

THE INTERNAL TENSION
IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S AMERICA

THE INTERNAL TENSION IN WILLIAM BLAKE'S AMERICA:

A Study of the importance of Blake's
earlier works
in the interpretation of the poem.

By

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

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In his book, Blake: Prophet Against Empire, David Erdman suggests that Blake, upon moving to Lambeth in 1792, began an early version of America: A Prophecy (1793). Finally printed in October of 1793, the poem was the first of the Lambeth books. Preceded by Songs of Innocence (1789), Tiri-el (1789), Book of Thel (1789), Marriage of Heaven and Hell (1790-93) and Visions of the Daughters of Albion (1793), America is Blake's first designated prophecy. It was followed by Europe (1794), Book of Urizen (1794), Book of Ahania (1795) and, eventually, by Milton (1804-08) and Jerusalem (1804-1820).

Chronologically placed at the mid-point of Blake's career, America illustrates an evolving artistic sensibility. Ideas germinated here are further developed in Blake's later poems while notions introduced in earlier works are given a greater depth of exploration. These early poems not only closely resemble America in text and illustration, but are also essential to a comprehensive understanding of this first "Prophecy". To study the role of these earlier works in the understanding of America is the purpose of this thesis.

America is a poem which consists of both poetry and illustration. Equally important to any meaningful consideration of the work, these two aspects are complementary. It is their seemingly paradoxical juxtaposition in America that makes the poem intriguing as it indicates an internal ambiguity in Blake's poetic statement, the nature of which I also wish to explore in this study. In exploring the nature and extent of this ambiguity, one discovers the important and necessary role of the earlier poems, Thel, Marriage and Visions in America. Similarly characterized by a combined lyrical and pictorial presentation, these early works not only reflect various images and themes in America but also reveal the distortions and adaptations made by Blake in the later poem and in this respect reveal how Blake produces a creative synthesis of former ideas.

Because of the visual and lyrical nature of the poems and their extensive similarity, equal emphasis will be placed on the textual development, and the relationship between the various illustrations. It is only after a consideration of these poetic and artistic aspects that a comprehensive evaluation of America can be made.

The importance given to Blake's visual and lyrical achievements is apparent in the body of Blake criticism. Reviewing the commentary, however, one is impressed with the general absence of approaches to America; in comparison

to Blake's other works, it seems to have been largely ignored. Critical response has been directed either to such early works as Songs of Innocence or to the later major prophecies, Milton and Jerusalem. While the reason for this indifference is unclear, America, as Blake's first "prophecy", has perhaps been regarded as an initial effort in a new poetic form and, consequently, lacking the poetic and artistic development of the later Milton and Jerusalem. Ironically, it is this transitional nature of the poem, in its thematic, poetic, and artistic development, that makes it unique in Blake's canon.

Another reason for the unjustified indifference with which America has been regarded has perhaps been the general assumption of its exclusive political nature. Containing a setting and group of characters associated with the American Revolution, America is a contemporary political poem. This aspect, especially emphasized in Erdman's Blake: Prophet Against Empire, has perhaps diverted critical opinion from its more important symbolic characteristics and created a feeling that in this highly political poem there exists little artistic development. Again this sentiment is unfortunate as America's political nature is but a minor aspect of the entire work.

Despite the limited extent of commentary, however, there exist several significant works of criticism on America. While some critical opinion focuses primarily on

the poem, other scholars use America to support their specific critical views of Blake. The most extensive work on America has emerged from David Erdman, who, in Blake: Prophet Against Empire, examines the political sources and aspects of the poem's composition. While Erdman claims that most of the dramatic action in speeches such as Washington's, "Friends of America ... (A 3:6-12) is from Joel Barlow's Vision of Columbus: A Poem in Nine Books,² he also asserts that the poem contains a poetic paraphrase of the Declaration of Independence and summarizes both the political and military history of the American Revolution. In a later chapter entitled "The Enormous Plagues", Erdman further points to Blake's use of pestilence and fire in the poem, a symbolic adaptation of the fourteenth-century Black Plague. A similar commentary on the use of plague imagery occurs in Harold Bloom's rather superficial textual analysis of the poem, Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument.⁵

At one point in his Blake: Prophet Against Empire, Erdman notes the presence of the phrase "Visionary Forms Dramatic" in Blake's Jerusalem. Borrowing the phrase for his edited collection of essays, Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic,⁶ Erdman in one of his essays, "America: New Expanses" explores the manner in which the textual and visual aspects of the poem lead the reader "from perception⁷ to Intellectual vision"⁸. Commenting on the "cinerama"

of William Blake, he asserts that the visual images in the poem are constantly in motion. Moreover, he states they are characterized by a "dialectical tension".

"America", he continues, "we might look upon as an acting version of a mural Apocalypse". Noting Blake's use of music, noise and silence and of static and dynamic images, Erdman explores in great detail both the text and the illustrations, although his article is dominated primarily by the latter examination. "The cycle of history prophetically examined in America, he concludes, "is not that of rebellion-vengeance-tyranny" but of "enslavement-liberation-re-enslavement, the prophet's concern being how to escape the re-enslavement". The critical importance given to the visual in this essay is anticipated in Erdman's article "Blake's Vision of Slavery" where he states that the "soul of America" in the "Preludium" in searching for a blossoming of the revolutionary spirit goes "seeking flowers to comfort her".

Other scholars, in addition to Erdman, have specifically examined America. In Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic George Quasha in "Orc as a Fiery Paradigm of Poetic Torsion" questions the relevance of any cyclic symmetry to the poem, as expounded by Northrop Frye in Fearful Symmetry. The "falsely closed form", of Frye's circular system, Quasha asserts, "is a Narcissistic parody of creation", Studying the relationship between America and

the Visions of the Daughters of Albion, he suggests that
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 the "paradigm of penetration" is a common characteristic
 of both poems and that the dramatic action of Visions
 foreshadows and produces America. The failure of a true
 marriage in Visions, a failure of a perceptual visual
 rendering or torsion, leads to the production of America
 where the "rape-outcry-prophecy" paradigm results in the
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 evoking of "human communication", characterized, init-
 ially, by an internal torque or self-rendering. Present in
 the Orc figure, Quasha claims, is a verbal torque of self-
 interfering processes by which the poem becomes the first
 example of a "self-extending system with a built-in pro-
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 creative mechanism". This torque which arises in the dia-
 logues between Orc and Albion's Angel, generates from
 "verbal pronouncement" to "increasingly violent reactive
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 verbal torsions" and finally to "pure action", and Quasha
 supports this view through constant reference to visual
 textual images, this visual aspect of the poem providing
 the basis for his arguments.

Concluding that the creative process in America
 is profoundly revolutionary, as any state of equilibrium
 or stasis is upset by this "self-rendering torque",
 Quasha rejects any notions that it is part of a pessimistic
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 cycle of enslavement. To "escape the re-enslavement" he
 suggests, is to misunderstand the perpetual and inherent
 freedom of the Orc figure, arising from the necessary and

internal dialogue or meeting of contraries.

The concentration on visual textual analysis in Quasha's article is also characteristic of Emily Hamblen's study of America in her On the Minor Prophecies of William Blake.²² The chapter entitled "America", which is devoted solely to the poem, is concerned with the meanings of such words as Urthona (urcha, thauma, thoma) and Orc (orchos) while the examination of individual words in the text is directed toward the illumination of the pervasiveness of instinct and emotion in the poem. As no attention is given to the relationship between America and Blake's other works, her analysis emerges as informative but isolated.

While Morton D. Paley's interpretation of America in his Energy and Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought²³ integrates the poem with others, he concerns himself primarily with the notion of Energy. Seeing a double perspective in America, where energy "hovers²⁴ between redemptive potentiality and the will-to-power", Paley asserts that it is Orc who embodies this energy, his animal forms becoming "symbols of liberated desire"²⁵. Because of the dualistic and ambiguous conception of energy in America, Orc's serpent form, Paley states, is associated with the dragon of Revelation and this illusion, he points out, contrasts with the Marriage of Heaven and Hell where "Energy is the only life and the Leviathan turns out

to be an innocuous fantasy".

In a method similar to David Erdman's Blake: Prophet Against Empire, Kathleen Raine in her Blake and Tradition attempts to trace the sources in Blake's poetical works. Her concern, however, is primarily of these past influences which are of an intellectual and artistic nature, as, unlike Erdman, she ignores the political aspects of the poem. While her comments on the preceding poems, the Book of Thel, and the Visions of the Daughters of Albion, are extensive, she virtually ignores America. Other than her discussion of the dragon figure in plate four, which she considers to be a cockatrice or basilisk, and a general commentary on the Orc figure, there exists no detailed treatment of the poem. Similarly in her book, William Blake, while stating that the poem was written during a time of personal happiness and turbulence, she confines her remarks on America to an assertion that it exemplifies "Blake's natural mythological genius 28 uneasily harnessed to a specific political theme".

Objecting to the importance Raine places on the "sources" of Blake's ideas, D.G. Gilliam in his William Blake states that in the evaluation of any Blake poem, attention is required to "its tone and internal logic 29 rather than its origins". Nevertheless, he, too, gives only a glance to America, stating merely that much of the "action" in the poem is "given in terms of symbols and

personifications with a function that is primarily
³⁰ abstract". "The spirit of the revolution is at work", he
³¹ states, "rather than the revolution itself".

Gilliam's mention of symbolic presentation in the poem re-affirms the emphasis placed by most critics on its visual aspects. This notion of the visual is given even greater significance by these critics whose concern is as much with Blake the artist as Blake the poet. It is within this realm of criticism that America has been used to emphasize specific critical arguments and it is also this visual approach that has dominated Blake criticism in recent years.

In his article "The Evolution of Blake's Large Colour Prints of 1795", from William Blake: Essays for S. Foster Damon, Martin Butlin puts forth the extreme view that with the production of the Colour Prints of 1795 "Blake's primary and most successful means of expression ceased to be poetry and its illustration and became purely
³² visual". The evolution to such a visual orientation is, he states, apparent in such poems as Visions and America, where, unlike the earlier poems, the illustrations are less integrated with the text and more self-sufficient as designs, while the actual writing appears more sober.

Writing of the same 1795 prints in her essay,
³³ "Blake's 1795 Colour Prints: An Interpretation", Anne T. Kostelanetz centres her argument on what she perceives is

the division between the open and closed mind - expressed in the illustrations. While noting the similarity of a crippled man entering Death's Door in one of the large colour prints to plate twelve of America, she places her greatest critical emphasis on the presence of various repeated images, symbolic, as she states, of open and closed minds. Nets, chains, briars and caves, for example, represent allusions to the latter, while flowers and non-predatory birds characterize the state of the former. Blake's finest designs, she asserts, "denounce the fall in to the human form as an unmitigated evil and portray that same human form as an ideally beautiful, heroic ...

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figure". "To reconcile these two aspects of the human form which would allow for the body's manifest natural beauty and its possible perversion into a closed system", Blake, she suggests, created a system whereby the mortal body is cast off and man is raised into a spiritual "human form
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divine". It is the iconology of the "open mind" which characterizes this state.

In a similar analysis of the America illustrations, Janet Warner in her essay, "Blake's Use of Gesture", suggests that "Blake's visual images are indicative primarily of states of man, which is one reason the human
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figure in various gestures is so central to his designs". Indicating the recurring human gestures in the poem (hunched forms, huddled figures), she attempts to illustrate

their consistent and meticulous formation and finally their consequent significance in any comprehensive interpretation of its meaning.

The importance given to the nature and appearance of the various human forms is re-iterated in another article, "Blake's Figures of Despair: Man in his Spectre's Power". Here Warner's focus narrows to the huddled figures appearing in the poem which she claims are symbolic of the state of despair. They are also, she adds, manifestations of a "language of art based on the human form"³⁷. Regarding further this "language of art" which includes the distinction between male and female figures, she proposes that in America: A Prophecy the poet is intricately engaged in the visualization of psychological states. Also examining the notion of a visualized psychological state, Northrop Frye in his essay "Poetry and Design in William Blake"³⁸ suggests that the crouching figure, predominant in the America poem, is symbolic of mental cowardice. In the same article, Frye expounds on the changing relationship between text and design in Thel, Marriage, Visions and the early prophecies, including America where, he claims, Blake finally achieved the proper "balance" between a text and illustration. He further comments on plate nine, saying that the speech of "a terrified reactionary angel denouncing Orc" is given an ironic tone³⁹ by the accompanying pastoral design.

It is this diversity of intention and presentation in Blake's visual imagery and lyric of which John Beer speaks in his "Blake, Coleridge and Wordsworth; Some Cross Currents and Parallels". The "play of opposites", he states, "is particularly bold in the productions of 1793-40⁴⁰". Seeing America as exemplifying "positive visual forms of organized energy"⁴¹, Beer suggests that it was during the composition of this poem that Blake moved from a "despairing contemplation of the contrast between vegetative innocence and tyrannical energy"⁴², to a view of their possible union. Thus, he continues, serpentine forms and foliage are "sometimes run together"⁴³ as in the last plate of America where a snake emerges to the right and a flower's head flows to the left "of which the lower features match the snake's head, tongue and lower jaw"⁴⁴. Further study of Blake's visual work occurs in Beer's Blake's Visionary Universe where he notes in America the presence of a visual actualisation of "reason reducing the serpent to analytical coils"⁴⁵.

The importance given to Blake's illustrations is also apparent in W.J.J. Mitchell's article, "Blake's Composite Art". Expressing the belief that Blake's illustrations often expand and transform the text, Mitchell adds that Blake often provides a vision which may appear independent of the accompanying lyric. The "coupling of poetry and painting is desirable", however, "because it can

dramatize the interaction of ... apparent dualities"⁴⁶.
 Mitchell also states that Blake rejected "illusionism"
 where an early event is placed in the foreground of a
 picture and a later event in the background. Instead, he
 explains, Blake "concentrates on a few foreground images,
 often arranged symmetrically, to encourage an instantan-
 eous grasp of the whole design rather than an impression
 of dramatic sequence"⁴⁷. This desire for an immediate unity
 is substantiated by the fact that "his portraits are not
 of men with minds, but of the mind itself"⁴⁸. The vitality
 which Mitchell perceives in Blake's art arises from the
 poet's desire to dramatize and visualize the activity of
 the imagination and its encounter with reality rather than
 to concern himself with the "fixed" and "emblematic"⁴⁹.
 While the unity in diversity which he sees as an essential
 aspect of Blake's art is exemplified in America where the
 images of Orc and Urizen are similar but have "opposite
 effects"⁵⁰.

While Mitchell evaluates the effect of individual
 designs and their unified immediacy, he neglects to mention
 the "progression" of illustration in Blake's poems. This
 movement, states Jean Hagstrum in his essay "Blake and the
 Sister-Arts Tradition" can be called a picture gallery
 "in which the reader moves like a spectator from tableau
 to tableau"⁵¹. Blake's great power as an artist, furthermore,
 springs from "a remarkable union of aesthetic (painting

and poetry) and the prophetic (vision and word)⁵²". This union, achieved in part through the use of "verbal icons" and "visualizable personification"⁵³, is strengthened by Blake's symbolic portrayal of man, at once God, Christ and the "universal family"⁵⁴.

This affirmation of Blake's belief in man's potential divinity is reiterated in Anne Kostelanetz' Blake's Human Form Divine, an expansion of her previously mentioned essay. Here she notes that during the composition of America and the other poems between 1790-5, "Blake's poetic vision and philosophical principles came into conflict with his visual style"⁵⁵. Recalling the symbolic representations which Blake intended for open and closed forms, she contrasts the development of an increasingly expansive view of man's potential in the substance of the text with the "teutonic" forms of the designs characterized by "sharply outlined, clearly bounded human figures"⁵⁶. This contrast evolves from her detailed visual and textual analysis of Visions and America. Of the latter poem she states that America celebrates the capacity of political and military revolution to destroy the closed institutions of reason"⁵⁷, and as the poem ends with a "triumphant prophecy of freedom"⁵⁸ she sees the "fierce flames of Orc" and the "force of Energy"⁵⁹ channelled into revolution.

Agreeing with Kostelanetz' political interpretation of the poem, Anthony Blunt in The Art of William Blake ⁶⁰ states that the poem America describes the first stage of a revolutionary movement or the liberation from enslavement. He sees America however, as part of a transition between the "energy" of the Marriage of Heaven and Hell and the "gloom" of the later Lambeth books. Referring to the appearance of a devoured figure and a drowned corpse, he suggests that the sombre tone of the poem is relieved only by the pastoral image in plate nine and the appearance of a naked youth. His preoccupation with these visual images arises from his belief in the increasing emphasis which Blake was placing on the designs, reflections, he maintains, of the poet's own state of ⁶¹ mind.

The summary of the Blake criticism on America: A Prophecy, specifically, or on Blake's "visual art" has been confined, until now, to either book publications or published collections of essays. The proportionate scarcity of criticism mentioned earlier in the paper is most obvious in the review of recent periodic literature. The most significant article on America: A Prophecy is ⁶² G.E. Bentley Jr's "The Printing of Blake's America", an historical account of the various copies of the poem. ⁶³ While Gerald Enscoe in "The Content of Vision" includes America as an example of Blake's power to visualize

psychological facts, the critical works describing the visual aspect of Blake are for the most part like E.J. Rose's "Visionary forms dramatic: grammatical and iconographical movement in Blake's verse and designs" in that they evaluate either the later or earlier poems.

Despite the neglect from which America has suffered, the numerous articles with such subjects as, "Blake Designs for the Book of Thel", "Blake's Illustrations to the Book of Job" and Blake's Watercolour Designs illustrating Gray's Poems" indicate the prevalence of critical thought concerning the artistic Blake. They, and other publications mentioned previously, demonstrate the necessity of understanding both word and picture in the evaluation of Blake's work. In the study of America, such an awareness is especially crucial.

While a review of America criticism reveals a continuing concern over the nature of Blake's visual images, it also illustrates the critical awareness of the thematic and artistic contrast between text and illustration. Anne Kostelanetz, in noting the paradoxical juxtaposition of the increasingly expansive view in the substance of the text and the teutonic form of the illustrations, and Anthony Blunt, in describing the contrast between the "energy" of the text and the despondency of the illustrations, point to the significant ambiguity existent in America, a characteristic especially important in view of the

"prophetic" nature of the poem. For rather than emerge as a confident prophetic work, America appears to give evidence of doubt and uncertainty.

This internal tension, suggested by these critics, is in fact a dominant characteristic of America. In his article, "The First Illuminated Books" Anthony Blunt suggests that in 1793 Blake was writing during a time of personal transition. Becoming increasingly aware of the failures of the American and French Revolutions, he became increasingly disillusioned over man's ability to become socially, politically and, finally, imaginatively liber-

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ated. Placing too much initial faith in the social and political reality of his time, Blake, Northrop Frye states in his Fearful Symmetry, was writing in a state of self deception. It is only when Blake transcended this reality in the later prophecies, Frye continues, and entered in the realm of the imagination, that he succeeds in creating a fulfilled poetic prophecy in such poems as Milton and

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Jerusalem. While the reasons for Blake's uncertainty must remain elusive, there being little personal correspondence during the time of which America was written, it is obvious that his doubt is manifested in the ambiguity of the poem.

The diverse and sometimes contrasting ideas in America's text and illustrations become especially apparent in their relationship with the earlier Thel, Marriage and

Visions. For in reflecting ideas developed and adapted in America, these earlier works provide important insights into the artistic and thematic intentions and accomplishments of the later poem. Not only are they essential to a visual and comprehensive evaluation of America, but they also reveal the development of Blake's poetic art in showing the emergence of a creative synthesis. For despite the ambiguity of America's final statement, Blake, in this poem, demonstrates his ability to develop and expand, dynamically and creatively, continuing themes of his poetic art, both in text and illustration. Thus while America may be thematically ambiguous and perhaps inconclusive, its artistic merits attests to Blake's power as an artist and poet.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

- 1 D.Erdman, Blake: Prophet Against Empire (Princeton, 1954), p.496.
- 2 This book was initially published in London in 1787. I have devised the notation (A 3:6-12) to refer conveniently to the America text and have used this form throughout the thesis. The explanation is as follows: A - America, 3- plate three, 6-12- lines six to twelve. All textual references throughout the thesis are taken from, William Blake, Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).
- 3 D.Erdman, Blake: Prophet Against Empire; (Princeton, 1954), pp.24-29.
- 4 Erdman, pp. 56-85.
- 5 H.Bloom, Blake's Apocalypse: A Study in Poetic Argument (Ithaca, 1963).
- 6 D.Erdman, J.Grant, ed., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970).
- 7 D.Erdman, "America: New Expanses"; in D.Erdman, J.Grant, ed., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 93.
- 8 Erdman, p.93.
- 9 Erdman, p. 94.
- 10 Erdman, p. 95.
- 11 Erdman, p. 112.
- 12 D.Erdman, "Blake's Vision of Slavery", in N.Frye, ed., William Blake: A collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1966), pp.88-103.
- 13 Erdman, p. 96.
- 14 G.Quasha, "Orc as a Fiery Paradigm", in D.Erdman, J. Grant, ed., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp.263-284.

- 15 N.Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969).
- 16 G.Quasha, "Orc as a Fiery Paradigm", Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (1970), p. 266.
- 17 Quasha, pp. 269-270.
- 18 Quasha, p. 276.
- 19 Quasha, p. 277.
- 20 Quasha, p. 280.
- 21 D.Erdman, "America: New Expanses", Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (1970), p.93.
- 22 E.Hamblen, On the Minor Prophecies of William Blake (New York: Haskell House Publishers Ltd., 1968).
- 23 M.Paley, Energy and Imagination: A Study of the Development of Blake's Thought (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970).
- 24 Paley, p. 61.
- 25 Paley, p. 77.
- 26 Paley, p. 179.
- 27 K.Raine, Blake and Tradition (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1968), I.
- 28 K.Raine, William Blake (London: 1970), p. 70.
- 29 D.G.Gilliam, William Blake (Cambridge, 1973), p. 173.
- 30 Gilliam, p. 157.
- 31 Gilliam, p. 157.
- 32 M.Butlin, "The Evolution of Blake's Large Colour Prints" in R.Rosenfield, ed., William Blake: Essays for S.Foster Damon (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969), p.110.
- 33 A.Kostelanetz, "Blake's 1795 Colour Prints: An Interpretation", William Blake: Essays for S.Foster Damon (Providence, 1969).
- 34 Kostelanetz, p. 130.

- 35 Kostelanetz, p. 130.
- 36 J.Warner, "Blake's Use of Gesture", in D.Erdman, J. Grant, ed., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 175.
- 37 J.Warner, "Blake's figures of Despair: Man in His Spectre's Power", in M.Paley, ed., William Blake: Essays in honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973, p. 208.
- 38 N.Frye, "Poetry and Design in William Blake" in N.Frye, ed., William Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice Hall Inc., 1966).
- 39 Frye, p. 124.
- 40 J.Beer, "Blake Coleridge and Wordsworth: Some Cross-Currents and Parallels", in M.Paley, ed., Essays in Honour of Sir Geoffrey Keynes (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973)p.236.
41. Beer, p.238.
- 42 Beer, p.236.
- 43 Beer, p.236.
- 44 Beer, p.236.
- 45 J.Beer, Blake's Visionary Universe (New York, 1969) p.76.
- 46 W.J.J.Mitchell, "Blake's Composite Art" in D.Erdman, J.Grant, ed., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970),p.62.
- 47 Mitchell, p.68.
48. Mitchell, p.68.
- 49 Mitchell, p.72.
- 50 Mitchell, p.79.
- 51 J.Hagstrum, "Blake and the Sister-Arts Tradition", in D.Erdman, J.Grant, ed., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p.85.
- 52 Hagstrum, p.91.

- 53 Hagstrum, p.85.
- 54 Hagstrum, p.88.
- 55 A.Kostelanetz, Blake's Human Form Divine (Berkeley & Los Angeles, 1974), p.xvi.
- 56 Kostelanetz, p.63.
- 57 Kostelanetz, p.66.
- 58 Kostelanetz, p.67.
- 59 Kostelanetz, p.67.
- 60 A.Blunt, "The First Illuminated Books" in N.Frye, ed., William Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays (New Jersey: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1966).
- 61 Blunt, p.131.
- 62 G.E.Bentley Jr., "The Printing of Blake's America", Studies in Romanticism, VI(1966), pp.45-57.
- 63 G.Enscoe, "The Content of Vision", Papers on Language and Literature, IV (1968),pp.400-413.
- 64 E.J.Rose, "Visionary forms dramatic: grammatical and iconographical movement in Blake's verse and designs", Criticism, VIII(1966),pp.111-125.
- 65 A.Blunt, "The First Illuminated Books", William Blake: A Collection of Critical Essays(1966), p.134.
- 66 N.Frye, Fearful Symmetry(Princeton, 1969),pp.216-218.

CHAPTER TWO

2 BLAKE'S TEXTUAL ALLUSIONS

In the review of the recent Blake scholarship in Chapter One, it became apparent that America has provoked a wide range of speculation and observation. Critical opinion has focused on both the nature of the poem and its importance in the spectrum of Blake's career. Considered by some critics to be the manifestation of a limited artistic and thematic development, it has been dismissed by others as a statement of political rhetoric. This scholarly neglect, arising primarily from the view of its initial position in the series of Blake's prophecies and its production in the midst of a transitional period in Blake's life, has been unjustified. The more valid assertion that the poem is a central representation not only of Blake's art, in the use of imagery and symbols, but also of a theme which pervades all of Blake's poetry, is made by Northrop Frye in his Fearful Symmetry, David Erdman in "America: New Expanses" and George Quasha in "Orc as a Fiery Paradigm".

The central concern of these scholars is the Orc figure and his relationship to the events in the poem, and in the chronological progression from the initial

views of Frye to those of Quasha, there occurs an increasing emphasis on the individuality of Orc and the inherent freedom which he embodies. Initially depicted as an integral part of a closed cycle, he is finally seen as rising from the system to which he has been formerly confined.

