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“In Love with the Productions of Time”

**A Study of the Treatment of Time and Eternity in
William Blake’s Prophetic Works**

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Abstract

Eternity and time are central concepts within the Prophetic Works. In the Prophetic universe, eternity is defined as a positive state of infinite potentiality, whereas time is depicted as a state founded on the exclusion of possibilities; hence, the existence of the human mind in time rather than in eternity severely limits the sum of his existence. Viewed as a whole, the Prophetic cycle can be seen as an extended attempt to reconcile man's awareness of his nature as an "eternal" being with his actual existence as a body in time. Within the poems, this conflict can be discerned on a symbolical, philosophical, as well as a linguistic level, and has repercussions in the Prophetic universe that are felt in almost every area of life. Throughout the majority of the cycle, the aforementioned conflict manifests itself as a struggle against the constraints of time and an attempt to reinstate the conditions of eternity to the greatest degree possible. By the end of the cycle, however, the goal has shifted to become the creation of a necessary synthesis between the two.

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Introduction

How exactly should William Blake's "Prophetic Works" be read? It is a question which seems to have prompted so many answers that a brief summary would probably fill volumes, the giddy counter-intuitiveness of many of the suggestions often supported with appeals to William Blake's anti-rationalist philosophy of harmony between contraries. Attempts to conclusively "decode" the symbolism of the poems tend to be baffled by the fact that symbols frequently overlap with each other and that an individual name often refers to a variety of seemingly unrelated symbols, as well as by Blake's predilection for frequently using common English words according to some own private definition of them. Similarly, attempts to read the poems as a diachronic "artist's rendering" of real world sociopolitical events must eventually account for the all but non-existent barrier between imagination and objective "reality", as well as Blake's very loose and non-linear depiction of time. Moreover, the value of the whole endeavor is diminished by the fact that Blake appears to gradually lose interest in terrestrial politics over time, so that by the time the reader reaches the later prophecies, politics is used as a mere gateway into far more lovingly described spiritual states.

Furthermore, the question of conceptual unity within the total "Prophetic" body of work is extremely polarizing. It is easy to trace a fundamental change in Blake's attitude toward Christianity between the cheerfully satirical (and Satanical) *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (published in 1793) to the dazzling explosion of Christian symbolism in *Jerusalem* (completed in 1820). Sloss and Wallis argue that such "natural evolutions in opinion" on Blake's part make it impossible to regard the works as one internally consistent mythopoetic creation, and claim that many of the central defects of the Prophecies stem from Blake's hopeless attempt to reconcile each new poem with the outworn symbols expressed in the earlier ones (Sloss & Wallis 7-8). Other critics, like Leopold Damrosch, argue that it is Blake's philosophy itself that suffers from internal contradictions, and that his poems should be read as the offspring of Blake the philosopher's lifelong futile attempt to reconcile these contradictions in art, rather than attempts to communicate a conceptually unified truth (Damrosch 8-9). Finally, amid all this confusion lurks the danger of projection on behalf of the modern reader – the ever-present temptation to "find that Blake was a precocious discoverer of [one's] own views" – or the

defeatist position that the Prophecies are simply too “private” and too “emotionally colored” for scholarly interpretation (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 5).

And yet, despite their chronic elusiveness, the poems express a paradoxical reverence of clarity and all things concrete. The two most pernicious forces in Blake's universe are abstraction and mystery, the former of which is represented as a form of spiritual death-in-life in that it rejects the world in all its beauty in favor of ghostly, immaterial falsehoods, and the latter of which is represented as a veil that enslaves humanity and compels them to trust in “the hidden” instead of the visible things around them. Instead, the poems appear to celebrate clear, unobstructed vision of the world in all its glorious detail (a form of vision that is made possible through the liberated “prophetic” imagination). In Blake's illustrations for his illuminated manuscripts, we are introduced to a world in which every trace of vagueness and mystery has been completely banished – a world in which clear outlines dominate and even the obstructive laws of gravity and perspective seem to have been done away with (Cooper 3). In one of the most beautiful passages from “Milton”, the smallest units of space and time are said to be imbued with infinite significance if only “seen” properly (Blake, “Milton” 402-403), and in “Jerusalem”, the reader is told that “Art & Science cannot exist but in minutely organized Particulars”, and that “The Infinite alone resides in Definite & Determinate Identity” (“Jerusalem” 547). This contradictory double-urge toward obscurity and clarity is perhaps the Prophecies' most frustrating and compelling quality: the choppy, bewildering verses loom on the page like words from some extra-terrestrial gospel, anxious to reveal the highest of truths but defiantly unwilling to speak the reader's language.

There are, however, legitimate reasons for this difficulty. Although the William Blake that speaks to us through the Prophecies is a gifted and original philosopher in his own right, the path to true knowledge in his mind evidently does not pass through reasoning and conceptualization, but only through vision (whether through a real eye or the mind's eye is of less importance). However, the visions that he attempts to make us see are not visions that can be contained within the laws of time and space, nor at times even logic; in fact, many of them appear to transpire on some primal “ur”-level of existence that *precedes* time and space. This infinite and timeless state of limitless imaginative freedom has since become corrupted and restricted by the appearance of the natural laws that govern our current universe. In Blake's mythopoetic universe, this infinite state is referred to as Eternity, and is contrasted with the world of Time, in which we live.

The objective of this essay is to study Blake's treatment of time and eternity within the Prophetic Works, and to examine how the conflict between the two states of existence is expressed on a symbolical, philosophical, as well as a linguistic level. My working assumption is that the main source of conflict within the Prophetic cycle stems from man's inability to reconcile his awareness of his inherent eternal nature with his actual existence as a body in the world of time, and that the Prophecies as a whole are an attempt to perform that act of reconciliation. Furthermore, I will argue that the repercussions of the conflict between time and eternity are indirectly responsible for a wide range of different smaller conflicts in the Prophecies, including problems that relate to theology, psychology, moral philosophy, and sexual politics.

The essay will focus mainly on the three longer Prophecies – “The Four Zoas”, “Milton”, and “Jerusalem” – although the two shorter poems “The Book of Urizen” and “The Book of Los” will also be studied because of their significance as the “creation myths” of Blake's universe. Because Blake's approach to this task can be seen to change drastically over time, this essay will be structured so as to roughly follow the chronological evolution of his argument; hence, the early chapters of the essay will focus mainly on the earlier Prophecies, whereas the last two chapters will deal primarily with “Jerusalem”, the last poem – and in many ways the summation – of the whole cycle. It will be an essay that strives to capture the amorphous, constantly-evolving nature of the Prophecies, while also attempting to remain true to the unwavering intensity with which it is willing to wage war against the most fundamental aspects of existence, as expressed by the quote that opens “The Four Zoas”, from Ephesians:

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities,
against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against
spiritual wickedness in high places. (Blake, “The Four Zoas” 146¹).

¹ Although Blake reproduces the quotation in the original Greek, I have used the English translation as it appears in the King James Bible (Ephesians 6:12).

Background

William Blake wrote his “Prophetic Works” over the span of roughly fifteen years (between 1789 and 1804, although “Jerusalem” was revised until 1820), during a time of great revolutionary upheaval. Although Blake – a freethinker and anti-royalist, whose circle of acquaintance included Thomas Paine and Mary Wollstonecraft (Bentley, *Blake Records* 40) – found himself firmly on the side of revolutionaries across the globe, it is clear that his vision of the imminent “age of liberty” differed wildly from that of his ideological peers. To Blake, the French and American revolutions were not merely redistributions of political power, but portents of a much larger emancipation – namely, the first rumblings of a cosmic upheaval that was to reunite all of humanity and the surrounding universe into a single eternal form: the “Eternal Man” that existed before the creation of time and space, and whose internal division gave rise to the whole cosmos. Humanity, the totality of which – when united into one being – constitutes God, would then proceed to dwell in spiritual ecstasy within an ever-changing universe of its own imaginative creation.

It was a vision so staggeringly singular, and so almost fully without literary and philosophical forebears, that Blake had to reinterpret all of human and religious history in order to set the stage for the epic that he wanted to write about it. First of all, he needed to find a way to dissociate the spiritual life from religion without losing the tangible necessity of the former – a task that was to require a reinterpretation of the Bible and all subsequent Christian narratives in a way that retained the kernel of spiritual truth but rejected all the arbitrary dogma. Secondly, because of the inherent anti-rationalism of his vision, the whole Enlightenment had to be rejected, which meant that Blake had to somehow convincingly embody the youthful, revolutionary zeitgeist of the time whilst opposing virtually every major thinker on his side. In other words, the task that Blake faced must have been nothing less than to invent his own literary, philosophical and spiritual ancestry from scratch, and somehow cohere this material into a vision so compelling as to inspire spiritual zealotry in an age of unprecedented rationalism.

The result was a mythopoetic creation so dense and strange that it languished mostly unread or unappreciated for more than a century; as late as 1947, Northrop Frye referred to it as “what is in proportion to its merits the least read body of poetry in the English language” (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 3). The few of Blake’s contemporaries who actually read the Prophecies almost

uniformly “dismissed them as incomprehensibly wild”, and his fellow Romantic poet Robert Southey declared “Jerusalem” to be “perfectly mad” (Bentley, *Critical Heritage* 10). The “plot” can be briefly summarized as follows: Before the creation of time and space, humanity is united in one “Eternal Man” called Albion, who in turn both exists in and encompasses a “fiery primordial plenitude” (Ferber 113) called Eternity. In this perfect state, Albion consists of four divisions called “Zoas” – the Greek name for the four “Living Creatures” mentioned in the Book of Ezekiel (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 273) – who together make up the imaginative machinery through which Albion continuously creates his own internal universe. In Eternity, the names of the four Zoas are Urizen, Luvah, Urthona and Tharmas. Urizen is associated with the reasoning power in man, whereas Luvah represents passion, and Los the creative impulse within imagination. The role of Tharmas is never explicitly stated, although in practice he appears to serve as a “bridge” between imaginative potential and its realization as a concrete form, i.e. the power that realizes the imaginative constructs of the other three Zoas (Bloom 105-106).

The “fall” of Albion from Eternity is initiated when an internal struggle appears in Tharmas, which causes him to divide himself into two facets of his being: his masculine “Spectre” and his feminine “Emanation”, the latter of which is named Enion. Deprived of his Emanation, the Spectre of Tharmas becomes mad, and his inability to fulfill his function in Eternity causes the link between imagination and its realization to malfunction, so that the imaginative designs of the other Zoas, instead of being realized in their intended forms, are churned out as a discordant, fragmented chaos. This, it seems, was the origin of the subject-object divide, at which point the outer subset of imagination – the layer of Tharmas’ realized forms – achieved the illusion of a reality distinct from the subjective consciousness. The symbol associated with this chaotic reality is the Sea of Time and Space (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 280).

Because total chaos in any form is intolerable, the Zoas elect Urizen to assert control over this broken portion of Eternity. However, the four Zoas are meant to operate in conjunction with each other, and when one Zoa is left to its own devices – or elevated above the others – it will only do harm to the universe. Therefore, under Urizen’s dominance, Tharmas’ disordered “reality” is reshaped in accordance with the principles of pure reason, which, left to itself, is sterile and monomaniacal. Urizen establishes the natural laws that govern the course of the planets, and rearranges Tharmas’s chaos into a cold, unresponsive object-world of crushing emptiness and immutable rules (Blake, “The Four Zoas” 173-179). This, according to Blake, is

where the Book of Genesis begins, and with it, the primary error of the Judeo-Christian tradition: namely, the error of assigning Godhood to a remote, forbidding sky-deity (Urizen under the name of Jehovah; Nuttall 4) rather than to the totality of creation, which constitutes God when united in the shape of Albion.

From there on, the fall from Eternity continues with internal warring between the Zoas until an entity named Los steps forth. Los is either the new name of Urthona – the Zoa of imagination – or some divided aspect of him (the poems are inconsistent on this point), and throughout the remainder of the poems, he serves as the most important force for engineering a return to Eternity. Due to the repressive character of the newly created “physical” universe (which Blake calls the “Mundane Shell”) and its hostility toward imagination, the consciousness of Albion has become trapped in a process of “Contraction” that threatens to eventually reduce it to non-existence. Los, however, steps in and fixes the “Limit of Contraction” at a certain point beyond which it cannot shrink further (Damon 6), thus bringing Albion’s long fall from Eternity to a stop. When consciousness has shrunk down to this existential minimum, Los fashions a body around it and names it Adam (Blake, “Milton” 371), and from there on, the history of the individual man begins, as outlined in the Bible.

With the establishment of the illusory “Selfhood” in Adam and his progeny, all of humanity’s worst qualities are brought into the world. Northrop Frye describes the Selfhood, or the “natural man”, as follows:

As an individual ego reflecting on his sensations of an outer space-world while existing in time, the natural man is a dying man; and like most chronic invalids the ego is fretful, irascible, cruel, bothered by trifles, jealous and inordinately vain. Its only freedom is in domineering over or hindering others; its only happiness is in solitary possession; and in everything it does it seeks, like Cleopatra, for a painless form of suicide.
(Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 58)

Here, we can see the beginning of Blake’s criticism of the rationalist mindset. According to the rationalist (embodied in Blake’s work by the unholy trinity of Bacon, Newton and Locke), the “false” Selfhood is accepted as the origin of all truth, and because the rational man’s relationship to his surroundings is limited to the “lowest common denominator” of his sense-

perceptions (i.e., that which can be demonstrated beyond all logical doubt), all the highest reaches of mental existence, Blake seems to argue, will remain forever off-limits to him.

The origin of time in Blake's cosmology is complicated, since time itself appears to take on a number of different forms. The first is that which is conjoined to space in the Sea of Time and Space (the world of Tharmas). This form of time has no separate existence from space – the two are merely different sides of the same body of visionary error that comes into being with the fall of Tharmas (Damon 404). The Sea of Space and Time appears to work in conjunction with a symbol called the Circle of Destiny – a structure superimposed upon time and space that gives rise to its cyclical, immutable character. The Circle of Destiny is the world of time as viewed in terms of cause-and-effect, the violent, inexorable time that strong-arms the human will and imagination, and reduces all of history to an interplay of forces acting upon each other in unconscious cycles of ebb and flow. Finally, there is Los, who is alternately described as the creator of time (Blake, "The Four Zoas" 209) and Time itself ("Milton" 393). Although the specific functions of Los varies from poem to poem, he tends to be associated with the positive, creative potential of time – the time in which the imagination orients itself and structures its creative labors. The division of time into these disparate forms might seem confusing at first, but it serves to highlight an important fact about Blake's cosmology: that time, like everything else, changes form depending on the extent of the observer's imaginative "power". Because of certain immutable restrictions on the human imagination that exist only in the "fallen" universe, time possesses a number of inescapable fundamental properties (namely, linearity and an "exclusionary" principle, both of which will be dealt with in the following chapter); however, below that unpassable point, time changes freely according to the imaginative whims of each inhabitant in the fallen world. To fully explain how this works, it will be necessary to provide an overview of Blake's philosophy of "vision", as well as the hierarchy that he associates with it.

