

**William Blake (1757-1827)**

In his *Life of William Blake* (1863) Alexander Gilchrist warned his readers that Blake "neither wrote nor drew for the many, hardly for work'y-day men at all, rather for children and angels; himself 'a divine child,' whose playthings were sun, moon, and stars, the heavens and the earth." Yet Blake himself believed that his writings were of national importance and that they could be understood by a majority of men. Far from being an isolated mystic, Blake lived and worked in the teeming metropolis of London at a time of great social and political change that profoundly influenced his writing. After the peace established in 1762, the British Empire seemed secure, but the storm wave begun with the American Revolution in 1775 and the French Revolution in 1789 changed forever the way men looked at their relationship to the state and to the established church. Poet, painter, and engraver, Blake worked to bring about a change both in the social order and in the minds of men.

One may wonder how a child born in moderate surroundings would become such an original artist and powerful writer. Unlike many well-known writers of his day, Blake was born into a family of moderate means. His father, James, was a hosier, one who sells stockings, gloves, and haberdashery, and the family lived at 28 Broad Street in London in an unpretentious but "respectable" neighborhood. Blake was born on 28 November 1757. In all, seven children were born to James and Catherine Harmitage Blake, but only five survived infancy. Blake seems to have been closest to his youngest brother, Robert, who died while yet young.

By all accounts Blake had a pleasant and peaceful childhood, made even more pleasant by his skipping any formal schooling. As a young boy he wandered the streets of London and could easily escape to the surrounding countryside. Even at an early age, however, his unique mental powers would prove disquieting. According to Gilchrist, on one ramble he was startled to "see a tree filled

with angels, bright angelic wings bespangling every bough like stars." His parents were not amused at such a story, and only his mother's pleadings prevented him from receiving a beating.

His parents did, however, encourage his artistic talents, and the young Blake was enrolled at the age of ten in Pars' drawing school. The expense of continued formal training in art, however, was a prohibitive one, and the family decided that at the age of fourteen William would be apprenticed to a master engraver. At first his father took him to William Ryland, a highly respected engraver. William, however, resisted the arrangement telling his father, "I do not like the man's face: it looks as if he will live to be hanged!" The grim prophecy was to come true twelve years later. Instead of Ryland the family settled on a lesser-known engraver but a man of considerable talents, James Basire. Basire seems to have been a good master, and Blake was a good student of the craft. Blake was later to be especially grateful to Basire for sending the young student to Westminster Abbey to make drawings of monuments Basire was commissioned to engrave. The vast Gothic dimensions of Westminster and the haunting presence of the tombs of kings affected Blake's romantic sensibilities and were to provide fertile ground for his active imagination.

At the age of twenty-one Blake left Basire's apprenticeship and enrolled for a time in the newly formed Royal Academy. It was as a journeyman engraver, however, that Blake earned his living. Booksellers employed him to engrave illustrations for publications ranging from novels such as *Don Quixote* to serials such as *Ladies' Magazine*.

One incident at this time affected Blake deeply. In June of 1780 riots broke out in London incited by the anti-Catholic preaching of Lord George Gordon but also by resistance to continued war against the American colonists. Houses, churches, and prisons were burned by uncontrollable mobs bent on destruction. On one evening, whether by

design or by accident, Blake found himself at the front of the mob that burned Newgate prison. These images of violent destruction and unbridled revolution gave Blake powerful material for works such as *Europe* (1794) and *America* (1793).

Not all of the young man's interests were confined to art and politics. After one ill-fated romance, Blake met Catherine Boucher, an attractive and compassionate woman who took pity on Blake's tales of being spurned. After a year's courtship the couple were married on 18 August 1782. The parish registry shows that Catherine, like many women of her class, could not sign her own name. Blake soon taught her to read and to write, and under Blake's tutoring she also became an accomplished draftsman, helping him in the execution of his designs.

By all accounts the marriage was a successful one, but no children were born to the Blakes. Catherine also managed the household affairs and was undoubtedly of great help in making ends meet on Blake's always limited income.

Blake's friend John Flaxman introduced Blake to the bluestocking Harriet Mathew, wife of the Rev. Henry Mathew and a celebrated lady of fashion whose drawing room was often a meeting place for artists and musicians. There Blake gained favor by reciting and even singing his early poems. Thanks to the support of Flaxman and Mrs. Mathew, a thin volume of poems was published under the title *Poetical Sketches* (1783). Many of these poems are imitations of classical models, much like the sketches of models of antiquity the young artist made to learn his trade. Even here, however, one sees signs of Blake's protest against war and the tyranny of kings. David Erdman argues that the ballad "Gwin, King of Norway" is a protest against King George's treatment of the American colonies, a subject Blake treated more extensively in *America* (1793). Only about fifty copies of *Poetical Sketches* are known to have been printed, and the verses never reached a wide audience.

Blake's financial enterprises also did not fare well. In 1784, after his father's death, Blake used part of the money he inherited to set up shop as a printseller with his friend James Parker. The Blakes moved to 27 Broad Street, next door to the family home and close to Blake's brothers. The business did not do well, however, and the Blakes soon moved out.

Of more concern to Blake was the deteriorating health of his favorite brother, Robert. Blake tended to his brother in his illness and according to Gilchrist watched the spirit of his brother escape his body in his death: "At the last solemn moment, the visionary eyes beheld the released spirit ascend heaven ward through the matter-of-fact ceiling, 'clapping its hands for joy.'"

Blake always felt the spirit of Robert lived with him. He even announced that it was Robert who informed him how to illustrate his poems in "illuminated writing." Blake's technique was to produce his text and design on a copper plate with an impervious liquid. The plate was then dipped in acid so that the text and design remained in relief. That plate could be used to print on paper, and the final copy would be then hand colored.

After experimenting with this method in a series of aphorisms entitled *There is No Natural Religion* and *All Religions are One* (1788?), Blake designed the series of plates for the poems entitled *Songs of Innocence* and dated the title page 1789. Blake continued to experiment with the process of illuminated writing and in 1794 combined the early poems with companion poems entitled *Songs of Experience*. The title page of the combined set announces that the poems show "the two Contrary States of the Human Soul." Clearly Blake meant for the two series of poems to be read together, and Robert Gleckner has pointed out in reading the poems one should always consider the point of view of the speaker of the poem and the context of the situation.

The introductory poems to each series display Blake's dual image of the poet as both a "piper" and a "Bard." As man goes through various stages of innocence and experience in the poems, the poet also is in different stages of innocence and experience. The pleasant lyrical aspect of poetry is shown in the role of the "piper" while the more somber prophetic nature of poetry is displayed by the stern Bard.

In the "Introduction" to *Songs of Innocence*, Blake presents the poet in the form of a simple shepherd: "Piping down the valleys wild / Piping songs of pleasant glee." The frontispiece displays a young shepherd simply dressed and holding a pipe, and it is clear Blake is establishing a pastoral world. The "piping songs" are poems of pure pleasure.

The songs of pleasure are interrupted by the visionary appearance of an angel who asks for songs of more seriousness:

"Pipe a song about a Lamb!"

So I piped with merry cheer.

"Piper, pipe that song again."

So I piped: he wept to hear.

The piper is no longer playing his songs for his own enjoyment. Now the piper is in the position of a poet playing at the request of an appreciative audience. The "song about a Lamb" suggests a poem about the "Lamb of God," Christ.

The child commands that the poet not keep the songs for himself but share them with his audience:

"Piper sit thee down and write

In a book that all may read."

So he vanish'd from my sight

And I pluck'd a hollow reed.

The "book" is *Songs of Innocence*, which is designed in a form that "all may read." The simple piper is now a true poet. He no longer writes only for his own enjoyment but for the delight of his audience. The piper is inspired by the directions of the child, and the poet is inspired by his vision of his audience. The child vanishes as the author interiorizes his vision of his audience and makes it a central part of his work. Immediately after the child's disappearance, the author begins the actual physical composition of the poem by plucking the hollow reed for his poem. At the end of the poem the poet is no longer the simple shepherd of Arcadia playing for his own amusement. Now he writes his poems for "Every child" of England.

