MIXED MEDIA:
INTENTION AND CONTRARIETY IN BLAKE'S ART

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines William Blake’s use of artistic media and his metaphorical representations of those media in his poetry, prose, and visual art. Blake’s images of media have generally been considered to have rather monological meanings, but I argue that he destabilizes their moral associations so that they fluctuate between positive and negative possibilities. I contend that the ambiguity of these images allegorizes Blake’s ambivalence about artistic intention itself. While his work often manifests a vehement desire to communicate vital intentions, it also reveals uncertainty about the potential of such intentions to reach beyond the artist’s imagination. This uncertainty is also operative in larger ontological and metaphysical dimensions of Blake’s art, because his idea of intention is implicated in the oppositional phenomenon of "contrariety," which is related to his theories of the "contraries" in his poems. For Blake, intention itself is contrary, which means that every intention necessarily invokes its opposite. Blake cultivates these contrary associations not in order to stymy interpretation, but rather to avoid Urizenic monologism and to create a kind of representation which is open to the imperatives of oppositional thinking. Contrariety generates semantic excess, which requires Blake’s readers to undertake extraordinarily active forms of interpretation.
Each of the four chapters examines a specific medium in Blake's work and tries to demonstrate how this medium embodies contrary intentional trajectories. Chapter One studies Blake's language, giving particular attention to his use of emphasis and his invocations of the prophetic voice. Chapter Two looks at Blake's theory and practice of linearism, showing how his lines embody the contrary functions of limitation and transgression. Chapter Three examines Blake's mirror metaphors and the mirror-effects of his graphic media, arguing that he alternates between a distortive Platonic mirror and a divine reflective surface which contains perfect representations. Chapter Four focusses on Blake's images of mechanism and his use of mechanical processes in his graphic media, arguing that he portrays technology as both an aid to human agency and a hindrance to it. Each of these chapters shows how Blake's contrariety of intention creates excess, which moves beyond the limits of system.
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# Table of Contents

**Introduction** ................................................................. 1

**Chapter One:**  
The Emphatic and the Vatic in Blake's Language .......... 24

**Chapter Two**  
The Sublime of the Line: Intention and Excess in  
Blake's Linearism .......................................................... 78

**Chapter Three**  
Lateral Imagination: Division and Vision in Blake's  
Mirrors ........................................................................... 133

**Chapter Four**  
Machinery and Mimesis in the Epics ......................... 189

**Conclusion** ....................................................................... 244

**Works Consulted** ............................................................... 251

**Figures** ............................................................................ 272
List of Figures*


* I use the term "Figure" to refer to reproduced images here, rather than the more accurate word "Plate," in order to avoid confusion with the numbered "plates" of Blake's illuminated works.


32. William Blake: *Jerusalem*, plate 81, copy D. Reproduced from *The Illuminated Blake*.


34. William Blake: *Jerusalem*, plate 6, copy D. Reproduced from *The Illuminated Blake*.

viii

Introduction

William Blake's poetry and art are famous for being ambiguous, and at times even contradictory, yet they can also exude a furious intentionality which gives the reader or viewer a sense that Blake quite insistently means what he says—that he is in fact trying to persuade us of something. This state of affairs is itself a kind of contradiction, since semantic uncertainty would seem to be a hindrance to any serious call to action. Perhaps for this reason, critics have tended to discuss these two distinctive features of Blake's work in isolation from each other. However, as we will see, Blake is often most at home when exploring semantic cruxes and paradoxes, and he seems predisposed to placing his readers in the same position. I believe we can learn something about Blake's oppositional imagination by venturing directly into one of these interpretive dilemmas rather than trying to ignore it or to reconcile it into a more stable and more easily interpretable construct. With such an end in mind, this study will examine the extraordinarily conflictual relationship in Blake's work between artistic intention and the process that complicates it—a process which I have labelled "contrariety," in reference to Blake's various invocations of the "contraries" in his poems. Contrariety can be defined as

1My use of the terms "intention" and "intentionality" in this dissertation should not be understood in the context of a naive "authorial intention" school of criticism, which would claim privileged access to the author's original intentions. Any talk of intentions in the following pages will inevitably situate us in an uncertain and speculative realm, one which is the province of hermeneutics. Of course, I make no claims to be able to divine Blake's original intentions, but on the other hand, it is important to realize that in the process of reading we almost always resort to making tentative assignations of intention. As long as we recognize that no ultimate authorized interpretation is possible, speculation about intention is really not very different from speculation about meaning.

2The terms "contrary" and "contraries" occur in The Songs Of Innocence and Of Experience, The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, The Four Zoas, Milton, Jerusalem, and also in several of his prose works and annotations. Unless otherwise indicated, all references to these and other Blake texts will contain parenthetical citations of page numbers in the Erdman edition, identified by a capital E. Because of various problems with the
the propensity for something—an image, an action, a thought—to become entangled in its opposite, so that it is never merely itself but is always a combination of itself and its radical other. I contend that Blake's contrariety and his intentionality are in effect contraries of each other, which means that they are involved in a web of inter-implication and interconstitution. In the following pages we will examine the interpretive consequences of this oppositional relationship, and we will see how, in the nexus of intention and contrariety, Blake shapes a rhetoric that at once asserts and falters, redeems and laments, builds and destroys.

The focal points of this investigation will be the figures of intention and contrariety that develop around Blake's use of, and his representations of, various artistic media—specifically language, the line, the mirror, and the mimetic machine. In my readings of these practices and images, I will try to show how these media function as both transmitters and as distorting of intention. This examination will necessarily focus on the equivocal moral associations that these images develop in the context of Blake's work. I will be trying to increase our sense of the equivocality of these images, which have generally been considered rather monolithic in their intentional capacities. What is "mixed" about these media is not only the fact that Blake routinely

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numbering and ordering of pages, plates, and lines in Blake's works, it has become customary in Blake criticism to cite the page number (rather than line number) in the standard edition instead of keying the citations to the manuscripts or illuminated pages themselves. I follow this custom here, though I will of course refer to line numbers when citing the work of other poets.

3 I am examining both Blake's uses of artistic media and his representations of them because these two aspects of artistic intentionality cannot be easily separated. For example, Blake's use of an engraving tool to physically inscribe the phrase "grave the sentence deep" in the copperplate of "Little Girl Lost" (E 20) must be considered part of the metaphorical meaning of the phrase itself. In other words, the mode of production is part of the meaning of the artwork, and Blake is extremely self-conscious about this. I will argue that his almost obsessive use of highly complex and contrary images of artistic intention reflects his uncertainties about the efficacy of his own forms of representation.
combines them with each other, but also that they are unstable in their capacities as transmitters of intention. In other words, these mixed media also embody extraordinarily mixed messages. This fact could be seen as only an extreme allegorization of the love-hate relationship that any artist might adopt toward his or her media, but Blake goes beyond narrowly aesthetic concerns to make the process of creation and expression into a scene of larger metaphysical, ontological, and ethical dimensions. Through these images and practices, he poses vital questions of agency and responsibility, and he highlights the issues of scepticism and belief that are so important in his prophetic project.

Blake recognizes that artistic media are unreliable as transmitters of intention, but in his representations of these media he sometimes seems to be trying to elevate this unreliability into a paradigm of contrariety, so that the media become in fact emblems of the instability of intention. However, he does not blame the intermediary for this state of affairs. Instead, he uses the images of media to put forward a highly complex and contrary idea of intention itself. Because of the oppositional nature of thought and existence, he suggests, we cannot intend one thing without also invoking its opposite—which is to say, in post-Freudian terms, that we do not always intend what we think we intend. Indeed, Blake's proto-psychoanalytic sensibilities are particularly prominent in his treatment of intention as a radically ambivalent process, one which is always involved in the returns of repression.

While Blake rarely discusses intention overtly in his writings, there is a general sense among his readers that his work is in fact highly intentional. It exhibits an unusually emphatic quality which has been described in various ways: as his prophetic voice, his political activism, or his attempts to
transform his readers. T. S. Eliot seems to be referring to this phenomenon when he remarks that Blake's writing is characterized by "a peculiar honesty, which, in a world too frightened to be honest, is uniquely terrifying" (317). More recently, Nelson Hilton has described Blake's "deliberate intent to stress certain words to the point where they break their husks and reveal, in the word that appears most frequently in the Blake Concordance, 'all'" (Literal Imagination 2). With surprising consistency, critics have assigned intentions to Blake's work on the basis of his emphatic tone. However, as several recent commentators have also recognized, Blake's claims to prophetic authority and persuasive power are often vitiated by a sceptical impulse that pulls the ground out from under the authorizing claims at the same time as they are made. In other words, Blake has a tendency to sabotage his ostensible intentions in the very act of expressing them. Readers of a poststructuralist persuasion might be tempted to speculate that he cannot do otherwise. There is some validity in this suggestion, but it should not be taken as the last word on this issue because, while Blake does tend to undermine his intentions at times, he does not erase them altogether. His narrative of intention is not a one-way journey from prophetic inspiration to irony and despair; instead, it involves an unstoppable fluctuation between these two possibilities. Thus, he portrays a complication of intention rather than a wholesale denial of it. We can see this phenomenon in the different ways he describes the process of his

4These three categorizations of Blake's intention are found, respectively, in Lussier ("Vortext as Philosopher's Stone"), Bloom (Blake's Apocalypse), and Erdman (Blake: Prophet Against Empire). However, variations on these possibilities can be found in virtually any discussion of Blake's work.

5This phenomenon is examined by Molly Ann Rothenberg (Rethinking Blake's Textuality) and David Riede ("Blake's Milton: On Membership in the Church Paul"). David L Clark's doctoral dissertation, "Auguries of Difference," also looks at the traces of difference and contingency in Blake's ostensibly logocentric representations of divine presence and prophetic inspiration.
own artistic creation: in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, he insists that "not a line is drawn without intention and that most discriminate and particular" (E 560), whereas in a letter to Butts he disavows intention in his writing of *Jerusalem*, claiming "I have written this Poem from immediate Dictation twelve or sometimes twenty or thirty lines at a time without Premeditation & even against my Will" (E 729). Though he does invoke an almost Nietzschean relativism at times, he also makes many extraordinarily logocentric appeals to the performative possibilities of his own art. This doubleness is what leads Lorraine Clark to conclude that Blake is "at once deconstructive and anti-deconstructive" (2),⁶ a conclusion which I find extremely useful as a way of encapsulating Blake's contradictory relationship to intention.

Another kind of doubleness in the intentionality of Blake's art can be seen in the limits that he seems to place upon rhetorical persuasion.⁷ Because his work embodies principles of both radical democracy and religious apocalypticism, it manifests an uncertainty about the imperatives of prophetic persuasion. It cannot be so persuasive that it borders on coercion; it must

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⁶Clark makes this statement in reference to both Kierkegaard and Blake. In the case of Blake, she supports her contention with reference to the work of several other critics: W. J. T. Mitchell's "Visible Language: Blake's Wond'rous Art of Writing" and "Dangerous Blake"; David Simpson's "Reading Blake and Derrida: Our Caesars Neither Buried Nor Praised"; V. A. De Luca's "A Wall of Words"; and David Wagenknecht's afterword to *Critical Paths* (Ed. Miller). A book which also belongs in this critical tradition but which appeared after Clark's study is Peter Otto's *Constructive Vision and Visionary Deconstruction*.

⁷While the above paragraph does not deal explicitly with a de Manian notion of rhetoric, it is virtually impossible to use the term without explaining one's position relative to de Man's. In his deconstructions of romantic images of authority, de Man relies on an idea of rhetoric which is stripped of its intentional capacity in the conventional sense that we regard rhetoric. De Man's sense of rhetoric in fact involves a reversal of the direction of intention. He approaches it not as a tool by which writers persuade, but rather as an external force which dictates its own imperatives to both writer and reader. The difference between Blake and de Man on this point is that in Blake any reversal of intention is always subject to the possibility of another reversal. Thus in Blake, intention is not necessarily a transparent and fulfillable process, but neither is it necessarily an unavoidable indoctrination into the externalized imperatives of the system.
allow us, as readers or viewers, to think for ourselves. This dilemma of rhetoric has always been a problem for democratic reformers, who seek to empower the people without resorting to the autocratic tactic of telling them what to think and what to do. Blake's involvement in this problem is, if anything, even more complicated, because he employs the rhetorical strategies of the prophet as well as those of the democratic radical. In both his religious and his political personae, he seems to believe in an empowerment of individuals as the preferred method of effecting positive change, whether that change is political revolution or religious conversion. The statement in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that "One Law for the Lion and Ox is Oppression" (E 44) resonates with this recognition that freedom can only come when we recognize and respect each other's differences, and refuse to try to make everyone else like ourselves. But of course any attempt at persuasion has elements of this kind of coercion, so all of Blake's political and religious arguments are necessarily associated with contradictory impulses. Perhaps it is anxiety about this situation that leads the narrator of *The Marriage* to ask Isaiah and Ezekiel

how they dare so roundly to assert, that God spake to them; and whether they did not think at the time, that they would be misunderstood, & so be the cause of imposition (E 38).

In this scenario, the danger of the prophet's language is that it might cause "imposition," which would be an overextension of the prophet's powers, and a diminishment of the subject's freedom to choose.

One way that Blake tries to mitigate the possibility of "imposition" in his art is by setting up situations in which his readers or viewers must actively create their own interpretations. While interpretation is always an active process, Blake's work often highlights this fact by making his readers work
extraordinarily hard to attain a tenable interpretation. In fact, he often polarizes or destabilizes the possible meanings of his work so that it becomes almost impossible for us to attain a single clear reading. He does this for two reasons. The first is that, as we have already noted, he sees intention itself as an inevitably contradictory process. Since "pure," singular intention is unattainable, a necessary doubleness attends every attempt to communicate intention to the reader. Blake's other reason for this doubleness is, strangely, that he sees it as the most effective method of instruction, because it places the readers or viewers in a situation which requires them to discover their own opinions rather than simply adopting the author's ideas uncritically. Blake alludes to this process in his angry letter to the Reverend John Trussler, who had rejected a drawing Blake sent to him, and had written, "Your Fancy... accords not with my Intentions" (E 704). Blake responds to this criticism by writing,

What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men. That which can be made explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The Wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act (E 702).

Blake defends the difficulty of his work here by arguing that it is conducive to a generalized rather than a particular form of action: it does not tell the readers or viewers specifically what to do, but it "rouzes" their faculties, and thereby empowers them to act on their own initiative.8 The process of instruction, in this model, is not so much a transference of intentions from the teacher to the passive student as it is an awakening of the student's own active potential. This gives us one explanation of why Blake's most emphatic

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8For a psychoanalytic perspective on this phenomenon, see Mark Bracher's "Rouzing the Faculties."
passages are often so difficult to interpret—why he seems to be trying to tell us something, but he refuses to do it in straightforward language.

One of the most effective ways that Blake can highlight the intentional nature of interpretation and "rouze" the faculties of his readers is by cultivating a kind of art in which the meaning of particular images is unstable—in other words, a kind of art which is resolutely "contrary." But what exactly is contrariety? As I mentioned earlier, my use of this term derives from Blake's various invocations of the contraries in his work. He never gives an explicit definition of the contraries, and his usage of the term changes somewhat as his career progresses, but I think it is still possible for us to form some useful analogues between his disparate uses of the word and his practice of oppositional representation. His first use of the word "contrary" occurs in the subtitle to the Songs Of Innocence and Of Experience, which are described as "Shewing the Two Contrary States of the Human Soul" (E 7). There is no clear discussion in the poems of what exactly makes these states contrary, but there is a definite sense of doubling in Blake's arrangement of them. "The Tyger" is obviously a rejoinder to "The Lamb," and there are several other sets of poems in this collection which seem to be matched pairs. In this context, the contrary states might be seen as mirror images of each other: they are similar but also opposite.

The contrary situations that are described in the Songs are often related to interpretation, which suggests that the characters interpret their surroundings differently depending upon which state they occupy. For example, in the "Nurse's Song" from Innocence and the "NURSES Song" from Experience, we see two contrary forms of interpretation. These poems describe remarkably similar situations--so similar, in fact, that they have three lines in common. The differences between them are largely conditioned
by the ways in which the two nurses interpret the voices of the children which "are heard on the green" (E 15; E 23). This is an intuitive kind of interpretation: Blake emphasizes how these situations make the nurses feel, rather than how they intellectually apprehend the voices. When the nurse of Innocence hears the children's voices, she feels at peace with herself: "My heart is at rest within my breast" (E 15). The other nurse, in contrast, reacts to the voices with physical revulsion: "My face turns green and pale" (E 23). The implication is that these nurses are somehow projecting their own states of mind onto these children's voices. In this way, interpretation is shown to be linked to intention, and the contrariety of intention is dramatized in these opposite readings of the children's voices. Thus, the contrary states of the human soul do not create two contrary worlds, but they simply represent the opposing ways in which we can project our intentions upon our surroundings.

In The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, Blake's invocation of the contraries takes on more cosmic dimensions. Here he states with characteristic conviction: "Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human Existence" (E34). The Marriage is a dramatization of the contraries in all their metaphysical possibilities, showing how binary oppositions can never be completely separated from each other. In fact, Blake argues that all contraries should be brought together in dynamic and combative marriages rather than being separated into static opposites. In the case of the Prolific and the Devourer, Blake specifically states that these two contraries should always oppose each other. He writes, "These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries to reconcile them seeks to destroy existence" (E 40). A productively "contrary" relationship, then, is one in which the two opposites are brought into contact with each other, but are not
reconciled to each other. Their contrariety consists in both their interrelationship and their continued opposition. In his epics, Blake introduces a refinement to this theory of contrariety by giving a name to its opposite, which he calls the "negation". He writes in Milton, "Contraries are Positives / A Negation is not a Contrary" (E 129). The negation is essentially a relation in which contrariety has failed, and it is a representation of the terrible consequences of such failure. In the epics it becomes even more clear that Blake values contrariety as a life-affirming and productive kind of interaction.

Critics have been fascinated by Blake's contraries since Northrop Frye's Fearful Symmetry, where Frye says that "the clash of contraries is . . . an essential part of the 'redemption' of mankind" (189). S. Foster Damon links the oppositionality of the contraries to Blake's readings of Boehme (40-41). However, in recent years, critics have generally focussed on trying to place the contraries in relation to a dialectical framework which is either implicitly or explicitly Hegelian. The most obvious example of this is David Punter's Blake, Hegel, and the Dialectic, but, as Lorraine Clark notes (201 n 1), many other recent critics assume or imply some connection between the two men.9 Despite the interest that Blake's contraries have aroused in generations of readers, there has been no explicit examination of the possibility that the contraries might pervade his work at a more basic level. However, there have been a number of critical studies which have focussed on attributes of Blakean

9My own sympathies lie with those like Lorraine Clark, who see the contraries as doing something different from the Hegelian dialectic. Another critic in this school is Leopold Damrosch, who places Blake within an extraordinarily complex Hegelian framework, but also acknowledges that Blake inevitably exceeds that system. Harvey Birenbaum also says that "one needs to be careful in attributing a dialectical framework to Blake" (134 n 20). Hazard Adams is perhaps the most straightforward on this issue, in his description of Blake's metaphysics as an "un-Hegelian dialectic" (6).
representation which are related to what I call contrariety. Critics have commented at length on Blake's ambiguity, his proclivity for parody, and the polyvalence of his language. While I agree that all of these elements are important in his work, I also contend that they are not exactly the same as his contrariety. The idea of Blakean polyvalence as Nelson Hilton describes it in \textit{Literal Imagination} is extremely fruitful, but this term does not encapsulate the doubleness of meaning that is part of contrariety because it does not involve a fluctuation between opposing semantic possibilities. Likewise, ambiguity does not have the connotations of opposition that are part of Blake's idea of the contraries: ambiguity is a fluctuation between two or more possible meanings, but they are not necessarily opposite meanings. Finally, the descriptions of Blakean parody are also somewhat different from contrariety because parody is unidirectional: it shows an image moving from a relatively positive association to a negative one. As we will see, Blake's images of intention fluctuate in both directions, and this phenomenon is what characterizes the contrariety of his art.

In this study I will argue that the metaphysical contrariety which Blake refers to in the \textit{Songs}, the \textit{Marriage}, and the epics is also operative at the level of image and metaphor. I believe that the contrary imperative is in fact dramatized in his work through the semantic instability that he so often constructs. This contrariety comes to haunt all of Blake's art, so that any particular image fluctuates radically in its possible meanings. Just as the children's voices in the two Nurse's Songs evoke diametrically opposed reactions in the nurses, all of Blake's metaphors and images are subject to this

\footnote{Examinations of Blake's parodies can be found in Stephen Cox's \textit{Love and Logic} and Northrop Frye's \textit{Fearful Symmetry}. The most systematic reading of Blake's ambiguity is Stephen Vine's \textit{Blake's Poetry: Spectral Visions}. The most notable discussion of polyvalence in Blake is Nelson Hilton's \textit{Literal Imagination}.}
fluctuation in value. They can become positive or negative depending upon how we look at them.

How we look at an image or a metaphor of course depends upon our various predispositions—particularly, our propensity to believe or disbelieve what we are interpreting. As Paul Ricoeur has noted, all interpretation is inflected with the alternate possibilities of faith and scepticism, depending upon the interpreter's relative receptivity to the message under scrutiny. These two different kinds of reading can be divided into what Gerda Norvig calls, after Ricoeur, the "hermeneutics of faith" and the "hermeneutics of suspicion" (Norvig 4). This is in one sense simply a recognition that we interpret differently depending upon our predispositions to believe or to discount what we are reading. For example, many people read the Bible with a level of credulity that they would not allow in their readings of the morning newspaper. In Blake's work, we see these two alternate possibilities dramatized in the opposing ways that the nurses of The Songs of Innocence and of Experience interpret the voices of the children. However, we also see in Blake a problematization of this division, since he often alternates between the two kinds of reading, as if to submit interpretation itself to the necessity of contrariety. We can see this alternation between scepticism and belief very

1 Ricoeur writes, "The hermeneutic field... is internally at variance with itself... According to the one pole, hermeneutics is understood as the manifestation and restoration of a meaning addressed to me in the manner of a message, a proclamation, or as is sometimes said, a kerygma; according to the other pole, it is understood as a demystification, as a reduction of illusion" (Freud and Philosophy 27). Ricoeur sees the former kind of hermeneutics as generally the province of the phenomenology of religion, whereas he associates the latter approach with Freud, Marx, and Nietzsche.

1 Norvig senses this tendency in Blake, and her way of approaching his illustrations to Pilgrim's Progress involves finding a middle ground of hermeneutics between the two extremes that Ricoeur identifies. She practises what she calls a "visionary hermeneutics" which "charts a middle course between the Scylla of antithetical criticism and the Charybdis of appreciative exegesis" (4). My own approach owes something to Ricoeur, and to Norvig's application of him, but I would argue that the contrariety of Blake's work
clearly in his annotations to Bishop Watson’s *An Apology for the Bible*, which is a response to Thomas Paine’s attacks on the textual authenticity and the authorship of the Bible. Blake starts out with a sceptical reading of both the Bishop's text and the Bible, essentially agreeing with Paine that "If Moses did not write the history of his acts, it takes away the authority altogether" (E 616). However, he does not end his commentary here, with a denunciation of the historical authenticity of the Bible; he instead transfers the basis of his judgment to an aesthetic realm rather than an historical one. He continues: "it ceases to be history & becomes a Poem of probable impossibilities fabricated for pleasure as moderns say but I say by Inspiration" (E 616). Blake’s reliance upon inspiration here can be seen as a vindication of the Mosaic writings in spite of their possible historical inaccuracies and their uncertain authorship. For him, it is not the origin of the text but its present impact on his life that is the main criterion for judging its value.

Blake does however also revert to a kind of scepticism when he concludes that "Tom Paine is a better Christian than the Bishop" (E 620). Blake believes that many of the problems Paine raises about the Bible are valid, and that the Bishop's defenses are feeble. He writes, "It is an easy matter for a Bishop to triumph over Paine’s attack but it is not so easy for one who loves the Bible" (E 611). He suggests here that he does not entirely agree with Paine, but that he also respects Paine’s ability to point out the contradictions and inconsistencies within the Bible. For Blake, any "easy" way of reading, any passive, self-congratulatory and smug form of interpretation, is bound to be a "Perversion" (E 611). This is especially the case when the reader is a figurehead of an institution which is invested in canonizing certain

requires us to approach him in terms of the fluctuation between hermeneutic extremes rather than finding a middle ground as Norvig does.
interpretations and discounting others. Blake distrusts the Bishop's intentions, essentially, and he respects the intentions of Paine's readings because Paine has little or nothing to gain by voicing his doubts. Blake seems to welcome the sceptical points which Paine raises because they will require a truly complex and multifaceted response from someone who respects and believes in the Bible. For Blake it seems that the more difficult and complicated it is to maintain one's belief, the more authentic such belief can be. Thus, a reading of the Bible which acknowledges its inconsistencies, its sometimes questionable moral advice, and its tenuous textual authenticity will be much more convincing for its recognition of these difficulties.

Because Blake's own work is filled with even more paradoxes and interpretive quandaries than Paine finds in the Bible, it should not be surprising that Blake criticism has historically hinged on the issues of scepticism and belief. Critics' decisions about whether to believe Blake's work or not have often been based on questions of his sanity or coherence. Robert Southey's comment on the "perfectly mad poem called Jerusalem" announces what is probably the first firmly sceptical approach to the poem: a declaration that it is not even worth reading, let alone believing. Indeed, the canonization of Blake in the twentieth century as one of the major romantic poets was in large part a demonstration of his coherence, his believability. The works of Northrop Frye and S. Foster Damon were particularly important in this canonization, because they provided structural frameworks by which

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13 For a detailed discussion of this issue, see Paul Youngquist's *Madness and Blake's Myth.*

14 This statement is recorded in Henry Crabb Robinson's diary (*Blake Records* 229), and the context makes it somewhat unclear whether the sentiments are those of Southey or Robinson. In any case, Robinson does explicitly state that Southey considered Blake "a decided madman. Blake, he says, spoke of his visions with the diffidence that is usual with such people And did not seem to expect that he sho.d be believed" (*Blake Records* 229).
Blake's work could be more easily understood, and thus they succeeded in procuring a receptive audience for him. The danger of this approach, however, was that such an inscription of Blake within a structuralized mythopoeic system tended to overlook the many unsystematic and contradictory aspects of his work. It also created a cadre of Blake scholars who took it as their appointed duty to "explain" Blake to the uninitiated. In this milieu, Blake critics sometimes took a less-than-critical approach to their subject.

The nineteen-eighties, however, saw a shift toward sceptical readings, as deconstruction and post-structuralism became important in the academy. Many of these works offered fresh perspectives on the issue of Blake's claims to authority and authenticity, and they complicated our notions of Blake's appeals to the readers' belief. Another work which was at least as important to the study of romanticism in the nineteen-eighties is Jerome McGann's *The Romantic Ideology*, which argues that Romantic criticism has generally been too close to its objects, so that it has become more of an apology than a genuine criticism. While McGann's book is far more influenced by Marx than by deconstruction, it too displays a marked advocacy of scepticism as the preferred mode of reading. The *Romantic Ideology* does not deal with Blake

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15 Some of the most important works in this tradition are Steven Shaviro's "'Striving With Systems': Blake and the Politics of Difference" and the essays collected in *Unnam'd Forms* and *Critical Paths*. A number of book-length studies of Blake are indebted to poststructuralism, but most of them do not go so far as to adopt an unequivocally sceptical reading of Blake.

16 McGann's scepticism may be explicable in relation to the overly naive criticism he claims to be reacting against, but his argument seems to be more of an overreaction than a genuine solution to the problem he so accurately diagnoses. He argues for a criticism that is overtly critical rather than sympathetic to the primary text—in other words, he calls for a hermeneutics of scepticism. He values the poetry of Shelley and Byron because of their despair at the failure of idealism. "The despair of such later poetry," he says, "is a sign of its ideological truthfulness" (121). The implication here is that we all know the sad truth of idealism's illusoriness, and thus any show of anguish on this issue is as good as a guarantee of authenticity.
in much detail, but McGann's practice has inspired several other sceptical readings of Blake, most notably those of David Riede and Molly-Ann Rothenberg.17

Even at the crest of this wave of sceptical readings which swept literary criticism in the 1980's, however, there were a number of important studies which continued to take Blake's claims to authority quite seriously. This is, I believe, a measure of the persuasive qualities of Blake's emphatic language. One of the most important of these readings is Robert N. Essick's William Blake and the Language of Adam, which traces Blake's attempts to produce a "motivated sign" (32) or an "incarnational sign" (77) that would allow unmediated representation. Essick's description of this process shows it to be the reverse of what Derrida calls the "becoming-unmotivated of the sign" (Of Grammatology 48). Essick recognizes some of the deconstructive aspects of Blake's work, but he also sees a blatantly logocentric sensibility in some of Blake's images, and he refuses to submit these images to purely sceptical readings. Similarly, V. A. DeLuca's Words of Eternity, published shortly after Essick's study, designates two modes of the sublime in Blake: the bardic, which operates within a framework of narrative continuity, and the iconic, which moves toward "the goal of a radical self-signifying discontinuity" (61).18 De Luca's "iconic sublime" seems to partake of an intentional trajectory that is similar to Essick's "motivated sign." While neither Essick nor De Luca voice opinions that they believe in Blake's capacity to create a kind of hypersignification, they both accept the idea that Blake himself seemed to

17The texts in question here are, respectively, Oracles and Heirophants and Rethinking Blake's Textuarity.
18De Luca explicitly links these two kinds of sublimity with intention when he describes "the poles of intention that motivate these differing stylistic effects" (Words of Eternity 62).
believe in the possibility of such representation. Instead of submitting this claim to deconstruction, Essick and De Luca try to understand its role in Blake's work.

The most recent full-length study which deals with issues surrounding the performativity of Blake's language is Angela Esterhammer's *Creating States*. Esterhammer examine's Blake's work through the matrices of speech-act theory and some of the poststructuralist critiques of it, but she makes several modifications of speech-act theory in order to suit her subject. She designates two different kinds of performative: the "sociopolitical performative" (12), which is imbued with its perlocutionary power by virtue of a kind of social contract; and the "phenomenological performative" (12), which derives its authority from the intentions of the speaker himself or herself. Esterhammer's addition of the phenomenological performative allows a more flexible understanding of the intentional aspects of signs than speech-act theory generally allows. But perhaps even more important than her designation of this useful category of performative is her commensurate recognition that the other category, the sociopolitical speech-act, also remains tenable. Her fluctuation from external to internal definitions of the speech-act is very apt in terms of the questions of intention and agency that Blake raises again and again for his readers. Esterhammer's definition of these two kinds of performative replicates our constant struggle with the relationship between intention and its contrary as we read Blake. Furthermore, her statement that "the strict categorization breaks down in both cases and serves instead to demonstrate the interaction between the two kinds of speech acts" (26) is particularly appropriate to the contrariety that Blake's portrayals and performances of intention so often embody.
My own approach in the following chapters is consonant with those of the last three authors discussed, at least in the general sense that I try to examine Blake's work from a point of view which is not exclusively sceptical nor overly credulous. The contrariety which I am studying in Blake's work obliges me to undertake a contrary form of reading, one which, in the terms which Esterhammer's study provides, examines Blake's images of intention from the double perspectives of phenomenology and its deconstruction. However, I should point out that such doubleness does not necessarily leave us in a state of paralysed indecision. This is because Blake's contrariety has an effect beyond the bipolar fluctuation that I have described. We have been examining the contrariety of intention, but there is an alternative way of looking at this relationship, one which exposes a kind of intentionality that is generated by the contraries. The reason that the contraries are not systematizable is that they form a relation in which the two opposites resonate against each other and produce a kind of excess, an energy which is beyond themselves and is not simply the convergence of their own forces. I believe that the contrariety of Blake's images, particularly his images of intention, is part of a strategy to generate this excess in even the most basic aspects of his

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19 As I have already noted, such a goal is similar to that of Gerda Norvig in Dark Figures in the Desired Country. However, I will try to maintain a contrary relationship between scepticism and belief in my readings, rather than establishing a middle ground of hermeneutics as Norvig does.

20 There are of course many strands of phenomenology in the twentieth century, some of which are more amenable to my study than others, but in general phenomenologically-inflected theories all maintain a sense of the primacy of the subject's experience (i.e., they approach subjectivity from within), and they all propose a direction or trajectory for the subject, whether this is Husserl's "intentional structure" of consciousness (659), Heidegger's notion of the "thrownness" (Being and Time 127) of being, or Levinas's sense of the subject's "Desire for the Infinite" (Totality and Infinity 50). Deconstructions of phenomenology, the most famous of which is Derrida's Speech and Phenomena, tend to question the internality of subjectivity, and to undermine phenomenology's claims to a basis in non-mediated experience. The fluctuation between these two possibilities is remarkably similar to Blake's own ambiguous invocations of intention.
art. While this excess cannot be invested with a particular intentional direction, it might very well "rouze the faculties" of the reader or viewer, and I think this is precisely the reason that Blake cultivates contrariety in his art. As the contrary images refuse to stabilize within the hermeneutic systems of the interpreter, a kind of shift occurs which moves the reader outside those interpretational strategies, outside the search for system, and finally outside the system itself. If this conflicted process can be described as an intentionality in Blake's art, it is an intentionality of the beyond, one which exceeds the very strictures of intention.

This process is reminiscent of the radical phenomenology of Georges Bataille, especially as it is practised in his early trilogy which is known collectively as the Somme Athéologique. Bataille is an enthusiastic reader of Blake, and he praises the "honest insolence" (Inner Experience 65) of both Blake and Nietzsche, who are taken as the precursors of Bataille's own practise in Inner Experience. The performativity of such insolence is suggested by Bataille's textual echo of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, where the prophet Elijah says "the voice of honest indignation is the voice of God" (E 38). Bataille seems to be particularly fascinated by Blake's highly charged tone, and it is appropriate that Bataille's own emphatic tone (which is described by his translator as "furiously Nietzschean" (On Nietzsche vii)) is reminiscent of Blake and Nietzsche at their most voluble. The intentional structure, or rather anti-structure, of Bataille's work is essentially the propulsion of the self away from the restrictions of being. In his quest to attain the "extreme limit" (Inner Experience 21), he initiates a phenomenology of the beyond.

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21The volumes of the Somme are Guilty, Inner Experience, and On Nietzsche.
Bataille's work is often simultaneously a theorization and a performance of excess, and as such it provides a useful analogue for the performativity that so often seems to animate Blake's art. Bataille suggests that excess itself is contrary, since he views it in two alternate ways: on the one hand, as the inevitable degradation and loss that affects every closed system, but also, on the other hand, as a more positive kind of surplus that involves an overflowing of the system. Blake's own work often deals with both of these sides of excess, which range from the scatalogical to the eschatalogical, and because of this I think Bataille can be particularly useful in our readings of Blakean contrariety. While I will not examine Bataille's work in detail in the following pages, his theories will be implicit in all of my discussions of excess in Blake.

Most post-structuralist or deconstructive readings of Bataille, including that of Jacques Derrida in *Writing and Difference*, have focussed on the negative aspects of excess rather than the performative surpluses that Bataille enacts in his texts. I would argue that Bataille generally sees excess as having a kind of performative effect, which is that it breaks the boundaries of restricted systems. I should be clear that Bataille does not designate two separate *kinds* of excess, but simply two different approaches to it. We can see it as a leftover, an accursed share, but also as an overflowing which is born of a fundamental plenitude that cannot be contained in any closed system. Writing about the excess of "inner experience," he says that it is "the movement which carries us to the more obscure apprehension of the unknown: of a presence which is no longer in any way distinct from an absence" (*Inner Experience* 4). While post-structuralists and deconstructive writers choose to focus on the negative approach to excess, writers like Emmanuel Levinas (in *Totality and Infinity*) and Jean-Luc Nancy (in *The Birth to Presence*) focus on the more active and plenitudinous aspects of it.

The *Marriage of Heaven and Hell* is probably the best example of this doubleness of Blakean excess, because it invokes traditional images of sacred plenitude such as "The cistern contains: the fountain overflows" (E 36) and also degraded scenes of excess such as Ezekiel "eat[ing] dung" because of a "desire of raising other men into a perception of the infinite" (E 39).

Other critics who have linked Blake to Bataille are W.J.T. Mitchell ("Chaosthetics") and Steven Vine (*Blake's Poetry: Spectral Visions*). While Vine's examination is interesting in terms of the economics of excess it seems to be based largely on Derrida's essay on Bataille in *Writing and Difference* rather than on Bataille's own works. It gives little attention to the phenomenological aspects of Bataille's writings. Mitchell's essay is more substantial in terms of the productive associations it makes between these two writers, but he is more interested in excess as it is generated by the grotesque than in the phenomenologically-inflected excess which I discuss above.
In the rest of this dissertation, the foregoing theoretical issues will be approached through specific readings of Blake's images and practices, rather than in the more abstract terms I have advanced so far. I will study Blake's conflicted intentionality by looking at the media of artistic intention, both as he uses them and as he portrays them in his work. In the first chapter, we will look at Blake's vision of the intentional capacities of language, particularly the language of prophecy, and we will see how Blake's critics have responded to the emphatic qualities of his writing. Chapter Two will examine the ambiguous intentionality of the line in Blake's theoretical writings, his poetry, and his visual art. Chapter Three will look at Blake's pervasive imagery of the mirror as a surface of representation, giving special attention to the two opposing types of mirror that he invokes. In Chapter Four I will study the images of machinery in Blake's epics and his use of mimetic mechanisms in his practise as an engraver. I will argue that Blake shows these media to be not only "The Extensions of Man," as Marshall McLuhan calls them, 25 but also simultaneously the constrictors and delimiters of human possibility. My goal is to expand our sense of the contrariety of these media, to show how Blake destabilizes their intentional trajectories so that they alternate between being transmitters of intention and being obstructions to it. I believe that we can come to a more subtle understanding of Blake's contrary intentionality by focussing on these intermediaries of intention, these instruments which can either enable it or stymie it. 26

25 This is the subtitle to McLuhan's Understanding Media.
26 The media I have focussed on in the following chapters are not of course the only ones depicted in Blake's work; they are rather the ones that are most closely related to the issue of intention. I could also have examined the images of books and scrolls as sites of intentional ambivalence in Blake's work, but this topic has already been admirably covered by David Erdman's comments in The Illuminated Blake, Paul Mann's article "The Book of Urizen and the Horizon of the Book," and Julia Wright's article "And None Shall Gather the Leaves": Unbinding the Voice in Blake's America and Europe." My practice in
While I will offer several readings of individual poems and artworks by Blake in the following chapters, I will also trace his attitudes to intention and contrariety by comparing many specific images from across the span of his career. This practice will sometimes subordinate the putative unity of the individual works to an approach that ranges across several different works. Such an approach has its dangers: it risks submitting Blake to an overly abstract or a rigidly systematic reading of the type that has been common in the history of Blake criticism. But I hope that by isolating Blake's images of media and looking at the ways in which he uses them throughout his career, we can derive a more complex sense of the ways they operate in each of the specific contexts from which they are taken. I will make every effort to clarify the context of each usage of an image, so that the temptation to over-

the following chapters is similar to that of Morton Paley in his essay, "The Image of the Garment in The Four Zoas, Milton, and Jerusalem," and I would be very satisfied indeed if I was able to approach my subject with the kind of subtlety and contrarious sensibility that Paley demonstrates in this article.

27 I am thinking in particular here of two of the most systematic and also the most accomplished books of Blake criticism to date: Frye's Fearful Symmetry and Damon's Blake Dictionary. We should however recognize that every reading is to a certain extent a systematization, and that Blake demonstrates the same kind of ambivalence toward system as he shows toward intention (see Tilottama Rajan's "(Dis) Figuring the System" for a detailed examination of this phenomenon).

28 Certainly, I feel no need to apologize for reading Blake's poems in relation to each other, since it is not at all clear that they are meant to be read in isolation. There is a great deal of what may be called "auto-intertextuality" in Blake's art: most of it seems to refer at least as much to other Blake works as it does to external contexts. His epics not only contain many of the same characters, and recount similar fall-and-redemption narratives, but they also contain several identical passages. The Songs Of Innocence and Of Experience come to have different significance when they are read in relation to each other, as Tilottama Rajan demonstrates (Supplement of Reading 222-234). The so-called Continental Prophecies are also obviously linked by the geographic connotations of their titles, and by the recurrent appearance of many characters throughout the texts. This suggests that we can make more informed interpretations of any individual Blake work by reading all the others. However, I do agree with Tilottama Rajan that the tendency of critics to "[assume] the coherence of his work by composing it according to the hermeneutic code of his later system" (Supplement 197) is problematic because it assumes the priority of the late work over the earlier productions. If Blake's various artworks are to be read in relation to each other, this practice should not entail an assumption that one work can become the interpretive key by which the others are deciphered.
abstraction can be minimized. My goal is not to provide complete coverage of Blake's corpus, but rather to examine the images of media wherever they appear in his art. In some of his works, these images do not figure prominently, so these works are not treated in detail here. In other works, most notably Jerusalem, these images are common, and for this reason I offer extended readings of Jerusalem in chapters one, three, and four. This might be seen as producing a kind of bias in my readings toward the redemptive possibilities that Jerusalem holds out, and away from the dark and differential works of Blake's mid-career—but I believe that such a view would be a misconception, since Jerusalem itself involves the kind of conflict between degradation and redemption that is symptomatic of Blake's corpus generally. I have tried in the following analyses to approach all of Blake's works in the spirit of contrariety that shows how the degraded and the redemptive are themselves inter-implicated, so that any discussion of one will inevitably lead to an examination of the other.

29While many critical works on Blake have undertaken to give readings of all the illuminated works from All Religions are One to Jerusalem, this is obviously far from being a complete treatment of Blake's art. Critics have tended to focus on the illuminated books to such an extent that any book-length study of Blake which does not deal with all of them might be faced with the accusation that it is "Incomplete." Of course, no single-volume work could possibly offer interpretations, even brief ones, of every artwork Blake produced, and there is no reason to assume that such an undertaking might be more valid than a less "complete" selection of texts and images. My own interests in this dissertation range across the illuminated books, the theoretical writings, and the separate engravings and paintings.
Chapter One

The Emphatic and the Vatic in Blake's Language

In addition to functioning as a medium of communication between people, language also resides in the psyche of every individual. This simultaneous internality and externality of language is what makes it such a complicated phenomenon in terms of intention and human agency—a phenomenon which seems to support contradictory approaches to these issues. In recent years, the debate about intention in language has been extraordinarily intense and polarized, with speech-act theorists such as John Searle claiming that language embodies and externalizes a person's intentions, while poststructuralists like Paul de Man argue that language is a domain of difference and discontinuity which imprisons the subject while at the same time creating the illusion of agency.¹ Even in theories which are less extreme than these, the problems of intention and agency remain central. In some respects, the contemporary linguistic turn in philosophy and critical theory is analogous to the explosion of interest in language in the eighteenth century, when new theories that suggested the arbitrariness of the sign—such as those of Locke and Hume—clashed with more traditional Christian notions of language. Blake's own use of language, and the linguistic theories which underpin that usage, take shape in the context of this conflict between the newer denaturalization of language and the earlier theological traditions

¹Searle defines language this way in chapter two of Speech Acts (22-53). For a critical treatment of this notion of the speech-act as an uncomplicated externalization of interior states, see Gabrielle Falkenberg, "Searle on Sincerity." De Man's position in relation to agency seems to change somewhat over the course of his career, but generally in his later work (especially that collected in Blindness and Insight and Allegories of Reading), he tends to conceive language pessimistically as a discontinuous system which does not allow access to interior states, and which therefore does not transmit intention.
which often did not make an absolute distinction between the sign and its referent.

While Blake is sensitive to the problems that are posed by the denaturalization of language, he generally leans toward the theologically-inflected characterizations of language that focus on the Fall, Babel, and the Incarnation. He is acutely aware of the limitations of fallen language, yet at the same time his work often manifests a vital hope that the powers of language which were lost at the Fall can be recovered. It is important to recognize that Blake's work does not simply purvey a nostalgia for the lost immediacy of Edenic language. Instead, as Robert N. Essick argues in *William Blake and the Language of Adam*, Blake sometimes tries to re-create this kind of language, to conjure its fabled performativity through an apotheosis of logocentrism. Since he must undertake this project from within the confines of an already-fallen language, Blake is faced with an extraordinarily difficult --some would say impossible--task. But he becomes very adept at charging his language with a kind of emphatic supplement which enables him to gesture (however fallibly) toward the kind of Edenic signification which he seeks. The various kinds of emphasis that he employs combine to form the vehement bardic style which is so characteristic of his work. And yet, even in the midst of his most blatant assertions of logocentric performativity, he remains sensitive to the fallenness of his language and, therefore, the possibility of its failure. In this chapter we will examine the conflicted intentional trajectories in Blake's language which come from his alternate acceptance of the vicissitudes of fallen communication and his attempted invocations of the Adamic "motivated sign" (Essick, *Language of Adam* 33).

At stake in this investigation are two contrary ideas of the relative veracity and performativity of metaphor, because for Blake metaphor is both
the source of language's potential power and the site of its radical instability.\(^2\)

We will focus on Blake's conflation of the literal and the figural in his use of metaphor, which effectively highlights the problem of intentionality while at the same time raising the possibility of an extraordinary form of emphasis which would lead toward an Adamic language. I will argue that the very structure of metaphor is implicated in the fluctuation between certainty and uncertainty which Blake's language illustrates, and that this phenomenon is what leads to the semantic contrariety of Blake's verbal images. In the first section of the chapter, we will examine metaphors and identity-statements in terms of their different inflections of the state-of-being verb, and we will see how Blake complicates this distinction so that his metaphorical language comes to have the kind of perlocutionary force that is normally accorded to more literal language. In the second section, we will continue an examination of the place of the "is" in Blake's metaphors, but this time from the point of view of the economics of containment, division, and excess in *Jerusalem*. The last section of the chapter will be devoted to Blake's many invocations of the prophetic voice in his writings, which can maintain powerful connotations of linguistic potentiality, but which are also extremely vulnerable to ironic or formalist interpretations. Throughout the chapter, I will argue that the general trajectory of Blake's language is toward an active potentiality which he associates with Edenic signification, but that he is also acutely aware of the linguistic limitations that are imposed by his post-lapsarian milieu.

\(^2\)In this respect, he takes a position between the theory of P.B. Shelley in "A Defence of Poetry" and that of Friedrich Nietzsche in "On Truth and Falsity in an Extra-Moral Sense." Blake has a Shelleyan conception of metaphor as a transformative power, yet he also acknowledges in metaphor a tendency toward concretization and stasis, as Nietzsche characterizes it.
I. The "is" of Metaphor and the "is" of Identity

Blake is an artist of the emphatic, and this is nowhere more evident than in the prevalence of various kinds of emphasis in Blake criticism. Readers who sense a certain vehemence in his writing have difficulty talking about this phenomenon without adding some kind of emphatic supplement to their own language. Many critics, in their descriptions of Blakean semiosis, apply such emphasis to the verb "to be," in order to signal an intensification of their intentions beyond the normal bounds of metaphoricity. This practise is strangely appropriate because, as we will see, Blake himself makes use of the emphatic "is" to an extraordinary degree. Blake critics, lacking the stentorian tones and the bardic excesses that the artist makes use of, tend to approach this problem of intention and language in a rather conventional way: through the use of italics. David Riede, for example, writes that in Milton "Blake clearly wants to establish a voice that is 'the breath of the almighty'" ("Blake's Milton" 273). The referentiality of Riede's italicization here might very easily be overlooked, but it is in fact crucial to an interpretation of the sentence. Through the use of this emphasis, Riede minimizes the possibility that his statement will be taken as a metaphor, as merely a suggestion that Blake wants his poetic voice to be like that of the almighty. Instead, Riede asserts something far more forceful in its intentionality: that Blake wants to bring his poetic voice into a state of identity with "the breath of the almighty". Riede cannot adequately communicate his understanding of Blake's vehement intentions without resorting to the supplement of emphasis, precisely because
he is talking about Blake's own forms of emphasis as they appear in the poem
*Milton*. The emphatic in a sense begets further emphasis.\(^3\)

There are many other examples of critics using the italicized word "is" when they are trying to describe Blake's emphatic modes of signification.\(^4\) Robert N. Essick defines the Blakean "incarnational sign" as a particular kind of performative which "makes possible a language without a difference between what it *is* and what it *means*" (*Language of Adam* 55).\(^5\) V. A. de Luca similarly describes what he calls the "iconic sublime" in Blake's work by emphasizing the copular verb. He writes, "in this mode. . . the text is foregrounded as text and *is* what it says, and *is* seen for what it *is*" (*Words of Eternity* 62).\(^6\) Angela Esterhammer notes that Blake "relies extraordinarily heavily" (207) on the word "is," and she suggests that he imbues his copular verbs with a particular kind of performativity. She demonstrates this by

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\(^3\)Of course emphasis, like irony, always involves an excess of discourse. We can never be entirely certain that we have isolated it, because it involves our inevitably intuitive sense of the writer's intentions. But this does not mean that it can be safely banished into the realm of the extra-textual, because, as any actor would tell us, meaning is highly dependent upon emphasis. The very process of interpretation is involved in decisions about the relative degrees of emphasis and irony that we sense in the work under consideration. Tilottama Rajan has called this process of readerly involvement in the text "the supplement of reading" in her book of that title. My discussions of emphasis and irony as supplements is indebted to her description of this phenomenon in the first two chapters of *The Supplement of Reading*.

\(^4\)Indeed, the use of the emphatic copula in Blake criticism is so common that I can only examine a few of the most interesting examples here. Other analogous forms of emphasis are equally common, such as David Sten Herrstrom's use of the word "literally" in his contention that Blake's *Laocoön* "is not merely an abstract image pointing beyond itself, but is literally what it represents" (43). In this case, the word "literally" connotes the same kind of emphatic intentionality that is represented by the italicized "is" in the examples discussed in this paragraph.

\(^5\)Essick goes on to say that "the very existence" of this kind of language "is denied by those who, from Locke to Saussure and Derrida, are equally convinced of the differential nature of all linguistic signs" (*Language of Adam* 55).

\(^6\)In his later discussion of the "vortex" passage in *Milton*, De Luca makes an even more straightforward identification of the language and its referent: he says, "the text *is* the vortex" (*Words of Eternity* 83).
quoting a passage from Jerusalem and adding italics to the key words in it.\textsuperscript{7} I have reproduced her quotation here, along with her parenthetical comments:

When Blake claims that "The Male is a Furnace of beryll; the female is a golden Loom" (J. 5.34, E148; my [Esterhammer's] italics), or "Ulro is the space of the terrible starry wheels of Albions sons" (J 12.51, E156; my [Esterhammer's] italics), he defeats our assumptions about the way constative statements should be read, by equating literal and figurative, abstract and concrete. . . . Blakean grammar relies on constative statements but invests them with performative effect (206).

