and we ask, through the door, the question ‘Who’s there?’, answer (since ‘it’s obvious’) ‘It’s me’. And we recognize that ‘it is him’, or ‘her’. We open the door, and ‘it’s true, it really was she who was there’. To take another example, when we recognize somebody of our (previous) acquaintance ((*re*)-*connaissance*) in the street, we show him that we have recognized him (and have recognized that he has recognized us) by saying to him ‘Hello, my friend’, and shaking his hand (a material ritual practice of ideological recognition in everyday life [...]). (161)

By calling someone, by acknowledging someone as a subject, and, by the same token, having that other person hear our call and acknowledge us, we participate in a scene of interpellation. Further, the first example in particular demonstrates the way in which we accept the ideology of the self; we are able to respond to the question “Who’s there?” with “It’s me,” thereby defining ourselves as a “me” separate from the “you,” the voice on the other side of the door. Judith Butler aptly describes this two-way creation of ideology when she says, “Although there would be no turning around without first having been hailed, neither would there be a turning around without some readiness to turn”

(“Conscience Doth Make Subjects of Us All” 7).¹⁵ This readiness is our acceptance of the individual and isolated identities of which we take society to consist.

While Althusser stresses the linguistic aspect (or perhaps even the oral/aural aspect) of interpellation, I also stress the visual aspect. He evidences recognition in the above example by way of the verbal greeting, but recognition also comes from facial cues. One does not need a verbal greeting to confirm when individual recognition has occurred. The act of looking can replace or coexist with verbal recognitions, as it does in *Urizen*. I find parallels between this visual recognition the way verbal-based interpellation works in Althusser’s discussion. He argues that “*all ideology hails or interpellates concrete individuals as concrete subjects*” (162, original emphasis); “The existence of ideology and the hailing or interpellation of individuals as subjects are one and the same thing” (163). Ideology is a force that imposes on all of us by calling us into a state of subjectification, a state we find ourselves in even before we come into the world. As Althusser notes, to be a subject is to be autonomous and yet bound: “[the term] subject in fact means: (1) a free subjectivity, a centre of initiatives, author of and responsible for its actions; (2) a subjected being, who submits to a higher authority, and is therefore stripped of all freedom except that of freely accepting his submission” (169). By misrecognizing or ignoring the aspect of freedom in our subjection, we allow ourselves to be trapped in a system, one of “ideological constraint and pre-appointment” (165).

Althusser seems to present us with a conundrum when he further explains this ideology. He continues, “[Y]ou and I are *always already* subjects, and as such constantly practice the rituals of ideological recognition, which guarantee for us that we are indeed concrete, individual, distinguishable and (naturally) irreplaceable subjects” (161-62). Therefore, society is such that it cannot break the cycle of ideological subjectification

¹⁵ Butler’s reading of Althusser’s theory of interpellation focuses on the hail of the law, and the role of guilt in the response to the hail. She writes, “The call itself is also figured as a demand to align oneself with the law, a turning around (to face the law, to find a face for the law?), and an entrance into the language of self-ascription [...] through the appropriation of guilt” (6). However, in Althusser’s essay, the hail by a police officer makes up only one example, what he calls a specialized form of interpellation, and he explains that our readiness to turn “cannot be explained solely by ‘guilt feelings’” (163).

because we relate to each other on the level of distinct subjects from the very beginning (i.e., birth) to the very end (i.e., death). The conundrum exists in the fact that an ideology is something that can be changed or dismantled. However, by saying that we are “always already subjects,” Althusser suggests that this state of affairs is just the way things are with no other possibility—and, thus, not an ideology. Yet, he persists in using the term ideology to explain the nature of social relations. We have names and roles and responsibilities even before we enter the world. Ideology manifests itself in “rituals of ideological recognition”: “the hand-shake, the fact of calling you by your name, the fact of knowing, even if I do not know what it is, that you ‘have’ a name of your own,” all of which confirm “that you are recognized as a unique subject” (162). By simply greeting or naming each other, acknowledging one another as others, we interpellate each other, we reinscribe the oppressive frame that makes us and our fellow human beings subjects—both as individuals within the system of relations and as subjects to this system.

In addition, Althusser calls his examples of interpellation and hailing a “little theoretical theatre” (163), a “*mise en scène* of interpellation” in which we are “actors” (165), thus setting up a theatrical discourse for these moments. He does not take the metaphor further, but, by configuring interpellation as theatrical, he emphasizes the social relations at play and the greater communal implications. My reading of vision and identity may seem to point more readily to a Lacanian reading of ego-formation—not surprisingly, Althusser was highly influenced by Lacanian psychoanalysis.¹⁶ However, my focus rests not on the individual who sees his/her image and equates it with “a coherent self” and a “corporeal wholeness” (Jay 346), as in the mirror-stage, but on the formation of an isolated identity that results from the mutually dependent processes of

¹⁶ For a more in-depth discussion, see Martin Jay 374-75. Also, Mark Bracher’s psychoanalytic reading of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in his article “Rouzing the Faculties” uses the Althusserian term interpellation but insofar as it applies to Lacanian theory. Bracher explores the psychological transformative potential of the text on the reader through the way “the poem pressures us” (177) and “interpellate[s] [us] into a position” (179). He is less concerned with identity and identity-formation than with the way the text imposes upon the reader in order to provoke an active response: “by interpellating us to a position where we must either accept [the symbolic] code or construct it through interpretation, Blake’s poem arouses our faculties to act in such a way as to enact a marriage that constitutes psychological transformation” (203).

seeing and being seen, or of hearing and being heard. Thus, using Althusser's theory, rather than psychoanalytic theories of subject-formation, allows me to better interrogate Blake's central concerns as they apply to the self: community and social relations. Moreover, Althusser's reference to the "*mise en scène* of interpellation" indicates that he acknowledges the fact that the formation of a separate self cannot and does not happen in a vacuum. The interpellative separation of self is neither an abstract nor a solitary moment; it is one that arises through the scenes of daily life as we connect with others. By associating the interpellative scene with the theatrical, he implies that the scene is artificial and constructed in much the same way as the theatre constructs a kind of reality through numerous repetitions or stagings. What this suggests is that interpellative relations are constructed rather than inevitable and that the resulting subject is one that continuously gets reaffirmed or constituted through subsequent reiterations. Once again, we are faced with the paradox of an ideological—and, thus, changeable—view of relations with the subject who is "always already" such—and, thus, cannot be otherwise.

My application of Althusser, especially his reference to irreplaceability and uniqueness, places more emphasis on the self—as signifying a coherent singular and isolated personal identity—than subjecthood or subjectivity where "human subjects" are "conceived [...] as agents" and/or "understood as subjected" to institutions of power (Henderson 3).¹⁷ Nevertheless, Blake's idea of a fallen selfhood does pave the way for a consideration of subjectivity in this sense, especially as being subjected to ideology. Blake rewrites the Judeo-Christian creation myth and the subsequent fall as the primordial scene of interpellation, the primordial scene of the constitution of selfhood. I argue that the poem suggests the fall occurs through an Althusserian interpellation; that is, the eternal community lapses the moment it recognizes separate selfhoods. Both the Eternals and Urizen recognize his separate self; consequently, both are complicit in the deed.

Moreover, this recognition emerges through the activity of the senses. Seeing, when attached to things appearing, has a kind of creative force in the poem, as if seeing

¹⁷ Moreover, my reading of Blake's *Urizen* leaves the redemptive power of vision open, while Althusser remained skeptical of sight, especially in relation to knowledge, because, as Jay explains, he "identified ideology with a reliance on sight of any kind" (374).

and coming-into-being arise mutually or mutually cause each other. Chapter one begins with the literal rising of Urizen, which provokes the Eternals to describe Urizen as the “primeval Priest[],” to give him “a place in the north,” and to later name him, all of which are ways of classifying his uniqueness as a part to be rejected from the eternal whole. At the same time, Urizen perceives himself to be a separate identity, an isolated “I”. By seeing Urizen rise, then, the Eternals acknowledge him as an independent identity, and their responses to him follow from this acknowledgment. Elkins states, “Seeing is being seen” (*The Object Stares Back* 12): “looking happens in both directions” (21); “Vision runs back and forth from objects to eyes, and whatever is seen also sees. [...]. And seeing is self-definition. Objects look back, and their incoming gaze tells me what I am” (86). Such a view of sight and perception suggests that the senses play a crucial role in the creation of identities. By seeing someone, one identifies or defines the other. This twofold structure suggests that, in order for the ideology of the self to take hold or come into effect, both Urizen and the Eternals must subscribe to it. Both acknowledge and recognize Urizen as a unique entity; therefore, both are complicit in the fall, and both are responsible for the domino effect that ideological interpellation sets off: you recognize me, I recognize you, we recognize them, they recognize us.

This mutual recognition gives rise to an ideology of self. Addressing the contradiction between the “always already” of subjectivity and ideology, Althusser explains, “What is represented in ideology is therefore not the system of the real relations which govern the existence of individuals, but the imaginary relation of those individuals to the real relations in which they live” (155). By defining these relations as imaginary, Althusser indicates that this way of being in the world and with each other is not a necessary one. Thus, change can occur. By recognizing each other, we are in fact misrecognizing the system of relations that binds us for one that is unalterable, permanent and inevitable. In this light, conventional and mundane social interactions take on a sinister quality: they inscribe us in a false system and lead us to a false consciousness. Ideology is this system to which we submit and which we accept as truth. The Eternals’ recognition, or misrecognition, of Urizen as a separate identity combined with Urizen’s self-enclosure and his self-perception as separate mark the beginning of ideology, the

beginning of the interpellation of subjects, which in *Urizen* occurs by way of perception; yet, as an ideology, an imaginary state of affairs, it can be altered.

Conversely, Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey" does not demonstrate this kind of awareness of social relations. Even though Wordsworth indicates the creative force of the senses when he refers to "all the mighty world / Of eye and ear, both what they half-create, / And what perceive" (106-08), he does not articulate this force as one that manifests its results in the external world, at least not in a social context. His own relation to nature may be based partly on how he constructs it, but the larger community of human beings does not factor into this equation. The only consequence of this half-creating and half-perceiving is an individual, internal experience. Also, this partial creative ability is mentioned only here. Throughout the rest of the poem, Nature "impresses" Wordsworth and teaches him (110-12), which is a more passive configuration. Critiquing this construction of relations, Levinson states,

The poem argues that 'thinking things' largely construct the object world, so that the latter, while its first cause is 'a motion and a spirit,' is subject to an efficient cause as well. There is, however, no indication of reciprocity. 'Thinking things' and their products, thoughts, apparently suffer no interference from the material and social world. Thought is free – the mind is its own place, the world is another. (40)

Blake, on the other hand, in restaging melodramatically the fall and what it signifies—the introduction of ideology as the misperception of the true nature of the relations between self and community—shows no such "operational ignorance concerning the degree to which the subjective eye—the individual 'I'—is constituted by its field of vision: a horizon, a structure, and a set of relations external to individual psyche insofar as that psyche leads an independent existence," as Levinson says of Wordsworth (45).

Wordsworth's rejection of the system of relations in the world, in civil society, is an "ideology-refusing" stance (Levinson 50), while Blake's view of human society and the individual's place in it acknowledges the over-arching influence and structuring aspect of ideology, as well as community relations.

Standing in contradistinction to Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," Blake's *Urizen* provides a depiction of the senses that suggests human relations and embodied

performance. Rather than being bound to the shadows of recollection, the senses have an actual impact in the world and on others, primarily through creative acts. Moreover, identity is necessarily part of a larger social network. To these ends, the poem more closely resembles Hadley's "melodramatic mode" than her "romantic" one. For example, a main concern in *Urizen* is proper perception, primarily in a social context. The poem is full of "noises ruinous loud" (13.24, E 77): blasts, thunders, rolling, swelling, trumpet sounds, spoken words, crashes, earthquakes, belching, beating, forging, panting, trembling, pangs, stamping, hammering, hurtling, clashing, smiting, writhing, hissing, shrieks, and howling. The sounds often occur as a consequence of activity and activity itself is configured as physical, indicating the exterior and public realm. For instance, creating and forging are most definitely of the body as well as of the mind. Los's activity—"heav[ing] the dark bellows, / And turn[ing] restless the tongs; and the hammer / Incessant beat; forging chains new & new"—is a material one, which is odd given that he is the Eternal Prophet. The physicality of his activity suggests that imagination is not confined to the mental realm. Of course, his activity connotes a certain degree of negativity by echoing *Urizen*'s forging of his metal books (4.24-25, E 72). However, as explained above regarding the senses, material activity in itself is not negative in Blake. After all, Blake's forging and engraving of his illuminated art has redemptive potential.¹⁸

In addition, Blake makes numerous references to vision, to things "seen" and "beheld" or "unseen" and "hid" from sight. The poem narrates characters seeing things appear and coming to pass or failing and refusing to see things. Many things simply "appear" in the poem without much of an explanation or description of the event. By replacing words such as "occur" or "happen," the word "appear" stresses the act of seeing. The preoccupation with coming into being also takes the form of birth. The created world is figured "like a womb, / Where thousands of rivers in veins / Of blood pour down the mountains" (5.29-31, E 73). Also, "Like a human heart struggling & beating / The vast world of *Urizen* appear'd" (5.36-37). Here, Blake uses a visceral simile

¹⁸ In reference to *Milton*, Thomas A. Vogler states, "The goal is not to escape 'Albions land: / Which is this earth of vegetation on which now I write' [...] but to experience it as a home, to be at home in it, to be human in it—which means to be creative, to be an artist, to labor in a material medium" (175). Avoiding the exertions of the material body and material forms, then, is not desirable.

that compares the creation of the world to the bloody birth of a human being. Moreover, this depiction significantly differs from the biblical account in Genesis in which God's ability to create is wholly performative and bound to the linguistic realm, not to vision.¹⁹

Similar to the text, some of the images depict characters with their eyes closed or hidden, suggesting perhaps that they are blind. Other designs show a character in such a way that we see only the back of his/her head; for example, the figure running through flames with his head deliberately pointed away from us (pl. 3) and a floating Urizen with his hands by his turned-away head (pl. 27; fig. 29). These kinds of images draw attention to the characters' capacity for sight or their refusal to use it. Moreover, these images contrast starkly with the images that face us squarely, particularly those who stare directly at us. Both the images in which characters face us and those in which they decidedly do not force the audience to consider vision (in terms of seeing and being seen or not seen) and our relation to the work. However, seeing and hearing do not represent strictly benign forces, despite their associations with creation or creativity. This is perhaps not surprising given the fact that *The Book of Urizen* revises Genesis's account of the fall of humanity as well as its account of the creation of the mortal world.

After Urizen's fall, all the senses take on negative connotations. Nowhere is this made clearer than in the description of the formation of Urizen's body, one of the most visceral descriptions in any of Blake's texts. First, Urizen's nerves "Shoo[t] out ten thousand branches / Around his solid bones" (11.6-7, E 76). Then, his brain, heart, eyes, ears, nose, torso and tongue painfully form:

His nervous brain shot branches
 Round the branches of his heart
 On high into two little orbs
 And fixed in two little caves

.....

His Eyes beheld the deep. (11.11-16)

Fig. 29. Urizen, copy 6, plate 27, verso 28, c. 1812, Library of Theoria / University of Toronto
 Library of Theoria. © 2010 The William Blake Archive. Used with permission. The

¹⁹ For instance, "God said [...] let the dry land appear: and it was so" (1.9), or "God said, Let us make man in our image [...] So God created man in his own image" (1.26-27).



Fig. 29. *Urizen*, copy G, plate 27, object 23, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

Two Ears in close volutions

 Shot spiring out and petrified
 As they grew

 In ghastly torment sick;
 Hanging upon the wind;
 Two Nostrils bent down to the deep. (11.21-27, 13.1)
 Within his ribs bloated round
 A craving Hungry Cavern;
 Thence arose his channel'd Throat,
 And like a red flame a Tongue
 Of thirst & of hunger appear'd. (13.5-9)

Blake isolates each sense and graphically delineates its painful shrinking and solidification. If the fall results in part from the activity of the senses, then are they not fundamentally a negative aspect of humanity? Does not *Urizen*, as Mann argues, depict a hopeless world in which we are trapped by sensory experience and the ideology that this experience creates? Does not the fact that objects and people “appear” in this poem potentially imply that sight is passive, as it is in “Tintern Abbey”? For example, when the Eternals see *Urizen*’s world take shape, the activity of seeing seems passive:

like a black globe
 View’d by sons of Eternity, standing
 On the shore of the infinite ocean,
 Like a human heart struggling & beating
 The vast world of *Urizen* appear’d. (5.33-37, E 73)

The world at first seems to be passively “view’d by sons of Eternity,” but the position of the phrases and the use of similes to describe the world coming into existence suggest the opposite is true. The simile refers to the Eternals viewing a black globe, which represents the world; viewing is directly related to the “appearance” or incarnation of *Urizen*’s

world, which one would conventionally expect to have been constructed. However, Blake's language refers to vision not construction. The Eternals see Urizen's world coming into being and as a result are complicit in the creation as well. Angela Esterhammer argues, "the heavy emphasis on the 'unseen' and 'unknown' at the beginning of *The Book of Urizen* implies that the role of language in this text is to make things visible, indeed to bring them into existence" ("Calling into Existence" 121). I would argue that the emphasis on seeing throughout the work implies that the role of vision is also to bring things into existence. Although I do not deny the power of the performative utterance in Blake's works, the visual aspect and the role of sight remain secondary to the textual or linguistic in much criticism. For example, Mitchell asserts, "The most far-reaching shift signaled by the search for an adequate concept of visual culture is its emphasis on the social field of the visual, the everyday processes of looking at others and being looked at. This complex field of visual reciprocity is not merely a by-product of social reality but actively constitutive of it. Vision is as important as language in mediating social relations, and it is not reducible to language, to the 'sign,' or to discourse. ("What Do Pictures *Really* Want?" 82)

Mitchell reminds us how important the visual is in the world; seeing impacts our relationships with each other and with our environment as much as language. Blake's melodramatic depiction of the creation-fall and the intertwined ideology of self rely heavily on the visual field. While the world is Urizen's, and he is responsible for its construction, the Eternals' act of watching Urizen implicates them in the construction of both Urizen's identity and his world. Viewing or seeing, then, is never simply a passive event in Blake; it is an action in which we actively participate.

Similarly, hearing functions actively. For instance, when Orc awakens the dead, his voice demonstrates the power to create life:

The dead heard the voice of the child
 And began to awake from sleep.
 All things heard the voice of the child
 And began to awake to life. (20.26-29, E 80)

Orc, or, more correctly, Orc's voice causes the dead to "awake from sleep" and things to "awake to life" or come into existence. Here, the voice has the power to change death into life. Like sight, the voice, the act of speaking, has the power to bring something into being. Hearing, then, like seeing, is not passive. In fact, the act of hearing implicates the dead in this scene of interpellation—they *hear* Orc and meet his call. Hearing functions actively; the listening ears meet Orc's voice rather than simply receiving it. This active quality of the sense of sound is reaffirmed by Elkins: "My ears are anything but passive recipients of noise. Out of the buzzing continuum of sounds I listen for certain things: I am acutely sensitive to voices, to rhythmic tappings that might be footsteps, to whistles, howls, shrieks, creaks, and whines" (*The Object Stares Back* 34). Not only are the senses discriminating, but they also seem to discriminate in ways bound up in interpellation. We are watching and listening for the sights and sounds of another individual and by doing so acknowledge his/her separate existence. In the process, we also construct him/her. By associating such creative powers with sight and sound, Blake suggests a more performative, performance-based, performance-oriented genre—a genre in which sight and sound are crucial.

In chapter three, soon after Urizen's lone speech, Blake presents us with the appearance of Los, the Eternal Prophet and representative of the imagination. Typically, Los is depicted as a positive force in contrast to Urizenic reasoning. However, in *The Book of Urizen*, the relation between the two is ambiguous, as I have already noted. Los simply appears without introduction as a player in the drama between Urizen and the Eternals. The first mention of Los does not signal him as a new character, nor does it signal his entrance into the poem. Rather, he is just there, already present in the action:

And Los round the dark globe of Urizen
Kept watch for Eternals to confine
The obscure separation alone;
For Eternity stood wide apart,
As the stars are apart from the earth. (5.38-42, E 73)

By not giving Los a formal introduction into the text, Blake emphasizes the way he enters the work. Los's entrance is startling. It is as if we should already know who Los is. The use of the conjunction "And" suggests that this happens to be just another episode in the

story of Los and Urizen, as if Los has been present continuously in the poem. This strange gap forces us to question his identity, his existence, and his appearance all the more.

Los, by watching or by being made to watch Urizen, exposes himself to the kind of division and separation (a kind of illness in Blake) that Urizen has undergone; in a way, his vision creates his own separate identity distinct from the Eternals. Worrall says, “Which came first? The answer is both” (Introduction 21). For Worrall, their simultaneous coming into being refers to the dual narratives of the Urizen texts and the dual authorships: both Los and Urizen tell the story. I would agree about the simultaneity of their appearance, but I align that simultaneity with the relational process of interpellation. By recognizing each other, they both emerge as isolated individuals, suffering from what Victor N. Paananen calls a “diseased solipsism” (31). Los’s despair, resulting from the sight of Urizen’s identity-formation, is followed by a rending of the two beings. The impact of seeing Urizen is significant for Los. The separation is figured in terms of sight—subject and object—and in terms of a physical separation.

Los, too, endures this fall in the act of seeing. Eternity now stands “wide apart” from the solitary figure of Urizen and from Los thanks to his preoccupation with watching the changes in Urizen: “He watch’d in shuddering fear / The dark changes & bound every change / With rivets of iron & brass” (8.9-11, E 74). Los reacts to what he sees by trying to bind Urizen. Some critics read this act as a compassionate act, while others see it as a Urizenic one. For instance, Connolly calls Los’s binding of Urizen “a merciful action which gives Urizen identity and protects him from being ‘obscure’” (78), but Mann argues, “Los’s antithetical posture toward Urizen is belied by the fundamentally Urizenic nature of his activity. Since separation, isolation of selfhood, and containment were invented by Urizen, binding Urizen is Urizenic” (54).²⁰ Either way,

²⁰ Like Mann, Mitchell and Steve Clark see Los’s act as Urizenic. Mitchell states, “Los is absorbed into the Urizenic mode of consciousness” (“Poetic and Pictorial Imagination” 352), while Clark writes, “At the very least, the relation of Los and Urizen is one of complex interdependence: syntactically, the ‘chains of the mind’ qualifies both protagonists, and as many critics have observed, Urizen’s actions repeatedly prefigure and foreclose those of Los” (135). Clark goes a step further to suggest that Urizen’s actions are actually commendable as he tries to create form from chaos (145-46) and that Blake was of “Urizen’s ‘party without knowing it’” (149).

with respect to Los, literal seeing causes a paradigm shift in the way he begins to see himself and the other Eternals. Los continues “dividing / The horrible night into watches” (10.9-10, E 75), thereby persisting in his need to see Urizen and what he endures. Los’s act of keeping watch and surveying Urizen separates him from the eternal community and, in this act, Los becomes Los—the separate entity—or comes into being by virtue of vision.

Los’s appearance invokes the kind of domino effect that results from ideological interpellation: you recognize me, I recognize you. As Mann points out, “The Urizenic genesis is the production or rather the continual reproduction of selfhood” (56); herein lies the cancerous effect. By distinguishing himself from the group of Eternals, Los seems to mimic Urizen’s separation, and, indeed, Los mimics other Urizenic actions in the chapters that follow. Los unintentionally participates in the continued dividing of Urizen by attempting to stop Urizen’s changes. The embodiment of Urizen, then, is as much a result of Urizen’s self-contemplation and self-enclosure as it is a result of Los’s actions and his seeing Urizen as distinct from him, as a viewable object, an object for visual consumption. The creation of separate selves proliferates once Los has forged a body for Urizen. Los is now lost, and his role in the fall is far from peripheral.

The division and separation of Los and Urizen occurs repeatedly, and the bard recounts them in various ways. However, the role of vision in Los’s fall persists: “Thus the Eternal Prophet was divided / Before the death image of Urizen” (15.1-2, E 78). The bard states that the act of viewing Urizen as divided (his “death image”) provokes the division of Los. Seeing Urizen outside the eternal community—in which identities merge while retaining distinction—suggests that Los now divides himself from Eternity and can no longer merge with the eternal identities. As a result, he sees Urizen as an isolated self, an isolation that is equivalent to the “death image” because of the implicit self-expulsion from communal interaction. Death and mortality, as components of the fallen worldview, emerge as a consequence of the shift in perception within the entire eternal community when it names death for the first time in the poem. Upon looking at Urizen after Los’s binding efforts, “The Eternals said: ‘What is this? Death. / Urizen is a clod of clay’” (6.9-10, E 74). In the context of the social relations among the group, such a statement shows how Eternity itself, or at least its ‘residents’, is compromised. By recognizing or naming

mortality, the Eternals are responsible in part for ushering death into the world, where death signifies both an end to life (or life as they know it) and ignorance (of the true nature of social relations). Following this division, Blake writes:

And now seen, now obscur'd, to the eyes
Of Eternals the visions remote
Of the dark separation appear'd.
As glasses discover the Worlds
In the endless Abyss of space,
So the expanding eyes of Immortals
Beheld the dark visions of Los,
And the globe of life blood trembling. (15.6-13, E 78)

Blake's simile comparing telescopes to the Eternals' vision turns on the word "discover." Here, too, there is a sense that the newness of the discovery, of having something come into being because one is now able to see it (as an astronomer "discovers the Worlds" with his "glasses"), implies a kind of creation. At first, union exists in Eternity, but with the separation of Urizen (and Los), presence and absence come into being. Separation allows Urizen to be seen, to be present as an objective phenomenon to the Eternals; conversely, it also allows him not to be seen, to be absent to them, as when they initially "gave him a place in the north" (2.3, E 70) for his self-defining act. Urizen "abstract[s]" (3.6, E 70) himself from the Eternals by "self-contemplating" (3.21, E 73), by viewing himself as unconnected and discrete from the whole. Again, Blake uses the word "appear'd," and this particular simile implies that, by seeing, by discovering or uncovering, the Eternals also help make this event concrete. Similes in Blake tend to make obscure moments or events more physical, as when Blake compares "the dark separation appear[ing]" to the discovery of a planet through a telescope. Having someone see their division helps to concretize the division of Los and Urizen, and it also helps to make them come into "Self-closd" being.²¹

²¹ Mitchell argues that the Eternals themselves are Urizenic in their appearance, as plate 15 suggests. Here, Blake depicts a group of figures in the sky creating something below them. Depending on the copy, there are sometimes three figures and sometimes four (as in copy G). Blake illustrates either two old men with white hair and long beards with one young man or two of each. Mitchell assesses the one with

Los himself divides even further in the wake of the initial division and binding of Urizen. Los's pity at the sight of Urizen produces his female counterpart, Enitharmon:

The globe of life blood trembled
 Branching out into roots;
 Fib'rous, writhing upon the winds;
 Fibres of blood, milk and tears;
 In pangs, eternity on eternity.
 At length in tears & cries imbodyed
 A female form trembling and pale
 Waves before [Los's] deathly face.
 All Eternity shudderd at sight
 Of the first female now separate
 Pale as a cloud of snow
 Waving before the face of Los. (18.1-12, E 78)

As with Urizen and Los, who rise or appear to the sight, Enitharmon's separation is an event for the eyes to behold. She "waves before" the face of Los and comes into being before his eyes, as if her creation and his seeing her are inextricably conjoined. His "deathly face" emphasizes the fallen quality of this continual separation. Eternity, or the whole community of Eternals, responds to her appearance, and in acknowledging her separateness, it too participates in the continual reproduction of the rituals of ideology, interpellating others as subjects, as separate individuals. Blake writes, "Eternity shudder'd when they saw / Man begetting his likeness / On his own divided image" (19.13-15, E 79). Blake's diction, the use of the words "likeness" and "image," explicitly

three figures and argues that Blake is showing how the two old Urizenic Eternals manipulate the younger Eternal, or Los ("Poetic and Pictorial Imagination" 345-46). However, I would argue that the four-person plate suggests that the Eternals consist of two youthful Los figures and two older Urizen figures; the old figures no longer outnumber the youthful ones, suggesting that they are all equally complicit in the actions of the poem. Thanks to the resemblance between Urizen and the older Eternals and between Los and the younger ones, it is difficult to distinguish between the characters in this poem and difficult to easily assign blame. In fact, the Eternals do not manipulate Los into Urizenic action; the action results naturally from the emergence of the ideology of self within the eternal community—all are infected.

unites vision and sight to identity-formation. The perpetuation of interpellation continues as Enitharmon “bore an enormous race” (20.45, E 81). Urizen’s production of identities occurs after Los and Enitharmon’s. Again, new individuals enter the world by way of appearance: Fuzon, Thiriell, Grodna, and Utha appear as they emerge from the various elements (23.8-10, E 81; fig. 24). Creation results from the act of seeing.

The Eternals respond to these events by trying to evacuate vision, shutting out the sights they see by erecting an edifice—called the ‘Tent of Science’—to enclose Urizen, Los, Enitharmon, and the others. In this example, the ideology of self and the social constitution of identity intersect in an explicitly theatrical articulation, resonating with both Althusser’s theory of subject-formation and Hadley’s melodramatic mode of identity-formation—as well as with melodramatic spectacle and embodiment more generally. *Urizen* begins with the voice of the Eternals and with the bard hearing their words. He says, “Eternals, I hear your call gladly; / Dictate swift winged words, & fear not / To Unfold your dark visions of torment” (2.5-7, E 70). Not only do his words resonate with Althusserian interpellation (Blake hears the call of the Eternals), but also the unfolding of visions suggests the pulling back of a (stage) curtain to reveal the spectacle hid within. The bard indicates that the Eternals summon him and utter the words of the poem to him. He does not mention the act of writing (with the implicit counterpart of reading); rather, he initiates this poem as a kind of performance—the Eternals speaking/dictating the events for him to hear. In addition, the comparisons to staged drama solidify when one considers the ‘Tent of Science,’ where, I argue, Blake references theatrical spectacle in a more literal fashion. Critics such as Leslie Tannenbaum, Sibyl C. Jacobson and F. B. Curtis interpret the ‘Tent of Science’ in a biblical context. Tannenbaum refers to it as “separating the fallen world from Eternity” in a “reversal of the Apolcalpyse” (34); Jacobson notes, “This passage from *Urizen* echoes the description in *Exodus* of the curtaining of the tabernacle” (71); and Curtis explains it as a possible reference to the “tent and darkness in A. Geddes’ *The Holy Bible*” (93). Rather than its biblical roots, I examine the tent’s theatrical status.

Blake theatricalizes the ideological or interpellative moment when separate selfhoods are recognized, specifically when the Eternals construct their edifice. After watching characters divide into numerous self-contained identities, the Eternals

eventually become unable to endure the sight of further divisions. As a result, they create a curtain to hide the events from their eyes. The Eternals command:

‘Spread a Tent, with strong curtains around them
 Let cords & stakes bind in the Void
 That Eternals may no more behold them.’
 They began to weave curtains of darkness.
 They erected large pillars round the Void,
 With golden hooks fastend in the pillars;
 With infinite labour the Eternals
 A woof wove, and called it Science. (19.2-9, E 78)

The reference to the “Tent” as “curtains of darkness” suggests a stage curtain that masks or reveals the drama on the stage, a stage demarcated with pillars, hooks, cords and stakes. Mary Lynn Johnson and John E. Grant aptly call what the Eternals are viewing a spectacle in a note to the work: “The spectacle of ‘love and jealousy’ [...] is too painful for the Eternals to contemplate” (*Blake’s Poetry and Designs* 1979, 153). With the Tent, Blake directly connects seeing with spectatorship of a theatrical nature. The Eternals seem to watch the others as if the ideology of self, the production of identities, is something they witness on a stage (rather than participate in themselves). The construction of this structure, then, indicates that, like an audience, the Eternals view the world as a stage and the beings upon it as performers.

The Tent of Science that the Eternals build not only functions to block out what they are seeing, but it also exemplifies the ideology of self in material terms. The structure creates the dynamics of audience and spectator, of two separate spaces—the space of the actors, which include Urizen and Los, and the space of the audience, or the Eternals. Elsewhere in Blake’s works, the Tent appears to be “a temporary and protective dwelling place, represent[ing] a man’s philosophy,” according to S. Foster Damon (397). If this construction is representative of the philosophy or science of the Eternals or of the performers they wish to hide, then such a philosophy or science is performative—they have a theatrical worldview in that ‘all the fallen world’s a stage.’ By naming the Tent, or the fabric or weaving that constitutes this edifice, Science, the Eternals imply that such a structure represents a system or an ideology. This ideology creates the network of human

relations as a division between performers and audience, or subjects and objects, I and you.