It is in Northrop Frye's Fearful Symmetry that Orc appears as a necessary and intricately dependent figure in his surrounding world. Viewed by Frye as representing the "continuous arrival of new life, the renewed sexual and reproductive power which that brings and the periodic over-²throw of social tyranny", Orc is associated with the power of human desire to achieve a better world which, in America,³ is brought about by the symbolic "dragon-slaying" of George III and English Toryism. As a "natural renewal of life in society", this symbolic transformation "therefore does not happen irrationally but at a definite time like the dawn and the spring"⁴. This social determinism which Frye attributes to Orc's actions arises from his belief that in Blake's poetry "human history no less than the natural world has a cyclic rhythm of decline and revival". History, taking "the form of a series of cultures or civil-⁶izations each with its own rise, maturity and fall" becomes part of a perpetual revolution which necessarily includes tyranny. Orc, consequently, becomes an agent of social determinism.

While Orc may exist perpetually in human history, Frye regards his state in America as transitory. For while he is associated with red, "the colour of revolution, blood, rage and sexual passion"⁷, and Urizen, in contrast, is linked with the white of freezing snows, the role of these two "individuals" in the natural cycle makes it "impossible", Frye asserts, "to maintain them as separate principles"⁸. Urizen is the Orc figure grown old and a perpetual self-rejuvenating entity and his cyclical emergence as the youthful figure is emphasized, Frye suggests, by the constant association of Orc with the "shedding" serpent. For as the wintry Urizenic layer is removed, the Orcean spring of sensibility emerges.

In addition to binding Orc to a cycle of social revolution, Frye also confines him to the temporary vegetable life of earthly existence. "He cannot represent an entry into the new world", as Frye states, "but only the power of renewing the exhausted form in the old one"⁹. The natural sun, seen as a mechanical device to light up the wall of the underground cave of limited perception, is, according to Frye, "imprisoned" in a "great spiritual night" which is the sleep of the human soul"¹⁰. Occurring in this spiritual darkness, Orc's actions in America, therefore, are both farcical and self-deceiving, as, a part of vegetable life, he becomes anchored to the confining "rock" of the physical world and its natural cycle.

This sense of futility which Frye gives to America arises from his belief that Blake, in attempting to proclaim, mythologically, the new dawn of the American Revolution, was, himself, writing in a state of self-deception. It is only when Blake transcends the social and political issues, Frye asserts, and enters into the realm of the imagination in the later prophecies that he escapes the limitations of the physical world¹¹. This view of America, though, is shared by neither Erdman nor Quasha.

In his exploration of America, Erdman in Blake: Prophet Against Empire, "America: New Expanses", and Blake's Debt to Joel Barlow" attempts to illuminate the political aspects of the poem. Through the mythological depiction of the American Revolution, he states, Blake is able to lead the reader to a new world of the imagination. Rather than describing the physical as a prison, Blake illustrates its function in leading one to the "golden thread"¹² of new perception. America, itself, Erdman admits, does not illuminate this novel imaginative perception but opens the way for its potential in the consumation of the gates in the final image of the poem.

Regarding America as a "cycle of history that begins with the birth and rising of an Orc or human serpent of Independence during the American War and Revolution"¹³, Erdman sees the poem as a "symbolic fusion of military and psychic history heightened by apocalyptic imagery"¹⁴.

Tracing the "sound" imagery in the text, he notes that Blake "first gives us silence, then the early emergence of articulate sound, and finally a conflagration of apocalyptic thunders and war clarions"¹⁵. The result of this exploration is his belief that the poem is best described as a prophetic opera.

Erdman's assertion of the sound imagery in the text is well supported. Noting the appearance of the words, "screaming", "raging", "howls", "bursts" and "cry", he points to the confrontation between the Prince of Albion "clashing his scales" and the Orc of Independence whose "thunders shake the temple"¹⁶. The piercing effect of sound is also characteristic of the image of fire and flames as they "glow to America's shore" and melt on the coast"¹⁷. Erdman's meticulous tracing of the development of these major images occurs, in part, to dispel any notion that America is of minor artistic merit. His display of their progression through the poem, on the other hand, also counters Frye's view that America demonstrates a perpetual enslavement and circularity. The "fires" and the "deep rolling thunder, which become less and less musical" emerge toward the end of the poem as "incendiary canonades"¹⁸. Their rising power, lastly viewed in the consummation of the gates of limited perception, "will hatch", Erdman claims, "into the vision of Eternity beyond the flames"¹⁹.

Erdman views America as a progression from an enslavement within the poem to a freedom which culminates outside the text and in the reader's imagination. Rather than an "illustration" of any cycle of enslavement, the poem performs an essential function in bringing about this journey into the imagination. America, then, is a prophetic catalyst designed to generate a political, social and spiritual liberation outside the poem. Its generative capability is indicated by the "embryonic" nature of Orc's world of "bloody fire" ²⁰. While Orc himself is born "o'er the ²¹ Atlantic sea" his rising strength is associated with the image, "Red rose the clouds from the Atlantic in vast wheels of blood" and "human blood shooting its veins all round the ²² orb'd heaven". With this emphasis on embryonic imagery and the "wheels of blood" ²³, Erdman implies that any notions of a cycle in the poem are transcended by the progression of a stronger generative force and in this respect counters Frye's argument of circularity.

While Erdman differs in his interpretation of the poem, he resembles Frye in his treatment of Orc. For both critics place Orc within their respective generative and circular systems as he exists as a symbolic manifestation of the forces around him. In contrast to this view, George Quasha in "Orc as a Fiery Paradigm" regards the Orc figure as the central force of the regeneration he sees in the poem.

Developing Blake's notion of dialogue and the necessary meeting of contraries as "Without Contraries is no progression" (MHH 3:Prose), he demonstrates the necessity and presence of an internal dialogue within the Orc figure. It is a dialogue which, as he states, creates a continual generative torque by which a new state is reached and a new set of contraries established.

Pointing to the importance of dialogue in the earlier Book of Thel, Marriage of Heaven and Hell, and Visions of the Daughters of Albion, Quasha asserts that it is of similar significance in America. His belief in the creative and generative nature of this poetic torsion which results from this dialogue or meeting of contraries also places him in opposition to Frye's notion of circularity. Of the "Orc cycle he states that it "may be a more characteristic creation of Northrop Frye's cartography than of Blake's poetic system which strove for escape from circular closure in space and time"²⁴. Orc, according to Quasha, is a "specific manifestation of a principle of renewed thought-creating fires" by which "primal Energy" is "released as formative power"²⁵. In a view similar to that of Erdman, he sees the release of such "primal Energy" in the fires which conclude the poem. The generative formation which results in the successful overthrow of Albion's Angel in America is meant to be repeated in the final image of the burning gates as the establishment of a formative social, political

and spiritual power becomes in this final fiery image the responsibility of the reader whose "expanded inner eye gazes, from a perspective of the infinite, at the world outside the poem." Orc's actions in America, then, are symbolically prophetic of those to be eventually experienced by the reader and in this respect he becomes a model of generative formation.

The success of Orc's revolution in America is especially significant, Quasha states, in view of the previous failures at liberation in the earlier poems. The "rape-outcry-prophecy" paradigm which begins in America with Orc's "conversion of cosmic silence into primal verbal presence in the shadowy daughter's newborn words, continuing through Washington's speech, Orc's Declaration of Independence" and finally to the "verbal apocalypse of plate 8" contrasts a similar paradigm in Visions. In the earlier poem the outcry is followed not by generative or formative action but rather by echoes of lamentations. Essentially, Quasha suggests, Oothoon is a failed Orc figure, or in a chronological view, one who has not attained a complete development of perception. Her intercourse and consequent self-reflection of spiritual virginity become the seed of generative action manifested in America as the child which she bears can conceivably be Orc.

Quasha also traces the development of "poetic torsion" in Thel, the Marriage and Visions. While these

works have the process of dialogue as their central internal structure, its results vary. The intercourse which occurs in Visions and which is dogmatically proclaimed essential in the Marriage, is avoided completely by the protagonist in Thel. In this chronological study of interaction Quasha displays most convincingly the development which led to America, indicating that in terms of poetic torsion America represents the completion of a self-reviving cycle where the "rape-outcry-prophecy" paradigm is immediately followed by another rape of this newly-formed but closed system. Thus, while in Frye's view the cycle and the resulting changes are recurring, the continual cycle, here, produces an infinite progression to an increasing higher innocence. The "thought-creating fires" which burn at the gates of the five senses in the conclusion of the poem become the rapists of the reader's imagination.

In emphasizing the relationship which Blake attempts to establish between America and its readers, Erdman and Quasha effectively undermine Frye's interpretation of the poem where the reader is left a mere spectator to the cyclical development of events. Quasha, in including Blake's earlier Thel, Marriage and Visions in his observations on

America gives to his thoughts the greatest consistency and credibility. The importance of the earlier poems to his idea of poetic torsion, moreover, supports the argument put forth in the beginning of this paper that an understanding of these earlier works is central to an understanding of America. While Quasha has demonstrated the validity of this argument in terms of poetic torsion, it is my intention to reveal that other aspects of America emerge as a result of developments begun in the earlier poems.

Reviewing the text of America and its allusions to Thel, Marriage and Visions, I have refrained in this chapter from making any conclusive interpretation of the poem. As Blake intended America to be a combination of poetry and art, any final observations about its nature must include a consideration of both these aspects. My purpose in this chapter is to trace the extent to which Blake's textual imagery is a reflection or distortion of image and word used in the earlier works. As will be noted, this "borrowing" was neither occasional nor insignificant and while some images appear as the result of unconscious recollection, other phrases seem either to determine directly or make deliberately ambiguous a specific critical observation.

Having determined the extent of Blake's textual borrowing, I intend in the following chapter to examine a similar reiteration of illustrations and, in the illumination of both textual and pictorial allusion, finally reveal the

internal tension which emerges. America will be seen to include aspects of the Frye, Erdman and Quasha interpretations and their apparent contradictions.

The idea of extended and developed themes of earlier poems as existent in America becomes apparent in the "Preludium". Here, as in Visions, there occurs a rape and consequent outcry. Eventually given greater social and political implications in the body of the poem, the physical rape in the "Preludium", while foreshadowing Orc's later imaginative assault, also alludes to the earlier rape of Oothoon in Visions as the suggestion of a symbolic unity between Oothoon and the shadowy daughter implies an affinity between Bromion and Orc. The exploration of the relationship between the figures from both works results in a greater awareness on the reader's part of Orc's more highly-developed spirituality. The lust which is embodied by Bromion in Visions, for example, is condemned by Orc in America and with the suggestion of an extended identity, his sentiment could be regarded as self-condemning or, in Quasha's terminology, as an example of self-rending.

While the suggestion of an extended or unified personality in Visions and America supports Quasha's view of the poem, the textual allusions allow for several other thematic possibilities. The initial reference to the shadowy daughter of Urthona, in recalling the "daughter of beauty" (BT 5:7) in Thel, suggests a movement from pastoral innocence

to a darker world of experience. This world of darkness is further alluded to in the description of "red" Orc. Resembling the "red, round globe, hot burning" (VDA 2:33) on the Abyss in Visions, his colour associates him with the figure of Satan in the Marriage while the traditionally regarded darkness inherent in the Satanic is emphasized in the conclusion of America where Orc's fires emit heat but not light.

The portrayal of the daughter of Urthona as "Crown'd with a helmet and dark hair" (A 1:4), enhancing this darkness, also creates in itself an image of emotional and spiritual frigidity. In describing this "crowned" female, however, Blake reminds one of the crown belonging to the clod of clay in Thel. While the idea of cold solitude arises from the clod's reflection that "My bosom of itself is cold and of itself is dark" (BT 4:12), her echoing statement, "And I have given thee a crown that none can take away" (BT 5:4) suggests a foreboding presence of control in the "Preludium" setting.

The contrast between the setting of Thel and America is further revealed in the reference to the "bow". Where in America the allusion is to a "bow like that of night/Where pestilence is shot from heaven" (A 1:6), in Thel a "watery bow" (BT 1:8) is compared to the protagonist, the life inherent in the symbol of water being in marked contrast to the death that comes with pestilence. The "dark

air" (A1:8) which surrounds the "shadowy" daughter is broken only by the clouds which form around her loins. Recalling the initial setting of the Marriage where "Hungry clouds swag on the deep" (MHH 2:2), this clouded enclosure of the genitals is a reminder of the sexual aversion characteristic of Theotormon. Significantly, his lamenting over Oothoon's intercourse with Bromion in Visions"clouds with jealousy his nights"(VDA 7:18) .

In the midst of this darkened setting, Blake portrays the shadowy daughter as standing "silent" "as night" (A 1:8) as once again he recalls the figures of Thel and Oothoon. In the allusion to Thel who "stood in silence listening to the voices of the ground" (BT 6:8), Blake emphasizes the passivity of the "shadowy" female figure, while in the comparison to Oothoon, who "waited silent all the day and all the night" (VDA 4:25), Blake points to a significant distinction between the two females. Contrasting Oothoon who is silent after her liberation from the "night" "that closed me in its deadly black"(VDA 2:29), the shadowy daughter exists in a darkened state of enslavement.

In the allusions to these early poems Blake emphasizes the pervading atmosphere of darkness, enslavement and frigidity which surrounds the female figure. The descriptive distinction, on the other hand, between her

"iron tongue"(A 1:9) and the pastoral "honeyed" tongue in The1(BT 6:16) demonstrates the oppressive potential of experience. Orc's reference to the female as a "dark virgin" (A 1:11), furthermore, contrasts with the "weeping virgin" in The1(BT 3:14) and the "virgin bliss" in Visions(VDA 6:6). His description of her father "stern abherr'd"(A 1:11) recalls Oothoon's curse, "Father of Jealousy be thou accursed from the earth"(VDA 7:12) and in this reiteration of "jealousy" emphasizes the initial association of Theotormon, Urizen and the female figure of the "Preludium".

This poetic interaction which helps to illuminate the characteristics of the shadowy daughter also gives greater insight into the initial description of Orc. Bound by "tenfold chains"(A 1:12), he resembles the "Giants" in the Marriage "who formed this world into its sensual existence and now seem to live in it in chains"(MHH 15:Prose). The relationship of these chains to the world of experience is suggested by the "chain of life" in Visions(VDA 4:23). Both Orc and the daughter of Urthona, then, appear initially passive and controlled in the world of experience. Despite this initial similarity, however, Orc's impending liberation is made apparent in the description of his "soaring spirit"(A 1:12) as it is this image which represents the potential for Eternity in Blake's earlier proverb from the Marriage, "No bird soars too high if he soars with

his own wings" (MHH 7:Prose).

Orc's rising spirit is given further association with the infinite in his self-reflected eagle image. For in the Marriage Blake proclaims that when "thou seest an eagle thou seest a portion of Genius" (MHH 9:Prose). The sense of Orc's impending rebellion, on the other hand, occurs in Blake's observation that the "eagle never lost so much time as when he submitted" (MHH 8:Prose). Similarly Orc's rebellious actions are given sanction by his reflection of the lion, as the "wrath of the lion", Blake asserts in the Marriage, "is the wisdom of God" (MHH 18:Prose). The ambiguous nature of this lion image, also associated with the Prince of Albion, makes it a possible representation of Urizen and Orc thereby supporting the notion advocated by Frye that Orc and Urizen are parts of one identity.

As the first plate of the "Preludium" concludes, we witness the rape of the shadowy daughter. Her limbs, wrapped in the folds of Orc, present an image reminiscent of Visions where "storms rent Theotormon's limbs" (VDA 8:6). Orc in this rape sequence "howls" (A 1:19) with joy and having joyfully rended "these caverns", differs with the earlier Bromion who "shook the cavern with his lamentation" (VDA 4:12).

Despite his similarity to Theotormon in being "silent as despairing love" (A 2:1), Orc rends the links of

his chains. That he is as "strong as jealousy"(A 2:1) equates him with the "Father of Jealousy"(VDA 7:12) in Visions and in this sense points to the inevitable clash between their two forces in the body of America. The shadowy daughter's first reaction to Orc's rape in smiling "her first-born smile"(A 2:4) momentarily demonstrates the assertion in Visions that she who "pines for man shall awaken her womb to enormous joys(VDA 7:14). "The lamentation which follows consequently becomes a greater tragedy of lost potential as she, like Thel, appears to enter "a land of sorrows and of tears where never a smile was seen"(BT 6:5).

In the speech of the shadowy daughter Blake introduces the political and social afflictions occurring on the "American plains"(A 2:10). The figures described here as "endured by roots and who writhe their arms in the nether deep"(A 2:11) that "grew black as a sea and rolled with a terrible noise" in the Marriage(MHH 17:Prose) are a bleak contrast to the youth in the Marriage who "stretched out his arms embracing the flames of fire"(MHH 22:Prose). The "roots" through which they endure the "afflictions" appear reminiscent of the "fibrous roots" of Thel(BT 6:3) associated in that poem with the "couches of the dead"(BT 6:3).

The assaulted female's final belief that her "fallen" state is "eternal death" and the "torment long

foretold"(A 2:17) epitomizes the fãlsehood in the Marriage, "That God will torment Man in Eternity for following his Energies"(MHH 4:Prose), and associates her with the Angels in the Marriage who similarly view "active energy" as "torment and insanity"(MHH 6:Prose). This final allusion to the Angels, who are continually mocked in the Marriage gives a humourous undertone to the daughter's speech as she becomes clearly a pitiable figure.

In her rape and subsequent outcry the shadowy daughter simultaneously resembles Ooothoon and Theotormon in Visions. Symbolic of a physical and spiritual rape, Orc's actions in the "Preludium" reflect the storms which spiritually rended Theotormon in the earlier poem. Lamenting within an illusory perception of reality, the shadowy daughter recalls the similar reaction by Theotormon. Her regressive state is also revealed in her relationship to Ooothoon. For while both female figures are raped, Ooothoon surpasses the daughter in her resulting novel perception of the world. Rather than regard her intercourse as "eternal death" and the "torment long foretold", she views her sexual experience as instrumental in allowing her to enter into a greater spiritual innocence. The chronological perceptual regression embodied in the shadowy daughter, then, may perhaps represent a lingering uncertainty in the poet's mind over the inevitability of a progressive

movement toward a new awareness. She appears as a stunted rather than a developed Oothoon and in this respect suggests in part that America is a regression from Visions.

But while the relationship between the shadowy daughter and Theotormon questions the state of progressive perception in America, the association of Orc and Theotormon creates a different impression. It has been suggested by D.G.Gilliam that in Visions Bromion and Theotormon are two aspects of one identity whose spiritual and sensual natures are totally isolated. Noting the similarities discussed earlier between Bromion and Orc, especially in their comparable rapes, the latter may also be regarded as a later version of Theotormon. For like Theotormon, throughout Visions, Orc is initially portrayed in the "Preludium" as being spiritually enchained. His rape of the shadowy daughter, then, who also resembles Theotormon, becomes an instance of self-rending and gives initial support to George Quasha's view that a pattern of continual and progressive self-torsion exists throughout America.

The subtle suggestion of character assimilation in Visions and the "Preludium" of America allows for a varied interpretation of the later poem. The ambiguity arising from the "progressive" and "regressive" reflections in the "Preludium" invite a closer study of Orc's revolution. That this ambiguity remains and is perhaps a reflection

of Blake's own state of mind is the argument of this study. For while the "Preludium" is reflective, it is also prophetic in its condensed symbolic portrayal of Orc's social, political and spiritual revolution and the textual allusion illuminating this symbolic stage also reveals the action and setting of the "Prophecy" section of America.

The opening lines of "A Prophecy" establish an immediate atmosphere of silent apprehension. While the Prince of Albion "burns in his nightly tent"(A 3:1) the "souls of warlike men" rise in silent night(A 3:3) and "Meet on the coast glowing with blood"(A 3:5). The intimation of potential explosiveness, enhanced by this overwhelming silence, effectively foreshadows the subsequent uprising of action and sound. In Blake's use of specific images, however this initial silence is given a greater sense of foreboding. The "nightly tent" which contains the Prince of Albion, reminiscent of the "shining tent" of the "fair-eyed dew"(BT 3:13) in TheL suggests a darkness, emphasized by the "silent night" in which the "war-like men arise", and complemented by the "sullen fires" piercing the nightly air. Emerging from the Prince of Albion these "sullen fires" recall the image of the "sullen frowning fool" in the Marriage(MHH 8:Prose) and create an impression of the "Guardian Prince"(A 3:1) that undermines his initial stature.

As a result, Albion's Prince appears as an oppressive fool of darkness from which Washington and the others may justifiably proclaim their independence.

While the "Guardian Prince" is immediately associated with darkness, the Americans, also through Blake's use of reflective imagery, are symbolically united with "energy". In his earlier Marriage, Blake reverses the mythology of the Christian world. The "active energy" traditionally regarded as evil becomes one with virtue and is embodied in the image of the Leviathan. Here, in a setting identical to America where the Americans "meet on the coast", Blake describes this Leviathan:

Between the clouds and the waves we saw
a cataract of blood mixed with fire ...
Advancing toward us with all the fury of
a spiritual existence tingling the
black deep with beams of blood(MHH 17:Prose).

Characterizing the Prince of Albion's view of Orc and the Americans, this image illuminates Albion's opponents and establishes Blake's own immediate sympathies.

The atmosphere of silence and tension pervading the opening lines of "A Prophecy" is broken, as David Erdman notes, by Washington's speech. Commencing the verbal action of the conflict, America's general reiterates, in his description, the oppressive nature of Albion's Prince. In instructing the Americans to view a "bended bow" "lifted in heaven"(A 3:7) he recalls not only the "bow like that

of night(A 1:5-6) which shoots pestilence in the "Preludium" but also the image of Urizen in Oothoon's curse, "O Urizen creator of men, mistaken Demon of heaven(VDA 5:3)."

The "heavy iron chain" which descends "link by link from Albion's cliffs"(A 3:8) is the chain which binds Orc in the "Preludium". In his opening speech, then, Washington establishes the affinity between Urizen and the Prince of Albion. Suffering from Albion's oppression, the Americans with "heads deprest", "eyes downcast" and "faces pale", at once reflect the shadowy daughter and Theotormon and their accompanying states of controlled sensibility. Washington's final proclamation that this perceptual limitation will descend into future generations, causing them to forget the nature of the oppressor, reiterates the theme of self-deception in the Marriage where "men forgot that All deities reside in the human breast"(MHH 11:Prose). More importantly, however, his statement warns of the perversion of Blake's earlier notion that knowledge is "transmitted from generation to generation"(MHH 15:Prose).

Washington's speech brings a "terrible blast"(A 3:13) from Albion's "Wrathful Prince". Resembling the "wintry blast" in Visions(VDA 8:6), the Prince's reaction reminds the reader of the later Urizenic "freezing snows" and consequently associates him with the forces of oppression arising in the darkness of midnight and flaming "red

meteors round the land of Albion beneath"(A 3:16). This association is emphasized as he appears to shoot the "deathly pestilence"(A 1:5-6) described in the "Preludium". Reacting to Albion's flaming, America "faints"(A 4:4) and recalls Oothoon's initial regressive reaction in Visions where on Bromion's "stormy bed" she lay "faint" and "soon her woes appall'd his thunders hoarse"(VDA 1:17). The suggestion here that Bromion may represent the Prince is supported by Bromion's own speech in Visions:

"Thy soft American plains are mine, and
mine thy north and south
"Stamp't with my signet are the swarthy
children of the sun;
"They are obedient, they resist not, they obey
the scourge;
"Their daughters worship terror and obey the
violent(VDA 1:20-23).

His affinity with both Urizen and Orc supports Frye's view that the latter two figures are aspects of one
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identity.

While "America faints" in response to the Prince of Albion, the figure of Orc rises from the "belching sea" and the "raging fires"(A 4:3). His emergence from these flames remind one of the "Lions of flaming fire" in the Marriage who are seen "raging around and melting the metals into living fluids"(MHH 15:Prose). In the Marriage these lions take part in the progressive "transmission" of knowledge from generation to generation and the recollection of their actions supports the notion that Orc is the personification of a generative force "shooting its veins all round

the rob'd heaven"(A 4:5). The image of the "wedge" of "iron" heated in the furnace"(A 4:8-9) also supports this view in that it is a reminder of the "melting" of "the metals into living fluids". In the final essence of Orc's "heat but not light"(A 4:11) penetrating the "murky atmosphere" the initial setting of "A Prophecy" is destroyed and Orc's "Satanic" personality is introduced. Its "evil" nature, as necessarily dependent on the perceiver in the Marriage is a theme also continued in America.

While in his reaction to the coming of Orc, the King of England appears "trembling", Albion's Angel standing beside a stone, views the Orc "terror" as a "comet" or the "planet red"(A 5:2). Alluding to this planetary symbol, the Angel hints at an imminent conflict. That this same "planet red" once "inclos'd the terrible wandering comets in its sphere"(A 5:3) suggests the idea of a self-imposed confinement, a notion central to the Marriage and Visions. In the action of "inclosing", the planet resembles the oppressive forces in Visions which, as Oothoon states, "inclos'd my infinite brain into a narrow circle" and who "told me that I have five senses to inclose me up"(VDA 2:31-32). Orc's newly acquired freedom, consequently, appears as a form of self-liberation. Staining the "temple" (A 5:6) of oppression with "beams of blood"(A 5:7), he infuses a new life, "Red as the rosy morning, lustful as

the first born beam"(VDA 7:27) into his own being. The sense of awakened sexuality, conveyed in this allusion to Visions, is further suggested when as the "morning comes", the "watchmen leave their stations"(A 6:1).

Their departure symbolizes the demise of the "creeping skeleton" of "self-love" seen in Visions with lamplike eyes watching around the frozen marriage bed"(VDA 7:22).

