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BLAKE'S MINOR PROPHECIES: A STUDY OF THE
DEVELOPMENT OF HIS MAJOR PROPHETIC MODE.

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INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of modern critical scholarship on Blake about forty years ago, interest in his three great prophetic poems, The Four Zoas, Milton, and Jerusalem, has risen steadily and for understandable reasons. These poems embody a comprehensive mythology which speaks of the eternal verities of the arts and sciences, and in calling for the unity of man's faculties in a world in which the divided psyche was ruled by reason, Blake's myth is as relevant today as it was in his own time. Despite the great critical elucidation of his mythological system, many readers still think of Blake as an eccentric and opaque prophetic poet, full of spectrous figures and images signifying nothing. The willing reader of his longer works, however, will find in the prophecies a high lyricism and an intellectual satire which delightfully taxes our wit and memory, and although none of Blake's ideas or characters are merely or mainly derivative, we often experience the delight of finding multiple analogues. Moreover, we find in these poems a wide variety of material, method and tone, all presented in a measure which weds verse to sense and
avoids monotony of sound, as Blake hoped his measure would.\(^1\) Northrop Frye is right in stating that these works embody some of the best unread poetry in the language.\(^2\)

Despite these merits, however, there is a question as to why Blake developed his peculiar mode of prophecy. In the first place these works are difficult: the symbolism and imagery are not only often obscure but even shift in meaning from poem to poem; the rhetoric, though basically koine English, leaves the reader frequently in doubt as to who is speaking or spoken about; one often finds a curious mixture of prose and traditional verse; and Blake's punctuation is as idiosyncratic as any in the language. Nor are these difficulties small. Blake had few readers in his own day, and time and scholarship have not succeeded in completely alleviating the difficulties in his poems, as those who have recently attempted to interest students in Blake well know. The question is the more perplexing when one notes that Blake clearly wanted a wide audience. Milton is addressed to all the "Young Men of the Age," and the first chapter of Jerusalem is addressed "To the Public." At least one

\(^1\)Preface to Jerusalem.

\(^2\)Fearful Symmetry (Boston, 1947), p. 220.
critic has claimed that Blake deliberately made his works obscure to shield them from the vulgar and to arouse our faculties. Blake does assert in his letter to Dr. Trusler that "What is grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men" and that "The wisest of the Ancients considered what is not too Explicit as fittest for Instruction because it rouzes the faculties to act," but he does not say that this is why he made his own works obscure, nor does this statement indicate why he chose his particular form of obscurity. Bronowski claims that Blake's prophetic mode is deliberate in view of the Sedition Acts and large-scale arrests of the early 1790's. But the only evidence for this is Blake's statement in his Annotations to Watson's An Apology for the Bible that "To defend the Bible in the year 1798 would cost a man his life."

In this study I hope rather to show that the development of Blake's prophetic mode illustrates not a retreat but a consistent advance. To some degree, when a poet becomes prophet, the characteristics of his work are already selected for him. As a genre, prophecy

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4J. Bronowski, William Blake and the Age of Revolution (New York, 1965 (first pub. 1942)), p. 79.
generally appears to have no beginning or end, passes rapidly from subject to subject, contains sublime obscurities, employs a simple stock of words which are highly metaphorical, and is repetitious. Blake's prophecies have all but the first of these characteristics. But the fact that prophetic poetry always tends to have the same broad characteristics does not explain why Blake developed his particular mode within the genre. We can easily distinguish Blake's prophecies from those, for example, of the Old Testament, Smart's Jubilate Agno, and the millenarian predictions of Joanna Southcott and Richard Brothers. But the question remains as to why Blake developed his unique form of prophecy when it cost him so many readers in his own day and in ours as well.

It is my purpose in this dissertation to study the development of Blake's prophetic mode in his minor prophecies, America, Europe, The Song of Los, The Book of Urizen, Ahania, and The Book of Los. These poems were written between 1793 and 1795, ten years before Milton and Jerusalem and immediately before Blake started working on The Four Zoas. They are experiments in which Blake tries many different verse forms, various arrangements and proportions of lyric and myth, different degrees of intensity of spectacle, and various modulations of tone and intensity of satire. By the end of 1795 Blake has achieved the mythic mode of his major
works. My study of the minor prophecies up to this point in his career is undertaken in the belief that by watching Blake experiment, add, delete, reinforce and simplify, shade and highlight, and constantly select new materials and new perspectives, we can better understand his mature mode. Watching a poet constantly choose X over Y does not always tell us why he makes that choice, but it does tell us that he knew the alternative to be available and that he did choose, and sometimes it does tell us why, in that the alternative will be as obvious a cul-de-sac to us as it was to him.

There are at least three important articles and two unpublished dissertations which bear on the topic of my study. Mark Schorer has written of Blake's prophetic mode as a purposive adoption of a mask to cover his radical politics in an age of sedition; W. H. Stevenson and David G. Halliburton, from two different perspectives, both see Blake's progressively more complex mythologizing as his attempt to sanctify his politics; Harold Otis Spicer has written of Blake's mode in his minor prophecies as an attempt to fuse Old and New Testament myths, with the character of Fuzon as the epitome of this effort; and Margaret L. Shook writes of structural peculiarities of Blake's myth as a product of his commitment to the Neoclassical tradition of ut pictura poesis combined with his insistence that the pictured
image be true to universal types. Alicia Ostriker's *Vision and Verse in William Blake* (Madison, 1965) has a brief chapter on the prosody of the minor prophecies. Although these essays are helpful, they do not help us to understand some of the principal ways in which Blake sought to develop his mythic mode.

Altogether, in fact, there has been little critical work of any kind done on the minor prophecies. The only full-length book on them, Emily S. Hamblen's *On the Minor Prophecies of William Blake* (London, 1930), is generally valueless. There are several articles on the minor prophecies, but only one, Morton Paley's essay on Ahania, touches on the topic under discussion here. Most of the critical comment on the minor prophecies is in the full-

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length books which attempt in one way or another to explicate the whole Blakean canon: e.g. Harold Bloom's *Blake's Apocalypse* (New York, 1963), S. Foster Damon's *William Blake, His Philosophy and Symbols* (Boston, 1924), Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry* (Princeton, 1947), Milton Percival's *Blake's Circle of Destiny* (New York, 1938), and Mark Schorer's *Blake: The Politics of Vision* (New York, 1946). These five books deal more with Blake's thought than his method. Peter Fisher's *Valley of Vision* (Toronto, 1961), J. Bronowski's *William Blake and the Age of Revolution* (New York, 1942), and David Erdman's *Prophet Against Empire* (Princeton, 1953), deal respectively with Blake's thought in relation to the Enlightenment, the Industrial Revolution, and political history.

My study is limited to the six poems listed above. Besides the fact that they are clearly experimental, I have selected them to the exclusion of others because they are all part of Blake's engraved canon, were all composed, apparently consecutively, between 1793 and 1795, and were the last works before his major prophecies. To say why I have selected no works prior to *America* requires some explanation, especially since The Book of Thel and *Visions of the daughters of Albion*, both engraved, are often called minor prophecies. The reason, as I have to show, lies in the definition of "prophecy."
CHAPTER I

FROM LYRIC AND NARRATIVE TO PROPHECY

In 1793 Blake completed America, a Prophecy, the first of his poems to announce itself as "a Prophecy." Its content and form justify its title and distinguish it from Blake's previous works. In the traditional sense, a "prophecy" is the verbal result of man in direct communication with God, for the purpose of bringing man to God. Man is the central subject, and his Edenic past and the possibility of his being like or one with God are presupposed. If we define "prophecy" thus, Thel and the Visions are not prophecy, and America clearly is, for the first two are concerned primarily with the relation of innocence and experience and problems of personal fulfillment, apart from a redemptive context. They have none of the scope and presuppositions of prophecy, while America meets the criteria noted.¹

¹"A Song of Liberty," the brief poem often placed at the end of The Marriage of Heaven and Hell and apparently written in 1792-93 /Cf. David V. Erdman and Harold Bloom, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake (Garden City, N.Y., 1965), p. 723/ is often considered Blake's first prophecy. I agree in that judgment, but I am not dealing with the poem here because it is quite brief and similar in theme to America.
Because it is composed for the purpose of bringing man to God, prophecy presupposes that the prophet is conscious of a radical gap between his own faith (Blake would say "Vision") and the ethos of the community. The events of the two decades preceding America were clearly adequate to produce such a consciousness in Blake, and they were particularly so in 1793, for of course that was the year England responded to the execution of Louis XVI by declaring war on the French Revolution. Like many other late eighteenth-century radicals, Blake had thought of the French Revolution as a divine event, divine not in the sense that the God of the Judeo-Christian tradition directed it, but rather that it was true to Imagination. Therefore, when England declared war on the Revolution on flimsy pretexts\(^2\) and before two of France's

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\(^2\)The Pitt Administration of 1793 was an excellent example of a government which very much wants to go to war and successfully finds reasons for doing so. One of its pretexts was that the Revolution had deprived Holland of the exclusive right to navigation on the Scheldt. But as Charles Grey (later Earl Grey) pointed out in Commons on 21 February 1793 (The European Magazine, XXIII, 214), England was not a party to the treaty involved and the Revolution had made no overt acts against England itself. Another pretext was that France had declared war on England. This sounds like an honest reason, but England had herself provoked the declaration. On 31 December 1792 Lord Grenville, the Secretary of State, dismissed M. Chauvelin, the Ambassador from France, and ignored the pleas for peace expressed in Chevelin's note of 27 December. As Earl Stanhope said in Parliament, this made the fault England's, for according to the covenant between the nations, dismissal of an ambassador was to be viewed as a rupture (The Gentleman's Magazine, LXIII, 532).
nearest neighbors, Holland and Spain, had felt a need to do so, Blake was in the same dilemma that almost drove Wordsworth mad. Justice, Truth, indeed all principles of Right, were outraged.

The sense of crisis that prevailed in England in 1793 is reflected everywhere, but perhaps most representatively in the periodicals of the day. The Gentleman's Magazine prefaces Volume LXIII (1793) with the alarm, "Europe since the period when it was overrun by the Goths and Vandals, has never experienced more alarm and danger than at the present moment—Religion, Manners, Literature, and the Arts, are all equally menaced by the foe, whose characteristic is a compound of impetuosity, ignorance, and crime." And the editorial in the New Year's Day number of The Times begins, "Few periods, since the commencement of the world, have produced so many extraordinary events as the present." Our foe are "sowing the seeds of unbridled licentiousness." For radicals like Blake the irony, indeed the outrage, of such statements was that the "crisis" referred to was the French Revolution, not the English repression of that sacred event.

Tory England's oppressive reaction to the Revolution manifested itself in almost every phase of life in 1793. In the political realm during the two decades immediately before the Revolution, the two most hopeful
signs for English Republicanism were the existence and growth of the "Corresponding Societies" and the political popularity of John Wilkes, the champion of the common man, first as Member of Parliament for Middlesex (1768), then as sheriff of London and Middlesex (1771), Mayor of London (1774), and finally as city chamberlain (1779). The Corresponding Societies were groups formed throughout England for Parliamentary reform. Everyone knew reform was needed. In 1784 only 300,000 voters out of England's 8,000,000 population had installed William Pitt the younger as Prime Minister for the next eighteen years; and on 21 February 1793, a Mr. Lambton, M. P., reminded the Commons that they had recently voted to receive a petition pointing out that House seats were "as notoriously bought and sold as stalls for cattle." The Corresponding Societies had been assiduously attempting to effect reform, but on the same day that Mr. Lambton issued his charge, the Commons refused by a vote of 109 to 21 to receive a petition for reform signed by 2,500 residents of Nottingham, because the petition was "not couched in respectful terms." Indeed, a debate in the Commons on 30 April 1792 had pretty much ended any hopes

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3Bronowski, p. 59.

4The European Magazine, XXIII (1793), 217.
for Parliamentary reform for several decades. On that
day Charles Grey asserted that he previously had been
for reform but that now was not the time. Burke agreed,
saying that there was a party in England seeking to
institute the "Rights of Man," and that the Jacobin Club
had already sent two of its members to France to form an
alliance between the French and the English people.5 In
1792-93 the Pitt Administration lived in deadly fear of
this "Party" and effectively destroyed the Corresponding
Societies, first by ignoring their pleas and then by
persecuting them. On 17 May 1793 the secretary of the
London Corresponding Society drafted a letter to the
secretary of the Friends of the People at Edinburgh,
noting that all the London society's petitions had been
unsuccessful and asking for suggestions for more suc-
cessful means.6 But later in the year the Friends of the
People at Edinburgh were, in Bronowski's words, "Savagely
sentenced" by Lord Justice Clerk Braxfield,7 and in 1794,
while Parliament suspended habeas corpus, the working men
of the London Corresponding Society were charged with
treason.

5Ibid. XXI, 387.

6The Annual Register. . .For the Year 1793
(pub. 1810).

7Bronowski, p. 73.
The fate of John Wilkes was different. Toward the end of 1792, when groups all over the realm were publishing resolutions pledging themselves to support the King, Wilkes "in a speech replete with manly firmness" joined the Aldermen and Common Council of London in approving themselves the "firm and [?] friends of our happy Constitution" and urging "the necessity of supporting the King and Constitution." In Blake's eyes, the people of England in 1793 were making tragic political responses to the apocalypse taking place across the channel. Oblivious to the new day of freedom and art, they were siding with their oppressors and persecuting their liberators.

An equally desperate situation presented itself in the economic realm. Rather than alleviating poverty the Pitt administration reacted to the Revolution by increasing indigence even while denying its existence. The plight of the agrarian day-laborers is vividly described by one signing himself "So Help Me God!" in a letter of 5 October 1792, in The Gentleman's Magazine (LXII, 93). In Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire, and Northamptonshire, day-laborers were receiving only one shilling a day and had to pay forty shillings a year for cottage, shoes, clothing, and fire. Considering the days

\[^{8\text{GM, LXII, 1052.}}\]
they were weather-bound and could not work, they received only about fourteen pounds a year. They often ate only bread, which cost two shillings five pence a loaf or about nine shillings a week for a family of four. The plight of the tradesmen is reflected in part by the bread riot of the miners of Cornwall on 5 February 1793, the "insurrection" of the tinners of Falmouth on 1 May 1793, of the nailers and colliers of Dudley a few weeks later, and the frequent riots of the "Defenders," a group of unemployed Irishmen, throughout the period. The occasion of these riots was similar. Several thousand tradesmen would gather before the home of some local official and demand bread or work or both. Usually they were either dispersed by the militia or assuaged by the Lord Mayor with a promise to do all he could to help.

But little was done. In fact, the war increased the poverty in at least three ways. First, the government hoarded wheat for the military, which in turn drove up the price. Secondly, the war slackened trade and thus cut the income of the masters. The nailers of Dudley, for example, rioted because stagnation of trade had disastrously cut the price of nails. Thirdly, the

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9GM, LXIII, 177, 473, 473, & 570.
10GM, LXIII, 475.
11GM, LXIII, 570.
war increased the national debt, already a scandal by 1793, and hence the taxes to retire that debt. The records of Parliament for the period July, 1792, to June, 1793, are studded with the passage of those huge military appropriations which legislatures pass with such frightening ease. There is no report of debate when the Commons approved the sum of £579,174 pounds 18 shillings and 1½ pence for "guards and garrisons" on 21 December 1792,¹² but there was debate, as we shall note later, among the people who had to pay for such appropriations with such taxes as the hated window levy, which enjoined each family to pay a yearly sum for each window of their domicile, the first two windows being exempted.

Worse yet, the wealthy and powerful responded to the threat of the Revolution either by denying that English poverty generally existed or by claiming that when it did, it was the fault of the poor. How near England itself came to revolution in 1793 is speculative, but the numerous resolutions of loyalty published in the periodicals of the day indicate that many persons felt that civil violence was frighteningly close. Most of these declarations, whether in the form of occasional verse by the poet laureate, editorials, or resolutions by town councils, included statements that England was a

¹²GM, LXIII, 239.
land of "security" and "plenty." In his "Ode for the New Year, 1793," published in many of the leading periodicals of the day, the poet laureate Henry James Pye, for example, defended the King, as he had to, and described England thus:

Her laws, to all protection yield
Security's impartial shield;
Who breathes her air, breathes purest liberty,
Gaunt Slavery flies the coast, who treats her soil is free.\(^3\)

Even Wilkes, in his speech to the inhabitants of the Ward of Farrington on 14 December 1792, asserted, "Our persons are safe, our property secure, and our commerce most extensively flourishing; especially during the reign of his present Majesty."\(^4\) And the editors of The Times characterized the people of England as being "rich, flourishing, happy and contented."\(^5\)

The argument that the poor are indigent through their own lack of industry and prudence is ageless, and one does not have to search to find it in the press of 1793. To the letter signed "So Help Me God!" quoted above, "Simplicius" responded on 2 January 1793 that there was now no reason for a family to be poor, for the whole family, children and all, could work in a factory. If

\(^3\)The Times, 3 January 1793, p. 2.

\(^4\)OM, LXIII, 475.

\(^5\)The Times, 12 January 1793, p. 3.
the day-laborer earned enough to buy bread, he ought, on his own time (the original author had already said the day-laborer worked from sun to sun) to raise vegetables. No day-laborer ought to mind the window tax, for few in fact had three windows. Indeed, the most frequently stated justification for the 3,000 commons enclosures made during Blake's lifetime was that the benefits of the commons made the farmer idle. He would be better off if he had to work harder for his bread. It is not clear that this kind of argument increased during 1793, but with the increase of poverty caused by the war it certainly became more outrageous to those who, like Blake, understood the dynamics of such reasoning:

It is an easy thing to triumph in the summers sun
And in the vintage & to sing on the waggon loaded with corn
It is an easy thing to talk of patience to the afflicted
To speak the laws of prudence to the houseless wanderer
To listen to the hungry ravens cry in wintry season
When the red blood is filld with wine & with the marrow of lambs
It is an easy thing to laugh at wrathful elements
To hear the dog howl at the wintry door, the ox in the slaughter house moan
To see a god on every wind & a blessing on every blast

16GM, LXIII, 34.

17Bronowski, p. 99.
To hear sounds of love in the thunder storm
that destroy our enemies' house
To rejoice in the blight that covers his field,
& the sickness that cuts off his children
While our olive & vine sing & laugh round our
door & our children bring fruits and
flowers. . .

It is an easy thing to rejoice in the tents of
prosperity
Thus could I sing & thus rejoice, but it is not
so with me! 18

The ironies in the reporting of the economic situa-
tion, though unintended, were frequently too patent to go
unnoticed. In The Times for New Year's Day 1793, for
example, directly under the editorial decrying the "unbri-
dled licentiousness" of the Revolution appears the
notice, "This evening the Queen will have a grand Concert
of Music and a Card Party, at Windsor-lodge." In the
May, 1793, number of The Gentleman's Magazine (LXIII, 471)
a letter from Eyles Irwin, Esq., one of the commissioners
of the East India Company who went to China to inquire
about trade, reports that a famine in Canton caused the
inhabitants to pay "a most exhorbitant price" for rice
carried there and that one of the Company's ships made a
sale of 50,000 pounds: "Such was the distress of the
inhabitants, that they raked the sand for single grains
of rice." Not only was England oppressing her own poor,

18 The Four Zoas, pp. 35:16-36:13. All quotations
from Blake in this study are from David V. Erdman and
Harold Bloom, The Poetry and Prose of William Blake,
she was exploiting the starving Cantonese at the same time. What is noteworthy is that the editors of these periodicals appear to be blind to the incongruities they themselves were expressing. Blake was certainly not blind to them.

As 1793 had been a disheartening year for those seeking political and economic reform, so it was for social reformers. The slave trade was the primary social issue of the day. Things had been going well for Wilberforce and those seeking abolition. Sentiment against slavery had risen to the point that on 23 April 1792 Commons passed, by a vote of 151 to 132, a motion for gradual abolition to become complete by 1 January 1793. The next step was to get the Lords to act on the measure. Exactly what went wrong is not clear. Bronowski writes, without documentation, that the revolt of the French slaves on Haiti and the French Convention's election of Wilberforce to citizenship in the Revolution are what stalled the movement. If this was the case, it is not apparent from the debates in Parliament, but one can see the trouble caused by the Haitian Revolt as Members of Parliament successfully complained that, because of the Revolt, they needed more time to induce the West Indian planters to cooperate with the Administration in the

19 The Dictionary of National Biography, sub Wilberforce.
matter of abolition. On 26 February 1793 Wilberforce's motion to hasten the action of the Lords was defeated 61 to 53, and on 12 June a measure to abolish the supply of slaves to foreign powers was thrown out. While the Commons was thus prudently putting off action on the slave trade and the Lords were ignoring it altogether, the March number of *The Gentlemen's Magazine* (LXIII, 273) casually reported that on 12 January in Kingston, Jamaica, slaves brought the excellent price of 55 pounds "per head" and that the Princess Royal had just arrived with "Eboes," by which they apparently meant "Ebonies," or "Blacks." As "A Song of Liberty," *America*, and several poems in *Songs of Experience* reveal, the plight of the slave was much on Blake's mind in 1793.

As Tory England, according to Blake's view, tragically misinterpreted the French Revolution, seeing it as a foe rather than as a divinely determined liberator, so England's blindness was also manifested in religious affairs. Rather than weeping with joy at the rise of the "red flames of Orc" and rushing to aid the cause, the Church of England dwelled on ridiculous or trivial arguments over such matters as adiaphora or organized charities for the relief of the exiled French clergy.

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21."A Song of Liberty," line 12; *America*, pl. 6:6.
For example, "A Friend of Order" complained in his letter published in The Gentleman's Magazine (LXIII, 125) that while the rubric was silent on whether it is the reader of prayers or the preacher who shall have precedence in entering the church, etiquette demanded that the reader have precedence; nevertheless, in the church where he read prayers the lecturer refused to follow him and even remained in the vestry five or six minutes after the prayer-reader had entered. One need not wonder how Blake would have responded to this. And, while five-year-old chimney sweeps were being cruelly exploited, while day-laborers had to work from sun to sun for one shilling a day to buy bread at two shillings six pence a peck loaf, and while slaves were still sold for fifty-five pounds a head, a cause celebre among Anglicans was the raising of funds through the "United Committee of Subscribers for the Relief of the Suffering Clergy of France." Aiding the clerical refugees of a revolution was to some a laudatory task no doubt, but it was not to Blake, who scorned the clergy as subtle oppressors of the young, the loving, and the energetic and described organized charity as an evil that made pity a trade and generosity a

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22 Advertisements and news about the progress of this charity were very plentiful in early 1793. See, for example, The Times, 9 January 1793, p. 1.
Perhaps more outrageous was the way both clergy and laity portrayed the Revolutionists as "atheists," while the executed Louis was depicted as a Christ figure. A close look at the "Particular account of the Murder of Louis XVI" as it appeared in The Gentleman's Magazine (LXIII, 85-86) reveals not only the contemporary Tory view of the man but also the Biblical rhetoric used to describe both him and his execution:

About two o'clock in the morning of the fatal Monday the 21st, voices were heard, at intervals, through the gloom, of lamentation and distress; but whence they proceeded, or what they were, no person has been able to discover. The unhappy Monarch passed all Sunday in preparation for his approaching change. His calm resignation, and meek patience displayed the eminence of that soul which animated the tenement of clay; but the meeting and the parting of his family was a scene too painful, too distressing to the feeling of humanity. The poor Queen hung around the neck of her dear departing Lord in a delirium of anguish. and Madame Elizabeth bathed his feet with the torrent of her tears. The King exhibited on this sad occasion all the tenderness of a Husband, a Father, a brother. his hope was full of immortality. The clocks of Paris at length sounded eight on Monday morning, and the Royal Martyr was summoned to his fate. The dauphine escaped with great precipitation. saying "I'll go in the

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24 Note, for instance, the review of John Bowles' The Real Grounds of the Present War with France in GM, LXIII, 447 and the editorial in The Times, 1 January 1793.
street, and fall down on my knees, and beg
the people not to kill my dear Papa. . . .
The Place of Louis Quinze is the
place appointed for the Murder. . . . The
King for a moment looked around upon the
people, with eyes which beamed forgiveness
and love. . . . In the middle stood the
block, and near it two large ill-looking
brutes, one of whom held the axe in his
hand. . . .
The King is about to speak but the offi-
cers cry out "No Speeches." All that can
be heard is: "I forgive my enemies; may
God forgive them; and not lay my innocent
blood to the charge of the Nation: God
bless my People!!!!
The Confessor fell upon his knees, and
implored the King's blessing, who gave it
to him with an affectionate embrace. The
religious and good monarch then laid his
head upon the block with admirable serenity;
and ceased to live in this world.

Blake's view of French Royalty, to cite but one instance,
was quite different:

The Queen of France just touched this Globe
And the Pestilence darted from her robe.
("Let the Brothels. . . ." 20-21)

The Tory response to the execution of Louis XVI
was such as to produce a radical gap between the vision
of the prophet and the contemporary ethos. Blake saw
the French Revolution as Orc, who, as Frye notes, is
like both Prometheus and Adonis, a figure who represents
the return of dawn, spring, sexual and reproductive power,
new life, and the overthrow of all tyrannies that oppress
life.25 Tory England, however, was repressing Orc as a

25Frye, p. 207.
foe and in its fight was becoming more politically, economically, socially, and religiously blind and oppressive than ever. There was a need for prophecy.

But something more than an awareness of a radical gap between vision and ethos is needed for the production of prophecy. Such awareness, after all, can as easily lead to escape, to silence, or mental illness and behavioral problems as it can to prophecy. There must be a contemporary, living prophetic tradition as well; otherwise the prophet appears merely bizarre and eccentric. No rebirth of prophecy has taken place without the new prophet's awareness of a prophetic tradition, and the great eighth-century Hebrew prophets offer an excellent example of a supporting tradition at work. Individual prophets of the Old Testament in their time might have been rejected, but the fact of prophecy was accepted, indeed, some scholars think, encouraged and nourished by the Hebrew community. Thus, S. Mowinckel sees the prophets as being like the choir of a temple responding as the religiose of the congregation. Aubrey R. Johnson has argued effectively that all religious sanctuaries had groups of prophets who stood side by side with priests and represented the interests of the congregation as well as serving as enunciators of divine truth. And Alfred Haldar declares that the writing of all prophets belonged
Blake had a compelling background for prophecy: all his life he had been steeped in the tradition of prophetic poetry and prose. The neoclassical artists who looked to the classics or nature to derive rules for imitation never interested Blake, and indeed the tradition incurred his wrath in his criticism of Joshua Reynolds, whose "Blotted and Blurred" forms represented mere abstractions and hence nothing. Instead, his models were the Bible; Milton, who prayed to the "Heav'nly Muse" and Urania in Paradise Lost; Bunyan, who felt that he was actually directed by heavenly voices in writing Grace Abounding; and Boehme, who had declared, "If we put our Imagination into the Light of God, and go with earnest sincerity into that, then we come into it, and are also with earnestness drawn into it." With the prophetic spirit of Isaiah and Enoch of the Old Testament, of Milton and Bunyan, and of the radical Protestant dissenters in his own century, Blake identified himself, and with them


27 Annotations to The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, back of title page and p. 61 (Erdman and Bloom, pp. 625 and 637).

sought to show the vision of a new Jerusalem, a new
earth and heaven.

Mid-eighteenth-century psychology also had made the
prophetic imagination and prophecy possible and congenial.
The Lockean psychology, which made the understanding the
arbiter of all preferences and even the tester of Reve­
lution,29 was still dominant. But a psychology which gave
primacy to the Imagination was being promulgated, most
notably in the works of William Law. For Law, reason
was a dangerously incomplete guide, for it relied on
empirical data to the exclusion of intuitive and imagi­
native perception, and empirical data described only a
sham world which "clouds and covers all the true Appear­
ances of Things, and keeps our Minds insensible" and
blind to "the invisible World, the World of Spirits."30
The redemptive faculty was the Imagination. Far from
relying on the "dreams" of rational knowledge, it strove
for that which is "sensible, intuitive and its own
Evidence" and swayed the whole man.31 Moreover, man par-

29 An Essay Concerning Human Understanding, XV, sec.
4-5; XIX, sec. 14. See Ernest Tuveson, The Imagination

30 A Discourse Concerning . . . Divine Knowledge, in
The Works of the Reverend William Law, M.A., repr. by G.
Moreton, 9 vols. (Canterbury, 1893), VII, 168-69 & 224

Works, III, 59.
ticipates in God and "has an Eternity within Him," and "God has but one Design or Intent towards all Mankind, and that is to introduce or generate his own Life, Light, and Spirit in them that all may be as so many Images, Temples, and Habitations of the Holy Spirit." Law's psychology thus proclaimed that man, through his Imagination, could participate in God for the creation of a new world.

The need for such a psychology was demonstrated in the Methodist Revival, the success of which stemmed from the fact that Wesley provided precisely what the rational, and seemingly cold, latitudinarian clerics of the Church of England did not, an emphasis on feeling in one's religious life. The foci of the movement were meetings of small groups for Bible study and prayer, often before the hearth of the private cottage, and larger worship services, many outdoors, in which extempore prayer, lyrical hymns, and sermons proclaimed a universal salvation and the possibility of a "Christian Perfection" wherein man is able to attain a "habitual dispensation of the soul" to love God and neighbor. On a rational basis alone, a Welsh miner would never stand in a field

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32 The Spirit of Prayer, Works, VII, i, 3 & 45.