By italicizing the copular verb in these passages, Esterhammer purports to be highlighting a valence of intention that is already latent within the text. She suggests that Blake's erasure of the distinction between the literal and the figural creates a kind of performativity which is simultaneously baffling and compelling to his readers. She reads Blake's "is" not as simply a passive and static state-of-being verb, nor as a marker of merely literary metaphoricity, but rather as an active agency which can bring two things together with extraordinary force and vehemence. This is, obviously, far in excess of the meagre mimetic tricks that we usually expect from language, so she has to use emphasis to gesture toward her point.

We can perhaps get a better sense of Blake's own emphatic language by looking more closely at what his critics are doing when they utilize the emphatic copula to talk about his modes of signification. In one sense, when they do this they are attempting to reduce the metaphoricity of their

\textsuperscript{7}Morris Eaves does something similar when he notes that "Identity and negation, 'is' and 'is not,' are the characteristic syntax of Blake's statements" (Blake's Theory of Art 56). He goes on to quote from Blake's annotations to Wordsworth's 1815 Poems, adding italics to Blake's identification statements and non-identification statements.
language. They use emphasis as a supplement to indicate that when they say "x is y," they do not mean it as a metaphor but rather as something approaching a statement of identity. They are insisting, "I really mean this, it is not merely a figure of speech". Their use of emphasis belies an anxiety about the status of their statements, a fear that the words could be easily interpreted in a way that is not consonant with their intended meaning. This anxiety is well-founded because, as Nietzsche insists in "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense," and as Derrida has shown repeatedly in his readings of philosophical texts, all language is metaphorical and therefore subject to multiple interpretations. Because of this instability of language, writers and interpreters can never attain complete mastery over what they write or read, no matter how much emphasis is involved.

It is tempting therefore to condemn these critics' uses of the emphatic copula as a forgetting of the metaphoricity of language—a movement toward a grounding truth. But suppressing metaphor is not the same thing as forgetting it altogether. The knowledge of language's figurality does not prevent us from trying to gesture—perhaps with the aid of emphatic supplements—toward particular meanings. Nietzsche himself uses the italicized "is" when he makes a statement that sounds surprisingly like the ground of his philosophy: "Life is will to power" (Beyond Good and Evil 194).

These Blake critics are not so much making a grounding movement as they are

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8In philosophy, statements of the problem of identity have been similarly troubled by the incursion of metaphor, and this is one of the reasons that many philosophers use the same kinds of emphasis on the state-of-being verb that the above-mentioned Blake critics use. Martin Heidegger says that when we make the identity statement, we must "think about the key note instead of just thoughtlessly mouthing the formula 'A is A'. For the proposition really says: 'A is A'" (Identity and Difference 26). Emmanuel Levinas describes the problem of identity in terms that are reminiscent of Heidegger, saying that "the identity of the individual does not consist in being like to itself...it consists in being the same—in being oneself, in identifying oneself from within" (Totality and Infinity 289).
simply indicating a desire for clear communication—clear, as opposed to unmediated, communication. The italicized "is," in Nietzsche as in the critics quoted above, represents a kind of wink and nudge, a suggestion that "you know what I mean, even though it is not strictly speaking within the limits of language to absolutely identify two things."

The italicized "is" can be easily deconstructed; it remains, at some level, metaphorical, because language cannot attain the kind of presence that it gestures toward.\(^9\) But this brings to mind a contrary possibility: if an attempted statement of identity could easily be interpreted as a metaphor, then is it not just as likely that a metaphor could be read as an identity statement? This is exactly what Esterhammer suggests in her reading of Blake's metaphors quoted above. The metaphor and the identity statement, after all, both usually occur within the same basic structure, "x is y."\(^{10}\) The more we consider this issue, the more it becomes clear that metaphors and identity statements cannot be readily distinguished from each other. They represent two different intentional capacities or directions which readers can attribute to the "is," but

\(^9\)As Esterhammer (207) points out, there are in fact two contrary extremes of intentionality which can be invested in the verb "to be": one which uses italics or other forms of emphasis to intensify the effect of the copula and move the phrase toward a statement of identity; and the other which tries to suppress the copula's linking function by using erasure on the word "is," as Derrida sometimes does when he gestures toward the differential nature of the sign. For example, in Of Grammatology he says that "the sign that ill-named the only one, that escapes the instituting question of philosophy: 'what is. . . ?'" (19). The use of italics and erasure connote the extremes of intentionality which can be invested in the "is." The logocentric trajectory of the italicized "is" can be deconstructed, but it is important to note that the sceptical trajectory of the "is" which is under erasure is also subject to similar limitations. Both inflections of the verb represent supplements which try to move the "is" beyond the limits of language, and both necessarily fail to do this completely. Derrida examines the issue of the inevitable remains of negation in "How to Avoid Speaking: Denials."

\(^{10}\)Of course, some metaphors are not structured in this way, but in these cases it may be argued that the "is" is understood. In other words, even when the "x is y" structure is not used, the bringing-together of two or more images can be interpreted as either mere wordplay without a referentiality beyond itself, or as a more literal identification of those images. The tension between the literal and the figurative remains to a certain extent unresolvable.
such an attribution is always to a certain extent unstable. Blake's work poses this interpretive problem to an uncommon degree, because his language is highly metaphoric, yet he also seems to imbue his metaphors with an emphatic quality which we associate with statements of identity. The effect of this practice is a destabilization of the commonly assumed distinction between figural and literal language. It is as if Blake is trying to reinstate the contrariety of his linguistic medium by refusing to differentiate between the metaphor and the identity statement. The alternate connotations of identity and metaphor that subsist within the "is" as Blake so often uses it contribute to the excess in his language which so many critics have seen as a kind of emphatic intentionality.

This uncertainty about the relationship between metaphor and identity statement in Blake's work raises the question of whether his images of artistic intention are simply metaphors, or whether they are radical performatives. His work is simultaneously metaphorical and something rather beyond what we would call metaphorical. Critics have voiced various approaches to this issue, depending largely upon their respective positions in relation to the hermeneutics of scepticism and the hermeneutics of faith. Leopold Damrosch is perhaps the most willing to believe; he says that he wants to "compel a recognition that Blake's visions were actual experiences, not merely poetic metaphors" (49). Such a statement might seem to be an extraordinary example of the romantic ideology at work, since it evinces a firm adoption of the poet's own constructions of his prophetic authority, but it is possible that Damrosch is simply referring to Blake's peculiarly strident modes of semiosis here.

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11Such a doubleness regarding the literal and the figural is visible in Nelson Hilton's study *Literal Imagination*, which examines Blake's literalism within a context that is highly associative and sensitive to the polyvalence of Blake's language.
which other critics have discussed in similarly emphatic terms. In any case, Damrosch's sense that Blake's work goes beyond the metaphorical would seem to coincide with the sense of the poet's sincerity that many readers report. Edward Larissy, for example, says of Blake that "when he is ambiguous, or ironic, he is still profoundly serious and conscientious" (59). Edward J. Rose describes a similar trajectory from the figurative toward something more active in Blake's work; he writes, "Since his poem is 'bathed,' as Wallace Stevens says, 'in the imagination,' the analogy becomes, therefore, the identity, for the imagination is agent and principal; it identifies itself" ("Visionary" 117).

The above critics' conceptions of Blake's ideas about the performativity of his metaphors can be related to Blake's own commentary on his now-lost fresco painting, A Vision of the Last Judgment, where he makes a distinction between two kinds of representation that he calls "Fable or Allegory" and "Vision or Imagination." He says,

> The Last Judgment is not Fable or Allegory but Vision. Fable or Allegory are a totally distinct & inferior kind of Poetry. Vision or Imagination is a Representation of what Eternally Exists. Really & Unchangeably (E 554).

Blake does not make use of the italicized copula here, but he does signify emphasis through the adverbs that he clusters around the word "Exists". It is significant that he chooses a synonym of the state of being verb here, and that he surrounds this verb with emphatic modifiers. The implication of this

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12 There is only one example of Blake using italics with the copular verb, though he often makes use of other forms of emphasis. This example is found in his annotations to Reynolds, who states that Albrecht Durer "would, probably, have been one of the first painters of his age... had he been initiated into those great principles..." Blake responds to this by writing, "What does this mean 'Would have been' one of the first Painters of his Age" Albert Durer is! Not would have been!" (E 649).
statement is that Vision is an extraordinary form of representation in which the image really is what it represents. Blake's prose description of the painting is of course a supplement to it in the same way that critical interpretations are supplements: he insists here that his painting should be viewed in a particular way, as having an extraordinary capacity of representation. He does not give much attention to the inferior forms of poetry, but we can get an idea from their names--Allegory and Fable--that they are indirect modes of communication which use images to suggest something other than themselves. In other words, Allegory and Fable work according to the rules of language as they are codified by Locke and Saussure. Blake's insistence that his own painting supervenes those rules seems to be serious, but of course it is impossible to be sure of this. Nevertheless, when he says that "This world of Imagination is the World of Eternity it is the Divine bosom into which we shall all go after the death of the Vegetated body" (E 555) it is difficult to avoid reading the "is" here in a particularly performative sense. This construction is not, however, an effacement of metaphoricity so much as it is an elevation of the status of the metaphor--an argument that products of the imagination can attain a kind of hyperrepresentational capacity.

We are perhaps ill-equipped to discuss the representational qualities of Vision in the late twentieth century because our critical milieu teaches us to treat such things as anomalies. However, Blake refers back at several points to a theological tradition which takes this mode of representation quite seriously. One of the most important inflections of the state-of-being verb for Blake is its associations with Jahweh, whose name was considered by eighteenth century
Hebraists to mean "The Essence, He that IS".\textsuperscript{13} We should note the emphasis indicated by the capital letters in the definition of Jahweh's name here: he represents a kind of being, but it is an emphatic form of being, a superessentiality. It should not be surprising then that Blake comes to adopt a use of the state of being verb which represents his own personal sense of God's potency and the intentionality of divine forms of representation. The repetitive use of the "is" can be seen as a mark of divinity in Blake's poetry, much as the figure of chiasmus is sometimes taken as a sign of Christ in devotional poetry, since the "crossing" of the chiasmus is an evocation of the Cross. As we will see, Blake uses the state-of-being verb so often and with such confidence that it might be considered an attempt to infuse his poetry with a divine presence and power.

Blake associates the "is" not only with the Jahweh-God of the Old Testament, but also with the Christian Incarnation, which is considered by theologians in the Athanasian tradition to be Christ's redemption of being.\textsuperscript{14} In \textit{The Marriage of Heaven and Hell}, he goes so far as to say that "God only Acts & Is, in existing beings or Men" (E 40). This suggests that being has not only been sanctified by God through the Incarnation, but that God in a sense \textit{is} being. In addition to the incarnational aspects of the state-of-being verb, Blake evokes related eucharistic traditions of signification which will be

\textsuperscript{13}This definition is from Parkhurst (111), quoted in Essick and Visconi, \textit{Milton a Poem} 271. Such an idea of God's intimate connection to being of course goes back much further than the eighteenth century, but it became very common to refer to God in terms of the state-of-being verb at this time. Coleridge, of course, calls God "the infinite I Am" in \textit{Biographia Literaria} (167). Emmanuel Swedenborg describes God in similar terms in a work that Blake annotated in the 1790's: "God the creator of the universe is called 'Jehovah,' which is from the verb to be, because He alone \textit{is}" (148). The ultimate source for these definitions is the Hebrew word "Jah," which, as Swedenborg says, is one form of the state-of-being verb.

\textsuperscript{14}This theology is of course the context in which Essick places the Blakean "incarnational sign."
useful in our attempts to contextualize his signifying practise. The climactic moment of the Christian Mass is, of course, the performative speech-act of the Eucharist, where the priest says of the consecrated host and wine, "This is the body of Christ; this is the blood of Christ." Blake would have been aware that the question of the metaphoricity or literalness of these phrases had been the subject of centuries of debate, strife, and war. The controversy between the consubstantiationists and the transubstantiationists is, at its most basic, a disagreement about the intentional force of the "is" in the priest's statement. Consubstantiationists believe that the "is" signifies a metaphor, whereas transubstantiationists believe that it connotes a radical identity statement—that the host in fact is Christ's body, disguised as a wafer of bread. Blake's own questioning of the differences between metaphor and identity statement in his texts places his readers in a hermeneutic position very similar to that of a Christian approaching the Eucharist.

It is no secret that the practitioners of the academic study of literature have almost all allied themselves with the Protestant consubstantiative notion of the sign as that which is not strictly speaking capable of containing identity. One of the consequences of this apparent victory of the consubstantiationists in the war of the signs is that we lack a useful way of talking about the investment of belief in language. There remains in the academic world a fascination with the anomalous semiotics of transubstantiation, but it is more of a prurient interest than an engaged one. We are accustomed to dealing with metaphors as metaphors rather than as

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15 Of course, Blake was not a member of any traditional church, and it is very unlikely that he would have taken communion. However, he would certainly have known enough about High Church theology (and Reformation history) to understand the mechanisms involved in communion, and his readings of Roman Catholic writers such as Augustine, St. Teresa, and Dante would have made him familiar with the communion ritual as well as its singular importance in Catholic theology.
possible identity statements, and this affects our notions of the possible performativity of art. In this milieu, it is not surprising that Mark L. Greenberg suggests that "regardless of the 'approach' to art one takes, almost no one believes anymore, with Blake, that art actually does anything" (173). We have perhaps come to develop a rather passive idea of literature as something which represents, and entertains, but which cannot go beyond the bounds of this metaphoricity to become earnest, or truly disruptive, or dangerous. Blake's art militates against this kind of passivity, not by eschewing metaphor altogether, but by infusing it with vehemence, by showing how metaphor is implicated in the emphatic possibilities of the identity statement. The prevalence of the italicized "is" in Blake criticism shows that—in contrast to Greenberg's assertion above—a significant number of Blake's most accomplished readers recognize that his art does indeed try to do something.

Blake does not explicitly choose a transubstantiative semiotic over the more mundane consubstantiative one, but he invokes both possibilities in such a way that he highlights the question of belief for his readers. In doing so, he demonstrates a recognition that the representational qualities of a text or a consecrated host are not entirely conditioned by the intentions of the author

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16 Some might suggest that the movement toward identity is in fact the opposite of anything that might be called disruptive or dangerous, because it suggests a move toward totalization. However, as we will see in the next section of this chapter, Blake's invocation of the performativity of identity statements does not involve a monological desire for closure; in fact, it is a manifestation of a kind of excess which makes closure impossible. In any case, Blake does not eschew metaphor in favor of identity statements; instead, he conflates the two of them so that his metaphorical language becomes charged with additional perlocutionary force. This relationship is one of mutual excess rather than colonization of one by the other.

17 I am not suggesting that we should all believe implicitly in the transformative capacity of Blakean semiotics, but I think we should realize that this capacity can be believed. Analogously, one does not need to be a practicing Roman Catholic to recognize that the doctrine of transubstantiation has had real consequences for hermeneutics and for history.
or the priest. In fact, he seems to suggest that a representation can become transformational or merely metaphoric depending on how it is interpreted. Such a recognition of the place of the interpreter is analogous to the transubstantiative doctrines of the Eucharist. When the priest says, "This is the body of Christ," his statement can of course be interpreted in a way that is different from what he intends. For the statement to refer to transubstantiation, the "is" must be understood to contain a certain unquantifiable level of emphasis. But the superrepresentational qualities of the Eucharist in this tradition do not derive purely from the priest's intentions; the other requirement is that the congregation must believe what the priest says. The congregation must reply "Amen," to the priest's statement (and must mean it) for the transubstantiation to take effect. This is a more active kind of interpretation than the passive assent that Austin designates "uptake" (117), in which the hearer tacitly agrees that a speech-act has taken place. In a sense, the congregation's belief in transubstantiation is considered to be what makes this miracle possible. Blake's sense of the performativity of belief is similar to this. He knows that his own furious intentionality is not enough to alter human existence radically, but he seems to think that if he can get enough people to believe him, then this transformation will take place.

For this reason, his work can be seen as an extended effort to persuade his readers that he is sincere about certain key issues, most of which are paraphrasable in statements that highlight the state-of-being verb, such as

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18 Piero Camporesi notes that in Early Modern Italy, the Eucharist "could be corroding and deadly to whoever swallowed it without due reverence" (138).
19 Blake addresses the issue of belief repeatedly in his annotations to Watson's Apology for the Bible, where he says, "Jesus could not do miracles where unbelief hindered hence we must conclude that the man who holds miracles to be ceased puts it out of his own power to ever witness one" (E 616).
"Imagination is Eternity" (*The Ghost of Abel*, E 270) and "Every thing that lives is Holy" (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, E 45).

Blake's reliance on the state-of-being verb is visible very early in his career. The title of his first work in Illuminated Printing, *All Religions are One*, is itself an identity statement of sorts, and in both of his early tractates Blake repeatedly makes this kind of confident assertion. The first principle of *All Religions are One*, for example, is "That the Poetic Genius is the true man" (E 1). While neither the subject nor the object of this sentence can be readily defined, the statement nonetheless tends toward being an assertion of identity rather than a metaphor. It brings two terms together and announces, with typical Blakean certitude, that they are identical. There is no intermediary here, no "is like" or "is related to." The sentence resonates with the authoritative voice of a foundational statement, a creed. In fact the entire tractate can be read more as a statement of Blake's beliefs than as a poem or even a philosophical treatise. Despite its arrangement in numbered "principles," *All Religions are One* does not follow the logic of philosophers. Indeed, the entire tractate is an elaborate tautology, ending on the same note that it began with: "The true Man is the source he being the Poetic Genius" (E 2). The only substantive difference between the first and last statements of the tractate is that the order of the elements is reversed in the last one, making it a chiastic restatement of the original theme.

The title of Blake's second tractate, *There is NO Natural Religion*, is similarly invested with the stylistic certainty of a credo.

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20 The body of the text, however, becomes a rather contrarious credo, because it lists two opposing approaches to the problem of the relation between nature and God: the first is an empiricist doctrine and the second is a statement of the primacy of revelation in religion. Blake allies himself with the latter position. However, as Tilottama Rajan suggests, these two positions are not as balanced as they may appear, since Blake did not print the whole collection in any of the extant copies (*Supplement of Reading* 236).
course a statement of non-identity, but the "is" here contains a similar earnest intentionality. To say that there is no natural religion is also to suggest the opposite: that there is a revealed religion. While that possibility is left unstated, Blake alludes to it in the conclusion of the tractate, where he echoes the incarnational dictum of the early Church Father, Irenaeus of Lyons:

Therefore

God becomes as we are,
That we may be as he

is (E 3).

The parallelism and the chiastic structure of this sentence reinforce the identification of humanity and divinity that it suggests. These lines place an extraordinary emphasis on the state-of-being verb, as if to consolidate both human and divine being into one syllable. This final line highlights Blake's emphasis on God's participation in being, and it shows the importance of the incarnational elements of the "is." Blake makes a similar identification in his annotations to George Berkeley's *Siris*, when he says "Man is All Imagination God is Man & exists in us & we in him" (E 664). Again, the emphasis on the state of being verb here is noteworthy, as is Blake's use of chiasmus in the phrase "& exists in us & we in him." The effect of this repetition of "is" and the chiastic structure is a suggestion that there is no hierarchy in the relationship between God and Man: they both exist in each other, and thus are in a sense interconstitutive. The medium of their mutual constitution would seem to be the state-of-being verb itself, which is the nexus of their commonality.

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Irenaeus's description of the Incarnation, which became very important for later theologians, goes as follows: "For this the Word of God became man, and the Son of God Son of man, that man, mingled with the Word and thus receiving adoption, might become a son of God" (III, 19.1, p. 137).
In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake's use of "is" as a linking word reaches its most feverish heights, and here the contrariety of the copular verb is foregrounded. Instead of only linking humanity and divinity as he had done in *There is NO Natural Religion*, he now brings together the most opposed metaphysical principles: good and evil, body and soul, heaven and hell. In addition, the intentional connotations of the copular verb are particularly diverse in this work; sometimes the "is" tends toward identity, but sometimes it seems to move toward the more figural end of the representational scale. Blake's rapid and unsettling shifts between metaphor and identity statement perhaps most insistently embody his project of ontological destabilization in the *Marriage*. By shifting the valence he places upon the "is," he makes it the vehicle by which both devilish ironies and sincere credos can interpenetrate each other. For example, after the poetic "Argument" of the *Marriage*, Blake presents us with a series of assertions, the first several of which are governed by the state-of-being verb:

As a new heaven is begun, and it is now thirty-three years since its advent: the Eternal Hell revives. And lo! Swedenborg is the Angel sitting at the tomb; his writings are the linen clothes folded up. Now is the dominion of Edom, & the return of Adam into paradise; see Isaiah XXXIV and XXXV chap. (E 34).

These sentences involve several different usages of the "is." Some of them move toward the metaphoric end of the spectrum, such as the characterizations of Swedenborg in terms of New Testament imagery. But when Blake writes, "As a new heaven is begun," and "Now is the dominion of Edom," the verbs seem to do more than describe a state of being, or, on the other hand, to coin metaphors. They seem instead to be radical assertions, attempts to present "things as they are" in a mode that is not mimetic but
performative. It is as if writing these words will make it so; as if the poem is an incantation or a prayer which will create things instead of simply representing them. Blake goes beyond the typical evangelistic line, "The kingdom of the Lord is at hand," to make a much more direct assertion, not that it soon will be here, but that it is.22

Blake's effusive use of copular verbs in the *Marriage* can be related to the title of the work. The latin derivation of copula is "couple," and it is possible that Blake's use of the copula in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* represents the copulation which constitutes the metaphysical marriage. Just as the function of the copula is to join two words together in a relation, the marriage ceremony performatively makes the bride and groom into one person before God. Even at the most basic linguistic level, the *Marriage* announces its hymeneal theme in a simultaneously sacred and energetically sexual union which takes place through the agency of the "is." This union, furthermore, is not a stultified and totalized Urizenic ideal of oneness, but rather a productive linkage—one which promotes creative contrariety. The copulation of the copular verb need not involve an enforced return to a totalized whole. For Blake this copulation is instead the source of new possibilities.

After Blake's initial round of pronouncements at the beginning of the *Marriage*, he then makes a series of other identity statements, declaring that the "heavenly" identifications are erroneous and that the infernal ones are true. These statements comprise another credo in the same style as the

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22The temporal aspects of Blake's usage of this verb are important: he focusses on the present tense, rather than on the future as most prophet figures do. By emphasizing the "is," rather than the "will be" or the "was," Blake highlights the transactional nature of the state of being verb, much as Heidegger does in *Being and Time*. This approach to the state of being verb gives us a more active sense of its performative possibilities, because it emphasizes the relationship between being and becoming.
tractates—a credo which is not prefaced by the words "I believe..." because they are too diffident. Blake prefers to say simply what things are instead of what he believes they are. This is perhaps because in Blake's mind, vehement assertion can actually make something true. There is no room for doubt in his pronouncements, and they ring with a fervent certainty that is seldom seen in descriptions of things as they are:

Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and Hate, are necessary to Human existence.

From these contraries spring what the religious call Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys reason [...]. Evil is the active springing from Energy.

Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell. (E 34)

This is probably Blake's most explicit description of the doctrine of the contraries, and the prevalence of copular verbs within it is commensurate with Blake's idea of contrariety. In the Marriage, he is trying to marry the contraries, but not to efface their contrariety because doing so would leave only stasis, non-progression, and death. Thus, even though the devil gets most of the good lines in this poem, Blake makes it clear that he is not advocating a pure diabolism here; he instead wants to link the two contraries in a way that still allows them to reverberate against each other. The marriage is a connection, but it does not eliminate the separate identities of the constitutive contraries.

In addition to rejecting a monism which reconciles opposites, Blake also works against the problem that occurs at the other end of the dualistic continuum, in which the opposites are completely separated from each
other. The paradigmatic instance of the latter error is the divisive cartesian formulation of the mind/body problem, which Blake takes as an example in his section entitled "The Voice of the Devil". This voice mingles morality into the issue, arguing that

All Bibles or sacred codes. have been the causes of the following errors.

1. That Man has two real existing principles Viz: a Body and a Soul.

2. That Energy. call'd Evil. is alone from the Body, & that Reason, call'd Good. is alone from the Soul.

3. That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies.

But the following Contraries to these are True

1 Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of the Soul discern'd by the five Senses. the chief inlets of soul in this age

2. Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy.

3 Energy is Eternal Delight (E 34)

The emphasis on energy here might seem to be favoring the body over the soul, but this is not exactly the case, since the voice also says "that call'd body is a portion of the Soul." Furthermore, we are to recognize that the assignation of errors and truth value here is done by "the voice of the Devil," so we are

23Blake's position on monism and dualism is extremely uncertain, probably because he sees them as a contrary relation which can never be satisfactorily stabilized into a state in which one of them rules over the other. Blake's critics have been divided on the issue of his advocacy of either monism or dualism, and this division is probably symptomatic of the contrariety of Blake's position. For a brief discussion of the different points of view on this issue in Blake criticism, see Moskal (10 and 180 n 25).
getting a diabolical interpretation—the view from one side of the contrary. It is worth noting that both the sacred "errors" and the infernal "truths" are expressed largely in terms of identity statements which rely upon the copular verb. Within the "is," then, a combative contrariety is always in operation, in which the opposites strive to claim their own versions of the truth. They each want to claim what really is, and to denounce the other's position as an erroneous mistaking of what seems for what is. The copular verb then becomes the prime site for the ambivalence and even the contradictoriness that contrariety is composed of. The "is" belongs to both contraries, and both of them use it with vehemence to indicate their investment in a particular view of things as they are. Because of this, the very status of the "is" remains radically unstable; it is subject to fluctuation from one side of the contrary to the other without any notice. This simultaneous instability of the "is" and its function in vehement statements can give us an idea of how and why Blake's art generally operates on principles of ambiguity. Whether the "is" in question gestures toward metaphor or identity statement may not in the final analysis matter; what does matter is that the "is" enacts a vector of intention which, because of its contrariety, can fluctuate between opposing possibilities.

II "Dividing and Uniting": The Economics of Being in *Jerusalem*

We have discussed the Blakean "is" as a meeting place of the contraries which generates a kind of excess that can be read as a vehement intentionality, but the emphatic trajectory of the "is" might also be seen as a drive toward totalization, an attempt to enclose meaning within a unified whole. This is in fact an issue of agency and intentionality which hinges on the question of whether Blakean emphasis occurs as a result of productive
contrariety, or whether it is an attempt to control the unruly polyvalence of language. In keeping with Blake's contrarious sense of the reversibility of intention, he approaches this problem in a complex and sometimes ambiguous manner, understanding that the excess of contrariety is itself related to the kind of systematic containment which is its opposite. Totality and excess must, after all, have a kind of symbiotic relationship because they are necessary to each other's existence—they are, in Blake's terms, contraries.24 As his career progresses, he becomes more and more concerned with the problem of distinguishing between those intentions which lead to totalization and those that produce excess. He does this in particular through examining the relationship between unity and division in his characters' definitions of themselves. Those who keep unity and division separate tend to view their psyches as closed systems, whereas those who see unity and division as productive contraries conceive of themselves as relational identities interacting fluidly with others. Blake clearly favors the latter approach, so much so that he suggests that it is one path to personal redemption. In Jerusalem, he describes this path in terms of the economics of the "is," depicting Los in the struggle to move from the restricted economy of selfhood to the general economy of the mutual identities in the Divine Family.25 In this

24An important phenomenological study of the relationship between system and excess is Emmanuel Levinas's Totality and Infinity, in which Levinas argues that desire is essentially a movement from totality toward infinity. My readings of Blake's approaches to system and excess in this section are indebted to Levinas's work.  
25The terms "restricted economy" and "general economy" are from George Bataille's Inner Experience, though they have been made popular by Jacques Derrida's essay on Bataille, "From Restricted to General Economy: A Hegelianism Without Reserve." Derrida's essay focusses on the aspect of uselessness which Bataille attributes to the general economy, but he does not give much attention to the intentional aspects of Inner Experience. Derrida quotes the following definition of general economy from Inner Experience: "The general economy... makes apparent that excesses of energy are produced, and that by definition, these excesses cannot be utilized. The excessive energy can only be lost without the slightest aim, consequently without any meaning. It is this useless, senseless loss that is sovereignty" (233; Derrida 210). However, Derrida does not comment on the performative
section, we will examine the contrary economic possibilities of the state-of-being verb as they are revealed in Blake's portrayals of the relationship between unity and division in *Jerusalem*.

Blake's description of the narrative of *The Four Zoas* as Albion's "fall into Division. & his Resurrection to Unity" (E 301) might give us the sense that the epics are structured around a narrative of division and unity which leads tendentiously from one to the other in a Hegelian trajectory. However, Blake's employment of these contrary terms is usually much more ambiguous than this. While all of the epics are fall-and-redemption narratives, they are not so resolutely aimed toward totality as this schematic statement makes *The Four Zoas* sound. Certainly, the apocalyptic ending of *Jerusalem* is not an *eschatalon* into absolute identity, but rather a renewed form of contrariety, in which Unity and Division are equal participants. For Blake, there is no end to oppositionality, even after the end of time. The corollary of this is that Blake sees dangers whenever one of the contraries comes to be valued over the other, or whenever the oppositionality of these contraries comes to be erased.

Urizen is Blake's embodiment of error in relation to the contraries. From *The Book of Urizen* on to Blake's epics, Urizen makes the same mistakes again and again, usually bringing disaster upon himself and his contemporaries. In *The Book of Urizen*, he is fixated upon two things: unity

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aspects of Bataille's practice, the fact that Bataille's goal in *Inner Experience* is to achieve sovereignty, to venture into that useless, senseless place that is beyond discourse. My own reading of Blakean excess is indebted to Emmanuel Levinas, who sees excess as not only a result of decay but also as the intentional trajectory of the subject toward the infinite. In this, Blake is very similar to Schelling, who posits a conflictual relationship between identity and difference both before and after the "existence" of finite time. Slavoj Zizek characterizes Schelling's idea of the cyclical antagonism between identity and difference before the institution of the symbolic order as "the rotary motion of drives" (*Indivisible Remainder* 32). Of all the German idealists, Schelling's early work is the most similar to Blake's, because, while Schelling is obsessed with system, his writings generally fail to be systematic.
and division. His mistake is that he separates these contraries from each other so that they can no longer form a productive relation. He alternates between a tropism for unity and an obsession with division, without recognizing the interconstitutive nature of these opposites. The result is that all of the contraries begin to lose their energy, leading to a reificatory fall. Early in the poem Urizen is described in terms of division: "Times on times he divided, & measur'd / Space by space in his ninefold darkness" (E 70). Soon thereafter, he announces his totalizing laws:

One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law (E 72)

He does not recognize that one extreme begets the other: the more he insists on unity, the more he simultaneously causes divisions—and vice-versa. It becomes a slippery slope, oscillating from rigid unity to absolute divisiveness, both forms of system causing a descent into a concretized, static, self-enclosed state which is the mundane world. Urizen reveals the one-sidedness of his desires when he says, "I have sought for a joy without pain, / For a solid without fluctuation" (E 71). Such desire for pure joy and pure solidity only succeeds in bringing about a vengeful return of their repressed contraries. Urizen's rigidly single-minded intentionality always produces an effect that is the reverse of what he desires.

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27 W.J.T. Mitchell comments on Urizen's monologism: "Urizen's attempt to rationalize experience into a homogeneous continuum always begets its own opposite, a chaotic multiplicity which will not obey his iron laws for a moment, and, in particular, a world of polarized forces such as time and space, mind and body, man and woman" (Blake's Composite Art, 32). However, Mitchell's diagnosis of Urizen's error misses the fact that Urizen actively and intentionally divides as much as he tries to unify. That is, his division is not merely a consequence of his will-to-unity. Instead, contrariety comes into play even here: Urizen's extreme monologism and his equally extreme divisiveness produce each other.
There is little suggestion of a redeemed relationship between the contraries in *The Book of Urizen*, but in Blake's epics there are many examples of both positive and negative versions of unification and division. All three of the epics narrate a fall into the divided subject, and they describe the various ways in which Los in particular must try to cope with this division and move toward a kind of unity which does not suppress division but which in fact embraces it in a productively contrary relation. In the interest of brevity I will focus here on *Jerusalem*.

The first scene of *Jerusalem*’s first chapter explicitly raises the issue of unity and division in the relationship between the human and the divine. Here the first divisive action of the poem is undertaken not by Urizen but by Albion. The Saviour sings to Albion of the mutual interconnectedness of humanity and divinity, saying,

I am in you and you in me, mutual in love divine:

*    *    *

I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and a friend;
Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me:
Lo! we are One  (*E 146*)

The Saviour's repetition of the copular verb here is suffused with suggestions of an economy which is not totalized, since he emphasizes the mutuality of their shared form of being, and he specifically states that he resides in the bosoms of humans at the same time as they reside in him. However, Albion reacts negatively to the Saviour's last statement, perhaps sensing in it a claim of totality. In a line that Blake excised from the plate, Albion makes explicit his reason for rejecting of the Saviour's assertion of mutual unity. He says,
"We are not One: we are Many" (E 146).28 We should not overemphasize the importance of a line that Blake removed from the final versions of the poem, but Albion's invocation of the ancient philosophical problem of the Many and the One in this context is worthy of attention.29 Albion seems to think that the Saviour's assertion "Lo! we are One" is a totalizing claim, which will in effect colonize humanity and subsume it in the unity of the divine. He believes that the Saviour is "Seeking to keep my soul a victim to thy Love! which binds / Man the enemy of man into deceitful friendships" (E 146-7). This love that binds is, in Albion's opinion, a force that will result in his enslavement to divine unity, and thus he rejects it completely. Albion assumes that he must choose either the Many or the One. He chooses the Many, and thus reifies multiplicity at the expense of unity and institutes a kind of fall.

Ironically, Albion's assertion of the multiplicity of being leads him to immediately try to consolidate his own unitary identity by claiming his own space and in effect making himself a god of that space. He says,

My mountains are my own, and I will keep them to myself!
The Malvern and the Cheviot, the Wolds Plinlimmon & Snowdon
Are mine. here will I build my Laws of Moral Virtue!
Humanity shall be no more: but war & princedom & victory!

(E 147)

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28 Erdman, who reconstructs this line from evidence on the various copies of this plate, does not speculate on Blake's reasons for removing this part of Albion's speech. It seems possible that Blake is trying to mitigate the extent of Albion's heresy here.

29 The Many and the One in the fragments of Parmenides (and in Plato's dialogue Parmenides) are essentially described as a contrary relation: they constitute each other, and neither of them is valued above the other. However, in Plotinus, the One becomes deified at the expense of the Many, thus producing a one-sided relation which is enclosed by a totalized conception of the One. Albion apparently reads the Saviour's statements of unity as claims for a Plotinian notion of the One which suppresses the Many.
In rejecting what he sees as the Saviour's attempt to bind him, he in effect binds himself, consolidating a "princedom" with himself as the ruler. He uses the copular verb here to claim ownership over a particular territory, thus asserting the boundaries of his princedom and dividing himself from whatever is beyond those boundaries. There is a suggestion that Albion sees his new aggressive insularity as a kind of replacement for being itself, since he says, "Humanity shall be no more: but war & princedom & victory" (my emphasis). The effect of this attempt to consolidate unity is once again a commensurate uncontrollable separation, which Blake describes in catastrophic terms as a cosmological and metaphysical diaspora: "Cambridge & Oxford & London, / Are driven among the starry Wheels, rent away and dissipated" (E 147). We get the sense that Albion has entered a vicious circle of alternate unification and division, much as Urizen does in The Book of Urizen.

Some readers hesitate to assign causality in Jerusalem, preferring to think of all the narrated events as occurring simultaneously rather than successively—but in this case, I think it is safe to say that Albion's rejection of the Saviour is the instituting moment in all the other falls that occur in the poem. Shortly after Albion's denial of the Saviour, we see the consequences of this event in the division of Los:

his Emanation divided in pain,
Eastward toward the Starry Wheels. But Westward, a black Horror,
His Spectre driv'n by the Starry Wheels of Albions sons, black and
Opake divided from his back; he labours and he mourns!

For as his Emanation divided, his Spectre also divided (E148-49)

Los does not choose this division; it occurs as a consequence of Albion's actions, which is why the Spectre begins "bitterly cursing him for his
friendship / To Albion, suggesting murderous thoughts against Albion" (E 149). But Los refuses to avenge himself upon Albion—perhaps because such an action would continue the chain of proliferating divisions that Los has fallen victim to. Instead, he has to learn to forgive Albion for his error. He tells his Spectre,

I know that Albion hath divided me, and that thou O my Spectre,
Hast just cause to be irritated: but look stedfastly upon me:
Comfort thyself in my strength the time will arrive,
When all Albions injuries shall cease, and when we shall
Embrace him tenfold bright, rising from his tomb in immortality.
They have divided themselves by Wrath, they must be united by
Pity.... (E150)

This then becomes Los's task, or at least one aspect of it: to reunite the lost unity of self, to redeem the divisiveness that Albion’s error has brought into the world. Such a task will be familiar to students of German Romanticism, because it is very similar to the intention that Friedrich Schiller attributes to the sentimental poet.30 However, we will see that Blake's conception of redemptive activity in this case does not involve simply re-sealing the divided consciousness to form a new unity, as Schiller's conception suggests. It seems

30Schiller writes, "To the sentimental poet nature has given the power, or rather has impressed on him a lively urge, to restore from within himself every unity which has been dissolved in him by abstraction, to make humanity in itself complete again and to pass from a limited state to an infinite one" (66). This text is extremely important to the later theoretical positions of the German Idealists, whose conception of consciousness as "being-for-itself" and nature as "being-in-itself" (Hegel, Phenomenology 17) can be traced to Schiller's usage. While Hegel does not allow that art has the capacity to overcome the dividedness of sublunary representation, several of his contemporaries, including Schelling, do attribute this power to art. Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe examine this phenomenon in The Literary Absolute. Blake also seems to believe in the possibility that art, especially his own art, can have certain superrepresentational capacities, but he does not usually portray these capacities as resulting from a resolution of the divided subject into a pure unity. Instead, he prefers to complicate the relationship of unity and division into one of contrarious excess.
likely that Los is oversimplifying his task here, because we know that Blake does not always see pity as a unifying force.31

Los in fact catches himself in a contradiction with his statement about pity, because immediately after he says this, it becomes evident that his pity does not extend toward his Spectre. Instead, he struggles to master his Spectre in order to remain active in his attempts to save Albion and the rest of the fallen world. In order to undertake practical action, he has to hold his divided self together by force of will. Such force in some ways replicates the very thing that he is working against, as we see when "The Spectre divides & Los in fury compells it to divide" (E 161). And yet, Los seems to be unable to devise a more productive partnership when his Spectre is continually working to subvert him. He also feels he must control the Spectre because he believes it may cause him further harm if it is allowed to go free:

For Los said: Tho my Spectre is divided. as I am a Living Man
I must compell him to obey me wholly: that Enitharmon may not
Be lost: & lest he should devour Enitharmon (E 161).

It is possible that Los's fears are ungrounded, and that he is in fact perpetuating a divisive mentality when he enslaves his Spectre. Certainly, in a later scene Los's Spectre does not try to devour Enitharmon: "wherever the Emanation goes. the Spectre / Attends her as her Guard. & Los's Emanation is named / Enitharmon" (E 193). Los's actions in any case do not prevent the Emanation from also dividing away from him, becoming his contrary.

31Pity is in fact an extremely contrary thing in Blake's work, sometimes occurring in ameliorative contexts (such as in "The Divine Image," where "Mercy, pity, peace, and love" (E 12) seem to be equally positive things) and elsewhere in negative contexts, such as in The Book of Urizen when he writes, "For pity divides the soul" (E 77).
Los identifies the Spectre and the Emanation with the concepts of negation and contrary, respectively. In one of his harangues against the Spectre, he makes this clear:

Negations are not Contraries: Contraries mutually Exist:  
But Negations Exist Not: Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs  
Exist not: nor shall they ever be Organized for ever & ever:  
If thou separate from me, thou art a Negation: a meer  
Reasoning & Derogation from me, an Objecting & cruel Spite  
And Malice & Envy: but my Emanation, Alas! will become  
My Contrary.  (E162)

The contrariety of the relationship between Negations and Contraries is defined quite simply here in terms of the state of existence: Contraries "mutually exist"; Negations do not exist at all. The mutual existence of the contraries implies that they are interconstitutive: one contrary cannot have being in isolation from its counterpart. A further implication of this idea is that existence itself is contrary, which explains why Blake's art is so resolutely equivocal. In this scheme, negation is only the negation of being (in its inevitably contrary constitution), and thus any denial of contrariety is in effect a negation of existence. We have already examined such monological denials by Urizen and Albion. It is worth noting here that negation is also linked specifically with scepticism, with "Exceptions & Objections & Unbeliefs." Albion's rejection of the Saviour at the beginning of the poem likewise takes the form of a rational scepticism: he says, "By demonstration, man alone can live, and not by faith" (E 147).

Blake dramatizes the contrariety of the copular verb in a few important scenes in Jerusalem, though often with less emphasis than we see in his invocations of the copula in his early work. For example, in the following
passage he repeats the word "is" many times, but he does so in an interrogative rather than a declamatory mode:

What is a Wife & what is a Harlot? What is a Church? & What Is a Theatre? are they Two & not One? can they Exist Separate? Are not Religion & Politics the Same Thing? Brotherhood is Religion

O Demonstrations of Reason Dividing Families in Cruelty & Pride!

(E 207)32

Blake's anxiety about making emphatic identity statements seems to be heightened here in comparison to his usages of the copula in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, but the general intentionality of this passage is similar. He does not say "A Wife is a Harlot" or "A Church is a Theatre," but the syntax of the questions indicates a challenging of the logic that would view these things as diametrical opposites. The implication is that these apparent opposites actually have a great deal more in common than we would generally consider. The questions "are they Two & not One? can they Exist Separate?" are specifically aimed toward revealing that the binaries Wife/Harlot and Church/Theatre are in fact contraries. 33 While such lines remain equivocal, it is important to note that this passage moves gradually toward more positive statements, culminating in the identity statement, "Brotherhood is religion". Even in this increasingly uncertain milieu, Blake uses the copula with certainty in some cases.

32 The context of this passage makes it unclear whether Los speaks these words or whether it is "the voices of Bath & Canterbury & York & Edinburgh" (E207). In either case, there is little reason to suspect that the speech is an ironic or degraded example of error (as we might suspect if, for example, these words were spoken by Hand or Hyle).

33 This is a dramatization of the problem of monism and dualism in relation to the contraries. One side of a contrary cannot "exist separate" from the other; in this sense they are both two and one.
The copula is not entirely the nexus of truth in *Jerusalem*, however; it is also dangerous because it can reify appearances rather than truths if people misinterpret the world. If a simulacrum is mistaken for reality, then the "is" becomes a solidification of that error. This function of the copula is made manifest in the speech of "those in Great Eternity who contemplate on Death" (E179), who say,

What seems to Be: Is: To those to whom
It seems to Be, & is productive of the most dreadful
Consequences to those to whom it seems to Be: even of
Torments, Despair, Eternal Death; but the Divine Mercy
Steps beyond and Redeems Man in the Body of Jesus Amen (E 179)

This passage is related to Blake's theories of perception, and also to his notion of the performativity of belief. It suggests that appearances can actually become reified into reality if the perceiver accepts them as such, and the effect of this reification is a self-imposed hell. In this case, the "is" gestures toward untruth rather than truth. However, Blake goes on to describe the redemption of the copula here, and he does this in incarnational terms: "but the Divine Mercy / Steps beyond and Redeems Man in the Body of Jesus Amen."

The body of Jesus here is a kind of supplement, making possible a reversal of the copula's trajectory, so that it does not necessarily solidify appearances, but instead reaches beyond the figuraiity of language toward an extra-linguistic truth.

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34This reificatory movement is reminiscent of the will-to-truth that Nietzsche describes in "On Truth and Lie in an Extra-Moral Sense"—it is an erroneous move toward foundationalism. However, unlike Nietzsche, Blake suggests that there is also a higher truth which is more than simply an accretion of fossilized lies.

35Blake's ideas about perception in this context are encapsulated in his description of imaginary vision: "to the eyes of the Man of Imagination Nature is Imagination itself. As a man is, so he sees" (Letter to Trusler, E 702).
At times in *Jerusalem*, Blake suggests that there is an alternative to the rigid extremism of Urizen, who fluctuates between obsessive division and tyrannical monism. This alternative involves a fluidity between the categories of division and unity, and it is best exemplified in the composite identity of the Divine Family. The Divine Family is a concatenation of the Many and the One: it involves movement toward unity but also movement toward division. It is both singular and plural, not merely one or the other, and Blake highlights the fluidity of the transformations back and forth from composite oneness to multitudinous separate identities. Blake is explicit about the contrariety of heavenly existence in this passage, where the Divine Family describes itself/themselves:

- Mutual in one another's love and wrath all renewing
- We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
- We behold multitude; or expanding; we behold as one,
- As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
- We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him,
- Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life,
- Giving, receiving, and forgiving each other's trespasses. (E 180)

The mutual interconstitution of the divine family and the Saviour seems to be a sign or a cause of their redemption. Blake here deconstructs the notion of selfish identity, in which the economy of the self is created by enforcing a boundary between self and other. Instead, this redeemed form of identity is an interconnection of self and other. The Divine Family is an open system, a

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37 This passage seems at first to be spoken by the Saviour, but we find out afterwards that it was spoken by the Divine Family. In a sense, these two are different aspects of the same thing, since they exist mutually. Blake’s characteristic lack of clarity about who is speaking actually contributes to our identification of the Saviour and the Divine Family.
general economy. It does not seek to efface division or difference, but rather it understands that these contraries must persist in a redeemed world. The Divine Family is able to shift from unity to division merely by contracting and expanding their (its) senses—which suggests that the very ideas of multiplicity and unity are perceptual templates that perceivers project upon the world. There is still an emphasis on unity in this description of heavenly existence, but it does not come at the expense of division or multiplicity. This dynamic, fluctuating form of divine being is Blake's answer to the static, uneventful heaven of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, in which there is no change, productive or otherwise.38 Donald Ault aptly describes the interconstitutive aspects of the Divine Family as "cells of energy in tension with one another" (*Visionary Physics* 31).39

Another description of an interconnected unity and division can be found in Blake's recounting of Jerusalem's and Vala's embrace on the Lilly of Havilah—a scene which has several edenic associations, not the least of which is the fact that Havilah is mentioned in Genesis as a place in the garden of Eden. Jerusalem and Vala are described "Dividing & uniting into many female forms" (E 164). This uniting and dividing is perhaps not as unequivocally positive as that of the Divine Family, but it remains generally an edenic description. There is however a parodic version of the Divine Family, which we see in some of Blake's depictions of Albion's children. The Daughters of Albion, for example, perform a kind of uniting and dividing which seems degraded rather than redeemed: "The Daughters of Albion. divide & unite in

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38 See Blake's comment in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* that "Milton wrote in fetters when he wrote of Angels & God" (E 35).

39 Ault is referring to an identical section of text in *The Four Zoas* rather than to the context of the same passage in *Jerusalem*, but his characterization holds true for both of Blake's uses of these lines.
jealousy & cruelty" (E 207). The difference between the activities of the Daughters of Albion and the activities of the Divine Family seems to be related more to intentionality than to outward action. Blake's descriptions of the uniting and dividing of the Divine Family often emphasize their "Mutual Forgiveness" (E 203)--because, even though the contrary identities in the Divine Family are in a state of contrarious "war," they redeem this activity by forgiving each other. This allows them to unite and divide without destroying each other. The Daughters of Albion, on the other hand, unite and divide "in jealousy"—thus magnifying the fractiousness of their relationship without preserving any sense of their commonality. This kind of uniting and dividing, because it is undertaken for the wrong reasons, ends up having negative consequences.

Blake's invocation of identity at the end of Jerusalem seems to partake of a similar logic to that of the Divine Family, in which unity and division are both contained:

All Human Forms identified even Tree Metal Earth & Stone. all Human Forms identified, living going forth & returning wearied Into the Planetary lives of Years Months Days & Hours reposing And then Awaking into his Bosom in the Life of Immortality (E 258).

Indeed Blake seems to choose identification as an alternative to unity and division here—but this does not mean that he sees identification as a leap into the Hegelian Absolute. This final consummation at the end of Jerusalem has sometimes been read as an apotheosis of unity, but in fact there are several clues to suggest that it is a unity which is mutually constituted with multiplicity. As Nelson Hilton recognizes, there is more than one sense of the word "identified" involved here. He describes this process as one of
simultaneous unification and division: "we behold all those forms identified each with its unique name and identified at the same time into one identical name. 'Identified' here presents the literal imagination of uniqueness in unity, of sameness in difference" (235). Within these contrary valences of the word "identified," Blake portrays the volatility of visionary existence. Identity comes to invoke its contrary here: the Human Forms are both identified and differentiated. They are also free to move back and forth from the "planetary" world of finite time to the bosom of Christ, thus preserving their freedom to do and be whatever they want. So the identification here is not a circumscription of the being of the Human Forms, but rather an expansion of it--a positing of interrelation, but not subjugation. Blake's use of "identified" at this culminating point in Jerusalem functions as a bridge between the uniting and dividing that we have seen earlier in the poem, because the ambiguity of identity in a sense provides its opposite within itself. In this way it represents a kind of being which is necessarily contrary and which therefore involves an economy of existence which is open to the identities of others.

III "Firm Perswasion": Blake and Prophetic Sincerity

In addition to Blake's use of the copular verb as a tool of emphasis, he also signals an intensification of intention by invoking the image of the prophet. Prophetic language, of course, is supposed to be charged with the

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40 Hazard Adams also comments usefully on the ambiguity of identity in Blake, without specifically mentioning the end of Jerusalem: "Identity is a harbor of individuality and relationship. One has an identity and one can be identical with something" (329). Adams' use of emphasis on the word "with" here indicates the kind of intentionality that we have seen in Blake critics' use of the italicized "is" of identity.
kind of vitality and authority which can only come from a divine source, so
Blake's use of this image can be seen as a particularly canny way of
increasing the vehemence of his language. The question, however, is
whether he is simply using the image of the prophet for his own rhetorical
ends, or whether he has a more personal investment in this image. To place
the question in the context of the issues we have been discussing earlier in
this chapter: when we read Blake's work we have to decide what we think
about the metaphoricity of his assumption of the prophetic mantle in his
poems. We have to decide, in other words, whether he is merely using the
trappings of prophecy as an extended metaphor, or whether in a sense he
really is a prophet. The issue is essentially one of intention, and as such it can
only be answered by hermeneutic conjecture, but the way in which we decide
this conjecture can affect the level of perlocutionary force which we accord to
his texts. It is fairly safe to assume that we have all chosen the former option,
seeing Blake's prophetic images as simply literary conceits that are part of a
long tradition of such borrowings and citations. After all, the late eighteenth
century is full of poetic renderings of prophetic voices, and this practise was
so common that it became aggregated into the figure of the bard, who is at
once prophet and poet. Despite this, however, it is not at all clear that Blake's
own intention was to use the image of the prophet as a metaphor. Just because
we automatically disbelieve in Blake's metaphorically assumed prophethood
does not mean that he also took it lightly. If we at least acknowledge the
possibility that Blake is serious about his invocations of prophecy, it can affect
our sense of the performativity of his language.