Throughout the Prophetic Works, Blake consistently uses the term "vision" to refer to something very different from mere seeing. Vision denotes a form of seeing that has been augmented with imagination, which means that it is not merely a receptive, but an active and creative sense. In "A Vision of the Last Judgment", Blake illustrates his conception of vision in the form of a conversation between Blake and an unnamed speaker regarding the appearance of the sun:

It will be question'd: "When the Sun rises, do you not see a round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea?" "O no, no, I see an Innumerable Company of the Heavenly host crying: 'Holy, Holy, Holy, is the Lord God Almighty!' I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning Sight. I look thro' it, and not with it. (Blake, "Vision of the Last Judgment" 565-566; quotation marks and punctuation mine)

Vision, as we can see, has transformed the sun into a "Heavenly host", whereas mere seeing reduces the sun to merely a "round disk of fire somewhat like a Guinea". The exact extent to which vision actually transforms the "visionary's" surrounding reality, or to which it stays confined to subjective experience, however, has been a contentious question among critics. A. D. Nuttall argues that the above example is all but a confession on Blake's part that he "prefers fictive imagination to sense perception", in that the conversation requires an implicit knowledge on behalf of both partners that they are looking at the same thing – an independently existing object that possesses certain objective properties called the sun – to work. This implicit knowledge, Nuttall further suggests, proves that Blake is aware that his heavenly choir only exists as a subjective visual interpretation, just as the guinea-resemblance only exists in the imagination of his conversational partner (Nuttall 265-266). Other critics, like Northrop Frye, take the opposite view, arguing that in Blake's universe there is no such thing as subjective perception, since imaginative intensity is his only criterion for reality:

The Hallelujah-Chorus perception of the sun makes it a far more real sun than the guinea-sun, because more imagination has gone into perceiving it. [...] The guinea-sun is a sensation assimilated to a general, impersonal, abstract idea. Blake can see it if he wants to, but when he sees the angels, he is not seeing more "in" the sun but more of it. He does not see it "emotionally": there is a greater emotional intensity in his perception, but it is not an emotional perception: such a thing is impossible, and to the extent that it is possible it would produce only a confused and maudlin blur – which is exactly what the guinea-sun of "common sense" is. He sees all that he can see of all that he wants to see; the perceivers of the guinea-sun see all that they want to see of all that they can see. (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 21)

Visions of the “Hallelujah-Chorus” kind, according to this view, are *more* real than the ordinary perception of the sun, because both are creations of the imagination and the former is a richer, more vivid creation. Leaving aside Blake’s actual conviction in this stated view, as well as its merits as epistemology, there can be little doubt that the latter interpretation lies closer to the spirit in which the Prophecies are written. If “objective” reality is merely the canvas upon which imagination works, then the act of vision, when unfettered by the constraints of nature, becomes powerful enough to accomplish just about anything, and the Prophecies are full of examples of this idea in action. “The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions, / Are become weak Visions of Time & Space fix’d into furrows of death” (“Jerusalem” 534), Blake writes, attributing not merely the illusory laws of nature but even death itself(!) to warped and impoverished perception. Blake divides vision into a four-tier hierarchy, from the lowest (Ulro, or one-fold vision) to the highest (four-fold Eden), and – since vision carries the power to transform reality – each level of vision denotes both a state of mind and the entire physical “dimension” that the observer occupies whilst in that state of mind.

The lowest form of vision, Ulro, represents vision that has become subordinated to abstract ideas. Rationalists like John Locke, followers of various restrictive dogmas, and people who cling to memories of the past all live out their lives in Ulro; because they have restricted their vision to only that which is allowed for by a set of narrow criteria (rationalism, laws and a frozen image of the past, respectively), they can see only the reflection of those criteria, and nothing more. Ulro is a state of “darkness and delusion” (“The Four Zoas” 254), which puts its inhabitants in a permanent state of “doubt and despair” (“Jerusalem” 489).

The second lowest form is referred to by a number of different names, but the name Generation will be used here, since that is the name Blake uses in his most coherent diagram of the four visionary states (“Jerusalem” 465-466), and since it appears to be richer in symbolic associations than the others. Generation is the state of primitive urges and emotions – sex, lust, appetite, animal instincts, wrath, passion and jealousy – the schizophrenic infinity engine that propels both the cycle of procreation and the cycle of senseless wars, which alternately expand and contract the collective body of “natural man”. It is presumably the fact that Generation extends somewhat beyond the illusory Selfhood that causes it to rank higher than Ulro in Blake’s hierarchy; unlike in Ulro, an observer in Generation does not attempt to reduce his or her surroundings to a formula or principle (for which reason that person has a greater

appreciation of the sensory complexity of the object-world than the observer in Ulro), as well as constantly transcends the Selfhood via communication (be it sexual, violent, or just plain social) with other subjects.

The third visionary state, Beulah, is a state of innocence, rest and pleasant reverie. It is associated with “softness” and “femininity” and is most often depicted as a sleepy, moonlit pastoral landscape. Children dwell in Beulah (and, indeed, readers may recognize it as the setting of most of the *Songs of Innocence*), as do artists most of the time, as well as sleepers when they dream. Beulah is associated with creativity and imagination, but only up to a certain point – whether because of humility, fear of change, childlike dependency on security or some greater power, idealized romantic or familial attachment, or the slothful contentedness of the dreamer, creativity in this state stops short of attaining true visionary power.

Finally, there is Eden, or perfect “fourfold” vision. Simply put, Eden is the state through which an observer perceives Eternity; hence, attaining one means attaining the other. A definitive description of Eden is difficult, since an observer in this state perceives Eternity directly rather than glimpses it through the distorting illusion of nature – and therefore transcends natural reality – but it involves perceiving all of humanity as one form “with many faces”, as well as perceiving the past, present and future simultaneously (“Jerusalem” 469). Because of the immense extent of the imaginative error associated with humanity’s fall from Eternity, reaching Eden is either very difficult or impossible in the current day and age, yet Blake himself claims to have found himself in this state at numerous occasions (Bentley 462).

One of the most important properties of Eden and Eternity, as well as one of the most central ideas in the whole Prophetic lexicon, is the notion that will hereafter be referred to as “Contraries without Negation”. In “Jerusalem”, Blake describes the antithesis of this property – Contraries subjected to Negation – in the following passage:

And this is the manner of the Sons of Albion in their strength:
They take the Two Contraries which are call'd Qualities, with which
Every Substance is clothed; they name them Good & Evil.
From them they make an Abstract, which is a Negation
Not only of the Substance from which it is derived,
A murderer of its own Body, but also a murderer
Of every Divine Member: it is the Reasoning Power.
An Abstract objecting power that Negatives every thing.

This is the Spectre of Man, the Holy Reasoning Power,
And in its Holiness is closed the Abomination of Desolation.
(Blake, "Jerusalem" 459)

In the ideal state, it seems, "Contraries" are not mutually exclusive opposites, but mere "Qualities" that are different from each other. As Qualities, they are complex, expansive properties that encompass the whole of "every Substance", and they gain the property of becoming Contraries not by being mutually exclusive to another Quality, but by being different enough from the other Quality to create valuable creative friction between the two. Because Qualities in eternity are complex and multi-faceted enough to truly represent the object-world, Contraries maintain an independent existence from each other, which means that one Quality with Contrary properties does not "need" the existence of another such Quality to define itself against. In the fallen universe, however, humans are deluded into thinking that Contraries are defined only by one thing – their opposition to each other – and that reality consists only of Contraries incapable of co-existing, some of which are good and must be preserved, and others of which are bad and must be exterminated. This phenomenon, by which the complexity of two Qualities are reduced to the sum of an abstract relationship that in reality does not exist, appears to be what Blake means by "Negation".

Throughout the later poems, Los works in conjunction with his emanation Enitharmon (who is associated with Space) to reawaken the imaginative potential of Albion through the creation of a city called Golgonooza. Golgonooza is the sum of all the "imaginative and creative acts" of humanity (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 91), and exists as a permanent structure outside of time – but the fact that it is located within the human brain is quickly gleaned from the information that it communicates with the outside world through four gates, each of which is associated with one of the human senses (Blake, "Jerusalem" 465; taste and touch count as only one sense, according to Blake). At the end of time, after an apocalypse has descended upon the world, and the illusion of nature (sometimes referred to as the Veil of Vala) has been rent away to reveal the world in its Eternal form, the completed Golgonooza will glimmer on the horizon like New Jerusalem at the end of the Book of Revelation, and humanity will dwell blissfully among its own preserved imaginative creations forever (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 91).

W. J. T. Mitchell argues that the critical response to Blake's body of work has passed through several distinct phases. The first phase, he argues, was characterized by preservation

and “archival interests”, “often rather private and amateur”. The second phase, which coincided with the modernist movement, was a period of modernist “appropriation”, wherein Blake was regarded as a “progenitor in an avant garde canon of unjustly neglected works”. Characteristic of the third and final phase on the other hand, Mitchell states, has been the attempt to “emphasize the coherence and methodical, systematic character” of Blake’s artistry at the expense of his “unresolved contradictions”, and therefore, a perhaps too unproblematic welcoming of even his more obscure poems into the mainstream literary canon (Mitchell 411-415). Since (or roughly at the same time as) the publication of Mitchell’s article, there have been a number of critics arguing similar theses – Leopold Damrosch and David Leonard Clark are two prominent examples – and consequently, it might not be unreasonable to say that Blake scholarship has now entered a “fourth” phase: one in which critics have become increasingly willing to problematize Blake’s work.

A prominent debate within Blake scholarship has been the question of whether Blake’s work can be unified into a single, philosophically coherent creation. Damrosch argues that the Prophetic works are an unsuccessful attempt by Blake to “reduce” an essentially dualist worldview – one that requires opposites, boundaries, and a differentiation between subject and object to exist – to a “friction-less” monist whole (Damrosch 190), and that it is precisely this internal contradiction that gives the poems their character. Clark could also be said to belong to the anti-cohesion camp when he argues that “indeterminacy” and “displacement” are central concepts within the poems, and that the disorienting aspects of the poems are simply ways to signal that Eternity itself is a state of “creative undecidability” (Clark 1-2). On the other hand, proponents of greater cohesion, like Hazard Adams, argue that contradiction-seekers like Damrosch either disregard or downplay the “crucial” distinction between contraries and negation in Blake’s philosophy (Adams 320). According to this distinction, as we have seen, it is precisely through the mind’s erroneous construction of an opposite relationship between two terms that the “true” existence of both terms is negated. Hence, any thought-process that sees the world in terms of polarities has already superimposed its own false terms onto the world, and will never reach beyond them to the “real” object-world. According to this view, it is not that Eternity is defined by either contradiction or indeterminacy, but that it precedes and maintains a separate existence from all such “negation-oriented” mental projections.

Although arguments from both schools of critical thought are used in this essay, in principle its argument is in favor of greater philosophical cohesion. It has been written in the belief that the Prophetic Works are a long and revision-riddled attempt to articulate a relatively small number of coherent metaphysical principles that have remained more or less unchanged from the start. While the works themselves may contain inconsistencies and contradictions, these can be seen as stemming from Blake's changes of approach over time as to how to best communicate his Prophetic ideas, rather than any change in the metaphysical principles themselves. It is, for instance, difficult to see why Blake, who was no stranger to obsessive revision and discarding symbols that had outworn their use, would retain the same intensely detailed cosmology from poem to poem, including the same timeline and virtually the same characters, if they were not associated in his mind with very specific concepts. Consequently, the position adhered to in this essay will be one in favor of a cohesive philosophical system, but which acknowledges inconsistencies in the expression of it.

Visions of Eternity

In order to arrive at Blake's conception of Eternity, it will be useful to define the conceptions of Eternity that he, either fully or in part, rejects. One such conception is the dualistic view of St. Augustine, which holds that Eternity exists separately from time, and serves as the "timeless" state within which God operates, thus removing the need for a first cause prior to God (Augustine 121-122) – a definition that could perhaps be described as the traditional Christian viewpoint. It is clear that Blake had no interest in remote "sky-god" philosophies that assign primacy to distant unseen realms, whether they be heavens or hells or any other place inaccessible to human imagination (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 81-83); Blake's Eternity, on the contrary, is the native habitat of Albion and humanity. Eternity, according to Blake, is the foundation of all reality, and our inability to perceive it is not due to cosmic inaccessibility but because of warped, impoverished vision (Blake, "Jerusalem" 534).

The second conception that Blake rejects is the model outlined by John Locke, which describes time as "duration set out by measures" and eternity as the hypothetical continuation of this measurement into infinity (Locke 114-118). This model, which could perhaps be called the

rationalist model, is even more strenuously rejected by Blake. In one of his early engraved plates, one of two that share the title “There is No Natural Religion”, Blake thunders against the danger of equating demonstrable fact – “the ratio of what we have already known” – with higher truth, and ends it with the lines: “He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only, sees himself only” (Blake, “There is No Natural Religion” 5). Locke’s view of eternity, according to this view, cannot be actual Eternity, but only an indefinite extension of the measurement with which one measures regular time, i.e. an indefinite continuation of the “ratio”.

The closest ancestor to Blake’s model of Eternity, it seems, can be found in the works of the German mystic and philosopher Jakob Böhme. That Blake read Böhme with enthusiasm and borrowed many ideas from him is well documented (Bentley 313; Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 152-153). According to Böhme’s model, time and eternity do not occupy different realms, but exist within each other, and “simultaneously and continuously give birth to each other”. Böhme’s eternity is a state of undifferentiated “nothingness” called the *Ungrund*, which manifests itself in time as the state of “ontological indeterminacy” that precedes each moment – the state of infinite potential before something comes into being (Gentzke par. 1-5). Time, on the other hand, allows for only one possibility, but unlike in Eternity, that one possibility can be rendered as a definite form in time. Blake’s Eternity resembles Böhme’s in the sense that it exists within regular time (reaching Eternity is not accomplished through traveling, but through the adjustment of vision), as well as interacts with it (see Chapter 4 for a longer discussion about this). Because time and eternity are not separate worlds, but occupy the same spatio-temporal realm, their co-existence can perhaps be described as two different “frequencies” occupying the same space; hence, tuning in to one of them involves tuning out of the other. However, Blake’s model departs from Böhme’s in that it is very much a state of physical form – even more so than the state of normal time. “There Exist in that Eternal World the Permanent Realities of Everything which we see reflected in this Vegetable Glass of Nature” (Blake, “Rossetti Manuscript” 342), and like the subjects in Blake’s paintings, these permanent realities are characterized by their clear outlines, exactitude and potent physical presence. Secondly, unlike Böhme’s *Ungrund*, Blake’s Eternity is not an undifferentiated whole. In fact, it is a place of great diversity, activity and frequent conflicts; the denizens of Eternity are constantly hunting for ideas and fighting great wars over them (“Milton” 412), except that the wars are motivated by love and poetic inspiration, and the combatants “fight & contend for life & not for Eternal Death” (“Jerusalem” 524). It is a state in

which contraries are maintained and the friction between them even heightened, but in which this friction gives rise to a complex harmony instead of discord.

