

IMAGINING NATURE

IMAGINING NATURE:
BLAKE'S VISION OF MATERIALITY

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Abstract

This dissertation is the first full-length study to examine William Blake's poetry and designs in light of the eighteenth-century concept of "nature's economy," a view of nature that prefigures twentieth-century ecological discourse by describing all earthly entities as integral parts of a dynamic, interactive system or whole. On the one hand, Blake celebrates the positive ethical potential of this model of existence, for "nature's economy" emphasizes the communal interdependence of all things. On the other hand, Blake is often highly suspicious of this paradigm of nature, for its logic tends reductively to consider individual entities in terms of the *functions* they perform within larger systemic wholes. In Blake's view, I argue, such instrumentalism raises the problem of interpretive practice, since the scientific or religious "Priesthoods" claiming special knowledge of "whole" systems may invoke holistic views of nature in ways that naturalize culturally constructed modes of political authority. By clarifying Blake's imaginative critique of the relationship between nature (as a cultural concept) and particular modes of governmental ideology, this dissertation challenges the common argument that Blake was unequivocally hostile toward material existence.

Chapter One contextualizes Blake's general views of nature in light of his response to the politics of Enlightenment Deism, English industrialism, antinomian and Miltonic theories of creation, and contemporary debates on animal rights. Building on this historical context, Chapter Two examines the relationship between Blake's anthropomorphic symbolism and the instrumentalist politics of pastoralism and gender in

The Book of Thel. By shifting focus to the epic poetry and designs of *Milton*, Chapter Three argues that Blake's famous critique of Newtonian science involves not a rejection of materiality per se, but Blake's antinomian opposition to a physical "legalism" that enslaves both nature and humanity. Chapter Four synthesizes the major concerns of the preceding chapters by analyzing the relationship between the fall of humanity and the fall of nature in *Jerusalem*'s radical Christian mythology, emphasizing the adverse social and environmental implications of anthropomorphism, "Patriarchal Religion," and primitivist modes of identification with nature.

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INTRODUCTION

"Green Romanticism" and Blake Studies

I. Nature and Ideology

If, in the process of "recovering" nature, Marxism or any other political movement ignores the violence and ideological complexity of nature as a cultural concept, it will recover a nature imbued with those ideologies which have helped provoke present crises. In short there is a danger that much reactionary thought will return on the backs of nature and of those who rightly recognize ecological politics as of the utmost urgency. Of course there are obvious and fundamental distinctions which can help prevent that--between human nature and the nature that is destroyed by human culture; between the ecological and the ideological conceptions of nature. But...they are distinctions which the concept itself traditionally slides across and between. (Dollimore 115)

I have chosen for my epigraph a quotation from Jonathan Dollimore's *Sexual Dissidence*, because it so concisely summarizes the central concerns of this study. Following the lead of such "Green Romanticists" as Jonathan Bate and Karl Kroeber (whose work I shall discuss presently), I am concerned with what Dollimore loosely refers to as the critical "process of 'recovering' nature." At the same time, however, I am aware of the impossibility of this task, for any attempt at such "recovery" presupposes that some "pre-colonized," non-human essence or alterity can indeed be made available to human understanding. Hence, while my research has been motivated in part by my desire to catch a respectful glimpse of "the great amorphous mass of otherness that encloaks the planet" (Evernden, *Social Creation* xi), its aim involves not the "recovery" of nature *per se*, but the more humble task of re-evaluating nature's status as a cultural phenomenon. In particular, by examining the major *uses* to which nature has been put in the work of

William Blake and some of his most important precursors, contemporaries, and critics, I hope tentatively to delineate an alternative view of human-nature relations, one which challenges the tenets upholding the traditional western view that humans should exercise a hierarchical "dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth" (Genesis 1:26).

Given his reputation as one of nature's most prominent English literary antagonists, my focus on Blake may seem strangely problematic in this context. In Chapter One, therefore, I shall examine the critical assumptions that have underpinned the establishment of Blake's reputation as such. For the moment, suffice it to say that Blake's centrality to this study stems from my conviction that he, perhaps more than any other poet in English literature, was aware of "the violence and ideological complexity of nature as a cultural concept" (Dollimore 115). Among other things, Blake's critical obsession with the unholy triumvirate of "Bacon & Newton & Locke" (J 54:17; E203)¹ expresses his awareness that even the most rigorous Enlightenment philosophy and science--which attempts to formulate a disinterested, "objective" view of nature by challenging the earlier theological episteme--cannot be trusted to "recover" nature from its colonization by anthropomorphic systems of thought.²

Blake's suspicion of contemporary concepts of nature is well-founded, for although Enlightenment science inaugurated a powerful critique of theological "mystery" (and so potentially challenged the political authority of Blake's most detested institution, "Priesthood" [MHH 11; E38]), its ostensible objectivity dangerously disguised the ideological assumptions informing its philosophy. As Michel Foucault has pointed out, "the subject in the discourse of eighteenth-century naturalists becomes exclusively a

subject *looking* according to a grid of perceptions, and *noting* according to a code" ("Politics...Discourse" 56-7). Naturalism's "grid of perceptions" and quasi-legal "code" of notation function *a priori* to *construct* the natural object, so that it inevitably conforms to the naturalist's all-too-human expectations. Hence, when the discourse of naturalism claims to speak *of non-human phenomena*, it actually *orders* them. In short, "discourse and the material in which it is manifest are never the elements of what might be taken as a neutral mediation" (Reiss 29).

Moreover, by providing "a surface of transcription where the form, the number, and the size of the disposition of [an object's] elements can be translated in a univocal manner" (Foucault, "Politics...Discourse" 57), naturalism renders possible the mathematical manipulation of natural objects according to their human utility, ultimately enabling the things of nature to be valued and appropriated "simply as grist for the mill of the industrial revolution" (Lussier 394). I shall discuss Blake's attitude toward industrialism later in this Introduction and in Chapter One. For the moment, I would emphasize that although eighteenth-century naturalism involved and entailed a thoroughly human, self-interested construction and consumption of nature, it was able effectively to hide this crucial fact; for the celebrated authority of science rested not on the fallible names of individual scientists, but on "an anonymous and coherent conceptual system of established *truths* and methods of *verification*" (Foucault, "Author" 126; emphasis added). From a Blakean standpoint, what makes thinkers like Bacon, Newton, and Locke so perniciously dangerous, in short, is their scientific ability to disguise the ways in which their own "discourses 'constitute' the truths they claim to discover and transmit" (Bové 56). In this sense, nature itself appears to authorize the truths of human science.

Like all human constructs, the various discourses of Enlightenment naturalism arose under particular historical conditions and in the context of specific strategies of government. Hence, when Bacon remarks in *De Dignitate et Augmentis Scientiarum* (1623) that "the *inquisition* of truth" is the scientist's "whole object" (qtd. in Merchant 168; emphasis added), we should attend closely to his words. As Foucault has remarked, the observations, descriptions, and "facts" comprising the indefinite discourse of eighteenth-century empiricism were derived from techniques of inquiry associated with the Inquisition. In other words, the all-encompassing knowledge of empirical naturalism --which played an important role in the economic and political conquest of the western world--is inseparable from the Inquisition's all-encompassing "politico-juridical, administrative and criminal, religious and lay, investigation" (*Discipline* 226). In early seventeenth-century England, for example, there was a palpable connection between the inquisitorial techniques supporting anti-witchcraft legislation and the techniques of scientific inquiry. Indeed, as Carolyn Merchant has argued, the rhetoric and procedures of Bacon's naturalist investigations are strongly suggestive of courtroom legalism and the interrogations of witches (164-72). Although subsequent practitioners of naturalism, by refining their investigative procedures, gradually dissociated their discourses from such explicitly juridical procedures (Dreyfus 162), the enabling connections between naturalism and inquisitorial politics were too fundamental to be completely severed.

Indeed, it is possible tentatively to hypothesize a correlation between early Baconian models of nature's inquisition and the rise of "panoptic" modes of social surveillance at the end of the eighteenth century. Consider, for example, Bacon's description in *The New Atlantis* (1624) of the relationship between animal experimentation (in the context of the public menagerie) and the scientific study of

human bodies. In his utopian community of Bensalem, Bacon envisions "parks and enclosures of all sorts of beasts and birds, which we use not only for view or rareness but likewise for dissections and trials, that thereby we may take light...what may be wrought upon the body of man" (qtd. in Merchant 184). By observing animal bodies and behaviours in the wake of their experimental manipulation, Bacon argues, the scientist will establish models and methods for the manipulation of *human* bodies. While Bacon does not exactly correlate the social surveillance of animal and human bodies here, his reference to "the body of man" establishes a similar objectivization of the two. This objectivization is especially interesting in light of Foucault's suggestion that Jeremy Bentham's "Panopticon" may have been inspired by Le Vaux's menagerie at Versailles. Like the Panopticon, this menagerie had at its centre a one-room, windowed, octagonal pavilion from within which the king could comfortably observe the differently categorized animal occupants of seven cages (*Discipline* 203).³ Here, the royal naturalist's penetrating gaze--which could encompass *all* the individual and social behaviours of its plant and animal objects--adumbrates an effective model for the intervention of a pervasive, instrumentalist governmentality in the human social world, a political rationality "defining power *relations* in terms of the everyday life of men" (205).

Whether or not this tentative correlation between naturalist observation and human social surveillance holds true, there can be little doubt that the developing theories and methods of objective science carried profound ramifications for political conceptualizations of the human social world. In the early nineteenth century, key concepts in biology began metaphorically to be applied in political theory: "organism, function, life thus engender social organization, social function, the life of words and languages" (Foucault, "Politics...Discourse" 57). Like concepts derived from the field of

Newtonian physics, the "inspired assumptions" of biological naturalism were increasingly applied to all areas of society, where, crucially, they came to be accepted as "revealed truth" (Evernden, *Natural Alien* 30-31).

In recent years, the science of "ecology" has been involved, to a certain extent, in a continuation of this trend. To quote Sueellen Campbell, ecology attempts to describe the way the nonhuman world "exists apart from us and our languages" (132). As "the contemporary authority on nature's laws" (Evernden, *Social Creation* 6), ecology offers insights that many people perceive as objective descriptions of nature's authentic mode of existence. Like Baconian science, in other words, the discourse of ecology (which I shall examine more closely later in this Introduction) promises something like a non-anthropomorphic view of the natural world and its processes, but with a crucial difference: it attacks the Baconian notion that nature's value lies in its human utility. Drawing in part on sophisticated models derived from cybernetic theory, scientific ecology decentres humanity by positing axiomatically "that *every* organism is unique but that *all* organisms and environments are essentially interdependent" (Kroeber 23; emphasis added). In other words, ecology focuses both on singularity and systematicity, without privileging either term in the equation. While I do not wish to belittle the importance of this double focus (which, as we shall see, has an important analogue in the eighteenth-century discourse of "nature's economy"), I would point out once again that a related dynamic characterizes the operation of a certain historical mode of governmentality. As Foucault has demonstrated, the effects of panoptic political rationality "are both individualization and totalization" ("Politics and Reason" 85). This double focus of governmental surveillance is evident, for example, in the all-important institution of the police. On the one hand, police supervision "seeks ideally to reach the

most elementary particle, the most passing phenomenon of the social body" (*Discipline* 214). At this level, the *individual* human, internalizing his or her own surveillance, is constituted as a self-governing subject. On the other hand (and inextricably connected to this constitution of individual subjectivity), the police functions to ensure a holistic totalization of the state: "Men and things are envisioned as to their relationships: men's coexistence on a territory; their relationships as to property; what they produce; what is exchanged on the market" ("Politics and Reason" 79). A crucial similarity between the ecological and political models I have been discussing involves the constitution of the individual entity in the context of a communal totality, whether this totality is conceived in terms of the biosphere or the state. In either case, as we shall see, the individual must be conceptualized in terms of its *function* in the greater community: individuality is tolerable to the extent that it does not disrupt the order of the systemic "whole." At the point of disruption, should this occur, the individual must either be contained within or expelled from the larger order, or its deviant behaviour must be instrumentally modified to conform to what is conceived as that order's "proper" mode of being.

While analogous models of the relationship between particulars and wholes can be found in the discourses of both ecology and political rationality, there is, one might object, a fundamental difference between each discourse--a difference that ultimately guarantees their non-coincidence. Simply stated, ecology focuses on the things and processes of nature, while the object of governmental rationality is the human subject in community. Hence, the objection will arise that my analytic sketch conflates the *separate* realms of nature and culture. Admittedly, to revisit my epigraph, there are "obvious and fundamental distinctions...between the ecological and the ideological conceptions of nature"; but, as Dollimore quickly adds, "they are distinctions which the concept

traditionally slides across and between" (115). While I do not wish to deny or negate the separate "reality" of the non-human realm, I would emphasize again that the alterity of this realm, far from being available *as such* to human apprehension, can only be approached via language and the social discourses organizing its usage. To conceive the things of nature *discursively*, then, is to acknowledge the "practice we impose upon them," to bear in mind that "it is in this practice that the events of discourse find the principle of their regularity" (Foucault, *Discourse on Language* 229). Hence, a discursively-aware ecological criticism must not only relentlessly question the regulative uses to which nature is put in society; as we shall see, it must also reflect on its *own* status as a discursive practice. Crucially, moreover, ecocriticism must embody an awareness that nature's "meanings" are always produced in social contexts involving competing claims for definitive mastery. In analyzing nature, therefore, one analyzes not only non-human objects and processes but human power relations, of whose configuration nature inevitably becomes a sign or symptom.

II. Ecological Criticism and Romantic Literature

The notion that nature is a discursive construct--that it embodies, on a conceptual level, the inescapable politics of human practice--is hardly new to Romantic studies; it shows up forcefully in the work of numerous critics of the "New Historicist" stamp. Alan Liu argues succinctly, for example, that there is "no nature except as it is constituted by acts of definition made possible by particular forms of government" (104). Liu's concern for the *politics* of nature's representation in Romantic literature is, for reasons I have been discussing, an important one. In the eyes of some of the most prominent advocates of Romantic ecocriticism (or "green Romanticism"), however, his insight has generated a

great deal of angry counter-polemic. Jonathan Bate responds to Liu's comments on nature, for example, by exclaiming that

"Nature" is a term that needs to be contested, not rejected. It is profoundly unhelpful to say "*There is no nature*" at a time when our most urgent need is to address and redress the consequences of human civilization's insatiable desire to consume the products of the earth. We are confronted for the first time in history with the possibility of there being no part of the earth left untouched by man. (*Romantic Ecology* 56)

There can be little doubt that Bate is addressing a serious issue here. If nature as such does not exist, then upon what basis--what literal "ground"--may an effective environmental politics be established? For Bate, criticism such as Liu's is not only self-defeating: it is symptomatic of the ecological crisis itself.

The main problem with Bate's critique of Liu, I would argue, is that it is based largely on misprision, a critical misreading of what Liu actually says. By claiming in the above-quoted passage that Liu says "There is no nature" (rather than what he does say: "there is no nature *except...*"), Bate trades rigorous logic for rhetorical and polemical affect. He can thus go on apocalyptically to prophesy, in a tone of self-righteous indignation, that "When there have been a few more accidents at nuclear power stations, when there are no more rainforests, and when every wilderness has been ravaged for its mineral resources, then let us say '*There is no nature*'" (56). Unfortunately, Bate's critique of Liu--indeed not a critique, but a dismissal--sacrifices the ecocritical project that *potentially* inhabits Liu's criticism: a project of questioning the relationships among *definitions* of nature, the modes of government that support them, their material consequences for biospheric and cultural diversity, and the possibility of formulating a practical, effective strategy of socio-ecological transformation.

Another prominent Romantic ecocritic, Karl Kroeber, objects to discursive or ideological views of nature on historicist grounds. Although he sarcastically agrees that England's Romantic poets "would not wish to contradict the current critical banality that 'nature' is a social construct,"⁴ Kroeber argues that these poets "would regard the assertion as question-begging..., because they believed that human consciousness (and the social constructs made possible by it) is a result of natural processes" (17). With this strangely tautological remark (nature is discursive, but discourse is natural; therefore nature is "natural"), Kroeber joins Bate in dismissing the potentially important environmental insights of discourse theory--despite the fact that the "natural processes" to which he refers are by no means transcendental "givens."

The desire to transcend nature's discursivity inhabits Bate's defensive analysis of the Wordsworthian pastoral. The "purpose of book eight of *The Prelude*," Bate tells us, "is not so much to show shepherds as they are but rather to bring forward an image of human greatness, to express faith in the perfectibility of mankind once institutions and hierarchies are removed and we are free, enfranchised, and in an unmediated, unalienated relationship with nature" (*Romantic Ecology* 29). With these words, Bate paints a utopian picture that betrays the critical naïveté of his ecological project. Significantly, he provides no concrete models for the attainment of such a de-institutionalized, non-hierarchical social relationship with nature. He seems to assume, rather, that a certain kind of pastoral literature, "properly" (that is, untheoretically) read, will be sufficient to inaugurate such a relationship. Furthermore, by taking seriously the admittedly tantalizing possibility of attaining an "unmediated, unalienated" human relationship with nature, Bate effaces the importance of language, which structures all poetic representations of nature, indeed all subjective views of the natural world.

My purpose in this argument is not to reject the insights of critics like Bate and Kroeber outright (as they have tended to do, for example, with the theoretical insights of critics like Liu, Jerome McGann, Marjorie Levinson, and Marilyn Butler). Rather, I wish to question the efficacy of the dichotomy they construct between ecocriticism and other modes of critical inquiry. Such dichotomization, implicit in many of the above-quoted passages, becomes dramatically apparent in Kroeber's general assessment of critical approaches other than those explicitly devoted to an environmentalist agenda. "Like the engineers and planners developing top-secret star-war systems of mass destruction," he warns, "high tech literary theorists enter into debates with themselves far too abstract to be connected with specific and immediate realities of injustice, poverty, and devastation of the natural environment" (40). Kroeber's alignment of his critical opponents with the producers of atomic weaponry is questionable, if only because it betrays his own failure honestly to acknowledge any personal responsibility for the social and environmental problems he identifies. (Have none of Kroeber's tax dollars supported the U. S. military complex?) This is a significant critical omission. As William Howarth observes, an ecocriticism that "insists on an Us-Them dichotomy...cannot be self-scrutinizing, only adversarial. Since ecology studies the *relations* between species and habitats, ecocriticism must see its complicity in what it attacks" (69; emphasis added).

An ecological criticism that cannot be "self-scrutinizing" runs the danger of naïvely celebrating all initiatives that encourage the perceived enhancement of green and wild spaces, while condemning all actions that seem to oppose such a programme. In studies concerned with the historical antecedents of ecological thought, such prejudices might potentially result in various kinds of critical myopia. In the history of English forest management, for example, England's forest policies, whether tending to legislate

widespread consumption of forest products *or* their natural conservation, have always been inextricably tied to the politics of the moment. The view of the forest as a natural resource to be exploited for the sake of profit played an obvious role in the consolidation of English capitalism and imperialist rule (Schama 154). But, as Simon Schama has demonstrated, the contrasting image of the forest as a natural greenwood retreat to be preserved and protected was no less ideological and discursive, since it tended to represent nature as the site of a highly conservative social renovation (as in the Robin Hood myths or the ritual of the royal hunt) (135-55). Indeed, because the twentieth-century conservation movement has important historical roots in the juridical practice of "afforestation" for the sake of the royal hunt, today's ecological activist, Robert Pogue Harrison remarks, "cannot help but be a monarchist of sorts" (69).

In eighteenth-century England, the legislated preservation of forest habitats often carried harmful consequences for local populations. As E. P. Thompson has pointed out, the famous English Forest Laws, which controlled such things as hunting, fishing, and the cutting of wood, turf, and heath, threatened the economy, crops, and traditional agrarian rights of the labouring people living in or near the forests (*Whigs and Hunters* 49, 64). After 1691, violations of these laws could result in punishments ranging from fines of twenty to thirty pounds, to a year in prison, to seven years' transportation--with imprisonment and transportation being meted out, predictably, almost solely to the poor (59-60). Understandably, the common "forest farmers bitterly resented the increasing number of parks created by royal or ministerial favour" (110). The social hardship caused by England's early legislative efforts to preserve rural forests was so fierce that the Reverend Will Waterson, vicar of Winkfield, wrote in his "Reading Book" (ca. 1727-56) that "*Liberty and Forest Laws are incompatible*" (qtd. in Thompson 49).⁵ Moreover, the

laws designed to protect wild animals such as deer from overhunting ultimately backfired, as poachers gathered themselves into highly organized companies to kill deer not only for venison but for mere retribution against the legislators and enforcing officers of the contemporary "conservation" movement (64).

The point I wish to emphasize with this brief digression--inspired largely by Thompson's painstaking Marxist historicism--is that human concerns for the protection of "material nature" cannot be separated from questions of social discourse and political authority. To appreciate the complexity of the issues surrounding what we now call environmental protection, an informed and responsible ecocriticism must be open to the insights of a wide range of critical approaches, which can help its practitioners reflect upon the far-reaching consequences of their own ideologically motivated theories and practices. Indeed, if an important aspect of the science of ecology is the notion that all things are complexly interrelated (a proposition which I shall examine in some detail later in this Introduction), then to be closed to other viewpoints is to be strangely anti-ecological.

And yet, like those Marxists who argue that all human problems will be resolved by a widespread embrace of Marxist doctrine, there are some ecocritics who seem to believe that all modes of critique should be made subordinate to ecological concerns. And the reasoning informing such a claim is not entirely unsound: "Human survival and the survival of nature are...co-ordinate with one another" (Bate, *Romantic Ecology* 34), because "it is on the health of the natural world that all ideologies, all societies, and all cultures ultimately depend" (Kroeber 66). These are forceful claims. It is important to note, however, that their logic is not unassailable. For example, the practice of capitalism (as opposed, perhaps, to its theory) depends not on the benevolent treatment of nature but

on the existence of an ecologically-harmful consumer society; for capitalist growth requires the continuing and accelerated exploitation of the earth's natural resources to supply a largely created consumer demand. William Blake was certainly aware of this kind of problem. In *Jerusalem*, for example, he declares that "the Kingdoms of the World & all their glory...*grew* on Desolation" (98:51; E258; emphasis added). Such oxymoronic, life-negating *growth* partakes of the approach to life that French ecological philosopher Michel Serres attributes to "the parasite" (9-10)--an approach wherein the entity, by consolidating its own self-interest, condemns to death the host that supports it (11).

Given the complexity of the issues surrounding ecological discourse, how do we construct an ecological politics that can self-reflexively negotiate its various complicities with the problems it seeks to address and redress? In my own experience, the best and most succinctly articulated solution to this question comes from ecocritic David Mazel. Extrapolating from Edward Said's politically motivated critique of western Orientalism, Mazel formulates an approach to environmentalism that is worth representing here at length (the embedded quotations are Said's):

Rather than treating environmentalism as a conceptually "pure" and unproblematic *resistance* to power, a resistance based upon an objective and *disinterested organization of knowledge*, I suggest we analyze it as just one of many potential modes for *exercising* power, as a particular "style," both political and epistemological, "for dominating, restructuring, and having authority" (3) over the real territories and lives that the environment displaces and for which it is invoked as a representation. (144)

Mazel's complex approach to environmental politics, by acknowledging the interimplication of environmentalism and the exercise of power, offers the possibility of formulating an ecological criticism that is truly self-reflexive, a criticism that builds upon the insights of other modes of critical analysis rather than rejecting them. Moreover, by

acknowledging the discursive aspect of nature--its status as a cultural *idea* embodying human assumptions, desires, and politics--as well as the importance of "real territories and lives." Mazel's critique tempers the unwitting idealism that can plague less analytical valorizations of nature's "materiality." This double emphasis--on the discursive *and* the "real"--provides the ground for a dialectic which can aim to alter destructive human discursive practices while at the same time acknowledging the materiality--and attempting to respect the profound alterity or unknowability--of non-human nature.

III. Blake's Poetics and the Politics of Nature

In William Blake's poetry, there is often a sense of doubleness in passages portraying nature and natural objects, a kind of tension between what we might see as the poet's desire to imagine the things of nature in ideal and infinite terms (i.e., as extra-cultural "givens," unbounded and uncontaminated by human intervention), and his darker, more sober understanding of their inescapable discursivity. An interesting example of such doubleness occurs in Blake's depiction of "Bath" in *Jerusalem*. When Blake introduces Bath by praising it as the "healing City!" (40/45:1; E187) in early, unfinished versions of the poem,⁶ he is gesturing toward its healing waters, the most celebrated aspect of Bath's geography. In his *Practical Dissertation on Bath Waters* (1707), for example, one Dr. Oliver promised potential patrons that the waters of Bath, taken both internally and externally, could cure *any* disease, even including the smallpox (Neale 39). It is in this "natural" sense that Bath is Blake's "mild Physician of Eternity," a "mysterious power / Whose springs are unsearchable & knowledg infinite" (41/46:1-2; E188). Since Blake detested "mystery," his reference to Bath's "mysterious power" might be read as a subtle indictment.⁷ However, his association of its natural springs with the

privileged visionary concepts of eternity and infinity suggests his willingness, at one level, to value the things of nature in the highest of terms.

But Blake was ultimately dissatisfied with this positive introductory portrayal of Bath. In the only "finished" version of *Jerusalem*, Copy E, Blake rearranges the plates, so that Bath is introduced into the text not as a representative of eternity and infinity but as "Legions...the physician and / The poisoner: the best and worst in Heaven and Hell" (37/41: 1-2; E183). Blake's repositioning of this passage may be interpreted in two ways. First, Bath's ambivalent, oppositional characterization gestures toward the age-old idea that the line distinguishing the therapeutic from the poisonous or good from evil in nature is imperceptibly narrow (at times perhaps even indistinguishable), necessitating, for its attempted negotiation, the most rigorous care. We see this kind of oppositional dynamic, for example, in the following passage from Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*:

O, mickle is the powerful grace that lies
In plants, herbs, stones and their true qualities;
For naught so vile that on the earth doth live
But to the earth some special good doth give;
Nor aught so good but, strained from that fair use,
Revolts from true birth, stumbling on abuse
Virtue itself turns vice, being misapplied,
And vice sometime 's by action dignified. (2.3.15-22)

Although Blake's portrait of Bath as "physician and / ...poisoner" likely plays with this notion that nature itself embodies both good and evil, a second, social reading of Bath's characterization is potentially more fruitful. Indeed, as Shakespeare's reference to the *application* of virtue and vice might suggest, the potential goodness or evil that may arise from the things of nature depends to a great extent on human appropriations of the natural. Bath, as Blake characterizes it in plate 37/41, is certainly subject to the human social realm. As Morton D. Paley has argued, Bath's identification as "Legions" (a

demon Christ exorcises from a man in Mark 5:9) likely concerns "its status as a spa, a place of social ostentation and fortune-hunting as pictured in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century novels" (*Continuing City* 206-7). Bath's reputation as a seasonal resort for gambling, drinking, revelling, and illicit sex was already well established at the turn of the eighteenth century (Neale 39). As the anonymous author of *A Step to the Bath* (1700) described it, the resort was "a Valley of Pleasure, yet a sink of Iniquity" (qtd. in Neale 39). By gesturing in plate 37/41 toward Bath's *human* history, Blake emphasizes the ways that a potentially "healing" natural phenomenon can become "poisonous" as a result of its human appropriation. This is the sense, perhaps, in which we might read Blake's statement that "The voice of Bath, [is] faint as the voice of the Dead in the House of Death" (39/44:44; E187). Appropriated by the deathly "voice" of human social discourse, Bath's own "natural" "voice"--and the excessive "knowledg infinite" (41/46:2; E188) which might, in its articulation, have unsettled human epistemology--all but disappears.

Another interesting example of the doubleness of Blake's vision of nature occurs in *Jerusalem* on the plate following the interpolated one discussed above. Under the influence of an ideology which supports "Swelld & bloated General Forms," "The wine of the Spirit & the vineyards of the Holy-One. / ...*turn into* poisonous stupor & deadly intoxication: / That they may be condemned by Law & the Lamb of God be slain!" (38/43:28-30; E185; emphasis added). In this passage, arguably, the vineyards and the wine--representing, on the earthly level, nature and its productions--have themselves undergone no ontological change. They have merely been *reconceptualized*, ideologically altered so that they come to signify "stupor & deadly intoxication" *rather* than the more benign Spirit and holiness which, as we shall see in Chapter One, animates

all Blakean "life." This change is part of Blake's critique of orthodox religion, whose discursive economy, upheld by its own institutionalized "Law," imposes erroneous moral signification upon a natural world whose prior "innocence" is suggested by its association with "the Lamb of God."

But these examples of the human appropriation of a pristine nature are ultimately problematic. Bath, even in its positive valuation as the site of healing springs, is also already a "City"--a distinctively human construct. On the level of Blake's epic mythology, moreover, Bath is a human being--one of the friends of Albion. As for the vineyards of plate 38/43, these *belong to* the "Holy-One," and so, from the human standpoint, are implicated in the religious structures through which humans attempt socially to apprehend God. And so, although we may catch tantalizing glimpses of the innocence of "natural" entities in Blake's writing, we must ultimately concede the impossibility of such innocence and understand that Blake's poetic gestures toward it represent nothing more than fleeting, albeit not unimportant, expressions of idealistic desire.

The discursivity of Blakean nature--its inescapable implication in the human systems of power which organize the constitution and circulation of knowledge--is especially apparent on plate 43/29 of *Jerusalem*, where we witness the "congenerat[ion]" of nature itself. The political context of nature's congeneration is particularly telling. Prior to this event, we are told that Luvah, "Albions Spectre" (J 60:2; E209), "strove to gain dominion over Albion / They strove together above the Body where Vala was inclosed" (43/29:61-2; E192). As the positioning of Albion and Luvah "above" Vala's "inclos[ure]" would suggest, the goal of this mutual striving is ownership of the passive, objectified Vala, "the goddess of Nature" (Damon 428) herself. That Vala is the object of

contention here is further suggested by the remarks that the bitter Albion makes to Luvah in the wake of the latter's victory over him: "Go and die the Death of Man *for* Vala the sweet wanderer" (43/29:66; emphasis added). Subsequently, Luvah and Vala flee from Albion's presence:

And as they fled in folding fires & thunders of the deep:
 Vala shrunk in like the dark sea that leaves its slimy banks
 And from her bosom Luvah fell far as the east and west.
 And the vast form of Nature like a serpent roll'd between
 Whether of Jerusalems or Valas ruins congenerated we know not....
 (J 43/29:77-81; E192-93)

I shall examine the intricate politics of Albion's relationship to Luvah, Jerusalem, and Vala in my discussion of *Jerusalem* in Chapter Four. For the moment, it will suffice to point out the most important implication of this passage, which portrays something akin to the birth of "Nature" in Blake's mythology: Nature is "congenerated" out of "ruins" resulting from the struggles for political "dominion" (such as the one we witness between Albion and Luvah) that contextualize Albion's fall. Although Blake chooses to leave us uncertain whether nature arises from "Jerusalems *or* Valas ruins," we can be relatively certain of one thing: "the vast form of Nature" is, for Blake, the very *product* of power relations.

Blake's representation of nature as discursive production is crucial to an understanding of his sexual politics, for, in much of his writing, nature and femininity are closely related. We see the inescapable interimplication of nature and patriarchal politics, for example, in the deceptively simple text and designs of *The Book of Thel*. In this work, as I will demonstrate in Chapter Two, Thel's subjectivity and view of nature are organized in such a way that she inevitably experiences and evaluates the creatures of the "Vales of Har," including herself, in terms of an oppressive discourse of androcentric instrumentalism. Thel's abandonment of her sister-shepherds in the opening lines of the

poem implies. I will argue, an intuitive act of rebellion against these discursive parameters; and her desire to attain an existence she characterizes as "gentle" (she obsessively repeats the word four times in 1:12-13) suggests her underlying awareness that Har's patriarchal pastoralism involves an unacceptable discursive violence. Rather than seeing Thel as an Innocent soul who fails ultimately to make the necessary transition through Experience en route to "organized Innocence" (the traditional reading of the poem), I will delineate Thel's newfound critical understanding that the natural "Innocence" of Har is *already* "Organized" by its patriarchal inscription, an inscription which complicates the seemingly anti-atomistic proposition, articulated by Har's non-human entities, that "every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself" (BT 3:26-27; E5).

In Chapter Four I shall continue my examination of nature and sexual politics in Blake's oeuvre by discussing in detail the relationship between Vala and nature in *Jerusalem*: for Blake's critics, following the example of the fallen Albion and his Sons, often identify Vala--somewhat mistakenly, I shall argue--as nature "herself." For the moment, it will suffice to point out that Blake does indeed figure materiality in feminine terms when he speaks of such things as "Time & Spaces womb" (J 85:28; E244). The metaphor of nature's womb has, of course, a long history. We see an earlier literary and theological usage of it, for example, in *Paradise Lost*, where Milton constructs his Chaos as a realm of "embryon atoms" and "pregnant causes"--"The womb of nature and perhaps her grave" (2.900, 913, 911). By sending his Son into the non-place of Chaos (2.892-4), Milton's masculine God actualizes the reproductive potential of this realm, replacing its feminine "anarchy" and "confusion" (2.896-7) with a hierarchically-organized, male-centred order of creation.

Earlier in the century, of course, Bacon had already transposed this theological metaphor into a naturalist register, arguing that the scientist, by "entering and penetrating" into the "holes and corners" of nature's "womb," might discover "many secrets of excellent use" (qtd. in Peterfreund, "Ideology of the Natural" 103). Here, the mysterious God of masculine theology becomes the male scientist, who, through ceaseless experimentation on nature's body, helps to restore order to--and male domination over--postlapsarian nature (see Merchant 170). For his own part, Blake reproduces the gendered language and logic of Miltonic and Baconian cosmology most forcefully in a famous aphorism from *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*: "Where man is not nature is barren" (10:69; E38). This "Proverb of Hell" suggests that "man," far from being a product of nature's womb, is that which brings it to life. In one economical utterance, it seems, Blake reduces the female (and feminine nature) to her reproductive role--and then denies the vitality of this role by locating "life" in "man." Clearly, such a proposition has both sexist and anti-natural implications.⁸

And yet, to quote Mark S. Lussier, we should not *overemphasize* the importance of this one hellish proverb, for "Blake's stance to nature did not crystallize into such a single vision" (398). While it can be problematic to read Blake's oeuvre synchronically,⁹ it would be unwise to ignore developments or changes in his usage of individual complex figures like that of nature's "womb." While this womb in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* requires, for its fruitfulness, the presence of "man" or humanity, a far different story emerges in certain passages from *Jerusalem*. Here, nature's "barrenness," rather than resulting from "man's" absence, arises in part as a consequence of his own discursive activity. On plate 30/34, as I shall argue in Chapter Four, Albion's essentializing of Vala--his reductive identification of her as "Nature Mother of all!"¹⁰--plays a key role in

causing "Albion the high Cliff of the Atlantic [to] become a *barren* land" (30/34:8-9, 16; E176; emphasis added). Later in the poem, moreover, in a much more explicit invocation of the womb metaphor, Blake depicts the appalling consequence of a social economy in which the female must internalize a male-centred regime of "Moral Law" (69:35; E223):

all the Males combined into One Male & every one
Became a ravening eating Cancer growing in the Female[.]
(69:1-2; E223)

Here, it is male presence (and not absence) that renders nature's life-giving womb "barren." As David L. Clark remarks of this passage, "[i]t would be hard to imagine a more gruesome warning against the dangers of the consolidation of power in the hands of men" ("Against Theological Technology" 187). In my examination of *Jerusalem* in Chapter Four, I shall discuss in detail the poem's representation of the relationship between nature, sexual difference, and patriarchal politics in an attempt to clarify its critique of an androcentric governmentality that figures nature as female.

Like gender politics, the question of class also plays an important role in *Jerusalem's* critique of contemporary appropriations of nature. From Blake's perspective, one of the most important of these appropriations was carried out by Newton and his followers: for the principles of mechanical materialism enabled the technological innovations of the industrial revolution, causing an oppressive transformation of labour and labour relations:

And all the Arts of Life. they changed into the Arts of Death in Albion.
The hour-glass contemnd because its simple workmanship.
Was like the workmanship of the plowman, & the water wheel,
That raises water into cisterns: broken & burnd with fire:
Because its workmanship. was like the workmanship of the shepherd.
And in their stead, intricate wheels invented, wheel without wheel:
To perplex youth in their outgoings, & to bind to labours in Albion
Of day & night the myriads of eternity that they may grind
And polish brass & iron hour after hour laborious task!

Kept ignorant of its use, that they might spend the days of wisdom
 In sorrowful drudgery, to obtain a scanty pittance of bread:
 In ignorance to view a small portion & think that All,
 And call it Demonstration: blind to all the simple rules of life.
 (65:16-28; E216)

Blake's reference here to the invention of "intricate wheels..., wheel without wheel," is an invocation of Enlightenment physical science, whose cosmology tended to replace the internal, final causation of organic panvitalism with the external, efficient causation of mechanical materialism. I shall examine different aspects of this paradigm shift closely in Chapters One and Three. The important things to note at this point are the passage's most obvious concerns: the eradication of "simple workmanship" and the subsequent enslavement of a class of workers who were bound to industrial "labours in Albion."

A brief look into the early history of scientific discourse suggests that these two aspects of the industrial revolution are more complexly related than we might at first realize. In his *Discourse on Method* (1636), for example, René Descartes argued that, by investigating both the forces of bodies and the work of artisans, humans could become "the masters and possessors of nature." Later in the same century, in his *Plus Ultra* (1668), one of Bacon's prominent English defenders, Joseph Glanville, advised his readers similarly that "the empire of man over inferior creatures" might be obtained by understanding and appropriating "those things which have been found out by illiterate tradesmen" (qtd. in Merchant 188). In the above-quoted passage from *Jerusalem* we see precisely this kind of appropriation at work as the principles informing the construction of such things as the non-industrial "water wheel, / That raises water into cisterns," are used to invent the "intricate wheels" of capitalist technology. By turning the principles of "simple workmanship" against the very artisans who formulated them, the capitalist beneficiaries of science demonstrate that Glanville's "empire of man over inferior

creatures" refers not simply to humankind's empire over nature but to the power an élite class of "men" exercises over less privileged members of the human race. To quote Foucault on the "limits and forms of [discursive] *appropriation*," such a social dynamic necessitates our asking a couple of important questions. First, "[w]hat individuals, what groups or classes have access to a particular kind of discourse?" And second, "[h]ow is the relationship institutionalized between the discourse, speakers and its destined audience?" ("Politics...Discourse" 60). Far from having *access* to Enlightenment discourses on nature, the artisan in Blake's poetry becomes, like the things of nature themselves, an *object* of these discourses; and his or her knowledge, appropriated by institutionalized science and industry, is used to produce and enslave a whole class of "inferior" labourers under the burgeoning "empire of man."

Let us return to the passage I have been examining, for here Blake makes explicit the material and social consequences of this class-based enslavement. Performing the same specialized task "hour after hour," the individual worker becomes alienated from the final product of his or her labour, "[k]ept ignorant," Blake says, "of its use." As Adam Smith remarks in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776), the "man whose whole life is spent in performing a few simple operations...has no occasion to exert his understanding, or to exercise his invention.... He naturally loses, therefore, the habit of such exertion, and generally becomes as stupid and ignorant as it is possible for a human creature to become" (qtd. in Doskow, *Blake's "Jerusalem"* 140n). It is perhaps in this sense that Blake's industrial worker, who "spend[s] the days of wisdom / In sorrowful drudgery," dwells "In ignorance," becoming "blind to all the simple rules of life." Such a life of bondage may seem "unnatural," but it is, like the machines at which the worker performs his or her labour, a material product of mechanistic views of nature. In short, if the

universe operates causally, like a machine of "intricate wheels," then mechanized industry--at least from within this paradigm--can hardly be said to be an aberration. On the contrary, as Blake the craftsman knew only too well, mechanistic models of nature function discursively to "naturalize" class oppression, "turning the whole man into a divided man, a *hand*" (Morton 15).

In the lines directly following his poetic denunciation of natural mechanism and capitalist industry in *Jerusalem*, Blake's narrator addresses Vala, informing her that "a battle rages around thy tender limbs" (65:29; E216). Insofar as Vala symbolizes nature, her "limbs" can be seen as representing the natural resources or raw materials necessary to capitalist manufacture. Since these resources--these parts or "limbs" of nature's body--are scarce and finite, a perpetual "battle" must be fought amongst industrialized nations for their possession. This exigency of capitalism necessitates further exploitation of the working class, as its able-bodied men are forcibly conscripted for the waging of corporeal warfare:

We were carried away in thousands from London; & in tens
Of thousands from Westminster & Marybone in ships closd up:
Chaind hand & foot, compelld to fight under the iron whips
Of our captains; fearing our officers more than the enemy.
(65:33-6; E216-17)

Just as "the workmanship of the plowman" (65:18) is appropriated for use by an industry that ultimately negates this workmanship (turning "the Arts of Life...into the Arts of Death" [65:16]), the plowman himself is "Compelld to leave the plow" (65:48) to "defend" in battle this same industry. The consequences of such a state of affairs are devastating not only for the enslaved and violated worker-turned-soldier (not to mention his dependents) but for the earth's domesticated and wild landscapes as well; for areas

comprising the "corn fields," the "warbling brook," and the "mirtle tree" are transformed into a capitalist battlefield blown by "the winds of desolation" (65:48-51).

According to Blake's logic, this desolate scenario is, as we have seen, the ultimate production of a scientific discourse (mechanistic materialism) whose knowledge, supported by the methodology of "Demonstration" (65:28), promises a view of nature that is "objective" and extra-discursive. Because of his commitment to political change, Blake was highly suspicious of his own (or anyone else's) desire to see nature in such terms. But this suspicion does not mean that Blake was an "intemperate antimaterialist" (Johnson, "Blake, Democritus" 105) or ultra-idealist who ultimately detested the natural world. On the contrary, as I will argue throughout the present study, Blake was aware of the political *and* environmental dangers of reifying nature as the locus of what Neil Evernden, in *The Social Creation of Nature*, critically labels "the *material given*" (23). For, like Evernden, Blake knew that an understanding of nature as "everything-but-us" "lends an aura of objectivity and permanence to the understanding of nature as norm" (23). And it is in this normative or regulatory sense that institutions deploy the concept of "nature" to "naturalize" their existence as institutions, placing their authority "beyond criticism" in "the realm of the absolute" (24). For Blake, the champion of intersubjective "Mental Fight" (M 1:13; E95), any mode of political absolutism, any foreclosure of dialogue, is dangerous indeed. And since contemporary Deistical science was beginning to see external nature in terms of an "economy" of interdependent entities and processes--a model, as we shall see, whose emphasis on relationality was thought to carry profound ethical implications--Blake might be forgiven, perhaps even congratulated, for his reticence to celebrate "material nature" too quickly.

IV. William Blake and Nature's Economy

In the design to plate 22 of *Jerusalem* (see figure 2), Blake distinguishes between two modes of cosmology. At the bottom of the plate, "Three Immense Wheels" (18:8; E163) of mechanism, partially submerged "in the Deep" (18:43), turn against each other in efficient-causal fashion. Like Newton's atom, each individual wheel is an entirely self-contained unit, exercising influence on other wheels only by way of external compulsion. These are the dark and "intricate wheels" of capitalist industry, which, as we have seen, compel artisans to perform slave-labour and "to fight under...iron whips" (65:16-51; E216-17). Since compulsion (a common word in Blake's canon) constitutes their mode of relations, Blake refers to these cosmic wheels as "Iron Wheels of War" (22:34; E168). Above these Newtonian wheels, however, Blake depicts four hovering, cursively joined angels, white "Cherubim" whose interlocking wings comprise Blake's weave of "Forgiveness" (22:35). Although these human forms are integral entities, they co-exist each with the other in peaceful community. Indeed, the posture in which Blake depicts these figures (conjoined at both upper and lower extremities) suggests that they are engaged in his highest ideal of internal or emanational relations, wherein "Embraces are Cominglings: from the Head even to the Feet" (69:43; E223). This fourfold community of angels symbolizes the organic and holistic (rather than mechanistic and atomistic) mode of relations which, as we shall see in Chapter One, informs Blake's privileged model of cosmos and nature.

With the rise of the Romantic movement at the end of the eighteenth century, many European poets and philosophers began to deploy holistic models of nature to combat the atomism characterizing the physical and much of the biological sciences. Indeed, in his ground-breaking study *Nature's Economy: A History of Ecological Ideas*

(first published in 1977). Donald Worster argues that the "Romantic approach to nature was fundamentally ecological," because "it was concerned with relation, interdependence, and holism" (58). Although the Romantics did not know about "ecology" *per se*,¹¹ they were aware of the analogous concept of "nature's economy," "a point of view which sought to describe all of the living organisms of the earth as an interacting whole" (Worster x). This concept of nature informed, and perhaps helped to inspire, the Romantic response to Enlightenment science (whose contrastingly reductionist methodology emphasized nature as an aggregate of individual atomic units). Despite its attractiveness, however, we must approach the concept of nature's economy with care, for, like its descendant "ecology," it is complex, ambivalent, and very much open to discursive appropriation.

"Economy" and "ecology" are related both conceptually and etymologically. The root of each term is the Greek *oikos*, which originally referred to the daily operations and maintenance of the human household (Worster 192). It is not uncommon for ecological critics to valorize the *oikos* as "dwelling place" or "home," seeking in this concept an attractive alternative to the oppositional notion that earthly nature is a potential enemy needing to be dominated and exploited in the service of humanity (see Biehl 142-47). But, as Janet Biehl has argued, the idea of the *oikos*, considered historically, is by no means as innocent as it might seem. Pointing out, for example, that the word "pharaoh" means "great house," Biehl reminds us that the grandest *oikos* ever constructed--ancient Egypt--was a thoroughly hierarchical, patriarchal theocracy (146). Indeed, the Greek word for "economy," *oikonomia*, signifies precisely the idea of house mastery (Howarth 73). In the eighteenth century, this idea of mastery, which clearly informed such concepts as "political economy" and "domestic economy," haunted the notion of "nature's

economy" as well. In *The Book of Thel*, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter Two, Blake depicts a "natural economy" whose holistic emphasis on relation and interdependence disguises and indeed naturalizes an *oikos* whose underlying order is thoroughly patriarchal, defining its relations in terms of an instrumentalism which exploits femininity to further its own self-interest.

The more recent concept of "ecology" does not entirely escape this problem of mastery. As Evernden has pointed out, the idea of ecology actually incorporates two opposed and contradictory models of natural dynamics: the idea, on the one hand, of a holistic, communal interdependence of all entities, and, on the other hand, the darker notion of "competition, exclusion, exploitation, and survival" (*Social Creation* 9).¹² Because of its conceptual ambivalence, "ecology" can be appropriated to naturalize the diametrically opposed ideologies of environmentalist activism, which aims to defend nature's special diversity and relationality, *and* capitalist production, which prospers by manipulating and exploiting nature both as resource and repository of human "waste" products. Although Blake is a product of pre-Darwinian times, his work contains insights which prefigure Evernden's understanding of "the perils of looking to ecology for social instruction" (10), for it emphasizes, in its representation of the exclusive and exploitative drive of the atomistic "Selfhood," on the one hand, and the inclusive thrust of communal love and "mutual interchange" between entities, on the other, the ways that opposing ideologies can appropriate "ecological" concepts (or their historical analogues) to justify positions that are otherwise incompatible.

For his own part, Blake is chary of overemphasizing either "self-centred" or "communal" positions, which find respective analogies in his poetic depiction of the conflict between "atomistic" and "holistic" views of the world. Significantly, as we shall

see in Chapter Three, Blake correlates the Satanic "Selfhood" with Newtonian physical science, basing his critique of Satanic self-interest in part on his understanding of the social and "legal" implications of Newtonian atomism.¹³ In an oft-quoted passage from a letter to George Cumberland (1827), Blake articulates his opposition to atomism in patently political terms:

I know too well that a great majority of Englishmen are fond of The Indefinite which they Measure by Newtons Doctrine of the Fluxions of an Atom. A Thing that does not Exist. These are Politicians & think that Republican Art is Inimical to their Atom. For a Line or Lineament is not formed by Chance a Line is a Line in its Minutest Subdivision[s] Strait or Crooked It is Itself & Not Intermeasurable with or by any Thing Else[.]
(E783)

For Blake, atomism negates the difference or particularity that "Republican Art" celebrates and attempts to guarantee. Blake was aware, to quote Charles Taylor, that atomism "tended towards homogeneity in that seemingly qualitatively distinct things were to be explained as alternative constructions out of the same basic constituents or basic principles" (*Hegel* 10). In other words, the atom tends by its very definition to destroy particularity--that which the "Line[s]" and "Lineaments" separating particular entities guarantee--by reducing all entities to the same ostensibly common denominator (like the identical grains produced in *Milton* by the Satanic Miller [Otto 51]). In this sense, the "truth" of the atom becomes *the* elementary truth, and, much more dangerously, its Priesthood of élite scientific interpreters becomes truth's Oracle. Transposed into the wider social world, the theoretical homogeneity of atomism tends, in Blake's view, to shore up the authority of "politicians" by supporting a theoretical "state of Agreement," a false social holism or communal consensus "to which I for One do not Agree" (E783).¹⁴ For Blake, atomism is an ideologically charged lie, a false "Doctrine" based on the notion of a purely mathematical entity "that does not Exist" but which takes

on a palpable existence precisely because of the very real social and material consequences of its *theoretical* privileging.¹⁵ Against this purely ideological entity, Blake asserts his own felt particularity--the experiential "I for One[ness]" that underpins his desire to refuse the homogenizing impulses of his era.

A powerful instance of Blake's critique of atomistic philosophy occurs in *Jerusalem*, where the poet differentiates the "Infant Joy" from "its anatomy":

The Infant Joy is beautiful, but its anatomy
Horrible ghast & deadly! nought shalt thou find in it
But dark despair & everlasting brooding melancholy!
(22:22-24; E167)

Simply put, "The Infant Joy is beautiful" because it is holistic: Joy is a processive gestalt that organizes the complexity of the infant's felt experience or physiological and psychological makeup. Conversely, "anatomy" implies a "cutting up" (L. Wilson 92)--here an act of philosophical dissection designed to reveal and systematize the various aspects or component parts that constitute the child's being. Such an act is thoroughly misguided, for the component parts of Infant Joy are, like atoms themselves, non-existent (non-existent because joy is precisely gestalt and therefore not reducible). For Blake, such reductive analysis results in a violent death: what he calls, perhaps echoing Wordsworth, "murder by analyzing" (J 91:26;E251).¹⁶ Negating the gestalt that defines and indeed names the child, "anatomy" transforms the Infant Joy from a "beautiful" living entity into an inanimate object which is "Horrible ghast & deadly."

Jerusalem contains numerous passages that oppose this kind of reductionism.

Mid-way through this epic poem we are told, for example, that

the voices of the Living Creatures were heard in the clouds of heaven
Crying: Compell the Reasoner to Demonstrate with unhewn Demonstrations
Let the Indefinite be explored. (55:55-6; E205)

The "Indefinite" in this passage refers to scientific methodology, the atomism which in Blake's view erroneously attempts to abstract elementary constituents from the contexts that define the being of entities like the "Infant Joy." This abstractive process (and accompanying "objective" analysis) constitutes the reductiveness of the *hewn* Demonstration. By advocating the need for "*unhewn* Demonstrations"--in which minute particulars remain contextually intact--the significantly "Living Creatures" or *zoa* inaugurate a critique of atomistic epistemology. In other words, these Creatures criticize the "Indefinite" method of abstraction from the standpoint of "life" conceived holistically, as an irreducible network of integral particulars co-existing in complex interrelationship.¹⁷ By "Compell[ing] the Reasoner to demonstrate with *unhewn* Demonstrations," the Living Creatures would force him to compare the "deadly" results of his habitual anatomy (J 22:23; E167) with those obtained via a more inclusive or holistic methodology. Thus, the former, "Indefinite" method of reasoning would "be explored" and its reductive, life-negating tendencies "Demonstrate[d]." For it is not "Demonstration" itself that is the problem for Blake. As Brian John has argued, Blake "attacked not reason, science, or the senses per se, but their misuse" (24-5). The "Living Creatures" deploy "*unhewn* Demonstration" in order relentlessly to oppose the "*hewn* Demonstration" of philosophical atomism, for this latter mode or "misuse" of reason threatens to negate their own identities as whole, *living* creatures.

Just prior to this call for "*unhewn* Demonstrations," Blake depicts a scene of labour which offers a practical alternative to the problem of atomistic reductionism, an alternative demonstrating the extent to which "holistic conceptions of nature necessarily lead to close attention to the individuality of the elements constituting the total system" (Kroeber 14):

Labour well the Minute Particulars, attend to the Little-ones:
 And those who are in misery cannot remain so long
 If we do but our duty: labour well the teeming Earth.
 (55:51-53; E205)

In this passage, the labourers of the furrow strive to establish a balanced relationship with the whole order (the "teeming Earth" that is their field of labour) as well as with the myriad parts (the "Minute Particulars" or "Little-ones") that comprise that order. The labourers accomplish this balancing act not by focusing on the relatively abstract whole, but by "attend[ing] to the Little-ones"--the most proximate and accessible forms they encounter in their everyday working practices. This act prevents "misery" in "the Little-ones" who comprise "the teeming Earth," thus affirming both particulars *and* the whole order in which they have their existence. This attention to and affirmation of particularity (which Blake opposes to the homogeneous reductionism of the hewn demonstration) generates a familial bond between the labourers and the earth, a sense of communion implicit in the workers' realization that they and the land that sustains them are "One Family!" (55:46).

Blake highlights this sense of familial connection in his poetic depiction of the workers' sympathetic identification with the land. Attending closely to the individual clods by "sit[ting] down within / The plowed furrow" (42-3) itself, the workers realize that the clods are "weeping" (55:42-3) as a result of their having been cut by the plow. This insight causes the workers themselves to weep: they resume their plowing "in tears" (55:54). These reciprocal tears signify an "unhewn" identification between labourer and land, suggesting that the workers have begun to cultivate a profound awareness of the minutely particular consequences of their work. It is this awareness which inculcates in the workers a sense of "duty," an ethically-motivated obligation to "labour well the teeming Earth."

I shall examine Blake's "environmental ethic" in some detail in Chapter One, below. For the moment, it is necessary to point out that the holism or interdependence implicit in the workers' realization that they and the earth are "One Family" also has its perils. Consider, for example, a passage from the subsequent plate, wherein Blake, elaborating on the metaphor of the plow, writes

Of that Eternal Man
And of the cradled Infancy in his bowels of compassion:
Who fell beneath his instruments of husbandry & became
Subservient to the clods of the furrow! the cattle and even
The emmet and earth-Worm are his superiors & his lords.
(J 56:33-37; E206)

If the "compassion" expressed by the workers for the "Minute Particulars" of the "teeming Earth" is taken too far, Blake warns us, the self--a "Minute Particular" in its own right--disappears. Identifying *too* closely with the things of the earth, that is, the human worker falls beneath his or her own "instruments of husbandry," becoming "One" with the earth by returning to "non-Entity's dark wild / Where dwells the Spectre of Albion: destroyer of Definite Form" (56:16-17). It is in this sense, perhaps, that the human becomes "Subservient" to the natural environment: the "clod," as clod, remains a *whole* entity, while the human form, returning to dust by having been "Plowed in among the Dead" (57:14; E207), becomes a mere *part* of the clod's constitution.¹⁸ Blake also depicts this strange confusion of human and non-human roles in his design to plate 33 of *Jerusalem* (see figure 3). Here, the human plowman stares intently at the earth he is plowing, while the strangely humanized animals drawing the plow gaze toward the heavens. The pained expression on the plowman's downward-looking face suggests his "Subservien[ce] to the clods of the furrow," while the contemplative expressions on the animals' upward-looking faces signify their "transcendence" of natural necessity in intellectual activity. That this design represents a confusion of human and animal

identity is apparent in the fact that the plowman and plow animals have identical bearded faces. In both poetry and design, then, Blake uses the figures of the plow and earth to emphasize the consequence of a conceptual mode of being that courts heteronomy, the loss of ability to engage in such crucial Blakean activities as "Mental Fight" (M 1:13; E95) and "Self-examination" (M 40/46:37; E142). Since conscious self-possession is necessary to the recognition of political oppression, the temptation to identify "holistically" with the earthly environment is as dangerous, in Blake's view, as the temptation to assert an absolutely autonomous, "atomistic" Selfhood.

In Chapter Four, I shall develop this argument by discussing the tension in *Milton* and *Jerusalem* between heteronomy and autonomy, especially as it is articulated in the complex network of associations comprising the (inter)relationship between Albion and the organic Polypus. I shall argue, in short, that the fallen Albion and the Polypus symbolize, respectively, pathological agency (an excessive privileging of an autonomous self conceived as unconnected with greater whole communities) and pathological communion (an excessive privileging of an organic or systemic "wholeness," wherein individual subjects are unwittingly absorbed into a heteronomous system wherein they exist in a state of "soft affections without Thought" [M 24/26:38; E120]). Arguably, Blake invents the monstrous, organic Polypus to symbolize the frightening result of an extreme primitivism advocating a "return" to a "natural" state of harmonious earthly co-existence. In Blake's view, the result of such a "return to nature" is an abdication of the critical faculty, leaving the subject open to, and powerless to oppose, the kinds of violent discursive inscription that we shall see at play in *The Book of Thel*. On the other hand, a rejection of nature is equally harmful, stemming, as we shall see in Chapter Three, from modes of perception exercised by a Satanic Selfhood, which Blake explicitly associates in

both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* with ecological devastation. According to Blake, one must develop a Selfhood in order to pass the Polypus (M 35:19-22; E135) on the way to Eternity; but one must also "annihilate" the Selfhood in order to escape the anti-relational violence of Albion-Satan's egocentric regime. It is in the attainment of balance between self and not-self that one may develop a healthy sympathy for the things of the earth without violating the integrity or minute particularity of one's own determinate form or identity.

Blake achieves this balance, on the one hand, by focusing on "the integrity of individuals rather than...systems" (Ault 30). This privileging of parts over wholes is ultimately politically motivated. In Blake's view, a "holism" giving primacy to the whole over the part is potentially tyrannous, for when parts of a system are considered primarily in terms of their relationship to the greater system or whole, they are necessarily instrumentalized: their perceived function in the grand scheme of things becomes their defining attribute. As we have seen, the danger of such instrumentalization involves the question of politics and interpretation: the particular group or institution (in Blakean terms, "Priesthood" [MHH 11; E38]) that society licenses to interpret the "nature" of the "whole" system will necessarily be in a position to dictate the proper role or function of each part in that system.¹⁹ Blake's writing forestalls this potential tyranny of the whole by privileging the concept of "Infinity," which denies not only the knowability of a final whole but its very existence as such, thus frustrating any effort to determine the instrumental role of minute particulars within the whole order.²⁰ Ultimately, however, Blake is unable or unwilling to do away with the cosmological notion of a final whole. Thus, he attempts to imagine a holistic order in which the whole and its parts "Live in perfect harmony" (J 34/38:21; E180).