Part of the reason for our inability to accept the possibility of Blake's
potential prophethood has to do with the scepticism that is prevalent in our
own historical moment. Unfortunately for Blake, now that his work has found
the kind of worldwide readership that he could not have even dreamed of, the cultural capital of prophecy is at an all-time low. To us, the figure of the prophet is always-already parodic: prophets today are schizophrenics or cult leaders or New Age gurus. Perhaps this is why, despite the number of contemporary readers who acknowledge feeling an emphatic quality in Blake's work, almost none take his pretensions to prophethood seriously. Generally, recent critics have tended to emphasize the formal elements of his prophetic phrases and images, viewing his references to the prophetic tradition as simply poetic devices used to muster a particular kind of generic authority. This has not always been the case in Blake criticism. As recently as Harold Bloom's *Blake's Apocalypse* (1963), it has been possible for a critic to see the prophetic aspect of Blake's work as more of a tonal quality than a formal one. Northrop Frye goes even further than this in *Fearful Symmetry*, even though that book is invested in a rather generalized project of mythopoeic formalization. Frye sees no strategizing behind Blake's adoption of the prophetic mantle, and he even goes so far as to call him "one of England's few prophets" (403). It is true that these critics accept Blake's prophethood somewhat too readily, and that in doing so they perpetuate a kind

41 The most thorough examination of Blake's relation to prophecy, Leslie Tannenbaum's *Biblical Tradition in Blake's Early Prophecies*, contains an entire chapter on "Prophetic Form" (25-54) and one chapter on "Blake's Biblical Typology" (86-123), but it has very little examination of the intentionality and disruptive potential of prophetic action. However, Tannenbaum does suggest an inspired role for the Blakean prophet at one point, where he uses the now-familiar italicized "is" in order to amplify his sense of the prophet's language: "Thus the prophet not only communicates the Word but he *is* the Word; his very existence is a sign, an indication of the eternal penetrating the temporal" (74). Another important study of Blakean prophecy is Molly Ann Rothenberg's *Rethinking Blake's Textuality*, which deconstructs the idea of prophetic intentionality, arguing that prophecy is merely a "strategy for producing authority" (25).

42 Bloom uses the word "prophetic" (121) not to delineate a rhetorical strategy by which Blake would solidify his own authority, but instead as a way of describing the exuberant and excessive qualities that he sees in Blake's language. He particularly identifies the figure of the prophet with Blake's Orc, who is the embodiment of dangerous excess. In Bloom's conception, the prophet is not he who cites, but rather he who *incites.*
of Romantic ideology, but this does not mean that their approach should be
discounted altogether in favour of an absolute hermeneutics of scepticism. On
the contrary, it seems appropriate that any reading of Blakean prophecy
should alternate between the possibilities of scepticism and belief.

Unfortunately, this kind of interpretive doubleness has been difficult to
attain in the current critical milieu. Even one of the most subtle and flexible
recent investigations of Blakean prophecy, Ian Balfour's "The Future of
Citation," leans toward the prophetic constructivism that characterizes our
sceptical age. While Balfour recognizes the "performative and
perlocutionary" (114) aspects of prophecy, he chooses to focus on it as a
generic construct rather than as a practise or an intention. He writes,
"Prophecy survives in citation, citation first of all within the New Testament,
and then beyond it in hermeneutics and in poetic revision" (115). Despite his
unusual admission of the performative aspects of prophecy, he relegates this
performative power to the past, and suggests that prophecy can survive in the
present only through citation. In doing this he denies some of the disruptive
and assertive force of prophecy in the present; he formalizes it into relatively
tame literary terms. The effect of this is to mitigate the active power of the
prophet's language, and to push the issues of belief and action to the side.
Prophecy becomes merely a textual practice rather than a potentially
disruptive social action. This state of affairs is reminiscent of certain readings
of the book of Revelation that Steven Goldsmith examines in Unbuilding
Jerusalem, where he argues that "the emergence . . . of Revelation as an object
of formal literary analysis occurs in part as a concerted effort to occlude the
book's relation to violence" (90). It is no coincidence that Blake's prophetic
writings are profoundly influenced by the book of Revelation. We as critics
are quick to submit his prophetic language to a similar formalism, not in order
to suppress violence, but perhaps to suppress the implications of his vehement sincerity, his insistence on the primacy of belief—which is a kind of affront to the sensibilities of secular readers.

One can see however why critics generally choose to sidestep this active aspect of prophecy. The only comfortable thing for a critic to address when studying prophecy is the genre rather than the practice, because if we talk about the practice we risk sounding like enthusiasts. I would argue, though, that this risk is worth taking when we see that the alternative is to overlook the problem of intention in prophetic texts. As Balfour himself notes, prophecy for Blake is not merely an effete participation in a generally canonized textual activity. One of the non-formal aspects of prophecy is its particular kind of sincerity: its attempts to persuade by virtue of an appeal to its own earnestness. It is not surprising that prophecy often utilizes emphatic style and earnest imprecations, because the goal of prophecy is to incite action in the reader. When we look at the form of prophecy in isolation from its persuasive, rhetorical function, we tend to forget that prophecy is intimately related to the issue of belief, and it becomes easier to conceive of prophecy as merely a citational practice of self-authorization rather than a sincere call to action.

Strange as it may seem, Blake scholars may have something to learn from the more involved readers of his work, such as the Blakean evangelist, Aethelred Eldridge, who in the mid-nineteen-seventies founded the Primal Church of the Blake Revival in Golgonooza, Ohio. Eldridge's readings of Blake are not published, but anecdotal evidence suggests that his church functioned similarly to traditional Christian services: there was a church building and a small congregation, and services were conducted every Sunday in which the
word of William Blake was read and interpreted for the assembled crowd.43 Eldridge and his congregation considered William Blake to be an inspired prophet, and they studied his writings not for literary or formal qualities, but for vital religious truths. This kind of enthusiastic interpretation is not generally condoned within the halls of academe, and certainly one might be justified in applauding such a prohibition, but at the same time, academic readers of Blake should recognize that there are more ways of reading than we generally suppose, and that Blake may well have preferred the credulous hermeneutic of Aethelred Eldridge to the confining formalism of most academic readings.

The authors of Nietzsche's Case make an interesting diagnosis of the discomfort that Blake's apparent sincerity occasions on the part of the postmodern reader when they contend that the difference between Blake and Nietzsche is that "Blake may give the sometimes unpleasant feeling that he really means what he says; Nietzsche gives the sense that he never quite means what he says" (Magnus, Stewart, Mileur 157). While this statement is very suggestive and seems accurate in a general sense, I will argue that it somewhat overstates the differences between these two writers when we look specifically at the question of sincerity. First, however, I would like to examine what this description of Blake might reveal about our contemporary approach to reading. The comment that Blake's sincerity troubles us is a particularly perceptive one, but the authors of Nietzsche's Case leave an important question unasked: why is it unpleasant to be faced with the possibility that a writer means what he says?44 There are several possible

43 These activities are described in Eldridge's letter to the editors of Blake Newsletter. 44 This is in a sense the opposite of the problem that Stanley Cavell tries to deal with in Must We Mean What We Say? where he suggests that it should not be necessary to mean what we say. Here there seems to be a collective pressure preventing us from ever meaning
answers. Perhaps it is because we are embarrassed by earnestness, or because we have been trained to expect and to value ironic obliquity in literature. Probably the most general way of explaining our discomfort is to say that the sincerity of Blake's language disrupts our sense of genre. While we might, for example, expect a prophet to mean what he says, we do not generally expect a poet to do the same—at least not in such a vehement manner. The issue of genre here becomes again a question of the relative perlocutionary force that we expect from the work. We can characterize Blake's writings as poems with prophetic elements, in which case those prophetic elements take on the somewhat meagre intentionality of metaphors; but we can alternately see Blake's work as prophecy which makes use of poetic devices (as many canonical prophecies do), in which case his metaphors can be seen to embody a more emphatic valence of intention. The fact is that Blake's writing participates so fully in both of these generic traditions that it is never a case of dividing the prophetic elements of his language from the poetic ones.45 By writing works that are both prophecies and poems, Blake places into question the very notion of poetic language as "What oft was thought, but ne'er so well expressed," as Pope has it (298). Blake's language is as self-consciously figural as any poetic effusion, but it is not mere ornament; instead there is a suggestion that this figurality also contains an emphatic potentiality.

It might be useful to discuss Nietzsche briefly here, in order to suggest ways in which traces of sincerity can be found in even the most ironic texts.

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45Two of Blake's works, Europe and America, are actually subtitled "A Prophecy," and many more of them overtly invoke the prophetic tradition. On the other hand, Milton is subtitled "a Poem." There is no evidence to suggest that he sees these works as distinctly different in genre however, since much of Milton's first book is narrated by the prophetic Bard figure, and America and Europe make use of many poetic conventions. This suggests that Blake's linguistic practise is a generic blending of the prophetic and the poetic.
The contention that Nietzsche is manifestly not sincere would seem to be a canonical understanding of his writing in the postmodern epoch, but I think this is not an entirely defensible position. I would suggest that Nietzsche is in fact sincere in regard to one issue: the value of his own writing. What Bataille calls Nietzsche's "honest insolence" (*Inner Experience* 65)\(^4^6\) can be read as a kind of sincerity, albeit a sincerity veiled by satire and irony. As we will see, the issue of sincerity makes Nietzsche himself uncomfortable, but the very fact that he continued to write, in the face of almost complete public apathy, suggests that he was sincere about the importance of his own messages for the world. While it is often difficult to decide exactly what Nietzsche might mean in a particular passage or work (largely because of the omnipresence of irony), most readers would say that he certainly does mean *something* or some things, and that he means those things with extraordinary intensity.

Nietzsche quite explicitly adopts the mantle of the prophet in *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, and in many ways Nietzsche's writings attempt to persuade his readers in ways that are analogous to Blake's prophecies. Some readers may object that the ironies of *Zarathustra* negate any sincere prophetic intention on the part of Nietzsche, but I would argue that irony does not so easily banish the possibility of sincerity. By choosing Zarathustra as his non-Christian prophet figure, Nietzsche is not necessarily eschewing the performativity of prophecy altogether. He is simply offering a variation on the theme of prophecy--one which, like many Christian prophecies, insists on its own vital importance for the reader. Despite Nietzsche's attacks on the stultifying effects of belief, he remains quite concerned that his readers will believe *him*. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, he writes, "Will they believe me? but I

\(^{4^6}\)As I noted in the introduction, Bataille uses this phrase to describe both Blake and Nietzsche.
insist they believe me..." (#281, 213). He engages in a good deal of cavilling immediately after making this statement, saying that "there is a kind of aversion in me to believing anything definite about myself" (213), but despite this disinclination to believe in himself, he does not withdraw his insistence that his readers (the unspecified "they") believe him. He senses the paradox of his position, but he purposely avoids an extended analysis of it, saying

Is there perhaps a riddle concealed here? Probably; but fortunately not one for my teeth. - Does it perhaps betray the species to which I belong? - But not to me: which suits me well enough. (213)

We see Nietzsche here in an almost self-conscious act of repression, keeping from himself the knowledge that his insistence that his readers believe him is not consonant with his general arguments against belief. This problem is particularly acute for Nietzsche, since his project is so overtly antinomian, but it is a common difficulty for sceptics generally: every scepticism must excise itself from the list of things which should be disbelieved, or else it will not function as a scepticism at all. This situation is similar to the one that prophets often face: prophecies usually contain attacks upon beliefs and practices that the prophet considers to be wrong. The prophetic imperative might be phrased, "Don't believe them, believe me!" Similarly, any scepticism must at least privilege its own truth value if it is to debunk the truth of the beliefs which it is preaching against.

Blake's writings are much more overt than Nietzsche's in their discussions and invocations of belief, but the possibility that Blake believes his texts are prophetic has been generally ignored because it is embarrassing and perhaps even threatening to readers who have been schooled to value irony. Manipulating the conventions of prophecy for one's own poetic uses is seen as
clever, but declaring oneself a true prophet is considered insane or pointless. However, the difference between these two possibilities is not as clear as we might assume. There is much evidence in Blake's works to suggest that he is indeed sincere in his adoption of the prophetic mantle, though his idea of what a prophet does is somewhat different from the canonical definition. For example, his description of the prophet in his annotations to Bishop Watson's *Apology for the Bible* focuses explicitly on honesty rather than on any citational means of self-authorization:

Every honest man is a Prophet he utters his opinion both of private & public matters / Thus / If you go on So / the result is So / He never says such a thing shall happen let you do what you will. a Prophet is a Seer not an Arbitrary Dictator. (E 617)

This definition of the prophet is a more democratic and a more praxis-oriented one than most. A Blakean prophet is not required to cite a canonical text; he must simply be honest and be willing to speak his opinions.47 Obviously Blake himself does cite prophetic conventions many times in his work, but the above statement gives us the sense that for Blake the motivation--the honesty--behind the citation overrides any purely formal generic requirements for prophecy. Prophetic language, then, derives from an intention rather than from an ability to cite the words of previous prophets.

In his first work in illuminated printing, *All Religions are One*, Blake makes a similar point. This tractate is subtitled "The Voice of One Crying in the Wilderness"--an obvious invocation of the prophetic tradition, and perhaps also a sign that what follows should be taken seriously. The third principle of

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47 I use the male pronoun to refer to the prophet because in Blake's usage and in general usage the term prophet seems to refer to a man. However, there are exceptions to this rule, such as the self-proclaimed "prophetess," Joanna Southcott.
All Religions are One is "No man can write or speak from his heart, but he must intend truth" (E 1). The emphasis on intention here is again crucial; Blake does not claim that those who speak from the heart are empowered to communicate the truth, but that they can at least intend it. The other half of the communicative equation is up to the prophet's audience, who must take his intention for what it is; they must believe it. If the prophet was empowered to make people believe, his job would be easy; the fact of the matter is that the audience of a prophecy can easily ignore it by interpreting it ironically.

Whatever else prophecy may be, it is always about persuasion—the attempt to instill certain beliefs in a constituency of people. In the Old Testament prophetic tradition, God or the prophets often express the knowledge that the people will not "hear" the prophecy—that is, believe it and act accordingly. The people are not compelled to believe; on the contrary, the prophet's words provide a test for them. If they do believe, as in the book of Jonah, then they are saved. Their belief itself has a performative effect. Blake dramatizes a similar performativity of belief in the second "Memorable Fancy" of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, where the narrator dines with the prophets Isaiah and Ezekiel. He asks Isaiah, "does a firm persuasion that a thing is so, make it so?" Isaiah answers, "All poets believe that it does, & in ages of imagination this firm persuasion removed mountains; but many are not capable of a firm persuasion of anything" (E 38-39). Isaiah answers the question in terms of belief, saying "all poets believe that it does" (my emphasis)—almost as if "to believe" was a transitive verb. It is important also that the word "persuasion" in this passage connotes both the act of persuading someone (i.e. the prophet's intention) and the state of being persuaded. When one believes the prophet's words, when one is persuaded by him, then in a sense one becomes a prophet too. Belief links the speaker and the addressee in
a single common action, at once the state and the activity of persuasian, which in a sense becomes hyper-intentional: it moves beyond intention into action, even miraculous action.\textsuperscript{48}

The prophet who claims divine inspiration need not understand his prophecy and need not even be able to defend its contents, but he must insist upon its authenticity: that is, he must be able to say "these are really and without a doubt the words of God." Thus, even though the words of the prophecy might be external from the prophet, he still maintains a responsibility to prove that his inspiration is valid. When he speaks the words of the prophecy he does not necessarily have to mean what he says (because he is supposed to be the medium of a divine message), but when he asserts that God spoke through him, \textit{then} he must be absolutely earnest. If he cannot be sure that he has been inspired by the words of God, then he severely undermines the authority of his prophecy.\textsuperscript{49}

Before a prophet's work becomes canonized, of course, it is up to him alone to defend his inner experience of the divine word--there are no external proofs of divine inspiration. The process of religious canonization is a process of becoming believed. The only real measure of the prophet's truthfulness is his sincerity--a nebulous indicator, certainly, but one which Blake often endorses. He portrays a scene of the prophet's burden of proof in \textit{Milton},

\textsuperscript{48}Blake quite often equates action with internal states of the psyche, as in this identity statement in his annotations to Bacon: "Thought is Act" (E623).

\textsuperscript{49}Salman Rushdie's \textit{The Satanic Verses} focusses on this very issue of the unverifiability of prophetic inspiration, which is probably why it caused such a furore among Muslim believers. Rushdie introduces doubt about the source of Mahound's inspiration. While Mahound claims to know when Allah speaks through him and when it is instead Shaitan, the Archangel Gibreel claims that the source of inspiration was "me both times" (123). Later in the novel, Mahound's scribe begins to alter the words of the prophecies, and Mahound does not notice the changes.
when the Bard has finished his song, and the assembled audience questions its value and authenticity:

All consider'd and a loud resounding murmur
Continu'd round the Halls; and much they question'd the immortal
Loud voiced Bard. and many condemn'd the high tone'd Song
Saying Pity and Love are too venerable for the imputation
Of guilt. Others said. If it is true! If the acts have been perform'd
Let the Bard himself witness. Where hadst thou this terrible Song

(E 107)

This assembled crowd might be a figurative surrogate for the readers of Blake's poem, who must also decide "if it is true" or if it is merely a poetic fancy. In this case, the bard is playing to a difficult audience; they approach his song with scepticism. Their discomfort with the moral implications of the song leads them almost inevitably to question its origins. They ask, "Where hadst thou this terrible Song." The Bard's response is to validate his song by an emphatic appeal to his own inner certainty:

The Bard replied. I am Inspired! I know it is Truth! for I Sing
According to the inspiration of the Poetic Genius
Who is the eternal all-protecting Divine Humanity
To whom be Glory & Power & Dominion Evermore Amen (E 107-8)

The Bard can produce no signs of his elect status other than the qualities of the Song itself (which is punctuated with the Bard's prophetic imprecation, "Mark well my words! they are of your Eternal Salvation!" (E 101)), and the emphatic tone in which he proclaims his inspiration. Unfortunately for him, this is not sufficient to persuade the assembled multitudes. "Then there was great murmuring in the Heavens of Albion / . . . Albion trembled to Italy Greece & Egypt / . . . Shaking the roots & fast foundations of the earth in doubtfulness"
The doubts of the assembly are so powerful that they threaten a cataclysm. Just as belief is performative in Blake's work, this scene suggests that doubt can also have a negatively performative effect.

But before the impending disaster can reach its threatened crescendo, something unexpected happens. "The loud voic'd Bard terrify'd [takes] refuge in Miltons bosom" (E 108), and as soon as this occurs, Milton is inspired to undertake the action that constitutes the rest of the poem:

Then Milton rose up from the heavens of Albion ardorous!
The whole assembly wept prophetic, seeing in Miltons face
And in his lineaments divine the shades of Death & Ulro
He took off the robe of promise, & ungirded himself from the oath of God

And Milton said, I go to Eternal Death! (E 108)

Milton, alone among the assembled audience, believes in the Bard's song and feels that he must act upon the knowledge it has given him. He reads the Song as a vital allegory of his own situation, referring to the character Satan in the song by saying, "I in my selfhood am that Satan: I am that Evil one! / He is my Spectre!" (E 108). In the act of believing the Bard's song, Milton in effect becomes a Bard too. He is inspired to believe but also, simultaneously, to act. In a sense belief and action are indistinguishable here: if you truly believe, then you must act on that belief—even if that action is as drastic as Milton's self-sacrifice. In fact, the Bard has entered into Milton's bosom, in a literal

50 Much later, the members of the assembly recognize the hermeneutic error they made when they refused to "hear" the Bard's song:
And they lamented that they had in wrath & fury & fire
Driven Milton into the Ulro; for now they knew too late
That it was Milton the Awakener: they had not heard the Bard,
Whose song call'd Milton to the attempt. (E 116)
inspiration which foreshadows the later one in which Milton himself falls as a meteor into Blake's left foot. The continuation of the prophetic line is made possible by the transference of belief. Milton, then, is about the persuasive and transformative power of prophetic language: the Bard's, Milton's, and ultimately that of Blake's own poem.

The "firm persuasion" of Isaiah's prophetic discourse and the inspired action of the character Milton are unusual in Blake's works however; he more often focusses on the failure of prophecy to incite belief. In Milton and Jerusalem, and even more in the brief prophecies of Blake's mid-career, the efficacy of Los, the "Eternal Prophet" (Urizen, E 77), is severely hampered by the division of his spectre and emanation. Deconstructive critics of the last few years have argued that Los's failures allegorize Blake's essentially post-structuralist understanding that the immediacy of prophetic speech is impossible. There is some validity to this. Blake recognizes the limitations of representation; he knows that sincere intention very rarely reaches its destination. But if we read tendentiously for a moment, as all prophets do, we can see that the ending of Jerusalem provides a fairly clear vindication of Los's prophetic work, a recuperation of his failures into a victory. The crux of our reading here is the question of whether Blake resignedly accepts this fact of representation, as post-structuralist readers have assumed, or whether he reacts against it with a vehement sincerity, a firm prophetic persuasion. The question is not strictly decidable, at least not on logical grounds, because both irony and sincerity involve an appeal to the intentions of the writer. Do we

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51 This is Molly-Ann Rothenberg's position in Rethinking Blake's Textuality, where she argues, "For Blake, prophecy is not the unmediated transmission of a "Divine Voice," but rather the art of establishing the prophet as a credible communicator, one who will be believed. . . . He has 'designs' upon his audience. . . . although he may work his wiles for benificent ends. In short, there is nothing 'miraculous' in the prophecies" (24).
believe that Blake is sincere, or do we see hints of irony in his invocations of the prophetic? Certainly it is possible to see irony in them. But of course it is possible to see irony anywhere—or sincerity anywhere either, for that matter. I would argue that in many cases, especially in Jerusalem, Blake sets up his work as a test of right reading to see whether his readers will believe or disbelieve. The challenge for his readers—as for any audience of prophecy—is to make that leap of faith. This does not mean that we should abandon our scepticism and learn to believe in Blake as a true prophet, but rather that we should be aware that he or his texts may at some level expect us to do so.

Stephen Goldsmith voices some concerns about the current academic propensity to read the Bible "as literature," because this kind of reading has an implicitly formalist bias, and it generally involves an underestimation of the disruptive and performative powers of a religious text (90). I would add that reading the Bible as literature can specifically involve a suppression of its powers to incite belief. Reading something "as literature" implies reading with a certain amount of detachment, scepticism, and openness to irony. However, we must at least recognize the possibility that texts—even purportedly literary ones—need not necessarily be read as literature. The canonicity of self-consciously "literary" readings does not necessarily occlude the validity of a reading which approaches the texts as a source of truth. And, just as the Bible need not be read as literature, we should also consider the possibility that Blake's writing need not be read strictly as literature either. This may seem an absurd claim, but at stake here is a sense of Blake's vehement intentionality and the reasons for its existence. While Blake is of course self-consciously an artist, he has a rather different notion of the potential powers of art than most of us have. I would argue that his sense of this performative and transformative power of art is something that goes
beyond the bounds of what we would normally call "literary" language. His poems are not written merely "to instruct and delight," in the Horatian mode. For Blake, it seems that art should instruct, delight, and transform his readers in a very active and literal way. The extra-literary quality of Blake's work is directly related to his generic cross-pollination of poetry and prophecy, which imbues his language with a sense of the prophet's self-assuredness and sincerity.

Blake himself raises the possibility that we should read his work as a kind of bible. Some of his poems, after all, are overtly identified as prophecies, and there are many indications that he is shaping his language on Biblical models. Furthermore, we should remember the oft-quoted section near the end of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, where Blake says "I have also the Bible of Hell: which the world shall have whether they will or no" (E 44). Several critics have speculated that Blake is referring to his other illuminated works as the "Bible of Hell"—a bible based on the active, transformative energies which Blake associates with the infernal. Immediately previous to this statement, Blake's narrator has said, "This Angel, who is now become a Devil, is my particular friend: we often read the Bible together in its infernal or diabolical sense, which the world shall have if they behave well" (E 44). This suggests that there are two different ways to read the Bible: the heavenly hermeneutic, which would use the Bible as the basis of laws and moral pronouncements, ignoring its appeals to belief and changing them into commands to obey; and the infernal hermeneutic, which recognizes the text as a site of transformative energy. The heavenly readers, such as Swedenborg, are analogous to the formalist exegetes whom Goldsmith describes, who focus on the literary qualities of Revelation in order to suppress its violence. In the same way, Blake suggests that there are two
contrary ways to read his own texts: with a detached sense of formalist logic, or with a vital and combative involvement. Neither of these contraries is completely isolatable from the other, but Blake seems to favor the latter approach.

We have seen some of the contrary associations that adhere to two particular aspects of Blake's language: his use of the copular verb and his adoption of the figure of the prophet. While Blake's language manifests an intentionality which is often experienced as an emphatic tone, he also takes a great deal of care to ensure that this emphasis is not a monological claim to a singular authority. In the next chapter, we will examine an aspect of Blake's work which is even more contrary than his usages of the copula and the figure of the prophet. We will see a visual analogue to the state of being verb in Blake's invocations of the line as both a boundary and an intentional trajectory.
Chapter Two

The Sublime of the Line:
Intention and Excess in Blake's Linearism

The line is one of Blake's most common images of human and divine intention. He makes the connection between intentionality and linearity most explicitly in his aesthetic writings such as the Descriptive Catalogue and A Vision of the Last Judgment, where he assures his readers that "not a line is drawn without intention & that most descriminate & particular" (E 560), but he also portrays the line as a metaphorical instrument of intention in his poetry and visual art, where lines appear in contexts that are not only aesthetic but also juridical, scientific, and theological. At first glance, these two kinds of line could be considered to be at opposite ends of the spectrum of intentionality, since the "bounding line" of the theoretical writings is heralded as a direct translation of intention, whereas the Urizenic line of division which often appears in the poetry and art is a perversely distortive medium which seems actually to reverse every intention it is invested with. However, Blake is not so clearly divided in his sympathies regarding these two kinds of line as has generally been supposed.\(^1\) Despite his assertions about the intentional qualities of the bounding line, his aesthetic writings also exhibit a degree of uncertainty about the reliability of lines as transmitters of intention. Furthermore, Blake's portrayals of the line in his poetry and art

\(^1\)There is not, as far as I am aware, any critical treatment which discusses the two above-mentioned varieties of line in conjunction—and this state of affairs is itself a commentary on the perceived differences between them. Critics generally seem to take Blake's doctrine of the bounding line at face value, as a valorization of artistic linearity, and they also generally see the metaphorical lines in his artwork as largely Urizenic.
exhibit a far more complex attitude toward linearity than one might expect if one looked only at the examples of Urizen and Newton, as the commentators on his lines have tended to do. In fact, his images of the line are subject to the same kind of contrariety that haunts his other metaphors of intention and representation.

It seems indeed that Blake focusses on the line because lines embody the kind of equivocality that he wants to cultivate in his contrary art. A line may be considered a symbol of division, but it can also be understood as a vector of unification. A line can divide a space, but it can also connect two points. Whether we choose one of these possibilities or the other depends finally upon our sense of the intentionality of the particular line in question. One of the great complexities of Blake's art is his ability to problematize the difference between these two kinds of line, so that his reader is rarely able to settle upon a stable interpretation of their intentions. In this chapter I will try to highlight the contrariety of Blake's lines by showing how these opposing kinds of linearity—the divisive and the unifying, the differential and the identificatory—implicate each other. We will begin with an investigation of the place of lines in Blake's theory of art and in theoretical writing generally. The second section of the chapter will be devoted to Blake's artistic practice of linearism, both in its chalcographic and its metaphorical dimensions. The third section will examine the linearity of the sublime in Blake's composite artwork, the Laocoön.

I. Theory of Lines

In the Descriptive Catalogue, Blake sets out his doctrine of linearity in the tone of an aesthetic categorical imperative, revising the Golden Rule into
an artistic credo of the bounding line. I quote this famous passage at length because it will occupy us for much of this section:

The great and golden rule of art, as well as of life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wiry the bounding line, the more perfect the work of art; and the less keen and sharp, the greater is the evidence of weak imitation, plagiarism, and bungling. Great inventors, in all ages, knew this: Protogenes and Apelles knew each other by this line. Rafael and Michael Angelo, and Albert Durer, are known by this and this alone. The want of determinate and bounding form evidences the want of idea in the artist's mind, and the pretence of plagiarism in all its branches. How do we distinguish the oak from the beech, the horse from the ox, but by the bounding outline? How do we distinguish one face or countenance from another, but by the bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements? What is it that builds a house and plants a garden, but the definite and determinate? What is it that distinguishes honesty from knavery, but the hard and wiry line of rectitude and certainty in the actions and intentions. Leave out this line and you leave out life itself; all is chaos again, and the line of the almighty must be drawn out upon it before man or beast can exist. (E 550)

One of the most remarkable things about this statement is the imperious, almost bardic tone in which it is delivered. Blake's pronouncements on the primacy of the line and the inadequacy of "that infernal machine, called Chiaro Oscuro" (E 547) are framed in terms that express his absolute certitude about the differences between the reprobate and the redeemed forms of artistic practise. Art that is based on linear principles is judged to be
inherently superior to art which relies on the more impressionistic effect of "blots and blurs" (Public Address, E 575). The absolutism and extremeness of Blake's judgments here are typical of his inflexible sentiments on many issues that he holds dear. Critics have gone a good distance toward contextualizing these bombastic opinions about the bounding line in terms of the debates between the painterly school and the revival of linearism at the end of the eighteenth century, but such contextualization does not fully explain the vehemence which Blake brings to this issue. It is true that his opinions on the value of linear art are related to his own status as an outsider in an artistic community and marketplace which was dominated by the painterly aesthetic. However, I believe there is also another reason for his use of strident language in his description of the bounding line. The bardic certitude in his aesthetic writings carries with it an implicit understanding that art itself should be vehement, or should at least be capable of vehemence. To him, the line is the most powerful transmitter of artistic intention, and this is what makes linear art superior to art which relies on colour or chiaroscuro for its effect. In the Descriptive Catalogue, he characterizes linear art as strong and painterly art as weak, and these terms can be taken as indicators of his sense of the relative level of performativity that each type of art can attain. Clearly, he values the kind of art that is more capable of impressing itself upon the viewer, and more capable of transmitting intention. In a sense, then, the bardic intentionality and the almost arrogant certitude of his language in his theoretical descriptions of the bounding line are verbal equivalents of the bounding line.

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2 See for example Morris Eaves' William Blake's Theory of Art and The Counter-Arts Conspiracy; see also John Barrell's The Political Theory of Painting From Reynolds to Hazlitt.
The line's inevitable contrariety is, however, a complicating factor in Blake's sense of its intentional value. In choosing the line as the favoured vehicle of artistic intention, he seems to be aware of its propensity to reverse or restrict intention as well as to transmit it. Even his adoption of the term "bounding" seems to be implicated in some restrictive connotations, as Paul Mann has noted (80). In much of Blake's work, the adjective "bounding" and its cognates are associated with imprisonment or constriction—images which would seem to be antithetical to the expressive qualities that he attributes to the line in the Descriptive Catalogue. Mann goes so far as to suggest that "bounding is binding" (80), and he draws upon the negative imagery associated with bookbinding in Blake's other work to deconstruct the intentional qualities of the bounding line which Blake seems to be praising in the Descriptive Catalogue. This different perspective on the bounding line is important because it reveals the contrary aspects of the line as a vehicle of intention, showing the line to be a constrictive force rather than a means of free expression. However, Mann's equation of bounding with binding does not fully account for the line's equivocal function in Blake's aesthetics. Lines may have a "binding" effect on the things they enclose, but they also have an active, intentional, almost verb-like motility. They "bound" as an animal or a person might, carrying intentions from the artist toward the viewer. In this verbal sense of the word "bounding," the line is an action rather than a means of containment. If Blake had called his lines "binding lines" in accordance with Mann's reading, they would have had more completely Urizenic implications, but as they are, they embody the possibility of both constriction and freedom. His choice of the word "bounding" suggests that he is aware of—

3For example, "Bound and weary I thought best / To suilk upon my mother's breast" ("Infant Sorrow," E 28).
and is perhaps even cultivating—a certain doubleness in the line's intentional possibilities.

Blake's own intentions for the line would seem to be equally ambivalent, since he expounds a doctrine of intense and almost paranoiac clarificationism in the long passage quoted above, yet he is also generally interested in excess and in the bold artistic style which he adopted from Fuseli. He almost paradoxically couples this penchant for particularization with the emphatic intentionality which we noted above. Francois Piquet describes this unusual combination as "l'exubérance maximale et le plus grand degré de précision" (30), and this statement encapsulates the double nature of Blake's intention here: precise exuberance. By focussing on the boundaries, Blake seeks not to bind his figures down, but to liberate them by clarifying his own artistic intentions. These intentions need not—and indeed probably cannot—be singular and monological ideas, because they are subject to the vagaries of contrariety. But for Blake, they can only be successfully transmitted to the viewer through the sharply drawn bounding line. This line, then, takes on the status of an artistic tool: it is the means by which intentions can be communicated.

As we saw in the first chapter, there is evidence to suggest that one of Blake's intentions in his poems and artworks is to exceed the normally accepted limits of artistic performativity, to create works of art which are more emphatic and more urgently sincere than art is generally considered to be. This intention is exemplified by his use of the figure of the prophet, and

\[4\] This insistence on the clarity of the bounding line is also at odds with certain examples of Blake's own artistic practice, particularly in the gloriously indistinct colour prints of the mid-1790's. We will return to this issue in the next section of this chapter.

\[5\] A more complete translation of this passage is "the maximum exuberance and the highest degree of precision".
by his adoption of the bardic voice in his poems as well as in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, where Blake chooses the bounding line as the medium by which he can accomplish such persuasion in visual art. The form of emphasis with which Blake invests the bounding line could be described in terms of the sublime, which Blake identified with the bardic style in writers such as Ossian. But his emphasis on the particularity of the bounding line is not consonant with many descriptions of sublimity (including those of Kant and Burke), which portray the sublime as a shattering of representational limits—in effect, a breaking of boundaries. Instead, Blake's linearism can be described in terms of an altogether different approach to sublimity, which V. A. de Luca labels the "iconic sublime" (*Words of Eternity* 80-102). The iconic sublime is attained not by breaking the bounds of representation, but by asserting them with uncommon emphasis, so that they stand out preternaturally from their ground. In this kind of sublimity, the power to generate an emphatic supplement depends upon maintaining the absolute clarity of the expressive medium. Therefore, unlike the wildly non-linear and highly coloristic sublimity of artists like Salvator Rosa and J.M.W. Turner, Blake produces a theory of art that emphasizes the expressive capacities of a sublime that is based on sharpness, clarity, and distinctness. It should be noted, however, that the intention that lies behind such regularity in the bounding line remains a transgressive one: that of impressing his vision with great force upon the mind of his viewer. Instead of making pictures of natural objects which were considered sublime—which would be to approach the sublime at a second remove, through the mimetic faculty—Blake tries to produce the sublime firsthand, through the agency of the line.

In addition to being a means of attaining sublime expressiveness, the line for Blake is a kind of artistic signature: it is how artists can recognize
each other's work. Blake's prime example of such investment of artistic identity in the line is the story of Apelles and Protogenes, in which the two artists introduce themselves to each other by the means of their lines. It is worth noting that the lines of Apelles and Protogenes are not described as portraying any particular intention or even representing anything other than themselves. These lines come very close to Blake's designation of the properties of the line in a letter to George Cumberland: "It is Itself" (E 783). As such, these lines are almost pure extensions of the artists' identities rather than mimetic tools. They are expressive of something besides the artist's message or moral. They are tracks, traces of the artist's self rather than simply vehicles of his or her intended meaning.

Blake also sees the line as a principle of differentiation. He insists that in order to "distinguish" (E550) the oak from the beech, or one face from another, we must rely on the bounding line. At this point he moves from art to life as he had earlier implied he would do: he suggests that everything in life as well as in art has its own identifying bounding line, and that these lines can be used by observers to make distinguishing judgments. Thus, it is not only in paintings that the line can be a marker of identity and difference. Trees, animals, and people also exude this bounding line, which is essentially the means by which we tell them apart. In the case of humans, Blake asks, "How do we distinguish one face or countenance from another, but by the bounding line and its infinite inflexions and movements?" (E 550). Here he links the bounding line with notions of inherent personal identity that were current in

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6 This meeting is recorded in Pliny the Younger's *Natural History*. The three lines the men produced were reportedly hung as an artwork and were universally admired as an example of artistic expression. The work was however lost during a fire in late antiquity, and the exact relationship of these three lines (for example, whether they were beside each other, on top of each other, or intersecting) has since been the subject of some speculation.
physiognomical discourse of the late eighteenth-century. Physiognomists such as Johann Caspar Lavater and John Varley argued that the character of a person was literally written on his or her face. Blake, who seems to have taken physiognomy seriously,7 and who contributed line-engravings for both Lavater's Physiognomy and Varley's Zodiacal Physiognomy, seems to be conflating line with lineaments when he insists that faces can be distinguished by their individual bounding lines. It is a principle of physiognomy that a person's facial lineaments reveal his or her inner character in a way that cannot be disguised. Thus, particular physical features are judged to be the signs of certain moral attributes. Blake suggests that the bounding line has a similar function when he says that it "distinguishes honesty from knavery" (E 550). To the physiognomist, the face is a natural sign, a surface on which the interior state of the person is indelibly written. In this context, Blake's bounding line seems also to be a natural sign, something that all people exude automatically, and which can reveal these people's interior identities to anyone skilled in reading the bounding line.

In the Descriptive Catalogue, Blake explicitly connects the bounding line with his notion of the "lineaments" when he describes his "chief objects in painting these Pictures" as "Clear colours unmuddied by oil, and firm and determinate lineaments unbroken by shadows" (E 530). He also writes "where there are no lineaments there can be no character" (E 540). Clearly, for Blake "lineaments" are a manifestation of the bounding line, as the internal pun

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7His "Visionary Heads," for example, seem to be executed with Lavater's physiognomical principles in mind. Certainly, Blake was fascinated by physiognomy, but it is difficult to gauge his level of seriousness about it in his physiognomical observation on Christ's nose: "I always thought that Jesus Christ was a Snubby or I should not have worship'd him, if I had thought he had been one of those long spindle nosed rascals" (E 695).
indicates. Lineaments are seen to be constitutive of character, as in the doctrines of physiognomy—but as we have seen, Blake imports his own theories of linearity into this physiognomical idea, making lines the most important means by which we distinguish between different physiognomies. Blake makes the most obvious link between physiognomy and lineaments in his description of the Canterbury Tales design, when he uses these two words almost interchangeably. He says that Chaucer's "characters themselves for ever remain unaltered, and consequently they are the physiognomies or lineaments of universal human life, beyond which nature never steps" (E 532; my emphasis).

This idea of the line as a mark of artistic and personal identity is examined by Morris Eaves in the only full-length treatment of Blake's artistic theory to date, William Blake's Theory of Art. Eaves' book is largely an attempted elucidation of Blake's theories, which is to say that his aim is more explanatory than critical. He takes pains to defend some of Blake's more bombastic statements in the Descriptive Catalogue and A Vision of the Last Judgment, and he assumes that Blake's theories are not only internally coherent but also applicable to his work—assumptions that are not always shared by readers of Blake. This approach does have its benefits. Through an admirable contextualization of Blake's place in various aesthetic debates, Eaves often succeeds in making the artist's arguments seem less hypersensitive and arbitrary than they might otherwise be considered. However, as Eaves does this, he sometimes elides the contradictions that are characteristic of Blake's theoretical writings. Furthermore, in his consideration of the bounding line, Eaves somewhat overextends the implications of Blake's theory. He goes beyond a notion of the line as a double-edged transmitter of intention, and instead posits an achieved state of unity in the line. For him, the artist's
identity is equated with the line. This might seem a reasonable conclusion to make from Blake's invocation of the Apelles and Protogenes story, but Eaves goes somewhat further than Blake when he says that "lines appear not only as geometric entities but also as the true self of the artist" (40). In this reading, the artist becomes the line in a rather literal way. One can see how Eaves arrives at this position, but his reading neglects the possibility that the artist might be at least partly separate from his or her lines--that the line may embody difference as well as identity. Eaves writes, "At the center of the associations animated by Blake's linearism is the metaphor line=human being" (40). While he qualifies this as a metaphor, his use of the equation suggests that it is closer to being an identity statement, and one which leaves little room for any divisiveness in the human being who is equated with the line. That is, Eaves sees the line as an apotheosis of artistic identity: in it, the artist becomes whole through a linear identification which does not admit of the possibility that the line could contain hints of self-difference. In other words, he sees the line as a tool for the artist's attempts at self-mastery and absolute self-definition: a means of completely sealing and defining the artist's identity, and at the same time consolidating that identity into a form of action. Eaves comments that the line for Blake "is the ultimate artistic act, an act with overtones of seeking the truth and making final judgments" (22). Though Eaves professes no connection to speech-act theory, he seems to be positing the same kind of unified, self-present subject that speech-act theorists sometimes assume. In these terms, the bounding line might be considered a line-act, a visual embodiment of the artist's intentions.

Eaves' interpretation is indeed one possible reading of the bounding line: as an almost geometrical ideal, a site of unity, potency, and absolute agency. However, there is an alternate possibility, which Molly Ann
Rothenberg explores in *Rethinking Blake's Textuality*, where she takes a much more differential view of subjectivity than Eaves does. She introduces a clever and apposite reading of Blake's doctrine of the bounding line which severely undercuts the unification of artistic intention that Eaves assumes. She focusses on Blake's statement, "Leave out this [i]ne and you leave out life itself"--a sentence which likely contributed to Eaves' equation of the line with the human being. Rothenberg argues that

The omission of the i in "Leave out this [i]ne" recapitulates in its form what the phrase asserts: that the I/eye--the material, historical, individual point from which one views--is constitutive of the order of the world and therefore the equivalent of the (lower-case) "almighty" (46).

She focusses on what seems like an innocuous typographical error, and thereby overturns any temptation we may feel to identify the author with the line--or to accord to either of them the status of an indivisible entity. It becomes impossible to ignore the significance of this typographical error once it has been pointed out, impossible to maintain a sense of certainty that Blake is espousing the kind of unequivocal linearism that Eaves describes. It is extraordinarily strange that Blake should make an error of this sort in a paragraph which praises the "definite and determinate," and at the very moment in which he is cautioning us against leaving out the line. Appropriately enough, the graphical form of the "i" consists, at its most basic, of a single line. The absent "i" is thus in a sense the absent line. Yet it also

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8Rothenberg does not mention Eaves' study in the context of the bounding line, but their approaches to it are symptomatic of the larger theoretical differences between them: Rothenberg is influenced by post-structuralism, whereas Eaves is not.

9Blake also insists in *The Vision of the Last Judgment* that "poetry admits not a letter that is insignificant" (E 560), which is another reason that the absence of a letter should be considered significant.
remains oddly present within the word, which is still recognizable despite the missing letter. In the context of the *Descriptive Catalogue*, a reader could easily fill in the missing letter of Blake's non-word "lne" and make it into the "l[i]ne" that David Erdman provides us with. So this sentence at least partially disproves itself: in the act of asserting that leaving out the line will leave out life itself, Blake actually reveals that he can leave out part of the very word "line," and its meaning will remain intact. At the site of this apparent typographical error, Blake's sentence attains an equivocality which is paradigmatic of the contrariety of his poetry and art.10

The question of intention in any reading of Blake can be characterized in the terms that Eaves and Rothenberg bring to the bounding line: is the "I" in the line, or out of it? Eaves asserts the equivalence between artist and line, placing the "I" of the artist, and sometimes also that of the viewer, directly inside the line. Rothenberg takes a more equivocal and somewhat more sceptical position. She recognizes the intentionality designated by the bounding line, but she also argues that the line is a perpetually unstable, and even reversible, site of agency. She says that "for Blake all particularity is *produced*, mediated by 'actions and intentions.' The bounding lines are both the manifestation and the cause of those 'intentions'" (47). In this reading, the line attains a radical reversibility, because it is seen simultaneously as the

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10 I have been operating under the assumption that Blake's use of the non-word "lne" was indeed an error—that he *intended* to write the word "line," but made a mistake that unconsciously subverted the meaning of his sentence. However, it is equally possible that Blake wrote "lne" as a simple abbreviation, or indeed with conscious knowledge that it would reverse and complicate the meanings of his sentence. There is a further complicating factor in the *Descriptive Catalogue*, because it is, as David Erdman says, "the only work Blake actually published in printed form (if it is true that *Poetical Sketches* was printed for him by friends and never sold)" (E 881). The fact that this text was "Printed by D. N. Shury" (E 529) instead of by Blake means that the misspelling of "line" might not be attributable to the author at all. The printer, as an intermediary, introduces a further degree of uncertainty about the intentionality of this minute particular.
result of the artist's intentions and the cause of them. Rothenberg suspends herself between an Eavesian "line-act" view of subjectivity, in which lines are manifestations of the artist's intention, and a constructivist conception of the subject, in which the line is that which defines and circumscribes the subject and endows it with the illusion of agency. On the one hand, the subject constructs the line; on the other hand, the line constructs the subject. Between these two possibilities, the question of the line's relation to human agency becomes undecidable. By characterizing the line as "both the manifestation and the cause" of intention, Rothenberg highlights the contrariety that can be seen to inhabit the bounding line.

These two divergent views of Blake's bounding line suggest that we can see in the line what we want to see, depending on the interpretive strategies we bring to it. In a sense, the line is a Rorschach test of our theoretical predispositions. It becomes a locus of divisiveness or a consolidation of unity depending on how we choose to interpret it. Edward Larissy characterizes this intentional fluctuation of the bounding line in his description of two contrary ways of understanding its differential function:

[I]f one accepts that this line of division is the ubiquitous condition of the fallen world, then it can be taken as a metaphor for all the outlines of that world, and all the differences which constitute it: for difference, in fact: indeed, for différence. But one of the chief differences that has to be conveyed by Blake's work is simply that between those who see in this hymeneal line the seeds of hope, and those who do not. The former are capable, so to speak, of expelling the line from centre to circumference, under the pressure of their own vision and energy; the latter are imposed upon by it in their very hearts (70).
In this conception, the line presents a kind of ontological test for the viewer, one which can have important consequences for his or her subjectivity and agency. We either master the line or we are mastered by it, and the outcome of this interpretive struggle in a sense separates the hermeneutical sheep from the goats. Larissy goes so far as to suggest that these are really two different kinds of line: a redemptive, externalized outline—the bounding line—which preserves the form of the object, and a "line of internal division" (70) which is the mark of post-lapsarian divided subjectivity, and which can therefore be regarded as a curse. However, it seems to me that the line of division and the line of boundary are not so easily distinguished as Larissy suggests. His attempt to define one type of line as redeemed and another as reprobate is an oversimplification which is borne of the desire to stabilize the intentional features of the line. He is right to recognize that the line performs both divisive and identificatory functions in Blake's theory, but he tries to separate these functions into two different lines that represent reified moral categories.

Outline and internal line are not in fact as different as Larissy assumes. A line which joins itself at some point, thereby creating a distinct shape that is separated from a ground, is subject to the same kinds of vicissitudes as an internal line which divides mind from body or consciousness from the unconscious. Outline merely expresses a particular binary—inside/outside—

11Larissy describes this line of internal division with reference to some of Blake's Job designs, citing a division between Job's upper and lower body as a mark of his affliction, and furthermore as a suggestion that his true curse is self-dividedness, that he has allowed the line to impose upon him. Unfortunately, however, Larissy's references are not as specific as one would like, and the divisive line that he describes is not particularly noticeable in Job. Furthermore, Job's external outline or bounding line is maintained throughout the engraving series, which would by Larissy's logic indicate redemption. This suggests that Larissy's reading of the line is more useful in relation to Blake's theory than his practice.
and this binary is just as susceptible to deconstructive scepticism as any line which divides the self from itself. Blake seems to have a more complex vision of outline than Larissy allows, for example when he writes in *Jerusalem*, "There is an Outside spread without, and an Outside spread within, / Beyond the Outline of Identity both ways, which meet in One" (E 162). This seems to be a recognition that the outline of identity remains ambiguous in its function, since it designates two different "outsides" which are, simply, outside of the line itself: they are whatever the line is not. In this passage, the "One" might well be the Outline itself, which functions as an agent of differentiation only when it is *identified* as a single unified line. Whether a line turns back on itself to form an enclosed shape or not, it still involves the contrary trajectories of unification and division. Larissy is correct to designate two alternate ways of reading Blake's lines, but both internalized and externalized lines remain destabilized by this equivocality. The viewing subject, like the artist, has to struggle with all lines not to externalize them, but to see in them the possibility of redemption rather than only the divisive traces of the fall. In Blake's theory, all lines are marked by this dual heritage—and, as we will see in the following section, this doubleness is not a merely theoretical construct for Blake. This is one case in which his ambiguous theory is fully realized in his artworks.

II. The Line in Practice

Blake's emphasis on linearism in the *Descriptive Catalogue* is representative of his focus on the line throughout his artistic career, from his earliest engravings to his great unfinished illustrations to Dante's *Divine Comedy*. One reason that he espouses such virulent linearism in the
Descriptive Catalogue is that he was trained as a line-engraver during his apprenticeship, and he absorbed very early a sense of the expressive possibilities of the line. As is evident from the engravings that Blake executed during his apprenticeship, his master James Basire taught him a mode of representation that was resolutely linear and was relatively free of "finishing"--that is, the use of a burnishing tool to add shades of light and dark between the engraved lines. Blake used more burnishing later in his career in order to lend three-dimensional shape to his figures, but generally when he did intaglio engravings, he remained faithful to the method of line-engraving that Basire had taught him. This was not a commercially astute practise, because fashions in engraving changed dramatically over Blake's lifetime, and the tradition of line-engraving came to be supplanted by more refined processes such as mezzotint, stipple, and aquatint. These new processes, as their names imply, were not based on lines: they produced their effects through dots or chemical washes, which created various textures on the copperplate. While Blake knew how to use these methods and sometimes used them in his commercial engravings, his more imaginative work is not generally executed in these media. In fact, as fashion dictated a move away from linearism, he often went against the tide and increased the boldness of his lines.