Here, some of the apparent contradictions within Blake's Eternity reveal themselves. We are told that the material reality is a mere illusion that inhibits humanity's "true" vision, yet the forms that surround us now will also surround us in Eternity, preserved down to the smallest detail – or as Blake puts it: "Every thing exists ; & not one sigh nor smile nor tear, / One hair nor particle of dust, not one can pass away" ("Jerusalem" 467). If our current "false" reality is an obstacle that impairs our vision of Eternity, then how can the products of this vision – even such paltry details as tears and particles of dust – also be *part* of Eternity? Similarly, we have seen that linear time, according to Blake, is part of the body of natural illusion. Yet, every moment of earthly time, as well as the accompanying "revolution Of Space" that occurs within it, is deemed similarly worthy of preservation – in fact, Los is described as walking "up & down continually" through the six thousand years of human history to make sure that not a single moment be lost (591). Suddenly, Eternity seems less like a state of higher existence than a static museum of reverentially preserved experiences from our own "lower" state. How can this static and slavishly preservationist vision of Eternity be compatible with Blake's vision of constant change and improvement of perception?

The answer, as might be expected, seems to lie in Blake's differentiation between contraries and negation. The implications of this distinction are, as proponents of greater philosophical cohesion in Blake's work have argued, almost unfathomably vast. In Eden, contraries can co-exist and retain their unique characteristics without the need for a dialectic of opposition through which to define them; indeed, opposites – according to Blake – are mental categories that belong to the realm of negation. Therefore, just as an observer in Eden can perceive past, present and future at once, so we would expect contrary principles to operate side by side, without canceling each other out. In fact, the principle of contraries without negation can be said to serve as Blake's solution to the "single-possibility" problem that we encountered in Böhme's model of time: namely, that existence in finite, sequential time only allows for a single possibility to take shape at a time (out of the infinite possibilities that could conceivably take shape, all of which except for one are irrevocably lost). Blake's Eternity unites the best of both worlds: all possibilities are rendered in time simultaneously, because the principle that states that they cannot has *ceased to apply*. In other words, if we are to take Blake's notion of contraries without

negation seriously, we would expect Eternity to be a state in which experiences from life are preserved yet somehow subject to constant change, a realm that contains time yet somehow remains unrestricted by it, and a state which is at once somehow static and dynamic – and that our inability to reconcile these contraries has less to do with its impossibility than the fact that we have fully integrated the “false” principle of Negation with our ability to perceive the world.

However, if Eternity can be described as the ultimate example of having your metaphysical cake and eating it, that does not mean that the same free-for-all logic can be applied to all areas of Blake's universe. Eternity, after all, is a hypothetical end-state of existence in which all conceivable quandaries have been resolved, not an escape clause that can be used to explain away inconvenient contradictions in general. The longing for a utopian end-state in which all of mortal life's faults have been rectified is something that Blake has in common with followers of virtually all religions, and Blake only deviates from his religious peers in the extent to which he is willing to pursue that train of thought. Whereas mainstream followers of the Judeo-Christian tradition generally imagine an end-state in which time is extended to infinity (heaven), Blake appears to perceive additional obstacles in the facts that time (due to its linearity) and logic (due to its dialectic of opposites) will always be founded on an exclusion of experience. In the example of time, one possibility always happens at the expense of another possibility, and any attempt to achieve the latter possibility – if it has not been irrevocably lost due to changed temporal conditions – invariably involves giving up the first in order to pursue it. Similarly, logic – which, like all abstract thought-systems, is founded on the principle of Negation – excludes experience in that Contraries are perceived to be mutually exclusive, which means that the number of possibilities that humanity can envision is significantly reduced. The result is an existence that always excludes far more at any given point than it encompasses – a tyranny of “one possibility” over diversity and complexity.

Because prophetic intuition, according to Blake, is a far more reliable tool for understanding the world than the rational faculties, any conflict between the two must be a failure of the latter and not the former. Consequently, if the above mentioned all-encompassing vision of Eternity contradicts the laws of reason, then that must be because the laws of reason are too narrow and restrictive to express Eternity – a reversal of the inductive thought-process that is perhaps one of the most characteristic elements of Blake's mythology. In accordance with this reversal, Eternity is not merely past, present and future multiplied into some grotesque temporal paradox – instead,

the division of time into past, present and future is an “impaired” view of the actual temporal state (Eternity) that our impoverished minds have simply become accustomed to. Similarly, with regards to contraries, Eternity should not be envisaged as a state in which qualities are detached from each other and multiplied to an incomprehensible excess, but instead, it is the division of the world into irreconcilable opposites that constitutes an “impaired” view of our actual state of existence (a state in which all things are equally true).

The likely culprit for this reduction of experience into single possibilities and negative dichotomies appears to be Urizen, who offers the following justification for creating the law-bound natural universe:

I have sought for a joy without pain,
For a solid without fluctuation.
Why will you die, O Eternals?
Why live in unquenchable burnings?
[...]strong I repell'd
The vast waves; & arose on the waters
A wide world of solid obstruction[...]
Let each chuse one habitation,
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure,
One King, one God, one Law.' (Blake,
“Book of Urizen” 89)

It is not difficult to read this speech as a blueprint for a universe founded almost entirely on exclusion. Urizen laments the fact that joy and pain, in the chaotic swirl of Tharmas' ocean, cannot be separated and sorted into opposite mental categories, but remain dynamically intertwined according to the notion of contraries without negation. Existence without the negative influences of a linear time and a restrictive logic seems to him a state of unbearable fluctuation and “unquenchable burnings”. Repelling the waves of fallen Eternity, he creates a world of solid “obstruction” – i.e., a world that attains its form not through creation, but through prevention and exclusion of all other forms. Finally, the laws that Urizen sets down to govern existence in his universe can be said almost perfectly to embody the tyranny of a “single-possibility” reality. To exist shall henceforth entail possessing “one measure” and “one weight” (i.e., one body), which occupies “one habitation” in space. Because of the exclusionary

properties of definite existence in linear time, this body is cursed to obey only “one command” (i.e., one thought) at any given point, and feel only “one joy” and “one desire” at a time, rather than – as in Eternity – all of them simultaneously. Finally, Urizen extends the same monomaniacal philosophy into social governance by inventing monarchy, monotheism and law – three concepts that keep the human mind fettered to the “single-possibility” principle and prevent it from returning to the dynamic pluralism of the higher imaginative reaches.

The workings of the “single-possibility” principle upon nature is perhaps best exemplified by the force that Blake calls “opacity” – a term which he uses frequently in his work to denote imaginative failure and restriction. S. Foster Damon's *Blake Dictionary* defines opacity as “imperviousness to divine light” (Damon 309), but more generally, opacity appears to refer to the property that reduces each thing to only the sum of its form and weight in time – i.e., the quality of matter being “only matter”. Like contraction, opacity has a lower limit below which it cannot sink: this limit is represented by the state which Blake calls Satan, which refers to the condition of having become a completely inert and impenetrable object (death is simply what happens when a formerly living being falls to this limit). The error that causes opacity stems from the contraction of man's senses, as explained in the following passage from “Milton”:

The Sons of Ozoth within the Optic Nerve stand fiery glowing;
[...]Shutting the sun & moon & stars & trees & clouds & waters
And hills out from the Optic Nerve, & hardening it into a bone
Opake, and like the black pebble on the enraged beach;
While the poor indigent is like the diamond which, tho' cloth'd
In rugged covering in the mine, is open all within,
And in his hallow'd center holds the heavens of bright eternity.
Ozoth here builds walls of rocks against the surging sea,
And timbers cramp't with iron cramps bar in the joys of life
From fell destruction in the Spectrous cunning or rage. (Blake,
“Milton” 402)

As is strongly suggested by the wording in the above passage, opacity can be seen as the continuation of Urizenic obstruction on a microcosmic level. Opacity is associated with petrification (as in the example of “hardening” the optic nerve “into a bone”) because it represents the most extreme application of the “single-possibility” principle: the transformation of one form into an absolute, impermeable solid. The opaque optic nerve (i.e., the eye that has

fallen prey to the delusions of nature) is likened to a “black pebble on the enraged beach” and “walls of rocks [built] against the surging sea”, adopting the symbolic language of “single-possibility” rock triumphing over “multi-possibility” ocean that Blake used to describe Urizen’s world of obstruction. The opposite principle of opacity is translucence, which in the above passage is represented by the diamond. In a translucent reality, the single-possibility principle has been eradicated, causing every object to contain within its “hallow’d center” the “heavens of bright eternity” – i.e., the infinite possibilities that Urizenic obstruction has kept out.

In the “Book of Los”, Blake provides a disturbing description of how Los, following the ascension of Urizen, feels himself separated from the “fires” of his eternal imagination by the obstructive laws of the newly created universe:

Wide apart stood the fires: Los remain’d
In the void between fire and fire;
In trembling and horror they beheld him;
[...] But no light from the fires: all was
Darkness round Los: heat was not;
[...] Coldness, darkness, obstruction, a Solid
Without fluctuation, hard as adamant,
Black as marble of Egypt, impenetrable,
Bound in the fierce raging Immortal;
And the separated fires, froze in
A vast solid without fluctuation
Bound in his expanding clear senses.
(Blake, “Book of Los” 109)

The “solid without fluctuation” that is existence in Urizen’s world is cold and dark from lack of imaginative heat and light. The principle of opacity makes it “impenetrable” to multi-possibility vision, and the restrictions it imposes upon the brain leaves Los estranged from the animating fires of Eternity, in a “void” where their light and heat can no longer reach him.

Perhaps the most explicit association between opacity and the single-possibility principle can be found not in Blake’s own poetry, but in the works of Jacob Böhme, from whom both concepts could be said to originate. As was stated earlier, Böhme – like Blake – defines the distinction between eternity and time in terms of potentiality: in Böhme’s case, eternity (or the Ungrund) contains an infinite number of possibilities that cannot be rendered into form, whereas

time allows for definite form, but only for one possibility at a time. Mediation between eternity and time happens through seven “principles”, the first three of which fulfill a remarkably similar function to that of Blake’s opacity:

The first property is the desire which causes and makes harshness, sharpness, hardness, cold, and substance. [...] The second property is the stirring or the attraction of the desire; it makes stinging, breaking and dividing of the hardness; it cuts asunder the attracted desire, and brings it into multiplicity and variety. [...] The third property is the perceptibility and feelingness in the breaking of the harsh hardness; and it is the ground of anguish, and of the natural will, wherein the eternal will desires to be manifested. [...] In these three first properties consists the foundation of anger, and of hell, and of all that is wrathful. (Böhme, *Clavis* 14-15)

Some differences between Blake’s and Böhme’s use of certain terminology notwithstanding, the three principles have clear similarities with Urizen’s process of creation-through-obstruction. Böhme’s first principle describes the process through which the infinite potential of eternity is harshly contracted into a single possibility; a process of painful birth into the “hardness”, “cold” and “substance” of definite existence². In Böhme’s mythology, this is essentially a “neutral” principle in that one loses one quality (infinite potential) and gains another (definite existence). However, because Blake’s version of Eternity, as we have seen, differs from Böhme’s in that it already possesses definite existence and form, this step in the process becomes purely negative in the Blakean mythology: a freezing of one pre-existing form at the expense of all others. In both cases, this reduction of multi-possibility into single-possibility is described in the same terms: hardening, cold, stoniness, contraction and substantiality, as opposed to the “translucent” (Blake, “Jerusalem” 582) or “crystalline” (Böhme, “Life Beyond...” 49) quality of eternity.

The second principle describes a “stinging, breaking and dividing” of this petrified potential into “variety and multiplicity”. It is important to note that the “multiplicity” mentioned here does not refer to a fluid, dynamic pluralism like that which characterizes Blake’s Eternity (which is associated with a multi-possibility reality), but rather the division of the single-possibility reality

² Somewhat confusingly, this form of existence does not yet entail material existence, since the first three principles are “pre-animate” (Birkel & Bach 9). Instead, Böhme seems to refer to an immaterial “initiation state” of existence, which precedes physical form.

into sets of mutually exclusive categories, i.e., the artificial division that Blake associates with the error of abstraction. It is this division that, according to Blake, splinters eternity into past, present and future, the universal consciousness into a number of competing selfhoods, and harmonically interacting contraries into negative opposites. It is a painful, mutilating form of division that, in Blake, serves as the root of all suffering, and in Böhme, is the “ground of the bitter pain” and the “true root of all life” (Böhme, *Clavis* 14). Finally, the third principle allows for the divided single possibility to will itself into material existence. Depending on the poem, this step is either omitted or downplayed in Blake’s mythology, since his model of Eternity – unlike the “Nothingness” of Böhme’s Ungrund – already possesses a definite form, and as such, the transformation into physical material is deprived of much of its greater significance.

In conclusion, then, it seems that the single-possibility principle has become so deeply ingrained in the structure of our “fallen” universe that separating the two appears almost impossible. It permeates the physical existence of the world that we perceive around us, and the sensory organs with which we perceive it. It permeates our perception of time and the mental machinery that we use to make sense of it. Does it not follow, then, that the single-possibility principle must also permeate every aspect of our imagination – the very faculty that Blake views as the way out of the madhouse? After all, because we as humans are hard-wired to orient ourselves among mutually exclusive objects in space, and to order our experiences as chains of cause-and-effect in linear time, the error inherent in these constructions must also infect the highest and most liberated of our imaginative efforts. Furthermore, if Golgonooza – the sum of humanity’s imaginative creations – is truly the creation of our own minds, then it must also be prey to our imaginative mistakes. Does this mean that error now reigns supreme, and that there is no hope for returning to the vibrant, harmonic multi-possibility state from which we once fell?