Blake imagines such "harmony" by differentiating true wholes or "General Forms" from their fraudulent counterparts, repeatedly making such a distinction in *Jerusalem*. As Los declares,

Swelld & bloated General Forms, [are] repugnant to the Divine-Humanity, who is the Only General and Universal Form
To which all Lineaments tend & seek with love & sympathy
All broad and general principles belong to benevolence
Who protects minute particulars, every one in their own identity.
(38/43:19-23; E185)

Blake represents the worship of false wholes or general forms in terms of physical pathology: the "Swelld & bloated" condition of such forms signifies their unhealthy consumption or subsumption of minute particulars. The Divine-Humanity, on the other hand, does not consume or subsume particulars in a pathological, totalitarian manner, but incorporates them in such a way that they are "protect[ed]..., every one in their own identity."

I shall examine the major ethical and environmental implications of Blake's organic, human cosmology in the following chapter. At this point, it will suffice to consider Blake's poetic representation of the relationship between the human parts and wholes that comprise his cosmological ideal. As Christ tells Albion in *Jerusalem*,

Mutual in one anothers love and wrath all renewing
We live as One Man; for contracting our infinite senses
We behold multitude; or expanding: we behold as one,
As One Man all the Universal Family; and that One Man
We call Jesus the Christ: and he in us, and we in him,
Live in perfect harmony in Eden the land of life.
(34/38:16-21; E180)

Here we see that Christ is Blake's ultimate whole--"One Man" containing within his form a "multitude" of determinate parts. And yet, this "holism" is clearly not a model of totalitarianism, for Christ, the ultimate whole, is also a *part* of each integral (i.e., whole)

form he incorporates: not only are "we in him"; he is also "in us." Such a cosmological model suggests an infinitude of interrelated parts and wholes leading not to hierarchical tyranny but to what Blake imagines as "perfect harmony."

Blake's organic cosmology offers ecocritics an interesting critical vantage point from which to consider the environmental implications of a contemporary concept of nature "that sought to describe all of the living organisms of the earth as an interacting *whole*" (Worster x: emphasis added). But can this cosmology ultimately underpin an ethic of respect for non-human creatures and the natural terrains they inhabit? Given Blake's unabashed anthropocentrism, one might be tempted to answer all too quickly in the negative. Indeed, Blake's focus on the human form has played a central role in consolidating the prevailing critical perception that he is in fact nature's Romantic adversary. An ecocritical study of Blake's work--a study that wishes to consider Blake's art and poetry from the vantage point of a history of ecological thought--cannot proceed without facing the charge of Blake's supposed enmity toward nature. Hence, it is to a consideration of this problem that we must now turn.

Notes

1. All references to Blake's writing in this study are to David V. Erdman's edition of *The Complete Poetry and Prose of William Blake*. In my parenthetical citations I refer first to plate and line numbers (for example, 34:24-26) and second, for ease of reference, to the page number where the citation occurs in the Erdman edition (for example, E134). In my citations I also make use of the following abbreviations, where necessary, to signify individual works: NNR ("There is no Natural Religion"); BT (*The Book of Thel*); SIE (*Songs of Innocence and of Experience*); MHH (*The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*); VDA (*Visions of the Daughters of Albion*); BU (*The Book of Urizen*); AI ("Auguries of Innocence"); VLJ ("A Vision of the Last Judgement"); M (*Milton*); FZ (*The Four Zoas*); J (*Jerusalem*); DC (*A Descriptive Catalogue*). All references to Blake's poetic designs are to the Princeton editions of the poems in question and refer to the plates as they are numbered therein. Where appropriate or necessary, I have indicated the corresponding plate number from Erdman's edition in parentheses. Many of the designs under analysis have been reproduced in the Appendix to this dissertation. Where this is the case, a brief parenthetical note has been included in the text to direct the reader to the figure number of the design in question.

2. Bacon makes explicit the anti-anthropomorphic thrust of his scientific endeavour when he criticizes the "illusion[s] of the dogmatist, who, out of arrogant pride in the operation of his intellect, substituted the patterns of his mind mistakenly for the complexities of the universe" (Prior 45). The "state of nature" that Locke delineates in his *Two Treatises of Government* (1690) also suggests the possibility of a non-anthropomorphic perspective on nature, for it gestures toward a natural condition which is ostensibly prior to government and sociality (Nash 14).

3. The eighth wall of the king's pavilion accommodated its entrance.

4. Even Foucault acknowledges the "banality" of discourse theory and its concomitant premise that philosophy must "keep watch over the excessive powers of political rationality." "Everybody is aware of such banal facts," he remarks. "But the fact that they're banal does not mean they don't exist" ("Afterword" 210).

5. The well-known social injustices surrounding the anti-hunting aspects of the English Forest Laws might provide a relevant historical context against which to read Blake's privileging of "Hunting" as one of the "Sources of Life in Eternity" (J 38/43:31; E185).

6. For a succinct discussion of the difference between a "finished" and "unfinished" production in Blake's oeuvre, see Morton D. Paley's Introduction to the Princeton edition of *Jerusalem*, page 9.

7. As historian R. S. Neale has pointed out, unscrupulous local physicians like Dr. Oliver clearly capitalized on Bath's contemporary association with the magical healing arts. Indeed, this physician went so far as to suggest that the unhealthy effects of sensual self-indulgence--which everyone knew could be had at Bath--could also be magically cured there (39-40).

8. Even if we interpret the word "man" in this aphorism as a reference to humanity in general (rather than as an exclusive reference to members of the male sex), the aphorism arguably retains an element of sexism, since humanity becomes the privileged term in a binary equation locating a masculine-seeming activity or agency in the human subject and a curiously "feminine" passivity in nature or the natural object. Such a subject/object dynamic has long defined gender relations in the Western world. For a pointed discussion of subject/object dualisms and their relationship to the domination of women and nature under patriarchy, see Karen J. Warren, "Ecological Feminist Philosophies," pages xi-xiii.

9. In the Introduction and opening chapter to this study, my contextualizing discussions of Blake's philosophy of nature are of necessity rather general. Hence, in these sections, I will be referring to texts and designs from across Blake's oeuvre. While such a practice is quite common in Blake criticism, it can be somewhat dangerous, insofar as it tends to construct a homogeneous view of Blake's diverse thought and works. Hence, in Chapters Two, Three, and Four, wherein I analyze individual works by Blake, I have tried to focus primarily on the works in question, reading them against likely sources or other *contemporary* materials such as relevant letters or annotations. I have adopted this critical practice in my final three chapters in an attempt to acknowledge and respect the differences between the individual works under study.

10. In the design to plate 8 of *Jerusalem* (see figure 1), we see the social outcome of a mode of thought which reduces the female to her biological (i.e., "natural") role in sexual reproduction. Here, Blake depicts a naked female bound by a harness to the moon, symbolizing the twenty-eight days of her menstrual cycle. According to Minna Doskow's essentialist reading of the design, this "fallen female" is "condemned to the never-changing repetition of the simply physical, ever waxing and waning, for imagination is absent" (*Blake's "Jerusalem"* 48-9). I would argue, on the contrary, that "imagination is absent" here only insofar as society essentializes the female *as* "the simply physical," relegating her to the subordinate term in a dualistic conception of the relationship between soul and body, humanity and nature, ideality and materiality. By exposing these dualisms as cultural constructs rather than accepting them as natural "givens" (see Warren, "Ecological Feminist Philosophies" xii), one can understand the extent to which discourses of nature (and not nature "itself") are responsible for the female enslavement Blake depicts in this design.

11. The concept of "ecology" was not introduced until 1869, when Darwin's most prominent German disciple, Ernst Haeckel, coined the term (Worster 192).

12. Historically, this latter model is, as Evernden points out, a product of Charles Darwin's concept of "natural selection" and of social Darwinism's notion of the "survival of the fittest" (*Social Creation* 9).

13. It is worth noting here that Newton's precursor, Bacon, was also a philosophical atomist. As Merchant points out, Bacon believed that "[m]otion and change were externally caused" and that the "atomic parts of the mechanistic universe were ordered in a causal nexus such that by contact the motion of one part caused the motion of the next" (185-6).

14. Such consensus is implicit in the epistemology that atomism entails. According to John Locke's "atomism of the mind," as Charles Taylor has called it, ideas "are produced in us...by the operation of insensible particles on our senses." Moreover, "a good part of the assembly of these atoms [i.e., ideas] is accounted for by a quasi-mechanical process of association" (*Sources* 166-67). According to Lockean atomism, the human mind is completely passive, governed wholly, one might say, by the workings of "external" "nature." In Blake's view, such passivity is politically dangerous, providing a theoretical ground for the false political consensus or homogeneity that he disdainfully criticizes in his discussion of the "Atom."

15. Mary Lynn Johnson reminds us that natural philosophers debated the existence of the atom throughout the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, precisely because it could not be verified experimentally ("Blake, Democritus" 121). Strictly speaking, this is still the case with the post-Einsteinian atom, which, as Lyall Watson remarks, "nobody has actually ever seen." Watson thus refers to the atom as a "metaphorm"--an *idea* which "seem[s] to take on an existence in the real world" (44, 46) as a result of what it is "*believed* to do" (44; emphasis added).

16. In his 1798 poem "The Tables Turned," Wordsworth condemns the atomism of a "meddling intellect" that "murder[s] to dissect" (lines 26, 28).

17. I shall examine Blake's definition of "life" in section four of Chapter One.

18. In the "Ode to a Nightingale" (1819) Keats's speaker gains a similar insight as his "dull brain perplexes and retards" in the process of his becoming one with the bird who inspires his song (lines 34-35). Like Blake, Keats was also wary of too close an identification with the natural world, calling this mode of communion an "easeful Death" (line 52).

19. This is precisely the role of Bacon's men of science in *The New Atlantis*. In the utopian community of Bensalem, politics takes the form of scientific administration,

and decisions are made "for the good of the whole by the scientists, whose judgement was to be trusted implicitly, for they alone possessed the secrets of nature" (Merchant 180).

20. As Errol E. Harris points out, "Infinity is a concept that has given cosmologists trouble since Newton, and one which physicists today do all they can to eliminate from their calculations" (11).

CHAPTER ONE

William Blake and the Natural World

Nature has no Outline: but Imagination has. Nature has no Tune: But Imagination has! Nature has no Supernatural & dissolves: Imagination is Eternity.

* * *

Nature is Imagination itself. (Blake E270, E702)

I. Blake Criticism, Nature, and Single Vision

Although Blake's attitude toward nature is equivocal and contradictory--as my epigraphs should plainly suggest--it has become a widely accepted critical commonplace that Blake is in fact nature's poetic adversary. For various reasons, as Mark S. Lussier has recently observed, critics have tended to privilege those significant aspects of Blake's writing that emphasize his idealist suspicion of material nature in lieu of his many declarations of respect for, and awe in the face of, the non-human world (398). Admittedly, this critical tendency has had its important dissenters. In a 1946 study with the curiously modern title *William Blake: The Politics of Vision*, for example, Mark Schorer called the "discrepancy in Blake's attitude toward the material universe...the most enduring and the most extensive conflict in his personality and poetry" (6). But Schorer's convincing reading of a non-unified and self-contradictory Blake was almost immediately eclipsed by Northrop Frye's monumental study of Blake's oeuvre, *Fearful Symmetry* (1947). Frye, positing in Blake's thought the presence of "a unified scheme" and "a permanent structure of ideas" (14), paints Blakean nature in the most emphatic Hobbesian colours: there is "nothing outside man worthy of respect," Frye would have Blake tell us, because "[n]ature is

miserably cruel, wasteful, purposeless, chaotic and half dead" (39). From the Blakean standpoint constructed by Frye, nature is quite simply "there for us to transform"; otherwise, as Frye casually remarks, it is "all very well to abuse nature" (40). With Schorer's insights all but forgotten in the wake of Frye's important intervention in Blake criticism, critics like David Riede could declare over three decades later that Blake "rejected nature utterly" (Riede, *Swinburne* 7)--and do so almost without raising a critical eyebrow among scholars in the field.¹ Indeed, although Blake studies have witnessed profound changes in methodology and viewpoint since the publication of *Fearful Symmetry*, the view of Blake as nature's English Romantic adversary has become so well entrenched that even the poet's most recent and sympathetic biographer, Peter Ackroyd, is able to argue authoritatively that Blake "despised" the material world, regarding nature as "no more than the Mundane Shell or Vegetative Universe that was the vesture of Satan" (257, 328).²

One of the most ubiquitous practices critics employ to uphold the construction of an unforgivingly idealistic, anti-natural Blake is the citation of the poet's marginalia, which are commonly quoted as rhetorical *coups de grâce* proving beyond doubt that Blake was unequivocally hostile to the natural world. But, for a number of reasons, this practice of using Blake's marginal annotations to support such readings of his poetry is critically problematic. First, Blake's marginal commentary on nature itself lacks internal consistency. In his annotations to Wordsworth's *Poems*, for example, Blake roundly condemns Wordsworth as the "Natural Man," explaining that Wordsworth "is at enmity with God" (E665). And yet, in annotating Swedenborg's declaration that "all the grandest and purest Truths of Heaven must needs seem obscure and perplexing to the Natural Man," Blake responds most furiously with "Lies & Priestcraft Truth is Nature" (E609).

Clearly, as these conflicting examples indicate, if critics are to use Blake's annotations to support the thesis of his hostility toward nature (and its human corollary, the "Natural Man"), they must do so in a questionably selective manner. More important (and this is my second point), in using annotations to support critical readings of Blake's poetical works, critics fail to theorize annotations generically *as* annotations, forgetting that such jottings are not necessarily positions, but more often polemical *reactions*. Such confrontational writings, produced spontaneously in the heat of particular interpretive moments, must be considered carefully in their specific performative contexts before they can be safely transposed to support general readings of Blake's philosophy or particular readings of his poetry: for the poetry, in contrast to the marginalia, is composed and published with great thought, care, and labour.

All too often, moreover, Blake's readers fail to give the annotations the close readings their understanding demands and requires. More than any of his writings, for example, critics have cited Blake's annotations to Wordsworth's poetry to support the overly-simplistic claim that Blake is merely articulating, in his response to Wordsworth, a sense of disdain for material nature and its champions. Frye, for instance, cites the following 1814 annotation to *The Recluse* in direct preface to his claim, cited above, that Blakean nature is a site of Hobbesian warfare:

How exquisitely the individual Mind
(And the progressive powers no less
Of the whole species) to the external World
Is fitted.--& how exquisitely too,
Theme this but little heard of among Men
The external World is fitted to the Mind.

Blake's celebrated response to this passage is "You shall not bring me down to believe such fitting & fitted I know better & Please your Lordship" (E666-67). Frye's influential claims aside, there is much more happening in this response to Wordsworth than a

straightforward Blakean critique of nature's shortcomings. It is necessary, for one thing, to take into account the class-based hostility that might be motivating the response of the often derided and relatively impoverished working-class poet to the widely read and almost universally acclaimed utterances of England's most famous poet and future Laureate.³ Such conflict would certainly help to account for Blake's derisive and dismissive phrase "& Please your Lordship." Furthermore, as we shall see in the pages ahead, Blake was in all likelihood offended by the passivity implicit in Wordsworth's depiction of human-nature relations. In the above-cited passage, for instance, Wordsworth implies, using the passive voice, that humanity and nature are "fitted" to one another, a process occurring, presumably, via the agency of a mysterious, unnamed force or entity. Blake, who despises Mystery, arguing in his annotations to Lavater that "Active Evil is better than Passive Good" (E592), could easily have found the doctrine of a "wise passiveness" to be the most offensive aspect of Wordsworth's seeming worship of nature. To attribute Blake's rancour against Wordsworth merely to a hostility towards the natural world itself (and not to Wordsworth's philosophical approach to that world) is to efface the complexity of Blake's response to the poetic doctrines of the most renowned of English Romantics.

Since it is almost impossible to decipher how much of Blake's marginal response to Wordsworth is philosophically doctrinal and how much merely splenetic and reactionary, it is worth considering at this juncture another of Blake's famous annotations to the great poet. When Wordsworth praises the "Influence of Natural Objects / In calling forth and strengthening the Imagination / in Boyhood and early Youth," Blake responds with the celebrated and often-quoted objection: "Natural Objects always did & now do Weaken deaden & obliterate Imagination in Me" (E665). Many of Blake's readers have

accepted this remark as gospel, often using it to support the critical construction of a Blake whose philosophy is purely and transcendently "Imaginative." It is important to note, however, that some of Blake's contemporaries were unwilling to take the poet at his word when he claimed thus to abhor nature and natural objects. Consider, for example, the following remarks of Benjamin Heath Malkin, Blake's earliest contemporary commentator. In *A Father's Memoirs of His Child* (1806), Malkin writes that Blake "professes drawing from life always to have been hateful to him; and speaks of it as looking more like death, or smelling of mortality. Yet still he drew a good deal from life, both at the academy and at home. In this manner he has managed his talents..." (xxii). In this passage, Malkin's use of the word "professes," and his subsequent assertion that Blake did in fact draw "a good deal from life," contradicts Blake's famous anti-natural professions, suggesting something of Blake's habitual polemical nature, which may have caused him occasionally to make claims in bad faith. In the paragraph immediately following the one quoted above, Malkin goes on to declare that Blake, who was considered mad by many of his peers, is "highly esteemed" among those particular colleagues "who can distinguish excellence *under the disguise of singularity*" (xxiii; emphasis added). Clearly, Malkin believed that people who took Blake at his word when he spoke, among other things, of despising nature, were the ones most likely to misunderstand his genius.

Blake's important patron Henry Crabb Robinson noted similar contradictions in Blake's philosophy. In reporting one of his conversations with the poet, for example, Crabb Robinson wrote that Blake claimed "not [to] believe in the *omnipotence* of God-- The language of the Bible on that subject is only poetical or allegorical[.] Yet soon after [making this claim] he denied that the natural world is anything" (qtd. in Bentley, *Blake*

Records 316). Concerning Crabb Robinson's remark, Mark Schorer asks: "Did [Blake] want it both ways?" (22). That is, did Blake wish to deny *both* a transcendent *and* an immanent God? This is an important question for, generally, in Blake's era, a theological denunciation of material nature implied an affirmation of transcendent deity, and vice versa--and Blake, if Crabb Robinson can be trusted, refused to take a firm stand on either side of the divide. Thus, before citing Blake's conversations and fragmentary jottings to dismiss nature as anathematic to Blake, we would do well to question the poet's own dismissals of nature and analyze the tensions that arise between Blake's contradictory positions on the subject. For if Blake often rejects nature (in his annotations, conversation, and epistolary correspondence), he tends often, as I will demonstrate in the chapters ahead, to affirm it in his early poems and in his late epics, works which, significantly, "are not the productions of a moment's mood of dismay but of a studied effort to state his view as, most soberly, he held it" (Schorer 124-25).

Blake's uneasy (rather than settled) attitude toward nature is also reflected in his discourse on Deism, which, contrary to the assertions of many of his readers, is often conflicted and contradictory. As Steve Clark and David Worrall have argued, the "assumption of a purely oppositional relation [on Blake's part] to a monolithic and oppressive Enlightenment has precluded a fuller understanding of Blake's diverse, unpredictable, and by no means unproductive responses to the culture of his time" (18).⁴ Blake's rather unstable relationship to the discourse of Deism is important to an eco-critical study of Blake's oeuvre, for the discourse of "nature's economy," which I shall consider at length in the following chapter, is largely the product of eighteenth-century physico-theological discourse. There can be no doubt that Blake saw himself as explicitly opposed to Deism, but, as S. Foster Damon has pointed out, "his denunciations

are not so sweeping as they seem. He shared the Deists' hostility to priests and kings, as enslavers of the minds of man" (101). It is perhaps because twentieth-century criticism has tended too quickly to celebrate rather than to question Blake's self-proclaimed prophetic authority that it has also tended to take the poet entirely at his word when he denounces, and so distances himself from, the philosophical tenets of Enlightenment Deism.

Perhaps the aspect of Deist doctrine most important to a study of Blake's attitude toward nature is its rejection of the orthodox notion that nature, being fallen, is evil. Undeniably, there are moments when Blake, following orthodoxy, seems to impute such radical evil to nature. Consider, for example, one of his annotations to Watson: "The Bible tells me that the plan of Providence was Subverted at the Fall of Adam & that it was not restored till...Christ" (E615). If Blake is in fact affirming here the doctrine of a fall that leaves no remedial recourse to the natural world (and this is by no means clear, given Blake's common habit of questioning what the "Bible tells me"), it is a doctrine that Blake does not dwell on or emphasize in his work. Schorer remarks that, among Blake's repertoire of attitudes toward nature, this view of nature as radically evil is "least characteristic" (114). Indeed, given Blake's critique of dualism in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (E34), where Blake imputes the concept of evil in part to the error-causing "Bibles or sacred codes" (E34) and ascetic doctrines of a self-interested "Priesthood" (E38), one might point out that Blake is at least in partial agreement with Deism's proposition that evil is a state of mind arising in human society as a result of institutional corruption, which imposes upon the individual mind the erroneous notion that evil *is* in fact real (Schorer 115).

The notion that evil is not an essential or natural category is typically "primitivist," part of a doctrine that Blake's era tended to associate with the Deistical writings of Rousseau. Given Blake's overt hostility towards Rousseau, it is perhaps surprising to find traces of the primitivist doctrine in Blake's own writing. Consider, for example, Blake's repeated defense of pagan beliefs in his annotations to Lavater, where he asserts that "True superstition is ignorant honesty & this is beloved of god and man" (E591), and that superstition is "honest feeling & God who loves all honest men. will lead...the poor enthusiast in the paths of holiness" (E598). Can we simply dismiss as momentary eccentricity Blake's assertion that "the Innocent <civilized> Heathen & the Uncivilized Savage who having not the Law do by Nature the things containd in the Law" (VLJ E559)? One cannot deny that Blake vehemently opposes Deistical doctrine in his early tractates on Natural Religion (E2-3) and in his address "to the Deists" in *Jerusalem* (plate 52), but, as Schorer has argued, this opposition must be considered in light of contrary assertions like "Truth is Nature" (E609) and "Natural Religion is the voice of God" (E614), assertions that express, using the vocabulary of physico-theology itself, something like "true deistical equanimity" (Schorer 114).

I do not mean simply to reverse the common critical reading of Blakean nature by denying the importance of his critique of Deism. On the contrary, as I will demonstrate in my reading of *The Book of Thel* in Chapter Two, Blake's arguments against certain aspects of eighteenth-century physico-theology can help to clarify crucial theoretical problems inhabiting Enlightenment theories of holism (such as the theory of "nature's economy"). Crucial to the discourse of "nature's economy," for example, is the physico-theological "argument from design," which claimed that God's ways could be known via careful observation of the complex interrelationships existing among natural phenomena.

As Linnaeus's disciple Isaac Biberg argued in the mid-eighteenth century, the "oeconomy of nature" (a phrase of Biberg's own coinage) refers to "the all-wise disposition of the creator in relation to natural things, by which they are fitted to produce general ends, and reciprocal uses" (31). "[T]hings on this our terraqueous globe," Biberg continues, "are so connected, so chained together, that they all aim at the same end"--to "make manifest the divine glory"--"and to this end a vast number of intermediate ends are subservient" (32). Biberg's remarks on "nature's economy," which, in their focus on the innumerable interconnections existing among natural phenomena, prefigure the holistic claims of today's ecological philosophers, would have been offensive to Blake (though, as we shall see, by no means entirely so) for a number of reasons. First, the "all-wise disposition of the creator" was optimistically understood by physico-theologians as manifesting itself in the universal "perfection" of nature's design. But, as Arthur O. Lovejoy has pointed out, this kind of "perfection in no way implied either the happiness or the excellence of the finite parts of the system. On the contrary, the fundamental and characteristic premise of the usual proof of [Enlightenment] optimism was the proposition that the perfection of the whole depends upon, indeed consists in, the existence of every possible degree of imperfection in the parts" (211). Hence, the "intermediate ends" proper to the parts of Biberg's natural economy remain "subservient" (Biberg 32), in the greater cosmic picture, to the larger ends of an inscrutable Providence.

Blake would certainly have been troubled by this proposition: his persistent concern with the "minute particulars" of existence--the manifold parts that together comprise the universal "whole" or organic body of Christ-Albion (the ecological implications of which we shall examine below)--is well known. Since the Deistical doctrine of "nature's economy" tended, like the doctrine of utilitarianism, to privilege the

general happiness over that of the particular, it is necessary, in Blake's view, to consider the plight of the particular with careful critical attention. This exigency becomes especially apparent given the instrumental underpinnings of Deistical theology, for when the argument from design is inevitably transposed into the social realm, it becomes clear that the only necessary rational knowledge is that which helps humans "to conform properly to the design of things" (Taylor, *Sources* 272). Rousseau seems to advocate such a stance in *Émile* when he cries "O Man! confine thine existence within thyself, and thou wilt no longer be miserable. Remain in the place which Nature has assigned thee in the chain of beings, and nothing can compel thee to depart from it" (qtd. in Lovejoy 201). Such a static view of the human role in the natural order encourages quietism and complacency, thus favouring the prevailing status quo. Indeed, on a political level, the notion that individuals must conform to a pregiven natural design endangers individual freedom, privileging as it does the larger order over its constituents, the "whole" over its parts. Such holism can be manipulated to justify social totalitarianism by "naturalizing" the authority of the political totality, that is, by equating totalitarian government with the "nature" of things. Finally and perhaps most crucially, the Deistical separation of general and particular ends presupposes the separation of divinity (the general) and humanity (the particular), thus not only perpetuating the dualisms (spirit/body, good/evil) that Blake's work decries, but also necessitating the perpetuation of theological and scientific "Priesthoods," which, by claiming authoritatively to know the cosmic "whole" in which God's will is made manifest, set themselves up to interpret and prescribe *the* proper role and function of its constitutive particulars, whether human or otherwise.

II. Environment and Industrialism in Blake's England

Blake was a metropolitan artist who preferred to live in London rather than in the country, and this simple aspect of his biography--which distinguishes him sharply from such contemporaries as Wordsworth and Coleridge--has itself helped to establish and perpetuate Blake's reputation as nature's Romantic adversary. But it is important to remember that, despite his metropolitanism, Blake was far from hostile to country life. Indeed, he spent much of his London residence living on or near the edge of the open countryside, where he was well-situated to witness the city's gradual urban encroachment on the natural landscape. During his childhood, when Blake lived with his family in Broad Street, the areas north of Tyburn Road and Oxford Street were comprised primarily of pleasant meadowlands (Erdman, *Prophet* 473), but these pastoral landscapes were interspersed with brick kilns, foul ditches, and unsightly piles of industrial refuse. The young Blake, a vigorous child who spent whole days wandering among these scenes (Ackroyd 31-35), could not help but have been struck by the ecotonal contrasts⁵ of these liminal spaces in which urban and rural environmental realities met and interacted. Perhaps it was on these walks that Blake first developed his distaste for the "cities turrets & towers & domes / Whose smoke destroyd the pleasant gardens & whose running Kennels / Chokd the bright rivers" (FZ 9:168; E390).

Even in his adult life, Blake was never far from the countryside. Contemporary Lambeth, where William and Catherine resided from 1790 until 1800, was sparsely populated, containing large tracts of meadow and undeveloped swampland. To quote James King, Lambeth retained at the time "a pastoral air, as if Blake had chosen to dwell where the urban and suburban could be, in a sort of compromise, blended" (68). When Blake writes in *Milton* of "Lambeth ruined" (25:48; E122), however, he is pointing at one

level to the destruction of this kind of compromise, where the major symptoms of human corruption are social *and* natural environmental degradation. Blake could not have been unaffected by Lambeth's transformation into "a peculiarly repellent urban slum" (Ackroyd 128), for he claimed, in his final epic, that the very "Foundations" of Jerusalem began in "*lovely* Lambeth" (J 84:4; E243; emphasis added). With this foundational site "ruined," the hope of building Jerusalem "in Englands green & pleasant land" (M 1:16; E96) becomes remote, entailing the need for reclamation and transformation even before the project of building can commence.

David V. Erdman points out that even when the Blakes moved to South Molton Street in 1803, the scene where the author of *Jerusalem* depicts himself as writing "in regions of Humanity, in London's opening streets" (J 34:43; E180), they were "just keeping up with the receding 'meadows green.'" In South Molton Street, if Erdman is correct, Blake would have witnessed "the arts of peace overshadowing the gallows of war," regarding the suburban expansion that occurred in London during these years as a positive effect of the Peace of Amiens (*Prophet* 473-4). Perhaps this is true; but given Blake's experience of the ruination of Lambeth Marsh, it is difficult to believe that he would have been without at least some reservations concerning London's rapid expansion.⁶

Blake's only extended residence in the country proper was in Felpham, Sussex, where he and Catherine lived, under the patronage of William Hayley, from 1800 until 1803. During the early days of their Felpham sojourn, Blake praised country life in the highest of terms. In a letter to John Flaxman (21 September, 1800), Blake claimed that Felpham was a "more Spiritual" place than London, a place where the "voices of Celestial inhabitants are more distinctly heard, & their forms more distinctly seen" (E710).

Writing a day or two later to Thomas Butts, Blake goes so far as to link this visionary aspect of Felpham directly to its natural landscape, expressing this connection in language that is reminiscent more of Wordsworth than himself. As Blake told Butts, "the sweet air & the voices of winds, trees & birds, & the odours of the happy ground" make Felpham "a dwelling for immortals" (E711). Finally, in a letter he wrote to William Hayley in the spring of 1804, Blake suggests a direct correlation between the open country landscapes and the positive expansion of human intellect: "the country," he declares, "is not only more beautiful on account of its expanded meadows, but also on account of its benevolent minds" (E751). Coming from a habitual city-dweller obsessed with mind-expanding visionary experience, such comments on Felpham amount to high praise for the rural life.

Each of the above-cited letters was, of course, written in the context of the vicissitudes surrounding Blake's troubled relationship with Hayley. It is likely that Blake idealizes Sussex in his early Felpham correspondence at least partially in order to justify his decision to move there in the first place, while the letter written to Hayley after the Felpham years is probably coloured by Blake's gratitude for the role his patron played in helping him through the Scofield sedition trials. At any rate, three years in Felpham was certainly a long enough country sojourn for the Blakes, both of whom were more than content to return to Albion's centre of arts and manufacture in London. But Blake's return to London need not be seen as marking any kind of ultimate rejection of the natural world. The notion of the "Romantic retreat" to nature is, in extreme forms, a species of philosophical "separatism" that is ultimately untenable: in the modern world, one can never obtain more than a "temporary escape from the looming reality of...industrial society" (Oelschlaeger 285). Blake, wishing to play a key role in the transformation of

his society's thoughts and practices, could not remain immured at a physical and intellectual distance from that society; rather, he had to work for change at the centre of things, where the need for "Mental Fight" (M E95) is most pressing and urgent. Indeed, in his pastoral Preface to *Milton*, Blake presents the highly social activity of "Mental Fight" as a necessary prerequisite to the building of Jerusalem "in Englands green & pleasant land" (1:16; E96). As I shall argue below in Chapters Three and Four, Blake sets key passages of *Milton* and *Jerusalem* in places like Felpham in order to affirm the role that nature's "green & pleasant" landscapes can play in human imaginative expansion.

Blake may have preferred the city over the country, but his love for the former was by no means uncritical: his concern for the adverse social implications of England's urban industrialization is well known. Thematically, both *Milton* and *Jerusalem* are all but obsessed with human industry and technology. Los's role in these epics as master of the forge and Enitharmon's supervision of the looms are indicative of their status as artisan labourers, as is evident, for example, in the design to plate 100 of *Jerusalem* (see figure 4). Here, Los's hammer and tongs and Enitharmon's distaff or spindle (Paley, Notes 297)--not to mention the easy, unconstrained, and open postures of the workers holding these tools--are affirmative symbols of local, non-industrialized labour and "simple workmanship" (65:17; E216).⁷ And yet, there are other contexts in which Los and Enitharmon can be called Blake's "great industrial figures," figures functioning in the late epics as veritable symbols of the industrial revolution (Bronowski 83). Although the industrialization of London did not begin in earnest until after Blake's death (English industry having been based primarily in the north), Blake was familiar with industrial monuments like the Albion flour mill (85); and his "dark Satanic mills" are at one level

images of the oppression that haunts such wonders of English industry. Moreover, as a working-class artisan and son of a hosier, it is not unlikely that Blake would have sympathized with the plight of such workers as the Nottingham Luddites, who destroyed industrial machinery in early nineteenth-century protests against the labour policies of capitalist factory owners. As Thomas Frosch has pointed out, Blake's poetic representations of technological manufacture, which constitute in his late epics "an almost continuous narrative matrix," are often associated with torture, imprisonment, and warfare, reflecting as such the "deep failure" of "Blakean man" (38-9). And although many of Blake's technological and industrial images comprise important aspects of the sublimity of the Blakean text (which itself is the product of an explicitly technological process), it is difficult to imagine Blake concurring with Thomas Carlyle's Victorian notion that the English industrial landscape was "sublime as a Niagara" (qtd. in Houghton 198).

Ultimately, as we shall see in Chapter Three, Blake uses the industrial image of the "Mill" to critique not only the implications of English technology and industrialization, but the philosophical underpinnings of these phenomena in mechanistic science. For in *Milton*, the workers at the dark Satanic Mills are slaves to a pan-mechanistic cosmology whose Prime Mover epitomizes and consolidates the tyranny of rigid hierarchy. In Blake's mythology, this cosmic order, a universe of self-contained physical object-systems subject to the endless repetition of rigidly governed cyclical processes, enslaves the workers of the Mill by foreclosing the possibility of creativity, novelty, and intersubjective communion between entities.

III. Blake's Theology: Contexts, Analogues, Implications

Blake's avowed and sustained Christianity--which differentiates him sharply from many of his English Romantic contemporaries--can tempt one to place his thought squarely in the context of a tradition whose environmental politics are dangerously suspect.

According to Lynn White, Jr., for example, orthodox modes of Christianity violate the rights of non-human nature by authorizing its subjugation under human instrumental control (the "dominion" of Genesis 1:26-28). Worse, as White argues, Christianity tends ultimately to negate the natural world by constructing and advocating a paradigm of transcendental salvation in which humans must ultimately reject natural creation in favour of an abstract realm of spirit (*passim*). But we must be careful here: although White's ground-breaking environmental critique of Christian tradition is important, Christianity is by no means a monolithic structure.⁸ In Blake's era, indeed, Christianity--especially in its schismatic subcultural forms--is comprised of a highly heterogeneous and diverse system of related beliefs. Blake's own unorthodox Christianity, moreover, is highly personal and idiosyncratic: during his lifetime he held no final allegiance to any established church. In the following pages, I shall examine Blake's theory of natural creation in light of its philosophical relationship, particularly, to antinomian and Miltonic cosmogonies, for these latter models provide contexts and analogues that can helpfully illuminate the complex environmental implications of Blake's own theological beliefs.

In the Muggletonian tradition of antinomianism,⁹ matter is itself radically evil. John Reeve and Lodowick Muggleton argue that "without Controversy Earth and Water were uncreated Substances, eternally distinct from the God of Glory" (*Divine Looking-Glass* 8). Such a view of creation (which has important parallels in Gnosticism and Manichaeism) helps to explain Muggleton's doctrine that the post-apocalyptic Earth will

be the site of Hell itself. As the Muggletonian Thomas Tomkinson argued early in the eighteenth century, "the Devil and his Angels are to be punished with eternal Torment...upon this Earth, for this Earth is the lowest Place in which the Devils can be cast down into" (9). Obviously, if matter is entirely distinct from God, material nature must be radically evil and, therefore, ultimately irredeemable. Although Blake may have been influenced, directly or indirectly, by Muggletonian doctrine, he would by no means have countenanced its dualistic view of creation. On the contrary, Blakean nature, being part of the indivisible body-spirit of Christ (or, in Blake's poetic mythology, Albion) must of necessity be redeemable if human salvation is to be at all possible. Blake concludes the lyrical preface to Part Four of *Jerusalem*, for example, by writing of the need to "Recieve the Lamb of God to dwell / In England's green & pleasant bowers" (J 77; E233). This passage recalls *Milton's* opening reference to "Englands green & pleasant land" (M 1:16; E96), but with the crucial difference that the explicitly natural reference in the later poem to "bowers" rather than to "land" emphasizes the need not only for England's redemption as a human nation, but for the redemption of its natural landscapes as well. Indeed, Blake's representation of an *earthly* millennium in *Jerusalem* involves, at one level, a pointed critique of contemporary Christian valuations of the physical environment.

In much antinomian thought, the primal dualism of spirit and matter serves to explain and justify the very possibility of the human fall from grace. According to Reeve and Muggleton, Adam's substantial body of clay is itself to blame for his original act of disobedience:

[T]hough the Soul of *Adam* through the divine Purity of its Nature was immortal, and incapable of the least Motion of any Kind of Rebellion against the glorious Spirit of its Creator, yet, because his Body was natural, and had its Beginning of Dust, and so was subject...to be changed from its present Condition, his immortal

Soul having its Being in a Piece of Clay, was become subject through Temptation to be transmuted from its present created Glory also. (*Divine Looking-Glass* 161)

Although Reeve and Muggleton argue elsewhere that the human body and spirit are indivisible, their contradictory primordial dualism allows them to place the blame for the fall on the corrupting influence of the body's physical substance. Blake, as we shall see, represents this kind of argument as a specious construction of "Priesthood," part of the project of "abstraction" which he criticizes in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (11; E38).

In more mainstream seventeenth- and eighteenth-century theology, the notion that material nature had "fallen" as a result of humanity's free and willful disobedience of God is much more common than the antinomian notion that the Earth's constitutive matter, being primordially separate from God, is radically evil. Milton's theology is a case in point. In Book Five of *Paradise Lost*, for example, Raphael tells Adam that "All things proceed...[from] one first matter" (5.470-73). This is the doctrine of Creation *ex Deo*, for the "one first matter" to which Raphael refers is an efflux or emanation from Deity.¹⁰ Milton's monism is ultimately heretical, for it posits a substantial God (a God who literally "fill[s] / Infinitude" [7.168-69]); however, such a monistic cosmogony is crucial to Milton's theodical project of "justify[ing] the ways of God to men" (1.26), for it guarantees both God's omnipotence *and* the goodness of his created works (Danielson 38; Hill 326).

The originary goodness of God's creation in Milton does not, however, guarantee the ultimate redemption of created beings. As Raphael warns Adam, "All things proceed [from God], and up to him return, / *If not depraved from good*" (5.470-71; emphasis added). J. H. Adamson interprets this proposition in light of Milton's belief that, once matter had emanated from God, it became, like humanity, "mutable and therefore subject

to taint" (87). And yet, according to Milton's theology, created natural objects do not share the same degree of prelapsarian goodness: Milton's representation of Edenic paradise seems to involve, from the beginning, two kinds of nature, one more perfect than the other. In *Paradise Lost*, for example, Milton opposes the "goodl[y]," "gay," "lovely" "landscape" of the human-tended Edenic garden (4.146-53) to the "grotesque and wild" tracts of land (4.135-36) surrounding and enclosing this paradisiacal setting. Whereas the Edenic environment is a well-ordered one containing "circling row[s]" of productive fruit trees (4.146), the tangled "wilderness," with its untended growth, "perplexe[s] / All path of man or beast" (4.176-77). The Miltonic world of primordial nature is only truly redeemed, it seems, when it is occupied and tended by Man, who, as the poet tells us, has "the regard of heaven on all his ways." And this heaven, Milton plainly states, "takes no account" of the doings of "other animals" (4.620-22).

Blake occasionally follows Milton and the writers of Scripture by using the metaphor of the "wilderness" to describe that which perplexes human spiritual progress.¹¹ But his own cosmology--despite its thoroughly anthropocentric character (which I shall examine below)--is one which questions the exclusive rights of humans to God's regard and salvation. In Blake's highly interrelational universe, for example, "A Robin Red breast in a Cage / Puts all Heaven in a Rage" (AI 5-6; E490). Or, as Blake characterizes this inclusive dynamic in *Jerusalem*, "not one sparrow can suffer, & the whole Universe not suffer also, / In all its Regions, & its Father & Saviour not pity and weep" (25:8-9; E170). This notion that wild animals have the regard of heaven may well be part of Blake's thoroughgoing critique of "Miltons Religion" (M 22:39; E117). But any critique of Miltonic conceptions of earthly nature must proceed with an awareness that Milton's philosophy of nature is occasionally inconsistent, and that, subsequently, his dualism of

humanity and nature is less than absolute. Consider, for example, the "songs" in *Paradise Lost*, which, as Adam declares, "Divide the night, and lift our thoughts to heaven" (4.688). It is interesting to note that these songs, which encourage human heavenly aspiration, issue from "the steep / Of echoing hill or thicket" (4.680-81). If we recall Milton's earlier reference to the "steep savage hill" with its impenetrable thickets (4.172-77), we must concede that the songs to which Adam refers issue from the untended wilderness rather than from the domesticated Edenic garden. Later in the poem, moreover, after portraying an Edenic world of breathing flowers, Milton declares that "all things that breathe, / ...send up silent praise" (9.193-95). These passages render problematic Milton's earlier claim that only humans have "the regard of heaven" (4.620-22), for, in Milton's theology, a creature's ability to acknowledge the Creator (something Satan cannot do) provides substantial proof of its goodness (Schwartz 22). Still, Milton hesitates to attribute an *inherent* goodness to the natural world (whether wild or Edenic), using articulate language as the criterion for a continued ethical separation of humanity and nature. Nature may sing and even praise God, but the full potential of these acts is fulfilled only when Adam and Eve join their own "vocal worship to the choir / Of creatures wanting voice" (9.198-99). In these lines, Milton attributes language to non-human entities (by calling nature a "choir"), only to take it away again (by declaring that nature's choir "want[s] voice"). Nature may sing, in other words, but its song lacks the significance of the redemptive Logos.

In the ensuing chapters, I shall examine the environmental implications of Blakean parallels to this kind of linguistic predicament. In *The Book of Thel*, for example, Blake attributes voice to such non-human entities as a Lilly, a Cloud, and a Clod of Clay, all of whom speak, in various ways, of their relationship to a God "who

smiles on all" creatures (1:19; E4), whether they occupy lofty or "lowly" (5:1; E5) places in the universal hierarchy. When we understand, however, that Thel is actually projecting her own human voice onto these animals, colouring their utterances with the ideological discourses that constitute her own subjective makeup, Blake's distrust for human notions concerning the capacity of the non-human world to signify becomes sharply apparent. But this distrust need not imply a devaluation of nature as such, for it is based on a problem of *human* interpretive practice. As I shall demonstrate in my discussion of *Milton* in Chapter Three, Blake is willing to attribute even the highest linguistic capacity --the inspirational faculty of prophecy--to non-human entities, declaring that "Trees on mountains" speak "instructive words to the sons / Of men" (M 26:7-10; E123). The major linguistic problem for Blake is that humans, in their present fallen condition, are unequipped to understand these utterances. And so, whereas Milton tends to deny nature an articulate voice (ensuring a firm conceptual separation of humanity and nature), Blake, by contrast, denies humanity an understanding of *nature's* articulate voice. In both cases, the result is similar: there is a radical disjunction between, and separation of, human and non-human entities. But, whereas in *Paradise Lost* nature's redemption depends on human presence, in the above-quoted passage from *Milton* the salvation of *humanity* is partially contingent upon the human ability to apprehend the meaning of nature's own "instructive words." By considering Blake's representations of nature and natural signification in *The Book of Thel* and in *Milton* from the "materially engaged" perspective of an ecological criticism, Chapters Two and Three will explore the environmental implications of Blake's own linguistic human/nature divide.

The question whether Milton's primordial nature is good or evil is, as we have seen, a complex and difficult one to answer. One thing of which we may be certain,

however, is that the "fall of Man" in Milton's work also entails the fall of nature, as it does in Blake's mythology. In the postlapsarian setting of *Paradise Regained*, for example, Milton's Satan, having successfully tempted humankind in Eden, has gone on to "posses[s]" "This Universe" (1.49), effectually claiming the Earth as his own "fair empire" (1.63). Satan is so entirely confident of his earthly and natural dominion that he believes he can conquer Christ merely by removing him from human society and "exercis[ing] him in the wilderness" (1.156). Part of this exercise would involve the ingestion of natural food: the banquet Satan offers the Saviour by way of temptation is one, or so he claims, that "Nature" "hath purveyed / From all the elements" (2.333-4). The material danger of this fallen and "possessed" elemental banquet is implicit in Satan's address to his subordinate "Demonian spirits," for they are themselves the elemental "Powers of fire, air, water, and earth beneath" (2.122-24).

In Blake's mythology, Albion's fall is also connected to Satanic temptation, carrying consequences for the material world similar to those of the human fall in *Paradise Lost*. In *Jerusalem*, for example, the Satanic "Reactor" "hath compell'd Albion to become a Punisher" and, as a result, "hath possess'd / Himself of Albions Forests & Wilds!" (43/29: 16-17; E191). And in *Milton*, Satan's possession of nature is every bit as complete as it is in *Paradise Regained*: we are told that "all the Living Creatures of the Four Elements...in the aggregate are *named* Satan / And Rahab" (31:17-19; E130; emphasis added). Indeed, from the perspective of an environmental politics, it is possible to argue that Blake's association of Satan with elemental nature is even more insidious than Milton's, for Blake's Satan is not simply the colonizer or usurper of an earthly "Empire"; he is, rather, nature "in the aggregate," in other words, the whole of nature itself. But we must not proceed too quickly with this line of argumentation, for the

reference in this passage to the performative act of naming (a ubiquitous theme in Blake) highlights the crucial difference in Blake's writing between the proposition that nature is indeed fallen and the notion that institutionalized discourse plays a central role in the *construction* of a fallen nature. Although Blake flirts in his poetry with the idea that nature is fallen, he is simultaneously uncomfortable with the idea, for he sees it as potentially complicitous with the perpetuation of the institution of "Priesthood," which sets itself up as the ultimate remedy to postlapsarian creation by constructing and authorizing its own system of *transcendental* salvation. Indeed, obsessed as he is with questions of law and moral virtue, Blake's Satanic "Reactor" is himself the highest priest in the land.

Paradise Regained solves the dilemma of life in our fallen world by advocating its ultimate transcendence. Christ's behaviour in this brief epic, if not his verbal justifications for it, exemplify such a solution. When Christ righteously refuses Satan's offer of elemental nourishment from the Satanic "spirits of air, and woods, and springs"--spirits who ostensibly come to "acknowledge" him as Lord and pay him "homage" (2.374-76)--he does so with the following justification: "Shall I receive by gift what of my own. / When and where likes me best, I can command?" (2.381-82). Christ's rhetorical question makes it plain that Satan has *usurped* control of nature from Christ's own rightful command, suggesting that fallen nature, like fallen humanity, is indeed redeemable. This implicit possibility of nature's redemption is not, however, played out in the ensuing drama of the poem. After his triumphant defeat of the Satanic tempter, for example, Christ chooses to command in the wilderness not the bounty of nature but a *supernatural* banquet, "A table of celestial food, divine, / Ambrosial, fruits fetched from the tree of life, / And from the fount of life ambrosial drink" (4.588-90). Moreover, at the

end of *Paradise Regained*, choirs of angels tell Christ that "A fairer Paradise is founded now / For Adam and his chosen sons, whom thou / A saviour art come down to reinstall" (4.613-15). Although Christ comes "down" to earth to "reinstall" lost paradise, the paradise regained by his act is of questionable ontology: paradise may be "founded now," in the temporal present, but it is spatially manifest not on earth but in Milton's distant and abstract realm of heaven. Having no material referentiality, in other words, the new paradise becomes a celestial image derived, one might say, *from* primordial nature, but functioning as a rhetorical and discursive device *to negate* that nature. For Blake, this unearthly, abstract spirituality was the most offensive aspect of "Miltons Religion" (M 22/24:39; E117). Hence, he counters such abstraction with a radical reinstatement of the human body (Frosch 160) and its material contexts.

Blake's reinstatement of the body is part of his famous critique of dualism and related ascetic practices, a critique that is not without important environmental implications. In practice, asceticism involves a profound psychic conversion, a righteous disavowal of all "base" or material attachments in order to gain "spiritual" knowledge of God. In other words, under the influence of negative theology, the penitent understands that the world is not God, and that God, being "wholly *other* than any being we [can] know by immediate perception or intuition" (Hay 154), can only be "known" via a "turn" away from the things of this world--and then by turning away from the desire implicit in that "turn."¹² From this standpoint, the penitential subject's conversion is understood to involve a profound exercise of free will. A radical critique of dualistic practice, however, would see this notion of subjective free will as illusory, considering ascetic doctrine rather in terms of what Judith Butler has called "a foreclosure that structures the forms that any attachment may assume." In short, institutionally-sanctioned dualism entails the

instantiation of "a regulatory ideal...according to which certain forms of love become possible and others, impossible" (*Psychic Life* 24, 25). And, from an environmental standpoint, the orthodox construction and privileging of the soul as spirit without matter entails a *founding* psychic prohibition of love not only for the human body, but for the material world that is its dwelling-place or *oikos*.

Blake, an antinomian opponent of the moral Law and its prohibitions (especially those prohibitions which take the subtle and insidious form of internalized "mind-forg'd manacles" [SIE E27]), sees the dualism underpinning ascetic practice as an insidious error. For Blake, dualism involves the institutionalized formulation of "a system" which "enslav[es] the vulgar by attempting to realize or abstract...mental deities from their objects" (MHH 11: E38). Blake combats this erroneous and oppressive separation of "mental deities" (i.e., souls) and "objects" (i.e., material bodies) by arguing that "Man has no Body distinct from his Soul for that call'd Body is a portion of Soul discern'd by the five Senses" (MHH 4: E34). Elsewhere, Blake argues similarly that "A Spirit and a Vision are not, as the modern philosophy supposes, a cloudy vapour or a nothing" (E541). In each of these cases, Blake's thinking is in line with the antinomian theology of John Reeve, who argues, first, that the soul and body "are both of one nature, and so both but one Creature," and, second, that "the spirit is nothing at all without a body, and a body is nothing at all without a spirit; neither of them can live or have a being without the other" (*Transcendent* 42, 44). On the surface, it appears that the philosophies of both Blake and Reeve could provide foundations upon which to construct an ethics of respect for the body and its physicality, perhaps even for the corporeality of non-human nature. But, as we have seen, the Muggletonian affirmation of the body is foreclosed by a cosmogonic vision founded upon a primordial dualism of spirit and matter. Hence,

Reeve's "body" is in fact *form*, what he refers to as "a spirituall body" rather than a body of clay (14). A similar problem is evident in Blake. For if a "Spirit and a Vision" are not "a nothing," neither are they substantial: "they are organized and minutely articulated *beyond* all that the mortal and perishing nature can produce" (E541; emphasis added). It would certainly be problematic to deny that Blake's "beyond" points toward some realm of the supernatural.

But Blake's critique of dualistic abstraction, despite its troublesome transcendental underpinnings, prioritizes the role of bodily experience to the apprehension of the transcendental. Consider, for example, the opening quatrain to "Auguries of Innocence":

To see a World in a Grain of Sand
And a Heaven in a Wild Flower
Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand
And Eternity in an hour[.] (E490)

With these lines Blake harnesses highly abstract, metaphysical concepts ("World" and "Heaven," "Infinity" and "Eternity") to human experience in material nature. He represents spatial "Infinity" as something that must be grasped in the human hand, thus advocating a necessary connection between metaphysical "reality" and the body's felt experience in the natural world. Similarly, "Eternity" is to be sought *within* the human experience of time--and not within the relative abstraction of a lifetime, but in the more easily apprehensible (because mundane) experience of "an hour." In Blake's view, the seeker after truth, rather than turning away from nature and the body, must seek salvation (i.e., "Heaven") in the simplest *natural* objects, in such minute particulars as individual wild flowers and grains of sand;¹³ for such particulars provide "the ultimate material starting points of [Blake's] visions" (Erdman, "Historical Approach" 22).

Blake's affirmation of bodily experience in nature also informs his conception of the proper way for humans to approach or know God. Since Blake's understanding of the

relationship between humanity and spirit contains interesting parallels to the antinomian theology of Reeve and Muggleton, it will be helpful first to consider the views of the latter, who argue on epistemological grounds against the idea of God as a formless Spirit. "If the Creator should be an infinite formless spirit, as some Men vainly imagine...it were impossible for any Spirit of Man or Angel to be made capable of fixing his Understanding upon any such spiritual Creator" (*Divine Looking-Glass* 4). On an allegorical level, Blake says much the same thing when, in his annotations to Swedenborg, he declares: "Think of a white cloud. as being holy you cannot love it but think of a holy man within the cloud love springs up in your thought. for to think of holiness distinct from man is impossible to the affections. Thought alone can make monsters. but the affections cannot" (E603). While the Muggletonian God is not "a formless Spirit," its human corporeal "form or likeness" (Reeve, *Transcendent* 14) is not substantial but ultimately abstract, a "spirituall body." Blake retains in his philosophy a similar notion of a spiritual body, but his allegorizing of Spirit as a mundane natural phenomenon--a cloud--is by no means insignificant. For Blake, in short, the logic of a Reeve or a Muggleton must itself be brought, as it were, down to earth. It is as if the antinomian "Creator" or "Spirit," whether formless or otherwise, is already, in Blake's view, too abstract to be grasped by the human understanding. In Blake's allegory, as we shall see in the pages ahead, there is a subtle, if often embattled, sense that human understanding requires a grounding in proximate nature even to *begin* to think of Spirit and related concepts like holiness. Indeed, as far as Blake is concerned, "it is *impossible to think* without images of somewhat on this earth" (Anno. Lavater E590; emphasis added).

For similar reasons Blake's vision of the New Jerusalem is also of an apprehensible, material character. In contrast to St. Paul, who opposes the earthly, fallen Jerusalem to an ideal "Jerusalem which is above" (Galatians 4:25-26), Blake chooses to represent the heavenly city not only as earthly, but as situated in the land of his own nation. For Robert Southey, *Jerusalem* is a failure partly because of what he saw as Blake's "perfectly mad" notion that "Oxford Street is in Jerusalem" (Bentley, *Blake Records* 229). But, for reasons both social and environmental, there is sound method in Blake's ostensible madness. If Blake, in the spirit of epic, is writing for his nation (Curran, *Poetic Form* 159), he must concretize what would otherwise remain absolutely distant and abstract. Just as humans cannot love a God understood as a spirituous vapour but must clothe this ideal in a human corporeal form, they must also attribute a familiar corporeality to the New Jerusalem, or the ideal of the holy city will be unimaginable and, hence, unattainable. Blake solves this problem by indigenizing the New Jerusalem.

On the one hand, this indigenization of the holy city runs the danger of effacing the historical Jerusalem's cultural specificity by denying its geographical reality and thus colonizing its difference. History has shown, however, that, from a Eurocentric standpoint, the international idealization of the historical Jerusalem inevitably gives rise to the "holy Crusade" and its attendant violence. Blake shares with antinomian divines like Reeve and Muggleton a repugnance for physical violence. The use of the "Sword of Steel" (as distinguished from the intellectual or "spiritual sword" [J 9:18; E152]) cannot be justified under any circumstance, since to kill humans is to slay "the Image of God" (Reeve, *Divine Looking-Glass* 9-10) or what Blake similarly calls "The Divine Image" (E12).

On a philosophical level, on the other hand, Jerusalem's English locus in Blake's mythology grounds its ideality as the heavenly city in the materiality of a specific, local geography, a geography that Blake's contemporary readers would have known most intimately. By bringing Jerusalem home to his own nation, Blake's text articulates a kind of bioregionalism, an environmentalist philosophy advocating the need for human society "to be more conscious of its locale, or regions, or life-place (thus 'bioregion')" (Plant 132). Suddenly, for the sympathetic reader of *Jerusalem*, contemporary Oxford Street, a muddy thoroughfare whose intersecting lanes and alleys were "no more than repositories of ordure and offal" (Ackroyd 31), is the *ultimate* reality. And if Oxford Street is a dirty, noisy, and unpleasant place, then it is up to its inhabitants to change it for the better. If English people are to attain the *heavenly* city, in other words, they must not utter empty prayers for transcendental displacement *out* of this realm of urban chaos and into a distant realm of abstract ideality. Rather, they must focus their attention and energies on transforming their immediate reality (see Morton 27, 31), since active concentration on local reality is the only way the English people can "buil[d] Jerusalem, / In Englands green & pleasant Land" (M 1:16; E96).

IV. The Problem of Life

Jerusalem may be Blake's holy city, but the property of "holiness" extends far beyond the borders of this city in Blake's imaginative vision of the cosmos. Indeed, as Blake declares in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, "every thing that lives is Holy" (25; E45). But, before we can define what the adjective "Holy" means in Blake's vocabulary, we would do well to ask what he means by the substantive "every thing that lives?" How, in short, does Blake define "*life*"? Interestingly, despite the centrality of this term and its

cognates ("alive," "live," "living," etc.) in the Blakean canon,¹⁴ Blake's critics have rarely ventured to offer a definition of Blakean life. Underlying this critical omission, perhaps, is the assumption that life is an unchanging given--that it was the same in Blake's time as it has always been in every era, and that we all *know* what it is. So seemingly self-evident is Blake's definition of "life," for example, that S. Foster Damon's monumental *Blake Dictionary* does not even list it as a term. But *is* life--and especially Blakean life--really such a transparent phenomenon?

Hardly. Life, as Lyall Watson has remarked, "is impossible to define. Many have tried drawing up lists of essential characteristics like growth, metabolism, movement and reproduction--only to stumble over exceptions" (22). And the exceptions are, as it were, substantial. The problems attending a definitive understanding of life have implications not only for the idealistic and conceptual pursuits of speculative philosophy but also for the empirically grounded research of the cutting-edge "hard sciences." In recent years, for example, one of the major problems confronting NASA's massively expensive search for extra-terrestrial life has been the very question "What is life, and how should it be recognized?" (Lovelock 2).

Closer to home, in Blake studies, we may attempt to define life by proceeding deductively. One thing we can know with relative certainty is that Blake's understanding of life involves a polemical response to institutionalized Christianity, whose rhetoric of dualism attacks the "pagan" notion of an animate universe by locating life in an abstract and hyper-hygienic realm of spirit. We may also read Blakean life as a response to institutionalized science, whose rhetoric of objectivity attacks animism and Christian anthropomorphism by postulating a cosmos comprised of pure, lifeless matter.