“The Eternals closed the tent / They beat down the stakes, the cords” (19.46-47, E 79) and shut out the horrific spectacle of embodiment, separation, and identity-formation, all of which becomes a performance. Paananen argues, “What we call ‘science,’ a knowledge based on delusive ‘nature,’ is not the truth about our existence but that which separates us from the truth. The Newtonian world machine, a ‘scientific’ model of nature that denies imagination a role in perception and separates subject and object, has been completed” (34). The Tent, then, represents in literal form the Eternals’ misapprehension of reality. Their false reality is one in which Urizen, Los, and Enitharmon exist as separate from their collective and where the senses are rejected (as the hiding away of the others indicates) rather than utilized to re-establish a pre-fallen state or to find redemption. The Eternals believe that they can merely close the curtain on the performance and return to Eternity unaffected by the spectacle of identity-formation. But this is impossible. Eternity is not a place to which they can return; rather than a geographical or cosmological location, it is a way of seeing. Despite their attempt to seal off Urizen and Los and the others from their view, the Eternals themselves will remain fallen—their perception has shifted along with the others that they reject.

In Althusserian terms, their social network has degenerated into one governed by interpellation. The Eternals recognized Urizen, and Urizen responded to their hail or call. At the same time, Urizen recognized the Eternals as other than himself, and they responded to his call. At this moment, the eternal community fractured, allowing for the relation between subject and object to emerge and for unique individuals to establish themselves, thereby threatening the overall whole. Building the Tent shows that the Eternals are compromised and that their perception is fallen, much as the first depiction of them suggests. As Stephen Behrendt points out, “Even the conventional invocation of the muses is inverted here, for it seems more as if the Eternals have sought Blake out to record their visions” (*Reading William Blake* 133; also qtd. in Worrall, Notes 129). By calling on Blake, they prove themselves to be inside the ideology of the self; they stage a scene of Althusserian interpellation. The theatricality at play in the construction of the Tent is concomitant with the fall. Blake’s use of the Tent as a theatrical space more

directly redefines the interpersonal relations between the Eternals and the others as theatrical, and, therefore, interpellation as theatrical.

While my reading of *Urizen* as the primordial scene of interpellation has focused primarily on verbal articulations, I do not intend to rank Blake's visual bodies second to the text; they offer something more as well. At times, Blake creates moments in his designs that are not represented in the text. For instance, in the narrative sequence of Enitharmon's birth, the corresponding design does not illustrate the text quoted above. The text suggests that the emerging being, "The globe of life blood," materializes before Los's face. All the emotion—the majority of the pain—is attributed to the "female form" and not to Los. However, the design of Los hunched over streaming blood from his body while a giant red orb hangs from his head indicates that Enitharmon literally pours forth from his body in a manner that seems anything but painless (pl. 17; fig. 30). In the image, Enitharmon does not merely appear "waving before his face"; instead, Los grasps the sides of his head with his hands and appears to be in a physical struggle. The blood pouring from Los is immense: much of the plate consists of his free-flowing blood and nerve fibres, and a great number of bloodlines or veins are visible on his back. The image of Los relays his part in the birth, which is not present in the poetry. It is a strictly visual moment without even a few 'stage directions' to indicate Los's exact role or the precise nature of Enitharmon's birth (i.e., how did she come to wave in front of Los's face as a giant globule?). In this moment of extreme duress, we are encouraged to look at and visually consume the bodies, to consume the image in all its excess. Blake's melodramatic bodies may correspond to a textual description, but they, like Brooks's assessment of the bodies of silent film, cannot be reduced to linguistic interpretation. There is always something that remains unarticulable, though the designs express so much. Elkins writes, "The skin communicates between the body and the outside world in a variety of ways, serving as an intermediary, an interface, between the two realms. [...] The skin also communicates by representing states of the body and mind to the outside world. It is a conduit, and it is also a writing surface on which the body's thoughts are inscribed" (*Pictures of the Body* 46). In his designs, Blake provides us with a way to connect, perhaps empathetically, to, for example, Los's internal emotional and



Fig. 30. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, plate 17, object 17, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

psychological state. Such a method of representation—the spectacle of extreme anguish and the excess that is not contained by the verbal sphere—suggests the melodramatic as a mode of performance, encouraging an affective, rather than purely cerebral, response in the audience.

What happens to the audience as they look at the spectacle? What good is it to see images of separation like the one of Los and Enitharmon mentioned above? Morris Eaves views the act of seeing, or more specifically beholding, when the beholder is changed to become that which he or she witnesses, in a negative light. Indeed, much of my own argument suggests that vision is a key factor in the fall. Eaves argues, “either man makes his environment or it makes him” (“The Title-page of *The Book of Urizen*” 229). If what Eaves argues is true and “Urizen is his own victim. ‘He became what he beheld’ should be his epitaph” (230), then the same goes for Los, Enitharmon, the Eternals, and so forth. Mann similarly argues, “Los ‘becomes’ Urizen” and “he becomes what he beholds, a stone, as stony Urizen” (54). Likewise, Steve Clark states, “Los [...] immediately dwindles to the image which he has constructed, and so ‘became what he beheld’” (135). With respect to Los, it very much seems that beholding a fallen Urizen allows him to “become” as well—that is, become fallen just like Urizen. Mann takes it a step further: “The reader also falls: the later equation, ‘they became what they beheld,’ includes us. If we tend to imagine ourselves outside the book, looking in, we are very much like the Eternals” (56). Since we are already fallen, there does not seem to be much value in Blake’s pointing out that we are fallen, or in replicating our fallen state. Rather, Blake seems to want to clear avenues to the Eternal rather than obstruct them. By depicting vision as an active force, whether good or bad, he shows the energetic side of sight and the potential that lies within. Yes, it is capable of making us fall, but by the same token, it is capable of making us rise. Creation may be figured as a fall, as something negative, but, even in *Urizen*, the implication that we can try to access the Eternal from our fallen position is present. The act of seeing in *Urizen*, while it more often than not results in a negative production, possesses the potential for a positive production. Blake imbues vision with a great deal of power.

Vision has the ability to engender specific human relationships in Blake’s *Urizen*. Once Los ceases in his attempt to bind Urizen’s changes, looking provokes in him the

feeling of pity: “He saw Urizen deadly black, / In his chains bound, & Pity began” (13.50-51, E 77). Pity arises in him when he sees Enitharmon: “But Los saw the Female & pitied” (19.10, E 79). As “The Divine Image” indicates, pity is “one of the Divine attributes” (Damon 327). It is one of many particular conditions and states of human relations, and, like mercy, peace and love, it forges bonds among people. Blake suggests that the way we come to relate to one another is, for better or worse, by and large a result of the visual sense. Seeing, then, is significant in determining how we engage with each other and—as do all the senses—provokes emotions that unite us to our fellow-beings. One implication is that by creating a medium in which we see the characters, he is pushing us, his audience, into a more relational context, a less self-involved one, as well as showing how sound and sight are linked to power, the power to create things or effect paradigm shifts. By including this conception of vision in his work, he inverts the conventional hierarchy of mind over body by showing the potency of physical sight and incarnated performance.

In fact, imagination and its creative force are not disconnected from the physical body. Ideally, the creative force of the imagination functions in unison with the creative force of the senses—mind with body—to achieve enlightenment. To argue, as Mann does, that “Blake writing *Urizen* is Blake repeating Los’s errors” (56), is to undo Blake’s vision of art and imagination. The fall, or the power and truth we ascribe to merely imaginary networks of relation, needs to be altered, but it is not a hopeless or permanent state. I find a more redemptive possibility in this act of seeing, particularly in a dramatic context. Despite the negative consequences of seeing in these cases, Blake highlights the power of vision, which is quite extraordinary; we must learn to use this capacity to lead us to eternal vision, something that Blake suggests is possible even from a fallen position. Unlike Wordsworth, whose representation of the senses situates him in the space of the closet and within Hadley’s romantic mode (where identity is constituted in a private space), Blake, who bridges the division between interior and exterior through the senses and emphasizes identity as constituted in a relational context, stands in Hadley’s melodramatic mode. Blake’s turn toward melodramatic techniques, which emphasize the visual and external spheres in various ways, demonstrates an understanding of identity as relational and stresses the importance of social interconnections.

Blake's designs also reaffirm the power of vision, and reach beyond the world presented in the work to the world of the audience. In some copies of *Urizen*, Blake visually depicts figures gazing straight ahead, as if looking into our world and, at times, even staring directly at us. For instance, Urizen gazes at us as he presents his book of metals (pl. 5, copies C and F), suggesting that the books he makes are intended for us; a despairing and newly formed Enitharmon seems to be looking at us as her body bends perpendicularly away from a hunched-over Los (pl. 19, copy B); the child in the Preludium directs his gaze toward the audience (pl. 2, copies B, C, D, F, and G); some of Urizen's children stare straight ahead after they first appear (pl. 24, copy B); and the praying child beside the sleeping dog stares at us (pl. 26, copy G). Perhaps the most significant plate in which a character looks directly at us is the howling Los (pl. 7; all copies; fig. 27). With this plate, Blake exploits the tension between visual and verbal description and the differences in affective response. There is a difference between seeing Los's body in the throes of horror and pain and reading about Los howling. The poetry can directly relate to the image of a howling Los on at least three separate plates:

Los wept howling around the dark Demon
 And cursing his lot; for in anguish,
 Urizen was rent from his side (6.2-4, E 73-74)

Los howld in a dismal stupor,
 Groaning! gnashing! groaning!
 Till the wrenching apart was healed. (7.1-3, E 74)

On ages roll'd ages in ghastly
 Sick torment; around him in whirlwinds
 Of darkness the eternal Prophet howl'd. (10.5-7, E 74-75)

All three quotations include a verbal reference to Los's howl. Although Blake's diction is both visceral (e.g., "rending," "wrenching" and "gnashing") and intensely passionate (e.g., "anguish," "groaning," and "ghastly Sick torment"), his design relays Los's emotional state in a more direct way; we can see his naked body gripped in anguish, his muscles clenched, and his eyes and mouth contorted to express horror and pain. Engulfed

in flames, Los kneels in an irregular manner—his torso is bent forward at a perpendicular angle to the ground, but his hands are crisscrossed to wrap around the sides of his head (rather than on the ground to support his weight). The verbal and visual delineations elicit different kinds of responses. The visual design concerns itself with showing the external manifestation of Los's internal anguish described in the text.

David Bindman relates this design back to theories of gesture (discussed earlier in this chapter), showing how Blake worked within the context of his time:

Blake's work in the 1790s tends to exploit more fully the expressive possibilities of the human body through physiognomy and bodily gestures. Blake still had recourse, probably unconsciously, to Le Brun's categories of facial expression, and in *The Book of Urizen* on occasions appears to follow them quite closely. Los's reaction to the unformed Urizen in plate 8 corresponds partially to Le Brun's illustration and description of 'Terror or Fright'. (34)

The parallels that critics such as Bindman and Warner find between Blake's designs and treatises on gesture and expression suggest that Blake exhibits a keen interest not only in depicting the external realities of internal workings but also in what Le Brun was doing: "emphasizing the relation between psychology and physiology" (Warner 38). By imitating Le Brun's terror and astonishment with "the open mouth and wide-open eye" (40) and utilizing such extremes of expression, Blake depicts the separation of selfhood in melodramatic terms. As Los's pity is aroused when he sees Urizen chained, our empathy is stirred by the visual effect of seeing Los under duress. Elkins states, "Empathy [...] has to do with an involuntary sharing of sensation between our bodies and something or someone we see" (*The Object Stares Back* 137). The images elicit an affective response in the audience as they look at Los's face and body, but the fact that Los also stares out at us as he lives through this torturous experience enhances our response because this gesture more directly "speaks" to us. One implication of this direct visual contact is that Los is potentially reacting to seeing us, thereby acknowledging our position within the ideological framework of social relations in the same way as our gaze interpellates him, making him a subject. As a result, we are implicated in the ideology of self, in the creation and fall.

Nevertheless, perhaps Blake's figures also call on us in order to stir us out of our complacency. Los's gaze prevents the audience from becoming absorbed in the fiction; he encourages us to take up a self-conscious position as participants and to abandon our desire to be mere passive receivers. These self-reflexive engagements interpellate us, showing us that we are part of the fallen world. They make it impossible to close the Tent curtain as the Eternals do, which is equivalent to ignoring the problem. By acknowledging our complicity as audience/co-creators of *Urizen* and the scene of interpellation, we take the first step toward righting the problem. The fact that characters hear and see each other come into being and that identity-creation is a matter of sensory perception suggests a kind of performance in which the audience—the perceivers—co-create the product onstage. However, like a staged drama, an audience changes the significance of the performance; the audience helps constitute the reality of what is staged. This power translates into the power to alter reality itself and to break free from the ideology of self through the power of sense perception, albeit a transformative kind.

From a strictly textual perspective, the narrative trajectory seems to signal a world unsalvageable. Fuzon and his siblings abandon the world, leaving “the pendulous earth” (28.21, E 83). The world offers no hope and they, in turn, give up hope for it:

The remaining sons of Urizen
Beheld their brethren shrink together
Beneath the Net of Urizen.
Perswasion was in vain;
For the ears of the inhabitants
Were wither'd & deafen'd & cold.
And their eyes could not discern
Their brethren of other cities. (28.11-18)

Mann argues that “*Urizen* functions precisely as a critique of exodus (of Exodus)” (64) because we are left on the pendulous earth. There is no exit. Rajan reads the end as a hopeless repetition of the beginning of the poem, thereby “conceding the futility of the project, begun by the Eternals when they confined ‘Urizen’ geographically by giving him a place in the North” (“(Dis)figuring the System” 409). It is true that the poem ends in a scene of ominous enclosure, but throughout and even near the end, Blake provides us a

way out. The senses are key in achieving redemption for the inhabitants: “No more could they rise at will / In the infinite void, but bound down / to earth by their narrowing perceptions” (25.45-28.1). Without their more expansive abilities, the inhabitants of the world are lost. They can no longer participate in Eternity. Division and separation does not seem to necessarily forego their relationship to the Eternal, but the closing of the senses does. The withered, deaf, and cold ears and the undiscerning eyes are to blame for the utter despair at the end of *Urizen*. The eyes and ears, then, and the potential to reinvigorate and expand these senses appear to be the primary ways of restoring a lost connection to the Eternal.

Through an imaginative use of sense perception can we break free of ideology and see the interdependent relationship between self and community. This restoration remains within our grasp if only we reexamine the potential of our perception. Makdisi claims:

it is precisely in accepting that what can be perceived defines what is possible, and that what is possible defines what can be perceived, that the fall takes place, every day. The fall, in other words, does not constitute a reality. Rather, it constitutes a certain highly circumscribed ontology of perception and of being—a mode of perceiving which is precisely what makes reality real to the limited forms of life appropriate to it. The latter, stripped of the capacity for imagination, and ‘bound down / To earth by their narrowing perceptions,’ regard this fallen world as the only world, this reality as the only possible reality, themselves as the only possible forms of being, and hence their history as the only possible (that is, legally sanctioned) history [...]. ‘Impossible history,’ on the other hand [...] refus[es] to take for granted that which the law mandates as ‘possible’ and ‘necessary.’ (*William Blake* 262)

Makdisi’s reading of Urizenic perception and the fall, though primarily focused on the politics of lived and recorded history, suggests the positive (and necessary) potential of the senses to provide a glimpse of Eternity with the help of imaginative acts. His idea of making the impossible possible reinforces my point about Blake’s notion of the senses as partaking in creation. We have a far greater ability with our imaginations and bodies than

we think we do; success is only a matter of not restricting the capacity of the senses, raising them in order to experience the infinite. Blake may depict the sensory world as one of experience, as a fallen world, but he recognizes the unavoidable relation between the mind's imaginative abilities and the bodily senses.

If a focus on the linear narrative makes it difficult to see the poem as anything more than a hopeless view of the fall, then I would argue that non-linear readings focusing on the designs thwart this negative reading. Specifically, I am referring to the iconography of the poem, which centres on two opposing poses: the confined figure and the liberated one. The implications of the poses revolve around a romantic versus melodramatic reading of identity and the power of the senses. The repeated pose of the hunched figure exemplifies the attempt to cut off sensory perception. It is telling that, in all of the images of figures hiding their eyes, their ears, or both, the figures depict sorrow or pain or terror—some kind of oppressive and restrictive emotion. The opposing image of the figure standing tall with arms wide open suggests an openness to sensory perception. For instance, on plate 6 in copies A, B, C, F, and G, three figures fall through the flames. The figures on either side grip their ears and eyes, respectively, as their bodies take up contorted postures (fig. 31). The central figure, however, straightens his whole body and stretches out his arms in a cross position. Although all three figures are falling, the one in the middle seems to suggest the possible road to redemption as he embraces the world through eyes and ears.

Moreover, all three figures have a serpent coiled around them, but only the central figure's serpent reveals its head, which forms a semi-circle around the figure's head. Arguably, the serpent represents Orc, the revolutionary force in the poem, as it does in *Europe* (Otto, "Re-Framing the Moment of Creation" 238-39) and elsewhere, suggesting that the road to redemption lies in this kind of freeing openness. As Paananen states, "Orc represents the possibility of revolutionary change. [...] if we do not restrain the passionate element in us [...] revolution will begin that will lead through political change to, finally, a return to Eternity" (36). Seeing Orc as serpent, then, allows us to read the central figure as embracing revolution, as embracing the path to redemption. Lussier convincingly argues that Blake's opposition to "the empirical tradition" and "to rational demonstration and its dependence on memory" provides a "liberati[on] [of] perceptual



Fig. 31. *The Book of Urizen*, copy G, plate 6, object 7, c. 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

dynamics from the fixed-point perspective from which Newton makes his pronouncements, and thus denies the integral role played by the observer's energies in the determination of reality in preference for an illusory objectivity" ("Blake and Science Studies" 200). The visual designs of *Urizen* provide us with multiple perspectives from which to engage the work and multiple ways to affectively respond to the bodies we see, thereby encouraging us out of a solipsistic space. By using iconography to offer something outside of the textual sphere, Blake parallels the power of sight in the poem: we the audience help to construct this avenue to redemption by our very act of seeing. The more we try to get beyond the ideology of the self and the more we embrace the imagination, the more expansive our physical bodies will appear. Our senses become valuable in allowing us to get outside ourselves; doing so helps to undermine the ideology created with the fall of the eternal community. The senses allow for an integrated mode of being through expressivity; they allow for the social; and, most importantly, they enable us to take the redemptive path away from the ideology of self toward a more integrated and expanded understanding of identity and community.

Blake's melodramatic mode of representation allows the potential of the spectacle of the interpellative moment to emerge. Baz Kershaw reasserts the power of the spectacle against anti-spectacle sentiment: "spectacle may produce a sudden deconstruction of the world as we thought we knew it. [...] [And] work paradoxically to open up new domains for radical revisions of the way things are. They are therefore an especially powerful potential force for progressive activism" (599). While Kershaw is referring specifically to more contemporary "deconstructive spectacles" of performance art (just one of many types of spectacles he outlines in his essay), I would argue that this point about "open[ing] up new domains for radical revisions of the way things are" applies to what *Urizen* accomplishes with its melodramatic focus on the body, the senses, the external, excess, spectacle, as well as social relations.

Reading the work in the context of melodrama, then, offers a way to see it not only as a radical revision of the biblical story but also as a radical revision of identity and community by stressing the social influences on identity-formation. In the poem, Blake examines the rupture of an ideal community, a rupture caused by faulty vision and which results in fragmentation and division (the fall). He locates the problem in Urizen's act of

self-identification, an act that entails a double process: Urizen wills his own separate selfhood *and* the Eternals recognize him as such. The Eternals share equally in the construction of his singular identity by virtue of seeing and hearing Urizen come into “Self-closed” existence (3.4, E 70). This process demonstrates an Althusserian interpellation and the emergence of an ideology of the self, which paradoxically includes both recognition and misrecognition in that what is recognized is merely imaginary and the true nature of social relations is forgotten.

Nevertheless, Althusser opens up the possibility for change by labeling ideology imaginary, despite its very real and material reach and consequences. Although *The Book of Urizen* ends with the continuing proliferation of selves and an image of the created universe as a place to abandon, Blake, like Althusser, also includes the potential for change. If the system of human relations is illusory or faulty, as is suggested by the emphasis on a fallen state, then Urizen and Los and the rest of the Eternals are not irrevocably lost. Perception is key—seeing has a creative force in the poem, and, though it works negatively to form singular and distinct identities, the possibility to use such a potent force for a positive outcome surely exists. Redemption is possible for them, and so too for us. If Eternity is a mode of perception, then perhaps the ideal community is within our reach. Perhaps with cleansed or altered senses we can see more correctly and get beyond a system of interpellation and an ideology of the self, and, thereby, refashion the existing social dynamic.

(En)Acting Identity in Blake's *Milton*

“Wondrous were their acts” (40.2, E 141), exclaims Blake upon seeing Milton’s and Ololon’s self-annihilation and unification in the illuminated poem *Milton* (dated 1804; printed between 1810 and 1818). The awe of human action expressed in this particular phrase encapsulates one of the primary effects of the work: the enactment and performance of deeds seem to be more significant than any one individual, and, furthermore, “doing” (taking action) rather than simply “being” (or existing)¹ reifies identity. My reading positions *Milton* as a key text for reconsidering Blake’s view of action and his depiction of identity as a paradoxical combination of essentialist and constructivist notions, and it suggests how such a reconsideration affects Blake’s relation to both the Romantic period and the present.

Ostensibly, the poem functions as a revision of John Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, correcting his orthodoxy; however, it also does much more: it explores the nature of identity and its relationship to action. Nevertheless, outlining a basic narrative or even sketching a linear map of the events in the poem is difficult. The poem repeats actions, obscures cause and effect, interweaves the identities of characters, confuses a traditional sense of time as distinctly past, present and future, and even seems to describe several events as simultaneous or as one single event.² The poem begins with Blake, as speaker, invoking Muse-like beings to inspire him to tell the story of John Milton’s acts in Eternity; a bard in Eternity seems to take over the story, and he narrates Satan’s fall, which is quite different from the historical Milton’s account. The Bard’s version of events seems to provoke the character Milton to take action; he leaves Eternity in an attempt to alter his current state of discontent by going to Earth and undertaking the process of self-annihilation, where he will destroy the Satan within himself and reunite

¹ Mark Bracher’s *Being Form’d: Thinking Through Blake’s Milton* explores questions of metaphysics and ontology in a reading of the poem, and the resulting implications for “what it means to be” (1), specifically examining the relationship between being and Being or “the being of the individual” (151) and “the totality of being” (152), arriving at the conclusion that “the individual [...] constitutes Being itself” (277).

² For instance, Ian Balfour states, “*Milton* can be said to have one and only one action, a single moment that is repeated, witnessed, contested, or avoided by every character in the text” (147).

with his Emanation. In the end, this action brings about the second coming of Christ and the apocalypse, along with the salvation of humankind. As the story unfolds, various encounters and events occur, all seemingly at the same time. However, the repeated acts by various characters, particularly acts of inspiration and self-annihilation, occupy the central focus of the poem. Examined individually, these acts provide insights into the importance of inspiration and self-annihilation for a given character in the context of a specific scene, but, taken together, these acts suggest a greater scope beyond one individual character; they indicate the significance of inspiration and self-annihilation for all individuals both inside and outside the poem. In this chapter, I will concentrate on the performative reiteration of these kinds of acts, using Judith Butler's theory to reread Blakean inspiration, and I will examine Blake's concept of identity, both personal and poetic, in the context of theories of identity, action, and performance.

The theories and philosophies of thinkers such as Friedrich Nietzsche, Michel Foucault, Louis Althusser, Jacques Derrida, Judith Butler, and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick have helped to deconstruct essential identity as a theoretical concept, leaving it without reliable or stable markers that signify sameness and continuity. This deconstructed "I" results in an understanding of identity as illusory, discursively and socially constructed, contingent, and performative. However, William Dennis Horn is critical of "post-Modernism's" configuration of the self as a "dogmatic rejection of all notions of centrality or agency" (260). In his article on Blake's questioning of the self, Horn sees Blake (and indeed the whole eighteenth century) as anticipating our postmodernist concerns with the self, arguing that there is a similar "self-scrutinizing honesty" in both (283). Horn also aligns Blake with the deconstructive approaches of postmodernism by demonstrating how "the concept of the self [...] is not merely a fiction, but an error in thought" in Blake's works (268). However, Horn never goes so far as to say that Blake destroys the self altogether, preferring instead to distinguish between a view of the self as isolated and as interdependent; it is the former view—the self as self-sufficient and independent—that leads to a "mistaken view of the world." Following Horn's analysis of Blake, I believe that *Milton* challenges an absolutist understanding of the Blakean self, making it difficult to position Blake easily under the aegis of postmodern theories of identity. On the one hand, Blake destabilizes the singular, personal identities of his

characters; on the other hand, he reaffirms his aesthetic view about the importance of a firm, clear, “bounding outline” (*Descriptive Catalogue* E 550), suggesting a clarity and stability in relation to identity specifically. I argue that Blake complicates any singular understanding of identity but without completely effacing either the self or human agency. This complication plays out through the performative aspects of the poem.

Performance and Performativity

In the introduction to their 1995 collection of essays, *Performativity and Performance*, Eve Sedgwick and Andrew Parker discuss how the word “performative” has gathered meaning in two distinct fields—“philosophy [specifically linguistic philosophy] and theater” (2)—and how the divide between the two is not as clear as it may seem. This double meaning is apparent in *Milton*, a highly “performative” poem in both senses of the word. For example, in two of the four copies of the poem, Blake adds a Preface urging the public and artists to “Rouze up” (E 95) against oppression and the restraint of the imagination resulting from the commercializing interests of society. With this address to the audience, even before the poem proper begins, he introduces a performative gesture. By calling on his audience, Blake acknowledges the public space outside of the poem, the public space in which he wants them to do something. I read this example as a kind of Austinian performative (in which words do things and have power to make things happen), specifically the kind that follows the “I dare you” structure. Sedgwick says of the “I dare you” performative, “[A]lthough ‘I dare you’ ostensibly involves only a singular first and a singular second person, it effectually depends as well on the tacit demarcation of the space of a third-person plural, a ‘they’ of witness—whether or not literally present. In daring you to perform some foolhardy act [...], ‘I’ [...] necessarily invoke a consensus of the eyes of others” (*Touching Feeling* 69). The dare does what it says and includes a performance in a “public” space where the dared actor either performs or fails to perform a deed to be viewed by an (presumed) audience, who would then applaud or deride success or failure. In part, *Milton*, alongside Blake’s call, dares the audience to do something related to their selfhoods. This call, then, functions primarily as a linguistic performative, whereby the command to “Rouze up” challenges us to do so; yet the implicit element of the witness or spectator in the challenge connects

it to the theatre as well.

In addition, Blake's poem explicitly moves toward the performative in the theatrical sense. Our understanding of what it means for something to be dramatic (even when not written according to the strict generic conventions of drama) and stageable continues to change. For instance, one may not expect a work structured as an epic rather than as a play to be found on the stage. Yet, recently, Amador, a production company in the United Kingdom, has staged "William Blake's 'Milton'" as a one-man performance.³ Some may counter that the poem, if dramatic at all, moves in the direction of a monodrama (like, for example, Tennyson's *Maud* (1855)), in which the drama of Milton's struggle belongs only to his own mind. After all, the poem aligns Satan and Milton repeatedly. Milton acknowledges himself to be Satan—someone who imposes on others and holds to the idea of a discrete, isolated self—because he identifies Satan's characteristics with his own actions and ideas, an acknowledgment that obscures the apparently firm outline of identity that Blake describes elsewhere: how can Satan be an individual identity and yet also be the part of Milton that must be annihilated? While examining this as a psychological poem where the characters are part of an individual psyche (as Andrew Cooper does (55)) offers interesting insights, my reading of the poem moves in a different direction: a dramatic—not monodramatic—one.⁴ Also, in light of the importance of the relational constitution of identities in *Milton* (and, indeed, Blake's other works), reducing the poem to the product and effect of one individual psyche undercuts Blake's depiction of the transformative effects of inspiration. Thus, aligning Milton and Satan implies more than just Milton's inner struggle.

Besides the content, the framework of the poem and the role of the narrator point toward the theatrical, and, moreover, reposition Blake in relation other Romantic conceptions of poetic identity. He does not rely on a singular narrative voice to give us a description of their various mental states; characters often speak what they feel or express

³ Accompanied by a live orchestra, Richard Ramsbotham (the solo performer) interacts with massive wall projections of Blake's designs, many of which are from *Milton*.

⁴ John Howard reads *Milton* symbolically and psychologically as an exploration of "the unity of cosmic, historic, topical, and personal existence" (21). He argues that, in part, the poem is a "psychodrama" (254).

their inner states more immediately in the designs. Furthermore, Blake does not simply write the poem from the position of speaker-narrator; he includes himself as part of the *dramatis personae*, thereby not privileging his interiority. Blake participates in this poem not only as the inspired poet who records Milton's deeds for posterity but also as a character—one among many. While the poem does have some autobiographical elements (i.e., the inclusion of Blake's wife, his brother, his cottage at Felpham, and his conflicted relation to Milton), I argue that it goes beyond the traditional Romantic autobiographical and subjective poem (most notably, Wordsworth's *The Prelude; or, Growth of a Poet's Mind* (1805)). The difference is that Blake focuses on action and a host of other characters rather than on the contemplative moments of a single consciousness (i.e., Wordsworth as poet), thereby creating a dramatic space.

In terms of the poetic voice or identity, the Romantic period provides us with many paradigms. In *Romantic Identities: Varieties of Subjectivity, 1774-1830*, Andrea K. Henderson argues that post-structuralists (Zizek, Derrida, Lacan, and Althusser) have mounted an "attack on the very idea of self-identity," thereby undermining the conventionally "Romantic view of subjectivity" (2-3). However, her thesis is that the Romantic period itself offers "competing models of the self" (2) distinct from a Wordsworthian model of "psychological depth" (1), and she proceeds to interpret a select number of Romantic-period authors to a large extent in the context of class, money, and the marketplace. I would add the poetic paradigms that also offer more general views on identity. For example, there is the "egotistical sublime" (Keats's term) of Wordsworth (Keats 279), who holds fast to his sense of self through his memories and to his relationship to the natural world through those memories. There is the performative paradigm in Byron, who blurs the line between himself and his fictional creations and calls attention to the process of writing. And there is the model of the chameleon poet in Keats, who argues for an annihilation of the self. These three examples offer varied implications for poetic identity and its construction.

Yet the boundaries separating these examples are not firm, particularly with respect to the Wordsworthian and Byronic ones, which are, in fact, different kinds of performative models. With its emphasis on sincere expression and speaking a more human (rather than ornate and poetic) language, critics tend to view Wordsworth's

“Preface” to *Lyrical Ballads* as “the manifesto of Romantic authenticity par excellence” (Russett 37), implying his opposition to performativity. However, Judith Pascoe interrogates this stereotypical and conventional view, which opposes Wordsworth to theatricality and performativity, as well as to performative poets such as Byron. She has argued persuasively that “Wordsworth’s [...] mode of presentation [constructs] the institution of an authorial voice so stable that the poet is conflated with the narrator of the poem” (178). This conflation represents an attempt to be authentic or sincere. She contends, “Wordsworth [...] struck a pose, but his was that of the sincere rural dweller, the natural talent.” His poetics attempt to depict a cohesive and expressive, rather than performative, speaking “I”: “a fragmented consciousness [...] is, paradoxically, precisely what Wordsworth’s antitheatrical sincerity works to conceal.” Poets such as Byron and even Wordsworth, given Pascoe’s new insights, suggest a certain drive toward the theatrical and performative in the Romantic construction of the speaker, a drive that Blake—who offers us yet another model—certainly shares.