33 Arminian Magazine (1787), as quoted in Otto W. Heick, A History of Christian Thought (Philadelphia, 1966), II, 43. No volume or page number is given for primary source.
with 10,000 others singing hymns with full gusto, but to do so felt right, so he did it and left the seemingly dead liturgy and sermons of the latitudinarian divines behind.

The mid-century emphasis on feeling was also manifested in literature, especially in discussions of the sublime. Although John Dennis had emphasized the importance of "enthusiastic passions" in his 1704 essay, "The Grounds of Criticism in Poetry," Addison's eleven Spectator essays on "The Pleasures of the Imagination" (1712) are often seen as the beginning of the eighteenth-century interest in both the sublime and the aesthetic of sensibility. Addison observed that the sight of the Great, the Uncommon, and the Beautiful have a redemptive effect, for they remind us of the greatness of God's creation and cause us to wonder at and delight in it. Representations of these offer us even more pleasure, for we are able to compare the representations with the originals and arrange the images in new combinations. These "pleasures of the Imagination" are greater than those of the Understanding, for the former refresh us while the latter drain us of energy. As Ernest Tuveson observes, the importance of Addison's essays is that they place the Imagination in a mediating position between sense and understanding. Previously the judgment or reason had been seen as the highest faculty in aesthetics.
and the one which must rule over lower and sometimes dangerous "sensuous" responses.\textsuperscript{34} William Smith's 1739 translation of Longinus, annotated with extensive illustrations from the Old Testament, convinced many of the redemptive possibilities of feeling in literature. And Burke's essay, \textit{A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful}, published in its first form in 1756, brought the aesthetic of sensibility to its peak by denigrating all associationistic explanations in aesthetics, thus leaving the viewer of art alone with his own feelings upon seeing it.\textsuperscript{35}

Collins' "Ode on the Poetical Character" (1747) affirms the possibility of prophetic poetry:

\begin{quote}
Young Fancy thus, to me Divinest Name,
To whom, prepar'd and bath'd in Heav'n,
The Cest of ampest Pow'r is giv'n:
To few the God-like Gift assigns,
To gird their blest prophetic Loins,
And gaze her Visions wild, and feel unmix'd her Flame!
\end{quote}

\section{2.}

The Band, as Fairy Legends say,
Was wove on that creating Day,
When He, who call'd with Thought to Birth
Yon tented Sky, this laughing Earth,
And drest with Springs, and Forests tall,
And pour'd the Main engirting all,

\textsuperscript{34}Ernest Tuveson, \textit{The Imagination as a Means of Grace} (Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1960), pp. 97 \& 76.

\textsuperscript{35}Cf. Tuveson, p. 169. The relevant section in Burke is Part IV, sec. ii.
Long by the lov'd Enthusiast woo'd,
Himself in some Diviner Mood,
Retiring, sate with her alone,
And plac'd her on his Saphire Throne,
The whiles, the vaulted Shrine around,
Seraphic Wires were heard to sound,
Now sublimest Triumph swelling,
Now on Love and Mercy dwelling;
And she, from out the veiling Cloud,
Breath'd her magic Notes aloud:
And Thou, Thou rich-hair'd Youth of Morn,
And all thy subject Life was born!
The dang'rous Passions kept aloof,
Far from the sainted growing Wood:
But near it sate Ecstatic Wonder,
List'ning the deep applauding Thunder:
And Truth, in sunny Vest array'd,
By whose the Tarsel's Eyes were made;
All the shad'wy Tribes of Mind,
In braided Dance their Murrers join'd,
And all the bright uncounted Pow'rs
Who feed on Heav'n's ambrosial Flow'rs.36

As Earl Wasserman has observed, Fancy here is the Johannine Logos and the figure of Wisdom, or Sapientia, in Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus, and The Wisdom of Solomon, figures often seen as God's agent in creation. Thus, when Collins writes in the final lines (not quoted above) that "Heav'n, and Fancy" are "kindred Pow'rs," he is not saying that God's creative act and the poet's are similar, but that they both derive from the same Fancy-Wisdom that created the universe and infuses the Grace ("all the bright uncounted Pow'rs") that empowers the poet to prophecy.37 Philosophically, Collins is a realist who


sees the poet as one who mediates the universal Ideas, "the Shad'wy Tribes of Mind," to the reader who is normally blinded by sensory data. In Old Testament terms, he thinks of the inspired poet as being kin to the prophets of Numbers, chapter 12:6, and Isaiah, chapter 1:1, who saw the Truth which God imparts.

Another compelling context for prophecy in the late eighteenth century was the interest in English antiquity and especially the folklore of a Druid Albion, both inspired and revealed, for instance, in Gray's The Bard, Percy's Reliques, and Jacob Bryant's New System or Analysis of Ancient Mythology (1774-76). Blake was intimately acquainted with this Gothicism through his apprenticeship under James Basire, an engraver to the Society of Antiquaries. But Blake could have acquired this interest in several other ways, for in 1793, interest in traditional things was so marked that "Antiquities" received a separate heading in The Annual Register. But the important point for our discussion is that a concern for English antiquity involved an interest in the bard, and in the public mind the concept of the ancient bard and the concept of the prophet merged. In Gray's poem the bard is a prophet. In addition to the Ossianic craze,

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enthusiasm for a bardic past was shown in the activities of the Welsh Bards resident in London, or the "Bards of the Island of Britain," as they called themselves, who met on each equinox and solstice on Primrose Hill according to "ancient usage... in open air, in public view, while the sun is above the horizon." On these occasions these modern bards made a circle of stones, built an altar, placed a naked sword on it, and declared that the Bards of the Island of Britain were "heralds and ministers of peace" and "never bore a naked weapon in the presence of any one." They then read two or more odes which, in the 22 September 1792 meeting, at least, expressed hope in the French Revolution and prophetic concern for all slaves.

There were, however, at least two other important contexts for Blake's interest in prophetic poetry. One was the eighteenth-century revival of interest in prophetic poetry following Bishop Lowth's explanation of how Hebrew poetry worked in his De Sacra Poesi Hebraeorum (1753). In his book Prophet and Poet, Murray Roston has shown how Lowth's work, along with John Husband's preface to A Miscellany of Poems (1731), William Smith's 1739 translation of Longinus, Burke's A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful

\[39\text{GM, LXII, 956.}\]
(1757), Thomas Harner's Observations on Divers Passages of Scripture (1764), Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry (1765), and Sir William Jones's Essay on the Poetry of the Eastern Nations (1772), to name but these, all helped to stimulate a taste for the Psalms and psalmody, and the poetry of Macpherson, Chatterton, Gray, Cowper, and Smart. Interest in prophetic poetry was at its peak in 1793. Lowth had been translated into English in 1787, and the periodicals of the day reveal many primary and secondary works of and on prophetic poetry, with discussions of the genre.\textsuperscript{40}

In 1793 millenialism also provided a context for Blake's prophetic poetry. As a matter of fact, most of Blake's prophecies were written during the period when the millenarians Joanna Southcott, Richard Brothers, and their followers were publishing their prophecies of the contemporary fulfillment of what they considered to be foretellings in Daniel and Revelation. Fanatics as they were, and unlike Blake in every important respect except their prophetic urge and intent, they do display something of Blake's intellectual and emotional unity of Imagination. Neither Southcott nor Brothers had published anything in 1793, and since the former was still

\textsuperscript{40}E.g. the letter by Edward Harwood, \textit{GM}, LXIII, 326; the review of George Richard's Songs of the Aboriginal Bards of Britain, \textit{GM}, LXIII, 434; and "A Runic Ode," \textit{GM}, LXIII, 461.
in Exeter annoying the local clergy and the latter did not prophesy till 1794, it is unlikely that Blake even knew of them when he wrote America. In the first six months of 1793, however, there was quite a flurry of excitement over the fact that a Presbyterian minister, Robert Fleming (1660-1716), sometime pastor of the Scots Church, London, had in his Apocalyptic Key of 1701 predicted with amazing accuracy the downfall of the French monarchy. The fact that this almost century-old prediction was accurate was first pointed out in the 15 January 1793 number of The Whitehall Evening Post and was quickly picked up by most of the leading periodicals. So notorious was this piece of information that "C.D." could chide the editors of The European Magazine, "I am surprised you have not, as most of your competitors have done, reprinted the extraordinary completion of a prophecy of the Revelation. . . from a religious discourse by Robert Fleming, V.D.M." The discovery of Fleming's amazing prediction led to four editions of his works in 1793 alone and the dis-


42 Actually he said that the French monarch would be "humiliated" by 1794. Louis was, of course, confined to prison on 10 August 1792 and executed on 21 January 1793.

43 EM, XXIII, 84.
covery of many other "prophets" who had in some way foretold the downfall of Louis. The prophecies of a few of these had been published just before Fleming's but caused little of the excitement his brought about. Most notable of these was one Christopher Love (1618-51), a Puritan minister who had been accused of plotting against the Commonwealth by corresponding with Charles Stuart and Henrietta Maria and had been executed 22 August 1651. A book entitled The Last Speech and Testimony of Mr. Christopher Love, . . . appeared in 1790 (though the British Museum General Catalogue questions that date), and one entitled The Strange and Wonderful Predictions of Mr. C. Love. With a . . . Prophecy of the Late Revolutions in France, . . . by Mr. P. Jurieu appeared in 1792. Also republished in 1792 were the millenarian predictions of Richard Clarke (1723 ca.-1780), curate of Chester. One should not underestimate the popularity of these "prophecies" in the 1790's. An edition of Love was published in America in 1791, as were several editions of Fleming's books. Looking for prophecies of Louis's downfall became a game, and in 1794 the following title was published in Philadelphia:

ous Pamphlet. 1747 With an Introduction and Remarks.

One needs a fair amount of imagination to find any prediction of Louis' demise in many of these works. The contemporary interest in them does, however, indicate that in 1793 there was a sizeable reading public seeking what it thought were prophecies. The millenarians and their surprisingly large reading public were thus part of the context in which Blake wrote *America a Prophecy*.

Almost all the "prophecies" of the above-mentioned authors are in a serviceable but artless prose. The *Prophetic Numbers of Daniel and John Calculated* (Philadelphia, 1759) by Richard Clarke, for instance, is what one would expect from the title: a seemingly endless calculation of the numerical meanings of the horns in *Daniel*, the vials in *Revelation*, etc. When not calculating digits Clarke engages in a close and highly fanciful explication of these works in an attempt to apply them to contemporary events. This is what most of the "prophecies" reprinted in 1793 do: they painfully read into, rather than out of, the texts of *Daniel* and *Revelation*. One wonders (and since he says nothing about it, we can only wonder) if we can safely say that since Blake fervently believed that "Prayer is the Study of Art," that "Praise is the Practice of Art," and that "The Last Judgment is
an Overwhelming of Bad Art and Science," he would have felt compelled in the face of such inartistic prophecy to write some prophecies which are artistically acceptable. The impulse which motivated the millenarians and Blake was the same, but the ends and in large part the means were different.

In 1793 George III and his Administration very much wanted to go to war against the Revolution. And, to anyone ethically sensitive, England's real reason for declaring war on 1 February 1793 was obvious. In the Parliamentary debate over the declaration, Fox correctly noted that the Members of Parliament always said England must fight the French to protect itself but then went on to reveal that what they really wanted was to "extirpate French Principles." To one who could proclaim in that year that "Empire is no more! and now the lion & wolf shall cease" and that "every thing that lives is holy" the situation was outrageous. Such a man was faced with the radical gap between faith and ethos which prophecy attempts to close. When one considers that Blake thought of Ezra, Isaiah, Boehme, and Milton as being four of the six thinkers who were the most formative of his mind (Shakespeare and Paracelsus are the

\[43\] "Laocoon" and A Vision of the Last Judgment, p. 94. (Erdman and Bloom, p. 555).

\[44\] GM, LXIII, 534.
other two he mentions in the letter noted above), and that the public was dizzy with the predictions of prophets but found these foretellings in works which were less than the Art which is true religion, one concludes it would be strange if Blake did not "prophesy" in 1793.

But it is a mistake to see prophecy only as an effect, for we omit an important thing if we forget the Hebraic concept of prophecy as an accomplishing entity. The Hebrew noun we translate "word" also means "thing." And the "Word" once it leaves the prophet's mouth becomes a separate entity, as W. L. Wardle says, "inexorably working out its own fulfillment."^45 Thus, the well-known lines from Isaiah:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it. (55:10-11)^46


^46Throughout this study I quote from the Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
Thus also, God is reported to say to Jeremiah:

Behold, I have put my words in
Your mouth
See, I have set you this day over
nations and over kingdoms,
to pluck up and to break down,
to destroy and to overthrow,
to build and to plant. (1:9b-10)

That is, God has given Jeremiah the "Word." This word in part is one of destruction, and therefore Jeremiah has the power to destroy and must use that power. Indeed, it is apparently just this which produces his agony, for he knows he must preach destruction to his own people and that by the very act of preaching it he is bringing it about:

My grief is beyond breaking
my heart is sick within me.
Hark, the cry of the daughter of my people
from the length and breadth of the land:
"Is the Lord not in Zion?
Is her king not in her? (8:18-19)

I think that Blake may have prophesied, in part at least, to effect what he desired. Jeremiah dreaded the bloodshed his own words would of necessity cause. Perhaps later, after he had matured, Blake would have dreaded such bloodshed also, but in much of the Lambeth period, as we shall see in America, he is aggressive, and if the French Revolution was tardy in promulgating itself, Blake was glad to help it along with a prophecy that accomplished what it proclaimed.
CHAPTER II

THE USES OF MYTH

In response to England's declaration of war on France and, indeed, in response to all tyranny against revolutionary freedom Blake wrote America a Prophecy. The work consists of eighteen plates of composite art, colored design and poetry, in which the designs sometimes illustrate the themes of the text or comment ironically on them. The original copies are magnificent. S. Foster Damon has said of their coloring, "Never again did Blake quite attain the same brilliancy, the same sensitiveness to broad sweeps of tonality, which intensify each other as the pages are turned." The book is indeed arresting, and plate 9, showing two youths asleep with a ram beneath a drooping tree filled with birds of paradise, is among the most pleasing watercolors I have ever seen.1

1Damon, William Blake, p. 339. It must be remembered, however, that because each copy was colored individually by hand, no two copies are exactly alike in color.

2What I saw was a reproduction in Geoffrey Keynes, William Blake: Poet, Printer, Prophet (Chateau de Boissia, Clairvaux, Jura, 1964). Keynes does not say from which copies these reproductions were produced or how other copies vary from them.
Sothundercast the war, then Albions Angel wrathful burnt
Beside the Stone of Night; and like the eternal Lions howl.
In lumin's war, reply'd: Art thou not Orc, who serpent form'd
Stands at the pair of Faunahorn to devour her children;
Blasphemous Demon, Antichrist, hater of Dignities;
Lover of wild rebellion, and transgresser of Gods Law.
Why dost thou come to Angrove eyes in this terrifc form?
In the Preludium, which sets the theme for what follows, a "stern" bard sings of a figure named Orc, whose spirit has soared as an eagle screaming, stalked as a lion, lashed as a whale, and folded as a serpent, while being bound in chains by Urthona and fed from iron baskets and cups by the latter's "shadowy," "helmeted," and silent daughter. The "red," "hairy" Orc breaks loose and rapes the "shadowy daughter," causing her to feel both joy and torment for the first time. Putting aside her obscuring clouds, she identifies Orc as "the image of God who dwells in darkness of Africa" and as the serpent, eagle, lion, and whale of Canada, Mexico, Peru, and the "South-sea." Orc is energy, desire, and revolution, with possible sources and analogues in Prometheus, Adonis, Loki, Christ, and Boehme's idea of the fiery, salty, astringent side of life which has the positive quality of containing, controlling, and punishing evil while strengthening the good.³ The "shadowy daughter" is the earth-spirit, the same as she who utters "Earth's Answer" in Songs of Experience, or Nature in her materiality and perhaps, by extension, natural science, religion, morality, and aesthetics, all the eighteenth-century derivatives of Nature. She may be a composite.

figure from such sources as Plotinus' Concerning the Beautiful, in which the forms that appear in Nature are described as shadows upon shadows, Everard's seventeenth-century translation of the Hermetica, in which Nature is presented as being cloudy and feminine, and Revelation, chapter 12, where a travelling woman "clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet" is attacked by a dragon and assisted by the earth. On one level Blake's allegory is saying that sex will make us free, and on another it proclaims that while contemporary revolutions rape the very culture that nurtured them, they are the only force that can bring that culture joy and productivity.

In the prophecy itself the Guardian Prince of Albion, or Albion's Angel, a dragon who represents George III, prepares for war against America. The American patriots look on as Washington calls to European friends for help. Orc, "Intense! naked! a Human fire fierce glowing," rises from the Atlantic, roars a declaration of Apocalypse, that "Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease." Albion's Angel declares war, sum-


5Obvious analogues for Albion's Angel are the dragons in Ezekiel, The Faerie Queen, and Revelation. Frye notes (p. 209) that Joel Barlow's Vision of Columbus may be a direct source.
moning the guardian angels of the thirteen colonies, who are sitting amidst the "Atlantean hills" in the "ancient palace" of Ariston. But the thirteen angels rebel and join Washington, and, seeing a vision of Orc in the sky, the British soldiers flee. Albion's Angel's next move is to inflict America with pestilence, but the colonists unite and with the fire of Orc's revolutionary spirit hurl back the plagues which, returning across the Atlantic, now wither and sicken the "Guardians" of London and Albion and the "ancient miter'd York." The returning plagues further force the "Guardians" of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales to retreat, cause the "Bard of Albion" and all priests to turn to reptiles, and ironically bring all females to a sudden awareness of their hitherto repressed sexuality. But Urizen, a kind of Eddic frost king representing the Deistic God of Reason, smothers the fiery Orc in ice and snow and rules for twelve years, till 1789, when light comes to France and the thrones of all Europe shake in augury of world-wide revolution. In the final action of the poem, the "ancient Guardians" of Albion attempt to shut the "five gates of their law-built heaven," but Orc consumes these gates of the senses with his fires. Man is freed of the ultimate tyranny: that over his senses and individuality.

What Blake is trying to accomplish with his myth in America is relatively clear. He writes of the American
Revolution, but he really means the French, English, and all contemporary political revolutions. The last five lines of the poem are as explicit in this regard as Blake's medium will allow him to be. And, in mythologizing the American Revolution, he is revealing what he thinks are the spiritual sources behind all contemporary revolutions. The allegory of the Preludium gives us the function and status of Orc as a raper and releaser of Nature, as a "God," and as an inevitable and irrepressible power. The narrative in the prophecy proper shows the revolutions to be a manifestation of this sudden loosing of apocalyptic power. The political world is thus set in the context of an imaginative and divine world in that Urthona, roughly creative intellect, is the father of the "shadowy daughter," who is Nature, and in that both he and Orc are "Gods." And, as Blake can sanctify with his mythology, so he can also damn. In presenting George III as a serpent, Blake dramatizes his villain and, of course, enriches his poem by calling up the analogues listed above.6

We should note that Blake uses myth in at least three different ways to accomplish this baptism of revo-

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6 In using the term Angel Blake may have been continuing the satire, which he started in The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, of Swedenborg's rather unappealingly pompous angels presented in the Treatise Concerning Heaven and Hell.
olution. First, he reveals that the contemporary revolu-
tions are manifestations of the spirit of Orc. Secondly,
and more subtly, once he has lifted us into his world
of Imagination with his Preludium, he can, as third-
person narrator, pass judgment on worldly persons and
events, for he is no longer merely William Blake, repub-
lican and outspoken engraver of Lambeth, but William
Blake, man of Poetic Genius and link in the golden chain
of prophecy extending from the Hebrews through Boehme.
Thus he can confidently close the poem with his gener-
alized comment that the Revolution has permanently
transformed us in searing away our imprisoning Lockean
means of knowledge and opened us to truth. And thirdly,
the gods of the myth can themselves speak prophecy; that
is, they can comment on the contemporary world and how
it does or does not conform to eternal verities. This
Orc does in plates 6 and 8, as do the thirteen Angels in
plate 11. Just how effective these methods are, which
might be abandoned and which developed I shall discuss
in a moment, but first I want to speculate on why Blake
chose them in the first place.

Discovering the precise nature of Blake's poetic
mode is partly a matter of our remembering his prophetic
purpose in an age of Reason and attempting to list
alternative modes. Blake, I have stressed, found him-
self in a world that needed prophecy and encouraged a
prophetic consciousness. The prophet traditionally opens his prophecy with the words "Thus says the Lord," or its equivalent. Whether or not he really believes that "the Lord" speaks the words of which he is the medium is irrelevant at this point in our discussion. What is relevant is that this is the way he authenticates his prophecy; the formula "Thus says the Lord" provides the sacred context. But Blake, of course, did not want to attribute his prophecy to the God his readers would associate with the seemingly cruel tyrant of the Pentateuch; nor did he, to say the least, believe this God was the source of inspiration. He had to authenticate his prophecy in some other way. One way was to present the revolutionary heroes as semi-divine. But this, as Halliburton has pointed out,^7 he had done in The French Revolution, with Fayette, the Abbe de Sieyes, and Necter, and this is precisely the reason for that poem's failure. As Halliburton observes, asking the reader to accept the French financial minister as being of eternal significance is to strain that reader's credulity far more than asking him to accept Orc in the sky.

Another method of authenticating his prophecy would be by implication, to develop a mythology of gods and devils (with Blake "Angels") who manifest themselves in

^7"Blake's French Revolution..." 165.
earthly action and themselves speak prophecy, the implication being that such a divinely Imaginative world could not have been depicted by anyone other than a prophet. The work then would be self-authenticating. This is the method Blake used in America: he created a mythology which he apparently hoped would authenticate itself. There was, of course, another method open to Blake: believing that all prophecy came from the "Poetic Genius" or Imagination, he could have prefaced his work with lines indicating that his poem was so derived. This would have been more direct, and it is what Blake did in his next work, Europe, and, in one way or another, what he did in each of the prophecies he wrote from that time on, with the exception of Ahania and The Four Zoas.

Blake used myth because he had to. He could not merely write what he "thought," for "thinking" implies abstracting and generalizing and combining and comparing concepts, and it was this whole Lockean mode of coming to knowledge which he considered tyrannical. Such prose might have been clear to the Understanding, but clarity was no test of Art, for "What is Grand is necessarily obscure to Weak men," and "That which can be made Explicit to the Idiot" is not worth the artist's care. Nor could

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8 The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, pl. 12.
9 Letter to Trusler.
he merely write what he saw, for to follow one's sensations was to be the child of a natural world which the fallen mind had created and one must learn to see through, not with the eyes. It was to get men to stop merely thinking or seeing and to achieve Vision that he wrote his prophecies. As St. Paul preached "from faith to faith," so Blake prophesied from Vision to Vision. Blake believed that the content of Vision, what we would see "if the doors of perception were cleansed," was the "infinite." But the only way we can structure and communicate the infinite is through myth.

Blake never again used myth in quite the same way as he used it in America. Perhaps one reason is that America is not entirely satisfactory as art, and Blake knew it. The problems in America start from the beginning and with the central character Orc, who is inadequately prepared for and developed. He is sprung on us in the first line, and we particularly miss a word on his origins. The "shadowy daughter's" statement that he is "the image of God who dwells in darkness of Africa" is simply not enough, nor is the information that he is the

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10 A Vision of the Last Judgment, p. 95 (Erdman and Bloom, p. 555).


12 Cf. Schorer, William Blake, ..., p. 25.
energy behind political revolution. Blake uses Orc to sanctify the Revolution, but no one sanctifies Orc. His identity is given by the "shadowy daughter," but she after all is only Nature in a fallen state. I have said that Blake may have expected his myth in America to be self-authenticating. If so, he may have felt that any who read America with Imagination would quickly accept the red, hairy demon as the agent of the Apocalypse. But Blake's attempts in his subsequent works to develop a theogony reveal that he felt the same lack in America as we do.

Moreover, Blake does not successfully fuse the mythic and natural worlds in America. Halliburton has suggested that to write of the Revolution in mythic terms is to produce a more credible and successful work than to lift the earthly characters to divinity by putting pompous speeches into their mouths. If this is true, and I think it is, it may also be true that an even more credible and successful work is produced if one entirely leaves out historic characters and uses only myth. This I think Blake saw; it is, at any rate, what he did when he got to The Book of Urizen. One of his reasons may have been that he saw that he never satisfactorily showed the interaction of the mythic and historic worlds in the Orc books. In the text of America Blake was apparently attempting to portray the Revolu-
tion as a manifestation of Orc and the events in that cataclysm as supposedly influenced by his power. But Blake rarely tells us how that was so, and we need to know. For instance, in plate 11:1-2 the thirteen Angels suddenly revolt against Albion, but we are never told how or why. In plate 10:11 they are seen to be "perturb'd," three lines later they are "indignant burning with the fires of Orc," and just two lines later they offer their declaration of independence in a series of rhetorical questions concerning social ethics. Evidently their life in America had opened them to the truth; the truth had at first merely confused them, and for a time they sat with it gnawing their insides. Suddenly in their own expression of their doubts about their "Guardian" they came to the acceptance of Orc. One can speculate thus on the revolt, but from the text one has no idea what happened. Again, in plates 14 and 15 Albion's Angel inflicts America with plagues which the patriots somehow return to sicken the inflictors. Presumably the plagues refer to the blockades, naval bombardments, crop-burnings, and the like visited upon the colonists by the British. The uniting of the colonists to ward off the plagues is one more manifestation of Orc, and the sickening of the Albion party is the embarrassment and confusion of the Tories at losing the war. But if all this is so, America is a puzzling allegory, not a myth
showing the events of the American Revolution as products of Orc-power. The mythic world and world of Nature do not really intersect here, and they are clearly meant to, for Blake refers to both: Orc and Washington, Urthona and Paine, Ariston's ancient palace and Bernard's house. Orc is at work in the world, but exactly how we are not told.

Another problem, more subtle and serious, is that as a revolutionary figure Orc simply is not attractive enough. The problem pervades almost every aspect of the poem, especially the imagery and tone. Here I wish only to point out the seriousness of the problem in Blake's basic use of myth. Blake attempted to sanctify the Revolution but omitted the task of making that revolution appear worth it. Orc certainly is attractive in his power and desire for social justice, in his sensitivity to the oppressed as revealed in his prophecies in plates 6 and 8. But apart from this, Orc appears cruel. He seems so, no doubt, because this is the way Blake wanted him to appear. He is, as the "shadowy daughter" describes him, a "terrible boy," one who brings peace by means of the sword. But if revolution is to be attractive, we must see the benevolent side of it, and though this is partially shown in the declaration of the Apocalypse in plate 6, this brief passage does not offer enough exposure to the joys of the millenium as compared
to the descriptions of the apocalyptic fire which brings that time of peace. Blake is experimenting with one of the most obscure prophetic forms, apocalypse, and he has not yet found the symbolic and mythic forms to accommodate his apocalyptic theme.

Finally, the Atlantic myth is not integrated into the rest of the poem. The insertion of this brief classical analogue may be an attempt to lessen the problem noted above, to present besides the "sublime" Orc the category of Beauty in the Atlantean hills. Specifically, Blake says in these lines (10:5-12) that the thirteen Angels are dwelling in Ariston's palace in the "forest of God" (later synonymous with error in Blake). The "Golden world" is accessible from these hills but apparently not to the thirteen Angels, for they sit "perturb'd" by clouds (again, usually synonymous with error) which hover over the palace roof. Presumably Orc, who has burned away obscuring clouds before (pl. 2:4), will some­day do so to these, and the "Golden world" will then be available to all. Blake is showing that Beauty is part of the Apocalypse. But these six lines are in no way integral to the poem and indeed appear to be an incon­gruous intrusion, an example of Blake's syncretism of myth which does not quite come off. The passage is an island of commonplace antiquity in a sea of exciting originality and seems to go counter to Blake's general
distaste for classical myth in poetry, of which he wrote:

Bloated Gods, Mercury, Juno, Venus, & the rattle traps of Mythology & the lumber of an awkward French Palace are thrown together around Clumsy & Ricketty Princes & Princesses higgledy piggledy.

Europe a Prophecy is etched on sixteen plates including the title page, frontispiece, and two full-page designs and is dated 1794. On the whole the work makes a less magnificent visual presentation than does America, though its frontispiece, an etching of Urizen with the compasses in his sinister hand, marking out the creation, is one of Blake's most frequently reproduced designs.

Of the poetry Erdman has rightly said:

Nowhere is Blake's symbolism more cryptic; nowhere do so many new characters appear in such fleeting contexts; nowhere is there such difficulty with ambiguities of punctuation and sudden shifts of pace.

Nevertheless, much in the direction and themes of the text can be understood and appreciated.