The eighteenth-century animistic and panvitalistic philosophies with which Blake was familiar were largely rooted in the Greek philosophical tradition. The Stoics and Platonists, as Bishop Berkeley put it, saw life as "infused throughout all things." And this infusion was "an inward principle, animal spirit, or natural life, producing and forming within as art doth without, regulating, moderating, and reconciling the various notions, qualities, and parts of the mundane system" (qtd. in Worster 81). Although Blake explicitly voices his distaste for the philosophy of the ancient Greeks,¹⁵ he does not entirely reject their cosmology. In his own mythology, he adopts and adapts the organic viewpoints of panvitalism and hylozoism,¹⁶ for they provide him with a model of universal existence stressing the interrelationship of all entities as parts of a unified organism. As Blake writes in *The Book of Thel*, "every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself" (3:26-7; E5). If this quotation, the implications of which we shall examine closely in Chapter Two, does not define Blakean life as such, it certainly delineates Blake's understanding of its principal dynamic. For Blake's cosmological vision accords with Hans Jonas's view that "life is essentially relationship; and relation as such implies 'transcendence,' a going-beyond-itself on the part of that which entertains the relation" (4).

But Jonas's notion of "transcendence" must not be confused with Christian notions of the same, for, in the latter tradition, transcendence was seen as a "going beyond" the material world, the world embodying the interrelational dynamic of which Jonas speaks. By privileging soul over body, Christianity gradually adopted the Orphic formula "*Soma--sema*, the body--a tomb" (Jonas 13), thus relegating life out of this world and into the abstract realm of spirit. Such a viewpoint is not at odds with the antinomian doctrine of the Muggletonians, which posits matter as "eternall death...void of all spirit or

life" (Reeve, *Transcendent* 12)--at least until the Creator takes it upon himself to "compose dead Matter into compleat living Forms" (Reeve, *Divine Looking-Glass* 34). In theologies privileging Spirit as the fundamental locus of life, the soul becomes an "alien injection into what is otherwise unrelated to life" and the universe itself is "formed after the mystery of the corpse" (Jonas 14, 15). In his epic mythology, Blake opposes this ontology of death by positing Albion, the human form divine, as the living, organic structure of the cosmos. Indeed, the myth of Albion's fall in *Jerusalem* into "Eternal Death"--his virtual transformation into a corpse--and the ultimate resurrection and renovation of his body, enables Blake to articulate a profound critique of a dualistic Christian religion which negates life under the insidious guise of celebrating it.

But Blake is fighting his philosophical battle on two epistemic fronts (Lussier 393-4, 405), and his hylozoism is also a response to mainstream Enlightenment science. While pre-modern panvitalism viewed life as the universal norm and death as its anomalous exception, Enlightenment science reversed this formula, positing a vast and lifeless universe in which death was the norm and life the anomaly. In the words of Jonas, the physical sciences "spread over the conception of all existence an ontology whose model entity was pure matter, stripped of all features of life" (9). The model of matter to which Jonas refers privileges extension and motion, denying scientific significance to the so-called "secondary characteristics," those aspects of the human experience of natural phenomena that were not mathematically quantifiable and manipulable. This scientific "suppression of the secondary--or the suppression of the subjective *as the secondary*" (Black 136)--is part of the Enlightenment's thoroughgoing epistemological attack on anthropomorphic paradigms of knowledge, which constructed a universe based on a projection of human self-experience (or what Rousseau calls the

"perception of our action upon other bodies" [*Émile* 262]). But, as Jonas has pointed out in his discussion of Hume's philosophy, this attack, taken to its logical and self-consistent conclusion, had to deny even "the explanatory concept of force as anthropomorphic, and as unverifiable by a mere measuring account of extensity" (36). According to Hume, in other words, even the efficient causation of Newtonian mechanism was derived from the human bodily intuition of cause and effect.

The Enlightenment's relentless attack on human modes of apprehension has had grave implications for our understanding of nature and human-nature relations. As Jonas points out, "*without* the body and its elementary self-experience, without this 'whence' of our most general, all-encompassing extrapolation into the whole of reality, there could be no idea whatever of force and action in the world and thus of a dynamic connection of all things: no idea, in short, of any 'nature' at all" (24). To rephrase Jonas's insight for ecocritical purposes, one might say that the "human body and its elementary self-experience" provide the very ground for ecological formulations of the dynamic interconnectedness of "every thing that lives." Blake's mythology embodies a profound awareness of this concern: it combats the Enlightenment critique of anthropomorphism and its attendant negation of bodily experience by constructing a universe that is, on one level, bodily experience itself--the complex physiological and psychological life-experience of the giant Albion.

Blake's human-centred cosmology is analogous to, perhaps even inspired by, Emanuel Swedenborg's notion that the "three Heavens" comprising the cosmos also compose, in the aggregate, a "Grand Man." Swedenborg's anthropomorphic vision is based on the ancient notion that there exists a profound interrelationship between the microcosm and the macrocosm. By tracing a system of correspondences between finite

particulars and larger wholes, Swedenborg constructs an organic holism that offers a philosophical alternative to mechanistic reductionism.¹⁷ But the important implications of Blake's own cosmic anthropomorphism can also be helpfully clarified by considering other contemporary analogies. In the seventeenth century, for example, Henry More contended that there was "a Soul of the World, or Spirit of Nature," an active force that he called the *Anima Mundi* (qtd. in Worster 42). Although many of Blake's English contemporaries used More's organicism to combat the ontological claims of mechanistic science (Worster 42), the concept of the *Anima Mundi* would have been distasteful to Blake for reasons I have already discussed: the idea of a "Soul of the World, or Spirit of Nature" was far too abstract to be useful to him, if only because the categories of "World" and "Nature" are themselves too vast to be apprehensible to the human mind. Whether Blake was aware of it or not, his notion of Albion as both the "human form divine" and the vast form of nature resembles more closely the scientific hylozoism of James Hutton than the panvitalism of More. In a 1785 lecture to the Royal Society in Edinburgh, Hutton, the father of geology, argued that the proper analogue for geological study was animal physiology and that a significant parallel existed, for instance, between the cycling of the elements and the circulation of the blood (Lovelock viii). The major difference between Blake's vision and Hutton's is that Blake concretizes, in his mythology, the analogical terms supporting Hutton's argument. In other words, Blake sees natural objects and processes as *parts* of Albion's physiology; and it is this organic vision that enables him to imagine "every thing that lives" as profoundly interconnected and interdependent. In such an interrelational universe, indeed (as American environmentalist Aldo Leopold was aware), even the traditional distinction between the animate and the

inanimate becomes hollow (Nash 65), so that rocks, stones, and grains of sand may be understood as no less alive than organic entities.

In recent years, the notion that the world is alive has been resurrected in the scientific community via the research of J. E. Lovelock, who proposes, in his "Gaia hypothesis," that "the entire range of living matter on earth" can be "regarded as constituting a single living entity, capable of manipulating the Earth's atmosphere to suit its overall needs and endowed with faculties and powers far beyond those of its constitutive parts" (9). From a Blakean perspective, Lovelock's hylozoistic Gaia hypothesis is interesting precisely because of its "holism";¹⁸ by explaining the functioning of all earthly organisms in terms of the role they play in the larger workings of the biosphere as a whole, the Gaia hypothesis poses a significant challenge to the atomistic reductionism characterizing the traditional methodology of the physical sciences. Moreover, by attributing a kind of intentionality to the biosphere (Lovelock calls it "a self-regulating entity" [xii]), the Gaia hypothesis implicitly affirms a model of final causation over the external efficient causation of much Enlightenment mechanism. But Lovelock's hypothesis would likely have been unsatisfactory to Blake, because it locates life only within earthly nature, failing to extend the principle of organic vitalism beyond the confines of our planet's biosphere. In Blakean terms, this problem is largely an imaginative one, a problem involving the limit-setting "ratio" of cognitive reasoning. But, as E. E. Harris has argued, Lovelock's privileging of the biosphere as the finite locus of life is insupportable on scientific grounds as well, for the earth's biosphere is itself subject to relational influences that are extra-terrestrial:

The earth cannot be treated in isolation from the solar system, if only because its own motion and physical state depend almost totally on the sun's gravity and energy outflow. Nor can the solar system be separated from the galaxy, or the galaxy from the rest of the universe. If, as the physicists assure us, the universe is

one system...then we must assume that there is ultimately only one universal morphic field. (98)

In Blake's mythology, the ultimate morphic field, of which the Earth is a crucial part (but by no means a final whole), is Albion, the divine humanity.

It is in this sense that we should perhaps try to understand Blake's doctrine of final causation. Properly speaking, final causation does not imply the causal influence of future events so much as "causation empowered by the ordering principle of an organized whole" (Harris 27). Accordingly, as Harris puts it, "a teleological explanation is one which explains the part in terms of the whole, and not *vice versa*. It is one for which the whole takes precedence, so that the explanatory principle is that which organizes the system" (27). In such a scenario, in other words, the mutual relations of a structure's parts "are governed by a principle of order or organization that pervades the entire structure" (17-18). In Blake's mythology--despite the emphasis on the necessary integrity of minute particulars which I discussed in my Introduction--Albion provides such an explanatory structural principle: his vast corporeality organizes the workings of the entire Blakean cosmos. Indeed, one might say that Albion exemplifies the process that E. O. Wilson has termed "mutualistic symbiosis," the biological scenario in which distinct "partners are melded into a single organism" (178) (as in the inglorious case, for example, of intestinal bacteria which help to support digestive processes in, and therefore the very lives of, larger animals). Since the Blakean universe is itself a giant organism, one might argue that Blake's Albion takes this concept of mutualistic symbiosis to its most radical and expansive extreme. In Blake's cosmic organizational scenario, in other words, virtually all things, as vital parts of Albion's giant body, are mutually interrelated, working together in infinitely various ways to comprise the complexity of Albion's multiplicitous but nonetheless individual being. Blake's reiterated notion that "every thing that lives is

Holy" (MHH E45; VDA 8:10, E51) might be conceived, from Albion's cosmic standpoint, as an affirmation of a vast (w)holism which sees all things as vitally interconnected and interdependent.

V. Blake's Poetics and Environmental Ethics

Blake's cosmology is unabashedly anthropomorphic. From the perspective of an ecological ethics, his foundational anthropomorphism (implicit in the organismic model of Albion) is problematic, for, like the concept of "environment" itself, anthropomorphism centres human experience while relegating the experience of non-human life-forms to the periphery of things, thus foreclosing the possibility of valuing non-human entities on their "own" terms. Much of Chapter Two will be devoted to an examination of this problem as it is articulated in *The Book of Thel*. For the moment, however, it will suffice to point out that anthropomorphic practice can take diverse forms, having diverse environmental and ethical implications. On the one hand, as David L. Clark has argued in a related discussion, "sentimentalizing anthropomorphisms make genuinely ethical thought...impossible, for, under the guise of a certain pathos, they peremptorily annihilate differences in the name of the (human) same" ("Last Kantian" 169). In his pastoral poetry, Blake often employs the pathetic fallacy in ways that sentimentalize nature and so colonize its difference (as, for example, in poems like the pastoral "Night," where Blake depicts the "lions ruddy eyes" as "flow[ing] with tears of gold" [lines 34-5; E14]). In his epic writing, however, Blake's pathetic fallacy, far from affirming a sentimental identification with nature, often highlights a sense of human-nature alienation. Consider, for instance, Blake's "Trees of Malice; Revenge; / And black Anxiety" (J 13:42-3; E137) and his "fierce Vegetation" where "The Oak frowns terrible"

(J 16:3-5: E159). Descriptions like these ones remain thoroughly anthropomorphic, for they take humanity as the very measure of nature, thus annihilating the sheer profundity of nature's difference. And yet, Blake's fearful anthropomorphisms suggest at least something of the alterity of non-human entities by figuring them as agents of potential menace. (This is significant in an age where all living things were being subjected to the most painstaking taxonomy as part of science's Baconian effort to bring all nature under human "dominion.") At any rate, by alternating between a sympathetic *identification* with the natural world and a fearful *alienation* from it (in his sentimentalizing and menacing anthropomorphisms, respectively), Blake's poetical practice helps to unsettle the complacency of our expectations regarding human-nature relations.

Blake's anthropomorphic cosmology--his radical centring of human experience in the Giant Albion--has played a crucial role in establishing and upholding the prevailing critical viewpoint that Blake's philosophy is antagonistic to nature. But, as Alexander Wilson has pointed out, anthropomorphism "can be a radical strategy in a culture like our own, where the frontier between the human and the non-human is well policed" (128). As we saw in the Introduction to this study, such philosophical policing of the human/non-human distinction can be seen in works like *Paradise Lost*, which sharply distinguishes human from non-human entities on the basis of language. Blake's organicism challenges mainstream Christian representations and valuations of nature by attacking the very conceptions of God and cosmic hierarchy invoked to authorize them. The contemporary Christian establishment would have been offended by Blake's cosmological privileging of the "human form divine," for such a structural anthropomorphism eradicates the distinction between humanity and divinity, thus doing away with the need for an institutionalized, priestly mediation between these terms.

Blake's foundational anthropomorphism also challenges the mechanistic underpinnings of Enlightenment Deism, for, rather than assuming the existence of God as an autonomous designer and Prime Mover existing *outside* the great cosmic machine, it presupposes, like all organic cosmologies, a God who cannot exist "apart from the nexus of relations that determine its reality" (Oelschlaeger 343-44). In either case, Blake's decentralization of cosmic authority implies a radical critique of traditional forms of hierarchy, a critique having important implications not only for human society and government, but for human-nature relations as well.

Consider, for example, the following passage from *Jerusalem*:

Cities

Are Men, fathers of multitudes, and Rivers & Mountins
Are also Men: every thing is Human. mighty! sublime!
In every bosom a Universe expands.... (34/38: 46-49; E180)

The argument that "every thing is Human," ubiquitous in Blake's canon, has important ethical consequences; for Christian morality, as epitomized in the Decalogue, concerns itself "exclusively with human-to-God and human-to-human relationships" (Nash 113). Blake's radical expansion of the category of humanity involves an emphatic questioning of this traditional exclusivity. Despite its anthropomorphism--or, rather, because of it--Blake's cosmology provides a firm conceptual foundation for a pragmatic environmental ethic, for if all nature is considered human, the Commandment "Thou shalt not kill" must necessarily be generalized far beyond a narrow conception of humanity, to include "every thing that lives." We witness something of this ethical dynamic at play, for example, in Blake's watercolour entitled "The Wood of Self-Murderers: The Harpies and the Suicides" (see figure 5). In this painting, Blake illustrates a passage from *The Inferno* (13.2-108), in which Dante tears a branch from a tree embodying Pier delle Vigne, a politician who committed suicide after falling out with his Emperor, Frederick II (Butlin

563). There can be no doubt that the painting gestures toward a harmful violation of human identity: its humanized trees, and the bird-human hybrids that perch in their upper branches, are clearly monstrous, functioning as iconographic indictments of the act of suicide and its violent negation of the divine human form. And yet, if we consider "The Wood of the Self-Murderers" in light of Blake's human cosmology, we can understand that Dante's assault on the tree is an inexcusable response to his encounter with *delle Vigne*. One of the most striking things about "The Wood of the Self-Murderers" is that the tree embodying *delle Vigne* bleeds profusely as a result of Dante's act. In the original watercolour, which hangs in the Tate Gallery, the blood that issues from the broken branch is offset against the forest background in dramatic red, continually drawing the viewer's attention to the centre of the painting and to Dante's act of violence. Interpreted in the context of Blake's human organicism, which sees *all* things as particulars of the divine humanity, Dante's mutilation of this vegetated form is more than a "punish[ing of] the already punishd" (J 45/31:34; E194): it is an act of *self*-mutilation. Indeed, if the aggressive Dante is seen as attempting to murder the humanized tree, he must also be seen as committing precisely what the painting's title designates: an act of "self-murder" or "suicide."

Blake did not formulate this kind of ethical "argument" in a philosophical vacuum: the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries witnessed numerous debates concerning what we have since come to call environmental ethics. Although neo-Platonists like Thomas Taylor had scorn for the idea of such an ethics (Taylor famously used the notion of the "Rights of Brutes" to parody Mary Wollstonecraft's groundbreaking argument for the "Rights of Women"), writers like Jeremy Bentham and John Lawrence spoke very much in support of animal rights. Bentham argued in 1789, for

example, that "the day *may* come when the rest of the animal creation may acquire those rights which never could have been withholden from them [but] by the hand of tyranny" (qtd. in Buell 202). Writing seven years later, Lawrence spoke with a greater sense of urgency, arguing not for the gradual evolution and distant realization of animal rights, but for animals' inherent possession of what he called "certain natural and unalienable rights" (Lawrence 84). Lawrence proposed, indeed, that "the Rights of Beasts be formally acknowledged by the state, and that a law be framed...to guard and protect [animals] from acts of flagrant and wanton cruelty, whether committed by their owners or others" (123).

The ethical arguments of Bentham and Lawrence, despite their importance to the history of animal rights, are, from a late twentieth-century eco-critical perspective, flawed for at least two crucial reasons. Bentham's ethics were grounded upon the utilitarian principle of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number." In an age that subscribed to the Cartesian notion that animals were automata, machine-like entities incapable of experiencing pleasure or pain, Bentham's argument for animal rights would have been difficult to support. for the notion of animal "happiness" would have been widely incomprehensible or at least subject to dispute. This is perhaps why Lawrence is careful to refute the Cartesian view of animality (82), going so far as to argue that "every living creature, is vivified and informed by a *soul*, or portion of intellectual element super-added" (78). But Lawrence's anti-Cartesian ethic is compromised by his notion that "man" must treat animals with humane kindness "in return for the benefit he derives from their services" (120). As E. O. Wilson has pointed out, use-value, despite its importance, "cannot form the whole foundation of an enduring environmental ethic. If a price can be put on something, that something can be devalued, sold, and discarded" (348). In his own poetic affirmations of what we might call animal rights, Blake does not argue on the

basis of pleasure, pain, or utility for the humane treatment of animals. Rather, he advocates such humane treatment on the basis of the "necessary interdependence of all things" in his organic universe (Schorer 98). In the interrelational universe Blake envisions, the abuse of any living thing is necessarily symptomatic not only of pathology on the part of the abuser (who cannot be entirely isolated as such), but also of a structural pathology in the larger, systemic whole.

Such a notion is clearly at odds with prevailing views of the implications of animal abuse in the late-seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. In *Some Thoughts Concerning Education* (1693), for example, John Locke declared that people "who delight in the Suffering and Destruction of Inferiour Creatures, will not...be very compassionate, or benign to those of their own kind" (qtd. in Nash 19). According to Locke's line of argumentation, children should be educated to respect animals not because animals are themselves worthy of human respect, but because cruelty against animals is ultimately harmful to humans and human society (Nash 19). At the end of the eighteenth century, arguments for the humane treatment of animals tended to be articulated on a similar logical basis. In general, the English movement supporting what John Lawrence called "the Rights of Beasts" understood cruelty against non-human creatures as a moral evil that harmed the *human* soul, especially the soul of the human animal abuser (Nash 24-25).

Considered in this context, Blake's declaration, in *Auguries of Innocence*,¹⁹ that "A dog starvd at his Masters Gate / Predicts the ruin of the State" (9-10; E490) can be understood as embodying a rather unprecedented approach to the topic of animal rights. According to the logic of this aphorism, the dog's abused condition signifies not the master's individual culpability--the "ruin" of his own individual, immortal soul--but the

culpability of the governmental structures that condone such cruelty by supporting a particular kind of anthropocentric system of legislated rights. This logic is especially interesting given the hesitancy of contemporary English lawmakers to legislate against "owner-caused cruelty to animals" (Nash 25). To quote eco-historian Roderick Nash, property, in the early nineteenth century, "remained too sacrosanct, too much a natural right in itself, to be challenged by [an assertion of] the natural rights of nonhuman beings" (25). In Blake's aphorism, however, the fact that the "starvd" dog belongs to a "Master" in no way excuses the human behaviour resulting in its abused condition. On the contrary, the dog takes on a strange agency, at odds with the notion of its subordinate status as an object of ownership, as the very consequence of its mistreatment: it actively "Predicts the ruin of the State" whose capitalist system of ownership allows such abuses to occur with impunity.

Blake's aphorism is radical even by the standards of the late-twentieth-century "deep ecological" movement. According to eco-philosopher J. Baird Callicott, the present-day "animal liberation" movement fails to articulate and practice a genuine environmental ethic precisely because it locates moral value atomistically in individual organisms. According to Callicott, a genuine environmental ethic is not atomistic but "holistic," for it values most highly "the good of the community as a whole" (qtd. in Nash 153), that is, the ecosystem in which individuals have their being. Similarly, although Blake speaks of a single "dog starvd at his Masters Gate," his concern is not atomistically limited to the welfare of the individual dog. By shifting the aphorism's focus from the individual dog and Master in the first line to the fate of the whole "State" in the second, Blake articulates an emphatic concern for what the dog's condition signifies about the

relationship between its abuse and the governmental structures which support such cruelty.

While the notion of animal rights tends to be based on legality, Blake tends in antinomian fashion to oppose law, favouring the concept of "Liberty" over the juridical and moral concepts of "Right and Duty" (J 22:11; E167). Hence, in contrast to John Lawrence, who argues that "unless you make legal and formal recognition of the Rights of Beasts, you cannot punish cruelty and aggression" (125), Blake's "environmental ethic" avoids, perhaps too idealistically, making such an appeal to legislative force. But this aspect of Blake's philosophy does not stop him from speaking of animals in terms of legality. "One Law for the Lion & Ox is Oppression" (E44), he declares in *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, implying on one level that there is a kind of oppressive government which does in fact extend itself to the animal kingdom.²⁰ This oppression may even involve, for Blake, the fact that animals have been used symbolically in poetic tradition to point toward explicitly anthropocentric concerns--like government itself. Blake's disdain for homogeneous rule ("One Law") suggests, perhaps, that the Law's main problem is its inability to acknowledge and respect the particular alterity of individual creatures and contexts, human or otherwise. Such respect would perhaps provide a basis for an environmental ethic based on "liberty," for, as I shall argue in the next chapter, in my discussion of Thel's treatment of such creatures in the Vales of Har, the best way to respect the rights of animals might involve an effort merely to let them "be"--or at least to imagine them as such from a respectful, relatively unintrusive distance.

This is not to downplay the importance in Blake's cosmology of the humanity of all things. As we have already seen, Blake's philosophy of creation is thoroughly and unabashedly anthropomorphic, since his discourse on non-human entities is inextricably

tied to notions of human identity. Such a philosophy would by no means ultimately accord with that of the present-day "deep ecologists," who argue that non-human entities must be cherished for their "intrinsic value," their value, that is, apart from "anthropocentric" motivations and concerns.²¹ For Blake, as I shall demonstrate in Chapter Two, *all* notions of value have their source in human thought, for ethical value is a distinctively human construction.

In attempting to delineate a Blakean environmental ethic, then, we would do well at this point to reconsider Blake's discourse on the cloud, discussed above: "Think of a white cloud. as being holy you cannot love it but think of a holy man within the cloud love springs up in your thought" (E603). For Blake, as I have argued, a certain kind of anthropomorphism *enables* our ability to conceive of the "holiness" of non-human entities, and thus to treat such entities with "love" and respect. By considering Blake's discourse on the cloud in light of his famous assertion that "every thing is Human" (J 34/38: 48; E180), we can begin to imagine a radical extension of the idea of "holiness" to all entities, human or otherwise. The potential respect for nature implicit in such a stance--for "[w]hat follows on the vision of the world as human is total responsibility" (Deen 219)--might offer a new perspective from which to consider the popular claims that Blake, an opponent of "tyranny in *all* its guises" (L. Clark 10; emphasis added), is "deeply concerned with the disruption and transformation of hegemonic discourses" (Mee *Dangerous* 10). Whereas Milton, Blake's most important poetic precursor, vows to work toward "the liberation of all human life from slavery" (Milton 323), Blake's radical humanism goes much further. An almost limitless expansion of the concept of liberty is apparent, for example, in the concluding lines to *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell's* "Song of Liberty," wherein Blake asserts that "every thing that lives is Holy" (25; E45).

If we consider this quotation in relation to Blake's assertion that "every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself" (BT 3:26-27; E5; Cf. VDA 8;10; E51), we can understand that holiness and relationality--the defining attributes of all Blakean "life"--provide the conceptual bases for an environmental ethic that "would respect otherness as part of a whole in which one participates" (Vogt 416). But, when we recall that "holiness" refers, etymologically, to that which is "healthy and intact" (Watson 21), we can recognize that Blake's concern for the relationality of an entity does not imply a negation of its particularity. Indeed, without a consistent focus on *particular* identity, as I shall argue in the next chapter, the concept of relationality can itself be insidious, for it can be deployed to justify and "naturalize" discursive interests such as institutionalized religion and patriarchal privilege.

Notes

1. Important exceptions are David Punter and, much more recently, Mark S. Lussier. Punter's 1981 essay, "Blake: 'Active Evil' and 'Passive Good,'" sees Blake's philosophy of nature as emphasizing the epistemological dilemma inherent in the relationship between a knowing subject and a nature which is "very possibly...forever unknowable." For Punter, Blake's insistent focus on the relationship between ideology and epistemology, and his resultant hesitancy to valorize nature and natural objects *as such*, demonstrates that Blake held "a far more sophisticated concept of nature than was common among English romantics" (12). Building upon Punter's insights in his 1996 essay "Blake's Deep Ecology," Mark Lussier opposes the "persistent attitude" that Blake detested nature by arguing that Blake's poetry enacts an "ethics of otherness" in which a "dialogical imperative [is] operative between an individual, visioning subject and a sentient, vibrant nature" ("Blake's Deep Ecology" 398, 402). I shall consider aspects of Blake's "environmental ethics" in the final section of this chapter.

2. The disdain for material nature that informs so much critical thinking on Blake is also perhaps due to the important influence on Romantic studies of critics like Geoffrey Hartman, who in the 1960s and 70s helped to construct a phenomenological Romanticism concerned not with the material realm but with the work of human consciousness.

3. By the time Wordsworth published *The Excursion* in 1814, the *Lyrical Ballads* had already gone into a fourth edition. Blake's contemporary reading audience was so small, by contrast, that between 1810 and 1815 he produced the only four extant individual copies of *Milton*, one of his self-professed masterworks.

4. See also Jean H. Hagstrum's essay entitled "William Blake Rejects the Enlightenment," especially page 142.

5. An "ecotone" is a liminal space in which two relatively distinct ecosystems meet, mingle, and differentiate themselves. I use the term here to signify the meeting of the human urban metropolis and the less-developed, relatively "green" pastoral countryside.

6. Referring to line 25 of Blake's lyric "The fields from Islington to Marybone" (J 27; E172), Erdman remarks that Blake "welcomed the 'golden builders' who were expanding London's suburbs" ("Historical Approach" 18). And yet, it is hard not to see at least some ambivalence in the stanza where Blake questions the presence of these builders, especially since Blake situates them "Near mournful ever-weeping Paddington / Standing above that mighty Ruin / Where Satan the first victory won" (J 27:25-8; E172).

7. A non-industrialized worker himself, Blake was an engraver and printmaker who had a keen awareness of the material basis of his art. He would likely have appreciated Milton's argument in *The Christian Doctrine* that the verb "to create," in its

Hebrew, Greek, and Latin forms, implies "to make *of something*" (305-6; emphasis added); for, as an engraver, Blake worked with concrete materials such as polished copper plates, upon which he carved channels (by graver, or using aqua fortis) for the ink. The fact that these channels were technically called furrows (Erdman, "Historical Approach" 24) enriches our speculations concerning Blake's use of the plow metaphor. Since he was, metaphorically speaking, a plowman himself, Blake's use of the metaphor may have been at some level self-reflexive. As an engraver, at any rate, how could he not have been struck by the material *basis* of his visionary art?

8. White himself recognizes an alternative vision of human-nature relations in Christian tradition when he proposes St. Francis of Assisi as "a patron saint for ecologists" (14).

9. In a general sense, antinomianism refers to the doctrine (embraced by such groups as the Muggletonians and the Ranters) that the coming of Jesus had rendered the moral law superfluous, so that the believer may obtain salvation via faith alone. That Blake was influenced by antinomian theology is generally accepted in Blake studies, although to differing degrees. A. L. Morton was the first critic to identify this influence, calling Blake, indeed, "the greatest English Antinomian" (37). More recently, critics like Iain McCalman (29) and E. P. Thompson (*Witness* 65-105) have argued for Blake's rather close acquaintance with Muggletonians and their doctrines. Thompson argues indeed that Blake's mother, Catherine Hermitage, may have come from a Muggletonian family, a circumstance that "would explain very satisfactorily the derivation of William Blake's antinomian vocabulary" (104). Jon Mee cautions, however, that antinomianism was alive and well in Blake's time "not...as a sect but as a tendency." For Mee, Blake's own antinomian tendencies are the product not of direct influence but "of a dialogue with the complex nexus of popular enthusiasm" ("Antinomian" 45, 55).

10. Milton bases his materialist doctrine upon the authority of 1 Corinthians 8:6 ("there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things") and Romans 11:36 ("For of him, and through him, and to him are all things") (Danielson 26, 29).

11. See, for example, *Jerusalem* 60:36 (E210) and 62:27 (E213).

12. For a discussion of the contradictions implicit in the doctrine of the *via negativa*, see, for example, my essay "The Devil of the Stairs: Negotiating the Turn in T. S. Eliot's *Ash-Wednesday*" (Hutchings, *passim*).

13. John Adlard points out that sand is a traditional Biblical image for infinity. In Hosea 1:10, for example, we are told that "the number of the children of Israel shall be as the sand of the sea, which cannot be measured nor numbered" (70). It is interesting to note that Blake, unlike Hosea, uses a single, minutely particular grain of sand (rather than an abstract expanse of the same substance) to invoke infinity.

14. According to *The Blake Concordance*, "life" is the forty-second most common word in Blake's poetic canon.

15. See, for example, the Preface to *Milton*, E95.

16. "Hylozoism" derives from the Greek terms *hylē* and *zōos*, meaning, respectively, "matter" and "alive" or "living." Thus, "hylozoism," like "panvitalism," refers to the doctrine that all created things are alive or have life.

17. See, for example, Schorer, page 96 and Paley, "A New Heaven," page 28.

18. For a brief but tantalizing discussion of the possibility of conducting "a Gaian reading" of Blake's work, see Lussier, "Blake's Deep Ecology," page 404.

19. *Auguries of Innocence* is a poem wherein Blake explicitly represents and forcefully criticizes the inhumane treatment of animals.

20. The objection may arise that Blake is speaking metaphorically here--that he is not concerned with lions or oxen at all. In Chapter Two I shall examine this aspect of Blake's animal symbolism in a close reading of the Eagle and Mole of "THEL's *Motto*." It is my contention that Blake employs his animal symbols in a highly self-reflexive manner, so that, despite their human metaphorical valence, they retain something of their non-human referentiality.

21. For a trenchant, if perhaps overly unsympathetic, critique of this aspect of "deep ecological" philosophy, see Luc Ferry, pages 59-90.

CHAPTER TWO

Anthropocentrism, Nature's Economy, and *The Book of Thel*

I. Anthropomorphism and Critical Practice

For critics of William Blake's *The Book of Thel* (1789), the Eagle and Mole of "Thel's Motto" have represented virtually anything and everything but--dare I say it?--eagles and moles. Among other things, these creatures of the Blakean sky and pit have been seen, respectively, as symbols of objective versus subjective modes of knowing (Levinson 291); sight versus touch (Johnson, "Beulah" 263); human poetic, prophetic, and inspirational insight versus the animal blindness of natural religion (Pearce 34); imaginative experience versus physical experience (Beer 200); divine or higher innocence versus regenerative experience (Tarr 193)--and the list goes on. As far as I am aware, only Gerda S. Norvig has discussed these complex symbols in terms that invite a consideration of the non-human entities for which they are named: *Thel's* Eagle and Mole. Norvig remarks, refer to "animals appropriated by common parlance as epistemological emblems" (267). Norvig's insight encourages me to examine the *discursive* uses such linguistic "appropriation" of non-human entities serves in *The Book of Thel* and its criticism; for, as I hope to demonstrate in this chapter, Blake's poem is acutely concerned with the ways in which our understandings of such creatures are inevitably constructed in and produced by institutionalized discourse. For Blake, I shall argue, concepts associated with vegetation and animality have important implications not

only for human identity but also for the lives of the myriad creatures who enter discourse under the homogenizing signs of the "plant" and the "animal."

In my Introduction, I attempted to delineate some of the ways in which Blake shows us that our thinking of "natural" objects is always discursive, involving, at the most basic level, what Michel Foucault refers to as a "violence" or at least "a practice we impose" upon things (*Discourse on Language* 229). To this extent, it is virtually impossible, when we consider the existence of non-human creatures, to catch even a fleeting glimpse of something "other" than ourselves. And yet, the fact that many people today take for granted the notion that animals have certain inalienable rights--a state of affairs that would likely have exceeded the most optimistic hopes of an eighteenth-century animal rights advocate like John Lawrence¹--proves that the "practice[s] we impose" upon non-human creatures are not so rigid that they cannot be radically transformed. By attempting to imagine the needs of the non-human world, we can, it seems, open ourselves to very real change, change that can mitigate or at least temper the violence that accompanies our discursive practices.

In many ways, however, the institution of literary criticism--and of Blake criticism in particular--has remained closed to such change. Indeed, in present-day readings of *The Book of Thel's* symbolism, critical practice tends to involve a subtle but violent effacement of the plants and animals from which so many of the poem's linguistic figures derive their names. Consider, for instance, the following reading of the pasqueflower in *Thel's* frontispiece design (see figure 6). A. G. den Otter perceptively characterizes the bud of this flower as "slither[ing]" up to Thel's knee, thus symbolizing "the serpent in Paradise, tempting the Eve-like Thel" (646). Without denying the interpretive efficacy of this reading, one might point out that the pasqueflower's botanical

referent is revealingly absent in it. For den Otter, Blake's pasqueflower represents, in short, not its biological species, but a serpent--which in turn symbolizes, for most Blake scholars at least, all that is harmful to human existence. As an embodiment of evil, the pasqueflower would be well served if Thel were to treat it as Satan's offspring, exacting revenge for its act of temptation by crushing it beneath her righteous heel.²

The anti-natural violence implicit in den Otter's narrow reading of the pasqueflower's referentiality is subtly pervasive in *Thel* criticism. A remarkable instance of such violence occurs, for example, in Marjorie Levinson's insightful commentary on the Motto's opening lines, wherein Blake asks: "Does the Eagle know what is in the pit? / Or wilt thou go ask the Mole" (E3). In her answer to these questions, Levinson advocates a convergence of what she reads as the objective and subjective viewpoints symbolized by the Eagle and the Mole--and she does so in a particularly telling way: "The marriage between Eagle and Mole vision would occur when the Mole brought his sense of the Eagle into the Pit. The Pit, unable to contain this unstable potential, would *explode* and produce a finite third term: double-vision, seeing the divine in the human and the human in the divine" (292; emphasis added). If one chooses to read Blake's symbols in a manner that centres or privileges their animal referents, Levinson's interpretation of Thel's Motto becomes rather ominous. At the very least, the hypothetical and figurative "explosion" of the Mole's underground pit suggests something of the violence inhabiting anthropocentric notions of divinity ("the divine in the human and the human in the divine"); for, in the natural world, such a circumstance would do away with troublesome moles once and for all quite simply by killing them. One might ask at this point whether biological moles wish to alter or abandon their subterranean homes, or whether they envy the experience of eagles--but the question would be all-too-human, entailing its own anthropomorphic

violence. Perhaps the only thing that can be said of biological moles is that they remain, from the human standpoint, unknown and unknowable. To respect these animals in their otherness, then, would entail learning simply and unintrusively to let them "be"--itself perhaps an impossible task.

Admittedly, my reading of Levinson's reading is hardly fair, literalizing as it does the figurative terms of her ground-breaking argument. Nevertheless, I would like to propose that Blake deploys the Motto's Eagle/Mole dyad in part to query our devaluation of "lesser" animals, indeed of animals in general, in our symbolic practices.

Traditionally, Europeans have appropriated the eagle as a symbol of transcendence--valuing it not for its "Eagleness," of course, but for the cultural or conventional roles it can be made to assume. And these roles, far from being "innocent," tend to be regulatory in character. A brief discussion of Foucault's critique of "governmentality" will help to clarify this point. According to orthodox belief, the soul is that which ultimately guarantees human freedom from corporeal strife. Seen as an historical effect or as a figure of understanding, however, it is that aspect of human identity in which various ascetic denunciations of corporeality are traditionally carried out. To this extent, the soul functions politically as an instrument of corporeal subjection. Indeed, by inhabiting the human subject and bringing it to existence, the "soul" is "a factor in the mastery that power exercises over the body. The soul is the effect and instrument of a political anatomy; the soul is the prison of the body" (*Discipline* 30).

These claims may sound hyperbolic, but they are part of a thoroughgoing political critique in which traditional notions of human sovereignty are seen unwittingly to play into the hands of power. Crucially, the imprisonment of which Foucault speaks involves not external coercion so much as acts of individual conscience, for, as the

ostensible voice of the soul, the conscience makes possible a mode of *internalized* surveillance linking "total obedience, knowledge of oneself, and confession to someone else" in a panoptic structure Foucault refers to as "pastoral technology" ("Politics...Reason" 70, 63). And this technology of power is not without important environmental implications. Allied with the hygienic realm of spirit in a binary equation subordinating the earth as the source and locus of corporeality and its attendant corruption, the "soul" in orthodox thinking imprisons not only the individual body but external nature itself, subordinating nature to a humanity understood as the earthly locus of transcendent spirit. This subordination of the realm of nature brings us back to the question of *Thel's* Eagle. As an embodiment of spirit or spiritual desire, this symbol points at one level toward a process of linguistic appropriation in which its earthly, animal referent has been utterly negated in the name of the human Same.

But what if Blake, a rigorously self-reflexive poet and iconoclastic critic of orthodox religious practice, appropriates such creatures as eagles and moles in his symbolic practice in part to *question* the implications of animal symbolism?³ Often, following Robert Gleckner (*Piper* 162), Blake's readers have privileged eagle-symbolism over mole-symbolism by appealing to Blake's hellish proverb that "When thou seest an Eagle, thou seest a portion of Genius" (E37). What tends to be forgotten in this standard appeal is that the espied eagle is not Genius itself, but "a *portion* of Genius," a *part*, in other words, of a greater morphology of spirit; and there is no evidence in Blake's proverb that this larger *whole* excludes the pit, the mole, or any other earthly or heavenly particular. As for *Thel's* Mole, it is nothing new to suggest that this blind and immanent creature has a kind of experiential "*insight*" that the transcendental Eagle can never access, for although the Eagle can "see" where the Pit opens onto the landscape, it cannot

"know" what is "*in the pit*" (except perhaps that its occupant, once vulnerably exposed to the light of the sun, is a potential morsel of nourishment). Arguably, both the Eagle and the Mole of Thel's Motto have "experience" that is peculiarly and distinctively their own. And whatever this experience may comprise, the Motto, by providing us with questions rather than doctrinal assertions, does not explicitly favour any single experiential perspective (Rajan 240) and, hence, does not privilege or even necessarily "pit" either one of its represented animals over or against the other. But this insight provides only a starting point for an "ecocritical" reading of *The Book of Thel*. For the question remains: how can we as humans respect the irreducible alterity of non-human creatures like moles and eagles in our symbolic practices? Is it at all *possible* to "ask the Mole" or the Eagle what they "know" about earthly life without destroying their nests, without "exploding" their natural habitats, without the violence of anthropomorphic colonization?

When Blake asks in Thel's Motto whether "Wisdom" can "be put in a silver rod? / Or Love in a golden bowl" (E3), he explicitly raises the question of anthropomorphic projection: as we decide whether to answer these questions affirmatively, we must consider the ways in which human characteristics or valuations are indeed "put in" or projected upon human-made objects. But these questioning lines, following as they do the Motto's references to the Eagle and the Mole, also underscore by their ultimate positioning in the quatrain the human tendency to consider *non*-human creatures in terms of institutional categories, for they structurally connect the "natural" realm of wild eagles and moles to the discursive realm symbolized by "the state rod of office" and "the golden chalice of orthodox Christian ritual" (Mellor, *Blake's Human* 37). More important, however, these lines--these questions--*question* the relationship between institutional discourse (as a nexus of power and knowledge) and the animal inhabitants of non-human

nature. Among other things, they ask us: Can "Wisdom" or "Love" be expressed in a symbolic economy that subjugates natural entities? Is anthropocentrism a Wise or Loving stance? Does such a stance express infinite Love or an all-encompassing self-interest? (This is certainly a question we must ask of a poet who asserted, only a year prior to the etching of *Thel*, that "He who sees the Infinite in all things sees God. He who sees the Ratio only sees himself only" [*No Natural Religion* E3]). Among the numerous questions that the Motto's perplexing questions raise, Blake seems to be asking whether it is possible to consider objects in "Infinite" terms rather than in narrowly anthropocentric ones.

But such a question raises the larger problem of the overtly anthropocentric epistemology involved in Blake's philosophical privileging of the "Human Form Divine." Critics who have emphasized Blake's suspicion of nature at the expense of his desire to see "the Infinite in all things" are convinced that Blake dismisses the natural world as a possible source of redemptive knowledge or wisdom. From such a standpoint, Blake is an anthropomorphic Swedenborgian, endorsing, as Désirée Hirst would have it (206-7), Swedenborg's dictum that "God is very Man. In all the Heavens there is no other Idea of God, than that of a Man." But is Blake's 1788 annotation to this passage really an endorsement *per se*? Blake responds: "Man can have no idea of any thing greater than Man as a cup cannot contain more than its capaciousness But God is a man not because he is so perceivd by man but because he is the creator of man" (E603). Blake does not say here that "there is *no* other Idea of God, than that of a Man," but that "*Man* can have no [other] idea" of God. This assertion is much more equivocal than Swedenborg's. Indeed, Blake's response to Swedenborg invites a further qualifying question: If "God is a man...because he is the creator of man," does it not logically follow that God is, for

example, a lily, because he is the creator of the lily? Blake's notorious anthropocentrism comes undone at moments such as this one, revealing, I would argue, an understanding of creation that is not absolutely human-centred but open to radical perspectival shifting.⁴

It remains to be seen whether this kind of multi-perspectivism is applicable to a reading of *The Book of Thel* proper. Following the example of the Motto, one might rephrase this problem as a question: Can Thel learn anything worthwhile from the natural entities she encounters in the Vales of Har? One critic has recently argued that when Thel begins in the poem to realize that the Lilly, Cloud, and Clod of Clay know relatively little about "being a human being," she correctly doubts the relevance, applicability, and truth of the knowledge that they offer her (den Otter 644). Certainly, as I will argue presently, the knowledge that these natural entities articulate is not "their own" so much as Thel's own discursive projection. But this does not mean that Thel cannot gain important insights from her interaction with these beings. On the contrary, as I will attempt to demonstrate in the ensuing pages of this chapter, Thel's encounters with the Lilly, Cloud, and Clod of Clay offer her opportunities to examine carefully her implication in the *discourses* that constitute her subjective view of the world and her understanding of its non-human inhabitants.

II. Pastoralism, Instrumentalism, Hierarchy

Although Blake does not explicitly delineate Thel's social background, we know from the poem's outset that she is a shepherd--so we may surmise that she has been raised in the context of a particular mode of pastoral organization. One must emphasize, then, that the poem begins with an act of rebellion against that order: "The daughters of Mne Seraphim led round their sunny flocks. / All but the youngest; she in paleness sought the secret air"

(1:1-2). Thel's abandonment of the social totality represented by the "All" that designates her sisters is obviously a rejection of the duties that belong to her assigned station in a specific pastoral mode of existence. Mary Lynn Johnson has interpreted Thel's rebellion as an undutiful abandonment of responsible activity, an act which apparently justifies the rebuke that Thel is "locked in selfhood, in a hell of her own making" ("Beulah" 265).

More recently, however, critics have become somewhat less severe in their judgement of Thel's behaviour. Brian Wilkie sees Thel's rebellion as a part of her effort to break free from the confines of a "limited world" (52); and den Otter sees Thel's rejection of her duties as symptomatic of a failure on the part of the authority figures responsible for her education (637). According to these latter critical perspectives, there is something unsatisfactory or lacking not so much in Thel herself but in the pastoral world she inhabits.

If we entertain for a moment the possibility that Thel is rebelling in the opening lines of her "Book" against the same dull "round" (1:1) of a stultifying human pastoralism, her "paleness" of complexion need not necessarily signify a "diseased life" (Johnson, "Beulah" 264-5), but might be read as signifying her awareness, at least at a physiological level, of the profundity of her transgression against the pastoral regime. As Tilottama Rajan has argued, Blake suggests in his early work that the pastoral ideal "may itself be a political convention used to cloud our perception of social violence" (239). Is there evidence in *The Book of Thel* that its protagonist senses something of such violence? Certainly Thel's propensity to refer to herself in the third person (see 1:8, 2:11, 3:3) suggests a sense of alienation (Eaves, Intro. to BT 75) which is at odds with the peaceful and unified existence we often associate with the ideal of a pastoral golden age.⁵ Perhaps the "air" which Thel seeks--as if her customary life in Har has been suffocating

her--is "secret" (1:1-2) because a sense of communal interaction with her environment has never been available to her. What I am proposing, in short, is that Thel may be intuitively dissatisfied with the anthropocentric world view that Har's pastoral regime has bequeathed to her. If this is the case, perhaps she longs "To fade away" from a "mortal day" (1:3) defined not so much in terms of a contrast between immortal life and earthly mortality, but in terms of humanity itself; for, in a secondary adjectival sense, "mortal" can mean quite simply "relating to humanity" (*OED*). More particularly, Thel attempts to flee "*her* mortal day"--not the day of some abstract universal humanity, but, as the genitive construction specifies, the quotidian day of the pastoral economy which has heretofore comprised the ratio or "round" of Thel's own particular mode of life.

Thel's articulation of her rebellious desire repeatedly in terms of "gentleness" is telling in this regard: "Ah! gentle may I lay me down, and gentle rest my head. / And gentle sleep the sleep of death. and gentle hear the voice / Of him that walketh in the garden in the evening time" (1:12-14). Here, Thel's insistent repetition of the word "gentle" suggests an awareness that her life has involved a customary or habitual violence; and it implies, moreover, an emphatic desire to escape this violence which, among other effects, disrupts or prohibits her ability to access the Word--"the voice / Of him that walketh in the garden" (1:13-14). But an ominous note has already been sounded: Thel's characterization of her life in terms of transient phenomena--rainbow, cloud, reflection, shadows, dreams (1:8-10)--suggests that the violence affecting her is strangely insubstantial and thus difficult to understand or even to pinpoint with any kind of precision.

Perhaps this is why Thel has such difficulty in the poem escaping her troubling predicament. Levinson astutely observes that most of *The Book of Thel* consists of its

protagonist's "ventriloquism," inasmuch as the entities that Thel encounters "do no more than repeat Thel's own knowledge" (290, 288). This ventriloquism or linguistic projection stems, I would argue, not from a narcissistic compulsion on Thel's part, but from the *discursive* conditioning constituting Thel's view of the world (I shall discuss the nature of this conditioning in a moment). Moreover, Thel's anxious concern about what the inhabitants of Har think of her--implicit in her troubled belief that "*all* shall say, without a use this shining woman liv'd" (3:22; emphasis added)--demonstrates that she has internalized the surveillance of power, that she is subject to a regulative mode of *self*-surveillance that would contain her rebellion even prior to its outbreak. Hence, if the empirical gaze of Mne Seraphim--the senior shepherd or watcher in Thel's world--can no longer fall upon Thel when she escapes to the "river of Adona," Mne Seraphim can at least rest assured that Thel, the transgressive daughter, has already been taught to watch *herself*. Because her subjectivity is the product of a particular social milieu, Thel's experience of the natural entities she will encounter in the Vales of Har will be largely pre-determined, even though she has physically removed herself from the watchful presence of her Seraphic parent and obedient sisters.⁶

That Thel's subjective experience of Har is constituted discursively can be clarified by examining the question of utility as it is articulated in her poem, for Thel tends to consider non-human entities almost entirely in terms of their use-value in Har's human-centred pastoral economy. Recently, there has been some critical debate concerning whether it is Thel or the creatures of Har who are responsible for the poem's seeming obsession with this utilitarian ethic.⁷ Hence, it is necessary to emphasize that Thel explicitly introduces the theme of use into the poem when she characterizes the Lilly in terms of the various functions it performs in a distinctly human-oriented pastoral

economy.⁸ According to Thel, the Lilly is praiseworthy because it nourishes the lamb and cleanses its mouth of "all contagious taints," "purif[ies] the golden honey," and "Revives the milked cow, & tames the fire-breathing steed" (2:5-10). These are certainly valuable services (Mellor, *Blake's Human* 24), but they are aimed precisely at humans, the ultimate consumers of the products of a domesticated nature. In short, Thel characterizes the Lilly entirely in terms of a natural order which, to quote Raymond Williams, "is simply and decisively on its way to table" (30). With this instrumentalism in mind, one might read the Lilly's rather abrupt departure from the narrative as a kind of poetic response to the insult implicit in such a narrow anthropocentric vision. Because Thel cannot think of the Lilly as having any value exceeding that of its practical usefulness to humans, in other words, the Lilly *itself* disappears from the scene. Not so the question of use-value, however, which Thel brings to bear on her subsequent encounter with the Cloud. For immediately after she describes the many *useful* functions of the Lilly, Thel declares "But Thel is like a faint cloud..." (2:11). Here, the conjunction "But" sets up a grammatical antithesis, implying that the Cloud is an apt symbol of the uselessness that Thel herself feels. The Cloud, so inscribed, echoes back this ideology (speaking of Thel's "great...use" as "the food of worms" [3:25-6; E5]), demonstrating that the discourse that constitutes Thel's subjectivity extends to itself as well.

But Thel is clearly at odds with this instrumentalism, which she cannot help but speak. If she indeed advocated such a doctrine, she would not have rejected, at the poem's outset, her duties as a shepherd--duties which should, presumably, define the scope of her own usefulness in life. Thel's act of rejection, I have suggested, stems from her intuitive awareness that her role in the social structure of Har is haunted by an intangible violence. Her inadvertent or residual subscription to a doctrine of utility in her

encounter with the Lilly and the Cloud signifies not a personal failure, then, but the overarching power of Mne Seraphim's pastoral--but nevertheless discursive--regime.

The Book of Thel brings established notions of utility into question in at least two ways. First, it questions anthropocentric biases by gesturing toward a radically expansive conception of use. For example, its representation of the human body's "use[fulness]" as "the food of worms" (3:23-26) suggests that Blake is willing to shock us into considering use in the widest possible terms, as a principle of life in general, and not just that of human beings. Second, in the Cloud's advice to Thel, Blake introduces a principle that exceeds the instrumentalism of an ethics based on use-value. The Cloud certainly tells Thel that "if thou art the food of worms... / How great thy use"; but he qualifies this assertion with the crucial clause "how great thy blessing" (3:25-26). This latter clause might be read as a paying of lip service to the realm of the sacred, or as implying that "blessing" is *derived* from utility. But there is something excessive about the Cloud's philosophical gesture. The Cloud goes on to tell Thel that "every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself" (3:26-27). If Thel's use-value arises because each and every creature lives "not...*for* itself" but in the purposeful and practical service of others, her "blessing" might be said to stem from the fact that each living thing "Lives not alone" (3:26-27), but as part of a holistic cosmic community in which no entity need be alienated. If Thel could free herself from the anthropocentric ratio that circumscribes her existence--if she could open herself to the vitality of a relational infinity that includes but also surpasses human-centred utility--she would begin to understand the interrelational holiness of *all* life, the intrinsic value or "bless[edness]" of literally "every thing that lives." The wisdom implicit in such an understanding would dispel the particular utilitarian anxiety that is part and parcel of the sense of alienation that Thel feels in Har

(and which I described above); thus, it would enable her to reformulate her view of the world so that she could begin, at least, to "find [her] place" (2:12) in it. According to her present viewpoint, Thel occupies the *centre* of a cosmic web of connections designed to serve her own needs. Perhaps her simultaneous desire for, and fear of, "fad[ing] away" is part of a larger but frightening desire to free herself from this economy of self-centredness by positioning herself upon a *strand* in the cosmic web rather than at its focal point.

In light of Thel's preoccupation with the notion of hierarchy, however, such a reading becomes problematic. For when Thel articulates her desire to establish her "place" in the order of things, the Lilly "answer[s]" her by addressing her as "Queen of the vales" (2:13; Cf. also 3:29 and 5:16), seemingly shoring up Thel's anthropocentric notion that she occupies, as the poem's human representative, a "pearly throne" (2:12) near or at the pinnacle of a Great Chain of Being. Later in the poem, Thel's response to the Cloud's story of his courtship with the Dew further demonstrates her subscription to some such notion of hierarchy. As she puts it, "I walk through the vales of Har. and smell the sweetest flowers; / But I feed not the little flowers: I hear the warbling birds, / But I feed not the warbling birds." This discourse culminates in Thel's declaration of her own uselessness, her fear that she lives "*only...to be at death the food of worms*" (3:18-20, 23; emphasis added). Thel wishes, in short, to be of use to the fragrant flowers and the pleasantly "warbling birds," but she is disgusted by the thought of serving lowly worms. In other words, she seems willing to condescend--with as little psychological inconvenience to herself as possible--to be of "use" only to what she has learned to conceive of as "higher" beings, pleasing entities situated in relatively close proximity to her own "pearly throne."

Although the hierarchical concept of the Great Chain of Being has been characterized as anti-utilitarian (Lovejoy 186) and even as "a description of ecological relatedness" (Worster 46), it clearly derives from and reinforces the Biblical sanction of human "dominion" over nature (Genesis 1:26, 28), and can thus be manipulated discursively to justify numerous forms of human-centred violence against "lower" beings.⁹ Blake's poem certainly incorporates the language of ecclesiastical and monarchical hierarchy, but it does so in ways that question the legitimacy of such vertical structure, thus problematizing the notion of Thel's ascendancy. Almost forty years ago, for example, Gleckner pointed to the Lilly's "silver shrine," the cloud's "airy throne" and the Clay's "crown," to support the idea that each speaker is a kind of regal entity, "an important personage, if not the ruler, in his own special realm" (*Piper* 173). I would take the implications of Har's ubiquitous regality much further, and argue that these poetic characterizations dismantle the hierarchical thinking that upholds and sustains the very concept of royalty. Such dismantling is certainly evident in Blake's portrait of the Clod of Clay, who presents herself as "the meanest thing" (4:11), but who is nonetheless convinced that "he that loves the lowly" has given her "a crown that none can take away" (5:1, 4). It is important to note that, as a symbol of eternal sovereignty, the Clay's crown defies any ideology of transcendence that would devalue the realm of earthly existence in favour of a "heavenly" afterlife. The Clay's royal status thus functions to problematize the very hierarchy that constructs it as "mean" and "lowly" in the first place.

Hence, in *The Book of Thel*, literally "every thing that lives is Holy" (MHH; E45) holistic, valuable, because "every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself." In such a relational universe, the very identity of *each* living thing is infinitely deferred in context, allowing no space or moment in which the entity may crystallize as a stable

"being" on a hierarchical chain. This is, arguably, the profound "ecological" insight at the heart of *The Book of Thel*. Nevertheless, as Blake is also profoundly aware, such a holistic philosophy is not without its dangers, for it can be manipulated to serve the interests of governmental discourse. Hence, it is to a consideration of this problem that we must now turn.

III. Nature's Economy, Nature's Alterity

We can begin to consider Blake's understanding of the governmental implications of a holistic naturalism by situating *The Book of Thel* vis-à-vis the eighteenth-century concept of "nature's economy," a perspective on nature which, as we saw in the Introduction to this study, "sought to describe all of the living organisms of the earth as an interacting whole" (Worster x). Blake, I would argue, invokes such a philosophical holism in *Thel* by problematizing the notion of identity as hierarchically-stratified and self-sufficient. But *Thel* also points to a profound ambivalence in the concept of "nature's economy." On the one hand, as I shall demonstrate, Har's natural economy epitomizes a highly ethical mode of mutual co-existence that the alienated, instrumentally-obsessed Thel would do well to emulate. On the other hand, however, Thel must approach Har's natural economy with self-critical caution; for this economy, far from being "Innocent," is "known" to Thel via internalized orthodoxies which efface the alterity of Har's natural entities by naturalizing various modes of social hierarchy.

It is highly probable that Blake was indeed aware of contemporary thinking on nature's economy. Certainly this thinking was "in the air" in late eighteenth-century England: it belongs largely to the contemporary discourse of botany, which, during Blake's lifetime, was the most popular branch of natural history. Indeed, according to the

Critical Review of 1763, botany had, "by a kind of national establishment, become the favourite study of the times" (qtd. in Jones 347; see also 345). Now if this "national establishment"--a telling phrase from the perspective of Blakean iconoclasm--evaded or excluded Blake's working-class experience, Blake could have learned about nature's economy from a number of concrete sources. During his three-year residence in Felpham, for example, Blake would have had the opportunity to read about or discuss botany with his patron and daily companion, William Hayley, whose library contained, by my count, no fewer than forty English-language volumes related to the subject (Munby passim). In contrast to younger contemporary poets like Coleridge, however, Blake was not an enthusiastic reader of such texts. And the Felpham period, of course, postdates the publication of *The Book of Thel*. What we know for certain is that Blake had read the first edition of Erasmus Darwin's *The Loves of the Plants* (1789) before completing *Thel*, and that shortly thereafter he had become familiar with Darwin's *The Economy of Vegetation* (1791),¹⁰ for which he engraved numerous plates.

Admittedly, there is no shortage of critical speculation concerning Darwin's influence on *Thel* and on Blake's subsequent works. But such discussions can be misleading if they fail to acknowledge at the outset the vast differences between Blake's and Darwin's poetic philosophies. One can only imagine, for example, the fury of Blake's response to Darwin's Advertisement prefacing *The Loves of the Plants*, wherein the naturalist-cum-poet forthrightly states that "The general design of the following sheets is to inlist Imagination under the banner of Science, and to lead her votaries from the looser analogies, which dress out the imagery of poetry, to the stricter ones, which form the ratiocination of philosophy." Blake is famous, of course, for his antithetical conviction that the "ratio" of philosophical rationalism *destroys* the Imagination. As a persistent

champion of imaginative endeavour, then, Blake would have had a great deal of cause to react against Darwin's stated agenda. Critics have disagreed, however, on the extent or nature of this reaction. For some readers, Blake's cosmogony is massively influenced by Darwin (see, for example, Leonard *passim*), as is his sexual politics (see my discussion of Erdman and Worrall, below); while for others Blake expresses his response much more subtly, with Darwin acting as a kind of "spectral presence" haunting Blake's oeuvre (Hilton, "Spectre" 37). What the writers of this otherwise diverse criticism have in common, however, is an omission: none of them has considered the Darwin-Blake connection in light of the contemporary discourse of "nature's economy" and the role it plays in the history of ecological thought.