The important difference between Wordsworth’s poetic model and other models of the time lies in the fact that Wordsworth’s poetry emphasizes the past moment—things done or felt and then considered in a calm reflective stance. In contrast, Blake, like Byron, centralizes the present moment. In the poem *Milton*, Blake rejects the Wordsworthian focus on memory and contemplation of the self and turns toward a different model, a model typically associated with Byron and his “I was there” approach,⁵ which places him on display through associations and parallels with the Byronic hero. Blake begins by replacing memory with inspiration—a process that emphasizes the present moment and present action—by invoking the daughters of Beulah (inspiration) rather than the daughters of Mnemosyne (memory). While doing so, Blake, in a more Byronic move, does not simply act as a narrator of recollected events (as Wordsworth

⁵ By this I mean Byron’s habitual emphasis on his real-life experiences, particularly the ones that define him as a world traveler. He often writes passages in the present moment, highlighting the fact that he really had visited various wonders and historical monuments in other countries and had firsthand experience of exotic cultures, as he does in, for instance, *Childe Harold’s Pilgrimage* (1812-18). In *Byron and Place: History, Translation, Nostalgia*, Stephen Cheeke explores this “I was there” element of Byron’s writing, arguing “that in fact the notion of *being there* represents the most powerful and complex aspect of Byron’s work” (6).

tends to do)—he participates in them (both in the text and design) in the moment, in the present, constructing himself as a character. Blake, as a character, participates in conflated moments of inspiration that the other characters enact or undergo. In addition, Blake describes (both verbally and pictorially) a moment of the poem in which he is being visited by Ololon, Milton's Emanation. Blake's cottage garden, then, becomes the site of a crucial event in the poem. In both these cases, Blake has not only written himself into the verbal drama, but he has also engraved and painted himself into the visual drama so that we *see* him act (or acted upon) as well as read about it. Thus, in *Milton*, the epic poet does not merely recount; he also participates in visionary acts of inspiration. As a character within his own poem, Blake makes himself a performer—he is an actor among his own “Visionary forms dramatic” (*Jerusalem* 98.28, E 257), contributing to the acts of inspiration and self-annihilation and performing his identity within the space of the poem.

Milton suggests the theatrical or performance-based performative in other ways. Manfred Pfister differentiates drama from narrative forms as follows: “whilst the receiver of a dramatic text feels directly confronted with the characters represented, in narrative texts they are mediated by a more or less concrete narrator figure” (3); “In other words, the characters are allowed to present themselves directly in their role as speakers. It is therefore the figures’ speech, and, above all, their dialogical speech, which constitutes the predominant verbal matrix used in dramatic texts” (6). The epic *Milton* begins with an apparent narrator, Blake the poet; however, we soon see that he becomes subsumed in the poem as a character. Furthermore, the other characters speak for themselves, delivering speeches of their own unmediated by a conventional narrator figure. In fact, in his *Annotations to Swedenborg*, Blake articulates a distinction between writer and characters when he chastises Swedenborg for conflating the two: “Thus Fools quote Shakespeare The Above is Theseus’s opinion Not Shakespeares You might as well quote Satans blasphemies from Milton & give them as Miltons Opinions” (E 601). Blake presumes that the characters have their own voice, a voice which cannot be immediately aligned with the writer. He complicates this viewpoint by presenting himself as the nominal author and narrator at first, but then he makes the author and narrator a character rather than a governing voice. Consequently, we can take nothing for granted in this poem. Even when Blake himself speaks, his very dramatizing of himself makes it impossible to

take anything at face value. Moreover, like any other character, he writes himself as having limited knowledge about the unfolding events of the poem.

The embodiment that marks theatre also correlates Blake's works to the stage. The word theatre refers to "seeing and sight" in Greek, as Joseph Roach explains (46). The theatre is a sensory experience in that we typically see (and often hear) the actors and the spectacle on the stage. It is of the body and uses the senses in a way that private, silent reading does not. Blake's poem not only forces a visual engagement with his designs thanks to his composite art, but it also emphasizes the body and action more than the space of the mind and contemplation. For Blake, the imagination is not separate from the body. For example, in the invocation, Blake calls on higher powers to tell the story of Milton in Eternity:

Daughters of Beulah! Muses who inspire the Poets Song
Record the journey of immortal Milton thro' your Realms

.....

Come into my hand

By your mild power; descending down the Nerves of my right arm
From out the Portals of my Brain, where by your ministry

The Eternal Great Humanity Divine. planted his Paradise[.] (2.1-8, E 96)

He asks the Daughters of Beulah to physically write about Milton's quest, using his body as a conduit. Blake implores them to enter and take over his physical body, his "hand," "the Nerves of [his] right arm" and his "Brain," so that they may write this vision of Eternity. Surprisingly, this kind of invocation scene is very much of the body. As Angela Esterhammer notes, "its intensely physical conception of the process of inspiration" is "[r]adical" (*Creating States* 185). Emphasizing the physical act of writing and the body parts involved in such an act, Blake subordinates the more esoteric counterpart of poetic creation. He does not ask for spiritual guidance or for his mental powers to be fortified. Even when he could use a more abstract word such as "mind," he chooses, instead, the concrete and biological term "brain." He joins the idea of the immaterial imagination to the material body as the site of paradise.

Furthermore, Blake does not figure Eternity as a space of immaterial bodies and eternal rest. In Eternity, no one should rest in peace; to do so would mean stasis or a kind

of death. At the beginning of Book II of *Milton*, Blake writes, “to / The Sons of Eden the moony habitations of Beulah, / Are from Great Eternity a mild & pleasant Rest” (30.12-14, E 129). Beulah provides a place of rest, but Blake does not make this the desired state. Eternity exists as a space of “the Great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration, / To build the Universe stupendous: Mental forms Creating” (30.19-20, E 129). S. Foster Damon explains that Eternity is here defined as “a place of great activity,” but not a physical activity; instead, he claims, “The great activity [...] consists in the hunting of Ideas and the mental warfare between them” (130). While Blake does refer to “Mental Fight” in the introductory lyric of the poem (1.13, E 95), the tone of this passage about Eternity indicates the physical as well as the mental. It is true that Blake opposes violent action in conflict so that “the Great Wars of Eternity” must preclude it, but it is equally true that he does not oppose physical activity and embodiment. The actual “build[ing of] the Universe stupendous” implies what we would call the external and physical world. Esterhammer argues, “The sentence is never completed, but culminates with and remains suspended on the present participle ‘Creating’ [...]. It is not certain whether ‘Mental forms’ is the subject or object of ‘Creating,’ but in either case the act of creation itself is the main focus of the lines” (121). Blake does not clarify whether or not such creation remains purely imaginative, suggesting that the construction of the universe depends on both “Mental forms [that] Creat[e]” and “[the] Creating [of]” “Mental forms.” I argue that this process of creation necessitates the involvement of the body, given that the poem as a whole, particularly in its depiction of the role of the body in both text and designs, does not reject physical or material interventions for mental ones, and, in fact, makes them crucial to Milton’s journey.

As with many maxims one tries to attribute to Blake, an alternative perspective can most certainly be found. For instance, in speaking of the natural world, he says, “I assert for My self that I do not behold the Outward Creation & that to me it is a hindrance & not Action it is as the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me” (*VLJ* E 565). Although this is Blake at his polemical best, I argue that his point is more about reshifting the focus in art to the human and less about his disdain for the natural world or even for anything physical. He singles out “Action” as the crucial human expression. To say that all his talk of bodies, creation, and action is metaphorical, as Damon does, I think is to dismiss

crucial aspects of Blake's understanding of human existence. In *Jerusalem*, as elsewhere, "the Great Wars of Eternity" and the dual activity of "Mental forms Creating" manifest themselves in the ceaseless exchange of and conflict between ideas; Blake's giant beings conversed together in Visionary forms dramatic which bright
 Redounded from their Tongues in thunderous majesty, in Visions
 In new Expanses, creating exemplars of Memory and of Intellect
 Creating Space, Creating Time according to the wonders Divine
 Of Human Imagination[.] (98.28-32, E 257-58)

Such an activity, as it is depicted in this long poem, not only externalizes the inner, but it also depicts a bodily act—conversation—and the body—in this case, the tongue—as leading to the embodiment and creation of the universe. As with *Jerusalem*, Milton's ultimate creative acts constitute a union between imagination and physical performance. Indeed, for Blake, the two are inseparable, and to think otherwise is an "Error": "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul [...] Energy is the only life and is from the Body" (*MHH* pl. 4, E 34) so that energy depends on the body to become action. W. J. T. Mitchell rightly states, "For Blake, the dualistic world of mind and body, time and space, is an illusion which must not be imitated, but is to be dispelled" (*Blake's Composite Art* 31).

Other details included in the poem indicate the vital importance of physical acts (in addition to mental and imaginative ones) in Eternity. For instance, Blake aligns action with sound, and, conversely, stasis with silence. As a negative state according to Blake, silence connotes passivity. As a result, Los chastises Satan for seeking to cast off his labour and to take up his brother's, but, more vehemently, Los chastises Satan's passivity. Los exclaims, "If you account it Wisdom when you are angry to be silent, and / Not to shew it: I do not account that Wisdom but Folly" (4.6-7, E 98), and he tells Satan, "Get to thy Labours at the Mills & leave me to my wrath" (4.14, E 98). Los has the ability to be wrathful and to express that wrath; Satan does not. Instead, he suppresses any anger he feels, more content to remain silent than physically express or enact such anger. Los clearly views this as a fault, while he views his own wrath positively. Later, Satan succeeds in switching tasks with Palamabron. The switch results in a topsy-turvy world that Los marks as a day of mourning to be remembered in future times:

follow with me, and tomorrow again

Resume your labours, & this day shall be a mournful day
 Wildly they follow'd Los and Rintrah, & the Mills were silent
 They mourn'd all day this mournful day of Satan & Palamabron[.]
 (8.21-24, E 102)

All activity ceases as each labourer puts aside his given task, and silence marks the inactivity as an ominous day. This “mournful day” counts as an unusual one in Eternity, suggesting that the stillness experienced on this day does not belong to the composition of the place. Labour and activity define this realm and make it vital; the turn to rest signals that something is not quite right, suggesting an unhealthy state of affairs.

The main action of the poem also criticizes silence and stasis while at the same time elevating the physical over the contemplative. Interested in the catalyst of Milton's deed, Blake asks the Muses to tell him the reasons for such an act of gigantic proportions:

Say first! what mov'd Milton, who walkd about in Eternity
 One hundred years, pondring the intricate mazes of Providence
 Unhappy tho in heav'n, he obey'd, he murmur'd not. he was silent
 Viewing his Sixfold Emanation scatter'd thro' the deep
 In torment! To go into the deep her to redeem & himself perish?
 What cause at length mov'd Milton to this unexampled deed[?]
 A Bards prophetic Song! for sitting at eternal tables,
 Terrific among the Sons of Albion in chorus solemn & loud
 A Bard broke forth! all sat attentive to the awful man.
 Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation[.] (2.16-25, E 96)

Again, silence marks a kind of negative passivity in which Milton sees the situation of his Emanation but fails to act to change this circumstance. Blake's poem begins with Milton's passivity, but the rest of the poem depicts only his forthcoming action. Silence here takes the shape of acquiescence as Milton ‘obeys’ and maintains his ‘silence.’ Prior to the “prophetic Song,” Milton's existence is marked by passivity, obedience, and silence—related negative terms in the poem. He breaks free from this state by choosing to act and embarking on a journey.

However, Milton's quest seems strange for many reasons. For one, he is already in Eternity, so his sense of dissatisfaction or unhappiness seems out of place.

Nonetheless, he still needs salvation or enlightenment. Being in Eternity has not conferred that on him. He has not achieved the ultimate Christian spiritual goal, leaving us to ask what is the goal once you find yourself in Eternity? And how does identity figure into a space such as Eternity? Milton does not find his salvation by mulling over various theological questions or philosophies in his mind; rather, he achieves it by an act, or, to use Blake's words, by an "unexampled deed." In fact, as David Riede argues, "Blake ironically parallels Milton with Adam and Eve to contrast their aboriginal 'happy State' with his unhappiness in the false heaven of his religious vision. Adam and Eve, however, were happy as long as they obeyed God, while Milton is unhappy even though 'he obey'd' [...]" God (268). Blake also ironically contrasts the subject of *Paradise Lost*, the cause of the fall of humanity (the failure to passively obey), with Milton's heroic deed (his resistance to passivity) that redeems humanity. Milton's present or soon-to-come activity contrasts with his past one hundred years of passivity, where he remains "silent" and "ponders," "obeys," and "murmurs not"—antithetical modes of being to a prophet-poet—even as he watches his Emanation in torment. Now, after all this inaction and silence, he speaks and begins his journey. By juxtaposing stasis and motion as well as passivity and activity in this way, Blake aligns the poem with a dramatic space where bodies act, often leading to redemptive possibilities.

Milton has an intriguing provocation for his actions here. He chooses to act only after he has witnessed, heard, and spectated a performance: that of the "loud voic'd Bard" who sings his prophetic Song (14.9, E 108). Blake directly links performance to effecting change. Parker and Sedgwick explain, "[I]t's the aptitude of the explicit performative for mobilizing and epitomizing such transformative effects on interlocutory space that makes it almost irresistible—in the face of a lot of discouragement from Austin himself—to associate it with theatrical performance" (13). Far from being distasteful and impotent, performance of a theatrical nature, whether literally taking place on a stage or not, has the power to incite action, just as the Bard's performance incites Milton's singular act.⁶ The

⁶ While critics disagree as to the potency and coherence of the Bard's Song in this respect (207-08), Peter Otto persuasively argues that the merit of the performance lies in "The Bard's visionary deconstruction" ("Visionary Deconstruction" 228) in which he shows the problematic nature of judgment, particularly the judgment of an individual, even Satan. I would add that Milton's subsequent speech, in

Bard's Song also provokes the whole assembly: a "great murmuring in the Heavens of Albion" follows the performance (14.4, E 108). John Hughes convincingly argues,

Beyond rage and indignation, Blake is also motivated by his affirmative, visionary, political and ethical enthusiasm, and importantly mobilizes a kind of thought that is based not on identity as interiority and reflection, but on individuality as response. Here music becomes particularly important, because Blake uses it to show how the exteriorized powers of passion, sensation, imagination break out from the integral, centripetal, identities of the self, of meaning, and of the moment. (92)

Included under the umbrella term 'music' are songs. For Blake, being a spectator who watches and listens to a performance has active potential, and it suggests the importance of interpersonal relationships—one character's act or performance compels the response of others. Indeed, the very state or identity of one can be affected by the actions of another. In contrast, Wordsworthian poetics, "pondring the intricate mazes of Providence"—or Nature as the case may be—does not lead to the visionary. In a Blakean context, one attains or participates in the visionary, in the Eternal, through action and vociferous speech (whether performing a song or speaking out and leaving Eternity), a speech that is always part of an exchange with another(s)—not a solitary monologue.⁷

The decentralization of one specific voice can also be seen in the absence of quotation marks, which confuses speakers throughout the poem. When the poem tells us that a "Bard broke forth" to sing his song, the subsequent exclamation, "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation," seem to be his. Yet Blake's failure to set off the speech makes it difficult to assign it to a speaker clearly. The exclamation may very well belong to the narrating voice that has begun to tell us about the Bard's song. The result, here, is to conflate Blake and the Bard, as Balfour also argues (151), because the

which he names himself Satan, supports this view in that Milton appears to subvert the process of judgment and revise the way he views himself in relation to others; as Otto says, the Song "open[s] the possibility of a change between self and other."

⁷ See Leonard W. Deen, who argues that "Blake [...] imagines human identity as active conversing in paradise" (19), for an illuminating discussion of the importance of communication in Blake's understanding of humanity and his vision of Eternity.

passage begins with Blake asking the Muses to tell the story of Milton through him and then slips into the Bard's story at the end; the "your" in the exclamation "your eternal salvation" also conflates audiences: the assembly of Eternals and us, Blake's audience. These confluences indicate that both those in Eternity and on Earth (i.e., us) need saving, making us part of the spectating assembly as well, and, thus, part of the poem. It also gives performative force to the words, as they themselves have the power to save: "Mark well my words! they are of your eternal salvation." By marking them, the "words," we are led to salvation.

Furthermore, the use of such deictics, "my words," "they," and "your eternal salvation," emphasize the uncertainty contained within the phrase and the whole process of inspiration as configured in this poem. In reference to Roman Jakobson and Jean-François Lyotard, Esterhammer discusses the impact of "the shifting nature" of such words in the context of a Blakean inspiration (the invocation passage being one example) (*Creating States* 185). She rightly claims, "In the process of reading, a deictic interrupts a constative statement by introducing a moment of ambiguity in which the reader must decide on the appropriate frame or frames of reference. Blake exploits the context-dependency and the disruptiveness of deictics to revise the concept of inspiration" (186), with "a focus on the individual as the defining term of vision—and on imaginative vision as that which defines the individual" (188). Blake's manipulation of deictics highlights an ambiguity already present within them because of the significance of inspiration within *Milton*. Blake creates multiple layers of potentialities: the Muses relaying the story to Blake, the Bard performing the Song for Milton and the assembly, and Blake relaying the story for us the readers. This layering serves to expand the moment of inspiration past the narrative level to the level of the audience and to open it to a more inclusive process than one confined solely to unique individuals.

These multiple layers function in a different but comparable capacity as well. For example, the Bard's performance operates self-reflexively, representing a prophetic vision within a prophetic narrative, which arises out of a visionary moment. The Song's effect within the poem and the creation of these layers is much like a play within a play. Pfister, in his formal analysis of the dramatic genre, says of these moments,

In a play-within-the-play one group of dramatic figures from the

superordinate sequences performs a play (the subordinate sequences) to another group of figures. By inserting a second fictional level into the text the dramatist duplicates the performance situation of the external communication system on the internal level. The fictional audience on stage corresponds to the real audience in the auditorium and the fictional authors, actors and directors correspond to their real-life counterparts in the production of the text. (223)

Despite not being composed as a drama, the poem includes similar dramatic elements. The song within a song functions in a parallel way to the play within a play as Pfister describes it. The Bard sings his song for Milton (as well as the assembly); Milton performs his actions, perhaps not for but in front of (speaking in visionary terms) Blake; and Blake re-stages both in the poem he writes for us, the readers. In *Hamlet*, the play within the play provokes the “superordinate” characters, or “fictional audience on stage,” as the play within the play mirrors the “superordinate” action. Similarly, in *A Midsummer's Night Dream*, the play the mechanicals stage functions as amusement for the “superordinate” characters. In both plays, the play within the play has the added effect of making the real audience break with their suspension of disbelief through the “duplicat[ion of] the performance situation,” as Pfister says. In *Milton*, the various levels of prophetic narrative and inspirational experience function similarly, implicating the audience in the visionary experience. The Bard’s Song, which represents one prophetic narrative, occurs within the story of Milton’s journey of self-annihilation, which signifies another visionary tale, a tale that, in turn, functions as the product of Blake’s own visionary experience. The Bard sings a song that inspires Milton to act—Milton’s act inspires Blake to write this poem—and yet there is a sense in which this poem was what began the initial movement (i.e., Blake himself seems to be the Bard as well, provoking Milton to act). In turn, we, as audience, engage with a visionary work meant to inspire us.

Identity, Acting, and the Correspondence between Inner and Outer

Such dramatic and theatrical contextualizations do two important things: one, they place Blake and his composite art a little more clearly in his time, and, two, they offer a fruitful backdrop against which to unravel Blake’s concepts of self and identity. The

closet-versus-stage debate that raged during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries—the closet being a private and often mental space and the stage being a public and sensory, bodily space—raised questions concerning the superiority and value of reflection versus action, subjectivity versus objectivity, mental space versus public sphere, and interiority versus exteriority. Stage critics such as Coleridge, Hazlitt, and Lamb at times derided the stage, favouring instead the mental act of reading. They argued that a staging of, for instance, Shakespeare's *King Lear* could never equal the performance that took place in an individual reader's mind as he/she read the play. For these critics, the embodiment and the "spectacalization" of the drama negatively opened it up to the external world and sensory response. In contrast, writers such as Joanna Baillie, and even Percy Bysshe Shelley with his *Cenci* (1819), advocated the staging of their dramas—the public space of physical action and social interaction.

Jonas Barish's *The Antitheatrical Prejudice* (1981) defends imaginative expression, particularly that of human performativity and theatrical performance.⁸ As I explained in the introduction, he delineates one, more or less, consistent strain of antagonism toward performance: a fear of and resistance to mutability or role-playing. The fear of this protean quality stems from the fact that it destabilizes what people had taken to be a stable idea of identity. Surveying puritanical responses to the stage, Barish states, "Players are evil because they try to substitute a self of their own contriving for the one given them by God" (93). Performance is mutable and the identity of actors appears unstable, as actors demonstrate the ability to change who they 'are' at will. Barish's account shows that, throughout theatre's history, antitheatricalists prove to be uncomfortable with the fact that actors can play, or "be," different people. These antitheatricalists cling to a belief in immutable identity to maintain a hold on some sort of fixed ground in life, but theatrical practices—whether on the stage or in the everyday

⁸ Around the same time, Stephen Greenblatt wrote *Renaissance Self-fashioning* (1980), which takes several historical examples from the period and discusses the way they participated in the spirit of the age, "conceiv[ing] of themselves as malleable roles in life itself and as well as writing" (xiii) and displaying "a profound mobility" (7). The role of policing institutions in shaping selves and the opposition from resisting individuals compose a main focus of Greenblatt's argument. My analysis of Blake's representation of identity, for the most part, does not focus on these kinds of pressures on the formation of an individual identity, but it does engage with the effect all human identities have on each other.

(such as rituals and ceremonies)—reflect the tenuousness of such a belief. The antitheatrical fears that Barish outlines indicate a deep anxiety about the nature of identity, an anxiety concerning the nature of the relationship between internal workings and external manifestations. We find such an anxiety, as I will elaborate, in a number of forms in Blake's time.

The actor's role-playing and ability to shift identities does not come without a cost. Barish describes the double bind of such a freedom of identity:

[A]ll conditions of modern life have helped accelerate the decomposition of the personality [...]. If, thanks partly to Freud, we have gained an unprecedented freedom of self-creation, an undreamed of power to make and remake ourselves at will, like Proteus or the chameleon or the actor, we have also sacrificed in the process, as Plato, Rousseau, and Nietzsche all prophesied and lamented, a certain clarity of outline, an integrity of self to which our thoughts and acts could have unambiguous reference. (472-73)

Dispelling the notion of a fixed identity situates us in a sea of uncertainty with all its positive and negative associations. Taking our cue from stage actors, we can "remake ourselves" to be other than who family, society, or ideology designates us to be, but this protean power also brings with it a loss of a solid ground because it implies that no person need be fixed in a static role, so all relationships and ways of being in the world prove unstable at best. How does Blake's understanding of identity relate to Barish's model of the total "freedom for self-creation"? Milton's acts of self-annihilation and the merging of characters in inspiration most certainly situate the poem *Milton* in such a discussion of identity—but to what extent? Whereas Barish states that, in rejecting a unified and continuous sense of self, we also must reconcile the loss of certainty and foundation or anchor from which we move about the world, Blake arrives at no such conclusion. Even in *Milton*, where self-annihilation offers Milton the key to his redemption (and to ours as well), Blake refuses to do away with separate individualities or notions of the self altogether.

Barish's exploration of the way performance frees us from fixed positions in life takes us in the direction of constructionist theories of identity, but it does not address to

any large degree the external impositions embedded in the creation of identity that others address. For instance, philosophers and theorists such as Friedrich Nietzsche and Judith Butler have argued that the “I” is merely a linguistic construct, an illusion, and that individual identity is contingent on a number of external and ideological factors, suggesting that various kinds of identities (personal, gendered, social) are constructed over time rather than being innate in any sense. Is Blake more suited to these kinds of identity theories that include some restraints and limitations? Again, I do not think so. Despite emphasizing the role of self-annihilation and the taking up of various identities in one body (thanks to inspiration), Blake does not articulate characters in his works so as to make him fit uncomplicatedly under the category of identity-construction. As I have pointed out, Blake does not reject essentialist notions, nor the “clarity of outline” that Barish refers to, altogether. Yes, he destabilizes the singular, personal identities of his characters in both the text and designs, but his familiar views about the importance of “minute particulars, every in their own identity” (*Jerusalem* 38.23, E 185) and a firm, clear, “bounding outline” (*Descriptive Catalogue* E 550) suggest the opposite. Rather than pigeon-holing Blake as either-or, I hope to explore these extremes and see what potentials arise from them and what implications these potentials have for his period and for current debates about identity.

Union and disjunction describe the relation between Blake’s characters in Eternity. The identities of characters merge together while remaining separate somehow—characters combine yet retain particularities of self. Blake’s Bard compels Milton to throw off his selfhood, which is Satan, suggesting that we too should follow suit. However, although the Milton at the beginning of the poem is not the same Milton who finishes his quest, at the same time, he is the same Milton. Negotiating Blake’s seemingly contradictory views on identity is a challenge. I read Blake’s dual desire to both escape the limitations of an unchanging identity and retain such a thing as a way to open up possibilities for revolutionary change, while maintaining agency and responsibility for actions. Characters usually commit acts only after being inspired or provoked by another character. Yet being inspired does not entail the absolute control of one character over another; instead, it is a fusion between or among characters so that an act has multiple agents. This kind of inspiration entails activity on the part of both

characters, displacing passivity altogether. In each moment of inspiration, a character's identity is not overwhelmed by the identity of the inspirer. Rather, the two merge together and are expanded by this action.

These opposite drives in the poem—reaffirming and deconstructing identity—necessitate a closer look at various definitions of identity. Three of the many entries on identity in the *OED* are particularly relevant for my definition of the term in this chapter. The first definition includes as key markers of identity “[t]he sameness of a person or thing at all times or in all circumstances; the condition or fact that a person or thing is itself and not something else; individuality, personality.” Also, with respect to personal identity, the *OED* lists as defining components “the condition or fact of remaining the same person throughout the various phases of existence; continuity of the personality.” This understanding of identity, which emphasizes the etymology of the word as same or sameness, comes closest to what I mean by “stable” or “singular” identity, particularly as juxtaposed with unstable, unclear or obscured identities found in *Milton*. In the poem, characters share deeds, undergo similar processes, and perform simultaneous acts, suggesting that deeds identify a doer in the sense of establishing a doer's identity. Of course, Blake cannot fully cast off the notion of personal identity. While the self exhibits continuity of personality, it also exhibits discontinuity by becoming or entering other characters, thereby altering the “original” self in some way. Yet, as my analysis of labour in *Milton* will suggest, Blake sees a person's calling as fixed and continuous so that a person is (or should be) his or her deeds (or work).

The second definition states, “Belonging or relating to identity [...], as in identity crisis, a phase of varying severity undergone by an individual in his need to establish his identity in relation to his associates and society as part of the process of maturing.” With respect to this psychological term, there is a sense that, in the maturation process, one finds or constructs a ground—some stable and firm element(s), whether memories, traits of self, likes and dislikes—by which to distinguish oneself from others in order to assert the “I.” Blake's characters flow quite easily amongst each other's identities without experiencing any kind of identity crisis *per se*; rather, the merging of identities allows for reification and redemption, not crisis. Characters integrate with one another, enabling

crucial events and changes as well as an integration that seems to empower rather than cripple individuals.

The third definition from the *OED* places identity in the context of identity theft: “the dishonest acquisition of personal information in order to perpetrate fraud, typically by obtaining credit, loans, etc., in someone else’s name.” This definition points toward the social practicality of having a community of fixed “I’s”. A belief in and perpetuation of continuous and stable identities make various social relations and modes of existence possible. However, someone can impersonate someone else by stealing his/her name, which is a primary marker of identity in society, in order to access various financial and personal records and accounts. In this context, the kind of identity commingling found in *Milton* would be problematic.

Despite the theoretical discourse about and arguments for identity-construction, most of us accept and practice the notion, or perhaps necessary fiction, of a continuous and stable identity in our daily lives. Although various theories deconstructing the idea of a stable “I” suggest we could, and perhaps should, do otherwise, most of us do not begin each day anew as a blank slate. In general, we hold to memories (regardless of how questionable their reliability may be), to our names, and to our established relations to people and the world. Even if we could cast off these things, others would enforce the stability and sameness for us, calling us by name and engaging with us as the past has determined.

While Blake’s model of inspiration does not appear to translate well to the practicalities of everyday life, it does offer some thought-provoking potential alternatives to the way we interact with others and the world and to the way we perceive the limits of human identity. As Horn argues in relation to *The Book of Urizen*, Blake does not denounce the concept of the “I,” only the concept of the “self as an independent entity,” isolated from everything around it (268). Through the poem *Milton* and its configuration of inspiration, Blake calls for a greater sensitivity to the dependence that the self has on other selves and shows us the potential this view of identity holds—without completely eliminating the coherent “I.”

In the context of these definitions of identity, I argue that Blake evokes and juxtaposes the two extremes of an essential, unchanging, singular identity and a

constructed, malleable, non-singular one. He discusses identity in a sustained manner at least twice in his works—in his Annotations and *A Vision of the Last Judgment*—not including the several briefer references in his poetry. What does Blake mean when he uses the term identity? Blake’s Annotations to Swedenborg’s *Divine Love and Divine Wisdom* respond to Swedenborg’s claim that “there is one Infinite, Uncreate, Omnipotent and God—is not one and the same Essence but one and the same Identity?” (E 604) Blake writes,

Essence is not Identity but from Essence proceeds Identity & from one Essence may proceed many Identities as from one Affection may proceed many thoughts Surely this is an oversight That there is but one Omnipotent Uncreate & God I agree but that there is but one Infinite I do not. for if all but God is not Infinite they shall come to an End which God forbid If the Essence was the same *as the* Identity there could be but one Identity. which is false Heaven would upon this plan be but a Clock but one & the same Essence is therefore Essence & not Identity[.] (original emphasis)

Blake distinguishes between the terms *essence* and *identity*, terms that Swedenborg aligns. For Blake, essence appears to be something singular and something that exists prior to and separate from identity, perhaps suggesting that God himself is essence from which other identities emerge and that God has no specific identity. All identities are also infinite, by which Blake means immortal; they transcend the impermanence of vegetative world. Hughes says that, here, Blake annotates “with an affirmation of the divine as an ideal essence capable of infinitely various actualizations” (102), implying that essence, or God, expresses itself through innumerable identities (of people and things). The implication appears to be that we each have a part of that divine spark or essence having arisen from it, but we are not equivalent to it because we cannot do the same (i.e., express ourselves as, or create, particular identities).

As I will argue, *Milton*’s performative re-articulations of inspirational moments actually suggests otherwise. Leonard W. Deen makes the case for “identity-as-community” in his reading of Blake: “Identity is the community of men acting through

the individual man to create a human world” (183). He attributes Blake’s qualities of essence to the communal identity of humanity and his qualities of identity to the particular expressions (i.e., individuals) of this communal form. In light of Deen’s reading, I interpret Blake’s distinction between essence and identity not as the disjunction between God’s abilities and our own but as the difference between the ability of a single individual and those of the greater community of “I’s”. Such a reading demonstrates that neither “individual man” nor “the community of men” can be sacrificed in the overall understanding of identity.

In the *Last Judgment*, Blake continues to hold firm to the idea of identity and of identities as separate, permanent, and eternal when he discusses the possibility of one thing becoming another. He says,

In Eternity one Thing never Changes into another Thing Each Identity is Eternal consequently Apuleius’s Golden Ass & Ovids Metamorphosis & others of the like kind are being renderd a Permanent Statue but not Changed or Transformed into Another Identity while it retains its own Individuality. A Man can never become Ass nor Horse some are born with shapes of Fable yet they contain Vision in a Sublime degree being derived from real Vision in More Ancient Writings[.] Lots Wife being Changed into Pillar of Salt alludes to the Mortal Body being renderd a Permanent Statue but not Changed or Transformed into Another Identity while it retains its own Individuality. A Man can never become Ass nor Horse some are born with shapes of Men who may be both but Eternal Identity is one thing & Corporeal Vegetation is another thing [...]. (E 556)

Temporary states or corporal changes such as the ones described above do not result in a change on the level of identity, suggesting that identity is prior to or transcends the mortal body and earthly life and all physical transformations. In this passage, individuality relates to uniqueness (perhaps to the extent that we all demonstrate unique personalities and abilities, or, as Damon says, it “differentiates each person from every other person” (194)), while identity relates to some inner core that cannot be affected by physical alteration (e.g., changing into an ass or pillar of salt).

The distinction between these two terms is not at all clear. How precisely does individuality differ from identity? If they do differ, does not this difference mean that identity exists as a more abstract term for all humanity (since individuality, and not identity, distinguishes us from others)? This cannot be if we consider the first passage on essence, where Blake refers to a number of “identities.” Blake very clearly dissociates the corporeal body from the “Eternal Identity” that animates it. He says that signs of mutability may visibly appear in the material world, but “Each Identity” resists alteration and maintains both continuity and unity. It seems odd for a revolutionary writer, for a writer who wanted apocalyptic renovation, to oppose change so steadfastly. It is also odd for one who previously writes that the body and soul are not, in fact, distinct to make a distinction between a static soul and a body in flux. For Blake, it would seem identity or the self does not or cannot undergo the revolutionary process—identity remains in a kind of stasis. In the end, though, neither of the two above passages mirrors exactly the representations of identity and the self found in *Milton*.