The poem opens with twenty-four introductory lines in which the poet-prophet comes upon a fairy who is singing of man's imprisonment in his five senses and failure to escape through the gate of touch, i.e. his sexual sense. Catching the fairy and privileged to

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13 Public Address, p. 18.
14 Erdman, p. 194.
command it, the prophet asks whether or not the material world exists and is alive, upon which the fairy "dictates" Europe. In the Preludium which follows, a "nameless shadowy female," alike to that of America, rises from the breast of Orc and laments to her mother Enitharmon that though she, the shadowy female, brings forth "myriads of flames," Enitharmon always stamps them "with a signet." Seeing the "infinite" bound in swaddling bands, she loses her voice and retreats. Again, she is like the earth-spirit of "Earth's Answer" in Songs of Experience, a spirit whom jealousy binds and revolution seeks to free.

The prophecy proper opens with a passage which echoes Milton's On the Morning of Christ's Nativity: a "secret child" descends through the gates of "eternal day." Enitharmon sees her sons and daughters gather in a crystal house, while Los, poetry fallen to an unimaginative state, commands a celebration for the birth of his Christ-child son, who is actually Orc, the "infinite," bound. Enitharmon then rises and calls upon her sons, Rintrah and Palamabron, and their wives, the jealous Ocalythron and the "silent Elynittria silver bowed queen," to establish female rule: to teach the world that "Woman's love is Sin," that all should lead lives of allegory, that joy should cease, and that each female child should spread "nets in every secret path," in short, to establish the Christian dispensation, the sinful and
jealous domination of woman, as Blake saw it. Having established her rule, Enitharmon sleeps for 1800 years, and the action (i.e. history) becomes her dream. The Angels lie under their ruined council house for an hour, stricken by the end-of-the-century revolutions in America and France. Then they follow the King through the porches of Verulam into a serpent-shaped, Druid temple, where man was first made prisoner of his senses. A gray mist envelops the churches, palaces, and towers as Urizen rises on the Atlantic, unclasps his "brazen book," and seeks to teach morality to the youth of England, who flee and hide. The King suffers the flames of Orc, Westminster "howls," and "The Guardian of the secret codes" flees.

Blake seems here to be suggesting a fall like that of Milton's angels, only this one is caused by Revolution, or Orc. Seeing such official torment, Orc rejoices, while Palamabron shoots lightning and Rintrah stands ready with his legions. As the poem comes to its climax, a "red-limb'd Angel" three times attempts to blow the apocalyptic trumpet. Newton finally seizes and sounds it, the blast of which kills "myriads of Angelic hosts" but awakens Enitharmon, who now calls all her children to her crystal house where they "sport beneath the solemn moon." As morning comes, all but Orc flee to their stations; he rushes to the "vineyards of red France"
where terrors reign and tigers "such the ruddy tide." As the poem closes, Los awakes and calls "all his sons to the strife of blood," the traditional sign of apocalypse.

The poem deserves a volume of commentary, but our discussion here will focus on the ways Blake uses myth for prophecy. The first new use appears in the introductory lines, which present a fairy who promises to reveal a world alive and enchanted. Blake accomplishes at least two things with these delightful lines. They directly authorize his prophecy, proclaiming it from a being of the world of Imagination, and they establish a tone which is at once serious and whimsical. Seeing the fairy, the prophet catches him in his hat "as boys knock down a butterfly," and to his query concerning the natural world, the fairy replies:

I will write a book on leaves of flowers,
If you will feed me on love-thoughts, & give me now and then
A cup of sparkling poetic fancies; so when I am tipsie,
I'll sing to you to this soft lute; and shew you all alive
The world, where every particle of dust breathes forth its joy.

The prophet concludes his introduction:

I took him home in my worm bosom: as we went along
Wild flowers I gathered; & he shew'd me each eternal flower:
He laughed aloud to see them whimper because they were pluck'd.
They hover'd round me like a cloud of incense.
Apparently Blake was keenly aware of the problem with the shrill tone in America and immediately set out to establish a different one in Europe.

Still another new use of myth in Europe occurs in Blake's satire and parody of other systems. He had already so used myth in The Marriage, but this is the first time he uses it in works he explicitly presents as prophecy. The opening plate of the Prophecy itself is a parody of Milton's "Nativity Ode," and Enitharmon's female reign of 1800 years is clearly a satire on Christian history. Moreover, plate 10, which describes the King entering the Druid temple through Verulam and the imprisoning of man in the five senses, satirizes Bacon and Locke, and later there is the harsh satire of Newton, his system, and his commentary on Revelation, in the derisive joke of his blowing the apocalyptic trumpet to usher in not apocalypse, not a new birth, but falling leaves, winter, and death. But while Blake is parodying other systems, he is presenting his own. As he narrates the birth of Orc, he parodies Milton, and as he tells of the primeval fall of man he satirizes Bacon and Locke. The artistic fusion is highly skillful.

Here, in the first mention of Druidism in his poetry, Blake uses myth to comment simultaneously in con-

\[15\text{Cf. Frye, Fearful Symmetry, p. 254.}\]
temporary philosophy, religion, and politics. Of course, the whole of America is a commentary on contemporary politics, and it contains satire on the Church: the "ancient miter'd York" and the reptile priests are made appropriate victims of the returning plagues. But one senses that the religious comment there is not integral to the major political orientation of the poem, and one finds no prophetic critique on contemporary philosophy in the poem at all. In the Druid myth of Europe, however, Blake comments concurrently and integrally on all three phases of life. It is the King and his ministers who, following the fiasco of the American Revolution, seek out and enter the serpent-shaped temple. Blake never uses the word "Druid" or its cognates in Europe, but because the temple is "ancient," "serpent-form'd," and of "massy stones," we associate it with Druidism, and because the entrance is at Verulam, Bacon's home and the title he assumed, we think of trust in Baconian logic as the basic faith through which we come to this religion. Thus we have composite comment: the religion is Druidism, connoting the ritual slaughter of humans; the political leaders, among others, are the worshipers; and seventeenth- and eighteenth-century rationalism serves as the catechism.16 Blake here uses the ambivalence

16Bloom may be right in noting (p. 165) along with Middleton Murry /William Blake (London, 1933), p. 96/ that since the temple is coextensive with the island itself, the whole nation is involved.
inherent in myth to achieve a wide spectrum of social comment. Such poetry may be unclear to the Understanding, but perfectly lucid to the Imagination, the faculty to which prophecy is addressed and the only faculty by which it can be comprehended. The Druid symbolism here is difficult for the casual reader to understand, but Blake was using it to be as precise and concise as he could be, for to him the philosophical, political, and religious orientation of his day was one religion and was most comprehensively described as Druidism.

Europe differs from America both in its analysis of contemporary problems and suggestions for solutions. In America political tyranny is seen as the major evil, while in Europe the individual's inability to get beyond the imprisoning senses is the primary difficulty. The difference is not complete: the Preludium to America shows Orc awaken in the "shadowy daughter" to Imagination (though that awakening is apparently not complete), and the Prophecy closes with Orc forever burning away the "five gates" of contemporary Europeans. Nevertheless, the primary problem as it is stated in Orc's prophecies in America is that Empire has physically (plate 6) and morally (plate 8) enslaved man. Europe is different in this regard, for in plate 10 we have an explicit statement, given in a flashback, of the original loss of perception. Though it comes almost as a second
thought, the passage nevertheless stands out and is the only explicit statement of a problem in the poem. Loss of perception, the senses overwhelming vision, therefore becomes the difficulty behind all contemporary problems including political tyranny.

Nor are the suggested solutions identical. In America the answer to all problems, including those of perception is Orc. History is seen as a linear movement toward apocalypse. There is no hint of historical cycles or that this apocalypse is not the last. In Europe, on the other hand, Blake appears doubtful of Orc's ability either to effect or maintain the apocalypse without help. The Preludium, supposedly that portion of the poem which sets the theme for the whole, portrays the shadowy female lamenting as she rises "from oft the breast of Orc," that she brings forth a "vig'rous progeny of fires... myriads of flames" but that Enitharmon ever stamps them "with a signet." History appears to be cyclical here, not linear, and Enitharmon seems to be lamenting that Orc himself is the victim of a cycle of birth and death. It must also be noted that the poem ends with Los calling all his sons to "the strife of blood." Earlier in the poem Los appeared to be poetry in a degenerate state (pl. 3:7-14), but in the final lines he is awakened and imaginative, and Blake seems to be saying that Orc needs the help of Imagination, that he cannot effect the
apocalypse alone. In Europe Blake appears to move from an identification of the problem as being political to a realization that it is perceptual, from an assertion that the solution is political revolution to an admittance that revolution is temporary, and without Imagination, incapable.

For all these advances over America, Europe is far from a total success. One problem lies in the content: Blake seems to be in doubt about the efficacy of political revolution but not yet ready to supplant it with a revolution of the psyche, and an irresolute prophet is hardly redemptive. There are problems of levels of tone, of a needless obscurity in the imagery of the Preludium, and of confusing rhetoric in the opening plate of the Prophecy. Los, it has been noted, in this poem is either poetry or prophecy in a dormant and then awakened state. But this interpretation comes from later works, always dangerous in Blake scholarship and, of course, an option not open to the first readers of Europe. As with Orc in America, we do not have enough information about Los's origins. The character is thrust upon us with no credentials, no genealogy. Perhaps Blake felt at this time that prophecy should need no credentials, but his subsequent attempts to carefully identify Los (such as in the opening lines of The Song of Los) suggest that he eventually saw the need. One thing Blake appears to
have learned from these "minor" prophecies is that he could not successfully present his myth without presenting all of it.

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The Song of Los, dated 1795, is a work in eight plates which includes only four plates of text. It is divided into two sections, "Africa" and "Asia," the first of which opens with five introductory lines that identify Los as the "Eternal Prophet" and author of the rest of the work. "Africa" presents the whole of religious and philosophical history as being a creation of Urizen propagated through the children of Los, Rintrah, Palanabron, Theotormon, Antamon, and Sotha, who give "Abstract Philosophy" to Brahma, "Abstract Law" to Trismegistus, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Plato, the Gospel to Jesus, a "loose Bible" to Mohomet, and a "Code of War" to Odin. While Urizen's law is being promulgated, Adam and Noah "shudder" and "fade"; Abraham flees; the "sunny" African turns black; Orc, who has been bound with chains of jealousy, "howls"; Har and Heva turn to reptiles; the human race withers, hides, and fears love, only the diseased propagating; the "Philosophy of the Five Senses" is completed and presented to Newton and Locke; and Voltaire and Rousseau gather clouds of error. The section closes with the first line of the Prophecy of
America, "The Guardian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent." In the "Asia" section the "Kings of Asia," startled from their webs by the "thought-creating fires of Orc," cry out in woe, enumerating the political and emotional strictures they will no longer be able to enforce. Orc rises above the Alps, and bone joins with bone till the human race stands naked together, while the grave "shrieks with delight," and Urizen weeps.

Important advances are made here over America and Europe. First of all, the important information that Los is the "Eternal Prophet" is given in the very first line. Secondly, Los rather than a "tipsie" fairy is made the author of the prophecy, and thus the point of view of the work is clearer and the tone less ambiguous. Moreover, Blake adds Brahma, Mohammed, Odin, Pythagoras, Socrates, and Trismegistus to the list of Urizen's rhapsodes, a list which now includes the whole Judeo-Christian tradition, Islam, Hinduism, the Norse mythology, classical philosophy, the Cabbala, and the Enlightenment, systems that Blake probably thought of as not stemming directly from the Imagination. While America dealt with contemporary political tyranny and Europe with 1800 years of Christian tyranny, Blake extends his myth in The Song of Los to include the evolution of tyranny from creation to contemporary events. While he is thus expanding his myth in The Song, he is also clar-
ifying it, for he is comparing his thought to other systems, something he had previously done only in the subtle satire of Milton and complex flashback of Druid myth in Europe. Moreover, while developing and complicating his myth, Blake puts all in chronological order so we can see the proper sequence of events, and he manages to tidy up his myth by entitling his two sections "Africa" and "Asia," thus including all the four civilized continents which have fallen from Edenic existence, and by having Urizen return to Judea, the symbolic origin of all cultures, so that all is subjected to Biblical tradition, which now awaits fulfillment in the Apocalypse which is just beginning as the poem ends.

One innovation in the poem deserves special comment here: the achievement of prophecy by implication in the demonic "howling" of villains. Just as satire advocates virtue by implication, so the howl of the "Kings of Asia," which particularizes the tyranny of the old order, implies the virtues of the new:

Shall not the King call for Famine from the heath?  
Nor the Priest, for Pestilence from the fen?  
To restrain! to dismay! to thin!  
The inhabitants of mountain and plain;  
In the day, of full-feeding prosperity;  
And the night of delicious songs.

Shall not the Councillor throw his curb  
Of Poverty on the laborious?  
To fix the price of labour;  
To invent allegoric riches:
And the privy adminishers of men
Call for fires in the City
For heaps of smoking ruins,
In the night of prosperity & wantonness

To turn man from his path,
To restrain the child from the womb,
To cut off the bread from the city,
That the remnant may learn to obey,
That the pride of the heart may fail;
That the lust of the eyes, may be quench'd;
That the delicate ear in its infancy
May be dull'd; and the nostrils clos'd up;

To teach mortal worms the path
That leads from the gates of the Grave.

This method of prophesying by implication through the
speeches of villains works well, and Blake employs it
often from this poem onward.

But the difficulties in the use of myth for prophecy
in The Song of Los are great. For one thing, the "Africa"
section is written in a short line with many anapests,
apparently to give the section a breathless, urgent
effect:

Adam stood in the garden of Eden;
And Noah on the mountains of Ararat;
They saw Urizen give his Laws to the Nations
By the hands of the children of Los.

But in covering so wide a span of history in only forty-
seven relatively brief and rapid-reading lines, Blake
makes the section appear perfunctory. Furthermore, while
there is no conflict of history and myth in this poem,
there is no integration of the two either. In the
"Africa" section Blake merely stipulates that Urizen is the source of all thought systems, something we can neither affirm nor deny, and in the "Asia" section he merely puts fictitious speeches into the mouths of kings. As we noted earlier, the poem tidies up Blake's myth, for the fall is extended backward from Christian Europe to the error of all pre-Christian thought, which Blake saw as coming initially from Africa, home of the Egyptians with their tyrannical Pharaohs, oppressive ritual, and mathematically precise pyramids, and the Revolution is extended forward in history to Asia, itself a mythical seat of all civilizations. But there needs to be an integration of history and myth, for Blake has not yet fully internalized the conflict as he later does in Urizen: he is still writing of the manifestation of Orc in history. Lastly, though Blake is gradually expanding his myth backward through history, he still has not given us the theogony we want and need. We have Urizen, Orc, Los, and the latter's children, but no idea of where they came from.

The Book of Urizen is the longest, most fully decorated, and in many ways the most skillful of the minor prophecies. It is also the work in which Blake takes the longest strides in the development of his

17Cf. Frye, p. 130.
prophetic mode. Its twenty-eight plates include ten full-page designs, many of which were sold apart from the text.\(^1\) The date on the title page is 1794, which would make the work prior to *The Song of Los*, but in content, as we shall see, the poem is clearly related to *Ahania* and *The Book of Los*, both dated 1795, just as *The Song of Los* is thematically related to the other *Orc* books, *America* and *Europe*. Moreover, as Erdman points out,\(^1\) the page format and lettering of plates 7 and 8, which are clearly additions, are unlike the rest of the work and are like the page format and lettering of *Ahania* and *The Book of Los*. Perhaps the best we can say about the dating is that the first version was begun before the final version of *The Song of Los* and the final version was completed after it.

In words that echo Homer and Virgil the Preludium begins by saying that Blake will report the dictation of the "Eternals" concerning "the primeval Priests" assumption of power and subsequent exile to the "North." The prophecy itself begins with a parody of Satan, as Urizen

\(^1\) D. J. Sloss and J. P. R. Wallis /The Prophetic Writings of William Blake (Oxford, 1926), I, 81/ note that the public liked the designs of the Lambeth books more than the texts and that Blake made up volumes of the designs. *The Book of Urizen* was the most frequently drawn upon in the proportion of 13 to 23.

\(^1\) Erdman and Bloom, p. 726.
seizes power in Eternity and sets up his "Book of eternal brass," a legalistic moral code applying to all. The "strong" responded with rage, and eternity divides, leaving "ruinour fragments of life" and "an ocean of voidness unfathomable." But Blake's myth of a fall is at the same time one of creation. Urizen builds a world of his own, bounded and materialistic, while Los, who is time and Imagination and who has necessarily fallen with Urizen, watches in terror and by means of a forge attempts to turn Urizen into some redeemed essence. But Urizen, continuing his fall through seven ages, becomes a natural man, and Los succeeds only in binding each change in him and creating time. At the nadir of Urizen's fall his five senses develop and imprison him. Seeing Urizen in his fallen state, Los pities him, and as he does so, Enitharmon, the first female, appears. The other Eternals erect a curtain or tent of "Science" to keep her from their sight. One is born to Los and Enitharmon and is immediately bound with "Chains of Jealousy." Los encircles Enitharmon with "fire of Prophecy" to keep her from the sight of Urizen and Orc, and she bears "an enormous race." Awakened by the cries of the chained Orc, Urizen forms measuring instruments and explores his world. He immediately recognizes its paradoxical nature, and his sorrow, like Los' pity, creates an enslaving net of "religion" everywhere he
goes. The populace feel their senses shrink for six days, at the end of which they can no longer see the hypocrisy of Urizen's moralistic religion, and they bless the seventh day in "sick hope." The thirty cities of Africa develop laws of prudence and call them the laws of God. As the poem closes, Fuzon, who is both Urizen's son and the elemental spirit of fire, leads the "remaining" children of Urizen out of Egypt.

There are several new elements and uses of myth here for Blake. This is his first attempt as cosmogonic or universal myth and his first effort toward theogony (other than his brief account of the birth of Orc). This work contains Blake's first display of sympathy for the enemy, here in the form of Urizen, and his first attempt to account for pity through the use of myth. Of lesser importance, Blake here introduces Fuzon as a would-be redeemer, and he includes two elements from Northern mythology, the chain which is broken at night only to re-form and re-imprison during the day and the woman surrounded by fire.

Among the most crucial of these innovations is the theogony, something we felt the need for in Blake's previous prophecies. Along with the genesis of his gods, Blake gives us his cosmology, indeed has to give it,

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20 Bloom, p. 185-86.
for with him theogony and cosmology are one: the universe was originally one man (here Urizen, but later in Blake, Albion), and through the fall of this man the creation of the natural world as we know it occurred. Whether Blake got this radical anthropomorphic conceit from the Adam Kadmon of the Caballa or somewhere else is irrelevant to our discussion. What is relevant is the way Blake uses this myth for prophecy. We have seen that in his previous works Blake prophesied with myth by using it to sanctify current events which he thought were apocalyptic, by putting prophecy and demonic laments into the mouths of the gods and devils of his myth, and by attacking all other systems through parody or the stipulation that Urizen is their source. We have also seen that all of these methods are hampered by the fact that they never achieve an integration of myth and history. But here in *Urizen* Blake effects that integration with the use of the radical anthropomorphic conceit, for in this conceit the myth itself is both history and prophecy. As the Adam of Genesis is everyman and what happens to him happens to us every day, so Blake's universal man is each of us. There is no need here to integrate the myth with history; it is the history of our psyche at every moment. Nor is there any need to put prophecy into the mouths of gods, or in any way use the myth for prophecy, for the myth itself is the
prophecy, directly informing us of the divine (the organized, Edenic man) and our conformity or nonconformity to him.

In using the anthropomorphic conceit Blake continues his practice of constructing his myth in such a way that it simultaneously parodies other authors and thought systems, e.g. Homer (pl. 2:6), Virgil (pl. 2:1-7), Plato (pl. 25:42), the Bible (pl. 4:31-40; 25:39-41), and Milton (pl. 8:3-4; 19:10-13; and 25:29). Perhaps the following lines offer the most obvious example:

Six days they, shrunk up from existence
And on the seventh day they rested
And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick hope.

(pl. 25:39-41)

Such parodies double the force of Blake's myth in that he is both presenting his own system (though he would object to the word "system") and denigrating other systems at the same time. And we should note that the artistic compression in Blake's use of the anthropomorphic conceit is great. Theogony, cosmology, prophecy, and parody are all expressed in one myth. In brief, Blake's mythologizing in such a way that the myth itself is prophecy is successful, and this method becomes a central ingredient in his prophetic mode.

There is another important new use of myth in Urizen, one which reflects a deepening of Blake's thought.
This is his attempt to gain sympathy for the antagonist Urizen. The author of the Orc books was, as we have seen, almost blood-thirsty. He had sympathy for the oppressed but never for the oppressor. He demonstrated none of the maturity of the man who sees himself as a portion of fallen humanity, and as the grave shrieks with delight in The Song of Los, we almost feel that Blake himself is ecstatic at the thought of the coming apocalyptic blood bath. The author of Urizen is a more compassionate man, for Urizen himself, guilty as he is of primeval pride and the imposition of restraining religion, is treated sympathetically. In plate 23 Blake writes:

2. And his world teemd vast enormities
Frightning; faithless; fawning
Portions of life; similitudes
Of a foot, or a hand, or a head
Or a heart, or an eye, they swam mischevous
Dread terrors! delighting in blood

3. Most Urizen sicken'd to see
His eternal creation appear
Sons & daughters of sorrow on mountains
Weeping! wailing! • • •

4. He in darkness clos'd, view'd all his race
And his soul sicken'd! he curs'd
Both sons & daughters; for he saw
That no flesh nor spirit could keep
His iron laws one moment.

5. For he saw that life liv'd upon death.

Certainly we are not meant to sympathize completely with Urizen, for his soul-sickness is a product of his will-
fulness, and the lines that follow the last quoted above show that his "pain & woe" are themselves productive of an oppressive religion which promises "abstract" joy to the exclusion of the real thing. But Urizen is shown to be in pain, and if he is victim only of himself, he is nevertheless a victim, and we are meant to feel his plight.

Despite the successes noted above, Urizen is not a flawless work. For one thing, Blake presents Pity as a major human weakness but never indicates why it is so, except that it "divides the soul" (pl. 13:52). We all know the dangers of pity, that it can be indulged in to humiliate and incapacitate the one pitied, that it can be enjoyed for its own sake, and that an overindulgence in it can deny the Divine (or as Blake would probably say, the Human) benevolence, and Blake indicates some of this in the poem entitled "The Human Abstract." But he mentions none of this in Urizen, only that Los pities Urizen and that this divides his soul and produces Enitharmon. That Blake does not consider all pity to be evil is seen in his poem entitled "The Divine Image," in which all pray to "Mercy Pity Peace and Love" and these are "the human form divine." Nor is Blake's point (whatever it is) inconsequential, for, as we have observed, it is Los's Pity which produces Enitharmon and indirectly her "enormous race." Also, Blake still
does not give us enough concerning the origins of his Giants. Urizen and Los separate from each other and Los produces Enitharmon, but who the other "Eternals" are who shudder at the sight of these three we do not know. We are merely teased with the knowledge of their existence.

The Book of Ahania, consisting of six plates, only four of which contain text, is dated 1795. Since The Book of Urizen contains the word "First" in the title of the earliest copies and Ahania carries on the action of it and is the only minor prophecy without introductory lines, it is relatively certain that Blake thought of Ahania as the second book of Urizen. The poem opens with Fuzon revolting against his father Urizen. The rebellious son hurls a "Globe of Wrath" which pierces the father's shield and divides his "cold" loins. As his soul, Ahania, departs from him, Urizen laments for her, and apparently because he calls her "Sin," she becomes "The mother of Pestilence." For a time the fiery beam of Fuzon is a pillar of fire to Egypt, and he apparently succeeds in leading an exodus from that country. But Urizen is not dead. His "dire contemplations" rush down his mountains and settle in "torrents of mud" with "Eggs of unnatural production / Forthwith hatching." The eggs produce serpents, one of which, "Scaled and poisonous horned," is slain by Urizen, who then places a rock
covered with the serpent's gore in his "Bow of ribs" and kills Fuzon. Urizen then nails his son's corpse to the "Tree of Mystery," a tree which grew from a rock that petrified when Urizen's senses withered and was watered by his tears. Fuzon endures forty years of pestilence on the tree while his followers turn to reptiles. The remainder of the work is a lament by Ahania, who pathetically longs for the days when she was in union with Urizen.

The development in the use of myth in Ahania lies in Blake's ability to express and evoke emotion. If Blake used myth to call forth sympathy in Urizen, he uses it to express passion in Ahania's lament, a passage that echoes both Biblical lamentations and Blake's own poem, "Earth's Answer":

Ah Urizen! Love!
Flower of the morning! I weep on the verge
Of Non-entity; how wide the Abyss
Between Ahania and thee!

3: I lie on the verge of the deep.
I see thy dark clouds ascend,
I see thy black forests and floods,
A horrible waste to my eyes!

4: Weeping I walk over rocks
Over dens & thro' valleys of death
Why didst thou despise Ahania
To cast me from thy bright presence
Into the World of Loneness

5: I cannot touch his hand:
Nor weep on his knees, nor hear
His voice & bow, nor see his eyes
And joy. . . .
8: To awake my king in the morn!
To embrace Ahania's joy
On the breadth of his open bosom;
From my soft cloud of dew to fall
In showers of life on his harvests.

9: When he gave my happy soul
To the sons of eternal joy:
When he took the daughters of life.
Into my chambers of love...

12: Then thou with thy lap full of seed
With thy hand full of generous fire
Walked forth from the clouds of morning
On the virgins of springing joy,
On the human soul to cast
The seed of eternal science.

Apparently Ahania is desire, and Blake is revealing what happens when reason rejects desire. One effect is the disorganization and fall of man, followed by a rational and legalistic tyranny which none can fully obey and is ultimately rebelled against. This result is portrayed in both *Urizen* and *Ahania*. Another result is the transformation of the rejected desire to a breeder of pestilence, a consequence that is merely mentioned here in *Ahania* (pl. 2:43). Both of these effects are particularly painful to man as a rational being. But there is a result which particularly pertains to man as a creature of passion: our desire, or passion, once rejected by our reason, is doomed to an endless, fruitless longing. It is this last effect which Blake dwells

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on in *Ahania*, and as a poet, he expresses the plight of rejected passion, passionately. Blake is now both comment- ing on and freely and fully evoking emotion with his myth.

The character and action of Fuzon in *Ahania* may represent an advance in Blake's thinking. Exactly what Blake meant Fuzon to represent and why Blake replaced Orc with Fuzon as his political revolutionary is not entirely clear, but there is a consensus that Fuzon represents Blake's disillusionment with the Revolution, that is, as Paley suggests, the hero who becomes what he rebelled against. Paley's suggestion is supported by the fact that Fuzon, as Bloom points out, uses Urizen's weapons and tyrannically proclaims himself the "eldest of things" (pl. 3:33) once he is in power, and the further fact that his followers find no redemption, but rather turn to reptiles (pl. 4:43). It may also be significant, as Frye notes, that Fuzon is the son of Urizen and Orc was not. That is, besides bringing his myth in line with other well-known father-son myths, like those of Prometheus, Absalom, Balder, and Christ, Blake is showing that Orc, or revolution, is more closely

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22Paley, p. 27.

23Bloom, p. 190.

24Frye, p. 214.
related to Urizen, reason, than it is to Los, Imagination. Of course, the fact that Fuzon is also fire makes him an especially appropriate symbol for revolution, for he is thus both elemental and refining as well as destructive. The progression of Blake's thinking in regard to the efficacy of political revolution appears to be as follows: in America he is wholly for revolution and sees it as inevitable and final; in Europe he hints that revolutions are cyclical and that the French Revolution needs the help of Los to succeed in the present cycle; in The Song of Los there is a picture of the Apocalypse brought about by Orc, but the song is Los's, not Orc's, and this may mean that although revolution is possible and desirable, it is Los who inspires and interprets revolution; in Urizen the problem is internalized; and in Ahania political revolution is portrayed as being evil.

The Book of Los, the last of the minor prophecies, has only five plates, three of these containing text. It is the most sparsely decorated of Blake's prophetic books, plate 4 having no decoration at all. The book tells the story of the fall from Los's standpoint and may be sparse in decoration for this very reason; that is, the book is Los's, poetry's, and therefore the poetic art should reign supreme. The first five stanzas are

written in a smaller hand and end with a wavy line across
the page and thus constitute a preludium. In these
stanzas Eno, the "Aged Mother," sits beneath the "eternal
Oak" and yearns for the days before the fall when Covet,
Envy, Wrath, and Wantonness were sated. In the prophecy
proper Los, who is bound in chains and is compelled to
watch Urizen's shadow, becomes furious, breaks loose,
and smashes Urizen's world. All begins to fall through
the resulting "void." As he falls, Los begins to contem­
plate (pl. 4:40), and his fall changes "oblique." He
labors to organize himself and becomes a Natural man.
In his wrath he smites the deep, dividing the heavy from
the thin, the latter becoming light. Seeing the backbone
of Urizen "Hurtling through the wind," Los fires his
furnaces and transforms the spine into the natural,
fallen, sensory world.