The "Introduction" to *Songs of Experience* is a companion to the earlier poem, and, as a poem written in the state of experience, it presents a different view of the nature of the poet and his relation to his audience.

The strident tone of the first stanza provides a marked contrast to the gentle piping of the first poem and reminds us that we are now in the state of experience:

Hear the voice of the Bard!

Who Present, Past and Future sees:

Whose ears have heard

The Holy Word

That walk'd among the ancient trees.

This is not an invocation, but a direct command to the reader to sit up and pay attention. Instead of

playing at the request of his audience, the poet now demands that his reader listen to him. The speaker now has authority because of what he has heard. The voice of the poet is that of the ancient Bard and that also of the biblical prophet who has heard the "Holy Word," the word of God. Assuming the role of the prophet and the Bard gives the modern poet a sense of biblical authority to speak on matters sacred and profane.

With his authority, the Bard is more willing to instruct his audience than is the piper. The Bard repeats the call of the Holy Word to fallen man. The message repeated by the Bard is that man still "might control" the world of nature and bring back the "fallen light" of vision.

Blake presents two sides of his view of the poet in these introductory poems. Neither one should be dismissed in favor of the other. The poet is both a pleasant piper playing at the request of his audience and a stern Bard lecturing an entire nation. In part this is Blake's interpretation of the ancient dictum that poetry should both delight and instruct. More important, for Blake the poet is a man who speaks both from the personal experience of his own vision and from the "inherited" tradition of ancient Bards and prophets who carried the Holy Word to the nations.

In reading any of the poems, one has to be aware of the mental "state" of the speaker of the poems. In some cases the speakers address the same issue, but from entirely different perspectives. The child of "The Chimney Sweeper" in *Songs of Innocence* lives in deplorable conditions and is clearly exploited by those around him: "So your chimneys I sweep & in soot I sleep." Yet in his childish state he explains away his misery with a dream of a promised afterlife where God will be his father and he will "never want joy." The same issue of child exploitation is addressed in "The Chimney Sweeper" of *Songs of Experience*. The speaker is also a child, but one who understands the social forces that have reduced him to misery:

"And because I am happy, & dance & sing

"They think they have done me no injury.

"And are gone to praise God & his Priest & King.

"Who make up a heaven of our misery."

In each poem the reader can see what the speaker can not always see because of his unique perspective: religion and government share a responsibility in the persecution of children.

The famous companion poems "The Lamb" and "The Tyger" are also written on the same subject: man's conception of God. Yet, how man understands God depends on man's view of God's divinity. In "The Lamb" the speaker makes the traditional association between a lamb and the "Lamb of God," Christ:

For he calls himself a Lamb:

He is meek & he is mild;

He became a little child:

I a child & thou a lamb.

The speaker sees God in terms he can understand. God is gentle and kind and very much like us. The close association between the "I," "child," and "lamb" suggests that all men share in the same spiritual brotherhood.

The speaker in "The Tyger" also sees God in terms he can understand, but he sees him from a different perspective. The raging violence of the animal forces him to ask what kind of God could create such terror:

When the stars threw down their spears,  
And water'd heaven with their tears,

Did he smile his work to see?

Did he who made the Lamb make thee?

The answer, of course, is never given, but again the reader should be able to perceive more than the speaker of the poem. God did make both the lamb and the tyger, and his nature contains both the gentleness of the lamb and the violence of the tyger. Neither perspective is true by itself; both have to be understood.

The two states of innocence and experience are not always clearly separate in the poems, and one can see signs of both states in many poems. The companion poems titled "Holy Thursday" are on the same subject, the forced marching of poor children to St. Paul's Cathedral in London. The speaker in the state of innocence approves warmly of the progression of children:

'Twas on a Holy Thursday their innocent faces clean

The children walking two & two in red & blue & green

Grey headed beadles walkd before with wands as white as snow

Till into the high dome of Pauls they like Thames waters flow[.]

The brutal irony is that in this world of truly "innocent" children there are evil men who repress the children, round them up like so many herd of cattle, and force them to show their piety. In this state of innocence, experience is very much present.

The speaker of the companion "Holy Thursday" presents an entirely different perspective:

Is this a holy thing to see,

In a rich and fruitful land,

Babes reduc'd to misery,

Fed with cold and usurous hand?

The speaker of experience understands that the children have been brutalized and places the blame for this condition not just on the "Grey headed beadles" who have direct responsibility for the children but on the country at large. In a "rich and fruitful land" like England, it is appalling that children are allowed to suffer:

For where-e'er the sun does shine,

And where-e'er the rain does fall:

Babe can never hunger there,

Nor poverty the mind appall[.]

If experience has a way of creeping into the world of innocence, innocence also has a way of creeping into experience. The golden land where the "sun does shine" and the "rain does fall" is a land of bountiful goodness and innocence. But even here in this blessed land, there are children starving. The sharp contrast between the two conditions makes the social commentary all the more striking and supplies the energy of the poem.

The contrast between innocence and experience is also apparent in another illuminated book produced in 1789, *The Book of Thel*. Thel is a maiden who laments the passing of youth and of innocence: "O life of this our spring! why fades the lotus of the water, / "Why fade these children

of the spring, born but to smile & fall?" Thel questions elements of nature, like the Lilly of the Valley and the Cloud, that are beautiful but transitory. Yet each understands that the transitory nature of beauty is necessary. The Cloud answers Thel's complaint by saying that "Every thing that lives / Lives not alone nor for itself." Thel is innocent but when one is stuck in a state of innocence there can be no growth.

Thel is allowed to enter into the world of experience, and she is startled by a voice from her own grave:

"Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy?

"Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire?"

The Virgin is shocked by this peek into her own sexuality and mortality and runs back to the quiet vales of Har "with a shriek." Blake satirizes those who are unable to see the necessary connection between innocence and experience, the spiritual world and the physical world. Thel's world of soft watercolors is not enough. She cannot understand that even the lowly worm is loved by God and serves his part in creating life.

The storming of the Bastille in Paris in 1789 and the agonies of the French Revolution sent shock waves through England. Some hoped for a corresponding outbreak of liberty in England while others feared a breakdown of the social order. In much of his writing Blake argues against the monarchy. In his early *Tiriel* (written circa 1789) Blake traces the fall of a tyrannical king.

Politics was surely often the topic of conversation at the publisher Joseph Johnson's house, where Blake was often invited. There Blake met important literary and political figures such as William Godwin, Joseph Priestly, Mary Wollstonecraft, and Thomas Paine. According to

one legend Blake is even said to have saved Paine's life by warning him of his impending arrest. Whether or not that is true, it is clear that Blake was familiar with some of the leading radical thinkers of his day.

In *The French Revolution* Blake celebrates the rise of democracy in France and the fall of the monarchy. King Louis represents a monarchy that is old and dying. The sick king is lethargic and unable to act: "From my window I see the old mountains of France, like aged men, fading away." The "old mountains" of monarchy are doomed to collapse under the pressure of the people and their representatives in the assembly. The "voice of the people" demands the removal of the king's troops from Paris, and their departure at the end of the first book signals the triumph of democracy.

On the title page for book one of *The French Revolution* Blake announces that it is "A Poem in Seven Books," but none of the other books has been found. The "Advertisement" to the poem promises "The remaining Books of the Poem are finished, and will be published in their Order." The first book was set in type in 1791, but exists only in proof copies. Johnson never published the poem, perhaps because of fear of prosecution, or perhaps because Blake himself withdrew it from publication. Johnson did have cause to be nervous. Erdman points out that in the same year booksellers were thrown in jail for selling the works of Thomas Paine.