How, exactly, did Darwin understand the economy of nature? Among other things, he learned from Linnaeus that natural life functions "as an interlocking web of cyclical processes" (McKusick 378). Although Darwin was, to a certain extent, an atomist who believed firmly in the breaking-down of complex ideas and systems into their component parts for the purposes of scientific study (Hassler 14-15), he often represents terrestrial life in terms of holistic processes. In *The Loves of the Plants*, for example, Darwin argues, among other things, that primeval vegetation produces the soil in which later species of plants will grow (1.295n); he discusses ocean and subterranean currents as natural phenomena having implications for plant-life that are nothing less than hemispheric (3.345n); and he considers the crucial role played by "Vegetable Respiration" in the production of air and the purification of water (4.161n). Although he did not begin comprehensively to articulate something like a systematic philosophy of organic creation until *The Economy of Vegetation*, Darwin speaks implicitly, in *The Loves of the Plants*, of terrestrial life as comprised of an interrelated community of

diverse species and processes; and he uses the phrases "economy of vegetation" or "vegetable economy" on numerous occasions in his footnotes to the poetry (see, for example, 1.211, 3.184, 3.188). One might say that the seeds that would produce Darwin's ideal of a holistic cosmos in which "Orbs wheel in orbs, round centres centres roll, / And form self-balanced, one revolving Whole" (*Economy* 1.111-12), had already been sewn in *The Loves of the Plants*.

Does Blake engage with this notion of natural creation as a balanced system of interconnected processes? Certainly he represents a cyclical and synergistic nature at various points in *The Book of Thel*. On the third plate of the poem, for example, Blake's Cloud seems almost to echo the thesis articulated by Linnaeus's disciple Isaac Biberg, who argued, in an influential essay entitled "The Oeconomy of Nature" (1751), that the hydrological cycle sustains all forms of life by distributing water everywhere on earth:¹¹ for Blake's Cloud discusses his own meteorological activities in terms of a perpetual cycle of evaporation and precipitation--where his "steeds drink of the golden springs" (3:7) in order subsequently to shower "food" upon "all [the] tender flowers" of the Vales of Har (3:16). The Cloud argues, moreover, for the cyclical interconnectedness of all biological entities in nature; for, in response to Thel's complaint that she exists "without a use" (3:22), he gestures toward a cyclical food chain that interimplicates all living creatures (3:25-27).

It is necessary to emphasize at this point that *Thel's* natural cycles are not necessarily representations of the "cyclical recurrence" that Northrop Frye disapprovingly contrasts with "infinite extension" (368), for *Thel's* cycles function according to principles of mutuality and self-annihilation in the service of others. The common critical consensus that Blake saw all natural processes in terms of "the same dull round"

of a mindlessly repetitive natural cyclicity must be reconsidered, if only on the grounds that such a vision would imply Blake's agreement with a mechanistic, Newtonian paradigm of nature. In Blake's later mythology, at any rate, only processes associated with Satan's Mill function according to such a mechanical cyclicity, going "around in a circle, [and] always returning to the same point" (Paley, Notes 191). I shall consider Blake's view of nature's cyclical processes in detail in Chapter Three, below. Suffice it to say here that, as early as *The Book of Thel*, Blake problematizes such a static view of natural cyclicity; for in this pastoral poem he represents cyclical systems as open, intertwined, and therefore complex. The Cloud's hydrological cycle functions *in concert*, for instance, with the natural cycle of birth and death, feeding flowers that die to nourish lambs, the latter of whose lives and activities provide sustenance for human shepherds, whose own bodies, in death, play an alimentary role in the life-cycles of helpless worms. Or, to approach this processive interactivity from another angle, Luvah's horses are "renew[ed]" by "golden springs"¹² belonging to a water cycle interacting with the heat of a cyclically regenerative "risen sun" (3:8, 3:14). And this "*risen* sun" is conceived in terms of a quotidian round connected homonymically to the theme of renewal via resurrection in the "*risen Son*." In the natural world, to be sure, processes repeat themselves, but the contexts in which these repetitions occur continually alter as minute particulars are rearranged in relation to one another. As I shall demonstrate in Chapter Three, Blake was convinced that only a questionably over-generalized view of the natural world conceives of nature's temporality in terms of *static* cyclical repetition. In Thel's world, an understanding of the life-cycle of a Lilly can suddenly--perhaps unprecedentedly--be of consequence to the material and spiritual existence of a "pensive queen" (3:29), productively transforming the latter's view of her own pastoral "round"

(1:1) and altering her understanding of her biological and ethical relation to worms and other "lowly" creatures. The Cloud, indeed, correlates the endless round of birth and death in a cyclical natural world with "bless[edness]" (3:26).

The male Cloud's holistic philosophy is shared in the poem by the female Lilly and Clod of Clay; but, for these latter creatures, adherence to such a philosophy is undoubtedly double-edged. First, let us consider the Lilly in light of some of the positive consequences stemming from her understanding of the communal position she occupies in Har's natural economy. Unlike Thel, whose sense of despairing alienation is emphasized, as I mentioned earlier, by her habit of referring to herself in the third-person, the Lilly is represented contextually as an integrated part of the natural community. She dwells "*in the humble grass*"; and although she declares individualistically that "*I am visited from heaven and he that smiles on all. / ...over *me* spreads his hand*" (1:15, 19-20; my emphasis), she is not singled out or isolated by this gesture, for it is accompanied by an imperative directed at the Lilly, the grass, and potentially at Thel as well: "*rejoice thou humble grass. thou new-born lilly flower, / Thou gentle maid of silent valleys*" (1:21-22). The Lilly's language and textual description express her easy awareness that she, as the Cloud will later put it, "*Lives not alone*" but as part of an interrelated community of beings. Blake's choice of words in this passage suggests that this community potentially embraces Thel herself, who, when she finds the gentleness she seeks (1:12-13), will take her place as the "*gentle maid of silent valleys*" and so will discover that she too can "*rejoice.*"

Despite this hopeful possibility, however, all is not well in the Vales of Har. We can begin to approach what is perhaps the central problem of *The Book of Thel* by considering Blake's explicit response in the poem to the eighteenth-century understanding

of nature's economy as a *sexual* economy. According to Alan Bewell, eighteenth-century botanical writing "was so imbued with socio-sexual implications that no botanical description was entirely removed from these concerns" (134). For his own part, Blake was emphatically aware of the ways in which botanic naturalism tended to read human sexual politics into plants "so that they could be re-imported back into social life" (Bewell 134). In *Thel*'s frontispiece design (see figure 6), Blake graphically literalizes the anthropomorphic projection of human sexuality onto the Realm of Flora: he depicts two human figures, a male and a female, emerging from out of the blooms of a pasqueflower plant, while Thel stands by idly observing the beginnings of their sexual embrace. Critics have often interpreted the relationship of this design to Erasmus Darwin's botanical writings and to the text of *Thel* in ways that support the thesis of Thel's developmental failure in the poem: her failure, in particular, to embrace her own naturally blooming sexuality.

David Erdman points out, for example, that the stamens of the pasqueflower, or *anemone pulsatilla*, were said to remain enfolded within the flower's petals until the latter were touched by the wind, at which time the petals would open, enabling the sexual process of pollination to occur. Erdman goes on to suggest that "we might take Thel herself for Darwin's 'sad Anemone' pining for the wind's 'cherub-lips,' since the two small figures beside her are performing Darwin's script" (*Illuminated Blake* 34). For David Worrall, the sexual self-doubt that Thel expresses in the poem is, significantly, "not reflected in the plant world of the two figures emerging from the flower" (400). Both Erdman and Worrall--along with a host of other critics--imply that the "Virgin" Thel's ultimate refusal in the poem to embrace her sexuality is *unnatural*, and so deserving of condemnation. From this perspective, the clearly aggressive posture of the male figure in

Thel's frontispiece design would suggest that Blake advocates the *naturalization* of masculine sexual aggression in the interest of what James King, in a related discussion, has identified as a masculinist "fantasy of free love" (94).

A re-examination of the figure of the Lilly, however, will help to bring such a reading into question. On the one hand, this "modest" (2:17) creature exhibits a profound sense of self-contentedness, for, in sharp contrast to the perplexed *Thel*, the Lilly expresses "love" for her condition (1:17) and great hope for the future (1:23-25). And yet, there is something unsettling about this portrait of love and faith; for the Lilly achieves her sense of serenity--as well as her holistic sense of communal belonging in *Har's* natural economy--in part by way of a questionable self-effacement. As Helen Bruder has pointed out, the Lilly has been persuaded by the insinuations of patriarchy to conceive of herself as a mere "weed" (1:16). Furthermore, as a consequence of minding "her numerous charge among the verdant grass" (2:18), the Lilly forfeits her life (Bruder 151): for she will be eaten by the supposedly "innocent" but significantly male lamb who "crops [her] flowers" (2:5-6). The Lilly has succumbed, in short, to an all-too-earthly ideology that naturalizes its power as knowledge via the *discourse* of a transcendentalist theology offering vague rewards in "eternal vales" in exchange for obedience and an earthly self-abnegation.¹³ (More accurately, I must emphasize, *Thel* has *projected* this discourse upon the humanized Lilly, which, in the design to plate 4 [E plate 2; see figure 7], significantly resembles *Thel* in posture, form, and dress.) Hence, it is possible to read the Lilly's representation of her harmonious existence as signifying her unwitting internalization of the gender-based hierarchy serving the self-interest of patriarchal religion.

Let me clarify this point by examining the doctrine articulated by the male Cloud. Whereas the Lilly achieves the serenity of her ostensibly harmonious existence by way of a philosophy of passivity and self-abnegation, the Cloud "speaks" of his own harmonious existence in terms of self-centred activity and agency. As Bruder points out, the Cloud--the sole adult male Thel encounters in the Vales of Har--is markedly different from the other creatures whom Thel meets (152). Unlike the self-effacing Lilly, that "weak" inhabitant of "lowly vales" (1:18, 17), and the "lowly" (5:1) Clay, both of whom Thel must look down upon to see, the Cloud actively "shew[s] his golden head & his bright form... / Hovering and glittering on the air before the face of Thel" (3: 5-6). Moreover, when he "pass[es] away, / It is to tenfold life, to love, to peace, and raptures holy" involving a successful courtship with "the fair eyed dew... / The weeping virgin, [who] trembling kneels before the risen sun, / Till we arise link'd in a golden band, and never part" (3:10-15). Bruder points out the "marked lack of enthusiasm" that the weeping and trembling Dew displays during the Cloud's courtship, suggesting that the Cloud *forces* himself upon an unwilling but acquiescent bride, the latter of whom offers an insidious model of feminine behaviour for Thel to emulate (152). In Har's natural economy, it is clear that the Cloud advocates a "self-interested" philosophy of environmental co-existence that is the perverse flip-side of that articulated by the abject Lilly and the all too "humble" (4:9) Clay. In short, although all of these non-human entities agree that "every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself," the self-effacing Lilly and Clay give themselves willingly to others, whereas the self-centred Cloud demands that others surrender their will to his own.

The gendered hierarchy supporting the privileged situation of *Thel's* Cloud is not unlike the model of hierarchy supporting the situation of "Man" in Erasmus Darwin's *The*

Economy of Vegetation, various passages of which, read analogically, can shed light on the gender politics informing *The Book of Thel*. In Book III of Darwin's poem, "Man" (represented at one point by Mr. Brindley, the "MECHANIC GENIUS" responsible for building numerous canals in eighteenth-century England), occupies a position that seems to transcend the feminized natural world in which he lives and conducts his work.

Whereas feminine "'Beauty fades upon its damask throne!'" / --Unconscious of the worm, that mined her own!" (3.315-16),¹⁴ the Mechanic Genius, recipient of "secret[s]" lovingly bestowed upon him by a personified feminine nature (3.324), is immortalized by the fame attending his feats of engineering and their profound manipulation of the natural environment. Thus, in contrast to feminine "Beauty," the male Genius transcends death, attaining in the poem the pedestal of a statue erected in his honour, from which, in a state of eternal animation, he actively "Counts the fleet waves, and balances the lands" (3.340. 344). Brindley, Darwin seems to suggest, need not fear the worms that will inevitably devour feminine entities like "Beauty" (and, one might add, Thel), for, by inscribing his human signature upon the landscape in the very material lines of canals gouged upon English soil for the advancement of "Plenty, Arts, and Commerce" (3.336), he ostensibly transcends the ecosystems in which Darwin represents animal and vegetable bodies as growing and dissolving in perpetual dynamic cycle (see 2.584n).¹⁵

The violence inhabiting such a hierarchical, gender-based vision of nature is evident in both *The Book of Thel* and *The Economy of Vegetation*. In the latter poem, as Darwin tells dame Nature, the "Mechanic Genius" gains his scientific knowledge by "Pierc[ing] all your springs, and open[ing] all your wells" (3.324). Such language recalls that of Francis Bacon, who metaphorizes scientific pursuit in sexual terms as the penetration of nature's "womb."¹⁶ In Darwin's view of "Man's" relationship to nature,

practice evidently actualizes the metaphorical language of scientific theory, as quasi-military "legions" of working men "tread the swampy heath, / [And] *Pierce* with sharp spades the *tremulous* peat beneath" (3.463-64; emphasis added)--activities which "alarm" the undoubtedly feminine sensibility of "a thousand hills" (3.333). In Darwin's view, Nature, femininely passive and submissive in the face of such masculine violence--and, perhaps, all the more alluring for its fearfulness of these sexualized technological advances--provides an ideal model for feminine behaviour in the human world:

So should young SYMPATHY, in female form,
Climb the tall rock, spectatress of the storm;
Life's sinking wrecks with secret sighs deplore,
And *bleed* for others' woes, Herself on shore[.]
(3.441-44; emphasis added)

As in *Thel's* Vales of Har, where the self-effacing Lilly and Clod exist in a state of feminine docility, thus helping to perpetuate the masculine Cloud's questionable pursuit of self-interest, Darwin's feminine nature willingly supports the violent ideological practices of the masculine Mechanic Genius. In other words, although "young SYMPATHY" deplores the "sinking wrecks" of a self-interested masculine mercantile economy gone wrong, her sympathetic compassion and figurative bleeding are here promoted as affirmative signs of a patriarchally prescribed feminine self-abnegation. Rather than vocally opposing violent and destructive masculinist pursuits, female Sympathy, as passive "spectatress," is capable of offering only an ineffectual critique consisting of inarticulate and impalpable "secret sighs."¹⁷

In contrast to *The Economy of Vegetation*, which envisions the gendered economy of human relations as properly continuous and correlative with a gendered "economy of nature," *The Book of Thel*, in its anthropomorphic allegory of human sexual politics, *questions* the ways in which androcentric ideology informs human views of nature. By

making lilies, clouds, and clods of clay the gendered mouth-pieces of an asymmetrical interlocking model of human gender relations, Blake demonstrates the ways in which our views of nature can "naturalize" the ideological interests of the status quo. This point, I would suggest, is implicit in Blake's poetic invention of the name "vales of Har."

In Erdman's edition of *Thel*, the word "Har" is followed on two occasions by a grammatically unnecessary period (3:18, 4:10), suggesting, perhaps, that Blake wanted his reader to pause over the term and--at least as one aspect of a polysemous interpretation¹⁸--mentally to complete its seeming abbreviation, thoughtfully reading into "Har." a reference to "Harmony." A reading of "Har" as a veiled reference to "Harmony" would certainly make sense in light of the fact that, during the eighteenth century, the pastoral mode--the genre in which most of *Thel* is self-reflexively written--was popularly associated with the notion of a harmonious "golden age." Indeed, if Har is a land of Harmony, the possible pun on the word "vales" with "veils"¹⁹ would suggest that the idea of Harmony functions in *Thel* as a *cover* for something insidious.

While an association between "Har" and "Harmony" in *Thel* is necessarily conjectural, it nonetheless raises some relevant and fascinating interpretive possibilities. As Paul Tillich asserts, the concept of harmony was "a part of the fundamental faith of the Enlightenment" (332) and so pervasive that virtually all Enlightenment philosophers used it "directly or indirectly, explicitly or implicitly" (333). According to the Enlightenment concept of harmony, private vices are actually public benefits (340), because the individual pursuit of self-interest is regarded as ultimately beneficial to the proper functioning of the greater social whole. This kind of thinking is evident, for example, in Rousseau's notion of the "volonté générale" and Adam Smith's "quasi-natural" (Gordon 41) idea of the "invisible hand"²⁰ (Tillich 334-37), both of which

philosophies tend theoretically to justify the self-interest of the individual in terms of larger beneficial outcomes. Arguably, Erasmus Darwin's "*self-balanced*" cosmology (*Economy* 1.111-12; emphasis added), mentioned above, involves an implicit gesture towards such a self-centred model of philosophical holism. But it is Alexander Pope's *Essay on Man* (1733) which offers the preeminent poetic representation of this kind of thinking. Asserting that "jarring Int'rests of themselves create / Th' according Music of a *well-mix'd State*" (3.293-94), Pope might well be summarizing the philosophical doctrine advocated by Blake's male Cloud; for the Cloud's approach to earthly mutuality partakes of this notion that the pursuit of self-interest does not ultimately contravene a beneficial and "harmonious" holism.

Charles Taylor's recent commentary on John Locke's conception of the universe as a "great interlocking order" can helpfully illuminate the philosophical underpinnings of this notion that the "partial Evil" of self-interest contributes to "the WORLD's *great Harmony*" (Pope 1.284, 3.295): "The principal thing that makes the entities in the world into an order is that their natures *mesh*. The purposes sought by each, of the causal functions which each one exercises, interlock with the others so as to cohere into a harmonious whole. Each *in serving itself* [emphasis added] serves the entire order" (Taylor, *Sources* 275). To put this insight into somewhat more "realist" terms, "things *feed each other*" in an "efficient-causal" manner (276). As this latter characterization begins to suggest, the picture of a harmonious interlocking order was *too* good--not to mention too complacently satisfied with the reigning order of things--to be generally creditable (322). For his own part, Blake was incredulous. In his 1798 annotations to *The Works of Sir Joshua Reynolds*, for example, Blake places Harmony (along with "Demonstration" and "Similitude") among the "Objects of Reasoning" (E659), declaring

derisively that "One Species of General Hue over all is the Cursed Thing call'd Harmony it is like the Smile of a Fool" (E662).²¹ One gets the impression that *The Book of Thel's* female Lilly, who "sittest smiling" (2:6) into the face of the male lamb that will devour her, might unwittingly be displaying such a fool's smile.

Arguably, Thel's act of rebellion in the opening lines of her "Book" stems from an awareness of the ideological artificiality of her harmonious existence in Har, which place Donald Pearce has ironically dubbed "Happy Valley" (28). The sole adjective in the opening line of the poem certainly suggests something like caricature. Mne Seraphim's flocks, depicted entirely in terms of sunlight, are perhaps *too* "sunny" to be believable, as if somehow, in the process of their discursive domestication, these animals have been reduced to mere reflective, aesthetic surfaces. Thel leaves these domesticated sheep, her habitual animal companions--whose docile condition parallels her own in the Vales of Har--to seek the company of entities that have not been subjugated to such an obvious degree by Har's pastoral economy. Her discomfort with Har's superficial "morning beauty" (1:3)--the "harmonious" aesthetic surface of a human-centred view of the non-human environment--manifests itself as a rejection of the harmony of the pastoral myth.

What Blake is advocating, I think, in his ironic portrayal of natural "harmony" in *Thel*, is not a devaluation of nature itself, but the need for incessant vigilance regarding the ways in which nature is constructed in and produced by social discourse. For Blake, self-interest generates not harmony, but a chain or web of oppression. In other words, the valorization of self-interest *naturalizes* oppression, even renders it good. The self-interested Cloud speaks the magnanimous language of goodness when he declares that he and his docile bride "walk united, bearing food to all our tender flowers" (3:16). But to what extent is the matrimonial unity of which the Cloud speaks at least subtly *coercive*,

the production of an oppressive patriarchal discursive economy which forcibly "link[s]" the Dew to the Cloud by way of the "golden band" (3:15-16) or bond of legality? And might the "flowers" that the Cloud charitably feeds be facing an earthly fate similar to that of the Lilly? These hints of an oppressively gendered economy regulating social behaviour in the Vales of Har bring the common critical notion that Har is a land of primal Innocence--a world of "equalitarian *harmony*" (Erdman, *Prophet* 132; emphasis added) wherein "everything is exquisite and harmless" (Frye 241)--very much into question. Har exemplifies, rather, what Mary Wollstonecraft identifies as "the *arbitrary* economy of nature," an economy deriving its significance from a political system in which females are "kept in ignorance under the *specious name* of innocence" (82, 54; emphasis added). The philosophy that all is "harmony," then, cannot begin to solve the dilemma in which Thel finds herself, for this philosophy tenderly encourages her to stop worrying about her relationship to her social and natural environments--to be content with things as they are, believing, with Alexander Pope, that "whatever IS, is RIGHT" (1.286). From a Blakean perspective, in short, such a notion of inevitable cosmic "harmony" belongs to a discourse of complacency and quietism which tends largely to support the pastoral status quo that Thel rejects in the opening lines of her poem.

IV. Anthropocentrism, Androcentrism, and Nature's Economy.

If nature, for Blake, is always in part the product of discursive systems or economies, can Thel (or any one for that matter) be open to nature's alterity without selfishly appropriating or dismissing it? Thel's encounter with the Cloud emphasizes the difficulty of being so open. It is significant that, even before his "bright form emerg[es]" in the poem, Thel declares that she "is like" the Cloud (3:5, 3); for her *predisposition* to assume

similarity between herself and the Cloud effaces the latter's unique otherness, subsuming it to her own epistemological categories. In other words, although she declares that *she* "is like" the Cloud, Thel can say this only because she has already projected her own notion of selfhood onto it. Thel's subsequent realization that she and the Cloud are *not* alike does not solve this problem, for it results in an unproductive sense of fear: When Thel tells the Cloud "I fear that I am not like thee" (3:17), she makes it plain that she wishes it were possible to recapture her lost sense of similarity. Acknowledging the Cloud's specificity is indeed frightening for Thel, for it reinforces her earlier sense of alienation and purposelessness. Thel has become trapped, it seems, in a vicious cycle of discursive "saming" and "othering." Her overarching problem is that, in each of these alternating modes of identification, she uses herself as the primary point of reference (*I am like thee; I am not like thee*). To see the Cloud on something like its "own" terms, Thel must learn to decentre her pastoral selfhood, to engage in a species of what Blake will call, in his later works, "Self-Annihilation."

Among other things, such a process of subjective decentring would help Thel come to terms with her instrumental or utilitarian anxiety, especially as it relates to the "place" (2:12) she seeks for herself in the natural order. Once again, an examination of Thel's relationship to the Lilly and Cloud can help to clarify this point. Brian Wilkie points out (in contrast to my own argument) that the Lilly's notion that she is protected by heaven (1:19-25) implies a certain "self-sufficiency" on her part, and that the Cloud's discussion of the water cycle demonstrates that he and his bride the Dew take more than adequate care of Har's "tender flowers" (3:16). But nature's self-sufficiency is not enough for Thel, who, as Wilkie puts it, "nevertheless projects helplessness and need onto animals and flowers, and uselessness onto herself for failing to tend them, though it is

abundantly clear that they already have all the attentive help they need" (59-60). Wilkie's point suggests that if Thel really wishes to serve the creatures of Har, she should not attempt needlessly to interfere in their lives and life processes but should try, instead, to understand the danger of her ideology of use-value. What Thel might learn from her experience among the creatures of Har is, in short, the efficacy of a "hands-off" approach to the thinking and acting-out of human-nature relations.

Perhaps the best way to attempt to apprehend such a relationship with the natural world is through a self-reflexive understanding of the environmental intrusiveness of language itself. Indeed, in her contact with the Worm, there is a suggestion that Thel begins tentatively to acquire such an understanding. First, if Thel is a "ventriloquist," as Levinson has argued, then the fact that the Worm does not speak--is not "itself" represented as entering into language in the poem--indicates that Thel is beginning to acquire a sense of the way in which the very language she speaks determines her experiences in the Vales of Har. In this regard, the series of questions that Thel poses to and of the Worm is particularly telling: "Art thou a Worm? image of weakness. art thou but a Worm? / [...] Is this a Worm?" (4:2, 5). Most obviously, perhaps, the Worm's silence in the face of Thel's first question might be seen as underscoring the classic philosophical discourse of animality (derived from Aristotle), which distinguishes humanity from animality by insisting that only humans "have" systematic and meaningful "language." From the human standpoint, language has long been "the implacable standard against which the animal is measured and always found wanting" (D. Clark, "Last Kantian" 191). In a sense, as David L. Clark succinctly puts it, human language is that which "muffles, strangles, and finally silences the animal" (191). On the one hand,

then. the Worm's failure to respond to Thel's linguistic questioning might be said to reinforce the anthropocentric bias of Western epistemology.

On the other hand, however, the Worm's silence is decidedly peculiar, for it occurs in a text where all other narratively-central non-human entities do indeed speak. Thel attempts to deal with the strangely silent Worm by infantilizing it: when it does not speak, she immediately constructs it as an inarticulate and infantile "image of weakness," "an infant" that *cannot* speak but can only "weep" (4:3-4). Such an anthropomorphism allows Thel to speak *for* the Worm, to represent the silent creature in her own words. The fact that Thel nevertheless feels driven repeatedly to question the Worm's identity suggests, however, that her anthropomorphic construction of it remains haunted by an element of anxiety in the face of its stubborn silence. Hence, the Worm's silent response to Thel's first question ("Art thou a Worm?") might itself be interpreted as the sign of an alterity that refuses, paradoxically, to be silenced by the symbolic economy of naming;²² for once comfortably identified as "Worm," this creature would be assimilated to established modes and methods of inscription which would confidently categorize it and thus attempt to contain its otherness. Thel's second and modified question --"art thou *but* a Worm?"--suggests that Thel is beginning to entertain the possibility that the Worm may be *nothing* other than "itself"--no voicepiece for human philosophical discourse (in marked contrast to the Lilly and Cloud), no projection of desire, no anthropomorphic symbol, but precisely a "Worm"--whatever that may be. Indeed, Thel's third question--"Is *this* a Worm?"--suggests something like an awareness that the label "Worm" itself is ultimately inadequate to the naming of this creature's identity--that the very act of naming, which appropriates the "Worm" into language, enacts a reduction, an effacement. This brief scenario of anxious questioning on Thel's part probes some fundamental issues

concerning the relationship between language and the objects it names, highlighting in the process the linguistic basis of our worldly perceptions. It is no wonder that Thel is "astonish'd" (4:1) by her encounter with the "naked" Worm (4:5).

Although the Clod's subsequent discourse indicates a resumption of the linguistic projection that Thel had practiced earlier in the poem in her meetings with the Lilly and Cloud, it nevertheless marks an important change concerning the capacity of language in the poem. For the central ontological insight articulated by the Clod--whom Gleckner has called "the great earth mother" (*Piper* 169)--emphasizes the inadequacy of language to the signification of her own condition. Although the Clod insists that her "bosom *of itself* is cold, and *of itself* is dark" (4:12; emphasis added), she has already problematized this notion of the "as such" in her proclamation that "we live not for ourselves" (4:10). The contextual nature of the Clod's identity--the extension of the finite "of itself" into an infinite realm of interconnectivity--causes this self-proclaimed "lowly" being to assume the elevated status of one who wears "a crown that none can take away" (5:4). The qualifying statement that immediately follows this assertion--"But how this is sweet maid. I know not, and I cannot know, / I ponder, and I cannot ponder; yet I live and love" (5:4-6)--problematizes the notion that language can accurately name the truth of such contextual identity. Donald Worster has pointed out that, for ecologists, the quality of organic interrelatedness that constitutes the complex whole of nature ultimately defies objective scientific analysis (21-22). Perhaps this defiance of analysis rests in part on the ways in which ecological interrelatedness exceeds linguistic definition. Because systems based on natural signs "provide no way to raise semiosis or consciousness above their systemic limitations" (Essick, *Language of Adam* 126), the value of organic life cannot be

posited logically; it can only be somehow intuited, as the Clod puts it, in "life" and in "love."

Whatever she learns from the Clod of Clay, the lesson is strong enough to persuade Thel to accept the Clod's invitation to "enter my house" (5:16). Subsequently, Thel finds herself in a "land unknown" (6:2), an environment whose characterization recalls the Clod's remark that she "know[s] not, and...cannot know," the conditions of her existence. But this unfamiliar territory beyond the Vales of Har is only truly a "land unknown" to the extent that it can evade or disrupt Thel's ability to categorize and thus to contain and dominate it--to the extent, perhaps, that it unsettles the manifold anthropocentric presuppositions implicit in the discourses of use-value, hierarchy, and harmony which, as we have seen, have constituted Thel's subjective experience of the Vales of Har. But let us be cautious. As David Farrell Krell points out in a discussion of Heideggerian ontology, "the charge of anthropomorphism and anthropocentrism is essentially duplicitous, for it always presupposes that a [mode of] thinking could, if only it were rigorous enough, erase the human backdrop and expunge the set of (human) existence" (130). Clearly such erasure and expunction is impossible, as Thel discovers in the "land unknown." For here she finds not freedom from her anthropomorphic impulses, but death, not (as it were) a new birth, but her "own grave plot" (6:9). Thel's discovery suggests that something like a total escape from human-centredness can come only with death, indeed is tantamount *to* death. And Thel, understandably, does not want to die. Hence, the "voice of sorrow [which] *breathed* from the hollow pit" (6:10; emphasis added) is a living, *aspiring* voice, reminiscent of the life-in-death characterizing "the couches of the dead," where Thel paradoxically espies the curiously living and organic "fibrous roots / Of every heart on earth infix[ing] deep its restless twists" (6:3-4). And

this voice from the grave significantly speaks not of living nature *per se* but of an explicitly *human* experience of life, in a passage that has perplexed generations of Blake's readers:

Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?
 Or the glistning Eye to the poison of a smile!
 Why are Eyelids stord with arrows ready drawn,
 Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
 Or an Eye of gifts & graces, show'ring fruits & coined gold!
 Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
 Why an Ear, a whirlpool fierce to draw creations in?
 Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror trembling & affright.
 Why a tender curb upon the youthful burning boy!
 Why a little curtain of flesh on the bed of our desire? (6:11-20)

The violence pervading this passage--made abundantly explicit by its references to "destruction," "poison," "arrows," "fighting men in ambush," "terror trembling & affright"--is remarkable. But what, exactly, has this poetry to do with the kinds of anthropocentric violence I have been discussing in this chapter? Let us take a closer look.

"Why cannot the Ear be closed to its own destruction?" Perhaps the answer to this strange question can be found six lines later in the succeeding reference to the Ear, which emphasizes that this perceptual organ is itself destructive of external phenomena insofar as it is a centripetal or self-centred "whirlpool fierce to draw creations in." But the Ear is *itself* overtaken by the destruction that it perpetrates on external "creations"--it cannot be "closed to its *own* destruction"--because it cannot be "closed" to the influence of the human discourses which determine its social and physiological functioning. In other words, insofar as discourses (like those of utility, hierarchy, and "harmony," discussed above) are constitutive of subjectivity and hence produce and determine the subject's apprehension of auditory phenomena, they cause all sounds to be heard *in a certain way*, thus "destroying" the "real" sounds that come to the ear--and, hence,

destroying the ear's *proper* (i.e., its "own") function of hearing. We witness an example of such destruction on plate three, in Thel's inability to take "delight" in the songs of "the warbling birds." Thel's obsession in this passage with utility ("But I feed not the warbling birds") introduces into the "gentle and melodious" warble (*OED*) of the birdsong an anthropomorphic mournfulness that is not present in the song itself, a sense of melancholy that turns Thel's thoughts away from living things and toward her own "death" (3:19-23).

Much the same thing can be said about the Eye's inability to "be closed" to the "poison of a smile." One might read this reference to the smile in terms of the various discourses of "Harmony" (productions, perhaps, of "a Tongue impress'd with honey") which Blake found so repugnant. For these discourses, as I pointed out above, offer questionable but smile-inciting versions of happy co-existence, a mere *appearance* of happiness, a deceptive *vision* of things (hence the relationship between the "Eye" and the "smile"). Recall the Lilly's "smiling" openness to the devouring lamb, and Thel's assertion that the Lilly's destruction serves to purify the "contagious *taints*" poisoning the lamb's ostensibly "mild and meekin mouth" (2:7; emphasis added). In a sense, the Lilly's smile is *self*-poisoning, for she has been taught (by a male deity who "*smiles* on all" [1:19; emphasis added]) happily to *embrace* a questionable self-abnegation. That the "land unknown" in Part IV of the poem offers a kind of extreme corrective vision to such veiled deception can be seen in its characterization as a land "where never smile was seen" (6:5).

The assertion that "Eyelids [are] stord with arrows ready drawn, / Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie" warns Thel of the need to approach her world with extreme caution. This reference to "Eyelids" conjures up the theme of veils implicit in

the pun on "vales of Har[mony]," suggesting a veiled "covering" of the human gaze. The subsequent reference to "fighting *men*" indicates, moreover, that Blake is thinking of an explicitly masculinist gaze. This gendering of the gaze suggests that anthropocentrism is not only related to, but is, more precisely, *androcentrism* in Har's patriarchal economy. Hence. Thel and all of the poem's female characters face the danger that the closed eyelids of an apparently peaceful male lover function to cover or disguise the violence implicit in a masculinist gaze which, when it is finally cast, will objectify and "ambush" external "creations." This kind of objectification puts a "curb" upon sexual expression by overdetermining and thus "denaturing" or "denaturalizing" *all* expression that occurs within the field of vision, transforming this field, one might say, into a deadly "field" of battle. We can therefore interpret the "curtain of flesh" as another "veil," insofar as patriarchy projects upon the hymen a significance which transforms sex from a life-giving and life-affirming act of communal sharing ("everything that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself") into a deadly act of violence, thus generating the alienating emotions of "terror trembling & affright."²³

In light of the lessons articulated by the "voice of sorrow" speaking from her "own grave plot," how should we read Thel's sudden retreat "back...into the vales of Har" (6:21-22)? The majority of Blake's readers have agreed with Robert Gleckner that Thel's retreat marks some sort of developmental "failure" ("Blake's *Thel*" 575).²⁴ Most logical and persuasive is Gleckner's argument (579-80) that it is necessary to read the Clay's invitation to Thel to "enter, / And to return" from the Clay's "house" (5:16-17) in light of Ezekiel 46:9 ("he that entereth in by way of the north gate to worship [cf. *Thel's* "northern bar" (6:1)] shall go out by way of the south gate...he shall not return by the way of the gate whereby he came in"). What Gleckner seems to have forgotten here, however, is

Blake's well-known opposition to Old Testament law, especially to negative commandments couched in the form of "Thou shalt not," which are the utterances of a Priesthood that desecrates the "Garden of Love" in the poem of that title (E26). Thel's defiance of such a command gestures toward her (perhaps antinomian) desire to resist the oppressive moral legalism that so offended Blake's own antinomian sensibility. Hence, she need not be seen as an "Innocent" soul who fails ultimately to make the necessary transition through Experience en route to a higher "Organized Innocence" (as so many readers have argued). Indeed, if Thel has learned by the end of her "Book" that the natural "Innocence" of Har is *already* "Organized" by its discursivity--that she has never experienced the creatures of Har or their utterances except in terms of the social "ratio" that constitutes and so defines her own finite selfhood--then she must go back into Har *in order* to enter Experience: a critical experience which attempts self-reflexively to respect natural entities in their alterity rather than solely in terms of their established and accepted discursive representations. In other words, if Thel has been constituted as an inquiring subject in Har, then her return to its vales might entail not regression or escapism but a self-reflexive genealogical consideration of her own "descent"²⁵ and the discursive systems that have constituted her view of the natural world and its inhabitants.

Clearly, for example, an instrumentalist anthropocentrism, by appropriating the things of nature to serve the ends of human life, tends to efface the life-needs of the appropriated natural organism. If Thel's name means not only to desire (Perkins 65n), but also "to flourish, abound, [and] bloom" (Norvig 262n), perhaps what Thel *desires* at some level is to understand, support, and be a part of the flourishing vitality of her natural environment.²⁶ And perhaps, when she returns to Har, she will attempt to dismantle the pastoral instrumentalism which has helped to constitute her subjective world-view, so

that she may learn to respect natural beings for the "blessing" that might be said to comprise their *intrinsic* value. Such activity would not, of course, remove Thel from the anthropomorphic economy, for, as Kelly A. Parker points out, "the *human* organism is inevitably the one that discusses value" (33). But even if it will always be impossible for Thel to encounter nature on its "own" terms, she can at least attempt upon returning to Har to clarify the *brute fact* of anthropocentrism, evaluate various anthropocentric stances, and choose the ones that may best sustain the diversity of the natural world in which she has her existence.

In this chapter I have argued that *The Book of Thel* uses animal symbolism in ways that interrogate the anthropocentric violence inherent in symbolic practice. The design at the bottom of *Thel's* final plate (see figure 8), in which three children are depicted as riding a rather harmless-looking tethered serpent, might be interpreted as an epilogue to this questioning, offering an iconographic corrective to the anti-natural violence inhabiting the symbolism of orthodox Christian mythology. To a certain extent, this symbolism colonizes the natural world by associating such animals as the serpent with the curse of human moral transgression (see Genesis 3:14-15). Blake marks his distance from this moral discourse by carrying out, in *Thel's* final illuminated design, an act of symbolical defamiliarization. Reunited with a renewed humanity (represented by the youthfulness of the children on its back), the transformed serpent and its riders glide over the words "The End," suggesting, in the spirit of Coleridge's *Ancient Mariner*,²⁷ the end of a cynical and destructive anthropomorphic practice, and auguring a transformation of the relationship between humans and the world of other blessed living beings. At one level, Blake's design releases the serpent--perhaps the most "othered" member of the

animal creation--from its discursive inscription as a symbol of all that is harmful to human existence.

But this is, I suspect, too "harmonious" a note on which to conclude this discussion, for it is possible to see *Thel's* illuminated serpent in exactly the opposite light, as an insidious symbol of foreboding evil.²⁸ Read in the light of Joseph Wicksteed's iconographic principle that rightward movement in Blake's designs indicates spiritual progression, while leftward movement indicates a regressive corporeality (133; see also Kiralis, "London" 13), one could argue that the leftward moving serpent on *Thel's* final plate is tempting its youthful riders away from the paths of righteousness, restaging in the process the original fall from Innocence. It is important to remember, however, that Blake had to etch his texts and designs using the engraver's technique of mirror-writing. Hence, in order to arrive at the spatialized economy of value that Wicksteed advocates, Blake had to *reverse* this economy on his copper template, since the left side of the plate becomes the right side of the finished design, and vice versa. This aspect of Blake's technical practice necessitates, in a sense, a conceptual marriage between heaven and hell, providing an instance in which material praxis would likely have affected iconographic theory. Arguably, Blake's major concepts and symbols are the loci of a similar double-take on value. Depending on the poetic context of a given utterance or the interpretive contexts readers bring to bear upon that utterance, such concepts as "holiness," "harmony," and "nature" itself may be positively *or* negatively valued. In this sense, Blake's symmetry is indeed fearful, for it implies an equivocity that continually unsettles the interpretive will to establish a dogmatic reading of his texts and designs.

These remarks bring me back to the problem of *Thel's* illuminated serpent. The fact that this creature can be interpreted as a symbol auguring *either* good or evil

outcomes suggests that there is something much more complex at play in Blake's poem than a moralized reading (whether pointing toward good *or* toward evil) would suggest. As Brian John has argued, "we misread Blake if we assume that certain images...are intrinsically good or bad, for such intrinsicality denies change and organic growth" (29-30). It is possible, I propose, that Blake deliberately deploys a degree of symbolic ambivalence in his depiction of *The'l's* serpent precisely in order to unsettle the kinds of interpretive closure that would deny the possibility of change and growth in our symbolic practices. For is not a conviction that Blake's serpent is somehow "good" as misguided and misleading as a conviction that it is patently "evil"? Or, more precisely, is not the desire to settle the problem of the serpent once and for all--even to consider the problem in moral terms--complicitous with a questionable will to power via a reductive taxonomic organization? Since, in Blake's later writing, the serpent becomes a figure for nothing less than "the vast form of Nature" (J 43/29:76, 80; E192-3), our desire to stabilize its symbolic status suggests, perhaps, a correlative desire to stabilize the meaning of this "vast form" itself. Here, it will be helpful once again to quote the ecological critic Kelly Parker: "If we have our being in the ongoing encounter with [the natural] environment, then to will that the environment become a fully settled, predictable thing...is to will that we undergo no further growth in experience. The attempt to dominate nature completely is thus an attempt to annihilate the ultimate source of our growth ["to flourish, abound, bloom"], and hence to annihilate ourselves" (30). Parker is not speaking here about Blakean "Self-Annihilation," but about pathological--and ecological--self-destruction.

In contrast to atomistic modes of natural taxonomy, "nature's economy" implies a holistic view of earthly life that is relatively unstable and indeterminate, based as it is on the changing relationships, at any given moment, between entities which live not alone,

nor for themselves. This is why, as I have suggested, the Clod of Clay "cannot know" her condition. On the one hand, the epistemological instability implied by such a lack of knowledge²⁹ indicates the Clod's potential openness to new perspectives, an openness that Thel would do well to emulate. On the other hand, however, such openness can dangerously engender (and I use the term deliberately) a passivity--a lack, that is, of critical self-reflexivity--that would leave Thel open, like the Lilly and the Clay, to manipulation by such things as patriarchal discourse, which, in the process of naturalizing its authority, would actively constitute her as a pathological, self-abnegating subject. These diametrically opposed possibilities exemplify *Thel's* rather famous thematic ambiguity (see Eaves, Intro. to BT 74-81), supporting Gerda Norvig's argument that Blake "forged the trope of liminality at every threshold, every barrier of signification in the text" (264).

At a certain level, *Thel's* liminal vision is a product of its genre. As Stuart Curran reminds us, "the enduring feature of pastoral is its double vision"; and if Blake's early poems are in a sense *antipastoral*, they are nonetheless "meticulous in [their] representation of a double vision" (*Poetic Form* 88, 111). Blake's meticulousness in this respect can be seen in his ambivalent attitude toward the contrary states he represents in his *Songs of Innocence and of Experience* (both of which states have their problems and limitations). It can also be seen in his antithetical valuations of "nature's economy" in *The Book of Thel*. On the one hand, as I have suggested, a cosmic natural order in which "every thing that lives, / Lives not alone, nor for itself" (3:26-7) provides the basis for a profound ethical mutuality in the social world. On the other hand, as *The Book of Thel* demonstrates in its depiction of Har's gender politics, such a model of relationality can be invoked instrumentally to support and sanction--indeed to disguise--oppressive and even

deadly modes of social hierarchy and governmentality. Is it any wonder that Blake's *Thel* both celebrates *and* abhors such a model of nature?

Mark S. Lussier has recently argued that Blake's "stance to nature did not crystallize into...a single vision" (398). One is tempted to add, indeed, that Blake's *overall* discourse on nature is one of liminal or *double* vision. It involves both the highest praise--"Nature is Imagination itself" (E702); "Truth is Nature" (E609); "every thing on earth is the word of God & in its essence is God" (E599)--and the deepest scorn --"Where man is not nature is barren" (E38); "Nature Teaches nothing of Spiritual Life but only of Natural Life" (E634); "The Natural Body is an Obstruction to the Soul or Spiritual Body" (E664). Needless to say, these contrary sets of assertions are exceedingly difficult to reconcile: one cannot side with either version of Blakean nature at the expense of the other without distorting Blake's thought. In other words, because Blake's "spectrum of nature...ranges from barrenness to truthfulness" (Lussier 399), it would be as misguided to say that Blake is a forthright champion of nature as it has always been to argue that Blake "despised" the material world (Ackroyd 257) and "rejected nature utterly" (Riede, *Swinburne* 7). Or perhaps not quite. As an enemy of "single vision," Blake understood that liminality is by its very *nature* unsettling, disturbing. It resists the complacency and easy appropriative gestures that petrific doctrinal formulations of nature have tended to generate and cultivate. As I have emphasized in the Introduction to this study, nature, as a *concept*, can be dangerous indeed. History testifies to the multitude of ways that this concept has enabled the *naturalization* of orthodoxies based on patriarchy, racism, classism, and even, somewhat paradoxically, the related systems and technologies that devastate the planet's biosphere--often under the guise of respect and praise for the "natural." A liminalist view of nature is, perhaps, one that can at least attempt to oppose

such appropriations of nature and the "natural." From this perspective, the idealistic notion that the vegetative flourishes on the letters of the word "BOOK" on *The*'s title page (figure 6) suggest "a free interchange between word and world" (Eaves, Intro. to BT 82) can be balanced by the more sober and unsettling possibility that this iconography signifies the ways that human language and the discursive systems that organize its usage inevitably *produce* our understandings of organic nature. The former view enables a celebration of the human-nature relationship; the latter necessitates the active and self-critical caution of what Blake will refer to in *Milton* as "Mental Fight" (E95). In concert, these approaches to nature might productively inform an ecological politics that would have as its goal the emancipation of *both* nature and humanity.

Notes

1. See my discussion of Lawrence in Chapter One, above.

2. Cf. Genesis, 3:15, and *Paradise Lost*, 10.1031-36.

3. Kathleen Raine is convinced that Blake derives *all* of his natural symbols "from some already established symbolic tradition," arguing that he sees "nature through symbol, not symbol through nature" ("Swedenborgian Songs" 71). I am arguing, on the contrary, that Blake--the self-proclaimed champion of Mental Fight--uses symbols self-reflexively in a manner that questions nothing less than representational practice itself.

4. For a succinct reading of radical multi-perspectivism in Blake's early work, see Lawrence Buell's ecocritical reading of "The Fly" (E23-4), wherein "Blake goes so far as to imagine a complete interchangeability between animal and human" (185). See also David Punter's reading of the same poem, wherein Punter describes "the mutual becoming of man and fly" ("Shadowy Animals" 233).

5. For a trenchant critique of eighteenth-century concepts of a pastoral "golden age" see Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City*, Chapter Four. For Williams, the feudal economy that characterizes the so-called "golden age," and which numerous historians have invoked as a counter against which to critique postmodern capitalism, "was an order of exploitation of a most thoroughgoing kind: a property in men as well as in land; a reduction of most men to working animals, tied by forced tribute, forced labour, or 'bought and sold like beasts'; 'protected' by law and custom only as animals and streams are protected, to yield more labour, more food, more blood; an economy directed, in all its working relations, to a physical and economic domination of a significantly total kind" (37-38).

6. Thel's view of the natural creatures of Har may be discursively pre-determined, but this does imply that it is the product of a *repressive* technology of control. As Foucault has noted, although resistance "can only exist in the strategic field of power relations"--and is, thus, subject to various structural constraints--power also makes possible the *productive* formation of "'reverse' discourse[s]" (*History of Sexuality* 96, 101). Although Thel's subjectivity is constituted and determined largely by Har's pastoral context, this context, as I shall argue, does not disable her from engaging productively in various modes of counter-discursive resistance.

7. See, for example, den Otter, page 640, and Wilkie, page 63.

8. Admittedly, the Lilly's self-characterization as a "weed" suggests something of her own subscription to a doctrine of utility, for the term connotes a non-useful plant (see Oelschlaeger 28). But, as we shall see later in the present chapter, this self-description can be seen as part of the feminine Lilly's acquired habit of self-abnegation in the context

of a natural world that is subject to the discourse of an emphatically masculinist social order.

9. While it is possible to argue that "dominion" in Genesis 1:28 properly refers to the notion of "stewardship," the term seems to have been interpreted in a less responsible manner in mainstream Christian tradition. Roderick Nash points out that

Hebrew linguists have analyzed Genesis 1:28 and found two operative verbs: *kabash*, translated as "subdue," and *radah*, rendered as "have dominion over" or "rule." Throughout the Old Testament *kabash* and *radah* are used to signify a violent assault or crushing. The image is that of a conqueror placing his foot on the neck of a defeated enemy, exerting absolute domination. Both Hebraic words are also used to identify the process of enslavement. It followed that the Christian tradition could understand Genesis 1:28 as a divine commandment to conquer every part of nature and make it humankind's slave. (90)

10. *The Economy of Vegetation* and *The Loves of the Plants* were published together in 1791 as Books I and II of *The Botanic Garden*.

11. After tracing the flow of water from the sources of rivers to the sea, Biberg declares: "Thus the water returns in a circle, whence it first drew its origin, that it may act over the same scene again" (36). For a helpful discussion of eighteenth-century understandings of the hydrological cycle, see James C. McKusick's essay entitled "Coleridge and the Economy of Nature," page 378.

12. Arguably the pun on "springs" also associates this word with the cyclical turning of the seasons.

13. The Lilly's willingness to forfeit her life in the service of the male lamb may be read as an insidious consequence of her religious convictions. As Nietzsche, the great opponent of transcendentalism and priestcraft would later put it, "Life...come[s] to an end where the 'kingdom of God' begins" (490).

14. Cf. Thel's "pearly throne" (2:12), her fear of "fading" (plate 1), and her fear of the "lowly" worm (3:23).

15. Darwin's portrait of the "Mechanic Genius" as secure in his fame is certainly more a product of the poet's desire than of his certitude. One might point out that Darwin's depiction of Brindley's statue is a poetic figure, not a representation of a real monument erected in Brindley's honour. Darwin's anxiety over the substantiality of Brindley's fame and the validity of his status as transcendent "GENIUS" is evident in a footnote to the poetry, wherein Darwin writes that Brindley "ought to have a monument in the cathedral church at Lichfield" (3.321n; emphasis added). In contrast to Darwin's

speaker. Thel, arguably, has come to understand that fame will *not* provide a cure for mortality. Although she has fame in Har as "Queen" on a "pearly throne" (2:13, 12) she nonetheless seeks, in her "dialogue" with the Cloud, and especially in their discussion of the worm, to obtain something like an immanent (as opposed to transcendental) understanding of the nature of her mortal existence.

16. For an insightful analysis of Bacon's figurative representation of the scientific endeavour as the sexual conquest of a feminine nature, see Carolyn Merchant, *The Death of Nature*, pages 164-72.

17. For a much more positive reading of Darwin's naturalism, see Anne K. Mellor's "Feminist Critique of Science" in *Mary Shelley*, pages 89-99. Mellor makes what I see as a problematic distinction between "that scientific research which attempts to describe accurately the functionings of the physical universe and that which attempts to *control or change* the universe through human intervention," attributing the former science to Darwin and the latter to thinkers like Sir Humphry Davy and Luigi Galvani (90). While this distinction may hold true in a relative sense, my reading of Darwin's "Mechanic Genius" should make plain that Darwin is not above celebrating an interventionist manipulation of the natural environment for human gain.

18. Many of Blake's readers construct a pathologically regressive Thel by reading the Vales of Har as the same vales Blake depicts in the poem *Tiriel*, wherein the characters Har and Heva dwell in an unquestionably pathological state of arrested development (see, for example, Erdman's commentary on E896). Although it is certainly logical to read the published and engraved *Thel* in light of *Tiriel*, we do so at the peril of overlooking "the difference between an abandoned manuscript and a finished work" (Paley, *Continuing City* 280). In interpreting *Thel*, I would argue, we must bear in mind that Blake chose *not* to engrave or publish *Tiriel*. Because Blake's small contemporary reading public would not have read *Tiriel*, *Thel*'s "Vales of Har" would have retained a much more flexible signification in the late eighteenth century than readers tend to give it today.

19. For a helpful discussion of the relationship in Blake's oeuvre between the words "vale," "veil," and "Vala," see Nelson Hilton's *Literal Imagination*, pages 127-46. Hilton argues that the word "veils" in Blake's oeuvre signifies, among other things, the idea of "the book or woven 'text' of Nature" (128). If this is so, the punning reference in "vales of Har" to "veils" can be seen, among other things, as gesturing toward the natural environment's linguistic or discursive inscription.

20. Blake, whose father and brother were hosiers, would probably have been aware of the appalling consequences of the doctrine of "*laissez faire*" for weavers and other members of the English working class. As E. P. Thompson has pointed out in a discussion of the weaving trade in eighteenth-century England, this orthodox view of

political economy led to the impoverishment of large numbers of weavers, who "did not 'share in the benefits' of economic progress but...suffered a drastic decline" (*English Working Class* 343). For social groups such as the weavers, *laissez faire* was "a system designed by employers, legislators and ideologists to cheapen human labour in every way" (346). Blake would also likely have discussed the doctrine of "free trade" with his close friend George Cumberland, who published writings on the topic (see Bentley, *A Bibliography of George Cumberland*, pages xxii and 71).

21. Although Blake is here referring to "Harmony" of colour in painting--"One Species of General *Hue*"--the concept also has a more general application in his thought. In *Jerusalem*, for example, he speaks of "Harmon[y]" in terms of "Concords & Discords / Opposed to Melody," "Lights & Shades, opposed to Outline," and philosophical "Abstraction opposed to the Visions of Imagination" (74:24-26; E229).

22. Language, like the social relationships and institutions in which it circulates and functions, is always inextricably involved in systems of power. Hence, although the act of speaking involves the speaker's effort to exercise her or his "will to power," it also entails, at a more profound level, the speaker's submission *to* power. For when "a man" speaks, as Foucault puts it, "he has been caused to behave in a certain way. His freedom has been subjected to power. He has been submitted to government" ("Politics...Reason" 84). Arguably, then, it is possible in some contexts to read silence as a mode of resistance.

23. For insightful remarks on "the significance invested in [the hymen]," see Nelson Hilton (*Literal Imagination* 130-32).

24. Blake's readers often oppose Thel's behaviour to that of Oothoon in *Visions of the Daughters of Albion*. In their summary analysis of the "important differences" between these two characters, for example, Morris Eaves, Robert N. Essick, and Joseph Viscomi make the following case: "At the end of her poem, Thel flees from the body and its deadly associations. In contrast, Oothoon accepts the body and its potential for delights that overwhelm conventional distinctions between the physical and the spiritual, even in the face of continued sexual and cultural violence. ...Thel preserves her virginity through an act of denial; Oothoon is raped and becomes a revolutionary" (Intro. to VDA 229). Such a reading of Thel and Oothoon is troublesome, for it assumes that in Blake's view women's identity or coming-to-consciousness must be based on a masculinist violation of the female body, a violation Thel arguably refuses when she flees the "thousand fighting men" who are prepared to "ambush" her near the end of her poem. While I do not wish entirely to deny the revolutionary aspect of Oothoon's critique of patriarchy in *Visions*, I would argue that a dichotomous reading of Thel and Oothoon in terms of unsuccessful and successful revolutionary activity effaces the significant complexity of the sexual politics informing and constituting their actions. For a succinct discussion of the problems inherent in the view of Oothoon as a revolutionary, see David

Aers. "Blake: Sex, Society and Ideology," especially pages 27-32.

25. In "Nietzsche, Genealogy, History," Foucault speaks of the study of *Herkunft* or "descent" (145) as an important aspect of "counter-memory" or "'Effective' history" (154). "Descent," in its Nietzschean usage, implies not the search for a unified racial or familial origin but the uncovering of "a profusion of lost events," including a plethora of historical "accidents," "minute deviations," and "complete reversals...that gave birth to those things that continue to exist and have value for us" in the present (146). Crucially, "descent" is concerned not only with the social world, but with the ways in which that world inscribes and produces "[t]he body--and everything that touches it: diet, climate, and soil" (148). It is in this sense that Foucauldian genealogy (of which Nietzschean "descent" is an aspect) concerns itself with the relationship between the human social world and that which we "know" as the natural environment.

26. The eminent biologist and ecological philosopher Edward O. Wilson has recently coined the term "biophilia" to refer to such a mode of desire (349-51).

27. In *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* (1798), when the Mariner overcomes his earlier abhorrence of the slimy "water-snakes," he sees them for the first time as beautiful and worthy of spontaneous blessing (lines 272-87). At this pivotal point in the poem, the Mariner's heart, formerly "as dry as dust" (247), produces a gushing "spring of love" (284). The Mariner's altered perception of these serpents, the poem suggests, is the catalyst that enables his own spiritual redemption (288-91).

28. See, for example, A. G. den Otter's persuasive argument, page 655.

29. With its emphasis on relationality, the concept of "nature's economy" arguably prefigures twentieth-century cybernetics, a naturalistic paradigm in which causes and effects are so complexly interrelated that they cannot ultimately be differentiated. Indeed, for J. E. Lovelock, the question of the relationship between cause and effect "has no relevance" in cybernetics (52). Because of its atomistic logic, traditional physical science is simply incapable of understanding the entities and relations constituting biological or ecological systems.

CHAPTER THREE

"The Nature of Infinity": *Milton's Environmental Poetics*

I. Blake, Newton, and Prophecy

In his reading of the Revelation of Saint John, Isaac Newton, best known to our age not as a Biblical exegete but as the father of physical science, takes great pains to safeguard the authenticity and authority of Biblical prophecy against the foolish incursions of vulgar interpreters:

The folly of Interpreters has been, to foretel times and things by this Prophecy, as if God designed to make them Prophets. By this rashness they have not only exposed themselves, but brought the Prophecy also into contempt. The design of God was much otherwise. He gave this and the Prophecies of the Old Testament, not to gratify men's curiosities by enabling them to foreknow things, but that after they were fulfilled they might be interpreted by the event, and his own Providence, not the Interpreters. be then manifested thereby to the world. For the event of things predicted many ages before, will then be a convincing argument that the world is governed by Providence. (251-52)

With these words from his *Observations Upon the Prophecies of Daniel* (1733), Newton maintains a strict division between the word of God and the language of mere humans, placing authority--the legal "govern[ance]" provided "by Providence"--only in the former. Such an understanding of prophecy is consonant in Blake's view with Newton's philosophy of nature. For if Newton believes that the providential governance of human history must be understood strictly by retrospective reference to the Book of Scripture and its laws, he also believes that the governance belonging to natural history must be

understood only by reference to laws ostensibly written at the time of Creation onto the pages of the Book of Nature.¹

I shall examine the legalism inherent in Newton's cosmology presently by considering its possible implications for William Blake's antinomian critique of legal authority. First, however, some contextualizing observations concerning Blake's approach to prophecy in *Milton* will be helpful. One of the most interesting aspects of *Milton* is its presentation of prophetic genius as inherent in all human beings: "Every one," Blake asserts, "is a fallen Son of the Spirit of Prophecy" (24/26:75; E121). Since the poem's first textual plate contains a quotation from Numbers--"Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets" (E96)--one might argue that *Milton* is motivated in part by its author's desire to redeem fallen humanity by helping to restore the prophetic faculty to all members of the human community. Newton, on the contrary, opposes such an extension of prophecy (Wittreich, "Opening the Seals" 30-31). In the above-quoted passage from his *Observations*, he rejects the notion that "God designed to make [readers of the Bible] prophets." If, for Blake, prophetic utterance entails the expansion of human communal relations via the intersubjective dynamic of "Mental Fight" (M E95),² then Newton, by opposing *universal* prophecy, might be seen as essentially opposed to such relationality. Such a stance, at any rate, would be consistent with the atomism informing Newton's scientific methodology. For his own part, Blake combats solipsism and self-enclosure by attempting with his prophetic writings to actualize a holistic community of verbally-engaged, mutually interchanging, visionary prophets.