In art, Blake argues that without this “distinct, sharp, and wirey [...] bounding line [...] the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling” (E 550). He continues, “How do we distinguish the oak from the beech, the horse from the ox, but by the bounding outline? How do we distinguish one face or countenance from another, but by the bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements?” In terms of the hard line, art and life must mirror each other. Without this kind of definite distinction in the world, “this line” which is “life itself,”⁹ we would be unable to distinguish between objects and people; without this distinction, we would slip into interchangeability, equality, and general “chaos.” Reinforcing the emphasis Blake places on discrete

⁹ In the context of human divinity, Anne Mellor’s analysis of the “bounding line” in Blake’s works shows how something that seems restrictive can actually be vital and expansive: “For the divine vision of man as God to survive on earth [...] it must be imaged in a specific bounded form that can be seen and imitated by men. Only if this vision is concretely presented to the five senses will men be able to see it clearly [...] one must articulate that awareness within a unique and bounded form, a particular self-image and social role. Otherwise, Blake believed, one’s consciousness of one’s own divinity will fade away or be repressed; and one’s Energy will be dissipated into incoherent, undirected activity” (*Blake’s Human Form Divine* 235). The divine and infinite, then, depend on firm outlines and precise or concrete expression.

individualities, Saree Makdisi assesses Blake's method in relation to his understanding of freedom. He has persuasively positioned Blake's repetitive drive regarding the copies of his work in the context of commodification and industrialization, where Blake resists both these emerging aspects of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century culture. Makdisi states, "Blake tried to subvert the reproductive machinery of commercial engraving in his illuminated books, using it to produce a number of dazzlingly heterogeneous 'copies' that have no 'original' to refer back to [...]" (*William Blake* 12). Makdisi quotes a letter by Blake in which he rejects this aspect of the revolution (and, thus, equal rights discourses such as Paine's) that makes men interchangeable in a system of exchange because there is a danger of "turn[ing] all of its members into equally homogenous and intermeasurable units," paralleling the "industrial logic of commodification" ("The Political Aesthetic of Blake's Images" 131; see also *William Blake* 201-03). Why then does Blake complicate this matter in *Milton*? What does this kind of insistence on the singularity and permanence of identity mean in this epic where the main action(s) entails characters merging with one another? Or what does the fluidity of identity mean for the critic piecing the works of Blake together? *Milton* contradicts the absolute view of identity that emerges in Blake's aesthetic treatises and annotations. The characters certainly do undergo transformations as they participate in moments of inspiration, enter into other characters, and seem to be one-and-the-same character, thereby destabilizing their singular identities. This discrepancy between the poem and his other discussions of identity leaves us with a conundrum. On the one hand, Blake's more theoretical statements seem to uphold a single, singular, continuous identity for each character; yet, on the other, his poem explores ideas of multiple, various, discontinuous identities for his characters by merging them.

The act of becoming another person finds a parallel in acting: actors enact other identities on the stage. In relation to becoming someone else or acting the part of another, Barish says, "One corollary of the concept of an absolute identity was the belief in an absolute sincerity. If it was possible truly to know the 'uniform, distinct and proper being' one had received from God, then it was possible either to affirm that being in all one's acts—to be 'such in truth' as one was 'in show'—or to deny it by disguise or pretense" (94). Role-playing and play-acting, then, are marked with hypocrisy; they

expose an anxiety about the connection between the inner world of an individual and his/her external acts. To be sincere meant one was natural and not the opposite—hypocritical, acting a part, not meaning what one says, or having one's deeds fail to correspond to one's principles or words. In *Sincerity and Authenticity*, Lionel Trilling explains “a mind wholly at one with itself” as “an instance of sincerity unqualified” (4), and he later compares the “True, which is to say loyal, [to] never wavering in constancy,” another aspect of sincerity. In this context, “sincerity” and the related term “constancy” are associated with a stable and “true” identity, one given to exhibit steadfast behaviour and consistent action regardless of varying circumstances, while inconstancy and insincerity are associated with unstable identity, one prone to disguise and deceit (and with chameleon-like or protean qualities), and one given to exhibit contradictory behaviour under any given circumstances. To explore the point, Trilling discusses the etymology of the word sincerity: “It derived from the Latin word *sincerus* and first meant exactly what the Latin word means in its literal use—clean, or sound, or pure. An old and merely fanciful etymology, *sine cera*, without wax, had in mind an object of virtu [or an object of workmanship] which was not patched up and passed off as sound [...]” (12). Such an etymology clarifies the correlation between sincerity and identity. The ideals of constancy and sincerity reflect a need to link external behaviour or action to interior feelings and intentions in order to maintain a belief in a unified self. To be inconstant or insincere suggests a disconnection between those things, suggesting a fragmented self, a self that is not whole.

Blake's construction of identity relates to issues of sincerity and constancy, the correspondence between inner and outer, between whom a person presents him/herself to be and who he/she 'actually' is. These issues were topical in both the eighteenth and the nineteenth centuries, suggesting that Blake's understanding of identity engages with the specific concerns of his time. As Elaine Hadley states, “‘Sincerity’ became a crucial concept even as it was necessarily more difficult to ascertain” (21). One particular theatrical example of this interest in the relationship between inner and outer is Baillie's *Plays on the Passions*, where she outlines her dramatic theory in which she articulates a fascination with discerning and tracing the passions within an individual, with understanding the internal workings and the resulting external manifestations. This

attempt to delineate and represent the relation between inner and outer is particularly evident in her *De Monfort* (1798) in which the title character questions the sincerity of his rival, Rezenvelt, and chastises his friend Freberg for believing in the precise correlation between internal and external. De Monfort states,

Freberg, though know'st not man; not nature's man,
 But only him who, in smooth studied works
 Of polish'd sages, shines deceitfully
 In all the splendid foppery of virtue.
 That man was never born whose secret soul
 With all its motley treasure of dark thoughts,
 Foul fantasies, vain musing, and wild dreams,
 Was ever open'd to another's scan.
 Away, away! It is delusion all. (1.2.91-99)

De Monfort makes the distinction between a person as he/she is in social settings—even implying a kind of performativity, artifice, and disingenuousness—and a person's internal nature. He very clearly tells Freberg that inner and outer do not match or equate. In fact, the interior “secret soul” remains inaccessible to others. De Monfort does not question the existence of this inner core, merely the ability for others to know it. Yet when he cannot reconcile his (murderous) deeds to his own identity, he exclaims, “I have no name—I now am nothing” (5.2.60-61) and attempts to obliterate himself. In the end, De Monfort's view that his acts and his identity are disjunctive leads to his inability to stabilize his sense of self. Here, stability means the alignment of deeds with identity and the outer with the inner.

Laura Kirkley, in speaking about translation practices in the late eighteenth century, says of sincerity, “In an aesthetic context the term denoted all that was natural, spontaneous, and original. Literary art could be condemned as contrived, artful or imitative. Hence the aesthetic ideas informing English translation theory favoured the creation of an ‘original’ perspective” (97). Indeed, Blake advocated original art over copies. It is interesting that spontaneity is here associated with sincerity (reminiscent of Wordsworth's spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling that translates to the poetic medium). Such a definition suggests that something unexpected and new could arise

without compromising the inner and outer dynamic. Thus, the potential for change and creative response determines the concepts of sincerity and constancy.

In regards to identity specifically, how does Blake respond to this preoccupation with sincerity and constancy at work in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries? For him, a person's talents or innate potentials should match one's deeds, otherwise one's self will be at risk. Blake seems to suggest that turning away from what one's identity demands is insincere. In the *Last Judgment*, Blake discusses sinful action in relation to identity. He states, "Forgiveness of Sin is only at the Judgment Seat of Jesus the Saviour where the Accuser is cast out. not because he Sins but because he torments the Just & makes them do what he condemns as Sin & what he knows is opposite to their own Identity" (E 565). Blake indicates that Satan becomes an outcast not by sinning in the biblical or Miltonic sense but by compelling people to perform actions that do not correspond to their individual identities. Thus, people sin only when they do what is contrary to their identity. Sibyl C. Jacobson explains that in *The Book of Urizen*, "Urizen invents the 'I' and Laws" (63); in *Milton*, Satan takes on this Urizenic role: "Satan making to himself Laws from his own identity. / Compell'd others to serve him in moral gratitude & submission" (11.10-11, E 104). Identities are not interchangeable or equal; therefore, the dubious distinction of inventing "the 'I' and Laws" resonates with Blake's famous phrase "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" (*MHH* pl. 24, E 44), which indicates the significance of actions to identity. Importantly for Blake, people cannot just change their stations, or labour, in life. People are either Lions or Oxen (reminiscent of Nietzsche's eagles and lambs).

In *Milton*, Satan and Palamabron cannot exchange places, tasks, or roles. Los tells Satan, "Anger me not! thou canst not drive the Harrow in pitys paths. / Thy Work is Eternal Death, with Mills & Ovens & Cauldrons. / Trouble me no more. thou canst not have Eternal Life" (4.16-18, E 98). Fundamentally, Satan represents eternal death, which Frye defines as "physical life" (316). Thus, Satan stands for the impermanent and mortal (and even corrupt) parts of the world, which oppose permanence and immortality (and perhaps purity)—in other words, eternal life. Furthermore, examining Satan as an individual (rather than a symbol) leads to a particular understanding of identity. By demonstrating mutability with respect to his divinely assigned labour, Satan risks his self

and subjects it to potential murder or existence-less-ness. This insistence on maintaining stations in life and assigned roles seems antithetical to the protean nature of actors who take on various roles. Deeds establish and reaffirm identity, and being forced into alternative action, or being restricted from the action that corresponds to one's identity, places identity at risk. To this extent, the Blakean self that remains true to itself also remains constant and sincere: one pursues one's task with devotion, thereby ensuring that the outer expression (deeds) reflects the inner calling (that which defines the identity of an individual self, particularly in the case of Blake as prophet-bard). However, although Blake appears to champion a sentimental or ideal reading of identity and actions, in which constancy and sincerity equal a strict matching of inside with outside, in *Milton*, the importance of inspiration and self-annihilation tells an alternative story.

If one considers the fact that characters merge and that Milton seeks self-annihilation, then *Milton* becomes more varied and nuanced in its notions of inner and outer, sincerity and constancy, fixed identity and mutable identity. Blake's characters open themselves to the moment and to circumstances. Blake appears to practice a kind of adaptability, as the actions of Milton casting off his selfhood and the merging of identities suggest. Milton must undergo self-annihilation to redeem himself and his Emanation, a process that seems to alter *something* (but what?) about his identity. Surely, part of what is wrong with Milton at the beginning of the work has to do with his vocation: he speaks not and acts not. Milton is not the Bard who performs the Song in Eternity. Instead, Milton is the audience. On earth, Milton occupied the role of prophet-poet, but in Eternity that role has been suppressed. I argue that his discontent stems from a kind of identity crisis. Redemption and being inspired would be impossible feats for one closed to any kind of change, and, for Blake, one must necessarily achieve those goals if one is to achieve a visionary existence. Achieving visionary moments and redemption entails being protean enough to allow for an extreme inner alteration. The characters in *Milton* undergo self-annihilation and partake in inspirational moments that do not undercut identity; in fact, they reaffirm it. The apparent mutability belies a constant and sincere inner self. Blake's exploration of identity in *Milton* reflects the tension between inner and outer, an anxiety evident in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Blake revisioned constancy and sincerity to suit a post-Revolutionary world.

He did not abandon the idea of firm and unwavering characters, nor did he reject the possibility of change and the importance of self-transformation; rather, he maintained stability together with a certain degree of transformative potential.

As Barish points out, the figure of the actor lends itself to this coupling of self-transformation and sincerity—albeit problematically. In examining the eighteenth century, Lisa A. Freeman implicitly takes up these various conflicts arising from the problem of determining and defining sincerity and constancy in relation to the actor. In line with Barish's account of acting, which undermined the plausibility of a direct correspondence between inside and outside, she defines the various uses of the term "character," two of the most relevant being character as a moral marker and character as performed on stage. She claims, "What the concept of character offered in the eighteenth century, then, and what the theater could exploit by taking it up, was an understanding of identity not as an emanation of a stable interiority, but as the unstable product of staged contests between interpretable surfaces" (27). The generic conventions of drama in general restrict, and arguably conceal, the interiority of character in comparison to lyric poetry and novels; however, Freeman locates a particular preoccupation with and anxiety surrounding the appearance and reality of character (and identity) in the 1700s, as well as the theatre's specific engagement with this anxiety. She designates the eighteenth-century stage as a site that forces people to deal with the absence of certainty when it comes to connecting external signs of character to interiority: "In the eighteenth century [...] the problem of defining an individual, or the formation and attribution of what we term 'identity,' involved conflicts over the value of outward appearances, or surfaces, as 'real' indices of persons" (21). What the theatre seems to have made painfully clear is the fact that, even offstage in life, knowledge of another person's true self (if such a thing exists) remains closed or hidden to objective examination. If one could not trust a "one-to-one correspondence between signifier and signified" (22), between actions and character, in cases of valuing or determining an identity, then "either [...] there was no true 'inside' or [...] if there were, we have no 'real' access to it. The only basis for assessing others consisted of multiple, contradictory, and competing 'outsides,' that which can be observed but never confidently 'known'" (27). As Freeman notes, such a state of affairs

would be “frightening” for a public that valued character as a sign of moral rectitude. One could no longer make such judgments with any degree of certainty.

The Romantic period produced actors who highlighted the tension between inner and outer in the way that Barish and Freeman describe (i.e., by destabilizing notions of a stable, singular self and by questioning the verifiability of character and moral rectitude), in a way that questions sincerity, constancy, and intention. Whereas James Quin (1693-1766) continued the past stage tradition of “a fixed interpretation of characters and [...] a mechanical art of acting” and a “style of declamation,” David Garrick (1717-79) broke with the past and introduced “the school of natural acting” (Campbell 170, 176, 186). Garrick achieved this “imitative action” through “the exact fashion of [his] preparation for acting”: his practice involved “observ[ing] and memoriz[ing] bit by bit any action he saw about him and later repeat[ing] this action on the stage” (187). The arrival of John Philip Kemble (1757-1823) and his sister Sarah Siddons (1755-1831) to the stage told both a new story and an old one. Kemble’s “style came from art not nature, [in] that it was classically polished not romantically empathetic”; his preparation involved “meticulous study” (Bate 94).¹⁰ According to Jonathan Bate, “Siddons’s preparation was very different. It looks forward to the Method of Stanislavsky rather than backward to the rhetoric of Quintilian. [...] She tried to get inside her character. As one commentator put it, ‘from the moment she assumed the dress she became the character’.” According to Peta Tait, “Stanislavski sought what is termed ‘truth of feeling’,” in other words “a motivation for inner action” (89; see also Stanislavski 46). He advocates “the art of living a part” (Stanislavski 12) because “[t]o reproduce feelings you must be able to identify them out of your own experience” (24). Paradoxically, he also makes sincerity a key marker of a good actor: “Sincerity of emotions, feelings that seem true in given circumstances [...] is exactly what we ask of an actor” (50). While antitheatricalists found reason to see the actor as insincere, Siddons (and Stanislavski after her) aligned

¹⁰ Qualifying the contrast between Kemble and Siddons or Kean, Kalman Burnim notes that “to memorialize him as an elocutionist who put ‘manner before matter’ and preferred ‘effect rather than expression’ is [...] false. Certainly his style was deliberate, calculated, and therefore different from Garrick’s and Kean’s. If he had been throughout his career full of artifice, coldness, and declamation, we must be puzzled by his preeminence” (199).

sincerity with role-playing through this kind of method acting. Stanislavski says to his actors, “You must learn to adapt yourselves to circumstances, to time, and to each individual person,” enacting “vivid powers of adjustment” (228); only then can one perform sincerely. Rigidity and firmness, not adaptability and malleability, lead to an insincere enactment or performance.

Stanislavski’s method and the method of Siddons, who heralds it, appear to counter Denis Diderot’s theory of acting delineated in *Paradoxe sur le comédien* [The Paradox of Acting] (1773). In “Telling Lies with Body Language,” which analyzes Romantic-era actors who perform counterfeit gestures, Frederick Burwick highlights Diderot’s paradox:

The idea of artistic control conflicted with the notion of ‘feeling’ the part.

If actually caught up in the throes of emotion, Diderot argued in *Le Paradoxe*, the player would lose all rational command of mime, gesture, and elocution. Thus, to create the illusion of powerful emotions affecting a character, an actor must play the role with studied deliberation. Total constraint enables the actor to concentrate artistic training and skill toward performing the very extremes of passion. (150)

For Diderot, then, inner cannot, in fact, correspond to outer. The actor’s talent lies in his or her ability to command emotions, thereby expressing them with the proper force.

Diderot suggests that the performance will fail or be flawed and unbelievable if such a distinction is not maintained. Although Diderot claims that an actor “excels in simulating, though he feels nothing” (108), his emphasis on “self-possession” (23, 47) brings him in line with Stanislavski who cautioned actors to “Never lose yourself on the stage. Always act in your own person, as an artist. You can never get away from yourself. The moment you lose yourself on the stage marks the departure from truly living your part and the beginning of exaggerated false acting” (177). The resolution to the acting paradox that Diderot delineated draws near to Stanislavski’s method, as Burwick indicates (151).

Later theorists would say that a skilled actor uses memory to create a believable performance. Burwick contends,

The efforts to create genuine emotion by constructing a fictional

‘memory’ and fabricating a psychological ‘identity’ were aimed at

reconciling the difference between acting a passion and feeling a passion, thus overcoming the crux of Diderot's paradox. The theorists succeeded in internalizing the mimicry, giving it a subjective or psychological center.

Yet even these new approaches recognized that body movements corresponded to emotional states. Therefore, the player must still master the body language of the emotions even before attempting to master the lines of a play. (151)

Siddons herself demonstrates such a mastery over her body and her articulation of the emotions and character. The resemblance of Siddons's acting style to Stanislavski's method suggests a shifting attitude on the part of the audience. Furthermore, in contrast to the plays and characters that Freeman argues undermine the idea that internal logic matches external actions, Siddons attempts to erase such a tension between inner and outer by making them appear seamless. Shearer West points out,

In the 1780s and 1790s, while she was enjoying London success, Siddons' acting style was characterised by its energy, physicality, the flexibility of her facial expressions and her ability to find fresh meaning in familiar lines. She carried Garrick's 'natural' style of performing to a deeper level, making actors of his generation appear stilted and bland by comparison. Her violent and emotional style chimed well with the expectations of audiences brought up on the idea of sensibility – which favoured a demonstrative display of feeling. They expressed their appreciation emphatically, by crying, screaming, fainting, vomiting and other extreme physical reactions. (192-93)

By fully embracing a character the way that Siddons did—the way she physically expressed and facially gestured to articulate the emotional state of a character—she seemed to erase the disjunction and anxiety that Freeman points out regarding internal and external processes. Siddons did so by portraying a wholeness of identity; thus, the division between character and actor seemed to get elided.

Siddons's initial acting style elicited rave reviews. She was passionate and fully embraced her characters, as if becoming them while onstage. Edmund Kean (1789-1833) exaggerated Siddons's approach "almost to a mannerism" (Downer 537). As Alan S.

Downer explains, Kean performed roles by “mechanically depressing his voice, pausing suddenly then rushing on, dropping his voice to a whisper then letting out all the volume at his command, until more than one critic accused him of rant.” Bate tells us that Kean had an “explosive style” (111), one that suited the excessively large theatre houses of the day. The stylistic shift from Quin to Kean was a shift from stiff artificiality, where actors showed no significant attempt to take on or become a character, to expressive “naturalism,” where they clearly indicated an attempt to align inner and outer, leading finally to an excessive style of performance, one that highlighted the performativity of the act and undermined the correspondence between inner and outer.

Despite Siddons’s acting skills and the success of Stanislavski’s method, does such an acting style erase this underlying tension between internal and external? I would argue that in some ways it more intensely highlights the disruption: Siddons, who “became the character” once onstage, offers evidence to her audiences of how one individual identity could be so immersed in another as to almost make the original identity disappear. I say “almost” pointedly here because Siddons’s physical body, as well as her own celebrity, makes it impossible to ever accept a full replacement of identities. One would always see Sarah Siddons upon the stage: Sarah Siddons as Lady Macbeth or Sarah Siddons as Juliet for instance. Bate quotes William Hazlitt on the problem of separating the body of the actor from the character, such as was exemplified in Siddons’s acting of Lady Macbeth. Bate argues that Hazlitt’s discomfort arises in the “conception of an *idea* of Hamlet [or Lady Macbeth], a thing-in-itself independent of its phenomenal manifestations in the particulars of individual performances” (93). Siddons makes it difficult for critics such as Hazlitt to maintain a clear separation between actor and character. Furthermore, Julie A. Carlson identifies this discomfort with the gender politics of the theatre and the social mobility of women. She explores how women began to wield theatrical power and how male writers began to see this power as a threat. She argues that Siddons played a substantial role in this gender dynamic by directing critical attention to Shakespeare’s female characters, particularly that of Lady Macbeth, and confounding the boundary between her person and the characters she played: “Hazlitt [...] [and] Coleridge [...] state explicitly that their analyses of the Lady’s character are indissociable from Siddons’s representation of it” (165). Personal identities, once thought

to be reflected in external action, become problematic; the fact that many actors easily enact a role undermines attempts to connect a person's actions to a person's interiority with any degree of reliability, thereby putting into doubt any verifiable notion of a true and static or permanent identity.

Shearer West and Judith Pascoe show how Siddons attempted to maintain the illusion of inner corresponding to outer. West says of Siddons, “[S]he managed her public façade so effectively that whiffs of scandal were quickly dispelled. [...] throughout her life, she chose tragic roles that emphasized suffering virtue and self-sacrifice”; “She was particularly effective at manipulating the unconscious perceptions of audiences who tended to see the performer and the role as two sides of the same coin” (193). Pascoe paints a similar portrait of Siddons, who brought her domestic life onto the stage at one point when she was taking leave of the Provinces for London. She brought her children onstage, along with her obviously pregnant self, to demonstrate why she was pursuing a London career (i.e., supporting her family). Pascoe states, “The actuality of those three children and her stable home life served to mitigate the extraordinary spectacle of female passion she created on stage” (24). In addition, “As part of this self-presentation, Siddons was enthusiastically involved in cultivating her public image through portraiture” by being “closely involved in her own image-making” (West 193) and by choosing artists and poses that would “suit” her best. What both Pascoe and West demonstrate is that Siddons manipulated the visual in the production of the sincere and authentic. People wanted to align visible externals with their idea of a hidden interiority and hoped that the former would reaffirm the latter. Romantic acting helped make the lines between onstage and offstage personas both indistinct and distinct, signifying the disturbance between seeing externals and accessing an interior that Freeman raises. Pascoe shows that the issues around Romantic performativity and the attempt to construct a sincere and authentic self point to “an ongoing discursive conflict between the private, felt self and the public, performed representation” (32). I would add that the conflict was not simply discursive; it was an ontological, epistemological, and phenomenological conflict as well.

If Siddons was a trailblazer in terms of acting styles in the late eighteenth century, as West's and others' readings of her suggest, then Siddons was indeed something new;

her style marked a change, one concerned with the alignment of the internal and external. Nevertheless, a progression from Quin to Kean can also be traced, one that marked a change in method and a concern with a more “natural” acting style. It is in this specific context that I see Blake participating in the spirit of his times; he was not self-enclosed and displaced from his time. The connections to acting theories and to Romantic actors offer some evidence that Blake takes up the concerns and issues of the period, particularly in *Milton*. He thematizes this ever-present tension between inner and outer, this confusion between people and the roles they perform. In fact, the elements of identity and action that Romantic acting elucidate suggest some interesting things about Blake’s representation of character, particularly when it comes to inspiration. People enter one another, and yet there are no surface markers to show that such a thing has occurred. Milton walks around for the whole poem with the Bard in his bosom. Los enters Blake, Milton enters Blake, Blake enters Milton, but we are never shown external signs that demonstrate the change. Blake’s decision to obscure the visible signs of the internal goings-on of his characters points to Freeman’s discussion of the problems with reading surfaces. And, yet, this obscurity of identity gives way to a kind of clarity, as characters find strength and reaffirmation in unions (as I will illustrate later).

Blake’s advocacy for a permanent identity that paradoxically allows for alterations finds another articulation in his description of States. These States are impermanent whereas Identity is permanent. The Angels of the Divine Presence tell Milton:

Distinguish therefore States from Individuals in those States.
 States Change: but Individual Identities never change nor cease:
 You cannot go to Eternal Death in that which can never Die.
 Satan & Adam are States Created into Twenty-seven Churches
 And thou O Milton art a State about to be Created
 Called Eternal Annihilation that none but the Living shall
 Dare to enter: & they shall enter triumphant over Death
 And Hell & the Grave! States that are not, but ah! Seem to be.
 Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore
 What is Eternal & what Changeable? & what Annihilable!

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
 The Oak is cut down by the Ax, the Lamb falls by the Knife
 But their Forms Eternal Exist, For-ever. (32.23-38, E 132)

Memories and reason and death are simply impermanent states, but they themselves do not change the fact that a person's identity is permanent. However, people have the ability to learn, fall, become enlightened, grow, and redeem themselves. What, then, is the link between identity and the states that a person passes through in life? Can others ever know a person fundamentally—his or her permanent identity—or are these transitional states all we can ever be privy to? Is all we have access to a continuous reading of surfaces? Blake never uses the word “personality” (according to the online concordance of the *Blake Digital Text Project*), so are a person's traits bound up with identity or with states? Esterhammer explains that, in *Milton*, states equate to “a psychological condition or spiritual disposition” (204); they exist as states of mind or of attitude or belief. For David Fuller, states connote error and therefore need to be transcended or removed:

Blake develops in *Milton* more fully [...] his idea of ‘states’ of being which was eventually to become basic to this idea of forgiveness without a price paid as the essence of Christianity. There is, Blake asserts, a central core of each individual existence which one can reach by an action such as that of Milton in the poem. But the bottom is a long way down. Many things that we take for fundamental parts of our being are garments with which we clothe ourselves to avoid what looks from the fallen perspective like non-existence. (166)

States are things we mistake for our true selves, things that merely hide our “central core.” These states tend to lead to error. In the end, though, by understanding sin as error and error as simply a state of existence that can be cast off without permanently marking the individual, Blake opens the possibility for “forgiveness without a price paid” and

eliminates the vengeance of the Old Testament from Christian faith. This reconfiguration of Christianity separates a person's identity from his/her actions, as if the two are not necessarily dependent. Yet Blake's views on work (or the fulfillment of a calling), which irrevocably unite doer and deed, contradict this position. One potential solution to this apparent contradiction relies on the words of the Angels to Milton in the above quotation.

The Angels of the Divine Presence explain that Satan and Adam are merely States and that Milton himself is one about to be created. They tell him, "Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore / is Eternal & what Changeable? & what Annihilable!" leaving it up to the individual to explore what parts of himself can and should be subjected to annihilation, change, and re-creation. If Milton is "a State about to be Created" through his journey to self-annihilation (and presumably this is an action that Blake values), then, even if all states are necessarily errors, the action of passing through them is not necessarily a mistake; in fact, according to the passage, passing through States may be necessary in order to find that which is permanent or true. In this light, identity appears to be something that we each find for ourselves, sifting what does not necessarily belong to it from what does—in other words, discovering what is alterable in ourselves. Lorraine Clark argues, "Blake exhorts his readers not to 'know' themselves or to 'create' themselves, but to *choose* themselves" (15, original emphasis); the moment of choice is "suspended between and beyond philosophical 'knowing' and aesthetic 'creating'—'beyond' them not in some theological realm but in the realm of life or actuality" (14-15). Perhaps choosing our identity through the process of self-examination lies somewhere between intuitive knowledge of our essential selves and inventing ourselves *ex nihilo*, a middle ground that foregrounds the here and now.

Esterhammer, who also sees states as political and linguistic, argues that "states are static conditions (although their stasis is more an effect of perspective than actual duration in time) during which relationships can be recognized" (*Creating States* 204). By providing a means with which to recognize relationships, we can more precisely understand the distinctions among people, things, and concepts. In proceeding through and discarding states, we reaffirm ourselves, our power to impact the world, and our vitality. But we must be open to protean alterations of ourselves in order to choose among them and, thereby, uncover our eternal and permanent identity—though Blake does not

explain how we know what to keep and what to discard or how we recognize our “true” identity. Harold E. Pagliaro defines self-annihilation as an “exposure to continual risk” (117), one in which the self is open to change and to the death of an “old view of things” (118). Since permanent identity is not a transparent entity in the poem, not even to an individual himself, then constantly transitioning through and discarding parts of the self help approach this elusive yet permanent identity, perhaps even as actors perform and become different people (as Siddons heralding Stanislavski’s method does)—testing out different selves, searching only to discard, yet potentially maintaining parts too.

This idea of permanence at the core of identity despite a necessary degree of mutability and the related tensions involved in acting a role resonate with performance theorist Richard Schechner description of two modes of performance: “Looking at performing worldwide, two processes are identifiable. A performer is either ‘subtracted,’ achieving transparency, [...] or s/he is ‘added to,’ becoming more or other than s/he is when not performing” (175). He aligns the first of these performances with the shaman, calling it “ecstasy,” and he aligns the second with the Balinese dancer, calling it “trance” (comparable, in part, to the Stanislavski approach). In ecstasy, the performer experiences “a soaring away from the body, an emptying of the body” (177). Conversely, in trance the performer maintains an awareness of or connection to his/her body while allowing him/herself to be taken over by the role he/she plays: “To be in trance is not to be out of control or unconscious” (175), but, rather, to maintain one’s sense of self and be open to role at the same time. Significantly, Schechner argues that “[n]o performing is ‘pure’ ecstasy or trance. Always there is a shifting, dialectical tension between the two” (179). Blake’s moments of inspiration and self-annihilation can be viewed as shifting between ecstasy and trance, between the identity of the doer being subtracted from—discarding the annihilable and displacing the self to make room for another identity—and added to—choosing the unannihilable, expanding the self with the identity of another to cross beyond “the outline of Identity” (*Milton* 37.10, E 137). In fact, many of the characters shift between these poles.

Blake’s poem implies a movement toward role-playing, and his characters seem to parallel stage actors: characters join and become other characters with ease and pleasure, yet without losing the notion of identity altogether. The characters associated

more with negative connotations represent a counter-model that leads to a non-viable mode of existence. For example, in *The Book of Urizen*, the title character creates his fallen state when he separates from the community of the Eternals and takes up his Satanic self-consciousness, self-enclosure, isolation, and belief that he exists as an “I” separate from a group of other “I’s”. However, although returning to a communal state prior to this fall in our fallen state appears unlikely, if we view states as parts of ourselves that we are testing out to find the true part, then perhaps role-playing or inspirational merging with other identities (as occurs in *Milton*) and performing actions that belong both to ourselves and to another provide a way of getting close to a pre-self-consciousness, a pre-division condition from within a fallen position. Perhaps this condition is a “sincere” existence (as in the etymological sense) and a whole one. If we must judge and discover those parts of the self (i.e., States) that do not belong to our eternal/sincere/true identity, if we must find a way to resolve the tension between inner identity and outer acts, then experimentation with our individual self—enacting or becoming more than one identity or shifting between ecstasy and trance—seems to be one way to accomplish such a feat.

Heroic Action and Heroic Identity

Part of the way Blake encourages this experimentation is by subverting convention and revisioning epic heroism. By the time Blake produced his two illuminated epics, *Milton* and *Jerusalem*, he had seen the American and French Revolutions, the Reign of Terror, and the continuing Napoleonic Wars. The bloodshed and tyranny marking these decades contrasts starkly with Blake’s promotion of love, friendship, selflessness, and peace in his two epics. Indeed, two (A and B) out of four copies of *Milton* begin with a Preface that condemns war-focused epics such as the classical Homeric and Virgilian examples as well as those of Milton and Shakespeare, whom Blake sees as following the same tradition in their writings. By contrast, Blake sees the Bible—not the Old Testament with a tyrannical God, but the New Testament with the loving, forgiving, and self-sacrificing Jesus who is both human and divine—as a better model for the epic genre. Blake introduces his epic by rejecting “the general malady & infection from the silly Greek & Latin slaves of the Sword,” a sickness that “Shakespeare

& Milton were both curbed by” (Preface, E 95). Blake opposed the tyrannical and violent element in Christianity, which he saw personified in Milton’s vision of God as a punishing God and also, as Fuller has argued, in “his presentation of Christ’s supreme merit in terms of military greatness in Book VI” (163). Riede rightly argues that Blake provides “a radical critique of Milton’s Puritan (and essentially Pauline) Christianity, and consequently of the idea of Christian inspiration that enabled Milton to write with dogmatic authority by transcribing the word of God. As Blake saw it, such a claim for inspiration made Milton akin to Moses, not as a prophet, but as the founder of an absolute and tyrannical moral law” (258). The title of Blake’s poem explicitly references, and thus reaffirms, his reworking of Milton’s *Paradise Lost: Milton: A Poem in 2 Books To Justify the Ways of God to Men* (E 95).