In *America* (1793) Blake also addresses the idea of revolution, but the poem is less a commentary on the actual revolution in America as it is a commentary on universal principles that are at work in any revolution. The fiery figure of Orc represents all revolutions:

The fiery joy, that Urizen perverted to ten commands,

What night he led the starry hosts thro' the wide wilderness,

That stony law I stamp to dust; and scatter religion abroad

To the four winds as a torn book, & none shall gather the leaves.

The same force that causes the colonists to rebel against King George is the force that overthrows the perverted rules and restrictions of established religions.

The revolution in America suggests to Blake a similar revolution in England. In the poem the king, like the ancient pharaohs of Egypt, sends pestilence to America to punish the rebels, but the colonists are able to redirect the forces of destruction to England. Erdman suggests that Blake is thinking of the riots in England during the war and the chaotic condition of the English troops, many of whom deserted. Writing this poem in the 1790s, Blake also surely imagined the possible effect of the French Revolution on England.

Another product of the radical 1790s is *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*. Written and etched between 1790 and 1793, Blake's poem brutally satirizes oppressive authority in church and state. The poem also satirizes the works of Emanuel Swedenborg, the Swedish philosopher whose ideas once attracted Blake's interests.

The powerful opening of the poem suggests a world of violence: "Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burden'd air / Hungry clouds swag on the deep." The fire and smoke suggest a battlefield and the chaos of revolution. The cause of that chaos is analyzed at the beginning of the poem. The world has been turned upside down. The "just man" has been turned away from the institutions of church and state, and in his place are fools and hypocrites who preach law and order but create chaos. Those who proclaim restrictive moral rules and oppressive laws as

"goodness" are in themselves evil. Hence to counteract this repression, Blake announces that he is of the "Devil's Party" that will advocate freedom and energy and gratified desire.

The "Proverbs of Hell" are clearly designed to shock the reader out of his commonplace notion of what is good and what is evil:

Prisons are built with stones of Law, Brothels with bricks of Religion.

The pride of the peacock is the glory of God.

The lust of the goat is the bounty of God.

The wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God.

The nakedness of woman is the work of God.

It is the oppressive nature of church and state that has created the repulsive prisons and brothels. Sexual energy is not an inherent "evil," but the repression of that energy is. The preachers of morality fail to understand that God is in all things, including the sexual nature of men and women.

Blake is, of course, not advocating moral and political anarchy, but a proper balance of energy and its opposing force, reason. Reason is defined as "the bound or outward circumference of Energy." Reason is a vital and necessary force to define Energy, and "Without Contraries is no progression." The problem now is that the forces of reason have predominated, and the forces of energy must be let loose.

*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* contains many of the basic religious ideas developed in the major prophecies. Blake analyzes the development of organized religion as a perversion of ancient visions: "The ancient Poets animated all sensible objects with Gods or Geniuses, calling them by the names and adorning them with the properties

of woods, rivers, mountains, lakes, cities, nations, and whatever their enlarged & Numerous senses could perceive." Ancient man created those gods to express his vision of the spiritual properties that he perceived in the physical world. So far, so good, but the gods began to take on a life of their own separate from man: "Till a system was formed, which some took advantage of, & enslav'd the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract the mental deities from their objects: thus began Priesthood." The "system" or organized religion keeps man from perceiving the spiritual in the physical. The gods are seen as separate from man, and an elite race of priests is developed to approach the gods: "Thus men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast." Instead of looking for God on remote altars, Blake warns, man should look within.

In August of 1790 Blake moved from his house on Poland Street across the Thames to the area known as Lambeth. The Blakes lived in the house for ten years, and the surrounding neighborhood often becomes mythologized in his poetry. Felpham was a "lovely vale," a place of trees and open meadows, but it also contained signs of human cruelty, such as the house for orphans. At his home Blake kept busy not only with his illuminated poetry but also with the daily chore of making money. During the 1790s Blake earned fame as an engraver and was glad to receive numerous commissions.

One story told by Blake's friend Thomas Butts shows how much the Blakes enjoyed the pastoral surroundings of Lambeth. At the end of Blake's garden was a small summer house, and coming to call on the Blakes one day Butts was shocked to find the couple stark naked: "Come in!" cried Blake; "it's only Adam and Eve you know!" The Blakes were reciting passages from *Paradise Lost*, apparently "in character."

Sexual freedom is addressed in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion* (1793), also written during the Lambeth period. Oothoon, the "soft soul of America," expresses her unrestricted love for

Theotormon who cannot accept such love because he is limited by jealousy and possessiveness. In the poem Oothoon is raped by Bromion, and the enraged Theotormon binds the two together. The frontispiece to the book shows Bromion and Oothoon back-to-back with their arms bound together while Theotormon, hunched over, stares at the ground. The relationship between Bromion and Oothoon is like that of marriage that is held together only by laws and not by love. In her lament to Theotormon, Oothoon denounces the destruction of a woman's sexual desire:

Till she who burns with youth, and knows no fixed lot, is bound

In spells of law to one she loathes? and must she drag the chain

Of life in weary lust?

The marriage "spells of law" bind a woman to man much like a slave is bound to a master, and marriage can become, in Mary Wollstonecraft's phrase, a form of "legalized prostitution."

Oothoon calls for the freedom of desire: "Open to joy and to delight where ever beauty appears" and even promises to provide women for Theotormon to enjoy "in lovely copulation," but Theotormon, bound by law and custom, cannot accept such love.

In 1793-1795 Blake produced a remarkable collection of illuminated works that have come to be known as the "Minor Prophecies." In *Europe* (1794), *The First Book of Urizen* (1794), *The Book of Los* (1795), *The Song of Los* (1795), and *The Book of Ahania* (1795) Blake develops the major outlines of his universal mythology. In these poems Blake examines the fall of man. In Blake's mythology man and God were once united, but man separated himself from God and became weaker and weaker as he became further divided. Throughout the poems Blake writes of the

destructive aspects of this separation into warring identities.

The narrative of the universal mythology is interwoven with the historical events of Blake's own time. The execution of King Louis XVI in 1793 led to an inevitable reaction, and England soon declared war on France. England's participation in the war against France and its attempt to quell the revolutionary spirit is addressed in *Europe*. In Blake's poem liberty is repressed in England after it declares war on France:

Over the windows Thou shalt not; & over the  
chimneys Fear is written

With bands of iron round their necks fasten'd into  
the walls of citizens

The very force of that repression, however, will cause its opposite to appear in the revolutionary figure of Orc: "And in the vineyards of reds France appear'd the light of his fury." Orc promises fire and destruction, but he also wars against the forces of repression.

Blake's minor prophecies are, of course, much more than political commentaries. In these poems Blake analyzes the universal forces at work when repression and revolution clash. Erdman has pointed out the historical parallel in *Europe* between Rintrah and William Pitt, the English Prime Minister who led his country into war against France. Yet in the same poem we see references to repression from the time of Christ to the Last Judgement. Blake saw English repression of the French Revolution as but one moment in the stream of history.

The causes of that repression are examined in *The First Book of Urizen*. The word *Urizen* suggests "your reason" and also "horizon." He represents that part of the mind that constantly defines and limits human thought and action. In the

frontispiece to the poem he is pictured as an aged man hunched over a massive book writing with both hands in other books. Behind him stand the tablets of the ten commandments, and Urizen is surely writing other "thou shalt nots" for others to follow. His twisted anatomical position shows the perversity of what should be the "human form divine."

The poem traces the birth of Urizen as a separate part of the human mind. He broods upon himself and comes to insist on laws for all to follow:

"One command, one joy, one desire

"One curse, one weight, one measure,

"One King, one God, one Law."

Urizen's repressive laws bring only further chaos and destruction. Like Milton's hell, Urizen's world is filled with the contradictions of darkness and fire: "no light from the fires." The lawgiver can only produce destruction, not understanding. Appalled by the chaos he himself created, Urizen fashions a world apart.