It is clear that Blake was well aware of the incompatibility between the parameters for existence in the “fallen” universe and the higher imaginative life of Eden. This is evidenced by the closing of the “Gate of the Tongue” – which, prior to the fall, was the function through which the Zoas (via Tharmas) transformed the imaginative designs of Eternity into reality – directly following the fall of Tharmas (Blake, “The Four Zoas” 151). By sealing off this faculty until the end of time (“Jerusalem” 466), it is all but stated that the “lower” reality (the crippled three-tier hierarchy that consists of Ulro, Generation and Beulah) no longer contains the potential to render Eternity in its actual, tangible form. Barring that option, the only available opening in the natural

universe appears to be an enigmatic location in Golgonooza known as the Gate of Luban, which Northrop Frye identifies as “the upper limit or south (zenith) door of Beulah” and situates on the exact point where the “[lower] limit of Translucence” meets the upper limits of Opacity and Contraction (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 389; see Appendix A for a visual representation). A closer examination, however, reveals that Luban is nothing else than the single-directional passage from non-existence into physical existence that is the birth canal; a place where the “spectres” of the dead are woven “Bodies of Vegetation” in the looms of Enitharmon³ (Blake, “The Four Zoas” 265) and lowered into the natural world. Perhaps nothing illustrates the extremely rigid border between life in the natural world and the imaginative diversity of Eden better than this fact: that the very point at which the upper limit of Opacity meets the lower limit of Translucence (i.e., the very point at which we would begin to perceive the world in “multi-possibility vision”) corresponds to the exact point that separates being from non-being. In other words, the very point where time-bound, single-form Beulah terminates in time-defying, multi-form Eden corresponds exactly to the point where physical existence (in the sense that we know it) ceases to be possible.

Against an obstacle of this magnitude, even imagination is powerless. In order for humanity to ascend to Eden, nothing less than an annihilation of “everything that can be annihilated” must take place, as described in a passage that appears to conclusively rule out all imaginative contact with Eden whatsoever prior to the apocalypse:

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 destroy'd 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 alway [sic].
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,
[...] These are the Sexual Garments, the Abomination of Desolation,

³ The looms of Enitharmon exist in a location called Cathedron, which is generally interpreted to mean “the body of woman, particularly the womb” (Damon 74).

Hiding the Human Lineaments as with an Ark & Curtains,
Which Jesus rent & now shall wholly purge away with Fire,
Till Generation is swallow'd up in Regeneration. (Blake, "Milton"
423-434)

In other words, not until our "false Bodies" have been destroyed, the Contraries have been "redeemed" by a destruction of the principle of Negation, and the whole natural world of "Generation" "swallow'd up", will Eden be accessible to humanity. However, with such a clear, unpassable demarcation between the natural world and Eden, what exactly is the purpose of prophets and artists in the former world? Once again, it seems that imagination in our current state – and by extension Golgonooza – has a clearly definable "upper limit", and since this limit coincides exactly with the point at which the errors of the natural universe begin, it would appear that imagination has been stripped of virtually all of the Messianic power that the Prophetic works have previously attributed to it. Where in the hierarchy of ascension, then, does that place Blake and his Prophecies, and what are we to make of Blake's own claims to have written much of his poetry from the state of Eden?

Perhaps we have now arrived at the crux of Blake's artistic predicament: on the one hand, he perceives that the faults of the current universe are so deeply-rooted that the highest state of existence must be completely incompatible with it, and yet on the other hand, he needs to believe that it is possible to attain the highest state in the present universe in order to legitimize his work as an artist. It is an unsolvable quandary with only one possible outcome: that which leaves even the most intrepid mental traveler, whether he be Ezekiel, Shakespeare, Milton or Blake, stranded on the upper limit of Beulah, too spiritually elevated to sink back down into the lower layers, and yet blocked by cosmic constraints from proceeding into Eden. However, it may well be precisely this "inbetween"-state, as well as the cognitive dissonance that characterizes living in it, that provides the poems with their most authentic sense of life. In fact, as we shall see in the next chapter, what seems like a state of torture-like confinement inches away from the finish line could perhaps even be considered a completely new visionary state – a state of "three-and-a-half-fold vision" – that obeys its own rules and reaps its own rewards.

Above Beulah, Beneath Eden

It is perhaps not difficult to imagine the frustration of an artist like Blake, possessed with a desire to render everything with maximum light and clarity, upon realizing that the highest possible state of existence in his philosophy is impossible to depict in art. Concepts such as a model of time in which all temporal modes are perceived as one or a reality that encompasses all possibilities simultaneously can be understood in theory, but – due to the constraints of our three-dimensional environments and the brains with which we make sense of them – arguably defy even the most abstract forms of pictorial and verbal representation. It is perhaps here that the necessity of Golgonooza – a state that contains many of the characteristics of Eternity, but is also physically tangible and in many ways compatible with life in the natural world – becomes apparent.

Does Golgonooza properly belong to Eternity or the fallen universe? Despite the great difficulty involved in trying to localize this particular realm in Blake's cosmos, the latter seems the more likely option. Firstly, whereas Eternity predates the fall and transcends the fallen universe, Golgonooza postdates the fall (Blake, "The Four Zoas" 218) and overlaps with the world of space and time. Because its origins lie in our universe, Golgonooza is also contaminated by the errors that characterize the natural world; although its existence is described as the opening of "new heavens and a new earth", it is described as "yet having a Limit twofold named Satan & Adam" ("The Four Zoas" 256; Satan and Adam refer to the lower limits of opacity and contraction, respectively), which would seem to conclusively damn it to the illusions that infect the lower dimensions. However, even if Golgonooza appears to be fully contained within the fallen universe, it unquestionably constitutes its "upper" limit toward Eternity; we are told that "travellers from Eternity pass outward to Satan's seat, but travellers to Eternity pass inwards to Golgonooza" (Blake, "Milton" 378) – a description that appears to locate Golgonooza at the opposite end of the spectrum that also leads to Satan. Since Satan constitutes the lower limit of Opacity, this would situate Golgonooza at the highest possible opposite that is still contained within the lower universe – namely, the lower limit of Translucence discussed in the earlier chapter (see Appendix A for a visual representation). This equivalence is supported by several other passages throughout the Prophecies: in "The Four Zoas", it is explicitly stated that Los builds Golgonooza "on the Lake of Udán Adán / Upon the Limit of Translucence" (Blake, "The

Four Zoas" 218, 256), a description that – although the poem does not state so outright – must refer to the lower limit, since Translucence expands forever in the other direction and therefore has no upper limit ("Jerusalem" 520).

If Golgonooza represents the absolute upper limit of the natural universe, we should be able to situate it somewhere on the unpassable cosmic frontier that is the upper limit of Beulah. Yet, Blake's descriptions of Golgonooza defy spatiotemporal localization to the extent that they can only be interpreted as a signal that Golgonooza is meant to remain distinct from the ordinary visionary hierarchy. In "Jerusalem", Golgonooza is placed, vaguely, in "the land of death eternal / a Land of pain and misery and ever brooding melancholy / In all the Twenty-seven Heavens number'd from Adam to Luther / From the blue Mundane Shell reaching to the Vegetative Earth" (Blake, "Jerusalem" 466) – a description that seems to indicate the natural world as a whole. In "The Four Zoas", Los builds it around the body of Enitharmon, near the Lake of Udan Adan and the forests of Entuthon Benython ("The Four Zoas" 218; 272) – both of which properly belong to the world of Urizen – yet Golgonooza is simultaneously described as "continuous from Urthona's world" (256). Elsewhere, Los builds Golgonooza on the banks of the Thames (459), from which it grows to cover the whole of Britain ("Milton", 358-359).

That Golgonooza seems somehow to exist everywhere and yet nowhere is in several ways appropriate, since – as a representation of man's imagination – it is at once a constant that follows him around everywhere, and a realm that remains distinct from whatever it is projected onto. This quality of "detached omnipresence" is heightened by the fact that Golgonooza contains one gate in every cardinal direction (corresponding to the four senses mentioned earlier), each of which contains four additional gates that lead to each of the four visionary states (Ulro, Generation, Beulah and Eden – although "[the gate] toward Eden is walled up till time of renovation"; "Jerusalem" 465). In other words, imagination is accessible from each of the emotional states, and – conversely – serves as the pathway through which we access new ones.

However, even if Golgonooza can be said to be connected to every level of Blake's visionary hierarchy, it appears that it only attains its maximum potential when accessed from the lower limit of Translucence (i.e., the upper limit of Beulah). Just as some emotional states are more conducive to imaginative life than others, so Golgonooza can be said to become clearer and more distinct the higher a mental traveler ascends in the visionary hierarchy, until eventually it attains its highest and most brilliant form on the border between Beulah and Eden (the "upper

limit” of imaginative development in the natural world). After all, it is only here that the highest functions of Golgonooza are permissible: the furnaces of Los require the higher imaginative development of upper Beulah to produce art, and the looms of Enitharmon that weave our bodies require the Gate of Luban (located on the border between Beulah and Eden) to operate. A visual metaphor for Golgonooza's appearance throughout the visionary hierarchy, then, could be that of a beacon shining the way to the lower Limit of Translucence; it can be perceived on every step of the way, but whereas it is only an indistinct glimmer in the depths of Ulro, it gains clarity and distinctness until eventually it reaches its full proportions over Upper Beulah.

As mentioned earlier, the integration of Golgonooza into the lower visionary realm very much compromises its status as the paradisiacal end point of man's “mental journey”. After all, if the best that we can ever hope to attain in life is the upper limit of Beulah – a state that still suffers from the yoke of time-bound single-possibility vision – then what is the point of all visionary activities? It seems clear that Blake wrestled with this dilemma, which is perhaps why the borders separating Golgonooza and Eden/Eternity often appear to have been left intentionally vague. This is especially true in “Jerusalem”, where it is sometimes unclear to what extent the newly introduced state of Jerusalem refers to one, neither, or all three of the above; like Golgonooza, it is a city fashioned out of divine inspiration and a realm that is compatible with the principles that govern the natural universe; like Eden, it is a state in which the “Eternal forms” are visible, and like Eternity, it exists outside of the “Planetary lives of Years, Months, Days & Hours” (“Jerusalem” 638)⁴.

The reason for this conflation might perhaps be as follows: The point of the Prophecies appears to be to synthesize the goals of Blake the artist with those of Blake the spiritual seeker, yet Golgonooza – a compromise that loses the multi-possibility characteristics of Eden in exchange for being tangible and accessible in life – only satisfies the demands of the former in terms of a utopian “end-point”. In order to harmonize the two sets of goals, the “upper limit” of Golgonooza needs to be kept intentionally vague, so that Blake's inner spiritual seeker can be placated with the faint hope that perhaps it will eventually spill over into Eden after all, and continue to lend his approval to the prophetic labors as a whole. Consequently, Golgonooza

⁴ The difficulty is compounded by the fact that Jerusalem also refers to a character (specifically the Emanation of Albion), the Biblical city, and also serves as a general metaphor for liberty (Damon 206).

occasionally comes across as something of a “Schrödinger’s Paradise” – until one gets there, it is both adamantly *not* Eternity, and yet maybe Eternity after all – a fact that only adds a new layer of indeterminacy to an already difficult symbol.

However, even if we decide to accept this one isolated instance of cognitive dissonance on behalf of the author/narrator, it should not be viewed as a defect in Blake’s mythopoetic system. As has been discussed at length in this chapter, there is significant textual evidence to support the idea that Golgonooza belongs to the lower reality that ends with the upper limit of Beulah, and that it is therefore fully consigned to the limitations of a linear-time-bound, single-possibility reality, and if Blake maintains a level of (possibly intentional) obscurity on this point, this could perhaps be seen not as much as an example of self-contradiction than a form of “motivational” self-deception; a comparative example could be the decision of a writer embarking on a particularly ambitious project to mentally “blur” (rather than repress entirely) his understanding of what his work can realistically achieve in order to maintain the motivation to finish it. This, however, is a theory that would need to be substantiated with biographical information and additional research that, as of now, does not appear to be readily available. As such, it must remain a speculative answer to a question that, as of yet, does not appear to have an easy answer.

What Golgonooza does represent is the highest state of imaginative existence that is permitted by the ontological restrictions of the lower reality. Because it is located exactly on the verge between Beulah and Eden, opacity and translucence, being and non-being, Golgonooza has a natural inclination toward the principles that govern Eternity, even though the restrictions of the lower reality prevent it from embodying them. The result of this tug-of-war between incompatible states of existence appears to be that Golgonooza must “simulate” the properties of Eternity as far as the rules that govern the lower reality will allow for. In the example of time, this means that Golgonooza must find a way to simulate the properties of timelessness to the maximum extent that this is possible within linear time. Because an artificial compression of past, present and future into one temporal mode is impossible under natural circumstances, Golgonooza settles for the next best thing: an extreme expansion and saturation of the present with the intention of liberating experience from having to be perceived as a sequential chain – in other words, a de-diachronization of experience to the greatest extent possible. This process, which we might call “present-saturation” is described at length in Book 1 of “Milton”:

But others of the Sons of Los build Moments & Minutes & Hours,
And Days & Months & Years, & Ages & Periods, wondrous
buildings!
And every moment has a Couch of gold for soft repose,
(A moment equals a pulsation of the artery)
And between every two Moments stand a Daughter of Beulah
To feed the Sleepers on their Couches with maternal care.
And every Minute has an azure Tent with silken Veils;
And every Hour has a bright golden Gate carved with skill;
And every Day & Night has Walls of brass & Gates of adamant,
Shining like precious stones & ornamented with appropriate signs;
And every Month a silver pavèd Terrace builded high;
And every Year invulnerable Barriers with high Towers;
And every Age is Moated deep, with Bridges of silver & gold;
And every Seven Ages is Incirclèd with a Flaming Fire.
[...] All are the work of Fairy hands of the Four Elements:
The Guard are Angels of Providence on duty evermore.
Every Time less than a pulsation of the artery
Is equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years.
For in this Period the Poet's Work is Done; and all the Great
Events of Time stand forth & are conciev'd in such a Period,
Within a Moment, a Pulsation of the Artery. (Blake, "Milton" 402-
403)

What is described here is not Blake's model of Eternity, in which past, present and future have merged into one, but rather a model of linear time in which each consecutive present *feels* all-encompassing. Using dazzling, elaborate visual metaphors, the passage transforms even the smallest possible moment into a self-enclosed world of sensation capable of sustaining a history's worth of imaginative life – and thereby transforms time into a chain of equally self-sufficient "presents", which renders their causal connection and order in the sequence proportionally less significant. In other words, the exclusionary tyranny of linear time is averted by concentrating emotional experience into such small all-encompassing units (units that may last shorter than "a pulsation of the artery", but which are perceived as "equal in [their] period & value to Six Thousand Years") that a linear sequence is no longer crucial to making sense of them – "A, B, C" has become transformed into "ABC, ABC, ABC".