But Blake, it must be noted, does not limit prophecy to the human community. Indeed, in his radical vision, he goes so far as to attribute prophetic genius to such *non-human* entities as "Trees on Mountains," which he depicts in *Milton* as "thunder[ing] thro'

the darksome sky / Uttering prophecies & speaking instructive words to the sons / Of Men" (26/28:7, 9-10; E123). What are we to make of this strange attribution of prophetic utterance to the realm of non-human nature? Certainly, such anthropomorphizing is not without Biblical precedent. In the Revelation, for example, "the two olive trees and the two candlesticks" together comprise St. John's "two witnesses" which "shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth" (Rev. 11:3-4).³ While Blake's prophesying "Trees on Mountains" may allude to the olive trees of this passage, their indefinite genus, location, and number suggest that they more likely symbolize that Biblical bugbear, the archetypal "wilderness." In a memorable passage from Book Four of *Paradise Regained*, Satan attempts to manipulate Christ in such a setting by conjuring a tempest in which "terrors, voices, [and] prodigies" will function as "a sure fore-going sign" that Christ must act now to take up his earthly throne (4.428-30).⁴ Since Blake's prophesying trees also speak in the ominous context of a storm (26/28:8), we might interpret their "instructive words" in the manner that Christ interprets the "voices" that afflict him in the storm-ravaged wilderness of *Paradise Regained*. As Milton's Christ tells Satan, nature's voices are "false portents, not sent from God, but thee" (4.488). In Blake's *Milton*, however, such a reading is clearly inapplicable, since Blake is careful to associate his prophetic trees not with traditional notions of Satanic evil but with the divinity of Christ himself. For, in direct reference to his speaking trees, Blake writes of seeing "the hem of their garments" (26/28:11), alluding thus to Christ's garment, the mere touching of which was thought to render humans "perfectly whole" (Matt. 14:36; see also 9:20-22). At one level, therefore, Blake is likely suggesting that his readers should exercise faith and not undue scepticism when considering the prophetic voices issuing from his mountain forests.

It is necessary, however, to consider Blake's use of this garment metaphor in greater detail, since it occurs in the context of a statement concerning the problems attending our capacity to understand non-human entities. In reference to his prophesying trees, Blake declares that we are able to "see only as it were the hem of their garments / When with our vegetable eyes we view [them]" (26/28:11-12). At first glance, one might be tempted to interpret this reference to "our vegetable eyes" as gesturing not toward a human problem *per se* but as an indictment of modes of vision available to humans within the order of "Vegetable Nature." Blake seems to be suggesting, in other words, that we must exchange our bodies of clay for spiritual bodies before we will be capable of "seeing" and understanding the trees that he calls "Visions of Eternity" (26/28:10). Such a conclusion is, however, open to dispute, for Blake has already declared that these same trees--as it were the *real* vegetables in this passage--themselves view the world through the unobstructed lens of instructive prophecy. Arguably, then, Blake's faulty "vegetable eyes" can be interpreted as referring to a shortcoming that is not "natural" but distinctively human: our inability to "know" the things of nature in their irreducible alterity.

For Blake, in short, our encounters with non-human entities are always in some sense anthropomorphic encounters with ourselves, as the design at the bottom of plate 16 (E plate 17; see figure 9) would seem to suggest. In this design, a human figure confronts a tree and a rock, which Blake depicts as deformed humans (lacking head and torso, respectively). The startled pose of the human passer-by indicates his extreme discomfort with this encounter, suggesting something of the interpretive crisis he faces as a result, perhaps, of his inability to confront the things of nature without anthropomorphizing and thus disfiguring them. And yet, the fact that the rock and tree are not entirely human in

form but maintain a degree of their non-human alterity indicates their resistance to anthropomorphic projection. At once human *and* inhuman, these strange hybrid entities disfigure human identity by both teasing and impeding our all-too-human interpretive impulses.

By repeatedly emphasizing the difficulty attending our interpretations of nature's visible signs, Blake is actually in limited agreement with Newton, who, like Galileo and Kepler, believed that the Book of Nature was written in a "veiled" language whose "meaning was hard to come by" (Manuel, *Religion* 32). But Blake departs from his scientific predecessors in imagining the nature of this language; for while these luminaries argue that nature's language is in fact rational, mathematical, and therefore open to the learned initiate of science, Blake sees it as imaginative, prophetic and therefore potentially accessible to the poet and the prophet. As many critics have noted, Blake's reading of the Book of Nature is similar to that of thinkers like Paracelsus and Swedenborg, whose doctrines of "signatures" conceptualized nature as a text filled with obscure characters, ciphers, and words. According to this notion of signatures (also called "correspondences"), the universe functions as a kind of mirror in which all things, sharing a common identity, see themselves reflected in all other things. As Michel Foucault has noted in a discussion of pre-Enlightenment epistemology, such a universe was thought to be "filled with the murmur of words," since its myriad "mute reflections" or signatures were understood to "have corresponding words which indicate them" (*Order of Things* 27).

If the signs inhabiting Blakean nature recall this "earlier" episteme based on signatures or correspondences, they are also different in important ways. For according to this earlier paradigm, all things tend in fact to be *passive* signs, signs which must be

gleaned and read by the active human interpreter. As we have seen, however, the prophetic trees of *Milton* are far from passive: Blake depicts them as "*Uttering prophecies & speaking* instructive words *to* the sons / Of men" (emphasis added). A few lines later, moreover, Blake represents these trees, whom he lists among "the Sons of Los" (26/28: 10, 23, 30), as labouring actively to provide identities for formless souls and "Sleepers." Indeed, speaking of these formless souls, Blake writes that "the Sons of Los clothe them & feed [them] & provide [them with] houses & fields" (26/28:26-30). Far from being passive resources to be exploited by active humans, Blake's trees are agents of a sort, working and speaking in ways that benefit and indeed redeem a fortunate humanity (since, as we shall see in Chapter Four, "non-entity" [J 5:13; E147] is, for Blake, one of the greatest imaginable evils).

In Chapter One, I discussed Blake's notion that all things in the universe are human. Here, it is important to emphasize the fact that Blake calls *Milton's* prophesying trees the "Sons of Los," for, while such a nomination is flagrantly anthropomorphic, it also implies, as Peter Otto has put it, a radical "decentring of the corporeal self" (81). In other words, by imagining trees as an integral part of the human community, Blake extends human identity far beyond its locus in an atomized human selfhood. Moreover, Blake attempts to prevent this act of anthropomorphic extension from becoming a mode of imperialism by problematizing our ability to "see" these trees, and by refusing to concretize their poetic utterances in the form of interpretable statements (for although Blake tells us that his trees speak, he does not represent the verbal content of their utterances). Most important, by calling his prophesying trees "the Sons of Los" Blake arguably *includes* them in the category of the "Lords people," which he invokes, as we have seen, by saying "Would to God that all the Lords people were Prophets" (E96). And

since, for Blake, "prophecy involves a way of relating" (Wittreich, "Blake's Milton" 77-8). *Milton's* imaginative representation of "Trees on Mountains" might be said to imply a conviction that prophecy will potentially provide a common ground upon which *all* beings, human and otherwise, might meet in communal, visionary exchange.

II. Blake, Newton, and Natural Philosophy

In the work of most Blake critics (my own included), Newtonian Reason often functions as a sort of negative counter against which to delineate and celebrate the figure of Blakean Imagination. In other words, "Newton" has come to represent in Blake studies all that Blake's philosophy is thought to abhor. While Blake's work no doubt encourages such a view of Newton, readers should beware of its reductiveness, for, as Harold Bloom has grudgingly admitted, there is "much that is imaginative mingled with the spectral aspect" of Newton's philosophy (376). Often Blake's anti-Newtonianism seems a response more to Newton's contemporary reputation than to his actual writings. As Voltaire noted, "Newton" became during the course of the eighteenth century a synecdoche for scientific genius itself: "There are people," he wrote, "who think that if we are no longer content with the abhorrence of a vacuum, if we know that the air has weight, if we use a telescope, it is all due to Newton. Here he is the Hercules of the fable, to whom the ignorant attributed all the deeds of the other heroes" (qtd. in Fauvel 4). A glance at Newton's historical reception demonstrates the appropriateness of Voltaire's remarks, for posthumously Newton's reputation achieved a status of almost mythical proportions: medals were struck bearing his countenance, statues were erected in his honour, and poets as famous as James Thomson and Alexander Pope invoked the muse to celebrate the man and his achievements in the most flattering of terms. Commenting on

these developments, Geoffrey Cantor observes that "[w]e are all heirs to one of the most effective publicity stunts in the history of science--*the beatification, indeed the deification, of Newton*" (203). But Newton, like all humans, was far from perfect, and those who deified him were content to ignore the fact that there are "deep internal contradictions and problems implicit in Newton's published writings" (207).

This is not to deny the profundity of Newton's contribution to the development of natural philosophy itself during the course of the eighteenth century and beyond. Without a doubt, Newton's writings helped to initiate an intellectual revolution of unprecedented magnitude. Under the influence of Newton's physics, Enlightenment thinkers enthusiastically transposed atomistic and mechanistic models and methodologies into fields as diverse as chemistry, botany, zoology, psychology, and theology, transforming in the process almost the entire terrain of European thought. Donald Ault summarizes this historical phenomenon most succinctly: "in the years following the emergence of Newton's paradigm, almost every philosophical problem was approached in terms of Newtonian imagery and doctrines" (46).

We should be careful, however, to distinguish Newton's writings from the discourse of "Newtonianism." Newton's celestial mechanics are a case in point. While many late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century writers, including Blake, believed that Newton was to a great extent responsible for the era's "brutal mechanistic world-view" and its accompanying "dehumanization of the universe" (Fauvel 5), Newton's own writings often strenuously oppose the basic assumptions of philosophical mechanism. Before Newton, to cite an important example, René Descartes proposed that matter was entirely passive and inert, and that its apparent movements in the universe were the result of a chain reaction initiated by God at the time of Creation. Significantly, Newton

opposed the principles of Descartes' physics by appealing in part to human bodily experience: "Do you learn by any experiment," he asks, "that the beating of heart gives no new motion to the blood, ...or that a man by his will can give no new motion to his body?" (qtd. in Henry 134). In order to explain what he saw as the spontaneous workings of nature in such phenomena as gravity and fermentation, Newton introduced into mechanistic philosophy the notion of "active principles." According to the *Principia* (1687), in other words, matter was not passive and inert but imbued with an inherent active force or power. One might note here that Blake's opposition to mechanism is based in part on objections similar to those which Newton aimed at Descartes, for, as we saw in Chapter One, Blake's organic cosmos is a human corporeal form endowed with the kind of spontaneous and unpredictable will that Newton points to in his refutation of Cartesian causality. Moreover, like Newton's natural philosophy, which imagines matter as in some sense active and powerful rather than passive and inert, Blake's poetic philosophy consistently privileges activity over passivity, what Blake calls "Mental Fight" (M E95) over blind faith and docile obedience.

Indeed, many prominent eighteenth-century mechanists objected strongly to Newton's natural philosophy. Leibniz, for example, saw the notion of active principles as a betrayal of strict empirical rationality, and, accordingly, he charged Newton with occultism (Henry 135; see also Golinski 165-66). In his *Moses's Principia* of 1724, moreover, John Hutchinson opposed Newton's physics on similar grounds but for a different reason. For Hutchinson, the attribution of active principles to matter entailed a heretical denial of divine omnipotence, for it located power not solely in God but in the physical makeup of the cosmos itself. Hence, to combat what he saw as a latent pantheism in Newton's natural philosophy, Hutchinson reinforced a Cartesian cosmogony

in which God's creative activity was entirely preserved in "the perfect perpetual motion machine" constituting an otherwise passive cosmos (Cantor 215, 218).

If Newton is not exactly the arch-mechanist that Blake understood him to be, neither is he quite the progenitor of the Deism that so troubled Blake's thought. Although Newton undoubtedly saw his natural philosophy as contributing to theology (Roche 43), he very often voiced his opposition to Deistical appropriations of his work. Before Newton, Galileo helped to inaugurate Deism by arguing that the study of astronomical wonders contributed to the earthly glorification of God. Subsequently, numerous English writers began to extend this "argument from design" to the zoological, botanical, and chemical realms. In 1692, Richard Bentley made a compendium of such arguments (gathering them from the writings of such diverse thinkers as John Ray, Francis Willughby, Robert Hooke, Robert Boyle, and Henry More) and "crowned them with the Newtonian system." a project that Samuel Clarke repeated over a decade later, but in a more philosophical vein (Manuel, *Religion* 34). For his own part, as Frank Manuel points out, Newton objected to numerous aspects of these performances, demonstrating no small degree of discomfort for the physico-theological uses to which his work was put during his own lifetime (35).

From the foregoing discussion, we can see that Newton and Blake share some common ground: they were both uncomfortable with the arguments of Deistic theology and with strictly mechanical cosmologies (although Blake's opposition to these things is obviously much more emphatic than Newton's). But the similarities between Newton and Blake do not end here. Like Blake, Newton advocated a philosophy of final causation (Brooke 170); he abhorred corruptions of Christianity for self-interested political ends (177); he opposed the glorification of theological mystery (178); and he had great disdain

for the classical philosophies of Plato and Aristotle (Manuel, *Religion* 42). Nevertheless, these similarities have gone largely unacknowledged in Blake criticism. To a great extent, one might argue, Blake's attack on Newton is aimed less at the man than at his reputation, less at Newton's work than at the uses to which it had been put by those who appropriated and modified its ideas. Indeed, there is much evidence that Blake felt a kind of grudging admiration for what S. Foster Damon has called Newton's "extraordinary feat of imagination" (298).

These contextualizing observations bring me back to the point with which I began the present chapter: the question of the relationship between Blake's antinomian tendencies and his critique of Newton. For Blake's strongest objection to Newton involves not a simple and unequivocal rejection of his materialism, as so many critics have argued.⁵ Rather, I would suggest, Blake's critique of Newton turns around the question of the relationship Newton establishes between material creation and law, whether the latter is formulated in social or in natural terms. Indeed, the history of Newtonian thought demonstrates that notions of human and natural law cannot be separated, for, during the course of the eighteenth century, Newton's laws of motion and gravitation were often invoked to support established models of political authority. In his *Spirit of the Laws* (1748), for example, the Baron de Montesquieu described "an efficient monarchy...in terms of gravitational forces attracting bodies to a system's centre" (Fauvel 36). And later in the eighteenth century, as Foucault has noted, T. N. Des Essarts invoked Newtonian cosmology to characterize the efficient functioning of a well-policed state. As Des Essarts argues in his 1787 *Dictionnaire Universel de Police*, the magistrate-general "operates all the wheels that together produce order and harmony. The effects of his administration cannot be better compared than to the movement of the

celestial bodies" (qtd. in *Discipline* 213). Such sociological appropriations of Newton's physics are consistent with the thrust of Newton's theology. If Newton detested theological mystery, and if his physics are part of an effort to demystify the workings of the cosmos, he nonetheless maintains, as I mentioned above in my discussion of his exegesis, the absolute authority of an inscrutable Providence. As far as Newton was concerned, one worshipped God quite simply by obeying his commandments (Brooke 178).

Blake's critique of Newton's theological and natural legalism is implicit in both the texts and designs of *Milton*. In the full-page design comprising plate 15 (E plate 16; see figure 10). Blake depicts Milton's encounter with the false God Urizen, whose hands grasp the stone tablets of Mosaic law. In the poetic text, Milton must give Urizen and his laws concrete form (19/21:6-14; E112) so that they may be recognized as "Deceit & False Forgiveness" (caption to plate 15) and thus rejected as embodiments of error. But Milton's exposure and annihilation of the moral law would be incomplete without a similar annihilation of natural law. Since above Urizen, on a curved green horizon representing perhaps the curve of the earthly globe, a group of human figures circle Urizen like satellites orbiting a parent star. Urizen's association with natural law is reinforced by the east-to-west movement of the figures circling him⁶ and by the fact that two of these figures hold globe-shaped objects. In the design as a whole, Blake arguably correlates both theological and natural forms of law, both of which, it seems, Milton must oppose.

Blake makes a more subtle correlation between religious and scientific forms of legalism in his poetic depiction of Theotormon's Mills:

These are the starry voids of night & the depths & caverns of earth
These Mills are oceans, clouds & waters ungovernable in their fury

Here are the stars created & the seeds of all things planted
 And here the Sun & Moon receive their fixed destinations[.]
 (M 27/29: 51-54; E125)

That this passage is a poetic depiction of Newtonian cosmology is evident in Blake's references to "starry voids,"⁷ the creation of stars, and the "fixed destinations" of a "Sun & Moon" subject to the laws of gravitation. Theotormon's Mills, which at one level refer to the rotating "Starry Wheels" (3:43; E97) of Newtonian galaxies, are "ungovernable"; for, endowed with "active principles," they are, as it were, *sources* of governance and therefore symbols of natural law itself. It is interesting to note that Blake uses the term "fixed destinations" to characterize both the motions of celestial bodies *and* the ostensible destinies of his "Three Classes of Mortal Men" (6:32; E100),⁸ for this terminological repetition suggests that Blake sees natural law and religious moralism as analogous forms of governance. Finally, it is significant that Theotormon's Newtonian "Mills are oceans, clouds & waters," for, in Blake's mythology, the element of water often functions as a symbol for the legalism of the Old Testament.

This last point can be clarified by a brief discussion of the antinomian eschatology of the "Everlasting Gospel" (which Blake directly invokes in *Jerusalem* in his address "To the Jews" [27; E171]). According to this doctrine, there are three ages upon the earth: the epochs of water, blood, and spirit. These epochs refer, respectively, to the past age of Mosaic legalism (or the Father of the Old Testament), the present age of Christian freedom from the Law (the Son of the New Testament), and the imminent age of Spirit (the Holy Ghost of the "Everlasting Gospel"). In this final age, the believer apocalyptically internalizes Christ as the Divine Image, becoming one with him so that "all existing forms of worship, ceremonies, churches, legal and moral codes...become superfluous" (A. L. Morton 37, 50).⁹ With these three temporal categories of the

Everlasting Gospel in mind, we can understand that Blake's association of physical science with water, the element of the first age, implies a pointed critique of Newtonian natural law. While Bloom argues in essentialist terms that the Newton-water association occurs "because water is a Blakean symbol for the delusion of materiality" (384), I would argue that it reflects not a denunciation of materiality as such, but, much more particularly, Blake's conviction that Newton's hegemonic doctrine of a universe governed by natural laws which are "immutable, static, and unchanging" (Ault 6) implies an insidious regression to a legalism analogous to the Mosaic law governing the epoch of water. Newton's utter immersion in legalism is most evident in the 1795 Tate Gallery print entitled "Newton" (see figure 11). While this painting is famous for its ambivalent portrayal of its eponymous subject,¹⁰ it depicts him, significantly, sitting on a rock at the bottom of the Sea of Time and Space (Klonsky 62), completely submerged in the element of the first, legalistic epoch. Blake further concretizes the symbolic connection between Newton's physics and Old Testament law in this print (which he finished, significantly, in watercolour) by depicting the scientist wielding a pair of compasses, instruments used by the Son in the creation scene of *Paradise Lost*¹¹ and by Urizen as he imposes order upon the universe in the frontispiece design to *Europe* (see figure 12). In "Newton," the rock upon which the eponymous subject sits as he performs his calculations suggests yet another correlation between Newton's naturalistic doctrines and the legalism of the Pentateuch, for the latter was, of course, originally inscribed upon tablets of stone.

The connections I have been positing here between Newtonian physical law and the moral law of the Old Testament can helpfully inform a reading of Blake's *Milton*, for in this poem the protagonist's descent from heaven and his arrival on earth arguably involve a comprehensive antinomian rejection of legalism in both its physical and moral

manifestations. When Blake first introduces Milton in the poem, he presents a figure who has been fully subdued by the moral law: "Unhappy tho in heav'n, he obey'd, he murmur'd not" (2:18; E96). By the time Milton decides to leave this realm to "redeem" his "Sixfold Emanation" (2:19-20), his attitude toward the law has clearly changed: we are told that "He took off the robe of promise, & ungirded himself from the oath of God" (14/15:13; E108). This crucial passage, which Blake deems important enough to illustrate with a full-page design on plate 13 (see figure 13), depicts among other things Milton's rejection of the covenant of Mount Sinai (Essick, Notes 23), the moral law of the Old Testament. This is the same monolithic law that Satan--"Newtons Pantocrator" (3:11; E98) and the "Prince" of the Newtonian "Starry wheels" (3:43; E97)--invokes when he sets himself up as the one true God, declaring "I am God alone / There is no other! let all obey my principles of moral individuality" (9:25-6; E103).¹²

The manner of Milton's ultimate arrival upon earth suggests that his earlier "ungird[ing] himself" from God's moral law also entails a symbolic release from the natural laws that maintain celestial bodies in their "fixd destinations" upon the Satanic "Starry Wheels." Blake describes Milton's arrival thus: "Then first I saw him in the Zenith as a falling star, / Descending perpendicular, swift as the swallow or swift; / And on my left foot falling on the tarsus, enterd there" (15/17:47-9; E110). While Milton's descent might be attributed to earthly gravitation, this possibility seems problematic given that Milton's body subsequently enters Blake's;¹³ for, according to the laws of physics, discrete bodies may collide, but they do not "enter" one another. Although he is figured as a "falling star," then, Milton has somehow escaped the Newtonian laws Blake associates with the "oceans, clouds & waters" of Theotormon's Mills. Clearly, Blake depicts Milton's arrival upon earth in a manner suggesting his own desire to imagine an

imaginative release from *all* forms of law, whether moral or "natural." Indeed, Milton's arrival augurs a visionary revaluation of earthly materiality, for it causes the "Vegetable World" to appear on Blake's "left Foot, / As a bright sandal formd immortal of precious stones & gold." Far from shaking off this world as "the Dirt upon my feet No part of Me" (VLJ; E565). Blake fastens it firmly to his foot, an act which enables him "to walk forward thro' Eternity" (21/23:12-14; E115).

III. The Temporality of Satan's Mill

One of the foundational concerns of Newton's natural philosophy is the definition of time. and since the revisioning of temporality is one of *Milton's* central thematic concerns. I shall devote much of this chapter's remaining discussion to a consideration of the poem's response to conceptions of time derived from or associated with Newtonianism. One of the first principles of Newtonian physics is the concept of "absolute time." In the *Principia*. Newton defines such time as follows:

Absolute, true and mathematic time, of itself, and from its own nature, flows equably without relation to anything external, and by another name is called duration; relative, apparent and common time, is some sensible and external (whether accurate or equable) measure of duration by means of motion, which is commonly used instead of true time, such as an hour, a day, a month, a year. (qtd. in Sherover 100)

To complement this notion of absolute time or duration, Newton introduces the concept of "absolute space." In contrast to "relative space," a "movable dimension" which we apprehend according to the changing positions of bodies, "[a]bsolute space, in its own nature, without relation to anything external, remains always similar and immovable" (qtd. in Sherover 583n). Since absolute time and absolute space "became the two fundamental quantifiable coordinates of the new Newtonian physics," so, as Charles

Sherover remarks, "they entered into common thought" (100). For his own part, Blake was offended by these new and commonly accepted conceptions of time and space, for they were abstract, mathematical, and inhuman (since they exist without relation to the sensory experience which relativizes them [Sherover 583n]). Thus, in *Milton*, time and space are not absolutes. Indeed, when he writes that "Los is by mortals nam'd Time, [and] Enitharmon is nam'd Space" (24/26:68; E121), Blake suggests that time and space should themselves be understood as *human* phenomena. Moreover, since Enitharmon is Los's Emanation, time and space are not properly separable but interrelated.¹⁴ Indeed, the separation of time and space in *Milton* is symptomatic of the fall, since it is in the fall that whole beings become fragmented and divided from their Emanations.

This problem of the fall raises the question of Blake's Eternity, that extratemporal realm in which the four Zoas who comprise Albion's being exist, at least prior to the fall and after their redemption in the apocalypse, in a holistic state of mutual interchange. Blake's eschatological privileging of Eternity has often led readers to devalue the six-thousand-year span of time constituting fallen history in Blake's mythology. And yet, there is an irresolvable contradiction in Blake's late mythology, a contradiction involving the relationship between Albion and the Eternal realm he leaves behind when he falls. Technically, as Paul Youngquist points out, "there can be no such world, since Albion contains within his limbs all things temporal and eternal" (605).¹⁵ Henry Lesnick addresses this problem of the relationship between Eternity and time by declaring that "[a]lthough Eternity is extratemporal, it is manifest in time. And although it is manifest in time, it cannot logically admit of a temporal dimension; it cannot be that infinitely extended reality which precludes the existence of any other reality" (409). Recognizing that Eternity is such an inapprehensible abstraction, Blake attempts to imagine it in terms

of the mundane time in which, as Lesnick argues, "it is manifest." Indeed, in *Milton's* imaginative vision, mundane time becomes a veritable gateway to Eternity, since "periods of Space & Time / Reveal the secrets of Eternity" (21/23:9-10; E115). And if Eternity's "secrets" redeem fallen time, time also in some sense redeems Eternity, for Blake goes on to write that "Time is the mercy of Eternity; without Times swiftness / Which is the swiftest of all things: all were eternal torment" (24/26:72-73; E121). Time may require Eternity for its own redemption, but an Eternity without recourse to time would itself become a kind of hell, a realm of "eternal torment." Such a hell clearly torments *Milton's* Orc, whom Blake figures at one point in terms of a strange inability to participate in the cyclic orders of youth and age, life and death. Orc "incessant[ly] howls burning in fires of Eternal Youth," a strangely atemporalized state in which "Death" is denied "his appointed *season* when the ends of heaven meet" (29/31:29, 45-6; E127-8; emphasis added). Because Orc is out of touch with the seasons of time--which Blake relates to "the ends of heaven" themselves--his youth, indeed his very life, becomes cursed, resembling that of the tormented souls in Revelation who "shall...seek death, and shall not find it: and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them" (Rev. 9:6).¹⁶

My reading of a properly interdependent relationship between time and Eternity in Blake's mythology is admittedly at odds with many of the extant readings of Blake's oeuvre. According to Northrop Frye's highly influential interpretation of Blake's later prophecies, for example, there are "two poles in human thought, the conception of life as eternal existence in one divine Man, and the conception of life as an unending series of cycles in nature" (383). Unlike Erasmus Darwin, who in *The Temple of Nature* celebrates Newton's "eye sublime" for "Mark[ing] the bright periods of revolving time" (qtd. in McNeil 227), Blake, in Frye's reading, righteously rejects cyclical modes of temporality,

especially the idea that humanity has its genesis in the cosmic natural cyclicity of the "Starry Wheels." As Frye would have it, humans are incapable of accepting such a vision, for its "moral and emotional implications must accompany it into the mind, and breed there into cynical indifference, short-range vision, selfish pursuit of expediency, and all the other diseases of the Selfhood, ending in horror and despair" (384). It is on the basis of such a powerful moral argument that Blake ostensibly rejects what Thomas Frosch has called "the aura of meaningless, self-enclosed, and compulsive repetition that characterizes nature as a whole" (161), advocating instead the Judeo-Christian transcendentalist conception of time as a linear, teleological progression (Oelschlaeger 33) in which the spirit of truth will be ultimately disclosed (Fisher 34). Even critics who acknowledge a positively-valued cyclicity in Blake's work--cyclic rhythms associated, for example, with artistic creation and Eternal life (Frosch 179, 177; Rose, "Forms Eternal" *passim*)--contrast such temporality with the debased temporality of mere nature, the latter of whose cycles ostensibly belong only to the "World of Death" (Frosch 172). In such readings of Blake's oeuvre, nature is quite simply and utterly the enemy of Humanity, and must therefore be either radically transformed or altogether transcended.¹⁷

There can be no doubt that Blake was suspicious of Newtonian conceptions of cyclical time. For one thing, such time provides a basis for "Satans Mathematic Holiness" of "Length: Bredth & Highth" (32/35:18; E132), since the uniform numbers gained by the analysis of planetary rotation become "a standard metric by which to measure the duration of all other things and events" (Sherover 99-100). Indeed, for Blake, it is impossible to "Tell of the Four-fold man, in starry *numbers fitly orderd*" (M 19/21:16; E114; emphasis added), since the predictive impetus of a mathematics based on prior measurement privileges "the Daughters of Memory" over "the Daughters of

Inspiration" (M 1; E95) and so destroys imaginative creation. Blake states his opposition to what Frank Manuel calls Newton's "cycloid cosmological theory" (*Religion* 42) most succinctly in an oft-quoted passage from "There is No Natural Religion" [b]: "The bounded is loathed by its possessor. The same dull round even of a univer[s]e would soon become a mill with complicated wheels" (E2). This profound antagonism toward the mill-wheels of Newtonian mechanism stems, I would argue, from Blake's imaginative understanding of the human need for a view of nature unconstrained by the "laws" governing the atomistic and rigidly repetitive "*same* dull round" of Newtonian cycloid cosmology. But this antagonism does not mean that Blake rejects cyclical temporality outright. Rather, he attempts to imagine such periodicity in visionary terms (Fisher 34-5), terms which in some ways anticipate the insights of today's "chaos theory" (also known as the postmodern science of complexity).¹⁸

Let me explain. In recent years, the notion that natural cyclicity involves a rigid pattern of recurrence in which events and processes endlessly and pointlessly repeat themselves has come increasingly into question. The work of researchers like biochemist and Nobel laureate Ilya Prigogine has helped to enable a new scientific and aesthetic understanding that natural phenomena, rather than invariably repeating pre-given regularities, co-exist in synergetic relationships involving the creative manifestation of "true novelty" (Oelschlaeger 454n). In other words, scientists are now beginning to suspect that the closed or atomistic gravitational systems associated with Newtonian mechanism comprise, at best, only a small part of the overall makeup of the physical universe, and that most "phenomena...are, in fact, *open* systems, exchanging energy or matter...with their environment" in unforeseen ways (Toffler xv). Today's "non-linear" fractal geometry, by attempting to model the complexity of multiple interlocking

systems, profoundly problematizes the philosophical tenets of Newtonian celestial mechanics. As Jules-Henri Poincaré discovered at the beginning of the twentieth century, the Newtonian equations traditionally used to calculate the gravitation of celestial bodies can be solved only when these bodies are considered in terms of a closed system of isolated pairs. When the mathematician attempts to add the effects of a third body, the equations are no longer solvable. As John Briggs explains this problem, the strange behaviour of non-linear equations suggests "that the eternal clockwork regulating the planets' orbits might come unexpectedly unsprung" (51-2), a possibility unthinkable within the framework of Newtonian physical science.

While Blake obviously did not know (and likely would not have cared for) the technical fundamentals informing the late-twentieth-century science of chaos and complexity, the emphasis that this science places on openness and exchange between different natural phenomena suggests at least some affinity with Blake's re-visionary representation of nature in *Milton*. For in this poem, Blake imagines an alternative to the monolithic "same dull round" he associates with Newtonian cycloid mechanism and its governing laws. As I shall argue below, the different temporal cycles Blake associates with such diverse entities as larks, wild thyme, and visionary artists entail an interrelational commingling of discrete entities analogous to that which, as I argued in Chapter One, characterizes the phenomenon of "life" itself in Blake's holistic cosmos. By examining *Milton*'s ubiquitous figuring of cycles, circles, wheels, and whirling vortices, I shall demonstrate some of the ways in which cyclical time, thought imaginatively rather than mathematically, becomes the "Divine Analogy" (J 85:7; E243) of an active and creative Eternity. For where Erasmus Darwin associates Newton's "bright periods of revolving time" with the discovery of nature's "latent laws" (qtd. in McNeil 227), Blake

attempts creatively to imagine the same "periods of...Time" as "Reveal[ing] the secrets" of an emancipated, antinomian "Eternity" (21/23:9-10; E115).

IV. Newton's Tyranny

Early in *Milton*, Los calls Satan "Newton's Pantocrator," declaring that "To Mortals," Satan's "Mills seem every thing" (4:12; E98). Los's insight is important to a study of temporal cycles in *Milton*, for in Blake's poetic mythology the only rigidly repetitive processes are, arguably, those that are associated with, or appropriated by, Satan and his Newtonian Mills. As Morton D. Paley has succinctly stated, "The Mill is constantly associated with Satan because, whatever its source of power, it goes around in a circle, always returning to the same point" (Notes 191n). During Blake's era, "Mortals" could hardly help but succumb to the pointless circularity of this Satanic "seem[ing]," for the model of a mechanistic, causally-efficient external order was the predominant paradigm underpinning Western views of natural process.

In *Milton*, mechanism is generally consistent with what Palamabron identifies as Satanic tyranny (7:22; E100), for it tends, as we have seen, to presuppose an omnipotent First Mover who, in the beginning, set all things in motion under the governance of irrevocable universal laws. As Charles Taylor has argued, a purely mechanistic universe is "the only one compatible with a God whose sovereignty [is] defined in terms of the endless freedom of fiat" (161). Surely it is such freedom of fiat that Blake's Satan desires to appropriate when he "mak[es] to himself Laws from his own identity. / *Compell[ing]* others to serve him" (11:10-11; E104; emphasis added). It is no mere coincidence that Blake's language here calls to mind *Jerusalem's* model of perverse causality, the "Water-wheels of Newton": "wheel without wheel, with cogs tyrannic / Moving by *compulsion*

each other" (J 15:16, 18-19; emphasis added). Newton's Water-wheels and the wheels of Satan's Mill are poetic figures for a cyclical universe fully subject to causal laws. As far as Blake is concerned, the forms of mechanism symbolized by Satan's Mills and Newton's Water-wheels imply equally tyrannical (if not entirely cognate) modes of oppression,¹⁹ for each privileges a "Mathematic Holiness" of measurable "Length: Breadth & Highth" (32/35:18; E132), constructing a cosmos made all the more governable by its potentially total phenomenal predictability--the Satanic dream and desire of much Enlightenment physical science. Such a universe has dire implications for human freedom, since it forecloses all possibility of "novelty, energy, emergence, [and] progression" (Ault 97).

In reading *Milton*, it is tempting to identify all forms of cyclical movement as Satanic in nature. Indeed, by "Circling Albions Cliffs in which the Four-fold World resides." Satan himself becomes an exemplar of mechanical cyclicity.²⁰ But Blake, it must be noted, immediately underlines the *unnaturalness* of Satan's "revolutionary" or circular movement by denouncing this activity as "a fallacy of Satans Churches" (39:60-61; E141). What I wish to emphasize at this point is that Satan's Mill and his Newtonian Water-wheels do not represent, for Blake, nature and natural process *as such*. Rather, these things symbolize mechanism as *discourse*, a diverse and often internally contentious body of institutionalized knowledge that simultaneously produces and disciplines "nature" in the ostensible process of describing its objects and the "laws" governing their existence. Blake's prophetic writings attempt, however, to "denaturalize" mechanistic discourse by emphasizing the crucial role that mechanism plays in Satan's institutionalized effort to propagate the widespread illusion that "All Things" are "One Great Satan" (39/44:1; E140).

An early incident demonstrating the proliferative power of Satanic discourse in *Milton* occurs when Satan persuades Palamabron to exchange "stations" with him. Satan's usurpation of Palamabron's Harrow involves, on one level, a kind of imperialist expansion and consolidation of his mechanistic tyranny. Palamabron's workers (significantly characterized as organic "living creatures," i.e., *zoa*), obviously accustomed to working to the tempo of less rigidly defined rhythms than those associated with Satan's Mill-wheels, are "madden'd like *wildest* beasts" in the wake of Satan's usurpation of the Harrow, responding with an understandable "*wild* fury" to their sudden loss of freedom under Satan's supervision (7:46-7; E101; emphasis added). Conversely, the workers of the Mills, accustomed to working to the oppressive tempo of Satan's mechanical rhythms, react to their changed circumstance under Palamabron's supervision with chaotic and carnivalesque exuberance. Los, we are told, beholds "The servants of the Mills drunken with wine and dancing *wild* / With shouts and Palamabron's songs, rending the forests green / With ecchoing confusion, tho' the Sun was risen on high" (8:7-10; E101; emphasis added). This understandable irruption of wildness and festive celebration represents the enthusiastic response of labouring prisoners suddenly freed from an oppressively regular routine. The regimented regularity of this routine is implicit in the expectation that the workers should, at this "high" point of the Sun's diurnal round, be working at Satan's Mills, and doing nothing else (8:16-17; E102).

Los blames himself for the bitter discord that results when Palamabron and Satan exchange stations. After ritualistically signalling a "solemn mourning" (8:11:12; E101), he declares sadly that "this mournful day / Must be a blank in Nature." In order to accomplish this strange erasure, he asks the workers of the Harrow and the Mill to cease their work and "follow with me," adding that they may "Resume [their] labours"

tomorrow. Subsequently, the workers follow Los "Wildly," and, significantly, the Mills fall "silent" (8:20-23; E102). By correlating the "wild[ness]" of the workers' behaviour with the simultaneous silencing of Satan's Mills, Blake encourages the reader to imagine the temporary suspension of a paradigmatic view of nature as simple recurrence. The worlds of the Harrow and the Mill, both of which have by now felt the effects of mechanism, are, it seems, temporarily freed from Satan's mechanistic tyranny. Indeed, Blake goes so far as to imagine the impossibility of a thoroughly non-discursive nature, for Los's assertion that the day must be "a blank in Nature" suggests that nature will become, with the silencing of the Mills, something of a *tabula rasa*. But, as the notion of the *tabula rasa* implies, nature nevertheless waits to receive, at the end of this "mournful day" (8:20; E102), a new inscription or meaning. And, with the impending renewal of the conflict between Satan and Palamabron, the privilege of constructing the meaning of "nature" and the "natural" will fall to the party which successfully establishes its hegemony.

For Blake, however, discursive power is not so simply suspended, and the openness of conceptual possibility implied by the "Wild[ness]" of an uninscribed or "blank" nature is all too quickly foreclosed when Enitharmon, under the influence of Los's well-meaning deception,²¹ forms "a Space for Satan" and "clos[es] it with a tender Moon." This act of atomistic closure marks the sudden reappearance of Satanic mechanism: Enitharmon, subject to the quasi-legal "compulsion" I described above, is suddenly "compelled" (notice the passive mood of the verb) "to / Defend [the] Lie" (8:43-4, 47-8; E102) of Satanic innocence (8:1-3; E101). Los, as if subject to the same compulsion, follows suit. He "*clos[es]* up Enitharmon from the sight" of his own wrathful response to Satan's victories in Eden (9:18; E103; my emphasis), thus

unwittingly perpetuating and consolidating the very system of atomistic closure he seeks to oppose.²² In the lines that follow, Satan takes this closure to its logical extreme: he legislates the anti-relational atomization of identity itself by introducing into the poem the concept of "moral individuality" governed by "Moral laws." Setting himself up as the grand exemplar of such self-enclosure, Satan announces that "I am God *alone*" (9:26, 22, 25; emphasis added). Appropriately, in a dramatic scene which emphatically underlines Satan's self-enclosure (but also, in its language, adumbrates its defeat), Blake represents Satan's bosom as growing "Opake against the Divine Vision," after which "a World of deeper Ulro [is] *open'd* in the midst / Of the Assembly" (9:31, 34-5; emphasis added).

Blake depicts the cosmic scope and oppressive political implications of Satanic hegemony near the mid-point of *Milton*, where he offers us a glimpse of the mechanical workings of the diurnal round:

Luvah's bulls each morning drag the sulphur Sun out of the Deep
 Harnessed with starry harness black & shining kept by black slaves
 That work all night at the starry harness. Strong and vigorous
 They drag the unwilling Orb.... (21/23:20-23; E115)

The insistent repetition in this brief passage of such words as "drag," "starry," "harness," and "black" reflects, at the very level of language, the notion of cyclicity as simple recurrence. And, at the narrative level, this pattern of linguistic repetition reflects the mechanistic philosophy to which such a notion of recurrence belongs: the Sun is conducted in its round by way of external compulsion, a compulsion emphasized by the "harness" of slavery. That such a model of natural cyclicity is perverse and oppressive is suggested by the figuration of the Sun as an "unwilling Orb" that must be dragged with the help not of free humans but of slaves who, notwithstanding their strength and vigour, are also compelled unwillingly to their task. Blake underlines the "unnaturalness" of this cosmic vision by depicting "The mountains...& every plant that grew" as lamenting it

with "wail[s]" and "solemn sighs" (21/23:19). In Blake's vision, in other words, the things of nature are themselves appalled by their subjection to Newtonian natural law. More hopefully, however, when the "Family / Of Eden" hears nature's lament, Providence begins--despite the fact that Los and Enitharmon can only hear this lament through the "inclos[ing]" walls of an atomized Mundane Shell (21/23:24, 28-30; E116).

But a note of optimism has indeed been sounded, and Blake subsequently offers us poetic depictions of processive circles and cycles that belie and attempt to challenge the Satanic vision of nature as cyclical enslavement and atomistic enclosure. In the design to Plate 32 (E plate 33/36; see figure 14), for example, Blake depicts the Four Zoas as interconnected circles, entities "whose Gates are opened" (34/38:17; E134) rather than closed. In the midst of, and intersected by, these circular entities is the Mundane Egg, within which appears the names of Adam and Satan. In *Jerusalem*, Blake explicitly contrasts this latter structure, which he also calls the "Mundane Shell," with Albion's Satanically-petrific "frozen Alters" (42:78; E190), auguring a potential transformation of religious moralism that is all the more apparent when we remember that Blake depicts the egg, in *For the Sexes*, as embodying the promise of a "hatching" (E262), suggesting a mode of transcendence immanent in natural structures and in the cycle of life itself. More important, in the design we have been considering, "Milton's Track" penetrates the circular Zoas (with the notable exception of Tharmas, whose border Milton's Track nonetheless touches) and the Mundane Egg, emphasizing that the entities they depict are not atomistically self-enclosed but permeable and open.

But this image of the Zoas as interconnected circles is not without a certain accompanying textual ambivalence. When the Zoas, also called the "Family / Of Eden,"

recognize that Milton is in fact "the Awakener" (21/23:33, 23-4; E115-16), we are told that they

collected as Four Suns
In the Four Points of heaven East, West & North & South
Enlarging and enlarging till their Disks approachd each other;
And when they touch'd closed together Southward in One Sun
Over Ololon.... (21/23:37-41; E116)

Despite their seemingly felicitous interconnection, the Zoas groan "in spirit" and are "troubled" at the thought of Milton's activity (21/23:43-4), for they have failed "to realize that Milton's descent into 'Eternal Death'...is a necessary part of his redemption" (Essick, Notes 157). One might gloss the problem here by comparing the behaviour of the Zoas in the above-quoted passage to that of *Milton's* "gorgeous clothed Flies." When these latter creatures come into contact with one another, they "touch each other & *recede*," "cross & change & *return*" (26/28:1-2, 6; E123; emphasis added), and in acting thus they become, like the prophesying trees I discussed earlier, "Visions of Eternity" (26/28:10). With the example of these visionary flies in mind, we can understand that the problem attending the interconnection of the Four Zoas involves their failure similarly to balance the "touch[ing]" of "their Disks" with an alternating--that is, cyclical--rhythm of recession and return. By merely and only touching each other, the Zoas form the "closed" synthesis of a singular and homogeneous "One Sun," what Ololon refers to as the "Unnatural refuge" (21/23: 40, 49) of a totalitarian community that cannot be open to the Other (who, in this case, is Milton himself).

Ololon is a key player in *Milton's* rethinking of natural cyclicity, and she is figured, tellingly, in terms of active circularity. On Plate 34/38 (which, in Erdman's edition directly follows the design depicting the interaction of the circular Zoas, the Mundane Egg, and Milton's Track) the Daughters of Beulah ask her: "Are you the Fiery

Circle that late drove in fury & fire / The Eight Immortal Starry-Ones down into Ulro dark" (34/38:3-4; E133; emphasis added)? The realm from which Ololon has driven out these "Starry-Ones"--the "Seven Angels of the Presence" (15:3; E109) plus Milton--is Blake's Miltonic heaven, a realm which, as I argued earlier in this chapter, is thoroughly circumscribed by an oppressive moral law. If God is the centre around which lesser angelic bodies move as subordinate satellites, then Ololon's act of driving out the "Starry-Ones" might be understood as involving a transgression not only of the moral law but also of its "natural" analogues. However we choose to interpret it, Ololon's act is crucial to the poem's movement from moral stasis to the beginnings of apocalyptic transformation. At a certain level, Ololon, the "Fiery Circle," also referred to apostrophically as "*O* wonder of Eternity" (34/38:7; emphasis added), dramatically embodies Blake's imaginative revaluation of circularity and cyclicity. Indeed, her very name suggests her *revolutionary* potential in the poem: in uttering it out loud (Ol-ol-on or O-lo-lon), the round Os, in concert with the repetition of combined "o" and "l" sounds, enact a kind of circular revolving on the tongue, lingually gesturing toward Blake's revolutionary critique of religious and natural modes of law. For as Milton's sixfold Emanation, Ololon represents the manifold contexts from which the pathological Miltonic selfhood has become severed in *Milton*; and the entire narrative thrust of the poem is toward the redemptive restoration of the complex relationality that would define Milton's "whole" being--and, indeed, that of all entities.

V. "The Nature of Infinity" and Satanic Encirclement

Perhaps more effectively than any other part of the poem, *Milton's* famously cryptic vortex passage can shed light on Blake's revolutionary rethinking of cyclical systems.

Because this passage is so complexly crucial to Blake's critique of Enlightenment mechanism, it will be helpful to quote it here at length:

The nature of infinity is this: That every thing has its
Own Vortex; and when once a traveller thro Eternity.
Has passd that Vortex, he percieves it roll backward behind
His path. into a globe infolding; like a sun:
Or like a moon, or like a universe of starry majesty,
While he keeps onwards in his wondrous journey on the earth
Or like a human form, a friend with whom he livd benevolent.
As the eye of man views both the east & west encompassing
Its vortex; and the north & south, with all their starry host;
Also the rising sun & setting moon he views surrounding
His corn-fields and his valleys of five hundred acres square.
Thus is the earth one infinite plane, and not as apparent
To the weak traveller confin'd beneath the moony shade.
Thus is the heaven a vortex passd already, and the earth
A vortex not yet pass'd by the traveller thro' Eternity.
(15/17:21-35; E109)

As Vincent de Luca points out, critics have likely devoted more commentary to this passage than to any other single passage in all of Blake's corpus, "and, notoriously, no two [of these] readings coincide" (81). For W. J. T. Mitchell, the interpretive difficulties attending readings of the vortex passage derive from its description of abstract, extra-mundane concepts like infinity and eternity "in terms of travel through space and time and the encounter with finite things" (*Blake's Composite* 71). De Luca addresses this representational conundrum by arguing that the passage, as an aspect of Blake's sublime textual practice, is deliberately designed to resist paraphrase (82), "actualiz[ing] intimations of the infinite and the eternal by detaching one from all cause-and-effect chains of corporeal existence, from time, sequential logic, and the many kinds of errant traveling" (80). Because of its emphasis on earthly transcendence, de Luca's reading is in some ways consistent with that of Stuart Peterfreund, who reads the vortex passage as restoring the primacy of spirit over matter by depicting a journey *through* "the material

[realm] and into the realm of spirit" ("Anti-Newtonian" 155). My objection to such interpretations is that they tend to efface the crucial role that materiality continually plays in Blake's visionary apprehension of the infinite and the eternal. As I argued in Chapter One, in my discussion of the relationship between Blake's antinomianism and his distrust of philosophical abstraction, Blake believed that eternity and infinity must be sought *within* the human experience of time and place, since "it is impossible to think without images of somewhat on this earth" (Anno. Lavater E590). Rather than negating the earthly images Blake associates with *Milton's* vortex by advocating the need to transcend them, we would do well, I think, to consider the crucial role these images play in *enabling* imaginative enterprise.

Perhaps the most remarkable assertion Blake makes in the vortex passage is that "*every thing* has its / Own Vortex." Since the structure of a vortex involves "both convergence toward a center" and the "interaction of contrary forces" (Mitchell, *Blake's Composite* 72). Blake's assertion suggests that each and every phenomenon can be conceptualized in terms of circular or cyclical movement in time. But Blake's vortex is not a closed structure subject only to the compulsive causality of mechanism, for it can be "passd" through like a window, allowing the imaginative "traveller thro Eternity" to escape the "moony shade"²³ of efficient-causal law and experience, literally, the "nature of infinity"--an *infinite nature* in which the finite space of "five hundred acres square" gives way to an "infinite plane" of possibility. This plane is a site of profound interconnection, since each entity inhabiting it has a vortex or gateway connecting it to other similarly-endowed entities.²⁴ Once passed, moreover, each vortex "roll[s] backward" behind the traveller, at which time it resembles *both* globular, cyclical bodies like the sun and the moon *and* "the human form, a friend" who inspires "benevolent" co-

existence. Hence, we can see that Frye's notion, mentioned earlier in this chapter, that Divine Humanity and cyclical nature are Blakean polar opposites need not be axiomatic. Indeed, the journey through the vortex is followed, significantly, by numerous positively-charged cyclical poetic figures. The "rising sun & setting moon" *surround* the traveller's fields and valleys. "Corn-fields" present to the traveller's gaze the nourishing produce of cyclically-turning seasons, while valleys conjure up images of streams which, like *Thel's* "golden springs" (BT 3:7; E4), flow in rhythm with the hydrological cycle. In such a universe, where vortices connect myriad object-systems, the earth is no longer the closed system or "same dull round" that so many of Blake's readers have associated with Blake's view of the material world. Indeed, readers who regard natural cycles only as structures of oppressive repetition in Blake's oeuvre might themselves be seen as "weak travellers" through the vortices of Blake's imaginative artifacts, approximating those "Mortals," mentioned above and near the beginning of *Milton*, to whom Satan's mechanical "Mills seem every thing" (4:12; E98).

When Milton encounters the vortex during his journey to the earth, his experience of space undergoes a significant alteration, an alteration emphasizing the imaginative power implicit in the thinking of cyclical systems as open and interrelated rather than closed and atomistic. Passing through the vortex, Milton finds that traditional hierarchical structures are transformed. As his perspective alters, "what was underneath soon seemd above" (15/17:42). Blake's employment in this passage of the word "seemed" suggests, however, that Milton's change of perspective need not be read as a simple inversion of the high and low terms constituting a heaven/earth duality. As the subsequent line--"A cloudy heaven mingled with stormy seas in loudest ruin"--indicates, the formerly opposed terms of heaven and earth (the latter represented by the "stormy

seas"²⁵) become "mingled," not inverted. Hence, the reference to "ruin" might be read to signify the destruction of a system of thought which hides heaven from human sight behind a "cloudy" veil of theological mystery.

In stark contrast to the imaginative cyclical nature he depicts in the vortex passage, Blake represents the strictly repetitive cyclicity of Enlightenment mechanism in terms of atomistic self-enclosure and its (un)imaginative consequences: environmental devastation and death. Early in the poem, for example, we learn that the Satanic Urizen has had his genesis in the celestial body of "a red round Globe hot burning" (3:11; E97). In Blake's symbolism, as Mitchell points out, the globe functions as "an image of rotation and cyclicity" (*Blake's Composite* 130). That the nature of Urizen's globe is mechanistic rather than imaginative is suggested by Blake's depiction of Urizen's perceptual faculties. His eyes are "Roll[ed] round into two little Orbs & closed in two little Caves" and his "petrified" ears, like *Thel's* auricular "whirlpool[s] fierce to draw creations in" (BT 6:17; E6), spiral forth "in close volutions" (M 3:14, 17-18; E97). In these lines, Blake emphasizes the atomistic closure implicit in Newtonian cyclical process by figuring Urizen's rolling "Orbs" as fully "closed" and encaverned and the volutions of his petrified ears as similarly "close" or closed. Urizen's sensory constitution can only result in distorted, inevitably solipsistic human percepts, sensory impressions which Blake depicts as both cosmologically generated by, and perpetuating, Newtonianism in and as a closed, literally vicious cycle in which we become what we behold by beholding (i.e., projecting upon the world) what we have already become.

Urizen's perceptual makeup has dire implications both for the natural environment and its living inhabitants, implications suggested by his "Tongue of hunger and thirst." This tongue, besides representing the insatiable appetite of Urizen's Faustian will-to-

power, is in a sense a logical *consequence* of his Satanic-Newtonian world-view. This claim can be explained by way of a brief digression. As we saw in Chapter One, the new physical sciences replaced an earlier panvitalism with what Hans Jonas has called "a universal ontology of death" (11). Whereas panvitalism saw the entire cosmos as a living organism (somewhat like the cosmic form of Blake's Ancient Man, Albion), the new sciences, highly critical of anthropomorphism, developed a panmechanistic ontology "whose model entity was pure matter, stripped of all features of life" (9). We witness such of view of materiality, for example, in Galileo's discussion of the rose:

that it must be white or red, bitter or sweet, noisy or silent, and of sweet or foul odor. my mind does not feel compelled to bring in as necessary accompaniments. Without the senses as our guides, reason or imagination unaided would probably never arrive at qualities like these. Hence I think that tastes, odors, colors, and so on are no more than mere names so far as the object in which we place them is concerned, and that they reside only in the consciousness. Hence if the living creatures were removed, all these qualities would be wiped away and annihilated. (qtd. in Evernden, *Natural Alien* 17)

Following Galileo's lead, Newton similarly "denigrate[s] the subjective witness of the senses" (Manuel, *Portrait* 75), removing what Galileo calls the "living creatures" (Blake's *zoa*) from his own objects of study by conceptualizing the universe only in terms of objective characteristics that can be measured and quantified, and thus arithmetically manipulated (Oelschlaeger 78).

For Blake, among other things, such a world-view negates human identity, reducing members of the "Divine Humanity" (i.e., *all* living things) to

Shapeless Rocks
Retaining only Satans Mathematic Holiness, Length: Breadth & Highth
Calling the Human Imagination: which is the Divine Vision & Fruition
In which Man liveth eternally: madness & blasphemy, against
Its own Qualities, which are Servants of Humanity, not Gods or Lords[.]
(M 32/35:14, 17-21; E131-2)

Significantly, this passage, which opposes the numerical quantities of science to the imaginative "Qualities" of "Divine Inspiration," follows one plate after Blake's extended poetic descriptions of Beulah's birds and flowers (31/34:28-63; E130-31). In this earlier section of *Milton*, the lark's inspired song "vibrates with the effluence Divine" (line 35), while the "precious Odors" and "sweets" of Beulah's flowers derive from, and augur the return of, an expanding "Eternity" (lines 46-8). Under Satan's regime of "Mathematic Holiness," which recognizes only "Length: Bredth & Highth" in "starry numbers fitly orderd" (20/22:16; E114; emphasis added), however, the imaginative "Qualities" Blake associates with the redemptive songs and scents of a subjective "*order* sweet & lovely" (31/34:62; emphasis added) are entirely negated. Unable to understand the world of qualities, Satan's objective order must condemn the Human Imagination's subjective order as "madness and blasphemy." But Blake does not wish merely to invert the dominant order of things by advocating an absolute privileging of subjective qualities over objective quantities, for such privileging would merely replace "Satans Tyranny" (32/35:16) of "Mathematic Holiness" with a potentially tyrannical sensuousness or subjective Holiness. Thus, Blake is careful to qualify his critique of objective, quantitative thinking by pointing out that subjective "Qualities...are Servants of Humanity, not Gods or Lords."

Critical of any methodological tendency to separate the "living creatures" from the material cosmos they inhabit, Blake associates Satan, whom he repeatedly represents in terms of rock, sand, and stone (what Frye aptly characterizes as "the deadeast part of the material world" [364]), with images of environmental devastation that are more than mere descriptive reworkings of traditional landscapes of hell. As he declares in *propria persona* just prior to Milton's encounter with Satan:

I...stood in Satans bosom & beheld its desolations!
 A ruind Man: a ruind building of God not made with hands;
 Its plains of burning sand, its mountains of marble terrible:
 Its pits & declivities flowing with molten ore & fountains
 Of pitch & nitre: its ruind palaces & cities & mighty works....
 (38/43:15-19)

While this passage can be read in terms of the contemporary philosophy of catastrophism, which understood such things as volcanic activity and the formation of mountains as geographical consequences of the ancient fall of humanity, it can also be read prophetically, as a poetic warning concerning the earthly devastation that *might yet* occur if humanity continues to pursue the course of discovery charted by the proponents of Enlightenment naturalism.²⁶ Indeed, from our late-twentieth-century vantage point, Blake's Satan might be seen as a prophetic personification of human-caused (but so-called "natural") catastrophes, including the process of environmental desertification.²⁷ An enemy of the "living waters," the "ruind Man" of mathematical science ruins all he touches, both buildings and open spaces, human and non-human environments, causally *producing* the Urizenic world of "hunger and thirst" discussed above, a world incapable of sustaining life. Hence, the warning that is part of *Milton's* prophetic message: the poem emphatically demonstrates that, by embracing mechanistic views of nature, we inevitably arrive at Satan's desolate condition, both within and without ourselves.

In the Epilogue to *Milton* we witness a powerful alternative to the desolate vision of human-nature relations that Satan represents and figuratively embodies in the poem. At the end of the grand prophetic vision that comprises *Milton*, Blake, far from enacting or advocating an artistic transcendence of Vegetable Nature, depicts himself as awakening from a swoon in his earthly garden, with Catherine Blake by his side as his soul returns "To Resurrection and Judgement in the Vegetable Body" (42/49:26-27; E143). With this passage, Blake shows his readers that transcendence (here called

Resurrection) can be conceptualized as immanent "*in*" Vegetable nature. Moreover, following the example of his "gorgeous clothed Flies" who "cross & change & return" (26/28:2. 6; E123), Blake, in the new arrival of his earthly return, demonstrates his conviction that artistic creation involves a cycle: he *crosses* over into vision, is *changed* by the experience, then *returns* once more to the green and pleasant earth that has all along supported his mind and body in their visionary endeavour.