This poem reveals Blake in his mature prophetic
mode, and a brief examination of it can serve as a sum­
mary of what he has learned about using myth for prophecy.
In the Orc books we saw that Blake prophesied through
myth by using it to sanctify political revolutions and to
denigrate all systems opposed to the revolution and by
putting prophecy into the mouths of his gods and laments

26 Sloss and Wallis (I, 105) point this out. The
Erdman Edition does not differentiate these with either
smaller type or the wavy line.
which prophesy by implication into the mouths of villains. We have seen the problem Blake had integrating myth and history till he adopted the radical anthropomorphic conceit in Urizen, and myth, history, and prophecy became one. Blake uses this latter method here in The Book of Los, portraying the fall of our Imaginations, ruined through perpetual staring at the provisional world our reason has created. The myth is both history and prophecy.

We see here also the way Blake has learned to combine prophetic myth with intellectual satire and literary parody. Bloom is certainly right in stating that plate 5 is a parody of Exodus, chapter 33:21-23, and the parody in plate 4 of Satan's fall in Paradise Lost is unmistakable even to the rhetoric of lines 27-28. The description of Los creating a universe is, of course, a parody of the first chapter of Genesis. The fusion here, the ability to speak mythologically to one's own age and all ages and concurrently parody both the thought and rhetoric of several opposing systems is what Blake is all about and why we read him.

A difficult problem for the reader is Blake's tone in presenting his myth. In America the speaker appears vicious. Apparently overcompensating, Blake at the

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27 Erdman and Bloom, p. 822.
beginning of Europe made the fairy-prophet overly whimsical. There is deep emotion in The Song of Los, but it is separated from the main myth. In Urizen Blake evokes sympathy for his antagonist and the emotion of the poem is integral to the myth. In Ahania Blake achieves passion. The Book of Los is a retrogression in the use of emotion. Los is apparently supposed to be feeling much, or at least Blake writes of Los's "fury" (e.g. pl. 3:35 & 48) and his "Wrath" (pl. 4:38; 5:4), but we feel none of it. We do feel Blake's emotion, however. At the end of the poem we are depressed at the hard, opaque world Los has created, depressed because it is our world, the world we awake to every morning. There is no hope expressed, for even the Imagination has fallen. Perhaps this is why the poem is not entirely attractive to us. But if the mood of the work is one of gloom, then there is, of course, an artistic success here, for the emotion is one with the content of the myth.

Another difficulty for the reader is the one each succeeding minor prophecy was partially meant to alleviate—not enough information is given; the myth is not full enough. We need more than Eno, Los, and Urizen. Here in The Book of Los, Los is bound by the other Eternals to watch Urizen. But we wonder who these other Eternals are and why they bind him to this depressing and ruinous task. We can speculate that they represent
the rest of the psyche, but then we wonder what these other faculties are doing while the Reason and the Imagination are falling. Presumably they fall too. Later works will tell us, for one of the prime lessons Blake has learned about using myth for prophecy is that his myth, at least, has to be presented fully if it is to be presented at all.
CHAPTER III

SELF-SCHOOLING IN PROPHETIC SYMBOLISM AND IMAGERY

The reader's problems with Blake's symbolism never end. To begin with we have the problem of discovering which images are symbols and which are literal images. Given the fact that Blake is speaking from his own Vision in a language which belongs to the natural world, each image is potentially symbolic, for it may stand for something which exists in Blake's visionary world but not in the natural world or is there only as a weak correspondent to the real thing in the world of Vision.

When Blake writes in *Europe* of Los's "num'rous sons" shaking their "bright fiery wings," we wonder whether we are to assume, with Erdman, that the sons are Blake's works and the wings are pages which are bright because colored and fiery because etched with acid, or that the sons are prophet-poets and the phrase "bright fiery wings" merely an indication of how Blake imaginatively sees these poets.\(^1\) When the Eternals in *Urizen* weave a curtain to separate themselves from the fallen Los, Blake

\(^1\)Erdman, p. 247.
tells us that the curtain is "Science" (plate 19:5-9), but we are left to speculate whether the large pillars which support the curtain and the hooks which fasten it have specific referents or not. And when Blake, describing Urizen's assumption of power, writes that "vast clouds of blood roll'd / Round the dim rocks of Urizen," we cannot determine whether "blood" is a symbol or just part of what Sloss and Wallis call the imagery of the "terrific."^2

Once determining that an image is a symbol, the reader still may have extreme difficulty in determining the referent. The Giants are often introduced with insufficient contextual information, and we are apparently supposed to know the whole canon before identifying the symbols in any one book. Eno, who speaks the Preludium to The Book of Los, is described as the "aged Mother Who the chariot of Leutha guides." If we know Leutha from Visions of the Daughters of Albion and Europe, books prior to Los, or Eno from The Four Zoas or Jerusalem, and, if we assume (which in fact is dangerous) that the Eno and Leutha of The Book of Los are the same as the Eno and Leutha found elsewhere in Blake, we can make the identification. Otherwise we are in difficulty. The danger of such identification-through-cross-reference is

^2Sloss and Wallis, II, 137.
illustrated by the case of the Rintrah of Europe, who is hardly the John the Baptist figure of the Argument to The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, though he could be the same character in a fallen state, another possibility which always confronts us in Blake. Moreover, a common noun that is a symbol in one line may have a different referent in a second line, and merely be an image in a third. Sloss and Wallis write:

One of the most constant features of the symbolism of the Lambeth books from America onwards is the association of the imagery of fire and flame with the spirit of ardent passion and desire, which is Orc. Sloss and Wallis may be right, but the problem is that fire and flame are also used as symbols for many other things as well. Albion's Angel has fires of his own; the Rintrah of Europe, hardly a figure of desire and passion, is described by Enitharmon as "king of fire" (pl. 8:8); in Urizen the dark and "quenchless" "flames of Eternal fury" (pl. 5:17-18) which drive Urizen to the rocks and deserts are not the same as the fires of Imagination which Los allows to decay (pl. 13:44), and neither are synonymous with Orc's flames of desire; in Europe Marathu-Vorcyon produces "flames of soft delusion"; the flames of America plates 12:8-12 and 14:1 appear to be

3Ibid. I, 45.

4America, pl. 3:2.
images of the terrific; and in *The Song of Los*, plate 6:20, the "fires" which the spider-kings call down upon the city do not appear to be symbolic at all.

The problems of interpretation can be serious. There is an agreement among critics that Ahania is desire, but the consensus excludes Bloom, who thinks she is a wisdom goddess, the "mind's pleasure," and Schorer, who suggests that she is the pleasure of self-contemplative reason. One hardly feels confident with the book if he can make only a tentative identification of its heroine. When difficulties of identification do not imperil understanding of an entire work, they sometimes tease us annoyingly. Ahania's lament is full of sexual symbolism borrowed from *The Song of Solomon*. If Urizen is reason and Ahania is desire, then sexual union of the two symbolizes organic union of reason and desire. So far so good. But when we examine specific symbols, confidence vanishes. We wonder about the referents of the "sons of eternal joy," and "daughters of life," and the "babes of bliss" which these sons and daughters produce. Perhaps Blake is saying that individual thoughts and desires can unite in an exciting union to produce "forms sublime," visions of a "World in a Grain of Sand" and "Eternity in an hour." But perhaps not. The phrases

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5 Bloom, pp. 190-91; Schorer, p. 240. Percival (p. 25) and Sloss and Wallis (II, 127) agree that she is desire.
may be merely emotive, echoing their counterparts in *The Song of Solomon*. We do not have to know. But we wish we did.

These problems are part of Blake's mode. Only in regard to the main theme of a fall from unity and the need for an apocalypse do they sessen as his prophecies progress. As continuing problems they should not be minimized or excused. Certainly they are the major reason most students never give Blake a second try. And, in regard to the shifting symbolism, I see no reason to accept Frye's dictum that Blake's prophecies are difficult because it was impossible to make them simpler. 6 Nor can we legitimately assume that because Blake believed that the "Grand" was necessarily obscure to weak men, he purposely fogged the symbolism to make the writing grand. One does get the impression, however, that during the Lambeth period, at least, he was attempting to avoid the systematization that Swedenborg fell into and that this attempt may account in part for the shifting referents.

A just view of Blake's symbolism is best attained perhaps not by excusing its inadequacies but by recognizing its merits. These merits can be seen in two developments in the minor prophecies: one in the mytho-

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logical characterizations and the other in the conventional symbols. Before tracing the development of the former, I should like to mention two criticisms directed at them alone. The first, by Mark Schorer, is that Blake's giants are

totally devoid of the pictorial and particularized interest of the mythological figures of Spenser and Milton and Keats, all of whom we are made to feel as persons, or helped to visualize as creatures in a pageant, or both.7

Blake's giants are without doubt the most conspicuous element in his prophecies; if Schorer's criticism is valid, Blake's works are far from artistic successes. The second criticism, my own and of far less importance, is that several of the minor figures, such as the inconspicuous children of Enitharmon, are merely problematic to the reader and are thus a distraction from our major task of confronting the prophecy implicit in the major figures.

These criticisms are valid in regard to Blake's early mode, but not his mature one, and it is in answering these charges that we see the development of his method of characterization. This development is one that moves away from the historical figures toward a complete cast of giants, away from minor characters toward

7Schorer, p. 369.
complete focus on the major figures, and away from political history toward prophecy through the plight of these giants as persons. Three kinds of characters are found in the minor prophecies: historical figures, such as Washington and Paine; those whom we will inaccurately but handily call demigods, that is, the historical figures who appear in imaginative form, such as Albion's Angel; and the wholly mythic characters, or giants, such as Orc and Los. In America all three are equally important. In Europe and The Song of Los the historical figures are less important, while the giants increase in number and consequence. And in the final three books, Urizen, Ahania, and The Book of Los, only giants appear.

This movement is in the right direction. We noted in Chapter II that in The French Revolution Blake attempted prophecy through the idealization of historic figures and failed. The patriots represented in America are vestiges of that attempt and are useless. Apparently they are supposed to be heroic, but Washington's speech in plate 3 of America is flat, and the only action the patriots take is to stand "with their foreheads reared toward the east" in plate 9 and again in 12 and 14. Admittedly, in many situations merely to stand is to

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\[ ^8 \] Newton is the only historic figure named in Europe, and even he is mythologized. Chancellor Thurlow is unnamed but clearly referred to in plate 12.
accomplish much, but Blake never makes it clear in America that the patriots' stand is anything more than a dull-witted stubbornness. Somehow, "all rush together in the night" (pl. 14:19) to repulse the British attack, but "all" apparently refers to the "citizens." Washington and the other leaders never do anything but look. Accomplishing neither action nor prophecy through these figures, Blake wisely drops them.

Nor are the historic characters who are cast as villains, such as the Bard of Albion and Chancellor Thurlow, prophetically productive. These figures merely flee, turn to reptiles, or are plague-stricken. We get no characterization of them, only the fact of their demise. One can think of several things Blake could have done with these characters, like developing them into extensive exempla or using them as Milton used Adam and Eve when Michael shows these latter two the future course of history. But Blake developed none of these methods, perhaps because they would have detracted from the mythology which he was rapidly complicating with excellent results.

Though Blake drops the demigods, Albion's Angel and the spider-kings of Asia, for example, he might well have retained them, for their villainous laments are lyric and with their call for injustice and cruelty actually suggest their opposite, prophecy. Moreover,
in the Druid section of Europe, where Albion's Angel worships in the serpent temple, Blake achieves prophecy through symbolic act. The most obvious reason why he drops these characters is the one noted above for the historical villains: as Blake develops his universal myth, they simply have no place in it. But the shift to the giants of his universal myth may in part have been motivated by the fact that Blake could do little more with the demigods than he had done. The villainous laments produce prophecy only by voicing its opposite and when Blake engages the demigods in symbolic action, he does so at the expense of a fusion of myth and history that taxes the reader's credulity.

I mentioned that the development of the mythological characters involves a movement away from numerous secondary characters and a focus on a few giants. The greatest concentration of minor figures appears in Europe when Blake names seven of the children of Enitharmon in plates 6 and 8 and then enumerates her whole progeny in plates 13 and 14. Many of these characters also appear in The Song of Los. In Urizen, however, with the exception of the four elements, which are merely mentioned in plate 23, only the major characters, Urizen, Los, Enitharmon, Orc, and Fuzon, are represented. Ahania has only three characters, and with the exception of the females in the opening lines,
The Book of Los contains only two. Although Blake never completely abandons long lists of minor characters, the lists in his later works are usually mere enumerations of characters which need not be scrupulously identified by the reader. Moreover, these lists are widely scattered. One reads twenty-five "pages" of The Four Zoas before he confronts the list of the daughters of Albion, fifty-four more pages till he comes upon the daughters of Urizen, and twenty-six more till he finds an enumeration of the daughters of Zelopedad.

By far the most important strand in the development of Blake's mode of mythological characterization is his gradual humanization of the giants, his portrayal of their plight as beings who are mentally and emotionally vulnerable. To see this development we must examine a few of the characterizations, first some from the Orc books, then a few from the latter three minor prophecies. Orc, the major figure of the first three prophecies, is minutely and provocatively pictured in both the designs and poetry. In the designs of plates 2 and 10 of America we see Orc as a muscular lad with wild hair, first emerging from the ground in a sunburst and then a cruciform position amidst the flames of revolution. And we

It must be admitted, however, that the facial expressions in Blake's designs, though vivid, often appear inappropriate. Here in America plate 10, for instance, Orc wears an expression which combines perturbation and horror. He seems to be suffering, rather than initiating, revolution
Thus wipt the Angel voice & as he wipt the terrible blasts
Of trumpets, blow a loud alarm gords the Atlantic deep.
No trumpets answer: no reply of clarions or of flaks.
Silent the Colonies remain and refuse the loud alarm.

On those vast shady hills between America & Albions shore;
Now barried out by the Atlantic sea: called Atlantian hills;
Because from their bright summits you may pade to the golden worlds
An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emparnes.

Here on their magic seats, the thirteen Angels sat persverbld
For clouds from the Atlantic hover oer the solarn rod.

Figure 3
read that he is "red" and "hairy" (analogue of Esau?), with "wrists of fire" (pl. 2:1). Because he is ever producing lightning and flames, we assume that he is somehow incandescent. But we never feel Orc to be a person. The "terrible boy" never hopes, never fears, never loves, and never doubts. Climbing out of the earth in the designs, raping it in the text, and spreading flames in both, he is momentarily, but only momentarily, exciting. In The Song of Los mention is made of Orc's "thought-creating fires" (pl. 6:6). This aspect of Orc, though implicit ever since the America preludium and explicit in his declaration of the Apocalypse in plate 6, is underemphasized. Were it put to the fore, he would be of more interest. In The Four Zoas Orc is described with these lines:

Concenterd into Love of Parent Storgous Appetite Craving His limbs bound down mock at his chains for over them a flame Of circling fire unceasing plays to feed them with life & bring The virtues of the Eternal worlds ten thousand thousand spirits Of life lament around the Demon going forth & returning At his enormous call they flee into the heavens of heavens And back return with wine & food. Or dive into the deeps To bring the thrilling joys of sense to quell his ceaseless rage His eyes the lights of his large soul contract or else expand Contracted they behold the secrets of the infinite mountains
The veins of gold & silver & the hidden things of Vala
Whatever grows from its pure bud or breathes a fragrant soul
Expanded they behold the terrors of the Sun & Moon.

(p. 61:10-22)

Were these, or equivalent verses, present in the Orc books, we still might not be able to feel Orc to be a person, but we would at least want to identify with him as a thought-creator and life-giver.

In Europe Blake introduces Los, his first attempt in a prophecy to allow a fully imaginative figure to err, to develop, to be a person in the sense of being intellectually and emotionally vulnerable. Still, the puzzling thing about the Los of Europe is that we are never given enough information to identify him properly. From information given in the opening lines of Blake's next work, The Song of Los, we can surmise that he is the "Eternal Prophet" fallen to a lesser state. But without this retroactive identification (which may be wrong) we would be quite confused. Blake boldly announces in plate 3:7 that Los is "possessor of the moon," but we are left to wonder what the moon signi-

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10 Actually the "shadowy daughter" of the America preludium has these qualities of personhood. The preludiums are consistently more advanced in prophetic mode than are the prophecies themselves.
fied for Blake. In plate 3:8 we learn that he has "num'rous sons" with "bright fiery wings." Erdman may be right in saying that Los is Blake here and his "sons" are his prophecies, but this reading cannot be supported from the text of Europe alone. In plate 4 we find Los to be a Bacchic figure, calling for instruments, "nourishing sweets of earth," "the sparkling wine of Los," laughter, and "lucky hours." And, he is glad that Urthona is resting and Orc is bound. From information given in the Preludium to The Song of Los we should say that he is the Eternal Prophet out for a weekend of gaiety. The next time we see him (pl. 15:9-11) he has suddenly become a political prophet who calls "all his sons to the strife of Blood." Whether his sudden awakening is a response to the rise of the apocalyptic sun (pl. 14:37) or from some other cause, we can only guess. Thus, the Los of Europe is obscurely drawn and motivated, but he represents Blake's first attempt, in

11He could have been thinking in terms of the nine spheres of Dionysius, and thus Los would be the regent of all that is "sublunary," dirty, and prone to evil; or he may have seen the moon as the conventional symbol of love and lyric poetry; or, again, he could have had some personal, idiosyncratic meaning in mind. Blake is not consistent in his use of the word. In Jerusalem plate 24:10 we read that the moon fled Albion's loins, and it thus should be associated with love. But as Hazard Adams has pointed out, Blake sometimes associated the moon with Tharmas and the breast, and thus, not love, but power would be the referent. [Hazard Adams, William Blake: A Reading of the Shorter Poems (Seattle, 1963, p. 40)].
a prophecy, to present a giant who has human fraility.

The Enitharmon of Europe is far more intriguingly drawn than is Los. She is a type (as Blake saw Chaucer's pilgrims to be various types\textsuperscript{12}), in this case the apotheosis of motherhood as an evil. As described in plates 6 and 8 she is against sexual spontaneity and for "allegorized" religion. In calling her children she reveals herself as the blind mother who encourages their vices as virtues: "bring the lovely jealous Ocalythron" and "Palamabron horned priest." She is portrayed as delighting in her daughters' materialism and coquetry (plate 14), loves seeing her children misbehave ("sport"), and weeps when the apocalyptic sun rises to end their revelry. In personifying Mary and the whole 1800 years of Christian history as a kind of Belinda-become-mother, older but no deeper, Enitharmon is, for Blake's prophetic purposes, a successful creation. Because she is demonstrably evil, however, we do not identify with her and therefore do not apply the implicit prophetic comment to ourselves.

In the final three prophecies Blake becomes more effective in his mythological characterizations. Fuzon is vigorously pictorialized in the text, and there is no character in the language comparable to him. He

\textsuperscript{12}Descriptive Catalogue, p. 9.
appears to be Apollo and Elijah combined:

1: Fuzon, on a chariot iron-wing'd
On spiked flames rose; his hot visage
Flam'd furious! sparkles his hair & beard
Shot down his wide bosom and shoulders.
On clouds of smoke rages his chariot
And his right hand burns red in its cloud
Moulding into a vast globe...13

If he ever was otherwise we do not know it, and in the
very next stanza he hurls invective against his father:

2: Shall we worship this Demon of smoke,
Said Fuzon, this abstract non-entity
This cloudy God seated on waters
Now seen, now obscur'd; King of sorrow?
(pl. 2:10-13)

This is no sooner said than he sends a bolt of fire
through his father's loins, separating the man from his
lust. For a time Fuzon, in an echo of Exodus, chapter
13, serves as a pillar of fire to the lost of Egypt
wandering in the wilderness, but just thirty-six lines
later he becomes what he rebelled against, unlooses his
tigers, proclaims himself God, and is immediately slain
by Urizen. Fuzon's presence on stage is far too brief,
especially since only three lines are devoted to his
transformation to tyrant, but he is the first humanly
vulnerable mythological characterization in the minor
prophecies whom we can identify with. In describing

13 Ahania, pl. 2:1-7.
Fuzon, Blake does exactly what Schorer says Blake does not do: he vividly pictures a character we feel to be a person. Unlike the Enitharmon of Europe, Fuzon is attractive, even though vicious, and in his desire to fulfill himself in the face of a restraining parent, in his common human error or becoming what he rebelled against, and in his suffering crucifixion for that crime, we feel ourselves one with him. In so far as we do, prophecy occurs, for our sentiments are amended accordingly. In 1795 the French Revolution had become what it rebelled against, and in twenty years would be defeated for its error. The prophetic possibilities implicit in the character, both personal and political, were great.

The Los of the final three minor prophecies is far more successfully drawn than the Los of Europe. Admittedly the descriptions of his movements are unsuccessful. In Urizen, plates 6-8, he weeps, howls, and is both "frightened" and in a "dismal stupor" at the same time. Undoubtedly Blake meant him to appear demonic, but Los's leaping about howling merely makes him appear like a monkey. We do get an intriguing picture of his mind and of the creation of the universe as a failure of Imagination. Being frightened at the sight of the fallen Urizen, Los carefully binds the changes that occur. In terror he finally shrinks from his task.
(pl. 13:20), yields to pity rather than firing his Imagination (pl. 13:51), and is thus divided. The other Eternals eventually shut themselves off from him, and he, like Urizen, becomes an oppressor, eventually enchaining his son, Orc. Blake has now created a mythological characterization of Imagination. The prophetic possibilities are obvious.

Ahania is the most successful of Blake's early characterizations. He does not describe her plight, but instead, as with the shadowy daughter and Enitharmon, allows Ahania to characterize herself through dramatic monologue. All we have is her lamenting voice, but this is all we need. She is desire condemned as Sin by the Intellect and forced to wander on the edges of existence, ever longing for the lost, golden days when she was in union with her mate. In her we can see ourselves as yearners shut out by an Intellect which is the less for our exile. The whole is exquisite, and insofar as we enter the drama, prophecy takes place.

As Fuzon is a prophetic advance over the Orc of the first three prophecies, the Los of the latter three prophecies is a development over the Los of Europe, and Ahania is a more productive characterization than is the Enitharmon of Europe, so we can see Blake's growing competence in his successive treatments of Urizen in these minor prophecies. Urizen is thoroughly pictured
in the designs, usually as an old man with a long white beard and occasionally a halo, and in the poetry of America (pl. 16:2ff) he is vividly pictured as a weeping frost king. But in the Orc books we get no picture of his mind. He merely acts as a law-giver. In the Books of Urizen and Los, on the other hand, we see his torment and pathos. The emotional climax of Urizen comes in plate 13 when Urizen eternally locks himself in a westward posture, doomed to see only the material, while the Eternal World of Vision lives on behind him:

12. Enraged & stifled with torment
He threw his right Arm to the north
His left Arm to the south
Shooting out in anguish deep,
And his Feet stampd the nether Abyss
In trembling & howling & dismay.
And a seventh Age passed over:
And a state of dismal woe. (pl. 13:12-19)

The climax to The Book of Los comes in the last stanza when Urizen is bound "In fierce torment" to the sun which Los has fashioned. In Ahania Desire bereft of Intellect was left to wander alone and be eternally frustrated; in The Book of Los Intellect, tyrannically divorcing itself from Imagination, is eventually glued to a material universe, able to perceive and abstract from it, but

Three times he is pictured in other ways: In Urizen, plate 8, as a skeleton in embryo position, in Urizen, plate 11, as a clothed skeleton, and in Ahania, plate 5, as a younger (thirty to forty year old) man, wounded in the neck and with a yellow beard.
Figure 4.
unable to achieve Vision of the better world he remembers and longs for:

9: Till his Brain in a rock, & his Heart
In a Fleshy slough formed four rivers
Obscuring the immense Orb of fire
Flowing down into night; till a Form
Was completed, a Human Illusion
In darkness and deep clouds involvd.
(pl. 5:52-57)

We should note that at the end of The Book of Los, Los is self-satisfied at the sham world he has created. Urizen, on the other hand, gets nothing from the fall but eternal torment.

In Ahania, to highlight Urizen's pathos and ours, Blake gives us a picture of what Urizen once was. We get the entire description through Ahania in a dramatic self-characterization speech that can be read on at least three levels, the agricultural, the sexual, and that of mental creativity. Ahania remembers Urizen as having been sweaty, lusty, and a sower of "eternal science":

12: Then thou with thy lap full of seed
With thy hand full of generous fire
Walked forth from the clouds of morning
On virgins of springing joy,
On the human soul to cast
The seed of eternal science.

13: The sweat poured down thy temples
To Ahania return'd in evening

15 Along with Damon (William Blake, p. 360) I assume that by "eternal science" Blake means knowledge and that he is speaking honorifically of it.
Having abandoned his historical, quasi-historical, and minor characters, Blake concentrates, in the final three minor prophecies, on a few fully imaginative yet human mythical characterizations whom we can identify with to the advantage of prophecy.

Blake also complicates his minor prophecies in his experimentation with the conventional symbols. The number and diversity of traditional symbols used in the Orc books is great: geographical, directional, astronomical, bodily, natural, seasonal, animal, and metallic. I can find no family of symbols present in Blake's later works which is not present in the Orc books. But one finds no pattern or development in their use in these early experiments. In the succeeding three prophecies, however, there is a noticeable rise in the number and frequency of industrial symbols. The word "iron," for instance, occurs only five times in the Orc books, but seven times in Urizen and four in Ahania. The word "brass" occurs only once in each of the Orc books but five times in Urizen. And we find a similar pattern for the words "rivet," "wheels," "bellows," "furnaces," "gins," "hammer," and "anvil," and last five of which do not appear at all in the Orc books. The
Industrial Revolution had been going on all through Blake's lifetime, and I find no special development of it in 1794 (the date of Urizen) that would suddenly increase Blake's consciousness of it. But beginning with The Book of Urizen there is a rapid rise in the use of industrial symbolism in Blake's works till in Milton he could write:

Loud sounds the Hammer of Los, loud turn the Wheels of Enitharmon
Her Looms vibrate with soft affections, weaving the Web of Life
Out from the ashes of the Dead; Los lifts his iron Ladles
With molten ore: he heaves the iron cliffs in his rattling chains
From Hyde Park to the Alms-houses of Mile-end & old Bow.

(I, 6:27-31)

As Blake begins to increase the industrial symbolism, he also begins to focus on a few conventional symbols which can be used to parody other systems, usually the Judeo-Christian, and which have imagistic qualities that make them prophetically productive. Having carefully selected a few of these symbols, Blake composes a plot line with them, much as a musician composes a tune with the five-tone Doric scale. The few symbols out of which the plot is constructed necessarily keep recurring in different patterns and are ever before the reader. In order to see this careful selecting and interlocking of symbols let us examine plates 3 and 4
of Ahania, taking special note of the words "serpent," "bow," "rock," and "tree." Below I quote all of plate 3:

1: But the forehead of Urizen gathering,
And his eyes pale with anguish, his lips
Blue & changing; in tears and bitter
Contrition he prepar'd his Bow,

2: Form'd of Ribs: that in his dark solitude
When obscur'd in his forests fell monsters,
Rush'd down like floods from his mountains
In torrents of mud settling thick
With Eggs of unnatural production
Forthwith hatching; some howl'd on his hills
Some in vales; some aloft flew in air

3: Of these: an enormous dread Serpent
Scaled and poisonous horned
Approach'd Urizen even to his knees
As he sat on his dark rooted Oak.

4: With his horns he push'd furious.
Great the conflict & great the jealousy
In cold poisons: but Urizen smote him

5: First he poison'd the rocks with his blood
Then polish'd his ribs, and his sinews
Dried; laid them apart till winter;
Then a Bow black prepar'd: on this Bow,
A poisoned rock plac'd in silence:
He utter'd these words to the Bow:

6: O Bow of the clouds of secresy!
O nerve of that lust form'd monster!
Send this rock swift, invisible thro'
The black clouds, on the bosom of Fuzon

7: So saying, In torment of his wounds,
He bent the enormous ribs slowly;
A circle of darkness! then fixed
The sinew in its rest: then the Rock
poisonous source! place'd with art,
lifting difficult
Its weighty bulk: silent the rock lay.

8: While Fuzon his tygers unloosing
Thought Urizen slain by his wrath.
I am God. said he, eldest of things!
Sudden sings the rock, swift & invisible
On Fuzon flew, enter'd his bosom;
His beautiful visage, his tresses,
That gave light to the mornings of heaven
Were smitten with darkness, deform'd
And outstretched on the edge of the forest.

But the rock fell upon the Earth,
Mount Sinai, in Arabia.

Besides being merely a weapon, the bow is a symbol
of Urizen's powerful destructiveness. As such it is
particularly forceful because it has often been used in
Western literature as a symbol of something beneficial.
Heraclitus used the bow as a symbol of the harmony of the
opposing forces of the universe; it was the weapon of
both the Alexandrian and Ovidian cupids; and it could be
used, as Blake used it in the Milton hymn and Jerusalem,
plate 97, as a symbol of the war of salvation. To
intensify further the evil of Urizen's bow, Blake makes
it black, and we read that, when drawn, it formed a
"circle of blackness," probably symbolizing the revolv­
ing heavens of the dead Newtonian world, our imprison­
ment in a natural cycle of life and death, and the
circular character of our perceptual life as viewed by
eighteenth-century epistemology, which describes us as
desiring only what we perceive and thus existing in the
"same dull round over again." 16 In line 26 Blake manages

16 Cf. Europe, pl. 10:23, the Europe Preludium, and
"There is No Natural Religion" [a].
to parody one of the few bows found in the Bible. That is, in Urizen's invocation to his weapon, "O Bow of the clouds of secresy," Blake is apparently satirizing the bow which the secretive Nobodaddy (as Blake saw the Old Testament God) put in the heavens in repentance for his petulant slaughter of all but his favorites, the Noah family.