This state of perceived “infinite present”, then, represents the highest state of existence that is possible within the constraints of the lower (sub-Edenic) reality. Unlike the bewilderingly complex mental life of Eden, it is a state that can be represented in art, which is why this – and not Eden – is the state that the Prophetic Works naturally gravitate toward trying to capture in form. In fact, the perception of the present as infinite is an effect that many scholars point out as characteristic of Blake’s art: Stewart Crehan writes about the “‘thisness’ or permanence, a kind of instantaneous, eternal *present* [italics in the original]” (Crehan, 253), whereas Jay Parini associates Golgonooza with the “primal unity of perception” that reinstates the “eternal present” (Parini, 89). When Blake describes the inward “Heavens” or “Paradise” that can be accessed through the brain (Blake, “The Four Zoas” 297; “Milton” 357), it appears to be this state that he is referring to – the limited paradise-on-Earth of synchronic emotional experience, as opposed to the true paradise of multi-possibility Eden and Eternity.

How, then, is this illusion effected? Paradoxically enough for an attempt to escape from diachronicity, it seems, through a maximization of movement and change. Constant, disorienting change severs the causal connections that keep the infinite “presents” enslaved to the delusion of clock time. But just as importantly, change combats opacity.

The antagonistic relationship between change and opacity can be described as follows: In Eternity, existence encompasses all possibilities and all temporal modes, which means that in Eden, there can be no meaningful difference between movement and stasis. In the lower reality, however, because of the one-possibility law of existence and the linear sequentiality of time, any loss of movement (i.e., change) leads to a proportional reduction of experience. Even with the present elevated to a self-contained synchronic universe, without a constant forward movement between each present to change the parameters for how the next present will look, the act of perception would cease to function entirely. In a linear one-possibility universe, the act of stopping, or contenting oneself with only one thing, one form or one state forever, is the same as death. Death, after all, is only the complete surrender to opacity that Blake calls “Satan” – the reduction of complex sense-experience into changeless, impenetrable “one-ness”. This appears to be the reason why, despite its negative aspects, “Time is the mercy of Eternity, without the swiftness of [which] all were eternal Torment” (Blake, “Milton” 393) – because time injects a mandatory element of change into a world that, left to its own devices, would sink powerlessly into complete opacity.

By maximizing change and movement between each consecutive present, then, we should arrive at the opposite end of the spectrum: the highest possible ratio of translucence-to-opacity that the lower reality allows for. It is in the midst of a constant, disorienting flux of activity that Golgonooza appears at its most clear and distinct, and therefore, it is this kind of state that Los (the builder and master of Golgonooza) constantly appears to be trying to create on earth. For this reason, it is perhaps appropriate that Los's chief symbol is a set of ever-burning furnaces, "Translucent" and "of Beryll & Emerald immortal" ("Jerusalem" 542), in which the imaginative labors of man is transformed into the "timeless" designs of Golgonooza, as well as something called the Spaces of Erin (a set of holy spaces located "in the ends of Beulah" (533), which appear to fulfill largely the same symbolic function as Golgonooza). These furnaces, which are described as "howling" (618), "raging" (530), and "thunder[ing] incessantly" (542), are perhaps the perfect illustration of how the superheated disorder of restless imaginative change and movement facilitates the creation of the permanent, indestructible spaces that make up the "infinite presents" within which we perceive Golgonooza.

This particular aspect of Blake's work, which we might call the "disruptive flux", is so characteristic of the Prophetic Works that the majority of commentators seem to describe it under one name or another. "If any one would realize to himself for ever a material notion of chaos," writes Swinburne, "let him take a blind header into the midst of the whirling foam and rolling weed of this sea of words" (Swinburne, 115). Carl-Johan Malmberg describes the "double" gravitational pull of reading Blake's more obscure poems, wherein "on one hand we are pulled toward a center of meaning thanks to Blake's exhaustiveness and precision, a centripetal movement... on the other hand we are being flung away from this center due to all of Blake's paradoxical metaphors, private symbols, elusive and fluid fictional characters ... a centrifugal movement" (Malmberg 33; translation mine), a paradoxical state that he identifies with the rationality-defying symbol of the vortex. Clark writes about the "creative disruptiveness" (10) and the "ceaseless flux" (14) as fundamental properties – as well as ideological goals – of the Prophetic Texts.

This feeling of disruptive flux appears to be accomplished through a number of different poetic strategies. Because the state of flux increases the higher up in the imaginative hierarchy one travels, the intensity with which these strategies are employed appears to exist in a proportional relationship to the spiritual elevation expressed in any given text, which means that

they are the least prominent in “The Book of Urizen” (which takes place in the depths of Ulro) and the most prominent in “Jerusalem” (which appears to take place on the verge of ascendancy to Eden). The first strategy consists of a ceaseless evocation of complex visual imagery that resists definite (or, sometimes, any) spatiotemporal localization. The following passage from the latter text provides a fairly clear example of this strategy:

Loud howl
The Furnaces of Los: Loud roll the Wheels of Enitharmon.
The four Zoa's in all their faded majesty burst out in fury
And fire. Jerusalem took the Cup which foam'd in Vala's hand,
Like the red Sun upon the mountains in the bloody day,
Upon the Hermaphroditic Wine-presses of Love & Wrath.
[...] Bowen & Conwenna stood on Skiddaw cutting the Fibres
Of Benjamin from Chester's River: loud the River, loud the
Mersey
And the Ribble thunder into the Irish sea, as the Twelve Sons
Of Albion drank & imbibed the Life & eternal Form of Luvah.
Cheshire & Lancashire & Westmoreland groan in anguish.
As they cut the fibres from the Rivers he sears them with hot
Iron of his Forge, & fixes them into Bones of chalk & Rock.
Conwenna sat above: with solemn cadences she drew
Fibres of life out from the Bones into her golden Loom.
Hand had his Furnace on Highgate's heights & it reach'd
To Brockley Hills across the Thames; he with double Boadicea
In cruel pride cut Reuben apart from the Hills of Surrey,
Comingling with Luvah & with the Sepulcher of Luvah.
(Blake, “Jerusalem” 618, 621-622)

In the above passage, action seems to be occurring not only within several different timelines and on several different planes of physical existence simultaneously, but also across them. Ghost-like fragments from Biblical history, ancient British history, Druidic history, late 18th century European philosophy and politics, as well as Blake's own life (the character “Hand” is supposedly a composite character meant to represent three different critics and editors that he deemed hostile to his vision; Bentley, *Blake Records* 219), seem to branch off and converge as Blake sees thematically fit, all against the eternal backdrop of the conflicts between the four Zoas. In several places, as elsewhere in “Jerusalem”, “characters and places ... overlap and

contain each other” (Sklar 123). Ancient Israelite geography interacts with the anthropomorphized geography of England, which itself interacts with the geography of the four visionary states. The excessive complexity of this tumult of incomprehensible movements renders it unlikely that any kind of precise orientation in time and space is expected from the non-telepathic reader. Instead, the effect on the reader could be described as an impression of unceasing movement across vast spatial and temporal distances, without a clear starting point, trajectory or end point.

With regards to the imagery itself, it is typically crowded with symbols. However, it is important to note that, despite the extremely large number of symbols in Blake's arsenal, the majority of them can be slotted into a comparatively small number of categories. The Urizenic dogma of “moral law” seems to be represented by a vast number of symbols including (but not limited to) Urizen, Albion's Angel, the Spectre of Albion, Jehovah, the Tree of Mystery, Bromion (Damon 60), the Elect, the Horses of “Intellect” or “Instruction”, the “Wheels within Wheels” (“Jerusalem 469), the “Covenant of Priam” (637). Likewise, the tyranny of the Selfhood (which, in itself, is coterminous to the earlier category) appear to be alternately represented by Babylon, Rahab, Leviathan, the Twelve Sons of Albion, Druidic Temples, the Wicker Man of Scandinavia, the Wars of Eternal Death, the “Twelve Gods of Asia” (“Jerusalem” 537), and the “Triple-Headed Gog Magog Giant” (637). The reason for the discrepancy between the number of symbols and their range of meaning appears to be that most of the symbols do not exist to communicate “new” information as much as to re-state pre-existing conflicts or contrasts over and over again in different ways – a form of disguised repetition intended to renew perception of a few core existential facts within each new “present”. Jon Mee writes that Blake's *Prophecies* and James Macpherson's “Ossian” cycle share the characteristic that they are both “crowded with imagery” and at the same time full of “repetitions of the same comparisons”, which he argues results in an “air of millenarian expectancy” (Mee 77). This poetic combination of maximized imagery and repetition is appropriate in that it strongly mimics the temporal model that Blake appears to be looking for: one in which meaning is concentrated within a super-saturated present in a constant state of re-assertion, rather than one in which meaning is diffused across a sequential chain in linear time.

The second strategy that Blake appears to employ in order to achieve the above mentioned model is one of a “de-centralization” of dramatic significance. David Clark writes that “the

Blakean search is ... in part an attempt to resist the 'concentrating' impulse or the 'concentering' vision" (Clark 22) – a line of thinking that is highly evident in the tonal structure of the longer Prophetic poems. Even in "Jerusalem", a poem that contains a very clear narrative progression from "the Sleep of Ulro" to "the awaking to Eternal Life" (Blake, "Jerusalem" 448) – and, indeed, consists mostly of a long period of anticipation of the latter – there is a remarkable lack of corresponding dramatic or tonal progression. The tone of ecstatic disorder remains at a consistent, unwavering pitch from start to finish, as can be seen in the following comparison of two passages, one of which belongs to the introduction, and the other of which constitutes the narrative climax of the poem:

The banks of the Thames are clouded! the ancient porches of
Albion are
Darken'd! they are drawn thro' unbounded space, scatter'd upon
The Void in incoher<er>ent despair: Cambridge & Oxford &
London
Are driven among the starry Wheels, rent away and dissipated
In Chasms & Abysses of sorrow, enlarg'd without dimension,
terrible.
Albion's mountains run with blood; the cries of war & of tumult
Resound into the unbounded night; every Human perfection
Of mountain & river & city are small & wither'd & darken'd.
(Blake, "Jerusalem" 450).

The Breath Divine went forth over the morning hills. Albion rose
In anger, the wrath of God, breaking bright, flaming on all sides
around
His awful limbs: into the Heavens he walkèd, clothèd in flames
Loud thund'ring, with broad flashes of flaming lightning & pillars
Of fire, speaking the Words of Eternity in Human Forms, in direful
Revolutions of Action & Passion, thro' the Four Elements on all
Sides
Surrounding his awful Members. (631)

Despite the seismic shift in the cosmic balance that has occurred, the tone in both passages – as well as more or less the whole poem – is roughly the same: ceaseless entropic movement pulsating forth in rough, jagged incantations. This process of tonal "leveling", whereby the tone

is fixed and maintained at maximum intensity throughout the whole poem, can be said to greatly decrease the role of narrative progression (which must be spread out across linear, sequential time) in the poem, as well as grant each consecutive “present” something very close to dramatic self-sufficiency.

So this, then, appears to be highest state of mental existence permissible by natural law: a temporary liberation of experience from time that is accomplished through synchronic artistic experience; to find that “Moment, a Pulsation of the Artery” in which “the Poet’s Work is Done” and which is “equal in its period & value to Six Thousand Years” (“Milton” 403), and re-experience it continuously. However, by the time we reach “Jerusalem”, Blake appears to have become severely conflicted about whether this false paradise is enough to sate the spiritual hunger of Albion’s contracted soul. The constant, endless building of Golgonooza suddenly feels forced and mechanical; Los is described as continuing his labors “in fears”, “in rage & in fury” (“Jerusalem, 542), and his daughters (which appear to be equivalent to the Daughters of Beulah, i.e. Blake’s version of the Greek muses) are equally unsatisfied (“Terrible their distress, & their sorrow cannot be utter’d ... Endless their labour, with bitter food, void of sleep”; 553). Jerusalem, the estranged Emanation of Albion, laments that “Humanity is far above Sexual Organization, & the Visions of the Night of Beulah” (600-601), reiterating that a false paradise built upon the latter can never be a substitute for the clear vision of Eden.

One reason for this appears to be a problem that relates to empathy. Although the emotional highs of Golgonooza provide temporary spiritual solace, they remain strictly confined to a private sphere of experience. This appears to be the reason why most of the conflicts that transpire in “Jerusalem”, the poem in which the inadequacies of Golgonooza have become the most apparent, are inter-personal and relate to sexual politics. In Eternity, each person retains his or her individuality while also being free to enter into each other’s subjective “universe” at will⁵, and because of this direct link between subjects, love in Eternity has the power to create perfect accord between them. In a single-possibility reality, however, there is a fundamental disconnect (stemming from the subject-object divide) in that it is not possible to ascertain beyond doubt what someone else is feeling, which means that love in the fallen universe is, at its most basic

⁵ “When in Eternity Man converses with Man they enter / Into each other’s Bosom (which are Universes of delight) / In mutual interchange.” (“Jerusalem” 616)

level, a matter of trust instead of certainty. As each consciousness contracts further into solipsistic isolation, the principle of Negation comes into play, and just like Contraries (which, in Eternity, are merely two different, equally real qualities capable of co-existing) are “negated” into mutually exclusive opposites, so the two non-identical wills are “negated” into antagonists in a zero-sum game. “In Eden our Loves were the same; here they are opposite,” Enitharmon says to Los (616). At the height of imaginative error, each foreign will lurks as an inscrutable “other” in the margins of subjective consciousness – an impenetrable object that desires only to obstruct the subjective will and deprive it of its sovereignty.

The failure of empathy that comes from this illusion of opposition eventually results in human interaction becoming a game of “hindering” the other and avoiding being hindered in return. This futile, vicious game, Blake seems to be saying, is the source of all evil that occurs on an individual level (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 55), as summarized in the following quote:

As I understand Vice it is a Negative ... Each thing is its own cause & its own effect. Accident is the omission of act in self & the hindering of act in another. This is Vice but all Act is Virtue. To hinder another is not an act it is the contrary it is a restraint on action both in ourselves & in the person hinderd [sic] ... Murder is Hindering Another. Theft is Hindering Another. Backbiting, Undermining, Circumventing, & whatever is Negative is Vice. (Blake, “Annotations” 226-227)

Hindering, then – like loss of movement – leads only to a reduction of experience, and therefore constitutes a downward spiral toward Satan, or the lower limit of Opacity. Its extension into self-governance is self-restraint, or the “omission of act”, which Blake views as purely negative, as that too only leads to a reduction of experience with nothing to take its place. The love that one experiences in Beulah provides a relief from hindering, but it is only illusory – Jerusalem describes those experiences as mere “dreams of bliss” that are in reality “nets of beauty and delusion” (“Jerusalem” 601) – since it is built upon trust in something hidden rather than the certainty of what can be directly experienced: a triumph of the indistinct over the clear, definite outline. “Beulah”, Susanne M. Sklar writes, “is not an end to itself [...] If it becomes enclosed or narcissistic, Selfhood blights its delights and can pull us back to the ‘Sleep of Ulro’ (Sklar 252), and when imagination has to make do with the solitary pleasures of Golgonooza and mere negotiation instead of “true” communication, this danger feels very present indeed.