At this crucial point in the poem, Blake uses various poetic images and allusions to emphasize his revisionary affirmation of natural cyclicity as the "Divine Analogy" (J 85:7; E243) of Eternal community. He finds himself once more in his own earthly garden, where he encounters the singing lark and the wild thyme, a pair of earthly creatures whose symbolic choice is particularly interesting. Stuart Curran has argued that, in the symbolism of lark and thyme, "the natural has been converted to transcendent symbol: skylarks become angels; the scent of thyme on the heath is an incense revealing the spiritual presence of the divine" (*Poetic Form* 113). This kind of reading, I would argue, involves a problem of misplaced emphasis: if we shift the terms of Curran's argument slightly, we might say that Blake, in his symbolic deployment of the lark and thyme, rather than spiritualizing nature, *naturalizes spirit*, bringing spirit out of abstraction and down to earth. It is important to remember that these two entities are among the most earthly--one might say the most "immanent"--of England's natural creatures. Far from exhibiting in its natural growth what might be construed as an emphatic striving toward the heavens, the wild thyme is a "creeping vine" which is "firmly rooted in the earth" (Kauver 84). Despite its humble character (or perhaps because of it), this flowering herb is commonly called "Christ's Ladder," a nomination suggesting its symbolic status as a natural link between heaven and earth. Like the wild

thyme, the lark is similarly humble yet visionary. In high contrast to such sky-dwelling birds as the eagle--a traditional poetic symbol of transcendental desire--the lark is a ground-nesting bird that builds an "*earthy* bed" (31/34:29; E130; emphasis added), living, as Blake reminds us, even closer to the soil than the "bright purple mantle" of the wild thyme itself (35/39:57-8; E136). At daybreak, however, the lark "Mount[s] upon the wings of light into the Great Expanse" of the sky (31/34:32), a movement suggesting that this bird functions, like the thyme, to symbolize a connection *in* nature between heaven and earth. Blake's symbolic choice of the lark and wild thyme as his visionary counterparts in *Milton* involves not a transcendental negation of earthly nature, but an affirmation of the "holiness" that is a fundamental property of all Blakean life.

To return to the theme of temporality, it is important to note with Frye that the lark is "the early-rising bird" of the returning day, and that the wild thyme is "the early-flowering plant of the returning spring" (Frye 355). As respective harbingers of new diurnal and seasonal beginnings in nature, these creatures together represent the complex *interrelationality* of cyclical processes when they are understood imaginatively. Their presence in Blake's garden suggests that the completion of the poet's own visionary cycle in *Milton* involves Blake in a commingling with other new beginnings in a natural cycle of returning days embraced within a larger cycle of returning seasons. And the result of this commingling, it must be emphasized, is by no means a stagnant return of the Same. On the contrary, this garden scene represents a meeting of human and natural entities who become interimplicated like the wheels *within* wheels of Ezekiel's vision and *Jerusalem's* Eden (J 15:19-20; E159), each containing and modifying something of the other according to the Emanative principle of mutual interchange. And it is because of this

mutual interchange that Blake's garden becomes in *Milton* what Curran has appropriately called "a reservoir of infinite potentiality" (*Poetic Form* 176).

Some additional commentary on Blake's lark will help to clarify this claim, for at the level of Blake's imaginative poetics, this bird exemplifies the mutual interchange that occurs when cyclical processes mingle in the natural world. As Blake tells us, the lark's

little throat labours with inspiration; every feather
On throat & breast & wings vibrates with the effluence Divine
All Nature listens silent to him & the awful Sun
Stands still upon the Mountain looking on this little Bird
With eyes of soft humility, & wonder love & awe....
(31/34:34-8; E130-31)

Here the lark, whose song as I have noted augurs the beginning of another diurnal round, has the power to *influence* the cycle it announces and in which it participates: the "awful Sun," no longer an "unwilling Orb" enslaved by the economy of mechanistic compulsion described above. "Stands still" at the sound of the lark's voice, which affects, indeed, "All [of] Nature." We might interpret the message that the lark's song imparts by considering, in addition to the Sun's emancipated response, another environmental context of its utterance: as Blake tells us, "Just at the place to where the Lark mounts, is a Crystal Gate" (35/39:61; E136). If this gate, like its counterpart in the imaginative vortex, marks the way out of necessity and enclosure in the self-centred systems constituting the "Starry Wheels" of Newtonian cycloid cosmology, then the Lark's song signifies, and marks the threshold of, an alternative, emancipatory cyclicity: the cyclicity of "Divine Analogy" (J 85:7; E243). Finally and crucially, Blake articulates a bond of poetic and visionary fellowship with this representative of the natural world by associating the lark, whose "little throat labours with inspiration" (31/34:34), with material acts of inspired poetic creation and, hence, with the above-described cycle constituting the inspired poet's visionary endeavour.

The wild thyme's role in the poem is similarly complex. Although Blake returns at the end of his visionary quest to his own *domestic* garden, the *wild* thyme's presence there suggests that this enclosed garden, rather than figuring the "absolute civilization" of Frye's Eden (389), incorporates *within* its domesticity something of the chaotic "wildness" of non-domesticated nature--a wildness that crucially modifies the domestic context. Blake tells us, moreover, that "The Wild Thyme is Los's Messenger to Eden, a mighty Demon," whose "presence in Ulro dark" is "Terrible deadly & poisonous" (35/39:54-5; E136). The Wild Thyme is certainly an enemy of Ulro, for the very existence of Ulro, the realm of mechanism and therefore of "Eternal Death," is threatened by the kinds of temporal excess and creaturely alterity that "wildness" represents. David Erdman has suggested, indeed, that the wild thyme's very name rings in Blake's poem "with a prophetic pun" (*Prophet* 431), which I would interpret as a poetic gesture toward the "wild" temporality I have been attempting to describe in this chapter. Such time involves not the linearity of Christian teleology, nor the closed and rigidly repetitive cyclicity of Newtonian mechanism, but an expansive, open, complexly interrelated system of temporal cycles, the multi-faceted temporal structure that characterizes Blake's alternative vision of nature, "the nature of infinity."

Notes

1. Newton, following the contemporary philosophy of the "Two Books," recognized the Book of Scripture and the Book of Nature as the only authoritative sources of human religious understanding. As Frank Manuel explains, "Newton did not conceive of one book as sacred and the other as secular or profane. The worth of the two books was equal, and there could be no invidious comparisons between them. And whatever knowledge of God was revealed in the one was harmonious with what was unfolded in the other" (*Religion of Isaac Newton* 48).

2. I am indebted to Joseph Anthony Wittreich for my understanding that prophecy "involves a way of relating" ("Blake's Milton" 77-8). I should point out, however, that Wittreich includes in the prophetic relationship only the writers of explicitly prophetic texts (77-8). But Blake potentially takes the idea of prophecy much further than Wittreich's argument suggests. Because all humans are potential prophets in Blake's eyes--and because Blake wishes to play a catalytic role in actualizing this innate potential--Blakean prophecy logically implies an ideal form of human relations *in general*.

3. For an Old Testament antecedent to this passage, see Zechariah, Chapter 4.

4. At this point in *Paradise Regained*, Christ has already explicitly declared that the time for him to assume his earthly throne is not yet at hand (3.393).

5. For examples of this view, see Damon (298-9) and Peterfreund, "Blake and Anti-Newtonian Thought" (passim). For Peterfreund, indeed, Blake's unequivocal response to Newton involves his desire "to show matter for what it is: mere inessential 'dirt'" (151).

6. In the design to plate 32 (E plate 33/36; figure 14), Blake situates the east on the right-hand side of the plate and west on the left-hand side. One might also observe in passing that the sun and moon move across the earth's ecliptic from east to west, following what Blake calls in *Jerusalem* "the current of / Creation" (77:4-5; E232).

7. Later in *Milton*, Blake speaks directly of "the Newtonian Voids between the Substances of Creation" (37/41:46; E138).

8. These three classes comprise the Elect, the Redeemed, and the Reprobate.

9. Cf. Newton, who argues, in plain contrast to the antinomian position, that the two basic commandments of the Pentateuch "always have [been] and always will be the duty of all nations and the coming of Jesus Christ has made no alteration in them" (qtd. in Brooke 182).

10. Maureen McNeil points out that while Blake depicts Newton "staring down at the ground, away from higher aspirations, [Newton's] figure is noble and not unsympathetically rendered" (226). Moreover, as Damon notes, Newton performs his geometrical calculations on a scroll, which in Blake's iconography tends to symbolize imaginative creation (299). For a fine full-colour reproduction of "Newton" see Klonsky, page 62.

11. The frontispiece to *Europe* suggests something of Blake's disagreement with Milton's representation of Christ as circumscriber of chaos during the creation. In *Paradise Lost*, as Blake likely noted, Milton represents the Son's role in creation in terms suggesting his subordination to the Father. "[A]ll his father in him shone" (7.196), says Milton, as Christ prepares to leave heaven's gate on his journey into chaos. Christ rides out into this realm, furthermore, "in paternal glory" (7.219). Finally, after Christ measures and circumscribes the portion of chaos necessary for creation, Milton writes: "Thus *God* the heaven created, thus the earth" (7.232; emphasis added). Like the compasses he himself wields, the Son seems a mere instrument of God during Milton's scene of creation. Hence, Blake represents not Christ but Urizen as the wielder of the "golden compasses" (7.225) in the frontispiece to *Europe* (see figure 12).

12. Aside from indicating his desire to be the one and only God, Satan's claim that "There is no other" demonstrates that the law can tolerate no form of "otherness" or moral plurality. That such law is operable in Milton's heaven is apparent insofar as this heaven excludes Milton's "other," Ololon, the curiously "natural" "sweet River" (21/23:15; E115) who comprises Milton's divided emanation.

13. It is significant that Milton enters Blake's "tarsus," for although this term refers to "the flat of the foot" and "the seven small bones of the human ankle" (*OED*), it also alludes to St. Paul, who was known as Saul of Tarsus prior to his Christian conversion. For an analysis of the relationship between the Blake-Milton convergence in *Milton* and Blake's critique of Pauline dualism, see Hutchings, "Locating the Satanic," pages 284-88.

14. While Enitharmon's status as Los's Emanation suggests that Blake in some sense gives time priority over space, *Milton's* text indicates that this is not necessarily the case. When Enitharmon creates "a New Space to protect Satan from punishment" in the wake of his usurping Palamabron's harrow, the Eternal Assembly ratifies this "kind decision" and gives "a Time to the Space" (13/14:15-16; E107), an act suggesting the precedence of space over time. In Chapter Four, I shall examine the implications of Blake's representation of nature's space as feminine.

15. Youngquist refers here to plate 27 of *Jerusalem*, where, in his prose address "To the Jews," Blake declares that Albion "anciently containd in his mighty limbs all things in Heaven & Earth" (E171). As Youngquist observes, the problem of the fallen

Albion's relation to Eternity is usually solved in Blake criticism "by being ignored" (605).

16. According to Frye, Orc's problem in *Milton* involves not his atemporality, as I am arguing, but his immersion in a temporal process Frye identifies as the "Orc Cycle" (207-35). For Frye, Orc's political activity in Blake's oeuvre takes a cyclical form in which Orc inevitably internalizes and duplicates the governmental structures he originally opposes. Thus, the Orcian revolutionary unwittingly *becomes* the Urizenic oppressor, necessitating the rise of a new Orc, whose activities, unfortunately, are also co-opted by Urizenic structures (and so the violent process of revolution and conquest repeats itself in the mundane world, presumably *ad infinitum*). In Frye's reading, this pernicious cycle is not only related to, but is indeed cognate with, the processes of nature: "The rebirth of Orc, the reappearance of life in a new form, ...is the ordinary process of life" (322). With comments like this one, Frye in effect essentializes political cycles of revolution and conquest, thus leaving virtually no hope for an effective, earthly, emancipatory politics. For an alternative reading of the "Orc Cycle," see my "Locating the Satanic: Blake's *Milton* and the Poetics of Self-Examination" (passim), wherein I argue that the replication of governmental structures in *Milton* points to a problem not of natural process but of politics and revolutionary strategy.

17. For additional critical remarks concerning Blake's ostensible belief in the need for humans to transcend nature's cyclical temporality, see Joseph Anthony Wittreich's "Opening the Seals," page 44, and Stuart Curran's "Structures of *Jerusalem*," page 330. For readings of cyclical time as potentially positive or redemptive in Blake's poetic mythology, see Peter F. Fisher's "Blake and the Druids," pages 33-35, and Henry Lesnick's "Narrative Structure...of *Jerusalem*," page 410.

18. I shall argue below that the science of complexity involves a radical departure from Newtonian mechanics, and so does not merely replicate the "complicated wheels" to which Blake refers in the above-cited quotation from "There Is No Natural Religion." Since the use of postmodern "chaos theory" may seem anachronistic in the context of a study of Blake, I should point out that Ilya Prigogine and Isabelle Stengers date the birth of this science in 1811, when Baron Jean-Joseph Fourier developed, in France, a highly acclaimed mathematical model describing the propagation of heat in solids, an entropic model that contradicted Newton's thesis that time was reversible (104). At approximately the same time in England, moreover, Erasmus Darwin's friend and colleague, James Watt, was developing a steam engine, the entropic functioning of which was similarly in conflict with the efficient causality informing Newtonian mechanism (103, 111). Arguably, such scientific "discoveries" could not have been made in an historical context where an intuitive understanding of the problems and shortcomings of Newtonianism was not already "in the air." In his very particular way, Blake, I am convinced, uses *Milton* to articulate his own intuitive response to the problems inherent in Newton's physics. For a succinct discussion of the relationship between "chaos theory" and environmental criticism, see Verena Andermatt Conley's *Ecopolitics: The Environment in*

Poststructuralist Thought, especially pages 68-75.

19. Satan's desire for absolute omnipotence in *Milton* suggests that his Mill properly symbolizes the sort of "pure" mechanism which, as I pointed out above, Deists like John Hutchinson opposed to the mechanism of the Newtonian system. Since Newton's Water-wheels move "by compulsion *each other*," the "power" that drives them might be said to stem not from some external "Prime Mover" (as in Hutchinsonian mechanism) but from the "active principles" with which Newtonian mechanism imbues all bodies. Arguably, Blake does not consistently differentiate these two forms of mechanism but tends instead to associate "Newton" with mechanism in general.

20. Satan "incircle[s]" Albion's body in a similarly predatorial manner at 39/44:16-21, E140.

21. Los hides Satan's murder of Thulloh from Enitharmon, "lest she should die of grief" (8:41; E102), thus denying her the opportunity to understand the violence of Satan's character.

22. Los's response significantly takes the form of environmental destruction, as he displaces continents and oceans and alters the poles of the world (9:16-17; E103). As we shall see, such destruction is itself a sign in *Milton* of Satanic influence.

23. The "moony shade," which confines the "weak traveller" of the vortex passage recalls the "Space" that Enitharmon creates for Satan earlier in the poem; for, as we have seen, Enitharmon seals this Space with the "tender Moon" (8:43-4; E102) of atomistic or solipsistic enclosure.

24. For an antithetical reading of Blake's vortex see Thomas Frosch's *The Awakening of Albion*. In his phenomenological approach to Blake's poetry, Frosch argues that the vortex, like Blake's structure of the Centre and Circumference, is "crucially ironic": "To try to find a way out in the given terms of the figure is to slip into a trap," for any "motion from a center, any quest for relationship that takes the self as its point of orientation, can only lead into the final solipsism of Ulro" (76, 78). My disagreement with Frosch stems in part from his claim that Milton takes up a "vantage point" in Blake's poem only when he passes through the vortex (72), for this claim assumes the phenomenological perfection of the heaven Milton leaves behind, enabling the argument that leaving this heaven involves Milton in "a descent in consciousness" (73). As I have argued elsewhere, Blake's Miltonic heaven, far from being an ideal, aperspectival realm, represents a Pauline discursive construct that presupposes the oppressive vantage point of a particular orthodox or Pauline way of conceptualizing human life and duty (Hutchings, "Locating the Satanic" *passim*).

25. Blake's "stormy seas" can be read as a direct reference to earthly seas. But more accurately, perhaps, the figure might be read as referring to "the deep" of Genesis

1:2, the locus of the "dark materials" (*Paradise Lost* 2.916) out of which, according to the theology of Milton and--with crucial differences--that of antinomian divines like John Reeve (*A Divine-Looking Glass* 34), God originally fashioned heaven and earth.

26. One of the major thinkers of "catastrophism" was Thomas Burnet, whose *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1697) attributed the sublime and terrifying aspects of earthly geography to a series of ancient cataclysmic upheavals: "overwhelming floods, precipitous falls, chasms suddenly yawning, toppling buildings, howling storms, fierce battles, vast conflagrations" (De Luca 154, 149). For Vincent de Luca, Blake's use of catastrophic settings and images is part of a discourse of sublimity designed to actualize in the reader "intimations of the infinite and the eternal" (80) by memorializing these ancient and terrifying upheavals. Since *Milton's* Preface explicitly privileges Inspiration over Memory (E95), I would argue that the poem's catastrophic imagery must also be read in terms of a forward-looking prophetic warning that widespread environmental catastrophe will occur again if we do not change our minds and practices.

27. "Desertification" is a geographical term referring to the combination of natural processes and human activities contributing to the relentless advance of desert areas (Blake's "plains of burning sand") around the globe. For a succinct discussion of this climatological phenomenon, see David D. Kemp's *Global Environmental Issues*, pages 54-60.

CHAPTER FOUR

Imagining Nature in Blake's *Jerusalem*

I. Criticism, Nature, and *Jerusalem*

It is a commonplace in Blake studies to consider *Jerusalem* the poetic culmination of Blake's anti-natural philosophy, a philosophy that had not yet attained its mature or fullest expression in the earlier epics. As Stuart Curran remarks in a discussion of Blake's generic practice, *Milton* marks the last time in the poet's career that Blake "writes poetry of natural description whose beauty is ravishing" (*Poetic Form* 113). Since critics often regard *Jerusalem* as the continuation and culmination of a single epic beginning with *Milton*,¹ its comparative eschewal of a pastoral vision in favour of a more emphatically apocalyptic vision lends some credence to the notion that Blake's attitude toward the material world was becoming increasingly antipathetic. As Harold Bloom points out, there "is no equivalent in *Jerusalem* to the wonderful vision of a natural world being redeemed by the work of Los that we are given in the closing plates of the first book of *Milton*." What Blake's final epic supposedly shows us is nature viewed unequivocally as "the delusive nightmare-world of the Ulro" (Bloom 366), the nightmare-world of Hell itself (Deen 217).²

Such a reading of nature in *Jerusalem* involves what I see as a serious oversimplification of a complex problem. Hence, by demonstrating in this chapter some of the ways in which nature and ideology are intricately related in *Jerusalem*, I shall offer a more equivocal reading of Blake's representation of nature in the poem. It is important

to note. first of all, that Blake's critique of the relationship between nature and ideology is itself multi-faceted and sometimes contradictory. On occasion, for example, Blake deploys an essentialist poetics, establishing a critical difference between the things of nature themselves and the uses to which they are put by humans. Bath's status in *Jerusalem* is a case in point. As I argued in my Introduction, Blake depicts Bath in at least two contrasting ways: on the one hand, he envisions it as a geographical wonder "Whose springs are unsearchable & knowledg infinite," and it is primarily in this "natural" guise that Blake praises Bath as the "mild Physician of Eternity" (41/46:1-2; E188); on the other hand, Blake condemns Bath as "Legions" (37/41:1-2; E188), since its popularity as a spa involved a human appropriation of its natural healing powers for self-interested ends. Blake's implicit critique of Bath's appropriation is an essentialist one insofar as it suggests that a "real" and "natural" Bath exists apart from or prior to the interests of those who use its space for profit or illicit pleasure. Such a critique, to quote Jacques Derrida, is "pre-deconstructive," for it is grounded in an "ontology of presence as actual reality and as objectivity" (*Specters* 170). This is not to deny the political efficaciousness of the pre-deconstructive aspect of Blake's critique. As Derrida himself admits, "[p]re-deconstructive...does not mean false, unnecessary, or illusory" (170). If nothing else, an ontology of presence can function as an enabling political *strategy*, for by attempting to imagine the things of nature as they might be said to exist apart from human practices, we can perhaps begin to access some critical distance from those practices, so that we may begin imaginatively to assess them and, where necessary, to formulate possible alternatives.

Blake is, however, ultimately suspicious of this strategic "ontological moment" (Critchley 6) in which he invites us to imagine nature in "objective" or "extra-discursive"

terms. Perhaps this suspicion stems in part from his inability to trust in doctrines of objectivity during an age in which the objective discourse *par excellence* was that of mechanical materialism. For Blake, as we saw in the previous chapter, this scientific discourse was thoroughly political, producing an enslaved human and non-human world by naturalizing and thus perpetuating established modes of legal authority. There are thus crucial moments in *Jerusalem* wherein Blake seems entirely to eschew an ontology of presence, as when he depicts nature's very "congenerat[ion]" as a consequence of Albion's and Luvah's struggle for "dominion" over the body of Vala. As I argued in my Introduction, the circumstances surrounding this incident suggest that, for Blake, power relations actually function to *produce* "the vast form of Nature" (43/29:77-81; E192-3).

Moments like this one are, however, relatively rare in Blake's late poetry. Neither a strict essentialist nor a consistently rigorous deconstructionist, Blake often formulates views of nature which combine, in a rather unsettling manner, both ontological and discursive or deconstructive modes of poetic critique. The best instance of such a combination occurs in *Milton* where, in the midst of Satanic strife, Los declares that "this mournful day / Must be a blank in Nature" (8:20-21; E102). In this passage, as I argued in Chapter Three, Blake's metaphorical language encourages us to imagine nature itself as a kind of *tabula rasa*, formerly written upon by human discourses but now temporarily liberated from such writings. The philosophical implication of this passage is almost primitivist in tenor: Los erases the totality of nature's *inscriptions*, until nature stands naked in its extra-discursive purity. And yet, what can be the *nature* of such a nature? Certainly, as a "blank," this strange figure points toward no apprehensible identity and thus no ontological presence. Blake's revisionist allusion to the concept of the *tabula rasa* thus tantalizes us with the *possibility* of accessing an extra-discursive nature, only to

present us ultimately with a troubling *absence*.³ At moments like this one, the seeming essentialism that often haunts Blake's vision of nature reveals itself as provisional, the strategic prelude to a radical critique of objectivity which, as I argued at the beginning of this dissertation, can all too easily be invoked to support dogmatic understandings of nature as regulatory standard or norm.

Because of its strong antinomian tendencies, Blake's critique of normative legal authority is often idealistic and seemingly founded upon "a conception of presence as effective reality" (Critchley 4). Consider, for example, Blake's critique of institutional corruption in *Jerusalem*, wherein he differentiates true Art, Liberty, and Religion from their constructed semblances or politically-interested representations. Midway through the poem's second chapter, Los refers in credal antinomian fashion to the various productions of "Law" as "Swell'd & bloated General Forms." For Los, such forms are insidious, involving "A pretence of Art. to destroy Art: a pretence of Liberty / To destroy Liberty. a pretence of Religion to destroy Religion" (38/43: 19, 30, 35-36; E185). These lines demonstrate Blake's occasional tendency to view ideology in terms of "false consciousness." Because orthodoxy largely controls the social mechanisms of interpretation, it can paradoxically define Art, Liberty, and Religion in ways that are actually destructive of these things. Blake is pointing here, in other words, to the ways in which the discursively-constructed "preten[sions]" of orthodoxy become normalized or naturalized in the social world as destructive realities.

On the same plate in *Jerusalem*, Blake suggests that the complex realm of nature is subject to similar modes of distortion. In line with the destructive practices of Art, Law, and Religion, Albion's sons, Scofield and Kox, "accumulate / A World in which Man is by *his* Nature the Enemy of Man" (38/43:51-2; E185; emphasis added). Scofield's

and Kox's world is the self-interested realm of the Ulro, a realm which is, significantly, the "material world" (Damon 416) of much Blake criticism. For many of Blake's readers, it is this realm--the world of nature itself--which stultifies and corrupts its human inhabitants (as Blake seems to suggest later in the poem when he writes of "A World where Man is *by Nature* the enemy of Man" [49:69; E199; emphasis added]). And yet, to essentialize the Ulro in this particular way is to efface *Jerusalem's* critique of the role human ideology plays in the conceptual construction or production of the material world. By failing to grasp Blake's political critique of nature's regulative function as a key concept in and of the social world, many readers continue to see *Jerusalem* as philosophically hostile to the material world "itself." Such a view, I would suggest, not only distorts the central political concerns of Blake's great epic; it entails a critical devaluation of nature that might, to borrow the poet's own rhetorical formulation, be characterized as "a pretence of Nature to destroy Nature." But the Ulro, we must remember, gestures not only toward the material world but also and perhaps primarily toward human self-interest, the anti-relational solipsism which shapes the fallen Albion's view of the world and its living creatures. In the ensuing discussion, I shall focus on Blake's representations of the relationships between and among humanity, "nature," and the "natural" in *Jerusalem* in order to query the role that such self-interest plays in Blake's philosophy of human-nature relations.

Blake's opposition to extreme forms of human self-interest or self-enclosure is well known. Indeed, *Jerusalem's* central action recounts Albion's withdrawal from dynamic relationality, his fall into solipsism, and his ultimate renovation as a fully-integrated, re-socialized being. Albion's reunion with Jerusalem, his Emanation, is

crucial to his renovation, for it is only via a mingling of Emanations that humans may encounter one another without violence. As Los tells Enitharmon,

When in Eternity Man converses with Man they enter
 Into each others Bosom (which are Universes of delight)
 In mutual interchange. and first their Emanations meet
 Surrounded by their children. if they embrace & comingle
 the Human Four-fold Forms mingle also in thunders of Intellect
 But if the Emanations mingle not; with storms & agitations
 Of earthquakes & consuming fires they roll apart in fear
 For Man cannot unite with Man but by their Emanations
 Which stand both Male & Female at the Gates of each Humanity[.]
 (88:3-11; E246)

This passage describes the sociality that occurs within Albion's unfallen Eternal form. Albion may in this state be a whole and integral entity, but he should not be understood as a homogeneous primal unity, for he is comprised of Zoas or personified faculties which continually "converse" with one another "In mutual interchange" via the "comingl[ing]" of their Emanations. As David L. Clark defines it, "the emanation is a trope for the *possibility* of relationship itself, for the principle of adjoining which inscribes entities in the web of difference" ("Against Theological Technology" 186; emphasis added). And yet, if the Emanation tropes a *fundamental* relationality, the gendered language Blake uses to describe this dynamic is, as Clark points out (186), troublesome; for although Los declares that the Emanations "stand *both* Male & Female at the Gates of each Humanity," he subsequently characterizes their mutuality as a mode of "Brotherhood" (88:14). Speaking of an analogous problem in the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, Derrida poses a crucial question: "How can one mark as masculine the very thing said to be anterior, or even foreign, to sexual difference?" ("At This Very Moment" 40).⁴ *Jerusalem* continually highlights the importance of difference and relationality--which, as we have seen, are fundamental concepts of ecology--but it often does so in

questionably gendered terms, personifying and dramatizing the concept of the Emanation primarily in the character and plight of its eponymous heroine. Thus, to a certain extent, Blake's critique of self-interest and solipsism seems inadvertently to reinscribe aspects of the anti-relational dynamic it attempts to oppose.

I shall examine this problem of gender and its relationship to Blake's philosophy of nature in my discussion of Vala's function in Blake's mythology. For the moment, it is important to emphasize that relationality is by no means a purely human phenomenon in *Jerusalem*. Indeed, the attempt to enclose oneself within the category of humanity by drawing an oppositional limit between humanity and non-human nature itself entails a rather grand denial of difference, for, at the very least, the logic supporting such a stance inevitably homogenizes the multiplicitous entities forced to occupy each side of the oppositional divide.⁵ It is significant, then, that *Jerusalem's* figurative language often associates the human Emanation's function with the earthly or natural landscape. Blake chooses, for example, to figure the failure of emanational "comingl[ings]" between humans in terms of environmental cataclysm: "if the Emanations mingle not," Los declares, then "with storms & agitations / Of earthquakes & consuming fires they roll apart in fear" (85:6, 8-9; E246). But Blake also highlights the landscape in his poetic depiction of the successful commingling of Emanations. In the opening lines of *Jerusalem's* first chapter, for instance, the Saviour presents the poem's ideal of the holistic interrelationship of all entities in curiously natural terms: "I am in you and you in me," he declares, "mutual in love divine: / Fibres of love from man to man thro Albions pleasant land" (4:7-8; E146). In his commentary on this passage, Bloom argues that "imaginative fibres...must bind man to man if England is to be liberated from the vegetative fibres that form the chains of selfhood and jealousy" (369). I shall discuss the role of "vegetative

fibres" in section four of this chapter in my analysis of Blake's *Polypus*. Suffice it to say here that the opposition Bloom establishes between "imaginative" and "vegetative" fibres is difficult--if not impossible--to sustain. Quoting Edwin Clarke, Nelson Hilton points out that the very word "fibre" came into the English language as "a 'concept' word, representing, as it had in antiquity, 'a basic unit of animal and plant life'" (*Literal Imagination* 80). While Blake certainly asks us imaginatively to rethink the meaning of "fibre" in *Jerusalem*, it is not clear that he wishes or is able to eradicate its biological and natural reference. If Hilton's argument is correct, "Blake seizes on the word ['fibre'] as a means of *connecting* human and vegetable life, micro- and macrocosm" (80; emphasis added). Even where it is provisionally possible to differentiate "imaginative" from "vegetative" fibres in Blake's work, it is by no means clear that the former fibres refer only to humanity while the latter refer to a natural realm essentially opposed to it. Crucial to the present argument, rather, is the peculiar fact that in the opening lines of *Jerusalem's* first chapter the Saviour conceptualizes "Albions pleasant land" as the primary *locus* of love's dynamic of human interconnection, indeed as the very corporeal medium "thro" which love's imaginative "fibres" perform their redemptive function of joining "man to man" (4:7-8).

In the lines directly following the Saviour's pastoral evocation of the land, however, *Jerusalem's* tonal register abruptly changes. Suddenly, we learn that "In all the dark Atlantic vale down from the hills of Surrey / A black water accumulates." Subsequent to this transformation of the landscape, the Saviour declares that "the Divine Vision is darkend" (4:9-10, 13; E146). By hiding his "Emanation lovely Jerusalem / From the vision and fruition of the Holy-one" (4:16-17), Albion has rejected the emanative "Fibres of love" that connect Eternity's human inhabitants to one another,

thrusting his "pleasant land" into an "accumulat[ing]" darkness (and auguring, one might point out, the self-divided world of Ulro which, as we saw above, will be subsequently "accumulated" in the poem by Scofield and Kox). According to Blake's cosmological vision, this correlation of the human incapacity for love and the darkened vision of the natural environment is entirely logical, for Albion represents in Blake's mythology not only humanity but England's material landscapes as well. Indeed, Albion's condition exemplifies Blake's notion of the direct correspondence existing between internal and external realities. As Minna Dosek remarks, "Nothing can happen within Albion that is not at the same time happening to his cities, villages, farms, forests, streams, and mountains..." (*Blake's "Jerusalem"* 22). Hence, a major symptom of Albion's "souls disease" and its darkening of the "Divine Vision" (4:13) is the "darkend" appearance of England's terrain (4:9-10), a terrain, one might say, whose transformation prophesies the possibility that Albion's fall will result in the "dark-end" of Non-Entity.

Significantly, Blake's reference in *Jerusalem* to "Albions pleasant land" recalls the opening lyric to *Milton*, wherein Blake locates the building of "Jerusalem, / In Englands green & pleasant Land" (M 1:14-15; E96). Although this lyric suggests that the building of Jerusalem must foundationally incorporate "greenery," such a thesis has rarely been advanced by Blake's most prominent readers. Alluding to *Milton's* opening lyric in his discussion of *Jerusalem*, Northrop Frye argues, for instance, that the New Jerusalem must *replace* "Englands green & pleasant Land" in order to be actualized. From Frye's perspective, quite simply, England must "turn its green and pleasant land *into* Jerusalem" (*Fearful Symmetry* 392; emphasis added); since the effort "to restore the New Jerusalem in (not to) England" (396) would contradict his thesis that the city of God must be a space or site of "absolute civilization" (389). Frye's archetypal theory presupposes, in other

words, that Blake's own syntax in *Milton's* opening lyric is erroneous and therefore must be altered by the reader in the process of interpretation.

Although his work is strewn with absolutist rhetoric, Blake can be wary of absolutes; and a glance at various aspects of *Jerusalem* will show that the relationship he constructs between nature and culture in this poem does not partake of an absolute dichotomy opposing non-human and human being or natural process and human cultural activity. At the bottom of *Jerusalem's* title page design (see figure 15), to be sure, Blake depicts the fallen Jerusalem as a "vegetated" entity whose human form is imprisoned in "the sleep of Ulro" (4:1; E146).⁶ Above this figure to the left, the newly-awakened Jerusalem looks down at her sleeping self with an expression of utter dismay, suggesting that she now recognizes the harmfulness of her earlier vegetated state. In her fully awakened state, at the top of the page, however, Jerusalem resembles not a typical human angel but a human-insect hybrid whose wings are tinted, significantly, in gorgeous green.⁷ Here we see that even Jerusalem, Blake's figure for Emanation itself (and thus the most important personified concept in the poem), need not be read as a strictly human or cultural entity.

Like Jerusalem, Blake's Christ embodies both culture and nature--the realms of "vision *and* fruition" (4:17; E146; emphasis added)--in the poem. In Chapter Two, for example, we are told that Christ "is all in all, / In Eden: in the garden of God: and in the heavenly Jerusalem" (34/38:24-25; E180). Later, we discover similarly that "every Human Vegetated Form in its inward recesses / Is a house of ple[as]antness & a garden of delight Built by the / Sons & Daughters of Los in Bowlahoola & in Cathedron" (73:50-52; E229). In each of these passages natural process, inhabiting the tended space of the garden, accompanies the cultural constructions of the house and the city. And although

the garden refers to a domesticated landscape (as opposed to the chaotic wilderness of an "unconquered" nature), Blakean cities are by no means opposed to natural processes. As Los declares in the final chapter, "The land is markd for desolation & unless we plant / The seeds of Cities and of Villages in the Human bosom / Albion must be a rock of blood..." (83:54-56; E242). Los's reference to the planting of seeds figures the genealogy of "Cities & Villages" in organic terms, suggesting the need for humans to build civilization in ways that are continuous with, rather than strictly opposed to, processes of biological growth. Far from positing a strict dichotomy between nature and humanity (by which the oppositional limits of Frye's "absolute civilization" would be delineated), Los's remarks warn us that a dichotomized view of these two realms will destroy England, transforming Albion into "a rock of blood." Two plates later, Los speaks again of the necessity to "plant... / The Seeds [of cities]...in the bosom of Time & Spaces womb / To spring up for Jerusalem" (85:27-29; E244). These lines suggest that the building of Jerusalem itself will not be accomplished by a rejection of nature or natural processes. As Peter Otto argues, the *entire* universe of Los and Enitharmon "is the ground necessary for visionary expansion" (27). In the ensuing discussion, I shall endeavour to explore the conceptual and material territory of this necessary "ground."

II. Albion's Fall and the Fall of Nature

If *Jerusalem* offers its readers a tantalizing glimpse of Albion's unfallen condition in the Saviour's early reference to "Fibres of love from man to man thro Albions pleasant land" (4:8), this glimpse is merely retrospective, for the verb tense of the Saviour's subsequent question--"Where hast thou hidden thy Emanation lovely Jerusalem / From the vision and fruition of the Holy-one?" (4:16-17)--reveals that Albion's fall has occurred prior to this

moment in what Morton D. Paley calls "the anterior myth" (*Continuing City* 199). As we saw in the previous chapter, this fall is in a sense unimaginable, for if, on a cosmic level, Albion's limbs contain "*all* things in Heaven & Earth" (plate 27; E171; emphasis added), then his human form embodies both Eternity and time, making his fall from Eternity illogical or self-contradictory. Reading this problem as an aspect of *Jerusalem's* textual instability, Paul Youngquist remarks that, with the fall, the "One Being identical with all things appears not to be identical with himself" (605). This insight is important, for it sheds light on the problem of anthropomorphism in *Jerusalem*. On the one hand, as I argued in Chapter One, Blake's anthropomorphic cosmology--his notion that all things are integral human particulars of Albion's cosmic human form--enables the construction of an "environmental ethics" in which *all* things must be granted the respect and dignity that traditional Judeo-Christianity tends to reserve exclusively for humans. With Albion's fall out of relationship and into solipsistic self-enclosure, on the other hand, this ethical anthropomorphism becomes somehow inoperable. No longer "identical with himself" (to borrow Youngquist's terms), Albion begins to engage in oppressive acts of anthropomorphic projection, denying the particular alterity of the natural realm by colonizing it in terms of the human "same."

Albion's first act of projection occurs in his opening dialogue with Christ. This encounter is important, because it provides a template for all subsequent self/other interactions in the poem prior to the apocalypse. Crucially, since Albion's limbs contain all things temporal and eternal, his dialogue with the Saviour must in some sense be enacted internally. Thus, Albion's seemingly blasphemous notion that Christ is nothing but a "Phantom of the over heated brain" (4:24) is, in a sense, an accurate assessment of his circumstance; for Christ is indeed a part of his own being. Albion fails, however, to

understand that Christ's existence and his own are of a piece. His phantasy of an externalized Christ is mirrored in his subsequent encounters with all entities (whether human or non-human), for every thing he meets is, properly speaking, an aspect or projection of Albion himself.

Interestingly, Albion's notion of the "separateness" of non-human entities seems to have played a decisive role in his fall, at least as he describes this incident in a crucial retrospective gesture toward the anterior myth:

We reared mighty Stones: we danced naked around them:
Thinking to bring Love into the light of day, to Jerusalem's shame:
Displaying our Giant limbs to all the winds of heaven! Sudden
Shame siezd us.... (24:4-7; E169)

It is important to note here that Albion's "Sudden / Shame" directly follows his construction of the "winds of heaven" as separate viewing spectators of his giant dance. Indeed, he repeats this anthropomorphism four plates later when he declares similarly that "all / These hills & valleys are accursed witnesses of Sin / I therefore condense them into solid rocks" (28:8-10; E174). As in *Paradise Lost*, the fall of nature in *Jerusalem* seems to be coincident with or a consequence of the fall of humanity. And yet, Albion's remarks in each of the above-quoted passages suggest that nature's fall, rather than involving an ontological transformation of the material world itself, is perceptually based upon an act of anthropomorphic projection. From Albion's human standpoint, the *idea* that the things of nature are separate gazing "witnesses" of his behaviour unaccountably entails a "Sudden" self-reflexive understanding of that behaviour as sinful. Concomitantly, according to Albion's logic, the things of nature, because of their ostensible witnessing, become "accursed." Los's statement, later in the poem, that "the accursed things were [Albion's] own affections" (42:3; E189) is highly significant in this regard. Repeating the word "accursed," this statement, explaining Albion's act of

"Brooding on [the] evil" of "others" (42:2, 1), recalls Albion's earlier accusation against the things of nature, where his own sense of shame causes him to view these things as evil "witnesses." In Blake's mythology, I would argue, the anthropomorphism implicit in this notion of "witnessing" founds the original devaluation or fall of nature, whose non-human entities, as we shall see, become explicitly separated from humanity in the wake of Albion's dancing display of "Giant limbs." Later in the poem, the Spectre "rejoic[es]" in this "Giant dance," for this entity, who "has no Emanation but what he imbibes from decieving / A Victim" (65:58-60; E217), is the product of the very conceptual separation of entities that makes possible the anthropomorphic "saming" of non-human nature, an act which aggrandizes the Selfhood by painting the external world entirely in its own colours.

After condensing the "accursed" "hills & valleys" into "solid rocks," Albion's anthropomorphic colonization of non-human entities gathers momentum:

He sat by Tyburns brook, and underneath his heel, shot up!
 A deadly Tree, he nam'd it Moral Virtue, and the Law
 Of God who dwells in Chaos hidden from the human sight.
 (28:14-16; E 174)

Subsequently, this tree shoots "into many a Tree," which the narrator refers to as "an endless labyrinth of woe! / From willing sacrifice of Self, to sacrifice of (miscall'd) Enemies / For Atonement..." (28:19-21). In light of the pathetic fallacies discussed above, we must examine Albion's relationship to this "deadly Tree" most carefully; for after his encounter with this tree and his parenthetically-highlighted act of "miscalling" (wherein Albion wrongly sees his friends as "Enemies"), Albion misnames his twelve sacrificial altars of "rough unhewn rocks" "Justice, and Truth" (28:21-23). This set of obvious misidentifications raises the likelihood that Albion's earlier identification of the tree as "Moral Virtue" is similarly misguided. The tree, in short, is not a poetic

representative of a natural world that has insidiously contaminated Albion's psyche. On the contrary, it has been anthropomorphically colonized by Albion's divided psyche, and its misnaming as "Moral Virtue" is symptomatic of Albion's own "souls disease" (4:13; E146).

Blake depicts the relationship between Albion's anthropomorphism and his fall most succinctly in the design to plate 19 (see figure 16). Lying "on the ground in pain & tears" (18:46; E163), the fallen Albion has literally crushed two other creatures in the process of his fall. Although these creatures appear to be human, the figure to the left has a distinctively bird-like head; and the limbs of both figures appear to be rooting themselves into the soil beneath them.⁸ These oddities of representation--in which human entities are not entirely differentiated from the non-human entities inhabiting or comprising their environment--can be read in two possible ways. On the one hand, it suggests that Albion's fall has resulted in the animalization or vegetation of humanity (a possibility that I shall examine in detail in my discussion of the Polypus below). But given Albion's numerous acts of pathetic fallacy in *Jerusalem's* text, we might also see this design as enacting in visual terms the process of anthropomorphic projection, which violates the integrity of the non-human "other" by defining it in terms of the human "same." By taking on human characteristics, Albion's animals and vegetations become monstrous, perhaps even "accursed." Understood in such a light, this design draws a correlation between Albion's fall and his self-centred view of nature, a correlation emphasizing the potentially deadly violence of his anthropomorphic tendencies.

These tendencies are especially interesting in light of Blake's representation in *Jerusalem* of the familial relationship between Albion and geographic phenomena. On plate 36, the very valleys, hills, and rivers of Albion's landscape express this relationship

in a touching lament: "Albion is sick! said every Valley, every mournful Hill / And every River: our brother Albion is sick to death" (36/40:11-12; E182). At this point in the poem, we understand that the "hills & valleys" (whom Albion earlier denounces as "accursed witnesses of Sin") are actually his own brothers. Albion's falling out with these members of his family is symptomatic of an important change in his condition following the "Giant dance," a change that can be understood by attending to the narrator's comments concerning Christ's behaviour in relation to Albion. For after Albion turns away from "Universal Love," the "mild Saviour" follows him,

Displaying the eternal Vision! the Divine Similitude!
In loves and tears of brothers, sisters, sons, fathers, and friends
Which if Man ceases to behold, he ceases to exist....
(34/38: 7, 10, 11-13)

In the wake of his dance Albion "ceases to behold" his brothers, the geographical forms which mourn his fall. Beholding instead his own "accursed" and distorted anthropomorphic construction of these entities, Albion loses all sight of "the eternal Vision" displayed in their "loves and tears." Thus, according to the Saviour's logic, Albion "ceases to exist." From an eco-critical standpoint (a standpoint, that is, which privileges the interrelationship of all earthly entities), such a development is entirely logical. As eco-historian Roderick Nash has commented, "the self, like the cell, has no being at all outside [its] environmental context" (159). Considering Albion's dilemma with this insight in mind, we can understand that his denial of relationship with the familial things of nature is also and simultaneously a denial of the self, a denial whose immediate consequence is a fall into the shadowy realm Blake refers to as "Non-Entity" (5:51; E148).⁹

Albion, it must be noted, is aware of a connection between his self-described pathology and the plights of his family members, both human and non-human. As he himself declares,

Shame divides Families. Shame hath divided Albion in sunder!
 First fled my Sons, & then my Daughters, then my Wild Animations
 My Cattle next, last ev'n the Dog of my Gate. the Forests fled
 The Corn-fields, & the breathing Gardens outside separated
 The Sea; the Stars: the Sun: the Moon: drivn forth by my disease....
 (21:6-10; E166)

Albion's shame, based on a presumably unprecedented subject/object division in his self-conception, causes all things externalized by this division actively to "flee" from him and from his oppressive anthropomorphisms. This turn of events suggests that Albion's process of withdrawal manifests itself, as it were, bi-directionally. While his shamed mind retreats repressively into itself, the geography and "Wild Animations" that comprise his physical makeup flee in an external, outward direction. It is in this sense that Albion is "divided...in sunder."

Mirroring Albion's pathology, Albion's cities and their inhabitants become "sick to death" (66:68; E219).¹⁰ In an attempt to resolve this dilemma, Wales and Scotland send

the Dove & Raven: & in vain the Serpent over the mountains.
 And in vain the Eagle & Lion over the four-fold wilderness.
 They return not: but generate in rocky places desolate.
 They return not; but build a habitation separate from Man.
 (66:67, 70-73; E219)

The "four-fold" character of the wilderness in this passage contrasts sharply with Albion's less than four-fold state, suggesting that such wilderness--perhaps nature not yet colonized by Albion's acts of anthropomorphic projection--might play an important role in restoring fallen humanity to the wholeness of its prelapsarian condition. In the

human/animal division that it ultimately depicts, however, this passage recalls God's promise to Noah that "the fear of you and the dread of you shall be upon every beast of the earth, and upon every fowl of the air, upon all that moveth upon the earth" (Genesis 9:2). It is interesting to note, as Roderick Nash has remarked, that the Old Testament God utters these words in the context of his reaffirmation of human "dominion" over nature, a dominion originally granted to Adam and Eve in the prelapsarian context of Genesis 1:28-30 (89). In the postlapsarian world, it would seem, human dominion takes on an increasingly malevolent aspect,¹¹ as the animals come to "fear" and "dread" their human lords. The point I wish to make here is that, from the non-human perspective that Blake constructs in the wake of Albion's fall (and to which he rather heretically attributes some agency in his presentation of the animals' refusal to cooperate with the human designs of Wales and Scotland), Albion's anthropomorphisms entail an oppressive domination of nature, one which the animals choose to reject even at the cost of perpetuating the "separation" grounding the very anthropomorphic practice that oppresses them.

Albion's penchant for pathetic fallacy, it must be emphasized, affects not only externalized nature, but also his own sense of self. On plate 43, for example, we learn that "Albions Reactor" "hath compell'd Albion to become a Punisher & hath possess'd / Himself of Albions Forests & Wilds!" (43/29:11, 16-17; E191). Since all things are part of Albion's identity in *Jerusalem*, Albion's Reactor should be seen as an aspect of his own divided selfhood. Thus, Albion "reacts" to his own pathetic fallacy--that which "possess[es]" his "Forests & Wilds"--by (mis)naming externalized entities and (mis)identifying their motivations. Reacting, in other words, to his own affected notion that such things as hills and valleys have witnessed his ostensible sin, Albion

"Punish[es]" these things by conceiving of them as "accursed." Such behaviour is akin to that which characterizes Hegel's "unhappy consciousness," which, to quote Judith Butler, "berates itself constantly, setting up one part of itself as a pure judge aloof from contradiction and disparaging its changeable part as inessential, although ineluctably *tied to it*" (*Psychic Life* 46; emphasis added). As we have seen, Albion is profoundly "tied to" the things of nature by the familial bond he shares with them; but he attempts to disavow this bond with the natural world by retreating into his atomized psyche. Wishing, moreover, that Vala could weave for him "a chaste / Body over [his] unchaste mind" (21:11-12; E166), he implies that his corporeal aspect--the very body of nature--is unchaste. Although he also condemns his mind as "unchaste," Albion's very ability to pass such a judgement on his physical or appetitive being implies his belief that an aspect of his divided consciousness retains the necessary chastity or purity required to cast judgement on its ostensibly "unchaste" part.

The fragmentation of Albion's consciousness has important consequences for his understanding of the physical "nature" of his pathology:

The disease of shame covers me from head to feet: I have no hope
Every boil upon my body is a separate & deadly Sin.
Doubt first assailed me, then Shame took possession of me
Shame divides Families. Shame hath divided Albion in sunder!
(21:3-6; E166)

According to Frye, Albion's "boils and plagues represent the physical misery of the state of nature," which is itself "the source" of his pathology (*Fearful Symmetry* 361). Given Albion's atomistic understanding of his condition, however, it is clear that his pathology associates him not with Frye's vaguely essentialist "state of nature," but with a very particular paradigmatic *construction* of nature: that of Newtonian mechanism. Because he is unable in his pathological self-division to conceptualize his "disease" in holistic

terms. Albion sees each of his boils as "a separate...Sin." Viewed thus atomistically, each symptomatic boil would need to be treated in isolation for Albion to be successfully cured. Needless to say, at such a rate (that is, without some kind of gestalt) a comprehensive cure would be all but impossible. Reflecting his strange affliction, Albion's universe itself becomes atomized in mechanistic fashion, as all phenomena become "separated" from his giant form, externalized or "drivn forth," as he subsequently puts it, "by my disease" (21:9-10).

In *Jerusalem*, Albion's efforts to deny the multiplicity of connections existing between the self and its defining contexts (both social and environmental) produces the Spectre of analytic reasoning. In the second chapter of copies A, C, and F (the order of which Erdman's edition follows), for example, Albion's "Spectrous / Chaos" (29/33:1-2; E175) appears directly in the wake of Albion's "building A Strong / Fortification against the Divine Humanity" (28:25-6; E174), that cosmic body which, as we saw in Chapter One, provides the morphological basis of Blake's panvitalistic and anti-atomistic organicism. The Spectre's status as "the Reasoning Power / An Abstract objecting power," causes it, significantly, to become "A murderer of its own Body" (10:13-14, 12; E153). To the extent that Albion's body is the natural world itself, it is appropriate, then, that his renovation is preceded by his falling into "the Furrow," where he is "Plowed in among the Dead" (57:13-14; E207); for this event adumbrates Albion's necessary reunion with his earthly aspect, that material part of himself which has been "murdered" by his abstract and atomistic reasoning power.

The "Reasoning Power," Blake declares, is "An Abstract objecting power, that Negatives every thing" (10:13-14; E153). According to the epistemology of contemporary physical science, in other words, "every thing" outside of the reasoning

mind is "Negative[d]." objectified, that is, as the "not-me." Since, as Blake never tires of proclaiming, the human subject "becomes what it beholds," the mind itself is not immune from this objectifying process. This is why, in the wake of Albion's self-imposed exile, it is not only the "Earth" that is "desolated" (19:13, 16; E164) but Albion's own subjective interiority: "All his Affections," we are told, "now appear withoutside" (19:17). As Blake describes this transformation two plates earlier, abstraction is a form of "Envy Revenge & Cruelty / Which separated the stars from the mountains: the mountains from Man / And left Man, a little grovelling Root, outside of Himself" (17:30-32; E162). In short, when the philosophical reification of an object-world is taken to its logical conclusion, humanity becomes "separated from [its] subjective self, objectivized and alien, to be manipulated as any other objects in the universe" (Doskow, *Blake's "Jerusalem"* 64). It is in this sense that the Spectrous Newtonian Satan--an aspect of Albion's own externalized affections--produces "A World where Man is *by Nature* the enemy of Man" (38/43:52; E185: emphasis added).

It is perhaps paradoxical that one of the products of Enlightenment thought is a denial of the very subjective processes that give rise to it, but, as Stuart Peterfreund has remarked, from the standpoint of Newtonian science the "very existence of the human mind is troublesome" ("Anti-Newtonian Thought" 144). In *Jerusalem*, virtually all of Blake's references to the human brain suggest as much. It is likely, to quote Nelson Hilton, that Blake's obsession with vegetative fibres involves his intellectual resistance to contemporary thinking regarding "the 'fibrillous' brain and its 'fibrillary matter'" (*Literal Imagination* 81). A brief discussion of contemporary brain theory will help to clarify this point. During the late seventeenth century, the renowned neuroanatomist and neurophysiologist Thomas Willis, whose work profoundly influenced John Locke's

theory of cognition, in a sense glorified the human brain by arguing unprecedentedly that it (and its associated system of nervous fibres) was the *only* seat of the soul (G. S. Rousseau 144). In an age of increasing objectivity and scepticism, however, the soul itself began to lose ground to its ostensible physiological location; and by 1796 Joseph Priestly was able to argue that this crucial aspect of human identity was merely and only "an activity of the brain and the nervous system" (Crehan 290). In *The Four Zoas*, Blake's Tharmas arguably refers to this neurophysiological denial of the human soul when he asks Enion "Why wilt thou Examine every little fibre of my soul / Spreading them out before the Sun like Stalks of flax to dry" (4:29-30; E302). Here, not only are the soul's "fibres" atomistically externalized and objectified; at the poetical level their exposure effaces divinity: they are spread out "before the Sun," in the sense that they are given priority *over the Son* who is the soul's Saviour.

Blake notes the violence implicit in such an objectification of human consciousness when he speaks in *Jerusalem* of the "Brain being cut round beneath the temples shrieking" (58:6-8; E207; see also 66:64; E219). Foreshadowing the logical conclusion of this objectifying process, Blake writes that "The Twelve Daughters in Rahab & Tirzah have circumscribd the Brain / Beneath & pierced it thro the midst with a golden pin" (67:41-2; E220).¹² As far as Blake is concerned, objective science turns *every* thing into an object, especially including the mind and soul of the scientist who practices it. Dennis Lee summarizes this process succinctly in his commentary on the rise of modern-day neurobiology, which takes the human brain as its *object* of study. Traditionally, Lee points out, consciousness has been understood as "valuative and qualitted"; but objective studies of the brain problematize this assumption, offering instead "value-free equations for the behaviour of the cortical synapses." From this

scientific standpoint, consciousness is merely "a subjective interpretation we have mistakenly projected onto the brain, but which has finally floated clear of its object." As with Blake's object-brain "pierced...through the midst with a golden pin," there is, for Lee, "only one conclusion open to consciousness" in the wake of recent brain theory: "consciousness is dead" (Lee 52).

Blake would have agreed with Lee's conclusion: the notion that an objective view of nature destroys the mind of the objective reasoner is ubiquitous in *Jerusalem*. The design to plate 62 (see figure 17)--depicting "a brazen (not a living) serpent...bound on [Albion's] head like an instrument of torture" (Erdman, *Illuminated Blake* 341)--demonstrates this dynamic most dramatically. On plate 43, Blake twice figures "the vast form of Nature" as a serpent (43/29:76, 80; E192-93). Recalling this poetic figuration, we can interpret the brazen serpent binding Albion's head on the design to plate 62 as a symbol for the objectified form of nature itself. Albion's objective epistemology not only kills the serpent nature (hence its brazen rather than living form in the design); it also tortures and threatens ultimately to destroy Albion's own consciousness by denying his subjective interiority. That Albion has interiorized the objectified world around him is apparent in the similarity between his own eyes and the external peacock-feather eyes that encircle the brazen-serpent outline around his head. If we interpret the small human figure at the bottom of the plate as an image of Albion in his original naked form, we can better understand the fallen Albion's dilemma. As he confronts his own objectified image in the form of the tortured giant whose head has been circumscribed by the epistemology of his object world, Albion becomes what he beholds. That Albion's pathology has both social and ecological ramifications is suggested by the menacing flames rising up the page; for these flames threaten to engulf and consume both of the human forms in the

design *and* the green turf upon which they stand. Thus, the violence implicit in Albion's objectifying acts of anthropomorphism has come full circle, threatening to destroy not only the things of an externalized nature but his own individualized being as well.

III. Vala and the Discourses of Nature

Vala is a complex character who, partly through conceptual over-simplification and the critical need to deploy a convenient taxonomical shorthand, has inspired the rebuke and disdain of generations of Blake scholars. Traditionally, Vala has been defined in essentialist terms as a personification of "nature" itself: she is, to cite a handful of examples, "nature on earth" (Frye, *Fearful Symmetry* 263), "the laws of nature" (Damon 430), "the possessive love of a fixed natural order" (Bloom 378), "purely physical nature...control[ling] the world in which she exists" (Doskow, *Blake's "Jerusalem"* 19), and "nature wanting to be all in all" (Hagstrum, "Babylon" 112).¹³ What is especially curious about such critical evaluations of Vala's character (most explicitly so in the last two definitions I have cited) is the degree of agency casually attributed in Vala's name to the realm of nature she ostensibly symbolizes. Far from being a cultural cipher, an empty signifier subject to contested and arbitrary productions of meaning, Vala is, for numerous critics, an insidious force "control[ling] the world," actively "wanting to be all in all." Thus, Jean H. Hagstrum argues that Vala, in the guise of "the dominant Female Will," "extends her sway from nature to philosophy, which she naturalizes into mechanism, and to religion, which she naturalizes into deism" ("Babylon" 112). Or, as Minna Doskow's more comprehensive formulation would have it, "Nature's destructiveness...expands to include the destructiveness of material institutions, penal codes, civil laws (courts), wars (armies), civil institutions, and nations, as well as the closest human relationships

(families), and all human expression (tongues)" (*Blake's Jerusalem*" 127). In both of these arguments (which are in many ways representative of discussions of the Vala-nature nexus in Blake's work), Vala wilfully contaminates the cultural realm (which must thus be on its guard against her imposition) and not vice-versa.

There is much evidence in *Jerusalem*, however, that Vala, far from being an essentialist symbol of an insidious realm of "nature" *per se*, is herself very much a production of the institutionalized discourses which name her and define her significance. One of these discourses is that of contemporary science: Jerusalem's "Shadow," Blake writes, "is Vala. builded by the Reasoning power in Man" (39/44:40; E187). Vala is thus the product of Albion's Spectre, since elsewhere in the poem Blake identifies the Spectre as "the Reasoning Power in every Man" (54:7; E203). As we have already seen, the Spectre personifies a form of cognition belonging to the epistemology and methodology of mechanistic natural philosophy. Thus, Albion's Spectre exclaims "Am I not Bacon & Newton & Locke[?]" (54:17). Clearly, as the relationship between Vala and the Spectre suggests, Vala is no extra-cultural "given" and, therefore, no independent external agency: she is "builded" by, and so is the *product* of, Enlightenment natural philosophy.

More than this, Vala is the product of institutionalized religion and its self-serving conceptions of nature. It is the Sons of Albion--among the most untrustworthy narrators in the poem--who explicitly identify her as "Babylon the City of Vala, the Goddess Virgin-Mother," declaring that "She is our Mother! Nature!" (18:29-30; E163). And it is Albion, that imposer of phantasy upon externalized entities, who asks Vala "art thou not Babylon? / Art thou Nature Mother of all!" (30/34:8-9; E176). As Karl Kiralis remarks in a study published almost forty years ago, these identifications of Vala as Mother Nature are "fallen...conception[s] of her and not, as some critics have assumed, [her] basic

meaning." Thus, Kiralis continues, "*Nature* is not an adequate description of Vala." More accurately--and the difference is crucial--she is "man's [sic] conception of the natural world" (105). And, in *Jerusalem*, this conception is consistently coloured by the various deployments and contestations of politics and power.