Blake has done much with the bow symbol here, but he can and does do more, for the bow had to be made of something, and in describing its construction Blake gets a chance to present his next key symbol, the serpent from whose ribs the bow was built. The ribs themselves are symbolic in that bone in Blake represents the dead, hard, opaque, fallen world of natural existence. The serpent echoes all serpents from Genesis to The Faerie Queene and symbolizes evil, as they do. The particular form of evil represented is revealed in the serpent's paternity; it was hatched from an egg spawned in the mud of Urizen's "dire Contemplations." I do not think I am over-interpreting to note that since the serpent is a product of Urizen's reasoning, his contemplations

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17 Cf. the spine of Urizen in The Book of Los, pl. 5:14,46 and note that Urizen's skull is called a rock in B. of L, pl. 5:52.

18 One wonders whether or not these mucky, egg-ridden contemplations echo The Faerie Queene, 1:1:20 where Error's vomit is full of "loathy frogs and toads."
are thus imaged as separate entities that threaten him. True, he has the power to slay these serpent-thoughts, but he is evidently ever producing the ratiocinative muck that spawns more serpents.

As Blake skillfully interlocks the bow and serpent symbols, so he artfully passes to the rock, the bow's projectile and the next significant symbol. The rock is an excellent example of the way Blake learned to select and focus attention on natural symbols with imagistic qualities and literary associations that make them especially fit for prophecy. Blake tells us the referent of "rock" in line 46 where he says it fell on Sinai. Its meaning is clear. The sources of its force as symbol, however, are complex. Because rocks are opaque, often ugly, painfully hard, silent, and inert, the image speaks to four senses. In being opaque, of course, they are antithetical to Vision. Moreover, the symbol has painful literary associations. Violators of the legal codes of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy were stoned to death, and a list of the crimes calling for this punishment must have made the stone of the law sound particularly hard to Blake. The naming of God, gathering sticks of the Sabbath, enticing to idolatry, disobedience to parents, being discovered on the wedding night to have been unchaste, and adultery are a few of
them.\textsuperscript{19} There is parody in the use of the symbol, for according to \textit{Matthew}, chapter 16:18, as we remember, the Church was supposedly built on a rock.

The whole scene takes place in Urizen's forests and much of it under an oak which is eventually called "the accursed Tree of Mystery" (pl. 4:6). Forests in Blake, like Dante's and Spenser's, are mazes of error.\textsuperscript{20} Because many varieties grow to be dark and thick (pl. 3:16, 63) and because it is always hard, we probably should assume that the oak is a particularly persistent and insidious form of error. In plate 4 Blake indicates the evil character of Urizen's oak by revealing its origins, and in the process again uses the symbol of the rock, this time making the whole narrative an attack on Lockean epistemology. When Urizen "shrank away" from the Eternals, his senses "petrified" his "redounding fancies." His tears watered the resulting rock causing it to produce this tree and eventually "an endless labyrinth of woe!" As a symbol of evil, the word "tree" is prophetically unsuccessful, for trees have unpleasant connotations only if one wants or needs cleared land. But as a tool of parody it cuts sharply. Fuzon is

\begin{itemize}
\item Bloom notes this, p. 133.
\end{itemize}
hung on the "accursed Tree of Mystery" (pl. 4:6). The Old Testament trees of life and death and of the knowledge of good and evil, the cross, Christian Doctrine (since Paul often speaks of individual doctrines as "mysteries"), and perhaps the Church (through the parable of the mustard seed) are all indicted. From a multitude of symbols Blake moves toward the careful selection and use of a few which gain him multiple prophetic meanings.

Throughout the minor prophecies Blake appropriates Biblical symbols and deftly manipulates them for his purposes. His use of Biblical apocalyptic symbols in Europe is especially instructive. In the final lines of the poem Blake simply borrows the wine press, fire, divine Wrath, blood, and thunder of Revelation and enlists them to describe the Apocalypse he sees in contemporary political revolutions:

But terrible Orc, when he beheld the morning in the east,
Shot from the heights of Enitharmon;
And in the vineyards of red France appear'd the light of his fury.

The sun glow'd fiery red!
The furious terrors flew around!
On golden chariots raging, with red wheels dropping with blood;
The Lions lash their wrathful tails!
The Tigers couch upon the prey & suck the ruddy tide:
And Enitharmon groans & cries in anguish and dismay.
Then Los arose his head he reard in snaky thunders clad:
And with a cry that shook all nature to the utmost pole,
Call'd all his sons to the strife of blood.

But sometimes he uses them ironically, as when the degenerate Los crowns Orc, his newborn son, with "garlands of the ruddy vine" (pl. 4:12), unaware that Orc will someday tread the grapes of Wrath in France. And, of course, in his most conspicuous use of a Biblical apocalyptic symbol, the joke about Newton blowing the trumpet, Blake uses the symbol satirically.

The Newton joke is not fully appreciated without some knowledge of the importance of the trumpet symbol in both the Old and New Testament. Among the ancient Hebrews trumpets called the community to attention. They announced the beginning and end of the Sabbath, the commencement of worship, the holy days of the year, and in the liturgy of the Temple, they celebrated the burning of sacrifices. Trumpets were especially prominent in the celebration of days of great joy, such as the day of the new moon, the Feast of Tabernacles, New Year's Day, and the day a new king was anointed. Whenever the covenant between God and his people was renewed, trumpets sounded. Moreover, trumpets had been


crucial weapons in at least two of Israel's most memorable victories, that of Gideon over the Midianites and Joshua's successful siege of Jericho.\footnote{23}{Judges, chap. 7; Joshua, chap. 6.}

But as trumpets meant joy and victory for Israel, so they also sounded a warning, for the fearful day of judgment was to be announced with trumpets, and Amos, Zephaniah, and Joel all warned that those trumpets signaled a day of wrath as well as of joy.\footnote{24}{Amos, chap. 3; Zephaniah, chap. 1; Joel, chap. 2.} And, as Earl Wasserman has observed, the trumpet easily became a symbol of the prophet, for the Hebrews saw God as breathing his prophecies through man.\footnote{25}{Earl R. Wasserman, "Collins' 'Ode on the Poetical Character,'" \textit{ELH}, XXXIV (1967), 111 nt. 32.} Thus, the trumpet blast was perhaps the most significant of all sounds to the people Israel, for it called them to attention before Yahweh and at once reminded them of their joy under a continuing covenant with him, recalled their glory in former military victories, signified prophecy, and warned them of the frightful day of the Lord when the unfaithful would be punished.

I mention the Old Testament heritage because in appropriating the symbol, the New Testament writers were not attempting to tell us how to predict or identify
the Day of Judgment but were informing us with "what human, historical experiences the Day is to be associated." Jesus, Paul, and John all use the symbol, the most extensive use occurring in John's vision of the Apocalypse being ushered in by seven angels blowing seven trumpets (Rev. chap. 8-11). At the blowing of the first six trumpets the wrath of God is unleashed destroying all forces of evil in fearful cataclysms and gruesome plagues. But at the blast of the seventh, there is untold joy for the faithful, as Christ begins his reign on earth. For the pious literalist the trumpet has always been the symbol of the day when a thousand slights will be compensated for, innumerable injustices will be righted, and his own good intentions will at last be divinely recognized and publicly acclaimed.

It is in this Biblical context that we must see Blake's joke on Newton. The satire is directed both at Newton's mechanical interpretation of the universe and his commentary on Revelation. The trumpet he blows, as opposed to the silver trumpets God commanded Moses to fashion, is of iron, signifying the ugly, cold, and hard universe his Principia describes. And while the seven trumpets of Revelation awaken the righteous dead to resurrection and announce the punishment of all oppress-

26Minear, p. 197.

27Matthew 24:29-31; I Thess. 4:16; I Cor. 15:51-52.
sors, Newton's blast brings winter, kills the "Angelick hosts," and awakens the oppressive queen, Enitharmon.

In Urizen, Chapter IX, Blake creates symbols out of Biblical images in order to attack the Old Testament tradition and universalize his own myth at the same time:

1. Then the Inhabitants of those Cities:
Felt their Nerves change into Marrow
And hardening Bones began
In swift diseases and torments,
In throbings & shootings & grindings
Thro' all the coasts; till weaken'd
The Senses inward rush'd shrinking,
Beneath the dark net of infection.

2. Till the shrunken eyes clouded over
Discernd not the woven hipocrisy
But the streaky slime in their heavens
Brought together by narrowing perceptions
Appeard transparent air; for their eyes
Grew small like the eyes of a man
And in reptile forms shrinking together
Of seven feet stature they remained

3. Six days they, shrunk up from existence
And on the seventh day they rested
And they bless'd the seventh day, in sick hope:
And forgot their eternal life

4. And their thirty cities divided
In the form of a human heart
No more can they rise at will
In the infinite void, but bound down
To earth by their narrowing perceptions
they lived a period of years
Then left a noisom body
To the jaws of devouring darkness

5. 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
Blake here pokes fun at the Old Testament and the whole condition of man in a universe as described by Locke and Newton. The thirty-cities symbol is from a number of passages in Judges, chapters 10, 12, and 14, II Samuel, chapter 23, and I Chronicles, chapter 11. The number thirty is common in the Old Testament: several Judges had thirty sons or grandsons, Samuel had thirty companions, and David had thirty "mighty men" who helped him to power. Moreover, in Judges, chap. 10:3-5, Jair, the second in a line of five inconsequential Judges, has thirty sons who ride on thirty asses and possess thirty cities. The verses concerning Jair are typical of several accounts in Judges which follow the formula: X judged Israel for Y number of years, and he died. These accounts are uninspiring even to Bible lovers, and to those not entirely respectful of the Old Testament they are humorous, for they imply that dying was the most significant thing these Judges ever did. Thus, in focusing on the thirty-cities image, Blake calls attention to some of the most literarily unappealing narratives in the Bible.

But Blake also turns the image of the cities into an emblem of our existence in a Locke-Newton world. To
Blake, most Christians thought of the Bible as a history of "salvation" in which God out of His love creates man and his world. Man falls far short of God's expectations and thus brings expulsion from God's presence and death upon himself. But God, again out of His love, offers man laws for guidance and finally a Savior for more guidance and comfort. The fact that man should invent such a fiction as the above and then talk himself into believing it till he no longer perceived its hypocrisy was the final irony for Blake. To a man of Vision, stories like Judges, chap. 10:3-5, inadvertently tell the truth: while man once created mental forms in Eden, he now simply possesses cities, invents laws of prudence and a mysterious Law-giver, and dies. The six days of creation were in reality six days of shrinking, and all man's Lockean epistemology now allows him to see are his material possessions and his tombstone.

But in pointing out the merits of Blake's symbolism, we must not blind ourselves to its faults. I noted earlier some general problems implicit in Blake's symbolism. One such difficulty is an overlapping of the characterizations, a problem which prompts the larger question of how logically precise we have a right to expect prophetic poetry especially apocalyptic poetry, to be. The overlap is especially apparent with Urizen and Enitharmon, in that both are responsible for the
legalistic, "allegorical" religion of eighteenth-century England. In America Enitharmon is merely mentioned (pl. 7:4), while Urizen appears twice, once as author of the decalogue and once as the teary-eyed frost king who literally snows under the hitherto fiery Orc (pls. 8 and 16). In Europe, on the other hand, Enitharmon is the dominant religious oppressor, stamping with "solid form" the shadowy daughter's "vig'rous progeny of fires" and establishing her 1800-year imposition of "female," anti-sexual, delusive, and materialistic religion.28 Significantly, Urizen is mentioned only in plate 12 where he "preaches" briefly to the youth of England. In The Song of Los both promulgate law through a third agent: Urizen is presented as giving his "Laws and Religion" through the children of Los and Enitharmon (pls. 3:8-9 and 4:13-14). The overlap appears again in Urizen. The "Eternal Priest" is described as the giver of

Laws of peace, of love, of unity:
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness.
Let each choose one habitation:
His ancient infinite mansion:
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law. (pl. 4:34-40)

But later Los circles Enitharmon with fire, and she bears an "enormous race," apparently of "sons of Har," or Old

28 Europe, pls. 6:5; 14:1-8.
Testament prophets, as in *The Song of Los*. And one plate later Urizen is the law giver again, complaining that his children cannot keep his "iron laws" one moment. The "Net of Religion" which he spreads, being "cold" and "female," sounds analogous to Enitharmon's as described in *Europe*.

*The Book of Urizen* presents another overlap of the roles of Urizen and Enitharmon. In plate 13:48 Enitharmon is born when Los pities Urizen, and, indeed, is his pity (pl. 19:1). But pity had always been the hallmark of Urizen. When first described at length in *America* (pl. 16:4ff), he is seen as a great weeper, and here in Urizen his damp, cold pity is so profuse that it precipitates into a "Web" of religion which trails after him wherever he goes. This overlap may stem from the fact that Los and Urizen are counterparts, and pity, at some point in their fall, is self-pity, destructive and hypocritical. But pity is ambiguously presented as the trademark of each.

The problem such overlapping raises is how logically consistent we should expect prophetic poetry to be. We know that to go through the text picking out minor contradictions, overlaps, and inconsistencies is to be "Urizenic" about that which is directed toward the Imagination. In ascribing legalistic religion to Urizen, Blake indicts the Old Testament Nobodaddy-type
god which he thought was the invention of a fallen Imagination; in naming Enitharmon as the source of religious legalism he emphasizes its feminine quality; and in making the sons of Los the immediate agents in its promulgation he indicts the Old Testament prophets and what he regarded as the fallen state of prophetic poetry in general. Thus, the overlap appears to be at least as productive as it is troublesome. But such inconsistencies are not always as easy to accept. There is nothing helpful in calling Orc the "First born of Enitharmon" in Europe, plate 48, and then, just eighteen lines later, mentioning Rintrah as Enitharmon's "eldest born." Such oversights merely remind us of Blake's statements that "Vision is determinate and perfect," that "Grandeur of Ideas is founded on Precision of Ideas," and that "Correct & Definite Outline" is essential in Art. 29 When reading Blake we always have to be on our guard against Urizenic interpretations on the one hand and, on the other, against a tendency to excuse carelessness on the grounds that his symbolism is only apparent rather than substantive.

A study of the mythological characterizations in the minor prophecies reveals two dramatic failures which

29 Annotations to The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds, pp. 48, 50, xix.
are puzzling. One is the lack of significant speeches by Los and Urizen. As we have seen, the dramatic monologues of the females are prophetically productive in that they allow us to identify with the plight of the speakers as persons. No such speeches exist for Los and Urizen, the characters from whom we would most like to have them. The Song of Los is apparently supposed to be just what the title indicates, Los's own song; but it is part of the Orc series and was written before Blake clearly saw that the problem of a fallen world exists primarily in the psyche and has to be dealt with there. Los does not express his vulnerability in his Song. In contrast to this, in The Four Zoas he laments:

Why can I not Enjoy thy beauty Lovely Enitharmon
When I return from clouds of Grief in the wandering Elements
Where thou in thrilling joy in beaming summer loveliness
Delectable reposest ruddy in my absence flaming with beauty
Cold pale in sorrow at my approach trembling at my terrific
Forehead & eyes thy lips decay like roses in the spring
How art thou Shrunken thy grapes that burst in summers vast Excess
Shut up in little purple covering faintly bud & die
Thy olive trees that pourd down oil upon a thousand hills
Sickly look forth & scarcely stretch their branches to the plain
Thy roses that expanded in the face of glowing morn
Hid in a little silken veil scarce breathe & faintly shine
Thy lilies that gave light what time the morning
looked forth
Hid in the Vales faintly lament & no one hears
their voice.
All things beside the woful Los enjoy the delights
of beauty. (pp. 81:23-82:4)

Had we such a speech in the minor prophecies, we might
better be able to feel Los's plight in them. Again in
The Four Zoas, Urizen bewails his fall:

Ah how shall Urizen the King submit to this dark
mansion
Ah how is this! Once on the heights I stretched
my throne sublime
The mountains of Urizen once of silver where the
sons of wisdom dwelt
And on whose tops the Virgins sang are rocks of
Desolation

My fountains once the haunt of Swans now breed
the scaly tortoise
The houses of my harpers are become a haunt of
crows
The gardens of wisdom are become a field of
horrid graves
And on the bones I drop my tears & water them
in vain. (p. 63:24-31)

The Book of Urizen has no such speech and needs one.
That Blake went on in The Four Zoas to write such
speeches, thereby more fully dramatizing, humanizing,
and mythologizing the giants, is an indication of his
developing conception of the prophetic mode.

There is also a dramatic failure in the omission
of scenes showing the state from which the giants fall.
In brief, there is no scene corresponding to Book IV of
Paradise Lost. Far more than merely intensifying the
tragedy, such a scene would of necessity give us a view of the giants in their attractive state and thereby aid us in identifying with them. Schorer writes that the mythological characterizations are not pictured so that we feel them to be persons. I hope I have answered this charge by demonstrating that in his mature mode, that is, from Urizen on, Blake presents his giants as intellectually and emotionally vulnerable, that we can thus identify with them in their plight, and that it is when we do so that prophecy occurs. A claim could be made, however, that with the exception of Fuzon, the characterizations are never presented in such a way that we wish to identify with them. This problem of a lack of attractiveness in Blake’s giants is great, and one wonders if this is the central problem Schorer felt. Blake eventually presents his giants in their redeemed states at the end of both The Four Zoas and Jerusalem. In Night the Seventh of the former we see the following picture of the redeemed Los:

Enitharmon spread her beaming locks upon the wind & said
O Lovely terrible Los wonder of Eternity O Los my defence & guide
Thy works are all my joy. & in thy fires my soul delights
If mild they burn in just proportion & in secret might
And silence build their day in shadow of soft clouds & dews
Then I can sigh forth on the winds of Golgonooza piteous forms
That vanish again into my bosom but if thou my Los
Wilt in sweet moderated fury. fabricate forms
sublime
Such as the piteous spectres may assimilate them­selves into
They shall be ransoms for our Souls that we may
live. (p. 90:15-24)

Such pictures are needed at the beginning of Blake's poems.

More important still, there is a question of whether or not Blake has touched upon the most common experience of a fall from Imagination in his description of how and why Los falls. In Urizen Los serves the other Eternals by keeping watch over the fallen Intellect. Frightened at the changes he sees (pl. 8:2,9), he begins binding them. In fear and chagrin (pls. 12:20; 13:22) he eventually shrinks from his task and immediately his fires fade. As his fires "decay," he closes with Urizen, pities him, embraces his pity, thus producing Orc, and is then sealed off from the other Eternals and Eternity. There is nothing to indicate that Los could have stopped his fall once he had shrunk from his task and banked his fires. His primary mistake, then, was submitting to the fear and chagrin which first caused him to shirk his task. Blake appears to be saying that as men of Imagination we do not have the staying power to withstand perpetual confrontation with a Urizen-ruled world.
In *The Book of Los* we find a different account of the fall. While he is "compell'd to watch Urizen's shadow," "Flames of desire" rage through the heavens firing Los to activity. In impatience with his passive watching (pl. 4:15) he rends the rock of eternity. The consequent collapse of Urizen's world removes his own support, and he too falls. While falling, he starts to contemplate (pl. 4:40) and thus creates his own fallen world, a shoddy thing, apparently better than Urizen's but fallen all the same. Quite unlike the shrinking Los of *Urizen*, we have here a fatally wrathful Los.

The problem presented by these seemingly conflicting accounts is not that they contradict each other, for they probably do not. The exact way in which each of us, as men of Imagination, falls may differ, and fear and wrath are close enough companions to have a common root. Moreover, the fall of the Imagination may be a multifaceted thing which cannot be exhausted by even several divergent accounts. But the question is whether or not Blake has hit the most common experience in either *Urizen* or *The Book of Los*. Perhaps George Santayana has come closer to that experience in the following account:

*For Imagination... seeks to reduce herself to conformity with existence, in the hope of vindicating her nominal authority at the price of some concessions. She begins to feign that she*
demanded nothing but what she finds. Thus she loses her honesty and freedom and becomes a flatterer of things instead of the principle of their ideal correction. . . .

The imagery of prophetic poetry has often been described as being simple, traditional, and emotionally rather than visually precise. Excepting the extraordinarily graphic sections of America, the imagery of Blake's experimental prophecies fits this description in every respect. Its tradition is that of the Bible, and especially its apocalyptic verses, of Milton, and of the horrific sublime of both of these, as well as of Dante and northern myth. Actually, in employing the apocalyptic and the terrible, Blake was being voguish as well as traditional, for in their quest for a literature of sensibility John Dennis, Shaftesbury, Nathan Drake, Richard Hurd, Joseph Priestley, and Edmund Burke, to name only a few eighteenth-century critics, had rediscovered the aesthetic of Longinus and the emotional value of the grand and terrifying, even while Thomson, Young, Blair, Gray, and Macpherson were employing it in their poetry. Some critics saw this horrific


31 See Bishop Lowth, Praelectiones, XX, 65-69 and Murray Roston, pp. 60-72.
'sublime—the hideous, the obscure, the dark, the uncontrol­
ably powerful—as causing the reader to think of
the omnipotent creator-God who must stand behind such
power and who alone could save us from it; others
described the fear produced as the most powerful of all
emotions and something which necessarily "expands the
soul." Either way, the horrific sublime was seen as
redemptive and therefore prophetic.32

America presents a vivid picture of the American
Revolution as seen through Blake's Imagination. Plates
3 and 4 present the frame and backdrop within and
before which all but a few lines of the action take
place. What is pictured is the beginning of an apoca-
lypse over the Atlantic community. The Atlantic shore-
line of both continents, the erupting ocean below, and
the flaming sky above are the borders of the scene.
On the right Albion's angel "burns" in his military tent
high on the cliffs of England. The glow from the fires
of his camp extends up the arch of the sky and down to
the American shore. A bended bow is seen in the
heavens, and an iron chain descends from Albion's cliffs

32 For extensive studies of the horrific sublime in
eighteenth-century literature see Samuel H. Monk, The
Sublime (Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1960 (first pub. 1935)
Marjorie Hope Nicolson, Mountain Gloom and Mountain
Glory (Ithaca, N.Y., 1959), and Patricia Meyer Spacks,
across to America. On the left the American patriots stand on the "sultry sands," which are glowing with blood. The scene is not static: a blast from the sea splits an obscuring cloud and Albion's Angel is revealed to be a clashing, glowing-eyed dragon. And up from the "belching" ocean into the center of the picture, amidst great shooting veins and whirling wheels of blood, arises the figure at which all the other characters in the scene are looking aghast. It is a human form, "Intense! Naked!" and it is emerging with "myriads" of "cloudy terrors banners dark & towers" round its feet. All is smoke and fire; red and black are the dominant colors. This is a startlingly bizarre, but nevertheless clear and memorable, picture, as are the succeeding scenes which make up the remainder of the poem.

America reveals a special aspect of Blake's imagery which should be noted: the many images of vigorous motion. In plate 14, for instance, we are told that the red flame of Orc "folded roaring fierce" and the plagues "flew forth" from the clouds, "recoil'd!" and then "roll'd... back with fury." We see the Americans "fierce rushing... together," and the "scribe of Pensylvania [sic]" "casts" his pen to earth. Nor are these vigorous gestures and motions merely indicative of the apocalyptic struggle described in America. All Blake's prophecies are full of such images
of motion. The picture painted is one of action. In this regard we might note that the memorable scene presented in the closing lines of *The Song of Los* is successful largely because of the images of motion. Below I quote the lines, underscoring these images:

Forth from the dead dust rattling bones to bones
Join: shaking convuls'd the shivering clay breathes
And all flesh naked stands: Fathers and Friends;
Mothers & Infants; Kings and Warriors:

The Grave shrieks with delight, & shakes
Her hollow womb, & clasps the solid stem:
Her bosom swells with wild desire:
And milk & blood & glandous wine
In rivers rush & shout & dance,
On mountain, dale and plain. (pl. 7:31-40)

This imagery of vigorous motion is in the tradition of the horrific sublime, for both suddenness and uncontrolled power engender fear and thereby expand the soul. Much of the apocalyptic imagery here is direct from *Ezekiel*, chapter 37, and *Revelation*, chapter 14:14-20, and echoes the mortuary imagery of Blair's *The Grave*, Young's *Night Thoughts*, and Gray's *Elegy*.

I have noted that in the minor prophecies preliminary experimentation is done most often in *Europe* while *Urizen* embodies the full adoption of the mature mode. With the imagery, however, both the preliminary experimentation and adoption of mature mode take place

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in **Europe**. The fundamental change in the imagery is that it suddenly becomes largely nonrepresentational and emotive. Writing of chapter 7 of *The Song of Solomon*, where the Shulammite's neck is compared to an ivory tower and her nose to a tower of Lebanon, Murray Roston notes that although these images do not work on the visual plane, they do on the emotional one, for upon seeing such a tower the ancient oriental would have felt a sense of "the fulfillment of its purpose as a defence and stronghold against invasion" and would have felt "the same sense of completeness as when gazing at the neck of his beloved, formed perfectly in every line." And this, he says, is the way the imagery of prophetic poetry works. But we note that while the tower image is visually incongruous, it is at least visually representational. Blake's mature imagery, on the other hand, often cannot be pictured at all, but is purely emotive. Below I quote several lines from plate 14 of **Europe**, underscoring the nonrepresentational imagery:

Where is my lureing bird of Eden! Leutha silent love!
Leutha, the many colourd bow delights upon thy wings:
Soft soul of flowers Leutha!
Sweet smiling pestilence! I see thy blushing light:
Thy daughters many changing,
Revolve like sweet perfumes ascending 0 Leutha silken queen!

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*Roston, pp. 64-65.*
Where is the youthful Antamon, prince of the pearly dew.

O Antamon, why wilt thou leave thy mother Enitharmon?

Alone I see thee crystal form,

Floting upon the bosomd air:

With lineaments of gratified desire.

My Antamon the seven churches of Leutha seek thy love.

I hear the soft Oothoon in Enitharmons tents:

Why wilt thou give up womans secrecy my melancholy child?

Between two moments bliss is ripe:

O Theotormon robb'd of joy, I see thy salt tears flow

Down the steps of my crystal house.

Sothe & Thiralatha, secret dwellers of dreamful caves,

Arise and please the horrent fiend with your melodious songs.

Still all your thunders golden hoofd, & bind your horses black. (pl. 14:8-28)

A few lines later in plate 15:9 Los arises "in snaky thunders clad." It should be noted that these images are not only visually imprecise, but offer no exact sensations to any other sensory organs either. But they are emotionally precise, for Leutha described as the "soft soul of flowers" with daughters "many changing" stimulates in us the same emotions as those aroused by an ephemeral sexual temptress, which in fact Leutha is supposed to be, and Antamon imaged as "prince of the pearly dew," one who floats "upon the bosomd air / With lineaments of gratified desire" reminds us of the refreshment, pride, and narcissism we feel in sexual fulfillment, feelings appropriate to Antamon, who apparently is art seduced by Leutha and thus fallen into gross sensu-
ality. The "dreamful caves" and "thunders golden hoofd" of the musicians stir the same emotions in us as do soothing and marshal music respectively.

Europe is a convenient work in which to observe Blake's virtuosity with imagery. He makes frequent use of mythic multivalence, as for example in his imaging of 1800 years of Christian history as Enitharmon's sleep. The image is primarily visual: Christian history is pictured as a woman sleeping. But it also works on the aural plane: sleeping women make no noise—Christianity, according to Blake, has said nothing. More ingeniously, the image carries a tactile significance: sleeping women make no sexual responses—Christianity, for Blake, is sexually dead. And, quite subtly, the image suggests the disagreeable odor of the slept-in room. Primarily a visual image, it also stimulates three other senses. Many of Blake's lines carry a multitude of images, each of which works on a different sensory plane. Europe, plate 14:14, describes Leutha's daughters, who "Revolve like sweet perfumes ascending O Leutha silken Queen!" The line contains visual, olfactory, and tac—

35 Cf. Damon, William Blake, p. 364 and Erdman and Bloom, p. 818. "Crystal form," though nonrepresentational, is more associative than emotive. Since crystal is hard and reflective (actually refractive), Blake probably meant the image to remind us of Augustan art, which he saw as being unimaginative and merely reflective of the sham-world of Nature.
tile images. And Urizen, plate 5:3, describes the flames of eternal fury as "Sund'ring, dark'ning, thund'ring," thus providing images of motion, sight, and sound.

I have observed Blake's frequent use of images of motion in America and The Song of Los; in Europe we are especially aware of images of sound. The action of plate 12 presents the effects produced in England by the onset of the Apocalypse (the French Revolution). All action takes place amidst the howls of those tortured by the event mixed with the laughter of the sleeping Enitharmon, who delights in the oppressive Tory counteraction. Amidst these tortured howls and the cynical laughter one hears "hissings, shrieks & groans, & voices of despair" (line 34) as the fires of Orc "roll" around Albion's Guardian.