However, if Golgonooza is not enough to satisfy humanity's needs for spiritual wholeness, what other options remain? Once again, Blake appears to find himself stranded on the upper limit of Beulah, prevented by natural restrictions from progressing further, but too elevated to sink back down into a reality which has been exposed for what it is: an existential prison cell. The unsolvable quandary at the heart of the Prophetic mission once again rears its ugly head, and this time, it seems like nothing short of a miracle is required for the project to keep moving. And perhaps it is the proximity to the era of romanticism with its ideals of the unwinnable battle against the elements, perishing in the midst of which is at once the most ignominious defeat and the highest victory, but the Prophetic quest continues toward the prospect of such a miracle, wherever it might still be found.

Between the Cherubim

If the main concern of the earlier and middle Prophecies is the nature of the "error" of the fallen world, "Jerusalem" can be said to focus on the relationship between error and the state that the error has displaced. Golgonooza – the earthly paradise of imagination – continues to create its "timeless" designs, which are occasionally referred to as the "Spaces of Erin", but an important change has occurred: these spaces, which were previously imbued with near-heavenly status, are increasingly often described as a "tomb" filled with mute ornaments (Blake, "Jerusalem" 532, 630). What began as a project to regain the freedom and explosive, amorphous life of Eternity, then, has had the opposite effect: instead, the products of imagination – the super-saturated "presents" – have become pristine, immobile visions entrapped within the hermetically sealed crypt of individual experience. Suddenly, humanity – spurred on by Los – appears to be clamoring for the real thing: the Eternity that, at present, can be understood in principle but neither seen nor attained.

However, as we have seen, the mere conviction that this state exists, and indeed, is "native" to humanity, is not enough to for Albion to attain it. This is shown in the passage where Los, frustrated by the lack of progress, convinces the other Zoas to "carry" Albion back to Eternity, with disastrous results:

[...] at length they rose
With one accord in love sublime, & as on Cherubs' wings
They Albion surround with kindest violence to bear him back
Against his will thro' Los's Gate to Eden, Four-fold, loud,
Their wings waving over the bottomless Immense, to bear
Their awful charge back to his native home: but Albion, dark,
Repugnant, roll'd his wheels backward into Non-Entity.
Loud roll the Starry Wheels of Albion into the World of Death;
And all the Gate of Los clouded with clouds redounding from
Albion's dread Wheels, stretching out spaces immense between,
That every little particle of light & air became Opake,
Black & immense, a Rock of difficulty & a Cliff
Of black despair, that the immortal Wings labour'd against
Cliff after Cliff & over Valleys of despair & death.
The narrow sea between Albion and the Atlantic Continent,
Its waves of pearl became a boundless Ocean, bottomless,
Of grey obscurity, fill'd with clouds & rocks & whirling waters,
And Albion's Sons ascending & des[c]ending in the horrid Void.
("Jerusalem" 526)

The failure to cross over the impassable border between Beulah and Eden, to transgress the limitations of the natural world, only causes Albion's consciousness to plummet deeper into imaginative failure. What seemed like a gateway into Eternity has suddenly dissolved into clouds and "immense spaces" – the "voids" at the edges of existence that the rationalist interprets as proof that there is nothing more to reality than what can be seen and heard (588, 625) – and even the smallest particles of light and air are reduced to opaque, impenetrable forms. The "narrow sea" that separates Albion from his Atlantis⁶ suddenly resembles a "boundless Ocean" of "grey obscurity", and the place where the fabled continent should reside has been replaced with a "horrid Void" of apparent nothingness. Weakened and demoralized, Albion must fall back on the paltry comforts of his imagination, and the ever dwindling conviction that there must be a way out of reality that is somehow being withheld from him.

⁶ The two are symbolically connected in that Atlantis represents a fabled, unreachable location that exists forever to the West of Albion (whose name means England), just like Eden lies unreachable to the human imagination beyond the closed Western Gate.

If there is a dominant thematic and emotional strain in “Jerusalem”, it appears to be a form of righteous indignation over the fact that humanity, in all of the most meaningful areas of existence, must make do with faith rather than certainty: that we are forced to conceptualize the ideal state of existence instead of being allowed to perceive or attain it, that we must place blind trust in our fellow men or women instead of being allowed to commune with them soul to soul, and that we instinctively understand that the Selfhood is too restrictive, and yet we cannot imagine life without it. The main conflict in “Jerusalem”, then, seems to be between the forces that persist in believing that there must be a way to transcend this state of uncertainty, and the forces that either deny or willfully obscure the fact that there is.

The most prominent figureheads of the latter category are, paradoxically, two opposites that have made joined forces in order to preserve the order of nature: the Spectre and Vala. “Spectre” is Blake’s term for a “masculine” principle that has become separated from its female counterpart (which is called the “Emanation”) and become autonomous, and the entity that appears in “Jerusalem” appears to be more or less a larger, universal embodiment of that idea. The Spectre represents “the Rational Power” at its most ruthless and self-serving: a detached, machine-like mechanism of “false reasoning” which in reality exists only to further the Selfhood’s own “Superiority Complex” (Damon 381). Because the Spectre’s primary goal is to serve the Selfhood, it is within its interest to deny the higher imaginative realities of Eden (wherein the Selfhood would be abolished), and to cultivate the principle of Negation (which negates the threatening diversity of the object-world and replaces it with abstract principles, which are mere extensions of the Selfhood). The primary ally of the Spectre is Vala, a feminine entity that was originally the emanation of Luvah (the Zoa of raw passion). Vala, who is sometimes referred to as “the Shadowy Female”, is a tyrannical Mother Nature-figure who reigns within the “hidden” and “indefinite”, and maintains her power through indeterminacy and obscurity. The “Veil of Vala” is Blake’s name for the body of illusion that prevents man from perceiving Eternity, and which “dissipates” his “perceptions into the indefinite” (571), resulting in the imaginative blur that occurs when man tries to picture something that is too remote from the natural order. Vala maintains her power over humanity through fear of Nature and the unknown, which infantilizes men and women and keeps them confined to the timid comforts of Beulah.

These two entities occasionally come together to form a giant “Hermaphrodite” – sometimes referred to as “the Covering Cherub” – whose main purpose appears to be to thwart all attempts on behalf of humanity to transgress the limitations of nature. The improbable alliance between these two seemingly disparate principles highlights the hypocrisy of both positions and constitutes a blistering attack on the nature of rationalism; by insinuating that the limitations of Nature are absolute, Blake appears to be saying, rationalists like Voltaire are actually enforcing the will of mindless nature rather than pushing back against it (588). Furthermore, the hermaphroditical character of the Covering Cherub appears to symbolize the barren contradiction at the heart of nature. Because sexual differences in Blake belong to the body of error – which is why, in Eternity, every person is genderless (627, 635) – the union of outward masculinity and femininity results in a compounding of error rather than each cancelling the other out, two wrongs instead of one right. Because these differences are also irreconcilable opposites – “Two Contraries warring against each other in fury & blood” (551) – the Covering Cherub can be said to become a self-consuming paradox, a “sexually blocked” negative (Paglia 290).

Because the combined forces of rationalism and the will of nature control the “form” of the lower reality, it becomes very difficult for the opposite force to amass any efficient resistance against them. After all, the reality defended by the Covering Cherub is demonstrably real, whereas the reality sought by the dreamers of the world exists in the fallen universe only as a distant hope. But fools rush in where angels fear to tread, and this might be why, in the first half of the poem, the sole combatant against the repressive natural order is Luvah, the Zoa of raw, unfettered emotion. However, Luvah’s rebellion fails spectacularly and he is sacrificed by the daughters of Albion, who have become followers of Vala. As Luvah perishes, all passion is stamped out of Albion and he appears to be transformed into a hollow satellite to the “female will”⁷:

They cut asunder his inner garments, searching with
Their cruel fingers for his heart; & there they enter with pomp;

⁷ Although Blake frequently uses the term “female will” synonymously with the tyranny of Vala, it is important to note that it is only evil insofar as it seeks to isolate itself from its counterpart, in the same way that the spectre (or the male will) is only harmful when it seeks autonomy (“When the Male & Female / Appropriate Individuality, they become an Eternal Death”; “Jerusalem” 623).

In many tears; & there they erect a temple & an altar.
They pour cold water on his brain in front, to cause
Lids to grow over his eyes in veils of tears and caverns
To freeze over his nostrils, while they feed his tongue from cups
And dishes of painted clay. Glowing with beauty and cruelty
They obscure the sun & the moon: no eye can look upon them.
(Blake, "Jerusalem" 571)

An altar to Vala is erected in Albion's heart, and his overheated brain is "cooled" into passive submission to her will. As his passions are replaced with tearful devotion to an unreachable mistress (who, as we have seen, dwells in the perpetual "beyond"), Albion is wing-clipped and tethered – as in infancy – to the womb-like safety of Beulah. Tears and ever-present mental images of "beauty and cruelty" obscure the real world from Albion's senses, and consequently, he once again forgets the promise of Eternity.

More than ever, it seems clear that humanity has exhausted its imaginative resources and seems doomed to wither and die within a fallen universe of its own making. Reason (Urizen), imagination (Los) and passion (Luvah) have all proven futile in conquering the limitations of the lower reality, and in the absence of a direct link (Tharmas) between imagination and reality, it appears that it would take a miracle to set the universe aright again. Unfortunately, as Frye notes, the closed Western Gate is a symbol of the discrepancy between the goals of the human will and the reality of the universe, which is why works of art – even at their most profound – do not perform miracles (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 393). It is clear that some kind of force external to Albion must be allowed into the picture, so that the wall separating nature from Eternity can be breached from the other direction instead. This, then, could be an important reason for the clearly discernible swing within the Prophecies from a heretical worship of the imagination to a renewed obsession with Christian symbolism that some commentators have viewed as a symptom of incohesion in Blake's philosophy: the dawning realization that some external entity must work in conjunction with humanity in order to save it from itself.

However, whereas the universe according to Christianity is divided between man and God, Albion in Blake's mythology encompasses all creation (including Eternity, which he merely cannot access), which means that there is no external sphere for him to communicate with. As such, whatever "external" entity he must now attract must be an aspect of himself that was lost at some point during the fall. Therefore, the role falls on Jerusalem – the estranged emanation (i.e.,

feminine aspect) of Albion – who comes to represent the potential for miracles to happen in our reality. Because this potential has become lost in the fallen universe, Jerusalem seems to hover miserably on the verge of non-existence; throughout almost the entire poem, she is either adrift, imprisoned or in some way weakened to a critical point (484, 556, 620). When her name is used to denote a location, her function as a potential intermediary between the upper limit of Beulah and Eden becomes apparent; the name then refers to the spot “where Beulah terminates in the cities and hills of Albion” which have “not yet [become] realized in time & space”, but which would be located above the furnaces of Los and the tomb of Erin (both of which belong to Golgonooza), (613). In other words, the “cities and hills of Albion” appears to refer to nothing other than the hypothetical extension of Golgonooza into Eden that could not happen because of the constraints of the lower reality.

As a living entity, Jerusalem is repeatedly said to have “dwelt between the Cherubim” (600, etc), which appears to be a reference to the physical manifestation of the God of the Hebrews, which dwelled between the golden Cherubim on the lid of the Ark of the Covenant. However, if we turn to kabbalah (which we know that Blake read; Aubrey 16) the identification of Jerusalem as a link or intermediary between humanity and the divine becomes more explicit; according to Talmudic lore, the divine presence that dwelled together with the Jews on earth was actually *Schechina*, the lowest of the ten sephirot that mediate between God and humanity, and – like Jerusalem – a feminine entity. Like Jerusalem also, Schechina has been separated from her masculine counterpart – a division that has resulted in a major imbalance in the cosmos – and must be reunited through the combined efforts of God and man (Dan 54-55). As the lowest of the sephirot, and therefore the closest to earth, she is consequently the only “direct” intermediary between man and the rest of the sephirotic system – i.e., the “first step” on the way to God – in the same way that Jerusalem resides just outside Upper Beulah as the “first step” into Eden.

If we extend this interpretation, the great crime of the Covering Cherub (as its name strongly implies) must be that it “hides” this intermediary between Eternity and the lower reality. One of the main purposes of the Biblical symbolism, then, could be to facilitate a reinterpretation of Biblical history in the light of what Blake views as its “true” meaning: a long conflict between man’s attempt to reclaim this intermediary miracle and the malicious “covering” entity that strives to keep him away from it. In Genesis, then, Jerusalem represents the Tree of Life which grants eternal life, whereas the Covering Cherub is doubly present as the serpent that tricks man

into forfeiting his birthright, as well as the cherub with the flaming sword set to guard the Garden of Eden after the expulsion of Adam and Eve (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 137). Likewise, following the covenant between Moses and God, Jerusalem is represented by the direct, physically accessible link to God that is Schechina, whereas the Covering Cherub is the thundering voice of Jehovah (“the warlike One sitting upon Horeb”⁸; “Jerusalem” 622) arbitrarily demanding the former to be kept hidden from man. Following the construction of the tabernacle (nearly always a sinister symbol in Blake’s poetry; 549, 580, 617, 620), the Covering Cherub can be said to be represented by the “veil” that separates Schechina from man and which Jesus (a positive force in Blake) tears away in the New Testament – an interpretation which bestows an extra layer of metaphorical significance upon the passage in “Jerusalem” in which Jesus tears away the Veil of Vala (545).