This is not to say that Blake was entirely a conservative or a traditionalist in his views of engraving, however. He adopted several of his own methods of engraving, which he used to create his illuminated books and

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12 He learned how to do non-linear forms of engraving as well, but it seems clear from the work he did as an apprentice that he was taught to value line-engraving as the pinnacle of the engraver's art.

13 For an extended look at this shift in the history of engraving and Blake's relation to it, see Morris Eaves' The Counter-Arts Conspiracy.
some of his separate prints. Nevertheless, these experimental engravings often appear even less refined than Blake's more traditional line engravings, and not surprisingly they were commercially unsuccessful in an age that increasingly valued finish. For example, Blake's 1805 etching Death's Door (Fig. 1) is strikingly original in its use of white lines on a heavily-inked black background, but it is also as far from being a fashionable Bartolozzi stipple engraving as one could imagine. Robert Cromek, who had commissioned Blake to invent and engrave this design for an edition of Robert Blair's The Grave, was understandably concerned that this style of engraving would hurt the sales of the book, so he hired Louis Schiavonetti to engrave a more refined version of Blake's drawing (Fig. 2)—much to Blake's disgust. The difference between the two renditions of this drawing could hardly be more pronounced. The levels of contrast, the preponderance of darkness and light, and even the perspectival depth of these designs differ radically. Furthermore, while Schiavonetti's version has better clarity and resolution than Blake's, many of its lines are in fact not lines at all—they are composed of discrete dots. The knowledge that Schiavonetti had translated his lines into dots would have infuriated Blake. This perceived aesthetic insult is probably the reason that Blake nicknamed his rival "Assassinetti" in one of his notebook poems ("And his legs carried it...," E 504).

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14 Blake's process of illuminated printing is a combination of several innovations that he made or that he adapted from his contemporaries, particularly from George Cumberland (for information on Cumberland's "new mode of printing," see his letters reprinted in The Visionary Hand, ed. Essick, 11-14). These methods are described in detail in Joseph Viscomi's Blake and the Idea of the Book, parts II and III (47-149).

15 As Morris Eaves notes in his discussion of these two designs (Counter-Arts 262-63), stipple engravings such as Schiavonetti's were often touched up with an engraving tool to make some of the lines sharper—in effect, to add some linearity to the image. Eaves does not address the theoretical implications for Blake of the fact that Schiavonetti's image largely abandons the linear style.
Despite his commitment to linearism in both theory and practice, the lines of Blake's engravings are not always entirely positive in their associations. In "Head of a Damned Soul in Dante's Inferno" (Fig. 3), for example, the extraordinarily pronounced lines that compose the subject's face might be seen as either an assertion of the line's representational supremacy, or as an indication of the character's damnation, his entanglement in a net of sinfulness and suffering. Blake calls attention to the lines of the design by the use of bold strokes and vigorous cross-hatching, but one cannot be certain of the intentional trajectories of these lines. They might be seen to invoke a kind of primitivist transgressive energy, or else to form a web of constriction that binds the damned soul into his agonizing torment. At the top and down the left side of the image, the array of wavering lines that seem to radiate outward from the subject's face might indicate fiery energy; certainly they impart an impression of movement to the design. On the other hand, the lines that make up the face are more evenly spaced, and they do not have the same degree of movement. They could be described as netlike. This is not to say, however, that there are two completely different kinds of line in Head of a Damned Soul. Close observation of the plate will reveal that many of the radiating lines are actually connected to the ones that form the subject's face.

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16 This is a reproductive engraving of a drawing by Henry Fuseli. The original drawing has not survived, so it is difficult to gauge how much of the engraving's design can be attributed to Blake. It seems likely that Blake increased the linearity of the image when he engraved it, since the control of line width and density that he exhibits here would have been difficult to achieve with a pencil. Certainly, Fuseli's extant drawings indicate that he was not in the habit of executing them with the kind of clarity and particularity that we see in this engraving.

17 It is worth noting that in some of Blake's work the image of netting seems to indicate imprisonment. See for example the final plate of The Book of Urizen (pl. 26; p. 113 of The Urizen Books), where Urizen is shown to be entangled in a net. This image is also prominent in some of the Night Thoughts designs.

18 Blake uses similar lines emanating from a character's head to indicate a vigorous rebirth in his portrayals of Albion Rose (especially the intaglio version) and Milton putting aside his garment (Milton pl. 28).
and his hair is also an intermediate zone which contains both properties of linearity. Blake's point would seem to be not that some lines are energetic and others are constrictive, but rather that all lines have the potential to partake of these contrarious functions.

Somewhat surprisingly, it is in Blake's non-linear media--his paintings and colour prints--that he undertakes his most interesting visual allegories of the line. Colour printing is a process that Blake invented which involved painting directly onto his copperplates with thick coloured ink and then transferring the painted designs onto paper.\textsuperscript{19} He was usually able to make at least two copies of each colour print if sufficient ink was applied to the plate. There is evidence to suggest that in some cases he painted on unengraved plates to create a planographic transfer, but in other cases, such as the \textit{Albion Rose} colour print, he applied the coloured ink onto a plate engraved with a design of a similar scene. In essence, Blake's method of colour printing was a combination of painting and printmaking. One of the interesting visual effects of this method is that the printed images have an unusual reticulated appearance; indeed, the ink sometimes seems to project noticeably from the paper.\textsuperscript{20} Another perhaps incidental effect of this process, though one that is crucial to our present investigation, is that it is impossible for Blake to represent continuous lines effectively in the process of colour printing. The pressure of the paper and plate on the thick ink inevitably causes the blurring of lines and the intermixture of colours. In some cases Blake left his colour prints in this blurred yet undeniably attractive state, but in other cases he cleaned up the prints considerably by overpainting with watercolour or

\textsuperscript{19}For a detailed description of the process of colour printing, see Viscomi 119-128.
\textsuperscript{20}This effect is particularly apparent in the first "pulls" of the separate plate designs, and in all copies of \textit{The Song of Los} and Copy D of \textit{The Book of Urizen}. 
with ink. For example, he does this in the *Nebuchadnezzar* design to such an extent that it looks more like a painting than a colour print. In the effort to clarify the image, and perhaps to emphasize the bounding line that surrounds the figure of Nebuchadnezzar, Blake in effect repaints it entirely.\(^{21}\)

One of the most famous of the colour prints of 1795, the *Newton* design (Fig. 4), can be seen as an allegory of linearity and intention.\(^{22}\) Blake gestures toward this possibility by creating a careful balance between the clear bounding line of Newton's body and the rampantly unarticulated background that could be achieved through colour printing. The figure of Newton has been repainted with the utmost clarity, emphasizing his boundedness, while the background has been left in its undifferentiated state. Blake's print thus becomes a commentary on these two contrary modes of existence: the highly formal and the chaotic. Newton uses a compass to measure a line which is also the base of a triangle and the intersection of an arc. He is engaged in the process of clarification, marking his clean lines on an immaculately clean piece of paper, which is the only surface in the entire print that is not crowded with undifferentiated shapes or enclosed in darkness. Many critics have noted the Urizenic associations of the compass that Newton holds in his left hand, but what he does with his other hand is at least as important: he reaches down to place his index finger upon the straight line,

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\(^{21}\)After some fairly extensive experimentation with colour-printing in the mid-1790's, Blake abandoned the process—possibly because it involved so much post-printing touch-up work that he decided it would be easier to simply paint the designs onto the paper in the first place.

\(^{22}\)This design has been the subject of many commentaries, most notably by Ault (*Visionary Physics* 2-4) and Butlin (*The Paintings and Drawings of William Blake* 166-168). The standard critical position in recent years emphasizes the negative aspects of Newton's practise. A somewhat more ambivalent reading of the design is advanced by W.J.T. Mitchell ("Chaosthetics" 455-458), who sees it as "a scene of the mutual production and consumption of chaos and form" (457). My own reading in the following paragraphs is indebted to Mitchell's arguments, though his article does not examine the issue of linearity in any detail.
in order to make his body an extension of it: to identify himself with this line.\textsuperscript{23}

But Newton's attempt to assume the identity of the line can be accomplished only by ignoring or repressing the complexity of the chaotic shapes around him. He is not entirely successful at this, because he is unable to enter completely the pristine space of the paper; most of his body remains outside of it. Blake depicts Newton poised halfway between the rarefied abstraction of geometric lines and the chaotic fact of materiality. As he concentrates on the line, his buttocks are in contact with the non-linear encrustations of the promontory behind him. It is possible that Newton has in fact \textit{created} this mass of detritus, just as he has apparently inscribed the lines on the page. W.J.T. Mitchell suggests that the chaotic matter behind Newton is actually "a gorgeous mound of excrement that he himself has produced" ("Chaosthetics" 457)\textsuperscript{24}. Whether this is literally the case or not, it seems likely that Newton is not simply ignoring the chaos around him, but that he is actually increasing and perpetuating its growth when he insists on identifying himself with its opposite. The line in a sense effects a reversal of his intention. He points with his finger as he tries to invest the line with his desire for purity and abstraction, but as he does so, a contrary effect occurs at the other end of his anatomy. This process of reversal could be considered an ironic Blakean version of Newton's third law of motion: "To every action there is always an opposed and equal reaction: or the mutual actions of two bodies

\textsuperscript{23}Ault comments, "As the compass becomes an extension of the figure's hand, so the drawing becomes an extension or projection of the figure's whole body onto a two-dimensional surface" (\textit{Visionary Physics} 2).

\textsuperscript{24}Mitchell's reading of the design is less outrageous than this quotation may indicate. He acknowledges the likelihood that the material Newton is seated upon is a coral reef (which is the conventional reading of the scene), but he also cites Rees's report in the \textit{Cyclopaedia} that coral was in fact a buildup of the excrement of the coral animal ("Chaosthetics" 457).
upon each other are always equal, and directed to contrary parts" (*Principia* 19). The contrariety that is endemic in Blake's art indeed suggests a metaphorical corollary to Newton's law, an imperative that every imaginative action creates an equal and opposite reaction. But Blake turns Newton's law back upon itself, and criticizes Newton's rationalism by pointing out that abstraction has its returns in chaotic materiality.

Another of Blake's colour prints from the same year is also involved with the problem of the line's intentionality. *God Judging Adam* (Fig. 5) has not been read in terms of Blake's linearism, but I think a convincing case can be made that it is a counterpart to the *Newton* design in this respect. This print contains fewer chaotic reticulated shapes than *Newton*; it has been at least partially repainted in each of the three extant copies, although parts of it do retain some of the characteristic non-linear formlessness of colour printing, especially in the first pull of the print. Probably the most striking formal feature of this design is the absolutely straight line which extends from God's right hand to the top of Adam's head. This seems to be the line of judgment, the instrument through which God expresses his stern appraisal of Adam's failure. It issues from God's hand like a weapon—perhaps like one of Zeus's thunderbolts. This line is not only an extension of the deity's

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25 *God Judging Adam* has received much less critical attention than *Newton*. Noteworthy comments on the design can be found in Butlin (*Blake as an Artist* 98-9), Mellor (*Blake's Human Form Divine* 153-55), and Heppner (*Reading Blake's Designs* 140-146) though none of the critics discuss the "line" of God's judgment which is discussed below. Heppner (139) argues convincingly that what has been considered to be an earlier version of this design, executed in pen and watercolour, is in fact not *God Judging Adam* at all, but rather *God Appearing to Moses*. My analysis does not apply to this early watercolour, which differs in several important ways from the colour print.

26 The Metropolitan Museum Copy (Butlin plate #385) is the first pull, according to Butlin. It and the Tate Gallery copy (Butlin plate #390) have much more of colour printing's typical reticulated texture and blurred outline than we see in the heavily overpainted Philadelphia Museum copy (Butlin plate #386) which I have reproduced. I chose the latter copy only because its increased clarity makes it more suitable for reproduction.
body, but also a visualization of the action he is undertaking: an iconic representation of the performativity of God's judgment. In Blake's pictorial vocabulary here, the line takes the place of the curse that God utters before he expels Adam and Eve from the garden:

cursed is the ground for thy sake; in sorrow shalt thou eat of it all the days of your life....In the sweat of thy face shalt thou eat bread, till thou return unto the ground; for out of it thou wast taken. . . . " (Gen. 3:17-19)

In this context, the line is quite literally a line-act, since it links God's imperious gesture to Adam's meekly bowed head.

There are several hints that this God is not the "mild judge and intercessor both" whom Milton describes in Paradise Lost (X, 96), but rather a sternly rationalistic and vengeful God who does not mingle forgiveness with his judgment. Commentators have noted God's Urizenic features here, which suggest associations with the famous Ancient of Days colour print, in which the creation is portrayed as an exercise in rationalistic solipsism. In God Judging Adam, one sign of God's rationalism is the line itself, which points toward the top of Adam's skull, but also seems to continue up God's outstretched arm to his own head. Thus, the line connects these two figures at the seat of the intellect. It also draws attention to the uncanny physical similarity between their faces, which some viewers have remarked upon, since Adam is not generally represented as an old man. It seems that God's act of judgment has turned Adam into a mirror image of God himself. Judging involves an application of a law, and the suggestion here is that God applies

\[27\] Blake portrays performative or kerygmatic gestures such as this in several of his artworks, as Robert N. Essick details in his readings of Christ Blessing, Adam Naming the Beasts, and other works (William Blake and the Language of Adam 6-27).

\[28\] Butlin notes their similarity in William Blake 60.
his own law to Adam to such an extent that he in effect transforms Adam into a copy of himself. This is similar to Urizen's obsession with forcing his own law upon others in *The Book of Urizen*.

If we trace the extension of the line in the other direction, we see that it continues behind Adam's head and shoulders to eventually connect with the bridle of the nearest horse. This line, then, performs another function in addition to the transmission of God's judgment toward Adam: it is also the rein or reins by which God controls his flaming horses. Thus it is an instrument of containment, used to master the energy of the horses and to overcome their independent wills—to submit these brute animals to the dominance of reason. God seems to be using the line to do something similar to Adam—attempting to harness his will. It is significant that God is also successful at containing his own energy: he dwells in fire, but this fire is strictly circumscribed by an arc.

This part of the image can be understood in the context of one of the diabolical principles of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Energy is the only life and is from the Body and Reason is the bound or outward circumference of Energy" (E34). God's reason provides the "bound" of his own energy as well as that of the horses, and in both cases this boundedness is represented in terms

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29Heppner (*Reading Blake's Designs* 140) questions whether this really is the same line, since the line behind Adam's back is a darker colour, especially in the Tate Gallery and Metropolitan Museum copies. He comments that "the recurring partial collapse of perspective makes it difficult to relate bodies accurately, and therefore to understand precisely their intentionality towards each other" (140). I would argue that in this case the flattened perspective is deliberately constructed so that the line of God's judgment (or the sceptre, as Mellor (155) calls it) is not readily distinguishable from the reins.

30The *Oxford English Dictionary* notes that the first published usage of the word "line" to mean "reins" did not occur until 1852, so this image is probably not the kind of visual pun that modern viewers might consider it to be. Nevertheless, a more generalized sense of the word "line" as a leash for dogs or other animals has been current since 1000 A.D., so the possibility of a pun remains.

31Presumably, this arc would meet itself beyond the frame of the picture to form a circle, similar to that seen in the *Ancient of Days* design—but of course this can only be speculated upon.
of lines. If we were to characterize these lines as "bounding lines," then we
would have to say that in this case the valence of the term "bounding" is closer
to that of constriction than of freedom.

The intentions that God invests in this line seem quite clear then: his
judgment is a curse and also an attempt to subdue Adam's will through the
force of rationality. But God's act of judgment also has a contrary effect which
he probably does not intend. If we envision the line as a ray of energy or of
intention, we see that it does not simply end at the horse's bridle. Instead, it
seems to reflect backward from a point just beyond the noses of the horses.
Though the actual point of reflection is not depicted, the angles of these two
lines are clearly complementary, and it does not take much of an imaginative
leap to deduce that the lower one—ostensibly a part of the horse's harness—is a
reflection of the upper. This lower line represents a reversal of God's
intention because it does not return to Adam's brain; instead, it leads directly
into his buttocks.32 Thus, God Judging Adam becomes a striking illustration of
the return of the repressed: the line of rational judgment which intersects
Adam's cranium reverses itself and becomes a sign of the excremental
grotesque, the irrational, the inevitability of bodily subjection. We are
reminded again of the Newtonian law and Blake's contrarious application of it:
"To every action there is always opposed an equal reaction" (Principia 19). As
we saw in the Newton design, these unforeseen consequences seem to grow out
of any attempt to invest the line with monological intention, because the line's
contrariety creates havoc with any single-minded intent.

32 This explains what Heppner refers to as the "puzzling detail" (Reading Blake's Designs
140) of Adam's nudity here—which is very unusual in depictions of Adam after the fall.
Blake makes Adam a nude so that he can be very clear about the excremental direction in
which the reflected line returns.
In *Newton* and *God Judging Adam*, Blake's portrayals of the line are generally negative, even though the line's symbolic function in these designs is equivocal. Indeed, it is the very equivocality of the line which Newton and God seem to ignore, and in both cases this suppression has unintended consequences. In some of Blake's later designs, however, he also reveals some positive aspects of the line and of certain other images which are sometimes associated with it. This tendency is most visible in his pen and watercolour design of circa 1800, *Christ in the Carpenter's Shop* (Fig. 6), in which Blake returns to the iconic vocabulary of the 1795 colour prints, but gives these images somewhat more redemptive connotations.

*Christ in the Carpenter's Shop* should be a remarkable image to most students of Blake, because it depicts Christ holding what has been considered the quintessential symbol of Urizenic degradation: the compass. The *Ancient of Days* and *Newton* prints have conditioned us to see the compass as an indicator of the limits of rationalism, yet here it seems to be functioning in a different manner. Perhaps the fame of the other prints and the relative obscurity of this image have encouraged viewers to see the compass as an easily-recognized emblem of fallenness, but Blake quite clearly wants to avoid such simple correspondences. In composition and iconic reference, *Christ in the Carpenter's Shop* seems to be a deliberate answer to the *Newton* print, and a complication of its symbolism. Christ here holds the compass against a geometrical diagram inscribed on the floor, much like Newton held his compass on his own abstract diagram. However, there are many differences

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33 Of the relatively few critics who have commented on this design, most mention the compass. Butlin (*William Blake* 90) says that it "may represent the synthesis of reason and imagination under the new dispensation of Christ."

34 There may be some significance in the fact that Christ's diagram is composed of squares, whereas Newton's diagram contains an arc and a triangle. As Frye and Damon
between their situations as well. Whereas Newton places his finger on the line of the diagram, Christ touches the corner of one of the squares with his toe. Christ's posture is also very active, in contrast with the static passivity of Newton, who seems to be bonded to the material he is seated on. Christ is stepping--perhaps even bounding--away from the lines of the diagram. He does this not necessarily to escape the limitations of the lines, but possibly to embody the active potential that lines can have. Furthermore, instead of looking down at the diagram and identifying himself with it, as Newton does, Christ looks back toward his earthly father. He seems to be identifying himself with the human world rather than an abstract rationalistic construction. This is reminiscent of Jesus's identification statements in *Jerusalem*, where he sings, "Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me:
/ Lo! we are One" (E 146).

In his other hand, Jesus carries a carpenter's square, and he seems to be stepping between this square and the compass as if into a doorway. Where this liminal zone leads is not entirely clear. If this design represents Christ's exit from the mundane world, then it is possible that the implements he is holding retain a negative valence, because they could represent the tools of destruction that are involved in the crucifixion. However, it is possible that Christ is stepping through the frame of the painting and into the space of the viewer, in which case the image becomes more like an allegory of the Incarnation. The instruments he is holding retain some of their negative connotations in either case, but there seems to be an emphasis on the positive, perhaps even the creative, aspects of them. Joseph, as a carpenter, uses these

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**recognized**, Blake often makes references to "fourfold" shapes as images of the fourfold vision of the redeemed world, whereas "threefold" shapes represent limited vision.  
**35**The image of a person entering a doorway is common in Blake's iconography, in works such as *Death's Door* and the frontispiece to *Jerusalem*.  

tools to create things rather than to destroy or to delimit; we see in the background the beams which are presumably his handiwork. But the most obvious sign of the redemptive capacity of these instruments and the geometric lines on the floor is the role that they play in connecting the three personages of the Holy Family. These tools and lines form a network of continuity by which Jesus, Mary, and Joseph are connected to each other. Joseph holds a saw which rests on the line of one of the squares; Jesus touches those same lines with his toe and also with the compass. Mary does not hold an instrument, but the carpenter's square that Christ is holding also touches the hem of her garment. This may look initially like an accidental arrangement, but on further examination one can see that the placement of these lines and instruments is highly strategic, and is undertaken with the intention of highlighting the redemptive capacity of these tools and lines. Indeed, these images seem to have reversed their metaphoric significance from their earlier appearances in Blake's images: they have become the means of human connection rather than the symbols of abstraction, limitation, and solipsism.

There are several other examples of at least partially redemptive linearity in Blake's designs, such as The Christ Child Asleep on the Cross (Fig. 7), which depicts the cross as a resolutely linear shape, and which also portrays the carpenter's tools in a context that makes them seem instruments of ultimate redemption rather than rationalistic limitation. In addition, Blake's linear practice in his many great line engravings near the end of his career, including the Illustrations to the Book of Job and the Illustrations to Dante, deserves further analysis. However, an exhaustive consideration of each of Blake's visual lines is beyond the scope of this study, and such an examination would in any case suffer from repetitiveness. In the interest of furthering my argument about the importance of the line in Blake's work
generally, I would now like to turn briefly to his use of the image of the line in his poetry. Though there are relatively few overt references to the line in his written work, the ones that do occur are usually found in crucial contexts. The remainder of this section will be devoted to the verbal representations of visual lines in Blake's work, with particular focus on the intentionality of these images. I will trace the development of Blake's attitude toward the line, from his earlier sense of its Urizenic limitations to his later recognition of another, more creative and redemptive kind of linearity which he associates with Los in *The Four Zoas*.

Blake's interest in the line as a poetic image begins in *The Book of Urizen*, which was completed in the year prior to *Newton* and *God Judging Adam*, and thus, as one might expect, his attitudes toward linearity in this work are rather negative. It is even possible that Urizen's name is related to a particularly limiting kind of line. Jerome McGann suggests that one potential source of Urizen's name is from Alexander Geddes's biblical commentary, in which Geddes describes the separation of light and darkness in Genesis as a "horizon," which, he claims, derives from "a Greek word . . . which signifies to bound or to terminate" ("The Idea of an Indeterminate Text" 317-18).36 Interestingly, Geddes considers the word "horizon" a verb in this context, as is shown by his use of infinitives in his definition. This suggests that Urizen's name might be an expression of his activity rather than of his substance. Certainly, the connection with Genesis is an apposite one, since Urizen is very often associated with the creation of the mundane world. *The Book of Urizen*

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36 There are many other theories about the meaning and etymology of Urizen's name. The homophonous associations with the words "horizon" and "you reason" are the most generally accepted ones. This is not a case where one of these potential meanings is conceivably the correct one; all of them resonate against each other in a way that is representative of Urizen's own complexities.
is even structured like a biblical book such as Genesis, with chapter and verse numbers, and it contains several scenes of "unprolific" (E 70) creation. McGann's citation of this etymology for the word "horizon" points also to the way in which Urizen undertakes his peculiarly negative form of creation: through the construction of boundaries. These boundaries, whether they separate night and day or distinguish self from other, are implicitly linear, and Blake makes this connection to the line explicit in several of his descriptions of Urizen.

As we saw in the first chapter, one of Urizen's most common activities in *The Book of Urizen* is dividing, even though his intentions also sometimes tend toward monological unification. In Chapter VII, his divisive activity is described in linear terms: "He form'd a line & a plummet / To divide the Abyss beneath" (E 80). Before he can begin dividing the abyss, he must form a line, because the line is the principle which makes division possible. But the line he makes is also a recognized tool of division in a different sense. The combination of "a line & a plummet" is an instrument, also known as a plumb line, which can be used to mark straight lines or circles, and which is often used by carpenters to maintain the proportions and squareness of a building. Blake chooses the word "plummet" because of its associations with falling, thereby suggesting that Urizen's attempt at linear creation becomes a kind of fall before he has even begun.

Urizen then continues to create other instruments, ones which are so representative of his mindset that several of them have come to seem quintessentially Urizenic:

He form'd a dividing rule:

8. He formed scales to weigh;

He formed massy weights;
He formed a brazen quadrant;  
He formed golden compasses  
And began to explore the Abyss (E 80-81)

He seems to require a veritable arsenal of measuring devices before he can begin to "explore," as if he is a scientist rather than an adventurer. But there is little reason to hope that he will be able to see beyond his instruments to the reality of the thing that he is examining. Instead, there are some suggestions that his creation of the instruments is itself a monumental act of projection.

As David Worrall points out, Urizen is not only literally forming these instruments out of the abyss, but he is also in a more metaphorical sense creating constellations out of the chaotic arrangement of stars in the heavens. He is a cosmological geometrist, using the line to connect the points of the stars into rigid shapes of his own choosing—shapes that represent his own obsession with measurement. In trying to make sense out of the chaotic array of the Abyss, he imposes his own hobby-horsical obsessions upon it, and he ends up finding exactly what he is looking for: more instruments. Like Newton in the Newton print, Urizen does not see the chaos of the Abyss; he only chooses to see the order that he projects upon it.

The primary instrument of this projection, as for Newton, is the line.

In The Four Zoas, Urizen is described in a very similar situation during the building of the Mundane Shell. This time, he does not undertake the project himself; he is the "Architect" (E 319) rather than the solitary creator. But the negative connotations of his linear practice remain the same. Blake describes the construction in terms of the line:

37Worrall writes, "The objects are mostly constellations in 'the Abyss': the 'scales' is Libra; the 'quadrant' is 'Quadrans Muralis' in the constellation Draco; the 'dividing rule' is Norma, the rule, also known as Quadra Euclidis" (Blake, The Urizen Books 139).
Then rose the Builders; First the Architect divine his plan
Unfolds. The wondrous scaffold reared all round the infinite
Quadrangular the building rose the heavens squared by a line.

(E 319)

Urizen begins with his plan, which is presumably a linear diagram. He
"Unfolds" this plan in two senses of that word: spreading out the paper on
which it is written, but also putting the plan into action, executing it. The
phrase "squared by a line" refers to the use of the plumb line, as in The Book
of Urizen. In another sense, though, the line against which the heavens
would be squared is the boundary between earth and sky: the horizon. If we
recall McGann's suggestion of the possible etymology of Urizen's name, we see
how fitting it is that Urizen should choose his own namesake as the yardstick
by which the entire construction is measured.

One might conclude from this example that Blake's sense of the line was
still predominantly negative during the writing of The Four Zoas, but the
Urizenic line is only one form of linearity in the poem. There is in fact a
contrary scene near the end of the Seventh Night, in which the line is treated
in a very different manner. Here Los is the one who draws the line, and Blake
describes it in relatively positive terms:

And first he drew a line upon the walls of shining heaven
And Enitharmon tincturd it with beams of blushing love
It remaind permanent a lovely form inspird divinely human
Dividing into just proportions Los unwearied labourd
The immortal lines upon the heavens till with sighs of love
Sweet Enitharmon mild Entrancd breathd forth upon the wind

(E 370-71)
This passage has been read as a description of Blake's own process of producing works in illuminated printing. His wife Catherine helped him produce some copies of the illuminated books by painting the watercolours between the lines that he had etched and printed. However, the possible autobiographical reference is not the only purpose of this scene in the poem. In fact, it is constructed as a positive echo of Urizen's earlier attempts at celestial artistry. Here, like Urizen drawing the constellations in *The Book of Urizen*, Los inscribes a line on the heavens. In order to reach the place where he will draw, Los must place "his right foot firm / Upon the Iron crag of Urizen" (E 370), which suggests that he is literally following in Urizen's footsteps. There are however a number of differences which make Los's lines "immortal" (E 371) rather than degraded—the first difference being that Los's work is a co-operative venture, undertaken with the help of his Emanation.

Los's lines are "permanent," "inspired," and "divinely human" (E3 71), but strangely, we are not told what these lines represent, nor do we learn what Los means to communicate through them. The lines remain simply lines, and the colours simply colours, without any specific representational capacities. Perhaps they are like the lines of Apelles and Protogenes: idealized examples of lines which are not burdened with the duty of mimesis. Urizen, in contrast, was interested in drawing celestial lines precisely because of their mimetic capacity: he used the lines to represent the instruments he desired. This suggests that the utilitarian employment of lines is a more degraded activity than the use of the line as purely emotive or expressive medium.

It is somewhat surprising to learn here that Los's lines, like those of Urizen, are associated with division: they are described as "dividing into just

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[^38]: Jean H. Hagstrum was the first to raise this possibility in "Blake's Blake" (171).
proportions." One might have expected that Los's lines would embody the opposite feature of Urizen's lines, that they would express a kind of ideal unity. But we must remember that Urizen himself desired idealized unity in his demands for monological authority, and that this desire was what begot the dizzying chain of divisions that he set in motion. Whereas Urizen was fixated on "One Law" (E 72), Los's lines express a connection to justice: they divide "into just proportions" (My emphasis). The difference between Urizen's linear intentions and those of Los is precisely the difference between law and justice. Law is an abstract and impersonal system which regulates behavior through the threat of force; it is in a sense authorized coercion. In contrast, justice is a more personal and intuitive concept which cannot be codified or systematized or embodied in a figure of authority. We all have our own internal sense of what justice is, and this cannot be imposed upon us. Los's lines are thus more democratic than Urizen's; perhaps Blake does not describe what these lines represent because every person will see them in their own unique way.

In the Ninth Night of The Four Zoas, there is another image of the line which enacts a redemption of linearity by connecting the line with the Incarnation. This occurs in the Eternal Man's description of Rahab's redemption. Throughout the earlier nights of The Four Zoas, Blake has associated Rahab with the Whore of Babylon and also with the corrupted Roman Church, but here the Eternal Man reveals that Rahab's metaphorical significance has been reversed:

But Sin Even Rahab is redeemd in blood & fury & jealousy
That line of blood that stretchd across the windows of the morning
Redeemd from Errors power (E 390).
Blake's Rahab shares many features with the biblical character Rahab, a prostitute who sheltered two of Joshua's spies from the authorities and thereby helped Israel to conquer Jericho. When she helped the men to escape, she asked them to spare her and her family in the coming invasion, and they told her to tie a crimson cord in her window as a sign that the soldiers should not kill anyone inside (Joshua 2). Rahab and her family were the only ones saved from the destruction of Jericho. In his allusion to this event, Blake increases the incarnational associations of the scarlet string by changing it into a "line of blood." This emendation of the biblical story is undertaken at least partially in the interest of conflating Rahab's redemption with the Passover ritual, in which houses are marked with blood to protect the occupants from the vengeance of the Holy Spirit. In the New Testament, this Judaic practise comes to function as an analogue for Christ's own self-sacrifice, which saves humanity from eternal death. In the context of The Four Zoas, the line of blood is a mark of salvation that typologically connects the narratives of Jesus and Rahab.

This connection is strangely apposite, because the line of blood is also a bloodline, a connection between generations--and it is through this meaning of the phrase that we find another connection between Rahab and Christ. In the New Testament, Rahab is listed as one of the ancestors of King David, and therefore she is also a progenitor of Christ. Blake refers to this fact on two separate occasions (The Four Zoas, E 380 and Jerusalem, E 213), though he labels Rahab as an ancestor of the Virgin Mary rather than of King David. Blake amends the biblical account once again here, this time in order to enforce the continuity of the "maternal line" (E 213)--which is, essentially, a

39See Matthew 1:5. Damon (138) also discusses this connection.
genealogy of Mary which links her with sexually profligate women of the Old Testament. Enitharmon describes these women as "the Daughters of Vala, Mother of the Body of Death" (E 213). However, while this maternal line would seem to be a degraded thing, it becomes redeemed by the fact that it produces the Saviour. The maternal line in fact becomes the incarnational line, because each of these women is shown to be necessary parts of the lineage of Christ. The Incarnation redeems the bloodline to such an extent that even Rahab, the prostitute, can become purified. Thus the "line of blood" is both a sign of salvation and also in a strange way a part of the very mechanism by which salvation comes to earth: it turns out that Rahab has been necessary in the chain of generations to prepare the way for Jesus. She places a line in her window, for her own salvation, but by virtue of her place in the matrilineage of Christ, she also plays a part in the more general salvation of humanity.

We have now examined Blake's use of the figure of the line in a variety of contexts, both visual and verbal, and this array has pointed out some of the contrary inflections that Blake applies to the line. I hope the contrast between these different treatments of the line has enhanced our sense of the complexity of this image, and has highlighted the implications that such complexity has for Blake's notions of artistic intentionality. One drawback of this piecemeal approach, however, is that it risks creating an overly schematic impression of Blake's art, since it does not lend itself to extended analysis and contextualization of particular works. In the final section of this chapter I would like to provide a counterpoint to this critical practice by examining a single work in detail, to show the depth and subtlety in which Blake's fascination with the line can be manifested. The most interesting
candidate for such treatment is the *Laocoön*, which resonates with many of the contrary inflections that we have been studying in this chapter.

III. The Lines of the *Laocoön*

Blake's late engraving, commonly referred to as the *Laocoön* (Fig. 8), is deeply and contrariously involved in the problem of aesthetic boundaries. The work questions conventional generic demarcations by presenting verbal and visual art in the same space, in a radically symbiotic arrangement in which neither of these elements can be subordinated to the other. And yet, though it problematizes the traditional boundaries between verbal and visual art, it does not efface them altogether. Instead, it places them in an irremediable relation in which they interpenetrate each other without one of them ever mastering the other. This relation is similar to what I have characterized as contrariety in other parts of this dissertation, but it is perhaps more accurately described in W.J.T. Mitchell's terms as Blake's "composite art," an interaction between the poetic and graphic elements of an artwork which Mitchell describes as "an energetic rivalry, a dialogue or dialectic between vigorously independent modes of expression" (*Blake's Composite Art* 40). The effect of this generic tension is a destabilization of the traditional expectations that govern the creation and reception of art. Perhaps because of the interpretive vertigo that the *Laocoön* inspires, there are few extended readings of it in the critical literature. Many critics make use of the *Laocoön*'s poetic lines in their

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40 *Blake's Composite Art* was the first full-length critical study to examine in a sustained fashion the complex interrelations of the verbal and the visual elements of Blake's Illuminated Books. Mitchell mentions the *Laocoön* in his study, but he does not offer an extended analysis of it.
comments on other Blake works, but readings of it as a unified verbal-visual artwork are relatively rare.41

Blake's insistence on the primacy of the line in this work can be seen in the way the central image contrasts with his first engraving of the Laocoon sculpture, executed about a decade earlier (Fig. 9). This commercial stipple engraving appeared as an illustration to John Flaxman's essay on sculpture in Abraham Rees's *Cyclopaedia*. Though the two engravings both seem to derive from the pencil sketch Blake drew in about 1815, they differ greatly in tonality, level of detail, and the roundness of the figures. The most important difference in terms of Blake's aesthetic theory, however, is the fact that the later Laocoon image is composed entirely of lines, whereas the earlier commercial engraving is composed of dots.42 Blake's line-engraving of the Laocoon is so superior to the stipple engraving that it seems likely he is trying to assert the superiority of lines over dots here, as he does so often in the *Descriptive Catalogue*. 43 Through the use of burnishing and a very dense application of lines, he is able to achieve remarkably subtle effects of shading—effects which were commonly considered to be mainly the province

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42Essick and Viscomi call this change from stipple to intaglio "the most significant visual difference" between the two versions (*Milton* 237).

43It is tempting to suggest that Blake is simply better at line-engraving than he is at stipple-engraving, but some of his commercial images indicate that he was capable of producing highly polished non-linear work when it was necessary.
of stipple and mezzotint processes. Blake seems to be taking pains here to
demonstrate the flexibility and vitality of the linear medium.

Another possible reason that Blake chose the method of intaglio line-
engraving in the Laocoön is that he wanted to suggest an ekphrastic
identification between the poetic lines and the engraved lines of his composite
artwork. While the central image is obviously linear in its composition, the
poetic maxims which surround it also participate in this linearity. Blake
highlights this connection by arranging the Laocoön's lines of poetry in
cross-hatched and curvilinear patterns on the page, so that they function
simultaneously as visual lines. In this context, the design can be seen as a
transgeneric pun which points out the fact that poetry and engraving share a
common investment in the line. One can see this effect by viewing the plate
with the eyes slightly out of focus, so that the shapes of the poetic lines
become more noticeable than their linguistic aspects. Of course, by suggesting
this identification of poetic and graphic lines, Blake does not efface the
linguistic elements of these inscriptions altogether. Through his imaginative
arrangement of the words, he simply brings out the latent visual capacity of
writing. By doing so, he seems to be portaying the line as the arena of
contrariety between the verbal and the visual: it is the nexus of their
interaction, but also the sign of their separate aesthetic identities.

The conceptual boundaries which Blake problematizes in the Laocoön
are the same ones that Gotthold Ephraim Lessing had taken a great deal of
trouble to construct in his monograph Laocoön: An Essay on the Limits of

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44 By extension, we can see this as a comment on the visuality of the poetic line generally. By dispersing these poetic lines in patterns that differ from the canonical straight-ruled, horizontal arrangement of them, Blake is pointing out that poetic lines always create linear patterns on the page. He suggests that the rigid systematization of poetry into straight horizontal lines had rendered the linearity of poetry almost invisible.
Painting and Poetry, and there is much evidence to suggest that Blake's composite work takes shape in response to the aesthetic theories of Lessing. Until very recently, the titular connections between these two works had been largely ignored by Blake critics, possibly because Blake did not read German and Lessing's Laocoön was not translated into English until after Blake's death. However, Julia Wright makes a convincing case that Lessing's work is a second-hand intertext of Blake's Laocoön, citing the possibility that Blake's friend Henry Fuseli—a sometime translator of German texts—could have told him the essentials of Lessing's argument ("Politics of Defamiliarization" 37-50). Fuseli was certainly familiar with Lessing's book: he mentions it in several of his Analytical Review articles of the mid-seventeen-nineties, and, as Wright points out, Fuseli's third lecture on painting is a revisitation of Lessing's argument (40). Furthermore, Frederick Tatham records that Blake and Fuseli had a conversation in front of the Royal Academy's cast of the Laocoön sculpture while Blake was doing his initial sketch of the work (Blake Records 238). It seems plausible that their discussion might have included some reference to the current fascination with the Laocoön in Germany, and perhaps to Lessing's place in the tradition of Laocoön criticism. In any case, it would not have been necessary for Blake to know more than a few basic elements of Lessing's argument for him to be able to formulate his artistic response to it, and the fame of Lessing's Laocoön was so well-established by the beginning of the nineteenth century that Blake could have gleaned this information from any number of sources.

Lessing's main argument in his Laocoön is an attempt to discredit the eighteenth century cult of ut pictura poesis, which insisted that poetry and painting should imitate each other. He ridicules those artists and critics who would apply the rules of one art to another, complaining that "in some
instances they force poetry into the narrower limits of painting; in others they allow painting to fill the whole wide sphere of poetry" (4-5). He tries to re-establish the limits (Grenzen) between the two arts, arguing that painting is suited for spatial representation, whereas poetry is an art of temporality.

Blake's Laocoön, of course, stands as a challenge to this kind of generic delineation, because it goes to radical lengths to show how poetry and painting can be incorporated into a single artwork. Wright suggests that Blake's Laocoön is in fact "a refutation of Lessing's thesis, delivered with a flourish" (53) and this is true in a sense. However, there are some indications that Blake's response to Lessing is somewhat more ambivalent than this. While he does create a composite artwork which is a challenge to Lessing's delineation of particular roles for the sister arts, he nonetheless maintains the boundaries between the poetic and the graphic lines of this artwork. Some of the textual lines curve around the figures, but a distance is always maintained between the two.45 They do not merge into one indistinguishable artistic practice, nor do they form a multimedia collage. It seems that, despite his arguments with Lessing, Blake finds it necessary to maintain a bounding line between his two preferred media.46

Fuseli also displays some signs of ambivalence toward Lessing, though he is generally more in agreement with the German critic than Blake seems to

45The possible exception to this observation is Blake's signature, which is engraved on the plinth beneath the central figure, within the space of the line-engraving. This was a common engraving practice, which Blake also uses, for example, in his lithograph "Enoch" (Essick, Separate Plates, plate 30). It may also have been necessary for Blake to place his signature within the space of the engraved image so that it would not be confused with the poetic maxims. However, Julia Wright advances a different theory about this signature, arguing that Blake signs the design here in order to make reference to Winckelman's discovery of the signature of Athanadorus on the base of the Laocoön sculpture (42).

46It is noteworthy that the interlinear designs which are so common in Blake's illuminated works are almost absent here, as if he was trying to maintain a distinction between the outer poetic lines and the inner engraved image.
be. His most critical comments about Lessing are in a pseudonymous review published in the *Analytical Review* of October, 1792. Commenting on Hickey's *History of Painting and Sculpture*, Fuseli writes,

\[\ldots\text{he expatiates on the boundless licence granted to poetry, and the very narrow limits prescribed to painting with regard to the choice of objects: a notion, which owes its origins to the German critics. The truth is, that horror and loathsomeness in all its branches are equally banished from the painter's and the poet's province. Terror, as the chief ingredient of the sublime, composes in all instances, and in the utmost extent of the word, fit material for both. \ldots}\]

Laocoon, with his sons, will always remain a sufficient answer to all that has beenretailed in our days on the limits of the art by tame antiquarians from tamer painters

(Quoted in Mason 216).48

As the editor notes, one of the "tame antiquarians" referred to here is certainly Lessing. Two years later, Fuseli would again apply the same adjective, "tame," directly to Lessing's *Laocoon*.49 In the context of Fuseli's discussion of the sublime in his review of Hickey quoted above, this complaint of tameness starts to acquire a larger meaning. The *Laocoon* sculpture is "a sufficient answer" to the "tame antiquarians" because it exceeds their notions

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47 Eudo C. Mason characterizes Fuseli's attitude toward Lessing by saying, "He charged him with 'tameness' and 'frigidity,' but ultimately took over in theory most of his main contentions with no more than comparatively slight modifications and amplifications" (*The Mind of Henry Fuseli* 204). I agree with the general assessment here, but I am interested in the exceptions to which Mason alludes.

48 Mason attributes this pseudonymous article to Fuseli.

49 In a review of Uvedale Price's *Essay on the Picturesque* in the *Analytical Review*, November 1794, Fuseli says, "The futility of such mutual inroads of poetry and painting on each other has been shown by a late German writer of great acuteness and some taste, though on a tame principle, and without drawing the inferences that obviously derive from his rules" (Quoted in Mason 207). In a footnote, Fuseli says that the writer to whom he refers is G. E. Lessing.
of the "limits" of art. In other words, the problem Fuseli sees with Lessing's reading of the *Laocoön* is that it does not sufficiently acknowledge the transgressive power of the sublime, which involves a breaking of representational boundaries. On other occasions, Fuseli applauds Lessing for asserting that the verbal arts and the visual arts have limitations, but in this case he sees such an invocation of the limit as a stifling of the disruptive power of art.

The crux of Fuseli's ambivalence toward Lessing can be found in Fuseli's double usage of the word "limit," which is the key term in Lessing's title. In another review published only three months after the above-quoted comments on the *Laocoön* sculpture, Fuseli voices what seems to be a contrary opinion on the importance of the limit in art. He writes that "all comparisons between the poet's and the painter's manners ought to be made with an eye to the respective end and limits of either art" (Quoted in Mason 205).⁵⁰ Here, he recommends that the limits of poetry and painting should be observed by artists, whereas he had designated such limits as a sign of tameness only three months earlier. It seems that in Fuseli's mind, limits are good and necessary, but they are also restrictive and enfeebling. This apparent contradiction, however, contains a certain amount of wisdom about the problem of artistic form, a problem which also preoccupied Blake. Fuseli's contrarious attitude toward "limits" is very similar to Blake's ambiguous use of the word "bounding" in his doctrine of the bounding line. Both men seem to see something simultaneously attractive and dangerous about the notion of boundaries in art. They have a sense that constriction and transgression are two sides of the

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⁵⁰This pseudonymous review of Cowper's *Homer* appears in the *Analytical Review*, January, 1793. Again, Mason verifies the attribution to Fuseli.
struggle for artistic form and expression, and they are unable to decide between these contrary directions of artistic intent.

This question is particularly tied up with the aesthetics of the sublime, which fascinated both Fuseli and Blake. The sublime, as a disruption of perceptual categories, is an inherently transgressive mode, but any aesthetic theory of the sublime must also come to terms with the fact that such transgressiveness has to be communicated through some kind of artistic form. Many artists of this period, such as Salvator Rosa, tried to represent sublimity through a diffusion of form and often a movement toward formlessness. As we have already seen in our examination of the Descriptive Catalogue, Blake was vehemently opposed to such an approach, which would be in his terms "to lose form" rather than "to find form, and to keep it" (A Descriptive Catalogue, E 538). Fuseli was not so adamant about the issue of form as Blake was, but still, most of his self-consciously sublime artwork reveals a preoccupation with clarity of form which we do not see, for example, in the work of Salvator Rosa.

In Blake, the role of boundaries in sublime art comes to be radically conflicted: the more one clarifies the artistic boundary, the more likely it is that the artwork will disrupt the perceptual boundaries of the viewer. This conflict can be described in terms of what V. A. De Luca describes in Blake's work as the "Iconic" sublime, which is characterized by "radical discontinuity and self-referentiality" (Words of Eternity 62). While De Luca's investigation is largely focused on the textual aspects of this manifestation (along with its contrary, the prophetic style of "Bardic Sublime"), I believe that his description can also be very useful in terms of Blake's visual linearism. The

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51 Mason provides several examples of Fuseli's interest in the sublime in part five of his book (293-336). V.A. De Luca examines Blake's extensive investment in theories of the sublime in Words of Eternity.
iconic sublime is self-enclosed but also highly intentional in its functioning: as it separates itself from its background, it manifests a performative intentionality which approaches the level of vehemence that Robert N. Essick describes in his writings on Blake's "incarnational sign" (*Language of Adam* 24). This is very similar to Blake's theory and practice of the bounding line, which insists that "the more distinct sharp and wirey the bounding line" (*A Descriptive Catalogue*, E 550), the more capable it is of transmitting disruptive intentionality.

In Blake's *Laocoön*, the relation between the lines is both extraordinarily clear and strangely disorienting. Blake provides a highlighted bounding line between the media, but the connection between the verbal and visual lines is so unstable that a high degree of uncertainty results. Furthermore, the epigrammatic textual pieces of the work are discontinuous from each other, which presents an interpretive challenge to the viewer/reader. As Julia Wright argues, the dispersal of these poetic lines on the plate disrupts the "narrative linearity" (52) that one generally expects of verbal art: there is no clear beginning or ending of the work, and the reader must negotiate a path through these maxims without any sense of what order in which to approach them.52

The very question of how to go about interpreting the composite aspects of the *Laocoön* has preoccupied several commentators on the work. David Erdman says of the poetic lines that "there is no right way to read them--

52 This issue of "narrative linearity" is the center of Wright's argument about the *Laocoön* (52-67). She examines various attempts by Blake's editors to linearize the poetic maxims of the *Laocoön* by choosing an order in which they should be read, and she suggests that any attempt of this sort negates some of the work's subversive power. She writes, "The *Laocoön* forces the recognition that we do not read the same way twice and that our access to the text is not transparent, but depends upon certain rules: linearity and order (whether thematic, generic, spatial, or formal), conventionally govern our contact with the text but do not totalize it" (64).
except all at once and as the frame of the picture" (E 814). While this suggestion seems to account for the peculiarities of the Laocoön, in some ways it raises as many problems as it solves. Erdman is asking an impossibility when he suggests that we read the text "all at once," since reading is inherently a temporal activity. Furthermore, his idea that the poetic lines form "the frame of the picture" imposes a kind of imbalance upon the work. A frame, after all, is a boundary which privileges that which it encloses. It might be more accurate to say that the textual lines of the Laocoön are a part of the picture, or that the very notion of picture and frame is contested by this composite artwork. Tilottama Rajan comments on the relation between verbal and visual aspects of the work in terms of the inner/outer dichotomy, noting how Blake turns his own representational practice inside-out. She writes, "Converting time to space by allowing words to function visually as borders, Laocoön reverses the layout of Blake's other textographic works, in which a verbal center is enframed by visual borders" ("(Dis)figuring the System" 392). This description is much more flexible than Erdman's invocation of the frame, since Rajan recognizes the Laocoön as a dramatization of "the interconvertibility of verbal and visual, time and space" ("(Dis)figuring the System" 392). However, there are some details of the design which problematize the question of borders even more than Rajan notes. There are two cases in which the relationship between the text and the engraved image is again reversed. The word "Good" and the Hebrew word "[Lilith]" are actually contained within the bounding line of the engraved figures, thus revealing that the verbal medium does not function only as a border here. Furthermore,

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53 On the frame as contested site of enclosure and entrance, see David L. Clark's "Visibility Should Not Be Visible: Blake's Borders and the Regime of Sight," and Jacques Derrida's "Parergon."
commentators on the design have generally not taken notice of the other visual line that encloses the whole composite space of the Laocoön: the square border. In a work so conscious of artistic limits, this line cannot be considered merely a demarcation of the edge of the page. Taken together, this progression of interconvertible limits suggests that anything can be a border, and that anything can also be enclosed by a border. In this context, the Laocoön becomes a veritable mise en abyme of boundaries.