The con-fusion of "nature" and religious politics in the construction of Vala's identity is most apparent when, as we are told, Albion's Sons "took their Mother Vala, and...crown'd her with gold: / They namd her Rahab, & gave her power over the Earth" (78:15-16; E234). Critics often read Vala's identification as Rahab as part and parcel of Blake's condemnation of nature, for Rahab, in the New Testament, is "Mystery, Babylon the Great, the mother of harlots and abominations of the earth" (Revelation 27:5). In such a reading, as we have seen, it is nature that colonizes and corrupts human spirituality, literally inventing, in the process, Deism or "natural religion." But Vala's role as Rahab is problematic: like her identification as Mother Nature, it is the result of an act of "nam[ing]," a product of social relations rather than an "objective" attribution of some pre-given essence. Vala's association with religious hegemony is apparent in the design to plate 32 (E plate 46; see figure 18), where Blake juxtaposes Vala with the negatively valued St. Paul's Cathedral.¹⁴ In this design, Vala's dark veil extends upward from the darkness of a heavily shadowed St. Paul's, whose base, disappearing into total blackness, is imagistically disconnected from Albion's earthly shore below. This design suggests that the metaphor of Vala's (or Rahab's) veil has for its tenor not nature "itself" but rather the traditional veil of the Old Testament's inner temple of orthodoxy. Symbolically, in Blake, this veil functions as a kind of theological prophylaxis, separating a God of mystery from direct human contact and so justifying Priesthood's mediative intervention into human spiritual affairs. Thus, Vala's threatening gesture in this design--her reaching

out to cover Jerusalem with her dark veil--symbolizes not "natural" oppression but the violence implicit in an institutionally-sanctioned denial of human spiritual liberty.

That Vala functions as a conceptual justification for the violence of religious orthodoxy is apparent in her association with religious warfare on plate 22. Once again, however, we must be beware of "naturalizing" this association by blaming its existence on the realm of nature, for *Jerusalem's* text represents Vala's role in religious warfare as a product of her cultural conditioning. Recounting the events of her childhood, for example, Vala tells Albion that Jehovah and his son Cush placed her in a "golden Ark" at the head of "his Armies." Vala's subsequent assertion that "The flesh of multitudes fed & nouris[h]ed me in my childhood / My morn & evening food were prepar'd in Battles of Men" (22:4-7; E167) suggests that her mature identity is the very product of the war-like relations she experienced during her formative years. Arguably, Jehovah and Cush make use of Vala to naturalize and thus support their political crusade, setting her up as a sexual reward designed to provoke and "sustain" the male warrior in his "glorious combat & battle & war" (45/31:65; E195). Later in the poem, after Jerusalem's long lamentation (which begins at 78:31), Blake offers us a telling description of Vala in her warlike context: "Beside [Jerusalem] Vala howld upon the winds in pride of beauty / Lamenting among the timbrels of the Warriors: among the Captives / In cruel holiness" (80:6-7; E236). Vala, having been glorified since her childhood by Jehovah's male warriors, might be excused here for her display of "pride" and "cruel holiness." Indeed, her howlings and lamentations (which are offered, interestingly enough, in a non-partisan way to "Warriors" and "Captives" alike) suggest that, despite her having grown to adulthood, she remains victimized by at least a trace element of masculine coercive force, which, as we have seen, has constituted her identity in the context of hostile relations.

Hence, the nature that Vala represents is discursive--a construct of the ideological crusade. Her upbringing demonstrates that material nature is not responsible for the production of religious warfare. On the contrary, it is religious warfare that produces and "naturalizes" a certain Hobbesian understanding of nature as a battleground of hostile relations between and among living entities.

Vala's oppression as a feminine icon of patriarchal warfare partakes of a related cultural phenomenon: the feminization of nature in Western patriarchal society. In *Jerusalem*, Vala's roles are all too often defined by her relation to male characters in a male-centred economy of social relations. In the postlapsarian world, Vala is Albion's bride: as we have seen, however, Albion comes to consider Vala his Mother, nature. Hence, as critics like Brenda S. Webster (276) and Morton Paley (*Continuing City* 196-99) have pointed out, Albion's pathology arises from a sense of Oedipal guilt concerning his relationship to Vala; and it is this guilt which engenders and perpetuates his hostility toward her. But Albion's hostility also has its basis in a more mundane and material commodification of the female under patriarchy. Although Vala is Albion's wife and mother, she is also Luvah's wife, emanation, and daughter. Hence, Vala's complex relationship to Albion and Luvah involves and entails a conflict of ownership which is crystallized, as I argued in my Introduction to this study, in the conflict that breaks out between Albion and Luvah for "dominion" over Vala's body. Although Blake's attitude toward gender was problematic, as many of his references to an insidious "Female Will" would suggest, his representation of this battle over a feminized nature in some ways prefigures late-twentieth-century eco-feminist insights correlating the "domination of nature and the oppression of women" (Soper 105).

By the end of the eighteenth century, the notion that the body of nature was a female one was well established. As I mentioned in my Introduction, Francis Bacon played a key role in perpetuating this ancient view of nature, arguing that the scientist, by "entering and penetrating" into the "holes and corners" of the "womb of nature" might discover "many secrets of excellent use" (qtd. in Peterfreund, "Ideology of the Natural" 103). The violence of Bacon's metaphor is obvious, as is the instrumentalist logic of his intent when he refers to the "use" to which nature's secrets might be put by the masculine scientist. Interestingly enough, Bacon denies his rapacious and imperialistic intentions toward nature's female body by defining the scientist's relationship to his object of study in terms somewhat reminiscent of the courtly love tradition: "the empire of man over things depends," he argues, "wholly on the arts and sciences. For we cannot command nature except by obeying her" (*Novum Organum*, Part I; qtd. in Prior 46). By attempting to understand and obey the laws of feminine nature, the masculine scientist, Bacon suggests, will be able to court and subdue her with the sanction of her full consent. More sceptically, one might argue that this strategy of ostensible obedience will enable the rapacious scientist to remove nature's veil without direct coercive force, by convincing her that she retains full agency in the affair.

In *The Four Zoas*, if not so obviously in *Jerusalem*, this notion of nature as consenting feminine lover is problematic; for Vala is shown in the Second Night to be coerced by, rather than to command, nature's laws. Appearing "among the Brick kilns," where she is "compell'd / To labour night & day among the fires," Vala laments her condition and that of her fellow labourers:

O Lord wilt thou not look upon our sore afflictions
 Among these flames incessant labouring, our hard masters laugh
 At all our sorrow. We are made to turn the wheel for water
 To carry the heavy basket on our scorched shoulders, to sift

The sand and ashes, & to mix the clay with tears & repentance

 Furrowd with whips, & our flesh bruised with the heavy basket....
 (FZ 2:215-22, 28; E320)

The wheel Vala is forced to turn in this passage is the Newtonian water-wheel, one of Blake's metaphors for the efficient-causal cyclicity of mechanistic science. As I argued in Chapter Three, the water-wheel partakes of the antinomian symbolism of the "Everlasting Gospel" (J 27; E171), in which water signifies the epoch of Mosaic legalism from which humans have been liberated by the blood of Christ. Blake, I have argued, associates Newton with water throughout his oeuvre in order to emphasize his antinomian aversion to a scientific discourse that locates "law" in nature itself. To the extent that Vala symbolizes nature, then, her enforced turning of "the wheels for water" and her carrying of "the heavy basket" (perhaps, in this context, a water container) in *The Four Zoas* suggests not an entity who oppressively *wields* natural law, but one who has been violently subjected to its dictates. From this standpoint, natural philosophers like Bacon and Newton--those men who "discover" or formulate nature's laws--can be seen as the "hard masters" who laugh at Vala's condition; for they are the ones whose legalistic doctrines have enslaved nature by inscribing law indelibly into the very structure of the universe. That Blake chose not to transpose this passage into the text of *Jerusalem* suggests that, as his mythology developed, his attitude toward Vala became less sympathetic. Nevertheless, we catch in *Jerusalem* a glimpse of Vala's enslaved condition when she briefly invokes the oppressive water-wheels of the dark Satanic Mill:

the slave groans in the dungeon of stone.
 The captive in the mill of the stranger, sold for scanty hire.
 They view their former life: they number moments over and over;
 Stringing them on their remembrance as on a thread of sorrow.
 (20:15-18; E165)

Both Vala's reference to the "mill" and her representation of time as a series of moments the slave must mathematically "number" are direct poetic invocations of Newtonian mechanics. That Vala goes on to associate this human enslavement with her own "griefs" (20:20) suggests the existence of a discrepancy between her "proper" identity and her textual status as the personification of a legalistically-inscribed nature.

Vala's invocations of the slave "in the dungeon of stone" and the "captive in the mill" are particularly interesting given that Jerusalem herself is represented, later in the poem, as a victim of both of these forms of imprisonment: she is "closd in the Dungeons of Babylon," where she is forced to labour "at the Mills" (60:39, 41; E210). In order to comfort Jerusalem in her captivity, the Divine Voice recounts "Blake's version of the story of Joseph and Mary" (Bloom 407):

She looked & saw Joseph the Carpenter in Nazareth & Mary
His espoused Wife. And Mary said, If thou put me away from thee
Dost thou not murder me? Joseph spoke in anger & fury. Should I
Marry a Harlot & an Adulteress? Mary answerd, Art thou more pure
Than thy Maker who forgiveth Sins & calls again Her that is Lost
Tho She hates. he calls her again in love. (61:3-8; E211)

To quote Morton Paley, this passage reflects Blake's "lifelong hostility to the doctrine of the Virgin Birth, with its concomitant condemnation of sensual enjoyment" (*Continuing City* 134). To Paley's insight, I would add that Blake's hostility to this doctrine reflects, in a more general sense, his distaste for its implicit transcendentalist devaluation of material existence--without which earthly sensual enjoyment would be impossible. Let me explain this point by discussing briefly the sexual politics informing the above-cited passage. Blake's critics have tended to read the reconciliation between Joseph and Mary in terms of the former's ultimate forgiveness of the latter;¹⁵ however, such a reading is partial in its implicit male-centredness. For true reconciliation to occur, Mary must also forgive Joseph for his false assumption of purity (61:6), as Jehovah's subsequent address

to Joseph plainly states: "this is the Covenant / Of Jehovah: If you Forgive *one-another*, so shall Jehovah Forgive You" (61:25; E212; emphasis added). The material consequences of this *mutual* forgiveness are startling:

Then Mary burst forth into a Song! she flowed like a River of
Many Streams in the arms of Joseph & gave forth her tears of joy
Like many waters, and Emanating into gardens & palaces upon
Euphrates & to forests & floods & animals wild & tame from
Gihon to Hiddekel, & to corn fields & villages & inhabitants
Upon Pison & Arnon & Jordan. (61:28-33)

This passage establishes a palpable connection between the domination of nature and the oppression of women. Patriarchal morality constructs a false Wife/Harlot binarism (61:3-6: cf. 57:8-9), producing Joseph's oppressive moralizings. In such a context, Mary's Emanations--comprising a world of gardens, palaces, forests, cornfields, and so on--remain significantly locked inside her. With the dismantling of this oppressive economy, however, these repressed Emanations spring forth in their multiplicity. While this dynamic seems to partake of a problematic essentialism insofar as it suggests that patriarchal morality functions to *repress* an "authentic" feminine identity, this identity, when it reveals itself, is by no means reductively "natural"; for Mary emanates a diverse and complex array of natural *and* cultural entities and artifacts. Significantly, this freeing of Emanations (Blake's trope for relationality) allows Mary and Joseph to commingle in a newfound spirit of mutuality, a spirit signified by the mingling of their mutual tears of joy (61:14, 29).

Much earlier in the poem, Albion oppresses Vala by invoking a moral economy of gender relations identical to the one Joseph attempts to enforce upon Mary prior to his reconciliation with her. After describing his own diseased condition--a pathology brought on by "Shame" (21:3; E166)--Albion tells Vala that "All is Eternal Death unless you can weave a chaste / Body over an unchaste Mind! Vala! O that thou wert pure!"

(21:12). Given Albion's habit of projecting his self-conceptions onto others in the poem, we can assume here that Albion has projected his own impure self-image onto Vala, so that she becomes yet another externalized object of his "Shame." At any rate, Albion's negative assessment of Vala's morality--implicit in the complaint "O that thou wert pure!"--is highly questionable, for one assailed by the impurity of shame is hardly fit to judge the purity of others. As we have seen, Albion's "disease" of shame causes his family members, "Wild Animations," cattle, forests, cornfields, gardens, and celestial bodies to become "separated" from him and to flee his presence (21:7-10). The story of Mary and Joseph, reconciled by mutual forgiveness, adumbrates the resolution of this crisis of separation as animals, forests, cornfields, gardens, and other phenomena are liberated from the governance of a moral code that oppresses women *and* the feminized object world, keeping them separate from "humanity." With the transformation of sexual relations implicit in Blake's doctrine of *mutual* forgiveness, the female, no longer circumscribed by the politics of patriarchy, becomes expansive and multiplicitous, emanating a world of harmoniously co-existent natural and cultural phenomena. It is as if Mary's freedom--freedom from the oppression of a double standard (where the impure male believes himself a fit judge of female "purity") *and* from an understandable desire for vengeance--and the freedom of the material world are of a piece.

The implicit critique of patriarchy underpinning Mary's questioning of Joseph's moralistic Wife/Harlot dichotomy can helpfully illuminate Vala's predicament in *Jerusalem's* fallen, male-centred universe. In particular, Vala's references to heterosexual love and marriage are important to an understanding of Blake's conception of nature's subjection to the androcentric cultural realm, because they expose the dynamics of female

commodification in an economy of patriarchal exchange. Recounting a parable "of old."

Vala indicts the ruthless instrumentalism of patriarchal marriage in the boldest terms:

Set your Son before a man & he shall take you & your sons
For slaves: but set your Daughter before a man & She
Shall make him & his sons & daughters your slaves for ever!
And is this Faith? (45/31:51-55; E195)

Vala's closing question here is, of course, rhetorical, for she is only too well aware of the ramifications of female exchange under patriarchy, wherein marriageable daughters become the mercenary instruments of masculine self-interest. Unlike Jerusalem (who, as "Liberty," refuses to partake of such an economy of male/female relations [45/31:44]), however, the enslaved Vala asserts her status as Albion's wife, declaring "Albion is mine! Luvah gave me to Albion" (45/31:50). These two declarations, it must be noted, are mutually contradictory, for although Vala affirms her right to possess Albion, she subsequently admits that Luvah has already given her "to Albion," an act which realizes her status as an object of exchange and ownership. As in the scene where Albion and Luvah battle for "dominion" over Vala's body (43/29:61-2; E192), this exchange is an aspect of patriarchal power politics. As a commodified object of masculine desire, Vala becomes, in short, the pivotal point around which the political "strife of Albion and Luvah" (45/31:55) turns.

Vala's conflicted position vis-à-vis Albion and Luvah crucially informs her narrative function in *Jerusalem*. Consider, for example, her horror earlier in the poem when she declares of Albion: "I have looked into the secret Soul of him I loved / And in the dark recesses found Sin & can never return" (22:14-15; E167).¹⁶ Although this speech has been interpreted as an inadvertent self-condemnation on Vala's part,¹⁷ it can be productively read in feminist terms as the articulation of a political dilemma. In a patriarchal regime, feminine identity is necessarily male-centred, since the "properly"

feminine woman must define herself in subordinate relation to the dominant male, the father or husband who "possesses" her. Thus, for the female, the initial realization that the male's "secret Soul" harbours "Sin" comes as a profound psychological shock, shattering the ideological notion of man as woman's superior, the normative assumption to which Vala "can never return" as a result of her newfound knowledge. Albion's subsequent confession--"I have erred! I am ashamed! and will never return more" (23:16; E168)--confirms Vala's perception of his sinful condition, suggesting, perhaps, that the state to which Albion can "never return" also involves the problem of identity in a patriarchal regime which ultimately enslaves *both* "sons & daughters" (45/31:54; E195).

Like the hills and valleys that comprise Albion's geography, the externalized Vala is derived from, subject to, and adversely affected by, Albion's psychic conflicts and impositions. This derivative and subordinate aspect of Vala's identity becomes especially apparent on plate 43, just prior to the congeneration of nature, in the famous passage where the self-deluded Albion falls down to worship his own Shadow:

Albion walkd on the steps of fire before his Halls
 And Vala walkd with him in dreams of soft deluding slumber.
 He looked up & saw the Prince of Light with splendor faded
 Then Albion ascended mourning into the porches of his Palace
 Above him rose a Shadow from his wearied intellect:
 Of living gold, pure, perfect, holy: in white linen pure he hoverd
 A sweet entrancing self-delusion a watry vision of Albion
 Soft exulting in existence; all the Man absorbing!
 (43/29:33-40; E191)

It is tempting here to associate the Shadow with Vala (who is identified in the text as Jerusalem's "shadow" [12:19; E155; 45/31:41; E195]), and thus to blame Vala for Albion's behaviour in this passage. Since Vala walks with Albion "in dreams of soft deluding slumber," we might see Albion's "self-delusion" (which Blake also describes as "Soft") as a product of Vala's "natural" or corporeal influence. We must remember,

however, that the Shadow derives from Albion's "wearied intellect," not from Vala's. Hence, the reference to Albion's "self-delusion" raises the likelihood that Vala's "dreams of soft deluding slumber" involve Albion's projection onto Vala of his *own* state of mind. Albion's ability to influence Vala can be seen in the similarity of their responses to the rising of the Shadow:

Albion fell upon his face prostrate before the watry Shadow
 Saying O Lord whence is this change! thou knowest I am nothing!
 And Vala trembled & covered her face! & her locks were spread on the
 pavement.... (43/29:41-43; E192)

In this passage, Vala reproduces Albion's behaviour, falling, as he does, "prostrate" before the Shadow (a position implied by the spreading of her "locks...on the pavement"). Clearly, she does not *cause* Albion's actions but *reacts* to them in a manner suggesting that she is a kind of mirror-image of, or projection from, Albion's own selfhood. The result of Albion's projectional world view is a "fad[ing]" of the Prince of Light's "splendor" and an "Idolatrous" worshipping of his own Shadow (43/29:35, 46), processes symbolizing, respectively, a fading of relationality and a concomitant falling into solipsism.

The extent of Albion's self-idolatry is shocking. Addressing his Shadow, the fallen man declares:

If thou withhold thine hand; I perish like a fallen leaf:
 O I am nothing: and to nothing must return again:
 If thou withdraw thy breath. Behold I am oblivion.
 (43/29:50-52)

If the Shadow symbolizes Albion's self-conception or ratio--not the insidious influence of nature but an anthropomorphic projection "from his wearied intellect"--then, because the Prince of Light (the antidote to this vision) has already "faded" (43/29:35), the Shadow's withdrawal will indeed cause Albion to become as "nothing": neither light nor shade. In

the design to this plate (Princeton plate 29; see figure 19). Albion's address to the Shadow is juxtaposed against an image, in the right-hand margin, of a pair of human forms--probably those of the prostrate Albion and Vala--which appear to be disintegrating, losing their outlines of identity. Obviously, Albion worships his own selfhood in a way that negates both masculine and feminine identity. That this negation adversely affects the realm of nature is suggested by his subsequent behaviour; for as Luvah descends to confront Albion, the latter "turn[s] his back on Vala" (43/29:57). It is at this point that the struggle for "dominion" over Vala's body begins.

As I demonstrated above in my discussion of the relationship between objective science and human self-identity (which Blake criticizes most forcefully when he depicts Albion's brain as "pierced" with a "golden pin"), human modes of understanding "nature" have important implications for human conceptions of self. By constructing an objective universe of dead matter, Blake argues, we effectively murder ourselves, for we "become what we behold." This strange "return of the repressed" informs Blake's construction of that bugbear, the "Female Will." For Damon, the "Female Will...is evil," for "[w]hen the Individual is divided, the Emanation has a will of her own, which acts in opposition to her consort..." (447). While Damon's insight is a good one (for objectified nature does indeed take on a kind of agency in Blake's myth when, as it were, it objectifies the human in turn), his positing of the Female Will as an essential locus of evil in Blake's myth is questionable, for, as *Jerusalem* repeatedly demonstrates, the Female Will is originally a construct of Albion's self-delusive anthropomorphic activity: "O Albion," Los asks, "why wilt thou *Create* a Female Will?" (30/34:31; E176; emphasis added). Eight lines later, Los reformulates this question in a telling manner: "Is this the Female Will O ye lovely Daughters of Albion. To / Converse concerning Weight & Distance in the Wilds of

Newton & Locke[?]" (30/34:39-40; E177). Los's questions have a related twofold function. On a grammatical level, first of all, the change from the indefinite article in Los's first question (where he refers vaguely to "*a* Female Will") to the definite article in his second (where he speaks of "*the* Female Will") suggests a strange consolidation of the entity in question, a questionable slippage from mere hypothesis to naturalized fact or given knowledge. In the space of a few lines, in short, the Female Will--Albion's own phantasmagoric "Creat[ion]"--becomes, like Vala's realm of external nature, an identifiable *object*. Los's reference to Newton and Locke, moreover, associates this objectified Female Will with--indeed identifies it as a production of--masculine objective science: the epistemology and methodology of Albion's self-division. Thus, the Female Will is a kind of fiction and not an essential category in Blake's mythology. While I do not wish to apologize for the sexism implicit in Blake's identification of this construct *as female*, I would argue that any consideration of Vala's role as a major representative of the Female Will must take into account the latter's discursive aspect, or Blake's critique of the ideological production that is nature will be misunderstood as a denunciation of the material world as such.

Admittedly, my reading of Vala's character is a sympathetic one, placing perhaps a dangerous degree of trust in the validity of her own "autobiographical" narrative and its critique of Albion's thought and behaviour. To this extent, my interpretation of Vala's character and role may be at odds with Blake's own "intentions." Indeed, Morton Paley calls two of the speeches I have drawn on to support my reading of Vala's oppression (20:12-20 and 22:1-15) "false-elegiac speeches," arguing that their nostalgia and analytic logic offer proof of their unjust imposition on the reader's sympathy. "Like the Satan of the early parts of *Paradise Lost*," Paley concludes, "Vala is made all the more dangerous

by her ability to elicit such a [sympathetic] response" (*Continuing City* 191-93). Paley's point is a good one, for there are a number of passages in *Jerusalem* where Blake seems overtly to denounce Vala and her activities. Nevertheless, Vala's utterances comprise some of the most dynamic and energetic poetry in all of *Jerusalem*; and their implicit critique of patriarchy and masculine science is certainly consistent with the common critical view that Blake was an "opponent of tyranny in all its guises" (L. Clark 10). Indeed, the rhetorical power of Vala's poetry, along with the poignant insights it offers into her enslaved condition under patriarchy, suggests the appropriateness of the analogue Paley draws between Blake's Vala and Milton's Satan. If Blake was not intentionally championing Vala's cause, perhaps he was of Vala's party without knowing it.¹⁸

IV. The Polypus of the Ulro

In 1739, Trembley's discovery of the polyp or fresh-water hydra caused something of a sensation in Europe's scientific community. The existence of this creature, which had been predicted by Leibniz prior to its actual discovery, was "hailed as the long-sought missing link" between the plant and animal kingdoms (Lovejoy 232-3). Conceived, in other words, as a transitional entity joining disparate orders of being, the polyp's existence supported the much touted hypothesis that the natural creation loathes a vacuum. Hence, rather than seeing this creature as a monstrous violation of categories, naturalists like Bonnet tended to celebrate it as living proof of God's goodness as reflected in the exuberant fullness or plenitude of his creation.¹⁹

But this fresh-water zoophyte was also a rather disturbing creature. For one thing, as George Sandys noted, it had a "ravenous" appetite--and a rather frightful manner of satisfying it. The polyp could deploy its many appendages²⁰ (using what Henry Baker

referred to as a "mill-like" motion) to generate a current with which to draw in its prey (qtd. in Hilton, *Literal Imagination* 87-8). Blake has such a model of predation in mind, arguably, when he describes Satan's "Heart" as having "numerous branches varying their motions" to draw in "the unfortunate contemplator / Who becomes his food" (J 28:21, 23-4; E175).²¹ In his *Attempt toward a Natural History of the Polype* (1743), Henry Baker noted that, upon being bitten, the polyp's prey would succumb to instant death (Hilton 88). In Blake's mythology, as we shall see, the Polypus's prey is not so mercifully killed: humans are incorporated into the body of this creature very much alive, but in a manner that robs them of all autonomy or ability to resist this absorption. Thus, Blake's Polypus symbolizes a kind of death-in-life, the nightmare state of "Non-Entity."

As fascinating to contemporary scientists as its predatory manner was the biological polyp's regenerative capacity and habits. As Erasmus Darwin writes in the *Zoonomia*, "the young ones branch out from the side of the parent like the buds of trees" (qtd. in Hilton 89). Something of this notion likely informs Blake's representation of "Albion's Tree" (a synonym for the Polypus), which is able to shoot "into many a Tree! an endless labyrinth of woe!" (28:19; E174). This model of regeneration also informs Blake's construction of "the Great Selfhood / Satan" as

Having a white Dot call'd a Center from which branches out
A Circle in continual gyrations. this became a Heart
From which sprang numerous branches varying their motions
Producing many Heads three or seven or ten, & hands & feet
Innumerable at will.... (28:19-23; E175)

In Blake's myth, the procreative capacity of this hydra-like creature is all the more frightening given its ability to multiply itself "Innumerabl[y] at will." If its predatory habits make the Polypus a representative of the "Devouring Power" (28:24), its reproductive capacity would suggest that it simultaneously belongs to the contrary

Blakean category of the "Prolific." In Blake's thought, as we shall see presently, such confusion of contraries has disturbing implications for both human and non-human being.

Another aspect of the polyp's regenerative capacity finds a particularly disturbing application in Blake's mythology. As Paul Miner has pointed out, the biological polyp could be cut into innumerable pieces; but, rather than killing the creature, this act of dismemberment would result in each severed segment becoming a complete living polyp (198-99n). Arguably, Blake draws on these notions of the polyp's indestructibility and excessive proliferation in his construction of the Polypus. After Los envisions the Sons of Albion enrooting themselves "into every Nation," becoming "a mighty Polypus growing / ...over the whole Earth" (J 15:3-5; E159), for example, his own sons "Stand round him cutting the Fibres from Albions hills / That Albions Sons may roll apart over the Nations" (15:23-4). This act, intended perhaps to resist the onslaught of the Polypus, causes it instead to proliferate even further, as we see when Reuben, one of its victims, "enroots his brethren in the narrow Canaanite / From the Limit Noah to the Limit Abram" (15:25-6). That the Limits Noah and Abram are temporal, signifying, respectively, the postdiluvian and antediluvian epochs (Paley, Notes 153), suggests that the Polypus is potentially able to colonize "the whole Earth" not only in the present, but across all time as well. Its proliferation, then, is truly fearful, for the "mighty Polypus" threatens to transform the diversity of *all* life, both past and present, into aspects of its own homogeneous form.

This brief analysis of the relationship between the biological polyp, as understood by contemporary science, and Blake's mythical Polypus should suggest something of the latter's complexity as a symbol in *Jerusalem*. Perhaps it is partly because of this relationship between biology and symbol, however, that critics have tended to interpret

the Polypus's significance in questionably reductive and essentialist terms. According to the dominant critical viewpoint, this creature symbolizes the "material[ity]...of Generation" (Curran, "Gnostic Hyle" 25), "the vegetated life at its blindest and most helpless" (Bloom 411), and that which life itself becomes as Vala "extend[s] her iron hand" across Blake's mythical world (Otto 181-2). In *Milton*, to be sure, Blake posits a one-to-one relationship between the Polypus and the Ulro, the latter of which the poem explicitly defines as a "vast Polypus / Of living fibres down into the Sea of Time & Space" (34/38:24-5; E134). But, as I have been arguing in different contexts throughout this study, we should be wary of essentializing Blake's symbols in too reductive a manner. Although the poet's references to "living fibres" and "the Sea of Time & Space" lend support to the common view that Blake uses the Polypus to denounce material existence itself, I shall argue, rather, that the Polypus functions in Blake's myth to highlight the problems implicit in a *particular* contemporary view, or discursive manifestation, of such existence.

In *Jerusalem*, it must be noted, Los imagines the Polypus in its first explicit textual appearance as "growing / *From Albion* over the whole Earth" (15:4-5; E159; emphasis added), not the other way around. In other words, Los's "awful Vision" of the Polypus (15:5)--his prophetic warning concerning what *might* occur on Earth if humans fail to take corrective action--suggests that Albion's pathology will potentially contaminate the entire material realm, "the whole Earth" whose very wholeness precedes the existence of the "growing" Polypus. But how, exactly, does the Polypus come into existence? Blake's reference to Los's "awful Vision" contains a clue that can help us to formulate an answer to this question. In *Milton*, Los calls the Polypus "No Human Form but only a Fibrous Vegetation / A Polypus of soft affections without Thought or Vision"

(24/26:37-8; E120). Los is able to see this monster in *Jerusalem* only because he is capable of "Vision," that which, as the passage from *Milton* plainly states, the Polypus itself lacks. For Blake, I would argue, *all* those who lack vision are as incapable of seeing the Polypus as it is of seeing itself (or reflecting on its own existence)--hence the social necessity of the prophet. Because most people, being fallen prophets (M 24/26:75; E121), cannot identify it, the Polypus is decidedly dangerous. Indeed, it is precisely humanity's lack of vision that engenders the Polypus in the first place. In the strictest terms, then, Stuart Curran is wrong to speak of "those who have *accepted* the material Polypus of Generation" ("Gnostic Hyle" 25; emphasis added); for such a comment implies a degree of agency or choice that the non-visionary human lacks. The Polypus, much more insidious than Curran's comment suggests, denies and co-opts all human intention. This is why, in a discussion of Satan's "Devouring Power," Blake speaks of "the unfortunate contemplator" who, quite unwittingly, "becomes his [i.e., the Polypus's] food" (J 29/33:23-4; E175).

How do humans lose the capacity for vision that would enable them to recognize and evade the threatening Polypus? Once again, I would argue, the problem is discursive and multi-faceted, having its origin in the human social world rather than in the realm of materiality *per se*. The Polypus that "grow[s] / From Albion over the whole Earth" is also identified in the text as Albion's Tree, that which, as we have seen, Albion anthropomorphically names "Moral Virtue, and the Law / Of God who dwells in Chaos hidden from the human sight" (28:15-16; E174). For Blake, dogma such as that which provides the basis for "Miltons Religion" (M 22/24:39; E117), with its Puritan construction of an absolutely distant Sky-God, itself produces the Polypus, which, like Milton's God, is "hidden from the human sight" (though not from imaginative "Vision").

Blake's reference to the "God who dwells in Chaos" recalls, furthermore, Milton's chaotic atoms in *Paradise Lost*. In Milton's cosmogony, chaos is a region of "Eternal anarchy" marked by "endless wars" and "confusion," where "Hot, Cold, Moist, and Dry, four champions fierce / Strive...for mastery, and to battle bring / Their embryon atoms" (2.896-900). Milton's atoms, the "elementary...materials out of which Heaven, Hell, and cosmos are created" (Curry 46), are, of course, different from Newtonian atoms;²² but for Blake this difference is largely insignificant: both belong to, and originate from, "the Atheistical Epicurean Philosophy of Albion's Tree" (67:13; E220),²³ that branch of classical philosophy which helps humanity to construct the Polypus.

In a famous passage from *Paradise Lost*, Milton figures chaos as a state of warfare wherein atoms gather "around the flag / Of each his faction, in their several clans" (2.900-901). In Blake's view, this military metaphor is apt indeed. Becoming what they behold, those who advocate an atomistic model of existence in Blake's writing pursue warlike relations with all other entities. Albion's Sons are a case in point. The second appearance of the Polypus in *Jerusalem* directly follows their own factional activities, in which they build "Castles" and "strong Fortifications" in order to conduct corporeal warfare (19:38-42; E163). The Polypus's "Emissaries / In War," Hyle and Coban, go forth from and return to the Polypus "Like Wheels from a great Wheel reflected in the Deep," wheels which rend "a way in Albions Loins" (19:41-44). These obvious poetic references to Newton's mill-wheels associate Newtonian atomism with the warfare of Miltonic chaos, suggesting that such atomism is, for Blake, merely another manifestation of "the Atheistical Epicurean Philosophy of Albions Tree" (67:13; E220), one of the discourses responsible for the creation of the Polypus.²⁴

A consideration of the full passage in which Blake's reference to Epicureanism occurs will clarify the relationship between the Polypus and the important figure of the fibre in *Jerusalem*. Blake writes that Rahab and Tirzah "drew out from the Rocky Stones / Fibres of Life" in order "to Weave" bodies for humans, both male and female:

They cut the Fibres from the Rocks groaning in pain they Weave;
 Calling the Rocks Atomic Origins of Existence; denying Eternity
 By the Atheistical Epicurean Philosophy of Albions Tree
 Such are the Feminine & Masculine when separated from Man
 They call the Rocks Parents of Men. & adore the frowning Chaos[.]
 (67:11-16; E220)

The fibres that Rahab and Tirzah cut "from the Rocks" are those same "Fibres of love," which, as we have seen, join "man to man thro Albions pleasant land" (4:8; E146). In their unsevered state, these fibres point toward a dynamic holism in which all things are mutually and integrally interrelated; but when they are "cut...from the rocks" and "separated from Man," they become atomic units, aspects of the solipsistic warfare that characterizes Milton's "frowning Chaos." Once again it is important here to differentiate, albeit not without a certain essentialism, between things and the inscriptions they receive in Blake's writing; for the Rocks from which Rahab and Tirzah extract their "Fibres of Life" are not *in fact* "Atomic Origins of Existence" or "Parents of Men"--they are merely "call[ed]" or named as such. That Blake chooses to reiterate his reference to the act of "Calling" in this passage emphasizes the linguistic constructedness of an atomism which tends in his view to naturalize violent modes of social relations. Such violence is symbolized by the "consecrated banners" around which all things "rage in...[a] conflict" (67:30-31) reminiscent of that which occurs "around the flag[s]" of "faction" in the anarchic chaos of *Paradise Lost* (2.900-901). Indeed, the "Fibres of Life" that Rahab and Tirzah weave are themselves ironically named, for they are the units with which the Daughters of Albion subsequently "weav[e] the *deaths* of the Mighty into a Tabernacle /

For Rahab & Tirzah; till the Great Polypus of Generation covered the Earth" (67:33-4; E220; emphasis added).

The misnaming of these fibres is important, for in many ways the Polypus functions as a travesty or parody of the holistic relationality which, as I argued above in Chapter One, is a definitive yet ultimately irreducible or undefinable trait of Blakean "Life."²⁵ The Polypus, as Albion's Tree, alludes ironically to Christ's new reign in *Paradise Regained*, which, Milton prophesies, "shall be like a tree / Spreading and overshadowing all the earth" (4.147-8). But whereas the "Christocentric theology" of *Paradise Regained* emphasizes redemptive love and mutual forgiveness, thus displacing the terrifying theological legalism of *Paradise Lost* (Wittreich, "Blake's Milton" 68). Blake explicitly names Albion's Tree after the "Law" of "Moral Virtue" (28:15; E174), the Law that Moses received upon "the Rock / of Horeb" (67:26-7; E220). As we have seen, such Law is for Blake a principle of separation rather than connection, for it keeps God "hidden from the human sight" (28:16) and so separated from human existence.

At a certain level, however, the Polypus does indeed represent communal interconnection; but this is a pathological conception of community, one which implies not the dynamic interrelationality of integral entities but the undifferentiation of the heteronomous condition. On plate 18, Blake traces the genealogy of this creature to something like a foundational negation of difference: "Soon Hand mightily devour'd and absorb'd Albions Twelve Sons. / Out from his bosom [grew] a mighty Polypus, vegetating in darkness..." (18:39-40; E163). The Polypus emerges, significantly, directly out of Hand's act of devouring and absorbing his brothers, an act which destroys their individualities or particular outlines of identity. In the design to this plate (see figure 20), Blake depicts three naked forms falling down the right-hand margin, forms providing a

marginal gloss to the events recounted in the textual narrative (Paley, Notes 158). This series of descending and seemingly headless human figures (perhaps the same individual in various stages of dissolution) points to the loss of identity that occurs when one is assimilated by the Polypus. Blake emphasizes the appalling consequence of this assimilation via a gradual decrease in the inking of the figures' outlines as they fall toward the bottom of the page. Indeed, the outline of the third figure in this descending series is hardly inked at all, so that it seems to blend with some vegetation growing up the right-hand margin of the plate. Upon close examination, one can detect what appears to be the remains of a fourth naked form near the bottom of the plate, directly to the right of lines 41 through 43 (and, significantly, just below the seeming birth of the Polypus on line 40). This fourth form, the outline of which is not inked at all, looks (to quote Blake's *Descriptive Catalogue* of 1809) like "a cloudy vapour or a nothing" (E541), suggesting that, in the encounter with the Polypus, the human loses all autonomous identity.

Blake adumbrates this fall into heteronomy in the opening lines of the same plate, where he articulates his view of the relationship between human interiority and the external world as it was understood by the objective naturalism of his day.

From every-one of the Four regions of Human Majesty,
 There is an Outside spread Without, & an Outside spread Within
 Beyond the Outline of Identity both ways, which meet in One:
 An orb'd Void of doubt, despair, hunger, & thirst & sorrow.
 Here the Twelve Sons of Albion, join'd in dark Assembly....
 (18:1-5; E162)

This passage describes the danger of the heteronomous condition, the state in which the "Outline of Identity" becomes blurred and the integrity of the entity is lost. Such a crisis stems from the excessive privileging of objectivity implied by the repetition of the word "Outside" in the second line of the passage. The first instance of this word would need to be changed to "Inside" (so that the passage would read "There is an Inside Spread

Without. & an Outside spread Within") if some kind of balanced interchange between subjective interiority and external cosmos were to be achieved. As it stands (with the "Outside" spread both "Without" *and* "Within") human subjectivity is overwhelmed by the "Outside" or objective universe, while this same universe holds no place "Within" it for the human subject. The overarching presence of an "Outside" consequently generates "doubt, despair, hunger, & thirst & sorrow" *within* the human entity. This all-pervasive "Outside" is the reality of the Polypus itself; and the "dark Assembly" that conjoins Albion's Sons in pathological community (18:5) augurs the coming--or is itself a manifestation--of the Polypus that devours and absorbs them near the end of the same plate (18:39).

Because it negates the difference of other entities in its acts of devouring and absorption, the Polypus belongs to the Blakean category of the Hermaphrodite, that state in which subject and object "seem to come together, but in such a way that the distinctions between the two are obliterated" (Frosch 83-4). This mode of relationship is analogous to the "fourth similitude" Michel Foucault discusses in his study of pre-Enlightenment epistemology: that of "the play of *sympathies*."²⁶ To delineate the relationship between the Polypus and this mode of identification, it will be helpful to quote Foucault's discussion:

Sympathy is an instance of the *Same* so strong and so insistent that it will not rest content to be one of the forms of likeness; it has the dangerous power of *assimilating*, of rendering things identical to one another, of mingling them, of causing their individuality to disappear--and thus of rendering them foreign to what they were before. (*The Order of Things* 23-4)

To counteract this drive toward sameness, Foucault continues, "sympathy is compensated for by its twin, antipathy" (24). In *Jerusalem*, the human who has been absorbed by the Polypus is a victim of its "sympathy," which is why Blake characterizes this creature in

terms of "soft affections," the pity that divides the soul. A human who overemphasizes the importance of an "Outside" (at the expense of an "Inside," that is, subjective interiority and its processes of intellection), as we saw above, creates the necessary conditions for such an absorption. In short, too much identification with the external world can, in Blake's thought, lead to a harmful annihilation of the identifying self. Such a conclusion is seriously at odds with the environmental ethics of such prominent eco-philosophers as Arne Naess. One of the founders of the "deep ecology" movement, Naess advocates an ethic of human "identification" with "all life," a mode of relationship entailing, as Ralph Pite puts it, "an extension of sympathy that reaches so far and becomes so constant that the self loses any desire to differentiate between itself and the world" (362).²⁷ In Blake, as my analysis of the Polypus thus far should suggest, such a degree of identification actually forecloses ethical possibilities; for, from a Blakean standpoint, ethics can only be thought and practiced in the context of a relational interaction between integral entities, each of whom retains its own minute particularity or difference in the process of social relationship.

This is not to suggest that Blake privileges antipathy over its contrary, the "similitude" of sympathy. Rather, he emphasizes the need vigilantly to maintain a *balance* between these two modes of identification. Such balance is implicit in the Blakean concept of the "Outline of identity," also called the "bounding line" (DC; E550). Such an outline protects the entity's integrity and autonomy by guaranteeing its difference from other entities. Taken to an extreme, however, this line can give way to "strong Fortifications" (J 18:38; E163; see also 28:25-6; E174) or "stone walls of separation" (J 90:12; E249), divisive barriers preventing the mutualistic commingling of Emanations. The "bounding line," therefore, is not a fixed line. While it defines the entity within its

proper boundaries, it also "bounds" in the sense that it "leaps" and "jumps," performing what Blake calls, in his *Descriptive Catalogue*, "infinite inflections and *movements*" (E550; emphasis added). In other words, the "bounding line" is moveable and porous, strong enough to define an entity in its own minute particularity but flexible enough to prevent atomism or solipsism by accommodating sociality and the commingling of difference.

One of Blake's descriptions of the Polypus in *Milton* illustrates the necessity of maintaining a balance between these contraries of identity and difference (or sympathy and antipathy) most succinctly:

were it not for Bowlahoola & Allamanda
No Human Form but only a Fibrous Vegetation
A Polypus of soft affections without Thought or Vision
Must tremble in the Heavens & Earths thro all the Ulro space
Throw all the Vegetated Mortals into Bowlahoola[.]
(M 24/26:36-39; E120)

To understand the importance of this passage for an analysis of the Polypus, we must first define Bowlahoola and Allamanda.²⁸ As the site where "the various Classes of Men are all mark'd out determinate" (M 26/28:37, 39; E123), Bowlahoola is a space where *distinctions* are made. The same can be said of its digestive function. As "the Stomach in every individual man" (M 24/26:67; E121), Bowlahoola breaks food down into its component particulars for use by the physical body. Allamanda, on the contrary, is "the nervous system, ...the apparatus for giving and receiving communications" (Damon 17). Hence, it enables sympathetic *connections* to be made between individuals. Similarly, as "Commerce" on "Earth" (M 27/29:42; E125), Allamanda ideally functions as a mode of relationship, enabling the physical and ideational exchanges that occur between entities. Summarizing these differences between Bowlahoola and Allamanda, Mark Bracher argues that the former is the analytic power (which breaks complex relationships or

entities down into their minute particulars) while Allamanda is the synthetic power (which establishes connections between discrete entities) (167). An overabundance of the analytic power (Bowlahoola) leads to an atomized, fragmented world view and thus to a fractured world. Conversely, too much synthetic power (Allamanda) causes dissociation or a fall into non-entity as the individual identifies too closely with the totality of its environmental stimuli. Both analytic and synthetic powers are necessary to the maintenance of a balanced sense of selfhood, one which can relate sympathetically with other entities without losing its individual integrity or the minute particularity of its being.

In the above-quoted passage from *Milton*, the "Fibrous Vegetation" of the Polypus grows. I would argue, because of an overabundance of synthetic power (Allamanda). Thus, this creature symbolizes the indissociate human, the product of pathological sympathy or totalitarian community. Such a human is not intentionally malevolent in its actions (hence its seemingly harmless "soft affections"). But its lack of a differentiating "Thought or Vision" entails a self-directed violence which destroys the integrity of its being. Entirely the product of sympathy or synthesis, in other words, the entity characterized by an excess of Allamanda becomes a "Vegetated Mortal" having no particular identity and knowing no self-difference. Hence, Blake associates it on the same plate with a "Web of Death" (24/26:36; E120) rather than one of life. The solution to such indissociate human identity is to "Throw all the Vegetated Mortals into Bowlahoola" (24/26:40),²⁹ where, subjected to the analytic power, the harmful vegetative syntheses of an overactive Allamanda will be broken down so that dynamic difference will once again be asserted.

In the hyper-sympathetic state symbolized by the Polypus, the human is-- somewhat paradoxically--unable to assert any genuine sympathy for other entities comprising and inhabiting its natural and social environments. To a certain extent, this problem is perceptually-based. Immediately prior to the appearance of the Polypus on plate 66 of *Jerusalem*, human "perceptions" have been "dissipated into the Indefinite." Subsequently assimilated to the Polypus, humans "look forth" into the world only to discover that all things inhabiting their field of vision are obscured:

the Sun is shrunk: the Heavens are shrunk
 Away into the far remote: and the Trees & Mountains witherd
 Into indefinite cloudy shadows in darkness & separation.
 By invisible Hatreds adjoind, they seem remote and separate
 From each other; and yet are a Mighty Polypus in the Deep!
 (66:47-54; E219)

To a certain extent, this passage represents poetically Blake's critique of the primitivism which he and contemporaries like Mary Wollstonecraft associated with Rousseau. For Blake, the notion that humans must rid themselves of their "cultural" accretions in order to access an uncorrupted state of "nature" is ultimately harmful, both to humanity itself and to the natural world. In short, excessive communion or sympathetic "identification" with nature (as I argued above in my reference to Arne Naess's "deep ecology") does not bring humanity into a closer relationship with the external cosmos. On the contrary, the "heavens" become "far remote" (like the abstract sky-God who governs them); and the forms of the natural landscape--the "Trees & Mountains"--become "witherd." Far from bringing humans into communion with the totality of their cosmic environment, the Polypus of natural sympathy causes them to become "separat[ed]" from it--and from each other. This separation, as I have been arguing, is part and parcel of the heteronomous condition, an indissociated state accompanied by the darkening and withering of *both* subjects and objects--a process foreclosing the very possibility of differential relations.

To quote Mary Wollstonecraft's critique of Rousseauvian "primitivism," the Polypus symbolizes a "ferocious flight back to the night of sensual ignorance" (53).

Earlier in the poem, a similar crisis of identity and perception occurs. Associated both with the process of "vegetation" and with the appearance of the Polypus (the two of which are clearly related), this crisis has both social and ecological ramifications.

The Gigantic roots & twigs of the vegetating Sons of Albion
 Fild with the little-ones are consumed in the Fires of their Altars
 The vegetating Cities are burned & consumed from the Earth:
 And the Bodies in which all Animals & Vegetations, the Earth & Heaven
 Were contained in the All Glorious Imagination are witherd and darkend.
 (49:10-14; E198)

It is important to note that Blake uses "vegetation" in two distinct senses in this passage. When he writes of the "Bodies" of "Animals & Vegetations," the word refers to the botanical phenomena of nature, actual organic vegetations which are damaged and destroyed by the activities of Albion's Sons. That Blake values these vegetations most highly is apparent in the relationship he posits between their "Bodies" and the "All Glorious Imagination." When Blake describes Albion's Sons and their "Cities" as "vegetating," however, the concept is negative and so represented in terms of violence and destruction. Because of this human form of "vegetation"--which implies the same lack of "Thought or Vision" characterizing the state of the Polypus--the non-human forms of plants and animals, once "containd in the All Glorious Imagination," are "witherd & darkend"; and human cities "are burned & consumed" in a fiery holocaust. Once again, Blake associates this environmental and social destruction with the "narrowed perceptions" (49:21) characterizing the emergence of the "Polypus of Death" (49:24). For Blake, in short, the human and vegetable realms must remain integral and distinct, for they are the loci of irreducibly different forms of existence. The blurring of the bounding line that both joins and separates these realms leads, in Blake's vision, not to heightened

inter-species communion (as Naess's deep ecology would have it) but to the destruction of both human and non-human phenomena (cities *and* wild places, humans *and* plants and animals, Heaven *and* Earth). In other words, the human desire to return to nature, to achieve "oneness" with its glorious animal and vegetable forms, entails a pernicious "vegetating" which ultimately destroys "the little-ones," the Minute Particulars grounding both identity and difference.

The figure of the vegetative human is ubiquitous in *Jerusalem*, where it is often explicitly associated with the Polypus. Immediately prior to the latter's first appearance in the poem, for example, Blake depicts Albion's son Scofield as "Vegetated by Reubens Gate" (15:2; E158). This passage recalls a similar one on plate 11, wherein "Scofield is bound in iron armour! / He is like a mandrake in the earth before Reuben's gate: / He shoots beneath Jerusalem's walls to undermine her foundations!" (11:21-3; E154). Blake associates Scofield with the mandrake for good reason. As Sir Thomas Browne pointed out in the seventeenth century, "the ancients...generally esteemed [the mandrake] narcotick or stupefactive, and it is to be found in the list of poisons set down by Dioscorides, Galen, Ætius, Ægineta" (315). Scofield, the "Vegetated" human mandrake, certainly exists in a stupefactive or poisoned state; and it is likely that he undermines the foundations of Jerusalem--thus destroying his only hope of liberty from such a state--without fully realizing what he is doing. It is interesting to note, moreover, that the ancients also saw the mandrake as "a philter or plant that conciliates affection" (Browne 316), for this aphrodisiac effect suggests something of the seductive nature of the Polypus, that creature whose "soft affections" transform unwitting men like Scofield into human vegetations.

The mandrake's traditional association with human fertility is well-known. The "common conceit," as Thomas Browne points out, is that the Biblical "Rachel requested these plants [from Leah] as a medicine of fecundation, or whereby she might become fruitful" (313). This association informs the function of the Polypus--that maker of human mandrakes--in Blake's mythology. As I mentioned earlier, eighteenth-century commentators were fascinated by the regenerative capacity of the fresh-water polyp; and Blake's Polypus, in its almost infinite ability to proliferate itself, plays upon this characteristic. By undermining Jerusalem's foundations, Scofield's activity as a mandrake threatens drastically to proliferate the human vegetative condition, enlarging the Polypus's domain from the entire realm of time and space to that of Eternity itself (since Jerusalem is, at one level of its symbolism, the Eternal or Heavenly city). With Albion's cosmic form entirely assimilated to the proliferating Polypus, all hope of human liberty (which is Jerusalem) would be destroyed.

What is less well-known about the mandrake is that its medicinal application "provokes the menstrous flows, and procures abortion" (Browne 316). Arguably, Blake's mandrake-making Polypus symbolically incorporates this association, for it is simultaneously a symbol for fecundation *and* abortion, a contradictory entity "at variance with Itself / In all its Members" (69:6-7; E223). Significantly, this quotation directly follows Blake's representation of the Polypus as a cancer of the womb:³⁰ "all the Males combined into One Male & every one / Became a ravening eating Cancer growing in the Female / A Polypus of Roots of Reasoning Doubt Despair & Death" (69:2). These lines explicitly associate the Polypus with masculine activity. At one level, this cancerous growth stems from scientific endeavour and its particular mode of "Reasoning." Bacon's rapacious penetration of nature's "womb," far from encouraging a

propagation of life, turns creation itself into a monstrosity, the "ravening eating" Polypus of "Death." At another level, the Sons' colonization of the female body represents poetically the negative implications for female subjectivity in a patriarchal economy wherein women are forced to interiorize a "cancerous" male-centred mode of identity, an identity not diversely multiplicitous but thoroughly homogeneous (as Blake implies in his reference to the "One Male").³¹ The loss of diversity implicit in the figure of the "One Male" culminates in a condition of "infernal bondage" (69:9) for both the male and the female, a condition in which identity can only be "at variance with Itself" (69:6). The resultant form--like the "Mistletoe [that] grows on the Oak" (one of Blake's numerous metaphors for the Polypus³²) (66:55; E219)--cannot ultimately survive its own activity, for it parasitically destroys the very body which supports its life.

The figure of the male Polypus as a cancer growing in the female "womb of nature" suggests something of the patriarchal aspect of its manifestation in *Jerusalem*. Just prior to its second explicit appearance in the text, the Sons of Albion condemn Jerusalem and declare their intention "To build / Babylon the City of Vala." It is at this point that they deify Vala as "the Goddess Virgin-Mother," loudly proclaiming that "She is our Mother! Nature!" (18:28-30; E163). The purpose of this act of naming is twofold. By declaring themselves the offspring of a deified Mother Nature, the Sons are able both to sacralize *and* to "naturalize" their building of Babylon and the politics of warfare informing their intention to destroy Jerusalem. Moreover, by announcing their mother's status as a virgin, the Sons set themselves up as Christs, thus "destroy[ing]" the real "Divine Saviour; the Friend of Sinners" (18:37). The Sons' activities here are obviously self-contradictory. Although they identify themselves as Mother Nature's sons (and thus as products of "nature's womb"), they negate their mother's reproductive role by insisting

on her virginity. This self-contradictory discursive activity produces a "mighty Polypus, vegetating in darkness" (18:40), a deathly-cancerous creature which, as we have seen, is "at variance with Itself / In all its Members" (69:6-7; E223). The Polypus may be a "vegetating" entity, but it should not be seen as a "natural" vegetation (that is to say, as the product of nature "itself"). Rather, it is the result of a complex power struggle, a struggle in which "nature" is constructed and deified for explicitly political purposes. That this activity is at odds with the interests of nature "itself" (and so not "natural" at all) is made apparent on the plate immediately following, where we witness an ecological devastation: the alteration of climate; the destruction of crops, domestic animals, and human children; and the ultimate production of a "desolated Earth" (19:1-16; E163-4).

Notes

1. See, for example, Northrop Frye's *Fearful Symmetry*, 356; W. J. T. Mitchell's *Blake's Composite Art*, 169; Edward J. Rose's "The Structure of Blake's *Jerusalem*, 51; and Joseph Anthony Wittreich's "Opening the Seals," 52.

2. In *The Supplement of Reading*, Tilottama Rajan observes that a critical emphasis on *Milton* and *Jerusalem* in Blake studies "has naturalized a hermeneutic reading of the earlier texts because it seems to be what Blake 'finally' wanted" (209). Among other things, the privileging of such a reading has profound ramifications for our understanding of Blake's philosophy of nature, since *Jerusalem*'s seemingly hostile judgement of nature thus becomes the philosophical standard against which critics measure *all* of Blake's earlier poetic utterances on human-nature relations.

3. In John Locke's cognitive theory, it is not nature but the human mind that is originally a "blank leaf" (Damon 243). Interestingly, Blake's figure of "a blank in Nature" suggests precisely the opposite: mind is not written on by nature, but nature is written on by an inherently active mind. If Lockean psychology "sweep[s] aside the notion of innate ideas" (Schorer 179), thus challenging the notion of a pre-given, indwelling human "Conscience" (J 93:21-2; E254), Blake's poetic figure of "a blank in Nature" sweeps aside the common view of external nature as an absolute, pre-given "reality," thus challenging many of the presuppositions of materialist doctrine.

4. I am indebted to David L. Clark for directing me to Derrida's discussion of gender in Levinas's ethics. For a pertinent analysis of the problem of masculinity in Blake's emanational theory, see Clark's "Against Theological Technology," especially pages 185-88.

5. In a discussion of animality in Heidegger's philosophy, Derrida explains how "a certain dominant logic of opposition" entails a denial of difference. "[I]f you draw a single or two single lines, then you have homogenous sets of undifferentiated societies, or groups, or structures. ...[D]rawing an oppositional limit *itself* blurs the differences, the difference and the differences, not only between man and animal, but among animal societies, and, within the animal societies and within human society itself, so many differences" ("On Reading Heidegger" 183-4). Far from advocating "the *blurring* of differences" (183), Derrida's deconstruction *multiplies* differences between and among entities, just as Blake's poetic philosophy attempts to do by continually privileging minute particulars over homogenizing generalities.

6. Here I follow Minna Doskow's reading of *Jerusalem*'s title page. Doskow interprets this design as depicting the process Blake describes in the opening lines of Chapter One (4:1-2; E146): "Of the Sleep of Ulro! and the passage through / Eternal Death! and of the awaking to Eternal Life" (4:1-2; E146). As Doskow remarks of the

frontispiece design, "Jerusalem sleeps in Ulro at the bottom of the plate, passes through eternal death at the left, and finally floats in her fully awakened, winged form at the top" (*Blake's "Jerusalem"* 19).

7. On the same plate, significantly, the colour green provides a background for the letter "i" in Albion's name, suggesting a further correspondence between human selfhood (the "I") and the green world of nature. All references to colour in my discussion of *Jerusalem's* designs refer to Copy E of the poem, which is reproduced in the Princeton edition.

8. These features are difficult to distinguish in black-and-white reproductions, but they are plainly apparent in the high-quality colour reproduction of Copy E offered in the 1991 Princeton edition of the poem.

9. Moreover, after Albion's denial of his familial relationship with the natural terrain, this terrain itself seems to take on a dreadful aspect, as we may surmise later in the poem by the behaviour of Enitharmon and Urthona, who "flee from the interiors of Albions hills and mountains! / From his Valleys Eastward: from Amalek Canaan & Moab: / Beneath his vast ranges of hills surrounding Jerusalem" (43/29:30-32; E191).

10. Significantly, these are the same words Albion's fraternal valleys, hills, and rivers use to characterize his pathology at 36/40:11-12 (E182).

11. See Chapter Two, note 9.

12. To the extent that Rahab and Tirzah personify the Baconian "womb of nature," this passage suggests that physical science's "penetration" of a feminized nature itself leads to the penetration (i.e., "piercing") of the masculine brain that perpetrates this act. In section three of this chapter I shall have more to say about the implications of Blake's feminization of nature in *Jerusalem*.

13. This identification of Vala as nature "itself" is, as I pointed out in my discussion of nature's "congeneration" in Chapter One, especially problematic given that Blake occasionally represents Vala and "Nature" as distinctly separate entities. After Albion and Luvah fight for "dominion" over Vala's body, for example, Luvah and Vala flee Albion's presence, at which time, we are told, "the vast form of Nature like a serpent playd before them" (43/29:61, 76; E192). Since this passage represents Vala and Nature as two separate entities, it is perhaps more appropriate to define Vala as "the goddess of Nature" (Damon 428)--a production of religion rather than of nature itself. I shall consider the discursive implications of such a definition below.

14. In Blake's art, St. Paul's symbolizes the oppressive politics of state religion as opposed to the "living form" of Westminster Abbey's gothic structure (Paley, Notes 181), the latter of which Blake situates in this design next to the naked Jerusalem and her naked

female attendants.

15. See, for example, S. Foster Damon, page 213; Harold Bloom, page 407; Brenda S. Webster, page 283; and Peter Otto, page 174. All of these critics speak in terms of Joseph's forgiveness of Mary rather than of the need for their *mutual* forgiveness.

16. Vala makes this declaration, significantly, after recounting the relationship, discussed above, between her childhood upbringing and the religious wars of men.

17. See, for example, page 61 of Minna Doskow's *Blake's "Jerusalem."*

18. In *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell*, Blake formulates his famous argument that Milton was "of the Devils party without knowing it" (plate 5; E35).

19. Unlike Bonnet, I should note, many thinkers were uncomfortable with the polyp's seeming violation of taxonomy. Hence, the question of whether it was a plant or an animal continued to be debated among naturalists from the time of the creature's discovery in 1739 until the end of the century (Hilton, *Literal Imagination* 88).

20. While George Sandys referred to these appendages as "feet," Henry Baker called them "arms" (cited in Hilton, *Literal Imagination* 88). This kind of disagreement, minor in itself, gestures toward the kind of taxonomical confusion already implicit in the polyp's status as neither plant nor animal. Below, I shall examine the negative implications of such confusion for Blake's doctrine of identity.