The process of separation continues as the character of Los is divided from Urizen. Los, the "Eternal Prophet," represents another power of the human mind. Los forges the creative aspects of the mind into works of art. Like Urizen he is a limiter, but the limitations he creates are productive and necessary. In the poem Los forms "nets and gins" to bring an end to Urizen's continual chaotic separation.

Los is horrified by the figure of the bound Urizen and is separated by his pity, "for Pity divides the Soul." Los undergoes a separation into a male and female form. His female form is called Enitharmon, and her creation is viewed with horror:

Eternity shudder'd when they saw

Man begetting his likeness

On his own divided image.

This separation into separate sexual identities is yet another sign of man's fall. The "Eternals" contain both male and female forms within themselves, but man is divided and weak.

Enitharmon gives birth to the fiery Orc, whose violent birth gives some hope for radical change in a fallen world, but Orc is bound in chains by Los, now a victim of jealousy. Enitharmon bears an "enormous race," but it is a race of men and women who are weak and divided and who have lost sight of eternity.

Urizen explores the fallen world, spreading his "Net of Religion" over the cities of men:

And their children wept, & built

Tombs in the desolate places,

And form'd laws of prudence, and call'd them

The eternal laws of God.

In his fallen state man has limited senses and fails to perceive the infinite. Divided from God and caught by the narrow traps of religion, he sees God only as a crude lawgiver who must be obeyed.

*The Book of Los* also examines man's fall and the binding of Urizen, but from the perspective of Los whose task it is to place a limit on the chaotic separation begun by Urizen. The decayed world is again one of ignorance where there is "no light from the fires." From this chaos the bare outlines of the human form begin to appear:

Many ages of groans, till there grew

Branchy forms organizing the Human

Into finite inflexible organs.

The human senses are pale imitations of the true senses that allow one to perceive eternity. Urizen's world where man now lives is spoken of as an "illusion" because it masks the spiritual world that is everywhere present.

In *The Song of Los*, Los sings of the decayed state of man, where the arbitrary laws of Urizen have become institutionalized:

Thus the terrible race of Los & Enitharmon gave

Laws & Religions to the sons of Har, binding them more

And more to Earth, closing and restraining,

Till a Philosophy of five Senses was complete.

Urizen wept & gave it into the hands of Newton & Locke.

The "philosophy of the five senses" espoused by scientists and philosophers argues that the world and the mind are like industrial machines operating by fixed laws but devoid of imagination, creativity, or any spiritual life. Blake condemns this materialistic view of the world espoused in the writings of Newton and Locke.

Although man is in a fallen state, the end of the poem points to the regeneration that is to come:

Orc, raging in European darkness,

Arose like a pillar of fire above the Alps,

Like a serpent of fiery flame!

The coming of Orc is likened not only to the fires of revolution sweeping Europe, but also to the final apocalypse when the "Grave shrieks with delight."

The separation of man is also examined in *The Book of Ahania*, which Blake later incorporated in *Vala, or The Four Zoas*. In *The Book of Ahania* Urizen is further divided into male and female forms. Urizen is repulsed by his feminine shadow that is called Ahania:

He groan'd anguish'd, & called her Sin,

Kissing her and weeping over her;

Then hid her in darkness, in silence,

Jealous, tho' she was invisible.

Blake satirizes the biblical and Miltonic associations of sin and lust. "Ahania" in Blake's poem is only a "sin" in that she is given that name. Urizen, the lawgiver, can not accept the liberating aspects of sexual pleasure. At the end of the poem, Ahania laments the lost pleasures of eternity:

"Where is my golden palace?

"Where my ivory bed?

"Where the joy of my morning hour?

"Where the sons of eternity singing.

The physical pleasures of sexual union are celebrated as an entrance to a spiritual state. The physical union of man and woman is sign of the spiritual union that is to come.

At the same time as he was writing these individual poems that center on aspects of man's fall, Blake was also composing an epic poem on the fall of man into separate identities. Blake originally called the poem *Vala* and later changed the name to *The Four Zoas*. He worked on the poem for a number of years but never completed it. It survives in manuscript form with rough designs for illustrations, but it never became one of the "illuminated books."

*The Four Zoas* is subtitled "The Torments of Love and Jealousy in the Death and Judgement of Albion the Ancient Man," and the poem develops Blake's myth of Albion, who represents both the country of England and the unification of all men. Albion is composed of "Four Mighty Ones": Tharmas, Urthona, Urizen, and Luvah. Originally, in "Eden," these four exist in the unity of "The Universal Brotherhood." At this early time all parts of man lived in perfect harmony, but now they are fallen into warring camps. The poem traces the changes in Albion:

His fall into Division & his Resurrection to Unity:

His fall into the Generation of decay & death, & his

Regeneration by the Resurrection from the dead.

The poem begins with Tharmas and examines the fall of each aspect of man's identity. The poem progresses from disunity toward unity as each Zoa moves toward final unification.

In the apocalyptic "Night the Ninth," the evils of oppression are overturned in the turmoil of the Last Judgment:

The thrones of Kings are shaken, they have lost their robes & crowns

The poor smite their oppressors, they awake up to the harvest.

The final overthrow of all kings and tyrants that earthly revolutions tried but failed to achieve will be accomplished on the last day. The "harvest" imagery is from the Book of Revelations and represents the process of gathering and discarding that marks the progress of man's soul on the last day.

As dead men are rejuvenated, Christ, the "Lamb of God," is brought back to life and sheds the evils of institutionalized religions:

Thus shall the male & female live the life of Eternity,

Because the Lamb of God Creates himself a bride & wife

That we his Children evermore may live in Jerusalem

Which now descendeth out of heaven, a City, yet a Woman

Mother of myriads redeem'd & born in her spiritual palaces,

By a New Spiritual birth Regenerated from Death.

The heavenly City of Jerusalem is the true form of God's church. The earthly city of Jerusalem and the numerous forms of religions are but pale imitations of that true religion where God and the church are joined. In that City man's separate identities are reunited, and man is reunited with God.

Very little of Blake's poetry of the 1790s was known to the general public. His reputation as an artist was mixed. Response to his art ranged from praise to derision, but he did gain some fame as an engraver. He received several commissions,

the most important probably being his illustrations to Edward Young's *Night Thoughts*. In 1795 the publisher and bookseller Richard Edwards commissioned Blake to illustrate the then-famous poems of Young. Blake produced 537 watercolor designs of which 43 were selected for engraving. The first volume of a projected four-volume series was published in 1797. However, the project did not prove financially successful, and no further volumes were published. After the disappointment of that project, Blake's friend and admirer Flaxman commissioned Blake to illustrate the poems of Thomas Gray. Blake painted 116 watercolors and completed the project in 1798. Blake was also aided by his friend Thomas Butts, who commissioned a series of biblical paintings. His commissions did not produce much in the way of income, but Blake never seems to have been discouraged. In 1799 Blake wrote to George Cumberland, "I laugh at Fortune & Go on & on."

Because of his monetary woes, Blake often had to depend on the benevolence of patrons of the arts. This sometimes led to heated exchanges between the independent artist and the wealthy patron. Dr. John Trusler was one such patron whom Blake failed to please. Dr. Trusler was something of a dabbler in a variety of fields. Aside from being a clergyman, he was a student of medicine, a bookseller, and the author of such works as *Hogarth Moralized* (1768), *The Way to be Rich and Respectable* (1750?), and *A Sure Way to Lengthen Life with Vigor* (circa 1819). Blake's friend Cumberland had recommended Blake to Trusler in hopes of providing some needed income for Blake. Blake, however, found himself unable to follow the clergyman's wishes: "I attempted every morning for a fortnight together to follow your Dictate, but when I found my attempts were in vain, resolv'd to shew an independence which I know will please an Author better than slavishly following the track of another, however admirable that track may be. At any rate, my Excuse must be: I could not do otherwise; it was out of my power!" Dr. Trusler was not convinced and replied that he

found Blake's "Fancy" to be located in the "World of Spirits" and not in this world.