The tension between the verbal and visual in this composite work is not only a formal one, however. There is also an amount of incongruency in their content, which causes a destabilization of the mimetic capacities of both media. The line engraving is a scrupulously accurate and certainly a recognizable representation of the Laocoön sculpture, but the title below it reveals a rather surprising statement of non-identity, since it seems to reject the standard interpretation of the sculpture as an image of the classical character Laocoön in his battle with serpents. From the time of its rediscovery in 1509, the sculpture had been universally regarded to be an image of Laocoön, but Blake argues that this provenance is erroneous. He accepts the idea that this sculpture is what the critics and artists of classical times thought was an image of Laocoön, but he insists that it is in fact a depiction of "[Yah] & his two sons Satan & Adam As they were copied from the Cherubim of Solomons Temple by three Rhodians & applied to Natural Fact. or History of Ilium." In effect, Blake is saying this is not really the Laocoön. Nowhere in the poetic lines of the plate is the character Laocoön mentioned, though the visual evidence unavoidably brings this name to mind when we look at the image. In the tension between the line-engraving and the verbal assertion, Blake's radical re-reading of the Laocoön image begins to take shape. In keeping with his assertion that "Christianity is Art," Blake here interprets the sculpture in a
Judeo-Christian context rather than a Classical one. Just as the Romans adopted many of their artistic and religious conventions from the Greeks, Blake suggests that the Greeks copied their own art from Hebrew originals.54

Obviously, this re-attribution is tendentious in the extreme, and it is not supported by either classical or biblical scholarship, but this does not change the fact that Blake's notion of Hebrew originals is fundamental to an understanding of his Laocoön. The very fact that we still call this work the Laocoön indicates a persistent misrecognition of the point Blake is trying to make here, and this is particularly troublesome since Blake quite clearly gives the work a title which indicates that he sees the image as precisely not the Laocoön. In our naming of this artwork, we have chosen to trust the visual aspect of it rather than the verbal. This is analogous to a group of art historians looking at Magritte's Ceci n'est pas un pipe, and deciding, on the basis of the mimetic evidence of the painting, to retitle it Pipe.55

Blake's interpretation of the Laocoön image in a context which is utterly foreign to its actual provenance is extraordinarily interesting as an imaginary displacement of the scene of reading. By literally recontextualizing the image of the sculpture in a web of his own original poetic phrases, he changes its meaning drastically. Critics have been somewhat reluctant to speculate on what Blake means by this appropriation of the Laocoön, perhaps because his premises are so outlandish. Our unwillingness to refer to the artwork as "[Yah] & his sons..." is symptomatic of

54Blake voices a similar opinion in the Descriptive Catalogue when he says "Antiquity preaches the Gospels of Jesus" (E543). He derives this notion largely from Winckelman. See Morton Paley, "Wonderful Originals," for an investigation of some of the currents of antiquarianism that influenced Blake's idea that classical art was copied from lost Judaic originals.
55For the above reasons, I believe the work should be referred to as "[Yah] & his two sons...". For the sake of clarity and consistency, however, I will continue to refer to it as the Laocoön in this dissertation.
this reluctance. It may also be related to our conceptions of artistic intentionality: we find it difficult to read the design as an expression of Blake's intention because it was obviously not invented by him. But it is important to attempt readings of this image in terms of the context that Blake provides for it—not by forgetting that the image also belongs to a classical sculpture, but by recognizing that Blake wants it to have meanings beyond that milieu. If we do suspend our disbelief to a certain extent, we can see how the image, in its new context, becomes a very personal statement of Blake's artistic and religious vision.

When we see the central character of the design not as Laocoön but rather as "[Yah]," we can envision an entirely different reading of the design's significance. By choosing to call this deity "[Yah]" rather than the more common Yahweh, Blake in effect makes the design into a deification of the copular verb, because, as we have already noted, "Yah" is Hebrew for "The Essence, He that IS" (Parkhurst 111). "[Yah]" even has a copular function in this design, since he is shown as the intermediary between the two other characters, Satan and Adam. Blake seems to be suggesting that "[Yah]" is the only connection between these two figures, who are described on the plate rather surprisingly as "brothers." Indeed, if we read the image as a kind of pictograph, with "[Yah]" performing the copular function, it would say, "Satan IS Adam." Such an extraordinary identification is certainly within the realm of possibility for a poet who dramatizes the marriage of heaven and hell. Furthermore, it is only appropriate that Blake should cause his image to perform a linguistic function, since he also enacts the same kind of reversal on his poetic lines when he highlights their graphic capacity.

A further point of similarity between the image and the textual parts of the Laocoön is that the poetic maxims are also dominated by the verb "to be".
At least half of these poetic lines are in fact identity statements, much like the ones we looked at in the previous chapter. The entire textual part of the *Laocoön* is a compendium of vehement assertions about the identities of art, humanity and the divine. Like the performative utterances which we examined in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* in the last chapter, the truth value of these identity statements is not based on an appeal to empirical reality, but rather on the foundation of the poet's own certitude. Blake writes, "Science is the Tree of Death / Art is the Tree of Life / God is Jesus," and he also says, "Prayer is the study of Art / Praise is the Practise of Art." These lines are not merely descriptive—for example, they are not on the order of a statement like "the grass is green." Instead, they are indications of Blake's fervent insistence that the usual understanding of the world is veiled with illusion. The implication in the ardent tone of these statements is that only Blake's vehement sincerity can bring us out of that illusion toward a vision of things as they really are. He also applies this strategy negatively, by making statements of non-identity, such as "The unproductive Man is not a Christian much less the Destroyer," and "A Poet a Painter a Musician an Architect: the Man / Or Woman who is not one of these is not a Christian".

The effect of this emphasis on the copular verb is inevitably to highlight the incarnational elements of the work—especially when we consider the connection between "[Yah]" and "is." The multiple identifications of the following lines are also an invocation of the fundamental identity of the human and the divine, which is the necessary result of the Incarnation: "The Eternal Body of Man is the Imagination. That is God Himself The Divine Body] [Yeshua] Jesus we are his Members." These lines hearken back to Blake's description of the Incarnation in *There is NO Natural Religion*: "God becomes as we are, / That we may be as he / Is" (E 3). Both passages display a similar
reliance upon the copular verb to indicate the mutual identity of humanity and God. As I discussed in Chapter One, this use of the word "is" is also reminiscent of the eucharistic ritual, in which the celebrant declares, "This is the body of Christ".

The design of the Laocoön can also be seen as an emblem of the Incarnation, if we dissociate it sufficiently from its classical heritage and interpret it in the new aphoristic context which Blake provides for it. We should note first of all that while the Incarnation is a glorious event from the point of view of humanity, it is also considered to be an immense act of self-degradation for God, since he can only redeem humanity by lowering himself to become human, by taking on the perishable flesh. Perhaps this is why Blake writes in one of the poetic inscriptions of the Laocoön that Jehovah "repented that he had made Adam"—because, with the creation of Adam, the possibility of God's own self-degradation comes into being. This association is reminiscent of Blake's colour print God Creating Adam, in which he depicts the Creation as simultaneously a kind of Fall by designing a winding worm around Adam's legs, thus suggesting that creation and death are inevitably connected. However, the word "repented" in Blake's poetic line is ambiguous: it does not necessarily mean that Yahweh regretted making Adam; in fact it could mean that God himself had to repent from his Urizenic ways after Adam's fall—he had to become a more forgiving God in order to save humanity through the Incarnation. Thus, the Laocoön may be depicting the corollary to the creation/fall, which is God's redemption of humanity and his triumph over mortality through his offer to become human himself.

God's victory through his degrading acceptance of a human body is the allegorical idea that Blake projects onto the Laocoön image. The characters are entwined in two serpents, which are coiled in distinctly intestinal form
around their bodies. As David Sten Herrstrom observes, the cloth beneath the legs of "[Yah]" also gives the impression that his bowels are spilling out (51). Thus, while "[Yah]" is in one respect battling against two serpents, he is also struggling with the degraded mortal body. He holds up his right arm in a gesture of victory, but he is also being bitten by the snake. This is a representation of the paradox of the Incarnation: God is able to triumph over death, but only by submitting to its sting--by dying himself. Above the serpent's head is the word "good," which suggests that this wound will have positive consequences, despite the pain that it inflicts upon "[Yah]." It seems that he has in fact taken this snakebite upon himself, that he has offered to have the serpent bite him so that it will not bite the man on the right, who is probably Adam. On the left, the Satan figure is bitten by the other snake, and he seems to be falling in a death-swoon from this injury. The point Blake makes here is that the real difference between Satan and Adam is that God does not forgive Satan for his fall, whereas he does forgive and redeem Adam. While all three of the characters are wrestling with the problems of materiality and mortality, only Satan seems to succumb to them.

In keeping with Blake's linkage of Christianity and art in the text of the Laocoön, the image can also be read as an allegory of the struggle for artistic form. These three figures may be grappling not only with mortality but also with the basic artistic problem of linearity. The snakes are, after all, contorted and sometimes constricting lines with intentions of their own; they must be subdued by the will of the artist, as "[Yah]" seems to be doing when he holds the serpent aloft in a gesture of victory. He may be a Pauline "serpent

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56 There is some disagreement among critics about which of these figures is Satan and which is Adam, but if we read the design as an incarnational emblem, then it seems very likely that Satan is the one who is bitten by the snake, whereas Adam is the one who is spared.
"handler" (Herrstrom 48) in the evangelical tradition, but in an aesthetic sense he is also a line-handler, trying to master the unruly and powerful shape so that he can create what he wants with it. The other two characters also try to cope with the strictures of these bounding lines, but with less success than the central figure, who is the only one who seems capable of bending these lines to his own will. Yet, as we have already seen, any victory that "[Yah]" may be able to claim over the serpentine line is somewhat mitigated by the fact that it is piercing his flesh with its teeth. But even this detail is appropriate for an allegory of the Blakean line, because it shows that these lines are not only constrictive, but also transgressive. They fasten their coils onto bodies, but they also invade the boundaries of those bodies. Just as the verbal and visual lines of the Laocoön interpenetrate each other, the snakes inhabit the outside and the inside of the bodies that they contain.

From the point of view of the artist, then, these lines are ambiguous: they must be grasped if one is to use them creatively, but they can also be dangerous because of their transgressive sublimity—they can, and perhaps always do, turn back upon their user, reversing his or her intention to a certain extent. The snake bite suggests that the line can never be completely mastered, but that its sublime energy can be tapped into, if one is willing to pay the price. To Blake, there is really no choice: any artist must take up this challenge, no matter what the dangers may be, because the line is necessary to artistic form.

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57Wright also sees the snakes as lines: "Laocoön's arm, holding a coil of the snake in his tightly clamped fist, figures this struggle with the line while, in the plane of the two-dimensional engraving, his fist succeeds in breaking the serpentine line" ("The Politics of Defamiliarization," 67).
Throughout this chapter, we have seen the contrary connotations that are manifest in Blake's many uses of the line—as an image, a metaphor, and a theoretical principle. These contrary aspects of the same basic image are so deeply rooted that it becomes very difficult to consider any individual example of a Blakean line as a manifestation of a single intention. Each line becomes an invocation of its opposite, so that even the clarity of the bounding line leads to a kind of interpretive vertigo. And yet this vertigo is not a forestalling of intentionality, but rather a complication of it, a recognition that although intention, like the serpent above "[Yah]'s" head, can never be completely mastered, it can at least be pushed in a certain direction. In the next chapter we will move somewhat away from the question of the artist's intention to approach the issue of art's performativity through the more depersonalized idiom of representation. This will involve us with an image of art that is nearly as common, and at least as contrary, as Blake's line: the mirror as a surface of representation.
Chapter Three

Lateral Imagination:
Division and Vision in Blake's Mirrors

Images of reflection have probably always functioned as representations of representation itself, and Blake's many uses of mirror metaphors in his poetry and designs can be seen in this context as self-conscious ways of referring to the process of representation while actually engaging in it. Blake's art is in fact doubly implicated in the idea of the mirror as a medium of representation, because all of his printed work had to be etched in a reversed or laterally-inverted orientation on the copperplate.1 In other words, his graphic medium was conditioned by a kind of mirror effect—which is perhaps one of the reasons that he was so drawn to the image of the mirror as a metaphoric aspect of his art. In this chapter, we will look at Blake's various mirror images as they occur throughout his work, and we will see how the reflective associations of his graphic medium are implicated in the meanings of his metaphors.

Blake's mirror images have generally been read through the Platonic, Ovidian, and Lockean traditions as various indications of fallenness: sites of difference, division, illusion, alterity, and paralysis.2 These readings, which

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1 Joseph Viscomi demonstrates this aspect of Blake's printing practice in Blake and the Idea of the Book, 5-7 and 20-21. Viscomi confirms Robert N. Essick's earlier theory (Printmaker 90) that Blake chose not to use the common transfer processes which employed chalk or wax tracings to convert a normally-oriented original into a laterally-inverted image on the copperplate. This means that in his illuminated books, Blake wrote all of his poetry and composed all of his designs on the plate in reverse.

2 Northrop Frye sees Blake's mirrors as parodic criticisms of Locke's division of perception into the sense impressions and the faculty of reflection (Fearful Symmetry 15-29). Stephen Cox also sees the mirror as the locus of Blakean parody, though he extends the range of this parodic reference to include other rationalist thinkers in addition to Locke (Love and Logic 225-273). M.H. Abrams (The Mirror and the Lamp 131) and S. Foster Damon (A Blake Dictionary 246) both briefly connect Blake's mirrors to the Platonic theory of epiphenomenal images (expressed most fully in Book VI of The
focus on what Blake calls the "Vegetable Glass of Nature" (A Vision of the Last Judgment, E 555) have much to recommend them, since Blake definitely does work within and against the catoptric associations that all three of these sources exemplify. However, I will argue in the following pages that Blake's use of the mirror metaphor also comes to be involved in a different tradition, one in which the mirror is seen as an embodiment of true representation rather than a site of falsehood and illusion. I believe there are two contrary kinds of mirror in Blake: the degraded "Vegetable Glass," which resonates with the negative implications that some critics have already suggested, but also the redeemed "Glass of Eternal Diamond" (A Vision of the Last Judgment, E 560), which hearkens back to a nearly forgotten tradition of more positive mirror metaphors in the early modern period. I hope to show that Blake's use of these two kinds of mirrors reflects his belief in two fundamentally contrary types of representation, the distortive and the perfect. The Glass of Eternal Diamond can be seen as the visual equivalent of the Language of Adam as Robert N. Essick has described it in Blake's works: it is a medium of representation which contains absolutely the thing which it represents. As such, the Glass of Eternal Diamond is the ideal toward which Blake aims his representational practices.

Abrams also connects the romantic mirror more generally with Locke. Robert Gleckner in Blake and Spenser examines some of Blake's mirror images in relation to the Petrarchan tradition of love poetry, in which the eyes of the beloved are considered reflective surfaces. Mark Lussier's doctoral dissertation, "Vortex and Mirror: Blake and Lacan," does not examine many specific images of mirrors, though it does focus on the psychological implications of Lacanian "mirror-stage" encounters in Blake's work, and as such it is implicitly engaged with the Ovidian story of Narcissus. This connection to the Narcissus story becomes more obvious in Lussier's essay, "The Contra-Diction of Design: Blake's Illustrations to Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat," where he undertakes a Lacanian reading of the narcissistic mirror-image as a site of otherness around which desire and sexual identity are constructed.
Before we examine Blake's many invocations of these two varieties of mirrors, it will be useful to give a brief sketch of the early modern traditions of mirror imagery, which may be unfamiliar to contemporary readers. In this period, the mirror becomes ambiguous in its moral and ontological implications. While some the negative valences of mirrors in the Platonic and Ovidian traditions are retained at this time, there is also a move toward seeing the mirror as a positive exemplum. The reasons for this shift are not entirely clear, but it is possible that the improvements in the technology of mirror-construction made the mirror seem more like a perfect representational medium than a surface of distortion. As mirrors became more popular in households, the appearance of the mirror-metaphor in art and literature also increased--so much so, that by the late medieval period, mirror metaphors constituted a veritable sub-genre. Hundreds of writers and artists utilized the mirror image in contexts that indicated both positive and negative moral implications. The idea of the mirror as a site of narcissistic fixation continued in the tradition of the mirror of vanitas, such as the one we see in the illustration to Stephen Batman's *A christal glaße of Christian reformation*

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3 For more detailed examinations of these medieval and Renaissance mirror images, see Herbert Grabes, *The Mutable Glass*, Anna Torti, *The Glass of Form*, and Peter Nolan, *Now Through a Glass Darkly*. Generally, histories of the mirror metaphor either begin or end in the seventeenth century, and there is no scholarly study that encompasses the early modern and modern periods. In fact, there seems to be a general lack of interest in the early modern mirror tradition in all studies except those which specialize in it. M. H. Abrams in *The Mirror and the Lamp* examines the persistence of Platonic and Lockean mirror images in romantic criticism, though he is more interested in what he sees as the transition away from the centrality of this image in the romantic period. Richard Rorty in *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* begins his analysis of mirror metaphors in philosophy with Locke and Descartes, but unlike Abrams he contends that the reflective image of the mind has persisted--lamentably--to the present day. Rodolphe Gasché in *The Tain of the Mirror* focusses on the legacy of Hegelian specular imagery in Derrida's writings. Eric B. Williams' *The Mirror and the Word* traces mirror images from the seventeenth century to modernism. Martin Jay examines some of the reflective associations of twentieth-century French philosophy in *Downcast Eyes*.

4 Grabes provides the most exhaustive compilation of these mirror references in the art and literature of western Europe.
(Fig. 10). In contrast, many of the books with the word "mirror" or "glass" in their titles use the mirror conceit as a claim to the truthfulness of their contents. A work like The Mirror for Magistrates, for example, uses the mirror metaphor as a guarantor of its representational veracity. Mirror-works of this type expose vice and folly, but they do so with the intent of showing the reader how to avoid sinfulness.

The mirror metaphor is also invoked in many positive exempla at this time, and in such cases the truth value of the mirror is often magnified to such an extent that it purports to overcome the bounds of representation. This mirror is often associated with saints or with God himself, as we see in Jan David's Speculum Exemplare (Fig. 11), where worshippers are praying to a mirror which contains images of Jesus and Mary. Hagiographies also often contained the mirror metaphor in their titles to indicate the purity of the saint as an exemplum.5 God was often described in terms of a perfect mirror, as Herbert Grabes notes (75); this divine mirror was sometimes called the Speculum Sine Macula or the Speculum Superius. The godly mirror escapes the limitations of mirror images as Plato describes them; it does not contain mere representations, but rather it contains the divine presence: like the eucharist, it is what it represents. For example, in Dante's Paradiso, Adam describes God as "truth's mirror" (XXVI, 106).6 Dante's use of divine mirror metaphors in the Paradiso can be traced to a particular reading of St. Paul's dictum "Now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face" (2 Cor. 14), in which this phrase is understood as a description of two different kinds of

5One example of this is Friar Leo's biography of St. Francis, which is entitled The Mirror of Perfection.
6For examinations of the movement toward perfect representation in the divine mirrors of the Paradiso, see James Miller, "The Mirrors of Dante's Paradiso" and John Freccero, Dante: The Poetics of Conversion.
mirror: one distorted and earthly, the other perfect and divine. The idea of
the "face to face" as a perfect mirror becomes quite common in the late
medieval period, and I believe it is also important in Blake's invocations of
divine mirror images.

Another kind of mirror-work is the morally composite style which
poses a test of recte legendi for the reader: it contains both virtuous and sinful
actions, and it challenges the reader to distinguish them from each other. The
Bible itself is the most common of these textual mirrors, and we can see its
various functions illustrated in Jan David's Speculum S. Scripturae (Fig. 12).
The Bible is sometimes characterized as a mirror of perfection, a true
representation of the incarnate logos, but at other times it is seen as a mirror
of moral improvement, designed to purify the reader's soul by showing him or
her examples of both virtuous and sinful action. In either case, it reveals the
truth, but the reader's task is to discover the nature of that truth. St.
Augustine is one of the many church philosophers who describe the Bible in
terms of its capacity to reflect the truth:

The mirror has set its writing before you; it is read to you:
Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. The mirror
is set forth in this reading, see whether you are what it has said.
If you are not yet so, then groan, that you may become so. The
mirror will disclose your face to you. As you will not see a
flatterer in the mirror, so you will not cajole yourself. Its
brightness will show you what you are: see what you are.\(^7\)

Augustine's biblical mirror shows both what we should be and what we are. A
recognition of the difference between the two images is what should inspire

\(^7\) Ennaratio in Psalmum, CII, quoted & trans. in Anna Torti, The Glass of Form, 12.
the viewer's spiritual improvement. I believe that Blake's works contain a similar doubleness in their mirror images, and that they place their readers in situations that are analogous to the one which Augustine describes.

Blake would have been exposed to these alternative traditions of mirror metaphors through his readings of medieval and Renaissance poets, mystics, philosophers, and theologians, and also through his perusal of various artworks from this period. He does not however adopt these mirrors to the exclusion of those other mirror-traditions which will be more familiar to the contemporary reader. While he gestures toward the semiotic potentiality of the "Glass of Eternal Diamond" in his work, he also recognizes that his own artistic signs are always implicated in the vicissitudes of the "Vegetable Glass." His art then involves an alternation between these two kinds of mirrors, one which tries to suggest the ways in which they might be related so that they can come to inter-implicate each other and thus to redeem the form of representation that is current in sublunary semiosis. Furthermore, the placement of these two kinds of mirrors in his work points toward the importance of interpretation, since he seems to be trying to teach his readers how to interpret so that they will understand the relationship between these two kinds of signification. The reader's task is then not only to distinguish the Vegetable Glass from the perfect one, but also to understand how they are interrelated so that we can move toward a redeemed form of representation.

In the first section of this chapter we will look at Blake's many mirror images that fall within the Ovidian tradition, mirrors which do not explicitly invoke the problems of lateral inversion, but which nonetheless see the mirror as a primary site of the constitution of both identity and desire. These mirrors are mostly negative in their associations, but as Blake's career progresses, he comes to see positive counterparts to them. In the second
section of this chapter, we will look in detail at the problems of lateral inversion in Blake's chalcographic practice and in his uniquely specular ontology, particularly as it is exemplified in his prose work *A Vision of the Last Judgment*. In the third section, we will examine the multiple mirrors of *Jerusalem*, with a view toward understanding Blake's most complex interplay between the two kinds of mirror I have identified.

I. Blake and the Returns of Narcissus

The mirror images we will examine in this section do not explicitly raise the issue of lateral inversion, but they engage the image of the mirror as a site in which identity, alterity, and desire are intermingled. These mirror metaphors owe a great deal to the example of Narcissus, and probably for this reason they are very amenable to psychoanalytic readings. In his early uses of this metaphor, Blake focusses on the traditional Ovidian and Platonic associations of mirrors as embodiments of illusion and error. However, he moves gradually toward a more contrary sense of the mirror's representational possibilities, and by the time he writes *The Four Zoas* he places the narcissistic mirror of illusion in relation to a redeemed mirror.

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8Freud's "On Narcissism: An Introduction" and Lacan's "The Mirror Stage as Formative of the Function of the I as Revealed in Psychoanalytic Experience" are the primary texts in any psychoanalytic reading of mirrors. While neither of these essays cites the Ovidian story of Narcissus and Echo, both of them contain implicit references to it. Freud sees narcissism as a psychopathology, whereas Lacan uses the mirror image in a more universal application, contending that the "mirror stage" is the point at which the subject arrives at self-consciousness through an identification with an always-externalized image. In both cases, no literal mirror is supposed to be present in the subjective dilemmas which are put forward. They both also use the mirror as a metaphor for a psychic situation which is represented implicitly by Ovid's Narcissus. In Freud's case, the mirror is a tool for the recirculation and self-containment of desire; in Lacan, the mirror is the metaphorical means by which the subject projects his or her ontological self into the exterior economy of the symbolic order. We will see both of these specular trajectories in Blake's invocations of the narcissistic mirror.
which purports to represent truth. This movement toward doubleness in the mirror image does not abandon the narcissistic mirror altogether, but rather complicates it by showing that there is another, preferable, form of representation which occurs in relation to the divine.

Blake's first extended use of the mirror metaphor is in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, where the mirror is related to gender, sexual desire, and jealousy. After her rape by Bromion, Oothoon seeks to reestablish her love relationship with Theotormon, and one of the ways she attempts this is by offering a purified version of herself as a mirror for Theotormon's desire. This could be read as a comment on the essentially narcissistic qualities of male desire, since none of the male characters in the poem offer themselves as mirrors to women. However, Oothoon's offer of her mirror-self is made with a kind of optimism that suggests she believes it will help to stimulate Theotormon to love her rather than to become fixated on his own reflection. She literally bares her soul to Theotormon in an implicitly Promethean act of self-sacrifice when she calls upon his eagles to "Rend away this defiled bosom that I may reflect. / The image of Theotormon on my pure transparent breast" (E 46). One of the traditional representations of the soul or psyche is as a reflecting surface, and here Oothoon works within this metaphor as a way of denying her body in favor of a purified soul. Another aspect of this mirror-encounter is Oothoon's reliance on a conceit of courtly love poetry, in which the lovers mutually reflect each other. However, Oothoon's sacrifice is not

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9Criticism of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* has generally focussed on issues of gender and slavery, but very little critical attention has been devoted to the role of the mirror image in this context. Gleckner makes a brief mention of Oothoon as a mirror (*Blake and Spenser* 45-6), as does Raine (*Blake and Tradition* I: 178). Strangely, David Punter does not examine the narcissistic elements of the poem in his readings of it in *The Romantic Unconscious: A Study in Narcissism and Patriarchy* (78-83).

10The image of lovers reflecting each other is very common in secular love poetry from the medieval period to the seventeenth century. Often the reflective medium is the eyes of the
effective unless Theotormon reciprocates the offer of reflection, and he does not do this because he is absorbed in jealousy and self-pity. His reaction to her sacrifice is only to look at his own reflection: "Theotormon severely smirks. Her soul reflects the smile; / As the clear spring mudded with feet of beasts grows pure & smiles" (E 46). Oothoon is able to project a kind of specular purity toward him, but all Theotormon can see in it is his own severe smile; he gains no sense of her as an other who might have emotions and desires of her own. It is possible that Oothoon's mirroring actually reinforces Theotormon's inward turn, since it provides him with an image of himself rather than one of Oothoon. He remains locked in his own formulation of the problem before them--so much so, that he becomes a brooding solipsistic philosopher, thinking abstract thoughts to distract himself from the reality of the emotional dilemma before him.11 He repeats several philosophical questions without responding directly to Oothoon's imprecations. By doing this, he reveals that his purported love for Oothoon is in fact entirely selfish.

After offering herself as a mirror, and wondering "How can I be defiled when I reflect thy image pure?" (E 47), Oothoon seems to become aware of the negative possibilities that mirror images can create. Her exclamation about "The moment of desire!" suggests that thwarted desire only spawns its own epiphenomenal spectrous objects, which lead one toward masturbatory solipsism. She says,

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11His philosophical positions are generally sceptical and empiricist, in line with Hume's radical empiricism, which denies the existence of others and at times denies the existence of the self. Such a philosophy is obviously not conducive to action, or to any sense of love as mutual interchange. However, Theotormon does not relinquish a sense of his own identity as Hume does: in a sense, Theotormon tries to solidify his identity by refusing to have a relationship with an other.
The Virgin

That pines for man; shall awaken her womb to enormous joys
In the secret shadows of her chamber; the youth shut up from
The lustful joy, shall forget to generate, & create an amorous
image
In the shadows of his curtains and in the folds of his silent pillow

(E 50)

Desire, in this model, must find an object, and if it is unsuccessful it will create
a spectral object of its own. The implication of Oothoon's speech is that such
reliance upon epiphenomenal objects is perverse, and that the only healthy
way to deal with desire is to act. She goes on to ask Theotormon, "Is it because
acts are not lovely, that thou seest solitude, / Where the horrible darkness is
impressed with reflections of desire" (E 50). This suggests that Theotormon has
begun to project his own reflected objects of desire, so that he has closed her
out of his psychic economy altogether. Significantly, her description of the
darkness being "impressed" with "reflections" is a reversal of the Lockean
doctrine of sense impressions: here the mind projects impressions upon the
darkness, whereas in Locke the impressions are stamped upon the mind by
outer forces. The implication is that these illusory sense impressions are just
as problematic as those of Locke's model. As Theotormon becomes more
involved in his own private visions, they come to be more real to him than
Oothoon, who describes herself as "A solitary shadow wailing on the margin of
non-entity" (E 50).

The projected mirror which allows Theotormon to complete the circuit
of his desire, to maintain all of it inside himself, is portrayed here as a more
pernicious one than the sacrificial mirror of Oothoon's soul. There are in fact
few demonstrably positive associations of mirroring in this poem, despite
Oothoon's original hopes to the contrary. Her offers to procure women for Theotormon and to eschew all jealousy are not successful because he is already too involved in himself. He "sits / Upon the margind ocean conversing with shadows dire" (E 51), in a posture that is unmistakeably narcissistic. The refrain of the Daughters of Albion, who "echo back her sighs" (E 46, 48, 51), also has a connection to the Narcissus story, since Echo is an important character in that narrative. In some ways, Oothoon herself plays the role of Echo in Visions of the Daughters of Albion, because she desires a narcissistic man who refuses to take notice of her. Of course, the Daughters of Albion are also a kind of Greek chorus in the poem, not so much participating in it as commenting upon it and lamenting the stricken relationship it allegorizes. Their echoing is a kind of solidarity with Oothoon's predicament rather than a cause of it. However, Blake may also be suggesting that women should not undertake the role of the echo or the reflective surface because in doing so they simply teach men to desire the image of themselves rather than the presence of a beloved other. In a sense, Oothoon's mirroring of Theotormon might be seen as misguided because it shows him that he can love himself instead of loving her. While Theotormon himself remains largely responsible for his fixation upon shadowy images, there is a suggestion that Oothoon plays a role in this turn of events. The masturbatory mirror imagery in the later part of the poem can be seen as Theotormon's internalization of the reflective strategy that she has taught him.

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12 Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi note in the Blake Trust edition of the poem that Thomas Taylor, in his A Dissertation Upon the Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries (ca. 1791) describes Narcissus in terms that are reminiscent of Blake's phrasing here, saying that he "converses with nothing but shadows" (Dissertation 13; cited in The Early Illuminated Books 278). It is worth noting that the Platonic associations of shadow and substance in the mirror image are also present in the Ovid text: "The vision is only shadow, / Only reflection, lacking any substance" (III, 434-5).
Blake's Pickering Manuscript poem, "The Crystal Cabinet," can also be read in specular terms, though its mirror imagery is somewhat more oblique than that of *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, and it is more involved in the Platonic tradition than the narcissistic one. Gender roles are reversed here from *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*; the narrator (presumably though not explicitly male) is caught by a maiden and imprisoned in a crystal cabinet which contains a separate world reminiscent of the alternate universe of the mirror:

And within it opens into a World
And a little lovely Moony Night

Another England there I saw
Another London with its Tower
Another Thames & other Hills
And another pleasant Surrey Bower

Another Maiden like herself
Translucent lovely shining clear (E 488)

The narrator has been locked inside the mirror, something like Lewis Carroll's Alice. The Maiden herself is described here in terms that are at once diaphanous and possibly reflective, which is reminiscent of Oothoon's mirrored soul. However, unlike Theotormon, the narrator of "The Crystal Cabinet" does not see a reflection of himself; instead, his desire is inflamed by this vision of the Maiden, and he tries to reach out and grasp it:

I strove to seize the inmost Form

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13 Gleckner's reading of "The Crystal Cabinet" in *Blake and Spenser* (53-8) places it in the Petrarchan love sonnet tradition, and links it specifically to Spenser's *Amoretti* 45. Gleckner sees the crystal cabinet as a mirror of containment and illusion which reveals its falseness once the relationship has ended.
With ardor fierce & hands of flame
But burst the Crystal Cabinet
And like a Weeping Babe became (E 488-9)
This attempt to project desire outside of the self, toward an external object, turns out to be just as disastrous as Theotormon's narcissism. The beloved image is exposed here as an empty (or at least extremely fragile and therefore unattainable) epiphenomenon, which suggests that the desire for possession of the other is antithetical to the rules of erotic representation.

The poem allegorizes certain problems of representation that are highlighted by Plato, though Blake's views on sexuality generally are very different from those of Plato. The invocation of the "inmost Form" seems to be related to the Platonic doctrine of the Forms, and the idea of the Crystal Cabinet as an illusory alternative world calls to mind many of Plato's warnings about the dangers of taking the representation for the real thing, the shadow for the substance. The description of the reflected images as "Threefold each in other closd" (E 488) and the characterization of the Maiden's kiss as "Threefold" (E 488) may refer to Plato's designation of artistic representation and mirror images as thrice-removed from the truth of the Forms.\(^{14}\) Plato in fact makes little distinction between reflections, shadows, and artistic images: they are all equally illusory to him. This is generally not the case for Blake, since he obviously values art much more highly than Plato does, but in this poem his portrayal of desire as directed toward illusion does suggest an acknowledgement of the limits of representation.

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\(^{14}\) The narrator's attempt to kiss the image also calls to mind the Narcissus story, since Narcissus tries unsuccessfully to kiss his own image: "When my lips go down / To kiss the pool, his rise, he reaches toward me" (III, 451-52).
Blake's approach to the mirror-image, and implicitly to representation, is extremely pessimistic in "The Crystal Cabinet." The attempt to consummate desire here in fact fractures the representational medium itself. The final stanza situates the narrator "in the outward Air" (E 489) along with a Weeping Woman who may or may not be a version of the original Maiden. At this point, the dream of desire is finished and the epiphenomenal world of the Crystal Cabinet is gone. All the narrator and the woman can do is lament this condition. The final line of the poem, "I fill'd with woes the passing Wind" (E 489), is reminiscent of the refrain of Visions, in which the Daughters of Albion "hear her woes, and echo back her sighs" (E 46). The response to the failure of erotic representation remains the same, even though these poems narrate two different kinds of failure. Sighing and wailing and other forms of glossolalia (like that of "a Weeping Babe" (E 489)) are perhaps the only possible forms of communication once the reflective surface of signification has been shattered. There is a suggestion here that non-discursive lamentation is the only communicative option which does not involve the illusions which are endemic to sublunary representation.

Blake's illustrations to Thomas Gray's "Ode on the Death of a Favorite Cat" also utilize reflective imagery to comment on erotic and pecuniary desire, this time from a female, though not always human, perspective. Blake portrays the cat Selima and the desired goldfish as partially or even fully human in his illustrations, thus adding an allegorical level to Gray's poem which is only latent in the text. On plate three of the illustrations (Fig. 13), Selima is both a woman and a cat, and she is positioned over the surface of the fish pond in an obviously narcissistic pose, looking down at her own reflection in the water. Selima's reflection does not contain the feline attributes that we see in her real face, which suggests that she is looking at an idealized image of herself,
or that she is in effect repressing the animalistic aspects of her identity. The fish are also nearly human in form, though they retain the weblike armature about their limbs which is visible in some of the other plates. They are holding each other in what seems to be a mutually loving embrace. At this point they are not aware of Selima, and she is not aware of them. She seems in fact to be fixated upon her own image, to be caught up in what Mark Lussier calls, after Lacan, "a primary narcissism which precedes her splitting that occurs in the mirror stage" ("Contra-Diction" 212). Lussier is correct in seeing Selima's self-absorption as a preliminary phase in the development of her identity, because she seems to be fixated on her own image here to such an extent that she makes no differentiation between self and other.

It is only in the next design (Fig. 14) that Selima's desire moves beyond her own image, and when this happens, she becomes almost entirely feline in appearance. Desire seems to be an animalistic instinct here. Selima's desire is complicated by the relationship that Blake suggests between the two goldfish, which are portrayed as lovers. As Irene Tayler says, it is possible that Selima is interested in the fish precisely because they are a couple and she is alone: that she is envious of their love (Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray 66). Whether Selima desires the happiness of the goldfish or she simply desires to eat them, her acquisitive focus on them is manifest in the way she leans out, wide-eyed, over the water. She is in fact in a very similar position to her earlier, more humanoid self, but now she is looking into the reflective medium rather than watching her own reflection in it. She is moving beyond the narcissistic infatuation with her own image that we saw in Figure 13, toward

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15Irene Tayler notes the non-feline appearance of the reflected image, but she reads this as a comment on the allegory of Gray's poem rather than as a sign of Selima's own conflicted identity (Blake's Illustrations to the Poems of Gray 61).
what seems to be an even more absorbing infatuation with something that is obviously other than herself. However, as she "stretch[es], in vain, to reach the prize" ("Ode on the Death of Favorite Cat" 22), she falls into the watery medium and drowns.

The parallels with "The Crystal Cabinet" are obvious: an attempt to grasp the inner form, the thing inside the reflecting surface, results in failure. One would think that Selima's abandonment of narcissism would be a positive thing, but in fact Blake allegorizes this in terms of the two extremes of representational error here, as he did in Visions and "The Crystal Cabinet." Blake suggests that seeing the image as entirely self or as entirely other is equally problematic. This too bespeaks a deeply Platonic sensibility, and a pessimistic sense of the possibilities of representation, since any investment in sublunary images is portrayed as a kind of trap. In keeping with this idea, the final design (Fig. 15) portrays an ethereal Selima, now fully human in appearance, ascending from the waters with her eyes raised upward. This is, one suspects, her Platonic spirit, liberated from the illusions of the body. It is significant that for the first time since the beginning of the poem, she is looking away from the reflective surface of the water, the treacherous medium of representation. In keeping with this development, the fish are no longer dangerously tempting epiphenomena. For the first time, they are merely fish which are not invested with any anthropomorphic qualities. The lack of anthropomorphism signals the end of the allegory, but also more generally, the end of the symbolic order: the fish no longer function as

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16In Blake's second Illustration, placed before the beginning of the poem, Selima and her human counterpart are looking directly at the viewer rather than into the water—perhaps as a way of suggesting that the artistic image the viewer is faced with is analogous to the reflective images of the water. In all other designs except the last one, Selima is focussed intently on the water.
images of desire because Selima is dead and has passed beyond the realm of symbols. At the same time as she becomes pure spirit, the fish become pure matter, and there is no need for a figural realm which would negotiate between the two.

The mirror images we have looked at so far are largely negative in their associations, but Blake does move toward a more ambiguous usage of the mirror metaphor at around the time of the illustrations to Gray. This change is most visible in his monumental collection of illustrations to Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*, and in fact Blake's development of a contrary sensibility toward mirror images might be attributable to his intensive reading of Young at this time, since Young himself invokes the Pauline idea of two different kinds of mirror. *Night Thoughts* is a meditation on "Time, Death, and Eternity," as its subtitle proclaims, and as such it is not surprising that Young should rely upon the Pauline mirrors as ways of allegorizing the passage from finite time to eternity. In Paul's formulation, the "glass, darkly" belongs to the "now," whereas the "face to face" is described as a kind of representation which will occur only in the "then" of eternity.

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17 There is relatively little criticism of these illustrations, especially when one considers the magnitude of the project. As far as I am aware, none of the criticism to date looks at the images of mirrors in these designs. Critics have generally focussed on the issue of Blake's attitude toward Young, arguing either that he is overtly critical of the poet or that he is a sympathetic illustrator. For an overview of this issue, see Heppner (*Reading Blake's Designs* 147-70).

18 There is as yet no conclusive evidence to show whether Blake's illustrations to Gray were done before or after the illustrations to Young. Certainly, both projects were completed within at least three years of each other. If the illustrations to Gray were done after the illustrations to *Night Thoughts*, then my correlation of Blake's ambiguation of the mirror image with his reading of Young is not as convincing as it would otherwise be. However, as we will see, Blake's sense of the ambiguity of the mirror is also visible in *The Four Zoas*, which in many ways grows out of his illustrations to the *Night Thoughts*.

19 Paul's description of this relation between finite time and eternity is itself intensely Platonic, of course. In Book VII of *The Republic*, immediately following the description of the shadows in the cave, Plato describes the kind of representation that will be possible in the future: "Last of all he will be able to see the sun, and not mere reflections of him in
Most of Young's mirror images remain within the tradition of the "glass, darkly"--they are images of the illusory nature of worldly reality. Early in the poem he writes, "All, all on earth is shadow, all beyond / Is substance; the reverse is Folly's creed: / How solid all, where change shall be no more!" (I, 120-22).\(^\text{20}\) The sixth "Night" of the poem contains the largest number of illusory mirrors, including a reference to the quintessential image of female narcissism at the time: "Like Milton's Eve, when gazing on the lake, / Man makes the matchless image man admires" (VI, 434-36). Blake illustrates these lines with an image (Fig. 16) that is very similar to his depiction of Selima looking at her own reflection in the water. Young also describes another situation which is reminiscent of Selima's desire for the goldfish, though in Young's case the animalistic desire is directed more explicitly toward money:

As monkeys at a mirror stand amazed,
They fail to see what they so plainly see;
Thus men, in shining riches, see the face
Of happiness, nor know it as a shade;
But gaze, and touch, and peep, and peep again,
And wish, and wonder it is absent still (VI, 523-28).\(^\text{21}\)

Blake illustrates this passage by showing a man staring fixedly at the shining surface of a bag full of coins (Fig. 17). This man's desire is in a sense

\(^{20}\text{My citations from Young's text refer to the edition Blake used in his illustrations, which is reproduced in William Blake's Illustrations to Edward Young's Night Thoughts. My parenthetical references to this text will cite the night number and line number.}\)

\(^{21}\text{Blake adopts a similar image to this in his fragmentary notebook poem commenting on English artists' preference for colour over outline:}\)

*Call that the Public Voice which is their Error
Like as a Monkey peeping in a Mirror
Admires all his colours brown & warm
And never once perceives his ugly form (E 578).*
narcissistic, but it is also projected outward into the money: he tries to possess it but also in a way to become it. The phantom image of happiness which Young describes would seem to be a dream of an inherent value in the currency—a dream that Young suggests is nothing but an illusory shadow. In another context, Blake portrays the mirror as an even more degraded site of solipsistic fixation in his striking illustration of what Young calls a "self-fetter'd... soul" (I, 157) (Fig. 18). Blake derives the image of the worm from Young's lines, but the images of the hand-mirror and the chains are Blake's own addition to the scene. Clearly, in this context, the mirror is a mechanism of self-entrapment.

In the later parts of the *Night Thoughts*, as the apocalyptic ending approaches, both Young and Blake start to develop an alternative kind of mirroring which reaches toward God rather than entrapping humans within the fallen world. Young's first extensive gesture toward this doubleness of the mirror is in the middle of Night VII, when he describes the infidel Lorenzo shunning specular knowledge of himself as well as knowledge of God. Lorenzo says,

"To *know myself*, true Wisdom?—No, to shun

"That Shocking Science, Parent of Despair!

"Avert thy Mirror; If I see, I die.

"*Know my Creator*? Climb his blest Abode

"By painful Speculation, pierce the Veil,

"Dive in His Nature, read His Attributes,

"And gaze in Admiration—on a Foe" (VII, 672-78).

Lorenzo turns away from the mirror that would give him a true vision of his own mortal self, but he is even more adamant in his rejection of the "painful
Speculation" that would reveal to him the face of God. Blake illustrates this design by showing an angelic figure holding a hand-mirror up for Lorenzo, who pushes it away from himself (Fig. 19). This mirror, whether it would show Lorenzo the truth of his own mortality or whether it would reveal an image of the divine, seems to be a very different kind of reflecting surface from the ones which have been prevalent earlier in the poem, which have been sites of narcissistic fixation. Blake signals this difference by the fact that the mirror is held by an angel instead of by Lorenzo himself. This mirror can be connected to two early modern traditions of mirror metaphors, both of which associate the mirror with truth. The notion of the mirror as a *memento mori* is a very common medieval and Renaissance emblem of human impermanence, as we see in Daniel Hopfer's engraving, *Vanitas* (Fig. 20), in which Death and the Devil try to insinuate themselves into the woman's reflected image. The other mirror in Lorenzo's speech, the one which would contain the Creator, is common in the specular images of the Pauline "face to face," as we have already seen. In the last Night of the *Night Thoughts*, Young makes explicit this reference to the face-to-face as a perfect mirror:

Enter a temple; it will strike an awe:

What awe from this the Deity has built!

A good man seen, though silent counsel gives:

The touch'd spectator wishes to be wise:

In a bright mirror his own hands have made,

Here we see something like the face of God (IX, 932-38).

While Young is careful to say that this reflected image is only "something like" the divine visage--thus preserving a sense of the figurality of such representation--it is clear that this metaphorical face-to-face embodies a
movement away from the limitations that plague most forms of sublunary semiosis.

Blake does not illustrate the above quotation with a mirror, but in a different location he goes even further than Young in his ambiguation of the mirror image. He does this when he illustrates the two kinds of vision that Young describes in Night VII (Fig. 21):

Above, Lorenzo saw the Man of Earth,
The Mortal Man; and wretched was the Sight;
To balance that, to comfort, and exalt,
Now see the Man Immortal: Him, I mean,
Who lives as such; whose Heart, full-bent on Heav'n,
Leans all that Way, his Bias to the Stars (VII, 969-74)

Blake portrays this scene of the Mortal Man and the Immortal Man with the aid of two props which are not present in the poetry: he shows the Mortal Man staring fixedly at his own reflection in a hand mirror, while the angelic Immortal Man bows down before a different kind of mirror, one which is set at an angle so that it points up toward heaven. We see that the difference between these two mirrors is essentially the intention with which they are employed. The Mortal Man uses his mirror to solidify a sense of his own identity, but also simply to admire himself. His posture and his facial expression suggest a high degree of vanity, and it is likely that Blake associates him with the medieval mirrors of vanitas and superbia, the ones which are linked directly to sin. In contrast, the Immortal Man uses his mirror to look beyond himself, toward something that is above him and also greater than him. He prostrates himself before the mirror, evincing the humility that is so obviously missing in the Mortal Man. In this formulation, the redeemed alternative to the narcissistic mirror is one that uses the
reflected image not to contain a closed economy of selfhood, or to institute an acquisitive desire for the other, but rather one that looks with humility beyond the self, toward what Young calls the "oeconomy divine" (IX, 1056).

In Blake's first full-length epic, The Four Zoas, which grows out of his illustrations to Night Thoughts in several important ways, he continues to explore the ambiguous possibilities of specular imagery, though there are still many more degraded mirrors than redemptive ones here. For example, in Night the Third, Blake describes a narcissistic theology in which man creates an illusory god out of his own reflected image:

Then Man ascended mourning into the splendors of his palace
Above him rose a Shadow from his wearied intellect
Of living gold, pure, perfect, holy; in white linen pure he hover'd
A sweet entrancing self-delusion, a watry vision of Man
Soft exulting in existence all the Man absorbing

Man fell upon his face prostrate before the watry shadow
Saying O Lord whence is this change thou knowest I am nothing
And Vala trembled & coverd her face, & her locks. were spread on the pavement

I heard astonishd at the Vision & my heart trembled within me
I heard the voice of the Slumberous Man & thus he spoke
Idolatrous to his own Shadow words of Eternity uttering (E 327)

22 The most obvious connection between The Four Zoas and the Night Thoughts designs is that the manuscript of Blake's poem is written on the discarded proof sheets of the engraved Night Thoughts illustrations. Blake consciously works within a framework similar to that of Young's poem, since he divides The Four Zoas into nine "Nights," just as Young did with Night Thoughts. On thematic and imagistic levels, there are many other connections between these two poems.
Here we see a man expressing humility toward an apparently divine reflected image, much as the Immortal Man does in the illustrations to Night Thoughts, but the significance of these actions is reversed because this God is an epiphenomenal projection rather than the true one. Despite the man's worshipful attitude, there remains an undercurrent of pride in this description, in which God is seen as the invention of man. A strange iconoclastic element comes out in Blake here, though it is certainly a very selective iconoclasm. He recognizes the power that created images can have over people, and he knows that iconic art can be turned to the wrong ends—toward worship of this world rather than the next. And yet this worship of the reflected image is extraordinarily similar to Blake's other attempts to emphasize the importance of the "human form divine" ("The Divine Image," E 13). The difference, it seems, is in the order of the occurrence, and in the intentions that animate the search for God. We can say that we are all one with God, but if we reverse the order of this statement, we apotheosize ourselves and in effect reduce God to a trace effect of our own desire for infinity. Blake is suspicious of any creation scene in which either God or humanity is given priority, so that one of them creates the other; he prefers to show how the human and the divine originate mutually from each other.

The above quotation can also be read as a Lacanian institution of the symbolic order, with the appeal to the image of authority being grounded on a misrecognition of the status of the reflected image. Urizen does a similar thing in a manner that is closer to Lacan's description of the personal subject's constitution in the reflected image. The narcissistic qualities of this encounter, in which Urizen derides his emanation Ahania for becoming external from him, are signs that he does not consider this an appropriate or adequate solution to the problem of subjective identity. The Emanation is a
relation of externality here, and Urizen wishes for the lost time in which Ahania was part of him instead of divided from him. He says to her, "once thou was in my breast / A sluggish current of dim waters" (E 329), but now thou has risen with thy moist locks into a watry image

Reflecting all my indolence my weakness & my death

To weigh me down beneath the grave into non Entity (E 329)

The "moist locks" which rise out of the reflection are reminiscent of a famous purveyor of mirror-images, John Locke, who is implicitly cited here as one of the causes of such division. Urizen, as the embodiment of reason, of course does not recognize that his own rationalism has in fact created the Lockean illusion that hovers before him. The reflection that Urizen sees is a stultifying and paralysing one, not unlike the image that Narcissus sees in the lake. Urizen also defines this reflected image as external to himself and thus as constitutive of his desire, just as Narcissus does. It creates his desire but at the same time roots him to the spot and saps his energy to such an extent that he sinks "into non Entity". Perhaps because he can no longer see the Emanation as a part of himself, and because his subjectivity is formed in the lack which this absence creates, his identity folds in on itself, and he succumbs to the knowledge of the emptiness at the heart of the reflected image.

There is a great deal of crystal imagery in The Four Zoas which can also be read in terms of the mirror, as I have done with "The Crystal Cabinet." Tharmas describes his emanation as his "Crystal form" in a narration that is remarkably similar to Urizen's earlier lament:

In sighs & sobbings all dividing till I was divided

In twain & lo my Crystal form that lived in my bosom

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23 Gleckner (Blake and Spenser 55-57) also connects the crystal imagery of The Four Zoas to that of the earlier poem.
Followd her daughters to the fields of blood they left me naked
Alone & they refused to return from the fields of the mighty
Therefore I will reward them as they have rewarded me
I will divide them in my anger (E 362)

This passage shows how the division of the mirror image provokes a proliferation of further divisions. Division is in a sense infectious; it splits everything until there is nothing but a play of mirror images, a potentially endless field of empty illusions. The longing for reunification with the estranged image in the mirror is Tharmas's justification for unleashing further divisions upon the world. He divides his rebellious daughters, and then commands Los to "gather them from out their graves & put thy fetter on them / And bind them to thee that my crystal form may come to me" (E 362). In other words, he tries to hold these divided images hostage, in the hopes of attracting his own crystal form. The very desire for reunification with the other begets a panoply of consequent divisions.