Balfour follows Harold Bloom’s thinking by placing Blake in the tradition of “strong poets” (Bloom 5) who misread their forebears as “an act of creative correction that is actually and necessarily a misinterpretation” (30). Balfour explains, “Blake overturns the program of his predecessor, performing a certain disruptive kind of quotation, a ‘Miltonic inversion,’ so to speak, and a prime example of the revisionary mechanism [articulated by] Harold Bloom” (155).¹¹ Such a revision potentially leads to what Mary Lynn Johnson calls an “interrogating, not justifying, [of] God’s ways” (231).¹² Blake also revises, parodically according to Riede (264), the conventional

¹¹ Joseph Anthony Wittreich, Jr. opposes Bloom’s vision as it applies to Blake. Wittreich claims that Blake saw Milton not as a paralyzing force needing to be overthrown: “Blake [...] set[s] himself, most emphatically, within the tradition of Milton” (*Angel of Apocalypse* 224). Accordingly, “the precursor, even if mistaken, is not an oppressor but a liberator” (223). More recently, Lucy Newlyn, following in the tradition of Wittreich, posits a qualification of Blake’s reworking of his antecedent. She argues that Blake, rather than opposing Milton, recovers the true Milton, “recovering the open-ended Milton who has become obscured in the process of reception, and whom Blake sees as a more salutary role model for his own beliefs and creative practices than the authoritarian alternative” (10). While I find Bloom’s reading convincing, I cannot help but agree, at least in part, with both Wittreich and Newlyn, especially given Blake’s intense investment and continual attraction to Milton, despite their apparent differences.

¹² In an astute reading of the title page to *Milton*, Johnson asks, “is Milton, in flexing his left foot to take a second step into Blake’s poem, leaving the secure foundation of his theodicy behind him? Should both poets—and their audiences—be interrogating, not justifying, God’s ways?” (231). Like Balfour, she highlights the subversive and even parodic elements of a seemingly innocuous direct quotation.

invocation of the Muses, which Milton himself invokes (“Sing Heav’nly Muse” (Book 1, line 6)). Instead of invoking the traditional Muses, Blake recreates them, saying, “the Daughters of Memory shall become the Daughters of Inspiration” (E 95). In his epic, he does not call on the daughters of Mnemosyne (the Greek goddess of memory) as they stand; rather, he translates them into daughters of inspiration and imagination. The shift from one to the other suggests that Blake is creating his own more innovative genre by refusing to depend on “memory,” on Greek (or even biblical) models. For the most part, he invents his own characters and events and actions, and, when he does not, he imagines them in a context beyond the confines of history or orthodox theology. Of course, this turn away from memory and imitation also represents Blake’s own particular aesthetics: imagination and new inventions surpass the excellence of imitating classical models.

The John Milton with whom Blake takes issue is not the writer of the “anti-monarchical, anti-episcopal, and pro-divorce pamphlets [that] fearlessly attacked evils” of the world, as Johnson states (234). Rather, he takes issue with Milton the poet and bard. Paul Yoder says that Blake located the “source of England’s problems” in “the acceptance of the classical epic tradition, as embodied in the myth of Trojan Brutus as the founder of the British nation” (17), a story which “supported the English appropriation of classical authority at both an ideological and a poetic level” (18). Pacifist Blake, being put off by an imperial mindset, offers a different display of heroism. Moreover, Julia M. Wright maintains, “Blake[] use[s] [...] Milton, the new national bard, as an emblem for cultural complicity in and corruption by the imperial project for which the classical nations provided the type”—for Blake, imperial England is “infected by classical culture” (258). Battles and wars allow characters (mostly male) to express their heroism through violent action, so “Milton bears bardic responsibility” for war-centred revolution in the world (Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* 426).

In response, Blake reworks the concept of epic heroism or dramatic heroism by shifting the focus from deeds of war and violence to unselfish deeds of sacrifice and self-annihilation. While Shakespeare’s histories and tragedies often do tend toward war and violence, particularly in establishing the heroic quality of main characters such as Macduff, Edgar, Prince Hal, and his later incarnation King Henry V, it seems odd, at least at first glance, for Blake to place Milton within the framework of this kind of poetry.

After all, Milton's *Paradise Lost* is a theodicy. In this epic, arguably the Miltonic work that most preoccupies Blake throughout his corpus and in this poem in particular, we find a defense of God's punishment of the disobedience of humanity. Milton portrayed the fall as the result of both Satan's temptation and of freely chosen disobedience, not as an event fated by God. While Jesus volunteers to sacrifice Himself in the future in order to save humanity from what Blake might call eternal death, Milton does not depict actual sacrifice here, so the focus remains on disobedience and punishment, on an oppressive religion governed by the tyrannical institutions of Blake's time.

Blake centres his epic poem on self-sacrifice not only as a present reality in the space of the poem itself, but also as a sacrifice committed by someone other than Jesus. In Blake's epic, Milton, a once-fallen human being who is still in error even in Eternity, sacrifices himself. Heroism, then, belongs to humanity as well as to God (for Blake, all is divine anyway). In *Paradise Lost*, Adam and Eve, if they are at all heroic, are so only in how they accept their punishment and how they endure it, embodying what Milton calls "fortitude / Of Patience and Heroic Martyrdom" (9.31-32). This passive obedience and acceptance does not sit well with Blake as a kind of heroism or as a model to follow. Instead, he structures heroism as something open to any individual: anyone can save others through their unselfish deeds. In this way, humans mirror Christ; we can achieve a similar level of heroism—we too are divine.

Blake's Milton, then, does not pick up a sword to cast out his Satan; rather, he forgives him through his deed of self-annihilation: "Satan must be forgiven or vengeful slaughter will never end" (Erdman, *Blake: Prophet Against Empire* 425). In *Paradise Lost*, Jesus (pre-sacrifice) expels Lucifer-Satan and his legions by means of the violence of war, casting them down into never-ending torment and hell, which then leads Satan to take revenge by tempting humanity (God's favoured creation) to fall, thereby continuing the cycle of vengeance. Blake makes another notable turn away from *Paradise Lost* by having his Milton acknowledge Satan, "that thing of darkness" (as Prospero says of Caliban), to be himself—not external to himself, but a mode of his thinking. The Miltonic Christ is much more the warrior than the sacrificer because his sacrifice is scheduled for a future time. Blake, however, implies that we can all be our own saviours, our own Christ-figures, through sacrificial acts of identification, acts which do not have to be physically

violent in order to be potent and to effect change. Blake does not reserve epic heroism for just One Man; he opens it up to any who choose this path. His revision of heroism leads to a renovated vision of England, where all are free from oppression and tyranny— aesthetic, monarchical, religious, institutional, and ideological.

Although he had attempted to create heroic characters earlier in his career, Blake arrived at a viable vision of heroism only in his epics. As a revolutionary force, Orc seems to be a good candidate for a model of heroism. However, Orc dissatisfies Blake; for instance, in *America* (1793) Orc's "visual similarities" with Urizen evidence his inherent inadequacies and limitations (Welch 108). According to Dennis M. Welch, this similarity between Orc and Urizen "suggest[s] that his work is not *finally* millennial but instead part of an historical cycle from enslavement to rebellion to re-enslavement." To break this cycle, a new heroic model is required—one Blake provides in *Milton*. But who is the hero of *Milton*? Obviously, Milton himself is a good candidate. Blake presents us with his vision of John Milton, both the visionary poet and orthodox Puritan. We encounter Milton in Eternity after his earthly life but before his grandiose visionary journey of redemption. In her brief discussion of "epic masculinity," Judith Halberstam argues that epic masculinity depends upon an adversarial relationship (using James Bond as her primary example). She states, "The 'bad guy' is a standard generic feature of epic masculinity narratives: think only of *Paradise Lost* and its eschatological separation between God and Devil; Satan, if you like, is the original bad guy" (*Female Masculinity* 2). Her point sheds light on Blake's reworking of epic heroism. Milton is in need of redemption because he has acted like Satan through his self-righteousness and his strict adherence to Old Testament orthodoxy. Deen claims, "In Blake's eyes [...] the judgment in *Paradise Lost* is vengeance, and the vengeful justice Satan suffers makes him in turn an accuser and a seeker of vengeance" (171). In Blake, rather than trying to punish Satan, Milton acknowledges that he himself is to blame for his predicament. A Satan does exist, but, after the Bard's Song, Milton sees himself as a "bad guy"; as a result, he actively seeks to redeem both himself and Satan through self-annihilation, reshaping heroic identity and what it means to perform heroic deeds in the process.

Blake's remaking of heroism can be seen most explicitly in the face-to-face meeting between these two figures. In Milton's encounter with Satan, perhaps the climax

of the plot (if this poem can be said to have one), Milton explains that his actions do not signify a confrontation of enemies in a battle to the death—quite the contrary:

Satan! my Spectre! I know my power thee to annihilate
 And be a greater in thy place, & be thy Tabernacle
 A covering for thee to do thy will, till one greater comes
 And smites me as I smote thee & becomes my covering.
 Such are the Laws of thy false Heavns! but Laws of Eternity
 Are not such: know thou: I come to Self Annihilation
 Such are the Laws of Eternity that each shall mutually
 Annihilate himself for others good, as I for thee[.] (38.29-36, E 139)

Milton dismisses Satan's false religion, the religion of the mortal (historical) Milton prior to his death and time in Eternity, prior to his decision to go to eternal death. In fact, he comes not to destroy Satan as an enemy, or to punish him: this would only make Milton another Satan, waiting to be destroyed and supplanted by a future foe. Instead, Milton opposes Satan's laws and desires to redeem Satan, in spite of the fiend's flaws and errors. As such, Milton rejects Satanic institutions—perverted religion that teaches people to fear death and act in selfishness—and chooses to teach people to annihilate themselves in spite of death, thereby reducing death's power.

What Milton finally comes to realize is that all of what Satan represents and does is "Self righteousness / In all its Hypocritic turpitude" (38.43-44, E 139). By the end, Milton no longer participates in this kind of attitude and ideology. Instead, he embraces self-annihilation because it is a kind of communal act: more than the doer undergoes a change and reaps the benefits; one's self-annihilation saves others as well. Importantly, Milton does not vanquish Satan; the fiend vanquishes himself by encircling himself and reifying his own selfhood, simply intensifying his mistake. Milton tries to explain to Satan that an act of destruction would just make him like Satan, which is exactly what Milton's earthly self-righteousness accomplished. Breaking the cycle of victor-victim, Milton, instead, chooses to annihilate himself and paves the way for a new kind of heroic action, one not founded on the elimination of the enemy as the goal but rather on a mutual redemption and expansion.

Moreover, having dispensed with the typical talk of conquering one's foes, Milton must also reclaim his female Emanation. Dissatisfied in Eternity, he must redress wrongs from his life on earth, namely to "resum[e]" "those three females whom his Wives, & those three whom his Daughters / Had represented and containd" (17.1-2, E 110) during "his bright pilgrimage of sixty years" "on earth" (15.52, E 110). This hero is decidedly not the hero of the James Bond films that Halberstam describes. Milton's masculinity is unconventional. Blake, then, constructs one alternative to epic masculinity and heroic identity—he constructs a new kind of hero. But, is Milton, in fact, *the* hero of this epic? I argue that this poem has no Odysseus or Achilles or Aeneas or, to turn to another genre, Macduff or Henry V. Unlike classical epic poets, Blake creates a hero-less epic, or, to be more precise, a conglomerate hero: several characters partake in the heroism—none is dispensable. Their achievement and progress depend on the interrelation of all.

Doers and Deeds: Establishing Identity

While several characters interrelate to create the heroism and heroic action of *Milton*, the poem also makes an argument for every individual having a responsibility to do the work that belongs to him or her, to fulfill his or her calling. Blake's depiction of work and deeds extends my earlier discussion of sincerity and constancy, as well as my discussion of the tension between inner and outer. Blake's anxiety about his calling at the time the poem was written—he dated it 1804—reveals itself in the work. The date of the poem suggests that much of the antagonism that Blake felt between himself and his patron William Hayley—who had a say in the work Blake produced at this time—expresses itself indirectly in the relationship between Milton and Satan and between Palamabron and Satan. 1804 marks Blake's return to London after his stay in Felpham on Hayley's estate, a stay commencing in 1800. Blake saw Hayley as trying to restrict him from doing the kind of prophetic and imaginative work he wanted to do and should have been doing; indeed, Hayley had Blake focusing on commercial kinds of engraving: portraits, illustrations, and the like. Leaving Hayley and returning to London resulted in Blake's completion of two of his most involved works, the epics *Milton* and *Jerusalem*.

For Blake, work equals life. The well-known description of extraordinary pockets of time reaffirms the place of work in the renovating aspect of life:

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[.]
 In this Moment Ololon descended to Los & Enitharmon
 Unseen beyond the Mundane Shell Southward in Miltons track (35.42-47,
 E 136)

These are exceptionally productive moments of time that we find, as if they exist within the fabric of our reality in a hidden yet accessible way. These moments cannot be easily found; only “the Industrious” find them. While industriousness suggests cleverness, the association of work with the term cannot be ignored in a poem that prizes deeds and makes labour the topic of the Bard’s Song. The Industrious have the ability to multiply and expand these moments that affect all other moments in time, suggesting that what they do (work—intense work) has power.¹³

Finding these moments of time enables heroic acts within the poem; for instance, Ololon enters into one such moment—in fact, her redemptive quest takes place inside one. Either she herself belongs to this group of the Industrious, or someone else’s work has opened up this moment for her. The answer is probably a little of both. Ololon’s parallel journey (i.e., seeking self-annihilation) with Milton’s becomes one of these moments, but so too does the “inspirational” work of the Industrious (perhaps related to

¹³ Blake’s renovating moment(s) contrast with Wordsworth’s “spots of time.” In Book XI (lines 258-79) of *The Prelude*, Wordsworth talks of “spots of time” as “retain[ing] / A renovating Virtue,” which “nourish[es] and invisibly repair[es]” “our minds” that suffer “the round / Of ordinary intercourse.” These moments mend and refresh us; they help us through our mundane lives. Wordsworth says, “Such moments [...] Are scattered everywhere, taking their date / From our first childhood.” The “memory” is key, as it takes time past to alter present time, or at least our perception and state of being in the present through, what Wordsworth calls, a “beneficent influence.” One important difference between Wordsworth’s spots and Blake’s moments seems to me to be the purpose and effect of each. Wordsworthian spots of time are personal and allow for individual and private change, while Blakean moments entail action, which later leads to change not only on an individual scale but a communal one. Also, Blake’s moments do not have an explicit connection to memory or the past, as Wordsworth’s do. Instead, Blake’s moments have a strong tie to the present. However, their ability to transcend the conventional limitations of time enables them to encompass past, present, and future as if it were all happening at once.

the poetic genius), which opens the space for Ololon's act. She herself, along with nearly every other main character in this poem, contributes to such an inspirational moment; in fact, all inspirational moments correspond to the renovating moment of the above passage. Such moments expand time and renovate or alter all other moments. Rather than a discrete and singular section of time, this powerful moment exhibits multiplicity. Elsewhere, Blake proclaims, "A Moment equals a pulsation of the artery" (*Milton* 28.47, E 126). Unsettling and distorting notions of linear time, he represents these moments as equaling a fraction of a second and yet as occupying an indefinite amount of time as well, reminiscent of "Auguries of Innocence," where "Hold[ing] Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour" (3-4, E 490) become possible. Blake makes the far-reaching power of these moments accessible to the Industrious specifically—those who work, perform deeds, and labour.

In Blake's Eternity, each individual occupies a specific role, carrying out a particular task. Satan, a miller, runs the mills to grind grain, while Palamabron, a harrower, works the land, breaking and evening the ground with his harrow.¹⁴ Turmoil in heaven begins (or occurs simultaneously with Milton's own turmoil) when Satan "soft intreated Los to give to him Palamabrons station" (7.6, E 100), wanting to switch his given labour as a miller with that of his brother Palamabron. Los finally submits, but the outcome is disastrous: "Next morning Palamabron rose: the horses of the Harrow / Were maddend with tormenting fury, & the servants of the Harrow / The Gnomes, accus'd Satan, with indignation fury and fire" (7.17-19, E 100). Disorder ensues as Satan and Palamabron exchange roles, for as Palamabron exclaims, "How should he [Satan] [...] know the duties of another?" (7.28, E 101). Upon seeing the chaos that arises from one brother taking over the responsibilities of another, Los proclaims, "Henceforth [...] let each his own station / Keep" (7.41-41, E 101).

This scene in Eternity suggests the fixity of one's position in life and that one should not attempt to change it. Many critics explain that Blake's attitude toward Hayley

¹⁴ See Otto "Visionary Deconstruction" (217ff.) for an extended analysis of the significance of these two roles (i.e., Harrower and Miller) in the context of the Bard's Song.

impacts the poem significantly.¹⁵ Blake believed that Hayley threatened his very life, identity, or self by threatening his duty as a prophet-poet. In a letter to Thomas Butts, Blake writes:

My unhappiness has arisen from a source which if explored too narrowly might hurt my pecuniary circumstances. As my dependence is on Engraving at present & particularly on the Engravings I have in hand for M^r H. & I find on all hands great objections to my doing any thing but the meer drudgery of business & intimations that if I do not confine myself to this I shall not live. [...] I cannot live without doing my duty to lay up treasures in heaven is Certain & Determined & to this I have long made up my mind [...] if I myself omit any duty to my [*self*] <Station> as a Soldier of Christ[] It gives me the greatest of torments [...] But if we fear to do the dictates of our Angels & tremble at the Tasks set before us. if we refuse to do Spiritual Acts. because of Natural Fears or Natural Desires! Who can describe the dismal torments of such a state! [...] If you who are organized by Divine Providence for Spiritual communion. Refuse & bury your Talent in the Earth even tho you should want Natural Bread. Sorrow & Desperation pursues you thro life! & after death shame & confusion of face to eternity [...] You will be calld the base Judas who betrayd his Friend!—Such words would make any Stout man tremble & how then could I be at ease? But I am now no longer in That State & now go on again with my Task Fearless. (10 Jan. 1803, E 724)

Blake faces pressure from Hayley (and others) to commit his life to engraving and forfeit his desire to pursue visionary art in order to maintain a stable livelihood and income. Andrew M. Cooper says, “*Milton* expresses Blake’s struggle to overcome preoccupying self-doubts and recover his rightful place in the world” (75), and the poem evidences his self-mastery in the face of doubt. Not succumbing to the pressure pushing him toward a steadfast pursuit of profitable work to attain only monetary ends, Blake embraces his divine “Task,” a task that he considers a “Spiritual Act” but one that manifests itself

¹⁵ For example, see Frye 315, 325; Marks 35; Cooper 57; Mitchell “Style and Iconography” 49; Riede 260; and Johnson 236.

through corporeal acts and in a concrete product (i.e., the illuminated works). He will refuse those who attempt to sway him from his path, those, like Hayley, who “will be calld the base Judas who betrayd his Friend!”

In one of two allusions in this letter to the Parable of the Talents, Blake says, “I cannot live without doing my duty to lay up treasures in heaven is Certain,” suggesting that his life is tied to his performance of his prophetic-poetic duties; his very existence—and even his eternal happiness if his character Milton is any indication—depends on the fulfillment of his “Talents”—which in Blake’s case is his artistic skill and passion, not his ability to make money as an engraver. He continues, “if I myself omit any duty to my [*self*] <Station> as a Soldier of Christ[] It gives me the greatest of torments.” While the final letter reads “Station,” Blake’s first instinct was to write “self,” suggesting a connection between what one does (the expression of one’s innate potential) and who one is (the self). Hayley, then, attempts to prevent Blake from enacting his divine potential as a visionary artist, and, in so doing, risks Blake’s ability to remain true to himself and to his calling, and thus undermines his very identity.

Similarly, Palamabron describes Satan’s acts as “self-imposition,” as imposition on another self or identity, and he describes Satan himself as “Seeming a brother, being a tyrant [...] While he is murdering the just” (7.21-23, E 100). By taking Palamabron’s labours from him, Satan intrudes on Palamabron’s self and compromises his freedom, implying that Palamabron’s actions and deeds—his work—define him and give him power over his own person—in short, his work gives him his liberty. Satan’s attempt to change his own position and his own tasks destroys Palamabron—robbing the latter of his deeds makes the former a “murderer.” Here, we have not only a depiction of the inflexible roles people must fulfill but also a depiction of the importance of actions to identity. If one does not fulfill one’s potential or if someone prevents one from fulfilling one’s potential, then one’s very existence is at stake, as if deeds consolidate and constitute identity. Satan’s perversion of his (and Palamabron’s) proper action, then, seals his fate. Palamabron envisions what lies ahead for Satan saying, “prophetic I behold / His [Satan’s] future course thro’ darkness and despair to eternal death / But we must not be tyrants also!” (7.23, E 100 - 7.25, E 101). Palamabron prophesies that what has just taken place is the beginning of Satan’s downfall, yet Palamabron holds himself back from

further attack, and perhaps (further) imposition on Satan's future potential, thanks to his fear of becoming a "tyrant"—an impediment to personal freedom—like Satan.

The dynamic between doer and deed and between identity and the expression of one's calling in the poem also has as a paradigm the Parable of the Talents. Blake reworks the parable, alluding to it in more than one of his letters while at Felpham, through the lens of Milton's "Sonnet XIX" ("When I consider how my light is spent"). In the sonnet, a near-blind Milton speaks of "that one talent which is death to hide / Lodg'd with [him] useless" (3-4). In other words, Milton worries that his future blindness will impede his ability to write poetry—his talent, metaphorically in this case, is his innate gift—thereby making him unable to serve God. Unlike the servant in the parable, however, he has not willfully buried his talent. Milton resolves the dilemma by concluding the poem as follows: "They also serve who only stand and wait" (14).¹⁶ Blake, however, does not go along with Milton in his patient forbearance; instead, he suggests that being unwilling or unable to fulfill one's divine role leads to the murder of one's self, to a kind of annihilation (but a pointedly negative one as opposed to the positive self-annihilation that redemption demands in *Milton*). Blake follows Milton's translation of talent from currency to poetic ability—one's calling—and suggests that it is part of one's identity. To ignore or suppress one's talent is to turn away from the Eternal. In the end, performing one's actions is firmly intertwined with one's identity. Here, the outer deeply impacts the inner, though this impact does not efface the role of the interior space in shaping the external world of an individual.

The self can be found in the crucial action of the poem, an action that consists of a twofold event: the moment of inspiration and of self-annihilation. The former act occurs several times in the poem to different characters, while the latter act belongs to Milton alone—even so, the poem makes clear that this act repeats, or potentially repeats itself, in every individual. The emphasis on these two acts suggests an emphasis on the deed rather than the doer, and it prioritizes action over reflection or contemplation. Deeds strongly

¹⁶ This sonnet was first printed in 1673 but likely composed several years earlier. Ironically, Milton, almost entirely blind by 1652, continued to pursue his vocation as prophet-poet, writing *Paradise Lost* and publishing it in ten books in 1667 and then again in twelve books shortly before his death in 1674. Despite the conclusion to the sonnet, he does not "stand and wait" but enacts his calling.

connect to, and in fact initiate, change in the poem. This emphasis finds an early articulation in Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* where he says that "[v]irtue of character results from habit," indicating that repeated action, rather than some innate material, creates the composition of personality (216). Unlike Aristotle's *Metaphysics*, which Blake satirizes in the *Marriage*, the *Nicomachean Ethics* offers a configuration of doer and deed strikingly similar to Blake's. In his discussion of virtue, Aristotle attributes having virtue to habit and repetition, not to innate possession:

Virtue of thought arises and grows mostly from teaching, and hence needs experience and time. Virtue of character results from habit [...] Hence it is also clear that none of the virtues of character arises in us naturally. For if something is by nature in one condition, habituation cannot bring it into another condition [...] Thus the virtues arise in us neither by nature nor against nature. Rather, we are by nature able to acquire them, and reach our complete perfection through habit. (216)

In the nurture side of the nature-nurture debate, a person is not born virtuous; he or she becomes virtuous through education, learning and repeating virtuous actions. A virtuous (and by the same token a vicious) character comes into being through habit. Nature's role, then, exists only in the capacity for virtue, not the actual possession of it.

Aristotle continues to link deed to action in subsequent passages:

Virtues [...] we acquire, just as we acquire crafts, by having previously activated them. For we learn a craft by producing the same product that we must produce when we have learned it, becoming builders, for instance, by building and harpists by playing the harp; so also, then, we become just by doing just actions, temperate by doing temperate actions, brave by doing brave actions. (217)

For Aristotle, we acquire virtues in a similar fashion to the way we acquire crafts. Being virtuous, or being a harpist, does not arise innately. We gain virtuousness, or harp-playing skills, through the process of doing—repeatedly doing. Actions, then, constitute a person's identity, moral or vocational. The action defines the person; the person's identity does not define the action that proceeds from the person.

Perhaps more importantly for Aristotle, “a person comes to be just from doing just actions and temperate from doing temperate actions; for no one has even a prospect of becoming good from failing to do them” (221). Milton would later argue a similar position in *Areopagitica*:

what wisdom can there be to choose, what continence to forbear without the knowledge of evil? He that can apprehend and consider vice with all her baits and seeming pleasures, and yet abstain, and yet distinguish, and yet prefer that which is truly better, he is the true wayfaring Christian. I cannot praise a fugitive and cloister'd vertue, unexercis'd & unbreath'd, that never sallies out and sees her adversary, but slinks out of the race, where that immortall garland is to be run for, not without dust and heat. (1006b)

Without the opportunity for action, a person could not be virtuous, nor could someone be, for instance, a harpist without an opportunity to play. When Blake blasts William Hayley for preventing him from doing his work—creating his visionary art—he does so because Hayley impedes him from fulfilling his identity as a prophet-poet. As Gerard Manley Hopkins's “just man justices” (l. 9) in “As kingfishers catch fire,” Blake, as prophet and poet, must prophesy and poetize, thereby crying out, “*What I do is me*” (l. 8; original emphasis). Blake's Milton has a similar crisis. We first encounter him in Eternity, but, tellingly, he does not perform his bardic offices as he did on Earth. By ceasing his bardic action, he has lost himself, which explains his “unhappy” state. This conclusion radically changes what we take to mean by his journey of self-annihilation. If his identity is already at stake, then questing for self-annihilation does not have the same meaning as it does if Milton has a firm grasp of his identity. Presumably, through self-annihilation he will somehow find or restore his true self.

However, actions alone do not forge the various shapes identity can take for Aristotle. He says, “But actions are not enough; we must take as a sign of someone's state his pleasure or pain in consequence of his action” (219). In other words, intention is key. Aristotle does not entirely remove agency from his version of identification. Yes, action makes someone virtuous, and without action someone could not be virtuous; however, “the agent must also be in the right state when he does them. First, he must know that he

is doing virtuous actions; second, he must decide on them, and decide on them for themselves; and, third, he must also do them from a firm and unchanging state” (221). Aristotle complicates matters by insisting on the doer’s knowledge of the act (as opposed to ignorantly doing an act that could be considered virtuous), the doer’s choosing to do the act for itself and not for some selfish or corrupt reason and the doer’s resoluteness when he/she performs the deed (as opposed to doing an act half-heartedly). Failing any of these three would result in a dilution of the act and, as a result, of the identity of the doer. As Blake states, “No man can think write or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth” (*All Religions are One* E1); hence, actions reflecting one’s “true” self cannot be false, and intention validates action as well as the interior self.

Aristotle’s particular focus on intention changes radically by the time we come to the late nineteenth century and then to post-structuralist thought. In her analysis of gender as constructed in *Gender Trouble*, Judith Butler builds on Nietzsche and Foucault and aligns herself with the newer tradition of prioritizing the deed without drawing a necessary link to an agent. Nietzsche claims, “there is no ‘being’ behind doing, effecting, becoming; ‘the doer’ is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything” (“First Essay” 45; also qtd. in Butler 25). He argues that “the misleading influence of language,” “the seduction of language (and of the fundamental errors of reason that are petrified in it) [...] conceives and misconceives all effects as conditioned by something that causes effects, by a ‘subject’” (Nietzsche 45). Nietzsche dismisses any belief in a doer who acts intentionally and instead advocates a vision of reality in which people (and animals) invariably express their identity without choice. As a result, Nietzsche argues for free expression; he believes ideas about restraint are misplaced when considering notions of strength. Comparing a bird of prey to a lamb, he explains that the one cannot help but exert strength, while the other cannot help but exhibit weakness.

Butler qualifies Nietzsche’s exorcism of the ghost of agency or subjectivity lurking behind action when she says, “My argument is that there need not be a ‘doer behind the deed,’ but that the ‘doer’ is variably constructed in and through the deed. [...] It is precisely the discursively variable construction of each in and through the other that has interested me here” (181). For Butler, then, the self shapes the act just as the act shapes the self, and both are shaped by the discourse of binary, heterosexual hegemony.

In this way, she appears to sidestep questions of agency by putting doer and deed on even ground. However, this formulation fails to show precisely how a doer can retain agency if the deed constructs the doer as he or she performs the deed. If deeds create the doer, then the doer inevitably faces becoming negligible in the enactment of social change. Butler acknowledges this potential criticism of her argument, specifically as this criticism might be shaped by feminist concerns. She imagines one critique to attack her erasure of agency as follows: “Without an agent, it is argued, there can be no agency and hence no potential to initiate a transformation of relations of domination within society” (33-34). Butler counters by asking, “does [gender’s] constructedness imply some form of social determinism, foreclosing the possibility of agency and transformation?” (11), a question that she answers in the conclusion of her book. Butler finds no contradiction between theories of agency and her theory:

For an identity to be an effect means that it is neither fatally determined nor fully artificial and arbitrary. [...] Construction is not opposed to agency; it is the necessary scene of agency, the very terms in which agency is articulated and becomes culturally intelligible. [...] The critical task is, rather to locate strategies of subversive repetition enabled by those constructions, to affirm the local possibilities of intervention through participating in precisely those practices of repetition that constitute identity and, therefore, present the immanent possibility of contesting them. (187-88)

Butler defends her argument against attacks that claim she erases agency by claiming that agency is not antithetical to notions of constructedness. Despite her defence (indeed, defences, as she continues to defend her position in her later works),¹⁷ her theory still faces challenges. For instance, Alex Dick states, “[A]s a number of critics have pointed out, Butler’s commitment to the (post)structuralist argument for the agency of language itself posits the agency for social change out of the hands of real people and into the hands of what she calls ‘discourse’” (101). Butler, skeptical of language, makes clear in

¹⁷ For example, see the Preface and Introduction to *Bodies That Matter* (ix-xii, 1-23) and the Introduction to *Undoing Gender* (1-16).

all of her works that we are inevitably caught in discourse, so a singular and independent “I” cannot exist.

In *Giving an Account of Oneself*, Butler tries to think through agency and unique identity. She engages with Italian philosopher and feminist Adriana Cavarero and what Butler calls her theory of “sociality” (32) regarding storytelling. Speaking of an individual self, Cavarero argues, “This *who* is precisely an unrepeatable uniqueness which, in order to appear to others, needs first of all a plural – and therefore political – space of interaction” (58). Butler says, “In [Cavarero’s] view, I am not, as it were, an interior subject, closed upon myself, solipsistic, posing questions of myself alone. I exist in an important sense for you, and by virtue of you. If I have lost the condition of address, if I have no ‘you’ to address, then I have lost ‘myself’”; “we are bound to one another by what differentiates us, namely, our singularity” (34). Cavarero, according to Butler, cannot think about the subject in isolation because the subject’s relational position in the social world is what defines it. Without others, no “I” could exist.

Butler finds Cavarero’s argument thought-provoking, but, inevitably, Butler cannot reconcile herself to this idea of a singularity formed within relationality. She counters that Cavarero’s attempt to maintain uniqueness does not succeed because her theory “establish[es] a structure of substitutability at the core of singularity” (35); “even as Cavarero argues that singularity sets a limit to substitutability, she also argues that singularity has no defining content other than the irreducibility of exposure, of being *this* body exposed to a publicity” (34). On the one hand, Cavarero sets up an “I” that is unique and relational, but ultimately without an essential ground: “[t]he self [...] has a totally external and relational reality” (63), where “the reality of the self is necessarily intermittent and fragmentary. The story that results therefore does not have at its center a compact and coherent identity. Rather, it has at its center an unstable and insubstantial unity” (63). On the other hand, Butler provides us with a view of identity without any ground, without the possibility of a comprehensible agency of the individual. Cavarero and Butler both offer invaluable insights into identity and its formation despite the critiques of their theories. Cavarero’s uniqueness within a larger interconnectivity of social relations and Butler’s performative identity lay the foundation for my reading of Blake’s conception of identity in *Milton*.