Blake's rebuttal is a classic defense of his own principles. To the charge that Blake needed someone to "elucidate" his idea, Blake replied with characteristic wrath: "That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot is not worth my care. The wisest of the Ancients consider'd what is not too Explicit as the fittest for Instruction, because it rouses the faculties to act." Blake relies on a basic principle of rhetoric that is evident in his writing: it is often best to leave some things unsaid so that the reader must employ his imagination. To the charge that his visions were not of this world, Blake replied that he had seen his visions in this world, but not all men see alike: "As a man is, So he Sees. As the Eye is formed, such are its Powers. You certainly Mistake, when you say that the Visions of Fancy are not to be found in This World. To Me This World is all One continued Vision of Fancy or Imagination." The problem then is not the location of Blake's subjects, but the relative ability of man to perceive. If Dr. Trusler could not understand Blake's drawings, the problem was his inability to see with the imagination.

Dr. Trusler was not the only patron that tried to make Blake conform to popular tastes. Blake's stormy relation to his erstwhile friend and patron William Hayley directly affected the writing of the epics *Milton* and *Jerusalem*. When Blake met him Hayley was a well-known man of letters who had produced several popular volumes of poetry. His *Triumphs of Temper* (1781), which admonishes women to control their tempers in order to be good wives, was very popular. In 1800 under Hayley's promptings Blake moved from London to the village of Felpham, where Hayley lived. It was expected that Blake would receive numerous engraving commissions, and his financial problems would disappear.

Hayley did provide Blake with some small commissions. Blake began work on a series of eighteen "Heads of the Poets" for Hayley's library

and worked on the engravings for Hayley's *Life of Cowper* (1802). Hayley also set Blake to work on a series of small portraits, but Blake soon bristled under the watchful eye of his patron. In January of 1803 Blake wrote to Butts that "I find on all hands great objections to my doing anything but the meer drudgery of business, & intimations that if I do not confine myself to this, I shall not live; this has always pursu'd me." In the same letter Blake argued that his duty to his art must take precedence to the necessity of making money: "But if we fear to do the dictates of our Angels, & tremble at the Tasks set before us; if we refuse to do Spiritual Acts because of natural Fears of natural Desires! Who can describe the dismal torments of such a state!"

The "Spiritual Acts" Blake referred to include the writing of his epic poetry despite Hayley's objections. In the same month Blake wrote to his brother James that he is determined "To leave This Place" and that he can no longer accept Hayley's patronage: "The truth is, As a Poet he is frighten'd at me & as a Painter his view & mine are opposite; he thinks to turn me into a Portrait Painter as he did Poor Romney, but this he nor all the devils in hell will never do."

Blake left Felpham in 1803 and returned to London. In April of that year he wrote to Butts that he was overjoyed to return to the city: "That I can alone carry on my visionary studies in London unannoy'd, & that I may converse with my friends in Eternity, See Visions, Dream Dreams & Prophecy & Speak Parables unobserv'd & at liberty from the Doubts of other Mortals." In the same letter Blake refers to his epic poem *Milton*, composed while at Felpham: "But none can know the Spiritual Acts of my three years' Slumber on the banks of the Ocean, unless he has seen them in the Spirit, or unless he should read My long Poem descriptive of those Acts."

In a later letter to Butts, Blake declares his resolution to have *Milton* printed:

This Poem shall, by Divine Assistance be progressively Printed & Ornamented with Prints & given to the Public. But of this work I take care to say little to Mr H., since he is as much averse to my poetry as he is to a Chapter in the Bible. He knows that I have writ it, for I have shewn it to him, & he has read Part by his own desire & has looked with sufficient contempt to inhanse my opinion of it. But I do not wish to irritate by seeming too obstinate in Poetic pursuits. But if all the World should set their faces against This, I have Orders to set my face like flint (Ezekiel iiiC, 9v) against their faces, & my forehead against their foreheads.

Blake's letter reveals much of his attitude toward his patron and toward his readers. Blake believed that his poetry could be read and understood by the general public, but he was determined not to sacrifice his vision in order to become popular. Men of letters such as Hayley would not be allowed to dictate his art. Blake compares himself to the prophet Ezekiel, whom the Lord made strong to warn the Israelites of their wickedness. Blake's images of a stern prophet locked head to head with his adversary is a fitting picture of part of Blake's relation with his reader. Blake knew that his poetry would be derided by some readers. In *Milton* Blake tells us that "the idiot reasoner laughs at the Man of Imagination," and in the face of that laughter Blake remained resolute.

In his "slumber on the banks of the Ocean," Blake, surrounded by financial worries and hounded by a patron who could not appreciate his art, reflected on the value of visionary poetry. *Milton*, which Blake started to engrave in 1804 (probably finishing in 1808), is a poem that constantly draws attention to itself as a work of literature. Its ostensible subject is the poet John Milton, but the author, William Blake, also creates a character for himself in his own poem. Blake examines the entire range of mental activity involved in the art of poetry from the initial inspiration of the poet to the reception of his vision by the reader of the poem. *Milton* examines as part of its subject the very nature of poetry: what it means to be a poet,

what a poem is, and what it means to be a reader of poetry.

In the preface to the poem, Blake issues a battle cry to his readers to reject what is merely fashionable in art:

Rouze up, O Young Men of the New Age! set your foreheads against the ignorant Hirelings! For we have Hirelings in the Camp, the Court & the University, who would, if they could, for ever depress Mental & prolong Corporeal War. Painters! on you I call. Sculptors! Architects! suffer not the fashionable Fools to depress your powers by the prices they pretend to give for contemptible works, or the expensive advertizing boasts that they make of such works; believe Christ & his Apostles that there is a Class of men whose whole delight is in Destroying. We do not want either Greek or Roman Models if we are but just & true to our own imaginations, those Worlds of Eternity in which we shall live for ever in Jesus our Lord.

In attacking the "ignorant Hirelings" in the "Camp, the Court & the University," Blake repeats a familiar dissenting cry against established figures in English society. Blake's insistence on being "just & true to our own Imaginations" places a special burden on the reader of his poem. For as he makes clear, Blake demands the exercise of the creative imagination from his own readers.

In the well-known lyric that follows, Blake asks for a continuation of Christ's vision in modern-day England:

I will not cease from Mental Fight,

Nor shall my Sword sleep in my hand

Till we have built Jerusalem

In England's green & pleasant Land.

The poet-prophet must lead the reader away from man's fallen state and toward a revitalized state where man can perceive eternity.

"Book the First" contains a poem-within-a-poem, a "Bard's Prophetic Song." The Bard's Song describes man's fall from a state of vision. We see man's fall in the ruined form of Albion as a representative of all men and in the fall of Palamabron from his proper position as prophet to a nation. Interwoven into this narrative are the Bard's addresses to the reader, challenges to the reader's senses, descriptions of contemporary events and locations in England, and references to the life of William Blake. Blake is at pains to show us that his mythology is not something far removed from us but is part of our day to day life. Blake describes the reader's own fall from vision and the possibility of regaining those faculties necessary for vision.

The climax of the Bard's Song is the Bard's sudden vision of the "Holy Lamb of God": "Glory! Glory! to the Holy lamb of God: / I touch the heavens as an instrument to glorify the Lord." The vision of the "Lamb of God" is traditional in apocalyptic literature. In this case the Bard's final burst of vision is important not only for its content, but also for its placement in the poem. The Bard's sudden vision of the Lamb of God testifies that man need not remain "in chains of the mind Lock'd up." The Bard begins by describing the fall from vision, but he ends with a vision of his own that indicates that man still possesses the powers of vision.

At the end of the Bard's Song, the Bard's power of vision is questioned much as Blake's prophecies were criticized. The Bard's spirit is incorporated into that of the poet Milton. Blake portrays Milton as a great but flawed poet who must unify the separated elements of his own identity before he can reclaim his powers of vision and become a true poet. Upon hearing the Bard's Song, Milton is moved to descend to earth and begin the process of becoming an inspired poet. It is a journey of intense self-discovery and self-examination that

requires Milton to cast off "all that is not inspiration."