In the Eighth Night of *The Four Zoas* there is a suggestion of an alternative to the narcissistic and divisive mirrors which have been most visible in the poem. The reflective associations of this passage are only latent, but I believe that nonetheless it is constructed in such a way as to reinforce the connections between mirroring and the Emanations. In this passage the bosom of Jerusalem is described as a medium of representation which is capable of presenting a vision of Christ:

And Enitharmon namd the Female Jerusa[le]m the holy
Wondring she saw the Lamb of God within Jerusalems Veil
The divine Vision seen within the inmost deep recess
Of fair Jerusalems bosom in a gently beaming fire (E 376)
The image of the female as a reflecting surface is familiar to us from *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, where Oothoon's attempt to reflect Theotormon back to himself could be considered something of a mistake. Here, though, the vision of the Lamb of God within Jerusalem's bosom seems to be a true vision rather than an erroneous one. It is reminiscent of the angelic mirrors of Dante's *Paradiso*, which provide increasingly correct and brilliant reflections of the divine light as Dante continues on his journey. But even more, this image of Christ within the woman's bosom brings to mind a passage from St. Theresa's autobiography, which Blake is known to have read in his later years:

> Being once reciting the *hours* of the *divine office*, with all the rest of the nuns, my soul began to be suddenly recollected; and it seemed to me that it was like some clear and pure looking-glass, without having any thing either on the back or on the sides, or above, or below which was not all exceedingly clear. And in the very Center thereof, Christ our Lord was represented to me, just as I am wont to see him. It seemed to me that I saw him clearly, in all the parts and portions of my soul, as in a looking-glass, and so also (though I know not how) this glass was all engraven, or set in our Lord himself, with such an enamoured communication of himself, as I cannot express. (170)

This passage would likely have attracted Blake's attention, given its appropriateness to his own practise as a visionary engraver. Perhaps even more importantly, Teresa's description of her own soul as a glass of "enamoured communication" provides an obviously specular precursor for

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24 In Gilchrist's biography of Blake (346), Samuel Palmer mentions that Blake often quoted aloud from St. Theresa's *Life*.
Blake's images of the divine Vision within Jerusalem's bosom. As we will see in the next two sections of this chapter, Blake builds upon this image in his other descriptions of divinely mirroring souls.

II. Lateral Inversion and Apocalyptic Vision

In the mirror traditions before Blake, there is little if any interest in the problem of lateral inversion in reflected images. Indeed, even after Blake, there is not much attention given to this issue in literature until Lewis Carroll's *Through the Looking-Glass*. In a sense, then, Blake can be considered something of a pioneer in the history of mirror metaphors, because he often focusses quite explicitly on the most insidious form of distortion that reflected images embody: the fact that they reverse right and left. It is not surprising that he does this, because, as we have already noted, many of his graphic works had to be created in a mirror-world of his own invention. The physical necessity of lateral inversion in printing is one of the laws of the material world which Blake may not have been fond of, but which he nevertheless had to contend with all his life. Blake critics have only recently begun to grapple with the hermeneutic implications of the

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25 The credit for the discovery of this remarkable passage goes to Kathleen Raine, who cites it in relation to Oothoon's attempts to mirror Theotormon in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (*Blake and Tradition*, 1, 178). I believe the text is more applicable to Blake's later uses of the mirror image, which Raine does not examine in this context.

26 There is however some suggestion of such inversion in the gothic tradition of the doppelganger, the twin which is also an opposite. In contrast to the relative lack of attention to lateral inversion before Carroll, there has been a huge upsurge of interest in this phenomenon in the twentieth century. An exhaustive list of twentieth century writers who work with the conceit of lateral inversion has not been written, but it would include figures such as Nabokov, Updike, Levi, and Cortazar. This may be due in part to the focus that Freud and Lacan have brought upon the mirror image, though they do not explicitly mention lateral inversion in their writings on narcissism and the mirror stage, respectively. I would argue that the influence of Carroll is more important than that of psychoanalysis in this change.
remarkable fact that all of the illuminated works were etched in reverse. In this section I would like to attempt some readings of this phenomenon in relation to the plethora of mirror images that Blake incorporates into his poems and designs. Because I will be dealing with the liminal zone between medium and message, this approach will involve a rather unusual mixture of chalcography, ontology, and the intentionality of the beyond.

Like any engraver, Blake would have been trained to deal with the vicissitudes of lateral inversion from the earliest days of his apprenticeship. All forms of reproductive engraving produce a laterally-inverted image when the engraved plate touches the paper; and thus, to make an intelligible print, the medium must be a mirror image of the intended finished product. Much of the history of the graphic arts consists of various attempts to compensate for this problem, and indeed several methods of doing this had been devised by Blake's time. Various transfer processes allowed an engraver to trace the image in its normal orientation and then transfer it in a laterally-inverted form onto the plate. Robert N. Essick notes that a simpler solution to this problem, at least for engravers working on designs rather than text, was to place the original drawing in front of a mirror to compensate for lateral

\[27\] Part of the reason that Blake critics have not addressed some of the more speculative metaphorical implications of this practice is that until recently there has been a great deal of uncertainty about how Blake did produce his illuminated works. Robert N. Essick's *William Blake, Printmaker* (1980) was the first book to provide a convincing argument that Blake did his etching in reverse. Joseph Viscomi's *Blake and the Idea of the Book* (1993) produces a great deal of evidence to support Essick's claim. Essick and Viscomi do make some suggestions about the metaphorical import of their discoveries in relation to Blake's poems and images, but their focus is more on chalcographical arguments than on the mirror metaphor.

\[28\] Until recently, most critics believed that Blake used one of these counter-proofing processes. Ruthven Todd's suggestion in "The Techniques of William Blake's Illuminated Printing" that Blake used a transfer process with varnish on paper seems to have been largely accepted by critics until the appearance of Essick's *William Blake, Printmaker*. Todd's rationale for devising this transfer process is that "it seemed ... unlikely that Blake could have written the whole of the hundred plates of *Jerusalem* alone, not to mention his other books[,] backwards" (35).
inversion, thereby avoiding the embarrassing spectacle of "battalions of left-handed soldiers" (*Printmaker* 13). Engravers who did not take these precautions were sometimes caught by the peculiarities of the graphic medium. Hogarth, for example, was notorious for producing left-handed images of right-handed people. Except in a few special cases, Blake himself did not take the trouble to compensate for lateral inversion in his images in the illuminated books either.29 For example, the image of the man on plate 24 of *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (Fig. 22) is not in the same orientation as the related image from his notebook (Fig. 23).

Blake would not have been able to ignore the problem of lateral inversion in the textual parts of his works, however, since written language is based upon the right-left axis which lateral inversion disrupts. The only way he could deal with this problem was by using a transfer process or simply by writing in reverse. Blake's choice to write all of his illuminated works in reverse was extraordinary in its scope, but probably not in its concept. Engravers were accustomed to working with mirrored copperplates, even though the ubiquity of moveable type usually made it unnecessary for them to engrave long passages of laterally inverted text.30 Before Blake began using illuminated printing, he would have had some limited experience with this strange art—for example, when he etched titles and signatures in his

29Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi state that "As with all known drawings of motifs subsequently used in relief etchings, Blake did not reverse the image when he drew it on the plate, and thus it is reversed in impressions from the plate" (*The Early Illuminated Books* 10). However, they do note that "the full plate designs in white-line in Milton and Jerusalem are exceptions to this practice. They required preliminary sketches for counter-proofing onto the copper, and thus the printed image has right and left in the same direction as the drawing" (10 n 4).

30Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi note in the Blake Trust edition of the tractates that reverse writing would have been "only a minor challenge to one trained as a professional engraver and etcher who must constantly work with mirror images" (*The Early Illuminated Books* 9).
his commercial engravings. Nonetheless, the earliest known textual examples of his relief etching process, *All Religions are One* and *There is NO Natural Religion*, reveal that he was not yet entirely comfortable with writing in reverse. As the editors of these tractates note, on several plates of *All Religions are One* the letters occasionally slant to the left instead of to the right, which suggests that Blake had not entirely mastered the technique of compensating for lateral inversion (*The Early Illuminated Books* 12). Furthermore, the line "The Author & Printer W Blake" on the frontispiece of *There is NO Natural Religion* is printed in reverse letters, which means that Blake wrote these words on the copperplate in the normal orientation rather than the mirror-writing that was necessary.  

This was probably an error on Blake's part rather than a comment on the specularity of his medium, since he effaced this line on most copies. In any case, it is clear from the evidence of subsequent illuminated books that Blake quickly perfected the art of reverse writing. In his later life, lateral inversion so suffused Blake's imagination that he even used mirror-writing occasionally in his notebook, when there was no graphic reason to do so. As Viscomi notes, Blake's friends Cumberland and Linnell were so impressed by his ability to write backwards that they told their acquaintances about it (23).

We have established that Blake dealt with laterally inverted images in one form or another on an almost daily basis, but a crucial question remains:

31Erdman notes this peculiarity in the textual notes of his edition (E 790). A reproduction of this plate can be found in *The Early Illuminated Books* 68 (Supplementary Illustration 1).

32Eaves, Essick, and Viscomi say of this mirrored line that "it seems more probably a simple error than a consciously symbolic gesture" (*The Early Illuminated Books* 37).

33For example, he writes the following passage in reverse: "Every thing which is in harmony with me I call In harmony--But there may be things which are Not in harmony with Me & yet are in a More perfect Harmony" (E 695). It is possible that Blake's use of mirror-writing in the notebook was done as a way of imitating Leonardo Da Vinci, whose notebook was famously composed in reverse.
what, if anything, might this practise mean in relation to his poetic and artistic uses of the mirror metaphor? Like any question about Blake's meanings, this one can only be answered tentatively, and with an eye toward the inevitable contrariety of Blake's metaphors. Nonetheless, it is tempting to speculate that in Blake's mind lateral inversion has something to do with the post-lapsarian condition, both in terms of ontology and representation. Lateral inversion is of course the most pervasive aspect of the mirror's distortion and the otherness of the reflected image. At times Blake seems to suggest that this kind of distortion is endemic to the fallen world generally, rather than merely being present in mirrors and graphic images. For example, his descriptions of the Mundane Shell sometimes suggest that it is a vast reflective surface which entraps us in an epiphenomenal world of illusions, much like the shadow-world of Plato's cave. In one of these descriptions, Blake highlights the fact that this reflected image is reversed: "whatever is visible in the Vegetable Earth. the same / Is visible in the Mundane Shell: reversd in mountain & vale" (Jerusalem, E 227).34

In this context, the Mundane Shell might very well be called the "Vegetable Glass of Nature." If all the things we see are merely images in a vegetable glass, then our perceptions must be subtly distorted by this medium, which would reverse our sense of left and right, thereby leading us into error. Since Blake is intimately acquainted with the vicissitudes of lateral inversion, he is eminently qualified to help his readers compensate for its distortions. It is possible that his many references to lateral inversion are meant to do just that.

34The Platonic associations of the Mundane Shell are even more visible in Blake's description of it in Milton: "The Mundane Shell, is a vast Concave Earth: an immense / Hardend shadow of all things upon our Vegetated Earth" (E 110).
A corollary of this is that for Blake a perfect mirror—as well as a perfect graphic medium—would be one that does not laterally invert its images.35

The most obvious way in which the lateral inversion of Blake's medium becomes manifested in his illuminated works is in the famous mirror-written passages which appear in Milton and Jerusalem. To create these cryptic lines of poetry, Blake merely had to write normally on the copperplate and allow the vicissitudes of his medium to invert the phrases for him. In these cases, it is quite clear that Blake intends his lines to come out in a laterally inverted form, since he places them in highly visible locations, and he makes no attempt to cover them up with ink or to efface them from the plate. For example, the mirror-writing is highlighted at the top of plate 33 of Milton (Fig. 24), which is the beginning of the poem's second book. Across the top of the page is written in reverse: "How wide the Gulf & Unpassable! between Simplicity & Insipidity" (E 129). A second mirror-epigram is positioned below the normally-oriented word "Milton": "Contraries are positives / A Negation is not a Contrary" (E 129). There is little doubt that Blake wanted these lines to appear in reverse writing, but the meaning of this reversal is somewhat enigmatic. As Morton Paley has argued, the fact that Blake's mirror-written lines are composed in reverse does not give them a privileged truth-value in

35The desire for a "true" form of reflected image, particularly one which does not laterally invert, is not unique to Blake. A recent consumer product, the True Mirror, capitalizes on the desire for perfect vision by providing a way for us to see ourselves as others see us. An advertisement for the True Mirror which was reprinted in Harper's Magazine (November 1994) emphasizes the importance of overcoming lateral inversion if one is to attain a perfect reflected image of the self: "Constructed from two mirrors positioned at an exact 90 degree angle, the True Mirror reflects true images of its viewers; it does not reverse them the way all other mirrors do. . . . For some, the True Mirror has an additional, much deeper effect: it reveals hidden aspects of their inner selves. Viewers notice that certain qualities appear in the True Mirror that they never saw before, especially what can be best described as their 'inner spark' or 'light'."
the poems, nor does it make them hermeneutic keys to the gates of the epics.\footnote{In his Blake Trust edition of Jerusalem, Paley writes, "The passages in reversed writing tease the reader with the hope of a shortcut to the meaning of Jerusalem. They turn out to be reiterations of material found elsewhere, truisms, or downright falsehoods" (129).} However, Paley's attention is focussed on the content of these messages rather than on their graphic form. When we look at this phenomenon in the context of Blake's self-consciousness about his own medium, it seems likely that his refusal to compensate for lateral inversion in these strategic locations is his way of pointing out that such mirroring conditions all printed images. It may also be a way of trying to teach his readers how to interpret the world from another perspective. The kind of hermeneutic torsion which is required for the reader to make sense of these mirror-lines might be the best way of moving beyond the limitations of the Vegetable Glass.

Blake also depicts lateral inversion in some of the designs of Milton and Jerusalem, and the possible meanings of these images are just as suggestive as his mirror-writings. We will look at one of the most interesting examples of this phenomenon: the two full-page designs on plates 32 and 37 of Milton (Figs. 25 and 26). These two images seem to be gesturing toward a difference between the fallen world of Blake's existence and the redeemed afterlife into which his brother Robert had departed. The most important difference between them is of course that they are mirror images of each other. In the text of Milton Blake describes the spirit of Milton falling like a meteor into Blake's left foot, and this is what the "William" plate (Fig. 25) illustrates. The meaning of the "Robert" design seems to come into being solely in relation to its mirror-twin, since Robert is not otherwise mentioned in the text of the poem. The meteor in this image is falling into Robert's right foot, in keeping with the lateral inversion of the two designs. The symmetry here is enigmatic,
but it does suggest that the world of spirits which Robert inhabits is a laterally-inverted version of this world. This makes sense if we consider that the Mundane Shell in which "William" lives is itself a distorted mirror. The world of truth will appear distorted when seen from a skewed perspective. This suggests that one way to correct the distortion of the Vegetable Glass might be to re-reflect it in another mirror.

Blake may have derived his sensitivity to lateral inversion from his work in illuminated printing, but his interest in the interpretive importance of mirror images goes beyond the bounds of his graphic media to include his theories of perception and interpretation. His most obvious example of a design organized on the right-left axis is *A Vision of the Last Judgment* (Fig. 27), where the redeemed souls are depicted on the right hand of Christ, and the damned are shown to be on his left.\(^3\)\(^7\) This arrangement is of course based on entirely traditional Christian ideas about the last judgment,\(^3\)\(^8\) but still it poses some interesting issues for the artist and the viewer. In this context, telling right from left becomes a vital moral question—in fact, it becomes literally a matter of distinguishing between salvation and damnation. If the artist should make a mistake and depict the damned and redeemed souls on the wrong side of the design, the result would be a perversion of the entire Christian mythos. For the viewer, the implications of this design are at least as troubling,

\(^3\)\(^7\) Blake never engraved this design, though he made several drawings of it (one of these is shown here) and one now-lost fresco painting which is the subject of his prose work *A Vision of the Last Judgment*. Another less elaborate version of Blake's *Last Judgment* design was engraved by Schiavonetti for R. H. Cromek's edition of Robert Blair's *The Grave.*

\(^3\)\(^8\) The Christian conception of the last judgment as a division into those on the right and those on the left owes a great deal to Plato's last judgment in book ten of *The Republic*, where Socrates describes the following scene: "In the intermediate space there were judges seated, who commanded the just, after they had given judgment on them and had bound their sentences in front of them, to ascend by the heavenly way on the right hand; and in like manner the unjust were bidden by them to descend by the lower way on the left hand" (*The Republic and Other Works* 309-10).
because the viewer cannot avoid noticing that his or her right and left are the opposite of Christ's—which means that that our own judgment is different from that of the divinity.

It is significant that Blake's prose description of the *Vision of the Last Judgment* design is where he formulates his idea of the two different kinds of mirror, since the design is so obviously invested in the moral and metaphysical implications of left and right. I mentioned this part of the *Vision of the Last Judgment* prose work briefly earlier, but it will be useful now to look more closely at Blake's descriptions of the two mirrors. One of the most important things to recognize about *A Vision of the Last Judgment* is the extent of its involvement in Platonic philosophy. Much of Blake's discussion of artistic representation here in fact seems to be a response to *The Republic*. There are many references to Plato in the text, some of them overt and others more subtle. For example, Blake writes, "Plato has made Socrates say that Poets & Prophets do not Know or Understand what they write or Utter this is a most Pernicious Falshood" (E 554). The mention of Plato here is crucial for a positioning of Blake's discussion of the Vegetable Glass, which he does on the next notebook page. Here he writes,

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

The prevalence of the emphatic copula in the first sentence of this description should be noted: Blake identifies the world of imagination with the world of
eternity, which he in turn identifies with the divine bosom. The introduction of the Vegetable Glass takes place against the background of this positive set of assertions about divine existence and vision. In other words, the "Permanent Realities" of the divine bosom are the undistorted versions of what we see in the Vegetable Glass. Blake's association of the Vegetable Glass with nature is reminiscent of Plato's mirror-images in *The Republic*, where Socrates uses the epiphenomenal status of the reflected image as an analogue for the illusoriness of artistic representation.39

Blake does not focus on the Vegetable Glass in this discussion, however, even though his critics have generally done so. In fact, he offers an alternative to the distorted vision of the Vegetable Glass in the next sentence, when he says, "All things are comprehended in their Eternal Forms in the Divine body of the Saviour the True Vine of Eternity The Human Imagination" (E 555). This is a variety of representation which is not illusory in the manner that Plato describes. This form of vision shows the truth, the "Eternal Forms" rather than the degraded reflections of them. And it is the body of the Saviour which provides the perfect representational medium in which these true forms can be "comprehended." Christ's body is not explicitly described as a mirror here, but it does seem to be put forward as an alternative representational surface to the distortive Vegetable Glass. Further on in *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, Blake does describe a similar divine form of representation in terms of a mirror. He writes:

On the right hand of Noah A Female descends to meet her Lover or Husband representative of that Love called Friendship which

39Socrates says that "by turning a mirror round and round" one can "make the sun and the heavens, and the earth and yourself, and other animals and plants, and all the other things of which we were just now speaking, in the mirror" (289). Glaucon responds, "Yes... but they would be appearances only" (289).
looks for no other heaven than their Beloved & in him sees all reflected as in a Glass of Eternal Diamond (E 560)

It is remarkable that, despite the attention critics have given to the Vegetable Glass in their readings of Blake's mirror images, none of them has recognized this other kind of glass which Blake so blatantly invokes here. The two characters in this description, the female and her husband or lover, are on the right hand of Christ, and thus they are ascending into heaven. This suggests that the vision they experience is pure and undistorted. In this context, the Glass of Eternal Diamond is quite clearly a mirror of perfection like the ones we examined at the beginning of this chapter. Its images are not illusory like those of the Vegetable Glass; when the female looks at her beloved, she "sees all reflected" in him. This "all" is very different from the reflective capacity of Oothoon's bared soul in Visions of the Daughters of Albion, in which Theotormon only saw narcissistic visions of himself. Here the beloved provides a representational surface which allows the woman to see everything, much like Dante in the Paradiso, who looks into Beatrice's eyes to see a reflected vision of God (XXXVIII, 4-12). Blake's name for this divine form of vision is also reminiscent of another passage from St. Teresa's Life, in which she describes God in specular terms:

Let us suppose the Divinity to be as some very bright diamond, much bigger than the whole universe: or else, as some looking glass, after the manner that I said before of the soul, in that other vision... and that all we do is seen in this diamond; it being

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40 Robert Gleckner (Blake and Spenser 258) is the only critic I am aware of who comments on the Glass of Eternal Diamond at all, and he does so without relating it to the Vegetable Glass. Gleckner discusses the Glass of Eternal Diamond in an illustration of Blake's idea of friendship. Stephen Cox, who reads some of Blake's mirror images in relation to St. Paul, also refers to "the mirror of Vision" (258) in Blake, but he does not connect this mirror with the Glass of Eternal Diamond.
so great as to comprise all things within it, and nothing being able to get out of that greatness (171).

This could very well be Blake's source for his description of apocalyptic vision as a Glass of Eternal Diamond: Teresa not only mentions the looking glass and the diamond, but she also says that this divine representational surface contains "all."

It seems clear that Blake designates two radically different kinds of mirrors in A Vision of the Last Judgment, but the question that remains is, how do these mirrors represent right and left? It is likely that one of the differences between these two mirrors is that Vegetable Glass laterally inverts, whereas the Glass of Eternal Diamond does not. There is no direct statement of this difference in A Vision of the Last Judgment, but Blake does make subtle suggestions that a redeemed form of vision is possible if we reverse our presently distorted sense of left and right. His reason for suggesting this is related to a recognition that lateral inversion is a fundamental defining characteristic of the viewing subject's selfhood. It is a commonplace that left and right are relative— that if two people are facing each other, one's left is the other's right. This difference might be seen as a sign (or perhaps a cause) of the gap between self and other. Blake is interested in closing that gap, and he tries to do this by getting his readers to move beyond a purely egocentric idea of left and right.

We see a possible attempt at this kind of movement in Blake's 1808 description of the Last Judgment design in a letter to Ozias Humphrey, where he writes, "The right hand of the design is appropriated to the Resurrection of the Just the left hand of the design is appropriated to the Resurrection & Fall of the Wicked" (E 552). It would seem at first that Blake has made the fundamental error of confusing left and right here, since it is obvious to
anyone viewing the design that the ascending souls are on the viewer's left and the damned souls are on the viewer's right. This is not however a mistake on Blake's part. What he is really doing here is expressing a radically different approach to point of view in aesthetic experience. When he refers to "the right hand of the design" (my emphasis), he is describing the design from its own point of view, as if he were inside it instead of outside. The viewer's own sense of right and left is reversed here in favor of an extraordinary identification with the artwork. I believe this kind of left-right reversal is also important in Blake's much more explicit identification of viewer and artwork in A Vision of the Last Judgment, where he says,

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

In this description, viewers can in effect experience the apocalypse by abandoning their own points of view and imaginatively projecting themselves into the space of the picture. To enter the picture is of course to reverse your view of left and right—to stop seeing yourself as the center of your universe and to adopt the painting's center, its axis of left and right. Lateral inversion is quite literally the locus of otherness here, but in this case the movement outside of the self is a liberating experience. This laterally-inverted interpretation is itself the "vision" of the last judgment—a kind of vision

41W.J.T. Mitchell describes this kind of vision in his discussion of infinity as a perceptual activity rather than a place or a time: "'Infinity' is a way of perceiving finite
that encourages an abandonment of the singular point of view which sees left and right in an egocentric way.

When we look closely at *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, we see that Blake has quite cleverly trained his readers to think in terms of the picture's point of view rather than their own. He does this by referring throughout the work to the left and right sides of the design, or of the characters depicted therein. For example, he describes the position of the woman who sees the Glass of Eternal Diamond in relation to her proximity to Noah: "On the right hand of Noah a female descends..." (E 560, my emphasis). Of course, he also describes characters according to whether they are on the right or left hand of Jesus. He says, "The Just arise on his right & the wicked on his Left hand" (E 556). In fact, in Blake's dozens of references to left and right in "A Vision of the Last Judgment," he is completely consistent in his avoidance of any reference to the viewer's left and right. In the process of reading *A Vision of the Last Judgment*, we come to adopt the left-right orientation of the picture almost implicitly. This exteriorization of our own point of view seems to be exactly what Blake is aiming at in his description of the design, and it could be said that such exteriorization is in fact what Blake sees as the key to apocalyptic vision. If the *Vision of the Last Judgment* design is itself a purportedly perfect mirror, then Blake's subtle methods of teaching us to view it from within instead of from without can be seen as ways of encouraging us to abandon the laterally inverted vision of the Vegetable Glass in favor of a true reflective image.

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things, not as indefinitely extended or boundless, but with a special kind of intensity, particularity, and empathy" (*Blake's Composite Art* 71).
III. Reflections on/in Jerusalem

Jerusalem is in many ways a combination of Blake's different uses of the mirror image which we examined in the first two sections of this chapter: it contains narcissistic reflections but also redemptive ones, and it depicts mirrorings that are implicated in lateral inversion and those that are not. If we look at the poem from this narrowly specular point of view, we see that the relationships between these various mirror images constitute the trajectory of Jerusalem toward a multiplicitous and intersubjective form of redeemed vision. Northrop Frye suggests the centrality of the mirror image in the poem when he describes the intention that he sees in it:

Jerusalem attempts to show that the vision of reality is the other one inside out. The poem shows us two worlds, one infinite, the other indefinite, one our own home and the other the same home receding from us in a mirror. (Fearful Symmetry 384)

Frye is gesturing toward Blake's description of the Vegetable Glass in A Vision of the Last Judgment, in which we can only see a distorted version of the truth. In Jerusalem, this idea is mapped onto various kinds of doubling between cities and characters. Frye sees the redeemed city, Jerusalem, as the Augustinian City of God, a perfect reflection of the mundane city in which Blake lived. By the same token, Babylon is the perverted reflection of London. Many of the characters in the poem also have specular associations. The Spectre is a creature of dark reflections, as his name indicates: one meaning

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42 This is why Frye associates Blake's mirrors with parody and error rather than true vision. He writes, "The world in which we live, therefore, contains a 'heaven' or imaginative world in which all natural objects have a mental significance, and a 'hell' or Ulro in which the same natural objects have an opposite significance. The latter is thus a parody or mirror-image, 'Vegetable Glass' as Blake calls it, of the world of mental reality" (Fearful Symmetry 382).
of the word is "An image or phantom produced by reflection or other natural cause" (*OED*). The word "emanation" also has a specialized meaning that connects it with optics: "A beam, flash, ray of light" (*OED*). The spectres and emanations of *Jerusalem* are, in a sense, representatives of the different possibilities of specular being. The poem itself can be seen as a hall of mirrors, one which we can only negotiate if we learn how to tell the false reflections from the true ones.

Even more than most of Blake's work, *Jerusalem* is a test of *recte legendi*, and we see evidence of this in the first words after the title page, which evoke an image of the Last Judgment. Etched in white-line engraving at the top of plate 3 is the word "Sheep" on the viewer's left side and "Goats" on the right (E 145). As in the *Last Judgment* designs, the reader is looking at these words from outside of the action (we know this because the sheep are on our left). As in the design, this may give us the impression that our own judgment is the opposite of God's. This could well be the case, even though a judge is not depicted on the plate. Between the words "Sheep" and "Goats" is the title of this section, "To the Public," which makes a double suggestion: that the public is both that which judges and that which is judged. As Morton Paley suggests, Blake's allusion to the "sheep and goats" passage of Matthew 25 is "a warning that *Jerusalem* is a last judgment on the reader's reception of the work" (*Jerusalem*, Blake Trust edition 133). It is therefore a judgment of *our* judgment. Blake turns the tables on his readers, and especially on his critics: he announces that he is going to judge them at the same time as they judge his poem.

One of the interesting things about this mutual interchange of judgment is the way it is implicated in lateral inversion. The fact that the sheep and the goats are on the wrong side of the plate to us, the viewers, might
be a comment on the distorted qualities of our vision, but on the other hand, when Blake worked on the copperplate, the word "sheep" would have been on his right, and "goats" on his left. There is a suggestion here that Blake's method of engraving allows him to see the image from its own point of view, by looking at it in a laterally inverted form. In the case of an engraved design such as this one, Blake's statement that the viewer should "Enter into these Images" (Vision of the Last Judgment, E 560) is essentially the same as asking them to imagine what the copperplate looked like to him when he etched it.

As I have mentioned, Blake's mirror-written passages in Milton and Jerusalem require the reader to make a similar compensation for lateral inversion, envisioning what was written on the copperplate in order to make sense of the printed leaf. The mirror-poem on plate 41 (37) of Jerusalem (Fig. 28) in fact seems to allude to such a process:

Each man is in
his Spectre's power
Untill the arrival
of that hour,
When his Humanity
awake
And cast his Spectre
into the lake (E 184)

Viscomi has suggested that the small man writing this poem is Blake himself, writing in reverse as he so often did (59). The poem itself is also very suggestive in its reflective and graphic imagery. As Robert N. Essick has noted, the casting of the Spectre into the lake could refer to the production of an etched copper plate by "cast[ing]" it in a "lake" of acid (Printmaker 157). However, the lake might also be a more conventional water body which is
simply a reflecting surface, in which case casting the spectre into this watery medium would be a way of compensating for its specular distortions. Perhaps the only way to correct the lateral inversion that the Spectre represents is to re-reflect it in another mirror. Blake explicitly links the Spectre with lateral inversion when Los tries to prevent it from dividing away from his back. Los says,

If thou separate from me, thou art a Negation: a meer
Reasoning & Derogation from me. an Objecting & cruel Spite
And Malice & Envy: but my Emanation. Alas! will become
My contrary: O thou Negation. I will continually compell
Thee to be invisible to any but whom I please. & when
And where & how I please, and never! Never! shalt thou be
organized
But as a distorted & reversed Reflexion in the Darkness
And in the Non Entity (E 162)

This description of the fall into a divided self is figured as the arrival of a kind of reflection that is distorted, reversed, and dark. The darkness of the spectral image brings to mind St. Paul's description of fallen vision as seeing "through a glass, darkly." However, this does not mean that all reflective images in the poem are equally degraded. Just as the Fall is shown here in specular terms, Blake reserves a different kind of mirroring for the redemption of humanity.

The genealogy of contraries and negations is delineated in Los's address to the Spectre--we learn that Los's Emanation becomes his contrary as a consequence of the initial spectrous split. Thus, spectral negation is the cause of sexual division. Enitharmon later says to Los, "In Eden our Loves were the same here they are opposite" (E 246), indicating that the fall into sexual difference has brought them from a primal harmony to a constant battle of
selfhoods. It should be noted that the Spectre itself displays what Blake believed to be feminine qualities, ones which could be associated with the medieval mirror of *vanitas*: pride, manipulativeness, silent scheming. However, the Spectre's femininity is not necessarily the same thing as the Emanation's femaleness. The Emanation and the Spectre are instead personifications of two different responses to sexual difference: one potentially fruitful, the other unproductive. This is shown by the different kinds of mirrors that Blake associates them with.

The female characters in *Jerusalem* often act as reflecting surfaces in which the male characters see themselves and from which they derive their identities. This scenario will be familiar from *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, but in *Jerusalem* some of these mirrors are surfaces of illusion, whereas others contain a measure of truth. The challenge for the male characters is to decide what kind of mirror they are faced with, and they are not always equal to this challenge. At the beginning of Chapter 2, for example, Albion turns away from the Divine Vision and then looks toward "his Spectrous / Chaos" (E 175). Within this Satanic chaos Albion has a vision of what seems to be his Emanation, Jerusalem:

Albions Emanation which he had hidden in Jealousy
Appeard now in the frowning Chaos prolific upon the Chaos
Reflecting back to Albion in Sexual Reasoning Hermaphroditic

(E 175).

This hermaphroditic reflection is in fact Vala rather than Jerusalem, but Albion does not realize this at first, and he is dazzled by her appearance. He says "who art thou O loveliest? the Divine Vision / Is as nothing before thee" (E 175). Only after she has spoken does Albion understand his mistake, and suddenly he sees that the glittering image before him is not beautiful but is
instead terrifying: "O how I tremble! how my members pour down milky fear /
. . . . At thy word & at thy look death enrobes me about" (E 176). He has in fact
been worshipping a false idol, since he turned away from the Divine Vision to
praise Vala's image.

Los also makes an interpretive error when faced with a mirror image,
but his mistake is opposite in nature to that of Albion. The ritual druidic
murder that he sees in the Looking Glass of Enitharmon really is true, but he
takes it to be an illusion, a mere "Poetic Vision," and therefore he does nothing
to stop it:

Los knew not yet what was done: he thought it was all in Vision
In Visions of the Dreams of Beulah among the Daughters of
Albion
Therefore the Murder was put apart in the Looking-Glass of
Enitharmon
He saw in Vala's hand the Druid Knife of Revenge & the Poison
Cup
Of Jealousy, and thought it a Poetic Vision of the Atmospheres (E
214-15)

Los approaches this looking-glass with the traditional Platonic scepticism
about reflected images, and thus he interprets the actions therein as mere
fictions which do not have any direct effects in the world.43 He reacts as if he

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43 My reading of this scene is essentially the opposite of Stephen Cox's reading. He says,
"Enitharmon's Looking Glass obviously parodies Blake's great mirror of identification.
His mirror ennobles by identifying man with man; hers debases by identifying man with
woman, symbol of reproductive division" (247). It is true that some of the female
characters in Jerusalem are parodic, and that some of their mirror images contain hints of
parody, but this does not necessitate the kind of identification that Cox makes here, where
he sees all female characters as symbols of degradation. While Cox does recognize that
Blake proposes an ideal kind of reflection, he does not believe that Blake actually portrays
this kind of mirroring in the poem. He seems to find it necessary to reduce the valence of
is watching a play, calling out, "How can the Female be Chaste O thou stupid Druid...Without the forgiveness of sins" (E 214). However, he feels no need to intervene in the horrific spectacle that he is witnessing. Los fails here as an interpreter because he underestimates the potential truth-value of Enitharmon's specular representation. He considers Enitharmon's looking-glass as a dream and as a "Poetic Vision," but to him at this point such forms of representation are closer to illusion than truth. The Looking-Glass of Enitharmon is in this case a mirror of truth rather than an embodiment of error. It may even be a scrying glass, a mystical tool which allows one to see into the future or into some other deep truth. Blake suggests here that reflections can indeed embody truth, but that often the viewers or readers miss this truth because they interpret the artistic images as merely "Poetic Vision" which is to be "put apart" from the world of praxis.

Blake also extends his preoccupation with mirrors into the visual images of Jerusalem, where he depicts both distorted and redeemed forms of mirroring. One may well ask how Blake can create an image of perfect mirroring when his medium is so obviously bound to the limits of the Vegetable Glass, but I believe this is possible. Of course, he cannot show us a true mirror of perfection, but he can depict a profile view of two figures who

the mirror metaphor to a single iconic meaning, which is for him a negative one. He writes, "the difference between object and reflection appears when the eye focusses on the defects of the reflecting medium. Blake calls attention to the flaws of mortal mirrors by emphasizing the difficulties and incapacities of even his own mirror" (269). I would argue that it is not necessary to see Blake's mirror images as having a unitary meaning, and that furthermore there is much evidence to suggest that several mirrors in the poem are positive in association.

44 Of course Blake's own definitions of "Vision" as a true form of representation in A Vision of the Last Judgment are implicit here, but the point is that Los does not yet realize that Poetic Vision is the same thing as the Divine Vision.

45 Scrying glasses were very popular in the Renaissance, especially those made of obsidian which reflected darkened images and which were considered to be particularly amenable to occult usages.
mirror each other in this way. Such an image is found on plate 28 of Jerusalem (Fig. 29). Two nude figures here embrace on the petals of a flower, their faces merging, but their limbs in a position which indicates that they are perfect mirrors of each other—that is, they reflect each other without lateral inversion. Both have their left arms placed above each others' heads; both have their right arms wrapped around each others' waists; both have their legs placed to their right sides. There has been some question among critics about the identity and even the gender of these two figures, but it seems fairly clear from textual references that the design depicts Jerusalem "soft repos'd / In the arms of Vala, assimilating in one with Vala / The Lily of Havilah" (E 164). Havilah is an area of Eden described in Genesis, so the assimilating embrace and the perfect mirroring of this couple make sense in that pre-lapsarian context (Gen 2. 10-11). After the sexual advance by Albion which sunders Jerusalem and Vala and unleashes a chain of further divisions upon the world, such vision of unity is no longer possible. The text immediately below the design refers to that past time and the consequences of its loss:

Every ornament of perfection, and every labour of love
In all the Garden of Eden. & in all the golden mountains
Was become an envied horror, and a remembrance of jealousy:
And every Act a Crime, and Albion the punisher & judge

(E 174)

The edenic state of unity that has now vanished has "become an envied horror" because it represents what all fallen creatures desire but none have

46 Stephen Cox again sees this episode in the opposite way from my own interpretation. He says, "Jerusalem herself succumbs to a parodic sexual logic when she repos'es 'in the arms of Vala'" (229).
yet obtained. Vala herself comes to be scornful of her former unity with Jerusalem, crying "Why lovd I Jerusalem / Why was I one with her embracing in the Vision of Jesus" (E 176). The "Vision of Jesus" may be a reference to the perfect mirroring of Jerusalem's and Vala's edenic embrace.

The extraordinary changes Blake made to plate 28, from the first proof to the final version which he included in copies of the illuminated book, suggest that he had very strong reasons for representing the figures in a position that eliminated lateral inversion. The first proof state (Fig. 30) depicts the couple with their legs intertwined (or perhaps simply touching) and with a worm or caterpillar on one of the lily's petals. To reach the final state, Blake had to re-cut another leg for the right-hand figure, change the former left leg of that figure into the right leg of the other one, and disguise the caterpillar by engraving white lines through it. Still, the changes are not entirely successful: the ghost of the caterpillar remains on the leaf, and the legs of the figures are somewhat jumbled, especially in posthumous copies where unsophisticated printing reveals the flaws in the engraved revisions. In any case, this is certainly the largest documented emendation to any design in Jerusalem, and as such it has attracted a great deal of critical interest. The most accepted explanation of Blake's possible reasons for making such alterations is enunciated by David V. Erdman, who believes that "the drastic change implies. . .a revised attitude toward copulation (or increased sensitivity to the moral disapproval from dear Readers)" ("Suppressed and Altered Passages" 20).

Erdman's conjecture seems to have some validity, since if the couple in the proof are male and female, it is possible that they are copulating. It is also certain that in the final state of the plate the two characters are not having sexual intercourse. However there is little external evidence to suggest that
Blake exhibited such prudery or such sensitivity to the reactions of his readers. It is true that he sometimes painted translucent clothing on his nude characters and he may have left out certain plates of illuminated books if he felt they might offend particular customers, but there is no record of him altering a copperplate for this reason (and thereby making the change permanent for all copies). Furthermore, he cannot simply have developed qualms about depicting sexual activities in his later life, because he made no significant alterations to the obviously homoerotic scenes on plates 45 and 47 of Milton, even though the final copy of that poem was printed within two years of the first printing of Jerusalem. It seems more likely, therefore, that Blake made an error in his first attempt to depict perfect mirroring between the two figures, or that he did not conceive of such a possibility until the design was nearly completed, and that he subsequently altered the plate to make their freedom from lateral inversion more obvious.

Many other designs in Jerusalem show figures in postures that are symmetrical, or nearly so. Perhaps they are trying to imitate the eternal mirroring of the Lilly of Havilah, thus representing the desire of all fallen creatures to attain the pre-lapsarian state of unity between self and other. However, if this is the desire of these characters, none of them are completely successful. On plate 46 [32] (Fig. 31), Jerusalem and Vala are again depicted, this time in a very different attitude from their original embrace. They are not attempting to embrace here; they have their backs to each other. The mirroring is incomplete because their postures are not identical—Vala is holding up her veil, either to shield herself or to throw it over Jerusalem. However, there are still elements of Edenic mirroring in the design, most notably in the fact that they are both looking over their right shoulders. Perhaps it would still be possible for them to attain unity if they turned around
and embraced. But now that Vala has become Jerusalem's shadow, as the veil indicates, we see that they are no longer counterparts but rather opposites. The darkness of the veil may be a suggestion that Vala's reflection is a fallen one, a vision seen through the "glass, darkly."

On plate 81 there is a similar design (Fig. 32), where Gwendolen and Cambel face each other in obviously mirroring postures. The line of clouds between them might even be seen as the reflective surface. The mirror-writing to which Gwendolen points reinforces the specular associations of the scene. The other ten daughters of Albion look on, some of them squinting to interpret the encrypted poem. This design is one of those that has led critics to believe that Blake's mirrors are unequivocally parodic, since Gwendolen's laterally inverted message is certainly an erroneous one:

In Heaven the only Art of Living
Is Forgetting & Forgiving
Especially to the Female
But if you on Earth Forgive
You shall not find where to Live  (E 238).

Blake's doctrine of forgiveness is of course equally applicable to earthly and heavenly existence, and Gwendolen's notion that forgiveness on earth will have negative consequences is patently false. Despite this, the two characters exhibit a form of mutual mirroring which is a very close approximation of the Vision of Jesus. Both of them point to the left with their right hands, and both have their left hands placed near their torsos. What makes this a perverse and failed attempt at imitating the mirror of perfection is that Gwendolen's left hand is to her back (containing perhaps the "falshood" mentioned in the text of the following plate), whereas Cambel's left hand is in the front, covering
her vagina. Both of them are trying to hide something, and this disrupts the symmetry of their positions.

There are many other partial mirrorings in the designs of Jerusalem, all of which serve to highlight the dilemma of judgment, the importance of distinguishing the true divine vision from the false vegetative one. The readers of the poem are not only to be judged themselves—as we saw on the first plate—but they must also learn to judge, to separate the sheep from the goats in their own vision. Blake seems to be equating human judgment with that of the divinity. If we judge wrongly, we distort our perceptions of God himself. The medieval imperative of the imitatio Christi is shown here to be involved in hermeneutics as well as mimesis. One must be able to recognize the true Christ before one can imitate him.

The design on plate 76 of Jerusalem (Fig. 33), depicting Albion attempting to mirror the posture of a Christ figure crucified on a tree, is perhaps Blake's greatest presentation of this dilemma of judgment. He does not make it clear what kind of mirroring is occurring here: since the crucifix is basically symmetrical on the right-left axis, we cannot judge on the basis of lateral inversion. If Albion is trying to emulate Christ, he is not quite succeeding. His head is positioned at the wrong angle, and his extended left leg precludes a cruciform posture. Whether he should emulate this Christ is another question, one which critics have hotly debated.47 Is this a "Vegetated

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47 For a discussion of this controversy, see Morton Paley's examination of this plate in The Continuing City (113-118). Stephen Cox was the first critic to suggest that this plate is in fact constructed to be ambiguous (257), and I agree with his assessment of it. Cox does add, however, that this kind of ambiguity is rare in Blake, because "a flawless symmetrical mirror-logic, a completely reversible set of parodies, would annihilate Blake's power to act as Christ's prophet and to reprove the Antichrist" (257). I would argue that, on the contrary, this kind of interpretive quandary is common in Blake's work precisely because he wants to "rouze the faculties" (Letter, E 702) of his readers and viewers without simply dictating his own point of view to them.
Christ" (E 250), providing a distorted and spectrous image for Albion to reflect, or is it the true divine body, the mirror of perfection? This design places the question of hermeneutics most squarely upon the reader. How do we distinguish between the degraded and the divine, the Antichrist and the Christ? By posing the problem so directly and so intractably here, Blake makes us question our own vision, and thus he leads us to recognize the divided nature of post-lapsarian being. The viewing subject, in approaching this design, is necessarily ambivalent, divided against itself. The crisis of interpretation that this plate occasions is perhaps meant to lead us toward a more contrarious way of reading.

After this crucifixion scene, Los appears to have learned how to distinguish a distorted glass from a true one, possibly because he has passed the interpretive test which plate 76 poses. The Song of Los, which is directed to Jerusalem, contains several references to the reflective qualities of Jerusalem's body. Los sings,

O lovely mild Jerusalem! O Shiloh of Mount Ephraim!
I see thy Gates of precious stones: thy Walls of gold & silver
Thou art the soft reflected image of the Sleeping Man
Who stretchd on Albions rocks reposes. . . . (E 244)

We have known that Jerusalem, like the other emanations, is a reflected image of her counterpart, Albion, but Los goes on to clarify that Jerusalem's reflection of Albion is a true and divine one rather than a distorted one. He says, "Thy forehead bright: Holiness to the Lord, with Gates of pearl / Reflects Eternity beneath thy azure wings of feathery down" (E 244). The reflection of eternity is obviously different from the perverted reflections that Vala puts forth. The fact that Jerusalem's forehead contains a "bright" reflection distinguishes her from the darkened mirror that Vala and the Spectre embody.
The critics who have commented on the negative aspects of mirrors in *Jerusalem* do not mention these positive descriptions of Jerusalem herself as a mirror.

As the poem moves toward its close, however, another grotesque mirroring creature appears, to tempt the unwary into error. The Covering Cherub reflects Eden, but in a distorted manner: "His Head dark deadly, in its Brain incases a reflexion / Of Eden all perverted: Egypt on the Gihon many tongued" (E 248). The Covering Cherub contains once again a "dark" reflection, like that of the Spectre and Vala. The Cherub is a combination of the beast of the apocalypse and a false messiah.48 He performs a parodic version of the rapture, causing many to "become one with the Antichrist" (E 249). But this apparent unity is an illusion, because the Cherub's spectrous reflections inevitably produce selfhood and its commensurate divisions: "The Feminine separate from the Masculine & both from Man. / Ceasing to be His Emanations. Life to themselves assuming" (E 249). The Covering Cherub is the focal point of a number of violent and grotesque mirror images near the end of the poem. He is the most extreme example of the distortive mirror that is attractive because of its glittering surface but dangerous underneath that surface. The play of appearances in his brain is more than simply illusory; it is in fact a pernicious attempt to mislead the unwary. The Cherub in a sense represents the dangers of interpretation: we have to look beyond the play of the images to speculate upon their purpose, or else we risk believing in a dangerous illusion, becoming one with the Antichrist instead of the Christ.

48 Frye sees the Covering Cherub as a perverted reflection of the city Jerusalem: in other words, as Babylon. He writes, "If we were to look at, or with, this basilisk, we should be absorbed into his own stony death; if we look through him, we see him as a mirror-image, as Perseus saw Medusa, as the reflecting analogy of the true Eden and the true Jerusalem" (402).
Because representation is not inherently good or evil, our approach to it must be extraordinarily complex: we must be ready to believe (we cannot be sceptics or we will miss out on the true visions when they are presented to us), but we must also be extremely careful about how and where we invest our belief. This double-bind of faith and scepticism is what contributes to the contrariety of Blake's work.

A true form of reflected vision does return at the apocalyptic ending of the poem, with the apotheosis of Albion and the arrival of the Millenium. Here, suddenly, the divisions of the fallen world are shed, as the redeemed souls begin to view each other with the perfect vision that is reflected in the divine body:

they walked
To & fro in Eternity as one Man reflecting each in each & clearly seen
And seeing: according to fitness and order (E 258).

This reflective intersubjectivity is the "face to face" of St. Paul's prediction, described in specular terms, as if each redeemed soul has a perfect mirror for a face. Here the distortive aspects of earthly mirrors are gone. By all reflecting one another, they encompass one another and attain a kind of unity—but it is not a totalized unity which effaces the individuality of each participant; they are both the many and the one. The mutuality of their vision seems to be related to the kind of vision that occurs in the Glass of Eternal Diamond. These redeemed beings are both "seen and seeing," which suggests that they are partaking of a multiplicitous kind of vision, a vision}

\[49\] Earlier in the poem, Blake has described Eternity in terms that are reminiscent of the Glass of Eternal Diamond: "When in Eternity Man converses with Man they enter / Into each others Bosom. . . . in mutual interchange" (E246).
which is not narrowly confined to a single point of view. Blake's apocalypse here becomes an intensification and multiplication of the perfect mirror images which he has gestured toward in some of his earlier work.

We have now seen the various possibilities of mirror images and of representation itself in Blake's work, from narcissistic illusion to the reflective divine body to the laterally inverted vision of the apocalypse. In a sense, these different kinds of mirrors allegorize two different views of the intentionality of the sign itself: the Vegetable Glass is one which distorts intention as well as vision, whereas the Glass of Eternal Diamond is one that exceeds all strictures of representation to allow perfect transmission of divine or prophetic intention. In the next chapter, when we examine Blake's images of machinery and his use of mimetic technologies, we will look at similar questions of agency and distortion in a context that foregrounds the issue of intention.

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50 Paul de Man, in his early essay "Intentional Structure of the Romantic Image," describes a trajectory of signification which is reminiscent of the motivated direction of the Glass of Eternal Diamond. While de Man is somewhat suspicious about this "nostalgia for the object" (15) and the "poetics of 'unmediated vision'" (7) which result from it, he does describe it in phenomenological terms as an intention common in Romantic poetry. He writes, "Poetic language can do nothing but originate anew over and over again; it is always constitutive, able to posit regardless of presence but, by the same token, unable to give a foundation to what it posits except as an intent of consciousness" (6).
Chapter 4

Machinery and Mimesis in the Epics

The images of the "dark Satanic Mills" (Milton, E 95) in Blake's work have entered the public consciousness to such an extent that many people who have not read his epics can still identify him as a conscientious objector to the Industrial Revolution. Most critics concur with this assessment, and they do so with some justification. As David Erdman argues in Blake: Prophet Against Empire, Blake opposes the technological and economic machinery that he sees enslaving the working classes and perpetuating the spread of imperialism. Joseph Bronowski goes further than this, suggesting that there is a Luddite aesthetic animating Blake's work.1 If the satanic mill was not enough to convince us of Blake's attitude toward machines, then his numerous deprecatory statements about the machine in his prose works would seem to decide the case. In the Public Address, Blake denounces the British system of artistic production and distribution as a "machine," and he adds, "A Machine is not a Man nor a Work of Art it is Destructive of Humanity & of Art the word Machination..." (E575). Morris Eaves reads Blake's artistic theories as straightforwardly anti-technological, saying that "his loathing of artistic machines is unmistakeable and unequivocal" ("Blake and the Artistic Machine" 903). However, I will argue in the following chapter that this point of view is too limited to be able to account for the redemptive qualities of certain mechanical images in Blake. We should by now be wary of any interpretation that assigns an "unequivocal" meaning to any of Blake's central

1Bronowski writes, "In this world, the rebellious working-men broke machines. It is not odd that, in this world, Blake turned his pitying and troubled mind against the machine" (William Blake and the Age of Revolution 122).
images because, as we have seen, his art has a way of turning hermeneutic certitude back upon itself. In this case, the prevailing sense of Blake as a Luddite artist is only partially accurate. Critics have focussed on the Satanic Mills in his work, but few have recognized that some of the machinery in the epics is far more positive in association—and that even the most degraded mechanisms in Blake's work often contain hints of redemptive possibilities. I will argue that this ambiguity or contrariety of technology in Blake is directly related to the uncertain place of machines in relation to human intention.

Blake's ambivalence about technology is far from being unique, of course. With the increasing complexity and apparent self-containment of machines in late modernity, many people have begun to wonder whether we use technology or whether in a sense it uses us. Jean Baudrillard poses this question with particular force in his reading of J. G. Ballard's novel Crash, where he defines the two contrary relations of machinery to the body and, implicitly, to intention:

From a classical (even cybernetic) perspective, technology is an extension of the body. It is the functional sophistication of a

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2 Many of the most influential discussions of technology in the twentieth century have been characterized by a similar ambivalence. For example, Martin Heidegger argues in "The Question Concerning Technology" that "the essence of technology is in a lofty sense ambiguous" (33) because while technology is a kind of "revealing," it is also an "enframing"—that is, it isolates us from nature. Bataille's discussions of technology in Theory of Religion are similar to that of Heidegger regarding the doubleness of technology. Walter Benjamin's essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" also manifests an ambivalence about the function of mechanism in mimesis, since he argues that such forms of reproduction cause the "aura" of the original artwork to "wither" (Illuminations 221), but he also sees that this technology will make art more overtly political.  