Identity in Blake's poem exists in a dynamic relationship to notions of interdependence, essentialism, and performativity. This dynamism allows an important alternative to the two sides of the debate mentioned above, especially for contemporary issues surrounding identity such as transsexuality and gender dystopia. The work of Judith Halberstam explores questions of sex and gender as they relate specifically to trans-identities. Her identity theory, which builds on Butler's theory of gender performativity, posits "[t]he postmodern lesbian body" as "remak[ing] gender as not simply performance but also as fiction" ("F2M" 210). In her article, she explains that she focuses on "sexualities and genders [...] as potentialities rather than as fixed identities" (210-11). Halberstam expresses dismay at one film documentary that explicitly "realign[s] sex and gender," something that now seems out of place in an era of gender construction and performativity (216). However, her argument is a contradictory, twofold one: "it is perhaps preferable therefore to acknowledge that gender is defined by its transitivity, that sexuality manifests as multiple sexualities, and that therefore we are all transsexuals. There are no transsexuals" (226). These are provocative words for both transsexuals and those who are not.

While I find Halberstam's realignments and her addition to previous gender-construction theories persuasive and significant, her theory has come under attack for celebrating constructionism in the face of those whose lived experience makes this view of identity unsatisfactory. In *Female Masculinity*, she addresses this specific criticism leveled at her earlier article "F2M: The Making of Female Masculinity." According to Halberstam, Jay Prosser critiques her article for "advocating some simple celebratory mode of border crossing," that is performative constitutions of identity (147). However, she accuses him of polarizing the debate so that queer theory stands opposed to transgender theory, where the former is aligned with constructionism and the latter with essentialism: "queer theory represents gender within some notion of postmodern fluidity and fragmentation, but transgender theory eschews such theoretical free fall and focuses instead on 'subjective experience'. Queer theories of gender, in Prosser's account, emphasize the performative, and transgender theories are essentialist." Indeed, Butler implies that "the narrative of gender essentialism" is institutionally (in psychiatric medicine) and culturally constructed (*Undoing Gender* 71) in that both instigate and

make necessary an essentialist (and coherent and stable) view of identity. However, she forestalls challenges to the aims of queer theory by stating that its main aim is to prevent “the unwanted legislation of identity” (7), and she even acknowledges that “a livable life does require various degrees of stability” (8). Yet she maintains, “One does not always stay intact” (19)—identity can come undone.

Similarly, Halberstam attempts to articulate a defence against Prosser and argues, “I wanted to question the belief in fluid selves and the belief, moreover, that fluidity and flexibility are always and everywhere desirable. At the same time, I was trying to show that many, if not most, sexual and gender identities involve some degree of movement (not free-flowing but very scripted) between bodies, desires, transgressions, and conformities; we do not necessarily shuttle back and forth between sexual roles and practices at will, but we do tend to adjust, accommodate, change, reverse, slide, and move in general between moods and modes of desire. (*Female Masculinity* 147)

Her defence doubles back on itself by saying fluidity marks the reality of gender and sexuality, leaving a space for criticisms such as Prosser’s. He takes issue with the fact that, despite her attempted revisioning above, the main thrust of her article and her book is the flexibility of identities and boundaries: “All gender should be transgender, all desire is transgendered, movement is all” (“F2M” 226). For Prosser, this kind of argumentation implies a subordination or dismissal of those who seek to move beyond transgendered labels and live a particular gender identity. Indeed, much performative theory, including Butler’s, opens itself to similar criticisms. As Prosser explains, “transsexuals who undergo sex-change operations live and experience a very different reality than the theory Halberstam espouses. Prosser valorizes the essentialist desire to achieve “one’s true and authentic gender” (Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* 163) that arises in many who experience gender dystopia. He contends, “[T]he hard facts of gender and embodiment” (167) will always undermine theories of performative and fluid gender identities. Like Butler, Halberstam provides a productive model of identity particularly in queer and trans contexts. However, Prosser’s objections show that not everyone finds these theories viable in practice. The notion of an essential self remains crucial for the

lived experience of many individuals. Yet these same individuals often need to cross boundaries in order to reach such a self. Identity-construction theories do not offer these individuals something wholly satisfactory or even commensurate with their experience of their selves and bodies.

I argue that Blake's conception of identity offers another voice in the current debates about identity and perhaps even a way to address the resulting dissatisfaction with the model of construction. Almost three decades ago, Stephen Greenblatt closed his book *Renaissance Self-fashioning*, which focuses in part on the social and political structures that shape human identity, by explaining the desire to believe in the "I" and agency even against evidence to the contrary: "For the Renaissance figures we have considered understand that in our culture to abandon self-fashioning is to abandon the craving for freedom, and to let go of one's stubborn hold upon selfhood, even selfhood conceived as a fiction, is to die. As for myself, [...] I want to bear witness at the close to my overwhelming need to sustain the illusion that I am the principal maker of my identity" (257). Dismissing a core self and embracing performative identity, not only in theory but also in practice, remains problematic and unsatisfactory for many. However, Blake's view of identity offers an alternative to the either/or position of the constructionist and the essentialist.

At first, his placing of deed and doer in a dependent relation seems strikingly constructionist in light of Butler's deed-doer equivalence, where one constructs the other and vice versa. For instance, when Blake explains, "There is not an Error but it has a Man for its [*Actor*] Agent that is it is a Man" (*VLJ* E 563), he seems to be asserting that one cannot think of a deed apart from its doer. Also, for Blake, a poet's writing and activity rely on his identity as poet, yet his identity as poet relies on his poetic action. Kevin D. Hutchings implicitly aligns Blake with Butler in his alignment of Blake with Foucault. Hutchings argues that Blake's "Self-Examination" is "a critical process which analyzes and questions the relationship between individual subjectivity and discursive authority" (279). Hutchings continues, "For what Blake wishes to show in *Milton* is that sovereign self-control is an *illusion*, indeed a fiction that paradoxically generates passivity on the part of its adherents." While his reading of *Milton* is insightful, he seems to gloss over or avoid the role of permanent identity.

The crucial difference remains in the understanding of agent or doer for Blake and Butler. The latter denounces a unified, stable self and the “willful subject” (*Bodies That Matter* 9); instead, she theorizes a performative identity that is necessarily constituted through acts and language. No self exists outside of these spheres of “constitutive constraint,” and no self can effect change outside of these limiting spheres (15). Blake, however, does not turn away from an idea of permanent identity—though his representation of it in *Milton* raises questions about the nature of such an identity. Blake insists on an essential self outside language and action—an eternal identity—as well as on intention. How can we know that the work we do is right, that it expresses our calling, our eternal identity? Alternatively, how can we know when it is wrong? These questions never concern Blake. He and his characters simply know what work pertains to their identity. Paradoxically, actions reaffirm an eternal permanence and constitute one’s identity. Strangely, he combines the essential and the performative. Perhaps this combination—no matter how impossible for reason to fully comprehend—offers an alternative to the sometimes unsatisfactory performative and constructionist identities that post-structuralists such as Butler theorize. And perhaps these are questions better left to faculties of mind and body other than reason, faculties like imagination and physical perception and affect. By refusing to reject individual, separate identity completely, Blake somehow retains the power for an individual to provoke change.

Self-Annihilation and Identity

The process of self-annihilation would seem to place Blake in the tradition of Nietzsche and Butler, in the tradition of those who undermine or displace identity, the self, or the willing subject. As an act, self-annihilation appears to contradict inspiration; the first suggests the complete destruction of the self, while the latter suggests the enhancement of the self by another being through the merging of identities. At the beginning of the poem, the Bard’s Song of Satan’s fall, as well as his distinction among the three classes of men—the Elect, the Redeemed, and the Reprobate—jolts Milton out of his complacency and into action. After hearing the Bard’s song,

Milton rose up from the heavens of Albion ardent!

The whole Assembly wept prophetic, seeing in Milton’s face

And in his lineaments divine the shades of Death & Ulro
 He took off the robe of the promise, & ungirded himself from the oath of
 God
 And Milton said, I go to Eternal Death! The Nations still
 Follow after the detestable Gods of Priam; in pomp
 Of warlike selfhood, contradicting and blaspheming.
 When will the Resurrection come; to deliver the sleeping body
 From corruptibility: O when Lord Jesus wilt thou come?
 Tarry no longer; for my soul lies at the gates of death.

 I will go down to self annihilation and eternal death,
 Lest the Last Judgment come & find me unannihilate
 And I be siez'd & giv'n into the hands of my own Selfhood

 What do I here before the Judgment? without my Emanation?
 With the daughters of memory, & not with the daughters of inspiration[?]
 I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!
 He is my Spectre! in my obedience to loose him from my Hells
 To claim the Hells, my Furnaces, I go to Eternal Death. (14.10-32, E 108)

Milton begins by disrobing himself “from the oath of God,” taking the first step away from the patriarchal religion of the Old Testament tyrannical God and the first step toward redemption. This line is the longest one in this passage, as if the form carries the burden and weight of God’s oath in its length. Blake’s Milton rejects the religion that Blake believed the historical Milton clung to in life, the religion of obedience, sin, violence, human physical sacrifice, and oppression. This kind of religion promotes ‘contradictions’ and opposes true faith, creating a “warlike selfhood” destructive to the individual. Milton, though expecting the final coming of Jesus in the Last Judgment, does not passively wait for redemption; there is no mere serving and waiting here. He acknowledges his error and resolves to find his Emanation, to annihilate himself, and to spurn memory in favour of imagination (changing his own history by imagining a future possibility)—all of which he suggests are necessary for his salvation. Already in Eternity,

it would seem that Milton has nowhere to climb up the cosmic ladder; rather, because he is dissatisfied, he risks complete destruction by going toward “Eternal Death”—he “enters this world and reincarnates himself” (Frye 316)—in order to redeem himself and his six-fold female Emanation. His heroic apotheosis comes in a non-classical form—not in an ascent but a descent, much like Christ’s. As in the invocation, which calls on the Daughters of Beulah instead of the Greek Muses (the daughters of the goddess of Memory), this passage reflects Blake’s displacement of memory in favour of inspiration. Memory tends to reify and affirm identity and the individual, and it is more identity-oriented than inspiration; inspiration, on the other hand, seems to violate the individual identity by inviting other agencies to work within and through the individual. As a result, it tends to the performative in the Butlerian sense of being the opposite of essence (i.e., something that cannot be changed).

In addition, Blake depicts selfhood as an oppressor or jailor: Milton fears being “siez’d & giv’n into the hands of [his] own Selfhood” if he does not proceed with self-annihilation before the Judgment arrives. Moreover, Milton sees his Selfhood as the arch-enemy, thereby affirming his role in Satanic error: “I in my Selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil One!” Here, Milton does not deny culpability; he affirms his agency in his misdeeds while on earth, misdeeds that resonate in Eternity and continue to cause his current turmoil. Rather than denying agency and accusing someone else (as Satan the accuser would do), he establishes his agency when he wishes “To claim the Hells, [his] Furnaces” in order “to loose [Satan] from [his] Hells.” Milton goes to eternal death in order to cast off and destroy his “warlike selfhood” and to redeem himself and his Emanation. Milton must act if he hopes to amend his erroneous path and achieve salvation. At the same time as Milton asserts his agency, he also begins the process of casting off and destroying “selfhood,” the process of self-annihilation. He appears poised to revise his perception of his being by seeing it founded not on selfhood but on an obliteration, an annihilation—literally a reduction to nothing—of his identity.

Not only does Blake seem to approach Nietzsche and Butler in his depiction of selfhood as error and as something that must be obliterated, but he also approaches them by prioritizing the deed over the doer in his configuration of self-annihilation. Part of Milton’s self-annihilation process takes place through Blake’s body. After Milton

descends to Blake's cottage, and just before Milton completes his act of self-annihilation, Blake seems to merge into another character. He says, "I also stood in Satans bosom & beheld its desolations! / A ruind Man" (38.15-16, E 139). If Satan is, in fact, Milton's own evil selfhood, then Blake also stands in Milton's bosom as he casts out the Accuser:

that portion namd the Elect: the Spectrous body of Milton:
 Redounding from my left foot into Los's Mundane space,
 Brooded over his Body in Horeb against the Resurrection
 Preparing it for the Great Consummation[.] (20.20-23, E 114)

The erroneous and spectral component of Milton exits from Blake after Milton merges with Blake, enacting one step of self-annihilation. The corrupt aspects of Milton are expelled, and Blake retains the visionary and prophetic part. Self-annihilation here does not have a solitary agent. It has at least two and perhaps more agents, if we recall the presence of the Bard in Milton and Los in Blake. Like inspiration, the process involves characters entering other characters. By confusing agency to such an extent, the action itself becomes more important than any individual who happens to take part; in other words, the process of self-annihilation, though essential for Milton individually, occupies a greater role than the fact that Milton (whose exact responsibility remains unclear) enacts the deed; indeed, Blake (perhaps by entering Satan) has a hand (and foot!) in this act.

As Blake's role in this feat demonstrates, self-annihilation does not belong solely to Milton; besides Blake, there are other characters who partake in this event. For example, Ololon conducts a parallel quest. She, or they ("they" because Ololon consists of all of Milton's Emanations), says, "Let us descend also, and let us give / Ourselves to death in Ulro among the Transgressors. / Is Virtue a Punisher? O no!" (21.45-47, E 116). Seeing the hopeful outcome of such a deed, Ololon goes to eternal death; her act suggests that Milton's cannot be accomplished without assistance. Self-annihilation helps others; it is not an act that affects only one entity, nor can one entity rely merely on its own deeds for redemption, though they are crucial. Thus, the deed when multiplied by others becomes significant and removes the selfishness of the doer. Despite her fear, Ololon's self-annihilation completes Milton's quest. After Milton has cast out Satan and after Ololon corporealizes in Blake's garden, both journeys find fulfillment:

the Virgin divided Six-fold & with a shriek
 Dolorous that ran thro all Creation a Double Six-fold Wonder!
 Away from Ololon she divided & fled into the depths
 Of Miltons Shadow as a Dove upon the stormy Sea.
 Then as a Moony Ark Ololon descended to Felphams Vale
 In clouds of blood, in streams of gore, with dreadful thunderings
 Into the Fires of Intellect that rejoic'd in Felphams Vale
 Around the Starry Eight: with one accord the Starry Eight became
 One Man Jesus the Saviour. wonderful! round his limbs
 The Clouds of Ololon folded as a Garment dipped in blood
 Written within & without in woven letters: & the Writing
 Is the Divine Revelation in the Litteral expression[.] (42.3-14, E 143)

This apocalyptic vision heralds the Last Judgment—there is blood, but rejoicing, implying that redemption is successful. The Virgin divides from Ololon just as Milton's Shadow—"the Covering Cherub & within him Satan" (37.8, E 137)—divides from him, implying that they have each successfully undergone self-annihilation, rejecting the self-righteous and selfish parts of their individual self. Moreover, Ololon, along with being partly responsible for Milton's self-annihilation, belongs to Jesus' deeds: she accompanies Him as a bloody cloud so that humans may see and read the "Divine Revelation." In this way Jesus "enter[s] into / Albions Bosom" (42.20-21, E 143), awakening England. The whole thing is described as loud and thunderous, full of trumpets sounding (a positive climax in comparison to the silence at the beginning of the poem prior to Milton's journey). One man's journey of self-annihilation has included several different agents, and it has led finally to an apocalyptic redemption. We need not be the Prophet of Eternity, we need not be Albion, and we need not be the prophet-bard Milton to change the world; all we need to do is embrace action. The doer has less relevance at the end of the poem (despite the title) than the doer's act, an act that suggests one can open one's imagination and de-centre one's self to merge with others, or at least be moved by them.

Despite such an emphasis on acts, especially those of self-annihilation, and despite Milton's quest for the destruction of his selfhood, Blake refuses to do away with

separate individualities or notions of the self altogether. Herein lies his incompatibility with philosophers like Nietzsche and Butler. Mitchell lists a number of possible words and phrases to describe Blake's ambiguous concept of self-annihilation: "ego-death," "nirvana," "Christian death and rebirth," and an "existential concept of the self as an entity which is continuously created and destroyed" ("Blake's Radical Comedy" 304). While Mollyanne Marks argues that "[t]he self or selfhood is, for Blake, the force irreconcilably opposed to creativity, generosity, and the human give-and-take of psychic warfare in Eternity" (28), others do not see Blake as rejecting the self entirely and, rather, define self-annihilation in a way that reaffirms identity. For instance, Welch explains, "[it does] not imply the loss or death of identity but instead its realization. (Blake typically distinguished between one's *selfhood* – a false and ghostly covering, one's 'spectre' in its various negative and impermanent manifestations – and one's identity – one's true self, which is eternal.)" (104). Coming from a Buddhist context, Mark Lussier explains that self-annihilation is "Blake's antidote" to "Urizen's illusory vision of 'solitary' existence" and desire for "a sovereign self" ("Enlightenment East and West" para. 24). While the process functions as a part of enlightenment, it "equally connects with [the] articulation of an ethos of otherness," which we find in his other works. Self-annihilation, then, integrates the concerns of the self with the larger network of relations among other beings. Hatsuko Nimii, quoting an earlier critic Soetsu Yanagi, writes, "Self-annihilation does not mean the denial of self but the perfect expansion of self, infinite expression and union with the universe" (172). For Welch, self-annihilation signifies the process by which we uncover our essential identity, allowing us to remove things we believe to be, but are not in fact, our true selves, things which are nothing more than errors of perception. Nimii suggests that the result of self-annihilation is not the rejection of notions of the self but an enhancement of the self. In fact, it is "a process which is in effect a transition from nullity to fulfilment" (178), rather than being a process that negates or obliterates.

Romantic concepts of poetic identity offer another way to understand the act of self-annihilation and its relevance to inspiration in *Milton*. The term self-annihilation is reminiscent of Keats's "camelion Poet" (279), who turns away from the Wordsworthian "Egotist" (263). Keats promotes a different kind of "poetical Character" (279), one that

“is not itself – it has no self – it is every thing and nothing – It has no character.” In a letter, Keats expands on what he means:

he [a poet] has no Identity – he is continually for – and filling some other body – The Sun, the Moon, the Sea and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none; no identity [...] When I am in a room with People if I ever am free from speculating on creation of my own brain, then not myself goes home to myself: but the identity of every one in the room begins to [...] press upon me that, I am in a very little time annihilated. (279-80)

The poet Keats describes has, in fact, no identity, no stable “I”; rather, he is constantly annihilating himself as the identities of others “press upon” him, as if he becomes those people and objects with which he comes into contact. Like a chameleon changing its colours depending on its surroundings, the poet takes on the identity of others, demonstrating adaptability, flexibility and openness. Keats says, “nothing startles me beyond the Moment. [...] if a Sparrow come before my Window I take part in its existence [sic] and pick about the Gravel” (259). Keats is moved by his environment and circumstances. This Keatsian poet undergoes annihilation through the influence of others; as he becomes inspired, as they inspire him, he loses himself. Blake configures inspiration in a similar manner, though for him there is no loss of identity: Milton undergoes self-annihilation, which is said to be crucial for his salvation; this self-annihilation includes a re-integration with his Emanations, as well as some kind of understanding of his foe, Satan. Furthermore, Milton is both inspired and inspires, thereby taking part in the existence of other identities. However, because Blake depicts the same characters being inspired and inspiring others, he suggests that inspiration is a two-way act. Characters both move and are moved (are influenced, or pressed upon, but in a voluntary manner). Neither identity is lost; both, or all, are expanded.

Near the end of the poem, Blake’s Milton unites self-annihilation with inspiration, offering an indication of what self-annihilation could possibly entail:

Obey thou the Words of the Inspired Man
All that can be annihilated must be annihilated

That the Children of Jerusalem may be saved from slavery
 There is a Negation, & there is a Contrary
 The Negation must be destroyd to redeem the Contraries
 The Negation is the Spectre; the Reasoning Power in Man
 This is a false Body: an Incrustation over my Immortal
 Spirit; a Selfhood, which must be put off & annihilated always
 To cleanse the Face of my Spirit by Self-examination.
 To bathe in the Waters of Life; to wash off the Not Human
 I come in Self-annihilation & the grandeur of Inspiration
 To cast off Rational Demonstration by Faith in the Saviour
 To cast off the rotten rags of Memory by Inspiration[.] (40.29-41.4, E
 142)

By uniting self-annihilation and inspiration, Blake indicates a correlation between or perhaps even an equation of the two. Milton finds “The Negation” anathema. Lorraine Clark contends, “This negation or Spectre threatens to reconcile or mediate the contraries of life [...], reducing them from absolutes to mere relativities within a system. But Blake despises such mutual accommodation as a blurring of distinctions which reduces the passion or energy of life” (4). By rejecting negation but not self-annihilation, Milton and Blake suggest that self-annihilation does not equal a negation. Self-annihilation and the expansion of self, then, do not throw the world into a blurry mess, where the merging or expansion of agents is also “a blurring of distinctions.” Identities are maintained and reaffirmed—as Clark indicates, life needs firm outlines to retain its energy. Moreover, by equating reason with the Selfhood and naming reason as the negating force—that which creates false bodies and petrifies the human spirit—Blake suggests that the Selfhood, which must be annihilated, does not belong to him alone. Salvation and the new Jerusalem depend upon each one of us submitting to “Self-examination,” judging and choosing what is and what is not annihilable just as the Angels of the Divine Presence instruct Milton to do earlier.

In order to self-examine, Milton turns to “Self-annihilation and the grandeur of Inspiration.” In a gesture reminiscent of his first speech, where he turns to the Daughters of Inspiration as he begins his quest for self-annihilation, Milton links these two acts.

Milton also aligns “Faith” with this process (these processes) at the end of the above speech. Elsewhere, Blake describes faith along similar lines as inspiration, where a single individual does not possess sole responsibility for the act. In defending the possibility of miracles, he says, “Jesus could not do miracles where unbelief hinderd hence we must conclude that the man who holds miracles to be ceased puts it out of his own power to ever witness one The manner of a miracle being performd is in modern times considered as an arbitrary command of the agent upon the patient but this is an impossibility not a miracle neither did Jesus ever do such a miracle” (Annotations to Bishop Watson’s *An Apology for the Bible* E 616-17). In these annotations, Blake opposes Watson “who considers [a miracle] as an arbitrary act of the agent upon an unbelieving patient. Whereas the Gospel says that Christ could not do a miracle because of Unbelief” (E 617).

I find Blake’s use of the words “agent” and “patient” particularly significant. His understanding of a miracle reduces considerably the role of the miracle-worker, in this case Jesus. Faith, the belief that something is possible, makes possible the act of miracle-making. Not even Jesus himself can perform such acts without the help of the so-called patient. In Blake’s assessment of miracles, this “patient” becomes a co-actor and co-producer of the miracle by having faith, by opening him/herself up to the possibility in a manner similar, if not equal, to the act of inspiration. Having faith means allowing oneself to be moved by or inspired by, in this case, Jesus; it entails a certain displacement of self, an annihilation of reason or skepticism or selfhood, to allow another inside oneself. John H. Jones states, “[S]elf-annihilation is necessary for inspiration”; “Self-annihilation [...] involves a radical interchange between the two contraries of addresser and addressee, and allows for the transcendence of the boundaries of finite Selfhood through dialogue and for the possibility of inspired discourse” (“‘Self-Annihilation’ and Dialogue in Blake’s Creative Process” 6). I agree, but I would go further. First, I would add that Blake goes beyond dialogue to include interpenetrating bodies (as I will discuss shortly). Second, while appearing to be oppositional acts (one expanding the self, one destroying it), inspiration and self-annihilation are not only inextricably dependent acts, both of which are crucial in *Milton*, but also—or in fact—the same act. To self-annihilate is to inspire, and to inspire is to self-annihilate. As such the self, or identity, remains;

rather than destruction, identity seeks reaffirmation and expansion through this singular act.

Performativity and Repeated Moments of Inspiration

Like self-annihilation, inspiration reinforces Blake's paradoxical concept of identity. In these inspirational moments, we find the disintegration of causality and an apparent fusion between characters and among various identities, specifically through shared or similar actions of inspiration. In this section, I will explore how these elements affect individual identity particularly and the composition of the deed-doer relation in light of Blake's firm belief in permanent identity and the outline of identity. Most significantly, I will apply Judith Butler's theory of performativity, and her notion of parody in particular, to Blake's re-articulations of inspiration to show how such an analysis reconfigures the significance of this action. I find Butler's performative theory of gender construction,¹⁸ as outlined in *Gender Trouble*, particularly useful in analyzing Blake's multiple reiterations of the scene of inspiration because of the theatrical, cultural, and social nature of her concept of performativity.¹⁹ I am not suggesting a one-to-one correlation between her theory and his poetics; rather, the heart of the connection rests in the repeated moments of subversion that function to bring about change. Blake subverts the traditional model of inspiration and also, as a result, identity in order to resignify and reinvigorate both.

Milton certainly does not provide us with a representation of identity in which characters respect the firm outline of one another's identities. They transgress these boundaries repeatedly. Various characters take on the roles of both inspirer and inspired

¹⁸ For Butler, gender is problematic because she sees it as a limiting concept. In the heterosexual normative world, sex is inextricably linked to gender as a form of regulation. A male body must enact masculinity, while a female body must enact femininity with the presumption that this is the natural order of things. However, Butler argues that gender is constructed; it is not what it is by any natural claim, but through reiterated acts that continuously reinscribe gender as this or that. There is no such natural order.

¹⁹ Butler says, "[M]y theory sometimes waffles between understanding performativity as linguistic and casting it as theatrical. I have come to think that the two are invariably related, chiasmically so, and that a reconsideration of the speech act as an instance of power invariably draws attention to both its theatrical and linguistic dimensions" (xxv).

at different times, and characters usually commit acts only after being inspired by another character. Nevertheless, an inspired state does not indicate the possession of one character by another; it indicates a fusion between or among characters so that an act has multiple agents. This kind of inspiration results in activity on the part of both characters, displacing passivity altogether; neither participant imposes on the other. In each moment of inspiration, a character's identity is not overwhelmed by the identity of the inspirer. While the action itself propels change, the willingness or ability of the actor to displace his or her self (thereby allowing someone to enter him or her) occupies an equally important role in the process at the local level of the event. However, because acts do not necessitate a single agent, what the characters *do* becomes more important than who they *are* as individuals in the context of the poem as a whole; multiplicity outweighs singularity. Thus, the act of inspiration has a greater value than any one character who could potentially participate in it.

Blake continually returns to the moment of inspiration. Rather than prioritizing and centralizing *one* moment of inspiration, he repeats a series of such moments. These moments become stylized because Blake reiterates, revises, and restages them, using several similar images to invoke inspiration, including fire or flames, lightning, a whirlwind, a star, a comet, and a sun, as well as a combination of these images. He also frequently depicts characters entering another's body. One could say that this poem is primarily about dramatizing various moments of inspiration. Each moment of inspiration is clearly important in its own right, but, taken together, the repetitive quality gains a deeper importance. The inspiration sequences include various characters (the Bard, Milton, Los, Blake, Robert, Ololon, Albion, Christ, and the audience) and a variety of types of inspiration in the text and designs: one character entering another's bosom, a shooting star (pl. 2; fig. 32), a shooting star entering someone's foot, flames (pl. 1; fig. 21), lightning (pl. 30; fig. 33), a fiery sun (pl. 21 [Bentley]; fig. 34), and even a simple encounter or visitation (pl. 36; fig. 35). Using Butler's theory as a basis for my interpretation, I argue that Blake's performative figuration of inspiration destabilizes the original biblical moment of inspiration, and it undermines not only the notion of the inspired prophet-poet as a unique and divinely authorized authentic voice but also the notion that such inspirational acts are singular. Paradoxically, Blake inauthenticates one

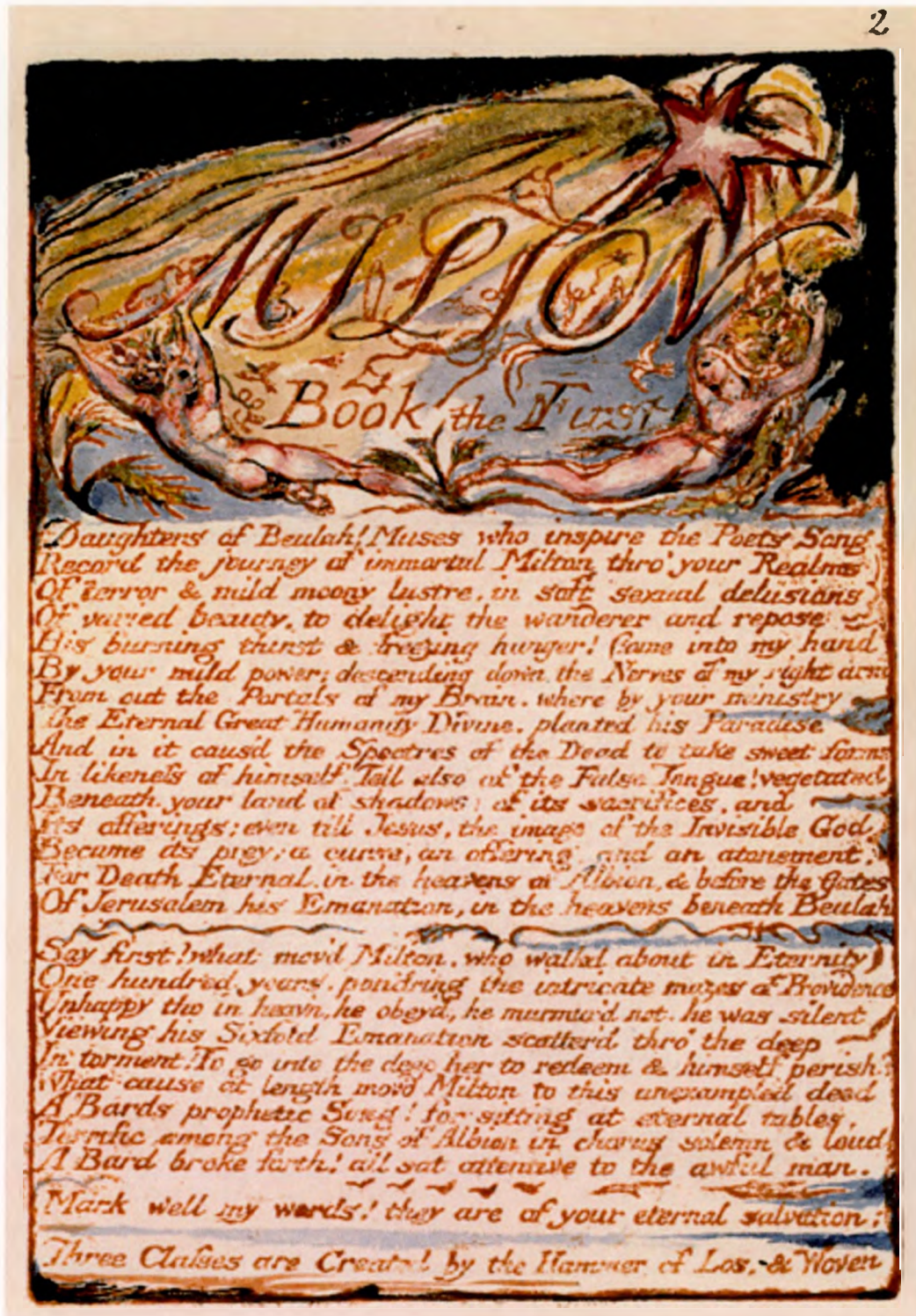


Fig. 32. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate 2, object 2, 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

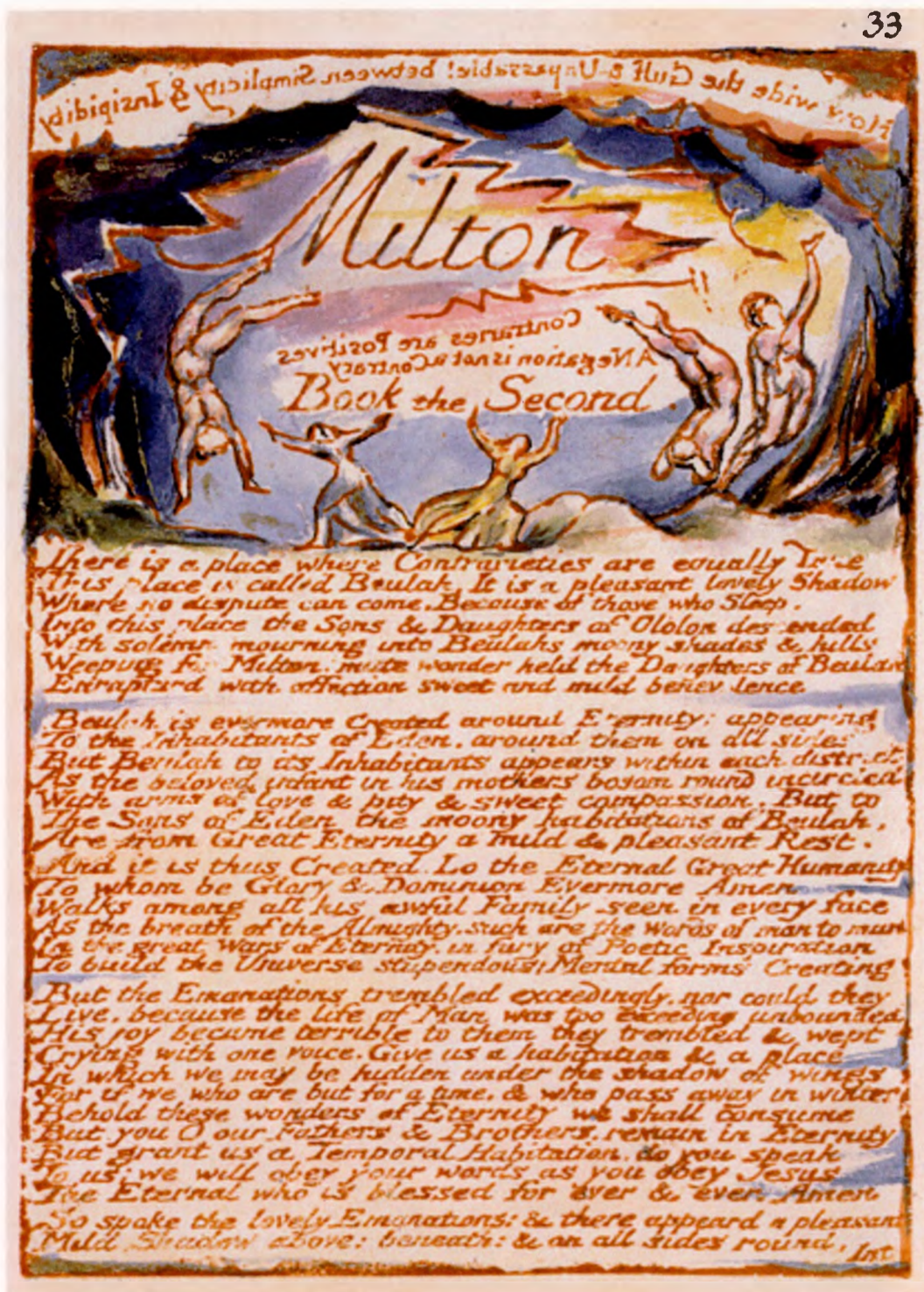


Fig. 33. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate 30 [33], object 33, 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.