As Milton is presented as a man in the process of becoming a poet, Blake presents himself as a character in the poem undergoing the transformation necessary to become a poet. As Milton is inspired by the "Bard's Song," Blake is inspired by the spirit of Milton:

Then first I saw him in the Zenith as a falling star

Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow  
or swift:

And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enter'd  
there

But from my left foot a black cloud redounding  
spread over Europe.

This sudden moment of inspiration extends to the very end of book one. Like Saul on the road to Damascus, the character Blake is not fully aware of the importance of this moment of illumination. Like Milton, Blake is in the process of becoming a poet.

In a moment of sudden inspiration, Blake overcomes his "earthly lineaments" and binds "this Vegetable World" as a sandal under his foot so that he can "walk forward thro' Eternity." Blake's act of creativity enables him to merge with Los:

And I became One Man with him arising in my  
strength

'Twas too late now to recede. Los had enter'd into  
my soul:

His terrors now possess'd me whole! I arose in  
fury & strength!

Blake's act of faith in the world of the imagination enables him to increase his powers of perception and sets a pattern for the reader to follow. Blake's union with Los marks the end of one stage of the unification process that began at the completion of the Bard's Song. In each case faith in the power of the imagination precedes union.

Only Milton believes in the vision of the Bard's Song, and the Bard takes "refuge in Milton's bosom." As Blake realizes the insignificance of this "Vegetable World," Los merges with Blake, and he arises in "fury and strength." This ongoing belief in the hidden powers of the mind heals divisions and increases powers of perception. The Bard, Milton, Los, and Blake begin to merge into a powerful bardic union. Yet it is but one stage in a greater drive toward the unification of all men in a "Universal Brotherhood."

In the second book of *Milton* Blake initiates the reader into the order of poets and prophets. Blake continues the process begun in book one of taking the reader through different stages in the growth of a poet. Ololon, Milton's female form, descends to earth to unite with Milton. Her descent gives the reader a radically new view of this world. Ololon's unique perspective turns the reader's world of time and space upside down to make him see the decayed and limited nature of this world. If he can learn to see his familiar world from a new perspective, then the reader can develop his own powers of perception. Indeed "learning to see" is the first requirement of the poet.

The turning of the outside world upside down is a preliminary stage in an extensive examination of man's internal world. A searching inquiry into the self is a necessary stage in the development of the poet. Milton is told he must first look within: "Judge then of thy Own Self: thy Eternal Lineaments explore, / What is Eternal & what Changeable, & what Annihilable." Milton descends within himself and judges the separate parts of his own identity; he must distinguish between what is permanent and what transitory.

Central to the process of judging the self is a confrontation with that destructive part of man's identity Blake calls the Selfhood. The Selfhood continually hinders man's spiritual development. Only by annihilating the Selfhood, Blake believes, can one hope to participate in the visionary experience of the poem. Unless the Selfhood is annihilated, one cannot become a true poet, for the Selfhood continually blocks "the human center of creativity."

The Selfhood places two powerful forces to block our path: the socially accepted values of "love" and "reason." In its purest state love is given freely with no restrictions and no thought of return. In its fallen state love is reduced to a form of trade: "Thy love depends on him thou lovest, & on his dear loves / Depend thy pleasures, which thou hast cut off by jealousy." "Female love" is given only in exchange for love received. It is bartering in human emotions and is not love at all. When Milton denounces his own Selfhood, he gives up "Female love" and loves freely and openly.

As Blake attacks accepted notions of love, he also forces the reader to question the value society places on reason. The Seven Angels of the Presence warn that the "memory is a state Always, & the Reason is a State / Created to be Annihilated & a new Ratio Created." Both Memory and Reason exercise the lesser powers of the mind. Nothing new can be created by the mental processes involved in memory and reason. In his struggle with Urizen, who represents man's limited power of reason, Milton seeks to cast off the deadening effect of the reasoning power and free the mind for the power of the imagination. Milton gains control of Urizen, and it is clear that in Milton's mind it is now the imagination that directs reason.

Destroying the Selfhood allows Milton to unite with others. He descends upon Blake's path and continues the process of uniting with Blake that had begun in book one. This union is also a reflection of Blake's encounter with Los that is described in book one and illustrated in book two.

As was the case with seeing Los, Blake is startled by Milton's arrival. Los appears as a "terrible flaming Sun," and Milton's arrival turns Blake's path into a "solid fire, as bright as the Clear Sun." Both events describe the process of union and the assumption of the powers of the imagination necessary to become a true poet. All of this comes about through the individual annihilation of the Selfhood. To become a poet and prophet, the man of imagination must first look within and destroy the Selfhood.

Milton's final speech in praise of the virtue of self-annihilation is followed by Ololon's own annihilation of the Selfhood. She rejects her virgin Selfhood and joins with Milton:

Then as a Moony Ark Ololon descended to  
Felpham's Vale

In clouds of blood, in streams of gore, with  
dreadful thunderings

Into the fires of Intellect that rejoic'd in Felpham's  
Vale

Around the Starry Eight; with one accord the  
Starry Eight became

One Man, Jesus the Savior, wonderful!

As Noah's Ark saved lives upon earth, the "Moony Ark" of Ololon preserves man's individual nature. The Seven Eyes of God that had instructed Milton are now merged with Milton, Blake, and all men on earth. Jesus is "One Man," for he unites all men in a Universal Brotherhood. By destroying the Selfhood, we do not lose our identity but rather gain a new identity in the body of the universal brotherhood. Our entry into this union prepares us for the promise of vision.

The apex of Blake's vision in Felpham is the brief image of the Throne of God. In Revelation, John's

vision of the Throne of God is a prelude to the apocalypse itself. Similarly Blake's vision of the throne is also a prelude to the coming apocalypse. Blake's vision is abruptly cut off as the Four Zoas sound the Four Trumpets, signaling the call to judgment of the peoples of the earth. The trumpets bring to a halt Blake's vision, as he falls to the ground and returns to his mortal state. The apocalypse is still to come.

Blake's falling to the ground is not a mystic swoon, but part of his design to take himself out of the poem and leave it to the reader to continue the vision of the coming apocalypse. The author falls before the vision of the Throne of God and the awful sound of the coming apocalypse. However, the vision of the author does not fall with him to the ground. In the very next line after Blake describes his faint, we see his vision soar: "Immediately the lark mounted with a loud trill from Felpham's Vale." We have seen the lark as the messenger of Los and the carrier of inspiration. Its sudden flight here demonstrates that the vision of the poem does not end but continues. It is up to the reader to follow the flight of the lark to the Gate of Los and continue the vision of *Milton*.

*Milton* does not come to a firm conclusion, for it can only be concluded by the reader. The reader, armed with the creative power of poetry and the power of his own imagination, is asked to continue the work of the poet and prophet.

Before Blake could leave Felpham and return to London, an incident occurred that was very disturbing to him and possibly even dangerous. Without Blake's knowledge, his gardener had invited a soldier by the name of John Scofield into his garden to help with the work. Blake seeing the soldier and thinking he had no business being there promptly tossed him out. In a letter to Butts, Blake recalled the incident in detail:

I desired him, as politely as possible, to go out of the Garden; he made me an impertinent answer. I insisted on his leaving the Garden; he refused. I

still persisted in desiring his departure; he then threaten'd to knock out my Eyes, with many abominable imprecations & with some contempt for my Person; it affronted my foolish Pride. I therefore took him by the Elbows & pushed him before me till I had got him out; there I intended to leave him, but he, turning about, put himself into a Posture of Defiance, threatening & swearing at me. I, perhaps foolishly & perhaps not, stepped out at the Gate, & putting aside his blows, took him again by the Elbows, &, keeping his back to me, pushed him forwards down the road about fifty yards--he all the while endeavouring to turn round & strike me, & raging & cursing, which drew out several neighbours....