Urizen and Ahania further display Blake's mature imagistic mode. In the former we find such nonrepresentational but emotionally effective images as "black winds of perturbation," "dark revolving," "ten thousands of thunders / Rang'd in gloom'd array," "an ocean of voidness unfathomable," "no light from the fires," "Ages on ages Roll'd over him," "sick torment; around him in whirlwinds / Of darkness," and Eddies of wrath."36

36 Urizen, pls 3:12,18,28-29; 5:10; 10:1,6-7, 20.
Blake's debt here to Milton's hell with its "gloomy Deep" and "whirlwinds of tempestuous fire" that give "no light, but rather darkness visible," is obvious. Plate 2 of Ahania exhibits Blake's increasing animation of his world: the chariot "rages," the "Globe of wrath" is "howling" and "Roaring with fury," and the fiery beam laughs as it tears through Urizen's shield. Even the non-vegetable world is imaged as human, and as Frye notes in relation to all eighteenth-century poetry of sensibility, Blake animates his world in such a way that all in it can provoke anxiety and suffer human emotions.37

Drawing heavily on The Song of Solomon, plate 5 of Ahania contains the most purely emotive imagery in the minor prophecies:

To arise to the mountain sport,
To the bliss of eternal valleys.

From my soft cloud of dew to fall
In showers of life on his harvests.

... bosoms of milk in my chambers
fill'd with eternal seed.

Swell'd with ripeness & fat with fatness
Bursting on winds my odors,
My ripe figs and pomegranates.

With thy hand of generous fire.

On virgins of springing joy...  
The sweat poured down thy temples...  
The moisture awoke to birth...

These images make a powerful, though imprecise, assault on our senses of smell, touch, and taste. All is sweet, warm, wet, and sexually suggestive, and, though the impressions on the senses are imprecise, the emotion aroused is exact.

We should not, however, let Blake’s purposely emotive imagery distract us from the fact that much of the time he is attempting to offer a visually precise representation of his Vision and that we are failing to see clearly only because that Vision is foreign to us. In Chapter IV of *Ahania* Blake describes the fall and creation, in part, as follows:

2: For in Urizens slumbers of abstraction  
In the infinite ages of Eternity:  
When his Nerves of Joy melted & flow’d  
A white Lake on the dark blue air  
In perturb’d pain and dismal torment  
Now stretching out, now swift conglobing.

3: Effluvia vapor’d above  
In noxious clouds; these hover’d thick  
Over the disorganiz’d Immortal,  
Till petrific pain scurfd o’er the Lakes  
As the bones of man, solid & dark

4: The clouds of disease hover’d wide  
Around the Immortal in torment  
Perching around the hurtling bones  
Disease on disease, shape on shape,  
Winged screaming in blood & torment.  
(pl. 4:11-26)
With the exception of the image "petrific pain" Blake is probably being as graphic as he can be in these lines without making his poem a pictorial tapestry and thereby detracting from the mythic action which is the poem's subject. One reason we cannot accurately see the scene is that all in it is in a process of transformation from the "fluxile" to the "petrific"; the shapes are still vague and half-formed. But another reason is that our Imaginations do not match Blake's.

Curiously, Blake occasionally includes an image which mirrors Nature, rather than his Vision, with a "perspicacity" the Augustans would have acclaimed. In Urizen, plate 3:33-35, Blake writes that "voices of terror / Are heard, like thunders of autumn / When the cloud blazes over the harvest." Later, in The Four Zoas, plate 4:28-29, Tharmas asks Enion why she examines the fibres of his soul, "Spreading them out before the Sun like stalks of flax to dry." Probably such images reflect one side of Blake's ambivalence toward Nature and demonstrate his belief that Nature must be viewed from the Imagination, and when so viewed, it is appreciated as much as, if not more than, it is by the man who worships it.

Blake's imagery presents a number of difficulties. A few images are weak in that they neither inform nor move. In America, plate 13:11-12, Blake describes
Albion’s Angel as having "awful wings" and "wings of wrath." Neither image provides an adequate picture or particularly moves us, but Blake may have had a vivid picture in mind, for in the design of plate 11 of Europe we find that Albion’s Angel has black, ugly bat wings. A few images are merely contradictory and confusing, like "shudd'ring waving wings," the two epithets of which cancel each other.\textsuperscript{38} Moreover, Blake often stoops to images that explain rather than reveal, like "solemn moon," "the light of his fury," and "The lions lash their wrathful tails."\textsuperscript{39}

The overuse of words like howl and roll is annoying to the reader. Blake uses the first, together with its variant forms, thirty-two times in the minor prophecies and the second thirty-three times, and he continues this overuse throughout his writing life. Erdman’s Concordance reveals that Blake uses howl and its variants a total of 198 times and the word roll 195.\textsuperscript{40} Explanations have been offered for this. Yeats claimed that howl is a sound symbol for desire.\textsuperscript{41}

\textsuperscript{38}The Song of Los, pl. 7:10.

\textsuperscript{39}Europe, pls. 14:32; 15:2,6.

\textsuperscript{40}David Erdman, A Concordance of the Writings of William Blake (Ithaca, N.Y., 1967).

word is such a symbol, its frequent use is explained, but I see no evidence that it is, and contradictory evidence is easily found. In *America*, plate 1:19, for instance, Orc says, "I howl my joy!" Blake may have consciously or unconsciously picked up the word *roll* from Boehme and the alchemists. Desiree Hirst notes that both Boehme and Richard Clarke believed that all creation involves an anguish that results from the antagonism of the first two principles of attraction and expansion and that this anguish produces a frustration that rolls back upon itself. Hans L. Mortensen has said that this rolling back designates an "unsolved dispute, dissension, and tension" and is properly called "Rotation." Much of the time Blake appears to be using the word in its normal descriptive sense, as "these clouds roll to & fro," but some of the time one senses Boehme's technical meaning, as in the nameless shadowy female's cry, "I see it smile & I roll inward & my voice is past." Whatever the reason for Blake's frequent use of these two words, neither image produces a pleasing sound or picture, and their ubiquity is an annoyance the Blake reader must learn to live with.


43 *America*, pl. 1:20; *Europe*, pl. 2:16.
A final problem is that many scenes are unappealingly pictured. In *Paradise Lost* we see a picture of Hell with its "darkness visible" and "ever-burning Sulphur, unconsum'd" The scene is one of torment, but the picture itself is not ugly. In *Urizen*, however, the following pictures are offered:

Life in cataracts pourd down his cliffs
The void shrunk with lymph into Nerves
Wand'ring wide on the bosom of night
And left a round globe of blood
Trembling upon the Void (pl. 13:55-59)

And his world teemed vast enormities
Frightning; faithless; fawning
Portions of life; similitudes
Of a foot, or a hand, or a head
Or a heart, or an eye, they swam mischevous
Dread terrors! delighting in blood (pl. 23:2-7)

And the creation of woman is hideously described as follows:

The globe of life blood trembled
Branching out into roots;
Fibrous, writhing upon the winds;
Fibres of blood, milk, and tears;
In pangs, eternity on eternity.
At length in tears & cries imbodied
A female form trembling and pale
Waves before his deathly face. (pl. 18:1-8)

In these passages Blake was attempting the horrific sublime. But he appears to have temporarily forgotten that one does not have to paint an ugly picture to picture something ugly. Happily, such scenes as those quoted above are not frequent enough in Blake to make us forget the simple-diction, yet cleverly emotive imagery
that enchants us even as it offers us a full sensory experience of the agony of a fallen world.

The difficulty of determining referents, the lack of contextual information on the mythological characterizations, the overlapping roles of these figures, and a highly emotive rather than representational imagery make Blake's symbolism and imagery confusing for many readers. But in these minor prophecies Blake develops the prophetic qualities of both his symbolism and imagery. He increasingly humanizes his giants till we can identify with them, learns to focus on a few conventional symbols that both parody other systems and carry highly prophetic imagistic qualities, and becomes the first poet in the language to use industrial symbolism. He attains great virtuosity with Biblical symbols—which he appropriates freely—using them to present his own system even while parodying the Old Testament and satirizing Lockean epistemology and Newtonian physics. The imagery is in the tradition of the apocalyptic and the horrific sublime and becomes increasingly emotive. Though they always tax our understanding, Blake's symbolism and imagery develop in the direction of a clarity and precision of emotion that serve his redemptive purpose.
CHAPTER IV

PROPHETIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND TONE

Bishop Lowth observed that the prophet, through his poetry, instructs his audience in the right sentiment, and that this instruction is effected by the prophet's expressing "in all its vigor," that passion which is appropriate to the subject.\(^1\) Thus, tone is crucial in prophetic poetry, and an analysis of the tonal variations in Blake's minor prophecies is especially instructive, for tone is one of the characteristics Blake extensively experiments with, and in its use we see him grow to maturity as a prophet. Moreover, many of his tonal modulations are distinctive and are contributions to the genre.

A wide variety and rapid shifts of tone have long been seen as typical of prophetic poetry, yet we cannot help being surprised at the diversity of tone in

\(^1\)Lowth, I, 366-70.
America. The Preludium reveals the audacity and exuberance of the political revolutionary who appears to delight in the destructiveness as well as the creativity of his cause:

The hairy shoulders rend the links, free are the wrists of fire;
Round the terrific loins he siez'd the panting, struggling womb;
It joy'd; she put aside her clouds & smiled her firstborn smile;
As when a black cloud shews its light'nings to the silent deep.

Soon as she saw the terrible boy then burst the virgin cry.

I know thee, I have found thee, & I will not let thee go;
Thou art the image of God who dwells in darkness of Africa;
And thou art fall'n to give me life in regions of dark death.

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²Lowth, I, 329. Note, however, that while Lowth saw these shifts as purposive, most modern Biblical scholars see many of them as products of redactors who joined diverse manuscripts of separate prophets or of oracles spoken at different times by one prophet (e.g. Hughell E. W. Fosbroke, "The Prophetic Literature," The Interpreter's Bible, George Arthur Buttrick, ed. (New York, 1951-57), I, 206). Such an idea does not negate the fact that the redactor exerted both a prophetic and literary function in his editing, but it does suggest that wide and rapid tone shifts may not have been characteristic of the oral prophecies which were the source of our Old Testament text. Since Lowth saw these shifts as characteristic of Hebrew poetry, however, probably all readers of the latter half of the eighteenth century who were interested in prophetic poetry saw them as such. It should be noted that we have no proof that Blake read Lowth, but the latter was in the air throughout the latter half of the century. Blake, of course, was a great student of the Bible and could have noticed the tone shifts of the Old Testament without the help of Lowth.
On my American plains I feel the struggling afflictions
Endur'd by roots that writhe their arms into the nether deep:
I see a serpent in Canada, who courts me to his love;
In Mexico and Eagle, and a Lion in Peru;
I see a Whale in the South-sea, drinking my soul away.
Oh what limb rending pains I feel. thy fire & my frost
Mingle in howling pains, in furrows by thy lightnings rent. (pl. 2:2-16)

As plates 6 and 8 reveal, the primary purpose of the Apocalypse is to free the oppressed, but in the Preludium one senses the audacity and deathly carelessness of the bonnet rouge.

The exuberance of the revolutionary expressed in the Preludium is matched by the admiration shown for the American patriots in the first plate of the prophecy proper. The common diction, the simple, subject-verb-object grammar, and the parallelism of the Ossianic prose represent an attempt to give the patriots dignity and solemnity of tone, although, as I noted in Chapter III, the result is curiously flat:

Sullen fires across the Atlantic glow to America's shore:
Piercing the souls of warlike men, who rise in silent night,
Washington, Franklin, Paine & Warren, Gates, Hancock & Green;
Meet on the coast glowing with blood from Albions fiery Prince.

Washington spoke: Friends of America look over the Atlantic sea;
A bended bow is lifted in heaven, & a heavy iron chain
Descends link by link from Albions cliffs across
the sea to bind
Brothers & sons of America, till our faces pale
and yellow;
Hands deprest, voices weak, eyes downcast, hands
work-bruised,
Feet bleeding on the sultry sands, and the furrows
of the whip
Descend to generations that in future times forgot.--
(pl. 3:2-12)

Through the adulation expressed, the patriots are deified.
Man is so honored by no other prophet. Traditionally it
is God who is revered in prophetic poetry, for it is to
God that man is being raised. But Blake is attempting
to raise the subhuman to the level of Man. It is in
"attempting to be more than Man that We become less."³

This admiration for the patriots is balanced by a
respect for the evil power of Albion's Angel. The
Angel's name is satirical, but it is only in his name
that lightness of tone is used in describing him or his
actions. Perhaps because he was afraid of jail and had
a right to be afraid, Blake was respectful of the crown's
power. Old Testament prophets respected the power of
kings only insofar as those kings served as an agent of
Yahweh's judgment on a sinful people; otherwise the
people Israel were instructed in how feeble the forces
of evil are when Yahweh, as he always does, champions
the just. Jesus taught his disciples not to fear "those
who kill the body but cannot kill the soul," and among

³The Four Zoas, "page" 135.
the prophets of Blake's time, Cowper feared the fires of Hell more than George's scaffold, and Smart was so joyful in his regeneration and so confident that God had elected him to reform the Anglican liturgy and prophesy the coming of the millenium that respect for the power of evil seemed to find no room in his psyche. But in 1793 Blake saw Albion's Angel as a "fiery Prince" with "awful shoulders," who gave "thunderous" commands and could cause immense damage:

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. . . enrag'd his secret clouds open'd
From north to south, and burnt outstretched on wings of wrath cov'ring
The eastern sky, spreading his awful wings across the heavens;
Beneath him roll'd his num'rous hosts, all Albions
Angels camp'd
Darkend the Atlantic mountains & their trumpets shook the valleys
Arm'd with diseases of the earth to cast upon the Abyss,
Their numbers forty millions, must'ring in the eastern sky. . . .

His plagues obedient to his voice flew forth out of their clouds
Falling upon America, as a storm to cut them off
As a blight cuts the tender corn when it begins to appear.
Dark is the heaven above, & cold & hard the earth beneath;
And as a plague wind fill'd with insects cuts off men & beast;
And as a sea o'erwhelms a land in the day of an earthquake:

Fury! rage! madness! in a wind swept through America.
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(plates 13:10-16; 14:4-10)

4 Plates 3:5, 17; 14:3.
True, Albion's Angel loses the American Revolution, the thrones of France, Spain, and Italy shake, and the five gates they erected are burned away by Orc's heat, but Albion's Angle is still in power at the end of the poem. In 1793 Blake was forced to concede and respect the power of the crown. Having acknowledged its strength, however, Blake gave deference to no other Tory. The thirteen Governors are described with curious ambivalence and finally taunted in plate 13, where they "grovel on the sand and writhing lie" before the feet of Washington, and the leading Tories of Albion, London's Guardian, "the ancient miter'd York," the Bard of Albion, the Guardians of Ireland, Scotland, and Wales, and all priests, sicken with plagues or flee to their reptile coverts.

The most spirited tone of the prophecy comes, as it should, in plates 6 and 8, where Orc proclaims the Apocalypse and expresses in words the springing joy and exultation in newly found freedom, which the print "Glad Day" expresses in line and color:

The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave their stations;
The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up;
The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk & dry'd.
Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! awakening!
Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are burst;
Let the slave grinding at the mill, run into the field:
Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air;
Let the inchained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing,
Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years;
Rise and look out, his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open.
And let his wife and children return from the oppressors scourge;
They look behind at every step & believe it is a dream.
Singing, The Sun has left his blackness, & has found a fresher morning
And the fair Moon rejoices in the clear & cloudless night;
For Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease.

* * *

To make the deserts blossom, & the deeps shrink to their foundations,
And to renew the fiery joy, and burst the stony roof,
That pale religious letchery, seeking Virginity,
May find it in a harlot, and in coarse-clad honesty
The undefil'd tho' ravish'd in her cradle night and morn:
For every thing that lives is holy, life delights in life:
Because the soul of sweet delight can never be defil'd,
Fires inwrap the earthly globe, yet man is not consumd;
Amidst the lustful fires he walks; his feet become like brass,
His knees and thighs like silver, & his breast and head like gold. (plates 6:1-15;8:8-17)

These speeches are a montage of images from Psalms 107:16, Ezekiel, chapter 37, Daniel, chapter 3, the New Testament resurrection narratives, and perhaps Isaiah, chapter 11:6-9, all calculated to produce the exuberance of Isaiah, chapter 40:9-11,28-31. In all these Biblical verses man is given life, freedom, vigor, the strength to "mount up with wings like eagles," and the substance to endure
afflictions like Nebuchadnezzar's furnace. Man is strengthened in each, and the passages are thus in contradiction to the Apocalyptic vision of Revelation 21, where a tired, defeated man is provided with a tearless heaven but is in no way exalted. But Orc's speeches differ from their Biblical sources, for in the sources the new strength of man reflects the glory of God, who is totally responsible for that strength, while in Orc's proclamation the political revolution unlooses a man who is himself inherently powerful. Orc's speeches thus display not only joy in the Apocalypse, but also a praise of the intrinsically powerful man who is freed by that Apocalypse. Inseparable from the joy and adulation is a full sympathy for the poor and oppressed, for that "unchained soul... Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years." The iambics of this last line are calculated to yield the pathos which is in fact produced, but we do not on that account challenge the sincerity of the prophet. No poet writes with a truer sympathy for the poor than does Blake.

_America_ contains the variety in tone and exhibits the vigor and urgency characteristic of much prophetic poetry, and in Orc's apocalyptic proclamation we find a blend of tones that is fully successful in its appropriateness to the subject and its ability to move. Nevertheless, Blake's experimentation with tone in _America_
yields as many failures as successes. The youthful audacity of the Preludium is refreshing, but the respect for the audacity of the political revolutionist which is expressed in it prevents us from developing the trust in the author we need to have if we are to accept him as prophet. I noted in Chapter III that Blake draws the American patriots in such a way that they do not appear worthy of the admiration he feels for them. This is a conceptual problem, but it also appears as a problem of mismatching the tone to subject matter. A similar mismatching occurs in plates 11 and 12 where the thirteen Angels face the truth implicit in the manifestation of Orc, betray Albion's Angel, and themselves proclaim the Apocalypse. The reader feels that they should be commended for all of this, but according to plate 13 the Angels' newly found integrity earns them only Blake's disdain.

A larger problem exists in Blake's attitude toward the reptile Tories. A vigorous scathing of evil is characteristic of many prophecies, Jesus' denunciation of the Pharisees in Matthew, chapter 23, for example, being among the most vicious of all prophetic attacks. Yet Blake's portrayal of the Tories as reptiles scurrying to their coverts appears overly harsh to us. Perhaps this is because we sense a balance of redemptive purpose in the Biblical prophets that we do not sense in Blake
at this time in his life, despite his sympathy for the poor. In the final plates of America, however, we are aware only of hate. Perhaps a measure of Blake's detestation of the Tories is seen in the use he makes of his source. The action of plate 15 apparently comes from Isaiah, chapter 2:17-21:

And the haughtiness of man shall be humbled, and the pride of men shall be brought low; and the Lord alone will be exalted in that day. And the idols shall utterly pass away. And men shall enter the caves of the rocks and the holes of the ground, from before the terror of the Lord, and from the glory of his majesty, when he rises to terrify the earth.

In that day men will cast forth their idols of silver and their idols of gold, which they made for themselves to worship, to the moles and to the bats, to enter the caverns of the rocks and the clefts of the cliffs, from before the terror of the Lord.

5 A look at the harshest prophetic verses in the Bible is revealing. In Isaiah, chapter 3:16-4:21, the prophet appears to despise only particular behavior of the women described and not the women themselves. Again, in Isaiah, chapter 2:12-22, and Habakkuk, chapter 3:3-16, the prophet appears to delight in the coming manifestation of justice more than in the downfall of the unjust, and when Jesus denounced the Pharisees, he immediately lamented over Jerusalem for its blindness. The prophecies of the treading of the grapes in Isaiah, chapter 63:1-6, and Revelation, chapter 14:17-20, include at least as much glee in vengeance as they do joy in the manifestation of Justice, but we are very much aware of thankfulness for Justice.
and from the glory of his majesty,
when he rises to terrify the earth.

Here the guilty flee underground, but they are not reptiles. Their metamorphosis is Blake's addition. Combined with the breezy Preludium, the hatred expressed in plate 15 gives the whole the tone of one who has a political ax to grind and is masking his motives under the guise of prophecy. If the god which the prophet is trying to raise man to is Man and the legitimate means to achieve Apocalypse is political, the prophet should and must grind a political ax, but if his tone in doing so is more one of hatred for the oppressor than love of the justice and good will expected in the Apocalypse, then we mistrust the prophet. In America the proportions of love and hate are too close for us to accept Blake as prophet.

Europe is, in part, an experiment in tone, and the poem offers as broad a spectrum in tone as any prophetic poetry in the language. The introductory lines begin with a song by a "mocking" fairy:

6 The charge that Blake's prophetic mode was only a politically expedient guise has formally been made by Schorer, pp. 13-15.
Five windows light the cavern'd Man; thro' one he
breathes the air;
Thro' one, hears music of the spheres; thro' one,
the eternal vine
Flourishes, that he may receive the grapes; thro' one can look.
And see small portions of the eternal world that ever groweth;
Thro' one, himself pass out what time he please, but he will not;
For stolen joys are sweet, & bread eaten in secret pleasant. (pl. iii:1-6)

The fairy thus mocks both Lockean epistemology and conventional sexual morality, and we are informed that the fairy's world is one that is beyond our world of sensation and convention. We are led to believe that we are to be both divinely informed and delightfully amused. Later statements in these lines reinforce our assumption and suggest that the fairy is neither didactically nor moralistically inclined but rather mediates a world that is both eternal and permissive, for he sings, thinking none see him, feeds on "love thoughts" and cups of "sparkling poetic fancies," knows a world "where every particle of dust breathes forth its joy," and laughs to hear wild flowers whimper when plucked. The whimsical tone is enhanced by the cheerful urbanity of the persona, who freely plucks the flowers and delights in their fragrance, and who catches the fairy in his hat "as small boys knock down a butterfly," addresses him as "small Sir," and carries him home in his "warm bosom." In tone we have turned 180 degrees from the closing plates of
America.

The Preludium introduces the first of several rapid and severe tone shifts. The nameless shadowy female's plea to Enitharmon is an agonized one, for she is expressing the most poignant of all suffering, that which is uncomprehended:

O mother Enitharmon wilt thou bring forth other sons? To cause my name to vanish, that my place may not be found.
For I am faint with travel!
Like the dark cloud disbursed in the day of dismal thunder...
I bring forth from my teeming bosom myriads of flames,
And thou dost stamp them with a signet, then they roam abroad
And leave me void as death. (plates 1:4-7; 2:9-11)

The tone of these lines is almost as different from that of the introductory lines as it could be.

The tone of the first four plates of the prophecy proper is mocking and combines several levels of satire, thereby exhibiting yet another extreme shift in tone. The whole section mocks the Christian dispensation, especially Mary (Enitharmon) and the "female," legalistic religion which Blake regarded as a product of Mariolatry. The humor in this mockery is slight. More apparent humor is present in Blake's description of Los, who in part represents the poets of the Christian dispensation and is seen as a "moony" lyricist, one totally uncomprehending of the revolutionary mission of Orc-
Jesus. The opening lines of the section, a parody of Milton’s poem On the Morning of Christ’s Nativity, provide the third and lightest strand of tone in this section, and one which brightens the whole.

As Blake shifts the scene to contemporary events, his tone becomes singularly complex:

Shadows of men in fleeting bands upon the winds:
Divide the heavens of Europe:
Till Albions Angel smitten with his own plagues fled with his bands
The cloud bears hard on Albions shore:
Fill’d with immortal demons of futurity:
In council gather the smitten Angels of Albion
The cloud bears hard upon the council house; down rushing
On the heads of Albions Angels.

One hour they lay buried beneath the ruins of that hall;
But as the stars from the salt lake they arise in pain,
In troubled mists o’erclouded by the terrors of struggling times. (pl. 9:6-16)

The tone of these lines appears solemn, mysterious, portentous, and yet too much so for their subject (i.e. reptile Tories) and thus the lines are also mock-heroic. In plate 3 Blake parodied Milton; here in plate 9 he appears to be using Milton’s description of the Council of Pandemonium to mock the sub-heroic privy council of George III. Since Milton’s description of Satan’s Council was itself mock-heroic, Blake achieves satire of double strength.
As Blake begins to describe events even closer to the time of his writing, he becomes harsher:

Above the rest the howl was heard from Westminster louder & louder;
The Guardian of the secret codes forsook his ancient mansion,
Driven out by the flames of Orc; his furr'd robes & false locks
Adhered and grew one with his flesh, and nerves & veins shot thro' them
With dismal torment sick, hanging upon the winds
he fled
Groveling along Great George Street thro' the Park gate; all the soldiers
Fled from his sight: he drag'd his torments to the wilderness. (pl. 12:14-20)

And in the final sixteen lines of plate 12, Blake combines sympathy for the oppressed, joy in the approaching Apocalypse, and disgust for Enitharmon's cynical laughter, all of which echoes the combination of joyous proclamation of Yahweh's Justice, repugnance for the oppressor, and sympathy for the oppressed that we find in the Old Testament "prophets of the poor," such as Amos and Micah. As we read plate 12 we again note how far we have come from the puckishness of the introductory lines.

Then, as if to give up the world for a quibble and be content to lose it, Blake inexplicably engages in a jest, grim and mock-heroic though it may be, about Newton's blowing the apocalyptic trumpet and thereby killing the Angelic host. While the trumpets of Revela-
tion announce resurrection, Newton's trumpet announces death:

A mighty Spirit leap'd from the land of Albion,
Nam'd Newton; he siez'd the Trump, & blow'd the enormous blast!
Yellow as leaves of Autumn the myriads of Angelic hosts,
Fell thro' the wintry skies seeking their graves;
Rattling their hollow bones in howling and lamentation.

(Pl. 13:4-8)

After several lines of mockery that echo plates 3-9 in tone, Blake ends the poem on an apocalyptic note that is grave, admonitory, and urgent, and he thus makes yet another severe shift of tone:

The sun glow'd fiery red!
The furious terrors flew around!
On golden chariots raging, with red wheels dropping with blood;
The Lions lash their wrathful tails!
The Tigers couch upon the prey & suck the ruddy tide:
And Enitharmon groans & cries in anguish and dismay.

Then Los arose his head he reard in snaky thunders clad:
And with a cry that shook all nature to the utmost pole,
Call'd all his sons to the strife of blood.

(Pl. 15:3-11)

The most notable thing about the tone of Europe is its variety, which includes the carefree and the admonitory, the puckish and the sneering, the sympathetic and the jocular. In many ways this variety of tone enhances the poem, for it manifests the spontaneity which the eighteenth-century reader saw to be characteristic of
prophetic poetry, and the rapid shifts are generally stimu-
ulating, even if sometimes confusing. Moreover, through-
out the poem the tone of each section is appropriate to
the subject of that section. The mismatchings of tone
and subject that we noticed in America do not occur in
Europe. But although severe tone shifts are character-
istic of prophetic poetry, shifts in levels of tone are
neither typical of it nor productive in it. When we
move from the dark predictions of Isaiah, chapter 39 to
the solace of chapter 40's "Comfort, comfort my people,
says your God," to quote the most notable shift of tone
in the Bible, there is no change in the level of tone,
both chapters being urgent and serious. But Europe, as we
have seen, embodies variations of tone levels, and these
variations, to our confusion, occur between the Intro-
ductory lines and the Preludium, both of which we expect
to set the tone for the whole, and between these two
sections and the rest of the poem. The whimsicality of
the introductory lines, supposedly reflecting the
character of the fairy-prophet, is echoed only in the
Newton joke, and to a lesser extent, in the literary
parody and slight satire of the first plates of the
prophecy proper. Since the word "Preludium," as Frye
notes,7 is borrowed from music, we expect the section so

7Fearful Symmetry, p. 186.
entitled to function as it does in that art form, that is, to state the "essential harmonies," and therefore almost necessarily the tone, of the whole. But the Preludium to Europe is not, in its expression of agony, compatible with the whimsicality of the introductory lines, and it appears to contradict the hope manifested in the concluding lines of the poem.  

The whimsicality of the fairy-prophet creates a problem of credibility. Because the fairy is so puckish, we feel no obligation to believe him. Nevertheless, these introductory lines may tell us something significant about Blake's adjustment to his role as prophet, and they may incidentally explain some of the too jocular verses in Europe. I have not yet commented on the enigmatic biographical lines affixed, in several copies, to the end of the America Preludium, but I must do so here. The only acceptable explanation of these lines is that they express the prophet's feeling of inadequacy.

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8 The "contradiction" of tones between the agony of the Preludium and the hope of the concluding lines is typical of much of the Old Testament, but when this contradiction is added to the divergence of levels of tone in Europe, the result is merely confusing to the reader.
The stern Bard ceas'd, ashamed of his own song; enraged he swung
His harp aloft sounding, then dash'd its shining frame against
A ruined pillar in glittering fragments; silent he turn'd away,
And wander'd down the vales of Kent in sick & drear lamentings (pl. 2:18-21)

If this interpretation is correct, we should note the following sequence of events: Blake first writes a prophecy which he ascribes to a Bard who is overwhelmed by the weight of his task; he ascribes his next prophecy to a tipsy fairy who is so carefree that we feel no obligation to believe him. It sounds as if Blake were having difficulty adjusting to his role as prophet. To prophesy is to exert the most dramatic form of leadership we know.