21. I am indebted here to Nelson Hilton's insight that "the biological polypus seems to underlie" Blake's discussion, in 28:17-24, of "the Great Selfhood / Satan" and his "Devouring Power" (*Literal Imagination* 88).

22. Although Milton speaks of the "embryon atoms" of chaos (2.900), his subsequent assertion that chaos is comprised of "neither sea, nor shore, nor air, nor fire" (2.912) supports the notion that this realm is "pre-elemental," referring "not [to] the elements themselves, but rather to their component qualities" (Chambers 60-61). Being in a sense substance without form, Milton's chaos is, as Christopher Hill puts it, "nothing in itself" (326). In this sense, Miltonic atomism (which refers not to the created world but to its pre-created, proto-elementary materials) differs from the arguably more substantial atomism of mainstream Newtonian materialism.

23. The notion that atomism was atheistical was a commonplace in Milton's time as well as in Blake's. Walter Charleton, physician to Charles I, called it an "execrable delusion," probably because the philosophy tended to posit chaotic "matter" (rather than God) as a first principle (qtd. in Schwartz 25).

24. Blake's association of Newton's physics with Epicureanism is another aspect of his reductive reading of Newton (see my discussion in Chapter Three, above), for Newton himself attacked Epicurean atomism in his commonplace book (Manuel, *Religion* 41).

25. The other fundamental and necessary trait of Blakean "Life" is, as we have seen. "minute particularity."

26. The other pre-Enlightenment "similitudes" are *convenientia* or juxtaposition, *aemulatio* or emulation, and analogy. See *The Order of Things*, pages 17-25.

27. For one of Naess's own discussions of the process of "Identification as a Source of Deep Ecological Attitudes," see his essay by that name (especially pages 261-265).

28. For my understanding of the relationship between Bowlahoola and Allamanda. I am indebted to Mark Bracher. *Being Form'd*, page 167.

29. According to Robert N. Essick and Joseph Viscomi, the word "Throw" in this passage is likely an error for "Thro," which Blake often uses instead of "through" (Notes 167). My reading suggests, however, that Blake deliberately used the word that appears in the text. Indeed, "thro" would make little sense in this context, given the syntax of the sentence: for if Blake had intended to use "Thro" he would likely have chosen "in" rather than "into" as the appropriate preposition for the sentence.

30. Quoting Matthew Baillie's *The Morbid Anatomy of Some of the Most Important Parts of the Body* (published by Joseph Johnson in 1793), Nelson Hilton reminds us that the term "polypus" referred in the eighteenth century to "a very common disease of the uterus" (*Literal Imagination* 89).

31. On the homogeneity of masculinity and the "multiplicity of female desire." see Luce Irigaray, "This Sex Which Is Not One," *passim*.

32. Blake's symbolism of the oak is, in an overall sense, ambivalent and unsettled. In much of the early poetry, for example, the oak functions as a positively valued symbol of Innocence (Damon 305); but, as Brian John remarks, "Experience will pervert [it] into a Druidic Emblem" (26). Hence, in the highly fraught political contexts of *Jerusalem's* narrative, the oak becomes, at one level, a negatively valued symbol of "the Patriarch Druid" and "his Human Sacrifices" (98:48-51; E258). It is important to note, however, that the oak was commonly associated in popular culture with England itself (Damon 305). This nationalistic association quite likely informs Blake's statement that "As the Mistletoe grows on the Oak, so Albions Tree [grows] on Eternity" (66:55), since the parallelism of this passage correlates the oak with Blake's highly valued Eternity, the "home" of the Unfallen Albion.

As a parasite, mistletoe is a natural entity that lives by destroying other natural entities. Parasitism points toward a problem inherent in any unqualified valorization of nature, not the least because its natural occurrence can be invoked conceptually to sanction or "naturalize" analogous forms of human "parasitic" violence. On human "parasitism," see Michel Serres, "The Natural Contract," pages 9-10. For a discussion of similar problems inherent in the deep ecological "sacralization of nature," see Luc Ferry, pages 132-33. For a succinct discussion of the ways in which naturally-occurring forms of "violence" have been used to justify the aggressive policies of some extremist forms of ecological activism, see Roderick Nash, pages 190-96.

CODA

Blake's Apocalypse and the Humanization of Nature

Throughout this dissertation I have argued that, for Blake, particular modes of human discursive activity or practice lead to the philosophical devaluation and ultimate desolation of the Earth, its ecosystems, and its living creatures. In *The Book of Thel*, Thel's conditioned obsession with human-centred discourses of hierarchy and use-value cause her destructively to instrumentalize her environment and its inhabitants, allowing her in turn to be manipulated as an instrument of patriarchal hierarchy and its own self-interested and inequable pursuits. In *Milton*, Satan's legal code of morality (in both its religious and naturalistic forms) appalls all living things, reducing humans to docile and obedient automatons and the cosmos itself to a vast and lifeless machine. Finally, in *Jerusalem*, we witness the devastating consequences that follow Albion's self-centred anthropomorphic practices, the feminization of nature in the guise of Vala, and even the all-too-human effort to identify sympathetically with the totality of nature itself. Now if, in each of these poems, human conceptions of nature are largely the *cause* of nature's devaluation and downfall, can the "Humaniz[ation]" of nature occurring in *Jerusalem's* apocalypse (98:44; E258) be trusted as an appropriate resolution to this problem? A comparative glance at some of *Jerusalem's* key passages will help us to formulate a tentative answer to this question.

Midway through *Jerusalem*, the Eternals, discussing their relationship to "the Dead" of the Ulro, articulate unequivocally their distaste for political hierarchy. "To be

their inferiors or superiors we equally abhor," they declare. "Superior, none we know: inferior none: all equal share / Divine Benevolence & joy..." (55:7-9; E204). If, as the Eternals plainly state, Eternity refuses to countenance hierarchy, then, presumably, the kinds of political conflict that rage around Vala's body during the course of the poem will be eradicated by the apocalypse, especially including those modes of conflict associated with or produced by hierarchical discourses allowing humans "dominion" over each other and over non-human others. As the process of cosmic renovation begins in *Jerusalem*, Britannia (Vala and Jerusalem finally reunited) charges herself with Albion's murder (94:22-3; E254); but her self-accusatory words suggest that this act was presided over by a certain anthropocentric hierarchy, since "The eagle & the Wolf & Monkey & Owl & the King & Priest were there" (94:27). The grammatical conjoining in this passage of non-human entities to "King & Priest" suggests, at one level, that Blake is "animalizing" the latter, denouncing "King & Priest" as less than human or less than humane. At another level, however, this same conjoining suggests that the animals in the passage have been tied to or bound by the same forms of institutionalized power that oppress Vala and other characters in the poem prior to the apocalypse. Indeed, the ultimate positioning on the plate of king and priest (consistently representatives of legal tyranny in Blake's antinomian philosophy) suggests that the systems of power they represent, and not Britannia, have been responsible for Albion's "murder."

When next we are offered a list of animals in the poem, there is a significant change in its constitution: the "King & Priest" are conspicuously absent. On plate 98, Blake tells us that he "heard Jehovah speak"

Terrific from his Holy Place & saw the Words of the Mutual Covenant Divine
On Chariots of gold & jewels with Living Creatures starry & flaming
With every Colour, Lion, Tyger, Horse, Elephant, Eagle Dove, Fly, Worm
And the all wondrous Serpent clothed in gems and rich array Humanize

In the Forgiveness of Sins according to the Covenant of Jehovah.
(98:40-45; E258)

A number of observations are relevant to a reading of nature and animality in this passage. First, many of the animals listed here (dove, serpent, eagle, lion) are the very ones who earlier chose, in the wake of the Polypus's creation on plate 66, to "build a habitation separate from Man" (66:66:70-73; E219). Since Blake has already depicted the "vast form of Nature" as "a serpent" (43/29:76, 80), the serpent's fleeing at this point into "the four-fold wilderness" (66:71)--and away from a less than four-fold humanity--suggests that "nature" itself, far from sanctioning the creation of the Polypus, knows enough to abhor it as un- or anti-natural. There is scant evidence, in other words, that the Polypus truly *represents* non-human nature or the material realm "as such" in the poem. On the contrary, this horrific monster symbolizes what becomes of nature as a result of the way it is conceptualized--indeed the way it discursively materializes--in contexts supporting human political strife and corporeal warfare. At the end of *Jerusalem*, the individual animals' return to the human sphere (and the return of nature itself as "the all wondrous Serpent clothed in gems & rich array"¹ [98:44]) represents a necessary reconciliation between the poem's human and non-human spheres. In the idealized non-hierarchical context of post-apocalyptic Eternity, in which the laws of "King & Priest" no longer exist, *both* humans and animals are united in their freedom from the oppressive discourses that had earlier sanctioned the violence and "Desolation" upon which "the Kingdoms of the World & all their glory...grew" (98:51).

Given the violence that humans perpetrate upon the realm of nature in *Jerusalem*, how should we interpret Blake's proclamation that the returning animals and the Serpent of nature "Humanize / In the Forgiveness of Sins" upon their reconciliation with humanity? Despite the syntactical ambiguity of this passage, critics are virtually

unanimous in their notion that Blake is speaking here of the humanization of nature,² that he is issuing "a call for lion and tiger"--and even "tree, metal, earth, and stone"--to "assume human form" (Frosch 147). Since all things in Blake's unfallen cosmos are integral particulars of the organic body of Albion (which, as I argued in Chapter One, enables Blake's particular formulation of an "environmental ethics"), I do not exactly take issue with this thesis. I do wish, however, to question its particular anthropocentric bias.

Arguably, when Blake says that animals "Humanize," he speaks not only of their transformations into human form, but also of an activity they perform transitively upon others. Although these others are not explicitly identified in the sentence in which the verb appears. Blake's subsequent references to "Moral Virtues" and to the "Kingdoms of the World" (98:46-53; E258) suggest that the object of the transitive verb is the human realm itself, which has heretofore been anything but humane in its treatment of either human or non-human entities. When the animals "Humanize / In the Forgiveness of Sins according to the Covenant of Jehovah," in other words, they are not simply the beneficiaries of a condescending human forgiveness (which implies a structure of hierarchy that Eternity abhors). Rather, as Blake plainly states in his depiction of the reconciliation between Joseph and Mary on plate 61 (and as I pointed out in my discussion of this event), Jehovah's Covenant refers to an act of *mutual* forgiveness: "this is the Covenant / Of Jehovah: If you forgive one-another, so shall Jehovah Forgive You" (61:24-5; E212). In short, as all "the Living Creatures of the Earth" (98:54; E258) witness the eradication of the institutions that throve upon Albion's "Desolation" (98:46-53), they "Humanize" each other *mutually*. This act of community reconnects the "Fibres of love" that had been severed at the beginning of *Jerusalem's* first chapter, thus

reestablishing the interconnections between--and affirming the value of--*all* entities inhabiting "Albions pleasant land" (4:8; E146).

Notes

1. This depiction of the serpent in terms of "gems & rich array" recalls Blake's reference to "this Vegetable World" in *Milton*, which he figures as "a bright sandal formed immortal of precious stones & gold" (21:12-13; E115). As I pointed out in Chapter Three, the binding on of this sandal *enables* the poet subsequently "to walk forward thro' Eternity" (21:14).

2. For diverse anthropocentric readings of nature's ultimate humanization in *Jerusalem*, see Bloom (401), Frosch (147-9), and Doskow, "The Humanized Universe of Blake and Marx" (239).

APPENDIX:

Selected Plates and Watercolours

by William Blake

Rose up against me thundering from the Brook of Albion's River
 From Rattling & Scrambling. From Cromwell's gardens & Chichester
 The place of wounded Soldiers, but when he saw my Name
 Whirl'd round from Heaven to earth, trembling he sat; his cold
 Poisons rose up; & his sweet deceits cover'd them all over
 With a tender cloud. As thou art now: such was he O Spectre
 I know thy deceit & thy revenges, and unless thou desist
 I will certainly create an eternal Hell for thee. Listen.
 Be attentive: be obedient: Lo the Furnaces are ready to receive thee.
 I will break thee into shivers; & melt thee in the Furnaces of death.
 I will cast thee into forms of abhorrence & torment if thou
 Desist not from thine own will, & obey not my stern command:
 I am clos'd up from my children: my Emanation is dividing
 And thou my Spectre art divided against me. But mark
 I will compell thee to assist me in my terrible labours. To beat
 These hyponitic Yellhoods on the anvils of bitter Death
 I am inspired: I art not for myself: for Albion's sake
 I now ask what I am; a horror and an astonishment
 Shuddering the heavens to look upon me: Behold what cruelties
 Are practis'd in Babel & Shinar: & have approach'd to Zion's Hill
 While Los spoke, the terrible Spectre fell shuddering before him
 Watching his time with glowing eyes to leap upon his prey
 Los opening the Furnaces; in fear, the Spectre saw to Babel & Shinar
 Across all Europe & Asia he saw the tortures of the Victims;
 He saw now from the outside what he before saw & felt from within
 He saw that Los was the sole uncontroll'd Lord of the Furnaces
 Groaning he kneel'd before Los's iron-shod feet on Liquidum Stare,
 Hungring & thirsting for Los's life yet pretending obedience.
 While Los pursu'd his speech in threatenings loud & fierce.
 Thou art my Pride & Self-righteousness: I have found thee out:
 Thou art reveal'd before me in all thy magnitude & power:
 Thy uncurious'd pretences to Christag must be cut in sunder:
 Thy holy wrath & deep deceit cannot avail against me
 For I am one of the living: dare not to mock my inspired fury
 If thou wast cast forth from my life: if I was dead upon the mountains
 Thou mightest be pitied & lov'd: but now I am living; unless
 Thou abstain ravering I will create an eternal Hell for thee
 Take thou this Hammer & in patience heave the thundering Ballows
 Take thou these Tongs: strike thou alternate with me, labour obedient
 Hand & Hyle & Shinar: Skould, Kox & Koton, labour obedient
 In the Wars of Babel & Shinar: all their Emanations were
 Condens'd. Haniel has absorb'd all his Brethren in his might
 All the infant Loves & Graces were lost for the mighty Hand

Con



Figure 1: Jerusalem, plate 8

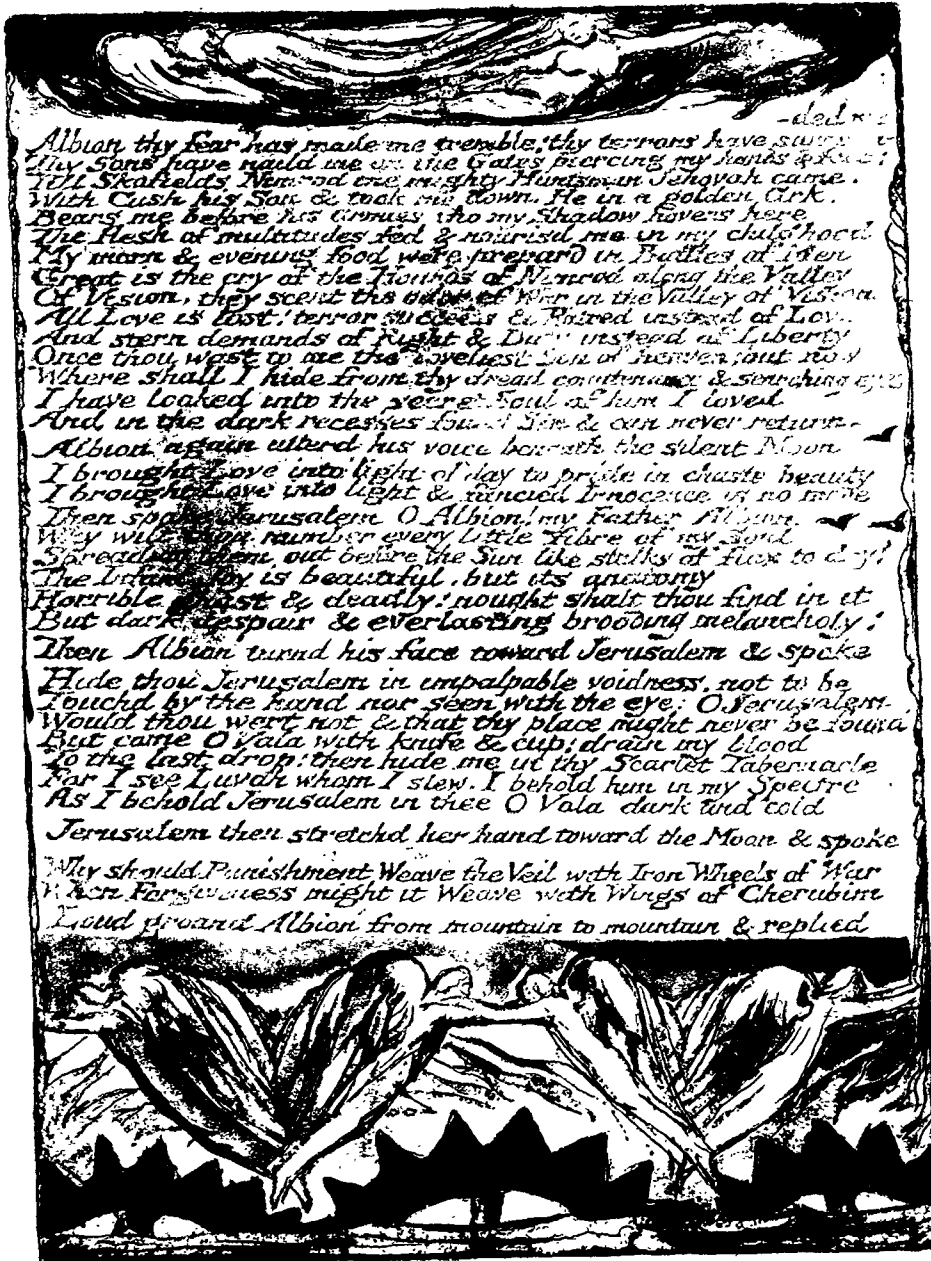


Figure 2: Jerusalem, plate 22

Turning his back to the Divine Vision, his Spectrous
Chaos before his face appeared: an Unformed Memory
Then spoke the Spectrous Chaos to Albion darkning coils
From the back & loins where dwell the Spectrous Dead
I am your Rational Power O Albion & that Human Form
You call Divine, is but a Worm seventy inches long
That creeps forth in a night & is dried in the morning sun
In fortuitous concourse of memorys accumulated & lost
It plows the Earth in its own conceit it overwhelms the Hills
Beneath its winding labyrinths, till a stone of the brook
Stops it in midst of its pride among its hills & rivers
Battersea & Chelsea mourn London & Canterbury tremble
Their place shall not be found as the wind passes over
The ancient Cities of the Earth remove as a traveller
And shall Albions Cities remain when I pass over them
With my deluge of forgotten remembrances over the tablet



So spoke the Spectre to Albion. He is the Great Selfhood
Satan: Worshiped as God by the Mighty Ones of the Earth
Having a white Dot called a Center from which branches out
A Circle in continual gyrations: this became a Heart
From which sprang numerous branches varying their motions
Producing many Heads three or seven or ten & many feet
Innumerable at will of the unfortunate contemplator
Who becomes his food such is the way of the Divine Power
And this is the cause of the appearance in the frowning Chaos
Albions Emanation which he had hidden in Jealousy
Appears now in the frowning Chaos prolific upon the Chaos
Reflecting back to Albion in Sexual Reasoning Hermaphrodite
Albion spoke Who art thou that appearest in gloomy pomp
Involving the Divine Vision in colours of autumn. Repeness
I never saw thee till this time nor beheld life abstracted
Nor darkness unmingled with light on my barren field
Whence comest thou: who art thou O Loveliest the Divine Vision
Is as nothing before thee faded is all life and joy

Vale replied in clouds of tears Albions garment embracing
I was a Temple built by Albions Children
I was a Temple with beauty I allured on hill & valley
The Rites were done against my wills & among my trees
Vale was a Temple in Great Eternity
The lovers were the Gods of Eternity when in my breast
I emanated the Divine Vision
And in her I saw the Divine Vision
The Spectre of the Divine Vision: why didst thou
Why wast thou so fair: why wast thou so fair
Where wast thou so fair: why wast thou so fair
In clouds of tears I saw the Divine Vision
Known as the Divine Vision
The Spectre of the Divine Vision: why didst thou
I brought thee here to see the Divine Vision
Born of the Woman to obey the Word of Albion
For the Divine appearance is Beauty

Figure 3: Jerusalem, plate 33



Figure 4: *Jerusalem*, plate 100



Figure 5: "The Wood of the Self-Murderers: The Harpies and the Suicides"
Illustration to Hell, Canto 13, of Dante's *Divine Comedy*
Tate Gallery, London / Art Resource, New York

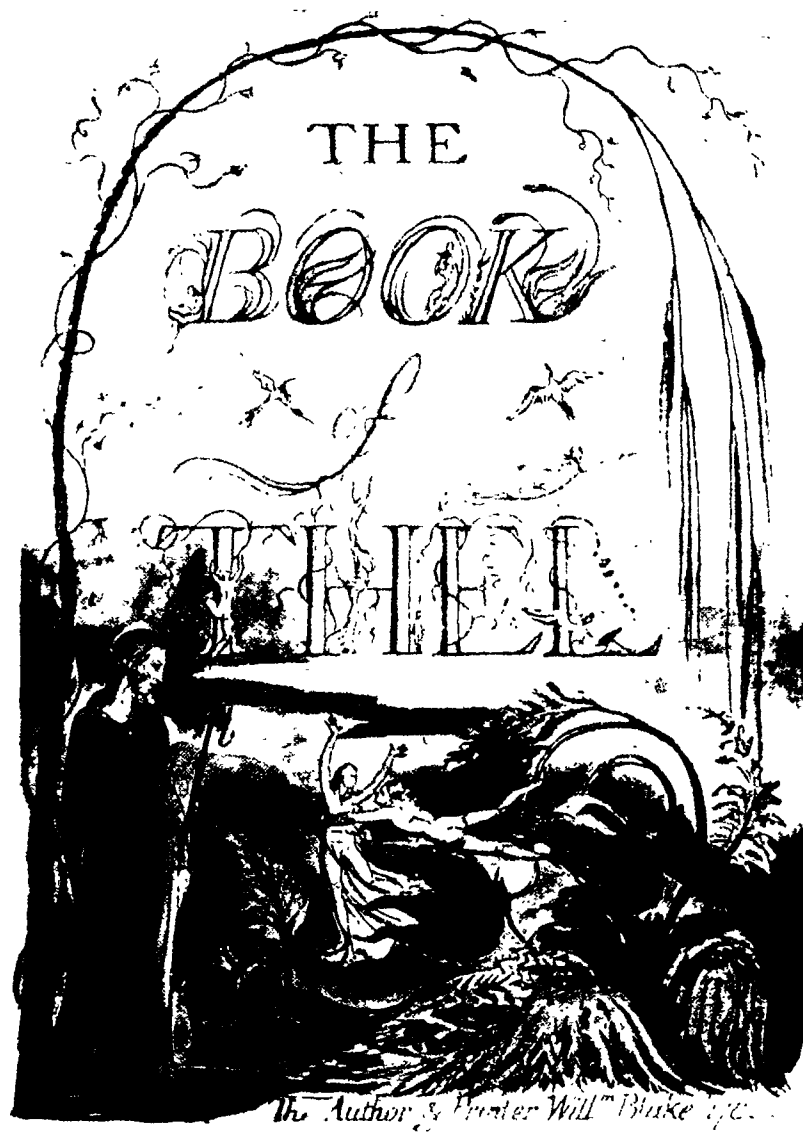


Figure 6: *The Book of Thel*, plate 2 (frontispiece)

Why should the mistress of the vales of Thel, after a sigh,
She ceased & smil'd in tears, then sat down in her silver shrine.

Thel answered, O thou little virgin of the peaceful valley,
Caring to those that cannot care, the voiceless, the unfired,
Thy heart doth cherish the innocent lamb, he swells thy rusty garments
He craps thy flowers, when thou sattest smiling in his face,
Wiping his mild and meek mouth from all contagious taints,
Thy wine doth purify the golden honey, thy perfume,
Which thou dost scatter on every little blade of grass that springs
Reveres the milked cow, & tames the fire-breathing steed,
But Thel is like a faint cloud kindled at the rising sun:
I vanish from my pearly throne, and who shall fill my place.

Queen of the vales the Lally answered, ask thy tender cloud,
And it shall tell thee who it clatters in the evening sky,
And why it scatters its bright beauty thro' the summer air,
Descend O little cloud & hover before the eyes of Thel.

The Cloud descended, and the Lally bowed her modest head:
And went to mind her numerous charge among the verdant grass.



Figure 7: *The Book of Thel*, plate 4

IV.

The eternal gates terrific porter lifted the northern bar:
Thel enterd in & saw the secrets of the land unknown:
She saw the corridors of the dead, & where the fibrous root
Of every heart on earth indexes deep its restless twist:
A land of sorrows & of tears where never smile was seen.

She wandered in the land of clouds thro' valleys dark, list'n
Dolours & lamentations: waiting oft beside a dewy grave
She stood in silence, list'n'ing to the voices 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 Ear be closed to its own destruction?
Or the glistening Eye to the poison of a smile!
Why are Eyelids stord with arrows ready drawn,
Where a thousand fighting men in ambush lie?
Or an Eye of gifts & graces, showing fruits & coined
gold?

Why a Tongue impress'd with honey from every wind?
Why an Ear, a whirlpool herve to draw creations in?
Why a Nostril wide inhaling terror trembling & aching?

The Virgin started from her seat, & with a shriek
Fled back unhindered till she came into the vales of Hel.



Figure 8: The Book of Thel, plate 8

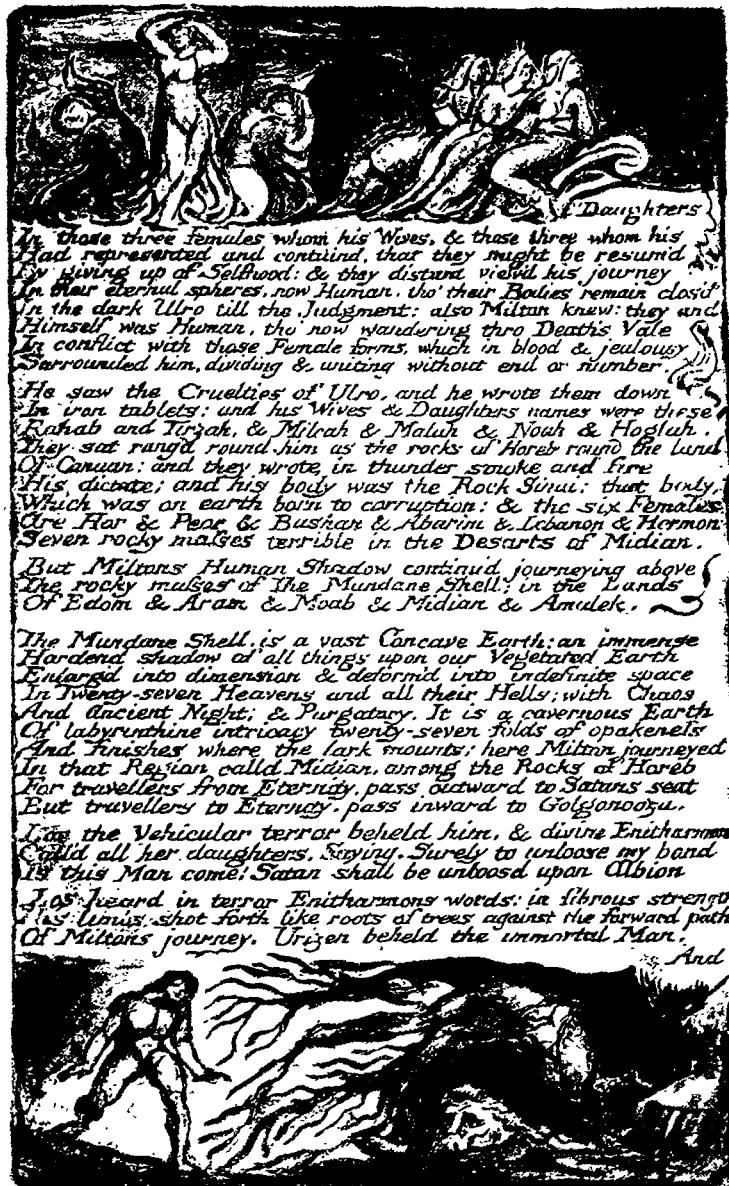


Figure 9: Milton, plate 16



Figure 10: *Milton*, plate 15



Figure 11: "Newton"
Tate Gallery, London / Art Resource, New York

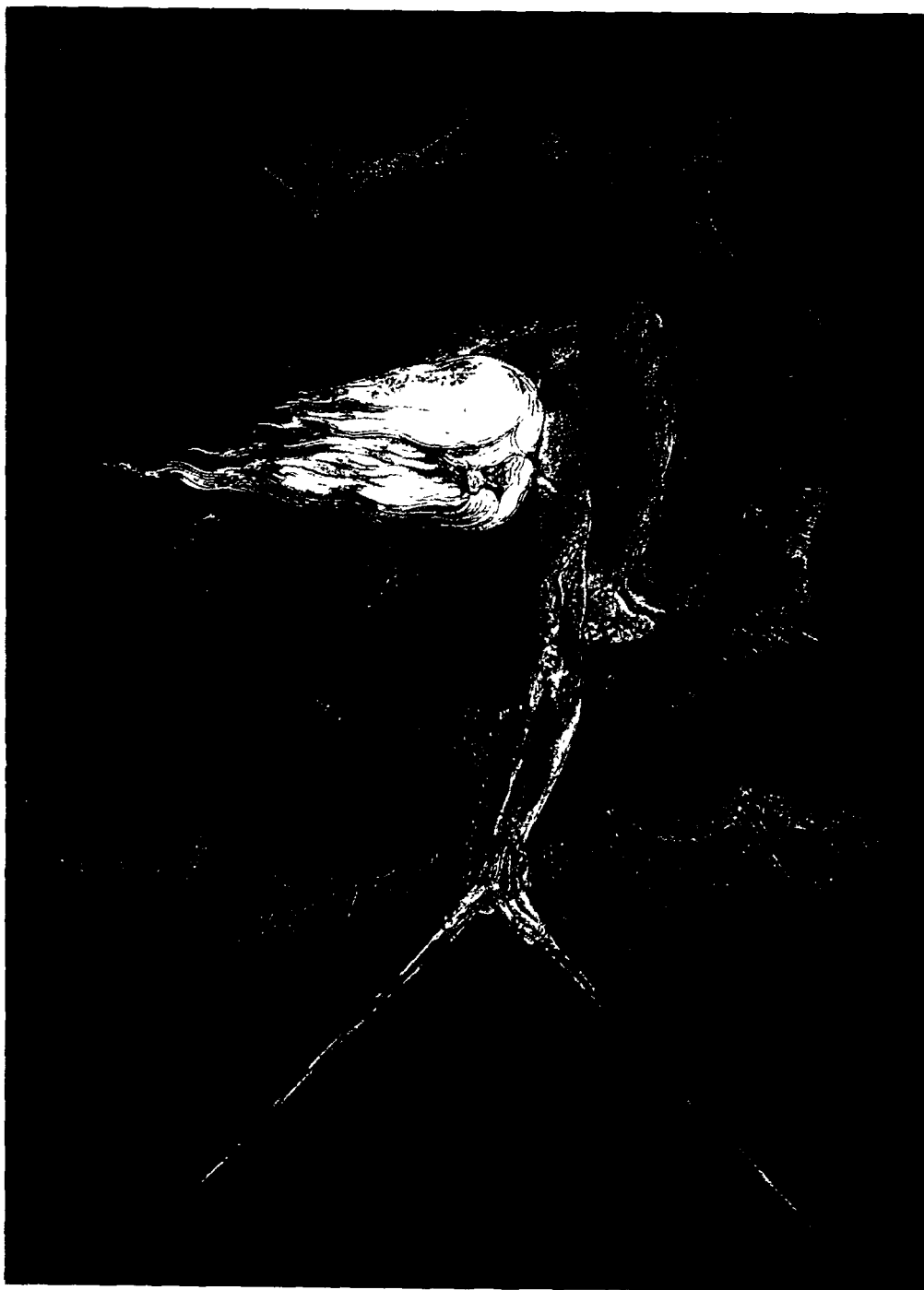


Figure 12: *Europe*, plate 1 (frontispiece)

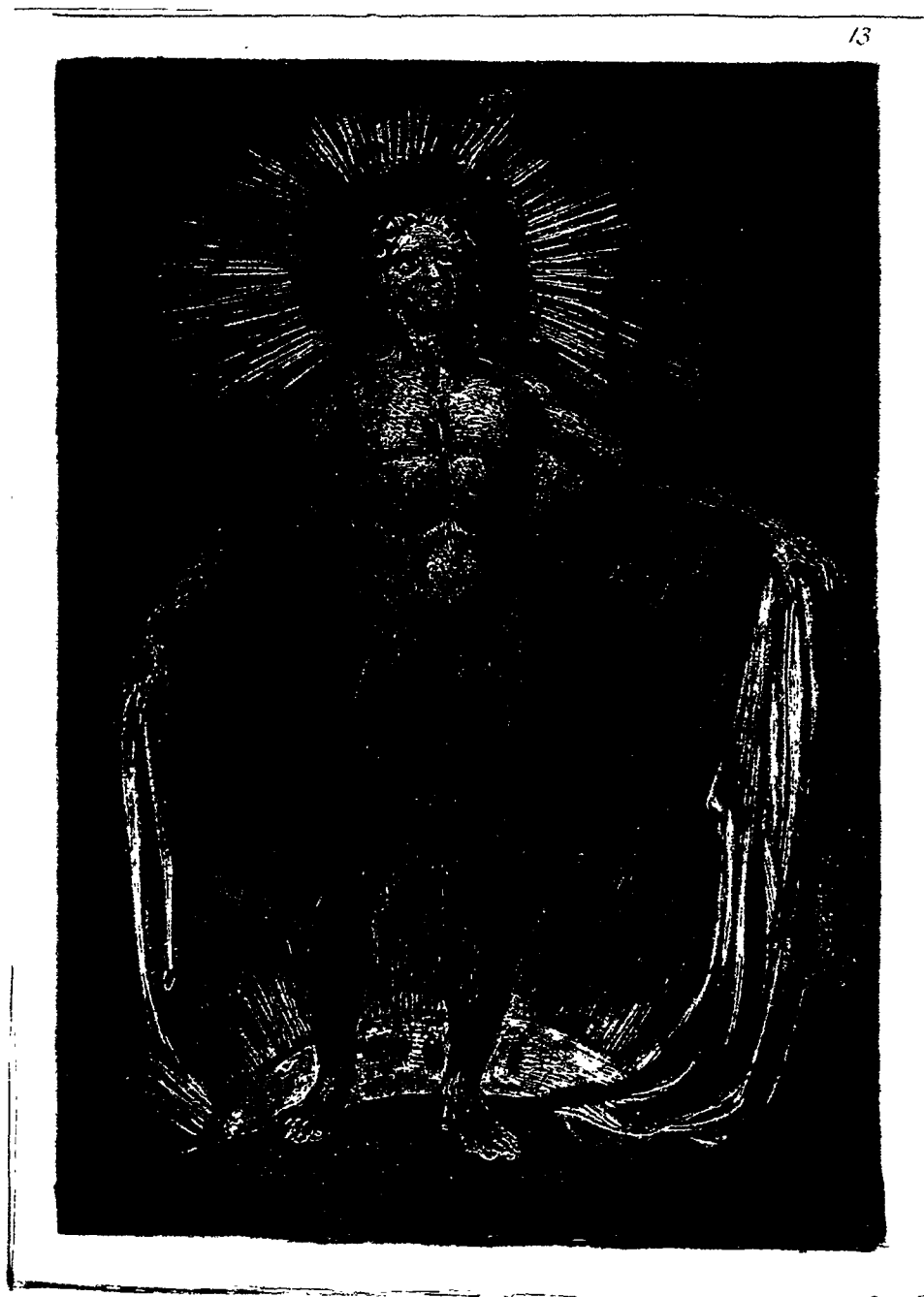


Figure 13: *Milton*, plate 13

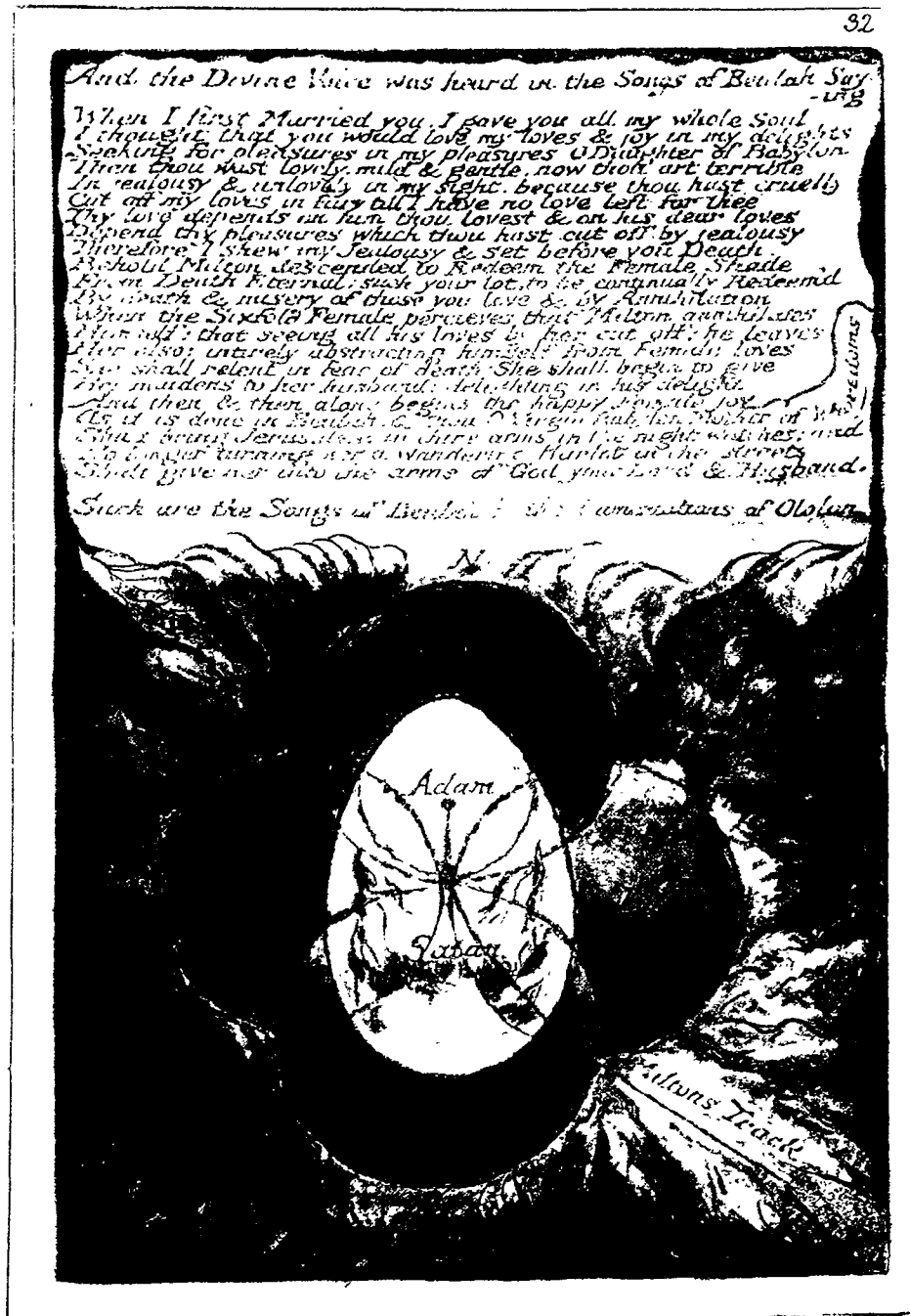


Figure 14: Milton, plate 32



Figure 15: *Jerusalem*, plate 2

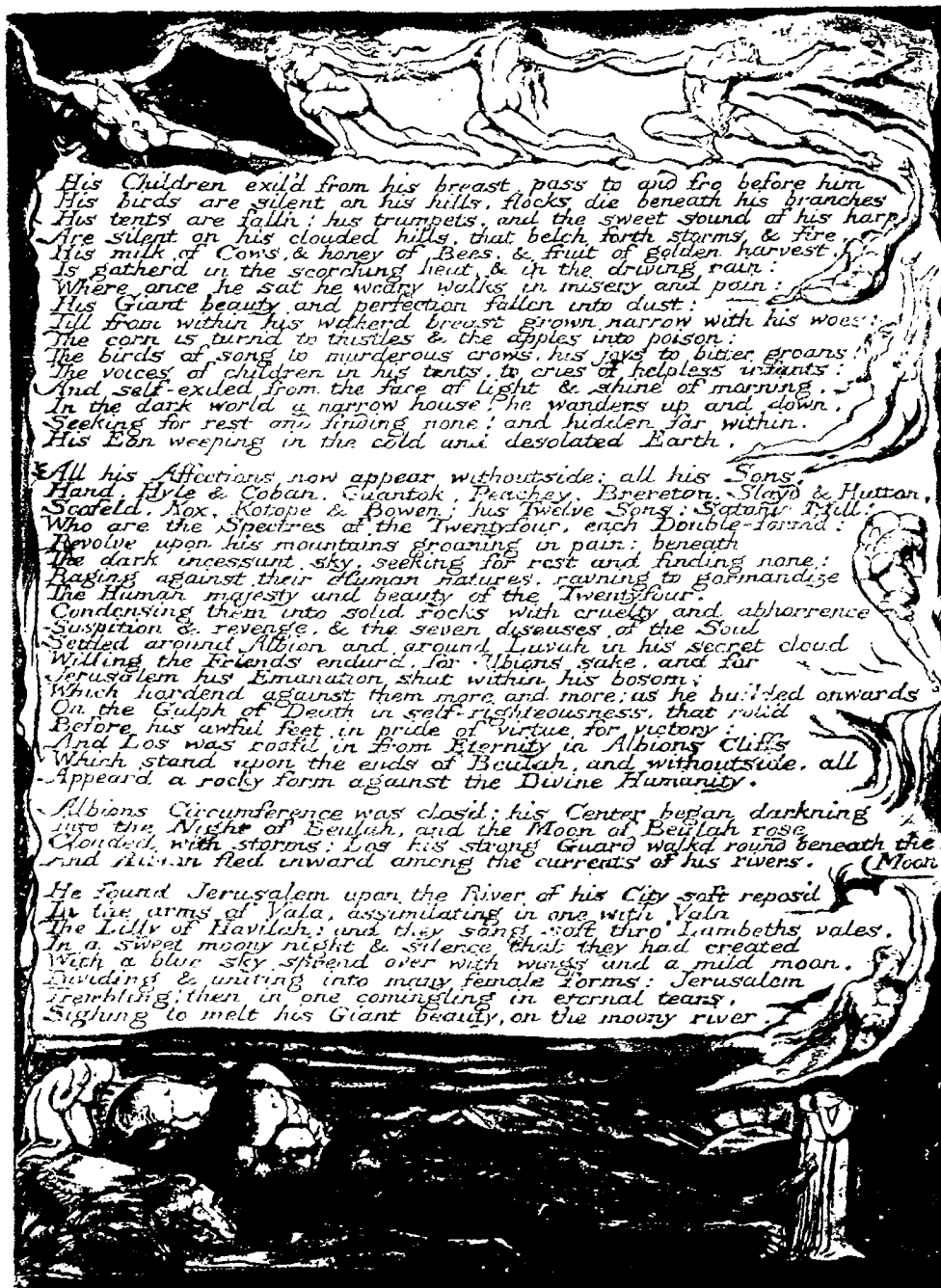


Figure 16: Jerusalem, plate 19

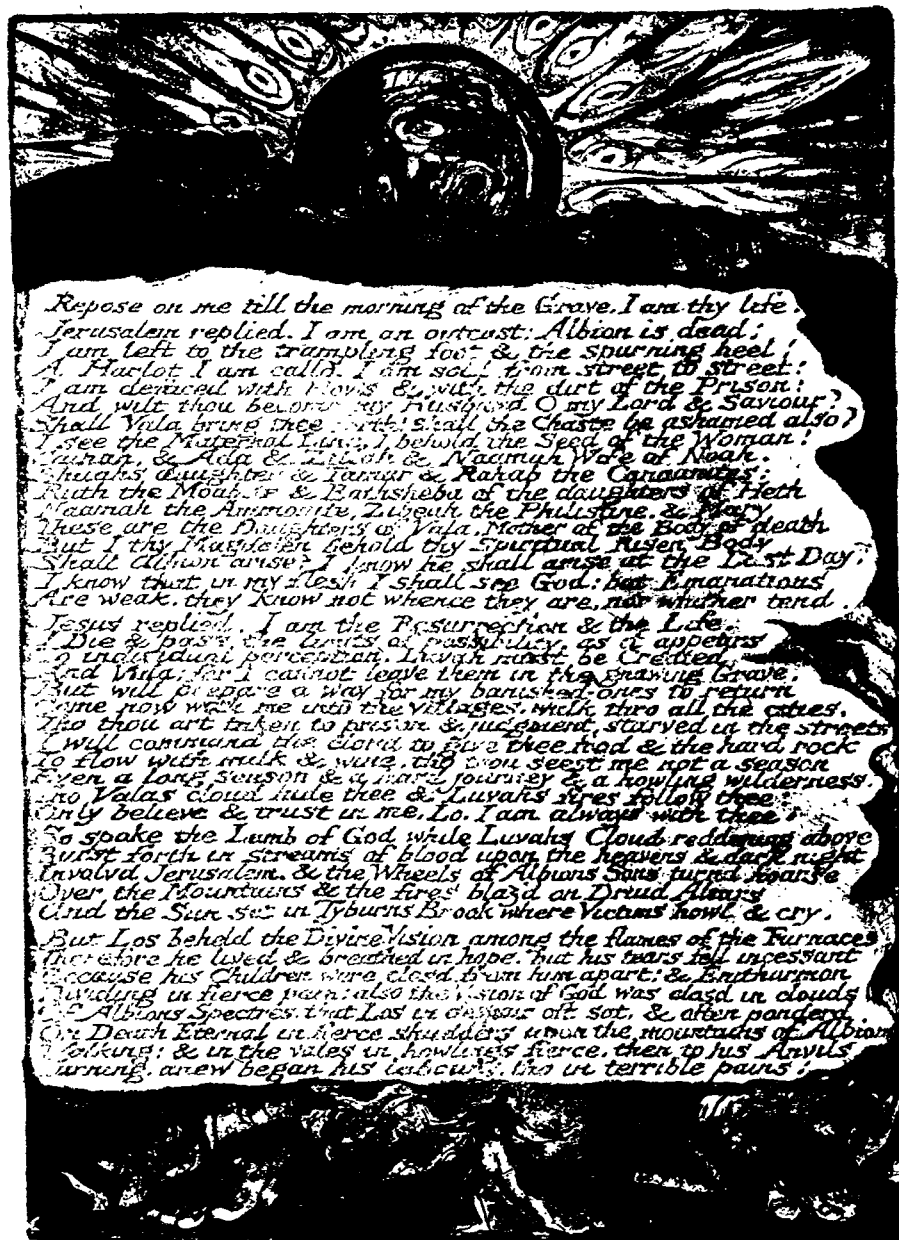


Figure 17: Jerusalem, plate 62

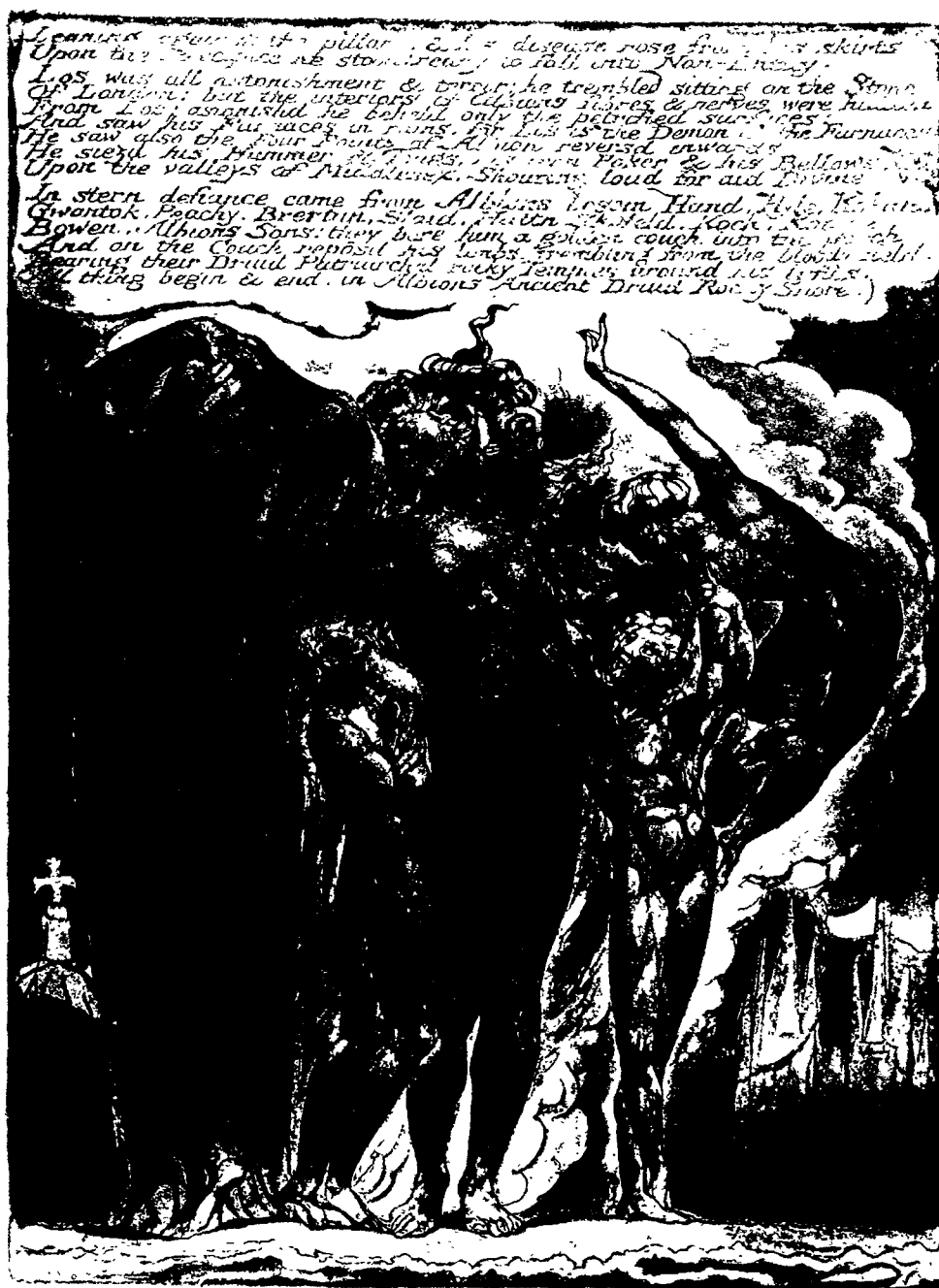


Figure 18: Jerusalem, plate 32

Then the Divine Vision like a silent Sun appeared above
 Albion's dark rocks: setting behind the Gardens of Hesiod.
 On Tyburn's River, in clouds of blood, where misty Zephyr Hills
 Most ancient promontory, and in the Sun, a Human Form appeared
 And thus the Voice Divine went forth upon the rocks of Albion
 I elected Albion for my glory: I gave to him the Nations,
 Of the whole Earth. He was the Angel of my Presence; and all
 The Sons of God were Albion's Sons: and Jerusalem was my joy.
 The Reader hath his himself thro' envy, I behold him.
 But you cannot behold him till he be revealed in his System
 Albion's Reader must have a Place prepared, Albion must Sleep
 The Sleep of Death, till the Man of Sin & Repentance be revealed.
 Hidden in Albion's forests he lurks: he admits of no Reply
 From Albion, but hath founded his Reaction into a Law
 Of Action, for Obedience to destroy the Contraries of Man.
 He hath compelled Albion to become a Punisher & hath possessed
 Himself of Albion's Forests & Wilderness: Jerusalem is taken.
 The City of the Woods in the Forest of the North is taken.
 London is a stone of her ruins: Oron is a day on her walls.
 Essex & Kent are her scattered bones: and her half lies in
 And the murdered bodies of her sons lie on Scotland and Wales.
 The Cities of the Nations are the bones of her destruction.
 The Nations are her dust: growing in the wheels of her
 Of her lordly conquerors, her bones lie with the dust.
 I come that I may find a way to her: I come to her to return
 Near not O little flock I come: I shall rest again.
 So saying, the mild Sun came out of the Western Family.
 Farthwith from Albion's darkness, a living ray of mortal forces
 Saying We alone are standing: I came to her and said to her
 We hear from the interior of the earth and the interior
 From his Valley's heart, a voice: a voice that said to her
 Beneath his vast range of mountains, Jerusalem is taken.
 Albion walked on the steps of the Western Family.
 And Vala walked with him: a day's journey from the Western Family.
 He looked up to the Palace of the West: a day's journey from the Western Family.
 Then Albion walked on the steps of the Western Family.
 Above him rose a shadowy form: a form that said to her
 Of a gold, pure, perfect, holy: a form that said to her
 A soft, entrancing, self-possessed, a form that said to her
 Soft exulting in existence, all the day and evening.
 Albion fell upon his face prostrate: a form that said to her
 Saying O Lord whence is this voice? I know I am nothing.
 And Vala trembled & covered her face: a form that said to her
 We heard astonished at the Vision, & our hearts trembled within us.
 We heard the voice of the Western Family: a form that said to her
 Indolent to his own Shadow words of eternity uttering:
 O I am nothing when I enter into judgment with thee.
 If thou withdraw thy breath I die & vanish into dust.
 If thou dost lay thine hand upon me behold I am silent.
 If thou withdraw thy hand I perish like a leaf in the wind.
 O I am nothing: and to nothing must I turn: I die.
 If thou withdraw thy breath, behold I am oblivion.
 He ceased: the shadowy voice was silent: but the cloud hovered over their heads.
 In golden wreaths, the sorrow of Man, a voice that said to her
 And to that son of Man, that Shadowy Spirit of a lost and lost.
 Luvah descended from the cloud in terror: a form that said to her
 Indignant rose the wild Man, & turned his back on Vala.
 We heard the voice of Albion starting from his sleep:
 Whence is this voice crying Enion? that sounded in my ears?
 O cruel pity O dark deceit: can love seek for dominion?
 And Luvah strove to gain dominion over Albion.
 They strove together above the Boy where Vala was enclosed.
 And the dark Body of Albion lay prostrate upon the crystal pavement.
 Covered with boils from head to foot: the terrible smiting of Luvah.
 Then Luvah the fallen Man and put forth Luvah from his presence.
 Saying, Go and die the Death of Man, say to the sweet wanderer.
 I will turn the volutions of your ears outward, and bend your nostrils
 Downward, and your humble eyes englobed roll round in fear.
 Your withering lips and tongue shrink up into a narrow circle,
 Till into narrow forms your breath go take your fiery way.
 And learn what tis to absorb the Man you Spirits of Pity & Love.
 They heard the voice and fled swift as the winters setting sun.
 And now the human blood roared high, the Spirits Luvah & Vala
 Went down the Human Heart where Paradise & its joys abound.
 In reason's maze & rage & rage & flames roll round their fervid feet:
 And the vast form of Nature like a serpent played before them.
 And as they fled, a shadowy fire & thunders of the deep.
 Vala shrank in like the dark sea, that leaves its slumy banks
 And from her bosom Luvah fell far as the east and west.
 And the vast form of Nature like a serpent rolled between.
 Whether of Jerusalem or Vala's ruins, congealed we know not.
 All is confusion: all is tumult: & we alone are escaped.
 So spoke the fugitives, they found a Western Family, trembling.

Figure 19: Jerusalem, plate 29

From every-one of the Four Regions of Human Majesty,
 There is an Outside spread Without, & an Outside spread Within
 Beyond the Outline of Identity both ways, which meet in One:
 An orb'd Void of doubt, despair, hunger, & thirst & sorrow.
 Here the Twelve Sons of Albion, join'd in dark Assembly,
 Jealous of Jerusalem's children, ashamed of her little-ones
 For Vala produc'd the Bodies, Jerusalem gave the Souls;
 Became as Three Immense Wheels, turning upon one-another
 Into Non-Entity, and their thunders hoarse appall the Dead
 To murder their own Souls, to build a Kingdom among the Dead.



Cast! Cast ye Jerusalem forth! The Shadow of deceptions,
 The Harlot daughter, foster of pity and dishonourable ingivers,
 Our Father Albion's sin and shame! But Father now no more!
 Nor sons, nor hateful peace & love, nor soft complacencies
 With transgressors meeting in brotherhood around the table,
 Or in the porch or garden, No more the sinful delights
 Of age and youth and boy and girl, and animal and herb,
 And river and mountain, and city & village, and house & family
 Beneath the Oak & Palm, beneath the Vine and Fig-tree.
 In self-denial! But War and deadly contention, Between
 Father and Son, and light and love! All bold asperities
 Of flatters met in deadly strife, rending the house & garden
 The unforgiving porches, the tables of enmity, and beds
 And chambers of trembling & suspicion, hatreds of age & youth
 And boy & girl, & animal & herb, & river & mountain
 And city & village, and house & family. That the Perfect,
 May live in glory, redeem'd by Sacrifice of the Lamb
 And of his children, before sinful Jerusalem, To build
 Babylon the City of Vala, the Goddess Virgin-Mother.
 She is, our Mother, Nature! Jerusalem is, our Harlot-Sister
 Return'd with Children of pollution, to defile our House.
 With Sin and Shame, Cast! Cast her into the Potters field.
 Her little-ones, She must slay upon our Altars; and her aged
 Parents, must be carried into captivity, to redeem her Soul
 To be for a Shame & a Curse, and to be our Slaves for ever!

So cry Hand & Hyle the eldest of the Fathers of Albion,
 Little-ones; to destroy the Divine Saviour; the Friend of Sinners.
 Building Castles in desolated places, and strong Fortifications.
 Soon Hand mightily devour'd, & absorb'd Albion's Twelve Sons,
 Out from his bosom a mighty Polypus, vegetating in darkness.
 And Hyle & Coban were his two chosen ones, for Emulraries
 In War: forth from his bosom they went and return'd,
 Like Wheels from a great Wheel reflected in the Deep
 Hoarse turn'd the Sperry Wheels, rending a way in Albion's Loins
 Beyond the Night of Beulah. In a dark & unknown Night,
 Outstretch'd his Giant beauty on the ground in pain & tears.

Figure 20: Jerusalem, plate 18

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