What made this almost comic incident so serious was that the soldier swore before a magistrate that Blake had said "Damn the King" and had uttered seditious words. Blake denied the charge, but he was forced to post bail and appear in court. Hayley came to Blake's aid by helping to post the bail money and arranging for counsel.

Blake left Felpham at the end of September 1803 and settled in a new residence on South Molton Street in London. His trial was set for the following January at Chichester. Hayley was almost forced to miss the trial because of a fall he suffered while riding his horse, but he was determined to help Blake and appeared in court to testify to the good character of the accused. The soldier's testimony was shown to be false, and the jury acquitted Blake. A local newspaper, the *Sussex Weekly Advertiser* (16 January 1804), reported on the acquittal: "After a very long and patient hearing, he was by the Jury acquitted, which so gratified the auditory, that the court was, in defiance of all decency, thrown into an uproar by their noisy exultations."

Blake's radical political views made him sometimes fear persecution, and he wondered if Scofield had been a government agent sent to entrap him. In any event Blake forever damned the soldier by attacking him in the epic poem *Jerusalem*. One positive result of the trial was that

Blake was reconciled with Hayley, whose support during the trial was greatly appreciated.

*Jerusalem* is in many ways Blake's major achievement. It is an epic poem consisting of 100 illuminated plates. Blake dated the title page 1804, but he seems to have worked on the poem for a considerable length of time after that date.

In *Jerusalem* Blake develops his mythology to explore man's fall and redemption. As the narrative begins, man is apart from God and split into separate identities. As the poem progresses man's split identities are unified, and man is reunited with the divinity that is within him.

In chapter one Blake announces the purpose of his "great task":

To open the Eternal Worlds, to open the immortal  
Eyes

Of Man inwards into the Worlds of Thought, into  
Eternity

Ever expanding in the Bosom of God, the Human  
Imagination.

It is sometimes easy to get lost in the complex mythology of Blake's poetry and forget that he is describing not outside events but a "Mental Fight" that takes place in the mind. Much of *Jerusalem* is devoted to the idea of awakening the human senses, so that the reader can perceive the spiritual world that is everywhere present.

At the beginning of the poem, Jesus addresses the fallen Albion: "I am not a God afar off, I am a brother and friend; / 'Within your bosoms I reside, and you reside in me.'" In his fallen state Albion rejects this close union with God and dismisses Jesus as the "Phantom of the overheated brain!" Driven by jealousy Albion hides his emanation, Jerusalem. Separation from God leads to further

separation into countless male and female forms creating endless division and dispute.

Blake describes the fallen state of man by describing the present day. Interwoven into the mythology are references to present-day London. There one finds: "Inspiration deny'd, Genius forbidden by laws of punishment." Instead of inspiration man is driven by the "Reasoning Power" which Blake calls "An Abstract objecting power that Negates everything." It is against this mental error that Los wars: "I must create a System or be enslav'd by another Man's. / 'I will not Reason & Compare : my business is to Create.'" Like the poet Blake, Los emphasizes the importance of the human imagination. Systems of thought, philosophies or religions, when separated from men, destroy what is human. To put an end to the destructive separation, Los struggles to build "The Great City of Golgonooza." Like a work of art, Golgonooza gives form to abstract ideas. It represents the human form and is composed of bodies of men and women.

In chapter two the "disease of Albion" leads to further separation and decay. As the human body is a limited form of its divine origin, the cities of England are limited representations of the Universal Brotherhood of Man. Fortunately for man, there is "a limit of contraction," and the fall must come to an end.

Caught by the errors of sin and vengeance, Albion gives up hope and dies. The flawed religions of moral law cannot save him: "The Visions of Eternity, by reason of narrowed perceptions, / Are become weak Visions of Time & Space, fix'd into furrows of death." Our limited senses make us think of our lives as bounded by time and space apart from eternity. In such a framework physical death marks the end of existence. But there is also a limit to death, and Albion's body is preserved by the Savior.

Before Albion can rise from the dead, the errors of religion must be corrected. Each of the last three chapters begins with addresses to what Blake saw

as the three large bodies of religion: Jews, Deists, and Christians. Each is flawed, and each is founded on negation. Blake believed that the ancient religion of Judaism preached the union of all men, but that Jews practice the Old Testament idea of sin and vengeance and deny man's divinity. Deists similarly deny the religion of Jesus and follow the religion of this world, believing in the material world and denying man's spiritual nature. Christians claim to follow Jesus but have so perverted his teachings that they turned Jesus into a moralizer and law giver. For Blake the essence of Christ's teachings was the "Continual Forgiveness of Sins." Without such forgiveness man can never realize his divine nature.

The cruelty of vengeance is displayed in chapter three in the bloody sacrifices of the Druids, whose rituals are performed at Stonehenge. Divisions of man's nature into separate sexual identities are further indications of his fallen nature as is the creation of a separate "Female Will." The multiple divisions of man's identities lead to chaos and war. Against this chaos Los struggles to create a "World of Generation" to place an end to the endless wars of separation and abstraction.

That *Jerusalem* is concerned with mental regeneration is made obvious in Blake's address "To the Christians" at the beginning of chapter four: "Let every Christian, as much as in him lies, engage himself openly & publicly before all the World in some Mental pursuit for the Building up of Jerusalem." "To build" Jerusalem is to reconstruct man's fallen nature, so that he can grow closer to the divinity that is within him. Primarily this is to come about through the liberation of the senses, so that man can perceive eternity. Much of Jerusalem is concerned with the expansion of the human senses.

The separation of man into male and female forms leads to the formation of a destructive "Female Will" that forever opposes unification and leads man away from eternity. As Enitharmon rejects Los, a terrible image is revealed: "Thus was the

Covering Cherub reveal'd, majestic image / Of Selfhood, Body put off, the Antichrist accursed." The Covering Cherub demonstrates the destructive power of the Selfhood, that part of the mind that makes man think only of the self and not of eternity. But its revelation also shows its true nature, and the discovery of error leads to "that Signal of the Morning which was told us in the Beginning."

As in the Book of Revelations, the appearance of such horrors as "The God of This World, & the Goddess Nature, Mystery, Babylon the Great" mark the beginning of the apocalypse. "The Breath Divine" revives the figure of Albion, and Jesus appears to Albion. The separate parts of man's identity begin to reunite as One Man. In the final vision of the poem, "All Human Forms" are identified, and man is no longer separate from the spiritual world.

Today *Jerusalem* is recognized as one of the major works of the Romantic period, but in its own time it was not widely read. In 1827 Blake wrote to George Cumberland, who had inquired about his work: "The Last Work I produced is a Poem Entitled Jerusalem the Emanation of the Giant Albion, but find that to Print it will Cost my Time the amount of Twenty Guineas. One I have Finish'd. It contains 100 Plates but it is not likely that I shall get a Customer for it."

Blake experienced similar disappointments in his engraving work. The fame that he had hoped to acquire on returning to London never materialized. He did receive a commission from Cromek to design engravings for Blair's poem *The Grave*, but he was disturbed that the actual engraving was left to the engraver Louis Schiavonetti.

Aside from commercial engraving, Blake produced watercolors. In 1808 he exhibited some of his watercolors, including "Christ in the Sepulcher guarded by Angels" and "Jacob's Dream," in the Royal Academy. He made two sets of watercolors for Milton's *Paradise Lost* and two

sets of six watercolors for Milton's "On the Morning of Christ's Nativity."

Unhappy with the reception given his art by critics and publishers alike, Blake decided in May of 1809 to exhibit his works at his brother James's house on Broad Street. In his *Descriptive Catalogue* (1809) prepared for the exhibition, Blake blasts contemporary tastes of the time: "Mr. B. appeals to the Public, from the judgment of those narrow blinding eyes, that have too long governed art in a dark corner." In the catalogue Blake establishes his own views on the necessity of firm line: "The great and golden rule of art, as well as of his life, is this: That the more distinct, sharp, and wirey 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."