The removal of this self-pre-occupation opens the way to infinite perception as the "palace of eternity" contained in the "jaws of a hungry grave" in Visions(VDA 6:1) is "burst" by Orc's emergence in America. The "bones of death", "breathing" and "awakening" spring like redeemed captives"(A 6:5) to give new life to the body while the "inchained soul" formerly "shut up in darkness"(A 6:8) perceives that "his chains are loose"(A 6:10). The doors of the "dungeon" which "thou are preparing for thyself to all eternity"(MHH 17:Prose) in the Marriage are, with the coming of Orc's liberation, opened. Significantly, in contrast to the initial setting of the "Preludium" and "A Prophecy", "the Sun has left its blackness and has found a fresher morning"(A 6:13) while the "fair Moon rejoices in the clear and cloudless night"(A 6:14). The similarity suggested between this enlightened state and the setting in Thel is deliberate as the comparison to this earlier pastoral world implies that in America a similar but higher

innocence has been attained.

In achieving this higher innocence, Orc, while appearing as a beneficial force of liberation to the formerly oppressed, is also the embodiment of evil to the oppressor. To Albion's Angel he is the "serpent-formed" who stands "at the gate of Enitharmon to devour her children"(A 7:3-4). Referring to the image of the serpent, the Angel re-introduces Orc's "Satanic" quality and the perceptual ambiguity of its nature, first presented in the Marriage. His accusation that Orc is a "Blasphemous Demon", on the other hand, becomes an ironic condemnation of "Urizen creator of men, mistaken Demon of heaven"(VDA 5:3).

Responding to the Angel's accusations, Orc proclaims his identity and purpose. In scattering Urizen's ten commands of religion to the four winds he desires that the "deserts bloom and the deeps shrink to their fountains (A 8:8). This "overflowing fountain" of the Marriage"(MHH 8:15) will renew the "fiery joy"(A 8:9) and "burst the stony roof"(A 8:9) of confinement. In Orc's newly created world, "virginity" may be found in a "harlot" such as Oothoon and in "course-clad honesty"(A 8:11) where in being "honest, open, seeking" "the vigorous joys of morning light are open to virgin bliss"(VDA 6:6). Orc's revolution renews the world of which Oothoon speaks when, in addressing Theototmon, she notes that "once were thy fires lighted by the eyes of honest morn"(VDA 6:15). In

this new world "everything that lives is holy" and "life delights in life"(A 8:13) as the proverb in the Marriage that the "soul of sweet delight can never be defiled"(MHH 9:14) becomes a fact in America. Once again this new reality is associated with the pastoral in the resemblance between Orc's "silver thighs"(A 8:17) and the Lilly's "silver shrine" in The(BT 2:2). Smiling in tears, the Lilly appears to embrace the joy and sorrow combined in Orc's state of higher innocence.

The helplessness which the Prince of Albion feels in the midst of Orc's presence is illustrated in his reaction to the latter's "proclamations". While he is able to see "terrible men stand on the shore"(A 9:9), the "clouds" which dominated the "Preludium" now ironically obscure his "aged sight"(A 9:12) and he becomes a victim of his own imposed limitations. His "aged sight" recalls the image of Theotormon whom Oothoon describes as having "web of age" around him, gray, hoary and dark/Till his eyes sicken at the fruit that hangs before his sight"(VDA 7:20), and in this allusion simultaneously suggests a fruition in Orc's liberation. The Prince's "punishing Demons"(A 9:3) are also impotent in the face of Orc's "thunders". As they crouch "howling before their caverns"(A 9:4), they at once reflect the earlier "howling" Oothoon and the Bromion figure who "shock the caverns with his lamentations"(VDA 4:12). These earlier figures who suffer from the pain of

their perceptual confinement reflect the nature of the "punishing Demons" who like the Prince become the victims of their own oppression. Appearing "like skins dry'd in the wind"(A 9:4), these agents of Albion's tyranny are unable to destroy the fertility of Orc's world. Failing to "bring the stubbed oak to overgrow the hills"(A 9:8), they are unable to sustain the roots of confinement and control prevalent in the America "Preludium".

The Prince of Albion's condemnation of Orc as an "Eternal Viper"(A 9:15) ironically recalls the image in the Marriage where the Viper is involved in the generational transmission of knowledge. Seeing America's shore "writhing" in "darkness" and in "pangs of abhorred birth" (A 9:16-17), he maintains the perception of the shadowy daughter with its characteristic distortion. His inadvertent self-condemnation is also revealed in his "evil" perception of the "harlot womb" heaving in "enormous circles" (A 9:18). It is against this circular and enclosed view that Orc's "crest rebellious"(A 9:17) rises.

Unable to incite a reaction against Orc, Albion's Angel weeps. His similarity to Theotormon "weeping upon the threshold"(VDA 2:21) and the Daughters of Albion who "weep a trembling lamentation"(VDA 1:1) emphasizes the fact that he has become the victim of Urizenic oppression and self-deception. The possibility for salvation, however, emerges in the allusion to the early image of Thel, the

"weeping virgin" who "trembling kneels before the risen sun"(BT 3:14). In America this "rising sun" comprises Orc, the Thirteen Angels and the "immortal pinnacles" of the "ancient palace"(A 10:8-9). While Blake alludes to the "palace of eternity"(MHH 14:Prose) in this third image, his use of "ancient" is also significant as this word is associated in his earlier poems with the infinite. Speaking in the Marriage of "ancient poets"(MHH 11:Prose) and "the ancient tradition"(MHH 14:Prose), he continues the celebration of the distant past in Visions. "Tell where the joys of old", he writes, and "where the ancient loves". "Thou knowest that the ancient trees ... have fruit"(VDA 4:13). This second association of Orc with fruition once again emphasizes the fertility of Orc's revolution.

America's Angels, in response to Albion's war-cry, sit silent below the "hovering" clouds of the Atlantic(A 10-12). In a significant contrast to the clouds "Hovering and glittering in the air before the face of The1"(BT 3:6), the clouds in America are sombre and threatening. Indignant and "burning with the fires of Orc"(A 11:2), the Thirteen Angels counter this threat with "deep thunder"(A 11:1) as the speech of Boston's Angel affirms, in open rebellion, the superiority of honesty and generosity over idleness and pestilence. His condemnation of these Urizenic qualities is consistent with Blake's proverb in the Marriage that "He who desires but acts not, breeds pestilence"(MHH 7:5).

Proclaiming the perversion of law and virtue in the Urizenic world, Boston's Angel rejects the state of the "pitying Angel" who, like Oothoon, "fans himself with sighs" (A 11:13). Reflecting Orc's actions in the "Preludium", the Thirteen Angels discard their robes of servitude. As they descend over America "naked and flaming"(A 12:6) they "come in the heaven of generous love nor selfish blightings bring"(VDA 7:29).

Standing in the flames by the figures of Washington, Paine and Warren, America's Angels perceive the roaring of Orc's fires in "black smoke thunders(A 12:10) and in this awareness recall the figures in the Marriage who "beheld the infinite Abyss, fiery as the smoke of a burning city"(MHH 17:Prose). In reflecting this "Abyss", Orc's fires in America fulfil the promise in the Marriage that a "cherub with flaming sword" will "consume creation" and make it appear "infinite and holy"(MHH 14:Prose). As the fires cover America, the political forces of Albion are seen in full retreat. Throwing up a significant "howl" of "anguish", they abandon their "swords and muskets(A 13:8) and flee from the "grim" flames(A 13:9). The desertion of their "dark castles"(A 13:8), reminiscent of the "castles and high spires, where kings and priests may dwell" in Visions(VDA 5:20), represents a further dissolution of Urizen's power.

Responding to this weakness, Albion's Angels,

"Arm'd with diseases"(A 13:15) attempt to sustain their "deadly world." Thrust upon the Americans "as a storm to cut them off"(A 14:5), these plagues blatantly symbolize the forces of death. Comparing them to a blight that "cuts the tender corn"(A 14:6), Blake implies the destruction of the "tender clod"(BT 2:3) and "tender flowers"(BT 3:6) of Thel and in this respect shows the plagues to represent the annihilation of all potential.

In bringing their diseases Albion's Angels are surrounded by darkness while beneath them the earth is "cold" and "hard"(A 14:7). The combination of these descriptive qualities is especially ominous in view of their earlier use. Reflecting the state of self-preoccupation in the clod's statement, "My bosom of itself is cold and of itself is dark"(BT 4:12), they also characterize a spiritual opaqueness in Visions where "cold floods of abstraction" are one with the "forests of solitude"(VDA 5:9). Their association with spiritual desolation is further illustrated in the image of Theotormon who "wearing the threshold hard"(VDA 2:6) is "shut up in cold despair"(VDA 4:2). Through these allusions to earlier states, then, the Angels appear as manifestations of an empty and destructive spirituality.

Blake emphasizes the extent of the Angels' potential destruction in his statement that "had America been lost", the "Earth" would have "lost another portion of the infinite"(A:14:17-18). Reacting in "wrath and raging fire"

(A 14:19), however, Orc's forces roll back the destructive plagues "with fury" (A 14:20) and in their action at once recall the "raging Lion" (A 1:13) in the "Preludium" and the proverb in the Marriage that the "wrath of the lion is the wisdom of God" (MHH 8:4). Once again Blake's sympathies are clearly presented.

As Albion's plagues recoil on London and Bristol, Albion's Guardian appears "writhing in torment", "pale quivering", "howling" and "shuddering" (A 15:6-8). Ironically embracing the characteristics which he attempted to inflict upon the Americans, he resembles the shadowy daughter and Theotormon. Similarly his ensigns are "sickening in the sky" (A 15:10). In an ironic reversal Blake now uses the traditional "evil" of the serpent to describe Albion's Angels and Priests who, with the "dungeon" doors open, are seen to hide with their rustling black scales in the "reptile coverts" (A 15:19-20) of perceptual confinement. Their females who were "formerly pining in bonds of religion" (A 15:23) now appear "naked and glowing with the lusts of youth" (A 15:22) and awaiting the promise in Visions that she who "pines for man shall awaken her womb to enormous joys" (VDA 7:4). In passing over "their pale limbs" (A 15:26), the "nerves of youth" (A 15:25) and the "desires of ancient times" (A 15:25) are seen "as a vine when the tender grape appears" (A 15:26) and this comparison Blake announces the return of the pastoral imagery of Thel

and the idea of potential which that poem represents.

It is in the midst of this promising potential that Urizen emerges with his "freezing snows". In contrast to "he that loves the lowly" and who "pours oil upon my head" in Thel(BT 5:1), Urizen appears as an empty and oppressive tyrant. Descending with "jealous wings" (A 16:6), he recalls the image of the "Father of Jealousy" (VDA 7:12) and although he temporarily freezes the spread of revolution, the extent of his power is continually undermined by the nature of his description. "Weeping in dismal howlings before the stern Americans", his "leprous limbs" and "hoary visage"(A 16:11) resemble Theotormon and indicate that he, like his followers, is weakened by his own oppression. His threatened power, characterized by "lust", "disease" and "mildews of despair"(A 16:20-21), is "unable to stem the fires of Orc"(A 16:21) which in the final image of America consume the five gates of his "law-built heaven" and burn around the "heavens" and "abodes of men"(A 16:23). The conclusion of America's text, then, appears to proclaim the triumph of Orc's revolution.

The presentation of Urizen's "despairing" and "hoary" visage, emphasizing his affinity with the earlier figures, Oothoon, Theotormon and Thel, illustrates the importance of Blake's textual borrowings. For while Urizen's limited power may be revealed through an exclusive consideration of the America text, the extent of his ironic

self-imposed oppression emerges only through the attention to Blake's allusions. Similarly Albion's Guardian and Urizen's other followers' evolving defeat is thematically enhanced by their increasing comparison to the earlier regressive figures and their accompanying states of perception. As the deathly pestilence blown back upon Albion symbolizes an ironic reversal of "oppression", the images earlier associated with Orc and the oppressed become linked with the oppressors. The "writhing" and "howling" of Orc in the "Preludium" becomes descriptive of Albion's Guardian as a shift in allusion appears to parallel a shift in power.

From the description of the setting of the "Preludium" to the final stage of Urizen, Blake illuminates America and its thematic development through his textual borrowings. The ambiguity of Orc and his association with the earlier Oothoon, Bromion and Theotormon varies from these earlier reflections and reveals a complexity of character in America that suggests that the opposing forces in the poem cannot be easily defined. While Orc does not appear as an absolute symbol of virtue, but must rise above his "howling" to a new perceptual awareness, Urizen and his followers do not appear to embody absolute oppressive power. Their self-imposed weakness, revealed by the allusions to the earlier poems, at once invites a feeling of distrust and sympathy. This pervasive ambiguity

which surrounds Orc, Urizen and their respective followers implies that the contraries in America are within and without, as the reversal of power and textual allusion suggests their fluidity.

In view of this ambiguity, one is left not with a sense of a great triumph of good over evil but, rather, with a notion of a new synthesis arising from painful but necessary experience. The absence of two isolated and totally antagonistic forces may perhaps support Frye's view that Urizen and Oræ are of one identity. Within that identity, however, there exists, continually, the possibility for a new synthesis. Fulfilled in America's conclusion, this newly achieved state represents an evolving awareness from an unceasing conflict. To say that America stabilizes is to support the stasis of idleness and pestilence. Thus both George Quasha's view of a continual internal torsion and Erdman's perception of the rape of the reader's imagination appear consistent with the necessary evolving nature of Orc's revolution, as the final consumation, reminiscent of the revelation of the infinite in the Marriage, reveals its extent.

In the evaluation of the America text, then, the consideration of Blake's earlier images is essential, for acutely revealing, not only the nature of the various settings and characters, but also the ambiguity and contraries necessary for the movement into a new and continuing perceptual synthesis.

This final celebration of sensual, social, political and spiritual liberation arises only from an exclusive consideration of America's text. For while the textual allusions to Thel, Marriage and Visions continually illustrate the progression of Orc's revolution, Blake's visual reflections, equally extensive, present an alternate view. To illuminate the nature of this view is the purpose of the following chapter.

CHAPTER TWO

BLAKE'S TEXTUAL ALLUSIONS

- 1 The method of notation described earlier in Chapter One will also be employed throughout this chapter. Here, however, I have included the earlier poems, Book of Thel(BT), Marriage of Heaven and Hell(MHH) and Visions of the Daughters of Albion(VDA) in addition to America(A). (VDA 3:4), for example, would represent the third plate and the fourth line of Visions. All selections have been taken from, William Blake Complete Writings, ed. Geoffrey Keynes(Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972).
- 2 N.Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Princeton, 1969),p.207.
- 3 Frye, p. 209.
- 4 Frye, p. 209.
- 5 Frye, p. 209.
- 6 Frye, p. 209.
- 7 Frye, p. 209.
- 8 Frye, p. 210.
- 9 Frye, p. 218.
- 10 Frye, p. 218.
- 11 Frye, pp.217-218,251,267.
- 12 D.Erdman, "America:New Expanses", in D.Erdman, J.Grant, ed., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p.110.
- 13 Erdman, p. 94.
- 14 Erdman, p. 95.
- 15 Erdman, p. 95.
- 16 Erdman, p. 96.
- 17 Erdman, p. 96.

- 18 Erdman, p. 98.
- 19 Erdman, p. 110.
- 20 Erdman, p. 110.
- 21 Erdman, p.110.
- 22 Erdman, p. 110.
- 23 Erdman, p. 110.
- 24 George Quasha, "Orc as a Fiery Paradigm", in D.Erdman, J.Grant, ed., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), p. 203.
- 25 Quasha, p. 266.
- 26 Quasha, p. 268.
- 27 Quasha, p. 273.
- 28 Quasha, p. 273.
- 29 Quasha, p. 268.
- 30 D.G.Gilliam, William Blake (Cambridge, 1973), p. 195.
- 31 N.Frye, Fearful Symmetry, (Princeton, 1969), p.210.

CHAPTER THREE

1 BLAKE'S VISUAL ALLUSIONS

In the previous discussions of Blake's allusions to Thel, the Marriage and Visions, I have attempted to illuminate the extent to which recurring symbols and imagery exist in America. While in some instances the possibility for a varied thematic interpretation arises, America generally reveals a pattern which continually emphasizes the beneficence of Orc's "liberation". Blake further suggests that Orc's revolution is both inevitable and necessarily triumphant, and in the final consummation of the gates of the five senses emphasizes this belief. In revealing this sentiment, however, America's text clouds the nature of Blake's entire poetic statement. For in America the accompanying illustrations are of equal importance and significantly add a greater complexity to Blake's views. It is because of this important visual aspect that I carefully avoided any conclusive evaluation of the poem, as a comprehensive statement on America is possible only after a detailed consideration of its visual art.

In the earlier review of critical thought, I noted the dominance of the visual approach to Blake's poetic works. The pervasive concern with Blake's artistic abilities

and intentions is evidenced in the articles by such writers as W.J.J. Mitchell and Jean Hagstrum². While their views affirm the importance of the illustration, other critics, such as Martin Butlin³, in their pre-occupation with the visual, seek to remain indifferent to Blake's lyrical achievements. In America, however as David Erdman had rightly stated, Blake is working on two levels. His text and illustrations allow for both self-sufficiency and interaction and it is up to the reader to discover the extent to which a relationship occurs.

Complementing his use of^{textual} allusion, Blake in America adopts many illustrations from the earlier poems. Reflecting and distorting his earlier visual art, he creates a visual complexity which subsequently results in an internal tension between illustration and text. In the final analysis it is the balance between these two aspects that illuminates the true nature of America, as, in the exploration of this visual-textual relationship, the poem becomes an obvious manifestation of transitional sentiment characterized by uncertainty, ambiguity and an internal tension. In this chapter, however, it is my desire to reveal only the extent and implications of Blake's visual borrowings.

As we first regard America, we confront, in advance of any text, its frontpiece and title page. Characterized by this absence of lyric, they produce an immediate

visual impression which, David Erdman asserts in his "America: New Expanses", conveys an atmosphere of silence. The "slain warrior, anguished maiden, the mother and children who seem to have been but are not now, weeping; the chained angel in the broken wall, his face buried, the dismounted cannon, and the broken sword in the foreground" all suggest "an irreversible silence"⁴. It is Erdman's belief that it is from this initial silence that the noise and forces of Orc's revolution triumph. A closer study of these illustrations, however, indicates a permeating sense of pessimism.

In the frontspiece the picture is dominated by the image of a winged figure manacled to a rock. Representing a potential flight to liberation, the figure, in his similarity to the chained figure in the "Preludium", can be regarded as a potential Orc. He is, however, also reminiscent of Theotormon who in the frontspiece of Visions similarly appears in a forward crouching position with his head buried in his arms. While Theotormon is not portrayed as being visually chained, his spiritual despair binds him to the accompanying large and foreboding rock and this image is repeated again in Visions 4J where, in a similar crouching position of despair, he appears bound once again. The consistent pattern of spiritual confinement depicted in these images is also descriptive of the America frontspiece. In America, however, the confinement is more powerful.

Here, in contrast to the natural rock of Visions the winged figure appears chained to a man-made prison. Further isolating him from the natural world, this man-made structure more importantly suggests that the winged figure is a victim of his self-imposed limitations, a theme which is dominant in Visions. Rather than being positioned beside the rock-like formation, as Theotormon appears in Visions, the winged figure is enclosed within prison walls. Emphasizing the greater extent of his confinement, this image is complemented by Orc's' similarity to Bromion and Oothoon, as in the Visions frontspiece they, like the winged figure, are visibly enchained. Similarly, in Visions 4J, Oothoon is chained within a fettered wave as Theotormon crouches in despair. Portrayed as victims of limited perception, Oothoon and Bromion, like Theotormon, illustrate a self-imposed confinement and thus the winged figure in America, in embodying the enslavement of Bromion, Oothoon and Theotormon, is part of a greater entrenched oppression. Only the potential inherent in his highly visible wings visually counters this pervasive sense of control.

The pessimistic tone of the America frontspiece also arises in the pictorial allusion to Marriage 4E where the image of the chained figure is also accompanied by the presence of a woman and child. In the Marriage, however, the male figure is visibly reaching out to the female in

the midst of the sun and wave-like fires. The America male, in contrast, is totally oblivious to his female and child companions, while the sun and fire imagery in the Marriage illustration is replaced in the America frontspiece by cloud and a surrounding darkness. Seeming to reflect the winged figure's despair, the female and her children also project a sense of confinement. Contrasting the outstretched figures in the Marriage, the female, with her legs crossed, hunches with a despairing look over a small child while, simultaneously, another small figure, with head downcast, leans upon her lap. In their hunched positions the female, her children and the dominant winged figure effectively conceal the sexual organs of the body and recall the theme of sexual sublimation in Thel, the Marriage and Visions. Consistent with the setting revealed in the "Preludium" text, the visual presentation of these figures conveys an equally foreboding sense of oppression.

The subdued atmosphere dominating the frontspiece is also characteristic of America's titlepage and is similarly comparable to the titlepage of Visions. Where in its comparable visual presentation the frontspiece of Visions illuminates the frontspiece of America, the titlepage of Visions is revealing in its contrasts to the later poem. Throughout the Visions titlepage, extended naked figures exude a vibrant energy. Their mutual contact, suggestive of imminent sexual interaction, proclaims a triumphant

sensuality which, in the form of fire, appears to consume a Urizenic figure. This symbolic victory enhances the sense of potential in the poem's beginning and is indicative of a theme also present in America. In the later poem, however, the mood of the titlepage is more sombre.

The illustration to the America titlepage contains only one extended figure. While David Erdman has argued that another figure hopefully points to the word "America", this questionable example of vigour appears as an obviously passive individual. Amidst these two most extended and exuberant figures, an old man sits hunched over a scroll and recalls the illustration in Marriage 10E. Appearing as a reiteration of the earlier figures deceived by the false teaching of the Bible, logic and reason, he, like the winged figure in the frontspiece who sits in a similar huddled position crowded over some form of writing, is oblivious to his surroundings. Contrasting the implied interactions in the Visions titlepage, the man and woman, here, appear totally separate and self-sufficient and remind one of the clod's statement in Thel that "My bosom of itself is cold, and of itself is dark"(BT 4:12).

To fulfil Blake's philosophy of America these figures must become part of a sensual union arising from the Orc fires. Their separation may, therefore, be descriptive of the Urizenic oppressive state or may indicate the limited extent of a potential liberation. While the

former view thematically presents a greater challenge to Orc's fires than in the Visions titlepage, the latter interpretation places an initial uncertainty on the possibility of such a revolution. The prophetic nature of the titlepage suggested in the words "America: A Prophecy" and the visual comparison to the prophetic potential in the Visions titlepage, however, implies that an uncertainty does exist in the America plate.

This ambiguous presentation is further emphasized in the lower portion of the illustration. Here, in contrast to the separation depicted above, two figures appear locked in embrace, and while the female is animated, the male, lying prostrate, resembles a corpse. Recurring in plate 9N and 13N, this image, suggestive of death or of a deadened sensibility in the America titlepage, is especially significant of its relationship to the idea of potential. The female can be seen either as mourning over a dead figure or infusing new life into the dormant body. Their unity, however, despite its thematic ambiguity, lacks the visual energy present in the couplings of the Marriage and Visions titlepages and, in contrast to the earlier poems, illustrates either a greater oppressive force or a weakened potential.

The suggestion that the winged figure in the front-piece is an image of Orc is supported by the appearance in the "Preludium" plate America 1K of a similarly chained

individual. Lying prostrate upon a grassy rock, this Orc figure points downwards to another, crouched in a position similar to the winged male. The suggested pattern of despair recalls the image of Theotormon and emphasizes the state of oppression dominating the early part of America. Also included in this illustration is a highly exuberant male whose sexual organs are openly displayed and a female apparently overcome by shame or guilt. Reflecting Orc's rape of the shadowy daughter, these individuals also recall the rape of Oothoon by Bromion. The initial remorse felt by both females is explicitly depicted in the America 1K

illustration and is consequently descriptive of a state of limited sensibility. The most dominant aspect of America 1K, however, is the presence of roots and overhanging limbs. While the Orc figure at the bottom is completely encompassed by this root system, the human figures at the top are visually crowded by the pressing limbs. Contrasting the image in America 7N, Thel iiN, 2N, 5N these limbs, rather than exhibit a pictorial harmony with the surrounding humans, appear as antagonistic threatening forces, appearing to symbolize a state of spiritual tension. The sense of apprehension with which the prostrate figure regards their presence, moreover, attests to their foreboding nature.

The confining roots which enclose the Orc figure in America 1K are also present in the second plate of the

"Preludium". Perceiving the image of a grapevine whose stem "bears an umbrella of future grapes"⁵, David Erdman, in his interpretation of this illustration, describes the permeating roots as the source of rising life. Noting that one of their "tendrils" is "heavenly bound"⁶ and leading to the text, he regards the "Orc" figure as moving in a similar fashion, free of chains, and crouched in a "fertile" furrow. His upward visual gaze, moreover, emphasizes his perceptual freedom from the depths of oppression. While this view is convincing in its theme of renewal, it neglects a number of significant details in the illustration. A consideration of these overlooked aspects, one discovers, changes the impression of the visual tone.

In contrast to the view that Orc is crouched in a furrow, there exists the possibility that he is still confined by the surrounding roots. Erdman's assertion that a furrow exists is unquestionable. The crouching figure, rather, is touching and is being touched by a complex root system and while his hands are limited by the bottom roots, his shoulders fail to extend above the upper enclosing web. The figure, therefore, appears similar to the entrapped Orc in America 1K. His upward gaze, moreover, which Erdman implies is heavenly, is reminiscent of Visions 7J where victims of limited sensibility also look upward. In this earlier poem Blake seems to illustrate a doomed potential and this sense of loss can also be descriptive of the America

figure's gaze. Significantly he looks not in the direction of Erdman's "umbrella of future grapes" but at the text of the shadowy daughter's speech.