3 The more complex the technology becomes, the more we tend to fear that it will overturn human agency and enslave us. However, I would argue that the emphasis on complexity is too extreme here, since even relatively uncomplicated technologies such as fire or the plow or the pencil have also transformed their users dramatically. The older technologies have become so much a part of our very definition of humanness that they have attained a kind of transparency in terms of human agency, but these technologies do nonetheless affect the intentional capacities of their users.
human organism that permits it to be equal to nature and to
invest triumphally in nature. From Marx to McLuhan, the same
functionalist vision of machines and language: they are relays,
extensions, media mediators of nature ideally destined to become
the organic body of man. In this "rational" perspective the body
itself is nothing but a medium.

On the other hand, in the apocalyptic and baroque version
of Crash technology is the mortal deconstruction of the body--no
longer a functional medium, but the extension of death--the
dismemberment and cutting to pieces, not in the pejorative
illusion of a lost unity of the subject (which is still the horizon of
psychoanalysis), but in the explosive vision of a body delivered
over to "symbolic wounds," of a body confused with technology in
its violating and violent dimension. . . . (111)

This is an extreme polarization of the possible roles of technology, but
nonetheless it maps out the contrary intentional valences of machinery in a
very useful way.4 While Baudrillard seems to be celebrating the destructive
capacity of the automobile in Crash and criticizing the functionalism of the
classical perspective on technology, he does not say that these two aspects of
machinery should be necessarily kept separate. I would argue that in fact one
cannot unequivocally divide them. Certainly, in Blake's work these two
contrary possibilities coexist and complicate each other--machines are

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4 Baudrillard is somewhat unfair to Marx and McLuhan here, because they are not such
resolute functionalists as he suggests. Although McLuhan often seems to be a booster of
technology, he also demonstrates a profound suspicion of it at times, and he undertakes
his study of media in order to understand "the power of the media themselves to impose
their own assumptions upon our modes of perception" ("Is it Natural. . ." 180). Likewise,
while Marx often suggests that improvements in technology will ameliorate the position of
the worker, he also recognizes that objects can sometimes effect a reversal of the user's
intentions.
simultaneously extensions of the body and "mortal deconstruction[s]" of it. Blake's epics contain many striking examples of this kind of combination: they portray technology as a degrading, enslaving system, but also as the only possible means of undertaking productive and creative action. In the manner of Ballard's novel Crash, some of Blake's machines cause the most spectacular kinds of wounds and enact the most amazing dismemberments of the human body, but unlike Ballard, Blake suggests that this form of mechanistic excess contains a redemptive capacity.

In this chapter I will try to expand our sense of the contrariety of machinery in Blake's work, and to examine the role of intention in that contrariety. In the first section, we will look at Blake's prose writings about the technologies of printing and engraving, and we will also give particular attention to his own uses of mimetic machinery such as his idiosyncratic method of illuminated printing. The next section will be a study of eucharistic machines in The Four Zoas and Milton, with special attention to the mixture of the sacred and the profane in the apocalyptic technologies that Blake portrays in these poems. In the final part of the chapter, we will look at Jerusalem as a vast construction project for both Blake and for his protagonist Los, and we will focus on the representations of Los's tools as machines which alternately build and destroy.

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5While there does sometimes seem to be in Blake's work a distinction (which might be based on different capacities for transmitting intention) between destructive "machines" and possibly redemptive "instruments," this distinction collapses so regularly that it cannot be regarded as a firm characterization of two inherently different kinds of technology. I would argue that the destabilization of the intentional possibilities of machines is what contributes to the technological excess of Blake's epics.
I. Illuminated Printing and the Ambiguity of Technology

Blake's ambivalence toward machines is visible even in the *Public Address*, which has been read as one of his most straightforwardly anti-technological tracts. Here, immediately after his condemnation of the "machine" of the British art establishment, Blake demonstrates his sympathies for certain incontrovertibly mechanical aspects of artistic representation. He does this by castigating the famous engraver Woolett for being unfamiliar with the tools of the trade:

Woolett I know did not know how to Grind his Graver I know this he has often proved his Ignorance before me at Basires by laughing at Basires knife tools & ridiculing the Forms of Basires other Gravers till Basire was quite dashd & out of Conceit with what he himself knew but his Impudence had a Contrary Effect on me (E 575).

Blake portrays Woolett as a repugnant product of a system which allows artists to divorce themselves from the physical aspects of their works. He also says that "Wooletts best works were Etchd by Jack Brown Woolett Etchd very bad himself" (E 574). The implication of these denouncements is that the system of apprentices allowed a master engraver to become so far removed from the actual production of engravings that he could lose all of the physical and mechanical skills that are the foundation of the craft. Blake calls this system a

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6 Morris Eaves has repeatedly advanced this idea of the *Public Address* as an attack on the prevailing technologies and institutions of printing (*Counter-Arts Conspiracy*, "Blake and the Artistic Machine," *William Blake's Theory of Art*.) Certainly, there is a good deal of evidence to support this conclusion, and Eaves has not been challenged by other critics on this point. However, I will argue that Blake does reveal a certain amount of fluctuation in his treatment of machinery in the *Public Address*.

7 Brown was an apprentice with (and possibly for) Woolett, yet Brown received little acclaim for his work.
machine because it in effect turns the lower-end engravers into cogs in the system of artistic production. However, this usage of the word "machine" should not be confused with a wholesale rejection of machinery. On the contrary, Blake's attacks on Woolett and on the machine of the art establishment--symbolized by the Royal Academy--are made in defence of the mechanical aspects of engraving. As a professional engraver, Blake was indeed a kind of mechanic, working with mundane tools and messy inks. Like many labourers, his work required him to get his hands dirty. His sympathies quite clearly lie with his fellow mechanics, like Jack Brown, who knew how to grind their gravers and how to use them on copper. He reveals this in his annotations to Sir Joshua Reynolds' Discourses on Art, when he responds to Reynolds' depredation of the mechanical faculty in painting by saying, "Mechanical Excellence is the only vehicle of Genius" (E 643).

This is not to say that Blake saw himself as more of a mechanic than an artist, but rather that he brings into question the very distinction between these two kinds of producers. The main object of his attacks in the Public Address is the division of labour in late-eighteenth-century engraving, which insisted on a distinction between the creative activity of "invention" and the supposedly mindless mechanical process of "execution." The net effect of this division was a valorization of invention and a commensurate fall in the cultural value of execution. During Blake's lifetime, journeyman engravers came to be looked upon more and more as replicating machines rather than as artists or even craftsmen. In the Public Address, he argues that the division between invention and execution is a false and damaging one for artists and

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8In the first two chapters of The Counter-Arts Conspiracy, Morris Eaves offers a very useful contextualization of the national and commercial forces which contributed to this arrangement.
copy engravers alike, because it gives them the sense that their work takes place in either purely mental or purely physical realms. His critique of this division in art is yet another of his attacks upon a form of dualism--this time an aesthetic dualism that enforces a split between the physical and the intellectual processes of art production.

Blake's own insistence on destabilizing the boundaries between invention and execution was undoubtedly a factor in his lack of public success. His engravings were often considered too wildly "original" for the tastes of commercial publishers, who usually wanted straightforward copies of a work created by someone other than the engraver. On the other hand, he was not taken seriously as an artist by many members of the Royal Academy, precisely because he was an engraver rather than a painter. In his time, he was an oxymoron: an original engraver, an artistic mechanic. There was almost no apparatus to bring his kind of art to the public because it did not fit the established generic categories of the marketplace.

It is doubtful that Blake could have done otherwise than try to be an artistic mechanic, given his situation in an artistic milieu of gentlemen, whose acquaintance with machinery would likely have been proprietary rather than practical. His mistake, in the bigoted terms of his own society, was to have artistic aspirations in the first place. But Blake's reaction against this implicitly class-driven imperative (lower class=mechanic; upper class=artist) provides a criticism of artistic currents of romanticism that go far beyond the issue of class--that in fact comment upon some of the most hallowed

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9Of course, Blake did undertake many commercial engravings, and his work in these commissions shows that he was perfectly capable of doing copy-engraving. However, as he himself notes in the Public Address (E 582), by the middle of his career he had a reputation of being an engraver who could invent but not execute. Probably for this reason, he received relatively few offers of copy-engraving work in the last third of his career.
conventions of the romantic age. Because the mechanical aspects of artistry are foregrounded for Blake, he resists an aesthetic idealism which would deny the physical world altogether. It is perhaps no coincidence that the age in which invention and execution were divided is also the age of idealisms which subordinate the physical world to the mental, the practical to the theoretical. While there is undoubtedly an idealist strain in Blake's own thinking, it is tempered by a practical sense of the physicality of the artist's tools and materials. He recognizes the destructive capacity of machines, but he also sees the redemptive potential of technology in the fact that artists must use tools and physical materials—not just intellectual energy—to create art which can in turn change the world for the better. I would argue that, while many critical works have been written about the influences of Blake's esoteric reading upon his art, we have not sufficiently considered the effects that a life of printers' ink and burins and the constant companionship of hard physical materials would have had upon his art and his ontology. His ambivalent attitudes toward mechanism have been conditioned as much by his experience with printing technology on a daily basis as they were affected by his philosophical objections to the mechanistic philosophies current in his time.

Blake's attempt to mend the split between invention and execution can be seen as a way of not only complicating but also recuperating artistic intention. He questions the notion that an artist could simply bring an idea or a sketch to an engraver and then let him do the mundane work of translating it into the material fact of a copperplate, because the engraver and the medium would inevitably distort the idea into something different. Obviously, when artists hire someone else to do half of the work, they surrender a certain amount of control over the finished product, no matter how rigorously the hireling is supervised. Furthermore, Blake suggests that a disembodied idea is
not a fully realized one, because for him the "Minute Particulars" (*Jerusalem*, E 247) of the image are what in fact constitute its meaning. The implication of this is that an artistic intention which could be stated in abstract terms, outside of the medium, is not really an intention at all, but merely an abstraction. The other side of this argument is that an engraver should not be employed as a mindless machine but rather as a creative individual with his own valuable point of view. An engraver who is merely replicating someone else's idea surrenders the powers of his own imagination and thereby degrades his own work. Instead of these extremes, Blake argues for a contrariety of artistic activity in which the two formerly separated terms, invention and execution, are brought together in a productive relation.

Blake's own method of illuminated printing, which has fascinated his critics for a number of years now, can be seen as an attempt to solve some of the problems that he saw in the commercial system of artistic production in England. This may well be the case, but we should not forget that Blake's development of illuminated printing may have been a more mechanical process than an ideological one. His description of illuminated printing in the *Descriptive Catalogue* focusses on its practicality: it is "one fourth the expense" ([Prospectus], E 692)) of traditional printing, and it would seem to involve less work for the engraver, since it made unnecessary the laborious transfer processes that were common in intaglio work. On the other hand, illuminated printing also has otherworldly connections, since Blake claimed to have received the idea for it through a ghostly visitation from his dead brother, Robert. Whatever its origins may have been, illuminated printing provided a solution to several aesthetic, economic, and mechanical problems that Blake had encountered in his other attempts to make his work public.
Instead of submitting his talent to the highly structured conventions of artistic production and distribution that were current in his age, Blake chose to create his own system—which is to say, his own medium.\(^\text{10}\) The implications of this choice are manifold.

In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in Blake's methods of illuminated printing, partly among bibliographers and partly among critics who seek aesthetic significance in the metaphorical aspects of Blake's medium. Bibliographical studies undertaken by Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi have revolutionized our understanding of Blake's practice of illuminated printing by proving that Blake etched his words and designs directly onto the copperplates, in reverse, without the aid of a transfer process. On the other hand, interpretive critics such as Mark L. Greenberg, Paul Mann, and Julia Wright have lately produced interesting readings of printing metaphors in Blake's poetry and designs, giving particular attention to the differences between conventional typography and Blake's own printing practice.\(^\text{11}\) As we will see, Blake does sometimes seem to advertise the putative technological superiority of illuminated printing through self-reflexive metaphors and also degraded or parodic images of traditional printing. But

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\(^\text{10}\)Illuminated printing should not be considered as a single, unitary medium, but rather as a kind of composite medium, since it involves a collection of various etching, inking, and painting techniques which changed through Blake's career. The general principles of the process do remain basically the same from the early tractates to the late play *The Ghost of Abel*.

\(^\text{11}\)Greenberg's essay "Books, Printing, and Blake's *Marriage of Heaven and Hell*" contains a reading of the "Printing-House in Hell" episode of *The Marriage* which argues that it is a parodic description of the bathetic process of conventional printing. Mann's article "*The Book of Urizen* and the Horizon of the Book" examines the images of bookbinding and printing in *The Book of Urizen* as manifestations of a desire for rigid containment of meaning. Similarly, Wright's essay "'And None Shall Gather the Leaves': Unbinding the Voice in Blake's *America* and *Europe*" interprets the images of printing and bookbinding in these poems in relation to Blake's own printing and binding practices. Essick in *William Blake, Printmaker* and Viscomi in *Blake and the Idea of the Book* also provide several readings of printing metaphors in Blake in addition to their more focussed bibliographical and chalcographic studies.
generally, it is more accurate to say simply that his work is extremely self-conscious about its existence within a medium. Blake's medium is so foregrounded in the illuminated books that it comes to be an important part of their meaning—so much so, that it becomes impossible for us to separate the physical aspects of his printing practice from the metaphorical role that printing plays in his illuminated works. The medium becomes part of the message in a very active and self-conscious way in Blake. In the next few pages, we will examine some of the possible meanings that illuminated printing can come to have in the context of the poetry and visual art that it embodies.

Much of the recent critical discussion of illuminated printing has centered implicitly on the issue of intention. Some commentators have read illuminated printing in a somewhat redemptive light, as a medium which allowed Blake more control over his art and more freedom for experimentation than any traditional medium would have allowed. Such an approach seems to have some intuitive validity, at least if we accept Joseph Viscomi's exhaustively researched descriptions of the actual process of illuminated printing. Viscomi argues that Blake tried to make illuminated printing into an "autographic" art, one which was essentially as much like drawing as possible. He contends that Blake etched his copperplates by drawing directly on them with an acid-resistant varnish, thus eliminating the need for the complicated transfer processes that were employed with most forms of engraving. As we saw in the last chapter, one consequence of this practise was that Blake had to

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12 Commentators have often mingled their observations on the physical process of illuminated printing with their readings of Blake's printing metaphors. Though this practice should be recognized for what it is—a conflation of two different modes of critical inquiry—I would argue that Blake's work invites us to do this, because it makes the medium a very involved part of the metaphorical and symbolic network that Blake creates in his composite art.
engrave his words and images in reverse. Viscomi argues that Blake found this lateral inversion a preferable alternative to the cumbersome transfer processes which severely limited creative freedom during the design of the plate. If Viscomi is right in his reconstructions of illuminated printing, then it seems likely that his suggestions about intentionality in it are also valid. Illuminated printing first of all eliminates the need for an intermediary—either a typesetter or a copy engraver—who could distort the artist's intentions. Furthermore, it removes the middle step in the process of engraving, thus making the artist's connection to the work more intimate and more immediate. Viscomi emphasizes this unification of the artist's practice when he says, "In illuminated printmaking, the labor of artist (delineavit) and engraver (sculpsit) is the same labor, occurring in the same place at the same time" (32). The implication of this identification is that Blake's technology allows his art to be more intimately connected to his intentions than other engraving processes would have allowed. Certainly, we can interpret Blake's rejection of traditional modes of engraving in the light of his comments in the Public Address, as an attempt to reintegrate invention and execution, since in illuminated printing the composition on the copperplate is both invention and execution. Illuminated printing would not have allowed the kind of division of labour that Blake decried in the Public Address, since the artist in effect invents the design directly on the copper.

However, as Viscomi is well aware, Blake's medium is far from being a transparent vehicle of intentions. Engraving the plate is only one step in the process of producing finished illuminated books; it is in the last three steps
that the possibility for disruptions of intention becomes more likely.\textsuperscript{13} The process of printing the leaves of illuminated books is far more variable, and more subject to errors, than the intaglio method. This feature of illuminated printing is the main reason that no two copies of an illuminated book (or even copies of a single leaf) are exactly the same. Furthermore, there is tremendous variation in the colouration of different copies of the illuminated books, since the leaves were periodically re-printed and painted at various times throughout Blake's career. There are also many variations in the collation and arrangement of the plates in each of the illuminated books, variations which can sometimes drastically affect the meaning of the works themselves.\textsuperscript{14} In addition to these many factors that disrupt the immediacy of artistic production in illuminated printing, there is another unseen and somewhat unquantifiable presence which further destabilizes our sense of Blake's artistic intentionality in the medium. While Blake did not employ apprentices to engrave designs that he had invented, we know that he did work in collaboration with his wife Catherine. There is no way to determine exactly how much of the work she did, but certainly there is evidence that she aided Blake by painting some of the coloured copies of the illuminated books. In any case, we can see that there are a large number of impediments to the transmission of intention in Blake's practise of illuminated printing. While it apparently solved certain problems for Blake, it was certainly not a utopian mode of representation.

\textsuperscript{13}Viscomi examines the disruptive effects of these steps in detail in his chapter entitled "Difference" (163-176). My overview of these issues is indebted to his more intensive treatment of them in that chapter.

\textsuperscript{14}There are many readings of individual instances of this phenomenon in Blake's work, but perhaps the most interesting discussion of the role of the context and arrangement of individual leaves is Tilottama Rajan's examination of the \textit{Songs Of Innocence and Of Experience} (\textit{The Supplement of Reading} 222-34).
In his essay, "Illuminated Printing: Toward a Logic of Difference," Stephen Leo Carr has applied deconstructive logic to some of these apparent aporias in the process of illuminated printing, arguing that "the multiplication of differences is a distinctive feature of every stage of Blake's printmaking process" (184). Carr goes on to link this kind of difference with deconstructive difference, arguing that the uncertainty of Blake's mode of production is in fact a purposeful destabilization of the very notions of intention and meaning. This position brings up some interesting possibilities, but in the end Carr overextends his argument into a rather extreme portrait of Blake as a bibliographical deconstructor. It is questionable to make an equation between these two forms of difference. Derrida himself makes it clear that difference is not the same thing as the simple differences between two or more things; it is instead the principle which subtends such differences. Furthermore, while the difference between Blake's impressions can be seen as a subtle undermining of authorial intention, this phenomenon is not so drastic or so metaphysically overdetermined as Carr suggests.

In fact, Blake's printing process can be seen not as an effacement of the authorial origin, but rather as a multiplication of "original" images. One of the most unusual things about illuminated printing, and one that has not been commented upon by critics and bibliographers, is that in this method the copies are the originals. Blake does not use his mechanical process to reproduce an already extant painting or design; instead, he creates a series of original artworks through a mechanical medium. Each copy of an

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15 Carr's focus is on the printing stage of the process, rather than the painting and collation, which add further variations.
16 It is tempting to say that in Blake's case the copperplate is the original, but we must remember that the copperplate is not engraved for its own artistic qualities but only in order to produce the printed pages. It is a part of the production process, but it is not the original in the sense that a painting could be considered the original of an engraving that
illuminated work is different from the others, as Carr recognizes, but this
difference can also be seen as a positive aspect of the works, as a sign of their
uniqueness. In Walter Benjamin's terms, each of Blake's illuminated works
has equal claim to the "aura" of an original artwork, even though they are all
created through a mechanical form of reproduction.\textsuperscript{17} There is no hierarchy
of mimesis here; no privileged primary image which loses its aura the more it
is reproduced. In illuminated printing, the artwork and reproduction are the
same thing, and each copy of the work comes to attain its own presence in time
and space, its own unique history, its own aura.\textsuperscript{18} This dispersal of the aura
onto several different works made with the same copperplates complicates our
notion of aesthetic identity: the several complete copies of Jerusalem, for
example, are not exactly different works, but neither are they identical.
Blake's method of printing requires us to think of art in terms of plurality
rather than self-enclosed unity, which is appropriate since his visual and
verbal images often encourage a similar kind of thinking.

\footnote{17}It is significant that Blake's illuminated books are considered "originals" by
bibliographers and connoisseurs in order to distinguish them from later reproductions,
yet they are also referred to as "copies" (they are named "Copy A," and "Copy B," for
example). Certainly, anyone who has viewed these "original" illuminated works would
agree that they each retain what Benjamin calls the "aura" in his essay "The Work of Art
in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" (221). Because Blake's practice is situated
between the mechanism of mass reproduction and the craftsmanship of individual labour,
it also falls between Benjamin's categories of original and copy. In a sense, Blake's
mechanical process multiplies the aura rather than causing it to "wither," as Benjamin
says (221). Of course, I do not make this point as a way of criticizing Benjamin's
arguments about the aura and the politicization of art in the age of mechanical
reproduction; I simply want to point out Blake's anomalous position in the history of
mechanical mimesis.

\footnote{18}Benjamin writes, "Even the most perfect reproduction of a work of art is lacking in one
element: its presence in time and space, its unique existence at the place where it
happens to be" (220). In the case of Blake's illuminated works, the copies do not take the
place of an absent original but instead lay claim to the status of an original themselves.
Robert N. Essick suggests a more moderate alternative to Carr’s conception of illuminated printing, and as he does so he gestures toward a diffused rather than purely differential view of artistic intention. He argues that "the dispersal of intentionality throughout [Blake’s] system of production disrupts the a posteriori presence of a self as the center and continuous origin of production" ("How Blake’s Body Means" 208). Rather than seeing a radical disruption of intention in illuminated printing, Essick says that there is a "dispersal" of it across time and space. He also suggests that in a sense the technology itself is a partial "author" of the work, since it determines the appearance of the finished product to a certain extent. This idea of the work as a result of the interaction between the artist’s intention and the imperatives of the technological medium is also asserted by Viscomi, who sees the artist’s intentions taking shape in relation to the problems and opportunities afforded by the medium. Such a notion of dispersed intention is flexible enough to account for both the autographic immediacy and the technological distortion that are as much a part of illuminated printing as they are of any other reproductive technology.

This approach, however, comes under some criticism in Morris Eaves’ *The Counter-Arts Conspiracy*, where Eaves suggests that the attention Viscomi and Essick give to Blake’s medium amounts to a kind of fetishization. Eaves says that the "transactional models of creativity" which Essick and Viscomi propound "tend to sentimentalize the medium" (184). Eaves does not elaborate on what he means by "sentimentalize," but the implication is that he sees Essick and Viscomi participating in a kind of romantic ideology, finding redemptive potential in what should only be described as a material process.19

19He may be referring to Viscomi’s description of the creative process as "more dialogue between spirit and matter than struggle of the former to overcome the latter" (43).
It is true that the idea of the medium as a collaborator rather than an inert substance might be construed as overly anthropomorphic or perhaps simply an overly rosy picture of the process of artistic production. However, Essick does point out that this transaction between artist and medium is not necessarily a happy one, and Viscomi documents in great detail the effects of the medium upon the appearance of the image.20 Eaves himself goes to the opposite extreme from the position that he sees in Essick and Viscomi; he tries to efface or denigrate the importance of Blake's medium and his tools. Eaves acknowledges his "Platonistic if not Platonic" (184) bias in his valuation of the spiritual over the material substance of Blake's technologies,21 and he carries this point of view to its logical conclusion when he denies the creative value of the artist's tools:

Certainly, within the terms of Blake's argument such simple tools as burins, quills, brushes, and graphite pencils are more responsive to acts of mind than ruling machines, which have a limited range of repetitive action within a confined mechanical system, but all tools signify compromises that This World makes necessary. There are no burins in eternity (185).

This remarkable statement suggests that Blake views all technology as an impediment to artistic intention rather than an aid to it. Eaves goes even

20See for example Viscomi's chapter 8, "The Illustration and Its Variations" (60-77), where he gives examples of how different engraving methods can radically alter the appearance of a design. See especially his figures 71, 81, 87, 88, and 89.
21Eaves' Platonism is particularly surprising when one considers that The Counter-Arts Conspiracy is a material history, one which examines in minute detail the context of the production of graphic arts in England during Blake's lifetime. Despite the specificity of his historical approach, and the underlying Marxist methodology of the book, Eaves insists on an effacement of the importance of Blake's artistic medium and the technologies of artistic creation. Eaves does however valorize certain other kinds of technology—particularly nineteenth-century improvements in printing methods, such as the invention of non-linear methods. In his sub-chapter "Technohistory" (182-272), Eaves wonders why Blake does not embrace this new technology.
further when he says that Blake's argument in the *Public Address* "is technically so regressive . . . that it comes close to opposing tools and materials *per se*" (184). This is certainly an overstatement; in the *Public Address* Blake argues in favor of a different technology from the prevailing ones, but he does not suggest that artists would be better off without tools altogether. Eaves sees the artist's tools as nothing better than necessary evils here, but he gives little evidence to support this conclusion. It seems unlikely that Blake would have maintained an ascetic disavowal of a relationship with his tools during his years of working with them. Would he really regard his burin as an enemy which must be subdued, or would he rather consider it as an aid to his artistic production? Certainly, he may not have been completely happy about the limitations that his materials and tools placed him under, but on the other hand, he must have been aware that his art could not be produced without them.

Eaves' extreme position is interesting because it manifests the radical instability of artistic intention in media generally. By categorizing Blake's technology as inherently regressive and delimiting, Eaves is really mapping out a particular view of artistic intention as a visionary, disembodied potentiality which must be given shape in a bathetic, mundane, and perhaps even evil medium. Such a notion is very Platonic, as Eaves himself acknowledges. Viscomi, on the other hand, claims that "art-making of the kind practiced by Blake is inherently Aristotelian, while discussions of art, including Blake's, tend toward the Platonic" (43). In his focus on the practical aspects of illuminated printing, Viscomi allies himself with the Aristotelian approach. In other words, the differences in opinion among these critics is based on a tradition of differences that goes back to two radically contrary understandings of art at the very beginnings of philosophy. What we can
learn from this vacillation among the critics is that tools and machines are sites of contestation in terms of intention. Blake's own attitude toward his medium, and toward technology generally, seems to be ambivalent, and this is probably why such diametrically opposed readings of his illuminated printing have been possible. Now that some of the contrary intentional possibilities of illuminated printing have been voiced, it is time to recognize the ways in which they interrelate.

My own intuitive sense of Blake's medium is closer to that of Viscomi and Essick, who see it as a potentially expressive technology, but who also recognize that it can disperse intention as well as transmitting it. Certainly, Blake seems to have believed that for certain purposes, illuminated printing was preferable to the other printing technologies that were available to him. However, he also made ample use of other methods of graphic representation, most notably the process of intaglio line-engraving which he employed in the *Laocoön*, the *Job* series, and the late Dante engravings. He was not resolutely committed to illuminated printing; he seems to have had a sense that it was useful for certain kinds of art and less useful for others. While his productions in illuminated printing were singularly unsuccessful in commercial terms, the technology did permit him to mingle text and image, and it certainly allowed him to create a distinctive style. In other words, illuminated printing, like any other technology, had advantages and disadvantages. Blake's sensitivity to the pros and cons of his medium, and of all media generally, can be seen in his personifications of two different attitudes toward machinery in his characters Urizen and Los. Eaves' understandings of the medium as an impediment to expression might well be based on Urizen's experiences with machinery, since for Urizen all tools seem to work against his intentions to such an extent that they end up doing the
opposite of what he wants. Essick and Viscomi may be looking at Blake's medium through the figure of Los, who uses his tools with much difficulty, but who at least manages to use them creatively at times.\textsuperscript{22} In the last two sections of this chapter we will look more closely at the metaphorical valences of machinery that Urizen and Los come to represent.

II. Blake and the Eucharistic Machine

Blake's epics are crowded with machinery. Throughout their pages, tools and technologies proliferate, causing both harm and good--and often it is very difficult to distinguish the helpful machines from the harmful ones. Furthermore, the epic machinery of the poems themselves--the characters and incidents which comprise the action--is extraordinarily complex and multifarious, and this machinery often rumbles forward and backward without giving the reader an immediate sense of its function. In terms of epic machinery, \textit{Milton} and \textit{The Four Zoas} and \textit{Jerusalem} can be said to have interconnecting gears, since many of the same characters populate all three of the poems, and since they also all share a common trajectory of movement from the agonistic struggle of the mundane world toward an apocalyptic consummation at the end of time.\textsuperscript{23} In this section, we will undertake an

\textsuperscript{22}This is not to say that Essick and Viscomi are the kind of functionalists that Eaves seems to suggest. Los himself is not a functionalist either: he does generally maintain faith in the potential of his tools to transmit intention, but he also fails in his attempts several times. Los is interesting because he is an amalgamation of the artist and the blacksmith, Apollo and Hephaestos. He wields a hammer and other technological instruments, and he is often a builder in the mechanical sense of that word, yet he also conceives his work with a poetic or artistic sensibility. We will look at the ambiguity of Los's tools in detail in the third section of this chapter.

\textsuperscript{23}Blake refers to this epic machinery in his letter to Butts of April 25, 1803, when he writes, "I have in these three years composed an immense number of verses on One Grand Theme Similar to Homers Iliad or Miltons Paradise Lost the Persons & Machinery intirely new to the Inhabitants of Earth" (E 728).
extended reading of *The Four Zoas*, and take a brief look at some passages of *Milton*, with the goal of showing how the poems are themselves implicated in the contrary kinds of machinery that they so often portray. I will try to establish a sense of the radical ambiguity of mechanism in these works, and I will explore the relation of intention to this phenomenon of doubleness.

There has been surprisingly little written about the machines and tools in *The Four Zoas*, especially when one considers their virtual omnipresence in the sublime and apocalyptic Ninth Night of the poem. Frye and Erdman make some important notes about the function of these grotesque yet implicitly eucharistic machines, but subsequent generations of critics have been strangely silent on this topic. George Rosso's recent book, *Blake's Prophetic Workshop*, treats *The Four Zoas* itself as a workshop, but only in the sense that the poem is manifestly unfinished: its revisions and emendations are still visible, like a building under construction, and thus we can read in it the traces of Blake's creative process. Donald Ault's imposing study, *Narrative Unbound*, also spends little time on the mechanisms of the poem, though Ault's ominous diagrams of the narrative's "bracketed structures" (20) do resemble blueprints or circuit boards. Kathryn S. Freeman's recent book *Blake's Nostos: Fragmentation and Nondualism in "The Four Zoas"* examines the Ninth Night of the poem as a providential *deus ex machina*, but she does not look at the explicitly mechanistic aspects of this poetic manoeuvre. The only critical work to give any extended attention to the mechanisms of the poem is Andrew Lincoln's *Spiritual History*, which provides an explication of the forms of labour that comprise the final scenes of vintage and harvest.²⁴

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²⁴See Lincoln's Chapter 8 (186-220). His suggestion that "The transition from the chaotic world of the Universal Empire to 'The Last Judgment' is one from a civilization dominated by trades and industry to one dominated by agriculture" (186) is not entirely accurate because, as we will see, Blake redeems industry as well as agriculture. Lincoln's position
The mechanisms of *The Four Zoas* can be understood in terms of a fluctuation and interrelation between the sacred and the profane. Early in the poem, technological images are generally associated with Urizen, and also with a monological specificity which Blake often associates with Newton or Locke. However, as the apocalyptic scene in Night Nine unfolds, the profane implications of machinery become less certain, and eventually a sacred element comes out of this process, in the form of a Eucharistic feast which is laboriously (and mechanically) produced in the final pages of the poem. There is seldom if ever an unequivocal image of machinery in the poem, but the associations of machines certainly do change as the poem reaches its climax, and the same kinds of machinery that were once degraded seem to be redeemed by the eucharistic associations of the final feast.

Even very early in *The Four Zoas*, the resonances of mechanism are ambiguous: the fall is figured as both Urthona's abandonment of his tools and Urizen's subsequent adoption of technology. When Urthona's Emanation divides from him, he throws down his hammer and is unable to continue his work:

> Beside his anvil stood Urthona dark. a mass of iron
> Glowd furious on the anvil prepar'd for spades & coulters All
> His sons fled from his side to join the conflict pale he heard
> The Eternal voice he stood the sweat chill'd on his mighty limbs
> He drop'd his hammer. dividing from his aking bosom fled
> A portion of his life shrieking upon the wind she fled (E 312)

seems to be based on an latent organicism which leads him to accept the harvest and the vintage as largely organic events rather than concatenations of the organic and the mechanistic.
Later, it will be up to Los to wield this hammer in order to maintain the necessary creative energy until the world can be redeemed. But before Los is given this task, Urizen's machinery begins to form: "perverse rolld the wheels of Urizen & Luvah back reversd / Downwards & outwards consuming in the wars of Eternal Death" (E 313). The perversion and reversal of these wheels signifies that they are the opposite of creative machinery, though they are part of the great construction that Urizen immediately undertakes, commanding the "Bands of Heaven" to follow his plans:

\[
\text{Divide ye bands influence by influence} \\
\text{Build we a Bower for heavens darling in the grizly deep} \\
\text{Build we the Mundane Shell around the Rock of Albion} \\
\]

The Bands of Heaven flew thro the air singing & shouting to Urizen

\[
\text{Some fix'd the anvil, some the loom erected, some the plow} \\
\text{And harrow formd & framd the harness of silver & ivory} \\
\text{The Golden compasses, the quadrant & the rule & balance} \\
\text{They erected the furnaces, they formd the anvils of gold beaten in mills} \\
\text{Where winter beats incessant, fixing them firm on their base} \\
\text{The bellows began to blow & the Lions of Urizen stood round the anvil } (E 314).
\]

This construction project begins with the fashioning of the tools themselves, but for a long time it does not get very far beyond this stage--perhaps because the builders become fascinated by the machinery and do not look beyond it to its use value. It seems that this technology is in a sense the Mundane Shell, because it creates the conditions for a division of the worker from his or her
labour, and such a division symbolizes the other kinds of self-difference that will occur in the fallen world. 25 Certainly, it is significant that Urizen commands his hearers to "Divide," and their answer is to produce machinery. Perhaps they interpret his command as an imperative to divide themselves. The fall here is a technological one, a reversal of the Prometheus myth: the coming of technology is more of a curse than a boon. One could read this as an extreme example of what Heidegger calls "enframing": the builders become so changed by the tools they have invented that they lose their connection to their original nature. 26 Blake's choice of verbs here reflects a gendering of Urizen's tropism for fixity: the process of constructing the machines is both congelatory ("form'd & fram'd," "fix'd") and tumescent ("erected").

The Lions of Urizen and the Sons of Urizen eventually set to work with the newly-created machines, and not surprisingly, they use these mechanisms to measure and solidify a Newtonian universe:

For meaur'd out in ordeurd spaces the Sons of Urizen
With compasses divide the deep; they the strong scales erect
That Luvah rent from the faint Heart of the Fallen Man
And weigh the massy Cubes, then fix them in their awful stations

And all the time in Caverns shut, the golden Looms erected
First spun, then wove the Atmospheres, there the Spider & Worm
Plied the wingd shuttle piping shrill thro' all the list'ning threads
Beneath the Caverns roll the weights of lead & Spindles of iron

25 Erdman alludes to this process in a different context when he describes "the fall from paradise or division of labor that isolated the imaginative poet (Los) from the productive laborer (Urthona)" (Prophet Against Empire 305).
26 Heidegger discusses this in "The Question Concerning Technology" 25.
The enormous warp & woof rage direful in the affrighted deep
(E 318-19)
The activity of building proceeds furiously at this point in the poem; it progresses from the weaving of the atmosphere to the construction of the enormous "Golden Hall of Urizen" (E 319). But even in the midst of this apparently productive activity, the negative implications of mechanism become visible. The mechanization and the division of labour that Urizen insists upon lead directly to the institution of slavery: "Severe the labour, female slaves the mortar trod oppressed" (E 319). At this point, the main victims of technology are female. Perhaps because Urizen is the architect rather than the actual worker, he places himself and other members of his sex in higher positions than the women. Vala herself becomes one of the slave labourers, "mourning among the Brick kilns compell'd / To labour night & day among the fires" (E 320). Urizen and his minions do produce a beautiful creation, a "Golden World" (E 320), but they achieve this at the expense of the workers, who "mournd their bondage night and day" (E 320). Perhaps Blake had heard of the slaves of Egypt who were used to build the pyramids, or of other architectural wonders which were built on the backs of enslaved workers. In this case, the chain which binds the slaves is the mechanism itself, which restrains them at the same time as it utilizes their energy.

Even in the midst of this fall into technology, however, there is a hint of redemption. The descriptions of the Golden World and its vicissitudes ends

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27Urizen, as an "architect" rather than a builder, is of course insisting upon the same kind of division of labour that Blake was so adamantly opposed to in the engraving and printing practices of his day. Urizen is obsessed with "invention," but he leaves the "execution" of his plans to the slaves, who are not allowed to participate creatively in the work because they must submit their wills to the abstract plans of Urizen. One reason that Urizen's plans are so abstract and so faulty is that he has no connection to the material world; he has left such physical labour to his slaves.
with the unexpected appearance of "the Divine Vision" (E 321). This event functions as a supplement of the degraded machinery, a kind of proleptic deus ex machina which comes in to redeem the egregious mechanical forms of error that Urizen institutes.\(^{28}\) A few lines later, the fall into mechanism is described as a kind of felix culpa:

For the Divine Lamb Even Jesus who is the Divine Vision
Permitted all lest Man should fall into Eternal Death
For when Luvah sunk down himself put on the robes of blood
Lest the state call'd Luvah should cease. & the Divine Vision
Walked in robes of blood till he who slept should awake (E 321).

Like the fortunate fall of Christian theology (as it is represented in Paradise Lost and elsewhere), this scene justifies the fall because it makes possible the Incarnation. Jesus permits the Urizenic construction because this makes it necessary for him to "put on the robes of blood" (E 321). This passage will become important for us later, because the eucharistic images in Night Nine of the poem partake of a similar incarnational logic. At this early point in the poem, the Incarnation occurs as Jesus's reaction to the technological machinations of Urizen, but in the later Nights, the relationship between mechanism and the divine body becomes more complicated.

In the Fourth Night, Tharmas tells Los that "Urizen is fall'n," (E 334), presumably referring to Urizen's fall into technological division. What concerns Tharmas about this fall is that it also has consequences for himself, because now he, like Urizen, is divided from his emanation: "A portion of my

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\(^{28}\) As I mentioned at the beginning of this section, Kathryn S. Freeman discusses the Ninth Night of the poem in terms of the deus ex machina. I believe that there are earlier hints of this kind of supplementarity in the poem, such as the passages quoted above. Freeman's discussion of this phenomenon is based largely in the Greek tradition of epics and dramas, but I believe that Blake's invocation of the deus ex machina should be understood in Christian context, relating it to the idea of the fortunate fall, as I elucidate above.
Life / That in Eternal fields in comfort wanderd with my flocks / At noon & laid her head upon my wearied bosom at night / She is divided" (E 334).
Tharmas commands Los to do something to remedy this situation, and significantly he says that Los should do this through the use of a tool: "Take thou the hammer of Urthona rebuild these furnaces" (E 335). Los begins his task with some trepidation, but at first it seems that he is succeeding:

Then Los with terrible hands siezd on the Ruind Furnaces
Of Urizen. Enormous work: he builded them anew
Labour of Ages in the Darkness & the war of Tharmas (E 335).

Los continues to build, and soon he is no longer reconstructing Urizen's ruins but rather creating a mechanical measurement of time: "Frightend with cold infectious madness. in his hand the thundering / Hammer of Urthona. forming under his heavy hand the hours / The days & years. in chains of iron round the limbs of Urizen" (E 335). In other words, Los begins in a project of renovation but ends up actually contributing to the further divisions of the Urizenic world. This failure is described in psychological terms in the following passage:

Terrified at the Shapes
Enslavd humanity put on, he became what he beheld
Raging against Tharmas his God & uttering
Ambiguous words blasphemous filld with envy firm resolvd
On hate Eternal in his vast disdain he labourd beating
The Links of fate link after link an endless chain of sorrows
(E 336)

Because Los has been compelled to work, he too becomes a slave—of both Tharmas and of the machines at which he must labour. This is probably why
the results of his work are not redemptive, and he becomes entangled in the process rather than working through it toward a goal.

Near the end of Night Four, Blake repeats similar lines to the ones quoted above, but with a variation that suggests how Los has become identified with his mechanical actions: "terrified at the shapes / Enslavd humanity put on he became what he beheld / He became what he was doing he was himself transformd" (E 338). When he becomes what he is doing, then his identity depends on the mechanism, and he does not look beyond the machine to any intended goal. This is what we have discussed in terms of modernity's fear of mechanism: Los is ensnared in the machinery; now it uses him rather than the other way around. This notion is brought home at the end of the Night, where Los is described as a piece of lead used in a printing process: "the bones of Los / Twinge & his iron sinews bend like lead & fold / Into unusual forms dancing & howling stamping the Abyss" (E 338). Los has become a piece of technology himself, folded into "forms," much as in a printing house, when molten lead is poured into forms in order to cast pieces of type.29 Los's hammer blows have been turned into printing impressions: he is "stamping the abyss" with a message that he did not compose and that he does not even understand. He has become the most slavish kind of mimetic machine.

29These "forms" are reminiscent of the "Unnam'd forms" (E 40) of the Printing House In Hell in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, which "cast the metals into the expanse" (E 40). It may be significant in this context that Blake's illuminated printing methods did not involve any "casting" in the way that typefonts are cast, and that he obviously did not use lead for his plates because it was too soft. Another interesting difference between Blake's own process and the traditional method of moveable type is that Blake's plates were all of a piece: the plates could not be broken down and re-used in a different context. In the process of moveable type, the individual pieces of type never form lasting connections to a particular context. Of course, in The Four Zoas this image is not as self-reflexive as it might be in some of Blake's other works, since The Four Zoas exists only in a manuscript and was never published by Blake in any form.
Toward the end of the poem, however, the role of the machine becomes less clearly constrictive; it starts to have emancipatory connotations. Ironically, this happens through an exacerbation of the mechanical conditions of the world: machines are no longer used simply for slavish construction; they also begin to be employed for active destruction. In Night Seven, Urizen’s sons turn toward the machinery of war:

Then left the Sons of Urizen the plow & harrow the loom
The hammer & the Chisel & the rule & compasses
They forgd the sword the chariot of war the battle ax
The trumpet fitted to the battle & the flute of summer
And all the arts of life they changd into the arts of death (E 364)

In this case the productive and destructive machines are all of basically the same order—they are "simple" machines which do not have large numbers of moving parts. However, in conjunction with this disavowal of productive machinery in favor of the destructive variety, the sons of Urizen decide that more complicated machines are better than simple ones:

The hour glass contemmd because its simple workmanship
Was as the workmanship of the plowman & the water wheel
That raises water into Cisterns broken & burn'd in fire
Because its workmanship was like the workmanship of the Shepherd
And in their stead intricate wheels invented Wheel without wheel
To perplex youth in their outgoings & to bind to labours
Of day & night the myriads of Eternity. that they might file
And polish brass & iron hour after hour in laborious workmanship
Kept ignorant of the use that they might spend the days of wisdom
In sorrowful drudgery to obtain a scanty pittance of bread

(E 364)

Not content with the divisions that simple machines have brought to the world, the sons of Urizen force needlessly complex machinery upon the labourers—not with the goal of increased production, but simply because it will increase the subjection of the workers.30 Here the increasing complexity of the machines can be seen as a measure of their delimitation of agency, but we should be careful not to see this episode as an indication of the absolute moral value of simple and complex machines, because the relation between them is not so clear in other scenes.

This increased complexity of the Urizenic machinery seems to be a further descent into technological degradation, just as the development of war machines is a degradation, but by the end of the poem such mechanical perversion becomes so excessive that it starts to reverse itself, to move toward redemption. This contradictory logic is at the heart of Blake's ambivalence generally, and, as we have seen, it is a deeply Christian way of thinking. A religion which insists that the crucifixion of its god is in fact a glorious victory rather than a defeat will necessarily be founded upon paradox, and Blake works within this contradictory tradition. Such notions of the interpenetration of negative and positive forces are not unique to Christianity

30This passage might be describing the typical activities of an apprentice engraver, polishing the metal plates before they are engraved. If this is true, then the complicated "machine" of the engraving establishment is shown once again to create a degrading division of labour. Similarly, Erdman reads the events of this Night as a quintessential depiction of the nullifying effects of the division of labour. He writes, "the tragic burden of the industrial visions of Nights II and VIIb is the tyrannous separation of labour from love, specter from man, production from perfection—such, the division of labor and the division of the laborer" (332).
by any means, however. Walter Benjamin writes of a similar phenomenon in Judaism: "just as a force can, through acting, increase another that is acting in the opposite direction, so the order of the profane assists, through being profane, the coming of the Messianic Kingdom" ("Theologico-Political Fragment," Reflections 312). This sense of extremity and excess as the only possible ways of overturning a systematic order seems to be part of many radically eschatological traditions.

In keeping with the felix culpa associations of the fall into mechanism, there is near the end of The Four Zoas a gradual unfolding of the divine plan, and it involves the destructive capacity of machines.31 Urizen marshalls his mechanistic power toward warlike purposes, but in a sense the destructiveness of technology becomes its saving grace. At the end of Night Seven, Urizen prepares his cruel instruments, but he does not realize that the further he pushes his perversity, the closer he comes to overturning his own schemes. He is perhaps the embodiment of the Proverb of Hell which states, "If the fool would persist in his folly he would become wise" (E 36). His mechanical mania becomes excessive, and in that excess lies its redemptive capacity. As we see, he intends to create havoc:

And Urizen gave life & sense by his immortal power
To all his Engines of deceit that linked chains might run
Thro ranks of war spontaneous & that hooks & boring screws
Might act according to their forms by innate cruelty
He formed also harsh instruments of sound

31 The felix culpa might be seen as a way of recuperating the mechanistic excess of the Ninth Night into a totalized godly economy, but in fact, as we have seen, Blake's God is not always a transcendental authority figure, and the fortunate fall need not be seen as a complete closure of this excess. In fact, God is quite often associated with excess in Blake, so this mechanistic excess might be seen as a way of generating a god out of degraded machinery—once again, the deus ex machina.
To grate the soul into destruction or to inflame with fury
The spirits of life to pervert all the faculties of sense
Into their own destruction (E 375)

However, as so often happens with Urizen, his intentions end up being reversed. He does not recognize that destruction is in fact the way to a kind of renewal.

Urizen's plans for annihilation in Night Nine paradoxically effect a kind of creation, but this creation does not take the form of an architectural project like the building of the Mundane Shell. Instead, it is the preparation of an immense eucharistic feast, in which the raw materials are human flesh and blood. What is described as "the harvest" (E 387) and "the Vintage" (E 402) is really a mass slaughter of humans, and a refinement of their bodies and blood into bread and wine. The apocalypse is portrayed here as the typological completion and reversal of the Incarnation: instead of God becoming human, humans become God.\(^32\) The medium of this transformation is in both cases the bread and wine as they are mechanically constructed. Blake's source for this scene of sacramental carnage is a conflation of the eucharistic scene of the Last Supper with the depiction of the "harvest of the earth" in Revelation 14, where one angel "swung his sickle over the earth, and the earth was reaped," and another angel

\[
\text{swung his sickle over the earth and gathered in the vintage of the earth, and he threw it into the great wine press of the wrath of God. And the wine press was trodden outside the city, and blood}
\]

\(^{32}\)We see here an enactment of the latter half of the phrase that ends \textit{There is NO Natural Religion}: "God becomes as we are, / that we may be as he / is" (E3). In this case, the eschatological logic of the statement becomes literalized into an inversion of the eucharist.
flowed from the wine press, as high as a horse's bridle, for a
distance of about two hundred miles. (14. 19-20)
Blake deviates from the biblical account to include scenes of the winnowing,
the grinding of the grain, and the readying of the ovens in which the bread is
baked. His emphasis in these scenes is persistently upon the technological
elements of the harvest and the preparation, and I believe he does this in
order to emphasize the role of machinery in redeeming the fallen world.

Urizen plays the role of the avenging angel, though he has little or no
sense that his destruction will have a beneficial effect upon the humans he is
cutting down:

This sickle Urizen took the scythe his sons embraced
And went forth & began to reap & all his joyful sons
Reapd the wide Universe & bound in Sheaves a wondrous harvest
They took them into the wide barns with loud rejoicings &
triumph

Of flute & harp & drum & trumpet horn & clarion (E 400)
I would argue that this spree of carnage is the point at which Urizen's ecstatic
and joyful profanity starts to have simultaneously sacred connotations. Some
critics have made distinctions between Urizen's destruction and that of Luvah
which follows, but I suggest that there is a difference of degree rather than of
kind. Though Urizen seems to have no sacramental intentions in his killing,
the orgiastic elements of it seem to suggest a redemptive quality to the
violence. It is reminiscent of Flannery O'Connor's shocking amalgamations of
the violent and the sacred, and it could also be described in terms of the
redemptive excess that Bataille examines in his studies of ritual
annihilation. Certainly it is significant that immediately before Urizen begins his harvest "the Eternal Man [is] Darkend" (E 400), but as soon as the destruction has begun and the eucharistic feast is started, the Eternal Man revives:

The Eternal Man arose he welcomed them to the Feast
The feast was spread in the bright South & the Eternal Man
Sat at the feast rejoicing & the wine of Eternity
Was served round by the flames of Luvah (E 401)

Urizen may not recognize the role that he and his machines play in the formation of this redemptive feast, but he is a part of it nonetheless. Perhaps he is like Judas in the synoptic gospels: his contribution is necessary, though he does not understand it himself.

The destruction continues in the Wine Press of Luvah, where the humans are crushed and refined into "Odors". The process is terrifying for them, but once they have gone through it they sing praise:

Into the wine presses of Luvah howling fell the Clusters
Of human families thro the deep. the wine presses were filled
The blood of life flowed plentiful Odors of life arose
All round the heavenly arches & the Odors rose singing this song

O terrible wine presses of Luvah O caverns of the Grave
How lovely the delights of those risen again from death
O trembling joy excess of joy is like Excess of grief (E 404)

An "Odor" is "the sweet odour exhaled by [a] dying or exhumed saint" (OED). These humans are saints because they are in the process of being reborn into

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33 Bataille studies these phenomena most attentively in Erotism and Theory of Religion, though he also employs similar techniques of orgiastic excess in his own fiction.
heavenly existence. This Wine Press, then, is the redemptive mechanism, which crushes the grapes out of their vegetable existence and makes them into a sacramental wine.