The exhibition caused some interest among the London literati. Charles Lamb visited the exhibit and, in a letter to Bernard Barton, described his impressions: "He paints in water colours, marvelous strange pictures, visions of his brains which he asserts that he has seen. They have great merit." Robert Southey also visited the exhibit but was less enthusiastic: "Some of the designs were hideous, especially those which he considered as most supernatural in their conception and likenesses. In others you perceived that nothing but madness had prevented him from being the sublimest painter of this or any other country." Robert Hunt's review in the *Examiner* criticized the paintings as "fresh proof of the alarming increase of the effects of insanity." In the "Public Address" written in his notebook, Blake answered his critics: "I know my Execution is not like Any Body Else. I do not intend it should be so; none but Blockheads Copy one another."

Despite being panned by the critics, Blake maintained a belief in the public reception of his work: In his notebook Blake wrote, "It has been said of late years The English Public have no Taste for Painting. This is a Falsehood. The English are as Good Judges of Painting as of Poetry, & they

prove it in their Contempt for Great Collection of all the Rubbish of the Continent brought here by Ignorant Picture dealers." Blake saw his own obscurity as the fault of booksellers, publishers, and critics, not the fault of common Englishmen.

Blake's fortunes fell after the exhibit, and his reputation dwindled although he seems to have been the object of interest among a few. Southey visited Blake at his home, and Crabb Robinson prepared an article on Blake for a German magazine. Robinson seems to have been fascinated by Blake, and Robinson's diary records his conversations with men such as Joseph Mallord William Turner, William Hazlitt, Walter Savage Landor, and Wordsworth on the subject of Blake's art and poetry. Coleridge's letters also reveal his interest in Blake's poetry. Blake's poetry was not well known by the general public, but enough was thought of him to mention him in *A Biographical Dictionary of the Living Authors of Great Britain and Ireland*, published in 1816.

In his later years, Blake was fortunate enough to have become friends with a young artist, John Linnell, who studied under him and helped to support him. In 1820 Blake produced a remarkable series of watercolors illustrating the Book of Job for his patron Thomas Butts. Under Linnell's sponsorship the designs were engraved and published in 1826.

In 1821 the Blakes moved to 3 Fountain Court, Strand, in a house owned by Mrs. Blake's brother-in-law. Their first floor apartment was modest, and Blake seems constantly to have had financial problems. In 1822 Linnell was able to persuade the Royal Academy council to give Blake a grant of twenty-five pounds.

In his later years Blake had his own followers, a group of young artists who called themselves "the Ancients." Samuel Palmer, Edward Calvert, George Richmond, Francis Oliver Finch, Henry Walter, and Charles Heathcote Tatham would meet at Blake's house to discuss art. At times they

would travel to the country to sketch, and Blake seems to have enjoyed these artistic expeditions.

In October of 1825 Linnell commissioned Blake to design a series of illustrations for Dante's *Divine Comedy*, and Blake continued to work on these designs until his death. Many of the water-color drawings were composed while Blake was forced to stay in bed. At the time of his death Blake had engraved seven of them, which were published in 1838.

Blake's letters at this time show his ill health. He complained to Linnell of "shivering fits" and of jaundice, and he suffered from gallstones. Blake died on 12 August 1827. George Richmond wrote to Samuel Palmer of Blake's death: "Just before he died His countenance became fair--His eyes Brighten'd and He burst out in Singing of the things he saw in Heaven."

In his lifetime the public knew of Blake primarily as an artist and engraver. Perhaps as a result of his unusual method of "publication," Blake's poetry never received the wide public recognition given to the works of Wordsworth and Coleridge, but it was read by Wordsworth and Coleridge and other prominent literary figures of the time. After Blake's death, John Thomas Smith devoted thirty-five pages of his book *Nollekens and his Times* (1828) to a biography of Blake. Blake was also thought to be of enough importance to receive mention in Allan Cunningham's 1830 edition of *Most Eminent British Painters, Sculptors, and Architects*. For a long time, however, Blake's reputation floundered. The publication in 1863 of Alexander Gilchrist's *Life of William Blake : Pictor Ignotus* helped to save Blake's works from obscurity and established Blake as a major literary figure. Gilchrist's biography motivated other studies of Blake, including Swinburne's 1868 study of Blake's prophecies. Blake influenced several later poets. Most important is his influence on William Butler Yeats. Yeats studied Blake's works and often speaks of him in his poetry. Ellis and Yeats's 1893 edition of Blake's works is

unreliable, but it does show Blake's influence on Yeats.

In the early twentieth century John Sampson's 1905 edition of *The Poetical Works* provided a solid text for serious study of Blake as did A. G. B. Russell's 1912 catalogue *The Engravings of William Blake* which reproduced many engravings. Joseph Wicksteed's 1910 study, *Blake's Vision of the Book of Job* provided a close analysis of Blake's designs and helped to demonstrate that Blake's art should be interpreted in careful detail.

Modern scholarship is in large part based on the herculean efforts of Geoffrey Keynes, whose 1921 *A Bibliography of William Blake* (along with his 1953 *Census of William Blake Illuminated Books*) set a firm foundation for a critical examination of Blake's works. Keynes's 1925 edition of the *Writings of William Blake* (and subsequent revisions) became the standard text for decades. S. Foster Damon's pioneering *William Blake : His Philosophy and Symbols*, published in 1924, argued that Blake's major prophecies, sometimes thought to be incomprehensible or the product of an irrational mind, could be interpreted through a systematic appreciation of his use of symbol.

Renewed interest in Blake's life and his times is evident in Mona Wilson's 1927 *Life of William Blake*. Jacob Bronowski's *Life of William Blake : A Man Without a Mask* (1945) and Mark Schorer's *William Blake : The Politics of Vision* (1959) both examine the political and social forces that helped to shape Blake's art. A modern critical biography still remains to be written, but G. E. Bentley's *Blake Records* (1969) carefully records all known evidence about Blake's life, including contemporary accounts of him. Bentley's *Blake Books* (1977) provides a comprehensive catalogue of Blake's writings and of works about him.

In 1947 Northrop Frye's seminal work *Fearful Symmetry* opened the field of Blake scholarship by showing the mythic structure of the major works and making the claim for Blake as a major poet of English literature. David Erdman's *Blake: Prophet*

*Against Empire* (first published in 1954, revised 1969) is important in showing Blake as a commentator and critic of the age in which he lived. Among the numerous explications of Blake's poetry that followed, Harold Bloom's *The Visionary Company* (first published in 1961, revised 1971) and *Blake's Apocalypse* (published in 1963) influenced many critics in the reading of individual poems.

Modern textual study of Blake has been aided by new editions of the poetry. David Erdman's *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake* (first published in 1965) contains a commentary by Harold Bloom. G. E. Bentley's two-volume *William Blake's Writings* (1978) provides a scholarly text and contains numerous reproductions of the designs. Students interested in the relationship between text and design have been aided by the excellent facsimiles of the illuminated books produced by the Trianon Press for the William Blake Trust. Erdman's *The Illuminated Blake* (1974) provides inexpensive black-and-white reproductions of all of the illuminated books.

Today Blake scholarship continues at a rapid pace with many critics now concentrating on the relationship between text and design in Blake's major poetry. From the relative obscurity of his reputation in his own time, Blake is now recognized as one of the major poets of the Romantic period and one of the most original and challenging figures in the history of English literature.

**Papers:** The British Museum contains an important collection of Blake's illuminated works, including Blake's notebook and the manuscripts for *Tiriel* and *Vala, or The Four Zoas*. The Tate Gallery in London has one of the best collections of Blake's art. Another major collection of illuminated works, including the manuscript for *An Island in the Moon*, is located in the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, England. In the United States major collections of Blake's works can be found at Harvard, the Huntington Library in San Marino, California, the Library of Congress, and

the J. Pierpont Morgan Library in New York, which has the *Pickering Manuscript*.

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**Source Database:** Dictionary of Literary Biography