Fig. 34. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate 21 [Bentley], object 47, 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

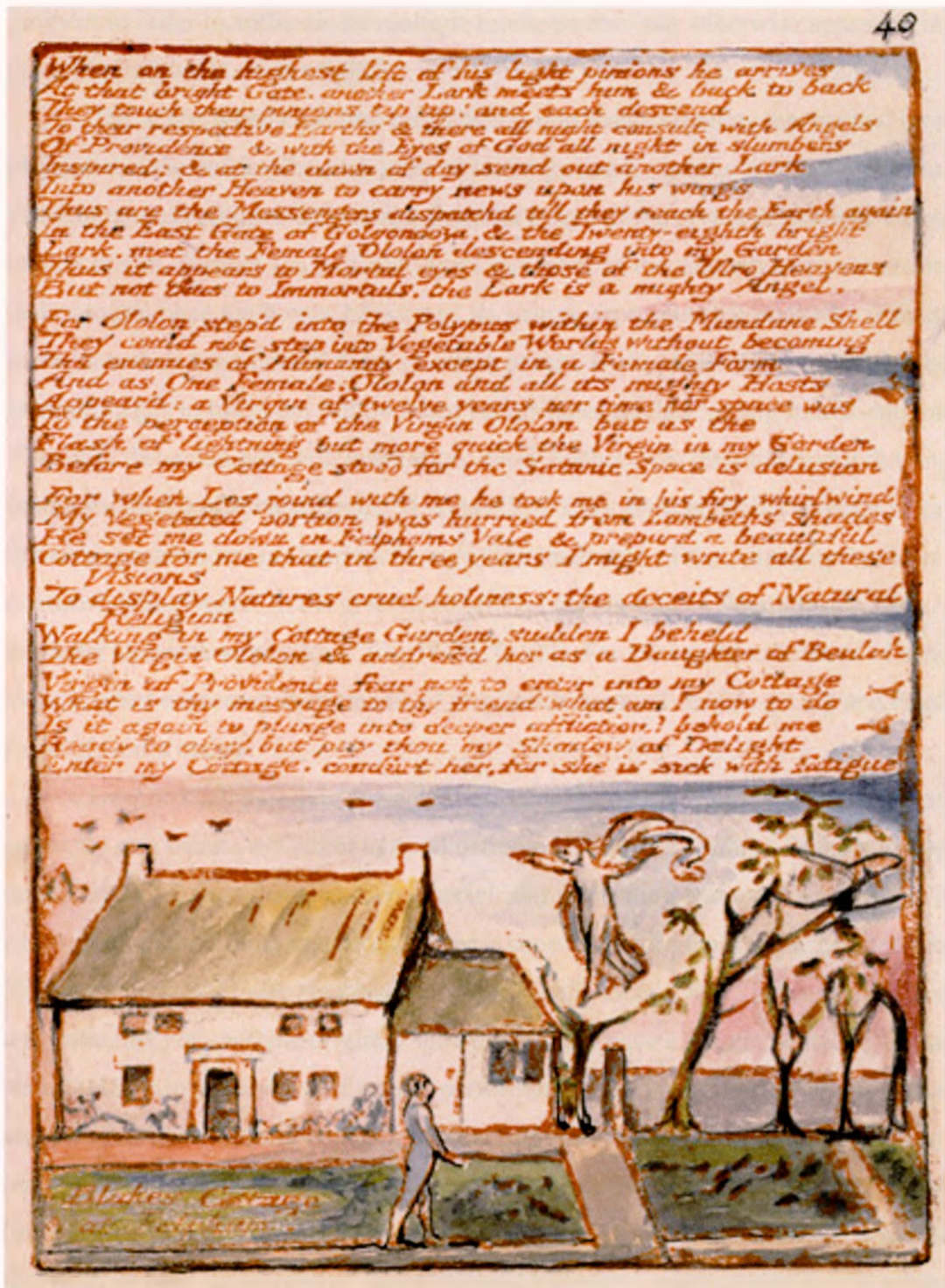


Fig. 35. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate 36 [40], object 40, 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

moment in order to authenticate multiple moments that may otherwise appear as impotent copies or imitations of an original.

The scene when God first breathes life into Adam signifies the original moment of inspiration in Judeo-Christian biblical terms: to inspire means to breathe or blow into. The Romantics refigured inspiration from the image of the divine breath into the image of natural breath. Samuel Taylor Coleridge's metaphor of the Aeolian harp, a harp that makes music once the breeze blows past its strings, represents the poet who is inspired by some natural or supernatural force to create poetry. Blake, too, makes use of similar natural images in his poem *Milton* when he attributes the lark's song to a divine force: "His little throat labours with inspiration; every feather / On throat & breast & wings vibrates with the effluence Divine" (31.34-35, E 130). Further, Blake directly links human expression to God's when he says, "As the breath of the Almighty. such are the words of man to man / In the great Wars of Eternity, in fury of Poetic Inspiration, / To build the Universe stupendous" (30.18-20, E 129). For Blake, the utterances of sentient beings, when expressed in moments of inspiration, parallel the life-giving and creating force of God's breath.

Despite such parallels, the activity of inspiration in *Milton* does not function primarily as a tribute to God or as a validation of His power. Rather, Blake's various depictions work to undermine such an origin for inspiration and to undermine the implication that all other inspiration is but a copy of the original unique biblical moment. Butler's theory of gender performativity specifically attacks and disables notions of the authentic, the real, and the original, showing them to have a "fundamentally phantasmatic status" (187). In the context of gender performance, she says, "performativity is not a singular act, but a repetition, which achieves its effects through its naturalization in the context of a body" (xv). Butler's primary example of the way gender can be subverted is drag. For her, drag, "*a stylized repetition of acts*" (179; original emphasis), demonstrates the theatrical and performative nature of gender identity, undercutting any pretensions to nature, essence, authenticity or originality bound up in notions of an original and a "failed copy" (186). Drag embodies a subversive act that challenges stable notions of gender, showing that a male body can indeed enact femininity or that a female body can enact masculinity. It functions as an example of a "parodic redeployment of power"

(158): it mimics a gender, which is presumed not only to be expressive rather than performative but also to be necessarily a product of biology rather than social construction. While Butlerian drag and Blakean inspiration seem a disjunctive comparison, both highlight the potentially disruptive effects of repetition and parody; drag, as iterations of gender stereotypes, destabilizes gender categories, while Blakean inspiration, as iterations of biblical inspiration, destabilizes the authority of such an activity.

Viewing Blake's multiple moments of inspiration in the context of repetition, parody, and subversion provides us with a concept of inspiration that subverts inspiration's sacred and authentic origin. Repetition often has the effect of emphasizing, but also of making the repeated item obviously un-singular or un-extraordinary. Through the sheer number of reiterations and his continual refashioning of the moment of inspiration, Blake disturbs the authority of the original biblical moment as well as of the original poetic moment, which are conventionalized as invocations to God or the Muses. In *Milton*, an inspired individual never completely loses the sense of self. The poem begins with the conventional invocation to the Muses (a passage discussed near the beginning of the chapter). However, when Blake calls on higher powers to tell the story of Milton in Eternity, he does not request inspiration. Instead, he asks the Daughters of Beulah to write about Milton's quest through his body, imploring them to enter and take over his "hand," "the Nerves of [his] right arm" and his "Brain," so that this vision of Eternity may find its way to the page. In this case, Blake occupies a seemingly passive role in order to be the conduit through which the Muses will "Record the journey of immortal Milton." It is as if Blake hyperbolizes this episode even to the point of parody, "a subtle parody of Milton's claim to have transcribed the whole of *Paradise Lost* by dictation from God" according to Lucy Newlyn (269). Blake undermines the meaning of conventional inspiration where "[t]he muse speaks, and the poet is only her mouthpiece and servant; or in the medieval Christian tradition the human *scriptor* has authority only as a scribe of divine truth. Both notions actually negate individual creativity. Inspiration there concerns matters of authority, the right to speak and the claim to speak in the name of truth" (T. Clark 2). Such an exaggeration of passive reception as a subversion or as a parody of this kind of relation between the poet and the Muses is reinforced by Blake's

portrayal of himself as the speaker of the poem.

Butler's discussion of "the original" offers some insights into Blake's manipulation of the origin. She argues, "The notion of gender parody defended here [i.e., *Gender Trouble*] does not assume that there is an original which such parodic identities imitate. Indeed, the parody is *of* the very notion of an original [...] so gender parody reveals that the original identity after which gender fashions itself is an imitation without an origin" (*Creating States* 175). After reading the poem and being inundated with one inspiration scene after another, one begins to question why Blake felt it necessary to repeat it so extensively. One answer that arises from Butler's performativity is that Blake imitates and potentially parodies the "original" scene of inspiration in order to show that its power does not belong to some God who sits on high. Rather, humanity has the capacity to wield this powerful tool. Also, by emphasizing the body in this process, Blake returns to the site of original inspiration in which Adam's body was literally animated by God's breath. Blake unsettles this moment by indicating that not only does God have the power to penetrate another so radically and so physically, but humans have it as well. Human inspiration, then, is not "a failed copy" of some original moment (186). It has its own potency as, to borrow from Butler, "[An] imitation[] which effectively displace[s] the meaning of the original [...]" (176). The tyrannical God of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, the God figured as a supreme being who demands obedience from his human subjects, is not necessary in Blake's world where humans are the ones with the power to create change and to alter the world.

Of all his works, this one, arguably, depicts Blake as a character in text and design more than any other. He may be a conduit in many cases throughout the epic, but he has such a role thanks to his ability to participate in mental strife, his ability to imagine, and, as a result, his ability to open himself to such visionary acts. As Esterhammer notes, Mitchell "specifically relates the creative effect of Blake's language to his rejection of a Miltonic model of inspiration" (*Creating States* 175). Mitchell argues, "Without the Miltonic assumption of an untouched, perfect divinity in the heavens, the prophet cannot simply serve as the mouthpiece of God; if he is to be a seer, he must create what he sees" (*Blake's Composite Art* 169). Indeed, Blake's depiction of inspiration in this example (and in the subsequent examples) does not suggest a possession whereby the person

under possession has his or her will suspended. Balfour, however, claims the contrary: “Blake’s works—like Milton’s poems, like the prophet’s words—are his and not his, with the emphasis on their author being more possessed than possessing. Once again, this giving up or over of one’s voice is the paradigmatic poetic and prophetic act, a sacrifice that is the condition of redemption” (172). My point about parody and disrupting the origin works against such readings of inspiration and prophecy. In my reading, a fusion between or among characters occurs so that more than one being takes responsibility for an act, nullifying the seeming passivity of one of the characters and thereby making all active. Through his exaggeration of passive reception, Blake subverts and parodies a relation between the poet and the Muses or God based on the latter exerting control over the former, and, in doing so, Blake opposes Milton’s understanding of inspiration.

Furthermore, despite calling on the Daughters of Beulah to enter his hand and brain and to write this epic through his body, he does not relinquish his authority, as is evidenced by the title page of *Milton*. Here, he does not list the Daughters of Beulah—or eternal beings—as the originators of the work, nor does he efface his role in the creation and production of the poem. Instead, “W Blake” is listed as “The Author & Printer” (E 95; fig. 21). *Milton* is one of the few works in which Blake identifies himself as the author, and the only later work in which he does so—all works after the *Songs* list him only as the printer. Thus, given the relationship between action and identity, it is significant that in this poem, he assigns to himself complete possession of the work before the audience without qualifying it in the design.²⁰ This assignation does not discount the inspiration that Blake seeks at the beginning of the poem; rather, it complicates the notion of agency and origin in the epic.

²⁰ Numerous times throughout his letters, Blake claims that he is a mere vessel for the eternal vision implemented by those in Eternity (e.g., E 701, 705, 724, 728-29). For instance, in reference to one of his epics, he states, “I dare not pretend to be any other than the Secretary the Authors are in Eternity” (Letter to Butts, 6 Jul. 1803, E 730). Yet, elsewhere, he takes exception with the implication that poets are somehow distanced from what they write: “Plato has made Socrates say that Poets & Prophets do not Know or Understand what they write or Utter this is a most Pernicious Falshood. If they do not pray is an inferior Kind to be calld Knowing Plato confutes himself” (VLJ E 554).

Similarly, Blake's depiction of prophecy functions to question the idea of an origin. Traditional prophetic moments follow from inspiration in that a prophet, in the biblical sense, as God's spokesperson, produces a prophecy under God's direct guidance. Thus, the tradition of prophets finds its lineage in the first biblical site of inspiration, the creation of Adam. As Balfour explains, "the authority of prophetic rhetoric normally derives in large measure from its representation as coming from a divine source outside the human mind. The only authority required by Blake is a 'firm persuasion'" (133). Blake, then, needs the authority only of the individual, not of an external source. In the poem, Milton's act is foreseen in an ancient prophecy in Eternity. At first fearful of Milton's act of leaving Eternity, Los then

recollected an old Prophecy in Eden recorded,
 And often sung to the loud harp at the immortal feasts
 That Milton of the Land of Albion should up ascend
 Forwards from Ulro from the Vale of Felpham; and set free
 Orc from his Chain of Jealousy, he started at the thought (20.58-61, E
 115)

Blake explains that characters know of such a prophecy, but he does not reveal the authority or source of the prophecy. No God stands behind it, and no one character stands out as *the* prophet or as God's mouthpiece; the prophecy merely exists in this rather mysterious manner. By destabilizing the authority of the prophecy about Milton's act and calling into question any kind of accountability, "is Blake not," as Esterhammer points out, "disrupting the very tradition on which he should be drawing for credibility as an inspired speaker?" (217). It certainly seems so. Blake daringly relinquishes, and, indeed threatens, the security and authority of the divinely inspired prophet. He abandons such a tradition and fashions a new concept of inspiration: Blake "avoid[s] the reductive clarity of a Miltonic overview, since there is no epic narrator to underline the significance of the events as they unfold, and no character within the poem who is truly omniscient" (Newlyn 266), not even Los, the figure of imagination. Los's recollection of the prophecy and the many performances of the prophecy by the Bard—who does not claim God's authority but states nevertheless, "I am Inspired" (13.51, E 107)—serve to complicate any notion of causality. Again, performance takes centre stage, but it also throws into

question Milton's decision to leave Eternity. We know the Bard's song provokes Milton's journey, but would he have made the decision if he had not heard it? Was he present at all these prior performances of the prophecy? If so, has Milton had an Eternity of hearing it to convince him to act?

The act of inspiration and self-annihilation embodies multiplicity, thus complicating causality or agency. Milton's journey, which appears to be a solitary one, is infused with various selves. For example, the Bard does not simply vanish from the text once his song concludes; he merges with another identity: "Then there was great murmuring in the Heavens of Albion [...] The loud voic'd Bard terrify'd took refuge in Miltons bosom" (14.4-9, E 108). While we do not see the Bard again, his last known act joins him to Milton by entering Milton and we never see him leave. The Bard, then, accompanies, and perhaps inspires in the sense of provoking, Milton's initial steps in his journey but also in the sense of continuing to fortify him for the remainder of his quest. At this point in the narrative, Milton speaks for the first time, announcing his decision to leave Eternity and seek eternal death. Blake does not account for how much the Bard acts as the agent behind Milton's actions or how much Milton himself acts as the agent. However, Milton's autonomy is not jeopardized in the fusion—there is no sense that he becomes a puppet obeying the will of his master. Instead, the lack of clarity suggests that both Milton and the Bard participate in the deeds that Milton enacts. His willingness to be inspired by the Bard and to allow him (literally) into his "bosom" (14.9, E 108) shows that he has already started to cast off selfhood by opening his identity to be shared with another. The two merge, and, as a result, both are expanded.

Similar to the Bard's entrance into Milton is Milton's entrance into Blake, the latter maintaining his sense of self while being joined with Milton:

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
.....
And all this Vegetable World appeard on my left Foot,
As a bright sandal formd immortal of precious stones & gold:

I stooped down & bound it on to walk forward thro' Eternity. (21.4-14, E 115)

Milton's entrance into Blake allows Blake, and indeed "all men on Earth, / And all in Heaven" to see into "the nether regions of the Imagination." Thus, Milton's descent into the world, his process of self-annihilation, opens the imagination of all, giving them visionary (in)sight. What this means is that his one act not only redeems him, but it also potentially allows all beings to seek redemption. Blake, now himself and Milton at once, does not figure himself as a vessel passively taking in the inspiration and letting something else happen to him. Instead, he actively pursues a course and proceeds to "walk forward thro' Eternity." Yet, as with Milton and the Bard, we never see a clear endpoint to the process of Milton inspiring Blake, suggesting that Blake now carries Milton along with him just as Milton presumably carries the Bard with him on his journey, making Milton's inspiration of Blake a three-way act—and, in fact, Blake's encounter with Los makes it a four-way act (not to mention the Muses whom Blake invokes at the beginning of the poem). If we consider Ololon and Robert, Blake's dead brother who is also entered by a star, and their roles in inspiration, the layers of identities become even more complex.

After Milton inspires him, Blake's journey through Eternity continues on to further merging of identities. As with Milton, when Blake encounters Los, the process does not leave Blake overwhelmed and passive:

While Los heard indistinct in fear, what time I bound my sandals
 On; to walk forward thro' Eternity, Los descended to me:
 And Los behind me stood; a terrible flaming Sun: just close
 Behind my back; I turned round in terror, and behold.
 Los stood in that fierce glowing fire; & he also stoop'd down
 And bound my sandals on in Udan-Adan; trembling I stood
 Exceedingly with fear & terror, standing in the Vale
 Of Lambeth: but he kissed me and wishd me health.
 And I became One Man with him arising in my strength:
 Twas too late now to recede. Los had enterd into my soul:

His terrors now posses'd me whole! I arose in fury & strength.

(22.4-14, E 116-17)

Los provides Blake with further fortification, as did the “preceding” encounter with Milton. While Los does not re-enact Milton’s entrance into Blake’s foot (though Los binds Blake’s sandals), Los does “enter[] into [Blake’s] soul,” which is perhaps not very different from entering into someone’s bosom or foot in this poem. Despite Blake’s comment that Los’s “terrors now posses’d [him] whole,” Blake still insists on using an active sentence to describe his subsequent action: “I arose in fury & strength.” Still demarcated as an “I,” Blake arises without suggesting that his (or Los’s) will has been compromised. Instead, combining with Los has given him new “strength.” Moreover, the experience is cast as a union of identities: “And I became One Man with him arising in my strength.” Not only does Blake arise in strength, but it also seems as though Los arises thanks to Blake’s strength (and thanks to Blake’s ambiguous grammar), thereby multiplying the act and confusing agency.

Again, who inspires whom to do what is not clear, but what is clear is that this process of merging, or destabilizing one’s self-centredness or Selfhood, and potentially annihilating it in these moments, leads to Blake’s “bec[oming] One Man,” an allusion to Jesus as the One Just Man who will redeem the world. Characters becoming other characters prefigures and parallels Jesus’ self-sacrifice to redeem us all. Hughes notes the same kind of disruption in causal logic in the “Introduction” to the *Songs of Innocence* (1789), stating, “The poem’s scene of inspiration is certainly a complex one to understand: is it the child who inspires the piper, or vice versa, or a combination?” (94). Inspiration in *Milton* is no less ambiguous. One may ask, who can take responsibility for the first act of inspiration? Does Milton’s inspiring act inspire this epic, or does the Muses’? The convoluted twists and turns that Blake contrives in attributing an action to an individual evinces that the point of origin is of little importance next to the fact that this act occurs at all.

As the above examples show, Blake depicts inspiration not only as a process that occurs through language and utterance but also as one that occurs at the level of the body and through physical action. Blake represents the materiality of inspiration through images of fire or flames, lightning, a whirlwind, a star, a comet, and a sun entering or

enveloping a human body. In fact, the poem shows inspiration to be the actual, and not simply metaphorical, interpenetration of bodies: Blake repeatedly refers to characters entering the bodies of other characters, whether into the brain, the chest, the hand, or the foot. Inspiration, then, does not appear only as an effect of breath or words but also as an effect of bodily penetration and physical acts. If Blake's bodies interpenetrate one another—as the Muses enter Blake's body, and Milton enters Blake's body, and Milton enters Robert's body, and the Bard enters Milton's body—then where do we draw the line around identity? Where does Milton end and Blake begin? Such a confusion of intermingling identities creates a multi-layered kind of inspiration, and it continues throughout the poem, becoming more complicated at each turn.

Moreover, Blake sensualizes and eroticizes some of the moments of inspiration. As discussed in the section on epic, Blake reconstructs a model of heroism. His model also includes the troubling of strict sexual codes. While sex *per se* does not occur in the poem, Blake includes several moments that gesture toward sensuality and eroticism, a gesture that revises traditional heterosexual notions of masculinity. I argue that Blake's central and continuously repeated image of physical penetration and amalgamation between various identities of various sexes suggests a queering of identity. Besides the (mostly) naked²¹ and muscular masculine images that he delineates, the mirror images²² of "William" and "Robert" being entered into by a star (pl. 29 and 33 [Bentley]; figs. 36 & 37) attach a homosocial-homoerotic element to inspiration. In the "William" design, Blake depicts himself with head and body bent back and arms open wide as a flaming star descends toward his left foot. Erdman reads the moment as a gesture of activity: "Dynamically we may define the tarsus as the articulation of the foot that energizes stepping forward" ("The Steps (of Dance and Stone)" 74). The flames from the star illuminate his foot and cast their light upward alongside his body and past his name. The

²¹ As Christopher Hobson points out in *Blake and Homosexuality*, the images of William and Robert from copy C of *Milton* depict the brothers with transparent shorts, while the corresponding images from the earlier copy A depict the men fully naked.

²² According to the numbered ordering of the plates, these two do not actually get bound as facing pages, but the Blake image does come first in the numbering, making them look as if they are mirror images when they are viewed together.



Fig. 36. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate 29 [Bentley], object 32, 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.



Fig. 37. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate 33 [Bentley], object 37, 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

text on plate 15, lines 47-50 (E 110) explicitly states that Milton is the star. If we read the star as Milton in the design, then we have the one (male) poet entering and penetrating the physical body of the other (male) poet. The image moves beyond the traditional model of authorial influence; it depicts a physical (in addition to mental and spiritual) union. Likewise, Robert participates in a physical-mental-spiritual experience, creating a link between all three men. We see “a triple spiritual and sexual union among the two brothers and Milton, manifested in the brothers’ simultaneous orgasmic body spasms” (Hobson, *Blake and Homosexuality* 131).

Several critics note the parallel between this moment and Saul’s conversion into St. Paul (for instance, see Riede 261 ff.). Riede states, “Milton descends into Blake’s lowest member in one more sense than we have considered it, for yet another pun on ‘tarsus’ plays on the plural of ‘tarse,’ an archaism for phallus (*OED*)” (271). However, Riede states that such a pun is merely a “continuation of Milton’s phallogentrism.” Nevertheless, both Mitchell (“Style and Iconography” 67) and Christopher Z. Hobson²³ point to the homoerotic and homosexual connotations of Blake’s text and designs. Hobson points out that these two images “give strongly homoerotic overtones to the heroic qualities they depict” and reinforce “the poem’s emphasis on positive male homoeroticism” (*Blake and Homosexuality* 131).²⁴ He adds, the images of Robert and Blake “suggest both crucifixion and sexual ecstasy”; “[e]vidently, the moment of Milton’s spiritual accession is also a moment of sexual exaltation.” Blake chooses to cast heroism, revelation, and sacrifice in a homoerotic light. He constructs the designs so as to depict explicit male-male eroticism, moving beyond the bonds of fraternity and brotherhood (based on Christian love and humanism) present in many of his other

²³ Elsewhere, Hobson provocatively argues, “in the middle and late works Blake’s idea of liberty expands to include both female and male homosexuality, and that homosexuality and its toleration become emblems of a larger mutualism within a free society” (“What is Liberty without Universal Toleration” 137).

²⁴ Besides the William and Robert plates, Hobson also analyzes the plate depicting Los appearing in a fiery sun to Blake as homoerotic, if not insinuating a specific sexual act (i.e., fellatio); in the design, Blake is kneeling and looks behind him to see Los emerge from the sun, while Blake’s head covers Los’s genital area (135-41; fig. 34).

works.²⁵ For example, as one being crosses the bounds of another being's outline of identity, a moment of sexual ecstasy occurs. Characters willingly allow themselves to be inspired, to be entered, and the act is most certainly pleasurable and ecstatic.

In the poem, touching and interpenetrating bodies are crucial. Significantly, Blake critiques the world of science and rational thought, "The Microscope" and "the Telescope," precisely because they contradict the point of these acts: "they [the scientific instruments] alter / The ratio of the Spectators Organs but leave Objects untouched" (29.17-19, E 127). On the surface, these instruments seem to open new worlds to us by revealing things we cannot see with the naked eye. However, the problem lies with the failure to effect material change, with the failure of the instruments to allow the individual user to actually penetrate the objects that they magnify. This example encapsulates one of the larger concerns of the poem: "healing the fissure between object and subject" through "discrete acts of perception" (Lussier, "Blake and Science Studies" 200, 207)—and, I would add, material penetrations. Thus, as Lussier claims, in *Milton* we find "Blake's participatory model" (200) of the nature of existence, reality, and the relationship among beings. More concretely, in the scenes of inspiration, bodies touching and moving one another are essential in the process; it is not only a matter of spiritual and psychic influence, though this is important as well. Sedgwick theorizes the agency aspect of touching between two individuals: "Even more immediately than other perceptual systems, it seems, the sense of touch makes nonsense out of any dualistic understanding of agency and passivity; to touch is always already to reach out, to fondle, to heft, to tap, or to enfold, and always also to understand other people or natural forces as having effectually done so before oneself" (14). The penetrability of Blake's bodies highlights Sedgwick's claims about the destabilization of the binary view of agent and receiver. However, touching is not the only sense affected in this process.

The representation of ecstasy and eroticism as part of the moment of inspiration in the designs inevitably heightens the visual effects that mediate the experience for the audience. John B. Pierce highlights the importance of orality and aurality in Blake's *Milton*, thus opening the performative potential of the poem. Yet his argument remains

²⁵ For a reading of the significance of "universal brotherhood" (447) to social and political relations in Blake's works, see Michael Ferber's "Blake's Idea of Brotherhood."

firmly rooted in the verbal, specifically the relationship between speech and writing. Even when he addresses a visual image (in this case the title page), he mainly associates it with linguistic problems: it poses “a challenge to the linearity of the book” (468). Pierce’s claim that “[Blake’s] Milton becomes a dispersion of subject positions, ranging from inspired positions within the orality of Eternity to the visible mark of the written form” (470) does not address the visual in its own right with respect to inspiration and subjectivity. The significance of Blake’s visual depictions of inspiration cannot be underestimated. The visual scene of inspiration, particularly in the example of the “William” and “Robert” plates, offers us more than the poetry allows:

Then first I saw [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,
 But from my left foot a black cloud redounding spread over Europe.
 (15.46-49, E 110)

The designs Blake provides for this moment come at separate points in the work, separate from the poetic reference and separate from each other. By comparing the text to the two images above, we see that they convey a great deal more than the poetry does (the star-Milton “enterd there”). The intense feeling of a body being infused with inspiration or becoming, in part, someone else is absent in the lines of the poem. Milton does not merely “enter,” as the words of the poem indicate; rather, the image shows us that he overwhelms Blake and produces an ecstatic moment. In addition, the image of Robert gives us a moment unsayable, or at least not said, in the language of the poem; the written text never mentions him.

As an art form that integrates both the linguistic and visual dimensions, dramatic performance offers a significant way of interpreting these visual moments of inspiration. These moments parallel theatrical “pointing,” a convention dominant in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Freeman explains,

The dramatic technique of ‘pointing’ refers to the practice of bracketing off a set speech from the course of action and directing that speech, along with a set of gestures, at the audience. Once plays were established in the repertory, particular roles and speeches or ‘points’ achieved privileged

status in the course of performance and were associated with the technique of a particular actor or actress who either originated the role or attempted innovations in that role. (31)

I argue that these kind of theatrical points find their equivalent in the inspiration sequences and images, which occur more than a dozen times in *Milton*, with the shooting star entering the foot arguably the most common. Repetition brackets them off from the rest of the poem and highlights them, signaling the relevance of these moments. The tableau-like designs resonate with theatrical points, wherein an actor often held a pose or a gesture for a short time in order to impress the audience. Each time we encounter one such moment from this sequence of repetitions, we inevitably recall previous ones, comparing and contrasting them with respect to the way they are visualized or articulated and with respect to the various characters who perform this particular point. Just as we compare various incarnations of Hamlet, especially in the performance and staging of the famous “To be or not to be” soliloquy, we can, and do, compare the way various characters become inspired or inspire, making the moment even more pivotal. The repetitions theatricalize the moment, making it performative. In addition, they set the moment of inspiration off from all other actions and events, suggesting that these moments are *the* defining acts of *Milton*.

Thanks to its numerous repetitions, this “point” does not belong solely to one character or actor. It is a shared act, which perhaps encourages more repetitions beyond the work—encouraging the audience to open themselves up in this way so that they to may add their own version in this series of similar “points.” As Mitchell reminds us, because of unions and the merging of identities, the problem of “see[ing] illustrations accurately” arises; “This underlying oneness makes the task of identifying characters in the designs particularly difficult. The problem is one of avoiding narrowly restrictive identifications on the one hand, and of confusing everything into a blurry unity on the other” (“Style and Iconography” 64). Either extreme should be avoided. Defining the various moments of inspiration as a series of theatrical points avoids these extremes and enables two possibilities at once: emphasizing the singularity of each moment and providing each moment a larger, more interconnected framework. The frequency of similar moments forces us to recognize each one as a remarkable event, while their

sameness encourages us to group them together and compare them, thus taking each “point” on its own terms but giving it fuller meaning and significance as a series.