However, this harvest and vintage is, of course, also the Last Judgment, which means that there are some humans who will not be redeemed by the destructive mechanism of the Wine Press. Here the winepress itself functions as the technology of judgment, transforming saintly humans into Odors, but leaving the reprobate humans in their bodily form. These unfortunates are described simply as "Human Grapes," which indicates their profane form, their lack of transformation into wine. They are in a sense the dregs, the leftovers of the sacramental process. And just as the winepress is the place of liberation for the saintly humans, it is also the instrument of torture for the Human Grapes. As a mechanism, the winepress here attains a radical ambiguity, as both the agent of redemption and of infernal torment:

But in the Wine presses the Human Grapes Sing not nor dance
They howl & writhe in shoals of torment in fierce flames consuming
In chains of iron & in dungeons circled with ceaseless fires
In pits & dens & shades of death in shapes of torment & woe
The Plates the Screws and Racks & Saws & cords & fires & floods
The cruel joy of Luvahs daughters lacerating with knives
And Whip[s] their Victims & the deadly sport of Luvahs Sons

(E 404)

This scene is a veritable explosion of violent mechanistic excess, revealing the Last Judgment to be in a sense the culmination of the poem's epic machinery. Blake's emphasis on the mechanistic aspects of this violence seems to be gesturing toward a statement about the excessive qualities of machines
themselves. Unlike Newton, who saw machines as simply preserving the equilibrium of energy, Blake sees that machines increase our capacity for both creation and destruction.34 In a way, machines are geared toward these contrary kinds of excess: they make humans somehow more than themselves; they allow us to kill each other more effectively and also to create and express ourselves more effectively. In Blake’s paradoxical imagination, both of these contrary processes lead toward apocalypse.

After this depiction of the Last Judgment as a eucharistic machine, there is another scene which deals specifically with mechanism, and which clearly shows that technology has been redeemed through the staggering excesses it has made possible. Tharmas and Urthona leave the great feast and take up their respective implements, followed by the other Zoas (except Urizen) and their emanations, all of whom are clearly associated with particular mechanisms:

With Mirth & Joy Urthona limping from his fall on Tharmas leand
In his right hand his hammer Tharmas held his Shepherds crook
Beset with gold gold were the ornaments formed by the sons of Urizen
Then Enion & Ahania & Vala & the wife of Dark Urthona
Rose from the feast in joy ascending to their Golden Looms
There the wingd shuttle Sang the spindle & the distaff & the Reel
Rang sweet the praise of industry. Thro all the golden rooms

34Newton applies the closed economy of his Third Law to machines when he says, "the action and reaction in the use of all sorts of machines will be found always to equal one another" (Principia 30).
Heaven rang with winged Exultation. All beneath howld loud
With tenfold rout & desolation (E 405).

This passage suggests that these tools are the same ones "formed by the sons of Urizen," but now they are ornamented with gold, to signify the fact that they have been redeemed. There are no implements of war here. Swords have been beaten into plowshares.

It seems that the redeemed machinery and materials in Night Nine are all reclamations of things originally fashioned by Urizen, which again reinforces the idea that Urizen's mechanistic fall was a felix culpa. The penultimate eucharistic image of the poem involves the refinement of Urizen's corn:

Then Dark Urthona took the Corn out of the Stores of Urizen
He ground it in his rumbling Mills Terrible the distress
Of all the Nations of Earth ground in the Mills of Urthona (E 406).

These communion mills, like the winepress, involve sublime destruction and redemption, and they can be seen as the ameliorative counterparts to the more famous satanic mills. Blake continues the use of mechanistic and eucharistic images in his description of the baking of the bread in Urthona's ovens:

They build the Ovens of Urthona Nature in darkness groans
And Men are bound to sullen contemplations in the night
Restless they turn on beds of sorrow, in their inmost brain
Feeling the crushing Wheels they rise they write the bitter words
Of Stern Philosophy & knead the bread of knowledge with tears & groans

Such are the works of Dark Urthona (E 406)
This is another description of the process of writing, described in mechanistic terms because the inspired prophet becomes a mechanism through which the divine speaks. Blake sometimes spoke of how he received the words of his epics directly from a divine voice, dozens of lines at a time, "from immediate dictation" (Letter, E 729). So this last image of the bread of philosophy which is also "the works of Dark Urthona" may be a description of Blake's method of poetic creation. It is fitting that the negative connotations of the crushing wheels should refer to a return to the mundane world in which he must continue to labour. Immediately following this rather negative description, however, there is an image of sacred completion which gives a generally redemptive cast to this section:

Tharmas sifted the corn
Urthona made the Bread of Ages & he placed it
In golden & in silver baskets in heavens of precious stone
And then took his repose in Winter in the night of Time (E 406)

These golden and silver receptacles for the eucharistic bread might be either chalices or tabernacles, used to store the consecrated host for a future sacramental occasion. Finally, in the "fresher morning" (E 406), things seem to have returned to the way they were in the beginning, since Urthona is back at work in his cave, wielding his hammer: "The hammer of Urthona sounds /
In the deep caves" (E 406).35

There are a number of related mechanistic images in Blake's later epic *Milton*, but we will focus our attention here on the most important invocation of eucharistic machinery in that poem. Blake's description of the "Wine-press

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35 Kathryn S. Freeman reads this return in terms of the Homeric tradition of the *nostos*, the homecoming, and certainly she is right to see it as a kind of reintegration. However I believe her emphasis on the Greek tradition leads her to downplay the more obvious Christian elements of the eschatological Ninth Night, which I have focussed on here.
of Los" (E 125) is very similar to some of the portrayals of the Wine Press of
Luvah in *The Four Zoas*; in fact, a number of the lines in this passage have
been taken directly from the earlier poem and adapted to the action of *Milton*.
Blake states that "Luvah laid the foundation" (E 124) of the Wine Press, and
then he goes on to re-use the lines from *The Four Zoas* about the sons and
daughters of Luvah treading the grapes: "Laughing & shouting drunk with
odours many fall oerwearied / Drownd in the wine is many a youth & maiden"
(E 124). However, the changes in inflection that Blake introduces immediately
after this are particularly fruitful for our discussion of machinery and
mimesis. He writes,

This Wine-press is call'd War on Earth, it is the Printing-Press
Of Los; and here he lays his words in order above the mortal
brain

As cogs are formd in a wheel to turn the cogs of the adverse
wheel (E 124).

The equation of the wine press and the printing press here is crucial to Blake's
ideas of mechanism and incarnation in his epics. The wine press maintains
the connotations of grotesque violence and mechanical oppression that it had
in *The Four Zoas*, and it also retains the joyous sacramental overtones of the
preparation of a magnificent eucharist. But when Blake says "This Wine-
press. . . is the Printing-Press / of Los," he is essentially equating the act of
printing with the act of making the eucharist. Perhaps he is aware that the
original printing press which Gutenberg used to produce his Bible was made
from the mechanism of a wine press,\footnote{Sigvard Strandh describes the wine-press and olive-press mechanism developed by
Hero, and adds that "Johann Gutenberg's first printing press, built in the 1430's, was
more or less a direct copy of the Hero press with its screw design" (43).} and he finds great significance in this
for his own activities as a printer of visionary texts. If the Zoas can create an apocalyptic and eucharistic feast, then Blake's own mimetic depiction of that feast can also be seen as eucharistic. The act of printing, in this model, becomes a sacrament--complete with all the ambiguous connotations of sacrament, the cannibalistic and the divine elements. Each printed leaf, tortured though the printing process may be, squeezes a redemptive quality out of the mundane materials Blake must work with. Perhaps he believes that this process makes those degraded materials into a eucharistic sign, a divine presence which is also inscribed with poetry.37

It is possible, then, that for Blake communication is communion. To communicate a divinely inspired vision through this mechanistic medium would be the same as dispensing a sacrament: the vision would be divided among the communicants and they would consume it by reading. It is significant that work in illuminated printing can be replicated just as the eucharist can. As a model of mechanical mimesis, this eucharistic mode of printing would seem to provide an antidote to the fears that Benjamin expresses about the proliferation of copies overwhelming the aura of the original, since in illuminated printing, as in the consecrated body and blood of the eucharist, each copy is an original. There is no limit to the number of communion hosts that can be consecrated, and all of them purport to represent

37This is one of the most literal examples of what Essick calls the "incarnational sign" in Blake. Like all invocations of the incarnational sign, this one begs a question of intentionality which is much like the controversy about the representational qualities of the eucharist itself—the battle between consubstantiationists and transubstantiationists. We are led to wonder whether Blake means this description as a metaphor or as a literal invocation of divine presence. This is similar to the question we looked at in the first chapter about whether Blake takes on the role of the prophet metaphorically or seriously. The issue is not so much whether we believe that Blake's printed leaves contain the divine body in a transubstantiative sense, but whether we think that Blake might believe it. Certainly, if he is as serious about creating a radically transformative text as he sometimes claims to be, we cannot rule out the possibility that he invests his printed leaves with a performative kind of belief.
(or present) the body of Christ in an equal way, and they are not—at least in transubstantiative traditions—considered to be inferior to the original. The mimetic proliferation that is performed in the eucharist is a model of perfect representation, and Blake invokes it here as a metaphor for his own method of communicating divine vision. If we follow this metaphorical suggestion, the leaves of his illuminated works can each be seen as infinitely replicable embodiments of the Divine Vision. This is perhaps the dream of every visionary writer, everyone who yearns to be able to express his or her vision in a medium that will not involve the inevitable vicissitudes of more mundane communication. In this passage Blake gestures toward another kind of mechanistic excess—the machine that exceeds its own normal limits to create a perfect functionalism. The printing press, which is often portrayed as a degraded mechanism in Blake's works, here comes to be redeemed into a machine of absolute representations.

III. Prophesying with a Hammer: Los and the Machinery of Jerusalem

Jerusalem is in some ways a vast restatement and amplification of Blake's famous lyric from Milton, "And did those feet in ancient time" (E 95). The reconstruction of a lost Jerusalem is the primary action of both poems—a rebuilding which can only occur in the present material world, and through the aid of mechanical implements. Jerusalem, like "And did those feet in ancient time," is millenarian in an active sense: both poems portray the New Jerusalem as a city which must be built, if not literally stone by stone then at least imaginatively through art.38 This was not such an unusual idea in

38 Blake regularly tries to collapse the distinction between imaginative and physical forms of building, which can be related to his resistance to the institution of any divisions of artistic labour.
Blake's time as we might consider it to be. Millenarianism reached feverish heights near the end of the eighteenth century, perhaps because of the many social upheavals that occurred at that time. Probably the most famous millenarian leader of Blake's generation was Richard Brothers, the British mystagogue who not only proclaimed himself Prince of the Hebrews and Nephew to the Almighty, but also formulated a grand scheme to return to the Holy Land with his followers and build the New Jerusalem on the site of the ancient city.39 A follower of Brothers asked John Flaxman to be the architect of the millenial city, but when Flaxman declined, another architect was enlisted.40 Brothers planned his city to such a degree that he even designed the costumes which its citizens would wear as they awaited the apocalypse.

While Brothers' city never got beyond the planning stage, it provides an example of the elaborate mimetic activity that was current in certain religious practises during Blake's life. Blake takes this practise a step further by focussing on the actual process of building Jerusalem, rather than simply planning it. Los's task is to construct the millenial city, not merely to sketch what the finished product might look like. This becomes once again a question of the literalization of metaphor: Los must move beyond the airy realms of imagining into a space where the imaginary comes to have a physical reality. This is why his work is as much physical labour as it is imaginative construction—and it is also why his tools are given such a prominent place in the designs and the text of the poem. Similarly, for Blake as an artist, it is not just a matter of imagining the New Jerusalem, but also a matter of producing

39David Bindman examines Brothers' project in relation to Jerusalem in William Blake: His Art and Times 165.
40Bentley (Blake Records 235 n 2) notes that Henry Crabb Robinson recounts this attempted enlistment of Flaxman in his diary (53-54). Brothers' follower Sharpe apparently tried to convert Blake as well, with similar lack of success (Blake Records 235).
an artistic embodiment of that imagining. Art for him is not merely an activity of the mind; it is also manifested in physical materials, and artistic tools are needed to manipulate those materials. As Los is building Jerusalem, Blake is building Jerusalem in his printing workshop. Both acts of mimesis are simultaneously imaginative and mechanical.

Furthermore, the mimesis invoked in Jerusalem is not the usual sublunary form of representation; Los must not simply build a copy of Jerusalem, he must build the actual holy city. This makes his task a great deal more difficult, because he is working against the very structure of post-lapsarian representation, in which a copy can never attain a state of identity with the original. This is reminiscent of the Borges character who sets himself the task of writing Don Quixote—not rewriting it, but actually composing the original text word for word, without ever having read it. Los is likewise building something that he has never been able to see clearly, because it is distorted in the glass of the Mundane Shell. He must use his tools as instruments to "touch the heavens" (Milton, E 107)—to move them beyond their degraded nature toward the divine. He must make a copy which is an original.

For Blake, however, destruction is as important as creation, so Los must be engaged in a process of continual building and continual destroying. Los says, "To beat / These hypocritic Selfhoods on the Anvils of bitter Death / I am inspired" (E 151). The consequences of his creating and destroying are usually positive, since he has the clarity of vision to know what he should build and what he should annihilate. But even he makes mistakes, as he did in The Four Zoas when he became bound up in the mechanism of Urizen's furnaces. Similarly, there are other characters in Jerusalem who participate in starkly degraded forms of construction, such as Albion's sons, who "build Babylon
because they have forsaken Jerusalem" (E 169). There is also much fruitless destruction in the poem, such as the Druidic sacrifice perpetrated by Tirzah and Vala which is depicted on plate 69.

Since the negative kinds of building and destroying are likewise accomplished through the use of technology, we might be tempted to speculate that there are two fundamentally different orders of machinery in the poem. However, as in the earlier epics, such a neat division is misleading, despite Blake's ambiguation of the image of the wheel to include the degraded "wheel without wheel" (E 159) and also the Edenic "wheel within wheel" (E 159) of Ezekiel's vision. He describes these wheels in the midst of a comment on the mechanistic philosophies which he sees permeating the intellectual milieu of enlightenment Europe:

I turn my eyes to the Schools & Universities of Europe
And There behold the Loom of Lock whose Woof rages dire
Washd by the Water-wheels of Newton. black the cloth
In heavy wreathes folds over every Nation; cruel Works
Of many wheels I view. wheel without wheel. with cogs tyrannic
Moving by compulsion each other: not as those in Eden: which
Wheel within Wheel in freedom revolve in harmony & peace

(E 159)

While these two kinds of mechanism represent the extremes of mechanical possibility, all earthly technology (such as the tools Los and Blake must work with) partakes of elements of both. The machines of Urizenic limitation have equally powerful positive counterparts—the fiery forges and golden looms which can be used in the creation of the great city. Los's machinery is situated outside of Eden, so he must make use of less divine mechanisms than the edenic wheel within wheel. But on the other hand, his tools are not all
inherently limiting and counter-productive. They still maintain a definite use-value, and indeed his task would be impossible without some kind of mechanical aid.

Los's tools are necessary as a means of accomplishing his work, but they must remain secondary to his vision: he has to act through them instead of with them. This is of course related to the intention with which he uses the tools. In a way, Blake's theory of ethical and aesthetic action is similar to his understanding of perception as he describes it at the end of A Vision of the Last Judgment: "I question not my Corporeal or Vegetative Eye any more than I would Question a Window concerning a Sight I look thro it & not with it" (E 566). If we perceive with our senses rather than through them toward something beyond, then we will become imprisoned by them, and this approach to function is analogous to the way in which tools can be used.41 This focus on the limits of perception is, in Blake's view, what produced the mechanical philosophy of empiricism. In order to avoid this, Los must keep in mind the purpose of his mechanical actions, as he does near the end of the poem, when his physical labour is described in ethical terms:

The blow of his Hammer is Justice. the swing of his Hammer

Mercy

The force of Los's Hammer is eternal Forgiveness (E 247).

Technological imagery in Jerusalem is foregrounded in the designs, and because of this we will focus on visual representations of machines in the

41 Harvey Birenbaum argues in relation to the above-quoted passage that "To see with the eye would be to use it as an instrument that examines an object; to see through it is to see in the manner of seeing" (135 n 4). However, this reading presupposes a rather one-sided view of instrumentality as inherently restrictive. I would argue that Blake's statement in fact allegorizes two contrary aspects of instrumentality: the delimiting and the functionalist aspects. These two sides of instrumentality can be related to the oppositional trajectories of intention which we have examined in this chapter and earlier ones.
following analysis. Nowhere is the focus on technology more evident in *Jerusalem* than in the depiction of Los's workshop on plate 6 (Fig. 34). This design seems to illustrate a time after Los's Spectre has divided from him. In the center of the design, Los holds his hammer upright against the anvil and rests his right foot on the lower part of the anvil, so the hammer is placed in an emphatically phallic position. The hammer here is a tool in the traditional meaning of the word, but also in the specialized sense of "the male generative organ" (*OED*). The penis was in fact referred to as a "machine" in some eighteenth-century pornography, most notably in Cleland's *Fanny Hill*, with which Blake may well have been familiar. This depiction of the tool as both bodily and mechanical has several possible meanings. First of all, it seems to suggest that Los's hammer is literally an extension of the body—in the tradition of the functionalist view of technology, which sees machinery as an enabler of human capacities rather than a limitation of them. This image might also suggest that at least some of Los's machines can be identified with masculine potency and the generative power of sexuality rather than the sterile repetition of the satanic mill. However, there are also less positive possibilities, as the Urizenic "erect[ing]" of machinery in *The Four Zoas* might suggest. This image may well be masturbatory rather than a depiction of

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42 Fanny's descriptions of the penis often suggest mechanistic imagery, such as the "oversized machine" (110) of Mr. H--'s servant, and the "instrument" (195) of the natural. She also occasionally refers to the vagina in mechanistic terms. Interestingly, this genital machinery is also subject to the same kinds of reversibility of intention as other more traditional tools. In Louisa's encounter with the natural, for example, his own agency is subsumed by that of his penis, so that he becomes a "man-machine" (200), and something similar happens to her: "she was now as a mere machine as much wrought on, and had her motions as little at her own command as the natural himself" (201).
productive sexuality, since the only other character depicted on the plate is the Spectre— an epiphenomenal aspect of Los himself. 43

The tongs, which lean outside the left margin of the design, is also an ambiguous tool because it closely resembles the famous compass so often wielded by Urizen and Newton in other Blake designs. One of these compasses is found on plate 12 of Jerusalem, where a nude and possibly bearded figure opens his compass against a globe, in the gesture of Urizenic creation by measurement that is familiar from the frontispiece to Europe and from other Blake poems. This physical similarity between tongs and compass underlines the fact that the external form of a tool need not dictate the use to which it is put. As we saw in Chapter Two, the compass itself is an ambiguous tool, since it appears in a degraded form in Newton's hand, and in a redeemed form in the hand of Christ. This suggests that this basic shape can have an entirely different meaning and function—creative or delimiting—depending on the intention that animates it.

The flames of Los's forge here might seem to have an infernal quality, and indeed Los later threatens to cast the recalcitrant Hand and Hyle into this conflagration as a punishment. But as we know from The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, even the flames of hell are not always negative for Blake. In Jerusalem, the fires of the forge can also be the burning energy which makes Los's creativity possible. By plate 82, the furnace has been transformed into a flaming purgatory where the "afflicted" (E 240) are purified. Furthermore, these flames invite us to look forward to one of the climactic events of the

43 The critics have taken contrary readings of the sexual connotations of this image. Damrosch (323) notes that the Spectre is "positioned appropriately above Los's phallic hammer," but Erdman in The Illuminated Blake (285) sees this phallic design as ironic.
poem, when Albion throws himself "into the Furnaces of affliction" (E 256) and thereby brings about a glorious transformation:

All was a vision: all a Dream: the Furnaces became Fountains of Living Waters flowing from the Humanity Divine And all the Cities of Albion rose from their Slumbers (E 256)

The bellows might also be considered a wholly negative instrument, bound as it is between two chains, and displaying the same kind of accordion-folds that we see on the Spectre's wings. However, this apparently degraded mechanism serves an important purpose in Los's creative endeavors: it provides the necessary wind to raise the flames in the forge, and thus it can be seen to provide the literal inspiration for Los's creativity. The description of Los's workshop on plate 53 perpetuates this ambiguity through a syntactical doubleness:

Translucent the Furnaces of Beryll & Emerald immortal: And Seven-fold each within other: incomprehensible To the Vegetated Mortal Eye's perverted & single vision The Bellows are the Animal Lungs. the Hammers, the Animal Heart

The Furnaces, the Stomach for Digestion; terrible their fury Like seven burning heavens rang'd from South to North (E 202)

There are two sentences embedded in this passage, both of which share the clause, "To the Vegetated Mortal Eye's perverted and single vision." There is no punctuation at the end of this line to tell us whether it belongs to the first sentence or the second. If we read only the second sentence ("To the Vegetated Mortal Eye's perverted & single vision / The Bellows are the Animal Lungs...") then we can confidently assert that the bellows are not really animal lungs when seen clearly. But if we read the passage as saying that the Furnaces of
Beryl and Emerald are simply "incomprehensible / To the Vegetated Mortal Eye's perverted & single vision," then we could say that the next line is a new sentence which tells the truth of things: that the bellows really are animal lungs.

Another complex example of Blake's mechanistic imagery in *Jerusalem* can be found on plate 22 (Fig. 35), where we see a juxtaposition of the mechanical and the angelic, illuminating the question that Jerusalem asks of Albion: "Why should Punishment Weave the Veil with Iron Wheels of War / When Forgiveness might it weave with Wings of Cherubim" (E 168). At the bottom of the plate, bristling interlocking wheels rise out of wave-swept waters and are surrounded by flames. This design seems less ambiguous than most other mechanistic illuminations in the poem, especially when we consider the text, which identifies machinery with punishment. However, as we have seen in *The Four Zoas*, mechanized punishment can also be indistinguishable from mechanized redemption. Here, despite the Newtonian associations of the interconnected cogs, this design seems to gesture beyond the finite world. The Cherubim, with arms and legs overlapping, seem to continue off both sides of the design in an emblem of infinity, similar to the line of encircled angels on plate 75.44 But if this is the case, then we must imagine the wheels of war to continue infinitely as well. Blake could be trying here to move beyond the limitations of Newton's clockwork universe by suggesting that this mechanical system of gears can gesture toward the infinite. By portraying these mechanical wheels as a potentially open system rather than a self-contained restricted economy, Blake raises the possibility

44This kind of visual icon is quite common in Blake's work. David L. Clark argues that a similar design of angels with overlapping wings in Blake's *Job* illustrations is also a representation of infinity ("Against Theological Technology" 200-204).
that they might lead to redemptive activity. This image, which appears at first to be largely negative, also embodies connotations of mechanistic excess which signal the potential of using degraded machines to gesture beyond their own limitations.

One of the most controversial ambiguous images in all of Blake's work is plate 76 of Jerusalem (Fig. 33), which I have already discussed in the previous chapter. Aside from the mirroring of this image, there are some mechanistic implications here as well, because the tree on which Christ hangs is also the most violent implement of destruction and redemption in the entire Christian mythos: the cross. Because it is the instrument of Christ's death, and also, paradoxically, his victory over death, the cross is an inherently ambiguous mechanism. Blake does not try to efface this ambiguity; in fact he heightens it. By portraying the cross as a tree, Blake adds a typological dimension to his design, suggesting the connections between the Crucifixion and the Fall. Appropriately, there are both good and evil connotations to the design in general. Paley (Jerusalem, Blake Trust edition 257) suggests that the leaves of the tree resemble those of an oak—the magical tree of the Druids, whom Blake associates with dark sorcery in his epics. But alternately, the leaves and the fruit of this cross/tree are very similar to those of the tree of knowledge as it is depicted in his Paradise Lost designs of 1807 and 1809. The connotations of this Genesis reference seem to be related to the choice between good and evil which this design itself represents: we are asked to decide whether the Christ figure here is good or evil, whether he is the true Jesus or is a "Vegetated Christ" (E 250) who should not be emulated. As I noted in the previous chapter, critics are divided on this question. I suggest that taking a side in this issue is to miss the point of the design, which is so ambiguous that it forces us to approach it in a different way. I think it is more useful to see this design as an
attempt to marry the contrary associations of the cross. In a way, we are asked
to look beyond good and evil, or at least to see them as extraordinarily
implicated in each other. I am reminded of the shocking ambivalence of
Blake's treatment of Christ in *The Everlasting Gospel*, which at times comes
close to identifying Christ with Satan:

But when Jesus was Crucified
Then was perfected his glittring pride
In three Nights he devourd his prey
And still he devours the Body of Clay
For Dust & Clay is the Serpents meat (E 523)

Blake seems to be appealing here for a fusion of the traditionally opposed
moral elements of Christianity, much as he does in *The Marriage of Heaven
and Hell*, where angels and devils mingle. In this contrary logic, the cross is
simultaneously an instrument of Christ's degradation and his glorification.
The nails which pierce his flesh, and the hammer which pounded them, are
instruments of torture but also tools of redemption.

There are few verbal images of technologies in *Jerusalem*, but if we look
at the epic machinery of the poem itself, we can see that it is analogous to the
other mechanisms that we have already examined. This analogy becomes
visible in the plot mechanism at the end of *Jerusalem*, which has generally
been considered to be a cumbersome and somewhat baffling aspect of the
poem. Many readers find the ending of *Jerusalem* dissatisfying because they
feel that Blake cheats us of the one thing that we expect from any epic: the
glorious victory of the hero. Of course the poem does end in a stupendous
victory, but we cannot help feeling disappointed that our hero, Los, is shunted
into the periphery as we witness the apotheosis of the newly reawakened
Albion. Furthermore, we cannot even take solace in the knowledge that Los,
with all his untiring work, has brought about this glorious conclusion. He does set the stage, so to speak, but he is not the one who awakens Albion; his tools are not sufficient for that task.

The mechanism of Albion's awakening arrives out of nowhere near the bottom of plate 94 and utterly transforms the poem:

Time was Finished! The Breath Divine Breathed over Albion
Beneath the Furnaces & starry Wheels and in the Immortal Tomb
And England who is Brittania awoke from Death on Albions bosom

(E 254-55)

It continues a few lines later on plate 95:

Her voice pierc'd Albions clay cold ear. he moved upon the Rock
The Breath Divine went forth upon the morning hills Albion
mov'd
Upon the Rock. he open'd his eyelids in pain; in pain he mov'd
His stony members, he saw England. Ah! shall the Dead live again
The Breath Divine went forth over the morning hills Albion rose

(E 255)

The "Breath Divine" is the most disconcerting element of Jerusalem's plot because it has never been mentioned before plate 94, and yet it comes in at the end of the poem to solve all of the heretofore intractable problems. In a matter of a few lines, the poem shifts from an episodic account of lamentation and apparently futile labour to a drama of triumphal ascension. This is a rather sudden, and perhaps overly convenient, turn of events. But before we dismiss Jerusalem as a cosmic Horatio Alger story, we should consider that such a plot device was one of the defining characteristics of Greek drama. I suggest that the "Breath Divine" in Jerusalem is none other than the Deus ex machina --the god in the machine of the poem. I am reminded here of the final lines of
Euripides' *Alcestis*, a play which has much in common with *Jerusalem*, especially the themes of self-sacrifice and resurrection from the dead:

Many strange things are performed by the Gods.

The expected does not always happen,

And God makes way for the unexpected. (249)

This plot device makes us recognize that the poem itself is a machine—but it is a machine which is inhabited by God, and as such it purports to be a redeemed one which can reach beyond itself to touch the heavens.

It is also entirely appropriate in Christian terms that the "Breath Divine" should enter Blake's poem to break the cycle of Los's struggle and give a definite direction to events. The "Breath Divine" can be compared to Divine Grace, though it is certainly not as absolute as the grace of Calvinism—Blake is obviously in favour of good works, whether they be aesthetic or moral ones. But his point in *Jerusalem* is that works alone are insufficient. Los can labour endlessly and perhaps even succeed in rebuilding the entire city of Jerusalem, but if it is not consecrated by a divine agent, then his work is nothing but an intricate copy, a simulacrum. It needs supernatural agency to move it beyond the status of a mere simulation and into the state of identity with the original Jerusalem. The "Breath Divine," then, is not merely a last-minute plot solution that Blake invented when he saw that his one hundred plates were nearly full and his poem was still unfinished. It is instead a mechanism that Blake employed with the same intentions that he exercised with his engraving tools. It bestows the necessary benediction on Los's work and thereby transforms it into a state of identity with the millenial city.

After Albion rises, he takes up his bow and "arrows of flaming gold" (E 255) in an action reminiscent of the warlike imagery of "And did those feet in ancient time." Then he sets all the Zoas into mechanical action:
Compelling Urizen to his Furrow: & Tharmas to his Sheepfold; And Luvah to his Loom: Urthona he beheld mighty labouring at His Anvil. In the Great Spectre Los unwearied labouring & weeping (E 255).

We have already examined the climactic ending of Jerusalem in other chapters, but it is worth noting that mechanical imagery is conspicuously absent from plates 96 to 99, when Albion's final apotheosis occurs. It is not until the final plate of the poem that we are presented with machinery once again.

Plate 100 (Fig. 36) is obviously positioned as a visual echo of the dark and toilsome image of Los's workshop on plate 6. Many of the same tools are displayed in plate 100, but here they seem to have lost some of their negative associations. The tormented facial features so familiar to us from earlier plates are now transformed into placid, contented expressions on the faces of Los and Enitharmon. It seems that Los and his Spectre and his Emanation are no longer divided against each other; they now work together in harmony. Their implements are likewise transformed. In copy E, Los's tongs and hammer are liberally painted with gold, as is Enitharmon's distaff. The Druid trilithons in the background are gilded too, and they are arranged in a beautiful symmetrical design which very closely resembles an engraving from William Stukely's Abury: A Temple of the British Druids, a book which celebrated Druid culture. However, no matter how beautiful this design is, the negative associations of these tools and trilithons cannot be completely cast off here--they are therefore still somewhat ambiguous. Damrosch sees this plate as a representation of "the best that the fallen imagination can do" (334-35), and

45 For a discussion of Stukely's possible influence on Blake see De Luca, Words of Eternity (171-189).
this seems plausible. This design shows the redeemed state of machinery, a state that was only latent in the design of plate 6. But to me Blake also has a more obvious, more mechanical reason for including this plate: he wants to make up for the frustrating twist in the plot by bringing Los back onto center stage, giving him some of the glory that the plot mechanism could not accommodate. Therefore, this is not so much an "alternate ending" (as Paley calls it), as a coda, a restatement of Jerusalem's mechanistic themes in light of the glorious events which have now taken place. Despite the fact that the "Breath Divine" was the true agent of Albion's transformation, we are left with the sense that Los's mechanical labours have been worthwhile because they made the Deus ex machina possible. Through the providential mechanism of the poem itself, Los has been able to invoke the divine supplement, and thus to move beyond the limitations of his own mimetic technologies, and to actualize his apocalyptic intentions.
Conclusion

In the preceding chapters I have tried to undertake what Robert N. Essick calls a "media-oriented hermeneutics" ("Body" 216 n 35), to match what might be called Blake's own media-oriented representational practices. We have looked at some of the linguistic, aesthetic, mimetic, and mechanistic aspects of Blake's art, and we have seen how his work fluctuates between contrary extremes of potentiality at the site of the artistic medium. It would be tempting to see Blake's media as manifestations of inherently different artistic and ontological problems, but I believe that such a McLuhanesque approach (subordinating message to medium) would not be as useful for a study of Blake as it might be for other artists who work in multiple media. Blake certainly does not try to efface the differences between his media, but at the same time, he does not allow his messages to be entirely dictated by them. For him, the media are largely contingent upon the consciousness of the person who approaches them, whether that person is an artist or an audience. The medium in a sense becomes whatever we make of it: if we approach it in a certain way, it will dominate us, but if we approach it in another way, we will be able to use it for our purposes. The necessary trick, for both artist and viewer, is to know how to make our approach. For this reason, Blake's images of media can be seen as variations on a larger problem which preoccupies him for much of his career: the problem of intention. As we have seen, Blake's understanding of intention is unavoidably linked to contrariety, and this is precisely what makes it problematic. If intention was a simple matter of deciding what one wanted and then doing it, then Blake's media would probably not have taken such a contrary role in his art. But since intention is
always subject to contrariety, every time Blake picks up his brush or his pen he must deal with the possibility that the marks he makes will somehow be other than what he intends.

In a way, then, the contrariety which we have seen in Blake's media is a dramatization of the contrariety of intention itself--and, on the other side of the communicative equation, it is a manifestation of the contrariety of interpretation. The medium is not necessarily an obstacle to the artist's intention or to the viewer's interpretation; instead, it is the place in which the uncertainty of all intention and all hermeneutics becomes manifest. The medium comes to represent the quintessential space of contrariety, which is probably exactly what Blake wants it to do, since he sees contrariety as not only a problem but also a solution. Only the contraries can produce the excessive energy that escapes the boundaries of their opposition; and, in a way, only a contrary form of representation can avoid the pitfalls of monological intention that Blake's work so often portrays. Becoming sensitive to this contrariety in Blake is a process of learning to read in a radically unstable fashion, reading with a sense that the opposite of what we see is also true. While this practises can be frustrating for critics who would like to be able to find a meaning in all this oppositionality, it can also be an extraordinarily liberating experience of reading: knowing that no matter how we interpret Blake's work, the interpretation will always be insufficient. This is the position I find myself in at the end of this project, realizing that there will always be another contrary side to every relation I have examined, knowing that my attempts to come to terms with contrariety have in many ways fallen victim to my own need for closure. However, I hope that I have succeeded in pointing out the instability of Blake's images of intention, and
that I have placed this phenomenon in a context which will be useful to other readers who have sensed the oppositionality of Blake's art.

In a larger context, I hope that this study of an artist who is extraordinarily conscious of the vicissitudes and the advantages of his media might be useful for students of other artists and writers who are not so conscious of their media. Blake is particularly interesting in this respect because, while he is undeniably focussed on the otherworldly, he still maintains an extraordinary connection to the physical aspects of his media. Furthermore, he pushes the boundaries of his media to a degree that is seldom seen in any artistic or literary context. Perhaps his attention to the physicality of his work is related to the extraordinary force with which he is able to engage the attentions of his readers and viewers. His sense of art as interaction is also related to this quality in his work: art for him takes place at the junction between opposites, so that spirit and letter, mind and matter, self and other are always being contested in his images and signifying practices. For this reason, his work has been amenable to a wide range of theoretical approaches, even ones that seem to contradict each other. This has been true of the various traditions I have invoked in the preceding chapters: phenomenology and deconstruction, faith and scepticism, functionalism and anti-functionalism, the sublime and the limit. It will probably be true of any other approach that one could take to Blake's art, because his work has a way of exposing the opposite of whatever we bring to it. This is itself a testament to the level of semantic excess that Blake generates through his exuberant and unrelenting contrariety.

Despite the apparent symmetries that I have traced in Blake's work—the mirror images, the contrary meanings, the oppositional intentions—there is a way in which these symmetries also lead beyond the static implications of that
word toward an extraordinarily energetic kind of asymmetry. This is why Blake's work does not get bogged down in the logic of its own contradictions, and it is also why some of Blake's readers are able to overlook the semantic doubleness that I have tried to expose in the preceding pages. Despite the paradoxes in Blake, we often have the sense that we intuitively know what he is trying to say and do. In a sense, the intentions that we attribute to Blake often override the uncertainties that can be found in his minute particulars. I do not think that we can afford to dismiss this intuitive understanding of Blake, because excess is usually experienced in the intuition rather than in the rational faculty. However, it is also important to understand why Blake's work so often causes his readers to feel this way, and I hope I have made some tentative steps toward such an understanding in this dissertation.

Since intention is always an excess of discourse, the ideas of intention and contrariety that I have examined here are also applicable to other forms of communication. Blake's work poses these problems particularly powerfully because his intentions are so much more emphatic and more consciously involved in their opposites than most types of communication, but in many ways Blake simply highlights the issues of semantics and performativity that we all take for granted in our everyday lives. Why do we feel that it is possible to act through representational media, and why do we understand other people to be doing so? What is it that passes from one person to another when communication takes place? How do we mean, and how do we interpret? In some ways, these questions are so basic to the foundations of meaning that they are not amenable to meaningful solutions. But Blake's work poses them

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1 Bataille gestures toward this experiential imperative in reading Blake's work when he describes "the shapeless emotion which Blake wanted to convey. This emotion can only be grasped in the moment of excess, when it passes the borders of reason and no longer depends on anything" ("William Blake" 87).
through the very vehemence and subtlety with which he tries to communicate. For him, they are not academic questions; they are intimately related to the potential efficacy of his artistic and prophetic practice.

Since Blake's works are so often directed toward an apocalyptic transformation, a movement beyond the finite into the infinite, it is not surprising that he often portrays this relation in terms of an asymmetry. We can see this phenomenon in the Glass of Eternal Diamond, which does not simply reflect an image of the viewer, but instead "reflects all" (A Vision of the Last Judgment, E 560). This association is reminiscent of what Emmanuel Levinas calls the "face to face" (Ethics and Infinity 85), which is always an asymmetrical relation because the face of the other is the presence of the infinite which ruptures the totalized economy of the subject. Such asymmetry is also related to the semiotics of the transubstantiated Eucharist, which is "a wondrous excess," as Piero Camporesi calls it ("Consecrated Host" 221). Indeed, all of Blake's most vehement modes of representation invoke a kind of asymmetry because they disrupt the normal economy of sublunary discourse: they purport to represent the infinite in the finite, or to embody a kind of representation which is motivated rather than arbitrary. They suggest that not all signs are created equal, that some of them are supercharged with the essence of the thing they represent, or that they are in fact infused with divine presence.

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2I use the term asymmetry to refer to a relation between the finite and the infinite; it is not directly related to the mirror-symmetries which I examined in Chapter Three. The word "symmetry" of course also calls to mind Frye's Fearful Symmetry and the poem from which that title was taken: "The Tyger." Frye, oddly, does not discuss this poem in any detail in his book, but his structuralized critical practice seems to suggest that he sees some value in symmetry. In "The Tyger," however, there is a certain doubleness to the word: it is unclear whether the Tyger's symmetry is a result of fear or a cause of it. In any case, the word "fearful" mitigates the value of this symmetry, and points toward the possibility that asymmetry might be a more redemptive alternative.
This discussion of symmetry and asymmetry is another way of talking about the relation between system and non-system. Blake's ambivalence toward system is captured admirably in Steven Shaviro's essay "Striving with Systems": Blake and the Politics of Difference," where Shaviro discusses the doubleness of intention that resides in Los's activity of "Striving with Systems to deliver Individuals from those Systems" (Jerusalem, E 154). Los strives both against systems and with the aid of systems. However, this does not trap him in a double-bind of infinitely reversible intentionality; he goes about his striving with a very definite goal of delivering individuals from system. We can either read this doubleness as an interpretive trap or as a movement toward hermeneutic excess. This seems to be the kind of excess that W. J. T. Mitchell gestures toward in his essay "Dangerous Blake," where he argues that critics need to read Blake in ways which do not reduce his work into merely formalized literary and artistic categories. I am in complete agreement with Mitchell's suggestion here, but I would add that it is not only the diabolical version of Blake who disrupts form and system. Instead, I would say that the logocentric Blake of divine revelations and the dangerous Blake of irony and political action move in similar directions. The sacred and the profane seem to meet in a realm which is one of simple excess. In a sense Blake's logocentrism and his vehemently performative aesthetics are at least as dangerous as his more sceptical deconstructions of power and authority. This is reminiscent of the doubleness of excess which I mentioned in the introduction: excess can occur through both degradation and divinity; it can be either an inevitable loss which happens despite the best intentions of the systematizer, or it can involve a vehement intention to propel oneself or one's representations

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3Tilottama Rajan examines a similar double trajectory in Blake's signifying practices in her essay "(Dis) Figuring the System."
outside of the system. Blake's favorite protagonist, Los, embodies both of these possibilities: he is the "loss" that falls through the cracks of every system, but also, in the laterally-inverted anagram of his name, he is "Sol," the sun, the source of radiating plenitude. As the stand-in for Blake's own labouring and striving, Los personifies the oscillation of artistic intention between these two poles of excess, both of which lead, in the end, toward the beyond of the system. This idea that the way up is the way down (and vice-versa) is perhaps the most appropriate exemplum of the contrariety of intention which we have examined in this study.

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4Damon (247) notes this reversal of Los's name but does not comment on its implications for the different modes of excess. Los is depicted holding a glowing ball of energy which looks like a sun in several plates of Milton and Jerusalem, and he is also described in Milton as a sun: "And Los behind me stood; a terrible flaming Sun: just close / Behind my back; I turned round in terror, and behold. / Los stood in that fierce glowing fire" (E117). The illustration of this passage on plate 22[24] makes it clear that Los is standing inside the sun, and that he seems to be burning with an overplus of positive and creative prophetic energy.
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FIG. 1 Blake, *Death's Door*. White line etching (1805).
FIG. 2 Schiavonetti after Blake, *Death's Door*. Engraving (1808).
FIG. 3 Blake after Fuseli, *Head of a Damned Soul in Dante's Inferno*. Line engraving (ca. 1789)
FIG. 4 Blake, Newton. Colour Print (1795).
FIG. 5. Blake, God Judging Adam. Colour Print (1795).
FIG. 9 Blake, "Laocoön." Stipple engraving, for Rees's *Cyclopaedia* (1816).
Of Pride.

V The signification.

The woman signifieth pride: the glasse in her hand flatteth or deceateth: the devil behind her temptation: the death head which she seteth her foote on, signifieth forgetfulness of the life to come, whereby commeth destruction.

Objects are but the Occasion; Ours th' Exploit;
Ours is the Cloth, the Pencil, and the Paint,
Which Nature's admirable Pictures draws;
And beautifies Creation's ample Dome.

Like Milton's Eve, when gazing on the Lake,
Man makes the matchless Image, man admires.

Say then, shall man, his Thoughts all sent abroad,
Superior wonders in Himself forgot,
His Admiration waft on objects round,
When Heaven makes Him the soul of all he sees?

Absurd! not Rare! so Great, so Mean, is man.

What Wealth in Sense such as These? what Wealth
In Fancy, sir'd to form a fairer scene,
Than Sense surveys? In Memory's firm Record,
Which, should it perish, could this world recall,
From the dark shadows of overwhelming Years?
In colours fresh, originally bright,
Preserve its Portrait, and report its Fate;
What Wealth in Intellef; that sovereign Power
Which Sense, and Fancy, summons to the bar,
In

FIG. 16. Blake, Illustrations to Edward Young's "Night Thoughts," p. 244. Watercolour (1797).
More, like a Breath of water from a Lock,
Quicken's our spirit's movement for a Hour,
But soon its force is spent, nor rise our Joys,
Above our native Temper's common stream.
Hence Disappointment lurks in ev'ry prize,
As Bees in flowers; and flings us with Success.
The Rich man, who denies it, proudly feigns;
Nor knows the Wise are privy to the Lie.
Much Learning shows how Little mortals know;
Much Wealth, how Little worldlings can enjoy:
At best, it babys us with endless Toys,
And keeps us Children till we drop to Dust.
As Monkeys at a mirror stand amaz'd,
They fail to find, what they so plainly see;
Thus Men, in shining Riches, see the Face
Of Happiness, nor know it is a Shade;
But gaze, and touch, and peep, and peep again,
And with, and wonder it is absent still.
How few can rescue Opulence from want?
Who lives to Nature, rarely can be Poor;
And is it in the Flight of threescore years,
To push Eternity from human Thought,
And smother souls immortal in the Dust?
A soul immortal, spending all her Fires,
Wasting her strength in frenzied Idleness,
Thrown into Tumult, raptur'd, or alarm'd,
At o'ert' this scene can threaten, or indulge,
Resembles Ocean into Tempest wrought,
To waft a Feather, or to drown a Fly.

Where falls this Censure? It o'erwhelms myself.
How was my Heart encurtled by the World?
O how self-letter'd was my groveling Soul?
How, like a Worm, was I wrapt round and round
In silken thought, which reptile Fancy spun,
Till darken'd Reafan lay quite clouded o'er

---

"Woe, from Herein's Bounties! Woe, from what was wont
To flatter most, high Intellectual Pow'r.

"Thought, Virtue, Knowledge! Blessings, by thy Scheme,
All poison'd into Pains. First, Knowledge, once
My Soul's Ambition, now her greatest Dread.
"To know myself, true Wisdom?—No, to thus
That shocking Science, Parent of Despair! Avert thy Mirror; if I see, I die.

"Know my Creator? Climb His blest Abode
By painful Speculation, pierce the Veil,
Dive in His Nature, read His Attributes,
And gaze in Admiration — on a God,
Obtruding Life, with-holding Happiness?
From the full Rivers that surround His Throne,
Not letting fall one Drop of Joy on Man;
Man gasping for one Drop, that he might cease
To curse his Birth, nor envy Reptiles more!
Ye fable Clouds! Ye darkest Shades of Night!
Hide Him, for ever hide Him, from my Thought,
Once all my Comfort; Source, and Soul of Joy!

Now

FIG. 20. Daniel Hopfer, *Vanitas*. Woodcut (ca. 1514-1536)
"This (says Lorenzo) is a fair Harangue;
But can Harangues blow back strong Nature's Stream?
Or stem the Tide Heav'n Pushes thro' our Veins,
Which sweeps away Man's impotent Resolves,
And lays his Labour level with the World?"

Themselves Men make their Comment on Mankind;
And think naught is, but what they find at Home;
Thus, Weakness to Chimera turns the Wife.
Nothing romantic has the Mute prescribe'd.
* Above, Lorenzo saw the Man of Earth,
The Mortal Man; and wretched was the Sight:
To balance That, to comfort, and exalt,
Now see the Man Immortal: Him, I mean,
Who lives as Such; whose Heart, full-bent on Heav'n,
Leans all that Way, his Bias to the Stars:
The World's dark Shades, in Contrast set, shall raise
His Lighter more; the Bright, without a Foil:
Observe his awful Portrait, and admire;
Nor stop at Wonder: Imitate, and Live.

* In a former Night.

FIG. 22. Blake. The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, plate 24, copy E.

When he had so spoken, I beheld the Angel who was sent from God, and he cried, 'Abide not in this place; for I am thy Saviour,' and the Angel, who is clothed with the sun, and whose breast is the moon, and whose thigh the sun, and whose name is the Angel of the Apocalypse, came to me and said, 'The Bible of the Apocalypse.'

I will leave this place. The Angel of the Apocalypse, who is clothed with the sun, and whose breast is the moon, and whose thigh is the sun, and whose name is the Angel of the Apocalypse, came to me and said, 'The Bible of the Apocalypse.'
FIG. 23. Blake, untitled drawing, related to Marriage, Plate 24. From The Notebook of William Blake, p. 44.
FIG. 24. Blake, *Milton a Poem*, plate 33 [30], copy A.
FIG. 26. Blake, Milton a Poem, plate 37, copy A.
FIG. 28. Blake, Jerusalem, plate 37 [41], copy D.
FIG. 29. Blake, Jerusalem, plate 28, copy D.
FIG. 30. Blake, Jerusalem, plate 28, first proof state.
Leaning against the pillars, & his dance rose from his skirts. 
Upon the Precipice he stood ready to fall into Non-Entity.
But was all astonishment & terror. 
He trembled sitting on the stone.
For he knew only the reported stories.
And saw his figures in round. 
His last to the Fowkes of the Founres.
He saw also the four Points of Alban reversed upwards.
He stood. His Summer did begin. 
His iron Fisher & his Bellows.
Upon the valleys of Medlenk. 
Shouting loud for odd Divine.

In stern delight came from Albions beam. 
Hand, Holy, Rubar. 
Doom, Nanny, Spurpin. 
Said, Navar, Slovak, 
Kneel, Navar, Slovak.
Bow, Albion. Sons, they bore him a golden couch into the nigh.
And on the Church crouched his hand. 
Screwing from the body held.
Journey their Druid Priarch's rocky term.
Crawling, his limbs.
All things begin to end. 
In Albions Ancient True Rocky Shore.

FIG. 31. Blake, Jerusalem, plate 46 [32], copy D.
FIG. 32. Blake, Jerusalem, plate 81, copy D.
FIG. 33. Blake, Jerusalem, plate 76, copy D.
For as his Emanation divided, his Spectre also divided. In terror of those fiery wheels, and the Spectre stood over Los Howling in pain; a blinding Shadow, blinding stark & speake. Surely the terrible Los: surely cursing his for his friendship To Albion, suggesting murderous thoughts against Albion.

Los reigned and stomped the earth in his might & terrible wrath; He fought and stomped the earth, then he threw down his honour in rage & In fury; then he sat down and wept, terrified. Then spoke And shouted his song, listen now, with the tongue and hammer; But still the Spectre divided, and still his pain increased.

In pain the Spectre divided; in pain of hunger and thirst to devour: Lamb's Human Providence, but what he saw that Los.
Albion, thy Son has made me exceedingly sorrowful.
Thy Son has judged me on the day of my years. He has
judged me, and I am ashamed of my ways. I am the
mighty King, sitter on my throne. I am the noble
Glorious Son. I am the mighty King, sitter on my
thron. I am the mighty King, sitter on my throne.

On this earth, when I was born, I was born in
a golden Age, in the age when the world was
new. I was born in a golden Age, in the age when
the world was new. I was born in a golden Age,
in the age when the world was new. I was born
in a golden Age, in the age when the world was
new.

Once upon a time, I was the loyal Son of Heaven, but now
I am the man who was cast down and turned by fate.
I am the man who was cast down and turned by fate.
I am the man who was cast down and turned by fate.
I am the man who was cast down and turned by fate.

Where shall I hide from thee, my many enemies and
skimming eyes?

I have looked into the secret Soul of him I loved,
And in the dark recesses found Sin & can never return.

Albion, again uttereth his voice beneath the silent Moon.

I brought Love into light of day to pride in chaste beauty
I brought Love into light of day to pride in chaste beauty
I brought Love into light of day to pride in chaste beauty
I brought Love into light of day to pride in chaste beauty

Why wilt thou number every little star of my Soul?
Spreading them out before the Sun like stakys of flax to dry?
The Infant Joy is beautiful, but its texture
Harsh naked flesh, and deadly Time shall find in it
But dark despair & everlasting brooding melancholy.

Then Albion turned his face toward Jerusalem & spoke:

Why should Jerusalem, in embattled weight, not be
bought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem,
ought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem,
ought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem,
ought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem,
ought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem.

Jerusalem, then stretched her hand toward the Moon & spoke:

Why should Jerusalem, in embattled weight, not be
bought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem,
ought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem,
ought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem,
ought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem,
ought by the hand of man, with the eye, O Jerusalem.

FIG. 35. Blake, Jerusalem, plate 22, copy D.
FIG. 36. Blake, *Jerusalem*, plate 100, copy D.
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