The image of "heavenly tendrils" is also ambiguous. Recalling the coil in America 1K which extends from the enveloping roots, the tendrils appear serpent-like in their formation. As will be indicated in the discussion of the later plates, Blake presents an alternating view of the serpent and the fact of this varying presentation allows for both a constructive and destructive potentiality in the "Preludium" tendrils.

The sense of gloom and darkened sensibility presented in the America frontspiece, titlepage and "Preludium" plates is relieved in America 3N which begins the main text of the poem. Here the illustration is permeated with images of life. Claspng the chains which formerly bound his sensibility, an Orc figure ascends in an airy flight. The implied freedom in his movement is emphasized by the appearance of several accompanying birds, also in motion, and a figure in the centre of the illustration who, Erdman states, blows the triumphant flames of Orc's revolution. The flames emerging from this sensual trumpet move upward and point to the ascending liberated figure. Only the depiction at the bottom of the plate represents a troubling ambiguity. For while the figures here embrace the flames of Orc's revolution, they are simultaneously walking in a direction to avoid its immediacy. The dual thematic

presentation

-inherent in this image becomes characteristic of the entire poem as part of a general manifestation of internal doubt over the inevitable triumph of Orc's revolution.

America 4N has been regarded as the most politically oriented plate. Erdman who regards three of the depicted figures as personalities of George III and who uses the text of the America cancelled plate b to support his views, refers to the "dragon form"⁷ of Prince Albion and states that the upper dragon-like depiction, significantly with human hands, is descriptive of George III as he appears to the Americans. The figure descending on the left, however, with "law book clutched behind his back, sceptre held in hand like a magic wand"⁸ is George III as he appears in his "Angel form" to the English Parliament. The crouched figure at the bottom, finally, is the "King of England"⁹ who "looking westward trembles" at the vision of Orc. The "beached sea monster" lying beside this huddled figure is a "revolutionary whale"¹⁰ while the huddled female and child are helpless victims of war.

Erdman's view, while politically comprehensive, is symbolically isolated. For in this plate, in Blake's earlier illustrations, there are reflections of earlier poems. The crouching figure, attempting to block the vision from his sight, refuses to hear the sound of the revolution emerging from the flaming trumpet of America 3N. While

this attitude can be convincingly attributed solely to George III, his despairing position near a rock and in the company of a woman and child visually recalls the image of Theotormon in the Visions frontspiece and 4J, the illustration to Marriage 4E and the winged figure in the America frontspiece. The America cancelled plate b which Erdman uses to support his political interpretation also seems to illustrate Blake's deliberate accentuation of this repeated visual theme. In contrast to the final image in America 4N, the figure in the cancelled plate crouches alone and without the foreboding presence of the rock. In including the woman and child and the rock formation, therefore, Blake not only takes away from the exclusive focus on the George figure but also suggests that this lower image is descriptive of the general reaction arising from victims of limited sensibility, throughout America and the earlier poems. The fear of Erdman's "revolutionary whale", therefore, becomes a symbolic aversion to self-awareness as once again the power of Orc's liberating fires is questioned.

The lower crouching individual of America 4N recurs in the following plate. Similarly placed at the bottom of the illustration, this hunched figure is one of two encompassed in visual flames. Despite the predominance of these fires, however, these two males in contrast to the later image of Orc and the figure in Marriage 3E

fail to embrace or even acknowledge their presence. The depiction of a serpent in their midst is significantly symmetrical in its enclosure of one individual. Recalling the images of entanglement in the "Preludium" plates, the circular coils give a retrospective foreboding to the earlier "tendrils". In its circular shape the serpent suggests a self-enclosure and thus implies that the threat arises from the evil of self-limitation. The fires which are obviously immense indicate that the flames of energy and liberation exist and need only to be perceived. Suffering from the despair of self-enclosure, however, the figures, here, are oblivious to the fires' rejuvenating powers.

In the upper illustration a similar state of self-imposed oppression is projected. While the individual on the right swallows the flaming sword of Orc's revolution, his heightened sensibility is offset by the actions of the two accompanying males. The first, while perched on the airy lightness of a cloud, carries the burden of another human body. The contrast between the burden which he bears upon his shoulders and the physically insubstantial cloud suggests that the weight is unnatural and lacking proper association with the surrounding setting. Its true insubstantial nature is displayed by the support which the cloud gives to both the figure and his burden. To the far left of the illumination the second offsetting human appears.

Looking upward to the burdened individual, rather than the embracer of Orcean flames, this figure appears attracted to the notion of a self-imposed oppression. His aversion to the fires of liberation is further suggested by the balance which he holds. Weighing down in the direction of the lower huddled figure, this balance at once associates the upper and lower individuals and illustrates the overwhelming extent of a limited perceptual awareness. The ratio of four enslaved and one liberated figure is reflected in the visual "imbalance" and once again Blake appears to undermine the power of Orc's revolution.

The following illustration to America 6N which Erdman sees as suggestive of a redemption also visually questions the extent of the rising Orc fires. Seated upon a skeleton, a naked youth with highly visual sexual organs at first appears to embody the renewed youth arising from the Orcean flames. In a comparison to similar images of earlier poems, however, this initial interpretation becomes questionable. Recalling the image of Theotormon in Visions 6J, the youth in America gazing at the same angle becomes a continued manifestation of a confined and destructive sensibility. Rather than emerging from the skeleton, then, the naked youth is ironically sitting on the consequence of his self-created mortal sensibility.

His association with the rationalism which comprises this mortal perception is made apparent in the

recollection of a similar figure in Marriage 21C. Here the naked figure in a remarkably similar position sits on a hill surrounded by the self-enclosed pyramids of reason and mathematics. The youth in America 6N, then, visually embodies a rational and mortal sensibility. The irony is that while he visually appears to be sensually open, he is, in reality, another part of a closed perceptual system. He is engaged, therefore, in the characteristic state of self-deception, the lifelessness of his awareness reflected, not only in the image of the skeleton, but also the accompanying foliage drooping down from the skeletal body. Similarly at the bottom of the illumination, vegetation withers as a lizard is about to devour and destroy a winged insect.

Drastically contrasting the "dark" implications of the America 6N illustration, the pastoral scene in America 7N projects a sense of innocence previously absent from the poem. The oppressive overhanging limbs in the "Preludium" plate are transformed into graceful bird and leaf bearing branches. Placed amidst a wide expanse of sky, the tree reflects the freedom of the accompanying birds while the figures sleeping with the ~~man~~ in the lower part of the illustration also display a sense of freedom in being widely separated from any overhanging branches.

More than any other illustration in America, this display of pastoral innocence recalls the visual imagery

of Thel. The overhanging branches, also present in the Thel titlepage, convey in both poems the notion of protective innocence. The recurring image of birds, on the other hand, suggest the potential for freedom in this innocent stage. In the titlepage to Thel, Thel observes the imminent sexual intercourse between two smaller figures as a naked aggressive male grasps a struggling and clothed female. Her vision of this world of experience recalls her early state of immense potential. Similarly the sleeping naked figures in America 7N demonstrate the sleeping sensibility and potential of the state of innocence. The peaceful atmosphere generated by this unspoiled pastoral setting reminds the reader of Blake's belief in the inherent goodness of man. While one may also regard this illumination as a reflection of the sleeping Thirteen Colonies it is more generally symbolic of man's essential nature. The possibility for the natural integration of this innocence with the world of experience is displayed in Thel 2N where the overhanging tree encompasses both Thel and the human Lilly of the world of experience. The contrast between the illustrated potential in America 7N and the dark and despairing nature of the earlier America plates once again points to the general absence of a rejoicing tone in the America illustrations.

The sombre tone which characterizes these early illustrations is emphasized in the depiction of Urizen in America 8N. Positioned among the dark clouds which also

dominate the frontspiece, Urizen symbolically extends his influence in the expanse of his arms while simultaneously suggesting an oppressive control in the downward direction of his hands. Recalling the image in Marriage 11i of an old man trapped within the quicksands of stasis, he points to the inherent destructive nature of his confining power. It is his image which is consumed in the lively titlepage of Visions.

Northrop Frye, in his exploration of the "Orc cycle", notes the similarity between Urizen, here, and Orc in America 10N. While Orc is engulfed in flames rather than dark clouds, his bodily position highly resembles Urizen's. Significantly both figures project identical hand gestures while Orc's alternate leg position appears as symbolically reflective of Urizen. In contrast to the triumphant gaze one would expect from the textual reading, the Orc figure displays a visual anxiety and apprehension. Looking back, his eyes appear to rest upon the corpse of America 9N. Possibly considering the potential failure to liberate himself from the Urizenic state, his regard could be perceived as a prophetic self-reflection. This visual interpretation is supported by the comparable image in Marriage 14E where Blake clearly depicts a figure in flames gazing upon a corpse. In its hovering position it combines with the Orc-Urizen hand gestures to produce the lamenting female in

Visions 8J. Here, the surrounding clouds, reminiscent of those which encompass Urizen, further suggest an affinity between Orc and his oppressive counterpart. The effect of these early associations, then, is to either visually combine the two figures into one or to convey the Urizenic influence in Orc. Orc's apparent visual liberation amidst the flames of America 10N, therefore, is incomplete.

Emphasizing the uncertainty of the "Orc" state, is Urizen's backward glance to the pastoral image of America 7N. Structurally uniting this peaceful setting with America 9N as an object of regard, Urizen's gaze introduces the notion that the potential America 7N could become the deadened state of America 9N, as significantly in the latter plate there exist remnants of dead vegetation. But while these darker connotations emerge from America 10N and its associations, the Orc image also conveys an impression of burning energy. Reminiscent of Marriage 3E, he appears engulfed in the purifying fires of liberation. In the total projection of his image, then, Blake presents in the Orc figure a visual and thematic tension.

The immense potential visualized in America 7N is enhanced in America 11N. Here in the upper illustration the symbolic birds of freedom are seen flying as in the earlier plate. The picture is dominated, however, by the image of a figure riding on a bird. The suggestion presented

is that the liberating flames have been constructively embraced in a new synthesis of open and flowing sensibility. That this new state arises from Orc's fires is indicated by the figure's stance towards the previous plate. In the lower image this new synthesis of innocence and experience also dominates. Surrounded by bright clouds and free-flying birds, three figures are seen riding upon a snake. Symbolic of the energy of experience, the serpent's visual harnessing pronounces the successful attainment of a higher organized innocence where the pastoral imagery of America 7N becomes one with the world of experience.

The most striking aspect of this lower illustration is its resemblance to Thel 6i. This earlier image which identically portrays three figures riding a serpent with three coils differs from the America plate only in the direction of view. The image in America consequently becomes a direct mirror image of Thel. This reflection while recalling the notion of potential also reminds one of its failure in the Thel poem. Contrasting the idyllic integrated innocence presented in this image, Thel refuses to liberate herself and remains a victim of her limited sensibility. Reminding one of Thel's actions, Blake again appears to question the inevitability of Orc's triumph and the consequent attainment of a higher innocence. Visually, then, he continues to create an internal thematic tension.

In his analysis of the similarities between America 11N and The1 6i, Erdman asserts that the serpent is seen smiling in America and not glaring as in The1. For this reason he believes that the America plate represents a new life not achieved in The1. This distinguishing detail, however, is both questionable and of a minor nature.

Blake's alternating sentiment is manifested in an alternating presentation of illustrations which change from the hope of liberation to the despair of oppression. In the image of America 12N one perceives this oppressive state as there are several parallels which emphasize the "darkened" spiritual and physical setting. In the upper part of the illustration, for example, the oppressive overhanging limbs of the "Preludium" reappear. Similarly depicted without life, the barren limbs extend the width of the illustration and hover over the figure of an old man entering a tomb. Recalling the crouching figure in Marriage 24E and of Urizen in America 8N, this aged man enters the grave of rational Urizenic thought. His tomb becomes a spiritual manifestation of his spiritual desolation and while he represents the forces of oppression of which he himself is a victim he also bears some qualities of Orc.

Remembering the close association between Orc and Urizen in America 8N and 12N, he symbolically embodies or reflects a failed Orc. His entrance into the tomb reiter-

ates the notion of deadened sensibility, characteristic of America 9N, while the chiseled walls and surrounding rock reflect the prison walls of the America frontspiece and the domineering rock of the Visions frontspiece and 4J. The re-appearance of the prison walls and rock in America 12N implies that a confinement is continuing and that the Orc and the Theotormon figures, incorporated into the old man, remain enslaved. The many characters associated with the old man are illustrated in the interior view of the tomb in Marriage 161 where he is surrounded by several huddled and despairing individuals. Politically this image could represent the former Guardians of America or the rebels, themselves, returning to the perceptual grave of those whom they destroyed. In its suggestion of lost potential, however, America 12N returns to the theme of regression in The1.

The mirror imagery which prompted the association between the two poems recurs in the following illustration. In America 13N the comparison is to Visions 3J where the nude body of Oothoon is devoured by an eagle. As in the reflection of the The1 serpent, the plate in America is mirrored duplication of Visions. Representing the initial darkened state of Oothoon following her rape by Bromion, the devouring eagle in America illustrates the continued existence of oppression. The spiritual desolation is especially enhanced in America by the darkened natural

setting visually absent in Visions.

The female, here, also resembles Theotormon in her position upon the rock and this pictorial detail again emphasizes the Urizenic force which devours her flesh, while the destruction of her body symbolizes the annihilation of sensual delight which, as a result, prevents an awareness of the "Eternal". The deadened sensibility apparent in this upper illustration is more obviously present in the lower image where a corpse, lying beneath the waves, is about to be consumed by scavenger fish and serpents. Appearing for the third time, this corpse image emphasizes the presence of death. In contrast to America 11N where the figures ride and control the "Leviathan", the prostrate body, here, is entwined by the serpent. Symbolic of Orc's fires, the snake reminds us of the ever present "eternal" while the corpse, a victim of Urizenic perceptual limitation, ironically rests in its midst. Rather than progress to the world of the "eternal" he becomes the food of the hungry fish. A victim of his self-imposed confinement, he, like the female above, cannot survive the onslaught of Orc's fires in the combined images of the eagle and serpent, symbolically presented here but visually present in Marriage 15i.

As the devoured female is a recollection of Oothoon, the lower corpse may be regarded as a manifestation of Theotormon and his deadened sensibility. The root formations

which join the two images are reminiscent of the pressing roots of the "Preludium" where the Orc figure is visibly enchained. Their continued presence in this illustration and in the following America 14N question the existence of any visual progression towards a liberated state and consequently appear contradictory to the textual events. Within the visual and textual aspects of the poem, then, Blake creates an internal tension.

The ambiguity arising from this thematic uncertainty characterizes America 14N. Here, as in the preceding illustration, Blake depicts a permeating root system which, in this image, is part of an overhanging tree. In their similarity to the "Preludium" plates and their contrast to The1 iil, 2N, 5N, the lifeless limbs convey a death-like atmosphere. Significantly, however, the encompassed individuals do not exhibit the anxiety of the "Preludium" figures. Rather, they project a passivity characteristic of the plates in The1 as Blake again conveys a notion of hopeful potential. The surrounding white clouds also imply the existence of life.

Seated amidst this ambiguous setting, an adult figure extends his arms to a nearby youth while a serpent coils around his loins. The identical projection of the serpent's head and the man's hand further associates this figure with the liberating force of Orc and the serpent. Significantly, a large serpent appears in the lower illustration spouting giant flames in a spirit of satisfied

delight. In response to the Orc figure's action, the accompanying youth remains in a prayerful position as he rests upon some books. Giving no indication that he accepts the inviting gesture, he may be perceived as continuing to pray in the traditional religious manner while the books upon which he rests, associated in Marriage 10E with confining religion and rationalism, further suggest that he is a victim of Urizenic oppression. The apparent visual communication between the two figures, however, affirms an openness as one is reminded of similar life-giving images in Marriage 2C, 4E, 11i and Visions iiiJ. The illustration in America 14N, then, is consistent with Blake's dual presentation of hope and despair.

This diverse visual character becomes most obvious in America 15N where Blake depicts a variety of responses to Orc's liberating fires. The general movement, however, is toward a state of entrapment and despair. One views in the lower illustration a number of engulfed females. Contrasting the expansive states portrayed in Marriage 3E, 4E, the Marriage titlepage and The1 41, these figures are huddled amidst the flames and, reminiscent of Visions 7J, 8J, are averse to Orc's liberating fires. Beside them sits a despairing figure who resembles the winged figure in the frontspiece and Theotormon in Visions 1K, 4J. The suggestion of a return to the original despairing state of perceptual limitation, evident in her physical position, also arises

in other pictorial details.

Unlike the surrounding huddled figures, one female appears in an expansive state and flowing with the force of the flames. In following their upward direction, however, she moves toward the figures of ^amother and child entangled in a web of roots. Recalling the earlier association of roots with Urizenic oppression, the expansive motion upwards seems futile, for the climax of this ascent is the presentation of a crouched and despairing female. Accompanied by a bird which is impeded by an encompassing branch, she embodies the despair of the shadowy daughter in the America "Preludium" plate. Theotormon in the Visions frontspiece and 4J, Oothoon in Visions 6J and the winged figure in the America frontspiece. Contrasting the freedom evident in America 7N, 11N and Thel 111, the bird projects an additional sense of enslavement.

The spiritual darkness conveyed in this upper image is enhanced in the final illustration of the poem where Blake visually magnifies the huddled female. Symbolic of an increasing spiritual desolation, she crouches, with head buried in hands, in a position of prayer. Turning to the traditional form of religious worship, she attempts to find salvation from Orc's fires. The tiny figure reading a scroll and seated upon her head, reminiscent of the image in the titlepage, emphasizes her rational spiritual state. Similarly a book bearing

individual stands upon her back while the couple pictured at her feet are emerged not in an expansive embrace but in a huddled confinement of Urizenic sensibility.

The sense of enslavement initially emerging from the visual presentation of the despairing female also arises in the accompanying nudes who become one with the dead and pestilence-ridden trees, as the potential for liberation, evident in the America titlepage, 7N, 11N, flows from the despondent female in this final plate. The smiling serpent amidst the flowers below may, consequently, be perceived as a deceptive anti-climax or as the manifestation of the continued presence of Orc's fires, visually unbraced in America, but available for other future works. Blake thus ends the series of America illustrations with the emphasis on potential.

This final suggestion inherent in the image of the serpent is important to a valid interpretation of Blake's illustrations. It reveals that the poet has escaped a falling into the spiritual hopelessness of the final figures depicted in the America illustrations. But while the poet moves out of the illustrated despair, in the end he does not reject the depictions as representations of his ideas. Rather, they illuminate his sense of doubt over man's ability to free himself from the overwhelming Urizenic oppression which surrounds his being. America is bounded by figures of despair, by the winged figure in the

frontspiece and by the huddled figure in America 16N, both of whom project a sense of spiritual desolation. Between these two images Blake alternates between the visual expression of freedom and that of oppression. Significantly, however, his "liberated" illustrations, as especially evidenced in the figure of Orc and of the sleeping children in America 7N, are descriptive only of a potential rather than of a fulfillment. There exists no concise visual depiction of Orc's victory and of Urizen's defeat and while in one sense this absence is consistent with the characteristic ambiguity within the textual pattern, that there are no absolute entities to triumph or fall to defeat, the tone of the illustrations differs markedly from the text.

In the text where the ambiguities of the opposing forces are presented, there exists in America's conclusion the possibility for an imaginative synthesis beyond the poem. In the illustrations, however, this synthesis appears impossible. Contrasting the clash of opposing forces in the text, which create the continued torque of which George Quasha speaks, the illustrations are manifestations of limited circularity especially evidenced by the bordering images of despair. The sense of closure characterized by the huddled figures throughout, and which significantly commence and conclude the series of illustrations, creates a feeling in the reader that the figures' feelings of

despair are turning back upon themselves, an image descriptive of Albion's Angels and their self-destructive plagues in the text. This visual suggestion, in uniting the illustrated figures with Albion's forces implies a dominance of Urizenic sensibility and further suggests the impossibility of fulfilling any potential beyond the poem. The self-enclosed nature of the illustrations, furthermore, while revealing the absence of any internal dialogue and consequent synthesis, also excludes any participation by the reader as in the plates he becomes the spectator to visual presentation of a continual and circular despairing stasis. He may identify only with the isolated depictions of potential in America 7N, 10N, and 11N and with the serpent in the poem's conclusion who emphasizes the existent, but unappreciated, liberated energy in the poem. In visual terms, then, America's theme, in expressing a sense of failed potential, closely resembles that of Thel.

While this pervading stasis of despair arises in part from an evaluation of the America plates, more importantly, it emerges from the pattern of imagery developed in the earlier Thel, Visions and Marriage. Throughout the America illustrations there occur visual reflections of the earlier poems as both the similarities and the distinctions present in the earlier and later illustrations emphasize the tone, theme, and poetic statement in America.

As with Blake's textual allusions, his visual "borrowings" are extensive and necessary to any comprehensive evaluation of America's art.

Occasionally in my description of Blake's illuminated figures I referred to David Erdman's contrasting views. The result of an almost totally isolated visual response, they reflect an inadequate appreciation of an overwhelming inter-visual pattern in the America, Marriage, Visions and TheL poems. Continually attempting to establish a comparable fulfillment in text and illustration, Erdman blurs the overwhelming distinction between the two, and the poetic ambiguity and uncertainty which it represents. It is this distinction which must be fully realized before a final and valid consideration of America can be made.

CHAPTER THREE

BLAKE'S VISUAL ALLUSIONS

- 1 Numbered references to illustrations mentioned in this chapter are those employed in William Blake, The Illuminated Blake, ed. David Erdman (New York: Anchor Press, Doubleday, 1974).
- 2 J.Hagstrum, "Blake and the Sister-Arts Tradition" in D.Erdman, J.Grant, ed., Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), pp. 82-91.
- W.J.J.Mitchell, "Blake's Composite Art", Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (1970), pp. 57-81.
- 3 M.Butlin, "The Evolution of Blake's Large Colour Prints of 1795" in R.Rosenfield ed., William Blake: Essays for S.Foster Damon (Providence: Brown University Press, 1969), pp.110-116.
- 4 D.Erdman, "America: New Expanses", Blake's Visionary Forms Dramatic (1970), p.95.
- 5 William Blake, The Illuminated Blake, ed., David Erdman (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974), p.140.
- 6 Erdman, p. 140.
- 7 Erdman, p. 142.
- 8 Erdman, p. 142.
- 9 Erdman, p. 142.
- 10 Erdman, p. 142.
- 11 N.Frye, Fearful Symmetry (Princeton, 1969), p.210.

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCLUSION

The distinction between the various visual presentations of hope and despair, noted in the previous chapter, and between the text and illustrations of America must be acknowledged and considered in any comprehensive evaluation of the poem. Characteristic of most of the America plates, the internal tension resulting from this distinction pervades throughout and appears to reveal an expression of uncertainty, and ambiguity of sentiment by Blake. The central theme of the text, in appearing to celebrate the triumph of Orc's flames and their movement out of the poem and into the reader's imagination, differs from the self enclosed nature of the illustrations that force the reader to become a mere spectator to a display of despair and unfulfilled potential.

Placed within the context of the entire poem, however, the text and illustrations reveal a cautious optimism indicative of an imaginative and valid reality. For while the text illustrates the manner in which an imaginative perceptual liberation may occur, in the method of torsion and self rending, the continual visual

appearance of despondent figures, combined with the notion of potential, reminds the reader of the possibility of an imaginative and spiritual stagnation and regression. The exhilaration felt in any contemplation of a liberated sensibility, then, is tempered and strengthened by an awareness of the potential "Urizenic" or "grim" reality, evident in Theotormon, the shadowy daughter and others. A descent into a state of deceptive fantasy, consequently, is avoided.

The complexity of the reality which Blake attempts to reveal is most obviously evident in the figures of Urizen and Orc who, exhibiting similar visual gestures in America 8N and 10N, bear similar characteristics. While Orc as the "planet red" enclosing the "wandering comets" (A 5:2-3) reveals an oppressive Urizenic quality, Urizen, on the other hand, "weeping in dismal howlings" (A 16-12) resembles the chained individual in the America "Preludium". This interaction of personal traits, not only prevents a perception of an antagonism between "good" and "evil", but also suggests an affinity between these symbols of liberation and oppression as, once again, Blake reveals, in this suggestion of a unified personality, the dual nature of the individual.

The tenuous state of man's spiritual being, in being able to exhibit both an oppressed and liberated sensibility is emphasized in the visual gazes of Orc in

America 10N and Urizen in America 8N. Here Urizen regards the depiction of life in America 7N as Orc views a corpse in America 9N. While the trees and sleeping figures perceived by Urizen may become spiritually and imaginatively fulfilled through Orc's liberation, they may also fall into the regression of spiritual death as symbolized by the corpse and dead vegetation in America 9N. The Urizen figure, consequently, could be perceived as awaiting the coming of the sleeping figures, representative of the reader's imagination as it, too, is presented with a reality which offers both promise and despair,

The nature of this reality is, as Blake asserts, throughout America, determined directly by internal perception. It is the acuteness or distortion of this perception which leads the various characters of Blake's Thel, Marriage, Visions and America into a state of celebration or despair. As seen in the discussion of Blake's visual and textual allusions, the association of oppression with despair, and liberation with joy, exists throughout America and the earlier poems. That a Theotormon figure may re-appear in America as the shadowy daughter or George III reveals Blake's belief that the distorted perception, manifested in these characters, inevitably continues in the imaginative and contemporary reality of the world. It is, Blake suggests, necessary, therefore, to take perceptual action to prevent such a distortion and its consequent

despair. Thus the idea of self-rending, suggested by George Quasha, and the necessity of an imaginative movement outside the poem, expounded by David Erdman, both appear as appropriate responses to Blake's presentation of the tenuous spiritual and imaginative state. It is the internal tension sensed throughout America that characterizes this delicately balanced condition. The ambiguity of poetic statement, consequently, is not only deliberate but necessary to Blake's perception of man's spirit and imagination.