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9 Bloom (p. 127) says that the Bard is disgusted because of the shadowy daughter's reaction and that the lines were later canceled because "the poem proper offers enough of an inconclusive hope to make the Bard's disgust premature." But the poem offers far more than an "inconclusive hope," and I find it hard to believe that Blake began writing the poem without knowing he was going to proclaim the Apocalypse; indeed, such proclamation appears to be one of its major purposes. Edward Hirsch, Jr. /Innocence and Experience: An Introduction to Blake (New Haven and London, 1964, p. 72) writes that the lines represent Blake's rejection of naturalistic apocalypticism. But if they do, Blake would have retained the lines, and G. E. Bentley, Jr. has conclusively shown that they were etched and later masked out, not omitted and later added. "The Printing of Blake's America," Studies in Romanticism, VI (1966), 557. Erdman (p. 264) gives, I think, the correct interpretation, that the lines express Blake's momentary dissatisfaction with the poem.
of. From biographical anecdotes about his eccentricities, we have come to think of Blake as one who easily asserted himself. Perhaps the extreme swings of tone between these two experimental prophecies demonstrate that in the unique role of prophet, at least, Blake had predictable emotional difficulties, was too conscientious in his first attempt, and too flippant in his second.

The Newton joke, though it is only five lines, itself poses a problem of tone. The difficulty is not the humor of the anecdote, but the fact that that humor is at a different level from the solemnity of plate 12, which precedes it, and the sardonic mockery of the remainder of plate 13, which is in turn followed by the admonitory imagery of plate 15. While shifts of tone seem to stimulate the reader's passions, as Lowth thought prophetic poetry should do, shifts in the level of tone merely confuse us and leave us emotionally untouched by the whole. A similar but somewhat different problem occurs in the tonally complex section beginning at plate 9.6. The notes of mystery, portentousness, and satire in the mock heroic are so subtle and perhaps contradictory that the section lacks the power to move us effectively. With all the difficulties of tone outlined above, *Europe* is a curiosity, a delightful poem.

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to study, but a less than effective example of prophetic poetry.

iii

In the introductory lines to The Song of Los Blake names Los "the Eternal Prophet" and ascribes the Song to him. It may be that in doing so, Blake has finally accepted his role as prophet, for in naming Los the author, Blake has done what all mature prophets do: he has named God as the author of his prophecy, for to Blake, Man is God, and Los, the Eternal Prophet, is the Imaginative portion of Man. Certainly in Blake's mind the Bard of America and the tipsy fairy of Europe were themselves prophets, but Los is the Imagination, the source of all prophecy, and hence, in ascribing his work to him, Blake displays a new confidence in his role. If the ascription of The Song of Los thus marks a new acceptance of his role as prophet, we might expect the work to display a more credible and effective use of tone. To a large extent this expectation is borne out.

11 As C. M. Bowra notes, such ascriptions mean that the creation of the prophet's works cannot be explained and that in reading the prophecies we feel ourselves "in the presence of something beyond the control of man" /The Romantic Imagination (Cambridge, 1949), pp. 43-44/. Such a notion of inspiration does not preclude a parallel notion of individual poetic craftsmanship, as Blake himself makes clear in Jerusalem, plate 3.
In the "Africa" section Blake is apparently attempting to portray the whole intellectual history of man with an Old Testament prophetic urgency. The combining of the nouns history and urgency here is not contradictory, for Blake is excited and angry about what has happened to man intellectually and is attempting to enable us to feel as he does:

Then Oothoon hoverd over Judah & Jerusalem
And Jesus heard her voice (a man of sorrows) he received
A gospel from wretched Theotormon.

The human race began to wither, for the healthy built
Secluded places, fearing the joys of love
And the disease'd only propagated:
So Antemon call'd up Leutha from her valleys of delight:
And to Mahomet a loose Bible gave.
But in the North, to Odin, Sotha gave a code of War,
Because of Diralada thinking to reclaim his joy.

These were the Churches: Hospitals: Castles:
Palaces:
Like nets & gins & traps to catch the joys of Eternity
And all the rest a desart;
Till like a dream Eternity was obliterated & erased.

We should observe that the only sardonic note in these verses is in plate 3:25 where Blake deliberately misapplies the word "healthy," as used by Jesus in Matthew 9:12, to indicate Jesus' endorsement of Pharisaic sexual legalism. Most of the section is a straightforward attack in an animated, breathless, Old Testament tone. As such, the section is successful. Its failure, as we noted
earlier, lies in Blake's attempt to cover too much in too few lines. The section does show that Blake is developing sureness of tone.

For the most part, the "Asia" section also displays a skillful use of tone. The lament of the spider-kings is written in a Hebrew parallelism that produces, as Roston describes it, a "rhythmic ebb and flow" and seemingly self-generating emotional swell.12

Shall not the King call for Famine from the heath? Nor the Priest, for Pestilence from the fen? To restrain! to dismay! to thin! The inhabitants of mountain and plain; In the day, of full-feeding prosperity; And the night of delicious songs.

Shall not the Councellor throw his curb Of Poverty on the laborious To fix the price of labour; To invent allegoric riches. (pl. 6:9-18)

As Frye notes, such poetry has an autonomous, oracular, incantatory effect,13 But since the spider-kings are villains expressing villainous thoughts, the whole becomes demoniacally incantatory rather than divinely so. In that the verses are ultimately Blake's, the tone is deeply derisive of the kings. We should note how much Blake has learned about directing his passion to produce effective prophecy. From the shrill petulance of the

12Roston, p. 28.

final plates of America, a petulance that detracted from his prophetic credibility, he has moved to the task of allowing the spider-kings to portray themselves as demons and to inspire our loathing.

After a brief narrative section, Blake presents the apocalyptic vision of plate 7:31-40:

Forth from the dead dust rattling bones to bones
Join: shaking convuls'd the shivering clay breathes
And all flesh naked stands; Fathers and Friends;
Mothers & Infants; Kings & Warriors:

The Grave shrieks with delight, & shakes
Her hollow womb, & clasps the solid stem:
Her bosom swells with wild desire:
And milk & blood & glandous wine
In rivers rush & shout & dance,
On mountain, dale and plain.

The tone here is one of apocalyptic joy, throbbing with an animation that signifies inevitable, irrepressible life. The heavy trochees and spondees, the parallelism, and the images of motion—all combine to produce the pulsating effect. The scene and its constituent images are, of course, direct from Ezekiel, chapter 37, but Blake selects, condenses, and focuses to make the scene his own. One major change which Blake makes in his source is crucially instructive. In Ezekiel the grave gives up its dead. It does so in Blake as well, but it also "shrieks with delight" at the new dead it is to receive as "milk & blood & glandous wine... rush & shout." The bonnet rouge again shows through the prophet.
Throughout these experimental prophecies, as Blake is becoming more confident of himself as prophet and more skillful in his use of tone, he is modifying the end toward which he is using that skill. In America we observed a prophet who was attempting to get his audience to see the American and French Revolutions as apocalyptic. In doing so, he showed little skill in managing tone. As he moved through Europe and The Song of Los to Urizen, we saw him lose faith in the efficacy of political revolution, grow to see the need for Imagination to guide that revolution, and finally come to see that the revolution needed was a revolution of the psyche. By the time Blake wrote Urizen he was adept at managing tone, but he was uncertain of precisely what he wanted us to feel. The main purpose of the poem is to force the reader to see the Newtonian universe, the Deist's God, and Lockean man as pathetic entities created by the fall from Edenic existence. But as Blake wrote he appears to have shifted his tone from mockery of those who most exemplify this fall to sympathy for them and all of us, with the break between Chapter 3 and 4 being a watershed for the two tones. This schema is not precise; Blake continues to use satire throughout his writing life, but it diminishes markedly after Chapter 3. 
of Urizen.

The Preludium ascribes the poem to Los and parodies the Iliad and the Aeneid:

Of the primeval Priests assum'd power,
When Eternals spurn'd back his religion;
And gave him a place in the north,
Obscure, shadowy, void, solitary.

Eternals I hear your call gladly,
Dictate swift winged words, & fear not
To unfold your dark visions of torment.

To be able to ascribe one's own words to the "Eternals" and in the same lines parody the words of another artist is to manifest both prophetic confidence and wit, to be at the same time ultimately serious about one's work and yet express that seriousness in a carefree tone. As far as I know, Blake is the only prophet poet in the language who uses literary parody in his prophecies, and it may be that with his view of art, literary parody was a necessary part of prophecy. For Blake, Art was Religion, and a people's Art therefore revealed their total orientation. To satirize a people's art therefore was to mock the roots of their existence. Because the art of contemporary England was based on rules supposedly developed by the ancients, in satirizing the classical epics, the highest art of the ancients, Blake was indirectly satirizing the whole life of contemporary
Blake continues this satirical tone throughout the first three chapters of the prophecy:

... unknown, abstracted
Brooding secret, the dark power hid.

2. Times on times he divided, & measur'd
Space by space in his minefold darkness
Unseen, unknown! changes appeared
In his desolate mountains rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation

3. For he strove in battles dire
In unseen confliction with shapes
Bred from his forsaken wilderness,
Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element
Combustion, blast, vapour and cloud.

4. Dark revolving in silect activity:
Unseen in tormenting passions;
An activity unknown and horrible;
A self-contemplating shadow,
In enormous labour occupied. (pl. 3:6-22)

This is satire of medium harshness, perhaps a little more comic than splenetic. Urizen—that is, Understanding as manifested in Newton in particular but also in all of us as beings who rely too much on that faculty—is made a buffoon much as Medieval morality plays or as Milton made Satan a buffoon. Blake depicts him as being a

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14 And, of course, Blake was curiously behind the times in parodying classical epics, for it is not clear that in 1794 they needed parodying any longer. The mock epics of Dryden, Pope, Swift, and Fielding, some of them a century-old in Blake's day, had mocked not only Restoration and eighteenth-century England but the epic as well.
blind, egotistical fool who contemplates his own shadow, fights the products of his own contemplations, roams in useless "activity," and ever divides and measures the empty, dark spaces he himself has created. The scene is all the more humorous because the lines are mock-heroic, the Miltonic inversions, like "desolate mountains rifted furious," being too lofty for the description of such a clown.

In Chapter II, as he describes Urizen as lawgiver, Blake makes what appears to be a bitter attack on Christ, the New Testament, and the Church:

7. Lo! I unfold my darkness: and on
This rock, place with strong hand the Book
Of eternal brass, written in my solitude.

8. Laws of peace, of love, of unity:
Of pity, compassion, forgiveness.
Let each choose one habitation:
His ancient infinite mansion:
One command, one joy, one desire,
One curse, one weight, one measure
One King, one God, one Law. (pl. 4:31-40)

But an attack on the dominant religion of any country always appears harsh, and on second reading one wonders how Blake could have effectively attacked Christianity as a seemingly legalistic entity and have been less harsh.

Blake appears to be in firm control of the tone throughout these three chapters. Much of the time he allows Urizen to satirize himself, sometimes through
speech, as in plate 4 where Urizen pompously reveals himself to be prideful in his blindness:

4. From the depths of dark solitude. From
the eternal abode in my holiness,
Hidden set apart in my stern counsels
Reserv’d for the days of futurity,
I have sought for a joy without pain,
For a solid without fluctuation
Why will you die O Eternals?
Why live in unquenchable burnings? (pl. 4:6-13)

Either way, Blake is able to assume an objective posture while indirectly mocking his adversary. The resulting tone embodies an effective and enjoyable mixture of the reportorial and the moderately satirical.

In Chapter IV Los begins to "rivet" the changes that occur in Urizen:

6. In a horrible dreamful slumber;
Like the linked infernal chain;
A vast spine writh’d in torment
Upon the winds; shooting pain’d
Ribs, like a bending cavern
And bones of solidness, froze
Over all his nerves of joy.
And a first Age passed over,
And a state of dismal woe. (pl. 10:35-43)

The tone in these lines is one of chagrin and sympathy for Urizen, Los, and all of us, a tone that becomes dominant in the remainder of the poem. The lines that mark the completion of the fall echo the heartbreak of the final lines of Paradise Lost:

2. All the myriads of Eternity:
All the wisdom & joy of life:
Roll like a sea around him
Except what his little orbs
Of sight by degrees unfold.

3. And now his eternal life
Like a dream was obliterated.
(pl. 13:28-34)

But the pathos is deeper here than in *Paradise Lost*. Adam and Eve leave Eden with a "paradise within" and the world "all before them"; Urizen and all overly rational persons have nothing but "the same dull round over again." The final plates of the poem contain some of the seemingly harsh satire of Christianity we encountered earlier in the poem, but again that satire is severe only in that any attack on the dominant religion appears severe. Urizen, who

sicken'd to see
His eternal creations appear
Sons & daughters of sorrow on mountains
Weeping! wailing!\(^{15}\)

is in so much agony that he captures more of our sympathy than our derision. And, as his later poems show, this is what Blake increasingly wanted.

\(^{15}\) Urizen, plate 23:8-11.
chagrin that vents itself more in sympathy than in mockery. Excellent subtle modulations of this tone occur. Despite the basic pathos of Urizen and Ahania, the latter begins with a fresh vigor, and Blake displays admiration for the headstrong Fuzon, an admiration we also feel:

1. Fuzon, on a chariot iron-wing'd
   On spiked flames rose; his hot visage
   Flam'd furious! sparkles his hair & beard
   Shot down his wide bosom and shoulders.
   On clouds of smoke rages his chariot
   And his right hand burns red in its cloud
   Moulding into a vast globe, his wrath
   As the thunder-stone is moulded.
   Son of Urizen's silent burnings

2. Shall we worship this Demon of smoke,
   Said Fuzon, the abstract non-entity
   This cloudy God, seated on waters
   Now seen, now obscur'd; King of sorrow?

   (pl. 2:1-13)

Rude, destructive, prideful, and rebellious, he is nevertheless, beautiful in his person, in his clear recognition of tyranny, and his fearlessness in the face of it. Blake notes that at his death Fuzon's tresses "gave light to the mornings of heaven." He is clearly an Absalom figure and as such must, and perhaps should, die; but in his death we feel that we have lost something, be it only an attractive and reckless zest in the face of tyranny. Tigers are beautiful in their fearful symmetry, and the world would be the less without them.

Just as ambivalent is Blake's attitude toward
Urizen. We noted in Chapter III of this study that Blake displays compassion for him in the final plates of Ahania. But Blake also shows compassion for him in the earlier, narrative sections. Oppressive, legalistic, and thoroughly life-sapping in his endless and useless contemplation, Urizen is, as Fuzon says, an "abstract non-entity," a "cloudy God seated on waters." Yet, we feel sorry for the old tyrant when he is ambushed by his rebel son, and we applaud his victory over the young upstart even while we mourn the latter's death. Blake's management of tone in Ahania, his ability to express and generate both antipathy and compassion for these two adversaries, both of whom represent all of us in various states of pride, is thoroughly deft, and we ask no more.

The change of tone we have been documenting signifies a gradual development of Blake's prophetic point of view. Blake was always attempting to raise man to Vision, and from at least as far back as 1789 (the date of The Songs of Innocence) that Vision had consisted, at least in part, of Man possessing a divine "Mercy Pity Peace and Love." But at the time he wrote Urizen and Ahania Blake apparently was growing in his vision of what these "human" qualities consist of. Eventually he offered the schema: the Divine Vision is Jesus, and Jesus is he who creates life by self-denial and forgive-
ness of sins. In *The Four Zoas*, a redeemed Los finds to his astonishment that he loves Urizen with his "whole soul." At the time he wrote *Ahania* Blake did not love, or want us to love, Urizen, but he was moving in that direction. It may be that in reading Blake's experimental prophecies we can see the latent Christian who later became the radical one.

vi

We have said little about *The Book of Los*, for in many ways it is a falling off from *Urizen* and *Ahania*. An analysis of its tone, however, reveals that in this aspect, at least, it is a success. The lament of Eno, which serves as the Preludium, is written in a tone of deep nostalgia for a lost golden age:

3: O Times remote!
When Love & Joy were adoration:
And none impure were deem'd.
Not eyeless Covet
Nor Thin-lip'd Envy
Nor Bristled Wrath
Nor Curled Wantonness

4: But Covet was poured full
Envy fed with fat of lambs:
Wrath with lions gore:
Wantonness lulld to sleep
With the virgins lute
Or sated with her love. (pl. 3:7-19)

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The quick shift to the animated, agitated description of the torment that swept through Eternity when Los rebelled against his imposed task of watching Urizen is startling and effective in emphasizing the poignancy of the fall:

6: Raging furious the flames of desire
Ran thro' heaven & earth, living flames
Intelligent, organiz'd: arm'd
With destruction & plagues. (pl. 3:27-30)

The tone that dominates all others is repugnance for the creation. Apart from Swift, there is no greater disparagement of the human body than in Blake: 17

1: The lungs heave incessant, dull and heavy
For as yet were all other parts formless
Shiv'ring: clinging around like a cloud
Dim & glutinous as the white Polypus
Driv'n by waves & englob'd on the tide.

2: And the unformed part crav'd repose
Sleep began: the Lungs heave on the wave
Weary overweigh'd, sinking beneath
In a stifling black fluid he woke

3: He arose on the waters, but soon
Heavy falling his organs like roots
Shooting out from the seed, shot beneath,
And a vast world of water around him
In furious torrents began.

4: Then he sunk, & around his spent Lungs

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17 And yet Blake also felt that the naked body could be beautiful. See The Marriage of Heaven and Hell, plate 8; Milton, plate 4:23; Jerusalem, plate 68:11; The Everlasting Gospel, pp. 48-52; and Annotations to Bacon, p. 22. Apparently Blake felt that when it is imaginatively viewed, the human body is beautiful, but precisely how his disparagement and adulation of the human body fit together is by no means clear.
Began intricate pipes that drew in
The spawn of the waters... (pl. 4:54-70)

The final scene is memorable largely because of its
tonal subtlety:

7: Nine ages completed their circles
When Los heated the glowing mass, casting
It down into the Deeps: The Deeps fled
Away in redounding smoke; the Sun
Stood self-balanc'd. And Los smil'd with joy.
He the vast Spine of Urizen siez'd
And bound down to the glowing illusion

8: But no light, for the Deep fled away
On all sides, and left an unform'd
Dark vacuity: here Urizen lay
In fierce torments on his glowing bed

9: Till his Brain in a rock, & his Heart
In a fleshy slough formed four rivers
Obscuring the immense Orb of fire
Flowing down into night: till a Form
Was completed, a Human Illusion
In darkness and deep clouds involvd. (pl. 5:41-57)

The disdain for Los's shoddy world and the pity for
Urizen are clear, but Blake's attitude toward Los is
more complex. Los smiles with joy (pl. 5:45) at what he
has built, unaware of its inferiority to Eternity, and
he thereby reveals his fallenness. Blake is thus sympa­
thetic toward Urizen but sardonic toward Los. It is this
mockery of the fallen Imagination, the last hope we had,
that colors the poem with a note of despair and bitter­
ness.

If Los in part represents the state of contempo­
rary poetry--and Blake was especially disappointed with
the way poets had responded to the political events of 1793-95—that disappointment would show in Blake’s attitude toward Los. But *The Book of Los* poses both a conceptual and methodological problem. With the Imagination fallen, Blake appears to have written himself into a corner, for we now have no source of redemption, a problem he later solves, somewhat awkwardly, in *The Four Zoas* by inventing a Council of God which never falls. Methodologically, the problem is whether or not prophecy that holds no hope is prophecy at all, for it does not serve to raise man to God. Old Testament prophecies of doom hold the possibility of repentance, which indeed is their purpose. But *The Book of Los* offers no hope. Yet, we feel that the poem is prophetic. Perhaps the justification for our feeling is that Blake, with true prophetic egotism, felt that he was redeemed and would later produce the canon that could redeem us. Indeed Blake must have felt that he still had Vision or he could not have recognized the fallenness of Los. The poem thus necessarily implies that redemptive sequels will follow and that we have only to wait.

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CHAPTER V

EXPERIMENTATION IN VERSE FORM

The poetic line of America is often described as being a septenary. Alicia Ostriker sees it as being seven iambic feet, and Northrop Frye analyzes it as being merely seven-stress. But it is doubtful that either is correct, as I hope the following scansion of plate 1 will indicate. Throughout this chapter the symbols / \ and ^ indicate stressed, unstressed, and moderately stressed syllables, the latter being used only when absolutely necessary. I define a stressed syllable as one which, if read aloud, would be given more volume or a higher pitch than those surrounding it. The symbol / indicates a caesura.

\[\text{The shadowy daughter of Urthona/stood before red Orc,}\]
\[\text{The shadowy daughter of Urthona/stood before red Orc,}\]
\[\text{abode;}\]
\[\text{His food she brought in iron baskets,/his drink in}\]

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cups of iron;

Crown'd with a helmet & dark hair/the nameless female stood;

A quiver with its burning stores,/a bow like that of night,

When pestilence is shot from heaven;/no other arms she need:

Invulnerable tho' naked,/save where clouds roll round her loins,

Their awful folds in the dark air;/silent she stood as night;

For never from her iron tongue/could voice or sound arise;

But dumb till that dread day/when Orc assayed his fierce embrace.

Dark virgin;/said the hairy youth,/thy father stern abhorr'd:

Rivets my tenfold chains/while still on high my spirit soars;

Sometimes an eagle screaming in the sky,/sometimes a lion,

Stalking upon the mountains,/& sometimes a whale I lash

The raging fathomless abyss,/anon a serpent folding

Around the pillars of Urthona,/and round thy dark limbs,

On the Canadian wilds I fold,/feeble my spirit folds.

For chain'd beneath I rend these caverns;/when thou
Neither seven iambic feet nor seven stresses accurately describe the lines above, and this plate, I think, is typical of the stress system of the poem. Moreover, although plate 1 would seem to indicate that fourteen syllables per line might be the basis for the verse, syllable count will not work either. Of the seventeen lines in plate 3, one has twelve syllables, six have fourteen, three have fifteen, sixteen, and seventeen each, and one has eighteen. It may be that a plurality of the lines in this poem are of seven stresses and a plurality have fourteen syllables, but we cannot claim that a majority of the lines have either. And at least a majority of the lines should fit a pattern if we are to proclaim that that pattern is the norm. That a majority of the feet are not iambic (if indeed the lines have any "feet" at all) is clear from the plate scanned above and others that will be scanned later in this chapter.

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2I scanned 110 lines, including all of plates 1, 2, 3, 6, and 9. Of these 110 lines only 50 are of 14 syllables. And of 106 lines (four of the 110 were not counted because they contained secondary stresses and could not be easily classified), only 42 are seven stress.
It is far more fruitful, I think, to see Blake's verse in *America* in terms of Hebrew parallelism than it is to examine it for stress or meter. At this point I must digress for a moment on Hebrew poetry and Blake's relation to it. In the Preface to his translation of *Isaiah*, Lowth describes Hebrew poetry as embodying a rime of sense in which succeeding lines are synonymous in thought, such as "Seek ye Jehovah, while he may be found//Call ye upon him while he is near," or antithetical, such as "A wise son rejoiceth a father//But a foolish son is the grief of his mother," or in which succeeding lines are of similar grammatical construction, such as "With him is wisdom and might//To him belong counsel and understanding." Lowth ends his discussion by noting that the parallelism is "sometimes hardly at all apparent" and that at times the principle is not one of sense or even grammar, but that the poets "seem to have more regard in distributing the sentence to the poetical or rhetorical harmony of the period, and the proportions of the numbers, than to grammatical construction." He then gives several examples embodying


\[4\text{Lowth, Isaiah, p. x.}\]
the last principle. The following one is typical:

I love Jehovah, for he hath heard;
The voice of my supplication.
I will walk, before Jehovah;
In the land of the living.
What shall I return unto Jehovah;
For all the benefits which he hath bestowed on me?
My vows I will pay to Jehovah;
Now in the presence of all his people.
Precious in the eyes of Jehovah;
Is the death of his saints.

Lowth gives no name to this type of parallelism, and succeeding critics have had difficulty classifying it. Many analysts think of it as a type of constructive parallelism and endlessly sub-classify the grammatical possibilities, but such a classification is inaccurate, for the poetry it purports to describe does not contain a parallelism of grammatical constructions, and such classification does lead to a list of structural possibilities which, to be accurate, must include every grammatical construction that appears in Hebrew poetry. Miss Ostriker thinks of it as free verse, but it is not really free, for succeeding intonations are of roughly the same length, or one is equal in length to the sum

5Psalm 116:1, 9, 12, 14, 15 as quoted by Lowth, Isaiah, p. xxi.


7Ostriker, p. 162.
of the two preceding it, and each line terminates with the end of an intonation. Although I have no precedent for it, for the purposes of this chapter, I shall call this kind of parallelism "intonation rime," just as synonymous, antithetical, and constructive parallelism are often called "thought rime." I am using the word "intonation," as linguists do, to signify the words between two major junctures, a major juncture being any pause longer than that between the words "night rate" or "dye trade." All four kinds of parallelism which Lowth describes contain intonation rime, but intonation rime does not embody the other three kinds of parallelism.

Blake never uses antithetical parallelism and rarely employs the synonymous variety, but he frequently uses constructive parallelism and almost always uses intonation rime. The verse form of America is best described as constructive parallelism and intonation rime, usually with two intonations per line. In plate 1 of America, quoted above, we can see constructive parallelism in lines 3, 5, 13, 16, and 19 and intonation rime in lines 1, 2, 5, 8, and 9. Lines 9 and 10 are close to being

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synonymous parallelism.

Four special patterns of parallelism which are frequent in both the Bible and Blake should be mentioned. One is the constructive parallelism in which image is built on image to produce an accretive effect. Lowth quotes Psalm 148:7-13 as an example:

Praise ye Jehovah, ye of the earth;
Ye sea-monsters, and all deeps;
Fire and hail, snow and vapour;
Stormy wind, executing his command;
Mountains, and all hills;
Fruit trees, and all cedars;
Wild Beasts, and all cattle;
Reptiles, and birds of wing;
Kings of the earth, and all peoples;
Princes, and all judges of the earth;
Youths, and also virgins;
Old men, together with the children;
Let them praise the name of Jehovah;
For his name alone is exalted;
His majesty above earth and heaven.

And we can see an example of this accretive parallelism in Washington's speech to the patriots in America, plate 3:6-12:

Washington spoke: Friends of America look over the Atlantic sea;
A bended bow is lifted in heaven, & a heavy iron chain
Descends link by link from Albion's cliffs across the sea to bind
Brothers & sons of America, till our faces pale and yellow;
Hands deprest, voices weak, eyes downcast, hands work-bruis'd.
Feet bleeding on the sultry sands, and the furrows of the whip
Descend to generations that in future times forget.—
A second pattern uses rhetorical questions and is common in the books of Job and Lamentations:

"Who has cleft a channel for the torrent of rain, and a way for the thunderbolt, to bring rain on a land where no man is, on the desert in which there is no man; to satisfy the waste and desolate land, and make the ground put forth grass? Has the rain a father, Or who has begotten the drops of dew? From whose womb did the ice come forth, and who has given birth to the hoarfrost of heaven? (Job, chap. 38:25-29)

We can also see the pattern in America, plate 11:3-15:

He cried: Why trembles honesty and like a murderer, Why seeks he refuge from the frowns of his immortal station! Must the generous tremble & leave his joy, to the idle to the pestilence! That mock him? who commanded this? what God? what Angel! To keep the generous from experience till the ungenerous Are unrestrained performers of the energies of nature; Till pity is become a trade, and generosity a science, That men get rich by, & the sandy desart is giv'n to the strong What God is he, writes laws of peace, & clothes him in a tempest What pitying Angel lusts for tears, and fans himself with sighs What crawling villain preaches abstinence & wraps himself In fat of lambs? no more I follow, no more obedience pay.

The pattern above is clearly from Job because it utilizes subordinate clauses after the initial question. Though they are not so in the passage from America quoted above, these subordinate clauses are themselves often parallel
to each other.

The two other patterns common to both the Bible and Blake embody intonation rime and can be seen in the verses of Psalm 116 quoted above. In the first two lines the direct object "voice" is separated from the verb "heard" so that the object is in first position in the second line. In like manner, in Hebrew poetry the verb is often separated from its subject. And in lines 3-4 and 5-6 the prepositional phrases are separated from their base sentences so that these phrases appear in first position in a line. An example of Blake's use of the subject-verb separation can be seen in lines 7 and 8 of America, plate 3, quoted above, and an example of the prepositional-phrase separation is visible in lines 19 and 20 of plate 1.

The parallelism can be complex in arrangement, with parallelism within and between lines, parallels within parallels, and overlapping parallels, this complexity producing a beautiful resonance and, ideally, a swell of emotion in the reader. And, as we observed in Chapter IV, it is this capacity to generate sentiment that makes prophetic poetry effective. Orc's proclamation in America, plate 6, is a good example of complex parallelism. On the following page I have diagrammed many of the parallels, not doubting that the reader can find some that I missed. Scanning for feet, or stress,
The morning comes, the night decays, the watchman leave their stations;
The grave is burst, the spices shed, the linen wrapped up;
The bones of death, the cov'ring clay, the sinews shrunk & dry'd.
Reviving shake, inspiring move, breathing! awakening!
Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are burst;
Let the slave grinding at the mill, run out into the fields:
Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air;
Let the inchained soul shut up in darkness and in sighing,
Whose face has never seen a smile in thirty weary years;
Rise and look out, his chains are loose, his dungeon doors are open
And let his wife and children return from the oppressors scourge;
They look behind at every step & believe it is a dream.
Singing. The sun has left his blackness, & has found a fresher morning
And the fair moon rejoices in the clear & cloudless night;
For Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wold shall cease.
or counting syllables is of limited value in analyzing this kind of poetry; one understands the verse form by seeing the parallelism in it.