Several characters enact inspiration and participate in this particular “point.” Not only do male characters enter and physically penetrate other male characters, but female characters also seem to participate in these kinds of moments (e.g., Blake requests female Muses to enter his physical body at the beginning of the poem). Ololon, the conglomeration of Milton’s female relations, undertakes a parallel journey to Milton’s, and, in fact, her journey enables the completion of his. Here, the epic hero seemingly begins his quest to save his Emanation, but it turns out that his own redemption depends on her quest. The apocalyptic moment that Milton asks for at the beginning of the poem is achieved in part thanks to Ololon. Mitchell argues “the descent of Ololon” is “[t]he decisive action in the poem” (“Style and Iconography” 50). She appears to usher in Christ, another component of the conglomerate hero of the poem. Blake writes, “So spake the Family Divine as One Man even Jesus / Uniting in One with Ololon & the appearance of One Man / Jesus the Saviour appeard coming in the Clouds of Ololon!” (21.58-59, E 116). Betsy Bolton interprets the image of Ololon as a garment over Christ at the end of the poem as a “female-male version of hermaphroditism” (76).²⁶ Moreover, Milton himself willfully enters into some gender ambiguity:

Then on the verge of Beulah he beheld his own Shadow;
 A mournful form double; hermaphroditic: male & female
 In one wonderful body. and he enterd into it
 In direful pain [...] (14.36-39, E 108)

²⁶ Bolton differs from Mitchell’s positive view of Ololon’s role; instead, she sees an explicit difference between her act and Milton’s: with Ololon, we have “an experience of violence, a loss of autonomy and agency,” while Milton’s act “seems far more gradual, peaceful and creative” (80). She also reads Ololon and Christ’s union as one in which Ololon “vanishes, sublimated into symbols surrounding the masculine figure of Jesus” (81). While I take Bolton’s point and do find Blake’s work to draw a clear division between men and women, even to the point of appearing misogynistic at times, I think that inspirational acts refuse such an absolute sublimation of any identity.

Milton's journey to earth necessitates such a union. While Blake's "hermaphrodit[e]"²⁷ is "A mournful form" (suggesting a state to be avoided) and a symbol of "a condition of mutual oppression between the sexes" according to Mitchell (63), the impact of the image cannot be negated. Milton enters this form that is both "male & female / In one wonderful body." Of course, "wonderful" can mean literally full of wonder, indicating surprise at the unfamiliar, but it also has the related positive connotation of delightful. The ambiguity also arises in a later formulation where Blake describes the "Twofold form Hermaphroditic" as standing before Milton in "their beauty, & in cruelties of holiness" (19.32, 34, E 113). Despite the form's cruelties, Blake acknowledges its beauty; he avoids using phobic terms of repulsion or unnaturalness.

Again, the image of Milton somehow joining with other male characters (as with William and Robert above) and with a "hermaphroditic" form destabilizes both Milton's sexual and gendered identity. While the text refuses to state explicitly what changes occur when one enters another in this poem, it is clear that such moments of alteration are crucial. In addition to the elements of theatricality and performativity, I argue that Blake's central and continuously repeated image of physical penetration and amalgamation between various identities of various sexes queers identity, particularly as bodies enact inspiration. Such an identity, though maintaining a claim on some eternal form, expresses the capacity to unite with other identities (of both genders), thereby refuting a notion of the isolated self and adding a level of multiplicity.

What is at stake for Blake in using interpenetrating bodies as a signifier for inspiration? For one, it gives visionary acts a concrete presence. He shows that these kinds of acts have a very real impact in the material world. But he also goes further. Butler's discussion of the body in *Gender Trouble* leads us in another direction. In relation to the AIDS epidemic and fearful responses to diseased bodies, she points to "permeable bodily boundaries" (168). She claims that such a permeability of the body through penetration and the exchange of fluids during sex confound any attempt to use the body—traditionally an external marker of a stable self—to ground the claim of "the

²⁷ Interestingly, Blake does not use the noun "hermaphrodite" to define the "hermaphroditic" form in the poem. This distinction may suggest that the figure of the "hermaphrodite" is not one that is inherently negative or one that must be rejected for a singular form of one sex.

internal fixity of the self" (171). The permeability of bodies "disrupts the very boundaries that determine what it is to be a body at all" (169). Blake's bodies are more than permeable; they are penetrable and move in and out of one another. If one's body does not signify a sealed enclosure, then we are necessarily open to change at a fundamental level. To embrace and acknowledge the permeability of both the self and the body is to be open to being other than what we have been before or other than what governing institutions say we should be. In fact, Blake makes it clear that rejecting this penetrability is akin to a failure or fall. Unlike Milton's *Paradise Lost* in which Satan sins through his disobedience and revolt against God, in Blake's epic poem, Satan falls, I would argue, because of his refusal to be entered or to be inspired by another. He resists moments of interpenetration such as inspiration and self-annihilation—at the end, in the face of Milton's self-annihilation, Satan "trembl[es] round his Body, [and] he incircle[s] it" (39.16, E 140). He chooses to enclose and to encircle himself and his body, thereby isolating himself from others. In contrast, the rest of the main characters in the poem form a community of inspirers, and, as such, they transform the world through inspiration.

Primarily through the performative depiction of inspirational acts, Blake moves away from conventional notions of a solitary and special poet or prophet figure being inspired by some divinity toward a theory of inspiration for all, a theory which addresses social concerns as much as poetic ones. As a result, poetic inspiration no longer belongs to a small minority. Blake does not construct a Wordsworthian vision of the poet speaking for or to "men." As Charles Guignon points out, a Romantic or explicitly Wordsworthian vision of an authentic and true mode of existence is one in which "The ultimate metaphysical reality is the human Self, independent of and untouched by anything outside itself, in its own unbounded freedom creating realities for itself, and in no way answerable to anything outside itself" (64). Contrary to this solipsistic and inward turn, Blake's reconfiguration of inspiration necessitates and emphasizes the interpersonal exchange between human beings, suggesting not the isolated mind turned in upon itself but a vision of community where to be human, perhaps even authentically so, is to open oneself up to others. In the end, Blake may be demonstrating a wish-fulfillment fantasy in his conception of human relationships, resulting from a frustration with his own lack of

community, particularly artistic. Nevertheless, his human community involves human beings inspiring each other through social and material interventions. In exploring Blake's understanding of identity and community, Deen argues, "Identity is the community of men acting through the individual man to create a human world" (183). In light of my analysis of inspiration, I would add that inspiration unites individuals into a community and gives them a unified power to effect change.

In *The Theory of Inspiration: Composition as a Crisis of Subjectivity in Romantic and Post-Romantic Writing*, Timothy Clark argues, "The history of the concept of inspiration in much Romantic and post-Romantic writing can be summed up as the attempt to locate or employ some privileged 'creative' faculty with the property of a performative that (impossibly) ensures its own value or which, in other words, projects and incorporates its own audience" (11, original emphasis). Although Clark references Blake only occasionally, the particular performative coding that Clark assigns for inspiration is relevant to Blake. As I discussed earlier, Blake's performative takes the form of the Sedgwickian dare. The Preface to *Milton* concludes with a quotation from the Bible: "Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets" (E 96).²⁸ The full quotation, as Moses speaks it in Numbers, is "would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them!" (11.29). The missing half of the verse suggests divine inspiration, while the placement of Blake's biblical quotation just after the famous lyric "And did those feet in ancient time," a poem that talks of "Mental Fight" (E 95) and "buil[ding] Jerusalem" (E 96), intimates a coming apocalypse. By withholding the second part of the verse, Blake implicitly prompts his audience to fill in the missing part. This omission and our subsequent completion allow us to take an active role in the creation of meaning and, by the same token, in the creation of the new Jerusalem. By doing so, we take a small step toward becoming the visionaries that Blake wishes us to be.

In a Preface that has already uttered a performative call to England's people to "Rouze up" (E 95), the biblical citation is conspicuous for pointing out two things at

²⁸ Critics such as Frye (340), Wittreich (*Angel of Apocalypse* 243) and Balfour (131) have pointed out that Blake not only cites the Bible with the quotation, but he also echoes Milton's *Areopagitica*, which also quotes this phrase.

once: one, that the poet wishes all people were divinely inspired prophets and, two, by doing so, he indicates that we are *not*, in fact, prophets. Here, Blake forces the audience away from the private space of the mind and into the realm of public action. In his reading of *Milton*, Mitchell foregrounds the public space where the audience is forced to interact with the work. Interestingly, he uses the term “radical comedy” as a “theatrical metaphor” for the poem, where this metaphor functions as “a way of seeing *Milton* as a kind of living theater, open-ended, inconclusive, and reaching out to involve its audience in the action” (“Blake’s Radical Comedy” 282). While I go further than seeing the relation between Blake and drama as merely metaphorical, I find Mitchell’s point about the poem and its audience particularly relevant. The two-pronged biblical quotation with which Blake ends his Preface exemplifies such a reaching out in the form of a dare (in fact, the second one of the Preface). Blake dares his audience to become what he says they are not, to access the visionary that inspired individuals can access; he dares them to demonstrate the protean or transformative ability to alter themselves.

Performative repetition, I argue, also expands the moment of inspiration past the narrative level to the level of the audience of Blake’s work, and it opens inspiration up as a more inclusive process, one not confined solely to unique individuals such as prophets and poets. The title page furthers these ideas, constructing a moment of inspiration that also disturbs notions of singular personal identity (fig. 21). Milton, with flaming feet, stands before a vortex, or a kind of whirlwind, which bears not only his name but that of Blake as well. As Milton steps forward into the vortex, his left hand hangs down adjacent to the name “W Blake,” while “[his] own [right] hand is shown reaching *through* and ‘breaching’ the name” (Vogler 142, original emphasis), thereby breaking his name in half. Thomas A. Vogler explains that this “fractured name[] anticipat[es] a complex act of un/re-naming.” Milton’s act of breaking his name is, indeed, important for the action of the poem, but, rather than following Vogler’s psychoanalytic reading, I focus on the importance of the act for Blake’s conception of identity and its relationship to self-annihilation and inspiration.

The vortex and flaming feet indicate that both Milton and Blake, connected through Milton’s body, are in a moment of inspiration. Milton is inspired by Blake, as is evident in the way Milton’s hand almost touches Blake’s name (an echo of the invocation

scene); however, Milton is also inspiring Blake. Significantly, in order to enter such a moment, Milton willfully unsettles and displaces himself: his hand separates and severs his name. Such an act resembles a later depiction of Milton (pl. 16; fig. 38). Here, Milton encounters an obstacle in the form of Urizen during his journey to self-annihilation. In this encounter, Blake depicts Milton's foot bifurcating the word "selfhood"—he literally divides it. He unsettles who he is and who he has been in order to participate in such a moment, and, thereby, confirms his penetrability.

In addition, the very status of the title page as the first page of the poem suggests a particular kind of relationship between the audience of the poem and Milton: Blake tropes the audience engaging with or entering his illuminated works as Milton entering another world and as Milton beginning a visionary quest. Yet, as the discussion of Blake's view of the world of imagination in chapter two suggests, what appears as a trope is really an encouragement for us to *actually* enter the illuminated work. Such an entrance inevitably resonates with the various entrances into other bodies that many of the characters enact. Blake points to the audience's willing participation as yet another level of these moments of inspiration. With *Milton*, Blake argues, in effect, that participation in such inspirational moments necessitates disturbing one's perception of the bounded self in order to shift one's perception of the way things are to the way things could be, or as Butler says, to "rethink the possible" (xx).

What, then, does it mean to be inspired? In his rendering of inspiration, Nietzsche says, "Everything happens involuntarily in the highest degree but as in a gale of a feeling of freedom, of absoluteness, of power, of divinity" ("*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*" 300). Timothy Clark, quoting the full passage from which this sentence is taken, assesses Nietzsche's understanding of inspiration as one that shifts between two extremes: "This passage presents inspiration in terms of extremes of both self-affirmation and, simultaneously, of a transgression of personhood" (174). Yet, not surprisingly given Nietzsche's dissolution of the doer in the "First Essay" in *On the Genealogy of Morals*, Clark states, "The overwhelming freedom and power undergone in inspiration is not in any way a matter of the individual conscious will. The will itself is the product of the very forces with which it feels so in accord" (175). Nietzsche, while embracing the feeling inspiration brings, rejects any notion of complicity on the part of the person



Fig. 38. *Milton a Poem*, copy D, plate 16 [18], object 18, 1818, Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. © 2010 the William Blake Archive. Used with permission. This project is supported in part by a William Blake Archive Reproduction Grant for Graduate Students.

inspired, just as he rejects the doer at all, much as Butler would do after him.

Blake's configuration of inspiration differs. I argue that a Blakean sense of inspiration suggests a process whereby the "I" enacts a kind of self-annihilation by displacing itself—but only to some extent. Allowing someone to inspire us, breath into us, means that we dissolve the illusory border that seems to demarcate and isolate identity, the self, and the body—we undergo self-annihilation. However, while perhaps appearing as opposite actions, self-annihilation and inspiration are, in fact, the same process. Erdman, in his analysis of the image of William being inspired by the star, describes William as "flinging his body back in self annihilation" ("The Steps (of Dance and Stone)" 81). The streaking stars, flaming feet, fiery whirlwinds, burning suns, and lightning-like images are renovating moments. G. J. Finch states,

For Blake life is a process of continuous creation. Poetry is not, as it is with the other major Romantics, a matter of recollection. Blake is not really interested in imaginatively recapturing the past but in creating the future. He writes with a dynamic sense of human possibility; poetry is enactment, it is not *about* something, it *is* something. He is surely the last major poet to write with such a firm sense of poetry as the eternal 'now' of existence. The true subject of Blake's poetry is liberation – not in the sense of some kind of observable content but because the poems themselves are performative acts of liberation. (193)

I would add that, for Blake, poetry *does* something, as is implied in Finch's performative identification. The figure of inspiration embodies the kind of action that should occur not only when we read and look at his work but also when we interact with others. The poem, as a moment of inspiration, becomes what it is, enacts what it suggests as we encounter it, all the while both affirming and destabilizing our sense of self.

Applying Butler's performative theory to Blake's poem *Milton* provides a way to make sense of his numerous reiterations of inspirational acts as they apply to identity and action. Her theory is a theory of subversion, as her subtitle to *Gender Trouble* states: *Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Although Blake's poem does not explicitly focus on gender identity, it does provide an example of identity subversion, namely human identity and poetic identity as it is passed on through texts such as *Paradise Lost*.

Repetition and reiterability are crucial components for both Butler and Blake: these activities challenge the status quo and confound notions of originality and authenticity. While drag subverts the preconceived notions of gender potential, inspirational acts subvert preconceived notions of human potential. While Butler demonstrates the performativity and inauthenticity of gender by using the example of drag, Blake demonstrates the performativity and inauthenticity of the power of God and the prophet-poet by using the example of inspiration. Boldly revising the fundamental problems of *Paradise Lost*, Blake undermines God's authority as *the* one and true Creator by destabilizing the primal scene of God's inspiration of Adam. The deconstruction of the authentic moment of inspiration, and also significantly of creation (poetic and otherwise), allows for a re-conceptualization of human identity and capacity. For Blake, displacing the so-called original and authentic moment of inspiration does not inauthenticate all such moments; rather, doing so reaffirms the authenticity of each iteration, giving them, and humans, authority and power.

Blake's rendering of identity offers us a paradox that is also a compromise, one that is apt for both the Romantic period and the present. Both time periods demonstrate preoccupations with the tension between inner and outer in terms of identity, the former period through its interest in sincerity and constancy and in theatrical performance, the current period through its attention to questions of identity, gendered and otherwise. Blake addresses this disjunction by advocating self-annihilation and change. The only way to preserve your eternal identity is through constant moments of inspiration and a displacement of the self. Today, where the affirmation of a fluid sense of identity sometimes conflicts with lived experience, Blake's paradoxical retention of identity and perpetual displacement of the self, perpetual self-examination and alteration, offers a more balanced, if somewhat contradictory, conception of identity. One does not have to kill the agent, as happens in Nietzsche and Butler (though she tries to refute this claim). The agent, while more complex than a single doer, still exists and has potency, though perhaps to a lesser degree than (visionary) action itself. The key moment is undoubtedly a cross between inspiration and self-annihilation or some amalgamation of the two. As I have positioned Blake both in relation and in contrast to Butler, he offers a space of agency while subscribing (in part) to a performative view of identity. By refusing to

Conclusion

My analysis of Blake's illuminated works in a theatrical context has sought to revise our critical understanding of his relation to his cultural and artistic milieu. Conceptualizing his works as dramatic performances reveals that Blake, far from being dislocated from his time, engages with the concerns and debates of his day regarding public and private, mind and body, interiority and exteriority, and reflection and action, and it offers an important perspective for understanding his notions of identity (individual and collective) and spectatorship.

In his essay about melodrama in the early nineteenth century, Jeffrey Cox writes, "We need to see the array of performances in London as part of an interlocking system," adding that we should "see the major theatres offering tragedies and comedies, pantomimic stages, circus rings, street fairs, and even poetic plays in print as all connected in a performance system that helps shape each part" ("The Death of Tragedy" 163). Cox points out not only the variety of performances—those bound to the stage and those not—but also the interrelatedness of these forms. Staged drama did not stand in isolation from less formalistic urban street shows, nor did printed dramas stand apart from these embodied presentations. Blake's illuminated works provide yet another kind of performance among the numerous ones present in London during his lifetime. His art is just one among a multitude of performances that provided audiences with many ways to engage with the production before them. In addition to those mentioned above, illustrated literary editions, painting galleries (e.g., the Boydell Shakespeare Gallery), attitudes (e.g., Hamilton's and Ducrow's), urban spectacles, panoramas, salons and family theatricals for intimate stagings and group readings, and the kind of spectatorship found in the theatres themselves (where the audience was both spectator and spectacle¹)

¹ The lighting of the theatre, the constant conversation during the show, and the see-and-be-seen (or heard) environment of the theatres made the experience of taking in a show quite different from the present-day ones of more conventional theatres. The audience had a much greater role in the spectacle. The Coburg Theatre pushed this role to the extreme by introducing "a spectacular mirror curtain" that reflected the audience as if it were the stage spectacle (Moody 152). As Jane Moody explains, "[T]he mirror brilliantly dissolved the boundary between the consumer and the object of consumption, allowing spectators to become the subject of their own spectacle" (152 and 154).

all functioned to create particular yet intersecting experiences for an audience; these experiences depended on the way the audience was encouraged to navigate a space and engage with the artifact or production in that space, the level of physical and sensory activity demanded of the audience, the visual, verbal, and acoustic components, and their relationship to each other.

Acknowledging Blake's role in this labyrinth of interconnections yields a number of hitherto unexplored aspects and potential meanings of his works. The theatrical context offers a different perspective for further explorations of, for instance, Blake's compulsion to repeat and revise, both in verbal and visual registers, in relation to questions of adaptation and (re)staging; the relationship between various copies of the same work and repeated performances in a theatrical run of a drama; and thematic concerns such as identity, perception, and action with respect to theatre theory and views of acting throughout his oeuvre. Questions that arise within this theatrical frame are the extent to which there is an evolution in Blake's thinking, the ways in which it corresponds with what was happening simultaneously in the world of performance, and how the various aspects mentioned above affect and shape an interpretation of Blake's multilayered presentation of identity.

The dual exploration of drama and identity-formation with respect to Blake's illuminated works in this study opens up alternative possibilities for understanding his composite art as a medium and the audience experience it constructs. Consequently, viewing these works as dramatic performances allows for a productive engagement with his paradoxical figuration of identity, one that comprises the imagination, mental acts, and individual *and* the body, physical action, and the collective. In the remaining pages, I will draw together some of my central claims about Blake's works by briefly considering an aspect of the visual imagery in *Milton* that I have not yet discussed: the star imagery that signifies inspiration.

Blake's unusual choice of the shooting star as one of the most common representations of inspiration furthers his vision of identity in the context of action. Why does he choose the shooting star, particularly the image of one entering a person (as opposed to simply seeing a star)? An astrological basis does not entirely fit because though the aspect of influence is relevant, the idea that the stars control human affairs and

determine our fates makes human agency negligible or non-existent. In contrast, Blake's depiction of inspiration, where both identities act, most certainly maintains and even reaffirms human agency; Milton entering Blake as a star does not suggest his unequivocal influence over Blake but rather a mutual influence.

S. Foster Damon's explanation does not account for the star imagery in inspiration either. According to him, "STARS symbolize Reason" and thus "are assigned to Urizen" (386). Indeed, in some images, stars seem to have this symbolic function: in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, Theotormon uses a whip with stars at the ends for self-flagellation (pl. 6), and, in *Jerusalem*, Blake depicts Albion, with tattoo-like stars on his body, being tortured (pl. 25). Visually, Blake most frequently uses stars simply to signify the night sky, as he does for *The Book of Job* and for various single plates in his other works, including *Milton* (pl. 6). However, the shooting or flaming star that Blake selects as the verbal and visual signifier of inspiration in *Milton* seems to mean something other than the stars of reason or the simple stars of the night sky.

Here, characters entering the feet of other characters, falling or shooting stars, characters depicted and seen as falling stars entering other characters' feet, as well as flaming feet create the core constellation of images that depict the moment(s) of inspiration. Mary Lynn Johnson associates the shooting or falling star with an apocalyptic sign, "a sign that history is coming to a close and 'Eternity' is at hand" (235). Joseph Wittreich draws numerous comparisons: "Prometheus" (*Angel of Apocalypse* 14), "Lucifer," "Milton's Satan" (15), "man's falling away from true religion," "the falsification of truth, the obscuring of light," Milton as the "destroyer" of his former errors (15-16), and, finally, the star from Revelation, which connects "Milton to the angel who appears as a star"—an "angel of the Apocalypse" who will "cast [error] off" (16). All these potential interpretations are fascinating and fruitful in their own right.²

² Geoffrey Hartman assesses the image of the evening star in Romantic poetry as "a Westerning of the poetical spirit, and the fear of a decline in poetical energy," as well as a "fear of discontinuity" (176). In this context, the star is "symbolic of a continuity that persists within apparent loss" (150). Blake's star is not freighted with this fear or sense of loss but rather it has an optimistic and celebratory status. Hartman goes on to say that "Blake thinks of each great poet as a new and equal star" (152); I would modify this statement: Blake thinks each of us has the potential to be a new and equal star with the power to inspire and be inspired.

However, given my own focus on identity and action, my interpretation bends in a different direction.

Nietzsche's striking example of lightning as a figure for our understanding of deed and doer offers one potential reading of Blake's shooting star. Nietzsche writes, "For just as the popular mind separates the lightning from its flash and takes the latter for an *action*, for the operation of a subject called lightning, so popular morality also separates strength from expressions of strength, as if there were a neutral substratum behind the strong man, which was *free* to express strength or not to do so. But there is no such substratum; there is no 'being' behind doing, effecting, becoming; 'the doer' is merely a fiction added to the deed—the deed is everything. The popular mind in fact doubles the deed; when it sees the lightning flash, it is the deed of a deed: it posits the same event first as cause and then a second time as its effect." ("First Essay" 45; original emphasis)

If lightning equals an act (the act of enlightening the sky) and is not the cause of the flash but the flash itself, then the same could be said of all phenomena. For instance, the shooting star is not a star that shoots itself across the sky; rather, it is what it does. This erasure of the doer resembles Blake's description of the relation between work and the doer—the identity of the doer depends on the expression of his or her work or deeds.

Furthermore, Blake uses the image of lightning as a figure for inspirational moments. He says of Ololon's appearance in front of his cottage that it was "as the / Flash of lightning but more quick" (36.29-20, E 137), and Satan sees Milton go by "swift as lightning passing" while the "startled [...] shades / Of Hell beheld him in a trail of light as of a comet / That travels into Chaos" (15.18-20, E 109). Also, the star image from the first page of Book I turns into lightning on the title page of Book II (Erdman, "The Steps (of Dance and Stone)" 80; figs. 32 & 33). Inspiration is a complex event—a deed with more than one doer according to Blake or a deed with no doers at all according to Nietzsche. The disruption in the cause and effect chain displaces the doer to the extent that it makes the fact that lightning strikes, or the shooting star falls, more important than any nominal agency that may stand behind it. Blake does not dismiss agency (or responsibility) as Nietzsche does, but the inextricable relation between doer and deed

presents one reason for why Blake conceives of inspiration as a shooting star. With so many characters involved in inspiration and with Blake's encouragement to have us follow suit, the specific identity behind the inspirational moment is not the overarching point (though it is crucial for individuals at a personal and local level)—the moments themselves are.

Identifying why Blake chooses a falling star specifically requires a further examination of the nature of shooting stars. While actual shooting stars are not stars at all but intergalactic debris entering the atmosphere, the misnomer suggests a connection to regular stars, which presumably fall from their stationary position in the night sky, thereby setting themselves in motion. Similarly, Milton's quest for self-annihilation represents a rejection of his stasis in Eternity. Stars themselves also offer other important qualities that enhance those of shooting stars. In the Bible, stars serve in analogies regarding offspring several times. For example, in Genesis, God twice blesses Abraham and then Isaac with numerous descendents: "I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven [...] (22.17); "I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries [...]" (26.4).³ Here, the stars indicate the sheer number of descendents that God will ensure for Abraham and Isaac.

However, in Psalms, stars have a different connotation: "The LORD doth build up Jerusalem: he gathereth together the outcasts of Israel. [...] He telleth the number of the stars; he calleth them by their names. / Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite" (147.2-5). These verses emphasize not only the innumerability of the stars but also the fact that God knows all "their names"—these stars are clearly not indistinguishable from one another. They have their own specific identities. While we may not be able to tell most stars apart from our earthly perspective, these verses indicate that they have their own singularity. Elsewhere, Paul proclaims, "There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars: for one star differeth from another star in glory" (1 Corinthians 15.41). As with the previous example, this one emphasizes the variation and difference between stars. Rather than classifying

³ For similar references to stars, see, for example, Exodus 32.13, Deuteronomy 1.10, 1 Chronicles 27.23, Nehemiah 9.23, and Jeremiah 33.22.

them as a group, Paul classifies them as separate entities, each entitled to its own kind of “glory.”

These biblical resonances of stars correlate to Blake’s star imagery in *Milton*. His subversion of the original moment of inspiration allows for the participation of all, not just the select few. Stars appear almost indistinguishable from our point of view, when in fact they are individual and singular. The analogy between a star and a human being, then, corresponds to both aspects of inspiration: through acts of inspiration, we become indistinguishable from the act itself (like Nietzsche’s lightning), but we also retain our individuality despite a level of obscurity. Moreover, by using the shooting star in particular for inspirational moments, Blake also implicitly aligns them with the crucial act of self-annihilation: what was once seemingly fixed and permanent becomes transient as it burns up in an instant, thus making the shooting star an apt image for these two necessarily interrelated events. And the fact that the shooting star physically penetrates an individual in inspiration reaffirms the necessary role that the body has in this visionary experience and that the senses have in being open to the possibility of this experience.

In Blake’s view of things, a star is never just a star; it is always something more. This ‘more’ can be seen only with visionary perception. The Blakean shift from ordinary sensory perception to a higher level of perception has been one of the running threads of this dissertation. But what exactly does this shift look like? In a letter to Thomas Butts (2 Oct. 1800), Blake includes a poem about his “first Vision of Light” (2, E 712), a poem of enlightenment or inspiration, where he explains how his “Eyes did Expand” (8), describing the transition from ordinary perception to higher perception:

The Light of the Morning

.....

In particles bright

.....

Distinct shone & clear

.....

I each particle gazed

Astonishd Amazed

For each was a Man
Human formd[.] (13-22)

The light of the morning functions to enact a moment of inspiration, much as the star does in *Milton*. But like the star (which is also Milton), the light is much more than it first appears: each particle of the light beam is also a man. The paradoxical image of the light with its numerous particles is a familiar one: a larger collective that seems to be a single entity yet clearly consists of myriad individual components. For Blake, the transition from seeing the general to seeing the particular seems to be effortless, but the movement from one kind of perception to the other unmistakably leads to a radically altered view of and engagement with the world. This view reveals the true nature of reality, one interfused with the imagination where physical phenomena are more than what the ordinary use of our senses shows, where the concrete and the visionary subsist within each other.

Blake continues his poem of enlightenment by personifying the natural and the cosmic:

Each grain of Sand
Every Stone on the Land
Each rock & each hill
Each fountain & rill
Each herb & each tree
Mountain hill Earth & Sea
Cloud Meteor & Star
Are Men Seen Afar. (25-32, E 712)

Two potential readings arise as a result of Blake's ambiguous grammar: either things appear in their typical form (i.e., a star is only a star) when seen from afar and in their visionary form (i.e., human) when seen up close or vice versa. In either case, the tension resides in the two kinds of experiences, distanced and immediate. The second reading corresponds more precisely to my analysis in chapter two that includes the critical awareness of Brechtian alienation and the presence of medieval spectacle: Much as the world of the imagination (or the illuminated works) can be entered and its full presence recognized only after a kind of alienation from it, the world around us can be penetrated

and seen for what it really is only after a more critical stance. The reality that all things are, in fact, men can be fully grasped only when seen from “Afar,” from a more aware perspective.

Also, Blake highlights the role of the sense of sight in his transformative experience:

My Eyes more & more

Like a Sea without shore

Continue Expanding

The Heavens commanding

Till the jewels of Light

Heavenly Men beaming bright

Appeard as One Man

Who Complacent began

My limbs to infold

In his beams of bright gold. (45-54; E 713)

Blake explains how his eyes, not his mind’s eye, grew. Enlightenment (or inspiration) is explicitly figured as a physical rather than mental or spiritual awakening: Blake’s “limbs” are “infol[d]” in the “beams” of the “Heavenly Men” who “Appeard as One Man.” The senses grow into infinity, the opposite process of the shrinking of the senses that occurs with the fall from an integrated identity in *Urizen*. Blake says that he, too, begins “complacent,” but this complacency or lack of awareness is erased in this epiphanic moment of insight and growth when he makes a full-bodied entrance into the eternal world of the imagination. Though the One Man “infol[d]” him, Blake suggests that he also actively participates in this inspirational event by emerging from his complacency to open himself up to this life-altering experience; after all, the poem begins with him actively “gazing” at the light to see the numerous human particles. This immersive experience comes only after an initial moment of alienation where the world is not seen from a more intimate perspective but “Seen Afar.” Rather than obscuring a clear view, distance offers a clarified vision of the nature of things. In his works, Blake underscores these paradoxically combined processes of alienation and incorporation as necessary in the alteration of perception. The same applies to the star that Blake mentions at line 32,

showing its humanity when seen from afar. This star echoes the star in the moment of inspiration in *Milton*; the distance of first seeing the star from afar is closed as the star falls and enters another individual, also closing the gap between two identities and creating an immersive event.

Everything has its own individuality and identity, yet, at the same time, everything is “One Man,” one interdependent entity. The personification of inanimate and vegetative objects makes the interdependence of the all things even more powerful. By identifying them as human, Blake encourages an interaction with earthly phenomena as if they were fellow beings in the human collective and emphasizes external connections, thereby solidifying our relation to other beings and other things and turning away from a solipsistic view of our place in the world. By humanizing the inanimate, Blake includes each small atom of the world in the network of human relations so that nothing stands outside of human interest, making all significant and vital.

But precisely how do we raise our senses in order to perceive the infinite as Blake describes above? How can we learn to see so that entering the world of the imagination and entering one another becomes a real possibility in lived experience? These are the million-dollar questions that Blake leaves unanswered. What he offers as a substitute is the illuminated works. Unable to replicate in others the visionary perception that he achieved in his life, he, instead, created the means to achieve it: the illuminated works in both content and form function to enable this transformative and visionary state. My aim throughout this study has not been to find the definitive answers to the difficult questions posed above; rather, it has been to try to understand a little better the concerns these questions raise and what is at stake in them, an understanding enriched by examining Blake’s art through the lens of drama and performance.

Constructing the illuminated works as dramatic performances is perhaps one key way that Blake tries to shake his audience out the confines of the “mind-forg’d manacles” (“London” E 27) that keep us bound to a mundane use of our senses and a stifling of the imagination, as well as to restrictive political, social, and moral ideologies. The dramatic elements prompt the audience to see beyond the typical view of poetry and pictorial art and help make the illuminated works come alive, and, by doing so, encourage alternative ways of thinking and of seeing and acting in the world. In its extreme or ideal form, this

transformative experience provoked by his medium also includes our entrance into the imagination. If seeing properly or imaginatively allows us to see that the physical world and the imagination interpenetrate one another and if the senses allow us to participate in the creation of identities and things, then perhaps Blake indicates that we wield an even greater power: to co-create the world of the imagination and, thus, the Eternal.

Employing our imagination and performing imaginative acts leads to its continuation. The creative force of the senses in combination with the imagination that Blake emphasizes in the theatrical and performative elements of his illuminated works suggests that humans have great power. Raising others to a higher level of perception, one that encourages an imaginative and physical use of the body's senses, is not just desired but crucial if the world of vision, the imagination, and the Eternal is to be reaffirmed and its vital spark kept burning. How this eternal world, which holds the property of permanence, can be and must be co-created is yet another boggling Blakean paradox, but one that celebrates the human. The theatrical dimension of his art form stresses the potency of human action—as in inspiration—and Blake's expanded view of mind and body, of real and imagined worlds, and of singular and collective identity found in the illuminated works.

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