In the midst of the longest visual description of the Covering Cherub, we find Jerusalem literally imprisoned within its “Devouring Stomach” – “hidden within the Covering Cherub as in a Tabernacle / Of threefold workmanship, in allegoric delusion & woe” (Blake, “Jerusalem” 620). Reclaiming Jerusalem, then, will entail striking at the heart of the natural order – a wholesale destruction of error and all its “covering” delusions. This appears to be the main reason for Blake’s particularly pronounced interest in the apocalypse: the longing for an upheaval so profound that it will correct the “jammed gear” at the base of nature’s broken machine and jumpstart the clockwork of Eternity again. However, mere universal destruction obviously will not do. What Blake appears to have in mind is very much an apocalypse in the sense of its original etymological meaning: an “uncovering” (“apocalypse”, par. 1) or unveiling of the Veil of Vala. The opaque “excrementitious husks” of nature, including our bodies, must be burned away to reveal the infinite, translucent forms beneath (Blake, “Jerusalem” 635). Consequently, humanity must enter into Eternal life through a “Waking Death” – a selective destruction of the Selfhood – as opposed to the “Eternal Death” that is mere cessation, or a reduction into a completely opaque, single-possibility form. Finally, time – being dependent on the single-possibility principle to exist – must end (630).

⁸ Horeb is generally believed to be the same mountain as Mount Sinai, where God spoke to Moses (“Sinai, Mount”, par. 1)

The nature and cause of this apocalypse is perhaps one of the most unclear aspects of the Prophetic mythology. On the one hand, it appears to be partially triggered by the works of Los and the building of Golgonooza; we see that the new all-encompassing form of Albion is the final product of the furnaces of Los (627), implying that the apocalypse is the end-product of the building of Golgonooza, and following the apocalypse, Los is praised by all for having “kept the Divine Vision in time of trouble” (632). On the other hand, this picture is complicated by the fact that time is repeatedly stated to be fixed at “Six Thousand Years” (“Milton” 421, “Jerusalem” 591), and even more so by the revelation at the end of the poem that time may only part of an eternally self-repeating cycle (638; see the next chapter for a longer discussion of this passage and its implications). In the light of these two facts, creation and apocalypse would seem to be pre-determined – two immutable black holes fixed at the beginning and end of time, respectively – and to follow each other endlessly in pre-set six-thousand-year cycles. Furthermore, since Blake’s apocalypse, unlike its Biblical counterpart, appears to grant salvation to all of humanity rather than merely a select few, this begs the question: To what extent is humanity actually playing any part in its own redemption? If the apocalypse is the only possible end-point of every six thousand year stretch of time, and everyone is saved, is the matter of Albion’s salvation not merely a matter of waiting?

This is a question that does not appear to be definitively addressed in Blake’s writings, and as such, can only be speculated about. Northrop Frye suggests a model in which the apocalypse is triggered by a fortunate combination of an artistic reawakening with the end of linear time: in this model, the end of a “historical cycle” brings the natural world directly opposite the city of Jerusalem (comparable to the alignment of celestial bodies), and if correctly timed, the interposition of the “glass of ... art” between the natural world and the mirage of Jerusalem will kindle the “world’s last fire”, i.e., usher in the apocalypse (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 394). Although this theory provides a satisfying explanation as to how intent and cosmic predestination can operate toward the same result, it fails to account for what would happen if Golgonooza is never placed between the natural world and Jerusalem, and time is forced to continue past the fixed limit of linear time. If we instead take “historical cycle” to mean a smaller period within the six thousand years of history, this would mean that humanity has a certain number of chances to bring about the Apocalypse – an explanation that could potentially explain the otherwise cryptic information in “Jerusalem” that “every two hundred years has a door to

Eden" (Blake, "Jerusalem" 532). This explanation, however, still fails to explain what will happen if history is allowed to continue past the six thousand year mark, and, additionally, fails to account for what would happen to the "un-lived" remainder of the six thousand years, which is the extent of the "completed" body of Time, if the Apocalypse is ushered in earlier than that.

At the time of "Jerusalem", the apocalypse is imminent. Most of the action of the poem unambiguously coincide with the events described in the Book of Revelation; the Covering Cherub is revealed to be the Antichrist (619), and the Spectre and Vala take the forms of "a Dragon red & hidden Harlot" (620), the three forming the Satanic trinity of Beast, Dragon and Whore of Babylon that are said to appear during the Biblical end times. Los even goes so far as to declare the rise of deism (which Blake considered to be an off-shoot of rationalism; Hagstrum, 149-153) to be "that Signal of the Morning that was told us in the Beginning" (629), i.e., the era of spiritual darkness that is said to precede the Last Judgment. However, the apocalypse itself transpires very quickly and abruptly:

Albion cold lays on his rock; storms & snows beat round him,
Beneath the Furnaces & the Starry Wheels & the Immortal
Tomb;
Howling winds cover him; roaring seas dash furious against him;
In the deep darkness broad lightnings glare, long thunders roll,
The weeds of Death inwrap his hands & feet, blown incessant
And wash'd incessant by the for-ever restless sea-waves foaming
abroad;
[...] deep heaves the Ocean black, thundering
Around the wormy Garments of Albion, then pausing in
deathlike silence.
Time was Finishèd! The Breath Divine Breathèd over Albion
Beneath the Furnaces & starry Wheels and in the Immortal Tomb;
And England who is Britannia awoke from Death on Albion's
bosom.
She awoke pale & cold. (Blake, "Jerusalem" 629-630)

As the world begins to crumble, Urizen's superficial natural order is repealed, and the fallen universe reverts back to its essence: the Sea of Space and Time that the corrupted Tharmas gave birth to. "Storms", "thunders" and "for-ever restless sea waves" tear apart the universe, and

Albion's body is consumed in the process – until, finally, the end of linear time is reached, at which point the “Ocean black” suddenly “paus[es] in deathlike silence”.

Time has ended, and with it, the “mind-forged manacles” that shackle man to its single-possibility reality have been thrown off. However, as we shall see in the next chapter, what comes next may be less of a permanent paradise than we have had cause to anticipate, and in fact, may contain its own unexpected limitations.

Beyond the End of Time

The first thing that Albion experiences after time has ended is an immediate awareness of Eternity being within reach. The surrounding world has been burnt away to reveal the eternal landscape underneath: the “morning hills” of Jerusalem on the verge of Eden, which previously could not be permitted to exist. Having risen from his six-thousand-year slumber, Albion commands each of the Four Zoas to his station, so that the machinery of Eternity can begin to operate anew (Blake, “Jerusalem” 631-632).

However, it quickly becomes clear that the conflict with the Covering Cherub has not yet been resolved. The “Selfhood cruel” is fast approaching, and as it draws near, the reader is treated to perhaps the most outlandish image in the whole Prophetic oeuvre: the collected visions of Six Thousand Years – linear time itself – compressed into a serpent-like form, slithering forward to reclaim its supremacy over man. Albion is approached by Jesus, who offers to sacrifice himself for humanity. It is perhaps only here that the greater significance of Christ's sacrifice within Blake's mythology becomes fully clear: the “Self-Annihilation” (635) of his body appears in reality to be a “Selfhood-Annihilation” on behalf of all humanity. This, then, may be the miracle that was missing at the bottom of Blake's ladder of ascendancy to Eden: Jesus, who is equal parts man and god (calling to mind the reunion of Albion and Jerusalem), miraculously throwing off the yoke of Selfhood through a destruction of his own physical body and subsequent resurrection of himself (and all his followers) as a spiritual body. This act of self-

sacrifice seals the “covenant of Jehovah”⁹ (635), which reunites Albion with Jerusalem and completes Albion’s ascendancy into Eden.

Eternity, then, has finally been regained, and it appears to contain all the properties that it had been prophesized to have. Eternity is a multi-possibility paradise, which means that all the petty “Jealousies, Revenges and Murders” that characterize life on earth “appear only in the outward spheres of Shadowy Possibility” (627); in other words, they are not lost, but occur simultaneously with all other possibilities, rendered harmless by their incapacity to hinder other possibilities from coming into being. The same goes for death, which no longer possesses the power to hinder activity and thereby reduce bodies to opaque forms, and is therefore only one out of an infinite number of possibilities for the mind to “play with” according to preference – it is said to be “seen in regeneration terrific or complacent, varying / According to the subject of discourse” (636). Furthermore, it is a paradise of malleable and ever-fluctuating time and space, in which both are spontaneously created according to the whims of imagination, and “vary according as the Organs of Perception vary” (636-637). It is a paradise of soul-to-soul communication, where each man sees himself reflected in the internal universe of his peer (637), and where discourse takes the form of “Visionary forms dramatic, which bright Redounded / from their Tongues in thunderous majesty” (636). Finally, it is a paradise in which Contraries have been liberated from Negation and can co-exist without becoming mutually exclusive opposites – a fact that is humorously illustrated by a vision of “Bacon & Newton & Locke” appearing side by side with “Milton & Shakspear & Chaucer” (635), the worst of the Urizenic dogmatists having become friends with the best of Golgonoozan visionaries. In short, Eternity appears to contain everything that was missing in the fallen universe.

However, the enigmatic last lines of the poem contain information that, depending on the reader’s interpretation of them, may have extremely important implications within the Prophetic universe:

All Human Forms identified, even Tree, Metal, Earth, &
Stone; all
Human Forms identified, living, going forth & returning
wearied

⁹ The discrepancy between Blake’s earlier usage of the name “Jehovah” to denote a tyrannical, Urizenic deity and this positive usage cannot be satisfactorily explained except as inconsistency on his part.

Into the Planetary lives of Years, Months, Days & Hours;
 reposing,
And then Awakening into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality.
And I heard the Name of their Emanations; they are named
 Jerusalem.
(Blake, "Jerusalem" 638)

It is difficult to read the above lines as anything other than a suggestion that existence is actually cyclical, and that each period of immortality must be followed by a "wearied" return into the "Planetary lives of Years, Months, Days & Hours", i.e. linear time. Although it might seem bizarre for Blake to introduce such a radically different theory of existence into the Prophetic mythology in the very last lines of the very last poem, this appears to be the interpretation of most scholars and commentators. Sloss and Wallis highlight the incongruity of the passage, writing that "nothing has been found to throw light on this doctrine of an eternal cycle in existence" (Sloss & Wallis, *Vol. I* 638, note 56). Damrosch argues that the addition of such a cycle shows that Blake realized that the world of time, while inferior to Eden, must be preserved in order to serve as its necessary complement (Damrosch 242); however, the point of Blake's philosophy of Contraries without Negation has been to prove the opposite of this thought – that contraries can maintain an independent existence without mutually exclusive opposites to define themselves against. Anne Kostelanotz Mellor suggests that this cycle may be voluntary, and that inhabitants of Eternity can choose at will to descend to the time-bound existence of Beulah, with the added risk of possibly contracting back into the opaque bodies that they were once trapped in (Mellor 330). Nonetheless, it seems unavoidable to conclude that Eternity is neither absolute nor necessarily the final destination of the spiritual traveler, and that existence continues in some form of cyclical alternation between the two.

A possible explanation for this can be found, once again, in the works of Blake's closest philosophical ancestor Jacob Böhme. Böhme, as we have seen, posits a distinction between Eternity and Time in that the former contains infinite potentiality but no form, and that the latter contains form but severely decreased potentiality. Life itself occurs within neither of these modes, but rather between them, in what Böhme calls the "Centre of the Mind":

This primordial productive enmity is intimately known by human beings,
indeed: we are this contrariety. Böhme envisions human beings as

creatures who ceaselessly enact this dialectic, whose very existence serves as a sort of liminal third space, which grounds the two polarities. [...] As time we are the manifestation and definition of being; as eternity we are the creative potentiality, the nothingness, which lies at the heart of being. In this sense, Böhme posits eternity as that which allows time to temporalize, that which allows itself to become *other*. And the free movement between creative potentiality and creation would then signify a harmonious interweaving of eternity and time. In this sense, the saying that Böhme often left inscribed in the guest books of friends, takes on a new significance: “the one, to whom time is like eternity and eternity like time, is free from all suffering”. (Gentzke, par. 2-6)

In Böhme's philosophy, then, neither time nor eternity *in isolation* is conducive to the life of the human mind: if kept wholly within eternity, the human mind becomes merely a collection of infinite possibilities without any definite existence; if kept wholly within time, the human mind loses the infinite potentiality whose existence before each moment constitutes free will. The life of the mind must in some way exist between the poles, and exchange impulses from both directions in what Böhme calls “love-play” (Buber par. 3-4), whereby potentiality and definite form can interact with each other to create authentic life. Since this love-play is the ultimate meaning of life (par. 4), the difference between existence on earth and the afterlife must not be that time is exchanged for eternity, but rather that the soul is allowed to engage in this creative movement without the constraints posed by nature – pure love-play without boundaries.

As was mentioned earlier, Blake attempts to avoid this interplay between polarities by adding definite form to the infinite potentiality of eternity. In Blake's Eternity, everything exists in all possible combinations at all times, which makes single-possibility existence in any shape or form redundant, and consequently, there would appear to be no need for a compromise between the two. Yet, this clearly stated doctrine of cyclical existence strongly suggests a realization that imagination, even at its highest, must in some way contain a measure of alternation. However, how can such a belief be squared with the principle that contraries maintain an independent existence from each other, and therefore do not need to define themselves against each other? And, just as importantly, what kind of state could possibly serve as an alternative to a state in which all possibilities already occur all the time?

To begin with the first question: even in a paradise in which contraries are no longer opposites, there must still be two mutually exclusive choices available to each inhabitant: whether to fully utilize the freedom of Eden, or whether to place artificial constraints on it. The mutually exclusive nature of this choice stems from the fact that the principle of Contraries without Negation only comes into play if the first choice is selected, since the second choice (if the constraints involve being subjected to the rules of a single-possibility reality) by definition does not obey that principle. Even the staunchest enforcer of the principle of Contraries without Negation must accept the reality of this dichotomy, since its existence is the main source of conflict throughout the Prophetic Works; after all, what is the fallen universe if not a set of artificial constraints placed on the freedom of Eden? Consequently, the polarities that Blake's "love-play" occurs between can be said to be absolute freedom and artificial restriction.

Secondly, a state of restricted possibility also serves as the only possible alternative to the state of infinite possibility that is Eternity. In "Jerusalem", the world of time is frequently likened to a state of rest (638), sleep (631) or "night" (633), whereas Eternity is compared to activity and "day" (633). The ideal form of existence, then, appears to be a cyclical existence in which the state of infinite possibility constitutes the "fullest" form of existence, and the state of restricted possibility serves as "repose" from the former. Northrop Frye posits a model in which Beulah serves as a lower paradise to the higher paradise of Eden, and suggests precisely this form of relationship between the two:

All life or imagination in the world, from the heartbeat to the creations of genius, shows an alternating rhythm of effort and rest. There is the energy which creates, and the incubation in which further stores of energy are laid up. There is the struggle to create, and the loving contemplation of what has been created. These are not antithetical qualities, but different phases of the same imaginative rhythm. This rhythm occurs more regularly in nature: there is the bursting energy of life in spring and the buried repose of life in winter; the heat of the day and the coolness of the evening. The fact that all imagination or life shows this alternation of rhythm indicates its existence in Paradise. The two forms of eternal existence, Eden and Beulah, are respectively a sunlit city and a moonlit garden, a golden summer of energy and a silver winter of repose. (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 230)

If this is indeed the kind of relationship that the cycle at the end of “Jerusalem” represents, then it would imply a fundamental change of mind on Blake’s part with regards to the self-sufficiency of Eternity. Clearly, infinite potentiality plus definite form does not automatically equal the best of both worlds; it seems that there must be an inherent value in being restricted that Blake had not foreseen – a value inherent not in presence, but in absence. Malmberg notes the prevalence of “agonistic” elements throughout Blake’s work, whose negative character and restrictiveness help to spur on the creative elements – elements that he argues represent “the lack of freedom that grants Blake his freedom” (Malmberg 108; translation mine). The self-imposed descent into a single-possibility reality at the end of each eternal cycle may be, among other things, such an agonistic element elevated to macrocosmic stature.