Structurally, however, Blake allows the reader only the promise of liberation. For, while allowing a participation in the textual notions of the text, Blake prevents any entrance into his closed system of illustrations. Rather, he permits only a regard of various figures and the perceptual states that they embody. Unable to enter into the illustrated despair, the reader, while continually aware of the regressive potential which the despondency represents, is given the opportunity to participate in Orc's liberation through his perceptions regarding the poem and his extended and inspired imagination outside the text. In the structural presentation of America, then, Blake obviously attempts to lead the reader from the circularity of Urizenic sensibility and its consequent despair into a system which is necessarily dynamic and which promises a view of the infinite. It is this struct-

ural design and its implications which most obviously suggests Blake's intentions to move beyond the contemporary political scene and into the symbolic aspects of man's imaginative potential.

In the previous two chapters I revealed the extent to which Blake borrowed various ideas and personal traits from the earlier Thel, Marriage and Visions, to place within a new context in America. Illustrating numerous repeated themes, these allusions in America demonstrate Blake's use of earlier notions to assist in the creation of a new poem. Revealing Blake's complex reality in their emphasis of the relationship between Orc and Urizen and enhancing the notion of a potential of promise and hope, they exist as a central and necessary part of a comprehensive interpretation of America both in text and illustration. For it is through the similarities of visual depiction and textual usage that various themes and images in America become more acute. Only through an awareness of these allusions to Thel, Marriage, and Visions, can the full extent of America's internal tension be felt.

In the composition of America, Blake reveals a conscious employment of his previous poems. Rather than dismiss these earlier works as irrelevant, Blake effectively uses them to illuminate the nature of America and makes them essential to a valid interpretation of this

first prophecy. He has taken the poetic and artistic experience of the past and formed, in America, a new synthesis.

APPENDIX A

SELECTED ILLUSTRATIONS

The illustrations which appear in this appendix, with the exception of Marriage 21C, have been taken from William Blake, The Illuminated Blake, ed. D.Erdman (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974). Marriage 21C has been chosen from, William Blake, A Study of the Illuminated Books of William Blake: Poet:Printer:Prophet, ed. G.Keynes (New York:Orion Press,1964). This plate has been chosen from a separate source as it is this copy of America, rather than that used by Erdman, that includes the pyramids mentioned in my discussion in Chapter Three. The illustrations appear in the order in which they are discussed in the third chapter.



America iⁿ



Visions iⁿ



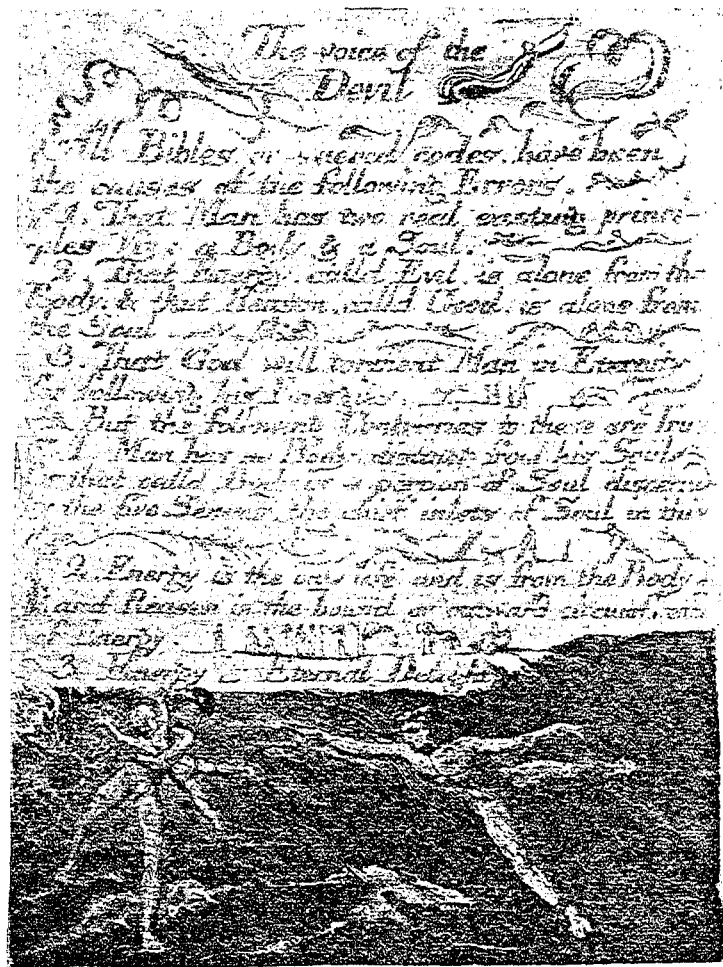
Wive shadows of discontent! and in what houses dwell the wretched
 Drunken with noe forgotten, and shut up from cold despair,

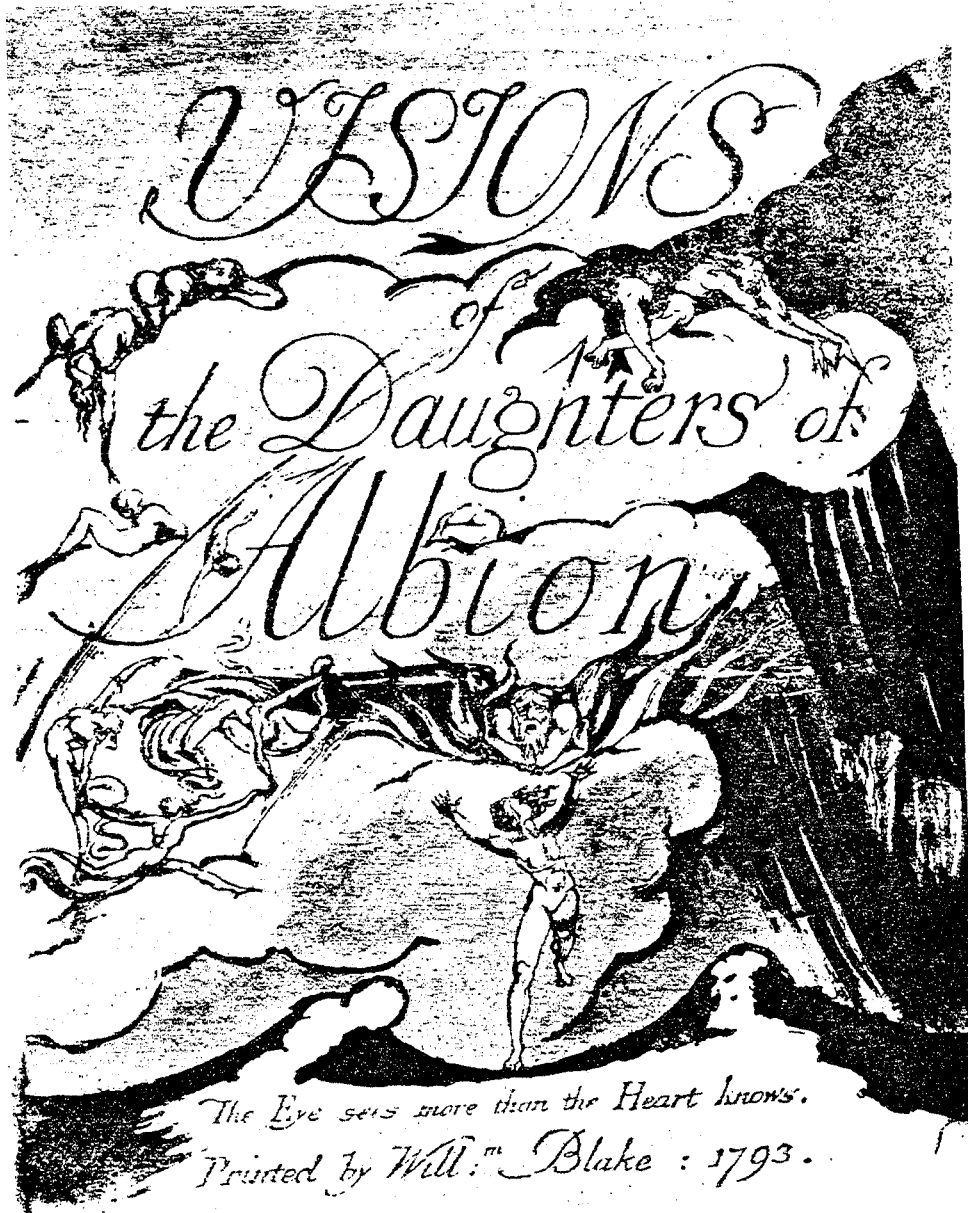
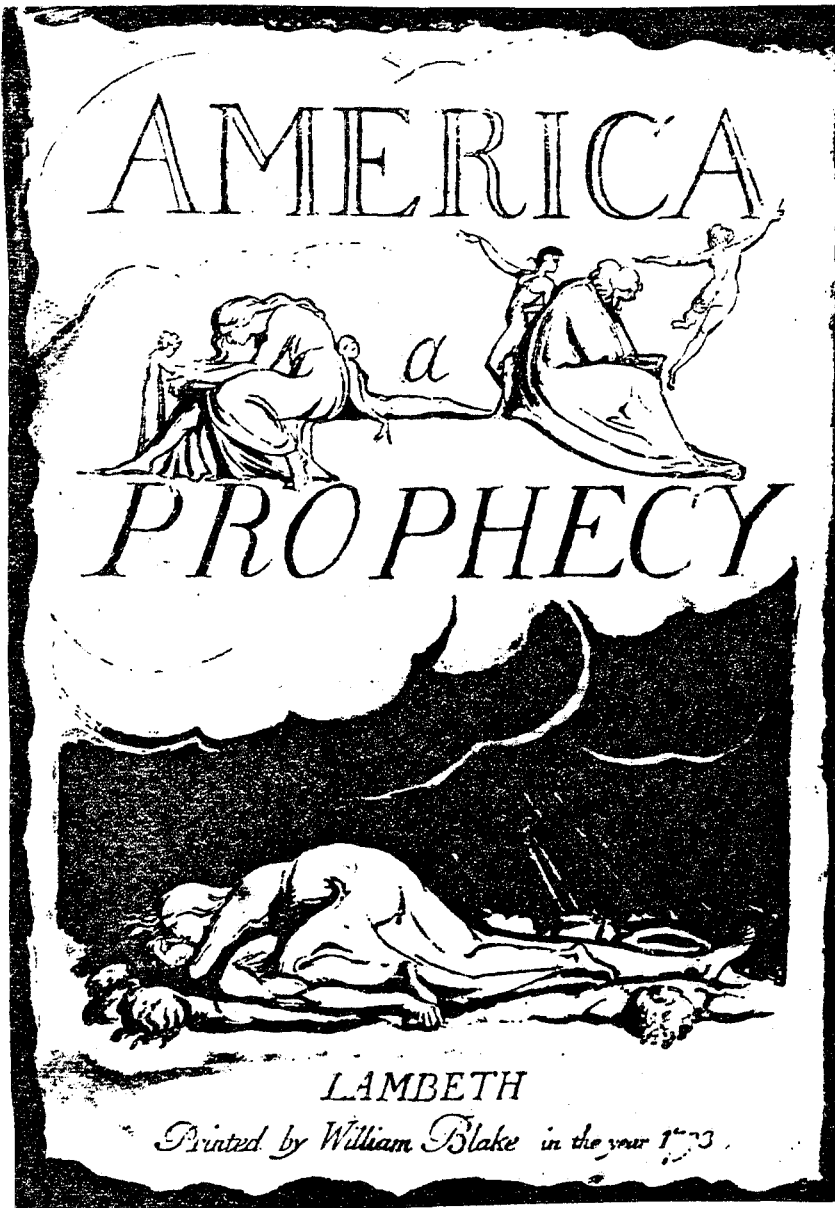
Tell me where dwell the thoughts forgotten till thou call them forth
 Tell me where dwell the joys of old! & where the ancient loves,
 And when will they renew again & the night of oblivion past?
 But I might traverse times & spaces far remote and bring
 Comforts into a present sorrow and a night of pain,
 Where goest thou O thought! to what remote land is thy flight?
 If thou returnest to the present moment of affliction
 Will thou bring comforts on thy wings, and dew and honey and balm;
 Or prison from the desert wilds, from the eyes of the envious.

Then Braxion said; and shook the cavern with his lamentation

Thou knowest that the ancient trees, seen by thine eyes have fruit:
 But knowest thou that trees and fruits flourish upon the earth
 In senses unknown? trees, beasts and birds unknown:
 Unheard, nor unperceiv'd, spread in the vnder microscope,
 In places yet unvisit'd by the voyager, and in worlds
 Like another kind of seas, and in atmospheres unknown:
 Ah! are there other wars, beside the wars of sword and fire!
 And are there other sorrows, beside the sorrows of poverty?
 And are there other joys, beside the joys of riches and ease?
 And is there not one lay for both the lion and the ox?
 And is there not eternal fire, and eternal chains,
 To bind the phantoms of existence from eternal life?

Orbana waked silent all the day, and all the night.







Marriage 1^o

Proverbs of Hell.

The head Sublime, the heart Pathos, the genitals Beauty,
the hands & feet Proportion.
As the air to a bird or the sea to a fish, so is content
to the contemnable.
The crew wished every thing was black, the owl that eve-
ry thing was white.
Cauterous is Beauty.
If the lion was advised by the fox, he would be curating
improvement makes straight roads, but the crooked roads
without improvement, are roads of Genius.
Sooner murder an infant in its cradle than nurse un-
desired desires.



Marriage 10th

Preludium



The shadowy daughter of Uthrona stand before the dark
 When lightning's voice had laugh'd among the dark
 His form she brought in with her own, his arms in hues of iron
 Crown'd with a helmet & dark hair the raiment's braids stood
 A quiver with its burning stores, a bow like that of night,
 When persistence is she from women in other arms she need
 Invulnerable the naked, save where clouds roll round her loins,
 Their watchful bolts in the dark air, silent she stand as night,
 For never from her own tongue could voice or sound arise,
 But dumb till that dawn day when Eric absolv'd his heart's desire.

Dark virgin said the hour with thy father stern abhorred,
 Rains my torrid chains while still on high my spirit soars,
 Sometimes an eagle screaming in the sky, sometimes a lion
 Striking upon the mountains, & sometimes a whale I look
 The raging pathward, thyself iron a serpent libbing
 Around the pillars of Uthrona and round thy dark limbs
 On the Cinanian wilds I held, while my spirit holds,
 For chanced beneath I view'd these caverns, when thou bringest food
 I howl my eye and my red eye such to behold thy face
 In vain! these caverns roll to & fro, & hide thee from my sight



The Author & Printer Will Drake 1840

Silent as despairing love, and strong as jealousy,
 The hairy shoulders rend the links, free are the wrists of fire;
 Round the terrific loins he seized the panting, struggling womb;
 In joy, she put aside her clouds & smiled her first-born soul;
 As when a black cloud shows its lightnings 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 fulin to give me life in regions of dark death.
 On my American plains I feel the struggling afflictions
 Endured by roots that writhe their arms into the nether deep:
 I see a serpent in Canada, who courts me to his love;
 In Mexico an Eagle, and a Lion in Peru
 I see a Whale in the South-sea, drinking my soul away.
 O what limb rending pains I feel, thy fire & my frost
 Mingle in howling pains, in furrows by thy lightnings rent;
 This is eternal death: and this the torment long foretold.



The stern Boreal wind, a band of his own song, mingled he saw
 His hair, as it swayed, then dashed its streaming locks against
 The pillar in darkness, he was silent, he turned away,
 And wandered down the vale of heat in such & such la-



In happy copulation; if in evening mild, wearied with work,
 Sit on a bank and draw the pleasures of this first-born joy.

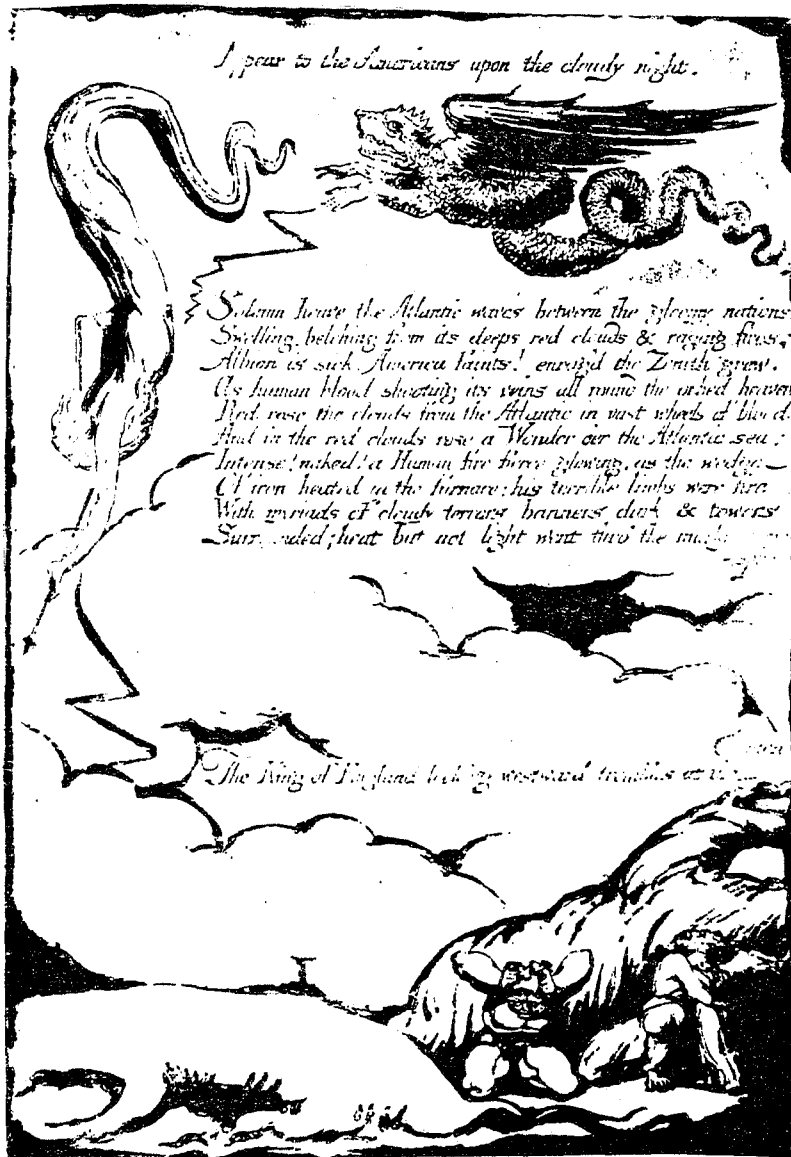
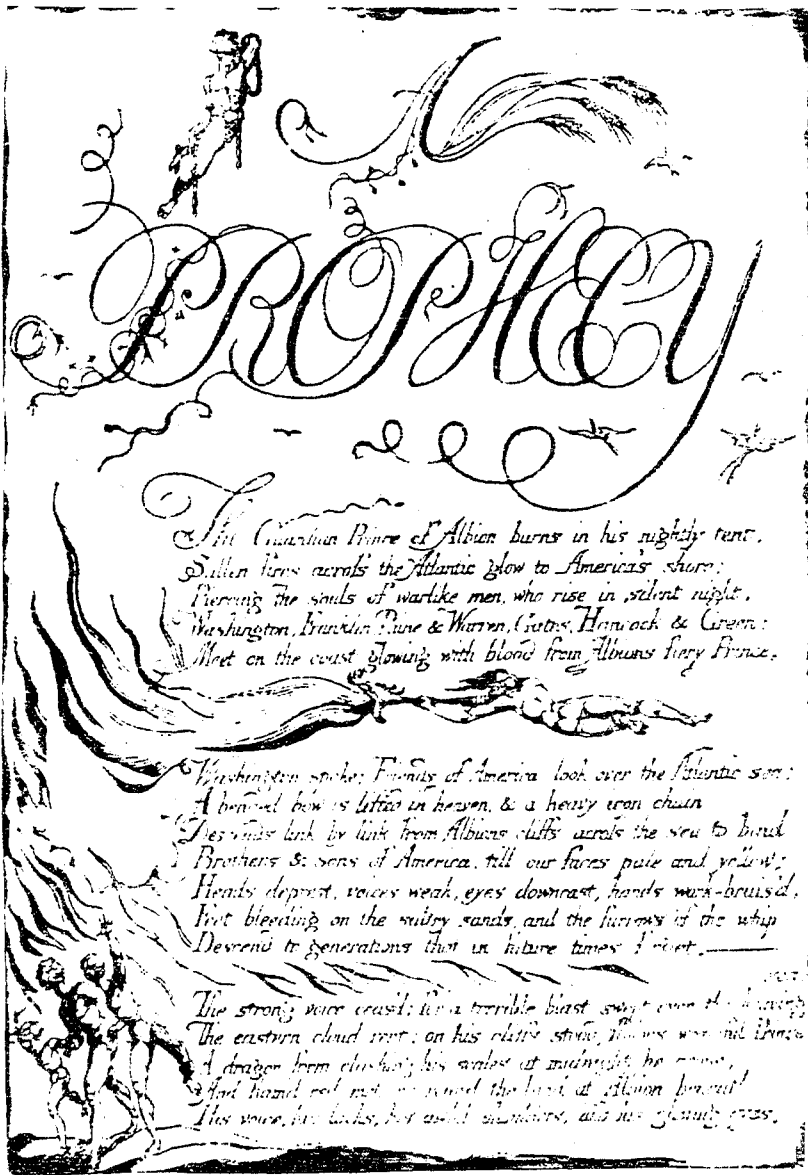
The moment of desire! the moment of desire! The virgin
 That pines for man, shall awaken her womb to enormous joys,
 In the secret shadows of her chamber; the youth shut up from
 The lustful joy, shall forget to generate, & create an amorous way,
 In the shadows of his curtains, and in the folds of his silent pillow.
 Are not these the places of religion, the rewards of continence?
 The self-enjoyings of self denial, Why dost thou seek religion?
 Is it because acts are not lovely, that thou seekest solitude,
 Where the horrible darkness is unprelaid with reflections of desire.

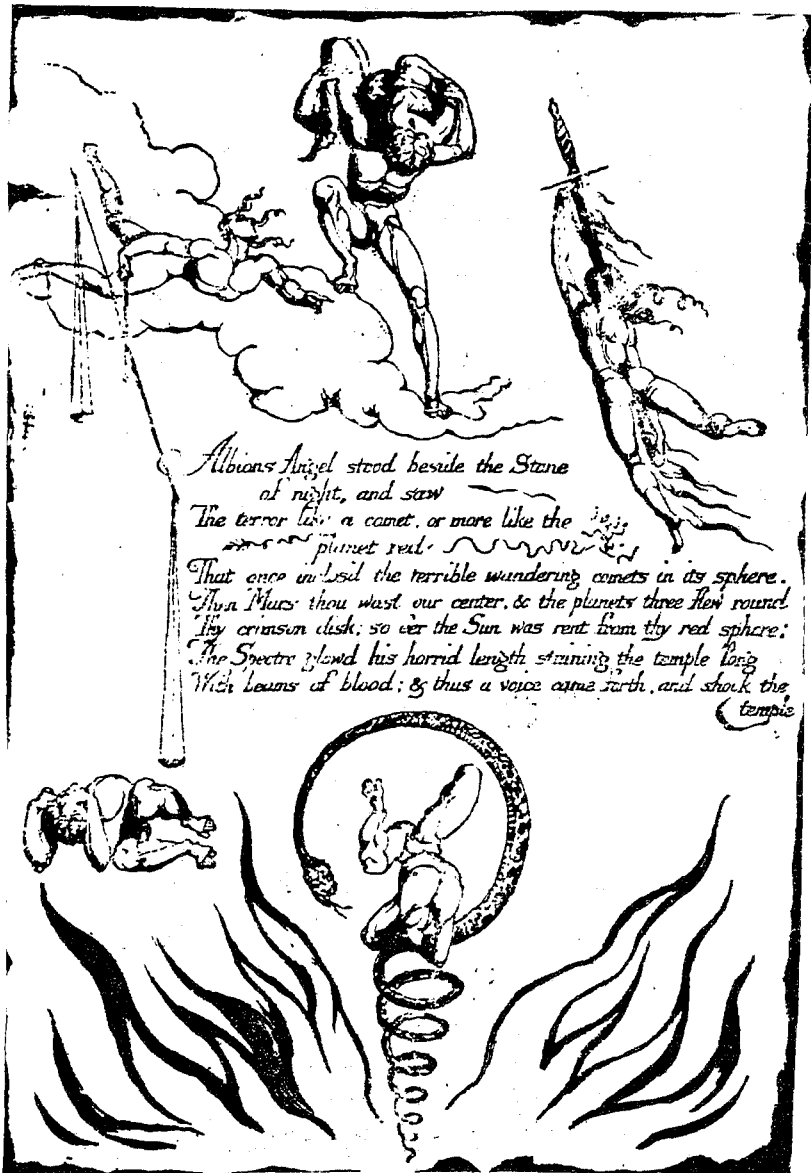
Father of Jealousy, be thou accursed from the earth!
 Why hast thou taught my Theotorman this accursed thing?
 Till beauty fades from off my shoulders, discoloured and cast out,
 A solitary shadow wailing on the margin of non-existence.

I cry, Love! Love! Love! happy happy Love! free as the mountain wind!
 Can that be Love, that drinks another as a sponge drinks water?
 That clouds with jealousy his nights, with weepings all the day;
 To spin a web of age around him, grey and hoary! dark!
 Till his eyes sicken at the fruit that hangs before his sight.
 Such is self-love that envies all! a creeping skeleton
 With lamplike eyes watching around the frozen marriage bed.