But Blake uses other prosodic tools in America besides parallelism. Like most poets of the language, he frequently adds stressed syllables and pauses, alliterates, and selects the proper length vowel sound to emphasize a word, or insure a desired tone, or suggest a motion or emotion. Plate 4:2-11 demonstrates Blake's use of these tools:

_Solemn heave the Atlantic waves between the gloomy nations,_
_Swelling, belching from its deeps/ red clouds/ & raging Fires;_
_Albion is sick! America faints! enrag'd the Zenith grew._

As human blood shooting its veins all round the orbed heaven

_Red rose the clouds from the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood_

And in the red clouds rose a Wonder o'er the Atlantic sea;

_Intense! naked! a Human fire fierce glowing, as the wedge Of iron heated in the furnace; his terrible limbs were fire_

With myriads of cloudy terrors banners dark & towers
Surrounded; heat but not light went thro' the murky atmosphere.

The accents and long vowels of "Solemn heave" suggest the rising and falling of the massive waves, and the stresses and caesuras in line 3 effectively emphasize the violence of the sea. The accents of line 6 plus the alliteration of "Red rose" and the long vowels of "vast wheels" draw our attention to the words Blake wants emphasized in that line, and the stresses, caesura, and alliteration of line 8 serve to convey the provocativeness of the figure of Orc. The phrase "a Human fire fierce glowing" is reminiscent of Milton's habit of placing an adverb in adjective form before a present participle. Although they are not plentiful in America, Blake uses many Miltonisms in his poetry. Whether he uses them consciously or not, and whatever his motivation, the effect of these Miltonic stylistic devices is to add epic dignity to Blake's work, even though we immediately recognize the devices as being derivative.

We can speculate confidently about Blake's reasons for choosing the combination of Hebrew parallelism and a long line. His preference for parallelism no doubt stemmed from the fact that it was the prosody of the Old Testament and Ossian, of prophets and bards. Blake no doubt observed on his own that Hebrew parallelism can do
what Lowth said it can do, build a swell of emotion and instruct in the right sentiment. In choosing a long line, as he has previously for *Tiriel*, *Thel*, *The Visions of the Daughters of Albion*, and *The French Revolution*, he was probably, as Frye notes, thinking of himself as using an English dactylic hexameter. The septenary had been the line of many medieval didactic poems; it combined with the six-foot line to form the Poulter's measure of early Elizabethan drama; and it was the line of Warner's *Albion's England* and Chapman's *Iliad*. The fact that Blake transcribed Thomas Tickell's *Colin and Lucy*, originally in ballad measure, in septenary form shows that he thought of the ballad line as basically a broken septenary. In short, the long line was associated with things old, things grand, things English, and things prophetic. Blake needed no other reason for choosing it.

The long line of *America* appears to be an effective vehicle for prophecy, and Blake is competent at manipulating it for a desired effect. Nevertheless, in *Europe*,

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10 Ostriker (p. 125) notes this transcription in Blake's letter to Butts, 10 January 1802.
his very next poem, Blake experiments with other verse forms. There is no need to document every variation that occurs (they are very numerous), but I shall show the extent of the variety. The poem begins with the fairy-prophet's song, which is in as regular an iambic septenary as Blake ever wrote. The caesura moves about freely as it always does in Blake:

\[
\text{Five windows light the cavern'd man;} \text{ thro' one he breathes the air;} \\
\text{Thro' one, hears music of the spheres;} \text{ thro' one, the eternal vine} \\
\text{Flourishes, that he may receive the grapes;} \text{ thro' one can look.} \\
\text{And see small portions of the eternal world/that ever growth;} \\
\text{Thro' one, himself pass out what time he please,} \text{ but he will not;} \\
\text{For stolen joys are sweet,} \text{ & bread eaten in secret pleasant.}
\]

The remaining introductory lines are unscannable, but all except three of them (or possibly four, depending on one's pronunciation of "flowers" in line 20) are of fourteen syllables, the whole section being divided into three verse paragraphs of six lines each. There is a temptation to think of such verse as being prose set out
as poetry, but it is far more than that and far more even than free verse. Intonation rime exists throughout, and probably we do best to see the verse form as being intonation rime in fourteen-syllable lines.

In the Preludium Blake uses the line of America but divides the section into verse paragraphs of four lines (except for the first paragraph which has only three), the third line of each being one intonation of six syllables. The half lines do not affect the sound, but the division into paragraphs adds a larger rhythm to the smaller rhythms of intonation and line, and both the half-lines and paragraph divisions make the section visually different from those surrounding it. Remembering that Blake's art was a composite of poetry and design and that Europe is one of Blake's most heavily decorated poems, we see that considerations of visual effect may have influenced his experimentation with various verse forms. As a matter of fact, Blake took advantage of the blank spaces left by the half-lines and etched a tendril into each.

The opening plate of the prophecy proper holds one of the keys to much of the prosody of this poem. The first two lines are an imitation of the iambic trimeter of Milton's On the Morning of Christ's Nativity. The next six lines of narrative are in Blake's long line, and then Orc's speech, plate 3:9 to 4:14, is in intona-
tion rime of one, and occasionally two, intonations per line. We should note what Blake is doing and not doing in this last verse form. The line's variation from his long line is slight. Instead of writing two intonations per line that together are roughly fourteen syllables long, Blake is writing a line of one and occasionally two intonations. It may be right to call this free verse, and I shall do so, but it represents a relatively controlled freedom. The difference, again, is mainly visual. Nevertheless, this visual variation has an important effect. It sets off a speech, or scene, from adjacent sections, and the variations seem, at least, to read faster. Moreover, and most importantly, it gives the impression of freedom on the part of the author. Blake is saying in both the content and verse form, that Milton—and by designating him Blake means the whole Christian dispensation—misinterpreted Jesus as being a mild, restrained, and restraining person, when he was really Orc. Milton wrote of Jesus in a controlled meter, but the poet who honors Orc-Jesus should be a free man who writes freely.

In the remainder of the poem Blake switches back and forth between his long line and his "free verse," the latter involving various arrangements of one- and two-intonation lines. Scene, time, and tone changes are often accompanied by a change in verse form. Several
of the narrative sections are in the long line (e.g. plates 3:3-8; 4:15-18; and 9:14-10:31). The otherwise unexplained switch to the long line at plate 9:14 probably was intended to emphasize the change in tone from the satire of 9:1-13 to the solemn, almost morose mockery of 9:14-10:31. Sometimes we can find no reason for the changes. In plate 13:16-18 Enitharmon is calling Ethinthus, and Blake uses a short line. In plate 14:15 she is still calling Ethinthus, but Blake has inexplicably switched to his long line.

For some reason, perhaps to enhance the solemnity of tone, in plate 10 Blake interspersed metric lines with those written in Hebraic parallelism. Lines 2, 3, 7, 25, and 26 can be read as perfect iambic septenaries, and line 4 is almost regular. Lines 21-23 and 28-29 show constructive parallelism, and lines 16-18 all run prepositional phrases into their succeeding lines and thereby show a constructive parallelism in which the members do not terminate at the end of a line, but rather run from midline to midline, something rare in both the Bible and Blake. In Europe Blake intersperses metric and parallel lines; later we shall see him make his parallel lines themselves metric.

In plate 14:37-15:11 Blake displays his virtuosity with his free verse:
But terrible Orc, when he beheld the morning in the east,
Shot from the heights of Enitharmon;
And in the vineyards of red France appeared the light of his fury.
The sun glow'd fiery red!
The furious terrors flew around!
On golden chariots raging, with red wheels dropping blood;
The lions lash their wrathful tails!
The tigers couch upon the prey & suck the ruddy tide:
And Enitharmon groans & cries in anguish and dismay.
Then Los arose his head he reared in snaky thunders clad:
And with a cry that shook all nature to the utmost pole,
Call'd all his sons to the strife of blood.

He arranges the grammar so that "Shot" is in first position, and thus the word and its overtones of speed and military destruction are emphasized. Lines 3-6 are in constructive parallelism, and line 6 with Enitharmon's "groans & cries" is ironically put in grammatical parallelism with the preceding lines which emphasize the fury of Orc. Blake ends the poem with free verse, apparently feeling that that verse form best represents the freedom man will have in the Apocalypse which is being announced.

The "Africa" section of The Song of Los continues the free verse of Europe, and an examination of its prosody increases one's respect for the section as
poetry. The lines contain a high proportion of anapests, which in part accounts for the tone of breathless urgency. It could also be argued that when one writes freely and excitedly, the product naturally contains a high proportion of anapests, but either way Blake's craftsmanship is evident, for he achieves a desired tone through his choice of verse form.

I will sing you a song of Los, the Eternal Prophet; He sung it to four harps at the tables of Eternity.

In heart-formed Africa.

Urizen faded! Ariston shuddered!

And thus the Song began

Adam stood in the garden of Eden;

And Noah on the mountains of Ararat;

They saw Urizen give his Laws to the Nations

By the hands of the children of Los.

Adam shuddered! Noah faded! black grew the sunny African

When Rintrah gave Abstract Philosophy to Brama in the

East:

(Night spoke to the Cloud)

Lo these Human form'd spirits in smiling hypocrisy War

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Since the line of "Africa" is not based on "feet," perhaps I should say that the verse contains many "unstressed syllables," not "anapests," but for the sake of convenience, throughout this chapter I shall call a combination of two unstressed and a stressed syllable an anapest.
Against one another;/so let them War on;/slaves to the
eternal Elements)
Noah shrunk beneath the waters;
Abram fled in fires from Chaldea;
Moses beheld upon Mount Sinai/forms of dark delusion.

Much of the section (e.g. lines 6-7, 10, and 15-17 quoted above) is in constructive parallelism, and one part of plate 4 shows great precision. With the line "And as they fled they shrunk" (plate 4:7), the verse shortens to six or seven syllables. The word "shrunk" appears three times in succeeding lines, and of the thirty-two words in the section, twenty-two are monosyllables. These gambits represent successful attempts to suggest pathetic smallness.

The "Asia" section contains some of the most memorable poetry in the minor prophecies. The section from plate 6:1 to 7:8, concerning the spider-kings, has enough three-stress lines to be called trimeter. 12

And the Kings of Asia stood
And cried in bitterness of soul.

Shall not the King call for Famine from the heath?
Nor the Priest, for Pestilence from the fen?
To restrain! to dismay! to thin!
The inhabitants of mountain and plain;

12 All but seven of the thirty-two lines (lines 6:5, 6, 9, 10, 13, 15, and 7:1) are trimeter.
In the day, of full-feeding prosperity;
And the night of delicious songs.

Shall not the Councillor throw his curb
Of Poverty on the laborious?
To fix the price of labour;
To invent allegoric riches. (plate 6:7-18)

But these trimeter lines are also in constructive parallelism, specifically the parallelism of the rhetorical questions in Job. In Europe Blake interspersed lines employing parallelism with metrical lines. Here in "Asia" he writes Hebrew parallelism into the English stress system. Murray Roston, in his otherwise excellent book, Prophet and Poet, says that Byron, in his The Destruction of Sennacherib, was the first to do this, and that Sennacherib "marked the stage after Blake's prophetic books."¹³ Blake did it in "Asia," at least twenty years before Byron's effort.

Having combined parallelism and the English system of stress, in plate 7:35-40, the lines describing the apocalyptic scene with which the poem ends, Blake combines accretive constructive parallelism and iambic feet. The six lines are in perfect iambics, with the exception of the inverted foot in line 35 that emphasizes the word "shrieks."

\[ \text{The Grave shrieks with delight, & shakes} \]

¹³ Roston, p. 191.
Both combinations of parallelism and an accentual system in *The Song of Los* are highly pleasing, perhaps for no other reason than that the passages embody the best of two poetic worlds. Because these combinations are so pleasing, one wonders why Blake did not use them all the time. A look at Blake's comments on poetry quickly yields the answer. In the early poem "An Imitation of Spenser" Blake speaks of the "tinkling rhimes, and elegances terse" of eighteenth-century poetry; in *Tiriel* he presents Har as singing in a great cage; he speaks in his *Public Address* of "Music traders & Rhime traders" who work "to the destruction of all true art"; and in *Jerusalem* he writes of the necessity of matching the "terrific numbers" to the "terrific parts" and the "mild & gentle" to the "mild & gentle parts."  

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14 "An Imitation of Spenser," line 18; *Tiriel*, p. 3:21; *Public Address*, p. 20; *Jerusalem*, pl. 3.
could use meter for special effects, but he could never confine himself to it nor prop up his art with it.

iv

An examination of the prosody of Urizen reveals the difficulty critics of Blake can get into when they resort to traditional scansion. Bloom says the verse is four beat, while Miss Ostriker says it is trimeter, "usually anapestic, sometimes lapsing into iambs." It is much more helpful to see it as intonation rime, which Blake attempted to keep to three or four stresses (roughly the length of a ballad line) and ten or eleven syllables.

Chap: I

1. Lo, a shadow of horror is risen
   In Eternity! Unknown, unprolific!
   Self-closed, all-repelling: what Demon
   Hath form'd this abominable void
   This soul-shudd'ring vacuum?—Some said
   "It is Urizen", But unknown, abstracted
   Brooding secret, the dark power hid.

15The trimeter makes the lament of the spider-kings more melodious, but ironically and demoniacally so. The iambs of the apocalyptic scene in plate 7 simply honor the scene with the meter of the most serious poetry in English.

16Bloom, p. 176; Ostriker, p. 164.
2. Times on times he divided, & measur'd
Space by space in his ninefold darkness
Unseen, unknown changes appeard
In his desolate mountains rifted furious
By the black winds of perturbation

3. For he strove in battles dire
In unseen confictions with shapes
Bred from his forsaken wilderness,
Of beast, bird, fish, serpent & element
Combustion blast, vapour and cloud.

4. Dark revolving in silent activity:
Unseen in tormenting passions;
An activity unknown and horrible;
A self-contemplating shadow,
In enormous labours occupied. (pl. 3:1-22)

Plate 4:6-7 illustrates Blake's conscious attempts to keep the line under eleven syllables:

4: From the depth of dark solitude. From The eternal abode in my holiness.

There is no reason for putting "From" in line 6, rather than 7, except for the fact that it would make line 7 a twelve-syllable line. From the scansion of plate 3 we can see that the verse has many anapests, but hardly enough to say, as Miss Ostriker does, that it is "usually
anapestic. In plate 3, stanza 4, the constructive parallelism, the long a's and o's, and the unusually large proportion of polysyllables, all yielding the feeling of the great (and, ironically, useless) physical and mental strain Urizen is going through, demonstrate Blake's skill in handling this verse form.

Miss Ostriker has commented on the various excellences of the verse in Urizen, particularly plate 4:31-40, 5:2-11, and 20:8-15,17 and I find no need to add to her comments. I should like to note, however, that in Urizen there is a noticeable rise in the number of Miltonisms employed. We saw earlier that Blake, like Milton, often put an adverb in adjective form before a present participle. He did this in Urizen, plate 8:4 ("mad raging"), and also in The Book of Los, plate 4:63-64 ("but soon//Heavy falling"). He also imitated Milton by using the adjective form of the adverb immediately after the verb, as in Urizen, plate 26:6 ("they swam mischevous"), Ahania, plate 2:2-3 ("his hot visage//Flam'd furious"), and Los, plate 4:28 ("Sunk precipitant heavy down"). Blake also adopted the "He"-plus-prepositional-phrase-plus-verb construction, as in Urizen plate 23:22 ("He in darkness clos'd") and grammatical inversions involving adverbs and present participles, like

17Ostriker, p. 166.
"The senses inward rush'd shrinking." Blake eventually came to see Milton as the prophet par excellence, but why the number and variety of Miltonic constructions should increase in his poetry at this time in his life is not clear.

Blake frequently speeds up his verse with monosyllables, anapests, and briefer intonations. In plate 19:10-13 he portrays the courtship of Los and Enitharmon:

1. But Los saw the Female & pitied He embrac’d her, she wept, she refus’d In perverse and cruel delight She fled from his arms, yet he followed. . . .

The brief intonations suggest the tripping coquetry of the amorous chase and mimic Paradise Lost, IV, 310-11, where Eve

Yielded with coy submission, modest pride, And sweet reluctant amorous delay. . . .

In plate 20:6-20 Blake speeds up his lines by switching to trimeter:

1. They named the child Orc, he grew
Fed with milk of Enitharmon
2. Los awoke her; O sorrow &
At'Round his bosom, In sobbings
He burst the girdle in twain,
But still another girdle

18Urizen, pl. 25:29.
Oppressed his bosom, In sobbings
Again he burst it. Again
Another girdle succeeds
The girdle was form'd by day;
By night was burst in twain.

3. These falling down on the rock
Into an iron Chain
In each other link by link lock'd . . .

This brief line seems to reflect Blake's habit of speeding up his line when he recapitulates a series of actions in the past, as in "Africa" and Urizen, plate 25:43-28:23.

Prior to Europe Blake had divided his longer poems into verse paragraphs. In Europe and The Song of Los he separated the material by varying the verse form. Perhaps because it is a relatively long poem with a stable verse form, Blake decided to divide Urizen into chapters and stanzas. The chapters, of course, contain large blocks of material, like Urizen's assumption of power, his confrontation with and speech to the Eternals, and the reaction of the latter, while the stanzas separate the chapters into particular scenes (Blake would probably say "Visions"), actions within scenes, and different perspectives on one scene. The stanza divisions sometimes appear arbitrary, as in plate 8:3-6, where we cannot determine the basis for the division between stanzas 2 and 3:

2: And at the surging sulphureous
Perturbed Immortal mad raging
In whirlwinds & pitch & nitre
Round the furious limbs of Los.

The chapter and stanza divisions make the poem easier to read and the page more like those of the Bible, the length of the average chapter being about the same in both and the stanzas flowing easily into each other like the verses of the Bible.

We have said little about how the verse form of Urizen actually yields prophecy, because it does so in the same way as the long line of America, the latter being merely a combination of two of the shorter lines. The line of Urizen is thus an adequate vehicle for prophecy, and we have demonstrated that, in general, Blake is an apt manipulator of this verse form. Urizen, however, is full of grammatical and punctuation problems that make reading difficult. These grammatical eccentricities show up in most of Blake's works, and Blake lovers learn to overlook them. But Urizen seems to have more than its share of them. In plate 10:5 "On" is evidently not a preposition, but an adverb in the sense of "she sang on," that is, lastingly:

In stony sleep ages roll'd over him;
Like a dark waste stretching chang'able
By earthquakes riv'n, belching sullen fires
On ages roll'd ages in ghastly
Sick torment. . . . (pl. 10:2-6)

But one does not see this in the first, or even second,
reading and can have difficulty unraveling the sentence. In plate 10:11-14 we cannot easily tell where to pause to insure a proper reading. After several trial-and-error attempts we find that the caesura belongs after "secresy" in line 13, but it can take several attempts to discover this:

2: And Urizen (so his eternal name)  
His prolific delight obscurd more and more  
In dark secresy hiding in surgeing  
Sulphureous fluid his phantasies.

Again, in plate 18:1-8 we cannot tell what the subject of "imbodied" (line 6) is and whether "A female form" (line 7) is the object of "imbodied" or the subject of "Waves" (line 8). After several readings it appears that "globe of life blood" (line 1) is the subject of "imbodied" and "A female form" is its object but that Blake then made the mistake of making the object of one verb the subject of the next, in this case "Waves," compounding the problem by shifting tenses in midstream.

v

Ahania continues the prosody of Urizen, and few innovations occur in it. The Book of Los, however, is in a different verse form. Eno's lament, plate 3:7-26,

19 Curiously, in discussions of prosody The Book of Los is always treated as if it were in the same verse form as Urizen and Ahania. See, for instance, Schorer, p. 357, Bloom, p. 176, and Frye, Fearful Symmetry, p. 185.
is iambic:

3: 0 Times remote:
When Love & Joy were adoration:
And none impure were deem'd.
Not Eyeless Covet
Nor Thin-lip'd Envy
Nor Bristled Wrath
Nor Curled Wantonness

4: But Covet was poured full:
Envy fed with fat of lambs:
Wrath with lions gore:
Wantonness lulld to sleep
With the virgins lute,
Or sated with her love.

5: Till Covet broke his locks & bars,
And slept with open doors:
Envy sung at the rich man's feast:
Wrath was follow'd up and down
By a little ewe lamb
And Wantonness on his own true love
Begot a giant race.

The proof that these iambs are more than an accident is seen in the fact that Blake wrote "Curled" in line 13 but elided "follow'd" in line 23 to keep the meter. We
saw several places in Urizen and Ahania where Blake used a definite stress system, but he had not used metrical feet since "Asia." More significantly, Urizen and Ahania employ, as we have seen, a three- or four-stress line. The Book of Los (discounting Eno's lament, which is of the nature of a Preludium) is four- and five-stress. Below I scan the third stanzas of Chapters II, III, and IV to demonstrate the point:

II, 3: Crack'd across into numberless fragments
   The Prophetic wrath, struggling for vent
   Hurls apart, stamping furious to dust
   And crumbling with bursting sobs; heaves
   The black marble on high into fragments

III, 3: He arose on the waters, but soon
   Heavy falling his organs like roots
   Shooting out from the seed, shot beneath,
   And a vast world of waters around him
   In furious torrents began.

IV, 3: Circling round the dark Demon, with howlings
   Dismay & sharp blightings; the Prophet
   Of Eternity beat on his iron links.

There are clusters of three-stress lines, such as plate 5:14-17, and clusters of five-stress lines, such as plate 4:27-33, but as Urizen and Ahania intersperse
mostly three- and four-stress lines, The Book of Los internmixes mostly four- and five-stress. The tone of the poem, as I have noted, is one of gloom, nostalgia, and repugnance for the creation. Whether Blake purposely lengthened the line to enhance this tone, or his mood naturally resulted in a longer and slower line, we cannot say, but the longer intonation and the heavy tone are of a piece.

Curiously, most of what Blake tried in verse form in these minor prophecies he immediately abandoned. He started in America with his long line and used it aptly in that poem. In Europe he experimented with various arrangements of one- and two-intonation lines, interspersed with his long line, and he continued this in "Africa." He combined Hebrew parallelism with the Old English strong-stress system and then with iambic feet, interspersing both with free verse in "Asia," but immediately abandoned the free verse and subsequently reserved the combination of parallelism and an accentual system for special passages like the Milton hymn. He switched to a ballad-meter length line in Urizen and Ahania and to a slightly longer line in The Book of Los. Then he was through experimenting and went back to his long line for his major works, The Four Zoas, Milton, and Jerusalem. We cannot say for certain why Blake went back to his long line, but we can speculate with confi-
dence. On the one hand, there was little reason for retaining the experimental forms. The four- and five-stress line of The Book of Los was especially suited only to the gloom of that poem, and we noted that a continual use of the combination of parallelism and accentual verse did not fit his view of art. All the other forms, the free verse and ballad-meter length line, are actually just visual variations of Blake's long line, the former conveying the impression of speed and freedom and therefore valuable when writing about Orc. But free verse is not particularly advantageous to prophecy when there is no focus on freedom through political revolution, and neither free verse nor the ballad line is desirable when compared to the added advantages of the long line. The latter, as we noted, was associated not only with things old, English, and prophetic, but also with things epic. And Blake's next works were to be epics. The chapter divisions he keeps but transforms into the "Nights" of The Four Zoas and the especially appropriate "Books" of Milton and Jerusalem. The stanza divisions he abandons, perhaps because they would appear petty in the "Books" of the epics and would seem to mitigate against the latter's dignity in size.
CONCLUSION

There are several authors whose skill we can see develop in their work. We can watch Malory grow from a crude compiler of Arthurian tales to the superb tragedian of the Grail legend and the breakup of the Round Table; we watch Shakespeare develop from a good dramatist to a great one, and we can observe Tennyson move from the humorously childish versifier to the excellent lyricist and then to the memorable didactic poet. Because we have the works Blake used as conscious experiments, we can watch him develop as a prophet. The defects of America are numerous. Blake sees man's primary problem as political, prophesies with the shrillness of a pamphleteer, presents a hero who is as ferocious as the villain, and thrusts his mythological characterizations upon us with little identification and no credentials for their redemptive role. Nevertheless, this experimental prophecy is successful in the brilliance of the apocalypse portrayed both in poetry and design. Although Orc is inadequately prepared for and unsuccessfully dramatized, for the first time Blake extensively portrays his giants, who indirectly authenticate the work and
themselves speak prophecy. At one point the poem reveals an exuberance of spirit especially appropriate to apocalypse, and the entire work honors man as only Blake's prophecies do. With its constructive parallelism and intonation rime, the long line of America is prophetically effective and is the one Blake will return to for his epics.

Europe is the most experimental of these six poems. Blake tries a variety of verse forms and even intersperses metric lines with those written in Hebraic parallelism. He presents a wide variety of tones and several rapid shifts of tone as many prophets do, but confusing changes in tone levels, too much whimsicality, and an ambivalence about the worth of political revolution and the character of Los, who is called to assist that revolution, detract from the poem's credibility as prophecy. Still, Europe is important in Blake's development as prophet. In it he extends his myth backward to include all Christian history, uses it to parody and satirize other authors and systems, and constructs his Druidic myth so that it comments simultaneously, in its ambivalence, on contemporary politics, philosophy, and religion. In the fallen Los we see Blake's first attempt to humanize his giants, and in the conventional symbolism we find Blake fully appropriating Biblical symbols and even using them ironically and mock-heroically. In this poem his
imagery suddenly becomes emotive rather than representational, as he learns to amend sentiments directly rather than through an intervening picture. Two failings suggest future advances: the work's too whimsical tone may represent an overcompensation for the harshness of America, as Blake adjusts to his role as prophet; and although he exhibits complete confidence in neither revolution nor rejuvenation of the Imagination, he clearly identifies man's primary problem as perceptual.

The Song of Los is an Orc book; in it Blake still sees apocalypse as a fruit of political revolution. Yet the poem manifests further development of Blake's prophetic mode. He further extends his myth back to creation, includes all thought systems in it, and tidies up the whole by including Asia and Africa in the list of fallen continents and having Urizen fly back to Jerusalem, the mythical seat of the arts and sciences, to await the apocalypse. All is set in chronological order, and the myth is clarified by extension and comparison with other systems. In clearly identifying Los as the Eternal Prophet and ascribing the poem to him rather than to an inadequate bard or whimsical fairy, as in America and Europe, Blake seems to have accepted his role as prophet, and with this acceptance we find a new sureness of tone evidenced in the animated, breathless, Old Testament imagery of "Africa" and the demonically autonomous,
incantatory speeches of the spider-kings of "Asia." In the latter section Blake combines the English stress and metric systems with Hebrew parallelism, the result being some of the most lyric poetry in the Blakean canon.

If *Europe* is the most experimental of Blake's prophecies, *Urizen* sees the greatest strides toward his mature mode, and *Ahania* the fullest adoption of that mode. In the former, Blake's myth is extended back to the fall, which is described as a division of the faculties under the tyranny or Reason. Man's primary problem is thus identified as psychic, and Blake no longer has to use myth to sanctify historic events for the achievement of prophecy, for now his myth is itself both history and prophecy. In *Urizen* Blake vigorously humanizes his giants, and after Chapter III writes of *Urizen*, the fallen enemy, with a sympathy and chagrin that suggest Blake's later shift to the Christian psyche as his major source of prophetic matter. The poem is written in a short line which is half the long line of *America* and which may be a step toward his eventual return to the long line for his major works. *Urizen* is the first of Blake's poems, and the first in the language, to embody extensive use of industrial imagery.

If *The Book of Ahania* could stand alone, it would be the most successful of these experiments. Its three giants are described with modulations of antipathy and
sympathy that allow us to identify with each in his plight and thereby feel the full emotional impact of the prophecy. In Ahania's monologue Blake learns to express and evoke passion through his giants and makes the important dramatic advance of describing Urizen before the fall. Blake extensively develops his method of selecting a few conventional symbols with highly prophetic imagistic qualities and then interweaving these symbols to form his narrative.

Commentators often wonder why Blake wrote *The Book of Los*, for its content overlaps that of *Urizen*, its decoration is sparse, and its tone both bitter and depressing. But in that tone the poem finds its success. In describing the shoddy world our fallen Imaginations create and by expressing nostalgia for the Golden World of Eno's lament, Blake shows how badly we need redemption; in portraying the fall of Los, he identifies himself as the only one left who still possesses the prophetic insight necessary to provide that redemption. Although Blake has developed his major mode, the poem reveals that he has much to do before he fulfills his role as prophet. He must further develop his theogony, for we have far too little of it. The giants must be more fully dramatized so we see their glory and euphoria before the fall. He must offer redemption and must prophecy at greater length, for his myth is now universal
in scope and demands a fuller presentation than these brief poems allow.
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