However, the fact that Blake saw fit to transform the highest state of existence into a cycle between single- and multi-possibility existence, rather than just impose restrictions on Eternity itself, suggests that – beyond “agonistic” contrast – there must be fundamental advantages to living in a single-possibility reality that by definition could not apply to Eternity. What, then, could those advantages be? A possible answer is that Blake, like Böhme, eventually saw that there was no way getting around the fact that existence requires a certain amount of “obstruction” to become meaningful. Just as a work of art reduces the overwhelming complexity of life to a small number of relevant features (or as Alfred Hitchcock said: drama is life with the dull bits cut out), so existence is heightened by selection and prioritization. Much has been written about Blake’s philosophy of heeding the “Minute Particulars” at the expense of the “general” – the small at the expense of the large – in life. However, true appreciation of minute particulars require a reality that is on some level founded on exclusion – a reality in which some things are true while others are not (negation), in which some things happen while others do not (time), and one in which certain things exist at the expense of other, less worthy, things (opacity).

The problem in the current single-possibility universe, however, is that these obstructive principles – time, opacity and negation – do not operate in the service of the imagination, but have become autonomous. If, instead, they followed the whims of imagination, the world of time could become precisely the counterpart to Eden that is required to create a rhythm between activity and rest, freedom and willful self-restriction. Also, since the only layer of the world of time that is congenial to imagination is Beulah, that would be the only section of the world of

time worth conserving, resulting in an eternal cycle of Eden and Beulah alternating each other, as outlined in the quote by Frye on page 49.

The relationship between the single-possibility state of Beulah and the multi-possibility state of Eden, when operating in cyclical harmony, is perhaps best described in terms of two of the most mysterious terms in the Prophetic vocabulary: center and circumference. Throughout the Prophetic Works, Eden and Eternity are routinely identified with the “circumference” of man, whereas Beulah is associated with his “center”. Prior to the apocalypse, Albion’s circumference – like Eden – is “closed” (Blake, “Jerusalem” 479), but when opened, the circumference expands infinitely in all directions, including inwards (582), meaning that whichever way you travel loops back into Eternity. The circumference, and by extension Eden, then, is infinite extension without a center. Beulah, on the other hand, can be viewed as a center closed off from its surroundings. In contrast to Eden, traveling inwards in Beulah only leads to greater levels of isolation and security:

She also took an Atom of Space, with dire pain opening it a
Center
Into Beulah: trembling the Daughters of Beulah dried
Her tears; she ardent embrac'd her sorrows, occupied in labours
Of sublime mercy in Rephaim's Vale. Perusing Albion's Tomb
She sat: she walk'd among the ornaments solemn mourning:
The Daughters attended her shudderings, wiping the death
sweat.
[...] The Daughters of Beulah in kind arms receiv'd
Jerusalem, weeping over her among the Spaces of Erin
In the Ends of Beulah, where the Dead wail night & day.
(Blake, “Jerusalem” 532-533)

In Beulah, as we can see, every “Atom of Space” contains a protected, womb-like center in which visitors can find rest and relief from life’s pains. Unlike the relentless activity of the circumference (or Eden), the center is associated with stillness, gentleness and contemplation: “perusing”, “sorrows”, “kindness” and “solemn mourning”. Other identifications of Beulah with a closed, confined center include mentions of it being “Earth’s central joint” (531), as well as existing “within the Human Heart, whose gates closèd with solemn sound” (532).

In Chapter 2, we saw how Blake appears to use various strategies of “de-centralization” of significance in order to emulate the properties of Eden, which – like Albion’s circumference – contains no center. This, however, does not mean that the center is an inherently negative concept in Blake’s mythology. During the building of Golgonooza in the current world of time, de-centralization is a necessary tool for escaping the restrictions that the “autonomous natural” order places on the human mind, i.e., the “false” center that nature forces upon the natural man, and which is the source of all imaginative delusion. Following the apocalypse, however, the “center” aspect of Beulah becomes – just like its single-possibility properties – something that needs to be regained and integrated into the eternal cycle. Viewed in these terms, we find what is perhaps the most comprehensible visual metaphor for the Beulah-Eden cycle: the circumference becomes the “outward” sphere of activity, freedom and unrestrained possibilities, whereas the center becomes the “inward” sphere of rest, security and permanent meaning.

However, in order for the center to be integrated within the eternal cycle, it first needs to be redeemed, or cleansed of its autonomy. In his analysis of Blake’s center and circumference symbolism, Dennis M. Welch draws a distinction between “open” and “closed” centers in Blake’s writings. The open center is one that is in some way coterminous to the circumference, whereas the closed center has become “blocked” by the vegetative (i.e., erratic) properties of the natural order (Welch 238-242). Expanding upon this line of reasoning, it seems fair to conclude that the “center” posed by Beulah is not destroyed along with the natural order in the apocalypse, but rather, is liberated from its “vegetative” clutches.

In summary, it appears that the aim of the Prophetic Works has changed drastically from an attempt to conquer time and achieve eternity to the achievement of a state of synthesis between the two in the form of an eternally self-repeating cycle. Because the ending of “Jerusalem” does not provide any explicit information about the portion of the cycle that takes place in the world of time, it cannot be ascertained beyond a doubt whether it refers to a “re-created” fallen universe that must be transcended and annihilated anew, or merely a voluntary stay in a “redeemed” Beulah that has become subordinated to man’s imagination. However, due to recurring motifs such as that of alternation between rest and activity, a division of the self into a center and a circumference, as well as the indebtedness of Blake’s philosophy to that of his spiritual predecessor Jakob Böhme, it seems likely that the latter is what Blake had in mind.

In “The Marriage of Heaven and Hell” – one of the transitional works between Blake’s early poetry and the Prophetic cycle – one of the so-called “Proverbs of Hell”¹⁰ reads: “Eternity is in love with the productions of time” (Blake, “Marriage” 15). This, then, might be the most appropriate (and beautiful) way of envisioning the relationship between Time and Eternity in their synthesized cyclical state: two polarities interacting with each other in an endless state of Böhman love-play, Eternity supplying the imaginative possibilities and Time solidifying them into single-possibility productions to the appreciation of the former – Eternity the inventor and Time the enactor.

Conclusion

William Blake’s Prophetic Works can be seen as a poetic-philosophical attempt to redeem imagination from a number of existential restrictions imposed upon it by linear time. In order to accomplish this, Blake posits a distinction between Time and Eternity in which the latter encompasses all of existence, while the former constitutes a narrowed-down, malfunctioning subset of the other. Time, due to its linearity, is defined by its exclusionary character; most importantly, it allows for only one out of an infinite number of possibilities to exist at a time, which means that everything exists at the expense of something else. This exclusionary property also infects existence in time-bound space, in which objects are reduced to a single, definite form occupying a designated point in space (opacity), and time-bound logic, in which contraries (qualities that are independent from each other in Eternity) become mutually exclusive opposites. Eternity, on the other hand, is ontologically all-encompassing. In Eternity, all possibilities occur at the same time eternally, time and space fluctuate according to the whims of imagination, and contraries maintain an independent existence from each other. Throughout most of the Prophetic Works, the main goal appears to be the overcoming of the constraints of Time and the attainment of the freedom of Eternity – although, by the end of “Jerusalem”, it has transformed into an attempt to effect a necessary synthesis between the two.

¹⁰ In Blake’s earlier poems, Hell symbolism does not have the negative connotations of the later works, but is employed as an imaginative antidote to restrictive religious morality; hence, “Proverbs of Hell” means simply “Proverbs of the Imagination”.

Because the contracted human imagination is sealed within time-bound bodies, it is not possible for it to transcend time and “see” Eternity. However, through “visionary” pursuits such as creativity and art (symbolized by the city of Golgonooza), it is possible for imagination to create an artificial substitute for the wholeness of Eternity, whereby each present in time is expanded and super-saturated until it feels like a self-contained universe of its own, which partially liberates it from the sequential nature of time. However, this substitute is imperfect and is accompanied by flaws of its own: it contains no possibilities for change, and it is too private to allow for inter-personal communication in any meaningful sense.

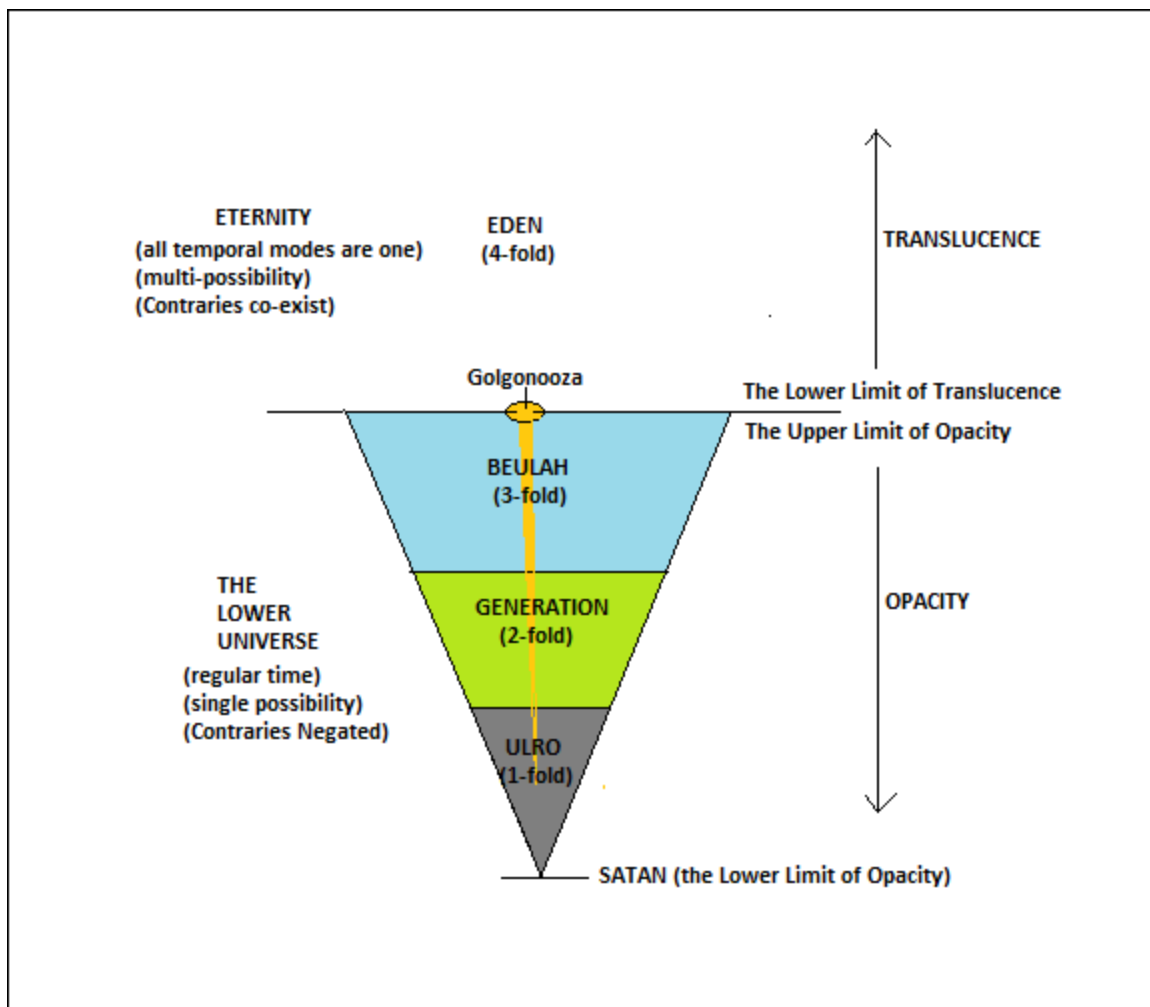
Blake's dawning realization that individual will alone is not sufficient to conquer time can be seen to explain the clearly discernible swerve within the Prophetic Works from private mythopoeia to eschatological Christian symbolism. Ideas such as the union of man and an external cosmic will in Christ, as well as the prospect of an apocalyptic “uncovering” of the natural order – including time – at the end of history provide Blake with the miracles he needs in order to construct a gateway out of Time and into Eternity. Having succeeded in liberating imagination from time, the new task that befalls Blake becomes to create a synthesis between the two, so that the advantages of both temporal modes can be utilized to the fullest. This synthesis turns out to be a cycle of existence that alternates between the two, so that the single-possibility existence in Time can serve as a state of stasis and reflection to counter the flux and activity of multi-possibility Eternity – a state of existence that is symbolized by the relationship between the “inward” center and the “outward” circumference of Albion's being.

Understanding Blake's treatment of time and eternity significantly enhances the experience of reading the Prophetic Works. It provides a clear and discernible dramatic trajectory from the Urizenic gloom of early Prophecies like the “Book of Urizen” and the “Book of Los”, wherein time attains dominance over imagination, to the apocalyptic grandeur of “Jerusalem”, at the end of which the eternal cycle is re-established. It helps to clarify many of the poems' more obscure symbols, such as the dichotomies between opacity and translucence, contraries and negation, as well as center and circumference, all of which are arguably either closely intertwined with or different facets of the struggle between time and eternity. It assists in outlining Blake's larger philosophical vision, including its debts to spiritual forebears like Jacob Böhme, and what it has to say about the relationship between the self to its surroundings, communication between human beings, emotion and reason, man and nature, good and evil, and the purpose of art. And, last but

not least, it paints a picture of an artist, who – far from being the obscure, uncommunicative eccentric that he had come to be regarded as by the time he died – had an angelic gift for perceiving the infinite in all things, and an oceanic yearning to make it tangible.

Appendix: Suggested Model of the Visionary Hierarchy

The following is a suggested model for envisioning Blake's visionary hierarchy, into which the interpretations and conclusions put forth by the paper have been integrated:



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