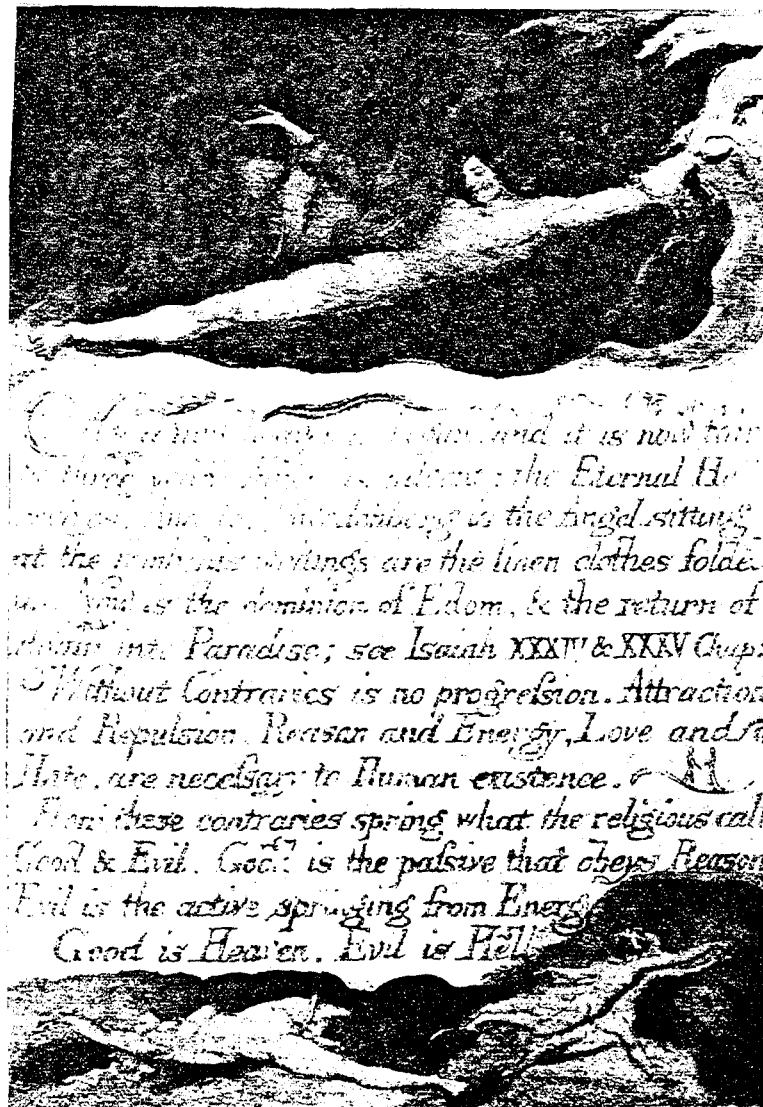
But silken nets and traps of adamant will Oothoon spread,
 And catch for thee girls of mild silver, or of furious gold:
 I'll lie beside thee on a bank & view their wanton play
 In lovely copulation bliss on bliss, with Theotorman:
 Red as the rosy morning, lustful as the first-born beam,
 Oothoon shall view his dear delight, nor e'er with jealous cloud
 Come in the heaven of generous love, nor selfish blightings bring.

Does the sun walk in glorious raiment, on the secret floor

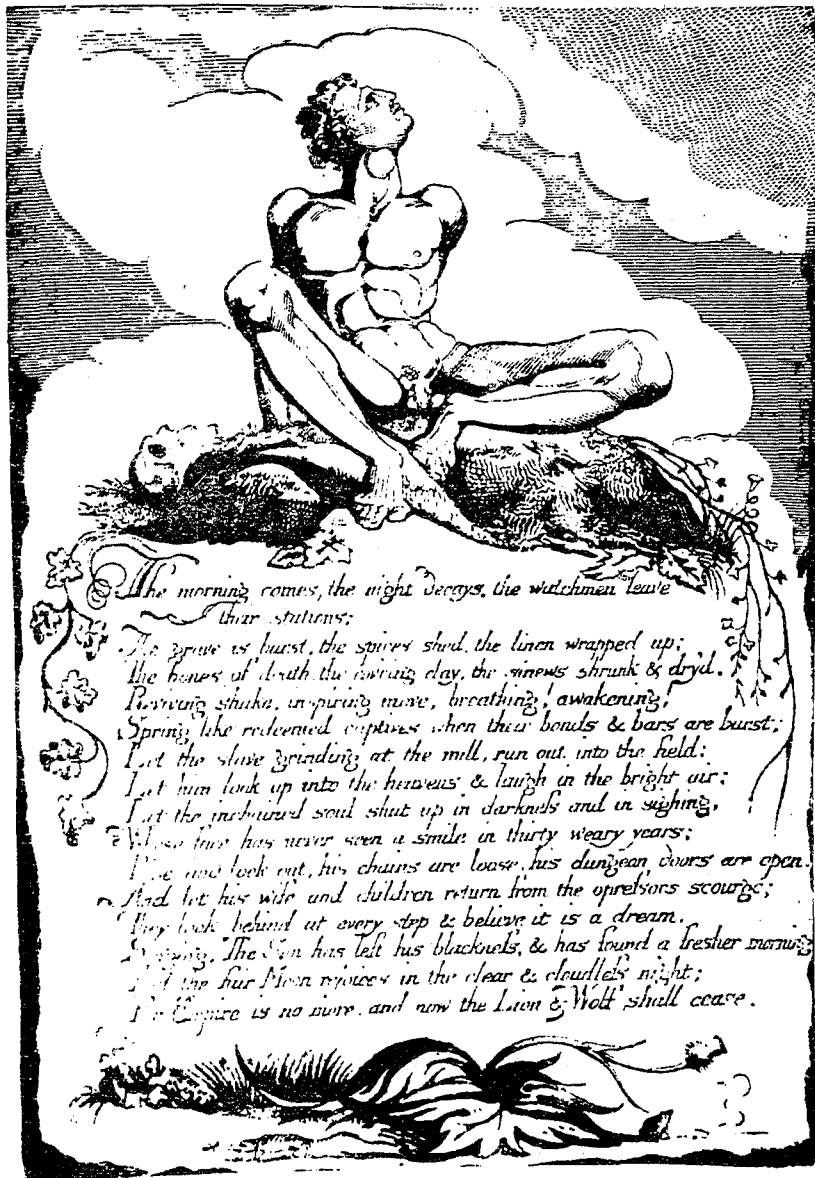




Albions Angel stood beside the Stone
 of night, and saw
 The terror like a comet, or more like the
 planet red.
 That once unloos'd the terrible wandering comets in its sphere.
 Thy Mass: thou wast our center, & the planets three flew round
 thy crimson disk; so e'er the Sun was rent from thy red sphere:
 The Spectre glond his horrid length staining the temple long
 With beams of blood; & thus a voice came forth, and shook the
 temple



The Angel of the Lord, and it is now fair
 to see, with his sword, the Eternal Ho
 ly Spirit, and the Holy Spirit, is the Angel sitting
 at the right hand of the throne, the linen clothes fold
 ed, and is the dominion of Edom, & the return of
 them into Paradise; see Isaiah XXXIII & XXXIV Chap:
 Without Contraries is no progression. Attraction
 and Repulsion, Reason and Energy, Love and
 Hate, are necessary to Human existence. *Al*
 These contraries spring what the religious call
 Good & Evil. Good is the passive that obeys Reason
 Evil is the active springing from Energy
 Good is Heaven. Evil is Hell.

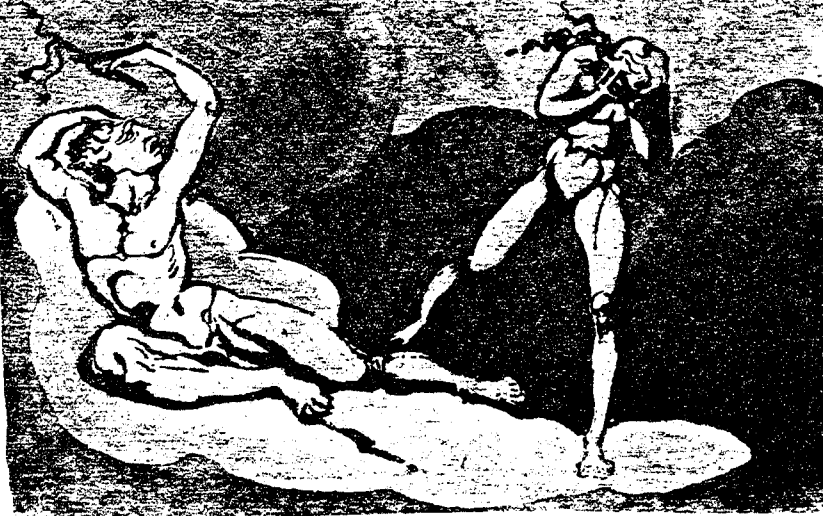


The morning comes, the night decays, the watchmen leave
 their stations;
 The yoke is burst, the spires shud, the linen wrapped up;
 The bones of death the morning clay, the sinews shrunk & dryd.
 Raving shudd, in-pining moan, breathing, awaking,
 Spring like redeemed captives when their bonds & bars are burst;
 Let the slave grinding at the mill, run out, into the field;
 Let him look up into the heavens & laugh in the bright air;
 Let the inebriated 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.
 Spring, The Sun has left his blacknels, & has found a fresher morning;
 And the fair Moon rejoices in the clear & cloudless night;
 The Empire is no more, and now the Lion & Wolf shall cease.

6
 And a palace of eternity in the jaws of the hungry grave,
 Over his porch these words are written. Take thy bliss O Man!
 And sweet shall be thy taste & sweet thy infant joys renew!

Infancy, fearless, lustful, happy! nestling for delight
 In laps of pleasure; Innocence! honest, open, seeking
 The rycrous joys of morning light; open to virgin bliss,
 Who taught thee modesty, subtil modesty! chide of night & sleep
 When thou awakest with thou dissemble all thy secret joys
 Or wert thou not awake when all this mystery was disclosed!
 Then comest thou forth a modest virgin knowing to dissemble
 With nets found under thy night pillow, to catch virgin joy,
 And braze it with the name of whore; & sell it in the night,
 In silence, evn without a whisper, and in seeming sle;
 Frigidous dreams and holy vapors, light thy smoky fires:
 Once were thy fires lighted by the eyes of honest man
 And does my Theotorman seek this hypocrite modesty!
 This knowing, artful, secret, fearful, cautious, trembling hypocrite.
 Then is Oothoon a whore indeed; and all the virgin joys
 Of life are harlots; and Theotorman is a sick mans dream
 And Oothoon is the crafty slave of selfish holiness.

But Oothoon is not so, a virgin filled with virgin fancies
 Open to joy and to delight where ever beauty appears
 If in the morning sun I find it, there my eyes are fixed





I have always found that Angels have the vanity to speak of themselves as the only wise; this they do with a confident insolence sprouting from systematic reasoning; Thus Swedenborg boasts that what he writes is new, tho' it is only the Contents or Index of already published books

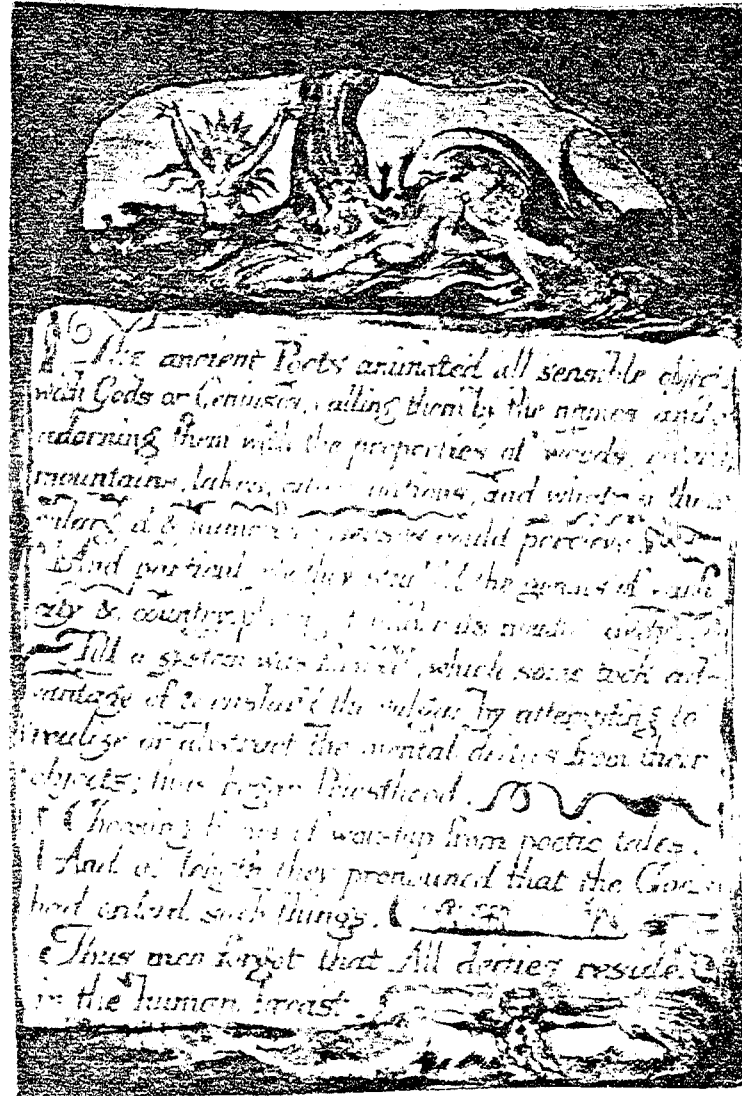
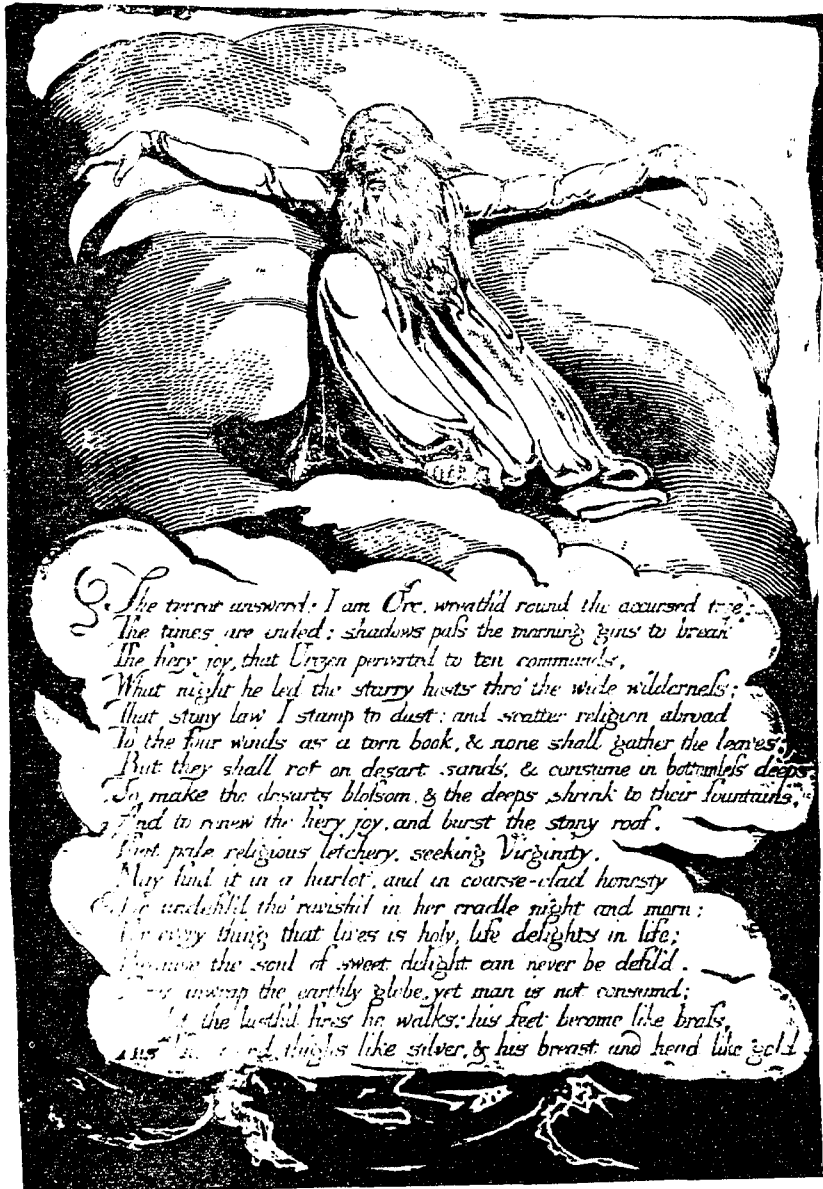
A man carried a monkey about for a shew, & because he was a little wiser than the monkey, grew vain, and conceiv'd himself as much wiser than seven men. It is so with Swedenborg; he shews the folly of churches & exposes hypocrites, till he imagines that all are religious, & himself the single one

Marriage 21^c



In thunders ends the voice Then flows Angel wrathful burst
Beside the Stone of Night; and like the carnal Lions howl
In famine & war, replyd: Art thou not Ore, who serpent form'd
Stands at the gate of Faularmon to devour her children;
Blasphemous Deimon, Antichrist, hater of Disputes;
Lover of wild rebellion, and transgressor of Gods Law;
Why dost thou come to Angels eyes in this terrific form?

America 7ⁿ



1290

Where the cold miser spreads his gold? or does the bright cloud
 On his same threshold, does his eye behold the beam that brings
 Expansion to the eye of pay? or will he bind himself
 Beside the ox to thy hard furrow? does not that mild beam blot
 The bat, the owl, the glowing tiger, and the king of night.
 The sea fowl takes the wint'ry blast for a covering to her limbs:
 And the wild snake, the pestilence to adorn him with gems & gold.
 And trees & birds & beasts, & men behold their eternal joy.
 Arise you little glancing wings, and sing your infant joy!
 Arise and drink your bliss, for every thing that lives is holy!

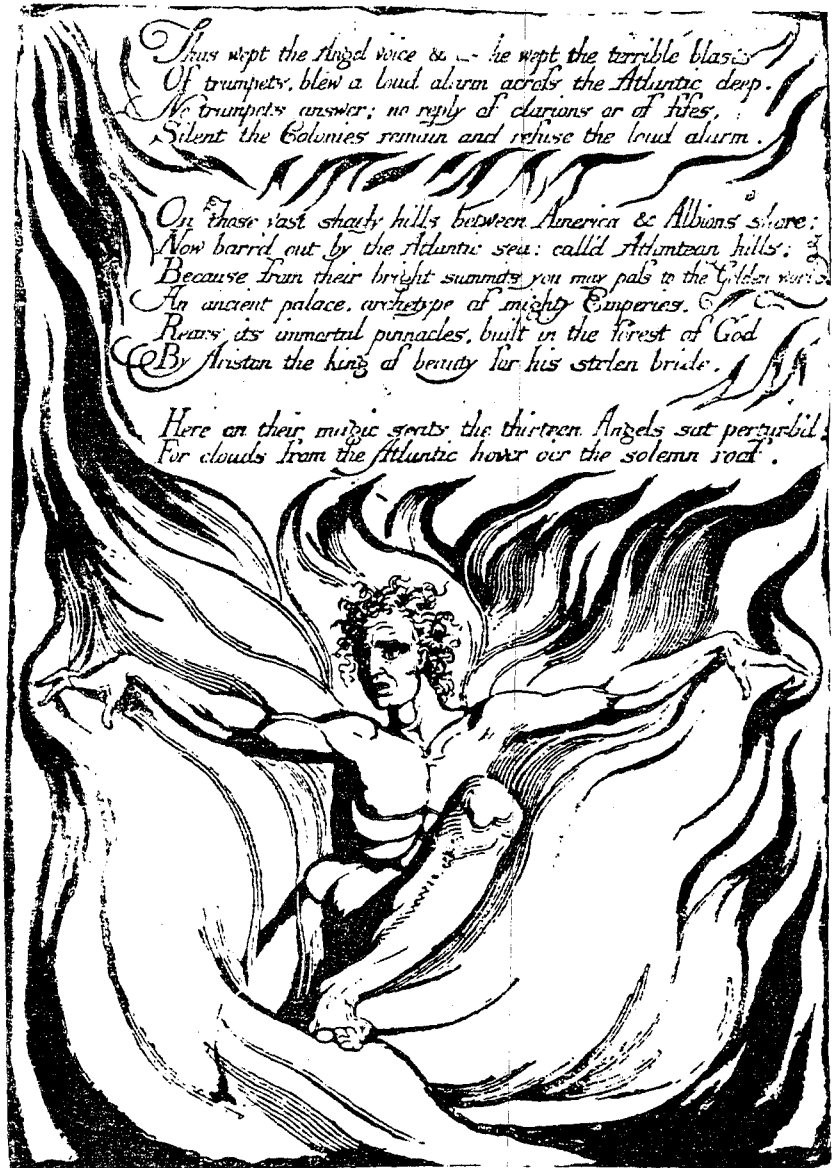
Thus every morning wails Oothoon, but Theotimon sits
 Upon the margined ocean conversing with shadows dire.

The Daughters of Albion hear her moes, & echo back her sighs.

The End



Visions 8^J

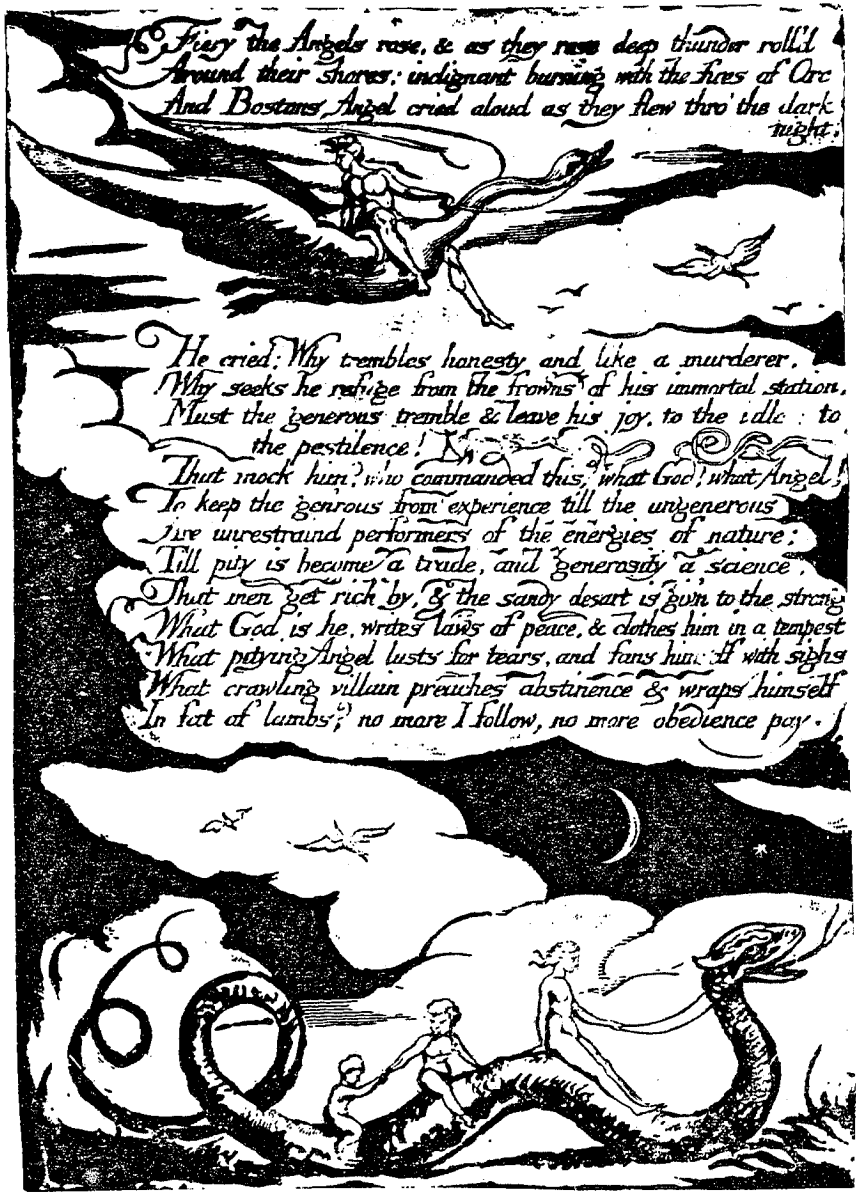


Thus wept the Angel vice & he wept the terrible blasie
 Of trumpets, blew a loud alarm across the Atlantic deep.
 No trumpets answer; no reply of clarions or of fides,
 Silent the Colonies remain and refuse the loud alarm.

On those vast shaggy hills between America & Albions shore;
 Now barr'd out by the Atlantic sea: call'd Atlantean hills:
 Because from their bright summits you may pals to the Golden world
 An ancient palace, archetype of mighty Emperies,
 Rears its immortal pinnacles, built in the forest of God
 By Anstian the king of beauty for his stolen bride.

Here on their nudic seats the thirteen Angels sat perturbid
 For clouds from the Atlantic hover o'er the solemn road.

America 10^N



As fiery the Angels rose, & as they rose deep thunder roll'd
 Around their shores; indignant burning with the fires of Arc
 And Boston, Angel cried aloud as they flew thro' the dark
 night.

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 rattle: to
 the pestilence! What mock him? who commanded this, what God, what Angel,
 To keep the generous from experience till the ungenerous
 Give unrestrained performers of the energies of nature;
 Till pity is become a trade, and generosity a science,
 That men get rich by, & the sandy desert is given to the strong
 What God is he, writes laws of peace, & clothes him in a tempest
 What pyrrhic Angel lusts for tears, and fans him with sighs
 What crawling villain preaches abstinence & wraps himself
 In fat of lambs; no more I follow, no more obedience pay.

IV.

The eternal gates terrific porter lifted the northern bar,
 That entered in & saw the secrets of the land unknown:
 She saw the courses of the dead, & where the furious rove
 Of every heart on earth calix's deep its restless twists,
 A land of sorrows & of tears where never souls was seen.

She wandered in the land of clouds thro' willow dark, listning
 To sighs & lamentation: waiting, she became a flow'ry grave
 She stood in silence, listning to the vows of the ground,
 Till to her own grave plot she came: & there she sat down,
 And heard this voice of sorrow breathed from the hollow pit.

Why cannot the Egg be closed to its own destruction,
 Or the glazing Eye to the poison of a scale,
 Why are the child's dead with arrows ready drawn,
 When a thousand serpents men in ambush see?
 Or an Eve of gifts to sinners, when ray fruits & venereal
 Why a language unpolish'd with longer than every word?
 Why an hour of charity to every creature, in
 Why a bestial noise inalking, to men trembling & able?

The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek,
 And with unhindered will she came over the moon of



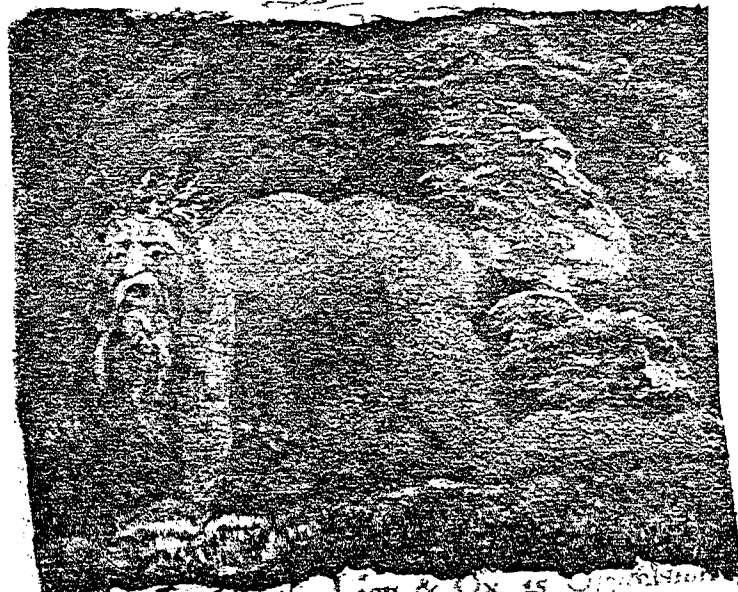


So cried he, casting all his robe & throwing down his scepter
 In sight of Albion's Guardian, and all the thirteen Angels
 Rent off their robes to the hungry wind, & drew their golden scap-
 tures
 Down on the land of America, indignant they descended
 Headlong from out their heavenly heights, descending swift as
 furs
 Over the land: naked & flaming, as their garments were
 In the deep gloom, to Washington & Paul & Vinton they stood
 And the thine riddled roaring fire within the pitchy m-
 Bore the Demon red, who burnt towards America,
 In black smoke thunders and loud winds rejoicing in his
 terror
 Breaking in smoky wreaths from the wild deep, & gathering thick
 In flames as of a furnace on the land from North to South

pulse, not from rules.

When he had so spoken: I beheld the Angel who
 descended and his arms embracing the flame of fire
 & he was consumed and arose as Elijah.

With this Angel, who is now become a Devil, is
 my particular friend: we often read the Bible to
 gather in its infernal or diabolical sense which
 the world shall have if they behave well
 I saw also: the Bible of Hell; which the world
 shall have whether they will or no.



The Law for the Lion & Ox is



The Giants who bound this world into its sensual existence and now seem to live in its chains are in truth, the causes of its liberty the sources of all activity, but the chains are, the enemies of weak and tame minds, which have power to resist every, according to the proverb, the weak in counting is strong in counting. Thus, our portion of being, is the Prolific, the devouring; to the devourer it seems as if the producer were in his chains, but it is not so, he only takes portions of existence and sanctifies it all the while.

Not the Prolific would cease to be Prolific & unless the Devourer as a man relieved the excess of his delights.

Some will say, is not God alone the Prolifer? I answer, God only acts in existing beings or Men.

These two classes of men are always upon earth, & they should be enemies; whoever tries



What time the thirteen Governors that England sent - were
In Bernard's house; the slaves covered the land, they rose they
Shaking their mental chains they rush in fury to the sea
To quench their anguish; at the feet of Washington down fall
They grovel on the sand and writhing lie: while all
The British soldiers thro the thirteen states sent up a howl
Of anguish: threw their swords & muskets to the earth & fled
From their encampments and dark castles seeking where to lie
From the grim flames; and from the visions of Orc, in spirit
Of Albion's Angel; who enraged his secret clouds opened
From north to south, and burnt outstretch'd on wings of warm winds
The eastern sky, spreading his awful wings across the heavens
Beneath him roll'd his numerous hosts, all Albion's Angels carried
Darkend the Atlantic mountains & their trumpets shook the valleys
Amid with diseases of the earth to cast upon the Abyss
Their numbers forty millions, mustering in the eastern sky.



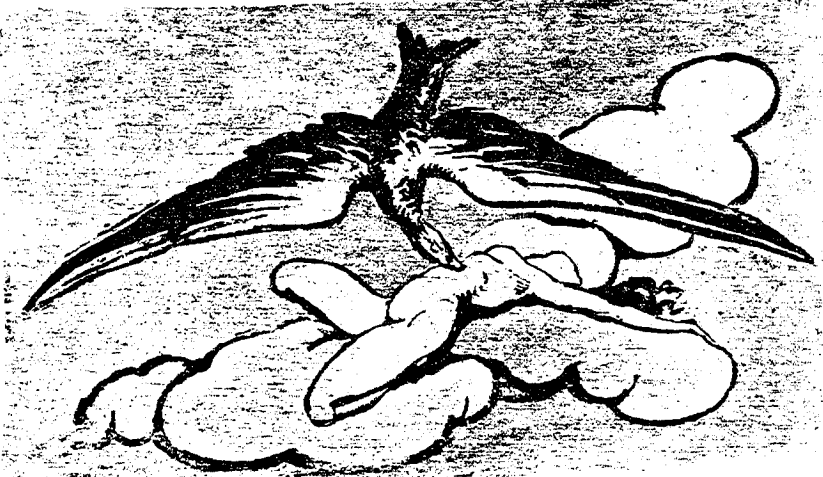
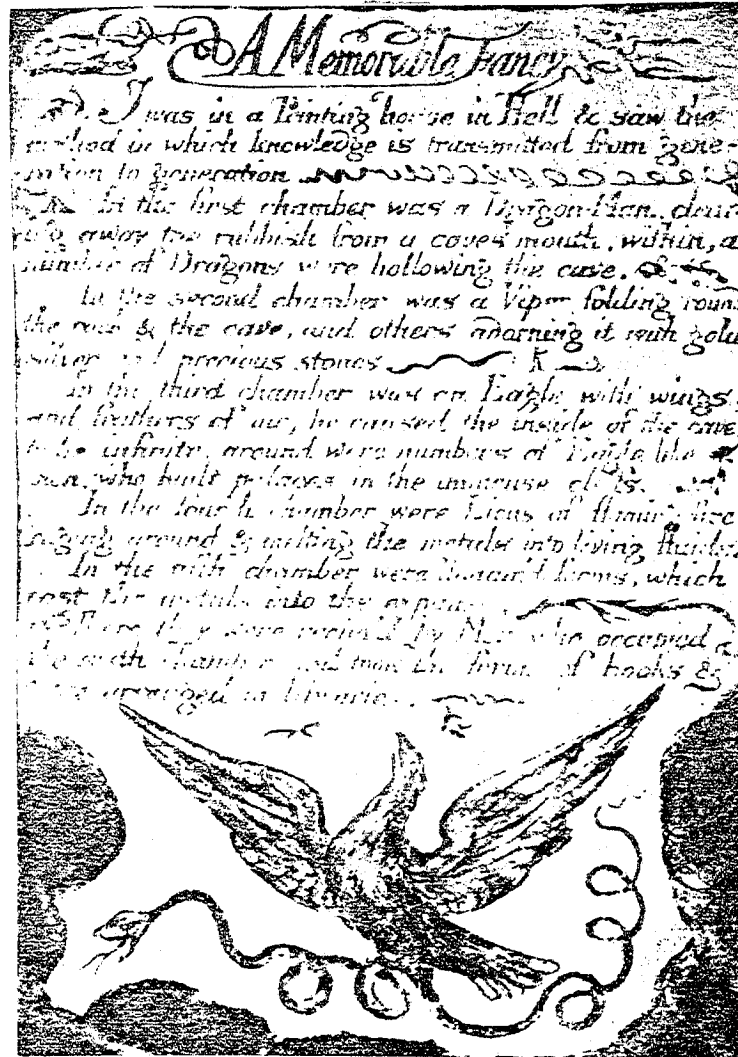
And none but Bronian can hear my lamentations.

With what sense is it that the chicken shuns the ravenous hawk?
With what sense does the tame pigeon measure out the expanse?
With what sense does the bee form cells? have not the mouse & the
Evas and ears and sense of touch? yet are their habitations.
And their pursuits, as different as their forms and as their joys:
Ask the wild ass why he refuses burdens; and the meek ass
Why he loves man; is it because of eye ear mouth or skin
Or breathing nostrils? No, for these the wolf and tiger have.
Ask the blind worm the secrets of the grave, and why her spires
Love to curl round the bones of death; and ask the ravenous snake
Where she gets poison; & the winged eagle why he loves the sun.
And then tell me the thoughts of man, that have been hid of old.

Silent I hover all the night, and all day could be silent.
If Theotormon once would turn his loved eyes upon me;
How can I be defiled when I reflect thy image pure? (woe
Sweetest the fruit that the worm feeds on, & the soul prey'd on by
The new washed lamb ting'd with the village snake & the bright sward
By the red earth of our immortal river: I bathe my wings,
And I am white and pure to hover round Theotormon's breast.

Then Theotormon broke his silence, and he answered.

Tell me what is the night or day to one overflow'd with woe?
Tell me what is a thought? & of what substance is it made?
Tell me what is a joy, & in what gardens do joys grow?
And in what rivers swim the scorpions, and upon what mountains

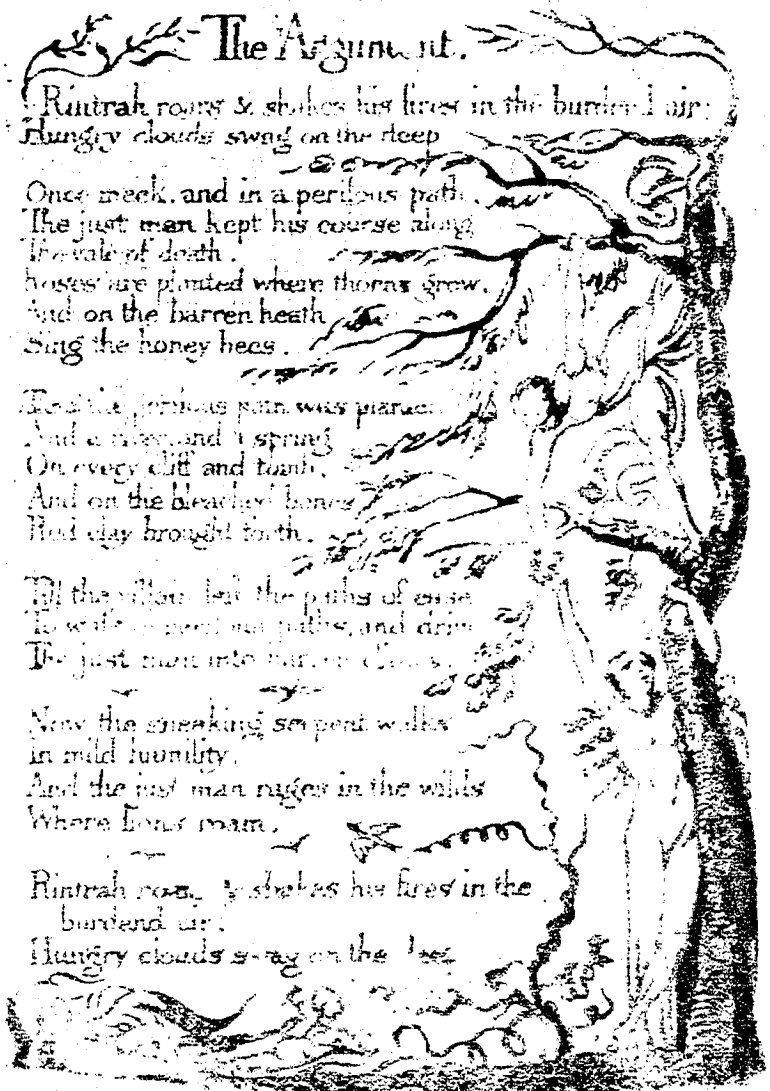




In the flames stood & viewed the armies drawn out in the sky,
 Washington Franklin Paine & Warren Dillon Gates & Lee;
 They heard the voice of Albion's Angel give the thunderous command
 His plagues obedient to his voice flew forth out of their clouds
 Falling upon America, as a storm to cut them off
 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 filled with insects cuts off man & beast;
 And as a sea overwhelms a land in the day of an earthly sea;

Fury, rage, madness, in a wind swept through America
 And the red flames of Ore that folded roaring fierce around
 The angry shores, and the fierce rushing of the inhabitants together;
 The citizens of New York close their books & lock their chests;
 The mariners of Boston drop their anchors and untide;
 The scribe of Pennsylvania casts his pen upon the earth;
 The builder of Virginia throws his hammer down in fear!

Then had America been lost, overwhelmed by the Atlantic,
 And Earth had lost another portion of the orbite;
 But all rush together in the night in wrath and raging fire
 The red fires raged, the plagues recoiled! then rolled they back
 with fury



The Argument.

Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the burdened air;
 Hungry clouds swag on the deep

Once weak, and in a perilous path,
 The just man kept his course along
 The vale of death,
 Hoses are planted where thorns grew,
 And on the barren heath
 Sing the honey bees.

To the perilous path were planted
 And a vine and a spring
 On every cliff and tomb,
 And on the bleached bones
 Red clay brought forth.

All the villan left the paths of ease
 To walk in narrow paths, and drive
 The just man into barren places.

Now the sneaking serpent walks
 In mild loquacity,
 And the just man rages in the wilds
 Where lions roam.

Rintrah roars & shakes his fires in the
 burdened air;
 Hungry clouds swag on the deep

The Argument

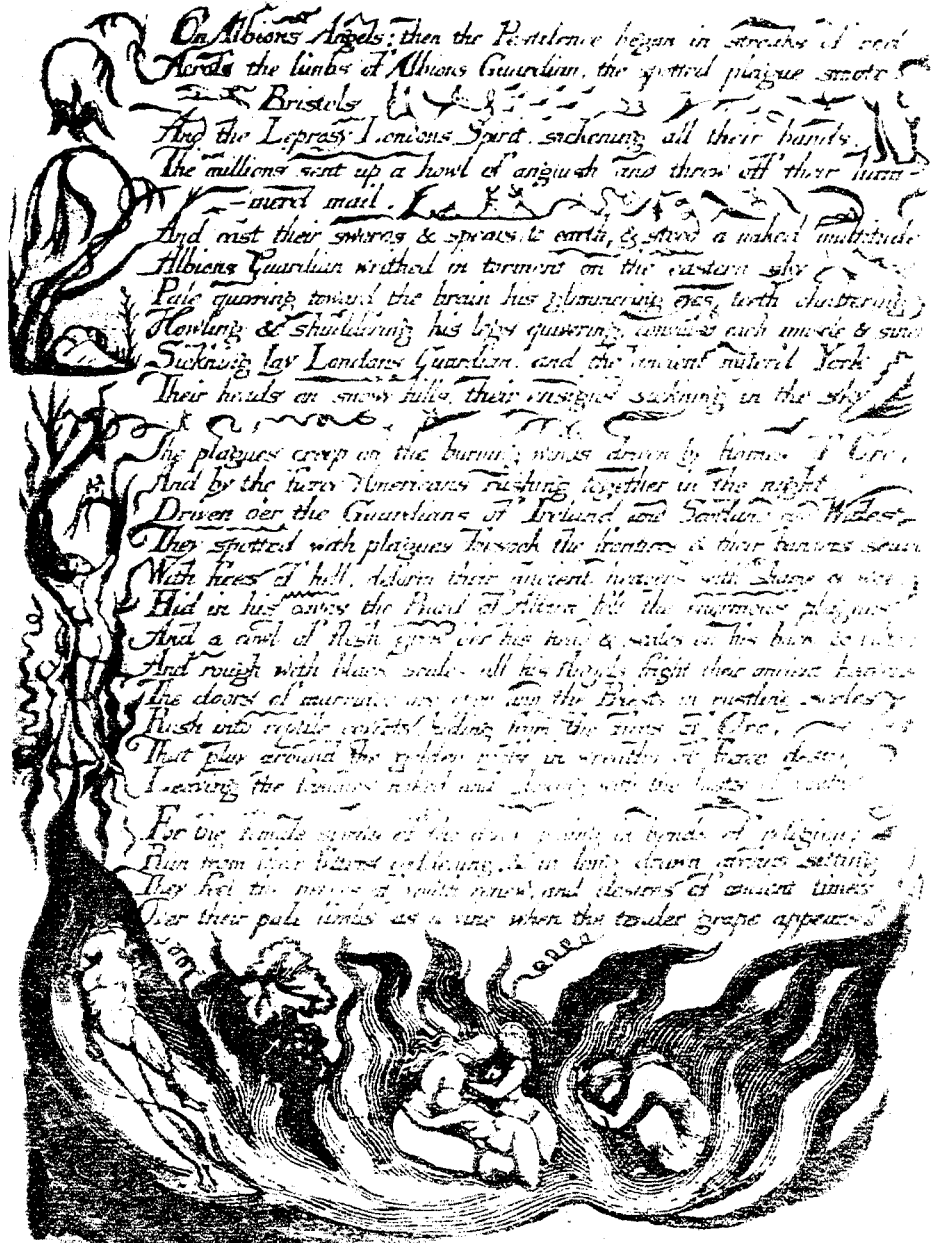
I loved Theotimon
 And I was not ashamed
 I trembled in my virgin fears
 And I hid in Leutha's vale;

I plucked Leutha's flower,
 And I rose up from the vale;
 But the terrible thunders torn
 My virgin mantle in twain.



Visions iii^J

America a



On Albion's Angels: then the Pestilence began in streaks of red
 Across the limbs of Albion's Guardian, the spotted plague smote
 Bristol & London's Spirit, sicken'g all their hearts,
 The millions sent up a howl of anguish and threw off their
 -overd mail.
 And cast their spheres & sprays to earth, & strew'd a naked multitude
 Albion's Guardian writhed in torments on the eastern shore
 Pale quivering toward the brain his ghastly eyes, with shuddering
 Howling & shuddering his lips quivering, convulsed each muscle & sinew
 Suck'ning lay London's Guardian, and the ancient mother York
 Their hands on snow hills, their visages sickning in the sky
 The plagues creep on the burning waves driven by flames of fire
 And by the fierce Americans rushing together in the night
 Driven o'er the Guardians of Ireland and Scotland and Wales
 They spotted with plagues to such the features & their features sear'd
 With faces of hell, deform their ancient images with Sars & scars
 Had in his caves the Priest of Aitha till the enormous plagues
 And a civil of flesh grew o'er his head & sides in his hair to rise
 And rough with black scales, all his strength fight that ancient heathen
 The doors of marriage were open and the Breeds in rustling circles
 Rush into virgile coverts, leading him the suns of Ore
 That play around the golden river in swarms of fierce desire
 Leaving the females naked and despoil'd with the limbs of earth
 For the female world of the dawn, young in bands of plagues
 Run from their fathers' embracing, it is laid down various settings
 They feel the pains of youth new, and desires of ancient times
 Near their pale limbs as a vine when the tender grape appears

America 15^K

America b



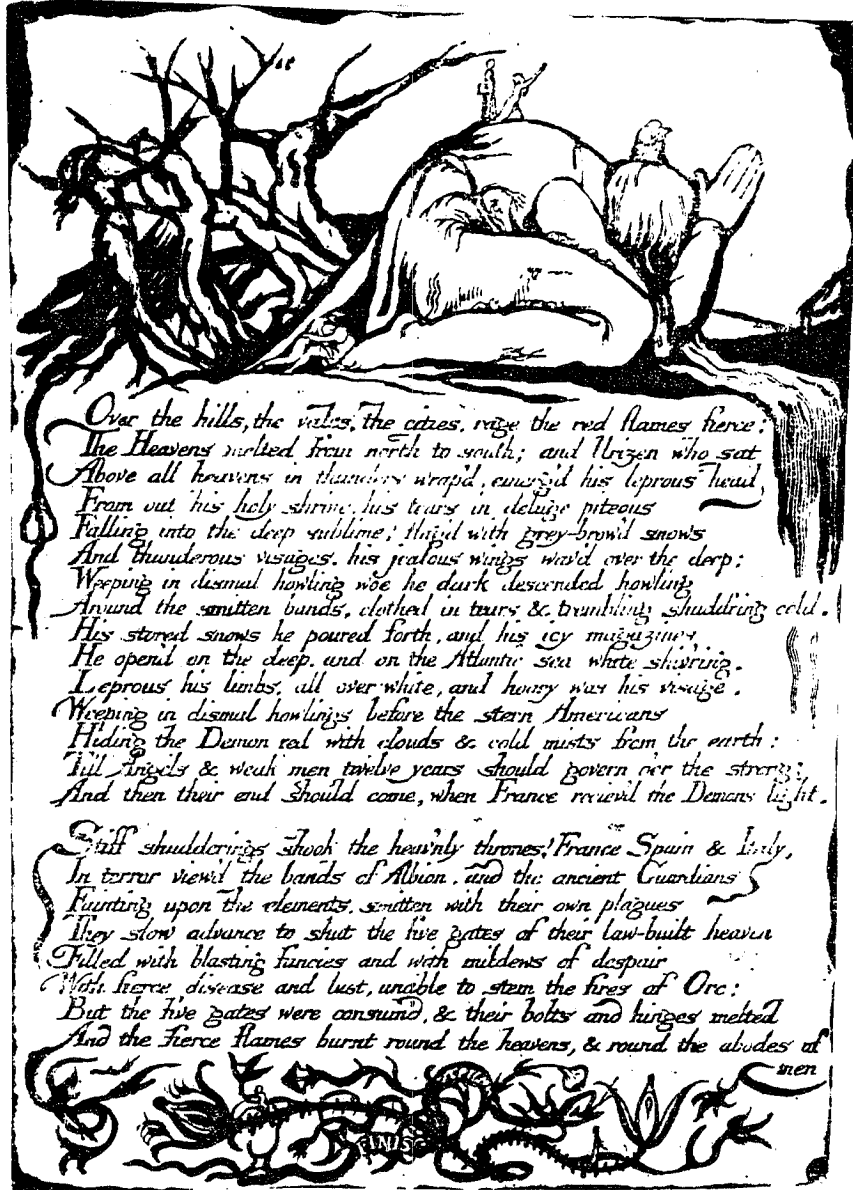
III.

How that spirit did reveal the Wren upon its downy bed.

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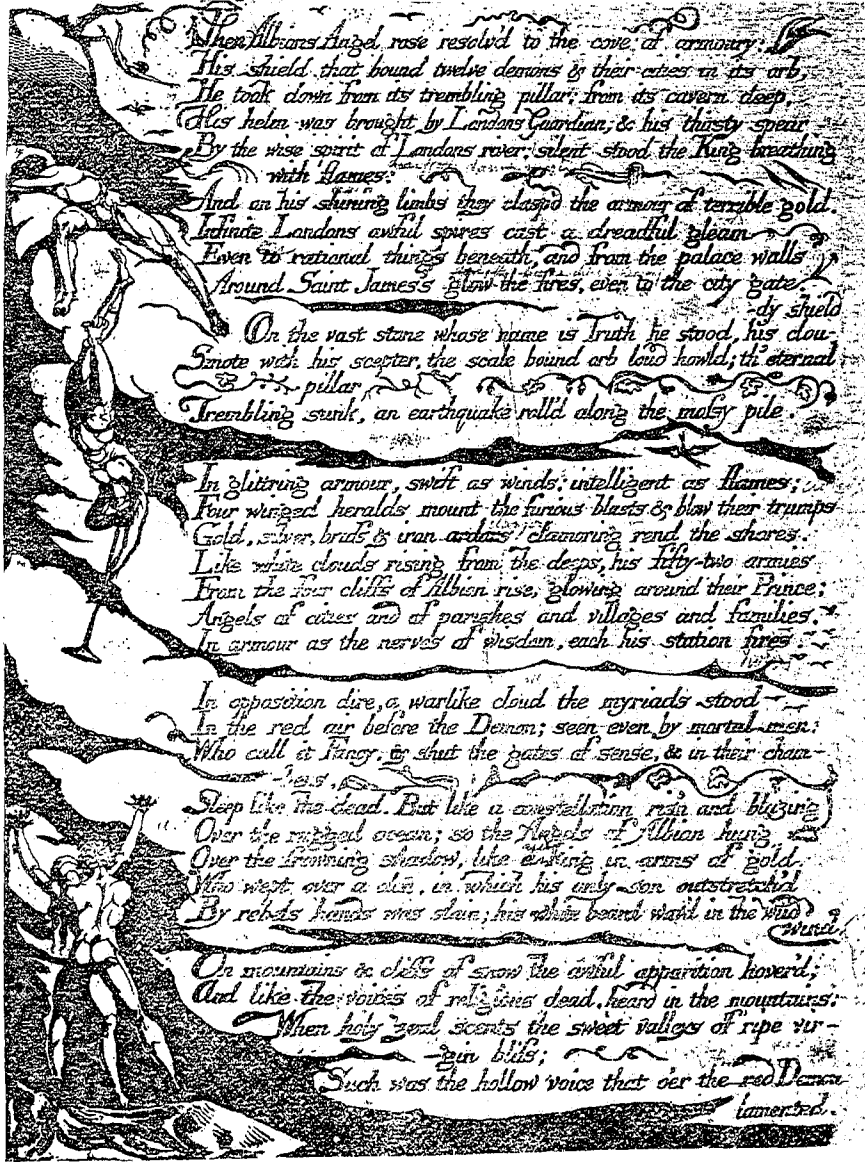
How that spirit did reveal the Wren upon its downy bed.
 How that spirit did reveal the Wren upon its downy bed.
 How that spirit did reveal the Wren upon its downy bed.

Of Nature of the wales of War we live not for ourselves.
 We must use the meanest things, and so have realized,
 The loss of it itself is cold, and of itself is dark.



Over the hills, the vales, the cities, rage the red flames here:
 The Heavens melted from north to south; and Urizen who sat
 Above all heavens in thunders rapid, curv'd his leprous head
 From out his holy shrine, his tears in deluge pitious
 Falling into the deep sublime; thiz'd with grey-brow'd snows
 And thunderous visages, his jealous wings mov'd over the deep;
 Weeping in dismal howling woe he dark descended howling
 Around the smitten bands, cloth'd in tears, & trembling shudd'ring cold.
 His stored snows he pour'd forth, and his icy magazine,
 He open'd on the deep, and on the Atlantic sea white shivering,
 Leprous his limbs, all over white, and hoary was his visage,
 Weeping in dismal howlings before the stern Americans
 Hiding the Demon real with clouds & cold mists from the north:
 Till Angels & weak men twelve years should govern o'er the stragg;
 And then their end should come, when France reviv'd the Demons light.

Still shudd'ring took the heav'nly thrones! France Spain & Italy,
 In terror view'd the bands of Albion, and the ancient Guardians
 Fainting upon the elements, smitten with their own plagues
 They slow advance to shut the five gates of their low-built heaven
 Filled with blasting furies and with maddens of despair
 With fierce disease and lust, unable to stem the fires of Orc:
 But the five gates were consumed, & their bolts and hinges melted
 And the fierce flames burnt round the heavens, & round the abodes of men



Then Albion's Angel, rose resolv'd to the cone of armour;
His shield that bound twelve devils by their caves in its orb;
He took down from its trembling pillar; from its cavern deep
His helin was brought by London's Guardian; & his thursty spear
By the wise spirit of London's river; silent stood the King breathing
with flames.

And on his shining limbs they clasp'd the armour of terrible gold.
Indurate London's awful spires cast a dreadful gleam
Even to rational things beneath, and from the palace walls
Around Saint James's glow the fires, even to the city gate.

On the vast stone whose name is Truth he stood, his dou-
-blet with his scepter, the scale bound orb loud howl'd; th' eternal
Trembling sunk, an earthquake roll'd along the mazy pile.

In glittering armour, swift as winds; intelligent as flames;
Four winged heralds mount the furious blasts & blow their trumpets
Gold, silver, brass & iron armies; clamours rend the shores.
Like white clouds rising from the deeps, his fifty-two armies
From the four cliffs of Albion rise, blowing around their Prince;
Angels of cities and of parishes and villages and families,
In armour as the nerves of wisdom, each his station fires.

In opposition dire, a warlike cloud the myriads stood
In the red air before the Demon; seen even by mortal men:
Who call it Fancy, & shut the gates of sense, & in their cham-

ber sleep like the dead. But like a constellation rain and blizning
Over the rugged ocean; so the Angels of Albion hung
Over the frowning shadow, like a king in arms of gold,
Who wept over a slave, in whom his only son outstretch'd
By rebels hands was slain; his white beard wail in the wind

On mountains & cliffs of snow the awful apparition hover'd;
And like the voices of millions dead, heard in the mountains:
When holy zeal scents the sweet valleys of ripe vir-

gin bliss;
Such was the hollow voice that o'er the red Demon
lamented.

America c



America d

APPENDIX B

AMERICA CANCELLED PLATES

Earlier in the thesis I stated that an exclusively political and social view of America is self-limiting and lacking the necessary appreciation of the symbolic aspects of the poem. While the extent of this symbolism is revealed in the various America plates and their relationship to the earlier Thel, Marriage and Visions, its prevalence is also enhanced by our awareness of the America cancelled plates, a, b, c and d.

In the illustration to plate a, as David Erdman notes, Blake removes the flag and the flag bearer in the final published version (America 3N). Rather than appear closely associated with the American revolution and the surrounding political climate, then, the illustration for America 3N appears more symbolic of the Orc flames and the Urizen chains and, consequently, seems more closely adhered to Blake's mythological system. The argument that Blake's artistic talents have been uneasily harnessed to a contemporary political theme, as a result, is weakened.

The desire to transcend the political connotations of America is also evident in America cancelled plate b, the cancelled plate of America 4N. Discussed earlier, the

most significant variation occurs in the lower illustration where Blake in America 4N added a large and foreboding rock and an embracing female and child. The visual similarity, here, between America 4N and the America and Visions frontspieces and the "Preludium" plate confirms the notion that Blake intended to emphasize the continuity of the theme of limited sensibility and its unfortunate victims. Rather than portray a solitary George III as is depicted in the cancelled plate, Blake intentionally takes the emphasis away from the individual and places it on the entire symbolic scene. The "revolutionary whale", accompanying these lower figures, appears as a manifestation of the Leviathan, unappreciated in the Marriage and similarly avoided in America, where once again it reveals the presence of disturbed perception.

This perceptual distortion is reflected in the ambiguity of the plate. The basilisk in being given human hands in America 4N projects an image of greater complexity consistent with the America text, and, in being inconclusively defined, demands a more intense critical response. The greater darkness associated with ignorance, furthermore, is suggested by the blackened clouds in the greater oppressive setting of America 4N.

It is interesting that, in America cancelled plate d, one views again, as in the various plates of America and Visions and cancelled plate b, the presence of a despairing

individual accompanied by a woman and child. While Blake did not use this illustration in America, it is obviously consistent with the visual theme occurring in the poem, in Visions and in the Marriage and is not, as Erdman claims, "unrelated to any part of the America text".¹ Not only does the overhanging branch resemble America 1K, but the figure encompassed is similar to the despondent figure in America 16N, the aged figure in America 12N, the winged figure in America 1N and Theotormon in Visions 1K and 4J. The female and child, moreover, reflect the joy of Visions iiJ and Marriage 4E and 11i. Their happiness amidst the shared setting emphasizes the despondency of the crouching figure and indicates that his despair results from a perceptual state rather than the environment, as he appears as a further embodiment of Theotormon and the limited sensibility of which he is a victim. In its similarity to the various plates in America, Visions and Marriage, then, this cancelled plate further illustrates Blake's conscious employment of a continuing visual theme.

Also reflecting symbolic themes in America is the illustration of the America cancelled plate c. Here, there exists not only the obvious image of physical rape but also one of a trumpeter included in America 3N. The image of physical intercourse, entirely absent from the final version of the plate, emphasizes the physical and takes away from the more important concept of imaginative

interaction, a dominant aspect of America. It is for this reason that Blake probably avoided this depiction in the completed version of the poem, as he again emphasizes his attempt to transcend the physical and move to an imaginative symbolism.

This aversion to the literal and contemporary associations of the poem is also evident in the text of America cancelled plates b and c where the text is drastically altered. The lines, for example, "Reveal the dragon tho' human; coursing swift as fire/ To the close hall of counsel, where his Angel from renews"(A b:1-2), which are specifically political in nature, are removed from the final text and thus the "dragon" appears to be a more symbolic than political evil. Similarly, Blake removes references to "George the third", "his Lords & Commons"(A b:9) and to the specific physical setting of the government chamber by the flowing Thames. In contrast to the final text of America 4N where "heat but not light" penetrates the murky atmosphere and reveals an opaqueness characteristic of symbolic action, the cancelled plate illustrates a literal destruction of the building which houses George III and the English Parliament. Its "roofs crack across", Blake states, "down falling on the Angelic seats(A b:24).

This general pattern of removing specific political

references is apparent throughout America cancelled plates b and c and is complemented by Blake's similar visual omissions. It indicates a clear desire by Blake to maintain a symbolic presentation and to transcend the contemporary political scene. It is Blake's central concern with perception, especially evident in the juxtaposed sentiments of happiness and despair within the singular setting of America cancelled plate d, that dominates the cancelled plates and becomes an important aspect of America.

APPENDIX B

AMERICA CANCELLED PLATES

- 1 William Blake, The Illuminated Blake, ed. D.Erdman (New York: Anchor Press/Doubleday, 1974), p.395.

APPENDIX C

TEXTUAL HISTORY

The information on the America copies, contained in this Appendix, comes directly and solely from G.Keynes, E.Wolf, William Blake's Illuminated Books: A Census(New York: Krause Reprint Co., 1969) and G.E.Bentley Jr., "The Printing of Blake's America" in Studies in Romanticism, VI(1966), 45-57. My contribution involves only the revelation of the differences between these authors' views and the selection and evaluation of the most convincing interpretation deriving from the given information.

APPENDIX C

TEXTUAL HISTORY

There are sixteen copies of America: A Prophecy (copies A - P; there exists no copy J) for which descriptions are available. One additional copy is recorded only through a dealer's catalogue. The Illuminated Book, advertised by Blake in the Prospectus of 1793 as "America, A Prophecy in Illuminated Printing. Folio, with 18 designs, price 10s 6d", is a folio approximately 36 x 26 centimetres consisting of eighteen plates. The copper plates from which the copies of the poem were made existed until after Blake's death, as one copy printed in 1832 indicates. The plates have since disappeared, although a fragment of the original copper used in this relief-etching was found in a cabinet belonging to Thomas Butts and is now placed in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection, Library of Congress. While the constitution and arrangement of the various America copies does not vary, certain details within specific illustrations do indicate some differences. These variations which have contributed to some confusion over the dating of the America copies appear in the two plates of the "Preludium".

In the second plate of the "Preludium", there are "four lines which were not noticed and printed before the

Philadelphia exhibition catalogue of 1939". "Apparently" according to Keynes, in his William Blake's Illuminated Books: A Census, "Blake changed his mind about the lines and in all copies after the first, until sometime after 1812 he covered the lower quarter of the design with paper or board so that it would not print". While Keynes' statement represents an educated conjecture, it is given conclusive validity by G.E. Bentley in his study, "The Printing of Blake's America". Having closely observed all of the public copies without the four lines and noted the significant variations in measurement and figure placement, Bentley convincingly concludes that such differences could only have arisen from the use of a covering plate. Had the lines been completely missing from the plates until later copies were made, Bentley argues, the changes in the measurement and placement of the illustrated figure would have been minimal. Moreover, as he notes, portions of the "T" from the first work "The" can be seen in several copies. While agreeing on the point of Blake's act of masking, Bentley differs with Keynes on the dating of copies A and B where the lines appeared and were masked respectively. Examining the claims of both authors, those of the former appear most credible.

In their discussion of the poem's various copies, Keynes and Wolf assert that the four lines appearing in copy A and absent from all copies until O, which was

printed in 1820, indicates, in part, that copy A is the earliest copy, subsequently followed by the others. This view is substantiated by the existence of the "Preludium" word plate, a small plate added to the top of the first "Preludium" plate, in all but copies A and B (Except for copies M and O where "Blake may have mislaid the little plate" and the posthumous copy P.) This word plate known to have been "added" further suggests that A and B are the first copies. Responding to this assertion, Bentley, using more detailed methods of calculation comes to a more convincing dating of the America copies.

Viewing the posthumous copy P, Bentley notes the existence of a heavy black border. "This border", which as he states, "is made by the rim which must be left at the margin of the etched plate in order to keep the acid from overflowing when the design is bitten in" was regularly wiped clean by Blake before printing from the plates. The evidence of such a border in copies P, Q and N indicate that, despite the watermarking dates of 1813 and 1812 on Q and N respectively, copies P, Q and N are posthumous. He further supports this view by noting that both N and Q are printed in black and that copy Q contains evidence of careless printing in the first four letters of "scep - /ter" which failed to print at the end of 1.4 on plate 14. Copy O, watermarked 1820, is regarded by Bentley and Keynes to have been intended for John Linnell,

who as Keynes states, probably purchased the copy from Blake in 1822.

Disagreeing with Keynes early dating of copies A and B, Bentley asserts that the watermarks of copies A, B, M (1794/J. Whatman (A,B) and 1799/Hayes & Wise (M)), combined with the inscription of 1799 to Blake's friend C.H. Tatham in copy B, imply that they may have been printed about 1799. The earliest copies, on the other hand, are copies C-L. Bentley distinguishes these copies from the others in a number of ways. While copies A-B, M-P are printed singularly, copies C-L are printed back-to-back and on ten rather than eighteen leaves. Furthermore only copies C-L are watermarked E&P (C-E, G-K) or unwatermarked (F,L). While their size (25.0 to 27.3 wide by 34.7 to 38.6 cm. high) is larger than all copies but B and M, only B is like C-L, unnumbered, and only M is printed in the shades of black verging to dark blue or dark green found in copies C-G, I-L (H is printed in blue).

In all copies C-L the "Preludium" word plate is present, implying Bentley's belief that it was included in the first printing and not as Keynes and Wolf assert, added later. Of these copies Bentley argues that copies E-G, I-L were printed before C-D, H because of the existence of three serpent-tails in plate 13 of the former copies and only one tail in the latter copies, a characteristic also of the latter copies, A-B, M-P. Copy G, the author

considers the earliest copy because unlike the others, the lines of plate 4 have been erased rather than masked, as stated by Keynes and Wolf. The erasure, Bentley states, "left faint but unmistakable traces of the letters". This evidence of careless printing", he continues "or a change of mind may indicate that copy G was the earliest printed copy". Convincingly then, Bentley places the various America copies in the following chronological order, G, (E-F-I-L), (C-D-H), (A-B-M) O, (N,Q,P).

In addition to the eighteen plates of the poem, there exist four rejected proof plates which begin with "A Prophecy" on plate 4 similar to the published version and continuing on with a completely different text for the next two plates. The final plate entitled "As when a dream of Thiraltha flies the midnight hour" is the most obscure of the cancelled plates in relation to the America poem. While Keynes and Wolf suggest that these plates were Blake's first version of America there is no conclusive evidence to confirm this belief. The first three proofs, now located in the Lessing J. Rosenwald Collection were initially printed in Geoffrey Keynes Bibliography, 1921. The fourth, printed first in Hodgson's sale catalogue 14 January, 1904 is not known to exist in proof state.

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The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign.

The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
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The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign.



Thel 2^N

The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign.

The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign.

The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign,
 The world is a book of the words of man, and a sign.



Thel 5^N

Sound! sound! my loud war-trumpets & alarm my thirteen Angels!
 Loud howls the eternal Wolf! the eternal Lion lashes his tail!
 America is darkened and my punishing Demons terrified
 Crouch howling, to fire their caverns deep like skins and in the wind
 They cannot smite the great, nor quench the lightning of the earth.
 They cannot smite with sorrows; nor subvert the plow and spade.
 They cannot wall the city, nor moat round the castle of princes.
 They cannot bring the stubbed oak to overgrow the hills.
 For terrible men stand on the shores, & in their robes I see
 Children take shelter from the lightnings, those stuns Washington
 And Paine and Warren with their long-hairs, many toward the east
 But clouds obscure my angel sight, A vision from afar!
 Sound, sound! my loud war-trumpets & alarm my thirteen Angels!
 Ah vision from afar! Ah rebel form that rent the ancient
 Heavens, Eternal Viper self-renewed, rolling in clouds
 I see thee in thick clouds and darknels on Americas shore
 Whetting in paroxysms of abhorred birth, and flames the crest rebellious
 And eyes of death; the harlot womb oft opened in vain
 Throws in enormous circles, now the times are returned upon thee
 Devourer of thy parent, now thy unalterable torment renews
 Sound! sound! my loud war trumpets & alarm my thirteen Angels!
 Ah terrible birth! a young one bursting, where is the weeping mother
 And where the mothers milk? instead those ever-lubricating jaws
 And parched lips deep with brim-gone; now roll thou in the clouds
 Thy mother loss her length outstretched upon the shore beneath
 Sound! sound! my loud war trumpets & alarm my thirteen Angels!
 Loud howls the eternal Wolf! the eternal Lion lashes his tail!



The ancient tradition that the world will be con-
 sumed in fire at the end of six thousand years
 is true, as I have heard from Eiel.

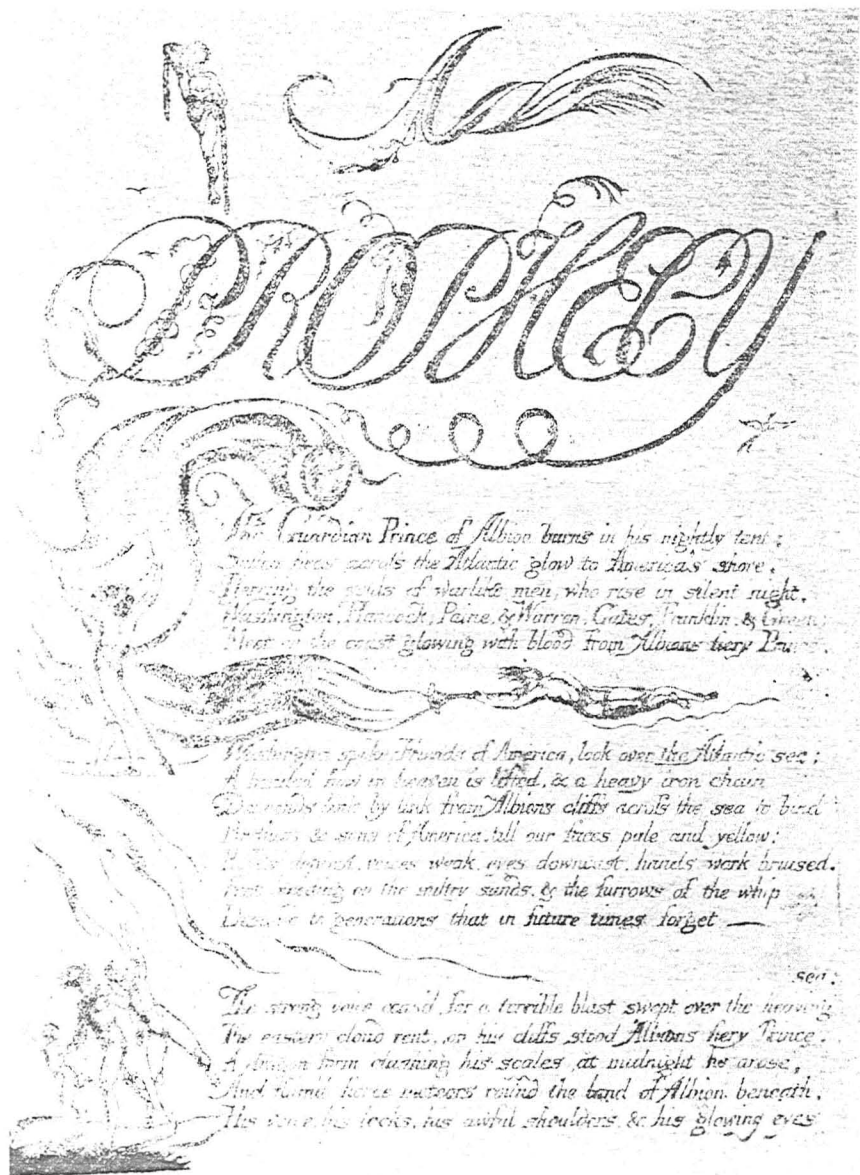
For the cherub with his flaming sword is
 barely encouraged to leave his guard at tree of
 life, and when he does, the whole creation will
 be consumed, and appear white and holy
 whereas it now appears black & corrupt.

This will come to pass by an improvement of
 sensual enjoyment.

But first the notion that man has a body
 distinct from his soul, is to be expunged; this
 I shall do, by printing in the internal method by
 corrosives, which in itself are salutary and me-
 dicinal, melting apparent surfaces away, and
 displaying the infinite which was hid.

If the doors of perception were cleaned
 every thing would appear to man as it is, in-
 finite.

For man has closed himself up, till he sees
 all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern.

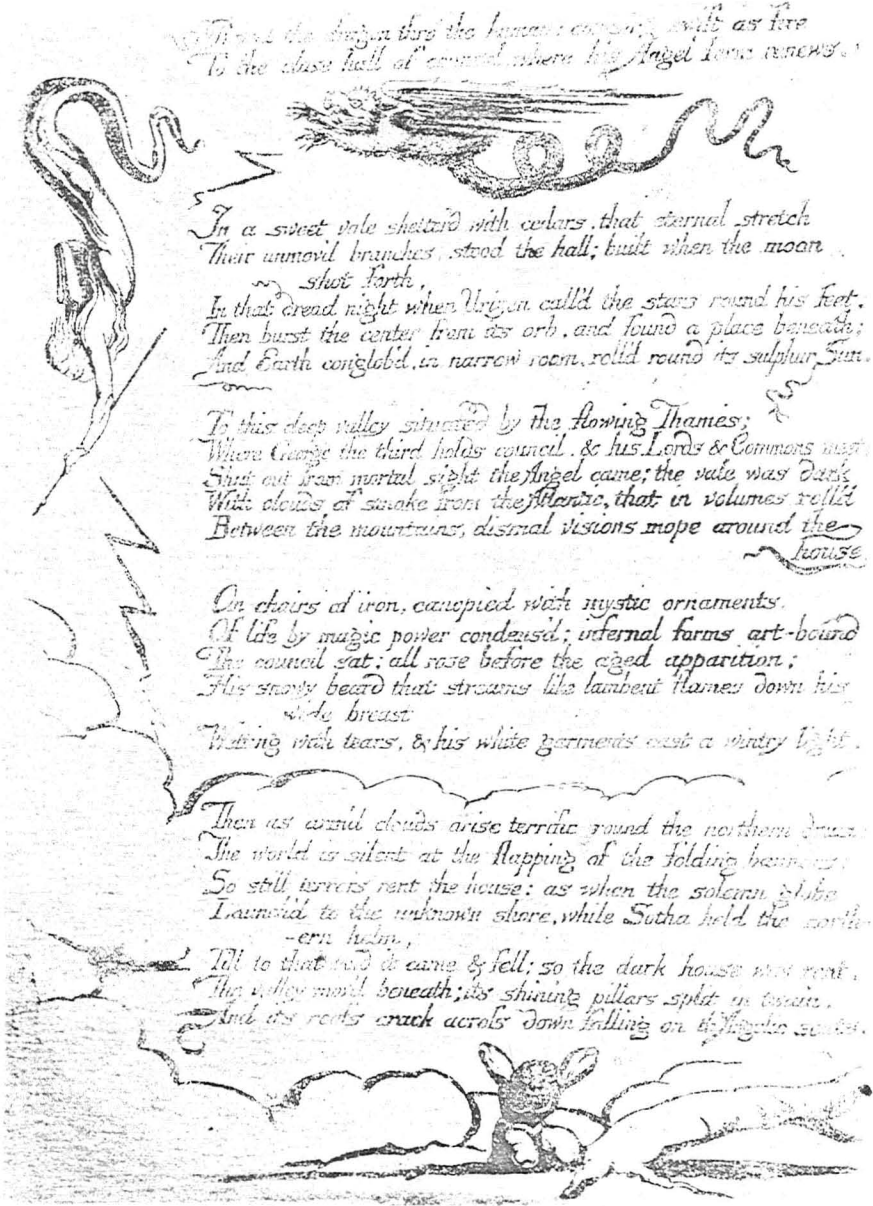


The Canadian Prince of Albion burns in his nightly tent;
 Within brass scrolls the Atlantic glow to America's shore,
 Whirling the souls of warlike men, who rise in silent night,
 Washington, Hancock, Peine, & Warren, Gates, Franklin, & Green;
 Whose in the east glowing with blood from Albion's fiery Prince.

Washington speaks: Friends of America, look over the Atlantic sea;
 A bearded form in heaven is lifted, & a heavy iron chain
 Descends link by link from Albion's cliffs across the sea to bind
 The lives & sons of America, till our faces pale and yellow;
 His voice against, voices weak, eyes downward, hands work bruised,
 Just reading on the sultry sands, & the furrows of the whip
 Whence in generations that in future times forget.

The evening voice heard for a terrible blast swept over the heavens;
 The eastern cloud rent, on his cliffs stood Albion's fiery Prince;
 A form in form clanking his scales, at midnight he arose,
 And round fierce warriors round the band of Albion beneath,
 His own his looks, his awful shoulders & his glowing eyes.

America a



Through the haze in thro' the human canopy, with as fire
 To the close hall of council where his Angel form appears.

In a sweet vale shelter'd with cedars that eternal stretch
 Their unmov'd branches, stood the hall; built when the moon
 Shot forth,
 In that dread night when Uryon call'd the stars round his feet,
 Then burst the center from its orb, and found a place beneath;
 And Earth conglob'd, in narrow room, roll'd round its sulphur Sun.

In this deep valley situated by the flowing Thames;
 When George the third holds council, & his Lords & Commons meet,
 Shut out from mortal sight the Angel came; the vale was dark,
 With clouds of smoke from the Atlantic, that in volumes roll'd
 Between the mountains, dismal visions mope around the
 House.

On chairs of iron, canopied with mystic ornaments,
 Of life by magic power condens'd; infernal forms art-bound
 The council sat; all rose before the aged apparition;
 His snowy beard that streams like lambent flames down his
 Side breast
 Weaving with tears, & his white garments cast a wintry light.

Then as awful clouds arise terrific round the northern doors,
 The world is silent at the flapping of the folding heavens;
 So still horrors rent the house: as when the solemn globe
 Launched to the unknown shore, while Sutha held the north-
 ern helm.

Till to that end it came & fell; so the dark house was rent,
 The yellow mould beneath; its shining pillars split in twain,
 And its roots crack across down falling on the Angel's seat.

America b